


overland

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Michael Wilding

Sydney

GRAHAM WAS BOOKED to sail to Sydney, even bought a dinner jacket, but then couldn't get the official medical examination until after the sailing date, so he flew. He had missed the experience of a passing era, and he was glad. The prospect of six weeks in a dinner jacket appalled him. The captain's table. Shipboard romance. Deck quoits, being dipped on crossing the equator, barbarous games with complex rules and conventions, evenings of bridge or charades or things equally indescribable. He was glad to fly. Surrendering the old world was what he was doing so forgoing the last of those sea voyages was a double surrender, about which he was perfectly happy. But to fly, that was to belong immediately to the new world, the new technology, jetting around the world at the point that jet-setting was part of the iconography of the new: that bleak vision of alienated modernity presented in the European cinema which transported to Oxford had seemed the future to be admired along with all the rest of that early sixties style. And to fly by jet, that was the bliss of a boyhood dream that had observed the steady domination of the jet over the propeller-driven piston engine. Seven sectors, five stops, even so, thirty-two hours. He was glad to have missed the propeller-driven age; five days in a flying boat, that would have been tedious too. He was delighted they still flew flying boats out of Sydney harbour. He loved to watch them coming in to land at Rose Bay. They were images from that *Chums Annual* of 1927, a huge repository of stories and images his father had bought for him when he had been in bed with scarlet fever. Flying boats belonged to that world, the security of a past survived, a nostalgia of convalescence. He was glad it was a 707 by which he flew to Australia.

He fell in love with the city, not initially, not with some sudden immediate recognition. It took much longer than that, it was a matter of discovery, of

gradual revelation, of slow familiarity. The harbour welcoming there in the golden sun, blue as the clear sky. Just two high-rise blocks, the AMP building at the Quay, and Blue's Point Tower, as indicators of what was to come, single raised fingers of warning, or the invocation of silent complicity. The first time he went over the harbour bridge he didn't know he had done, he was in a train, missed experiencing the experience.

He stayed in a university college and it was hideous, noise, barbarism. Germaine rescued him. She got her boyfriend to drive them round and they started off in Glebe, old decaying rooming houses. It wasn't what he had in mind, it evoked all too fully looking for lodgings in Oxford and he'd left that behind, chosen not to have to live like an impoverished graduate student. Finally she took him to a place in the Cross, a room in an old building in Victoria Street, with a Chinese landlord. "No night ladies," his wife said. Again it wasn't what he'd had in mind but he accepted it. Germaine took him to Newtown and organized a kettle and teapot and saucepan and mugs and instant coffee and deposited him and all of it back in the room, and there he was.

The romance of the rooming house. The bed. The chair. The window on the street, deciduous leaves falling, people passing, no night ladies. Lying on the bed in the early twilight reading *The Red and the Black* in an American paperback edition. He had found the bookshop in the Cross, a deep narrow slot with books ranked up the walls, sometimes stacked on the floor, piled on the central tables, and he would wander up there, look at *London Magazine*, *Paris Review*, and wonder did he really want to buy them. But *London Magazine*, *Paris Review* and American paperbacks were the iconography of the hope of literature, of the literary life, not available in the provincial Midlands. These were nervous sorties he made, discovering the delicatessens with their European cheese and salamis,

the Austrian cake shops, the Italian cafes where he could sit in the morning sun and jot down notes for the novel he was determined to start without any waste of time, the coffee, the ashtray, the glass-topped table, the sun, the heavy smell of gasoline from the buses and cars, the loneliness. The loneliness in the big city, constructing a world around you of familiar structures, desired images, writing the new hieroglyphs of the great adventure, waiting for the connection with other characters, contacts that would spell out a sound in that silence of the undifferentiated background, a word that might lead to a narrative.

The sun, that was what he always remembered, the sun, the warmth. Yes, there were idyllic, sunny days in England, but so many others were damp and grey. You did not need to be wealthy to be warm in Sydney. He could feel the sun drawing him out as he walked through the Cross in the mornings, the chequered shade of the trees of Macleay Street and Victoria Street, the awnings of Bayswater Road, the fumes of William Street. That gentle morning hosing-down of the pavements, putting out the produce in front of the shops, some places quietly closed, restaurants not opening till midday, chairs still stacked on tables, clubs, strip clubs, cabarets not opening till night, so it was a leisurely morning bustle that tolerated the refusal of others, that allowed the slugabeds and night owls, that could exist on multiple rhythms, so somebody was always getting up or going to bed and no-one cared, no-one remarked, no-one noticed. He loved it. Except for the loneliness. Yet the loneliness was a part of that tolerance, was the unique way to experience tolerance, no-one caring at all when you did anything or didn't, rose and shone or not, no-one intruded at all.

It was a scenario and he followed it, wrote about it, read it. In which order? The model had permeated through so many texts, he could not have cited any specific one at that point, though it was another ten years before he read the archetype, *Lost Illusions*. But he knew what it was to be the young writer arrived in a metropolis, unknown yet there to be known, the writer's growth the discovery of the metropolis, ob-

***Germaine took him to
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jective correlative, homology, or only subject. The restaurant in Victoria Street, the Europe, just along from his room; he would eat there regularly, the waiter nodding, smiling in a recognizing yet non-intrusive way, Wiener schnitzel, *The Red and the Black* open beside him, and a pen to jot down notes. There was no special communication with the waiter, just a soon developing familiarity of place, or role. Then one evening he took a girl he had met to dinner there. The waiter beamed, pulled out the chair for her, it was like the family, the stooped, near hump-backed cook came out from the kitchen, looked round the door. It was so palpable, they were so glad the lonely young man had a girl, they did everything to make Jan feel at ease, at home, belonging. Old, brown restaurant chairs, the impression of brown wood, door frames, window frames, was there half-panelling? The waiter's white shirt and black trousers, waiter's uniform but not

dapper. An allusion to the dapper, to old Europe, but without the tie on those hot evenings, the leaden heat melting the cold, iron rigidities of the old world, in the end dissolving it all away.

He was glad to have been there at that point, at the softening of the old Europe, at that point where warmth could be elicited by warmth, at the point where the memory of how things mattered still persisted but untyrannically, before it was all dissolved, all forgotten, the old Europe gone, the whole era of dark brown middle European cafes dissolved, bleached in the inexorable increase of the heat.

The typography, the clean, sure sensuality of those days. Not the American paperback of *The Red and the Black*, that was hideous, cramped setting, smudged printing. But *London Magazine* and *Paris Review* had an assurance and clarity and elegance in their presentation, *Paris Review's* covers, single dobs of primary colour, and the space of uncramped margins, the satisfactions of the paper stock, neither shiny nor furry but of a semi-matt texture, bulky, light yet substantial. These worlds of allusion dictated so much of his mental space; at least in retrospect: the readiest icons to respond to recall, detaching themselves from the caves of the past and fluttering, even hurtling, into the space of visual memory, other issues preferring

to adhere to the caves' walls, dry and dusty and crumbly, or damp and slimed and greened, or camouflaged, breathless, inert, hoping any beam would pass them by unknowing while the moths of cultural production sought out the limelight.

You could walk from the Cross with its Goodyear sign, the arrow now stationary, no longer allowed to pump through the tyre, walk along Victoria Street past where he lived, and at the end there look down from the huge cliff with its railed walkway at the ships moored in Woolloomooloo Bay, grey naval ships, Bear Line cargo ships. It was a maritime city. Commentators came out from old Europe and remarked on the cities clustered on the coast, the fear of penetrating the inland, as if there were something uniquely bizarre about it. He found he wrote about it himself, borrowed the ready image. But it was only odd if you saw life as starting in the centre of the land and moving slowly outward to the coast. That had been his own pattern. But here, the sea was the medium to which the great ports belonged. And Sydney was on that web of travel.

Again, like the old Europe restaurant, it was coming to an end even as he perceived it. The day of the shipboard novel was over. People still knew the names of the great liners, the regulars between Europe and Australia, the *Fairsea*, the *Fairsky*, the *Camberra*, but that was a knowledge soon to be forgotten as aircraft took over on the passenger routes and the liners became cruise ships. When the first cruise ships began to arrive they were written up in the press, a thousand United States millionaires moored at the Quay. But that too became a thing of the everyday and the unremarked. And the aircraft: you might remark a 707, later you might look out for the arrival of the first 747 Jumbo, alerted by the press, you might recognize an airline insignia, but the days of knowing the name of the individual craft were about to fade. And aircraft landed on land, took you beyond the great ports of entry, whose names began to fade, Southampton, Liverpool, Le Havre, channels of memory silting up.

It remained external to Graham. Ships were things he saw but did not travel on. But they were always there in Sydney, you would constantly come across

them moored in the bays and inlets of the harbour, glimpsed at the end of streets, or see the groups of sailors walking along the Rocks or the Quay or the 'Loo, stories of parties on board, of eating dog on the visiting Chinese freighter that ran a restaurant. These were part of the tapestry, the web of allusion against which he was to live.

The ships were always there. Even as the passenger liners disappeared, the container ships arrived. It was always busy, the port of Sydney. And the magic always remained and not only because he had grown up landlocked. The magic was magic whether you grew up inland or on the coast. The low boom of the ship's foghorn in the night, the pilot boats racing out through the Heads, the submarines clustered at Neutral Bay, and *Titan*, the floating crane, like some glorious celebration of Meccano, and named, personalized, individualized, not an anonymous part of marine activity, but *Titan*, and he

always remembered it, or *Lady Hopetoun*, that elegant, black, steam-powered transporter of dignitaries around the harbour with its distinctive hoot and plume of black coal smoke.

Ferries. A word on ferries. Criss-crossing the harbour. Imagine going to work by ferry, the glistening light of the morning harbour, the saline clarity of the air, the touch of the breath of the Tasman Sea (not strictly the Pacific Ocean, though you could imagine it as the Pacific and write about it as if it were – how do you demark one bit of sea from another, how do you demark one bit of land from another, indeed?). But he made little use of ferries. He lived across the harbour a couple of times, but generally he didn't. It was the city he kept close to. And when he did use the ferries it was the inconvenience that he generally registered in those days. Getting to the wharves, from the wharves. So the ferries were another image of the city, another cosmopolitan or Mediterranean or Asiatic note, that yet played little part in his life then. He would think, ah, the ferry, as he rode the ferry, I must impress these images, this rare and privileged experience of transport. But the great dramas were less of the ferries than of leaving the ferry precipitately, like Slessor's poem he was soon to encounter, 'Five Bells', death of a cartoonist fallen overboard; or

Nor did Sydney have its outdoor cafes. It was one of the first laments he heard. Why are there no outdoor cafes in Sydney? Why indeed? he could only ask.

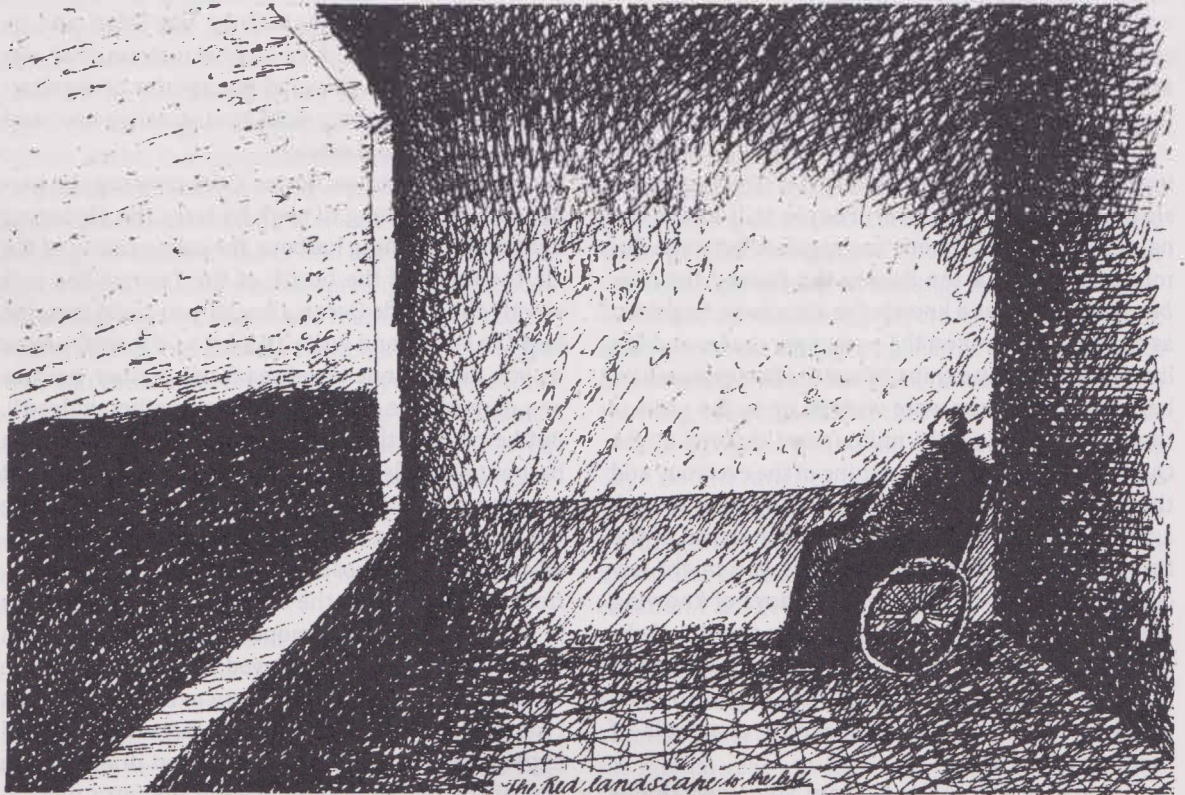
the opening of Jack London's *The Sea Wolf*, overboard in San Francisco bay and rescued to a floating paradigm of horror, the spirit of free enterprise. So ferries and falling off ferries played mainly a decorative part, more backdrop, like the cargo vessels.

Transport was by the smoky old Leylands, or could they even have been AECs or Seddons, browning cream and fading green, some ultimate reach of British Raj utilities, fading colours of the forties or earlier, lurching double deckers that gave a scenic drive of the city.

It wasn't a city of secret passageways and narrow alleys. There were some; occasionally he would come across one downtown, but they were not a characteristic of the place. Rather it was an impression of openness that he took away and was glad to take. The medieval pokiness of old Europe was to have its charm when refurbished by the heritage industry. But through the 1950s it had mainly represented squalor, decay, crumbling buildings, slum conditions.

Nor did Sydney have its outdoor cafes. It was one of the first laments he heard. Why are there no outdoor cafes in Sydney? Why indeed? he could only ask. The winds, he was told, it's too windy. The failure of the imagination, the British heritage, was the alternative explanation. To the Australian bourgeois intellectual returned from the grand tour that lack of outdoor cafes was the great colonial repression. But even the cafes were slowly to appear, despite the winds, and the rain, and the lack of wide pavements, as Europe bored with itself pushed out its tourists to Australia. Then there were people to occupy the cafes, people with money and time on their hands, the material base of the European cafes, tourism.

'Sydney' is from *In Wildest Dreams* forthcoming from UQP in September 1998. Michael Wilding's recent fiction includes *This Is For You* (A&R) and *Somewhere New*; *New And Selected Stories* (CQUP).



Jiri Tibor

Sing me not a ballad

Juliana Ryan

Sing me not a ballad.

Send me not a sonnet.

I require no ballad.

Rhyme and time are wasted on it.

Kurt Weill & Ira Gershwin, *The Firebrand of Florence*

I'll give you one O.

THIS IS SUNBURY FESTIVAL and flower-born children are warmed to life by the sun. The stage nearly always seems to be too far away. It might be the *Aztecs* or *Max Merritt and the Meteors* playing or an unknown folk singer accompanied by a twelve-string guitar. Bass and rhythm rumble underfoot. They stretch out and let the wind and music sway them. They usher in the real thing; ready to escort the changing times a'coming.

This flat yellow field north-west of Melbourne opens out. Just like a board game it unfolds. Now other journeys become possible. Trade winds take you to once distant lands. To Kathmandu and near-neighbour Lahore, where someone hisses hashish sir? To sunny Mullumbimby where the pot's home-grown. Diagonally across the fault line (just a crease in the board) look for acid in San Francisco. Or take the zigzag route to rocky, sloping fields in Afghanistan, where opium poppies grow.

Children are playing in this market where goods aren't displayed. They follow the elaborate rules of their own games, while whisperers make sideways approaches to a skinny bloke, dressed in a duffel coat despite the heat. He chews betel nut constantly. He waits for people to count their money. If they take too long, he clears his throat in warning, before aggressively spitting out a cannibal's mouthful of dirty red saliva.

There are wandering people. There are circles of people.

A young man leaves his circle of magic lullaby weavers and walks down to the dam. Sun and acid have made him sweat. He finds a quiet place. The water sizzles. He feels pins and needles and every hair on his leg being tugged. Wind over water makes shivery cuts, the sensation of skin parting, but there is no blood. He is thinking about diving into that brown water. Reaching its chocolate mousse depths and re-emerging. Slowly licking his muddy fingers and tasting sweet earth. Instead, he slides into the shallows

and lies still, eyes tightly lidded. Something tickles. He waits. Wonders whether a floating water weed, a gum leaf dropped from nearby trees, or a gentle hand has lightly touched his hair. Half hears a sibilant sound. A sigh? A faint amorous whisper? Something soft turning into the rush of being carried by a fast-moving body of water. Wind in his ears and a waterfall. Too steep. Watch out. Go back. He starts to move backwards. Then feels something brush against his legs. A snake. He screams. Snake. Crawling abruptly to his feet he opens his eyes, squints at the glare. He is whispering something as he runs out of the dam, roughly knocking over a boy of about eight, who had been standing behind him, watching the grown-up lying so still in the shallows, blond hair trailing a reedy green behind him in the brown water. He feels the grass sting his feet as he runs, dripping water over the lizard people lying on the banks of the dam. Land curves fantastically as he moves. The boy gets up, sucks the cut on his arm made by pebbles when he fell and walks over to where the other children are playing, while the fugitive keeps running until all he can hear is his breath in his throat and his heart beat. Later on he says that the rings around the sun poisoned him and shows people the place on his footsoles where he felt the grass speak to him, as he breathed through his feet like an ant.

MY MOTHER MEETS my father at the Sunbury Festival.

The sun was starting to set as she waited in a toilet queue. He was a cock-your-leg-where-you-please wandering minstrel. But he had noticed Allison as he was heading backstage and he liked the way she stood so still, one thin tanned leg bent, like an exotic bird grazing. Closer up he admired her thick dark fringe kicking out from under the brim of her floppy purple suede hat and her pale astigmatic eyes. So he passed an hour behind her in the queue talking softly

to her before taking her by the hand – quite naturally it seemed since they'd seen day into night together – and leading her off into the darkness.

Where maybe she's been ever since.

What is your one O?

ICAN'T BE SURE where I was for most of that day. It was one of many times that I wandered around the other children. Mostly the only boy among Sky and Tara and Honey, Jude and little Lucy, everyone's favourite. I wasn't easy to identify. It was the unisex era. I had long hair that my mother cut occasionally. We were girls and boys all mixed together in embroidered Indian cheesecloth shirts with wide sleeves. In velvet smocks of emerald, ruby and violet. We wore home made tie-dyed tee shirts in yellow, red and orange. I had an embroidered vest from Afghanistan. It was lined with curly black wool. I was proud of my black fleece.

Now those children have disappeared beyond the memory. I think they have probably married out of their names and reframed their lives. I imagine them conscientiously paying for their parents (who began to recede into premature senility, paranoia and infirmity with the onset of the eighties) to live in well-appointed modern nursing homes. I think they too would probably have very little memory of their childhoods. And, unlike me, I suspect they do not regret this and would not like to remember. I give them an imaginary certainty that I do not have.

They are separate people who do their best and try and live decent lives.

Unlike their dependent parents, who gave up meat and feared treading on ants, because they believed in karma.

My father was a writer of ballads, a folk singer of many parts. Back in the heyday of bearded men, he recorded a bushel of ballads. He was particularly in-

spired by disaster. When the Westgate Bridge came down, he read newspaper headcounts of the dead and penned a song. Now because of this, I can only feel like the loser he became each time I journey west to east. Against the sun and nature. And if the centre of the bridge were to open up and drop me into the poisonous waiting waters I wouldn't be at all surprised. Every time my car wearily fights the wind to cross this pledge against another tragedy I feel somehow tinged with mystery and loss. Because only I know this bridge so intimately still. Over twenty-five years later.

If he hadn't been a balladeer, he'd have been a tabloid journalist. Or a talkback broadcaster. He could consume any public event and reproduce it in verse chorus verse chorus, then fade. He could make the words stiffen in your consciousness as effectively as any thick black horrorshock headline ever set off a page of newsprint.

Often memories arrive like that. In concise summary bursts. Decapitated headlines.

And even now his songs are hard to forget.

Green grow the marijuana O.

WHEN MY MOTHER met my father at Sunbury, I was already a decade-old love child, possibly even immaculately conceived, though if so there's no sign of my inheritance. And if I was a love child, it was a love which did not survive my entry into the world. Somewhere, if I could only see well enough, I might find his footsteps on me too; running away and leaving behind some traces other than his absence.

We don't have any photos of my father now. Just the old RCA albums. Before he was my father he recorded Ramblin' Man. Against a two-dimensional half blue half bushy backdrop he wears turquoise and sil-

ver rings, which slab his small fingers with colourful epitaphs. He wears a fringed suede jacket and a large black hat encircled with more semi-precious stones. Holds his guitar very tenderly to the backdrop of a shady gumtree – a coolibah perhaps? – and rests one small foot on a convenient stump. A well-groomed black and white sheep dog sits beside him. Only his beard looks authentic.

He put my mother on his third (and most successful) album. It went gold. Al-lison. He wrote her the lilting title song. The colours have barely faded. Her crushed velvet dress is still an emerald green. She wears two strings of coloured African beads. Flawed, deliberately, she later told me, with a disconcerting emphasis; because only Allah is perfect. Allison wears no shoes. And her long hair out. On her left ankle she wears an anklet which my father gave her. Some kind of a shackle engraved with love. My mother looks almost happy as she lies on a hammock, anchored by two lustyweeping willow trees. Was she stoned? My father can't be seen. He is in her ears with his ballads and his lazy declarations of love and rebellion.

Again, I don't know where I was that day. I like to think that while Allison lay on the hammock, I ran happily around in circles behind the scenes. That it was a hot day. Another sun-drenched childhood memory. That maybe one of the record company people asked me my name, or how tall I was, or what I wanted to be when I grew up. That one of my father's gentle-faced young groupies encouraged me to sing them one of my songs. A member of the band let me borrow his banjo and half mime, half pluck out a few notes to accompany my song. There was a little applause. Afterwards they might have said that I would be a musician like my father. And I was allowed, just that once, to have an icy pole. It melted faster than even I could eat it, staining my lips and tongue.

The Drover's Wife

Craig Cormick

HANG ON, SAYS ROSS, stopping the car suddenly and peering down the long dirt track. I think we've been down this road before.

Nick, in the back seat, leans forward. Peels himself off the hot vinyl. Looks all around them. Flat desert. Mulga trees. Flat desert. Small shrubs. Flat desert. Just like every track they've driven along all day. Bullshit! he says.

Suzie, in the front passenger seat, turns to Nick and says, Well we could've looked it up on the map if some dickhead didn't throw it out the window.

Gedfucked. Nick whispers it. But just loud enough for her to hear the trace of the words. But she turns to Ross. How do you know we've been here before?

Look at it, says Ross. Don't you feel it? Nick shrugs. Slumps back into the seat. Pushes his leather jacket aside. Doesn't want it to smell of vinyl. Wishes they had some beer left. Even warm ones. Wishes they were on a tarred highway somewhere. Anywhere. Wishes they were still in Melbourne. Whadayamean feel it? he asks.

We've driven down this road before, says Ross. There's a homestead along there with a bright blue roof.

Suzie looks at Ross really carefully. Trying to see his pupils. Wonders if he's been popping some of his pills while she was dozing. Or was busy screaming at Nick. Homestead? she asks.

Sure, says Ross. And we drive up to it. Really slowly. And it looks like nobody is there. Real quiet and still.

And we look around the yard. It's flat and sparse. A few tall thin trees. A shed. Assorted old equipment. And a little garden. Geraniums wilting in the heat.

Ross waves his index fingers around as he speaks. As if painting the yard. Can you see it? he asks.

Nick looks up the track. No, he says. I can't see it.

Ross looks to Suzie. She just shakes her head. Patiently. Nick winds down his window. Looks out across the red sand and scrub. Nothing. Mulga. Desert. Sand. Heat. Nothing. Then, just for an instant he can see a distant lake. Shimmering out there. Inviting. Blue and cool. Then it's gone. Only sand. Flat desert. And the buzz of flies flitting in the window.

Hey, shut the bloody window, says Suzie. The flies are getting in. Shut the window!

Nick winds it shut. Slowly. Listens to the flies buzzing around his ears. Feels them landing on his neck. Hates them. But he knows that Suzie hates them more. Winds it really slowly.

And I hop out of the car first, says Ross. Just to look around, you know. To see if there's somebody there or not. Nick wants to tell Ross to shut up. But he listens to the words. The buzzing of flies. The engine grinding angrily in the heat.

And I start walking across the yard, says Ross. But slowly like. I put one foot out at a time. Like testing the ground. And I've only taken a few steps and a dog barks.

Ross looks around. Looks at the other two. Watching him. Waiting for him to go on. There is no move-

ment. So he takes another step. And then the dog barks again. And comes charging out. A black and white mongrel cattle dog. All teeth and noise. And speed. So fast. And he's barely half a metre from Ross when he hits the end of his lead. Pow! A long nylon rope. It jerks him to a sudden stop. Ross has his hands up. Just like this, he says. In front of my face. I can only see the teeth and red eyes in front. The dog gulps large mouthfuls of air then leaps again. Straining against the rope. Barking and snapping.

Ross turns and looks at Nick and Suzie again. But they aren't sure what to say. They just look at him. Want to know what happens next. So he goes on. And there is this loud whistle. And the dog is gone. And so I take another step forward. But I stop at the edge of the rope's length. Just in case, you know. And that's when we see him.

Who? asks Suzie.

The Aborigine, says Ross.

Of course, says Nick, now swatting at the flies. How did I forget him?

We can't see his face, says Ross. It's hidden in the dark shade of its own features. But he's carrying a gun. As dark as his face. And he slowly raises it and points it at us. Remember? And I want to say something, to tell him not to shoot, but my voice won't come. I can't get the words out.

Suzie is looking at Ross. A little worried. But wondering what the point of this is going to be. Where is he taking them with this? She wants him to explain it to her. But she can see how much the story is pissing Nick off. And so she says, And then what?

Then there is a shout, says Ross. Hey-oh! And the Aborigine puts down his gun. Turns. And a woman comes out of the homestead. A fat dumpy woman in a wide-brimmed hat. She walks up close. Past the Aborigine. And says, Whadchufellahswan?

Ross points up the track. Remember now?

No, says Nick. I don't. And we're stuck here in the

middle of the fucken desert in central-fucken-Australia and we're just about out of fucken petrol and if this trip wasn't bad enough, you're off on your own fucken trip!

But that's it, says Ross. It's the petrol. We ask her if we can buy some.

And what does she say? asks Nick, wiping sweat from his eyes. 'Cause I sure hope she's got some to spare.

She says, Juzbring ya car aroun the back. Like that. And she's got this petrol bowser there. Not a flash one. Like an old farm bowser.

Oh yeah, says Nick, Now I remember it. And the old bird says to us, Can I check your fluids?

No, she says, Solomon ere'll do the filling. And she indicates the Aborigine. And then she says, Come into the ouse for a spell. And she takes a step towards the homestead. Just one. But we don't follow her. We just stand there. And then she says, I don't get much company. It's the way she says it. And so we follow her inside.

Ross turns around again. Looks at Nick in the back seat. Nick purses his lips. Like he's getting ready to spit. And Suzie can see he's about to say something awful. So godamnfuckenjustlikeNickawful. So she says to Ross, quickly, Tell us about the inside of the homestead.

Don't you remember? says Ross. It was real cool. And sort of like somewhere you know. The kitchen in a share house you used to live in. Or perhaps the kitchen of some auntie's place that you haven't visited since you were real small.

I hope she's got some coldies in the fridge, says Nick. Yeah, says Ross. She pours four large glasses of beer and places them on the table. Ere's ealth, she says, and sculls half her glass. Then sits back. Wipes the foamy moustache off her lips. Then she says, My name's Bridie!

Bridie?

Yeah. That's right. And she says, I suppose Solomon must ave given youse a bit of a fright. You don need to worry about im though. E's pretty harmless. Only shot two people. An they were both wogs!

Nick scowls at Ross. What does that mean? Is that meant to be a dig at me? This is my fucken car, sport! You're only driving because I let you.

Because you're too fucken pissed, says Suzie. And because you keep getting lost and don't have enough fucken sense to not even throw the fucken map away.

Never needed a fucken map in Melbourne, says Nick.

We're not in fucken Melbourne any more Toto, says Suzie.

Gedfucked! says Nick. Right into her face. Like a slap. Sees the anger building there. Remembers her sudden violence. Knows she's about to lose it. Slowly leans back into the hot vinyl seat. Listens to the flies buzzing angrily.

We don get many people comin up the ol road any more, Bridie says suddenly. Breaking the tension, you know. It's pretty rough an all. She puts her glass down on the table and picks up the beer bottle. Just holds it there a moment. You lot must ave a bit of the pioneer spirit, she says. Either that or you really got yerselves lost! And then she pours us all another cold one. Really cold.

Ross says it again. Slower. Really cold. They can almost feel the taste of the beer. Wish Ross would stop talking about it. Want him to stop. Want him to go on forever.

And it's so cool in the kitchen. You can feel the chill of the lino through your shoes.

Suzie nods. Oh yes!

And there's this big print on the wall, says Ross. Right there. His fingers painting again. A portrait of a fat dumpy woman in the middle of nowhere. She looks just like Bridie. Standing there with a broad hat and shopping bag.

A shopping bag?

Well, like a shopping bag. She's standing in the middle of this plain, like, and there's this wagon in the distance behind her. She looks huge. Larger than life. You know the one?

Oh yeah, I get it, says Nick. She's the drover's wife. Right!

Yeah, that's right, says Ross. And Suzie wants to know where her husband is.

Why would I give a stuff about her husband?

I don't know. You just ask her. And she says, E's orf. Orf some-bloody-where.

And that's when Nick says, He's a drover, isn't he? And she says, A drover. A driver. All the bloody same.

Nick looks forward at Suzie. Cautiously. But the anger has left her now. She's looking off into the distance somewhere. As if she can see something way out there. He follows her gaze. But he can't see anything. Flat desert. Mulga trees. Flat desert. Small shrubs. Flat desert. Nothing. But he can't seem to focus his eyes properly. Closes them a moment. Wishes the blackness were cool.

Then Ross says, So we're just sitting there, you know, and that's when the snake appears.

What snake? asks Suzie, looking back.

A big bloody black snake. Enormous. About two metres long and as thick as your arm. And it just slithers out from the wall somewhere. Right across the floor. And everybody screams. Like we try and jump up on the table. Call for somebody to kill it. And then Nick grabs this shovel.

And I bash Sweat is dripping from his face. So hot it's hard to think straight. Hard to remember the snake well.

And then what? asks Suzie.

Well, Bridie picks up the snake. Suzie nods. She is looking distantly out the window again. Looking up the track. Staring into the heat-hazed distance. Where she can see the old woman bearing one pale

breast. Lifting the snake gently. Coiling it around her arm. Offering it her breast to suckle from. The image fades. Slowly. She looks at Ross.

He is smiling and nodding his head. And Nick is a bit embarrassed about it all and says, I think we'd better get a move on. And he stands up from the table and then all go outside again. The car's full and Solomon is nowhere to be seen. So we just hop in, and sit there, says Ross. Just like this. Not sure what we should do next.

But then Bridie goes over to the pump. Reads the counter. And says, Let's see, nearly a full tank, that'll be ah – a hundred dollars!

But that's about two dollars a litre, says Nick.

Yeah, that's right, says Ross. And Bridie says, I dunno ow much a litre it is, but it's ten dollars a gal-

lon. And then Solomon steps out of the shadows again. With the gun. And the dog on a short chain. And Bridie says . . . he looks at the other two. Waits for one of them to finish the story.

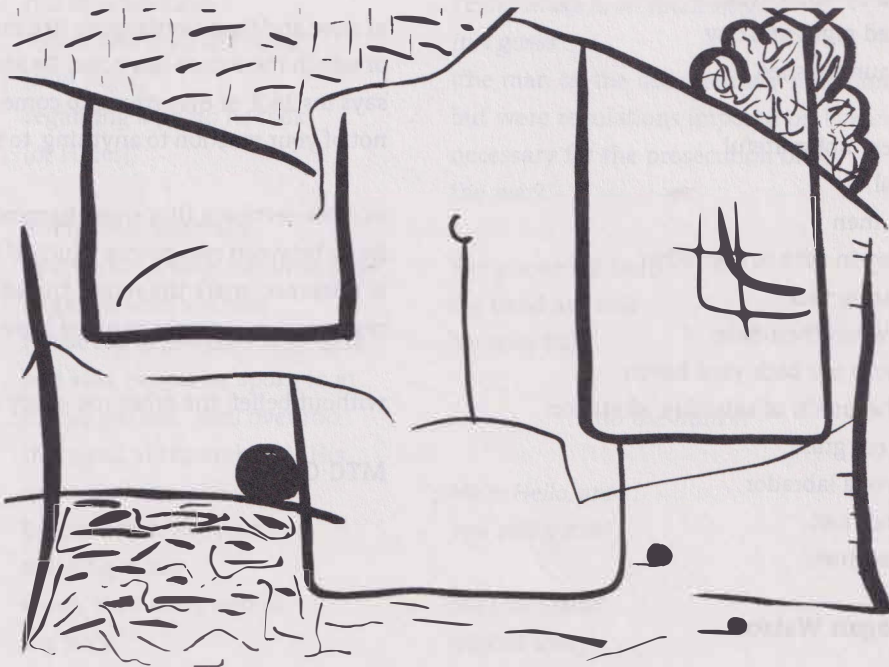
They are all looking up the track now. Flat desert. Mulga trees. Flat desert. Small shrubs. Flat desert. And something else.

Cheapest petrol for miles, says Suzie.

And she takes traveller's cheques, says Nick.

Yeah, says Ross. That's it. He puts the car into first gear and edges it slightly forward. And then the blue roof of the homestead seems to suddenly come into sight. Shimmering in the distance. As cool and blue as a distant lake.

Let's see if she's home, says Ross.



the crooked men

my dad straightened out the crooked men
in the old laundry shed
above the fishing gear and jars of nuts and bolts
where on a rack
their naked, twisted forms did hang
from the neck
body hair like pine-needles
restrained by welded g-clamps
and steel-trap teeth
hydraulic arms and pullies
and a shiny drip-tray on the floor
to catch the expelled blackened hate

sometimes 8, sometimes 10
the crooked men
with faces like prunes
and tattoos and scars
tongues that could no longer work
but engulfed by obscenities
as they leaked night and day
in that old laundry shed

and they were not grateful
or ungrateful
the crooked men
nor were they in debt to my father
and his amazing rack
in the days when their hate
secreted across my back yard haven
drowning the smells of saturday afternoon
and freshly cut grass
and the yap of a labrador
and innocence lost
to the crooked men . . .

Samuel Wagan Watson

The number of days (sonnet philosophically and formally uncontained)

thinking on the number of days, the way
they group particularly for each of us within
the sub-sets of our lives, the consequence
of all beautiful skies and the way our fears
turn within us like the tail-ends of stories
begun before our time, the soft phrase

of *now and then* overlapping like meaning
of which the future has none. Be afraid,
says instinct, of everything to come, but
not of your reaction to anything, to the moon,

in cross-section a thin slung hammock
hung between two points which, if the moon
is reference, mark the round-trip of eternity
my question is surely, can you have acceptance

without belief; the other too easily answered

MTC Cronin

Bodies Like These (In this story, Eva lives)

the imprint of his face
on my eye
I believed
was produced by artificial
conditions
the light was worthless, made
by this moment for revealing
bodies like these, his
and mine, and mine merely
visiting, telling that look
from ten years away.
I should explain: whenever

we met we
would end up in bed, he
was a great talker and I
saw him in a street
full of ticker-tape
"there was fluid in the air"
(said Jager,
regarding a photo he took
[of Hitler])

But he was, normally,
apart from seeing me, otherwise
engaged, with a whole
house full of people – wife, kids,
and kids, people he spoke to at
dinner parties. "Well over 100
thousand at Nuremburg!" His
voice, to them, was a
Brilliant Red Poppy, and on
smelling it, like
vases, they narrowed at
the neck.

Grabbing and swallowing.

I didn't believe
a thing he said.

Like, Soon we'll be together.
We had, in fact, been together
a long time,
under certain conditions,
the whole thing cooking
at a certain temperature
and I was tired. Dressed
and ready to go at eight. It was
ten o'clock at night when he
rang:

*I can't make it, so you'll stay
in, I guess . . .*
(the man on the documentary said) "Yes,
but were regulations imposed on bakers
necessary for the prosecution of
the war?"

The phone fell from
my hand as I saw
his body fall

into the bunker

*Hello Hello, are
you still there?*

But Eva Braun
walked away . . .

MTC Cronin

Lunar Calendar

A name as simple as Suez
brands itself in your memory,
cat-like in its capacity for flux.

Determined to stay home, you withdraw,
effable as ever, a regular Turgenev.
Forgotten pen pals reassert themselves, this time in Urdu.

Garishly pale, you tilt
however subtly to the south, bypass
instructions handed down for generations, the lunar calendar

just an excuse to avoid a stopover in Iraq,
Kasbah or no Kasbah.

“One Alp
loves its brothers” our family credo,
marked in green with that O’Malley sheen.

Nothing but snapshots will keep you warm.
Or, to put it another way, you’ll caterwaul,
poltroon that you are, without us at your back.

Quadrilles during our guided hadj,
rock-paper-scissors with swans of origami,
slipping down scree to a collective “Hallelujah!”,
traipsing among cacti and scorpions: that’s vacationing!

Under duress, are you? In a huff?
Varicose veins in you mother’s calves brought you here –
why spoil her holiday, and to what end?

X. is beautiful this time of year, the natives speak langue d’oc,
you’ll adore the tide in its inability to ebb.
Zeus never had it so good. And neither did Leda.

Brian Henry

The Skin of the Earth

The masters of action
have gone into the earth.

There is hunger, unexplained,
in the virus,

there are planes that fly
beyond the limits of vision,

there are navies that sail
beneath the skin of the earth.

I have set out on journeys
from which I can’t return,

I have seen the sun rise
on a hundred serious islands.

There are faces and hands
I am not allowed to touch

in the heart of the poem,
invisible bells that call me.

In the kingdom of death
a ghostly aura surrounds me.

I might have been a white horse
cantering.

Gavin Burgess

Accidentals

The trip south hazes into afternoon.
Cars knot and unwind across
the two black lanes. The highway
tracks by errors of countryside –
the lake's distraction, enormous slabs
of hills, sheep grey as rocks.

We're flagged down before we even know.
Somehow, it will be reported, her car
jumped the white divide. Smash
of embrace, shuddering the truck's steely side.
Pushing it sideways, over. The huge force
tangles. Metal and the shut down
of a last brief flash at life.

We're only aware we crawl
the slow way past agitating police lights
and orange witches hats shouting
detour, detour, their decisions final
and secret.

All we share with our convoy
is a passenger, irritation,
and the local radio's tuning. The sad song
becomes, again, the rose that blooms beside
death. Its retinue of loud silence,
accompanies the red light swinging
above the arrival of a white empty van
and the last laying-on of hands.

Jill Jones

crocodile beach

there is news of another
comet and then another

it is too near the
end of the century
for all these omens

what will the horses do
at Jerudong Park?

will they snort and kick the air
their hooves flashing
like shooting stars?

and all those jellyfish?

why are they so large
and so very many?

they lie like white moons
on the yellow sand
and the real moon

(they say) outshone five times
five thousand years
five years

James Norcliffe

Jennifer Maiden

Weapons of Mass Defusion

I HAD A BET ON THIS ONE. But more of that later. If one were writing a novel, one would say that Rupert's heart wasn't in it. He'd just received his knighthood from a very wily Pope, who as an authority-figure-in-the-head was not going to be too impressed by someone practising the ancient Australian sport of urging when it involved a possibly uncontrollable and initially embarrassingly one-sided war in the Middle East. And Rupert, like Montgomery eternally staring at his snapshot of Rommel, had begun to internalize the opposition. Who in this case was not Saddam Hussein but CNN's founder Ted Turner, with whom Rupert had been battling bitterly for the exclusive news channel in New York. And Ted Turner was in Rupert's eyes not only a left-wing fanatic but also the champion of what I have become accustomed to calling "Trochaic News".

MY TROCHAIC NEWS concept is based on Prosody: the categorization of English verse into metre. A trochee is an up stress followed by a down stress in syllables. Words like 'river' and 'peaceful' are trochees. The opposite of the trochaic metre is the iambic metre: a down stress followed by an up stress. Iambic metre is much more emphatic and truculent than trochaic metre. Most old-fashioned newspaper headlines and news items, and most of Sylvia Plath's poetry, for example, consist of iambs. Down stress + BANG. Down stress + BANG.

I realized that news coverage was changing from iambic to trochaic when I was reviewing the journalist Peter Arnett's autobiography, *Live from the Battlefield*. CNN's Arnett became an international celebrity as the only broadcasting journalist in Baghdad just after the start of the Gulf War. Earlier he had won a Pulitzer for his Associated Press coverage of the Vietnam War. His prose had changed slowly from the conventional iambic news metre to a longer,

more balanced trochaic pattern. It occurred to me that this might mirror the new rhythms of the twenty-four-hour satellite news he was now reporting. The abrupt impact of 'Breaking News' is followed by the slower confirming camera work, information and discussion. The time has to be filled and it fills itself in natural, less stressful, less controlled biological rhythm. Indeed, efforts to control the news also tend to feed into this more rational pattern. 'Talking Heads' (CNN has a particularly obvious retired Airforce Major General whose reappearance with 'objective' information on Pentagon military strategies and equipment is a dead sure sign that the Yanks have decided to bomb somewhere) mouth support of the Establishment position. They are certainly brought in at times of crisis – not, as it is sometimes assumed, times when there isn't a crisis, to fill space. In spite of themselves, however, their effect is to calm things down. And the small opposing voices which do have to be foddered in for time's sake (and paradoxically because of the lack of time to pre-monitor their message) undermine them surprisingly well.

IF RUPERT WANTED to really do twenty-four-hour satellite news, not cushioned by chatty anchors, local sports and free to air repeats, then trochaic he had to become. You only had to look at *Time* magazine. Once, under Luce, it was a master of the iamb. 'Red' Chinese and Russian leaders wouldn't just digest their food, they would 'chomp' it. They wouldn't just debate, they would 'snarl'. Why, it seemed there was hardly a *Time* journalist in Vietnam who wasn't proud to work for the CIA as well. And now what? Red Ted had sold his control of CNN to Time-Warner. At first it seemed as if CNN was going 'Timestyle'. There were suddenly some CNN features on teenagers overdosing on heroin in the Midwest (with film of blighted roses) and details of Heath Robinson con-

traptions invented by peripatetic Muslims to blow up New York. But the rhythms of 'Breaking News' overcame all that. And what did you read in *Time*? Stories like "Should We Assassinate Saddam?" alright, but with answers like "well, no". Or something like: "Princess Di's death. Accident or Secret Service conspiracy?" With the answer, "well, probably not, but, hey, maybe . . ." There was probably hardly an operative on the staff any more.

Some of Rupert's people were slow in osmosing the change. His editors were the most canny – football, Sharon Stone's wedding, free cars, stabbed coppers, anything but anything like "Stick it Up Your Junta" from the old days. Some of the journos, though were still pushing things like the 'Dr Germ' story. This quiet, pretty, female evil genius in biological warfare was to be the first US target, along with Saddam Hussein. Dutifully, the piece went in, but the only proven victims of the testing were unlucky species like mice, rabbits, sheep and donkeys. Animal Lib were less interested in attacking Saddam Hussein than Roche and the local fox hunt, so it softly fizzed out again. Rupert's cartoonists were more militant than their editors, to the extent of labelling Kofi Annan an appeaser and a Neville Chamberlain. They had eagerly expected a war, during which they could draw patriotic images and no longer have to struggle to be funny. Hardly any of Rupert's cartoonists had ever been funny. If he wondered why, sometimes, he decided that anyway they were loyal – or tried to be, if they could just catch up – and he was not himself a sophisticate in the realms of mirth. He remembered: the Pope seemed to have a sense of humour, though. Perhaps one would come, in time.

AND PERHAPS IN TIME IT WILL. *But to my bet:* Given my theory of Trochaic News defusing violence, I bet that the US would not gather enough iambic momentum to bomb Iraq at the start of 1998. And to my profound relief and faithless astonishment, I was right. If ever there was a walking trochee, it was Kofi Annan. The softness, the dry humour. For a trochee is not only a lyrical, defusing thing, it is a bitten-down, humorous thing. Not an anti-climax but a smooth flow to the next disciplined climax. I have often argued that CNN-style coverage of the last NSW bushfire season contributed to the much safer, more conserving, less confronting approach to those fires. CNN itself had a particularly long, balanced and ra-

tional coverage by their Australian journalist John Raedler, who had earlier left a Sydney radio station which objected to any questioning of the Gulf War.

The interaction between the news and its subjects – described so apprehensively by journalists before and during the Gulf War – seems to me a fortunate thing, and very sound in military terms. Apart from the understandable terror of administering Iraq, George Bush (his very name neither an iamb nor a trochee but a compulsive spondee like 'door mat') stopped the Gulf War because press coverage of the Basra Road bombing was about to become a necrophiliac's paradise. General Schwarzkopf explained this to him at the time but quickly disowned his own advice in a TV conversation with the gimlet-eyed Scotch Whisky salesman and ex-satirist (all satirists are temperamentally conservative), Lord David Frost. Lord Frost appeared to be in favour of making Iraq a State of the Union and who was the amiably victorious General to argue? The General has since of course retracted and returned to his first stance of Germanic reserve. Do not bomb again, he advised. I have served in Vietnam, and Vietnam awaits you. He had the usual professional soldier's distaste for an excess of dead bodies, and anyway had retired to a great trochaic space in the mind where there is no ideology but art.

Art is not well in Iraq. Peter Arnett seems to be living there, as far as CNN (ever nostalgic for its Gulf War ratings) is concerned. One of his latest packages as I write is about Iraq's immense archaeological and artistic heritage being pilfered and vandalized by the new hungry and new poor. Four of these had been executed for carving up a very large Assyrian winged bull statue into a lucrative jigsaw puzzle, but the penalty didn't seem to be deterring anyone from exporting anything portable and many things not. What wasn't leaving on the back of a truck was deteriorating from lack of excavation or preservation, or hidden hastily away from the prospect of US bombing.

Another Arnett package was of conscripted Iraqi art students doing military drill. The intense girls and all. Half a troop of youthful Frieda Kahlos and Georgia O'Keeffes. They seemed about a match for our SAS, really. Remember the Raid on ASIO? Despite fervent promises of no troops on the ground, the US has declared the role of our SAS to be to enter Iraq and rescue downed US pilots. My nephew in Perth was in the School Cadets once and assigned to guard the

Cenotaph against projected 'Women's Libbers' with spray cans. None arrived, but I had the fun of Larry writing a poem imagining what would happen if one did. Maybe I could do a poem now: an Iraqi female art student battles a stranded SAS boy for custody of a dejected ejected pilot. Sent there for buzzing cable cars in the Italian Alps.

They do that sort of punishment, the US military. The Military Intelligence Officer in my 1971 poem 'The Problem of Evil' really existed. I met him in 1971. He was sent to Vietnam after being given the choice of a year there or two in Berlin Gaol. He and two girls had been setting off mines along the Berlin Wall with empty strawberry wine bottles. "Have you tasted strawberry wine?"

I remembered him because he had the mind of a Borgia courtier. I was writing a short story set in New Guinea at the time and he suggested spontaneously so many intricate power plays and plots for it that it would have come out like *Chinatown*. Maybe he's still working somewhere for someone. Maybe they did kill Princess Di. He wouldn't like Arabs and he would like landmines. Harrods and almost the entire Egyptian press might have a point.

While this media essay was gestating, many things were happening. Pauline Hanson made a posthumous video and Michael Hutchence really died. Would I entitle my essay, 'If You Are Watching This, I Will Have Phoned Bob Geldof'? Princess Diana also died and Iraq wasn't bombed, twice. Rupert was knighted by the Pope and felt spiritual. Would I entitle my essay 'Weapons of Papal Mass Destruction'? 'Weapons of Mass Defusion' seemed okay. Not 'diffusion' – but maybe that, too. Madeleine Albright – whose gold lapel pins kept growing huger and fiercer – was repeating "Weapons of mass destruction" like a mantra. So were all the US Administration. Around what they insisted was the end of a countdown, they were holding up decades-old pictures of gassed Kurdish families and proclaiming "Madonna and Child, Saddam-style".

I was being as flippant as I usually am when the pain of anticipatory empathy is too great. Specifically, some part of my psyche was inadvertently exposed at core during the last Gulf War, and Baghdad indelibly entered in. Specifically, when "Princess Diana dead" first came up in letters before the announcer could pronounce it on CNN, my body rocked crying for a minute before my mind registered what had

happened. "I'd never felt that much about her when she was alive", as the people in the queues also said. When I was speaking to a poetry magazine editor, he stated that he couldn't understand why so much fuss was made about the death of "a socialite in a car accident" and less about the death of Mother Teresa. I explained that the socialite had done much more for humanity than the saint, who was actually running a skilful anti-contraception campaign with a few palliative care beds as window-dressing. I was impressed by Mother Teresa's love for Princess Diana, though. Maybe the poor, shrivelled, powerful old lady whom I had once described as the world's most famous Münchhausen-by-Proxy was full of the most brilliant fantasies of womanly loveliness and maybe the shock of grief did kill her. They held hands when together, with the same infatuation in their eyes. No wonder the misogynist Freud was so alarmed at 'Narcissism' in women. I realized again how necessary it was for vanity to be the healthy backbone of any viable attempt at goodness, even if it only escapes ideology too late.

When Versace died, CNN's fashion arbiter, Elsa Klensch, called it "The Death of Glamour". When Princess Diana died, Elsa Klensch called it "The Death of Glamour". When Mother Teresa died, I said, flippant with secret insights, "Elsa Klensch can't call it 'The Death of Glamour'." But maybe she did. And was right.

ON THE SUBJECT OF VANITY AND ITS USES: Most Iraqis are now unemployed. Some of them, however, were re-employed building numerous Presidential Palaces of a vast and puzzling ugliness which must have seemed remarkably dispensable to the cultured Iraqi soul. Apart from the hotel-suite-style accommodation for the visiting hierarchy, these palaces were inclement, sparsely inhabited and the plumbing was unreliable. Outbuildings suggesting sinister mysteries were increasingly discovered to hide wonky generators.

The Australian Chief UN Arms Inspector Richard Butler grew increasingly tetchy about the whole business and reproved Peter Arnett on CNN for calling them "Presidential Palaces" not "Presidential Sites". As Butler shows no signs of a passion for architecture, one assumes this was to suggest that proposed inspections involved no disrespect, and also that the areas to be inspected were wide and vague enough to allow for something suspicious to be found on

them somewhere – although last reports were that this had dwindled to possible lists on a computer or maybe a bit of paper in a drawer.

During the endorsement of Kofi Annan's peace agreement, Butler sat in the UN with his face puckered and arms folded in what appeared to be the Mother of All Passive-Aggressive Tantrums. Maybe he realized that if he were an Iraqi President wanting to hide something, not having very much left to hide – or maybe just wanting to have the right to hide something – he would build a lot of very big and very dispensable buildings with material he didn't have to import (since he wasn't allowed to import very much) on a lot of fairly useless ground with some intriguing out-structures and he would tempt the US to bomb them to win him wonderful international and civil support. Or he would use them as a desperate bargaining chip, then allow people to search them. The down side of the latter is that he would still have to visit the palaces.

Maybe some sections of US Intelligence are right and some of the dangerous stuff was shipped to Sudan. But you couldn't include Sudan in your bombing easily without mentioning it, like Kissinger and Cambodia . . . could you? "Should we bomb Sudan?" asks *Time* magazine, and decides . . . well, no, probably not, not really . . . and then there might be nothing there, too.

Another media death while I was conceptualizing this essay was that of Carla Faye Tucker. She was a young pretty articulate woman who had helped her boyfriend bludgeon a man and woman to death years ago in Texas. George Bush (the son of our George Bush and equally a spondee) as Governor of Texas predictably refused to pardon her. The media did an execution watch on her and when her death was announced a beautiful girl sitting on her boyfriend's shoulders in the crowd applauded like a cheerleader on speed. Carla Faye walked to the table for her lethal injection and was not given any prior tranquillizers. As she died, she gave a groaning cough which may have indicated pain. Her eyes remained open after her death. One had been watching her bright live eyes and wry smile unavoidably for some days previously on TV, and could still do so for some time after her death.

It is a new thing that US citizens approve the death penalty. During the first half of this century, the days when *The Front Page* and then *His Girl Friday* and

the writings of Damon Runyon were popular and powerful against the death penalty, statistics showed a majority of US citizens opposed it. So what went wrong? I am reminded that the US author Gore Vidal blames the destruction of the US on Harry Truman. He argues that Truman was seduced by military-industrial forces and that they have governed the US ever since. Wars are their circus and their justification. Sometimes he seems to see CNN as an instrument of this, sometimes the reverse, and says "I am an addict" of CNN. He lives in Europe, writing and watching CNN.

I am writing and watching CNN. Mr al-Fayed has just spent two hours with the French Magistrate, still insisting that his son and potential daughter-in-law were murdered by the British Secret Service. The CNN reporter insinuates that this is to distract attention from the fact that he employed a drunken driver. The insinuation doesn't overcome the effect of the situation. And such a reaction to al-Fayed's charges – like the British Prime Minister's tone of boyish indignation at them – seems oddly low-key and inappropriate. This tone seems to be: well yes – there may be a slight possibility that they topped her, but why not (to quote Mr Blair and the Tory headlines) "Leave her alone"? Well, I suppose because – in her own and her children's interest – she wouldn't have wanted the topic to be left alone, and she certainly did believe herself a target.

When considering this essay, I thought a Princess Diana conspiracy theory was not likely to lend it a great air of balance. But it seemed a more useful venture to include my poem 'The Chauffeur' (which is subtitled 'one version', just in case):

*Amnesia at the thirteenth pillar
of the Place de l'Alma
doesn't threaten in this pretty
young SAS man, this boy
who minds your fruit juice in the bar
while you take a piss, the mirror
confirming you are not drunk, the few
you had you were careful not to
mix with pills, you who
are always so professional. The lovely
ex-SAS boy is with his friend, another
ex-SAS boy, and they tell you
some silly English plot concocted
to fool the press and spirit the princess*

away from the back door. You'd sneer
 at the English thirst for conspiracy, but there
 is so much innocence in their
 excitement and it might make a story
 to cheer up your parents in Brittany,
 so: okay. And such a beautiful woman
 should be extravagantly protected,
 anyway. One boy leaves to drive the decoy car,
 you and the other are at the back door.
 She stands with your employer's gentle son,
 is tall-tilted as a lily, waiting gently
 like any English schoolgirl in a queue,
 who has said she often suffers déjà vu,
 profoundly, you can see her
 becoming accustomed in landmines, a cannon
 loose or tied, and still afraid of horses.
 Somehow, you think of black, close-stepping ones.
 Déjà vu may be contagious. In the car,
 as his seatbelt clicks, you feel very
 high and very slow, and you wonder
 why there are so few cars
 on the road before
 the Alma Bridge, why the boy beside you
 insists you move, when as usual the press
 are far behind you fast.
 You are shocked
 that he sees a Fiat before you do,
 stretches out. And the horn. So it returns –
 that taste of citrus juice so sour,
 in the taste of blood so sweet.

Interestingly, one recent report of the bodyguard's memory returning and contradicting the authorized version of events was followed on Sky News by an avuncular British psychiatrist analysing the account as a case of false memory, and by general suggestions that this was merely another al-Fayed version because Harrods bodyguards were present. Whatever the merits of the conspiracy theory, one feels rather relieved that they were.

Again, though, the expansive trochaic pattern of the news is allowing the al-Fayed case to be heard and considered in a way which would not have been possible before.

The attempt to create an atmosphere of rage or disgust against people making conspiracy allegations seems not to have had much effect.

I am writing and watching CNN. The US Senate has voted as a body to indict Saddam Hussein as a

War Criminal, although recognizing that this will not be done. It would indeed be a brave Senator who would explain to his constituents why he didn't vote for that one. Richard Butler has told a Paris newspaper that his inspectors fear that Iraq is concealing many warheads which might carry chemical or biological weapons. They will search for them in Iraq and he's going there himself soon. Why, yes.

It seems to me that what Saddam achieved in the Annan negotiations was a genuine recognition that sanctions could end with Saddam still in power. If, as has been indicated, the Annan agreement was vetted first (or even after) by Madeleine Albright, it may be that Richard Butler is as behind the times as Rupert's cartoonists on how far the hunt should run. Certainly, the general establishment reaction of "It's over, but only for now!" is probably wildly pessimistic.

Wild pessimism could triumph, of course. As you read this, you may be glimpsing Baghdad being bombed on CNN from the corner of your eye. What you're more likely to be glimpsing is the start of CNN's new bureau in Baghdad. CNN International's President Chris Cramer (late of the BBC) says they hope to start one soon. This was on CNN's 'Q&A', in which the viewers asked him questions, including via the Internet. CNN has a vast web-site.

Since the BBC toed the Thatcher line so well during the Gulf War (sixties peace songs were even banned from its music programs) one assumes CNN is a blessed relief for Mr Cramer – although he stressed how similar are the two institutions in terms of the eternal quest (one admits, more eternal for some than others) for journalistic objectivity. In fact, he agreed with a viewer that it was undesirable for anchors to have emotional reactions to news items – and included in this was smiling. There was no memory that Orwell had based 1984 on the workings of the BBC, but it is common in even very good journalists to share Lady Macbeth's fear that memory will drive them mad.

I like the way the rhythms of CNN and general twenty-four-hour news tend to reinforce my preferred type of existentialism. This is one in which the ethical person is neither incarnate (in Christian or Sartrean terms) all the time nor strategically disincarnate (like the Lady of Shalott or Pauline Hanson) all the time, but rather develops intellectual choice as to when to conceptualize and when to open completely to physical sense-data. For a long time, my thesis has been that a lack of existential expertise in

these matters caused, for example, the US disaster in Vietnam. They (it seems to me that the death penalty and other issues show the United States so divided that one can return to the pre-Civil-War habit of referring to them with a plural pronoun at times) were either trapped in false ideals when they should have been tuned in to real events or trapped in real events when they should have remembered their ideals. Instead of this trap, the trochaic rise and fall of modern broadcasting rhythms facilitates the process of choosing, by mirroring sane existential rhythms and also allowing time for them to be exercised.

RUPERT SOMETIMES QUESTIONED one of his formative experiences. As a young newspaperman he had learned to play two-up at Broken Hill. The iambic rhythm of the game had given him perhaps too great an appetite for the abruptness of fortune. Often he simply sought out an opponent – whether a man or even a trade union (every trade union has an individual personality) – whose stakes would be very high, and the outcome very clear and very sudden. But his taste for that had led him to this: the more he won or tried to win, the slipperier the trophies were to grasp. He had been misunderstood about Chris Patten. Of course he hadn't meant to instruct his publishing company not to publish Patten's book about Hong Kong. Yes, he did want to have a satellite in Mainland China, but the whole thing had become very confused.

Firstly, he'd had to confirm in public that Patten's book wasn't boring, and then Patten had gone to another publisher anyway. Rupert hadn't minded saying Patten wasn't boring. He couldn't see why anyone would care whether Patten was boring or not. Or why he should have to publish a book about boring Hong Kong. The Mainland Chinese didn't seem worried about it either. Neither (unless Rupert had missed one of the recent Papal pronouncements to tourists in St Peter's Square – there'd been rather a lot of them lately) did the Pope . . . and he was never really sure about Ted Turner.

WHAT IS THE METRE OF THE INTERNET? Trochaic, too, I think, but for different reasons to that of television. Last Sunday, my husband and daughter went to a rainy meeting in the local park to protest against the threatened airport at Badgery's Creek. When they came home, they checked the TV to ensure that

they were somewhere in the mob under the orchestrated umbrellas, then drifted off to more personal interests. Two commercial channels featured the protest second on prime-time news, the others and the ABC not at all. Although the first time this had happened, it felt unsurprising, with a very everyday rhythm: doing something and then watching it on statewide TV. On the Internet, the trochaic metre is created by the action of the mouse or the keys followed by the relaxation involved in the reading and assessing. The process is usually much quicker than that involved in television, but the effect is probably much the same – if often more agitated, intense and immediately satisfying.

The forthcoming digital television is much more economical and technically prolific than current western analogue TV. Asian countries which do not have such an entrenchment of analogue TV and are also particularly adept at digital technology will as a result have a quick saturation in the digital system, enhancing that worldwide pattern of loud event followed by quiet analysis. I think it unlikely that the conservative regimes in Asia will withstand this, particularly combined with current Internet methods of counteracting propaganda. There is at present, for example, a very effective web-site contradicting the PR claims of the Burmese Government with information on and pictures of its victims.

Answering, in fact, seems to me what the new media are all about. The late Twentieth-Century Intelligentsia (as *Quadrant* might have called them in its CIA prime) have developed a bad habit of assuming there are no real non-violent rational answers to ethical problems, and that of necessity the results are likely to be increased passive or active violence. Hence their general surprise at the Kofi Annan solution.

Even were it not impossible, disarming Iraq has always seemed a problematic concept. It would necessitate a costly US presence in the Gulf to protect the integrity of Iraq from Kurdish nationalists, those invading Iraq to attack the Kurdish nationalists, Muslim Fundamentalists, etc. Taking away many more conventional weapons of mass destruction like bombs would genuinely result in less conventional weapons – even if Iraq is increasingly unlikely to use them – being planned or stockpiled somehow or somewhere. One more likely danger is that there will be more groups like the US right-wing one which tried to plant lethal germs in New York last year in the hope of

starting a war if the blame was placed on Iraq. Maybe that's where my 'Problem of Evil' M.I. ended up . . .

Poker machines have to be rigged by the management because their natural tendency is to favour the customer. Arthur Koestler argued that probability – and therefore perhaps the universe – was anthropocentric. Certainly, trochaic news is. As I write, the thirtieth anniversary of the My Lai massacre was featured, and two Americans who were belatedly honoured for disobeying orders and risking their lives to protect a dozen villagers from among those five hundred murdered by other US soldiers in 'Operation Pinkville'. I remember that in some studies of the Vietnam War, Peter Arnett is quoted as saying he and his colleagues were surprised at the excitement caused by Seymour Hersh's exposure of the massacre, because things like that happened regularly there and they reported them regularly in the wire services but would never have tried to context them as War Crimes. Vanunu, the man Israel kidnapped in Rome and kept in solitary confinement for twelve years because he described Israel's large nuclear arsenal to the *Sunday Times*, has been allowed to associate freely with other prisoners, pending a high court hearing. These days the media in Israel and elsewhere discuss Israeli nuclear weapons freely.

Microsoft's Bill Gates is in Australia as I write – I see him from my eye's corner on TV, talking to Kerry Packer and John Howard. Gates is described as the owner of nineteen billion dollars and later on the ABC as 'the anti-Christ', telling the government not to make laws which discourage technology, telling a huge live audience that the world's present stage of information exchange is 'Palaeolithic'. The last comment seemed to shock reporting journalists vaguely, as if they were apprehensive of some dilemma like that at the end of astronomer Fred Hoyle's novel, *The Black Cloud*, in which the hero dies of future shock as a cloud of intergalactic information bombards him with the overturning of every concept he's ever been taught or known. Which is the sort of mental spring-cleaning (I really do mine in the autumn, which seems a more natal season for my body rhythms) we all surely should do often anyhow. Not that one doesn't also polish up some earlier ideas and put the best ones back in the mental cupboard. Bill Gates has a frugal rather than revolutionary air. He is in essence a packager and provider. Someone else has always done the circuits.

One problem with a flood of information, of course, is that it can tend to produce obsessives – people who have had to become fixed on one particular person or concept in order to have a narrowing focus to cope with the whole. Which when positive can be great fun and very artistic, ethical or sexy, but can also take negative forms. Maybe the US political craving for a succession of villains is not so much mass paranoia as simply a symptom of technological bewilderment. Maybe that's what Rupert provided in the old days: a confusion of values and information, but also the obsessive negative focus to make it bearable . . .

I've autumn-cleaned another of my theories in honour of this piece. For years, my observation of torture and trauma survivors has been that they crave very hierarchical situations in society, sex and art – perhaps reproducing a much earlier secure nurturing situation and/or even compulsively reconstructing and correcting the malign hierarchical situations of their torture or trauma. This hierarchy can be with their own power position either at the top or bottom, but the key process in the hierarchization is that as soon as the hierarchy is defined, the survivor needs to destabilize it, and redefine his or her role completely – a process which continues to be disruptive throughout their lives. My suggested solution to this has always been that it may be possible to choose alternate hierarchies such as those in sex and art in which the survivor can choose a continuously reversible role. One minute, for example, an artist is in power, the next the audience or the subject matter, as the process and participants allow. The essence of Trochaic News is to allow such role reversals in which government power figures cede to media power figures such as journalists and they in turn to assessing power figures such as the discerning viewer, and back again.

The rhythms in this process allow enough passive reflection for the choice of such transitions. The ultimate effect of Trochaic News may not be to overcrowd us with information but to relieve the stresses of both power and powerlessness. The balanced rhythms of information could enable us to evolve in a way which changes the biological nature of our temporal experience. Instead of being overwhelmed by the projected information bombardment, we could at last, because of it, have enough time to think.

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Saddam Hussein still hailed as the Hero of Baghdad

SINCE THE BEGINNING of the Gulf Crisis, the western media has focused on President Saddam Hussein and his regime more than on any other nation or political leader in the world. It has discussed the Iraqi people and its culture only superficially at best. Many Australians and Americans have been convinced that Iraq might soon gain the capability to bombard the whole world with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. (Chinese and Indian papers and analysts increasingly question American claims about Saddam's weapons programs.) Most Iraqis will allow that Saddam Hussein is unable to feed his people, who are dying in their thousands every month from starvation and lack of basic facilities and medication. On a recent visit to Baghdad, I observed and experienced the nightmare-like tragedy that the Iraqi people have endured since 1992.

I set out from the Jordanian capital Amman in a dilapidated sixties-era bus bound for Baghdad, the capital city of Iraq. This bus had been mustered by the Iraqi embassy in Jordan for a group of thirty foreign journalists and European and African musicians whom the Iraqi government had invited to take part in its International Babylon Festival. Getting to Babylon-Baghdad took us fifteen hours of gruelling travel through empty desert. We could not fly there because a UN resolution engineered by the US at the end of the Gulf War prohibits all Iraqis and their visitors from flying in and out of Baghdad. In contrast, the resolution allows United Nations officials and American U2 spy-planes flying under United Nations emblems to pass freely over Iraq. Indeed, the Iraqis have to foot the bill for the salaries and everyday expenses of such foreign personnel. Their tasks include searching Iraq and destroying any weapons of mass destruction that they may find there. On the way to Baghdad, we also had to spend about five hours at the Jordanian-Iraqi border being thoroughly searched by

personnel of both states, who, lacking modern metal detectors or x-ray machines, were using some of the most ancient (and offensive) methods of searching travellers.

Since the imposition of the world embargo, the highway from Amman to Baghdad has become an increasingly important artery connecting Iraq with the whole world through Jordan; my impression was that the Iraqi government has been keeping it in very good repair. However, we met no heavy traffic along the way to Baghdad: the stars in the clear desert air were all we encountered in that long journey.

As soon as the bus crossed the Euphrates river on the approach to Baghdad, we noticed a strange smell. This stench partly derives from the residues of some eighty thousand tonnes of explosives dropped on Iraq during the Gulf War – the equivalent of seven atom bombs of the size of that dropped on Hiroshima. The Iraqis also acknowledge that they have, for more than three years now, lacked enough trucks to collect the garbage from the streets of Baghdad as no spare parts have been allowed to enter Iraq since the imposition of the sanctions some seven years ago. A few kilometres from Baghdad, a heavily built man with an air of quiet assurance or authority about him boarded the bus with a sack of Iraqi dinars. He knew that we would want Iraqi money for our stay in his country, while he needed our dollars. We were surprised to exchange every American dollar for 1400 Iraqi dinars. This rate at one point reached 3000 dinars after the start of the Kuwait-Iraqi crisis. In the late seventies, when Iraq had been rapidly modernizing under the presidency of General Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr – an aged, more gentle Ba'thist who kept the military budget within bounds – each Iraqi dinar had been exchanged for four American dollars.

As the temperature was around forty degrees, we found water a constant necessity. During the Gulf

War, the American bombers had destroyed Iraq's water treatment system and sewerage plants. We found the water supplied from the river Tigris to be polluted and undrinkable as the Iraqis have not been permitted to import chlorine to purify their water. Sweeteners have to be added to the water to make it more palatable, although it still has to be drunk with caution.

Throughout Baghdad numerous photos, portraits and revolutionary sayings of Saddam Hussein are displayed. The Iraqi radio never lets up playing songs glorifying 'al-Qa'id', the Leader. Iraqi Television carries video footage of him delivering the major speeches of his long career in power; and its religious programs present him as a practising Muslim, often showing him intoning 'directions' in classical Arabic that give an Islamic religious twist to Ba'hist Arab nationalism. This impresses upon Iraqis that it is their religious duty as Muslims to stand with the regime, and if need be suffer a bit for its sake. God will reward their steadfastness after the grave at least. The wise, cautious middle-aged and elderly people one encounters in Baghdad's streets, shops and coffee-shops – most young men are away in uniform on the borders safeguarding the Arab nationalist regime – cannot but speak highly of Saddam Hussein's wisdom, courage and unprecedented leadership. Iraqi musicians and writers have produced thousands of songs on Saddam Hussein, which have sunk deep into the Iraqi psyche.

Because I had come to Iraq under invitation from the Ministry of Culture and Information (a guest of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad) I became the centre of attention and care from ordinary Iraqis. Such guests may get offered the last loaf of bread or last apple that any Iraqi may have left as a result of the sanctions. After everything that they have suffered, the Iraqis still retain their touch of spontaneous Arab generosity which is quite independent of any media manipulation, and is truly impressive.

The majority of the people of Iraq are starving, or close to it. Even the fortunate ones get less than one third of the calories required each day. According to Minister of Health, Midhat Moubarak, every individual is receiving five and a half kilograms of bread, 120 grams of oils/butter and 140 grams of beans per month. As a result of this diet, most Iraqis are now skinny and some ten thousand people, half of them infants, are dying of starvation every month. Some new diseases that cannot be identified have started to appear, and local doctors are discussing whether

these diseases and their symptoms are to be attributed to malnutrition and/or to the bombs that were dropped on Iraq. Iraqi specialists and officials speculate that the mysterious sicknesses to which American and British veterans have succumbed since the Gulf War likewise derive from the components in experimental bombs and shells the allied commanders had been testing on Iraq's soldiers and populations during the conflict. (Robert Fisk has now confirmed that the 'depleted' uranium bullets the US used during the Gulf War are spreading cancers and leukemia among southern Iraq's Shiites in particular.)

During this short visit, I visited some of the shopping centres in Baghdad. The prices are very high and the shelves half-empty. I had to go to several places to find even a bar of chocolate. The price of a frozen small-sized chicken is 3500 dinars – the equivalent of a half month's salary for a senior Iraqi public servant. Having a cup of coffee or possessing a bar of soap has become a rarity in Iraq. People are unable to see any hope of change in the near future. Yet petrol is abundant and cheap: a taxi is readily made available to a foreigner for a whole day for just ten American dollars.

As with any country, including Australia, the survival of the regime will depend on how the population thinks politically. How much acceptance and legitimacy can Saddam's administration still command? In Baghdad I encountered a hard core of Iraqis that seems genuinely to believe that they are the victims of the Americans and British who have imposed the sanctions against Iraq. They still have a remnant of the old militant idealism and anti-imperialism of earlier Ba'ath mass media rhetoric. However, thinking of how to win their daily bread has become more of a priority to most Iraqis than discussing the political future of Iraq. The hard core, however, is there, and will fight hard to defend the regime. While in Iraq, we heard of the graduation of the Fidayi Saddam, that band of 'self-sacrificer' guerrilla fighters of Saddam Hussein who are led by Saddam's decisive son Uday Hussein to protect the Leader. The Fidayin will be backed up by the cohesive Republican Guards – who adroitly evaded America's ham-fisted attacks during the Gulf War – and by the huge Popular Army militia of one million Ba'ath Party members, together with the intelligence services headed by Saddam's other son, the calm, calculating Qusay Hussein.

Iraq also struck me as devoid of any broad-based opposition that can challenge the current govern-

ment. This is because ordinary Iraqis cannot accept an opposition bankrolled by the very Americans who bombarded Iraq. Saddam Hussein is as skilled as ever at mustering the ethnic feelings of the nation he leads: he has pointed out that his opponents who left Iraq went to America or Iran. This opposition was automatically rejected by ordinary Iraqis as divisive Shiite or Kurdish particularists; and it has, in exile, lost contact with the Iraqi society that Director Qusay Hussein supervises and disciplines. Moreover, members of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party still dominate Baghdad and the recent election of this party has fortified the position of Saddam Hussein. The party's members are still able to organize huge demonstrations of support for the President and their families will offer themselves (if the need arises) as human shields to protect the presidency of the Struggler-Comrade Saddam.

Some in Iraq, though, do have the sense that Iraq's civic society is falling apart. Education is an instance. Schools in Iraq have been hit hard by the sanctions and students lack enough stationery to do their school work. Iraqi requests to import stationery have been rejected by UN officials in the past on the grounds that it contains materials that could be used in bombs.

Hospital and medical centres which rely heavily on the west for equipment and medicine are the hardest-hit by the American blockade. Children in these hospitals have been described by a western journalist as like "Christmas ceramic toys".

Iraq would not be a poor country if it were allowed to market its resources. Iraqis have under their feet the world's second largest reserve of oil. In the 1970s, Iraq was producing six million barrels of oil a day and Iraqis led a prosperous if hard-working and productive life from the income generated by the export of oil to many countries in the west. Saddam Hussein was able to import technology, utilize Arab and international intellectuals and bring in a few million Egyptians to work for Iraq. Saddam – his advisers at least – encouraged Iraqi postgraduates to attend various universities around the world, including the US and Australia. At the same time, the universities of Iraq were accepting students from all the Arab countries. In the early eighties Iraq was not considered a Third World country. The Iraqis claim that Iraq was able to produce all the food it needed, but that the Americans systematically destroyed Iraqi agriculture during and after the Gulf War.

The Iraqis have been able to rebuild many sites destroyed in 1991. It would take an excellent observer to see that Baghdad was the target of the armies of thirty-three countries (including three superpowers) that deployed the most up-to-date military technology. Some sites were fully rebuilt and function better than before the war. The destroyed Aljumphouriah bridge, for example, was replaced by a three-level bridge, and Iraq's new 'Saddam Tower' is a better communications centre for the regime than that which the Allies bombed out in 1991.

The psychological damage to the Iraqi people is huge. The young generations have lost hope; and this will have severe consequences for many years to come. A million people have died since the imposition of the US-promoted sanctions; and another million may now be on the brink of death. This is made clear around the sacred Shiite sites that include the graves of Imam Ali the fourth Caliph of Islam and his two martyr sons Elhasan and Elhussein. These sites attract believers from all over the world and provide income for starving children who welcome you there and beg for your assistance.

The Iraqis were promised food for oil by United Nations inspectors following the cease-fire that took place after the Gulf War. No-one knows when the Americans will be fully convinced that Iraq has no weapon that can challenge America's interests in the Gulf region and allow Iraq to resume minimal imports. It is estimated that around eight thousand sites have been inspected throughout Iraq, including government departments, hotels, schools, hospitals, churches, mosques and private houses. Some of these sites have been inspected several times by different inspectors. America's demands to search Saddam's presidential palaces, ostensibly for biological and chemical weapons, would give her the lie of the land if she wanted to kill him with missiles, or wipe out the Republican Guard that is the core of his regime. Hence, Saddam has repeatedly blocked those American UNSCOM inspectors, despite the risk that Clinton might seize the pretext to bombard Iraq.

The high rate of mortality and the shortages of food have started to draw support for the Iraqis. France, Russia, China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia (as well as the small Gulf states that America affirms it is protecting) have recently started to sympathize with the people of Iraq. The Americans are finding it hard to involve their allies (Britain aside) in new rounds of

bombing against Iraq, or in the further tightening of the sanctions by passing new resolutions at the Security Council. The Chinese representative there has characterized US demands for widened weapons-inspections of Iraq as contrived and has called for any further activity to be linked to letting Iraq sell oil and receive a better flow of food.

Iraqi officials and media dismiss Australia's Richard Butler and his (mainly American-staffed) UN inspection team (UNSCOM) as not much more than American tools programmed by such information as the CIA feed them. They are seen to keep shifting the goalposts on the disarming of Iraq in order to create a never-ending chain of pretexts to starve Iraq of food, manufactures and technology. The intent seems to be to make Iraq disintegrate as a coherent society, at least so long as Saddam lasts. French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine has concluded that some of Butler's statements about Iraqi weapons capacities or intentions went beyond any evidence provided by his organization to the Security Council. Some more paranoid Iraqis even believe that America decided in 1991 that Iraq – regardless of who leads – had to be permanently destroyed as the only potentially strong sizeable Arab state near the west's oil sites in the Gulf and Arabia. The exodus of Iraq's highly skilled middle classes under the blockade is destroying the capacity of the country to recover and develop as a modern state over the long term after Saddam goes.

For any Arab–Australian who visits Iraq, the country must stand as a sad emblem of Australia's failure to make itself an independent player in the Arab World. At a press conference on the population's nutritional crisis, Health Minister Mubarak denounced American and British UN officials for excising crucial items from the food and medical packages Iraq has been able to order from Western countries under the 'Oil for Food' exemptions. He does not yet include Australia among the Western states intent on Iraq's downfall. He singled out Australia for the wheat sales she has continued to offer even after the US–Iraq War, placing Australia at the top of the list of the countries with which Iraq hoped to improve trade in the near future. Nevertheless, Australia may well have blown the chance it did have to carve out a creative and lucrative role for itself in the Middle East. Knee-jerk support by Hawke and Howard for America against Iraq has diminished the good impression that

Australians might be somewhat apart from the more imperial Anglomorph powers, and therefore able to offer the region Anglo-Saxon intellectualism and technology with fewer strings attached. Neil Truscott, the ambassador Australia appointed early in its relationship with Iraq, took pains to learn Arabic and won the respect of Ba'thist officials. But the Gulf region has noted such acts as the sanctuary Australian intelligence gave to a Syrian fighter pilot who defected to Israel. Gulf Arab officials now associate Australia with the US, Britain and Israel.

The crisis of January–February 1998 settled nothing between America and Iraq, and the potential for a military explosion remains high. Clinton remains eager to bombard Iraq again in order to create more 'positive' headlines, and to assert America's international primacy. The European and Third World countries in the UN, however, are whipping away America's carefully crafted UN cover. Russia demanded during the February 1998 tension that one of its nationals be appointed a deputy chief of UNSCOM, in accordance with long-standing Chinese demands that the team's membership – heavily American – be broadened out to make it truly represent the UN and its member-countries. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has firmly told the US the view of most UN member-states is that it must consult the Security Council before hitting Iraq again.

The US retains overwhelming power, which it continues to exercise arbitrarily. There was a long decade when America sold arms to both the Iraqis and the Iranians so that they could kill each other off while producing business profits for US factories. Now the Iranians are regaining strength. A few American officials calculate: why not let Saddam again get back some of his old strength to restore a balance of power in the Gulf? Yet most US officials are pressing forward with the policy of 'dual containment', a policy of secondary boycotts and blockade designed to deny both Iraq and Iran the means to become modern states able to demand input into Gulf affairs.

But Iraq is not getting enough food now, and an explosion could come at any time.

Izzeddin Rafhi, President of Melbourne's Arab Welfare Association, recently visited Iraq as Arab-Australian observer at the Babylon International Festival. Dr Dennis Walker, a Melbourne historian, is writing a history of pan-Arab ideas in Egypt.

Alan Geoffrey Serle, AO, 1922–1998

John McLaren

WITH THE DEATH of Geoffrey Serle, Australia loses one of its most distinguished historians and *overland* one of its greatest friends and supporters. Geoff was a member of the board that was established to take responsibility for *overland* after the death of its founder, Stephen Murray-Smith, in 1988, and became chairman in 1993. As chair, he was firm and efficient, preventing the often lively meetings from descending into misrule, and ensuring at all times that necessary business was properly considered and discharged. He gave firm support and wise counsel to three successive editors, and expended his own considerable energies on securing a sound financial basis for the journal.

But *overland* was merely one of the many public activities that Geoff pursued as a citizen, a democrat and a scholar. Returning to academic studies at Melbourne University after wartime service in New Guinea, he was president of the Labour Club and one of the founding members of the Victorian Fabian Society, which presented a practical socialist alternative to the revolutionary politics of many of his more romantic contemporaries. After further study at Oxford, where he held a Rhodes Scholarship, he returned to an academic career, first

at Melbourne, then at Monash University. He was a member of the generation of Australian historians who produced a new understanding of our past, recognizing the greed and violence that had been a major part of it, but also qualities of endurance, egalitarianism and tolerance that had forged a tradition of radical, democratic nationalism. Through his histories of Victoria and of Australian culture, his biographies and his teaching, he added to our understanding of our national past and fostered a broad interest in Australian Studies. He also had a long association with *Meanjin*, editing it for one year and chairing its board for many years. Appropriately, at the conclusion of his full-time teaching career, he became editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

It is for others to make a full assessment of Geoffrey Serle's contribution to Australian life. We hope to contribute to this assessment in a later issue of *overland*. In the meantime, we can recall the words he spoke in tribute to his friend Stephen Murray-Smith. Both were among those who moved Australians from colonialism, when they "thought of themselves as necessarily inferior, to self-respect." In 1990, when Geoff was appropriately invited to deliver the

first Stephen Murray-Smith Memorial Lecture, he chose as his topic 'Stirrers and Shakers', defining them as those who "out of love for their country criticise it and abuse it constructively". Geoff himself was one of these, and the words he used to close his lecture define the qualities he shared with them: they were "native-born of Anglo-Celtic background and also unselfconscious Australians, post-colonialists entirely free from the bonds of Empire, and all of them resistant to American political and cultural domination. Yet they were all cosmopolitan internationalists, none of them narrow nationalists . . . They were all bonny fighters, cussed in varying degree, yet open-minded advocates of free discussion . . . And they were all funny men, anecdotists, delighting in the human comedy. In the arid Menzies-Bolte years they were harbingers of the future who gave us hope and encouragement." Geoff Serle's words and example gave us hope and encouragement for the half-century and more since the war, and into this last dreary decade of the millennium. They will outlast the present darkness with their reminder that the light on the hill is never extinguished.

John Morrison 1904–1998

Further Fragments Recalled

Vane Lindesay

IT IS INDEED GRATIFYING for a writer not only to fulfil ambition but to be one of the fortunate creators to enjoy recognition in his or her lifetime – a circumstance not always rewarding the often deserving until after death. In his lifetime John Morrison enjoyed this distinction. John, who died aged ninety-four during May this year, was the last active writer of a circle formed in Melbourne during the immediate post Second World War years, creating a school of realist writing that included Lance Loughrey, Eric Lambert, Alan Marshall, Judah Waten, Ralph de Boissière, David Martin and Frank Hardy.

John Morrison, an “Australian by choice”, his proud claim, migrated to Australia during the 1920s, having served in his birthplace Sunderland, England as a museum apprentice and briefly as a member of that city’s police force, to gather experience from varied occupations as a jackeroo on outback sheep and cattle stations, as a wharf labourer, as a gardener at one of Melbourne’s larger private schools, and as a cleaner in a postal store depot.

Curiously, my interest in entomology, particularly butterflies, was the genesis of my very long friendship with John Morrison who, at the time, was working as a

gardener at the grammar school I passed every day. Looking up from a garden bed he greeted me to yarn about the migrating waves of Caper White butterflies flying past. This encounter led to several years of Sunday morning visits to his Elwood flat where, over a beer or two, I learned of John’s wide interests and indeed of his creative life. “The writing disease took me while I was in my teens,” he once explained. “I began with essays on natural history. All I have ever wanted to do has been to earn enough to keep my head above water so I could write.”

On one of our Sunday chin-wags John mused about when he purchased a two-shilling book on ‘How to Write’. He recalled one of the tips of writing fiction was to grab the reader’s attention in the first line; for example ‘The shot rang out’. John said he never forgot that, pointing out how crudely sensational he knew it to be. Nevertheless he cited the opening words to his fine short story ‘Morning Glory’: ‘The shot was fired about 4.30 in the morning’. John was very proud of that story and listed it at the top of his four best stories, followed by ‘Pioneers’, ‘The Incense Burner’, and ‘Dog Box’.

John was often shrewdly critical of his contemporary writer friends,

not of their work so much as their personalities. He would yarn, not gossip, for hours about writers and writing, poets and poetry. I recall a specific occasion when he pronounced that the finest piece of writing in the English language was not from Shakespeare, or Pepys, or Boswell, but the last paragraph of the James Joyce short story, from his *Dubliners* collection, ‘The Dead’.

These wonderful Sundays were, sadly, to end. John’s health was failing noticeably and my visits were now to a string of hospitals and nursing homes. Compounding his frailty, an arthritic condition of the hands prevented further creative work. But his writer’s eye and ear were both, as ever, keenly attendant. On a 1993 visit to John in hospital he confided gently – it was a four-bed room – “I could write many stories about my time spent in hospital. At Epworth the nurses, as here [Elsternwick Private], are not only the poorest paid of all workers, but a source of great humanity and humour for a writer.”

Among the last words I was to hear John say concerned his belief, indeed fear, of the planet’s destruction, not by nuclear war, but by man-made pollution.

Mercifully, John will never know which.

Kathryn Greck

100 Days on the Docks



This has been a well thought-out plan, worldwide. It's a new right movement, based on Thatcherism. The Liverpool dockers have done two and a half years, now it's the Australian waterfront. They want to get rid of organized labour, that's all it is. We're proud to be a part of the people coming behind the wharfies here. The Australian people have come behind the wharfies, and it shows you what people's power can actually achieve. And people's power can beat any government. We've been on the pickets all around the country. It's given all of our crew a great pleasure to be a part of this picket, even though we're getting docked. But if we stick together, God you've got it. And why should a few, rich, greedy people beat the majority? It's not a part of the way that we were brought up. Let's get rid of them, and let's get back to basics.

Harry, seaman from the New Zealand ship SS Rotoma

IT'S IMPORTANT TO DOCUMENT ORAL HISTORIES in times of political conflict. Oral histories provide a snapshot of perspectives. This piece attempts to pull together the strands of community support, workers' voices and politicians' voices, recorded at Swanson, Webb and Appleton Docks, between 7 April and 6 May 1998. I wanted to find out first hand about the working people who stood firm in a period of political conflict.

Charlie

I've been on the waterfront for thirty years. That Tuesday night (7 April 1998) about twenty-seven of us got in to work. As soon as we got in we saw about a dozen security guards with dogs. I was really upset that we had to find out from Channel Two that we'd been sacked. They said, "Do you know that you've been sacked?" I said, "What are you talking about? We're rostered in for tonight and tomorrow night and you're trespassing! I beg your pardon, you're the ones that are trespassing and those security dogs down there, too."

They came after us and we went into the dining facilities. We couldn't get out. One of the members nearly got bitten by a dog. Another fell down and hurt his back while he'd been running.

We were stuck in that building for nearly twenty-four hours without sleep because we didn't know whether they were coming in after us. It was unbelievable. Thirty years on the waterfront and they sack you, just like that. We've done nothing wrong. We're just normal workers.

I have dreams about the dogs and security guards. One minute there was a dozen of them, then a quarter of an hour later they were everywhere. They came in by boat because we could see them coming past the garage. They blocked us in with a chain and a van. The next day the Union got us out because the court decided that we could go back to work.

Simon Crean

If it can happen to one set of workers in this country, it will eventually happen to everyone. We know how the avoidance schemes emerge when the companies start to learn tricky ways of getting round things. If employers can avoid their obligations of paying wages to one set of employees, they'll

do it for everyone. That's why this dispute needs to be fought out. And that's why we need to stand together. I think they underestimated the extent to which their actions and their support was going to galvanize such a large cross-section of the community.

Good Friday, 10 April 1998

I attended the Webb Dock picket on Good Friday. There were probably about seventy people in attendance. I had heard through the media that a Melbourne court had allowed the MUA members to go back to work. Why, then, were the police escorting non-union labour through the gates of Patrick Stevedores Shipping Company? Paul Martin, a foreman at Webb Dock, put it simply: "We've been locked out."

Paul showed me workplace agreements, "signed with Patrick, and on behalf of the unions. They sent us notices which told us, 'We want to do everything that we can to provide you with an employment guarantee and provide you with reasonable levels of employment.' Two weeks later, they took away all the cranes. This was last December. 'In avoidance of a dispute, they shall at all times implement the no work, no pay rule.' They're supposed to give you notice of any impending dispute. 'Work shall be without interruption.' The only reason we are allowed to stop work is on the grounds of safety. 'Neither party shall engage in provocative action, pending the resolution of a dispute.' This has just all been ignored."

In Sydney there was a meeting of women supporters, wives, daughters and sisters of MUA members. Women spoke passionately about the need for women to form the front line in the picket if the police attempted to remove picketers. "No MUA member is to be taken before us," was the catchcry and became an agreed-upon decision. An older man said to me, "I think this is a mistake, no bloke is going to watch and see his wife or any woman manhandled by the cops." But I disagree. At the Melbourne picket this issue was addressed directly in a statement read out by Leigh Hubbard. It made clear in strong terms, that women were participating on this picket as equal members; no men were to go to the "rescue" of women if the police started to arrest and rough up women picketers. These sorts of discussions and statements are instrumental in sowing the seeds for creating an atmosphere of equality, solidarity and ultimately respect and real communication between men and women. **Chris Raab, Women's Research Officer VUT**

Wednesday, 15 April 1998

A Footscray *Mail* article, headlined 'Docks Law War', featured solicitor Robert Stary's letter to the Commonwealth Attorney General, stating that "Mr Reith and Mr Corrigan had made comments [which] constituted a contempt or incitement to contempt of orders imposed by the court". Mr Stary suggested that "the rule of law must be applied equally to all parties".

Friday night, 17 April 1998

My party of friends drove down to the docklands in the evening. We were looking for Swanson Dock. We thought we were too late. We saw at least a hundred trucks, queued up in Coode Road. But they were not going to Patrick Stevedores. These trucks were lined up to be unloaded at the P&O Docks. We didn't know where we were. Some guys pointed the way to the picket at Swanson Dock.

We arrived by 7 p.m. at Swanson dock. I was with three friends. A placard saying DEFEND MARITIME WORKERS leaned in a drum at the T-intersection into the Dock. The road is quite wide as it accommodates large transport trucks. A large trailer was laid on its side on the road. SCABS OUT was painted on the wheel in green paint. We approached the gate and sat on a gutter. I looked around at the few hundred people on the picket. A huge flock of seagulls flew overhead. I felt vulnerable. But as the night wore on, more people started to show up. The strength in numbers consolidated the sense that we were a force to be reckoned with. The announcements were calm and controlled.

Announcement

In the event that we do have to defend this gate this morning, we should conduct ourselves like this . . . no children are to be involved on the gateways or to have any interaction with police. Please make sure if there are any little tackers, they're out of the way. Anyone



*Celebrating MUA workers at Webb Dock,
photo: Kathryn Greck*

who is frail or elderly, because there are many people in the community who have come down to support this, let's make sure that they're at the back, and not subject to any of the to-ing and fro-ing. In terms of this peaceful protest, link arms and behave as one. We need to look after each other tonight. The best way is for everyone to get as close as they possibly can. I don't want anybody abusing that, either.

Day 81

The emphasis on the peaceful aspect of a protest movement was, at the very least, reassuring. The union leaders conveyed applaudable sentiments. A sense of calmness and unity flowed through the crowd at this point. The number of family members at the picket impressed me. A woman stood up proudly as the picket strategy was announced. When we linked arms, this woman said to me, "My son has been sacked." She had been at the picket to support the livelihood of her son and his family. I felt a sense of respect for her.

It was now 1 a.m., day eighty-one of the Docks dispute. The announcer told us that police intended to make arrests this morning. Marshals handed us papers explaining our rights should we be arrested. We were told that the police would arrive at 1 a.m. I was prepared to be arrested. I believe that the struggle for the MUA is for the democratic rights of every member of the community. The police still hadn't arrived by 1.45 a.m. I left the picket because twelve-year-old Mitch was cold and tired. We felt great to have been a part of the picket. My friend Lyn was sorry to leave the solidarity of the group, but glad that so many other community members were in attendance.

Les

We returned to the docks later that morning. Les Thomas, a furniture maker, told me what happened between 2 and 8 a.m.

A helicopter swept over the crowd, attempting to intimidate them with a spotlight. This went on for a number of hours. A lot of one-finger salutes came up from the crowd.

By 5 a.m. people were linking arms in tight lines, all the way back up to the fence. It felt like an eternity just waiting for the police to get here. Once they got here it was a relief. We thought they were going to attack and that was just another waiting game because the police were just standing there. They changed over and we thought, here it comes now. The police manoeuvred about eight times or more. My arms started getting really tired and I started feeling a bit loopy.

I guess people thought that when two thousand CFMEU workers came up behind the police, we'd pretty much succeeded for the day. There was a huge feeling of victory. It was amazing to see the police part. They came over to one side and the CFMEU came up from behind and formed a line themselves. Total adulation washed over the crowd.

Joan Kirner was at the front line. She's been a hero of mine for a while. Thanks Joan. The police left that line at 8 a.m.; four thousand people gathered together at the main gate. I am proud to say that I participated in this meeting in a small way. I think that the political scene has been revitalized in Melbourne.

The 'Community Art Project' at Webb Dock, photo: Kathryn Greck



17–29 April 1998

I attended the picket on many of the days that followed. Community members at the picket came from all walks of life. I spoke to perfect strangers, drawn together in peaceful protest, to support the MUA members and their own personal political principles. Many of the faces changed from day to day, as thousands of people coursed through the docks. Irene, a canteen worker and her husband John, from Geelong, attended Gate four when not working. They attended in principle, to support their son, who works for Vic Grain. I saw familiar faces from the Footscray area and from the campus where I study. I met Rodney, a rigger who travels from Ballarat to work on a construction site in the city each day. I saw men in suits, labourers in work boots and retired folks.

I befriended a historian who linked arms with an eighty-year-old man on the picket line. She said his body was frail and hands were cool, due to poor circulation. Two women in their nineties linked arms with a small party of thirty, when a truck attempted to enter Gate four.

Workers piled heavy railway lines in front of Gate one. It was welded to form a solid barricade. Safety barriers were constructed to protect the public. A sign reading 'community art project' was installed. This artefact was enjoyed and photographed by the public, who by this stage were invited to "come and enjoy a picnic" with the MUA.

The MUA members I spoke with were down-to-earth, exhausted, polite family men who wished to

return to work. Their comments illustrated the high stress levels endured by these workers, due to enforced double shifts and the severance from social and family life that this entails.

John Howard derided the MUA for including children in picket line violence in Sydney. Television footage emphasized that confrontational tactics are not the way to resolve economic problems. People attend pickets to protect the interest of their families. John Howard's confrontational method of government does not demonstrate good leadership. He does not negotiate with members of the public. He has hidden behind a rhetoric of children. He appears to have no regard to community values.

On a ship

Paul Martin invited me to board a cargo ship at Appleton Dock. Two crew members were due to retire upon returning to their home port in New Zealand. They expressed their disappointment. They felt that their shipping company's redistribution of leave-loading meant that they could spend far less time with their families, if they continued working. When I took one photo from the top deck, he said "I don't want to be photographed in front of the Patrick's cranes." Some of the crew members also want Australians to know that they feel the standard of living in New Zealand has deteriorated since the implementation of the GST.

Countless other stories have accumulated on the docks during this dispute. Actions and opinions occurred everywhere: in the media; at universities; workplaces; the courts; in homes and the Docks themselves. It's wonderful that the MUA workers won their high-court case. As I write, this dispute has been running for one hundred days. The MUA workers may return to work tomorrow. I wish the MUA members and their families, smooth sailing on the work front.

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Donald Brook

Rent-a-Crowd

a nocturnal meditation on the engine of history



IT IS JUST AFTER THREE in the morning and I must have slept for two hours. It has not rained, but the temperature and humidity have shifted because water has condensed in dribbled lace on the outside of my car, blurring the windows and scattering yellow light from a huge sodium lamp at the picket site a hundred metres away, powered by a hired generator.

I belong to Peter Reith's rent-a-crowd. We are stupid, he implies, as well as venal, standing in the way of his reform of the Australian waterfront.

We fear that we are about to be removed from the Fremantle docks by force, along with the wharfies whose jobs have gone. Richard Court's government, through the agency of the Port Authority, has put most of the State's resources at the disposal of Patrick Stevedores. Now is the time to rob a bank, if you are so disposed, while the guardians of public order confront the menace of a rented crowd.

Not since Vietnam have the police presented themselves to lawful and orderly people like me in such an intimidating way. But there is a difference. There are two differences. Unlikely as it has seemed for thirty years, this is an even more important cause. Hot wars come and go, but this war – on which I am inclined to meditate – is ongoing, stealthy, and has perhaps taken a fatal turn. The other and more comforting difference is that the police in those days were more eager to crack our skulls than they are today. They only waited then for their opportunity to go all the way with LBJ. This time they are not so eager. They have a union of their own, and it could be next.

Which is not to say that they won't do it. They will, if they are told to; and I, for one, am extremely apprehensive. We are still living through the Easter coup on the waterfront and we don't yet know that the Federal Court will agree with us that the wharfies have an arguable case. We are yet to share the brief euphoria of temporary vindication, the order for re-

instatement, and to hear a reckless Paddy Crumlin boast that, after all, Australian law and justice run together. This is a serious mistake: that confluence of virtues is part of Reith's and Corrigan's cynical piety, not ours. The law will be used to defeat the union wherever this is possible, and then to bleed it white in the courts when it resists. Paddy knows this perfectly well, and seems to have been overtaken by astonishment.

Opening the window and adjusting to the light I can see that the sky is now a dull red, with huge black cranes painted on it and smaller more officious lights flashing peremptorily, red and blue. At the top of the most southerly bin in the long array of the vast concrete grain silo, the police have cameras running. Without doubt they are eavesdropping on our conversations. There is a helicopter slowly circulating, often hovering for minutes at a time like a dragonfly above a pond. I hope that nothing happened while I slept. It is too quiet. Can they have done their sweep already, somehow missing me?

A few days ago Kim Beazley unexpectedly showed up, pushing through the crowd to the sound of muted, sporadic, half-ironic, applause. Some of the wharfies called to him to get up on a parked truck to speak, but he would not do that. It would have put the wrong message on television screens. He found a small amplifier instead, and delivered from the pavement a perfectly crafted motherhood speech, no word of which could be quoted against him by John Howard as condoning lawlessness. No word of it could be quoted against him by us, either; so we gave him three rousing cheers. After all, he did show up.

The car parked next to mine is a handsome scarlet one, looking muddy chocolate in this light; and one of the men I have seen on the picket has the back door open, arranging something inside. I call out to him "Everything OK?" He misunderstands me. "Yeah," he says. "My youngster's in here sleeping, too."

There is nothing critical in his inflection but that "too" is wounding. The children and the middle classes sleep, while the real men stand around the forty-four-gallon drum of burning timber, in the stink of tar and the yellow light, keeping watch. I am caught in the old stereotype of class: the one that no longer works, the one that fell to economic reason. My meditation is on this.

The old stereotype is not quite dead. It collects me, uncomfortably. I got a scholarship and moved up in the world, protected from damnation by small eccentricities. I have only one suit, which I have not worn for a long time, and rebelliously prefer Riesling to Chardonnay. Wharfies talk to me cheerfully, but over the fence. My voice is wrong, and my style. They tell me things that I already know, and don't pick up my signals of informed consent. Partly this is because of the passion and resentment that they need to express. Ninety thousand a year for fourteen hours work. Worst efficiency record in the world. Rorts. Scams. Partly it is to shut me up. I cannot speak freely, expressing my own passions and resentments as I do to my friends. When I speak guardedly I feel – and no doubt sound – like an imposter or an extension lecturer. Somebody is apologizing to me about the terrified children as seen on TV. He tells me that they were caught by surprise. Hadn't planned ... I interrupt him.

"That's not the answer." I say. "It's the victim accepting blame. The question is 'Who was terrifying those children?'"

I cannot tell whether he has missed the point because of my unfamiliar diction, or he disagrees with it. He does not answer, and changes the subject. Something divides us, but it doesn't matter. On the only question that matters – freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining – our most fundamental interests are identical. Whatever this thing is really about, we are on the same side.

IT IS THE OPPOSITE SIDE to my father's. In the Great Capitalist War he volunteered for the Yorkshire Hussars at seventeen, hoping that an association with horses might bring him into the company of gentlemen. When he put on the uniform they gave to him he found that he was in the Durham Light Infantry. Within weeks he was in France, shelled out of the trenches, gassed and taken prisoner. He was injured by a coal truck in a Ruhr mine, as a forced labourer. Freed in 1918, he went through an apprentice-

ship in engineering. As a qualified draughtsman he was locked out by the employers in 1926, the year of my gestation. His faith in the salvation of the human race by unrestricted private enterprise never wavered through the Great Depression, when we learnt to mend our own shoes. He sold wireless sets, the rising technology of the day, and even became a minor manager until the radio manufacturers found a more profitable way of distributing their product and he was sacked. He had saved a little money by the end of the thirties, which he invested in television shares, and lost the lot. I do not ever remember him leaving the house dressed other than in a suit. He admired Margaret Thatcher to the point of idolatry and would have doted on Peter Reith. I think that he was almost certifiably insane.

So I moved up into the class to which he had so ardently aspired: the class that is not, or anyhow not in principle, at war with the unions. Peter Reith belongs to that class. He has no quarrel, he says, with the unions. He is only interested in efficiency. But he does not tell the truth. I face the dismal pre-dawn, my back aching, conjuring in the weird half-light an image of the arch-dissembler as seen on TV, rolling an interviewer. She has asked him for the third time a searching question that he does not intend to answer.

"With respect," he says; and there is no respect at all in his voice, or in his face. Only a hectoring contempt. And he sets out once again on his catalogue of unstoppable, irrelevant, ritual falsehoods. "Seventy thousand a year," he crows, "for reading the water meter, would you believe?" He quickly licks his lip and a malevolent gloat appears, that he instantly switches off because this is supposed to be serious.

But it is not serious. It is not true, and it would not be an issue worth launching a civil war about if it were. The truth is emerging. Even halving the hundred dollars that it costs to put a container through the Australian waterfront – which is impossible – would reduce a beef exporter's costs negligibly, relative to the three thousand dollars that is paid for unloading and transporting that container in Japan. 'Container lifts' in Australia are not out of sight of the world's best, and the reasons for the gap are complex. Making a significant improvement would depend much more upon the introduction of better equipment, better management practices and better-structured port facilities than it does upon improving individual work practices. Efficiency is not what this

is all about. It is about turning labourers into a cheap, compliant, disposable resource; a resource that is as readily available and expendable as the environment. All that stands in the way of this rationally utopian vision is the union.

Who, then, really wishes to destroy the union, and why do they wish it? Who are the combatants, if they are not the property-owning and investing middle classes on the one side, and the workers on the other? If that class war is over, whose war is Reith directing and Corrigan waging?

It seems to me, as I ease my back in the uncomfortable car, that we must remember a contrast with which the dictionary colludes: a contrast between work and labour. Now that the war is over we are allegedly all workers; and moreover we are increasingly alike in our anxiety about job security, as academic and public service tenure slips away. (The judiciary, too, would do well to stay alert.) As I shall later confirm, the *Macquarie Dictionary* proposes that 'labour' is bodily toil for the sake of gain and that it is work especially of a hard or fatiguing kind. But, contrastingly, 'work' is exertion directed to produce or accomplish something. Work is that "on which exertion or labour is expended; something to be made or done; a task or undertaking".

Very roughly indeed – in a quicksand of overlapping considerations and conflicting criteria – work is done by those who devise and control their own ends, while labour supplies the means. Inspired by this understanding of work we shall (perhaps) applaud the first industrial revolution; not least for its paradigmatic invention: the 'labour-saving device'. The succeeding information revolution does not repudiate this idea but projects it forward. Bill Gates is the model worker of our time, always welcome in the company of John Howard's equally diligent cabinet. His programmers, however skilful they may be, are only labourers. As soon as he has devised a labour-saving program that will write his programs for him, the labourers can go.

Of course this split between ends and means is only conceptually distinct. In practice it is blurred, and we can respond to that in two ways. One way – the uphill way that has been substantially rejected by governments of all persuasions – is to stitch work and labour together again as best we can, both conceptually and practically. Perhaps William Morris was not quite the perfect fool.

The downhill way, via the LSE and the Harvard Business School, is to rip the two apart like tigers. This is the way of current orthodoxy: the way that fuels the war that is no longer comprehensible as a class war. The aggressors are those few fortunate or shrewd workers who have somehow contrived to get control of their own ends, and who seek constantly to minimize the laborious means of achieving them. The victims are their labourers. The traditional armoury of labourers against economic adversity – the acquisition and guardianship of high skill – is now turned against them. A skilled workforce (as the labourforce is deceptively characterized) is exactly what the aggressors want. Properly managed and directed, skilled labour will, more quickly than unskilled labour, create the conditions for its own redundancy.

I reflect on the phrase 'labour-saving device' and on the miraculous ambiguity of language. If labour is to be saved there is only one device with a chance of doing it in this country tonight, and that is the Maritime Union of Australia. The favourable conditions for its own redundancy that labour perpetually creates must be somehow turned away from the generation of higher profits for the lucky and the cunning to the generation of reasonable work and wealth for everyone. If we cannot find ways to do this – or if, like Reith and Corrigan, we are ideologically committed against doing it – then eighty percent of Australians, know it or not, are already over the cliff and half way to hell in a basket.

There is a sullied dawn in the sky, and I must have slept again. Trucks are rolling, but not into Patrick's wharf. My shoes seem to have shrunk. There are four portable dunnies beside the picket tent, and I am lucky to notice in time that there is no paper left in mine. A huge man with a packet of bacon is firing up a barbecue. Two sleepy kids lean against each other. Against the chain-wire fence tents sag dispiritedly, smeared with dew. A woman who looks exactly the way my mother looked when I was ten years old is peeling onions at a trestle table.

I am still convinced that they will come for us, but evidently not this night. One elderly malingerer from the rented crowd will now rot the system, going home for a shower. We are on the telephone tree for emergencies, and shall be back.

Donald Brook lives in Fremantle. He is Emeritus Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University.

The Port Lights: Six poems by Barry Hill

1

Density of waiting. Among the containers.
Standing . . . between . . . one huge thing and another.
Between city and shore. Casino lights and dockside
the dark flat waters slicked to the river's mouth
and *this cul de sac* at the high-wire gate.
To know that truth can arrive by water
is part of our overseas freight of ideas
to be unloaded from the good ship
Liberty, Solidarity, Fraternity, Etcetera –
since '89 we've needed fork-lifts
to get some slogans working for us again,
who would have thought the sky
over the bay would build as nobly
as this, or a narrow road between
wire fences be as liberating as this,
as consolidating as giant Lego blocks
in pastel colours under arc lights;
why, we have an encampment here
made for art, the art of the possible
and also the real thing – like that
sculpture of railway tracks for instance.
Last night we saw it sprawl, metallically yawn
as our men with visors monkeyed on and under
knitting it with blue flame solid as resolve
making a cohort of steel for the police horses,
a corral for their riders if they choose to pause
to admire a major art project,
the city's first good outdoor display
of *civitas* for a long time.



2

The horses. Creatures with beautiful ankles.
Terror in their nostrils, and in us crushed
against the wire. Uncommon melee
of enmeshment in a necessary ecstasy.

Odd. In a moment of waiting
you can go to water
while becoming a girder.

The one whose voice out-grapples hooks
The one who hammered in that peg, effortlessly
The one who said don't punch or kick a cop, if anybody's looking
The one whose laugh burns the air like a set of shears.
The one whose head, shoulders, neck and chest are a building site
The one whose silence has one million '*fuck ems*' in his head
The one as patient as rope, as fixed as a bollard
The one whose laughter rises as easily as cigarette smoke
The one who's hardly needed a feed yet, whose food is talk
The one who borrowed my pencil for a message to the other gate
The one who led the drill that gets women off the hook:

*Don't break ranks for anyone
who's been hauled out of line.
Men stay where you are.
The women know the risks.*

3

Shoulder to shoulder, arms locked, hands clasped
 (like this – look, the fingers hooked in, clawed):
 one leg across the other, the feet planted;
 fore and aft as well, my hand in the belt in front
 your hand in mine from behind; his and hers and ours.
 A ballast of bodies, a containing wall of containment.
 Blood sparks along the line of resolve. Body politic plugged in.
 You don't have to speak, you can shout you can sing.
 We put the wall of containers to shame, they are so *dead*.
 A conversation – unspoken, historical – locks us in sinew.
 A strong communion – mentally orgiastic – a mind fuck
 in all weathers of love for the *polis*, for the river and the sea.
 And don't they know it, those green-eyed ones in the city
 the baying boys of Stock Exchange who think they own the lot
 who pray each day to the Dow Jones, the Nikkei clocks –
 those curs chained to the percentage, their silk ties infected.

4

To hear it working well again, to hear it said,
 and spoken once more the other way round,
 to be gardening the sounds, flowers of rhetoric
 each verb well rooted, the bloom of *communitas*
 thriving here, the tongue of the *polis* alive again
 – with no votes in it! When it's embodied.
 All this makes the waiting healthy, the risk enlivening.
 We are relaxed and comfortable in good fear.
 We have our backs to the water but feel the breeze
 lift there, out over the bay. It's cooler than the air
 that wants to blast our faces from dustbowl country.
 It comes in around our open necks to settle the night.
 It feels like a gift from far away that we well deserved.
 Thank you History, O thank you, for returning once more.
 Buoyed up, with political language worth using again,
 we are mariners sailing around the docks, under them,
 right over the top of them, come to think of it:
 why, the words we use are as good as cranes,
 they could lift those containers if we wanted
 they could set them down in the holds of new hope,
 if we keep our Promethean articulations, fire or no fire.
 As my brothers and sisters run rings around the
 editorials, I'll say more. HERE-TO-STAY! Yes,
 we're staying the language of our tribe. Now.
 Fuck purifying it. We'll handle it in good quality bulk.
 Set it down here for what it is as it comes.
 You ask, comrade, "What is to be done?"
 Vladimir, I'll tell you as we stroll among
 these speakers. This, and this, and this.

5

Heard a little bird say, "Cops got their pay rise
last night. What they wanted, and more.
So they'll be down tonight to bust heads, yeah."
Yeah. There's one now. Age eighteen and a
half minus pimples. And check out that pistol,
just as well it's plastic. No more real than
a schizo Aboriginal woman with tomahawk
or a young father with claw hammer, or that
bloke they thought had a rifle in his boot
but didn't. All shot dead by pimple and mates
no worries. Where are the coroners?
Would be good to have some sound
coroners alive on the picket line.
But we've got the numbers, so far.
It's not raining yet, it's only 3.30 a.m. and
slippery near the portable dunnies
and we'll know before they come,
the agreement is they won't bust us
without warning, there's trust between
our leadership and theirs during the day
when they have the TV cameras running
faster than any horses can run, hey. It's
dripping acne at night we have to watch out for.



6

Those lit ships, afloat at the back of us,
are bulk twinkling from an ocean
that heaves away to San Francisco
where Jack London, miraculously sober tonight
waits on the wharf, with all the Longshoremen,
the wolves of Capital baying beyond them,
each fang of each deludedly individual wolf
rotten for lack of collective nourishment
from the Longshoremen, the Longshoremen –
Who would have expected, my friends,
support from the Americas, from the paradise
of the dollar, from Capital's capital.
Waiting here, seeing the tides come and go,
with Victor Serge in the hip pocket
. . . Serge with his arms out in embrace
of all workers, men and women
from the Urals to Santiago,
Serge of the French prison,
Spanish trench, Russian camp.
Serge of the electric sentence
that has all of us together, active inside it . . .
It's a little too easy, I know
to be romantic about Longshoremen.
So we won't be. (For the present purpose
I'll even put Shelley aside.)
We'll work on what we have. Here.
Be proud of the bluestone we build with. Here.
A city of blue stone is as created, as creative
as a welder with his torch and blue flame.
It's as if we've become,
while waiting on one dock,
a floating harbour
a beacon of voices
our own festival
of port lights.

Dream:
of the starboard ones
dying out
night by night.

Merv Lilley on Scabs

Who? and What?

This is the question both subtle and dense.
who are 'the Jackies' behind the steel fence!
and what is *Their* purpose in sacking clean men
Who'll be working the wharves in the future again?
It's all in the heads of the infinite rich
through sly politicians each 'sonofabitch'
who've been busting their guts since the year BC on
to demonise labour, starve each 'sonofagun'
with industry workforce stretched out at 'the gates'
and never a job for the union-man's mates
and never a soul would the 'ruling class' save

Through that dirty little coward
by the name of Johnny Howard

as he lays Aussie decency in its grave.

All About the Waterfront

What is *It*? A Johnny Howard?
A Sandy McNabb?
Can *It* be
reptile, bovine or sick monkey?
Is *It* a putrid crawling creature
on two legs or three?
No, *It's* someone who will not understand
the simple class layout of this land
with international solidarity
the absolute primeval feature
that defeats *Prime Minister* and *Scab*.

'balaclava man on wharf' by Tony McDonough,
courtesy The Age

Union-Busters Along the Waterfront

Who are they, who are the Sandy-McNabbs destroying Australia? It's The Federal Government with new laws that have destroyed the Arbitration Courts. The Federal Government has been using International Coalmine-owning gangsters, and the courts with the laws that they have passed; now Patricks, The Farmers Union, and scabs from the ever-present everlasting filth of Tory politics.

The Federal Government has overlooked international solidarity of the trade union movement. They have signed their own death warrant, and probably that of their allies, pocket-wise. When the dust has cleared from the bullring democracy will be stronger than before this malicious onslaught on trade unions, follow on from hospitals, health, schooling etc.

We are here to lay a wreath on the burial of Reith's bullshit. Reith, at least in his head, carries the torch of the New Guard, which was created at the end of the Second World War to smash the Waterside Workers in first instance. The founders of the New Guard and the Australia First Movement were Generals from the Australian Air Force and Army who wanted to fight in Australia, recruiting an army, particularly from soldiers who had been under them, prepared to take army orders, kill and gloriously scab.

This history is sometimes forgotten even when repeated in action, as in this instance. The connection is not always known. But at this moment, the fight with the Federal Tory Government is added to our history of struggle. It is up to writers of leftwing calibre to see that it be added correctly.

Mark Gregory

Songs and poems from the pickets



*If you'd not sent the wharfies out,
Without their rightful job,
We might not have united in the way we did today,
To celebrate our victories, this merry month of May,
So call the next election and we working folk will say,
Goodbye Howard and your thieving Liberal mob.*

JOHAN WARNER'S SONG 'Tribute to John Howard' (see page 48) arrived in my e-mail, shortly after he wrote it on the Sydney May Day march. Within a few minutes it had joined a dozen other 'MUA Songs' on my 'Union Songs' web site.

Union songs have been a special interest of mine ever since I heard Paul Robeson sing 'Joe Hill' when I was ten. More recently, I began to build my Union Songs web site at the start of 1997, after some months of rehearsal with Bill Berry for a Blue Mountains Folk Festival union songs workshop. We concentrated on Australian union songs as much as we could, an extensive seam dating back a century or so. Lawson and Paterson were there of course along with Tex Morton, Dorothy Hewett, Helen Palmer and Merv Lilley, so were the more contemporary works by folk revival songwriters like Don Henderson, Harry Robertson and many more.

In our workshop for the 1998 festival we also 'showed off' a brand new song that Maurie Mulheron had written, a song about the wharfies called 'Right That Time'. By then my Union Songs web site had links to unions across the world and I was getting regular e-mail from unionists in many countries including North America, Sweden, Britain, Thailand and Malaysia.

I had been aiming to expand and internationalize my collection of songs, hoping to learn something from traditions outside the Australian, British, Irish and

Right That Time

Maurie Mulheron © 1998

They speak about it proudly, it's now union folklore
How wharfies wouldn't load any pig-iron for war
Japan was a threat so they walked off the job
They wouldn't help the fascists for old Pig-iron Bob

They were right that time and they're right again now
But the strength of one isn't much of a power
So united they stand against all odds
Fighting for us all against the little tin gods

Indonesia's young and fighting to be free
But the Dutch had different plans for their former colony
When the people rose up with freedom on their lips
The wharfies stopped loading any Dutch bound ships

Korea was in trouble, overrun by the Yanks
Wharfies told to load rifles, guns and tanks
Why get involved in this bloody civil war?
We're not gonna ship any weapons any more!

Pig-iron Bob's back, says we're off to Vietnam
Tugging his forelocks for good old Uncle Sam
The seamen wouldn't work on the war ship 'Boonaroo'
And the wharfies held the line when they sacked the ship's crew

The struggle's moved on, mass sackings overnight
The union's survival is the heart of the fight
We'll defy your threats, your thugs and court
We're standing united, no wharfie can be bought!

History's on our side, we'll see this battle through
There's too much at stake for the profits of the few
Our fathers, before us, stood on every picket line
Keep their mem'ries alive and we'll win every time.

They've been right ev'ry time and they're right again now
But the strength of one isn't much of a power
So united they stand against all odds
Fighting for us all against the little tin gods

North American ones I had studied for years. I also hoped to get songs as they were being written. After Patrick sacked their workforce in a quasi military operation on 7 April 1998 that second wish came true. From that time it seemed each week brought a new harvest of songs about the MUA's fight for reinstatement.

Maurie Mulheron, author of the play *One Word We* describing the life of Pete Seeger, wrote this song after hearing one of Peter Reith's diatribes against waterside workers in February. "After a bout of road rage" as he describes the muse that compelled him to write. He has since sung it many times on the various Patrick pickets, and he sang it at the Sydney May Day rally. The wharfies love the song and of course it has particular interest for a whole new generation who began to turn up to the extraordinary 'community pickets'.

A NUMBER OF MY FAVOURITE union songs come from the Kentucky mines in the 1930s. Songs from Sara Ogan Gunning, Aunt Molly Jackson, Jim Garland and Florence Reece. I changed a few words of 'Which Side Are You On?' and came up with the song on the right.

JOHAN DENGATE, ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S most revered songwriters and a parodist without peer, phoned Chris Kempster with a new song he'd written to the tune of 'Abide With Me' (see next page). Legend has it that the hymn was sung by the band as they went down with the *Titanic*, and it seems that Minister Reith may be caught in a similar kind of undertow as a result of his inability to unhitch himself from Patrick, so when Chris sent me the words I was only too happy to include it in my growing collection. Almost immediately I heard the song sung to great effect at the special Peter Reith picket in Wentworth Falls. Five hundred Blue Mountains residents came along to face the drizzle and an even grimmer Reith (the Grim Reither as one banner had it!).

SCABS HAVE LONG BEEN the target and subject of union songs. Jack London penned the most famous description of scabs:

When God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad, the vampire, He had some awful substance left with which he made a scab . . . the modern strikebreaker sells his birthright, his country, his wife, his children, and his fellow men for an unfilled promise from his employer, trust, or corporation.

Industrial Workers of the World organizer, songwriter and martyr Joe Hill wrote about scabs in songs such as 'Casey

Join the MUA

Come all of you good wharfies
Good news to you I'll tell
Of how that good old MUA
Has come in here to dwell

Chorus
Join the MUA
Come and join the MUA
Join the MUA
Come and join the MUA

My daddy was a seafarer
And I'm a sailor's son
I'm sticking to the MUA
Till every battle's won

On wharves around Australia
There are no neutrals left
You'll either be a union man
Or a thug for the NFF

Oh, workers can you stand it?
Oh, tell me how you can
Will you be a lousy scab
Or will you be a man?

When Patrick sacked the wharfies
They thought it was a joke
But worldwide solidarity
Is causing them to choke

Don't scab for the bosses
Don't listen to their lies
Us working folks haven't got a chance
Unless we organise

Jones'. The pitmen from the mines of Newcastle in England had a particularly fierce song about them called 'The Blackleg Miner'. One verse ominously advises:

*So join the union while you may
Don't wait till your dying day
For that may not be far away
You dirty blackleg miner*

Geoff Francis and Peter Hicks, recent emigrants from the mainland to far away Tasmania, e-mailed me their new song on the subject (see page opposite). The authors added "We are pleased to donate this song to assist the MUA in their struggle. Please use it widely and pass it on. This song borrows proudly from folk history, and in particular from 'Casey Jones, Union Scab'. At the Sydney May Day rally, gathered on the historic 'Hungry Mile', Peter Hicks was there to sing this song.

IN THE AUSTRALIAN TRADITION, no songs loom larger than 'Waltzing Matilda' and 'The Wild Colonial Boy'. The swagman was very likely to have been a member of the young Shearers Union and while Donahue may not have been a member, the song about him inspires unionists to this day with its defiant lines like "I'll fight but never surrender said the Wild Colonial Boy". So it was no surprise to find parodies of those songs dealing with the wharfies' struggle as we approach the end of another century. I found 'The Fighting MUA' (see page 46) on a wharfies support web site in Melbourne, a site called "Songs and chants for the MUA & Community Assembly Picket Lines" at <<http://www.users.bigpond.com/Takver/soapbox/muasongs.htm>>

I Can't Abide

John Dengate ©1998

I can't abide the government's front bench, send them away to the Germans or the French
I can't abide Costello's shallow sneer – won't someone make the bastard disappear?

I can't abide that bloody awful Kemp, bring back the gallows, the hangman and the hemp
Take Peter Reith and dump him in the tide. Him I particularly can't abide

Poor little John deserves our sympathy, born neath the star of mediocrity
Pat his wee head and send him off to bed, then hide the key lest he abide with me

I can't abide the government's ministry, Senator Vanstone's worse than dysentery
Send her away without the least delay – don't pour the tea lest she abide with me

Sink them the swine, an iceberg would be fine. Far, far away in distant Hudson Bay
As they go down they'll warble while they drown, flat and off-key, they'll be despised by me

I can't abide the government's front bench, send them away to the Germans or the French
Take Peter Reith and dump him in the tide. Him I particularly can't abide



The Slimy Patrick's Scab

Geoff Francis & Peter Hicks ©1998

Tune: works well with 'The Sydney Market Boys' – or try your own!

There's vampire bats and sewer rats, there's pubic lice and crabs,
But the lowest form of life on Earth is the slimy Patrick's scab.
There's vampire bats and sewer rats, there's pubic lice and crabs,
But the lowest form of life on Earth is the slimy Patrick's scab.

An hour before the sun comes up, he crawls out of his pit,
You wouldn't get too close to him for the smell of slime and . . . other little bits,
Beneath the cloak of darkness he sets off, all clad in black,
To serve his wretched masters goes the slimy Patrick's scab.

And when his treachery is done, on his knees he crawls back home,
His kids don't want to know him, so he eats his tea alone,
They haven't been to school for days, they're ashamed that he's their dad,
"Tell me, what's your father do?" "He's a slimy Patrick's scab."

There's vampire bats . . .

He's not dared step inside a pub or an RSL for days,
'Cos when you're a slimy Patrick's scab the world don't seem too safe.
He sits at home and counts his hoard to find out what he's worth,
But what value would you put upon the lowest slime on Earth?

Alas, accidents do happen, in the wharves and on the shore –
A crash, a smash, a flash, a splash – and our scab's a scab no more,
Nobody mourns his passing, no-one's even slightly sad,
Upon his grave these words inscribed – "Here lies a Patrick's scab."

There's vampire bats . . .

So he walks up to the pearly gates where the heavenly bell he rings,
Says he, "I've worked hard all my life, you'll surely let me in.
"I've always done the boss's will, to have served him makes me proud,
"So please give me my halo now, and my little fluffy cloud."

Saint Peter slowly shakes his head and looks him in the face,
"What makes you think that I've got room for scabs inside this place?
"You've robbed your neighbour of his job and his children of their food,
"You've stabbed your brothers in the back and betrayed your sisters too.
"My angels would lay down their harps, do you think that I'm that mad?"
And to burn in hell forever he despatched the Patrick's scab.

There's vampire bats . . .

A VIEW OF THE JUDICIARY comes from one of the most prolific of the songwriters to have taken up the pen in the MUA cause, John Warner. His song 'Justice Delayed' (below) won immediate acclaim. Written prior to the Federal Court and High Court decisions, it's a powerful vehicle for the basic demand of the wharfies: reinstatement.

Justice Delayed

John Warner 25 May ©1998

Tune: Mixture of Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre and Bonnie Dundee/Billy of Tea

Justice delayed is justice denied,
Four judges have ruled that the right's on our side,
Now give us our jobs back and fling the gates wide,
For justice delayed is justice denied.

We've maintained the peace as we stood for our right,
They brought in the dogs and armed thugs for the fight.
They went to the courts and the courts ruled our way,
Why are we still standing outside today?

It's comic to hear businessmen crying poor,
They can't pay fair wages yet they pay for the law,
The law goes against them, as rightly it ought,
And still they have money to try the next court.

They say they can't pay us, the company's broke,
And we'd all be laughing except it's no joke.
They're still paying scabs on the big hired bus,
But they've stripped all the assets, there's no cash for us.

We're sick of injunctions, we're sick of the wait,
While scabs wreck equipment we see through the gate.
Our trust in the law's wearing weary and thin,
It's time to do justice and let us back in.



The Fighting MUA

Tune: the Wild Colonial Boy

There was a foolish stevedore
And Patrick was his name
It was owned by a scab named Corrigan
To our great nation's shame
He was a liar and a cheat
A puppet some may say
But never could he bluff or beat
The fighting MUA

It was in the night that Patricks came
Like burglars at their trade
With guard dogs, scabs and Canberra spies
Coming to their aid
While Peter Reith and his little mate
Fanned the flames all day
In London, Cooktown and Dubai
They'd smash the MUA

Chorus
So come away my Comrades
On the wattle we'll have no stains
We'll scorn to live in slavery
Bound down by iron chains
We'll link our arms and stand and fight
Forever we shall try
We'll fight beside our fighting mates
The fighting MUA

The judge in England said he could not
Countenance this lot
A nasty scheme was all worked out
A filthy dirty plot
And comrades from around the world
Will now come to our aid
To fight and organise
Beside the fighting MUA.

PATRICK HAS DOCKS AROUND AUSTRALIA. This includes Brisbane, where the following three poems seem to originate – if the e-mail address is anything to go by. I discovered John Tomlinson's poems at the 'Support Australia's Wharfies' web message board in Melbourne at <<http://www.insidetheweb.com/messageboard/mbs.cgi/mb63212>>

These poems (John Tomlinson ©1998) give this union struggle, in many ways a very old struggle, a modern beat or rap. They remind me of Rock Against Racism performances by John Cooper Clark or maybe the *Making History* recording of Linton Kwesi Johnson.

What sort of Practice?

World best practice so they say.
Wharfies working without pay.

While wharfies picket one more day
Patricks seeks another stay.

World best practice so they say
taking all the jobs away.

World best practice it is new
coming to a job near you.

World best practice made for you
coming soon to your job too.

Picket Line

Oh we're relaxed and comfortable
Yes we're doing fine
we are relaxed and comfortable
out on the picket line.
I know you said you'd govern
you'd govern for all of us
we'd be relaxed and comfortable
and there'd be no fuss.
Well we are relaxed and comfortable
and so say all of us:
yes, we're relaxed and comfortable
we're feeling mighty fine
we are relaxed and comfortable
out on the picket line.
The rain might fall the wind might blow,
hard times come and hard times go,

there might be hail there might be snow,
but we're relaxed and comfortable
out on the picket line.

'Cause in our hearts we're smiling
and we know we'll see sunshine.

Yes we will see sunshine
at the ending of this struggle
when we lay our banners down
we'll be relaxed and comfortable
there'll be no need to frown.

Because we stand together
and together we will win.

We won't scab or lie or cheat
so in the end you face defeat.

Together we will win.

We don't need guard dogs
nor come in the dead of night
we struggle for each other
and we try to do what's right.

Oh we don't need to lie and cheat
we don't need to steal.

We try to tell it like it is
we try to make it real,
and in our trust of others
we have forged a force of steel.

You might look in wonderment
you might smile and sneer
but the picket line is stronger now
the end is coming near.

We don't lie to judges

we won't lie to you

we don't lie to each other

we will build a world anew.

We are relaxed and comfortable

I say we're doing fine

we are relaxed and comfortable
out here on the picket line.

Standing shoulder to shoulder
supporting one another:
brothers, sisters, children, wives,
fathers, daughter, mother.

Yes, we are relaxed and comfortable
out here we're doing fine
yes, we are relaxed and comfortable
out on the picket line.

Oh you can stick best practice,
and you stick your hate.

We're never voting for yer
once we're back inside the gate.

The artisan is partisan

Reith's seldom right
he's not too bright.
In fact he's f—ing stupid,
fallen in love with Corrigan
John Howard's playing cupid.
Blood on the street.
Blood on the stair.
Blood in your eyes
and blood in your hair –
industrial resolution.
World best practice in asset stripping.
Bottom of the harbour skinny dipping.
I know indeed
just what we need –
a worker's revolution.

“**W**ORLD'S BEST PRACTICE” is a favourite mantra of those who accuse the wharfies of indolence on the job, while “relaxed and comfortable” is what John Howard said he hoped Australians would feel if he was elected. “Bottom of the Harbour” was a corporate strategy of companies to illegally divest themselves of responsibilities and tax burdens by setting up special shells that were artificially sent bankrupt while the parent companies lived on in style. These schemes were revealed in 1980 by the Costigan Commission, and the judge in that investigation, Frank Costigan, recently likened the tactics of the owners of Patrick to those “Bottom of the Harbour” schemes. John Howard was treasurer at the time of the original schemes yet seems to have forgotten the stench they left on him and his fellow Liberals.

John Coombs the wharfies' leader proposed a new definition of World's Best Practice at the May Day rally, one that includes social responsibility such as decent health, safety and education systems, security of employment and ending child labour. He also points to another kind of Globalization, one of workers' internationalism against the onslaught of multinational corporations.

AS I WRITE THESE WORDS the union has won back the right to the jobs on the wharves in the High Court. The day before this historic decision saw the biggest May Day celebration for many years, where many of

these songs were sung along with the traditional repertory of union songs. Every capital city in Australia has a Trade Union or Solidarity Choir along with assorted folk singers to sing this kind of material, and we have seen a great outpouring of new and refurbished songs to meet the needs of another campaign in union history.

The tradition of union songs is as old as unions themselves – now approaching their third century. It borrows from the popular traditions of the broadside ballad and the folk song. There is the sense of the expression of views of a vibrant community, a culture. The means of collection and dissemination quite naturally include the latest technologies, the Internet and the World Wide Web. Such songs are a hardy breed and resurface from their underground streams or untapped seams when most urgently required. Typeset on a page they may not look much but a song exists for the singing and the printed version is never much of a guide to its qualities.

I leave the last word to John Warner with a song inspired by the May Day march in Sydney while he was on his way to perform for a wharfies fundraising concert.

Tribute to John Howard

John Warner ©1998 (May Day March 3/5/98)

Dear Johnnie Howard, we thought we ought to say,
How much we appreciate the things you've done today.
You've really done us well, old lad,
You've treated us alright,
You only had to flap your gob to make us all unite.
Ten thousand folks were on the street,
You should have heard the cheers,
More union solidarity than there has been for years,
Take on another union, lad, before it disappears,
Johnny Howard, the working man's delight.

Dear Johnnie Howard, receive our vote of thanks,
Likewise Mr Corrigan, his businesses and banks,
If you'd not schemed and plotted,
To bully, cheat and rob,
If you'd not sent the wharfies out,
Without their rightful job,
We might not have united in the way we did today,
To celebrate our victories, this merry month of May,
So call the next election and we working folk will say,
Goodbye Howard and your thieving Liberal mob.

Visit Union Songs web-site <<http://www.chepd.mq.edu.au/boomerang/unionsong>> and send me some more songs!

Richard Evans

Damned rorts and God's reforms

The language of the docks dispute



MANY OF CANBERRA'S SUBURBS are named after important politicians: Deakin, Lyons and Fadden, for example. In the early seventies, Les Murray wrote a poem in which he imagined Canberra suburbs named instead after the ideas which had shaped Australia.

*I shall play a set of tennis
In the gardens of Red Menace
Shall I scorn to plant a dahlia
In the soil of White Australia?*

If the current federal government were to take up this notion, there is little doubt a new suburb called Waterfront Reform would soon spring into being.

The waterfront dispute is the most bitter industrial confrontation since at least the pilots' strike, and probably since the SEQEB dispute. We have seen mass sackings, angry confrontations on the wharves, extraordinarily intemperate language from public figures, and a bewildering tangle of litigation.

The government and its allies, which include Patrick Stevedores and the National Farmers Federation, have experienced major setbacks, both in courts of law and the court of public opinion. Despite this, they are determined to push ahead. "We have not changed our resolve to go forward and reform the waterfront," says the chairman of Patrick, Chris Corrigan. "Court decisions come and go, but the Government's determination to reform the Australian waterfront will remain undiminished," says the Prime Minister, John Howard. "Waterfront reform has overwhelming public support," and indeed is "inevitable", says workplace relations minister, Peter Reith.

But what exactly do they all mean when they talk of "reform"?

The argument is based on the principles of free market economics, and it runs something like this: the Maritime Union of Australia is a monopoly supplier of labour to the stevedoring industry; all monopolies are bad, but this one is especially bad because of a deep-rooted workplace culture of greed, obstruction and thuggery; the result of the MUA's intransigence is a slow, costly and unreliable waterfront which adds to the cost of Australia's imports and exports.

In a radio interview, the Prime Minister defined waterfront reform in these terms: "This is not a debate about ideology. This is [a] debate about Australia's economic future . . . my Government will do everything it can to deliver the most productive, competitive, and successful waterfront in the years ahead." These are the key words: productivity, competitiveness, and success – economic success. The implication is that these are aims of indisputable worth. And, judging from the results of opinion polls, most of us agree. The judges of the Federal Court certainly do.

In announcing the Court's decision to turn down Patrick's appeal against the order to reinstate the sacked wharfies, Justice Wilcox said: "As individuals, each member of the bench, like all sensible Australians, is in favour of a more efficient waterfront."

The dark side of the force, in the government's scheme of things, is unionized labour, and again there are three key terms used: rorts, overmanning – also described as bludging – and inefficiency.

The use of the word rort here is especially interesting. 'Rort' is an Australian word, not found anywhere else in the world that I am aware of. Like much of the Australian vernacular, it is derived from nineteenth-century English slang. To speak of a 'rorty time' a century ago meant an enjoyable time, a day out. A rort

came to mean a rowdy and drunken party, and later an underhand scheme, a racket. It is a good Australian word. Like 'bludger', it appeals to the Australian heartland, the 'battlers' whom the conservative parties so energetically wooed during the last federal election.

THE LANGUAGE IS PERFECT. Asked whether we support 'reforms' which will end 'bludging' and 'rorting', few of us could say no. But does this apparent consensus entitle the government to label its efficiency drive as 'reform'?

The waterfront dispute is just the latest example of an economic change which is persistently described as reform. We have seen telecommunications reform, banking sector reform, public service reform, and many other reforms which seem mostly to involve sacking people and closing offices in country towns. So persistently have the advocates of these changes hammered away with the word 'reform' that it has become a fixed part of the debate. Journalists who are reporting in an otherwise even-handed and impartial manner will talk of 'waterfront reform' as an established fact. It has even entered the strange lexicon of headlines: 'Defiant minister will press on for reform'.

The word 'reform' is even used by those who are critical of the process. In an editorial in the *Melbourne Age* in April, it was argued that the federal government was deeply implicated in a possibly unlawful conspiracy, one which bore comparison to the bottom-of-the-harbour tax schemes of the early 1980s, and which might yet lead to violence. "For an administration that has placed such a high store on the rule of law and observance of its proprieties," the newspaper said, "this is a stain on its character and reputation." But in the very same article, the government's strategy was still described as "reform".

This careless and indiscriminate use of the word is unfortunate. 'Reform' is a loaded word, one which carries with it a veritable shipping container of historical and emotional associations. While dictionaries do list relatively neutral definitions of 'reform', meaning an improvement or rectification to something faulty or inefficient, in general usage it carries strong moral overtones. It is a word which harks back to the Reformation, the great religious movement which attacked the scandalous abuses and corruption of the late medieval popes, and which eventually gave rise to the Protestant and Reformed Churches. More

strongly, it revives the memory of the great Reform Movement of Britain in the nineteenth century, and in particular the Reform acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884, which extended the right to vote to wider and wider sections of society. Other important reforms were the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, improvements in the legal status of women, universal elementary education, and the end of child labour.

The driving forces behind such reforms were moral and religious, not economic. Indeed, these changes were vigorously resisted by many conservative interests of the day. They argued that reform was a ticket to economic ruin, and the thin edge of the revolutionary wedge. Charles Dickens satirized this resistance in his novel *Hard Times*, which is set in a fictional northern industrial town, Coketown. Dickens wrote of Coketown that, despite its imposing grimy brick buildings, it was a wonder it existed at all:

It had been ruined so often that it was amazing it had borne so many shocks. Surely there was never such fragile chinaware as that of which the millers of Coketown were made. Handle them never so lightly, and they fell to pieces . . . They were ruined when they were required to send labouring children to school; they were ruined when inspectors were appointed to look into their works; they were ruined when such inspectors considered it doubtful whether they were quite justified in chopping people up in their machinery; they were utterly undone when it was hinted that perhaps they need not always make quite so much smoke.

The reformers believed that society was faced with a simple choice. Either it could reform, and create a more just, equitable and moral society, or it would face bloody revolution. In the words of Shelley, "Choose reform or civil war".

The nineteenth century was an age which believed strongly in moral uplift and the improvement of society. This aspiration was symbolically reflected in the soaring cathedrals they built in the Gothic Revival style. It was also an age of humbug, of course. Being human, the reformers had failings. They could be sanctimonious, pompous and hypocritical at times. As one wit observed, "All Reformers, however strict their social conscience, live in houses just as big as they can pay for." Even so, it was a period of lasting achievement, one which created many social institu-

tions which have made great contributions to society. The independent press. Sporting clubs. The civilian police force. State education. Free hospitals. Oh yes, and trade unions.

BACK TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, and to the pickets blocking port gates from Fremantle to Botany Bay.

At the height of the dispute, the Productivity Commission released two reports which supported some of what the government and Patrick had been arguing. The reports argued that there were restrictive and inflexible work practices on the waterfront which raised costs. The reports also blamed poor management by stevedoring companies, high government taxes, and inefficient quarantine and customs services.

Mind you, this is not the end of the argument.

The Melbourne *Herald Sun* described the work of the Productivity Commission as "a damning report showing Australian dock operations to be among the world's most inefficient". But three paragraphs later, clearly struggling with the subtlety of it all, the article said that "a rival report by Drewry Shipping Consultants has found Australian port operations are close to the world's best". (Q: How do you confuse a tabloid journalist? A: Say "I have some good news, and some bad news.")

But let us accept, for the moment, that the federal government is right. Let's accept that the MUA is the problem, and that Patrick's actions in dismissing its entire workforce would indeed significantly improve waterfront productivity. This result would be good for many people. It would allow stevedoring companies and those involved in the import and export trades to make more money. Perhaps they could then employ more people, and invest in new areas of business. Good for them. But it would not in any way improve the moral and spiritual life of the Australian community. To the contrary, it could do a great deal of harm.

As parents are constantly reminded, it is what you do, rather than what you say, which teaches children how to behave. And the lesson which everyone in the community, including our children, would take from the success of the government's waterfront strategy is this: that secrecy, legal trickery, deceit and brute force are permissible means to achieve economic gain. Surely this is not something which can legitimately be called 'reform'.

Richard Evans is a journalist and policy researcher with the Communications Law Centre, Melbourne. This is a revised version of a paper broadcast on Radio National in May.

Under the Hook

Melbourne Waterside Workers Remember 1900-1980

by Tom Hills & Wendy Lowenstein

A book about the waterfront and the men who worked on it, told in their own words.

This historic book, first published with the assistance of rank and file waterside workers, is now out of print. The author, in association with the New International Bookshop and with the assistance of the MUA, plans a new edition, updated to include interviews with today's wharfies. But money is short. You can help to underwrite publication by pledging to lend a specific amount if needed when we go to print.

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Yes I would like to play a part in republishing *Under the Hook*.

I would be willing to help by underwriting its production with the sum of \$
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Romancing the Drone

The Contemporary Didjeridu

THE DIDJERIDU HAS quite recently expanded its scope beyond Aboriginal cultural practice to become an inescapable and potent part of Australian society. Prior to this, the didjeridu was most common in the northern tropical regions of Australia where it was a part of both sacred and secular ceremonies and activities¹ and where its use dates back at least fifteen hundred years.² While the didjeridu is still integral to some traditional cultures, it is now used nationally in Australia by individuals and groups with diverse abilities and attitudes.³ When, in this process does homage become theft? Does artistic licence become a licence to steal? When does inspired musical synthesis become pointless pastiche? Is it possible to keep culture, commerce and creativity separate? Can intercultural musical collaboration and innovation be mutually beneficial?

These questions and the issues that underlie them are not unique to the didjeridu. They are now occurring in popular music on a broader scale than ever before. Distribution, popularization, and commodification have helped incorporate the local into the encompassing global on an unprecedented scale and the trend will probably continue. Yet simplistic, one-way notions of western cultural imperialism are often inadequate. They fail to acknowledge that other cultures and peoples can manipulate western technology, mercantile networks and aesthetic criteria to serve their own ends.⁴

The didjeridu is being globalized. It is promoted in folk music festivals in the US (Seattle) and the UK (Glastonbury), and at healing circles, workshops and concerts in many other countries. Well-known and accomplished Aboriginal performers such as Mark Atkins, David Blanesi, Alan Dargin, David Hudson and Richard Walley are sometimes keenly sought out as 'authentic' practitioners. Sometimes, para-

doxically, overseas audiences may be more receptive than Australian audiences to Aboriginal Australian artistic expression, bringing with them less cultural baggage, and taking the didjeridu at face value as artistic expression and not as overt political statement. Whether the didjeridu's reception overseas is as exotica or art is uncertain but it has established a burgeoning niche market with world music and New Age aficionados and within alternative music scenes.

The most highly regarded public performers on the didjeridu are indigenous, who project specific cultural groundings and authenticities in their music. Those from Arnhem Land may play in traditionally meaningful and sanctioned styles. Others who produce quite original musical expressions expect them to be read as linked to aboriginality. There are a few highly regarded non-indigenous players such as Charlie MacMahon (solo and with the groups Gondwanaland and Gondwana) who are well regarded by Aboriginal audiences because of their cultural sensitivity and awareness of cultural etiquette and protocols. However, the overwhelming majority of didjeridu players are non-indigenous Australians, drawn to the instrument for personal, recreational and musical reasons.

IN OCTOBER 1996, a festival, Didjfest '96, held at the premises of the Aborigines Advancement League in Northcote, Melbourne, brought together about two hundred didjeridu enthusiasts to play, learn, and listen. Among the participants were professional players, makers and sellers of didjeridus and associated music, paraphernalia and merchandise. This included clothing, Aboriginal artwork and even alternative healing technology and objects. Though the group brought together by Didjfest '96 was socially diverse,

there was a high representation of white-collar tertiary educated participants between the ages of 30 and 50. About 15 to 20 per cent were women. At the festival there were playing workshops, concerts, lectures and discussions. Renowned players like Alan Dargin were featured, and the event consolidated the idea of a didjeridu network and scene.

Discussions and interviews which we conducted with participants revealed some recurrent ways in which they understood their own commitment to the didjeridu. A relatively small number had well-defined public musical ambitions for their playing. Most found satisfaction in playing for their own pleasure, relaxation, enjoyment or spiritual and mental health. Some placed their involvement within specific personal and political projects of reconciliation between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australians.

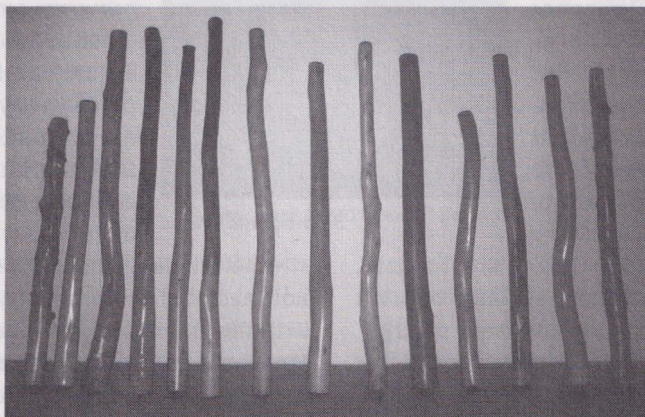
Some participants, particularly teachers and sellers, had integrated the didjeridu into elaborate and syncretic cosmologies and theories of consciousness, typical of the confluence of social and religious beliefs characterized as New-Age.⁵ For some, the instrument is linked to the Hindu chakras or points of body energy. Others propose that the vibrational frequency of the sound is consonant with global or universal oscillations. In such theories many metaphysical and scientific and cultural theories are promiscuously blended. In spite of the, at times, non-mainstream, alternative nature of these theories, they seem to be treated by many participants as at least plausible.

However, most players described themselves as drawn to the instrument by the sound itself. How, then, is this range of dedications best understood and analyzed? Ethnomusicologists like Mark Slobin remind us how often within the cultural complexity of globalized culture, a particular musical sound and meaning may strike an individual with unique intensity, but with little apparent social predetermination.⁶ This largely unexplained 'affinity' can set them on a musical pathway to a commitment. But the in-

dividual character of didjeridu enthusiasm does not mean that it is divorced from other social structures and actions.

The cultural choices of players take place within musical and social institutions, which suggest the ways in which these choices can have a consistent and resonant meaning, and can energize and steer personal enthusiasms and interpretations. Although these players may have been inexplicably attracted by the sound and idea of the didjeridu, few would have felt this pull a decade ago, and if they did it would probably have come to little. Players are now increasingly aware of a didjeridu scene which is emerging as a social institution and musical subculture, through the activities of all participants. A core of public actors and stakeholders take leading roles in this process.

SOME OF THE MOST influential actors are organizers, producers and sellers, whose interpretations and judgements are displayed for public evaluation. Raymond Mow, the organizer of Didjfest '96 has been



Stringybark and Bloodwood didjeridus photo: Lynne Johnstone

associated with cultural entrepreneurship in Melbourne since the 1980s. He ran a major folk venue, the Troubadour, during the 1980s which attempted to move the loose musical coalition of acoustic folk music towards a relatively professional style of presentation and promotion. He took up the didjeridu about eight years ago, and in

the past few years has taken an increasingly active part in teaching, selling and promotion.

It has been estimated that from 30,000 to 50,000 didjeridus are sold each year in Australia, many to overseas visitors.⁷ The production of didjeridus is an important local industry for some Aboriginal communities, as well as non-Aboriginal manufacturers. Most instruments are retailed through arts and crafts outlets in capital cities and tourist centres, usually as ethnographic tourist paraphernalia. Many such instruments carry statements of the maker's name and origin, which may or may not be accurate.

Many are decorated with artwork which ranges from more traditionally based northern tropical-region styles to much more recent Central Desert-region dot-painting styles.

Some of these kinds of instruments are retailed by non-Aboriginal distributors associated with the didjeridu scene. However, most of the didjeridus made and sold to players through local networks come from non-Aboriginal makers. Many didjeridus produced as items of ethnographic craft are of little value as musical instruments, and many of these player-makers started making didjeridus in reaction to the decorative ethnographic market, beginning their activities with the aim of producing musically satisfying and durable instruments. However, in doing so, they make significant and strongly signifying choices about production methods, materials and decorative finishes. For example, one Melbourne maker, Kevin Bradford makes his didjeridus from termite-hollowed branches collected from Northern Victoria, mainly mallee species. Using a clear polyester external finish and an internal beeswax coating, he finishes them in several styles. Most of his didjeridus are 'baries', stripped of bark back to timber and following the contours of the branch. Others are 'natural', which are finished with the smooth mallee bark left intact. Occasionally, he uses Aborigine-style painting.

Bruce Rogers, a workshop presenter at Didjfest '96 is another prominent producer and seller and full-time didjeridu enthusiast. He produces mainly plain didjeridus. He obtains timber from northern Australia, and the didjeridus he makes are stripped of bark, sanded and clear finished. He maintains that he does not want to be seen as stealing Aboriginal culture and he wishes to promote the didjeridu as a musical instrument in its own right. This means not using Aboriginal decorative design: "That would be misrepresenting myself and insulting to Aboriginal people".

His strategy invokes the aesthetics of western timber instrument design, showing the wood grain through a varnished finish, which is produced predominantly with natural products. Rogers remarks

that prospective customers will say that his didjeridus "look like my guitar". He also cuts his didjeridus to tune them to a standard pitch in the western tempered scale. These design options are consonant with the use of the didjeridu in structured western concert and recorded music. Rogers has played didjeridu in musical projects including folk, jazz and rock bands.

The styles of instrument production reflexively create and respond to the emerging discourses of didjeridu music. The clear finished, sanded wood didjeridu is an autonomous musical instrument. Its plainness emphasizes the essentially abstract, musical aesthetic: for ensemble playing the fundamental pitch is important, and contemporary recording technology highlights the acoustic characteristics that result from the shape, size and internal bore.

Yet even within this plain and intentionally non-Aboriginal style there are variant approaches to the 'natural wood' finish, in the choice between synthetic polyester and other natural varnishes. Some makers use coloured gloss finishes to replace the wood appearance with deeper stains or colours, resulting in a relatively high-tech appearance. By contrast, other makers place the didjeridu as a 'natural' musical instrument

which produces a sonic experience that is not mediated by specific cultural conventions. The extreme of this design option is to be found in what are referred to as 'feral' didjeridus, produced by some makers. These are little more than selected termite-hollowed branches, with the bore cleaned out, perhaps with a limited amount of carving to produce a suitably accentuated mouthpiece and a flared bell end. Especially if made from rough-barked eucalypt species such as stringybarks, these evoke in appearance the dusty and matted hair associated with their namesakes, if not their makers.

FOR ENTHUSIASTS OUTSIDE Australia, the global didjeridu culture interacts with ideas of individual and collective identity. Typically, the intense localism of the instrument contrasts with the possibility of transnational identifications. These include what is identified as New-Age, the so-called 'fourth world' of



Boxwood didjeridus

transnational indigenous peoples' alliances, or the consumerist exhilaration of access to a musical smorgasbord drawn from outside the uniform global metropolis.⁸ Australian players, too, form part of this scene and market. However, they also implicate the didjeridu in local cultural politics.

David Carter has described the construction of the Australian national "imagined community" in the 1980s and 1990s as the convergence of several competing discourses.⁹ Among these the idea of the geographical Australia, as "a unique ancient land", competes with other constructions, such as multiculturalism, or the Australia of a historical heritage. But most importantly in the socio-cultural positioning of the didjeridu is the possibility of an Australian nation imagined out of Aboriginal culture. This merges into ideas that the political basis of the nation-state is geographical. Throughout the 1980s, nearly all the landscapes upon and through which the nation of Australia is imagined have been Aboriginal landscapes, though often depopulated of Aborigines.

This discourse reads the didjeridu as the voice of the land. The idea that the sound of the didjeridu, particularly the unbounded drone, and the interplay of vocalizations and overtones, is somehow representative of arid inland Australia has become commonplace.¹⁰ But in this semiosis, the player is allowed a privileged position. The didjeridu, more than most musical instruments, creates and relies on a range of somatic involvements, from the continuous circular breathing (the psychotropic effect of which is often used as a meditation aid), to the experience of the vibrations being transmitted through the body.

Playing, according to teacher Peter Lamshed, can "evoke strong emotional charges which resonate through the entire body. By recreating the sound of the earth and animals, ancient memories rekindle a primal need to reconnect to the earth and ultimately ourselves". Thus the player is directly implicated and invited into a chain of associations: instrument, land, individual, and nation. For Raymond Mow, the didjeridu encourages relationships of unity with 'the land', to "connect with it rather than live on it".¹¹ The

physical structure of the instrument and its sound is ordered and made meaningful by its closeness to nature.

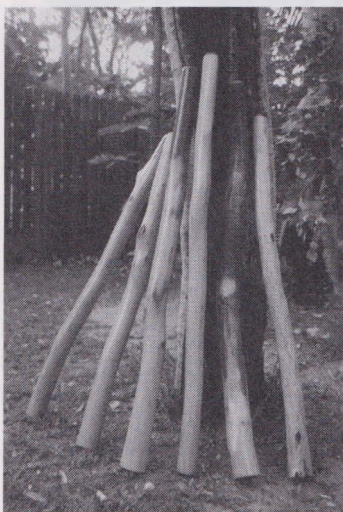
In their attraction to 'the sound' nearly all players assert a pre-cultural basis for musical power of the didjeridu. The didjeridu is thought of as the voice of elemental consciousness and experience, the voice of the land or in more extreme cases, of the universe itself.¹² These interpretations oscillate uneasily between an acknowledgement of Aboriginal cultural primacy and pre-cultural essentialist interpretations. Various reconciliations are possible. One is to take the

Aboriginal uses of the didjeridu as evidence of their access to a pre-cultural wisdom. But if Aboriginal Australians are merely the first discoverers or inventors of this 'universal' instrument, and merely passing it on to the world, then their claims of cultural ownership recede. It is a paradox that for players and makers wishing to acknowledge Aboriginal primacy of cultural control and power, this may be diminished by a pan-spiritual engagement with the instrument.

The most obvious areas of debate in establishing interpretative and cultural control over the didjeridu appeared in the possibility of gender restrictions on the use of the instru-

ment. It is widely recognized that women players can be unsettling or offensive to at least some Aborigines.¹³ Some non-Aboriginal players radically relativise traditional law as customary belief, with meaning and power only applying to those who feel governed by its power. Such players may acknowledge the importance of respect for the instrument, but this is thought of as deference to the feelings of individual Aborigines present, rather than conceiving the power of the didjeridu to be culturally or gender specific.

Certainly some female players have no time for gender based restrictions that they interpret as essentially patriarchal. As a female player at Didjfest '96 noted: "[Disapproval of women playing] is not going to make any difference to me. You don't do what your husband tells you what to do, you don't do what anyone else tells you what to do." Most of the participants at Didjfest '96 were aware of some uneasiness



Stringybark & Boxwood didjeridus

about women playing. In the context of the long-running Hindmarsh Bridge controversy,¹⁴ few could be unaware of the potential for 'women's (or men's) business' to inflect Aboriginal culture and be contentious (and litigious) for the stakeholders in such debates. This issue was raised and discussed repeatedly during one workshop on socio-cultural and musical contexts. At the evening concert an Aboriginal performer made overt critical observations. He pointed out that some Aborigines, including his women relatives, found women playing the didjeridu offensive, and that he believed it to be in conflict with traditional law.

In a focused analysis, Barwick has argued that absolute taboos against women playing the didjeridu have little basis in the traditional law of the original didjeridu-using Aboriginal groups of northern Australia.¹⁵ She suggests that they may be based more on the New-Age interpretations of the didjeridu as a 'spiritual' instrument, the conventional idea of a 'fertility symbol' imagined through a universal mythopoeia. Such taboos add frissons of mysterious power to this 'ancient instrument'. Despite

this, and for various reasons, gender restrictions are keenly felt by some south-eastern Aborigines. First, in recognition of the central significance of traditional law in other areas of Australia, and its prohibitive character, they would prefer to err on the side of caution rather than permissiveness in the face of conflicting interpretations. Second, they have some justification in taking a zero-sum view of cultural relations. One informant noted: "Whenever a non-Aboriginal person receives some Aboriginal culture it dilutes what is left because there is not as much".

The didjeridu has only come to its current position of widespread public interest and respect in Australia after a long history of the general ridicule and trivialization of Aboriginal culture and artistic expressions. Aboriginal activist, and didjeridu and gumleaf player Herb Patten says that he felt "raped" by Rolf Harris' trivializing use of the didjeridu. Being personally familiar with these techniques of racism, Aboriginal Australians have a right still to be wary of

new cultural contexts where they will have little control over the social meaning of the instrument. Yet like most non-Aboriginal players, many southern Aboriginal didjeridu players have come to the instrument in recent times, which is not to say that their personal and cultural investment in didjeridu playing is equivalent to that of non-Aboriginal players. For many Aborigines from urban backgrounds, playing didjeridu is part of a personal re-discovery or re-affirmation of their heritage: looking for a means of expressing their Aboriginality.

Reg Blow, who was Chief Executive Officer of the Aborigines Advancement League, weighs his sympathy with traditional restrictions of playing against the universal spiritual values that he also finds embodied in the didjeridu. Recognizing a range of attitudes to women playing the didjeridu in traditional Aboriginal societies, he would allow some room for individuals to decide, although he would discourage women from playing the didjeridu: "I don't believe women should play the didjeridu; but if they do, they should suffer the consequences of it." Ultimately, a respectful attitude is paramount: "The

woman who plays the didjeridu has to be respectful to the company she's playing in. If there are traditional people there, she really needs to seek permission."

These protocols may be interpreted as a request for public modesty in playing or as active discouragement. However, many players, male and female, have taken up the didjeridu as a personal action towards cultural understanding and reconciliation. It is a part of Aboriginal culture in which they can participate directly as a project of personal development, or as a platform for a public demonstration of Aboriginal culture. Even some players who use the didjeridu as a private instrument think of it as a stage upon which intercultural politics can be performed. One player, asked for his motivations in learning didjeridu, said: "I feel as though by learning this instrument, and becoming aware of the issues with indigenous people, it will help to actually learn to experience, and come to understand more of their ideas as well as their personal beliefs. And if in some way I



Stringybark didjeridu

can actually help . . . with reconciliation, I'd like to have that as a major achievement as well."

The only point of equanimity at Didjfest '96 was the enthusiasm about the didjeridu. The differences raised by other issues such as underlying notions of respect, cultural relativism and cultural difference revealed what the production of culture at events such as Didjfest '96 is all about: a pluralistic society using music to assemble fragile and ephemeral alliances and conjunctions of meanings out of the components of its cultures, the contradictions of its histories, the realities of its politics, and the motivations of its individuals and groups.

The didjeridu entangles music with socio-cultural, political and spiritual matters. Crucial among these were issues such as respect, cultural relativism and cultural control, which inform the role(s) Aboriginal culture, cultural practices and artefacts might occupy within Australian society, and how Aboriginality and its icons might respectfully and successfully be woven into the fabric of non-Aboriginal Australian society. The rise of the didjeridu to iconic prominence has been rapid, and the transactions described here are a moment in this process. Within it, both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians are working out what it might mean to become, in Newton's words, "authentic Australians through music".¹⁶

ENDNOTES

1. A. Moyle, 'The Australian Didgeridoo: A Late Musical Intrusion', *World Archaeology*, vol. 12, 1981, pp.321-331.
2. An in-depth analysis of Aboriginal rock-art, which documents depictions of the didjeridu, is found in G. Chaloupka, *Journey in Time*, Sydney, 1993.
3. See C. Keil & S. Feld, *Music Grooves*, Chicago, 1994; G. Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place*, London, 1994; and P. Parkhill, 'Of Tradition, Tourism and the World Music Industry', *Meanjin*, no. 3, 1993, pp. 501-508.
4. For an Australian example see K. Neuenfeldt 'Agendas and Aspirations: Yothu Yindi as Product, Politics and Process' in P. Hayward (ed.), *Sound Alliances: Indigenous Peoples, Cultural Politics and Popular Music in the Contemporary Pacific*. London, 1997.
5. A discussion of the use of didjeridu in contemporary

shamanistic practice and pedagogy is found in R. Willis, 'New Shamanism', *Anthropology Today*, vol.10 no.6.

6. M. Slobin, 'Micromusics of the West. A Comparative Approach', *Ethnomusicology*, 36/1 1992 pp. 1-87. See also S. Crafts, D. Cavicchi & C. Keil (eds), *My Music*, Hanover, 1993.
7. A relevant overview of the didjeridu industry in Central Australia is found in K. Neuenfeldt, 'The Didjeridu in the Desert: The Social Relations of an Ethnographic Object Entangled in Culture and Commerce', op.cit.
8. Some of the ramifications of global dissemination are examined in K. Neuenfeldt, 'The Essentialistic, the Exotic, the Enigmatic and the Absurd: The Didjeridu in World Music', *Perfect Beat*, vol. 2 no. 1, 1994, pp. 88-104.
9. D. Carter, 'Future Pasts', in D. Headon, J. Hooton and D. Horne (eds), *The Abundant Culture*, St. Leonards, 1994.
10. For example, Stan Satour, a sound engineer and producer for CAAMA (Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association) recording studio, says: "everybody has their own view on how they want to go about [recording the didjeridu]. I tend to lean more towards an 'ambient' sound so you get distance, which gives me dryness, which to me is this country around Alice Springs". Cited in K. Neuenfeldt, 1997, op.cit. p. 113. Ironically, the didjeridu was not common historically in the Central Desert region.
11. P. Lamshed and R. Mow in Didjfest '96 pamphlet, 1996.
12. This issue is discussed in depth by P. Sherwood in 'The Didjeridu and Alternative Lifestylers' Reconstruction of Social Reality' in K. Neuenfeldt, 1997, op.cit.
13. See L. Barwick's 'Gender "Taboos" and Didjeridus' in K. Neuenfeldt, 1997, op.cit.
14. Comprehensive discussion of the Hindmarsh Island controversy is found in the *Journal of Australian Studies* no. 48, 1996.
15. See Barwick, op.cit.
16. J. Newton, 'Becoming "Authentic" Australians Through Music', *Social Analysis*, no. 27, 1990.

- Graeme Smith is a Research Fellow in Sociology, Politics and Anthropology at La Trobe University.
- Karl Neuenfeldt is a Lecturer in Media and Communications at Central Queensland University.
- The didjeridus were made by Bruce Rogers from Kangaroo Ground, Victoria and photographed by Lynne Johnstone.

North

*Realms where the air we breathe is love,
Which in the winds and on the waves doth move
Harmonizing this earth with what we feel above.*

– Shelley

Ducks in History

On the far bank a child,
a mite in a pink dress,
stands rapt above a throng of ducks
all but joining them.

I finish peeling the orange
as Peter and Joan walk by
still hand in hand after thirty years
of taking it hard.

More people go by, Anna with her bun.
They say that, if you sit here long enough
the whole History Department will pass
carrying buns, holding hands.

I think of Semiramis and her duck,
that most remarkable of fables
– not even a cat, but a duck
just like one of the ones

floating out there now, as the kid
in the pink dress is wheeled past
at speed in her pushchair, beaming
like a small and very merry queen.

Kai Jensen

Under the flight path at the sad hotel of lonely
rich recalcitrants. Here, chai-wallah, punkah-wallah,
something with value added. To serve brings merit.
Use their own logic. That's the trick. I flex the rotan.
Lesson one. Good lad. Here's your lump of coal.
You're equal now. Stand up straight. A lovely verb
– berotan-rotan. Fire up the wok in readiness.
Another lump? No, never!

An inch and there's a million islands where the sea
was sunk. Tree stands in the flood, the great bird
bringing ghosts, big tides. There is nowhere
beyond the smoke of our fires. We have had the forest
and our love is done. There is no more a circle. All
elements a single tone. Shy ones graze the remnant
jungle – track of wrappers. Nothing to turn back.
Sea is the shit edge of everything where tortured
air's passed on forever. Labour of building
likewise unending.

Still in the fields from which plenty has gone,
now wheels have surrendered land to its tithe.
Dream of the turn in the hours' march to market.
Schemes come to grief and griefs are betrayed.
Skins of a colour, mouths fallen in. Our
haircut and suit and our new pair of shoes.

Rice wallows in one bowl between us.
The village soup. Breathy walls of paper,
grass. This rudeness offends, it gets
our disgust. Last – carrying all the bricks
of Asia – is one bent woman. Not quite
old because she never gets to be.

Christopher Kelen

Kurt Iveson

The Real-Life Adventures of Streetwise Comics

COMICS BOOMED in Australia in the 1940s and 1950s as a form of entertainment mainly for young people. The left was particularly antagonistic towards comics, partly because it was not uncommon to find Asian or communist villains being defeated by the hero in many comic strips. But it was not just reactionary stories that angered radicals. Comics also came to represent the flooding of Australia by mass commodity culture from the United States. The Communist Party directed a stream of abuse and criticism towards comics, acting in league with everyone from school principals to the Catholic Church and Liberal politicians.¹ Censorship legislation targeting comics was passed in some states with ALP and union support.²

The attitude of the left towards mass entertainment and popular cultural forms such as comics has softened in the intervening years. This softening is still the subject of a great deal of debate, associated as it is with the 'cultural turn' in political analysis. The story of Streetwise Comics highlights some of the benefits and tensions in mixing politics with popular culture.

STREETWISE COMICS BEGAN in 1984 as an attempt by a group of community legal workers and youth workers to give young people a realistic and practical guide to their legal rights. Conventional methods of providing information to young people, such as government pamphlets and formal education, were often judgemental, inaccessible and full of jargon, and failed to relate to the everyday lives of young people. It was hoped that by using comics, the information would be more accessible to young people, particularly young people with low levels of literacy. Comics are a part of youth culture, and by their nature they reduce the emphasis on the written word and abstract concepts. Instead, information is conveyed

through illustrated stories of everyday life, with dialogue constructed in conversational language.

The comics were distributed freely through a range of alternative networks, in particular youth centres, refuges and other community agencies, as well as schools where possible. Before long, a range of government agencies saw the potential for this method of information distribution. Streetwise has continued to expand, and has now produced over fifty different comics funded by a range of government and community agencies. As well as legal issues, they have focused on youth health, occupational health and safety, disability, indigenous rights, income support, housing, sexuality, violence, drugs and alcohol and more. Since 1984, over four million comics have been printed and distributed.

In Streetwise Comics, it is not uncommon to find female characters, young people from Aboriginal, disabled, gay and lesbian, and a range of ethnic backgrounds. Other situations featured include share households, refuges, cars, pubs, skate parks, schools, sporting fields and the family home – all places that young people can readily relate to. Story lines generally follow a pattern, with a character facing a problem, and their peers helping them to overcome the problem by utilizing existing sources of information and support. Contact details for support agencies are also provided outside the comic panels. The stories focus on both personal and social issues, and commonly deal with a range of structural hurdles that young people face in contemporary Australian society. The message is that these hurdles can be lowered with knowledge, and the means to act on that knowledge.

Does the Streetwise attempt to empower young people through comics make for a good *comic*? Some have found it to be a failure in this regard. While Fos-



from Workwize pp. 8-9

ter gives a grudging respect to Streetwize for opening up the limited field of protagonists normally found in mainstream comics, he laments the loss of escapism:

The older strips were, often, sexist or racist, 'classist' or conservative, but, at least, they were enjoyable to read. This is not the case with the didactic alternative strips [such as Streetwize], and is not necessarily true of the egalitarian mainstream styles.³

Of course, young women, or ethnic young people, may disagree with this total abandonment of politics from the analysis of comics. Foster makes a mistake in assuming we *all* have fun as he does regardless of sexism or racism. He neglects the importance of seeing images of oneself in comics (probably because in older strips he saw plenty of images of himself). Other aspects of *Streetwize* neglected by Foster are the production and distribution of the comics, and their visual impact on readers.

Streetwize Comics are produced by committee. While this might seem a recipe for disaster, in fact the process has a number of benefits, given their aim. When Streetwize is commissioned to produce a comic on a given issue, a panel is convened which involves artists, writers, and 'experts' who can lend technical advice on the particular theme. Young people are then consulted in the production of draft stories. Once draft stories have been produced, they are distrib-

uted to the panel and different groups of young people for suggestions for improvement before final copies are printed.

For example, in the case of *Workwize*, a comic about occupational health and safety, those involved in devising stories included trade unions, the Workcover Authority, and young people. The result is that the information provided about safe work practices is accurate, potential remedies are clearly explained (including both the Workcover Authority and union membership), and the featured work situations (a farm, a hairdresser, a supermarket and an automotive repair shop) are realistic.

The involvement of young people in the production also ensures that the stories are not judgemental. The comics show young people a range of lifestyle choices, and information about the potential consequences of these choices, rather than simply lecturing them about the evils of their ways. So, where it is appropriate, stories might involve sex and drugs (and there's even some rock 'n' roll scattered through different comics). By allowing young people's lives to be portrayed realistically, Streetwize has caused some controversy, and encountered opposition from some politicians and bureaucrats. So while a range of government departments have recognized the importance of delivering information to young people in this fashion, distribution in schools in some states has not been without problems.

Streetwize places a high degree of importance on



from Streetwise pp. 24-25



making its comics accessible to groups of young people who are particularly marginalized from conventional information sources. Involving a wide range of young people in the production of the comics has been a proven strategy in this regard. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people regularly feature as characters in Streetwise strips, and fifteen comics have been devoted entirely to indigenous issues. These comics aim to present information to indigenous young people in a culturally appropriate way, and do so by involving them in devising stories and providing the artwork, with self-determination a guiding principle.⁴

The distribution also provides a contrast with more mainstream comics. Streetwise is distributed freely to young people through a network of youth centres and refuges, high schools, and other community and government organizations such as health centres, detention centres and Centrelink branches. This method has obvious advantages in reaching the target audience – firstly because they do not have to pay to read Streetwise, and secondly because it builds on links established by services which work closely with disadvantaged young people.

Of course, the balance between entertainment and information is not without its tensions. These become particularly apparent when considering the visual style of the comics. In terms of successfully providing practical knowledge to young people, Streetwise rightly focuses on realistic, everyday situ-

ations. So, in discussing Reconciliation, they did not produce a comic featuring a group of Aboriginal young people developing supernatural powers, exposing John Howard and his government for the evil aliens that they really are, and sending them back to whatever vile part of the universe they came from. Such a story might be fun, and it might also lend itself to more stylized artwork than the realism of the Streetwise house style. However, the protagonists in these comics do not have bulging muscles or supernatural powers. They are ordinary young people, and a wide range of readers are able to recognize images of themselves in the stories.

It might therefore be that Streetwise, as a comic, lacks the visual style of many contemporary comics and animation. However, superhero stories are not much use in helping real young people to think about how they can contribute to the Reconciliation process. On this level, Streetwise should not be compared with other comics. Young people are not stupid – they are aware of the difference, and do not read Streetwise simply to be entertained. Rather, it has come to be recognized as a valuable and relevant source of information. The comic style is used to present this information in an accessible way, not in some attempt to hide or bury information and therefore 'trick' young people into learning, when they think they are just having fun. Such an attempt to patronize readers would be immediately detected. Given the level of marketing directed at young peo-



ple in contemporary Australia, this generation has become quite adept at detecting adult manipulations of youth culture.

Maybe what the Streetwize approach fails to deliver is the joy that young people may get from recognizing youth art styles in the comics, as well as recognizing themselves. However, testing this theory would raise a number of problems. In particular, there are few if any styles of art that are generic 'youth' styles. Forms such as graffiti, although often assumed to be young people's art, are in fact often specific to particular subcultures (in the case of graffiti, hip hop culture). Not all potential readers would relate to these styles.

Of course, the story of our indigenous superheroes is also unlikely to receive funding from any government agency, and this raises another difficulty in trying to maintain the balance between information and entertainment. Streetwize exists from project to project, earning no income beyond the funding it receives for specific comics. Funding bodies are not in a position to subsidize stories that are simply 'fun' – they pay to get their message across. In recognition of this situation, Streetwize has launched a new

series of comics called *Krunch*, which are sold to service providers through subscription. *Krunch* reprints popular stories from previous Streetwize comics that are no longer in print, alongside series such as *Hit the Road* and *Suzi and Flem*. These stories are less concerned with conveying messages and realism (although they do not abandon this aim altogether), and more concerned with simply having a bit of fun. *Hit the Road* features four young people on a road trip, two of whom at one point are forced to jump from a cliff to avoid an angry mob of bikies, only to land on the wings of a passing hang-glider and fly away to safety (see *Krunch* #3), and *Suzi and Flem* grace the back cover, with colourful and more stylized character art and more 'wacky' situations. The serialized nature of *Krunch* also allows the comic to be more interactive, with readers contributing letters to the editor, questions to Dr J.P. Klevadik, and drawings to the 'Your Draw' section.

Perhaps the only criticism of Streetwize within its own realist framework is that the stories often conclude with happy endings. Knowledge certainly equals power for the characters in the comics, with stories placing great importance on showing readers ways in which people can act to change their situation. These solutions are often the result of the collective efforts of peer or social groups. However, sometimes the comics present government or community agencies as flawlessly effective, ready to assist young people once they have been approached with a request. This is not always the case in real life, but then Streetwize is a comic after all.

ENDNOTES

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Virtual Love

for my idea of you

The electronic recreation of your voice
said

I love you

I told

my microphone the same,
at half the distance of the Great
Dividing Range, in the fuzz
and rise and fall
of the Mobile Net.
Strolling pixelled
through Sim Romance,
squeezing handsets,
we made static for hours, unable
to part without gestures.

Matthew Power

It is so bloody difficult to create the new

a couple of lazy bones like us
at the point of troubled times befalling
are trying to find a good way of making a fortune
shooting pornographic films
would turn one dollar into millions
but how to create the new
is a question of art
for things like men fucking animals
or placing a cobra
into a vagina are
nothing new
it is so bloody difficult to create the new
and it is hard to make a fortune
try to think harder
if we get the sphinx
to make love with the statue of liberty
and order the three thousand terra-cotta soldiers of the chin dynasty
to stride into the red light district
it would be too expensive
and the ends would not be worth the means
try to think still harder
is we get confucius
to rape a nun
and hitler to strike up a gay relationship with sadam
would that be possible
we then could play the male roles
and go find a female star

Yi Sha

translated from Chinese by Ouyang Yu

Ode to James Baker's Eternal Teenagers

i.m. John Forbes

I

Certain professions suggest themselves

via the charm of scale

As Handsome Dick Manitoba said

back when the band scene made

so much more sense

– or sensation,

“Quantity *is* quality”.

Tracing the evolution of a glacier, for instance

crumbling at the edges, a few groans & cracks

of inevitable progress

& frozen rubble smearing the stark white.

Or watching a drawn five day test

full of character & the rich meccano of fate

where progress meets its end.

Out here

kept aloft on the wings of an enthusiasm

(say, listening to the almost perfect *Stoneage Romeos*

on Viv's sunny Brisbane floor

or something more

'symphonic'

Sly & Robbie's *Let's Rock*, a particular cadence – its pill-like effect)

out here, we can see *continuities*

which brings to mind Sam's hip view of your vocation

“an anterior inscription” & more abstractly

resuscitates formalism.

Some problems fascinate because they last so long

& their success can be measured

by historians only

with their wonky rulers, terminally analogue.

A successful problem! Are there rankings?

& the problem of taking *the long view*.

What do we do while we're waiting ?

The feet can be kept warm by stamping.

I remember Bill & Sherene & Rosie & Natalie

running through Central pedestrian tunnel

after a gig at the Southern Cross
& now I collect together tributes to the Ramones

– The Eastern Dark
(poor James Darroch)

Ars Poetica

and *your* shirts, buttoned at the neck, jacket, perfect hair.

Were they John's favourite band?

"We didn't write short songs. We just sang long songs very quickly."

Follow the strictures of Adorno:

check your baggage
& don't turn into a cranky old bastard.

II

I want to be invisible like . . . nothing you've ever seen

stupid!

The man in the bed next to Mark

has lost *some* of his memory –

the middle bit,

from Harold Holt to Bob Hawke.

They can find no finer gauge.

How will it come back?

how does it come back for you?

III

A nostalgia for the future has no market value

if Sydney's monorail is anything to go by.

The entrepreneurial spirit duped by a

theme park

(& remember our version of a Police State –

the extraordinary traffic powers of the construction authority)

& further down the food chain

the middle classes, equally distracted, relentlessly organising

amateur sport,

as John noted in our last conversation.

John, complaining about the quality of the mineral water

in Sydney shopping malls

& John, praising the "superior architecture"

of the Macintosh.

Chris Burns

Overnight Snow

Riding on the table in the half light
Of morning when air is glimmer and sepia

The country is snowbound, snow dragged
Over every pedestal, caps and coats, all white.

My throat breathes the ether of cold snow scent,
Hands are blue, the tyres break the ground

And it is, with the road shoulder white,
Like sitting on an icebreaker's prow headed

Far past the furthest fence to mend,
Further than the byre (its smoky cattle

Stench, steam, hay and piss, already a hint
That its stone walls are around the hill)

Off towards some ocean, some Antarctica
Where the seals trail the boat, and herons

Find you curious, where slabs of ice split
To reveal virgin water, cold as looking,

And there is no compass, no sunrise or set
But the clock, the intuitive telling,

That the spill of light reveals the brownstone byre,
Polishes snow and alpine gums. You are glad to be

Home.

Zoltan Kovacs

Great Ocean Road Snapshots

i

Marengo

The clouds came across as they always do
here in the south looking towards Ant-
arctica where the weather's closing in
and here isn't much better.

The beach is littered with kelp and
sea-gulls accustomed to begging for
their staple diet in the warmer months.
Now the tourists couldn't care less,

merely determined to find something to
write to the folks back home about,
something other than 'it rained some of
the time every single day we were away.'

And even now, with the sea a grey-green
and the gulls circling overhead the Rainmaker
determines that the enthusiasm needs
dampening down; needs some sort of control element.

ii

Lorne

Once again a couple of lone surfers
battle the waves rather than looking for them
and glide gently shorewards to the sounds
of the espresso machine in the Arab
churning up a fine mess of coffee in this
haven of Mediterranean cuisine, here
facing the Southern Ocean; later now
and the clouds heavier and the sea
a darker shade of pale and the trendies
walk up and down decked out in their
latest finery wondering where the opposition
is, and a new BMW embarrassingly
seeks the assistance of the RACV while we
manoeuvre the Golf into a parallel park
and head for a view of the sea in the
near empty café

David Farnsworth

George in Costa Rica

Jennifer Maiden

THEY WERE READY to board the plane. I had let them walk on a few paces in front of me, with their arms around each other – not possessively or fearfully so much as with an almost dragging weight, like two survivors helping each other from the scene of an accident. I was jotting down their contacts in Sydney again for them, when I saw him. It was the Case Officer – I still don't doubt that. He was standing near a toilet door.

He didn't pretend to be anything but what he was, and he wasn't carrying anything. His clothes had pockets, though. He seemed to have no communication with anyone in the room. I felt that he was alone. Mateu saw him and tensed, but I nodded towards the plane. It's curious how alarming big planes are that close up. My civilized occiput reassured me that the plane was a vessel of rescue but my primitive cells whispered to me as deep as my spinal pia mater that it was a grey pterandon with talons and an appetite for blood. Teresa's face watched it with the same dull horror for a second, before the abundant sunrise overcame the sweat-chill ingrained in her hands, and she could lead her husband across the tarmac.

The Case Officer's fingers were brushing down his coat to his heavy wallet pocket. I didn't know what to do, but then I walked towards him as obviously as I could. I must have seemed quite large and powerful, and he paused and let his arms lie at his sides. After all, I had pockets, too. I let my gaze stay level and mildly interested. Perhaps he'd only been going to buy something at the nearby kiosks.

Within twenty seconds, I was standing close to him, blocking his view as they boarded the plane. He looked back at me, without stepping aside. Perhaps he still wasn't sure who I was, or what I could do. He had no orders to attack me. We watched each other politely for a couple of minutes, almost miming an acquaintanceship for any onlooker. Then I knew that they must be aboard and I relaxed. Without lifting my arms, either, I began to walk away.

I didn't think he'd follow me, but he did. With equal purpose to that I had shown, he touched my arm. I didn't turn. He laughed, gripped my shoulder and suddenly punched me shallowly with the tips of his knuckles above the back of my other elbow. It had the force of a stiletto and my lower arm jumped once and numbed down to the fingertips. It happened too fast for me to gasp, and probably looked friendly enough. Our gazes met again, and I nodded in acknowledgment, as if I understood. Actually, I didn't quite: maybe it was a warning, maybe a salute, maybe an act of revenge ... or maybe he just wanted to let me know that he was real.

I think he went back to the men's room. I walked out of the airport and caught a taxi to the Museum without allowing myself to look over my shoulder. The sunrise had lost its crispness. Unselfconscious children wrestled strenuously on the roadside embankments, as if at any moment they might fall into our path.

This is an excerpt from The Blood Judge.

HIS OFFICE IS definitely perfumed. But I'm not sure if it's just something aromatic in the air, or more insidiously, a sweet-smelling anaesthetic. The ghoulish decor of his walls is even more unsettling. Everywhere you look, there is a layer of former patients' skin. Numerous framed photos of disconnected body parts, which from a distance create a monstrous

A High Index of Suspicion

Damien Barlow

fleshy collage. I stare closer at his richly textured walls; some photos are limbless or lack a head, others focus more minutely on cracked lips and oozing sores eating away at ears and noses. The skin is always freckled with moles or skin cancers or terminal melanomas. There are also unusual hues

of brown and black. Bubbly skin, scar red.

The doctor sits calmly at his desk. The cool ducted air keeps everything moderate and controlled. Laid out in front of him are more photos, each with a small white tag in the corner; date, client and file number. The only photo in his office which does not double as a diagnostic aid is the one of his wife and kids, who inhabit an acknowledged yet unimportant niche on his desk.

Well then, the doctor begins in hushed tones, you understand that when we are concerned with possible skin cancers or melanomas, it is essential to use a high index of suspicion when conducting physical examinations. I'll also need to take some photos for future reference.

His voice is soothing, even disarming, as he tells

me to take off my clothes. The camera hangs behind him like a large vacant eye.

I start to undress. The doctor puts the camera around his neck and disappears into a small adjacent room. I am momentarily alone in his gallery of skin, and suddenly realize that the majority of these people are probably now dead, or at the very least horribly disfigured. He returns and tells me to lie face down on the bed. I taste disposable paper towel, abrasive and functional, against my mouth. I can also smell his hands, which overwhelmingly reek of photographic developing fluid. The doctor turns on a movable light that starts to heat up my back. He does not wear gloves, as his fingers trace and retrace a semi-circle just above the cheeks of my arse. The doctor begins talking into a tape recorder, describing my body in a strangely poetic yet clinical fashion:

On the lower back there is a large constellation of moles, curiously circular, forming an uneven curve. However it is also a nebulous configuration, blurring with the surrounding skin. Speckles of red-brown melanin give the overall design a cute blush.

I feel the slight pressure of his wrist on my arse, then a cold steel watch band, which by the time it leaves is flesh warm. Intrusive flashes come next, erratic clicking from behind. I start to feel self-conscious, exposed. The light is switched off. *You can get dressed now*, says the doctor. I fumble with my clothes, successfully hiding my erection, as he writes out a reminder card for my next appointment.

Two weeks, okay and I'll show you the photos then. Bye now. I think his smile looks almost affectionate, as the doctor again disappears into the small photographic room.

Melbourne is cast in a thick mid-week smog, the type that makes your lungs tighten and sees the sunsets turn a rich fluoro red. Even the tram seems to

wheeze its way through the city, past the Victorian grandeur of Collins Street with its gold-boom facades announcing the entrances to sleek multinationals. His nameplate is polished and proud too, though it doesn't shine, as the fierce antipodean sun barely reaches street-level here. For some unknown reason, his receptionist makes me fill out another form declaring my high risk, potentially disease-carrying status. She doesn't appreciate my lack of cooperation and tells me it is a necessary legal requirement. I eventually tick the box and read a copy of *Who Weekly*.

His office retains its unsettling ambience. The pastiche of flesh on his wall seems to have changed shape and colour since my last visit, but one cannot be sure. The doctor doesn't notice me standing there and looks slightly irritated when I interrupt his absorbing study. His demeanour softens when he recognizes who I am, and enthusiastically greets me with a photo of the curved moles that reside on my back. The crack of my arse is also just in shot. I ask if it's cancerous. The doctor shakes his head.

No, I don't think so. I believe they are just some unusual mole formation. But of course, we must keep a close eye on them.

I cautiously start to undress, acutely aware of my semi-erect cock. I leave my boxer shorts on and concentrate instead on the sick skin that adorns his walls. I think about death, or less dramatically, having his expensive hands make large excisions in my flesh. I imagine biopsies, skin grafts and the egos of those who practise plastic surgery. Yet, my cock still grows as he begins to stroke my back. I can feel his breath tickling my skin, and for a second, I sense the slight graze of chin whiskers. I hear him speak as if to himself, or perhaps someone else, he whispers, *looks like the top of a lip*. The doctor kisses my intriguing moles, sucking my skin till a bruising flush of blood appears. He momentarily stops, and talks to my moles as if to a lover. *Beautiful*, he mumbles affectionately.

Woman in Staffroom, Woman in Corridor

Moira McAuliffe

HE WAS GENTLE. Because she knew him, because he was gentle, because he'd cried when his wife left him, because he loved his kids.

Because he had cried and been stricken, because he was lost and had cried, because he was gentle and laughed and loved his children.

Because they'd walked and half-laughed along the river-bank and walked and half-listened along the street, because he wanted and she thought she could give him something, enough, over lunch, over tea, while he was lost.

Because he asked and she couldn't say "No, because . . .", she agreed to tea in the staff dining-room. It was handy; she was contract-staff and so she'd never been there, had never bothered to go; he had to stay for a class at half-past five.

THE STUDENT CAFE was downstairs, along the side-street, a long string of a room, orange vinyl under a black wooden ceiling. The vinyl was adrift in squalor. The squalor was encrusted with noise.

The staff dining-room was upstairs and along the hallway, a long, blue-carpeted room, maple tables, heavy beige hessian curtains. The light was muted. The air was muted. She watched the curtains hang, block out traffic, commuting, blackboards, chalk, diagrams, work; morning, evening, coming, going, home, work; lay-off, fury, fear.

There were four older men eating without much sound at a few isolated tables.

She was alone, morning, evening, coming, going.

She was early. Chalk, blackboard, lay-off.

She was by herself. Fear. Fear, fury.

The blue-carpeted space waited for sound. The men's eyes waited for news.

Everyone knew everyone; only old-timers ate up here. She was news that would be alluded to. These men would see and surmise, shake their heads, smirk, shrug. She turned to leave. Laid off. Fury, fear, fear.

He arrived. He smiled at her, blushed and said how glad he was she could make it, how he'd looked forward to it, she was his guest. He ushered her to the centre table, held her chair, gave her the menu with a flourish, told her how his kids had taken to her when they'd all had dinner after the walk along the river, how they'd asked when she'd come back.

She smiled and asked if the vegetables were frozen, so he'd stop being so direct, so pleased, so loud, so voluble, because the last of the sunlight was glinting through chinks in the curtains and she could see how dusty the air was, how old the men really were and how they'd fought over the years from the time the college had been a smithy and lunch had been in an open shed; how they'd furnished their classrooms out of estate sales; how they'd sharpened their pencils with their teeth; how they'd hung their metal coats in grey cupboards while the rain and the years and the nights pelted down; how they'd fought and gradually things had got better, a staff association, a dining-room; how their fingers and thumbs had been ingrained with chalk and still were and would be even after they stopped lecturing; how the heaviness of their heads and gazes was age as much as armature; how they could see her as a bright parrot-like frivolity, another one of the endless pretty women who came and went in the endlessly frivolous Arts Department; how other men took them to dinner and somewhere else afterwards, if they didn't themselves, those women who probably shouldn't have been there and who certainly wouldn't be in another

thirty years, because they'd never been in it for the long haul. Never would be.

He was looking at her and telling her about his lecture.

He was looking at her and his eyes were wide with trust and his hands were small and neat, too small to fend off a blow, far too small to strike one.

She had to leave, was desperate to leave because he was trusting and alone and his kids had taken to her, because she had nothing to say and nothing to give, because everyone was being laid off, old-timers and all, and his severance would be large and he was generous, because he loved his kids, because he was gentle.

She smiled and declined dessert. She smiled and thanked him and said she had to go.

He offered to walk her to her car.

She stood up.

The chair refused to move on the carpet. The edge of the tablecloth rose with her; the coffee spilt, the heavy silverware fell against the plates, every head turned.

The old men's eyes looked at her, saw a wisp.

His eyes returned to her, saw earth and hearth and warmth.

When all she'd wanted was an unobtrusive exit.

HE HELPED as she gathered books and papers from her office for the evening's work. She closed and locked the office door. It was *the* office, she thought. Not hers. It was less transient.

They walked down the corridor.

He was waiting, small hands, generosity, smile. He loved his kids, wanted someone decent for them.

"What about next Saturday?"

She had been dreading this because she knew him and liked him and he had been hurt, because walking along the river had been too much, was *in it for the long haul*. She wanted to hide, stop existing, because the only thing she could say now would leave him alone in a landscape of loss, where he was gentle, and loved his kids, and was still crying.

An Elasmobranchological Cyrano de Bergerac

Chris Newton

A LEMON SHARK. He knew it was a lemon shark. The lemon shark was hanging upside down in a photograph with a big man standing next to it. A big man with blond hair and a red beard who was also holding the photograph at the bar of the Surfside saying this was a photograph of him with the tiger shark he caught. It wasn't a tiger shark.

"It isn't a tiger shark," he said to the man.

Redbeard squinted and took a deep drag so there was a hard molten tip that couldn't be flicked off. "Tell from over there can you? The fuck would you know, hey? Fuck. Put your fuckin' specks on Richard Dreyfuss I caught it the fuck didn't I?"

Petfood said "Full on fuckin' uni hoax on yer Red ask what the fuck it is an' how he knows. Smithsonian fuckin' Institute picnic excursions or what?"

"I'm an elasmobranchologist," said the elasmobranchologist, "and this is not a tiger shark. It's a lemon."

"Faaaark," said Redbeard, doing the mock impressed. "And you know this do you? From over there?"

The elasmobranchologist took the photo and pointed out things with the back of his little finger as if he were painting it. "Snout, see? Too sharp for a tiger. Look at the clasper fins, wrong shape. Appellinae of Lorenzini located too far down. Wrong pectoral fins

and no stripes. Can you see stripes? No stripes. It's a lemon."

"Oh right, must be then. You know how many sharks have stripes?"

"I know the known ones. It doesn't matter. No other shark looks like the lemon and no other looks like a tiger."

"Then you know every shark, I s'pose."

"Yes."

Redbeard ripped his velcro wallet open and put a fifty on the soggy terry-towelling bar cover. "There's fifty. Any other crew want to put money down?" Petfood and the others followed with purples and reds and yellows and change which was counted up to a hundred and seventy dollars and thirty-seven cents.

The elasmobranchologist took one of the fives, ordered a double absinthe and began.

"Sharpnose sevengill, bluntnose sixgill, bigeye sixgill, broadnose sevengill, frilled shark, bramble shark, prickly shark, hooktooth dogfish, needle dogfish, gulper shark, dumb gulper shark, lowfin gulper shark, smallfin gulper shark, Taiwan gulper shark, leafscale gulper, mosaic shark, black dogfish, granular dogfish, bareskin dogfish, combtooth dogfish, ornate dogfish, whitefin dogfish, rasptooth dogfish, Portuguese dogfish, longnose velvet dogfish, shortnose velvet dogfish, mandarin dogfish, kitefin dogfish, birdbeak dogfish, arrowhead dogfish, New Zealand lanternshark, shorttail lanternshark, lined lanternshark, cylindrical lanternshark, combtooth lanternshark, crow lanternshark, broadband lanternshark, southern lanternshark, Caribbean lanternshark, devil shark, blackbelly lanternshark, dwarf lanternshark, African lanternshark, great lanternshark, smooth lanternshark, darkbelly lanternshark, fringefin lanternshark, thorny lanternshark, velvet belly, brown lanternshark, Hawaiian lanternshark, green lanternshark, taillight shark, pygmy shark, longnose pygmy shark, cookie-cutter shark, largetooth cookiecutter shark, softskin dogfish, Sherwood dogfish, whitetail dogfish, Japanese velvet dogfish, smallmouth velvet dogfish,

plunkett shark, Greenland sleeper, Pacific sleeper, little sleeper, cigar shark, roughskin spurdog, Cuban dogfish, Cyrano spurdog, Caribbean roughshark, angular roughshark, sailfin roughshark, sixgill sawshark, Bahamas sawshark, sawback angelshark, Argentinian angelshark, ornate angelshark, ocellated angelshark, clouded angelshark, smoothback angelshark, monkfish, sand devil, horn shark, crested bullhead shark, Mexican hornshark, Port Jackson shark, Galapagos bullhead, whitespotted bullhead, zebra bullhead, barblethroat carpet, Taiwan saddled carpetshark, collared carpetshark, rusty carpetshark, Tasmanian carpetshark, necklace carpetshark, blind shark, tasselled wobbegong, Japanese wobbegong, spotted wobbegong, ornate wobbegong, cobbler wobbegong, Arabian carpetshark, Burmese bambooshark, grey bambooshark, Indonesian bambooshark, slender bambooshark, whitespotted bambooshark, brownbanded bambooshark, Indonesian speckled, Papuan epaulette, hooded carpetshark, nurse shark, shorttail nurse, giant sleepy shark, zebra shark,

whale shark, spotted raggedtooth, Indian sandtiger, bumpytail raggedtooth, bigeye sandtiger, goblin shark, crocodile shark, megamouth shark, pelagic thresher, bigeye thresher, basking shark, great white shark, shortfin mako, longfin mako, salmon shark, porbeagle mackerel shark, bignose catshark, flatnose catshark, Atlantic ghost catshark, brown catshark, hoary catshark, Federov's catshark, Iceland catshark, madeira catshark, fat catshark, spatulasnout catshark, soupfin shark, hammerhead shark, shovelhead shark, sicklefin weaselshark, mallethead shark, pigeye shark, scoophead shark, false shark, Saldanha catshark, Panama Ghost, draughtsboard shark, balloon shark, gecko catshark, pyjama shark, dusky shark, silky shark, starspotted shark, graceful shark, nightshark . . ."

The elasmobranchologist stopped there. He said "Double or nothing for the Latin names."

The side of Redbeard coiled and blurred. Now the elasmobranchologist's jaw clicks in and out when he chews.

ULITARRA

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About Robbo

Merv Lilley

1

I'D BE THE ONLY BLOKE ON EARTH that remembers you Ted Robertson. Why do I write about you? Must be a phobia or something about a big stretch of my itinerant life, plus a lot more that I'm trying to work out on paper. You might say, I'm searching for the meaning of life with no chance of finding it. I might be getting close. The answer may be in the few jobs we worked on together, no more than half a dozen, from the age of twenty-six to thirty-eight, you fifteen years my senior, both out of the army, defending our shores in different outfits, a joke almost. We were skilled only in bush work, shovel and bar, axe and mall and wedges, adze and broadaxe, and your eccentric braces for hand-boring; tea and sugar, flour, billy can and frying pan, we played the part of pioneers with relish on big stations that were not ours nor ever would be. The die was cast, the big land-grabs a century earlier. They still needed fences and yards in the twentieth century.

We were at times in need of each other, as itinerants we drifted to other work and back again; undoubtedly a strong bond, we corresponded intermittently.

Years later I began to take writing seriously. We had both been pretty smart at writing letters to the paper, then I found the short story, the literary journals to get published in. I found I had the touch of the anecdote in my long-hand writing. I bought a typewriter, covered it with a cardboard box and learned where the letters were by touch.

You continued to write letters to *The Morning Bulletin*, to tear your opponents apart with gusto. It was all you needed to keep you chuckling as you drove your bar into the ground, as you worked out what you would write in the next letter to the paper that would confound your critics. Your critics, by the way, were doing the same thing, and congratulating themselves on playing merry hell with your arguments,

should I say your politics. I didn't work that way; I struck once then moved out of range. Get on with the next thing, keep 'the ignorers' out for the opposition. The feline principle works well for writers.

You blamed me for the bug of 'trying to be' a writer as your family expected of you. Your brother said, "write a book and emancipate us all!" But that's where it ended. It was like looking for the elusive gold in country where there was no gold.

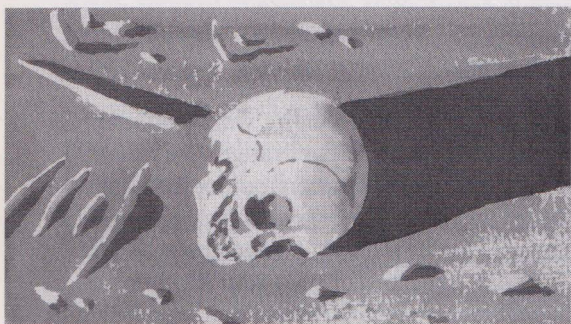
You taught the science of fencing, yard-building. You gloried in the title Master Fencer. But when it came to the levels of writing that got you past political rhetoric, you had nowhere to go, or if you did, wouldn't go there, would you comrade? And you continued to go nowhere. In your pig-headed manner you said "I know what everyone wants me to write, but I won't do it". You couldn't do it, that was the truth of the matter, but it was too much to say. It was something you would never understand.

Someone has to tell the truth about it, and it's not going to be anyone else but me. I wouldn't think it was important, that it had to be done, except that finally we're talking about a lot of people... who say, "I would have been a writer, but... I didn't have time..." It only takes a lifetime Ted, and an intense education. Our problem was that we were intense without education past primary, if we got that far. I didn't, Ted, but I found that Art is long, and can be pursued for a long time. We are talking about 'the *duende*'. That is a good thing to start with. You had a bit of it Ted, but not enough. That was the tantalizing thing in your life. You have it or you don't have it, full on. It's only a start, at that. You find another education for yourself if you want to become a writer.

It's a bit late for me to be talking to you about this, but there's a big community out there interested, and a few of them will tune in.

You said you understood what I was saying or writ-

ing but no one else did. "I know what it means" you said. Then it was me who didn't know that there was a problem. That was disturbing when you made that confidence one night after work, in the roadside camp at Consuelo. What the hell had I written in a letter that perplexed others, then? You weren't the only one to say it to me, with variations, as time wore on. If I



was an odd bod, I'd have to wear it, and get on with the task, eh? You knew that, you said that I could stay there and write, in that roadside camp where I once took refuge from a world that didn't want me, companies, political parties or unions. I was too far out for them.

I could go to the clean bush, dig holes in the ground, stand up fences, swing the axe on your job. Three pounds a day, tucker and mutual rhetoric from a man fifteen years my senior. Or I could camp in my own tent and be a writer. It was the first time that man or woman had offered to support me as a writer, apart from my mother. I think you might have preferred that I take that offer, rather than join in the work ethic, but I wasn't ready for it – and yet . . .

I found poems there, that linked my life with country characters. Was I a bush madman, like the characters I wrote about on Consuelo a lifetime ago? They reckoned Leichhardt's buggy was buried there in the big natural dam that started nowhere and finished there at the station homestead well over the ranges from Roma, bushranger country where Doyle and Dalke were shot and burned; one Kenniff hanged and one gaoled for twenty years. When he came out he travelled through that country as a bootmaker, having learned a trade in gaol.

There was some fascination that drew us into that country, with its high rainbow walls circling the valley, a lovely sight that invents stories about its origins. 'Priggy' the carrier with a big diesel truck told me when he was taking me out there from Springsure, the rain-

bow lines were the water marks of the great flood as the water gradually receded. At least he didn't say that Noah's Ark was there somewhere.

I thought that there was a lot about geology that 'Priggy' and the rest of us didn't know. His real name was Prigg. It was Ted Robertson called him 'Priggy' when Prigg wasn't there. It was me called Ted 'Robbo', if I'm not mistaken. Now Ted Robertson is dead and I'm an old man wondering if my lines scan, wondering if I'm writing poetry or dithering on the page. Who would want to know about Doyle and Dalke laying down their lives to chase cattle duffers, or Brumby Jones, an illiterate stockman who could take you and show you but couldn't explain where *it* was? Tommy Roundhead, a poem about him has disappeared. Seeking information I asked him "what else have you done Tommy?" and he said "I've been a cane cutter, a fighter, a timber cutter, a stockman, and I'm only eighteen years of age. What else do you want me to have done?"

Ted Robertson master fencer laughed like a horse's whinny, and marvelled that a poem could be written about it, thereafter quoting Tommy Roundhead's words in a poem as a constant source of wonder and amusement, particularly when Tommy at eight and a half stone came to our camp and offered to be my sparring partner if I wanted to take up training again, if I could produce a set of gloves. I couldn't and explained that I had retired from boxing. It saved me from explaining the well known rule in the game of not giving away weight and reach. I was about fifteen stone, Tommy was eight and a half. I did like little Tommy Roundhead's amazing spirit, and hoped he'd never come to much harm. It may have been there was an unreal world lived in our heads on Consuelo or other cattle stations.

Ted held his position for a long time as an amazing man with a crowbar and shovel. A man passing by on a bicycle stopped and asked him "How many posts could you stand in a day on a sandhill?" And Ted without pausing whinnied and said "I've never found a sandhill that long!"

This is not poetry. It doesn't have to be, but there's poetry in it, if you can dig it out. In the process you will find there's human bones laid out in caves all over that country. They are not white men's bones, they are tribal. Nobody white or black will ever identify them, who will know where they are now? They are protected by the black reaper, wherever and whoever

he/she may be. If you are a believer and shout loudly in that country, there will be swarms of spirits answer you through the hills gorges and rocky crags there.

The Yanks, drilling for oil, have flown skeletons home to have one in their living rooms, in the USA. That's imperialism for you, that's total disrespect.

This is sacred country if ever there was, and no blacks from those tribes left to claim it. I'm claiming it for them but I can't go into court, I'm a whitey that doesn't know enough.

'Priggy' the carrier out of Springsure told me he once found a large cave of bones whilst 'possuming one night by lamp. He would never tell anyone where it was. I think he was concerned with fame and fortune, and might have only swapped his knowledge for that last commodity. The bush is full of characters hoping to find some slender thread that will emancipate them from the nothingness of hard lonely work. They are not indigenous people; if the opportunity arises to escape to the cities they will be gone like a shot.

We've picked up twine made out of grass by Aboriginal hands in that country before and after it had been claimed for cattle, and a story of tribal revenge, where the women and children were all killed at the waterhole near our camp, when the men were out hunting. Who would know where that one came from? It seemed to be very rich country where the river runs out of the steep mountain all the year round, low over the stones, at about eight knots an hour, I'd say.

Too much for private ownership for cattle. There's enough sweet water runs out of that high mountain to quench the thirst of a big slice of humanity with liquid poetry and prose. I'm putting sweet running water down on paper for your edification. It is life, life, life, singing through that country. It was tribal life-blood translated into fruits of the forest. For me, in the next century, words on paper. Water, water, flowing through Consuelo forever. Leave it that way, we are the feral pigs capable of destruction. The super pig above or around us is not very good at looking after his own creations. He needs a hand on a typewriter, a Greenie, I'd say.

The feral pigs out there are Tamworth breed, big brown fellows. The cattle have turned into red monsters faster than racehorses, the stockmen may be airborne technicians. That's the only way to keep pace with industrialized cattle these days; a new breed evolved out of what might be from test tube cross-

bred buffalo zebra moose prehistoric monsters eating out of the tops of trees.

Not what you and I would call a fair crack of the whip Ted. Ugly. That's a fair description now of the lifestyle we loved then. It's an emu running downhill kicked out of step, completely fucked by cowboys running behind rooting it with economic rationalism bulging out of their pockets.

I think I'd better have a cup of tea. No sugar, thank you. The days of sugar for energy have long gone. Actually it was the sweetness we were after. A working man needed some slight sweetness in his life, some small drug while the salt sweat dried your clothes stiff under the sun/shade.

2

*Yeah well, he died in a chair
that man I worked with forty fifty years ago
great mates as far as mates go in the bush
he roared like a scrub bull at midnight
challenging the world with defiance.*

WHAT DID WE HAVE IN COMMON? A love of poetry, and politics, not to mention women. He had a beautiful wife with refined tastes, a swarthy in old age that looked like a touch of the tar. They were both from Normanton where it all hangs out, the wild Territory bush, the original Australians before it was Australia . . . perhaps it was Goanna Land then? They had two beautiful daughters and a masturbating son whose efforts rocked the tent night after night on blow-in jobs as I came back from the sea, the shipping lanes, to give the old fellow a hand to finish the last few jobs we'd ever be on together, and to give myself a hand to relive the bush and the past occasionally.

I would have married either of his daughters if I'd had the choice, the stability of character, but he intimated, muttered, almost to himself, inaudibly, he didn't like his workmates fucking his girls and I respected those sentiments the girls never knew about. Ted liked to keep his own loves in his head, clear of the family. He had a winning touch with women, somewhat harmless, and in a sense an influential warmth with working mates. I was a chosen one of them, I was adrift and ready to go on any job, a disturbed boy out of the army, alone.

As time went by he reckoned he wanted me to be a pall bearer for him one of these days, me and son Teddy. A man sometimes thinks of going to rest in perfect dignity, borne aloft and along on the wings of mateship, in perfect security. But I wasn't there, never knew until a couple of years afterwards.

Hard work wore out the booming voice, that man with black eyebrows, black curled locks starting to grey around the edges like creek water drying back from banks; yet the love of chiack was there; we parried, sparred and fought with words far into the night of bright stars swinging down over the campfires, bulls roar cows bellow lowing for calves taken from them for weaning, or the dogs had bitten; the hyena principle; bitten calves dying slowly, crying weakly, a pitiful child, part of the dog's food-chain, possums blasting their staccato calls into the midnight cool late night starlit eerie sense of last forebodings hanging over our camp as the last rails of the stockyard went up for the last time; the sick stockrider moving toward death with Gordon:

*Hold hard Ned and help me down once more and
lay me in the shade
you've had your work cut out to guide both horses
and to hold me in the saddle while I swayed
all through the hot slow sleepy silent ride*

the plaintive tone of Gordon saying, saying on towards death,

*When our work is done 'tis best,
best that we should go.
I am weary, let me rest,
I am weary, let me go.*

posed against the drum-beating voice of Essex Evans advising

*In the world's broad field of battle
in the bivouac of life
be not like dumb driven cattle,
be a hero in the strife.
Art is long and time is fleeting
and our hearts though stout and brave
still like muffled drums are beating
funeral marches to the grave.*

I see clearly enough now that art is long and time is

fleeting as the crowbars shovels brace and bits axes pieces and tents are thrown into the old chevy truck for the last time on the way to the old men's home in the despicable city where men took orders from bosses.

Only Ted should be giving orders.

I would go back to sea, I would go below the waterline with shovel and slice. I would write poems to immortalize hard work, shipwreck, life and death. I would pursue the fantasy of perfect love; I would take a final cane cut, I would press a few more sheds, the last, like a turtle head back to sea; a few more ships, marry, explore the grown world, the child mewling and puking in my arms.

Thirty years later I would receive a message from Robbo through John Meredith, a Folklore collector:

"You can tell him from me he's still a fat cunt as far as I'm concerned" amongst other things . . . I assume he didn't like some of my writings, a poem about him. If he understood any of his own imperfections, he didn't want anyone else to. Desperation about escaped life and treasured illusions vanished has its own insanity for some. Naked stories are to be buried deep down in limestone caves *where breath of breeze and axe of men* will never spread them, or *wake the shining satin bird* as Henry Kendall observed. Kendall's shining satin bird is a different one to mine. I don't have that delicacy, that reticence. I'm the blabber-mouth, the write-it-downer, spread it far and wide, fertilize, reach the ends of earth if you can manage to get it there, growing your own crop of ideas.

'Blossom' was the first to go, she was resurrected from death the first time. I was told that he got very impatient with her for some memory loss in death. But she didn't forget everything. I will testify.

Will I die in a chair one day, waiting for nurse to prepare my bath? Will I be hated or loved for what I have said on the page? That's fate if you see life that way. I hear him singing ironically his mockery of his political associates' learned words from the Marxist bible:

O the bourgeois and the bourgeoisie

Then sotto voce growling enquiring perplexed judgemental dismissive

Silly lot of cunts.

As he ambles off to work I hear him roaring "I acknowledge no master!"

I add a few remembered lines from somewhere

*Dark as the night that covers me
black as the pit from pole to pole
I thank whatever gods there be
for my unconquerable soul.*

It would be a shock to him to learn that our words uttered by the Consuelo river would appear on this page half a century later, when Blossom and Young Teddie are buried by a river in Queensland on your grandson's property.

Remember Ted, you could never learn the secret of real writing: Let it all hang out; let it drag on the ground and pick up the leaves, the bindi-eyes, the pebbles, the dirt, the truth. You couldn't believe it was the way to make a hero. Philosophically culturally screwed by an upbringing in the footsteps of Victorian culture, the duende eluded you though you wanted it to bloom for you all your life. You knew I had a corner of it but you shuddered from its personal touch. Instead you wrote screeds of pro-Stalinist religious ravings out of your hysterical soul, writing without meaning from the now known reality of terrible betrayal. You, the original confused kid, who knew nothing of the '56 Khrushchev report. The destruction of our dreams of a perfect world was unacceptable to you, like many old members, particularly the leaders, who acted like thwarted killers themselves, stripped of potential glory by Khrushchev's historical grassing of Stalinists, now a sad heap of leftover old bones.

First you chose to ignore, then you chose to defend, Ted. Like many old Bolsheviks you spoke of justification through necessity. A strange thing for the bluegums of Consuelo to have raving under its stately branches, high canopy, jackasses laughing in rows in the early mornings and late evenings. Years later from your retirement you wanted me to find you a publisher, come hell or high water. Talk about deaf ears, blind determination to resurrect, to set right again, the phobic killer Joseph Stalin in order to re-establish the dreamtime story of goodness.

If only you had understood the nature and cruelty of fables, Ted, but I see you as having made one by seeing me as still a fat cunt! I have pondered over

these words, through forgotten incidents, gradually coming back to me. Folklore collectors do this sort of thing to a man; a woman too of course. You couldn't believe that what I'd written was done for you and me out of our pure love of the past, the country we wanted to live as always.

If time and gravity were to turn around I would be willing to go back there, to pick up the bar and shovel with you, your wife Blossom cooking sometimes, your eldest daughter and grandson coming out for the holidays; but the cup and saucer that fell from the table and smashed will not pick itself up and sit back in place with the tea in it, and neither will you



and I, Ted Robertson, have another cup of tea, live and work together other than on the printed page, written down but not out, true comrades with ironbark heads, young saplings springing up, spinning around toward and through two thousand.

*No more
Roses round the door,
Baby's on the floor,
and Mary's way down in sleepy valley.*

That was your favourite song, was it not? No-one will sing it, no more sleepy valley songs, no more sleepy valleys. Instead there is a saying. *You can't go home again.* It's true if you're talking about the lifestyle. It's heartbreaking to go back for a look at what's not there now. Or is there something in what Banjo Paterson had to say?

*So throw the weary pen aside and let the papers rest,
For we must travel far and fast across the blue hill's
breast
And we must travel far and fast across the rugged
maize*

*to find the fields of youth at last and bring back from
the buried past
the old Australian ways.*

There's no fields of youth out there baby blue, I've been back there. It depends on what you're looking for. Hearts aren't made to break. Its only function is to pump blood particularly to the brain. Brain tells heart to speed up a bit or a lot, or slow down; it's been shocked by what it sees now. Well I'm a pretty tough cookie, Ted, fat cunts often are. I'll go back there for a good look around one of these days, and everyone's going to hear about it. I might take your daughter with me if she wants to come. She'd be free now to climb rainbow mountains, and perhaps help me up some of the tough pinches. She's ten years to the day younger than me, remember?

I would go back to that last yard job on the 'ten mile' over the last crossing that could be made over the river, where it came out of the almost perpendicular mountain top, pouring out its water. That leasehold country was to be cut up straight away, having been held for close on a century by one company, who now wanted urgent improvements to present arguments for holding onto it. Fat chance they'd have with a few puny buildings, green timber stockyard rails, a cover over the dip. I would like to sit where I sat by the campfire after midnight alone, 'possums finished feeding, having a sleep in the forks of trees behind me. Two men in the tent on my right, the cross low down on my right shoulder, cattle coming up to the hollow under the yard at night, lowing together for the calves that had been taken a couple of weeks ago. That was amazing to me, that they would come back every night towards midnight and take up this corroboree for their calves, until I became annoyed, got out the long barrelled shotgun and fired over them down there in the hollow and they left and didn't come back. I reckon they had no track of time, and thought it was always the day they had the calves taken from them. How bloody human can you get, you warm blooded animal? I reckon if I went back there now I might learn something more about the state of play in the game. What did happen to that leasehold country? Is it relevant now to the present government wanting to give all of leasehold Australia to a few richies?

Young Teddy and I went for a walk one night over the river, up toward the mountain top, and got lost.

We started out to follow the weak awful bellows of a calf bitten by a dog, but found no calf or dog in that black night. Luckily we found a spot where we could see the cross, and headed back to it, cross over the left shoulder to take us back to camp. We never told Robbo, bushmen don't easily admit to another bushman that they get lost.

It was sometime after that, somewhere else that I wrote the poem that may have upset him, as well as a couple of other small matters I put on paper somewhere. I haven't got it all together, worked it out completely yet. A man forgets important things, that's for sure . . .

*A tent and a galley and an ironbark tree,
the night and the fire burn restlessly
possums asleep in the ironbark fork
the night and the fire and I to talk
on this last job I'll ever be on,
With the fencing boss Ted Robertson.
The southern cross swings low to the right
As I sit and I ponder a course each night
while the startled snores of this friend of mine
tells me man be gone from the fencing line
tells me steel is hard on the man my son,
look well at your mate Ted Robertson.
I have watched the man with the shuffling gait
and I would be gone but his pride is great
and I have no wish to hurt a man
who has given me bread and called me son
and taught me never to give up the fight
to the sullen earth where the sun turns white.
Where Gods revenge the murdered son
I stood by the man Ted Robertson.*

It's bad luck that young Teddy passed in his marbles to the marker, shortly after you, Robbo. He was the youngest of us all. He was a good man, always the boy, never the man you were, Ted, when it came to the bar and shovel, or cruel rhetoric. And neither was I, for that matter. Or was I? Strange that I'm still out in front – ain't it?

You gave my box of tools to Junior, Ted, when you retired. It was that box of tools you borrowed from me that made it possible for you to become a carpenter. You set out to convince me that I wasn't good enough to become a carpenter, and you should have them. I suppose I thought I could get some more, I didn't have a family to rear. I did want to become a

carpenter, but I believed you, Ted. I took your word that I wouldn't be good enough. I always thought you would give it back some day, but you didn't.

Perhaps the descendants of young Teddy, Junior, might know where they are and they might come back to me. I'm good enough now, Robbo, to take them into my care, and know that justice is sometimes done, in spite of the failings of humanity. But it's too late now to think silly things. As another old mate said to me some years ago, "Merv, the only way you'll go back to work is on paper". And that's the most ironclad fact I know.

I DID CALL IN TO Ted's place in North Rockhampton about twenty years after that last job, doing a flying trip through the north. I had a young man, a co-driver with me, we walked up the front steps to the door in the dusk and knocked on it. He opened a window near the front door and peered through, as a safety measure, and I said, "We're looking for a fencing job!" He made some excited noises in his throat, whispered to Blossom, peered some more, and then said, "Is that you, Merv?"

I admitted it was, he let us in, fed us well, and made up a double bed for us. We talked a bit, not much, he'd need a one-to-one situation for more than the sort of conversation that was reserved for the meals after work in the camp a quarter of a lifetime ago. How well he had preserved himself since retirement, immediately he could get the pension, plus his partner, 'Blossom.' I never did know her true name. I discovered somewhere that she had been dead for some moments, but some resuscitation work had pulled her out of it, with some memory loss. The youngest daughter told me that Ted had become very impatient with her because of this memory loss. He was on the point of selling up and putting them both into homes, to be looked after. He would invest all the money for the children. He told me this in the morning under the house, standing astride, agitated about his writing he couldn't get published, and he had fallen out with old comrades over their criticisms of his writing. He hadn't wanted to do that, and he hadn't wanted them to criticize him. He only gave it to them to read. He would have accepted praise for his book, I don't doubt. He reiterated that I was responsible for him not to be able to stop writing. I was sorry about that, I couldn't do anything about it. It was probably two score years and ten too late to go

back to the start, as writers. It hurt me too. I was well and truly involved. It was like owning a runaway horse that smashed up the cart and would evermore bolt when put into harness. I once had such a horse, it was an enormous wonderful spirited beast, burned to death in a bush fire.

The other thing I remember about that visit was an extraordinary thing. Whilst swapping a few words about Consuelo and the characters involved there, she, Blossom, said to me, "And I was alright too, wasn't I Merv?" and I replied, "You were the best of all. You were better than any of us". And then she came up to me, put her arms around my neck and we kissed, full on the lips, and I mean kissed.

For her to have done anything like that in the old days was quite unthinkable. If I haven't explained all that by this, I can give up. Suffice to say, there is the kiss of life, and the kiss of death, and as I discovered, the freedom of the kiss of life back again from death. There was gratitude for final praise there, and I don't know what else, except that it was me, I was there. You work it out for yourself. One of the things I've learned about women is that if you are very patient, this kind of thing can happen when not at all expected. It comes out of the blue, baby, blue.

I was expected to call in again on the way back, but found we had hurtled past. My co-driver was looking for the country his sweetheart had come from, and wasn't interested in anything else. Belatedly I rang Ted up and tried to explain this to him. He said "I understand perfectly. Don't you ever ring me up again or write to this address!" and hung up. I had to take him at his word. So that was the final straw with him. I was responsible for him writing, I didn't get him published. That was the most important thing in his life and I let him down. As he said about tools and carpentry, I was too careless, I wasn't good enough. The chickens had finally come home to roost.

I pulled into a relative's farm, we skinned and cooked an echidna for our supper. I'd picked it up on the road, it had been knocked by a car in front of me. I was in a sense starting to teach another young man about bushcraft. You never get the smell of it off yourself. Bushcraft, I mean.

Sleep well comrades, don't let me disturb you. You might have found that sandhill that's long enough for us to find out how many posts you can stand in a day in sand, Robbo!

Bob Santamaria, Fish and Chips, ASIO and Democracy

Terry Monagle

ONE DAY IN the early seventies Bob Santamaria said to his staff "We should have a Mass here on Fridays, at lunch time." I asked, mischievously, "Would that be in Latin or English?" He replied, "I would have thought it was self evident." Sometimes you know you have to have a go. "Why don't we have a ballot box and vote?" I suggested. There was no reply. We never had a ballot or a Mass.

Now with the emotion of the period of death and funeral of Bob Santamaria behind us it is important to make a more distanced reflection on his political style and achievements. I try to offer some hints that historians might like to pursue.

The question that keeps coming to me is to what extent was he a democrat. Answers to this question lie in the decisions he made both in his own organizations and in national political activities. Santamaria seems to have served his own abstract passions rather than the concrete needs of Australians. He just didn't mix with ordinary Australians and did not seem to have reached for them in his imagination. He did not share the experience of working in the war effort nor did he ever work in an ordinary job rubbing up against all comers and subject to a boss.

When his troops canvassed the rough backstreets of Broadmeadows and Fawkner for votes in metal worker or clerks union elections, Santamaria was not amongst them. He was safe in Kew and latterly in Surrey Hills, leafy eastern suburbs. There were thousands of mainly Irish working-class men who made sacrifices and suffered pain in their careers and families through activity as Groupers and in the Split. I must confess my bias. As a small boy I grew very frustrated at the absence of my father who was an activist during both the Grouper and Split period. Santamaria meanwhile was safely cloistered in his own organization, not appearing to make sacrifices for his passions.

He introduced an element of the apocalyptic passion into Australian politics. It was always five minutes to midnight. We were in a perpetual state of crisis. Not for him the pragmatic and measured ambitions of mainstream politicians. A sense of normality seemed to necessitate a state of fear.

While he was personally kindly to those he met, I think fundamentally he had little confidence in the mass of people. Despite his political passions there was a lifelong reluctance to test out his ideas in the political market place. He never stood for public office, but invented a role for himself and his organizations that he grandly described as a "prophetic shock minority". The strange assumption in

this is that majorities can never be right, only minorities. The majorities have to be manipulated by clever minorities operating like moulds growing on the fruit. I suppose he was happy to have friends and allies, like Brian Harradine and some DLP senators, do the messy compromising for him.

Majorities, in his thinking, were an enormous spongy mass which needed to be manipulated and shaped. I think it is clear that he had no conception of a national community nor of class interests. The majority of people were followers and were malleable, he assumed, if they could be momentarily distracted from their secular fixations. If you are driven by a belief that you will always be a minority, you are free of the responsibility of actually running anything. People make this analysis of the policy promiscuity of the Greens and Democrats. Why not of Santamaria?

His main political operation was to set up fronts. They all had elements of fraud. The Industrial Groups, The Moderate Student Alliance, Peace With Freedom, the Australian Family Association and many others over the years. The Movement itself was really a shelf company that was a vehicle for Santamaria's talents. Australians were rightly suspicious of these organizations. "If you've got something to say, come and say it." "Why don't you trust me to talk to

me?" is the Australian style. His defence of these methods is that they were the only way to beat his opponents, they had to be beaten at their own game. The logic of this position is that if the Communist Party which used these tactics should be banned, well why shouldn't the Movement be banned as well?

The challenge for Santamaria was to stand for the Senate as a DLP candidate, when election would have been reasonably assured. During the eighties with sectarianism ebbing he might have attracted many Liberal and Country Party voters as well as those who had voted DLP. Surely his influence would have been enhanced? But he chose the safety of the sidelines. He could also have stood as an independent in the Senate alongside Brian Harradine. What an interesting and powerful team they would have been for the past couple of decades and what might they have been able to achieve for their interests?

He also had little real appetite for democracy inside the Movement. There was no constitutional system by which policies were debated by the membership, nor a system of elections by which a rank-and-file person could rise to the top. The full-time officials were predominantly the delegates to national conferences. Such meetings were of very small groups dominated by paid officials. Santamaria always gave the keynote speech and the rest of the meeting was about implementing his strategic vision.

He was hurt by any scepticism towards the rightness of his vision. Take me, take my vision, was the style, rather than let's sit down, talk it through and arrive at a negotiated, albeit messy, position.

There was never any formal

membership of the Movement. But in the extensive filing system, the thousands of individuals catalogued were marked M1, M2 or M3. M3s would buy a raffle ticket. M2s would vote the right way if asked. Only the M1s, those prepared to be activists and to take risks, were to be trusted. A story used to go like this: "Gerrard's not with us any more. Why not? He was only 98 per cent."

The loyalty expected was not to the organization but to Bob. The organization was Bob. To question the ideas was to question Bob. He was like the Italian Poppa at the head of the table laying down rules with an inherent authority.

Another incident that sticks in my mind from those days is that he was the first person I ever saw eating fish and chips with a knife and fork. As a working-class boy from the northern suburbs I was shocked. I was also surprised at his incapacity to work simple technical devices like a tape recorder. This might be why he thought the army would be better off without him.

Even on the sidelines, however, he did have real political power. In the year I worked for him there was a vacancy for the position of Postmaster General. Three coalition cabinet members rang him and asked who it should be. It was not unusual to see state and federal Liberal members get out of their cars in the office car park. There was a handful of rich Catholic businessmen who provided his contacts with the Liberal Party.

Working closely with him convinced me however that he was not the intellectual he seemed to be from a distance. He was no tinkerer with abstract theory, nor a wandering searcher after truth. Awkward facts were explained away.

Mind you, most politicians do make him look like an intellectual. He was a great propagandist, simplifier and rhetorician.

Both this wariness of exposure to voters and the fish and chip anecdote illustrate that he was strangely out of sync with the cultural majorities in Australia. His working life was cloistered in his own office, with his own staff. It was quiet and reverential there, like in a vestry. He never worked outside an organization he was not running. He does not seem to have worshipped in his own parish, at least in latter years, nor to have involved himself in the nitty gritty of parish councils or school boards. It was principally his love of the Carlton football club which enabled earthy links between him and his followers. Many speeches were launched with football references. It became very predictable.

His children went to the richest Catholic schools in Melbourne. He kept out of the mess of the real application of policy. Though a fervent Catholic he seems to have kept away from normal parochial contacts and involvement. He got an enormous sense of security from the Catholic Church as a monumental historic organization, even if he didn't like its human face. He covertly invoked its authority for his own political operations. Threats to the Church provided an energy for his political activity. It sometimes seemed that he and his conservative Catholic followers were psychologically dependent on an almost overwhelming threat to the Church or to Australian society. If no threat existed one had to be conjured. Communism, Libertarianism, Islam, Protestant heresies inside the Church, Neophilia, Economic

Rationalism and others have each served in their turn as the threat which galvanized them into political action.

As well as having many important political contacts there was constant information-sharing with ASIO. One illustration of this was ASIO's practice of cutting intelligence reports down the middle of the page and mailing the halves in two separate envelopes to Belloc House, an institute of social studies run by the Jesuit fathers. One of my jobs was to go to Sackville Street, Kew to collect the letters and stick them together. I have little doubt that a good deal of intelligence flowed the other way too from Santamaria's contacts in many areas of Australian life. There have been claims that Lionel Murphy's raid on the ASIO office in Melbourne led to the security devices on Santamaria's office being intensified in case Murphy found proof of Santamaria's acting as a channel of information on Australians to the security service, and had reason to raid his office too.

I would have thought disinterested service to the whole Australian community should be a key criterion for the honour of a state funeral. Does a man who was involved in passing personal details of fellow citizens on to the intelligence service; and who did not avail himself of the opportunity of war service; and who campaigned to have the political rights of some Australians outlawed, really qualify for a state funeral? You would have to wonder. Howard's decision to offer a state funeral can be read as thanks for services to the Liberal Party.

Terry Monagle is a Melbourne writer who once worked with Bob Santamaria.

Forever Young?

Sue Luckman

THE RELEASE OF Mark Davis's *Gangland: Cultural Elites and the New Generationism* was one of the most discussed literary events of 1997. Much of the debate, especially in the major press, centred on his generationalism thesis at the expense of more considered debate on the real central premise of the book: the role of this generational discourse in the construction and maintenance of an Australian intellectual, artistic and media elite (hardly surprising given the ensuing public discussion was conducted almost exclusively within the elites identified by Davis). Additionally, little discussion has ensued regarding the way in which this elite has occluded the creative and/or political contributions of an increasingly educated cohort of younger people to Australian intellectual and artistic life. Not to mention the role played by younger people – since the sixties – in the maintenance and growth of organised political dissent.

Is 'youthful rebellion' just not what it used to be? Inevitably. That change does occur is a truism when it comes to the passing of time: things do change and they are different (but not inherently for the better nor the worse). The problem lies not in the details of the differing forms that acts of dissent and 'dropping out' can take, but in the fact that repeated comments from some prominent commentators that there has just not been any significant dissent since the 'good old days' of the late sixties and early seventies, repeated widely and often enough, have attained currency as truth in many quarters. These claims

are reinforced by the continual recycling of 'the usual suspects' when 'radical' comment is required: Germaine Greer, Helen Garner, Richard Neville, et al. That some people may not have been to a demonstration or sat on a picket line since the sixties and seventies seems therefore to stand as proof that there have been no demonstrations or picket lines since that time. Those commentators, who purport to have the one, true position on 'real' dissent, from often quite comfy positions within the media and cultural mainstream in Australia, would appear to have convinced themselves that they were fighting a battle that was trans-historical, trans-national, and trans-temporal.

It really is time to just get over it. No matter how many times the Rolling Stones continue to tour, milking whatever musical credibility and respect they may once have possessed, the initial moment when they were at the top – a definitive musical moment for a great many people – simply cannot be re-created. Techno is here to stay as a substantial musical (macro)genre. Millions of people can, and indeed do, enjoy dancing to it, even though it may remain unfathomable, undifferentiated noise to others (just as the Rolling Stones once did). As Davis himself writes: "The so-called 'Year of the Helens' [1995] wasn't just the year of the Helens. It was also the year of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Hendrix, the Eagles, David Bowie and Queen." The indulging of such nostalgia, as Davis writes, occurs at the expense of positive discussions of young people and contemporary cultural production:

The Year of the Helens, at least as far as music coverage in the

'quality press' went, was a year of diminished public space for younger people. It was also the year when Anna Wood died, the year of the Paxton beat-up, and the year in which importation of the book *E is for Ecstasy* was banned. It was the year first news came through of the invention of a pill to stop ageing, and the year of *Smoky Joe's Cafe*, featuring the songs of Lieber and Stoller. "Who could forget the Delltones?" Charles Wooley intoned in the '60 Minutes' tribute to the stage show.

Even if there were 'another Rolling Stones or Beatles', how would those who lament the passing of a musical golden age ever know they were actually out there, when they persist in filling the spaces in which they might come into contact with them with a self-fulfilling whine?

I MUST CONFESS that while I enjoyed *Gangland*, the substantive critique was hardly a surprise. *Gangland* is one of those wonderful texts – much like a critically rigorous version of 'Good News Week' or 'Media Watch' – that reminds many of us that we are not alone. We are not the only people who find themselves continually swearing at the telly, or entering into a totally pointless, and therefore highly frustrating, debate with our Saturday paper. And, in many ways, therein lies much of the power of *Gangland* for many of its readers: it gave voice to an exasperation many people feel. For those readers whose own perspective is in some way akin to Davis's, *Gangland*'s central argument is essentially a truism. It is a testament to the very lack of self-awareness of which the cultural elites identified by Davis stand

accused, that they should find such an evident challenge to their position so new and extraordinary.

The thesis that generationalism operates for many born in the postwar period as a discursive crutch to legitimate power amongst a group of people, who, as the first group of young people to be pandered to – qua young people – by the advertising and media industries keen to exploit economically the new consumer category of 'teenager', is both an important and useful one. Members of this particular elite need more gracefully – and self-reflexively – to come to grips with the reality of the power they now wield. To accept that they have become the people they swore they never would. Today, savvy companies such as Volkswagen continue to pursue this demographic, are pandering to the idealized image of perpetual vanguardism. Advertising campaigns exploit the opportunity to play on the of guilt of the once hip bourgeoisie, as they seek to reassure those on substantial salaries that conspicuous consumption does not necessarily require having to sell out or be 'uncool' (at least not if you're purchasing their products). Similar anxieties are conspicuously evident in the Internet-related hype which has emerged this decade from the west coast of the United States.

That these particular elites identified by Davis, having believed what is often their own hype, continue to find solace and legitimacy in the so-called 'golden era' of youthfulness, is as sad as it is obvious. Perhaps the last word should go to an article, 'Make Room For The Next Boom', published on 10 March 1998 in *The Age*. In it 'Echo Boomers' – children of Baby Boomers, loosely those born between 1977 and

1994 – are lauded as the 'next big thing' in generational identification. 'Echo Boomers' are to take up where their parents left off: "The generation of today's teens is going to be almost as important as the Baby Boom was". That's right, in the often fickle world that is generationalism you can just sweep those pesky 'Generation X-ers' under the carpet; the true way forward is to create a new generation in their own image. A generation to carry on their name. Just like Peter Pan, they can be young – forever.

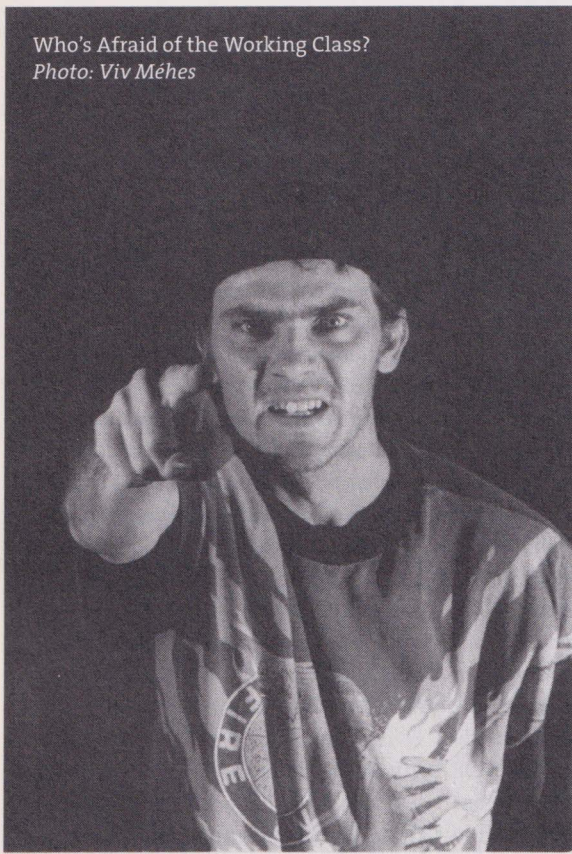
Who's Afraid of the Working Class

Lynn Beaton

THE LATEST Melbourne Workers Theatre offering, *Who's Afraid of the Working Class*, was a brilliant theatrical production as well as a condemnation of the deterioration in the quality of life for increasing numbers of working-class Australians.

The work was conceived to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Melbourne Workers Theatre whose first play, *State of Siege*, was written in 1987, in response to the question – what does it mean to be a unionist?

When the same question was asked of four writers, Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Melissa Reeves and Christos Tsiolkas in 1998 it was transformed into a new question – who's afraid of the working class? This very transformation is a reflection of the world we live in today – and the extent to which the relevance of unionism is being questioned – and its right to exist is being challenged.



Four stories, written by the four writers, were interwoven throughout the play creating a breadth no one writer could have matched and creating characters which would not have been recognized as Australians ten years ago.

Today they are the fastest growing groups but still largely invisible as people. Increasingly they exist as statistics – so many unemployed, so many just laid off, so many living below the poverty line, so many homeless, so many drug addicted – but the stories behind the statistics are hardly ever told.

It has always been the strength of MWT to tell the untold stories. The writers have written about the disturbing aspects of Australian life and resisted the ever-present pressure on political writers to show a way out, or feature the grains of

strength in a beach of despair.

Political theatre is hard to find these days, with funding bodies increasingly demanding that companies fulfil 'mainstream' criteria such as sponsorship and large audiences. This has led to an abundance of extravagant but vacuous productions, which stimulate the senses momentarily but offer no nourishment for the contemplation of the world we live in.

WAWC, on the other hand penetrates deep into our social psyche. It runs the whole gamut of emotion. Whilst its overall mood is bleak, there are nevertheless

flashes of humour, strength, courage and ingenuity which remind us that when humanity is replaced by accountancy, an abundance of human skills and talents are lost to society.

WAWC was no feel-good production, but it did leave audiences with a renewed determination to turn the tide around and work towards a society which is inclusive of all.

Suzy Foerster writes:

During the five years since the Russian army invaded Tomas's country, Prague had undergone considerable changes. The people Tomas met in the streets were different. Half of his friends had emigrated, and half of the half that had remained had died. For it is a fact that will go unrecorded by

historians that the years following the Russian invasion were a period of funerals: the death rate soared . . . the hopelessness pervading the entire country penetrated the soul to the body, shattering the latter.

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

LIKE KUNDERA, I have lost half my friends to emigration – seventeen, including engineers, managers, teachers and writers. None as yet has died. I put this down to the fact that they're all younger than forty (or were). At the end of the year my husband and I will also be emigrating. In the next five weeks four more friends are leaving for England; other friends are researching work possibilities overseas.

What drives us to leave is the feeling that you must sell your soul to get a job (in sales, in the gambling industry or, for an increasing number of young women, in the 'exotic dancing' or sex industry). Making a liar of every careers counsellor, teacher and parent who ever told us that getting an education meant getting a good job, the current employment scenario calls for young uneducated people to work for five dollars an hour. Those of us who are 'overqualified' or 'overeducated' find our place in the dole queues. Also joining the dole queues are the 'over-aged' – people over thirty-five who are forced to change jobs due to retrenchment or collapse of the industry in which they have worked all their lives. There are the young and inexperienced who, being older than twenty-one, are excluded from even applying for five-dollars-per-hour jobs.

What is happening to our society? Old people tell me that the children

have all gone away, that no-one walks the streets and says hello any more, that they see the point to drinking themselves to death.

Women tell me they are afraid to have children because they feel that this government is doing its best to keep mothers at home, through cuts to child-care. A working mother with two children would have to earn \$700 each week to justify leaving the house – because it costs more than \$200 each week just to have children minded. This would be additional to having no sleep during the night and having to purchase pre-cooked food because of lack of time for preparation.

And because this government thinks the fifties were so wonderful, women are again afraid of losing their jobs and careers, not to mention their superannuation, which they're told they should rely on when they get old. (Or does this government expect us to rely on our men?)

For many the fifties were not wonderful – it was an era of racism and sexism. It was an era in which non-Anglo-Saxons were forced to defend themselves with their fists. My own mother was forced to do this when she was nine years old. The fifties also saw discrimination in the classroom. My mother, because she is a 'wog', and despite her academic brilliance, was constantly picked on and marked down by her Anglo-Saxon teacher.

Hands up all those who share the Head Goon's vision of Australia returning to the fifties. When Keating was PM there was hope. We believed we'd have reconciliation, we believed that government would protect our rights as workers, we believed they would work with us to preserve the environment, we believed that they supported female

workers who were also mothers, we believed that we would be able to afford to educate our children. We believed that Australia was a great place to be.

Keating and Labor weren't perfect (and Labor is far from perfect now) – but this government is truly monstrous. To illustrate just how monstrous this government is, I pass on this anecdote from an overseas visitor who recently went to Sydney. He told us that in Sydney they're rounding up all the Aboriginal people and shoving them where no-one will see them, just in time for the Olympics. Are we ashamed yet?

At this point let me throw in a pertinent quote from Kundera:

cowardice was slowly but surely becoming the norm of behaviour and would soon cease being taken for what it was . . . by inflating cowardice, [they] would make their actions seem commonplace and thereby give them back their lost honour . . .

We are being led by a bunch of cowards who are morally too limp-wristed to make the hard decisions. To paraphrase Kundera, 'we are shamed by their weakness'.

And just in case you were feeling comfortable with the direction in which our society is heading, another quote, this time pertinent to the attitude of Kennett to *The Age*, as well as to the Government's attitude towards the ABC (note recent appointment of Kroger to executive board):

[The secret police] handed Tomas a piece of paper . . . it condemned the intelligentsia . . . [and] denounced the editors of the writers' weekly [critical of the

governing regime] . . . [meanwhile] radios intoned ominous reports of police functionaries who had replaced cashiered broadcasters . . .

This Government would like to obliterate all critical media outlets, while simultaneously spreading propaganda through their media lackeys. They tell us this themselves. Remember back to sixty years ago, and remember what happened when the citizens of a certain country unquestioningly and with relish accepted the murderous tasks assigned to them by their government – in the name of the economic prosperity of that country.

We don't have the hell of sixty years ago but we do have the unquestioning amoral obsequiousness of that era evident on the faces of our so-called 'most respected citizens' – and we ask our young to use these people as role models.

And do we still have a democracy? A democracy exists when the people own the government. That is, the people give temporary licence to a bunch of people – whom we pay – to make sure our society runs smoothly and that our assets are maintained according to our wishes. Victorians ceased to live in a democracy when Kennett came in.

One final quote from Kundera:

As the result of your 'not knowing', this country has lost its freedom, lost it for centuries, perhaps, and you shout that you feel no guilt? How can you stand the sight of what you've done? How is it you're not horrified? Have you no eyes to see? If you had eyes, you would have them put out and wander away . . .

Some of us are wandering away.

Orchestra Dreaming

Celia Brissenden

ON THE PENULTIMATE NIGHT of the 1998 Telstra Adelaide Festival, something extraordinary happened in the Thebarton Theatre. As rain swept through the city, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and staff from the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (at the University of Adelaide) took us on an incredible journey of music, dance and spoken word, through the Australian landscape and into the experiences of indigenous Australians across the country. And they did it together. For the first time, indigenous musicians and a dancer collaborated with a symphony orchestra to create a new work in which the indigenous voice truly speaks for itself, and using contemporary more than traditional Aboriginal music.

Anglo-Australian composers opened the program, each using Aboriginal music in different ways. Peter Sculthorpe's *Kakadu* (1988), begins with the violins rustling, chattering and finally sweeping into the air in an explosion of energy evoking birds in flight. His score is like an aerial flight over the Top End in its aural descriptions of landscape and light, but his use of Aboriginal melody threaded through rich orchestral textures is barely discernible, and "only reinforces", what Stephen Whittington calls "a sense of what has been lost in translation".

Richard Mills' *Earth Poem/Sky Poem* (1993) is a different project, much larger and more ambitious. According to Mills, its eight sections were "formulated in collaboration with the Yolngu people from Irwe (Milingimbi) and Galiwin'ku (Elcho

Island) in north-eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory." He uses pre-recorded sounds of birdsong and rain together with symphonic techniques and live traditional dance and music from the Galpu Wilderness Dancers and Elcho Island Dancers.

There is a sense of cultural dislocation from the moment the seven painted, feathered men take the floor in front of the ranks of gleaming french-polished wood and strings. I keep expecting them to be on the musical beat, to move in time with the orchestral structures, but this is a different language in a context with expectations I know nothing of. In this forum I am forced to re-examine my presuppositions about what is good or bad dance. western preoccupations with timing and precision are irrelevant here, where communication is not just the key, but the whole of the experience. The dancers are moving within the context of the natural world, telling us of their environment against a framework of sounds and music that uneasily integrate modern orchestral and traditional indigenous techniques. It is not entirely successful.

The core of the evening is the best – the first performance of *Music is Our Culture*, a thirty-minute work combining urban and traditional Australian indigenous song, music and dance with orchestral instruments. Months of experimental improvisation, interpretation and 'mixing and matching' the sounds of traditional and orchestral instruments by Jardine Kiwat, Grayson Rotumah, Kerry McKenzie and Chester Schultz have produced a work that shifts the balance of power. Since early colonial times white composers have, with increasing sensitivity,

adopted and adapted indigenous music into western musical traditions. In *Music is Our Culture* the symphony orchestra is forced to adopt the indigenous idiom, and the Aboriginal composers here perform their own work.

Eight movements of spoken text and song explore the emotional journeys of indigenous Australians around the country, often living away from their birthplace and family, isolated from their culture and its traditions. Two dancers enact scenes from the narrative with a beautiful fusion of indigenous and western dance forms, Juliette Bland's fluid technique contrasting against Jensen Warusam's earth-anchored movement as starkly as her white skin against his dark. The choreography draws its energy from the ground, the essential, earthy nature of indigenous dance extended into a challenging vocabulary that matches the music's mix of contemporary songs and symphonic strings. Traditional flat-footed stepping becomes the basis for a sudden Classical lift; arms spread like wings initiate unexpected partnering as Bland and Warusam's bodies lock together, a visual cue for the stories of urban dislocation and the Dreaming that James Muir narrates with clarity and passion.

Music is Our Culture successfully gives the rest of us an extraordinary insight into an authentically voiced experience, with an emotional journey that made Sculthorpe and Mills' works sound like postcards from tropical Australia.

Celia Brissenden writes for the Adelaide Advertiser and the national magazine Dance Australia.

miscellany

Magazine Wrack

Nathan Hollier

IT IS DIFFICULT to remember when the divisions within Australian society have been brought into such open rhetorical and even physical conflict. There is a sense of an approaching cultural sea-change which for better or worse will probably be induced by the next federal election. It is a time of excitement and exasperation, of mornings spent punching the dashboard of the Mazda while listening to Peter Reith on the way to work. The waterfront dispute, and the culmination of the New Right's long-running attack on "rigidities in the labour market" that it represents, is the most recent and perhaps the most powerful rallying point for left and right. Another is Wik. There is the prospect of a republic, following the Constitutional Convention. The privatization of education and practically everything else continues apace, while a proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment adds an international dimension to these internal struggles. Opposing sides have staked so much, some having so much to lose, others so much to gain. It is a time also when the value of Australia's little magazines is pellucid. Each of these above-mentioned concerns appears in a perusal of some recent issues. Beneath an often bland Murdoch-Packer consensus, these magazines offer evidence of, and help to stimulate, a deeper cultural life.

In one of his most perspicacious (and least misogynist) observations, Milan Kundera said "the struggle of people against oppression is the struggle of memory against forgetting". The little magazines, with their prohibitive lead-times, inevitably find it difficult to match the alacrity of the dailies' social commentary. They generally lack the time and money, too, to facilitate extensive social investigation. It is perhaps in aiding this public and community 'memory' then, that these magazines do their most valuable work in the present. The recent passing away of B.A. Santamaria has provided an apposite example. As Paddy McGuinness (April *Quadrant*) and James Griffin (April *Eureka Street*) note, the popular media assessment of Santamaria evoked the often sycophantic cliches of 'a towering public figure', feared and admired, if not liked, by all sides of politics. For Paddy, a populist who has made a career out of bull-whipping the general populace, thereby attracting readers who want to feel similarly aloof, this is proof of the Man's greatness, while Griffin uses the shallowness of this consensus as the starting point for an examination of competing Santamaria myths, public and private. Particularly interesting is his suggestion that "an oral historian might take up before it is too late: what was the cost to families, marriages and mental health in fostering fanatical activism and crisis attitudes". Geoff Sharpe, Tony Ayers and Val Noone (April-May *Arena*) continue the critical

discussion of Santamaria's legacy. Terry Monagle, in this issue of *overland*, offers a personal description of his former employer. Largely in accord with these three above, he asks us not to forget the many ways in which the power wielded by Santamaria caused irreparable harm. The contrast with the popular media's history lesson is complete.

Given the extent to which the wharf dispute has occupied media and public debate, the relative dearth (so far?) of little-magazine articles on this issue is slightly disappointing. Not averse to mentioning issues of class (see for examples articles in the Autumn *Island* by John Lucas and Kathy Barnsley), the magazines currently seem less primed to fill in the spaces of the mainstream media's coverage of this conflict than they are of some others, such as Wik and republicanism. The public support for the MUA has been extraordinary, though as with the death of Diana, proffering early explanation may be hazardous. Is there just a sniff of community values becoming fashionable again, a whiff of nostalgia in the air, perhaps left over from BA's late espousal of the evils of globalized capitalism? Not according to Chandran Kukathas (April *Quadrant*), for whom the presence of any non-rabidly self-serving motivation is a bourgeois pretence and the first step to Stalinism. At least he is consistent in his advocacy of a neoclassical economic agenda, which is more

than can be said for his editor's garbled, tendentious and eccentric wander through economic history in the March *Quadrant*.

It seems amazing that an event could push the Wik legislation off the front pages but Howard and Co. have managed it. The latest issue of *Meanjin* (no.1, 1998) is entitled 'Unfinished Business'. The title is drawn from an article by James Tully, a Canadian academic currently based at the ANU, and refers to what passes for our reconciliation process. Fiona Nicoll and Tim Rowse also write admirable *Meanjin* articles on this theme. Tully outlines in what ways the findings of the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is applicable to the Australian case. The vision of a new relationship includes: i) recognition of Aboriginal peoples as coordinate, not subordinate to federal and provincial governments; ii) recognition of Aboriginal peoples' rights to self-governance, again within a coordinate relationship with existing law; and iii) a recognition that "the equal and self-governing status of the first nations coexists through all its interrelations with the provincial and federal governments". Aboriginal sovereignty is identified as something which can neither be traded (having never been acknowledged), bought, or, as John Forbes (*March Quadrant*), donning his Goebbels hat, charmingly puts it, "paid off". Forbes admirably takes up Paddy's editorial agenda of wheeling out tired old conservative catch-cries for a relaxed and comfortably ill-informed readership. He argues that Native Title legislation is a short-sighted, time-consuming, expensive and generally impractical "fashion" which unfairly privileges a minority.

He means the Aborigines. That minority to which Howard's Ten Point Plan proposes to hand over massive tracts of land in the name of 'certainty', including Packer, Murdoch and that grand Australian patriot, the Sultan of Brunei, Forbes neglects to mention. His article seeks directly to negate what former Fraser government Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Ian Viner described recently as a "new political dimension . . . the dimension of simple justice and the underlying moral stature of the nation" (*The Age*, 31/3/98).

It is little wonder that Mark Davis (*April Australian Book Review*) seems tired of holding up one side of the long-running 'culture wars'. In a bizarre case of life imitating critical argument, Davis has become the *sole* person to whom members of the literary establishment go in seeking a response to their liberal-humanist grievances. Keith Windschuttle (*March Quadrant*) and Jean Curthoys (*April Quadrant*) are two 'culture-war-warriors' to recently repeat aspects of their attacks on theory and the modern humanities, though Davis's column is a rejoinder to yet another quixotic foray by David Williamson (*March Australian Book Review*). "Forget universities," Davis writes, "the culture wars are now being fought out on other fronts: Mabo and Wik to name but two. The future of the ABC and the concentration of media ownership are a third and fourth. The rise of political populism is a fifth." Germaine Greer (*April-May Arena*) adds a customarily raw endorsement from overseas: "I am not sure if I could come home if native title to the whole country is never recognized; if Howard gets away with it, if he's voted in on a racist ticket, as everyone says he will be,

my exile will only end with my life." These new culture wars, Davis notes, are "government sponsored". 'Wedge' politics, as Jenny Lee discussed in a recent *overland* (149), is the defining modus operandi of the Howard government. The terms in which these national issues are decided seem inevitably shaped by this leadership. Davis argues that these changes are part of an altered political and cultural landscape: "The questions of who speaks for who, who owns what under whose terms, and who owes who an apology [witness a letter by William James in the *April Quadrant*, opining that "Leftists" such as the ABC should apologise to the victims of Communist regimes], are currently concerning a range of thinkers, left and right". Bob Brown makes a comparable argument for political realignment in relation to Green issues in the *Autumn Island*. Whatever positive effects these cultural shifts may bring, the preservation of community memory, knowledge of the ways and means by which power is obtained and protected in our society, will remain a precondition of freedom.

NT News

Marian Devitt

ON 26 MARCH 1998 the NT Community Writing Program was renamed the NT Writers' Centre Inc. This was a significant moment in our development as an organization. Like the other Writers' Centres around Australia we attracted triennial funding from the Australia Council and so have a certain sense of security for the next three years. There is growing

evidence of a number of writers finally breaking through to some level of recognition beyond the local scene with some recent publishing successes. Jo Dutton from Alice Springs has launched her first novel, *On the Edge of Red*, and Alexis Wright has completed a mammoth editing job in compiling *Take Power*, a celebration of twenty years of Land Rights. There are numerous stories and essays from Aboriginal people and others involved in the Land Rights struggle. Kim Caraher will launch her fifth children's book, *Cockroach Castle* in Library Week in May and Rowena Ivers is expecting to launch her first novel *Skin*, which was shortlisted for the 1997 Vogel Award. During Library Week a series of on-line writing workshops will be held in the Darwin Public Library.

A special 1998 issue of *Northern Perspective* was dedicated to the publication of the 1997 NT Literary Awards, with commended and highly commended entrants published in the anthology. Like many other literary magazines around Australia, *Northern Perspective* is struggling to stay alive and the future of the NT Literary Awards is somewhat shaky without a faculty of English Literature at the University. While the NT Literary Awards are a relatively modest event in terms of national awards, it is one looked forward to by NT writers and those writers who have travelled to the NT and been deeply affected by the landscape, the people and the sense of something profoundly Australian, yet unique, that is usually experienced here.

Despite diminishing opportunities for local publication writers continue to write and gather together to discuss and read their work. The Katherine Branch of the Writers'

Centre is collecting submissions for an anthology which has as a focus the recent devastating floods in Katherine. Poets in Alice Springs are applying for funding to bring Dorothy Porter to the Territory. A small group of writers is reconvening in Nhulunbuy, the FAW in Darwin is experiencing a renewed sense of enthusiasm, and there are rumours of an anthology from the Central Australian branch. The beginnings of a NT Society of Editors have come about as a result of a recent visit from the Sydney editor Robin Appleton and the urging of the Writers' Centre for those working in editing to develop a network for professional support. A major cultural 'mapping' exercise has been in place over the last three months in Palmerston, the fastest growing suburban area in Australia. A tentative writing group may develop as a result of contact with the writer-in-the-community, Karyn Sassella.

Later in the year the Writers' Centre and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory are collaborating on a residency for a writer at the museum and we are looking forward to the progress of this initiative in the second half of 1998. The Multicultural Arts Network is busy planning a multicultural poetry festival in June, while planning for the Festival of Darwin in September is already under way along with the hunt for venues and poets and writers. There will be an intensive writing workshop with Jenny Kemp in June, a theatre director/writer from Melbourne and a brief residency for the poet Chris Mansell in July when the Dry Season madness descends in its full frenzy.

A major project for Aboriginal writers in Central Australia has just finished with the arrival of a

seventy-page handbook on my desk, thanks to the hard work of Terry Whitebeach on this project over the past year and a half. The project relates back to research conducted by Peg Havnen and Alexis Wright in 1996 called 'Reclaiming Our History and Ourselves'. Alexis says in her introduction to the handbook "I wanted to develop a trust in literature because I think it is a very powerful tool and essential for our future, particularly in ensuring that our voices, and the voices from our old people, can live on."

So while the isolation and difficulties prevail, writers still find a way to tell their stories and to be heard at least at home, if not abroad.

Finally, a reminder: the Spring '98 issue of *overland* will feature a special supplement of Territory writing.

Brisbane Line

Duncan Richardson

THE BEGINNING OF 1998 has left a distinct impression that the days of the committee-run voluntary writers' organizations may be over, at least in Brisbane. The Australian Writers and Authors Group (AWAG) had died by March and the FAWQ seems to be struggling to stay alive. The year's program is under way but the numbers involved in planning are very small. The program of Literary Walks run over the last eighteen months is on hold and the new blood to replace the burnt-out just hasn't appeared.

Despite this atmosphere of gloom, the former Fringe Festival readings got off to a great start at the Avid Reader Bookshop in West End, with a change of format in the

new venue. Guests Venero Armano and Matt Condon ensured a full house and a mention in the *Courier Mail* didn't hurt. Organized by Brett Dionysius, the new readings go under the banner of *the word made flesh* and in the coming months will feature combinations of poetry and fiction on the third Thursday of the month. In June: Peter Corris/Sam Wagan Watson and in July: Rob Morris/Evelyn Hartogh.

Funded by the Literature Board and the Queensland Arts Office, *the word made flesh* does not depend on the traditional committee and financial members structure. Perhaps it is the shape of things to come, events closely linked with individuals and set up at considerable expense in time and money by those people. If so, the wrangling and paper pushing of committees may be major causes of this shift and will not be mourned. Unfortunately, the opportunities for people to learn from others' experience will also decline, as, at their best, committees can be places where know-how is passed on.

Also going well are the new Club Sangria readings on Logan Road at Mt Gravatt on the first Wednesday of the month. Poet Ross Clark is the organizer and the event is helping to de-centralize poetry performance in Brisbane. The main readers are selected by Ross but they then choose two "and friends" to complete the bill.

Report from Europe

John Kinsella

THE VISITING AUSTRALIAN reading series at Churchill College in Cambridge is progressing steadily.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe recently performed to an audience of forty-fifty (an extremely good turnout) and was well received. He read from his *New and Selected Poems* (OUP) and most recent volume *Whirling* (OUP, 1998). In July, Robert Gray will be making an appearance to time with the publication of a British edition of his *New and Selected Poems* to be published by Arc. This will be the final reading for the 1997/1998 season. We'll begin again in September, after the summer break.

Literary Links is continuing at the Menzies Centre and Australia House in London. Les Murray and Vicki Raymond are set to read at Australia House in June. The long-awaited Murray verse novel is due for publication here. There is in fact a plethora of Australian books on the market, or about to appear on shelves over the next twelve months. John Tranter's selection *Late Night Radio* was due out with Polygon in May and it was gratifying to see that the Serpent Tail edition of Dorothy Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* was given an extensive and extremely positive review in a recent issue of the *London Review of Books*.

I was recently writer-in-residence at Copenhagen University and found a large and receptive audience for Australian poetry, fiction, and critical material. Academics Bruce Clunies-Ross and Martin Leer are keen to keep the impetus going and I'll be returning there later this year. It looks like some kind of regular residency program for Australian writers may evolve out of this. The English Department at Copenhagen University is supportive and the library has a reasonable selection of Australian critical material. The facilities are good including office,

computer access, etc. There is a strong interest in Australian literature and Bruce Clunies-Ross is well known as a critic and academic both within Australia and throughout Europe. He has in fact a long association with *overland* as it happens! Martin Leer has recently completed a Danish translation of a selection of Les Murray's poetry for publication.

A number of Australians have read in Spain over the last year, including Peter Goldsworthy. Susan Ballyn at Barcelona University and Maria Vidal at Lleida run extremely efficient and well-attended reading/lecture programs for both writers and visiting academics. Both women have dedicated much of their own time and resources to supporting the presence of Australian literature in Spain. In the four days I was there recently, there were lectures by visiting artists and academics on Aboriginal art, Australian film, and Sally Morgan's *My Place*, amongst other things.

Elaine Lewis's Australian Bookshop in Paris is constantly supporting visiting Australian writers. Recently she hosted a fringe event for the Festival Franco-Anglais de la Poésie, coordinated by Jacques Rancourt. Tracy Ryan was amongst the participants in this fascinating festival in which guest poets workshop each other's mutual translations of their poems, translating from French to English, and vice versa. Other Australians who have used their French language skills at this festival in the past include Cath Kenneally, Vivian Smith, and Andrew Taylor.

A particularly exciting event scheduled for 7-10 June 1998 is the annual Encontro Internacional de Poetas in Coimbra, Portugal. A huge

international gathering, it will host poets from Brazil, France, Canada, Israel, Nigeria, USA, UK, Spain, Angola, Argentina, Spain, Australia etc. to read in an atmosphere of exchange and celebration of poetry and poetics. The American critic Marjorie Perloff will be giving the opening lecture and the program includes an interesting mix of the linguistically innovative, formalists, and plenty of those who occupy the ground in between. Poets as varied as Michael Palmer, Maggie O'Sullivan and Tony Harrison will help make up the English-language constituent.

Sydneyside

Sean Scalmer

THE COLLAPSE OF the contemporary public sphere is commonly remarked upon. The sites within which political and intellectual debate has traditionally occurred are in historic decline. The diminishing cultural presence of the Left has deprived oppositional voices of one of their most important bases. The penetration of market relations into the university has undermined many of the resources of critical public thought, while the publishing industry increasingly orients itself toward the well-marketed cookbook or the safe textbook with guaranteed sales. Intellectuals who refuse to trim their sails to these prevailing winds are dwindling. A few are making careers in the celebration of the media that persist: proclaiming the popular media, such as the women's magazine, the mainstream newspaper, or the internet, and attacking those who refuse such brash endorsement as elitist or

anachronistic. Fewer still have made the 'splash' a career requires by attacking some aspect of contemporary public debate, such as the absence of younger voices.

However, there are signs that some contemporary writers are responding to this situation by creating or reactivating alternative cultural institutions. In Sydney, The Sydney Studies in Society and Culture continue to publish interesting and politically challenging work. Two volumes have recently been produced which commemorate the career of Soumyen Mukherjee, a long-term member of the History Department and the School of Asian Studies at Sydney University. Mukherjee's thoughtful contribution to historiography has been collected in *Citizen Historian* – a collection which contains reflections on the role of history among the disciplines, the social function of the past, and the need for historians to become conscious of their role in society. Another volume, *History, Literature and Society: Essays in Honour of S.N. Mukherjee*, brings together critical contributions from history, literature, economics and politics, and documents the ongoing existence of committed, publicly concerned intellectual work within the university. Also at Sydney University, postgraduate students have recently combined to produce *Masochism*, a book edited by Natalya Lusty and Ruth Walker. *Masochism* contains nine essays, on topics that range from Ayn Rand to Surrealism, the Law to Sylvia Plath. The book is funded by the University's new Post-Graduate Arts Research Centre, and it is to be hoped that similarly engaging and diverse publications will follow.

Self-publication is also on the rise. Rowan Cahill has recently self-published a slim monograph, *Sea Change: an essay in maritime labour history*. In it, he registers the sense of defeat and historic change, as he reflects upon the slow passage of the funeral cortege of E.V. Elliott, Federal Secretary of the Seamen's Union of Australia, through the streets of Sydney in 1984. It is the end of an era. Cahill returns to the life and union career of E.V. Elliott in an attempt to discern the lessons of history, the constraints of union leadership, and the struggles of workers to respond to the changing labour process. He recalls, too, his own personal contact with Elliott, and the humbling education of a New Left student in the 1970s. The book is serious, accessible and introspective, and we can be grateful for Cahill's efforts. It is to be hoped that the book, too, represents a sea change in the rise of politically progressive publications. Perhaps among such committed and diverse publications, intellectuals are developing some of the cultural and political tools for the ongoing conversation for which they live.

Floating Fund

Once again the generosity of our supporters is overwhelming. *Overland* would like to thank the following:

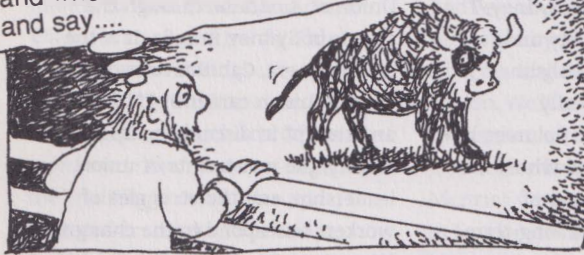
\$150 J.McL., A.M.H.; \$100 L.H., Z.D.; \$68 Z.N.; \$50 M.&S.P., P.&B.A.; \$48 J.S.; \$25 M.H.; \$20 S.T., J.C.; \$18 M.M., M.B., J.L.P., E.S., L.F., J.C., J.M., E.W., R.H.G., E.R.; \$10 I.H., S.&M.G., A.M., D.J.W.; \$9 V.D.; \$8 J.M.S., M.G.S., A.H.K., R.G., B.B., B.G., R.W., F.S., J.A.S., E.W., K.J.M., E.I., B.B.; \$5 J.P.; \$4 N.G.A.; \$3 G.S., P.G.; 3d S.M.C.: Totalling \$1129.

The curse of the last line

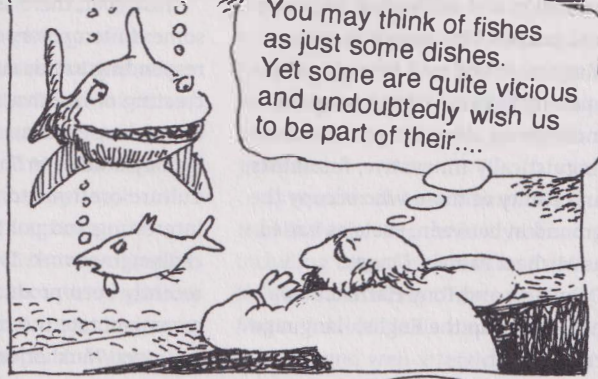
by Lofu

Poetry came natural to Sebastian. It flowed like gentle rain wherever he went. Words bloomed from his fertile mind, effortless, beautiful. Until he got stuck on that last line. For instance, he went to the zoo...

The theory of dominos does not apply to buffalos. They have no dots nor are they square and when one falls, his mates just stare and say....



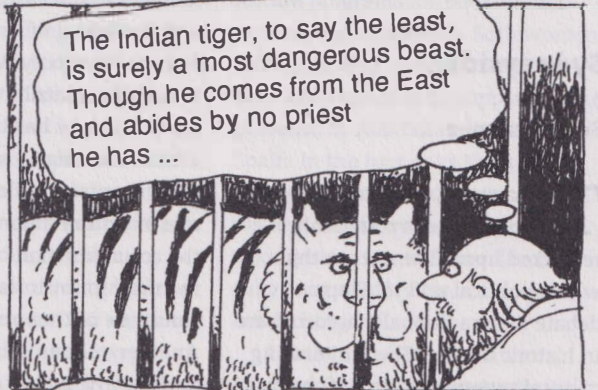
You may think of fishes as just some dishes. Yet some are quite vicious and undoubtedly wish us to be part of their....



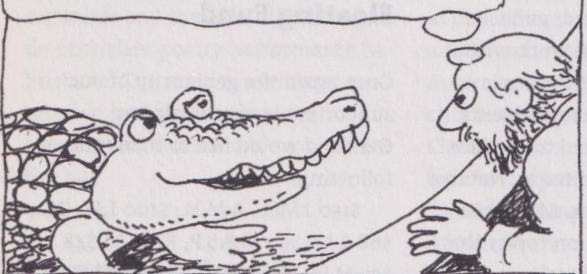
Through noon-dust and through desert sand there strides the mighty elephant. His trunk well serves him as a hand whereas his tail is always...



The Indian tiger, to say the least, is surely a most dangerous beast. Though he comes from the East and abides by no priest he has ...



The *Crocodylus niloticus* surely has it in for us. He does not browse on fruit and grass but likes his meat with...



When contemplating a flamingo the word that springs to mind is bingo. Then Ringo, then lingo, and possibly dinko, but isn't it time to let the whole thing go, when...



"That visit to the zoo was a waste of time", Sebastian thought, "next Sunday I'll go to the Botanical Garden." But he knew it would be the same twist cactus and spruce. Somewhere, somehow, an evil spirit was sitting on his last lines, preventing him from ever achieving his deserved fame and fortune...

The Making of the Communist Party of Australia

Stuart Macintyre: *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from origins to illegality* (Allen & Unwin, \$49.95).

Sean Scalmer

HOW SHOULD THE HISTORY of communism be written? The question has been answered in various, even contradictory ways as communist history has itself unfolded in achievement, conflict, and tragedy. In stirring prose, Leon Trotsky chronicled the making of a revolution and its eventual betrayal. In *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*, Stalin told a story of advancing political unity under a sagacious leadership. In Australia in 1945, Communist Party member E.W. Campbell taught Australian Communists that the same triumphalist history was in motion in our own country. The formation of the Communist Party of Australia in 1920 had been “the most significant event in the history of the Australian labour movement”, the harbinger of the eventual unification of socialism with the Australian working class.

By 1969, after almost twenty-five years of splits, defeats and revelations, the history of communism in Australia had become a lament. Alistair Davidson wrote his short history of the CPA as the importation of an inappropriate “alien tradition” of political activity, followed by a “stumbling, limping move back to Australian traditions with the weight of past errors on the Party’s shoulders”. In the almost three decades since the publication of Davidson’s book, communist history has itself come to an end. Communist states have collapsed, and the CPA is also no more. The writing of the history of communism has reflected this. There has been a retreat from the broad canvas, and only fragments of the history of communism have been relayed – accounts of specific moments, struggles, discourses, personal experiences. The personal

memoir has become one of the key modes of writing the history of communism.

However, with the publication of *The Reds*, Stuart Macintyre has produced a new sort of history of communism – massive, authoritative, and generous. It is neither the story of immoral betrayal nor immanent victory, lamentable failure nor glorious success. Instead, Macintyre tells the fascinating story of the making of the CPA.

Macintyre presents the first twenty years of Communist Party history as a dynamic, messy, fitful process: a process of formation. The practices that came to dominate the party – the democratic centralism, the disciplined membership, the supplicatory relationship with the USSR – were not immediately enforced, and Macintyre’s account emphasizes the gradual, jagged struggle to establish them. The image of the CPA as an immediately monolithic, undemocratic institution is replaced by a more historically subtle picture, in constant evolution until at least the Second World War.

Equally, the image of the Australian communist as a Soviet dupe takes a powerful battering. *The Reds* restores agency to Australian communists in their relationships with the Comintern and the USSR. In a careful and persuasive reconstruction, Macintyre demonstrates how local circumstances, struggles and actors dominated – establishing the terrain upon which Moscow would intervene, shaping the information passed to Moscow, and seizing upon Moscow’s sometimes ambiguous pronouncements to bolster their various positions. The reality of subservience to USSR foreign policy is explored, the existence of spy-

ing is conceded, the debilitating importation of political language and strategy is noted, but the agency of Australian communists is nonetheless emphasized. As Macintyre puts it early on in *The Reds*, if the Australian party succumbed to Stalinism, then that needs to be understood as a “commitment made freely”. *The Reds* establishes the dimensions and the basis of that free choice, and thereby provides a valuable corrective to the simplistic claims of ‘Moscow stooge’ that have dogged Australian communists throughout the century.

Thirdly, Macintyre extends a sympathy to Australian Communists that is deserved and necessary. Like Edward Thompson’s poor stockingers and utopian artisans, Australian communists have now been exposed as casualties of history – defeated and subject to a kind of enormous condescension. Today the historian of communism must combat that condescension, and re-establish the aspirations and experience of communists in their own terms. *The Reds* promises to show how and why Australians became communists, to restore the intellectual and moral world in which they operated, and Macintyre is largely successful in this quest.

Fourthly, *The Reds* is notable for its attempt to connect with a wide, generalist audience. If previous histories of communism have aimed to rally party members or justify new party strategies, then this history is directed outwards rather than inwards. Macintyre is keenly aware that communism has become “almost unintelligible” to citizens today – a movement widely seen as tyranny and nothing but. The aim of *The Reds* is therefore to explain and narrate the history of communism to those who know “little or nothing of its forms”. Here again, the book is largely successful – jargon-free, fluently written, and persistently engrossing. The history of communism in Australia emerges as inspiring, brave and varied.

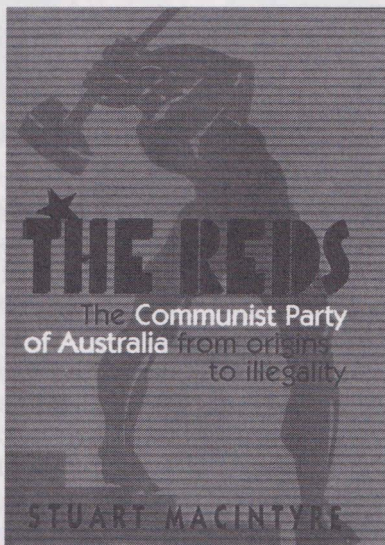
The Reds is also characterized by a kind of Thompsonian concern with ‘experience’. It is a history of communists as much as it is of the party. Macintyre goes to great pains to delineate the experiences of individuals which propelled them into the party, and

to specify the differing motivations for membership. Equally, the experience of party membership is powerfully evoked, and the reader is made to see the physical bravery, comradeship and self-discipline that characterized party members of the time. Here too, *The Reds* emphasizes the differing sorts of party membership, and how gender, class and party-rank implied varying struggles, barriers and rewards for CPA members.

However, it is at this point that the framework of the book leads to tensions. If Macintyre focuses on the experience of individuals, then this is generally either the experience which leads to party membership, or the experience of carrying out a particular party task. There is little examination of the experience of communists outside of the party – within the workforce, the community or the family. As a result, there is no real analysis of the interplay between ‘party’ experience and ‘class’ experience, or of the tensions and conflicts between these experiences. Indeed, while Macintyre eventually agrees that the CPA member was a kind

of wise, disciplined outsider in working-class communities, *The Reds* does not contain a measured examination of experience and party activity within the web of community life. We get tantalizing glimpses, specific episodes, singular events, rather than overall analysis.

This has three unfortunate results. Firstly, we lose an analytical window on the dynamics of class politics in the interwar years – on the successes and failures of the Communist form of politics at a local level. An opportunity to gain a fuller understanding of political mobilization led by communists – its strengths and limitations, its relationship to non-communists, its enduring lessons – is therefore lost. Secondly, because party experience is separated from ongoing class experience, we are deprived of a full understanding of the lives of Australian communists, who were, as Macintyre notes, overwhelmingly proletarian. The Communist is wrenched away from the working-class social milieu of which he or she continued to be a part, and thereby isolated as a figure of the



text. As a result, Macintyre's aim to present the lives and aspirations of communists in their own terms is eroded. Finally, because *The Reds* emphasizes 'party experience' it tends to focus on the lives of those Communists who were full-time party workers (and whose 'experiences' rarely left the bounds of the party) over and above the experiences of other Australian Communists.

Macintyre would not be unaware of each of these problems. He is, after all, the author of *Little Moscows*, a classic study of communism and working-class community in a number of British mining villages. Perhaps in this study of Australian communism he was anxious to sidestep the constant conflation of party and class, or to avoid theoretical and strategic concerns which would alienate the 'generalist' audience he seeks. They are, in any case, questions of emphasis which do not detract from the undoubted sympathy, thoroughness and scope of *The Reds*. The book is a new sort of history of communism, which reflects the changed priorities of a historical moment when communism is no more. It is based on daunting research, generous, expansive and engaging. It tells the important story of the making of the Communist Party of Australia, and it deserves the wide readership that it seeks.

Wendy Lowenstein

STUART MACINTYRE'S HISTORY of Australian communism, *The Reds*, is very good indeed and will surely become a classic. The author joined the party in the radical sixties, and draws on a mass of writings and memories of many leading communists and activists, ex-party members and dissidents, and has also used police and ASIO files to write this careful, penetrating, generously documented, illustrated, and often funny description of the rich working class and intellectual culture of Australian communism from inception in 1920 to illegality in 1940. It is scholarly, easy to read, the language idiomatic, devoid of academic pretension.

In the beginning was the word: There is one significant omission in this otherwise impeccable work. Written records are seductive, the conventional and familiar tools of the academic, and talking to people who don't make it into recorded history is time-consuming but is an essential dimension for a working-

class history. The author has spoken to many communists, but few of the rank and file. This is a considerable loss because these workers were the party's vanguard and often its glory. In campaigns notable for working-class know-how, ingenuity, humour and brilliant, audacious initiatives, humanity and comradeship, many workers emerged transformed, many apparently hopeless battles were won. Wonthaggi miners survived for five months without desperate hardship, mobilizing community support, calling on mining communities' cooperative traditions, industrial skills and working-class consciousness. Even more heroic and unexpected were the victories won by the long Victorian dole strikes of the 1930s which won payment of award rates for sustenance work. "In the dole-strikes" (surprisingly not mentioned in the book), Tom Hills remembered, "unemployed were eating out of dustbins". One must hope for more rank-and-file informants in the second volume.

Difficulties were made for Bolsheviks to overcome: In 1920 socialist groups formed an Australian Communist Party, but fell into warring factions. By 1928, as depression deepened, this party of Australian male workers had only three hundred members, but was more or less united. The communist mission was to change the world. Members must challenge the existing social order, study Marx and Lenin, learn to organize, be active and courageous, fight injustice – fund-raisers, recruiters, sellers of the party press, and be worthy of winning the workers. When the Labor Party and many trade unions turned their backs, they took up lost causes, by their personal example, courage, conviction and audacity inspired demoralized workers, not always to win, but at least to make a stand – a victory in itself. Following Lenin's insistence on the importance of the party press, a massive amount of print was generated.

Workers of the world unite: From the start, Australian communists actively opposed racial intolerance, endorsed Aboriginal land rights. The Weils Disease strike in North Queensland was taken over by communists who built rank-and-file groups, opposed anti-Italian xenophobia. In the Kalgoorlie race riots members courageously defended Yugoslav and Italian miners.

The streets belong to us – we built them: In the streets, hungry, impassioned men (and the odd woman) appeared demanding work for all. In 1933, Melbourne communists won the crucial free speech

issue in a campaign involving massive crowds, police bashings and gunshots, jail sentences for many activists. They were having party classes in Pentridge. Organized unemployed, led by the party, struggled for existence and dignity. All over Australia they demonstrated, marched, occupied government offices, resisted evictions and railway police, campaigned for a cash dole, staged successful dole strikes. Unemployment was still officially nine percent and growing, Gangs of workers, still on sustenance, were sent to the Victorian countryside to repair fire-damaged roads when, in 1939, Australia's worst-ever bushfires killed seventy people. Many timber workers survived only because the union, bitterly opposed by mill-owners, demanded dugouts. Sixteen people perished in one unprotected Victorian mill.

Living without the boss: Trade unions, influenced by party members, started to fight back. Many engagements were won or lost. Short strikes were endemic among unemployed workers on sustenance jobs. Wonthaggi coalminers struck for five months and won. Port Kembla steelworkers struck for nine weeks. There was a stay-down strike in the Sunbeam Colliery. With war approaching, Port Kembla wharfies won broad support by banning pig-iron shipments for Japan.

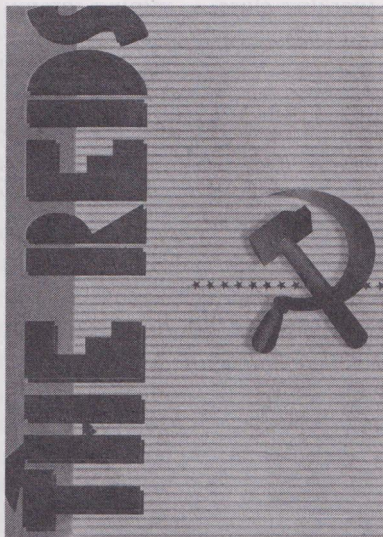
Against war and fascism: The Movement Against War and Fascism, organized with church and other groups, built a United Peace Council, and notable citizens supported the MAWF. When Czech journalist Egon Kisch, keynote speaker to the 1934 peace congress, was excluded by the government, massive protests defeated the ban. Forty Australian communists fought fascism in the Spanish Civil War, some losing their lives.

We are the Youth: The Young Communist League worked for a popular youth front. Camping and sports of all kinds were promoted along with classes in politics and public speaking. The Workers Sports Federation ran highly successful, cheap cooperative family camps for workers. The YCL became the League of Young Democrats. In the city clubrooms, aged thirteen, I heard Lloyd Edmonds describe his experiences in Spain.

Opening the gates of the arts: The party encouraged participation in the arts. Branch life already promoted reading, public speaking, the writing of reports, and orderly discussion. Workers Art Clubs in Sydney and Melbourne staged readings, art and drama classes; members designed factory bulletins, painted banners, produced plays, did factory gate sketches. In 1936 Sydney New Theatre presented the anti-Nazi play *Till the Day I Die*. It was banned, as offensive to a friendly power – Nazi Germany – but the ban was sidestepped. Communist artists, with others, formed the Contemporary Art Society. Melbourne Writers League built a united front against book censorship and Ken Coldicutt, a student and Spanish Relief Committee film organizer, almost unaided, defeated film censorship in Australia.

They knocked on the door: In 1938 prime minister Joe Lyons, a Labor renegade, died, and Bob Menzies succeeded him. War broke out in September 1939 and on 15 June 1940 all communist organizations were banned by the Menzies United Australia Party government, party offices and homes of known members were raided, and all party assets confiscated. When the party was legalized at the end of 1942 by the new Labor government, membership had trebled. By 1945 there were over twenty thousand Australian communists.

Power to the people?: "Any history of communism", Macintyre writes, "must ask what made Stalin possible and why it was unable to find a lasting alternative to his methods." Surely the destruction of the revolution, and Stalin's crimes against humanity, had earlier roots and the ultimate collapse of communism was inevitable given its beginnings. "Communists", Marx wrote, "don't form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties", but are the most advanced and resolute section of the proletariat, understanding and promoting its common interests. However, while asserting devotion to Marx and revolution, Lenin, bitterly hostile to other working-class parties, and an admirer of capitalist industrial organization, of Taylorism and of Henry Ford, abandoned the revolution which had promised to liberate hu-



mankind, to allow workers of the world to break their chains. Instead he transmuted Marxism into a rigid and hierarchical dogma based on managerial capitalist models – a counter-revolutionary party under an iron discipline, that was small, centralized, obsessed with power, and which inevitably led to Stalinism, mass murder, the collapse of the Soviet regime, and the demoralization of communists worldwide.

The workers' opposition: The crucial issues of the Soviet Union were not known to Australian communists. Questions of women's emancipation, sexual morality, the reimposition of bourgeois rule under the New Economic Policy, one-man management of large enterprises, and the appalling impact of forced collectivization of farming were unknown in Australia. Alexandra Kollontai raised these issues on the CPSU Central Committee, but nothing was known here of the Workers' Opposition she advocated, and which nearly gained a majority on the Central Committee. Lenin abolished it in the early twenties. Power to the people was not to be. In Australia, as in the Soviet Union, local leaders on power trips of immense proportions, ignoring party rules, perpetrated miserable tricks on the dissident or critical. Character assassination became an art.

Missing the Party: Macintyre writes truly that the Communist Party was a major part of Australia's political landscape for more than half a century, attracting fierce hostility, inspiring passionate devotion. I argue that communism can't be understood as a political party, but like trade unionism was a moral movement. The stated ambition was to change the world by revolution. In practice, the CPA was, as the author concludes, not revolutionary, but a part of civil society opposing exploitation and injustice, agitating for change. I hold that it could not be revolutionary because its mentor, Soviet communism, was not revolutionary except in rhetoric. However, the CPA was undoubtedly the most successful, principled and effective social democratic pressure group in Australian history. Ironically, its work of reform provided capitalism with a much more human face. Stuart Macintyre also asks, "had wartime suppression broken [the CPA] so completely that an alternative working class radicalism emerged in its place, how might its activity . . . be assessed?" Today, when all hope of a decent world for common people seems lost, shouldn't we work to develop Marx's alterna-

tive working-class radical movement, which understands, defends and promotes our common interests? Is it not time for a new people's charter, a new militant minority? Shouldn't we give it another go! How will our children and grandchildren assess us if we don't?

- Sean Scalmer is a Sydney labour historian and an overland correspondent.

- Wendy Lowenstein and Tom Hills are working on updating and republishing *Under the Hook: Melbourne Waterside Workers Remember*.

New Order Indonesia

Tom O'Lincoln

Vedi R. Hadiz: *Workers and the State in New Order Indonesia* (Routledge & Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, \$121.95).

AS THE ISLANDS TO OUR NORTH suffer an agonizing economic crisis, Indonesian workers are among the hardest hit. Because of their position at the heart of the economy, they also have great potential to fight back. Yet we know so little about the Indonesian working class. Here at last is an authoritative and comprehensive account.

The Indonesian labour movement arose early in the century under Dutch colonialism, when cities were small and most capitalist production centred on export commodity enclaves. Transport workers, who occupied a strategic position, formed a legendary tram and rail union associated with the socialist movement.

There was a second wave of labour struggles after independence, as Sukarno's government tried to consolidate power. The main militant union was SOBSI, associated with the Communist Party (PKI). SOBSI claimed over 2.5 million members, though most were still outside the cities. Nearly half a million workers waged strikes during 1950.

Anti-labour forces also emerged. Sukarno nationalized Dutch companies in 1956, cheered on by the PKI. However these nationalizations weren't socialist, but rather a form of state capitalism; they enabled the military to begin playing a management role. When Sukarno later declared a dictatorship ("guided de-

mocracy") this strengthened the army further, in some ways laying the basis for Suharto's post-1965 New Order.

Suharto brutally suppressed SOBSI and the PKI. The New Order then set about subduing other unions, with General Ali Murtopo and his Special Operations (OPSUS) group in the lead. After convoluted manoeuvres and further labour unrest in the late seventies and early eighties, the tame-cat All Indonesia Workers' Union (SPSI) arose, accompanied by a new ideological framework: *Pancasila* (Industrial Relations) which condemned any idea of class struggle.

Labour was effectively subjugated until the 1990s brought industrialization and a new working class. Strike levels then climbed up till 1997. Hadiz draws together a vast amount of material on these workers and their forms of struggle, including his own field interviews with workers and activists in and around Jakarta.

He shows us a new proletariat, with women prominent. "Undoubtedly, any fieldwork done today [about workers' groups] could not fail to register the leading role that a large number of young women have played in them." In discussions "many of the female workers tend to be more active and outspoken than their male counterparts". Western feminists often worry that a focus on class means ignoring women. The Indonesian experience proves otherwise.

The workers' situation is full of contradictions. On the one hand, lack of job security and high levels of turnover can intimidate them, or undermine job organization. On the other, sacking militants often just turns them into full time activists, who set about building links between workplaces: "some of them, many of whom are young females, have even acquired reputations as 'troublemakers' in particular industrial areas".

Religious traditions sometimes restrain militancy and hold women back, yet they can also cause industrial unrest, as when employers try to stop workers praying. Life in company-owned barracks can be intimidating, but in other cases workers build solidarity by trading thoughts around communal wells. "Sometimes discussions that begin in these situations give rise to plans of staging collective actions of protest."

We learn about new labour organizations. The first attempt at an independent union, *Setiakawan* (Solidarity) didn't survive, partly because of disagree-

ments over how political a union should be. Its successor, the Indonesian Prosperous Labour Union (SBSI) has survived, but has adopted a very moderate political line, looking to West European unions as a model, and suggesting that union representatives join company boards.

More radical groups also exist, such as the Centre for Labour Struggles and the Foundation for Mutual Progress, however they're still small.

Where is the labour movement heading now? This book can't tell us because it was written before the economic crisis. Contacted in Jakarta earlier this year, Vedi said the impact of the crisis was "immense". Workers were hit hard by unemployment and it would be hard to fight back in the short run. The long term was hard to foretell, because "right now everything is up in the air".

Despite its recent progress, the labour movement was far from ready for such a devastating crisis. It needed to occupy factories in response to sackings, but that hasn't happened. It needs a coherent national leadership with more radical politics than the SBSI – but where will that come from?

It may emerge in the next few years, when the economy grows again. One lesson that emerges clearly from *Workers and the State in New Order Indonesia* is labour's incredible ability to rebuild and fight back. Unfortunately, at \$122 this book is unaffordable for most of us. Get your library to order it.

Tim O'Lincoln is a Melbourne political activist.

Shark Dreaming

Michael Flynn

Alan Atkinson: *The Europeans in Australia* (OUP, \$24.95).

IN 1996, AS I WOUND through a microfilm reel of the *Sydney Illustrated News* for 1866, my eye fell on an interview with an elderly colonist, reprinted from the *Melbourne Spectator*. In 1790, aged nineteen, John Dell had sailed for Sydney with the NSW Corps on one of the hell-ships of the Second Fleet. In 1808 he stood guard over a furious Governor Bligh after his arrest in the Rum Rebellion. Later, he settled in Tasmania and by 1866, a lucid ninety-five, old Dell was still able to walk the streets of Launceston with the

aid of a gnarled walking stick. He recalled a childhood spent in an English market town when he joined an anxious crowd awaiting the London stage coach for news of the Gordon Riots (1780). Urged on by a tub-thumping rabble-rouser, a mob protesting against legislation extending toleration to the Catholic minority had burned Newgate Gaol, the Chief Justice's house and every Catholic chapel in London.

Dell recalled bitter years of hunger and flogging under Governor Phillip, resented by soldier and convict alike. Filtered news of wars and revolutions travelled the vast distance from Europe, breeding superstitious talk among the illiterate rank and file. One night in 1793, Dell said, a sentry on duty outside Government House gazed into the moon and saw a vision of the execution of the French king, many months before news of his decapitation arrived.

If not as venerated as the dwindling band of Anzacs of our own time, Dell was probably the last eyewitness of a quintessentially Georgian past which must have seemed primitive and remote to Victorian Australians of the 1860s with their railways, gas-lit terrace houses and Italianate town halls; as distant as it seems to us in the 1990s, with our Internet, Mediterranean-Asian cuisine and global warming. Yet, as Alan Atkinson says in *The Europeans in Australia*, the 1780s was "one of the most exciting periods in the history of the world"; "or at least", as he adds carefully, "the Western part of it".

Atkinson sets out to tell the story of the colony in the twenty-five years after the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. But he does more than that. He conveys a sense of the ideas, attitudes, feelings – almost the smell – of these eighteenth-century Europeans who arrived with the cultural baggage of a millennium or three. The result is a welcome change from the trench warfare of recent years between the promoters of 'postmodern' concerns (gender/race/imperialism) and the defenders of empirical history such as Keith Windshuttle (*The Killing of History*). Simply and unselfconsciously, Atkinson describes the arrival of the Europeans as an invasion. This is no comfortable Howardesque picture, but the dreaded Derrida and jarring tones of complaint and resentment are nowhere evident.

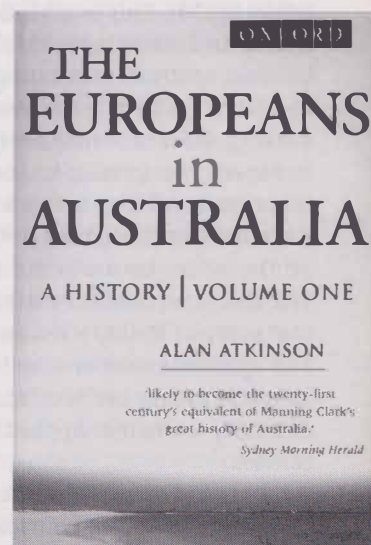
Like a Greg Dening or a Paul Carter he draws on resonances of place, language, culture and literature, demonstrating the prominence of Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe*), Swift (*Gulliver's Travels*), Locke and Rousseau

in the imaginations of eighteenth-century colonizers. Like Dening and Carter, Atkinson's meanderings and flights of fancy are occasionally overblown. But he is more like a Manning Clark or a Robert Hughes in his rich use of language, especially in an intriguing discussion of the interaction between talk and writing in the colonial enterprise. "Talking and freedom of speech were the essence of the English idea of liberty", he writes. "Talking was pervasive, fluid, protean. Like smoke, it filled the places left for it. Like fire, it made its own spaces."

In a dazzling display of scholarship Atkinson makes rigorously footnoted contributions to nuts-and-bolts history by examining early colonial Australia in terms of cultural context and historical precedent, including earlier colonizing efforts on the American Atlantic coast and in the Caribbean – New York, Georgia, the Mosquito Coast – and the triangular traffic in convicts and slaves that linked Virginia, West Africa and England. He wades into the 'Botany Bay Debate' over the reasons of the foundation of the Sydney colony in the context of failed at-

tempts to transport convicts to West Africa, defending Mollie Gillen (*The Founders of Australia*) from the apoplectic attacks of Alan Frost (*Botany Bay Mirages*) while providing his own insightful middle view. New perspectives emerge on Governor King, the causes of the Rum Rebellion, the colonial experience of convicts and women and the cultural influence of Masonic Lodges on ideas of brotherhood among men. The behaviour of Caribbean pirates, distant from the centre of power, is compared with the frontier war waged by the Hawkesbury settlers on Aboriginal clans. Hand-wringing attempts by Governors and lawyers to enforce paper ideals of Crown, Church and court protection faced realities of massacre and mistreatment on the frontier: colonization as piracy.

But for Atkinson the courts and concepts of liberty and proto-democracy signify an embryonic civil so-



ciety. In this dot picture, Lord Sydney, the British government minister responsible for the First Fleet, is a kind of ancestor being who dreams European Australia into existence – as Phillip’s mentor and principal formulator of the colony’s ‘constitution’, the letters patent that grounded the authority of the Governor and courts. For the convicts, if not the indigenous inhabitants, they offered a chance to have their say, allowing, for example, a woman to assert her rights to property and freedom from sexual molestation.

Lord Sydney’s title commemorated his descent from Algernon Sidney, author of *Discourses Concerning Government* and a leading figure in Cromwell’s republic, who became a political icon after his decapitation in 1683. This emphasis on republican ideas of liberty and commonwealth, more Roundhead than Cavalier, contrasts interestingly with Atkinson’s previous book, *The Muddle-headed Republic* (1994), a Burkean defence of monarchy.

For Atkinson, Phillip too becomes an ancestor being, represented as a shark entering Sydney Harbour. A shark is depicted in the Aboriginal painting on the book’s cover. In the Australia of Mabo and Wik this is a powerful metaphor indeed, reflecting two sides of Phillip’s character – his self-sacrifice and egalitarianism on one hand, and on the other his swift, savage use of official terror to maintain his authority – whether applied to soldier, Aborigine or convict.

In his first speech Phillip established a kind of social contract with the convicts, promising rewards to those contributing to the good of “our community”, while threatening those committing crimes affecting the food supply with execution “however it might distress [my] Feelings”. Phillip’s feelings fascinate Atkinson (he privately disliked capital punishment), all the more because he seems such an enigmatic, distant, controlled figure who rarely allowed the mask to slip. Atkinson’s view of Phillip is no hagiography. Simultaneously humanitarian and authoritarian, he is a kind of Shiva figure, creating and destroying, allowing a convict to say his piece in court, then ordering the man a savage flogging. Phillip’s genuine interest in Aboriginal people and his close relationship with Bennelong sit alongside his reprisal raids and kidnappings. Whatever his private feelings, Phillip completed his imperial project with a sense of grim relentlessness, like Milton’s Satan overlooking Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*:

*And should I at your harmless innocence
Melt, as I doe, yet public reason just,
Honour and Empire with revenge enlarg’d,
By conquering this new World, compels me now
To do what else tho damnd I should abhorre.*

Michael Flynn is a Sydney historian and author of *The Second Fleet: Britain’s Grim Convict Armada of 1790 and Settlers and Seditious (Library of Australian History)*.

The Last of Everything

Simon Ryan

Tom Griffiths & Libby Robin: *Ecology and Empire; Environmental History of Settler Societies* (MUP, \$29.95).

Ernest Favenc: *Tales of the Austral Tropics* (UNSWP, \$34.95).

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS with the plethora of approaches to text and history that are stuffed in a box and labelled ‘postcolonial theory’, is that the globalized conclusions that tend to result from this mix iron out the wrinkles that each colonial situation and its response possess. Also, for a long time postcolonialism has been (understandably) fixed on questions of race and to a lesser extent gender, meaning that many other facets of the imperial and post-imperial processes have been obscured. Lastly, postcolonial studies have often been accused of being caught within a narrowly literary frame, so that many other texts, and indeed non-literary elements of colonial and postcolonial culture have been ignored. Historians of empire, on the other hand, have rarely been sufficiently attuned to the role of language; Greg Dening would be an obvious exception. Most of these criticisms, valid as they may once have been, falter under an increasing body of work that is willing to look at specific colonial or postcolonial situations and texts, and which is as satisfied examining scientific work and writing as it is literary texts.

One of the less examined facets of imperialism was its effects on the environment. Alfred Crosby’s work *Ecological Imperialism* (1986) serves as a starting point for many of the essays in *Ecology and Empire*, but the often generalized analysis of Crosby’s

work, and its suggestion that imperialism is simply a one-way process, is effectively critiqued. Most of the contributors to *Ecology and Empire* eschew general conclusions about the nature of colonialism and instead examine ecological imperialism on the level of case histories. William Beinhart's 'Environmentalism at the Cape', for example, treats us to an analysis of the interaction of pastoral practices and viral infections in sheep and cattle in late nineteenth century South Africa. Richard Grove's brilliant 'Scotland in South Africa' provides a compelling argument that environmental concerns in the colonial context were voiced often by the Scots because of their history of invasion and deforestation by the British. In both papers, and many others in the collection, the reader is slowly brought to the conclusion that there is precious little that is "natural" about the environment; that consideration or experience of the natural world is inescapably cultural.

Tim Flannery adds to his book *The Future Eaters* in an essay entitled 'The fate of empire in low- and high- energy ecosystems' to remind us of two things. Firstly, that mistaking the environment for a 'natural' and stable system can be disastrous, as in the case of early Europeans in Australia who failed to understand that the gentleman's park that the landscape seemed to be was manufactured and not 'natural'. Secondly, Flannery points out that there are systemic limits to any environment, especially to a resource-poor one like Australia.

Many of the essays in this collection seem to be a little fragmentary; Flannery's essay, while enlightening, seems to be a compression of what he would like to explicate at greater length and Eric Rolls' 'The nature of Australia' is simply eccentric. Otherwise, it is an extremely valuable collection and will undoubtedly spur more cultural analyses of this amorphous thing called the environment.

Ernest Favenc emerges from his journals of exploration as one of the more likeable explorers, though still steeped in some of the uglier discourses of the time. Cheryl Taylor, the author of a biography of Favenc, in producing this collection of his short stories as part of the Colonial Texts Series, has worked through the complex textual questions that the numerous versions of the stories present. The introduction is enlightening, particularly in terms of Favenc's adventurous and in many ways unhappy life. Taylor makes the point that Favenc has been placed at the

margins of the Australian canon; included in some but not other histories of Australian literature, his liminality can perhaps be attributed to the fact that his reputation has been forged largely through his work *The History of Australian Exploration*, known by generations of children. While Taylor's editing is extremely adept, she does miss the recent reading of Favenc's *The Secret of the Australian Desert* in Robert Dixon's *Writing the Colonial Adventure* (1995).

The stories themselves veer between dry Lawsonian tales of hardship in the bush and ripping yarns of mystery and mayhem. Unlike Lawson, Favenc was well acquainted with Australian bush life, and also unlike Lawson he was haunted by the idea, common to many explorers, that there had to be something more out there in the desert. So arose stories such as 'Spirit-Led' in which the three adventurous males find a reef of gold in the desert. One of them, Maxwell, has dreamt of this source of wealth while having a 'cataleptic' fit; his companions, thinking him deceased, proceed to bury him when his spirit returns to his body and he cries out. This near death and burial experience turns his previously dark hair a stark white. This is an important point, as before the expedition after gold begins, Maxwell is shot at by Delaine, a man in 'the horrors', who mistakes him for a white haired Aborigine he saw shot in the head during a 'dispersal' and who haunts him in his delirium. The references to hunting Aborigines as game contribute to the story that sense of casual bush brutality familiar in stories in the *Bulletin*, which is indeed where 'Spirit-Led' was originally published. On finding the gold, Maxwell's spirit once again departs his body, which is left a skeleton for reasons that are, well, not entirely clear. 'The Spell of Mas-Hantoo' is a similar tale; this time the setting is Kalimantan and the goal is diamonds rather than gold and the narrator's companions are killed by such everyday dangers as natives and giant boa constrictors. But for a combination of the cynicism, dry humour and racism that made the *Bulletin* so memorable, 'The Rumford Plains Tragedy', a murder story featuring three men who wrongly believe they are the killer, is highly recommended; whatever one's opinions of the discourses involved, Favenc could, on a good day, mix it with the best of the *Bulletin* writers.

Simon Ryan teaches at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane.

A Word on Landscapes

Robert Hodder

George Seddon: *Landprints; Reflections On Place And Landscape* (CUP, \$39.95).

IDEOLOGY IS SLIPPERY: a chimera of the intellect, part false consciousness, part worldview, often a pixel from doublespeak. As a subject it is commonplace; or rather, it is reflections on place. George Seddon, once a boy from the bush, now a PhD graduate in geology, professor of English, Emeritus Professor of Environmental Science and diligent cultivator

of the quarter-acre block, argues in *Landprints* that "landscape is a cultural product". More so than one might know.

Seddon claims "that the way we use words tells us a good deal about the way we relate to landscape – and that a little weeding in the garden of words can help to maintain linguistic health." In fact, 'landscape' came into English from the Dutch 'landskip', a painter's term, "and it retained

that sense of detached aesthetic contemplation" until the nineteenth century when the "change in meaning, and loss of clarity, came from North America, where Olmstead and Vaux introduced the term 'landscape architect', and Harvard established the first chair of landscape architecture in 1900". But clearly Seddon is not mixing a metaphorical palette for poets. His concern is the Australia "inside our heads" and "the lie of the land" (a seriously intended and thematic pun) and that the environment is, at least in significant part, an expression of expression itself; language, culture and ideas must be directly confronted if not purged for that cleaner, safer world.

Landprints, says the foreword, is a "fugue for six voices". More accurately it is a collection of Seddon's essays, many previously published, and now collated around six themes on culture and landscape with

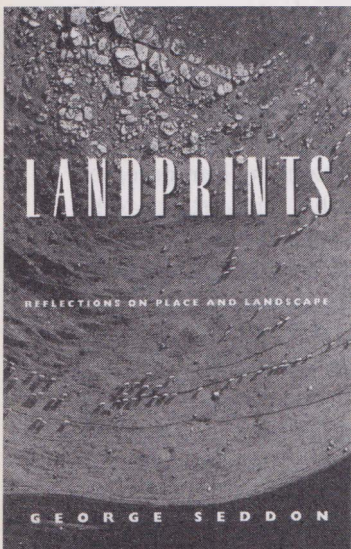
each section introduced by the author in a preamble of reflection on reflections. Sensitive that the exercise runs the danger of a mere dialectical word game, Seddon reminds us that his motive is scientific: to examine the role of language in the impact of society, white and black, on a continent's geography.

He credits this consciousness of language, that is analysis of language as both proclaimed and denied intent, to modern feminism and borrows from postmodernism the notion of myth masquerading as truth. What Seddon means, only sometimes explicitly, is that culture is a manifestation of economics, hunter-gatherer and commercial, private and public. Simply, this is an exposé of a particular ideology. As a 'story' of (mostly modern) Australia its subject is the ideology of capitalism, whether colonial, industrial or corporate, across class, gender, race, city and country. The subject and methodology cry for a comment from Karl Marx; alas when Seddon briefly concedes to the obvious he only misconstrues.

Of course Seddon is not alone in this. And in a sense he is archetypal. He seems middle-class to the marrow. This is not meant as a pejorative, only that an observation like "Gardeners are key land managers", while not denied, by itself implies a politics of an urban kulak angrily shaking the secateurs from those tree-lined streets on the right side of the river. A radical praxis will not grow from under Seddon's hedge-row. "Pragmatic" is the self-description for this "landscape planner", the 'powerline man' with Victoria's State Electricity Commission of two decades past.

To be fair, Seddon is wary enough to steal glances from over the back fence of the western middle class. He berates the "sentimental pantheism" of those who turn themselves into knots over animal liberation, the "self-indulgent" wilderness cults and the "make-believe" of a materially rich society which diverts attention from injustice. He stops short, however, of asking if the very wealth of the middle class could be the source of injustice and if it in turn suggests why the neighbours feign virtue in greenspeak and vote Howard, Carr, Kennett, et al.

Yet if his view is obscured by a verdant bourgeois canopy, sincerity and passion ensure Seddon some marvellous half-truths. From tongue-in-cheek quips such as "the global supermarket" and "Home is where your fridge is" to phrases turned on the edge where "We have no choice but to live dangerously" and "There is more at stake than survival", the author de-



livers with engaging, though rarely heady, discourse. The convivial tone conveys a chat over the Sunday papers with tea and lamingtons on the veranda. It is not so much that this is light finger-food for thought – that is too harsh, even untrue – just that *Landprints* is not searching for first principles. Instead it is a commentary on local details and in an Australian accent to ward off Eurocentrism.

Landprints is environmental science, accessible to the untrained, which eschews hyperbole and calls for debate sensitive to how language manipulates our unwitting perceptions. Seddon wants “to achieve passion in the pursuit of qualified objects”. If passion can be cautious, then he does achieve it. Dinner-party conversations might call *Landprints* a good read. But despite the desire for a critical language, the implicit call for action is little more than steady as it goes. And there is the guile of ideology.

Robert Hodder is an outdoors writer stuck in Kensington, inner Melbourne.

The Road to Smithfield Hostel

Michael George Smith

Ann-Mari Jordens: *Alien To Citizen; Settling Migrants In Australia, 1945–75* (Australian Archives/Allen & Unwin, \$39.95).

THE HEAT WAS STILL oppressive, even at nine or ten o'clock at night, as we stood with the rest of the group waiting for the bus that would take us out to Smithfield Hostel. The only things I can really remember from that night are a lot of flatness, probably the Port Adelaide Docks area, a big ghostly-looking gum tree and the tatty-looking bus that eventually collected us. Why didn't these people have big red buses like the ones I knew from London? My first impression of Australia was definitely one of disappointment, though once we settled in, mercifully for a mere two weeks or so, the hostel recalled a little of the holiday atmosphere I'd felt on the boat trip out, and even to some extent the family holidays on the south coast of England.

But I was still very disappointed, and I was English, born and bred. Imagine how disappointed my

mother must have been, having already experienced fourteen years or so of dislocation in an alien London, having left her village home on the island of Rhodes to marry my father. Even my father, I could tell, was disappointed, but the stoic family man that he was, he got out there, found himself a job and a house and got us out of the hostel and into the then youthfully hopeful satellite suburb of Elizabeth West, twenty kilometres north of Adelaide. This was 1964. The Beatles had just toured, Johnny O'Keefe and *Bandstand* were Australian television's idea of rock'n'roll and as a 'sophisticated' pop music lover of twelve years old, disillusion settled in solidly for at least the next two or three years.

Much as the move to Australia was ultimately good for me – I'd never have got to university back in England – it broke my father. Without the familiar landmarks of London to take us to every Sunday, without a decent bus service to get us to and from such places as might exist of interest – he never learned to drive, chose not to learn – his world became increasingly circumscribed by dull work routine and the flat, featureless landscape and culture that surrounded us. His lack of formal education compounded his lack of qualifications suitable for employment beyond unskilled labourer here, despite years of self-education and papers to attest his skills as a high-rise building site foreman.

But it must have been far, far worse for my mother, who had still not really come to terms with English, the English and England, let alone Australia. At least my father, my sisters and I spoke the language.

There was for me, therefore, more than a passing interest in this latest book to be published based on research into social policy facilitated by the opening up of the Australian Government archives, of which Ann-Mari Jordens' book, *Alien To Citizen*, is a part. The book focuses on the response to and intervention on behalf of the migrants who arrived in Australia between 1945–75 by the Department of Immigration, the book itself a response, as Jordens suggests, to the call by demographer W.D. Borrie, chairman of the National Population Inquiry of 1972 to “attempt an overview of the response of Australian institutions to changes in the population brought about by the immigration programme pursued since the end of the Second World War”.

Ultimately, the heroes of Ann-Mari Jordens' book on those efforts to help the approximately 3.3 million migrants who came to Australia between 1945 and

1971, the small determined band of social workers the Department took on board hesitantly and never with more than some vaguely tacit commitment, wouldn't have been able to help my mother. She'd chosen long ago not to leave the island, having managed to get her unmarried older sister first to England and then to Australia with us. With my aunt as insulation, the outside world could be kept at a safe distance. With the arrival of sons and daughters-in-law and Australian grandchildren, that's all changed to a great extent, but those first dozen or so years of life in pre-multicultural Australia were hard even without my mother allowing the real world into our little suburban home. For thousands and thousands of migrants who didn't have the advantage of an English husband or wife to help bridge the gap, as the story unfolded in Jordens' book makes clear, life in Australia could be a nightmare.

Still, *Alien To Citizen* presents a far more optimistic story than that previous paragraph might suggest. There were a lot of committed people within and outside the Department of Immigration determined to help those hundreds of thousands of non-English migrants settle into their new country, and the resulting successes changed this country into the vibrant and for the most part tolerant multicultural society we enjoy today.

The decision to initiate a program of mass immigration to Australia was announced in August 1945 by Australia's first Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, and was taken partly to bolster a shrinking and ageing population and partly to support the international commitment to the relief of the refugee crisis that had been created by the Second World War. Until 1964, the Department saw its job as one of assisting migrants to "assimilate" into Australian society, a term we know all too well today as one of disparagement, particularly in the context of the Stolen Children report with respect to Australia's Aboriginal population.

There was inevitably, though never explicated in policy, an endemic racism in the choice of migrants Australia was prepared to accept, and one of the earliest ethnic groups to feel that racism was the Greek. What made the restrictions imposed on the eligibility of many hopeful Greek migrants doubly galling at the time was the fact that other ethnic groups were accepted far more willingly despite the fact that, unlike the Greeks, they had in fact been the enemy in

the Second World War – Germans and Italians were welcomed where Greeks appeared not to be. This was, to some extent, due to a perception not only that southern Europeans in general were a less desirable 'type' than northern Europeans, but that there was some question as to the 'whiteness' of many potential Greek migrants! As Jordens points out, "selection officers in Mediterranean regions were given the task of picking the difference between 'colour' and sun-tan. One, selecting Greeks, used to refer doubtful cases to the medical officer, who had them strip to see if they were dark all over".

Restrictions on potential Greek immigration had been implemented by Australian governments as far back as the 1920s, a blanket policy discriminating against all 'aliens' finally being introduced in 1930. Considering the fact that Melbourne today is the biggest 'Greek' city outside Greece itself, early migration under these restrictions was not surprisingly small. Only 8,963 permanent settlers came to Australia from Greece between 1946 and 1954, despite the fact that in 1948, a significant contingent of Greek ex-servicemen led a protest against that undisclosed discrimination. The Greek Consul-General at the time argued unsuccessfully for the inclusion of Greeks in the assisted passage agreements for ex-servicemen Australia was entering into with various countries at the time. The argument became even more heated when, in 1951, the Greek Consul-General in Melbourne informed the Department of Immigration that "there is a strong undercurrent of resentment among the Greek Community that 20,000 Italians should be brought out here free of charge while no similar scheme operates in respect of Greeks".

Migration officers were eventually appointed to Athens and the Australian government relented to some extent under the pressure of that perceived favouring of former 'enemy' aliens over former allies in its migrant selection process. Still, the country into which these Greek migrants were coming didn't understand the culture within which the Greeks had grown up any more than those Greeks understood the society into which they were entering, a fact not exactly helped by at least one Greek envoy, Dimitri Lambros, who in 1953 suggested that young married Greeks were displaying "a lack of discipline and stamina" by opting to desert work they'd been designated in Mildura in order to return to their wives in the hostel at Bonegilla.

My mother was lucky in another respect in her initial migrant experience. Unlike the rest of the non-English migrants, she was housed in a hostel that was under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labour and National Service, as a British migrant. These hostels were far better serviced in terms of social workers and the infrastructure necessary to facilitate assimilation into the wider community than those hostels administered by the Department of Immigration for non-English migrants.

Nonetheless, those non-English hostels became the testing ground for the questioning of a lot of assumptions about the migrant and host culture's experience and ultimately became instrumental in changing Australian society in general. As Jordens points out in her chapter on 'Non-Compliant Women in Holding Centres':

the plight of alien women for the first time drew the attention of administrators to the unresponsiveness of Australian culture and administrative structures to the needs of working women in general, and in particular of women in the community attempting to provide for children without male support . . . By the end of 1975 there were child-minding facilities and after-school care in all hostels for working women. The demands placed on the bureaucracy by migrant women contributed significantly to the cultural change that was taking place in Australian attitudes towards the participation of women in the workforce.

Obviously, Jordens' book explores far more than the Greek migrant experience but I hope you'll forgive my concentrating on that one aspect in a book full to bursting with information on the full spectrum of non-English-speaking migrant experience if only for the fact that it allows a snapshot of the whole. I will just pick up on the English side of the equation for a moment. The general perception on post-war immigration has always been that it primarily targeted British migrants, and these did constitute the biggest segment of the overall migrant figures by far – around 1,086,500 arriving between July 1947 and June 1970 according to figures published by Charles A. Price in *Australian Immigration, A Bibliography and Digest*, No. 2 (ANU, 1970). Jordens reminds us however that British migrants formed the minority of the intake

until 1958, and that there seems to have been a reticence on the part of British rural workers, a group the Department of Immigration was particularly interested in attracting to Australia immediately after the war, to take up the opportunity, since their skills in post-war Britain were similarly in demand and therefore attracted far better wages and conditions than Australia seemed able to offer.

And it's amusing to note too that, true to the stereotype, Department of Immigration social workers tended to prefer their non-English-speaking clients because they found British migrants "full of complaints, much harder to relate to, and reluctant to seek help from the same people who were helping aliens".

The impact of those 3.3 million immigrants, approximately 200,000 of whom were Greek, inevitably changed the makeup of Australian society and its perception of itself as a society, making the change from a predominantly British to a multicultural society inevitable and ultimately enriching the lives of all Australians thereby. The part the Department of Immigration played in ensuring that these changes would come smoothly was not always right but as Jordens shows in this thoroughly researched book, that part was far greater than we realize. Many of the innovations that it implemented, from education to telephone interpreting services, were never publicly announced and therefore never credited to the Department, which makes *Alien To Citizen* an important contribution to not only migration studies but to redressing the previously unbalanced public perception of the Department.

It's not an easy read by any means, bound as it must be to the exploits of bureaucrats and welfare workers as expounded by the archives, in the form of reports and recommendations. But *Alien To Citizen* is an essential addition to the body of sources available for anyone interested in the way not only the migrants who came here (British, Greek or otherwise, and the people who tried to help them adjust to this disconcertingly distant land), but those who were here already, came to understand what it is to be Australian.

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Interest in the Amoral

Foong Ling Kong

James Bradley: *Wrack* (Random House, \$16.95).

Brian Castro: *Stepper* (Random House, \$22.95).

Morris Lurie: *Welcome to Tangier* (Penguin, \$16.95).

Louis Nowra: *Red Nights* (Picador, \$16.95).

FOUR BOOKS, FOUR MEN: one a first-time novelist, his stablemate on his sixth outing. Another is perhaps better known as a playwright, and one the author of over two dozen works.

Some common themes: alienated expatriates, lives adrift, travel, dangerous pasts, fiction, real-life, masks, love, age. How we think and live spatially. Place is all important – most of the protagonists in these novels are men who “leave, go elsewhere”, who reinterpret mental maps in relation to where they are at. The places they end up in have transformative effects.

A line from Morris Lurie’s *Welcome to Tangier*, “being bad a long way from home”, can almost be applied as a subtitle to these books. The exotic, they seem to say, has much potential to corrupt, and frequently does, leading the flawed-but-good man astray. In *Red Nights* it is inner-city Sydney; in *Stepper* Tokyo of the thirties; in *Wrack* the shifting sandhills of southern New South Wales.

Their characters, in the main, are men interested in the amoral: in *Wrack*, *Stepper* and *Red Nights*, the seeming lack of morality is a condition that allows for that hazy, indefinable space where the writing of the books may have happened. The books are also quite conspicuous in the secondary roles the women play. In two of these books the women do come in to figure as nuisances, who get in the way, who would otherwise clutter up the narrative. Also, women betray. Perhaps because of that, they are literally the baggage that these men travel to get away from.

There are lots of things to like in James Bradley’s *Wrack*, not least a thoughtful structure that successfully weaves various points of history and genres together. Bradley’s use of cartography and its semiotic and imagined signification is particularly skilful, even if the result is not entirely unexpected. The artifice of the interweaving of fact and fiction is heightened; the mix of what is received and assumed questioned.

David Norfolk, archaeologist, is leading a dig in the southern coast of New South Wales for the *Mahogany*

ship, which could place British claim to *terra australis* in dispute. The search for the wreck of the ship in the sand is stymied when the group discovers a body riddled with bullet holes swaddled in an old army blanket. His search temporarily blocked, Norfolk tries to make up for lost ground by conducting investigations of his own, and by chance, encounters a decrepit hermit who lives at the foot of the sandhills.

The man-in-the-shack, Kurt Seligmann, holds all the narrative keys and controls all its threads. He has an agreeably shadowy past, which he determines to tell to Norfolk and his lover Claire Sen in its entirety, carefully meting out their daily ration. It is through Seligmann’s morphine-sustained storytelling that readers come to understand the characters, past and present, and their (un)becoming.

This is a work that depends for its effects on Bradley’s frequently imagistic writing, which is blessedly assured. The mores of the day are captured with precision; the figures of Seligmann, Norfolk and Sen, while sympathetic, and not merely there to inhabit dogmatic truths or be convenient ciphers. Isolation in all its manifestations is rummaged through and challenged.

However, despite Norfolk and Sen’s yearning towards an understanding of Seligmann and his actions, “nothing is true, save that which we feel. Nothing we remember, nothing we believe, all are just stories and echoes”.

A floating vessel also inhabits Louis Nowra’s *Red Nights*. *Babeica*, moored at Sydney’s Rushcutters Bay, is new-moneyed Nelson Taylor’s last hope for A New Life after the hurly-burly of the eighties. The repo men have moved in on his harbourside mansion, the quasi-mythical site of Red Night parties, where invitations were once so sought after that “I invited five people and made five thousand enemies”. It’s the lean and mean post-economic rationalism nineties, and high living and big spending are more than a little *déclassé*.

Magazine editors not previously invited to *Red Nights* have relegated Taylor to the Twilight Zone, their ‘out’ lists. Having overinvested his identity in such things as ‘in’ lists and as the Boy Who Couldn’t Drown, Taylor is understandably unhappy. On the last day of his life he swans around Sydney’s inner-city making deals, drinking, doing a little shopping, but every move he makes and every person he meets only underlines his abjection and outsider status. “He was

a mirror that merely reflected the good things people wanted to see in themselves."

Like Gatsby, who liked to watch the people at the parties he threw, Taylor (and his Daisy/Zelda-like wife Marion – drug addiction having replaced the schizophrenia), is not self-reflexive enough to understand the disaster that awaits him. Nowra displays a sure and deft hand in this morality tale of class mobility, played out against a backdrop of glamour and scunginess that only inner-city Sydney can lay out. He has a marvellous ear for scandalously funny conversation and the characters are confident, arch, *de trop*.

BRIAN CASTRO'S SIXTH NOVEL, *Stepper*, won the National Book Council's Banjo award for fiction in 1997. The enigmatic figure of the spy – a "man of many parts", a border crosser with neither past nor future – is an apt vehicle for Castro's writing, which is often elliptical, allusive, playful. Indeed, Castro seems to be striving for the condition of espionage in the writing of the book: the double life and double bind of Stepper's life and times are conveyed in short, often fractured, sentences that simulate the spy's dislocation and the condition of being slightly out of step with the rest of the world. The sentences build on one another, creating a stop-start effect that accumulates, slowly, to form pieces of a life of someone who lives the biographical lies he tells. The truth he prefers to leave to the scribes and biographers who come after him, such as the aristocratic Ishigo Isaku.

Like Castro's Tokyo, "the empty centre, the *mu*", Stepper is an empty vessel waiting to be filled with readerly projections and aspirations. His function is to act as a catalyst; he exists so that the narrative may happen, but remains unchanged to the end. Always "something else entirely" to the characters in the book, only after he has been captured – and revealed as a spy – can Stepper exist, and write, "without ideology, without blame, without flourish . . . because he now has the words and the meanings . . . no longer that split between what words he could have used and what he represented; no longer the separation between being and word; no need for codes".

In *Stepper*, as in his other books, Castro plays off genres to effect a false consciousness. The symbols are skew-whiff, the maps not accurate. His investment in language, style and form allows for the transgressions and reinventions that he has made his stock-in-trade. Think about it: Russian spy in *noir* Japan?

"You know when you are finished in a place", Morris Lurie's protagonist, Barker, muses as he boards the plane from Morocco, a place he visits because "I had run out of Europe. There was nowhere else to go". In Tangier to write because "Everyone was writing. Everyone was a writer. Everyone wanted to be a writer. Everyone was trying to write", he thought the "thrilling exotic sky" would provide him with the material, the inspiration, the space.

Barker the writer is a *flâneur*, who watches from cafés and writes of the people around him instead of cultivating a connection with them. The Tangier stories are replete with the descriptions of the life and activity around the place, but the people, in the main, are faceless hordes, tourists, exiles, expatriates.

When we encounter the present-day Barker he is unwell, lonely, still watching the world around him, still helpless in the face of its apparent messiness and absolute emptiness, still in the game of writing and reading, on a quest for a work that is exactly perfect.

The twenty stories of *Tangier* are well-made objects in the classical sense – the voice perfectly consistent, the words counted out like bullets, the portrait Lurie draws of Barker affectionate but shorn of sentimentality. The wry, self-deprecating humour, memory's tricks, the celebration of past and present – all here, thoughtfully handled.

Four satisfying books.

Foong Ling Kong is an editor and a contributor to Bodyjamming (Random House), edited by Jenna Mead.

A Guidebook to Self-Destruction

Russell Servis

Leonie Stevens (ed.): *Pub Fiction* (Allen & Unwin, \$14.95).

AS WITH MOST ANTHOLOGIES, *Pub Fiction* is an erratic affair, and perhaps the authors involved were not terribly fussed about its readership – it being just another opportunity to get published. While there is some genuine writing talent here, it's hard to accept that these authors have handed up their best efforts. The gimmicky introduction from editor Leonie Stevens suggests that the call for good writing never went out:

– hey, someone should do an anthology called ‘Pub Fiction’. Yeah – get a bunch of cool writers. They’ll know what to do.

On the strength of that, Stevens scarcely deserved a decent submission. There are a few readable stories here, but there are a few clangers too: their non-mention in this review indicates that they . . . well, sucked . . . and provides me with the opportunity to make it sound like I enjoyed the book.

Skip to page 77 for Clare Mendes’ tale of a publican running a beer tent in the middle of nowhere in ‘The Deserters’ for the first okay effort. Mendes has a reasonably good grasp of narrative here (better than in her award-winning novel *Drift Street*), and her main character, Doug, seems fairly well fleshed-out, although, as with *Drift Street*, Mendes writes about people she has no empathy with, using clichés to shape her subjects. ‘The Deserters’ is atmospheric and although geographically vague, does manage to capture some of the beauty of outback Australia.

A far less contrived read is Anne Maree Weatherall’s ‘Certainty’, an episode in the life of a love-struck young Aboriginal girl and her local Sydney community that revels in good-humoured spirit, filial closeness and hope.

Simon Colvey’s ‘Trespassing’, is a cracker of a tale about murder, love, suspicion and heartache. But the ending is a complete bummer, a perplexing ‘fizz’. What was enjoyable about Colvey’s story, though, was that he had a story going. Unlike most of the pieces in *Pub Fiction*, this is an unfolding tale: characters have motivations and reasons for being written about. If there is anxiety and confusion in ‘Trespassing’, it is in the characters’ heads, not the author’s.

A wonderfully coarse piece is Richard King’s ‘Night on Gore Street’. It is entertaining and funny and, although not a lot happens, is at least told as the sort of drunken, giggling anecdote you might well hear at a pub. King, thank goodness, indulges in his account of drinking excesses without any social conscience or apologies. This is perhaps the best effort in *Pub Fiction*, and does exactly what a short story should do: interest the reader in more of the author’s work.

As for the rest of this collection – well, I promised not to discuss anything that wasn’t good writing . . . but why are there so many listless, boring, nasty and forgettable pieces here? And why do so many people write in the narratively impossible present tense, and

just how many of these characters carry a laptop PC to type out their stories as they unfold? They never mention the PCs in the stories. And can someone explain how so many flawed metaphors that never make any textual link to their referents can be crammed into a fourteen-page story? And how many large pieces of engineering in Sydney are used for titles that have nothing – *nothing* – to do with the tale? And, most important of all, how many stoned punks and academic luses are going to fork out \$14.95 for a guidebook to self-destruction when drugs and alcohol are so much cheaper and less painful?

Special mentions must be made, though, of Christopher Cyrill’s ‘Breathe A Word’, which demonstrates that Cyrill is the Pablo Picasso of narrative structure, and Bernard Cohen’s ‘The Monitors’: what the hell are you going on about, Bernard, and what’s it got to do with drinking?

Russell Servis drives an XC Falcon around the inner-city streets of Melbourne.

One Nation

Jeffrey Poacher

Peter Boyle: *The Blue Cloud of Crying* (Hale & Iremonger, \$16.95).

Barbara Giles: *Poems: Seven Ages* (Penguin, \$19.95).

Peter Lloyd: *Black Swans* (Wakefield Press, \$12.95).

Kevin Brophy: *Seeing Things* (Five Islands Press, \$12.95).

Wadih Sa’adeh: *A Secret Sky*. Transcreated from Arabic by Anne Fairbairn (Ginninderra Press, \$12.50).

Ludwika Amber: *Our Territory*. Translated by Richard Reisner (Five Islands Press, \$12.95).

Jacob G. Rosenberg: *Twilight Whisper* (Focus Words, \$19.95).

IN REVIEWING SOME of the latest poetry offerings from presses large and small, I cannot get out of my head the little-known fact that *overland* and Pauline Hanson both came into the world in the same year, 1954. The early issues of this magazine are memorable for their decided note of cultural optimism, notwithstanding the bleak political landscape of the Menzies era. The first editorial manifesto (what corporate spindoctors would now call a ‘mission

statement') declared that *overland* "will make a special point of developing writing talent in people of diverse background" – a declaration that would presumably be anathema to other sorts of rough beasts that were slouching towards their own Bethlehems at the time. The present tone of Australian poetry, if the latest output is a reliable sample, appears considerably less optimistic than that first *overland* editorial – and it is a tone which, in the circumstances, seems quite justified. But what this latest swag of writing should also remind us is that poetry, in its steadfast refusal of paraphrase, can never be reduced to any lowest common denominator. For that reason, we should not be quick to foreclose on the ethical possibilities of literature; the one thing that poetry can always offer is a scepticism about the forms of proscriptive rhetoric that have become uncomfortably familiar of late.

On that note, I will begin by recommending Peter Boyle's *The Blue Cloud of Crying*. With an ear tuned to the noise of the century, Boyle interweaves his own voice with echoes from other cultures (mainly, but not always, Hispanic ones). At times, he has an almost Paterian aspiration to the musical, as shown by his various homages to Messiaen, Mompou, Ravel, Prokofiev and Scarlatti. This last poem is an especially powerful one, recalling the grim commissions that Scarlatti was obliged to accept from the sinister patrons of his art:

*The stench of the world was there
all that blazing summer,
as you stood in the thin library
of the syphilitic millionaire,
scrawling the rise and fall of notes
on pages borrowed from the sky.*

But Boyle does not confine himself to matters of high culture. Many of the images in this collection depict the otherwise unremembered – immigrants in Sydney, prostitutes in Madrid, a starving child in Manila. This is a better book than Boyle's earlier volume, *Coming Home from the World* – not least because it values lucidity a little more highly. This is one reservation I have about Boyle's work; it seems to me that some sort of realism is necessary to articulate the concerns he has for those who are society's least articulate. His poetry is at its strongest when it develops something along the lines of a representational aesthetic – with-

out it, the sincerity of emotion might become too much of an exercise. This is worth pointing out, I hope, because all the signs suggest that Boyle's voice will be an increasingly important one as we stumble into the next millennium. His work is truly distinctive – it is hard to think of anyone in Australian poetry writing like him at the moment.

A quite different sensibility can be found in Barbara Giles' *Poems: Seven Ages*, which collects her work from the last two decades. Giles' strength lies in recording those aspects of daily life too diffuse, or too ordinary, to be thematized by other modes of expression. There are some personal poems for Antigone Kefala and Stephen Murray-Smith ("remembering/ community was what you studied"), and several meditations inspired by Gwen Harwood. But mostly what Giles offers is a poetry of experience – observations of people met and friendships forged – rather than a poetry of somersaulting inventiveness. At its best, her work captures the nuances of how we live with others, and how we live with ourselves. Her ongoing dialogue in the later poems with her own ageing body – what she calls "the hag in the mirror" – is especially rewarding.

Peter Lloyd offers a much darker vision in *Black Swans*, his first collection; here we enter a *démimonde* of the deranged and the deprived. Lloyd prefers a staccato diction and a generally sparse style for his sketches of the evil in our midst. In 'Sound of Music', he hears 'La donna è mobile' sung by "the wife-beater/cleaning his fist off under the kitchen tap"; in 'The Caller', an old woman makes her funeral arrangements with quiet dignity after a vicious assault in her own home. There are occasional flashes of William Carlos Williams here, and for Lloyd, like that American master, so much depends on the power of observation. This is an impressive debut, with some moving social poems and startling imagery – though perhaps not the best book to have on the bedside table if one wants to reach that dull nirvana of feeling relaxed and comfortable.

Images of the urban also predominate in Kevin Brophy's *Seeing Things*. This is Brophy's first book in seven years but it retains much of the wry humour of his earlier collection, *Replies to the Questionnaire on Love*. Brophy's irony is best exemplified by the radical menagerie he imagines in 'Zoo of the Exiled' where he calls for exhibitions of cockroaches, silverfish, earwigs and the like ("I would keep lions in my zoo for

the fleas and flies"); his anti-zoo aims to reveal "the deathless spores/ that float at last through those infinities that do not notice our/ passing". To my mind, Brophy's musings in this vein are more powerful social commentaries than those poems where he sets out with loftier intentions. His satire is at its best in works like 'How to recognise an academic thesis of outstanding merit'. But perhaps this is also a sign of the times – that poetry's readers are too often limited to the universities. Brophy's book certainly deserves a wider audience than that.

A Secret Sky is the latest volume from Wadih Sa'adeh, a Lebanese poet who has lived in Australia since 1988; it has been 'transcreated' from the Arabic into English by Anne Fairbairn. The poignancy of Wadih's economical lyrics suggests some reasons why poetry remains such a viable medium in many cultures; it also captures something of the village life which the poet was forced to leave behind because of the war that devastated his country. A Whitmanesque image that recurs in several of the poems is that of a shadow wandering in bewildered exile from its owner. These severed shadows provide a striking metaphor both for the loss of homeland and for the terrible list of war's casualties (a list that becomes too vast to count in 'Names of the Dead'). My only slight quibble is with the term 'transcreation', which is a little too exculpatory for my liking. The often thankless task of poetry translation inevitably involves a negotiation between the literal and the liberal. Anne Fairbairn is to be congratulated for bringing Wadih's work into English; no apologies are necessary.

Another translation is Ludwika Amber's *Our Territory*, which is published as a parallel text in Polish and English. As the title suggests, the emphasis is on landscape, with some impressive inscriptions of the natural world. But the possessive in the title is also an important inclusive gesture. Amber reminds us that 'our' territory in this age of information can extend to Sarajevo, just as the eucalypt forests of her adopted country can now dominate her own imaginative landscape. It sounds a little homiletic to point out the need for voices like Amber's in a climate of growing intolerance, but sadly homilies of that sort have become all too necessary these days.

Perhaps translation is really about acknowledgement – acknowledging others and, in so doing, acknowledging something in ourselves. A similar intensity to uncover what makes us human can be

found in Jacob G. Rosenberg's *Twilight Whisper*. A survivor of Auschwitz, Rosenberg shows us the doorway that leads to darkness. His is also a voice that needs to be heard in recognizing the evil (and that word is hopelessly inadequate) which flows from prejudice. Some of Rosenberg's previous work in Yiddish has been published in Russia and Israel; I fantasize that his voice might even be heard as far away as Oxley.

Jeffrey Poacher writes from the University of Queensland.

A Bloody and Broken Land

Tim Thorne

Coral Hull: *Broken Land: 5 Days in Bre, 1995* (Five Islands Press, \$12.95).

THE ESSENCE OF THIS BOOK is summed up in the opening two lines of 'Saving the Town': "My cousin said, 'Chronicle the town, it's on its last legs./Dad said, 'We're finished up 'ere, the land is dead ...'". Returning for a few days to the small town where she grew up, the persona of this sequence of poems experiences a range of emotional and intellectual responses, a lot of the poetry being created out of the tension between love of family and hatred of the racism and violence which seem endemic to the place she wants to call 'home'.

Brewarrina is evoked through its abattoirs: "... they start ter scream as the blade goes in." and through its climate: "... Sand moves across me, until/A few layers of skin blow away." Mostly, though, it is its people, the father with his ute and his dog, the kooris "along the wall" and the various minor characters, meatworkers and others trying to battle on in the face of a hostile land as harsh as its traditions, who constitute the real picture.

This is not to deny Hull's ability to evoke the landscape of an outback which, as she writes, "even the rabbits have deserted ...". Indeed, the images of heat, dust and dead trees, and of the "big low on the horizon stars" are among the book's strengths. That "fair dinkum" Australia, the vast spaces which the overwhelming majority of us shun but which lurk at the edge of even the most urban of consciousness, has

rarely been presented as rawly, as dispassionately in the poetry of recent years.

The most powerful imagery, however, is of the sights and sounds of slaughter. Whether it is the "Red Hill roos/Flattened into landfill", the goats' heads spinning through the air, "Blood rain lashing out, from spiralling horns, like the arms of a galaxy" or the dead fox which "shone a creepy scarlet", the animal world is presented here as meat, as victim, as product or vermin. The predominant smell is of "... the dead sweet blood,/that hung in the air..." The exception is the dog, the indispensable link in the outback between the human and the animal worlds. The dogs of Hull's Brewarrina range from friendly adjuncts to human families, to the rescued pup which catalyses a bonding with the night and the country in a short group of poems which threatens sentimentality or pretentiousness, but beautifully avoids both, to Bindo, "the overweight backyard cattle dog" next door, who must be braved on the way to the toilet, and of whom his mistreating owner says, " 'e downe hurt cha though/'e only bring da blud."

The reader is given a smattering of examples of rural racism in some grimly deadpan monologues, and there is an interesting exploration of the dilemma of how to deal with the problem of cross-cultural bludging. The awareness of what has happened to the land and its people since – and directly because of – the coming of the whitefella is never far from the surface. The abundance of smashed glass for which the town is infamous is there, of course, but the poet makes us realize that a lot more than glass has been smashed. The town, and by implication the whole country (or at least those parts of it that are distinguishable from the cities of California) only got there because of murder, only survives because of killing, and is dying anyway.

Coral Hull has shown us this, but she has shown it lovingly and she has shown us, too, that we cannot entirely escape our personal Brewarrinas, that we all have, as she says of herself in the book's closing lines, "... a little bit of red dust/on my shoelace."

Tim Thorne is overland's Tasmania correspondent.

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