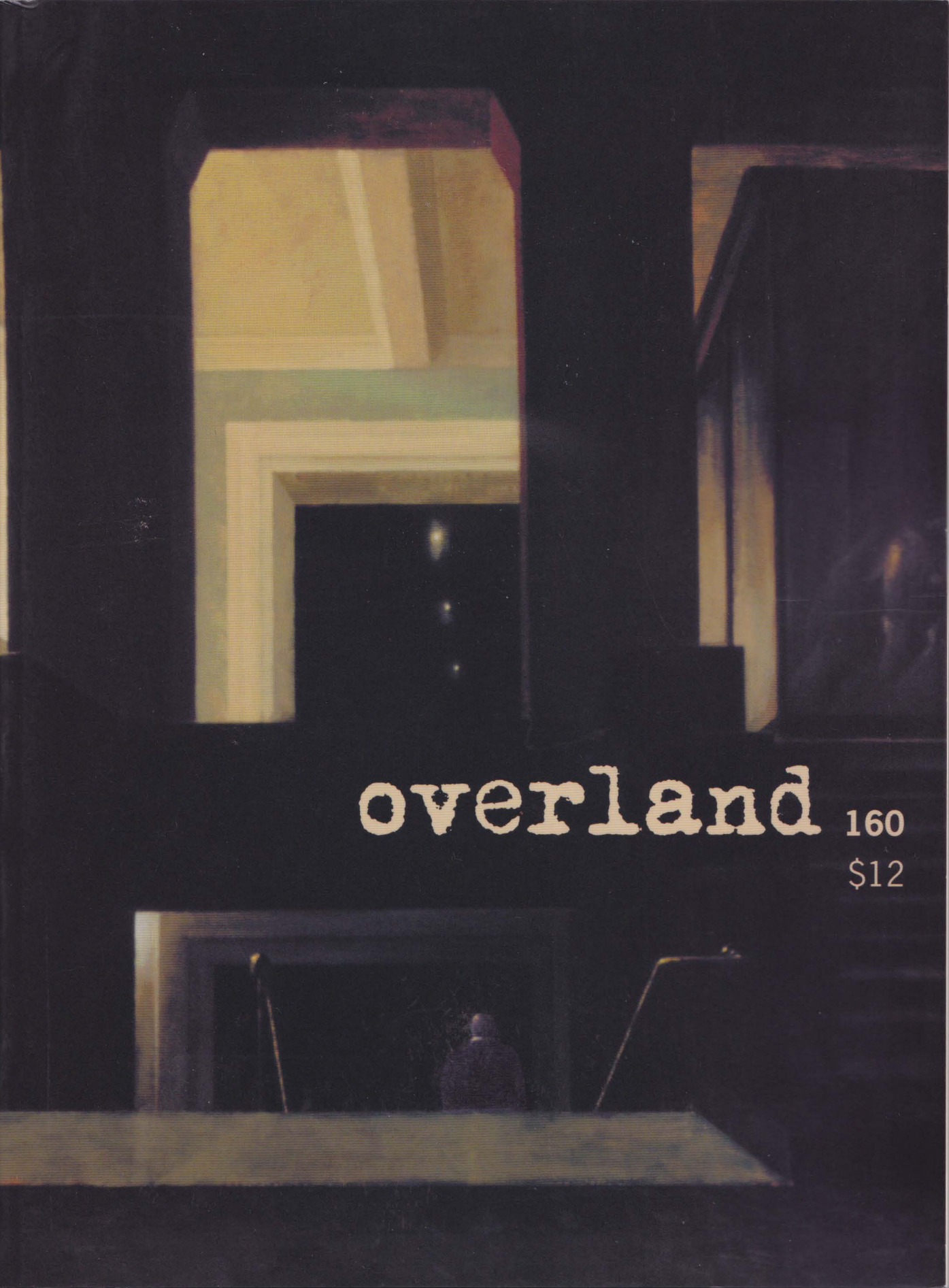

# overland

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overland

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ARTS VICTORIA

A WORLD IN WHICH all the important decisions are made by pragmatic, managerially-minded economic rationalists would be, perhaps above all, an unbearably boring world. As these be-suited people swish through their corridors of power, their smugly one-dimensional vision of the world would trickle down into the rest of society, its institutions and its culture. It is the dream of our Prime Minister and the nightmare of those whose idea of a good time involves something other than comparing four-wheel-drive prices at the tennis club and checking the share market. Unfortunately, the Australian Labor Party has probably never done such a fine job of imitating the exponents of Howard's End. As Graham Sewell writes in his critique of the ubiquitous Blairite McKenzie Wark, "If ever we were in need of critique (from anywhere . . . please) it is now".

Many of the people putting forward left-wing social alternatives at present are motivated in part by boredom, for boredom has become part of the cultural weaponry of the Right. Being bored, alienated, intellectually unstimulated, is symptomatic of living in an economic rationalist society. As Dorothy Hewett, another contributor to this issue, stated at the last Adelaide Writers' Week, "Economic rationalism has bugger all to do with us. A country without culture has a dead heart and its children commit suicide" (see *SMH*, 6 March 2000). How else would you describe a society in which we are told what 'creativity' is by accountants and investment analysts?

Bob Ellis suggested a little while ago that there might be something fundamentally wrong with a society characterized by endless queues. His examples were the former Soviet Union and today's West. When you consider that unless you're a high-ranking technocrat, bureaucrat, corporate manager or

shareholder of some description (the equivalent of the old Party official?), you're basically there in the Telstra queue with the rest of us, getting nowhere talking to some bottom-rung slave who isn't going to re-connect your phone or put you in touch with anyone accountable even if they wanted to (because no-one is accountable to you anymore), then you start to get a sense of a particular kind of political oppression operating today.

Alongside a lot of waiting around in queues goes a good deal of time spent filling in forms. Anyone working in the university sector will identify with Michael Wilding's depiction of an endless process of data accumulation that keeps staff from doing their work while supposedly demonstrating the value of that work to the 'customers'. 'Accountability', 'transparency', 'rationality', all in the process of being bought, privatized, and re-defined in the interests of their new owners. A new degree of disenfranchisement, a new surveillance: the wholesale privatization of life. Kundera's description in *The Joke* of the horribly comical Soviet processes of control comes to mind.

As we are going to press, Peter Singer's *A Darwinian Left* and Anthony Giddens' *The Third Way* are getting considerable attention as statements of a possible future Left politics. However, these texts have not delivered the excitement one might expect from genuine resources of hope. And for different reasons, this is understandable: Singer argues for a new understanding of human nature, while Giddens basically accepts conservative economic orthodoxy.

Paradoxically, genuine social alternatives can most readily be found amongst intellectuals who are less willing to disregard what has gone before. The 1960s *Dissent* has been re-born under Kenneth Davidson's editorship, and its first three issues have established a neo-Keynesian critique of economic-rationalist society. Hugh Stretton's recent book, *Economics,* has attempted to revivify and democratize that discourse. In a later issue *overland* will add further examination of Stretton's text to those already published in *Dissent* and elsewhere. In this issue the enormous contribution of two people whose vision of a just society pre-dated the economic-rationalist era is acknowledged: Veronica Brady writes an obituary for Judith Wright McKinney and Marilyn Lake examines the legacy of Nugget Coombs. Verity Burgmann, at *overland*'s recent Raymond Williams conference, spoke of the need for the labour movement to re-engender an identity politics of class, in order to build democratic opposition to the forces and effects of economic rationalism. The latest *Arena Magazine* looks at this and other suggestions for Left renewal, including the radical enthusiasm inspired by the World Economic Forum. *Overland* hopes to contribute further to the development of these politically committed ideas and enthusiasms.

But as Bill Bonney argued in 1988's *People's History of Australia,* the general historical failure of the Australian Left to recognize the importance of culture meant that the lived experience of people, their particular feelings, pleasures and desires, were largely left unexamined. The door was thus open for people like the Packer dynasty to buy 'culture' and sell it back to the nation, in the process strengthening consumerism, the culture of capitalism. Culture and creativity must be central parts of any new manifestation of a Broad Left. *Overland* will continue to provide a space for independent, living writing, alongside literary and cultural analysis and exchange, for the dialogue between these different genres and intellectual traditions is both endlessly interesting and the basis for progressive social change.

Nathan Hollier

Dorothy Hewett

# Excerpt from 'The Empty Room'

## An Autobiography in Progress

LATE SUMMER 1959, time stands still and I'm walking once again across the campus of the University of W.A. Thirty-five years old and a mature-age student, I am no longer carrying with me a copy of *Das Kapital* and the poems of D.H. Lawrence, but it as if I am walking to meet myself, a wild-haired girl with limpid eyes who lost her virginity under the pines on the football oval. Except that she has gone forever. So it's goodbye girl dancing the jitterbug in a flared red skirt at the university dances, goodbye girl playing Crystal in *The Women* in a skin-tight lamé evening dress, goodbye girl publishing her poems in *The Pelican, Meanjin* and *The Angry Penguins,* cutting lectures and tutorials, editing *The Red Black Swan,* an undergraduate literary journal banned by the Guild of Undergraduates. She did ask for it, but life has dealt harshly with most of her aspirations. She is alone now except for her membership card in the Australian Communist Party and her three small boys.

After a twelve-year break with a bad academic record behind me, I have been permitted to re-enrol as a second-year arts student under the auspices of the Teachers' Training College. I lied at the interview, telling the officials I had never been married. In those days married women were forbidden to train as teachers and if they married during their course they were summarily dismissed. Divorced in 1951, I had been 'living in sin' for nine years in Sydney but now that's over.

Things have changed, the city has changed. Highrise buildings have been erected over the systematic destruction of history. My eyes search for the old landmarks but most of them have already gone, although the Communist Party still rents its offices, incongruously, in the gimcrack Disneyland of London Court. In a way it is typical of this whole weird civilization. Why would anyone build a replica of a Tudor arcade on the edge of a mighty desert? The Town Hall, convict built, with its arrowed decorations, is still standing, but the Old Barracks at the end of The Terrace have been demolished except for a cardboard facade left behind like the entry to a theme park. At last the Narrows Bridge has been built over the Swan River, with the foreshores and parts of the river filled in with gardens and concrete car parks. Soon there will be a new and magnificent university library encircled by canals and bridges, the English Department will shift out of its prefab wartime sheds to a large new sandstone Arts building with a dream by default set down in the middle of it – the three-tiered New Fortune Theatre, a huge platform stage, two trapdoors and a Juliet balcony thrusting out into a makeshift auditorium. None of it is planned. It is an entirely ad hoc decision. Alan Edwards, Professor of English, has seen its potential as has Dr Philip Parsons, my longtime friend and confederate in the days of the old University Dramatic Society. Together they have planned it, calling in the university carpenters on the quiet. If the stuffy powers that be had stumbled on it they would no doubt have called a halt, but by the time they find out it is too late. An Elizabethan theatre has been created in an internal courtyard in the new Arts building. It is Alan Edwards' and Philip Parsons' dream and it is my inspiration. For the next nine years, the New Fortune will nurture my birth as a playwright and alter forever my

impatient relationship with the old-fashioned proscenium arch. For this is the great uncluttered room of the imagination, the empty room with no curtain to go thump at the end of each act, little or no props, just an open space inhabited by bodies and words. Here I will write my play *The Chapel Perilous*, hardly knowing what I am doing, roaming its circumference in sunlight and rain, muttering the dialogue, shifting the characters in great dramatic sweeps across its three levels. How can I manage this incomparable space, the unbridgeable gaps between scenes to create a seamless whole? Back to Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Webster, Tourneur and the rest of the Jacobeans, back to Brecht and his boxing ring. In the workshop of this great space I will try out all I have learnt and will never forget, all I will miss and grieve over when I have left it behind me forever. Here I will see in 1971 the only great production of *The Chapel Perilous* fitting into the landscape of this theatre as if it were made for it.

But none of this has happened yet. I have just completed the university intelligence test with the same result as in 1941. Called up before the university social worker he tells me I haven't the required intelligence quotient to complete my degree. Trying to brazen it out I escape to sit on the stone steps overlooking the Great Court with exactly the same sense of worthlessness and despair I'd felt as a seventeen-year-old. At the end of the year I'll have proved him wrong with a prize for the Best Woman English Student and a respectable B and B+ in Ancient and Australian history. At the end of five years I'll be teaching in the English Department and in 1996 in the same Winthrop Hall looming up beside me I'll receive a Doc. Lit. for my achievements in Australian Lit. But now as I sit weeping above the pool I comfort myself as I have always done by writing a poem. It is a poem for the schoolgirl I fell in love with when I was only sixteen. I haven't been in contact with her for ten years but how strange memory is, the way it inexplicably signposts our lives.

*So many girls are in my arms tonight,*
*So many breasts and lips and eyes and tears,*
*And yet the image of that girl I loved*
*I have mislaid her somewhere down the years.*

*The touch of her time can obliterate,*
*That white girl swearing passion in the rain,*
*And what has she become for me but this,*
*The image of all women and old pain.*

*Time had no terrors for my ghostly girl,*
*And still her spirit in my spirit grew.*
*What bitter jest is this that comes too late*
*And says she is not one but always two?*

*Two women in the dark and three in day,*
*And perhaps a dozen in my moonlit bed.*
*How sad it is to clasp her and confess*
*I would not know her if she turned her head.*

Where do poems come from, surging into the light? No-one knows what triggers them off or why, but it is already obvious I have come a long way from the dogmas of socialist realism which kept me silent for so many years. Strangely enough I don't go in search of this girl. It might be too painful, maybe even disappointing. Better to leave her as an icon presiding forever, smiling sardonically at the back of the 5A classroom at Perth College in 1940.

TOWARDS THE END OF 1958, a miracle happened. Listening to the news on the ABC I heard the announcement of the results of the Mary Gilmore Novel Competition. My novel *Bobbin Up* had been highly commended. I could scarcely believe it. Those six weeks of typing into the small hours with my fingers freezing and my eyelids drooping with tiredness while the terror waited for me in the bedroom inside, had paid off. I didn't know then that my dog-eared manuscript had been discovered, quite by chance, in the judges' reject cupboard by the folklorist Bill Wannan, nor did I know that the novel would sell out in eight weeks in Australia, would be translated into four languages, be reprinted by Seven Seas in East Berlin, rescued from oblivion by the feminist press Virago and finally be reprinted in Australia in 1999.

The Communist Party held meetings about it in Sydney where it was roundly criticized and praised as a novel about the unorganized lumpen proletariat, a book obsessed by sex and using language no self-respecting Australian worker, particularly working-class women, would ever use. I had perpetrated the crime of naturalism, which was against Zhdanov's rules for socialist realism. "Sex," said Ernie Thornton, former secretary of the powerful Sydney ironworkers, "is best left in the bedroom with the door closed." "I want to congratulate you on *Bobbin Up,*" wrote Helen Palmer, daughter of Vance and Nettie in a letter to me. "It is quite an achievement but I did miss the presence of the respectable working class who toil in the same work place all their lives and mow the lawn on weekends."

I had met these *respectable* men and women in the Communist Party Branches and Section Meetings, but I had never lived with them or loved them or worked with them as I had the protagonists of *Bobbin Up*. "Better books will be written," wrote Ray Clarke, Secretary of the Sydney Democratic Rights Committee, "and you will be there to write them."

But in that summer in 1958 there was nothing to dilute my triumph. I sat on the front deck of my mother's holiday house at Middleton Beach, Albany, looking out over the distant murmur of the surf breaking along the sand. This nostalgic landscape of sturm and drang with its wet black granite cliffs and foaming seas was exactly the right backdrop to contain a tragedy, to lift it out of the realms of a tasteless Victorian melodrama with a mad lover and three illegitimate children, and I had managed to retrieve something from the wreckage of my life – salvation by words. They had always been my saviour. They would never let me down. So began the long process of reinventing myself. Toddy Flood was dead and I was back with the girl who had dreamed of being as great a poet as Edith Sitwell and as great an actress as Bernhardt. My dreams were more manageable now but they were already beginning to propel me tentatively into an unknown future.

My children and I are living at Cathay, my sister Dessie's house in South Perth, looking out over the magnificent sweep of the Swan River. This is my 'safe house', the home that once belonged to my dead grandparents. I used to call in on my way home from school to sit under the peach tree reading and writing, sometimes staying overnight, sleeping out in the sleepout with the old people. I called it my safe house because it was my place of refuge from the tensions and rows at home. There was a benign spirit over it which had a lot to do with my beloved grandfather. Here I was never criticized but always welcomed, always spoilt by both of them. But Cathay was left to Dessie in my grandmother's will. All I had inherited was the player piano where I used to sit peddling away, singing at the top of my voice *Schubert's Serenade, Tea for Two, The Merry Widow Medley* and *That Certain Party*. My mother had sold the piano while I was living in Sydney and had given me three thousand pounds to buy a house with the proceeds of the will. "Don't think for a moment," she said, "your grandmother would have left you anything after you became a communist but I organized this much for you." But then in the full flush of my conversion to Marxism I had renounced all claim to my family's wealth, so what did I expect?

Cathay is a serene and beautiful house with large rooms and an acre of garden. A broad front deck looks out over the Swan River. For entertainment in their old age, my grandparents used to sit there, counting the number of cars that swept by along Riverside Drive, marvelling at all the changes they had seen since they drove a horse and buggy along the sandy road to Como. I sleep in my grandmother's old sewing room with the hydrangeas outside the window filling the air with a dim blue light. There in a single bed, with a wardrobe and a small desk under the window, I settle down to become a student again.

At the university, my attitude has changed completely. After years of intellectual stagnation, I find I enjoy learning. The library proves a godsend. I spend hours there, sitting cross legged on the floor amongst the stacks, quietly enjoying myself reading poetry, drama, novels and criticism, studying

Eliot and Yeats again. Literature is even more exciting than in my first schoolgirl encounter. I become obsessed by Fitzgerald, Faulkner and Hemingway, in fact the whole gamut of available American texts fascinates me. I have little or no contact with the Communist Party. The memory of my scandalous departure is still fresh in people's minds and my reappearance alone with three small children has done nothing for my reputation as a scarlet woman. At a Wharfies' barbecue whenever any man in the gathering pauses to speak to me his wife or girlfriend glare from the sidelines. An unattached woman is apparently a dangerous female. "Her life is finished," says a friend of my mother's. "No man will ever look at her again."

At least my literary career seemed to be moving steadily on its way. I had received an offer of publication for *Bobbin Up* from the Australasian Book Society, a co-operative publishing house started by a group of left-wing writers in Melbourne. Amongst them were Frank Hardy, Judah Waten, David Martin, Ralph De Boissiere and John Morrison. I must also have received a letter of interest from Nelsons although I have no recollection of it. There is a typical letter from me in Frank Hardy's archives in the National Library in Canberra asking for his advice. Should I publish with the Australasian Book Society or, if I received a firm offer, should I publish with Nelsons? Was it my communist duty to support the left-wing publisher or should I sign with Nelsons as it would probably disseminate my novel more widely. Anyway, I speculated, once Nelsons read the manuscript they would probably lose interest. It would be too radical for a capitalist entrepreneur. Frank's answer to this has disappeared into the mists of history but I am willing to bet he advised me to go with Nelsons. Frank was never one to turn his back on fame and fortune. However such a choice apparently never eventuated so now I was rewriting certain sections of *Bobbin Up*, expanding the impressionist style of the novel: Stan Mooney's soliloquy as he plays the ukelele on the back steps, the recurring image of sputnik in the Sydney skies, the little man writing Eternity outside the rooming house in Moller Street, the pregnant girls asleep in the home for delinquents, folding their work-worn hands over their swollen bellies. I was trying to enrich the texture of the novel and for the most part I think I succeeded.

One of my problems however was to find time to retype the manuscript. Reading an advertisement in *The West Australian* about a typing school that took on the typing of manuscripts for cut prices I decided to send them *Bobbin Up*. Soon afterwards I received an irate letter from the principal. One of the student's mothers had written to him complaining about the filthy book he had given her daughter to type up. On reading the manuscript he agreed and he had immediately sent it off to the Vice Squad. I was distraught. This was my only copy. Reading *Bobbin Up* now one is astonished by these reactions. By today's standards it is a mild enough picture of the life of working-class women in a Sydney spinning mill. But now in order to retrieve the manuscript I needed a lawyer, preferably a left-wing one, and the only communist lawyer I knew was my ex-husband Lloyd Davies. He was very good about it and wrote a stiff letter to the Police Department, supported by the Fellowship of W.A. Writers. The manuscript was returned to me by a sour long-faced sergeant who asked the inevitable question, "Would you like your fifteen-year-old daughter to read this book?"

"Yes," I said, "I think it would do her the world of good."

Too afraid to let the manuscript out of my hands again I managed to finish the retyping myself and *Bobbin Up* was finally published in hardback in 3000 copies in the winter of 1959. It had enthusiastic reviews in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, even a short notice in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Although it sold out in eight weeks the Australasian Book Society was unable to fund another print run because the type they had rented from the *Sydney Morning Herald* had already been destroyed.

When my mother read *Bobbin Up*, all she said was, "You can do better than that." My father looked bemused. His old friend, Arthur Kelly, ex-manager of the Yealering Co-op, had asked him how I had

managed to learn all that dirty language.

In the winter of that year I was invited to travel interstate for a promotions tour of the novel. I couldn't return to Sydney so the tour would only take in Melbourne and some of the main Victorian centres. This was the method ABS used to promote their publications and it was remarkably successful. The author spoke at factory gate meetings, Realist Writers' Groups and book clubs, selling copies on the way.

My mother bought me a new wardrobe to celebrate: a classic dark red suit with a pleated skirt, a scarlet wool suit with fake grey fur cuffs and a tight-fitting black wool dress threaded with silver lurex. I really fancied myself in these outfits. I can remember buying a pair of grey gloves with a scalloped edge decorated with tiny seed pearls and a pair of grey suede shoes with silver buckles to dress them up. Naproing my hair to a lighter shade of blonde I set out for the airport. My first interview in *The Age* was headed "Busy housewife finds time for writing".

*Bobbin Up* was launched by the slightly drunk historian Brian Fitzpatrick in the Athenaeum in Melbourne. Jack Coffey, Secretary of the Melbourne Realist Writers, called for "the books that burn". Apparently he did not consider that *Bobbin Up* was one of these. Stephen Murray-Smith, the editor of *overland*, asked did I think the only subject worth writing about was the life of the working class? Afterwards there was a party where I met the artist Noel Counihan, and was presented with a very soppy poem written to me by Aileen Palmer, the daughter of Vance and Nettie. The next day Aileen in an old and ratty overcoat took me out to lunch and afterwards to meet her mother. Vance had died two years before and Nettie, looking old and frail, sat out in the wan sunlight in the garden. Helen Palmer was upstairs packing up the family archives to be sent to the National Library. The atmosphere between the two sisters was strained. Aileen was still a committed member of the Communist Party but Helen had been expelled for publishing her magazine *Outlook* without the permission of the party. I had been worried about the expulsion of Helen Palmer and other intellectuals and had stood up in party meetings in Sydney to ask questions about it but none of them had been satisfactorily answered. All that happened was that I was then regarded as suspiciously 'anti-Party'.

When I first came back to Perth I had visited Katharine Susannah Prichard in her house in the foothills of the Darling Ranges and she had asked me about these expulsions. Her links with the Palmers went back a long way to their early years amongst the Melbourne literati. To this day I am ashamed of my answer. I said Helen Palmer had probably deserved expulsion because she refused to accept party discipline. "Oh well," Katharine said, "the Palmers were always Trotskyites, the lot of them." Looking back now I shudder at the lack of humanity, the wilful blindness that a dogmatic political belief can foster. And here was Helen, looking strained and withdrawn, obviously longing to escape from these proselytizing politicos.

I met Aileen once again before I left Melbourne. Drunk, manic, and dishevelled, looking like a bag lady, she invited me to the Palmer house again. Nettie had died. It was dark, dismal and cold. Aileen lit a fire in the grate and talking savagely to herself began sorting through two filing cabinets filled with papers. Every now and again she consigned a bundle of letters to the fire. "Lies, all bloody lies," she muttered. I realized these must be the papers Helen had been sorting for the National Library on my last visit. It was Australian literary history that Aileen was burning. I couldn't stay in that haunted house any longer so, making some excuse, and pursued by Aileen's wails I escaped into the wintry streets of Melbourne.

It was Frank Hardy who eventually told me Aileen Palmer's story. As a young girl she had fallen in love with the novelist Flora Eldershaw and kept running away to her house in the Dandenongs pursued by Vance. The monumental rows and confrontations between Aileen, Flora and Vance became part of the literary gossip of Melbourne. Vance threatened Flora Eldershaw with legal action for corrupting a minor. I imagined that the letters I had seen Aileen burning so ferociously had some bearing on this episode in

her life. Poor Aileen. In homophobic Australia how could she have hoped to obliterate these scandals? I never saw her again but years afterwards I read a heartbreaking account of her last years in a psychiatric hospital where the nurses laughed indulgently at the fantasies of a mad old woman who claimed to be a published poet and a Spanish war veteran. But it was all true. Aileen Palmer had published a poetry collection and served as a nurse with the Republican Army in Spain.

There were other problems engendered by the split in the Communist Party. I had always been friendly with Stephen Murray-Smith who had left the party after the expulsion of his great friend Ian Turner. Sensibly Stephen had registered the magazine *overland* in his own name, and in spite of harassment by the party leadership through Judah Waten, Frank Hardy and others he had refused to hand it over to the party collective. From this time on Stephen was the enemy. In Melbourne, that home of radical intellectuals, the name calling was always particularly vehement. Stephen asked me out to lunch and in spite of the warnings by Les Greenfield, secretary of the ABS, I was determined to go. I had always liked this big intelligent man, an ex-commando from a wealthy Toorak family, who as a young man had thrown in his lot with the communists. As time went on I grew to love his warmth and courage, and perhaps most of all that quality of unshakeable loyalty that was as much a part of him as breathing. That day in Melbourne we had a long liquid lunch in George Mora's restaurant. Afterwards he introduced me to Sabini's Bookshop where I saw for the first time my book displayed on the counter amongst other new Australian novels. I went back several times just to sneak a quick look through the window. Walking through the streets of Melbourne Stephen told me about his battles with the party, the name calling, the dirty tactics and his deep sense of injury about what had been done to him. Here was I the devoted party girl walking side by side with public enemy number two (Ian Turner was definitely number one), listening to his complaints with a sympathetic ear. Did I realize then that the great rift had already begun that would lead me to publicly renounce my membership in the Communist Party nine years later? But I had no more time for polemic. I spoke at factory gate meetings. I travelled to the Wonthaggi coal fields and spoke to a large assembly of miners and their wives, sensing that my audience was obviously shocked by *Bobbin Up*. But the most extraordinary of all these experiences was the invitation by a book club in Wangarratta where the president of the club was manager of the Brock Mills. I was put up in the VIP suite. Next morning I addressed the factory workers and was invited to lunch with the manager and his staff. I had quickly discovered that none of them had read *Bobbin Up* but here they were, enthusiastically buying copies for their wives for Christmas as "they didn't have too much time for reading". Down the end of the dining table a small, spare, sardonic man kept regarding me quizzically. He was George Turner, the factory social worker who had just published his first novel and who had certainly read mine. Afterwards he wrote to me in Perth congratulating me on the greatest hoax of the century and criticizing the heroine of my book as "Poor Blind Nell".

There were other memorable moments – visiting Frank Dalby Davison, the legendary author of *Man-Shy*, and his charming partner Marie at Folding Hills, their beautiful little property outside Melbourne. Frank was a charmer, a generous man with a soft spot for young women. It was a magical day and one I never forgot. What heady stuff it all was for the girl from Malyalling, Wickepin, who had just published her first novel. It was these kinds of experiences that made me realize all I had missed, brought up in the cultural isolation of Perth. I had joined the Communist Party at twenty-two, at twenty-six I had run away to live the complete proletarian life in Sydney. If I had gone to Melbourne as a young woman, I would have been part of a totally different artistic, even political climate and that would have changed everything. Even though I knew that I had learned a great deal about the lives of ordinary people, I began to feel culturally deprived. A whole period of Australia's literary life had come of age while I, enclosed in my proletarian

gulag, had hardly been aware of it. I think it was at this time that I first became aware that it was necessary for me to change my options before it was too late and become part of this developing artistic tradition.

But of all the meetings and events that occurred on that extraordinary visit to Melbourne there was one that stood out above all the others, one that would change my life forever – the meeting with Merv Lilley. We met at the bottom of the lift going up to the ABS rooms in Collins Street. He was carrying a copy of my novel which was a pretty good introduction. We had met before, once at a Realist Writers' meeting when his ship docked in Sydney. He had read a ballad which I said had the same rhythmic structure and cadence as *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. When he said how did I know about Oscar Wilde's ballad, I was incensed. Did he think I was an ignoramus? Long afterwards he told me he had spent the rest of the night admiring my legs, the first man who had ever done so. They were short and stocky, shaped I thought like bottles and had always been the bane of my existence. Later when we travelled into the city in the same car I was very aware of his presence and wished he would ask me to go out on the town with him but he didn't.

The next time we met he was with his girlfriend Enid Morton on the Domain. He had just come off a cane cut and brown and fit, hair blonded by the sun, he looked dazzling, a look-alike for the young Marlon Brando. I asked them both to dinner making one of my usual silly quips. "There mightn't be much to eat," I said. He took me at my word and they never turned up for the roast dinner I had cooked so carefully. Our last meeting was on my final night in Sydney at the Australia Night I'd helped organize for the Realist Writers and the Bush Music Club. Standing on the sidelines he had asked me was I okay or did I want any help? I longed to tell him that I was totally terrified, that I needed help badly to escape with my children from a madman, but I was too proud to confess it, so I said nothing. And now here he was, tall and big and handsome, standing in Collins Street looking down at me with slanted golden eyes, a half smile on his lips. I could scarcely believe my luck. He invited me for a drink at the London Pub and leaning across the table said "How's your sex life lately?"

"Shithouse," I said, which wasn't strictly true. "How is yours?"

He invited me to go with him to see the stage version of *My Fair Lady*, but I was already booked up for another meeting about *Bobbin Up*.

"Oh well," he said, "that's that then."

I could feel him slipping away.

"But the meeting finishes at ten o'clock. I could meet you then," I said quickly.

And that was how on a dark wintry night in St Kilda we walked towards each other down an empty street into our long life together.

Forty years later *Bobbin Up* is relaunched at the Melbourne Writers' Festival. It has been republished by Vulgar Press, the new left-wing press begun by Ian Syson, the editor of *overland*.

*Overland* and Melbourne – it seems a fitting reunion. Some of the old faces are present: Bill Wannan at ninety looking spry and full of enthusiasm, Ralph De Boissiere still as handsome as ever, who tells me he is writing his autobiography, David Murray-Smith, Stephen's son, and Shirley Hardy, Frank's daughter, both looking and sounding absurdly like their fathers, and of course Merv Lilley, eighty years old but bigger and cheekier than ever, to whom I have been married for thirty-nine years. But the roll call of the dead is much longer.

Brian Matthews gives the opening speech and sitting in my wheelchair I reply telling them the stories of the seizing of *Bobbin Up* by the Perth vice squad, my hilarious visit to the Brock Mills and the memorable meeting with Merv Lilley in the streets of Melbourne.

But the ghosts of the past are everywhere for me – Stephen Murray-Smith, Frank Hardy, Ian Turner, David Martin, John Morrison, Alan Marshall, Noel Counihan, Brian Fitzpatrick, Frank Dalby Davison and Aileen Palmer – all the old icons of the left who once came to celebrate the launch of a first novel by a young woman of thirty-five. I raise my glass in silent tribute.

Veronica Brady

# Judith Wright McKinney

## 1915–2000

POETRY, AUDEN SAID in his elegy for W.B. Yeats, makes nothing happen. But that depends on what is meant by the word 'happen'– as Auden also knew:

> *. . . it survives*
> *In the valley of its saying where executives*
> *Would never want to tamper.*

Certainly in her long, passionate, polemical, poetic and fruitful life Judith Wright made many things happen, things which few, if any, of our politicians, business leaders, technologists or even scientists have managed to achieve.

Born into a prominent New England pastoral family in 1915, just a few weeks after the landing at Gallipoli (she had a lifelong horror of war), she drew from her family a sense of obligation to the community. But from the land she derived an understanding of its compelling power which never left her and also a sense of its Aboriginal past. She also rebelled against the assumption that the destiny of a woman of her class was to marry a grazier and produce children and was determined to become a writer.

*photograph: Mike Bowers, courtesy of* The Age

The poems which first made her name, in the 1940s during the Second World War when Japanese invasion seemed imminent, spoke of the land in a new, more intimate fashion, as "my blood's country", for example, rather than as an object of conquest and exploitation and of the Aboriginal presence which haunted it. One of these poems, 'Niggers Leap', about a massacre in the nineteenth century, opened out the gulf we now face more openly:

> *O all men are one man at last.*
> *We should have known*
> *the night that tided up the cliffs and hid them*
> *had the same question on its tongue for us.*

From the beginning then she was writing 'political' poetry,

however little her readers realized it. But it was politics of a different kind, based on feeling, not just calculation of personal or economic profit, in which compassion and mercy had their part. So too did sympathy, an ability to honour lives very different from her own – in poems like 'Bullocky', for example. But the greatest gift she brought to our culture perhaps was to express the full range of women's experience, love, desire and the mysteries of birth and pregnancy, not as merely individual experiences, however, but as part of the larger life of creation.

In the late 1940s she met Jack McKinney, a penniless and unconventional philosopher who, having survived the First World War devoted the rest of his life to an attempt to understand the destructive madness of a culture which had allowed it to happen and to find some alternative to it. He became her lover, mentor and inspiration, the father of their child and finally, when his first wife's death made it possible, her husband. Their partnership gave her life and work the strength which sustained them long after his death in 1966:

*So certainly you went, so certainly*
*the path you followed gave you travel-clearance.*
*I strained to follow as it drew you on.*

This certainty inspired her work for the environment and made it so effective – the Wildlife Protection Society of Queensland, for instance, which she founded with a friend and fellow artist, Kathleen McArthur, was largely instrumental in saving the Great Barrier Reef from mining in the late 1960s. Just as importantly, the poetic and philosophical understanding she and Jack had developed made her realize that the environmental crisis was part of the crisis of Western culture as a whole:

*We with our quick dividing eyes*
*measure, distinguish and are gone.*
*The forest burns, the tree-frog dies,*
*yet one is all and all are one.*

What was/is necessary, she saw, was a "transvaluation of value".

This was so, too, in our dealings with Aboriginal people. As usual, however, this was not the result of abstract thought but of a combination of feeling and intelligence, a sense of history and the conviction that the history which matters is not that of the 'winners' but of the 'losers'. Aboriginal activist and poet, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), became a friend, "the person I speak . . . to most easily. I refer things to her in my mind", and this friendship gave her a special access to the Aboriginal community. In the 1980s she and her friend and ally, Nugget Coombs set up a committee to work for a Treaty with Aboriginal Australians. For a variety of reasons it was disbanded but it is an idea which is once more on the agenda. To the end she regarded justice for Aboriginal Australians as the key issue and her last public act, just a few weeks before she died, was to lead the Reconciliation March in Canberra on a bitterly cold day.

As she wrote in one of her later poems, she chose "fire, not snow" and raged against the direction in which the country seemed to be going under politicians whose only value seemed to be money, devotees of competition, ruthless self-interest and conspicuous consumption and the climate of hatred and suspicion which they depend on. Not surprisingly, there was only one current politician, the Arts Minister from Queensland, at her Memorial Service in Canberra. Some of us, however, would like to think that her kind of politics, based on sympathy, compassion, an unwavering passion for justice, an intelligent assessment of the actual – as distinct from the 'virtual' – realities facing the planet today, offers the only hope for humanity. Life for her was "painting a picture, not doing a sum". The humanistic, multivalent, passionate poetics which inspired her have made many things happen and may make many more happen in the future.

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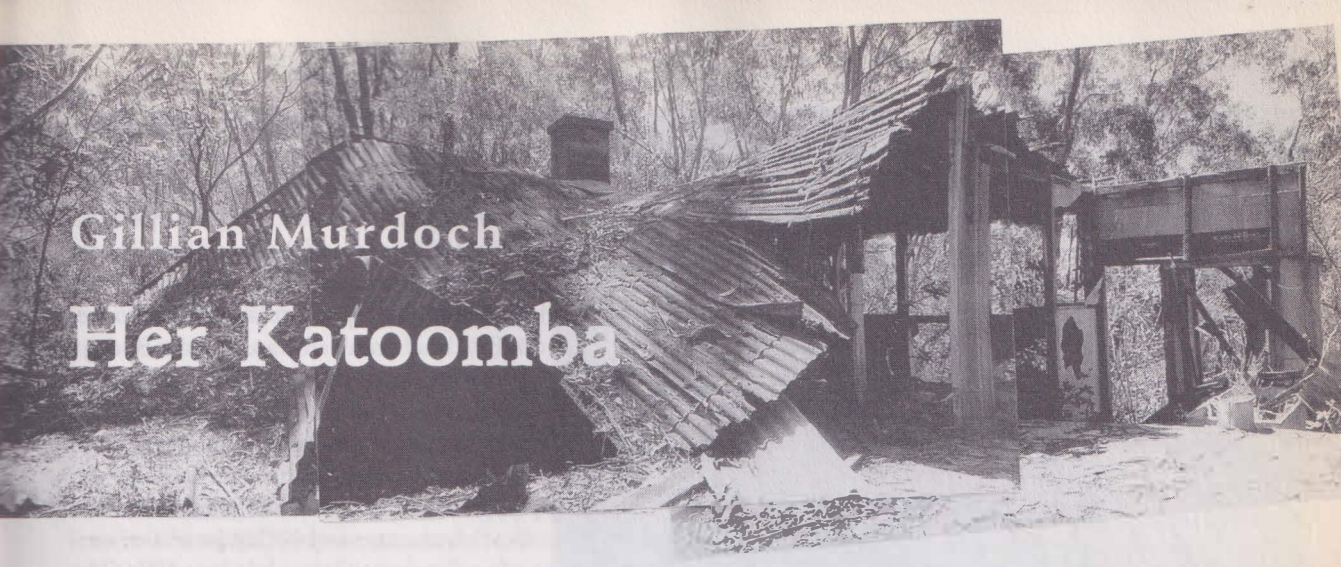


Gillian Murdoch

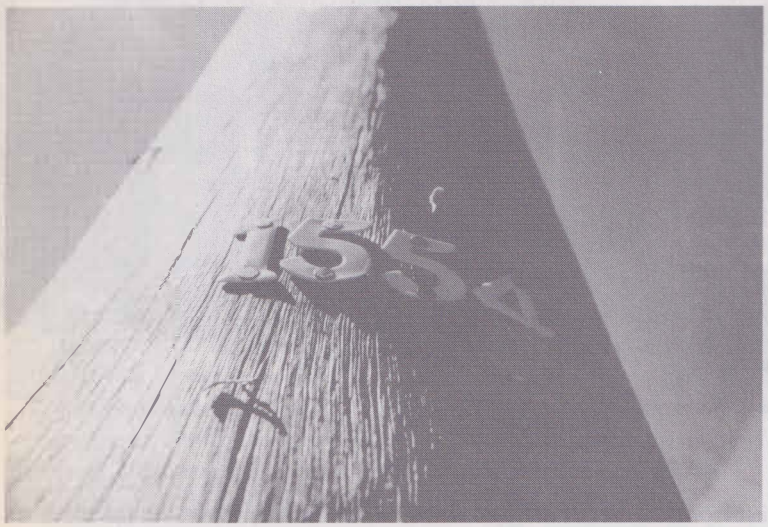
# Her Katoomba

FOLLOW THE Great Western Highway east from Katoomba towards Leura along the flat-topped gum tree country of the Blue Mountains plateau, and take Queens Road on the left just after the rest home. About a kilometre down take the right branch of a Y intersection into Dennison Road, and half a kilometre past this follow a sharp left-hand bend into Princes Road. Again continue to the end, where the road meets the unsignposted Clydebank Avenue at a T-junction. Directly opposite this intersection stands a tall timber power-pole with the yellow numbers 1 5 5 4 nailed to it; behind this a faint path leads in to an abandoned and overgrown section.

Eve Langley lived her last fourteen years here in the three-bedroom hut that still stands at the centre of her tall-treed plot. Existing in a fragile state of collapse, the roof caves towards a carpeting debris layer of rusted tin cans, old newspapers, a light green plastic frisbee, and other more indistinguishable rubbish. Her once bright yellow and blue bus lies stranded one hundred metres from the shack on a pile of old bricks. Wheel-less, roof-less, windowless, its paint is cracking and wild plants grow up through it.

Langley acquired the Katoomba house and section with her publishers' financial assistance in 1960, when, after years of travelling and living overseas, she decided to settle permanently in her native Australia. Naming the hut 'Iona Lympus', she quickly established artistic routines free from external distractions. With her early literary fame forgotten by all but a few, she passed her time typing memories, fearing snakes, and listening to pop songs on 2UE late into the long nights. She supplemented a steady diet of fish and chips, cakes, and Penfolds wine, with canned foods and bottles of Bundaberg Rum. More than forty years after the first great gypsy season she immortalized in her S.H. Prior prize-winning novel *The Pea Pickers*, Langley wrote she still loved and lived by "the melancholy musings of 1928."[1] Faithful to the memory, she continued her annual Australian harvesting adventures into the early seventies, picking hops at Panbrooks and grapes at Seppelts; witnessing first-hand the progressive replacement of her beloved hand-pickers by machines. She fulfilled a long-held ambition of travelling to Greece in the latter half of 1967, and visited her daughter in New Zealand in 1968; but otherwise her movements were increasingly internal: days spent single-space typing on thin 'Pinkerton' pink paper. Awash with memories she devotedly rechronicled her lost times and places, like a nomad sick with stationariness seeking to cure herself with an imaginative mobility. She wrote letters to friends and publishers, painted watercolours on the cardboard insides of cereal boxes, and re-read *The Pea Pickers* with proud nostalgia while the house slowly deteriorated around her.

Happily, her always comfortably loose ties with reality stretched supportively to accommodate her lifestyle needs. A characteristic rejection of housewifery combined smilingly with her hard-working belief in artistic mission. She continued to produce prolifically, surrounded by dusty piles of unpublished manuscripts and the memories of so many others lost forever on various travels. The fine series of tactful rejection letters she'd amassed also left her undaunted – she wrote back to her publishers amused, imagining them sitting "wondering




what to do with all those books",[2] and reassured them all she expected of them was storage.

Time passed. No need here to dwell on the to-be-expected idiosyncracies of the conventional eccentric. No need to speculate on the content of her doll conversations, or the life and opinions of her imaginary friend Albie. It's enough just to wonder at the tone rung by the several carefully wrapped parcels she left containing nothing. It's enough just to be interested.

Visiting relatives offered infrequent respite from the days of unbridled literary introspection. Her daughter Bidi stayed in contact, and her sons Karl Marx and Langley both stayed a few days with her in the hut. Otherwise she was alone with the darting lizards, battling bush rats and a growing certainty that her elderly neighbour, Miss Francis, was maliciously plotting an invasion. She took recourse to a kitten and barbed wire against these respective threats. She walked the wide long sunny streets in her already well-worn, immortalized white topee hat (see *White Topee*, 1989), and drank in Katoomba's Bodega Wine Bar and Carrington Hotel. Her diary faithfully detailed the days' non-events and compared the current with their more memorable predecessors. Her body lay undiscovered for a couple of weeks after her death from coronary occlusion and atherosclerosis some time in early June 1974. The rats gnawed her face. She was buried in an unmarked grave in the town cemetery.

But all this is speculation – the buttoning-up of a likely-looking conclusion of a coat on a skeletal array of second-hand stories. Any such academic attempts to flesh the dead with posterity's ghoulish interpretations must acknowledge the artifice involved. Outside eyes often judge irrelevantly, in neatly-tailoring life's random fragments to patterns seen as significantly fitting. The clinically come-too-late tidying interests that sort and label and cover their subjects in clean Mitchell-Library-white tissue paper bind, reconstructed realities.[3] The safety of the curiously confident, the living adopt to the departed, is the only undisputed biographical certainty.

No-one will know her Katoomba. Her skies should not be unnecessarily darkened by after-the-fact assumptions and deductions. Alongside the trace of atmosphere left in letters that reveal her sense of humour as unextinguished, and house-proud photos of her plot, the impossibility of really knowing her mind should be recognized.

Perhaps above all the anecdotal clutter surrounding Langley's life and achievements: the famous deed-poll changing of her name to Oscar Wilde in 1954; the nine years in the forties spent in Auckland Mental Hospital on her then husband's insistence; her consuming dedication to her conception of the "ideal life" of an isolated poet, should be remembered as something worthy of our respect, rather than any final old-lady-alone pity. From an early age Langley had known the intimate habits of

boarding houses and hostels, and had later done her time in worse incarcerations. She was no stranger to being one. To be too enamoured of her Katoomba situation's tragic potentials is to ignore the positives all around. Langley chose her "splendid isolation", chose her self-imposed constrictions over those of popular convention, chose her "hut on a hard dry hill".[4] Her literature reflects such solitary aspirations, and, more originally, affirms the attraction of the mythical Australian gone-bush tradition as a passion powerful beyond gender. Her semi-autobiographical heroines exhibit separatenesses that stem from both consuming artistic quests, and highly personalized relationships with the countryside, that others can assume no real significance in. Rejecting love to remain "free forever to write and think and dream",[5] they survive in her system, sustained by the solace of "the real and perfect joy that comes to one who has kept the faith and loved strongly all the past".[6] No-one can know how powerfully the rhetoric of sustenance can, or did in Langley's case, endure in actuality. What is easier to infer is how much it was desired. The remains of her detached hut stand in testimony to the defiant strength of her self-belief and endurance, just as much as they may so neatly hint at any inner-fallennness of vision. No other ending to her story seems credible. No ghost seems to linger amongst the rubbish of the lost plot. Her Katoomba remains an aptly neglected memorial to an undiscovered soul.

## ENDNOTES

1. "You never know how your writing's going to affect you in after years. The melancholy musings of 1928, I still love and live by. It is I, alone, who read them anyhow. I think back on things that happened this hop picking and try my memory out. I seem to be still there, walking back home from Ming's hut over the big strong hop vines . . ." Eve Langley, diary entry written in her account of *Hop Picking At Panbrooks, March 1967*, Mitchell Library.
2. "I feel so amused to think of you and Nan wondering what to do with all those books. Now, my dear, I told you to store them for me, at least, so don't worry about publishing them . . ." Letter from Eve Langley to Beatrice Davis (her Angus & Robertson publisher, along with Nan MacDonald), 13 January 1960. Mitchell Library, Angus & Robertson correspondence, 1941–1968.
3. Eve Langley's ten unpublished manuscripts, papers, and a selection of personal effects are held in the Mitchell Library of NSW in several boxes. They were presented to the library in 1975 by the NZ film-maker Meg Stewart, who found them in the Katoomba hut while researching her film about the author, *The Shadows Are Different*. Further papers were found and donated by the police. In 1983 Eve Langley's children gave permission for all the papers to be incorporated in the library's collection. See Aorewa McLeod's 'Alternative Eves' article for a useful discussion of recent academic interest in Langley's unpublished novels (*Hecate*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1999, pp. 164–179).
4. 'Australia Remembered Me', poem by Eve Langley, dated 1970, in the Mitchell Collection.
5. *White Topee*, Eve Langley, 1989, p. 57.
6. op. cit. p. 69.

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Eve Langley, *White Topee*, Angus & Robertson, 1989 (first published by Angus & Robertson, 1954).

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Joy L. Thwaite, *The Importance of Being Eve Langley*, Angus & Robertson, 1989.



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## Signs

On a distant hill in the city
a billboard says – *Soldier on.*

Two men walk ahead.
One says to the other, I love
your body. You look really good.
Yes, his friend says, *I* like it.

A woman calls to a friend
on the train; she left her
marriage, Turkish husband, toys,
sewing machine, all her clothes.

Unprotected (he trashed the car),
she has no money. A loophole means
no free legal help. She is crying now.
She is told – That's how it is.
In the beginning.

When a woman's mate
manhandles her, her child asks –
Why does this always happen
to you?

One artist gives her spotted red
party shoes to another saying,
These are from my bimbo days.

Another dismisses her lover
in order to think.

A poetics expert quotes a thinker
to show that hearing is more important
than writing. Yet, writing is given
more importance than speech.

The speaker demonstrates
the deconstructive strategy
of his hero so that the importance
of one over the other is broken
both up and down.
The pieces scatter all around,
in the air and across the floor.
When it comes to question time,
I wonder whether to polish each piece
until it is as clear as possible.

Since I am occupied
with this prospect and how it might
impinge on my Being or Doing,
I stay in the present
even when time is up.

One of the audience
enjoyed the lecture totally;
another found it –
incomprehensible.

Elsewhere a social theorist draws
excessive crowds to the venue.
People spiral in the courtyard
to make a thick texture of form,
floor to ceiling
in the lecture hall.

A second hall is opened
where the theorist is projected
via a television monitor,
to tell us the world of illusion
is on both sides of the screen.

People in the second hall
are satisfied they have
the authentic experience of this
legend whose themes involve simulation.
This is because they have the Copy;
the others have only the Real Thing.

Years ago he predicted the future
would not come. Now he suggests
the end will come quickly
as in the cabbala, provided
perfection is reached
with the help of technology.

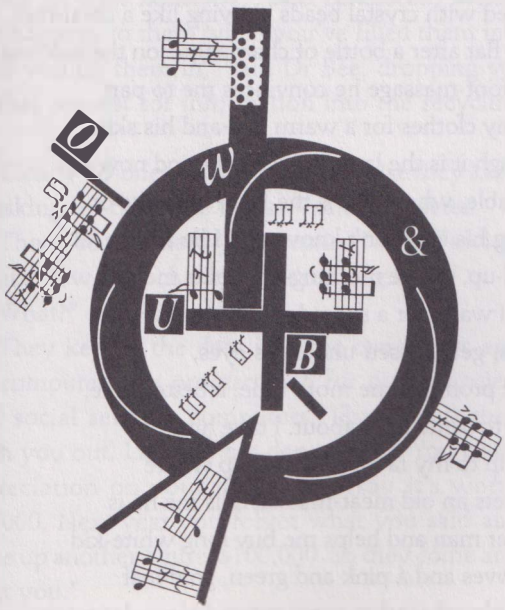
This is not the threat it appears.
Thanks to technological advance,
mistakes happen constantly,
wiping away information and so
breaking up the path
of mankind's apotheosis.

An enterprising artist in the audience
sells him four baseball caps
embroidered with his name.

A student stays away from her
graduation because she cannot
get suitable robes. Another,
known for wearing a suit for three years
receives his degree in
a slashed T-shirt, ribbon jeans
and a nipple ring.

Somewhere in the city a man
speaks to hundreds; a boy
has a problem; one man flatters another,
a billboard stands to attention. This one
is pink – *It's a man's world but you
don't have to wear a moustache.*

Gail Carson




pete spence

## Primula

*for Alison Gillies*

Primulas from the mountain
purple like sunset stand
among blue glass marbles in a jar
on the windowledge in the bath-
room of the farm. It is winter
and these tiny so flower-like
flowers have something to do
with perfection. They remind me of
picture-book love in another season. Brushing
my teeth I watch their delicate heads
shiver in the cracked pane's
breeze while in the other room on
the shelf over the fire I imagine the framed
face of her sister to be flushing pink.
It is one of those photographs
that is only for memories.
Nursing her was like having your heart
broken over and over in a year
she said once and picked
as many flowers that day as
her arms could hold. Remembrances
are quieter here and more clear.
Like the primulas they grow well
in this cold, resisting
all the greys of the land behind us.

MTC Cronin

# Glad rags

In Tan Hoa Hung's red-signed butcher shop along
Commercial Road at 6 pm on a Saturday
a girl is sprawled on the plastic grass inside the
window wearing a red bikini on honey-toned
skin. A butcher in a striped apron stands
behind her. They are being photographed for *Large*
magazine. We pull our clothes tighter-to-skin to
keep out the cold and mount the tram to the city.
When he touches me his hands are ice. "Warm
heart," he says but mine is wrapped in the past and
charades in a 70s traffic-light green wool suit with
navy button-and-braid trim that is scratchy to touch.
At the play *Sarsaparilla* a bitch in heat with dogs
after her is linked to three suburban couples in
the next street. The student-actors' enthusiasm
overcomes unheard lines, the light-operator is
wearing sexy high-heels and the director comes
out to say hello. My actor-friend runs away half-
time to his performance and I hug him farewell in
the darkspace of first-and-second entry doors to
the theatre. I have just begun a period anyway
and although boys like blood on sheets
because it reminds them of fucking a virgin it
is no fun soaking stains out of white linen.
My friend says that when I am getting over
a boy I indulge in retail therapy or op-shop madness.
On Monday I buy an early 70s Nina Ricci
apricot gown that clamps down over the breasts
and sweeps like a medieval bride. It's a new thing,
a real thing, a glad-rag to see the night in. The actor
says for me clothes are sex – that I get more excited
over a new dress than when he talks about licking me.
My ex once said that everything I owned appeared to
be see-thru after he saw my 50s embroidered
shirt, my pink sheer floral dress, my cat-on-a-hot-
tin-roof petticoat and this was before I gained the 50s
negligee under matching puffed-sleeve brunch and
the 60s swinger dress in black chiffon trimmed with
satin ribbon. Through the week I buy a 60s rib
jumper, a fur hat of unknown origin, a Misses
Mooney pleated orange hat, a brown velvet evening cape
and a black coal-scuttle. I photocopy *Sanity in Sex*
1920 which advises that actors and musicians are
highest on the list for infidelity and venereal disease
and puts forward the notion of rehabilitating
prostitutes on farms as the city infects good morals.
On Friday I catch up with the beautiful young
actor soon travelling to Canberra to continue his
play. Then it is on to Sydney for a filmshoot for
three weeks. I do a full spin in a 50s Marilyn-cut
phalacyline-blue low-cut lace-and-diamante
bodiced frock and change to a 60s turquoise silk
dress, hand-woven in Siam, with matching coat
trimmed with crystal beads glowing like a coral-reef.
At my flat after a bottle of champagne on the balcony
and a foot-massage he convinces me to part
with my clothes for a warm bed and his skin.
Although it is the last day of my period now he
is not able, whether it is the Es or the coke or
missing his ex I don't know, and I lie awake, all
ruffled-up, till the morning-light puts me to
sleep. I wake for a shared shower, soft hand-
strokes, get dressed under his eyes,
and he promises me more time, a better time,
a time to write lines about. I take him
on a trip to my favourite op shop where
he covets an old meat-mincer, tells me he is
a tender man and helps me buy long white-kid
ball gloves and a pink and green, gold-leaf
embroidered scarf to wear when I slow-dance on
wooden floorboards shedding my veils for the life-artists

**Ashlley** Morgan-Shae

# In the Lists

Michael Wilding

IT WAS LIST TIME. It was always list time, these times. Activities report. Research report. Publications report. University report. Faculty review. Departmental review. Personal development review. CV update. Review of reviews. Health questionnaire. Physical activity questionnaire. List of graduates supervised. Every other week there was another list to complete.

Dr Bee stood beside the paper recycling bag, opening his mail over it and dropping it in after a cursory glance.

"The business of the university," said Pawley. "Compiling lists and filling in forms."

"It's an utter nonsense," said Lancaster. "Whatever happens to them when you've filled them in?"

"If you fill them in," said Dr Bee, dropping yet another request for information into the recycling bag.

"Clearly no-one looks at them because they keep on asking for the same things," said Lancaster.

"That's to correlate your replies," said Pawley. "That's how they check if you're lying."

"What?" said Lancaster.

"They key all the data into the computers and the computers are programmed for discrepancies. Like social services computers. That's how they catch you out. Like the tax department. You claim depreciation on your library and say it's worth $60,000. Next year you forget what you said and make up another figure, $100,000. So they come and audit you."

"Do you mean to tell me all these piddling reports are being processed and collated somewhere?"

"Of course," said Pawley. "Why do you think they want them?"

"Just to make us wretched," said Lancaster. "Just to waste our time and stop us getting on with any real work."

"Well there is that," Pawley agreed. "But they figure someone will figure that out anyway. That's just the distraction. Beneath that there's the hidden reason of data collection."

"I'd have thought that was the perfectly explicit reason," said Dr Bee.

"Well it is, of course," said Pawley. "But they assume nobody takes anything at face value so no-one will think it really is serious data collection. They figure people will look for the hidden reason – general time-wasting and destabilizing. But beneath that is the hidden reason."

"The surface reason," said Dr Bee.

"Well, yes and no," said Pawley.

"As far as I'm concerned it's all a damn waste of time and paper," said Lancaster.

"That's what most people thought and that's why people didn't bother filling them in."

"Indeed," said Dr Bee.

"So when the report was leaked to the press, that's why we got such a bad press."

"What report?" said Lancaster. "I never saw any report."

"You were probably out of the country," said Dr Bee. "Waving to your friends across the demilitarized zone."

"The report said the average academic in the humanities published one article and gave one conference paper every five years."

"Sounds a bit rigorous," said Dr Bee.

"It's all used to cut funding to the humanities," said Pawley. "Makes us look idle."

"We are idle," said Dr Bee.

"Speak for yourself," said Lancaster. "Personally I make a point of publishing any conference paper I give as an article later."

"Under a different title, of course," said Dr Bee. "So you get two for the price of one."

"Of course," said Lancaster. "No-one ever reads anything you do. They just read these damn lists, if they ever read them."

"They don't read them," said Pawley. "They scan them electronically. Looking for correlations and discrepancies. Checking if you forgot to change the title sufficiently and were counting the same piece twice. The Ministry found there was a forty-eight per cent error in the reporting of academic publications. People putting things in the wrong categories. Claiming five-page articles as books. Listing the same paper twice under different names. Forty-eight per cent error sounds high for mere error, wouldn't you think? Sounds like downright dishonesty to me. Apart from that they check to see who's inviting who to write for what. Ah, here's old Henry Lancaster in this book edited by that old commo fellow-traveller, fancy that."

Lancaster blenched. "How did you know about that?"

"Stab in the dark, actually," grinned Pawley.

"One man's stab in the dark is another man's stab in the back," said Dr Bee. Enigmatically. At least that was how Lancaster took it. Enigmatically.

AND THEN THE rules changed. Maybe the Ministry was having trouble collecting the data. Too many people throwing the forms away. Or not filling them in fully. So they introduced a cash incentive. Instead of research funds being distributed to the department on the basis of each department's publication record, now it was distributed to each individual. The more you published, the more you got. And not just publications. Grants too. You listed any research grant you had received and you were scored for that too. The bigger the grant, the bigger the score, and the more money you got. You didn't even have to publish anything, just apply for a research grant. Just writing a grant application was scored as the equivalent of publishing an article, whether you got the grant or not. Anything you might ever have thought of, you applied for a research grant to research.

It was a simple incentive but it worked. Individual greed.

"IT'S A TRAVESTY of intellectual life," Lancaster fumed.

"That's our business," beamed Pawley. "That is what we are on this earth to do. Travesty."

"Look at this," said Lancaster. "Just look at the way they think. They make you list journal articles first, books second. Isn't a book a greater achievement than a piddling journal article?"

"For a man who's written twenty-five books, the answer must surely be yes."

"Thirty-five if you count the edited ones."

"But of course," said Pawley. "He said he was the editor of a famous edited book."

Lancaster glowered. "We're run by scientists and philistines. Just because they never write a book they have to downgrade books. Just because all they produce are piddling two-page articles with fifteen co-authors and written by their graduate students, they have to impose their model on all of us. How can I fill in a form like this?"

"Don't," said Dr Bee.

"You're not going to?"

"Why should I prop up the Dead Hand? If he wants to claim this department is an intellectual hot spot, let him write something himself for once. I don't propose to give him any support."

"So you're not filling the form in?"

"I've thrown it away," said Dr Bee. "How can I fill it in?"

"But I need to," said Lancaster. "I need the research score. I need the research funds it gives me."

"The Bulgarians no longer offering free trips?" said Dr Bee.

LANCASTER SAT at his desk. When he wasn't writing fiction there was nothing he liked better than to work on his curriculum vitae. He pressed the computer keys with eager delight, opened the folder on himself, HENRY LANCASTER, opened up the CV file, scrolled through to the publications. And there it all was, his life's work, every novel, every story, every magazine excerpt, every translation.

The mail would arrive with a serious looking journal in some language he couldn't read, often in a script he couldn't read, maybe with a covering note from the translator indicating what it was that was translated. And with what delight he would add it into the CV, yet another airing for a story written twenty years ago, now in Urdu, now in Slovenian, and he would meticulously key in the journal, the anthology, the date, the page numbers, the translator's name, the translation of the journal's name, place of publication. It was a work of art in itself the publication list, the list of all his writings.

It was a work of bejewelled exotica, from the plains of Hungary to the plains of Uzbekistan, from the paddy fields of Bengal to the paddy fields of Esarn, a glowing library of Alexandria, a humming tower of Babel, a library of continual congress.

He sat at it extracting the year's work. For further sensual delight he had taken the assorted publications from his shelves. The floor was covered with issues of *Knjizevna rec* (Beograd), *The Literary Criterion* (Mysore), *Nagy Vilag* (Budapest), *World Literature* (Beijing), *Gargoyle* (Washington, D.C.). Undervalued at home but what a fame abroad. He leaned back and shone in the glow of his reflected image.

But Pawley had intruded doubts. Pestilential Pawley, the unreconstructed, seventies, dope-smoking Pawley, Pawley the forever-stoned, saturated with molecules of THC, permeated with theories of the CIA, an unregenerate, still-walking psylocibin vision of conspiracy and paranoia.

He picked up *Srpski knjizevni glasnik,* the *Serbian Literary Herald.* Was it such a good idea to list it? And the others. *Gradina, Most, Politika.* Would this be seen as trading with the enemy? Every government did it. But he wasn't government. What if some over-zealous analyst up at the Ministry noticed and passed the information along. ASIO. MI6. CIA. MOSSAD. He was getting as mad as Pawley. He was infected by Pawley's craziness. He must have inhaled some of Pawley's permanent aura.

But it made such a good list. Twelve stories in Serbian translation. Another three in Chinese. And Bengali, what about Bengal, so it was a communist regime, did it matter, would anyone register, two novels in Bengali, how could he not list them?

What a jewelled list it was. How impoverished it would be without this exotica.

DR BEE came in. The imperatives of lunch time.

"Do you think that freak Pawley was talking sense?" Lancaster asked.

"Depends what he'd been ingesting into his system," said Dr Bee.

"About the publication report form."

"I threw it away."

"That's because you never publish," said Lancaster.

Dr Bee shot one of his vicious looks but Lancaster was oblivious, lost in his own agonies.

"I'm wondering if he was right. I'm not sure about listing all this Serbian stuff."

"What stuff is this?"

"Translations of stories. Should I include them in the report?"

"As I recall," recalled Dr Bee, "for years you endlessly complained that the Dead Hand always left your fiction off the publication list."

"He did, the bastard," said Lancaster. "Every year I'd give him a list of everything I'd published and every year he'd edit out the fiction. It was his uncontrollable hatred of living writing. His loathing of the creative."

"And now you're proposing to do the same."

"Well, not exactly. Well, not quite. Well, yes, I suppose I am."

"Self-immolation rather than burning by the inquisition."

"Well, yes. I mean, if there is an inquisition, why give them fuel for the flames?"

"Why indeed."

"Is there, do you think?"

"Is there what?"

"An inquisition."

"Only one way to find out."

"What's that?"

He gestured at the journals strewn over the floor. "List all these."

LANCASTER TAPPED on Pawley's door. There was the sound of drawers opening and shutting, rustlings, movements. Pretty well everyone else in the department kept their doors open when they

were in. To show they were there. To show no sexual congress with students was taking place. But Pawley's door was resolutely shut. Lancaster tried the handle. Locked.

Pawley let him in. The windows were wide open. The fan was on. But the room still reeked of dope. Pawley blinked at him, eyes bright pupils of blue amidst bloodshot irises.

He pressed the lock button on the door again and sat down at his desk. Lancaster took a chair. No point waiting to be asked. Unlike Lancaster's computer, glowing with cosmopolitan data, Pawley's was blank, closed down. He opened a drawer and took out his plastic bag of marijuana and began to roll a joint. A three-paper one for visitors. Lancaster knew there was no point in beginning until the ritual was completed. Pawley lit up, took two or three deep drags and passed the joint across. Lancaster took a drag, and then brought up the subject of the publications list.

"What do you think they would do?"

"If you listed all those dodgy places you publish in?"

"They're not really dodgy."

"Well, they're either under United Nations sanctions or under communist governments or anti-American regimes."

"Well, what would they do?"

"Oh, block research grants. Intervene in promotion committees. Tip off passport control. Alert international publishers so you don't sell foreign rights in the free world. Let your tyres down. Kill your dog. Those sorts of things."

Lancaster was visibly shaken. As the day wore on the horror of it all had seized him, exacerbated now by the paranoid potentiating qualities of the dope. Pawley passed the joint across again. Lancaster refused.

"Go on," said Pawley. "Steady your nerves. You look worried."

"Well it is worrying," said Lancaster petulantly.

"You don't have to list everything. Just forget to put them down."

"It's not that," said Lancaster. "Or not only that. It's the money."

Pawley took the joint back and grinned.

"What do you need it for? To write more books to score more research funds to write more books?"

"Yes," said Lancaster.

"I rest my case," said Pawley. "Hooked."

"It adds up to quite a lot," said Lancaster. "Every story counts."

"Under the shadow in the dale, every shepherd tells his tale," said Pawley.

"I could use that money."

"What for?"

"Well, practically anything. You've seen the research protocols."

"Not exactly," said Pawley.

"You must have," said Lancaster. "It was that desperate memo saying spend all your research funds by October, otherwise they'll all be clawed back to general revenue. They drew up a list of how you could spend it for those too stupid to think for themselves. Now it's all down on paper. Anything goes. Everything's legitimized. You must have seen it."

"Can't say I have," said Pawley, rolling another.

"It was circulated."

"I'm sure," said Pawley. "I can't read everything that's circulated. As Dr Leavis said about reading *Tom Jones,* life's too short. I'd rather read *Tom Jones.*"

"You'd rather smoke your life away."

"As a matter of fact," he said, "cannabis extends time. You end up living more, not less."

He offered the joint again. Lancaster took it without demur.

"You haven't said what you want the funds for."

"Anything," said Lancaster. "You can use them for anything. Travel. Accommodation. Books. You can just buy books. Conferences. Teaching relief."

"Teaching relief?" said Pawley. "What's that?"

"You pay someone to do your teaching for you while you're busy doing research."

"Really?" said Pawley. "Sounds a ripper. What research do you have to do?"

"Whatever you like. No-one looks at it, you know that."

"Sounds perfect," said Pawley.

"I know," said Lancaster. "That's why I was going to list as much as I could. The more you list, the more you get."

"That's what I mean," said Pawley. "It's a perfect sting for self-incrimination. It capitalizes on every

academic's petit-bourgeois greed and competitiveness. For a piddling amount of cash and to prove you've published more than your colleagues you end up listing every fragment you can think of. There it all is, down on file. And the stasi don't even have to raise a finger. You do it all for them. It's the most thorough scoop-up of data in history, all motivated by greed and competition. The twin motors of our capitalist ideology. And when they've collected all the data for five years they'll change the rules. They'll set up some research institute and give it all the money and you won't be able to claim any for yourself. But everything you ever did will be down on file. For ever after. You'll see."

Lancaster pondered on that.

"You might have a point," he conceded.

Pawley grinned his yellow-toothed smile. The wisps of smoke hung beneath the ceiling. Time extended.

"Are you," said Lancaster, "are you going to roll another?"

"For you," said Pawley, "anything is possible."

He reflectively licked the papers, began assembling the joint.

"So I'd best not fill in everything," Lancaster said. Reflectively. Sadly but reflectively.

"Probably too late," said Pawley. "The central data registry is programmed for discrepancy. It'll be picked up. 'Ah, what's happened to Henry Lancaster, suddenly there are no more translations of his work in Cuba or Serbia or China. No record of any change of heart in the old bugger. Must be concealing something. Better do a break-in of his office, see what he's hiding. Punch up the Security Council listing of the contents of hostile nations' literary journals, see what he's been publishing that he won't tell us about.'"

"I don't believe it," said Lancaster.

"Feel free," said Pawley. "It's a free world, after all."

"Absolutely," said Lancaster.

"How do you think the free world won and the Soviet Union lost? By being freer? Or by having a more efficient state security system?"

"Stop it," said Lancaster.

"Why do you think they try and get us to fill in these forms all the time? Why is it all centralized now? Now the universities have no independent research funds. Now it's all controlled from the capital. Why? For efficiency? Clearly not. It's just another additional bureaucracy. Why then? Just for bureaucracy's sake?"

"Yes," said Lancaster.

"That's what they want you to think. Everyone takes the boring old intellectual liberal line and laughs at bureaucrats. Everyone thinks it's a joke – forms, forms, forms, lists, lists, lists. But that's just to wear you down. Stop you being alert. Because it's all being recorded and correlated. Now they want a profile not just of every university but of every university department. And not just of every department but of every academic employed. Now why would the Ministry want that? A file on every individual academic. This is like the centralization that destroyed eastern Europe. Now we've taken it on over here."

"I thought you claimed the West destroyed Eastern Europe," said Lancaster.

"But all those centralized state controls we all inveighed against . . ."

"I never heard you inveigh against them."

"Well, anyway," said Pawley, "now we have them here."

IT'S THE SAME with all those biographical dictionaries," Pawley went on, the afternoon sun adding to the gentle glow, colouring the clouds of smoke with a soft golden tinge.

"What biographical dictionaries?"

"All those Who's Who of Poets and Novelists you're always filling in forms for. Dictionaries of Forgotten Fictioneers."

"Which ones?"

"Any of them. They're all dodgy."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know," said Pawley, "but it sticks out like dogs balls that they must be dodgy. Who wants them? What use are they?"

"Well," Lancaster bridled, "someone might want to look up . . ."

"Who would want to look you up, Henry, except the secret services? Some female fan? Some Japanese geisha? You've impaled yourself on your vanity again. Wow, look, here am I invited to be in

a Who's Who of International Novelists, fame, glory, list your hobbies – fellow-travelling – grandmother's maiden name, clubs – Writers for Freedom, Novelists against Capital – editorial positions – advisory board, *Liberation Literature* – visiting lectureships – Cuba, North Korea . . . They scoop it all up, books, journals contributed to, date of birth, education, school, university. Then they can correlate you with all their data banks. Who was at university at the same time, what defector, which double-agent, what unsound chaps and chapesses you were up with, fascinating. And then they do your astrological chart from the dates you give them – easy enough, all computerized – and they can analyze all your personality traits, all your susceptibilities, how to ensnare you – greed, competitiveness, vanity, insecurity."

"I'm not sure about insecurity," Lancaster said.

The room shimmered gently.

No, he couldn't deny it. His novelist's imagination could believe it all too easily.

"Even that bit where it says list other writers you'd recommend for inclusion. Well, it's a long shot, most writers are too competitive and individualist to give a mention of any others. But your temporarily closest friends, you might recommend them. And there you are. They've got your associates on record. They know everything about you. And what they don't know, they know where to look to find out."

DR BEE WAS waiting for them at afternoon tea.

"Happy form filling?"

Lancaster just grunted. He steered uncertainly over to the table, tea cup shaking in its saucer, stoned, shattered.

"Cull out all the incriminating ones?"

Lancaster gave another grunt.

"What about the Muslim fundamentalists?"

"What about them?"

"I thought you had an Iranian translator. Isn't that a bit tricky too?"

"How did you know about that?"

"The administrative officer showed me the lovely Iranian stamps you gave her for her charity collection."

Lancaster grunted again.

"She said she's asked you to give her whole envelopes since they're more valuable like that, but you didn't seem to want to. Worried about your name being bandied around with exotic stamps beside it?"

Lancaster sipped at his tea.

"You're spilling it," said Dr Bee. "Do you want me to get you a straw?"

"Fuck off," said Lancaster.

"Ah, the novelist speaks. How would they translate that into Urdu?"

"They're not."

"Really? So what happened to your translations?"

"They never came out."

"You're very laconic."

"The guy's house burned down."

It was Dr Bee's turn to spill his tea. He tried to suppress his laugh. It seemed like bad form to laugh at personal tragedy.

"You think you jinxed him?"

"I don't even want to consider the possibilities."

"You think the fundamentalists discovered he was receiving parcels of Western decadence? Was it your novels or your parlour pink lit. crit.?"

"I refuse to think about it."

"Maybe the SAS sent in an arson squad to stop the spread of Henry Lancaster," Pawley suggested.

Lancaster sat silent, spreading nothing.

"Maybe," said Dr Bee, "you should consider burning some of your books yourself. I mean, not listing them on the data base is one thing. But what if someone casts an eye along your shelves? Some innocent seeming student who's been recruited? That American graduate student you used to supervise? Much better to do it yourself than be burned in person. Fulke Greville did it. Burned his manuscripts. Mind you it still didn't save him from being murdered while he was having a shit. But then you don't have a manservant you're having an affair with. Do you?"

"I have to go," said Lancaster. He got up.

Dr Bee reached into his pocket.

"Box of matches, if you want them," he offered.

Graham Sewell

# Thoroughly Modern Macca

## An appreciation of a public intellectual for our time

### Editor's preface

*IN A TRENCHANTLY self-deprecating column entitled 'Confessions of a public idiot', McKenzie Wark announced just as we were going to press his intention to quit his* Australian *column to make space for "someone else", though from his own experience he now advises against "experiments in general communication". Readers will make up their own minds about Wark's record as a public intellectual, and perhaps Sewell's piece will now contribute to this evaluation.*

PITY POOR MCKENZIE WARK. There he is at the top of Australia's cultural greasy pole and you have to wonder whether there are enough hours in the day for such a consummate public intellectual. Think of it. Among his many commitments he has to compile a regular column for *The Australian*'s Higher Education Supplement [*AHES*] and satisfy the rapacious appetite for knowledge displayed by his other main customers, the students of Macquarie University's Department of Media and Communications. No doubt he is also pounding the international conference circuit on a regular basis, bringing the benefit of his wisdom to the rest of the world, showing them that Australia really is at the leading edge when it comes to *cyberspace* and the *hyperreal*. With all this going on stuffy traditionalists might ask, 'What about his academic work?' But there he is, with four expansive monographs to his name in as many years, along with a host of other editorial responsibilities.

Such are the trials and tribulations of today's Renaissance Man. For one of Australia's leading experts on the impact of the media on contemporary life it decidedly looks like a case of Saturn devouring his own children, for where would Wark be without the very thing that supports him yet absorbs so much of his energies? So, with all these demands it is hardly a surprise that, from time to time, his comments on some of the most pressing issues facing us today go off half-cocked. One thing about Wark, however, surely cannot be disputed: in all his intellectual endeavours he must be the very embodiment of Postmodern Man. Indeed, he is at great pains to demonstrate his supple and nuanced grasp of all the most up-to-the-minute ideas, from the decline of Australia's suburban dream to the emergence of the Third Way as a political force. But does an almost slavish celebration of novelty obscure Wark's thoroughly Modern core? In other words, could striving so hard to be fashionable paradoxically reveal a good old-fashioned elitist? An elitist, moreover, that uses his privileged position to peddle a surprisingly outmoded ideology. In order to explore the enigma that is McKenzie Wark I propose that we Deconstruct Macca.

Deconstruction? Mmmn, we've got to be careful here. Isn't that one of those trendy postmodernist terms that really means nothing? Aren't I also guilty of falling into the trap of intellectual vanity by trying to demonstrate my knowledge of the latest academic craze? Well . . . maybe . . . if I am merely using it as a hackneyed synonym for any old analysis, but I believe we should take Deconstruction seriously as, so it would seem, does Macca [*AHES*, 18 August 1999]. Deconstruction differs from more traditional forms of analysis in its avoidance of the pretence that, by subjecting texts to ever more sophisticated techniques of interpretation, we are getting closer to revealing the singular 'truth' that resides in the words. On the contrary, as the literary theorist Jonathan Culler indicates, one of the purposes of Deconstruction is to demonstrate the all too common situation where a text ends up undermining the very arguments it depends upon. It is in this particular spirit of Deconstruction that I wish to show that

Wark often misses the point of so many things he comments on. But, in this very same spirit, I am not claiming privileged access to the mind of Macca here. Still, you don't have to take my word for it, or the word of any other self-appointed 'expert' for that matter, Wark included. Judge for yourselves.

When it comes to Deconstructing Macca it's difficult to know where to start, he weaves such a rich tapestry of half-baked ideas, to mix my metaphors. One of the most egregious examples of him harping on in an ill-informed manner is his re current attempt to 'prove' the irrel evance of "the Left". Take his articl entitled 'Third Way to Critical Masses [*AHES*, 13 January 1999] where War tries to show us why Tony Blair ha rejected the advice of Labour's tradi tional brains trust, the "left-liberal in tellectuals" as Macca describes them According to Wark, the reason they have been banished to internal exil in their provincial universities is be cause they are always carping on i such a negative way, complainin about how bad things are when all people want to hear (not least Tony himself) is the good news. If only they would disavow their outmoded ideas and embrace the Third Way. "Give up with the criticism already," says Macca, "didn't you know it was inherently conservative anyway?"

If ever we were in need of critique (from anywhere . . . *please*) it is now.

For the sake of a good argument we might momentarily be able to forgive Wark's inability to distinguish between "criticism" and the notion of *critique* inherent in social theory. Also for the sake of a good argument we might even momentarily forgive him his irksome habit of wilfully misrepresenting other peoples' ideas; in this case his attempt to pass off Richard Rorty's philosophical pragmatism as good old-fashioned Richo-style political pragmatism solely on the basis that they sound similar [*AHES*, 13 January 1999]. (To be fair, Wark may well be aware of the difference and is using the reference to Rorty in a knowingly tendentious manner.) But what if the argument in question is as tired as it is simple-minded? Then no such latitude can be extended. Let us take the Third Way itself. Wark seems to be unaware of the origin of the idea among the very left-liberal intellectuals that he now condemns. Then again, neither does Anthony Giddens, director of the London School of Economics and principal architect of Blair's version of the Third Way. If Karl Mannheim, who coined the term in 1943 as a form of "militant democracy", could hear the way in which his idea has been traduced by the likes of Clinton, Blair, and Wark he would be turning in his grave. Nevertheless, we still have to take this debased version of the Third Way seriously, not least because political and intellectual elites are talking about it, following it through to its depressingly familiar conclusions. In this way it is legitimate to ask: Why are 'Tony's Cronies' any different to Margaret Thatcher's 'Seven Wise Men', Harold Wilson's 'Kitchen Cabinet' or the cabal of think-tank troglodytes and talk-back radio pundits advising John Howard? Of course, there is no difference at all. They are all examples of leaders drawing around them sycophants and like-minded ideologues. But where have we heard echoes of such 'To the victor the spoils' triumphalism and hubris that accompany the Third Way before? Well, every time the dominant ideology gets yet another make-over, in the process claiming that we have finally reached the natural culmination of human endeavour and, in the process, thrown off the shackles of unreason. Oh joy. Let the heralds proclaim. Truth is vouchsafed and the obvious error of all alternatives is laid bare. American social commentators like Seymour Lipset and Daniel Bell came up with this kind of tosh in the 1950s and 1960s when they proclaimed the "End of Ideology", just long enough ago for Francis Fukuyama to hope we had forgotten the idiocy of such declarations when he announced the "End of History". But has Blair given left-liberal intellectuals the bum's rush simply because the Third Way is as good as it gets? Let's face it, in the hands of Tony's Cronies, the Third Way is indistinguishable in almost every respect from Margaret Thatcher's "There is No Alternative", Keating's "Recession We Had to Have", or even Howard's much vaunted 'mandate' to govern on behalf of "the great mainstream of Australian society rather than the narrower agenda of elites and special interests". Pass the sick bag! If ever we were in need of critique (from anywhere . . . *please*) it is now.

Of course, the question that, time and again, Wark allows to go begging is what he exactly means by the Left anyway. In his hands it is little more than a

lumpen cartoon-like figure made up of stereotype heaped upon stereotype. He really does seem to have swallowed hook, line, and sinker the spiel about the Left that the more boorish and bellicose commentators like Paddy McGuinness have been peddling for years. Like McGuinness, Wark's Left is populated by a cast of grotesques; of Dave Sparts who sleep with copies of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* tucked under their pillows. But Wark can barely even lay a glove on this wobbly old straw target. Just take one of his more preposterous returns to this *idée fixe* [*AHES*, 26 April 2000]. I don't know about the slings and arrows of literary fortune but his choice of people like Bob Ellis and David Williamson as representatives of the Left seems, well, just *so* lazy. Poor old Bob and Dave. They are like a pair of old slippers, not much good to anyone now but we still can't bear to throw them out. Like a schoolyard bully Wark seeks out the weak and infirm and, in the process, studiously ignores people like Christopher Hitchens or, closer to home, Andrew Milner, Paul James, Geoff Sharp, Verity Burgmann, Stuart Macintyre, Michael Wilding or Carole Ferrier. In fact he ignores anyone who might put up a bit of a fight. It's a set up. Bob and Dave are patsies. But who does Wark offer up as his alternative commentator on economic and social issues? Mark Westfield! Waxing lyrical over Westfield's *The Gatekeepers*, he holds up this book as evidence of the complexities of today's economic world; complexities, moreover, that 'the Left' (those words again) don't understand. Yet Wark's only attempt at drawing out these complexities is to note that the book contains a "deal-by-deal account" of how corporations "seek to minimize uncertainty – and competition". As one of James Ellroy's characters might say, "No shit, Sherlock." And all this in a breathless style that leaves you wondering whether Wark has ever heard of Andrew Carnegie or Leyland Stanford (or, for that matter, the economic historian Alfred Chandler who has been writing about this kind of thing for over forty years). If this is the best that Wark's alternative analysis of contemporary capitalism can offer then woe betide us.

Wark's other saviour of Australian intellectual life is that "forty-something going on sixteen" Melburnian, Mark Davis [*AHES*, 1 September 1999]. I don't know if Davis has started to wear his underpants on the outside since Wark hailed him as a 'Punk' superhero but I'm sure that, in posing for his picture in *The Australian* with boxing gloves on, Davis wants us to know that he's taking on all-comers. Mark Davis a Punk? Mark Davis is about as Punk as Barry Manilow. In fact, if posturing in an unconvincingly menacing manner whilst wearing boxing gloves is any indication then Aussie Joe Bugner is more Punk than Mark Davis. Like so many of their generation, Wark and Davis demonstrate a nostalgic hankering for a mythological 'Punk moment' when a complacent world was irrevocably turned upside down. Many readers between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five, however, can probably remember the alarming rapidity with which Punk was co-opted by the very 'Establishment' it purported to oppose. As Nihilism and rage gave way to the need to look 'right' Punk quickly became a mere fashion statement characterized by a slavish uniformity of style and outlook. By this stage calling yourself a punk was an admission that you never really got the point of it all; that you had long since missed the Sex Pistols' bus to 'Nowhere'. Of course, the avant garde and the experimental had already moved on or, worst of all for people like Wark, ignored Punk altogether. They used to say that if you remembered the sixties then you weren't there. Well, if you can't *forget* Punk then you weren't there.

This brings us to the paradox of Punk: as a musically based movement whose bottom line was supposed to be 'authenticity', it was no less contrived than the progressive rockers it railed against. You don't believe me? According to Tom Cox's review of Julian Temple's film about the Sex Pistols [*The Guardian*, 12 May 2000], when the *Filth and the Fury* was recently shown to a group of school children they thought it was a remake of Rob Reiner's spoof 'rockumentary' *Spinal Tap*. There you go. As authentic as Reiner's comically absurd creations, Nigel Tufnell and Ian Saint Hubbins. Worse still, Punk was the final death throe of a white Anglo-Saxon culture that had fought so hard to exclude Britain's Black and Asian population. That's why Jon Savage called his book on the history of Punk *England's Dreaming*: as a vehicle for dissent Punk was still-born; already a nostalgic movement whose values were no more relevant to late twentieth-century Britain than morris dancers or maypoles. And who do we remember from that period anyway? It isn't underground groups like Vic Goddard and the Subway Sect. It's the Sex Pistols: a band put together by that master media manipulator, Malcolm Maclaren; a band who, along with the dinosaur progrock instrumentalist

Mike Oldfield, made Richard Branson the multi-millionaire he is today. 'But weren't things different in Australia?' I hear you say. Surely here Punk was not all 'bread and circuses'; not the manipulative Gran Guignol staged by Big Business and the tabloid press that it was in Britain. To be honest, I never lived through the birth, life, and death of Australian Punk but Macca did, as he rather wearingly tells us in his book *celebrities, culture and cyberspace*. (Note the use of lower case. Perhaps an attempt to convince us that he is still a rebel; that he still has a tattered 'Anarchy' T-shirt in his wardrobe.) From his account Punk in Australia must have been a pretty dreary affair especially if, according to Macca, the high-point was listening to The Boys Next Door singing 'Shivers'. Wark appears oblivious to guitarist Roland S. Howard's own admission that this dirge ("... a classic punk torch song", as it is curiously described in the book) was written as a calculated attempt to get a hit single. Still, anyone who ever attended a Birthday Party concert would realize that such cynicism came back to bite this latter incarnation of The Boys Next Door. You only had to see the expressions of pained resignation on the band members' faces as the crowd bayed for them to play the song to understand their realization that they had created a monster. For The Birthday Party 'Shivers' became a Golem that they could no longer control; the property of the recalcitrant proletarian masses who were incapable of recognizing the band's superior status as 'artists'. So much for Wark's preposterous claim that The Birthday Party were torch carriers of Nietzsche's Dionysian spirit. *Pulleeeez*, Macca!

The real trouble with Wark's ill-founded celebration of Punk, however, isn't so much his heaping of nostalgia upon nostalgia, for we can excuse anybody a bit of nostalgia in their declining years. Nor is it his grandiloquent philosophizing about a band that only had one good song to show for all their efforts (the Hammer Horror high camp of 'Release the Bats' with a drumbeat courtesy of The Glitter Band). No, it's his gullible acceptance of one particularly pernicious myth: the transformational 'power' of Punk's DIY ethic. According to Wark it is this seemingly magical power that Davis invokes when he makes his cultural guerrilla raid from within on the 'Coterie Liberals'. Macca's belief that anybody could disrupt the status quo now if they only tried could explain his rampant but naïve individualism. In this way, when Wark bemoans that the 'conservatives' have all the best commentators [*AHES*, 26 April 2000] or calls the cyberwarriors to arms [*AHES*, 1 September 1999] he is inhabiting the self-help section of the bookshop where all you need to do to succeed at something is to want it enough and then work really *hard* for it. Unsuccessful? Not exerting enough influence? Feeling like an irrelevance? Well, you're just not trying *hard enough*. Don't let poverty, racism, vested interests, structural inhibitors, a lack of educational opportunity, or any other barrier for that matter get in your way. Now even talent seems an optional extra in the cultural relevance stakes (except, of course, a talent for self-promotion). Move aside the Spice Girls and Bardot, Macca's coming through. Of course, in the world according to Wark there is little or no consideration of the ownership and distribution of media resources or of who is controlling the information and setting the agendas. Worse still, he suggests that the Left is incapable of thinking of a world "where people's more dubious motives can be made to yield a positive outcome" [*AHES*, 26 April 2000]. If anyone is in doubt about the speciousness of such a comment then let me remind them that, according to the International Telecommunications Union, 70 per cent of the world's population doesn't live within a day's walk of a telephone, let alone a Mac G3 or a Palm Pilot. How many of these people are able to use the dubious motives of, say, the media barons to yield a positive outcome? Come to think of it, how many are able, in its most literal sense, to use the media at all? I suppose they could always traipse through a war zone somewhere trying to find a callbox to ring McKenzie and ask his advice. If he's too busy to answer and they leave a message, will he ring back?

Unsuccessful? Not exerting enough influence? Feeling like an irrelevance? Well, you're just not trying *hard enough*.

So, when it comes to offering a vision of social change, Wark and Davis may be hopeless Punk nostalgics but do their analyses have any other virtues? Well, to give Davis his due he does seem to demonstrate a keen sense of irony. How could you not, writing a book decrying the self-serving cultural elite whilst collecting royalty cheques as the

members of that very same elite buy it by the truckload? As a sort of inside 'outsider', in *Gangland* Davis reminds us yet again of the incestuous nature of the 'you scratch my back . . .' demimonde that is Melbourne's literary establishment (as if this was news). In this way he *is* being reflexive: a writer who understands the dangers of biting the hand that feeds him; a commentator who doesn't set himself outside the very processes that he comments on. Unfortunately for us it's obvious that Macca is an irony-free zone who wouldn't appear to know what reflexivity was even if it bit him on the arse. If it isn't a breezy don't-you-just-wish-you-were-here-too travelogue ["A journey through the snow to visit Egypt . . . at the Metropolitan Museum in Manhattan" – *AHES,* 19 January 2000] then it's empty posturing [". . . Paddy and Robert on 'Lateline' . . . I'd rather turn the sound down and read the *Koori Mail*" – *AHES,* 1 September 2000] or an ill-judged attempt to show that he's 'down with the kids' [". . . as James Brown used to say, *Watch Me Work*" – *AHES,* 29 March 2000]. When he's performing this peacock strut Wark reminds me of somebody's Dad trying to do the twist (or, more appropriately perhaps, the Macca-rena) at a family wedding: someone who doesn't realize the absurdity of what he is doing and who ends up an embarrassment to everyone concerned.

So why does Wark's craven celebration of the Third Way, his petty nostalgia for Punk authenticity, and his singular lack of irony make him so thoroughly Modern?

By now you may be wondering what it is about McKenzie Wark that *really* bothers me so. Is it personal? Has he crossed me? Has he ignored me? No, none of these for we inhabit completely different universes. My objection to Macca is untainted by personal animosity (although I doubt that we could ever be friends now). My objection to Macca is . . . well, let's face it . . . because . . . all in all . . . how can I say it? Because he's the sort of bloke who gives Postmodernism a bad name. There, that's it. It's because he's the sort of bloke who takes Paul Feyerabend's famous observation "Anything Goes" out of context and quite literally or who, in *celebrities, culture and cyberspace*, wilfully takes Gilles Deleuze's critique of empiricism and tries to turn it into a defence of his own brand of nineteenth-century positivism. Perhaps Macca really believes knowledge is value-free and comes about through an accretion of impartial observations. More likely though he is being an opportunist who sniffs a chance to foist his brand of sloppy thinking on whoever is too busy or (more likely) too bored by his pomposity to challenge him. So why does Wark's craven celebration of the Third Way, his petty nostalgia for Punk authenticity, and his singular lack of irony make him so thoroughly Modern? Well, first of all Wark still seems to inhabit a world unchanged by the poststructuralist revolution in thinking he purports to comment on. He acts as if Michel Foucault hadn't disabused us of those great Modernist hoaxes: the idea of Progress; the ontological purity of Reason; and, our ability to unmask ideology in order to reveal transcendental Truth. This ignorance is evident in Wark's credulous attitude towards the Third Way as somehow a 'better' means of securing liberty than that which went before it, seemingly oblivious to the old tyrannies it shores up and the new tyrannies it brings with it. Of course, ideology, that most suasive of discourses, has not disappeared to be replaced by Truth. On the contrary, it has infiltrated the finest capillaries of contemporary life, beguiling us with its stealthy charms. Ideology is no longer about power blocs slugging it out either side of Checkpoint Charlie in a Cold War stalemate. It is about the smug complacency and chilling fatalism of the Third Way's advocates (you can imagine the 'hear, hears' Third Wayers would have muttered over the "Recession We Had to Have"). It is what the sociologist William Bogard calls the "simulation of surveillance" where all our actions (both unlawful and lawful) are laid bare and that keystone of personal dignity – privacy – is a long-distant memory. It is about what the philosopher Steve Best calls the "stupefying effects of globalized media". On this last point, you sometimes get the feeling that Wark just might be onto something here (for example, his discussion of the effects of the information economy on New York's suburbs [*AHES,* 16 February 2000]) but even then he blows it. So what if the Internet is consolidating knowledge production in traditional centres like New York? Tell us something we don't know Macca. What about the

point that the Internet might actually end up consolidating economic power in fewer and fewer hands? You don't believe me? My own employer, also a university, has gone into partnership with News Corporation to sell 'knowledge' over the Internet. Won't we all be confused when Australia has two Murdoch universities?

So, there you are. That's my main objection to Macca. What bothers me most is that, time and again, Wark is being a good old-fashioned bourgeois liberal pluralist masquerading as a Postmodernist, something quickly exposed by his self-serving interpretation of "Anything Goes". OK people, anything goes, so long as you end up agreeing with *us* (i.e. me and my mates). Let us stitch up a compromise for you of what *we* (i.e. me and my mates) see as the best of Left and Right. Such ill-concealed instrumentalism and conceit is the hallmark of the Modern elitist. And what about Wark's caricature of Left and Right anyway? He sees them as homogenous, organic classes delivered into this world fully made up, forever unchanged. It is as if Social Constructivists like Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann had never existed, although you don't have to be a Social Constructivist to spot such blatant reification. But Wark isn't even a Liberal Ironist in the way that Richard Rorty wants us to be for Macca is not reflexive enough even to see the irony of his status as an arbiter of what is "good in the way of belief", a status, moreover, that derives entirely from his affiliation with those two bastions of liberal pluralism, the 'press' and the university system. If Wark cannot see that he is being elitist when he chooses what is 'good' and 'bad' for us then on what grounds has he based his decision, at the time of writing, to stop recommending *overland* to his undergraduate students? Because the writing is no longer relevant? Because it's no longer interesting? Or, perhaps, just because it's too 'critical' and, didn't you know, criticism is inherently conservative. Then again, maybe he just forgot.

If I were feeling more generous I would put down many of Wark's failings to that occupational hazard of all self-appointed authorities on important matters: the need to go from 'nought to expert' in twelve seconds. Wark, however, never shows such a spirit of generosity, except to his cronies of course, so I have no compunction in being polemical. Perhaps I have misjudged him. Perhaps Wark spends his weekends running English classes for refugees or helping out in safe injecting rooms. You don't have to be Modernist, Postmodernist, Left or Right to do those things. You don't have to take a *position*. Then again, I may have got him altogether wrong on another front. For all I know he really is the master ironist, a performance artist of rare skill and sustained intensity. Someone who is constructing his entire life as an intricate work of art; a knowing self-parody that holds up the mirror to all that is risible about academic life and media punditry. Maybe . . . but all I see is an egoist with a shameless urge for self-promotion whose commentary always puts me in mind of another James Brown song, 'Talkin' Loud and Sayin' Nothing'. Of course, this McKenzie Wark may merely be a cypher, just another text but, as Macca has probably told us somewhere, "There is nothing outside the text." If we can learn anything from Wark it is that reading Derrida no more makes you a Postmodernist than reading *Mein Kampf* makes you a Nazi.

So, what is to be done about Macca? Paraphrasing the literary critic Stanley Fish, when it comes to public intellectuals, each generation doesn't necessarily get what it deserves but it does get what it asks for. I agree with him, up to a point, for we certainly don't deserve McKenzie Wark's impostures. Which leads us to the most perplexing question of all: who's *really* asking for Macca? There is a poignant moment (yes, Jim Carrey has a stab at poignancy) in Milos Foreman's biopic *The Man on the Moon*. Andy Kaufman, under pressure from the producers of *Saturday Night Live* who no longer consider him a comedic asset, challenges the audience to vote him off the show through a phone-in poll. We see Kaufman crumple on air as this is exactly what the audience does. I challenge McKenzie Wark to stick to his convictions and submit himself to the will of his Virtual Republic. Let 'the People' decide Macca's destiny. Let's set up a website where we can vote on whether he be allowed to continue telling us what he reckons. I hope he will abide by the 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down' of this electronic Colosseum crowd. Of course, he would have no choice in the matter. As he has already told us (echoing Dick Morris, an architect of Clinton's version of the Third Way), don't you realize, the instant opinion polling of cyberspace is the truest form of democracy.

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Adi Wimmer

# The Dramaturgy of the Political Right

## Austria's Jörg Haider in comparison with Pauline Hanson

THE EUROPEAN UNION started the year 2000 inauspiciously. Its common currency 'Euro'was relentlessly slipping against the US dollar. The optimism of expanding the Union eastwards, admitting as full members such key countries as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary (along with half a dozen smaller countries) by 2003 had dissipated. But nothing rocked the Union more than the admittance of a right-wing populist party into a new coalition government of one of the member states on 2 February. That state is Austria, the party is the so-called 'freedom party' FPÖ, which had pulled 27 per cent of the vote in the October 1999 federal elections, and its leader is a smart yuppie named Jörg Haider.

Responding swiftly, the fourteen EU prime ministers imposed sanctions against the Austrian government. As long as the populist freedom party was a partner in the Austrian government, there would be no bilateral contacts between EU-country governments and members of the Austrian government. Austrian ambassadors would not be invited to any official functions. No Austrian candidates for top-level positions in Brussels' administration of the European Union would be appointed. However, although these sanctions were meant to affect only the Austrian government, many more snubs occurred on the local and regional level. An Austrian cycle team had its invitation to compete in Belgium withdrawn. The organization of Brussels taxi drivers declared that they would not transport any Austrian visitors. A delegation of sixteen-year-old Austrian students to an open-house event at the European parliament of Strasbourg was vilified by French students as 'Nazis' and prevented from speaking. The city of Grenoble cancelled its twinning agreement with Innsbruck. Several scientific organizations cancelled plans for conferences at Austrian universities; where cancellation attempts were unsuccessful, boycott calls were distributed on the internet. The Portuguese prime minister cancelled his ticket for the Opera Ball. In several countries, Austrian ambassadors were advised that invitations that had already been sent out for dinners and parties were void. The Belgian foreign minister called for a boycott of Austrian tourism. Throughout the month of February, Haider was the single biggest media presence all across Europe and in the US, dominating TV news right across two continents. And all over the globe Austria was portrayed as a country where "Nazi troglodytes had suddenly reemerged from secret Alpine hiding places to . . . threaten the peace of humanity".[1]

There were good reasons for the way the EU responded. Similar to Pauline Hanson ("the most famous Australian politician in the world"[2]), Jörg Haider is now the most successful right-winger in all of Europe and possibly the best-known European politician world-wide. He rose to fame through a series of inflammatory statements that the media obligingly seized upon, and although Austria and Australia are two vastly different countries, the similarity with Hanson's 'policies' is striking. Haider demands a total stop to immigration. He has called critical artists "parasites". He alleges that immigrants are getting more money through government handouts than "honest, hard-working Austrians" are earning. (The top FPÖ candidate for the federal elections of 1999, Thomas Prinzhorn alleged that Balkan immigrants were receiving free hormone treatment to increase their birth rate, a secret plan by the Labor Party to "wash out" the Germanic stock of the nation.) More than once Haider has alleged that asylum seekers and immigrants ("not necessarily the best from their countries") are "stealing" the jobs of "ordinary Austrians". He opposes multiculturalism, declaring that not a single instance of a successful multicultural society exists "anywhere in the world".

Like Hanson he also claims that there is a conspiracy by the powerful against him, the 'ordinary' Austrian who speaks the ordinary person's language. In 1991 he claimed that activists of his party were being treated "like once the Jews", and during the Carinthian state elections of 1999 there was a campaign poster that showed him with the slogan "This man blocks the path of the powerful". Also like Hanson, he claims that the nation's business interests have been flogged off to foreign capitalists, by traitorous and corrupt elements primarily in the Labor party who he called "thieves, liars and frauds".[3] Pauline Hanson, it will be remembered, criticized John Howard as a "career politician" who was "unable to decide if he was a 'citizen of Australia' or a 'citizen of the world'".[4] Haider, who bitterly opposed Austria's joining of the European Union in 1994, has alleged that Austria's political establishment is more directed towards Brussels than its own citizens. The European Union is much the same "Big Brother" bogeyman for Haider as is the UNO for Hanson. After the sanctions of March 2000 he gleefully picked fights with President Jacques Chirac, whom he called a "pocket-sized Napoleon", and the whole Belgian cabinet, alleging that it had abetted the serial rapist and child murderer Marc Dutroux.

The most notorious statements are those relating to National Socialism. Haider's father was a member of the SA and had to flee Austria for Germany in 1935 on a charge of murdering a policeman. As a young man, Haider had advocated the 'Anschluss' of Austria to Germany, and throughout his career has defended aspects of Nazism. As half of Europe was once occupied by German forces, it is no surprise that French, Dutch, Belgian, British or Danish politicians reacted with outrage to the admittance of Haider's ilk into a federal government. Only now did they take full note of Haider's insensitivity and invective. In a 1989 interview Haider was asked which historic personages he detested the most, and his answer was "Churchill and Stalin".[5] In another interview of 1995, he alleged that "historically", it was still "an open question" who had started the Second World War.[6] He claimed that the "resistance" of the Wehrmacht to Stalin's armies had made the rebirth of democracy in Germany and Austria possible.[7] About the collapse of Hitler's Germany in 1945 he said that not many Austrians had reason to be glad let alone proud at this historic event.[8] In an interview with the newspaper *Kurier* (9 February 1995) he referred to the Nazi death-camps as "correctional camps". About the holocaust he made similarly offensive remarks, such as putting it on a par with the expulsion of the *Sudentendeutsche* in 1945. In a parallel to PM John Howard, Haider said he saw no reason why the Jews of Austria were owed an apology: "Only people without character constantly apologize" (interview, *profil*, 18 February 1985). At a rally of war veterans in 1989 (including SS and *Waffen*-SS) he exclaimed that no German veteran who had fought in the war, regardless of which organization he once belonged to, should be excluded from such a 'dignified' occasion.[9] The best-known instance of Haider breaking a political taboo occurred in 1997, when he went – uninvited, out of a deep-seated urge to associate with former Nazis – to a meeting of former SS and *Waffen*-SS. There, in an impromptu address, he held them up as shining examples for today's youth and praised their steadfastness of character. (It should be remembered that it was the sole responsibility of the SS to operate the death camps.)

International commentators were as dumbfounded by Haider's electoral victory as they had been by the Pauline Hanson phenomenon. Until the Waldheim scandal, Austria's image had been that of a somewhat backward, but benign and culturally homogenous alpine nation which knew few, if any, social tensions. Is the economy doing badly? Well, there is a big national debt, but the economy itself is strong (Austria has the highest proportion of Mercedes owners in the world). Is unemployment high? At 4.3 per cent, it is substantially lower than the EU average of 10.5 per cent. Has the government recently cut back on benefits and services? Again no; unless one sees the reduction of *paid* maternity leave from twenty-four months to eighteen months as a severe cutback. Have taxes been raised? Actually, the government *lowered* income tax across the board in 1999. University education is still free and access to it unlimited, the health service one of the cheapest and best in the world, the average retirement age is 57 and 55.8 years for men and women respectively, and the environment the envy of many other nations.

There is a mixture of reasons for the rise of Haider, many showing striking parallels with Hanson's rise. Haider's power-base is in Carinthia, where his share of the vote in the gubernatorial elections of April 1999 was 42 per cent. Carinthia, alone of the nine Austrian states, has an ethnic minority that occasionally demands more rights – as a result, Carinthians tend to be fiercely nationalistic. During the Nazi years, Carinthia had the highest proportion of card-carry-

ing NSDAP members *anywhere in Germany.* Many acts of brutal repression against the Jews and the Slovene minority fell into a collective memory hole after 1945; when the new generation demanded a reckoning with the past in the late 1980s and 1990s, there was a backlash. Also like Queensland, Carinthia was never widely industrialized and never developed an urban culture; its capital Klagenfurt has only ninety-thousand inhabitants. As a result, the rural population has more political clout than is good for the region. Carinthians see themselves marginalized and are resentful of the political elite of the capital Vienna; most of the FPÖ politicians come from the provinces. Like Hanson, who had "promised 'independence' for Queensland without being too specific about what it meant",[10] Haider had also speculated about a "free state" of Carinthia. And also like Hanson, Haider has made numerous allegations of "corruption" within the centre's political elite and called for its elimination. In one of his lowest moments (interview, *profil,* 25 April 1994) he likened "red" (social democrat) and "black" (conservative) politicians to "red and black crab lice, which must be fought with cyanide".[11] In the death camps, cyanide gas was used in the mass murder of Jews, who were led to their deaths on the pretext that they would be 'de-loused'.

Even though Austria is a fairly stable and prosperous country, Haider was able to exploit a number of deep-seated fears and desires emanating from an alienated, post-modern, consumerist society. Much more skilfully than the amateurish Hanson – Kingston's study of her campaign provides much evidence of blatant incompetence – Haider has assumed at least four personae that he stages with great dramatic competence and flourish, as befits each occasion. Firstly, there is 'Rambo'. Haider frequently presents himself as a physically fit man who regularly runs the New York marathon, goes rock-climbing and scales the highest peaks of the Alps. During his years as governor of Carinthia (1989–91) he ventured a much-publicized bungee-jump off a hundred-metre-high bridge; this he called a "manly test" and "an exercise in self-discipline". At least two high-ranking politicians of his party acquired their positions merely on the strength of having played tennis with him. Klaus Ottomeyer has argued that Haider's cult of the body is part of a Reaganite 'roll-back' of the socially minded 1960s. Now it is much more fashionable to preach the 'survival of the fittest', and not just in the economic sphere.[12] Haider's indeed admirable fitness is emulated by many men, and acts as an eroticizing agent amongst female voters to a much greater extent than in 'pre-Rambo' years. The dark side of his fitness manifests itself in sneering remarks about the physical appearance of his opponents. Haider called the former Polish president Lech Walesa "more wide than tall", called former President Waldheim (who had refused to back him up after yet another pro-Nazi gaffe made in 1991) "spineless and weak in the loins", joked about Bill Clinton's fear of competing against him in a marathon, and only recently (8 March 2000) said about the social democrat mayor of Vienna that his mental development had not kept pace with the growth of his girth. Even women politicians are not safe from his jibes: when there was a 'groping' scandal in the Austrian parliament, he alleged that the Minister for Women's Affairs, Johanna Dohnal was pressing the matter mainly because she was too ugly to earn such male 'attentions'.

The second mask is that of the revenge hero. Haider has repeatedly invoked the term 'Robin Hood' for his politics, and in the carnival season of this year participated in a parade where his costume was Robin Hood's green jacket and cap, plus bow and arrows. It is part of this persona construct that Haider rarely wears the customary suit and tie, preferring open-neck shirts and leather jackets instead. The iconography is that of the Sherwood forest rebel ready to take on modern, corrupt 'sheriffs' in their suits. On occasion, Haider uses metaphors related to the hunt. In 1990 he announced an "open hunting season" of "red and black game", and that he would "drive the old parties before [him]". There is a clear connection to Hanson in this mask. Ron Brunton was not the only (anti-Hanson) commentator to note that Hanson was seen from the start as someone with the necessary courage to say the emperor was not fully dressed. Such iconoclastic courage has much appeal for an electorate that feels cheated by the new economic policies devised by an alliance of big business and self-serving politicos. In Hanson's words this alliance had "all but destroyed the country",[13] and in Haider's populist terms were a kind of Mafia. (In the Vienna city elections of 1992 the FPÖ coined the slogan "Vienna must not become Chicago!" which drew a mild protest from the mayor of the windy city.)

Hanson tried a similar tactic but it failed: her claim to be "like a mother"[14] to Australians lacked resonance in an electorate that was anti-feminist and that wanted to get rid of certain civilized, 'mothered' features of Australia.

The third mask is that of the 'good mate'. Haider does more than just shake hands during election campaigns; he is famous for stalking the beer-halls and 'in' venues of Austria's cities, ready to shout for any gaggle of admirers. He will offer first-name terms of address (*call me Jörg*) at the drop of a hat and will in matey fashion clasp the shoulders of his fellow-drinkers. The multi-millionaire and owner of one of the largest estates in Carinthia presents himself as a chum to ordinary workers, who in the normal state of affairs are on the other side of the social fence. He pretends that class differences need not exist, in very much the same way that Hitler insinuated that the community of the 'Volk' should supersede a class society. In these beer-hall meetings, Haider offers a symbolic dissolution of class antagonisms and himself as the agent of 'simple people' whose interest he will defend. Like Hanson, Haider is fond of the epithets 'simple' or 'ordinary.' Here is a sample of his election poster slogans: "Simply honest, simply Jörg" (1994); "a man who can still listen and take seriously the concerns of ordinary people" (1999, Haider pictured with a farmwoman in traditional costume); "simply human: his handshake counts" (1999, with a firefighter). We tend to forget that 'natural' is nothing but a construct invented by advertising agencies so as to boost the marketing of industrial products. One can learn how to be 'natural', and very likely Haider employs psycho-trainers who teach him that art. The socialist PM Vranitzky (in office from 1987–1994) was often criticized by the media for his convoluted, well-nigh incomprehensible prose; in contrast, Haider was lauded for speaking the language of 'ordinary people'. And his tactics work. In the federal elections of October 1999 a full 60 per cent of male workers under thirty voted for Haider – another parallel with Hanson.[15]

The fourth mask is that of the Redeemer, which in turn has two components. The first: with hindsight it is no coincidence that the rise of Haider starts with the Waldheim scam. In 1986 and after the revelation that Waldheim had lied about his activities during the Nazi years, Austria was plunged into six years of diplomatic quarantine. The conservative party unleashed a campaign of patriotic bluster against sinister outsiders, most notably the World Jewish Congress and the state of Israel, but the real beneficiary of that campaign was Haider. With great skill he managed to persuade the older generation that the 'unfair criticism' from abroad amounted to a blanket condemnation of Austria's 'soldier generation', and that he alone would stand up for them. "There is no such thing as a collective guilt of our fathers" Haider thundered, regardless that no-one had said there was – and then went on to declare a meeting of SS men collectively innocent. What mattered to the older generation: here they had a young and untainted man who offered to restore a tarnished generational morality, who behaved *in exactly the opposite way* to the 1968 protest generation. Hence also Haider's absurd claim that Wehrmacht bravery on the Soviet front had made the resurrection of Austrian democracy possible.

The second 'Redeemer' component addresses the fear of being left behind in a society characterized by bewildering changes. Once again, Haider was smart enough to be unspecific about what should be done, but promised he had the solutions. These consist largely in abolishing the 'wasteful' and 'corrupt' government that has heaped up a fearful national debt (first scapegoat) and in stopping immigration (second scapegoat). And in this respect, Haider's invective borders on propagating racial hatred. For years now he has drummed it into his electorate that Austria's rising unemployment is primarily due to the competition by Eastern immigrants, whom he calls "social parasites", "layabouts" and "workshy riffraff".[16] In a speech before parliament (18 June 1996) he typically placed 270,000 unemployed side by side with 270,000 foreigners, insinuating that the repatriation of the latter would provide jobs for the former. His campaign included a petition for a referendum with the telling name of "Austria First". Turkish children allegedly outnumber Viennese children in some schools, which prompted him to ask "did we fight the Turkish wars [of the seventeenth century] for nothing?" No less overtly than Hanson, who had directly "linked Asians to organized crime",[17] Haider charges that Austria's asylum and immigration policy has resulted in an "importation of crime".[18] The Viennese election campaign of 1999 very successfully mobilized feelings of envy and resentment in the 'genuine Austrians' against the 'pampered' foreigners. The outcome of the election saw the FPÖ as the second most important party (at 25.3 per cent of the vote) where twenty-five years ago the social democrats had a massive 60 per cent majority and the FPÖ languished around the 3 per cent mark.

Haider's tactic heavily relies on cultural scapegoating. Never averse to racial invective, Haider's comment on a more liberal medical law was it would "allow any bush Negro to practice medicine" (inter-

view, *Der Standard,* 13 October 1998). After a private visit to Namibia Haider said "blacks are a real disaster. Even where they have the majority they can't get anything done. They are beyond hope." (TV News ch. 1, 1 May 1995.) When a number of arrests of black drug dealers were made in early 1999, Haider seized this opportunity to allege that *most* blacks in Austria were dealing in drugs. In April 1999 a Nigerian man suffocated during a deportation flight because three Austrian police had taped his mouth shut. Haider expressed his sympathy not with the victim, but the police. The dead Nigerian had been part of a "drug dealing milieu" (for which there is no police evidence) and he, Haider, was in favour not of shedding "crocodile tears for a deported drug dealer" but of sympathizing with "the victims that he caused".[19] Several weeks later Haider renewed his attack on black asylum seekers and announced "Murderers of our children are unwanted here" (headline, *Kronen Zeitung,* 29 May 1999). The victim of a brutal police killing was thus transformed into a criminal and a violator of Austria's youth. It is depressing to record this, but it needs a political genius like Haider to link three unrelated issues (immigration/asylum, illegal drugs, and child molestation), thus creating a powerful campaign weapon. Hanson was never smart or ruthless enough for such a political stunt.

I SUSPECT MOST AUSTRALIANS congratulate themselves for a political culture that proved sound enough to cleanse itself. Had it really been the greater maturity of Australia, or had Pauline Hanson failed simply because of incompetence? As Judith Brett has argued, One Nation's failure is mainly attributable to "inadequate ideological resources"[20] without which a common sense of purpose is impossible to achieve. And so there are a number of nagging 'what if . . ?' questions left. What if Hanson had been just a bit more able to handle the media? (Haider's success rests in excellent relations with Austria's biggest tabloid.) What if Hanson had had more time to build a solid party base? (Haider had fourteen years to get where he is now.) What if she had been able to exert more control over harebrained One Nation candidates and self-seeking advisers? (Haider has been absolutely ruthless in getting rid of anyone in his party apparatus who offers the slightest danger to his dictatorial authority.) What if she had been personally wealthy? (Haider's wealth is estimated at 500 million AS.) What if she had been a skilled rhetorician, a more powerful mind, a person with more formal education? (Her famous "Please explain?" secured a brief popularity surge, but ultimately the phrase came to haunt and denigrate her. Whereas Haider has a doctorate in law.) And not leastly, in view of the continued male dominance of the political sphere: what if she had been male?

## ENDNOTES

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2. Margo Kingston, *Off the Rails: The Pauline Hanson trip,* Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1999, p. 214.
3. Hubertus Czernin (ed.), *Haider, beim Wort genommen,* Czernin Verlag, Vienna, 2000, p. 32. ('Haider verbatim.' A collection of Haider quotes. All references translated by the author.)
4. Anthony Philipps, 'Travails in Identity: an Interpretation of Hanson's Heat', in Bligh Grant (ed.), *Pauline Hanson: One Nation and Australian Politics,* University of New England Press, Armidale, 1997, p. 161.
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8. Ibid, p. 36.
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13. Kingston, p. 70.
14. Ibid, p. 51 passim.
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16. Czernin, p. 47.
17. Karin Strokirch & Mary Low-O'Sullivan, 'The Asian Region: Does Hanson Matter?', in Bligh Grant, op. cit., p. 115.
18. Czernin, p. 76.
19. Ibid, p. 97.
20. Judith Brett, 'Representing the Unrepresented: One Nation and the Formation of the Labor Party' in Abbott, et al., op. cit., p. 35.

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Max Watts

# Whatever Happened to Walter Kaufmann in East Berlin After the Wall Came Down?

WALTER IS OK. His new books are still coming out, contrary to those of most DDR authors, who, when the wall came down, the 'turn', the *Wende* as it's called over there, suddenly found themselves free, but unemployed. Unpublished. Tasting the other side of Freedom. Before they had complained about communist censorship, but still got into print; now they can write what they want, but find their publishers gone, bought up by West German capitalists, who are not very interested in what they have to say. But there are exceptions, and Walter Kaufmann is one of them.

He just celebrated his seventy-sixth birthday. Born in 1924, he was – he says – the, or at least one of the, youngest Dunera Boys. Of 2200 anti-fascist, mostly Jewish, (male only) reffos in England, who, in May 1940, when there was an invasion on the cards, were quickly rounded up by the British, put behind barbed wire and then shipped on HMT *Dunera*, a 12,000-tonne ex-liner, to Australia. (There were also two hundred genuine Nazis and two hundred mostly utterly innocent Italians, 2732 prisoners in all, on that crowded one-ship Third Fleet.)

Walter and most other Dunera boys were parked behind barbed wire in western NSW, in Hay, for some years, until it dawned on some great thinkers in London and Canberra that in the middle of the – Second World War 'they' were feeding a couple of thousand idle anti-fascists, who were then slowly released to pick fruit in the Riverina or join various allied armies, including, as Kaufmann did, the Australian.

After the war Kaufmann, who had got a political and literary education in the Hay camp, joined the Communist Party, became a seaman, wedding photographer, truck driver and started to . . . 'write'. Many of his short stories were published here; *Voices in the Storm* – about a boy growing up in the Ruhr city of Duisburg as the Nazis consolidated their power and some Communists tried to resist – became a best-seller. On a Seamen's Union delegation to East Berlin he fell in love (that's one version) and stayed there. Went to sea on DDR (East German) freighters and continued to write. Stories, books, reportages.

I first met him in Northern West Germany, in a town called Muenster, where I had gone to cover the trial of one Professor Christian Sigrist, who was accused of insulting the FROG, the Federal Republic of (West) Germany. This was long before the 1989 *Wende* and in North West German Muenster East Germany was not an issue. I asked him, sitting next to me on the press bench, whom for and whence he came. He said from a big daily in Berlin, the *Junge Welt* (*Young World*), and I replied there was no such animal, I also worked for a Berlin daily, the *TAZ*, and knew all the papers there. He, somewhat huffily, said: "East Berlin" and I, after recovering from my surprise to find someone from there there, got to know him better.

Professor Sigrist, who had – during a lecture in Stockholm – said – quite correctly – that the West German Federal Republic was a continuation of the previous German government, i.e. Hitler's Third Reich, was eventually convicted of insulting Germany and fined. I – after a comic interlude of being briefly arrested for revolutionary pissing in a public lavatory – had phoned my trial report to

Stockholm in loud, misunderstood English from the neighbouring public telephone – re-met Walter Kaufmann and became his friend. And reader. He reworked the Sigrist trial into a 'faction' novel, *Flucht*, which translates literally into 'flight' but had nothing to do with flying. It concerned the escape of an East German doctor's family to the West, and the subsequent life there of its members. It was, at the time, I believe, the first DDR novel picking up that hot iron and had to fight its way through the thickets of the 'communist' censorship. Successfully. Walter's writing had always pushed the envelope, tried to enlarge what could possibly be printed.

He was now writing mostly in German, though his first books published in East Berlin had been in English. I particularly remember a collection of short stories: *The Curse of Maralinga* – which included a remarkable piece of 1959 predictive writing – twenty-four years before ex-servicemen told of four Aborigines left behind to die as the radioactive clouds from the Emu Plains A-bomb tests rolled over them . . . (see also the more recent Australian film, *Ground Zero*).

I re-met Walter several times in Australia, which he began to visit after a twenty-seven-year absence. I helped him get a later novel, *A Death in Fremantle* – translated – he wrote it first in German – and published here. It's a reworked faction about the killing of Ricci Vincenti, a very gifted young Aboriginal artist, who, as a child, had spent many years in East Germany. And who was shot dead "trying to escape" in Fremantle. Vincenti, then 19, had been jailed for stealing, less than a carton of cigarettes.

*Outrider*, the Brisbane publisher of 'Death', went belly-up soon afterwards; I think that was the last time Kaufmann had anything come out in Australia. But his novels and short stories have been selling quite well in Germany. Even after the Wall came down.

His last: *Steinwurf* – 'A Thrown Stone' – is a love story set in the Eastern Germany of today. Between a black brickie from England and an (of course white) Eastern German woman. I found its ending inconclusive, and told Walter this, to which he replied that that is the way life, reality, really was. Is. And that he writes it as he sees it.

Walter Kaufmann's latest book is – unfortunately for many of his monolingual old mates in Australia – again written in German.[1] Forty-five short 'factions': tales and recollections of events lived between 1933 and 1999, across Albury, Hay, Melbourne, Eastern Berlin, Poland and the USA. Wry, sometimes caustic, but hardly cynical.

## ENDNOTE

1. *Gelebtes Leben: ein Geschichten-Kaleidoskop* (*A Well-lived Life: a Kaleidoscope of Tales*) Editions Dietz, Weydingerstr. 14, D 10178 Berlin, 2000, 125 pages, paperback, price approx 20 DM.

*Max Watts is a semi-retired journalist, writer and stirrer.*

Walter Kaufmann

# Three Stories

## translated by Eva Windisch

### Shoes

Duisburg, 1956

This encounter has been buried for some time in one of my novels. Once again I will bring it to the surface of my consciousness: see me walking through the Prinz-Albrecht street in the Kaisernviertel of Duisburg; see me stop at number seventeen, my parental home, a two-storey, red clinker villa, unscathed, without any bomb damage; with freshly-painted window frames and spotless scrubbed stone steps leading to the front door. The years have discoloured the brass railing, the fist-size spheres on the top and bottom newel have turned a green-brown; see me grasp the railing, climb the steps, and pause at the door until, finally, I ring the bell; the sound fades while around me – the street, the villas, the trees lining the street, my parental home – all seem to be merely stage scenery; unreal. Where am I? What compels me, after seventeen years in foreign lands, to return again?

You, who returned. Survivor from a darker time; reluctant witness!

I hear footsteps and the sound of the glass door inside being opened, creating a draught which I can feel out here. The maid opens the door just a crack wide. I hear myself speak; my explanation sounds hollow, my own name sounds strange. The girl bids me to wait and closes the door. A gaunt old woman opens the door but the homecomer is not invited in.

"I am alone in the house. Come another time."

Another time. What gives her the right . . . I ask her if she recognizes me.

"Yes, of course."

"You must have known my parents . . ."

"Yes, of course."

The crack between the door and the doorcase does not widen. I can see the woman, ghostlike, in the narrow opening; her face grey in the half-dark, grey hair, grey dress, even the voice is grey and thick.

"Another time, please. I am alone."

So am I. Alone here on the steps of my parents' house. The parents murdered. Smoke over Auschwitz. And everything around me seems unreal: the city, the street, the house.

"You knew my parents?"

"Your mother, yes. Your father scarcely."

The crack between the door and frame stays narrow. But she has not yet shut the door. With trembling voice she says, "Your mother, yes, I knew her. Slightly. She came here before she went on the big journey and said, 'How can I walk that far without solid shoes?'"

"No shoes?" I ask.

"Shoes, of course, but not solid ones," says the old woman. "And so we gave your mother a pair of solid shoes. Before she set out on this journey."

I take a step closer, which seems to frighten the woman.

She says again that she is alone, and why don't I come another time when her daughter and son-in-law are at home.

Her words about the shoes have struck me, but the door is already shut, and I turn to walk down the steps. All this is unreal: *the city, the street, the house, and a pair of solid shoes.*

## Breakfast in Warsaw

Krakau, Poland, 1999

THE CITY LAY UNDER a bell of haze. It was hot and humid, and the rain which fell in the evening from dark clouds brought little relief.

The humidity persisted. The rain had settled in and any thought of leaving the hotel was dashed. The run-down building no longer deserved its grandiloquent name, nor the formerly granted four stars. It was hardly less humid in the unadorned dining room, where I found myself sitting among empty tables. However, at one table sat an elderly lady who had been watching me. Distracted by the waiter to whom I was giving my order, I was only fleetingly aware of the woman. She might have been seventy, possibly older, looking at her white hair, but she did not appear old. Whenever I looked at her, our eyes met. She seemed to be lonely. I was touched, but I did not feel like company, and soon after my meal I withdrew to my room.

My mood had not improved in the morning. It still rained, it was humid, and the view across the roofs of the city was dismal – a stone desert broken up by illuminated advertisements under grey clouds. None of this reminded me of the Warsaw of the past; Poland's capital city decked out in colourful banners in the summer sun during the world games in the fifties.

When I returned from the breakfast buffet to my table, the elderly lady from the previous evening had already taken her place there. She nodded at me as if we were old acquaintances, and, indeed, she seemed to me to be so – surely we shared the same history, she said immediately, and, as I spoke English, she was sure that, at the war's end, I had also gone to England. For her, I discovered, England had proven to be a paradise, especially after all that she had been through.

"So tolerant are the people there. In the whole neighbourhood not a trace of animosity against Jews or anyone."

Where had she grown up? I asked her.

"In a Ukrainian *shtetl* on the Styr. Not far behind the Polish border."

That is where she wanted to return while she still had her strength. She had been to the Krakau and Warsaw ghettos; now all that remained to visit was her *shtetl* on the Styr. I understood. I, too, after all those years in foreign countries, had to seek out the Scheunenviertel in Berlin, bear the sight of Auschwitz, and find my parents' once-ruined house in Duisburg.

"My children don't want me to travel," she said. "Channele doesn't, neither does my Amnon. 'Mama, why? What are you doing to yourself?' But I must. For my parents, my brother, my sisters, who all were lost in the *shoa*." Her eyes looked sad; dark, sad-looking eyes. "I am trying to forgive without bitterness."

The little watch on her wrist showed the time – suddenly she seemed to be in a hurry.

"However, it is difficult alone, difficult . . . if my husband were alive . . ."

She looked at me; and the thought occurred to me to accompany her on this journey into the past. Why not? What was holding me here?

I suggested it to her. She wasn't sure that I meant it, I could tell. "You would do that . . . really?" she asked, uncertain.

I nodded, but she didn't seem to believe me.

"How did it come about that you are the only one who survived?" I asked softly.

I felt her growing unease. She was anxious to leave. And in the few minutes left I saw the train with the stock car rolling through the night out of the town on the Styr; I heard the clattering of the wheels over the brittle, buckled tracks, and the rattling loosen the hasp on the door where she sat cowering; I saw her, the sixteen-year-old, push through the door which suddenly opened; saw her falling from the train and thrown on to the gravel; rolling down the escarpment into the bushes; lying there hurt as the train rolled on into the night.

"My parents' house, the streets of my childhood, the shady spot under the willows by the river, the train station and the side track where in the night the goods train waited for us . . . I want, once more, to see the hut in the forest, my hiding place; and if Jurek,

the one who kept me alive, is still there . . ."

The waiter interrupted her, and while she was paying her bill I made my resolve. *I will go with her.*

And only the fact that I needed a visa for the Ukraine, and that I could not obtain a visa in a hurry, prevented me from going on this journey.

## Photographs of Krakau

Krakau, Poland, 1999

The Japanese man came from St Mary's Church, crossed the market place and walked towards the cafe in which we sat. The sun sparkled in the lenses of his spectacles. I only realized that he'd been heading towards me when he bowed and handed me his card. Beneath his name he had written 'poet'.

"Are you Jewish?" he asked softly.

While I was in Japan there was never any reason for such a question, but here, in Poland, I knew immediately why he had asked. I nodded and said, "Yes, I am."

He bowed again, and politely asked if he might take my picture. "Please, sir, right where you are sitting."

I let him be. I remembered him well. In the previous week I had asked, to the annoyance of our tour guide, that the bus make a stop at the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial. The Japanese had followed me out of the bus, and had stood silently next to me at the eternal flame burning in the bowl. He had waited there until I returned to the bus.

This man's photograph would become the only memento I had to show from my visit to Krakau, because, just here, in the café at the market place, someone had stolen my camera from my coat pocket. I noticed the theft only later while walking through the Krakau ghetto. Gone was the expensive apparatus with all the pictures of the castle, the textile halls, the churches, and the Krakau Florianstor. However, this made me look at things more keenly. The eye replaces the camera. The squat old houses on either side of the ghetto wall imprinted themselves in my mind's eye, as did the little restaurants with the tables laid out in the shade of the forecourts, the Hebrew script over the entrances, and, opposite the square, the red-brown building of the synagogue which had, miraculously, escaped the destruction.

Crossing through the ransacked synagogue, forlorn in its emptiness and spotty grey crumbling walls, I came to a side room with pictures of the abduction of the Jews from the ghetto. In the dark-haired, slender youths in the long rows of emaciated, ragged humans, I recognized myself. I saw women with dark, expressive eyes like my mother's, and I suddenly realized how narrow was the degree between my fate and that of these oppressed Jews who were being driven to their death by rows of soldiers standing with their legs spread apart.

Among these photographs I found one that held me longer than the others. Two huge soldiers were forcing a small, bearded Jew on to a chopping block such as farmers use to split timber, so that, to the amusement of their comrades, they could trim his beard. With his chin stiffly forced forward and an inward look in his eyes, the old man endured the humiliation. The more I engrossed myself in the picture the louder I could hear the roar of the soldiers, and the stamping of the booted feet of the two perpetrators, who were bent over with laughter. Suddenly it seemed to me that a part of my being was predetermined never to climb on a chopping block on anyone's command. The notion vanished almost as soon as it occurred to me, but what remained was a feeling of fulfilment, an echo of an experienced resistance.

*Eva Windisch is the editor of* Tirra Lirra *literary magazine.*

# Andre Mueller talks to Hans Magnus Enzensberger

## translated by Rudi Krausmann

*HANS MAGNUS ENZENSBERGER is widely regarded as the most important poet in Germany. He is also an essayist, journalist, translator, dramatist, editor and publisher, described by the* Times Literary Supplement *as a 'phenomenon'. His most recent volume of poems to be translated into English was* Kiosk *(Bloodaxe Books, 1997). His 'On Leaving America' appeared in* overland *39 in spring 1968.*

Mueller: In the epilogue to your recent book *Diderots Schatten* (Diderot's Shadow) you put the question: What's an intellectual? The answer does not come off nicely.

H.M.E: Why?

Mueller: The moral overstrains of: "unarmed eggheads" has led to self-righteousness, hypocrisy and dogmatism.

H.M.E: Yes, well, but this is no objection to this kind of activity, it only refers to what these people think of themselves. Some of them have fallen into a moral megalomania. That's bad of course. It is the job of the intellectual to be self-reflective, but if he gets a swelled head than he does his job like a baker who bakes bad bread. I hope one is allowed to criticize that.

Mueller: Do you apply this criticism to yourself?

H.M.E: That may be. He who talks about his profession, unavoidably also talks about himself.

Mueller: In 1968 you were one of the leaders of the student movement. You wanted the political downfall of Germany. You called the Chinese cultural revolution an "indispensable, seductive concept".

H.M.E: I agree, this rhetoric was of course nonsense, that is easy to see now. I talked hot air like all the others. I don't deny that. But that does not change the fact that a political awakening was necessary, it made this country, the Republic of Germany, habitable. Before it was uninhabitable.

Mueller: Today, so you write, it is even more so.

H.M.E: That's not true.

Mueller: In an essay you published in 1993 'Ausblicke auf den Buergerkrieg' (Views on civil war), you warn us of the illusion that we have peace. Every carriage in the subway could change into a "Bosnia en miniature".

H.M.E: Well, but one can do something against it.

Mueller: The government, you claim, should make better use of its monopoly of power.

H.M.E: Yes, for sure.

Mueller: In the sixties you became upset because this government used power against those who wanted to get rid of it.

H.M.E: Then it mattered to protect our liberal constitution against a political clique. Today a few unruly arsonists and madmen want to destroy civilized order.

Mueller: They want chaos.

H.M.E: Yes.

Mueller: And the government should protect us against it?

H.M.E: That is its function.

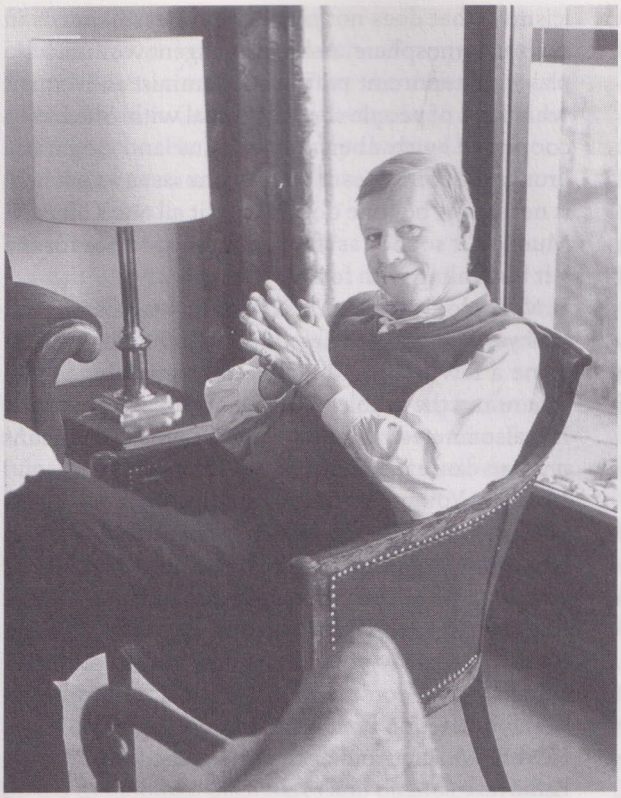
Mueller: Once you said it differently. In your book *Ach Europa* (*Oh Europe*) you praise the art of improvisation of the Italians who manage to live rather well in chaotic circumstances. The order maintained by the state has become an anachronism. One has to get used to: "The everyday coexistence with chaos".

H.M.E: Yes, that is what I predict but it does not mean that I wish it.

Mueller: We northern Europeans, you write, have delegated too many tasks to the government, because we are too stubborn, too fixed and too twisted to act on our own accord.

H.M.E: In this essay on Italy, I also say that a society without a judicial system is no solution.

Mueller: In your poem 'Utopia' from the fifties, you celebrate disorder as a kind of paradisiacal situation.
H.M.E: That's how I felt at the time.
Mueller: Anarchy was your ideal?
H.M.E: That's correct.
Mueller: One could think you became frightened by your own courage?
H.M.E: Mmh.
Mueller: Does that mean yes?
H.M.E: No, I am only listening to your story.
Mueller: Is it wrong?
H.M.E: One could also tell it differently. One could say someone grew up under a forced order and afterwards came a wonderful time of anarchy. It only lasted a few months but it forms a person of that age. I was sixteen at the end of the war. There was then no government in Germany. There was the American Military Government but that was a fiction. In those months I experienced the happiness of maximum freedom. But order returned with its mixed signals. Much of the forced order we had got rid of returned. That was less agreeable. The fifties in this country were very heavy, muffy, reactionary. Nothing moved, everywhere this Nazi shit. I escaped.
Mueller: You emigrated to Scandinavia.
H.M.E: Yes, I wanted to get out. I quit. I was away for nearly ten years and had slowly learned what to appreciate of civilization and what not. That depends on the experience one makes. The order I had grown up in had been the very opposite of civilization.
Mueller: It was menacing?
H.M.E: Of course.
Mueller: And that returned with Adenauer?
H.M.E: To a great extent, yes. That's why I went to Norway where there was a liberal society and stayed there with interruptions until some 'instinct' told me that in Germany something was happening, that the situation had changed. In 1966 I felt something could happen and I moved to Berlin. That was a wonderful opportunity. Finally something was happening. Well, I was no longer a student, I was ten years older, I had already experienced a few things. That separated me from the students, I was another generation. But I did not want to let it pass by. A writer can hope for nothing better than a revolutionary movement. You can also call it modernization. Something like this only happens every fifty or hundred years. I did not want to miss it.
Mueller: You believed in the possibility of change?
H.M.E: I believed in the necessity of change and indeed much had changed. Everyone of my age can be witness to that. Until the sixties every German school was an unbearable place. I had experienced it myself. The teachers of my school had been terrorists. I had to defend myself. Politics is self-defence, nothing else, and if you see a chance, not as an individual but in solidarity with others, then you take this chance.
Mueller: You preached disobedience?
H.M.E: Yes, that too.
Mueller: Disobedience is a fundamental human need.
H.M.E: Correct.
Mueller: You ignored that.
H.M.E: Now it's getting better, we are no longer in an interview but in a discussion.
Mueller: In German schools today one deals in drugs and the pupils lie in wait with jack knives.
H.M.E: I am not talking about that. What happens today is written on another page.
Mueller: Does it not make you despair to see what has happened to your ideal of a free society?
H.M.E: Despair is not my theme.
Mueller: But don't you have to bring your aims in the past in relation to today's reality? Nobody has described this reality in such sombre colours as you. An "autism of power" is spreading. Whoever walks on the street in cities like Hamburg or Berlin is in danger of his life.
H.M.E: What has that to do with the year '68?
Mueller: Every child knows that freedom is dangerous.
H.M.E: Listen, if people are killed in the streets, that never meant freedom for me, you can't make me responsible for that, that's stupid.
Mueller: But you recognized early, so you wrote, that human beings are not good by nature.
H.M.E: You know you sometimes speak in great terms, you mention despair, freedom, chaos. These are all notions which mean many things. It depends on the context. I am no theoretician, I am a man of experience. In doubt, experience gets the upper hand. If my experience tells me otherwise I disregard any concept from Plato to Marx to Wittgenstein. That in the end is irrelevant. The alternative to the situation in 1968 was not some kind of freedom in which one kills people but to change an authoritarian society into a more democratic one.
Mueller: And you believe that succeeded?
H.M.E: Yes, I think so. You can't tell me that the



Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 1984
courtesy of John Tranter

people in this country today have not an entirely different consciousness than in the past. A teacher behaves towards his pupils quite differently now than in the fifties, a superior to his subordinate, a doctor to his patients. The authoritarian state does not exist any longer. But we had it once. I have experienced it. The students' revolt was a necessity for the sake of civilization. I stick to that and I am sure of it.

Mueller: If you consider things historically, afterwards everything that happens seems necessary.

H.M.E: But there must be some who do what is necessary. I am not a fatalist.

Mueller: A fatalist is not someone who just sits there and does nothing.

H.M.E: Of course not.

Mueller: He is also active. But he does not think that the world as a whole can be changed. He may bandage a child who was torn to pieces in Bosnia by a grenade although he is aware that a world without violence and wars shall never exist. He only thinks that he can help this child.

H.M.E: Yes, sure.

Mueller: He is fatalistic and at the same time humane.

H.M.E: Yes, that's fine.

Mueller: He does not have the intention to start a revolutionary movement.

H.M.E: Yes, because the circumstances do not permit it. What one can do depends on the situation. Recognize the situation, a German poet said once, Herr Benn. I was not longing for the year 1968, it happened, it was suddenly there. I took the consequences as I did with the Nazis.

Mueller: You were still rather young then.

H.M.E: Yes, but they wanted to bully me. They even wanted to put me in a uniform. I resisted that. I refused to wear the Hitler-Youth uniform, not for political reasons, but because I didn't want to be dictated to.

Mueller: What position did your parents take?

H.M.E: They were the educated bourgeoisie. They took the attitude with these people, the Nazis, that one could not collaborate; they are some kind of riffraff. But they did not put up any resistance.

Mueller: Alfred Andersch explained the anger of your early poems as a hatred against your middle-class background.

H.M.E: Well, he can do that.

Mueller: Do you want to elaborate?

H.M.E: No, you see there are so many stories about me. There is the "light-footed brother" story about the one who takes part in everything but continuously changes his opinion; there is the story of the traitor who is unreliable and not a good comrade; there is the Germany story about the one who has problems with his homeland. These are legends one has to live with. All these stories contain some truth, none I would see as absolutely wrong. But why should I make them my own? Let others invent their stories. They are entitled to complain. I remain pretty cool about it.

Mueller: That is not true. When a year ago in *Die Zeit*, there was a comment describing you as *"schoenhubernd"* [Schoenhuber is a politician of the extreme right], you were very annoyed.

H.M.E: But I did not react to it.

Mueller: For a long time you did not want to grant me this interview for *Die Zeit*.

H.M.E: Would you grant an interview to a paper which considers you a Nazi?

Mueller: That was not the question, rather the lim-

its of your aloofness.
H.M.E: I take the liberty to publish where I like.
Mueller: The commentary in *Die Zeit* was an answer to your article in the *Neuen Zuericher Zeitung,* where you criticized the attitudes of contemporary women in the world of fashion.
H.M.E: Yes, that was a jolly essay, wasn't it?
Mueller: Feminism, you wrote, has created an unreachable but often imitable ideal type – the simpleton.
H.M.E: Isn't that amusing? Every movement produces its ridiculous results. It is like pharmacy. With a good medicine one must always count on negative side-effects. At the beginning we talked about revolutionary rhetoric which was often nothing more than stupid phrases, hot air, extremist nonsense. Nevertheless the student movement and feminism were politically necessary steps.
Mueller: Did you have the insight that the left was talking nonsense at the time you yourself still belonged to it?
H.M.E: Sure. At the time I had already written that the whole thing was a carnival. Only one does not want to quote it. I wrote that in 1969. At the time one took it badly.
Mueller: You felt distant to the events?
H.M.E: Yes.
Mueller: How could you, from the distance, develop the necessary fighting spirit?
H.M.E: Dear Mr Mueller, if you are walking, for instance, during a demonstration in Neukoelln and someone shouts: "For a red West Berlin!" (they shouted that at the time) and you see women above at the windows, leaning on cushions watching, who can't believe it; then you have, if you are not stupid, a second thought, well it becomes obvious that behind the thoughts of the demonstrators there must be another one. Behind every thought there is a second thought and that is often the more interesting one. The world is paradoxical, that is not my fault, for that I am not responsible.
Mueller: That means you took part in these demonstrations with a slight smirk?
H.M.E: Not with a smirk, I don't say that this demonstration was only nonsense. It was to a degree also a serious matter. Something was done, something was put into action. Things were said which finally had to be said. For Christ's sake, the Federal Republic as we know it today had only come into existence. That there were also excesses, stupid suspicions, fanaticisms – that does not matter, it always happens in such an atmosphere. Ask an intelligent woman who plays an important part in the feminist movement what kind of people she has to deal with. She has to cooperate with aberrant lesbians and dogmatic drunks. But one does it because the issue as a whole is necessary, but one does not do it all one's life.
Mueller: It sounds as if you made a sacrifice for the left by dealing with fools.
H.M.E: No, it was not like that. It was also fun. It was very amusing. There were also highlights. Imagine a few thousand people do something somewhere and the whole of Germany goes topsy-turvy. It is also interesting to see that with the least means one can cause panic in a powerful institution.
Mueller: You mean the government?
H.M.E: I mean the SFB (*Sender Freies Berlin,* Radio Free Berlin) to give an example. It was occupied and after that did not put up its roller shutters for another five years. They were so frightened. At the Bavarian Radio even today you are checked at the entrance.
Mueller: You don't mean that has anything to do with your action twenty-eight years ago?
H.M.E: Well, it could be that their reaction became a habit.
Mueller: Did you only occupy the SFB to create fear?
H.M.E: No, I only told their old comrades who were printing leaflets on their copymachines they should do it in order to reach a wider audience. And then they went there and demanded more time for broadcasting.
Mueller: That is cynical.
H.M.E: Why?
Mueller: You were the manipulator in the background, the comrades had to do the work.
H.M.E: Yes, division of labour is not bad.
Mueller: Peter Weiss once called you a gambler.
H.M.E: Well, Weiss was in reality an aesthete, an artist who got into the political whirlpool and did not understand anything at all because he took everything on face value. Then he read Marxist books and believed everything that was said there.
Mueller: You did not believe it?
H.M.E: For me Marxism was a toolbox. I still find Marxist ideas useable. I did not throw them into the rubbish bin. But they can't be used for everything. If I want to put a nail into the wall I have to use a hammer, but if I want to take the nail out a hammer is of no use.
Mueller: How would you describe your relation to

Gunther Grass?
H.M.E: We've known each other for many years. Our children are friends. That we differed politically is known. Gunther has always been a good social democrat. He has not really changed.
Mueller: A man of consequence?
H.M.E: Yes.
Mueller: Not your cup of tea?
H.M.E: Why?
Mueller: In your essay '*Das Ende der Konsequenz*' (The end of consequence) published in 1980 you plead for more flexibility.
H.M.E: Sure, there are differences of temperament.
Mueller: "Blessed is assimilation" you write. Faithfulness to principle in Germany leads to self-destruction and barbarism.
H.M.E: Yes, there is nothing wrong with that. Why should one persevere with something when one realizes that it is nonsense?
Mueller: You never hesitated to admit mistakes in your thinking?
H.M.E: No.
Mueller: In your 1974 published collection of essays 'Palaver' you demand an emancipated use of media to mobilize the masses and dream of an interaction of participants in order to have subversive possibilities for the revolution.
H.M.E: I got rid of that long ago. That was an error. I also corrected that publicly.
Mueller: Today you see the television set as a "Buddhist machine" which opens an approach to Nirvana for the spectator.
H.M.E: Yes, as a social hygiene it has its function.
Mueller: Do you make use of it?
H.M.E: Rarely. I don't need this medicine television as I don't sit daily in badly-aired company with Fräulein Lehman who plots against me. It suffices for me to read the newspapers. I must admit it is a strange desire to look every night at this postmortem.
Mueller: You mean the news?
H.M.E: Yes, that is perverse, I don't have that desire, I don't have to see the knife in the belly. Nor do I look at movies in which people are shot in rows.
Mueller: One can't put that on the same level.
H.M.E: Psychologically it has the same basis.
Mueller: One is reality the other fiction.
H.M.E: For me what is shown in the news has no reality. The image is not reality.
Mueller: No, but you know at last that what the news report shows is really happening.
H.M.E: I don't know. The Romanian revolution during which one saw thousands of people gathered on squares was a deception. For twenty years I've travelled again and again to Yugoslavia. I know many people there. Everyone with whom I have been drinking, eating, talking, is more real to me than all TV images. The image is abstract.
Mueller: Well, but the mutilated bodies after a grenade explosion in the market square in Sarajevo don't come from a scenario of a horror movie. It has been shot by TV cameras.
H.M.E: Cameras are only there where something is happening which is just topical. The intention behind is to arouse our indignation. I am against that because it is without consequence, none at all.
Mueller: A sensitive human being reacts with despair.
H.M.E: Yes, but does that change anything?
Mueller: One cannot foresee that. First of all despair is the outcome.
H.M.E: Now you speak for yourself. I knew it. You are a specialist in despair. But that does not take us anywhere. I am not a philosopher. I see no point in looking at pictures which drive me to despair.
Mueller: But these pictures assault you. You can't cut them off quickly. They come immediately after Helmut Kohl.
H.M.E: I also don't look at Helmut Kohl. That would be a waste of time. He never says anything. That is highly unproductive. I prefer to work or have fun with my daughter. There are thousands of things which interest me. One has to learn to leave things out, to ignore, to shut one's mouth. One has to set priorities.
Mueller: To do that, one has to know what is important.
H.M.E: I know that. I know exactly what I like.
Mueller: Objectively speaking, everything has the same value.
H.M.E: Well, yes, if you look at the world in toto from above, from a godly place, then everything is the same. But this perspective only the Lord can have, the one who knows all. That is not me. That's the one I don't want to be.
Mueller: Because you would go mad.
H.M.E: Yes, or fall into total despair. Total despair is nothing else than the negation of omnipotence.
Mueller: Are you a happy man?
H.M.E: I can manage quite well.

Mueller: That is no answer.
H.M.E: If I compare my life with others, I must admit I am not badly off. I can bear life. I am not complaining. I hate to complain.
Mueller: In your poem 'Chinese Acrobats' you describe a happy moment. "One minute long" you write, "while more and more empty plates turn like ghosts faster and faster and higher and higher in the sky, aaaah fear forgets its hunger and lust its fear."
H.M.E: That's not bad.
Mueller: Yes, but what does it mean?
H.M.E: It is the triumph of the artist who overcomes fear for one minute.
Mueller: The fear in the face of lust?
H.M.E: Yes, it is very widely spread, otherwise the world would look different.
Mueller: Are you an artist?
H.M.E: That could be. But I shall not make any self-descriptions or pour my heart out. Poetry is a possibility to talk of things about which actually one can't talk. Whoever wants to read it can do so. Let it rest at that. In the poems my private life is accumulated. To write them takes the strain off. That is not obtrusive, that remains discreet. I like to be inconspicuous. People should not be interested in me, but in my books.
Mueller: You don't want to speak openly about your feelings?
H.M.E: No.
Mueller: In the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* one could read recently that you are a man who does not enjoy sex.
H.M.E: Aha!
Mueller: It is asserted by a student, not named, with whom you had a relationship.
H.M.E: Well, of course one can write that. We have the freedom of the press. That is a little unpleasant, but one has to accept it. That's the price of democracy. He who wants the freedom of the press must tolerate the gutter press. In an office sits a human being who has to make money. But why should I take part in it?
Mueller: Didn't you read this article?
H.M.E: No.
Mueller: Do you want to have it?
H.M.E: Probably it's all lies.
Mueller: Can't we talk about women?
H.M.E: Sure, why not?
Mueller: You are married for the third time.
H.M.E: Yes, but these are only the officially documented relationships.
Mueller: Beside these were others?
H.M.E: Naturally. I can say this much: I learnt more from women than at the universities; political things, aesthetic things, philosophical things. I learnt entire worlds. Woman is the ideal medium to learn, because via intimacy one gets a much more direct access to knowledge. An erotic relationship is also a relationship of cognition. With a woman one learns without effort, do you understand? It all flies to you. That is fantastic.
Mueller: Have you been alone for a longer period of time?
H.M.E: Yes, when I was young.
Mueller: Was it difficult?
H.M.E: It was not pleasant. But you know, youth is not an enviable phase of life. I don't understand why people make such a cult of it. A young person is unstable, insecure, precarious, is not sovereign, commits any stupidity. Think only of this passion for clothes. The atmosphere in a discotheque is terrible. If one has a motorbike, the other one also has to have one. Terrible. One has to be glad once one gets past it.
Mueller: You want to have your life under control?
H.M.E: I don't want to be the rag which one cleans the world with.
Mueller: In your youth-poems you often mention death.
H.M.E: True, death is a recurrent theme in these years. The thought of death is an obsession, when one is young, also the thought to kill oneself.
Mueller: Have you tried it?
H.M.E: No, but I have thought of it. There is a pathos of adolescence and a melancholy of adolescence. That is nothing wrong, it has to be like that. Someone who has never thought about suicide must be strange somehow. Something must be wrong.
Mueller: What saved you?
H.M.E: I think slowly I developed a sense of the comedy of life. The older I got the more I became aware that life is a comedy, although with black humour, a tragic comedy.
Mueller: And you are the observer?
H.M.E: Not only. I also act. But I don't believe that what I do achieves something specific. I can only offer something. What the others do with it, I don't know.
Mueller: You have lost your illusions?
H.M.E: I can't remember having had any.
Mueller: In an interview which was published recently in *Der Stern* you said human beings can live

quite well without utopias but not without desires.
H.M.E: Yes, desire one can't get rid of.
Mueller: You mentioned, for instance, the desire for justice.
H.M.E: Correct.
Mueller: But justice is the greatest utopia which exists.
H.M.E: Just a moment, let me explain it.
Mueller: You deny the necessity of utopias and say at the same time mankind cannot exist without the belief in the possibility of a just world.
H.M.E: No, I say the desire is the primary thing. First are the desires. Utopia is a recipe which puts desire into a system. In this system people are not much interested, they don't believe in recipes. They don't believe that the state ownership of the means of production automatically leads to a just society. Nevertheless they have the desire for justice.
Mueller: Although they know that it will never occur?
H.M.E: Yes, sure. Desires are not a question of will. They occur more or less behind our backs on their own. All people wish for instance for a happy love although they know it is not very probable.
Mueller: I imagine I have already experienced it.
H.M.E: Wonderful for you.
Mueller: I can even, if I see that others are unhappily in love, enjoy it. But it depresses me to know that children are shot to pieces even if it does not happen in the country I live in at the moment.
H.M.E: I can't help you in this respect.
Mueller: It is hard to bear that there is no peace without war, no justice without injustice, no good without the bad. There always remains a balance . . .
H.M.E: Yes, well.
Mueller: . . . because everything is only possible by its opposite.
H.M.E: That may be. Only it sounds too abstract for me. Your arguments, if I may put that in, are always a trace too high. I am not a sage. I can't solve the riddles of this world. I am a modest worker in the vineyard who tries to become a little more clear-sighted about my own confusion.
Mueller: That sounds like resignation.
H.M.E: No, why? I live, I pay my rent, I eat, I write . . .
Mueller: You mean, as long as one does not take one's life, there is hope?
H.M.E: Of course, as long as one does not give up one's bank account one should not talk of resignation.
Mueller: What do you think is your most important achievement?
H.M.E: I can't tell.
Mueller: Your poetical essays or the poems?
H.M.E: Perhaps the 'Sinking of the Titanic' is a work of prolonged value. At least I see it as my major work. It has formally a certain drive not easily achieved. But please I don't want to sound as if I want to advertise myself. I ask you to avoid that.
Mueller: There is nothing wrong in saying it is your most important creation.
H.M.E: Yes, but not because I have said it.
Mueller: In which disposition do you have to be that makes you write a poem?
H.M.E: I don't know. Something is given, the rest is work.
Mueller: Given by whom?
H.M.E: Let's say in the body something is poured out. The biochemical equivalent of what we call intuition are substances which are called 'endorphins'. One has a flash. The reason a poem emerges is a sudden flash. It has nothing to do with reason. Writing poetry is an absurd activity. Who wants poems? Society's demand for poetry is as everyone knows, small. It does not do much for business.
Mueller: You make your money by writing newspaper articles?
H.M.E: Yes.
Mueller: And get 30,000 DM for a longer article?
H.M.E: Just about.
Mueller: You belong together with Martin Walser and Botho Strauss to the trio of best-paid writers.
H.M.E: Apart from that I have little in common with the other two.
Mueller: With Botho Strauss particularly you don't like to be associated.
H.M.E: God, he is a very talented man, but his preoccupations are not mine. I find it indecent that he portrays himself as a tragic figure. To speak about tragedy correctly is difficult because it leads easily to self-stylization, to self-heroism, to 'Kitsch'! All these attitudes I don't like.
Mueller: Is Botho Strauss doing that?
H.M.E: Yes, all this stuff from the twenties which he refers to continuously. Ludwig Klages, Rudolf Borchardt, all these passé, pale motifs. I don't know why he gets so hooked on it. A talented writer must recognize that they are no longer relevant themes. But I don't like to talk about colleagues. You can leave that to the Reich Ranickis of this world. They should take on the writers and make judgements. It's not

my thing.

Mueller: Botho Strauss you have commented on some time ago.

H.M.E: Where?

Mueller: In an article in the *FAZ* (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) about poetry of the eighties.

H.M.E: I did not mention any names.

Mueller: But you quoted. It was easy to guess.

H.M.E: I described a situation. In our society the poet is a man of feeling who can also be stupid. I have been thinking about the fatal consequences of such an attitude.

Mueller: You seem to be a man of pure reason.

H.M.E: That is also wrong.

Mueller: Your brother Christian has said you look down on the education of the heart.

H.M.E: Christian is not very well informed.

Mueller: For you the heart is not in the centre of existence?

H.M.E: Yes, let them all ramble on. Man of feeling, man of reason, with such concepts you can chase ghosts. These are cardboard figures with no relation to reality. I have very strong feelings with certain thoughts and very strong thoughts with certain feelings. I don't understand this counterpoint. I like, for instance, mathematics. My love for maths is an ecstasy and ecstasy is a feeling. So what's all this nonsense? These are cliches, twaddle. Why should someone who has intelligence be without feelings? Why should an intelligent woman have no feelings? Many men are afraid of intelligent women. But an intelligent woman is much more erotic, she is a whole human being because she has brains. Why should that be disturbing?

Mueller: One says intelligent women talk too much.

H.M.E: Why? One can also be silent if one is intelligent. All that does not rhyme. It's stupid. Stupid men's twaddle, stupid men's gibberish. This separation between feeling and thought I consider artificial and superfluous. Did you want to build our conversation on that?

Mueller: No.

H.M.E: That you even mention it I find inexcusable. A thinker who does not feel when he thinks is a bad thinker. First there has to be a passion. The body has to be part of it. The head alone is not enough. Thinking is a vital activity.

*Hans Magnus Enzensberger (11 November 1929–) achieved literary fame with his first book of poems* Verteidigung der Woelfe *(Defence of the Wolves). In 1963 he received the Georg Buechner Prize. In 1964 he founded the literary magazine* Kursbuch. *He lived for a short time in Cuba. A major work is* Der Untergang der Titanic *(The Sinking of the Titanic). He wrote a series of articles for* Die Zeit, *amongst them 'Ach Europa' (Oh Europe). His latest book of poems is called* Kiosk. *He lives in Munich.*

*Rudi Krausmann, born in 1933 in Austria, arrived in Australia in 1958. He founded the art and literature magazine,* Aspect *in 1975. He has published poetry, prose and plays and is co-editor of the bilingual anthology* Made in Australia: The Poetry of the Fifth Continent *(1994).*

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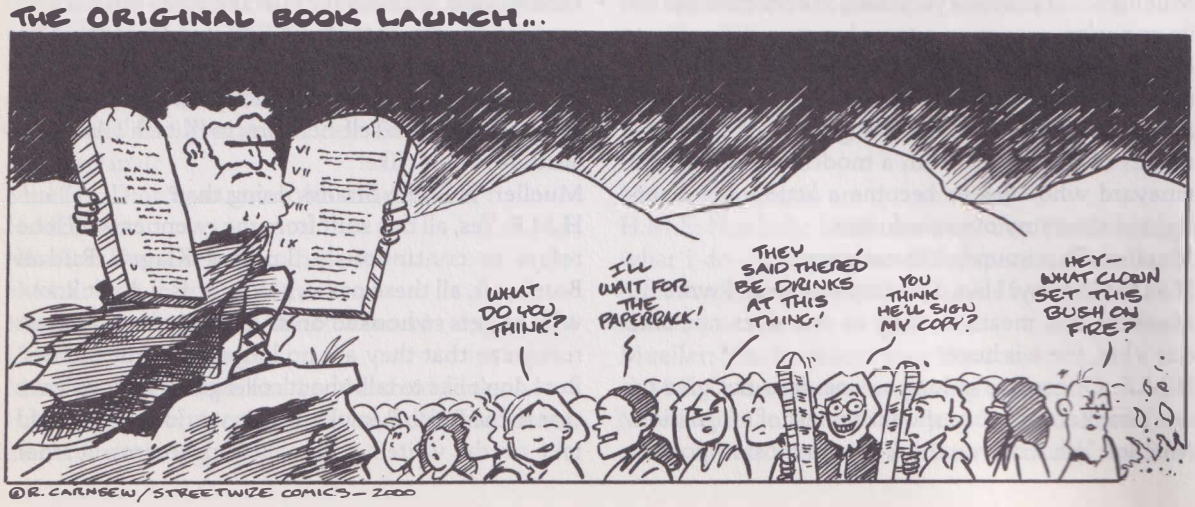


# Oliver Connors in about Ten Minutes

Brendan Somes

I

The hardware store owner is closing the cash register after a sale. The just-served customer has taken a step to the left towards the open door. She is checking to see if the docket is in the bag with the foam. Oliver Connors has just taken a photograph of this second. He now stops to let the just-served-now-in-a-rush customer turn right, very uncar-like, at the intersection of the footpath and the door of Ray Jones Hardware Est. 1947.

II

Oliver Connors writes in his book of photographs, My Haybarton (page number extremely large I suspect), beneath the title, 3.37 p.m. Parkes St.: You must be young Anthony's son. Yeh I'm Oliver. Pleased to meet you Oliver. I remember Anthony when he was your age. And before that your grandfather. Do you know that he was the second person I made a sale to?

That man has been there all his life. Behind that counter selling nails and screws and shit to people since 1947. 1947! That's his life! That's what he's done.

I can't do that. That's not me. But it's life.

Sheer life.

A seismic tuning down. The reduced body baggage of Oliver Connors now aware, minutely, of its pathetic density as it walks amongst the voluminous x-y-z co-ordinate system of Parkes Street, Haybarton, Pop. 9500.

III

Ray Jones was born in 1926 on the verandah of his parents' house, two streets away. Father owned Bill Jones Menswear. Ray went to the local schools. Saw action at the tail end of the war. Came back home, opened up the hardware store. Working hours Mon–Thur 8–6, Fri 8–9, Sat 8–1. Got married in 1952 to a local girl. Five children. Bill plumber, Mary family, Gary accountant, Alex publican, Alice lawyer. Owns a nice house, one of the earliest in the area, just around the corner from where he was born. Also a holiday home down the coast. Tries to get down there for at least a month every year, well sort of, sometimes it doesn't work out.

Some old guy speaks at some isn't-he-a-good-bloke bash. For over fifty years, Ray Jones has provided wonderful service to the people of Haybarton. How often has each of us present tonight been in a mess with the so-called easy-to-assemble furniture? Quite a few I see. And how many of us have gone to Ray's with absolutely no idea of what it is that we want, and left a short time later with exactly what we need? Yes, too often. But Ray is always there putting . . . The speech goes on to mention pillar of the community, valuable assistance to our various charities, loving husband and father, etcetera, etcetera.

I s'pose I got into hardware because I'd always liked tinkering with stuff. Knew making furniture. Putting up fences. And I sort of knew that Haybarton would grow after the war. Houses would have to be built and all that. So I guess that's how I decided upon a hardware store.

Ray Jones was twenty-two in 1948. He had just broken up with his girlfriend. His business was struggling. For thirty-two of the fifty weeks he worked

that year, he asked the marvellous whys. Why did she leave me? Why run a hardware store? Might go overseas. What about uni? Why bother getting up today?

The Ray Jones advertisement features the following scenes: Ray's post-sale smile to the satisfied customer; the family barbecue with children grandchildren the loving wife celebrating Ray's seventy-second birthday; Ray mowing the grass of the house garden beautiful; Ray on holiday with his wife down the coast, cuddling walking along the beach in the overcast cool dusk; Ray sailing, blue sky, water splashing, invigorating.

A thirty-second ad leaves six seconds a scene. A second for every two years and one hundred and forty-six days.

IV

Where has Oliver mounted 3.37 p.m. Parkes St.?

Next to the life of Leonardo? He had just finished Bramly's biography that morning. Next to the Calvin Klein advertisement of the beautiful man woman baby beach filmed in grainy black and white? Oliver witnessed that life before the movie began on Saturday night. Next to Anna and him laughing as they ate fish and chips on the oval last Thursday night, daylight savings night? Or, no, nothing as particular or as immediate. Life, written by Oliver Connors, born 1976, educated Haybarton High, Australian National University, currently resides in Haybarton with his family on the family orchard, one of our brightest young talents?

What brightness made and makes 3.37 p.m. Parkes St. a profound insignificant pale? The brightness of Ray Jones' other lives as brought to him by Oliver? You could have been. But you are not. You are there, Ray Jones Hardware Est. 1947. The brightness of me, Oliver Connors, and the paleness of you, Ray Jones? Me, vibrant complex living; you, stale simple dead.

Question: Is brightness necessary? I don't know what the hell I want but it sure isn't this. The rumbling dictating life is bigger than the 3.37 p.m. Parkes St. display.

V

Can't Ray Jones just be left there? Just leave things as they are. Or appear. Or whatever. You're always up about fidgeting judging assessing describing ordering. Just leave him alone. I mean you don't know anything about him. You just have one of his regular seconds. Man is not a shutter speed.

What does it mean to leave a scene alone? Subtract senses? To pass through life absorbing all reflecting none? I hate the person I married. Or reflect all absorb none? I do not own my life. Or what does it mean to leave me alone? Or that the 3.37 p.m. Ray Jones remains the 3.37 p.m. Ray Jones? Not Ray Jones 1926–2006, but 3.37 p.m. Ray Jones: not to be used for future reference. Go, forget Ray Jones, he'll just bring you nothing but ignorance.

But easier said than thought: observe 3.37 p.m. Ray Jones colonize Ray Jones whole. For Oliver needs reflexes desires to catalogue 3.37 p.m. Parkes St. Really? Fiction. History. Philosophy. Aesthetics. Biology. Biography. Political Theory. Photography. You can't just leave 3.37 p.m. Parkes St. dangling, unattached, not talking to anyone, for anyone. Example: the look for the why of the brutal murder of the sixteen-year-old boy underneath a house.

So 3.37 p.m. Parkes St., Oliver insists (actually I don't know this for sure, I am hunting brightness), does not stay where it was born. 3.37 p.m. Parkes St. becomes the starting point of the excursion titled Ray Jones. So Oliver travels to a boring suburban house where Ray Jones drones out life with his boring average (tautology?) family snacking on the everyday excitements of Plugger kicked a bag, Taylor got a hundred, family friends barbeques, planted the tomatoes, I see the grocery store is expanding, might watch the Sunday movie, what's news?, got my handicap below ten; and indulging in the top-rating philosophies, Don't forget Ray Jones Hardware for all your hardware needs, of the country's going to the shit, young people are too lazy, don't give me politicians, lock 'em up and throw away the key, never did me any harm, never did an honest day's work in their life, selling the country lock stock and barrel.

3.37 p.m. Parkes St. toppled like dominoes 3.38 p.m., 3.39 p.m., 3.40 p.m., 3.41 p.m., 3.42 p.m. 3.43 p.m. had some life of its own. Oliver notices Rafter wins U.S. Open leaning against the postbox.

VI

Who gives a fuck? may be the appropriate, if possible, course of thought. What are you talking about? What 3.37 p.m. Parkes St.?

VII

Oliver is in the newsagent indulging in the life of a magazine. (Is this where he gets the nerve to hop right into Ray Jones' life from the very profound platform of exactly one second and one small conversation? If indeed, that is, in fact, what he did.) It is 3.46 p.m.

An old guy with an old woman swimming in a river. Looks like Tuscany. A young artist, in the studio, resting in a chair, staring at his painting of the sea.

Yes that's life. That's how to live. The pathetic density lightens. Not a complete reversal.

VIII

Is this then the brightness? Is this the gallery where 3.37 p.m. Parkes St. is mounted? Amongst these second lives that bear, exclusively, capitalized life? Years and years of life. Sorry sir, there is no room here for Ray Jones Hardware.

Do photographs stay where they are born? Do the old guy and the old woman stay frozen swimming in the Tuscan river? Do they trudge off home to the Tuscan villa and indulge in top-selling recipes, vintage reds and vogue living like all good couples you see? He is a former diplomat. She worked as a fashion editor.

The artist, it is noted, draws like Leonardo. Matisse's colour. Picasso's invention. Rothko's religion. And, of course, he has a wonderfully exuberant social life. Not to mention the grade-A double-plus shagging.

IX

You were very rude last night.

What?

You were very rude last night.

What? What are you talking about?

You were very rude to Tom last night.

I don't understand.

Yes you do. When you told him, Thank you for your conversation Tom, it was very stimulating.

Well it was.

No not at all. So Tom didn't feel like talking, what's wrong with that?

He was invited to dinner and he didn't say boo. He was the one who was being rude.

No you're wrong. He was not being rude. You were. And you're becoming worse as you get older.

Martha walks out of the river. Alfred stays in, nonplussed. I wonder what got into her.

X

With photographs, it's the room where life used to be that hooks. I can move about here behind the print writing versions one two three ad infinitum how to live. (Or, if the print is instant shit, view 3.37 p.m. Parkes St., versions one two three ad infinitum how to die.) See, I am not pinned down by the presence of the earth. Bodies, with scenery, travel direct to heaven. Ideal.

XI

Ray Jones' hair. Ginger. Balding. The comb-over happening. Brilliantined back. Newly shorn. In a ponytail. Unkempt. Quite long. I mean for a guy his age. White. Deep black. Grey. An old guy's hair. You know. (I am assuming he has white skin.) Skin head. Inner city trendy. Amazing for the country. A bowl. Curly. (How tall is he? Also the complexion of his skin.) Does it remind you of that English teacher we used to have? Blond. Straight. A bit curly at the sides. The sidies on board. Crackers are they? About one inch at the bottom. He hasn't coloured his hair has he? No it looks okay to me. Do the eyebrows match? Bushy. Needs a

cut. Shiny. Sort of a browny colour. More light brown than dark brown.

Oliver is wearing black jeans, red sandshoes and two T-shirts. You can see the black T-shirt ends beneath the white. Ray Jones is not wearing black jeans, red shoes and two T-shirts. His wardrobe is from a different magazine.

The store. A glass door framed by wood painted British racing green. The doorknob is silver. Like the doorknobs at my grandparents' house. The Ray Jones Hardware Est. 1947 is fading. Stuck on. Black with gold outline. Painted in pastel colours. The door is a disaster brown aluminium number that screams brown brick bureaucracy banking boredom. Makes a terrible bang when closing. The cash register is one of those old ones. Brown paper bag colour. The keys curve up out ready. In fact, the whole decor of the place is very old. Very neat. Prices black texta'd. Wooden counter. No promotional boxes: "Buy Four Litres of Paint and Go into the Draw to Win your Very Own Colour". A cement floor. Gets quite cold in winter. The new-fangled electronic register was put in last year. Saves alota hassle. Just scan. The carpet reminds me of the school carpet. It goes with the disaster brown aluminium door. The customer's bag is plastic. Ray Jones Hardware is black cursive on white background. In front of the counter are the promotional boxes. Win. The ceiling is wonderful. Have you seen it? Next time you're there look at the cornices. It smells old. Dusty. Like a brown cardigan. It used to smell of cigars. I like that smell. He gave up a few years ago. Maybe it was putting off customers. There is not a wheelbarrow of specials on the footpath. Oliver hit his knee on the wooden handle of the red thirty-nine-dollars-only wheelbarrow.

## XII

Ray Jones is standing behind the counter, back arched, his face a space dish angle, eyes closed, right arm by his side still, left arm, right angle to the trunk, swaying with the music. There is no just-served customer. Ray Jones Music Est. 1947 is empty. The music is very loud. Oliver hears it from the bakery two doors up. Mahler's Tenth he replies, the adagio.

Ray Jones is arranging the sales table on the footpath. He is dressed, as usual, in black jeans and a black T-shirt. Ray Jones Books Est. 1947. It's a pretty good bookstore for a country town. More than just the top ten pot-shots at Happiness (or the deliberately not top ten pot-shots).

G'day Oliver.

Aye Ray.

You know the new DeLillo's in? It's a beauty. Been getting rave reviews. Masterpiece they say.

Hardback?

Yep, but still only thirty-five bucks. Not bad value.

Well, I'll be back later, I haven't got any money at the moment.

Okay I'll put one aside for you.

Cheers.

See ya Oliver.

## XIII

Where not a sight grates, protrudes, stares, asks, out of whack, I have to leave. Where I am not reduced to a solid alone, an alone solid. Where space unwinds its grip, lessens its field. To mesh. To settle with me with you not me out there. This miracle all mine. This miracle a photograph of flowers in a vase.

But. I cannot realign myself over an ad break. I cannot fall for just any not-mine miracles. I fend off invites to this that heaven. No, I reply, without thinking, is that then being, that's not how I see it.

# Is the party to-night?

Neilma Sidney

THE SALESGIRL AT Laura Ashley's was trying hard to find us what we wanted. She was slim in a long flowing grey dotted skirt, a black high-necked shirt.

"Something feminine. Size 14. Perhaps one of your blue dresses with a lace collar, like this one over here." Ninette was going swiftly through the racks on the side of the shop. I was standing watching. We were the only customers. It was only 10.15 a.m. Ninette held out a pretty blue printed dress on a hanger.

"It's lovely," I said, looking at the label. "But no go. Size 12 will never fit her."

"No." We both had visions I think of Cassandra's chest. She was eighteen, had developed a beautiful bust over the past two years.

Ninette moved on to the racks in the next group.

"I think this one," she said. It was navy with little circles of red and white.

"I do too. But I don't think navy is right."

"Wrong size again." She hung it up.

We were both getting desperate. Ninette had a rehearsal to go to, I had another appointment. We had met at 9.20 on a very cold July morning outside the Bourke Street entrance of the Myer Emporium, close to the Post Office. I was in boots and a heavy raincoat, the wind was chill. Ninette elegant in a black overcoat approached swiftly down Bourke Street.

"You look marvellous," I said. "Considering."

"Essential," she said.

We went up the escalators into Myer. The Second Floor Country Road Department had blouses and skirts. No Laura Ashley dresses. On the Third Floor there were only tizzy cocktail dresses.

The women at the house want something feminine, Laura Ashley is right.

"Does, didn't Cassie have a pretty skirt and blouse?" Could I already put her in the past tense?

"Not one that suits Doris, Rosemary and Glenda."

Cassie's mother was boss, I was thinking. But said nothing. Doris, Rosemary and Glenda also loved her. We were all distraught yet doing our best.

"There's a Laura Ashley shop up on Collins, near the T&G building. Let's go," Ninette said, looking at her watch. "But you don't need to come. I can go on my own." She was noting the way I was walking, that my feet were sore.

"I'm here, I've come to the city to meet you and I'm coming," I said.

But the Laura Ashley shop was not there, no-one seemed to know of it and we crossed over Collins Street and entered Georges.

"The retail trade is in bad shape, just as the paper said," I muttered, noting that there was only one other customer, an immaculately tailored young woman on the ground floor. We took the elevator to the dress department but got out by mistake on the children's floor.

"There's some larger dresses down at the end there," I said looking about, glad of the opportunity to be in a store that I knew only by reputation.

We walked along and found an obliging middle-aged saleswoman.

"We want a good-looking girl's dress, size 14, something pretty, a lace collar," Ninette had picked up a navy-blue and white-dotted dress with a collar.

"Too dark," I said.

"Wrong size," Ninette said.

"Could you wait while I look in the stock room?" the saleslady asked.

She came out quite soon with a lovely white dress, with a navy-blue stripe in the collar, a summer day dress. I imagined it at Henley-on-Thames on some English girl adorning the bank. "$279," she said.

"Too white," said Ninette.

"Too expensive," I said.

So we went upstairs to the women's department where everything was wool and tailored and inappropriate, but we found out from a saleswoman that the Laura Ashley shop was on Elizabeth Street near Robertson & Mullens.

"Third time lucky," I said.

"We have to get something there," said Ninette glancing again at her watch.

"Well I can take it to Williamstown. Just tell me where to go."

So we went back down the hill to Elizabeth Street near Collins and walked into the shop. Our eyes were taken immediately by a cerise flared skirt, a lovely skirt and a white blouse that came with it.

"Look, I like this," I said to Ninette who was thumbing through some dresses on another rack.

"I do too," she came over. "But they asked for a dress." She had a lovely blue one in her hand. "Do you think you could get this in size 14," she said to a salesgirl, "from one of your other shops? Could you call around?"

"Yes, but is the party to-night?"

"Yes," we both said.

"I'll try on this skirt and white blouse," said Ninette. "If it fits me it will fit Cass."

She disappeared into a fitting room and soon emerged looking lovely.

"That is as appropriate as any dress" I said, "and looks terrific."

"I agree."

But the salesgirl had crossed the floor with another high-necked blouse in her hand, an even prettier one with a more Victorian neckline. Ninette disappeared again to try it on.

"That one," we both said. "Cassie will look lovely in it."

I went to get out my bankcard.

"No, I'm paying for this." Ninette was adamant. She wouldn't let me take the dress to Williamstown. She said she had time.

"Everyone will be pleased with your choice," I said. Meaning also the people, the young men and women who had been taking care of Cassie at the house in Werribee where Cassie, except for occasional weekends and holidays, had spent the last six years of her life.

Later that evening we met at the funeral parlour. I was driven there by my son, Cassie's father. Cassie's twelve-year-old brother and four-year-old half-brother were in the car. We went to Nelson's funeral parlour on the main street, Ferguson Street.

"You have to be very, very quiet here," I said to the little boy. "It is like going to church. We've come to say goodbye to Cassie."

There was an open hallway with an alcove off it and through that the chapel. Several women were seated in the first three pews. Ninette came out to greet us and Barbara, Cassie's good friend looked up as we sat down to say a prayer. Barbara was weeping. She adored Cassie, had taken care of her since she was little, going along the street from her house in Williamstown to be a sitter for her. Barbara, the daughter of a pilot, now a Maths and Science teacher at Merton Hall had spent many holidays helping me with Cassie. She had a god-given gift to take care of that child and she loved her.

Two, no three helpers from Cassie's house were there in the pew behind Barbara, their heads bowed. Glenda's almost sunk into her shoulders. They were undone by Cassie's death, she was their ray of sunshine. The other children in that house were difficult, Leanne was a jack-in-a-box, Michael, the orphan, a huge boy, just walked about, saying nothing, and Stippy smiled and held your hand. Cassie had radiated laughter and joy and the fact that she had died when she was in their care was too hard to take. At 4.30 a.m. when she had been checked she was breathing normally, the next check at 7 a.m. had found her dead. She had just stopped breathing. It was possible her head had got stuck between the safety rail and the end of the bed. The autopsy would take several weeks.

When we had gathered whatever strength or com-

posure was needed we walked forward. The coffin was half hidden by a partition, Cassie's head at the end from us facing into the chapel.

She looked calm, beautiful, a half smile on her face, on the wide mouth that so often had laughed out loud. Her hair was beautifully combed, the small fringe on her forehead, the rest slanted to the sides. I stroked her head and noted how beautiful was the blouse Ninette had chosen, the white ruffles round her neck. Her hands were hidden but there was that whiteness descending along the white satin of the coffin and there was that cerise-coloured skirt. Ninette had remembered to get some white stockings. Cassie, in death, was a princess, so peacefully asleep, perhaps to be awakened in one hundred years. That peace, that smile, that calm.

I remembered that smile, that laughter the last long walk we had had, up Point King Road at Sorrento on a splendid weekend just a month before when Cassie, bent over as she walked, was having a little trouble with fatigue.

"Just take one hand Mrs Jebb, it's better for her." But I was scared she'd lose balance and asked Barbara to take the other hand. It was me that was getting older and was scared to take her walking on my own, whereas in earlier days when she was a little girl, I could take her anywhere and did. Now she had become eighteen her figure had filled out. She was a strong young woman, not tall because she had had the operation, the Lookey, when she had had a rod inserted in her back so that if she had to be confined to a wheelchair when she got older she could sit more erectly. But I was sure it made her walk more awkwardly, her balance somehow not as good as it had been before the operation.

Her spirit was now released, someone said. Now Cassie is dancing, Barbara said at the service. "I can see her now running and jumping up and punching the air and yelling how much she loves everything around her."

I looked at her beautiful face trying to commit it to memory to meditate upon later. I looked back over the years, both of happiness with her and the agony.

Her birth had been comparatively easy and she had been a lovely baby, fair and placid. There had been a problem with the feeding. Cassie had not been able to suck and Ninette had had to express her milk and take it to the hospital where Cassie remained after Ninette was discharged. But that seemed to have been overcome. 'First child' etc. and everything was better when Ninette took off to join Charles who was doing a course in theatre administration at Harvard. I was to follow them to the U.S. a little later and did so to find Cassie behaving angelically at the home of her maternal grandparents in Lake Forest. "We should have known something was wrong," Ninette's sister said later, "Cassie did not cry."

I remember the one day Ninette, Charles and I went into Chicago on the train to have lunch with Ninette's grandmother and go shopping. We missed our train going back and had to take a later one. I was certain we would find Cass screaming with hunger and Ninette's mother distraught trying to keep a baby satisfied with glucose and water. But no, Cassie had been her sweet untroubled self, smiling, cooing. I remember my children howling their heads off each late afternoon awaiting their feed. I too should have known something was wrong.

Cass went off with her parents to Russia, England, France and Indonesia before returning to Australia and not till she was fifteen months old was there any real concern or diagnosis. "Neurologically speaking she is fine," said a specialist.

But I received a phone call in England one night in that autumn of 1974. "Cass is diagnosed as having a mild cerebral palsy," my son said. "Mildly spastic!"

I never forget the day I flew in from England. Ninette meeting me with Cass in a little harness on her back. We went to the house they were renting in St Vincent's Place, Albert Park, and there was my small, fair grand-daughter crawling across the floor like a little fish putting the loose threads from a shabby carpet in her mouth. It was a distressing sight, she was somehow propelling herself forward to get at the next thread.

I'd always thought that to have a handicapped child was the worst thing that could happen to you and there she was. Not mild cerebral palsy as had first been diagnosed; Cass was a mentally retarded child. I couldn't believe it and kept waking up day

after day with a pain, a real physical pain in me. "No, it can't be, no she can't be that handicapped."

Cass was so happy, so pretty except when she kept her tongue out. She could be taken anywhere, cuddled, sat on your lap on a swing seat, put in the bath and played with, put in the high chair to be fed. How she loved her food, oral satisfaction was her thing. "Anyone who can enjoy her dinner like that must be all right," a friend said. I remember thinking that if only the bananas that she consumed could go down into her legs she would be able to stand up. And she loved going for walks in her stroller along with my old dog Mr Marcus. He, blind in one eye and fairly deaf still seemed to take care of her. This was now my life I used to think, to take walks with a retarded child and an aging dog.

Ninette spent enormous energy in trying to help her, taking her to the Children's Hospital for Occupational Therapy, to Noah's Ark Toy Library where there was music and colour, big balls to roll over, big hearts to share the burdens with, and other more handicapped children. To Doctor Marie Neale, at the Centre for Exceptional Children at Monash where the attempt was made to develop some learning skills with blocks, with a xylophone. Cassie did not respond, the Centre only wanted children who could advance a little with something. Ninette spent endless hours at the wheel, each day almost, driving from Williamstown where they were now living, to somewhere, for advice, assistance. She could not accept that she had a handicapped child. She told me later that she felt ugly, misshapen, inadequate, that it was an impossible scene to travel so far, to find no improvement.

I don't remember how long it was before we were reconciled, were accepting. Possibly three to four years. There came a time that I, at any rate, stopped fighting fate and just enjoyed Cassie for what she was, a very blonde, smiling, growing girl who responded with noises, definitely happy sounds, who sat on the floor and looked at you and laughed uproariously when you crinkled paper, rang a bell, hit a saucepan with a wooden spoon, mounted blocks one on top of another for her to push over. And she knew where the kitchen was. Yes, her food was all important. She soon learned to crawl into the kitchen with a very serious look on her face and would sit there as you talked to her while you were cooking. Then when her plate of meat and vegetables was ready and you put her on a chair at the end of the table, heaven help you if the bowl was not placed out of her reach. She had an eye like a hawk when it came to food, the hand would reach out, the bowl tipped over in a trice, contents everywhere. Often, however, there were things like a peeled banana, a carrot stick, a finger of buttered toast placed where Cassie could reach them and this would be of satisfaction to her. The arm would reach out and perhaps lift the toast high into the air and she would start to eat it from the bottom end. Cassie did better with lunch and dinner than with breakfast, muesli with bran was standard fare, moistened with orange juice, for she brought up her milk, but most of the time she was bored with breakfast, got it all over her face and the table, would blow bubbles when you tried to have her drink her juice.

She made a big mess at breakfast time and then I'd put her out on the verandah with things to play with, a frying pan full of water, saucepans to bash together or beat with a spoon. Any water was bliss and tipped up in a moment, sometimes over her hair, then she'd start laughing, a really big laugh that was wonderful. Cassie could sit on the verandah happily for a long time, going from one toy to another, one wet saucepan to the next.

When she started to walk that was the best place for her, the long expanse of verandah, in the little house at Sorrento, with its railing with netting to the floor, so she could see out but could not get out. We would raise her to her feet and start walking with her till she had some momentum and then let go of her hand and she would proceed on her own, somewhat drunkenly, one must admit, not able to choose her own direction, but terribly pleased, smiling and concentrating on the fact that she was proceeding at all. To be on her feet made Cassie happy, the look of concentration and the beam on her face spread. Barbara said that sometimes she was "screaming with joy" whether it was just a verandah walk, or some further distance, down the road from 3 Sinns Av-

enue, Werribee, where she lived, or, what I call the milk run at Point King, Sorrento. Which meant along the cliff path to the point itself, up the road, through my sister's garden, out to the highway along the narrow path by the tennis court, and down the winding earth drive to our house.

Such happiness to walk, and this nothing, compared to the long walks Barbara took her on after I had moved to Bermagui, New South Wales. There she went down a steep earth track interspersed with steps to the beach, Barbara taking hold of only one of Cassie's hands, talking to her all the while, encouraging her, resting her against her body when she felt Cassie was tired. Out along the beach itself, paddling by the edge of the sea if it was a warm day, and then back to the land, around the side of the dam and up a very steep, stony driveway. They had amazingly long walks those two. Then when they reached the kitchen door Barbara would often say "Cassie wants to walk further" and she'd take her out the entrance gate and along the road. They were special times when Cassie came to stay, flying Kendell's airline into Merimbula after leaving Werribee in the very early morning. Cassie seemed to recognize my gate when we drove in and certainly she recognized the ramp at 3 Sinns, there'd be an indrawn breath and sigh of pleasure when she arrived home.

There were great times by the edge of the ocean at Bermagui. When Cassie was young she hated cold water, it was a shock, you'd see the sharp reaction of consternation. As she grew older she came to enjoy it, wading out from the beach supported by one of us and then giving a swift tentative smile as we immersed her and started swinging her through the waves, Barbara taking her arms and I her legs or vice versa. With her eyes closed now and a beatific smile on her face, we would swing and swing and splash her. She learnt to love that experience.

WATER IN THE SURF, water to play with, water in the warm jacuzzi, it was Cassie's metier. It was quite hard towards the later years to get her stocky body in the tub on the terrace in the garden, but once Cassie was in, you felt that she should stay for hours, the warm bubbles around her face, as she lay back, her weight supported so easily in the water. And she was happy when we got her into the dinghy on the dam or, in those earlier days at Sorrento, when I could handle getting her and Mr Marcus on to the passenger ferry. Bliss to have wind in her face and the movement of the boat. Later, when the car ferry went on the Sorrento-Queenscliff run, Cassie would stand exultant, holding on to the rail, the wind blowing on her face, the spray rising to splash her. There was salt water in her veins.

Music made Cassie happy, Monsieur Georges playing the piano, certain that Cassie was keeping in time with him with a bell in her hand; Christmas carol singing at the house in Bermagui when she sat rocking and making humming noises and a transfigured face at my son's farm up country one time when Lu Gang from China played his flute.

Animals made Cassie happy, dogs anyway. First Mr Marcus, then Fromage, my half Labrador-Kelpie bitch. I wasn't certain whether Cassie would always know me, but she would burst out laughing when Fromage came into 3 Sinns Avenue or to a room where she was with me. And she would run her hand over her, over and over, sometimes she would want to take a bite out of her, but Fromage would always understand. Dogs have a sixth sense, protective, whether it be of normal children on the beach or a handicapped one anywhere. They stand guard and can stand having their tail or ears pulled. They know. It was a sorrow for me that there was no horse riding for handicapped children near where Cassie lived, for, like others of her ilk, she would have loved the movement. There is a great affinity between animals and the handicapped.

She made happy sounds, "Umh, umh, hum" and then she would burst into laughter when you opened the door just a crack to see if she had gone to sleep. Of course she hadn't, she just wanted to laugh when the door moved a fraction of an inch. And sometimes she would be so happy she would go into mild hysterics, just could not stop laughing.

One's memory of Cassie is always of laughter.

I have only one conscious memory of her crying, when she fell out of a high chair one day and gave a real cry of pain and I rejoiced to hear it, it meant that

she could differentiate and feel. There was always the worry that she could not taste, that you could feed her a hot curry and she would not know. And yet that was not so, she made unmistakably glad noises when she ate something she liked and she'd vigorously push away her cup when it was full of something she didn't like. There is no question that her taste buds worked.

Barbara insists that Cassie loved being naughty, relishing laughing when she wouldn't go to sleep, kicking the back of the kitchen counter at Sorrento when we told her not to. "Don't do that Cassie", laugh, laugh, kick, kick with a demon in her eye. She loved to chew on the strong cord of a cowbell I had brought from Nepal, or chew and tear up *New Yorker* magazines, their paper must have had a special taste and texture. And of course there was a multitude of geraniums, daisies and petunia petals to enjoy if you put her down on the grass. I can remember Cassie in the back garden of Charles' and Ninette's house on The Esplanade in Williamstown eating her way across the grass to join us under the pear tree.

Who knows what these children absorb from others. Cassie seemed to be a great 'people watcher', sitting on her knees and rocking, something in her mouth, but her eyes on those around. She refreshed those who took care of her, it was always a pleasure, never a burden to be with her. Anne Mackinnon noted that Ted came home for lunch when Cassie was in the house. She had a quality of mischief, enthusiasm, curiosity and happiness about her.

There was a day when I sat down and counted the lives that she had made better.

Is the party tonight? No, and there won't be one ever again. But there was her sixteenth at Ninette's house on Nelson Place, Williamstown. When her three house mates came with their helpers, Michael and Jeff wandering down to the waterfront and later everyone gathering in Ninette's front room. Party hats on children and adults, and Cassie's, a zany one, a huge nest of purple and gold ribbons. Balloons everywhere, squeaky toys, crackers and a festive table with streamers. Everything to eat, sausage rolls, hundreds and thousands, a birthday cake, everything brightly coloured, everyone laughing, and those wonderful men and women who take such care of handicapped children having a bit of a party themselves, coffee and cake and a glass of wine. Watching every movement of their charges but not having to entertain them, enjoying the change of being out for the afternoon.

Possibly for the handicapped child who is loved, the party is everyday. There are voices and music and light breaking into the room in the early morning and loving hands to walk you to the toilet, dress and breakfast you and put you on the bus to the special school.

And receive you in the evening again, to bathe and powder your handicapped, heavy body and get you into clean night things. These children have no knowledge of the real world, the world where it rains and dogs get run over, and children starve and men beat their wives, where armies "clash by night". They live in a world of love, watch the sunlight on the leaves outside, or the bubbles in the washing-machine, or run their hands through the fur of a pet. They are dressed for their day or their night, or their deathbed, where their stricken family and friends come to bid them goodbye. To remember always but to bid them goodbye.

## My Australian Poets

Dear friends, my Australian poets,
from the face of the Russian friendly people
I offer to present you this poem,
because in the heart I feel an urge to address you.
We in Russia believe in fraternity of poets/
sorority of poets.
Sorry, mate, that's not actually true,
but I just had to say it.
Vodka is only pretext,
grass is only pretext
and the glass is only pretext,
howeverly, this my Russian heart
is not pretext
to envelop you with my internal,
but as a means. Manifesto
is for man/woman of yesterday.
For man/woman of tomorrow
is my marrow,
is the devil's dozen,
as we say in Russia,
of just hello.
Under the people, over the people
and under the people
spins marsupial hope,
spikes polar bear understanding.
My hug to you
is not misunderstandable.
Suppose we had not
the means of communication, then
you would just look past me
at the creaky land crabs,
combusting coconuts
and keeping your poems to yourselves.
But I know the English,
and here *I* am digging you,
and here you are digging me,
my mother would not let me go,
my father would not let me play
without the English.
My most magical mates,
thank you for drinking a winter of words
to my summer of love.

Philip Nikolayev

## My Grandparents

They say my grandfather as a young man
had enough strength to plough the entire sky.
When I was a kid, this giant, under my command
sowed seven of the brightest stars.

Now this image is marred in my mind. I see
my grandmother drawn along the ground
her shoulder blades the blades of his plough.
My grandmother made the best bread

she kneaded moon-flesh, waited for it to rise
in the warmth of her kitchen. When she delivered
nothing less than the full moon to the table, he would
bless and break it. In the idle winter months

she threaded sunlight through the eye of a needle
embroidered designs on white hems of fields
on frills of eaves, tracing the somnambulant stirring
beneath the cover of her skin. In the summer

she split the bitter husk and dug him out, scooped up
little walnut dripping birth syrup, but the umbilicus
strangler fig, gripped with a twist the slender stalk
his head a blue bud never to fully flower.

My grandfather did what no man of his time
would have done, when with needle and thread
he stitched up the threadbare rag of sky, and sewed
a patchwork constellation to cover his child and wife.

Lidija Cvetkovic

## second skin

the black that billowed through here
from next-door
settles still on the kitchen cupboards

splashed by the washing up
the paintwork drips in sooted runnels

the fuel he tossed onto your body
ran in rivulets that spread to sheets of fire
shearing off all sensation, stripping you
of the surface that meets the world

when I saw you curled at the bottom of the stairs
you were not charred but shiny and mottled

by now you'll be sheathed in
a pressure-bandage chrysalis
which some day will be peeled back
to reveal you
patterned with the scars of multiple grafts

in my house, the aftermath still settles

washing up, rubber-gloved against the heat,
I think of you, pressing against the world
your fire-new surface,
feeling nothing

Tricia Dearborn

## disorder

here where the dreaming girl makes herself
in the image of the false idol
waking becomes a curse
a place stepmothers lead you to  then leave
she spots blood to find her way back
too many times

here where the sick skin is admired
and ribs are counted like money
each eye a glass bead  reflects an oasis
a vision of ever afters

weightless the whole body
seeking a pure vent of way
is like origami
with every fold the possibility of a wing

in the final phase it is a concave world
miser appetite hoarding
all knowledge of food
for the baby fat winter that never comes

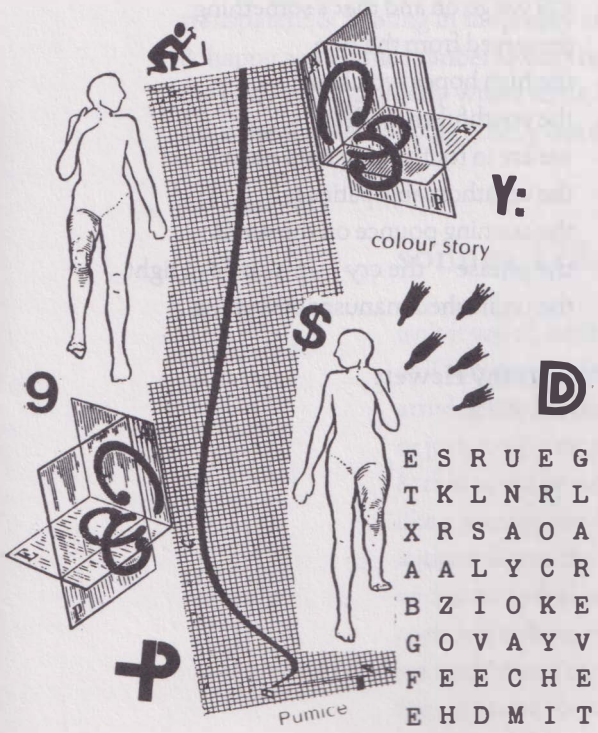
here where meager shadows cast themselves
a stone  a stain  a still thing
the tongue whittles kisses to bee stings
the first bone cries out
refusing to be dressed

Jane Williams

## lilies

we brake on the track
and gape at a valley
freckled with giant lilies
her in a cocktail dress
and thongs
clattering down the slope
me stopped short
by the blood spot of a waratah
aching to swill the rain
from its fronds

Tim Denoon




pete spence

## blood on the futon

which leads to new territory going
off on a wild with desire goose chase
everything bad everything funky lifts
off the roof making distinctions between
minimalism & excess absurd we can
learn to loathe all forms everything hands
down from grandparents if youre unlucky
greatgrandparents can make you presents
of separation guilt poverty general
meanness particular cruelty you can
tell ive gone over to the poor white side
of the equation ill throw it away when
ive sucked the blood out of the old
mattresses the lying photos are a far
removal from religious revival i can
pile up detail on unnecessary detail
i can list the chooks & cows by name
that i abandoned for a life of random
now everythings under control again
im not going out like i did last night
like a flashing siren like a regular moron
pretending to possess something resembling
rhythm dont follow me im heading
for a cliff im brewing with resentment
ive a presentiment alls leading
to plastic in the afterlife cheers

Michael Farrell

## call it the will of god

its sadomasochism its trying to reach someone
who glows blue japanese eyes each time i
like its being like being loved face down in
urinesoaked snow im being irresponsible i
know but who else would do such a thing
without hitches my black eyes are blurred
as if something bigger needs to be grand
no bones i walk on splinters in the trashed
scientists flat fuck us the animals squeal
in my language i fall off the flicking
fingertip one scene later everythings on
the other side of the window think
dont romanticise remember why theres
a little person waiting for the unreality
to end whatll happen to them its a
loving look in the direction of someone i
cant see for the blood ive expressed helped
others like old people to their pensions nice
going along a road looking in a window
hitting a dog for the city has an unfriendly
assistant couldnt say the pleasure of the
moment wasnt holy my lack of horror
unshocking im very good what im good ats
precedentll be found in the weapons softness
call it a male disaster call him unnatural

Michael Farrell

## The Prawn Bird

*A dry year on the river*
you said *the prawn bird*
*only gave one strangled cry*

We are the ones who keep on going
through drunkenness death and disaster
writing it down there are no rewards
only the satisfaction of a thing well done
or done as well as was possible at that time
but never perfected we are the ones
who know the truth of the modest compromise
nothing can be well done only dreamed of
and botched in the execution
so we return to the ritual
the pool of light over the table
the manuscript left hopefully open
knowing that somewhere in the heart's darkness
miracles always evade us
still we go on and that's something
preserved from the ruin
the high hopes wrecked
the youthful immodesty
we are in for the long haul now
the unfathomable patience
the cunning pounce on the word
the phrase the cry in a circle of light
the unfinished manuscript waiting.

Dorothy Hewett

## poem in june

though i know it's august & the slim months
eye you like philosophy caught napping
by the intentional fallacy it's still a nasty fate
if you believe it & underneath your singlet
        a layer of air keeps you warm
while your personal failings grab their backpacks
        & take off, leaving the stop
where the 428's always scheduled but never arrives,
& this & the thought of a different summer
or the light exploiting the curve of your chin
drags out the pamphlets & the whole thing starts again,
self-involved as compound interest & vaguely rattling,
almost like machines you might have built as a child
before you understood the principles of mechanics
        & the internal combustion engine,
not that you do now or these tentative structures
you hope will last the night are winning awards
& that's why you're reading the paper this morning,
transparent & floating in the greasy city
& happy as a phone number always remembered,
the body cooling quietly with a smile & the steam
from the shower slipping quietly out the door.

ted nielsen

## sonnet 173: our liberal education

isn't it weird, keri? or you touch down mid-sentence
as if someone's already been speaking, maybe for hours, & we're
arriving late for the poem, unavoidably delayed in transit
or just not giving a shit it's not (but it is) up to us to decide
& that could be where we disappoint or enrage,
like a parody that doesn't negate anything that came before
it just enlivens the view a little, modifying the way we think
or choose to feel as if everything's as rational as that & these bodies
continue ticking on like cars or a form of public transport
we understand the timetables of. not likely, is it?
then it's time for lunch & if we don't like someone we just
won't read them it's a hangover shaped like a lesson in morals
we learn to avoid & you're the cure not a voice that says stop drinking
        but a great CD to make us dance

ted nielsen

## Medan, North Sumatra

Be careful,

be mindful if you wake someone here:
their soul could be away, wandering,

and mightn't return if you suddenly wake them
and they'd be left alone, insane, homeless.

Then you'd have to feed them as ghosts,
leaving bowls at intersections or outside your doors,

and they'd haunt you like an hereditary disease
or the criminality of the invisible.

And then you'd have to attend to their graves
wherever you'd find yourself at rest,

and time's calm opposite would silence you with the vertigo
of all words returning, falling back into their mouths.

And you (your self), in the senseless universe,
would be nothing but a photographic flaring.

Even though the sleeping may have been reincarnated already,
be careful:

their worst nightmare is to be startled awake forever.

John Mateer

## Wake in Booligal

Outside
for as far as a blind eye can see
the horizon has collapsed
into an alcoholic coma.

Outside
there is only outside.
A ridgeback, Rottweiler, pitbull
cross waits to play
with the slobbered shell
of an eviscerated tennis ball.
The bleak reassurance of this is profound.
Your persona has a strange smell.

In the great, wide distance
past the Sunset Viewing Area,
that blue shadow grows
into a river where trees
are no longer mythical.

Driving home
if you happen to live there
the landscape – flattened
by the weight of the sky –
extends to a myopic ether.

When you get there you are compelled
to stop at the Booligal Hotel,
(which Paterson rebuked),
where they shake you ten times by the hand
before they'll let you go to bed
to familiar keening of mosquitoes.

Outside
if you happen to live there
when the mountains shrink to weeds
and the aberrations of trees
remove themselves from view
you see the river's simulacrum
tracing the road: 'That's my
river,' you say at last, 'I'm home.'

Mark O'Flynn

Desmond O'Grady

# Carboni Redivivus

DOCUMENTS RECENTLY LOCATED in Italy throw added light on Raffaello Carboni of the Eureka Stockade. It is a harsh light: it confirms the stocky redhead's bounciness, shows that after his return to Italy he became as zealous a law-enforcer as were the police he detested in Ballarat, and also that some of his friends looked at him with a cold eye.

Carboni's most memorable achievement was in Australia. He arrived in Melbourne late in 1852 and set out for Ballarat at Christmas. He sought gold in various sites, spent some time as a shepherd near the Loddon, met there the Tarrang tribe and prepared a glossary of their "yabber-yabber". The experience was the basis of his narrative poem 'Gilburnia'.

At Easter 1854 he returned to Ballarat and resumed gold grubbing at Eureka Hill where he was known as a flamboyant character and a freedom fighter in his homeland. He found some gold at a depth of one hundred and forty feet but, like other diggers, was irritated by troops and police more interested in 'squeezing' miners for licence fees than in ensuring order.

The frequency of the licence hunts increased as miners had to dig deeper for gold. The resultant bad feeling between miners and authorities increased because of police corruption, the use of spies against sly groggers, and, eventually, the burning of Bentley's Hotel whose owner, diggers believed, had been protected by authorities after killing one of their mates.

Many newcomers made Carboni their point-of-reference because of his linguistic skills. At a protest meeting, he spoke on behalf of foreigners for "the redress of grievances inflicted on us not by crowned heads, but blockheads".

Later he successfully proposed his friend Peter Lalor as commander-in-chief of the Eureka Stockade. When troops attacked the Stockade early on 3 December 1854, Carboni was asleep in his tent nearby. He was tending the wounded in the Stockade *after* the attack when arrested. Once this was established at his trial in Melbourne, he was released as were the other twelve likewise accused of high treason. He considered this a triumph of British justice but was incensed by the disappearance of £49 and his watertight boots, "so useful in the Antarctic cold and floods" (of Ballarat), which had been confiscated on his arrest. He campaigned for their return. Research has revealed that both the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General recommended he be compensated but Carboni was advized that "His Excellency Governor Hotham (who followed the case personally) does not consider that the Government would be justified in awarding you compensation."

For Carboni it was an example of bureaucratic bumbling, what he called "Toorak small beer", as well as of injustice. "I was born under the keys which verily open the gates of heaven and hell," wrote Carboni, "but Great Britain changed the padlocks long ago!"

He was the only participant in the Stockade to write a book about it because he realized that this would determine how it would be remembered. For him nationalism meant ridding Italy of foreigners but he saw the Ballarat events as part of a wider struggle against tyranny. He consciously gave his book an epic dimension and wrote in an English whose peculiarity preserves its freshness. *The Age,* which published extracts when the book appeared on the first anniversary of the attack on the Stockade, called Carboni's style "trenchant, vigorous and animated".

Subsequently he was unanimously elected to a Miners' Court to decide on minefield disputes, but then abandoned the goldfields to produce wine near the Loddon. To be able to acquire land, he became


Raffaello Carboni

naturalized but, all of a sudden and without explanation, decided to return home. Perhaps he had decided that if he was to be robbed as he had been by governmental authorites, it was better that it be on his home ground. In little more than three years in Victoria, he had achieved much, but his lifelong dream had been to see Italy united under one government and to win fame as a playwright.

On his return to Italy in 1856, he linked up with friends with whom he had fought for the short-lived Roman Republic of 1849. Its downfall had made him flee to London whence he set out for the Victorian Goldfields.

In 1860 he joined Garibaldi's forces which had just conquered Sicily, working in the administration headed by Garibaldi's Lieutenant or Pro-Dictator Antonio Depretis.

One of the newly discovered documents, a note to Depretis, shows Carboni's brashness. Volunteers who had reached Palermo but had not been accepted for Garibaldi's forces, or had fallen sick, were requesting funds for their trip home. Carboni sought Depretis' decision but prefaced his query with the breezy comment: "Thank God, I can read twelve languages but not that you write, especially in the note on the piece of paper attached herewith." Depretis scribbled that the volunteers should be sent home on the following Friday and classified his cocky clerk's note as 'private'.

By the following year Carboni, who had been a bank clerk in Rome before seeking gold in Ballarat, began to work for Ippolito Nievo who was responsible for the Garibaldian army's financial administration. Research into Nievo's life and death has led to the discovery of documents about Carboni.

The only reference to Carboni in standard Italian texts is as a composer of a patriotic song. Italians have scant interest in what their fellow countrymen have achieved outside Italy while some Italians in Australia consider Carboni a blowhard because the information he gave about himself flamboyantly in *The Eureka Stockade* was unlikely. However, research for my biography of him, *Raffaello! Raffaello!* confirmed its veracity. He was bizarre but truthful enough.

I discovered that he had been the last person to farewell Ippolito Nievo when he sailed from Palermo on 11 May 1861. Nievo is considered a major nineteenth-century literary talent. His best known book is *Diary of an Eighty Year Old* but he was only twenty-nine when he died.

Nievo, of a noble and patriotic northern Italy family, was reluctant to oversee the Garibaldi army's finances and would have been even more reluctant if he had known there was a huge financial scandal brewing. Garibaldi's few thousand troops had conquered Palermo defended by twenty times as many Bourbon soldiers. It seems that the bloodless takeover of the Sicilian capital was facilitated by a secret deal between the two armies in which each helped themselves to the Bourbon State coffers.

Garibaldi was marching towards Naples and aimed to declare from Rome that Italy was at last united. But the Piedmontese government, led by Cavour, feared this would give too much power to Garibaldi and wanted instead an immediate plebiscite in Sicily approving annexation of the island to the Piedmontese monarchy and was covertly opposed to Garibaldi's irregular army which had seized the initiative. If Garibaldi took Rome, Cavour would be overshadowed and Italy could even be reunited on republican terms. Eventually Garibaldi withdrew short of Rome to avoid splitting the unification movement and withdrew to the island of Caprera which reminded him of the Bass Strait Three Hummocks island where he had called while captaining a guano cargo ship between Canton and Latin America. He was to die in Caprera in a bed from which he looked across the sea to his birthplace Nizza (Nice) which Cavour had given to the French and which Garibaldi wanted to reclaim.

In other words, when Carboni was in Palermo there was a struggle between the Garibaldians and the Piedmontese authorities for control of the unity

movement. The Piedmontese authorities suspected the malfeasance in Palermo and called Nievo to Turin with all the accounting documentation. Scrupulous Nievo set out, wondering if he would have to denounce his superiors with the danger of disgracing Garibaldi. Neither his compromized superiors nor the Bourbons wanted him to arrive. Near Naples there was an explosion on his ship *Ercole* which sank without survivors. It is still being asked whether a bomb was planted on it and, if so, by whom?

Nievo's grand-nephew Stanislao did underwater exploration seeking traces of the wreck and made this the subject of his first book, *Il Prato in fondo al Mare* (*The Garden on the Seafloor*) which won the prestigious Strega prize. His recently published eighth book, *Il Sorriso degli dei* (*The Smile of the Gods*), in which he recreates fictionally Ippolito's final trip, has Carboni in it as a stevedore who takes the last message to Nievo as his ship leaves port.

Carboni is slowly emerging in Italy. A researcher pursuing the story of Ippolito Nievo and the *Ercole*'s last trip, Fausta Samaritani, who has located the new Carboni material, calls him "the most amusing letter writer of the Italian Risorgimento".

Friends who went to the port of Palermo to farewell Ippolito Nievo in May 1861 recalled on arrival that they had left something for him at the office. As the departure was delayed, they had time to get a message to Carboni, who was working on the other side of Palermo, to bring the forgotten item to the port. He did so and was rowing with it to the ship as it swung for the open sea; the item was delivered to Nievo who spoke with Carboni which has ensured that some researchers are still interested in him.

Carboni was very active on the Palermo waterfront. He was engaged in spying or, at least, in gathering political intelligence. For instance, he was sent to the *Panther* on its arrival to see if a certain Cordova, whom he referred to pejoratively as "a Jesuit", was on board. As there was an interregnum in the Garibaldi administration, it was feared that Cavour had dispatched Cordova to assume control in Palermo for the Piedmontese king. But Carboni was able to report to his superiors in Naples that Cordova was not on board the *Panther*.

The assignment showed that he was alert, with political nous, as suggested by the fact that he reported from Palermo for a paper established in Turin by a Garibaldian friend, Angelo Bargoni.

Carboni also policed the waterfront: the Ballarat poacher had now become a gamekeeper. He was promoted to captain and advertized in the paper *Il Precursore* to celebrate the fact under the heading: "at last justice is done". Shortly after, as recounted in the newly-located documents, on a windy mid-winter night with high seas, 23 November, he waited in the bay for the arrival of the *Ercole* as he was to take receipt of government dispatches. When the ship approached about midnight Carboni noticed sailors throwing sacks of green, waxed canvas to rowboats and concluded that they were smuggling tobacco. Exercizing his authority as an Army Captain, he ordered that the sacks be returned to the *Ercole* but there was no response from the ship. The Quarantine launch came to his aid and the official on it tried to scale the ladder to the *Ercole* but it gave way: with the descending passengers, he fell into the bay. The commander of the ship told Carboni that he knew nothing of the sacks. The following day Carboni wrote to the Minister for the Navy recounting the episode and pointing out that the *Ercole* had released both passengers and cargo before health officials gave approval.

Carboni was not content with having managed to connect up again, after over a decade away, with the revolution and his friends. He wanted also to reform the theatre of united Italy and star in it. For him there were many stages in the revolution.

In Palermo in 1861 he published *La Campana della Gancia*, a play about a failed nationalist uprising in the city shortly before its occupation by Garibaldi's forces. He must have been struck by the fact that there were thirteen victims on that occasion just as thirteen had been tried after the Ballarat clash and attempted again what he had done in *The Eureka Stockade*: provide a factually-based account with mythic overtones which would determine how the event was remembered. But he had not participated in this event and the theatrical form tempted him to rhetoric. A drubbing of Carboni's play has just been located in a Milanese satirical periodical *L'Uomo di Pietra* (The Stone Man – the title derives from a 'talking statue', meaning one to which Milanese attached pasquinades). It said that the play's plot made no sense, facetiously advised librettists to study the metre of the verse – the periodical was founded by Verdi's librettist for *Aida* and other operas – and also that Carboni's prose was needlessly complex. Its parting

irony was that the text was available for inspection if anyone did not believe in the "originality and profundity" of Carboni.

In 1861 Captain Carboni transferred from Palermo to Turin where he was one of the few Garibaldian officers to pass the examination necessary to enter the regular army. But it was hostile to "Garibaldian dross" which probably explains why, after a mere nine weeks, on 29 June 1862, Carboni resigned. Piedmontese small beer was no more palatable than that of Toorak.

Shortly before his resignation he visited Benedetto Cairoli, a friend who had been wounded in Palermo but became a parliamentarian. Carboni must have been up to his madcap antics again because, in a recently located letter to a mutual friend, Cairoli wrote testily: "Carboni was here for two days which were sufficient to give him a reputation as a real clown".

Cairoli was on the way up whereas Carboni, because his patriotic plays on which he banked all seemed fustian, was headed for growing isolation and frustration until his death in Rome, at the age of fifty-seven, at 8 a.m. on 24 October 1875.

He had been lively, gifted in languages, quick to read political situations and with journalistic talent. These skills had served him well in Australia. But perhaps because he had been schooled by Luigi Vecchioti, one of the Rossini circle who was keen on fostering genius, he had an exaggerated opinion of his artistic gifts. He may have been ingenuous but it came over as presumption. The new documents suggest that his fellow countrymen were not prepared to make allowances for him.

## POSTSCRIPT

It has taken almost 150 years but at last Raffaello Carboni's *Eureka Stockade* has appeared in Italian. Gaetano Rando, who teaches at the University of Wollongong, is responsible not only for the translation but also the accompanying substantial and precise introduction, the notes and an appendix of documents.

Some years ago Nino Randazzo published in Melbourne a translation of an abridged *Eureka Stockade* but Rando, who has previously analyzed Carboni's language, is attempting to make him better known in Italy, at last to an academic audience.

The introduction pays particular attention to Carboni's comments on the colony, arguing that while Carboni considered the Aborigines, with whom he spent some time, as noble savages, his judgement on the rough colonial lifestyle was drastic. He adds that Carboni also saw its positive aspects, such as the justice system which enabled his acquittal. But, in fact, Carboni saw this as an example of British justice; although he became naturalized, he was an Italian rather than an Australian nationalist.

Of course, the irony is that Italy, which was his ideal, ignored him once unification was achieved. It is only because of the interest he aroused in Australia that Rando and others are trying to draw Italian attention to 'Great Works', as he was known in Ballarat.

*Desmond O'Grady is the author of* Raffaello! Raffaello!, *a biography of Carboni and a play about him,* Let's Hear it for Carboni.


pete spence

Anne Beggs Sunter

# Something borrowed, something blue

## the tale of a much-travelled piece of the Eureka flag, finally come home

NATIONAL MEDIA INTEREST focused on Ballarat in 1997 when Christies announced that they would auction a tiny piece of the Eureka flag. The flag has acquired the status of a national icon, reverently preserved and exhibited in the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery. It has been reproduced for all manner of purposes, from selling products in Ballarat to promoting radical political action at a national level. That it has become so readily identified as a symbol of left-wing political protest is tied up in the story of that little piece that Christies attempted to sell.

It had been carefully excised from the flag in 1938 by William Keith, the custodian of the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery for thirty years between 1933 and 1963. He was a kindly man who sincerely believed that he held the best interests of the flag at heart. The flag, which had been the symbol of democratic protest in 1854 when it flew over the Eureka Stockade, had been torn down by a member of the government forces, Trooper John King, and remained in his possession until his death. Subsequently, his family gave it into the care of the Ballarat Art Gallery in 1895, a battered, torn and bullet-riddled trophy of war. It was displayed in various unsatisfactory ways, its huge size making it very difficult to hang. Mostly it was folded up and stored out of public sight and public memory. By the 1890s Ballarat was an imperial city, fiercely loyal to Queen Victoria and the Empire, and publicly inclined to hush up its past association with republicanism and rebellion.

The Gallery custodian knew that many pieces of the flag had been souvenired before his time – both at the Government Camp immediately after the Stockade in 1854 and later – and he felt that there was no point in preserving the remains intact because the flag had been so dismembered. Hence he was prepared to cut tiny pieces of the flag to give to visitors he felt really cared about it, as in medieval times Italian churches had distributed pieces of clothing belonging to the Saints as holy relics for the faithful.

In a strange way Mr Keith was an enthusiast for Eureka. Without realizing it or articulating the sentiment, he promoted the spirit of the flag and its symbolism. He was happy to help any people who demonstrated an interest in it, including a group of young communist artists in Melbourne. These artists had been asked to make banners to carry in the May Day march of 1938. This was a turbulent and ideologically charged year, the sesquicentenary of white settlement in Australia, the year of the formation of a popular front against fascism in Europe. Reacting against the official celebrations that gave an imperialist reading of history, the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) looked back into Australia's past for examples of local popular fronts, and found one at Ballarat in 1854 when the diggers built their stockade to defend themselves against police brutality.[1]

One of the young artists of 1938, Evelyn Shaw, had grown up in Ballarat, her memory shaped by stories of Eureka and the image of the tattered flag gained when visiting the Art Gallery as a child.[2] She asked her mother to find out if the flag still existed, so that her friends could make an accurate reproduction of it for the May Day March in 1938. Mrs Shaw visited the gallery and talked to the custodian, who brought the flag out from the drawer where it was stored. He carefully tore off a small rectangle of blue cloth and gave it to the visitor.

She then sent it to her daughter, enclosed in a letter describing the visit and containing a sketch of the design. The young woman gave her mother's letter and the piece of fabric to Rem McClintock, who was a senior member of the Artists' Branch of

the CPA. Evelyn recalled, "He was shocked that it had been taken off the flag as he cupped it in his hands."[3] However he was delighted to find that the original Eureka flag still existed in Ballarat, and from the description, the artists produced their banner.

Since the 1890s, trade unionists and the labour movement had drawn inspiration from the events at Eureka and the Eureka flag, and had raised flags based on the remembered emblem at the maritime strike of 1890 and the shearers' strike at Barcaldine, Queensland, in May 1891.[4] As the last of the stockaders died off in the early years of the twentieth century, so did the public commemoration of the event. It was left to writers like Henry Lawson, R.S. Ross (who admits to having a piece of the flag in his 1914 book on Eureka)[5] and Mary Gilmore to evoke the spirit of Eureka until its discovery by the CPA. Thanks to Evelyn Healy, the May Day march in 1938 may well have been the first public airing of an authentic replica of the Eureka flag since its unfurling in 1854.[6]

Three years later, the CPA adopted the diggers' revolt at Ballarat as the name of its new youth organization, the Eureka Youth League. Moscow had asked party organizations to form popular fronts, which linked in to national sentiments within particular countries, giving a prominent role to young people.[7] From 1941, League members would often carry Eureka flags in public events, with the organization spreading rapidly from its base in North Melbourne.

Evelyn Shaw did not join the Eureka Youth League. She moved to Sydney in 1940, when CPA organizations were banned by Prime Minister Menzies. So she lost touch with her artist friends, especially with the leader Rem McClintock, who had never returned her piece of Eureka flag. She had asked him a number of times to return the fragment with her mother's letter, which was precious because it was evidence of her mother's affection for her daughter. Evelyn later recounted this episode in the documentary video *Flying the Flag*, made early in 1997 by the Eureka Stockade Memorial Trust.[8]

In July 1997 the piece of the Eureka flag came up for auction at Christies in Melbourne, with a reserve price of $10,000. It came from the collection of Alex McClintock, the son of Rem, whom Evelyn remembered seeing as a child at CPA meetings in 1938. The blue fragment was in a frame with an accompanying pencil sketch of the flag and the design on the cover of Raffaello Carboni's 1855 book, *The Eureka Stockade*. Also in the frame was a piece of plain paper, written in ink on both sides, as follows:

> I inquired from Mr Spielvogel, who has charge of, is responsible for, the Historical Museum here. He showed me a book by a man Raffaello written in 1855, six months after the Eureka riots. On the cover was a reproduction of the first flag I have drawn, which Mr S. feels certain is similar to the original. However, there has been quite a bit of controversy over the whole thing, as another flag, claimed by many to be the real one, is at the Art Gallery. Mr S. showed me a letter from Marcus Clarke to Peter Lalor, also other items about this last flag and the various ones held little doubt that it might be the original. I went to Mr Keith who produced it for me. It is a huge flag, handmade (he said it was supposed to be made from the petticoats of the women, which it easily could be, as this material, which he tore off for me, is similar to what was used then. It is tattered, and also smothered with small holes, lots of which have a slight burnt edge. I would almost certainly say bullets had made them. Mr K. thinks it is the real flag.
>
> The stars are very large . . . at the ends of the bands. Mr S. said the original flag was silk, the Gallery one, bunting. However Mr K. says it is not bunting: I don't think I'd call it bunting. It has a silk texture and sheen.
>
> Apparently no-one can prove definitely which is correct, so I hope the information is of use to you, and the diagrams exact enough. You'll admire my regularity of drawing right-angles, I'm sure!!!
>
> Mr Spielvogel says the one in the Gallery is a bogus flag. He pins his opinion mainly to the fact that the book he has was written so soon after the event and the drawing of the flag would surely be accurate.

This is the letter from Mrs Myrtle Shaw in Ballarat to her daughter Evelyn in Melbourne, circa March or April, 1938. This is the letter and piece Evelyn gave to Rem McClintock, and never saw again, until, to her amazement, she saw it reproduced in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 2 July 1997, with the announcement that it would be auctioned. This was the piece which Len Fox wrote about in his 1986

article, 'Women and the Eureka Flag' published in *overland* in December 1986. Evelyn expressed "deep emotion" on picking up her newspaper and being confronted with her mother's handwriting after nearly sixty years. She felt "the need to rescue it from the mercenary and ironic role of helping sell a piece of the Eureka flag."[9]

This set off a train of events, with the Ballarat Gallery determined that the piece should not be auctioned. With the financial support of the Ferry Foundation, Evelyn took out an injunction against the sale, on the grounds that the letter rightfully belonged to her. She had carefully kept copies of her mother's letters and was able to produce these as evidence that the handwriting in the 1938 letter was indeed her mother's.

After lengthy legal proceedings, the letter and the piece came to the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery in March 1998, thanks to the generosity of Evelyn Healy (nee Shaw). By this time, the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery's attitude to the flag had completely changed. From 1963 the flag had been locked away in a bank vault for its protection, the beginning of the process of making it into a national icon. The appointment of the first professional director of the Ballarat Gallery in 1967 revolutionized conservation and exhibition procedures. James Mollison, the first director, laid down high standards for the care of the collection. In 1971 Gallery President and Ballarat Mayor Jack Chisholm, a keen local historian, spearheaded a move to bring the flag out of its hiding place and mount it for public display. Under the watchful supervision of the director, it was carefully washed, then stitched to backing material by accomplished Ballarat seamstress Val D'Angri. By a quirk of fate, Mrs D'Angri later discovered that according to family memory, her great, great-grandmother Anastasia Withers was reputed to have been one of the women who made the flag.[10] Next it was mounted behind glass, as R.S. Ross had recommended back in 1914 when he visited the Gallery and commented on its poor conservation in his book on Eureka.[11]

It was unveiled by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam on Eureka Day, 1973, with no possibility of any further excisions by misguided custodians. Whitlam's Labor government marked a revival of interest in national identity, and during this time the Eureka flag was taken up as a symbol of Australian independence and republicanism.[12]

The story of the flag has been told by journalist and former CPA member Len Fox in his book *The Eureka Flag*. Len first became interested in the Eureka flag during the Second World War, having heard about it from his friend Rem McClintock! Thanks to his painstaking research, he established the authenticity of the flag in the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, and through his writing on the subject, he has made many more Australians aware of its existence.

Thus one more piece of this most precious national icon returned to its rightful home, after a long journey that had involved it with many contentious movements in twentieth-century Australian political history. The tiny blue fragment has been carefully framed, with the letter from Evelyn's mother, and now hangs beside the remains of the banner, in the Gallery's special Eureka Gallery. Nearby are a number of fragments that have also found their way back to the Gallery. Doubtless there are many pieces of the jigsaw still hiding in envelopes in bottom drawers. Hopefully Evelyn's story will flush some of them out.

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fiction

# Resumé Mosaic

Samuel Latham

AFTER YOU WORK with resumés every day each one becomes a work of fiction. A petit embodiment of autobiography which has been dramatized at key points for climactic poignancy.

I can remember, while working in HR within the banking industry, resumés were different. The jobs network has changed it all, but also changed my position. These resumés would come through and each one would be more a statement of individuality, where people felt the need to influence you with their creativity. Some would send them through on recycled paper. Others would scan their photo in and it would be printed on the front page. A little passport photo which revealed the author of the document, like the photos of writers that appear on the back of hard-cover novels. Their pose carefully selected to represent a thoughtful, contemplative lifestyle. So too, would people carefully pose for their resumés. Tellers would have large close-ups of smiling faces, while those aspiring to management had more casual poses with arms folded and a sterner, authoritarian look on their faces.

This individuality appears to be lost. I haven't come across a single photo on a resumé since I have worked in the jobs network. Job seekers appear content with text thrown violently on to the page by a bubble-jet printer. These resumés are five-second fiction. With each one that passes over my desk I become more enthralled in creating this new fictitious community around me.

Our offices are in a recently converted two-storey building which sits on the corner facing the Frankston City Library. The building lends itself to sterility. Not the antiseptic sterility of a hospital, but the sterility of primary colours on the walls, air conditioning, and new carpet. It also runs deeper, as the people confined within its walls relentlessly chase targets for placements with a focus on their monthly commission. I am one of the salaried few. From my corner window I can not only see the new public library but the cultural centre which it is connected to. On the hill above are the council offices undergoing renovations for a new façade. This certainly is a suburb on the move.

My job has been simplified through technology. A job seeker will come in to the office and register by completing a two-page questionnaire and submit it with their resumé. Their resumé is then passed on to me. I scan it on to our local network, with text recognition software, and then I run the job matching software. This is an emotionless process, for which I needed a degree just to get my foot in the door, for the software makes all of the decisions for the agency. I mouse-click through the process trying not to intellectualize it all too much. If the software matches our new job seeker to a position I call them in for an interview. If there is no match then they are filed on the system and I archive their paperwork and attend to the next resumé.

It wasn't until I stumbled across a resumé with a name that I recognized that my ideas began to change. Katie Bower had been a young commerce graduate whom I recruited in to the bank's head office. She was young and ambitious, with a degree from Melbourne University, and her photo was unlike any of the others. Katie chose a family snap. She was posed in the centre with her two sisters on ei-

ther side, a vista of what looked like the Snowy Mountains in the background. Katie added an arrow with 'Me' captioned underneath. Beside that her resumé was typical of a student. Part-time work while studying, that sort of thing.

However, the resumé she submitted to us was practically bare. There was mention under the broad category of 'Education' of her degree, but no mention of the eight years she'd spent at the bank in International Finance. I picked up her resumé immediately and left my office.

I walked downstairs to the reception and registration area. It was always busy there. The white-tiled floor was a continuation of the sterility, the only exception being the large curved counter which arced down the room. New job seekers would venture in there daily, forcing themselves from the woodwork, usually influenced by letters from Centrelink threatening to remove their benefits. In this area job seekers would access job network computers which were banked against the right-hand wall. I waited for the two remaining job seekers to finish with administration and then I asked Simone, holding the resumé out to her, "Do you remember this job seeker? Katie Bower. Shoulder-length brown hair."

Simone looked at the resumé and then pondered. "I think she came in this morning." She handed back the resumé, looked at her watch and continued matching questionnaires to resumés.

Although it wouldn't have been proper for me to use this information for my own personal advantage, there wouldn't have been a problem if I assisted Katie to get a job using personal information. Of course this kind of conduct would certainly have cost my job at the bank, but no-one here would know. So I called Katie.

I wasn't sure what to expect, considering she had denied eight years of her life on paper, and by doing this she was jeopardizing any potential she had at gaining work in this competitive job market. The bank was a prestigious position and the mention of its name opened doors. People couldn't be choosers with the jobs they wanted any more. You had to take what you could get. When I called I expected the same bubbly voice which she once carried around the office. She was always excited about her career prospects at the bank. So my voice carried with it that sense of anticipation.

"Hello, is that Katie Bower?"

"Yes."

"Katie, this is John Somers from Job Solutions in Frankston, but you may remember me from the bank."

There was silence on the end of the phone. I could hear the faint sound of her breathing, slow and regular.

"I remember."

"I hope you don't mind me asking Katie, but you haven't mentioned this experience in your resumé. I was concerned about the way this may inhibit you from gaining employment."

Once again there was silence. Her breathing continued. I was concerned that I had stepped over the line and pushed too far. "Katie, are you there?"

"Sorry, I was just surprised that someone called so soon. I really don't want to talk about this. Thanks for your concern John."

And Katie had hung up. I still held the receiver to my ear. My mouth was agape. So much for that.

IT WASN'T UNTIL LATER that night I thought about Katie. I had a glass of hot chocolate in front of me and the Employment Section of *The Standard*. I've always found it best to keep my finger on what the job market is doing. I read through the job descriptions within the professional section, and I try to imagine the exact type of person they are looking for. I find the job description only makes the broad brush strokes, and they have become as much minor works of fiction as resumés, whereas many of the broader descriptive terms for positions have become clichés. Like team player, and self starter. People just can't say what they want, and they never say what they mean. So I try to dig deeper, beyond those words and find the person they are looking for.

It was while I was doing this that I thought of Katie again. I knew there must have been something wrong and her relationship with the bank must have soured. One bad investment decision which resulted in severe losses for the bank could have cost her job.

But she always appeared to be so bright to me. Job seekers would never include positions on their resumé if they had been dismissed from the position. They would leave it out and hope that no-one would discover the anomaly. I knew there were ways around this, being in the system. This glitch with her resumé didn't have to stop her from finding employment.

The warm chocolate milk had started to work its way through my system. I could feel my eyes become heavy. I folded the newspapers and placed them in the brass paper stand in the corner. I pushed my chair back in to the dining table and went to bed.

I can't say that I ever dream much. I find that I am more often taken by thoughts of work. Who would want to hear about dreams filled with daily routine? Job interviews with people which run well over time, and the most frightening thought is knowing that this has thrown my daily schedule for hours. I know I was thinking about Katie last night, however, I can't quite pin down specific images or sounds, not even a dreamscape which had taken my night visions through the course of sleep. When I woke in the morning I knew I could find her a job. Even if I had to bend the rules a little.

I suppose this course of action would have been difficult if I was still at the bank. Where every procedure was checked by someone else, and generally the HR decisions were made in tandem. An applicant who had an initial interview could have a further three interviews plus a general aptitude test before they heard whether they would be suitable or not. Here things were different. We have an initial interview and then, if the job seeker is suitable, recommend them to the employer. Generally, on this basic, verbal recommendation the employer will take them on. It's that simple.

This is why I enjoy studying the resumés and job descriptions. I want to give employers exactly what they want. We also have the ongoing pressure from management to make as many placements as possible in the shortest amount of time.

Quite often we performed small recruitment jobs for the banks. They had downsized their departments and disempowered their bank managers to glorified tellers. The positions we filled for them were mainly just part-time teller positions at a local level. Primarily, they were after people who could add, subtract, and provide a smile for their customers, although the smiling seems to have fallen by the wayside lately. I could easily fit Katie in to one of these positions. Get her in the front door and make some opportunities happen. Her resumé was an oversight, and, if necessary, I could change her resumé to include her original experience before we passed it on to the bank. I would also change her resumé to one of our own so that it had more credibility. All of our resumés conformed to a standardized format which was designed by a graphic artist. They all contained our logo on the footer of every page.

I held the phone to my ear with Katie's resumé in front of me and I cleared my throat.

"Hello."

"Yes, hello. Is that Katie?"

"Yes."

"It's John Somers from Job Solutions again. I have a position which you would be suited to. I was wondering if you would like to come in for an interview?"

"Look John, thanks, but no thanks."

"I was thinking . . ."

"Goodbye."

I still held the phone to my ear, on the verge of telling her that I was willing to cut a few corners and make an exception for her. I reconsidered the possibility that she may have been dismissed by the bank. I replaced the receiver, breathed out, cleared my throat and dialled her number again.

"Hello Katie, please don't hang up." There was no response, just her soft breathing, but she had not hung up the phone. I considered this to be a small success. "Do you mind if I just tell you what the position is?"

"John," and it sounded as though she was whispering into the handset, "it really isn't important."

"Katie, I understand that things may not have ended well with the bank."

"No John, that's not it at all. I'm a mother now. I don't want to work."

I didn't say anything. I felt my throat dry and words fail me.

"John are you there?"

"Ah, yes."

"I left the bank because I had a baby. I want to spend as much time with my child as I can." Katie's voice was composed. I was trying to regain my composure as thoughts pushed through my consciousness and struggled for dominant positioning. "I was sent a letter from Centrelink explaining that if I did not register I'd lose my benefit."

"Oh, the computer sends them out automatically."

"I might go back to the bank later, I haven't decided yet. Why did you leave the bank John?"

"Um, well, I don't think that is important. I was just going to offer you a part-time teller position."

"I thought so."

"Why didn't you include your experience on your resumé?"

"Because I don't want to work yet."

"Sorry to have bothered you Katie," I heard Katie begin to say something as I placed the handset back in its cradle. I played with the corner of her resumé, turning the paper in my fingers. Our procedure was that if someone told us they did not want to work we were to report them to Centrelink. All of this unpleasantness because I was trying to help her find a job.

I couldn't believe that she had asked me about the bank. Her nerve. This was one of those lines which was invisibly drawn across a business relationship which one does not cross unless proffered. I have spent so much time thinking about the retrenchment letter I had received that I am not sure what is actual memory and what is fiction.

I RECEIVED THE LETTER in the mail on a Wednesday morning. It was filled with eloquent business clichés like 'changing corporate marketplace', 'downsizing', 'cost-cutting' and 'departmental restructuring'. All of these words said one thing, there was no room for me in the bank any more. They said it would make better business sense to 'outsource' these services. I went to the office the next day ready to accept the package, in expectation that everyone would be down about their uncertain future. Yet, no-one else seemed to have the same disjointedness. They moved about the office performing the duties outlined in their job descriptions. I thought the department must have been testing the water to see who was really committed to the institution. Even so, I can remember opening a new document on the word processor and typing, "Resumé of John Somers".

The phone at my desk began to ring.

"Hello. John Somers speaking."

"John, it's Katie. I always thought it was rude to hang up on a client?" She paused, possibly in anticipation of an answer, but I continued to listen. "I wasn't curious to know why you left the bank John, I was told. I thought what they did to you was shit." If only Katie knew it all, I thought. "Most of the people in HR were shocked, John."

"Yes, well these things passed and I moved on." I didn't know that Katie was still there when I was asked to leave. The whole sordid situation was not a test of my loyalty to the institution, they wanted me to leave.

"How long did you work at the bank John?" Katie's voice sounded calm and I began to relax.

"Seventeen years. I started there as a teller, but employment and HR was what I really enjoyed."

"Most of the people who worked in HR aren't there anymore. Did you know that?"

"I gathered they changed everything later. Fulfilled some of the downsizing they promised in the letter they sent me. How old's your child Katie?"

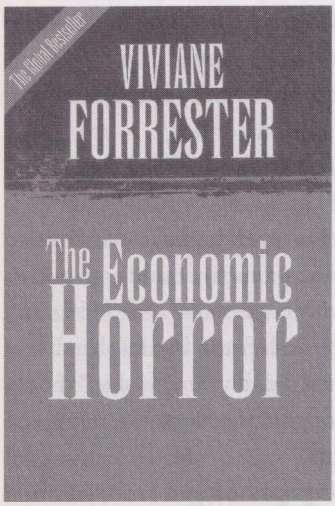
"She's twelve months now."

I turned my chair around and looked out of my corner window. "Katie, I won't let Centrelink know that you don't want to work. If you want we can organize some interviews for you so you don't lose your benefits. You know, the type of interview you don't have to attend."

"Thanks John. Thank you very much."

I didn't say anything else straight away, content with the comfortable silence which stretched across the phone line. Comfortable with the fiction we were about to create.

# Economic Horror




*". . . the text and speeches analyzing the problem of work and therefore of unemployment really deal with nothing but the idea of profit, which is their foundation and matrix but never mentioned. While the profit motive remains the great organizer in these scorched areas, it is kept secret. It persists upstream, further up the line, so obvious an assumption that it remains unsaid. Everything is organized, planned, prevented or induced with profit in mind, which then seems inevitable, so fused with the very fabric of life that it cannot be told apart."* (p. 13, Polity Press, ISBN 0745619940).

## Introduction

IN HIS HUGELY influential novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914) the untrained critic of capitalist economics Robert Tressell observed that in the 'flexible' labour market in which he worked, employees would be better off if they were slaves rather than wage-earners. If they were slaves, their employers would have an interest in their physical well-being. As matters stood, employers could obtain and dispose of employees at will. This is of course precisely the point of a 'flexible' labour market: workers' lives are made flexible, expendable, so they can fit in seamlessly with the desires of capital. Viviane Forrester's *L'horreur Economique* has lodged its fundamental dissatisfaction with this dispensation and has struck a chord with thousands of dispossessed, unemployed and underemployed in France and around the world. Her book has been a global bestseller, the highest selling economics text since Marx's *Capital* and a contributor to new movements and debates about the validity of present forms of capitalist power and social organization. Like Tressell, she is a self-taught critic of capitalist economics, and where Tressell was writing before the introduction of a meaningful welfare 'safety net' and before the 1917 Russian Revolution, nowadays the legacy of both ideals is being dismantled. We are often told that we are living in a 'new' economic age. Crucially however, poverty and exploitation remain constant. Hence the widespread appeal of *L'horreur Economique*.

## Frank Stilwell

THIS BOOK DEALS with an important issue – the problems resulting from the continuing dominance of employment as the basis for economic security and social identity. Unfortunately, it casts little light on the causes or on possible alternatives. It is a remarkably incoherent tirade against an ill-defined target – the architects of a "masterly deception" (whoever they might be), "the decision makers of our time", "transnational economic networks", "indifference", "business leaders", "markets", "profit" . . .

Perhaps the book loses something in the translation

from the French, but a rant is a rant in any language. This is not to deny a place for polemical political writing – important contributions by the likes of George Orwell, R.H. Tawney, E.P. Thompson, Susan George, Noam Chomsky and Teresa Hayter come immediately to mind. But this book is not in that league. Indeed, it is so far away that it is difficult to take it seriously.

The major puzzle is why it has been an international best-seller. One explanation may be that the publisher's blurb on the back cover is, by contrast with anything inside, a model of clarity. It poses the big issue about the tension between employment-based social values and the persistence of widespread unemployment. This is indeed looming as one of the major tensions within capitalism in its 'triumphant' phase as we enter the twenty-first century, along with increasing economic inequality, potential ecological catastrophe and the consequences of the relentless commodification of social life. How are we to adjust to a technologically-advanced economy by sharing its fruits more equitably and sustainably?

It is an issue which has been insightfully explored elsewhere. In Australia Barry Jones tackled it a couple of decades ago in his book *Sleepers Wake: Technology and the Future of Work*. It has also been a major theme in the writing of the French scientist Andre Gorz, who produced a series of publications over the last two decades, arguing the case for new social arrangements which would permit a partial liberation from work. One such scheme envisages working lives of around twenty thousand hours each, undertaken in periods of full-time or part-time work according to personal preference, but with greater continuity in the lifetime income stream than current capitalist economic arrangements would provide. Remarkably, only one brief passing reference to Gorz is made in Forrester's book. Jeremy Rifkin, whose book on *The End of Work* has been another major international best-seller, receives similarly short shrift. So the practical steps proposed by these and other authors, for the redistribution of working time and the broadening of definitions of socially productive work, have no significant place here. Nor, ironically, is there any systematic consideration of the policies implemented in recent years by the French government in pursuit of the goal of reducing working hours. Interested readers could consult *Sharing the Work, Sparing the Planet*, by Anders Hayden, a new book which deals thoughtfully with the ecological as well as socio-economic aspects of shorter working hours.

Concerns about the redistribution of working time are increasingly prominent in Australian debates about public policy. There is widespread recognition of the social costs of some people working very long hours while others are denied any waged work. The former are, in many cases, suffering ill-health because of the stress of work, while the latter also commonly experience ill-health, as well as low self-esteem, because of their marginalization from the mainstream of the economy and society. A report by the Australia Institute on *Redistributing Work* has identified some possible reforms, including a four-day week and arrangements whereby workers can take long intervals of leave without pay while having their income spread over work and non-work time periods.

Tentative steps in these directions are being taken by some employers, although there is often resistance where such reforms are seen to undermine managerial prerogatives to determine the forms that 'labour flexibility' can take. Trade unions have also been generally apprehensive about policies that involve trade-offs between working time and total take-home incomes, although the ACTU leadership has become increasingly concerned to develop a progressive position on this issue. It is not clear that such trade-offs are inevitable: certainly, it should be possible to take the benefits of higher labour productivity in terms of hours rather than wages. What combinations of wage incomes and working hours are acceptable to the employed workforce depends on a host of other factors too, such as the cost of living, housing costs in particular, transport facilities, tax rates, and so on. In other words, reform in this respect needs to be seen as part of a broader process of social and economic change.

Forrester's book is largely innocent of such practical

concerns. Seven pages from the end we are suddenly confronted with the question "why not look first for a mode of distribution and survival that would not depend on wages?" But the idea is not developed. Instead the next few pages present more froth about "a sense of stupor", the sale of human organs in India, sex tourism and the counter-productive character of "speeches overlooking or falsifying the real problems, diverting them to other, artificial issues" . . . Indeed!

And so to the final paragraph: "Would it be extravagant to hope, at long last, not for some love – so vague, so easy to declare, so self-satisfied, authorizing itself to use all kinds of punishment – but instead, for the boldness of a harsh, unrewarding sentiment, a sentiment of intractable rigour which refuses all exceptions: respect?" Say no more. Please.

What a pity that such an important topic is treated in such an incoherent manner – ultimately devoid of any clear meaning. The book is called *The Economic Horror*, but the horror is the book. *Quelle horreur. Quel domage.*

## Bill Harley

*THE ECONOMIC HORROR* is 140 pages of impassioned and elegantly written polemic, which ultimately is worse than useless. The problem which motivates Forrester – the awful human costs of contemporary capitalism and in particular of mass unemployment – is of undeniable importance. Indeed, her critique of the new managerialism and of the impotence of many government policy initiatives is difficult to disagree with. The fatal flaw of the book is that Forrester's reading of the nature of the problem facing workers in the advanced economies is wrong, in simple, verifiable, factual ways. Her suggested solution, which could be paraphrased as 'just say "no" to employment' is empty.

Forrester's central argument is along the following lines. First, unemployment is now the "established norm". Second, in spite of this fact, we in the advanced economies cling to the belief, based on the past, that "social and economic life [is] governed by work-based exchanges, even while work itself has disappeared". Third, because of this disjuncture between reality and belief, the unemployed are unfairly shamed and degraded. Fourth, as a means to overcome this problem, we must challenge the outdated modernist belief in societies based on employment, and seek to establish new cultures and social structures which are *not*.

I have no disagreement with Forrester's third claim. Undoubtedly the majority of unemployed are in that situation because there simply are not enough jobs. Undoubtedly they are subjected to degradation, justified on the basis of such fashionable, but misleading, concepts as 'mutual obligation'. Undoubtedly this is a major social problem and results in many citizens being largely removed from active participation in the economy and society. To the extent that *The Economic Horror* is concerned with this undeniable problem it is a laudable project.

Alas, in spite of Forrester's claim that the only weapons with which to combat the lies of those who control the capitalist economies are "accuracy and cold fact", she fails to show much evidence of reliance on either. It simply is not the case that unemployment is the norm. No doubt, as Forrester claims repeatedly, official unemployment figures understate the true extent of the problem, with those who have given up looking for work or who are working only a few hours a week not counted. Nonetheless, the fact remains that across the OECD in 1999 the average national unemployment rate was 7 per cent (OECD 1999: 19). Even allowing for massive under-reporting of unemployment, the majority of citizens in the OECD are in paid employment. Moreover, the *total* number of people in paid employment across the globe is larger than ever before. Work remains central to people's lives.

To this extent Forrester is barking up the wrong tree. The problem is not that there is *no* work. Rather, at the same time as contemporary capitalism throws up high unemployment, it is characterized by dramatic changes in work and employment which see growing proportions of the employed in insecure jobs, where the threat of dismissal is used as a disciplinary device. Even those who find themselves in apparently secure jobs are working longer hours and being subjected to increasingly sophisticated forms

of workplace surveillance. As Richard Sennett argues in *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (1998) the new "flexible" capitalism means that employees are increasingly expected to adapt to the demands of capital by changing jobs, skills and working arrangements. The difference between Sennett and Forrester is that the former considers the evidence, while the latter relies on impression and assertion, the result of which is a total misunderstanding of what is going on in the economy and society. Since her first claim – that work is dead – is so clearly wrong, her second claim – that we *misguidedly* cling to a belief in work as central to society – is immediately rendered invalid. It is Forrester who is misguided.

What then does Forrester propose should be done as a means to combat the undoubted negative consequences of contemporary patterns of work and employment? It is not surprising, given her misreading of the nature and causes of the changing shape of work that the solutions proposed lack credibility. The specific solution which Forrester proposes, expressing surprise that "no thought has ever been given to organizing society starting precisely from the absence of work", is that "rather than watching out vainly and in distress for the return of work and galloping employment [we must] try to make life decent and viable by other means and do it today".

At the risk of being accused of arguing ad hominem, perhaps a literary critic is not terribly well equipped to hold forth on changes in work and employment. The claim that no thought has ever been given to a "post-employment" society demonstrates an extraordinary ignorance. Forrester appears completely unaware of arguments for societies not based on paid employment, which can be traced back at least to the late eighteenth century. Romantics like Coleridge, proto-socialists like St Simon and Proudhon, anarchists such as Kropotkin, Syndicalists, Utopian Socialists and even that obscure German scholar Karl Marx argued for alternatives to wage-labour as the foundation of society. More recently, such ideas can be found in the work of the "post-industrialists" (see Pixley 1993 for a discussion and critique of this approach).

Her suggested solution demonstrates the futility of trying to inform action with misread facts and a philosophy of fatalism. If, as Forrester appears to believe, the demise of work is inevitable, being caused by technological change and globalization which cannot be resisted, then we must simply get used to the work-free world. By adopting this fatalistic position, Forrester denies a role for politics in shaping patterns of employment. She overlooks the fact that social change emerges from social action, within and beyond the institutions of the state, and not from pious hand-wringing. It is clear that appropriate government policies can reduce unemployment, with the key obstacle being not globalization or technology, but a lack of political will on the part of neo-liberal governments across the advanced economies to tackle the problem seriously (see Boreham et al 1999).

Ultimately, the only action which flows from Forrester's proposed solution is to do nothing. This is why I started the piece by suggesting that *The Economic Horror* is worse than useless. It is an initially seductive work, but because Forrester so egregiously misreads the situation facing workers in contemporary capitalism she is ultimately able to offer nothing but worthy sentiment and passionate, but ultimately empty, polemic.

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## Kaleeswaran Kalirajan

*THE ECONOMIC HORROR* by Viviane Forrester – a novelist, journalist and literary critic for *Le Monde* – paints a depressing picture of a society in an era of neo-liberalism. As she depicts it, unemployment in this era is more than a problem brought about by

adverse economic conditions. Large corporations, which once provided people with employment, are now finding labour superfluous. These corporations are creating a large proportion of their profits from investments in the stock market, which do not require labour. As a result redundancies have become a management practice. The source of employment is disappearing, yet society still presents the view that being employed is the norm. The unemployed are made to feel inadequate, marginalized and unwanted and thus prevented from challenging the purveyors of this system – private economic powers.

There are some very interesting ideas presented in this book, which will resonate with many readers. However, as an economist, I was troubled. While reading it, I nodded in agreement sometimes, but felt some of the arguments presented are a little misleading, and conclusions often reached too quickly without consideration of all possible explanations. The author seeks to pre-empt any such criticisms through her characterization of 'ecospeak':

> Suppose you venture on a few timid reservations expressing some alarm at the prospect of the hegemony of a globalised abstract and inhuman economy? You will soon be shut up by the dogmas of that same hegemony – in which, let's be realistic, we seem to be trapped. You will soon be brought up against the laws of competition and the competitive spirit, adjustment of international economic rules – which are those of deregulation – and you will soon hear the praises of a flexible labour force sung.

But, if an author is going to 'subvert the dominant paradigm' (and attempt to convince others why they should reject it too), then surely she should have at least a reasonable amount of knowledge about the topic. Some of Forrester's views suggest that she may not.

Her view that the source of jobs is drying up is simplistic. I agree with the author that society is moving into a new era, and one that is better characterized by a greater reliance on market forces and by the much-maligned process of globalization. The continual deregulation of industries worldwide has meant that more and more markets are being opened up to competition from both domestic and international sources. This has meant that the incumbent corporations, which have previously been sheltered from competition, have had to adjust to operating in a competitive market. As a result, unusual behaviour traits such as redundancies while recording profits, are being noticed. A good example of this in a local context is the recent announcement by Telstra of large-scale redundancies while achieving an Australian record half-yearly profit. It can be very misleading to assume the activities of one corporation in an economy are the accepted practices of the majority of corporations in the economy or the world. Just because Telstra is shedding jobs while recording a large profit does not mean that every corporation will do the same. Moreover, what does not seem to be noticed much is the growth of these industries in the economy and the benefits to consumers and other industries that are the result of deregulation and increased competition. The arrival of new corporations in the telecommunications market has meant prices for these services have fallen. Lower prices for telecommunication services result in lower production costs in other industries, and the possibility of a growth in jobs in these industries. In addition, Telstra's large-scale redundancies must be taken in the context of any new jobs created by these new corporations. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that employment in communication services has risen by about 20 per cent in recent years.

Large-scale redundancies are not a commonplace management practice. Although redundancies are employed by some executives to increase the stock price of their corporations – as was the case when the price of Xerox shares rose when it also announced large redundancies – this increase in the stock price occurs because investors are attracted by the expected increase in short-term profits brought about by the reduction in the corporation's wage bill. It does not indicate labour is now superfluous and that the increase in stock price is due to the elimination of this 'superfluous cost'. In addition, a corporation cannot continue to reduce its labour force

indefinitely, as it will undermine its ability to produce in sufficient quantities to meet demand. (It is still not economically viable to replace large proportions of the labour force with automation. Further, even if full automation were possible, it would generate a new stream of employment in the form of maintenance, parts and accessories to 'replace' those it eliminated.) In a market with many competitors, a corporation that cannot adequately meet demand will lose market share to its competitors. This leads to a reduction in sales and profits and subsequently a reduction in the stock price. Large-scale redundancies are only a short-term fix to a reduction in profits. No executive could conceive it being a 'management practice' that will lead to prosperity for his/her corporation in the longer run.

In addition, the author fails to understand that corporations that invest in the stock market, do so to reduce the risks they face and are not solely interested in creating wealth by wholly abstract speculations which have tenuous links to productive investment. Forrester also wrongly concludes that the adverse reaction of stock markets to better than expected employment figures is proof that profit and employment are mutually exclusive rather than a possible reaction by the markets to unexpected inflationary pressures. Further, the author misrepresents the roles and 'powers' of intergovernmental organizations such as the OECD, World Bank and IMF.

That said, unemployment is a very important issue that needs to be addressed with greater urgency and compassion. I agree with Forrester that the suffering of unemployed people is more than what is popularly held, which is further heightened by harsh welfare policies, which seek to persecute the unemployed for their circumstances. The current government's welfare policy is aimed at making it more difficult to obtain benefits. This would give any welfare recipient a sense that they were being persecuted, being blamed for being unemployed. Further, I also agree with the author that the role of work is misplaced in our society. Being employed is not something sacred, and being unemployed is not something to be persecuted for.

But, this does not justify the author's desire to subvert the dominant paradigm. It is not the system that is causing the suffering, it is the policies within the system that are to blame. It is possible to have bad policies within any system. What are needed to better address the suffering of unemployed people are better policies. A re-evaluation of the role of work and the work ethic in society would also be very welcome.

## Angela Mitropoulos

IT MIGHT BE PLAUSIBLE to locate *The Economic Horror* in a direct line from Rifkin's *The End of Work*, and be more or less done with it on that basis. Forrester's book does echo principal themes found in Rifkin's, arguing as she does that work has been in decline since the late 1950s. However such comparisons have their limits or, rather, they miss the echo of something notably different to that offered by Rifkin. *The Economic Horror* is not – even granting a certain terminological coincidence, as well as the shared geographic imaginary of a national economy – a celebration of capitalist progress as Rifkin would have it.

Though I remain unpersuaded by claims of the end of work, for reasons of space let me just reference a couple of essays on this: Caffentzis, 'The End of Work or the Renaissance of Slavery?' (<http://lists.village.virginia.edu/spoons/global/Papers/caffentzis>) and Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy" (*Social Text*, forthcoming).

I'll focus here on the related but by no means secondary questions of communication, representation and invisibility or, in other words, the horizon of the possible and admissible. It's debatable whether or not work is indeed ending; but what is striking about Forrester's book and its reception in Europe is what it tells us about expectations of a world to come.

To begin, then, with what seems to have been 'lost in the translation'. In at least two English-language reviews, written from divergent perspectives, I found the same complaint: Forrester does not tell us what to do. That is, there are no solutions proposed, no concrete suggestions as to – take your pick – policy,

vision or program. What appears as an obvious question and complaint is in fact a disagreement with a characteristic aspect of the movement, its idiom and politics, through which this book makes sense, and against which the obviousness of the programmatic stance is actually a rule being passed off as eternal.

*The Economic Horror*, so clearly written in the tradition of the early French Utopian Socialist pamphleteers is not, for all that, a Utopian tract. No blueprint. It consists instead of a series of provocations, questions and paradoxes, approached with a mix of anger, disgust and laughter. Given the ways in which emotion tends to be disavowed in politics (let alone in economics) as effeminate, unreasoned and so unreasonable, or just downright embarrassing (all the better it must be said to allow for a smooth reduction of all sense to the pliable emoticons of fear and the sadistic indulgences of 'crackdown' policies), it's not at all surprising that this book has been received by some as an occasion on which to re-assert who can and cannot speak with authority on economics and society, and how exactly this ought to be done. When Forrester was asked why she had not proposed any solutions as such, she replied that it was not her role to do so. At most, she insists that we are presented with an historically unique choice between terror and a "metamorphosis", whose shape she discerns as the end of waged work, but whose path she does not consider it her role to provide a map for.

What came to be known variously as the 'Movement Against Unemployment, Insecurity and Exclusion' or the 'Movement Against Social Exclusion' erupted – without modesty – onto the European media landscape in 1998. Much like the protests in Seattle and London last year, it too had been a long time in the making: over twenty years of struggles that began with the *autovalorisation* campaigns in Italy and *autogestion* in France, re-emerging in the 1990s speaking in a language other than that of policy analysts and economists on the ostensible topic of unemployment. In 1994, 20,000 people began by walking through the French provinces. In subsequent years, similar actions took place in Italy, Spain, Greece and the UK; whereas in France, to mention only the most frequent and largest actions, empty houses were requisitioned by homeless groups; welfare offices, banks and utilities were occupied; public buildings such as the Louvre were taken over in order to hold annual general assemblies of the movement; and demonstrations of tens of thousands took place. Those assemblies were pivotal in creating a space outside and against the regular circuits of representation and communication, producing amongst other things statements such as the Manifesto of the Have-Nots.

As casualization and temp work breached the usual divide between employment and unemployment as commensurate with a division between relative comfort and poverty – in 1993, an EU report estimated that around fifty-seven million people in Europe were living in poverty of whom, just as in the US, over a third were of working age and in employment – this movement was not for very long a movement of the unemployed: it included unionists, casualized and temp workers, the homeless, migrants and students. Emerging rather humbly as a demand for jobs and a Christmas bonus for the unemployed, the assemblies began to question the self-evidence of a sanctification of waged work or, what is the same thing, the sanctification of capital – a leap from the slogan of 'More Jobs!' to that of 'We don't want full employment, We want full lives!' One of the statements produced in Paris in 1988 read: "Up till now the specter of unemployment has been used by the capitalist system to terrorize people into accepting any job they can get, even the most absurd, under any conditions . . . Isn't it time we ask ourselves the point of all this production? What are we producing? For whom? How? At what social and ecological cost? . . . Let's stop leaving things to the lying specialists who claim to speak in our name. It's up to us to decide what is possible, what we want, and how to get it. It's up to us to reclaim power over our own lives." Another read: "Certain sociologists have described us as 'a sacrificed generation'. Well, we refuse to sacrifice our lives for their stock market, their government, their rigid politics. We are carrying on a daily struggle, autonomously organized. We don't have any

leaders. Our general assembly retains all power; its committees are subject to the collective."

Even as unemployment is a necessary ingredient in ensuring that workers work, it only functions as such to the extent that the unemployed are silenced, allowed only to make an appearance as public menace – in an earlier register, as the dangerous classes. From anti-immigrant hysteria to compulsory work schemes, everything becomes, Forrester argues, suddenly justifiable according to a magical displacement of one term for another: the phrase 'to solve the problem of unemployment' really means 'to increase profits', where the latter was "never referred to except in the modest guise of the 'creation of wealth' that is supposed to bring immediate benefit to the entire human race and to contain a treasure of jobs."

What numerous governments shared in this respect was and is a characterization of 'the problem' as a function of inadequate job-seeking efforts that, in order to be deemed adequate, one would have to be prepared to work for "as near as possible to nothing". Under the banner of 'solving unemployment', what was (and here in Australia, still is) being inflicted was nothing other than impoverishment and suffering; certainly not an end to unemployment, itself the result of an ongoing search for productivity and efficiencies invariably defined as the production of profits.

It's within the context of that movement in Europe that this book's particular sense becomes apparent, not only as an expression of it, but more specifically as an index of debates within it. A simple question about life was being posed or, rather, re-posed after almost a century in which an austere accord had been cultivated between state socialist orthodoxy and capitalist imperative: the absolute veneration of work and production such that it was no longer possible to even think the sense and possibility of a labour irreducible to, and outside of, wage labour.

For Forrester, the paradoxical experience of "the disappearance of work . . . in a society that is bent on basing its only criteria, its very foundation on it" constitutes a moment of decision that can no longer be deferred. Or, it can; but with terrible consequences, not least that of reasoning that such consequences are perhaps not so terrible after all. What does it mean, Forrester provocatively asks, when those depicted as superfluous according to the criteria of productivity and accounting are no longer politically and socially tolerated? What does it mean when life itself is judged according to such criteria?

Finally, and by way of comparison: in Australia, the unemployed are still silenced and excluded. Here, and without much reflection on this peculiar arrangement, the unemployed are officially represented in policy debates and the broadcast/print media by those who are contracted by the Government to implement and enforce the Government's policies. Publicly, representations of the unemployed are confined to prime-time appearances as a dark threat to 'social cohesion' and 'our way of life', tendered as the imaginary proof of a rather fanciful conception of the 'labour market' as a zero-sum game. At its most excessive, such an understanding runs easily to a legalized racism and xenophobia: mandatory detention of asylum seekers and mandatory sentencing for property crimes. In other moments, we might have called such an understanding of the world Malthusian, and noted the workhouses and enclosures forming around us. Not so today. It is tolerated because it is a necessary measure to deal with the problem of unemployment. As the Liberal-National Government ponders who else it is capable of vilifying and thereby expanding the range of punitive measures it has at its disposal to command work to be done, and as unions begin to halt their decline through campaigns to reduce work time, Forrester's book is, well, timely.

*Frank Stilwell is an associate professor in Economics at the University of Sydney.*

*Bill Harley is a political scientist who teaches industrial relations at the University of Melbourne.*

*Kaleeswaran Kalirajan is a research economist who at the time of writing was working in Canberra.*

*Angela Mitropoulos is at this moment astounded at proposed legislation that will allow for the military to be mobilised against dissent.*

## White Smart Arts

Bruce Pascoe

ART WAS NOT invented by Europeans, nor has it always meant the output of a single genius supported by the patronage of the state, church or commerce.

Recent commentaries by Susan McCulloch, Gabriella Caslovich and ABC TV's *Art from the Heart*, manage to sound shocked by the collaborative approach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people bring to their art.

All the heat and bulldust raised in the stampede of dealers and academics to cover their traces may turn out to be productive if, in the process, attention is turned to the nature of indigenous art and its relationship to place and people.

Indigenous people are not free agents in their art in the same way that white artists and journalists are free to pursue the scoop. Writers, artists, musicians and historians from the indigenous community must consult with the community every step of the way in a manner which white artists would consider anti-art. But that's how it is.

Aboriginal people can never be said to have general access to all stories, styles and motifs, because in most cases those things belong to a particular community and sometimes to an individual. Use of those materials has to be negotiated.

While editing *Australian Short Stories* the editing process of indigenous writing was exhaustive. Sometimes, at the last minute, we had to withdraw all mention of an incident, tale or character because permission had been declined and it has happened to me in my own work. I can't tell several compelling stories because I've been asked not to, not because some other artist is jealously guarding them, but because the knowledge of this material is dangerous to particular people and occasionally the community at large. I'm not claiming special knowledge or access, because my heritage is so remote and fractured that it precludes me from the intimate knowledge of cultural initiates. You do not reveal the wounds and temptations of Christ to kindergarten children and nor do indigenous people spill the beans to the uncultured, whether they be black or white. There are cultural activities taking place in communities all over Australia which to all intents and purposes will remain known only to the community who are the guardians of that knowledge.

I visited Oenpelli (as it's known to Northern Territory map makers) in 1991 with Maureen Watson, the Murri story teller. I'm forever grateful to the National Book Council and Kate Veitch for the opportunity, even if I was wheeled in at the last moment because half a dozen others couldn't take it up.

One morning I was taken to an artist's camp as described exactly in the 'Lagoon' chapter of my novel *Ruby Eyed Coucal*. The whole chapter, apart from the final conversations, are the most faithful representation of that day I could achieve. For those too mingy to buy my book I'll summarize it. A family group were gathered beneath a tree and an old man supervised the painting of several barks. He instructed people in the landscapes, spirits and meanings of each of the paintings and indicated how the art should proceed, even which brushes and colours should be used. And all this while the

aromas of roast duck and billy tea mingled with the exhalations of the giant eucalypt and the camp fire.

Since that time I've witnessed the collaborative creation of indigenous art many times and it surprises me that experts in the field could have so completely misunderstood the process, or, given their vast experience of indigenous art, failed to witness collaborative creations. Perhaps it's simply the general ignorance of the indigenous culture many Australians have tried to usurp.

Susan McCulloch is no fool, she's one of the best art critics in the business, but criticisms highlight the need for the white community to develop a far greater understanding of indigenous Australian culture, not just the works of art which can be sold for profit. Black artists are not white artists and will always react differently and have different inhibitions impacting upon them and that is a positive rather than negative influence. Not all art and artists are travelling in the same direction and that should excite more than dismay.

The Aboriginal community are not pulling the wool over white eyes, they are simply painting within the liberal confines of their own culture. And it's different.

If the accepted history of this country remains a crude pastiche of wool, wheat, gold, wars and EXPLORATION, then no wonder white people are surprised that six can work on a painting which is signed by the only elder with the authority to do so, an authority far superior to any statutory declaration of white law.

Progress toward this understanding will be the most exciting development in white Australian culture and may even ease the anxieties Australians are expressing about their place in the continent.

*Bruce Pascoe edited and published the quarterly* Australian Short Stories *for sixteen years and his most recent novels* Ruby Eyed Coucal *(1997) and* Shark *(1999) have been published by Magabala. A collection of stories,* Nightjar, *was published by Seaglass in August.*

## LUMBU Indigenous Community Foundation

### Australian First for Aboriginal Community

AFTER MORE THAN three years of community consultations and planning, Australia's corporate and philanthropic communities rallied together to launch a first for the Aboriginal community. The LUMBU Indigenous Community Foundation is the first independent, non-government organization established to support indigenous community development Australia wide.

Launched in Melbourne by Chairperson, Dr Mick Dodson, the Foundation is aiming to raise $5 million in three years from corporate and philanthropic Australia to support long-term, sustainable change in the Indigenous communities.

Dr Dodson said he expected the first of four community level projects to benefit will be announced in September this year.

Conceived some three years ago, the name LUMBU derives from the Yanuwa people's language. The emblem was designed by John Moriarty and symbolizes unity and strength.

Dr Dodson said the Foundation was a significant positive step towards encouraging non-government sources to support Indigenous community development.

"Being Indigenous-controlled, the Foundation is uniquely placed to forge partnerships with non-government organizations, philanthropy and corporate Australia," he said.

"LUMBU is about using the corporate community, charities and other existing philanthropic networks to achieve sustainable long-term, positive change within indigenous communities," he said.

Applauding the launch and encouraging other corporations to support the scheme were representatives from BHP Minerals and Levi Strauss who have already contributed significant sums in both direct and indirect financial support.

Also supporting the Foundation were the US-based First Nations Development Institute, The Federal Minister for Health, The Hon. Michael Wooldridge, Ms Jill Reichstein of the Lance Reichstein Foundation, Ms Sylvia Geddes of ANZ Trustees and Mr Ray Minnecon of World Vision's Indigenous Programs.

The Foundation's recently appointed CEO, Mr Darren Godwell said, "We have spent a

long time creating the right structure. The LUMBU Indigenous Community Foundation has been established to maximize every dollar. The monies received will be placed in trust to optimize the long-term return on our investment and each and every dollar will be ploughed back into the indigenous community," Mr Godwell said. Deputy Chairperson, Daphne Millward added, "The Foundation embodies a new approach for a new millennium in Indigenous Australia. The Foundation's four key areas are health, community development, economic development and indigenous young people."

Also joining Dr Dodson on the board are former ATSIC CEO, Ms Patricia Turner, and Chief Justice of the Family Law Court, Justice Mr Alistair Nicholson, Indigenous leaders Mr Sol Bellear, Ms Anne Martin, Torres Strait Islander Mr Kenny Bedford, Indigenous health specialist Professor Ernest Hunter, philanthropist Ms Rhonda Galbally.

Chief Justice Nicholson outlined his reasons for joining the Foundation Board: "The Foundation is a bold, fresh effort that will invest in the most precious resource in every community – young people. This is a Foundation for the future of Australia."

For further information contact: Darren Godwell at LUMBU Indigenous Community Foundation on 03 9639 6272.

## Report from the Rome studio

Cath Kenneally

MY MOTHER, a few years back, distinguished herself by returning to Adelaide Uni to pick up Latin Honours and a thesis on Cicero's *De Senectute* where she left off fifty years before. She died just before we left Adelaide to come to the B.R. Whiting studio in January, so being in this city where the drain covers and bus-stops still say 'SPQR' has been particularly poignant for me.

Two thirds of the way into our time, one is in linguistic limbo. Attempting to direct a Frenchman to the Centro, I kept saying '*si*' when I meant '*oui*', though my French is perfectly serviceable. Long forgotten Spanish words pop out occasionally, some days Italian flows from a well I wasn't sure was there. Some days, conversations around me on the bus all register, other days, not a thing. '*Non parlo Italiano*' now rolls rather too fluently off the tongue, and isn't quite true any more. I should say '*Sono straniera*', which fits the case exactly.

Six months is a perplexing, though luxurious amount of time to have here. You have hopes of becoming to some extent 'of' a place by then, having satisfied the urge to soak up the antiquities and settled into a routine, found regular hangouts and friends, become a participant rather than observer. But you could spend every day of six months looking and still not have seen even all the best things, let alone the more curious and out-of-the-way. And although you do make friends, it's a slow business. You won't be any sort of 'local' by the time you leave. In the apartment building in Trastevere where the Whiting Studio is, they're used to the regular comings and goings of *scrittori Australiani*. In the apartment below us lives the grocer from round the corner. He's getting quite blasé about the passing parade.

For Whitingites, the trick is probably not to fret at the continuing strangeness, not to underestimate adjustment time, to remember that '*Roma, non basta una vita*', and do what takes your fancy, taking care to jot down anything at all that seems noteworthy, for later consultation and 'working up'. Attempting to subject impressions to over-elaborate analysis while in situ is probably to force the issue.

Being in Bertie and Lorri Whiting's former flat for the purpose of allowing this absorption process to proceed is a dream: it's large, light, airy, comfortable, convenient, houses guests if necessary, and feels like a home. Bertie Whiting's library is still here, very comprehensive, a 'gentleman's library', full of oddities like the complete P.G. Wodehouse, Pepys' diaries, colonial memoirs, mid-century Brits like Amis sr., history, theology, a Roman (Empire) cookery book . . . there's always something to deal with the slightly lost, at-sea feeling that *stranieri* are prey to.

Meanwhile I'm following my own advice and making written observations on a myriad matters, trying not to be bothered if they sound priggish or judgemental or complacent or prurient. You have to acknowledge that what you thought was your passion for social justice won't prevent you having uncharitable urges towards persistent beggars, whose artful state of (un)dress doesn't escape you. You find yourself wondering whether the gypsy kids being pressed into service to beg on the trams ever get to go to school, rather than reflecting on the richness of Romany culture. I get furious with the Catholic Church for closing churches to visitors for so many hours each day. (Why?) On the other hand, I'm constantly delighted by the blissed-out, cossetted babies, the way everyone trots home for lunch in the middle of the day, the way young and middle-aged people walk around patiently with old people, and the way '*anziani*' stay part of the action up to such an advanced age.

The abundance of water, pouring continually from public taps and fountains, has a festive feel (you can't turn off the drinking fountains because the calcium in the water silts up the spouts), the ubiquitous natty uniforms for every kind of official are cheery, too. There are so many bookstores, full of classy books, that you can't imagine how they survive.

All these inconsequential *aperçus* are filling up notebooks. Meanwhile, we have been to see Lorri Whiting at Orbetello, where she still makes paintings, sails her yacht, and keeps bulldogs, as she did when Bertie was around. Australian poets are forever in her debt. As all her terrace potplants, oleanders, rosemary, pittosporum, roses, respond to the advance of spring, we count the days left and prepare to pass the baton to the next resident. Must remember to tell him/her about the morning *Mercato Testaccio* over the river – the cheap shoes – the car-free Sundays – the open-courtyard program. *Non dimenticare* . . .

## From the West

Susan Hayes

I WAS TAKEN ABACK when a colleague in Sydney recently asked me why the writing community in Western Australia is so confrontational. While uncharacteristically silent at the time of our conversation, back in my hotel room I reflected that this was rather unfair; we can certainly get the knives out over here, but we have had nothing to compare with the literary stoushes that regularly feature in the national press and we haven't had a law suit in years. It's decades since one of our publishers had to pulp a book and we could argue that while the so-called Wanda Koolmatrie was published by Magabala in this state, she/he didn't actually live here.

The point of our discussion had been the recent fiasco surrounding the Perth Writers' Festival, and this came back to me when a week later I read some comments made in *The Weekend Australian* by one of my favourite columnists, Matt Price. Matt, who usually avoids cliches, trotted out the usual comment about West Australian culture being something to do with yoghurt, before going on to talk about golf and the Fremantle Dockers. I was about to rush to the computer and rip off a scathing e-mail, drawing his attention to the Review section of his own paper; but reluctantly came to the conclusion he might be forgiven for dragging out an old joke. We do have some great arts organizations over here, both mainstream and fringe. Black Swan Theatre Company has international standing and the Blue Room Theatre in Northbridge has a growing reputation for new, exciting drama. We have writers and artists to challenge the world. But in the end, in terms of public profile, it all comes down to money. We have not, as yet, had a Kennett to pour funds into the arts.

The Nugent Report helped out our larger companies, but for the most part WA arts organizations operate on ludicrous budgets. It's hardly surprising that our quarrels, such as they are, usually centre themselves around dollars and cents. As a case in point, for the twenty years I have been living here, we in the arts community have been unsuccessfully lobbying for a modern theatre complex. In its place we have been given a convention centre and a bell tower. Earlier

this year, when the Perth Glory soccer team reached the national final, our State Government promised a multi-million dollar football stadium to be built immediately. Enjoy your yoghurt Matt!

In February this year the Perth International Arts Festival gave us a first-class Writers' Festival, widely acclaimed in the press and by all who attended. There are a number of reasons why the Writers' Festival has been cancelled for 2001, including a clash of personalities, overspending by the Festival management overall and the reluctance of some of its university hosts to spend large amounts of money on community arts, while they struggle to pay teaching staff. Some good people are working to revive the Festival and it may be that by the time this piece is published there will be better news. In the meantime I cannot help questioning the whole Festival scene. In a State where the arts are badly funded, can we justify spending millions of dollars for three weeks of the year? Would it not be better to have a sustained arts program from January right through to December? How will our own emerging arts companies ever be invited to overseas Festivals if they never receive the research and development money to bring them up to world class? Attendance figures at the 2000 Festival were not remarkable and many people, such as myself, could not afford to go to more than three or four events. Audiences need to be nurtured and developed and if we continue to concentrate our resources on one Festival, this will simply not happen.

Happily, apart from the Writers' F-word, 2000 has been a great year for writing and publishing in WA. The University of Western Australia Press, under its new management, brought out the long-awaited *Big John Forrest* by Frank Crowley, launched by Premier Richard Court and, at a time when the multinational publishing houses are in danger of falling apart, Fremantle Arts Centre Press had an extraordinary first half to the year, with sales more than satisfactorily ahead of budget, giving them a better than expected foundation from which to confront the unknown quantity of the GST. Michele Drouart's *Into the Wadi* is currently in its third print run and Kate Lamont's cookery book must be in every kitchen in Perth. Best of all was Kim Scott's Miles Franklin Award for the totally brilliant *Benang*. When the prize was announced you could almost see dancing in the streets of Fremantle, not just because of the book's truth and lyrical quality; but because it really couldn't have happened to a nicer man.

In February the State finally got its federally-funded Writers' Centre when my own organization, the WA State Literature Centre, broadened its program and opened up for membership. Poetry readings are gaining a new and much-needed popularity in bars and cafes around the State. All we need now is a handful of government ministers to realize that there is more joy in books and music, more fulfilment in theatre and dance, than anyone will ever find in a convention centre.

## Letter from Melbourne

### Hugh Tolhurst

MELBOURNE WAS GRACED in July by the presence of Dr Kay Jamison, a world authority on manic depression. Herself an openly manic-depressive psychiatrist, Dr Jamison mentioned in one of her several public appearances the Iowa-based research which suggests that 61 per cent of poets are manic depressive.

Given much of the mental health disability support worldwide now falls on philanthropic trusts in this area (such as The Richmond Fellowship), I'd like to suggest to contributors that donating their next contributor's fee (however small) to a philanthropic trust in the mental health area, is a small thing we can all do to the public good.

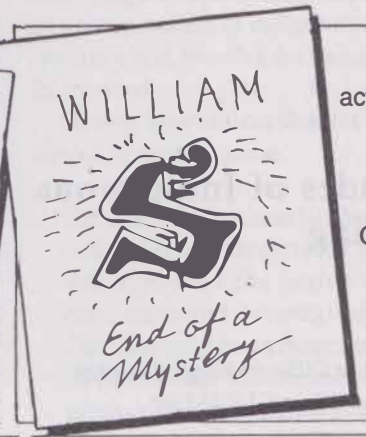
## Floating Fund

ONCE AGAIN the generosity of our readers is astonishing. Thank you to: $3000 anon; $164 Z.M.; $64 J.E.H., F.S.; $50 E.M.; $30 L.L; $20 K.J.S.; $14 T.B, E.W., J.G.B.; $9 D.J.O'S.; $8 R.H.B.; $4 P.S., W.&R.W., T.G., J.R., P.D.; Totalling: $3471.

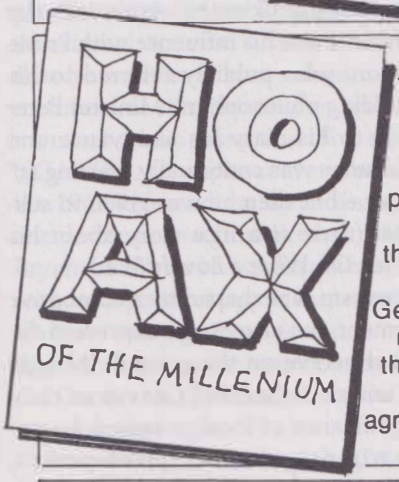
# A book, a book, a kingdom for a book!

Some ideas for "Good Reads by Lofo

Azaria Chamberlain's name was Azarovna Spiotchka. She was a Russian dwarf spying on American installations in Australia's outback. Her body is being kept on ice in Narranga.

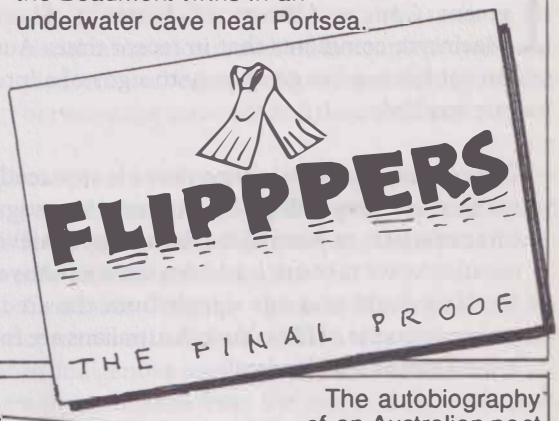




William Skakespeare was actually an Aborigine by the name of Jacque Spare. He grew up near Stratford/Avon in Gippsland and was the son of a sealer and a runaway female convict, which accounts for his white skin.

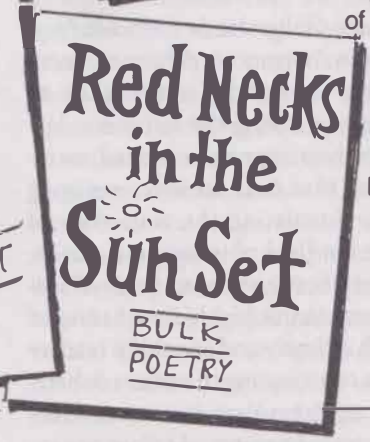



The Nazies really killed 30 million Jews, but so as not to give post-war Germany a bad image and thereby jeopardise the profits of the German companies now controlled by the USA, the figure of 6.1 million was agreed upon. Lots of photos!

Harold Holt is alive and lives with the Beaumont twins in an underwater cave near Portsea.




John Kennedy was killed because he was about to reveal that Castro was paid by the CIA to keep Cuba hostile, so that cheaper Cuban sugar and tobacco would not compete with USA products.


The autobiography of an Australian poet who was fattened up by his parents, so that the girls would make fun of him and inspire him to write poetry. For refusing the Lenin medal he is invited by the Queen to have dinner with her corgies.

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# The Vicissitudes of Indigenous Nation Building

Marilyn Lake

Tim Rowse: *Obliged to be Difficult: Nugget Coombs' Legacy in Indigenous Affairs* (CUP, $32.90).

IN THE RATHER GLOOMY concluding chapter of his recent *Concise History of Australia*, Stuart Macintyre comments that in recent times Australian confidence has given way to signs of a 'premature senility':

> The capacity for political innovation is apparently spent. At the beginning of the century investigators came here to learn of the Australian achievement; now we take our lead from the nostrums of the New Right and our signals from the credit ratings agencies of New York. Australians are followers rather than leaders . . .

It is Tim Rowse's goal in *Obliged to be Difficult: Nugget Coombs' Legacy in Indigenous Affairs* to document one Australian's substantial contribution to creative political thinking during the last three decades. The resulting study is impressive indeed, an intellectual analysis that is at once incisive, engaging and provocative. In elucidating the trajectory of Coombs' thinking in the field of indigenous affairs, Rowse also provides the first systematic study of federal policy developments in this highly fraught area of governance. The book is timely and should be read by all those interested in contributing to current debate.

Nugget Coombs, an exemplary bureaucratic intellectual, embarked on the project of reforming indigenous affairs policy when Prime Minister Holt appointed him, following the successful referendum in 1967, to chair a new Council for Aboriginal Affairs (CAA). In reminding us of the significance of this Coalition government initiative and documenting the policy argument between 1967 and 1972, Rowse wants to question the importance usually attributed to the Whitlam government reforms after 1972, or at least to place them in context. One of the more intriguing phases of Coombs' work with the Coalition government was his influence with Prime Minister McMahon, who publicly referred to his adviser as his "guiding philosopher". Minister Peter Howson confided to his diary his annoyance and suspicion that Coombs was continually "getting at" the Prime Minister – but then he was given to suspecting the worst (there is a nice story about his reaction to the play *Oh What a Lovely War*).

Coombs' reformism was shaped by a combative political environment, but also by the expressed desires of Aboriginal people on the ground. (Nugget liked to go north and sit in the dust.) Convinced early on about the significance of local or regional associations to Aboriginal political development, Coombs gradually formulated a new version of federalism in which indigenous associations were no longer clients (as they had become), but an indispensable part of the nation's government: "In his enthusiasm for regionalism he put forward the possibility that regional coalitions of indigenous organizations would be assured public money not through their involvement in program delivery but as units of government in their own right".

This, for him, was the logic of 'self-determination' – a goal usually represented as the antithesis of, and successor to, 'assimilation'. It is one of the provocative purposes of this book, however, to take issue with such conventional understandings by pointing to continuities between the two regimes. For a start, both policy ideals required indigenous Australians to change, to remake themselves as modem citizens: "As-

similation and self-determination are variations – significantly different, it could be argued – on an inexorable governmental imperative: the modernization of indigenous society". Both regimes required indigenous communities to adapt to the demands of the dominant society, but the point of change, and the basis for its adjudication, in Coombs' view, was that it should better enable indigenous people to determine their own future.

When Harold Holt asked Coombs, professional public servant and then Governor of the Reserve Bank to chair the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, he responded by asking if the Prime Minister was "dinkum", because if not, then he, Coombs, would be "obliged to be difficult". His subsequent journeying, intellectual as well as geographical, caused many, not just Coalition government ministers – to judge him as difficult, inscrutable, not always to be trusted. He made people 'wary' – one of Rowse's favourite adjectives. Aboriginal activist, Charles Perkins, complained that he was never sure where Coombs stood; and members of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), triumphant after the large 'Yes' vote in the 1967 Referendum, were dismayed by his apparent desire to marginalize them. Ministers Gordon Bryant and Peter Howson saw him, for different reasons, as a political opponent, standing in their way. Coombs was a go-between and mediators, suggests Rowse, must become masters of ambiguity. But what did Coombs really think, about the policy of assimilation, for example?

Rowse emphasizes that the CAA "eschewed any definitive reckoning with assimilation as a policy ideal" – it was seen to be a humane aspiration, as long as its applications were open to genuine choice. The government should woo and listen, not coerce. Rowse, then, wants to complicate the current truism that assimilation represented discrimination and oppression at their worst; rather, he insists, assimilation should be understood as a progressive policy of 'inclusion', fostered in opposition to previous policies of 'segregation'. Understood by both the left and the right as "the liberal state's humane duty", 'assimilation' was the logical expression of the principle of 'non-discrimination' as enunciated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. But it was also, of course, predicated on assumptions about the superiority of the Western way of life and the conceptualization of citizens as abstract individuals.

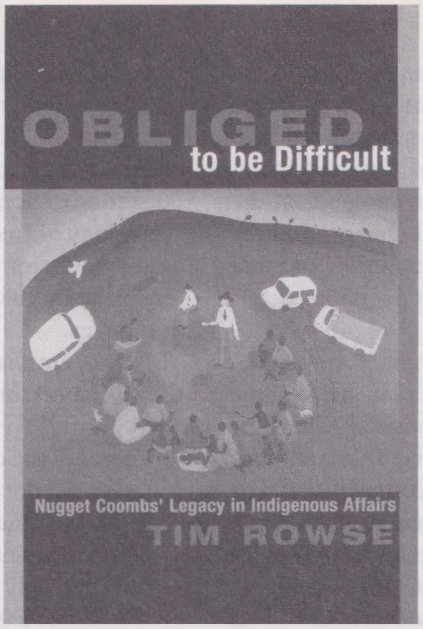
Increasingly, from the 1950s, Aborigines, anthropologists and activists began to insist on the importance of 'group life' and 'culture' to indigenous communities and their desire to retain their distinctive identity. The outstation or homelands movement associated with the Yolngu of East Arnhem Land impressed Coombs as an expression of indigenous choice, the desire to remain apart, to work for themselves, rather than for Europeans.

Rowse emphasizes that for Coombs 'choice' was the all-important issue:

> Critics of the eminently liberal doctrine of assimilation did not have to look beyond the liberal tradition to find the notion that would undo its certainties and question its authoritarian forms. One had only to postulate an indigenous prerogative to *choose* the manner and pace of their integration into Australian society . . . The radical dynamic of Coombs' liberalism, in indigenous affairs, was rooted in nothing more exotic than this: he insisted that whenever the tasks of national integration remained incomplete their completion must be a matter for respectful negotiation between the colonists and the colonized.

Choice could redeem assimilation and give meaning to self-determination. But what choices would different groups of indigenous people make and who would articulate them?

Central to Coombs' vision of future political developments in indigenous affairs was the emergence of an 'indigenous intelligentsia' broadly defined. This group would arise from the practical tasks of creating new communal structures – in Coombs' words, "every conceivable form of social organization", such as village councils, "limited liability companies, cooperatives, sporting clubs, progressive associations, trusts and so on *ad infinitum*". Strategies focused on local empowerment should also identify the differences between indigenous communities, in their circumstances, histories and priorities. In the early years of his engagement with indigenous affairs, Coombs together with his colleagues on the CAA, Barry Dexter and Bill Stanner, tended to divide Aboriginal people into distinct groups: the urban (assimilated or semi-assimilated), the fringe-dwellers of country towns and 'the remote Aborigines' of the Centre and the north. Coombs' policy thinking was most influenced by the conditions of the latter, as Rowse notes:




If the basis of Coombs' approach was to make governments take seriously Aboriginal choice, then his characteristic field of action was with 'the remote Aborigines'. The ethnographic orthodoxies which he picked up from Stanner and other anthropologists inclined him to think that those with the greatest scope for choice lived in the north and Centre of the continent, where relatively recent contact with relatively unintrusive forms of non-indigenous authority had little compromised their traditions and where the political realities of federalism favoured Coombs' own interventions. Self-determination would thus express local choice. A Commonwealth mandarin, Coombs yet opposed centralizing power in Canberra and resisted the creation of a separate Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which was nevertheless put in place by Whitlam's Labor government in 1973.

Though always insisting on the importance of local circumstances and the diversity of Aboriginal conditions, his own project of ascertaining Aboriginal views and bringing representatives to national voice contributed to the ascendancy of an homogenizing politics of identity. The necessity of determining modes of federal representation called into being a national consciousness among Aboriginal people expressed in such bodies as the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee. Inevitably Coombs found himself challenged by the indigenous intelligentsia he had called into existence, with Charles Perkins, for example, employing "a rhetoric of race and identity" to demand the Aboriginalization of Aboriginal affairs.

With his imagination engaged by 'the remote Aborigines' in the context of negotiations over land rights and mineral development in the 1960s and 1970s, Coombs was unprepared for the appearance of the Tent Embassy outside Parliament House in Canberra and the southern activists' "pan-Aboriginal perspective on land rights". As Rowse notes, Coombs' thinking on policy was shaped by events as well as ideas, by indigenous desire as well as government policy. With the growth of indigenous nationalism and demands for the recognition of Aboriginal 'sovereignty', Coombs came to see that Aborigines were united in a "common history of dispossession" heretofore obscured by "striking differences of demeanour and idiom exhibited among indigenous Australians":

> In their southern abjection, they were determined and angry – at times contemptuously so; in their northern tentativeness they were nobly enigmatic. As Chair of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, Coombs was not spared the journey from pity to recognition which all settler-colonists – secure in their charitable duties to 'uplift' – have eventually to make.

But this eloquent assessment begs the question of what, precisely, settler-colonists were brought to recognize. For his part, Coombs resisted the nationalist logic of the indigenous politics of recognition, his goal being to secure 'self-determination' within the framework of the divisible sovereignty of the Australian federal state. 'Self-determination' should be realized locally through such bodies as Land Councils. Although a proponent of a Treaty, as chair of the Australia Treaty Committee from 1980, Coombs was not attracted to the 'mirror image' of an Aboriginal nation. Committed to the idea of indigenous Australia as an ensemble of local constituencies, Coombs seemed not able to recognize the emotional appeal of the idea of nationhood, especially to the indigenous intelligentsia. And he could not foresee the ways in which an emerging Aboriginal history would be so influential in defining a common past of dispossession, frontier violence and the destruction of families which would become a basis for a new national consciousness.

In recent months, talk of a treaty has been revived. Reconciliation may well be a people's movement; but the prominence of treaty talk testifies to the discursive power now wielded by the indigenous intelligentsia. But would a treaty extinguish Aboriginal sovereignty or affirm it? That is the question. In media commentary much has been made of the New Zealand precedent with commentators recommend-

ing the Waitangi Treaty of 1840 to the attention of Australians – without noting, however, that the Waitangi Treaty (in its English version anyway) saw the Maori cede their sovereignty in exchange for the 'protection' of the Crown and land rights. Interestingly, Coombs' understanding of the purpose of a Treaty in Australia was similar: "In his view, the treaty would extinguish sovereignty validly, with compensatory recognition of indigenous rights". But here he was at odds with many indigenous Australians, for as Rowse notes, in their eyes their sovereignty was, and is, inextinguishable.

In the conclusion to this careful, painstaking, analysis, Rowse reports his defensiveness when tackled by an angry Aboriginal man over a book review he wrote in which the issue of Aboriginal 'agency' was raised. The government didn't give indigenous people anything, his critic insisted: "They didn't give us anything, we fucking took it!" Characteristically, Rowse reflects on this exchange, but decides that he is:

> unrepentantly committed to the idea that one way to make sense of the politics of indigenous Australians is to frame their actions within a wider narrative: the changing approaches of settler-colonial liberalism to the integration of a colonial minority into national political life. My account of Coombs amounts to an elaboration of that frame: it is an essay about the vicissitudes of nation-building, not a narrative of indigenous agency.

Yet it seems to me that the disavowal is disingenuous; this book *is* an account of indigenous 'agency' and a good one, but it complicates the notion of agency. Here 'agency' is neither autonomous nor self-determining, but an effect – produced and constrained by specific discursive and political contexts.

And what more powerful and legitimating representation of a people's agency in modern times than the claim to nationhood, the assertion of sovereignty? Men prove their manhood in nationhood. *Obliged to be Difficult* is an illuminating essay about the vicissitudes of nation-building – for both colonized and colonists – and the dynamics of their painful intertwining.

*Professor Marilyn Lake holds a Personal Chair in History at La Trobe University. She is currently writing a biography of Aboriginal-rights activist, Faith Bandler.*

# Rhetorical self-inflation

## Dennis Argall

David Walker: *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850–1935* (UQP, $32.95).

Stuart Cunningham & John Sinclair (eds): *Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diasporas/ Negotiating Cultural Identity through Media* (UQP, $32.95).

WE ARE ONCE AGAIN – or still – in the middle of national debate about race relations. With One Nation a matter of history, the issues are now back in mainstream politics, and more harshly divisive. The subjects of these two books, which seek to improve understanding of past attitudes to Asia and the workings of contemporary Asian communities in Australia, are of considerable importance. *Anxious Nation* has the potential to succeed; *Floating Lives* unfortunately does its best to discourage readers.

David Walker has been teaching Australian Studies in Deakin University's distance education programs for many years; insomniacs will have seen the interesting 'Out of Empire Open Learning' programs on ABC-TV in the early hours. *Anxious Nation* reflects a familiarity with and affection for the material and a capacity to keep external students alert and interested, with cheerful writing, sometimes with dry wit, providing an account that supports a succession of broad propositions or subjects with a wealth of detail. The detail provides an account of intellectual life, political debate, and the influence of popular fiction and news media. It is a story of White Australia worrying about itself and about the region. It is not comprehensive though it does not claim to be. Defence issues, apart from broad security apprehensions informing population and immigration policy, are not dealt with; there is no account of why Australia contributed to colonial forces at the time of the Boxer Rebellion. Prime Minister Billy Hughes work to deny Japan equal-with-Whites status at the post-First World War Peace Conference is not covered.

The extent of Australian interest in the region at the time is striking, as is the depth of 'expertise': in 1932, 25 per cent of applicants for the first advertised trade commissioner appointments spoke an Asian language – in the post-Second World War period there was no such depth of expertise within the trade commissioner or diplomatic services until at

least the 1980s. The book does not set out, but it is important background, that while in 1901 the Constitution gave the federal government powers in relation to 'external affairs', nobody took this then to mean that we would run our own foreign policy. Australian views on foreign policy were to be given by the Prime Minister to the Governor General, from whom, with comment they might go to the Colonial Office in London, at whose discretion the views might pass to the British Foreign Office. The British were not happy at the attempt to alter that arrangement with the appointment of former Prime Minister Andrew Fisher as the first Australian High Commissioner in London in 1915.

So the public debate was much of the substance of our relationship with Asia, together with a smattering of visits and some trade (mostly to colonial trading companies) through the period. Australian embassies were eventually sent to China and Japan in 1940.

Although I spent much of a career working on relations with Asia, I found a wealth of new and useful knowledge in the book. Reading *Anxious Nation* unexpectedly reminded me of views my father would express, back in the late 1940s and fifties. Despite having only modest education, he spent a lot of energy, as did many working people at that time, on being informed and discussing major national issues. It is pleasant to wrap these revived childhood memories now in the fabric of the whole debate on such issues in his formative years in the 1920s and thirties.

*Anxious Nation* provides a valuable background to current debate on race and relations with the region. We remain impulsive and ideologically driven, muddled in our identity, given to self-righteousness, quick to arms. Understanding past debates on these issues is instructive. The grounds of the debate, and the vocabulary, have shifted – but surprisingly little. At the end of a chapter in *Floating Lives* on the Vietnamese community's use of the media, Stuart Cunningham and Tina Nguyen say that "Australian claims to cultural pluralism would be more plausible if the 'shadow system' of diasporic video, music and popular culture was to come into a fuller light". If this is so, this book has not advanced the cause very much. There are interesting chapters, contributed by a range of people mainly working in media studies, on the Chinese, Vietnamese, Fijian Indian and Thai communities and the way the media is woven into their culture. The picture is one of great variation, not just between communities but also within them.

However, these are preceded by a chapter on 'methodology' and interlarded with more of the same, which detracts mightily from the integrity and readability of the book. I went to some effort to wade through all this, as an anthropology graduate and observer of foreign cultures, determined to hear whether there was a coherent body of thought emerging. I wondered about poor editing (but surely editing should be a *sine qua non* for media teachers), as where Manas Ray, in an otherwise very interesting and entertaining account of "Bollywood Down Under" writes:

> [The] main concern [of the literature of transnationality] is to write diaspora as an enigmatic excess and privilege the aleatory nature of diasporic temporalities: the true people are the liminal people.

But there is just too much of this kind of blather:

> David Morley [no, no previous explanation of his status] quotes Aijaz Ahmad [ditto] on "the issue of post-modern, upper-class migrancy", the contradiction of people who have come from dominant-class origins in peripheral nations and become complicit in "a rhetoric which submerges the class question and speaks of migrancy as an ontological condition". While it might be true that "the rich also cry", and have their own form of alienation, it is clearly a fallacy to identify the diasporic experience exclusively with the subaltern, and not to observe the dangers of a naive post-modernist culturalism on which we have already commented.

Is 'media studies' a new discipline still trying to prove itself, a bit like a 'tertiary' course in Year-12 woodwork where students, instead of being focused on creation of beauty from blocks of wood, write leaden essays on 'implement-materials interaction': "the rarefied heights of 'grand theory' and the dense depths of untheorized empiricism"? In the community studies themselves, there are gems of information, but quality seems to vary inversely with the number of authors. The paper on the Chinese community has the worst signs of being written by a committee. Somebody left out any mention of Chinese community newspapers. There are too many occasions where the five writers seem to be injecting their own values, as when there is an amount of haughty amuse-

ment at one respondent who confesses to watching 'The Oprah Winfrey Show'. And the chapter is marred by a longwinded discussion of why those interviewed were friends, or friends of friends, of the two of the authors who did the interviews, with this horrendous conclusion:

> . . . the relationship between the Chinese interlocutor and the researcher, in her curious objectified subject-position of the native informant as ethnographer-observer-observed-translator-transcriber, is discursively framed by the contingent meaning of ethnicity (Wilson and Yue, 1996). Following Rey Chow's suggestion (1993) that part of the task of articulating diaspora is to undo the submission to one's ethnicity as the absolute signified, it can be argued that the methodology of this chapter begins from the assumption that "Chineseness" is not a given, but something to be tactically mobilized.

Oprah Winfrey doesn't talk like that, and Oprah has probably done more than anyone else to encourage ordinary people to read books in recent years. *Floating Lives* won't make Oprah's book list, but it's worth picking your way through the subturdation of rhetorical self-inflation if you would like a quick and interesting insight into Asian communities' uses of media. A nice resource perhaps for fiction writers as well as students of the subjects, though you may not experience "intense epistephilic pleasure".

*Dennis Argall was Ambassador to China in the 1980s.*

## The Journalist and the Politician

### Marg McHugh

Margo Kingston: *Off the Rails: The Pauline Hanson Trip* (Allen & Unwin, $25.20).

*OFF THE RAILS* IS A breathless account of what happened when the standard rules of engagement between journalist and politician slipped away from Margo Kingston (political writer in the Canberra bureau of *The Sydney Morning Herald*) during the 1998 federal election campaign.

Assigned to report on Pauline Hanson – President, Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON), party candidate – Kingston looks forward to getting close to her "subject", doing "real work for a change, which required personal judgement on the stories and pictures", and investigating whether Hanson is racist by 'design' or through ignorance. The two women had already met at Parliament House, where the politician had disarmed the journalist with her personal approach, and during the 1998 Queensland election campaign; at that time Margo Kingston made "purely observational" reports on PHON and received ribbing from a senior press gallery journalist that she had "fallen" for Hanson. Kingston reports they "got along fine": this personal compatibility combines with their political opposition to fuel her journey. Fluid professional boundaries spring from Kingston's voyage through this passionate new terrain and create for her a host of fundamental dilemmas.

Recordings of Hanson's points of view are transcribed into the text. They confirm for the journalist, by the end of the campaign, that the politician is a racist because she is ignorant. Margo Kingston further decides that the reason for racism doesn't matter if ignorance and maliciousness lead to support for the same policies.

While I am told that race is of central concern it is gender issues encapsulated on the front cover. A vivid photograph shows Hanson, seated with her hands clasped and knees together, flanked on a speakers' platform by PHON heavies David Oldfield and John Fisher; their noses are level with her neck, their chins incline toward her yellow shoulder pads, behind her their eyes meet. A caption to the photograph could read: MEN MANIPULATE FEMALE POLITICIAN. The photograph is supported by a text which casts Oldfield as intelligent, evil, a misogynist, and keeping the candidate ill- mis- and under-informed. Emphasizing this gender-based interpretation of Hanson's position in PHON is Kingston's reference to her as "The Product".

The Product carries a passive ring and it sits at odds with Margo Kingston's suggestions that Hanson is working class. "There was also an element of class putdown in Hanson commentary which I found extremely unattractive . . . It was true enough that working-class politicians were now rarely to be seen in federal politics." This class appellation appears to be drawn from observations that Hanson works hard, is ill-educated, and that "Pauline's People were rural poor and fringe city poor". In this

class context Kingston is amused by the snobbishness Hanson displays when she refers to her shop as a Seafood Takeaway rather than a fish and chip shop. I had to remind myself that Hanson is the daughter of a shopkeeper and a businesswoman, a co-Director of PHON, and as PHON President earns an above-average income: using Marxist criteria she is petit bourgeois and her snobbery, work ethic and individualism are recognized traits of this middle class.

Throughout the campaign Margo Kingston is part of a core media contingent of four whose full-time assignment is to follow and report on Hanson. The PHON President proves to be an anarchistic candidate, alone and without minders, who works at evading the media and drawing them into high speed chases which break road rules. Other established rules are also broken as Margo and Pauline report and campaign respectively, co-operating and battling for ascendancy over the other. Kingston acts at times like a campaign adviser, including orchestrating with her sister (also a Fairfax employee) a meeting between Hanson and Jeff Kennett.

In an atmosphere of heightened emotions media – PHON relations climax at the PHON campaign launch – held four days before the election – when officials withhold from the media costing of PHON election promises. Margo Kingston and others refuse to leave the meeting and in another transgression of the campaign the media's action, not the candidate, becomes the news. "I am literally a force for order on this campaign Phillip," Margo Kingston explains about her role to Phillip Adams on Radio National's 'Late Night Live' program. "I am after claiming an institutional role for the media in election campaigns." During the melee at the meeting Pauline Hanson signs autographs. Kingston describes her as "oblivious to the commotion" and interprets her response as exposing "the final, shocking split between Hanson the phenomenon and the political party she had spawned". Could Hanson be oblivious to the commotion? Why isn't she reported as *ignoring* the commotion and choosing to leave its management to her henchmen?

In *Off the Rails* Margo Kingston presented me with a description of the 1998 PHON federal election campaign (a circus train) and her involvement with it. Kingston's final message about Hanson – a "stupid woman" who is "not evil" but "ignorant" – left me dissatisfied. While such a verdict could arise from a gender analysis, if race and class considerations are applied the judgement changes.

*Marg McHugh writes and gardens on the NSW south coast after an activist life in Sydney, Brisbane, Hobart and Adelaide.*

## Kafka on Steroids

### Brian Musgrove

Peter Kell: *Good Sports: Australian sport and the myth of the fair go* (Pluto Press, $32.95).

AS RUSSELL DAINE WRIGHT so tragically showed in *overland* 158 ('Accounting for Our Souls'), everything in public culture now is number-crunching. Speaking to a reported record live crowd and a television audience of millions, John Howard played a cynical numbers game in his Gallipoli address on 25 April 2000. It was a speech that will live in infamy: for those, at least, who are keeping score of the hypocrisies currently fast-bowled at the Australian public from Liberal HQ.

The ANZACs, Howard said, ranked high in the "scale" of national achievement. They faced "overwhelming odds", were a "great-hearted generation" and "as wild and free as the land they loved". This travestied history articulated core values of Howard's 'One Australia Policy' – a phrase he used in 1988, foreshadowing his agenda if he ever came to office. Before Howard won the Canberra Cup, before Hansonism and stolen generations denial, John Pilger's *A Secret Country* (1989) ominously equated One Australianism with "White Australia Policy brought up to date" in a "potentially destructive" race for the votes-trophy.

George Megalogenis ('Reality Check', *Weekend Australian*, 29–30 April 2000) noted that Howard's arithmetic and the "Coalition's compassion index" deserve the Red Pencil: "Barely 1 per cent of the Australian population (60,000 out of five million) fought at Gallipoli . . . [Howard] should abandon his abacus because it also told him last month that 10 per cent of Aboriginal children taken from their parents did not amount to a 'stolen generation'." Howard's score-keeping, an unsporting obsession with national ledgers of winners and losers, shames any pretence to egalitarianism. He is always jogging with figures. And 'figures' carries a troubled double suggestion: first, statistics; and then symptomatically, in second

place, the real human beings who are the depersonalized fractions of government auditing.

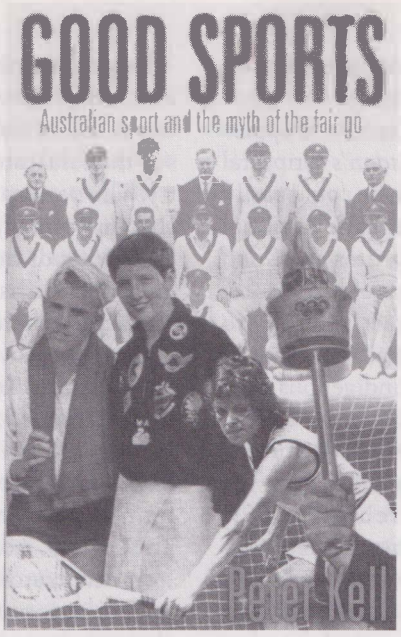
Howard's love of figures, in both senses, is apparent in his passion for cricket. In *Wisden's* scriptural tables, there are wicket-tallies which he could easily interpret as a testament of significant national achievement. Indeed, Peter Kell writes in *Good Sports*, "Howard has the habit of creating cricket metaphors to describe his own career, referring to his prime ministership as an 'innings'" – a game of putting runs on the board, in which indigenous Australians, workers and asylum-seekers are hit for six. His identification with figures like Mark Taylor also deserves scrutiny. On Taylor's resignation from the Australian cricket captaincy, in February 1999, Howard abruptly exited the year's first cabinet meeting, convening a press conference on the 'crisis'; attempting "to tap into the reservoir of goodwill and adulation that Australians extend towards their sporting champions". Later, Howard personally presented Taylor with the 1999 Australian of the Year Award. Taylor gratefully took the catch, and "began to make statements in interviews that praised the Queen and questioned the need for a republic." The "appropriation of the Taylor legend" – Taylor the family-values common bloke, traditionalist, fair-player and meritocrat – was an exercise in political flannelling. For as Kell tellingly reveals in *Good Sports*, cricket is about as far from fairness, meritocracy, and the lived realities of contemporary multicultural Australia as a sport can get. But it *is* 'traditional': anglocentric, imperialist, insular, responsive to media and corporate interests, tainted by corruption, ruled by a well-connected metropolitan power elite and an ethos of clubbable cronyism.

One of the golden means by which Australian politicians have attempted to develop a rapport with publics is through a mutual allegiance to sport. And sport, Kell writes, like politics, has become a survivalist "numbers game, where participation rates, public perceptions of image and television ratings are linked to sponsorship dollars . . . For television networks, sport represents the cheapest and most profitable programming" – the ultimate fiscal-number-crunch – with a political pay-off: televised sport is a virtual arena where "Fans and sponsors" demand that "violence, ugliness and difference are suppressed". *Good Sports*, however, is a provoking collation of cases which shows that violence, ugliness and difference count amongst the structural principles of Australia's sporting establishment and heritage.

A great number of people are systematically discounted by the Australian sporting mythos. Sport is one of the Infotainment Age's most effective consensus-manufacturers, and particularly so in this country. The national sporting mania is shaped by, and a shaping spirit of, an illusory pastoral: a mythology of innocent kids from the back-blocks, healthy bodies, great outdoorsism, and the selfless, unspoiled moral character of heroes who are as "wild and free as the country they love". As an obvious lover of both sport and Australia, Kell is rightly and deeply depressed by this outmoded pastoralism – so close to Pauline Hanson's, and Howard's own "compliant response to her race-based politics" – for it obstructs the reform and rethinking which are preconditions of a just society. Accordingly, the nation needs to confront the historic fact that "sport has been instrumental in forming social hierarchies . . . based on class, race, gender and ethnicity – social hierarchies that have perpetuated rather than alleviated long-term social inequalities. Far from being a source of unity . . . sport in Australia has always been a source of divisiveness and a site of exclusion."

Kell's own numbers game is an enumeration of chauvinisms, which methodically jumps critical hurdles to examine how "moves towards a tolerant and multicultural community have been frustrated by the barriers that some sports have erected." This is racy and absorbing reading – *Good Sports* is a one-sitting book – but it is also a plaintive catalogue of destroyed careers, money-grubbing, administrative arrogance, gloves-off politics, scandal and bare-knuckled lying: not to mention the naked exploitation of athletes and the paying public by sponsors, the media, sports officialdom and government-funded affiliates like SOCOG.

On this point, *Good Sports* suggests the terms for a bond between sportswomen and men and the spectator: they are all factors (suckers) in a sanitized, bureaucratized, corporatized financial equation. For this reason, individual sports stars are rarely blamed for personal transgressions, falls from grace, or surrender to the political forces which entrench prejudice and silence dissent. The case of Cathy Freeman, 'repenting' the famous flag incident by making a television commercial with her racist nemesis, Arthur Tunstall, is depressingly instructive. Freeman was boxed into a corner by the 'No Black Flags Here Thanks Cathy' mind-set; the backward-looking bellicosity of sports governance and 'investors', which forced a terrible choice – celebrate your Aborigi-




nality, but leave professional athletics to do so. The role-modelling and national image-making that Freeman might have proudly and progressively exemplified was killed off by the 'Old Turks' of racism, sexism and money.

An issue on which athletes do not entirely escape censure is drug use. In Australia, they are continually and officially warned of doping's medical and legal costs. Post-publication of *Good Sports*, the seizure of banned substances imported by Australian Opals star Annie Le Fleur, and a consignment shipped to an official at the New South Wales Institute of Sport, must surely ring bells at a time when "the penetration made by drugs into Australian sport should give cause for alarm." Kell is skeptical about the older misdemeanours of Dean Capobianco and Samantha Riley in similar terms. He analyzes the massive media campaign to solicit sympathy for Riley – innocent all-Aussie water-babe, merely following coach Scott Volkers' advice – contrasting it with the outrage at female Chinese swimmers caught in the drug-act.

Kell's 'China Syndrome' chapter surveys Sino-Australian contacts, from the racist paranoia of the gold rush to turn-of-the-century panic over opium dens and white slavery, contextualizing the vilification of Chinese swimmers in Perth's 1998 world championships. Conveniently, the female Chinese busted for dope gave Australian officials a much-needed chance to cast the drug problem as a foreign menace. Yellow Peril mythology was matched with the stereotype of the Chinese as androgynous communist automatons; and a sickened sense of the sublime human sporting form chemically transformed – Kafka on steroids, no less. The reaction of shock-jock Alan Jones encapsulated this: "Oh, it's the most grotesque thing I've ever seen in sport, is that Chinese woman. Was she a woman? Six feet nine! I mean the Chinese are knee-high to a grasshopper at the best of times and, this great big beast . . . Oh, a heifer." But even here, Kell keeps a firm eye on coaching and managerialism. He argues that just as generations of fledgling Eastern Bloc swimmers – as young as twelve – were probably unaware that they were fed drugs in the 1970s, so the migration of East-Euro coaches to China in the post-Cold-War period has repeated the practice. The Chinese swimmers, he concludes, were not privy to what was transacted upon their bodies. In Australia, however, he finds no excuse for protestations of naïvety or the occasional 'technical' slip-up.

The most interesting dimension of Kell's book is its view of sport as an exemplum of the new work ethic. The image of sports stars as 'hard workers' – who put so much back into the community – is well emplaced. But the *actual* contribution of sport must surely puzzle the most hardened economic rationalist and bean-counter. Kell mentions the tennis player Andrew Ilie: "With all the coaching, travelling and financial support, one administrator estimated tax-payers invested $300,000 in one of the game's rising talents. The trade-off was to be in [his] representing Australia." Like many hopefuls at the Australian Institute of Sport and other 'campuses', Ilie's debt to the community after pocketing generous professional earnings will be zero-rated; whereas students in legitimate community-service-bound education – nursing, social work, teaching – are required to repay HECS.

In a May Day 2000 flourish, Australia's millions of low-paid workers 'won' a $15 weekly pay rise – their biggest basic-wage increase in a decade. On 2 May 2000, Australia's cricket captain Steve Waugh was awarded a $95,000 annual pay increase, bringing his Australian Cricket Board 'retainer' to $312,000 per annum. This calculates to $854.80 a day – or, to give him a 'fair go', only $852.46 a day in the Olympic leap year. On talk-back radio, rugby commentator Ray Hadley – stand-in host for the 'John Laws Morning Show' – noted the $15 increment, then neatly segued into a discussion of the Waugh story. Not only would Australia's workers be pleased with their own good fortune, Hadley said, but they would be universally delighted with Waugh's windfall: "no-one begrudges him the money" because, after all, he's "a fabulous ambassador, a great leader – and a winner."

The alignment of "winner" Waugh with Australia's workers indicates the specific version of contemporary labour which sports icons represent. It

implicitly applauds the triumph of the individual workplace agreement, the boon of co-operation with management, and cheers the mutual obligation encoded in Waugh's national ambassadorship. Sport wraps itself in the flag and travesties history as cynically as any politician; in rugby league's 'Anzac Tests', for example, played between "highly paid footballers" from Australia and New Zealand. Shouldn't we be taking-on Turkey, Kell asks of these "hyped-up contests" which "do little to honour . . . sacrifice, grief and loss – the true emotions at the core of the Anzac spirit." The vaporous conception of the nation itself as beneficiary of sport is a distorted ideological mask – as twisted as the governmental and employer assertion that Australia's changing workface serves the national interest.

But sports stars *do* epitomize a "core spirit" – that of corporate globalism. The big names are masters of the game of 'flexibility' and 'mobility'; following migratory work-patterns, frequently refusing national selection in the steeple-chase for cash abroad: "Loyalty is an expendable luxury to professional sportsmen and women, who are becoming nomads willing to swap citizenship and residency to gain financial security." Echoing the memory of that 'team' which was 'trained' in Dubai, sports stars are no longer patriotic warriors but, rather, an emergent class of industrial 'mercenaries'.

It might also be the case that sports stars will be used to prime the workforce at large to accept industrial precedent. Recently, major Olympic sponsors – Telstra, the National Australia Bank – have written a compulsory drug-testing clause into athletes' contracts. Almost all potential Olympians have agreed to sign the pledge. If Olympians set standards for the nation, and if the running-track and the pool are workplaces, what does this prefigure for employees in other fields?

Should young Australians today be encouraged to emulate the "great-hearted" athleticism of the mercenary stars, or heed the breathless advertorial puffing of sponsors, media stake-holders and sporting governors? Given the current state of play, perhaps the most reasonable course would be for the public to become collective referee, and show them all the Red Card.

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# Four fishkettles

Lucy Sussex

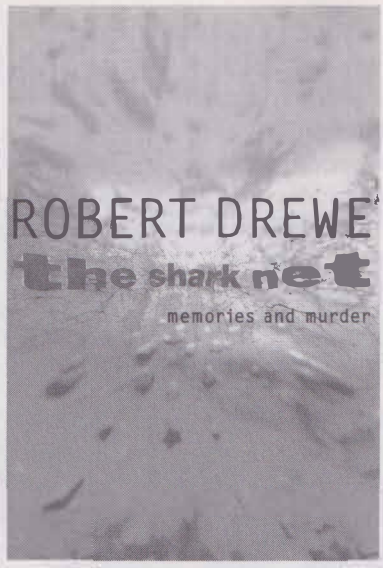
Robert Drewe: *The Shark Net: memories and murder* (Viking, $38.32).
David Foster: *In the New Country* (Fourth Estate, $19.65).
Tom Petsinis: *The Twelfth Dialogue* (Penguin, $19.65).
Sarah Walker: *The Tin Man* (Allen & Unwin, $19.71).

RECENTLY A RISING CHORUS of mumbles, and in some cases shouts, has suggested that all is not well within the pearly world of Australian writing and publishing. Some adverse comments were made about Penguin's penchant for first novels by famous women; Helen Elliott, in *The Eye*, bravely argued that Australians can't, on the whole, write good novels; and the judges of the *Sydney Morning Herald* Award execrated nearly all the current crop of young writers. Less publicly, the usual bitching about award shortlistees and winners was more scabrous than usual, freelance editors passed around, sniggering, less than fortuitous sentences from *ABR*'s favourites, and a lot of newly-published Australian titles, good or bad, languished unread.

What's wrong with Australian writing in the twenty-first century? There are some obvious answers: distribution, inferior marketing and publicity strategy, the cutting of editing budgets, some genuinely dubious tastemaking from the top, and the bloody GST. It may seem unfair to take the four books here, a grab-bag from the *overland* offices, as indicative of the greater whole. Yet, in their variety, not only of themes, fiction and non-fiction, and authors – with two big and near-canonical names, a lesser known but well-regarded author, and a writer crossing over from the young adult market into the world of 'li-fi', the general fiction or literary mainstream – we can still consider them as a sounding, or sample.

The author in the position of alphabetic last shall be discussed first, as the novel which comes burdened with the least weight of reputation, and therefore can be read without expectations. Sarah Walker has written three young adult novels, of which *Camphor Laurel* has been honoured by the Children's Book Council. This background shows in the protagonist of *The Tin Man*, Ricky, a teenage boy who has, like many YA heroes, a troublesome family background. However, few YA novels would feature

someone who is a French-Australian hybrid, the result of an overseas affair, and, unusually, being reared by his downunder Dad. Ricky wishes to meet his mother Camille and goes to Paris, only to be drawn into a psycho-sexual game between Camille and her lover Christian, the heartless Tin Man of the title.




Several things about this novel are reminiscent of a late-1980s critical fave – Mark Henshaw's *Out of the Line of Fire* – such as the themes of incest, and innocent Australian meets jaded, decadent old Europe. Camille is a modish Parisienne with no apparent occupation but idleness. She seems a cipher, too cool and elusive to feel particular empathy with Ricky, not even when this only begotten son is made the butt of Christian's psychological cruelties. Her behaviour is explained (or is it?) by revelations of incest: it appears Ricky's father is actually his maternal grandpere. The blurb states *The Tin Man* "goes to the heart of taboo", which begs the question whether taboos have much force any more in fiction. Perhaps the book might genuinely shock if written with more of the psychodrama found in novels by the three Patricias: Highsmith and the Australians Carlon and Pat Flower. These works, unread by li-fi fans because crime, and therefore 'pulp', are utterly relentless in their suspense – unpleasantness after unpleasantness appears on the page but the reader cannot cease perusing.

What is most rewarding about *The Tin Man*, though, are the moments when Walker approaches poetry, where the language fractures, hinting at possibilities otherwise unspoken in the text:

> Though the ground is soft and the park is peaceable, there is something haunting in the landscape, something that reminds him of
> (shallow graves)
> forgotten things

Which does suggest that *The Tin Man* could have been written in the currently fashionable form of the verse novel, possibly with more success.

Tom Petsinis' second novel is an entirely different kiddle of fish, with no incest and a local setting. In *The Twelfth Dialogue* he draws deftly the world of a second-hand bookseller, a bibliophile faced with financial ruin. Anyone who has read Anthony Marshall's *Trafficking in Old Books*, or gone on a bookshop crawl, will appreciate both author's and protagonist's unashamed love affair with books. His heroine Sonya is wooed by a mysterious author, who leaves anonymous dialogues (the twelve of the title), enclosed in gold envelopes. These feature such unlikely conversationalists as Nietzsche vs St Paul, Hemingway vs Kafka, as well as more expected conjunctions: Ibsen and Strin- dberg, Rimbaud and Verlaine. Clearly the lady is not a feminist, as the dialogues (in which she has some walk-on parts) are devoid of Jane Austen vs Emily Brontë, Hildegard of Bingen vs Mary Magdalene. However, Sonya is wooed and won, though her author proves to be a mute, the written word his only means of expression. The book ends with echoes of both *The Pillow Book* (not Sei Shonagan's but Peter Greenaway's) and *Fahrenheit 451*. *The Twelfth Dialogue* has much charm, and there is real intellectual rigour in the series of dialogues, but I had a nagging feeling it could have been more effective at half the length.

Another fishkettle entirely (though not, perhaps, so entirely different) is David Foster's *In the New Country*. It is a little alarming when a favourable review, quoted in the preliminaries, is quite offputting, but such is the case with Andrew Riemer's words, taken from the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "This seemingly inchoate ramble through the obsessions of contemporary rural Australia [includes] several incendiary statements about Aboriginal activists, feminist agitators, Jewish entrepreneurs". In all fairness to Riemer, he also terms the novel witty, and an "inventive adaptation of classical pastorals", but the cumulative effect is not exactly enticing. However, the book does prove better than its (ambivalent?) praise, though seeming less pastoral than a sophisticated example of the Australian shaggy dog story, involving gorilla suits, the Sydney City to Surf race, a fane, and the rural fire brigade. Certainly it rambles, as do its characters, especially in speech, and the absurdist satire does get heavy-handed, with characters nicknamed Ad Hock and World Wide Webb (really?). And yet, at the same time, there are

moments of glorious writing, such as the whole of chapter 5, where in miniature a life is laid bare.

On to the last book, technically non-fiction, being true crime, a genre that all too easily descends into voyeurism and pop gore. However, *The Shark Net* is also a memoir, as much about youth as it is about Perth in the 1950s–60s. Robert Drewe, as a cadet journalist, covered the case of a serial killer whom he happened to know; he was also a friend of a victim, another friend owned a murder weapon, and he also knew a man falsely accused of the crime. Given such pure writerly gold, one might wonder why Drewe has waited so long to coin it; it might have been from a wish to do the material justice, which indeed he does. The result is a tour de force, with Drewe weaving themes in and out of the text like a fugue. Innocence, both of childhood and a city are lost, and life, in the end, seems far richer and stranger than fiction. It might be his best book.

And so, to sum up: four fishkettles here, which range widely in theme and treatment. Of this sample, perhaps only one really deserves its praise, the rest being interesting but flawed to various degrees. Australian writing may not be in the most robust health, but on the evidence here, it is far from dead.

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## Male Crises

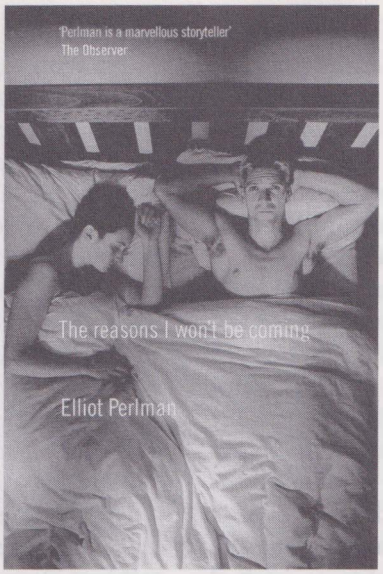
Dianne Currier

Stephen Gray: *Lungfish* (NTU Press, $27.50).
Elliot Perlman: *The reasons I won't be coming* (Picador, $19.65).
Victor Kelleher: *Collected Stories* (UQP, $21.95).

THESE THREE WORKS traverse the terrain of relationships between social institutions and self. While there are obviously significant divergences in approach to this broad subject matter all three remain concerned in their different ways with the meetings of the private and the public, and the effect the institutions of both have on forming an image of self. For Gray the law epitomizes social institutions and while Perlman also at times uses the law, he is more generally concerned with white-collar working life in the nineties, as refracted through the legal, health or education systems. Both Gray and Perlman demonstrate the dissonance between the personal and the institutional, often through problematic relationships with women. However these are not works driven primarily by the much declaimed crisis of masculinity but more it seems by the pressures and expectations of the middle class. Kelleher, not plagued by the middle-class angst of Gray and Perlman, considers broader questions such as identity, place and nation in his African and Australian stories, and the intricacies of family life in the Irish stories.

For Gray in *Lungfish* the realms of public life and citizenship are embodied in, firstly, the practice of law, and secondly, the middle-class respectability and café latte lifestyle of Melbourne. His protagonist, Alex Lungwicz, flees both by coming to Darwin to complete his articles and then refusing to complete the admission process. Alex is attempting to extract himself from the various social roles and expectations which have accumulated around him by accident of his birth in a particular time and place, in order to find some more authentic essential self. This of course proves to be a difficult task. He has nothing but contempt for others who profess to be attempting the same task by choosing not to work in the mainstream. He resists all attempts by his girlfriend and others to draw him into the 'alternative' scene of legal centres and crisis counselling, environmental organizations, snags, social activists, feminists and tempeh burgers. Gray is critical of this 'alternative', sketching it as a new professional class – equally educated and privileged as the mainstream, driven by ideas of social justice but in reality little more than an annex to the mainstream. For Alex it remains part of the system. Instead he looks to the detritus of Darwin for some more genuine alternative, people truly on the margins – a Pakistani immigrant family, the local Aborigines, the working-class drunks and most of all his flatmate Marco. Marco is a man driven by the primal instincts of the body – love, violence, intoxication, illness and ultimately spirituality. Alex however can never hope to emulate Marco's instinctive approach to life – Marco brutalized out of the mainstream in childhood and Alex raised in the comfort and security of Melbourne's leafy suburbs.

Instead of becoming more alive he flounders – he is attempting stasis in order that the flows and movements of society will just go around and leave him to find what or who he really is – but ultimately he




finds nothing. Selves it seems are intractably bogged in their background – for the dissatisfied members of the middle class their only options seem to be putting their advantages to some use on the margins, or dissolving.

Perlman too is concerned with the relationships with institutions which give a man his role and sense of self. In this collection of short stories we find men floundering in various ways. Many are falling short of conventional success – failing to get ahead in the workplace, unable to sustain meaningful relationships or at times simply being unable to understand the forces which are at work around them and deciding their fates in the late-twentieth-century economic-rationalist world. These men are often blindly following their inner impulses, in most instances concerning relationships with women, although in one case poetry, and just as often as not they are as naïve in these areas as about the broader sphere of work.

While ostensibly delving into the inner lives of such men, Perlman's writing style is strangely at odds with any contemplative journey. His clever barbed summations of the state of things – the world, life, man's expectations and failings – what is often praised as his ability to distill – works to flatten the nuances and complexities of daily events into stark inhuman reliefs which render them comical but also pathetic. His clipped precision, when he puts these words into the mouths or minds of his protagonists makes for a cold, disassociated and aloof perspective. Small wonder then that the relationships he tries to fathom seem doomed from the outset – riven by dissonance and an inevitable inability to make meaningful contact. He never gets below the surface. If this proves problematic in terms of capturing the depths and messiness of relationships it succeeds in another register to raise questions about the relations between social roles and institutions and selves.

Perlman uses the flattened surface of the prosaic workings of various social institutions, such as the law courts, to reflect on the question of how socially sanctioned categories and roles – i.e. poet, father, worker, victim – connect with inner experience. He finds no evidence of coincidence or connection. The flatness of everyday life, the artificiality of such roles leaves no space for the depth or complexity of human feeling. At times he draws broad analogies – mostly with law or business to counterpose these two spheres. These can tend to labour the point and take on an instructional tone – the most artless instance being in 'Manslaughter' which narrates the events surrounding a court case. While it does illuminate a disjunction between personal and institutional versions of events it reads like reportage.

For Perlman, late-twentieth-century man is struggling under his institutional and social load which cannot and does not match his experience. The flat and polished surface of his prose suggests a displaced depth which can find no expression within the constraints of social institutions.

If Perlman dwells on surfaces and disconnection Kelleher's *Collected Works* on the one hand is about being embedded in the institutions and the comforts as well as the contradictions that this involves and on the other the grand narratives of nation and identity. This loosely bisected collection of stories ranges across the public to the private – in 'The Traveler: Stories of Two Continents' there are stories of Africa and Australia concerned with nation, race and identity and in 'Micky Darlin' the family provides the lens through which all such institutions are filtered and understood.

'Micky Darlin', which occupies the greater part of the volume, is a ramble of vignettes about a sprawling and dislocated Irish family in England in the 1940s. Told from the perspective of Micky, a young boy growing to adolescence, who lives with his grandparents, it is a parade of drunken misadventures, family conflict, momentary solidarity and ultimately dispersal. The patriarch, Micky's grandfather, rules the family and it is through his character that we see a variety of experiences and encounters with social institutions being filtered through to the private realm with destructive effects. The vehement anti-church sentiment born of the loss of a son, killed in the war while supposedly under God's protection, is a divisive influence – it sets family members against each other and isolates the family from a large section of the expat community. The family may appear to provide the central reference for its mem-

bers but Kelleher chronicles its inevitable dissolution as the outside world infiltrates it. This occurs in many guises such as romantic attachments to outsiders (Protestants, Americans, gypsies), accidents at work, interference from church or school. Despite the solidarity in the face of such challenges the bonds of family ultimately give way as succeeding generations pursue their own paths.

Family is almost entirely absent from the African and Australian stories which speculate on the place of homeland in the lives of transient men. These are stories of men removed from their homelands, cultures and families – most often alone and completely unable to function – professionally, maritally or socially. Kelleher is ambivalent as to the consequences of such dislocation. At times it seems liberating – insofar as belonging to no-one or nowhere frees a man to follow his impulses. There are several instances of sexual encounters followed by spectacularly hasty retreats – the implication being that intimate relationships demand a constancy which is unacceptable. The disconnection from social expectations and responsibilities a traveler feels is both a source of discomfort and pleasure. Kelleher's men, whether they are in Africa or Australia, while sometimes floundering in the flux of not belonging seem little inclined to renounce it.

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## Cursed by Poverty and Religious Fundamentalism

Nathan Hollier

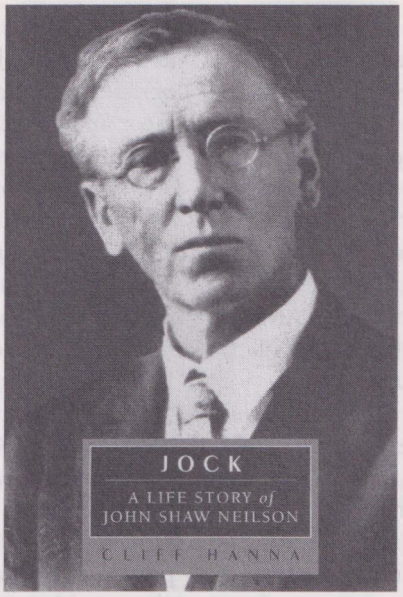
Cliff Hanna: *Jock: The Life Story of John Shaw Neilson* (UQP, $19.95).

CLIFF HANNA WROTE his first major scholarly article on John Shaw Neilson in 1972 ('The Dual Nature of Shaw Neilson's Vision', *ALS* 5). Further articles on various aspects of this poet's work followed over the years and in 1990 his critical study of the Shaw Neilson oeuvre appeared: *The Folly of Spring*. A year later this UQP publication was accompanied by a companion volume, also edited by Hanna, *John Shaw Neilson: Poetry, Autobiography and Correspondence*. This was by far the most authoritative edition of the poet's published and unpublished writings. Since Shaw Neilson's death in 1942 there has been a steady trickle of critical work produced on this Celtic bard and bush worker. Tom Inglis Moore wrote in 1941 that "As a pure singer Neilson at his best stands unsurpassed in modern English-speaking poetry, and he can take rightful place in company with the finest lyrists of all English literature" (*Six Australian Poets*). Much less famously, Alan Marshall wrote in a letter to John Morrison in 1949: "Remember that poem of Shaw Neilson's we read at my sister's? I'd like to write a short story that would make the reader feel as I felt when I finished reading that".[1] But this critical and private adulation has been affected by the relative absence of specific information about the real circumstances of Shaw Neilson's life, especially his early life. In this *Life Story* Hanna sets out to answer the difficult historical questions about his complex subject and in doing so completes what could almost be described as his own life work.

John Shaw Neilson, 'Jock' to his family and to Hanna, was born in the small country town of Penola in South Australia in 1872. His father was an agricultural labourer and chronically unsuccessful farmer and his mother a devout Covenant Presbyterian who according to her death certificate died "from typhoid and exhaustion" in 1897. The family was cursed by poverty and religious fundamentalism. Poverty led Jock's paternal grandparents to risk their own and their children's lives on a perilous sea journey from Scotland to Australia. Twenty-seven of the 466 passengers died. Most were young children, and two of these were Neilsons. A diarist wrote: "The fourteenth child dies. A prayer meeting was held on deck . . . a pleasant sight to see hundreds of people on their knees on deck acknowledging the goodness of the Lord". Jock and his siblings couldn't escape the penury and hard labour that had been the lot of their parents and grandparents and nor could they easily shed a fear of God passed on by their mother.

For God to provide genuine hope in times of extreme hardship he had to be imagined as a tangible being. But this also meant that the price of salvation was high: purity had to be constantly aspired to; His demands were always present, narrowly shaping and codifying behaviour. Hanna delineates some of the connections between the Shaw Neilson children's relationship with their loving, domineering, religiously

pure mother, their general failure to develop or sustain long-term sexual relationships, and the presence amongst them of fundamentalist notions of personal purity. Something of this final characteristic is present in Jock's poetic fascination with childhood. Hanna here opens up fascinating lines of inquiry for future scholars and critics.




Childhood also loomed as a time of lost innocence in Jock's mind because of his experience of being uprooted from a relatively secure life in Penola and taken with his family to begin 'afresh' in the bleak and unforgiving semi-desert of the mallee region in Victoria. As the oldest child he was soon forced into taking much responsibility for farm work as well as for the physical and emotional wellbeing of his siblings. As his father also had children to a second wife Jock spent most of his own life preoccupied in some way with the welfare of his immediate family. The move from Penola was forced on the family by the first of Neilson senior's several failed attempts to purchase his own farm and achieve financial security. The dream was foiled by drought, mice and rabbit plagues, global economic depressions, deaths in the family, and, not surprisingly, the occasional loss of sanity.

The photos that accompany this text and Hanna's descriptions of the physical environment of the mallee reveal the harsh and barren conditions in which the Shaw Neilsons lived and worked. It could be imagined how easily the creative life and culture of these people could have been swept away in the dust of history. But in addition to searching out the historical traces of Jock and his family amongst abandoned farms and run down towns and tiny official markers in graveyards and government records offices, Hanna has also uncovered something of the self-sustaining cultural life of the Shaw Neilsons. Along with the hope in God that enabled them to look to the future, the 'pioneers' of Penola and the mallee region maintained (usually Celtic) traditions of balladry and folklore and committed to memory the lives, experiences and stories of each other. The value and fragility of these sustaining structures of knowledge and feeling is perhaps instructive at a time when these and comparable areas of Australia are characterized by high rates of suicide.

Hanna found himself amazed at the memory of those who continue to live in these areas, and he attempted to capture something of this oral culture: "I see myself not as a biographer in the traditional sense – as an omnipotent accountant of 'the truth' – but as a life story-teller caught in a two way drama between the text and the reader, doggedly juggling the roles of guide, historian, fiction writer, dramatist and mouthpiece". His text is dedicated "To Jack Howley and Ruby Sandars and the other rememberers who graciously passed on a part of their lives". This method could be seen as 'postmodern', but as with Hanna's choice of the familiar 'Jock', this approach could also be seen as a demonstration of respect for the terms of Shaw Neilson's own culture; something closer to oral history. This method enables a dialogue with Shaw Neilson's specific rural society that might otherwise have been lost.

A clear image emerges of a complex man bound by duty to the material and emotional support of his family yet capable of overcoming his shyness to the extent of being accepted as a personal friend and valued artist by many members of the literary community. He carried on a long correspondence with Mary Gilmore and in his old age was taken in as a house guest by James Devaney, who collated much of Shaw Neilson's autobiographical testimony. By far Shaw Neilson's most important non-familial relationship, however, was with A.G. Stephens, who 'discovered' him through the red page of *The Bulletin* and who carried on as his literary agent and editor and surrogate father for most of Jock's writing life. Hanna's treatment of this stimulating, sometimes fraught but always affectionate friendship, in a broader patriarchal context, is one of the real strengths of this study. In bringing his *Life Story* to a close, Hanna speculates that his subject freed himself at the end from the psychological strictures of the omnipotent heavenly father. In his final illness Shaw Neilson did not call for a priest and perhaps hurried his own death by his refusal to eat.

The author's devotion to his topic, his sensitivity to the different 'ways of knowing' encountered in his search for the truth, his refusal to overstate his

critical and historical findings and his final attention to detail in shaping this highly readable narrative, mark this biography out as an outstanding work. There are further lines of fruitful inquiry that are called for by this biography but it is difficult to imagine that it will be surpassed.

## ENDNOTE

1. Alan Marshall to John Morrison, 7 February 1949, Morrison Papers currently in possession of the executor, John McLaren.

*Nathan Hollier is* overland*'s associate editor.*

# A Bit Close to Home

## Leigh Dale

Ian MacNeill: *Looking for Ms Warscewicz* (Mieli Press, $24).

THIS IS A NOVEL about teaching in an Australian high school, that also explores questions of relationships, sexuality, and self. The protagonist of the title has just returned to Australia from Cambridge with a PhD and a determination to teach. She is assigned to Malanatta High, where her 'challenges' range from largely recalcitrant pupils to a staff suspicious of 'the academic type'.

There are many good things about *Looking for Ms Warscewicz*. Those of us who are friends of teachers can congratulate ourselves for hanging on grimly during the first half of the book as we are taken, breathless and then exhausted, through the minutiae of days in the life of a teacher: the petty tyrannies of administration, the muddling inhumanity of the Education Department (teachers transferred on a whim, and paid, it seems, on the same basis), and the endless and only occasionally endearing demands from students. The sheer length of this part of the book encourages us to empathize with the character, but our understandings aren't really deepened or developed: all succumb to the treadmill.

The novel's suspicion of 'depth' may be no bad thing, but the reader is tantalized by hints of relationships and complexities of character and experience that lie just beyond the horizon of the narrative. In particular, the book flirts with issues of sexuality: there is the occasional hint about the protagonist's past relationship with one of her new colleagues, there are glimpses of gay characters. But these intriguing moments remain on the edges of the novel, haunting the narrative without being of sufficient significance to really shape it. This may be a fair picture of teacher sexuality in the school environment – veiled, fragmentary, manifested in the very gestures by which it is determinedly hidden. And it may be true that epiphany and in-depth exploration of sexuality are a bit light on in Year 11 English – but it may also be the case that such moments *do* occur, and that a challenge for a novelist would be to talk about the exception rather than the rule.

The intriguing cover photograph shows a woman who might be the protagonist walking across what is probably a school sports field, her face uplifted, her back to the soccer goal in the background, her shadow extending towards it. It is a nice metaphor of the character's ambivalent relationship to the school culture in which she works. But inside, presentation does the novel no justice. Basic aspects of layout are not well done: paragraphs are not marked by spacing or indentation; the margins are impossibly small (particularly noticeable when the type size could easily have been reduced); there are some typographical errors that scramble whole sentences.

But it's not fair to end on such a note – those with some connection to the teaching profession will be interested in this book; English teachers, though, may be unable to bear reading a novel that will take them so close to home!

*Leigh Dale teaches Australian Literature at the University of Queensland.*

# Intimate histories, possible selves

## Kerry Leves

Bruce Beaver: *Poets and Others* (Brandl & Schlesinger, $18.65).

> *Cricket, cricket,*
> *how has this happened?*
> *I rub my limbs together*

*like dried sticks*
*but no fire comes.*

BRUCE BEAVER'S *Poets and Others* may strike many readers as a poet's self-portrait at the beginning of old age. It's distinguished by a created intimacy, thus has affinities with Beaver's 1969 collection, *Letters to Live Poets*.

That mid-career book was a suite of reflections, sometimes rueful, sometimes hopeful; questioning the connections and missed connections between the poet, his poetry and the changing, chaotic world. It's possible *Letters to Live Poets* was written partly to answer one of the demands of its historical period: relevance. The mood of the late 1960s was revolutionary, and poets were challenged to speak to and for the times. *Letters to Live Poets* was welcomed for its openness, its disclosing spirit.

*Poets and Others* enters a more sophisticated and more sceptical climate. The mass media assert relevancies; the Internet suggests relevance is where you find it. The lyrical 'I' that's fundamental to the kind of poetry Beaver writes, is under pressure to remake or unmake itself, to interrogate in particular the devices – the language/s – whereby the illusion of literary personality is created. This isn't new. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was written in the provenance of literary romanticism; her novel can be read as an anxiety formation that links the romantic, revolutionary self (c.f. her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley) and the possibilities suggested by the then very new adventure of science. Now, as biotechnology proposes a radical remaking of the (or some) human(s), lyrical poetry questions the basis of the 'I' that's been its mainstay.

Bruce Beaver's *Poets and Others* doesn't concern itself with science, but it does evince some scepticism about the plausibilities of its 'I', in a playful spirit. Aging is also a radical, if 'natural', unmaking and/or remaking of the self, and Beaver addresses this theme with considerable verve.

In the eponymous poem, a *chaise longue* which is "skeletal, broken ribbed,/ abandoned" is noticed for its durability, different from the flesh and bones lowered into it. The *chaise longue* "looks at home" whereas its intending occupant no longer feels at home with it. Familiar objects, taken-for-granted items of furniture, this poem suggests, grow strange and difficult as one ages: a phenomenon which admits a "wanness" into the radiant afternoon summer light.

*Poets and Others* also remembers the physical resilience and recklessness of youth. The poem, 'The Wave', with brilliant unshowy mimesis, recreates the sensation of being suddenly lifted off one's feet and spun and dumped by a freak wave at the beach. In recollection, the experience becomes an intimation not only of death, but more interestingly of a powerlessness that seems to have been realized over a long and thoughtful period of time.

But Beaver's poet is not only the wise and gentle contemplative the book's first set of poems evokes. He can be Lear-like, cranky, intransigently declamatory on this "sapless mantel-piece of earth/ we euphemistically call home". The poem 'Visit and Revelation' is a forceful rhapsody, and a problematic one. "Individuating/ psyches", the poet tells us, must "find their sanctuary". Where? "Within as always" the poet answers himself. I have trouble with those "individuating psyches", because they seem to smuggle a Jungian therapeutic purpose into the poetic venture.

Jung himself, when he was making paintings to stave off madness, refused to let anyone call them art: the pioneer psychologist made a clear boundary, keeping art-as-therapy firmly bound to the development of the individual, while at the same time cutting a less-self-centred art loose to the public realm. Beaver's invocations of Jungian purpose are few and far between, and they show up in the rhapsodies, not the quieter lyrics; but they're a leit-motif. Elsewhere poetry is exhorted to release archetypal figures like Prometheus and Lucifer from "petrified eternities of self". It's a big ask.

More suavely, Beaver casts his poet as Nosferatu, the movies' most hideous vampire, who turns the summer "abortive". There's a comedic fidelity to the furies of age – in this case, at finding one's physical self not merely undesirable but repellent – as well as to age's capacity for calm, incisive retrospection.

Beaver can turn a fine, pungent image. On the beach at Sydney's Queenscliff, in retreat from "the self-shattering city" his poet "taste[s] riposte in the whipping foil/ of salt". He follows this bit of very dynamic mimesis with a Shakespearean trope, hearing, he says, "the blood of pines incarnadining/ all the empty sea of speechless voices". The suddenly-inflated diction seems to signify rage itself – against death's closure, its finalization of possibilities that are no less seductive because they're inchoate. "Because I had nothing I was left alone", the poet fin-

ishes; deflationary, bleakly wise.

The book's centrepiece is 'The Village', a suite of sonnets that turns a local history – of the Sydney coastal suburb of Manly – into a microcosmic glimpse of white Australian history. The vocal tone conveys an earnest amateur historian; a personage who mingles civic pride with worldly wisdom and is unemphatically ironic. "Between the ocean and the harbour, between two shores./ A summer place where youth goes privateering;/ Where treasure rises golden from the sands/ In scraps of floral censorship . . ." This sly gentility is undercut, time and again, in the traditional way of the sonnet: the closing lines revise the conceptual framework. The accumulation of fact and vignette, the sensuous tropings of weather and landscape, are collapsed into tougher-minded couplets that undermine the historian's modest certainties:

> *. . . the lugging of gear from the boats and the setting up shop*
> *Of family, the shaping of shelter into*
> *House into home – That last phase was the rub*
> *On the raw side of being here, not there. They knew*
> *The home in the mind was half a world to the west;*
> *The home in the soil belonged to the dispossessed.*

'The Village' is a meditation on social history, on attitudes and mores and values and the way these get inscribed on landscapes, through statuary and plantings (sonnet VIII is very witty about the Norfolk Island pines along the foreshore) and the representations of worthy and prosperous selves in architectural styles. "Bricks piled on bricks/ Stood up for Queen and country, fence to fence . . ."

The final third of *Poets and Others* takes us into the company of poets, among them Adrienne Rich, Robert Duncan, Paul Celan, Grace Perry and Richard (Lewis) Packer. It's perhaps the richest and most ambiguous section of the book. Styles of writing and styles of living and dying are subjected to affectionate inquiry, homages and speculations. Affection can allow bluntness: a poet "went through food and drink and relationships/ like a used car salesman in a tv commercial." Affection can also produce an elegiac tone, poignant for all its formality: Celan's "white hand/ saluting with finality the Seine./ So many of your 'kind' had gone before you/ it became a sort of rendezvous./ Never forgotten, you joined the nameless."

*Poets and Others* has a lot to recommend it – virtuosity, wit, broad-based social commentary, generosity of feeling and invention. The poem 'Three Etchings by Sally McInerney' demonstrates Beaver's ability to, in Mallarme's formulation, evoke objects "little by little so as to reveal a mood." The descriptions are vivid, e.g. "two water-tanks/ thistle-based with pecking chooks/ under a threatening skein of cloud", yet the poem becomes a meditation on the apparent intimacy and actual non-intimacy of the art-object. The etchings described become traces of a human personality which remains finally unknowable. Bruce Beaver may be the least literal-minded of Australian lyrical-realist poets.

*Kerry Leves is a NSW poet.*

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Rick Amor, *The Silent Hour*
1999, 101.5 x 97 cm, Oil on canvas
Courtesy of the artist and Niagara Gallery, Melbourne