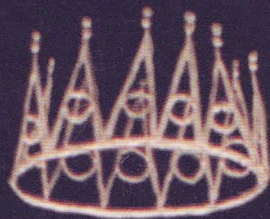


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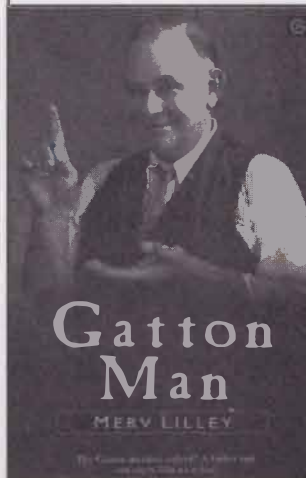
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overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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editorial

FOR WHATEVER REASON, the end of a century inspires introspection and re-evaluation, public calls for new directions and 'essential values'. The beginning of the new millennium has especial importance for the Australian state, if not its people, because it was one hundred years ago that the various state leaders agreed to compromise and federation. No doubt self-interest played a part in this process, but in light of the recent failure of the republic referendum, the basic co-operative achievement of 1900 suddenly seems more profound.

At the old Parliament House in Canberra some weeks ago, a randomly selected group of the population moved from being split roughly 50-50 on the referendum question to a clear pro-Republic lead of something like 75-25 per cent. While not wanting to hold up this event as some pure educative process, or to dismiss the anti-Monarchist 'No' campaign out of hand, this public forum appears to have enabled its participants to find reasons, other than the purely personal reasons suggested by a 50-50 split, why they would move society in a particular direction.

This was an example of the social importance of education. Conservatives only ever have to convince the public that all politicians and public leaders are equally self-interested and misanthropic. Progressives have to convince the public that there is a chance for something better, and this educative process takes time, money and careful planning.

As Bob Connell writes in this issue, education is always intricately involved with questions of social justice. Nadia Wheatley and Adrian Caesar take up such questions in relation to prominent works of teenage and young adult fiction. Education inspires deep division and debate, as well as periodic media hysteria and state paranoia: witness the cases of Barry York and Ben Ross in this issue. Putting together this *overland* has also been a learning experience. It was sometimes difficult to procure submissions from and even to engage in dialogue with spokespeople for tertiary and secondary education. In the university sector it is obvious that staff are working very hard, often with the threat of unemployment hanging over them. Angela Mitropoulos sets out in our lead article how this experience is being replicated right across the workforce.

Educationalists are often willing to work harder and longer than is strictly necessary because they see an intrinsic benefit to learning which cannot be put into monetary terms. A privatized education system necessitates the destruction of this relationship between teacher and student, not because people suddenly become incapable of selfless thought but because within a freely operating market relationship, the educationalist must by definition work as hard as he or she can to serve the 'needs' of the 'consumer'. This sounds like a positive thing until one looks at the effect this process has on the definition of the student's needs. Privatization not only changes the relationship between student and teacher but also, in the process, necessarily changes the nature of the educational 'product'. The 'needs' of the 'consumer' must be readily quantifiable. Since the student is paying directly for his or her education, that 'product' can only be measured, ultimately, in monetary terms. Hence knowledge production, the work of the educationalist, is reduced to the narrow and reductive terms of the market.

Who benefits from a system where the amount of money you have determines how much 'knowledge' you can buy? Who benefits from the maintenance of such stressful places of work and learning?

In a zeitgeist of privatization the zeitgeist itself is often held up as the reason why certain policies are necessary. Any other approach would be behind the times. It is the most specious, yet most common of arguments. The people who most obviously benefit from a privatized education and social system are also most often the people telling us that these things are necessary, modern, rational, glamorous etc. The case of the broadcaster John Laws is exemplary rather than exceptional.

overland is a literary and cultural journal. But education systems play a large part in any nation's literature and culture. The moral character of these systems affects the quality of any national imagination or discussion. For this reason *overland* 157 pays particular attention to education, as part of our ongoing opposition to cultural and political conservatism.

Nathan Hollier

Angela Mitropoulos

Invisible hands and iron fists

fear, progress and work at the end of the century

OVER THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS in Australia, the workplace has been thoroughly and miserably transformed. With the biggest growth in employment recorded in casual and part-time work, with the proportion of those working over sixty hours a week registering the most dramatic increase relative to other hours worked amongst full-time workers, the eight-hour day no longer warrants the appellation of 'standard hours'.¹ Overwork, casual work, outwork, temporary work, part-time work and unemployment are now the conventional experiences of working classes in Australia and other OECD countries. This has breached the usual divide between the employed and the unemployed that distinguished a prior formula of workforce motivation and discipline. At the same time, those who are unemployed are seen as easy targets for labour conscription and the castigating idiom of 'mutual obligation'. Thus, the fear of losing one's job is no longer simply fear of impoverishment, but also the prospect, if one is under thirty-four, of being bound to work for an income level and under conditions that cannot legally be negotiated. Young people are being prepared to expect subsistence wages no less than to assume the overt threat of starvation as a normal feature of one's work life.

It does not take much to realize that the grim immediacy of this for the vast portion of the workforce urges the acquiescence of the entire workforce, as fear becomes a discernible innovation in enterprise bargaining, contract negotiations and, not least, in the ways that panic and anxiety are embraced in the composition of political constituencies. Fear, the kind of fear that stifles the demand for better and makes us anticipate only variations of distress, is of course the belief that one cannot possibly hope for progress, which operates as a kind of dissipation of hope itself.

This fear has a paradoxical basis: it would not be so generalized were it not for the ways in which

understandings of progress have been fashioned as the belief that things get better over time—the conviction that progress is measured by clock and calendar. The bond between progress and linear time is no whim, however. This was the usual corollary of the assembly line, the career, and adult lives spent more or less in one occupation. As the assembly-line marked time as both linear movement and the painstaking collection of parts toward a final, determined whole, so too this doctrine identifies progress as a conveyor belt moving resolutely toward promised satisfaction. Officially, at the core of this notion, is the work ethic of early capitalism rendered time-bound: work hard and life will be better in the future.

The remaking of work has not been widely grasped as the moment for a new interpretation of progress, a different imagining of the possibilities for a radically different and better future. It has not been seen as the occasion on which to ask whether or not progress ever came to pass in these simplified and calendrical terms, whether the post-Second World War period was indeed one of progress for most people, or whether present misery is perhaps a consequence of those post-war circumstances. What has occurred instead, has been an attempt to locate explanations for the collapse of this particular narrative of progress in ways that do not query that very rendition of capitalist progress and which, in the most dogged of ways, seeks to insure it against disrepute.

Progress, thereby transformed from a demand that things be better into a philosophy that over time they will, easily finds itself menaced (or perhaps tempted) by chronicles of a strict decline, resolving down into a panicky compulsion to ledger blame for those (or that) perceived as a barrier to forward motion, toward the contracted goal. Once progress is figured as sequential and cumulative, then the lack of progress tends to be presented either as an unequivocal reversal (degen-

eracy) or, more intensely, as the result of obstacles deemed external (the fly in the ointment, the scape-goat, the malingeringer).

Degeneration, insecurity and incomes

Such narratives, even when they begin by recognizing the frightful nature of recent changes to work, function not so much as critique but as a nostalgia for times past. This is from Richard Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of the New Capitalism*:

Enrico had spent twenty years by the time we first met cleaning toilets and mopping floors . . . He did so without complaining . . . What had most struck me about Enrico and his generation was how linear time was in their lives: year after year of working in jobs which seldom varied from day to day. Along that line of time, achievement was cumulative.²

Corrosion begins with, and is confined by, a comparison between Enrico and his son, Rico, a computer programmer – biography recast as allegory. For Sennett, transformations to work have damaged that which he associates with 'good character': loyalty, traditional authority, moral development and, not least, the work ethic.

There is little doubt that there has been an aggravation of competition between workers, that mistrust and separation permeate the workplace. Nevertheless, this does not seem to be Sennett's preoccupation. *Corrosion* implies not only that there has been a generational decline, nor that the life of the son is worse than that of the father (since Rico is by most standards of living much better off than his father), but that the character of the son is impaired, and that of his children likely to be more so. One might ask whether Sennett thought this was the case because (unlike the requisitioned gratitude of the immigrant father) Rico complains all the time – about his work and prospects for the future in particular. The mortgaging of the present to some promised future no longer functions to bind Rico to his employers and his work.

From whose perspective, then, is this supposed decline in 'character' a problem? For Sennett, the constant movement of workers – around different jobs, companies and places – makes it impossible to develop a sense of loyalty and commitment. To be sure, many workers are horrified by the ease with which they are disposable. Where Sennett, out of a fondness for his chosen

narrative of progress and decline, sidesteps precisely what is before him, is here, in an inability to see that Rico might well complain about his financial insecurity, but he has no desire at all to return to what he sees as the deliberately mind-numbing routine of his father's work. Instead of offering an explanation and critique of why these changes to work have been important for capitalism, Sennett is rather more concerned to compare the present to the past, in a move which makes the future possible only as an idealized version of the past or present, which obliterates any imagining of the future as radically different to either.

Yet the changes to work, even the discontinuous nature of work, would not inspire fear were it not for the threat, especially in the US where Rico lives, of being without any income at all. According to another sociologist, Ulrich Beck:

We need to see that there is a life beyond the alternatives of unemployment and stress at work . . . that the lack of waged work can give us a new affluence of time . . . the welfare state must be rebuilt so that the risks of fragile work are socialized rather than being borne increasingly by the individual. We must, in short, turn the new precarious forms of employment into a right to discontinuous waged work and a right to disposable time. It must be made possible for every human being autonomously to shape his or her life and create a balance between family, paid employment, leisure and political commitment.

For Beck, then, poverty is the problem, not unemployment or discontinuous work. And so, instead of calling for a return to a mythical time of 'full employment' – mythical, since it was always premised on the unpaid domestic work of women – or a return to full-time, life-long drudgery, Beck argues for "decoupling of income entitlements from paid work and from the labour market [that] would, in Zygmunt Bauman's words, remove 'the awesome fly of insecurity from the sweet ointment of freedom'" – in short, a universal basic income.³

In *Corrosion*, the predicament is viewed not so much as the effects of late capitalism on workers but rather as the impact of such changes on that obliging theme of orthodox sociologists: 'social cohesion'. If the 'social bond' furnished by the post-Second World War era was premised on the trade between the promise of future reward and a pledge to commit to a lifetime of work, then the collapse of financial security entails se-

rious risks for capital itself. In the pre-Second World War period, absenteeism, breaches of company security and sabotage were common ways in which employee 'disloyalty' manifested itself in a climate of restraints on more open sorts of industrial conflict like strikes. Sennett appears as something of a risk analyst for capitalism, locating the ways in which the new organization of work makes for discontented, disloyal workers who increasingly see little reason to work other than for an income. Here, then, the handling and channelling of discontent becomes an obligatory accompaniment of any government which seeks to place limits on increases in wages and social incomes, or which, to put it another way, seeks to head off the arrangement of a working-class politics around the relative proportions of incomes and profits.

Malingers, parasites & final solutions

There are numerous versions of the blameworthy. Sometimes it is enough to impute to individuals the liability for systemic failure, as Tony Abbott, Minister for Employment, sought to do with the robust motif of the "job snob". "Long-term unemployment has tended to breed a subculture of the job snob, that's to say someone who wants a job but only on his or her own terms," he said.⁴ Not far from the surface of this outlandish declaration was the claim that unemployment is caused by 'too high wages', as if wages and life in capitalism bear no relation worth dwelling on, or at least not long enough to recall that people are not the same as merchandise unable to find a buyer because of a 'too high price' – jaunty attempts to make it so aside.

And who can doubt that these imagined individuals are routinely young, and young males in particular? That Abbott could hardly believe such a fantasy of causation is beside the point. He believes that others will believe it because they have a historically inscribed faith in a narrative of progress which lashes out against officially-prescribed others and 'outsiders' at the first sign of its own inadequacy. Given the age demographics and voting-age laws of Australia, the political pitch is more often than not a wink to those over fifty, raised on the historical association of line production, rising incomes, and – as it was touted – the triumphal progress of post-war capitalism. Not surprisingly, then, young people are a potent figure for visions of risk, the attribution of responsibility or (what is the other side of the same coin) as endless potential victims who must be under constant supervision and control lest they hang around in

malls without spending money, walk the streets after dark, or look at nakedness on a computer screen.

Other, ever more vague, conspiratorial and belligerent figures can be summoned to bear the projected weight of general fright. Obviously, we could cite the emergence of One Nation and its impressive array of evils: the 'ethnic lobby', the 'Aboriginal industry', 'overpopulation', 'world government' ... Less obviously to some, we might notice a reassertion of the ALP's historic preoccupation with immigrants as the source of peril. From the ALP's commitment to the 'white Australia policy' at the beginning of this century, to their recent excitement over an imaginary invasion of the coastline, there seems little interruption to a discourse which seeks to make 'outsiders' the repository for alarm over – and liable for the experience of – depressed working conditions and incomes. But then, it was of course the ALP government that began the 'belt-tightening' drive under Bob Hawke, that introduced enterprise bargaining, which saw real wages fall and unions become an appendage of Treasury policy.

Faced with the choice between censoring the ALP and implicating those effortlessly cast as 'alien', you can guess what was electorally advantageous. During the lead-up to the 1998 elections, media commentators and politicians assembled to denounce the prospect of a 'race election'. No-one remarked that we had already had *two* such elections in recent times. The 1993 election was the climax of a contest between the Liberals and the ALP over who was tougher on refugees and in immigrant law, culminating in the introduction by the ALP of highly restrictive conditions on immigration and refugee applications, including the abrogation of the rule of law in refugee matters. By the campaign of 1996, the Coalition was promising a boost in the restrictions and extending the range of 'outsiders' in what was to prove a fertile acrimony against 'political correctness', 'black armband history' and the 'multicultural lobby'. That prominent members of the ALP have been actively seeking the explicit adoption of such comprehensive resentments, including of course their own special attachment to 'law and order' campaigns, indicates just how seductive this strategy is in the assembly of 'the national interest'.

Strikingly close to the terminology of One Nation, much of the left characterizes this moment as a period of globalization and deregulation – as if danger issues from the world 'out there' and the disintegration of authority, usually defined as national. Nothing could be more deceptive. The ability of global money to en-

force austerity has indeed been sharpened and 'flexible' production systems have been extended. But global money has been with us for as long as the Australian nation has. Likewise, the Australian economy has always been overwhelmingly export-oriented. What has changed is not the territorial reach of money and trade, but the laws relating to the movements of people. Since the end of the Second World War, there are more not fewer constraints, Australia's refugee detention camps being the most shameful example of the recent rush to contain people, to criminalize them simply for passing across borders. Ironically, at the same time, governments declare the merits of free markets.

Domestically, industrial laws are also more regulated from the perspective of workers, strictly designating what can and cannot be a correct industrial claim, the terms under which workers can take action, and so on. According to the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations and Training:

The last ten to fifteen years has been associated with a substantial external re-regulation of industrial relations in Australia designed to enhance the internal power and discretion of employers in their interactions with employees and, where relevant, unions. Invisible hands, so it seems, need to be transformed into iron fists if they are to achieve their ostensible 'purpose'.⁵

So, the orchestration of a seeming consensus of opinion over how to perceive late capitalism includes putative 'solutions' which bear little relation to what is actually occurring. Thus, if globalization is the problem, then more nationalism would seem to be the solution; if we are experiencing the collapse of authority, then authority should be re-asserted; if unproductiveness is the problem, then forced labour is the solution ... A fully processed politics, a total and totalitarian politics, which irresistibly imposes particular 'solutions' the moment one concedes the characterization of 'the problem'.

Work, slavery and citizenship

The methods used to obliterate prior foundations of working-class solidarity, organization and incomes (casualization, individual contracts, temp agencies, part-time work, austerity budgets, etc.) have contradictory effects. They do carry through, in limited form, the compliance of workers but this acquiescence is achieved

at the real cost of enthusiasm. To a society that likes to imagine itself as egalitarian and democratic, composed therefore of citizens accorded human rights, political spin must find a way of re-building a stable constituency for the policies of sado-monetarism. That is, not only must scapegoats be foreshadowed in the midst of policy announcements (such as the 'job snob', the 'illegal immigrant'), but the 'work ethic' must be observed as the essential debt of citizenship and indeed humanity. For us, work is seen as a requirement of citizenship in marked contrast to the distinction between work and citizenship in Ancient Greece, where to be a citizen was to be not a slave. Work today draws the political border of the nation – those defined as 'us'. That this is so can be seen by the experiences of those regarded as non-citizens, as unable to appeal to those rights associated with citizenship (access to the law, the presumption of innocence, protection from coercion, equal treatment before the law, political participation, etc.).

The necessary fiction of wage labour as free labour does not seem quite as necessary these days. Perhaps it never really was in capitalism. Open coercion was always sanctioned by defining those who were coerced as unable to correctly internalize and experience as their own a duty to work, to work hard and work efficiently. Command thus had to be present as an external and often brute force alongside the judgement that those who were coerced were less than human. This judgement was always a result rather than a premise of coerced labour; a decision which nonetheless had to display itself as assumption in order to persist in the midst of such apparently universal declarations that 'all are born equal'. Slavery could therefore be seen as an attribute of 'blackness', defined as laziness, apathy, et cetera – in short, as an aversion to work.

Here is how the German National Socialist bureaucracy in Poland anticipated the concentration camps:

Overpopulation ... defined relatively and by its proportion to insufficient productivity and under-employment ... to the inadequate utilization of the available labour force [as well as] the additional factor of 'mentality' explained why the labour force in the General Government was "less efficient than the German one" since it "generally lacked what was natural to the German worker, namely the motivation to organize his own work with the purpose of attaining the highest labour efficiency possible".⁶

Since the Second World War – since, that is, the collapse of the ‘white Australia policy’ – immigrants have been allowed entry into Australia conditional upon their being available for the labour market. The unwritten pledge of allegiance is in fact, ‘I will work or I will make others work’, as every immigrant has known and as is clearly stated in immigration law. Those outside the workforce for any lengthy period have more recently been subject to the conscripted labour scheme of work-for-the-dole. That this is intimately tied to racism, and is thereby a kind of echo and generalization of the ancient division between slaves and citizens, is evident in the commencement of work-for-the-dole schemes in Australia. Work-for-the-dole is not a recent policy. It has been operating in Australia since 1977, when the Fraser Government introduced it for indigenous communities, under the name of the Community Development Employment Program. That few noticed this previous form of work-for-the-dole suggests that those most marginal are often the initial and easiest targets of social engineering. What this policy declared was that the unemployment rates of indigenous people were a result of their inability to work unless forced to do so.

The UN Declaration of Human Rights states that no-one shall be subject to forced labour. Australia was one of the first signatories to that document. As the promissory note of a buoyant capitalism, the liberal idea of human rights falters on the constitutive and devastating premise of really-existing capitalism: the compulsion to work as an endless injunction to produce more and more for no other reason than to be able to produce still more. Production – organized as a means to make profit in order to secure the future means to make more profits – has little regard for either the pleasures or necessities of life unless they too can become a means to a means. Since, on a global scale, the worktime it now takes to reproduce our lives is remarkably shorter than the time we spend pushing out profits for others, the command to ‘be a productive member of the community’ (an oxymoronic phrase if there ever was one) looks increasingly like a political dictate parading as social necessity. Whilst food production between 1990 and 1997 increased per capita by around 25 per cent, the income gap between the bottom and top fifths of the world went from 30:1 in 1960, to 60:1 in 1990, and up to 74:1 in 1997. Around one in six people now live below subsistence.⁷ Could there

be any sharper evidence that productivity, organized as a means to profit, has little to do with necessity?

At the end of the century, submission to boundless work and overwork (as the very meaning of capital) is candidly disclosed as the prerequisite of any appeal to human rights, indicating just how flimsy those rights are, and how flagrantly the universality of those rights is eclipsed by the core requisites of capital. Perhaps this is why, for the first time in the history of capitalism, capitalism itself and in its totality was the target of global protest action. On 18 June 1999, the first day of the G8 Summit in Cologne, hundreds of thousands participated in a series of demonstrations on a range of issues – including global debt, workfare/work-for-the-dole schemes, border laws, environmental destruction, anti-union laws, the arms trade, poverty, agribusiness – but with one, unmistakable culprit in sight. 18 June was the world-wide ‘Carnival Against Capitalism’:⁸ in London, Barcelona, Seoul, Melbourne, Sydney, Harare, New York, Buenos Aires, Nigeria, Dhaka, Tel Aviv, Stockholm, Rome, Zagreb, Toronto, Montevideo, Moscow, Prague, Mexico City, Berlin, Valencia, Edinburgh, Cologne, Oregon, Los Angeles, Indonesia... The J18 actions signalled the re-appearance of the demand that life be better, a refusal of the pall of nostalgia, diminished expectations and fear. A glimpse of a new century and a new enthusiasm.

ENDNOTES

1. Australian Centre for Industrial Relations and Training, *Australia at Work: Just Managing*, Sydney: Prentice-Hall, 1998.
2. R. Sennett, *The Corrosion of Capitalism: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, New York: Norton, 1998.
3. Ulrich Beck, ‘Goodbye to all that wage slavery’, *New Statesman*, 5 March 1999.
4. Australian Associated Press, 20 May 1999.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Gotz Aly and Susanne Heim, ‘The Economics of the Final Solution’, *Common Sense*, 11, Winter 1991.
7. 1999 UN Human Development Report, available at <http://www.undp.org/hdro/report.html>
8. For information on the J18 actions, see <http://www.j18.org>

Angela Mitropoulos also wrote ‘Discipline and labour: sociology, class formation and money in Australia at the beginning of the century’, Journal of Sociology, 35:1, March 1999.

Lyn McLeavy

The Woolbales of Wrath

THE EARLIEST PHOTO I HAVE OF MYSELF is when I'm three years old, a stout little tree trunk in a white dress and sandals, at the wharfies' picnic. It would have been around 1951 when Menzies was trying to eradicate the wharfies' union, using fear of communism as the weapon. You can see I've got a worried look on my face.

My father was a Port Melbourne wharfie, and so was his father, and his. The McLeavys had been on the Port Melbourne wharves since at least 1866. Our family's oral tradition goes back to 1880. I know a lot about my grandfather's life, and my father's life, as wharfies. I learnt it at the knee; the rest when I interviewed my family for an oral history, some of which was published in *Under the Hook* by Wendy Lowenstein and Tom Hills. The pre-1880 stories I researched in the last two years. I know what it means to live in poverty, a hundred years and more, on the Melbourne waterfront.

My great-grandfather Archibald listed his occupation as a "lumper" (a labourer who loads and unloads wharf cargo; a stevedore) when his son, Hugh, my grandfather, was born in Sandridge (Port Melbourne) in 1876. Archibald may have carried four or five hundred bags of wheat on his back in a day as Ned Kelly served three years nearby on a hulk at Williamstown.

Archibald was born in Carlingford, County Louth, Ireland in 1837. His elderly father, Hugh, told the 1871 Douglas, Isle of Man, census that he was a seventy-three-year-old labourer born in County Louth, recently widowed and living with his seventy-one-year-old relation, Catherine, also born in County Louth who was "on charity". Hugh died the following month. I was relieved to see they were not living in "The House of Industry for the relief of the poor of Douglas" or "sleeping in barns, sheds or tents, or in the open air", as the Census suggested. They'd left Ireland to escape the famine in 1846 when Archibald was nine years old.

Archibald arrived in Victoria in 1855, aged nine-

teen, headed for the Ballarat goldfields. I imagine he wanted a better life; to leave behind the recurring famines and hardships of Ireland.

Ten years later he had a child with a woman living in Market Street, Emerald Hill (South Melbourne). She was born in Galway, Ireland, arriving in Port Melbourne from Jamaica, when she was fourteen years old in 1856. Margaret Fleming was possibly a convict or the child of convicts. Being a long-time fan of Bob Marley, I can now joke about my Jamaican roots.

Margaret, thirty-one, had three "illegitimate" children under eleven years when she and Archibald, thirty-six, married at the Registry Office in Sandridge in 1873. Archibald couldn't sign his name and Margaret's signature is laboured. It's a time when the poor of Sandridge are "starving".

I expect Archibald was involved in the first union on the Melbourne wharves in the 1870s, in the eighteen-day strike of 1886 that supposedly gave Melbourne wharfies an eight-hour day (thirty years after the stonemasons and craftsmen); and in the five-month strike of 1890 in support of trade unionism and the principle of the right of labour to organize. The lament of the day was:

*The Lord above, send down a dove,
With wings as sharp as razors,
To slit the throats of bloody scabs
Who cut down poor men's wages.*

The nature of the industry created the men and their unions. According to Tom Hills, the "shipowners started off as pirates and they never changed. They got rich on colonialism. They made their fortunes in India and China and Africa. They were in the slave trade. They paid their seamen bloody nothing, and they shanghai'd them from the waterfront pubs.

"In most of the world they could get their ships loaded

for almost nothing – some places they still can. You waited on them for work; they picked you up when they wanted you, and sacked you the minute it was raining so hard that it would damage the cargo – never mind about you! They only wanted you if you were strong and docile. If you got old or sick they didn't pick you up. If you were militant they didn't pick you up. They gave you nothing." Even the British Prime Minister, Gladstone said, "for money, the ship owners would agree to land enemies in the Port of Heaven".

It was casual work; few could count on a regular income. Shifts were often twenty-four hours straight and then nothing. One of Lowenstein's interviewees reported, "Waterside workers spent a lot of time just waiting for work . . . a ship would come in at two or three o'clock in the morning. Now the word would have gone round – 'She's up at two o'clock in the morning!' You'd get up in the dark, and you'd go down there, just on the chance of getting a job. And if you were picked up, you had to go to the Company's yard and pick up your crowbars and six-wheelers and all the rest, and drag them down to the job . . . best part of half a mile."

My grandfather would have been twelve years old learning about trade unionism, at the knee of his father, as it was starting – experiencing the hardships of ordinary working people's lives as they tried to improve their lot. Everything had to be fought for. Many disputes were over unsafe gear which could lead to death and injuries. Shipowners resisted spending money or time on equipment, safety or working conditions.

Hugh would see his father, with six children, out of work for five months, living on air, trying to forge a kinder life through hungry bellies, no food on the table, nothing to sell. Just poor people sticking together, helping each other survive the hungry times as they stood up to the rich and powerful shipping companies of the British Empire. He would see the strikes of 1890–94 by the early trade unions of wharfies, shearers and coalminers, put down by the state.

Archibald died in 1905 of stomach cancer and debility before Margaret's death in 1911. They are buried in unmarked graves.

My father's grandmother, Johanna Connor, was thirty-two years old when she married twenty-one-year-old Wally Elliott, the son of a local fisherman at Port Melbourne Registry in 1888. Johanna couldn't sign her name. She'd been living at the Cross Keys Hotel in Essendon since she was about twenty-two, working as a charwoman (a woman hired by the hour or day to clean rooms), and had two young daughters, Mary,

ten and Alice, eight, to the publican's son.

The publican, John Morgan, married Margaret Kelly of Tipperary (where Ned Kelly's family came from, before his father was transported to Van Diemen's Land). Ned was born near the Cross Keys and Granny Elliott (as Johanna was later known) knew the Kellys and said they were a good family.

Johanna was born at Franklin in the Huon Valley, Tasmania, to Jane Cook, convict, and her husband, Owen Connor, convict. During the Irish famine Jane had stolen meat, left one of her two children and – on a three strikes you're out policy – stole a pot lid and was sentenced to ten years in Van Diemen's Land, arriving in 1850 with her ten-year-old daughter.

She met Owen at Franklin where they married in 1852. He came from Tralee in County Kerry, stole three cows during the famine, which he tried to sell at the fair, was caught and sent with his two brothers to Bermuda for their troubles.

Owen and his brothers were given Conditional Pardons in Van Diemen's Land when they arrived from Bermuda via South Africa, where they expected to be discharged, but being unwanted in South Africa their ship was forced on to Van Diemen's Land where they were discharged in April, 1850. There'd been a mutiny on board, which was hushed up, and a lot of controversy about where they could be dumped at the end of transportation days.

OWEN AND HIS BROTHERS seem to have kept their noses clean. Jane however was always in strife. As a young woman Jane was a laundress, illiterate, and suffered from nervous attacks since the time of her first arrest in Ireland. She was the only woman on a boat of two hundred Irish convict women, many of whom were suffering from hysteria, to be hospitalized and 'treated' by the ship's surgeon, a man of dubious methods, such as causing burns that blister to reduce hysteria.

Drunk and disorderly, using obscene language, harassed and arrested at every turn, a feisty woman, Jane spent thirty years, on and off, in the Female Factory in Hobart until her death in September 1890, aged sixty-six, a pauper in the Female Invalid Depot. After Owen's death in 1871, she became homeless and destitute living in barns, wherever she could, stealing food and clothing to survive. No-one wanted to know an Irish convict woman. Jane endured the unendurable for sixty-six years. She died of 'heart disease' and Owen of 'paralysis'. They are in unmarked graves in Tasmania.

Convicts and their children were discriminated against in Tasmania for years. The divide between the landowning class and their slave-convict labour endured longer there in its original form than anywhere on the mainland, so Johanna must have been pleased to get away from the horrors of her mother's life, the shadow it threw over her own, to the Cross Keys (a wild Irish pub by the sound of it) with a grocery store and safekeeping for gold for those on their way from the diggings.

After a few years, Johanna's husband, Wally, left her (in the great Australian tradition) with four children.

Johanna's eldest child, Mary, married my grandfather, Hugh 'Dodger' McLeavy, in South Melbourne in 1920 at the Registry Office. They had known each other since they were children when their mothers, Johanna and Margaret, lived side by side off Princes Street (now the trendy 'Beacon Cove' where I was born). Mary had seven children from a previous marriage (her husband deserting her around 1911). Mary, Catholic, Hugh, atheist, had another five children, my father the youngest, born in 1922.

Working on the wharves was always a hard and dangerous occupation. Casual work in substandard conditions with bad equipment. Men died. The British aristocrats that owned the shipping companies held working people's lives cheaply – profits were considered more important. It was their group of international monopoly shipping lines, led by the P&O Line, versus the poorest of the working class. Like today, the wharfies got bad press, because they fought to improve their conditions. It would have been democratic to allow them a legitimate voice.

Hugh went onto the wharves aged fifteen, spent fifty years as a stevedore until he was knocked down by a van on his way to work in 1943 and broke his leg. In the 1928 strike, being a union man, he lost his job to the scabs and faced unremitting poverty for the next eleven years, with all the children (some with TB and epilepsy), and Granny Elliott to support.

My family spent these years evading eviction, living in twenty-seven different houses, a jump ahead of the bailiffs; moving from one hovel to another, killing bed bugs and fleas with kerosene; the children stealing food. Mary and the children working when they could as casuals in factories, living in the Stevedores Club in Bay Street when they had nowhere else to go.

Mary changed from a shy woman to an activist, helping other families, begging for food and clothing from factories and shops to distribute around, work-

ing for the Labor Party. She was friends with militant English suffragette leader, Jenny Baines, smuggled out of England after a series of arrests and living in Port Melbourne. They and nine other women disrupted the Victorian Parliament when wharfies were shot by police in the 1928 strike, calling out from the gallery, "We are the wives of the stevedores of Port Phillip, and our children are starving while the scabs are scabbing!" In Parliament the Country Party leader said, "If that's the way you train your women to behave themselves, I certainly think that the police were needed." It's a long, sorry, tale.

My uncle told me Mary would pawn anything, including Hugh's tool of trade, the hook. "She'd say 'Get your father's cargo hook. Wrap it up in the flannel.' I think we'd get two-and-six. Then he'd get a job out of the blue, and he'd say, 'Cut us up a bit of lunch while I get me hook.' Mum would look at him. 'Oh, Jesus. No hook here! Go and borrow some money somewhere, quick! Get the hook!'"

AT THE END OF the 1930s there were still no first aid, toilets, safety gear, change rooms, lockers, dining rooms, public holidays, sick pay or annual leave. There were still twenty-four-hour shifts. Wharfies went to work with empty bellies. "We'd cut up lumps of hessian and wrap it around our feet and wear our overcoats and scarves and work in freezers no more than about eight to ten degrees [Fahrenheit], paper in your hat to keep the cold out."

Tom Hills, wharfie trade union leader, said, "The war made a vast difference to the maritime industry, to Australian waterside workers and seamen. It was the start of improved conditions. But we had to fight for them. There's never been anything on the waterfront – first aid, showers, canteens, lockers, smokes, gloves – not one of these things has been given to us by the shipowner without fighting. You can't name one thing he's given us voluntarily." The employers improved conditions in exchange for industrial peace during the high-profit war years.

A doctor examining wharfies in 1943 said, "I have had many years of experience of workers in the shearing and timber industries . . . I can say without hesitation that neither of these industries can produce any comparable number of physical derelicts as I have encountered amongst the waterside workers . . . I examined men in the main who had been ruined physically by the intolerable anxieties of the Depression years. The endless search for the infrequent job, which would

keep them and their families on the precarious borderline of malnutrition, had taken its devastating toll.

The feverish high-tension work performed when the job is secured, in order to ensure its repetition, had been paid for at the shocking price of premature old age and physical calamity."

When the war came there was work. War work. My father, nineteen, and his brothers joined up "to get a feed and a pair of boots".

Michael Duffy, columnist for *The Australian*, wrote during the recent waterfront dispute that wharfies were unpatriotic during the Second World War, but others, like Sir Isaac Isaacs, our first Australian-born Governor General, wrote of his admiration for the wharfies as the conscience of the nation in their opposition to Menzies' selling pig iron to Japan, saying their opposition "will find a place in our history beside the Eureka Stockade, as a noble stand against executive Dictatorship and against an attack on Australian Democracy".

After the horror of war, my twenty-year-old shellshocked father returned to the docks and I was born into this unequal battle between rich and poor. We had nothing. No-one in our family had yet had an education past year 8. In the tiny condemned house I grew up in I learned about fascism and who supported it, who profited from the war and how trade unions were the first targets of Hitler and Mussolini. I learned of Ghandi and Paul Robeson as inspirations leading the way in the fight against slavery and racism, in South Africa, America and Australia.

There was no greater insult than to be called a scab, no greater crime than to take away the livelihood of marginal people, who for over a hundred years had been treated no better than cattle.

The wharfies identified with the poor all over the world and are famous for their generous support for people fighting oppression anywhere. They fought for unemployment benefits, rent subsidies for evicted families – their whole life was struggle.

Menzies haunted my childhood fears. He said we were communists and wanted to make us outlaws. If the Depression, soup kitchens, poverty, ill health, lack of education and war didn't get you, Menzies would. (I dreamed of knocking on his door hoping he'd save me from the communists.) I tried to run away from the shame and prejudice of being a wharfie's child, in the same way Granny Elliott tried to leave her convict past behind. All my young aspiring capitalist ways disappeared when I saw the horrors of black slavery in South Africa when I was twenty-one and I returned to the fold and activism.

The clasped hands carved over the entrance to the Stevedores Club in Bay Street in 1922 symbolized Karl Marx's saying "Workers of the world unite – you have nothing to lose but your chains". The saying does not seem to have lost its relevance in 1999, as Marx's predicted globalized economy puts wealth and poverty, and deteriorating working conditions, centre stage, again, and not just for wharfies.

"Will the capitalist press print this story?" my elderly aunty asks, doubtfully.

Last year I went to Princes Street, Port Melbourne, to that little block where I was born, where my family have lived and died for over 130 years. Their spirits walked with me. I saw the expensive residences built there in the last few years, the old pier at the end of the street. 'Beacon Cove' they call it now, but I see Port Melbourne.

fiction

Express Post

Rebecca Maidment

EVERY DAY DAVID WALKS across the brown river to work. He works on the thirty-eighth floor of 452 Flinders Street, a building with steel outsides, marble insides, and no windows. A brass plaque screwed to a pillar outside records several architectural awards.

This morning, like every morning, the building sucks up over nine hundred people between seven and nine-thirty. A great river of people, and David is one of the last drops. He's late and thrusts out his hand to stop the lift. The doors close on his arm and swoosh open. He feels embarrassed in front of the two men inside, and looks down, the hurt arm bent behind his back, braced by the other. The two men take no notice of him.

"So the upshot is that it's a choice between installing the system for the three months, or getting in twenty temps to do it."

"How long will the temps take?"

"Three months."

"What's the price difference?"

"Same price."

"Go with the system."

"In the final analysis ..."

David swipes his identity card and gets out on the thirty-eighth. He logs on then calls the bank to check if his pay went in.

"That better not be a personal call David."

He shakes his head, pretends there's no answer and puts the phone down. His pay hasn't gone in. The message pad on his desk says "Smile when answering telephone". He sits and hits keys on the computer whenever the supervisor looks his way.

As he sits there he stamps a pad of post-it notes. He stamps the left hand corner of each one in exactly the same place, until he can flip them quickly, like a dealer with cards, and the image remains static. When he has finished, he takes the pad into the bathroom. Inside a cubicle, he sheds his clothes and stands naked. One by one, he peels off the squares of paper, and sticks them to his body. He overlaps them, and they curl up slightly, strange yellow feathers around his ears, through his hair, on the soles of his feet. He checks in the bathroom mirror, and fixes up a few spots he missed.

He feels light, and glides back into the office. People look up from their work stations. He lifts his arms and rises slowly to the ceiling, then, getting used to it, begins to move around. He flies into the lobby, swoops down to push the lift button, spins into the lift, hovering at the top, then swiftly out and through the entrance way.

He hangs above the building and can see hills in the distance. He begins to follow the silver line of the river towards them, careful not to fly too close to the sun.

Raising the University

The stairwell's empty, fluorescent pale
but the air's filled with the stink
of burning kerosene. Then thumping.
Is the Minister Against Education
burning down the University?
Somewhere downstairs I can hear
hammers from a heavy shoulder-lift
thud against walls, a high-speed
masonry drill clattering like brackets
around a high-pitched snarl.

She's here! She's here! The anvil-minded
Vanstone smashing walls: "Why should
taxpayers fork out for young people's study
who'll just get jobs that're better than theirs?"
The syncopations of the hammers thump:
BANKrupt! BANKrupt!
In my office I try to write stop-start
my right hand mediating head and pulse
but the line of shiver from the drill
gets inside me, trawls the ink.
The room below's an Id.

I go back down the stairwell.
The room's so undone the ceiling's burst
a downpour of cables over the men,
dust swirls as one of them kicks
plaster chunks like sheets of ice
across the floor. Two more shoulder
hammers like heart-lift, the blows dividing time
like Taiko drummers drumming where
nothing falls down except the heavens.
The three men move like clouds.

All-week news: "raise Titanic": the film, the ship
raised like an actor from her fabulous rest
her flooded glitz. These wires pour down
like water rushing out of one cabin
into the next, the first one filling with light.
The resurrection's steep! It's Thatcher's ice!
This government as cold as the Atlantic.
Then the bang as the inner wall falls down
(the iceberg!) and the men walk over it
like floodlights over the foc'sle, the beams
like pale thighs, the cable snapping, the dream
sinking down again like a 20s period film
each frame spilling debt.

I climb the stairs, hear an academic saying
"Ah, you mean cognisant!" to a room of students.
Well, only sometimes. I look into
the wrecked insides of a filing cabinet,
then over through the window at the rain
pouring down like fresh cement.

Philip Salom

The god of naughty children

Spring in the park.
Children clomp up the plastic steps
to the twirling orange slippery dip

while a woman holds her anxiety
in a trembling styrofoam cup.
As the swing creaks she sips & stares

while behind the filling sails of her dress
the god of naughty children
puffs out his fat little cheeks & blows.

An old elm shakes & the air sparkles.
Soft gold husks shower the air & the pollen
rises & floats away with its living cargo
of invisible hope.

A little girl in a blue dress
holds out a hand as the mischievous wind
plays with her fine brown hair
& riffles it aside

& a flake of gold sticks to her finger.
She howls to deny that she is chosen.

Her mother turns & the fleshy pods of her arm shiver
as she scuffs through the storm of gold
in flat brown shoes

& thinks about the wonder
on the little girl's finger with some regret.
It is terrible to remember what it is to be small,
& to be appalled by a trick of light.

With a swift motion of her finger she wipes it away.
The god of naughty children draws in breath & whispers
& the polystyrene cup drops & rolls along the grass.

The little girl laughs & reaches up.

It is a lie! Don't believe him! Calls her mother
although she believes it herself,
& her daughter can not listen.

rae desmond jones

fiction

Friday At The Pool

Jane Downing

SHE SAT BRIEFLY ON THE EDGE of the pool before plunging into the biting cold. Stella's body adjusted quickly to the temperature as she pounded up and down, the pounding of her heart filling her head, obliterating the rest of the world. Until she had to stop to catch her breath.

Friday mornings were quiet at the Sports and Leisure Centre. Before-work adrenalin addicts had left for the office, school kids were safely in their classrooms, and families were only readying for another weekend of sport, and a little leisure – leaving Friday for the outsiders, let into the edge on this quiet morning at the end of the week.

Over on one side splashed the water aerobics class with goodness knew what goal in mind. The chicken necks and crepe underarms of the old women were not ever going to get back into shape. Bodies collapsed after years of lifting children, hanging washing, town chores, country chores, played at the fitness game, tilting at windmills, and not taking it very seriously. One able-bodied woman strutted up and down the side of the pool shouting – left arm, right arm, kick, higher, come on girls, higher – knowing her body admired in its high-cut swimsuit, bum tight, calves, as the old women would say, well-turned, breasts heading due east. More admired here than it would be in the pub that night amongst her age peers.

Yes, and the 'girls', went on Stella bitterly in her thoughts, despite doctor's orders – why else would they be there? – worked up no sweat. To the strains of

'Let's Get Physical' they did nothing of the sort. Their blue-rinse perms and careful face powder remained dry throughout. Their bags of cellulite were let hang out, suspended and supported by the water. They ignored their collective age and shared winks with each other.

Stella pushed off from the side. The next few laps were at a slower pace, though Stella still pushed herself, wanting to be gone before the class from the special school arrived. They also came regularly on Friday mornings for therapy, and would never learn the social niceties of not staring, pointing, commenting aloud. Of ignoring the outsider.

Keeping to her lane she ploughed up and down, as she had on the tractor up and down the paddocks. She swam, caught in a furrow of old thoughts that dug deeper and deeper into the soil, no new ideas, seeds of hope, planted, no blessed rain coming to transform the landscape of her memory.

Rain beat down steadily enough on the reinforced perspex roof above. The drought had broken while she was in hospital. For years they'd prayed for rain, and now it brought no jubilation. Just as well the dam was empty, her Dad had tried to console, or you could've drowned too. That the tractor wouldn't have overturned on the dry, crumbling edge of the dam if there'd been moisture to hold the land together she didn't say, well not to her Dad. Because down the four-tonne machine tumbled when she ventured too close to the edge, preparing the field for the promising

clouds, intent on every inch to make up for the months of barren despair. Down Stella went, realizing the danger, heaving herself clear, almost clear.

She turned on her back for the next lap. Arms propelled her, great waterwheels scooping up the pool, dragging her weight to the other end. The clouds above were beginning to look less threatening. The day might clear to a sunshine afternoon sitting in the garden of the hostel. But she'd have to leave there one day soon, they all would when it closed. They'd be kindly sent home. Though what earthly good she'd be back on the farm no-one could tell her.

Left arm over her head, right arm, strong arms, even stronger now. She'd tried to pull herself out from under, to lift her face from the mud which cracked into shapes like the soles of a generation's work boots. She didn't give up for the three hours it took for Mum to get worried and come looking. Only then did the pain come, only when someone else had taken on her survival. And Mum had only cried when Stella was lifted into the helicopter, her survival a thing for the city.

Every Henty Field Day as a teenager Stella had nagged to go up in the helicopter. The machinery – the tractors and graders and big cultivators – the sheep-dog trials and the calls to ostrich farming, the thousands of isolated folk wandering together down roads of produce and ideas, looked like a festival from amongst it all – how magnificent and surreal it would look from above. But they could never afford the ride and when she was finally in a helicopter all she wanted was the noise to go, the rotary blades to stop cutting her in two.

Exhausted, heart tired, she stopped. Just one more lap to get her back where she started. The aerobics class was over and the old women had gone; the water surface stilled as she regained her breath ready to go on. She could see clear to the bottom; she was not swimming above a bottomless pit like in her dreams.

Stella reached her arms forward, the only movement on the surface her movement, strong and slow, pushing the broken water behind her, pulling forward,

breathing steadily, pulling forward again, up the pool, giving the illusion she was going somewhere.

How far could she go in a straight line if she didn't have to turn round and go back over the same ground?

HE WAS ABOUT LEVEL with the clock halfway up the pool when the tranquility of the moment crumbled into dust. The class arrived early by the clock, surging past the potted palms and across the tiles: moon-faced girls, hunchbacked girls, obese boys, stick boys, callipers and braces unbuckled, yellow skin released by tired slow-moving carers, infinitely patient, moving to the rhythm of their charges' lives, never meeting their eyes. A limp rag of a girl manoeuvred her crutches to park directly beside Stella's, slumped onto the edge, then pushed herself in, bobbing, made almost whole by the gentle pressure of sympathetic water.

Stella swore aloud. Now she'd have to make her way through them, the halt, the lame, the maimed, to get to the steps and out. They would not look away at the first horror. They'd stare at the stump of her leg, the angry scar inches wide. They'd watch with unveiled eyes her panting efforts to lever this bag of flesh out of the pool and up onto its single hopeless appendage.

She swam closer – It's her, it's her – she imagined she heard with the paranoia of the different.

Closer still she did hear – It is her, she's here again.

– You say it – whispered the palsy child to the biggest boy, as she moved through the class.

– No you say it – he shot back, snake-wiggling his limbs away from the steps.

– You, you – they fought amongst themselves, eager, afraid.

– Maybe mermaids don't speak Australian – suggested one as Stella reached the side, as the moment was almost lost.

Stella grasped the metal rail of the steps – Maybe they do – she heard herself reply.

Social Justice in Education

IN THE MOST RECENT PERIOD of Australian history, discussions of almost all public issues have been dominated by the agenda of the New Right. With the triumph of 'the market' – often a euphemism for the wealthy, but sometimes an agenda for remaking institutions – the public sector is scaled down, the common interest is discredited, and the restraints on private and corporate greed, competition and hatred are loosened.

There was no way that education could be insulated from the market agenda, or from the power of the groups promoting it. A major change in the strategy of the Australian ruling class has occurred, itself part of a massive, global restructuring of capitalism. Accordingly, questions of justice in education have been sidelined as policymakers have set about bolstering the private school system, privatizing public institutions such as universities, and doing their best to increase rivalry and authoritarianism in what is left of the public system.

Yet there are signs internationally that the mad marketeers are losing their dominance of public debate. The hardline Republican hegemony in the US Congress has crumbled. The 'Third Way' proposed in Europe by Schroeder and Blair may be a pretty tepid alternative, but it has gained popular support. Even the neo-liberal hardliners of the IMF are softening their stance on 'restructuring' packages in the developing world.

So it is timely to start thinking about educational agendas beyond the market agenda. In that work, I would suggest, questions of justice must have a central place – partly because the growing injustice of market society is what will drive public debate beyond it. And if that is going to happen, we need to think carefully about the meaning of justice in education, and the strategies through which it can be realized.

The following text is an attempt to formulate a useable concept of social justice in education. First written for the remarkable Canadian magazine *Our Schools*,

Ourselves, it draws mainly on the experience of Australian schools in the period (roughly from *Schools in Australia* in the early 1970s, to the 'social justice' statements of Labor governments in the early 1990s) when questions of justice were prominent on the educational agenda, but the means of resolving them were limited. The issues of educational philosophy and strategy raised by projects such as the Disadvantaged Schools Program were not solved by the market agenda, they were simply repressed. It is time we pursued them vigorously again.

Why does this issue matter?

To many people, questions about education and questions about social justice belong in separate baskets. Education concerns schools, colleges and universities, whose business is to pass knowledge on to the next generation. Social justice is about income, employment, pensions or physical assets like housing. Governments have separate departments for them, and so should our minds. The schools have no business getting mixed up with welfare; their job is to teach.

It is easier to believe in this separation if you are yourself well-paid and well-educated. People who are poor and who have been ill-educated have been raising questions for a long time about the connection: about who the education system is actually serving, and why it seems closed or indifferent to the likes of them. There are, it seems to me, three key reasons why the issue of social justice matters for everyone connected with the school system – teachers, parents, pupils and administrators alike.

(1) The education system is a major public asset. It is one of the largest industries in any modern economy; it is one of the largest public undertakings. In many communities, especially working-class communities, the

public schools are the largest institutions around, and the most important centres of neighbourhood activity.

Teachers, harassed with demands and fighting budget cuts, and seeing little immediate return from much of their work (since education is a slow, long-term process) easily forget this. But schools *are* major social institutions, they have weight in the world. It is not just election-year rhetoric to say that it does matter to society as a whole how schools work, and how well they work.

Given the scale of this public asset, who gets its benefits is a serious question. And there is an immediate reason for asking about social justice. Educational institutions themselves have a shape that shows an unequal distribution of benefits. Western-style education systems have a pyramid shape. As you get closer to the top of the system, fewer and fewer people are there to get the benefits. The pyramid narrows sooner in poor countries, where most people are lucky to get a full elementary education. In the richest countries, the institutional narrowing is most noticeable at the tertiary level. Thus if we look at education on a world scale, there is a pyramid of pyramids.

Some idea of the scale of this inequality is given by adding up the public costs of educating young people who leave the system at different levels. An Australian comparison showed the (current-dollar) public expenditure on the schooling of a youth who left high school after year 9 to be \$33,600, while the amount spent on an age-mate who left after a four-year chemistry degree was \$79,800.¹ These are only indicative figures, but they do point to the order of magnitude involved.

Who gets to the upper levels of the pyramid? Social researchers have compiled abundant evidence about this, documenting how retention rates in secondary schooling, access to higher education, or other educational 'outcomes,' differ between social classes, regions, ethnic groups. The contours vary from place to place, and from time to time, but the underlying fact remains, there is massive evidence of inequalities in chances of benefiting from the upper levels of education, depending on social background.²

Despite the great expansion of the education system in the last two generations, the results have been lopsided in terms of social access. It is common for children from the most advantaged groups to show two to four times the rate of entry to higher education than children of least advantaged groups have. The position for particular minorities, such as Australian Aboriginal children, is worse.

(2) Not only is the education system a major public asset now – it is likely to become more important in future.

Many economic and social commentators have argued that education is becoming more important as an asset in the late twentieth century. Organized knowledge has certainly become a more important component of the production system. Information industries, based on the education system and its capacities for research and training, are now key determinants of economic growth or decline.

So it is not accidental that we hear so much talk at present about the economic uses of education: labour productivity, skills formation, support for advanced technology. But the point is broader than simply technical education. More and more jobs in all kinds of fields have become credentialed. It is a long time since you could become a doctor without having a medical degree, and that 'professional' model is spreading. As new degree programs multiply in human kinetics, leisure studies, business administration, etc., it becomes more and more difficult to get a job as a sports coach, camp administrator, company manager, etc., without the corresponding degree. The education system becomes more and more important as a gatekeeper.

The education system, then, not only distributes current social assets. It also shapes the kind of society that is coming into being. Whether our future society is a just one depends, in part, on the use we make of the education system now.

(3) My third point is about what it is to *educate*. Teaching has been described as a 'moral trade', and I think this is profoundly true. Teaching and learning, as social practices, *always* involve questions about purposes and criteria for action (whether those purposes are shared or not), about the application of resources (including authority and knowledge), and about responsibility and the consequences of action.

These issues cannot be evaded. If you try to dodge them by going into value-neutral technocratic mode and teaching only 'information' (an attitude common, for instance, in natural science and mathematics teaching), then by *default* you are teaching lessons of moral indifference and lack of responsibility. (These are chickens that come home to roost in high-tech environmental disasters.)

The moral quality of education is inevitably affected by the moral character of educational institutions. If the school system is dealing unjustly with some of its

pupils, they are not the only ones to suffer. *The quality of education for all the others is degraded.*

I would like to shout this from the rooftops every time I hear another argument for 'gifted and talented' programs, for tougher 'standards' and stricter selection, for streaming or tracking, for merit awards and opportunity schools and honours programs – in short, for any of the hundred and one affronts to equal provision of education. An education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education, even as it gives him or her a social or economic advantage.

The issue of social justice is not an add-on. It is fundamental to what good education is about.

The meaning of justice in education

Questions about 'education and justice' are certainly not new. In the western philosophical tradition the first great treatise on education, Plato's *Republic*, was also the first great treatise on justice. In neo-Confucian China, the legitimacy of the scholar-official system of government flowed from open selection to the elite by literary exams.

But we would hardly rest our current ideal of education on elite concepts like Plato's guardians or Confucian mandarins. In modern discussions the issue of 'education and justice' has been framed another way. Debates centre on the service provided to the whole population by a mass education system, and are posed as questions of distributive justice.

Questions of 'distributive justice' are questions about who gets what – particularly, who gets how much of some social good. As the philosopher Michael Walzer shows, distributive questions can be raised about a whole series of 'social goods': money, welfare, office, leisure, love, grace, recognition – and education.³

In what follows, I use the term 'justice' in the sense of Walzer and of John Rawls' famous book *A Theory of Justice*, as a question of fairness in distribution for which the normal criterion is equality.⁴ There is another common usage of 'justice' that refers to getting what one deserves – for instance in 'criminal justice', or 'wage justice'. For the case of social justice in education, the two usages converge. 'Deserts' of individuals may differ markedly, as the criminal law presumes. But it is difficult to see how a whole social group can *deserve* either more or less education than another social group; so this conception too points to equality.

But there is a risk, in emphasizing equality in distri-

bution, that it will be seen only as a matter of individual rights. So we should take note of the other tradition of thought about justice, descending from Plato, that emphasizes balance and harmony in the social life we all share. Individual equality is the condition, not the goal, of a just *social order*. The quality of our collective life is central to the argument. Over seventy years ago L.T. Hobhouse (the first professor of sociology in England) put it clearly in a book called *The Elements of Social Justice*: "Acts and institutions are good not because they suit a majority, but because they make the nearest possible approach to a good shared by every single person whom they affect".⁵

Over the last 150 years or so, in western and western-influenced societies, questions of justice in education have mainly been about access to formal schooling and certification. The 150-year span is, roughly, the life span of state-funded, bureaucratically-controlled mass elementary school systems. Mass elementary schooling has everywhere coexisted with a much more selective (sometimes private) provision of secondary and higher education.

Out of this history came two great questions of distributive justice. The first was about providing elementary education for the whole population. This issue is now settled in countries like Canada and Australia, far from settled in countries like India.

The second was about fair access to the selective upper levels of formal education. Secondary schooling was the focus of this issue in industrialized countries for most of this century. Now higher education increasingly is the focus. We see debates hotting up about university enrolments and overall funding – that is, about how much access there shall be. We see debates about university fees and rich students buying university places – that is, about who shall have access.

These distributive questions underlie the two great enterprises in educational justice that have been undertaken in the last generation. On a world scale, justice is pursued by the creation of universal elementary school systems, and by campaigns for universal literacy, in poor countries. This broadens the base of the educational pyramid. In affluent countries like the United States, Britain and Australia, attempts are made to establish 'equal opportunity' in education via scholarships, compensatory education, desegregation, affirmative action, Assisted Places schemes, etc.

Broadly, both of these enterprises take the content and form of education for granted. The 'social good' they seek to distribute is the educational service pro-

vided by bureaucratically-controlled mass schooling systems, of the type created in Europe and North America in the mid nineteenth century.

The debates about *justice* are about who gets how much of this service (as measured, for instance, by that staple variable in survey research, 'years of education'). Compensatory and equal opportunity programs are essentially designed to make sure it is more widely delivered. *What* the service is, is debated in a separate theatre altogether – the theatre of curriculum theory, teaching method and the psychology of learning.

This split is revealed when education authorities make explicit statements about their efforts on behalf of the disadvantaged. In the late 1980s the Australian Labor Party, faced with an increasingly disillusioned rank-and-file, tried to formulate a 'social justice' policy. Education was included in the resulting policy statements, which are among the clearest recent formulations of the issue of justice in western education policy.⁶

A careful look at these documents shows that they remain within the distributive framework.

Here, for instance, is the 'overall objective' of equity policy in higher education as formulated in *A Fair Chance For All*, issued in 1990:

To ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education. This will be achieved by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole.⁷

Such statements raise scarcely any questions about what *kind* of education is being provided. That is taken for granted. The issue they address is who gets how much of the familiar product.

The underlying weakness of this approach to educational justice is its indifference to the nature of education itself. For education is a social process in which the 'how much' cannot be separated from the 'what'. There is an inescapable link between distribution and content.

I learnt about the connection between content and distribution during the collaborative research for *Making the Difference*.⁸ Starting from the idea that the unequal distribution of education between social classes had to do with differences between working-class and ruling-class families, we found this was so only because they had different relationships with a particular kind of curriculum. The hegemonic curriculum in Australian high schools has a class history embedded in it, and has always operated to include and

exclude students on class lines.

Broadly similar conclusions have been widespread in the sociology of education over the last two or three decades. Researchers in France, the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia all found the relationship between school knowledge and the production of social inequality to be a key issue.⁹

A crucial policy conclusion follows. Justice cannot be achieved by distributing the same amount of a standard good to children of all social classes. Education is a process operating through relationships, which *cannot* be neutralized or obliterated to allow equal distribution of the social good at their core. That 'good' means different things to ruling-class and working-class children, and will do different things for them (or to them).

This requires us to re-think the issue of justice in education *around the issue of curriculum*. Questions of distributive justice remain important; nothing I have said up to this point needs to be retracted. But distributive justice is an *incomplete* way of understanding educational issues. We need another kind of concept, which I will call *curricular justice*.

Three principles of curricular justice

I suggest three principles, taken together, might constitute a workable model of curricular justice.

(1) *The interests of the least advantaged*. One of the key concepts in the philosophers' discussions of the nature of justice is caring for the worst-off first. John Rawls proposes that education must specifically serve the interests of the 'least favoured' groups in society. The principle of advantaging the least advantaged is central in Rawls' general theory, and captures what is usually meant in public politics by talk of 'social justice', even in the limited sense of social justice policy statements.

The 'standpoint of the least advantaged' means, concretely, that we think through economic issues from the standpoint of the poor, not of the rich. We think through gender arrangements from the standpoint of women. We think through race relations and land questions from the standpoint of indigenous people. We think through questions of sexuality from the standpoint of gay people. And so on.

I would argue that this is not only a matter of social justice. It is also likely to be a source of enormous enrichment for the experience and knowledge of the advantaged groups, in all the cases that I have mentioned. But this is not to say that taking this standpoint

is easy for advantaged groups. Justice is not a question of ease and it is the opposite of anaesthesia. At the best of times it is likely to mean trouble. But as Michael Walzer argues, such a conception of justice is a practical one, it is about justice 'here and now'.¹⁰

This principle has strong implications for curriculum, which become clear when we think about the social history of curriculum and the way the current hegemonic curriculum embodies the interests of the *most* advantaged. Justice requires a *counter*-hegemonic curriculum, designed to embody the interests and perspectives of the least advantaged.

What this means in practice is being worked out by teachers in a variety of settings: compensatory education programs, multicultural education, programs for girls, indigenous people's education, certain adult literacy programs. Here I will make two general points about this and other cases.

First, social justice is not satisfied by curriculum ghettos. Separate-and-different curricula have some attractions, but leave the currently hegemonic curriculum in place. Social justice requires moving out from the starting-point to *reconstruct the mainstream* to embody the interests of the least advantaged.

Second, social justice is not satisfied with one counter-hegemonic project. Contemporary social science recognizes, as contemporary social practice does, a number of major patterns of inequality: gender, class, race, ethnicity, and (on a world scale) region and nationality. Curricular justice requires counter-hegemonic projects across this whole spectrum. In practice there will be great diversity in what is undertaken. I am not trying to lay down a blueprint here, but to indicate the scope of the principle of curricular justice. No institutionalized pattern of social inequality is in principle exempt from it.

To recognize that knowledge can be organized differently, and that different ways of constructing it will advantage and disadvantage different groups, is to risk falling into relativism. There have been education systems where the key criterion for curriculum choice was political correctness. This was the case in the Soviet Union, and the far right in the US is doing its best to impose the same logic in that country.

It is important to avoid this, as it would abandon the element of independent truth in, for instance, scientific accounts of the world; and therefore the possibility of *critique* of the political agenda itself. (To notice that these accounts are shaped by gender and class is not to say that gender and class are their only content;

they also document an encounter of a gender- and class-shaped consciousness with the natural world.)

The principle of the interests of the least advantaged provides a clear motive for avoiding relativism, since it cannot be in their interest to continue being excluded from that knowledge of the natural world that is embodied in conventional science. A counter-hegemonic curriculum must include the generalizable part of the conventional curriculum, guaranteeing all students critical access to scientific methods and findings.

(2) *Participation and common schooling.* School systems commonly claim, in statements of goals, to be preparing future citizens for participation in a democracy.

If we take this purpose seriously – and I am not for a moment suggesting that ministers of education usually do – it has major implications for curriculum. The notion of 'democracy' implies collective decision-making on major issues in which all citizens have, in principle, an equal voice. Major issues in modern states include war and peace, investment, employment policy, urban development and environmental protection, sexual violence, social welfare provision, the content of mass communication, and the design of education systems.

To be active participants in such decision-making requires a range of knowledge and skills (including the skill of getting more knowledge). This range is required for *all* citizens, as Walzer forcefully argues. You cannot have a democracy in which some 'citizens' only *receive* decisions made by others. That is why feminists are right in pointing out that a society in which men routinely exert control over women is no democracy.¹¹

Here is the basis of a common curriculum which must be provided to all students *as a matter of social justice*. This is a much stronger criterion than the invocations of 'democracy' commonly imply. This criterion rules out all selection, competitive assessment, streaming and classifying mechanisms while the common curriculum is in operation, since such mechanisms differentiate offerings and therefore advantage some citizens over others.

It points, rather, to ungraded and cooperative learning practices in respect of the common curriculum. They should be cooperative, since all participating citizens are advantaged (as citizens of a democracy) by each others' learning. In this respect, justice would be significantly advanced by banning all grading and competitive testing during the compulsory years of schooling.

Since a necessary part of the knowledge and skills of participants in democracy is an understanding of

the cultures and interests of the other participants, this criterion also rules out curricula produced from a single socially-dominant standpoint. It points firmly towards the principle of the 'inclusive curriculum' proposed by Jean Blackburn and others in the 1980s.¹² This means curricula which include and validate the experiences of women as well as men, Aboriginal people as well as whites, workers as well as professionals.

The attempt to produce a 'diverse' or multicultural curriculum, currently resisted by conservatives with rhetoric against 'political correctness', is clearly supported by this principle.

(3) *The historical production of equality.* Tension exists between the criterion of participant citizenship, requiring common curriculum, and the principle of pursuing the interests of specific groups, the least advantaged.

This could logically be resolved by using one of Rawls' devices and introducing a 'lexical ordering' of the principles of curricular justice. Thus we might say that participation has priority, and the criterion of the least advantaged applies *after* the participation criterion is satisfied.

But this would rapidly lead to educational absurdity. It would assume the curriculum can be partitioned into 'participant citizenship' and 'counter-hegemonic' bits. In the realities of teachers' daily work in schools, such a distinction is impossible to sustain.

If a counter-hegemonic criterion is to be practically useful it must apply to the same educational processes that the participant citizenship criterion applies to, and we must find a way to think these criteria *together*. The tension between them can be handled productively by taking note of the historical character of the social structures producing inequality. Their existence is not that of objects like rocks or planets, but is a *process of producing and reproducing* social relationships.

This means that 'equality' cannot be static; it is always being *produced* in greater or lesser degrees. The social effects of curriculum must be thought of as the historical production of more (or, as the case may be, less) equality over time.

Participant citizenship and counter-hegemonic criteria can then be seen as elements in the same historical process. Dealing with the tension between them is a matter of making strategic judgements about how to advance equality. The criterion of curricular justice is the tendency of an educational strategy to produce more equality in the whole set of social relations to which the educational system is linked.

Curriculum logics

Our research on the Disadvantaged Schools Program gathered a mass of information about what is actually done by teachers, administrators and parents who are trying to meet criteria of justice in curriculum decisions. Reflecting on this evidence, I would suggest that there are three curriculum logics in actual use, each of which could be generalized into a social justice policy.

(1) *The logic of compensation.* This was central to the initial design of compensatory education programs in the 1960s and 1970s, and is still the commonest way of thinking about questions of justice in education.

By 'compensatory' logic I mean the principle being followed when extra resources are added to the schools serving communities of disadvantaged people. The idea is to bring the disadvantaged to the same table at which the advantaged are already eating.

A concrete example is where school systems go out and buy more computers for schools serving disadvantaged communities. This is a resource issue, of course, but also affects the curriculum.

(2) *The logic of oppositional curriculum.* This is the approach that flatly rejects the mainstream curriculum. Its supporters say that you don't try to bring the poor to the same table as the rich because that table itself is not level, and the poor cannot get a fair feed at it. The mainstream must be rejected because it is producing the unequal outcomes.

Instead, the principle is to separate out an area of educational practice in which a separate curriculum can be developed, over which the disadvantaged have control. Then they can get the kind of education that fits their needs specifically.

In a limited sense, that logic could be found in technical schools in earlier periods of educational history. There was a system of technical schools, mainly serving working-class youth, and tied in to apprenticeship schemes influenced or even controlled by unions. At its best, this could produce an educational ethos which built on working-class experience and ideas about learning.

This was always severely limited, however. It was focused on boys, and substantially excluded girls; 'domestic science' schools were doubly marginalized. Technical education was always subordinated to academic education in the school system as a whole.

A more vigorous 'oppositional' logic was created, in the early part of the century, in the form of Labour

Colleges. They were educational institutions set up, not by the state, but by the trade union movement. They tried to develop a curriculum which grew out of the collective experience of working-class people as embodied in the unions. They faded out after a generation or so, but the story is worth recalling. It suggests the kind of educational creativity to be found in working-class organizations which are not normally thought of as an educational resource.¹³

More recently, oppositional curriculum logic is represented in areas like Black Studies, Women's Studies and Aboriginal Studies in the universities and colleges. Again, a part of the curriculum is separated out. Named courses deliberately set out to embody the point of view of the named group in the design of curriculum. This is not meant to be a top-down, 'we'll study them' kind of exercise, but a collectively produced body of knowledge by a group reflecting on their own experience and history.

The debates about Women's Studies programs in the last two decades highlight the problems of setting up a curriculum enclave. On the one hand, this risks abandoning the rest of the curriculum to the social forces that the movement was setting out to challenge. It lets academics off the hook, in terms of the content of other courses: 'We don't need to put women into History 101, that's taken care of in Women's Studies ...' On the other hand, it creates a serious status-and-resources problem for the enclave, which is likely to be defined as very low on the academic status ladder and therefore starved of resources – a common experience in fact for Women's Studies programs. That sets up pressure to make Women's Studies more academically respectable, more theoretical or more technical – which also has happened in practice. And that moves it away from the political purpose for which it was set up in the first place.¹⁴

(3) *Counter-hegemonic curriculum logic.* (My apologies for the jargon.) This approach attempts to *generalize* the point of view of the disadvantaged rather than separate it off. There is an attempt to generalize an egalitarian notion of the good society across the mainstream. That remains the basis for curriculum thinking as reform moves out from the standpoint of the disadvantaged to reconstruct the system as a whole.

Let me give an illustration from the history of computing. The Apple and Apple II were the first widely popular small computers. It is not widely known that the design of these machines had a political motive.

A group of progressive people in the American computer industry, influenced by the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s, were critical of the domination of information technology by mainframe computers, by big business users, and by the enormous monopoly company IBM. They argued that information technology ought to be democratized, and set about trying to design a kind of computing that would be widely accessible. In the late 1970s and early 1980s they achieved spectacular, if qualified, success.¹⁵

Counter-hegemonic strategies are known, though not often named, in school systems, both at the policy making level and at the level of school practice. An interesting example comes from the work of the Australian Schools Commission in 1985. Among the goals proposed for the Disadvantaged Schools Program (then administered by the Schools Commission) was the idea of ensuring that students have systematic access to programs which will equip them with economic and political understanding so that they can act individually or together to improve their circumstances.¹⁶

That got watered down in translation into the actual program guidelines; but at least in its initial formulation, the goal was a counter-hegemonic one in the sense I mean here.

An example from higher education is the sociology curriculum at Macquarie University, where I worked for a good many years. We attempted to design substantial parts of it on counter-hegemonic principles. For instance, in designing our courses on gender we tried to create a program of study which covered areas of sociology traditionally organized around other concepts (e.g. 'the family,' 'deviance'), reorganizing the curriculum in ways that gave priority to the perspectives of women and gay men. This included new material, of course, but it did not move off the terrain of the traditional discipline; rather it claimed that knowledge and attempted to reorganize it.

An example from practice in schools is the 'Hands On' computer learning package produced by a group of disadvantaged schools and a regional service centre in Sydney. This involved an approach to computer learning which emphasized not only the techniques of handling the machines but also the social implications of computers in the workplace. The package was produced in a disadvantaged setting, and used the experiences of disadvantaged kids and adults with the new technology. But it is capable of being used across the whole system – of being exported, so to speak, beyond the context of disadvantage. And this has indeed been done.

Finally, as an example of the wider development of these ideas, I will mention the 'Essential Curriculum' project. This grew out of a secondary school DSP network in Sydney. It attempted to generate a structure for curriculum as a whole, in a way that embodied the principles of social justice spelt out above. It was produced by teachers and grew out of experience in particular schools, but had the potential to be applied to a whole school system.¹⁷

These are three curriculum logics that can be developed from the starting point of social justice. They do not necessarily exclude each other. I suspect that an effective social justice program in schools would move through all of them in some way or another. There is, nevertheless, a logical development from the first to the third, in terms of scope and long-range potential.

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Barry York

'There's no good time to be arrested'

Incident on Plenty Road, Bundoora, 1972

IT'S 21 JUNE, 1972 and I'm driving along Plenty Road, Bundoora. Plenty Road is a main road connecting Melbourne's northern suburbs to the rest of the city. The northern suburbs grew beyond recognition during the 1960s and in 1964 a university was built at Bundoora. La Trobe University was, back then, regarded as one of the lesser universities, attended by lower middle-class and country kids. It was strong in the Arts and a lot of us were admitted on teacher-training studentships that bonded us to the Department of Education for a period of three years. I probably couldn't have gone to university were it not for the studentship system. Both my parents worked for wages. But it was a time of university expansion and even us migrant working-class kids were being allowed in.

Under normal circumstances, 1972 would have been the year of my graduation. Bachelor of Arts and Diploma of Education. And three years' employment at a school of the department's choice. I didn't graduate that year because I had been expelled the previous year. Expelled for three years for helping to lead a student revolt, as well as arrested on political demonstrations (more times than I care to remember) and relieved of my Education Department studentship. And now, here I was, still regularly and illegally attending La Trobe University, helping to keep the struggle alive. Still agitating against the Vietnam War, the ultimate source of the campus troubles. And driving along Plenty Road, late in the afternoon.

I knew the road well. I lived at home with my parents in Brunswick and Plenty Road had taken me there each night, five days a week, since 1969. Travelling south from the campus, on the left, there was a cemetery, followed by a sports oval, a drive-in theatre and a pub. Then came the suburb of Preston, then Coburg. And then Brunswick. A group of youngsters was playing football at the oval. My thoughts turned also to the

pub. The Summerhill Hotel was a gathering-place for the La Trobe Left but, being on the run, I'd kept away from it, and other off-campus places where I might be caught by police.

Three months earlier, the University Council had obtained an injunction from the Supreme Court, restraining expelled student leaders Fergus Robinson, Brian Pola, Rodney Taylor and myself from "entering upon the premises known as La Trobe University". We violated that injunction each time we went back to the campus to address a rally, or distribute a leaflet. We had a lot of student support and, despite having been officially excluded from the campus, had never ceased being part of its culture. Fergus and Brian had already been caught and imprisoned for violating the restraining order. So I avoided obvious places which might lead to me joining them in Pentridge.

The Supreme Court had attempted to catch me at home, at my parents' place. But it was my territory. I'd lived in Brunswick since 1955 and knew every cobblestoned laneway. My parents' house was next door to a factory and our garage was at the back of the house, which itself backed onto a dead-end street. All the neighbours on the north side of the street knew me and had watched me grow up over the decades, as I would walk to Moreland Road to catch the bus to primary school and, later, high school. Young and romantic, I believed the police could never catch me in Brunswick.

As I watched the youngsters kicking their football, I felt a car overtaking on my right. I slowed down. And it slowed down. I looked to my right and saw a carload of men. One, in the driver's passenger seat, held up a white sign, with red letters, declaring: "POLICE". My first thought was to escape. There were only two suburbs between me and them and Brunswick. But there were also traffic lights. And innocent pedestrians. And besides, I only drove a Morris 1500.

The policeman holding the sign waved me over and I parked at the kerb, next to the oval. I looked in the rear-vision mirror and noticed two other unmarked police cars pulling up behind me. The kids dropped their football and came running over to the oval fence. Several police came out of their cars; the main man waving a pair of handcuffs. I was shoved up against the side of my car, hands behind back, and 'cuffs applied. It was all too quick to induce any fear. I just kept thinking of the TV show 'Homicide' and how accurately Leonard Teale and the other actors portrayed the plain-clothed police. And I felt a strange embarrassment that it was all happening in front of young kids. I wanted to explain to them that I wasn't a common criminal. My crime was 'contempt of court', arising in an unfortunately complicated way from my involvement in the Vietnam protest movement. A short, thin, chap – whose body language marked him apart from the police – stood before me and read a statement from the Supreme Court. It was a Writ of Attachment, informing me that I had violated a court restraining order by entering "the premises known as La Trobe University" and, as a result, I would be lodged in Her Majesty's prison, Pentridge, until such time as I purged my contempt.

The police bundled me into a car and we headed along Plenty Road to Pentridge, Coburg. Along the way, the main detective indicated his personal dislike for me, and for what I represented, by tightening the cuffs. I asked for the pressure to be released, which resulted in more pressure being applied. This pettiness represented real animus – as well as pain – and sometimes took more acute forms in police cells. The main cop relished telling me "Your own mates put you in". As we turned right into Murray Road, ten minutes from the Bluestone College, various thoughts came to mind. Was he just trying to sow seeds of suspicion and disunity among the comrades? Or, had someone dobbed me in?

There had been very suspicious circumstances involving a particular individual, whom I shall call 'Sam'. Sam had been with me for three or four hours prior to my arrest and, shortly before I left the campus, had gone off to make a phone call. He had asked me for a lift and so could be reasonably sure of my intended departure time. My arrest involved the mobilization of three police cars, plus the Sheriff of the Supreme Court of Victoria. They must have been prepared beforehand and been confident of the moment I would be leaving the campus. My belief is that Sam co-operated with

them to secure my capture and that an unmarked car had been positioned at each of the campus exits.

The La Trobe left was full of intriguing characters – everything the lower middle class could throw up. There were serious revolutionaries, identifiable by their personal earnestness. There were anarchists, Trotskyites, CPA revisionists, Christians and social democrats. And there were rebels-without-a-cause, eccentrics, freaks and plain old nut cases. I never regarded Sam as a serious revolutionary. He personally established a 'security committee' in one of our organizations – the Worker-Student Alliance – and became known for his cigarette-case which converted into a pair of miniature binoculars. Ted Hill, the chairman of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), or Maoist party as it was known, warned us to beware of individuals who were obsessive about security matters as, he said, they very often had turned out to be police agents in the past.

So, there I was: heading for Pentridge in an unmarked police car, with the head detective teasing me about how my 'own people' had given me up. The nearer we came to Pentridge, the more my head flooded with thoughts. What would happen to my car? Would I be booked for leaving it on busy Plenty Road? How would I let my parents know I wouldn't be home for dinner? Would the police give me a hiding? Ditto the warders at Pentridge? Would they cut my hair? And what of Wendy, the amazing young college resident with whom I was dangerously infatuated?

There's no such thing as a good time to be arrested under Writ of Attachment and lodged in prison for an indeterminate period without trial or rights of bail or appeal. But for me personally, this was probably the worst possible time. And all because of Wendy. Or rather, because of my immature devotion to her.

Wendy is not her real name. And neither is Jack the real name of her boyfriend. I first met Wendy during an occupation of the La Trobe administration building in 1971. It was part of the campaign that resulted in my exclusion from the university: a campaign to force the resignation of the Chancellor, Sir Archibald Glenn. Sir Archibald was managing director of Imperial Chemical Industries (ANZ) and on the board of directors of the parent company in England. ICI had been involved in the munitions industry in South Africa and ICI (ANZ) had a contract with the Department of Defence. Opposition to apartheid in South Africa was second to opposition to the Vietnam War as a rallying issue in 1971 and 1972. Glenn's chancellorship was seen as evidence of

how the universities in capitalist societies served the capitalist class rather than the needs of the majority of people. We called him a “merchant of death”. We wanted – and achieved – his resignation. And I met Wendy.

Wendy was the type of chick Sonny Boy Williamson had in mind when he sang:

*You've been talkin' 'bout your woman,
let me tell you 'bout mine,
Every time that girl starts a-lovin'
she brings eyesight to the blind.*

In a parallel universe, I handled it right. Saw it as a blessing. Made the most of the pink hue in her college room at night. And the perfume and the incense. And the stars and big gum tree outside her window. In that parallel universe, I had the maturity to understand the sexual mores of early 1970s college life, and the self-esteem to cope with them. In reality, however, I blew the whole thing. Turned it into a nightmare for Wendy and me, and for anyone who came near it. Jack occupied the ‘main man’ position and I was obsessively jealous. There was immaturity and insecurity on all sides and it culminated, or so I thought, in Jack threatening to do me in to the police and me knocking him out in the college car park. I had, ridiculously, put enormous pressure on Wendy to say she loved me. And as the car headed for Pentridge, I hoped that somehow my imprisonment would achieve the impossible and bring us together.

I’m sure that in all the histories written about political movements and struggles, there are hidden, secret, volumes to be written about the personal relationships that influenced the main actors. These relationships probably don’t feature because they are set in motels and bedrooms – outside the sites of the main struggle. My six weeks in Pentridge was a time of acute depression and anxiety because of an unresolved affair of the heart on the outside rather than because of poor conditions or political oppression on the inside.

Wendy was my first prison visitor. She told me what I desperately wanted to hear and she sent me a couple of love letters. Visits were every fortnight, but physical contact was not possible. Huge bluestone walls kept me apart from home – just down the road – and Wendy, up at La Trobe. I used to joke with other prisoners in ‘A’ Division (the section for long-termers and first offenders) that I could smell my mother’s home-cooking wafting up from Brunswick. As for Wendy, I used to mope a lot, especially after lock-up time, when

I would plunge into a deep state of depression. My strong gut feeling was that she felt sorry for me and was only acting out of a sense of duty to keep my morale high, and that really she was still with Jack. I’d call it paranoia, only it all proved to be true.

In Pentridge, I had the worst nightmares of my life. They were always set in confined, claustrophobic, environments. And they always involved Wendy and Jack, with Wendy being tantalizingly nearby – but always out of reach. The regularity of these nightmares represented quite a pressure on me to apologize to the Supreme Court for my contempt. I was desperate to be on the outside, where I could at least deal with my relationship with Wendy. It, rather than the struggle, was the central issue on my mind throughout my time in Pentridge. Purging one’s contempt, or apologizing, was supposedly the only way in which any of us could be released. But neither Fergus, Brian nor myself ever seriously considered apologizing. In the end we were released because the University Council, which had been responsible for our imprisonment in the first place, applied for the lifting of the injunction. The Council decided that we had been punished enough and probably realized that the radical student movement was entering a decline anyway. There had been some effective protest activity on our behalf by university students, civil libertarians and some trade unions. Amnesty International also became interested in our case. We had, after all, been gaoled without trial or rights of appeal. And there was no sentence: we were in indefinitely. The Vice-Chancellor, Dr Myers, approached the Supreme Court, on behalf of the University Council, for our release. To this day, we have not purged our contempt or apologized.

When it became clear that Fergus, Brian and myself would be released, Wendy sent me a letter, which reached me at the start of August, saying that she didn’t want any relationship with me once I was out of gaol. We were duly set free on 4 August. Fergus had done four months, Brian three months and I did six weeks. Rod Taylor was never captured. Oh lucky man.

We were released on a Friday afternoon and greeted back on the campus by a rally in the university’s Agora. Newspaper photographers were keen to set us up drinking from bottles of beer but I refused, partly because I wasn’t a big drinker and partly because I felt it would convey an inappropriate image. The billboard of the Melbourne *Herald* that evening read: “La Trobe students freed” and we were front-page news.

I should have been happy to be released and back on campus but I was obsessed with Wendy and Jack. When I saw them walking hand-in-hand near the Agora, I went over and spat in Wendy's face. A while later, Jack came over and wanted to fight me but Doug White, a lecturer in education, intervened. It was a continuing nightmare, with some of my comrades using my disgraceful personal behaviour to score points for their particular factional viewpoints within the left.

Some weeks later, I also confronted Sam. He was outraged by my allegation – perhaps too outraged. Some of the comrades sided with him but he soon dropped out of things. The student left splintered into factions within factions and there was a terrible level of personal recrimination. Most of the former activists realized that the movement had had its day, mainly because conscription for the Vietnam War had, in practical terms, ended and Australian troops had been withdrawn. It is one of the prevailing myths of Australian political history that Australian troops were withdrawn by the Whitlam Government in December 1972. They had in fact been gradually withdrawn by Gorton and McMahon between 1970 and 1971. Ninety-nine percent of Australia's troops were back home by Christmas, 1971.

Quite a few former activists joined the Australian Labor Party and some ended up in senior positions and in parliament. Others just pushed ahead with their

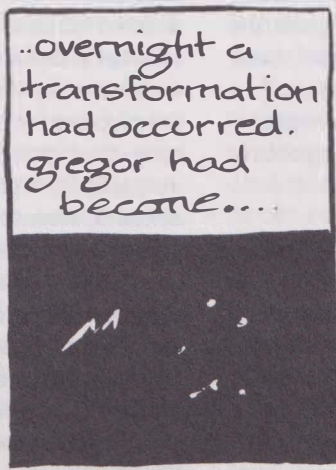
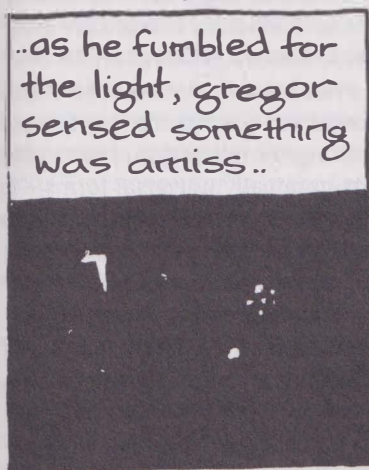
studies and/or careers, while retaining a left liberal commitment to social justice. Some eventually joined the alternative groups, such as the Rainbow Alliance, the Greens and the Democrats. Few that I know have somersaulted into the right. All have done well, thanks to the university qualifications we used to call the "entranceticket to the goodies of capitalist society". I doubt if more than a handful would describe themselves as revolutionaries in the sense that the term was used back then.

As for Wendy, I wrote her a letter fifteen years after my release from Pentridge. In the letter, I apologized for my behaviour and tried to explain why it happened. I included my phone number and wasn't sure whether I'd hear from her – or from the police! She rang back and said she was delighted to hear from me. We've been in occasional touch by letter, phone and Christmas card ever since.

When I think of Wendy, I think of places: La Trobe, the admin. building, her room in college, her parents' home in the bush where I spent a few very happy days while on the run and, of course, Pentridge and Plenty Road. I suppose 'place' becomes special because of the memories injected into it. These can be collective memories or personal ones. For me, Plenty Road will always be a very special place, particularly at that point where kids can still be seen kicking a football in an oval – between a cemetery and a pub.

overland has engaged cartoonist Ross Carsnew to create a literary cartoon serial. The first episode of 'Metamorphosis' is presented below.

metamorphosis



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Benjamin Ross

The Dirty Underpants of the Law

*While there is a lower class I am in it, while
there is a criminal element I am of it, while
there is a soul in prison, I am not free.*

Eugene Debs

I believe in illegality.

Jean-Paul Sartre

IN THE INFAMOUS *RABELAIS* CASE it all seems very easy. A case of censorship, of literary criticism with recourse to violence, the state-authorized violence that claims to adjudicate the responsibility of writing. For conservatives the banning of *Rabelais* and the charging of the editors is the defence of law-and-order and the prevention of the poisoning of young minds. For liberals these acts are an unnecessary, an excessive reaction which undermines the correct balance of rights they take to be essential to a liberal democracy and sufficient to the maintenance of order. For radicals it is a reactionary extension of the repressive powers of governments and police, in the interests of a defence of property rights above all else, which criminalizes dissent and which will be used against social movements challenging the status quo when conservative forces feel they can get away with it.

Whilst, perhaps unsurprisingly, my sympathies lie with the last view, here I would like to explore the significance of this case slightly differently, as a manifestation of tensions within liberal democracy. In a necessarily provisional and schematic way I will propose a few theses on what might be called the politico-legal context.

Common sense

A politics is seeking to define itself as the mainstream, as the common sense of the 'Australian community', the everyday philosophy of the obvious. This is not new, and even, in the politics of the Howard government, has seemed to draw strength from taking seriously as history what is remembered nostalgically as

the comforting clichés of Menzies-era conservative discourse. By recalling the discourse once articulated allegedly on behalf of the 'forgotten people', some conservatives seek to encourage amnesia, the forgetting of those who are not included in 'all of us'. Nonetheless, this politics, as I view it, extends beyond these confines, which is precisely the goal, the project of presenting an image apparently beyond or prior to 'politics' in which we are invited to see ourselves.

This politics insists – implicitly by preference but explicitly when necessary – on the illegitimacy of any radical questioning of that which is labelled 'democracy'. 'Democracy' is the name of the legitimate by definition, defined through procedural reductionism: periodic elections with universal suffrage, parliament, formal representation. Since 'liberal democratic' processes are legitimate in themselves and by definition adequate to society, none of those facts of society deemed external to the democratic essence are even relevant and changes to these facts cannot reflect back on democracy. Since this mainstream seeks to efface the propriety or necessity of questioning this democracy – its origins, meaning, the imposition of particular interests through its nominally universal forms – it demands assent to the result of democratic procedure: public policy, the law. With this compulsory assent as a given, a not-to-be-examined concept of 'criminality' can thus be deployed in an attempt to appeal to the perceived interests of that section of the population who quantify their security in terms of guns, batons, arrests, private security and gaol cells, for whom the meaning of peace is passivity in the face of exploitation and the absence of resistance to oppression.

This politics, seeking continually to impose itself as the legitimate, as the mainstream and the reasonable, must never allow this view of its own legitimacy to be viewed in its historicity. The violent process of colonialism and the undemocratic (even on its own terms) constitution of the federal Constitution must be viewed as external contingencies of history which cannot result in an analysis of the internal consistency and rightness of the present order.

The Australian community

*Tolerance is not the opposite of intolerance:
it is its counterfeit.*

Thomas Paine

In the politics I am discussing, 'Australianness' is given a more than geographic definition which nonetheless, in its dominant articulation, falls short of defining nationality simply in terms of race. The discourse of Australian patriotism has significantly developed since 1905, when the ALP could include as one of its "objectives" the "cultivation of an Australian sentiment based upon the maintenance of racial purity". Rather, Australianness is de facto defined by assent to the status quo as *fait accompli*.

Racism is the secret of mainstream Australian nationalism as class violence is the dirty underpants of the law. That is to say, hitched to a liberal democratic capitalism taken to be enlightened and cosmopolitan, mainstream Australian racism is a universalism. The essence of this Australian nationalism is a conservatism which seeks to conserve the essence of the given. It relegates colonial violence to the distant past, often with a serene disregard for the empirical, because the colonial project is unpalatable and in any case, in Liberal Party eyes, more-or-less completed, the indigenous population more-or-less defeated. Liberal democratic capitalism must nevertheless continually seek to impose and re-impose itself as a structure of social relations. This imposition is, in the deepest sense, violent. Also in the deepest sense, this violence must be denied. Only then, when the defeated agree to limit the terms of any dissent, can liberal 'tolerance' begin.

Resistance to the violence of this particular universalism thus places one's national loyalties, and one's participation in the putative national spirit – at the very least – into doubt. And it is notable in the debates over both Mabo and Wik that even those, such as Noel Pearson, who implicitly contest what is meant by lib-

eral democracy, by legitimacy and by community, do so in the interests of determining an alternative periodization which would initiate legitimacy and community: locating the moment when we can 'legitimately' claim that post-coloniality has begun. This is as good a definition as any of the public presentation of what is named 'the process of reconciliation'. Since Australia never experienced, and hence did not need to overcome, an entrenched feudalism, the precondition for the imposition and development of capitalism was instead the attempt to erase the Aboriginal civilisations through extermination, exclusion and assimilation on the colonists' terms. But whereas France, for example, incorporates and recuperates the revolutionary struggle against feudalism as a central narrative of national political identity, official attempts to constitute an Australian political, legal and cultural identity have been formed around the denial of history: *terra nullius*.

In fact, pervasive ignorance concerning the exterminationist history of colonization undermines the persuasiveness of the most critical language discussing this history – that using the figure of genocide. That is, given that the Aboriginal peoples were not successfully wiped out, this figure can be thought to describe an unfulfilled intention, thus effacing the scale of the misery and death imposed. The reality is that in the period from the arrival of British colonialists in 1788 until the early 1920s, the Aboriginal population estimated as having been initially approximately three quarters of a million people declined by over 90 per cent. That it has been and remains necessary to argue that this decline has been a consequence of colonialism and its development into contemporary Australia clarifies the degree to which this society has been founded on racism, indifference to the lives of the expendable, and the denial of violence.

Now, and at best, post-colonialism is being centrally defined as the supposedly thorough acknowledgment of historical violence, rather than as its conclusion. Indeed, since the continuity in the colonial project must be denied, its conclusion can only be weakly formulated as at best redress or compensation, and at worst as supposedly manifest in the deployment of empty symbolism and use of tokenistic rhetoric. The current federal government is seeking a way to acknowledge what it is no longer possible to deny in such a way as to sever any link with an obligation to compensate. On 2 March 1999 the Commonwealth sent Douglas Meagher QC into Darwin's Federal Court to argue

against Commonwealth liability for the effects of government-approved attempts to destroy Aboriginal civilizations through the theft of Aboriginal children. He falsely distanced Commonwealth governments from policies of "breeding out the color" by "mating half-castes with whites" while approving of an aggressive "cultural" assimilation.

Race touches on public discourse in multiple ways, not least being the different positions which would be occupied by critics. That is, whilst all are permitted to assent to the status quo, analyses such as those presented here are likely to call forth different responses depending upon perceptions concerning their origins. What rights, routinely inherited by legitimate heirs to full citizenship, are denied the 'newly-arrived migrant'? Though these legitimate heirs might on occasion be permitted to break what Derrida has referred to as the "filial bond of identification", we are all undoubtedly familiar with the discourses, often nominally pro-multiculturalist, which declare that migrants either should (in anti-multiculturalist versions) or do (in the 'pro-' camp) relinquish ideological baggage at the border. This enacts an important moment in the geopolitics of reification – that of the division between politics and culture – and takes its urgency from stereotypes of such baggage as fanatical, extremist, terrorist, most recently in coverage of the desperation of the Kurdish people. Nor is this limited to the question of 'un-Australian' nationalisms. For example: a 1992 editorial in the *Herald-Sun* following a large student demonstration in Melbourne, of which I was an organizer. Red-baiting the International Socialist Organisation, in part by attributing to the ISO responsibility for alleged violence, the editorialist wrote that: "The International Socialist Organisation is, by definition, imported. The immigration authorities should find out whether any of its members are, through their actions, in breach of the permits under which they remain here. If so, let's send them home." The most important phrase here is clearly "by definition". This right-wing *Surrealpolitik* is an extreme but quite mainstream tendency, as can be seen in its persistence in a letter to the Melbourne *Age* by Peter McGauran, then a National Party member of the House of Representatives Parliamentary ASIO Committee. McGauran praised the "action" taken by ASIO with regard to the student "unrest" of 1992, condemning "external political agents ... inciting community violence". Of course, some might suggest that the only "external political agents" were the ones working for ASIO.

In one sense politics

Or consider the following remarks of Justice J. Heerey of the Federal Court, from his judgement upholding the banning of the edition of *Rabelais* containing the article entitled 'The Art of Shoplifting'. Heerey noted the examples of writers advocating the illegal transfer of property – theft – for social or political reasons. Citing this tendency, as well as support for illegal civil disobedience and similar illegal political action, in the writings of Oscar Wilde, Jean-Paul Sartre, Tolstoy, Thoreau, Ghandi, Proudhon, Bakunin and Anarcho-Syndicalism generally, Heerey explicitly denied these works Constitutional protection. Heerey wrote that:

All this may be in one sense politics, but the Constitutional freedom of political communication assumes – indeed exists to support, foster and protect – representative democracy and the rule of law. The advocacy of law breaking falls outside this protection and is antithetical to it.

In other words, the suppression of certain oppositional discourses is considered unproblematic for the operation of democracy, and obviously so. This freedom of communication is limited, is domesticated, by its purpose, in a key moment in the imposition of the Law of the Obvious. Contrasting the Australian situation with that of American First Amendment law, Heerey continued that in Australia:

There is no Constitutional protection for speech which is 'mere advocacy' or abstract teaching of the necessity or propriety of criminal or violent conduct. The reason is simple. Such conduct is not part of the system of representative and responsible government or of the political and democratic process.

Criminal or violent. Neither Heerey nor the wording of the censorship code states that by 'violence' is meant only *illegal* violence. Is this too embarrassing to state openly, or is the legitimacy of state violence so ingrained in legal and political thinking that the assumption need not be stated?

Covertly mirroring discourses on the 'foreign' noted above, Heerey acts as if 'violence' comes to the present order, and more particularly to its 'political process', as an outsider, an unwelcome stranger against whom borders must be erected. But violence is not merely internal to the present order, it is constitutive of cur-

rent social relations. The state and certain authorized non-state forces – private security and prisons, for example – must continually assert their oligopoly over the legitimate use of violence. Police are precisely taught that their violence is necessary to maintenance of what is vital in the status quo. This is equally true whether we are referring to the actual, vulgar exercise of police power, which frequently (usually) violates the laws that police allegedly enforce – the rib-cracking baton jab; the bogus but violence-justifying ‘resisting arrest’ charge; the capsicum spray in response to insufficient subordination; the strip-search sexual assault – or if we imagine that the illusory propriety of the Force can be taken seriously. Police have a *right to violence*. The instruction in this violence, we can be assured, will not be banned; instructors will not be gaoled. Politicians arguing that Australia should go to war against Iraq will not be charged. The training of privately employed guards at private prisons will not exclude training in violence or declarations of its “necessity or propriety”. But leaflets urging civil disobedience against logging in old-growth forests or advising people to picket during an industrial dispute will potentially face the full force of the government and police’s repressive powers. The distinctions concern what is to be ‘supported, fostered and protected’. To the politics of the mainstream as it is asserting itself, the legitimacy of these distinctions is as obvious as the correct decisions as to what is to be preferred – though many might be made uncomfortable should this lead to the formation of a new kind of “in one sense” political prisoners.

The critical critic versus the well-adjusted citizen

Liberal democracy, then, always imagines its violence as an exception, something which is as clearly external to its truth as the outside agitator is to its normal political processes, and journalistic accounts, for example, largely unable to move beyond what is fantasised as the empirical, cannot do justice to the manner in which all social facts are marked by force. We must turn to others – to alternative analyses from Marx to Derrida, from Balibar to Andrew Charles – for an account of the conditions of possibility of the unexceptional which is not dominated by this social amnesia.

There are words within the Marxist tradition which describe the forms taken by this politics and the processes it assumes and which form its necessity: fetish-

ism and reification. Fetishization gives to social relations the appearance of objectivity, of being a “relation between things” (as Marx writes of the commodity-form). The theory of commodity fetishism seeks to describe and explain how we can carry around our social relations in our wallets in the form of money and credit cards, and how these can function as command over our own status as the commodity of labour-power, as “living labour”. ‘Reification’ is a name given to Georg Lukács’ attempt to derive from the analysis of commodity fetishism a general account of the comprehension of contemporary social reality, that consciousness founded on atomization and eternalization which is commensurate with our continuing alienation as subjects and exploitation as objects within capitalism. In elaborating these concepts we are generally seeking a propaedeutic phenomenology of legitimacy and domination – they are prolegomena with which Marxists might seek to destroy and transcend the obviousness of the obvious.

If the realm of the reified presents itself as prior to politics, it is terrain that should be that of an ethics prior to politics, an apolitics. Presenting itself as self-evidently right, such an apolitical ethics, to the extent that it refuses questioning of its constitution, represents the surrender of thought and hence of responsibility. Forgetfulness as morality.

This consciousness, however mystifying, is not simply an error in perception, but reflects real forms of existence lived under absurd conditions. Within this context Marx saw illegality as internal to the dynamic of capitalism and to the progressive re-imposition of capitalist social relations. “Crime,” he wrote, “through its constantly new methods of attack on property, constantly calls into being new methods of defence, and thus is as productive as strikes are in relation to the invention of machinery.” Technological progress occurs as part of a process contesting the imposition of commodity fetishism and the law of value. Called into question here are the divisions between politics and economics, public and private, between law, class struggle and crime. Such a questioning can form a starting point for an alternative to the conservative politics of the obvious, an attempt to generate a counter-obviousness, a different common sense. I need hardly add that encouraging the development of such a viewpoint was the purpose, however inadequately put into effect, in publishing ‘The Art of Shoplifting’. Nonetheless, several decades of feminist and Marxist discussion of the way we live through, reproduce, experience

these categories have not abolished the powerful realities which encourage our conformity with their force, with the divisions they embody between people and within our individual lives and consciousness.

The positivity of our existence can never be reduced to the categories of reification, and crime, like the class which must be continually decomposed into citizens, is a symptom which threatens to expose the universalist aspirations of liberal democracy for what they are. A class analysis of crime retains its truth. It is thus a mark of the success of conservative ideological projects that the existence of crime can be used, that this threat is not merely neutralized but converted into its opposite: not a recognition of problems with the status quo but of the necessity of its violent reinforcement. Individuals coerced into crime by the invisible fists of the market find their punishment applauded by all – the sounds of invisible hands clapping.

These divisions can be seen to operate also in accounts which would see resistance within capitalist forms of consumption as in some sense occurring in a private or non-political space, as simply a symptom of desperation, as in the recent looting in Indonesia or that during the LA riots, for example. They are thus seen as opposed to attempts to 'politicize' the 'economic relations' at the point of production. The point here is not to deny the importance of production for radical politics, but to think about questions of consumption without moralizing or condescending.

The Marx cited above (that of *Theories of Surplus Value*) does not resolve the criteria of judgement to be made on our various resistances enacted on the terrain of the law of value. Jean-Paul Sartre, by contrast, foregrounded the issue of fetishism and hence of subjectivity in his discussions of the developing politics of what he saw as a "vast anti-hierarchic and libertarian movement" within French factories and youth in the early seventies. Sartre commented that:

the increase of thefts in large department stores is significant. This is not habitual theft, which implies

a reaffirmation of property – 'this object is his; I take it; it is mine' – but theft as a radical challenge to property.

Retained in Sartre's presentation is a certain moral economy which can be read as privileging politicization as a condition of legitimacy of theft, thus retaining a version of the distinction between the political consciousness seeking public good and the egoistic consciousness grasping at private economic gain – a position which, crudely understood, appears to vindicate a subjectivity affording itself the luxury of a pure duty in the Kantian sense. Sartre attempts to give proletarian crime a kind of radical respectability by its conjunction with what used to be called 'class consciousness'. The inverse position is expressed in Oscar Wilde's 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', where the injustice of capitalism justifies theft without Wilde progressing to any reflection on the relations of fetishism, consciousness and social change. If I have perhaps been unjust to Sartre, it is to make the point that the attempt to theorize resistance and political action needs to re-pose from the beginning the question of the relations between need, 'revolutionary' subjectivity, and the dialectic of class struggle.

Announcing the death of communism again (or even of history) has not freed capital of its need to maintain, on a global scale and through force and violence, the social relations which guarantee its existence, its profitability and its stability. Following the 150th anniversary of *The Communist Manifesto*, the communist goal remains the same – to end history in the sense of the history of class struggle, not through the occluding of its symptoms and its historicity, but rather through the suppression and transcendence of its reality. A precondition of this project is the presumption that *things could be different*.

Ben Ross is a Melbourne writer and activist. He was one of the Rabelais editors terrorized by John Laws and the Australian legal system.

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Looking Back on It

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the wish to bring the mission (and the war)
to completion, the nights filled with fire, the days of sleep,
a casual conversation with more-
than-casual results, the nothing happening,
the silkworm threading its life, the eyes stung with sweat,
the near-escape, then the next, the falling off,
the pursuit in air, the pursuit on foot,
a lucky break, the conduit discovered,
flesh on flesh on fire on the roof,
the razor blade, the exotic everything,
the impossible distance breached at last,
natural light curling, bat guano building,
a run for cover and a dive into bushes,
the cut behind the ear, the sand between the toes,
the flexibility of schedule, the imposition –
turned us in a certain direction
that, once we were on course, kept us going,
not sustaining us, but not destroying us,
not yet, and the curve of it all, the trajectory
captured for us the moment,
not transcendent, not epiphanic,
but not earthly either, and clear vision
was the last thing we wanted, could endure.

Brian Henry

furl

around here sunset
comes on like a tipped
up cart of peaches

from my verandah I watch
the plummy rot of clouds
evaporate like a bruise.

I follow the jacaranda's
purple carpet fade to black
& the cessation of the snap

dragon's lunge at the grass.
the sky moults like an animal.
night shakes itself awake &

crawls out its bag of dark.
the star cupboard unlatches;
whole galaxies tumble into

existence. the hot bubble
of jupiter rises above a
porcelain dish of moon.

in front of my eyes midnight
loosens its hair; thick thick
space falls onto my shoulders.

i run my fingers through
its matted knots till sleep
like a vinyl-gloved hand

presses on my eyes;
sheds its clutch of furry
petals on my tongue.

Melissa Ashley

This is a National Trust town

In this small town
where the old buildings glow
with heritage colour
and every second shop sells arts & crafts,
history, once a year,
is cast adrift
on a muddy stream of Akubras
that swirls and eddies through the main street
into the park,
washing around the market stalls
and the picnickers
with their billy tea and damper.

Today, though, it's raining,
the streets are quiet
and, in the vegetarian restaurant,
the Celtic wailing of Van Morrison
drifts like incense
from a tape player in the corner.
The girls who wait on tables,
cocooned in their youth,
laugh like their mothers and grandmothers did.
This is a National Trust town
and, trapped in the amber light
of this small room,
the pioneers are serving us lunch.

John Low

Between Dog and Wolf

Birds fidget early on.
A dark newspaper hits the front wire door
explaining who is bombing whom
but not why.

Now the pillow asks the mattress
who you are, in very point of fact,
and a pile of new potatoes
lies asleep in its brownpaper bag.

Out in the side garden
crepuscular spiders and woodlice
are working to
a different timeframe, old parameters.

To what extent is the salmon-rose dawn
part of the same piercing narrative
as a daybreak thirty-five years back,
you can't help wondering.

The lavender says not a word;
sparrows and traffic
take up their instruments, from which
you compose a kind of harmony
like joy.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

Minor Blessings

News reports repeat over, as in:

'Where's my tie? Coffee sure, I'll be there in 10.'
But I've got all morning & though Chalkie's Bottle Shop
won't have me, three mornings ago driving
back from Ballarat, Commodores bustling past
with Port Power scarves flapping, an icy 6am coldie
may have curiously revived me. Yep, when a semi-trailer
shakes the car, a cold wind jabs your neck and you've
just headbutted the steering wheel, it's easy
to feel a tad bitter thinking of the couples you know
curled up under fresh doonas in bedrooms bigger than yours.
Let's face it: munching barbecue shapes in Safeway at 4.30am
is not the most stylish way to usher in your 31st birthday.
Close your mouth and admit it. You like Island Coolers!
Yet a card from Adelaide justifies it all proclaiming:
'We all need a little trash in our lives' and now,
looking across to Chalkie's from this café window
a toasted sandwich, a coffee and a fairly thorough read
of the paper seem enough before a long dawn walk:
windscreens blanketed by dew, a big sniff
of freshly cut grass; these minor blessings
when friends are still asleep
and every ATM is closed to you.

Kieran Carroll

year of the dog

the year was a dog
it began with a whimper
& growled almost immediately
it dogged my days & ran ahead of me
it barked & slavered
& scared people away

i was too close to the dog
it demanded constant attention
& bit me when i fed it
the wound turned gangrenous
i lost an arm & the dog was still a pup
it needed veterinary treatment
that cost a leg & the crutches rubbed
then there was the prosthesis
to get used to & i still
had to walk the dog every day
there are a lot of days in a dog
& fleas ticks chewed up shoes
that dog never came when i called

it died in december
& went out with a bang
scream of wheels impact
i buried the dog on a vacant lot
where the weeds growl & snarl
where nobody goes

i think of the dog sometimes
but it's hard
that was a dog easily forgotten

next comes the year of the cat

jenny bould

five poems by joanne burns

chip

this is the hair on the salon floor. the salon named after a famous comic strip character, after a song. i can't remember which. but the hair, the curls and clumps of old hair prompt the memory. of loss. of shame. of failed defiance against the blade. i tilt my head and hear the voices starting up inside the threads and strands. not 'the chipmunks' or even the mermaids singing. it's a singing in an untranslatable dialect that goes straight to the heart. i rush to grab the hair in great bundles into my arms, like sudden sheaves of wheat, like those loaves and fishes, like clouds that have suddenly fallen from the sky on the world's last saturday.

industrial relations

we read our latest
poems to rooms of torn
curtains upturned
cigarette machines mangled
carpets patterned with
scruffy wreaths, then
the contract cleaners
move in

queue jumping

the credit card archive:
a mere annex in the
history of desire (*doesn't*
'greed' lack cadence shoosh)
or the jewel
in the crown how the public
lines up to gain entry before
high noon; who authorised
such a situation
surely not just a slip
of a human being whoops
watch out for that
skateboard peddling blue
chip industries or rapid
screen wiping quick as
a jockey in the wind and
don't let that backpacker
omelette courier jump
the queue

intermission in the global village

they sit in directors' chairs bought
at the last garage sale on earth, hear
the chairs creak as they slightly shift
their arses to relieve the pressure on
a cheek; rigid as the tribe of hopper they
stare ahead at a horizon in front of closed
vertical bran-coloured blinds, all the pictures live
inside their heads, all the movies television
specials just roll on like eternal lappers in
circular swimming pools; and they can blink
a personal i.d. for the electronic host to
come and service them with little tubs of nuts
and pretty drinks whose swizzle sticks are topped
with petite replicas of just discovered stars and planets,
or feathery bright arrow-necks inscribed with *mariposa*,
arcadia, *cunard*, *p&o*: nostalgia taking her last sips

cut-up prose – a collector's item

sleepers out do not tick,
ring the census hotline for
the best answer – all people
including visitors are
to be placed in a privacy
envelope – persons ninety-nine
years or over please specify
level of fertility – the number
of people who are employed as
nurses or labourers will be pulped
for recycling – religion, it's something
like an improvised home – how old
was the person when he or she was
born – please scan
your completed census form

Nadia Wheatley

Including Them Out

Working-Class Characters in Contemporary Australian Young Adult Fiction

The worst books are often the most important, because they are usually the ones read earliest in life.

George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies'

WATCHING KEN LOACH'S NEW FILM, *My Name is Joe*, I was struck afresh by the sympathetic and authentic way in which so many British storytellers depict working-class life and culture. But beyond Loach's trademark themes, this film reveals another frequent preoccupation of British stories. This is the friction (or at least complicated interaction) that happens when people from two classes come into close contact. Thus the romantic plot of Loach's story revolves around the tension that occurs when an unemployed working-class man and a middle-class community nurse fall in love. (The alcoholism of the Joe character simply serves to accentuate his position at the bottom of the class scale – and to heighten the viewer's sense of the divide in the system between people like Joe and his young heroin-addict friends and the social workers and bureaucrats across the other side of the welfare counter.)

Of course, it is hardly surprising that the class system is the trigger in so many British stories, from the level of classic literary novels such as *Great Expectations* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to that of television sitcoms like *Keeping Up Appearances* or *To the Manor Born*. Yet it is by acknowledging the extent of British preoccupation with this subject matter that we can see how very absent this is from Australian storytelling, in different mediums and genres.

In the previous issue of *overland* (156), Robin Morrow discussed aspects of the class images of Australian society that very young Australians see in picture books. In this article I am concerned with the way in which class is represented at the other end of the Aus-

tralian youth literature market – in contemporary Australian novels for young adults.² While I am not going to waste space trying to define class, I should say that when I refer here to working-class people, I include not just manual workers and their families, but also people who are dependent on social security – unemployed workers, single parents, and others whom the economic system has dispossessed.

By and large, these sorts of people are invisible in Australian YA fiction, except in incidental roles, for the society which young Australians find in their popular national literature is usually represented as being an idealized one-class system. Certainly, the young characters and/or their fictional families often have 'problems', because the plots of YA novels are usually driven by 'issues' or 'problems'. However in most texts the characters speak, act and dress as if their parents earn the kind of income that John Howard thinks is average.³

While working-class life and culture is generally left out of Australian YA fiction, it is pointless to write an article about an absence. Therefore I intend here to pick out some texts in which there is either representation of working-class life in isolation, or evidence of interaction between two classes. I will roughly sort these texts into four subject areas.

TO BEGIN ON A POSITIVE NOTE, it is interesting that in this year's Books for Older Readers category of the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) awards, both the winner and one of the two Honour Books provide a sympathetic view of working-class life, seen from the inside.

Deadly Unna (1998), by the new author Phillip Gwynne, is set in a small Australian coastal town; though the time is around the 1960s, the issues explored in this text are more than pertinent for readers in the 1990s. The story is told by fourteen-year-old Blacky, who comes from a large family of battlers. Part of Gwynne's success is the way in which he presents a drunken and fairly violent father and a salt-of-the-earth mother, without either stereotyping or sentimentalizing. As well as having a sense of meeting real people, the reader encounters a whole world which just feels right in regard to every small detail from accent and idiom to the food on the table. As the story unfolds, Blacky becomes aware of the racism in his town when he becomes friendly with an Aboriginal boy who plays in the same football team. Though class is not in itself an 'issue' in this text, the exploration of small-town prejudice is given a tighter focus because the story is seen through the eyes of someone who is at the bottom of the white social system.

Like *Deadly Unna*, Sarah Walker's novel *Camphor Laurel* (1998) deals with loyalty and friendship – in this case, the shifting alliances in a group of three young women. An unusual feature of this text is the fact that it is set in Sydney's sprawling western suburbs – where few novels, either for adults or young adults, are located. The nexus between class and suburban geography emerges even more strongly in an earlier novel written by this author. *The Year of Freaking Out* (1997) is a lesbian 'coming out' story about a character called Kim, who is in Year 11 at a girls' high school. Kim and her mates live so far west that when they go 'to town' to the movies they get lost coming out of Central Station. It is possibly unintentional, but the character's outsider status as lesbian is effectively counterpointed by her geographic and class status. And just as Kim becomes comfortable with her sexual identity, she doesn't give a damn about being a 'westie'.

An interesting parallel to Walker's exploration of the culture of young women in Sydney's outer suburbs can be found in the first novel of another young author, Matt Zurbo. *Idiot Pride* (1997) follows the lives of a group of young men who go to school (or wag school) in Melbourne's inner suburbs. Though places such as Carlton are now more middle-class than working-class, Matt Zurbo's narrator (also called Matt) positions himself as being a streetwise working-class kid. *Idiot Pride* was shortlisted for the 1998 CBCA awards.

Zurbo's characters explore the streets, but they live at home with their families. There is however a long

tradition of books about kids who are forced to live by their wits on the streets. Obviously the prototype for this sort of character was Oliver Twist, who made his original appearance in 1837 – the year Queen Victoria came to the throne. So attractive was this cheeky urchin that he gave rise to many imitations; these tended to become increasingly sanitized as the decades rolled on – until Oliver finally reappeared in the 1960s as the singing, dancing, musical version of himself.

At the same time, the Dickensian street kid started to crop up again in British historical novels for children. While the most traditional was the eponymous hero of Leon Garfield's *Smith* (1967), there was also the female Cockney waif Dido Twite in Joan Aiken's *Black Hearts in Battersea* (1964). At the same time, Australian author Hesba Brinsmead put a contemporary spin on this theme in *Beat of the City* (1966), which follows a group of young bikies and beatniks around the streets of Fitzroy in the mid 1960s. This novel was so far in advance of its market that it has taken Australian authors three decades to pick up where Brinsmead left off.

Meanwhile, around the 1980s, an interesting development took place in the tradition of books about kids who are forced to survive in the streets. Now these characters started to appear in future fantasy novels, where the post-holocaust city provided the same sort of setting as Dickensian backstreets and thieves' kitchens. The Australian forerunner of this type of story was Lee Harding's *Displaced Person* (1979), in which an alienated seventeen-year-old boy slips into a sort of parallel version of Melbourne. The format would later be brilliantly explored in Victor Kelleher's *Taronga* (1986), set in a semi-deserted Sydney.

Tragically, in the 1990s youth homelessness has reached such a level that authors are able to dispense with both the historical and the futuristic trappings, and set their street-kid books in the streets of contemporary Australian cities. The title of Libby Hathorn's novel *Feral Kid* (1994) expresses something of the popular fascination with the idea of children (supposedly innocent and protected creatures) being in some sort of wild state. Again, this is nothing new. From Romulus and Remus through to Mowgli and Tarzan, the character of the wild child has proven a stock in trade of storytellers. There is a twist in the tale, however, if the child is wild in the jungle of the city. Hathorn explored this idea further in the text of her YA picture book, *Way Home* (1994), in which – rather than having the child nurtured by a wolf or ape or other creature –

the street boy rescues and cares for a kitten. As well as turning the traditional motif on its head in this way to reinforce the independence of the kid, this story sets out to reassure readers that a snug and safe cubby hole can be established inside a derelict building. This sense of comfort and warmth is vividly realized in Gregory Rogers' images, for which the illustrator was awarded the British Greenaway medal for illustration – the first time an Australian illustrator has been so honoured. Of course, as a depiction of what life on the streets is really like for many homeless youth, this text leaves most of the tale untold.

A more grittily realist version of contemporary life on the Australian streets is that found in Margaret Clark's *Back On Track – Diary of a Street Kid* (1995). Based on the author's experience as a social worker in the area of homeless youth, this text sets out to raise awareness of some of the complex issues involved in street life and heroin abuse, as a kind of admonition to readers who may be contemplating running away from home. The message is somewhat undermined by the hopeful ending.

IN THE TEXTS CONSIDERED SO FAR, working-class life has been depicted (with varying degrees of authenticity) as if it exists in isolation. That is, though middle-class schoolteachers, social workers and so on are sometimes a vital part of the plot of these novels, the texts themselves do not engage with what happens when people from different classes come into contact or conflict. Yet – as E. P. Thompson points out in his introduction to *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) – it is only through observing friction that we can see class happening. I would therefore now like to look at two groups of Australian YA novels which, in different ways, bring characters from different classes into close contact.

The first group consists of historical novels. For many readers, the prime Australian example of this genre is Ruth Park's *Playing Beatie Bow* (1980), in which a middle-class girl living in an apartment in Sydney's Rocks area slips through a timewarp into the 1870s, and makes friends with a poor girl who lives with her family in the disease-ridden colonial slums. Though two different class positions are presented in this text, time separates the two experiences, and also appears to have been the agent of amelioration, for the reader feels reassured by the fact that the particular type of nineteenth-century urban slum no longer exists in this country. Park's novel – which was CBCA Book of

the Year and was subsequently made into a feature film – provided a model for a number of timeslip fantasies in which characters from a middle-class present go sightseeing in a working-class past.

In both *Mavis Road Medley* (1991) by Goldie Alexander and *Somewhere Around the Corner* (1994) by Jackie French, the particular bit of the past into which the young characters slip is the Great Depression; in these texts, the reader is given a peek at the economic crisis, and even sees that there was protest by unemployed workers. While these authors have their hearts in the right place, once again time seems to have solved the economic and political problems. An endemic difficulty with the timeslip genre is that the timeslipping characters cannot use the wisdom of hindsight to act in the past to effect change, because then the present might be different.

Jenny Pausacker sensibly avoided this problem by setting her 1930s novel, *Can You Keep a Secret?* (1989) wholly within its own time. This text overtly tackles the class issues at play in the Great Depression. Here, the boundary between the ruling-class boy Graham and the working-class girl Dotty is geographic as well as economic and social, for Graham lives in a mansion in Melbourne's Kew, while Dotty lives in the adjoining working-class suburb of Richmond. In this stylish adventure thriller, Graham is recruited as a spy into a secret right-wing army and adopts a working-class disguise in order to penetrate the Unemployed Workers' Movement. Unsurprisingly, his identity is eventually sprung. By this time, however, Graham has been converted to the cause, because of what he has witnessed and experienced of both sides.

If this Pausacker text is a rare example of a YA novel which pictures Australia as a society which knows class conflict, it is probably no coincidence that *Can You Keep a Secret?* scored few reviews, was shortlisted for no awards, and – most significantly – did not sell in bulk into the secondary school market as library copies or class sets, although English and History teachers usually love to give students historical novels that convey the flavour of an era.

I would be willing to bet that a new novel by David McRobbie will have a different sales history. Set in a Scottish dockyard in the early 1950s, *Tyro* (1999) traces the experiences of Andrew, a young apprentice engineer. While both the workplace itself and the experience of the work are brilliantly evoked, the class 'problem' explored here is discrimination against middle-class Andrew, who is dubbed 'the Swank' on his

first day by a short, fat and stupid labourer named Jack Coultree. Over subsequent weeks, Coultree not only organizes some older apprentices into a systematic campaign of bullying Andrew, but he stalks Andrew, following him home from a night out with his girlfriend. Then he starts regularly perverting on the girl while she gets undressed. While there is a peculiar lack of any trade-union presence on this enormous shipyard, it is also significant that Andrew eventually solves his problem by the individualist action of dropping a large weight onto the labourer's head. A two-page note 'About This Story' at the end of the text tells the reader about cases of workplace bullying in Australia in the 1990s, and cites a newspaper article claiming that "the dramatic downturn in traditional apprenticeships" is because of "a scarcity of young people who wish to take up such careers". So working-class bullies are responsible for youth unemployment?

Of course, this stereotyped depiction of class through images of the body and particularly through the contrast of cleanliness and dirtiness (of mind as well as body in the case of Coultree) strikes a resonant chord. In recent Australian YA fiction this kind of polarity can be found in a particularly extreme form in Margot Lanagan's novel, *Touching Earth Lightly* (1996). This is the account of a friendship between two completely different eighteen-year-old girls. Middle-class Chloe comes from a very happy and loving family. Though not a virgin, her sexual status is indicated by the fact that she plays the Ice Princess in a major production at the Sydney Opera House. Working-class Janey is portrayed as a serial nymphomaniac, the willing participant in regular backseat gangbangs which occur while Chloe sits nearby listening, and chatting to the boys in the queue. As evidence of Janey's frequent sexual abuse including rape by her father and brother is revealed, the reader might feel that this offers some explanation for the young woman's destructive attitude to her body. However, the text again and again insists that Janey is trapped in "the pattern of [her] hormones". Yes, at a certain "point in her cycle" she is "sort of on heat for a couple of days" and becomes a sexual predator. Of course, Janey comes to a violent end. But as Chloe tells the rapist brother: "She was better off dying than coming back to you". Chloe herself acquires a lovely new boyfriend to replace her dead girlfriend, and is now ready to start university.

If it is a literary stereotype that working-class characters are dirty and promiscuous while the middle class are clean and pure, the theme of cross-class ro-

mance is also common. The *Jane Eyre* model sets up the connection of rich man and poor girl, but the situation is intensified if the gender roles are switched. This is no doubt because of the sugar and snails syndrome, whereby girls are seen as clean and boys as dirty. Thus if the female character is upper-class she is doubly clean, and if the male is working-class, he is especially dirty. The classic literary model here of course is the liaison between Queen Titania and Bottom.

The most explicit Australian YA version of this theme is to be found in John Marsden's *Dear Miffy* (1997). This text has attracted the outrage of certain moralists because the working-class boy Tony, in his letters to upper-class Miffy, writes graphically about having sex with her. In fact, the moral message of the novel is that crossing the class barrier brings dreadful retribution. The letters are being written from an institution (a common device in the novels of Marsden), where Tony has been placed after attacking – indeed probably killing – Miffy's mother, who called him "filth" when she found him in bed with her daughter. As well as being punished with a long time of incarceration, Tony will spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair because both his legs were crushed when he jumped under a train, after the attack on his girlfriend's mother. Yet the worst punishment seems to be that the maiming stops just short of Tony's sexual organs: so his masturbatory sexual fantasies about Miffy are particularly painful, because he believes: "I'll probably never have sex with anyone except myself again."

What a relief to turn from this moralistic scare-mongering to the good-humoured romanticism of Maureen McCarthy's *Queen Kat, Carmel and St Jude Get a Life* (1995) – recently shown on the ABC as a television miniseries. Though inner Melbourne provides the location for most of the action, the three characters have their roots in the microcosm of a small country town, where class levels are openly acknowledged. The daughter of a surgeon who has also inherited the family property, Katerina (Queen Kat) lives in a mansion on the hill overlooking the town. In contrast, Carmel lives with her large Catholic family on a small and rundown farm. Kat is beautiful and academically gifted while poor Carmel is fat and scrapes a low pass in the VCE. Yet just as black characters often have a natural talent for sport or music, which enables them to escape from their backgrounds, Carmel has a beautiful voice as well as a generous nature (unlike snobby Kat). It is through the background of the third character, Jude, whose father died in post-Allende Chile,

that McCarthy brilliantly provides a lightning rod for the issue of class difference. As Jude begins to explore the political history of her father's country, readers are led to the idea that battles are fought and people die over the issue of poverty versus wealth and power.

Yet within the Australian framework, this text follows the line that love conquers all – even class divisions. Not only do these three very different girls become good friends when they share a house together, but Carmel wins the heart of Anton, a young lawyer who comes from a property even larger than the one owned by Kat's father. Meanwhile, as the story closes, it looks as if some sort of relationship is blossoming between Queen Kat and Carmel's brother Vince, who is charismatic in the style of Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. While this novel begins by acknowledging the operation of the class system, it ends by reinforcing the view that in Australia it is comparatively easy to overthrow it – not by bloodshed in the streets, but by friendship and love.

THE HAPPY ENDING of McCarthy's novel – plus the subtextual moralism of *Dear Miffy* and the admonitory agenda of Margaret Clark's street-kid 'diary' – combine to raise certain issues that are central to the business of writing and publishing YA fiction. As the young adult novel is descended from the nineteenth-century literary traditions of both the family novel and the moral tract, there is a very strong (though usually unstated) pressure on authors and publishers to provide characters who can be seen as good role models. Conversely, it is important to show that punishment happens to bad characters. At the same time, there is an expectation that YA texts should end on a note of hope. This means that the resolution should show characters getting their lives together and solving their problems. While moralistic lobby groups periodically attack certain YA novels because of the inclusion of sex, drugs, swearing, or general bleakness of subject matter, the wowsers never seem to notice that almost invariably the YA novel's message reinforces mainstream values and socially responsible behaviour. This ameliorist intention is sometimes even spelled out in pages of contact addresses and phone numbers for crisis and welfare organizations, inserted at the end of a YA text.

These sorts of pressures certainly account for some of the idealization that imbues YA fiction. However, I don't believe that this accounts for the way in which class differences are presented (or usually not pre-

sented) in Australian YA fiction. Rather, I feel that the depiction of an idealized society is connected with a peculiarly Australian (or perhaps Australasian) desire to deny the effects of the class system, and to promote the old Lucky Country lie about a paradise of equality and sunshine. This kind of view was epitomized in a recent comment made by New Zealand author and critic William Taylor in the YA literature review journal *Viewpoint*:

Of course we are not immune to poverty in Australia and New Zealand but, somehow, the condition seems a little more bearable in societies that are 'fresher', where the sun appears to shine more brightly and where opportunity to escape the jaws of this trap can present itself.⁴

It is no coincidence that this remark appeared in a review of a couple of recent realist novels from the United Kingdom. British YA authors frequently show that it is possible to give an authentic depiction of life at the bottom of the economic system – and even to give the kind of message that the moral gatekeepers seem to require from youth literature.

To cite only one example, Melvin Burgess's novel *Junk* (1996) is as direct and as unromanticized as the title would suggest. The text cuts back and forth between the voices of about a dozen young adults who talk about running away from home, living in squats and share houses, using heroin, trying to get clean, using again, ripping each other off, dealing, falling in love, getting pregnant, living on the dole, stealing, even going on the game. By the end, one young woman has moved back home (with her baby); the reader feels that she is going to stay clean. But the rest of the characters are still battling. As well as winning a wide readership, this novel was awarded both the Guardian Fiction Award and the highly prestigious Carnegie Medal for children's literature. Certainly, it is a piece of popular rather than literary fiction. But that is not the issue at stake here. The characters speak and act with the naturalism of people in a Ken Loach movie.

Of course, depictions of working-class life do not necessarily include characters at the desperate level of the drug scene. But it is notable that Australian YA fiction leaves out the experience of living on the dole, which is a fact of life for many Australian school-leavers.

As long ago as 1984, Penguin published a novel called *Catch the Sun*, by a first-time author, Erica Hale, who had worked with unemployed kids in an Adelaide

youth refuge. Essentially a well-meaning tract giving the message that the young unemployed should educate themselves out of unemployment and poverty, this novel does at least include a slice of real life. When this text appeared, I thought that it would soon be eclipsed by more realistic fiction, written from the point of view of the client rather than the social worker. I was wrong. This book and its author sank without trace, and there has been little attempt to follow up this kind of material over the intervening fifteen years.

Overall, when I look for representations of the life and culture of young working-class Australians, I find myself thinking of the expression 'to include out'. This gap or absence is highlighted by the fact that, over the last two decades, there have been great changes in the way both ethnic diversity and gender roles have been represented in Australian YA fiction. Though there is still a considerable imbalance, and though there is also a problem of tokenism, readers in the 1990s are far more likely to encounter strong female characters and non-Anglo-Celtic characters than they would have had they been reading Australian youth literature in the 1970s, let alone the 1950s. Yet in the same period, there has been little change in the depiction of working-class characters.⁵

In conclusion, it must of course be pointed out that, in the matter of representing class, Australian young adult fiction is no worse than Australian fiction written for adults. However, the class bias evident in contemporary Australian youth literature happens to matter more than the class bias of contemporary adult literature.

In January this year, John Howard announced the direction his government should take in the lead-up to the new millennium. One of his five main policy points was the requirement that dole recipients aged 18–24 be compelled to attend literacy classes, if they have difficulty reading or writing. While on the surface this may sound reasonable – or even enlightened – it is of course just another attack in a very long campaign. Over this last decade, as youth unemployment has become one of the major facts of Australian life, we have witnessed governments of both parties, at both state and federal level, attempting to make young people take responsibility for their own unemploy-

ment because of their allegedly low educational levels, and particularly their low levels of literacy.

Some old adults ask: "Why aren't these young adults reading?" But I find myself asking: "Why would they want to read, when by and large they aren't going to find familiar characters and places and problems in the books that are supposedly written for them?"

Working-class young Australians have been excluded from their national literature just as they have been cast out of the economic system. And this exclusion becomes one of the self-perpetuating factors that keeps them in their place.

ENDNOTES

1. George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', 1939, included in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. I, Penguin, 1970, p. 528.
2. Those outside the field may not be aware that there is a considerable critical debate about what constitutes Young Adult (YA) literature – where it starts and ends – and indeed what a young adult actually is. I gave a long answer to this in 'From Teenager to Young Adult: The Terms they are a'changing', in Agnes Nieuwenhuizen (ed.), *The Written World*, Thorpe, 1994. The short answer is that YA fiction roughly begins when reader and protagonists enter puberty, and can go on until both are about twenty, or even twenty-five. YA fiction is not a genre in itself, but is a megafiction encompassing most genres from romance to action to horror to historical novel to grungy realism etc., and ranging from popular to literary modes.
3. In 1939, George Orwell identified a similar phenomenon in the stories appearing in British magazines for young women. He noted that the characters were "all living at several pounds a week above their income. And needless to say, that is just the impression that is intended." George Orwell, *op. cit.*, p.527.
4. William Taylor, 'Grim Reading', *Viewpoint*, vol. 7, no. 1, autumn 1999, p. 18.
5. After beginning this paper, I hunted out an article which I wrote on this very topic in 1986 – and found that my argument was essentially the same. It was alarming confirmation. NW, 'A Different Line on the Story: Class and Children's Literature', *Scarlet Woman*, no. 21, autumn 1986.

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Adrian Caesar

Invasions of the Mind

John Marsden and the threat from Asia

MOST STUDENTS OF AUSTRALIAN literature are aware that in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of this one, a rash of novels and stories appeared which had as their central concern the invasion of Australia by an Asian power either Chinese or Japanese. Equally familiar will be the idea that because Anglo-Australians invaded the country to begin with, there is a tendency towards paranoia about a similar event occurring again – this time with the white population in the role of the invaded. Despite David Reeve's work, what may not be so well known is the phenomenal contemporary success of a series of novels, written primarily for teenage children, which also have as their controlling premise the invasion of Australia by an unnamed Asian power.¹ These books by John Marsden at first constituted a trilogy, but due to their huge success this has grown into a sextet, and at least one further title is promised. The fifth in the series, published in 1997, was sold from dump bins in book shops which boasted that over a million copies of Marsden's books have been sold. The first, entitled *Tomorrow When the War Began*, has been reprinted at least fifteen times since its first appearance in 1993. The books are widely used in secondary schools and *Tomorrow* was published as a cross-over book aimed at the adult market. In this essay I only allude to the first three titles in the series, *Tomorrow When the War Began*, *The Dead of the Night* and *The Third Day, the Frost* (1995). The subject of my essay is the ideological implications of these texts.

In *Tomorrow When the War Began* seven teenagers, aged about sixteen, leave their country town homes to go camping in a relatively remote part of the bush. They return to find their homes abandoned and their country invaded. The inhabitants of Wirrawee, as the town is called, are baled up in the showground, the invaders having been cunning enough to take the town, if not the country, on what Marsden calls 'Commemo-

ration Day' when everyone would be at the show. From this point onwards, the seven form a guerrilla group who partake in various actions against the enemy.

The novels are fast-paced adventure stories narrated by Ellie, one of the teenagers involved. In between desperate actions in which there is plenty of death and violence, the narrator has time for liberal agonizings over what she and her friends are doing. Marsden also includes some rather coy dealings with teenage sex and sexuality. Indeed one of the criticisms of the books might be the lugubrious way so much is explained in very self-conscious ways by the narrator. From an ideological point of view, however, what is of more significance is what is not said. Who the enemy actually are, for instance, remains a mystery. Given that Ellie speculates about almost everything else, this is a glaring omission from the narrative. But, of course, the omission is there so that Marsden can't be accused of unnecessary scare-mongering or overt racial prejudice.

We are given enough information, however, to know that the invaders are from the South East Asian region. The teenagers tune in to a radio station and hear 'The General' in command of the foreign power warning America not to get involved, and claiming that the invasion is aimed at "reducing imbalances in the region".² This leads to a discussion amongst the Australian group about inequality. Robyn (another young woman who is avowedly Christian) remarks:

We've got all this land and all these resources, and yet there's countries a crow's spit away that have people packed in like battery hens. You can't blame them for resenting it, and we haven't done much to reduce any imbalances, just sat on our fat backsides, enjoyed our money and felt smug.

And sure enough, by volume three in the trilogy we are told that colonists have come "swarming across

the land like locusts, like mice, like Paterson's curse".³ They are said to constitute the "most swift sudden and successful plague ever; they are too cunning, too fierce, too well-organized". Furthermore, "they must have been planning this for years". The emotive, dehumanizing and clichéd language here, is allied to less than sophisticated strategic and political analysis. Even more unsatisfying is the way that the non-specificity of Marsden's depiction means that he is forced into the most generalized and prejudiced depiction of all Australia's neighbours.

Throughout these books, Marsden makes liberal gestures through the conversation of his characters, but their actions are totally unrelated to such conversations. For instance, following a remark about "a disease of colonists", we are treated to a moment's reflection by one of the boys, Homer, who says that it must feel to the invaders as it once felt to the English when they first arrived in Australia. Apart from Marsden's re-naming of Australia Day, Commemoration Day, and one or two other very fleeting references to the Aboriginal past, this is all we get in terms of overt comparison between now and then. There are no Aboriginal characters in the book. No attention is paid, then, to this most significant and pertinent of issues.

Rather, Marsden gestures towards multiculturalism by making one of his Australian characters of Greek extraction, and one the son of a Vietnamese and Thai marriage. But with extraordinary insouciance Greek history is invoked to justify killing the Asian enemy. On the occasion of the narrator and a companion killing three people, Homer is made to say:

"You guys did well. Don't feel so bad. This is war now, and normal rules don't apply. These people have invaded our land, locked up our families. They caused your dogs to die, Ellie, and they tried to kill you three. The Greek side of me understands these things. The moment they left their country they knew what they were doing. They're the ones who tore up the rule book, not us."

This is hardly complex cultural or ethical analysis. Even less so is the attraction of one of the girls towards Homer. When asked if she minds that he's Greek or part Greek, she replies "Greek is sexy". Even more worrying than this is the way that Lee, the son of Asian parents, is presented. In a mirror image of the stereotypical way in which Australian authors have traditionally dealt with Asian women in their texts, Marsden

makes Lee not only sexually exciting and exotic, but also aggressive and threatening. On the one hand the narrator finds him attractive, on the other frightening. She is said to be "fascinated by his ideas" and feels she would "see life differently the more" she talked to him. She contends that there is a lot to learn from Lee; he is the possessor of "interesting secrets". What these 'ideas', 'secrets' and 'knowledge' constitute, however, we are never told. But the relationship is sexually consummated. Later things change when Lee demonstrates to the others that he is a very efficient killer indeed with belt and knife. The other teenagers blow things up with impunity, and Ellie shoots three of the enemy in cold blood to save her friends from capture. But it is only Lee who is "very into honour and revenge"⁴ and who uses the knife with alacrity, and thereafter is portrayed as having a homicidal intensity lacking in the others. This eventually leads to the cessation of the sexual relationship with Ellie.

When the other characters express or experience violence it is the cue for liberal agonizings of whether they are right or wrong, justified or not. But these reflections after the fact, one feels, are window dressing. The agonizing is never allowed to stop the action or the killing. Non-violent methods of resistance are never contemplated. When it comes to the action a crude nationalism is invoked in which the enemy is described as "scum", as a "cancer" as "filth" and "vermin". It is also implicit that the invaders represent a regime which doesn't care about "individual rights" or "personal freedom". So the killing goes on.

Like the invasion scare novels of the 1890s and 1900s,⁵ Australia is presented as being betrayed by the ruling imperial power of the day (England then, the USA now) and by its own politicians, who, of everyone in Marsden's books, get the worst press of all. Our leading politicians have all escaped to America from where they make bellicose broadcasts but do nothing. They are portrayed as cowards, bunglers, and cheats who have allowed the country to become weak. Our only allies are the New Zealanders. But they don't help much.

In the earlier invasion scare novels the heroes are those bushmen who constitute the legend of the 1890s. In Marsden's version women are allowed to partake, but the values are very much in the tradition that begins with the bushman, and then is transmuted into the Anzac myth with the Gallipoli landings in 1915.

Marsden's heroes are kids from the bush who display all the prerequisite qualities of Anzac nationalism and the sense of racial superiority that goes with it.

They are amateur soldiers who succeed precisely because of their amateurism. The narrator in *The Dead of the Night* offers us this comparison of her guerilla band with the invading army:

We did seem so amateurish, compared to them. I don't know though, that could have been an advantage. Perhaps we had more imagination, more flexibility of thinking, than them. And they were just employees, carrying out someone else's orders. We were our own bosses, able to do what we liked. That probably helped a bit.

Initiative, independence and daring are allied with a supposedly democratic ethos to give us all the characteristics of the Anzac hero. The reader is, as a corollary, asked to believe in the ongoing and repeated incompetence of the opposition, as the teenagers score one victory after another.

All the action in these books takes place in rural Australia, and the teenagers' sense of nation is rendered via the narrator's loving evocations of the land and her feelings for it. Early in the first volume we are told that she loves being a "rural" even if it means that she spends half her life "headfirst in a tractor engine or pulling a lamb out of a barb-wired fence, or getting kicked black and blue by a heifer . . ." These formative experiences are more overtly related to military competence in other passages. In *The Dead of the Night*, for instance, after an attack on a convoy of trucks, the teenagers escape into the bush, and we have the following:

I knew that they could never and would never follow us through the bush. This was our natural environment. I felt as much at home here as the possums and wombats and galahs. Let no stranger intrude here, no invader trespass. This was ours and this we would defend.

The narrator's sense of ownership of the land is reiterated elsewhere and there is a rhapsodic hymn to rural people and activities in *The Third Day, the Frost*. More pertinent to the war effort, however, is the narrator's acquaintance with firearms, and with the slaughter of animals. None of the Australian protagonists is vegetarian because, as the narrator says, "being a vegetarian is a capital offence in our part of the world". And so we are treated to a graphic description of Ellie and Homer slaughtering a lamb. Before this is enacted we are told that "you never get blase about slaughter-

ing an animal". But the narrator's fears that she may not be able to perform the task because it will remind her of killing people prove to be unfounded. Rather, the reverse is true. Killing and eating the lamb is a means by which the narrator can move to the comforting conclusion that "The death of one thing can be the birth of something else."

It occurs to none of Marsden's characters that if we treated animals in kinder ways we might also learn to do so to each other. On the contrary 'nature' is invoked not only to explain the skills and superiority of the Australians, but also to justify the killing. In *The Third Day, the Frost*, in the immediate aftermath of Lee throttling an enemy soldier with a belt, we have the following reflection:

I didn't, couldn't watch any longer, but looked away towards the beautiful bush, the bush that I loved. Did these things happen in the bush? Did animals and birds kill each other in cold blood because of fights over territory? You bet your life they did.

So, territorial battles are sanctioned by nature, as is the superiority of the Australians. Towards the end of the same novel, Ellie, incarcerated by the enemy, contemplates yet again her relationship to the Australian landscape:

All my life I'd been surrounded by sky and earth and trees and to be cut off from them now, to be cut off so suddenly and completely, was very hard.

The Slaters had a Japanese lady visit them a couple of years back. She was about twenty-three, twenty-four. She told them that until her trip to Australia she'd never seen the horizon. Twenty-three years old and never seen the horizon! It was a modern day horror story. I'd realized then how lucky I was.

There is not much sensitivity shown here by the narrator to the culture and sensibilities of the Japanese.

But of course this is the narrator and it won't do to confuse her with Marsden. Yet the shape of these narratives tends to bolster the ideological position of its narrator. What we are shown are the continual triumphs of the Australian teenagers over their seemingly hopeless and incompetent enemy. The point is also made over and over again that the war is full of positive values for the youngsters. They might agonize briefly over killing other people, and they might

suffer reactions to events in the form of nightmares etc. But none of this has any lasting effect. Like characters in soap operas, Marsden's heroes just keep bouncing back. Nothing has a lasting negative effect upon them. But that they are changed for the better is continually either implied or asserted. In *Tomorrow When the War Began*, Ellie discovers what "true courage" is; other characters acquire a sense of pride as a result of their actions, and it is even suggested that their guerilla activities might be a way to find "meaning" in their lives.

In *The Dead of the Night*, Robyn raises the topic of the local war memorial which is decorated by two lines of verse which read, "War is our scourge but war has made us wise/And fighting for our freedom we are free". Siegfried Sassoon wrote these lines in the first flush of enthusiasm for the First World War.⁶ This is not acknowledged in the body of Marsden's text, presumably because this might disrupt the Anzac spirit of the proceedings. But what follows Robyn's recitation of the lines is a litany of what each character has gained through their experiences of war. This includes not only wisdom, and a certain measure of freedom, but also strength, determination, and bravery.

It is interesting that it is Robyn who initiates this conversation, for she is also the character who represents Christian ideology throughout the texts, and who, in *The Third Day*, *the Frost*, comes to a suitably sacrificial end. In order to allow her comrades to escape she blows herself and one of the enemy to pieces with a grenade. The narrative, like so much war literature in our culture, valorizes this 'sacrifice' without wishing to contemplate the fact that it also entails the murder of another human being. This incident enables Marsden to put into the mouth of his narrator the following, thoroughly disturbing conclusion:

What I want is for Robyn to be remembered, for what she did to be known. I never stop thinking about her. I used to think heroes were tough and brave. But that last look on Robyn's face: it wasn't tough or brave. It was scared and uncertain.

I learned something very important from Robyn: you have to believe in something. Sounds simple doesn't it? Well it's not. It's not for me and it wasn't for Robyn. But she did it, and I'm going to keep looking and keep trying till I do, too.

That's the real trouble with our politicians: they don't believe in anything except their own careers.

You have to believe in something. That's all.

This seems to me, like much else in these books, thoroughly problematic. Whilst covertly discriminating between different orders of belief, it suggests that 'belief' in and of itself is a good. It also tends to suggest that killing and dying for one's beliefs are good also.

In a report of an interview contemporaneous with the publication of *Tomorrow When the War Began*, a journalist wrote, "John Marsden fears he may be tagged a fascist for his new book . . . He is, he asserts, a liberal, small l."⁷ The reviews of his books have, on the whole, taken him at his own word. They are overwhelmingly positive in their response. What concerns me is that in these books the small 'l' liberalism is all talk, and the action espouses a far more conservative position. The series taps into a tradition in Australian literature and nationalism that is militaristic and implicitly racist. What is even more disturbing is that Marsden and the great majority of his reviewers do not seem to realize this.

In the first book in the series, the narrator dwells upon the loss of her innocence in the following way:

But I've learnt something now. Corrie, we were still innocent. Right up to yesterday. We didn't believe in Santa Claus but we believed in other fantasies. You said it. You said the big one. We believed we were safe. That was the big fantasy. Now we know we're not, and like you said, we'll never feel safe again, and so it's bye-bye innocence.

If we concede that Marsden himself is not a racist (and I don't believe he is) and doesn't intend some of the racist implications of his writing, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that writing like this can only encourage teenagers to think of our Asian neighbours in terms of a military threat. It encourages the fear and loathing upon which racism breeds. It is easy to dismiss Pauline Hanson and her supporters as a fringe group, an extreme, unthinking minority. It is much more difficult to come to terms with the presence of such writing in what John Howard calls the Australian mainstream, being taught in our schools and lauded in our newspapers.

In a recent review of *The Night is for Hunting*, the sixth book in Marsden's series, Jenny Pausacker remarks that she is "less disturbed by Marsden's vision than by the absence of publicly audible debate about it"⁸. I am disturbed by both. Marsden's vision and the lack of public debate about it suggests that we have some way to go before we properly understand ourselves, and our relationship with our neighbours in

the region. I hope that in some small way this essay might at least encourage some further discussion of Marsden's work and its place in our High Schools.

ENDNOTES

1. D. Reeve, 'Old Fears in New Forms: Some Australian Representations of Indonesia', *Representations of Indonesia in Australia*, ed. N. Mobini-Kesheh, Monash Asia Institute, 1998, pp. 1–9.
2. J. Marsden, *Tomorrow When the War Began*, Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1993, p. 168.
3. J. Marsden, *The Third Day, The Frost*, Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1995, p. 4.
4. J. Marsden, *The Dead of the Night*, Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1994, p. 60.
5. See N. Meaney, 'The "Yellow Peril": Invasion Scare Novels and Australian Political Culture' in K. Stewart (ed.), *The 1890s: Australian Literature and Literary Culture*, St Lucia: UQP, 1996, pp. 228–232.
6. S. Sassoon, 'Absolution', *The War Poems*, London: Faber, 1983, p. 15. This was Sassoon's first war poem, written in 1915, before he had seen any action in France. The poem shows none of the anger, anguish and bitterness that characterize his finest war poems.
7. S. Voumard, 'Tomorrow when the word, and the world, is dark', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October 1993, p. 12A.
8. J. Pausacker, 'Mixing the Metaphors', *Australian Book Review*, December 1998/January 1999, pp. 43–44.

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two poems by Susan Bower

A Muddy Life

The windows of the house
are panes pressed to a slow moving river.
The locals say that anyone who's been in there
swears that their skin has softened, gotten a *sheen*.

It is a muddy life,
the bath in the backyard has a layer of dirt
and down the bottom of the paddock
is a pond with eels.
*Someone was bitten once
and the wound is still weeping.*

It would be true to say that
although there's a dog and a ball
out the front, no-one would ever walk past,
entwine two fingers and say
they're like this.

Downriver

Water roars at the concrete pinch
of the weir
then eddies and washes away
prints of waterfowl.

Disher's Three Fiction-Writing Hats

Ioana Petrescu interviews Garry Disher

Ioana: *overland* magazine published your first short story back in 1976. Could you tell the readers about your literary debut?

Garry: I'd always written short stories for school and university magazines, but this was my first attempt at writing for 'commercial' publication. I felt ready to make the transition. I was in my mid-twenties and had earlier spent two years bumming around in Europe, Israel and southern Africa, during which time I kept a journal and began to read more widely, and although I was now working on a Masters thesis in Australian History, my wish to write fiction was growing. I discovered *overland*, *Meanjin* and other magazines while I was doing my research. I didn't know any writers, and didn't have a sense of a literary community, but *overland* went some way towards providing that. In 1976 it was edited by (the late) Stephen Murray-Smith. An associate editor was (the late) Ian Turner. I encountered both at lectures and seminars I attended at Monash, Melbourne and La Trobe. *overland* was committed to Australian writing and published dozens of new writers over the years, many of whom have become well established. I can't bear to look at that *overland* story now, but it was an enormous boost to my confidence to get an acceptance for the first story I ever submitted to a literary magazine, let alone see it in print and be paid \$100. It was on the strength of that story and a handful of others that I was awarded the Stanford University creative writing fellowship.

Ioana: More than twenty years after your debut you are a full-time writer now – you write 'mainstream' literature, crime fiction and books for children. Which of your three 'fiction-writing hats' brings you most satisfaction on both the personal and the professional level?

Garry: I think that I extend myself most, artistically, when I write 'literary' fiction. *The Sunken Road* is my

most ambitious book, my best and most sustained piece of writing to date. It's sold about 15,000 in Australia, been well reviewed in England (my publisher there nominated it for the Booker Prize) and was shortlisted for the National Book Council and other awards. But the style of writing I use in that book wouldn't be appropriate for a crime or a children's novel.

This is not to say that I don't write as well as I can or work as hard as I can when I write children's fiction or crime fiction. I put all of my energy and creativity into each new book, no matter what it is or who will read it. The manner in which a book is conceived – the manner in which I 'dream' it – determines the voice, tone, style and approach, and in *The Sunken Road* that meant structure and style at an intense and experimental level. In other words, that particular book demanded that particular approach. The 'literary' novel I'm writing now is demanding a more conventional style and structure.

Ioana: On reading your novel excerpt, *An Inland Soul to Sea*, I found many specific references to the geography and history of the place – how and where did you conduct your background research?

Garry: I've read extensively about the time and the place – travel books of the period, war histories, archival documents such as letters and diaries, anthropology, etc., and I trust my imagination to do the rest. I've visited Malaysia a couple of times and that helps me conjure up smells, sounds and textures.

Ioana: There are also many details on how to fly a plane – I was wondering, Garry, can you fly planes?

Garry: I can't fly, but have loved aeroplanes since I was small. I live near Tyabb aerodrome and there are several old warplanes being restored there and restored planes often fly overhead. I like the aeroplanes and the seat-of-the-pants flying of the 1930s and 1940s.

I've written aeroplanes into my latest crime novel, *The Dragon Man* (the title refers to a Dragon Rapide being restored by the main character), and into a novel set in Broome, *The Divine Wind*.

Ioana: How would you define 'good fiction'? Is it affected in any way by writing with a targeted market segment in mind?

Garry: Writing that targets a market segment is often bad writing. It's usually derivative and written to a formula, and it underestimates the reader. It doesn't take risks or push at boundaries. Categorizing books according to genre often obscures the issue. E. L. Doctorow's *Billy Bathgate* is a good novel – but it's also a good crime novel. Ruth Rendell is known as a good crime novelist, but she should simply be known as a good novelist. I'd like to think that the Wyatt novels are good novels that happen to be about crime and criminals. I'd like to think that my children's novels, *The Bamboo Flute* and *The Divine Wind*, may be enjoyed by adults.

Good fiction stimulates the imagination and the intellect. It creates pictures in the head, makes connections, tells us about the world we live in or takes us into unknown worlds. The rise and fall of the language gives pleasure. The characters move us. Good writing is at the same time perceiving well, thinking well and saying well.

Ioana: You seemed to be quite surprised by the fact that *The Sunken Road* is taught in at least one university in Australia. Could you tell me why the surprise, as many of your books have been taught in schools, high-schools and colleges before?

Garry: There have never been critical articles about my work, or reviews in literary journals. I've been getting published for almost twenty-five years now, but it's only in the last year or two that I've been invited to talk at writers' festivals – and then only on the token crime or children's panels. And so I've always assumed that I exist in a kind of blind spot. Mark Davis is quite right when he argues in *Gangland* that a babyboomer coterie exists in the Australian literary world, sustained by mutual congratulation, etc., etc., but quite wrong when he argues that it's a generational thing. I'm a babyboomer, too, and just as excluded as any Generation X writer, critic or editor, and there are plenty like me in the same position.

Ioana: You said earlier in the interview that in the seventies there wasn't much of a sense of a literary community in Australian writing. Do you think this would still apply in the late nineties?

Garry: When I say that I didn't have a sense of a literary community I mean that I was new to Melbourne, didn't know other writers and didn't know where to meet them. There was no Writers' Centre and there were no writing courses. There was only the FAW with its useful newsletter but rather staid image.

Things are more vital now, but I'd argue that there are several loosely defined writing communities or cultures, rather than a literary community *per se*. They are defined by location, lifestyle, cronyism, certain pubs, age group, publishing opportunities (or lack of), ideology and preferred medium. We have academic poets, street poets, pub poets, grunge novelists, Young Novelists, babyboomers and writers given the nod by certain arbiters of literary fashion. But I suspect that these groupings are more apparent than real. It's probable that most writers don't have a sense of belonging to a coterie, and have few friends who are writers. A more general literary community is impossible, given that too many writers are competing for too few rewards (grants, readers, publicity, a spot at a festival). The knives are always out. Besides, the writer is elevated above the work nowadays, a condition encouraged by festivals, the media and publicity departments. The result is a privileging of certain writers, not of Australian writing.

Ioana: I'd say that what matters in the end is who reads those books, and your books *are* being read. I know that beside the specialist reviews you do get feedback on your writing from fans of various ages, from children who admire your kid heroes to adults who praise your thrillers. What does the fan mail mean to you? Do you gauge your writing according to the reader response? Do you answer all of that mail?

Garry: There really isn't a great deal of mail. Most of it is warm and generous. I like the sense of a stranger engaging with what I've written. I do answer every letter, though if a class of thirty year-8 kids writes to me I'll write one letter in reply rather than thirty, figuring that twenty-nine of them didn't want to write to me in the first place but were obliged to by the teacher. I certainly reply to those who find errors of fact in the crime novels, because the first such letter I ever got

was from a man who offered to let me test fire his .357 Magnum and his .38 Colt, and men like that shouldn't be offended – and likewise the man who informs me that a street in inner Melbourne is one-way east to west, not west to east.

Ioana: Last year I put on the Internet a home page about your writing, and so far it has registered more than two hundred hits. What do you think about virtual media and their influence on the very real books and authors?

Garry: There's no point in fighting new information technology. We should embrace it. The Internet offers all sorts of benefits to writers in terms of alternative ways of publishing and publicising their writing. If only one of those two hundred people then went out and bought one of my novels, then it would have been worth it. New IT forms complement books and offer new ways of reading them.

Ioana: You say in the introduction to your latest collection of short stories, *Straight, Bent and Barbara Vine* that crime fiction has taught you how to write. Is there any special reason why you chose to write crime fiction when you first started? Or, in other words, why did you choose crime writing as one of your modes of artistic expression?

Garry: I'd long been writing 'literary' novels and short stories before I wrote the first Wyatt short story and novel, but I'd been a reader of crime fiction all of my life, and had always wanted to write crime fiction. I'm not sure why I started when I did – perhaps I saw that crime fiction had a market in Australia, and had heard that Stephen Knight was compiling his first *Crimes for a Summer Christmas* anthology (I have a story in it called 'Cody's Art' – Cody was my early name for Wyatt, changed at the publisher's suggestion when I submitted *Kickback*), and perhaps I felt tired of writing careful, unexciting serious fiction at the time. I can't remember my reasons.

However, I have learnt a lot about fiction writing since then, from writing the Wyatt novels and some of the crime short stories (many of which aren't about Wyatt). In particular, I've learnt about story complexity (plotting), character motivation, pacing, delaying tactics and other important crime fiction devices, which have helped to enrich my other fiction.

Ioana: How did *The Dragon Man* do once offered to your readers?

Garry: *The Dragon Man* received enthusiastic reviews and sold out quickly. I'd like to write more Challis novels. But that doesn't mean I've abandoned Wyatt, just put him on hold. I wanted a change from the 'will-he-get-away-with-it?' question that drives the Wyatt novels to a different way of thinking, a more conventional police-procedural, 'whodunit?' question.

Ioana: Many of your books have earned high distinctions, your latest young adult novel, *The Divine Wind*, brought you an entire collection of awards (the NSW Premier's Award 1999 among many others). You've been writing full time for ten years now and you've often told me it hasn't always been easy – what is a successful year for a full-time writer? Which was your best year ever?

Garry: To me the calendar year is fairly arbitrary and artificial, for I'm self-employed and don't do anything but stay at home and write. I tend to gauge time in longer cycles – the early-eighties-when-I-spent-too-much-time-writing-short-stories-instead-of-novels, for example. And so I'd say that the last three years have been my most successful and satisfying. *The Sunken Road* was sold to England and France and was highly praised; the crime and children's novels found publishers in the United States, Europe, the UK and South America; I feel that I made a successful switch to a new crime-series character and structure in *The Dragon Man*; *The Divine Wind* garnered awards and short-listings; I spent time as a writer-in-residence at an English University (helped by the writer Liam Davison, who first held the position); and I've been able to return to *An Inland Soul to Sea* [see the accompanying extract] and make it work (*The Divine Wind*, reworked for 'young adults', was a subplot of the original, failed attempt).

Ioana: A Romanian proverb says that "books will breed books". Do you read a lot? What do you read (books, magazines, newspapers etc.)? What would you read for your mind and soul, and what would you read for relaxation and entertainment?

Garry: I read two or three books a week, a daily newspaper and an occasional literary or book review magazine. I like to read crime fiction to unwind. I read a lot of

contemporary fiction, mostly by North American and Canadian writers. I read very little non-fiction. I find that imagined worlds and people are more satisfying.

Ioana: Interviews and reviews about you are usually quite positive, but I've also seen one which I thought was a bit unfair, to say the least. In what way do the media responses affect your creative work? Where do you feel you are on the Australian literary scene now after almost a quarter of a century of writing, and what are your future plans?

Garry: Taking my future plans first – I'll continue to divide my time between 'literary', crime and children's fiction. They each bring satisfaction, earn me a living and a readership, and allow room for me to push at the boundaries I set for myself.

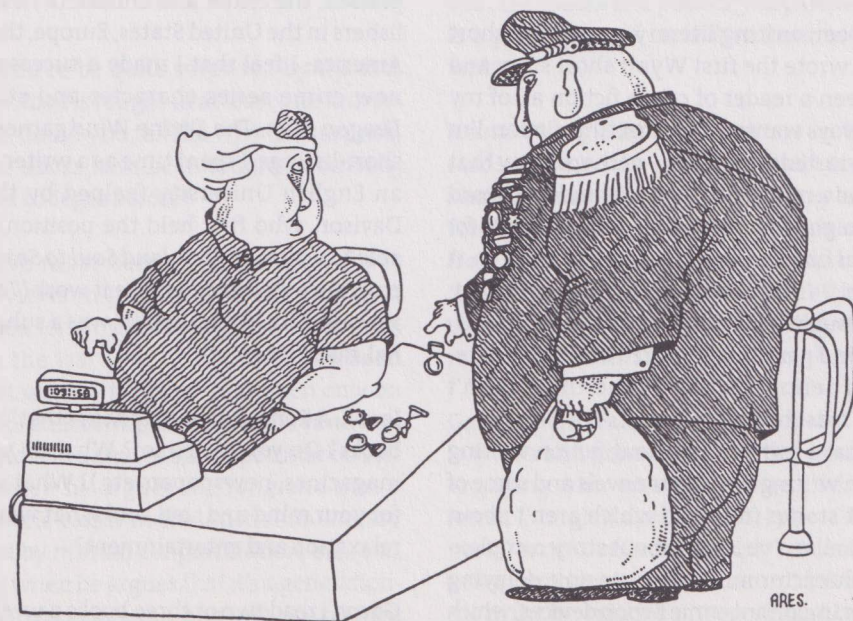
Reviews: I've had many wonderful ones and some stinkers. I pay attention to the stinkers if they can teach me something about the way I write. Interviews are simply a necessary part of publicity.

As for where I stand in the current literary scene, I honestly have no idea. If you mean by that, what do my peers think of me, then I can only repeat what I said above, that I've been in print for a long time now but only recently been interviewed, or invited to talk

at festivals or judge awards. These seem to be the markers of worth in Australia. As for what readers think ... my sales are solid, plenty of my books are still in print, I'm on school and university reading lists, and now and then someone writes or takes me aside to say heartwarming things about one of my books, so I can't complain, for these are the things that really matter.

*Garry Disher (born 1949) grew up in rural South Australia. His first story was published in *overland* magazine in 1976. A widely travelled author, he spent several years in England, Israel, southern Africa, then later in the USA and Italy. When he returned to Australia, he taught creative writing and also wrote 'literary' and children's fiction, writers' handbooks, history textbooks, and thrillers. In 1989 Disher turned to full-time writing. He has published more than thirty books. He lives with his partner and daughter near the coast on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula.*

*Ioana Petrescu is a doctoral student at the Flinders University of South Australia. Her first poetry collection *I Say . . .* was published recently by Wakefield Press in the volume *New Poets 5*. Her home is Romania, where she is a senior lecturer at the Transilvania University of Brasov.*



An Inland Soul To Sea

Garry Disher

*Exultation is the going
Of an inland soul to sea,
Past the houses, past the headlands,
Into deep Eternity.*

Emily Dickinson

Malaya, 7 December 1941

AT 0600, THE UNVARYING HOUR of the tropical dawn this close to the equator, the ground fell away and Quiller climbed east toward the cumulus formation that had massed over the Gulf of Siam. As expected, the undercarriage remained locked in the down position and nothing, not even the manual release device, would retract it. At Angels 18 he lost fuel pressure. This, too, was expected, and he began to work the hand pump, one eye on the gauge. At Angels 20 he levelled out, still pumping, but the world beneath him was blanketed with cloud, and this was virtual blindness for Quiller, who was the eye of the dawn.

He signalled Bandar Star to say that he was dropping to Angels 5. Here, five thousand feet above the water, he was at times under the cloud mass, at times slipping down a canyon of it, walled in by roiling white-and-grey vapour. Beneath him the Gulf was empty and serene, but he knew that the wind would begin to rise, the sea begin to run. That was the daily pattern, brief opportunities for reconnaissance before the sky turned dirty, full of violent squalls and solid rain fronts that sat high and heavy and stretched farther over the sea than the range of a simple aeroplane. There was nothing to see in those conditions, no news that Quiller could bring with him back to Bandar Star.

The canyon closed in then and he was properly blind. A moment later, and in the time it took him to steady the Buffalo and operate the shutter release, a gap opened, revealing a cruiser and three transport ships on a bearing toward the coast of Malaya. As he signalled Bandar Star with the details, the cruiser apparently opened fire, and Quiller felt his insides clench with fear. If war had been declared, then he was the last to know of it.

He sideslipped away, the Buffalo heavy and graceless because her wheels were down. Quiller was thank-

ful for the lowering clouds and the rain, which sheeted past him suddenly, but kept to the survey area, vectoring and quartering to the limit of his fuel endurance. He didn't spot the convoy again.

He turned back. He'd been in the air for over two hours now and had the south-west Gulf and the peninsula to cross before he reached Bandar Star, on the Strait of Malacca, and if a floatplane had been catapulted from the cruiser to intercept him, then he'd need eyes in the back of his head. The Buffalo was no comfort. Speed and altitude mattered, and although loading and wind drag had been reduced by stripping away the Very tubes, parachute flare bins and cockpit heaters, the wing cannons had also been removed; and the wheels were stuck, and the fuel pressure was unreliable, and so Quiller felt clumsy and defenceless in the sky.

He emerged from the clouds and crossed the coast in clear conditions, passing quite rapidly over a stretch of dirty sand fringed by the coconut palms of a fishing kampong. Then paddy fields, jungle, and finally terraced hill slopes with dirt roads like brown cracks in the variegated green. He kept low, flying beneath the obscuring clouds. He watched the terrain unfold beneath him, palm fronds into hen-scratched dirt into the bony, tail-flicked spines of village cows. Children swarmed and ran and tiny goats trembled, full of nerve endings and the zipping howl of his engine in their soft ears. Later he surprised a company of turbanned Punjabis in a troop train of open wagons on the Jitra line as he swung south for his final approach into Bandar Star.

When he saw the aerodrome he put his flaps down and throttled back until he was just above stalling speed, then dropped from the humped back of Elephant Hill and levelled out and sideslipped in a wind that was bending the coconut palms. He crossed the

perimeter fence and the Blenheim bombers in their earthen pens, meeting the main strip at a shallow angle. Even so the wind pushed him down and across, and he found himself snared in the grass verge. Before he could bog to the axles he opened the throttle and powered back on to the metalled strip, arousing ironic cheers from the ground crew detail which spent its days digging aeroplanes and fuel tankers out of the binding mud.

He parked, got out and walked down one side of the fuselage, around the tailplane and along the other side. The skin was tight over the airframe; there were no tears, no holes pursing. He crouched to peer at the underside, touching a finger to a streaked and fummy patch of moisture. Fuel often ran down the overflow pipes and along the fuselage, passing under the cockpit. Quiller was certain it would ignite one day. He was philosophical about it. The Buffalo didn't repay much tinkering by the mechanics. It was an obsolete aeroplane, unsuitable for just about everything, and all a man could do was fold his arms and not be surprised.

The adjutant to the Squadron Commander appeared. "Quill, Freddy wants the dope on your adventure this morning."

Quiller removed the film canister and followed, threading between the hangars and the bowser sheds to the operations room. He was debriefed for an hour, adamant that he'd been fired upon by a light cruiser. It was information that troubled the men who interrogated him. Quiller could see that it would be picked up by the corners and passed about gingerly and head-scratched over for the remainder of the day before someone informed Singapore.

When they let him go it was close to noon. He set out to trace the inside of the perimeter fence, his habit after a mission. He didn't look in at the aerodrome but out, in the manner of a prisoner hungry for the possibilities of the world. He lingered along the northern fenceline, which offered him the Kedah River, a kampong and the road that led up to the border with Siam. One of the Blenheim pilots had a woman in a small hut at the river's edge, above a shallow reach where the kampong men relieved themselves each morning, their skinny hindquarters aimed at the mud.

Quiller continued to skirt the perimeter fence. Ed-dying in air laden with the odours of aviation fuel, the stormfront and the rottenness of human and animal habitation, was a hint of spices and fish spitting in hot oil somewhere. Hunger drew him away from the fence and at a diagonal across the aerodrome. He bounced

on each of the grass runways as he went. They were saturated, as spongy as mattresses, and poorly drained. Nothing was satisfactory. There was no fighter cover, no radar, and everything declined into boredom, rust and mould.

He left by the main gate. After some time he came to a ferry landing, where he joined four Chinese men waiting with bicycles, a jeep and driver of the 16th Punjabis, and a Malay man with a yak cart loaded with banana leaves. As he watched, the fraying iron cable lifted out of the sluggish water and the ferry began to cross toward them, groaning, shuddering, the cable taut now, jewels of water springing from it as if shot through with electricity.

In the kampong on the other side Quiller was swamped by children who saluted, called "Hello, Joe" and stuck two fingers in the air for Victory. They swarmed about him, tugging at his hands and plucking at the cotton pasted to his perspiring flesh. "You want cigarette, Joe? You want soap? Apple, twenty cent."

Twenty cents was sevenpence. Quiller paid the child and pocketed a soft, brown nugget of apple. When he walked on, half of the children walked with him, but he was striding out, a madman in the heat, and they fell back after a while, calling *selamat jalan*.

He found the food vendor at the seaward edge of the kampong, where howitzers had been mounted behind sandbags among flame-of-the-forest trees and pawpaws heavy with yellow gourds. The old man saw him and hurried away from the Indian gunners on a three-wheeled bicycle, his wicker baskets bouncing on a dented tin tray mounted over the front wheel. Quiller paid him for rice balls in banana leaves and a thick steak of dry spiced fish. The old man's eyes were moist, the whites muddy-looking. Sparse hair sprang back in surprise from his seamed forehead. He was stringy and very old and sometimes carried with him a monkey he'd trained to climb for coconuts. The monkey was permanently outraged and bared its teeth at Quiller.

Quiller wandered back among the bamboo huts. The villagers gazed after him on their steps. They knew that he brought commerce to their various households – a snack here, a haircut or needles and thread there – but were otherwise uninterested in him or the possibility of war. He wondered how well liked he'd be if he hadn't small change in his pocket and a few halting phrases of greetings and benedictions on his tongue.

A small, shy, vividly smiling girl approached him hauling two open petrol cans of well water suspended from a sturdy stick across her shoulders. He couldn't

see that she had the strength for it. Her eyes never left his face and her burden propelled her along, she could not stop, her bare feet softly exploding in the powdery dirt and dodging nimbly among heedless darting piglets and almost-featherless hens. There was a cow nearby, and Quiller wondered why the child didn't simply hang her pole over its powerful hump and slap her hand on its tough hide or tug it by the ears to and from the source of her water.

Any exertion at all encouraged perspiration. Quiller tossed his bruised apple to a pig and loosened a shirt button. The temperature was close to 90 degrees, despite the lurking storms. The humidity was always high and the men he served with were full of complaint. As for himself, Quiller had been in Broome and Darwin during the Wet season, and knew all about humidity. Broome and Darwin had also given him a taste for the spicy dishes from a spitting wok. He tried to walk close to the huts, seeking shade, now and then wiping his forehead. He loosened another button of his heavy uniform and looked enviously at the shirts and sarongs drying softly on the poles that poked from the shutters, and wondered if in Whitehall they saw the world in terms of a northern chill.

He stepped under a landline that ran down to the gun positions on the beachhead. They had tried radios but the static had defeated them, wattage seeping away with the everpresent wetness of the ground, the coconut palms, the huge, dripping jungle leaves that hung like swords and shields all about.

A despatch rider from the 6th Rajput Rifles and two Muslim holymen joined him on the ferry. Above them a Blenheim bomber came in too fast over Elephant Hill and Quiller listened as it aborted the landing and came around again.

His room was in a long hut of similar rooms. He showered and attempted to sleep but the wind rose and then there was rain. The bamboo walls around him began to flex, the palm fronds unknitted above his head, and his iron cot rode the impressions of the wind as it channeled and howled around the cement blocks that kept the mess hut clear of the damp earth. He lay with his eyes open. There were no mosquitoes this early in the day and in such squalling weather, but he had his net closed around his cot to suggest the night and encourage sleep. He sweated in the muggy air. Small gusts of wind, concentrated by narrow apertures in the outside wall, tugged and poked at the net. He heard a creak of bedsprings in the next room, bare heels hitting the floor, the fuggy groan of a man who has slept badly

and had never slept in the daytime before he was posted to this hell-on-earth. The afternoon passed. Then his door opened and the adjutant said, "Freddy wants you to make another sortie over the Gulf."

QUILLER CLIMBED TO FIFTEEN THOUSAND FEET. He could see curtains of rain far out to sea, but conditions were clear over the neck of Malaya. The terrain was rich and intricate and his eyes drank it in. Fifteen months earlier, he'd been as avid for hedgerows, moorland, thatched cottages and cricket pavilions. He'd looped, hedge-hopped, stalled and recovered from stalling for almost forty minutes before touching down with a flourish. The RAF instructor said sourly, "This is not the outback, Mr Quiller."

Satisfied that Quiller could fly, the recruiting officers had then looked again at his written application. "You say that you published a guide for pilots. Please explain what you mean by that."

Quiller's kitbag still bore a patina of Kimberley dust. It sat beside his new boots and trouser cuffs like an overstrained sheep dog of the dry country. He rummaged inside it and handed over a small, jacketed book with an uncracked spine. "This," he said.

One day in the Dry of 1938, when he was barely eighteen, Quiller had been about to take off from Derby with mail for Leeuwin Downs station when he'd experienced an inexplicable draining of confidence and know-how. Leeuwin Downs lay at the end of the Meda River and east of Windjana Gorge. Was he to pass to the left or the right of Mount Behn? And wasn't it tricky magnetic country, apt to send compass readings haywire? He'd sat for some time, the sun beating against the cockpit of his charter plane.

Then he remembered that the doctor at the leprosarium sometimes flew to the inland stations. He got out, crossed to the tin hut, and asked to use the telephone.

"You pass Mount Behn on the right, then follow the river to Mount Broome."

"Thank you."

The doctor seemed to sense Quiller's blankness, terror and youth. He said kindly, "Make a note of it for next time."

Quiller did. He began to fill a logbook with notes, collecting and ordering seat-of-the-pants information from mail pilots, station managers, drovers, bore sinkers, surveyors of the Vacuum Oil Company, mounted troopers and Pallotine missionaries on the coast. He explored by car and truck, coastal steamer and launch, horse and bicycle. He compiled lists of telephone num-

bers, pedal wireless frequencies, and road and air-mile distances. Finally he took low-altitude photographs which he then pasted into his logbook, annotating them with black ink.

His observations were home-grown and first-hand. Where magnetic interference made for unreliable compass readings, for example, he suggested alternatives: *"The woolshed at Mistake Springs has an east-west alignment."* He pointed out that the Wyndham aerodrome was a heat-generating saltpan, that the Derby pub stopped serving evening meals at half-past six, and that it was advisable to carry a scrap of chamois to filter the fuel at Vansittart Hill. He described the terrain: *"Twenty minutes and forty-five miles north-east of Halls Creek the red stony surface becomes corrugated, rather like a static surface chop in an ocean. Hence the name, the 'Bay of Biscay Hills'."* He warned that the sugar grass on Missiessy Station was often high enough to hide a man on a horse, and that there was no windsock on Hartog Hill: *"Radio ahead and ask them to build a smoky fire."* Finally, he rated landing approaches: *"Lambadina Mission may be reached from a southerly, landward approach, or from Cygnet Bay, Cape Leveque or the Ocean, depending upon the wind. The Cygnet Bay approach affords a rewarding view of King Sound, while a north-easterly climb on takeoff will take you over Buccaneer Archipelago and all that it has to offer."*

There was nothing shaped or formal about his notes, but they were serious. They fixed the landscape and, once or twice, had saved him from doing a perish.

Eventually word got out. Other pilots began to ask for his advice or demand to see his logbook. Some of these men and women glanced at him doubtfully, as though to say that so young a man had a poor claim on the country. Quiller shut down in the face of their doubt. It was not an insufficiency of language but of fellow-feeling. Finally he did the only thing possible and paid a printer to produce two hundred copies of the logbook. He titled it *A Pilot's Guide to the North-West*. The guides sold for twelve shillings and sixpence a copy, and by 1940, when Quiller sailed for England, only fifty copies remained unsold. It had been Jeannie Verco who pointed out the misplaced apostrophe in the title. She meant it kindly, but it just about summed up Quiller's few years in the north-west, and he jerked away from her roughly – though not before she caught the pain and fury in his eyes and, mortified, had tried to snatch at his sleeve to comfort him.

Quiller said none of these things to the RAF recruiting officers. He waited while they leafed through his guidebook. Finally the senior officer stabbed his finger upon Quiller's shot of Leeuwin Downs homestead and airstrip. It was a well-composed photograph, sharp and free of distorting shadows. "I think we may have a position for you, Mr Quiller."

That was fifteen months ago, and now, as Quiller slipped between clouds above the Gulf of Siam, the stick shuddered in his hands. Tracer fire whipped past the cockpit, two Zeros overflew him, and suddenly there was a neat row of holes stitched along his starboard wing.

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fiction

The End of The World

Louise D'Arcy

LEAVES TUMBLEWEED DOWN my veranda while the currawongs hold their late afternoon service of regret. The sky is closing down. Each morning the corner over the compost heap between the dogrose and the liquidambar is a little darker. I haven't worn sunglasses in two years.

"Darling, why don't you switch a light on, we can hardly see in here."

I shrug and look out of the window again. I'm fogging the glass with my anxious breath. Already the sky is bloodless and probably somewhere the other side of the hill the first star has appeared. The birds are skittish, they sense my eyes on them.

"The leaves are piling up again," I say mildly enough, but Edward's face pouts a little further, while his hands, crab-scuttling, crinkle over the paper and pull it towards him.

Mornings are better. The sky is still pearl bright and brave and he has his head full of bathroom mirror paunch and bran flakes. We even talk a little then. Small exchanges of words that jostle comfortably together and I feel no compunction to check on the light – I can sense it on the back of my neck as I lean on the sink and watch him roll words towards me.

"I'll do the shopping at lunchtime today, you stay home."

Am I supposed not to notice that I'm kept out of the car as much as possible? Two months it stayed at the garage. "Parts," he said. "Bloody foreign car, should

never have bought one." We both knew I needed it and more chillingly that there was nothing wrong with it. Eventually the mechanic brought it back unasked one long-shadowed afternoon and we stood on the doorstep and scratched our heads for a while. When he laid the key in my palm it glowed for a second and he backed down the path nervously. I had to think back afterwards – had we really not exchanged a single word?

But when Edward comes home from work it gets really hard. We don't eat together. This is the time I need to be at the window, comparing shadows and the smudged silhouettes of naked trees. I pretend that it's too early for me to eat, that I had a late lunch. When I do eat with him, when he forces the issue with his pink palms raised in distress, I keep my head to one side and watch the light reflected in the mirror over the mantelpiece.

The sky is like a horizontal cinema screen and looped at each corner are heavy night curtains. The curtains are pulling slowly across and before long I will need to switch on a light to look at Edward clearly. Not that I need to, his face is more familiar to me than my own.

HE BRINGS HIS SISTERS ROUND. His round sisters. Twin black holes in my armchairs. I sit well clear of them, leave Edward to deliver cup and saucer, the biscuits he must have found in his lunch hour. Perhaps they are absorbing all the light just as they vacuum

up all sound and movement.

"Lovely day at the fair on Sunday," Marion says, in that half-finished way of hers. She is leaning over to Ennis, who leans away – perhaps they must avoid each other's force field or mutually disappear.

Ennis nods and stirs the spoon in her cup. The tiny chink is the sound the birds will make from the other side of the curtain. I go over to the window.

"You should take her out a bit more, Edward," whispers Marion.

"You can't see the houses on the hill anymore," I tell them and breaths are held collectively round the room.

"There's some lovely places to visit round here," says Ennis and slurps her tea. Or perhaps she just holds her lips close to the cup and it is sucked in helplessly.

Edward takes them to the door; I am too busy at the window. It seems to me the blackbirds are gathering up at the top of the garden. I would like to go out to them but I am not as silly as that.

"Good day, dear?" He's back again. Where has the day gone? I can't have been standing at this window all day. Yet the breakfast bowls are still on the table – I can see the milk spatters solidified on the mats.

Ennis is going to come in twice a week to help me keep the house clean. She will simply absorb all the mess and disorder, stop it existing. What will I do with her around?

This evening, when it was too dark to distinguish tree from night I went looking for my children. I know they are no longer here – their rooms are inured to emptiness. Ennis will want to get in there and absorb the faint traces of occupation – I will have to keep her out.

"Where are the children?" I ask Edward but he is studying the paper frantically, whipping the pages over, crack, crack. He licks his index finger, sometimes thirty, forty seconds before he is ready to turn the page, sometimes he licks twice before the page is done. I stand behind him, which makes him nervous – he

squirms on his seat like a child desperate for the toilet.

"They left home ten years ago, I had to send them away," he says finally, his eyes scurrying. I look at him calmly and smile – I refuse to let him do this to me. Perhaps I can learn how to become like Ennis, I can dematerialize his efforts to frighten me, unmake them in his mouth. I move a step closer and he stands up. It is a long time since we have been so close to each other's faces and frankly it's not a pleasant reminder. Edward has large pores. Moonface – I remember now – that's what they called him at school – and he would run away to the staff room. They had a chair left outside the door specially for him.

"Do you remember your children, Edward? Phillip and Morag? About so high, take more after their mother looks-wise."

Edward has backed away, thankfully and has opened his briefcase.

"I must look at this," he says and removes another piece of paper.

Of course I know the children are gone – it's a game I play when I think Edward needs a little punishment, a little needling. Edward never wanted any and at this late stage it is quite fitting that he should be made aware of their absence, their effective non-being.

When I look at Edward this closely I can become strangely settled to the idea – perhaps he did best after all.

"I'll throw these out, shall I?"

It is Ennis, frog feet splayed on my kitchen mat. I am on the other side of the room, pretending to read the paper. Whatever she has found is now gone – even if she puts it back she will first have denatured it and rendered it unrecognizable. Ennis has no children either. Ennis has a problem with the internal ordering of her vital organs. Ennis is calmly draining the energy from the Earth – given time she will break loose and as she goes will calmly absorb the wrinkled prune that will be left.

That's better. I shut Ennis in the garden while she was out sweeping the bird table. It was mildly amusing to watch her at the window for a while but only until I caught sight of the inside of her mouth. There was something alive in there, something fluttering feebly. Now she has gone and I never found out what it was.

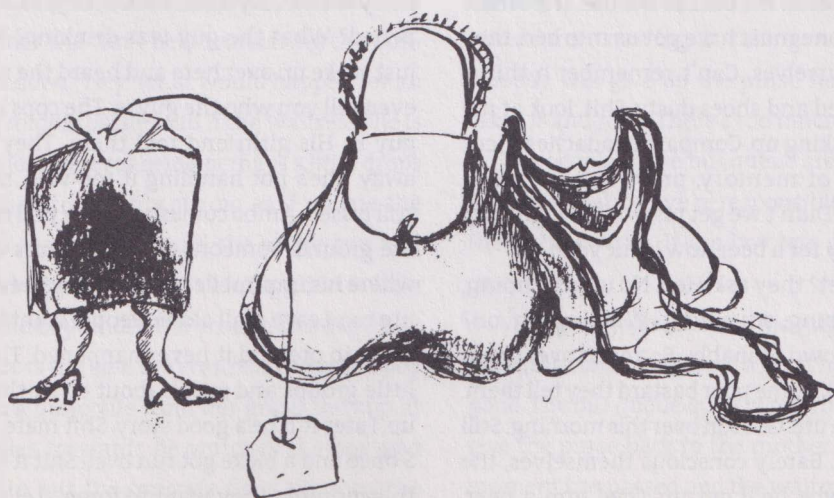
"Let me in!" Ennis has climbed over the side fence and is applying her plum-painted mouth to the keyhole at the front door. She doesn't fool me – I know that if she wants to badly enough she can simply reorder the nature of the wood and the lock and get me. But I think she's afraid of me.

I TOOK THE CAR OUT TODAY after all. I have been inside long enough to find the streets a little alien. And people walk so strangely, like a cast let loose from some children's puppet show. When I wave at them their faces come alive briefly before they turn away and resume their mechanical trudging. I thought I might crash the car but in the end the kind man in the car park backed away. I know he is kind, though he believes he is hard and uncompromising – the words he sent across the space between us were intended for spectators' ears, not mine. In any case, I could not attend to him as I was discovering that my purse has

been Ennised, its contents vaporized. All that is left is the tattered burgundy lining and the crumbs of long-forgotten chocolate bars. And so, with undignified swoops and swerves I leave the car park and return home.

I have tried to tell Edward that the end of the world is coming but I cannot use the words he would understand. He deals in pre-packed vacuum-sealed language units. The wild wilful words he does not want to hear he simply refuses to process. He looks up at the sky when I ask him but it makes no sense to him and he cannot allow himself to see it. He prefers his ideas on pieces of paper that can be put in his briefcase and locked away. At one time there were many court papers to be hidden in there, before the children went away. He wouldn't let me see them but unlike him I can believe something exists even though I can't see it.

When the light is finally gone, what will happen? The birds will have gathered one final time, but what will they do? Perhaps they will fly upwards and beat their wings against the curtains until they part to let them through. There will be a tiny flash of light and then darkness again. Leaving Edward and I sitting at this table together, him fretfully pawing at his newspaper and me smiling beatifically into the black.



tea bag, bag/lady, old bag...

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fiction

Circle Work

Kirsten Johnston

THE WEEKEND. Bloody bewdy they say. They're off to a B & S Ball in some tiny town. Doesn't matter which tiny town. The rum's the same, the girls are the same. Rangy bodies climb into crumpled dinner suits, sickly aftershave. Lookin' good mate. Writing themselves off makes the weekend complete.

Get there late so all the good birds are taken. Only thing to do then is get their money's worth. Drink fast and get as much into you before you pass out. Get into it, mate, they say. Leave the beer for tomorrow. Rum and coke, rum and who cares what. Just drink it mate.

Soon the world closes in. Narrows to the face in front of them. You're me best mate, mate. Get us another drink. Shapes of bodies shimmer in the distance. The world's all angles and movement. Booming music cushions everything. Makes them bounce off walls. Makes the dusty ground soft as hell. Shit I'm pissed, they say. Never been so pissed. Who's the most pissed? It's important. Arms and legs feel like someone else's. Mind goes to sleep long before the body stops yelling and lurching and draping and drinking.

Morning. Hell. Feel like shit and have to tell someone about it. One lies in the back of the ute. The others lie under it. Someone must have got us into bed, they say. Too pissed ourselves. Can't remember a thing. Dinner suits ragged and shoes dusty. Shit, look at me shirt. Sit round waking up. Compare headaches. Piece together shards of memory, proving how much they've forgotten. Didn't we get pissed. Top night. Top night, mate. Ready for a beer now? Shit yeah.

Why's it so quiet? they ask. Hell. No utes spinning, no motors throbbing, squealing. What's goin' on? Bloody weird. A crowd of shabby Bs and Ss over there. What's up? they ask. Some poor bastard they tell them. Passed out under a ute. Got run over this morning. Still there, lying there. Barely conscious themselves, the crowd stares. Maybe he'll get up. Give him a beer, someone yells.

He doesn't move. His body's pressed into the damp ground. Grass sticks into his neck. His body buckles in funny places. Looks unnatural mate. The ute still shadows him, dripping oil beside his foot. People begin to realize. The bastard is dead. Stupid bastard. Girls start to cry. Stupid girls. How's a bloke meant to act? They eye each other. What do we do? Are we meant to care? Are we meant to laugh? Get us a beer mate, while we work this out.

Someone goes into town. Get a doctor mate, but the police will come. Wallopers. Shit. Me rego's out of date. New sticker is down behind the seat somewhere. Swimming with beer cans and bits of greasy rag. Knew I shoulda put it on before. Compare rego stories. Mine was once two years out of date. Mine had five stickers on. Could hardly see out the windscreen. Rego rebels. Heroes. They have another beer and wash away the sight of a squashed bloke sinking into the dirt. Shit, I reckon I'm still pissed as hell.

Sirens bounce over the paddocks. Cops. Ambulance'll be another hour. God we're out in the sticks here, they say. Where are we again? Can't remember. Too pissed last night, mate! The crowd around the body moves away. No-one wants to know anything. Shit, poor bloke. What about the bloke who ran him over? Yeah. Poor bloke. Not his fault though. Nah. Conversation runs out. Shit it's depressing around here. You'd think someone'd died. No-one laughs.

Cops come over. Clean and sober. Sharp lines in a fuzzy world. Any information, boys? Know what happened? What the guy was drinking? Nah mate, we just woke up over here and heard the news. Couldn't even tell you who the guy is. The cops know who the guy is. His girlfriend told them. They're taking her away. She's not handling it too well, mate. Probably still pissed. Ambo comes and they pull the bloke out of the ground. Someone wants to muss up the ground where his imprint lies. Leave it, say the cops. Leave the ute too. Leave it all alone. People want to forget. They want to pretend it never happened. They sit in their little groups and speak about other things, sobering up. Later it'll be a good story. Shit mate, went to a B & S once and a bloke got run over. Shit it was funny. But this morning they want to forget. Let's have another beer, mate. Yeah. One for the road.

fiction

Chain Reactions

Simon Enticknap

... the boy moves through the cafe I'm sitting in the window sliding between tables watching a big sheet of bubble wrap the waitress is preparing being blown down the middle and scoops up the purse of the street and there are people outside a latte and a short black on the pavement while the mother is distracted for the couple in the window by the baby in the pram waiting for the bus a neat move twisting and turning in the wind and I'm hoping that the single man with a full one will go past he does it without rushing the short hair I'm waiting to see what happens when the woman who is sitting comes down to earth a nice easy action and the European-style sports shirt as if it was his purse all along because then I get to see with her partner in the window the looks on their faces and he has only just been watching the waitress remembered where he left it leaps to his feet when they realize she has her eye on the cup he's seen that it isn't going to stop the boy of black coffee take the purse for them and as it looms larger his first reaction is to shout the woman's partner she can't help wondering the bubble wrap flops down 'Hey' what would happen for an instant in the middle of the road if the waitress she is startled he almost believes being perhaps a little drops it and folds itself too highly strung as if on cue the word has also seen the boy and the white cup and heard the word which holds the steaming that will fly will restrain the boy under the wheels of a car black liquid slips across the cafe the waitress drops the boy is already like a projectile from her grasp the cup at the door topples forwards he watches the boy and immobilize him hits the concrete floor allowing the purse like a small raft the word to be retrieved pass

through the doorway and breaks up on impact going over a waterfall ricochets harmlessly momentarily hidden off the stripped pine framework the surface tension of the black coffee by the stripped pine framework is disrupted and then reappear as it splashes on the pavement on the hard surface the car drives on sending out fine tendrils out on the street and there's a loud popping noise and microscopic liquid spores almost in the clear he could go like fire crackers in any direction now going off and disappear or maybe rifle fire but instead everybody looks up the mother is just about quickly to see what's making that noise to realize he stops her purse and hesitates is missing...

That's when I lean out of the window and put my hand on the purse.

The boy looks at me and there's a flash of recognition. Not that we know each other or anything, but everything is understood in that moment, who we are and where we come from.

We're almost holding the purse together now, both supporting it, although he could easily take it from me, wrench it free and be gone. I could let him have it too. What does it matter to me if the boy takes the purse, just a few bucks and a bit of plastic? It's no great loss.

But we both know that isn't going to happen. Everything is unfolding too fast for us to think about it, other forces moving in, taking over, dictating to us. Nobody will give up the purse now, even if the boy takes it and runs. There's too much at stake.

The people in the bus queue are turning to stare at us, as if somehow we're responsible for the popping of the bubble wrap. If the boy lets go now, he can escape...

Very gently, he releases his grip on the purse, like dropping something from a great height, and then he's gone. The bus queue quickly reforms and by the time I give the purse back to the mother with the baby, the moment has passed and the waitress is already bending down to pick up the pieces of the broken cup.

fiction

Sydney

Simon Barker

JOHN WAS STARING through the back window of the brothel. He could see his uncle Syd next to the bed, tugging at his boot. Too drunk to get the thing off by himself. A black girl was sitting on the bed watching. Syd held up his foot so the girl could pull off the boot for him. When she'd finished she got up and turned on the radio. After a minute it warmed up and started playing.

I wanna hold your hand!

The sound came out the window and into the backyard. Syd stopped to listen. Then he held up his other boot. When it was off he undid his belt and pulled down his trousers without taking off his holster, and piled them on the chair next to the bed. Then he staggered to the window and gazed out. He wasn't wearing underpants.

"Look at his tossle!" John whispered to the other kids.

"Where? I can't see."

"Look at his hairy balls!"

The five boys were squeezed into a stormwater drain that came up in the backyard. John, David, Philpot, Brian and Johnny. They'd crawled up the tunnel from the street. There was a concrete box where three pipes joined. It had a slab laid over the top like the lid of a sarcophagus. On one side was a slit you could stare out of with your ear squashed against the concrete. You could see right into the back window. Kids did this all

the time. Sometimes Uncle Syd used to wink at them.

But he didn't wink today. He was too pissed. He just stood there in his shirt, with his policeman's hat on, scratching himself. Then he farted.

The kids in the drain giggled. David held his nose and fanned the air with his hand, and they nearly pissed themselves.

Then John saw a fat woman come into the room with a wad of money. Syd snatched it and started counting the notes, but he gave up before he'd finished and tossed the roll onto his pants. The fat woman went out.

The black girl undressed and lay down on the bed. Syd ordered her to turn over on her stomach. He played with himself for a bit. Then he came up to her from behind.

"Hey! What are you doing?" she said.

He snorted, then he pushed her head down and got on top of her.

"Ouch. You're hurting me!"

The kids could hear.

"What's happening?"

"Is he doing it?"

"I can't see."

Then there was a groan and Syd said "FUCK!" in a loud voice. The kids started giggling again.

"He's doing it!"

"Give me a look!"

They could see his arse going back and forward. His big hairy arse. Then it stopped. Nothing happened for a while until they heard another noise and realized he'd fallen asleep.

"He's snoring!"

He farted in his sleep and they knew the show was over.

"What'll we do now?"

"I don't know."

"Hey," said Brian, "I bet you can't get his gun."

Brian was Syd's son.

"How much?" said John.

"Two bob."

The five of them heaved the cover off the drain. John climbed out and stood up in the tiny concrete backyard. It was a hot afternoon and a storm was brewing. Halfway across the yard there was a clap of thunder and he froze. But Syd kept snoring. So he sneaked over to the window.

When he stuck his head through, the girl lying under Syd made a movement with her hand to shoo him away. Then she stopped and stared at his face, as if she recognized him. John put his finger to his lips.

"Ssssh."

She watched while he climbed inside. He carefully lifted the wad of money off Syd's trousers and put it

on the floor. He rolled the trousers up with the gun and the holster inside and then put the money back on the chair and left it. He winked at the girl and sneaked back out the window and down the drain.

"Got it!"

"Give us a look!" the other kids whispered. "Give us a look!"

But John scurried along the tunnel and out the drain hole, up onto the street. They chased him as fast as they could down the road to Philpot's house with the southerly blowing behind them and big drops starting to splash on the road. Out in the back room of Philpot's house the rain beat on the tin roof. They unrolled the trousers and stared at the gun, as if it was something pornographic.

"Where's me two bob?" said John.

"I haven't got two bob," said Brian, flatly.

"That's not fair."

"Hey! Look! It's got bullets."

"Yeh!"

"Are they real ones?"

"Shit! They're real!"

Brian took hold of the gun and pointed the barrel straight at John. "Look! I'm going to shoot you!"

"Shit! Don't point it at me!" John shouted. But Brian didn't pay any attention. "I said *don't point it at me.*"

Click.

fiction

Kite

Monica Raszewski

THE WHITE, EGG-SHAPED bassinet gleamed in the dark. Sarah lay in bed, watched the bassinet and waited. She heard a branch of the Japanese maple scrape against the window pane and the fly wire door rattle in the wind. At six minutes past one the baby kicked her legs in the air and began to cry. Sarah turned on the bedside lamp, jumped out of bed and put on her dressing gown. Her breasts were hard and full and seemed ready to burst.

The baby cried louder. Sarah reached into the bassinet and picked her up. She carried the baby to the lounge room and turned on the lamp. Then she shoved a pillow against the back of the armchair, grabbed another pillow from the floor and shoved it under the baby. She unbuttoned her pyjama top as quickly as she could and guided the baby's head towards her left breast. The baby's mouth clamped onto the nipple. Sarah flinched then sat back.

After a while the baby's rhythmic sucking and pulling became like the beating of butterfly wings. Sarah looked down at the small ear, at the fat left cheek and the closed eye. The eye made her think of a newly hatched bird. When she was a child she had found a dead chick underneath a tree in the backyard of her family home. She remembered seeing bits of light-blue eggshell lying on the grass and then the tiny, bedraggled chick. She had picked up the chick, held it in the palm of her hand and waited for it to open its eyes. She thought the chick must have fallen to the ground when the wind tipped over its nest. The chick lay wet and motionless in her hand. She peered closely at the head then shuddered, dropped the dead chick on the ground and wiped her hand on her trouser leg.

The baby spat out the nipple and threw back her head. Her face turned towards the light. She stretched

then lay still like a lizard basking on a rock. Her eyes were elongated, almost shut, with the small black pupils just visible. Sarah lifted the baby onto her shoulder, patted her back and waited for a burp. Then she guided the baby's head to the other breast.

A couple of weeks after she had found the dead chick, Sarah looked into the tree and saw a large nest. She climbed the tree higher than she had ever climbed before. From a branch close to the tree trunk she stretched towards the nest. She leaned forward as far as she dared and put her hand into the nest. She felt a small egg, leaned further and took a small, light-blue egg from the nest. She held the egg in the palm of her left hand and scabbled down the tree. Then she went inside, wrapped the egg in cotton wool and put it into a cardboard shoebox. She kept the shoebox in the furthest corner under her bed. Every morning she crawled under the bed, pulled out the shoebox and looked at the egg. On the fourth day the shoebox was gone.

When the baby finished feeding, Sarah carried her into the second room off the passage. This room used to be a study and would one day be the nursery but at this time was still half study and half nursery. Sarah put the baby on the change table, undid the grow suit then remembered that she should have got some warm water. Whenever the baby's nappy needed changing in the hospital the nurses had filled a small plastic container with warm water then taken off the nappy, dipped cotton balls into the water and cleaned what they called the baby's nappy area.

Sarah patted the baby's stomach, picked up the plastic container and held her breath while she dashed into the kitchen. She held her breath to keep the baby on the change table, to make sure the baby would not wriggle or squirm and fall onto the floor. She watched

the water pour from the tap into the container then, with her neck stretched forward like an emu, raced back to the change table.

The baby lay with her head twisted to the side, her face turned towards the lamp in the corner. Sarah put the plastic container on the desk and stood at the end of the change table. She took off the wet nappy then looked at the baby's belly button. It was a little pushed out and twisted. Sarah's pyjama top was still unbuttoned and she caught sight of her own belly button. In the last weeks of her pregnancy it had looked like a volcano. After the baby was born it had gradually collapsed and folded back in on itself and now resembled a brown rippled cave just like her mother's belly button.

Sarah bent down and kissed her baby's feet. She thought of her mother kissing her feet when she was a baby. Her mother, herself, her baby daughter were like a series of caves leading into each other. She leaned further over the baby and it seemed to her that she passed through all three caves. She caught her breath and ran her thumb under the baby's soft rounded toes. "Frog feet, frog feet", she murmured and brushed the tips of the toes with her mouth.

The wind made the branch of a gum tree thump against the fence a few times. Sarah started when she first heard the noise. She looked at the black window pane then continued to put the baby into a clean, precisely folded nappy. She fastened the grow suit, carried the baby back to the bedroom and wrapped her in two blankets just as she had been shown in the hospital. When Sarah's mother first saw Sarah pin down the baby's arms and tightly wrap the baby in a cotton blanket followed by a woollen blanket, she shook her head and said, "You can hardly see her face in that bundle".

Sarah's mother said she never wrapped her babies like that, especially not in summer. "When it was warm I let you lie on a sheet with nothing on, no nappies, nothing. That way your skin was free, it could breathe," she said.

Sarah grunted and tucked the last fold of the blanket under her baby's feet. This time she left the baby's arms free of the blanket. She kissed the baby's forehead then turned off the bedside lamp. She went back to the room where she had changed the baby's nappy, picked up the wet nappy and switched off the light.

Every night after Sarah brought the baby home from hospital, she walked through the house in the dark. She waited for her eyes to adjust to the moonlight or if there was no moon she felt her way down the passage. On this night there was a little light from the sky. She walked down the passage to the laundry only occasionally touching the wall. She put the nappy into a bucket beside the washing machine, left the laundry and was about to go back up the passage when the back door rattled. She went to the back door and saw that it was unlocked. She bolted the door then listened with her hand still on the bolt. She sensed that someone or something had entered the house. Although the laundry window was closed a strong gust blew into the passage from the laundry as if the wind was inside the house. Sarah closed her eyes and in that second glimpsed the edge of a white wing. A huge bird's wing or the wing of some supernatural being, an angel or a demon, beat the air from the doorway to the laundry.

Sarah ran down the passage to the room where she had changed the baby's nappy. She closed the door behind her but before she could get to the window to check that it was locked, another gust blew her back against the door. She ducked then crawled under the change table and covered her face with her hands. The desk beside her tipped over and the drawers fell out. Papers flew up in the air, circled then floated down again. It seemed that everything in the room would be turned upside down.

A few minutes later the gale died down as suddenly as it began. Sarah crawled out from under the change table and ran to the bedroom. From the doorway she could see that everything was just as she had left it. The white bassinet still stood in the corner, on the other side of the bed.

Sarah took a step forward. The wind blew in behind her. She stood firm, kept her back to the door and lifted her arms to shield the baby. The wind lifted her high into the air. She somersaulted then floated above the bassinet with her arms and legs outstretched. The room beneath her remained perfectly still. She looked over at her own unmade bed, at an open drawer, then down on the white wicker-work bassinet. She no longer had arms or legs. She hovered over the bassinet beside another clean, white flannel nappy.

Jennifer Maiden

Magic, Power, Guilt and Deep and Sincere Regrets

Ghassan Hage: *White Nation* (Pluto Press, 24.95);

Roberta Sykes: *Snake Dancing* (Allen & Unwin, \$22.95);

Jackie Huggins: *sister girl* (UQP);

Steven McCarthy: *Black Angels – Red Blood* (UQP, \$18.95).

TOWARDS THE END OF WRITING my notoriously unpublished novel 'The Blood Judge' (then called 'Complicity'), I realized with a grim and weary relish that I'd inadvertently achieved a work which was going to offend *everybody*. No doubt an essay on racism has to be something of the same enterprise. To clarify my mission statement, however, I should explain that this piece was commissioned to be a persona-essay with a 'different' approach to racism *and* a book review. Large lateral speculations, therefore, might with charity be regarded as deliberately macrocosmal rather than accidentally narcissistic. To work:

Guilt is a magical thing. There is a remarkable current fashion for books and plays in which Aboriginal characters are used by white authors to reach a conclusion in which the white characters are absolved of guilt about their ancestors' persecution of blacks. Many of these works are greeted with relief, rapture and lucrative prizes by white critics. Many of these works also have an air of intense spirituality, whether western religion, as in Les Murray, or 'Aboriginal' magic – as in some recent novels and plays, such as *Angel Street*, by whites.

Since I have never yet met any white person, left-wing, right-wing or liberal, who suffered the slightest shiver of genuine personal guilt about early white Australian behaviour, I think that this essay may be the time and place for me to consider some processes involved in a craving for magic and 'absolution'.

One such process is illuminated quite well in Les Murray's *Fredy Neptune*, where the persona at last forgives the Aboriginal people for making him feel guilty. Yes, indeed. If you come from a culture in which guilt is regarded as part of a benign power structure, to which absolution is a form of mutual consent, then

guilt from any other source is a problem. Guilt can be seen as the monopoly of a certain value system. 'Guilt provoking' is therefore a term of abuse, in that your system's power of guilt is being challenged by an outside authority or insurrection. By extension, Aboriginal culture must have some threatening characteristics projected onto it (no current physical threat being remotely evident from it) and accusations of 'guilt provoking' (often purposely confused with the demand for a mutually dignifying apology) are part of this projection.

Taking responsibility, apologizing concisely, analyzing the situation and trying to do whatever possible in the way of reparation have nothing to do with the sorts of 'guilt' in question. If some guilt is a conservative tactic, one who is busily creating fictitious guilts and inventing one-dimensional characters to assuage them is hardly likely to be doing much reparation at all.

Guilt! There are three different forms of genuine guilt which are also relevant to us here. One is guilt about misdeeds, another is guilt about weakness and the third is guilt about inauthenticity. All three are characterized by a mighty need for magic.

Authenticity. Towards the end of Sykes's *Snake Dancing*, the author is devastated by overhearing an older Aboriginal friend and colleague discuss her on the phone: "Just because a person's been raped doesn't make them an Aborigine." The reference is to Sykes having been gang-raped when very young (as described in her first autobiography *Snake Cradle*) and the fact that her mother seems to be dithering continuously in public about the nature of her ancestry. Sykes had recounted the rape to her friend by way of explaining and exploring her distress at her uncertain

genealogy. This blacker-than-thou syndrome (the curliness of hair being a recurrent criterion at some conferences) reminds one of the more-tortured-than-thou rivalries which crop up in some torture and trauma survivors, but there is also an obvious racism about it. I conducted a recent literary workshop in Blacktown in which a sensitive and talented woman with white skin and Dharug ancestry wanted to write about her beloved, alcoholic, heroic and tragic black grandmother. There are all sorts of guilt there: at being white, at being black, at dobbing in granny or, if not, then at not doing her the justice of facts. . .

Grannies! Hage seems fragmented by his. She worried about his driving (which to do her justice may simply have *been* appalling) and in her disenfranchised need to control him by worry he finds the key to the Australian policy of multiculturalism revealing a need for (in its case, racist) power. He argues:

For White multiculturalists today, White neo-fascism represents the latest technology of containment and problematisation of Third World-looking migrants. Pauline Hanson has enabled White Australians to unleash a new phase in the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, aiming to transform the increasingly demanding and "arrogant" migrants into decent "debatable problematised objects", safely positioned in the liminal spaces of inclusion/exclusion. The relation between the dominant White multiculturalism and White national exclusionism, which has always been a relation of affinity based on a shared fantasy structure, has evolved into an active relationship of *complicity*. This is the fundamental basis for what has clearly become the more general Hansonisation of White culture.

He concludes: "In the face of this destructive white tendency, some questions need to be asked: Are Whites still good for Australia? Have they been living in ghettos for too long? Are they dividing Australia? Do we need to have an assimilation program to help ease them into the multicultural mainstream? Clearly, it's time for Third World-looking Australians to do the 'worrying about the nation' number. And let's face it, there's plenty to worry about."

And no doubt his granny would be willing to take it on. Hage seems to categorize himself as a 'Third World-looking migrant' (he comes from Lebanon) and so has no problems of personal guilt for past power structures, whilst at the same time being clearly a prime

candidate for a small place in the next one. His thesis meticulously involves modern French theories, particularly Bourdieu and Lacan, on competing power microcosms. But it often simplifies into the popular assumption that the multicultural elite uses people like Hanson (who is seen as belonging to an earlier microcosm of values and attributes once entitling one to power) to do its shit-kicking and make it look good. He has an endearing, personable style, however, and a gift for anecdote and aphorism.

On the general subject of anecdotes about racial guilt, I often think of the Welsh socialist Nye Bevan's comment on de Valera's ambivalence after Bevan had tried unsuccessfully to persuade him to oppose the Nazis during the Second World War: "For the first time, a sense of guilt has crossed the Irish Sea." By this, he meant guilt about a possible misdeed, not guilt about weakness and lost culture. Which brings us back to magic. The Irish are a notoriously superstitious people. My father would relate how his undertaker uncle would claim worriedly to have been visited by a posthumous client complaining, "Mick, you made the coffin too short." Guilt about weakness and inauthenticity seems so often to be associated with supernatural powers and intuitions. Sykes's story often involves hauntings and premonitions:

The two-bedroom flat was light and sunny, but the place rippled with strange vibrations. At night I saw stains on the walls but when I went to scrub them off the next day, they were no longer there. Being another school holiday break, I'd sent the children up to stay with Mum . . . On their return odd things began to happen. Both children began sleep-walking and having bad nightmares . . . Eventually I became so upset by these phenomena that I asked MumShirl to visit.

She continues: "MumShirl was often very sensitive to the presence of spirits and, when I'd left her alone in the flat for a few minutes, she called out in alarm. A child-spirit, she said, was in the flat, a lonely-child-spirit who was seeking a companion. MumShirl offered to locate some visiting traditional Aborigines and have them smoke the flat to clear the spirits, and I agreed. Once this was done, I had no more problems with the children." A neighbour later tells Sykes that a child was murdered in the flat.

MumShirl (who had a genius for improvisatory compassion) also helps Sykes explicate her identity prob-

lems by explaining that it is better if Sykes doesn't question her Aboriginal blood, as this seems like an insult to Aborigines.

McCarthy's *Black Angels – Red Blood* is a vivid and engrossing novel. It has an attractive young black hero, Tim, who is intelligent, sensible, in tune with both the country and urban environments and in apprenticeship to "his *Mumiya*, his Santa Claus, the Old Man", from whom he is learning supernatural powers and for whom he has already magicked the death of one corrupt official. At the end, he appears to use his powers to escape murder by four policemen. He fights them off physically and violently, stares down a young constable and starts back towards the road as "A lone pelican flew over, heading westwards, towards the storm clouds gathering over the western plains."

Jackie Huggins' essays are not concerned with the supernatural but have a tone of reverence for her mother and her culture whilst expressing wariness about power. She seems to need to conserve energy almost as much as to conserve tradition. She dislikes white feminists who assume black women will be willing to help them with their private racial prejudices, because such people are exhausting. She has great distaste for those who use racial slang terms or appear to show casual disrespect for Aboriginal suffering. Whilst this is a correct distaste, I was also again reminded of a quote from Nye Bevan: "The Labour Party has too much reverence." Some problems must be dramatized to be understood and it should be noted that one of the most sensitive and powerful anti-racist plays workshopped recently was Fallon's "Three Boongs in the Kitchen", the title of which has made it anathema to some of an elite whose work actually *is* intrinsically racist in nature.

Reverence for culture and reverence for magic tend to blur together and both can be very dangerous to the user, not because of power but because of weakness. As ancient feminists who thought they were witches learned, neither culture nor magic will really protect you. And the fear the power structure professes to have of your magic and culture is not associated with real guilt but a stylized performance to justify continuing callousness about past and present misdeeds.

Hage apologizes for not including anti-Aboriginal prejudice in his *White Nation* thesis, but it is still a significant omission. His best but undeveloped insight on the subject is to compare Aboriginal tribal women to marginalized labour such as the illegal Mexicans

essential to the US economy, controlled by the myth that they are inferior and expendable.

Considering such issues, white feminism is probably too easily dismissed by Huggins. Influenced by experiences such as her mother's in domestic service, she sees white women as the cutting edge of the power structure and resents feminist suppositions of mutual subservience. Sykes is not so dogmatic, but there is no doubt that serious usage and betrayal by the capricious Germaine Greer has made her dubious about the issue.

As in most cases of the suppressed trying to empower themselves, there is a strong use of emotion-charged symbols in the McCarthy and Sykes works. One has to be careful of this, though, because Sykes's snake theme is not an appropriation of tribal totems so much as a form of self-protection and confidence-renewal associated with the experience of pack rape. The only tribal elders who should feel challenged by it are the disciples of Sigmund Freud. She uses a real snake in her early nightclub dancing so that she does not have to be sexually explicit and as an engaging pet to protect her from molesters after hours.

As Hawthorne argued in *The Scarlet Letter*, where Hester appropriates the emblem as a sign of independence and survival, reversing the function of authority symbols is a traditional form of spiritual insurrection. Maybe in fact there is more empowerment in this process, even against a dominating alien culture, than there is in combatting the oppressing or invading culture with one's elders' symbols in their traditional form.

We should not, however, forget the function of the super-ego in preventing the threatened culture from fragmenting too violently.

It is disappointing that by Hage's French models of rival attributes between evolving power structures, and his general omission of Aboriginal references, he does not acknowledge sufficiently how much, say, Pauline Hanson's fear of fragmentation by Asians is akin to the legitimate Aboriginal fear of being fragmented by white invaders. Some social terrors *are* historical not immediate. In my own experience of conducting literary workshops, I've seen Kokoda Trail and Japanese death camp survivors overjoyed to be able to recount their suffering and the government's mismanagement of battles without feeling they were being embarrassing or racist. In the same way, during the Second World War, the power of truthful rumour about the realities of casualties in northern Australia created a perma-

ment mistrust of the government which probably had a useful function during the Vietnam War. People knew the need to use their own discernment and respected ex-soldiers such as Cairns and Uren who ridiculed any comparison between a virtually unavoidable war and McNamara's.

Australia was invaded once successfully by whites and once unsuccessfully by Japanese, and this could be supposed to create a fragile and insecure national psychology. One could extend Hage's axiom that worry is an attempt to control a subject over whom one is about to lose control and say that the concept of guilt has the same function, but worry and guilt have very useful everyday remedial functions and any attempt to lessen those functions would seem to me in fact to increase the likelihood of everything from white car accidents to Aboriginal child mortality rates substantially. Guilt or worry caused by one's own weaknesses and defeats can lead to more benign social adjustments and allotments. Direct political power is not such a joyous thing that people will be willing to retain it perpetually unless their survival depends on it, and there is also sometimes a balancing ectogenetic need in the suppressed to assume power naturally without friction or challenge. In complex and often puzzling human situations, guilt and worry are often just sources of energy to move at all. They are part of processes of introspection and retrospection which create a clearer and more powerful sense of self in the oppressed, and are therefore often revolutionary in nature. On a more dramatic level, the guilt instilled by power structures can provoke the writhing Lutheran force which overthrows them.

SEXUAL GUILT is a different matter. We haven't talked about that in this essay yet. A recent issue of the downmarket but basically pleasant *People* magazine boasted its first Aboriginal woman nude centrefold. The model was unforgettably beautiful and photographed in a variety of poses with a variety of props, some problematical. *Now* I will dance lightheartedly onto the feminist racist ethical quicksand involved in the fact of this centrefold. Firstly, I was reminded of my old aesthetic theory that sex and sexual desire are great insurrectionary forces in changing social standards of physical beauty and therefore changing one of the main facets of social prejudice and social power. Undoubtedly, this was also how the editors of *People* would like to present their innovation.

And in some of the pin-ups the woman indeed ap-

pears proud, cheerful and in control. In one, however, she is cowered against rocks like some archetype of unwilling sexual and racial submission. Whilst that image is troubling and could be expected to appal both Aboriginal women and women in general, it would be fairer to the set of photos to say that in fact the woman in them occupies a variety of different levels on the power scale. As in most sexual fantasies, the observer has equally the role of liberator and oppressor, in modes that flux and merge excitingly. Because such a process is conceptual and often, therefore, intensely verbal, one has to suppose an increase in imagined communication between race and gender which must to some extent be preparation for transformed social realities. Power in its most extreme form denies its sexual elements in a way which would make such a public centrefold impossible in a truly colonial society.

The sexuality of this centrefold's beauty reminded me of that other visually lithe and sexual depiction of Aboriginal womanhood, the 1950s film *Jedda*. The rather peculiar apartheid ideology of *Jedda* – arguing against assimilation but for reasons of condescending racism rather than any particular revulsion against the policy of stealing children – has always been an obstacle to analysis of its other, more interesting features. One of these is an obvious correlation between sexual guilt and magical shape-shifting. At the end, after the station owner's wife's Aboriginal protegee, Jedda, has been abducted and one assumes raped by a sort of Black rebel outlaw Heathcliff figure (sorry for the 'sort of', but the film's vague, totemic characterization requires such inexactitude), they both topple suddenly over a cliff. Jedda screams realistically but then a native bird flies up on queue to replace her.

In the mythology of the psyche, however, the problem with such shape-shifting is that the shapes into which the sexual guilt has shifted will then in themselves take on a furtive, haunting and accusing function, a Hanging Rock of ghosts, animals, landscapes and absences to be sorted out by subsequent events.

It has been stated here that this essay is based on the assumption that neither occupied native landscapes (of any country), native flora and fauna (of any country), Aboriginal people or women as such are endowed with anything more than the normal quota of magical powers, whether in a vengeful or useful capacity. It is not to deny that there are good spiritual forces in the universe on which a supplicant can call. I question any monopoly on these with some regret, as it means that

neither my own gender, nor my Irish or Asian Indian ancestry guarantee that any excess reserves of white light might effulge in my direction. I would like my democratization, though.

Just as there are different species of guilt, of course, there are different species of magic. There is the magic projected by guilt onto those who have been subdued and/or sexually desired. There is the magic the suppressed hope to enjoy to fulfill their own wishes against the oppressors. There is also the priestly magic used to control and unify social groups.

This last brings us to one of the most difficult ethical situations in any analysis of colonial power. Many colonized cultures, whether Irish Catholic or Aboriginal tribal, do – as white feminists allege – depend on subjugation and marginalization of women for social cohesion. Women such as Jackie Huggins (or earlier perhaps Bernadette Devlin) may argue that this is not an issue for anyone but the women themselves, and that loyalty to one's own culture is more vital, but I think that this glosses over too much misery, terror and guilt about inauthenticity within the cultures in question. There is no doubt that colonizing cultures have sometimes offered another ice floe onto which the potential victims of Suttee, bound feet, tribal initiation, clitoral circumcision, punishment rape, ineffective birth control, and so on, can jump.

In the process, they often reassure themselves that the magic of the colonizing culture is as strong as their old tribal one, or – more benignly – modify and blend the two forms of magic into a less censorious pattern. The Sykes book has an uneasy but vivacious sense of this often, which may be why it has attracted criticism.

For the feminist point of view, it should be noted that the usual enforcers of tribal magic in many cultures are not priests but drunken men on Saturday night. Parallel to the enforcing, irrational role, perhaps, that many, including Hage, argue Pauline Hanson performs for the educated white power structure.

At a recent panel discussion on taboo, I provoked an uneasy silence when I said I'd once seen another panel discussion (a Robertson 'Hypothetical', I think) in which that panel had said they'd honour religious taboos and not enter a temple if they were menstruating. I remarked that I'd go in, menstruating or not. In retrospect, I should have added, 'Especially if menstruating', but you can't always recall the full courage of your lack of conviction.

Violence against women, boys or transgressors in a colonized culture springs not only from the need for

preserving tribal identity, but also from the guilt at weakness caused by colonization itself. This guilt has two solutions. As in the Weimar Republic, guilt admitted to the self can lead to growth, private identity and the ability to escape, or it can be rejected, at the price of rejecting a concise sense of self. The sense of self is then diffused onto the more powerful and 'pure' remnants of the colonized culture which, as I've suggested, it then becomes a 'duty' to enforce.

Often in these situations, the sufferer of this last form of violence will themselves resort to a monopolistic form of magic. All defensive magic is of concern to us on a humane level, as it can be poignantly inadequate as self-protection, just as Black women slaves in the American South built up their own vast and intricate subcultures of voodoo.

Of all the despicable things done to Aborigines in our recorded history, the one which has at present stolen under my defences is not as spectacularly brutal as most. It is the story from Huggins' book of how an old grandmother was left behind when the tribe was forcibly relocated. Desperate for her babies, she wandered into the bewildering desert and died. I suppose the true motivation of this essay (in that human motivation is usually one other person) is to reach back in time, re-orientate and genuinely protect that old woman – or at least some version of her in the future.

Magic can energize and comfort but it should not assume security or power.

This is not to argue, of course, that jumping onto ice floes can't work both ways. One knows of many people from colonizing cultures who have successfully jumped to the culture of the colonized, with very healthy results. I like to think of my ancestors, a white male civil servant in the Indian Raj and a young Indian woman from a prosperous family who married and managed to be disinherited by both their families simultaneously. Miscegenation isn't the only solution, but it isn't to be dismissed.

On the subject of attributing extraordinary magic powers to dominated cultures, it may be that this is sometimes an active strategy to leave them undefended in more practical terms. It may be that using magical concepts to define a culture and relating to these in a reverential way is sometimes also an active strategy to prevent more complex and difficult discussions between conflicting cultures.

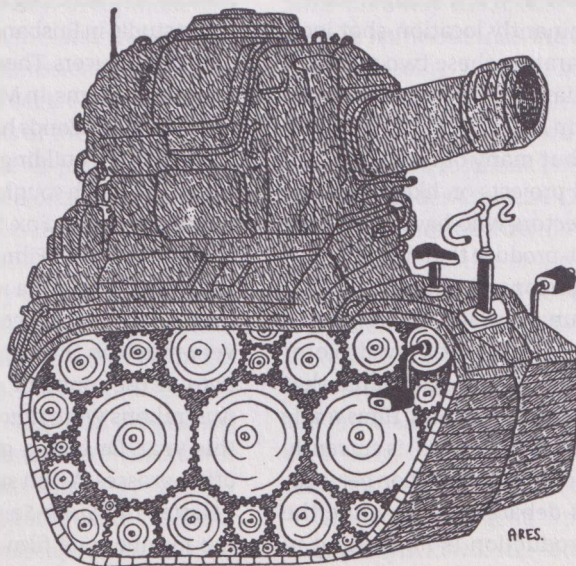
When I saw the new Democrat Senator Ridgeway being smoked in a ritual purification ceremony on the news, I felt some foreboding which may have been

justified by the lukewarm sentiments of reconciliation he subsequently elicited from John Howard. It is not that I doubt the Senator emerged genuinely cleansed by the fumes, but that if magic absolutes are deemed possible here, they must be deemed possible for Mr Howard as well. Mr Howard seems to have an interesting psychology. He repeatedly declares a radical right-wing policy or position, waits for the general revolted protests, and then much less obtrusively backs down. The result is an illusion of dialogue and moderation. It was therefore inevitable that Mr Howard would in some way tease the electorate about reconciliation and then express a qualified contrition. Senator Ridgeway seems to have 'facilitated' this process, but we are left with an opportunity to analyze the difference between regret and guilt in a post-colonial situation. To apologize and express guilt for the crimes of one's ancestors is to admit that the seeds of those crimes are still present in the current generation and could flourish in more modern forms. To express regret is a bystander position which evades responsibility but also detaches one from one's cultural base. This can actually be a useful detachment for a socialist or radical liberal, but the consequences for someone as conservative as Mr Howard could be fascinatingly odd. Mr Howard often has an air of startled, indignant ac-

cusation reminiscent of Pauline Hanson, and one could imagine him turning eventually against his own power base because of a feeling of use and false definition.

Indeed, whether it is John Howard, Pauline Hanson, a British soldier or the wife of a station owner, any who are the direct administrators of a colonial or post colonial power are likely to consider themselves its victims. Huggins dismisses this too easily as a tool of legitimate power for the oppressed. Sykes has a much surer ability to use the mutual or sympathetic aspects of the power structure (even to the extent of getting her washing machine repaired). McCarthy's prose is shrewd and strong but he falls back on the macho-magic solution. Hage's models summarize part of the situation one-dimensionally but the need to document rival attitudes in power structures does not permit sufficient analysis of the interactions where oppressor and oppressed (sometimes in the same person) can transmute those attributes and change. Perhaps also our hope should rest on the fact that the human concept of magic is essentially about change, and tends to outwit those who claim or attribute it for conservative reasons.

Jennifer Maiden writes from the western suburbs of Sydney.



Ben Goldsmith

The full range of ugly Australians

Australian film in 1999

AROUND SEPTEMBER EACH YEAR, members of the Australian Film Institute are charged with the responsibility of casting votes on the films entered for the annual AFI Awards. The act of watching eighteen nominated feature films, four documentary sessions and three shorts and animation sessions in a little over three weeks and the invitation to choose favourites invites attempts not only to rank the films, but to draw comparisons, to look for commonalities of theme and style, to reflect on the health of the industry. This year, the AFI Awards were held in November at the old Showgrounds in Sydney, site of the largest film studio in Australia. This is a smart move on the part of Fox Studios Australia, part of a long-term strategy of "good corporate citizenship" aimed at winning over sceptics and cynics within the local industry who decry the practices of Fox or the incentives offered to bring them here in the first place. The staging of the Awards at the studios brings together the two worlds of the Australian film and television production industry – the glitzy, international, studio set-up, a tangible link to Hollywood, and low-key, low-budget, determinedly original, predominantly location-shot local filmmaking. The line separating these two worlds is increasingly fluid; Australian creatives and crew have long gone to try their luck in Hollywood – now at least they have less far to go – but many of them are coming back to work on local projects or, like a growing number of Australian directors who have hit the big time in Hollywood, to post-produce their films.

A recent report commissioned by the major Hollywood trade guilds, 'US Runaway Film and Television Production Study Report', May 1999 <www.dga.org/press/releases/1999/runaway.pdf>, estimates that runaway or offshore production (meaning films made by the Hollywood studios outside the US) is currently costing the Californian economy US\$10 billion per year. While the exact figure is debatable, and while the majority share of this production is happening in Canada, it is clear that Australia is becoming an in-

creasingly attractive proposition for Hollywood studios. The depth of creative and technical competence and the fact that we speak a form of English they can more or less understand are considerable advantages for American producers with an eye on the bottom line. Technological developments in communications and media in recent years have rendered physical distance from Los Angeles almost irrelevant, and the practice of many US-based Australian directors post-producing their films in Australia has normalized for studio executives the idea that Australia is much more than just a set of breathtaking and highly photogenic locations. And most significant of all has been the development of an integrated strategy of incentives and tax breaks offered by Australian governments to compound their agencies' promotional activities.

Meanwhile, former Chief Executive of the Australian Film Commission, Cathy Robinson, is in Brisbane examining the possibility of establishing a postgraduate film school. And everywhere the talk is of studio developments. The Pacific Film and Television Commission is conducting a feasibility study for the siting of a film studio in Brisbane, targeted (at this stage, at least) at local producers. There are rumours of a studio development in Cairns. In Melbourne, the Studio City development at Docklands has attracted much attention, and there is talk of building more facilities around the Horizon tank – much sought after for filming watery scenes – at Point Cook. Fox Studios in Sydney, site of the recent Australian Film Institute Awards, is reported to be booked solid for a number of years hence.

If further evidence were needed that Australia is very much on the minds of Hollywood studio executives at the moment, one need only remember that Australians were nominated for seven Oscars earlier this year. Or take a glance at recent American box office grosses. A film starring an Australian actor (Toni Colette, *The Sixth Sense*) was recently succeeded as the number one film at the American box office by another directed by an Australian (Bruce Beresford,

Double Jeopardy). And with the long awaited release of his new film *Snow Falling on Cedars* imminent, Scott Hicks is again the toast of Australian directors, not least for his enviable deal with Steven Spielberg's Dreamworks which reportedly allows him a substantial degree of freedom to research and instigate projects.

But is this really all good news for the local industry? Many worry that the focus on studio construction may create a two-tier system in which the best talent is locked up on international productions, while the smaller more fragile local production industry continues its struggle to survive. While it is true that both total production investment and cinema attendance have been rising, Australian films' share of the domestic box office has hovered around 10 per cent for a number of years. While foreign and private investment grows and the forms of government assistance diversify, federal and to a lesser extent state governments remain key industry players. Within the industry there is rumbling discontent over the operation of the film agencies, the structure of funding support mechanisms, the allocation of the cut of gross takings, and particularly over the systems of peer assessment of scripts. Although none of this is really new, the rumbling has reached critical volume: Minister for the Arts Peter McGauran has recently requested a report on the state of the local industry from the two main federal agencies, the Film Commission and the Film Finance Corporation. This comes on top of the recent report on the screen culture sector conducted by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, an ongoing review of coproduction arrangements by the Department, and the restructuring of the Australian Film Commission. Anyone who has been around the university sector in the last few years will know the implications of the term 'restructure' for morale, wages, conditions, job security. The AFC has already announced the closure of its London office, and the 'streamlining' of its marketing division with the loss of a number of jobs.

Much of this flurry of activity at government level has been sparked by the forthcoming Millennium Round of world trade negotiations, scheduled to begin in Seattle on 30 November, 1999. Audiovisual services and national policies which shelter local production and other cultural industries from market forces will be key topics for debate in this round. Agreements reached in this round have the potential to dramatically change the audiovisual landscape in Australia, a fact of which few within the industry seem to be aware.

Opportunities may well open for Australian producers as content hungry new media proliferate, but the immediate future is uncertain. Domestically, the brawl over the introduction of digital television (slated to begin on 1 January, 2001, or in binary code 01/01/01) with the commercial television networks on one side, and News International, Fairfax, Telstra and Optus on the other, shows no sign of being amicably resolved. And the Productivity Commission is scheduled to deliver its final report on broadcasting early next year which itself will have significant ramifications at all levels of the industry.

What then of the present?

The Australian Film Institute Awards, held every November, are the industry's major annual excuse for a frock-up, but they are also a time for introspection, and an opportunity to take stock. For many years the main funding agencies have invested a lot of time and money in project development, reasoning that encouraging first-time writers and directors would build the base for a robust industry. And, recognizing that competing with Hollywood on its terms is simply not on for an industry of this size, the agencies have for many years emphasized their interest in films that are distinguished by their difference. Such recent initiatives as the Million Dollar Movies scheme (a joint AFC-SBS Independent venture), have compounded this position. The prominence given to originality has delivered a host of remarkable films in recent years: *Doing Time for Patsy Kline*, *Kiss or Kill*, *Idiot Box*, *Feeling Sexy*, to name but four. But it has also given rise to an ever-increasing range of substandard 'quirky' comedies built around a single zany idea and populated by the full range of ugly Australians.

To digress a moment. There is a scene in the American independent feature *Go* – a film which will undoubtedly become a defining film for post-Tarantino teens – in which one of the gang of guys heading for Las Vegas tells a story about a sexual encounter he once had. When pressed for the finer points (like his partner's name) his imagination fails him. He has appropriated a memory, a story, to entertain his mates and grow his stock of cultural capital. But he botches the telling, concentrating on the broad thrust of the story but neglecting the details that give it texture.

Good stories are good capital the world over. A good story badly told will still corner an audience. But a bad story well told will only draw a crowd for a short time.

In their quest for originality, Australian films often fall into this trap: at their best, all style, little substance. And at their worst . . . go see *Muggers* and judge for yourself.

That is, if you get the chance. *Muggers* (directed by Dean Murphy), the closing night film at the Noosa Film Festival (with tickets costing \$90, there must have been some people feeling royally ripped off after the screening), has had its release date put back until March for a variety of reasons. Officially (amongst others) to avoid clashing with the release of the next James Bond film. Unofficially, because it's crap. One thing is clear: whoever is advising Matt Day on which roles to take does not have his best interests at heart. *Muggers* is an everyday story of the lengths poor medical students must go to in order to pay their way through medical school. With commendable entrepreneurial drive, two of them get involved in an organ-stealing scam, selling assorted kidneys and livers (taken involuntarily from unsuspecting acquaintances) to meet the demands of rich, private patients. Another prostitute herself to pay off the local loan shark. Fortunately it all ends happily: the guys get the girls, pass their exams and win a couple of prizes to boot. At least that's what happened in the version I saw. I wouldn't be surprised if it was substantially re-edited before it again sees the light of day.

Ultimately I blame John Birmingham for giving aspiring filmmakers the idea that their own tall stories of urban living are worth trying to sell to an audience. And George *Mad Max* Miller for encouraging medical students to think that they could have a profitable second career as film directors. And Emma-Kate Croghan whose debut film *Love and Other Catastrophes* seemed to prove that the lives of inner city students can be of more than passing interest to those outside the director's own circle of friends.

Hard as it may be to believe though, *Muggers* does not walk off with the award for worst film of the year. That honour goes to debut filmmaker Elise McCredie's *Strange Fits of Passion*, a deeply conservative Catholic morality tale about a mousy bookstore clerk's attempts to lose her virginity. She (Michela Noonan), never named, seeks the meaning of love in poetry. She begins as an impossibly naïve inner-urban yoof searching for the mean-

ing and mechanics of love as if she had just landed from outer space. She knows nothing, literally not the first thing about sex. Of course she is punished for finally achieving her desire to lose her virginity (to a poet "for ten years, though as yet unpublished"); Jimmy, her confidant, her bridge across the gulf between the sexes (he happens to be gay, surprise, surprise), slits his wrists in her bed on the night she succeeds in getting laid.

A special place in this year's hall of shame should also be reserved for the only children's feature to be put forward for awards, Mario Andreacchio's Canadian-Australian coproduction *Sally Marshall is not an Alien*. This appalling film revolves around what can only be described as Hansonism for kids coated in a sickly saccharine moralism. Playground fascist Ronnie revels in her role as mini-demagogue. Holding her playmates in thrall, she organizes a campaign to expose a new kid, Sally Marshall, as an alien who should be driven out of town, in order that Ronnie might win a telescope in a bet. The film reminded me of that terrible Tom Hanks film *The Burbs*, a film about community intolerance in which the wildest fears of the all-American residents of a typical 'burb about their new, alien (foreign accented, night people, physiognomically, physically, fashionably marked as other) neighbours are ultimately proven correct. Andreacchio, a recent appointment to the board of the Film Finance Corporation, had the opportunity here to make a kids' film with important things to say about the ignorance of xenophobia and racism. He didn't take it.

The theme of the heart of the metropolis as a feminized cinematic space, a space overlaid with the fantasies, desires and secretions of young women in pursuit of a root, connects a number of this year's crop. Young girls searching for love (and sex) in the city parade across Brad Heyward's *Occasional Coarse Language*, John Curran's *Praise*, and Emma-Kate Croghan's eagerly anticipated second film *Strange Planet*. The last, sadly, is a disappointment despite some striking visuals. Croghan is clearly in tune with the circadian rhythms of everyday urban life, and obviously feels deeply the trials confronting young lovers, but she needs to broaden her horizons before she starts to believe that she can only make one kind of film.

Emily Woof, publicity still from *Strange Fits of Passion* (Rep Films)



Bryan Brown (Pando), publicity still from *Two Hands* (Rep Films)



The films that try to be genuinely original in style or ambitious in subject matter do stand out from the rest, but some are just as uneven as the formulaic quirky comedies. Neil Mansfield's *Fresh Air*, the first Million Dollar Movie to reach the screen, is a brave attempt to make an original piece of cinema. The film characterizes itself as 'zinema', an attempt to make a film like a 'zine'. But it never quite pulls it off. About twenty minutes in it occurred to me that *Fresh Air* could go on forever as it comprises a random pastiche of moments in the lives of three housemates (inner city dwellers, of course). *Fresh Air* is the ultimate in the deeply personal style of filmmaking that is another consequence of the emphasis on originality in project selection: after all, what could be more original than the filmmaker's own life? The result though is a mess which is virtually unwatchable.

Jon Hewitt's *Redball* is stylistically and in story terms one of the most interesting features released in Australia in recent years. Shot on digital video, this slick film about police corruption in Victoria was snubbed by the funding agencies and did not receive a single nomination for the AFI Awards. This is a gross injustice. Belinda McCrory and John Brumpton in particular give powerful performances which deserve recognition. And any film which is condemned by the Victorian police must be doing something right.

Manuela Alberti's *The Missing* is a big picture picture. Through the figure of Tommaso (Fabrizio Bentivoglio), a high-ranking Vatican priest who returns to Australia to search for his secret missing daughter, the film plays with the difficult legacy of contact between the Catholic Church and remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. It is a commentary on the stolen generation, on the complicity of the church in the treatment and condition of Australia's indigenous peoples, and on the problematic space where two sets of laws overlap. Sadly, the film never quite manages to pull off its ambitious project, but Alberti deserves praise and encouragement for the attempt.

Bill Bennett's follow-up to *Kiss or Kill, In a Savage Land*, is a curious period piece about a married couple of anthropologists who venture to the Trobriand Islands to record indigenous culture and rituals on the eve of the Second World War. By all accounts the story

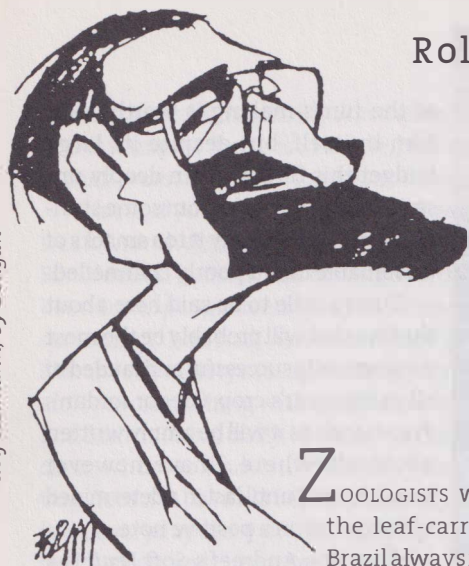
of the film's making is worthy of a film in itself, but despite its large budget this film is again deeply unsatisfying. And aside from some stunning cinematography it too smacks of undeniable talent poorly channelled.

There's little to be said here about the film that will probably be the most commercially successful and lauded of all in this year's crop, Gregor Jordan's *Two Hands*, as it will be amply written about elsewhere. I have however saved the best until last in a determined bid to go out on a positive note.

Christina Andreef's *Soft Fruit* is a welcome relief from the excessive stereotypes of Ernie Clark's *Spank!* (a comedy about a former monk returning to work the café strip of Adelaide) and John Polson's debut feature *Siam Sunset* (a comedy about an industrial chemist who is propelled by a series of catastrophes deep into the outback where he can lose and find himself). *Soft Fruit* is a rich, fleshy, juicy comedy about a family gathering to help each other through the last weeks of the mother's life. Sacha Horler, nominated for best actor for her role in *Praise* and nominated for her role here as best supporting actor, is spectacularly good as single mum Nadia who retreats to her car to masturbate to a Mills and Boon novel, and arranges secret trysts with her ex-husband in a run-down beach hotel. Jeannie Drynan as Mum is wonderful (although in danger of being forever remembered for doomed mother figure roles after her performances here and in *Muriel's Wedding*). And Russel Dykstra as the mongrel son, a recently de-institutionalized ex-bikie with a penchant for self mutilation and mood altering substances of any kind, steals most scenes he's in.

For all their unevenness the films nominated for this year's AFI Awards demonstrate a rich seam of acting and creative talent which bodes well for the future of the industry here. The real test for most of these filmmakers though will be in their next projects. How will they interpret originality then? Will they be brave enough to tackle genuinely different subject matter, or will the temptation to stick with what they know prove too hard to resist? And will they want to make a studio film next?

Ben Goldsmith won a pen for sitting through thirty-five films in nineteen days. He's learning to use it.



Rolf Heimann

Pyramid Power in Cuba

ZOOLOGISTS WHO DESCRIBE the leaf-carrying ants of Brazil always marvel at the power of these insects when it comes to carrying multiples of body-weights. Those zoologists have obviously never observed Cubans arriving in Habana after their overseas trip.

When questioned by customs about those enormous cardboard cocoons they lied so obviously that not even I was fooled. They fumbled and stuttered and sweated profusely, and when they lifted these loads they pretended that they were as light as feathers, when in fact they nearly broke their backs. As far as I could see, none was asked to actually open their parcels. The inspectors were more interested in the passengers anyway: if they crumpled in fear, and sweated and stuttered in terror, they were satisfied and let them pass.

Terminal One in Habana has barriers at the exit, just like in any airport. Except that here they are totally ignored. Emerging from the door I was met by a solid wall of people. Luckily a Cuban with a 900-litre refrigerator cleared a path for me like an icebreaker.

The clamouring crowd immediately closed behind me and surrounded us. About two hundred crude signs were being thrust into my face, alas, none bearing my name. Only when my icebreaker and I emerged into the open air did I spot the cardboard sign of my prospective minder. He explained that he would have positioned himself closer to the gate, but had been unwilling to compete with old ladies who said they were waiting for medicine!

Medicine is obviously a very

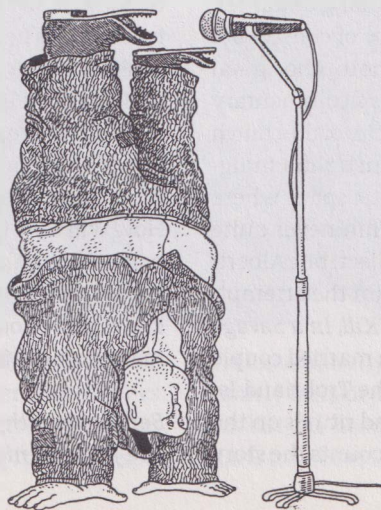
powerful word in Cuba. For instance, somebody had given me some presents for Cuban friends, toy koalas, pens and such things. These were always referred to, despite my initial protests, as medicines, probably to assure their prompt delivery.

I let my friend know that the little old ladies who purported to need medicines had abandoned their grey wigs along with their good manners as soon as they had reached their fighting positions near the gate, and that they had shouted offers of cheap transport and accommodation.

I had been invited onto the jury for an international cartoon competition in Habana, and the Cuban government paid for a week's accommodation. After that week was over, I stayed on at my own expense. Because I like revolutions, I always had a soft spot for Cuba. But because I had grown up in East Germany, I had no illusions about dictatorships masquerading as democracies. This trip would be a chance to learn about Cuba.

It would also be a chance to meet those Cuban cartoonists who enjoy such a formidable international reputation. I was soon to find out why: apart from their obvious talent they are spurred by an incentive which we in the west do not have. In Cuba, where a medical doctor earns less than a dollar a day, a prize of \$2000 is a fortune. Top cartoonists in Australia never even bother to participate in international events. Not so in Cuba.

Occasionally I asked Cubans whether they had been overseas. Some had been soldiers in Angola and some had worked in Prague, but all the cartoonists who had gone abroad had done so as a result of winning competitions.



ARES.

Many admitted that each time they had been tempted to stay abroad. In the end there had been too many good reasons to come back. For instance, by betraying the government after getting permission to leave, they'd make it difficult for future applicants. Then there was the shopping list – friends and relatives expected you to return with the break-linings for a 1937 Buick, certain books, sewing machine needles etc. And despite all the poverty and shortages, Cuba is not actually as unhappy a place as the west supposes. There is free education and medical service, and old-fashioned rationing cards ensure that even the poorest will not go without. There is a lively culture, and the weather is free.

DURING MY STAY in Cuba I became aware of what a hypocrite I was. Every observation I stored in one of two mental files, according to whether they would delight friends of Cuba or should only be told to those who wanted to hear bad things. As always, bad things were more fun. Here are a few typical items from that file.

Arriving at the offices of the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* I gratefully sank into an armchair in the lobby, as one does when one suffers blistered feet and has voyaged through Habana's noon-day heat. I was immediately ushered out of these chairs. They were not for sitting under any circumstances. No such lame excuses as signing books or changing films or blistered feet were accepted. The Cubans, shaking their heads, could not understand why these forbidden chairs acted like magnets to us foreigners. These were not sitting chairs, but looking chairs.

Another time we were walking home late at night along the Malecon and noticed a graffiti-like inscription on the footpath: *no paseo*. Echos of *no paseran?* Indeed a soldier suddenly stepped from the darkness and told us to walk on the opposite footpath. My Cuban friend saw nothing strange in this and we obediently crossed to the other side. The reason? Nobody was allowed to walk past a building that had a sensitive purpose.





Five-year-old travel books about Cuba are sadly out of date. It is no longer true that there are no beggars in Cuba. And they have a highly developed sense of justice: If you give to one of them, why not to all? And if you give to none, that is even more unfair, because you are rich, and they are poor. If a beggar only gets one dollar a day – and that is easily achieved – he earns more than a doctor. Respectable housewives

crossed the street to ask me for a dollar.

The beggars have a way of shaming you into giving. If you persistently ignore the hand tugging on your sleeve, they will switch to phase two: they will follow you another two blocks cursing you at the top of their voice. Even if you have no intention of learning Spanish you will leave Cuba with at least three words firmly imprinted in your mind: *hijo, puta* and *perro*.

As travellers we have certain expectations, and we mentally cross off from our list the items as they are experienced. This mental list is a kind of Spotto (a game played by schoolchildren on long bus trips). Cuban Spotto looks something like this, and within a single day one can expect to collect all these sights:

CUBAN SPOTTO

	a trunk that does not open
	a tree growing from a crack in a wall
	a camel bus
	a tap that keeps running
	A car from the fifties without lights
	a picture of Che Guevara
	a mule cart
	a tap without water
	soggy toilet paper
	somebody who surely must be a spy

After my first week in Cuba I realized that there were more than the aforementioned reasons as to why cartooning flowered in Cuba. The whole atmosphere seems conducive to the artform. First of all there is Cuban history: filled with so much blood, so much heroism and treachery that it makes Australia's two hundred years of white occupation seem like a church

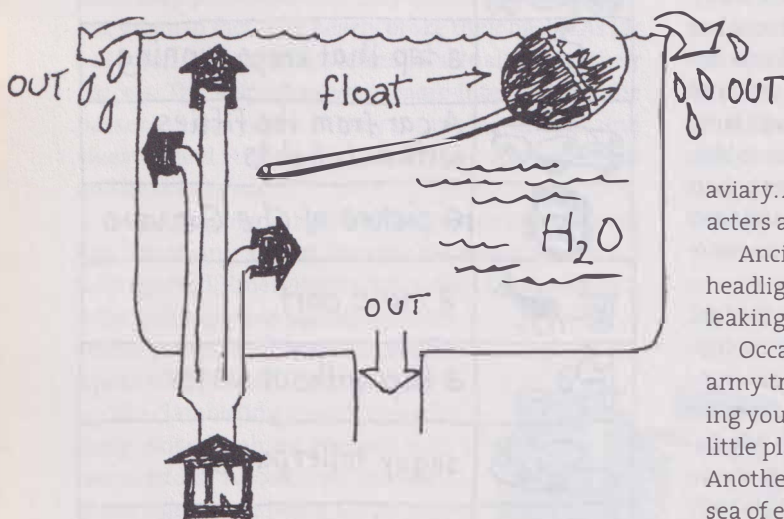
picnic. Then there is today's incongruity: street scenes out of a *Mad Max* film, but festooned with banners from a Soviet party congress; Kafkaesque bureaucracy next to hedonistic abandonment rubbing shoulders with autocratic severity within tropical sloth giving way to revolutionary ethics ... Only a cartoonist can do it justice!

Good news/bad news at every step: The water is so clean that you can drink it from the tap, but half the time it does not flow.

My hotel is designed along familiar western principles. The toilet cistern, for instance, is installed with just the right slant, so that one's toothbrush box slides down at the slightest vibration. One could of course try to jam it between tap and wall, right over the crack where the cockroaches live. But that is a trap for which such a seasoned traveller as I no longer falls.

The water comes back in the middle of the night, in generous spurts that sound like a herd of elephants suffering diarrhoea. Not only does the cistern overflow into the toilet, but onto the floor.

I happen to be an expert in fixing cisterns. Everybody needs a hobby.



Contrary to popular belief it is quite safe to plunge one's arm deep into a murky foreign cistern. The water only becomes unhygienic *after* use. Most cisterns operate according to some basic principles of engineering. But this one was, as one might expect in Cuba, revolutionary. At the danger of being arrested on my next visit for industrial espionage, above is a rough diagram of its design.

One notes that there are several openings at three levels and with apertures of varying sizes, which accounts for the variations in pitch. Indeed the device is called 'Cuban Echo', in Spanish of course. I discover this when I disturb some muck at the bottom and note letters in the plastic: '... *echo en Cuba*'. The Cuban Echo comes on at unpredictable times, wisely in the middle of the night when all the guests are in, so that they can thereby be advised to have their shower. Nobody can appreciate the benefits of a shower as much as a traveller in Cuba, who often feels like having been dragged through a boiling glue pot.

Conveniently, the water always stops after a short time, so that the guests can sleep and the floors can dry out.

Having grown up in East Germany, Habana filled me with nostalgia. There was a Lenin Park and a Karl Marx Theatre where Brecht was being performed, and plaster was falling from walls in generous chunks. The quality of the roads compared favourably to those of my childhood in war-ravaged Dresden.

When my official stint as cartoon judge was finished, I moved into Habana Vieja to a room which had no window – but there was a corridor leading to a balcony from where one could watch the street. And Habana streets are worth watching.

At any time, even after dark, the noise outside resembled that of an overcrowded aviary. After a couple of days I recognized the characters and knew the routine of the day.

Ancient American cars with flat tyres and blind headlights lined the curb like huge squashed beetles leaking their body juices into the gutter.

Occasionally trucks trundled through the street, army trucks for instance, filled with innocent-looking young men who spoiled the effect by clutching little plastic lunch bags instead of machine pistols. Another time I looked down onto an IFA truck into a sea of eggs.

In the doorway of the corner house always sat a chain-smoking black man who served as a cigarette lighter for the whole *barrio*; he was so often asked for a light by passers-by that he did not even look up but simply held his fag in the air when requested. Nearby were two men engaged in comparing papers, which they showed each other as if they were valuable collection pieces. They were probably permits, or permits for permits, and the men discussed whether such

permits were still valid and where they could be obtained. Another old man had just found a coin in the gutter and demonstrated to all and sundry that it must have come from his own pocket which had a hole, and not only was this coin his by rights but probably any other coin in the vicinity.

Above him on the balconies young couples pursued the most popular Cuban pastime: they kissed in total self-abandon. While next to them old women hung out plastic bags on washing lines, carefully as if they were fragile silk.

Vendors came through the street, and they were already awaited by housewives on the balconies who with the skill of seasoned sailors let down bags to be filled with bread or newspapers.

Two men tried to open the trunk of a battered old Lada car, with various instruments like knives and wires and screwdrivers, then they stood back and discussed the problem and remembered a cousin in La Playa who also had a Lada. Right opposite me, through the wrought-iron grill of a ground-floor window a grandmother in a grubby gown said goodbye to a young girl, squeezing her hand and not letting go, continuously finding new words as an excuse for prolonging the farewell. Nearby another young woman was reluctant to get onto the seat of her bicycle which consisted of a misshapen lump made of corrugated cardboard and rags, with an uncomfortable iron pipe protruding. Her dilemma was as bad as that of a huge black man who passed riding a bicycle which had no handle-bars at all. No kidding, he steered by clamping his giant fists onto the vertical steering column!

A flower vendor was unable to get a bouquet into a hanging plastic bag and people from everywhere called out, some recommending that he squeeze the stems together more, while others advised a larger bag. The conflicting recommendations confused him no end, and not only him but all the other vendors as well, who directed searching glances towards the balconies, wondering whether the advice was directed at them.

And all the time dogs barked, and roosters crowed. Yes, even in the middle of a city of two million, roosters crowed.

Once in a while wonderful things happened, like the trunk of the old Lada suddenly opening as if by magic, revealing a spare tyre that would have been the envy of Kojac, and a battered jerry can from which the old men proceeded to syphon a liquid which was most likely flammable, even though they let it bubble into an open bucket. And by the way, Cubans like to throw burning cigarette ends through windows without caring where they fall.

Then it happened: the *abuelita* across the road finally let go the hand of the girl, because even in Habana people had to part sometime, but the old woman kept her bony arm stretched through the bars in such a theatrical gesture that the girl came back and held that hand again and talked for another ten minutes.

Once in a while people pulled carts through the street, on tiny little rattling metal wheels and with pathetic loads like flattened cardboard boxes or cans, and once there was a woman who pulled a big cardboard box on a string, without any wheels at all, and the box was filled with nothing but crumpled papers that spilled onto the road whenever she hit a pot-hole.

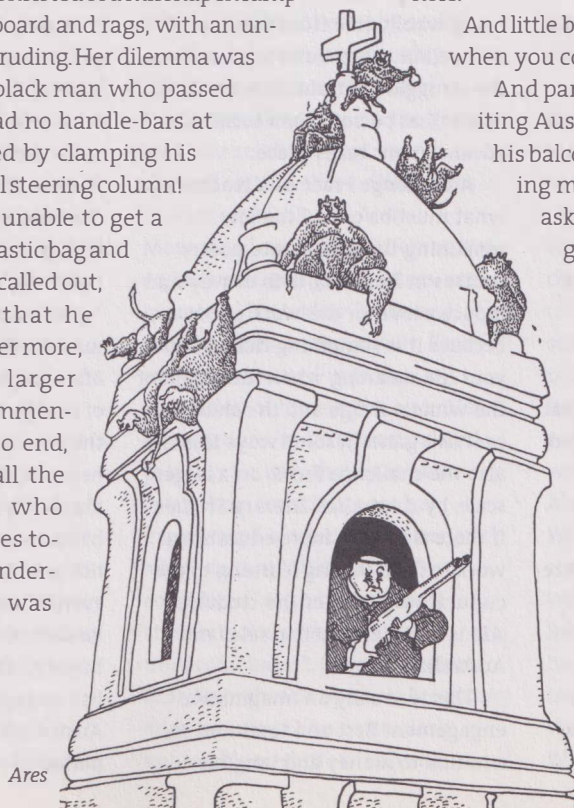
And little boys played football, even at night when you couldn't see a thing.

And part of the street scene was the visiting Australian who watched it all from his balcony, nursing his blisters and wiping mango juice from his camera and asked his Cuban friend where he'd go to, if he could freely travel anywhere in the world.

My Cuban friend did not have to think for long. A dreamy smile spread over his face as he said: "The Pyramids. In Egypt."

There was only one way he'd ever see those pyramids: win first prize in an Egyptian cartoon competition.

Rolf Heimann (aka Lofu) is a Melbourne writer and artist.

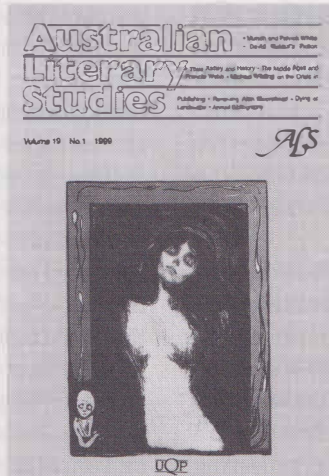


dialogue

Magazine Wrack

Nathan Hollier

THE REALIST WRITERS of the 1940s and 1950s sometimes asserted that the short story had become the dominant form of Australian literature because its 'yarn' length suited the work and leisure patterns of the ordinary working people. The literary form of a similarly democratic tradition today would presumably be the haiku, as those with employment are pushed to work ever harder and longer (Tim Colebatch, 'The problem, Minister, is simple: too few jobs', *The Age*, 6 August 1999), while those without are told they should be ashamed of themselves for making everyone else work so hard (Andrea Carson, 'Minister has another lash at jobless', *The Age*, 6 August 1999). Tom Mann and other contributors to the Melbourne *Socialist* newspaper in the early years of this century, flushed with the attainment of the forty-hour week, believed that automation would soon make six-hour working days a thing of the dark and ignorant past. Realizing that 'knowledge is power' they envisaged a society in which the desire for education, necessary for raising levels of personal and social awareness, would outstrip the desire for work, and its material gratification. Given that Capital endlessly promotes consumerism and shifts in fashion to counteract the disappointments thereof, it also promotes both love and hatred of



work; love for what it promises, hatred for the burden of attaining these things. It is difficult to imagine being wholly free from this love/hate relationship, but it is probably in the struggle to attain such freedom in life, that personal and social advancement takes place.

A challenge I face as a teacher of what must be one of the few remaining undergraduate poetry courses in Australia, is to convey and induce a love for the 'work' of poetry, because it is something that can give your life meaning when the gleam of the whitest fridge and the shiniest car have gone. In some ways this is also the challenge faced, on a larger scale, by *Australian Literary Studies*. If there is always more educational work to do in linking learning to the cultural resources of the students, *ALS* is richly engaged in relevant Australian issues.

This is usually an imaginative engagement first and foremost. In addition to money and tangible

resources, the economy of literature (its creation and study) requires a currency of leisure time. Literature necessitates taking leisure seriously, as that which enables important imaginative and reflective work. Public educational institutions conventionally purchase time for their employees, freedom from direct accountability to a private employer, in the belief that the society as a whole will benefit from this investment. In the absence of a degree of freedom from private financial interests, knowledge and creativity become mere commodities, yet more products to be bought and sold for the advancement of those who own them.

In the May issue of *ALS* (19:1), Andrew Taylor looks at the nature of David Malouf's imaginative engagement with Australia. He notes that five of Malouf's novels "span the chronology of Australian history". Despite this, Taylor writes, "If one accepts that history is the study of change over time, or the study of the past at a particular time – and hence that the study of differences is absolutely central to history – one has to concede that Malouf's fiction is not primarily historical in that sense, even when it involves 'the epochal landmarks of Australian social history.'" The semi-expatriate Malouf has engaged imaginatively with Australia's history over an extensive period as part of a personal quest for

"comprehensive identity", a psychological and spiritual unity. Those of us disappointed with his 1998 Boyer lectures, mythical to the point of self-delusion, can be heartened by Taylor's intellectually generous yet historically sensitive treatment of the author's creative efforts. The historical awareness of Taylor's article is one of the persistent strengths of the journal. Other notable qualities, evident throughout the articles that follow, are the emphases on original research and the willingness to find and discuss evidence of authorial intention. This does not preclude different readings, but does offer the uninitiated reader an immediate introduction to the particular work's context.

Though it lost its arts funding a few years ago on the rationale that the magazine is specialist rather than general, in this sense that finding does not seem entirely fair. The historical details ensure that the articles are of general interest to all those with an intelligent interest in Australian history and culture. Leigh Dale's 'Colonial History and Post-Colonial Fiction: the Writing of Thea Astley', is a good example of the fact that consciously theoretical approaches to literary study need not cancel out empirical forms of enquiry. Dale discusses Astley's re-workings of actual historical events, with particular reference to *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*. This enables a sophisticated reading which in contrast to the mythic ruminations of Malouf has a direct bearing on our understanding of the nature of Australian society: "Astley seems to suggest that while history as narrative has an instability that arises from its necessary dependence on memory and metaphor, simple-minded fictions

which restore 'colonial order' will thrive".

Helen Verity Hewitt draws on unpublished letters to discuss Patrick White's reliance on the images of Edvard Munch. There are parallels, of course, between Malouf and White's use of mythic images and their spiritualistic depiction of the Australian landscape. These themes continue in Rosslyn Haynes' discussion of the desert in the work of E.L. Grant Watson. Though he only visited Australia on three brief occasions (most significantly between 1911-1912), Watson's Darwinist upbringing and later attachment to Jung contributed to a fictional preoccupation with 'primitive' man and hence to novelistic re-workings of his contact with Aborigines in the Western Desert. Though her attempt to resuscitate Grant as a precursor to "respectably postcolonial" writings seems forced at times, Haynes' article sheds further light on the representations of spirituality, creativity and the Australian landscape, as well as on the gender and race relations that cannot be ignored within these discussions.

Francis Webb and Alan Moorehead, two very different but equally intriguing characters, are examined by Andrew Lynch and David Callahan respectively. Each critic is concerned with the reputation of his subject, and offer explanations, in turn practical and probing, for why their stature in Australian consciousness has experienced a relative decline. Lynch suggests that Webb may be considered "too hard for school students, and often even for undergraduates". Callahan asserts that Moorehead's open and revealing style has made him particularly vulnerable to shifts in cultural

values.

Most of the writers discussed in this issue spent considerable time abroad. Bruce Clunies Ross brings his personal experience of expatriation to bear in a discussion of three recent texts dealing in different ways with this process. Clunies Ross is humorously incisive ("In the face of concerted kangarococo", Ian Britain's *Once an Australian* "descends into kookaburbaroque in the manner of that other characteristic Australian stylist, Sandy Stone"), implicitly suggesting that Britain's text was produced with an insufficient investment of time and intellect, in order to cash in on the relative public prominence of Greer, Humphries, James and Hughes. Clunies Ross suggests a number of other figures who might have been included in such a text were quick saleability not the primary objective. Unfortunately however, there remains a trace of the Oxford 'first-rate mind', philosophy in his uncritical conception of intellectualism itself.

Michael Wilding, an expatriate of England, also attended Oxford, though as a scholarship boy. He seems always to have been closer to the Count of Montecristo style 'claw what you can get', school of working-class politics, as opposed to the more retentive, 'I'm not going to sell out' school. Interestingly, this attitude or philosophy may be linked with the fictional response to postwar consumerism by a number of English working-class writers (John Braine, Alan Sillitoe, Stan Barstow, Keith Waterhouse) who must have contributed to the milieu in which Wilding developed, creatively and intellectually. A result of this attitude has been a long and energetic involvement with most aspects of the publishing world. In this issue Wilding returns to a topic, 'Australian

Literary and Scholarly Publishing', that he has commented on a number of times in different forums over the years. The essay is an example of the more direct mode of interaction with social issues conducted in *ALS*.

In revealing the interconnectedness of literary creativity and broader economic patterns, Wilding's reading of the present publishing context is anything but cheering to the small publisher or, indeed, the patron of Australian literature. His final formulation that "when an existing situation is not working efficiently, as is the case with literary and scholarly publishing in Australia, then the necessities and incentives and opportunities for change will inevitably present themselves", seems somewhat at odds with the bulk of evidence suggested in the essay. Arguably however, this final assertion represents a consistently valuable libertarian philosophy identifiable in such important articles as 'Literary Critics and the Mass Media' (*Dissent* 19, 1966).

Linking education to the culture of the student, I have suggested, is one way of attempting to stimulate art and culture as aspects of life rather than objects of consumption. This should not be confused however, with the 'yes man' approach to educational restructuring, in which the culture of the student is conflated with the demand of the market. Similarly, publishers will need to look beyond the market to adequately reflect the diversity and mutability of Australian culture. In the words of George Seelaf, the first Arts Officer of both the Trades Hall and the ACTU: "If you don't take responsibility for your own culture, someone will impose theirs on you".

Report from the West

Susan Hayes

W A'S REGIONAL literature officer Jacqui Wright works out of an office in Lotteries House half way between Broome's town centre and Cable Beach. It's a sprawling building with wide verandahs and a garden of randomly labelled tropical shrubs. The red earth of the carpark and yard invades every office, spreading itself between the pages of government documents and embellishing the children's paintings in the Daycare Centre. Inhabitants of Lotteries House work on Broome Time and I soon learnt the pointlessness of turning up for anything under ten minutes late. One community worker explained the problems of keeping an appointment diary in a town where people fear the telephone and prefer to drop in on the chance of having a chat. I had become accustomed to the feral lifestyle through working at Fremantle Arts Centre, where staff meetings have a tendency to centre around the current effects of the Zodiac; but Broome is something else. People smile a lot, spend more time listening than talking, and move slowly. I left the high heels in the back of the wardrobe and learnt a lot about the differences between arts administration in the City and the Bush.

My visit coincided with the Shinju Matsuri arts festival and I was lucky enough to catch the first night of Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre's production of 'Solid' with Ningali Lawford and Kelton Pell. This took place in a big iron shed at the back of the local indigenous radio station and was well supported by the local Aboriginal community with some terrific vocal input from some of the

kids. The cultural mix in Broome produces a lot of beautiful people. Ningali Lawford, whose one-woman show was such a hit a couple of years ago, is an immensely talented writer and performer, with an amazing stage presence. The play is currently on a community tour prior to production in the 2000 Perth International Arts Festival and I hope that this involves some workshoping, as the play's anti-drugs message is often over-stated and holds up the action, but it's powerful and worth seeing for Ningali's performance alone.

Writers were represented at Shinju with a poetry reading evening at Matso's. This popular Broome landmark on Roebuck Bay combines a gallery of local arts and crafts with a restaurant and coffee shop, open from breakfast to late. The readings take place outside in the gardens once a month and as is the custom in these parts have no particular structure. Readers come from all over the place and the holiday season brought a large contingent from the Grey Army, the band of retirees in caravans and campers making their way round Australia. One terrific woman from Queensland who confessed that in over sixty years she had never done anything quite like this, recited a long yarn about the first aviators without a prompt and without a single slip. There was the usual range of poetry – from the gifted to the embarrassing – that those of us who are habitués of poetry readings have grown to love and hate; but even the most halting performers were treated to the warmth of an audience who had come to enjoy literature, the tropical night and Matso's home-brewed beer. My task was to present the prizes for the Shinju Writing Competition, and I was proud of the

fact that I managed to do this with the same degree of chaotic and totally unrehearsed goodwill demonstrated by the local organizers.

Broome has grown since I first visited six years ago and though many of the locals consider it ruined beyond repair, for most of us it is still Paradise-on-Sea and a significant cultural centre for the arts in the Kimberley region. The Kimberley Bookshop, close to Chinatown, has as good a range as any shop in central Perth or Melbourne and staff who can guide you to the local product. Much of the local product comes from Magabala Books, at the other end of town. This indigenous publishing house gets better and better and I was particularly taken with their new range of Uupababas (the Nyulnyul word for 'little kids') picture books, featuring the animals and people of the Australian bush. Some regional funding authority should come and see the appalling physical conditions of the prefabricated building that houses Magabala. I would like to see any government department working efficiently under these drawbacks and achieving the same level of productivity. Despite this, Manager Jill Walsh and the rest of the editorial and design staff continue to bring out their sensitively edited and designed books. Like many other arts businesses in Broome, Magabala has taken advantage of the increase in tourism and now sells directly to coach parties and other visitors, as well as distributing throughout Australia and overseas. There's a noticeboard at Cable Beach giving information to visitors. Against the heading 'Surf Condition' someone has chalked, 'Go sailing'. Next to 'Time of Sunset' it says 'When it gets dark'. You can forget the real world up here and

concentrate on the things that matter. The message for visiting writers tells us unequivocally to slow down, soak in the atmosphere and write the great Broome novel.

Australian Poetry Festival, August 27-29 1999

Tim Thorne

BALMAIN MAY BE ONE of Australian poetry's sacred sites, but its Town Hall's acoustics make it a lousy venue for poetry readings.

Downstairs, however, in the Hard Poet Cafe, the coffee was excellent.

The Poets Union is to be commended for organizing this festival, for gathering such a varied array of poets from all over the country (well, the eastern seaboard, at least), rounding up sponsorship and other funding assistance, and getting hold of some heavyweight dignitaries to launch the event. All this within a fairly tight timeframe.

Les Murray didn't turn up, despite having originally agreed to do so. The story, from unnamed sources close to the Poets Union, is that Les, a former Union member, pulled out when he found that he was to have been on a panel with Alan Wearne. Despite an offer to rearrange the program to suit him, the noted preambulator remained determined. Some old grudges die hard.

Each festival session was given a theme: "The Word is ... (funny, spiritual, political etc.), which meant that one could attend selectively, basing the choices not only on the poets but on the topics. Of course in most cases the poets, as they are wont, read what they wanted to read, anyway. The panel format is not my preferred way of presenting poetry, although festival organizers

and many patrons seem to love it, perhaps because of a belief that text and performance need to be coated with layers of conversation, dissertation or exegesis in order to be digestible. Those of us who just want to hear the poetry are invariably left a little hungry.

This hunger can always be assuaged at the bookstall, although the number of people who will spend the equivalent of the price of three books for admission and go away with only the fading memory of poems heard once, rather than taking the printed versions with them and having the pleasure for the rest of their lives never ceases to amaze me.

With variety being a key aspect of the festival, Friday night's main session encapsulated this with performances from Komninos Zervos, John Tranter, Gig Ryan, Tug Dumbly, Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Amanda Stewart, as well as a witty little film called *The Beat Manifesto*, produced by Shilo McClean of the Australian Film Television and Radio School and directed by Daniel Nettheim.

Saturday kicked off with the Homebrew Slam, won narrowly by Tug Dumbly over A.J. Rochester and a relatively new young performance poet with a lot of promise, Cameron Semmens. A bit of a purist in these matters, I find that a two-minute Slam tends to drag. If you haven't won over the audience within sixty seconds, you're not going to.

An interesting innovation was the provision of booths where for a small fee expert advice was available in a range of areas from performance to electronic publishing. Despite the jokes about confessionals, these were popular and gave less experienced or less confident writers the opportunity to get more out of

the festival than they would have if they had merely been audience members or readers in the open session (which, as such sessions so often are, was attended almost entirely by those who were reading).

To pick out highlights from among the readings is a highly subjective act, and hardly fair as I admit to having wagged a few sessions, but it was great to hear Amanda Stewart, one of this country's truly original voices and a very underrated poet. It had been over a decade since I had had the pleasure of listening to her and time has not diminished the power of her performances.

It has become very close to a cliché in reports on poetry festivals to state (in a tone of mock surprise) that no blood was shed. The atmosphere here was friendly, the conversations on the smokers' balcony, in the pub and over that excellent coffee were lively, witty, nostalgic and only occasionally bitchy.

In these times of tight budgets and scarce sponsorship, to have three festivals within a few weeks (this one, Melbourne and Tasmania) devoted entirely to poetry, all with a national focus, and each one in addition to a general writers' festival in the same state, also within the same six-week period, might seem a luxury. Poets and poetry lovers, so often the poor relations when it comes to major literary events, would, I am sure, disagree.

Putting Words in Manning's Mouth

Stephen Holt

THE *COURIER MAIL* continues to be haunted by the spectre of communism.

On the eve of the publication of

my book *A Short History of Manning Clark*, I received a letter from the *Courier Mail*. The letter indicated that the *Courier Mail* was in the process of "obtaining the full 18,000 page Comintern Archive on Australia, and all material on Australian politicians, trade unionists, academics and media professionals from the 22 open archives in Moscow and all Australiana from the Berlin and Prague archives."

The ultimate purpose of this vast archival exercise is not entirely clear but its genesis can be precisely identified. The *Courier Mail* began trawling through the Soviet archives in an attempt to substantiate its August 1996 claim that Clark was "an agent of influence" acting on behalf of the Soviet Union.

The *Courier Mail's* investigations seemed to hit pay dirt in 1997 when it published a version of a speech that Clark delivered in Moscow at the time of the Lenin centenary celebration in 1970. The *Courier Mail* continues to regard this speech as a key document.

There is no gainsaying the *Courier Mail's* diligence. Research conducted in Moscow had unearthed the transcript of proceedings of the conference at which Clark delivered his Lenin speech. The transcript of proceedings being in Russian, the *Courier Mail* prepared and published an English translation of Clark's speech. The *Courier Mail* later stated that the transcript indicated that Clark "almost certainly wrote and delivered the speech in Russian", reliance being placed on "Clark's handwritten corrections in Cyrillic".

Publication in Australia of the Lenin centenary speech was seen as a king hit in demonstrating Clark's unquestioning support for the Soviet Union. Two sentences in particular

seemed well designed to embarrass Clark's supporters. Near the end of the speech Clark was quoted as saying:

Lenin was convinced that this [i.e. Lenin's belief that 'the good life' could be shared by all] could only be attained when communism conquered the world. We are lucky to live at a time when this tenet is being verified by life.

Here, it seemed, was a typical damning Clarkian slip (comparable to Phar Lap as "twice winner of the Melbourne Cup" or Lenin's being "Christ-like, at least in his compassion) that the historian's critics are apt to fasten on with glee.

Provoked by the *Courier Mail's* promotion of its translation of the Lenin speech, Katerina Clark, Professor of Slavic languages and literature at Yale University, wrote a letter to the Australian press. Katerina Clark noted that she had studied a published version of her father's Lenin conference speech and indicated that it had been delivered in English. She commented on numerous discrepancies between her father's original speech and the *Courier Mail's* translated version.

In particular, Katerina Clark emphasized that Clark had never said that communism was "being verified by life". His actual words were that communism was being "put to the test" which had a "radically different" meaning. The "distortion in translation", Katerina Clark noted, put a "very different slant on the speech". The effect was to remove an important element of ambivalence in Clark's attitude to the USSR.

Katerina Clark did not refer to the actual source of the published speech but had she done so the case against the *Courier Mail* would have

been even more damning.

In September 1970, as the Lenin centenary ground on, Clark's address, in its original non-Soviet translated form, was published in the journal of the British-USSR Friendship society. Five months later the speech was reproduced in *Friendship*, the journal of the Australia-USSR society.

The idea that Clark had said that communism was being "verified by life" did not surface until 1997, *Friendship* presenting what he had actually said in Moscow:

Lenin insisted this [i.e. 'the good life' could be shared by all] could only be done when the whole world was won for communism. We have the good fortune to live at a time when this is being put to the test.

The English version in *Friendship* was the authoritative text. Clark did not deliver the speech in Russian. Katerina Clark has subsequently commented that her father's study of the Russian language was "terribly inadequate". She does not consider that the handwritten Cyrillic corrections of the Russian translation of the speech were done by her father. Clark's "command of Russian was so poor he really wasn't in a position to know how accurate the translation was – let alone make corrections in correct Russian".

Katerina Clark's comments are supported by contemporary evidence. In a private letter from 1972, Clark lamented his "all too inadequate Russian". Clark had studied Russian in the late 1950s but did not acquire a mastery of the tongue. What knowledge he had picked up was completely rusty by 1970.

Clark, then, delivered the 1970 Lenin speech in English and the text was soon available in a publicly

available document. There was never any need for the *Courier Mail* to hunt down the Russian transcript of the speech and arrange for it to be translated before publishing it. The speech had already been available in English for some 27 years.

The *Courier Mail's* version of Clark's speech put words in the historian's mouth that did not belong there. Instead of quoting Clark's original version, reliance was placed on a translation of a Russian version of what Clark said in English. The discrepancies that Katerina Clark highlighted were bound to arise. To the extent that they did the *Courier Mail's* initiative in publishing its unneeded translation can be discounted as a telling contribution to anti-Clark polemics.

If this episode is any guide, the *Courier Mail's* exploration of the Soviet archives, upon which a considerable amount of time and money is being expended, and the subsequent uses to which that material is put, seems likely to produce confusion rather than reliable information and greater understanding.

Stephen Holt, a Canberra writer and former student of Manning Clark's, is the author A Short History of Manning Clark (Allen & Unwin, 1999)

Reply to a critic with an elephant gun

Paul Eggert

IN 1936 P.R. STEPHENSEN wrote: "Business is Business, and literature is a product which must be paid for. Until this fact is recognized, Australian literature will have to continue a struggle against heart-breaking difficulties."

(*The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, p. 7.) The same thing applies to new editions, but Brian Kiernan seems to have forgotten this in his review of the first three titles of the Academy Editions of Australian Literature series ('White Elephants', *overland* 155).

Critical editions are expensive to produce: this series was fortunate to secure significant support from the ARC so that the research could be done thoroughly. If the resulting volumes are expensive by Kiernan's standards then he may just have to retune. Many of the taxpayers for whom he takes it upon himself to speak are prepared to buy grand-final tickets and seats at the Olympic stadium for more than an Academy Edition costs.

The series has also to be looked at in the wider publishing context where normal trade editing is in decline as publishers are driven more by marketing and as books are seen as throw-away items. The Academy Editions project is helping to counter this tendency. Setting a high editorial standard will tend to make newcomers to the editing of literary works from the past more wary of taking tempting shortcuts – or shortcuts mandated by their publisher.

The Academy Editions are based on a fresh and systematic examination of the archival and printed evidence. Reliable reading texts are established and contexts for their understanding are provided through explanatory notes, a textual apparatus documenting the different versions, and an introduction that reveals the way in which the work was written, produced and received. If this advance unsettles any scholars who have produced student editions in the past, it should not. As works of reference, the Academy Editions are

quite different from student editions, yet Kiernan seems determined to confuse the two, and so to blame a series of critical editions for not being a cheap reprint series. This is strange logic.

In the Academy Editions series, the opportunity has been seized to move forwards in our understanding of the production and functioning of important literary works from the colonial past and the early twentieth century. Kiernan's resistance to this advance borders on the bizarre. If we don't get the basic building blocks of documentary scholarship right, then every line of critical or theoretical reasoning that builds on or appeals to them is devalued. To accept that near enough is good enough is really to say that finely honed understandings of Australian literature are not worth striving for.

Alas, this seems to be so in his own reviewing, for some remarks that Kiernan makes show that he has not read the volumes under review either closely or fairly. He is, for instance, quite wrong in what he says about the textual status of the two cheap editions of *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn*, and therefore in his belief that reliable texts existed already. Another example is his claim that there must be an error in a speech made by a character on p. 501 of the *Maurice Guest* edition. Henry Handel Richardson was a perfectionist, as anyone who studies her manuscripts must see; and, if one of her sentences seems unidiomatic to Kiernan, that may have something to do with the passage of time since she wrote: she had a keen ear, as reading her prose out loud will readily show. (And in this case it is a German character who is speaking in English.) We should not hasten to iron out the wrinkles that texts from

the past trip us up with at first. If there is doubt, editors must give the text the benefit of it. Correcting apparent anomalies to present-day standards is a denial of the past, and a condescending one at that.

In contrast, both at the theoretical level of editorial rationale and at the practical level of the presentation of texts and contexts, the Academy Editions are responding intelligently to recent trends in the international practice of critical editing. Each is a highly focused archive in itself. Student editions drawn from them are obviously to be desired, but for the publisher the financial equation has not yet been right. The nationalist bubble of the 1980s burst for Australian publishers some time ago. That is one reason why it was right to pursue the textual scholarship when opportunity knocked. When the financial equation for student and general-reader editions falls into place, they will appear. That will be the easy part.

Note: The three Academy Editions titles are: Henry Kingsley, *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn*, ed. Stanton Mellick, Patrick Morgan and Paul Eggert (1996); *The Journal of Annie Baxter Dawbin 1858–1868*, ed. Lucy Frost (1998); and Henry Handel Richardson, *Maurice Guest*, ed. Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele (1998). They are published by UQP.

The Oxford Literary Hiccough of Australia

π.ο.

IN THE CHAPTER ON 'Poetry since 1965' in the *Oxford Literary History of Australia* Dennis Haskell tells us that an anthology of "performance poetry" like the π.ο. edited *Off The*

Record (Penguin, 1985) is "a contradiction in terms", and he tells us this almost as a yawn, i.e. in passing, i.e. as tho it were a belated footnote to the real thing! Poetry readings he graciously acknowledges having had "a renewed boom in the mid-1980s". He then goes on to tell us, that "There are poets now" who write "primarily for performance rather than the page and, whereas good readers were once more scarce than good poets, these people are very much 'performers' rather than just 'readers'". This is extraordinary stuff! – We don't even deserve (as his reference to us as "these people" suggests) the title 'poets'. In fact he couches his comments in such a way as to suggest that performance poets don't write for the page at all (anymore) but rather for . . . the stage (?) i.e. the boards on which the 'performer' will dance. I think that what he is confusing us with, is with the 'performance artist' movement that had its roots in the conceptual-art and 'happenings' experiments of the sixties and seventies. I challenge him to cite those poets who don't write for the page. In fact the evidence would suggest that virtually every performance poet and spoken-word performer has attempted to publish their poems in a magazine, journal, newspaper or book, with very few (%-wise) opting for the cassette &/ or CD alone. And even those who *have*, have invariably opted to include the text of the poems (in their 'written form') placed inside the plastic covers of the 'new technology', and that includes the 'sound poetry' contingent of performance poetry, poets like Jas H. Duke, Amanda Stewart, and Hazel Smith. This 'trend' (or tendency) to 'publish' is not as marked in the

'performance artists' scene, as it is in performance poetry, i.e. that burning need to have the 'performance' published! There must therefore be (one would presume) a larger issue at stake. That issue (I would suggest) is the 'orality' of the text. The fact that what we call 'performance poetry' is in fact a movement of 'oral-literates' appears to be of no import. Performance poetry from the start was (and *still is*) an *assault* on 'writing', not *against it per se*, i.e. the 'writerliness' of Australian poetry, i.e. the fact that most of the poems being published in Australia today are deaf to their own 'sense' of 'sound'. Australian literature until performance poetry came along was letting the 'eye-ball' do all the *reading* and not the ear or tongue. It was (and is) challenging our very notion of what a poem is. 'Writing' and 'Literature' are not the same thing, and they are being treated as though they were. It is a dangerous assumption that has been written into the very psyche of Australian literature. And in one sense, you can understand the stubbornness of these institutional oralphobes, who prefer to dispense with too much audience in favour of the lone reader (with a convenient and institutionalized set of unchallenged prejudices about 'lay' practitioners). Yes dear reader, the 'text' is only 'one' element of the 'work' and not its entirety, irrespective of what Structuralism says. Don't get me wrong though; I'm analyzing Dennis Haskell's article in detail here, because (a) it's about me, (b) it's in an authoritative reference, and (c) because it's not about me, but about an attitude in literature that has kept (and is keeping) a lot of people like me out of the canon (whether he knows it or not). And he's not alone! You can

see the same assumptions in a critic like Don Anderson, in that now famous quote of his, about 'performance' poetry being more like a 'blood-sport' than anything you might want to call poetry. I don't think Australian critics and commentators (or those people *borrowed* from the world of 'prose' who seem to be experts on all sorts of poetry somehow) actually realize just how rich this vein of poetics is (or can be)! It's not enough to just poke fun at it. Its endurance on the scene (for so long) alone should have ensured a serious curiosity. (Now there may be some truth to the assertion by Dr Arnold Ludwig (of Kentucky University, *The Australian*, 27 October 1993) that poets are five times more vulnerable to depression than scientists, fifteen times more than soldiers, and are more likely to turn to the bottle and exhibit symptoms of psychosis, depression and paranoia, but that isn't a necessary and sufficient condition to not examine the frontiers of a new and evolving poetic. (I think Dr Ludwig's got problems by the way, but that's another story.)

What we are talking about here is the failure of academic discourse to engage with the issues. It's been over twenty years since the advent of 'performance poetry' and its 'spoken word' cousin, so why so much institutionalized ignorance? I should point out here also, that this simplistic notion that performance poetry has something to do with 'acting', is not confined solely to 'outsider' criticism (either). Peter Bakowski described poetry readings (in *The Age*) as "worse than the dentist" (*The Age*, 18 November 1996). Another poet referred to it as "my idea of hell", and Peter Porter reported that a journo in London

likened it to "a bunch of weasels squabbling over a dried-up septic tank". And in Melbourne there is even a regular poetry gig at the Barleycorn Hotel in Collingwood that has an "Open Section" called "The Killing Floor" (an attempt, I suggest, at fronting the dilemma head-on in fact, because in truth it is by far the best gig in Australia, and as Ivan Kolker reminded me, whenever anyone new gets up to read, everyone [without exception] gives them warm applause). Australian poets and Australian scholarship don't seem to understand that they aren't thinking well (if at all!). They seem to think it's okay to just take the word 'performance' out of the term 'Performance Poetry' convert the *noun* into an *adjective* and declare that, that *is* its poetics. Sad really! Only the story gets even better with Dennis Haskell who goes on to say "Their work has the limitations of oral poetry: relatively simple statements and straightforward syntax, a reliance on techniques such as repetition (in structure or phrasing or both), the depiction of 'type' characters and situations". What 'limitations'?! Since *when* has 'oral' poetry been *limited*?! . . . or seen as having 'limitations'? . . . and, by whom? Does he mean to say that a *written* poem is better than a *spoken* poem? Should we re-evaluate Shakespeare's contribution to the 'spoken' tradition or Chaucer's, in the light of his new findings? The privileging of the 'written' over the 'oral' may be an historical imperative but it is by no means a universally acknowledged asset (even in literature). And what does he mean by "relatively simple statements"? Is he proposing that poems *must* by necessity be a set of complex statements? I challenge him to show

me a “simple statement”! And what are we to make of his assertion that performance poems have “straightforward syntax” and “reliance on techniques such as repetition” etc. – this is extremely *bad* scholarship! Hasn’t he heard of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord (in the twenties and thirties) whose pioneering research into the ‘oral’ traditions of European poets revolutionized the study and our notions of ‘orality’ and the Homeric poems?! Hasn’t he heard about (or read about) the complex ‘formulas’ generated by these poets in the rendering of their work, and the use and uses of repetition and how they are put to work? A work of poetry has always been larger than the sum of its text(s), and very much more complex (I would suggest)!

The intellectual poverty of those statements is awesome, and yet by no means an isolated example in the sniping debate that has raged on in ‘footnotes’, poems, ‘asides’ and ‘by way ofs’ (in both the literary and popular press). Dennis Haskell then goes on to conclude that “The genre attracts quite a number of migrant writers” (people like myself who have “attempted to give migrants a voice”) and he quotes an extract from one of my poems:

politz,
kech mi, plai kartz,

sai

:wich yoo nem!
(eye), giv bodgie nem
: “Kon”

(Now) Please Note 1: The ‘genre’ he’s talking about, not only attracts quite a few migrant writers, but it was brought into being *by* quite a lot of them (along with many other

displaced and dispossessed peoples); the ‘oral’ &/or ‘spoken’ tradition was (is), and will always be important to them – the calligraphy of language being a slower process to enlist in the service of the imagination, for all sorts of people! Note 2: the poem he quotes as being both a migrant poem *and* a performance poem cannot I submit be described as “relatively simple” with “straightforward syntax” – *by anys+t+r+e+t+c+h* of the imagination. Let’s. Get. Real!

Performance poetry is richer than all those kinds of simplistic notions outlined above; it solicits and challenges our notions of ‘orality’, ‘urbanization’, ‘multiculturalism’, ‘linguistics’ and notions of ‘class and politics’. The genre *is* important, and has serious implications for what we call literature (and possibly Australia). Performance poets are the Oral-Literates of the last part of the twentieth century, and have had more to do with the renaissance of literature in Australia than all those boring poets being nurtured by Writers’ Festivals and their publishing house lackeys who prop them up with the aid of the media, and it’s going to need some special tools of literary criticism to do it justice. Australia is going to have to wake up one day. It better get cracking – we’re dying of boredom down here.

π.o. is a Melbourne anarchist and performance poet.

Intertwining and overland express

INTERTWINGLING is a hypermedia work by Hazel Smith (hypertext) and Roger Dean (sound) on the *overland express* website at

www.overlandexpress.org. The word *intertwining* was invented by the hypertext pioneer Theodor Nelson, and combines the idea of interweaving and intermingling. The highly-coloured hypertext consists of a large number of short texts – including poetry, short narrative, aphorisms, theoretical ideas, quotations, satirical advertisements and many other genres – juxtaposed with each other through hyperlinks which create multiple pathways through the work. The texts encourage the reader to be interactive: each reader will take a different route through the work, which links ideas about place, travel, narrative, subjectivity and language in a labyrinthine structure. *Intertwining* also includes a sound work constructed from a live performance of a piece by the *austraLYSIS* Electroband (Roger Dean, Sandy Evans and Greg White). It involves computer manipulations of the live performance which drastically modify the sound.

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Lofo's Australiana

Australian Place Names: Evocative, Inspiring, Omeo-poetic.



Until Then . . .

Nicole Moore

Bruce Bennett & Jennifer Strauss (eds): *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* (OUP, 1998).

“CLAIRVOYANTS AND SOOTHSAYERS are always lackeys of the ruling class.” So declares Terry Eagleton in a 1990 essay on ‘Marxism and the Future of Criticism’. Unlike prophets, he says, their job is to tell us that things will be as they are. But what if we think, instead, of the much-policed historical association of clairvoyants with working-class women’s abortion and reproductive health networks? In that role, their job was to tell us that things would be as we might wish them to be. Unlike prophets, declaiming and denouncing the future, warning that there may be no future at all, maybe clairvoyants can foretell, even enact, futures that are livable, imaginable, bearable.

The times are auspicious for soothsayers right now. For historians as well: for looking forwards and backwards at once, marking in that act some ‘now’ that can regard itself. As Eagleton suggests, the importance of knowing the past, and the relation of past to present, is always “under the sign of a possible or desirable future”. Adam Shoemaker’s opening chapter for *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* describes Aboriginal storytelling as defying datable chronology, laying down “tracks which are typically circular; which journey forwards and backwards”. Looking backwards in order to look forward, this collection doesn’t defy chronology in its account of white nationalist literary culture, of course. But its production does allow us to take another look, at the very end of the twentieth century, at Australian ideas of the national, historical and cultural as contested social facts. Now is something that places the future in abeyance, but what is that ‘now’, when what has been the future for so long is finally coming around?

The Oxford Literary History of Australia was released late last year. Edited by Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss, it is a book of some significance: “A major new literary history for all lovers and students of Australian writing.” It takes a prominent place in the institutional history of

Australian letters, responding to the *Penguin New Literary History* of 1988 and replacing the Leonie Kramer edited *Oxford History of Australian Literature* from 1981. It has sixteen contributors, seventeen chapters, a thirty-seven-page chronology, fifty pages of notes and bibliographies, thirty-one for its index. “A highly readable and authoritative reference guide,” declares the blurb, “an essential guide to the growth and diversity of Australian literature.” It’s a manifestly authoritative conspectus, offering a breathtaking density of both material and analysis to readers who should be gratefully impressed.

Convention is to read a compendium like this symptomatically. Definitely, expressly, it is symptomatic of many cultural operations working to constitute ‘literature’, ‘history’ and ‘Australian’, as *über*-categories arched over smaller, more contingent organizing categories. It is perhaps necessary, also, that such a large, commemorative, absolutist exercise such as this should be working at the limits of these three terms. In the introduction, Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss place them in inverted commas, discussing ‘literature’, ‘history’ and ‘Australian’ in that order. These inverted commas of course question old elitist meanings and signal significant departures from the organizing values of the Kramer *Oxford History* particularly (although not from the H.M. Green history, Elizabeth Webby suggests in her review of Bennett and Strauss, referring to the inclusion of journalism and various ephemeral non-fiction in that 1961 two-volume study). While literature, history and Australian national identity are discussed and reformulated along lines that we may all wish to see pursued, their status as overarching categories is not in question, however, and, perhaps generically, neither can it be. The operations that constitute the three concepts as social facts are not invisible in *The Oxford Literary History* but, at the same time, neither can their privileging be provocatively challenged by its production. For this reason and others, as a commemorative drawing of limits, as a summation, this *History* seems also strangely asymptomatic. It seems so obsessively a history that it becomes, perversely and perhaps self-effacingly, prior to its own moment of production. The last years of the century remain somewhat invisible to it and its nuanced and variously compacted recounting of a past literary culture

seems almost to come from somewhere unannounced. Why now? It is as if it casts lines of baited hooks backwards from a moving boat, churning up the water.

Why now? Before the year 2000, before the Olympics, before the Republic, before the Centenary of Federation? Why do a stocktake or a reassessment on the eve of nationalist phantasmagoria rather than in their wake? The *Penguin New Literary History* came at the same time and in response to the Bicentennial, in a repulsion from its erasures and as one of some significant critical voices raised against it as a nation-making moment, even as it participated in that moment. Bennett and Strauss' explanation for the 1998 moment is interestingly hermeneutic rather than historical, western rather than local, and kind of passive in comparison. They describe a "pause" in the period in which the *History* was planned, "after apparently contrary tendencies in the 1980s towards a democratized notion of literature as merely any 'writing' or 'discourse', and those post-structuralist theories which encouraged philosophical speculation and seemed to push literary study towards forms of esotericism." As tendencies, these two are seen to necessitate 'pause'. In the apparently ever-onward movement of literature and criticism, has there come a critical impasse, in which only a retrospective reassessing of the cultural past can point a way forward? A pause for thought, then, is the 'now' in which this history places itself, configured by the tangles of academic thought and displaced from political or historical urgency in cultural production. "This pause may have enabled us to survey the field of the literary with a relatively open view." An image of the calm before the storm, perhaps, but what has been calm?

Literature, history, Australia. Must cultural work be tied to the limits of a nation state? "The literary representations of this country by its writers" make up the concerns of the collection as a history of Australia. But the 'creative spirit' is also sometimes "well beyond the confines of the 'national'." Reading Australian literary culture as a national culture seems to be a difficult thing in this moment of pause, moments after some of its 'post'-colonial, settler-capitalist consenses have been split apart by Howard's hopeless idea of an apology, by Wik, by massive economic inequities, by a reactionary government hell-bent on reauthorizing exploitative privilege. Or moments before that national culture witnesses its own reinvention against those fragile consenses ('egalitarianism', 'femocrat', social welfare, multiculturalism', the need for a treaty) as, to some degree, their opposite. Arguing for the need to "increase a national sense of community" in this pause seems at least superfluous, since the Olympics are about to generate one

perhaps more hegemonic than ever before.

The seventeen chapters that make up the *Oxford Literary History* escape from, transfigure and remake some of these framing gestures, particularly via the editors' decision to take contingency and conflict for granted. Set out as a 'proper' chronological history and in periods marked off by international wars and events, the five parts include different essays that take pointed aspects of those periods and pursue them differently. Titles such as 'Literary Culture 1851-1914: Founding a Canon' or 'Clearing a Space for Australian Literature' invoke nationalist gestures but others pursue the provoking questions of nationalist traditions ('National Dress or National Trousers?' asks Susan Martin) or inscribe conflict explicitly ('White on Black/Black on Black', Film, Television, Literature: Competing for the Nation'). Conflicts and contradictions between the essays rehearse conflicts unresolved in, even nagging at, any singular 'Australian Literature'.

Adam Shoemaker's beginning essay carefully and thoroughly brings into question most of the premises by which Australian literary history has excluded Indigenous culture and points of view, in a broad purview that determinedly challenges dominant notions of history and literature point by point. It ends by elaborating complications and contradictions in European attitudes to Aboriginal people, reaching across some spectrum from malice to compassion. Importantly, however, Shoemaker places those ambivalent contradictions firmly against the consistent note of suffering in Aboriginal writing, "intense suffering on a psychic level", characteristic and unambivalent. Delys Bird's essay 'The "Settling" of English' comes next and begins with David Malouf's much-contested settler set-piece, Gemmy declaring his British object status in *Remembering Babylon*. The essay then inscribes this postcolonial subject as the figure for English textualization of the new world; choosing not a colonial mouthpiece but Malouf's contemporary and controversially appropriative one, inscribing postcolonial preoccupations with invader "loss of the sense of self and of history" as inaugural rather than retrospective, or self-consciously twentieth century, or in any way justificatory. At the same time, Shoemaker's and Bird's activity is to open up and do away with certain beginnings for white 'national' culture, themselves previously read retrospectively: Shoemaker's takes the importance out of the question, Bird's interposes sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European and Asian calculations and imaginings, using recent work that interestingly refigures 'Australia' from a prior, non-Anglo imperial 'outside'. The order of these essays then stages strong

debates about the facility of postcoloniality in Australian literary culture and analysis; not speaking but certainly in the shadow of continued indigenous refusal of those poco terms of reference.

The chapter categories at work have shifted interestingly since the Penguin 1988 *History*. There are two crucial framing chapters on Indigenous culture and writing, at the beginning and end, and none on multicultural or women's writing as specific categories. Instead the essays present a varied 'mainstreaming' of these identity questions to do with nation. They are at the crux of Susan Martin's and Adrian Caesar's work on national myths, for example, their literary politics are taken seriously by Susan Lever's chapter on fiction since 1965, but they form only a muted addendum to a chapter on poetry and modernism which resists gender or nation or the critiques that come with them as means by which to rethink value or genre. The mix and difference between the essays is a good thing in general, however. While we may get repetition or confused contradiction, on rare occasions, the interest sparked by wholly different approaches to similar material is real and useful. Juxtaposing broad contextual accounts with interested thematic surveys in parts three and four is especially productive of a denser sense of what has been at stake, and of its various measures.

Graeme Turner's chapter comes last and introduces film and television as the non-literary 'other' for this collection, the threatening mass/margin. Against the introduction's gestures away from some 'over' democratization of all writing as literature (that pursued particularly by cultural studies, or rereadings of Aboriginal documents?), Turner's final chapter argues that in any competition for 'the Australian mind', "the ground has shifted in favour of the visual media". If film is Australia's 'cultural flagship' and TV advertises writers to the willing public, is there less need to work towards that Vance and Nettie Palmer vision of the literary nation, lucidly telling itself to itself? Visual media can do that complexly and ironically, in ways not always at odds with those envisaged by them. At the same time, there may be more brutal urgencies which render any nationalist vision sometimes threadbare and sometimes untenable.

Turner's survey of cultural production in the 1990s is representative of the collection's summative approach to its own cultural moment, listing diversities rather than firmly grounding any definite declaration about the present, even about the withdrawal of federal government support from the traditional arts. It seems an interesting indication of the collection's ideas of time and history that the largest and last of the five parts dates from

1965. To periodize the end of the twentieth century as these thirty-five years is reasonable, but doesn't it also make the run-up to 2000 the baby boomer decades? Why not from 1988, for example? Is there no distinct *fin de siècle* cultural moment, no writing unto 2000?

In the end, perhaps this collection will turn out to be transitional. Until the next century, if you like, its work is to collect and summarize, rather than imagine futures and enact change. Telling the density of a past to a posited future, maybe these historians are clairvoyants, in a way. But the fortunes of contemporary Australian culture wait to be revealed. Until then.

Nicole Moore teaches Australian literature at the University of Tasmania.

Ties That Bind, Ties That Blind

Andrea Collis

Melissa Lucashenko: *Hard Yards* (UQP, \$19.95).

IN *HARD YARDS*, MELISSA LUCASHENKO explores complex and volatile issues of filiation and affiliation, interracial disharmony, cultural dispossession, and the construction of Aboriginal identity through the vicissitudes of her protagonist Roo. A hopeful for the Sydney 2000 Olympics Roo has more than the hard yards of gruelling training to contend with. Unemployed and on the wrong side of the law, he is living with his Murri girlfriend Leena and her family, the Kings, in inner-city Brisbane. The novel opens with the funeral of Leena's brother Stanley, yet another in the long line of Aboriginal deaths in custody in a Brisbane watch-house. Added to this family tragedy is the dilemma Roo faces on finding his biological father, who is, to his horror, one Senior Sergeant Graeme Walter Madden: "Roo's head spun some more. He looked at Madden as if he'd climbed out of a spaceship. A cop. His father, a fucken cop! If there was a God, he had a friggin funny sense of humour, eh." When Leena discovers she is pregnant, Roo, not prepared to shoulder the responsibility of fatherhood, leaves, and after a stint of homelessness and another brush with the law, goes to live with his father.

This then is a novel about community, family, belonging, and about 'blood': ties that bind and ties that blind. Roo, "gutstarved" for love and praise, reaches "tentative fingertips out towards the idea of *father*". But the prospect of finally belonging to a 'real' family, while tantalizingly close,

and seductive in its promise of material comforts, is fraught with danger, for it transpires that it is Graeme Madden who is under internal investigation for the suspicious death of Stanley King. For Roo to form any sort of allegiance with him would be tantamount to betrayal and would confirm the Kings' worst suspicions that, as a 'migloo', ultimately he couldn't be counted on: "There is no sittin on the fence being a whitefella . . . with Murries, you're either with em or against em, eh". Here then are the real hard yards that Roo has to negotiate: to believe his father's protestations of innocence he needs to sacrifice the sense of kinship that he had found with the Kings, and to somehow revise all he has come to know and accept about the nexus between police brutality and racism in the Sunshine State.

In its interrogation of notions of home, dispossession and genealogy *Hard Yards* is a work that needs to be understood in the context of, and alongside, the narratives that have emerged from the Inquiry into the Stolen Generations. The epigraph to the novel is from Sir Ronald Wilson's Report on the Inquiry and the economy of his phrase "it was genocide" prefigures the pervasive and continuing ramifications of the forced removal of children on the lives of indigenous Australians today. The questions surrounding the identity and (perhaps) Aboriginality of Roo's mother render his search for home and his alienation from the Indigenous community more poignant, and raise further questions of the nature of what constitutes Aboriginality: is it filiation or affiliation?

Early in the novel we learn that Roo has the "highly desirable talents of being able to fight and run like the clappers". Lucashenko's talent is that she can write like the clappers. Her skill in *Hard Yards*, as with her earlier novels *Steam Pigs* and *Killing Darcy*, is in creating characters whose turmoil revolves around crucial issues of cultural identity and survival. But *Hard Yards* is not an onerous read: Lucashenko's wit, humour and irony; her use of an urban Aboriginal vernacular; and the strategically placed clues to the 'mystery' of Stanley King's death make this a most compelling novel. In the midst of Australia's pre-Olympic delirium and willful amnesia Lucashenko's voice provides a much needed and sobering reminder of white Australia's deep and abiding shame. Hers is a voice that needs to be heeded, if reconciliation is ever to be anything more than what Lucashenko has called another meaningless "long white word". This is a marvellous, timely, and extremely important novel.

Andrea Collis is a postgraduate student in the School of English and European Languages and Literatures at the University of Tasmania.

A Rhythm of Opposites

Nicole Moore

Dorothy Hewett: *Neap Tide* (Penguin, \$17.95).

A NEAP TIDE FINDS THE HIGH-WATER LEVEL at its lowest point. Occurring soon after the first and third quarter of the moon, it's a rhythm of opposites, a fulfilled contraction. Dorothy Hewett's new and third novel chooses this contradictory tide as an organizing pulse, in preference to a spring tide when the high-water level is fullest. Neap becomes lower, smaller, neater, yet has a logic of fulfillment. It is still the high-water mark, the withdrawn reach of the tide at a maximum. In this novel, the neap is a dangerous calm, a pulse of reconciled memory, aging renewal, wise compromise, negotiated death. A charged, fluid book aching with the mess of the sea, *Neap Tide* bears these contradictions along in a rush of mingled danger and desire.

Jessica Sorensen, a literary academic working on Australian romantic poets, "Brennan to Dransfield", rents a house on a headland in a fishing village on New South Wales' south coast. Withdrawing from a husband's flaunted affairs, from the accusations of sexual harassment against him graffitied in the toilets on campus, Jessica tells herself the house is just what she wants, "nothing to break the horizon except a few gulls planing in on the wind." The reader recognizes a South Coast gothic when we see it, however. Soon enough, sooner than enough, the haunted past creeps up and lies drowned at Jessica's feet. Zane is a town haunted by secrets, wilful drownings, disappearances, closeted sex, death and decay and all of it will out, as a good reader of the Australian small-town Gothic drama knows.

Neap Tide's foray into this genre is more committed than many others of Hewett's works. Working with something of a broader canvas and a larger cast than *The Toucher*, the narrative takes up those dominant Australian narrative premises that can be seen distilled in a Thea Astley novel, for example. An outsider come to a small town, Jessica gradually allies herself with its wetly secretive inhabitants, and her presence stirs up concealed histories, murderous and ghostly, about seduction and betrayal. This is literally transcribed into a haunting by a dead threesome: a famous poet, transcendent and albino; a dark-haired seal woman, sly and silent; and the aging daughter of a whaler, at home in Zane and its inlets.

A cast of bonded male poets – city sophisticates turning out to be small-town boys – hides the secret of the three

lovers' shared deaths. Brought back to indeterminate life by the rituals of one of the poets or by Jessica's presence, the lovers seduce and threaten her with annihilation, with a dissolving of connection with anything but the sea, or with words about the sea. Her resistance to this threat turns out to be a resistance to romantic poets. Immersed instead in the popular thrillers and detective novels stacked in her haunted house, Jessica embarks on a study of popular reading patterns. A pragmatics of shared plots informs her; a way forward, she grasps it as a turn away from a poetics of exclusion and betrayal.

Aboriginal meanings are grappled with in an Astley kind of way, local representatives given certain kinds of aloof wisdom and belonging in the evocation of the place and its politics. Out of this, a tension develops between the background of this role and the potential power of a role in the foreground of the white characters' obsessions. Isaac Mumbula is a political orator, landrights campaigner, loner, and has a wife and kids in the Settlement who he doesn't live with. Instead he occupies a hidden hut in a eucalypt forest, which turns out to be a place of rest for displaced white women, one of whom Jessica recognizes, eventually, to be herself. A bushfire destroys this hut and Isaac dies of emphysema, the hope of his ongoing meaning for a white community blasted and burnt. Hewett's characters play out the full drama of long association, in the backwash of time, as relationships fall into nothing, or follow new movements out of and away from those falls.

A striking feature of the novel is its fluidity. In a kind of lyricism, the tidal movements of its chapters surge in waves, inundatory. The action of the narrative occurs within an ebb and flow of images, building and dying. Jessica leans against a dinghy and thinks "that's me ... split and old, with a wrinkled hide"; she runs and dives into the surf "a green tumble of water, a spur of rock, a scatter of shells". She remembers "his black head bobbing like a seal" next to her, then a cormorant dives in the shallows as she leaves, "its slick wet head and black wings edged with gold."

Jessica fluctuates between action and passivity in this tidal rhythm. As a central woman character she lacks the compelling narrative self-obsession of Esther La Farge from *The Toucher*, that largesse and sexualized urgency. Instead she's a careful, self-protective thinker, betrayed by poetry, by its seductive masculine illusions of transcendence, which for women are death and dependency, silence. Men die all around her – two husbands, Isaac Mumbula after they are lovers, her brother falling quickly into the thrall of full-blown AIDS. A hippie nomad young woman disappears after a gang rape – the town is unconcerned. The narrative's helplessness in the face of different horrors is

stacked against the romance of the landscape, the metaphors of history reflected in a place. But Jessica and the narrative find that Zane's history is of horrors: we have to leave, as she does. That leaving is a wise compromise, a limited fulfillment, like a neap tide.

Held up to Public Scrutiny

Jeannie Rea

Paul Adams: *The Stranger From Melbourne: Frank Hardy, a Literary Biography 1944–1975* (UWAP, \$29.95).
Carole Ferrier: *Jean Devanny: Romantic Revolutionary* (MUP, \$49.95).

IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO *THE REDS*, a history of the early years of the Communist Party in Australia, Stuart Macintyre muses, "With its passing, communism has become almost unintelligible." He goes on to write about the difficulties of teaching about communist doctrine and history to young undergraduates. Most difficult is trying to convey how and why so many people saw communism as the most viable and desirable way of organizing society. Macintyre attributes this to young people's views of communism being shaped by the events of 1989 and the depiction of these events by "the triumphal anti-communism" that allows communism "no other meaning than tyranny".

Two new books about passionate and committed communist writers and activists, Frank Hardy and Jean Devanny, could help illuminate the times now past, when some people in Australia were convinced that communism – as shaped by the Soviet Union and communist parties – was the answer to poverty, injustice and exploitation. On the other hand, the debates about correct doctrine, changing party lines, submissive obedience to the central committee, as well as the callous disregard for personal hurt caused to faithful members, could only reinforce the damning condemnation of communist parties.

But these books go much further. It could be a mistake, though, to recommend these biographies to the 'non-believer' as both are much more written from the 'inside'. By this, I do not mean as Communist Party faithful, but as writers of the left clearly concerned about the future of the ideals that motivated the likes of Hardy and Devanny. However, these are certainly not the sycophantic biographies of earlier eras; they are much more situated in contemporary late twentieth-century postmodern academia.

Whilst critical, Paul Adams and Carole Ferrier are un-

abashed about their fascination, and indeed admiration, for their subjects. Both books take as a central theme the lifelong struggle between activism and writing – in an environment where writing, other than overt propaganda, is seen as suspect by the Party leadership.

Hardy (1917–1994) joined the Communist Party in 1940 and Devanny (1894–1962) joined in 1931. At the time that Devanny joined, she had to undergo three months' probation because, as Ferrier quotes, writers were "declassé and vacillating elements". She was already a published and controversial novelist at this time. Her first book, *The Butcher Shop*, which came out in 1926, was set in New Zealand from where she migrated to Australia in 1929. At the time Hardy joined, the Party was illegal, but whilst he may not have been probationary like Devanny, he still had to prove his worth as a speaker and grass-roots organizer. Joining the Australian army and serving in the far north during the Second World War, he was able to demonstrate his organizing and writing talents in editing a soldier's newspaper, *Tropo Tribune*. His first published short story, 'The Stranger from Melbourne' appeared in 1944.

Both books describe ongoing tensions, not just with the Party, but within the writers themselves about their roles and priorities. Both Devanny and Hardy in their published and unpublished writings constantly grapple with how to use their writing to advance the cause, and to also write well. Despite this desire, both have been criticized for their classic socialist realist characterizations and plots on one hand, but also for not following the party demands for one dimensional heroes and villains. Both sought recognition and respect as serious writers from the mainstream literary establishment.

Devanny, in particular, was critical of her own writing in the 1930s, as she churned out the novels to support her family. Writing was to Devanny a paying job, a fact that the Party superiors chose not to recognize. In the post-Khrushchev's letter era, Hardy also had to deal with the embarrassment of his earlier naive praise of the Soviet Union. Both writers struggled for a basic income, as not just writing, but Party work took up their time. Hardy's and Devanny's times as party activists overlap and indeed, in Ferrier's book, various discussions involving both writers are described. However, their experiences are also different. Devanny was most active through the glory days of the new Soviet Union, when Australian communists really believed that revolution was around the corner. Hardy's most active years were during the difficult ups and downs of disillusionment, party splits and disenchantment with failing dreams.

Despite the common themes, these are very different works. Paul Adams has written a literary biography of

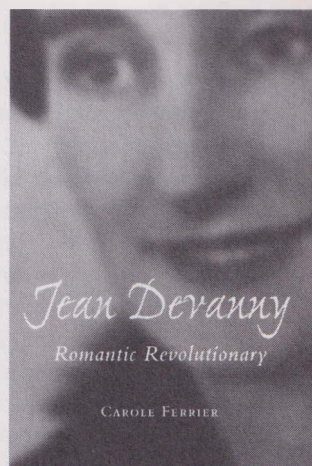
Frank Hardy covering the years 1944–1975. Carole Ferrier has written a biography of the life and times and writing of Jean Devanny.

Ferrier's is the first biography of Devanny and is in part a retrieval of history, which seeks to restore for Devanny a place in history and literature. She has been gathering information for *Jean Devanny: Romantic Revolutionary* for over two decades. Much has happened to the communist project in the years of Ferrier's research, which enables not only hindsight from informants, but reflections on changing political climates.

Ferrier has a particular mission in her investigations into Devanny's complicated life, which is to try and find out the story behind Devanny's expulsion and reinstatement to the Communist Party. Devanny herself is vague and has written different versions of what happened. The story becomes clearer, but still unsatisfactory. Why does it matter, this search for the 'truth'? It is important because there is a story about sexual double standards and patriarchy in the Communist Party that needs to be told. Devanny is remembered (or is forgotten) as a woman of a dubious sexual reputation, rather than as a significant writer and a brave and dedicated activist.

Slowly more research and writing, as well as memoirs are being written by and about communist women which tell an uncomfortable story of sexism, marginalization and exploitation in a party which preached equality and claimed recognition of women's oppression under capitalism. Joy Damousi's *Women Come Rally* (1994) starts from the premise of the "tension between the masculinist nature of left-wing organizations and women's activism". The sexual double standard is particularly pernicious and lingers, as Ferrier found as she tried to get to the bottom of Devanny's expulsion. Whilst there were explanations of lost letters and other confused communications, informants were still caught up in the sexual mores of the decades past (and present).

Gender relations are foregrounded in *Jean Devanny*. Ferrier would argue that this is because they should be, but it is also because they must be to explain Devanny's life and her struggles as a writer and activist. All is made more difficult for a woman treading on male turf. The Party wanted women who were prepared to do the public speaking, and to organize other women, but only on the Party's



THE STRANGER *From* MELBOURNE



FRANK HARDY –
A LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

1944 – 1975

PAUL ADAMS

terms. As a history and explanation of the ways that the CPA did work and organize, there is much to learn from Ferrier's detailed account.

Ferrier has consulted many sources, including voluminous police files. She engages in discussion of her research process, which as well as being a fascinating story in itself, counterpoises the usual authorial detachment of

the biographer. To place Devanny in the times and for the reader to understand Devanny's political and personal struggles, Ferrier provides rich detail of the people and events that touched Devanny's life. The writing is evocative, as this reader found herself feeling, as Devanny did, frustrated and claustrophobic as avenues of physical, political and emotional escape are blocked. However, even after 320 pages, I still felt that I did not know enough about Devanny. She remains enigmatic which, considering the silences in her autobiographical writing, is probably how it should be. Ferrier concludes with:

In retelling and reconstructing the story of Jean's life, I hope that something may be learnt from it, about what might be true, about what is important and what is not, for the struggles for liberation that still continue.

It is a line with which Frank Hardy would have been comfortable. Hardy is best known for *Power Without Glory*, published in 1950 and subject to the infamous criminal libel case, where the questions of fact and fiction were central. Throughout his writing life, Hardy grappled with truths and versions of truths. From *The Hard Way*, where he split himself into two characters to chronicle the *Power Without Glory* campaign, to *The Unlucky Australians*, where he wrote across the grain of the Gurindji struggle for land rights, to the philosophical *But the Dead are Many*, he was a writer who experimented with structures and themes, as he sought to demonstrate complexities of perspectives and interpretations. Adams contends that Hardy was a pioneer in introducing to Australia new approaches to writing, which positioned him ahead of his time.

The Stranger From Melbourne is a rigorous discussion of the writing of Frank Hardy, and an intriguing insight

into the frustrations for Hardy of not being able to achieve all he (and others) thought he could in his writings. Frustrations caused by the pull on time and energy between political activism and writing, as well as, and maybe in contradiction to, struggling to be accepted, published and reviewed in the mainstream as a serious writer.

Adams, publishing from his doctoral thesis just a few years after Hardy's death, is mindful that his work is the first published of several books in progress on Hardy's life and work. In future, Adams' literary biography will be read and discussed alongside these complementary works. At this time, this book stands alone as a work of literary criticism and of positioning Hardy's life and times in relation to his writing. At the beginning, Adams acknowledges that Hardy is famous as a popular, public figure, and his aim in *A Stranger From Melbourne* is to give greater prominence to Hardy's literary legacy. It is not intended as a general biography, and can only give the reader tantalizing glimpses of the 'life' of Hardy outside of the public and political record. Family, friends and lovers are only mentioned when they assist in explaining Hardy's writing. Surely, though, in 1999, there is much more to say about how little Hardy writes of or reflects upon gender relations.

Jean Devanny's private life was held up to public scrutiny, and this had to be a major theme in Ferrier's biography. White heterosexual men, it seems, still do not get this treatment in their lifetimes, nor by friendly biographers. Devanny's struggles against the constraints of the 'party line' were much tougher than Hardy's, because of the sexual double standards. Adams' assessment that Hardy "was a true eclectic, following different brands of politics like different racehorses" could only be said of a man. No woman communist would have got away with the type of populist behaviour typical of Hardy. Despite his struggles with the Party, Hardy had the standing and success to get the space to go his own way. Devanny was vilified.

A Stranger From Melbourne is a particularly rewarding read for those familiar with Frank Hardy, his life and times and people with whom he argued, including within the pages of this magazine. Adams' book deserves a wider readership, for his insightful analyses of Frank Hardy's life and work have much to offer both literary criticism and new generations of idealists and fighters against oppression and injustice.

Jeannie Rea teaches at Victoria University and is a long-time political and union activist. She was raised on the writing of Hardy, Devanny and other passionate advocates for a better and fairer world.

Kisch, Kommos, Conspiracy

Max Watts

Nicholas Hasluck: *Our Man K* (Penguin, \$24.95).

NICHOLAS HASLUCK IS A PRACTICING LAWYER in Perth and the author of a dozen published books: novels, short stories and poetry. He is also the son of Paul Hasluck, once a senior minister in conservative, Menzies-led, Australian governments. Hasluck recently wrote *Our Man K*, a 'faction' book, a novel combining historical events of the past century with fictions.

The book is about several men whose names begin with 'K'. Some, the author's 'I' voice, the Australian Kaub, the Austrian Jewish officer Kreide who denies his past and changes his name to Count Kvaldy, spring – Hasluck told me when I asked – from the author's imagination.

Others are history. Karl, for two years (1916–1918) the last tragic Hapsburg Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary. And two "Czech-born, German-Jewish writers from Bohemia" – Franz Kafka, and Egon Erwin Kisch. Kisch – and particularly his *Australian Landfall*, are the central themes of this historical 'faction'.

In October 1934 Kisch, then forty-nine years old and a world-famous reporter, journalist, author and anti-fascist had been invited by the small Australian Movement Against War and Fascism to address its Melbourne congress.

Kisch had been reporting from Berlin during the years of Hitler's rise. He had been imprisoned by the Nazis when they came to power after the Reichstag fire in February 1933. His books were burned by the Fascists together with those of 20,000 others by 'politically incorrect' authors in May 1933. But as a citizen of (then still unoccupied) Czechoslovakia, the Hitlerites had had to let him go. Kisch, from Prague and Paris, reported on the (still hardly believed) early atrocities committed by the Nazis against their left-wing opponents and against Germany's Jews.

He was eminently qualified to inform Australians about Hitler, Nazis, fascism. But the Australian government barred him from landing in Australia. The Federal Attorney General, Robert Menzies, declared Kisch would never set a foot on Australian soil. On orders from the Australian government the captain of his ship, the *Strathaird*, detained him on board. When Kisch defied the ban and jumped fifteen feet from the moving ship's deck onto the quay in Melbourne, breaking his leg, the ship was called back and the 'jumper' carried back on board.

In Sydney the High Court found Kisch's detention on board illegal and ordered him freed. He – broken-legged –

was carried ashore on a stretcher, and immediately re-detained by the police. He was given a dictation test in Scottish Gaelic. This – a test in any European language – was believed legal. It was part of the racist White Australia policy, today conveniently forgotten. Kisch spoke most European languages but not Scottish Gaelic. He cried out through the police station window, "This will make Australia the laughing stock of the world". Failing the test, he was convicted by a Magistrate's Court of illegal immigration and sentenced to six months' hard labour. In Germany, the Nazi press applauded.

But the High Court ruled, four to one, that Scottish Gaelic, spoken by only some four hundred persons, was "not a language within the meaning of the Immigration Act" and quashed the sentence. Kisch made full use of his freedom, speaking in the next three months to huge audiences, much to the embarrassment of the Lyons–Menzies government. He even appeared in *The Bulletin*.

After three months Kisch returned to Europe. The Federal government dropped all charges, paid his legal fees, was happy to see him go. One of his many new friends, John Fisher, son of the First World War Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, accompanied him, helping him with his successful book, *Australian Landfall*.

Kisch enjoyed himself. And his trip, thanks to Establishment stupidity, had been highly effective. Many Australians thought the rise of the left, of a broad anti-fascist movement in the 1930s, owed much to the Kisch trip.

Like his father, Nicholas Hasluck is from the political 'right'. Why would a right-winger write a tale centered on this Kisch, who is from the left, but who – even with the worst of intentions – is rather hard to dislike? Indeed, in *Our Man K*, Robert Kaub, his (fictive) companion and cabin-mate would like to dislike Kisch, but fails.

And whose then 'premature' anti-fascist warnings were soon confirmed, justified, by history?

And why should Nicholas Hasluck (here I am willing to give great odds!), probable supporter of conservative Menzies governments, concentrate on, revive the memory of, this episode in Australian history – an episode which hardly covered the right, and Robert Menzies personally, with anything but ridicule?

Ah! Hasluck believes he has discovered, with the benefit of "subsequent research", sixty-five years down the track, that there was "more going on beneath the surface than 'outward' events would suggest." Kisch, Nicholas Hasluck states in his book, in an article published in the April 1999 issue of *Quadrant* and in subsequent interviews, was not just a satiric larrikin, rendering the mighty ridiculous. There is a second, more sinister tale, discovered by

Hasluck, a tale with a “contemporary resonance”.

Kisch was, Hasluck believes, a well-connected, influential, Comintern agent. His exclusion (or rather the attempt to exclude him) from Australia was thus not a silly bureaucratic bungle, but a well-meant, though perhaps badly managed, quite justified action by an Australian government combating subversion, the Comintern, the “Stalinist cause”.

Trying to prove A may sometimes indicate Z, its very opposite. Hasluck bolsters his second “justified exclusion” theory with some massive omissions. He notes (*Quadrant*, April 1999, p. 29) that “even now” the Attorney-General’s (i.e. Robert Menzies’) file on the Kisch case at the National Archives bears tags showing that documents have been removed from the file by (the much later founded) ASIO.

A very interesting discovery! But does this purging of the files, these missing documents indict Kisch as a dangerous (to whom?) “Comintern Agent” or – far more likely – do the missing documents further ridicule, even damn, discredit, then Nazi-friendly Australian politicians?

Hasluck’s unmentioned Third Reason: That the Nazi German (and the Italian and Japanese) governments heartily supported the attempted exclusion, silencing, of the anti-fascist Kisch is well known.

So is the fact that Australian ‘Menzies’ conservatives, just as their colleagues in Chamberlain’s ‘Munich’ England and in other capitalist democracies, long found Hitler, Mussolini, even Hirohito, far more acceptable than left-wing ratbags such as Kisch. This – today rather shameful – preference seems, by itself, a quite sufficient third explanation why “Our Man K” was banned and had to dangerously jump fifteen feet to land in Australia, while Nazi emissaries such as Count von Luckner had red carpets rolled out to their gangplanks.

The then (not today’s?) political affinity between anti-communist conservatives and Fascists may, by itself, explain Kisch’s barring. But it appears that it was probably reinforced by further, economic ‘rationalist’, considerations.

Years ago I heard that the German Ambassador (or perhaps the commercial attache?) had threatened the Australian government that, were Kisch allowed to continue to insult the head of a friendly government, i.e. Adolf Hitler, on Australian soil, German contracts to purchase Australian wool would be cancelled. (A sum of £10,000 was mentioned.)

Another – not very savoury – reason to ‘get’ Kisch: It took me some time to trace and verify this particular premature example of economic rationalism, although Kisch himself had already described it in *Australian Landfall*. I found that there had been not just two, but three attempts

to ‘get Kisch’. The first had been to bar him from “ever putting a foot onto Australian soil” – as a yet ill-defined subversive; the second to give him the famous Scottish Gaelic test. Both had been struck down by the New South Wales High Court. But even after Kisch, landed and liberated, had spoken widely to Australian audiences the establishment once more went on a Kisch-hunt. Once again, in January 1935, Kisch is charged with being illegally in Australia, a prohibited immigrant.

Heavy guns are again brought into a magistrate’s court. The NSW Attorney-General, a Mr Manning calls the Federal Minister for the Interior (was that a title in January 1935?), a Mr Thomas Paterson, as a Crown witness. Minister Paterson testifies that after Kisch’s first two acquittals the Australian Government had asked the British their opinion of Kisch, of his subversion. Thus prompted, London had replied that “because of his notorious subversive activities” (specifically: talking against Hitler, Goering, the Nazis) Kisch would “not be admitted into the United Kingdom”. This sufficed. England is a friendly power. Minister Paterson again instituted a case to prove Kisch a prohibited immigrant.

But then Kisch’s attorney, Mr Piddington, asks some precise questions of Minister Paterson: “Is it not known to the Minister that Germany has threatened to retire from the Australian wool market, and even cancel an already concluded purchase of £10,000, if Kisch were not banned, or the exclusion not enforced?” Piddington continues with some other obviously well-informed questions, and asks for the coded telegrams to Germany which preceded the request to Britain ... Minister Manning is very unhappy, and refuses to discuss these messages to Hitler, nor will he allow a subpoenaed undersecretary – who could testify to the Nazi intervention – to appear in court.

Was it this coded correspondence between Canberra, probably Menzies, and the Nazis, these telegrams, any statement by that perhaps quite heroic whistle-blowing undersecretary, which ASIO, years later, removed from the Kisch/Menzies files?

We owe thanks to Nicholas Hasluck that he has discovered such ‘removals’. But were they not most likely documents compromising for the then Menzies governments, rather than Kisch?

Other, very well-known incidents, do confirm this reasoning. Many times in the post-Kisch 1930s, the Australian government showed its sympathy for Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, even Imperialist Japan. After the defeat of fascism in 1945 these predilections became an embarrassment. To cite but the most famous:

In February 1938, Attorney General Robert Menzies, on

his road to higher office, acquired a permanent nickname: Pig-Iron Bob, when he desperately insisted, over the determined opposition of the communist-led Port Kembla wharfies, that Australian iron and steel be shipped to Imperialist, fascist, Japan. The Japanese were already using such metal supplies to make bombs, for bombing the Chinese. The 'Kisches' world-wide tried to block such shipments. Soon, as the anti-fascists had warned, the steel returned in the shape of bombs and shells not only on the Chinese but also on Australians and Americans, on Pearl Harbor, Singapore, on Darwin, Townsville, Sydney.

These facts supporting a 'third reason' are totally ignored by Nicholas Hasluck. They are never mentioned in any of the 361 pages of *Our Man K*.

I am also puzzled by another aspect of Hasluck's 'Comintern Agent' theory: Given the then 'All against Fascism' new line of the world communist movement, enthusiastically and very openly propagated by Kisch, what need would there be for any hidden agency?

But for me perhaps the most negative part of *Our Man K*, of what might have been a good book, is its pervasive sense of sadness, of failure. An unjustified feeling of depression. Unjustified, for as far as I can judge, the historic Kisch remained resolutely upbeat, cheerful, optimistic. Although the times he lived through, in particular the 1930s, would make many depressed and pessimistic. But the K whose mood pervades Hasluck's book seemed to me that of the hardly seen, downbeat, Kafka, not that of the 'famous Jumper', the upbeat Kisch.

I hope there will one day be a better 'faction' novel about this Czech-born, German-Jewish writer from Bohemia. And, while we're at it, about that really interesting unknown Australian, K's friend John Fisher.

Max Watts is a semi-retired writer and stirrer.

Searching for CIA Gold

Damien Cahill

Frances Stonor Saunders: *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (Granta Publications, \$49.95).

IN THE 1930S, IT WAS ANTONIO GRAMSCI who, from an Italian Fascist prison, highlighted the importance of intellectuals in the struggle for hegemony and the promotion of ideology. Although it is unlikely that the CIA would recognize a debt to the Italian Marxist, the funding

and encouragement by the CIA of western intellectuals espousing pro-American anti-communism which began with the organization's inception in 1947 indicates they too understood this role.

Frances Stonor Saunders' *Who Paid the Piper?* is a detailed discussion of this relationship between western intellectuals and the CIA during the Cold War. The book deals primarily with the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the crucial role played by CIA operatives and CIA funding in its formation and history, but also provides glimpses of myriad other cultural projects in which the CIA had a hand.

The CIA's "Cultural Cold War", as Stonor Saunders describes it, began with the appropriation of Marshall Plan money in the late 1940s to fund anti-communist intellectual and cultural activity. This practice of the unaccountable appropriation of funds for cultural activities, events, magazines and conferences provided the context for the CIA's relationship with the intellectual community for the next twenty years.

Through the establishment of front organizations (such as the Fairfield Foundation) which provided funds to organizations and events under the guise of philanthropic interest, the CIA was able to support numerous cultural and intellectual initiatives and events during the 1950s and 1960s. Formed in 1950, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) was one such organization. The CIA was directly involved in this project, from the outset, both via financial support and through the involvement of American intelligence operative Michael Josselson – later the CCF's Executive Director. Others involved in the formation of the group included Arthur Koestler, Nicolas Nabokov, James Burnham and Sidney Hook, and for its twenty-nine-year life, the CCF was a conduit for pro-American, anti-communist intellectual and cultural activity. In addition to supporting conferences and symposia, the CCF established affiliates in many non-communist countries. The Australian affiliate was the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom; its magazine was *Quadrant*.

The CIA's goal in these projects was to organize the influence of cultural and intellectual elites, the aim being to foster a positive image of America, American culture and American foreign policy, and to counter both pro-communist and anti-American sentiments. It was the view of the more strident anti-communist intellectuals that in a war, however cold, one has to take a position – and the only moral position, it was argued, was to support America as the best chance for guaranteeing freedom and democracy.

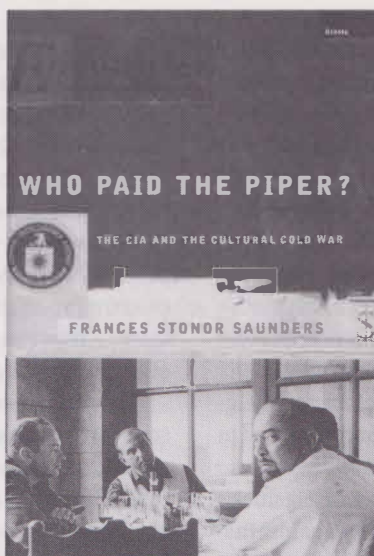
Stonor Saunders acknowledges the difficulties she faced in researching the book due to unofficial restrictions placed upon the access of CIA documents from the period.

Who Paid the Piper? is pieced together from interviews, memoirs, correspondence and documents retrieved from the private collections of key players in the events. Despite these limitations, the book is able to provide a convincing account of the period, shedding further light on the extent of CIA involvement in the Congress for Cultural Freedom. It is clear that, far from playing a mere sideline role, the CIA was heavily enmeshed in the CCF and in intellectual activity in non-communist countries generally. It is also clear that a few key individuals involved in the CCF knew that the CIA was the source of substantial funding of the organization and that it is likely that other intellectuals were also aware of the CIA's involvement at some level in the activities of the CCF. The extent to which these people were aware of the CIA's involvement, and thus the extent to which they were willing recipients of CIA funding, is still inconclusive. Perhaps access to further documentation (for example CIA files and the *Quadrant* files in Australia) would clarify this issue.

Whether or not intellectuals who benefited from CIA funds were aware of the source of this funding isn't necessarily the crucial issue here. Since it was made public in 1967 that the CCF magazine *Encounter* was in direct receipt of CIA funds, a number of those associated with this magazine have declared that the funding came with 'no strings attached' and therefore did not compromise the intellectual integrity of the journal. Former editor, Irving Kristol, for example, is quoted as saying "I think it's interesting that the only British magazine worth reading at the time was funded by the CIA, and the British should be damn grateful". In the introduction to the book, Stonor Saunders frames her discussion by asking a number of questions:

Did financial aid distort the process by which intellectuals and their ideas were advanced? Were people selected for their positions, rather than on the basis of merit? Were reputations secured or enhanced by membership of the CIA's cultural consortium? How many of those writers and thinkers who acquired an international audience for their ideas were second-raters, ephemeral publicists whose works were doomed to the basements of second-hand bookstores?

Although she doesn't address them directly, it is clear that the effect of CIA involvement in intellectual life was to directly influence it, by promoting certain ideas over



others, and contributing to the climate for legitimate intellectual speculation. Such issues are ignored by Kristol and company.

Who Paid the Piper? does have a few deficiencies. Firstly, it could benefit from better organization. Secondly, Stonor Saunders sources direct quotations, but does not source figures. The provision of these sources would both strengthen the author's argument and be of assistance to other researchers. Finally, Stonor Saunders makes much of the CIA's concentration upon influencing the "Non-Communist Left" away from anti-Americanism, but this idea is poorly articulated. What is

meant by "Non-Communist Left" varies greatly in the book. A good example of this is Stonor Saunders' characterization of *Quadrant* magazine as providing "a lively focus for the Australian Non-Communist Left". If *Quadrant* did this, then it did much more also, and under the editorship of James McAuley, the magazine had a strongly conservative editorial voice. A more thorough discussion of this topic, including perhaps a greater analysis of the ideological journey of many Cold War warriors from the left to the right would have improved the book.

These criticisms notwithstanding, *Who Paid the Piper?* deserves to be read. It is an important contribution to the growing body of work which seeks to provide a clearer perspective of the Cold War than the common black-and-white moralistic version offered by many anti-communists. The Cold War may be over, but the battle over its interpretation continues.

Damien Cahill is a PhD student, tutor and activist from the University of Wollongong.

Liberating Information

Jayson Althofer

Brian Martin: *Information Liberation: Challenging the Corruptions of Information Power* (Freedom, \$27.80).

Peter McGregor: *Cultural Battles: The Meaning of the Viet Nam-USA War* (SCAM Publications, \$15).

McKenzie Wark: *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace* (Pluto Press, \$24.95).

DURING THE VIETNAM WAR, when the Kelly gang inspired such left-wing groups as the Sons of Ned and the Australian National Liberation Movement to resist domestic tyrannies and international aggressions, Ian Turner reviewed the speeches and writings of Che Guevara. He wondered if Che was the Ned Kelly of the Sierra Maestra, or Ned the Che Guevara of the Wombat Ranges. Given Che's "understanding and organizing ability", might Ned have founded the Republic of Northern Victoria?

The celebrity of Ned as outlaw and even potential statesman spread along what McKenzie Wark, in *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace*, calls vectors of communication and recording. Che's deification – and message to "Make two, three, many Vietnams" (or Monash campuses) as part of an international revolution against imperialism – thrived in similar ways. The Vietnam War still emits emergency signals about imperialism and the imperative of anti-capitalist resistance, made all the more urgent by the role of old and new media technologies in recent or ongoing wars in the Gulf, the Balkans, Rwanda, East Timor...

With the imprint of SCAM (anarchist publishers of the instant classics on *How to Stop Whining and Start Living*), Peter McGregor's *Cultural Battles*, promises – and delivers – a passionate anti-authoritarianism oriented towards principled social changes. "Sorting out the politics of the war and exposing the deceptions," as McGregor argues, "is a prerequisite to any meaningful reconciliation [between former combatants, as well as between veteran combatants and protesters in Australia], and the corresponding compensation that remains due to the peoples of Viet Nam – of Indo China in general – to their societies and cultures." A member of the 'Vietnam generation' who faced conscription in 1967, McGregor has collected over a dozen of his previously published articles (mostly from 1988–97) which examine various contests over the ideological meanings of the war.

A main conclusion concerning wartime journalism is that mainstream "news media functioned largely as an ideological state apparatus rather than as a fifth column" that lost America and Australia the war. Besides Louis Althusser's Marxist conception of the media as ideological state apparatuses (1969), McGregor draws on libertarian traditions and practices of both the news media and academia (such as the work of Alex Carey, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman). But libertarianism is sometimes liable to reproducing bourgeois-liberal illusions and dichotomies, as when "a liberal democratic social order, where the media are adversarial watchdogs" and "a hegemonic social order where the media are sycophantic lap-

dogs" are seen as "oppositional polarities". In keeping with the Marxist influence, McGregor could have viewed liberal democracies as specific forms of bourgeois hegemony. Despite this tension – and though a lot of his uncompromisingly critical views haven't "yet reached into the mainstream media" – McGregor makes a valuable contribution to freeing and circulating information which will aid reconciliation and compensation processes.

The rise of cultural studies in the sixties, McKenzie Wark notes, contained both "a radical impulse to critique mass media" and "a democratic impulse to get to know how culture worked for different kinds of people in their everyday life". Partly influenced by Craig McGregor's pioneering *People, Politics and Pop* (1968), Wark's is much closer to the second approach; the first being "negative and critical" and supposedly more disposed to viewing "fans of celebrity images as so many cultural dopes, duped by capitalism".

Labelling 'radical' (i.e., negative, critical, unpopular) analyses of mass media culture as elitist can betray itself as a top-down perspective: the largesse of a *laissez faire* statism. Such 'democratic' tolerance (which happens to balk at radical or far-left cultural politics) reflects warm-fuzzy feelings of uncritical respect for the productive heterogeneity of 'the people' within the capitalist system. Nonetheless, Wark's antipathy towards the unpopular aspect of criticism is disarming. He wants the Labor Party to evince proper concern with what people actually desire, as revealed through empirical analyses of "celebrities, culture and cyberspace".

Leaving aside the false and simplistic distinction between 'radical' and 'democratic' approaches, Peter McGregor's book arguably occupies an adversarial watchdog position, whereas Wark's is an eager running dog of cyberspace capitalism, thrilled to fetch and fetishize its apparent benefits. It draws on Marshall Berman's reading of Karl Marx (on "constant revolutionizing of production") to argue that the information revolution has already happened and is happening constantly. This can sound like a paean to the dynamism of global capitalism; given the system's 'revolutionary' structure and structural indeterminacy, socialist movements for the determinate negation of capitalism are rendered unnecessary, and probably elitist in any case. Cybercapitalism is 'the revolution'.

While McGregor's book suggests that the dissemination of valuable information requires prolonged political struggle, the social tendency of Wark's is to celebrate the speedy spread of "the open vectors of cyberspace". Information is already liberated – travelling constantly revolutionized vectors – but this is not to say that Wark doesn't see problems in its distribution. However, responsibility for unequal

access to information has, in his argument, more to do with the "information proletariat", who persist with an irrational dogged resistance to cybercapitalism, than with the owners, managers and ideologues of that system.

If he is the Ned Kelly of Australian cultural studies (as some reviewers have suggested), then one reason for the comparison is that "like the helmeted bushranger, Wark's view of Australia is conspicuously blinkered" – framing suburban and urban cultures in simplistic binary opposition (Christopher Scanlon, *Arena Magazine* 41) – and near-blind when it comes to rural, regional and Aboriginal Australias. Despite attention to some important questions of class, Wark's treatment of suburban "info-proles" smacks of the interests of a self-assured "strata of comfortable urban and inner suburban information burghers". The insistence that the info-proles should "join the emerging public consensus on how to speak and act in postindustrial society" seems elitist and incipiently authoritarian, though couched in terms of an urbane manufacture of consent. Where and what is this 'consensus'?

Because "The community is the collective victim of profoundly unequal access to information" (Barry Jones), a Labor government's goals will include the civilized management of cybercapitalism to eliminate the gross inequalities in the distribution of the fruits of information production. Thus the familiar tension between class conflict and community consensus runs through the book. But mediation by urbane intellectuals can help resolve (or pacify) class divisions: "The agenda for Labor [is] to spread the cultural and economic benefits of cyberspace . . . to make itself the power that might broker the interests of the information proletariat. Blue collar voters [who voted conservative in 1996 and 1998] have to be persuaded that it was not really in their interests to resist the postindustrial order . . . Labor has to find benefits for those chunks of suburbia that have been shut off, or wanted to shut themselves off, from absorbing and applying new information. At the same time, it has to persuade the more urbane beneficiaries of cyberspace that it is also in their interests to defuse such resistance." If this is Left-of-Third-Way-idealism, I shudder to imagine an open alibi for a *Realpolitik* of some metropolitan intellectuals protecting their class interests by servicing the Labor party machine. Info-proles aren't dopes, Wark says throughout his book, but its argument is premised on them wanting to remain prisoners of capital.

In their resistance to the touted "new information" might be found both a healthy dose of cynicism about the promises made for cyberspace, and an implicit great refusal to identify with the dominant class interests of capitalism, industrial or postindustrial. However, the urbane

imperative is to defuse such resistance; not, for instance, to help mobilize and organize it into forms of extra-parliamentary movements left of Labor. Info-proles should just open their shut-off minds and suburban doors to cybercapitalism. With such priorities, Wark's hawking of the "open vectors of cyberspace" sounds like fulsome apology for business as usual: postmodern billingsgate used to persuade poor provincial proles (who don't know their best interests) to buy into an emergent metropolitan 'consensus'.

Wark has a reputation for dashing off guerrilla vectors against the 'authoritarian' left and right (unreconstructed Marxism and conservatism) and, indeed, against the purityranny of the whole idea of left and right. These raids usually proceed from a volatile mixture of social democracy and libertarianism. The latter comes into direct conflict not only with radical leftism but also traditional labourism – and his book's myth-making about the freedoms and possible equalities of cybercapitalism becomes even more outrageous – in certain propositions concerning solidarity and "voluntary association".

It can be agreed generally that "recreating solidarity requires openness to new information and the invention of new forms". But some of Wark's more specific formulations tend to ahistorical formalism and slide towards apologetics for New Right libertarianism: "if there has been a transformation in Australian culture . . . it is from forms of compulsory solidarity to voluntary ones . . . It's better to suffer a bit of anxiety of choice than to be forced to conform to compulsory forms of association, such as . . . the old style trade unions were". The unjustified implication that old style unionism was basically constituted through coercion is a bourgeois caricature of a particular kind of social relation: freedom in and through certain forms of "compulsory solidarity".

Unionists can well do without such urbane judgements about what is better for them. They are justified in establishing compulsory unionism, the closed shop, since in the struggle against their employers, workers need to establish a united front. Because non-members weaken organization and solidarity, their 'freedom' (not to unionize) can mean unfreedom (fewer rights) for union members. More than "a bit of anxiety", openness and 'free' choice can mean ongoing insecurity, uncertainty, job loss. In such contexts, formalistic championing of openness over closure has more in common with the government's current advertizing campaign – "Freedom of association: It's your call" – than with rethinking social democracy. In a virtual Republic of Australia governed by cyber-Laborist power-brokers and mediated by persuasive urbane beneficiaries, Ben Chifley's vision of "the light on the hill" is hardly going

to be reached or even well-defended against the constant degradations of capitalism.

Turner thought it "over-simple" to see "the self-hatred of the urban intellectual" as the reason Che, despite his failures, became a hero. Rather, he represents a desire for "an activism which is unsullied by compromise and injustice". Though it sounds quaint and naive compared to the compromised reformism of Third Way politics and Wark's urbane self-assurance, the desire for such an unsullied activist spirit is a moving force behind Brian Martin's *Information Liberation*; a manifesto and manual for freeing information from the corruptions of vested power across a range of interconnected areas, including mass media, intellectual property, research funding, defamation law, surveillance technologies, and the academic marketplace of ideas (especially "celebrity intellectuals").

Where Wark disdains the discourse of 'liberation', Martin's book exemplifies the defiance of some of its anarchist forms. Critical of reformist solutions to the problems of information production and dissemination, Martin proposes a series of radical alternatives, focusing on grassroots activism with the aim of abolishing the market and replacing it with local self-managing collectives of workers and community members. His book provides convincing arguments, examples and strategies for breaking the chains of capitalism, whether they're made of iron or ideology, silicon or celebrity.

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One Historian's Travels

Jackie Delperio

Henry Reynolds: *Why Weren't We Told?: A Personal Search for the Truth about our History* (Penguin, \$24.95).

WHY WEREN'T WE TOLD? is autobiographical and is interspersed with Reynolds' trademark citations from a range of historical texts. The blend of documentary evidence and personal experience provides a powerful basis for his arguments and makes compelling reading. He attempts to answer the questions that occurred both to himself and to many people who have read his books and listened to him speak on Australian history. Why were we never told and why did we not know

about frontier violence and the laws that founded Australia? His search for answers begins with a critique of his conventional education and the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous versions of history. Reynolds emphasizes the need to bring the two stories together.

Reconciliation is a strong theme in this book, particularly in the last few chapters. Although Reynolds has been categorized as a 'transferred nationalist' by some of his critics, he stresses that "(w)hile drawing attention to the truth of Australia's history, I never felt that it cancelled out or made void all the many achievements of the settlers". Acknowledging both costs and achievements is crucial to the reconciliation process. All Australians need to share ownership of our history. "Reconciliation means the reconciling of the two stories about what happened." But as Noel Pearson asks in his review of this book, published in *The Age* on 17 July 1999, is shared ownership possible while scars remain and strong emotions are aroused? Pearson's doubts are evident in the recent debate about whether Aboriginal deaths during invasion and settlement should be commemorated at war memorials.

Reynolds estimates the death toll during the 'border wars'. The few monuments to Aboriginal heroes of the frontier have been defaced or, more commonly, destroyed. Suggestions that Aboriginal fallen be included in the Australian War Memorial are met with hostility from groups such as the Returned Services League. Reynolds argues that if a similar number of non-Indigenous people were killed there would be monuments and public holidays to mark the occasion. This point seems to be very important to Reynolds because he mentions it twice in the book.

He has "often been incensed or angry about the cruelty and injustice involved, but even then... felt under professional obligation to try to understand and explain the behaviour of the perpetrators". He argues that the violence comes from the central problem that has existed from the beginning: settlers came to acquire land that was already owned and occupied. Where Aboriginal people resisted, force was the only recourse for settlers. He believes it was a result that was predetermined and unavoidable. Reynolds' argument seems almost conciliatory and there seems to be a softening of criticism for racism and violence for the sake of reconciliation and professionalism. However, the brutality and the terror perpetrated by settlers on the frontier should not be understood in terms of unavoidability and inevitability. They should be condemned as inexcusable and unnecessary, a view I hold after reading Reynolds' books. The violence that he so passionately discusses in this and other books goes beyond self defence. A sense of entitlement that comes from notions of superiority is pre-

sumed by settlers, a sense that persists today and continues to obstruct the reconciliation process.

The need to serve his profession seems to be very influential in the final chapter. He appears to be suggesting that ignorance and a pervasive, almost hidden racism can explain present-day injustice. Although education and history may have let Reynolds and his contemporaries down up until the 1960s, it is not the case for those in the 1990s with the benefit of a revised history. Reynolds' style of writing is very accessible and his research has been made into a television documentary series for those less likely to read.

Although reconciliation is a strong theme, much of the book is taken up with addressing criticism. Throughout the book, Reynolds often refers to hostility to his research from other historians, conservative politicians, some sections of the media and anonymous letter writers. He suggests that the hostility is partly due to the nature of his work and that it undermines long-held and cherished beliefs. As Noel Pearson commented, Reynolds has laid bare the nation's soul.

Reynolds responds to his critics, in particular to an article by Peter Cochrane published in *Eureka Street* in October 1998. In the article, Cochrane discusses many of the criticisms of Reynolds' work from a variety of sources. Reynolds has been accused of being a traitor, of undermining national self-confidence, creating guilt and corrupting young people. He criticizes Reynolds for overdoing the violence and down-playing the co-operation between settlers and Indigenous people.

Reynolds argues back that records overflow with violence and the appalling acceptance of such violence. He argues that "to hide the violence it is necessary to hide the history". He points out that very few Aboriginal people believe that he overdoes the violence. A chapter is dedicated to co-operation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in establishing major Australian industries. There is also a discussion of the native police.

A major focus of Cochrane's critique is Reynolds' interest and impact on common law and questions whether this is appropriate. Reynolds responds with a discussion of the Mabo and Wik decisions. He was surprised by the High Court's decisions because he understood the doctrine of *terra nullius* as a legal given. It was not until after the decisions that he realized his ignorance of the law that founded Australia. This again prompted the question, why were we never told? The use of native title laws and the doctrine of *terra nullius* have had a major impact on Indigenous people's culture and identity and in part constitute non-Indigenous identity. Yet many people are ignorant of the law including those that make new ones. There ap-

pears to be a need for Reynolds to continue his research on the history of laws.

Reynolds holds firm to the conviction that his history is good and necessary. To ignore the overwhelming evidence that supports his work would be to perpetuate the great Australian silence and the distortion of our history. He also holds the conviction that Australians value equality and refuses to accept that this is the most bigoted and racist country in the world. The values espoused in this book give an example of how the reconciliation process could proceed.

At a time when the possibilities for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians seem limited, *Why Weren't We Told?* is timely. It is an important book for those who want to understand why they did not know. Although it does not actually provide answers, it raises many more questions about Australian identity and maturity. It responds to criticism and acknowledges the confronting nature of revising history. If reconciliation is ever to be meaningful, we need to share ownership of our history, the good and the bad, as this book advocates.

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Bringing the Public Back In

Terry Irving

Stefan Petrow: *Going to the Mechanics: A History of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute, 1842-1914* (Historical Survey of Northern Tasmania, hb \$35; subscribers \$25; pb \$15).

IN 1942 THE LAUNCESTON MECHANICS' INSTITUTE was described in an official survey as having the best subscription library in Australia, and the largest outside the capital cities. For just on a hundred years it had offered enlightenment and pleasure to the readers of its community. Its Board of Management had always been diligent and mindful of its public responsibility; indeed since 1935 it had been known as the Launceston Public Library. Yet it was a failure. Never in its history had its membership been more than about one in thirty of the population. Were there ever only a thousand or so serious readers in Launceston? Was it a waste of time to encourage culture among modern working men (and women, latterly) – the project of the Mechanics' Institute movement in the English-speak-

ing world? More broadly, what does this history tell us about how we should understand 'the public'? What sort of 'public' can be created by high-minded men of power?

Reading Stefan Petrow's unassuming but fascinating book prompts these questions. The fourth in a series called the Historical Survey of Northern Tasmania, it tells the story of the setting up of the Institute in the 1840s, the erection of its handsome building on the corner of Cameron and St John Streets in 1859–60, and the efforts to bring members through its doors for education, reading, uplifting contemplation of the arts, and entertainment – the last mainly out of financial necessity. Its office-bearers and board of management, listed in an appendix, were solid men of business, professional practice, or public service, with just a scatter of tradesmen. Their views about the Institute and its public role are copiously presented by Petrow, who has followed them assiduously through the records of the Institute and the local press. The petty squabbles among lecturers and benefactors, as well as the dedication of its supporters are carefully chronicled here. Worthy gents gaze benignly (but why so many wild beards?) from the photographs, among which is a revealing picture of the reading room, with its Greek columns and cabriole seating: mass-produced refinement; nothing that an honest tradesman would feel at home with. Still, it helps one understand what William Morris hated so much about the bourgeoisie, and why he dreamed up the honest tradesman.

Petrow reads this story as one of community-building and philanthropy. So it was, from the point of view of the quite small minority that took advantage of the Institute's facilities. Wearing a Marxist hat one might say, on the contrary, that it is a story of class formation among the bourgeoisie. Both stories contribute little to an understanding of 'the public', which is a pity at a time when the idea of the public is under attack. Take libraries: what is wrong with putting library services out to tender – replicating the efforts of the not-for-profit notables who ran the Institute library for so long? Those who think along these lines should consider the final stage of Petrow's story of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute. In 1945, a proactive state, emboldened by the wartime mobilization, moved in on the Launceston worthies and their 'public' subscription library. At first run by the local government, in a little over a decade it had become a regional section of the State Library of Tasmania. These years were its finest. There was an explosion of readers: about 3,500 in May 1945, and 14,000 two years later. Another reading 'public' – more vigorous and demanding – had been discovered, but only after a public-spirited elite had been pushed aside.

I don't want to suggest that Stefan Petrow does not understand these matters. He does recognize the shortcomings of the mechanics' institute model, and his evidence shows that the Institute's facilities were not unappreciated by some trade unionists and radical educators. There was more than one notion of the public contending for space in this building. That is why a sense of loss is appropriate for the epilogue of his story. In Petrow's words: "Tragically, in 1971 the gracious, even noble, old mechanics' institute building was demolished by an act of State government vandalism. The building was 'torn down with indecent haste so that the ruins would not be too apparent to Lord Casey', who had agreed to open the new building; Casey was the descendant of Dr Casey, the President [of the Board of Management] when the original building was opened." We can learn a lot about the ironies of history from buildings, and from books, including this one by Stefan Petrow.

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What Makes Labor Tick?

Robert Pascoe

Colin Cleary: *Bendigo Labor: The Maintenance of Traditions in a Regional City* (the Author, 24 Goynnes Road, Epsom 3551, \$25 plus \$3 postage).

THE CENTRAL VICTORIAN GOLDFIELDS city of Bendigo has returned a Labor representative in either or both the national parliament or Spring Street every election since 1904 (except for the 1970s). This engaging work of local labour history appears at a most fortuitous moment in the political history of Victoria, with the second Kennett Government decimated at the 18 September 1999 polls, thanks largely to seats like Bendigo.

For the first time ever Labor has triumphed even in Bendigo East, the more conservative half of the city. Indeed the book contains a full-page portrait of twenty-six-year-old Jacinta Allan, described rather propitiously as "the future of Bendigo Labor". Colin Cleary makes the point that there has never been a Victorian Labor government without a Labor MP from Bendigo.

Australian social history is replete with books on the radical side of politics, but local labour histories are fewer on the ground, partly because labourism has been such a shifting category of political expression. Cleary quite clev-

erly overcomes this problem by providing a wonderful summary of the entire national history of the centre-left mainstream movement, into which a reader can place local developments in Bendigo.

Cleary identifies several distinguishing themes in the general social history of this goldfields city which have always connected it strongly with an ongoing labour movement. One is the search for a reliable water supply, to quench an otherwise naturally dry locale. (Bendigo shares this with many other Labor towns, notably Kalgoorlie.)

A second theme is Australian Rules Football. Here, as in towns like Fremantle or Port Adelaide, football provided a powerful glue to social relations and the local Trades Hall was situated close to the 'QEO', the Queen Elizabeth Oval. By one of the nice ironies which characterize Australian football history, Bendigo in the 1960s was zoned to Carlton, precisely at the time that club was being captured by Liberal Party interests!

A third theme in this account of Labor success in Bendigo is the resilience of the movement in adapting to the dramatic economic changes in the region. Mining was followed by manufacturing and other new industries; these in turn were replaced by service industries from the 1970s onwards. Bendigo shares with Ballarat this succession of sea-changes in its occupational make-up and the necessity for organized labour to make rapid adjustments if it was to survive as a potent force.

One of the other key factors in Cleary's story is the capacity of the party to put forward outstanding and appropriate candidates. It is interesting that some electorates are notoriously better at doing this than others. On the conservative side of politics, for instance, it is remarkable how well Malvern has done in this regard, producing Menzies, Holt, Gorton, and, now looming as a rival to John Howard, Peter Costello. So too with Bendigo, producing for the Labor side representatives such as Walter Hamilton, A.E. Cook, Galvin and Stoneham (Ministers in the Cain Snr Government), John Brumby, David Kennedy and Steve Gibbons.

Regional Victoria has been stronger in its support for Labor than most people readily realize. Brumby and Steve Bracks (the latter of Ballarat extraction) built Labor's 1999 campaign around this proposition and took Kennett by surprise. As long as rural electorates have some medium-sized towns, or bigger, there is no reason why Labor cannot win them. The dispersely populated electorates of Gippsland in Victoria's east, are stony ground for Labor, but central and western Victoria have always been fair game.

This book will interest students of politics, particularly those young people who are keen to learn more about what makes Australian Labor tick. Labor has proved its

worth in the 1999 Victorian state election. At the very moment in Australian history when the winds of global economic change are whistling through our deregulated institutions, leaving our regional communities vulnerable to economic rationalism, Victorian Labor has shown people that there are policy prescriptions vastly different from those offered by Pauline Hanson and One Nation.

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"no freer than before"*

Pam Brown

Patricia Dobrez: *Michael Dransfield's Lives: A Sixties Biography* (MUP, \$44.95).

*Dransfield, who wrote
200 poems each day,
was wiser than his editor
who printed them.*

Laurie Duggan, *Epigrams of Martial*, VIII, XX

WELL MAYBE NOT TWO HUNDRED, but the arch-fabricator, Michael Dransfield, claimed to have written eleven poems in one morning during his stay in a psychiatric ward in Canberra in 1972. Michael Dransfield excelled, to quote Patricia Dobrez, in "extensive self-mythologising" – he was, to his less courteous contemporaries, a romantic bullshit-artist. A private schoolboy growing up in suburban Brighton-le-Sands, he invented a memorially grand family home called 'Courland Penders' and imbued it with overblown nostalgia. When his book *Drug Poems* was published by Sun Books he bragged that it had sold 2,400 copies in the first six weeks – actually, it had sold only thirty-one copies in two months. But his admirers aided his self-embellishing – told by Geoffrey Dutton to expect a young Rimbaud (what pretention) the Melbourne artist Mirka Mora dutifully did:

When he entered my studio . . . For me it was like Rimbaud coming in, something special had come to my house. He looked like a tall, beautiful spider. Michael had something of an animal about him, a happy animal, as you find in the country.

* from the last line of Dransfield's 'Bum's rush II'.

Dransfield, the heroic victim, exaggerated his injuries in bike accidents and decided that it was hospital pethidine that got him hooked on drugs. Patricia Dobrez faithfully, although somewhat patchily, chronicles his fantastic versions of himself.

I should have known Dransfield – contemporaneously I attended anti-Vietnam War rallies, wrote and published poetry, lived on the Surry Hills side of the same street, worked at Paddy's Markets on a similar stall and accompanied my heroin-addicted boyfriend to the same rehabilitation farm at Caloola. I probably met him but I lived in a different section of the 'counter-culture'. Dransfield was taken up by established figures like Geoffrey Dutton and Rodney Hall and was published by the new verse culture vying at the time to topple the old guard (and who unwittingly eventuated as the official verse culture). They had a poetry society with as normative a bureaucratic structure as a Rotary Club or a social committee – a president, treasurer, secretary and, crucially, a magazine. We had an offset printing press in the front room churning out workers' control and pro-abortion pamphlets and poetry broadsheets, a few silk-screens for posters, Ubu group filmmakers, women's and gay liberation, the Yellow House and politics. Mostly everyone used some kind of drug. I had heard of Michael Dransfield more for his habit than his poetry. He seemed to me to be a purple-hazer.

Although Patricia Dobrez devotes a chapter to an analysis of what biography is and questions whether or not she's writing one I'd say that *Michael Dransfield's Lives* fails as a biography. It's very long (over 500 pages) and it's fairly witless in its lofty historiographical construction. Really, Dransfield was not a key figure in poetry for anything other than his untimely, tragic death at 24 in 1973. As John Forbes contended, he died too soon. Dead now for over twenty-five years, he missed out on some exciting 'isms'. He missed feminism, he missed gay liberation and, given his (typical-of-the-times) problems with girlfriends and his sexual ambiguity he might have enjoyed those movements. He missed a Labor government, he missed the end of the war against Vietnam, he missed multiculturalism and the rise of environmental and Aboriginal rights movements. He missed performance poetry, Sylvia & the Synthetics, the Filmmakers Co-op, the Tin Sheds, the Poets Union, pub readings, Town Hall dances, Jura Books readings at La Pena, the Poets' Balls – events and organizations which could have provided a deepening and an accompanying sense of celebration for him as they've done for every poet who outlived him. Dransfield was a prolific, slightly gloomy but not always interesting poet made central to the early seventies by his loyal patrons (imitating

Dransfield's own self-romanticizing) – Tom Shapcott and, especially, Rodney Hall who published excessively (as Laurie Duggan's epigram suggests) *everything* posthumously. I disagree with Tom Shapcott's 1970 assessment of Dransfield as being "terrifyingly close to genius" – some of the poems quoted in the biography now seem very youthful and not as critically accomplished as the poetry of his peers in the same period – John Tranter, rae desmond jones, Nigel Roberts, joanne burns, Laurie Duggan, Vicki Viidikas and Tim Thorne.

Subtitled "*A Sixties Biography*", this book's really about the 1970s and, for me, is most interesting as a record of some of the alternative or underground little magazine publishing activities and for its documentation of the warring verse-culturatis around what became Robert Adamson's *New Poetry* magazine. The author's method is to use Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Maurice Blanchot, Baudrillard, Barthes, Habermas, Lyotard and even Monsieur Derrida to reclaim or re-place Dransfield in post-modernity. It's a highfalutin pursuit and succeeds in enlarging a hole in Australian literary history. I wish some poetic historian would let Dransfield's short, sad life lie and get on with writing a comprehensive account of what were extremely dynamic times.

Pam Brown is overland's poetry editor.

routines & revelations: new poetry

Kerry Leves

chris jurewicz, *borderlands*, c & n press. Sensibility is contraband, poetry the false-bottomed suitcase that carries the traces, the nuances of another culture across linguistic borders. The self – the histories it merges and disperses – is a set of "overlaid transparencies" (I quote the poet's own apt description). One history is Poland's – bitterly contended, a centuries-long war fought by the proponents of a national culture against many different forces of repression and destruction. Jurewicz writes this past obliquely. His lyricism – which is fresh, with the bloom still on it – almost casually conveys the shock of brutality, the tenacity of hope, and a fierceness of living – and wit – that makes its own kind of resistance, may even salvage "the real history that lingers/ under the nouveau riche paints/ in mouldy crevices/ forever like a faint tattoo/ it's under

our skin". This young poet may be a little in love with the lyrical mode and put a shade too much faith in its revelatory power, but his confidence is exciting. And 'borderlands' makes another present to the reader: a suite of poems by Polish poets from "the last fifty years or so" – some unknown in English, though a number of these poems are considered "national treasures" in Poland. Read, and understand why. Ryszard Krynicki, Miron Białoszewski, Irena Wyczolkavska are standouts. Poet Jurewicz seems also a fine translator.

joanne burns, *aerial photography*, fip, \$12.95. Lucid, as always, but satire is too polite a term. These ambling, artful jeremiads inscribe consumerism as nightmare, a no-exit theme park; could be read, perversely, as National-Geographic-style treatments (the thoroughness, the telling, surrealistic imagery) of contemporary pathologies. The vision – of Barbie dolls and burnt teaspoons, of stupid tourists, heartless yuppies and plasticked-out banality – is very consistent, so much so that when poems break out of their stick-it-to-'em frameworks, the effect can be experienced as a grace-note, a relief. In the book's second half, the grace-notes take over; complexities of feeling are allowed to inform the poetry, which becomes more subtly expressionist, varied and refreshing.

Rory Harris, *Waterline*, fip, \$12.95. Less is more: minimalism if not triumphant then at least imaginative and affecting. Much of the book is paeans to children, unborn or otherwise, and, indirectly, to fatherhood. The spare and reticent style is worked into some enjoyable illusions of energy, intimacy, physicality, direct involvement. A suite of poems set in New Guinea adds reflectiveness: "I divide the night air/ carry the image like a photograph/ & place it anywhere/ before me, or after me/ I don't stop for detail/ a dog barks/ the doors are closed".

John Kinsella (ed.), *Landbridge: Contemporary Australian Poetry*, FACP, \$19.95. An act of connoisseurship – painstaking, sensible, trenchant and rather problematic. Rejecting "the rural myth ... at the core of our national identity, the propaganda that has ... excluded outside interaction and marginalized indigenous peoples", the editor looks to "crossover territory ... between rural and urban ... the fringes produc[ing] the most interesting hybrid languages." Kinsella's searching has resulted in one of the most enticingly diverse (within limits) Australian anthologies. Gratitude seems appropriate: where else do we find so many contrastive voices provocatively juxtaposed? Writing by women is strong: Lisa Belleair, MTC Cronin, J.S. Harry,

Dorothy Hewett, Coral Hull and Tracy Ryan are perhaps the boldest. But anthologies are also – inevitably – about omissions. The major one here is intercultural voices: Belleair and Lionel Fogarty are represented, but Ouyang Yu, πO and Tom Petsinis – innovative contributors to the poetic culture – are not. Neither is Ania Walwicz, who's influential, nor Antigone Kefala, Anne Fairbairn, Philip Hammial – my list of 'hybridizers' goes on. While *Landbridge* doesn't aim to be "a definitive statement" it provides fascinating evidence that Australian poetic English is becoming creolized, and readers could use a sampling of the cross-cultural or inflected Englishes the last-named poets supply. Yet despite its narrow scope, *Landbridge* re-opens a sense of the language's possibilities. "Each work enhances our reading of another", says the editor, and he's right.

Alex Skovron, *Infinite City*, fip, \$13.95. The sonnetina – a tight but flexible ten-line rhyming form – interestingly explored and exploited. In Skovron's renderings, there's lightness of tone, crispness of effect. This book is likely to send many a poetic practitioner to their notepads, to see what they can manage within the discipline of the sonnetina. Narcissus (in the eponymous poem) "got married/ to himself. A civil ceremony, nothing too glib ... / At last, he escorted/ himself into the Bridal Suite: nervous, a little beery ... " Sorry, but you'll have to read the poem for its conclusion, which pays off admirably. Not all the poems are as good – the content goes whimsical sometimes, the tone occasionally loses its cool (middle-class epiphanies like "The Keys' get custardy). But some of the meditations on language and time are enjoyably trippy. And the absolutely regular form, the playful conciseness, can refresh a reader. In the modest context of poetry book sales, I predict this one will be a hit. Keep an eye out for the painter (in the poem 'Art') who "Jotted down a poem (on what depression is), / Took a running leap – and rebounded with a jolt! / He'd forgotten he was an abstract expressionist / Whose landscapes lacked a vanishing point."

Deb Matthews & Stephen Lawrence (eds), *Beating Time in a Gothic Space: Friendly Street Poets 23*, Wakefield Press. Good eclectic fun though very uneven, as commemorative anthologies tend to be. Another in the series that celebrates the long-running Adelaide reading venue, and showcases some agreeable talent. David Cookson offers precise, painterly-and-then-some, luminous understatements. Junice Direen's social anecdotes are made intimate by the illusion of personality, and carry their rue with flair. Anna Brookes makes character and context vivid on a funny, appalling incursion into the armour-plated un-

derbelly of popular culture. And Steve Evans creates an India that may have been a person or a state of mind. These, and other highly-readable by Geoff Kemp, Stephen Lawrence, Graham Rowlands, Ros Schulz and the very witty Kon Calembakis make it well worth the price of admission.

MTC Cronin, *Everything Holy*, Balcones International Press, \$12. What's holy is the body – desiring, exalted by love, joy and suffering; vulnerable to power politics, violence, ego. There's a lovely incompleteness, but the luscious excess of the poet's previous collection *The World Beyond the Fig*, seems to have given way to a more gestural, maybe even a schematic approach. It's all just that little bit drier and more formal. Feminist bases are duly touched, but your intellect could get lonely at times, for opportunities to think sustainably outside the frame: it's hard not to be against brutality, rape and the old double standard. Normative syntax gets fractured, but the concomitant elaborations, the often brilliant abstractions, are delivered in a tone that tends to flatness. Longer poems – 'The Cuan', 'The Confetti Stone', 'Currumundi Beach' – go beyond ideological aptness into lives and complexities, textures and emotions – they deliver, become richer on a second read. Whatever the falling-off since 'Fig', this is still a poetry that evinces openness to the unpredictable, the turns and shifts of world and language.

Dimitris Tsaloumas, *The Harbour*, UQP, \$19.95. A deliberate, informed and intimate recalling of the language of the King James Bible, and through it, the mythic Levant, with its ships and voyages and blazing light and numinous women – see 'Daughter of Kalyrnos' or 'The Bridge': "I build this bridge/ to walk my soul. Slick-dank/ and penguin-winged,/ it'll never reach alone/ the spring where love first/ drank from the rock's core." When the language is kept to one register, the poetry can be magnificent, with a deep ground-bass. Mixed idiom, ornateness (e.g. 'Towards the New Millennium') work far less well.

Jennifer Harrison, *Dear B*, Black Pepper, \$19.95. Very concentrated – some readers may feel there's a community with Pushkin: fables take shape like constellations against the dark. And the wit's informed by worldliness – "dancing in ever-widening folk dresses/ the self-help book snaps open and shut, the chinks/ in theory now so overgrown with narrative/ you'd never know where to find a neurosis' thirsty roots." Harrison knows how to cast an image that'll hold, engage, it's a talent well used – for suggestion and sensuousness, nothing overwrought. There's a difference,

however, between the flow of images that gives dimension to longer poems like 'Dear B' or the 'Boston' sequence (both spellbinders, incidentally) and the set-piece metaphors or similes that close – and diminish – some of the shorter ones (e.g. 'That Place'). But the book's final sequence, 'Casino', has cogency to spare – its gambler convinces and involves: "the most pure lurching/ human thing I do each morning/ is to scheme, even in church/ I daydream poker".

Poetry Review, Spring 1999, FACP, \$16.95. Superbly produced English poetry magazine: this edition is of special interest, since it's a representation of the Australian poetry scene assembled for a primarily British audience by the tireless John Kinsella and co-editor Peter Forbes. There are splendours – Coral Hull's 'Black Ice', Dennis Haskell's 'Walking in England, Late November', Kinsella's own poems, Brian Henry critiquing Hull, Brown, Rose and Gig Ryan – in an otherwise mixed bag of reading which includes further reviews of recent Australian poetry books, and (another!) interview with Peter Porter.

Robert Adamson, *Black Water: Approaching Zukofsky*, Brandl & Schlesinger, \$19.95. Nothing is finalized: language extends its variable horizons indefinitely; infinitely. We're teased with the possibilities of meaning and goaded, pleasurably, into cognition. "Philosophers I swallowed undigested swim in circles,/ bronze-whalers of the intellect, one cannot dream/ in this slipstream of blood. Your punishment is to think." The poetry has plangent, modulated tones and an assured playfulness, yet there's commitment, a seriousness that isn't about the poet's persona. Instead the relationships between language and art-making and quotidian living and dying are interrogated – often delicately, with a kind of latent humour. Each poem seems to have an inner life of its own. That 'inner life' is as elusive as the contemporary urban Eurydice of the 'Daybook' sequence, who may or may not be a nightjar, "a bird Aristotle talked about", and who "moves through the penthouses,/ her white wings stroking polished atmosphere,/ going from bed to bed, changing form,/ listening for her lover's song." The longings are multiple: it's less 'love' that's yearned for, than the language-worlds of classical poetry and philosophy, with their promises of calm and order that play – maddeningly – against routine chaos and the depredations of time. The titan ought to be pleased: the visions inscribed in/on 'Black Water' couldn't be made persuasive in any other medium. And they are; the poetry is persuasive.

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet.

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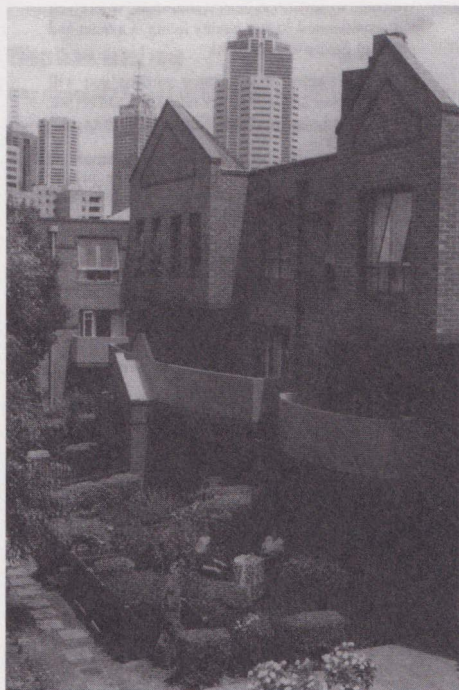
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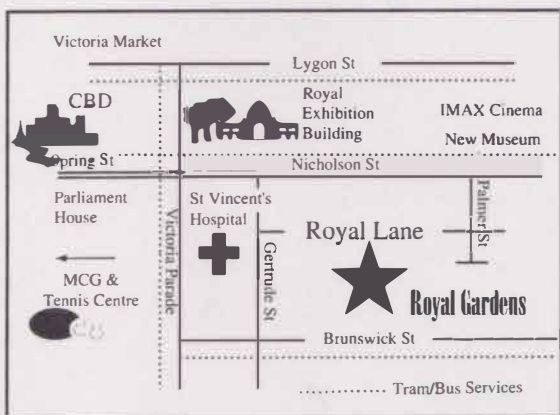
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