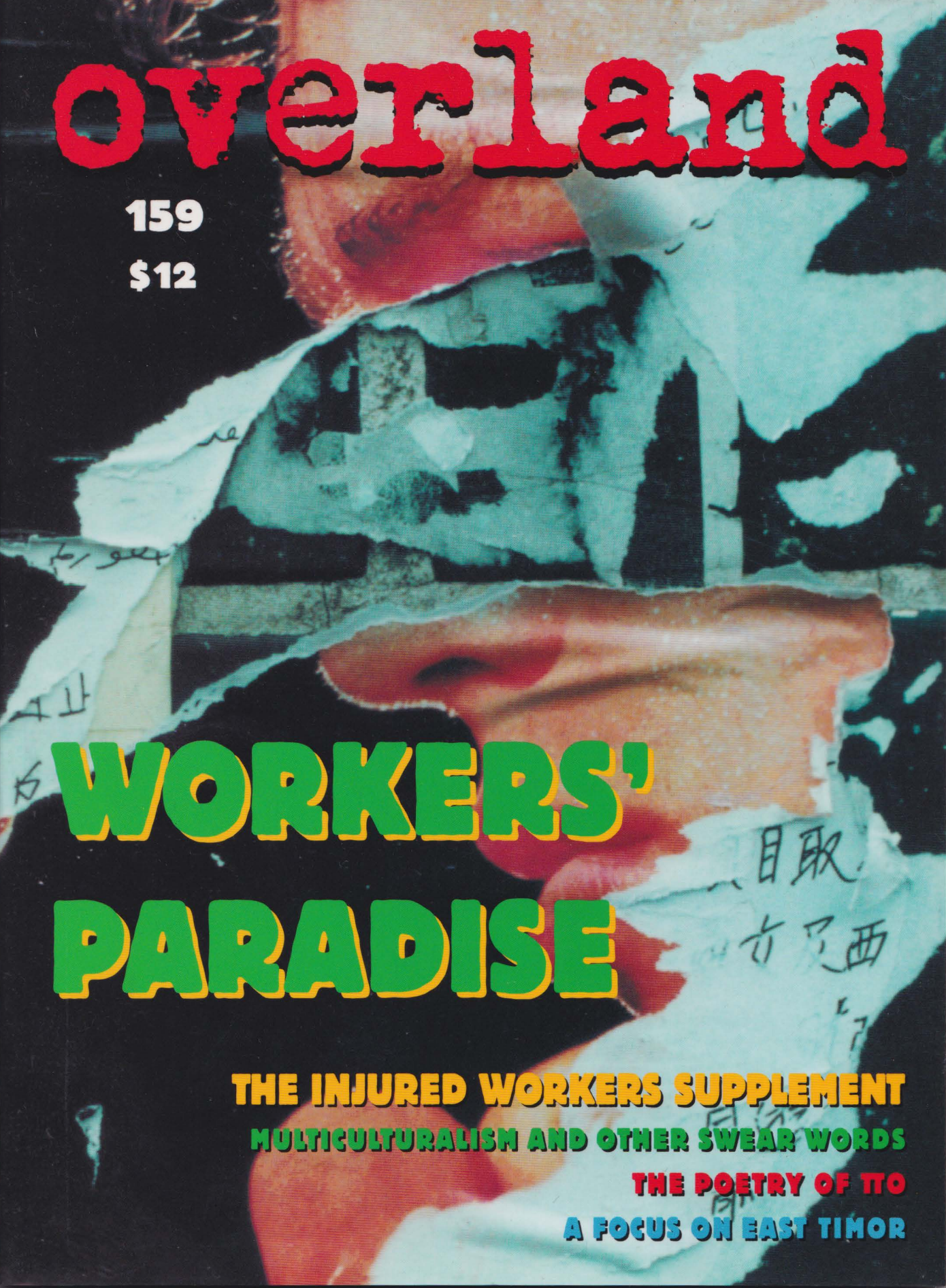
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WORKERS' PARADISE
THE INJURED WORKERS SUPPLEMENT
MULTICULTURALISM AND OTHER SWEAR WORDS
THE POETRY OF TTO
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contents

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Injured workers supplement

contents

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AN INJURY TO ONE . . .

Ian Syson

WHILE EVER WORKERS are getting injured or killed on the job there will always be something to fight for. And there will always be something to write about. We are proud to feature in this issue a supplement devoted to the writings by and about injured workers.

While many of the pieces are powerful and moving, they are not the kind of works that would usually be found in a literary magazine. These poems, stories and sketches – often raw and untutored – pay little heed to most traditions of literary verse or prose. Yet they pay utmost attention to the traditions of working class writing they inhabit, speaking with the rhythms, authority and standing that come from their authors' having experienced working life.

Wenche Ommundsen leads off the issue with a look at the M-word – multiculturalism – and its fall into disrepute after sustained attacks from the right and, surprisingly, recent critiques from the left. Essays by Cameron Logan, Enza Gandolfo and Abbas El-Zein demonstrate clearly that the M-word still has value in contemporary Australia. Jim Aubrey and Graham Pitts on East Timor give weight to that point.

Multiculturalism also provides an entree into our continued focus on contemporary Australian poetry. In addition to a long poem by π.o., John Mateer looks at the cultural connections made and missed during a Chinese poet's vist. Lee Cataldi places π.o.'s verse novel, *24 Hours* in the superlative position of losing little in comparison to *Ulysses*, while Sarah Attfield compares *24 Hours* to Les Murray's *Fredy Neptune*. Using π.o. as her hammer, Attfield finds Murray's claims to speak about and for Australian workers completely hollow.

IN THE EARLY YEARS of the 1990s Geoff Goodfellow was a genuine poetic voice for Australian workers. He carved his way around Australian worksites, usually with union support, highlighting such issues as workplace safety, ethnic discrimination on building sites, domestic violence, the poor treatment of Aborigines, prisoners and most workers by the state, and the absence of poetry in most workers' lives.

One of his finest poems is 'Poetry in the Workplace', well worth reprinting in full here because it draws on his personal experience of injury at work. It was written in 1990 as a response to the claim by the General Manager of the South Australian Chamber of Commerce that Goodfellow's Community Writer's Fellowship was "a waste of time . . ."

They had their chance
to learn poetry at school he said
it's a bit late now

but Mister Thompson's
talking out of school
his standards measured
by dollars
not sense

from Enterprise House
on leafy Greenhill Road
you can bet he'd be
well-versed
he'd know the 100% write-off
for removing asbestos
from out-dated public buildings –
but as for blue asbestos claims
it's a bit late now

& maybe Mister Thompson knows
a sonnet has just fourteen lines

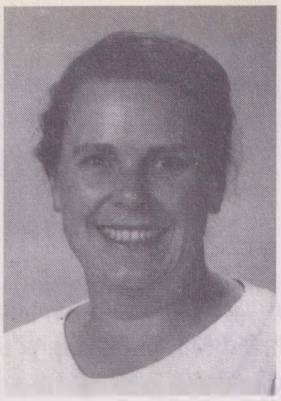
but would Mister Thompson know
the weight of workers'
steel-capped boots
or just that weight of coin
required to replace a pair?

& would Mister Thompson know
how families deal with death
when a scaffolder takes a dive?

would Mister Thompson then respond
to a union call for increased safety?

or would Mister Thompson simply say
it's a bit late now.

SOMETIMES THERE'S nowhere else to go but the workplace if we want to hear good and true stories. Often the only stories worth telling are about the conflicts that begin there. Occasionally, the best of all political actions is simply to tell one of these stories. This is something that much of the labour movement has forgotten in a period of attacks and contraction. We hope this issue of *overland* will be a stark and powerful reminder.



Shirley McLaren 1930–1999

When I first met Shirley McLaren she overwhelmed me. I was there with Alex Skutenko to do the laborious task of hand addressing the (surely) millions of envelopes for the *overland* issue that had a red heart on it (*overland* 118). Shirley didn't stop talking and I was probably completely silent; all eyes and ears when nervous.

The next time I remember was probably the next mail-out, sitting with Alex and Shirley in 361 Pigdon Street cramped in that little study and this time being in absolute paroxysms of laughter. Shirley asked us why we were both laughing, unsure of us. We both through tears explained that she was making us laugh. And then relaxed, she was off, dazzling us with anecdotes. I don't think she was capable of bland observation. She had a keen insightful love of the absurd. I loved her view on things, the words she used, the phrases she invented. She was fascinating on so many subjects. The little things she knew. An expert collector of bits of information and her thrill in inspiring or enthralling you with them.

Alex took over the office work. The mail-out became computerized though still intensive.

Shirley would never fail to call me her 'slave' whilst smiling sweetly.

Her phone manner to the 'I-should-be-published' was legendary. Her famous "Well have you got a copy of the magazine in front of you?" still makes me laugh. Not superior, just true. Just Shirley.

She inspired me. Sent me down a new career path. Enriched my life.

Wonderful Shirley. Very much missed.

Elyse Moffat

Shirley McLaren, who died after a long battle with cancer on New Year's Eve, 1999, was over many years a vital member of the team involved in producing *overland*.

Shirley trained as an arts and craft teacher and began her teaching career at Leongatha High School. In 1954 she moved to Wodonga where she met her husband, John McLaren, then another high school teacher. She later trained as a teacher-librarian and took Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Arts, producing theses on the lost child in Australian literature and on a Scots poet, Robert Henryson.

Shirley first become involved with *overland* during 1971 when John McLaren took over the editorship while Stephen and Nita Murray-Smith were overseas. Shirley took over as secretary and manager for the magazine and was to perform this role during later periods when the Murray-Smiths were overseas.

After Stephen's death in 1988 the O L Society was formed to continue publishing *overland*. Shirley became treasurer of the Society and a member of its board.

The first editor after Stephen's death was Barrett Reid who, in spite of having introduced the Dewey system of library classification to Australia, was rather disorganized in everyday matters. Shirley became the bane of his life with many repeated requests for receipts and properly organized expenses claims. Barrie usually forgot to obtain the former and appeared incapable of producing the latter. To Barrie, Shirley became "that dreadful woman who keeps pestering me about trifling money matters". To the rest of the *overland* board, Shirley was an efficient and diligent treasurer who kept meticulous records and produced accurate budget and financial reports whenever they were required.

When Shirley became treasurer of *overland*, the magazine's finances were in a parlous state. Together with the present writer, Richard Llewellyn, Rick Amor and others she entered enthusiastically into fund-raising efforts that eventually put the magazine on a much sounder financial footing. She also worked hard to increase the magazine's subscriber base.

Shirley developed an efficient book-keeping system for overland and trained first Betty Freeburn as book-keeper and then our present executive officer and editorial coordinator, Alex Skutenko. When, after John McLaren became editor, Shirley asked if I would take over the treasurer's position, I found that I had inherited an efficient system of financial management and an executive officer whose skill and devotion to her task could not be overestimated. Both were in large measure due to Shirley.

On a personal level I thoroughly enjoyed working in co-operation with Shirley. She was lively, talkative, vivacious and shrewd in financial management. She gave me much advice that was sensible and useful. She was always available for consultation and always interested in what one was doing.

On another level Shirley was an excellent host at board meetings and other events related to the magazine, a role she had previously performed during John's time as editor of *Australian Book Review* when she hosted that magazine's monthly book note meetings. At no function with which she was involved did Shirley allow anyone to go hungry or thirsty!

In short, Shirley was a major contributor to this magazine's successful continuance after Stephen Murray-Smith's untimely death. She was tireless in her support of John McLaren and a good friend to her fellow board members and many others.

Michael Dugan

Wenche Ommundsen

NOT THE M-WORD AGAIN

Rhetoric and silence in recent multiculturalism debates

THERE IS A SOLUTION TO ALL the problems that have accumulated around cultural diversity in Australia. It's so simple it's not even funny and the beauty is that people from across the political, social and ethnic spectrum for once seem to agree: get rid of the m-word. Abolish multiculturalism, thundered Pauline Hanson in her maiden speech, and a great many Australians, not only from within Hanson's own party, have gone on to agree with her. John Howard for a while achieved what the others were only talking about. In December 1997, launching the issues paper 'Multicultural Australia: the way forward', he managed to speak about cultural diversity for twenty minutes without using the term 'multiculturalism'.[1] Under the Howard government, departments and government officials have been encouraged to avoid the term whenever possible. This distrust of the m-word is not confined to socially conservative politicians. Aboriginal communities have repeatedly chosen to position themselves, and their political/cultural agenda, outside the ambit of multiculturalism, and so, perhaps more surprisingly, have increasing numbers of non-Anglo-Celtic, non-indigenous Australians, members of those immigrant communities which the terminology and practices of multiculturalism were primarily intended to serve. "The practice of multiculturalism has gone astray", argues Nancy Viviani.[2] In a recent paper Kateryna Longley proposes the "way forward" as "a movement into a space beyond multiculturalism".[3] Jon Stratton and Ghassan Hage put the case against what Stratton calls "official multiculturalism" and Hage "white multiculturalism" in their recent books *Race Daze* and *White Nation*.[4] Multiculturalism, it would seem, has in a few years moved from being the most celebrated concept in Australian social discourse, to one of the most vilified.

The distrust of multiculturalism expressed in the randomly selected examples above is not motivated by the same, or even remotely similar, social and political agendas. Implicit in much of the anti-multiculturalism rhetoric, however, is the notion that the word itself is at fault, and that its demise, or replacement, will somehow lead to a better state of affairs. The m-word, as it were, has failed to deliver; it has been caught sleeping on the job and so has to be sent to the big lexicon in the sky or whatever it is that happens to bits of supernumerary vocabulary. If only it were that simple. But if there is one thing that twentieth-century theory has taught us, it is that language does not function like pieces of machinery: words cannot be simply discarded when we decide that they have come to the end of their useful life. Australia was one of the first countries to make multiculturalism part of the rhetoric of national identity, but many others have followed suit, among them the United States and the United Kingdom, and the term has moved into the wider social and linguistic field, now informing the discourses of tourism, advertising and public relations as well as the government-sponsored public domain. Those who have serious doubts about the rhetoric of multiculturalism will find that it simply is not, and never was, there for them to 'abolish'. What recent debates demonstrate, however, is that multiculturalism, and its implications for the social construction of Australia, are in need of serious clarification and rethinking.

Multiculturalism's current image problem did not start with Pauline Hanson. Hanson and her followers' objections are in this context more usefully regarded as one symptom among many of a more widespread confusion over concepts and terminology. As far back as December 1992, in a valedictory address on the eve of her departure for Canada, the

cultural critic Sneja Gunew voiced her concerns with the way the debate about multiculturalism in Australia seemed to be heading. The "controversy over terminology", she argued, "has long operated as an excuse for refusing to deal with the substantive sociopolitical issues involved."[5] The "necessary theoretical work" on multiculturalism, she claimed, is thus being neglected in favour of more fashionable areas of theorizing: "Multicultural studies remain the daggy cousins of radical chic postcolonialism."[6] Part of the reason for this may be that for the theoretically inclined academy, multiculturalism was always hopelessly contaminated by policy and practice, whereas for some (though not for all, and certainly not for indigenous Australians) it seemed possible to retain postcolonialism within the rarified domain of theory. The necessary and useful connections between postcolonial and multicultural theory, between postcolonial theory and multicultural practice and between multicultural theory and multicultural practice, were not given the kind of attention they deserved. The risk, according to Gunew, was considerable: "If Australians consign the need for a continued analysis of multiculturalism to the sidelines, they run the risk of losing the momentum that allowed Australia in the Whitlam era to take the lead in acknowledging its hybrid population and all that it entails."[7] From the vantage point of 2000, it is tempting to read her comments as prophetic.

Obviously, it would be preposterous to argue that if a few more of us had been sitting around theorizing multiculturalism we would have been able to predict, or even prevent, the rise of Pauline and the consequent sea changes affecting the rhetoric and policy-making of the major political parties. The main support for One Nation, after all, came from groups who have little or no involvement in the theoretical analysis of social or cultural phenomena. But if I am right in suggesting that One Nation's confusion about multiculturalism is shared by a majority of Australians, it would seem that not only has the conceptual terrain of multiculturalism been insufficiently mapped, but those who had the ability to do so have failed to communicate their wisdom to the wider community. As a result of this absence of well-informed public debate, Hanson and her followers caught not only mainstream politicians, but also intellectuals, off guard, and it proved difficult to mount a robust and coherent defence of multiculturalism against her accusations. Multiculturalism, as some recent publications have demonstrated, had become increasingly difficult to defend, except in the most general and unreflective manner.[8]

As we wade through the referential baggage which has accumulated around the term, multiculturalism emerges as an increasingly incoherent and nebulous concept. The language of access and equity bleed into the discourse of diversity in cultural representation in ways that are neither politically useful nor theoretically defensible. Moreover, negative connotations have multiplied to the extent that the m-word is at risk of following 'political correctness', a concept with which it has frequently been associated, to a point beyond all rescue. The most notorious example of this can be found in Paul Sheehan's contribution to the 'culture wars', *Among the Barbarians*, in which the m-word, in its adjectival form, seems to function as a natural attribute to the noun 'industry': the "multicultural industry", it appears, is rapidly overtaking any manufacturing or service industry as a provider of cushy jobs and a drain on the public purse. He also writes at great length about the "multicultural myth", "multicultural ideologues", the "multicultural orthodoxy" and "multicultural zealots", and defines multiculturalism by terms such as "racial axe-grinders", "reverse racism", "social engineering", "cultural enclaves", "tribal animosities", "liberal racism", the "grievance industry", the "thought police", "racial ghettos" and "the general assault on individualism and individual responsibility cloaked in the euphemisms of diversity".[9]

The rhetoric of Paul Sheehan, or even Pauline Hanson, would not concern me so much if it wasn't for the fact that the vision of multiculturalism they project seems to be shared by a great many commentators, many of whom would not dream of sharing their politics. Indeed, one might argue that certain populist images of multiculturalism had been well established long before Paul and Pauline came upon the scene, came, as it were, pre-packaged, only waiting to be occupied by the attitudes and opinions we have come to associate with the backlash. My attempt to make sense of such rhetorical or discursive images has yielded a list of categories, or models of multiculturalism, primarily based on media commentary, political rhetoric and advertising. By labelling these models 'populist' I want to imply that they do not include theoretically sophisticated models of multiculturalism elaborated by academics and other serious analysts, though I am frequently disturbed by the extent to which such models have found their way into the academy and distorted debates on the issue. It is

not simply that these images are damaging, though I think many of them are, but that their juxtaposition, conflation even, reveals contradictions, gaps and silences at the heart of the multiculturalism debate which remain unresolved and under-theorized. The fact that many of these models are constructed to present multiculturalism in an attractive light does not make them less problematic; if anything, it has made them even more intractable to critical analysis.

Recent discussions have distinguished between models of multiculturalism on the grounds of national difference: for example, the Australian brand of multiculturalism has been distinguished from its Canadian or American counterparts. The evolution of multiculturalism over time has also attracted attention, in particular the difference between the predominantly 'white' multiculturalism of the 1970s and the more recent reorientation towards Asia and Asian immigration, which presents a challenge to the earlier model.[10] Other distinctions have been made: Jon Stratton, for example, highlights discrepancies between "official multiculturalism", the ideology pursued by government policy-makers, and "everyday multiculturalism" as the lived experience of cultural diversity.[11] The list of models outlined below is not proposed as an alternative to these sets of distinctions, but rather as a complementary 'take' on contemporary perceptions of multiculturalism in the public domain. My main purpose has been to suggest something of the complexity which has developed around the term, along with its ever-increasing potential for paradox and conceptual confusion.

> . . . recent debates demonstrate . . . that multiculturalism, and its implications for the social construction of Australia, are in need of serious clarification and rethinking.

SENTIMENTAL MULTICULTURALISM is a term frequently used by opponents of cultural diversity to designate a kind of feel-good liberalism which basks in the idea of its own generosity and tolerance but has little to offer in the way of solutions to the conflicts of cultural cohabitation. It works particularly well if the object of such welcoming generosity is someone one can feel sorry for, look down upon, or both. It also depends on one's own cultural assumptions remaining largely unchallenged. On the other hand it has difficulty in coming to terms with individuals and cultures that refuse to remain grateful and humble, or accept being relegated to a lower social or cultural order than the majority culture. In the area of the arts and cultural production in general it translates into a vague sense that multiculturalism is good for you, and that the experience of art forms of diverse cultural derivation somehow makes you a better, or at least a more cultured person than one whose cultural repertoire is more limited.

Undoubtedly this notion of multiculturalism played an important role in Australia in the decades following the Second World War, and still informs the attitudes of those who regard multiculturalism as a modern-day variety of charity. Its main asset, it would seem, is its ability to bestow virtue on the host community. The problem is that presenting multiculturalism as a sentimental attachment to wishy-washy do-good liberalism is also an invitation to dismiss it out of hand, either as a luxury the nation can no longer afford, or as a demeaning and outdated social practice. It is not a model that can be sustained in the face of either reactionary or progressive social thinking.

The related image of what one might call *folkloric or touristic multiculturalism* produces a similar effect.[12] Its appeal to minority cultures as exotic turns them into objects of desire, commodities to be consumed, experienced or played with but set aside when the serious business of living in the modern world has to be faced. Folkloric multiculturalism employs the discourse of authenticity to present ethnic minority cultures as an antidote to the alienation of contemporary life. It produces a discourse of nostalgic longing for the past and the primitive, a museum culture fixed at an indefinite moment of time and packaged for easy consumption. Culture as lived experience gives way to culture as fashion accessory and spectacle. Ethnicity is signalled by food and folklore and a great deal of energy is invested in keeping the cultural product pure, uncontaminated by other cultures, or by the modern world. Folkloric multiculturalism is pervasive, so influential, in fact, that its discourse has changed the way we talk about culture. The current practice of using the term 'ethnic' to designate minority ethnicities only, is an example of this. As a consequence of this usage, minority cultures are made to carry a baggage which belongs in

travel brochures rather than in the social world, and majority cultures are deprived of their ethnicity: mainstream art and culture are presented as ethnically neutral. Folkloric multiculturalism is one that even most opponents of multiculturalism are happy to embrace: who would not rather eat a variety of national cuisines than nothing but fish and chips? As a way of managing cultural diversity, however, it has little to offer, and the image of multiculturalism projected by such a model has proved both trivial, potentially damaging and an easy target for criticism.

An image of multiculturalism frequently trotted out in conjunction with the folkloric version, in spite of their obvious incompatibilities, is that of *sophisticated cosmopolitanism*. This is multiculturalism of the jet-set variety, whereby those fortunate enough to participate can mix, match and combine ethnic influences. The more varied the sampling, the more daring the combination, the more multicultural it is. Thus, the latest culinary chic, and the Australian trend which, we are told, is in the process of conquering the world of international gastronomy, is the combination of Mediterranean and East Asian influences. The model is characterized by cultural hybridity and frequently associated with postmodernism in its disregard for purity and its constant reworking of cultural traditions. This model, while attractive to many, has been presented by others as 'proof' that multiculturalism is out of touch with the realities of cultural cohabitation in Australia. Culture becomes the preserve of social, intellectual and artistic elites with access to a variety of traditions and modes of expression. To Pauline Hanson and her followers, cosmopolitanism constitutes an all-out attack on traditional Australian cultural values. However, it is not only socially conservative Anglo-Celtic Australians with limited access to a wider cultural capital who perceive this model as threatening: their views are shared by many ethnic minority groups wishing to protect their cultural heritage against appropriation and contamination. The model is starkly at odds with the folkloric model, with its emphasis on authenticity, and with the model favoured by most ethnic minority groups: that of cultural preservation. In spite of that, populist condemnations of multiculturalism will, often in the same breath, dismiss efforts to preserve ethnic minority cultures intact and the creolization of cultural practices as if they were the simultaneous effects of a monolithic policy.[13]

Cultural preservation has always been one of the main objectives behind the activities of ethnic minority organizations in Australia. The maintenance of links with their original culture helps migrants come to terms with life in a new country, and as time passes and the community settles, these organizations take on the task of educating younger members, second- or even third-generation migrants, in traditions and practices that might otherwise get lost over time. Since the inception of multiculturalism in Australia, governments have actively promoted the right to cultural preservation, and have supported community organizations in a number of ways, for example by funding instruction in community languages. In the eyes of opponents of multiculturalism, such practices have resulted in what they call *ethnic ghettos*, in which cultural groups isolate themselves from other groups and resist interaction with mainstream Australian institutions and culture. The call for an abolition of cultural ghettos echoes with monotonous regularity in the daily press and on talkback radio. The fear constantly expressed is that members of such cultural groups will continue to favour their home country over Australia, and so will never become integral parts of Australian society. Ethnic ghettos, according to many, represent a threat to national security; they also carry with them a potential for social unrest. The fact that ethnic minority communities in Australia, practically without exception, are happy to regard Australia as their primary allegiance, and that no serious case of ethnic unrest has been recorded in the postwar period, is not enough to lay such fears to rest. The fear of that which is unknown, different, and that resists assimilation, is obviously still a major factor in the opposition to multiculturalism. Policies of cultural preservation have also been criticized from the opposite side of the political spectrum. Jon Stratton, in particular, argues that "official multiculturalism" in Australia, with its emphasis on a plurality of separate cultural identities, ignores the cultural negotiations encountered in everyday life and does not provide the conceptual tools to combat a rising tide of racism.[14]

Cultural assimilation was officially abandoned as a strategy for managing the effects of mass immigration at the inception of multiculturalism in the 1970s. Today, as the call for the abolition of multiculturalism becomes more frequent, assimilation is once again coming into favour as a model for social cohabitation. Recent debates reveal that assimilation has never gone away – in fact many have persisted in regarding multiculturalism as simply a new name for the management of the process of assimilation. The terms

of reference given the National Multicultural Advisory Council in 1997 for their preparation of the issues paper 'Multicultural Australia: the way forward' state that the report should be "aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is a unifying force for Australia."[15] The rhetoric of 'unity in diversity' is widely supported, more often than not underpinned by the discourse of assimilation. On the day the issues paper was launched, a Melbourne high school principal was asked to comment on how his school coped with a student population from fifty-six different nationalities. "We really go out of our way to celebrate their diversity," he said, but then went on to add: "In these guys here, I see a real eagerness to improve themselves and become Australian."[16] Multiculturalism here functions merely as a facade for a politics of assimilation, and it would seem that little has changed over the last thirty years. The difference, of course, lies in the fact that recent waves of migrants, from places like the Middle East and East Asia, have found it more difficult to assimilate into a largely European culture than did the predominantly European postwar immigrants. The Australian unwillingness to accept these migrant communities as integral parts of the nation clearly indicates that racial discrimination has survived into the multicultural era. Jon Stratton argues that a "new racism", or "culturalism" now dominates the anti-multiculturalism and anti-immigration discourse, according to which non-Europeans are culturally too different to make the required adjustments to the dominant Australian way of life. It is this discourse that allows Pauline Hanson to express anti-Asian and anti-Aboriginal views and at the same time argue that she is "not a racist in any sense of that word".[17]

The fear of that which is unknown, different, and that resists assimilation, is obviously still a major factor in the opposition to multiculturalism.

One of the extreme images of multiculturalism to have found favour with vocal minorities in Australia today is that of *reverse racism*. No doubt such notions are the unfortunate consequence of the importation of the political correctness debate into the Australian context. The perception that ethnic minorities, along with other minority groups, have profited from practices of affirmative action to the extent that the white majority now is the disadvantaged group, is gaining ground in a society where the level of unemployment is high and traditional low-skill jobs are disappearing, leaving older and working-class Australians particularly vulnerable. It is this view that underpins the populist argument against multiculturalism, in the case of Paul Sheehan providing the basis for an all-out attack on the Labor Party, which he accuses of social engineering and widespread corruption. Interestingly, this argument has also been taken up by a number of writers and artists, who argue that they are being overlooked by funding bodies in favour of ethnic minority artists. "A lavish public soup kitchen for the Beards, ethnic politicos who couldn't make it in their home countries" is how the poet Les Murray refers to government sponsorship of ethnic minority art.[18]

The main (some would say only) reason for the retention of multiculturalism recognized by the current government is the risk to foreign trade occasioned by the backlash. The government's belated denunciation of Pauline Hanson, and half-hearted endorsement of the principle of multiculturalism have been offered in the mode of damage control. What I call *politically* or *economically expedient multiculturalism* is clearly in evidence in the 1997 issues paper, where the section 'Why accept these principles?' lists the following reasons prominently: "diversity can enhance Australia's ability to compete and market ourselves globally and therefore add to economic growth", migrants "link Australia into a wealth of business and personal contacts in countries where we want to do business", "Australia has significant advantages in terms of economic opportunities in Asia which would not have been readily available if Australia had remained a closed society", and "a harmonious and cohesive society together with cultural and linguistic skills facilitates Australia's attraction as a tourist destination and as an education export country".[19] Ghassan Hage discusses Paul Keating's notion of "productive diversity" as a shift in government rhetoric from a discourse of consumption to a discourse of exploitation, arguing that it was the Labor government that initiated the view of multiculturalism as an economically exploitable resource.[20] Under the Howard government, the discrepancy between the openness towards Asia expressed in the field of economics and the protectionism favoured in areas of

social and cultural practices has become glaringly obvious and, not surprisingly, has returned to haunt Australians in their dealings with their Asian neighbours.

My final model, or image, is that of the *empty signifier*. Multiculturalism, according to such a construction, has become nothing but a rhetorical gesture; like Baudrillard's simulacrum it masks the absence of an underlying reality. It is a void, a silence, which reverses the silences in the Howard government's issues paper: not a lengthy discussion of a concept that has no name, but a name to which no meaning can be attached. The multicultural rhetoric of difference, it has been argued, functions to cover up both indifference and lack of differentiation. The Chinese-Australian poet Ouyang Yu, in his poem 'Moon Over Melbourne' uses the image of "multicultural sleep" in his description of Australia's attitude to the lonely migrant: a 'sleep' that can be read as benign acceptance, but also as indifference, or even hidden hostility.[21] After almost three decades of multiculturalism, the term, for many, has become a convenient pretext for not dealing with the issues arising from cultural difference. For governments and individuals alike, it offers opportunities for self-congratulation but not for self-scrutiny. To me, Ouyang's image suggests that a certain tiredness has become attached to the notion of multiculturalism. Perhaps its referential baggage has become too heavy a load for one word to bear, perhaps it is cracking under the strain. Multiculturalism, in its populist versions, has become suggestive of numerous competing discourses, but does not make fine distinctions. In its effort to be all-inclusive, it might erase difference, in its efforts to present cultural cohabitation in an attractive light, it might sweep under the carpet, and so in effect silence some of the issues it most urgently needs to address. Foremost among such silences, as a number of commentators have pointed out, is the question of race, and this is where the multiculturalism debate in Australia has the most to learn from similar debates in other countries, and from the theory and practices of postcolonialism.

GETTING RID of multiculturalism has repeatedly been advocated as the quick way to resolve cultural tensions and settle social unrest in contemporary Australia, but like all easy solutions to complex problems, it simply won't work. The image problem is real enough, so serious, in fact, that a monumental rescue operation is called for. The long overdue debate is currently gaining momentum, as evidenced by a spate of recent publications as well as conferences and other events.[22] I share the concerns about current practices and policies of multiculturalism expressed by authors such as Hage and Stratton; I also worry that if the attack from the left becomes as vehement as the attack from the right, the socially enlightened ideas that inspired the inception and implementation of Australian multiculturalism might be dismissed together with its less desirable baggage. The void in the middle would be another kind of silence, a silence dangerously close to John Howard's solution. I remember a rare moment of idealism creeping into the multiculturalism debate when Jason Li told a recent conference of a dream in which the prime minister visits a high school in order to persuade the coming generation of voters to support him. Despite his efforts, the students remain unimpressed, and John Howard eventually challenges them directly to say why they won't vote for him. Their answer is unanimous: "because you've forgotten the magic word".[23]

The m-word requires a great deal of work, theoretical as well as political, if it is to survive the conceptual confusion and persistent vilification of the backlash era. It could also do with a bit of magic.

ENDNOTES

1. 'Let's keep the m-word', editorial, *The Age*, 16 December 1997, p. 14. The paper 'Multicultural Australia: the way forward', presented by the National Multicultural Advisory Council in December 1997 can be found on <http://www.immi.gov.au/general/notices/macpaper.htm>. For further comments on the paper see Greg Sheridan, 'Just don't mention the "m" word', *The Australian*, 12 December 1997, p.13 and Brian Woodley, 'Words with a world of meaning', *The Australian*, 12 December 1997, p. 4.
2. Nancy Viviani, 'Multiculturalism: why it's gone astray', *The Age*, 6 August 1998, p. 13.
3. Kateryna Longley, 'Beyond multiculturalism: Australia and Canada', paper presented to the ACSANZ conference at Macquarie University in July 1998.
4. Jon Stratton, *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*, Sydney, Pluto Press, 1998. Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Sydney, Pluto Press, 1998.
5. Sneja Gunew, 'Multicultural Multiplicities: US, Canada, Australia', in David Bennett, ed., *Cultural Studies: Pluralism and Theory*, Melbourne, Department of English, University of Melbourne, 1993, p. 54.
6. Gunew.

7. Gunew.
8. See Stratton and Hage. See also David Bennett, ed., *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998. This paper refers to these and other academic analyses of multiculturalism, but concerns itself primarily with populist models of multiculturalism constructed in the media and mainstream politics.
9. Paul Sheehan, *Among the Barbarians*, Sydney, Random House, 1998.
10. Ghassan Hage, among others, argues that the Australian policy of multiculturalism is based on a model of white dominance, a model that has come under increasing pressure due to the changing patterns of immigrant intake.
11. According to Stratton, p. 154, official multiculturalism is based on notions of group difference, whereas everyday multiculturalism emphasizes individual difference within a general human similarity.
12. Ghassan Hage, ch. 5, uses the expression "white national zoology" to designate a multiculturalism informed by the discourse of tourism.
13. For a further discussion of the role of 'cosmopolitan multiculturalism' within Anglo-Celtic culture, see Ghassan Hage, 'Anglo-Celts today: cosmo-multiculturalism and the phase of the fading phallus', *Communal/Plural* 4, 1994.
14. Stratton.
15. 'Multicultural Australia: the way forward', p. 14.
16. Meaghan Shaw, 'Students enjoy their multicultural melting pot', *The Age*, 12 December 1997, p. A4.
17. Stratton, ch. 2.
18. Les Murray, 'An Unruly Voice Smeared', *The Australian's Review of Books*, February 1997, p. 32.
19. 'Multicultural Australia: the way forward', p. 12.
20. Hage, p. 128.
21. Ouyang Yu, 'Moon Over Melbourne', in *Moon Over Melbourne and Other Poems*, Melbourne, Papyrus Publishing, 1995, p. 9.
22. Examples of the latter include, 'The future of Australian multiculturalism', University of Sydney, December 1998, and 'Re-imagining multiculturalism', Monash University, October 1999.
23. Address to the conference, 'The future of Australian multiculturalism', University of Sydney, December 1998.

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Cameron Logan

Flourishing Featurism

A Retail Tale

It has been noted by various commentators and historians that Robin Boyd desired most to be remembered for his architecture, yet it is his writing, in particular his inventive neologisms, that constitute his most frequently remarked-upon legacy. Among those neologisms it is 'featurism' that he used to greatest effect.[1] Featurism, as he defines it most simply is "the subordination of the essential whole and the accentuation of selected separate features".[2] In *The Australian Ugliness* he describes Melbourne as "The Featurist Capital" having been born, thrived and subsided in the half century that was Queen Victoria's – "in the spirit, the letter, and in the image of Victorian taste and Victorian endeavour".[3] Melbourne was thus too late for the "unstudied late-Georgian dignity" which was in Boyd's view the only "coherent phase of Australia's architectural development",[4] but thrived in the chaotic and 'featuristic' 1880s and 1890s.

Boyd's account of Australian architectural history as it emerges from *Victorian Modern* (1947), *Australia's Home* (1952), *The Australian Ugliness* (1960) and *The Walls Around Us* (1962) is consistent in tracing a decline and fall during the nineteenth century from the purity of Colonial Georgian down through the various historical revivals and eventually into the abyss of eclecticism. This eclecticism, while present in various manifestations from as early as 1870 until perhaps 1920, assumed its most recognizable form in Melbourne during the economic boom years of the late 1880s. Hence the description of buildings from that period as being of the 'boom style'. What this usually refers to are buildings whose facades employ various combinations of historical references and elements of represented structure which jostle for attention. Represented structure – expressive elements of a building that are present for their symbolic communication rather than being structurally necessary, yet have the appearance of being structurally determined or relevant – is something that is present in one way or another in the facades of innumerable buildings from all different periods, but its use reached a crescendo in this period. The complexity and exuberance in the use of elements of represented structure, along with the polychromatic treatment and extravagant facade ornamentation of buildings that employed a Gothic vocabulary, are the most characteristic features of boom period architecture. Well known examples of the 'boom style' in the central city include The Block Arcade (1891), The Old Stock Exchange (1888) and the group of buildings between 475 and 503 Collins Street that are often referred to collectively as either the Rialto Buildings or The Olderfleet Buildings. However, while such buildings find their most ornate and large-scale expressions in the central city, they can also be found throughout the suburbs that sprang up or were extant at the time. Areas such as Auburn, Armadale and Malvern are rich in buildings from this period as are the traditionally working-class suburbs of Footscray, Fitzroy and Collingwood. These suburban buildings, while characteristically cruder architectural statements than their urban contemporaries, likewise employ a diverse array of historical references and expressions of represented structure. Therefore they are most often buildings which demonstrate an eclectic approach to facade design, which, along with their better known city counterparts, contributed to Boyd's characterization of his own city as Australia's most stridently 'featurist'.

Boyd's account was extremely influential and as George Tibbits has pointed out it permeates much of the architectural criticism and heritage discourse that emerged particularly from the coterie of National Trust taste-makers in the fifties and sixties.[5]

This basic narrative underpinned the process of classifying buildings during the National Trust's first ten or fifteen years and turned out to be very important when the Hamer Liberal government enacted historic buildings legislation in 1976, reifying the preferences of the Trust by giving automatic legal protection to all of its 'A' listed buildings. In publications that the National Trust produced in the pre-legislation years the boom era buildings were usually completely ignored or characterized in terms of their fussiness, pretension and superficiality. So while such buildings constitute a significant part of architectural tradition in Melbourne, and one of its most characteristic visual points of reference, during the fifties and sixties they were considered by critics, historians and arbiters of taste generally, to be of no positive aesthetic or historical interest.

In the intervening years the wheel of taste has turned to the extent that some of the boom-period buildings in the city are now the most highly prized by those who have taken responsibility for exhibiting and interpreting Melbourne's architectural past.[6] Of course it is impossible fully to account for this change but there are a couple of obvious reasons. Firstly the increasing influence of social history and sociology on art criticism, which likewise affected heritage discourses, and meant that a canon of taste based on a pure model of evaluative appreciation of art became far less important to the way the architectural past is narrated. Secondly the imminent peril faced by many of these buildings during the late sixties and seventies caused a broader public, including architecture students and trade unions, to become involved in activities which sought to save a range of buildings previously ignored by the National Trust.[7] The result of having an apparently fast-diminishing stock of nineteenth-century buildings was a radically broadened set of criteria for what is considered a valid and valuable architectural past. This is also reflected in the trend that has emerged since the seventies to preserve streetscapes, townscapes and precincts where prior to this the emphasis had been upon saving the best example of a particular style, or best building in a street or area that was considered characteristic of a certain period.

What interests me here is how this change in taste, or emphasis, that has affected city buildings, has been expressed in a couple of the suburbs that I referred to, where buildings have not been subject to such explicit development pressures, and are also much less a part of a conscious system of exhibition and interpretation. As a consequence of this change we might ask how has the legacy of 'featuristic' late nineteenth-century architecture been embraced and extended in specific suburban streetscapes? What can we say about the way these streets look today? And in what way is this related to an ongoing elaboration of ideas about facade design and the interaction or communication of these facades with the peopled street?

'Featurism' is still a very helpful way of describing large parts of our everyday built environment but needs to be considered in a quite different light to that under which Boyd viewed it. Firstly it should be approached without the moral implications often implied by criticisms of facade-oriented superficiality. A corollary of that is that 'featurism' should be considered as an aspect of communication as it occurs amongst the expressive components of buildings themselves, and between those buildings and the people on the streets around them, not purely as an issue of design.

Footscray and Armadale are very different places and today represent two distinct aspects of Melbourne's enduring featurism. For those unfamiliar with the areas the present state of the old picture theatres in the two suburbs is instructive. Both are striking buildings from the teens or twenties and occupy prominent locations on their respective main streets. However, the similarities end there. In Armadale Sotheby's auction house occupies an obviously well maintained building and bespeaks the obvious wealth that exists in the surrounding residential streets. While in Footscray the old movie theatre has recently attracted attention for two reasons: the risk to pedestrians posed by pieces falling off the outside of the building; and for the injecting heroin users who go inside and are at potential risk from fire and the unsound structure. The reasons for the poor state of Footscray's Barkly Theatre are in fact complicated by the heritage value that has been attributed to it by the National Trust. Following their recommendations Heritage Victoria has listed the building and the Maribyrnong local planning scheme is therefore subject to their authority. Despite this complication, however, the contrast is pointed and certainly indicative of the social gap that separates Armadale from Footscray.

This gap finds further expression in the very different appearance of the facades of the shops along the two streets. In Footscray it seems that almost every available piece of wall space competes for the attention of the pedestrian, passing motorist and tram traveller and the overall appearance could be compared to a badly typeset tabloid magazine. A more positive comparison might be that of the competing voices of a fresh-food market where the different vendors call out to attract the shoppers with their latest bargain. In Barkly Street and its neighbouring shopping streets the passer-by is appealed to in Chinese, Vietnamese and English amongst other languages. The ads are positioned or painted on at various heights and employ a multitude of gimmicks and modes of address. People who know Footscray and have looked up from the street level would be familiar with landmarks such as the football-banner-sized *Fiesta Bingo* sign, which on its own entirely obscures the 'feature' facade of a sizeable boom-period terrace row. It is a brick building with an Italianate cement facade which architecturalizes the building and constitutes its original gesture toward the street. Overlaying that gesture you now have the *Fiesta Bingo* sign which seems to both extend and reverse the original design gesture. It extends it in the sense of continuing the tradition of somewhat extravagant or bold attempts to communicate with the street by means of laying a facade over the existing structure. The reversal is in the fact that the *Fiesta Bingo* sign does not seek to draw any connections between itself and the building which it encrusts, nor articulate any pattern of formal relationships amongst the elements that constitute its own mode of communication. It simply testifies visually to the presence of a bingo hall. *Fiesta Bingo* doesn't have it all its own way, however, as the signs for *Diamond Head Fashions* and *Fong's Fashion Jewellery* encroach onto the space above the verandah level, and the feature street lamps also partially

obscure the massive sign. Indeed, Footscray's many boom-era buildings with their feature pediments, gables, pilasters and other elements of represented structure are almost without exception further encrusted with 'feature' signs and paintwork. Structural elements of the building thus become buried deeper beneath layers of signification. Boyd's description of Surfer's Paradise in 1960 is today equally true of Footscray: "(T)he buildings disappear beneath the combined burden of a thousand ornamental alphabets, coloured drawings and cut-outs added to their own architectural features."[8]

Interestingly one street in Footscray breaks the pattern of frenzied communication in an apparently deliberate attempt to separate itself from what could be called the 'Krazy' approach to signage and advertising. In a row of perhaps twenty shops the only sign visible above the verandahs is a real-estate board and with only a couple of minor variations all the shops are painted white. In a sense, rather than evading the featurism of the busily self-promoting shopping area this street becomes a feature street in itself, declaring its own restraint and "pursuit of pleasingness".[9]

The "pursuit of pleasingness" is another critical, descriptive term used by Boyd in *The Australian Ugliness*. Indeed he devotes a chapter to discussing the concept arguing for the presence of ideas in architecture and planning, and against conventional and picturesque notions of beauty. This would appear to go against the Robin Boyd I introduced above, a leader and confidante of the men and women of the National Trust who made no secret of the fact that they valued highly the qualities of graciousness, simplicity and good taste. Yet this tension or ambiguity is typical of Boyd who commonly decries the expressions of awful taste he sees around him only to go on to attack the notion of good taste and its logical outcome – 'the pursuit of the pleasing'.

High Street Armadale, like Leeds Street, Footscray, is inclined towards this second, and in Boyd's terms more offensive, form of featurism. While this area too has its share of the ordinary competitive 'featurism' that characterizes retail streets in places all around the world, the dominant mood is one of tastefulness. It is well heeled, clean and its shoppers are almost without exception white and have consistently straight teeth. The pursuit of a pleasing streetscape is there determined by three major attributes. The first is the presence all along the street of topiary trees, which are very evenly sized and pruned into a consistent roundness. The second is the 'sensitive' treatment of nineteenth-century buildings such that they generally do not host modern cantilevered verandahs and commonly feature 'olde' lettering or other such 'heritagesque' features. The final and most interesting attribute is the stylistic tendency of the new buildings. Collectively they are a somewhat reserved example of what Charles Jencks described nearly two decades ago as postmodern classicism. That is, they are usually constructed using cheap, modern, industrial methods such as tilt-slab construction, but also include some element of represented structure or schematic classical ornamentation on the facade, such as pediments over the doors or windows. The style taken very generally has most often been used for houses, units and suburban office buildings but has also found favour on many suburban retail streets. What is interesting about its use here is the obvious attempt to create sympathetic connections with the existing streetscape. As is almost always the case such sympathetic treatment is invoked by reference to the classical tradition and achieved in a very schematic, even diagrammatic fashion. In this way no real sense of dialogue is created between them and the existing nineteenth-century architecture. The 'boom style' buildings in comparison seem excessively busy and boisterous

in their manner of offering the street visual cues that are often generated from relatively complex compositions. Such buildings appear not to be content to simply offer the street, as many of the newer buildings do, large windows in which shoppers can view reflections of themselves and the luxury European cars that populate the parking spaces.

The attempt to somehow tone down the competitive 'featurist' environment through the application of pleasing design attributes is of course more related to tastefulness and good manners than any version of what Boyd might have described as good design. The 'pursuit of pleasingness' in Armadale parallels the conspicuous wealth and ethnic homogeneity of the suburb. The street does not need to be covered head to toe in competing commercial information because everybody knows in advance who is there and where they are from. Shopping there becomes in this sense a doubly narcissistic pleasure. Shoppers are not confronted with any sense of the street as contested or uncertain. The space is entirely theirs and acts to buttress in the Armadale shopper a sense of themselves as at home while in public.

In Footscray on the other hand there is a kind of inversion at work in the latest incarnation of the 'featurist' tradition. One way of thinking about streetscapes is by conceiving of architectural facades in terms of the employment of images of information. In the theatre in Melbourne in the last quarter of the nineteenth century travel narratives were extremely popular and in these spectaculars great emphasis was put on the verisimilitude of the painted scenes.[10] Dioramas, tableaux and intricately painted backdrops became the norm and often these depicted important travel destinations in Northern Africa and Europe such as the Pyramids, Venice and Paris. In a related way, as Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* makes clear, the experience of city streets could offer the nineteenth-century shopper and stroller a fictive experience of travel. As Peter Kohane describes it, buildings were expected to inform and entertain through a mixture of decoration, exciting formal relationships and historical allusions.[11] Indeed this expectation of the responsibility to entertain or amuse is an important source of inspiration for the eclectic designs that became so common in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The manner in which this is today reversed relates not to design so much as display. In the 1880s architects and builders erected buildings with Italianate stucco facades alongside others with characteristically Dutch gables, or Venetian gothic detailing, as a means of imaginatively carrying the shopper and stroller to places most were unlikely ever to see. Today the shopkeepers and restaurateurs offer the street a conscious display of different codes of national and regional identity. Through the presentation of signs in languages other than English as well as via the nature of the products or dishes advertised, specific buildings in Footscray testify to the presence in Melbourne of people from South East Asia. The 'Asianness' that can be seen there *needs* to be exhibited as a means of asserting presence and providing a sense of proprietorship of place for, to take the most obvious example, Footscray's Vietnamese, both as a form of communication amongst Vietnamese themselves, and as a means of representation for those whose ethnicity has a longer history in Melbourne, such as the Anglo-Irish and Southern Europeans, and are thus less in need of such explicit forms of display.

One important reason that Footscray is so 'featurist' must relate to its role as a home to successive waves of newly settled migrants. The facades of shops are like palimpsests onto which evidence of each new set of cultural influences has been inscribed. But instead of each set of earlier markings being erased by new ones it seems more often that new signs and displays have simply been applied over the

top of the old. Of course there is always more going on in a busy commercial area than can be accounted for by noting its polyethnic character and the residual influences of the different groups who have contributed to its appearance. In Footscray there is a general excess of communication which resists anything other than speculative and provisional efforts to interpret it. Yet it strikes me that if we are to begin to come to terms with issues of place and culture in a context of deracination we need concepts which address the surfaces and instances of communication that mark our everyday environments. Robin Boyd, while not necessarily asking the same questions as I want to, was able to address that visual environment in a detailed and challenging way. And so, with his neologisms, drawings and engaging prose style, he at least provides a foothold from which we can pay attention to the content that is expressed in the veneer of our surrounds.

There are of course many things to object to in Boyd's idea that the facade orientation of buildings, with their self-conscious display of codes and intricate self-advertisement, represents *mere* featurism. He says of featurism, for example, that it is a camouflage, a mere "whistling in the wind" which is indicative of an unwillingness on the part of Australians to confront reality and the landscape.[12] Such comments do exhibit an admirable desire to forge a connection between an urban and/or suburban vision of Australia, with a quite grounded and specific sense of place connected to the landscape. But equally they fail to acknowledge the degree to which a built environment can operate like language, and as such can often be deliberately, and apparently superficially, suggestive of other times and places. The self-consciousness and apparent desire to competitively exhibit forms of cultural and ethnic difference is something that should be of considerably less concern, culturewise – to use a favourite term of Boyd – than public places that smugly assume the identity of those who occupy and are at home within them. It seems to me that the real target of Boyd's criticism is the laziness and presumptuousness that he sees reflected in the surfaces of Australian life, and these characteristics persist most obviously in places of relative homogeneity and putative tastefulness such as Armadale in Melbourne. Therefore, the apparent sensitivity to heritage of councils and traders in such areas should be understood in the commercially expedient context in which it arises (historic ambience, old world feel etc.), and not mistaken for being a more valuable example of the persistence of the past than can rightfully be claimed by a suburb such as Footscray.

ENDNOTES

1. Coining neologisms was a favourite practice of many architects and critics during the 1950s and 1960s. Terms as seemingly unlikely as Chaoticism, Supersensualism, and even Bowellism, are just three of the dozens that were applied to styles and approaches to architecture around the world during that time.
2. Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963, p. 23. First Published 1960.
3. Boyd, p. 50.
4. Boyd, p. 50.
5. Tibbits argues this in his article 'Robin Boyd and the Interpretation of Australian Culture' in the special issue of *Transition*, no.38, 1992, dedicated to Robin Boyd.
6. In the City of Melbourne's Heritage Walk no. 6, West Melbourne, this group of buildings is described as "Perhaps the best-known nineteenth-century building row in central Melbourne".
7. A prominent example is the group of buildings that I referred to, which occupy the southern side of Collins Street between William Street and King Street. David Dunstan has recounted the dispute which affected this block for nearly ten years in 'A Gothic Tale', *Trust News*, May 1990.
8. Boyd, p. 46.
9. Boyd, pp. 179–231.
10. Mimi Colligan used this idea in her PhD thesis *Canvas and Wax*. She discusses the importance of travel narratives in the theatre in the 1870s and 1880s and the kudos that could be obtained from creating impressively painted scenes of, for example, the Pyramids or Rome. This scenographic emphasis in the theatre is not without importance for architecture also, especially when you consider the connection the major architect William Pitt had with the theatre.
11. Peter Kohane, 'Classicism Transformed: a study of facade composition in Victoria, 1885–1892' *Transition*, vol. 3, no. 2, February 1983. Or for a fuller background to this period of facade design see his M.Arch. thesis, *Problems of Meaning in the Late Nineteenth Century: Melbourne's Boom Period Buildings*, Melbourne University, 1985.
12. Boyd.

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Enza Gandolfo

Of a Class

"IT'S ONLY BY ACCIDENT, an accident of fate," says my father, "that we ended up in Footscray." Maybe. It seems perfect to me. The perfect place for displaced peasants from a Sicilian village.

They left their villages by cart, by train, by hired car and went to Messina where the ship waited, or in my father's case to Catania and then by train to Rome to catch an aeroplane to Australia. The men, most of them, had done a stint in the national service living in some northern city for a year in their late adolescence. For the women, it was the first time they had been to a large city, their first time to Messina.

So the first time in a city becomes the first time on a ship; the first time outside of Sicily. The first time outside Italy; the first time away from parents, from home; the first time in a foreign place. And remember this is not a holiday, good or bad they knew they would have to stay. They had no way of going back.

My parents, like many other southern European migrants, were peasants. Farm workers and unskilled labourers. They had very little education; three or four years of primary school, if they were among the lucky ones. They went to school long enough to learn to read and write, to do some basic calculations. That's all they needed. But even then their literacy was a matter of pride.

They could see the past in their future. For centuries the landlords and the government had exploited the Sicilian peasants, forcing them to pay high taxes and to sell their produce at low prices. It was impossible for them to accumulate any savings or buy land of their own (not legally anyway). They knew their children's lives would mirror their own. Hard work and long hours to make just enough, one would hope enough to eat, to live. They may have accepted it, as their parents and grandparents had been forced to. But there was America, Canada, Australia, Germany and Argentina: migration was being held up to them with the promise of a better life. A dream life. A life of dreams. A life they could not even imagine. But imagine it they did. A leap of faith – they were Sicilian after all. Some of them were descendants of other migrants – Spanish, Roman, Greek, Norman – explorers, conquerors, invaders and exiles. A mixed heritage. Hybrids.

My parents settled in the western suburbs of Melbourne. They had little money, few marketable skills and a history of being exploited – where else could these migrants go? They had much in common with their working-class Anglo-Australian neighbours, though neither group was prepared to admit to any similarities.

My father lived in Werribee when he first arrived. An outer western suburb, forty minutes on the train from the city and half an hour down the Princes Highway. It's suburbia now, populated with young families living in cheap new brick veneers. On a bad wind day the sewerage farm is the ever-present reminder that the neighbouring market gardens are not the only industry.

It was not like that in 1949 when my father arrived. It was farmland, orchards, vegetable fields, small farms, the hint of a fresh sea breeze; and lots of Italians. They were planting foreign vegetables – broccoli, eggplants, zucchini. They grew fig trees and prickly pears. It was here that my father's brothers and then his parents joined him. It was here they bought their first house. My grandmother loved Werribee.

In 1955, my father's youngest brother became ill. A fatal disease. They had to move closer to the city, to the doctors and to the hospital. They moved to Footscray.

"There were just a few houses on Geelong Road," my father says, "we were surrounded by paddocks

and cows." Fifteen minutes from the city and less then ten from the nearest hospital. Around the corner from the *strega* who came every few days to remove the *malocchio*. A few blocks from the church where the family offered desperate prayers and many gifts to God, to the Madonna and several of the saints in return for a young man's life.

I am sorry my uncle became sick and that he died and I never had the chance to meet my father's youngest brother. I am sorry my grandmother had to leave her rambling blue weatherboard house surrounded by fruit trees (there are three houses on that block now) but I am glad they moved. I am glad I grew up in Footscray.

Footscray of the 1950s was working class, poor and had, some said, too many wogs. It was not always an easy place for an Italian girl to live, sandwiched between factories and chemical storage facilities.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN to be working class? My father, the farmer, became a labourer. My mother's only work experience in Sicily had been sewing dresses for the village women, crocheting and embroidering for glory boxes. She had worked from home, sitting on the balcony or by the stove, with her sisters and girlfriends. In Australia she joined the workforce doing piecework in claustrophobic factories in the back streets of the inner suburbs.

We lived in a 'poor' area by Australian standards but compared to the life my parents lived in Sicily we were not poor. I grew up in a paradox – between abundance and scarcity. There was such a selection of food on the table that my mother, always hungry as a child, considered it paradise. Watching me swallow olive after olive, a childhood addiction, she would say, "in Italy we would eat a whole loaf of bread with one olive." My grandmother had filled her hungry children with bread and pasta. My mother filled us with treats.

My father on the other hand complained about money all the time. The mortgage and the bills. Once the local priest soliciting funds door to door for the church stood with my father on the front veranda for an hour until my father signed, committed himself to a weekly donation for twelve months. Afterwards angry at himself he blasphemed, blamed god, the church and even my mother – for committing to give money we could not spare.

I knew we were poor but I did not think of us as 'poor'. Our living standard was pretty much equal to that of most of our friends and relatives. Constantly, my parents made me aware that there were people poorer than us; there were my cousins in the village in Sicily who my mother tried to send money to whenever she could. There were the homeless old men sleeping on park benches in our own suburb, and there were our poorer neighbours with large families and shoeless children who ran wild in the street.

Growing up in Footscray, we were never exposed to material wealth. I knew, of course, that some people were incredibly wealthy – but they were not real. They were not part of my world. They were not part of my reality when I was growing up. Even when I saw them on television their stories were no more real than the fairytales I read in the books I borrowed from the library.

It was not until my first trip across town to Toorak, at sixteen, to a Sunday literature workshop at the home of my English teacher (a passionate and dedicated teacher), that I caught a glimpse of 'how the other half lived'. Stepping off the train that day, six of us, girls from Footscray, we were foreigners in a strange land. There were so many trees, and high brick fences surrounding huge houses; footpaths without nature strips and not a Holden in sight. We huddled together over a pencil sketch and an address, worried about getting lost, and frightened in a way I had never been in a street in Footscray. The neighbourhood was deserted, no lawn mowers, no children, no car-washing fathers. No voices screaming from doorways, no laughter or music, no booming televisions tuned to the Sunday's wrestling match. More than anything I remember the silence of those streets, a haunting quiet. We imagined the doctors, the lawyers, the politicians who lived inside those houses. It surprised us that a suburb existed where these people *really* lived, for we had never thought of them as real people living anywhere.

A year later at Melbourne University, I was the only student from my school and one of a handful from the western suburbs. I started to get much more of a real sense of the differences. Of the class distinctions. It was at university that I started to get a glimpse of the different world my middle-class fellow students inhabited. To begin with I became timid. They had so much more 'cultural capital' than me – I began to feel inferior. As well read as I was I did not have their background. I knew almost nothing about classical music and about art. They had grown up in houses surrounded by the 'fine arts'.

They had gone to music classes, to dance classes. Their parents went to the galleries and museums on weekends, to theatre, the opera, the ballet. They discussed politics and literature over the dinner table. I was overwhelmed by what they had acquired as they were growing up and I knew I would never be able to catch up.

I survived by flaunting my class, to the students alongside me in rallies and during elections who admired the 'genuine article'. They gave up their bourgeois backgrounds to live in squalor, in dilapidated share houses on almost no income, becoming socialists, communists, radicals – joining the working class. A temporary aberration. At the end of their degrees, the middle-class Melbourne University students moved out of the condemned housing, cut their hair, put on suits and went to work for their father's law firm (or its equivalent). And I could hardly recognize them.

Just as they had situated themselves with the working class when we were all students, my education and occupation now situate me with the middle class. Or do they? I know it is not where I belong – I never have. Whatever my change in circumstances I carry my background and therefore my class – an accident of birth even though it may be – with me always. Those of us who via education or money no longer fit so easily into the 'working class' can never shake where we come from, we hover in between.

Class may not be like race or gender. Not imprinted on our skin. Mobility may be possible but never can we totally shake where we come from.

And this question of mobility is a red herring anyway for upward mobility is not common. It is the children of the working class that continue to drop out of school early, that fill the unskilled and manual jobs, that make up the majority of the unemployed. And while some of us 'make it' into the professions we remain in the minority.

Growing up in the west made me strong. It made me passionate about social justice. I learnt that it was not money or material wealth that bought happiness, however I also learnt that it is much harder to be happy when you are poor, when you have to struggle to survive. That one person can have enough money to feed a small country while others are starving and homeless is obscene.

It is important not to romanticize the working class – there is nothing romantic about poverty, about working long hours in dirty and dangerous work. The working class are no less racist, sexist or conservative. My father and his friends call themselves socialist and can talk for hours about the terrible job the Liberal Party is doing, and then complain when the government builds public housing in their neighbourhood.

IDENTITY IS COMPLEX. I may be working class but I am also a wog (among other things).

My father worked twelve-hour shifts as an unqualified fitter and never refused overtime if he could get it. How long the day must have seemed, from eight in the morning to eight at night; sometimes he did not see the light of day at all. Often he got home tired and irritable and we hated him for being like that – he was doing it, he said, all for us. He worked hard to collect, to save, to accumulate. He worked under conditions that were exploitative – bosses that were cruel. He lost the top of his thumb. The blood to his heart clogged. An aneurism grew in his stomach. The struggles were enormous, but he did not see any other way, he had worked long hours in the village, on the land and in Australia he continued doing the same. It was difficult for my mother too, working away from home. Factory work was another world, a nightmare but she had come to Australia to work, and if she didn't make money, what would be the point of having come this far? My mother travelled across town, sat in line at a machine, like a machine while we went to school and ran home to our grandparents.

Each of us bore the scars of being a 'foreigner', a 'wog'. My father at the factory. My mother on the train. My brother and I at school. In our street, at the shops, on the way to church. Name calling. Abuse. Given the worst jobs. The message – go home. Go home. We kept these attacks to ourselves. We kept them secret from each other. There was nothing to be gained by talking about them – it would only increase each individual's burden. I learnt as a young child of five, during my first year at school, not to tell my parents about the name calling and the teasing. I knew there was nothing they could do for me.

My parents worked hard and dreamed of a better life. They persisted in their dream, and sacrificed everything for it. Money was never spent on holidays, never on luxuries. They limited their pleasures and their frugal living meant they finally accumulated enough to build their dream home. A two-storey brick veneer with a large kitchen and dining room. By the time they finished it, my mother no longer felt the same enthusiasm or energy for large parties. But they achieved what they had come here

to achieve – a better life – educated children that do not need to do back-breaking work to survive.

The western suburbs and Footscray suited us. It would have been lonely living in the more middle-class suburbs. We shared our street with people from all parts of the world. Next door to the left, a Greek family, they ran the local fish and chip shop. To the right another family of Italians, across the road a Yugoslav family. I did not know then whether they were Serbian, Croatian or Macedonian. Also in our street a Spanish family. My mother became quite friendly with the woman, and they spoke to each other in a mixture of Italian and Spanish, that no-one else understood. There were Polish families, Lebanese families, Turkish families and other Greeks and Italians. There were a couple of Irish Catholic families with children by the dozen and of course several Anglo-Australian families. We played across the national boundaries, most of us wog kids together and occasionally with the Australians.

The western suburbs though were as far as my parents could have got from the lush and mountainous landscape that was their home. I imagine, though I don't know, that it must have been easier for those that moved to Gippsland and Daylesford, to the Blue Mountains; to places where the rolling hills or the dramatic mountain drops reminded them of their beloved villages.

Part of what I love about the west is its bleakness, the constructed nature of its landscape. What I loved about Footscray in my youth was the way that people lived and played outdoors. In their front yards and in the street – kicking a ball or playing neighbourhood cricket, or collecting tadpoles in the creek. The sound of sprinklers in the summer and squeals of wet children, the chatter that came from the verandas in the evenings as people moved outdoors to catch the evening breeze.

There were also the loud voices of angry fathers, and the cries of abused women and children; the fighting on the street between men too intoxicated to control their tempers. The frightening violence of frustration. There were less trees and more concrete, less parks and more factories and the putrid smell of the meatworks that greeted you as you turned the corner into Ballarat Road. I know the danger of nostalgia, I know the fear of walking home past drunken youths breaking bottles on the wall of Sam's Coffeepot but it was the landscape of my youth and it made me the person that I am. And I know now, though I didn't then, that domestic violence was just as bad in the eastern suburbs, just more contained, hidden behind those high brick fences, less public but no less dangerous.

I have seen many changes in Footscray in the thirty or so years I have lived here (most of my life that is, except for a brief venture to Carlton and Richmond in my twenties). Young middle-class professional couples have bought across the area and they are renovating the weatherboard cottages, having children, planting trees and demanding more resources for their schools. They like the working-class nature of the suburb, the strength of the community networks. I am grateful for the cafes they have brought with them, and for the greening of the suburb, but I dread the balance tipping too far their way.

As house prices go up in one section of the suburb, drug dealing is becoming epidemic in another. When we drive down to the shopping centre in Footscray, my husband and I, for a Vietnamese soup, we can see the dealing happening there on the street. Some old houses are being renovated. They are being painted in heritage colours, their verandas are being replaced, new fences are being built and stained-glass windows fitted. But some old houses are decaying, as the increasing unemployment rate leaves some people without the money to survive. There are still remnants of the Anglo-Australian working class and of the European migrants. There are many more Asian and African Australians and many more middle-class professionals.

Yarraville is hardly recognizable – six cafes/restaurants have opened up in the last four or five years; and the Sun Theatre has reopened showing films to full houses most weekends. The Greek community's plan to rebuild the church and hall – that five years ago would have gone unnoticed – has become a major local issue.

In some sections of Footscray if you close your eyes you can smell the Asian herbs and spices; you can transport yourself to Thailand or Vietnam. And more recently to parts of Africa. I love this diversity.

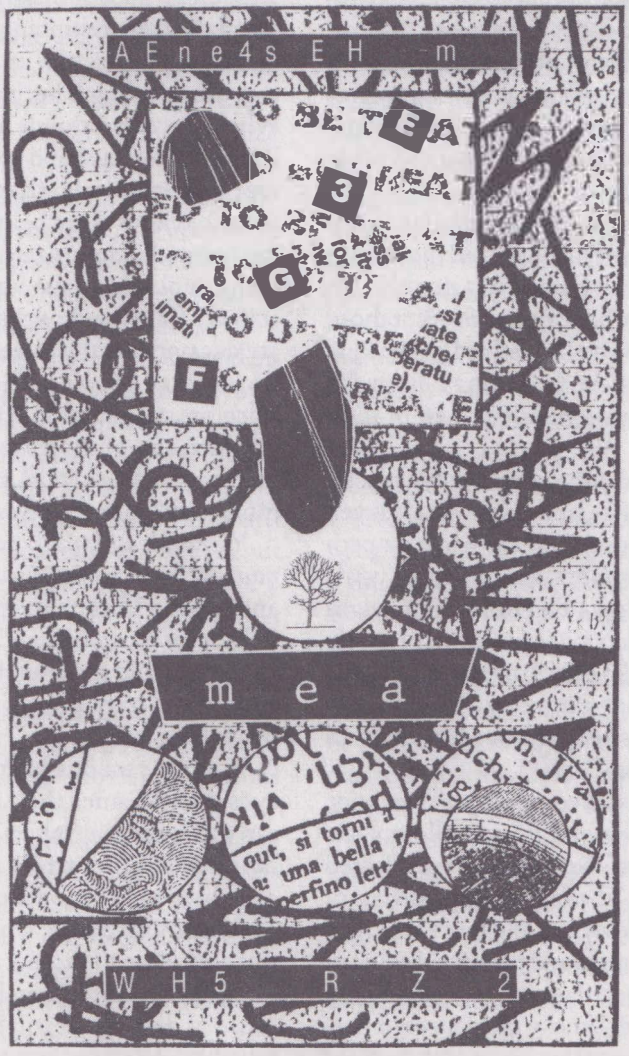
However, for many local people the conditions are becoming worse. Unemployment has affected this area more than most and some people are going hungry; some are homeless; there is an increasing sense of desperation on the streets. Many of those who have jobs continue to work in appalling conditions for very little pay and many are being discriminated against every day.

There are pressures on the Council to clean up the suburb, to plant more trees, to cobblestone the walk-

ways, to create rules to restrict certain types of buildings. It scares me when I walk down a local street past the four-wheel drives parked on the gutter and the verandas empty. The houses in matching Brunswick green with picket fences and rose gardens. And a certain silence filling the streets.

Who are they intending to get rid of in the clean-up? Not just the drug dealers – I am willing to bet. Soon other species will be hard to find here: the addicts, the homeless, the unemployed, the most recent arrivals, all the wogs, and the working class.

Enza Gandolfo is a Melbourne writer. This piece is an extract from a work in progress written with the support of a grant from the Australia Council and a Varuna Writers fellowship.



pete spence

Welcome to Werribee

Come on down to Werribee, we've got
Big Macs
hungry jacks
Indian
Italian
Cantonese
Chinese
Vietnamese
Take away please,
fasta pasta
Pizza haven
Pizza Hut
All you can eat for four ninety five
or dial a dino on
111111111111111
got that number folks
111111111111111
We've got
Hyundai
Chrysler
Rick Wolany Toyotaaaaa
car salesman of the year in Werribee
yyyyeeeessss
We've got
Mitsubishi
Nissan
We got deals, deals, deals for you
Melbourne Motors
Warren Motors
Lemon Motors
for a great deal on wheels ring
9 double 9 triple 9 double 9 9
don't forget that number folks
9 double 9 triple 9 double 9 9
We got
St Thomas
St Luke's
St Mary's
St Andrews
Corpus Christi
St Vincent de Paul
St James
not only have we got half the disciples in Werribee
we've even got
Mary Mckillooop
And there's more, yeesss
Bi-lo
Bigger and better at Biii-looo
SSW
combens
Coles
Jewels
Target
Doors galore
World for kids
Mr Muffler
Mr Muscle
Mr Fix it
We got the
$2.00 shop
and don't forget
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Plaaaazzaaaaa
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poker machines in

Werribee

Dennis Mcintosh

Abbas El-Zein

Covering One's Tracks

Desert Roads from Memory to Fable

Al Massi, Michael Ondaatje's *English Patient*, travels through the North African Sahara as an explorer with a passion for the desert and its inhabitants.[1] When he speaks of the desert – on his deathbed, his body burned, his memories and Hanna's ministrations keeping him alive – he is an exalted lover, a man who has discovered his Eldorado, and has lost it to war and politics. He dwells on a Bedouin's face, relishes the names of winds and watches a boy dancing next to a bonfire:

> Here in the desert, which had been an old sea where nothing was strapped down or permanent, everything drifted – like the shift of linen across the boy as if he were embracing or freeing himself from an ocean of his own blue afterbirth. A boy arousing himself, his genitals against the colour of fire.[2]

He can tell a tribesman from another by the taste of saliva on the date the men chew and pass around. Al Massi is searching for the lost oasis of *Zarzura,* but it is sensual experience, rather than science or vainglory, that drives his quest – and it is sensual experience more than anything that drives Ondaatje's writing. When the Second World War breaks out and choices can no longer be postponed, it comes as no surprise that the explorer opts for "a richness of lovers and tribes" rather than maps and armies.[3]

Motab'l Hazzal, the old man in Abdel Rahman Munif's epic novel *Cities of Salt*, loses his desert oasis, *Wadi'l Ouyoun* – The Valley of Springs – to American oil companies.[4] But, unlike Al Massi's Sahara, Motab's Wadi is his birthplace and the only corner of earth he has ever known and loved. The Wadi survives on passing caravans, extending Arab generosity in times of plenty and fighting rival tribes over water in times of dearth. The young often migrate because the "people of Wadi'l Ouyoun are like its water: when they exceed a certain limit they must flood over and flow away . . ."[5] One day, three European-looking foreigners appear, escorted by two Arab men. They are searching for something the Wadi's inhabitants could not make out. It isn't long before the Emir's soldiers evict Motab's folks from the Wadi to clear the way for monstrous oil-extraction machinery. On the same day, Motab mysteriously disappears, last seen riding his camel eastward. Wadi'l Ouyoun, a lost Eden rather than an Eldorado, later acquires a mythical quality in the eyes of the exiled community. So does Motab himself, his hoped-for return a focus of the community's aspirations. Memory replaces the desert as

> man's desired curse and his dangerous game. Just as it allows him to travel towards freedom, it becomes his prison. And, in this permanent journey, he reconstitutes the world, his desires and illusions.[6]

Al Massi and Motab are very different characters but both become heroes by rejecting and circumventing loss. Both men, in other words, are resisting history because it has no respect for the sanctity of the desert. While Al Massi swims against the tide of war, loses the fight, and reconstructs his fabulous desert on his deathbed, Motab vanishes at the moment of the Wadi's final disappearance and hence does not experience the loss.

Loss, memory and migration meet again in Eva Sallis' novel *Hiam* whose protagonist is an Arab migrant driving through the Australian desert.[7] Hiam, an educated Jordanian woman married to a Palestinian man, drives her husband's taxi out of Adelaide,

northward, following a family trauma. Her daughter Zena and her husband Masoud, both lost to her in different ways, hover in the back of her mind. Masoud, who must work as a taxi driver even though he has qualified as an engineer, is gradually overwhelmed by the indignities and disappointments of migration. To make matters worse, Zena's estrangement from her family grows, as she rejects her parents' restrictions on cross-ethnic dating and pre-marital sex and eventually breaks free of them.

Eva Sallis spins an unusual tale out of such conventional fictional material as the affinity between natural and psychic landscapes, a Father-Mother-Daughter web of relationships and the modern migration experience.

Both the past and the future unravel in Hiam's mind as she penetrates deeper into the outback. The desert, in Hiam's case, is a background to her torment, rather than the object of her bereavement or the focus of her passions. A harsh physical landscape, it is far from neutral, mirroring, amplifying and distorting her predicament. If, in the case of Al Massi and Motab's folks, the past invades the present and memory is allowed to reconstitute the world, Hiam's desert is the landscape which makes such a fusion untenable. It is, in other words, the scene of her catharsis.

In his analysis of the dubious motivations of Gutzon Borglum, sculptor of the four presidential heads on Mount Rushmore in South Dakota and anti-Semitic member of the Ku Klux Klan, the British-American historian Simon Schama says in his book *Landscape and Memory*, voicing the thoughts of the mountain-master: "To make over a mountain into the form of a human head is, perhaps, the ultimate colonization of nature by culture, the alteration of landscape to manscape".[8] The Desert – that great omission in Schama's book – resists perhaps more tenaciously mental and physical colonization by humans. Where mountains are unruly heights waiting to be scaled, trimmed and given semantic shape, deserts offer their harsh monotony and dry emptiness as a challenge. They resist the shaping power of human imagery because they fail to inspire it, as Hiam was to discover:

> The stilted ideas trotted by like low trees and stunted bushes, and the road accommodated them. She felt mentally dry and rusty. Hiam with the University Education was strangely inadequate out in the red, while the road's readiness to be anything from her lover to the unravelling skein of human psyche was disturbing. The road was obliging every time and she left the game in disgust.[9]

In crossing the Australian desert, Hiam was not only trying to come to terms with a life crisis, performing a "purgatory of repetition" in the aftermath of the breakdown of her family.[10] She was, as Eva Sallis pointed out in an interview, "colonizing" a foreign place, her new country, and dealing in her own way, with that foreignness.

Borglum's enterprise and Hiam's journey are two contrasting ways of mentally appropriating a landscape. While the first is a particular incarnation of the state of mind of the conquering settler, the second pertains to the alienated migrant. Clearly, the right-wing sculptor goes about his business in a more physical and pompous manner than Hiam. He must make the landscape in his own image (or his tribe's) in order to be at home in it. His obsessions are crude in their graphic possessiveness of nature, compared to Hiam's private and gradual integration of her new country into her consciousness. But both Hiam and Borglum must start by projecting themselves onto the landscape, in order to contain its unfamiliarity. In Borglum's case, this is done almost literally: "So tireless was Borglum's self-promotion that it is not too much to suggest that, somewhere in his mind, there was always meant to be a fifth head up there on the mountain."[11]

For Hiam however, it is a dynamic interplay between memory and landscape that drives the quiet conquest: the less she hides in her memory, the more she is able to *be* in the landscape, and eventually be *at home* in it. Memory, to Hiam, is a mixed blessing, a refuge and a prison. Despite the profound sense of loss that blights her household – Jordan left behind, Palestine never seen, Australia never understood, Masoud's career never realized – she has a capacity for happiness that is most in evidence in the way she nurtures old memories, at once vehicles of loss and remedies for the pain of separation: "She awoke in the tent in the morning light. A memory rose unexpectedly and she clutched at it, rolling it over, savouring it."[12]

While her flight to the desert is rendered in the past tense, her flashbacks are narrated in the present. This reversal of the temporality of the novel creates a powerful intimacy between Hiam and the reader. As she travels inland, the demarcation between reality and memory gradually becomes blurred in her mind. Her engagement with, and disengagement

from, the landscape become more painful and abrupt, with heat waves and small towns and kangaroo carcasses punctuating the road. Stories – hallucinatory visions, dreams and fairy tales – begin to dominate her imagination and ours. This, I thought, was where the novel's strength lies, in Sallis' ability to enact and balance against each other those three elements of Hiam's experience: her emotional turmoil and its history, her interaction with the Australian landscape, and, finally, her eventual redemption, the outcome of a therapeutic fusion of reality and memory into something resembling fable.

HIAM BELONGS TO an Arab minority in Australia which, although subjected to harsh judgements by the dominating Anglo-Celtic culture, lacks the representational and political means of challenging the prevailing views. In *Hiam,* there is no debate between the different ethnic communities, only blind prejudice and mutual contempt. Significantly, Hiam's powerlessness as a migrant is most acutely felt when quizzed by Australians about her presumed powerlessness as a Muslim woman:

> The first time someone asked her what it was like growing up as a woman she was so confused that she stared, her mind sidling away rapidly like a crab on the seafloor . . . She had not realized how strange Australians would be and how powerful their view of her would be. She had stopped speaking to people but earlier she had occasionally tried. She senses now that unless she says what they already think, their pity grows the more she speaks. She finds the words dead on her lips and the sound of things precious to her becoming weak and piping as she looks into eyes that think they know something else about her. She and her friends know one thing clearly: being Muslim is not highly thought of and Australia itself is.
>
> "It must be wonderful for you to live in Australia!"[13]

Apart from the obvious irony, the celebratory blindness of the last sentence is cruel: it sounds like a complete closure, a final word killing off the possibility of real communication. Sallis captures here two crucial moments of migration, two sobering discoveries migrants make, which are constitutive of their experiences. There is, on the one hand, the importance of the views of the dominating culture in the migrant's self-identity, giving rise to an encumbering self-consciousness – words dying on one's lips. There is also the impossibility, or so it seems, of changing these views, even when they are as demeaning and naive as the ones that Hiam encounters – the blindness of "eyes that think they know something else about her". And if it is impossible to counter prejudice, it is not only because prejudice is deeply entrenched and faithfully perpetuated by the mainstream media. More important perhaps is the fact that the objects of prejudice – Muslim men and women, middle-aged Russian migrants, Vietnamese teenagers and so on – remain marginal in the dominating culture. They do not get the attention that might have led to scrutiny and change, even if prejudice and hostility is, as one might expect, high on the migrant's agenda. The intensity of prejudice, in other words, reflects the degree of presence of the ethnic community in the mainstream culture. That is why encounters such as the one Hiam makes with Australians are so fraught with politics, even when they are perceived by both parties as the most private of conversations.

A review of *Hiam* in the *Bulletin*, sent to me by Sallis' publisher, turned out to be a curious extension into real life of the misunderstanding depicted in the above scene. The review talks about a "close-knit Muslim community" and says:

> Australians, from the perspective of the female members of the clan, are not much better than prostitutes . . . After discovering that Australians have little regard for her religion and culture, Hiam has retreated into herself and abandoned the effort to make friends . . . keenly aware of any slight to her husband's honour, Hiam is powerless to prevent the many humiliations and disappointments he is forced to endure.[14]

Throughout this short article, there is an unmistakable sense in which the reviewer herself has little regard for Hiam's religion and culture. While there is nothing wrong with this per se, almost a third of the account is about the Muslim community's racist views of Australians. No question at all of Hiam's strength, of Australian prejudice, of the dilemmas of the migration experience, of Masoud's work problems as opposed to his preoccupation with his 'honour'. We're back into firm normative territory here, where the characters of the novel are torn out of their context and conveyed to us with the same old keywords: Islam, honour, powerlessness of women and so on. Hiam's problem, we gather from the article, is

that she is an educated Muslim woman without the strength of character to challenge her community's prejudice against Australians, or to break free from patriarchy. Only an acrobatic reversal of the story based on a highly selective reading could have come up with this interpretation.

Such a reading is hopefully exceptional. But although reading is a creative act and every reading is a re-writing of the work, I could not help wondering, after reading the *Bulletin* review, whether fiction changes readers or readers change fiction, and under what conditions the former is more likely than the latter.

In fact, Islam, as a religious language and a spiritual system of beliefs, is an intrinsic part of what holds the character of Hiam together. Hiam's spiritual rebirth is sealed with an encounter, in dream, with the Prophet Mohammad. Sallis' usage of Koranic verse is refreshingly unconventional; it goes a long way in conveying the way Hiam views herself and the world.

The novel reminded me of the extent to which Koranic expressions in English, such as *Allahu Akbar* (God is Greater) and *In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful*, have become contaminated by the media's portrayal of them as vehicles of fanaticism and hate. These expressions have an utterly apolitical life of their own in Arabic, since they are used in daily communication by millions of Muslims. But mainstream Western media, which measures the world on a scale set between *boring* and *great story*, remains blind to anything but the most violent late twentieth-century manifestations of Islam.

Ironically, Islamic revivalism, with its insistence on the inseparability of State and Church, is an unwitting accomplice of this reductionism. Militant Islam not only leads to more religion in politics, but also to more politics in spirituality. The religious ritual becomes an act of rebellion against secular tyrants, a symbol of cultural allegiance, a yearning for a mythical past, or a protest against Western hegemony, and so on and so forth. This has overshadowed the vast spiritual space in the lives of Muslims that has no conscious political dimension; a space, both social and private, occupied by rituals, everyday expressions, linguistic and social conventions, and communal beliefs, which add up to a dynamic spiritual and cultural identity.

The realm of the everyday is far more relevant to the lives of Muslims than political activism or political violence, save perhaps in societies in a state of war or civil war. As Eva Sallis reminds us, such a realm is best explored by fiction which, though it can be deeply political, is certainly able to map out other dimensions of people's lives. Cultures, although delimited by language, beliefs and rituals, are never as final or pre-determined as stereotype and prejudice would have us believe. Good fiction depicts them more accurately: they are as open to possibilities as the individuals that live within them.

HIAM'S REDEMPTIVE QUEST, like the reminiscence of Michael Ondaatje's Al Massi on his deathbed and the disappearance of Abdel Rahman Munif's Motab'l Hazzal, is a cultural as well as psychological journey. The harshness of the desert becomes a sanctuary, a safe haven against the tyranny of culture and history and all external forces beyond the individual's control. And it is of course an illusory – or, at best, a temporary – haven, since these forces will triumph in the end, as Al Massi and Motab have discovered and as Hiam understood when she finally emerged from the desert, scarred and transformed. But this victory is never complete because humans conjure countless ways of circumventing culture and history – and the collective imagination they give rise to. Individual imagination survives and, by the same token, reshapes and enriches the forces it has resisted so fiercely. Therein, perhaps, lies the paradox of all three of the above characters. After all, Al Massi represents a long tradition of European desert lovers who would probably not have existed without the European expansionism which they often loathed. The figure of Motab'l Hazzal strongly hints at the present-day alienation of the Hijazi Arabs and their self-perceived loss of affinity with the land. Likewise, *Hiam* is, among other things, a new facet in a quintessentially Australian mosaic: a tense encounter between a hostile landscape and a foreign sensibility.

ENDNOTES

1. Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, London, Picador, 1993.
2. Ondaatje, p. 22.
3. That is why the reversal of Anthony Minghella's screen adaptation of the book is extraordinary: a powerful anti-war novel has turned into a largely conventional war movie. The character Madox who, in the novel, kills himself in his local church to protest against war mongering by the priest, takes his own life on screen because he believed his friend to be a Nazi spy. The Sikh Kip, who burst with anger at the news of Hiroshima in the novel, celebrates the end of the war in

the film. The deliberately anti-Euro-centrist features of the novel – the centrality of Kip who saves London from German bombs, the centrality of the desert and its inhabitants – also vanishes from the screen adaptation, and non-European characters return to being simple accessories to European protagonists.

4. Abdel Rahman Munif, *Cities of Salt*, trans. Peter Theroux, London, Jonathan Cape, 1988.
5. Abdel Rahman Munif, *Mudunu'l Milh*, vol. 1, Beirut, Arabic Institute for Research and Publishing, 1988.
6. Munif, vol. 3.
7. Eva Sallis, *Hiam*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1998, winner of the Australian/Vogel award in 1997 and the Dobbie award in 1999. It was shortlisted for the *Courier-Mail* Book of the Year in 1999 and for the Festival Award for Literature of the Adelaide Writer's Festival 2000.
8. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, London, HarperCollins, 1995, p. 396.
9. Sallis, p. 65.
10. Sallis, p. 65.
11. Schama, p. 399.
12. Sallis p. 83.
13. Sallis, pp. 20–21.
14. Penelope Nelson 'Grief is a stranger', *The Bulletin with Newsweek*, 21 July 1998.

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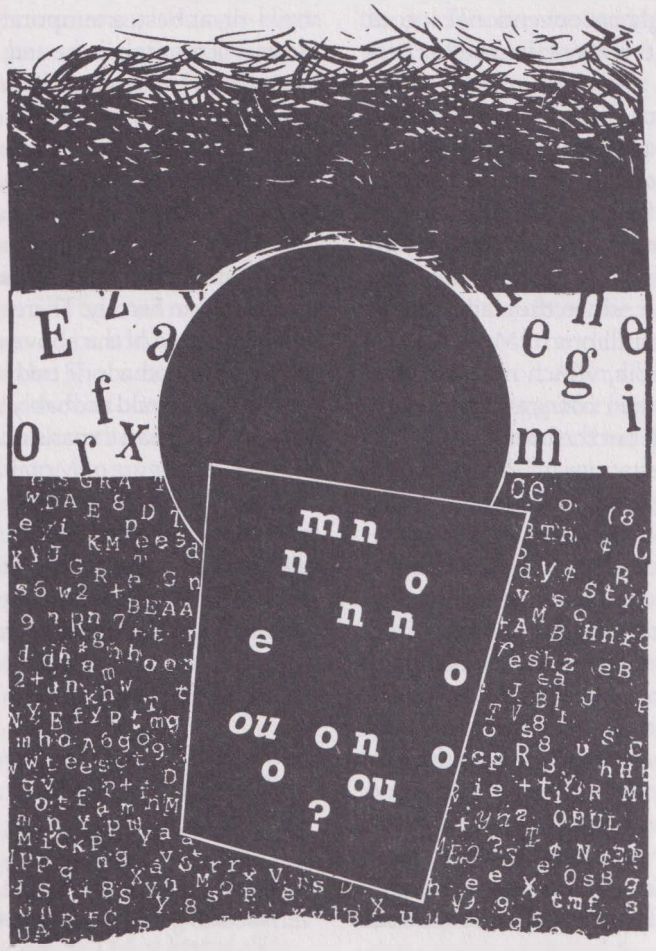


pete spence

John Mateer

The Chinese Poet's Visit

Now he wanders islands of immortals.
Li Po

"Chao," the Chinese poet repeated himself. That was his name. He said, "No last name. Only Chao." I would have been rude asking him what it was for a third time.

He was thin, boyish in his over-sized khaki clothes. His hair hung in an uneven fringe over the bulky frames of his glasses. He shook my hand briefly before he was called to the front of the seminar room to present his reading. I sat at the back next to Mike, a friend who's also a poet. Chao's hand in mine had been soft and remote, like that of an infirm child. I remarked on this to Mike. He whispered: "The Chinese don't shake hands, do they?"

After a brief introduction, Chao stood up, apologized for what he was about to do, then placed his satchel on the desk directly in front of him, and sat back down. The bag hid him almost entirely. "This is because I am very, very nervous," he explained. No one seemed concerned by the eccentricity of the act. If anything, the undergraduate students, who were at this reading instead of at a lecture, took it as a sign that this small, foreign man was truly a poet. They stiffened attentively in their desks.

Sitting behind his barricade, Chao started reading the poems. Initially his voice was quiet and the commentary he offered between each poem more a babble of impressions than a biography. It was difficult to hear what he was saying, partly due to his lack of volume, partly also because his accent and the walls seemed to be conspiring to mute him. I registered a few clear words, and noticed the earnest concentration of the audience. "Cultural Revolution . . . Great Leap Forward . . ." It was as if the audience was astonished that History could be an utterance in their presence. They were reverentially silent. "After Tianenmen Square," he said, "I felt very bad. I felt bad for my friends. So many of my friends committed suicide . . ."

Then Chao stood up, braced himself, with both hands held the book out in front of him and started chanting his poem *The Great Wall*. Energy streamed through him rapidly, jerkily, like an electrical charge. His voice was howling and his body trembling:

the enormous corpse
of the dragon
ancestor of a nation
abandoned
on a vast hill of tombs
rises and falls
as if living

On finishing, he collapsed exhausted into the chair.

I asked Mike what he'd made of that. He shook his head, almost mournfully, but sighed, "Wonderful poem."

Crawley Esplanade was already shaded by the tall gums when we arrived. The bay was flawlessly glassy and each of the boats at its mooring seemed fixed in time. Chao was impressed by the selection of food we'd prepared: potato- and green-salad, sausages, steaks and blue crabs. He was especially taken by the crabs.

We left the crabs till last. I counted them, then shared them out. We each got six. They were typically small. I explained, somewhat apologetically, that my mother's boyfriend had caught them in the estuary down at Mandurah. The poet didn't seem to understand.

"My mother's friend. A friend." I repeated myself, aware that I was risking being seen as a product of the decadent West. It appeared that he understood, though probably didn't approve, as he kept his eyes on the crab in his hands, even while nodding twice.

"In China," he said, "in the restaurant we get one crab. Cut it here, here." With his finger he was indicating quartering the tiny creature. We all laughed. "How do you eat it?"

Mike showed him how to break the shell apart and how to crack the legs to draw the flesh out. Soon Chao was tucking into his share with gusto.

Eating slowly, obviously savouring the sweet flesh, Mike said to the poet, "You must find it strange in China, not having any siblings . . ." Chao looked at me intensely, as though he'd just been insulted in a language of which he had only a shaky grasp and I were the interpreter. Sensing consternation, Mike rephrased his question: "Is it strange not having siblings, with the One Child Policy?"

"Siblings?" Chao repeated.

"Brothers and sisters, he means. He means no-one has brothers and sisters in China. Your child will never have brothers or sisters . . ." Immediately I realized that I'd laboured the point, particularly by bringing his young son into it.

"Yes, yes," Chao responded, suddenly smiling. "In China everyone is your brother and sister."

WE WENT DOWN to the foyer for drinks. There were the usual hierarchies of networking writers at this conference of International PEN: the powerful talking to the organizers, the mid-ranked trying to corner editors and publishers, and those of the lower echelons desperate to swap telephone and fax numbers with almost anyone. Sitting in the corner beside huge pot-plants, Chao and I were speaking. Out of the corner of his eye, Chao caught sight of someone. He sprang up and disappeared.

He was gone for a reasonably long time. When he returned, he was towing an old Asian man by the hand. The man was thin and stooped, wearing a white three-piece suit with a narrow, pale red tie. His posture and the crescent of white hair on his speckled skull reminded me of a Butoh performer. Chao introduced me to him as "my good friend", and introduced him to me as "my teacher, a great, very great poet from Taiwan." The elderly gentleman nodded courteously in my direction, though it was apparent that the introduction had no significance for him and that he was eager to wander off as quickly as he'd been brought here.

When he left, Chao slumped into the chair beside me and began chatting away about his admiration for that "truly great poet".

Later in the day, we attended a session about the conference's theme, 'Freedom of Speech'.

Someone had made the comment that South Korea currently held several writers as political prisoners. There was a hush, followed by the palpable tension that precedes a fight. I was surprised by the immediacy of the reaction. Two Korean men dressed in dark suits, looking like secret agents, rushed up to the podium with their interpreter and declared that the statement was false. "We, South Korea, hold no political prisoners," came the interpreter's utterance after a fierce and denunciatory speech in Korean. Standing at the front of the room and confronting us with uncompromising stares, those three men could have been apologists for Apartheid. I had a dry throat and blood was pounding in my ears. I scanned the audience on my left and right, hoping to catch sight of Chao. If anything could reveal his view of the tyranny of government, his fear of History, it would be the sight of its black-suited minders at work. I couldn't see him.

Then, turning right around, I spotted him sitting by himself two rows from the back. His glasses were folded on the chair beside him, and his runners were on the floor. He was seated cross-legged, bowed over slightly, with his eyes closed. He seemed to be deep in meditation.

An audience member stood up to dispute the South Koreans' statement with 'facts'. Few in the audience appeared to be familiar with the facts, yet their interest didn't flag. Rather, they were realizing that what was occurring was possibly 'an international incident', an instance of free speech confronting power and of power responding with denial and doublespeak.

The South Koreans made more statements to the effect that there were no political prisoners in their country. According to them, the people whom the audience member had named were being detained because they were a risk to South Korean national security. "North Korea, however," the interpreter said, "holds many political prisoners." Someone else stood up with more facts. An organizer indicated that the time for the session had expired. The man who'd just spoken provocatively asked the organizer why time couldn't be extended to allow for what he called "the debate of this issue". The answer was, "We have to stop now for organizational reasons."

Again I looked to see Chao's reaction. He was gone.

WE TOOK HIM DOWN to Cottesloe beach. We arrived at dusk. It had been over thirty degrees, so there were lots of people. The tar on the car park was still hot enough to make us trot across it. Glancing left and right, Chao followed us between the bodies to the spot where we dropped our towels and shed our shirts.

He stared at us. Then he turned around to survey the people on the lawned terraces. He was uncomfortable. Maybe because there were so many Cau-

casian people. Maybe because they were virtually naked. For a moment I thought I caught him staring at a tanned young woman bending over to straighten her towel. Mike had told me that a week ago Chao had been invited to a barbecue with some people from the university. It was a hot night so most of the women present were wearing what by Chinese standards must have been very skimpy dress. Chao was so distracted, so disturbed by the women's exposed flesh that he began praying, asking for God's help to prevent him from being tempted. He said that once he'd prayed, a calm descended on him. He felt distanced from lust and that, in looking at the women and their near-nakedness, he felt as though he were looking at naked children, at innocence itself.

"Are you ready to come in?" I called out to him as Mike and I headed down to the water. Absentmindedly he raised his hand. Hesitating only briefly, he undid his shirt, folded it and carefully placed it on top of his rolled-up towel. "We're going in. Are you coming?" Uncomprehending, he stared at me. I turned and ran into the glossy surf.

From about fifty metres out in the dark water I could see him standing exactly where we'd left him on the cleft of sand just before the beach sags into the water's edge. He was standing, braced, with his legs apart, with his arms tensed at his sides. He was facing something in the red, dusk sky.

Mike brought our tea out into the back garden. It was dark now and none of us felt like talking. Alan, Mike's housemate, was seated with us near the lemon tree. The fragrance of lemons was as pervasive as the starlight. Though Chao was quiet he was restless. While we sipped our herbal tea, he explored the garden, the shed and examined the leaves of the shrubs. "Yes!" he exclaimed.

He came over to us with a small fruit in his hand. In the dimness we couldn't quite see what it was.

"Oh. The mulberry," Mike said. "I'd forgotten that it was having fruit now."

Chao looked at him. Returning his gaze to the fruit in his palm, he tried out the new word: "Mulberry." He must have grasped it too tightly when he'd picked it because there was a smear of its juice on his fingers. He was entranced by the colour of the juice. "It is just like blood."

We were silent, struck by the implications.

"Mulberries," Mike ventured. "As children we'd feed their leaves to silkworms. You know silkworms?"

"Of course he does," Alan said. "Silk comes from China. Marco Polo brought it from China in a hollow walking stick."

I asked Chao if he'd heard of Marco Polo. He didn't glance at me. He slowly shook his head, continuing to stare at the blood on his hands.

After I left Mike's house, I drove home in silence. I didn't have the radio on. In the quiet of the night road I didn't hear the day's conversations in my mind as I usually do. All I was hearing, clear and loud, as if it were the present itself, was a song Chao had sung when we had been walking along the deserted foreshore.

Mike had told me that Chao had been taught an ancient folksong by a friend of his, an anthropologist, who had worked in remote northern China. Chao had told Mike that the song was in an extinct dialect. Both of us badgered him to sing it. He was reluctant. We hassled him some more. Then, with his attention focused inward, he opened his mouth. We stopped walking. The melody and raw physicality were like nothing I'd ever heard before. And Chao uttered it with such ferocity it could have been a war cry. He sang louder.

Around us, the road, the pavement, the blocks of flats, the night sky itself trembled with the reverberations of the archaic Chinese song, its ghostly lion dance.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE, when I'd been at his flat for dinner, without warning he had told me about his grandfather, that his grandfather had been like a father to him. And that during the Cultural Revolution his grandfather had been accused of being a counter-revolutionary. The old man was beaten to death in front of the young poet. For months afterwards the young boy had felt the weight of the old man's grip on his small, warm hand. Repeatedly the boy dreamed of the funeral: the coffin opened and the corpse sat up, eyes luminous, arms outstretched as if to grab young Chao. The corpse shouted, "I am not counter-revolutionary!"

MIKE WAS ON THE PHONE: "Have you heard the latest about Chao? Our friend has been in the east and he has performed a miracle. He was in the Blue Mountains, at Katoomba." He paused.

"OK. Enough suspense. Out with it, Mike!"

"They were at a cafe not far from the writers' centre where the poetry festival was being held when a man at an adjacent table stood up to leave but fell from his chair, paralysed. It's not clear what was

wrong with him. According to Chao, the man was completely paralysed from the waist down. The cafe staff and people from his table gathered around him. It was then that Chao and those he was with thought it best to leave.

"Chao, as you would expect, was frantic. They were in the car going back to the writers' centre when he declared, 'We must return'.

"They found the man was still where he had fallen. Chao knelt down beside him, bowed his head, closed his eyes and prayed that God might use him as a channel to bring life back to the man's legs.

"Lo and behold . . ."

"Good God, really?"

"My thoughts exactly. I must say, that while I admittedly have some difficulty in believing the story, when he told it to me he told it in all sincerity. If it's not true, it would be safe to say that, at least, he believes it happened –"

"That he cured someone?"

"No. That God acted through him . . . Actually, that puts me in mind of another story he told me. Shortly before I arrived to meet him at his office at the university, he must have been having a difficult time. I suspect he is missing his wife and child terribly.

"Before I was to meet him, he had been out walking on the playing fields. He was frustrated with his praying. He said, 'To God I shouted.' And he threw himself to the ground, yelling, yelling at God. When I arrived at his office, he was sitting in his chair, with his glasses removed and his eyes shut. There was dried grass in his hair."

THERE WERE OTHER STORIES like that. Mike had also told me Chao's 'conversion story', the account of how he'd become a Christian.

His wife was pregnant, in labour. She was in a terrible state with the pain. She was wheeled into the surgery. Chao waited outside.

The doctor burst through the theatre doors, rushing up to him. "There's a problem," she told him. "There is a problem with the labour. The umbilical cord is around the child's neck. You have to make a decision. You have to choose either your wife or your child."

He couldn't answer.

The doctor would briefly check on her again, then return for his decision. He would have to decide quickly.

He put his hands together and started to pray. He begged God to save them and promised that if they survived he would . . .

I was with Mike when he next saw Chao at the university. He took us to the cafeteria, let us choose sandwiches, insisting on paying. We didn't mention that we knew he could barely afford to. While we ate on a bench out in the sun, we spoke little.

"I believe your wife and son are coming over?" Mike asked.

Chao placed his sandwich back on its wrapper on the bench. "Indeed." His smile was radiant. "She will be here in one week's time."

The day'd been a long one. We spent most of it in the closeness of conversation. From eleven until half past four, we'd been dealing with the difficulty of cross-cultural communication, the lacunae, the misunderstandings. It was draining. Many times I was unsure if Chao shared our English. Once, when we were sitting on the lawn in the park opposite the university, Chao suddenly fell silent, saying nothing for what must have been more than ten minutes. When he eventually spoke, he pointed at a bird that was gliding in to make a landing on the lake: "What is that?"

I answered: "A duck."

"What kind?" he asked. Neither of us knew.

Chao shook his head sternly, telling us, "My friends, you should know the name of that bird."

FOR WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN several months I'd heard nothing of Chao until I received an invitation to the launch of his book *Fate of a Grasshopper*.

We were late arriving at the crowded university staff room. Someone was already giving a speech. Mike and I were concerned that we would miss Chao's reading.

Chao was wearing a suit and tie. His brief speech was full of thanks. His reading, as always, was striking. His voice, in a tone between that of a chant and a yell, drove the words into our minds like nails into a cross. The images, of suicide, of his lost twin brother, of his child, were an angry, articulate trembling.

The applause that followed wasn't as loud as his song.

We waited until most of the crowd had left. He shook our hands, saying little, though he was obviously happy. A child ran up to him and pulled on his jacket pocket. Chao patted his head without looking down. "My son," he stated proudly. Turning to his right, he pointed to a group of elderly Chinese people who were chatting to a slim, young woman. "She is my wife." She was as glamorous as a Shanghai model.

She must have noticed Chao's pointing because she came over. She smiled bemusedly while shaking

hands with me. Chao said something in Mandarin. "A very busy time," he apologized. I nearly shrugged.

"We'll leave you to it then," Mike said. That was the signal.

WE TOOK A BOOTH close to the window. The renovations had changed this cafe only slightly. There was the usual relaxed presence of backpackers, students and ancient Italian men with grizzled hair.

I was gazing out into the glare, at the Asian video store across the street, when Chao declared, "I am very happy to meet my friends. It is very wonderful."

Silence.

"So you will be leaving us soon?" I asked.

"Yes indeed. Indeed."

"When?"

"Two days, I think so."

Mike smiled at that. "So you aren't quite sure?"

"Yes. Yes. Two days, I think," he muttered. "Two days only." Chao's face, while being expressive, was not an indication of what he was thinking. It was as if there were contradictory energies streaming inside him. Strangely, in looking at Chao, his jovial expression, his slight build, the way he gently touched Mike's shoulder when he shared a joke, I doubted him.

He addressed me: "John Mateer, is your wife well?"

"Alicia? My girlfriend, you mean. She's good."

"You are a very lucky man indeed." Then, in a tone he hadn't used with me before, he confided, "She is beautiful. She is innocent."

For a while we sipped our coffees. Mike noted that now even Chao was drinking coffee. Shortly after we'd first met him, we'd taken him out for a coffee and he'd looked at us strangely and insisted that he didn't know how to drink it. We told him it's nothing special. He disagreed. He didn't explain what the problem was, but it seemed that to him coffee drinking was a cultured act and he was concerned to first learn the protocol.

"You've been here for a year and yet we haven't even got around to discussing contemporary Chinese poetry," I said. Mike murmured in agreement. Chao was stony-faced. I added, "It's bizarre that you've been here for so long and we still know just about nothing about the situation you're writing out of." Still no reaction. "It's the opposite of the situation in Frank Moorhouse's 'The American Poet's Visit', isn't it?"

Neither of them knew the story. Mike piped up, "Well, that's not entirely his fault: the university was to hold a series of lectures on new Chinese poetry, but there was insufficient enrolment. Insufficient interest."

"No worries," Chao interrupted, planting both hands on the table.

I wasn't going to let him change the subject that easily. "It's almost as though you don't want to tell us anything about it." I instantly regretted the accusation. I asked another question: "What do you think of Bei Dao?"

His face remained blank. "Oh. Oh," he said, pronouncing 'Bei Dao' correctly. "He is a great poet. He is a teacher to me. The first poem I read was Bei Dao. My friend had written out the poem. He had placed it on my pillow. When I found it, I thought, 'This is very wonderful'." At that memory Chao was clearly happy.

"He's living in exile, isn't he?" I said quietly.

Chao turned his attentions to his empty cup. He began toying with the spoon. Mike was watching both of us carefully, aware that a threshold was being breached. Without looking up, Chao said, "I have a son and a wife. And a grandmother." I didn't reply.

Seeing that he should say something, Mike asked whether or not he knew if Bei Dao was still writing.

Immediately Chao cheered up. "Indeed." In fact, he said he had recently corresponded with Bei Dao: "Bei Dao writes in the kitchen. When he wants to write a poem he goes to sit at the kitchen table and taps a pencil against it until he feels inspiration." Chao paused. "Bei Dao," he said, with even more enthusiasm than he'd shown in talking about discovering his work, "is now also Christian."

Mike smiled. "So there is hope."

WALKING TOGETHER down William Street in the direction of the station, our final conversation became a series of pleasantries. If someone had overheard us they would have thought we were barely acquainted. We stopped at the traffic lights a block away from the station.

Awkwardly, as may be expected in parting with someone with whom difficult circumstances have been shared, we became formal, shook hands and said our goodbyes. As an afterthought, I asked Chao to send me a postcard from his province, telling him that I always like getting cards from exotic places.

"It is difficult for me," he said. "Post is expensive." Then he crossed the street.

The poet Chao Shen was Writer-in-Residence at Edith Cowan University in Perth during 1995–6. John Mateer is a South African-Australian poet. His recent collection is Barefoot Speech *(Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000).*

TWO EXCERPTS FROM 'POEMS OF CHANCE' BY PHILIP SALOM

So: always liked those Chinese Poets
for their zeal and their excessive
paradox. Each poem kicks a TV in.
But quietly. They are tough and light
even when they're sober, which they risk
but don't succumb to. I get word-drunk
from English, and some poets even spew,
but ideograms? I think of Sign Language,
air passing across the palm like meaning,
like butterflies, the wind . . . Am I a man
dreaming of ideograms, or a puppet master
wording down each string? Mouth open,
glottal-stopping, insensitive to reason?
Wind shakes the bamboos. The lake steams.

* * *

My voice bellowing and yours high, duets
for the mind-impaired the balance bereft
who'll lift their arms like a long kiss inwards
the room turning brighter like a rheostat.
To make it up but not yet: now our bodies
rage on hate-heavy the worst of air and line
I am so desolate and angry even while I sit
I am thrown. Fall somewhere in the dark
like a stone. I am the worst dummy of
our ventriloquist: love.

* * *

I've kinned a younger version of the Generation X
see no/hear no/fear no (ah, but I do) echoing back to A.

Each wrist, each forearm has its own blue statement
stamped like a contract, tattooed in sacral blues

punctured through his dermis like a 3D genealogy
down a dynasty of rising skin. That's kin.

Is there in this wearing out so young a future,
anything left that knows its past? His note is not-trying

as a style, its drive like a power cut on computer,
on head and heart who can guess. The river more alive

for those who pull in the oars, ors, young Ur-Luddites,
solipsists, whose tribe can not believe in nothing? No-
mind.

Their Zen of darkened cinemas or clubs, and America
thrashes them on the back with wooden sticks.

Oh most unread of critics, your hormones don't think,
they only copy, you are post post-modernists without

even knowing it. Head down under the skin pulled over
you, the era's a wave passing, the swimmer, the tattoo,

the needle of what isn't – and isn't well. I fear
A to X swallowed like an overdose. Oh, daughter, son.

With their door-to-door religion and shiny bikes,
in different ways there are missionaries, and we are
their Africa: more gullible, less proud, more running water,
shopping centres, crowds of kids in college jumpers,
baseball, basketball and rapper pants.
The same entrapment. Enlightenment costs all we know.

They've seen the truth and now they want to sell it
like 'Days of our Wallets' and mid-week talk-shows.
They don't look like us – truth has changed them.
They have wolves' teeth and the wounds heal up.
They theorise on self-esteem and practice
primal volume. Each voice is like an open concert
of the pistons. We know they're insincere.

But some of them are genuine and thereby worse,
unless considered mind-arrested children,
almost sane. The past-and-future journalists
they're writing God's late headlines. It's all
so Watergate, so broken into, every shadow
in them argues not for theory but for clean.

Even God seemed faintly possible
until evangelists . . . Closure, our second-
guessing death – obsesses us, but over-
doing it leaves it underdone. Whatever
tact it takes they haven't got. So, what
chance have we got with them? They ache.
They smile so much they want to faint.

I'd like to die in front of them, shit myself,
and hope for an out-of-body experience:
I want to see reality hit them
because I cannot.

Lee Cataldi

Contemporary Australian Poetry

a prejudiced biased account

Long ago when dead poets were young men, James McAuley and Douglas Stewart, possibly when drinking (something Australian poets still do, although in these days of austere diets and health rather less often and less copiously), concocted a set of joke poems, modernist in style, sketched out an invented biography of an unknown poet from a remote area whom they called Em Malley and sent them to another young man, Max Harris, editor of a journal, modernist in aspiration, called *The Angry Penguins*. Max Harris thought he had discovered a new genius and published the poems with much praise. Then the spoof was revealed and Harris was humiliated.

Thus the lines were drawn between two major strands in Australian poetry this century, between right and left, conservative and modernist. When I was an undergraduate I once listened to a talk A.D. Hope gave to a literary dinner when Eliot was of course already well and truly at the heart of the academic canon. In this talk Hope weighed in against free verse and half rhymes; a bit like Don Quixote fighting not windmills but the ghosts of windmills.

Hope's obsession with the fact of others not using rhyme is unfortunate because now in Australia it has made the use of full rhyme a mark of the conservative (whereas rhyme like any other strategy is useful in its place). Half rhyme (in classical rhetoric known as assonance) has also been around since the time of Isocrates and is not in itself a transgression introduced by the modern.

There are other features which make up the conservative Australian poetic; in content, a conservative politics often allied with a conservative religious position. This is found in the work of Hope himself, of Jim McAuley, and in the present most notably Les Murray. Another feature is a rather strange tendency to refer extensively to classical European mythologies, strange that is, in the Australian context. This is found in the poetry of Hope and also that of Geoff Lehmann, who hardly writes about anything else, as if his head was permanently stuck in *A Shorter Latin Primer*.

This latter tendency, the neo-classic one, must combine a longing for the innocence of one's school days with a feeling of exile, which is a problem for people of European/Mediterranean origin living in Australia. Many Australian writers have at some point or other in their lives identified with Ovid, the poet of the imperial court (the centre of culture) then exiled to the outer darkness of the edge of empire. Australian writers sometimes feel like that, as if their true surround is really some other more glittering place, not all this bush, dust, flies, or straggling fibro suburbia. These writers are the lonely cosmopolitans stuck out 'beyond the black stump'.

This feeling of exile may explain the proliferation of apparently irrelevant references to Greek and Roman things in some of this poetry, and the bitterness which sometimes accompanies it. For example, in the poem, 'Agony column', A.D. Hope has taken the Greek legend of Andromeda and transferred the tale to an Australian pastoral station:

> *Lady Cepheus wishes it to be distinctly stated*
> *That any attempt at rescue has been banned;*
> *Offenders will be summarily emasculated;*
> *Heroes are warned: the police have the matter in hand.*
>
> *As the victim is to be chained wearing only her skin,*
> *The volunteer armorers will be blinded at once.*
> *On the following morning her lovers and next-of-kin*
> *May assist in gathering any remaining bones.*

Hope might have thought he was criticizing the way the rural Australian upper class treats its daughters. Or he might have thought he was being witty, but I find the second stanza I have quoted peculiarly tasteless and if is meant to be wit, a failure. What this

poem reveals is Hope's disgust and rage and contempt for his own social surroundings. It betrays his feeling that culture in Australia is a debased mockery of real culture, and real culture he perceived as that of the Graeco-Roman classics.

More generally, one can see from this and poems like it how Hope, and following him other conservative Australian poets, are really the poets of and spokesmen for what is known as 'the cultural cringe'. Their idea of the real and true comes in fact from the schoolroom, and is astonishingly provincial and immature.

A contemporary conservative poet, Les Murray, while appearing to defend the Australian, the 'redneck' small farmer, is well and truly in this tradition, only he has chosen to appear to be proud of what all the others are ashamed of, a sort of inverted cultural cringe, 'I'm a yob but I'm proud of it'.

Australia's rednecks comprise only the 7per cent of the population who voted for Pauline Hanson. Most Australians belong to the 93 per cent who did not. It is these people in all their multicultural variety who make up Australia in 2000; the poets who represent them are the important ones. I would not be so obstreperous about this if it was not for the fact of our chronic under-representation. It is as if big publishers and bookshops are combining not just not to stock and sell our books because they are unknown and unread but to keep them out of bookshops and deprive them of publicity so they will remain unknown and unread.

For example, the day the Slessor prize was announced I went into Dymock's largest Sydney shop. Poetry is now in the education section (not downstairs with fiction or Australian writing, oh no). I asked for two of the other books in the shortlist. The manager of the education section said that because they were published by presses she did not know (the ones who publish most new poetry) she had no intention of ordering or stocking them or even looking them up. As for my book, although it had just won the prize, she did not want me to sign any copies in case they needed to return them. I had naively expected to find copies of all the books in the shortlists (announced a month before) on a display somewhere near the front of the shop, even the poetry.

Unpublicized or not, many of the poets who represent contemporary Australia are urban, as are most Australians, and most of these poets belong to the modernist tradition that Max Harris was a champion of. Although he lost the Ern Malley battle, when you look at the development of Australian poetry in this century, you could say that Max Harris won the war. Consider this poem, 'Leavis at the London', by John Tranter:

You need the money – your way of thinking's
going out of fashion, and you're growing old.
You need the make-up, and you need
the wake-up pills before the bombing run;
the flak is active tonight, you need
a glass of something sparkling and a deep
breath before you're ready for the fray.
On your way to the affair in the back seat
of a taxi you catch a face in the mirror –
bandages and a black eye, is that really
you? It's not Humphrey Bogart – you
should have gone to Acapulco like
mother said, but no, you had to take
the youth cure, then the bandage
loops across the screen spelling out
'Mad Dog' and you guess it's true.

Like A.D. Hope, John Tranter does yearn in Australia for a more metropolitan existence, but for Tranter this is a trans-Pacific one. For Tranter and other poets, such as the younger Ken Bolton, the metropolis is New York, not Augustus' Rome. If the real for Hope and Co. is defined by the schoolroom, the real for many contemporary Australians is defined by the movies. While Tranter's poem (like Hope's) does betray a longing to be somewhere else, the poem is genuinely witty, and this yearning is treated ironically, a desire for nothing more than "breakfast on the terrace with the Krazy Kats". Tranter's absent real is scrutinized and criticized. It too has its failings, "The shark pool looks inviting". Without this ironic scrutiny, which takes advantage of the Australian position, of being the outsider, wit is impossible.

Another way of dealing with the problem of being in Australia but wanting (not necessarily really) to be somewhere else, the problem of the 'cultural cringe' that in different ways Hope and Les Murray have given in to, is to act as if you are in the metropolis, to remake where you are (in Ken Bolton's case Adelaide) over in the guise of, say, New York, as in 'Criticism':

One of the few pictures
here

that speaks to the 20th century
which in some ways admittedly

I don't inhabit – I live
in the bits that interest me

& I do it right here & now
the way some people you see

drive through the traffic
eyes in the rear view mirror,

Mozart,
or Brecht or Weill, or Copeland,

on the stereo,

suddenly they look up to see
a car from the 20s (!) say,

exactly the era
from which this painting addresses me!

in some ways, in the traffic,

in other ways I address it,
from a 'mental space' now, oddly,

that resembles the set
from One From the Heart,

itself a nostalgic movie

If what this poem surrounds itself with, the sophisticated art and the criticism, is not really New York, it is like it. And it is not really Adelaide, but inside Bolton's sophisticated head. But Adelaide is not despised, or despised and promoted at the same time.

However, for Australian writers there are alternatives to the positions I have outlined, what I might call the 'currency alternatives'. 'Currency lads and lasses' was what we called the first young white people who were born in Australia, many of them the children of people who had been convicts. They had no desire to live elsewhere. The 'currency' writers are those, also in the modernist tradition, who celebrate, critically, ironically but affectionately, the here and now of Australian life. This group has produced the most varied and the most innovative writing. Bolton's work also belongs here; in fact his main criticism of Murray's poetry is that hectoring the reader is not ironic, not witty, not modest, not currency:

Les assured us the Country was
'more Australian'.

It was different. I could see that.

So I could see how it
might be 'better'.

– Well, actually, I couldn't,
but I could see
that someone might say it.
Though, really, I wished they wouldn't.

from Lecture (Part one): *Untimely Meditations*

Not surprisingly, the poets who seem to be behind those who now represent urban Australia's multicoloured multivoiced people, were women. Conservative Australia does not treat women very well. To this day a woman who lives in a country town, if she wishes to be upwardly mobile, has to leave (see *Man's Town,* Ken Stewart). The issues raised in the work of both Judith Wright and Gwen Harwood, the Australian surround, whether rural or urban, as home, for better or worse, as worth preserving, the rights of Australia's various inhabitants, indigenous people, women, minorities, are things the group I will call (tentatively) 'currency' poets continue to be concerned about. In 'Lecture (Part two)' in *Untimely Meditations,* Bolton continues:

whether they want distant hills, innocent muzak,

or the counter myths of Australianness and nation.

The empty landscape, I can't help thinking, bears
some relation to strike breaking, shooting people,
the police,
legislation against assembly,

impatience and disdain.

The location of the mainstream of contemporary Australian poetry is, as it should be, not the empty or even haunted outback landscape of myth, but the cities where almost all of us live. Joanne Burns is a writer whose criticism of the denizens of suburban Australia can be as ferocious as that of Patrick White, but as in the work of Judith Wright, the fierceness of the criticism is related to the affection in which these characters are also held, for example in this short prose poem, 'chocolate' from her book, *blowing bubbles in the 7th lane*:

people get thirstier than you understand. when it is time to go your hands reach out to your shopping bag as if it is an old friend. the love in your long firm hands enters me as i recall the hours i watched you cut up tiny pieces of coloured paper to make mosaics years ago. you had all the time in the world. when you left that autumn for the north you carried it away warm in your orange and yellow shopping bag reserving it for the future.

Another of these prose poems or 'small stories', 'accessories', takes up those issues introduced into the poetic ethos by, among others, Judith Wright; rapacious accumulation, the thoughtless destruction of the environment by capitalism:

> *a friend, George, gave me some pieces of what looked like glass and i had them made up into this necklace at the jewellers. George said the glass came from the test site of the first atom bomb. you know, THE bomb. way back in the forties. apparently the stuff the necklace is made of is called trinitite, after trinity, the name of the site. such a cute name.*

In the work of Ken Bolton and Joanne Burns generally deep feeling is elided. It is there, but it is kept at a distance by irony and the work of both writers is often genuinely comic (rare and precious in poetry where too much mediocre writing is remorselessly self-regarding). Also, one of the limiting parameters of the currency tradition is that one must not whinge. So love, the end of the world as we know it, injustice, oppression are things Australian writers, coming from the most stiff-upper-lipped society in the world, can't speak of directly. For us, that can only be something one gets away with. Pam Brown whose poetic voice is sceptical, anxious, jokey, certainly currency, manages to get away with it quite often, as in this poem, 'In the Dark'(the title of which is of course a pun):

> *everything worth saying*
> *is silenced and after that*
> *you sit by yourself everywhere*
> *and you miss the connection*
> *for dinner with the one*
> *who talks endlessly about himself*
> *like a novelist on a grant*
> *all the abandoned children*
> *are there in the dark and little*
> *brown cockroaches are crawling*
> *through their bookshelves*
> *they have thrown away the baygon*
> *because of ozone depletion*
> *all the abandoned children*
> *behaving like telephones*
> *waiting in perpetual availability*
> *"It's interesting," they say,*
> *"those coins cost more to make*
> *than they are worth."*

In 'Anzac Day' (see *overland* 150), a poem that could have been written for a paper on the currency voice, the late John Forbes tried to define out of the mixture of cultures that now makes up Australia, and the mixture that impacts on us through the global media, what strand of history is the currency one, the native born. In doing this, unlike Murray, he does not reject the others, or opt for a definition of Australian behaviour which is degraded but which he defends because it is Australian. The poem is ironic; what Forbes saw as our contribution to humanity are the working-class institutions and the conditions these institutions achieved, which have been all but lost.

The Australians that writers have to represent include people from many different places, immigrants or the children of immigrants, now not only the original English and Irish, or the different groups evading fascism or persecution, but people who came from Europe after the Second World War, and now, after the repeal of the White Australia Policy, people from the Pacific, from Africa, from Asia. If we as writers are to represent them, that is, to truly represent ourselves, they must have a voice that is audible in our writing, or our writing must give them the space in which to have a voice. As a result of their own great and militant efforts, Aboriginal people are no longer excluded from the literary world, but immigrants who don't speak standard English still are.

Theirs are now the voices you hear on Australia's streets. However, the various traditions of Australian writing have not provided a space for them. Even after the mass immigration of the forties and fifties, established writers such as Hope and McAuley still wrote as if they had never met an immigrant in their lives, and the next generation of modernists have paid them scant attention, even when, like myself, we are the children of the same. However, one poet, probably the most innovative of this group, π.o., of Greek parents, has dedicated his writing career to single-handedly introducing the many voices of Australia's real population into the so-far heavily defended field of literature, not to "purify the dialect of the tribe" but to give the tribe a say in the matter. The voices in his work are the voices of the community of Fitzroy, an inner city suburb of Melbourne.

Their voices and the politics of their position are homologous. In Australia non-standard English means discrimination, as this poem from his 1978 book *Panash* shows:

> *Pita! yoo rayt leta!*
>
> *the akchell rock hit me was the size of*
> *evrij pilow (apox 40/50lb).*
> *the walls whor saif. w-hay? it hepen, i do not know.*

thet was up to the pepol abav me.

i was drilling whit my machin.
the rock hit my halmat and giv me conchshn,
and i hev 2 to 3 tayms a wek sever hadaks.

i wen to fissioterapiss, 7 munts
bicoss i was paralaiss
and my lef ensait is very wek.

hey mus giv me compensation, Pita.

rayt letta, big lettas, a?

law institoon.
dear sir, i steven petdro wod lake to know
of my case wat happen bicoss is

sach long time. i have to cut of my penticion
to pay the bills for the doctor and
all addar expenses.

Here you can see clearly how Steven Petdro's inability to speak or write standard English is going to make it impossible for him to get the compensation he is legally entitled to. The language is the problem. But the patience and fortitude of the worker is also in this language. The language is also the person. π.o.'s writing is both politically committed and generously humane. The inclusiveness of the language, in which no voice is rejected, is also an inclusiveness of people. No speaker is rejected.

The gain with π.o.'s break from tradition, the classic modernist project, a new language for new circumstances, strenuously and single-mindedly pursued, is the liberation of language. π.o. began, as did Burns, Forbes and Bolton, with his own speaking voice, but made a radical shift to include and give speech to the normally excluded, in Australia, a linguistic category. That is, in Australia the subaltern speaks non-standard English. The price π.o. is in danger of paying is to be misunderstood.

π.o.'s most recent book, *24 Hours*, is a masterpiece. Its demotic includes transcribed Greek (of course), but as with *Finnegans Wake* (and unlike that, *24 Hours* is not syntactically or semantically obscure) the secret is in the sound. In his keynote address to the Soundings conference in 1998, π.o. ended with a reminder of the primacy of sound in his work. *24 Hours* moves forward as a musical composition. π.o.'s poetic ear has always been the most delicate, as in this early poem, 'Colour T.V.', about his mother (in his own voice):

3 times a day
she listens & talks
to the newsmen

lie-er. *lie-er.* *my choolden*
got life
you can
do dat
you.
yes.

she grows fat.
talking to the colour t.v. set
accusing & cursing

she tells me, she refuses to vote.
– i agree.

In *24 Hours* this delicacy of aural texture, and of musical flow is combined with all the Englishes of the people who make up Fitzroy, 'THE STREET OF A 1,000 CAFES', including π.o.'s own recognizable standard English, to take the reader on a trip through urban Australian life which is violent, brutal, horrifying, funny and beautiful, and which is of course conscious of its relation to Joyce's *Ulysses* (including the placing of the most hallucinatory and erotic events near the end). What can I say? It can stand the comparison, apparently without effort.

However, although one aim of π.o.'s project is to include the immigrant Australian in Australian literature, the Steven Petdros of this world often cannot read English. As a poet π.o. is committed to performance, to street poetry, to broadsheets, to cheap poetry magazines (such as the unforgettable *925* which was distributed free, and published any poem about work, with the proviso that quality could be achieved by working on the poem). If anyone can get his writing to its audience, π.o. can.

In Australia at present, and in the world's view of Australia, Murray, the conservative, is very well known, but most poets are in Max Harris' modernist camp, not Hope's. A truer, final interpretation of the situation will place at the centre the poets who have kept the original currency promise, that this country belongs to those in its cafes, workplaces and streets, not to those who control its publishing and reviewing, not to the Packers and Murdochs.

Lee Cataldi's Race Against Time *won the 1999 NSW Premier's Literary Award for Poetry. She lives near Adelaide.*

Π.O.

AMERICA

In 1985, 4 poets did a 16 city tour of the United States of America. I was one of them. This poem was the build-up in anticipation of my first trip outside Australia since arriving here as a child from Greece.

The thing that worries me most
about America is . . . just how much bullshit can it take?!
I mean: What's BULLSHIT?!
What constitutes BULLSHIT?!
I mean: If i'm bullshitting around and
somebody doesn't like it are they going to pull out a gun
and just BLOW ME AWAY?!
I mean: How far's too far?!
But Thalia [my sister] isn't worried about me
getting bashed-up or anything, cos she reckons i've got
a flat-nose like a Boxer's!; She's more worried
about me catching AIDS or something she sez [cos i tend to catch
whatever's going] [whatever's on the market at the time
:Gonorrhea, Crabs, Syphilis . . .]

*

People are curious about my trip [to the States]: Me too!

*

We *here* [in
Australia] joke about how
we're supposed to be the 51st State of America [or should be] but
it isn't a joke really! — When i get over there
i'm going to tell them we "dub" the movies [coming out
of Hollywood] cos they *talk* funny!

BAD NEWS: Uncle Sam doesn't like me!
The Australian dollar is dropping against the US dollar
and a woman in Europe [on
holidays] was raped and had her throat cut!
Are they allowed to do that to Tourists?????!
That's it! NO FUCKING!
I don't care how beautiful their women are!
N O F U C K I N G W A Y!
AIDS is everywhere! Even under the bed!
Will i be reading
to the blue-rinse ladies [or] the toupee set?

Hope not! *[Just remember:*
There's no such thing as a good American.
They're all CIA! [Aren't they?].]
AMERICA: Don't touch!
Keep Out! Wrong way! Leave Australia [and New
Zealand] alone! If you want me . . . raise the value of
the Australian dollar, or i won't be able to come!
AMERICA: I'm arranging [and
re-arranging] my poems for you! I hope your hotels
are cheap & your "ears" open!
AMERICA: I'm an ANARCHIST!
Will i have to drink Coca Cola? like they do in Asia
cos they can't trust the water?!
AMERICA: Is there really a lot of SMOG in L.A.?
[I can't believe it!; I'm walking around Melbourne
telling everyone i'm going to the heart of the Empire!]
AMERICA: I want to have FUN
when i get over there, so don't act like you don't care.
AMERICA: I suspect
we're not all that different. Am i right?????
AMERICA: I'm not really BLACK!
Do you like ETHNICS?
AMERICA: I hope all your poets love talking;
Have they heard of Mayakovsky? Yannis Ritsos? Peter Handke?
AMERICA: Take a deep "sigh"
of relief — I'm coming! and I'm going to be reading [in
Hawaii] but i'm not going to buy one of those
stupid T-shirts – Promise!
AMERICA! AMERICA!
You're becoming a boring refrain — WAKE-UP! —
and don't declare WAR on New Zealand [or
Australia] [for God's sake] until i get back!
AMERICA: I've got visions of PIGS at the airport
and PIGS on the street!!

*

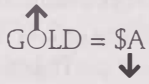
I went to the Post Office [the other
day] and got myself an application for a PASSPORT.
I filled it out: Name, Age, Date Of Birth,
Height, Weight, and handed it back to the bloke [behind
the counter]; under "complexion" i'd written "white-ish"!
. . . . . The bloke, had a look
and asked me for some kind of Identification.
I told him: I was against Identification.
He asked me for my Driver's License.
I told him, i didn't drive [and i don't have "plastic-money"].

He asked me for my Medicare Card.
I told him, i didn't have one!
He said: But everyone's got one!!
Well, i don't!, i said
all i've got is my R.M.I.T. card [Expired '73]
but . . . it does have a photo of me, and signature
and the photo DOES look like me.
/
Ok!!!! [Thank God!]
[Alright!] [At last!] -BANG!- -THUMP!-
STAMP!
That'll be. . . $30!
I crossed my fingers and hoped
it'd be ok! — I got Ken Hubbard [a mate of mine] [who
works for the Railways] and Ben Reid [my boss
at work] to counter-sign my Passport [cos he's
in the Liberal Party] so i don't suspect i'll be knocked back.
Or at least . . . that's what i thought
until i consulted my desk-calendar [at work] which said
there's . . . an old Persian saying: "The arrow that has
left the bow never returns" —*Christ No!!*—
When i told the Tour Organizer
she said NO SWEAT [cos she'd already met and talked with
the American cultural attaché, and so long as i didn't say i was
an "Anarchist" or something stupid like that
he was willing to send in a covering letter of support].
[He said, they had to be
careful about who they let in nowadays, on account of
all the people in Latin America wanting to get in.] [I told her
to tell him, I already come from a land of "milk'n'honey".
I DON'T WANT TO STAY!]

MORE BAD NEWS:
The Australian dollar has dropped to an all time low
against the US Dollar [from 67.45c to 64.1], and against
our other Trading Partners, just as much!; [and
all the Analysts are predicting, the dollar
could drop even *lower!!!!!!!!*] — **Fuck No!!!**—
I can't believe i'm looking at
all these decimal-points! [Every time i see someone
they tell me i'll have a GREAT time; Only. . . . I CAN'T SEE HOW!
One more blip [left or right
of the decimal-point] and i'm FUCKED!]
Have you ever noticed
how the American Dollar doesn't ever really get sick like

the Australian dollar does?; Surrounded by Surgeons
taking its Temperature, Pulse, and
Blood-pressure every 15 minutes?? while [every once in a while]
someone administers a bit of mouth-to-mouth
or Oxygen to it [as the need
arises], while it just sits back coughing'n'spluttering
at everything that can and does go wrong??!

But . . . you know what
really floored me????? This "ad":-



i.e. an equation of sorts,
showing the Australian dollar "falling"
as the price of GOLD [Christ no!]
goes thru the roof!

AMERICA: What happens if it isn't any fun???!
If everyone's armed to the teeth and killing each other?
:there goes Disneyland!
:there goes the Statue of Liberty
:there goes the Eiffel Tower!

AMERIKKA! Eye dig-Ya Blaak poets m———— ow!!!!

*

The other night Karen and i
went over to a friend's place, and they told me
all these HORROR stories about
going to New York; Stories about, getting stuck in an elevator
with 2 men [heading down towards
the basement] while they argued over who was
going to rape you 1st!

And i got some free advice,
about not going down 42nd St,
110, 3rd Avenue, 93rd & 2nd , 84th St, 98th and 11th
and about how the "dope" there was *really* **really** strong!

The other day [at
the Dentist] while i was waiting, i read
in TIME how the Melaleuca was introduced into Florida in 1906
by John Gifford, FROM AUSTRALIA and about how
it was responsible for strangling all the native vegetation.

I sure hope they
don't declare War on us [until i get back!].

[[[[[[Fu'k!!!!!]]]]]]] SHOCK HORROR EXPOSE!
I just had a thought!
What if
the fleas in New York
transmit
the AIDS virus?
cos i've got absolutely
no resistance to fleas; One bite and i *boil over*
SOMEBODY! Quick! Vaccinate me!

*

6 to 8 weeks to BLAST OFF!
I leave on the 10th.
My passport arrived in the mail
confirming i'm . . . "rijidij" i.e. AUSTRALIAN!
I told Charlie and Manni [the 2 Murris] next door
that i was more Australian than they were, cos
i had a piece of paper that said so!
We all then looked thru the envelope i got
and on the back [of the Passport] the Government
had written [a blood-curdling message]:
WARNING! DRUG USE
AND DRUG TRAFFICKING CAN LEAD
TO THE DEATH PENALTY OR LIFE IMPRISONMENT
IN SOME COUNTRIES, and as if to
underline the point i read [a couple of days
later] an article, about an Australian in Asia who was
sentenced to death for drug-trafficking.
The article said: As the plane is about to descend, the voice
of the Singapore Airline Hostess *puns*
over the p.a.: BE WARNED!
Death for drug-traffickers under Malaysian Law
and to make extra-sure it's *repeated* [in BLOOD-RED
BLOCK LETTERS] on the wall, just outside the transit lounge.
I promise! Strike me purple!
It's cold-turkey! *Not even so much as a "joint" till Christmas!*
I don't want no Customs Man [taking a urine-sample off me
just cos i l"o"-"o"k stoned!]
But the envelope [in which
i found my Passport] had something in it, that was
even more sinister, a pamphlet [from the Australian
Tourist Commission] entitled: MAKING FRIENDS
FOR AUSTRALIA; trying to encourage Australians [travelling

overseas] to behave as Ambassadors
for Australia [which
"shouldn't be all that difficult" it said "as
most Australians [naturally] talk about
their own country, in the fondest of terms"]; and
to help me to help *them* [to help "us"] it listed all the things
i could tell the Americans about
e.g., the kind of facts one absolutely [[[[[[[[[[needs]]]]]]]]]] to know
like — that there are 136 million sheep in Australia
and 95 million head of cattle; And
to that touchy Question about our 1.2% of the population
that just happens to be BLACK i was to say [assuming
anyone was listening] that the "transition
from Tribal past to political
and social equality was accelerating".

The pamphlet then went on to say,
that i shouldn't forget to tell everyone, all about our
other great traditions, like ANZAC DAY
and that familiar "slouch-hat" [worn by the Diggers
in WORLD WAR I and II], and not to be afraid to talk about
Olivia Newton-John, The Little River Band
and Air Supply; [Lots!!!!] And to remind them
that in 1988 [to commemorate the attempted genocide
of a whole people] we'd be throwing a party
and that there'd be a special plate on our table
for them, if they happened to walk in.
And -*Yes!*- they could come and see [or cuddle!] a koala
if they wanted, or "pat" a kangaroo [at Brisbane's Lone Pine
sanctuary]. And -Yes!- we did and do speak English
only . . . they may need a translator
for some of our more *colourful* sayings; And . . . as for
our "mineral" wealth . . . . [Well!] [what can
you say] except that Australia is an "Aladdin's cave"
of coal, bauxite, mineral sands, manganese,
and -Yes!- Uranium!

And to HELP ME [to help
them] [to help AUSTRALIA] at the back of the pamphlet
was a number of coupons which [it said] i could just "——:tear
off" and mail back to Australia with
all the names and addresses of all those Americans interested
in coming out here.

[I don't think i can go on with all this BULLSHIT!]
AMERICA! I've got nothing to say!

Find out yourself!

*

At work this bloke: Ted Guggenheim
was caught with his hand in the till; He *allegedly*
doctored Office documents, and set about selling them
down at the pub, so when everyone at work
found out, that the trip i was going on
was being sponsored by the Literature Board
and the Guggenheim Foundation [in N.Y.] they began
to suspect i was in on the scam; Graham Carter [my Boss]
told me it was all "blood-money", and 2 days later [by way
of proof] came up with a photocopy [out of one of his
encyclopedias] about this "Guggenheim".

It said: He was a Jew who
migrated to the States from Switzerland in 1847
and made a fortune, out of "mining";
with interests in copper, gold [in Alaska], tin [in Bolivia], and
diamond mines [in South Africa].
It said, he sired 7 children, and that it was his 4th son: Solomon
who set-up the Foundation
so what's a nice Anarchist Greek Poet like me
doing [going to the States] — on Guggenheim money????
FUCK KNOWS!!!!! [Stay tuned] I DENOUNCE ME!

[Or as John Berryman [the
poet] said [in a poem]: "*WE HATE ME*"]

When i told Jas about it
he said it was a 2-prong problem: If you . . . . *don't* <u>make</u> it
all you're doing is catering to an elite i.e. bohemians . . .etc,
and if *do* then you've SOLD OUT! — Damned if you do
and damned if you don't!

AMERICA: You're becoming a headache!
Graham Parker [another
friend of mine] bought me 2 tickets
to the Bruce Springsteen concert [in Melbourne]
cos he couldn't go, so Karen and i went;
She had a bad-back [at
the time] so we stayed on the sidelines;

The whole stage was decked-out in the Stars
and Stripes, and it looked like FLAG DAY [outside all
the junk-food shops].

I hadn't quite realized it before [until
then] but Ronald Reagan may have sent Bruce + the Boys over
to <u>placate</u> us [over New Zealand's anti-Uranium policy
and our resistance to the MX missile project] -Who knows?!-
I wouldn't put it past him!

[Anyway] all the men [in the audience]
were doing the best they could by their girlfriends [like they do

in the States] by putting them on their shoulders
to give 'em a better look, and it looked great!
And they had a huge video-screen hooked-up
to a couple of pterodactyls [just above the main stage] and from
where we were, we could see all the pipe-work
and scaffolding on the twin-towers [that housed
a couple of large speakers] that blared-out all the songs.
As Bruce + the Boys
belted out the numbers, the people in the audience
began linking arms and in no time
they had formed a Chinese dragon [that cut thru the crowd
like a knife], while others formed large "circles"
that looked like patches of fungus under a microscope.
Bruce Springsteen + the Boys [of
course] were great! i.e. lots of energy etc . . . only, he was
very pro-American-Vietnam Vet and all the booths
were selling Bruce Springsteen AUSTRALIAN TOUR T-shirts
with the *American* flag on it
for $18!!!!!! e@ch.
AMERICA: Stop flogging a dead horse
and admit you're wrong! — You're starting to give me the shits —

About a month later
i met a Canadian tourist [at Cliff Smyth's]
I read him some poems and he told me i'll go down well.
He said, Americans just love Australians!
We were "Flavour of the month"!
He said, they looked on us, like "innocents"!
As part of the "Last Frontier" [in fact] ✓ and that, even
the Canadian Prime Minister
wanted to be American, it was that good
and *Yes* there <u>were</u> GOOD Americans
and even good American Customs Men -Wow!!!-
AMERICA: Will i meet Bob Dylan??
Or Cyndi Lauper????
We're pretty much Americanized here already,
but i'm sure, with a bit of effort we could do even better!

ADVICE:
When walking in N.Y. walk like you know where you're going!

AMERICA: I'm pretty fast
on my feet [already] and if you hype-me-up anymore
i'm certain i'll self-destruct.
– – – – – – – – – – – – – –

I'm . . . out of sync with everything
and it's affecting me: I had a talk with Karen last night
and she told me i was going too fast! — This trip, she said
hasn't got anything to do with anybody else, but me
and to "ease-up" -I'm up myself!-

AMERICA: I know i'm becoming unbearable but i can't help it!

I was watching the LOGIES [on TV the other
night] and Larry Hagman from "Dallas"
came up on the screen [cos he was the overseas Guest
that year]; he came on wearing one of those
50 gallon cowboy hats and everybody [in
Australia] started clapping! -I couldn't believe it!-
He walked on, gave us one of those *Hhowwdee* [full-set-
of-teeth] looks and lifted-up his hat, that had
100s and 1,000s of $$$s in it, that fell out
like it was autumn. -It really was "Banana Republic" stuff!-
And Greg Evans [from "Perfect
Match"] who was compering the LOGIES that night
suggested he might want to swap it for an akubra [cos it was
ANZAC DAY] and Larry [graciously] obliged
by putting it on for the cameras [and the TV audience
at home] slouch'n'all!
I felt *embarrassed* for Australia that night!

D-Day

Karen's sacrificing a lot for me lately;
In fact, everyone has!
She's gone over to Pam's place
cos she got the flu and didn't want to give it to me.
The Father has been really good [too]
about the Mother [re: domestics, etc] making meals
and even ....,,,,,,,,,, sweeping the floors; He wants me to
feel relaxed about going, i think.
I'm abit worried about Athena tho . . . . .
I think she'll be putting abit of pressure on Thalia -Not sure!-
Thalia is doing heaps [of
course] without complaining which is hard for her.
Thanks Thalia! If i don't get back sell the diary,
and make millions!

Sarah Attfield

Working Class Heroes?

Les Murray vs π.o.

How does a poet who denies the existence of politically defined class divisions become the representative poet of the working class? Ask the mainstream literary establishment who seem to have played a large part in elevating Les Murray into his current monopoly on poetry written about Australian working people. Although Murray agrees that there are divisions within society, he mainly attributes them to the gap between the academic, intellectual "cabal"[1] and the wider Australian community, suggesting that "the educated elite in Australia hates the ordinary people".[2] Murray prefers to avoid terms such as 'class' and has stated that class rhetoric is based on "Marxist fantasies"[3] constructed by troublesome left-wing intellectuals "recruiting people to their purposes"[4] although he has referred to himself as belonging to a "relegated class".[5] Murray's public statements on class therefore conflict with his position as producer of 'authentic' working people's poetry and there is cause for concern when poetry that does not fit the Murray blueprint is ignored or dismissed as unsophisticated, non-literary or political propaganda. Murray's insistence on calling himself a "bard",[6] on a mission to reach 'ordinary' Australians with poetry that is both authentic and accessible has been embraced by the mainstream to the exclusion of many other poets.

The lack of analysis of Australian working-class poetry can be explained by the version of the working class that has been accepted by the mainstream. The romantic, individualistic and fragmented working class as portrayed by Murray, devoid of any suggestion of collective action, has created a comfortable view for middle-class readers that would probably not convince many working-class readers. The exclusionary environment that rejects working-class poets such as π.o. avoids the often confronting reality of working-class life in Australia's urban centres and denies the existence of a class divide in this 'equitable' nation.

This argument can be illustrated by comparing the work of Murray and π.o. with specific reference to Murray's *Fredy Neptune*,[7] and π.o.'s *24 Hours*,[8] both of which are epic works dealing with the lives of working-class characters. In *Fredy Neptune* Murray appears to have reverted to the fabricated 'glory days' of the bushman and Anzac soldier: the myth of the heroic rural man is alive in the stanzas of *Fredy Neptune*, and its hero is the archetypal rural superman. Murray invests his character Fredy with mythic qualities of super strength and indisputable integrity. Fredy is the ultimate working-class superhero, and his travels around the globe seem to serve as a means of forging Australian identity. Fredy can be viewed as an exemplification of the working class and it is interesting to consider the degree to which Murray's ideological standpoint is evident in his treatment of the character and whether he manages to accurately capture the experiences of working people.

Murray believes that he has a responsibility to bring poetry to those who are not adequately represented, those who are dispossessed from the urban cultural centre.[9] Murray refers to an era when poetry was "genuinely loved by people who had no formal education at all"[10] but laments the modern "elite takeover"[11] which has lead to a situation where "only certain privileged places are regarded as the centre".[12] For Murray, the key to creating poetry that speaks for the people is found in the use of the vernacular.[13] The language of *Fredy Neptune* demonstrates how effective Murray is in making the text accessible for 'ordinary' Australians. Murray has stated that he made a conscious decision to "avoid literary language altogether"[14] while writing the poem. He intended to "create a language of discovery and breakthrough"[15] because he believes that lit-

erary language operates as a controlling device to force the reader into only one way of experiencing a text.[16] Despite Murray's use of early twentieth-century slang and certain idiosyncrasies of Australian speech, the poem does not read as the first person narration of a working man; Fredy's idiom bears little relation to that of the working class. There are sections within the poem that despite their inclusion of Australian colloquialisms, are not as easily followed or understood as Murray would like to claim. This is especially noticeable when Fredy becomes philosophical about his numbing illness:

> *Neither warm nor cold, neither dead nor alive, I was king*
> *alike among the movers and the still;*
> *attacked on the one side of death, I could step through to the other.*
> *...So then I was king only*
> *while I couldn't rule. And where I couldn't live. Like anyone.*

This particular stanza may not contain highly elevated literary language, but neither is the use of language as simple as Murray suggests. It is unlikely that the diction of a rural working man would be so simply eloquent, and Murray does not illustrate the abruptness that often characterizes working-class speech. Language and reported speech in the poem seem to have been modified to suit Murray's overall style, which would not be problematic if Murray had not stated that he was trying to reproduce a working person's language.[17] The particular Australian slang and expressions that Murray uses in *Fredy Neptune* also appear to have been manipulated to suit the poem, and it becomes questionable whether Murray has in fact created his own version of working-class speech. Again this is only a problem in the light of Murray's claims to be presenting authentic working-class diction. Despite Murray's intention to challenge the literary canon,[18] it could be argued that by moulding the colloquial language to fit his poetic form, Murray is not allowing the language to operate on its own terms and is in fact channelling the working-class aspects of the language into a canonically literary system. As a result, it could be suggested that Murray fits into one of the categories that he claims to be against, that of the intellectual attempting to write for the people. In the process of writing he is then inventing a position for the working class that best serves the interests of the intellectual elite, rather than the subjects themselves.

It is difficult to believe that the labourers, sailors and soldiers that populate the work would speak as Murray presents. Even when Murray includes expletives and insults, there is a degree of poetic resonance to their use when read as part of an overall stanza:

> *Well, suddenly he got dubious about me:*
> *Why did you tell me you was from Dungog, you squarehead fucker?*
> *(Of course he swore. It's a man's sign of feeling cheated.)*

It seems strange that the narrator has to justify the swearing, as if it is unusual among such characters. This reveals a degree of over-sensitivity toward the working man's diction, suggesting that such language is only acceptable if used for a specific reason, but not as a general component of everyday speech.

The characterization of the poem's narrator, Fredy Boettcher, is also problematic as Murray uses the character to present a non-threatening working-class figure. Murray does not allow Fredy to align himself with any form of collective working-class power. Fredy is steadfastly individualistic, willing to engage in individual feats of bravery, but never to join a union or political party. In the poem, Murray treats union or party figures harshly, maintaining through their speech and actions some kind of devious ulterior motive behind their recruitment of new members. Murray denies Fredy the opportunity to ally himself with his fellow workers. Whenever Fredy meets representatives from unions or socialist parties, he discovers their less savoury side. Fredy manages to learn a union leader's true reasons for wanting him to join:

> *Defeat in New Guinea would discredit white colonialism –*
> *he started to interest himself, and forgot to pose. Coming on top*
> *of the Depression, it would discredit the ruling class at home.*
> *The people might feel emboldened to rise . . .*

Fredy's individualism adds to the non-threatening nature of his character; he will not use his Herculean strength against the institutions of the establishment because he has no political allegiances, and one man cannot change society. The fear of working-class collectivism appears evident and Murray offers a working-class 'hero' who will not have any influence over the struggles inherent in class conflict. The character

is therefore reassuring to bourgeois readers; his lack of commitment to any class-based cause undermines his apparent position as a representative of the wider working class.

Murray not only paints a romantic picture of the working class through the characterization of Fredy, but also excludes certain members of the working class, notably women. The main female character in the poem is Laura, Fredy's wife, and she serves as mother and waiting wife, but her struggle in raising children alone during wartime is not treated in any detail. Laura often appears as a victim, unable to continue with her own life when Fredy appears to abandon her: "She didn't believe it and clung to it. *You'll send for us. / Did I get ugly, this last twelve months, Fred? Did I?*"

For most of the poem, she is in the background waiting loyally for her missing husband, and ready to accept him on his return, with no indication that she may have evolved in the way he is supposed to have. Other working-class female characters are also not treated in any great depth, and they often exist as a means for Fredy's escape or comfort, in the role of nurse or confidante. The working women he meets are rarely challenging, and always accept Fredy on his terms. In this treatment of working-class women, it could be said that Murray is revealing his distrust of feminism, and appears to be demonstrating that working-class women are non-threatening because they have not taken up the ideals of left-wing feminists: "Emily Monroe was peaceful to be with./ . . . none of that big mauve Mystery/ some women go in for, to keep us off balance and belt high."

The absence of strong working-class women in the poem makes it difficult to accept the poem as an authentic account of working life. Although it should be possible for a poet from a non-working-class background to write effectively on the working class, and for a working-class story to be presented in a non-realist genre, Murray's treatment of his subject matter does not reveal a deep understanding of what it means to be a working-class person. Fredy Boettcher is not a believable working-class character, and his opinions and ideology appear to come directly from Murray; the poet, therefore, appears to be demonstrating his own agenda, which resists focusing on the reality of class conflict and ironically reflects Murray's insistence that ". . . when you go pretending to represent other people, if you are not *of* those people, you will get their life and their concerns wrong".[19]

It is possible to suggest that by using Fredy to give voice to his own beliefs, Murray is appropriating working-class experience and manipulating it to suit his intended treatment, a technique recognized by Marxists who state that the bourgeoisie have a tradition of making decisions on behalf of the working class.[20] Murray's poem appears to operate as evidence of this particular practice.

MELBOURNE POET π.O. provides a useful contrast to Murray's approach. π.O. explores themes common to many working-class people in Australia, such as unemployment, poverty, poor living conditions, and migrant experience; as well as the more positive aspects of life that appear in the sense of community often apparent in a predominantly working-class neighbourhood, while demonstrating an innovative and experimental style that is often considered absent from working-class poetry.

π.O.'s epic work *24 Hours* is indicative of his style and method, and the innovative nature of the poem illustrates the possibility that working-class writing can be more open to experimentation than much of that of the middle class.[21] A variety of experience is presented which refuses to correspond to any homogenous view of the working class. At the same time the poem recognizes the spirit of shared experience, and demonstrates that working-class consciousness is a combination of collectivism and individualism.[22] π.O. illustrates that often to survive in the modern world requires an inner strength equivalent to that of Fredy, but without the luxury of lucky escape that Fredy enjoys. π.O.'s characters are aware of their situation and each discovers his or her way of dealing with their circumstances; for some this leads to self-destruction but for others a sense of dignity in achievement prevails. Murray may consider himself a contemporary 'bard', but his poetry speaks *for* people rather than *to* them. For π.O., the characters and events he portrays are directly part of his environment and his poetry comes from the inside. In *24 Hours*, the reader dips in and out of characters' lives. The sensation is equivalent to listening to snatches of conversation while walking along the street; although each isolated fragment may not contain the usual logic of speech, when absorbed together they give the listener a method of accessing the atmosphere of the surroundings.

It is the language of *24 Hours* that creates the poetry, and the poem challenges the idea that working-class speech is "deviant"[23] or against the norm of so-called standard English. π.O. presents working-

class speech in the raw, including all the untidy idiosyncrasies, offering his own form of creative manipulation without appropriating the language as Murray does in *Fredy Neptune*. The rhythms and cadences within the characters' speech combine to form the basis of the poetry and an alternative version of English is presented. There is a new form of logic to the language, influenced by the migrants' native tongues and including speech patterns learnt from those sharing their environment, which in the case of *24 Hours* is the Fitzroy working class.

Iz HOT ewtsayt! the boss sez.
But iz good hee-a (aye)?
Eye, open dor . . .detz wai!
Yoo plai lus'-nayt . . . ?
N-o much! the bloke sez.

The environment has bred this distinctive manner of speaking, and those living in the area have the ability to understand the various versions of English used, while peppering their speech with their own specific variations. The authenticity of working-class speech is evident, as π.o. is not afraid to portray the coarseness of his characters' diction. Unlike Murray, π.o. does not present a diluted treatment of working-class language. The use of expletives is not limited, as to do so would be to deny an aspect of the characters' culture. As a result the language is extremely coarse, to the point of obscene in places. But π.o. is not acting gratuitously by including such speech, he is attempting to illustrate the poetry of the street and *kafenio* of this working-class suburb.

Cultural differences are apparent in the poem, but the characters appear to share a collective spirit indicative of the working class, and unlike Fredy Boettcher, they are willing to declare their allegiance when the cultural differences appear to be causing too much friction: "No mor POLITIKZ!!! / Wi ar Aastraaliaanz!" They also demonstrate this collectivism when faced by an external threat,[24] such as the police or racist and abusive 'Australians', and a sense of loyalty is evident.

In *Fredy Neptune*, Murray allows Fredy to move between classes effortlessly, and there are several references to people being essentially the same regardless of class. Although this may be true in individual cases, the reality of working-class life generally prevents this mobility, and the characters in π.o.'s world often demonstrate that outside their working-class circles, it is difficult to fit in. The reasons are purely cultural and not economic. As π.o. illustrates, having money does not immediately allow access into another class. Some young men in the poem discuss how they are made to feel when they visit an expensive restaurant. They have the means to pay for the meal, but they are obviously not welcome due to their appearance and 'rough' way of speaking: "The Waiter comes over / takes their orders, and looks 'down'/ his 'nose' (at 'em)". This is not untypical of how many working-class people feel if they attempt to cross the class divide.

π.o. never engages in a romanticized treatment of the working class and *24 Hours* is not populated with noble working-class heroes. He includes characters who represent the lowest and most desperate sections of the underclass, such as drug addicts, street walkers, hardened criminals, but does not glamourize their lives or give poverty and despair a 'picturesque' treatment. The reality is often stark and brutal, and demonstrates that existing within a culture of violence does not produce superheroes like Fredy, but will more likely lead to hardness and a degree of indifference towards victims.

Like *Fredy Neptune, 24 Hours* is a distinctly masculine world.[25] Women do feature in the poem, but often as the subject matter for men's stories, in which they are often described in a chauvinistic, macho fashion. The women are usually referred to as sexual conquests for the men: "A girl's gotta have abit of 'shoonka' / on her – something to, grab onto". It may be possible to criticize this treatment of women, but this sexist attitude is a common feature of working-class culture. π.o. is presenting the reality of life for many working-class women; the crudeness and vulgarity expressed by the men may appear shocking, but it is something that is unavoidable if the women enter the domain of *24 Hours*.

In the world of *Fredy Neptune*, the main female characters exist as nurturers or confidantes to Fredy, either as homemakers or sympathetic whores. They seem to accept their roles uncomplainingly. In *24 Hours*, the women's position is treated differently, as they are not content with their lifestyles, and often demonstrate the brutal reality of their lives through descriptions of domestic violence or experiences on the streets. Through π.o.'s filter, female characters are given a chance to tell their own stories and their desperation at their current situation is coupled with a sense of hope for the future. Again there is nothing romantic about the lives of the women and in many places in the poem their stories are extremely confronting, especially where the prostitutes discuss their

work. The opportunity to hear the women relate their own tales allows the women to maintain their dignity and their stories do not appear to be treated voyeuristically. This is another example of how in *24 Hours,* π.o. provides the reader with an insight into many aspects of working-class life, ranging from the brutal and extreme to the subtle expression of emotion while always presenting a picture of working-class experience that is uncompromizing and truthful.

Both Murray and π.o. claim to have an affinity with the vernacular of Australia. It can be argued, however that in his poetry Murray is manipulating the working classes to fit his personal ideology. In comparison with *24 Hours,* it is apparent that Murray will not acknowledge the political reality of the ongoing class division in Australia, and as a result contradicts his self-appointed position as cultural spokesman for 'ordinary' Australians and denies the need for collective action to bring about change.

Murray's canonization marginalizes poets such as π.o. who are attempting to write about working-class issues, experiences and people in a more direct form. This is not to say that a working-class writer must employ π.o.'s form or style, but it can be argued that it is necessary for a working-class writer to be connected with and have a deep understanding of her/his subject matter. It is possible to suggest that Murray's poetry further alienates the readers he claims to be reaching. In contrast, π.o.'s work demonstrates a commitment to and passion for his subject matter. π.o.'s work is not easy to read, but ultimately it could be said that the working-class reader is more likely to find something that s/he can identify with in *24 Hours,* than in *Fredy Neptune.* This has implications for the presentation and understanding of working-class poetry, and for the definitions of what exactly can qualify as working-class poetry. By accepting the poetry of writers such as π.o. in preference to Murray, it is possible that a marginalized group can be provided with the opportunity for expression and that their lives can be presented in all their diversity.

ENDNOTES

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4. Murray, *The Peasant Mandarin,* p. 150.
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14. Qtd in Michael Glover, '*Fredy Neptune* Review', *New Statesman,* vol. 127. no. 4396, 1996, p. 1.
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24. Ivor Indyk, '*24 Hours*', *Southerly,* vol. 55. no. 4, 1995, p. 67.
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Hotel Martello

Jefferson Kinsman

THE COPPERPLATE WRITING on the brass sign at reception reads: *The only thing we overlook is the park.* I like to point it out to my friends when they drop by on the way home from a gig. It always gives them a laugh. Not that I'm ever sure whether they're laughing at me or the sign.

There's no laughing at Hotel Martello tonight. The three o'clock break is still two graveyard hours away. There's a mountain of food and beverage receipts for me to audit. The problem is interruption. I keep having to stop for a couple of chubby jazzmen up on four who keep ringing down for room service. Whenever they want something, the cash drawer has to be locked, the spare change tin has to be locked, the back office has to be locked, and the shutter on the key rack has to be locked. Only then can I go hunting for whatever it is they've ordered – Strawberry mousse, Danish beer, Diet-Fanta. I never find exactly what they want, but they're always happy with what they get. Next time they ring I'll hit them with the number of the local pizza deliverer. I should have given it to them the first time they called. Room service crushes the marble of my twenty-year-old ego. It means going from night auditor to porter in four quick turns of a key and a rubbery mousse.

There goes another round of honking and whistling. It's Saturday night, and the park across the street is awash with petrol freaks. Bucket-seated gods cruise the bitumen in their chariots, their heads just peeping over their steering wheels, their brake lights flaring whenever a rank of girls approaches. Lesser mortals drift through the park on foot, sometimes resting at the brink of the cigarette-packet-eating fountain, or gathering below the love-heart-engraved trunks of the gum trees. There hasn't been any real dragging for several months now, not since a boy leaned out of a Gemini window and clashed heads with a parking meter. The council was quick to put in white speed humps, but the herds still roll in to graze on their own fumes.

A stationary engine detonates. Then it roars like a trapped beast. I don't know why I always wait for an incensed guest to phone down with a complaint before calling the police. It's thrilling to see the cowboy cops creeping up from Dunkley Street in their wagons, and the wild kids all funneling down like steers into the opposite corner of the park.

I'm thinking of my break again. The plan is to head out to the kitchen and cut a two-mill slice off the brie wheel. Two foot of two-mill slice adds up to a lot of cheese. I know it's pilfering. Maybe I do it because they pay me eleven seventy-two an hour to run this late-night show on my own, which is less than a friend of mine gets for standing in the mall throwing free vouchers for a pancake kitchen at people. Or maybe I nab the cheese because I have to do room service.

IT'S TED GRIMSHAW. His face is wine-purple. The caps of his nails are black. He likes to think he's special because he always asks me how things are going. He doesn't know about the white-suited Malaysian lawyer who slips me duty-free packets of Salim cigarettes whenever he's staying with us. But I shouldn't be too harsh on Ted. I mean, how many other guests care to ask me how things are hanging?

What am I saying? Of course I should be harsh on Ted! The only reason he plays 'mates' with me is to impress Cleopatra. She's waiting for him now, tight-jeaned and stilettoed, cooling under the sticky fronds of the lobby palm tree.

"How's it going, mate?"

"Not too bad, *mate*," I reply. "Same room as usual?"

"Nah. The elevator was driving me crackers. The girl gave me a different room this time. It's 233."

I unhook the key from the rack. I don't tell him

that 233 is only any good until the metropolitan fire brigade needs the help of the backup truck parked in the garage on the south side of the hotel.

"Wake-up call at quarter to ten?" I ask, already writing it into the book.

"What did you say check-out time was?"

"Ten."

"Yeah. Sweet. Thanks mate."

I'm only thinking of Lucy, who'll be in to take over from me when I finish at seven. She has a very private nervous breakdown whenever she has to remind a guest of house regulations.

The phone rings. An American is threatening to leave without paying unless I do something about *them Mung-loid azz-holes in the cars*. While he's berating me, I bring up his room registration on the computer. The status says $53, which is a low-rate travel package deal. This means he'd have to chase the travel company for his money, and not us. But even though I don't buy his bluff, I do apologize profusely and thank him for bringing the noise to my attention. I tell him that the police will be notified immediately. With his bird's-eye view of the roundup in the park, he'll get his fifty-three bucks' worth, no hassles.

I'm about to phone the police, when a woman's scream fills the lobby. Even though I've had plenty of practice when it comes to leaping the front desk and dashing to the elevator, I'm not quick enough this time to stop a boy in a pale blue polo-neck from sprinting out through the lobby doors. He's holding the front of his black jeans together as he runs.

"Pig! Pig! Pig!" yells Cleopatra.

I don't need to ask what happened, because I can smell the urine. A panpipes version of *California Dreamin'* is coming from inside the elevator.

"I can't believe it! He was pissing when the doors opened for us. Why didn't you grab him, Ted? Didn't you see that he was pissing?"

"Don't worry," I tell them. "He'll be one of the guests. We're pretty full tonight, so I won't be able to work out who he is. He knows I saw him. He won't have the guts to come back until after my shift is over. He'd have to ring the buzzer for me to open the doors for him."

Ted puffs himself up. He's a bull of a man. The fact that he's got a Woonoora West postcode under his registration in the computer somehow makes him even larger.

"If he does turn up, give me a call," he says. "I'll fuckin' pound the little piss-artist cunt."

When they've gone, I hop to it with three rolls of absorbent paper, a vase of water, and the carpet spray from the housekeeper's office. I blast away with the spray until only air is coming out of the loose nozzle. Personally, I think the spray smells worse than the piss.

IT'S ALWAYS A MISTAKE to hire the kid who comes in asking for a cleaning job so you'll sign his dole form. But to hire him as your part-time night manager and auditor, and then to think you won't need to train him to use your *Hostatron* computerized accounting system? Two or three times a night I get into trouble with the audit and have to phone up Angela, the woman paid by *Hostatron* to give round-the-clock advice to their clients. Mostly she's up feeding her baby, which only makes it worse for me if I actually do get her out of bed. The blunder I made with a data entry tonight was so bizarre that it's got her wading through manuals. She's told me she'll call me back when she works out how to fix it. So when the phone buzzes, I'm naturally expecting it to be Angela.

"Hotel Martello. How can I help you?"

"Hi. I was wondering if there is a Ted Grimshaw staying there. I'd like to talk to him."

Her voice is feeble, and her accent is broad. Being more accustomed to dealing with people who have the confidence of a Doberman at a front door, I am strangely aroused by her pitiful tone. She's got me wrapped around her little finger, which I suspect is a little finger, even for a little finger.

"Mr Grimshaw should still be awake," I say. "I'll put you straight through, right away. Just hold on for a minute."

Tap. Tap. Tap. The number 233 goes into the switchboard.

Then I stop breathing.

I've just broken the second rule for being a part-time night manager. The first rule is never phone the day manager.

In an act of desperation, I check the notice board next to the desk, the one the guests can't see. There it is, a piece of A4 with black texta words. It's always there when Ted's staying.

DO NOT INFORM ANYONE THAT MR GRIMSHAW IS STAYING AT THE HOTEL

Lucy has underlined the word 'not' so many times that the texta started to run out for the last couple of lines.

IT'S BEEN ANOTHER TOUGH WEEK up in Woonoora West, with rivers of heat meandering across the plains, and gusts of wind bringing sheets of hot-iron

sky crashing to earth. Ted Grimshaw's forehead reddens like his paddocks. The more the original spirit of the land thrives in the heat, the more Ted's control over it chokes and wanes. When he gets home from another day of shooting and burying sheep, his little boy, the one dancing impishly in the cat-shit-filled sandpit beneath the Acacias, mirrors his own insanity. He would like his son to come running to him. He watches as the boy, who ignores him, picks up one of the four-week-old puppies from the sand, swings it around windmill style by its tail, lets it go, and squats down in respect for its pain when, upon hitting the side of the tin garage, it releases a decrescendo of squeaks.

It's Saturday evening. Ted is showered and changed. He sits in the Toyota in the oily shadows of the garage, lighting the last match in the box of Redheads. The last match in the box lights the last cigarette in the packet. When the cigarette is wedged between the hard spots on his lips, he leans forward and turns the key in the ignition. Suddenly everything comes to life like a disco. "Shit! Shit!" His wife, Valerie, who was the last to drive the car, has left the radio on at full volume. In his attempt to turn it off, Ted punches the radio dial so hard that the hazard lights come on. He throws a second punch, thereby restoring darkness and peace. He smokes the cigarette, then starts up the car when it's done. The hum of the engine has convinced him that all is well under the hood. He reverses out into the clean flames of dusk, thinking how good it will feel to drop south beneath the hot wind and the flatness, and then further south through the welt of hills, before shooting on towards the cold fairyland lights of the city.

Ted might be restless, but Valerie's strength is her patience. She knows she will get to the bottom of things if she waits long enough. She knows she will catch out the man she loves.

The advertisement for Hotel Martello doesn't hit the country television screens until after midnight. For three months, it's been flogging half-price rooms to people in rural areas who quote it when making a reservation. Tonight it comes on immediately after a phone-sex advertisement. Valerie, who is sitting up in bed, finally twigs. Her hand falls like a meteor to the phone on the bedside table. But the meteor goes cold. What will she say to him? Ted's sure to make up some excuse about how bloody Barry, the friend he is purportedly visiting, wasn't home, about how he is too bushed to tackle the two-hour drive back to Woonoora West.

Bold red numbers flash across the television screen. Valerie finds something extra. She picks up the phone and dials. She knows she's shaking like the old bitch Blackie does when she's about to drop her pups. And even if Ted is staying at Hotel Martello, she doubts that the people at reception will be very helpful.

IT'S THREE O'CLOCK, the modern version of midnight. The world has stopped and the pumpkins in the hotted-up cars have vanished. Even the computer shuts down while the system does a fifteen-minute backup of the previous day's records. It's computer dreaming. And it's like I'm the only one or thing in the universe that doesn't need to do a backup of their life's daily episodes. Instead, I slink out to the kitchen, slice a two-millimetre cross-section off the wheel of Tasmanian double brie, flush a coke with too much syrup and no fizz from the bar tap, and head back to the lobby. I take the only unstained armchair in the place, the least noticeable one, which also happens to have a faultless view of each of my three major concerns: the reception desk, the elevator, and the lobby doors.

Things are back on track. Angela sorted out my computer blunder and the day's receipts have all been processed. I get out a menthol Salim and place it in the glass ashtray on the table in front of me. My mind is a bird in a jar. Through the smudged lobby window I can just make out some of the brighter stars. A lone cab cruises past the hotel. It's a shark searching for prey.

The elevator doors start to roll. An orchestral version of *I was made for loving you baby* starts up. Out steps Cleopatra. She catwalks over to the counter at reception and slaps down hard on the silver bell. When nobody appears, she leans over the counter so that she can see around into my office. She knows what hotels are about. I wait until she's given up on me and is out in the street before I light my Salim.

Halfway through my break, the phone rings. It's Ted wanting to cancel his wake-up call at quarter to ten. He says he wants two continentals sent up at eight, plus one kid's breakfast. I was expecting him to sound like a man who's just blown a head gasket; but he doesn't, so he's probably not sharp enough to guess that I'm the cause of his woes. To be fair to him, the early hours of the morning are dark and dense. They tend to bend logic and conceal reason.

I'M ALMOST FINISHED with the market segment report when the door buzzer sounds. Gary with

the green shorts comes in carrying his three full crates of milk for the kitchen. His bowels are just about splitting under the weight of all that milk. I close my eyes, press my temples, and hiss with relief. Thank god it's only Gary.

"Hey, John! It's gonna be another good one!"

He got my name wrong the second night I ever worked here. He's been calling me John ever since. It's difficult to correct people who drive small delivery vans around before the break of day. They have a lot of energy. The force of their apology could prove to be fatal. If we rounded them all up and harnessed their enthusiasm, we'd have enough energy to bring the sun up a full hour earlier for them.

Not that I'd like the sun to come up an hour earlier. It's the sunlight hours at the end of the shift, when the cooks and porters are arriving, that really liquefy my brain.

I open my eyes and stop pressing my temples. Standing in front of me are a woman and a child. They must have come in behind Gary. They don't look like the types who stay at hotels. They were probably standing at the door for twenty minutes before Gary arrived, just wondering how to get in. People who never stay at hotels rarely see the buzzer.

"Hello. I'm here to see Ted Grimshaw."

I'm too ashamed to look at her, so I look at the kid instead. He's holding her hand and clutching a button-eyed teddy bear to his chest. His own eyes are bulging. They've probably never seen this hour, let alone the empty heights of a sleeping city.

"Ted Grimshaw? Oh, you mean Mr Grimshaw! Certainly! Yes. He's expecting you. Just take the elevator up to the second floor and turn left. He's staying in 233."

I've already decided that tomorrow I'm quitting this job for good. It needs someone quicker, someone sharper, maybe even someone harder.

"I'm really sorry to trouble you," she says, "but is there a spare bed up there for Jason?"

I point to the brass sign on the counter beside me, and smile idiotically.

"Like the sign says, *the only thing we overlook is the park*."

The Semi-Detached Man

Kieran Galvin

I DRIVE THROUGH THE STREETS AT NIGHT. Steam rises like ghost-breath from the bitumen. The air is hot. The city is uneasy. Full of impending violence and back-alley rituals and signs that say *Wrong Way Go Back*.

I wish I could. Go back. Reverse.

Cars and vans and trucks slide past like frames from some strange movie. I wonder if perhaps somebody could paint the walls of a tunnel in the underground so that it would appear like a cartoon to passengers in the trains as they move past at speed.

I collect these thoughts like some men collect beer labels or stamps or memories of lovers. One day I will place all my thoughts in little vases and I will give them to the Mayor in exchange for the keys to the city.

I drive between the towering buildings. Buildings burdened by bureaucrats and democrats, boomtown rats and heart attacks and elevators that plunge like heat-struck birds.

I sneeze and spray blood onto the speedometer and windscreen. I reach into the console for a tissue and find a dozen photographs of Claire. Claire smiling. Claire at the beach. Claire signing the registry.

At night the city is lit up like a cheap neon whore, defiant in the face of darkness.

I walk past girlie bars and candy bars, Irish bars and police cars. No holds barred.

The kerbside restaurants are full of people who are afraid of the suburbs. The cool cafes are full of café lattes and city dwellers who have learned the aromatic language of coffee.

Greek waiters look like little Elvises. All greased black hair and snarling lips. I picture olives, pitted and pierced and placed beside backgammon boards and a young Greek man approaches and asks me what I'd like.

"I'd like an end to war and famine. I'd like the Miss Universe contest to be treated with the respect that it deserves. I'd like Judge Judy to publicly soil herself. I'd like an obscure African soccer team to win the world cup. I'd like a short white guy to be Nike's next superhero. I'd like a girl who sucks my cock without wanting to kiss me. But I suppose you'd like to know what I want to order. A flat white in a long glass would be great. Thanks."

Oh yes. I can be funny. One day I will wrap my laughter in lettuce leaves and leave it in some Chinese restaurant among the fortune cookies and the Peking duck. We'll see who's funny then.

I sip my long flat white, careful to appear oblivious to people checking me out. Careful to appear natural and relaxed and full of my own importance. I do this well. I have practised the art of pretense in every mirror, in every glazed shopfront. I have even fine-tuned my skills in the reflective sunglasses of hidden passers by. Bolle are my favourites.

A young gay boy stares at me too long.

I hear him willing me: "Look over here."

He thinks he says this telepathically. It is the privilege of the young to always believe the incredible. But I believe in Chinese Whispers . . .

"Look I'm queer," is what I hear.

I look at him. Long enough to appear vaguely interested.

"Kiss me," he says, *telepathetically* of course.

And I reply, "If I were to kiss you I would only be kissing the emptiness in you."

Young gay boy leaves with his tail between his legs. His black turtleneck sweater, his black crotch-enhancing pants, his black bomber jacket; this is the armour of the night. Like smoke in smoke. He blends. He fades. Beneath the neon signs on the high-rises he is just another form of darkness.

He is young enough now to survive the nuances of the night but the city will swallow him. By the time he is thirty, surgery will be the only option.

I build little floor plans from sugar cubes and toothpicks. Two fat women at a nearby table talk of calories and colon irrigation while they stuff their faces with sticky toffee date pudding. So close and yet so far.

I contemplate having a tube put up my ass and

wince as I remember an old girlfriend's straying finger. *I am not an animal. I am a human being.*

I'd like a girl with no fingers who sucks my cock without wanting to kiss me.

I pay the bill. I refuse to tip waiters. I know it destroys them. If I were a regular they'd probably piss in my coffee or sneeze on my sandwiches but I never eat in the same place twice in any year. Only wankers want to be recognized by waiters.

I walk a few blocks. One day automatic teller machines will read your palms while you wait for your cash. If they detect a short lifeline they'll call in your mortgage and all the other loans that make your borrowed life. They'll cancel your credit cards and refuse to renew your death benefit.

Just another thought for the little vases. Something to give the Mayor when he plants a tree in my honour or asks me to leave my palm-print beneath the feet of a million tired office workers.

The girls line up on X street. Walk up. Walk down. Smoke. Tell a joke. Talk about the Pope. There are too many Catholic prostitutes in the city.

One girl who wears the tracks of her addiction like bee stings smiles at me. Her smile is false but not more so than the lawyers and accountants and the men who take each other to Girlie Bars and Pool Halls and do the business bonding thing over lunch and lap dancers.

"What can I do for you honey?" the hooker asks, her hands on her hips. Her hips revolving like a turnstile.

"You could go to the Balkans and take part in the mediation process. You could join the Red Cross and ferry bodies from churches and schoolyards to makeshift morgues. You could ask the Dalai Lama if the sound of one hand clapping is the same as the sound of prayer wheels that go nowhere. You could tidy yourself up. You could scrape away the negligence that hangs from your overpainted eyelashes. You could do that for me. But I suppose that would be asking too much."

"Fuck you Bozo!" the hooker shouts. "You shitpacking faggot!"

The darkness echoes with her shrill indignance until sirens churn through the street. The lights like eggwhisks, blending red and blue, spinning out of control. These are prayer wheels too.

One day ambulances will ferry people out of the city. Magistrates and judges will sentence criminals to coffee bars and lives spent in studio apartments with persistent interior designers flush with primary colours and faux French furniture.

Wearing black will be compulsory. Oh dahhling, it goes so well with the gold-leaf postmodern company logo on the imported marble toilet floor. Black is your colour. It's so YOU!

I want an interior designer with no fingers who sucks my cock and hasn't heard of Louis XV.

I ring Claire but when she answers the phone I can just about manage to clear my throat. I form words that only I can understand. I want to say, "Claire. Please find me." But all I find is my anger. "You dirty fucking whore!" I scream. "Filthy bitch!"

A man's voice comes over the line "Who is this? What do you want? Do you know what time it is?" But these are too many questions to answer in one night.

Above the payphone someone has written, If you want to be fucked dial 000. *I replace the 000 with Claire's telephone number.*

I walk slowly to Chinatown. China is a squillion miles away but little toothless men in slippers still practice Tai Chi in the outdoor mall, among the caged birds and the dead birds, their flightless carcasses hanging upside down in fly-filled windows. By night my own reflection is superimposed on the black arsehole of a fetid Peking duck.

This is neo-narcissism. I want my mirrored Ray-Bans. I want my MTV. I want a window in the city where the birds are free.

I walk past dozens of restaurants. There are tanks of lobsters and mud-crabs. I picture the faces of my former colleagues on the exoskeletons of those bottom-dwellers and imagine that I am swimming freely between them.

WHEN I WAS A KID I used to love swimming. Especially holding my breath and swimming underwater, pretending to be a dolphin or a submarine. I used to love the way water distorts sounds. How you can hear noises and echoes and feel vibrations but they mean nothing. You don't even know where they're coming from. They're just sounds, autistic noises, like weird alien voices, robotic and imprecise, half-formed and uncertain. Like meaning lost in translation, like thought lost in drunkenness. These are the sounds that fill my dreams at night. Sounds that wake me and unfold me. Sounds that penetrate. Voices that soar through the darkness, music which is linked forever to a time, a place, a certain emotion. Voices raised in argument. Silences that punctuate for effect. The sound of a tap running as Claire washes

blood from her nose.

Old drunks with rusty zippers and crusty clothes gather at a pedestrian crossing taunting young yuppies with their horrid breath. They flick invisible lice and fleas at girls who have hair that is free from split ends and unwanted bends.

The girls run onto the road, weaving between traffic. Their long hair like cloaks trailing behind them. This is the kind of hair the Nazis stuffed into mattresses.

If Dr Mengele were alive he would have cut their spines out and stitched their backs together. It would matter little. Only breast implants make the news these days.

Ground troops would have been sent into Kosovo if the refugees arriving in Albania were photogenic curvy women with triple-d-cup tits and pearly white teeth.

Clinton would be waiting at the border to greet them in person. Come in, sit down. Let's talk about the first thing that pops up.

I walk past men in striped suits carrying monogrammed brief cases and I yell at them. "For Christ's sake! It's eleven o'clock on a Tuesday night!"

One of them shouts back at me, "So what?"

"So you could be lying on a deserted beach marveling at the Milky Way and the unfathomable clusters of stars that make a universe. You could be sitting in a back garden, watching possums walking on your fence or running through the trees. You could be tucked around somebody you love. You could be lying in a bath waiting for your chest to chill before you slip it back into the warmth."

"So, why the fuck aren't you doing that?" he says as they walk away from me and I could tell them . . . I could tell them that I was once a prince of business. That I walked the corridors of power and I manipulated men in the backrooms and the boardrooms and the restrooms and for years I planned each detail of my life, measuring time and timing phone calls and being unavailable no matter when you called.

And I forgot I had a wife.

And a house, and a mortgage on four hundred square metres of land that nobody has a right to own.

I could tell them that I had to paint the fence around my house in bright colours so I wouldn't drive in the wrong gate on the way home.

We can blow up countries by remote control. We can blast arteries with lasers. We can send people to the moon. We have submarines that stay underwater for six months. We have pills that make you happy, beds that give you a suntan, silicon for tits. We can measure earthquakes, predict volcanic eruptions, grow test-tube babies and hydroponic lettuce. We can put pig and ape organs into humans. We can put jellyfish genes in sugarcane, flounder genes in strawberries. We can watch Belgrade getting bombed live on TV but people still need twenty-five-year mortgages to buy identical houses on identical streets and still I see the middle-aged middle managers grappling with gasoline and carcinogens on the lunchtime jog. Their vests moulded to gargantuan stomachs, their eyes dull as the stares of rent boys waiting for a fuck and a fix. The urgency is the same. Only the methodology differs.

At funerals everywhere people are saying, "At least he died doing what he loved." Like sending that fax, finishing that report, stapling some pissy business card to some lie-filled corporate brochure is what people live for.

I ring Claire. Her voice is heavy with sleep. "I told you not to ring," she says.

I tell her that I'm seeing things differently. "You're probably high," she says, hanging up the phone.

Inside the phone box, the noises of the city have melted into a deep hum. A fluorescent bulb shakes light onto my face. I stare at it until I imagine that I am a tiny speck of light in the night sky. I imagine my mind racing at the speed of light. Images hitting my retinas and bouncing off my skull. I wonder if it is possible for a star to be visible long after it has imploded.

Another thought for the little vases.

I ROLL A TEN-DOLLAR BILL into a cylinder and drag the powder screaming into my nose.

Suddenly I am running to my car. Pushing through crowds of people emerging from a cinema. I leave their protests trailing, blurred like a recovered memory.

I throw my watch into the path of a passing semi-trailer. My heart throbs up my neck, filling my head with urgency and then I am driving, swerving through lanes, past parked cars and rail guards and I can see the suspension cables of the bridge rising above the riverside office blocks and there is no stopping me. All the traffic lights are flashing amber and suddenly I am on the bridge. Stopped.

My car straddles two lanes as other cars swerve around me into the path of oncoming traffic. Horns are blasted into the night air. The bridge is alive like Mardi Gras.

I reach into the boot and grab the can of petrol,

splashing it all over the car and all over my body. It burns through my skin. The traffic slows to a halt. People file out of dormant cars but keep their distance from me.

I retreat over the crash guards as the crowd draws closer and then I climb through the supporting trusses and brace-work. I am a child with a Mechano set. I climb steadily until I am suspended above the bridge and in the distance I see the blue and yellow lights winding through the streets, the dormant cars parting like the Red Sea before them.

A bunch of teenage guys are chanting "Jump, jump, jump. Just do it!" and I resolve that I will endeavor to jump in their direction.

I stand up. My arms outstretched like a welcoming Christ, an unlit joint between my lips, a Zippo lighter between my thumb and forefinger.

A voice fills the air around me. I turn to where the sound is coming from and I see a policeman standing in front of the crowd below. Through the blaring horns I hear him say, "Before you jump, is there anything you'd like to say?"

"I'd like to thank my agent," I yell, laughing, I think. "I'd like to thank members of the academy who voted for me. I'd like to thank Steven Spielberg for giving me this opportunity. I'd like to say I don't really deserve this kind of recognition. I'd like to thank my wife, Claire, for fucking around behind my back and I'd like to thank Nextel Corp for stealing eight years of my life and mostly I'd just like to say a fucking great CIAO BABY."

A wave of clapping and cheering filters upwards to me. The teenage guys are throwing Nazi salutes at me. One of them cups his hands in front of his mouth and shouts "BURN BABY BURRRRRRRNNNNN."

The policeman moves directly under me. "What you just said was really important," he yells. "I'd like to get closer to you so that I can hear you above all the noise down here. Is that OK with you?"

I agree but I tell him that I won't be to blame if he falls.

He moves to within twenty feet of me. "I've never been up here before," he says. "It sure is an amazing view."

I laugh at him. "You are so obvious," I say.

"I hope I am," he responds. "I hope it is obvious that I really care about getting you out of this mess. I hope it's obvious that I want to help."

"It's obvious that you're getting paid to be here," I say, absent-mindedly flicking the Zippo.

"Actually," he says, "I'm not paid to be here. The truth is I'm going to get in trouble for climbing up here with you. Our protocol for this kind of situation is to stay on the ground and wait for a professional negotiator or psychiatrist to arrive."

"So why'd you come up then?" I ask.

"Because I couldn't just stand by and watch a young guy like you throw his life away. I might be a bit backward but I never met anyone who really wanted to die like this."

I stand up. The wind seems to rush up from the river, perpendicular to my face. "Go home to your wife and kids," I tell him.

"If you jump, I don't think I will ever be able to go home," he responds. "I couldn't look my wife in the eye without feeling that I had failed."

Other cops are pushing the crowd back away from my discarded car. Firemen are spraying the car with white foam.

I think I feel a tear roll from my eye and when I reach to wipe it away the petrol on my hand stings me. I look down over the city and the high-rises and the neon lights disappearing in the distance and I imagine myself as a meteor, lighting up the night sky, as I plunge, screaming, to the river in a ball of flames, but a kind of clarity comes over me and I hear the cop repeating his question: "Who do you want to be right now?"

I look at him and I think quietly while the wind buffets my ears.

"I want to be the man who rings the bell at Lloyds," I tell him. "When a ship is lost or overdue, I want to be the one who breaks the news."

He asks me to explain.

"It was a tradition in London," I tell him. "At Lloyd's, the Underwriters, the ringing of a bell signified a major loss."

He moves closer to me and holds out his hand. "One small step for you," he jokes.

"So you want to ring the bell," he says, as his fingers fold around my hand.

The crowd below is clapping wildly and cheering.

"D'you hear that?" he says, guiding me down the superstructure of the bridge. "They're cheering for you."

"They're not," I tell him. "They're cheering for you."

fiction

Keys

Maria Zajkowski

My memories are not only mine. I find them: lockless keys in old bags, scrawls on bluelined paper that catch my eye. They stare at me from photo frames – those never-closing windows that hail you in to rooms where generations sit. Mothers and fathers bound in airless poses, immune to weather, unwillingly acknowledge with heads raised or inclined, my own state of siege. Their actions are known little to me, or sometimes a little more through the words of my own battle-weary parents.

My sister and I, blonde and brunette brackets, held my father. Our questions on what he'd forgotten brought answers, then tears. They fell into my mouth, little indigestible pieces that lie like stones under my heart. His memories shaken from him; a small seeing boy, as he was run out of his village, over the bodies of his sisters, brothers, to a Siberian winter to starve, and with hunger to start to forget. The village he was born in lay collapsed inward, lining the giant tank track mark that assumed its position, the new main road.

My father's bravery in factory work for twenty-five years was recognized with a moulded plastic pendulum clock.

A clean light comes from him. It pours out when he laughs at our old child-like conduct. His simple humour always the same – predictable, and now comforting as down occasional phone lines he laughs less as his memories recede. The world at war with itself shakes him from behind, collecting his thoughts in leafy tornadoes. Once again they fall around him.

I see him this way, filling up the room of old age, looking out its windows at original fields. I look back in at him. With these useless, lockless keys in hand, I stare at the photo he now is, from this place I have forgotten how to leave.

Yossi Berger

Pickled in Irony, Mama

When they start treating me half decent-like . . . when they even look like they're really gonna listen to us battlers tryin' to make a living, that's when I'll take any notice of this here OHS system crap and see if I can show them how to make it work. Look at the size of this folder, willya?!

Well then take a minute on my behalf, think of 400 homicides per year, ten bus-loads of people. Decorated buses if you wish, with underwear or alcohol on the sides. Let the image form. Then compare that to 3000 occupational deaths in that same year, seventy-five bus-loads. Deaths from past work conditions (say, with asbestos materials) as well as from present work practices and workplaces. With a heavy hand add one million occupational injuries per year as well as the many more (those unknown we all meet) who are injured and harmed in those twisted ways that never enter the statistics, and the hundreds of thousands of workers who are deliberately harassed daily by the grinding repertoire of the temporarily powerful – and you are starting to get the picture. Australia tolerates and suffers terribly from poor occupational health and safety (OHS) standards. Whichever way you choose to calculate workers bear the brunt.

Softly now: how many managers does it take to significantly improve OHS conditions? Only one at a time (Management 101 will instruct you) but the workers must want to change. 'Must want to change' is then naively operationalized in hypothetical constructs like 'work attitude', 'occupational culture' and 'safety behaviour'. And then . . . nothing! Generally that's where the train stops. I am afraid to report, Mother, that much (but not all) of what infests Australian workplaces under the dancing name of OHS programs is ancient curly fraud. History repeating itself in mood banal. Workers know it, union officials know it, OHS experts know it and by far most managers (anxiously) know it. What exactly is it they know? First, that the majority of industry's persistent and old-fashioned OHS incidents (falls, crushes, amputations, chemicals) are easy and cheap to fix, but they are bothersome and generally don't increase productivity.[1] Second, the majority of present day magic bullets (The Fixes) don't work yet managers must, like those condemned to energetic nowhere-marches, continue to bark rhythmic hallelujahs to them and feel obliged to employ shameful excuses (as defences – see Table 1) why they can't do better or why workers and unions must not increase pressure for improvements,[2] and the government mustn't interfere. Like gun slingers for hire they deftly draw on arguments devoid of compassion, often in front of whiteboards or elegantly frosted doors, windows, walls, using computers, slides, clever transparencies, marking marking marking with special squeaky pens, analyzing, pointing, dividing, talking suavely of Objectives, Goals, Targets, Problems, Outcomes . . . Never allowing themselves to be seduced by the obvious, the daily hazards and chronic suffering.

And the prolonged helpless fatigue . . . It's not that they genetically love bullshit, but what are they supposed to do when their heart is caught helplessly in career-frenzy? They self-righteously demand greater 'flexibility' as they hail it, to manage their business, to use more 'beneficial' chemicals, to insist on faster work practises and do it all by putting greater pressure on workers, more workload, more stressors[3] and peculiar, hard and extended shifts. And plenty of night work. The holiest justification muttered evokes that virtual and seductive 'bottom line'.

But there's more Mother. Yes, I know workers are other people's children. Put yourself for a minute in a manager's shoes: What do you do if you

DEFENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
1. Dictionary Defence	What do you mean by safe and healthy . . . ?
2. Production Defence	Jobs mate, jobs . . .
3. Guardian Angel Defence	Show me where the law says . . .
4. Sailors' Defence	We'll go offshore . . .
5. Familiarity Blindness Defence	Been here so long, don't notice hazards no more . . .
6. The Pittsburgh Defence	Head office won't allow us . . .
7. Over The Rainbow Defence	Oh, so you don't like your job here . . . ?!

Table 1. How Not To Listen

wish to generate the impression that you're having a real go at improving OHS standards? Or, even better, true, what do you do if you as a manager really want to achieve OHS improvements but don't really have a clue how? In a storm of apparent action you evolve a form of *degenerate OHS activity*. This flourishes when a manager (supervisors, foremen/women, site/project managers etc.) invokes – but doesn't really use – some of the very tools (guides, codes, laws, OHS systems) designed to help, and particularly their often silly detail. This feverish interest with systems, which are generally not all that practical, generates a mentality of paper compliance (*count the correct ticks, circle the right number, tick the right box*) that has little to do with the workplace (yes, yes, dignity, decency, compassion . . . go tell them!). This in fact attenuates OHS improvement and (note) largely happens at the big end of town enterprises. Careful. Read that again! Because? Because, madre mia, most of the small ones don't know nothin'. That's it, full stop, end of story. They're too busy, too pressured (often by the Big End . . .) to care much about OHS, despite all the bullshit-talk.

All of this is terribly damaging to workers. It immediately creates a false sense of security in OHS-like activity. This is cosmetic behaviour. Such attention to systems misdirects effective daily attentiveness from the workplace and daily tasks to the OHS-System-As-A-Guardian Angel ('It' will look after us). Too often such misdirection is no accident. Too many managers are becoming expert at completing such inventories, managing the systems (not the workplace) and ticking boxes. This is role-playing at safety behaviour. The majority of managers (mostly who manage the smaller non-unionized workplaces) and their supervisors know little about all these OHS documents beyond some vague reference to a name, perhaps! So their lack of OHS activity doesn't stem from a misunderstanding and lack of implementation of such documents, but from total ignorance, and greed. These are those small workplaces where 80 per cent of the workforce works. Their OHS activity is so often simple crude fraudulence.

The most important and OHS-useful (practically functional) feature at work is an ever-present mumbling environment. And it's just this which is continuously marginalized. This is that (publicly) almost silenced talk, implications, allusion . . . all of which construct and maintain the occupational world-view. Workers' voices, talk, their narratives, their exchanges – often just winks and subtleties all so well pickled for years in generations of irony. Decades in the making. So how come the mumbles? Where is the clear loud larrikin voice? The simple answer: Such talk is marginalized and suppressed because it's not 'data', not respectable. By referring to workers' talk as "just opinion", "subjective", "uninformed fear", "based on unreasonable anxiety or childish suspicions", "emotional rubbish" managers (confused and helpless) must marginalize such discourse.[4] This makes workers feel like a 'cultural minority' at work.

Their views (and feelings) are pronounced trivial matter at the edge of a truer and more objective reality, that of data, numbers, statistics, cost-benefit analyses, in short, proper, mainstream, economically-blessed discourse. So the workers mumble. And it's just here, in the midst of this calculated disempowerment, that managers pretend to help workers by 'correcting' their work attitudes, culture and 'unsafe' behaviour. They benevolently try to construct for them a more accurate view of the occupational world: "See? The sun does shine out of my airconditioned office."

A Grim Life, Nicholas Nedelkopoulos, 1986

A Case Study[5]

Another road construction worker killed on freshly-turned soil. Scattered blood, the biggest of all laws. That silent richness. Look on, look away. Freeway construction. A truck loaded with soil and rock reversed all over him. He was walking across to the other side to pick up his clipboard off the ground. Sudden strong wind sprung up, dust, noise, other engines, landing jet overhead . . . ! You wouldn't believe the intersection of events at someone's wrong time. And then . . . wheel after wheel after wheel.

I was there with the union Organizer, Rixy, early next morning. Distraught workmates in the smoko shed. Mud. Questioning leads to bursts of clipped anger. Distress is palpable. Subbies operating graders, back-hoes, dozers, cranes are asked if their plant has automatic reverse lights, and always always an auditory reverse signal (a beeper). The offending truck didn't. They don't mince words. No, mostly they don't! Organizer's eyes dilate, his face crimson in disbelief and anger.

We meet the bosses in the next shed. The most important, statewide, is in Honest Con mode. The nationwide OHS officer seems cunning and evasive.

"Why was the truck facing up-hill?"

"Don't know." After all, if in that position he manouvres a three-point turn to swing around with a load of soil he'll tear up the newly compacted ramp. [N'est pas? Talk to me mongrel. Youse killed him. Speak!]

"Yep. Don't know."

"Why wasn't a flashing light used?"

"Don't need to use them by law on site. Do we?"

"Do you think it would help safety and send the right message?"

"Depends. Could make it worse. Lights, noise everywhere, a bit like a circus." [Tell that to his mama smartarse, when she later, choking, asks for the hat he was wearing. Too emotional? Not enough statistics?]

"Why wasn't there a reverse beeper on the truck?"

"Don't know. Should've been. Required by law, isn't it? We're looking into it."

"What about the rest of the mobile equipment here?"

"Yes. We're checking that too. Can I show you the company Operating Procedures for the site?"

"Do you mean this 10cm stack of pages in this folder?"

"Sure. But have a look at the detail."

"So how come there was no beeper on the reversing truck?"

"Well, as I said, we're looking at that. But [dismissive] the police know all about it."

"How come you moved the truck from the site of the accident when you were told not to by WorkCover inspectors? Isn't that in your Operating Procedures for fatalities and accidents?"

"I think we made an honest mistake there."

"If you have kilos of documents for operating procedures and fancy OHS systems how come most of your subbies don't have reversing alarms on their mobile machines?"

"As I said, again, we'll be fixing this in a week or so."

"A week or so you reckon?"

"Yeah. That's fair."

"Since the circumstances were unusual and there was no flashing light nor a beeper, was a spotter used instead?"

"Let me show you the section about spotters in

our safety procedures."

"What for? Obviously it doesn't work on the site itself, you've just had a worker killed."

"And we're all very upset."

What about the foreman? "Doug, do you know what this safety book says about spotters?"

"No mate, I don't." Genuinely distressed, he was one of the witnesses.

"What about you Dave," [State Manager] "do you know what your own book says about spotters?"

"To be honest, I don't." [Open face, lots of eye contact.]

To Mike [Project Manager], "Do you know what it says?"

"Well, I think that I've seen it but, no, I really couldn't tell you what it said."

"Mate," [union official to company OHS officer who is becoming more uncomfortable by the minute] "what's the point of all this fucken paper shit if ain't no-one knows nothin' about it on site?"

OHS Culture or the Mumbling Environment?

This, Mother, is a special for your recipe books, Vegie section: Many modern management styles at work generate and maintain damaging characteristics of a socio-occupational phenomenon I refer to as the 'Mumbling Environment' which stands in contrast to the opaque and exploitative notion of 'work culture'. It directly contributes to the awful OHS burden of death and injury in Australia and around the world.[6] On a daily basis it also contributes to the more widespread and highly damaging small-coinage but far from trivial oppression (the devil, after all, *is* in the detail of workers). Since everyone really knows of this but ain't talking, this is 'fraudulence'. The lie is well-understood and the action perpetuated.

This occupational environment, its mumbling tone is a common workplace background-'noise' couched in dark mutterings. It provides the local wisdom that results in certain reactions for better or for worse. When poisoned and marginalized by untrained managers it can turn to damaging venom:

"Sure they'll fix the hazard! When they work out their budget in thirty years' time."

"Of course health and safety comes first . . . after profit."

"Because if I open my mouth I ain't got a job, can ya understand that?"

"Na mate. Ain't got time for doin' Work Permits properly. I'd be doin' nothin' else most of the day. How long d'ya reckon I'd last here?"

"Alright for him to say that! See the car I drive and the one he drives?"

"They knew all about it years before he got killed. Just didn't want to put money into safety, that's all."

"Bullshit mate. Profit is what matters not health and safety. They can say what they like and use as big a words as they can get their lips 'round. It's profit, profit. And if somethin' goes wrong – like it did for Ross – well, me old mate, it's all over red rover."

Result? Poorly managed workplaces which over time kill, injure and impose decades of destructive oppression. Hear the corporate chorus: at work workers have become a 'human resource', often referred to by the hoped-for minimum criterion of labour, 'hands'! When they get injured they are referred to as malingerers and 'bludgers', and it's only when they get killed that so many crawl out of the woodwork and ostensibly treat them as if they once-were-treasures. Suddenly they've become so valuable that even their bosses weep (at times) over their damaged bodies. Watched uninvited.

ENDNOTES

1. I will not labour the point here but Dr Andrew Hopkins' book *Making Safety Work*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1995, is a good starting point to consider this. So are more than two hundred inspection reports I've written. Also see *Work, Health and Safety, Inquiry into Occupational Health and Safety, Industry Commission Report No. 47*, 11 September 1995. Also note that 80 per cent of Australia's workforce works in small workplaces with well less than fifty workers. Go talk to the managers there about the wonderful link between profit and OHS!
2. Nothing new here. See for example, Beris G. Penrose, 'The Australian Workers' Union and Occupational Arsenic In The 1930s', *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 41, no. 2, June 1999; or read the novels: Jean Devanny, *Sugar Heaven*, Melbourne, Redback Press,1982; and Betty Collins, *The Copper Crucible*, St Lucia, UQP, 1996.
3. This is described in detail in Y. Berger, *Occupational Stressors: Some Facts, Fictions and Fixes*, Executive Media, July 1997. Also see 'Employment Security and Working Hours – A National Survey of Current Workplace Issues', July 1999 – Prepared for the ACTU by Yann Campbell Hoare Wheeler.
4. See paper presented at Future Safe 1990 Conference, 'Sick and Tired in the 1990s vs Sick and Tired in the 1980s', Berger, May 1990.

5. Extracted from a story in, Berger, *A Kind of Violence*, Melbourne, The Vulgar Press, 1999.
6. See the ILO's publication, *World Of Work*, no. 29, April/May 1999, p. 26. It reported:
   — that deaths in the workplace exceed the average annual deaths from road accidents (999,000), war (502,000), violence (563,000) or HIV AIDS (312,000).
   — approximately one-quarter of those deaths result from exposure to hazardous substances which cause such disabling illnesses as cancer and cardiovascular respiratory and nervous system disorders
   — work-related diseases are expected to double by the year 2020 and if improvements are not implemented now, exposures today will kill people by the year 2020.
   — workers suffered an estimated 250 million occupational accidents and 160 million occupational diseases each year.
   — 600,000 lives would be saved every year if available safety practices and appropriate information were used.
   — every year, 250 million accidents occur causing absence from work, the equivalent of 685,000 accidents every day, 475 every minute, 8 every second.
   — working children suffer 12 million occupational accidents and an estimated 12,000 of them are fatal.
   —3,000 people are killed at work every day, 2 every minute.
   — asbestos alone kills more than 100,000 workers every year.

Yossi Berger is National OHS Officer of the Australian Workers' Union. This article is based on his chapter 'Why Hasn't It Changed On The Shopfloor', in Claire Mayhew & Chris Peterson (eds), Occupational Health and Safety in Australia, *Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1999.*

The Grand Gesture, Nicholas Nedelkopoulos, 1988

Thea Calzoni

WHAT CAN THE READER DO?

I wake up in pain.
Alone in the house, I go to the kitchen, make some black coffee, and sit beside the radio.
I listen to the Greek program for an hour: songs, community information, news from around the world.
And then, SILENCE.
Unable to bear my pain in the empty house, I go to the front gate.
What should I do today?[1]

WHY PUBLISH DEPRESSING STORIES by injured workers? The suffering of people at work is hardly a new subject. Injured workers have long found it therapeutic to write about their pain.[2] OK but what can the reader do about it? Look closer! All the reader is asked to do is to read and feel a response to the injured workers' expression. All that is asked is for somebody to listen.[3]

Injured
like a toothache in my hand
a hot poker in my shoulder
like needles in my back
burning needles in my shoulder[4]

This expression of pain illustrates Elaine Scarey's observation that the articulation of pain as "an image of agency" (for instance as being like *a hot poker in my shoulder*) "is to project it into an object . . . conceived of as moving towards the body".[5] Such expression is therapeutic because the image of agency described "by its separability from the body" can be seen to reduce its force, leaving "an image that can be lifted away, carrying some of the attributes of pain with it".[6] The writing of injured workers is also motivated by the desire to inspire others to feel some identification with the feelings expressed.[7] The point of identification provides the basis for appeals to common human rights and provides a counter to political and media demonization of injured workers as bludgers and cheats.

Consider, for instance, the anguish of *Despina*, who directed her narrative to the doctors who judged her:

> Not only do you deny us hope, you make our condition worse by writing to the insurance company that we are only feigning injury. You condemn us to live with our unbearable pain, and to live night and day with the painful idea that you think we're lying. These are the few words I wanted to say, both for myself and on behalf of all injured workers.[8]

There is social and political justification for publishing injured workers' stories. Injured workers' literature speaks to us all, not just as fellow humans, capable of pain and disappointment, but as individuals repressed by the demands of the labour market which values each of us not as a feeling human being but as a collection of body parts and physical capacities. Injured workers represent this repression in their struggle to articulate the isolating condition of pain. In the past ten years injured workers have copped a lot of misery in the name of rehabilitation. The WorkCare workers' compensation legislation introduced by the Cain Labor Government in 1985 defined rehabilitation as "the restoration of the injured worker to the fullest physical, mental, social, vocational and economic usefulness of which they are capable".[9] 'Restoration' wasn't a lot of fun but worse was to come in the 1990s when many injured workers would experience rehabilitation as a humiliating work test.[10] It was the Bosses' government that finally stuck the boot into injured workers, but the process was well and truly begun by a Labor government prepared to undercut injured workers in the

interest of political survival. Government support for injured workers was gradually undermined and was ultimately abandoned in favour of management by insurance companies in 1991 by the Kennett Coalition Government which replaced WorkCare with WorkCover.[11]

In 1991, a study conducted by the Victorian Trades Hall Council found that injured workers' problems occurred and were compounded by stigma with the view of "injured workers as bludgers" permeating the activities of agencies constituted to provide services and support to injured workers.[12] To empower injured workers to contest this stigma, union and cultural activists developed Industrial Voices, a community writing project funded by the Community Cultural Development Unit (CCDU) of the Australia Council for the Arts.[13] Community cultural development was defined at that time by the Australia Council as "people doing things together which expand their awareness and understanding of the meanings life has for them, making images and symbols which illuminate that meaning and which express their vision of themselves, their relationship to each other and the world in ways which enhance personal and communal power".[14]

Since Industrial Voices, this idea has been applied in projects using support groups to develop the culture of injured workers and produce writing to increase understanding of the experience of work injury.[15]

Workplace prejudice against injured workers arises from media and institutional representations of bludging and cheating.[16] It makes sense that people whose lives are inscribed by routine and other impositions of the industrial workplace should feel diminished by those who flout the work ethic, by the unemployed who don't look for a job or the workers who fake injury compensation claims. Some workers vent their anger on those who take time off for non-demonstrable injuries and who return to work on easy jobs, doing lighter duties, the burden of which must continue to be carried by able bodied workers.[17] Injured workers doing depressing 'light duties' jobs may be silenced by the stigmatizing of their position as 'bludgers':

Good morning Bludger
it's like you're useless

On my own all day
upset
cut off from my workmates
grey
dull colours
black
black and white

Call me lazy
doing light duties
slowly slowly
coping with pain
ignoring the insults[18]

Injured workers may undergo a high degree of personal discomfort in seeking to preserve their reputations as good workers capable of hard work and compliance with production needs. In the poem, 'Dark and Light', injured workers assert their determination to prove their worthiness. The poem begins with an affirmation of the injured worker's former status as a good worker, describing capabilities and compliance with the needs of the organization:

A good worker
healthy and strong
feeling good about the job
I could do anything . . . [19]

This contrasts with the poem's conclusion, which is phrased in terms of the demands the workplace imposes on the individual for whom work has become a trial:

I used to like coming to work
Now I have to prove I can do it.[20]

Semsa Villic *enjoyed* working with other Croatian women assembling electrical components on a production line. For a long time she didn't complain about the pressure of work, or her sore shoulder. These were accepted as facts of working life. Even after an accident, which further injured her back, neck and shoulder, she kept on working. But working with her injury for a long period worsened her condition to the extent that her labour power was no longer of value:

> I struggled on for three months, getting worse, working slower. The boss, the leading hand and the shop steward had a meeting with me and tried to force me to resign. The boss was particularly rude to me. I refused to sign the paper they gave me until I had seen a lawyer. When I got home I telephoned a lawyer I knew but he was away. I was

scared. I went to my doctor and begged him to increase my hours at work. He gave me a certificate extending my hours but on very light duties with a rest break every hour. The boss refused to look at it and sent me back to the production line.

I felt like a wounded soldier, fighting to keep my job. I couldn't do the job on the line but I stayed there trying to do it and crying in pain.

I asked the shop steward to help me. She saw that I was in great trouble trying to do the work and she begged the boss to take me off the line. He refused. My arms and back and shoulders felt like they were on fire. I asked if I could go home. The boss refused. I stayed on the line until I collapsed. As I blacked out, I saw shapes like ghosts all around me saying, "You can't work anymore".

The next thing I remember I was in a bed in the sick bay. My husband was there. They had called him in. They gave me two weeks' notice. He carried me like a carcass to the car.[21]

Villic may have fought like a soldier but she was inadequate in the front line, the production line. For the injured factory worker, unemployment is the ultimate scrap heap. Giacomo Apraco describes this scenario with bitterness:

> No thought is given to the injured worker, marked by society with a big black spot, who can never obtain another job. No thought is given to the fact that behind the injured worker there is often a family with children to support. Many of us have had to sell our homes; many of us have broken off with our families because we have reached a point of no return.[22]

To stave off the horror of being reduced to an unemployment statistic, a social cost rather than a productive asset to the nation, injured workers strive to prove their worth in return-to-work. If they try too hard, they may wear out, but if they don't try hard enough, they may lose their jobs. They want others to know of this predicament. Joe Tarranto appeals to the reader:

> If you are still in the workplace, I hope you have learnt from my experience and do all you can to change society's attitude towards the injured worker because when it happens to you it's too late to worry about it. [23]

Injured workers struggle to articulate the isolating condition of pain:

> *Quiet keep quiet*
> *go see sister*
> *panadol*
> *anti-inflammatory pills*
> *hot pack*
> *Don't complain*
> *Carry on in pain*[24]

The workplace represses pain. These workers have got the message that they should keep quiet about pain and use methods that repress it (*panadol*) rather than allow for its expression (*don't complain*). At the same time, they feel better for writing about their pain.[25]

Beyond individual therapy, how important is this type of writing? Scarey argues that the cultural expression of pain is important for social wellbeing, because, just as in war or torture, the culture of the dominant group in society can be directed towards silencing, and refusing to acknowledge the humanity of, those who suffer pain.[26] Other than verbalizing itself directly through pre-language cries and groans, pain must rely on metaphor.[27] The ultimate political consequence of pain's lack of voice, Scarey suggests, exists in the opportunity for social institutions to ignore the problems of people in pain.[28] Scarey argues that people become accessible to one another through verbal and material artifacts which are called into being through the impulse to move sensations, like pain, out of and away from the body. She argues that in this sense, pain relates to the nature of human creation in general.[29] If Scarey is right, then giving injured workers the medium for creative expression can help reduce their pain and at the same time provides cultural products which reveal buried aspects of our society and our humanity.

Managerial discourse speaks of and to a certain type of worker who will contribute to increased production.[30] Injured worker narratives quoted above reflect judgements that it is good to be a strong healthy willing worker and it is bad to be a weak, injured worker. Not so the 'No Frills' poets who celebrate recalcitrance. Their culture expresses itself through abusing managers and mocking the corporate rehabilitation system. The NUW 'No Frills' writing group was developed in response to union concern about alarming rates of work injury in the distribution warehouse of a well known bargain-supermarket chain. Something of the group's extreme anger at the workplace and the workers' compensa-

tion and rehabilitation system is evidenced in the following poem, 'Pump up the Jam', written by an injured storeman calling himself 'The Fucked Injured Poet':

WorkCover yeah what a farce
To most people, stick it up your arse
They break your balls and fuck you around
Never a lift – just grind you down
Deeper and deeper into the ground

This place is fucked I tell you no lie
Look for yourselves and you'll see why
Up, down, in and out
My fucked back is heard from a shout
Off to the doctors to stop the pain
But there's nothing wrong with you, are you insane?

People get angry and feel real hurt
When their faces are rubbed into the dirt
WorkCover has its own law
From my experience this is what I saw
They wheel and deal in a funny way
To fuck you up and make you pay

No matter what, you won't be a winner
Just get out of the job you fuckin sinner
So get a gun and shoot the cunt dead
Or do it Mafia style with the horse's head

This place and WorkCover just don't give a fuck
Sorry poor fellow you're all out of luck
Just fucking you around and passing the bucks
The whole situation fuckin sucks[31]

The No Frills poets take pride in debasing the corporate order.

The representation of things that lie beneath the corporate surface of static efficiency and wholesomeness, whether in disappointment and failure, or disease and dissolution, reflects what Julia Kristeva has identified as the realm of the abject.[32] She has described the abject as the place where meaning collapses, where the corporeal reality of the body confronts the sense of identity which is built upon identification with vitality rather than decay, upon things that endure rather than perish. "Conformity to the symbolic order requires suppression of the abject, repressing all forms of speech and modes of being regarded as improper or unclean".[33] The poet, Kevin Abrahams, a man who mockingly calls himself 'Harry Rort', speaks of the first-hand experience of abjection:

It was the day I done my calvin klein
Little did I know it was the start of my decline
Goin from one doctor to another I could see them shitpot signs
So to knock the pain I started necking flagons of andy devine
Even fronting work was like doing harry lime
A man was getting pig rooted down the end of the line

I finally had this flash x-ray
Which should have been done on the very first day
Well we're sorry mate you've blown a disc in your vertebrae
Well now we believe you, what more can we say
There's the door now get on your way

See they reckon you're an egg and spoon
Thrown in a 10x10 cage playing dark side of the moon
Though they call it the Reclamation Room
Its fucken no less than being harpooned into a spittoon

And when I tried to find the light
Instead of the knife, out walked the trouble and strife
So what now, long overcoat on a park bench tonight
Fuck this is a "grouse life"

You have no choice but to get on the pen and ink
These shitmen must think rinso's a fizzy drink
They fill you up with shit and send ya to a shrink
Fuck no wonder you end up like the missing link

So for me – no home but still the pain
Where tonight, the Gill, Ozanam or Staffa – it's all the same
The hounds couldn't give a fuck whether it's skid row or up a lane
See you get the tijuana brass when they whack ya on the insane
But see they know it's me frame and not me brain
But all they are looking at is another fucken WorkCare CLAIM[34]

This poem gives expression to the collapse of meaning in a life affected by injury that has cut a man apart from the mainstream workforce in his loss of strength and vigour, in his isolation in a rehabilitation ghetto, "the Reclamation Room" and through his experience of marriage break-up and dissolution into a drunken doss-house life. His mate, Mick Franklin, is of the same mind:

Go to bed early the night before
hoping to wake not as sore

Unfortunately I wake and the pain is still there
It's not a fake, does anyone care?

Within myself I know something's wrong
Bosses and doctors just tell me to be strong
They say "Do your job it's all in your mind"
with no consideration, can't even be kind[35]

The No Frills poets deride rehabilitation as a phoney practice, one whose agenda has more to do with saving money and forcing people to work in unsafe jobs, than in caring for injured workers. They mock the rehabilitation system in the manner of the eighteenth century street literature represented by Foucault, which championed a condemned criminal in the wake of his public execution.[36] Their attitude could also be linked to the confrontational and disrespectful political tradition of the Industrial Workers of the World. They liken their relationship with managers to that of prisoner to warder. Kevin Abrahams sets the scene in 'Mentally Sick':

Some reckon this joint is like the slot
The screws stalk us till we've had a gutful of the lot
It's a joke this shit with these toy cops
Let them have the pain and all we've got
What's this, the hamburger with the lot?
Maybe they've lost the plot
On Workcover it's something you cop

They have these eggs like freaks
Looking through keyholes playing hide and seek
Screws with pen and timesheet doin their beat
Locking eyes as we meet
Fuck these screws are so discreet
Trying to be nice when they speak
They must think we are all deadbeats

We're not to blame because we're in pain
But this shit drives you insane
Pacing the floor time and again
They get a high on this rat and hound game
See when ya on WorkCover you're not treated the same
They reckon we're all mentally lame

They hunt in packs
Geein you up hopin you'll crack
Always looking over your robert stack
Hopin to give some joker the axe
They should inject these jacks with ratsack

Then they try and talk and call ya "mate"
"How's your injury?" as they contort and gyrate
"By the way, we're dropping your payrate!"
So you're back to work until ya break
Don't be late or you'll be shown the gate

It's like ya been sour-graped
Walking around with night sticks
Amateurs getting their kicks
"Forget the pain stiff get on the pick!"
Nothing clicks with these two bit hicks
On WorkCover it's like you got the seven year itch
Maybe they should be inside with the mentally sick"[37]

The human condition is stated in corporeal terms like 'gutful' and 'shit', in references to sex, violence, mental illness, being crippled, and in the contortions and gyrations of those who speak words that are mocked by body language. The prison imagery is phrased in the language of inmates 'pacing the floor' in 'the slot', being watched by 'screws' 'in the nick', the 'toy cops' with 'night sticks'. The experience related is one of being under serveillance, being looked at 'through key-holes' by screws with 'pen and time sheets'.

This evokes Foucault's description of forms of discipline and punishment in the modern state as structures and methods of observing, identifying and enclosing individuals within social systems designed to enforce a norm of behaviour. He describes modern society as 'carceral' in the ubiquity of "the practice of placing individuals under observation, a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures".[38] Foucault notes that in the prison the technique of regulated and timetabled activity, silence, exercise and work are calculated to mould obedient subjects habituated to rules and orders.[39] In the factory the worker is characterized by position in a hierarchy, allotment to a job, a particular place on the floor.[40] The supervisor's gaze regulates the behaviour of deviants.[41] Discipline, asserts Foucault, normalizes by means of surveillance and assessment.[42] Foucault reminds us that the prison generally fails to rehabilitate but it may function effectively to make delinquents into a manageable group, 'known criminals' with 'records' that allow them to be kept under surveillance beyond prison walls.[43] While the network of discipline may encroach on our lives there remains a certain boundary between the life of the free, those innocent until proven guilty, and the life of those who are tried and imprisoned. The boundaries become blurred, however, in situations such as that of injured workers returning to work, who fail the test of normalization, individuals constrained by economic necessity to subject themselves to surveillance and assessment by supervisors who act as judge, jury and jailer. The No Frills poems tell the story of how a

workplace which fails to rehabilitate its injured workers attempts rather to manage them as delinquents.

Bereft of hope, these poets find some satisfaction in showing their contempt for so-called rehabilitation, describing it as a sentence they had earned by virtue of the institutionalized abuse of the unsafe workplace. Signifying a cheap generic brand product, the term 'no frills' captures the essence of a rehabilitation system based on economic rationalist principles. Market forces dictate that overused injured workers will return to work in unsafe conditions, doing life sentences as storemen in the bargain basement warehouse. In 'Pump up the Jam' the discourse of rehabilitation is reversed, described as a 'farce', with its 'own law' which makes the worker pay rather than those responsible for his injury. It is decried as an 'insane' system from which there is no escape other than cashing in one's job. Violent revenge is advocated. In the poem 'Mentally Sick' the question of sanity again is posed in the context of the experience of injured workers who feel they are represented as insane by an insane system and again revenge is sought: *Let them have the pain and all we've got/What's this, the hamburger with the lot? / Maybe they've lost the plot/On Workcover it's something you cop.* Justice is called for in the fantasy of injecting supervisors with ratsack.

We may take for granted the rules, surveillance, and time-tabling that occur in factories, schools and prisons, but injured worker literature makes real the shadowy condition of abjection and we are moved to challenge this disciplinary power. Foucault refers to discipline as a technology of subjection that acts by means of the body, inserting itself into human actions and attitudes, their discourses and daily lives. When we consider the physical body of the subject under study or management, then we must acknowledge his or her concrete identity as a thinking, feeling, flesh-and-blood human being. Many No Frills writers indicated that they felt they were punished for their work injury by return to work regimes which they described as "doin time":

Doin time
short term piss up
in the concrete wasteland[44]

Doin time
long term
for my back
for being crushed by a forklift
I'm a lifer[45]

Some wrote short pieces under the heading 'What are you in for?' Michelle, an order picker, wrote that she was in

for RSI
overuse
long term
no win situation
win or lose
from picking[46]

Fork-lift driver, Ken, wrote that he was in for

Reach Truck Neck
unsafe systems of work
back operations
no training
no frills[47]

In the narratives of the abject, workers' compensation protection, rather than being accepted with relief as a form of social care is received as a form of oppression by subjects of a repressive rehabilitation regime. Their abjection attests to a site of resistance against the punitive powers of workplace rehabilitation management. Where are the revolutionaries who would join such a struggle? Who will help to develop goals for the reconstruction of the workplace? Which union leaders will work to develop an injured workers' agenda for workplace reform?

In the worst case scenario the injured worker is no longer the worker who contributes to surplus but one who requires that a share of that surplus be contributed to his/her care. Business insists that a ceiling be kept on the workers' compensation premium that can be extracted from employers.[48] Injured workers' stories attest to the result: bargain basement rehabilitation which places injured workers in degrading jobs perhaps as a 'disincentive' to others who might seek to cheat their bosses and their fellows in the labour process by bludging. Perhaps all workers are abject who are worn out in order that production may increase. If this is the case then the injured worker must be the most sickening of workers in representing the border that encroaches upon the system, representing with disconcerting immediacy the looming fate of any worker.

Injured workers writing about their pain have made a social contribution, revealing the underside of the sanitized prosperity of economic growth. Now what can the reader do? Read, empathize, get angry, have a laugh, have a cry, get involved. Get involved

in a dialogue with others in the workplace and society to expose (maybe even improve) conditions of life at work and beyond.

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Thea Calzoni is a community activist and writer. She was inaugural president of the LeftWrites Alternative Festival for Readers and Writers.

injured workers

Introduction

OVER TIME YOU CAN come to accept pain as something unpleasant but bearable because it is not life-threatening. But not all work injury leaves you with your life.

When injury or death is caused by unsafe systems of work, it is fair to claim that the employer has stolen your health (or your life).

Rehabilitation or restitution may be sought from your employer through the workers' compensation system administered by the State. But does the State help you or does it help your employer? We can't forget that it is the employer who pays the insurance premium. Is this a way a Boss can buy out the safety of workers?

This collection of literature about work injury (and death) revives the question of justice for people injured at work.

Much of the work is drawn from the following trade union and worker publications and collections:

Industrial Voices – VTHC & Carringbush Library (1990)
The Road to Recovery – National Union of Workers and Kraft Foods (1992)
Stories from the Workplace – National Union of Workers (1994)
Buried but Not Dead – The Australian Nursing Federation Injured Nurses' Support Group (1997)
til death do us part – Industrial Deaths Narratives IDSA (1999)

Funded by the Australia Council for the Arts, *Industrial Voices* was assisted by the involvement of writers Tom Petisinis and Antonio Damarko, community arts workers, Cliff Smyth (Carringbush Library) and Daphne Stitt (VTHC) and migrant worker activists Lorella di Pietro and Gaetono Greco. The NUW publications came into being thanks to the energy and commitment of OHS worker, Gayle Burmeister. Injured worker activist Elizabeth Langford is the driving force behind *Buried but not Dead* as industrial deaths advocate Elizabeth Horvath Mobayad is of *til death us do part.*

Many have offered inspiration and support for bringing injured worker literature to light, in particular union OHS officers, Gayle Burmeister, Jeanette Sdrinas and Gwynnyth Evans, and Dr Helen Sutcliffe and others on the committee of management of the Workers Occupational Health Centre. Support was also provided by Helena Gilles and Helga Crocker of Broadmeadows Workers' Rehabilitation Services, Kevin Vaughan, Pat Snowden and John Bottomley, involved in the operation of the Victorian Injured Workers' Centre in the early 1990s, Vic Guarino from the Italian Injured Workers' Support Group in Coburg, and union delegates Tom Nolan and Des Shelley (Kraft Foods) and Ken Moore (Franklins).

The project of bringing injured workers' stories into the cultural sphere has been encouraged and assisted by Mike Hamel Green, Paul Adams and Michele Grossman of Victoria University, the committee of LeftWrites Inc, the Lance Reichstein Foundation and the Australia Council for the Arts. The work presented here is but a sample of injured worker writing produced over the past ten years. To all those injured workers who downed tools and picked up pens, congratulations on bringing the mumbling environment of OHS irony into the larrakin ambience of *overland.*

Blaming the Victim

I worked in a fibreglass factory for fourteen years. For the first seven, on and off as a casual worker, I felt like a yo-yo. Whatever skill level I reached, I would be put to training a junior to do the job and as soon as I trained one, I'd get put off and she would do the job for less money.

The juniors were not so reliable so I was eventually employed full-time. It was high pressure with the supervisor always on my back to work faster. She was always right. She would never listen to a worker's point of view (although it was not long since she had moved up from that rank herself).

January 1988 I was put to work on a new machine. After a demonstration it was up to me to learn about it as I worked. They were in a rush to get the orders filled and there was pressure on me to work faster. The thread warps for the machine were too big. Excess threads hung down the back, getting tangled up. I was losing time running around into a cramped space to cut them and get them untangled. I wore my scissors round my waist on a piece of elastic. As I leaned over, they got caught in the rotating shaft of the loom. In a frantic struggle to get safe, I bashed my knee. The elastic snapped and I was free but my knee was very very sore, swelling up from the bruise. It didn't heal well with the continued pressure of work. I couldn't stand up for long periods anymore. I tried to keep on working but it was getting worse. In February I filled out a WorkCare claim. Three weeks later I was dismissed. The union rep was a young boy. He didn't come to talk with me after I was given notice. I don't blame him. He had been told off only two weeks before for telling somebody how many sick days they were entitled to.

The manager said I was being put off because there was no work for me as "all the shuttle looms were now being disposed of". I felt like he was saying "Your looms are being thrown out and so are you".

Within a week of my dismissal, the factory placed an advertisement in the paper:

"Narrow fabric needle loom operator required for afternoon shift." It was my old job. Too late for me to lodge an unfair dismissal claim. I never got WorkCare. My knee is still sore. I have to be careful with it. I feel as though I have been used but I see that I am partly to blame because I knew it was a bad place but I kept on going back to work there, didn't I?

Barbara Bennet

Barbara's Story

I liked the women I worked with
I don't get to see them anymore
We worked in a Quality Circle
and our invention was approved by the Board

I like my job
I don't like some of the bosses
I like the women I work with
I don't get to see them anymore

I liked all the social club outings
I don't go on them anymore
No I don't ever see my workmates now
I'm no longer on the floor

My job was to wire up the cars
before they were put out for sale
I liked being part of the process
I felt I was part of the team

Until one day when shifting some wiring
the weight became too much for my arm
I felt it wrench my shoulder
I didn't think it had done much harm

For the next two weeks I kept working
looking forward to my Christmas break
My holiday was very relaxing
then my shoulder began to ache and ache

I liked returning to work
to see all my friends again
I looked forward to the wages that were coming
but my shoulder had packed it in

I went to see the doctor
who diagnosed my frozen shoulder
I went back to work on light duties
The floor lady's attitude was colder

For twelve months I did light duties
until they started laying off staff
Injured workers weren't given much choice
My Quality Circle days are now past

I liked my job
I don't like some of the bosses
I liked the women I worked with
I don't get to see them anymore

Barbara Bromley, Rhonda Wilkinson, Kevin Vaughan, Eric Roberts, Doreen Cincotta, Chris Sadler and Alan Hocking

Before my Dad's Back got Hurt

We used to go places, but now we hardly ever go places, because of his back.
We used to live together as a family, but now he lives in a different place.
My Dad used to always be happy and hardly ever get upset. Now he cries at a lot of things and he is always in pain.
Before my Dad's back was hurt we used to play games, football, netball . . . but now all he does is just sit inside and watch TV and talk about his sore back.
Every pay night we would have Macdonald's or take-away but now we just have vegies and meat.
My Dad never used to get angry at us but he does a lot now.
I don't blame my Dad for all of this because I will always love him. Always. No matter what happens.

Kim Kropp

I'm Glad I'm Alive

After being at home caring for three children, returning to work was not only an economic necessity but a mental one too. My youngest child asked if the tablecloths in the restaurant were red. There were no tablecloths, just tables on which people would dance at the end of the night. For two years things went really well for me. My colleagues and boss were great. I started as a waitress. I became a chef. Six months later I had my first accident. My reaction? Why me? People ask me how I feel. I say that I'm fine.

Inadequate floor-covering in the cool-room. Wet cardboard on an aluminium floor gets slippery. I walked in. I went one way. The cardboard went another. Like a rag doll, I sat down. I remember thinking I was very clever because I didn't drop one prawn from the aluminium bowl I was holding.

The second accident was a month later. I slipped and fell on greasy tiles. Six weeks off. New Year's Eve I spent cleaning up after the new chef. I bent the wrong way; it felt like a blunt knife ripping my spine. The next day I couldn't get out of bed.

Three years next month, on WorkCare. Awful. Dependent on other people and other things. WorkCare is a thing. It's not human. Imagine being in a supermarket, looking for something specific. You ask an assistant for guidance.

"Sorry, that's not my department."

That's what I got from WorkCare. A simple example? Waiting for recompense for my medical bills. Passed from person to person on the phone.

"They're being processed."

"The computer's broken down."

Don't give me that. I was a computer operator for ten years myself. I said it must be up to the input clerk. Two days later I got the cheque.

I've kept a diary of pain and depression, of avoiding people, even on the phone, of lining tablets up on the table and wondering if taking the lot would get me out of this. I don't know why my husband stayed with me through all that but I'm glad he did. After October last year, when I found out I had stress-induced epilepsy, I was relieved because I thought I had been going insane. My husband gave me logic when I wanted to fall apart. We talked and talked about two and half years of it. Found out just how selfish I had been with the "why me?" syndrome because it was really "why us?"

A lumbar disc is disintegrating from the inside out. There is permanent muscle and tissue damage on the right side of my lower back. I walk with a limp. Why? Because of the pain down my left leg. I take pain-killers, anti-depressants, muscle relaxants and, for the epilepsy, circuit-breaker pills.

What about my children? The oldest has had to grow up in an awful hurry. They all have. The middle one is very insular. I don't think they understand but I know they love me. I love them, absolutely.

I'm glad I'm alive but it's taken a long time for me to say that.

Anne Robinson

Work Care Clips

I who once roared as loud as the lion
who was alive and in control of my life
who made decisions as a free spirit
who now cringes when seen, and hides in the dark
Who am I now?

Writing about being injured is difficult
It's such a long drawn-out process
To tell it all
would simply put you to sleep!

Wait! Is that WorkCare saying that they're sorry,
they believe me,
they want to share? To feel my pain, my anxiety and
despair?

Pay deal
Budget Cuts
Grovel
Just as I thought!

Slow action
High Pain
Waiting, suffering
I hear laughter!

60% entitlement
Impairment Unknown
Official ignorance
I know what I can and can't do!

Dianne Wiggett

Second Time Around

One day I was given the job of building a platform for the use of engineers servicing the airconditioning unit outside the factory. I was given pine wood to work with but I could see that this would not stand up well to wet weather. Appropriate material would have been marine ply but the manager refused to provide this on the grounds that it cost too much. I wasn't happy but you have to do what they pay you for. I built a pine frame and covered it with pine boards.

In my seventeen years at the factory I had done many jobs which I wasn't able to do properly because of management practices and work policy. I accepted it by regarding it all as a big joke that people who become managers won't listen to somebody who is skilled in a job. Managers think they must always be in control, making every decision themselves.

About three years after building the pine platform I was instructed to take out the now rotten pine boards and replace them with marine ply. While I was repairing it, I fell through.

Now I have to come to terms with the fact that my body is so injured that I can never do my job again and at fifty-nine years of age I am too old to be retrained.

Fred Hinz

Buried but not Dead

Conclusion to the Australian Nursing Federation *Injured Nurses, Support Group survey of occupational illness and injury incurred by nurses in the Victorian health service industry*, Melbourne, ANF, 1997, pp. 20–23.

It is clear from this study, and from other Australian and overseas studies, that while nursing is a health profession, it is not healthy for the care givers themselves. Very little has improved for nurses in relation to injury rates and occupational health and safety over the years. It is significant to note that, despite the reduction in WorkCover claims overall, and the reduction of nurses employed in the health industry, the claims among nurses in the health industry are rising. This suggests that the pressures in the health system are increasing the rate of injury among nurses.

There are many reasons for this, however the overriding reason is one of attitude. The view that the health industry is automatically a healthy workplace leads to inaction in improving the design of hospitals and work processes/practices and the purchase of equipment. This is exacerbated by poor staffing levels, and lack of funding to provide for adequate staff-to-patient ratios.

Much 'lip service' is given to improvements, however these core issues are not dealt with. 'Window dressing' issues such as correct lifting techniques and manual handling aides are the prime focus in health institutions because they are the least expensive to provide.

However, to simply emphasize the use of correct equipment and lifting techniques, and ignore the fact that in many instances there is not enough staff to make the use of such techniques or equipment practicable, serves only to focus on the nurse as the cause of the injury.

Blaming the victim in this way allows the government and employers to ignore the structural problem. It is essential that funding and staffing levels are recognized as occupational health and safety issues too.

It is also time to revisit the expectation that nurses will deliver sustained, high powered and heavy physical care. Workplace design, equipment and work processes need to be reassessed. Ways of restructuring the industry to allow nurses who have worked for long periods at the bedside to work in light work areas, or modifying bedside care needs to be considered. (Even when a nurse is injured, and a return-to-work plan is devised, the pressure to return to pre-injury work is such that the nurse does so and is further injured or just gives up altogether.)

The excuse that these measures are not economically viable can no longer be used to delay change. The WorkCover Authority's own statistics detailing the cost of workplace injury and illness should be reason enough to implement radical changes.

The poverty which is imposed on injured workers, the antagonistic system which is inclined to make injured/ill workers feel like criminals and the lack of suitable alternative duties make it clear that the workers' compensation system in Victoria needs a major overhaul.

What is required is a commitment on the part of nurses and their union to bring occupational health and safety issues to the forefront. This requires a commitment to take the necessary action to force a cultural and attitudinal change on their governments and their employers, so that workplace illness and injury will itself become a thing of the past, dead and buried.

Elizabeth Langford

Returning to work after injury

When I notified the hospital that I had been cleared to return to work I was greeted at first with surprise by the administration. They had not expected me to be able to work again.

Next came the problem of what to do with me. In their infinite wisdom my employers decided that I would be best off sitting in the hospital security room watching the security monitors. This was not what I had envisaged. I had assumed – unwisely I suppose – that I would be returning to my pre-injury position as an anaesthetic sister in the operating theatres.

Another problem seemed to be the general attitude of people working around me. Most of them had no idea of what I had been through physically over the past three and a half years, that is, the injury, the pain, the anxiety, the surgery (three operations: two on my lower back and one on my neck) the merry-go-round of doctors, physiotherapists, psychologists and, at my own request, psychiatrists.

The hospital came up with the bright idea that they would conduct a refresher course which would serve the purpose of re-integrating me as well as being open to people from other hospitals in the same situation as myself. This was political procrastination. It never eventuated.

Next they decided they would tailor a course specifically for me. I have just begun this program – nine months after returning to work.

The majority of the staff have been informed of the situation with regard to my condition but appear not really to have grasped or comprehended it in the right way. Some of them resent the fact that I am unable to comply with all their wishes. I get a lot of non-comprehending looks and sometimes comments when I try to explain my situation. This causes me emotional trauma and at times pure anger.

Another problem. Why commence this refresher course in a high pressure high dependency area of the Accident and Emergency Department? Are they trying to push me out of the hospital by proving I can't cope? I have fought so hard to get back to work there is no way they will get me to give up.

Keith McMahon

Trauma Shock

A sudden horrific shock
Creates a mental block
Homicide, volence, abuses, rape
Escape
Being a trauma victim
Upsets your system
Changes your routine
Like you have never seen
Not able to function normal
You feel abnormal
Vivid, intrusive moving pictures
Not fictitious
Crying and crying
Wish you were dying
Emotions out of control
Sweats of hot and cold
Nightmares in your sleep
You may grind your teeth
Fear of the outside world
Safety always an issue
No matter where you go or what you do
Isolation, devastation
Inner turmoil
Anger, depression
Aggression
Incredible mood swings
No desire to sing
A chemical imbalance in the brain
You are not insane
An abnormal situation
Caused this manifestation
How do you learn to trust again
After so much
Pain
This occurrence
Post Trauma Stress Disorder
A disturbance
Like a phantom it will reappear
A haunting fear
No solution
No peace
Without true retribution.

Angela Bove

The Four Letter Word

It attacks with a rage and engulfs you
It can shock you with its power
until it takes your breath away and
leaves you reluctant to take another

You need strength to fight it
to push it away, or live beside it

It invades your dreams and senses
leaving nothing untouched
Last night I dreamt of a little machine
malignantly attached to my spine
I was angry that it never stopped
It manufactured PAIN

There, I've said it
This deleted expletive that has become
such a big part of my life
that has changed my perception of life

In fact it has separated me from life
until I sit, still, almost scared to move
a couch potato, hot-water bottle in position
Pain-killers, my comfort cat on my lap
Tears trickling down, unbidden.

Lindy Ray

Love and Pain

Nancy's got pretty blue eyes and blonde curls, but she's no Barbie doll. Once she was a stacker in a plastics factory, lifting, twisting, bending, carrying, pushing, pulling. She took bottles from the machines, packed them into boxes and lifted them onto stacks of pallets. She lasted ten years.

Nancy loves Frank. He's a fireman. Shift work but he enjoys it – and the money. Everybody likes Frank. He's a great guy who never understood how hard Nancy had to work.

She was the quiet achiever, not one to complain, but one day she came home from work and said to Frank:

"My back's really sore."

"I get that too, love," he grinned. "It's old age catching up."

"I'm not old," said cross Nancy.

"Eh, I'm the same age as you and I reckon I'm getting on. What does that make you then?"

She didn't have to think about it.

"OK, fair, fat and forty."

A sexy answer. But Nancy pulled away from his arms.

"It's been hurting for a while, Frank."

He gave her a kiss.

"Listen, let's go and have a lie-down. We've got half an hour before the kids come home. C'mon, you'll feel better after, I promise. And tomorrow, don't do anything stupid, right? Be careful how you lift stuff. Take it easy. OK?"

The next day, Nancy did think about what Frank had said. She thought about how she moved and tried to keep her back straight. She concentrated so hard on looking after herself that her work slowed down and the supervisor had to tell her to pull her finger out. All very well for Frank to give advice but he didn't know what it was like on the floor. Anyway, how could she even take it easy at home, with all the housework and the cooking to do? He hadn't offered to help out there had he? Still, nobody's perfect. You gotta take the rough with the smooth. Frank is pretty good, as blokes go.

That weekend was good, sociable and relaxing. Nancy felt a lot more positive by Monday. She still had that tight spot in her back but she knew it would be OK. Kate and Eric had school holidays. They would help out around the house. So Nancy thought as she moved through the day at work. The trouble with thinking about home when you're at work is you see it kind of dreamy and unrealistic. Reality hit that afternoon.

Kate and Eric always had lots of friends over in the holidays and there they were, having snacks and leaving the lid off the jam. They had been watching videos and getting a fresh glass for every drink; they had eaten lots of potato chips and scrunched little bits into the lounge-room floor. As teenagers they were rightfully embarrassed when Nancy yelled at them in front of their friends. It always used to be OK to have fun in the school holidays. Mum had said often enough that she was happy to have other kids over.

"Sorry about Mum," Kate told her pals. "She's just a bit menopausal."

Right on cue, Nancy rushed into her room to cry. Positive thinking was wearing thin. As the school holidays progressed, it got worse. Frank would come home to find the house in a real mess with Nancy burning the dinner and yelling at the kids. One night he sent Kate and Eric to get fish and chips. He sat Nancy down with a beer and tried to sort her out.

"What's got into you? You've changed!"

"God, Frank, it's my back. It's getting worse."

She started to cry. Frank suddenly felt very tired.

"OK, take some time off work."

He was being as patient as possible.

"How can I? You're the one said we could use the extra money."

He ignored that comment. He wasn't going to let her blame this one on him.

"See a doctor. Do something about it. Just stop taking it out on me and the kids, alright?"

He didn't mean to be unkind.

"Look, love, I realize you're having a hard time. You need a break. Go and see a doctor."

Nancy knew he was right. She also knew he didn't understand. If she reported her injury, she feared she'd get the sack. She'd seen it happen to others. That would really mess up their plans. She was only halfway through saving up for their summer in Queensland. Frank was going to take his long service leave. They hadn't had a family holiday since the kids were little and she was hanging out for that holiday in the sun. She would try to focus on her goal, keep her back straight and forget about the pain. That's how she got through each working day. But by the time she got home she'd be exhausted, snapping at Eric for nothing, bossing Kate and trying to ignore Frank. He just kept on at her to report her symptoms until she couldn't stand it any more.

The supervisor looked her up and down and asked her if she was sure it was work-related. Then she sent her off to do the paper work. The girl at the pay office was too young and glamorous, but she gave Nancy a friendly little smile as she handed her the form. Nancy bit her lip. Funny how people can treat you like dirt and you can keep your chin up and then someone is kind and you feel like crying your eyes out.

The doctor arranged for x-rays which showed nothing much wrong. Said it was soft-tissue injury. He gave her some anti-inflammatory drugs and said she'd be right to go back to work in three days. He was wrong. She got worse and began to break down emotionally. He gave her strong pain killers and anti-depressants. They didn't stop the stiffness and pain in her back. She began to lose interest in life.

Frank pushed her to try other doctors, exercise, acupuncture. They were searching for a miracle cure. All the while, Nancy got worse and her work got worse. The boss was relieved to put her off on compensation. She knew he'd soon find a way to get rid of her for good.

Now she was off work, Nancy was supposed to get better. Her treating doctor believed the pain was real but he felt the problem wasn't helped by her smoking and eating habits. Sure enough the family got to hear about it and soon everybody was nagging her to lose weight and give up the smokes. Not that it made an impression. She was locked up in herself, in her precious pain. She didn't notice that Kate and Eric were doing heaps of housework. She sat in her special hard-backed chair, chain smoking like there was no tomorrow. Her only outings were to the physiotherapist, which she said was torture, and to various doctors, including compo doctors who she said were spies. One of these was a psychiatrist.

"How are things going at home?"

He seemed genuinely interested.

"Good thanks," Nancy replied.

"You have children?"

"Yes, two. They're good kids. Kate is twelve and Eric is fourteen."

"And your husband?"

"He's marvellous," said Nancy, thinking how she and Frank didn't talk much any more. "He looks after me."

"How does he make you feel?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you happy with him?"

Nancy went quiet, trying to poke through the fog in her heart to remember what 'happy' meant. Eventually she said:

"No, I'm not happy with anybody these days. I'm in awful pain and I haven't got the energy."

"Are you and Frank sleeping together these days, Nancy?"

"No, I've got a special posturepaedic bed. It's too hard for Frank."

"Do you enjoy sex?"

"That's personal. I don't have to answer that, do I?"

"No, you can say whatever you please."

"What has all this got to do with my back?"

"The body and the mind are connected through nerves in the back. A person's emotional state may cause problems in the spine and associated soft tissue."

"I see. Do you think I'm nuts or something?"

"My job is to assess you for the purposes of your claim for continued compensation. I am not here to treat you. However, if you would like some help with your mental health I could recommend someone very good."

Nancy declined the offer. Two weeks later her payments were stopped. Her stress levels peaked as she did the rounds of solicitors and on to the Appeals Board to get re-instatement. Not just for the money. Now it was a matter of honour. Frank took time off work to drive her around but you could see he took

no pleasure in her company. And how could she appreciate help delivered in this surly fashion? Nancy let Frank know she resented his attitude. He returned the compliment. She won the Appeal but she lost his support. Instead of coming home to help with meals, he'd go straight to the pub at the end of his shift. He'd be home drunk and soon snoring. Next day he'd be withdrawn and moody. When Nancy begged him to pull himself together, he laughed. He swore at her and said she'd ruined his life. He wished he could walk out on her, but he didn't want to hurt the kids. Where were they, anyway? They just about lived at their friends' places, these days. He'd heard at the pub that one of Eric's mates had been expelled from school for dealing cannabis.

"Cop that, Nancy," he snarled, and headed off to the pub.

Nancy's heart was beating so fast, it was scary. She knew her family was going down-hill. She felt guilty about it but it seemed like her own misery was too big for her to help anybody else. What could she do? What was going to happen to her?

When you're down and troubled and you need some love and care and nothing, no nothing is going right, stop a while and think of me and soon I will be there to brighten up even your darkest hour . . .

The radio was playing Carol King and her clear all-cried-out sound cut through Nancy's pain. *Just call out my name and you know wherever I am I'll come running . . .You've got a friend.*

Where were Nancy's friends? They were still around, out there somewhere. There was nothing to talk to them about any more. Especially her workmates. Sometimes she saw one or two of them when she went in to pick up her pay. Seemed like everyone was embarrassed about that, including Nancy. She was embarrassed to be on compo and to have a husband who everyone knew spent most of his free time in the pub.

Carol was still singing: *People can be so mean. They'll hurt you and desert you, they'll take your soul if you let them . . .* Nancy lit a cigarette. She went into her children's rooms and looked at their rumpled beds. She prayed for forgiveness, then she went into her own room and took twenty pills. Twenty hours later, she woke up to a screaming telephone. Frank was in hospital. A fall at work. Heart racing, head pounding, Nancy struggled to think what Frank meant to her. Memories of how they used to be together came back in a rush, pushing away the reality of the last hell of a year. She was ready to love him again.

He had come close to losing his life, but he had no remorse for the time he had wasted at the pub. He was nasty and unappreciative of Nancy's efforts to help him. She could handle it. She knew what he was going through. He felt vulnerable and scared about how long it would take for his back to heal. She knew he needed her. She could manage her pain so long as there was a reason for her to make the effort.

In six weeks, Frank was better. He couldn't wait to get back to work. After his shift, he didn't stay long at the hotel. He brought a couple of bottles home. Nancy was dressed up and they got close slowly, tentative until the chemistry took over.

Nancy no longer receives compensation pay and she has lost her job. She is studying for a Higher School Certificate. It's good for getting her out of the house. She doesn't believe there is much she can do to help her kids. Eric is in trouble for truancy and Kate's underperforming at school. Frank still spends time at the hotel. He drinks a lot more than he used to. Life is not what it used to be. Love is not the way Nancy expected it to be. Her family has been touched by failure and there is no point working out who is to blame. All of them have learnt tolerance. It's too late for that family holiday in the sun but maybe they will get there one day in their separate ways.

Barbara Bromley, Rhonda Wilkinson, Kevin Vaughan, Eric Roberts, Doreen Cincotta, Chris Sadler, Alan Hocking and Thea Calzoni

A Working Life

I have been twenty-four years in Australia, twenty-three and a half years as an assistant machine operator working for a company which manufactures bedding and bedding accessories. My health has always been good. My doctor used to say if all were like me, he would have no customers.

Up until recently I have been lucky in not having had any major problems with work. The only consequences I suffered from years of heavy lifting have been two hernias. One was operated on in 1983, the other, last year. In 1983 I didn't suffer hernia pain for very long. After I reported it to Sister at work, it took just one week to get the OK to have an operation. Workers' Compensation paid my medical costs and 75 per cent of my regular wage for the eight weeks I had off work to recover. The Sister was very kind. She told me not to come back to work until I really felt I was ready. That helped me a lot. I can't say anything against the new nurse but he is not the same.

In 1994 the pain in my groin was much worse right from the start. It would come like a big heat, then it would feel like somebody was punching me. I would have to sit down until the pain eased off enough for me to stand up and continue with my work. As in 1983, I reported the trouble and saw a doctor who said it was a hernia and referred me to the specialist. But this time, the specialist wouldn't perform the operation until he got the OK from WorkCover. (He wants to make sure he gets his money.) I went back to work and waited for the claim to be processed. I complained many times at work about it but they did not tell me anything about when I could get my operation. Eventually I asked the union to help me and within one week of their intervention I got a letter from the insurance. Then I was able to go off and have the operation. My recovery was spoiled by many calls from the company trying to push me back to work before I felt ready. My wife was very upset by this. Eventually I had to go in to work and ask the big boss to tell the person harassing me to stop. Then we were left in peace. I was ready to return to work ten weeks after the operation.

Everything went well for me until I was involved in an accident at work. It happens like this: Between two machines there is a roller which moves lengths of polyester around a steel bar. I take the old roll off the spindle when the new roll falls, the end of it hits my head and crashes against my shoulder. Straight away I fall back. I scream from the pain. The fellow on the other side is also hit but not as bad. He is able to run around to ask me what has happened to me. The pain is very bad and I am dizzy and getting sleepy. I don't remember what happens until the ambulance comes and the attendant is asking me what is my name, where do I live, and so on.

I was four days in hospital. My shoulder was dislocated and had two fractures. At first they thought I would need an operation but now after some physiotherapy the doctors think I may not need an operation. I hope I don't have to have one. The pain is still there but I am slowly improving with physiotherapy and hydrotherapy. Perhaps my shoulder will never be pain free, because I am not young but I am doing my best to help it to heal.

One thing that was a bit funny was how one week after this accident the WorkCover Officer from my workplace was ringing me up to get me back to work. I told my union representative that I was worried I would be pushed back to work with my injured shoulder. He said "No worries, you got the right to take it easy until you heal". After three months off, I have returned to work on light duties. The doctor has recommended no lifting more than three and a half kilos and working only four hours per day for one month but WorkCover say it should be like this for only two weeks. I will refuse to get pushed into any job that is too hard for me. I don't care about the hours as long as it is light duties that will not make my injury worse. My left shoulder now is getting painful too, perhaps from me always having to protect the right. I can't lift my right arm up high enough even to comb my hair. My wife does it for me at home. At work I use my left arm.

I will stay calm and stay working as long as I can provided the job is not too heavy or too hard. I am fifty-eight years old. I have been working for forty-five years of my life. Without that injury I would still be fit and healthy and as good a worker as ever.

Efstathios Georgiou

Bad Vibrations

At work there is
a bright yellow forklift
to whirr away the time
rumbling raw nerves

Like a dog
barking on a chain
all day invisible wounds
bleed your soul

At home you shift
from chair to chair and
snap and snarl at your son
and your wife

You look
at the rooms
you used to paint
the garden you used to grow

You think
of the food you used to cook
and how you used to clean the house
that now begins to close in on you

Remembering how active you were
working with your yellow machine
stacking the pallets and lifting them with the forklift
you, the other men and the trucks were a team

Now you just sit your bum on the forklift all day
trapped like a baby in his high chair
unable to explain the bad vibrations
as you watch the action

Occasional pains are quite normal
after a certain age
and you never complained
until the big one got you
in the back
and it keeps on getting at you
forcing you from the forklift
to the office
from one chair to another

John Darmanin and Thea Calzoni

A Few Thoughts

I want to write about the headaches and how they affect my concentration and my moods.

I feel bad about the people I work with who are nice to my face but I get the feeling they say things about me behind my back. Do I really care about it? Yes, with some of them, I do, and the rest I don't even care for. One day they could be in my place. But even then would they really understand? It seems that if you have an injury and you carry on and just see the work doctor or sister or the physiotherapist, then that's OK. But they say I shouldn't take time off on compensation because then I'll have a bad work record. But they don't understand that when you are in a lot of pain and can't do your job properly then it affects the people you work with just the same.

I've tried to show other injured people to do things the way I've been helped to learn how to do to help myself, but they don't really want to listen. They feel if they keep putting on a brave face eventually their problem will go away. I've watched these people and I know the pain they are in and I understand that nobody likes to give in, but sometimes it's better to take responsibility for yourself and stop doing your work on the line at the expense of others who have to make up for your slowness.

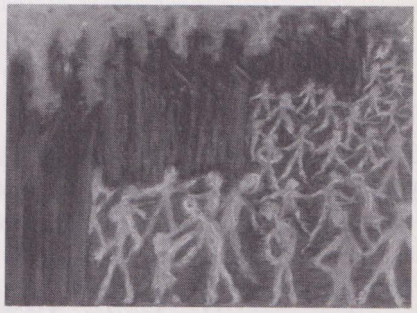
Since my injury I've found out that if you talk to the right people you can get help to carry on at work. The best thing is not to listen to the jibes behind your back. You have to explain to people that you are doing things a certain way because that is what you have been told to do to help yourself cope with your injury. I can still do my work but I have to do it differently at times. The job will get done, but I have to do it my way.

Dawn Campbell

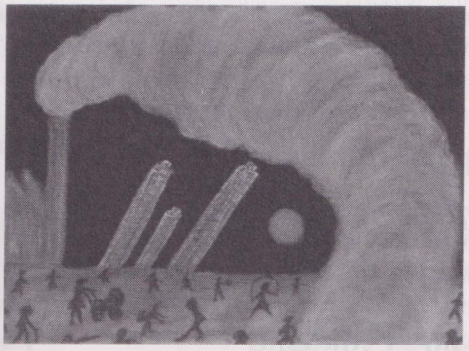
A Thought

In the period of consumerism, there are the users and the used. The problem is that today the material is thrown away once it has been used. We workers belong to a category of material that has been used.

Vittorio Truglia



Retrenchments at the Factories, Nicholas Nedelkopoulos, 1986

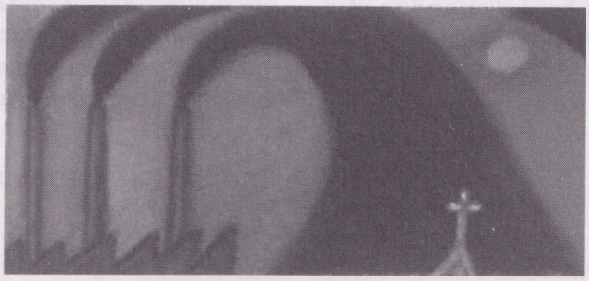


Life in the Industrial Zone, Nicholas Nedelkopoulos, 1986

Landscape

Rough, bitter asphalt people without hope creep all over you. Buildings of nightmares form uneven lines. The beautiful parks are lonely isles Inhuman factories mindlessly produce suffering. A cannibalistic and repugnant system consuming wheels of numerate human flesh.

John Phoenix



The Dim Signs, Nicholas Nedelkopoulos, 1987

Pain Does Not Make an Appointment

My Injury

I slipped and fell in a pool of oil in 1977, injuring my lumbar spine. I went to the doctor who sent me to have x-rays and physiotherapy. I returned to work but I could no longer perform at the same level as before the injury. I was moved from my old job to one that required less bending. I coped in the new position for two years.

Then I was transferred without reason and overtime was no longer available to me. This made me feel like a social outcast. One day the foreman from my old job rediscovered me and asked me to join his team. I returned to work for him. When it became obvious that I was having difficulty coping, I asked to be transferred to a lighter job. He replied: "You are too valuable here and I cannot let you go."

I kept working until 1981 when I bent down to pick up a box for the last time.

The Doctors

My local doctor kept giving me Digesics without explaining the side effects. He sent me to a physiotherapist who first claimed that my injury was only minor and he would have me back to work in six weeks. Then he heard my back click and he said, "There is nothing more I can do for you."

The Hospital

After examination I had a mylogram, where dye is injected into the spine. It flows freely where there is no pain, but where there is pain, the pressure makes it slow down. It was said I should have cortisone injections in my spine but there was insufficient space between the vertebrae for them to do it.

The Specialist

The specialist could not guarantee the success of the operation and there was a possibility that further damage could be done to other parts of my spine as a result of the proposed spinal fusion. I decided not to go through with it.

Compensation Doctors

They agree I have a serious back problem but say it is not work-related. The say it is a birth defect called spina bifeda.

Insurance Company

They claimed they had a film of me doing some physical work which I should not be able to do with my injury. This type of blackmail saved the insurance company $15,000 because I was too frightened to enter the court room.

My Workplace

I used to work exchanging pleasantries with work mates and finding the bosses very helpful. Morale was high and so was productivity until one day the managing director called everyone to the canteen. He announced the sacking of the general warehouse manager and many other leading hands from various departments for stealing and other offences.

Industrial Engineers

A team of efficiency experts was employed by the company to streamline the whole operation. Production quotas were introduced that were beyond the physical capability of most workers. Everyone tried to cope with this new situation. Many mistakes were made.

The Humiliating Process

Whenever you made a mistake and the assembled item came back to the warehouse, it was put on display with your name on it. What followed was ridicule from your work mates, causing depression and a sense of isolation.

Many people were taking days off to recover and production went down.

Solution to the Productivity Problem

The solution was to bring in casual workers and only keep the ones who performed well above the average permanent worker. This created an atmosphere of competition between permanent and casuals resulting in many injuries.

The Desire to Increase Productivity

As we arrived in front of the production office one morning, the foreman made an announcement to the effect that anyone caught speaking to a fellow worker would be sacked on the spot. Everyone became depressed and concerned about job security. We began writing notes to each other.

Six hours later management realized that no work was being done. They called everyone to the canteen to discover why the workers weren't producing. The workers told the managing director that since they were not allowed to speak, they thought note writing was a reasonable alternative. The foreman apologized and we returned to work. Production remained lower than morale for many months after that!

Social Security

To receive the Disability Pension, I was asked to attend their doctors many times and I was asked many questions like "When does your back hurt you most, before lunch or after lunch?" I replied: "Pain does not make an appointment."

The Final Humiliation

I was asked to bring all my x-rays to the Social Security Doctor. When I got there, he didn't want to see them. Instead, he asked me questions about my background, my parents, my wife's health background. At this point, I objected and asked him to tell me who he really was. He apologized and said he was a psychiatrist.

To the Reader

If you are still in the workplace, I hope you learn from my experience and do all you can to change society's attitude towards the injured worker because when all this trouble happens to you, it's too late to worry about it.

Joe Tarranto

From Reclamation to Rehabilitation

The dull steel surface of the sink bench is piled high with damaged goods. What to do with these broken bottles of lurid yellow vitamin B capsules? You prefer to avoid looking at the dog food oozing from its cracked can as you move on past the bench, careful not to trip on the wooden pallets lining the centre of the room. One of them is already half-stacked with empty packets and rejected bits and pieces. Another is loaded up with towels ready for labelling. Another is covered with half-way useful damaged stuff for the Salvos. You squeeze past a table of odds and ends that need cleaning with spirits. Kerosene and metho and other cleaning products line the shelves against the wall. Benches on the opposite wall house numerous containers of chemical products, most of them corrosive. Some have leaked a jagged pale stain onto the concrete floor. Welcome to the Reclamation Room.

Between the benches six workers huddle together for warmth as they sort, clean and pack the rejected products. It doesn't smell good in here. There are no windows. This concrete rubbish shed is separated from the main warehouse by a cyclone wire gate. Occasionally a supervisor peers in through the wire to check that the men are working. I ask what crime have these people committed that they should be assigned to working in the Reclamation Room for weeks, months, even years.

They are injured workers, unable to do their former jobs for reasons of physical disability and chronic pain. The company no longer finds them useful but it is obliged to employ them for one year following their injury. They have had time off to recover from serious injuries. Now they are at least capable of moving about and need to return to take an active role of some sort. In fact, the law requires that they be rehabilitated, even if this means returning to work at duties which seem humiliating. Other workers despise them. This makes an ugly anger grow within their souls as they shoulder their pain to sort through the rubbish that represents their lives.

I am told that change is going to come. The company is setting up a medical centre in one of the warehouse offices, with a full-time occupational health nurse and some gym equipment out the back. The new Occupational Health and Safety Manager is planning to discontinue the use of the Reclamation Room as a site for alternate duties for injured workers.

This is something, but it is not everything. I meet many people working on this cold cement floor who tell me what it's like to front a job where divisions will always be drawn between those who keep their noses to the grindstone and those who cut loose and speak out, where petty power is still wielded by small-minded bullies against workers who dare to complain about their conditions.

Thea Calzoni

So you want an easy job

So you want an easy job like you think we get on WorkCover? OK mate, you try it for a laugh, you go on WorkCover, lose your overtime, lose your self-respect – get ready to travel all over Melbourne for appointments with WorkCover doctors – get treated like a criminal.

If you don't like missing out on pay for the days you take off, then you front the Conciliator and wait in the foyer hoping for the best while other people talk about you in the Conciliator's rooms.

Get harassed by your manager and your co-workers. Enjoy the sly remarks and the back stabbing. Say goodbye to any opportunities for promotion. Begin the fight to hang on to your job.

Most people on WorkCover don't do it for an easy ride. They do it because they've been in accidents or they've got over-use injuries that are giving them non-stop pain. When that's the case, you've got no choice.

Ian Skinner

Protecting my Health

I've been working in the manufacture of antibiotics for about five years. Penicillin dust is in the air and on the floor in the dispensing area where I worked.

I got pains in my stomach at work. In hindsight I see them as the result of the build-up of penicillin in my system. After three and a half years I had obvious rashes and swellings. Company tests showed my extreme discomfort was due to what they termed as a "slight allergy".

There is still a bit of penicillin residue in the packaging department where I now work and I get a slight rash but I can cope with that. I'm doing women's work but that's just too bad. I refuse to return to work in manufacturing because of the intensity of my reaction to the powders.

When the company pushed me to go back to manufacturing, I refused. They sent me for tests and although I was never notified of the results, I have managed to hang on to my job in packaging. I deliberately let it drop to somebody that I knew would tell tales to management that I was going to get help from the union. I think this helped my campaign along.

Jefferey Brown

Dirty Work

"This one's blocked again," yelled Eva from the bowels of the cubicle.

I left hosing the urinal to investigate.

"Have you tried the plunger?"

"As always. It worked last time, but now it's really blocked up. Yuk."

I knew how to fix it. Double strength Huff'n' Puff.

"I'd like to work outdoors," Eva said. "Take my postman. There's a happy man. He's got a rash all over his face and neck but everybody's pleased to see him. He's out in all kinds of weather . . . "

"Like the parking inspectors," I reminded her as I sprinkled extra strength chemicals into the loo, "but nobody's pleased to see them."

"Yes, what a rotten job for them."

"You'd have to be pretty low to do that sort of work."

"Desperate times, desperate measures," moralized Eva in her sing-song German accent.

"I'd rather rob a bank," I provoked.

"Don't say that. I'm always scared for something like that. In Frankston only last week – "

"Desperate times, desperate criminals," I laughed as I flushed the toilet. Slimy water welled up and spilled over the bowl onto my shoes. She handed me the plunger.

"Have your tried – ?"

We agreed to leave that one for the plumber. I started to write a note there and then but Eva insisted we go outside without delay. Her eyes were stinging and she couldn't stand the stench of human excrement and Huff'n'Puff.

In the office I wrote a note for the Sergeant about the loo:

"Uncleanable. This is the third advice to you regarding this matter. Call a plumber immediately or we'll black the site."

"We'd lose our jobs," muttered Eva, screwing it up and tossing it in the bin. She wrote the usual pleasant little reminder and put it in his pigeon-hole. It pissed me off.

"They can see it's blocked. They shit in it. Why doesn't he get the plumber in straight away? Why do they expect us to do all the dirty work?"

Eva began dusting. I knew what she was thinking. We are the cleaners after all. Feeling vitriolic, I added an extra dose of Toxy Stripper to the suds bucket before taking it outside to slop onto the balcony and the stairs. The skinny police clerk always complained that the smell of it made her feel sick.

"You're a wimp, Angie," I would tell her. "Pen pushing and button popping all day, you need to get out and do a bit of real physical work."

She'd just sit there and sniff. No sense of humour.

After mopping up I went outside to have a fag as Eva was just finishing off inside, wiping the kitchen benches with Spray to Kill. I was keen to get out of the stinking joint but Eva suddenly called me in. Her trembling yellow-gloved finger pointed to a cartoon stuck on the overhead cupboards. Some idiot had stuck up an obscene drawing of friendly fat constable Tim. Tim had done his back in a couple of months before as a result of getting the worst of it on a routine domestic.

"That's how they treat their own," Eva muttered. "What if it was you or me?"

"Bad back gets the sack."

"That's not right, if you get it through your work."

"Well I certainly wouldn't be getting it from my old man."

"Seriously, Jill."

"Well, I've got a crook back. Haven't you?"

"Sore, sometimes, yes, but not so bad that I can't work. Young Tim was nearly crippled."

"Give it time, Evie", I replied, with my best gallows laugh, "and we'll be ready for the knackery. In about ten years I reckon, if we keep on at this game."

"Cleaning doesn't hurt you. Women have been doing it for centuries."

What she said was true but I'd suddenly come in for an attack of negativity. I could feel the job killing me somehow. I don't know why. It wasn't that hard. I used to say it was good for me. I'd burn off a lot of anger at work. Now the anger seemed to be growing inside me while I was at work and afterwards I would feel it fester and nag at me when I wanted to forget.

"C'mon, let's get out of this pigsty. I need a drink."

Eva never came with me to the pub. She always wanted to race home to shine up her own place or cook up something hearty for her hubby. I'd just have a couple of quiet whiskies to cheer me up and then I'd cruise home, have a lie-down, watch a bit of TV and wait for Martin to come home from school. Then I'd do the mumsie bit until Steve arrived expecting me to do the wifey bit. Somehow I always got the dinner on the table but I can't say it gave me any pleasure. Half the time I couldn't stand to eat the stuff I cooked. I was fed up. I didn't want to work any more but I didn't want to give up the money. There's things I like to have around the house that Steve doesn't want to provide for. There's the freedom to go and have my hair done when I want, or to buy something good for Martin. Steve mainly thinks of himself. He pays the rent, he buys a bit of our food, but mostly he wants it all for himself, for golf or fishing or drinking, whatever's the latest craze with his crowd. Good luck to him. I gave up expecting him to think of me years ago. I can't see much point in us being together really, just habit, I suppose, and the boy. This train of thought is a torment. I've got to give it up. It was keeping me awake at night as I lay there, tense and bitter, wondering what the hell I was living for. Not so long ago I was young and cheeky; Steve had the hots for me and I was hard to catch. I worked in a bar. Cleaning is better though. At least you don't have to be servile to the public.

I woke before I was ready and was more depressed than the night before. Breakfast is always a dreary occasion with everybody munching stolidly, thinking their own thoughts about the day ahead. Toast crumbs everywhere. Smell of stale coffee hanging about, mingling with the odour of the microbes on the dish-rag. Kitchens, I hate them. It does me good to let off steam banging all the plates together in the hot sink. I use plenty of detergent and the job's done in no time. There's a few odds and ends to tidy up before leaving for work. My heart is definitely not in it but a bit of music keeps me going. I like Elvis, that's when you're heartache begins, that sort of thing. I can't stand talk-back radio, the yapping of fools, the irrelevant opinions, as if it makes any difference. Perhaps it's the increasing dreariness of home that's always made me look forward to a day's work. I've never shirked heading off to the copshop for another go at the grime. Lately, it's true, I've been dragging my feet, but I always feel better once I'm there and into it.

Eva reckoned I was addicted to floor-stripper. She had become superstitious, perhaps on account of the change of life. Her periods were all over the place. She'd lost so much blood, she had to get weekly iron injections. And she'd put on a lot of weight. Her body had blown up like a balloon. It had happened quite suddenly really; last year she was slim and pretty and then, in the space of a few months, she became all bloated and grey in the face. Only forty-two. Even her eyes were giving her trouble, itching and sore. She wouldn't take the hormone replacement therapy but she sure hopped into the tranquillizers. I don't know if they did her much good. She started having black-outs. One day she pissed herself. Had to go home and get changed. Apparently it wasn't the first time. It's her own fault, in a way. She doesn't know how to relax. Works too hard at home, I bet, and always worrying. For the past six months she's had a terrible cough. Shadow on her lung. I saw it in the x-rays she had done at the clinic. And she's never smoked a cigarette in her life. Whereas I drink and smoke like it's going out of style – which it is – and I'm never sick. I can see it's a miserable bloody existence when your body starts to go on you. I've done my best to help her out, but it's taken its toll on me. I got cranky. I didn't want all that responsibility. I told her she should quit the job. She didn't talk to me for a week after that, then on Friday, she blacked-out for five minutes. That put the wind up me. When she came to, she was babbling on about the pain. Said she couldn't take it anymore. Said her left arm was going numb, her back was killing her. Said her chest was on fire. The boss got her a taxi home, gave her four weeks pay and asked her not to come back. She smelt of stale urine.

She'd been a good work-mate all these years, and a loyal worker for the police station. They shouldn't have paid her off like that, just because she was acting funny and sick, anybody could tell she was sick. I hopped straight over the road and had a few, to steady my nerves, to try and think straight. I began to get weepy on the Scotch so I switched to beer, to sober up, when in walked Angie, the poker-faced clerk.

"What's up Angie, somebody take the broomstick

out of your arse?"

I only said it because I was sad and drunk. I think she understood. I bought her a drink but she was more interested in trying to get me to read some notice about materials' handling. It didn't make any sense to me at the time but she stuffed it in my purse for me to take away. I was just about ready to toddle home, but she insisted on buying another round and then she was rabbiting on about Evie being poisoned and how we were all In This Together or some such rubbish. I couldn't make heads nor tails out of it, but I played along with her to keep things from getting more complicated. By the time I left she had me promising I wouldn't mop the floor again until she had the Department of Labour around. Fair enough. I wasn't even sure I wanted to walk on that bleeding floor again. Just thinking about it brought back visions of Eva lying there with her tongue hanging out and her eyes rolling back in her head.

I've had a week off to think about things and I've been feeling off-colour. The more I read the Safety Data Sheets for the floor-stripper, the sicker I feel. I know a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing so I phoned the Health Department to find out more. They said not to worry. The nasty compound in the stripper is called Butoxyl Ethanol and it's only harmful in concentrated doses or if used over a long period of time. It is in a lot of common domestic products, washing up liquids, toothpaste, cosmetics. It seems you can't avoid it. You can even get addicted to it. It's only if you overdose on it that you get the anaemia, the lung problems, the reproductive system upsets, the incontinence, the tumours . . . It's bad news for Evie. She worked with the stuff for over twenty years. It's not so bad for me, funnily enough, on account of the drink. They say the toxic ether binds itself to alcohol and passes through your body without penetrating your sensitive organs. Anyway, I can't afford to stop off work. And it's no good for me to be moping around at home. You might think it's funny, but I can't wait til Monday to get back to washing that floor.

Thea Calzoni (inspired by
Pat Snowden, activist supporting
workers injured by toxic chemicals)

Poems

We need
justice for injured workers and communism
not poems.

Adriano Trombelli

Power Brokers

I wish my mind
were as well as my body
Bludger, am I?
I'll show them!
I'll storm the castle of their tight-arsed
profession
and smash edifices hiding faceless birocrats
who at the flick of a pen
condemn me to oblivion.
Bastards!

But despair sets in,
and my inadequacy confirms their victory
my total defeat.
My case for complaint?
Leave it in the box
and me with it.

Nigel Randall Cape

Industrial Darkness,
Nicholas Nedelkopoulos, 1996

Imago Maybe

I used to combine harm with healing
in a workplace where the dopening drugs were free
but now, dried seared and on the margin
I dig for small grain in good ground

I like the gentleness of those who know themselves
I don't like the harshness of those who seek out
their own faults in others.

Once I dreamed that the social good
was drowning – in a world
which cried out for sharing.

Now I know that the battles are
before us
and the good is in the battle itself.

I am older, and gladly grey and free
but I remember the marshlights of
ambition – the light from my own dream mansion
on the hill.

Neil Beggs

Culture Problems, Ill Health and Lost Opportunities

The team I worked in was all Vietnamese people. We worked well, but it might have been better if we had all been spread around the factory so that we would have more opportunity to practice English and learn more of the language and customs. Some trouble was raised between us over competition for overtime. When some of us complained we got a lecture from the manager. He said our culture was not for Equal Opportunity like Australian culture.

Everyone should be equally respected in terms of their culture and other differences. The manager had no right to look down on Vietnamese people when he really has no idea about our culture.

The Vietnamese people feel that they have been discriminated against by the management since this incident of cultural misunderstanding. They have been left out of day to day activities, such as not being asked along with other workers to contribute money to buy a gift for a sick worker. They have been denied time for going to the toilet during working hours. They have been transferred to other sections without reasons being advised. Any problem raised with management has been met with no response. The Team Leader always picks on Vietnamese workers and gives them a hard time due to the culture problem. Most importantly, Vietnamese people have come across a lot of difficulties in climbing up their career paths. After being transferred to another section, I have missed out on promotion.

I developed a rash from sensitivity to the penicillin in the factory. Over time I also developed breathing problems. I endured it until it became acute. There was no interpreter to help me get my rights to health and safety. It was difficult for me to explain my problem in English and it was also difficult for me to understand what response I was getting. But I refused to have my problems dismissed as hay fever symptoms because I knew of too many others in the workplace with serious symptoms like mine.

I was transferred to another section in another building. I have to start again at the bottom in this section. My promotional prospects have been reduced. If I had been able to stay in the other factory, I would be on a Level 4, but I am stuck here on Level 3. The machines are different here but I learn fast and could learn many new machines if given the opportunity. I have been frustrated by being left on the one machine long past the time when I have mastered it. I feel that my career path is not being supported because of my culture and because I spoke up about my ill-health.

Mark Nguyen

He Thinks the World is Made with a Hammer and a Nail

Peter is an ordinary man
and the best handyman,
carpenter, brick-layer, electrician
and the oldest philosopher on the site.

Peter is an ordinary man
a building worker
he loves walls and windows
going to the sky.
He always talked to the clouds
in the heights of the scaffold.
He thinks the world was made with a hammer and a nail.

One day a scaffold collapsed
and Peter with two more mates
fell off the summit.
Peter's legs were broken
and his shoulder
but the foreman said very angry
"It was their fault. They are old and weak
looking for compensation."

Now when time is gone
Peter looks at the clouds passing him by.
He silently cries and thinks
that his life is more important than any
Australian building.

Peter Stone
(The pseudonym of the teller of an autobiographical story told to Antonio Damarko)

Out of the Maelstrom

It was about two-thirty in the morning. The place was pretty quiet. My head and body felt like lead and though I needed a meal, my stomach didn't feel that way at all.

My eyes were getting sore and rainbows were appearing in the flicker of the fluorescent lights. Scuffle of feet and muffled yelling. A couple of residents had gotten out of their rooms and bumped into each other. I raced the corridor to sort it out and quieten the noise before the whole twenty-three residents were up.

Fred's room: a small disaster, the floor awash with urine with Fred and Joe having a push and a punch up. Both men tall with little covering flesh. A hard fall if they slipped on the wet linoleum. They were pushing each other at chest level just above my head. They took a few thumps at me. Being that time of the morning, I zigged instead of zagged and got thumped again. This took the edge off their fight and I soon got them in separate rooms.

I wondered why Brian, my SRN had not come to help. Surely he had heard the commotion from his bed-down in the lounge room. I couldn't have called for his help as that would have woken residents. In my agitated state, I got cold and scared. Brian knew I had a back injury from childhood, but he had left me to sort out two scuffling men alone. Flashed into my mind what another SRN had told me a couple of weeks back about places where if a nurse started to complain about treatment of patients a couple of male patients would be revved up and that nurse sent to sort it out, while the rest of the staff would not amble in to help until later, much later. It hit me then that I had just been set up. The boss was away and I would not be able to report it for several weeks. I would have to hang on until she got back.

The harassment of the next weeks on night shift was heavy. All the dirty linen from the day shift was dumped on the floor of the dirty room and I had to hump thirty bags of soiled wet linen chest high into the wire baskets and wheel them outside for pick-up. Sometimes I was helped by the SRN, sometimes not. With many untrained staff it was not unusual to find faeces and pads left in the clothing. I reported this but day staff denied responsibility. I was disbelieved until I came in early at night to check the washing, find the evidence and show the evening SRN.

One Friday night there was a letter waiting for me saying that my SRN had made a formal complaint that my behaviour to my peers on night shift had to change. I was rattled and pretty sick. Bright lights seemed to flash before my eyes and my gut was tight. Disorientation and headaches increased. I asked my SRN if she had made the complaint. She said she hadn't. I stuck out the shift with my mind in turmoil. I rang a class-mate whose husband was a lawyer and we talked about the possibility that I was being set up for an accident. It could be blamed on the residents who would then be medicated – a lot. The world spun around me as I was sucked into a maelstrom, a whirlpool with no bottom.

The next week I got myself to the union. I looked like something the cat had dragged in and I was barely coherent. I was terrified by what had happened, of what could happen and where it would end. I still am. They told me to apply for WorkCare.

It is nearly two years later. My boss claimed I had some sort of psychiatric disability. I have been sent to psychiatrist after psychiatrist for insurance companies who know much about creative writing. I am now on sickness benefits, in varying amounts of pain, still having nightmares, still scared.

Ann Don

Working for Whom?

Saw a funny thing the other day
on the telly
An Ad – Cheery faces smiling
and singing
WorkCover's Working!
WORKCOVER'S WORKING!

Could have fooled me!
Working for whom?

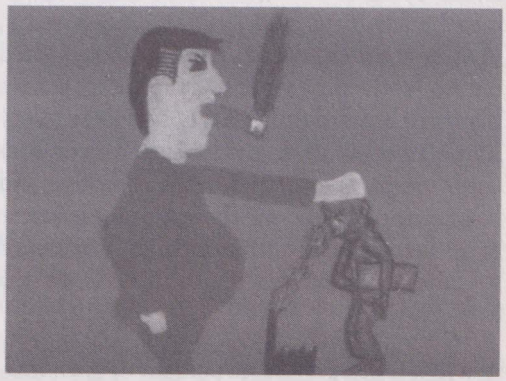
So much money spent
on political advertising
propaganda –

When the people –
what's left of them
are forced to justify
OVER AND OVER again

WHY they are sick
injured
unable to work . . .

Stressfully, endlessly –
Oh Yes –
WorkCover's working
but not for the workers.

Margaret Gurney



Oppression, Nicholas Nedelkopoulos, 1986

Craig Segar*

Craig Segar was a qualified plumber. He was employed in a trade which he loved. He died on 21 March 1995 having fallen through the roof of a building whilst removing asbestos. Harnesses and other safety equipment were not provided. Craig's father and mother tell his story . . .

. . . When Craig was surfing he saw a Bronze Whaler shark trying to beach itself. He helped it get back into the water and saved its life. Craig was the oldest of three children. We have another son and a daughter. About the time we lost Craig, he'd been teaching his sister how to drive. Craig had lived away from home for a few years and had just moved back with us six weeks before his death. His brother and sister had come of age, so the three kids were just starting to go out together to listen to bands. We were always together on special occasions like Christmas and birthdays.

. . . Craig had mentioned a couple of things that had happened at the site. He said, "Dad, I was asked to sign a form." I asked him what was on it and he said, "If we should have an accident on the site, we would be responsible for the first $1,000 of any damage done to the property." Craig hadn't been given a copy of the form. It was either sign the form or don't bother starting the job.

. . . At Craig's wake, a young man came up to me and asked if he could speak to me in private. We went into the study and sat down and he told me he was the person on the other end of the sheet with Craig when he fell. He said to me, "You've got to know the truth and what's going on, there's a cover-up being carried out and I don't want to be part of it . . . After the accident, the foreman had gone on to the roof and put the safety line in place, fastening the harness onto the safety line and activating the (asbestos) decontamination unit, which they should use by law.

". . . The next day, I started pursuing the matter with the various authorities. I found it very difficult to get to anyone who would listen to me . . . Eventually the WorkCover Authority sent out an inspector to my workplace who was very sympathetic. He got me to fill out a statutory declaration, which was witnessed and it gave him something to start with . . . All the people who were on the site that had given statements were called back in for a second interview, and the inspectors realized there was a conflict between the information that had been passed on. When people were told that their interviews would be recorded, that's when the truth finally came out. We were then made aware that Craig had no chance – the safety equipment on the site hadn't been produced and there had been an orchestrated cover-up by the foreman."

. . . The company was fined $25,000 for Craig's death . . . The foreman was fined $14,000 . . . The company asked for sixty days to pay the fines to the Court, but before that date, they 'liquidated' the company. I understand that the wife of the former Director became the Director of the company, which is listed under the same name in the phone book. They got out of paying the fine. They walked away paying no penalty. I think our law needs looking at, that people can walk away without paying their fines or facing their penalty.

. . . At a service we attended recently, we were asked to write something and I just put down, "Thanks for the memories, Craig". We've got some wonderful memories of a fine young fella. He was just a terrific kid. It's sad that he didn't get to live his life to the full. Gwen often says, you don't bury your children, they bury you – that's how life is supposed to be, but sometimes you have no control over these things. The people Craig worked for had control, but they chose not to carry out the safety standards that are in place and it's cost our son his life.

Elizabeth Horvath Mobayad

* From Mobayad's *til death us do part – Industrial Death Narratives*, 2nd Edition, Broadmeadows, IDSA, 1999, pp. 42–47.

Jim Aubrey

A Political Hippocratic Oath?

During the recent federal senate East Timor inquiry one senator in particular repeatedly stated that there is no need to focus upon the past. It's an easy thing to say when the victims of the atrocities are not Australian. But these same victims were subjected to a failure in Australia's foreign policymaking and it is only through a comprehensive appreciation and assessment of the past that any improvement can be made to the present policymaking processes. These processes have never been subjected to either debate or change. Should the electorate have to wait for an 'East Timor' to happen again before its representatives are made more accountable for a national interest (their words to describe government policy on East Timor) that was morally and ethically reprehensible?

"From Peacock to Evans, Fraser to Howard, they are all responsible. And what a bloody mess it turned out to be. Finally, in East Timor today, it is the Australian soldiers who must bear the shame for them. Watching and listening to tonight's ABC broadcast, it appears that Keating has no problem with this arrangement."

The above quote is from a member of the Australian Defence Force in East Timor who contacted me last year after reading my book on East Timor. His assessment of Australian foreign policy on East Timor is contrary to the assessment we are used to hearing from major participants like Gough Whitlam, Richard Woolcott, Gareth Evans and Paul Keating. They all leave me with the impression that consecutive Australian governments played the role of the Good Samaritan with policies that helped shape the tragic destiny of the former Portuguese colony. Each of them viewed their relationship with Jakarta as *sui generis,* which is puzzling from the perspective of international relations and the corollary of obligations under international law concerning universal human rights.

On one hand, Canberra would condemn brutal dictators everywhere else in the world, while on the other hand, she would argue that, regarding Indonesia, there were special circumstances to consider and therefore appropriate accommodation to the plague of human rights abuse by this country became policy *res ajudicata* for consecutive Australian governments.

Responding to Phillip Adams in May 1998, that Whitlam had considerable achievements regardless of his failing over East Timor, I suggested that a similar assessment was probably made by Romans over the legacy of Pontius Pilate. Equally, I have repeatedly stated that no parliamentarian would survive their tenure of office if they had described the Port Arthur massacre as an aberration, as Gareth Evans did in reference to the Dili Massacre in November 1991.

On the part of Mr Whitlam in East Timor's unholy saga, several of his faithful coterie have been trying to erase the blemish of East Timor from the former prime minister's career. However, silence is embraced on the trip by Mr Whitlam to the UN Decolonization Committee, in November 1982, where he was unsuccessful at urging the UN to remove East Timor from its agenda.

It may be a coincidence that Mr Whitlam was in Jakarta in May of the same year advising President Suharto how Indonesia could secure the vote of African countries at the UN which would thereby undermine international concern for East Timor.

At the Decolonization Committee meeting, contrary to Australian media reports, which exaggerated Mr Whitlam's performance, it is worth recalling the remarks of several committee members to Mr Whitlam's testimony (all comments are from the UN summary-record of the meeting). Mr Cassandra, representing Sao Tome and Principe, said that "by taking the liberty of appearing before the Committee to defend colonialism and the annexation of East Timor, Mr Whitlam, as the former prime minister of Australia, would diminish his reputation all over the world"; Mr Cabral, representing Guinea-Bissau, said that "Mr Whitlam had repeatedly affirmed that there was no problem in East Timor, but he had given abundant testimony about the problem, which was an ambiguous state of affairs. In reality what he was doing was justifying the unjustifiable"; Mr Van Lierop, representing Vanuatu, said that "Mr Whitlam had left the questions put to him unanswered and it was therefore impossible to accept the statements he had made. The statements of Portugal, on the other hand, and its desire to rectify the errors of the past, inspired confidence."

The Committee meeting ended with several statements from various members and it is worth recalling the words of the representative from Guinea-Bissau, Mr Cabral: "If the question of East Timor was still under consideration, that was because the Timorese people's desire for freedom had not been crushed and the Indonesian Government was incapable of crushing it. The people of East Timor rejected their territory's occupation by Indonesian armed forces, even if those forces built roads and schools, and were opposed to Indonesian annexation because they were demanding that their inalienable right to determine their own destiny, under the leadership of their liberation movement FRETILIN, be respected."

Putting aside for a moment the policies of government, the sensibilities of the wider community concerning human rights are equally pertinent. In the 1999 television series, Hypotheticals, during one program focusing on the Sydney Olympics, Geoffrey Robertson asked an elite Australian athlete how she would respond knowing that a Balkan mass murderer wanted for crimes against humanity would be competing in her event? Would she compete or pull out? The athlete replied that she would indeed compete and would shake that person's hand at the end of the event because, at the end of the day, sport is only sport.

I squirmed and had images of our finest competitors competing with a motley crew of criminals guilty of heinous crimes – Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot, Augusto Pinochet, to name a few. Perhaps Robertson should have used an example closer to home. Would this athlete compete with a sneering Martin Bryant?

I have expressed disbelief and sadness on many an occasion over the apathy and indifference that characterize our culture until events themselves force our leaders to galvanize popular opinion into proactive support, as has happened with the current InterFET mission in East Timor.

It is important to question the political indifference in the general community to the problems of others. Before InterFET, during the twenty-three years that the civilian population of East Timor was tortured, raped and murdered, the Indonesian island resort of Bali became a successful tourist destination for Australian holiday-makers.

Questions about human rights responsibilities and culpability in determining the fate of the East Timorese are being levelled against former Australian governments, and rightly so. Even now, former president Suharto would have absolutely no trouble competing in any sporting event with former Australian leaders. And they would let him win!

The failure of the athlete to respond to Robertson's question with solidarity for the victims of her mythical fellow-competitor illustrates an over-enhanced idealization of individuality where the single aim of sporting glory overshadows a more enlightened collective consciousness. It is so easy to be indifferent when the victims are faceless but I doubt if such a view would be taken if the victims were family and friends.

The challenge remains for activists to introduce accountability in political policymaking and also to inspire the general community to greater awareness. The 1936 Nazi Olympics, the tragic Munich Olympics, the sporting boycotts during anti-apartheid, all illustrate times when sport is dominated by politics.

There can never be a higher consideration than the ideals of common purpose and common allegiance with oppressed men, women and children. For more than twenty years Canberra's spin-doctors have adopted a business as usual attitude with Indonesia regardless of the death of a nation in East Timor.

Surely, even after the terrible experience of the first two Australian battle casualties in East Timor, we must demand that the immoral and decadent indifference underlying the history of federal govern-

ment policy on East Timor must never have the possibility of happening again. This means reform of the dynamics and processes of policymaking, unless anyone is prepared to accept a verbal guarantee with a nod of the head from our representatives on political integrity. Blind faith is the kiss of death to accountability and allows both experts and miscreants to overuse the too-hard basket.

Consecutive governments mischievously used the aid-dollar as a fashionable panacea and this effectively prevented more serious accountability and misled a general public who were either in Bali or who couldn't care less. Almost $2 billion was granted in bilateral aid to the brutal Suharto regime.

Millions more was spent on military aid and training under the policy of constructive engagement which told of introducing the Indonesian military to western values. From the beginning this policy was a snowjob from the Department of Foreign Affairs in order to perpetuate more of the same indifference to the crimes in East Timor, but as well, to give this indifference a humane gloss. This same department makes no reference to the missing 200,000 East Timorese in 1979 when Fraser granted de facto recognition of Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor (de jure recognition was granted less than a year later).

Taking into account the annual population growth rate of the 1960s and 1970s, the first post-invasion census conducted in 1980 by Indonesia shows 200,000 people missing. That Australian governments, especially the Department of Foreign Affairs, were so obliging to Jakarta and the Javanese militarists, while being unable to question them upon the fate of these innocent men, women and children, must rate alongside the infamy of other European Axis governments who accommodated the Nazis with their Final Solution to the Jewish problem during the Second World War. The collaborators in Canberra carried on with their complicity for another nineteen years and feigned sensitivity with policies, like constructive engagement and the pathetically small refugee family reunion program, and with dollars, as in minuscule aid packages.

In reference to East Timor in 1983, the then Attorney General, Senator Gareth Evans, stated that politics is "the art of the achievable", and that the interests of the East Timorese would be best served by a more careful approach to Jakarta. It appears that the current 'art of the achievable' is convincing reasonably discerning citizens that it is futile, irrelevant and meaningless to look into the past if one is to gain a better understanding of the present. It is this art of disingenuousness that has made Australians so cynical about politicians. Aside from the remembrance of victims of persecution by their communities, tragedies like the Holocaust, the Stolen Children or East Timor are recalled so that they don't happen again and it is the absolute pits of cowardice to infer otherwise and to be happy to let sleeping dogs lie.

Good government is all about a covenant of care between itself and the electorate. In the global village this covenant of care is all that is left for people like the East Timorese to cling to in times of tyranny. The current Senate Inquiry on East Timor will hand down its recommendations this month. If the inquiry fails to cast a spotlight on past policy and does not promote policymaking rehabilitation and reform, then Canberra will have learnt nothing on the dual roles of accountability and integrity in political office. My experience over the last decade has shown me that there cannot be a national interest without national honour. This is one reason why John Howard, though appallingly late by any prudent interpretation, is ostensibly able to salvage his reputation on East Timor.

Last year, a motion was put to the members of the Northcote branch of the ALP regarding the initiation of an ethical foreign policy. The motion called for the creation of ministerial codes of conduct whereby accountability and ethical considerations would be enshrined through legislation so that universal human rights as espoused by the UN Charter would become the bedrock of policymaking.

Under such a system each ministerial department would have its own job description and would not be able to deviate from it. For example, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade would not be able to grant bilateral aid to a military dictatorship. Equally, the Department of Defence would not be able to grant military aid or conduct defence cooperation with a military dictatorship.

The creation of such a system of accountability is akin to a political Hippocratic Oath. It has never been in the national interest to accept a people as expendable in the grand scheme of things. That this happened to the East Timorese is adequate reason to ensure it cannot happen again. Perhaps then, we will be distinguished by a sense of solidarity with common humanity and not a blanket disregard for our ethical responsibilities by citing non-political professional careers and naively maintaining sport is only sport. Barbarity shares no such illusion; it acts indiscriminately. The question remains whether the

federal Labor caucus has the courage of its Northcote membership and will take up their challenge in their next biannual conference.

In the final analysis, history will be kind to Mr Howard and will probably say that he upheld Australia's honour – official history will regurgitate Howard's claim that he was responsible for Habibie's policy shift on East Timor. It will be forgotten that as minister for business and consumer affairs in the Malcolm Fraser government Mr Howard was involved in the confiscation of food and medical supplies that well-meaning Australians tried to boat over to the island in the year following the 1975 invasion. In years to come, travellers to Dili, in particular whole teams of empty-headed sporting enthusiasts, will be able to get stinking drunk and puke their heart up on Howard Boulevard and Downer Avenue – I know I will.

Postscript

Paul Keating is Australia's quintessential false Messiah. On the recession we had to have; on East Timor; on Australia as a part of Asia; and especially on his own greatness.

Listening to him parry the judicious questions of Graham Davis on 'Dateline' (29 March 2000) over his former government's policy on East Timor reminded me of a funeral parlour director during the bubonic plague who welcomed the bereaved to the farewell of their loved ones with a smile on his face as if they had arrived at a carnival.

As the victims of the plague reached hundreds of thousands, as it did in Indonesia under the plague of Suharto's new order, the degree of compassion and depth of regret expressed by Keating and Co. was not dissimilar to the glorified gravedigger who upon completion of the ceremony wished both the departed and the bereaved 'a wonderful day'.

In your dreams, Keating!

Jim Aubrey is currently taking a well-earned sabbatical from political activities. His first book of verse, Between Darkness and Dawn *(Pigeon Books), based upon his East Timor years, was published in June.*

Graham Pitts

Raping East Timor

Rebecca Winters (comp.): *Buibere – Voices of East Timorese Women,* vol. 1 (East Timor International Support Centre).

Jim Aubrey (ed.): *Free East Timor – Australia's Culpability in East Timor's Genocide* (Random House, $19.95).

Reading these two books, I remembered once hearing ABC radio commentator Norman Swan and former magazine editor Robert Manne discuss Prime Minister John Howard and One Nation leader Pauline Hanson. Howard had coyly supported Hanson by emphasizing her right to deliver what many commentators saw as racist tirades but then he realized that she was attracting bigots away from his own Liberal Party. His language, as he sought to extricate himself, became labyrinthine. Suddenly, during their discussion of such language, Swan asked Manne if he, as a fellow Jew, did not detect something familiar in the Prime Minister's contortions. Were they entirely dissimilar to the anxious fastidiousness of anti-Semitic bigots when they spoke uneasily of 'Jewesses' and 'Israelites'? Wouldn't the English language (and statesmanship) have benefited if Howard had spoken in simple, clear terms from the very beginning? Swan and Manne concluded that if the Prime Minister had only stuck to principles, he would have saved himself a great deal of trouble.

Buibere – Voices of East Timorese Women is the transcript of interviews of twenty East Timorese women with an introduction by 'Rebecca Winter' (the name is a pseudonym because "if Rebecca's real name were to be published, the Indonesian government might prevent her from returning to Indonesia or East Timor"). The second book, *Free East Timor – Australia's Culpability in East Timor's Genocide* is a collection of documents which, like *Buibere*, depict the horror of life in East Timor whilst also tracing the appalling record of Australia's senior politicians as apologists for Indonesia's invasion, occupation and, indeed, genocide. It is impossible to read either book without wondering what devil's brew of 'pragmatism' and 'realistic attitudes' persuaded so many of our leaders to forsake honour and decency and, in the end, bear at least some of the responsibility for the rape, slaughter and misery of East Timor.

Would it not have been better, for example, if Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam had stuck to principles in his pre-invasion conversations about East Timor with President Suharto of Indonesia?

Perhaps he did. Very little is known, still, of what was actually said or, especially for a Javanese such as Suharto, what was implied by his demeanour. However it is known, now, that Suharto was resisting pressure for an invasion from his generals; that nonetheless Whitlam was of the view that "an independent East Timor would be an unviable state and a potential threat to the area"; and that after the meeting the plans for 'Operasi Komodo', the invasion of East Timor, were accelerated. It is also known, except by people who'd prefer not to know, that Whitlam, eight years after his removal from high office and when the genocide was well underway, personally and privately petitioned the General Assembly of the United Nations that "it is high time the question of East Timor was removed from the agenda".

In the same year, 1983, an East Timorese woman called Kaikei was in a prison with many other women after being "captured by forty soldiers armed with bayonets and guns". Her account of what happened is one of the twenty different testimonies in *Buibere* (a word which in Tetun, the East Timorese language, means 'woman'). It is best, as the editor and other people responsible for this book have realized, to let the truth about these women be told by themselves. And one of the saddest things about Kaikei's story is that the other nineteen testimonies are equally or even more appalling . . .

> In that prison, I saw a lot of very bad violations. Many women and children were raped by the military. They damaged the women and girls as young as ten or eleven years old. Many who had been arrested before me had already been in that prison for months and they were still being raped when I arrived . . . The military who tortured and raped us had one Timorese man called Alfonso who was their interpreter. Alfonso would get into the rape first, with the 'bapaks' watching. He was the one to start the abuse during interrogation. For example, he would rape a woman then pass her on to the Indonesians. Then they would pass the woman on, from man to man . . .

Meanwhile Australian citizen Edward Gough Whitlam was petitioning the United Nation that "it is high time that the question of East Timor was removed from the agenda". In the same year the Labor Party led by Robert Hawke was re-elected to power. The new Foreign Minister and future Governor-General Bill Hayden announced that Australia would not back any UN motions supporting the people of East Timor. The Australian company BHP also reported a major petroleum find in the Timor Sea. The presence of great oil reserves under the oceans between Australia and East Timor had been known to Australians in high places for years. One former Minister under the Fraser Liberal Party Government made a killing on the stock market as the result of such knowledge.

"I was interrogated two times a day for four months," says Kaikei.

> During interrogations, the military slapped and punched me on each side of my face. They would do this four times on the face, ten times on the chest, ten times on the back . . . after the beatings, some of my teeth fell out . . . they raped the women all the time. The women told me they had been raped many, many times in the past months. During the four months I was in that prison, I saw with my own eyes the military raping women many, many times, including two pregnant women who were sisters. They were called Teresina and Filismena. I used to go to school with Teresina. The sisters were soon to have babies and were in a bad condition but they were still being raped. When they were in labour, bleeding and about to give birth, the military put them in a truck and took them away. They were never seen again.

Free East Timor contains a document which also records the fate of many women under the Indonesian occupation. Written by the Indonesian academic George Aditjondro, it was presented in 1997 to the UN Special Rapporteur on Women. Some people might argue that Kaikei's account is too emotional to be objective; some people do argue such things, just as they argue that such multiple rapes are 'aberrations'. However Aditjondro's scholarly report contains forty-six footnotes, all of which corroborate and substantiate the general situation depicted in Kaikei's simple, clear, personal account.

Mind you, in 1991 Senator Gareth Evans (the Australian Foreign Minster after Bill Hayden) declared "the truth of the matter is that the human rights situation in East Timor has in our judgment conspicuously improved particularly under the present military arrangements". This sort of language came back into play nine months later when Gareth Evans described the killing of hundreds of East Timorese men, women and children during and after their attendance at a funeral rite in the cemetery in Dili as "not a matter of deliberate or calculated government policy". Rather, it "represented some aberrant behaviour by a section of the military". The reader might by now see why reading *Free East Timor* and *Buibere* reminded me of the benefits of simple, clear language spoken by people of genuine intellectual and moral worth.

Free East Timor is by far the most comprehensive collection of documents ever published about Australia, East Timor and Indonesia. (Matched only in a different sphere by *A Critical View of Western Journalism and Scholarship on East Timor* by Geoffrey C. Gunn with Jefferson Lee, published in The Philippines in 1994.) The contents page lists nineteen such documents though there are many more cited and quoted within each section. All were written or spoken at various times from 1975 to 1999 by scholars, journalists, activists, politicians, lawyers, religious figures and a Second World War veteran, Harry Levy, who with the 2/4 Independent Company fought the Japanese in East Timor in 1942: "Not once did the Timorese betray us. They were unbelievably loyal to us. That loyalty is why we survived . . . it is a debt that we owe unto the third and fourth generations . . . and all the generations to come."

Some of the sections in *Free East Timor* are voices from the grave. Australian journalist Roger East's last article out of East Timor was originally printed in *Australian Left Review* but by then East, along with

hundreds of East Timorese, had been shot on the wharves of Dili by invading Indonesian soldiers. Television reporter Greg Shackleton's last on-camera report was broadcast on Channel 7 but Shackleton, with four other Australian and New Zealand television reporters, was slaughtered by Indonesian soldiers and his body burnt in the town of Balibo. The Australian Government disclaimed any knowledge of these murders even though their Signals Intelligence Units were listening daily to the radio traffic of the soldiers. Indeed, after the killing of Shackleton and his colleagues, alarmed Indonesian generals paused in the invasion, awaiting an Australian response. Even they apparently over-estimated our leaders' adherence to principle.

Other chapters in *Free East Timor* range from Nobel Peace Prize Winner Jose Ramos Horta's national Press Club speech in 1994 to Robert Domm's 1990 interview of Xanana Gusmao, then a guerrilla in the mountains; and from John Pilger's description of the country of graveside crosses he encountered when secretly filming a documentary on East Timor in 1994 to Darwin activist Rob Wesley Smith's account of how the Fraser Government closed down the last radio links with East Timor in 1978. Rob Wesley Smith also details how, in 1976, he and the late Cliff Morris were arrested at sea when attempting to take food and medical supplies to East Timor. Cliff Morris was, like Harry Levy, a veteran of the Independent Companies..

The charges were overturned on appeal but, according to Wesley Smith in 1999, "The return of the medical supplies was delayed until they were out of date by our current Prime Minister John Howard who was then the Business and Consumer Affairs Minister in the Fraser Cabinet (a post which also saw him in charge of customs duties)."

Buibere and *Free East Timor* were published before the 1999 vote for Independence in East Timor and before the outburst of mass emotion and protest which finally forced our politicians to send peacekeepers instead of support for the governmental thugs of Indonesia. So maybe we as a nation have redeemed ourselves for our politicians' pusillanimous and corrupt behaviour in the past? No. We've a very long way to go yet before the slate is clean. Each of these books is what the East Timorese call "averdada de conscienca"; the "truth of conscience". Read them.

When you do read, look at the eight photographs in *Free East Timor*. They are from a photographic exposition of the genocide of the Nazi Holocaust and East Timor toured internationally by Jim Aubrey, the editor of *Free East Timor*. The photographs show the rape and torture in a jail cell of two young East Timorese women, one of them a schoolgirl, by Indonesian soldiers. In Darwin the police confiscated the photos on the grounds they were obscene. Justice Marcus Einfeld, who contributes a chapter to *Free East Timor*, observed that "what is obscene is the conduct that put them (the women) in this terrible, humiliating state". Einfeld, had he thought to do so, might also have mentioned Picasso's response when he was confronted by the Gestapo over his painting 'La Guemica', depicting the death and horror caused by the first mass bombing of a town of civilians by the Nazi air force. "Did you do this?" the Gestapo demanded, furiously pointing at a copy of the painting. "No," said Picasso. "You did."

Free East Timor closes with an epilogue. It is the last on-camera transmission of reporter Greg Shackleton with his camera crew of Gary Cunningham and Tony Stewart. They had spent the night before in a tiny un-named village in East Timor. Their report was filed on 15 October 1975.

> Something happened here that moved us very deeply. It was so far outside our experience as Australians that we'll find it very difficult to convey to you, but we'll try. Sitting on woven mats, under a thatched roof, in a hut with no walls, we were the target of a barrage of questioning from men who know they may die tomorrow and cannot understand why the rest of the world does not care. That's all they want; for the United Nations to care about what is happening here. The emotion here last night was so strong that we, all three of us, felt we should be able to reach out into the night air and touch it. (Greg Shackleton at an unnamed village which we will remember forever, in Portuguese Timor.)

Several nights later they were all dead. The rest, as they say, is history.

Graham Pitts is a Melbourne-based writer who has worked with many East Timorese people living in Australia. His play Emma – Celebrazione! *has been produced by theatre companies in every state of Australia.*

Susan's Jar of Honey

Kevin Bonnett

1

What is a spirit?
Is it a ghost?
How high are the killing stairs?
Who was Clive Wagg?
When was James Parker's motorcycle accident?
What required amputation?
Why did Susan go to Loughbourgh?
When did she visit the Taylor bell forge?
Did she meet James and Dorothy Parker?
What was wrong with the 'F' bell in the carillon?
How did the spirit of Clive Wagg reach England?
What sort of container did Susan use?
When was Clive's accident?

2

Was 'F' ready to cast when Clive 'fell' into the molten metal?
Why was he angry that morning?
Who told him about James Parker and Dorothy?
Had Dorothy and James gone to the railway yard on Saturday night?
What had happened?
How soft, how white was her skin?
Are her eyes green in darkness?
Can you feel her long hair all of the way down?
How warm were her breasts?
How cold was the train?
Did they both laugh about Clive?
How long had Clive been going out with Dorothy?

3

Why did Clive live with his mother?
How sick was she?
What did he say at confession?
Where had he touched?
What was he about to ask Dorothy?
What was the little black box for?
Would Saturday night change everything?
Did James Parker push Clive?
Did flesh melt or did he become steam?
How about his bones?
Who screamed?
What did they fish out?
Was death instantaneous or was he able to watch them pick and poke?
Were his clothes on fire?
Who was that sweet smell?
What spring flowers bloomed over the valley?
Who called on Clive's mother?
Who would look after her now?
When did she die?
Who carried Clive's casket?
How heavy was it?

4

When did the ship set off for Australia?
How well were the bells stowed?
What did the first mate see one morning?
What could he smell?
Who could he smell?
Why was he confined to quarters?
What happened when they docked in Sydney?
Where did the laughter come from?

5

When did the flaming spirit block Susan's way to the carillon?
Why were a hand and a leg missing?
Why was Clive screaming without sound?
Did Susan soil her underwear and have to go straight home without practicing?
Who wrote on the whiteboard in the clavier room?
What scorched the carpet?
When did the queen open the carillon in Canberra?
Which bell glows at night?
Who removed the supports for 'F'?
Who helped to roll the fallen bell into the lake?
Why did it take so long to find?
Why does the water boil when a diver approaches?
Whose face calls from the molten metal?

6

When did Dorothy Stott marry James Parker?
In what way did she find him inadequate?
When did Susan visit James and Dorothy?
Did she give them a jar of honey?
Why were there no children?
Why was the house so dark?
Who always left flowers at Clive's grave?
How soon after breakfast was Dorothy's accident?
How far did she fall?
Did she have honey on toast?
How thick is honey?
How consistently should it be spread?
How much do you have on your toast?
Who woke her at the bottom of the stairs?
What did James find when he came home?
What made him sick?
Why were 'they' laughing?
Why couldn't he hear?
Why did James leave so quickly on his motorcycle?
What made him turn away so abruptly at the intersection?
Who was on the road?
What were they doing?
What was missing when he regained consciousness?
Who were the first faces he saw?
How often do they change his sheets?
Who is his doctor?
Who is his nurse?
Is he still alive?
Does he know?
Does he care?
How often do they give him honey?
Who visits every night?
What do they do on the bed next to him?
Every night?
Be careful.
When you push.
When you shove.
You hear?
Do you hear?

Loy Yang Powerstation

Burt's friend lives in a large house
on the hill,
success
and yet he doesn't know that
Michael Hutchence died.
His life is a light that
switches on/off
on an engine room circuit board.

Now he is tour guide:
The excavator that wouldn't fit on the SCG,
the size of the hole,
the coal that would power Melbourne for 400 years.

The suggestions that are being mooted for the hole
once the coal has gone.

Susan Bower

The Weir

It's the Year of Recreation.
Fat from sausages is dripping through
the barbecue grill.

It's the weir.
Foam and inflatable fantasies,
an ocean beneath the weeping willows.
Water is a white explosion
over kicking feet
quick breathing
and the strange silty bottom.

Susan Bower

. . . after the beginning

a man visited clutching a matchstick candelabra.
He rode in on a zebra just made of flames,
& his shirt looked as if it were sewn
from the thread of the first day. When
he opened his mouth, the moon shone out

&

he started muttering in the language of blinking
which set the stars alight, like silver ellipses.
The night was brailled with fire. The man
took his zebra then, & then he left.
There was light & there was fire everywhere

& then, it was dark again . . .

Dan Disney

SHIT-EATERS

On an expedition to the Hawkesbury river
the party had been shooting birds to feed
themselves.
They reserved the ducks for themselves
giving the less palatable crows and hawks to the
Aborigines.
Eventually disgusted with our behaviour,
class system,
and lack of respect for the initiated men,
Boldaree refused to swim for a duck
which we had shot.
On the trip he and his friends constantly
laughed at and mocked us
for our clumsiness and stupidity in the bush.
When the exhausted Europeans,
who were also carrying their supplies,
showed ill-humour at this irreverent behaviour,
the Aborigines promptly called them
gonin-patta –
shit-eaters.

Colleen Z. Burke

STONES

for Gay

When I was a kid
I spent hours gathering
the ugliest least-promising pebbles
smashing them open
with a hammer the pieces wildly flying
endangering my sight
always looking for the hidden
heart a secret within
crystal or quartz veins
running through
like runic maps of time
now I give my daughter
thunder eggs moss agate silver ore from
the Lucky Friday mine
she goes with me to a friend's house
where smooth brown river stones
are served for lunch
tapped open gently
a lotus leaf unfolds
from among the sandy fragments
blooming quail fish rice
the scent of coriander and lime

Nicolette Stasko

Halong Bay, Vietnam, January 1999

enveloped in mist, channels pass through stunted mountaintops weathered by history, shaped by mythology, shrinking into glassy sea. silver surface becomes sky, shrouds limestone coming into light. a dark birdshape glides across silence. stone fades with motor hum into outlines hinting misty shapes of which poets write.

vegetation clings to balding tops, ocean dissolves stone from below, cutting caves. you are crouched on a sampan bow feeding trawling nets into the bay. all around limestone faces falling into jade glass quietude, your crinklecut sails navigating passages through humbling valleys between clings & caves. & i, ephemeral i, self-cast drifting mistbound over rounded tops over scattered fragments, remains of a cracked fragility, water passages & misty clouds hinting of ancient paper, pigment eating it away. its chinese characters run, ink washes the sky gray & flailing its tail behind, the dragon slumps into the bay.

D.J. Huppatz

Day Surgery

So the doctor finally calls you in and lays you down. He pulls the white towel from a tray, rattling the instruments, and invites you to choose a scar from the chart on the wall. You pick the long bright one, the one with the clattering stitches, wondering why, since all judgements are provisional, you get that feeling which comes when paying off on a stupid bet. But the doctor proceeds with authority, telling you stories as he works, telling you about your divorce. The anaesthetic has frozen your mouth, and in any case it doesn't seem wise to interrupt him. He operates like a sniper, driving each point home with the soft, precise gesture of a trigger finger. "You can get dressed now," he says suddenly. Finished, already? You climb off the table, a New Man, and look around for a mirror. There are none, but no matter. You leave a fat cheque with the receptionist and walk into the sun, happy, like a cow going for a ride in a big truck.

Rob Riel

FROM POINT ORMOND, SHIPLESS

The day is at the wrong end of things,
the café is sinking

and you were just stirring
so each coffee would take longer,

as the view sails in
and you collate the ingredients

of nothing to read,
no film or play irresistible

and white goods dream of us
as they round the heads unawares

someone whistled on the docks;
where bottles do not dream

they are patient, resisting,
as the explosives expert says

that which explodes
is that which explodes

•

There is within the problem of talking of the Bay,
the lift of several gusts of wind,

and much that ought to be going on
like poems about how kites are cute

but writing like that is the sort of mackerel
where your novel must have clouds

within the title and or as the cover image.
Meanjin let through a contributor's note once

where someone solemnly announced themselves
as 'Not packing up and moving to the Blue
Mountains'.

In the city, in unmapped restaurants of the new
drift pockets of pure humanity,

here the vodka does not touch the lips
and the bar staff are not unionised

but pour through a labour hire company
such small waters as still make it

under the docks. February dreams
silver Arrows speeding around the lake,

the chilled extravaganza of the morning
leads on to the long tall quiet afternoon,

June cooks up a GST, my dear
the price of Ecstasy

is indexed to the price
of other party favours, time

is wearing something blue for the new millennium
and though each nightclub is like a prison

we have seen a girl in Grey Street
dance the dawn into a blurred tattoo

on the underside of a lifestyle
the corporate sun climbs in on.

Things make sense at times
when the evening puts out the day

and those varieties of loneliness
that play pink or blue or grey

lap like soft waters
on the shaving of the beach

as whole buildings light up
flash reflective rectangles

making sunset so twentieth century
we all feel better, swell with civic pride

and yes, great swathes of circling seagulls
and everyone goes home

because people go home still
and going home is warm and human

no one there will introduce you
as the author of X or as a rockstar

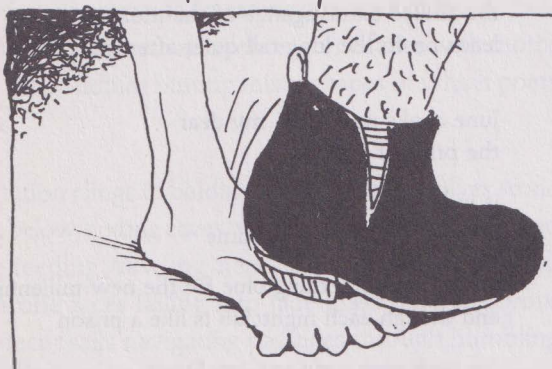
and the narrator in you
nods off to sleep on the cusp of a dreamline

by the late John Anderson 'The aborigines./
Their aloofs are not compatible with Australian
journalism'

Hugh Tolhurst

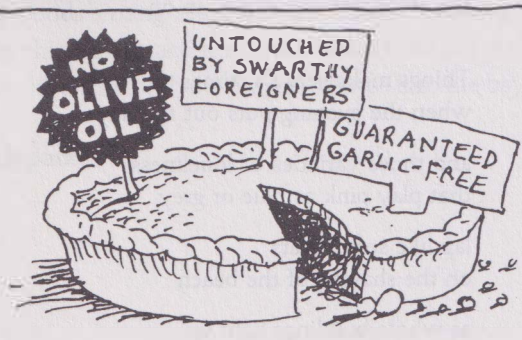
Gosperatorium

Some desperately needed new words for the english language

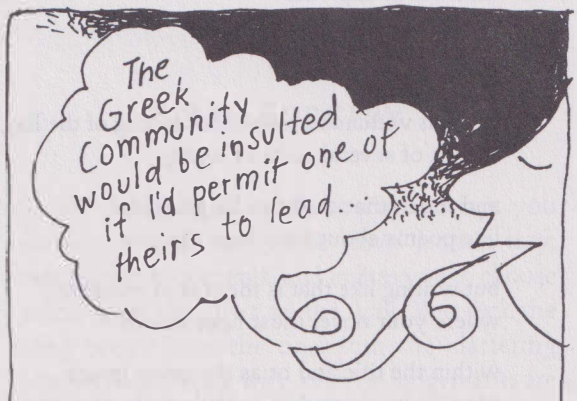


gosper: 'to gosper' - meaning to prosper despite stepping on other people's toes. See also **Gosperado.**

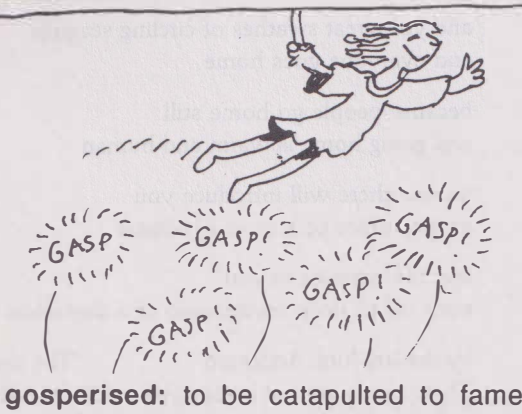
gospicious: highly suspicious, despite official whitewashes.



Gosper-Pie: A foreign dish that has foreign ingredients replaced by pure Australian ones, often leaving bad taste in one's mouth.



gosperation: an imaginative twisting of truth disregarding all logic.



gosperised: to be catapulted to fame due to having a Gosperado as a father.

Gosperoo: An Australian who believes that important functions must be exercised by individuals of pure Australian blood, preferrably from his own family.

LOFO

Dialogue

General Act Of Closure

Vacuous Desire vs The Working Class

Mick Searles

In order to address the subject of class prejudice and the suffocation of the working-class voice one must analyze the interactive sources relative to literature but by no means unique to it.

Within a maelstrom of rhetoric, the Labor party no longer mentions a working class, instead they drone on about 'workers', a term which defines such luminaries as the entire Murdoch and Packer families, Ross Perot and Bill Gates. Similarly, the Liberal party pushes the barrow of the 'battler', an equally dubious definition containing much the same list. Of particular irony, now inherent in the ALP, is that it was Kim Beazley Snr who said, "When I first joined the Labor party it was the crème de la crème of the working class, now, it's the dregs of the middle class." Both parties fund a literature structure which engenders the same consequences for most working-class writers – they are simply excluded.

Much public and private funding in this country is directed towards sport and entertainment (such as it is) while a minority of artificers are funded in a 'winning' capacity, based not on literary merit, but on social origins which exist in specific relation to the burgeoning divide between those tastes considered refined or unrefined.

Littered among those aforementioned martyrs of the class war lie some battling, working-class writers. Writers who have overwhelmingly gone through the process of social re-orientation. In other words, they've got a university degree. Their minds have been cleansed and henceforth they're afforded some peripheral space on the literary landscape, fondly recalling their working-class status.

This hybrid value system is rewarded by the refined with an improved social status and publication of their work. That is not to say that their work is still not considered low-brow, but as long as they continue to move in the correct social circles, nurture relationships with editors and publishers, verbalize appropriately, are considered generally inoffensive by middle-level publishing bureaucrats who are mostly white middle-class women, and aspire to write chic, cutting edge literature, taking their readership on the long, long journey of vacuous desire, they will be patronized.

While many literary journals, including *overland*, claim to publish material by and of the working class, the claim is often false. Further, if *overland* does publish this particular article, it will have more to do with the limited literary socializing I've done, rather than mere blind submission of my work. Working-class writers and their work are alternatively ignored or banished and condemned by most publishers, either deliberately with subjective personal taste, or simply by the nature of publishing itself.

My first published poem was achieved at the age of twenty-two as I was sticking my working-class (circumcised) cock into a woman chairing a committee selecting poetry for paid publication. Since that time I've gained weight and my writing, like my body, has become too unappealing. Further, I have, to date, devoted seven years to writing poetry based on the lived experience of working-class life. After numerous submissions to magazines purporting to address the issues of working-class art and life, I've yet to achieve publication in those journals. Although, I have received support from Arts S.A. throughout that period.

The contemporary publishing agenda is often to validate and reinforce the social critics of an exclusive politically correct ilk, which sees itself as advancing the claims of Aborigines, Feminists, Homosexuals and other strains of acceptable literary and moral purposefulness. In the current hysterical climate it needs to be

stated that these writers are generally writing in reaction to the dominant, extreme right political/economic policies all western democracies are subject to. However, a closer inspection of many of these works will often reveal they are devoid of a class conscience and so seek to advance their particular sectarian ideal. This acts to create further elitism within a class, social, cognitive and literary structure, which excludes the fundamental purpose of genuinely political, working-class art and struggle. This schizophrenic treatment of gender, race and sexuality et al. amounts to a debasement of the writer's own objective/subjective reality. Its aim is to suggest, concoct and support, via art, the accepted theories and practice of middle-class values and structural feudalism.

It has been pertinently so in the past fifteen years that we've seen duplicate governments go into battle against the diabolical ills of racism, sexism, and the unemployed, etc. Australian literature can be traced throughout the period, following these social/political fashions. The related discourse also transfers neatly within this free exchange of ideas, so that the working class are constantly forced to learn and understand the use of such innocuously bland and suggestively middle-class patois as the 'disenfranchized', the 'underprivileged' and of course the 'underclass'. We don't hear of class struggle or the proletariat. Accordingly, the machinations and personnel of literature and publishing are firmly geared towards the insular, co-operative benefit of the middle class.

The so-called and alternately defined formless, abstract, post-modern or experimental literature is considered the ideal by those publishers who assume the role of a cultural police, defining the literary tastes of a refined elite. This taste runs in direct opposition to the general output of most working-class writers and what most often passes for working-class writing is little more than middle-class angst.

These publishers transform and refine needs into a hierarchy of qualitative value according to behaviour, voice patterns, physical size, dress code and personal reputation, thriving within an incestuous environment where poetics is superior to poetry and substituting literary personality for writing, thereby appeasing and validating the shifting trends of middle-class favour. Idiosyncratic and provincial distinctions are oppressed, to facilitate an all-embracing (middle-class) supplication.

Much of the unspoken tragedy for working-class artists is the great lie that they are still working class, when by the time they take their own art seriously they are usually, at best, in exile. The fatal mistake made by most untainted working-class writers is to be honest and direct, both in their work and in their person. They are then often treated with passive or overt aggression while being portrayed as violent, unintelligent and unrefined in nature and artifice. While the superficialities and meanings of language are in constant change, the nature of working-class struggle remains constant. This problem is compounded by the middle-class ownership of publishing as class inequity and exclusion in literature is as rigid now as ever, in any democratic/capitalist economy.

As Keith Richards sings, "If you struggle, it only tightens up".

Mick Searles is a working-class writer from Adelaide. He is working on a collection of poems, 'Cardboard Suitcase'.

Bending His Back

Paul Mitchell

MY DAD ISN'T a tall man. Five-foot-six if he's lucky. But these days he's a whole lot shorter, bent over almost at right angles, walking with a cane on a good day, and not at all on a bad one. Which, if he was in his eighties, might be halfway understandable. But he's in his early fifties. What started as a twinge in his back at work one day has turned into a full-blown disability.

The experts are stumped. All the specialists in Geelong, where he lives, have had a pick and a poke, then stood and scratched their heads. The Range Rover drivers in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne have pushed and prodded, then pointed towards the same pain relief classes and positive thinking books. And I don't think watching Merv Hughes bend and stretch on the telly, telling him to get out and bowl a few overs, is doing the old man a hell of a lot of good, either.

My Mum, despite having no health industry training of any kind, is renowned for her cross-disciplinary medical knowledge. She has put Dad's condition down to everything from chronic fatigue to a lack of testosterone.

Maybe amateur diagnosis runs in the family because I have my own theory about why he looks like a Gallipoli veteran.

I reckon the old boy is weighed down by the effects of his working life, most of it as a Bank Manager. From the morning he began as a teller fresh out of school pants, right up to his last official day in paid employment, his 38-year-career took turns he could never have expected.

The old man's last day in the work force a few months ago also marked the end of his six years with the Australian Securities Commission (ASC). He'd worked part-time for the last two because of his back, and not at all in his final couple of months. That afternoon he sat at home waiting for a visit from the ASC. They had told him someone would come and make a presentation, do things officially. Maybe even send someone down from Head Office in Melbourne.

At four o' clock there was a knock at the door. It was Interflora. As a token of their appreciation the ASC gave Dad, who likes a beer and a bit of fishing, a bunch of flowers. Tied to it was a small, white card which read, "To Bob, Congratulations on your retirement."

I've never heard the old fella verbally run anyone down. It's just not his style. So I wasn't surprised when I rang him from Melbourne a few days later and he said of the ASC's thankyou, "It was good of them to give me anything at all."

Part of me thought he's probably right. He'd only been there six years, it wasn't as if they were going to bother the jewellers for an engraved Seiko. The thing was I couldn't help thinking there were a few organizations and people who might also have handed out bouquets, or at least handshakes, that afternoon.

It would have been good if the CBC Bank could have shown up. For them, Dad had sacrificed his and his family's sense of community, moving around Victoria seven times in thirteen years. It's hard to send flowers, though, when all you are is a few lines in a NAB merger document.

The NAB could have put in an appearance. But I guess the great Red Star didn't feel the need to show up because they'd given the old man a send-off dinner when he left them in the mid eighties. Trouble is he probably doesn't remember his night out. He was too wound up with stress at the time, having weathered a few years worth of mini-Alan Bonds sailing into his office.

He couldn't have expected to see anything of the National Mutual Royal Bank. They've probably been gobbled up so many times since the late eighties that they are little more than chalk dust on the Stock Exchange floor. As for Pyramid, for whom he served his final tour of duty, there wasn't much chance of them turning up with a bouquet.

There's no doubt Dad had to duck some bouncers in the last few years of his career. But his decision to take what was supposed to be a less stressful managerial role with one of Pyramid's subsidiaries was the one that knocked him over. After the company collapsed, along with a good slab of the old man's life savings, the only job he could get was working as a Cashier at a Mobil Service Station. That was the first job I had as an eighteen-year-old. Couldn't do anything but want to cry and admire him at the same time when I saw him behind the counter.

The hard truth is that I reckon Dad sees himself as a failure because he couldn't hack the pressure of being a Bank Manager. That fact is stuck in his lumbar and he can't crack it out. He sits in front of a wide-screen TV and tells me, straight up, that he "hasn't got anything to offer anyone any more". Then he offers me a beer.

It's the amateur psychiatrist in me, I know, but I reckon if the old boy measured himself by more than whether or not he was a tough nut under pressure, his back condition might improve. And I know others I could wheel in, à la *This is Your Life*, who'd back up my theory.

There are probably a hundred skinny, awkward tellers, clerks and other lesser lights who worked with the old man who would tell him there is more to managing a bank than slapping a bright red stamp on the bottom line. As a kid, I saw first-hand the way he respected them as people just the same as him, not insects for treading on because they were on a lower rung. Whenever the old man was transferred from a branch, I noticed the difference between how they carried themselves before he arrived and how they looked when he left. They talked to him, smiling, like he was their Dad, too. Where some of them used to stoop and look at their shoes when they served customers, they pulled themselves taller and looked people in the eye.

If they'd known, I reckon

some of them would have turned up the day the old man retired – with more than bouquets under their arms. And Dad would have stood up a bit straighter as he let them through the door.

The Kisch Case Revisited

Nicholas Hasluck

IN HIS REVIEW of my recently published novel *Our Man K* in *overland* 157, Max Watts contends that the left-wing journalist Egon Erwin Kisch was banned from entering Australia in November 1934 because of a political affinity between the conservative Lyons-Menzies government and the Nazi regime in Germany. He criticizes my novel for its failure to acknowledge this supposed fact, and for its effrontery in putting up a case to the contrary: that the Australian government moved against Kisch in the belief that he was an agent of Stalin's Comintern.

I have no axe to grind. Like most novelists, I am principally interested in telling a lively tale, in this case a tale with a continuing relevance, for many of the labyrinthine ways of the Australian legal system experienced by Kisch in 1934 are still with us today. Nonetheless, even a satirist feels obliged to do some research before venturing forth, so let me defend my work by drawing attention to certain facets of the affair that Max Watts has conveniently overlooked.

Kisch's credentials as an opponent of Fascism were established in early 1933 when he and other writers were imprisoned by the Nazis after the Reichstag fire in Berlin. Kisch later fled to Paris where the ingenious Münzenberg was busy publishing *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror* and organizing the Reichstag Fire Counter Trial to be held in London, a forum set up to show that the Nazis started the fire as a ploy to seize power. When Kisch tried to attend this forum, he was stopped at Dover and had his name placed on a British black list.

In 1934 the Australian Branch of the Congress Against War and Fascism applied to its head office in Paris for a speaker to address an anti-war rally being organized in Melbourne on Armistice Day. Delegated to attend the rally, Kisch arrived at Fremantle on the P & O liner *Strathaird* shortly before the appointed date. He was prevented from landing by a ministerial declaration made under the *Immigration Act* 1901 (Cth) concerning undesirable persons. When the ship reached Port Melbourne Kisch jumped ashore, a dramatic leap to the quay below that earned the ebullient journalist some additional notoriety but didn't overcome the ban, for he was immediately seized, put back on board, and forced to travel onwards.

The ship's arrival in Sydney marked the beginning of an extraordinary series of court cases. A.B. Piddington KC, instructed by the Anti-War Congress, managed to persuade Dr Evatt of the High Court to issue a writ of *Habeas Corpus* on the grounds that the sources of information underlying the ministerial declaration had not been properly specified.

In the meantime, the Kisch case was being debated in the Federal Parliament. Speakers for the conservative Lyons Government, such as the Attorney-General, Robert Menzies, pointed to the events preceding the earlier ban in Great Britain, and the possibility that left-wing agitation could lead to an overthrow of democratic rule in favour of the Soviet system. It is here that I part company with your reviewer, for Max Watts chooses to ignore this publicly expressed rationale for the ban, and simply repeats the mantra that became an article of faith on the left for decades after the controversy, namely, that Menzies and his colleagues, like their Tory counterparts in England, found Hitler and Mussolini more acceptable than defenders of freedom such as Kisch.

The respite afforded by Evatt's ruling proved illusory. Menzies later made a further declaration of undesirability, relying on updated information that Kisch was banned from entering England "on account of his known subversive activities". This led to a conviction in the Court of Petty Sessions, although the exact nature of these 'subversive activities' was not specified. Kisch appealed the conviction, still on bail.

Eventually, after four months of controversy, and constant litigation, the Government compromized. Kisch left Australia voluntarily in March 1935, legal costs paid, his passport returned to him. He wrote a book about his misadventures down under – *Australian Landfall* – fought in the Spanish Civil War, emigrated to Mexico, and eventually went back to Prague where he died of a stroke in

1948. Two years later – this being an aspect of the affair that weighs against your reviewer Max Watts – a Royal Commission into the 'Aims and Activities of the Communist Party in Victoria' found that Kisch came to Australia as an agent of Stalin's Comintern.

It may surprise your reviewer to learn that the Royal Commission's conclusion is reinforced by an illuminating article on Kisch published in this very journal, the March 1988 issue of *overland*! In that article, Howard Daniel, an Australian who befriended Kisch in 1934, provides a fascinating and affectionate account of various meetings with the Czech writer in the years that followed. Daniel describes Kisch as "a full time functionary of the Comintern" and refers to an occasion in the late 1920s or early 1930s when "the Comintern sent him (Kisch) as a sort of press officer to accompany a party of foreign journalists to the opening of the Turk-Sib railway."

Likewise, Arthur Koestler makes it plain in his memoirs, especially *The Invisible Writing*, that Kisch was linked to the Comintern via his friends Willi Münzenberg and Otto Katz. This is corroborated to some extent by Kisch himself in *Australian Landfall* (as I demonstrated in the article Max Watts mentions in his review) and, more fully, by Stephen Koch in *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (Harper Collins 1995).

In summary, then, although the exact nature of the 'subversive activities' attributed to Kisch in 1934 remains unclear – thus providing a space to be occupied by the novelist – your reviewer goes too far in suggesting that the research underlying my novel is flawed. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that Kisch was banned because of his links to the Comintern; there is less in favour of the Watts claim that our man K was banned to appease Nazi sympathizers in Canberra. Lost in a historical quagmire of his own creation, it is not surprising that your reviewer was left without space to address the literary merits of the work in question. So be it. The imperfections of Australian reviewers in that regard is an issue for another day.

Max Watts replies

NICHOLAS HASLUCK'S points may be summarized thus: 1. The central figure of his novel, the Czech journalist, writer and anti-fascist Egon Erwin Kisch was almost certainly a "Comintern Agent". 2. This was the reason for the Lyons-Menzies government's (rather unsuccessful, indeed counter-productive) repeated attempts to prevent Kisch from landing in Australia, and then to imprison and/or expel him. According to Hasluck, "the Australian government moved against Kisch in the belief that he was an agent of Stalin's Comintern." (This would override any other useful purposes Kisch's visit to Australia could have, such as beginning to alert the Australian public to the growing danger of fascism.) 3. I ignored this "publicly expressed rationale" for banning Kisch and simply repeated the 'mantra' of the left that Menzies and Co. found fascists more acceptable than dangerous ratbags like Kisch. 4. I go too far in suggesting that Mr. Hasluck's research into the Kisch-Menzies case is "flawed". 5. I was left without space to address the literary merits of the work in question.

I doubt that Kisch, whose writings and biography I know quite well, could have been an acceptable, disciplined agent for Stalin. Indeed the 'proofs' cited by Hasluck confirm my opinion.

In any case I do find the 'Comintern Agent' issue quite irrelevant. A minimal amount of further research would have shown Hasluck that the Lyons-Menzies government did not need any such 'Agentism' to exclude foreign delegates, such as Kisch, from the November 1934 All-Australian Congress against War and Fascism.

No-one has, as far as I know, suggested that the Kiwi Gerald Griffin, the second international delegate to the Melbourne congress, was working for Stalin or the Comintern. But Griffin too was seized by the police on arrival in Sydney, given a dictation test – in his case not in Scottish Gaelic but in Dutch – and having failed even that – sent back to New Zealand. (He returned 'illegally' to Australia, spoke at many anti-war, anti-fascist meetings and, like Kisch, was condemned to six months imprisonment, a conviction overturned on appeal by the High Court on 8 April 1935. Here too costs were awarded against the government.)

Thus whether Kisch was or wasn't a Comintern Agent was irrelevant for Menzies and Co. Kisch, like Griffith, was quite 'undesirable' in any case: an anti-fascist, a leftist, a ratbag.

However, Kisch really was

perhaps far more dangerous than the run-of-the-mill ordinary anti-fascist. This aspect of his past seems to have escaped the then Australian government, and – partly – also Mr Hasluck's researches:

Kisch was not only a reporter, writer, and anti-Hitlerian. In 1917 he became the only officer (he had been promoted during the war from the ranks) in a clandestine Workers' and Military Council. This highly illegal organization played a major role in an anti-war strike in January 1918. Its very effective resistance inside the army did much to convince soldiers that they had no interest in further fighting and dying. It did this so effectively that in November 1918 they stopped, went home and overthrew the government.

This highly subversive aspect of Kisch's past, making him far more dangerous than any Comintern Agent, was not cited against him then by Menzies nor, unfortunately, noted in *Our Man K*.

Perhaps in 1934 Australians would still have remembered that the army Kisch resisted in, the government he helped overthrow, was that of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a by then defunct empire which, in 1918, was fighting – alongside the Turks – against Australians in Palestine.

Perhaps this aspect of Kisch's subversive activities would have won him further sympathy amongst Australians. Some of whom – not so indirectly – may have owed their life to Kisch's anti-war ratbaggery.

Mr Hasluck is unhappy with my criticism that the conservative Australian Lyons-Menzies government of those days found greater affinities for the fascist regimes of Germany, Italy and Japan.

What surprises me is that Mr Hasluck completely overlooks not only my specific points, my quotes from 'anti-Kisch' trials, but the widely known examples of such sympathies.

I did not then include any references to Mr Menzies' highly favourable comments on Hitler's Germany, made both over there during a visit in 1938 and before and after in Australia. There are very many.

Hasluck suggests I go "too far in suggesting that the research underlying [his] novel is flawed." But Mr Hasluck, here I must protest! I praise your research! If indeed you have found that "certain documents have been removed from the (Menzies-Kisch) files by ASIO" (*Quadrant*, April 1999, p. 29) I believe this to be a useful, important discovery, although we may disagree as to its implications.

"Lost in a historical quagmire of his own creation, it is not surprising that your reviewer was left without space to address the literary merits of the work in question."

Guilty. I did however note that for me Kisch was an 'up-beat' man in the most difficult times, and that *Our Man K* seemed pervaded by downbeat sadness. Sometimes *de gustibus non discutandum*, tastes do differ.

A Third Way

Duncan Richardson

IT'S A STRANGE FEELING to stand in 'No-Person's Land' on the southern front of the Great Poetry Wars, agreeing with Dennis Haskell that much of what is called performance poetry is simple and repetitive, almost a verbal bludgeon, while also concurring with π.o. (*overland* 157) that much poetry published around university based presses is turgid and lifeless.

In exchanges of fire like this one, it often seems there are only two types of poet in this country, the Academic and the Performer. Fortunately, the world is not that simple. 'No-Person's Land' is actually quite well populated. There are people who write and read poetry who do not engage much with either extreme, finding one often dry, pretentious and boring and the other frequently relentlessly simplistic and boring. The work that lives between these poles can be enjoyed by non-specialist readers or listeners, not because it merely reinforces their own beliefs but because it has a fresh view, often but not always, on something familiar.

It is strange too that π.o. over-generalizes about writers' festivals excluding performance work. For all their faults, these events usually feature performance poets as well as those with a more literary bent. Even some of those who fit neither camp get a look in occasionally and have been known to enter the canon, whatever that means these days.

It was also interesting to note that π.o. used his own very distinctive work and two writers from the 1920s and thirties to refute Haskell's point about simplicity. What about other contemporaries? Regulars at poetry readings around the

country would recognize the germ of truth in Haskell's point. Much of what is called performance poetry is basically a rave or anecdote with only the performance situation to distinguish it. While some performance work does challange established notions as π.o. suggests, a lot of it is more geared to the ego of the performer.

At the same time, university based poetry publishing, a shrinking beast, does not always produce turgidity and two exceptions were reviewed, albeit briefly, in the same issue as π.o.'s article, namely Joanne Burns and Rory Harris. Their work is typical of this middle ground, poetry that provokes and challenges through innovations in language and form yet still allowing for the readers or listeners to make connections.

Generally, it's a pity that the diversity of audience and practice in this country can't just be accepted and celebrated rather than people expending energy in disputing the way the categories should be viewed. As everyone knows, what's boring to one person can be interesting to another. Some people like to have their opinions and experiences presented to them loudly, in plain terms, rhymed or otherwise. Others prefer strings of arcane images that need a knowledge of classical mythology to interpret. While others want to hear and read poems that are inventive with words and experience while still trying to communicate to a general reader.

All the argument in the world is not going to change these preferences. We all have our biases but if π.o. is as bored as he says, he ought to get out more.

Drug Addiction as Demonic Possession

A reply to Dale Atrens

Peter Graham

IT'S HARD TO KNOW where to begin – such a long article and so much repetition to explain that addiction is a myth.

Has Dale Atrens (*overland* 158) ever treated a heroin addict hanging out for a hit? Cold turkey is no joke for any heroin user. They all dread the symptoms of stomach cramps, sleeplessness, backache, headache, vomiting, diarrhoea, shivering and need no prompting to exhibit them. These symptoms may last only six or seven days but they are real and a heroin addict – and I use the word deliberately – needs the support of multiple drugs and expert attention to get him/her through. And at the end of the withdrawal my lady heroin still beckons invitingly. The addict is always looking for that glorious rush of the first hits when he felt 'king of the heap', impregnable. Who cares that I can't get a job and compulsorily haunt an indifferent Centrelink? Soon the centre of life, the whole focus is on the next hit or the discomfort of a sniffling hanging out.

"Drug users have to know what withdrawal symptoms are expected in order to produce them. Clear withdrawal signs often do not follow even long-term heroin use." Who is he kidding? That tobacco is more addictive than heroin may well be true but withdrawal symptoms are minuscule in comparison. And heavy cannabis use can cause strong dependency and inevitably causes depression in the young user and may reveal a covert schizophrenia.

It is also true that a properly titrated opiate dose will enable an addict to function normally and productively in society and in the workplace even if that dose would bowl over the average adult. Tolerance is a reality, "reports of addiction to eating, dieting, love, hate, spending etc." merely illustrates a loose and inexact use of the word in common parlance and does not detract from its scientific value. Let me spell out in simple terms the definition of Addiction or the Dependence Syndrome as defined by the World Health Organisation. The definition is a consortium of criteria already quoted by Atrens and peremptorily discarded:

* Tolerance
* Withdrawal (symptoms)
* Continued use to diminish withdrawal symptoms
* Compulsion to use (especially when trying to reduce or stop)
* Narrowing repertoire of behaviours (i.e. work, family, sport and other activities receive low priority).
* Drug-related behaviour (pursuit) takes precedence (including criminal behaviour of fraud, burglary, assault).
* Early relapses after withdrawal

Of these components, compulsion to use, tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms (hanging out) are in my experience the most important. Atrens makes a curious statement "that there is little evidence of a drug epidemic" in the face of overdose

deaths in Victoria, mostly of young people, exceeding the road toll. It may seem a paradox that the use of opiates for pain relief seldom causes addiction although prolonged use in palliative care soon produces tolerance. Some patients will need several hundred milligrams of morphia per day to control their pain.

Perhaps it is time for me to reveal my credentials. I have been treating heroin-dependent young people in my rural district for the past thirteen years, both by prescribing methadone and offering inpatient detoxification. Although hardly mentioned in Atrens' article, I am concerned about the uncontrolled ready availability of heroin and cannabis of uncertain quality, even in rural areas. Whereas thirty to forty years ago the only addicts were middle-aged pharmacists, doctors and nurses and patients who had acquired 'the taste', now abuse of these drugs is almost exclusively the province of the young together with a hard core of middle-aged 'lags'. I have no trouble agreeing with Atrens that the war on drugs is a waste of time and of money which could be better spent. Legalizing the home growing of cannabis would be a good first step but like home brewing of beer, make it illegal to sell. There is no black market for home brew!

The 'old lags' should certainly be given the option of legally prescribed heroin which for many is more acceptable than methadone and would reduce the profitability of street-bought heroin.

Supervised injecting centres, if easily accessible, are a small but important part of harm minimization. The methadone program is still the mainstay of harm minimization but needs to be freed from its bureaucratic shackles. At present its rules cause the addict to feel that he/she is under house arrest or at the least on parole for a serious crime when being required to front up to the pharmacist at a regular time each day to drink the slug in front of the pharmacist.

Medical Practitioners should be free to issue take-away doses at their discretion without having to fax a request to the central bureaucrat each time. Let us hope that, as Atrens suggests, it may soon become unfashionable and not cool to shoot up. That wish is not helped by an article which suggests that addiction is not easy to acquire.

X-Ray Wallabies and Mickey Mouse

The Commodification of the 'Authentic' in Aboriginal Art

Stephen Gray

THE 'LABEL OF AUTHENTICITY' for the indigenous arts was launched in early November 1999. It was created by the National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association, in consultation with indigenous artists and others. It is intended "as a guarantee of the authenticity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander products" (see information at the NIAAA web-site, at http://www.niaaa.com.au/label.html).

Indigenous artists can gain a licence to use the label by demonstrating that they are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. They will do this by providing written verification from local indigenous organizations, using the same procedures that are used by the Commonwealth Government and Aboriginal communities. An artist would not need to be 'traditional' in order to gain such a licence, so that an urban artist could also apply for and use the label. An 'official licensee' label has also been created, certifying that a product or service has been derived from an authentic indigenous work of art under fair and legitimate licensing arrangements.

The authenticity label is clearly legitimate in one sense. Many Aboriginal people have shown that they want such a label to help stop the 'rip-offs' of Aboriginal art which have occurred for many years. If accompanied by a well-directed advertising campaign (and the authenticity label will not work otherwise, since the label will not prevent unauthorized people selling 'look-alike' Aboriginal art) it will also be a useful marketing tool – a symbol of Aboriginal identity and pride.

Nevertheless the authenticity label is also symbolic of something else – of how far Aboriginal art has become commodified, part of an international world of finance, production and exchange. Paradoxically, a major source of the appeal of indigenous art to the Western consumer lies precisely in its 'authentic', unsullied image. The authenticity label reflects and fosters the idea that Aboriginal art is a product of near-naked, painted elders, noble savages with access and willingness to

pass on arcane traditional knowledge – the 'Real People', as Marlo Morgan put it in her best-selling 'rip-off' book, *Mutant Message Down Under*.

This image is, of course, a long way from the reality of the conditions under which most Aboriginal art is produced. Such an image allows Western consumers to maintain a 'relaxed and comfortable', apolitical image of Aboriginal people, and multi-national mining companies to create a caring image by putting leased works of art on their board-room walls. The label is a kind of consumer guarantee that Aboriginal people are not moving forward, that they remain reified in the primordial state first dreamt of by Rousseau, doomed to repeat the same brush-strokes passed on by their elders from the Dreamtime.

The friction between romantic image and less-than-romantic reality is the source of many of the recent 'scandals' which break out like Dry-Season bushfires over the 'authenticity' of Aboriginal art. In the last few years there has been the Wanda Koolmatrie affair, in which a Sydney taxi driver named Leon Carmen won an award for Aboriginal writers under that name. There has been the Elizabeth Durack scandal, in which a station-owner from the Kimberly submitted paintings for an Aboriginal art contest under the name Eddie Burrup. There has been the Marlo Morgan scandal, and there have been aspersions cast over the 'authenticity' of the works of the artists Kathleen Petyarre and Clifford Possum, and over the Aboriginal identities of the writers Archie Weller, Roberta Sykes and Mudrooroo.

These scandals create enormous, short-term publicity, front page of *The Australian* material. It is as though non-indigenous expectations about authentic Aboriginal art are first created by the media, then inevitably disappointed. Aboriginal artists are then blamed for not being what the non-Aboriginal art world wants them to be.

The 'scandals' seem broadly to fall into two categories. Firstly, a non-indigenous artist may win some kudos by posing as a traditional indigenous artist, and is then dramatically uncovered. Secondly, an indigenous artist is perceived to be falling short of standards of authenticity defined primarily by the non-indigenous art world. In both cases the outrage of the art world seems to be the result of the fact that the boundaries of authenticity it has developed for Aboriginal artists have been violated. These boundaries are not the same as those existing for non-indigenous artists, nor indeed the product of traditional Aboriginal culture, and they are in any case peculiarly constricting.

This is not in any way intended to suggest that Aboriginal cultures lack a notion of authenticity. On the contrary, indigenous notions of what artists can or should produce seem far stricter than those in non-indigenous culture. Much of the difficulty regarding the issue of legal protection for indigenous art arises from the fact that indigenous people generally seek a far greater level of protection than that granted under western law. They would like, for example, to see protection for words, languages, genetic resources, and artistic styles such as dot painting or X-ray art.

In Australia, government has been conspicuous by its silence on this issue. There has been little public discussion either of the theoretical issues surrounding such proposals, or of exactly how they would work (see, for the major discussion of legal options, the 'Our Culture, Our Future' web-site at http://www.icip.lawnet.com.au).

In the United States, however, the question of whether 'culture can be copyrighted' has become intensely political. Proponents of some special form of cultural protection have been demonized as opposed to liberal democracy, fairness and free speech, one of a kind with the post-modernists with their destructive and nihilistic secret agenda:

"No-one can really mean it [i.e proposals for special cultural protection] as a genuine act of respect. It is more in the nature of a pretend act of respect given on the insistence of its supposed beneficiary. Objectively, such an act involves contempt for the latter's intelligence. To be an object of such an act of respect demeans. The proponents of neo-Nietzschean theories [expressed in the works of Foucault and Derrida] hope to escape this whole nexus of hypocrisy by turning the entire issue into one of power and counterpower. Then the question is no longer one of respect, but of taking sides, of solidarity." (Taylor, 'The politics of recognition', quoted approvingly in Michael Brown, 'Can Culture Be Copyrighted?' *Current Anthropology*, vol. 39, no. 2, April 1998, p. 205.)

This ideological mud-slinging obscures the fact that copyright has become increasingly available

as a multinational tool. Large corporations are able to obtain copyright protection for such simple designs as company logos (even where trade mark protection is concurrently available) without this being seen as a threat to free speech. However, a proposal to protect Mimi or Wandjina figures apparently does pose such a threat.

It would appear, then, that the maintenance of 'authenticity' is only desirable as a marketing tool: that is, when defined in non-indigenous terms. At least some urban or 'non-traditional' artists are likely to refuse to use the authenticity label licensing procedure for this reason. The procedure would probably be rejected by the majority of non-indigenous artists on free speech grounds, were they requested to use some such label. There has been no public debate on the possible free speech implications for Aboriginal artists.

On the other hand, free speech suddenly becomes an issue when its exercise by non-indigenous writers, artists or corporations is at stake. When the notion of authenticity is defined in indigenous terms – to reflect the collective rights of artists and communities to their words, language, genetic resources and artistic styles – authenticity is suddenly dangerous. The noble savage is no longer a relaxed and comfortable image, dancing out in the desert. He or she has become real.

A truer recognition of 'authenticity' would mean actually taking account of indigenous demands to have their cultures protected. It would mean a recognition of the extreme social and economic disadvantage of most Aboriginal communities, of the perceptual gulf between indigenous artists and the non-indigenous art worlds, and of the difference in power between indigenous communities and multinational corporations. Only when these issues are addressed can the notion of reconciliation, and the art itself, begin to build across this perceptual gulf a shaky bridge.

A Candle in a Darkened Room

Gaylene Carbis

A YOUNG WOMAN who calls herself Melissa Elizabeth read poetry on 24 November 1999 at the Barelycorn Hotel as part of the LeftWrites Festival. It was her first public reading. A first reading, a first act of public speaking, is an important event in itself, but this particular reading is important not just for everything the LeftWrites Festival has attempted to represent but for its meaning in this young woman's life. This was one of the most significant events in Melissa Elizabeth's life.

I met Melissa through Anglicare Choices, where I run a Writing program. Anglicare Choices provides a support program for young women, under twenty-five, who are pregnant or who have children. At the time I knew Melissa, Choices ran a residential support program, which is now defunct. It was not re-funded and young women like Melissa, with very few resources, have had to find new homes in a highly competitive market.

When I first came to Choices, Dot Hoffman, Michelle Semmens and myself discussed a Literacy program, based on our shared belief that building literacy skills enhances access to study and employment opportunities, both of which are areas of concern for all of us but especially for groups who are viewed as having 'special needs' or as being disadvantaged in some way. Though the idea for a group began as a pilot Literacy group, we decided to run groups which were not called 'Literacy' but names such as: *Express Yourself, Writing For Children,* and *Introduction to Computers.* Essentially, young women came along and either pursued their own interests or I provided direction and ideas, usually a combination of the two. In any one session, one young woman might be writing up her resume; another writing about coming to Australia and adjusting to a completely different culture; while others were reading and writing poetry.

The young women who are typically involved in the Choices program are women who have had little or no access to education: they are women who have faced or are facing issues of homelessness; domestic violence; sexual abuse; drug abuse; and difficulties in coping with parenting and living skills in general. Young women from programs like Choices are women who have been marginalized by our society, single mothers who are relegated to the fringes: a writing group offers them time and space to themselves. Many come along saying "I'm no good at writing" or "I can't do . . ." (whatever you suggest they try). But they find they *can* and *do*. These writing groups are about self-expression as a tool of empowerment, as a means to express one's creativity

and as a powerful tool for change, a way of building confidence and self-esteem.

Melissa Elizabeth, like most of the young women at Choices, has been through incredibly traumatic and difficult experiences in her young lifetime: she has faced darkness many of us will never experience. The divide between the lows Melissa has known and the highs of being invited to read at a Festival is an enormous one. On the continuum of Melissa's life, this public reading was the culmination of her attempts to build a new life for herself.

She was giggly and high-spirited as she waited for the reading to begin. She kept asking when it would start. She looked long and lean in a flowing black dress with white flowers over it, dancing solo to the music at the pub, singing and smiling and laughing excitedly. When finally she stood before the microphone in the candle-lit room they call *The Easychair*, she was more subdued, serious even. You could see she was slightly nervous.

But her voice was strong and clear and she gave her work the integrity it deserved. She was very emotional but no more so than any of us who have been through a lot to get to that point where we can say: "Here I am on the other side." Actually, emotional isn't quite the right word. She was *heartfelt*: every word mattered to her. She had a belief in herself that made this her shining hour.

The LeftWrites Festival is one about community; about the collective. It evolved out of the desire of a number of like-minded people to offer an alternative to the mainstream, an alternative to the writing world of our capitalist society which breeds poets/writers who feel they have to compete with each other to gain attention, to gain a grant, to claim space in a society, a culture, a world which embraces money, profit and sport (especially male sport) as its cultural life-blood.

I have singled out one person amongst many. The Reading at the Barleycorn was promoted as a reading of poetry and prose by young women reading from the book *Where I'm Coming From*, which came out of the Choices program. Due to circumstances which are intricately bound up with years under the Kennett government (the restructuring and relocation of the Choices program and the attendant downsizing; the transience of the young women at Choices, who frequently change addresses and are often not easy to locate), the young women who were involved with the book were not able to attend.

Melissa Elizabeth came after the book had been printed. Melissa, Tania Bahro (ex-Community Liaison Co-ordinator at Choices) and myself read some excerpts from the book for this Reading, though the night was focused around Melissa's work. I felt I had not done justice to the book: the young women weren't there. I hadn't been able to contact them and the few I did speak to couldn't come.

But the young women *were* and *are* there. They are there in the book. They are out there in the world getting on with their lives. And they are there in Melissa Elizabeth, who wanted to read even if it meant she was the only person reading to an audience of her mother, her boyfriend and myself. I'm glad to say many of the people associated with the LeftWrites Festival turned up and Melissa proudly read to what she described as "a fantastic audience".

In a life characterized by instability, struggle and powerlessness, this reading gave Melissa the opportunity to break out against all that and to begin to envisage other possibilities. She plans to write a book and hopes to be accepted into a Writing course at TAFE next year. Next week, after moving seven times this year, she and her son will move into a housing commission flat, her first home of her own.

Writing programs, such as the one provided by Choices, and Festivals such as the Leftwrites Festival, offer hope to people who struggle to have hope. I have been witness to the unique way Writing programs give voice to people who are often silenced. The outcomes are immediate and tangible and, as Tania Bahro said to me, as powerful as therapy. You could see by the bright eyes of the women when they'd produced something at the end of a writing session that the act of self-expression (even in the form of writing up a resume) is one which has enormous personal and political significance.

I celebrate the advent of the LeftWrites Festival for providing a further opportunity for these young voices to be listened to and hope that this Festival, and other community-based programs such as the Writing program at Choices, continue to be funded and recognized with the attention they deserve.

The Writing program at Choices runs 10.30 a.m. – 1.30 p.m. on Tuesdays. Contact Anglicare Choices:118 Napier St Fitzroy, Tel: 9415 9060, Fax: 9415 7070.

Vagabond: A New Small Press

Pam Brown

JUST AS MOST commercial publishers were closing their poetry lists, in 1999 Michael Brennan and Jane Gibian, two young Sydney-based poets with nomadic intentions, established a small enterprise called Vagabond Press. Their aim was to produce high quality pamphlets of poetry and prose at an affordable price and that's exactly what they've been doing.

Their list is eclectic and includes both well-known and lesser-known and emerging local and overseas-based Australian writers. So far, the list goes – Nick Riemer, Kevin Hart, MTC Cronin, David Brooks, Zan Ross, Nicolette Stasko, John Kinsella, Louis Armand, Kate Fagan, Peter Minter, Vivian Smith, Noel Rowe, Tracy Ryan, and John Tranter.

Three Vagabond booklets were launched in Autumn at the Hollywood Hotel in Sydney – Peter Minter's *Morning, Hyphen* –"A corresponding/zero in the heart,/eating air.", Kate Fagan's *return to a new physics* – "we are splitting prisms/hoping/for slow fantastic/disturbance", and MTC Cronin's *Mischief-Birds* – "As far from each other as/ the length of our bowels". Michael Brennan read from Louis Armand's *Erosions* – "quoted from elsewhere, the place-names read/like an inventory of/absentees."And to give samples from a couple of others – Tracy Ryan's *Ex Opere Operato* – "Overlay, you/Spakfill cracks in our frail/Provisional systems" and John Kinsella's *Counter-Pastoral* – "cow wallpaper most wanted/in the do-it-yourself narcissus/bush museum, the town's/only tourist attraction."

The *Rare Objects Series* booklets are hand-made and published in signed, numbered editions of 100 and they sell for a mere $7 each. The forthcoming *Stray Dog Editions* will vary in style and design as well as offer a more substantial selection from each writer but the print-run will remain at 100 copies.

This is a commendable and refreshing venture. Any money made from sales goes straight back into producing the next series. Vagabond Press has a website – http://thirdangel.com/vagabond and can also be contacted at P.O. Box 80, Newtown, NSW 2042.

Floating Fund

As we sail warily into the coming GST storm, we thank the following for their generous donations:

$150 M.H.; $100 J.R.; $64 B.G.; $50 D.&P.G., K.B.; $24 J.C., J.M., J.S.; $22 J.F.; $20 M.M., M.H., E.W.; $15 P.H.; $14 M.G., A.H.K., R.H.&M.G., J.B., B.B., F.S.; $10 D.M.C.M., D.J.W., J.P.; $9 J.A., $7 J.A.S.; $5 M.L.; $4 C.D., J.B., P.J.R., J.F., E.I., A.B.M., M.S., N.A.; $2 P.T.; Totalling: $752.

Reviews

Bulk deliveries & cool slim volumes: poetry

Kerry Leves

Len Fox: Progress *against fascism*, cartoons by Tom Challen (Len Fox, 10 Little Surrey St, Potts Point 2010; unpriced) This little book recreates a period in Australian history when the rhetoric of power was less populist in tone; when politics and advertising weren't quite so inextricably married; when cynicism wasn't so usual. The time was the early 1940s, when the authoritarian style of official propaganda served as a cover for monopolist economic practices and muddled defence policies and attacks on the trade union movement and severe censorship. In context, Len Fox's light, barbed verses seem to have the authentic sound of the people's voice. The poem 'The Bludget' accompanies a cartoon of the bushy-browed, portly-girthed Prime Minister Menzies thwacking the heads of a couple of better-looking-but-browbeaten working-men with a furled scroll of paper as thick as a rolled-up carpet: "This hurts you more than me!/ Bonus shares for B.H.P/ Bigger profits for I.C.I./ Mining shares are rising high!/ 'Low and middle incomes hit.'/ I'm not worrying a bit./ The Stock Exchange has felt no gloom!/ Mr Rydge predicts a boom!" Funny-and-pointed was the style favoured by the paper called *Progress*, founded "in the depths of the [1930s] Depression by a small group of unemployed in North Sydney", adopted in 1940 by the NSW State Labor Party, and then produced by three left-wing journalists, Fox, Bill Wood, and George Farwell along with cartoonist Tom Challen, who also worked for one of Sydney's main dailies. The foursome had in common a dislike of stuffiness and pretentiousness, a keen sense of the ridiculous, and a loosely-affiliated social idealism. The bold lines and tough-minded humour of Challen's cartoons match up with Fox's poems, where the verse-technique is flexible enough to produce emotionally touching or stirring effects, as well as the laughter of recognition. Of course it's propaganda, or counter-propaganda, but arguably more humane, probably more informative and certainly more fun than the government-and-media stuff of the period. Len Fox has done present and future readers a service; the verses and cartoons, contextualized in Fox's understated memoir, evoke a witty and incisive public discourse in an era when there seemed few alternatives to bombast and verbal coercion. *Progress*'s circulation went from 2000 to 20,000 in the Challen-Farwell-Fox-Wood days (1940 – 1945).

Marian Devitt (ed.): *Landmark: Poetry from the Northern Territory* (NTU Press, NT Writers' Centre, GPO Box 2255, Darwin, 0801; $12.95 + $2.50 postage) Makes possible an open-ended imagining of the place – many places, from Michael Watts' Alice Springs, with its mountain-fringed hinterland where crazy motorists burn off on three wheels, and lonely lovers find private places out of town, and desperate ("we've only known each other a week") sex is blessed by unasked-for "cool rain . . . and . . . warm clinging mud", to John Muk Muk Burke's Tiwi, its night sky blazed not by Venus or Lucifer but by "the bright one Bornambirr", reconstellated in a potent contemplative act; from Val O'Neill's Gillen flatlands, where violent resentments and unreconciled histories and bone-dry humour form a matrix for the not-so-simple life, to Kaye Aldenhoven's ravishingly reader-friendly Sumatran lakeshore. At every turn the scenic gives way to the vagaries of people and languages, as in Meg Mooney's lively portraits of women on a seed-gathering party in the bush. Well-paced anthology drags a bit in the middle (a few poets give us the "I" and its "experience" in the creative-writing-class stolid manner). Otherwise persuasive of an immensity of life under those northern stars, of many dreamings uneasily co-existent under the fierce sun and monsoon

rains. *Landmark* has what the 1998 anthology, *Fifty Years of Queensland Poetry*, lacked – a complicatedly regional spirit, a sense of deep-rooted cultural particularities.

Megan Surmon & Simon Jackson (eds): *Cafe: An Anthology of Writings and Images* (Scant Publishing, $12.95) Distinguished by an introduction both stylish and historically informative, by Jenni Nixon's cogent, poignant 'Cafe Boogie', the glimpses of social history afforded through Helen Cohn's 'Lunch at Coles Cafeteria', the adept light touch of Kirsten Johnston's vivid, high-spirited 'Scrabbling at "the Grape"' – otherwise, this overstuffed anthology suffers a preponderance of vapid, throwaway poems that may inadvertently suggest why some people shun "cafe society". Pity, because it's a well-designed book (weeny typeface aside) with a scatter of enjoyable graphics and some competent prose fiction.

jeltje (ed.): *925: workers poetry from australia 1978–1983* (collective effort press, Box 2430V, Melbourne 3000; $15) Work as hassle, work as technologized exploitation, work as social process; work as bad joke and physical damage and nervous breakdown. Work as the reduction of your sense of being human to a few bleak-humoured practicalities. Lack of work as another reduction. jeltje's selection from five years of the journal *925* is never less than engaging, with wonderful tell-it-like-it-is poems from Lindsay Clements, Letizia Mondello, Barry McDonald, bonny, and jeltje herself. However, the only writer who goes beyond the univocal, the vital yet narrowing sense of a single-voice-bearing-witness, is π.o., whose multi-vocal, multivalent and subtly-rhythmed language evokes the dynamics of work-cultures; conflicts and harmonies with strong, traceable roots in the layers of Australian history. If this page were at once a megaphone and a rooftop, you'd hear it: π.o. is an original and magnificent demotic poet, and, even without the good company it's in, his contribution would make *925* irresistible.

Rob Riel: *For as Long as You Burn* (fip, $9) Rather good. The occasions are random – for instance, a gardener ("a gentle enough helot/ in the Army of Family Values") is observed "outside Macca's, Sunday 10 am" while the writer finishes a coffee in a styrofoam cup, and the result is an arresting speculation on the possibilities of risk in a world that practices "correct management" yet encompasses "mutilation . . . made in fear or hate". The tone is kept light, the cool is sedulously practiced, yet there's what J.S. Harry once called "a felt struggle" in this writing – it avoids both facility and fancifulness, can deliver a thought, a feeling, even a vision, with subtlety and precision, and " . . . set these signs/ as spindrift myths of ache/ and innocence, shivering/ through the cool blue flesh/ of the sea."

Brian Henry & Andrew Zawicki (eds): *Verse*, Vols 15 [3] & 16 [1] (English Dept, Plymouth State College, New Haven, US, A$13) Compendious but by no means exhaustive array of Australian poetry, starting with Kevin Hart's pastoral-contemplative (for fun, read Hart's 'The River' as if [a] Robert Frost and [b] Wallace Stevens had written it). High-register predominates. The demotic is allowed a back-door sneak-in via J. S. Harry's 'Peter Meets the American', where the naive allegorical rabbit of Harry's *The Life on Water and the Life Beneath* returns in a really fine poem that constructs a series of different perspectives on an embattled scene – writers ingesting large theories, extruding small gains and dealing with day-jobs while "learning – to write" – and manages to be grimly pleasurable; funny yet also empathic. Meanwhile the formidable John Kinsella gets to tease us, in an interview, with the spectre that haunts contemporary poetry: "commodity fetishization". But Kinsella's poems, artful tracings of cultural cleavage-lines, are impressive, and the American Mark Wallace's essay-like review of Kinsella's new books is admirably straightforward, limning contexts and arguments without burying the poetry in explication. Cross-cultural reviewing is a theme, which allows Peter Boyle to be informative about Charles Wright, and many reviewer/essayists have poetry in as well. Standout poems include Tracy Ryan's 'Mallee Root', Pam Brown's acerbic 'Miracles', Peter Rose's (though less of him might have been more), Peter Boyle's geographicals, and Stephen Kelen's Vishnu-like 'Turtle'. Non-Australian contingent is headed by the Rumanian Eugen Jebeleanu and the Belgrade poet Alexander Ristovic – both deceased, unfortunately, but their translators (Matthew Zapruder & Radu Ioanid, and Charles Simic, respectively) left this reader wishing for more, especially of Jebeleanu. Also on board are Pulitzer Prize winner James Tate; Susan M. Schultz, "screaming lost/ verbs at loan sharks" (Schultz edits the Honolulu-based, creole-friendly journal *Tinfish*); and flavour-of-the-month Tomaz Salamun: "Every true poet is a monster./ He destroys people and their speech . . . "

which sounds more like Papa Doc's or Stalin's activities than those of, say, Jebeleanu or Susan M. Schultz.

Paul Knobel: *Male Homosexuality and Australian English Language Poetry* (Veritas, email = knobel@ozemail.com.au; unpriced) Forty-page stapled booklet serves as a taster for the author's forthcoming, global-scoped *Encyclopedia of Male Homosexual Poetry*. This one could make a reader wish he'd go further unlocking the Australian literary closet, and exploring its contents. Huge research project has resulted in a detailed, pacy narrative, grounded in the mess and chaos of historical writerly in/discretions, academic and media censorship and a certain law-teasing nudge/wink sensationalism. From convictry through to the late 1990s, the story constantly reminds us of the dis/junctions between literary personas and cultural practices. Knobel's essay is as much social history as literary analysis; yet there's the germ in it of an Australian epistemology-of-the-closet that could complement and intensify Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's brilliant study of American and European writers.

bev roberts & ian mcbryde (eds): *my secret life* (melbourne festival of poetry, 12 little chapel st, prahran 3181; $10) Small, finely-designed-and-produced souvenir of the 1999 festival, allows a reader to enjoy the poetically succinct, the pithy, the pungent and the off-beat. It's a challenge to poets to deliver in a tight space, and many meet it with flair. David Reiter's depiction of an aged and lonely man's responses to a telephone researcher is unpretentiously affecting; Caroline Caddy's 'Editing the Moon' is imaginative and subtle; Hugh Tolhurst's pre-election kiss-off to Jeff Kennett is concentratedly scathing. But the really bold and intense language-work comes from π.o., Javant Biaruja, John Mateer (his 'For the Mothers' has an earthy chant-like grandeur), Bev Braune (a good read of an unorthodox kind), and Angela Costi, who in nine lines gives us a Mediterranean female sensuality, the patriarchal structures that contain it, and the teasing, rhapsodic 'why' of those rigid structures – no mean feat. Others in top form include Rebecca Edwards, J. S. Harry yet again, and Alex Skovron. Present, too, are some lapses – for instance Chris Wallace-Crabbe's poem, less a reverie than a nap; the extract from Dorothy Porter's *What a piece of work*, opaquely flat; Lee Cataldi's stereotypical Indian-labourer sketch. Fay Zwicky's take on a recent-historical brutality isn't mine, but it is impassioned and dazzlingly-written. *my secret life*, with its manifold liveliness, is likely to convince most readers to latch on to the affirmative.

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet.

Campfires of the Lost?

Hugh Anderson

Bruce Simpson, Kelly Dixon & Bob Magor (eds): *A Thousand Campfires* (Pan Macmillan, $30).

MOST THINGS about this book are strange. According to the blurb sent with the review copy it "encapsulates the spirit of the outback" and "reflects various traditional aspects of the bush and its people" as well as being "a personal and comprehensive anthology of Australian bush ballads written during the late twentieth century", but is, nevertheless, not definitive, although it includes the "cream of Australia's bush poets".

There are seventy-two writers included, listed alphabetically according to the writer's surname – some with a single item and some with as many as ten poems, but none with any indication of selection criteria or biographies. There is not even a title or first line index. I notice that each of the selectors figure largely in the entries: Bruce Simpson (twelve poems), Kelly Dixon (eleven), and Bob Magor (eight). The names of Banjo Paterson, Henry Lawson and Will Ogilvie are invoked, but seem to belong to another era, while several of those gaining a place are known in recent times: Louis H. Clark, Bert Dunn, Dan Sheahan, and Richard Magoffin (the promoter of *Waltzing Matilda*, with nine poems). Denis Kevans has written better verses than the one, *The Tick-tacker's Benediction,* presented here.

Jack Sorenson's publications don't gain a mention in the inadequate bibliography, *Works of Australian Poets,* anymore than do those of Douglas Stewart (represented by one poem!). Many of the authors have been published by themselves (which is no disgrace in my view), but it is hardly a good indication of the "resurgence in the popularity of the ballad" asserted in the Editors' Note. The contents, in fact, appear to draw heavily on various anthologies of bush verse, such as *Off the Shelf* (1960), and the

Bronze Swagman Books of Verse from 1972 onwards.

The reference to Dame Leonie Kramer as "the amazing lady of letters" is quite inexplicable in the context of bush verse.

Hugh Anderson is a prolific author of works on Australian social history and a contributor to overland *from the beginning. His latest book is* Tocsin: Contesting the Constitution.

Escaping the 'Sardine Syndrome'

Kirsti Sarmiala-Berger

Russ Kick: *Psychotropedia. A Guide to Publications on the Periphery* (Pluto Press, $40).

Chris Mikul: *Bizarrism. Strange Lives, Cults, Celebrated Lunacy* (Headpress, $24.95).

Simon Sellars (ed.): *Amorphik. An Erotic Constellation* (Sub Dee Industries, $14.95; *Amorphik* may be ordered by phone: (61-3) 9593 9367; or email: subdee@mindless.com; or the web: www.vicnet.net.au/"subdee).

RECENTLY, I HAD A DREAM in which I was metamorphosed into a sardine, obliged to live in suffocating conformity in a sardine tin alongside other identical, fishy specimens which, like myself, had been chosen in compliance with some invariable, pre-existing standards of taste. Absurd? Perhaps. Or an appropriate metaphor for individuals who find themselves at odds with the irrevocable claims of the Establishment, whether such claims belong to mainstream religious, scientific, political, or any other orthodox socio-cultural discourse.

Alternative cultural traditions have always existed alongside the mainstream, but have been repressed – to a greater or a lesser degree throughout history – by the Establishment. As sociologists such as A.M. Greeley have repeatedly noted, cultural and intellectual statements outside the margins of conformity have always been seen by the upholders of the latter as evil and dangerous forms of social deviance, the lunatic ramblings of crackpot fringe-dwellers. Fortunately for those of us who dislike conformity, the recent *fin-de-siecle* resurgence of alternative cultural phenomena has not yet diminished: not since the end of the nineteenth century has there been such widespread interest in theories and practices considered by the Establishment to be anomalous to their accepted stockpile of cultural 'truths'.

The wealth and diversity of the current rehabilitation of alternative views is triumphantly reflected in *Psychotropedia. A Guide to Publications on the Periphery*, a critical bibliography compiled by Russ Kick and published in Australia by Pluto Press. Attempting to cover the entire "subcontinent of 'alternative thought' . . . from the frivolous through the intriguing to the inflammatory", Kick has surveyed a massive cross-section of literature and visual and auditory media, dealing with topics related to occultism and mysticism, sabotage and conspiracy theories, anarchism, utopianism, psychedelics, erotica and the unorthodox body-image, and the darker side of the psyche as manifested in black humour, art, graphics and underground literature. The "subversiveness of Shakespeare's plays and poems", as explored in Michael Macrone's *Naughty Shakespeare*, for example, is evaluated by Kick alongside his dissection of tomes on firewalking, astral projection, vampires and *The Big Book of Weirdos*, in which sixty-five comic artists present biographies of "visionaries, eccentrics, crazed geniuses and madmen who have livened up history". These, amongst other intriguing outposts of the radical and the outlandish are presented through a body of professional reviews which ignore the exclusivity of consensual orientations. With its index and appendices of catalogues and publishers' ordering information, *Psychotropedia* should prove useful to those in the book and other media trades, as well as appealing to researchers and private individuals interested in alternative topics. Although written prior to 1998 when it was first published by Headpress in England, the book is remarkably current; and there will certainly be scope for another edition based on the author's website 'Mind Pollen' (www. mindpollen. com/psy) which is already, in part, "devoted to keeping *Psychotropedia* up-to-date".

In *Bizarrism. Strange Lives, Cults, Celebrated Lunacy*, Chris Mikul profiles a number of real people whose eccentric lives reflect the more extreme aspects of human behaviour and thinking: Harry Crosby, a wealthy American poet and sun-worshipper, joined the free-wheeling bohemian and artistic circles in early twentieth-century Paris, where he sought his poetic muse through 'perversity', excess and, finally, suicide. William Chidley, an Australian

autodidact and visionary, led an abstemious life and developed a sexual theory of ageing and disease in which the convergence of the eyebrows was an early physical sign of "unnatural coition". Rosaleen Norton's psychic proclivities inclined her towards the strange and the supernatural. She became known as the 'Witch of King's Cross', a worshipper of the horned god Pan, who produced a remarkable and unique body of visionary art. Although all of Mikul's biographies are fascinating, there is one aspect of his approach that I do not like: whereas Russ Kick's well-rehearsed reviews in *Psychotropedia* seem entirely without bias, Mikul – as the title 'Bizarrism' suggests – tends to gloat on the weirdness of the lives he chronicles. 'Lesbian Vampires' and 'The Life and Death of a Lobster Boy' might, for instance, be said to rival any of the hyped-up headlines of the sensationalist press. But, for other readers, the sensationalist element may merely add to the appeal of the book.

When it comes to alternative sexuality, *Amorphik. An Erotic Constellation*, edited by Simon Sellars, comes hot on the heels of such US publications as *Dark Eros* and the periodical *Diabolical Clits*. In *Exhibitionism for the Shy* the "sex-positive activist", Carol Queen, has commented that it is "a pernicious myth that sex comes naturally" – mainstream attitudes to sexuality are still tense, negative and suppressive: "In our uptight, erotophobic society, we grow up in a sex-negative atmosphere . . . Most of the natural instincts we have towards sex are choked off at an early age". Often, it seems, 'sex' is perceived as a dirty word, to be associated (as in *Roget's Thesaurus*) with 'defilement', 'indelicacy' and 'social evil'.

Amorphik is an anthology of poetry and short stories intent on exploring and expanding our sexual territory, sometimes – as in Andrés Vaccari's intriguing 'End of Season' – to outer space. Gay, lesbian, hetero- and bi-sexual themes intermingle with SM, fantasy and science fiction, relating to all forms of desire. Yet, Sellars' statement of purpose makes it clear that *Amorphik* "is not fiercely categorized 'gay' or 'lesbian' fiction; it does not indulge in softcore 'hetero' play-acting; and it is not insipidly 'bisexual', the latest flavour of the month – it is amorphous, androgynous". Some of the stories may shock and surprise but, as Sarah Endacott writes in the opening poem, entitled 'Dear Heterosexuals', " . . . Out-/ side the blue- and pink-laned thoroughfares/ we learned together lies/ this bowed terrain . . . ".

Regardless of the current climate of extensive New Age activities and Neo-Pagan revivals of ancient mythologies, experimentation with alternative cultural views – the 'bowed terrain' of Endacott's poem – is still designated as countercultural fads or 'fringe phenomena'. Nevertheless, for increasing numbers of people alternative thought – be it sexual, spiritual, political, or merely outlandish – is fast becoming established as an ideological and practical resource. The causes of the current popularity of alternative thought form an interesting sociological question and are related to a growing dissatisfaction with the lukewarm trends of mainstream cultural activity and so-called 'progress'. These three books go a long way towards informing the faint-hearted conformist; but they are especially recommended for those who, like myself, wish to escape the 'Sardine Syndrome'.

Kirsti Sarmiala-Berger is currently completing a PhD at Monash University, on the subject of occult and mystical influences in Australian art.

The Struggle for Some Global Justice

John Leonard

Geoffrey Robertson: *Crimes Against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice* (Allen Lane, $45).

IN THIS WORK Geoffrey Robertson, a leading international human rights lawyer, and one of the lawyers involved in the Pinochet extradition proceedings in Britain, gives the layperson a very extensive run-down on the history and current state of international human rights law, and on the various bodies which enforce it. The book is an unusually weighty tome for these times, of some 450 pages, and contains a mass of information discussing international human rights issues from the C19 to the recent NATO intervention in Kosovo and the Pinochet Trial.

One of the problems that must have faced the author in writing this book is that the subject area is vast and disparate, and I found some difficulty in keeping all the various topics discussed in focus at once. (Of course the book would be a very useful reference work.) This is because the area itself has no real definition, and encompasses such issues as the punishment of the perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity, the Geneva conventions

on the conduct of war, the rights, or lack of rights, of minorities (and majorities), indigenous people, women, children, the environment and so forth. There is no doubt which of these questions most interests the author: it is the pursuit of perpetrators of headline crimes against humanity, such as Pinochet, Milosevic and other Balkan war-criminals, the genocidal Hutu leaders in Rwanda, and others. And here there is much ground for optimism, as the ruling on the *Pinochet (No.1)* case indicates; here a panel of senior British judges ruled that whilst Pinochet was Head of State of Chile he was immune from prosecution for any actions he ordered, however, once he was no longer Head of State his immunity only extended to those actions which were the proper concern of heads of state, which did not include such actions as the use of terror and torture.

Clearly such a precedent is a very heartening one, and one which, if generally and frequently applied, would take away much of the incentive for political leaders to use terror, torture and other inhumanities against their opponents. However, whether the Pinochet case and other war-crimes or crimes-against-humanity trials that have taken or are taking place really justify the assertion of the blurb of the book that "the human rights idea will come to dominate world politics in the C21" is doubtful. Firstly it is clear, and Geoffrey Robertson admits, that all the criminals brought to international justice recently have been those who have run out of powerful friends, or who are no longer useful to their powerful former friends, and only leaders of small nations can ever be threatened with international prosecution (we have heard nothing about possible international prosecutions of the current Russian leadership for their actions in Chechnia, for example). Secondly when human rights concerns come very close to home then the powerful act defensively, as the recent refusal of the US to support a permanent International Criminal Court demonstrates.

However the biggest problem with international human rights as currently understood is that they seem to exclude such matters as the rights of people to a healthy environment and humane living and working conditions. The recent failure of the WTO meeting in Seattle even to begin to discuss some of these issues would suggest that they are largely considered as areas which are not susceptible to legal jurisdiction, instead being part of 'world's best [business] practice', and that the excercise of taking away human rights on a day-to-day, non-dramatic basis is now considered an unalienable human right of the rich and powerful.

John Leonard is a freelance writer based in Canberra.

Race, Place, Gender

Dîpti Saravanamuttu

Radhika Mohanram: *Black Body: Women, colonialism and space* (Allen & Unwin, $35).

THIS BOOK TRACES the process of representation of the black body in a number ofprojects and discourses central to Western notions of identity. To this extent the project requires a certain essentializing of the term 'black' although the author supports the homogeneity of the term itself.

The first chapter compares Claude Levi-Strauss' *The Science of the Concrete* with Alfred Cosby's *Ecological Imperialism*, an analysis at the interface of biology, geography and European expansion. Both texts are on ways of classifying the world. Mohanram reads these in conjunction with each other in order to examine the bodies which are formed in the two. In both, she argues, there is an embodiment of blackness and a disembodiment of whiteness: that whiteness has the ability to move, and hence becomes unmarked, while blackness is always static and immobilizing.

Mohanram points out the important recognition that "racial difference is also spatial difference" in that "The inequable power relationships between various spaces and places are re-articulated as the inequitable power relationships between races". This linking of bodily identity and geography bring a new undestanding to contemporary theories of embodiment.

The strongest voice in the texts Mohanram writes with is Frantz Fanon's, who speaks with anger of the inadequacy of analyzing the body without reference to its historical-racial schema as well.

The second chapter reads Freud via Locke and Fanon. Locke's priorizing of consciousness within the discourse of liberal democracy juxtaposed with Freud's conceptual schema of identification and identity. It is characteristic of this writer's style that she sometimes throws out utterly fascinating remarks and insights that would probably merit chapters by

themselves. For instance to what extent the disavowal of difference (within a category) underpins a hierarchical scheme of identity. She mentions this in the context of Locke's ideas about man being consciousness and embodiment hence being the province of the beast. I began to wonder to what extent the 'all x's are superior to all y's' type of thinking hasn't been intrinsic to this particular stage of capitalist development. In order to pretend that a group of people – whites, say, are superior to blacks, we have to deny the possibility that there are any exceptions, either upwards or down. It's an applied mode of thinking that some of us have experienced in our recent history.

In pointing out that gender functions as a metaphor for race in Freud's work, Mohanram references a recent book by Sander Gilman titled *Freud, Race and Gender*. In the context of pre-Second World War Austrian/German anti-Semitism, the (male) Jewish body was connoted as 'black'. Gilman's reading is premised on Freud's preoccupation with his Jewish identity and how this may be transposed onto the female body in Freud's writings on gender and sexuality.

Gilman points out that the essential male of dominant scientific discourse was the antithesis of the female and the Jewish male. Mohanran points out that Gilman's reading frees Freud of the blind spot that Irigaray reads in his work (that he can't read alterity, that woman doesn't exist in his work). According to Gilman's reading she is conflated with the black male body and both are the constructs by which male Viennese identity can come into inscription.

Mohanram argues that contemporary notions of space and time valorize the latter over the former. She points out that time resembles space because of the notion of displacement – the affect that properly belongs to space is displaced onto time in this instance. She adds that metaphysical notions of space and time do not seem to consider the concept of power which permeates notions of place as well as identity, as Michel Foucault has indicated in much of his work.

Mohanram's chapter on the links between nationalism and the female body, titled 'Woman-body-nation-space' I read with delight. She juxtaposes theories of female embodiment within the nation-space, and how this is constructed, with the writings of feminists working in the context of nationalism and politics. Writers such as Chandra Mohanty, Kumari Jayawardene and Ella Shohat.

She points out that gendered identity and national identity functions in similar ways, quoting Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*:

> The woman in marriage qualifies not as identity, but only as a relational term that both distinguishes and binds the various clans to a common but internally differentiated patrilineal identity.

In Chapter four, on indigenous feminism and nationalism in the Aotearoa/New Zealand, Mohanty examines the notion of bi-culturalism, the acknowledgement of equal partnership between Maori and Pakeha. She voices concern with activist Donna Awatere's alliance with a far-right, anti-immigrationist party, the ATC, which both Maori and liberal Pakeha find a complete reversal of Awatere's former values.

In arguing that the black woman's body (and hence its consciousness) is what is repressed in theory, is this not an example of how theoretical frameworks produced in the northern hemisphere cannot be transposed wholesale onto a different location and hemisphere? In opposing multi-culturalism in this instance, or rejecting any possible alliance with non-white New Zealanders of foreign descent, is not Awatere constructing another entity as the silent, the repressed, the invisible of discourse? And given that we are dealing with real circumstances, the here and now, and not some ideal situation in the past, is not the very construction of a dual Maori/Pakeha bi-cultural hierarchy dependent on such a repression?

In a brief aside on Australia, the repressed body becomes the repressed of discourse, or in particular, autobiography. Mohanram analyzes place in Sally Morgan's *My Place*, locating it in a context of many voices (Morgan's Aboriginal family) rather than one construction, and explains the way class (working class in this instance) becomes a trope for race.

Chapter six, 'Britannia's Daughters', starts out by pointing out how Britain is replicated in the colonial environment. That on one level this is the *meaning* of imperialism: the re-naming and re-conceptualizing of the colonized world, in a way that makes the *colonizers*' interpretation the only current validity.

Mohanram mentions the extent to which the imperialist enterprise defined notions of masculinity, femininity, class and sexuality, and that these were then filtered back to Britain to emerge as 'English'.

In the discourse of imperialism, as of nationality, woman's body is positioned as timeless, unchanging, as it is in the discourse of embodiment. How-

ever, its meaning changes, signifies differently according to the changing needs of its specific situation – it has no meaning unto itself, but, as in the discourse of embodiment, functions to give meaning to others. "The woman's body within representation is indeed the black body from Freud's dark continent." And according to what that "black body" is – female, Jewish, non-Maori, non-indigenous black, asian, etc., that to which you can couple any negative or contradictory significance?

A final chapter on postcolonial criticism, points out that the emphasis of Indian academics such as Spivak, living in the West, seems to be on the construction of subjectivities. Whereas academics in India braid postcolonial theory with theories of nationhood so closely, that it is impossible to separate the two. Mohanram is in agreement with Ella Shohat who points out that the struggle takes place not only between nations but also within nations, with their "constantly changing relations between dominant and subaltern groups".

In the discourse of postcolonialism, several topics around identity intersect: race, class, gender, sexuality, feminism, race and ethnicity, and space and landscape. The first/third-world divide is not an absolute hierarchy, a simple opposition of oppressor/oppressed does not meet the case. The South African theorist Benita Parry's dismissal of Westemized academics and her valorization of natives in their native land smacks of exoticism. Maintaining a binary of 'West versus the rest' effectively silences the voices and concerns of third-world academics working in the West. Spivak of course has pointed out that theory produced in India is Western-influenced also – the very concept of a pan-Indian identity having been a response to colonialism.

This is a closely argued and interesting book, that encompasses a breadth of scholarly work from Kumari Jayawardene's 1986 text *Feminism and Nationalism* to Elizabeth Grosz's work on embodiment, and on space and time. I especially enjoyed the last two sections of this timely book. In arguing, with Australian academic Sneja Gunew, that the body classified as black need not necessarily be black, Mohanram signals the role of postcolonial discourse to deconstruct the meanings placed on race, place, body and identity. She reveals the tendency to place authoritative meaning on them, and argues for a lack of closure in theorizing how these sites affect and reveal each other: seeing as they overlap, contain sites of one within another, etc.

There is of course a mode of thought that regards 'postcolonial' discourse itself as a misnomer, arguing that the situation of colonialism is one that exists now, in a different guise, and its critique would more correctly be termed 'anti-colonialism'. In which case I would want to ask *whose* discourse of anti-colonialism stemming as it would from a variety of sites, encompassing race, place, gender, metropolitan discourse, antipodean discourse etc. – against the worst aspects of organized free-market economics, known formerly as fascism?

Dîpti Saravanamuttu is a Melbourne poet. Her latest book is Dancing From the Edge of Darkness *(Papyrus Publishing, 2000).*

'that story when . . .'

Peita Collard

Louis Nowra: *The Twelfth of Never: A Memoir* (Picador, $25).
Katharine Brisbane (ed.): *Plays of the 60s: Vol. 2* and *Plays of the 70s: Vol 2* (Currency Press, $24.95).

THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES were important times for Australia in its coming of age both politically and socially. Theatre is an excellent vehicle to elucidate these changes. The enduring crusader of Australian theatre, Katharine Brisbane, has compiled two excellent collections from these times. *Plays of the 60s* contains Alan Hopgood's *Private Yuk Objects*, James Searle's *The Lucky Streak*, Dorothy Hewett's *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home*, Alex Buzo's *Norm and Ahmed*. *Plays of the 70s* contains Peter Kenna's *A Hard God*, Alex Buzo's *Coralie Lansdowne Says No*, Jim McNeil's *How Does Your Garden Grow* and Robert Meritt's *The Cake Man*.

Plays of the 60s reflects a country on the verge of change. The playwrights portray the attitudes and issues facing Australians at the time; Vietnam, conscription, racism, cultural identity and our place on the world's stage. What also emerges is a pride in the Australian vernacular as a way to celebrate and to satirize our identity. It was in the sixties that the stage was set for a more truly Australian theatre to emerge.

With the seventies, the progression continued. Brisbane's collection indicates a sophisticated Australia dealing with more complex endeavours and emotions. The cut and dry issues of the sixties are

now layered with a more internal reflection as to our state of affairs influenced by feminism and Aboriginality and, in Jim McNeil's case, prison life. *A Hard God*, for instance, uses a more subtle approach to the working class and its issues are harder hitting than its predecessor *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home*. However, compared to the sixties collection, the seventies seems to be overridingly naturalistic. The exception is *The Cake Man* which maintains a more obvious theatricality in its writing.

Brisbane has produced two important collections of Australian plays worthy of becoming text books for future playwrights, theatre practitioners and social historians. Initially, many of the plays seem dated in their issues, but with some reflection they take on a new relevance. For instance, Howard's recent refusal to apologize to the Aboriginal people makes *The Cake Man* a shameful indication on how far we have not come. Most of all, Katherine Brisbane's collections are identifiably Australian in both language and location. They provide the reader with a solid basis for understanding what was to come in Australian theatre.

In the late seventies, a new style in Australian theatre emerged. This theatre was abstract, non-naturalistic and epic. No longer so easily definable as Australian, the new playwrights introduced more exotic settings and neutralized the language. Audiences which had been previously entertained by the nationalist new wave, e.g. Williamson, Buzo and Hibberd, were now seeing the rise of the internationalists, namely Steven Sewell and Louis Nowra. Louis Nowra surprised his audiences with theatre that combined internationalism with themes that were also obliquely Australian.

Once again, Nowra is surprising his readers. The chief surprise in his memoirs, *The Twelfth of Never*, is that from humble and not too bright beginnings, such a career was ever achieved. Nowra's prospects, judged by all including himself, seemed limited to becoming a beer-bellied truck driver. As a boy, he was obstinately opposed to education and by the time he drifted into university Nowra had read only one book of his own volition, *Biggles*. But, hidden below the surface of this ordinary boy were a vast imagination, precise memory and an inherited Irish ability to tell a great story. These qualities were, at most times, hidden or stifled. But, with a growing frequency, there were moments of brilliance that would flash across his sky, just like the aliens he one day hoped to see and which fuelled his imagination. *The Twelfth of Never* is the autobiography of a man who overcame great odds to achieve extraordinary results.

The memoirs begin in the desolate suburb of Fawkner in the sixties. A housing estate 12 km north of Melbourne, it was built with no sewerage, no roads and far from shops and transportation. Here Nowra lived for most of his childhood. His is a classic story of the working class, of struggling families making ends meet, the loss of hopes and dreams leading to alcoholism, abuse, suicide and even murder.

The Twelfth of Never, however grim it gets, is a story told fondly and with a gutsy engagement. It recalls the work of Ray Lawler, Dorothy Hewett and Ruth Park. The paddocks of purple thistles and the infertile soil that blows dust storms in summer and becomes adhesive mud in winter bring forth images from Australian paintings which firmly set the book within our collective memory.

Nowra's accuracy and razor wit make this book an absolutely riveting and delightful read. His descriptions of family, friends and neighbours seem fantastical and yet frighteningly familiar. The narrative is enlivened by stories of murder, aliens, first love, sexuality, mateship, a nauseatingly detailed head injury, rabbit-hunting and chook hypnosis, of university in the seventies and of being chased, as a clown, with his buddy, "the red menace", by a mob of angry unionists.

Nowra has denied that there is autobiographical content in much of his work. However, one can see his inspiration for such plays as *Summer of the Aliens* quite obviously in *The Twelfth of Never* and facets of his life experiences in *Inner Voices, The Golden Age, Edward Meets Albert* and *Cosi*. If, before embarking on *The Twelfth of Never*, you have not read any Nowra, the book is enjoyable regardless, for its stunningly accurate portrayal of Australian and, more so, Melbourne life in the sixties and seventies.

The Twelfth of Never is a memorial to the white working class in the suburban fringes. It is also a reminder of aspects of the working class that have not changed. Most of all, for a long, long time, *The Twelfth of Never* is certain to become a well thumbed volume over the years as you search for 'that story when . . .'

Peita Collard is the Artistic Director of Melbourne theatre company, Wax Studios.

Crippled Dragon Man

Patsy Poppenbeek

Garry Disher: *The Dragon Man* (Allen & Unwin, $22.95).

THE DRAGON MAN has a promising menu: Serial Killer, Woman Hiding from Her Past, Embittered Detective, Police Corruption. There are also lots of suitably entwined mysteries, such as why our hero, Detective Inspector Hal Challis, receives apologetic phone calls from his imprisoned wife; whether or not Sergeant Ellen Destry will bed the air-conditioning serviceman to whom she is unaccountably attracted; and what the antique airplane, the Dragon Rapide Challis is restoring, has to do with anything other than supplying the reason for the title.

But this thriller failed to thrill this critic.

Book Defender: Why weren't you thrilled? Not arty-farty enough for you?

Me: Honest, I'll even read Mills and Boon. Um, the trouble is I guessed who the murderer was.

B.D.: Isn't that what you're supposed to do?

Me: Not immediately. One of the delights of the detective story is being distracted by red herrings, as in Agatha Christie's stories, when the murderer is never the one you suspect.

B.D.: Admit that you have been riveted by other books when it was obvious who the murderer was!

Me: Yes, but except for once it was because the narrator or the detective told me. And once that happens the suspense focuses on something else. With James' *Innocent Blood*, for example, we focus not on who dunnit but on why they dunnit. Plus there is the tension of wondering if the murderer will strike again and the mystery of the adopted daughter's parentage remains until the end. Cornwell's Dr Kay Scarpetta frequently knows or suspects the murderer early on, but nobody believes her, the murderer comes after her, the body count rises, the CIA or the FBI gets in her way, and omigod at the end everyone else is either dead or unavailable and it's a shootout between her and the killer! Ahem. Pardon me. It's like in the *Alien* films. We know that the heroine probably won't get hers, but it's all terribly scary and besides she might!

B.D.: But there's suspense at the end about whether or not the police will catch the killer in time to prevent another murder.

Me: True, but the victim was such a boring horror I didn't care whether they did or not.

B.D.: What about why he dunnit?

Me: Well, that's never really explained. He tells the third victim that she was rude to him and that "Your mother's a . . . Stupid copper bitch who goes back on her word." But these reasons (if you could call them reasons) don't apply to his other two victims, because he didn't know them.

B.D.: Do you have anything good to say about this book?

Me: The range of characters is interesting, as is the background of the Peninsula, and there are some real possibilities. Challis' restoration work, for instance, is a nice idiosyncratic touch, and the reasons for Ellen Destry's desire to stray are convincing. I also liked Pam Murphy, who has a kind of solidity lacking in some of the other characters. As a whole, it's a great background for a series, which I hope Disher does. Maybe the next one could use this world more effectively, perhaps by concentrating on just one or two of these characters as well as having a more suspenseful plot.

B.D.: If you're so smart, why don't you do it?

Me: That would be far too hard.

Patsy Poppenbeek has an MA in Australian Literature, teaches and is a student in the Creative Media Department, RMIT, and reads a lot of rubbish.

The Mechanisms of Exclusion

Paul Adams

David Carter (ed.): *Judah Waten: Fiction, Memoir, Criticism* (UQP, $24.95).

JUDAH WATEN WAS even to his contemporaries a curiously unfashionable writer. As David Carter argues in a new collection of Waten's fiction, memoir and criticism, entitled simply *Judah Waten*, he was often considered too 'literary' to be placed within the ranks of socialist realist writing proper: he could speak from the literary centre as well as to the socialist margins. This was no mean achievement for a writer who found the intricacies of standard English painful and complained that words and language did

not easily flow from his pen.

But even a 'literary' communist could not avoid the mechanisms of exclusion faced by all communist writers. Angus and Robertson declined to publish Waten's novel *The Unbending* because it was too "long and political". The Commonwealth Literary Fund which funded *The Unbending* dissociated itself from the book because Waten had been unfaithful to the terms of his grant by not writing a novel about "integration of a Jewish migrant family with the Australian community". His 'literary mate' A. A. Philips was moved to tell Waten that "the interesting thing is that so much survives your bloody stupid acceptance of the bloody stupid theories of your bloody stupid clique".

It was of course not just style or literary skill which brought a writer closer to the real literary centres of the period where real institutional power was deployed but rather the way in which ideological notions of the literary were refracted through the lenses of Cold War anti-communism and the continuing belief that communists could not by any stretch of the imagination write 'literature' because they, unlike writers in the anti-communist camp, were too 'ideological'.

One of the importances of new collections of writing and particularly this collection on Waten is that through different editorial framings, selections of writing and thematic ordering of new material, new readings can be developed of marginalized writing and in this case of writing often dismissed as part of a monolithic unchanging socialist realism. Carter's selection and editorial comment are thoughtful and raise new possibilities for Waten's writings. As well as recovering the bohemian and avant-garde periods of Waten's life, this collection also explores Waten's relationship as Australian Jewish writer and communist.

Waten engaged in what was called migrant writing almost by accident and if for no other reason than it had been suggested to him that it might make interesting source material for his readers. Yet what was to start as a casual interest in migrant writing soon became a major preoccupation. In stories such as 'The Knife' and novels such as *Distant Land* and *The Unbending*, Waten worked through some of the complex shades of meanings of assimilation and representations of the 'migrant' in the context of war and the rise of fascism and the political choices and barriers confronting his characters. Waten became a major advocate of an Australian Yiddish literature in 1940 and helped Jewish writers such as Goldhar and Bergner gain wider influence.

Waten wrote in one of his essays that "the migrant's outlook might well be defined as the product of . . . transplantation, loneliness, homesickness, language and cultural barriers, misunderstandings between newcomers and the locals, and plain racism and prejudice." These are themes which can be accommodated within the terms of present multicultural criticism but as Carter reports, "Waten's conventional realist forms have not always found favour with contemporary tastes for the post-modern".

Waten's critics it seems have too often assumed that his realist writing is complicit with assimilation. They have claimed his writing makes ethnic differences acceptable to the majority culture and offers little resistance to integration of mainstream Australian literature. As Carter suggests, however, more careful readings are required of Waten, whose realism was without architecture and whose use of empathetic identification was often ironical, troubling and subversive of readings which supported mainstream views of ethnicity.

Waten remained a Marxist. He believed identity was connected in contradictory ways to other subjects and the social forces and relations which shaped capitalism. His ethnic characters, by and large Jews, Italians and Greeks, are marked by their different identities but they also confront a common master narrative which assimilates them all as 'newcomers' and 'dagos'. For Waten migration can also be a modernizing and illuminating experience which as well as leading to new forms of repression can also lead to liberation from the repressive forces of European fascism, new freedoms of mobility in Australian cities and the bush and escape from older forms of social constraints such as religion.

That Waten remained a collectivist and could see the positive as well as the negative aspects of migration into an assimilationist culture will not please all of his critics, even if as Carter suggests he continued to press insistently against the mainstream. Yet in this new collection of writing, there is also much that is challenging for (post)modern notions of the multicultural and much to discover that has been previously hidden about Waten and about left-wing migrant writing of the last century.

Paul Adams is a Melbourne westie. His The Stranger from Melbourne: Frank Hardy – a Literary Biography *was published by UWA Press.*

Feeling the moment

Ben Goldsmith

John Harms: *Confessions of a Thirteenth Man* (Text Publishing, $17.95).

I'VE PONDERED IN RECENT MONTHS something a friend told me, about his feelings and thoughts as he held the hand of his dying sister. He says he could feel the moment she died. In that moment he finds himself staring out of the hospital window across the Brisbane skyline. It is dusk. From the west a rain storm builds. He wonders how others experience this moment not knowing someone they never knew has died, not realizing that they would never have the chance to make her acquaintance, nor hear her laugh, nor engage her in conversation.

Then he realizes they too will have felt the emptiness as he does now. And he knows that some time, yesterday, now, tomorrow, they may ponder their mortality and perhaps cast their minds over the nature of their connection to you and me, people they may never meet, but with whom they share a common plane of existence, an idea of community. And they will realize that in the end it is how we are connected, what we share, what binds us together, how we relate, what we do for love that makes us human.

John Harms understands this. *Confessions of a Thirteenth Man* is ostensibly another contribution to that popular epistolatory form, the tour diary. But it is much more than a book about the 1998–99 Ashes cricket tour. Driving across the vast geographical distance which separates Australians, Harms maps human connections as he taps a common vein: the love of cricket.

Cricket is the stuff of shared memory. Its conventions and rituals and histories are the mucilage for countless communities who sustain it by the willing commitment of energy and time not only to play the game, but to administer its competitions, to tend its grounds, to coach the juniors, make the teas and sell the raffle tickets which fund the end of season tours. In return, cricket provides a rich lode of conversation. It is, as Harms describes, the warp and weft of small towns and settlements for whom the sporting oval is a community heart.

At the launch of *Confessions of a Thirteenth Man*, former Queensland opener and current state selector Andrew Courtice suggested that the book be made part of the kit given to those chosen to wear the baggy green Australian cap. In reading it they would be reminded of what the game means to so many people. And perhaps the book might knock the edges off the surly arrogance, petty chauvinism and grasping opportunism exhibited off- and sometimes on-field by certain members of that exalted band in recent times.

For me, the abiding memory of last year's Ashes will not come from the highlights tapes. It came at a hastily convened press conference a couple of days before the third test at which Shane Warne and Mark Waugh performed a modern day *masque*, the spectacular multimedia show so beloved of early modern European royalty. Two men sheepishly enter the press conference disguised as off-duty Australian cricketers. They take it in turns to soliloquize, to read with but slight variations the same prepared statement in which they express regret for innocently taking a bookie's cash in exchange for some tips on the weather. In the reading they unmask themselves as silly, greedy mortals ethically blinded by the special treatment their celebrity accords them. But the usual culmination of the masque, a dance mixing performers and audience, is excised from this script. Waugh and Warne are under instruction not to answer questions, and outside the boundaries of the prepared statement they show little sign of remorse.

Both statements are reproduced verbatim in *Confessions*, the better to deconstruct them after the dust of the media scrum has settled. Harms, a former schoolteacher, is reminded of Grade 10 students who have not done their homework, and have been caught. They, like the cricketers "believe their mistake is in being found out". It is the actions of the cricketing establishment in closing ranks around Waugh and Warne, and covering up their indiscretions for years, which boost these public confessions to Sam Newmanesque heights of insincerity. There is something insidious about the way the ACB went about trying to 'manage' this incident. It fits perfectly with the view of cricket's relationship with its public which sanctions the bulldozing of the Gabba Hill, and which stations security zombies (to borrow Harms' phrase) around the grounds to dampen and sanitize the atmosphere. In this vision of the modern game, the cricketing public is not a respected confrere, but a mob whose behaviour must be controlled and channelled into acceptable forms of expression like the Channel 9-Toyota banner competition.

John Harms describes these incidents with an acute eye for the rituals of performance which extend beyond the bounds of the playing arena into the outer,

the stands, the Hill, to the kitchens and living rooms of the nation. He covers the sporting action in a clipped, journalistic style befitting a regular contributor to *The Australian*'s Monday sports pages. But the book is much more than a dry sports report. Driving around Australia in a battered but faithful Camira following the Test cricket caravan is a pilgrimage for Harms. It provides the canvas, the backdrop and the occasion for his yarns and his yearnings. In it, Harms lays bare his romantic's heart, infusing his work with lyrical descriptions of love never quite fulfilled. Around Christmas he drives from Adelaide to Naracoorte. He is alone for the first time on this journey:

> I wonder what is in Grace's heart. I feel a deep loneliness; the loneliness of betrayal; the loneliness born of the breach of trust. Not just the loneliness of being in a car by myself, but a loneliness that separates me from others despite the fun. I feel that lots of things allow me to connect with people in the way that I want to, but that somehow it will take some special connection, some complete connection to alleviate that loneliness, to resurrect the faith. I imagine it with Grace. I romanticise and desire nothing more. And I ignore the other connections: my terrific friends; my wonderful family. I know it is a deep sadness, because I feel the tears in my eyes, and on my cheek. This is the human reality. Alone and on a road in a bomb.

In its resigned bitterness, this passage is unrepresentative of the tenor of the book. But Harms, like one of his inspirations, Martin Flanagan, recognizes that investing so much of himself in his work enriches it beyond measure. Often deeply personal and frequently amusing the book reveals a philosophy that is bound to be widely shared. Cricket provides the basis for some of the shared stories which give depth to our community of strangers. And as Harms is so acutely aware, these are mediated stories, meaning that they often come to us second-hand, via the television commentary of Richie Benaud or Tony Grieg, or the radio commentary of Tim Lane or Alan McGilvray. This mediation gives them the licence to be told again: cricket has already become story. His first Ashes memory, Greg Chappell's century on debut in Perth in 1970–71 when ABC television broke for the news and returned for his hundred, is common currency. As too, no doubt, are his sentiments on the day he went to see his first Ashes Test live, in Melbourne in the same series:

> I remember standing on the seats to see Rod Marsh pummel the English attack as Australian fans rose as one around me. It was a thrill to be part of a crowd where every person seemed as happy as I was. Even the big people. It was the Test when Bill Lawry declared with Marsh not out on 92. At that time no Australian wicket-keeper had scored a Test hundred. Although we came from a home in which we were made aware, consistently, of what was right and what was wrong, it was Bill Lawry who made the penny drop: there was a distinction between good and evil.

Whether detailing his encounters with the Barmy Army, retelling the anecdotes explaining the nicknaming of his mates, describing his impressions and memories of rural and urban, small town and big city Australian life, or recounting love's missed connections, Harms demonstrates his sense of the things that give us meaning beyond ourselves. He knows that these are the things that make us.

Ben Goldsmith is overland*'s Brisbane correspondent.*

"go forward together as mates"

Darren Godwell

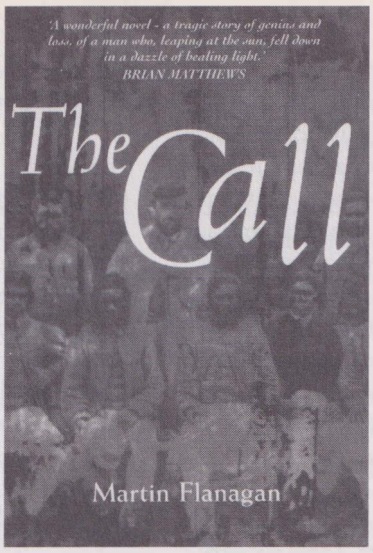
Martin Flanagan: *The Call* (Allen & Unwin, $16.95).
Martin Flanagan: *1970 & Other Stories of the Australian Game* (Allen & Unwin, $16.95).

IN LAST YEAR'S Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture, Patrick Dodson[1] revisited the symbolism and reignited the hope of the Big Boss at Wattie Creek.

The dramatic resolution of the walk-off at Wave Hill Station marks a special moment in the struggle for justice by Indigenous peoples. Other courageous achievements preceding this campaign included the formation of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Rights Council in 1962, the stop-work protests for equal pay for Aborigines in Darwin in 1951, the Aboriginal Pastoral Workers Strike in the Pilbara in 1946, the Cummeragunga walk-off in 1939 and the Day of Mourning protest in Sydney in 1938. Throughout the last century of Australian history Indigenous peoples

have fought to protect national values like the fair go and mateship.

Dodson's lecture reflected upon Lingiari's hope to "go forward together as mates". In doing so Dodson reiterated the Old Man's hope for an honourable reconciliation as if between mates. Much of Martin Flanagan's writing speaks to the same ambition. Flanagan writes of Australia. He writes about our communities. Flanagan writes about mates, about Australians. His writings celebrate their lives and our values. In the ordinary lives of everyday Australians we are moved to understanding the extraordinary value of their lives and our shared humanity – as mates.



The Call and *1970* are two fine tracts of Australian literature. Both books are accessible and readable, almost to a fault. After years of feature writing, the structure of deadlines and word limits has refined technique. Spared hubris, Flanagan quickly focuses the reader. Invariably, the themes of Flanagan's writing are tracked through Australian society. Questions of mateship, friendship, family and community. Inextricably linked to this examination is a recognition of the contradictions. Not the least of which is the manner in which Australia treats the original Australians. Race relations is the issue which truly defines Australia. Flanagan's honesty, both with himself and with the subject matter, is refreshing.

Based on a true story, *The Call* considers the life of a once celebrated son of colonial Victoria – Thomas Wentworth Wills. Nineteenth-century English colonial expansion beyond the settlements of Melbourne and Sydney provide the context for Wills' life. In Wills, Flanagan finds both metaphor and example of the consequence of Australia's great unresolved tension – race relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Sure the colony of New South Wales has its historical feet in England but this is not where Australia began. Australia's social and political beginnings are found in the manner in which the future nation and its institutions related to Indigenous peoples through the late nineteenth century up until Federation in 1901. Race relations are accorded national prominence and significance because it is one of the few truly moral challenges that have confronted the nation-state Australia.

This moral challenge permeates Australia's national consciousness.

Its implications stretch beyond personal opinion.

Left unresolved it subtly seeps into the lives of everyday Australians. Gross opportunism that appeals for a collective denial is simply the shadow of cowardice. Its hollow call is 'I'm ignorant. Join me'. There is comfort in not knowing.

Black armbands signal loss but black blindfolds signal impending death.

Because it is a matter of the nation-state, the nation's collective response to this moral question must be carried out through our collective institutions, i.e. literature, art, sport, politics, religion, the law. To Flanagan's advantage the two rivers of sport and literature flow through his life experience. Flanagan wades into these streams of national psyche. In fact, he bomb-dives, swims, frolics and fishes.

In her *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Vintage, 1993) Toni Morrison argues that the American literary experience has been one permeated by the presence of slavery and black people. Morrison suggests that if American writers were not stealing the creative genius of the black experience then they were denying the contribution of this sector of society. No matter whether co-opting or refuting, American literature developed in reference to African-Americans. To a degree, I would apply the same argument in Australia.

The fundamental Australian experience is about contact with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. If not the actual practice of invasion, then the denial of benefits enjoyed through ill-gotten gains across a continent. I return to my earlier point. The issue of Australian race relations is predominant because it is fundamentally a moral question. And a lie cannot last forever.

In Flanagan's *The Call* witness the efforts of a writer, a good writer, honestly confronting race relations. Flanagan draws out the experience and the tension within Wills' short life as a metaphor for the same forces within Australia's short life.

Wills represents the standard-bearer for pre-federation colonial outposts. Thomas is young, full of promise, the future personified, energetic, a mate and a larrikin. His sporting prowess creates occasions of

colonial building – the first Victorian team to defeat New South Wales and acknowledgement from the godfather of English values in sport, W.G. Grace. Yet at the heart of Wills' experience is the compounding, unresolved tension of colonial race relations.

Wills' formative years in western Victoria are spent with the local Aboriginal peoples. After his time with these generous human beings the formal policies and informal practices of the day confront Wills. This conflict is heightened by Wills' father's behaviour in Queensland.

In Wills' story we find the logical conclusion of not resolving the moral issue of man's inhumanity to fellow man. *The Call* provides a great Australian allegory akin to Xavier Herbert's *Under Capricorn* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The Call's conclusion, and maybe ours also, although foreseeable does not have to be inevitable. Flanagan provides a personal and original perspective on how one man paid the highest price for neglecting affairs of the soul. What price is Australia willing to pay?

As an Aboriginal Australian I believe Flanagan is a compatriot. He writes about the spirit that flows through life. He writes of the spirit that touches his life. Often these occasions of affirmation are found in the least likely of venues. The 1970 VFL Grand Final offers one such occasion.

This particular game has been ascribed so much significance over the years since 1970. True to his senses Flanagan knows the significance of the occasion is not found in the game but rests with the human characters of this paranormal event. His ability to relay the sensations, emotion, memories and motives found in the 'Australian game' is a rare quality that is on full display in this book. What's more you don't need to be an Aussie Rules fan to recognize and enjoy his craft.

Most people can not explain sport's magical moments. But Flanagan is on the trail. He can track the scent of sentiment from a hundred paces. This practice is our gift. The paragraphs and chapters make accessible the thoughts and meanings frequently out of reach. The resonance of these experiences lies in their commonness.

They are magical moments because they could be ours.

These are the modest joys of everyday people. The average fan of anything knows the highs and lows.

Footy, in fact most sports, tap into the bigger personal experience of everyday life. And so it is that Flanagan associates footy with many of the significant players in his life. His daughter (Alastair Lynch Goes to the Tribunal), his father-in-law (Marrying into the Club), his friends (A Face in the Crowd, Going to the Footy with Emie), or his hero (Gypsy Lee).

Martin builds a community around him and, in our reading, around us. The richness of footy is knowing people. The characters play themselves out before us. They are real. They bump into us. They crowd us. They may even be related to us. They also leave us in our own spaces.

This interplay is about people sharing their personality and you offering your own. Just as with the *The Call, 1970* offers insights into our collective character. These literary adventures thereby offer assessment and advice.

The attraction of truly Australian literature is its willingness to confront the true nature, history and consequences of the social experiment that began in 1788 and culminated in the birth of a nation in 1901. Australia's maturity as a nation is in large part measured by our ability to build on this foundation and frustration. Although the ongoing consequences of failing in this enterprise have yet to be fully comprehended. In his personal effort Flanagan contributes to this maturing through his books. Read these two because they are unpretentious and offer true insight into our collective Australian soul almost one hundred years after creation.

I too believe that we can "go forward together as mates".

ENDNOTE

1. P. Dodson, Lingiari – Until the Chains are Broken, Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture, Centre for Natural & Cultural Resource Management, Northern Territory University, Darwin, 1999.

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DEATHS IN THE WORKPLACE exceed the average annual deaths from road accidents (999,000), war (502,000), violence (563,000) or HIV AIDS (312,000).
— approximately one-quarter of those deaths result from exposure to hazardous substances which cause such disabling illnesses as cancer and cardiovascular respiratory and nervous system disorders.
— work-related diseases are expected to double by the year 2020 and if improvements are not implemented now, exposures today will kill people by the year 2020.
— workers suffered an estimated 250 million occupational accidents and 160 million occupational diseases each year.
— 600,000 lives would be saved every year if available safety practices and appropriate information were used.
— every year, 250 million accidents occur causing absence from work, the equivalent of 685,000 accidents every day, 475 every minute, 8 every second.
— working children suffer 12 million occupational accidents and an estimated 12,000 of them are fatal.
—3,000 people are killed at work every day, 2 every minute.
— asbestos alone kills more than 100,000 workers every year.

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