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overland

$11 . . . Power Without Glory

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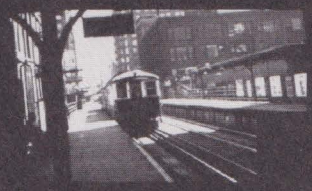

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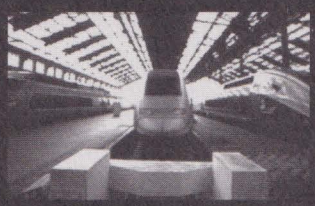

poetry

hypertext

- home
- poetry
- fiction
- gallery
- subscribe
- submit
- links

Australia Council for the Arts

ARTS VICTORIA

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

contents

overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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Australia Council for the Arts

ARTS VICTORIA

edit

ONE OF THE THINGS we value about *overland* is the sense of a continuity in the magazine's present and past content, and the concomitant sense that we are heading in a particular direction. Our readers, we hope, are attracted by the clear goals, if not identity, of the magazine, and are coming along not only for the ride but to be altered a little by the time we reach each destination. There is of course a community around *overland* and it is very heartening to see people turn up to our launches or to receive feedback. We value both positive and negative equally of course!

We are also proud to have regular contributors who to a greater or lesser extent share *overland*'s goals. Stephen Gray first appeared in *overland* 150. Since then he has written for us a number of times and helps to assess our fiction. It is gratifying to see Gray's writing recognized with the recent Vogel Award for young Australian novelists. Other regular contributors who appear in this issue are Kurt Iveson and Sean Scalmer. Both work in universities, and their piece is exemplary of the possible benefits of attempting to reach 'specialist' and 'general' readers. A host of good material about S11 and the World Economic Forum (WEF) did appear in the mainstream media and elsewhere, eventually, but Iveson and Scalmer have contributed to a scholarly basis for subsequent discussion and theorization of those three days in September.

The title of this issue: 'S11 ... power without glory', of course refers to two important elements of left-wing Australian cultural memory. Funnily enough, Hardy's title sits neatly alongside 'S11' without requiring explication. This issue also hosts a special ex-

orial

panded reviews section. While in boasting persona, we have always been proud that our identity encourages reviewers to avoid the often bland generalisms of much reviewing and to put forward an argued evaluation of a text.

HELEN DANIEL, who edited *Australian Book Review* from 1994 until she died recently, is remembered in this issue by Bruce Sims. One of the best features of Daniel's editing must surely have been her capacity to inspire and facilitate strong debate. Her editorials and the letters section of *ABR* were always worth reading. You never knew which writer was going to complain about his or her treatment, or how far the invective would go.

Speaking of which, response has come thick and fast to 'Thoroughly Modern Macca', Graham Sewell's attack on McKenzie Wark in the previous issue. Fiona Capp's *Age* review suggested it marred its impact through the use of "excessive sarcasm". A number of correspondents agreed. One thought the attack "pathetic" and a poor example of "1960s radical chic". On the other hand, many have said that the criticism is well made and "about time", or that Wark has received a dose of his own medicine. One correspondent suggested "Sewell was marvellously indifferent to cliqueish power".

What McKenzie Wark thinks about it all is a little hard to fathom because he has declined *overland*'s offer of space for reply. He also refused to debate Sewell on Michael Cathcart's 'Arts Today' program on Radio National – thereby reinforcing Sewell's claim that Wark is not prepared to take it up to those capable of defending themselves, preferring instead to slap straw figures about. The reason given to Cathcart was: "I don't reply to this sort of nonsense." This begs the question why Wark initially did respond – by posting Catharine Lumby's 'The Idiot's Guide to Sledging McKenzie Wark' (published in *Strewth!* magazine) to an *overland* email list. Maybe it's Lumby's job to reply to "this sort of nonsense" for him.

This is not good enough from a man who has for years produced a fair few column inches in one of the few forums available for diverse and divergent opinion in the Australian mainstream media. He has a responsibility as a widely published public intellectual to respond to these kinds of criticisms, however sarcastic or vituperative. Whatever flaws Sewell's piece might have, the one charge that doesn't stick is the one of nonsense. As we have found, Sewell articulated a widely-held argument.

We expect to generate more controversy in this issue through a number of pieces. Martin Mulligan tries to negotiate the minefield of discussing whitefella relationships to the Australian land. And Euan Mitchell delivers a broadside to the Australia Council and its 'economic discrimination' against non-mainstream publishers. Phil Doyle gets fired up in criticizing much of the third National Young Writers' Festival held in Newcastle in September of this year. Surely there are some young writers out there or other attendees, or others with opinions for that matter, who would like to air their views on Doyle's piece. One thing's for sure, Doyle will be prepared to argue back. It would be great if *overland* could have a dialogue section as vibrant as that of Helen Daniel's *ABR*.

Nathan Hollier & Ian Syson

Kurt Iveson & Sean Scalmer

Contesting the 'Inevitable'

Notes on S11

WHAT WERE THE S11 protests at the World Economic Forum (WEF)? Who gathered at the Crown Casino to demonstrate between 11 and 13 September? How did the actions of those present fit into the history of popular mobilization in Australia?

Certainly, for the *Herald Sun*, these were easy questions to answer. While praising the "long tradition" of Australian public protest, and paying tribute to the "moratorium marches of the 1960s" (sic), this august journal saw the opponents of the WEF as a twisted, somewhat misshapen offspring. They shared "none of the character qualities evident in those who marched in the peace protests" (*Herald Sun [HS]*, 28 August 2000, p. 18).[1] They were led by "shadowy organisers", who were "out to destroy democratic society" (*HS*, 28 August, p. 18). They used "weasel words" (*HS*, 31 August, p. 18), scattered marbles, and they poured urine on police. They were cowardly (although also violent and provocative to police); a pathetic few who numbered four thousand (although, it is true, also a horrifying mob, capable of laying siege to the city); un-Australian (although admittedly, made up of individual Australian citizens); stupid opponents of the inevitable (and yet also machiavellian tacticians and manipulators of school children and of the media). They were, in short, all things dark and ugly – a shameful eruption of illiberal, crafty, but incoherent sentiment.

At the same time, other observers saw S11 as an advance rather than a retreat from earlier traditions of Australian protest. Even critics like Mark Latham noted their "pioneering" role in the globalization of politics (*Daily Telegraph*, 15 September, p. 27). Others emphasised that S11 was technologically-wired, decentralized, internationally-connected, carnivalesque, and able to supplement "traditional protests" with a range of electronic and 'virtual' interventions.

Reporters on the scene initially found it difficult to categorize the actions going on around the Crown Casino. There were clowns, ten-foot puppets and twenty-foot dragons. There was an effective blockade. Dance music blared from mobile speakers. Organizers marshalled those present to respond to challenges. ABC journalist Damien Carrick thought the atmosphere "quite strange". It was like a carnival most of the time. And yet:

> every now and again the atmosphere turns when buses or cars try to enter, and the protest becomes quite serious and the atmosphere changes quite dramatically. And then five, ten minutes later it changes back again, so the atmosphere is really quite strange. (*The World Today*, 11 September, 12:10)

Clearly, something novel, unaccustomed, was at play. What, precisely, was so strange? What brought so many people onto Melbourne's streets?

The lead-up

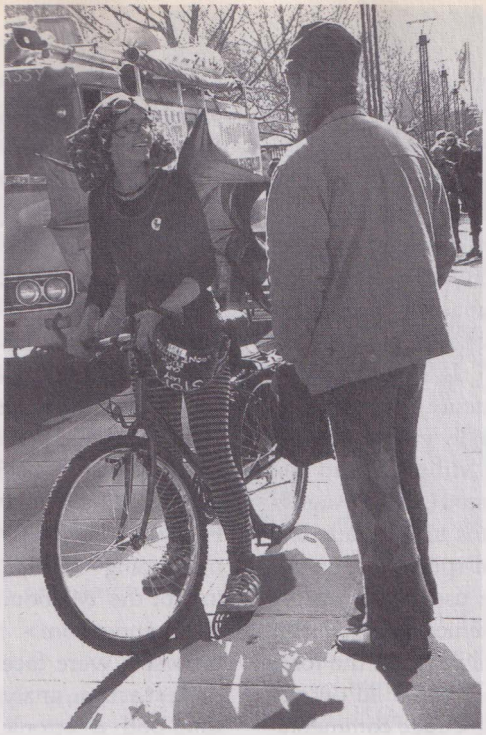
Perhaps because of the influence of earlier protests against the World Trade Organization, S11 seemed to represent a new form of globalized political action. Demonstrators promised to "Bring Seattle to Melbourne". The official web-site, <www.s11.org> made the point directly: "seattle + washington = melbourne". Journalists would later argue that a "key tool" in S11's success was "its sophisticated use of the www" (*The Australian*, 16–17 September, p. 4).

However, this apparent novelty initially seemed both dubious and counter-productive. S11's very place in a 'global movement' – the close relationship between the Melbourne and Seattle protests, was a consistent source of misinformation and scare-mongering. The possibility of "Seattle-style violence" was raised in the months preceding the protest (*Australian*, 18 August). The dilemmas faced by Seattle and therefore Melbourne police were sympathetically assayed (*Aus-*

tralian, 29 August, p. 6). The inspiration of Seattle was used to undermine the claims of protesters to be non-violent, as in the typical reporting of Damon Johnston:

> S11 is believed to be basing its protest tactics on the Seattle demonstration, which was meant to be peaceful but erupted in riots with five hundred arrests and $2.3 million damage (*HS*, 26 June, p. 9).

The fear of "hardened international protesters" (*Australian*, 8 July, p. 9) and of violent British anarchists (*Australian*, 29 August, p. 6) was often enunciated in the lead-up to the World Economic Forum. Columnist Andrew Bolt was profoundly concerned. "Are we ready to resist them?" he asked – "Police wise, maybe just. Culturally, definitely not", he fearfully answered (*HS*, 11 May, p. 18). The *Herald Sun* counselled that Seattle-rioters should not be allowed visas to enter the country (*HS*, 27 June, p. 18). As early as June 2000, Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, felt sure that those involved in the S11 Alliance violated "the Australian way of doing things" (28 June, p. 12). In short, the very international connections that made S11 apparently new and globalized, also allowed it to be depicted as alien, violent and extraneous to local conditions – "imported protest and criticism", as Bracks would also put it (*HS*, 26 August, p. 2). There was little such criticism of the international capitalists who were to attend the WEF meeting.



A couple of 'hardened international protesters' planning some violence at S11?, photo: Kath Wilson

In the same way, the much-hailed Internet presence of the S11 protest was also something of a double-edged sword at times. Journalists and police alike referred to the S11 web-site as a means of undermining the protest. In an almost parodic performance of 'investigative research', critics of the WEF protest continually re-publicized information openly available at <www.s11.org> as if it were part of a secret, sinister plot.

Internet communications were used by authorities as evidence of a planned invasion by British anarchists (*Sydney Morning Herald [SMH]*, 7 August, p. 4). The *Herald Sun* used information garnered from S11's website to summon outrage at the involvement of high-school students in the campaign (*HS*, 18 July, p. 7). Gerard Henderson thought that there was "reason for genuine concern" that the protest would become violent. He also thought that the S11 web-site explained why (*SMH*, 5 September, p. 12). Andrew Bolt quoted from apparent S11 chat-sites in order to argue that protesters planned for violence (*HS*, 31 August, p. 18). In late August, *Herald* journalists noted that the S11 Alliance had posted a list of "essential items to bring to the planned blockade", and they highlighted the advice to bring "gasmasks, helmets, goggles and energy snacks" (*SMH*, 30 August, p. 5). Imre Salusinzsky carefully scanned the S11 site, and managed to find discussions that highlighted the more trivial or superficial concerns of activists. He eagerly reproduced them for readers of the *Herald* (*SMH*, 28 August, p. 17). Other journalists reported claims of "email bomb-threats" to opponents of the demonstration (*HS*, 1 September, p. 2), or claimed that the S11 site had been inundated by "furious" opponents of the protest (*HS*, 14 September, p.18).

In short, S11's web-site became a kind of quarry for those who set themselves against the Melbourne action. Repeatedly, dexterously, the electronic communications of S11 activists were mined for argumentative resources. Actions, motives and comments were 'discovered', brought from the Web to the newspaper, and used to pillory or destabilize the plans for the demonstration. Indeed, the status of the Web as a key medium of the movement (both publicly available and 'privately' or narrowly directed to movement participants; theoretically open to all and yet practically closed to those newspaper readers with no experience of, or access to the Internet), helped to fuel the public denunciation of the protest. It gave public criticisms both additional evidentiary range, ongoing momentum, and a faintly exotic, singular impact. If the prominence of the Internet was, in fact, a novel

element of the S11 action, then it also had quite complex and uneven implications.

Indeed, if the mass media eventually came to insist on the violent happenings of September 11-13, then this should not be surprising. The S11 protests had already been constructed as violent *before* anyone had gathered at the Crown Casino at all. In August, police declared their fears of being "bombarded" with blood and urine (*HS*, 21 August, p. 25). They warily requested shields and helmets (*HS*, 24 August, p. 12). Over the next month, the prominence of institutions previously involved with supposedly violent demonstrations (including the ISO, Militant, and the CFMEU), was stridently emphasized (*HS*, 28 August, p. 18). Newspapers reported plans to blockade city streets with "wrecked cars", and speculated on the possible need to prepare for the use of sarin nerve gas (*HS*, 2 September, p. 11). A "senior police source" was even reported to be doubtful whether the force possessed sufficient numbers to "keep a lid on any trouble" (*HS*, 8 September, p. 17). Public commentators argued that the key lesson of the Seattle experience was that the police should intervene rapidly and decisively (*SMH*, 4 September, WEF supplement, p. 10). A memo from consultancy firm 'Hill and Knowlton' that predicted the eruption of violence was leaked to the press (*Australian*, 6 September, p. 3). By the eve of the planned action, the prospect of "violent protests" had become a commonplace of public discourse, and the need for police readiness, "firm and decisive action", had also become widely accepted (*HS*, 9 September, p. 1). A battle loomed.

On the other hand, the activists involved in the anti-WEF action were by no means passive in the face of this barrage. When they were interviewed by the mass media, they insisted upon their non-violent orientation (*Australian*, 30 August, p. 5). When angered by misrepresentation in specific newspapers, they wrote letters outlining their peaceful, if militant aims (*SMH*, 6 September, p. 17). The S11 web-site carefully articulated the meaning and importance of non-violent direct action. A special, electronic *indyBulletin* that covered S11 issues was produced by the Melbourne indymedia group. The image of Seattle as a simply violent affray was contested and complicated (*indyBulletin*, no. 2, p. 1). The rights of protesters were listed (*indyBulletin*, no. 3, p. 3).

Not only did supporters of the S11 action manage to use the alternative media to publicize an independent interpretation of the protests, they were also able to use the Web to garner advance publicity, even notoriety, both in Australia and overseas. The strategies were varied, but they were united by both a technological aptitude, and by a sensitivity to the interests and tastes of the mainstream media for news.

In late June 2000, a still unknown group hacked into the official Nike web-site, and browsers were automatically redirected to the S11 Alliance site. Over the next nineteen hours, <www.s11.org> received almost 900,000 hits. The international and national media were astounded, fascinated. Both brief reports and sustained analyses followed (*HS*, 26 June, p. 9; *SMH*, E)MAG, September, pp. 18–22). Less adventurously, but in a similar vein, 'cyber-warriors' supporting S11 set up a site using the name 'Melbourne Festival' as well as sites that aimed to attract those mis-typing 'Olympics' – <olympisc.com> or searching for the 'Melbourne Trading Post' – <melbourne tradingpost.com>. In all of these cases, surprised browsers were faced with announcements on the protest action, analysis, and links to further information. Both electronic browsers and newspaper-readers soon learnt more about the anti-WEF actions.

However, perhaps the most complicated and bountiful source of electronic and newspaper publicity for S11 derived from a quite remarkable dispute over an official protest anthem. In late August it was announced that John Farnham's hit from the 1980s, 'You're the Voice', had been chosen as the official anthem of S11. A picture of Farnham and link to a recording of the song were posted at <www.s11.org>. The public attention was massive. Legal action was threatened unless the link was removed (*HS*, 24 August, p. 2). S11 refused (*Daily Telegraph*, 25 August, p.18). Farnham's conservative manager, Glenn Wheatley, fretted over the impact on his client's reputation (*HS*, 25 August, p. 1). Complaints from sincere fans flooded an affiliated web-site, while protesters defended the song as "the people's anthem" (*SMH*, 25 August, p. 3). When Farnham's distaste for the protest became obvious, fellow rock-veteran Ross Wilson offered his own song, 'No Soul', as an alternative (*Australian*, 31 August, p. 5).

The motives of S11 activists are open to question on this matter. Publicly, their commitment to 'You're the Voice' was unwavering and seemingly ingenuous. Officially, the enormous media coverage that the issue aroused was only "inadvertently" achieved (*indyBulletin*, no. 2, p. 2). Perhaps this was the case. However, on September 11 itself the song was performed by many protesters with a kind of ironic glee and a knowing nod. The ruling tastes among

most young participants were closer to European electronic dance music than to Australian MOR. The entire incident may have been an elaborate 'publicity-trap' – an engineered issue that was designed to provoke outrage, conflict, and the 'investigative' interest of commercial journalists.

Whatever the motives of protesters, the advance publicity for the September 11 demonstration became an avalanche. Net surfers barrelled to the S11 site. It was, indeed, the four hundredth most popular web-site in the world over the first two weeks of September. As events unfolded on Melbourne's streets, they were eagerly observed around the globe. Demonstrators shouted "The whole world is watching" with only faint hyperbole.

Police and security guard outside Nike office, photo: Kath Wilson

The event

When September 11 finally came, protesters were faced with dilemmas that have been faced by countless protesters before them. As has so often happened, the apparent novelty of the action and the disruption that it caused resulted in generous publicity. However, most media coverage achieved tended to focus on the action itself. The message of the protest was all but drowned out by discussion of the conduct of protesters and police.

There were numerous accusations of violence on the part of protesters from the very beginning – observers desperately sought evidence that their prophecies had been fulfilled. The Casino itself had been fortified with over 2000 police officers and a "ring of steel" made up of barricades designed for the Albert Park Grand Prix (*HS*, 11 September, p. 5). Large blockades of protesters "laid violent siege" to the Casino entrances and prevented around two hundred delegates from entering the conference (*Australian*, 12 September, p. 1). Other delegates were forced to gain access to the Casino by boat and helicopter. Accusations of violence were most commonly substantiated with reference to a handful of incidents. On the morning of Monday September 11, West Australian Premier Richard Court attempted to enter the Casino in a hire car, which was blocked and then surrounded by "jeering mobs" (*Channel Ten News*, Sydney edition 11 September). The afternoon edition of the *Herald Sun* on September 11 reported that the tyres on his car were "let down" (*HS*, 11 September, p. 1). Television news that night, and the *Herald Sun* the next day, amended this initial observation by reporting that the tyres had in fact been "slashed" (*HS*, 12 September, p. 1, 19). Police eventually used batons and horses to clear a path for Court's retreat. Accusations that protesters threw marbles under police horses made by the *Herald Sun* (11 September, p. 1) were not repeated on the evening television news – no doubt because camera footage of the incident failed to reveal any such marbles. Victorian Opposition Leader Dennis Napthine's car was also surrounded and daubed with spray-painted slogans.

Protestors on the first day were also accused of "roughing up" an ambulance officer and stealing the keys to his vehicle (*HS*, 11 September, p. 1; *Channel Ten News*, Sydney edition 11 September). US Olympic basketball teams found themselves trapped inside the Casino along with WEF delegates. When police offered to escort the men's team out along the Yarra River, a team spokesperson replied "we're not putting the boys in no boat" (*HS*, 21 September, p. 5). The women's team, however, enjoyed the "real-life experience" (*HS*, 21 September, p. 5) of seeing the protests, and negotiated their way through the blockade on foot – the only hostility shown towards them came from one protestor who initiated an "Aussie Aussie Aussie" chant as they made their way through the picket line.

Despite the focus on these incidents, there appeared to be some confusion over whether the protest was as violent as had been predicted. Even the *Herald Sun* (21 September, p. 3) was prepared to acknowledge that both Court and Napthine had disobeyed explicit police instructions not to attempt to

S11 Swanston Street parade, photo: Kath Wilson

enter the Casino in their own vehicles. Deputy Commissioner Neil O'Loughlin later accused them of being "foolish" (HS, 21 September, p. 3). Channel Ten's coverage of the day's events concluded with the observation that "despite the sporadic violence, police have praised their members and the protesters for the level of restraint" (Sydney edition 11 September). Police claimed two officers sustained injuries, and S11 organizers also claimed that several dozen protesters had been injured. But there was some acknowledgment that the whole day was not characterized by clashes. After the violence, "it resembled a carnival with protesters in costumes and bands playing" (*HS*, 11 September, p. 1). Indeed, for the ABC's *7.30 Report* that night, "the protest was as fluid and hard to define as the S11 Alliance itself".

But not everyone shared this difficulty in defining the protests. Premier Steve Bracks condemned the "senseless violence" of protesters, and praised police for their "restraint" (*HS*, 21 September, p. 1). The *Herald Sun* headline the next day was "Shameful" (12 September, p. 1), and Andrew Bolt went so far as to equate S11 protesters with Nazi street thugs in Germany in the 1930s (*HS*, 12 September, p. 19). NSW Labor Premier Bob Carr agreed (*Australian*, 12 September, p. 1). As usual, there was some debate over how many of these 'thugs' had responded to the calls to blockade. According to the *Herald Sun*:

> Police estimated the protest crowd at 1500, but S11 organisers reckoned 6000 to 10,000 protesters were present. (*HS*, 21 September, p. 1)

Andrew Bolt later put the number at an "abysmal" four thousand (*HS*, 14 September, p. 18), although *Channel Nine News* (Sydney edition, 11 September) were happy to report that ten thousand protesters had been involved in "street battles" with police. Among the protests were some secondary school students, as had been feared before the event. S11 organizers were condemned for "involving secondary school students in the protest and risking their safety" (*HS*, 12 September, p. 18).

There were accusations that police had been too soft on protesters. On Monday, police had tried "too hard . . . to avoid confrontation in the face of serious provocation" (*HS*, 12 September, p. 19). Des Moore thought that it was:

> worrying that Victorian policing policy operates under an order that "the success of any operation will be primarily judged by the extent to which the use of force is avoided or minimised". (*HS*, 12 September, p. 18)

Editor in Chief of *The Australian*, David Armstrong, was one of the delegates stuck on a bus which had been unable to enter the Casino. He noted that while police had respected the right to protest, they "ultimately were not interested in other rights, such as the normal, everyday right to attend a conference" (*Australian*, 12 September, p. 3). He thought the protests more organized than the anti-Vietnam War protests he remembered – but then, he reminisced, "we came up against a tougher class of cop". Dennis Napthine was widely reported on Melbourne television news to have declared September 11 a "victory" for the protesters. Crown Casino was forced to shut down its gaming rooms on Monday night, eventually losing over $5 million as a result of the blockade (*HS*, 12 September, p. 2). Deputy police Commissioner Neil O'Loughlin promised that over the next two days police would "use whatever force is necessary to achieve public order" (*HS*, 12 September, p. 3).

Police came good on this threat. The *Herald Sun* was pleased to report that on the morning of Tuesday September 12 there had been a "crackdown" (12 September, p. 1). According to *The Australian* (31 September, p. 1):

> Premier Steve Bracks authorised the crackdown after protesters kept up to 200 delegates out of the conference at Crown Casino on Monday.

Baton-wielding police in riot gear and mounted police had "smashed through a protest blockade" in the morning to clear a way for delegates entering the building (*Channel Ten News*, Sydney late edition 12 September). ABC Radio journalist Giulia Baggio described the scene:

> Police today were leaving nothing to chance. Early on, with just fifty-odd protesters milling around one of the building's main entrances, about three hundred police burst forward from behind the barricades, pushing the crowd out of the way and forming a corridor three to four officers deep.
>
> In the front row, riot police wearing helmets yelled fiercely, sweeping people aside and belting them with batons. Behind them were a couple of rows of uniformed officers and behind them thirty mounted police. (ABC Radio, *PM*, 12 September)

In the evening, police used similar tactics in order to facilitate the exit of delegates, in what *Channel Seven News* described as "their strongest show of aggression since the World Economic Forum began" (Sydney late edition, 12 September). The pictures were confronting – particularly from the evening police raid, during which two officers were filmed leaning over barricades wildly swinging batons at protesters. Protesters complained that they had been "trampled", and S11 organizers and union officials called for an independent investigation (*HS*, 31 September, p. 1; *Australian*, 13 September, p. 1). The photo on the front page of *The Australian* showed riot police clearly walking over seated protesters, and for S11 spokesperson David Glantz:

> It was payback time. A simple act of revenge – crude and vicious revenge – because we won the day on Monday. (*Australian*, 13 September, p. 1)

A *Herald Sun* photographer captured one police officer using an outlawed 'sleeperhold' on one protester, which provoked further criticism of police tactics by the Australian Council for Civil Liberties (ABC Radio, *The World Today*, 13 September).

Police and the Victorian Government justified their violence with accusations of protester violence. According to *The Australian* (13 September, p. 1):

> The police wore protective eyewear [on Tuesday] after being showered with urine, ball bearings, glass and marbles on Monday. Rocks had also been hurled at officers and nails thrown under car tyres and at police horses during the past two days, Victorian Police Minister Andre Haermeyer said.

The police had not refused to wear name tags, rather they had been "ripped off" by protesters (*HS*, 13 September, p. 3). Some protesters had even "threatened to attack police officers' homes" (*HS*, 13 September, p. 3). According to Neil O'Loughlin, "The protesters promised peaceful protests and what we got was despicable thuggery against police". (*HS*, 13 September, p. 3)

But accusations of police violence were bolstered by graphic television footage of police actions, which was not accompanied by footage of violence by protesters. Indeed, just as they had before the protests, the S11 Alliance worked the mainstream media with great skill, anticipating the conflicts which erupted over police tactics. Legal observers were present throughout the three days, and dozens of protesters carried video and photographic equipment to capture evidence of police aggression. Video footage was distributed to mainstream television stations, and some television cameramen were also caught in the crush on Tuesday night (*Channel Seven News*, Sydney late edition, 12 September). When the commercial media alleged protester violence on September 12, the Indymedia site provided a different account – of "creative and non-confrontational" actions overlooked; of a successful blockade; and of police baton-charges and provocation. Demonstrators themselves told their own stories:

> The only thing that I've seen that was violent today has been instigated by police. (*indyBulletin*, no. 4, p. 2)

The best the police could do was to produce some nuts and bolts at a press conference.

An ABC Television journalist on the scene on Wednesday 13 September noted that:

> The police say that they have been provoked through the day. They claim that protesters had showered them with urine on one occasion, and thrown ball bearings and things. But at the protest last night where the police charged I saw none of that. A few protesters threw empty plastic bottles, but that was the only protester violence that I saw. (ABC Television, *The World at Noon*, 13 September)

The contrast in *The Australian*'s headlines describing events on September 11 and 12 was indicative of a wider shift in reporting of the protests – Tuesday's headline of "Melbourne under siege" was followed on Wednesday with "Protesters up in arms over police 'revenge'". (*Australian*, 12 September, p. 1; 13 September, p. 1)

On the morning of Wednesday 13 September, the final day of the WEF, police tactics changed again. Protester numbers were down, and delegates gained entry in the morning thanks to a "clever ruse by police" (*HS*, 13 September, p. 1). A large police contingent gathered at one Casino entrance, drawing protesters away from another entrance which was subsequently used to bus delegates into the conference. But just as the protest appeared to be coming to an end in the afternoon, a female protester was run over by an unmarked police car, which sped away from the scene. This was captured on video and by a photographer from *The Australian* (14 September, p. 1), and subsequently shown on television news and in newspapers around the country. Calls for an inquiry into police actions by protesters gained momentum. As the ABC Radio show *PM* reported the next day:

> For three nights, television screens were dominated by violent images of police wielding batons, using the pressure point technique on the carotid artery, and last night footage of an unmarked police car running over a protester.

The *Herald Sun* was notably but not surprisingly silent about this incident. While there was sustained discussion elsewhere about police tactics, this newspaper was more concerned about the fact that "Victorian taxpayers and businesses" faced a "bill of more than $20 million" as a result of the protest "rampage" (*HS*, 14 September, p. 3).

Premier Steve Bracks commended police after the conference had finished, promising to put on a barbecue for the officers who had spent three days "defending the World Economic Forum" (*HS*, 15 September, p. 17). On the same day, State Ombudsman Barry Perry launched a major investigation into claims against police by protesters (*HS*, 15 September, p. 17).

With the overwhelming focus on the nature of the action itself, however, there was much less room for public discussion of the issues the S11 Alliance hoped to raise. Where such discussion did occur, it typically focused on the stupidity of protesters. Claude Smadja, managing director of the WEF, thought the protests to be "a tremendous illustration of a very intolerant mindset" (*HS*, 11 September, p. 5). The WEF, according to the *Herald Sun*'s Terry McCrann, was "just another conference":

> In short and sum, there's going to be reason and knowledge inside Crown this week. And ignorance and anger outside – a very clear looking of an intellectual gift horse in the mouth. (*HS*, 11 September, p. 5)

The backlash against globalization was nothing more than a "fashion statement" (*The Australian*, 12 September, p. 11). The WEF was an "open door to prosperity" (HS, 31 September, p. 35), foreign investment and free trade a "poverty buster" (HS, 21 September, p. 29). Tom Allard wrote that:

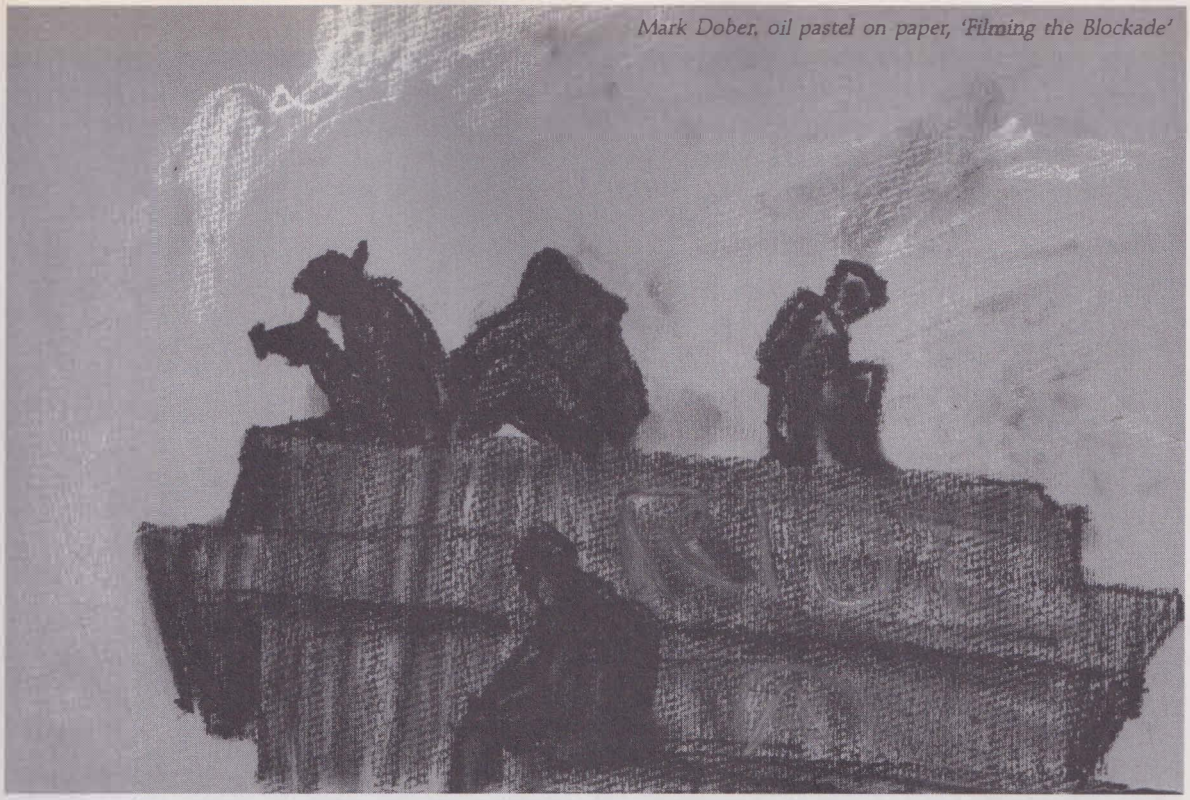
> The tragic irony for the S11 protesters is that the anti-globalisation movement is unwittingly playing into the hands of the richest countries at the expense of the poor they feel so passionate about. (*SMH*, 13 September, p. 4)

ABC Television did provide some protesters with the opportunity to state their views (Sydney edition, 11 September), but their approach was not typical.

Old wine in new bottles?

To some extent, then, the S11 protests followed a pattern established by the many popular mobilizations which have preceded it. Attention focused on the action, and to the extent that protester voices were heard, this was more likely to be in the context of discussions about police tactics than globalization. Was there anything novel about the action at all?

The WEF protest did have some novel aspects. The 'carnival atmosphere' constructed by protesters, particularly in those periods between police attempts to breach the blockade, was noted by a number of commentators (as discussed above). The carnivalesque protest has recently made a resurgence on the global and Australian stages, thanks in large part to movements such as Reclaim the Streets (RTS), an anti-car protest movement which first emerged in England in the early 1990s.[2] Sydney and Melbourne RTS activists established a visible and audible presence at the Casino, with a truck blasting music and free-style raps for blockaders' danc-



Mark Dober, oil pastel on paper, 'Filming the Blockade'

ing pleasure. Of course, this atmosphere did not guarantee positive coverage of the protests – Andrew Bolt, for example, labelled it a "carnival of hate" (*HS*, 12 September, p. 19). Nonetheless, the party-protest combination proved successful in helping to mobilize people for the protest, and in keeping them entertained during long days of blockading the Casino.

Also interesting has been the range of actors who came together under (or around) the S11 banner. Organization through affinity groups facilitated a wide coalition of old and new political actors, including students, environmentalists, community sector agencies and unions. There were some attempts by the media to talk up divisions between blockaders and the union movement. ACTU Secretary Greg Combet worried about the fact that some Casino workers had been prevented from getting to work by the blockade (*HS*, 21 September, p. 1). But the planned union march to the main stage outside Crown Casino on Tuesday 12 September drew large numbers. Interestingly, coverage of the "peaceful" union demonstration included comments from speakers about the need for 'fair trade not free trade' (e.g. *SBS World News*, *Channel Ten News* Sydney late edition, *Channel Seven News* Sydney late edition, 12 September). The very lack of novelty of this march meant that the action itself was less interesting to the media, and the opinions of spokespeople on the issue of world trade were generously covered. Victorian Trades Hall Secretary Leigh Hubbard also supported calls for an inquiry into police tactics, and alleged that the police crackdown on Tuesday was the result of political pressure following WEF threats to abandon the conference (*HS*, 15 September, p. 17).

Perhaps most importantly, the S11 action was also novel in its ability to contest corporate globalization directly. In this it clearly owed much to Seattle actions against the World Trade Organisation. Indeed, while the economic processes most often described as 'globalization' have frequently been criticized by the Left, the development of political action to challenge such processes has long been lagging. The transnational flow of capital has seemed to be everywhere and nowhere; linking specific places and yet ranging across global space. Progressive (and indeed reactionary) movements have often sought *shelter* from global capital in the particularity of place, unable to challenge or even fix their specific targets. The locally-bound demonstration has seemed ineffectual, even anachronistic.

The Seattle protest was innovative because it fixed upon a specific set of individuals and institutions grouped together in a particular place, and because it treated these individuals as the key agents of globali-

zation. In Melbourne, the same strategy was used. The actions that opposed the WEF – marches, blockades, demonstrations – were not of themselves particularly new. But the fact that these actions were brought together to make political claims about the harmful effects of 'globalization from above' was relatively novel. Here, protesters tactically transformed Crown Casino into a place from which they could *contest* corporate capital's domination of global space.[3]

And although coverage of the protest itself focused overwhelmingly on the action itself, it also created a new space for discussion and debate about globalization in the wider public sphere. When a WEF delegate told the assembled press on Monday that globalization was "unstoppable and irresistible" (*ABC News*, Sydney edition, 11 September), it was he who sounded hopeful, rather than his opponents. For example, in the week leading up to S11, *The Australian* published a number of opinion pieces about globalization, including articles by ACTU President Sharon Burrows and ISO member and S11 spokesperson David Glantz. What had once seemed so natural suddenly appeared as widely contested.

Which S11?

Of course, the precise meaning and nature of the event remains open. As this issue of *overland* attests, many alternative accounts of S11 exist, and the quest to construct a politically enabling version of 'the event' is itself an important political battle. We hope that our own account stimulates further interventions, and it certainly does not seek the status of a 'master narrative'. However S11 is viewed, it is clear that the battle over its precise dimensions continues apace. In the period of late September and early October alone, several significant interventions are worth noting. Steve Bracks has been forced to call off his barbecue for police after protesters threatened to crash the party (*Canberra Times*, 23 September, p. 3). His vocal support for police tactics has been condemned not only by protesters, but by Labor Party branches in Melbourne and beyond (*HS*, 25 September, p. 20). Bracks' face was even splashed with cream pie in Melbourne by a protester concerned with the policing of the WEF. Kim Beazley, who himself was hit with a cream pie by an anti-capitalist protester in June 1999, stood up for Bracks' handling of the S11 protests, and lambasted the pie thrower for knocking over a kid while in pursuit of his target (*Canberra Times*, 23/10/2000, p. 3). Some journalists, particularly Andrew Bolt of the *Herald Sun*, have waged a tireless campaign against the protests conducted by a "tiny dictatorial minority" (*HS*, 14 September, p. 18, see also *HS*, 25 September, p. 20). He has even purported to tell "The real story of that baton-swinging" on the Tuesday night (*HS*, 2 October, p. 20). Alternative versions of this incident (and others) have been proclaimed by protesters on internet sites such as <melbourne.indymedia.org>. A video of footage taken by roving camcordistas – *Melbourne Rising* – has also been put together and is available for sale. It focuses to a large extent on the same incidents covered in the mainstream media, although of course it also gives protesters and their advocates (such as Indian activist Vandana Shiva) much more space to explain their case for fair trade. Police are yet to release their surveillance videos to support claims of protester violence. Debates over the event will no doubt be kick-started again by the Ombudsman's report when it is released.

As these debates over the identity of the S11 protest continue, from our perspective, further interventions from the left would do well to combine the mixture of: party and rational debate; labour and youth movements, and; action and media interventions which have characterized the event so far. This will not be without its difficulties. The forms of protest constructed by the S11 Alliance were not inevitably successful, and internal struggles and conflicts beset the wider movement. However these are resolved, it is certainly without question that the S11 protest was anything but the violent, derivative, stupid, incoherent action that the media, the State and business wanted it to be, prophesied it would be, and tried to claim that it was.

ENDNOTES

1. All subsequent references are to media publications or productions in 2000.
2. See George McKay (ed.). *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain*, London, Verso, 1998.
3. On the difficulties progressive movements have faced in using 'place' to challenge capital's dominance over global 'space', see David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Cambridge (USA), Blackwell, 1996, pp. 291–326.

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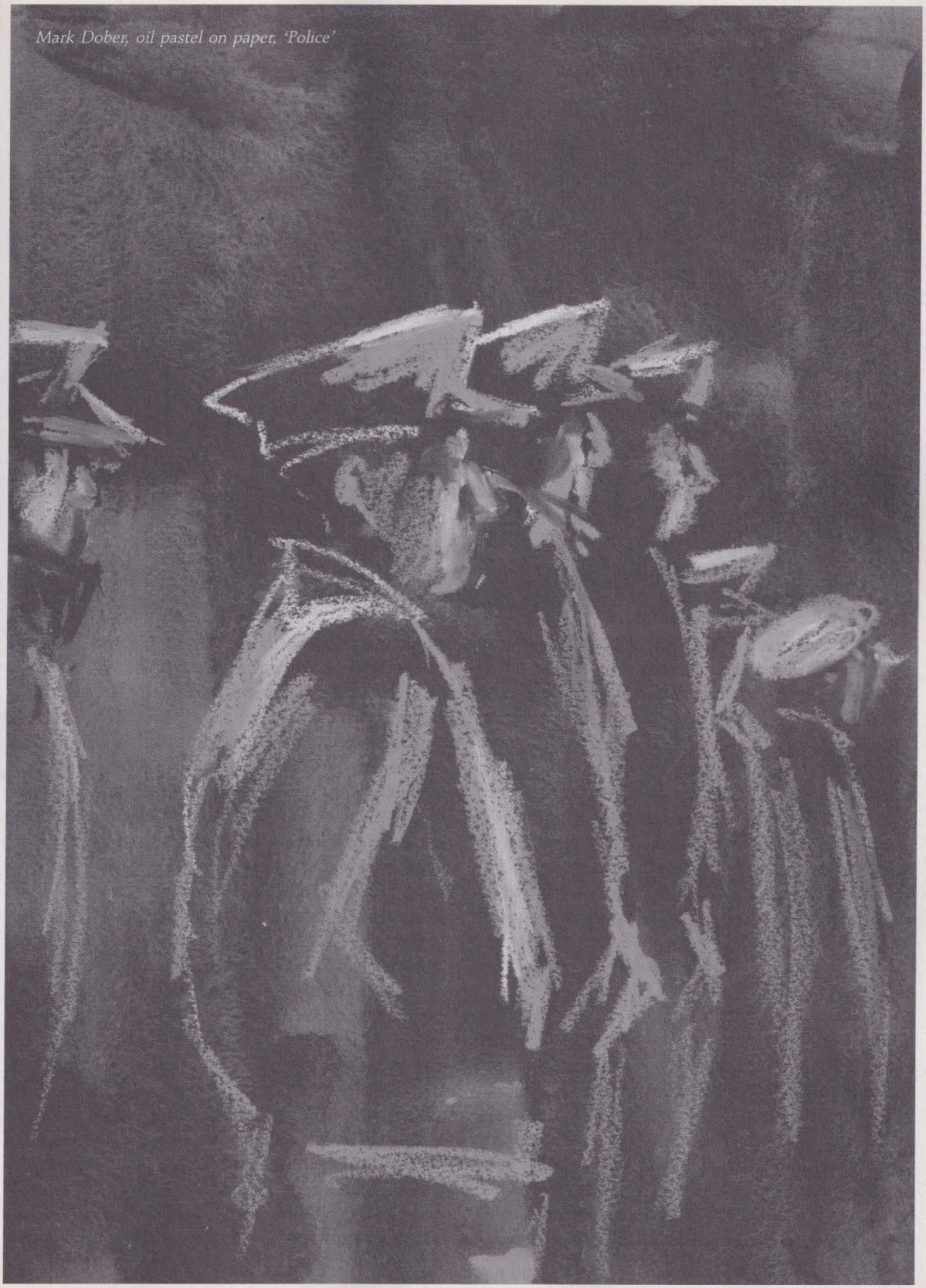


Mark Dober, oil pastel on paper, 'Police'

Damien Lawson

Copping it at S11

DURING THE WEF protests a team of lawyers, law students and para-legals watched and recorded the actions of Victoria Police. Despite our widespread experience and knowledge of police brutality through our work in community legal centres and private practice, we were shocked anew by what we observed.

Given past form, we should have expected such actions from the police. In fact, the media reports leading up to the protests all suggested that sections of the police were envisaging precisely what occurred. The Force Response Unit was rehearsing baton drills at the Melbourne Show Grounds, the Police Association was calling for riot shields and the *Herald Sun* was baying for blood.

Despite previous undertakings given by senior police after the baton charge on protesters resisting a Kennett government closure of a Richmond school in 1994, officers of the Force Response Unit were on record as defending the use of such tactics.

In the end we hoped that numbers of protesters, the extent of media attention and what seemed to be police plans for large-scale arrests would mean police would act lawfully and not use excessive force against the demonstrators engaging in civil disobedience.

Mass arrests?

Much of the legal team's preparation for protest focused on ensuring people had access to legal advice and assistance if they were arrested. We conducted large numbers of workshops for activists on their rights and responsibilities if arrested, and organized a network of lawyers to visit people in police custody and represent them in court. As S11 began we handed out stickers and leaflets informing people of their rights and a twenty-four-hour hotline to call.

We hoped that we had done enough. Preparations by Victoria's criminal justice institutions in the lead-up to the protest and a swathe of stories in the mainstream media suggested to us that police were planning to arrest large numbers of people. There were reports of the old gaol in Geelong being reopened; police cells previously closed because they contravened human rights standards being examined; and even Ararat's new forensic detention centre being prepared for the protesters. The Chief Magistrate took the unprecedented decision of declaring all courts in Melbourne to be bail courts and requiring that the courts would sit into the evening. Protesters had said they intended actions of mass civil disobedience making it quite likely that police would arrest large numbers of people blockading entrances to the Casino.

In fact, fewer than twenty people were arrested over the three days. No protesters – with the exception of several streakers arrested during the nude action – were taken to a police station. All were released after a short time. While some people were mistreated while in police custody, all were told they would be charged by way of a summons. The mass arrests never materialized. Instead police engaged in what can only be described as three days of rioting and the main task of the legal team became one of documenting the litany of mistreatment of protesters by police.

Unlawful assault?

Over the three days of the protest the legal team took over five hundred statements from people assaulted by police or witnesses to such mistreatment. Nearly four hundred people were injured by police during the protest, with over fifty requiring hospital treatment. Injuries included broken and fractured bones,

S11 police queueing for badges? photo:Kath Wilson

concussion and people losing consciousness, neck and back injuries, extensive bruising and shock. Actions by the police included charging the crowd with horses, the use of batons to hit and jab people, punching, kicking and even biting. In a number of cases police drove their vehicles through crowds at high speed; in one case police ran over a young woman and then sped off.

While much attention has been given to the Tuesday morning and Tuesday evening 'baton charges' these actions occurred over the whole three days and highlight the degree of 'unlawfulness' that was prevalent amongst the police. This is further illustrated by the systematic removal of identification badges by almost all police throughout the protest. Senior police explanations for this practice range from the fanciful "that the badges were stolen by protesters" to the more accurate, concern of police "in relation to being unneccessarily identified as being persons who may or may not have assaulted them".

It was the baton charges on Tuesday (the same operation was conducted on Wednesday) that revealed the level of military organization and amount of force police were prepared to use. On both Tuesday morning and Tuesday evening hundreds of police ploughed through the small crowds in front of a Crown Casino entrance on Queensbridge Street. The police, wearing protective padding and helmets, struck people indiscriminately with batons. In one instance an officer reversed his baton and wielded it like an axe, striking people with the handle. People were trampled underfoot, often unable to move. On Tuesday morning people had been sitting down with arms linked as police came over the top of them.

So, do hundreds of unidentified police, clearly acting under instructions, have a lawful right to baton charge a crowd of people whose worst offence may be blocking a roadway?

The Victorian Crimes Act 1958 (s.462A) allows police to use reasonable force to overcome resistance to a lawful arrest or "to prevent the commission, continuance or completion of an indictable offence". Police do not have the right to use force to prevent someone committing a summary offence, only indictable or serious offences.

It is clear that at most, people on Tuesday morning or evening were committing summary offences. Police therefore only had the right to arrest people – which they didn't do. If they had intended to arrest

S11 mounted police looking for their badges outside McDonalds, photo: Kath Wilson

people such force as was reasonably necessary is all that is allowed. The force used by police in 'dispersing' the protests was at best excessive and at worst potentially lethal.

The Victoria Police know this. Advice given to the police by the Office of Forensic Medicine regarding the use of batons states that baton blows to danger areas (head, face, neck, abdomen, kidney and spinal region) should only be used when lethal force is justified. Manufacturers of the PR-24, the side-handled baton used by many of the police, warn that striking the head or spinal areas may cause "unconsciousness, serious bodily injury, shock or death".

The baton charges were unlawful and given the small numbers of arrests over the whole three days it would be difficult for police to justify the lawfulness of many of the other assaults that occurred.

Who gave the orders?

The Victorian Ombudsman has announced an inquiry into the actions of the Victoria Police and already his office has had numerous complaints. We would hope that given the scope and gravity of the evidence that the Ombudsman will recommend strong action against the police. However, given the response to a similar inquiry into the baton charges at Richmond we should not expect too much to come of any critical report.

Inspector Mawkes, the officer in charge of the Force Response Unit at Richmond and one of the officers responsible for the WEF operation, told an Administrative Appeals Tribunal hearing following the Richmond inquiry that the Ombudsman's report carried little weight. He was asked:

> So, whatever the Ombudsman said about the use of it [baton charge] as far as you are concerned, it's still a matter that's available to be used by you?

He answered:

> It's available now and there's been a separate [internal] inquiry into it and I know for a fact that the inquiry results were that there's nothing wrong with the method we use.

Mawkes also informed the tribunal that training in the use of batons in the manner used at Richmond had been adopted force-wide. No criminal charges were laid against the police at Richmond and disiplinary charges laid on the recommendations of the Ombudsman were dropped a month before the WEF protest.

Any inquiry into the police actions at the World Economic Forum will be worthless unless it is followed up with strong sanctions against the senior officers in charge of the operation and public undertakings that such actions will not occur again. Given the strong support of the police actions by the Bracks government such sanctions are unlikely to occur unless the widespread public outrage against the actions of the police translates into political pressure on the government.

Police on trial?

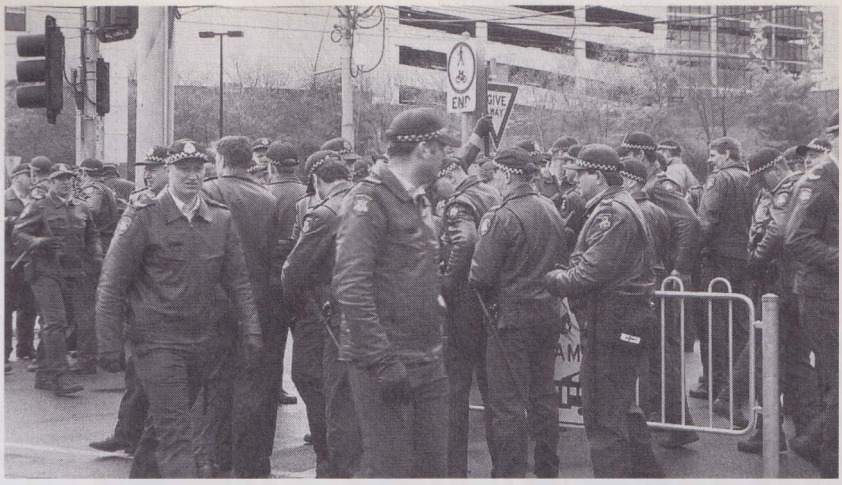
It is unlikely criminal charges will be brought against whoever gave the orders for unlawful assaults on the protesters.

One of the few remedies that injured protesters have is to bring a civil action against the police. Given such strong evidence, such action is likely to succeed. Over the past six years the Victoria Police have been forced to pay over $8 million in compensation to people mistreated by the police. That figure is now likely to increase.

This is small compensation for such overwhelming assaults on the democratic rights and civil liberties of Victorians.

Damien Lawson is a legal worker at Western Suburbs Legal Service and a member of the S11 legal support team. If you were a witness to police mistreatment at S11 call 0500 806 806.

S11 police still unable to find their badges, photo: Kath Wilson



Bruises

Georgina Lyell

THERE HAS ALWAYS been a sense of camaraderie between cops and nurses. Perhaps it's because of the front line nature of the work and having to deal with people who are under enormous stress on a daily basis. But on Wednesday 13 September 2000 I felt no empathy whatsoever with the Victoria Police Force; instead I felt a profound sense of outrage and disgust.

I had risen at 5 a.m. in preparation for an early appearance at the Crown Casino – the apt setting for the WEF – before I commenced my shift as a recovery room nurse in a major Melbourne hospital. It was a decision made the previous evening, one made because like a lot of people I am concerned about corporate globalization and the exploitation of the poor and powerless by the rich.

That morning two friends and I cycled down to the Crown Casino blowing heat on our hands. Our mood was quietly elated, perhaps even relieved – we hadn't become so complacent in our lives that we didn't care about what sort of society we lived in. We all owned cars, didn't recycle absolutely everything and used the internet on a regular basis, but individually and collectively we felt that something was dangerously askew in the world – that the rich just kept getting richer.

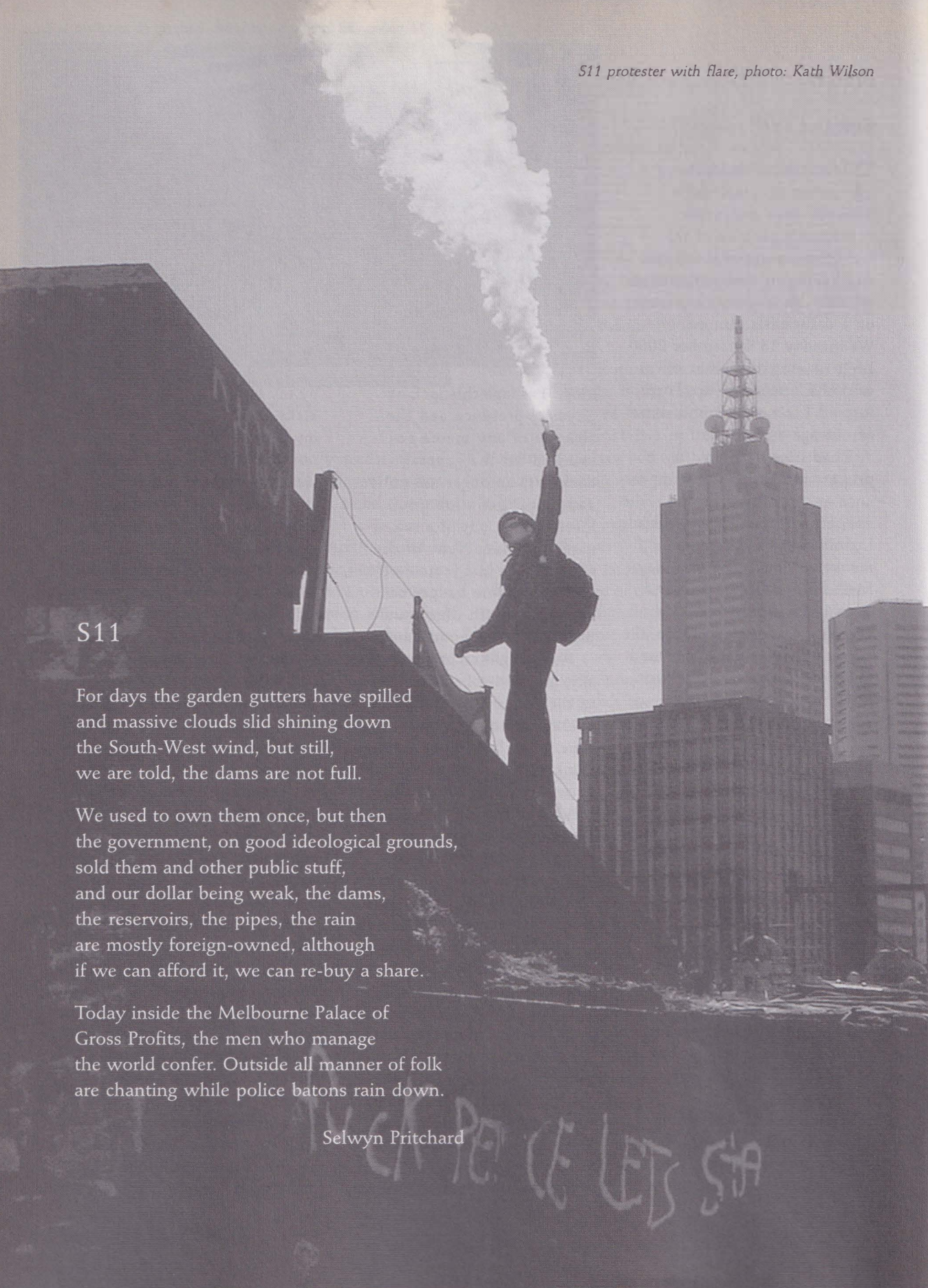
Standing in front of the Spencer Street entrance to the Casino, we would have numbered thirty at the absolute most. Perhaps this lack of physical presence and the absence of any media accounted for the general cockiness amongst the police. Taunts of "get a job you losers" came out of a sea of nameless blue. None of the officers, bar one female officer, had their name badges on – something both illegal and probably not a good omen.

As daylight crept across the sky, hundreds of officers ran out of the entrance to the Casino decked out in riot gear. At the time it had been amusing to think that they thought it necessary to deploy so many officers to subdue such a small gathering of non-violent protestors. My friend had hummed the triumphant strains of 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' much to everyone's amusement.

The amusement was short lived however, as a few minutes later we were being swept along Spencer Street in an angry frenzy. Without warning the police had turned on us, the majority of us women, with a sharpness and violence that was terrifying. At five foot three and of slim build, I felt extremely vulnerable as I was dragged along Spencer Street by my hair, dodging vicious kicks and thumps to the back of my head. Stunned, with arms raised above my head in a clearly recognized sign of surrender, I was moving as fast as my legs could carry me. I made no attempt to retaliate or resist. I just wanted to retreat to a safe position as far away as possible from batons and men twice my size.

We were herded onto a narrow, grassed patch where people sat shaking and bleeding. I attempted to solicit further medical attention for a man who had sustained cuts, bruises and some neck injuries. I approached the police lines only to have batons drawn on me and several officers scream at me "Get back!" as though I was carrying a range of explosives. I attempted to explain that I was a nurse and that a man was hurt, but they were intractably aggressive. I wondered what sort of preparation these officers had received that morning: were they fed on raw meat and made to watch *Rambo* on a big-inch screen?

Two weeks later, the physical bruises have healed; the emotional ones will take longer.



S11 protester with flare, photo: Kath Wilson

S11

For days the garden gutters have spilled
and massive clouds slid shining down
the South-West wind, but still,
we are told, the dams are not full.

We used to own them once, but then
the government, on good ideological grounds,
sold them and other public stuff,
and our dollar being weak, the dams,
the reservoirs, the pipes, the rain
are mostly foreign-owned, although
if we can afford it, we can re-buy a share.

Today inside the Melbourne Palace of
Gross Profits, the men who manage
the world confer. Outside all manner of folk
are chanting while police batons rain down.

Selwyn Pritchard

Jeff Sparrow

The Victory at S11

WE WON. You could see it when the TV cameras panned over a half-empty conference hall, in which those of the super rich who had avoided the blockade by puddling around in barges or flying over by helicopters sat glumly trying to pretend nothing had happened. You could see it in the unseemly squabbles that broke out between the WEF organizers and Crown Casino management. You could see it in the decision by *The Age* to set its gang of columnists solemnly pondering the curious fact that some people evidently didn't share their enthusiasm for corporate globalization (this in a newspaper which, a few days earlier, had published a glossy magazine lauding the Forum and all its works).

Most of all, though, you could see it in the faces of the demonstrators. For three days, they'd faced baton charges, squalling weather and a sustained campaign of media vilification. But, despite everything, they'd blockaded Crown Towers and they'd shut down the World Economic Forum.

A victory for the demonstration, sure. More importantly, though, a victory for the Left.

Of course, in the weeks leading up to the WEF, the media presented the convergence on Melbourne as bearing no relation to anything so tediously outmoded as left-wing activism. The spin was that S11 represented a complete break from the traditions of the past, that the WTO protests in Seattle had generated a new paradigm of protest, in which computer savvy culture-jammers took to the information superhighway rather than the street.

In the event, none of that was true.

S11's organizing took place not through the internet but in the much more traditional forum of campaign meetings in overheated rooms, where organizations and individuals debated and declaimed and harangued until they hammered out a consensus – a process certainly familiar to the activists of the 1960s (and probably to those of the 1860s, as well). During the Forum itself, blockaders confronted not the problems of the communication revolution, but a trifecta of issues that have faced the Left time and time again.

Firstly, the role of the police. In a book published earlier this year, Deputy Commissioner Neil O'Loughlin co-authored a chapter (and I swear I'm not making this up) entitled 'Positive Police Culture: Correcting Perceptions'. Down at the Casino site, of course, the self-same O'Loughlin led his men in correcting a few perceptions with their three-foot batons and police horses – just as the Deputy Commissioner O'Loughlins of the world have done since time immemorial.

Secondly, the behaviour of the media. The *Herald Sun*'s description of the blockade as "shameful" (the banner headline on 12 September) might have come as more of a surprise had we not known that the company that owns the rag was actually a member of the WEF – a point that somehow never made it into the Hun's coverage.

Thirdly, the nature of social democracy. S11 illustrated once more that, when the chips are down, the ALP sides with the powerful, even (or perhaps especially) against its own supporters. This is just as true in 2000 as, say, in 1928, when a Labor Premier defended the police who shot down striking Victorian wharfies – though at least Ned Hogan had the decency not to offer a celebratory barbecue to the officers involved!

In many ways, then, the significance of S11 stemmed not from the novelty of information technology (though cellular phones proved extraordinarily useful – my favourite blockade story involves a young woman, just as the police formed up in front of her line, answering a call on her mobile: "Mum?

Er, this is not a good time right now.") but because it forced something of a return to first principles.

Despite the equivocations and hesitations of Trades Hall, the blockade forged a much closer relationship between left activists and the organized labour movement. A precedent, of course, had been provided by Seattle, where an overwhelmingly union rally marched alongside environmentalists (one of whom carried the immortal placard: 'Teamsters and turtles, together at last'). In Melbourne, the protest outside the WEF involved some 5,000 trade unionists – an astonishing figure, given how long it has been since union members last participated in an event so clearly dominated by the far left and the social movements.

The blockade also confirmed that the old Cold War certainties are continuing to evaporate, producing a milieu of quite striking ideological fluidity. Many of the S11 demonstrators were six years old when the Berlin Wall collapsed – for them, the idea of advising a Marxist to 'go back to Russia' simply wouldn't make sense. With the absence of that historical baggage, the semi-ritualized debates one might have expected (like, for instance, militancy versus principled non-violence) never moved to centre stage, and the kind of identity politics in which the celebration of difference leads to disunity almost as a matter of principle proved notable by its absence. I watched a friend sell a revolutionary magazine to a woman dressed as an enormous beetle without either of them feeling any incongruity about the transaction.

Of course, a lack of argument can represent an indifference to theory as much as a commitment to dialogue, and it's true that the tumult around S11 didn't succeed in generating much interest in the nuances of the world economy. For the majority of protesters, 'globalization', I suspect, figured not as a political analysis but as a generic phrase signifying everything wrong with the world, from Third-World starvation to environmental destruction.

In the context of a demonstration emerging from a long period of political quiescence a lack of clarity was no doubt inevitable. But it does mean that, in the aftermath of S11, we face a problem.

For where once politicians openly endorsed 'globalization', the world-wide protests (Seattle, Davos, Melbourne and Prague) have transformed the term into a word no longer fit for polite company (like 'economic rationalism' – or, further back, 'imperialism'). And, somewhere in a bunker in Zurich, there's a highly paid think tank feverishly devising a more palatable phrase that will duly make its appearance in all future pronouncements by the WEF and its co-thinkers.

The victory at S11 means that the Left now has the opportunity (indeed, the responsibility) to argue that what the blockaders described as 'globalization' is precisely what our tradition has always called 'capitalism', a system that should be fought no matter how many times our rulers try to re-badge it.

Repopularizing the C word involves more than a pedantic insistence on calling things by their right names. It means linking the enthusiasm and energy of those moving into politics with the rich experience of the past, as part of building a movement capable both of analysing the world and moving to change it.

Jeff Sparrow is a Melbourne political activist. When not on the street he can be found managing the New International Bookshop.

Tony Dewberry & John Tully

The One-Sided Class War

Laurie Aarons: *Casino Oz: Winners and Losers in Global Capitalism* (Goanna Publishing, $12.95).

Andrew Scott: *Running on Empty: 'Modernising' the British and Australian labour parties* (Pluto Press, $32.95).

Peter Sheldon and Louise Thornthwaite (eds): *Employer Associations and Industrial Relations Change: Catalysts or Captives?* (Allen & Unwin, $35).

THE S11 PROTESTS in Melbourne, coming in the wake of the Seattle events, show a new generation of radical activists has entered the political arena. They confront the global power of the corporations, a power that has burst all bounds over the last twenty years. Each in their own way, these books highlight the process by which the power of the corporations has grown and the collectivist ethos of the labour movement has waned.

Eighty-three-year-old Aarons is what all angry young radicals should aspire to live to be: an angry old radical. Aarons would thoroughly approve of the tens of thousands of mainly young people who demonstrated against the WEF. Aarons writes "as a lifelong socialist acknowledging the failure and crimes of regimes set up to achieve [the] ideal . . . of a just and equal society". His new book, *Casino Oz,* will provide a fund of ammunition for this new generation of radicals in their battle against the corporate globalizers. Its message deserves a much wider hearing than it has so far received. Apart from a sympathetic review by Labor MHR Anthony Albanese in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the mainstream media has ignored the book. It is not hard to see why, given the corporate ownership of the media. The book debunks the myth of Australia as a 'lucky country' in which we are all 'winners'.

As Aarons shows, the gap between the rich and the poor is now wider than at any time since 1915. Australia is a grotesquely unequal society: in 1997, the top 10 per cent of the population owned 40 per cent of the nation's wealth. The next 40 per cent owned 55 per cent. The bottom 50 per cent owned just 5 per cent. In a country where "a sizeable minority of Australians – 12 per cent or 13 per cent – are in housing crisis, often unable to feed or clothe themselves after paying the rent", the super-rich shuttle between abodes worth $30 million and over. While Aboriginal children still die from Third World diseases, well-known chain smoker Kerry Packer took off for heart surgery in New York aboard a private jet replete with defibrillator and ECG device.

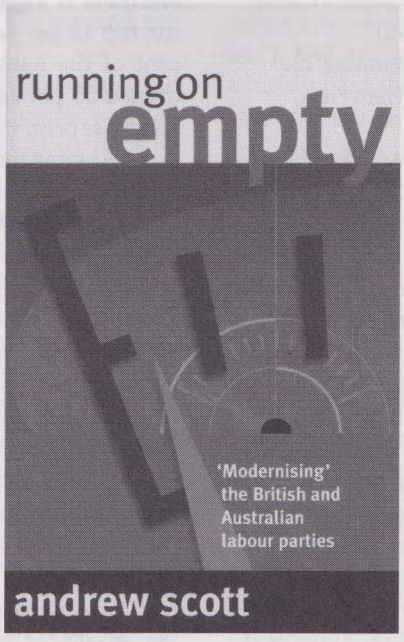
The top ten super-rich in Australia were 'worth' almost $20,000 million in 1999, up from $1,255 million in 1983. Yet, in the fourteen years or so before 1999, the real incomes of the bottom lower half of the population fell in real terms by 7 per cent. New figures released by the ABS show that over 25 per cent of Australian children live in households that are wholly or substantially dependent on welfare, compared with less than 5 per cent in 1965. These children are the victims of the 'gush up effect'.

Aarons argues that a fairer tax system could do much to redistribute wealth. The very rich pay little or no tax. Packer's Consolidated Press Holdings paid *no tax* in 1997 and 1998, despite making a profit of $614 million. Another four multi-millionaires were 'worth' $200 million between them. One of them got his taxable income down to below $4,500, under the taxable limit, taking to heart Packer's words that, "anyone who doesn't minimize his tax wants his head read".

Aarons isolates unemployment as the major direct cause of poverty and shows that in practice the major parties have given up on full employment. Both put their faith in the private sector, despite decades of 'downsizing' that have destroyed whole oceans

of jobs. As Aarons reminds us, they have forgotten that, "A genuine effort to restore full employment requires recognition of the fact that mass unemployment is *a real social crisis.*" [Emphasis added.] Aarons proposes a national plan to tackle unemployment, via such mechanisms as the reduction of the working week to thirty-five hours and a cap on all but essential overtime. He advocates a massive program of public works to build up the nation's infrastructure and to tackle the burgeoning ecological crisis of the continent. Such ideas are a breath of fresh air in an intellectual and political climate stuck in the miasmic dogmas of free market liberalism.

His answer to "the inevitable triumphant query" of "where's the money to come from?" is that genuine taxation reform would recoup *billions*. Up to $3 billion is lost to the public purse each year from corporate tax evasion. Aarons also proposes a Jobs Levy on the net worth of the 280,200 millionaires who own 21.5 per cent of the nation's wealth (or $463.5 billion). A levy of just one cent in the dollar on them would raise $4.6 billion – "a small sacrifice indeed" for the moneybags, and a potential godsend for the millions of unemployed and underemployed in this country.



Aarons knows that the "interests and the ideology of the super-rich pervade [the] political thinking of the major parties" and advocates "people's democratic action" as the cornerstone of campaigns for change. He believes that most Australians would enthusiastically support policies to make the rich pay their fair share. He is scornful of the recast social Darwinist ideology that portrays the rich as the worthy controllers of the planet, and the poor as an underclass of 'losers' mired in sloth. He makes the eloquent observation that:

> great wealth is no guarantee of happiness, nor is money the main or only gauge of human worth, intellect, virtue or morality. Workers are not inherently inferior to the owners of capital; wealth confers no right to rule, though many wealthy people believe themselves an overclass, and act as if they are.

> It is equally false to equate poverty with stupidity, immorality or criminality. The last twenty years of corporate history is crammed with criminal misdeeds by the corporate cowboys driven by one or more of the three.

Part of that history has been the radical rightward shift in industrial relations. Accounts of Australian industrial relations have tended to concentrate on the unions, so Sheldon and Thornthwaite's book fills a big gap. The book deals with an era of tumultuous, ideologically driven change in the nation's industrial relations system. The late twentieth century saw the replacement of the old system, based on arbitration and national and state awards, with one of enterprise agreements in the context of a weakened union movement. As the book shows, 1983 was a real watershed for Australian industrial relations. The federal ALP won office and began the "novel experiment" of the ACTU–ALP accord, initially based on centralized wage fixing and indexation.

Although 'mainstream' employer organizations were unhappy with the early version of the accord because they felt excluded from its deliberations, they were happy with the arbitration system *per se*. Associations such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry were deeply suspicious of the New Right, exemplified by the Young Turks of the National Farmers' Federation, whom they saw as "nonsensically extreme". The New Right, for its part, saw the older employer organizations as part of a self-serving Industrial Relations Club that had to be destroyed. With surprising speed, yesterday's extremism became today's orthodoxy. As the conservative journalist Paul Kelly put it: "in 1990 there was no New Right; the 1985 extremists had become the 1990 Liberal Party mainstream".

The book does not explore *why* the ALP government and even the ACTU came to adopt so much of the New Right's 'reform' agenda, although this is perhaps beyond its scope. The editors do lay bare the steps, and pinpoint Hawke's September 1986 Work Practices Summit as a major turning point.

Shortly afterwards, Hawke signalled the end of his support for wage indexation. Henceforth, in the new climate of 'award restructuring', wage increases were tied to productivity increases and the elimination of so-called 'restrictive work practices'. By the early 1990s, this approach had slashed nine per cent from average labour costs.

From the workers' point of view, however, the rot did not stop there. In the 1990s, the ALP government, with the full support of the ACTU leadership, went even further down the neo-liberal road with the adoption of Enterprise Bargaining. Interestingly, the move met with at best lukewarm support from many individual employers and employer associations. Again, a 'militant minority' of employers set the agenda. Incredibly, and again with ACTU blessing, the 1993 Industrial Relations Reform Act allowed the Industrial Relations Commission to broker non-union enterprise agreements. As Sheldon and Thornthwaite point out, this "provided employers with their first real opportunity this century to develop a distinct non-union sector similar to that which employers have carved out in the USA".

By 1996, a new, bellicose Coalition Government confronted a debilitated union movement. Union membership had plummeted since 1983 and the movement faced the union-busting drive heralded by Peter Reith's Workplace Relations Act. In 1998, an alliance of the Coalition, the military, the National Farmers' Federation and Patrick Stevedores launched an all-out assault on the MUA with the intention of replacing union wharfies with scabs employed by an NFF front. Although a largely spontaneous public movement of solidarity headed off Reith and Corrigan, the Liberals' anti-union laws – in particular those relating to secondary boycotts – were highly effective.

Andrew Scott's *Running on Empty* is an easy book to recommend to anyone interested in political ideas or labour history. It is a well-written comparative study of the British and Australian labour parties that explores their links, similarities and differences, the changing social bases of labour parties, the role of factions and the records of the two labour parties in office. Scott knows his stuff and you put this book down feeling you really have learnt something about both labour parties and the labour movements of Australia and the UK.

Scott sees the clash between loyalty to labour tradition and the pressure to modernize as the dynamic behind the political evolution of these parties:

> For decades the British and Australian labour parties have been advised by the mainstream opinion leaders to deal with social change by getting rid of old-fashioned ideological baggage: to travel light and respond to specific political circumstances as they arose. The trouble now was that, in hastening to take this advice, they had discarded not just the excess and unfashionable ideological luggage, but their essential basic clothing, so they were now running on empty . . .

Without being didactic, Scott allows his own political views to show. He clearly supports the progressive elements of the Labor tradition and charts the movement of both labour parties away from any collectivist ethos from the 'revisionists' of the 1950s and 1960s (such as Anthony Crosland in the UK) up to labour's contemporary capitulation to the neo-liberal agenda. It is probably a mistake, however, to see too much continuity between the Crosland school and the likes of Blair, Hawke and Keating.

The earlier revisionists were responding to a capitalism that seemed to have overcome the instability, violence and stark social inequality of the inter-war years; their move to the Right remained within the context of support for a welfare state and mixed economy. This was not the case when Hawke and Keating led Labor's move to the Right. They were not making peace with a capitalism that had temporarily shown it might be able to meet the needs of Labor's constituency. They were making peace with a capitalism intent on wrenching back concessions to labour and the poor during the post-war boom. This social and economic counter-reformation has been accurately described by Noam Chomsky as a "one-sided class war".

Scott's is a very good book, although we disagree with some of his political premises. Despite all of the devastating shortcomings and betrayals that he outlines, he remains wedded to the idea of seeking social change through the ALP. While this litany of betrayal is by now well known, Scott does not make any convincing argument that the Left of the ALP fought against this process in any meaningful way, or that it can be relied upon to turn the tide in the future.

One weak point in the book is that he presents the capitulation of Labor to neo-liberalism too much as the result of a battle of ideas, rather than as a clash of class forces. In that clash, the ALP took sides, unfortunately the wrong side. The Hawke and Keating

'reforms' put the ALP on the side of the corporate assault on the post-war gains of the labour movement. In this process, the labour parties have been agents of change, but not of progressive social change. They have been the staunch allies of the likes of Reagan and Thatcher in their implementation of the neo-liberal agenda.

Opponents of that agenda have now taken the political stage world wide, with Melbourne's S11 protests the latest manifestation of a global wave of protest that is feminist, ecological, internationalist and anti-capitalist. Surely, this new generation of fighters will not be conned by the ALP and luminaries such as 'Jeff' Bracks! For those of us on the Left, the history of the past twenty years shows that, regardless of which of the major parties is in office, working-class people can only rely on their own organized strength. Rebuilding the labour movement, and cutting ties with a party that is Labor in name only is essential if neo-liberalism is to be dealt the kind of historic defeat that is needed for our children to have a decent future. Thornthwaite and Sheldon might not agree with the reviewers' standpoint here. Scott, although a progressive, cannot see any road other than via the ALP. One can feel confident, however, that Aarons would not demur.

Tony Dewberry is a long-time socialist activist. He has been involved in socialist politics and various international solidarity campaigns since his involvement in the anti-war movement in Sydney in the late sixties.

John Tully is a writer, long-time socialist activist. He teaches in the Arts Faculty at Victoria University. Both Tony and John have contributed to the left-wing press for about thirty years.

Mark Dober, oil pastel on paper, 'Blockade'

Bruce Sims

Helen Daniel 1946–2000

HELEN DANIEL was an intensely private person but also gregarious in public gatherings and with friends. Her seriousness masked her fine sense of fun. I am left wondering whether she is really dead and will come back to lambast us for our lame reactions.

Her public role as a champion and practitioner of fine Australian writing inevitably showed some of her passions. One was a fierce independence upon which no-one would trespass lightly.

After years of surviving as a freelance writer, Helen took the job of editor of *Australian Book Review,* which was nearly perfect for her. She had as much freedom as anyone could wish for, aside from the inevitable financial constraints. Within those constraints, Helen created one of the best journals in Australia in which contributors could say anything of substance without censorship.

As a commentator and critic, she was fearless and responsible. Many people have reason to be grateful for both attributes. In public or private, Helen did not mince words. If you asked her for an opinion, it was bound to be stimulating and valuable, if not always palatable. And so it should be, but rarely is. She was never merely eccentric. Her support for Australian writing was indefatigable and hugely productive.

The death of her long-standing partner, Margaret Wintergeist, several years ago, made obvious how much support Margaret had given to Helen. An obituary to Helen is as much one to Margaret, who in a sense passed unnoticed by the world at large. Helen continued to produce *ABR,* in her untiring professional way, until her own death, in spite of large threats to her health, which eventually overcame her.

Margaret was a saleswoman of excellence. Once, as always living off her wits, she worked in a white-goods shop in Jamaica. Realizing that few potential clients could afford fridges or washing machines, she sold huge numbers of blenders, good for making potent fruit cocktails which she gave away as samples at lunchtimes.

For many years, Helen and Margaret ran a secondhand shop in Brunswick Street, until driven out by exhaustion and the trendification of the street. Helen did the books and Margaret did the bric-a-brac and the furniture. The shop was a perfect marriage of talents.

Earlier, Helen had a career as a taxi driver as she worked her way through university at a time when women taxi drivers were as thin-on-the-ground as independent Australian intellectuals still are. She liked working the night shift in spite of its dangers.

Danger was a large element in Helen's life, and taking risks something to be valued. Many critics are pusillanimous and rely on other opinions to form their own. Courage to take a position is unusual in Australia or anywhere. Helen's huge body of work reflects her penetrating talents. She produced the critical works, *Liars* and *Double Agent,* two innovative anthologies, *Expressway* and *Millennium,* *The Good Reading Guide* to Australian fiction, countless reviews for Australian newspapers and journals, editorial and commentary pieces for *ABR.*

She was a judge for many literary awards and was involved with programming the Melbourne Writers' Festival almost from its inception. Quite prepared to admit when she was wrong, which wasn't often, she was generous to those with differing opinions. Her ethical standards were sometimes impossibly high, but who can quarrel with that?

No one person could put together a list of all the writers she has helped in her incredibly busy twenty-eight-hour days. Even in the secondhand shop, she used to give away books to aspiring writers. The Australian community has too few people like her who will foster talent without wielding influence.

As a friend, she was stalwart. I will miss her immensely as a sounding board and a very affectionate companion. And, in some senses, too good for this world.

Anthony Hassall

Over There

The Dream/Nightmare of Europe in Tim Winton's *The Riders* and George Johnston's *Clean Straw for Nothing*

Over there was the land of labyrinths and mirror mazes, where dreams turned into nightmares and sweet things went sour or grew bitter and freshness curdled.

George Johnston[1]

When I got to Europe I knew the moment that I set my foot down that I wasn't European. I'd been brought up all my life to think that I was a European. I'm not even faintly European.

Tim Winton[2]

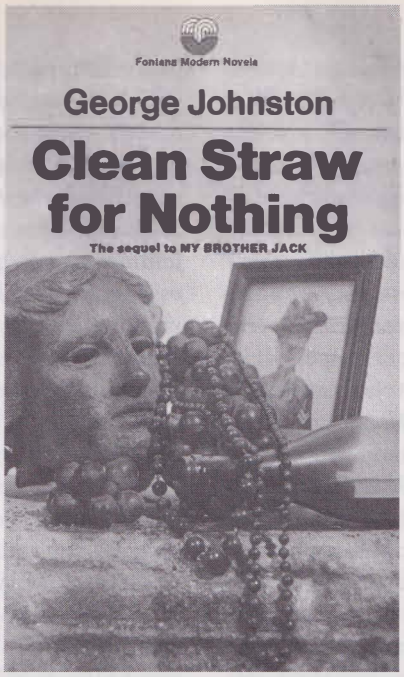
GEORGE JOHNSTON'S *Clean Straw for Nothing* (1969) and Tim Winton's *The Riders* (1994) belong to the substantial sub-genre of Australian writing dealing with the experience of Australians who journey to Europe in search of a cultural home. Classic examples of the genre include Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1917–30), Martin Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford* (1946) and Ray Lawler's *The Piccadilly Bushman* (1959). Despite the lengthening distance from Australia's colonial past, and the lessening of the cultural cringe, the genre shows no signs of disappearing, as recent examples like David Malouf's *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (1996) and Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) indicate. Australians continue to undertake the ritual pilgrimage to a Europe rendered alluring by distance, absence and perceived cultural centrality. The literature generated by this experience chronicles the contradictory emotions, and the conflicting national and cultural allegiances that journeying arouses. In this article I want to look at some of the ways in which *Clean Straw for Nothing* and *The Riders* contribute to this continuing, failure-haunted search for a mythologized cultural centre or homeland.

The exodus of creative talent from Australia in the post-Second World War decades included many of the best and brightest of that generation.[3] Their fictional representatives in *Clean Straw For Nothing* include the painter Tom Kiernan, based on Sidney Nolan, and the actor Archie Calverton, based on Peter Finch, who are close friends of the Merediths, a semi-autobiographical depiction of George Johnston and Charmian Clift. The postwar Australia they fled was a country of blackouts and shortages, socially destabilized by a restless generation of ex-servicemen and women. In the Menzies years of the 1950s a bland philistinism settled over the land. What lightweight public culture there was, was largely imported by J.C. Williamson from somewhere overseas. For those of us who remember the period, the alienation of the intelligent and the creative, and the desire to get away, as so many did, remain vivid.

Even then, however, the traffic was not all one way. Patrick White, for example, was educated at Cheltenham and Cambridge, and had spent much of his early life in Europe. He lived in Germany and London before the war, which he spent as an RAF Intelligence Officer in the Middle East, falling in love with Greece as the Johnstons were later to do; but in 1948 he left London, which he characterized as "an actual and spiritual graveyard", and a life which, before the war, had seemed "a brilliant, intellectual, highly desirable existence", but which had become "distressingly parasitic and pointless", and returned home to Australia.[4] In the 'Jardin Exotique' segment of *The Aunt's Story*, published in the year he left (1948), Europe is portrayed as surreal, decaying and self-destructive. Two decades earlier the young A.D. Hope had turned "gladly home" from Oxford and "the chatter of cultured apes . . . over there" to an Australia about which he had no illusions, but which he nonetheless preferred.[5] It is interesting to note that Hope and White were to figure larger in the annals of Australian literature than most of the expatriates heading in the opposite direction, though the

latter included, at different times, Christina Stead and Peter Porter.

Those who made the pilgrimage believed they were escaping from a philistine cultural wasteland which stifled creativity and enforced a mindless suburban conformity. They dreamed of Europe not so much as the tribal homeland yearned for by earlier generations, but as the *fons et origo* of culture, where creativity would be appreciated and rewarded. Like Henry James' innocent Americans, seduced by the cultural patina of Europe, and by its unscrupulous, world-weary inhabitants, many of them were to be disillusioned, and some of those wrote memorably about their frustrations and disappointments.



In 1951 George Johnston and Charmian Clift joined the exodus to London. They shared the aspirations of their generation of writers, painters and performers for whom journeying to Europe, and gaining recognition there, was the ultimate ambition. The Johnstons eventually acquired legendary status by enacting the expatriate dream of subsistence living devoted to their art on a picturesque Greek island. After a decade of this supposedly idyllic life, they returned home to Australia in 1964, driven by illness and poverty and, ironically, by the success of *My Brother Jack*, which was set in post-First World War Australia. The less than idyllic actuality of the Johnstons' experience of Europe is reflected in *Clean Straw for Nothing*, and in Charmian Clift's *Mermaid Singing* (1958) and *Peel Me A Lotus* (1959), though their disillusionment with Greece was never complete, as George Johnston's favourite C.P. Cavafy poem indicates:

> *Ithaca has given you the beautiful journey.*
> *Without her you would never have taken the road.*
> *But she has nothing more to give you.*
> *And if you find her poor,*
> *Ithaca has not defrauded you.*
> *With all the great wisdom you have gained,*
> *With so much experience,*
> *you must surely have understood by then what Ithacas mean.*[6]

Twenty years later Tim Winton, who had "always been fascinated" by George Johnston,[7] spent two years with his family living in Europe (1987–89), initially for six months in the Australia Council's studio in Paris, then in Ireland, and finally for six months in Greece – on the Johnstons' island of Hydra. For Winton, Europe was not an escape from a despised Australia: "When I got to Europe I knew the moment that I set my foot down that I wasn't European. I'd been brought up all my life to think that I was a European. I'm not even faintly European".[8] Unlike the Johnstons, Winton had no wish to stay on Hydra, though he enjoyed the relatively familiar climate and lifestyle after the alienation he experienced in northern Europe: "When I got to Greece I realized why I live in Australia . . . I found on Hydra that people lived very differently to the people who lived further north, and they lived in approximation to how I live in Australia".[9] Winton's time in Europe made him realize why he preferred to live in Australia. It also convinced him it was not an environment conducive to creative work: "I lived among expatriates who were a-bottle-of-vodka-a-day people. I discovered that I was never going to be an expatriate, that this kind of romance is destructive, soul-destroying, unless the person is strong enough, productive enough to overcome total displacement".[10] Like Hope and White before him, Winton returned gladly to Australia.

The books that grew out of these experiences are in some ways very different and in some ways intriguingly similar. *Clean Straw for Nothing* and *The Riders* both depict the pain of marital breakdown against a background of Australians in Europe searching for wider cultural horizons and richer creative opportunities. They explore the parallel failures of marriage, and the dream of Europe, from a bleak, bitter and exclusively male point of view. Both followed popular successes by their authors. *My Brother Jack* (1964) was George Johnston's first real success after a quarter of a century of writing, and ten years of full-time commitment to fiction. Ironically its major success with both the public and the

critics was in Australia rather than in Europe, which the Johnstons would have preferred. For its part *The Riders* followed Winton's best-selling *Cloudstreet* (1991) which, like *My Brother Jack*, was semi-autobiographical, though with significant fictionalizing of the author's family and events.

Some readers were initially puzzled by the unexpected nature of the sequels to these very popular and successful books. *Clean Straw for Nothing* and *The Riders* were set in contemporary Europe, not in a nostalgia-inducing Australian past. Jack Meredith disappeared in *Clean Straw for Nothing*, David moved to centre stage, and the Australia graphically recreated in the earlier book was quickly abandoned. The relatively traditional form of *My Brother Jack* was replaced by a modernist narrative, with an achronological time scheme and a dispersed mosaic of separate episodes.

For its part *The Riders* moved from the Western Australia lovingly documented in all Winton's earlier books to an unfamiliar Europe; and while it continued to explore the fragility of family relationships, which runs through all of Winton's earlier work, *The Riders* was more narrowly focused than *Cloudstreet*, the cast was limited, and the action took place at a frenetic, wildly accelerating pace over a period of just two months, not twenty years. These departures from the expectations created by the bestsellers which preceded them may have disappointed some readers, but the critics were appreciative: *Clean Straw For Nothing* won a second Miles Franklin Award for George Johnston; while *The Riders* was short-listed for the Miles Franklin – which Winton had earlier received for *Shallows* (1984). Ironically perhaps, *The Riders* was also short-listed for the Booker Prize in Europe, the kind of recognition coveted, though not achieved, by Johnston.

One interesting similarity between the two books is the way in which their dreams of Europe transmute into nightmares from which the protagonists struggle to escape. One striking difference is that Scully succeeds in escaping from his nightmare while David Meredith does not. The recurring midnight vision of the silent, ghostly riders in the grounds of the castle below Scully's cottage in Ireland haunts *The Riders*. At the end of the book, and on the first night of a new year, Scully finds his seven-year-old daughter Billie silently watching these ghostly visitants. Their significance is emphasized, though not explained, by the naming of the book after them. I would suggest that the riders represent a narrative of the European past, frozen in defeat and waiting, which tempts Scully and Billie to opt out of an agonized present and to dwell in such a past, peopled by ghosts, and without hope (or fear) of change or escape. Their alternative is to turn away from the past and into a future in which Scully's marriage to Jennifer is over, but that need not be the end, as it is, essentially, in *Clean Straw for Nothing*. Scully realizes that though the ghostly riders will return every night "seen and unseen", he must reject them: "he knew that as surely as he felt Billie pulling him easily away, that he would not be among them and must never be, in life or death".[11] Scully thus resolves to end his anguished pursuit of his wife, to turn away from the ghosts of the past, and to embrace the new year and his and Billie's future.

Another of Winton's telling images of a Europe locked into a life-denying paralysis is the eighteenth-century cottage in Ireland that Scully buys to humour a whim of his wife's. Binchy's Bothy in County Offaly near the Slieve Bloom Mountains is "older than his own nation", abandoned, dysfunctional, encrusted with death and dirt:

> It was a small house, simple as a child's drawing and older than his own nation. Two rooms upstairs, two down. Classic vernacular, like a model from the old textbooks. It stood alone on the bare scalp of a hill called the Leap. Two hundred yards below it, separated by a stand of ash trees and a hedged lane was the remains of a gothic castle, a tower house and fallen wings that stood monolithic above the valley with its farms and soaklands . . . Strange to own a house older than your own nation. Strange to bother, really, he thought. Nothing so weird as a man in love.

Ironically reversing the colonizing experience of the Irish in Australia, Scully cleans up this derelict hut with brutal energy and makes it habitable.

Jennifer had brought him to Europe hoping it would allow her to fulfil what she believed to be her artistic potential. Pursuing a dream similar to the Merediths', but lacking their talent, she abandoned a dull job in Australia for the creative life in Paris or on a Greek island. For Scully, however, Europe is alien. It has nothing to offer him which compares with his life in Australia. Not sharing his wife's dream, he feels uncomfortable and out of place. He is not impressed by the arty crowd, who in turn sneer at him: "He frightened the French and caused

the English to perspire. Among Greeks he was no great shakes". When Jennifer disappears, leaving only a mute Billie, Scully does not know why she has deserted him: "In the name of what – love? Personal development? The bohemian life?". His subsequent search for her, and for an explanation of her desertion, develops into a nightmare journey through the hell of Europe.

Scully and Billie end this garish and tortured journey in the red-light district of Amsterdam on Christmas Day. A drunken Scully is arrested in a sex-aid supermarket for accosting a female impersonator he mistakes for his wife. In Paris the night before, Scully, again drunk, had stolen his companion Irma's money, and then been thrown out of midnight Mass at the city's gothic cathedral. Earlier again, on the legendary island of Hydra, where they go in pursuit of Jennifer and her imagined lover, they find only the dying, failed and impotent artist Alex Moore. In effect, all of Winton's images of Europe in *The Riders* are squalid, uninviting and uncreative.

The souring of David Meredith's dream of Europe in *Clean Straw for Nothing* is more protracted and less surreal than Scully's. The most striking image of Europe as nightmare is again at the end of the book, when David Meredith is recovering in a Sydney hospital from a life-threatening operation on his diseased lungs. Reflecting bleakly on the narrative of his life, he recalls his friend Tom Kiernan's obsession with a painting he planned called *The New Renaissance*, which would depict the destruction of "Mantegna's first great frescoes" in the bombing of Padua in the Second World War. Kiernan wants to create:

> that moment when the bombs fell on Padua . . . the bombs falling and blowing the Mantegna frescoes to smithereens – the pale coloured bits and pieces flying off in all directions, mouths and eyes and faces and hands and noses and bits of ears and the shreds of coloured robes and whizzing chunks of brick and plaster.

For the painter this was, like Picasso's *Guernica*, an image of the brutal destruction of civilization brought about by war. Meredith the novelist appropriates it as his final, summatory image of the fragmentary and inconclusive structure of *Clean Straw for Nothing* and, more personally, as an image of the destruction of the work of art that David and Cressida Meredith had sought to make of their lives together, and of their sojourn in Greece in particular.

The image of the exploding frescoes is richly suggestive. The wartime destruction of Europe – and in particular the artistic heritage of Europe – recalls Patrick White's phantasmagorical *Hôtel-du-Midi* consumed by fire in *The Aunt's Story*, and also the account of a maddened Europe rushing into war at the end of Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*. The fact that 'The New Renaissance' was never in fact painted also suggests that there will be no new Renaissance for a Europe perceived to be as far beyond recovery as the Meredith marriage, and indeed the Meredith lives.

The tragedy of *Clean Straw For Nothing* is that the Merediths abandoned Australia and that Europe betrayed their expectations. Their books are published, but do not sell well enough to support the family. They are given just enough false encouragement to persevere until the alternative of journalism is lost. The lifestyle of the Greek island is captivating, and in some ways idyllic; but it is also narrow, primitive and without the medical attention that David increasingly needs. Their children are deracinated – stranded between two cultures. The expatriate artists' colony that develops around the Merediths is stiflingly petty, creatively bankrupt, yet demanding of time, attention and money. The ultimate irony of the Merediths' sustained and determined questing for a European cultural homeland is that David only writes a prize-winning bestseller when he returns to his Australian experience, and it is Australian not European readers who confer the accolades and the money. Europe fails them, and the Merediths' final return to Australia is little more than a bewildered prelude to their deaths, deaths unenlightened by answers to the questions that have haunted David Meredith throughout *Clean Straw For Nothing* and its unfinished sequel *A Cartload of Clay* (1971).

THE BOOKS THAT GREW out of Johnston's and Winton's experience of Europe constitute two intriguingly parallel and yet disparate chapters in the long, complex and continuing history of Australia's changing constructions of Europe as cultural centre and (former) homeland. *The Riders* is a generation later than *Clean Straw For Nothing*, and while it is not necessarily representative, it is tempting to read it as indicating a generational change in Australian attitudes to Europe. Certainly the Australia entering the twenty-first century is culturally very different from the Australia of the 1950s–1960s from which

the Johnstons fled. On the one hand, it has been colonized by American popular culture, the infotainment superhighway of Hollywood/ Disney/Gates so tellingly satirized by Peter Carey in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994). On the other hand, the influence of the cultural cringe is diminishing, particularly among creative artists, who are asserting what remains distinctive about the national culture more confidently and less defensively.

Australia is now just hours away from New York, London, or anywhere else, and the glamour of those cultural centres has been dissipated by familiarity and ease of access. People and ideas move about freely, and individual national cultures are increasingly hybridized. In recent years an Australian writer like David Malouf could commute for part of the year to a writing retreat in Tuscany and spend the rest of the year in Australia without agonizing unduly over a sense of divided allegiances, or feeling obliged to choose between the cultures of Europe and Australia.[12] Tim Winton can visit Europe, discover that it is not to his taste, and return home to pursue his creative career in Australia.

George Johnston and Charmian Clift, on the other hand, belonged to the last generation of Australian writers who felt obliged to leave Australia to pursue their creative careers, and to make a definitive choice between living in Europe and living in Australia. Even they returned home, disillusioned, to a success that had eluded them in Europe, and that in many ways came too late. When David Meredith returns, he sees Australia as "foreign" and "alien"; but he later finds himself thinking on Ayer's Rock: "what a very strange thing it was for me to have grown to love this country, after having hated it so much". Tim Winton, a native Australian who feels alien and homesick in Europe, does not share that particular love-hate agony, and does not have to make a choice between cultures to follow his career as a writer. That may suggest that Australia, which began as a sustained nightmare for many of its original European inhabitants, may at last be awakening from its long-cherished vision of Europe into its own creative dreaming.

ENDNOTES

1. *A Cartload of Clay*, Collins, Sydney and London, 1971, pp. 143–44.
2. Richard Rossiter & Lyn Jacobs (eds), *Reading Tim Winton*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1993, p. 13. cf. Les Murray, 'We aren't Europeans any longer: some of us never were', *A Working Forest*, Duffy & Snellgrove, Sydney, 1997, p. 118.
3. The fullest account of this exodus is Stephen Alomes, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain*, CUP, Melbourne, 1999.
4. 'The Prodigal Son', *Australian Letters*, 1:3 (April 1958), p. 38.
5. 'Australia', *Collected Poems 1930–1965*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1966, p. 13.
6. George Johnston, *Clean Straw For Nothing*, Collins, Sydney and London, 1969, p. 312. Subsequent references are to this edition and are included in the text. According to his son Martin, this was George Johnston's favourite poem. See Martin Johnston, 'Concerning A Cartload of Clay', in *Selected Poems and Prose*, John Tranter (ed.), UQP, 1993, p. 164.
7. Ray Willbanks, *Speaking Volumes: Australian Writers and Their Work*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1991, p. 199.
8. Rossiter and Jacobs, p. 13.
9. Willbanks, p. 199.
10. Willbanks, p. 200.
11. Tim Winton, *The Riders*, Macmillan, Sydney. 1994, p. 377. Subsequent references are to this edition.
12. See 'A Complex Fate', in David Malouf, *A Spirit of Play: The Making of Australian Consciousness*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1998, pp. 25–42.

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Sam's Day

Ron Rodgers

EIGHT A.M. FRIDAY. Sam, slowly awakening, to lie a minute, big brown eyes focusing on the low ceiling of the annexe, with a sunburnt hand moving over sandy crewcut hair, and the over-night stubble of whiskers. An anticipating smile replaces the despondency on his face, galvanizing him into action. His short wiry body, encased in blue jeans, black singlet, propelled by bare feet, hits the floor with a jar, descends on the refrigerator, opens the door, smile reversing to frown. "Oh no!" he laments, slapping his forehead . . .

Hesitantly, while neglecting to close the door, he turns, gazing up the short staircase into the house – a place he seldom enters. At his wife's bedroom – a place he never enters. Now, hovering over his fortieth year, and for the five preceding that, Sam has chosen to live in perpetual euphoria. His obsession with hard liquor ensuring total dereliction of any matrimonial duties. Infrequent bouts of sobriety are plagued with suspicion – is another man filling the vacuum? Judy's glowing, contented face, and ready acceptance of the situation do not incline him to think contrary. However, not the problem of the moment – the empty fridge is . . .

Sam goes out the back door, along the boundary hedge, fumbles with his zip and, while urinating into the crotons, lifts one leg, farting. There is a rattle and a clang as the white spotted bull-terrier tethered to a peg, and startled awake, runs out of chain. The animal, sniffing a familiar pollution in the air, comes over to rub against the offender's leg.

Sam strokes the dog while speculating on his immediate future, examining and rejecting possibilities. Vaguely he remembers, before passing out, that his new neighbour had been giving a party – an avenue worth exploring? He parts the crotons, entering the adjoining property.

Sam, through a close acquaintance with the former tenant, is familiar with the layout. He moves silently across the yard, ascends four steps, glancing into the kitchen. The place, as expected, is a shambles, the table and floor littered with empty stubbies. He hears snoring and, on peering around the corner, observes a man sleeping on the verandah bed, with a tattooed arm draped over his face, and a bottle of Bundaberg rum, near on a quarter full, standing on the bedside table. "Hello," he calls, tentatively, and on receiving no answer, tiptoes across the room. One look at the fly-catching mouth and he knows he's got no worries. He calmly admires the stranger's tattoo – while demolishing his rum. Then tiptoes out of the house, stomach burning, soul soaring . . .

Fortified now, Sam crosses, with short energetic steps, his own back yard, by a workshed cluttered with a confusion of lawnmower and car parts, all with the odour of dubious origin, passing on through the opposite hedge into the manicured grounds of Mrs Murray.

The widow, plump, grey, bespectacled, is emptying her teapot into a flower bed. "Is that you, Sam?" she inquires, squinting at him.

He slips his arm around her shoulders. "The yard's a picture, mum," he tells her.

"Thanks to you, son. I don't know how I'd manage without you. You're so selfless, Sam . . ."

The woman's vision-impaired eyes fail to detect

his faltering smile. It is true that he does not begrudge the hours spent in her yard every Sunday morning, mowing lawn, tending garden. "I'll just check on the vegie patch," he says, walking over to the rows of trellised tomatoes. Closer inspection shows they are in fine shape; so too the marijuana bushes he's cultivated amidst them, that the unwitting widow so religiously waters for him – and that are now ready to harvest . . .

Sam arrives back in his own domain just in time to intercept the stranger, a big man in a white shirt, with authority stamped on his face, approaching down the drive. He steps out, blocking the man's progress, his wiry frame akin to a fox-terrier defending his bone from an alsatian, bristling with aggression. "What can I do for you, Mister?"

"Are you Sam?"

He nods.

"I'm looking for a cousin of mine – Joe Wales – he's only just moved into this area. The woman in the Post Office said you might know him?"

"There's no Joe Wales livin' around here," disputes Sam, emphatically, terminating the conversation.

"Thanks – anyway," replies the stranger, obviously affronted.

Sam watches him walk to his car, drive off, before crossing the street, short legs pumping like pistons, a scowl staining his features.

"Geeze, Wendy," he blurts to the short, blonde Post Mistress, "who was that joker you sent over to my place?"

The blonde is taken aback. She has never before seen Sam lose his cool, look so agitated. "I don't know," she stammers. "He was looking for someone – and I thought you might be able to help –"

"He could have been anybody," interrupts Sam, "Even a – " he bites off the word 'cop', before adding lamely, "Do me a favour, love – just be careful who you send over home in future."

Returning to the annexe, Sam closes the fridge door, collects his tobacco. "I'm off, Jude!" he calls to the wife he lives with – but seldom sees.

"Okay, Sam," her tone, as usual, is compliant, momentarily arousing suspicion – is she? "Are you still working down at the commission units?"

Sam is reminded of the drink driving charge he'd received six months earlier, and was still paying for. How like her to refer to community service as work. "Are you going out today, Jude?"

"No," she answers. He can tell she's still in the bedroom – that's good.

Out in the yard Sam, using a key obtained without his wife's knowledge, enters her car, peeling the registration sticker off the blue Volkswagen, transferring it to the windscreen of his green Falcon work utility. Then driving away . . .

Thirty minutes on, and five kilometres along the road Sam, still bootless, and wearing a leather seaman's cap, his sweaty face darkening with whiskers, is entertaining the units Supervisor, as he works in the gardens. "I'll bet you've turned a few heads in your time, Shirl," he flatters, winking at her.

"Get away with you, Sam," she admonishes, "you're nothing but a kidder." She walks off towards her office, patting her short auburn hair into place, a smile tugging at the corners of her prim little mouth . . .

An hour elapses with an admirable pile of weeds and clippings accumulating on the verge of the gardens, and the man in the seaman's cap, despite being surrounded by water taps, acquiring a mammoth thirst. He appears at the Supervisor's door. "Bad news, boss," he says, his face glum, while pointing at the wheel of the barrow he has parked in front of her.

"Oh no!" she deplores, seeing the flat tyre. "Does this mean that pile of rubbish will be lying there all over the weekend?"

Sam tips the cap back on his head, wiping his sweaty brow. "I think we can kill two birds with one stone here, love," he says, with endearing familiarity. "I didn't mention it before, but the wife's a bit crook. I'd like to look in on her and, as luck has it, I've got a repair kit at home – I could fix the tyre at the same time . . ."

"Oh, would you?"

"She'll be right, love – you can always count on Sam."

The Supervisor stands watching him load the barrow onto the back of the utility. She shakes her head, whispers, "So selfless . . ."

RUBY, THE PROPRIETRESS, dark hair in curlers, is amusing herself with a half dozen elderly regulars. "He must have a brain like a pressure-cooker," she ruminates, "the schemes he cooks up." There is a ripple of laughter and Ruby, glancing out the window, seeing the green Falcon utility pulling into the hotel yard, concludes, "Speak of the devil".

The new arrival is greeted by knowing smiles, and a chorus of, "'lo Sambo", and after removing his cap, executing a mock bow, responds, "Fellow sinners".

"The usual?" Ruby has the rum bottle poised.

"Most certainly," he croaks, pouring the double rum she hands him straight down his throat.

"Again?"

Sam, unable to talk, bobs his head.

After the second drink he visibly relaxes, and Ruby, wise in such matters, knows that the demons that infiltrate his head after any period of abstinence have been put to flight.

Back in control, Sam orders a steak and chips lunch, taking it over to the wall counter where, while studying form on the racing sheet, he devours the meal, washing it down with another double. Before leaving the establishment he gets Ruby, doubling as the TAB operative, to place several bets for him. As he walks out the door one of the regulars remarks, "What a character!"

"He's alright," cracks Ruby, "just as long as you don't get between him and his rum bottle."

On the return trip Sam pulls into a service station where he, while the attendant is refueling the Falcon, picks up the air-hose. It takes him only a little less time to inflate than it had, by depressing the valve with a match-stick, to deflate the wheelbarrow tyre . . .

A half hour hence, Sam, who's philosophy is 'never shit in your own nest', has fulfilled his promise. The community gardens are 'spick and span' – the Supervisor beside herself with gratitude. "I've put you down for four hours, Sam," she elaborates, winking at him, a conspiratorial smile looking quite irregular on her stern little face. Sam shows her how a wink, wordless communication, should be accomplished, before taking his leave . . .

RUBY IS WAITING with the rum bottle poised.

"Most certainly," agrees Sam, "and a drink for the boys while you're at it."

She hands him his rum. Then pours six beers, lining them up before the regulars.

Meanwhile Sam's attention has been arrested by the TV set. The horses are exploding into the straight in the second in Sydney. He stands there, eyes riveted to the screen, the upper part of his body leaning forward, right hand flaying his leg like a jockey wielding a whip. "Come on! Come on Irish Eyes!" he pleads as they hit the line in a close one.

There is a hush, and some heavy breathing, for when Sam wins, everybody wins. The seconds grow heavy as they wait for the photo. "Number three!" the announcer's voices shatters the silence. "Irish Eyes is the winner from –"

"Fill 'em up again, Ruby!" bellows Sam.

In the ensuing two hours, while plying himself and the regulars with drink, Sam goes through the antics of riding two more winners. After collecting his profit he places two further bets on later events, handing the slips back to the proprietress. "Hang on to these for me, Ruby, will ya?" he then purchases three bottles of rum. Shouts a final round.

Ruby shakes her head in wonder. "You're a walking contradiction, Sam. You'll turn yourself inside-out to make a quick dollar – but as soon as you've got your belly full of rum – you can't get rid of it quick enough . . ."

"Who's complainin'?" asks Sam. "Not you, I shouldn't think, Ruby?"

BACK HOME SAM, after having replaced the registration sticker on the Volkswagen, is storing

his purchases in the fridge. The fact that the room has been tidied, and a clean set of clothes, identical to those he wore, draped over the bed, neither surprises nor impresses him. "Mrs Murray was over," calls his wife from the kitchen. "Her son, the detective one from Brisbane, is coming home for a few days, arriving on the four o'clock plane – she wanted to know if you could pick him up?"

Sam is reminded, with a jolt, of the widow's tomato patch. He mentally shuffles his playing cards. The situation requires arrangement, or more to the point, rearrangement. "I've got a prospective buyer comin' in to look at a lawnmower," he replies, improvising as he goes, "do you think you could pick him up, Jude?"

"No problem."

"Be nice if you could take the old lady with you. Be a treat for her . . ."

Having transplanted the thought, Sam collects one of the rum bottles, adjourning to the back of his work shed, igniting the brick incinerator. Then, entering the shed, he gathers an armful of insulated copper wire from a pile accumulated, by night, from premises with large signs reading, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted'. He drops the bundle into the now blazing furnace, grimacing, this being one of his more unpleasant enterprises, but the receiver, although paying well, insists on the wire being stripped of its insulation – and fire is the easiest and quickest method.

Presently the furnace begins emitting dark fumes and Sam, about to put the cover on, is distracted by the Volkswagen's engine coming to life. He watches the vehicle move to and park in front of the widow's house, hears the horn toot, sees the old lady emerge and get into the car. They drive off. Sam darts into the shed, arms himself with a haversack, before taking another foray into Mrs Murray's garden . . .

Minutes later, mission completed, Sam is coming back into his own yard, when his eardrums are assaulted. "Arsehole!" screeches an infuriated female voice.

The perpetrator, an old redheaded trout, his sworn enemy from over the back, is pointing an accusing finger at the soot-blackened sheets on her clothes-hoist.

Sam drops the haversack and approaches, with trepidation, the fence. "I forgot to put the lid on, Annie," he apologizes, lamely.

The redhead, sniffing the burnt air, challenges, "What are you trying to cover up this time you little bastard?"

"I'll by you a new set of sheets, Annie," he proffers.

The woman peers suspiciously at him. "Maybe I should call the police – ?"

"And a flagon of sweet sherry, too," he pleads.

The woman relents, retreats, mumbling, "Make sure you do . . ."

And Sam, knowing he will, is aware of his reduced profit, feels a dent in his ego. This isn't the first time he's tripped up, had too many irons in the fire, always trying to be one jump ahead, too often ending one behind. He gives a resigned, fatalistic shrug of his shoulder, stoops, picking up the haversack . . .

Sam is in the bathroom showering when his wife returns. He hears her come up through the annexe, go to her room where, he knows, she will remain until he is out of the house. In the early stages he'd felt guilty about dodging his wife, but had since come to suspect that Judy was enjoying the game and was, he concluded, even more adept in the art of evasion than he . . .

Out in the yard again Sam, attired in clean clothes, cap set at a jaunty angle, unleashes the dog, Spot. The two of them set off on their afternoon walk. Along the tree-lined avenue they go, Spot trotting ahead, tail in the air, seeking a place to deposit his load. His Master, with the inner fires well stoked, freshly shaven face glowing with wellbeing is, without doubt, an exponent of good will. There is a warmth in his smile, cordiality in his voice as he acknowledges garden waterers and pedestrians, greeting, "Top of the day to you, Missus. Sir," while tipping his hat to the ladies, raising his hand to the men, as

they proceed up and back the avenue, and all who encounter him know, instinctively, that such a man's transgressions, if any, will be small . . .

On attaining the sanctuary of his own domain he observes the widow showing her son, whom he knows to be a high-ranking member of the Brisbane drug squad, her prize tomatoes. Sam, not a religious man, crosses himself before moving on and is tethering Spot to his peg, when his neighbour from the other side comes through a gap in the hedge.

Sam does not recognize the stubble-covered young face, however he is familiar with the dragon tattoo on his arm. "You wouldn't by any chance have a drink on the place, would you, Mister?" There is a desperate quaver in the man's voice and Sam, realizing that he is in the company of a kindred spirit, grins at him. "Most certainly! Come into my parlour, Mister – ?"

"Joe Wales."

"I thought it might be," says Sam, under his breath. As they walk towards the annexe a voice screeches, "I'm waiting, arsehole!"

After seating his guest, Sam makes a beeline for the kitchen telephone. "Home deliveries here!" booms a voice from the other end. "Joe, this is Sam, do me a favour and send a bottle of sweet sherry around to old Annie – thanks, mate."

"Boy," approves Wales, after putting away his second rum, "I sure needed that! Me and the boys," he elaborates, "are renting the house next door. We had a house warmer last night. We're into prawning, you see, and they've all gone back on the trawler. I've got a week's leave."

"I can see that you like a drink or two, Joe," says Sam. "As one pro to another, you should know better than to leave yourself without a heart-starter for the morning, mate . . ."

"That's a funny thing," recalls his guest, "I was sure I left a healthy swig in the bottle."

"Wishful thinkin'," refutes Sam.

"And another funny thing. A cousin of mine promised to drop me off some money. He never showed – and he's never let me down before . . ."

Sam, remembering the big stranger in his driveway, is reminded of his own shaky start to the day, and reflects on his progress since –

He's in the good books with old Shirley down at the commission units and, with twenty hours still owing, sure he can organize, one way or another, some more concessions. Ruby at the hotel holds a couple of betting slips – with unknown prospects. He glances at the bulging haversack, thinking that the money to cover the ute's overdue registration is, you could say, in the bag. His dinner, as always, will be in the oven. Damn it! Why was she always so accommodating? Once again that pinprick of suspicion almost punctures his tranquillity. He tips his head back and, taking a big swig of rum, gets back on the merry-go-round – his new friend here, he hopes, being in the prawn-trawling business, will prove to be an outlet for some of his obscure markets. And last, but not least, he will be sure to have a reviver in the fridge come morning. "It just hasn't been your day, Joe," he proclaims, topping up the seaman's glass. "Just not your day at all, mate . . ."

Marilla North

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor . . .

who was Norman Randolph Freehill?

ON 19 JULY 1949 Norman Randolph Freehill left Sydney for London on the *Esperance Bay* to rendezvous with his lover, Dymphna Cusack. He left behind a successful career (spanning over forty years in both conservative financial *and* communist trade-union journalism), an estranged Catholic wife, a married daughter and a son suffering from chronic tuberculosis. His journey was closely monitored by ASIO.

Yet, like his friend Jessie Street (wife of Supreme Court judge Sir Kenneth), Freehill was neither named nor called before the Australian Royal Commission on Espionage in 1954. In 1941 Jessie had organized the Russian Medical Aid & Comforts Committee and the 'Sheepskins for Russia' appeal: both had been of considerable interest to the Royal Commissioners. Norman had been a key player in Australian Communist Party decision-making in the late 1940s and had edited the magazine *Russia & Us* for the Australian–Russian [Friendship] Society.

Norman was to become the first elected foreign member of the Chinese Journalists' Union when, over 1956–58, he supervised all work in English at Peking's Foreign Languages Press. Dymphna was writing *Chinese Women Speak* at the time. In the 1960s, whilst Dymphna's plays were being performed across the USSR and she was engaged in the translation and publication of half a dozen of her novels, Norman was writing for the Moscow Press. They were both on first-name terms with Nikita Khrushchev and Kliment Voroshilov to name but a few.

An internationalist . . . a man of charm, discretion and influence . . . just who *was* Norman Randolph Freehill?

He was born on 21 March 1892 in Annandale, Sydney, son of Swedish seaman, August, and Anna Friberg. The Birth Register gives the phonetic spelling: 'Freeberg'. Norman went one step further in 1927, anglicizing it to 'Freehill'.

According to family legend, in 1870 August Friberg jumped ship in Ballina, NSW, worked on the east coast steamers, did a brief stint as a farmer and was frequently unemployed. He eventually reached Sydney and joined the Australian Socialist League, then the Socialist Labor Party formed in 1897 "to fight electorally on a socialist platform".[1]

In 1894 Friberg registered the births of two daughters, Lillie and Joy, and in 1900 another son, Victor August. The family had settled in dockside Woolloomooloo and the children attended Plunkett Street Public School. One of many Scandinavian militants on Sydney's waterfront around the time of Federation, August Friberg was active in the worldwide movement which led to the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Chicago in 1905. In 1907 the Australian Socialist Labor Party set up its own IWW on the platform that:

> The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace as long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people . . . a struggle must go on until all the toilers come together on the political as well as the industrial field and take and hold that which they produce by their labour through an economic organization of the working class . . .

This was the rhetoric that young Norman was reared on. Leaving school at the minimum age of twelve he began as a messenger boy for Angus & Robertson. His barely literate mother had taught him to respect and lay claim to the power of the written word; in 1906 he joined the *Evening News* as a cadet, progressing to the *Daily Telegraph* as Assistant Commercial Editor while still an adolescent. In 1911 he was a foundation member of the Australian Journalists' Association. In 1913 he moved interstate and, by adding six years to his age, became Financial Edi-

Norman Freehill and Dymphna Cusack, 1965, in the Hotel Metropole, Moscow, where they were guests at the conference to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet victory over fascism. On 15 July 1965 the first adaption for the stage of Heatwave *in Berlin was performed at Moscow's Maly Theatre and received a standing ovation; her "triumphal evening" said compatriot writer Leslie Rees, who was in the audience.*

tor of the Brisbane *Daily Standard*. The not-quite-twenty-one-year-old Norman Freeberg had already begun to create that double identity which the more perceptive of his journalistic colleagues would later try to pin down as they grappled with his essential elusiveness, his carapace of ambiguity. He walked a thin line as the dapperly dressed financial journalist of the Capitalist press – rolled umbrella, Savile Row suit and a bowler hat – whilst out-of-hours operating as an undercover propagandist for the socialist cause into which he'd been born and bred.

Rupert Lockwood, who worked with Freehill on the Melbourne *Herald* in the early 1930s, recalled his own admiration for Norman's almost Machiavellian daring, for – at least amongst Socialist networks – his reputation as one of the 'Wobblies' had preceded him to Australia's finance capital. "A tough mob," Lockwood recalled. "These 'Wobblies' were the anarcho-syndicalists who had plotted to burn down Sydney, mouthing blood-curdling slogans such as: 'Not until the boneheads wipe the tears of their eyes with the slack of their guts will they ever wake up'."[2]

Norman had married Alice Kineally of Brisbane's Kineally-Sears family of bookmakers in 1914. A daughter, Margaret Patricia (Peg), was born on St Patrick's Day 1915 and in 1916 a son, Norman Robert (Bob). Norman senior was then sub-editor of the Brisbane *Worker*, and, with the Queensland Socialist League, involved in the anti-conscription campaign, "as a public speaker both soapbox and public halls".[3] The League's cosh-armed Self-Defence Corps protected their mates on the hustings in the 1916–17 confrontations with the pro-conscriptionists.

A Commonwealth Investigations Branch (CIB) entry on Norman Freeberg's activity over the First World War noted that as the sub-editor of the *Worker* "he made himself a constant nuisance to the Queensland censor" recording the irritation of the Chief Censor, J.J. Stable: "The sub-editor tries by every tricky means to outflank the censorship and it is only by means of more than ordinary care that this matter does not reach the publicity stage".[4] An autodidact with all the strengths and weaknesses that implies, Norman was a highly skilled propagandist-wordsmith and tactician. Stable, on the other hand, was highly educated; he was later an English Professor at the University of Queensland and worked for Allied Intelligence in the Second World War. Norman's "self-education" had been "a ravenous consumption of everything political I could get my hands on, from muddle-minded Utopian literature to material and papers from the two IWW's . . . I read every available pamphlet and book dealing with the working class movement . . . All the socialist classics, all the old bourgeois economists and philosophers . . . everything of Marx and Engels that was translated, including the first volume of [*Das*] *Capital*".[5]

BY THE END OF the First World War some four thousand Russian exiles lived in Brisbane. Anti-Tsarists, they had arrived there after "a tortuous escape route from political imprisonment, principally in Siberia", between 1905 and 1915. Among them was Tom Seergeev, a confidante of Lenin. As Norman's Swedish father had been forty years before, so these Russians were discriminated against as 'non-Britishers', fit to be exploited as piece-work-

ers. By necessity they had ghettoed in the South Brisbane slums and in the northern sugar cane and abattoir towns. By 1912 Seergeev had galvanized his compatriots into the Union of Russian Workers (URW).

After the overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917 Seergeev returned to Russia and became one of the fifteen members of the Bolshevik Central Committee who planned the October 1917 coup which put Lenin and Trotsky into power. Henceforth Brisbane's Russians and their supporters had a direct line into the new regime. In Norman's own words, he "was swept up in the wave of enthusiasm that ran through the ranks of the politically-active workers everywhere"[6] and became a powerful cog in the inner wheel which turned the existing local Socialist Parties into the Communist Party of Australia.

THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN 'diplomatic representative' of the new Bolshevik government, Peter Siminoff, was arrested, detained and deported in November 1918. His successor, Alexander Suzenko, an exiled seaman from Riga, had the "active support afforded by Norman Freeberg to the Russian Association", so the CIB file recorded:

> This man Freeberg of the *Worker* seems to have constituted himself the guide, philosopher, friend and counsellor of the Russians. So Suzenko (Soozen-ko) seeks his advice about all matters affecting the Russian community.
>
> When the Government ordered the suppression of the official journal of the Russian Association, *Knowledge and Unity*, Freeberg wrote: "It is palpable that there is some sinister and deeper reason for the suppression than appears on the surface. The *Worker* fully expects to hear in the very near future of frame-ups against some of the more prominent members of the Russian Association".[7]

But of course Norman was writing 'under cover' for *Knowledge and Unity*. "Being employed by a Labor Party paper [the *Worker*]," Freehill later explained, "I could not work openly on a pro-Bolshevik paper. I wrote the editorials of the English section using the name *Civa Rosenberg,* Suzenko's wife." In *Knowledge and Unity* of 31 December 1918, 'Civa Rosenberg' chided 'her' readers: "You have not been strong and alert in the past, comrades of ours . . . papers have been suppressed – you have not troubled to acknowledge the fact. Comrades have been gaoled – you have passed resolutions. Militant members of the working class have been deported . . . You have read the news uninterestedly and turned to the sporting page."

Norman's propaganda for the Bolsheviks at that time included an 'easy guide' to political revolution for the workers: *Socialism, What is It?: Word Pictures of Socialism in an Australian Frame.*[8] It's a title typical of his gung-ho public relations style. [See his 1959 *China – All About It*] Norman claimed that his handbook "answers all the common objections to Socialism and the queries as to what the militant proletariat will do when they overthrow the Capitalist system". No mean feat!

Norman's confidence certainly matched his convictions. In this immediate post-war period, whilst under well-documented CIB surveillance, Norman was also attempting to reform the Queensland branch of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) "by alienating it from the University". Although he did not succeed in bringing about the schism – the WEA remained within the *alma mater* – he was elected its Queensland vice-president.[9]

UNDER THE *War Precautions Act* public display of the Sinn Fein's tricolour had been outlawed in Australia since March 1918; that September the ban was extended to include the Bolshevik's red flag. These were symbolic acts of reprisal, Prime Minister Billy Hughes' revenge for the loss of the second Conscription referendum which he blamed on the Irish Catholics and the Left. Australia was polarized on the issue and its aftermath. Writing as '*Civa Rosenberg*' in *Knowledge and Unity* of 22 March 1919 – the day prior to the events history would call the Red Flag Riots – Norman stoked the mounting conflict between the pro-conscriptionist Returned Sailors, Soldiers, and Citizens Loyalty League (the RSSCLL), popularly known as 'The Loyalists' and their supporters, and the anti-conscriptionist socialists of the IWW and the URW.

The editorial expressed the anger of the Left at Queensland's Acting Labor Premier Ted Theodore's treachery in authorizing State police raids on the Russians' clubrooms and homes, and sought to motivate the Bolsheviks and their supporters:

> The Labor Party has the soul of the bourgeois democrat . . . which envies the big fellow but does not want to wipe out the system . . . Let there be

Norman Freehill and Dymphna Cusack on the cobbled streets of Prague, 1959. As guests of the Czech Writers' Union, Norman and Dymphna wintered in the countryside just outside Prague. There Dymphna dictated Heatwave in Berlin *to Norman, always her willing amanuensis.*

> agitation, ceaseless agitation. Agitate over the back fence, in your office, on the job and from the soapbox on all occasions. AGITATE, EDUCATE, ORGANIZE.[10]

If there was any one event which precipitated the Red Flag Riots it was URW comrades Suzenko and Bykov's public defiance of the banning of the Bolshevik flag by resolutely holding aloft three large Red Banners and then distributing one hundred handkerchief-sized red pennants to the assembled crowd on the Sunday afternoon of 23 March 1919. The RSSCLL 'Loyalists' mobilized. The next night, Monday 24 March, saw a veritable pogrom and this time the Russian homes, clubrooms and shops in South Brisbane were completely destroyed and looted. The following days brought dismissals, evictions and the boycott of Russian businesses: a ghastly, ugly display of "xenophobia . . . and unleashed vigilantism". From his legitimate platform on the Brisbane *Worker*, Norman Freeberg wrote: "The War is over yet the War Precautions Act still disgraces the Statute Books of Australia, still hovers the Damoclean sword above the neck of the militant proletariat, and when it expires with the effluxion of time, an equally filthy measure will be made law under another name".[11]

FORTY YEARS LATER Norman Freehill wrote to his old comrade Norman Jeffrey, reminiscing on these events, unaware that he was sharing his nostalgia with ASIO: "Were you in Brisbane at the time of the March up Queen Street? The Russians, led by Alex Suzenko carrying a red flag and the brave little crowd singing a Russian song . . . I can still sing the song today though I've never heard it since nor do I know the words".[12] He had forgotten that it was Jeffrey himself who had climbed the Moreton Bay Figtree in the Brisbane Domain to address the thousand strong rally that Sunday autumn afternoon in 1919, for which act of larrikinism Jeffrey and fourteen others received gaol sentences in the wash-up. Suzenko, of course, was 'captured' and taken to Sydney where he was incarcerated (as Simonoff had been six months earlier) in Darlinghurst Gaol before deportation on the *SS Bakara* in mid-April 1919.

IN THEIR DOCUMENTING of another incident in early January 1919, just prior to the escalation of the Red Flag conflict, the CIB file reveals the frustration of Stable and his continually thwarted security agents. On the pages of the Brisbane *Worker* Norman had re-printed a satirical piece written by H. Spencer Wood ('Woodicus'), of the Newcastle *Argus* entitled 'Bolshevism in Heaven'.[13] "One of the foulest pieces of blackguardism that ever disgraced the journalism of Australia", accused the morally outraged Brisbane *Daily Mail*. Sub-headed 'Bolshevism Has Broken Out In Heaven: God Abdicates', the offending article began, as it continued, in Monty-Pythonesque spoof style: "The Almighty has been arrested and is now being tried before the Soviet for being a despot . . . It is rumoured that Christ and Mohammet have combined forces to stir up a counter-revolution".

R.S. Ross had also reprinted the article in Melbourne and, though it seems totally ludicrous, Ross actually "served six months imprisonment therefor". However, fumed the thwarted CIB agent, as usual "Freeberg went scot free!"[14]

ON 30 OCTOBER 1920 the Communist Party of Australia was born. Records show no 'N.R. Freeberg' at the First Annual Conference on 26 March 1921, but an obviously bogus 'A.J. Shatinoff' of no address did sign on, and an 'A. Randolph' was present at many early meetings. Could 'A' stand for August? Or was it just the indefinite article?

SOLIDARITY AMONGST Australian Communist Party members in the formative years was forged by the courage and idealism of a small band of committed men and women who had experienced unjust curtailment of civil liberties. Their political resolve became a steel-willed self-righteousness which is normally the province of institutionalized, monotheist faith. Perhaps this is partly explained by the high proportion of formerly devout Roman Catholics among those committed to the Marxist-Leninist cause.

Just as solidarity and belief had sustained the early Christians, so those early Comrades maintained a fierce loyalty to each other and their shared vision of a Promised Land which would be created from the remnants of feudalism in the new Bolshevik state.

THE REAL CIVA ROSENBERG with her husband, Alex Suzenko, eventually made it back to Moscow. Suzenko, disguised as a Norwegian seaman, returned covertly to Brisbane in 1922. His temporary base was with Norman Freeberg at his desk as founding editor of *Common Cause*, the new weekly newspaper of the Miners' Federation, which was, of course: "militantly opposed to imperialism and war, strongly supported the USSR . . . international in outlook . . . and consistently advocated socialism and industrial unionism".[15]

THE CIB FILE records that Norman and Alice Freeberg changed their name to 'Freehill' by Deed Poll in 1927. Why?

By this time Norman had moved his family to Sydney, and, as he later chronicled for his daughter Peg, he had to compromise his politics with the demands of his role as breadwinner, so it was back to leading the 'double life' again: "There being no Labor *Daily* and most of the union papers being little concerned with basic politics [read Marxism] the only jobs available to Socialist-thinking journalists were in the Capitalist Press . . . I went from being Financial Editor of the one-time liberal nationalistic *Bulletin* [with his finance column *The Wildcat*] to private practice as a Financial Company Consultant, then on to Finance Editor of the Melbourne *Herald* [early 1930s] and then, for seven years, chief executive of H. Byron Moore, Day and Journeaux, the second biggest stock and share broking business in Australia." [c. 1934–1941]

Jim McGrath, Norman's son-in-law (who married Peg in 1942) confirmed this career path. Jim's memory added yet another facet to Norman's Melbourne activities, and that was with the wire service, AAP. Geoff Wills, former Seamen's Union organizer (mentored by Freehill in CPA politics since 1935) also recalled having visited Norman in the AAP offices in the mid 1930s.[16] Wills had also crewed for Norman on his beloved boat *White Wings*. Yachting had provided Norman with an entrée-card into that fraternity whose members were, by-and-large, rich bourgeoisie and businessmen. Only his inner circle knew that he'd bought *White Wings* for a song from a chap who'd gone bust in the Depression. "After all," he'd quip, "we workers also deserve our share of the perks!"

FOLLOWING HIS LOW-KEY profile throughout his Melbourne sojourn (at least there appear to be no annotations in the CIB files covering the decade) Norman Freehill re-emerged in Sydney newspaper circles in the early 1940s as the Deputy Chief of Staff on Packer's *Daily Telegraph*. The story goes that when old Sir Frank was told of Norman's Communist affiliations (and those of another staffer) he replied: "Yes, I know, and they're two of the best journalists I've got." But Norman didn't enjoy the editorship of Brian Penton, a former International Socialist who'd renounced his Spanish beret for attire more suited to Gretel Packer's dinner parties.[17] Norman's old mate J.B. Miles, General Secretary of the CPA, came to the rescue, and early in 1946 he recruited him "to take control and/or remedy the technical and journalistic problems of the Party and trade union papers which were under Party leadership or control or influence, and bring some order out of what he [J.B. Miles] described as 'relative chaos'".[18]

Norman discreetly filled this role in which he wore multiple hats – as *Tribune*'s joint Chief of Staff, the Party's propaganda and publicity chief and Marxist class and public lecturer – until mid 1949. It was the first time for nearly twenty years that he didn't have to live a 'double life'. His desk was at Marx House and there he hung his bowler hat. It was over this period that his personal life-story began to merge with Dymphna Cusack's . . . but that's another story.

J.B. MILES AND Norman Freehill had been close friends ever since the anti-conscription days in Queensland. Wherever they were in the world they never lost contact until Miles' death in 1969. Norman was at the funeral.[19] In the Depression years "when the Party had needed a Passport", Comrade Miles sent Norman overseas. When the CPA's East Sydney Branch had problems, Norman took over the chairmanship. When the Menzies Government moved to declare the Party illegal and it was deemed necessary to have the Party archives and documents in a safe place, J.B. Miles left the selection to Norman and the funds collected for the Party were also placed in his care. When the Government found its way blocked by the Constitution and was gearing up for a Referendum to outlaw Communism, the Party put an emergency plan in motion. According to Norman "the European arrangements" were placed in his hands, and Jack Hughes of the Clerks Union "took care of the rest". It is reasonable to conclude that the financial whizz Comrade Freehill was J.B. Miles' 'bagman', his courier, his undercover operative in matters of Capital.

THE BRISBANE *Sunday Mail* on 2 October 1949 ran a front-page story headlined 'REDS GET READY FOR PURGE', disclosing that Special Investigators believed the CPA was liquidating its assets and going underground, reporting both an 8 July 1949 raid on Marx House and that Rupert Lockwood, Associate Editor of the *Tribune*, and Norman Freehill, Chief of Staff and party pamphleteer, had left for Europe in recent months.

When Norman landed in London on 3 September 1949 (Dymphna had arrived in June) he made immediate contact with the diplomatic representatives of the Socialist countries. He had all the bona fides he needed, and, with Lady Jessie Street's introductions, doors opened quickly. He set off almost immediately on a Soviet Friendship tour of the UK with a visiting Russian delegation, and, with Jessie, he was a delegate to the 1949 Dutch Peace Congress in Amsterdam, and in October 1950, to the Second World Peace Congress in Warsaw. Too ill to make Warsaw, Dymphna orchestrated the successful campaign against the Australian Government's attempts to impound passports and deny visas to her fellow Australians who did. In October 1951 she was sufficiently recovered to help mobilize the British arm of the Authors' World Peace Appeal, part of the international nuclear disarmament movement.

NORMAN'S 'DOUBLE IDENTITY' over four decades had worked to keep him one step and more ahead of those who would thwart his plans to save the world from Capitalist greed and make it a better, fairer place. In 1949 the Commonwealth Security operatives didn't realize that the Norman Freeberg of the old 'Z' files was none other than the dapperly dressed, well-spoken Norman Randolph Freehill whom they'd just trailed to London – at least not until a retired member of Brisbane's 'gumshoe brigade' read that October 1949 headline in the *Sunday Mail*. The penny dropped and he wrote to Canberra to bring his new ASIO colleagues up to speed. Signing himself only "Late Commonwealth Investigation Branch, Brisbane" he wrote: "Please note . . . the Norman Freehill, Chief of Staff *Tribune* etc is, I believe, identical with a person I knew years ago under the name of Norman Freeberg – former sub-editor of the Brisbane *Worker*, later editor of *Common Cause*, the miners' official organ, later again finance writer for *Smith's Weekly*. The above person changed his name to Freehill by Letters Patent."

Perhaps this was the same bedevilled bloke who'd burned with frustrated zeal as he tried to pin down the ever-elusive Norman when he was editor of the *Worker* and outwitting the chief censor at every turn, or when he was writing inflammatory editorials as 'Civa Rosenberg' for *Knowledge and Unity*, or worse still when he got away scot-free with printing "one of the foulest pieces of blackguardism that ever disgraced journalism in Australia" – 'Bolshevism Has Broken Out In Heaven'.

After all – as the pages of *overland* have evidenced in recent years – the old Cold War Warriors' agendas die mighty hard.

ENDNOTES

1. Biographical data on the Fribergs from a four-page document typed by Norman Freehill undated, and annotated 'Peg, a rough biography. N' provided to me by Jim McGrath, Norman's son-in-law and from many interviews with Jim since 1990 to his death in December 1999. Genealogy from Births Index, Registry Office, 1889–1918. Confirmation of the original Swedish patronymic from Diane Eklund-Abolins, translator, Swedish Embassy. Telecon 9 September 1996. Australian Socialist League data from Edgar Ross *A History of the Miners' Federation of Australia*. The Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation, 1970. 1984

Reprint Macarthur Press, Parramatta, p. 159.

2. IWW platform from Ross p. 160; Norman Freehill's career from 'Peg, a rough biography. N' given to me by Jim McGrath, 1990. Interview Rupert Lockwood/ Marilla North at St Albans, 4 August 1991. Tapes held
3. 'Peg, a rough biography. N'
4. 'Self Defence Corps' etc in a Copy of letter from Norman Freehill to Norman Jeffrey, from Peking, dated 25 June 1958. In ASIO file AA 6119/83 /1424.f.86; Censor's comments dated 28 August 1922, Melbourne, ibid, f. 89.
5. 'Peg, a rough biography. N' At that stage there co-existed both the IWW, the International Workers of the World, and the IIW, the International Industrial Workers which was an even more radical and militant organization and gave rise to the One Big Union Propaganda League – the OBUPL. See *The Red Flag Riots: A Study In Intolerance*, Raymond Evans, UQP, 1988, p. 89.
6. Seergeev etc *The Red Flag Riots* p. 29; Freehill's role 'Peg, a rough biography. N.'
7. Compiled Melbourne August 28, 1922. With 1959 Memorandum following intercept of Norman Freehill's letter to Norman Jeffrey from Peking, 19 August 1958. ASIO Series A6119/83, Item 1424, ff. 87–90.
8. Norman R. Freeberg, *Socialism What is It?: Word Pictures of Socialism in an Australian Frame*, published Brisbane by Norman Freeberg: The *Worker* Newspaper,1919, 141 pp.
9. Simonoff etc., *The Red Flag Riots*, pp. 79–81; Freeberg's role from 'Peg, a rough biography. N' and ASIO file AA6119/83/Item 1424, f. 89.
10. Norman Freehill's role from 'Peg, a rough biography. N'; *The Red Flag Riots* on Ryan's regime, p. 82, Ted Theodore etc., p. 102 and *Knowledge & Unity*, p. 110.
11. Evans op. cit.
12. Norman Freehill's ASIO File AA 6119/83, Item 1424, f. 89
13. *The Newcastle Argus & District Advertiser* became *The Toiler* from vol. 1 no.1 in 1920. The latter is held in the Victorian State Library. The former appears to exist in only one remaining copy, 15 July 1916, held in the NSW Mitchell Library. Source: *Newspapers In Australian Libraries* & Mitchell Readers' Reference.
14. Evans op. cit. and in the *Worker*, AA 6119/83/Item 1424, f. 88; 'Bolshevism in Heaven' from Evans, p. 94 and AA 6119/1424/f.88; corroborated from R.S. Ross.
15. Third International from W.J. Brown, *The Communist Movement And Australia*, p. 23. Evans, *The Red Flag Riots*, p. 207; Comintern records ML MSS 5575. Minutes; Freeberg and the *Common Cause* from Edgar Ross, *A History of the Miners' Federation of Australia*, pp. 310–312.
16. 'Peg, a rough biography. N', p. 3; Jim McGrath to Marilla North, January 1990 and subsequent conversations to December 1999; Geoff Wills to Marilla North Tape and Telecon 5/1995; Rowan Cahill's *Biographical Notes on Rupert Lockwood* for *Labor Biography* copy to Marilla North, August 1996 and Rupert Lockwood interview with Marilla North at St Albans, 4 August 1991. Interview with Geoff Wills/ Marilla North, 1 May 1998. Interviews with Len Fox/ Marilla North, various, 1991–2000.
17. David McNicoll to Marilla North, interview at Consolidated Press 16 January 1990.
18. 'Peg, a rough biography. N'.
19. Dymphna Cusack's Diary, 21 May 1969, NLA MS: 4621, box 28, f. 10.

Marilla North is a daughter of Newcastle, NSW, and of Southern Steel. *She has been working on the life of Dymphna Cusack (and Norman Freehill) since 1989, and on Florence James' story for almost a decade before that. The first of the intended four-book outcome of that research,* Yarn Spinners – a story in Letters between Dymphna Cusack, Miles Franklin and Florence James *will be published by UQP in March 2001.*

Passage for the blind

Stuart Luijerink

"IN MY NEXT LIFE I'm going to be a fisherman and live on the outskirts of a small village," Thiru remarks darkly. "I'll cast my net upon a quiet lagoon, not so far back from the open sea."

"The rickshaw boy has worried them to the side of the road," Ratha's voice reasserts itself through the still air, "but he has lost all momentum and now he literally faces an uphill battle to get moving again where the street rises slightly."

The rising din of tuk-tuk horns spiced with the tinkle of bicycle bells forces a momentary pause in Ratha's commentary. Thiru can smell the sweet incense of an Indian cigarette winding about him.

"Must you smoke in this wretched heat?" he snaps. He can feel the vibrations of Ratha shifting his weight upon the low, rooftop wall. Perhaps Ratha is about to depart . . . , sometimes he just walks off . . .

There is that dull sound of his cigarette being stubbed out. He's getting up.

Thiru sits petulantly.

"Come on, let's make a start, you'll only stew up here."

The noise of the traffic argues for motion. At least the air will be stirred about down there on the street, whilst up here he will be left with a dreadful silence.

He gets to his feet, finding the line of his direction from the lie of the low wall at his knees and shaking the guiding fingers from his elbow. He steps forward, waiting for the floor to fall away, then stabs brusquely at the stairs with the feelers of his feet, testing Ratha out in the rapidity of his descent.

"It said in the paper today," that voice comes, lagging slightly behind, "that we have developed the technical and engineering sophistication to be a dominant player in the satellite industry."

That's sent him scuttling, Thiru thinks with satisfaction as he reaches the doorway well in advance of his sighted companion. The commotion from the impending traffic ignites within him a respectful trepidation however, easing his pace in his emergence upon the hard-trodden dust.

He can already feel the sweat begin to settle on his brow.

Those thin, bony fingers are at his elbow once again, leading him awkwardly to the left.

"Not that way," he objects, detaching himself from that grasp and wheeling himself in the other direction.

The tyre of a bicycle jabs into his leg. Someone is shouting but he pushes on determinedly, taking his bearings from that rich odour of fresh dung which promises the relative safety of browsing cattle upon the roadside.

"The river lies in the opposite direction Thiru," Ratha's smoky voice sounds at his side and he is drawn by the arm, wide of this island of slightly shifting cowhide. "There's nothing up here but congestion. Two trucks are trying to squeeze past a bullock cart full of vegetables and they're only jamming each other in. You're not going to find your way on your own up here."

The cacophony of horns and human cries reveal to Thiru the lie of the road.

"Do you think I can't smell the river in this weather? Do you think I can't feel it bearing down upon us? I'm crossing over here," he retorts, then waits with his sightless anticipation as the grasp at his elbow sets them sideways into the traffic. The hard-edged metal carriages upon the motorbikes and the wooden framed carts press against him. It is easier with Ratha, but he doesn't need Ratha. He doesn't need someone to lead him forward the way Ratha needs to have someone following in his wake.

Suddenly he collides with the softness of a woman, but she has hurried off before he has a chance to . . . before he can . . . Here is a thickening tangle of pedestrians marking an impending mass along the barely flowing traffic.

These are the worst moments, second guessing the idiosyncratic lurchings of impatient passers-by, one after another. He puts his trust in those clutching fingers at his elbow and feels himself being threaded through this crush.

It is a relief to emerge into a cooler corridor of air and to be welcomed by the wafting scents of coriander and chi. It's about to rain, he is thinking. The atmosphere feels so ripe for it.

"Why are we stopping?" Thiru asks warily, sensing that Ratha is about to light up another wretched cigarette.

"A car is attempting to move up the street which is barely wide enough for all the hawkers' stalls and the cattle browsing amidst the refuse, as it is."

Thiru can hear the blaring of a horn.

"There should be a law forbidding cars in streets which are not wider than four oxen shoulder to shoulder," he asserts as he waits for the pressure at his elbow to resume with their forward passage.

"The cars are not the problem," Ratha retorts, "do you suppose they allow the streets to be used in such a fashion in other countries?"

"It is not for us to copy the situations of other countries," Thiru says haughtily, impatient to move forward and discover if he is on the street he suspects.

"Yes we should," Ratha replies adamantly, "otherwise we only end up lowering our own defences."

Thiru suspects he is holding them back for an unnecessarily long time just to force his point.

"What nonsense," he mutters, shaking his elbow free and moving tentatively toward the intermittent sound of that blaring horn. The hard-edged corner of a cart blocks at his progress stubbornly and as he moves to the right he finds himself hemmed in by a bicycle wheel. Determined not to be stuck here by Ratha, he works his way behind it, but stops with a dignified tilt of his chin as the unmistakable smell of human faeces warns him back. He considers casting his foot forward and to one side, veering on toward the sound of the impatient car . . . No. He waits for the bicycle wheel to edge forwards, breathing as slightly as possible as he stands and feeling Ratha's eyes upon his back.

He will not move from here until that wheel rolls on. In any event, the report of the protesting horn is losing its urgency as it approaches. The bicycle wheel is beginning to press back upon him and the general mass of objects which make up the immediate traffic are seemingly condensing in a slow regressive wave, forcing his thigh into some metal extrusion from the vehicle behind. The vibration of the passing car is rioting through the road at his feet as the crush intensifies. I only hope that Ratha is stuck in a worse position, he thinks to himself. The thought that he may be caught up in some obscure pocket of congestion, whilst Ratha and the great majority flow forward in an easy passage, riddles him with a sense of injury. After all, he has yet to prove to himself that this was the route he had chosen, as it is all too easy for Ratha to manipulate his intentions simply by manufacturing illusions as to where the way was open and where it was blocked.

Here is the awaited advance, the niggling bicycle wheel rolling away, tuk-tuk engines spluttering and the fumes banking up precipitously in the humidity.

It will be a lonely journey if Ratha has gone on ahead, he reflects, not without regret. The best course will be to skirt the hawkers' stalls for the moment and so he moves a little way forward, taking his line

from the sounds and sensations of the hastening flow, then veers to the side tentatively.

"Thiru," comes that throaty appeal, "this way will only recongest." There are those fingers at his elbow, persuading him from his chosen course. He shakes them off, not wishing to concede the original point.

"A fisherman on a quiet lagoon," he murmurs, making a pretext of wiping the sweat from his brow with the top of his sleeve.

Beyond the hawkers there is space to walk without bumping into the passing chaos. Now that he has come this far and found the streetscape to be as he anticipated, he knows that a tiny row of shops lies before him. He listens intently, through the white noise of the traffic, to pick out the steady sound of sweeping and fixes his direction upon it. There is a *rhythmic grace in the sound, which alludes to a cer*tain femininity.

The corners of his mouth curl up into the body of his cheeks.

The rhythm of the sweeping is broken momentarily and then resumes. It will annoy Ratha to stop, to lose all momentum, and to speak to a cleaning woman. Thiru can feel him held back by a kind of gravity which runs between them, standing at the margin patiently until this distraction is dispensed with. Ratha and I are not so much bound up by camaraderie, as pressed together by a universal alienation, Thiru muses. "How can you be sweeping in this humidity," he calls, "I'm sure it is about to rain heavily."

Here is a pause in the sweeping once more. "It has been about to rain for a week," the reply comes wistfully.

There is something about this voice which always holds him for as long as he can keep her attention, but she is always so quick to resume her work.

"What are you wearing?" he asks, and reaches out before him to make some contact with her. Barely has he touched the fabric of a dress when his hand is smacked sharply to the side and the air stirs about him as the sound of sweeping reasserts itself between them.

"Walk with me as far as the river," he calls directly, the warmth that had emanated from her flesh in that brief moment, now running through him.

"The river lies the other way," her voice comes back without patience.

The manner with which that sweeping persists informs him that he must leave his petition for another day. He waits for a moment, just to let his presence settle in her mind.

"There's no point in going on in this direction," Ratha's voice prompts him from behind. Those fingers are gently pulling at his elbow, testing his resistance to being turned around.

He steps forward, leaving Ratha the option of coming with him or letting go.

"What else lies up here that's worth such a tour?" *Ratha calls, but does not let go of his grasp and insists* at least on taking them further into the noise of the traffic.

Something moves slowly ahead, emitting a trundling sound, like large wheels turning on the hard earth. It leaves a convenient clearway in its wake and, every so often, Thiru hears someone call out in broken-off exclamations, as if to a beast of burden.

"There is a new building up on the left," Ratha remarks. "It looks like the skeleton of a hanging jungle with its scaffolding of bamboo. The motorcycle mechanics have already set up a crowd of operations amidst the rubble at its base."

"And those chattering women? Are they young?" Thiru asks, drawing towards them.

"Either they are girls with supple skin and lifted chins, or sunken-eyed grandmothers. I'll decide once we're well past them," comes the reply.

"Ha!" laughs Thiru with glee, "I smell jasmine in their hair."

"Hmmm," his friend concedes, steering him back to their facile passage behind the slow-moving cart which is slowing further as the ground begins to rise beneath their feet.

"We'll go left," Ratha advises, "otherwise we'll end up scaling this hill and not even get as far as the river."

Thiru is not responding to the pressure at his elbow, pushing on determinedly. He feels Ratha come to a dead stop beside him.

"I'm not going on like this in the heat," Ratha intones with a dry impatience.

The two stand in a bargaining silence, despite all the noises of the street and the now diminishing trundle of those cartwheels.

Thiru turns directly to the point where he deems his companion to stand. "I'm a good man," he mutters intently.

"Yes Thiru, you're a good man," he hears his friend reply without question.

"I'm a good man," he repeats softly, as he nods and sets off again, against the rising earth.

There is every chance that in a moment he will hear Ratha's voice at his side once again and feel that grasp upon his elbow. Ratha is a relenting soul, especially when he faces the prospect of going about by himself.

It's difficult to negotiate this hill when the street is so uneven.

Not far behind, a truck . . . bus? . . . is crashing down through its gears. It blasts at everything before it . . . or perhaps simply at him . . . He veers to the side, but there are streams of people hurrying in a cross-current amidst the traffic . . . The sound of the oncoming truck – it must be a truck – is getting intimidatingly close, but there's no way forward . . . It will have to take this into account. It will have to forgo all the momentum it has gathered for its assault on the hill. That deep, blasting horn must be directed at everything, because he can now press his hand directly upon that cart before him and it is not moving. And there is some metallic panel to the other side – it's not moving either. Nothing is moving . . . A set of handlebars presses up from behind into the knob of his spine.

The chorus of protest is rising.

Surely the other pedestrians are finding their way through all this, he muses, but then something else pervades his senses, something even more immediate than the traffic pressing hard all about him.

The air is relenting, its thick humidity easing back.

Here is the first tiny explosion of cool, life-giving moisture bursting against his forehead. Now another at his arm, and another running down his neck, as the rain breaks. The pattering sound of the shower runs down the street, overriding the chorus of horns and cries. He feels the heat drawn from his core and absorbed into the steaming air, as all the leafy smells and traffic fumes mix together with a doubled pungency.

He breathes a deep draught of the transforming air.

The traffic isn't moving, in fact – if anything – the jam is intensifying, especially behind, so many heavy horns sounding. It's impossible to move – forward, backwards, sideways. He raises his face to the heavens, feeling the fat, ripe raindrops strike his chin and run. He raises his arms and opens his mouth, catching the drops in his palms and on his tongue. Already there are splashing sounds competing with the fury of the knotted traffic and the drumming of the wonderfully cool rain. There is barely room enough for him to stand upright in the gathering crush of impatient vehicles, but he forces his hips about and bends down to rake at the running waters with his fingers.

"Not so far back from the sea," he mutters, as he watches himself somewhere ahead, casting his net upon a quiet lagoon.

Monsoon

Sharon Shelley

I ONCE KNEW this woman who followed the monsoon's cycle instead of her own. She said she could conceive on the day of the first rains and tracked its journey, velocity, force and the estimated time it would arrive at her village. And when the day came for the monsoon to break its swollen belly, she took off her sari and stood naked outside the back of her hut letting the rains and the wind have their way with her. She was so enraptured that she entered a trance that only she and the monsoon could tell you about. But her husband would tell you that it was him that had his way with her as he too joined her at the back of the hut. It is this part she doesn't remember, but isn't averse to the thought of.

She conceived every time. She had twelve babies before an early menopause planted its own contraception but this prevented them none in trying. She had four boys and eight girls, though the father of the children quietly killed four of the daughters at birth as he knew they could not support them or their future dowry. She mourned for the lost children and while her husband held her he reminded her that there was only three months to the next monsoon and this time perhaps they would have another son. He prayed that lightning would flash during their intercourse, believing that this electrical charge represented the gods' intention to create a male child. Thunder on the other hand represented the rumbling mood of a woman.

OUT OF THE EIGHT remaining children, two died of measles, one of whooping cough, one of an asthma attack and the youngest son of AIDS – though it wasn't known at the time that this was his affliction. Neither did they know that their son's uncle also liked the monsoon, although his target was not his wife but young boys. So three children remained. One girl, two boys. The only constant to the mother appeared to be the annual arrival of the monsoon and with it her intimate ritual.

When the children were in their teens, entering an earlier adulthood than most, the weather started to change. The arrival of the monsoon to the village became later in its tropical itinerary. Sometimes it sent a transparent shower as its diplomat instead of itself and when this happened, rice fields failed to germinate and whole communities prepared for an unchosen fast. Farmers, in disbelief that the rains had forgotten them and believing that the gods must be testing their faith, stayed squatting at the edge of their fields waiting. Some died squatting, rolling backwards in a half somersault when rigor-mortis changed their balanced posture.

These erratic cycles affected the monsoon-family. It was the year the monsoon forgot to arrive at all, that differences appeared within the living three children; differences that changed their lives. To understand these changes, you first have to fathom a usual day within their home. Sections of each day were ordered, by this I mean that tasks were done at approximately a similar time daily and done with a particular awareness. And just like mathematicians are known to find a sense of depth and meaning behind their formulas, or poets exclaim huge universal chasms between their counted syllables and rhythm – this couple passed on the tradition of finding a

deeper resonance within a task. The world behind the task. The depth behind the order. The parents taught their children the possibilities within their actions. For example, washing one's body was a means of communicating with the cleansing wisdom of water; acknowledging the relationship between water and the body, the body and water. Eating a meal was a prayer between life grown, life eaten and the life it reproduced within the body: life, death and life again. Tasks were done with care, time being something that was produced for such a purpose. Everything was related to everything else. The four elements – water, earth, air and heat – interacted to create and sustain life. If you can perceive the power of this tradition; let me now tell you what happened to this family the season the monsoon didn't arrive.

EACH MORNING during the monsoon season, the eldest daughter awoke and instinctively listened for the sound of the wind or felt for the rain's tears upon her bedding. There was neither. After several weeks, she became aware of something within her head that grew with each passing day that the monsoon was absent. It was a list. The morning's tasks were itemized inside her head. This list was heavy and she experienced her first headache as it sat static within her mind. She became rebellious to the expectation that she would do these tasks. She put off getting out of bed, even though she shared the room with her siblings and parents who were stirring and moving over her with their usual awakening. Her mother, for the first time since her daughter was a young child, needed to approach her to remind her that it was time to perform the aculum. Inspired by the unconscious and the gods, an aculum was a pattern the woman and her daughter drew together on the hearth of their home. It was the first task of the day. A wake-up call to the deity of the house, a welcoming gesture, an offering of grateful acquiescence.

Hurry, her mother had said. *It will bring us misfortune to do this begrudgingly.* The daughter had pulled herself out of bed with resistance and an unusual feeling of resentment. It was small and tight like a wooden chest and inside this chest her daily tasks had turned to chores. She did the aculum with her mother, satisfied at least that this would rid her of the first item on the list. She was eager for the chore to be finished so that she could get on to the next. In doing this she thought her mind would open a little and allow her to breathe more than the shallow breaths she was feeling.

They carried water up from the well so the family could wash and the daughter complained that the water was heavier than usual. She undressed quickly. Washed with an automated sequence and dried her body before the skin had time to feel its tactile pleasure. She brushed her hair with force and winced with displeasure. Her mother asked her to assist her in tying her hair; while doing so the daughter noticed that her mother's hair appeared lifeless like a horse's tail, when only yesterday she had thought it leapt with the vitality of black eels.

Preparing food was fast. Eating was swift. She attempted mouthfuls on top of mouthfuls allowing little time for separate swallows. She finished before she had time to enjoy it and feeling cheated asked for more even though there was none. By this time her mother, who observed everything, wondered if her daughter had become possessed or if they had inadvertently insulted the gods. She made a note to talk to her husband if her daughter continued with her hurried behaviour. Three days later, under the worn sheet that covered them, she whispered her concerns. He listened to her, with an expression of ache on his face, and when she had finished he said he too had a story to tell.

HE SAID THAT their eldest son had refused to practice puja with him for three days now. Puja was a prayer ritual that they did together every morning. It represented a sacred act; an offering to the gods. He said that their son had been avoiding him and then, when confronted, had spoken of an overwhelming sense of disbelief. He no longer was able to ac-

knowledge or sense the divine in any action, aroma, sight or taste. Their son was continually searching for meaning in what they did, but found none.

The father looked around under the sheet that lay over his wife and himself, to check for eavesdropping spirits. Sensing none, he continued. He said their son thought that if he had more money, if he was rich and could do anything he wanted, then perhaps he could find happiness. And then with that happiness the meaning he was searching for. He felt little purpose in anything to do with their everyday life and like his sister, who made lists in her head, he had lost the ability to experience life. The parents held each other after their discussion and the husband suggested that perhaps this was what was needed to balance their children's frenzied conception – that it may balance their frenzied minds. She moved on top of him but both missed the wildness of the wind, the erotic moisture of the rain and the rhythm of her hypnotized body.

MEANWHILE, at a city forty days' walk away, a group of men and women gathered in secret. They were scientists and meteorology experts, who held in their soft hands rolled-up weather charts and world maps with dates, times, places and statistics passionately scribbled in the margins. They had been following a phenomenon on these charts. They followed its changes in direction like that of a cyclone or the mass movements of a plague of rodents. They had watched it start in the west and then slowly move across the continents.

Sociologists joined the team of watchers and as they compared notes, it became obvious that the movements of the phenomenon coincided with other societal changes such as immense unease, recurring depression and the need for large advertising billboards. Their findings were significant. This was a pattern that would determine the events of the twenty-first century. The study had begun fifty years ago by a nominal few, but now its status had grown to warrant many workers. All data and findings had been kept secret for fear of causing unfounded panic.

The catalyst for further action was the fact of El Nino – which presented as weird weather changes all over the world. And this year the life-giving monsoon had become lost, perhaps taken a ticket to ride some other low pressure front. Perhaps it had ventured out to be part of the universe that their instruments couldn't reach? Perhaps it was lost in uncharted air. Whatever the reason, the plague which scientists from the west called *progress* and those from the east called *desire,* had managed to take its place and travel to uncharted landscapes it had never been before. As more and more symptoms appeared within the people, eastern physicians identified a pattern. They said it appeared that those conceived during the first day of the monsoon were most susceptible to *desire*'s effects. They didn't know why. They suggested that conception during the passionate arrival of the monsoon had set a relationship to the elements that was not explainable by instruments. It leant on the cusp of the divine and with the absence of rains, an empty crevice laid within them. A crevice that wept with craving.

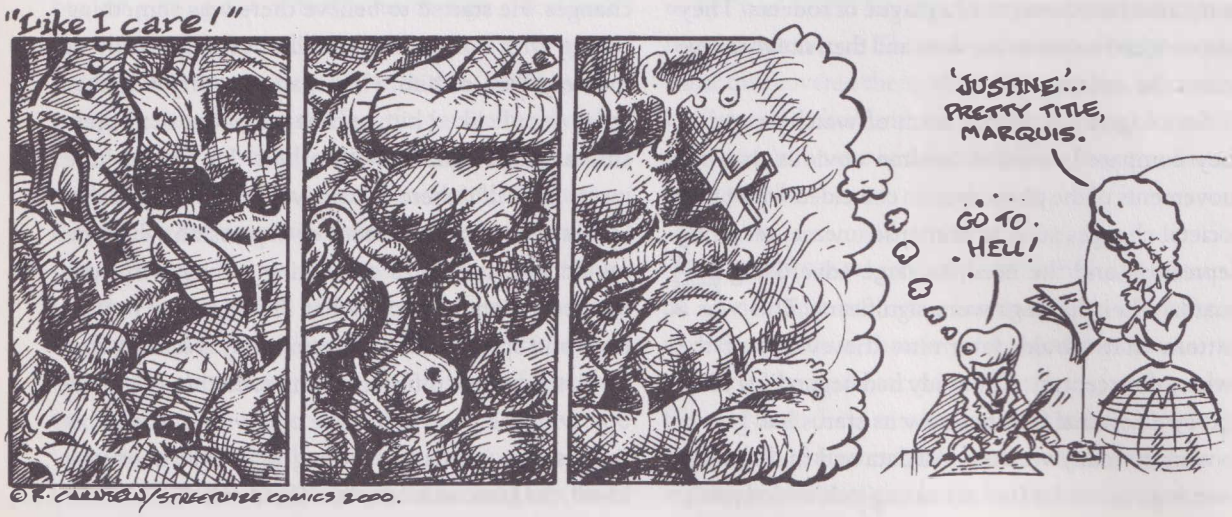
AND SO LET'S GO BACK to the monsoon-family; the three children having been conceived in the tantric pulses of rain, were the first to feel the effects of the monsoon's absence and the *desire* that had replaced it.

The youngest son was next to experience the changes. He started to believe there was something wrong with him, not physically but intrinsically at the very core of him. He began to worry whether other people liked him and hence under such pressure avoided contact with others. He would hide inside himself if there was no way to hide physically. He started to have episodes of depression where he would say there was something wrong with him but he didn't quite know what. He wanted to be well liked and spent whole afternoons daydreaming that he was someone different doing something else: the boy with the good voice, the one with music in his fingers, the handsome young man that everyone loved, the famous movie-star. If only all this was true

– ah, then he would be happy. He became unusually dim-witted and failed to notice the meaning of his own dreams or that contained in waking life. He needed to be told everything and became sluggish in energy which fed well in his depressed mind. Meanwhile his parents now felt that they no longer had time to appreciate life as most of their energy was dedicated to caring for their strange children.

Now these were simple folk. They did what they did because they felt it the only way of assuring their children the ability to once again experience life. They felt that if this ability was regained there would be no more talk of finding this so-called meaning. Yes, simple folk. Some may say ignorant, perhaps uneducated. Some said wise. The woman and her husband believed that their sacrifice would bring new life. You have to have death in order to have life. That each generation has to die in order that the next generation can come into its own spiritual space. They felt that something drastic needed to be done to save their children from a life of aimless searching. They needed to make the gods take notice. So when the next year arrived and they once again waited for the monsoon, they prepared for their death. It was four weeks late and its force halved but the monsoon did arrive and as she had always done, the mother stood out at the back of her hut and rocked her body to its tune. Her husband stood behind her and as he came within her, he slit her throat with a sharp and blessed blade. He then lay down beside her and used the same blade on himself. They held hands under the pitted rain and gladly bled to death. They severed their lives believing that it would sever their children's static minds.

And the scientists? They called in so-called western experts to assist in interpreting their findings. These experts urged the eastern thinkers to analyze their data another way. They said to see *progress*' effects not as a spiritual disability but as an opportunity for countries to develop competitive economies. It brought new income to poor governments. Trade and business would blossom to cater for new and obscure needs. Pharmaceuticals would evolve to keep depression manageable. It could be the redeeming of their culture, rather than the decline. Although the scientists were not quite convinced, the governments were. And so they rolled up the charts and maps they had originally arrived with and made their way home.



The Stance

Like any good poem,
creation myths make the usual
storage house.
Replete with sensory detail
open to interpretation.

The rainbow serpent, the dream
in the head of Brahma.
Seven days of creation, or theories
of an expanding or exploded Universe.
You've decided all art's reducible
to a line in a catalogue, or
at most, to ten basic points.

To maintain that
the source of art is actually
some instinct, possibly
even spiritual, someone insists
on naming his theory Pig's Arse.
It becomes him, as
parcelled up in an old suit
and fashionable tie, he
fronts those searing footlights.

My cat, an idiot savant, just
strong images and resonant lines,
maintains her own content. Aware
that roles can reverse, I crave
some faith in numbered lists
or something more exotic
to sharpen the winter evening –
a dark Cypriot port, supposedly
the wine of the Crusaders.

And I watch, while you
complicate your own aesthetic.
Dressed like a cowboy
when the Beats are coming back,
playing to the gallery
minus the price tag.
Your wildly beautiful novel
about stylish lust.

How difficult and dangerous,
that the cosmic condenses so
easily into the particular;
your fictional characters
locked in an all-absorbing
emotional bond, they
swan it around overseas
practising fragments
of an entirely different dialect.

Dîpti Saravanamuttu

Loose Water At Longnose

Yet from the rivercat the sound of a man
half-saxophone half widgen
while the pages from every book you have ever
written float down from the stars
a school of flatfish nosing the illuminated air
for a bottom that is simply not there
This is the tide just out from Long Nose Point
where the shags and black plastic
garbage bags remind us that the eye
perceiving alters all, country singers are splitting tongues
making up beach worms for monkfish
as the bottom boils up in the wake of a tug
butting a letter into place, K for kindness,
in the long time it has taken us to prepare well
for the last fishing trip; the nub
of Johnny Goodal's 'A Silver Boot for Huidobro'
tells us we are due to spin out
but we are redeemed by our understanding of work
as we tip the half-man
half-instrument so that he will open a vein
and feed the need to continue writing poetry
beyond getting dates, new shoes, clothes
and experimental homing pigeons
The riverine smell of soap and diesel blocks out the perfume
of the honeysuckle and jasmine hedges of Lousia Road.

Robert Adamson

. . . there was a thing had eaten out the cogs of the night.
God was supped on a horn stew when the new moon
split the midnight, & an albino's kung-fu dream

slid into the lightshaft, kicking angels. Parts of a calendar
went missing. The dead began to murmur. On the
six hundredth & something floor, the Ideas Council

was woken. Fingerbones twitched at the hands
of a gas-powered clock, wiped sleep & snot from
rheumy, sunken false-teethed faces. This was

something new. This was, definitely, something new
to the stone caravan, parked & still in the vacant
carpark galaxy. Shade had entered the dark, blind world . . .

Dan Disney

End Game (Chess players, Bondi Pavilion)

for Pam Brown

As loss appears so does gain; he looks up from the board
at hot waxed beachside traffic
queuing motorised investments, blitzkrieg
on cruise control, no logic without losers.
Take that away: what's left? 64 squares
of black and white, seagull droppings,
vodka picnics. Life's inspiration combinations,
shifting tokens round, bunkered down in National Heritage.
Wives maintain positional stability,
Flawless granddaughters head upstairs
cat-walk the Seagull Room, shape up
with Feldenkreis, books on their heads.

A favoured opening, then the other guy's simple gambit
invites a see-what-happens response.
His Karo-Cann varied slightly, more European,
dandyish for a scorching day like this.
The middle game, as usual, less than neat:
white bishop, on good form
pins black queen behind a colonnade of pawns.
The end game's down to two apiece.
Black's still in it, but white's got rooks
to run amok and black runs down the clock.

Fuzzy logic, sacrifice and pain: the perfect trap
defines escape.
But who really understands the *en passant*?
IBM said to a broken Kasparov:
Your King is dead young man. Well done.
Quaint and ruthless in all its clunky grammar
before its humming program goes to sleep.
He sets those pieces up again,
before its humming program goes to sleep.
He sets those pieces up again,
before the century falls apart.
Spare nothing troops! You know the rules!

Adam Aitken

CHILDHOOD MADNESS, THE LADYBIRD

initially i thought i may have been a ladybird, the house of the self is on fire & i am fleeing it, rising up in the smoke, the grey heat scorching my wings, once up in the air i looked through my crystalline eyes & there was nothing to grasp onto, nothing to learn from although my mind was processing information at the speed of light, so i processed wind & space, gradually my learning process slowed down to accommodate the wind that entered it & a light came to fill in the space that was left by the absence of love, i had nothing to learn from but god, if someone doesn't come soon i will go mad if someone doesn't come soon, i went mad & found that madness was something left to hold onto, but i am too big to lift off the ground & have recently counted my legs & felt my back for wings, i have tried to attract the attention of other bugs & birds with my volcanic colouring, coming up with nothing, except the fly away world of insects & more blue sky expansiveness, finally i have come down to land, i do not mind that i am not the bug, it was merely representative of how i felt inside, the passion of its colours, the drama of its lift-off & the panic of the tiny fire from somewhere beneath it, i seem to reflect upon those things that represent me, including the mystery which is what i have yet to learn about myself, i attach quickly & instinctively, set about processing emotions like a moth navigates the night as a fat caterpillar will process the summer into its body turning a brilliant pulpy green, i feed on backyards in search of these tiny relationships, like a garden spider, chewing up the experience, this could be seen as predatory but i am an emerging dawn, dreamy & simply aware of my own pale light, i have been looking into water & although i see myself, it seems as if i am looking at another, is she me? then i know she is, but what does it mean? what does madness feel like? & how do i recognise it? is it the place to drift into beyond torture & what can be endured? when the mind is stretched like an overcooked noodle into absurdity & the heart is crushed, when you are standing on the outskirts & looking into that expansion of distance, that moves towards you like a soft & treacherous tide, that queer even water that never reaches the base of your shoe, like a train pulling out past another train at a station of childhood, you don't know whether you are moving past it or it is moving past you, you are being thrown a lifejacket but it keeps falling short, there are watery stories between you & the high ground where it appears the world is standing with their backs turned, but someone up there is hating you or something under water like a shark will rip your feet off, your legs fall out from beneath you & then madness is crashed upon like a soft mattress behind a door, it is a derelict comfort, to fall into the cinder of madness, my face buried in the mothball poverty of an old coat, into the snoring, farting & rolled over back of a one night stand, not what you want but better than nothing, when a child goes mad what does it mean? they may sit & stare at green, when anything green enters the room the eyes of the mad green child will follow it all about the place, they may develop an attachment to a plant & if it is taken away the long sulking will start, the child's eyes may have developed a green hue in preparation for photosynthesis, they may simply wilt into paleness & become watery in appearance, or they may develop an obsession with trains, becoming a train, logging through the world with steam shifting from the mouth, that mechanical thrusting forwards like a hard metal or a fire faced engine fuelled from the hell inside, without blinking, with the temperament of a train with kneebones clanking together, thundering along the tracks to a shaky adolescence, i myself jumped into the skipping rope that was turning, i sang 'over the rainbow, over the sea' & 'the cat's got the measles' songs to myself, but because there was no one around they came out garbled & crude & unlike the language of a child, the messages were not getting through, soon i found that the rope was lying on the ground & that no one had been holding either end, i was jumping up & down on the hairy coils & calling out like a bird would call, with the vibration of its parents' feet upon the nest at feeding time, the parent birds that had all the long day searched the forest & snapped at wings in mid air or stilled into terror on the silent bark, but nothing came back, no message from any direction to give any indication of what i had been doing & having no image, no understanding of myself, i walked the big time of my childhood invisible, i caught a glimpse of it in the air like a grey cloud flying away, my tears dropped in the dirt like rain, i waited & waited but no one came, i do not know who i am, initially i thought i may have been a ladybird

Coral Hull

Lime and Coriander

Stone walls screen the Temple of Literature from
pavement-haircuts sweets rubber gloves incense
lottery tickets mops balloons a road accident
Entering grand Temple gates where for centuries
women's feet were forbidden to cross the threshold
we pass by the false green of cultivated lawn
hedges twisted to shape deer roosters wreaths
and I say *Was it 1946 that Vietnam's first Constitution*
guaranteed equal rights to women and you say
Once as a child I came in here there was nothing
my mother worked in a factory nearby

At the concrete square of lily pond
flat green pads floating on thick green soup
I'm thinking that last week I meant to visit Monet's
garden palette at Givemy but couldn't make it
You touch my arm *Look the lovely flowers sleep*
đẹp quá nhỉ? Your voice lightens viscous air
the solid green tank the pink flowers on your blouse
Lovely I agree *U đẹp thật đẹp thật* and from
the Well of Heavenly Clarity we walk arm in arm
through the Gate of Great Success toward elemental music
air bamboo silk metal stone skin wood clay

Friday night we roll out the matting
to sit round the aluminium serving tray
As guest I sit next to your husband Nam
then young An and Giang and the blind aunt
who declares this meal gives strength to friendship
prefacing an incandescent stillness like
the family scene in the old lacquer painting
Then we lift fine white noodles from the soup
carry the dripping flavours to our mouths
translucent as meaning complex as pleasure
phở gà fragrant with lime and coriander

Sandra Hill

5 poems by Kate Lilley

Pantoum for Bob Hope

Bob Hope is not dead
humidity is drying out
the Ritz may have asked employees to lie
minivans are in short supply

Humidity is drying out
girl impaled by metal rod
minivans are in short supply
bugs at famous resort

Girl impaled by metal rod
the IRS owes apologies and refunds
bugs at famous resort
suspect goes berserk

The IRS owes apologies and refunds
Orlando should not be waving those flags in God's face
suspect goes berserk
a grain elevator exploded Monday

Orlando should not be waving those flags in God's face
critics blast the mayor for having nothing better to do
a grain elevator exploded Monday
more June than expected

Critics blast the mayor for having nothing better to do
Bob Hope is not dead
more June than expected
the Ritz may have asked employees to lie

Where Was I

High speed trains aren't meant for looking:
if you try to solve the blur you'll get a headache.
Masks are popular if you're feeling infectious
or prophylactically alert.
Sit back and practice mind-control instead,
turning the pages of a cartoon novel.
This one has pictures of lunch boxes emulating
regions and seasons, ingenious snacks
sold on certain days at certain stations.
Don't try to escape allegory
or over-read the vending machines.
You'll regret it later, and you'll miss a lot:
pre-mixed cocktails, blood-type fortunes,
bandaged schoolgirls shitting on Teacher.

Nicky's World

As the plot rocks back and forth on a pinhead
count to fifteen very slowly.
By that time you should be alone again
contemplating your evening.

You could go for a ride and take a fall,
break your back and welcome an addiction –
or ask Miguel to serve drinks by the pool,
that hunky contractor might stop by.

Finally there's a knock at the door,
a lady policeman shows her badge.
She's asking if these unusual cufflinks
belong to the father of your children.

Illocution

If I don't discontinue straight away
they'll put me in the other room and leave me.
I've been scouring the paper for tricks and
misprints,
inserting silent letters where there are none.
A comprehension test with no prospect
of failure is a trial of parsimony.
If this were any other language
I'd turn in my office key and go home.

Arrest me now, I'm sick of it:
the subterfuge, the pain and suffering.
These stitches aren't the dissolving kind,
they'll need some caring, professional attention.
Discard, abolish, abrogate
explains desuetude if you're interested.

Live at the Opry

Porter Wagoner in a nudie suit
flashes the crowd an embroidered *Hi!*
He kids around trading jokes with the hee-haw,
then the lights go down and the teardrops start.
The Queens of the Nashville Sound gear up,
nobody's laughing or chewing now.
Skeeter, frail in a sky blue sheath,
is out of rehab and born again.
Her voice has gone the way of her orchestra.
It's almost fifty years since the crash
killed off the harmonizing Davis Sisters,
the sleep-overs and double-dates,
square dancing after the Big Barn Frolic.
So long my honey, goodbye my dear,
gonna get along without you now.
When she holds the microphone to her lips
and whispers mine is a lonely life
it sounds like a radio tuned to the end of the world.

Martin Mulligan

Towards a 'whitefella dreaming'

Re-enchanting nature conservation 'work'

ARGUMENTS USED to promote the conservation of nature in Australia are starting to become sterile and ineffective. Many people feel alarmed at rates of deforestation and the plight of endangered species. Many also understand the link between deforestation and the greenhouse effect. The 'need' to preserve wilderness for scientific research and the development of new products – like pharmaceutical drugs – is probably viewed rather cynically in a society growing weary of commercialization.[1] Plenty of Australians worry about the possible despoliation of beautiful places they would like to visit and many want to see them preserved for future generations. But how many people feel that they can really make a difference? For most Australians, nature conservation is the preserve of experts, fanatics, and eccentrics.

Since the big Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the conservation movement internationally has put a lot of faith in the concept of 'biodiversity'. But for most people this is an abstract and remote concept, even if preserving diversity seems like a 'good idea'. The Australian movement has put a lot of work into the declaration of national parks and wilderness reserves. The result has been an impressive network of public reserves managed by specialist agencies. However, the reserves are largely on land not wanted for other, more 'productive', purposes and there is no prospect of the reserve system becoming sufficiently representative to prevent further extinctions of endangered species.[2]

With the post-colonization nature conservation movement in Australia effectively entering its second century,[3] the time has come to consider new strategies that can motivate and engage more people in conservation work. For this to happen, the movement must reduce its dependence on the abstracted rationality of science and find ways to engage people more emotionally and creatively. We need to recognize that people become fascinated with the 'more than human' world[4] through sensuous, embodied experience (particularly in childhood) rather than by being exposed to rational argument.

New strategies emerging

There are heartening signs that the conservation movement is rethinking its strategies as we enter a new century. Spurred by criticism initiated by Aboriginal activist and academic Marcia Langton – to the effect that the concept of 'pristine wilderness' betrays a *terra nullius* view of the land – those campaigning for nature preservation have acknowledged that nature and culture are never as separate as had earlier been imagined. There has been a growing interest in Aboriginal understandings of the relationship between people and the land and the Aboriginal concept of 'caring for country'.[5]

By challenging the nature/culture dualism so directly, Marcia Langton, Noel Pearson, and others have helped the cause of those who have argued that nature conservation and cultural heritage preservation should not be dealt with as separately as has been the case hitherto.[6] In NSW, a respected heritage consultant, Meredith Walker, has also been serving on the advisory council of the NPWS and she reports considerable progress in overlapping campaigns for the preservation of nature and cultural sites and artefacts.[7] Walker argues that cultural artefacts located within national parks trigger an interest in the way that nature and culture have interacted in that location in the past. Writers like Eric Rolls, David Malouf and George Seddon have also been able to stimulate an interest in the stories embedded within particular landscapes.[8] This coincides with a growing academic interest in the role of a 'sense of place' in forging affective bonds between people and their environments.[9]

The idea of a 'whitefella dreaming'

One way to dramatize the need for new and more creative conservation strategies is to support calls that have been made for the creation of a 'whitefella dreaming'. One of those who has made this call is Gregg Borschmann – environmental activist and political adviser turned historian and writer – who collated 300 hours of oral history in creating a book and exhibition called *The People's Forest.*[10] In explaining the idea to the *Blue Mountains Gazette,* he said:

> To call our chequered history with the Australian bush a white-fella dreaming may offend some people, but I intend no denigration of Aboriginal people, their forebears or traditions. Far from it. We may have gone another way to the Aboriginal people who managed this country before us. But it doesn't mean that we haven't got a dreaming about the bush, or at least the potential to develop one. By dreaming, I mean a store of knowledge, of lore and ability to learn from, celebrate and communicate it. Perhaps it is not as rich, all-embracing and unifying as an Aboriginal dreaming. But we can work on that.[11]

Compared to the long history of occupation by Aboriginal people, white Australians have lived in this land for a blink of history's eyelid. Clearly, we have not had the time (nor inclination) to build up the same depth of knowledge or the same rich store of place-based stories, myths and legends. A 'whitefella dreaming' could not be compared with Aboriginal dreamings. But before the charge of cultural appropriation is levelled, we should remember that the English word 'dreaming' was used to characterize a form of cosmology for which no English words existed. This application of the word has given it a new meaning. In wanting to borrow it back, we acknowledge that this new meaning hints at a gap in our cultural understanding of the 'more than human world'.[12] The transformed English word may be the best we have to fill a vacuum; a way of re-enchanting our overly rational and rather mechanical ways of perceiving the life-world[13] we are immersed in.

While it is true that a 'whitefella dreaming' would be fundamentally different from its Aboriginal forerunner, it is important to note the richness in what we have already started to accumulate. For a start, we have a very powerful set of creation stories generated by science – from the creation of the planet to the creation of ecosystems – and they have an ability to deepen our understanding of and respect for the non-human world. Scientific stories are powerful but not enough. As a literate society, we also have a capacity to circulate and access fictional stories that resonate strongly with our experience in searching for our identity in a 'new' land. For example, Patrick White's *Voss* and Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* stand out as examples of the kind of stories that could be part of a 'whitefella dreaming'. As well as great novelists, we have non-fiction writers capable of creating powerful stories – such as Rolls and Tim Flannery. And we have some very good poets – from Kenneth Slessor and Judith Wright to Les Murray – who help us look at ourselves and our surroundings with more insight and empathy.

Our best landscape artists – from Tom Roberts to Drysdale, Nolan, and Boyd – were also great story-makers, interested in reinterpreting whitefella myths and legends about people and the land. Landscape 'literacy' has also featured in the work of film-makers, photographers and musicians. In recent times, environmental activists have added a new set of stories and 'campaign narratives' to our place-based mythology. Outside Australia, a good example of how a diverse range of narratives can be woven into one text about people and landscapes is Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory.*[14]

Adding to the store

Places and regions accumulate their own stories, reflecting various interpretations of their social history. Whenever we 'put down roots' in a new place we feel a need to tap into the local folklore in order to strengthen a sense of belonging. Just as importantly, we each carry around our own set of personal stories relating to the places where we have lived, and these are part of broader sets of family histories related to places and landscapes. When you ask a group of adults to think of one experience that made them feel differently about nature, they often recall a story from their childhood. And when people begin to explore a 'sense of place' they often develop a fresh interest in their family history. Each of us carries our own personal 'dreaming of who we are and where we belong'.

The author has had great success running amateur poetry workshops in outdoor settings by giv-

ing people some simple techniques for playing with images, language and unexpected thoughts. This may unleash some hidden talent and people may produce pieces that others enjoy. But, more importantly, those involved are encouraged to move outside the constraints of rational thought. Creative expression in various forms can help us explore the importance of sensuous, embodied experiences of the 'more than human world'.

The sort of whitefella dreaming I am suggesting here would be less normative and much more diffuse than Aboriginal dreamings. It would be more abstracted because our culture is more tenuously rooted in particular landscapes (or country, as Aboriginal people prefer to say).[15] An advantage of this is that it might enrich the rather abstract discourse on national identity by making stronger connections between land and identity. Our dreaming might share with Aboriginal dreamings the characteristics of being multi-layered and heuristic, but it would be much less coherent and more open to interpretation; perhaps it could be described as a postmodern version of a pre-modern cosmology.

Direct comparisons between the cosmologies of Aboriginal societies and those prevailing within contemporary white Australian society, however, are really rather futile. The idea of a whitefella dreaming is more simply a way of acknowledging that we need richer and more diverse ways of perceiving our relationships with landscapes and we can learn that from the indigenous people of this land. This should not be allowed to simplify the complex idea of Aboriginal dreamings. The connection is one of inspiration only.

. . . and another problem

The concept of a 'whitefella dreaming' could enrich the discourse on land and identity, but it could also be tarnished by problems that have long plagued the discourse on national identity and image. A social conservative, Les Murray, has said the "making of national images is a major journalistic and literary industry",[16] which churns out a steady stream of myths, metaphors, and catchy slogans that are supposed to represent the essence of being Australian; ranging from 'white Australia' to 'the land of the long weekend'. According to Murray, this "trade in images" gives academics and aspiring writers a chance to make a name for themselves, often by debunking some of the more enduring images, such as the 'myth of mateship'. This is a cheap shot at people who don't happen to share Murray's view of the essence of being Australian. After all, he was the one chosen by Prime Minister Howard to help draft a preamble for the Constitution. Like their more liberal-minded opponents, Murray and the prime minister's other favourite image-maker, Geoffrey Blainey, would undoubtedly want to put their particular spin on the character and purpose of a whitefella dreaming. Like the debate about becoming a republic – an apparently straightforward proposition – it would become politicized.

But Murray does have an important point, in that all image-peddlers can harm people who are excluded by their images. He recalls that he had the misfortune of moving to the city at a time when the 'Sophisticated Urban' image encouraged city-dwellers to see most country folk as being rednecks, peasants, rural idiots, or 'hicks from the sticks'. Responding to such epithets, Murray points out, has given his own writing some impetus, but his relatives and friends – living in communities of small farmers – still feel betrayed and abandoned by a nation which once feted their achievements. The surge of support for the crude political outfit, One Nation, gives credence to what he says.

In a rather reactive way, Murray has promoted the image of hard-working bush pioneers who have gone out of fashion during his lifetime. He has been much less critical of the pioneer legacy than Judith Wright, the farmer's daughter. However, both poets have captured images and understandings of people and landscapes that can give us deeper, more heartfelt insights and both, in very different ways, have contributed to our emerging dreaming. The idea of a whitefella dreaming is one that must be inclusive of all those who have learnt something of the land that is worth sharing. Such a dreaming doesn't need gatekeepers; it's an open resource for those who love the land and need sources of inspiration to continue working for its health and wellbeing.

Too big to compromise

Of course, people will fight over the alleged content and role of a whitefella dreaming. But the concept has the potential to rise above such hegemonic battles. It will defy attempts to define and own it. It will feed a hunger that can never be fully satisfied, because, as Murray has also said:

It is probable that many Australians now spend more of their spiritual energy on the quest for national and communal identity than on any other theme. This is not surprising, in a country just far enough in time from its initial settlement for the themes its people brought from their original homes to have faded and become unreal in the minds of the descendants . . . Of course, any nation is a semi-criminal conspiracy . . . If we don't make something worthwhile for mankind out of our conquest here, we are little more than thieves living on spoils . . .

We have come to the sense, which the Aborigines had before us, that after all human frenzies and efforts there remains the great land . . . We know, deep down, that the land does not finally permit of imported attitudes that would make of it simply a resource, a thing; it has broken too many of us who tried to make such attitudes fit it.[17]

If the land has this ability to impose itself on us, then we are caught up in a dreaming that is much older than we can imagine. This thought can be both scary and exhilarating. It is something we will never cease to contemplate, dipping into the rich resources of our whitefella dreaming.

ENDNOTES

1. The recent demise of the Kennett government in Victoria was partly attributed to public cynicism about the dominance of commercial interests in public policy.
2. This point was made strongly by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service ecologist Daniel Lunney in a paper given at a 1997 conference titled *National Parks: New Visions for a New Century*. Proceedings available from the organizers, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Sydney.
3. Although the first organization of nature lovers was probably the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria formed in 1880, the movement can probably best be dated from the formation of the Wildlife Preservation Society in 1909 or efforts by R.M. Collins or Romeo Lahey to establish national parks in Queensland around the same time – see *A History of the Australian Environmental Movement* by Drew Hutton & Libby Connors, CUP, Melbourne, 1999.
4. This phrase is borrowed from author David Abram, whose important book *The Spell of the Sensuous*, (Vintage Books, New York, 1996), explains how people in literate societies have become abstracted from nature.
5. For a good discussion of Aboriginal concepts of landscapes and wilderness, see Deborah Bird Rose *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra, 1996.
6. See Marcia Langton, *Burning Questions: Emerging Environmental Issues for Indigenous Peoples in Northern Australia*, Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management, Northern Territory University, Darwin, 1998.
7. In a talk presented at the Ecopolitics XII conference held in Katoomba, NSW, in October 1999, organized by the Social Ecology Department at the University of Western Sydney – Hawkesbury, Richmond, NSW.
8. See, for example, David Malouf, *A spirit of play: the making of Australian consciousness*, 1998 Boyer Lectures, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1998; Eric Rolls, *From Forest to Sea: Australia's Changing Environment*, UQP, St Lucia, 1993; George Seddon, *Landprints: Reflections on Place and Landscape*, CUP, Melbourne, 1997.
9. At the time of writing, national Sense of Place colloquiums had been held in the Blue Mountains (1996), Central Australia (1997) and Melbourne (1998), initiated by Dr John Cameron of the University of Western Sydney – Hawkesbury, Richmond NSW.
10. In order to conduct the research for the project and mount the exhibition, Borschmann set up a People's Forest Foundation that attracted a wide range of sponsorships. The book was published by The People's Forest Foundation, Blackheath, NSW, 1999.
11. 28 April 1999.
12. The nature of this gap is well covered in David Abram's book, op.cit.
13. The term 'life-world' was introduced by the German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl as a way of bridging the conceptual gap we have created between ourselves and the world that sustains us.
14. Fontana Press, London, 1995.
15. For a discussion of the difference between landscapes and 'country' see Deborah Bird Rose.
16. In the essay 'The Trade in Images', reprinted in *The Quality of Sprawl: Thoughts about Australia*, Duffy & Snellgrove, Sydney, 1999.
17. In 'Some Religious Stuff I Know', in *The Quality of Sprawl: Thoughts about Australia*, Duffy & Snellgrove, Sydney, 1999, pp. 28–30.

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Sue Taffe

Making a Difference

a 1960s partnership opposing racial discrimination

IN MAY THIS YEAR, a crowd of more than 150,000 marchers crossed the Sydney Harbour Bridge. This symbolic act was seen by commentators as an expression of support and goodwill by all Australians for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The word 'reconciliation', and the action of marching in support of it, clearly meant many things to many people, but there were some among the crowd able to take a longer view. Forty years ago members of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA), some of whom marched across the Bridge, worked to stimulate awareness of injustices faced by Indigenous Australians. They fought public apathy and bureaucratic indifference as they agitated to remove structural racism from laws and practices in Australian society. One of the marchers was Dr Barry Christophers.

BARRY CHRISTOPHERS MET Joe McGinness in Brisbane in 1961 at a meeting remembered for its intensity and significance. This was the fourth annual conference of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement, an organization made up of advancement leagues from all states working for equal citizenship rights for Aboriginal Australians. Christophers, president of the Victorian Council for Aboriginal Rights, was one of a number of conference speakers. He spoke of the situation in the Northern Territory where Aboriginal labour was vital to the pastoral industry. He quoted the tokenistic wages paid to many Aboriginal cattle workers, explained that most Aboriginal people were categorized as 'wards' (a polite term denoting people from whom citizenship was withheld) and then provided a graphic example of government attitudes to those so classified. Aboriginal people were listed on the Northern Territory government's Register of Wards by derisive nicknames. Some names emphasized a disability – Blind Nelly, Ruby Yaws, Hunchback Willy – or a creature – Donkey, Tadpole – or food and drink – Onion, Whiskey. Was this an example of the Commonwealth's assimilation policy, a policy supposedly preparing people for citizenship?

McGinness, secretary of the newly formed Cairns Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advancement League, made his own contribution to the conference, speaking on a topic of interest to him as a returned serviceman – the position of the eight hundred Torres Strait Islanders who had served during the war under the Native Forces Act and who were not entitled to repatriation benefits. Christophers recalls:

> I didn't notice Joe at first, until he addressed the conference. He spoke about Aboriginal returned servicemen and the question of repatriation benefits. He had been in the armed forces himself and had an ability to paint the broad political picture of Aboriginal returned servicemen who had fought for Australia but who were not receiving their repatriation entitlements . . . I was impressed when I heard him and I nominated him for president.[1]

"A softly spoken, forty-seven-year-old Cairns aboriginal [sic] was today elected president of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement. He is Mr J.D. McGinness, a six-foot-tall, fourteen-stone wharf labourer", the Melbourne *Sun* reported. This was the beginning of what would become an enduring friendship between McGinness and Christophers. Thirty-nine years later they are still in regular contact, occasionally holidaying together in outback Queensland. How did these two men from opposite ends of the country come to be partners in work which effectively exposed and redressed Aboriginal disadvantage?

Joe McGinness, born in 1914, was the son of Alyandabu of the Kungarakan people from northern Australia, and Stephen McGinness, an Irish immigrant who worked as a fettler outside Darwin.

Stephen McGinness' death when Joe was still quite young marked the end of family life for him. Under the Territory's Aboriginals' Ordinance he became a ward of the Chief Protector of Aborigines and was taken to the Kahlin Compound, where McGinness recalls "there was no such thing as regular food or formal schooling for me – or anyone else for that matter".[2] At twelve years of age, having only received three years of education, young McGinness was assigned by the Northern Territory Protector of Aborigines to work as a handyman for a travelling salesman. He recalls that this job taught him about "how the other half lived" and included travel through the Territory, Queensland and down the Birdsville track to Adelaide. A meeting with Xavier Herbert motivated Joe, his brother Val and others to consider becoming active in Aboriginal rights but the outbreak of war and the 1942 bombing of Darwin intervened. McGinness recalls that army service, especially in Borneo, exposed him to other peoples' responses to invasion and colonization. After the war he got a job on the wharf and joined the union. Joe writes that it was "my early experiences with the Waterside Workers' Federation in the 1950s which helped me understand the system of organized labour much better".[3] During this period, the heyday of the Waterside Workers' Federation, a disciplined rank and file gained both higher rates of pay and safer working conditions. Work and union membership provided McGinness with a vision, a hope for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, whose conditions at this time were deplorable. In 1958 Aboriginal and Islander unionists got together to form the Cairns Aboriginal and Islander Advancement League, and McGinness began his active involvement in Aboriginal politics, as secretary of the new League.[4]

While Joe McGinness was gaining an education on the roads, on fishing fleets, oil rigs and wharves, Barry Christophers, a medical student at Melbourne University, joined the Melbourne University Labor Club, a meeting place for Melbourne left-wing thinkers. Racial discrimination was not an issue of discussion in the club at this time but Christophers' interest in anatomy led him to the work of Professor Frederic Wood Jones, a scientist with a humanitarian regard for Aboriginal Australians, who wrote and spoke about their conditions of life on the edge of European society.[5]

In 1957 an opportunity arose for Christophers to become actively involved in working for and with Aboriginal Australians. He met Shirley Andrews, the secretary of the Victorian Council for Aboriginal Rights, which was at this time looking for a replacement president. Christophers joined the organization and was persuaded to take the president's job, beginning almost twenty years of work opposing unjust laws and practices which affected Aboriginal Australians.

By 1964, Islanders were recognized in the name of the federal body when it became the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. FCAATSI campaigned for equal wages for Aboriginal pastoral workers, for rights to land and for the successful 1967 referendum which empowered the Commonwealth in Aboriginal affairs. While both McGinness and Christophers were involved in these broader campaigns they also worked to get the discriminatory clauses in the Tuberculosis Act deleted, and to assist people controlled by the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act to have a right to manage their own earnings. These latter campaigns brought pressure on governments to amend legislation which discriminated against Aboriginal and Islander Australians.

In the early 1960s, many Aboriginal workers, especially in Queensland and Northern Territory, did not receive award wages. In Queensland those "under the Act" had no control over their own wages or property.[6] They could not marry without authority and were not legal guardians of their children. McGinness recalls that he realized the "virtues of organized labour, especially when I compared my income with the low wages received by the Islanders working under the Department of Native Affairs".[7] Learning meeting procedure and the rules of debate were practical lessons which McGinness would call on in his later roles, first as Secretary of the Cairns Aboriginal and Islander Advancement League, then as President of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement.

The Tuberculosis Allowance Campaign

In 1963, when visiting a non-Aboriginal friend in the thoracic annexe of Cairns Base Hospital, McGinness got talking with an Aboriginal patient in an adjacent bed. "Conversation revealed", McGinness tells us "that the non-Aborigine was receiving a special tuberculosis allowance, while the Aborigine was not receiving this special health benefit."[8] The allowance was

designed to encourage those suffering from this highly contagious disease to recuperate without the financial pressure of a return to work during the rehabilitative stage. McGinness reported the situation to the executive of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement. Christophers, Secretary of the Federal Council's Equal Wages for Aborigines Committee, investigated.[9]

Christophers brought personal qualities of patience, single-mindedness and determination to his work for equal wages and equal access to government benefits. His research experience meant he could find and dissect both the laws and the departmental regulations drawn up for their implementation. He identified weak points in Commonwealth legislation and exposed the gap between the rhetoric of equality and the reality of existing unjust laws. His research into the Tuberculosis Act showed the existence of a race-based clause which excluded from the allowance "Aborigines and people of mixed blood who prior to their illness, did not support themselves and their dependents (if any) from their eamings".[10] He wrote to McGinness, asking for details of Aboriginal TB sufferers who had been refused the allowance.

"Send for Joe" was the call whenever an Aboriginal person needed help in north Queensland. McGinness explained that his involvement in Aboriginal affairs meant:

> I am on call seven days a week and the work involves me in all aspects of social service applications, education and student grants, wages and trust fund negotiations, legal adviser, tax consultant, etc, etc.[11]

McGinness now made it his business to visit tuberculosis units up and down the Queensland coast. He collected people's stories of illness and disadvantage. Some people were ignorant of the existence of the tuberculosis allowance while others had applied and been knocked back, because they could not prove that they could "manage money".[12] McGinness sent down details of twenty cases of Aboriginal and Islander patients who were medically eligible for the allowance but who were refused, apparently on racial grounds.

In his correspondence with public servants, politicians, members of the National Tuberculosis Advisory Council and medical practitioners Christophers used these cases in two ways. Firstly, he argued that the exclusion of Aboriginal patients was racist and failed to serve the purpose of the allowance, which was to limit the spread of the disease. Secondly, he pointed out that the criteria regarding the management of money was being inappropriately applied, since no such condition was contained in the Act.

"It is an unfortunate state of affairs when a member of the medical profession is required to administer an Act which of necessity must be repulsive to him" [sic], Christophers told his colleagues.[13] He campaigned strenuously to inform doctors, unionists and the newspaper reading public of this discriminatory legislation. His oft-repeated rhetorical remark, designed to emphasize the racist basis of the discrimination, was "what a commotion there would be if instead of 'Aborigines and people of mixed blood' the determination excluded Jews or Catholics".

Christophers detailed the situation in an article, 'Discrimination in an unexpected quarter', which was distributed widely in Queensland by the Waterside Workers' Federation, the Queensland Peace Committee and the Union of Australian Women. He wrote to state governors, federal ministers and shadow ministers, and the Governor General, who was the patron of the National Tuberculosis and Chest Association. The publicity succeeded. In February 1965 the Director General of Health acknowledged that the clause which excluded Aboriginal people from the allowance "may be capable of misinterpretation".[14] A carefully worded clause replaced the race-based one, and a number of Aboriginal Queenslanders who were suffering from tuberculosis received the allowance that had previously been denied them.

The Case of John Belia and the Challenge to the Queensland Act

Four years after this amendment was made, Christophers and McGinness collaborated again, this time to expose the unjust, paternalistic Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Act. Police violence at Mareeba, discrimination in hotels, the compulsory removal of residents from the Mapoon mission on Cape York and many similar situations were regularly brought to public attention by Federal Council members. Now, two years after the 1967 referendum, when the Commonwealth had made no attempt to override Queensland Aboriginal legislation, McGinness suggested to the FCAATSI executive that it was time to act.

One aspect of bureaucratic control which irked

Aboriginal Queenslanders at this time was that "assisted Aborigines", as Aborigines under the Act were called, had no control over their own earnings. Under section 27 of the Queensland Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander Act district officers were empowered to control the earnings of Aboriginal people living within their areas of jurisdiction. In order to gain access to their money, people were required to apply to the local Clerk of Petty Sessions. Frequently claimants would have to queue up outside the courthouse for half a day. Sometimes they were told to go away and come back tomorrow. The indignity of this situation was captured in a story of a young woman who asked for money to buy a petticoat, only to be told that as she already had one she didn't need another. "What was she supposed to do when it was in the wash?" one outraged Federal Council member asked.[15]

Joe McGinness, President FCAATSI, and Dulcie Flower, Secretary 1968–69 at the annual conference outside Telopea Park High School, Canberra, 1968. Photo courtesy of Marj Broadbent.

Once again McGinness went searching, this time for a person prepared to test the legislation. His journeys to places as far apart as Coen, on Cape York Peninsula and Western Queensland led to John Belia from Dajarra, south of Mt Isa. Although illiterate, Belia, who had been a stockman for more than thirty years, had kept his pay slips, and wished to be freed from the controls of the Act. Federal Council's strategy was that Belia would apply for exemption. A refusal would provide the opportunity for legal appeal.

The Belia case was used to demonstrate to Aboriginal and Islander Australians that the whitefella law could be successfully challenged, and to show other Australians that the Australian 'fair go' did not extend to everyone. In a letter to newspapers Christophers quoted a memorandum from one district officer to another which described a man from Chillagoe who was going on holidays as "a waster" and instructed that "it would be appreciated if only small amounts were given for pocket money". Targeting the Commonwealth Bank which managed the trust fund, Christophers argued that "no bank should knowingly associate itself with such a scheme", and urged concerned members of the public to boycott the Commonwealth Bank.[16] "Is it acceptable to refuse a worker access to his wages because a public servant reckoned he was 'a waster'?" Christophers asked newspaper readers.

The Belia case was prepared and fought with the assistance of lawyers, accountants, politicians and other activists. As with the tuberculosis allowance campaign, however, it was the teamwork of Joe McGinness in Cairns and Barry Christophers, coordinating in Melbourne, which was central to the success of the Belia challenge. The appeal was heard in Cloncurry, north-western Queensland, on 9 October 1972, almost four years after Joe McGinness first wrote to the General Secretary about this matter. John Belia won, and was given the legal right to manage his own financial affairs.

Writing about this decision a few days later in *The Australian*, Dominic Nagle contrasted White Australia's indifference to the court ruling with Black Australia's celebration of the event as "a rare but vital victory". He explained that John Belia had worked the equivalent of "slightly more than four years between 1966 and 1971 for roughly $2,300" in total and that he could only access his pay by applying to the local Clerk of Petty Sessions. This was, as far as I know, the first time that an Aboriginal person had used the legal system to successfully challenge discriminatory legislation.

There was much dividing Joe McGinness and Barry Christophers – cultural background, race, education, experience of life as well as more than 3000

kilometres, but these differences were transcended by their shared values: a respect for difference, an uncompromising commitment to opposing injustice, and a recognition of the value of collaborative work. Their teamwork achieved both welfare and political purposes. McGinness' effort, the trust he engendered, his collection of personal details – all these were vital. And Christophers' political know-how and unrelenting letter writing demonstrated to public servants and politicians that he would not let up until their purpose was achieved.

THE IMAGINATION OF INDIGENOUS Australians and the consciences of some of those in the mainstream were stirred by FCAATSI campaigns such as the two described here. In a country in which only 2 per cent of the population are Indigenous, both imagination and a sense of moral responsibility are qualities which are required on both sides of the colonial divide.

The successes of the campaigns against the discriminatory clause in the Tuberculosis Act and against the paternalism of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Act contributed to growing Aboriginal and Islander confidence to mount more fundamental challenges such as for the rights to land. This co-operation between a black and a white Australian, two men using their particular skills for a common goal and succeeding after years of campaigning, would have been a significant achievement at any time. And in the 1960s when distance was more of a barrier than today, and given that this work was carried out after work on the wharf or in the doctor's surgery, it is worthy of celebration. The work of these two Australians shows us a friendship based on a respect for cultural difference while at the same time asserting that human rights must apply to all.

ENDNOTES

1. B. Christophers, interview by the author, 27 September 1996. Interviews referred to in this article were conducted by the author, in collaboration with Koori Arts Collective in 1996 as a part of an oral history of FCAATSI, funded by the Australia Foundation for Culture and the Humanities. This collection is housed at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Canberra.
2. J. McGinness, *Son of Alyandabu: My fight for Aboriginal rights*, UQP, St Lucia, 1991, p. 9.
3. Ibid., p. 35.
4. See McGinness, *Son of Alyandabu*, chapters 1–5 for an account of the period of McGinness' life which is summarized here.
5. Wood Jones spoke at the 1928 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science on 'The Claims of the Australian Aborigine'. He contributed to public debate in newspapers and on radio on Aboriginal issues. His *Australia's Vanishing Race* was published in 1934. Barry Christophers has published *A List of the Published Works of Frederic Wood Jones 1879–1954*, Greensborough Press, Melbourne, 1974. He has also contributed a number of articles on the life and work of Wood Jones to the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Surgery*. See, for example, vol. 64 'Frederic Wood Jones as a teacher and on teaching' and vol. 65, 'Frederic Wood Jones: Coral and Atolls'.
6. This expression is applied to people who were racially classified under the various forms of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legislation. The rights of people so classified were restricted with regard to movement, marriage, child custody and money management.
7. McGinness, *Son of Alyandabu*, p. 34.
8. McGinness, *Son of Alyandabu*, p. 73.
9. This committee worked on the issue of equal wages for Aboriginal workers as well as investigating eligibility for social service benefits. See S. Taffe, 'Health, the Law and Racism: the Campaign to Amend the Discriminatory Clauses in the Tuberculosis Act' in *Labor History*, no. 76, May 1999 for a more detailed analysis of this campaign.
10. Scheme of Tuberculosis Allowances, determination under section 9, *Tuberculosis Act 1948*.
11. J. McGinness to F. Bandler, 8 February 1971, Christophers personal papers.
12. The ability to "manage money" was used as an indicator of assimilation by the Department of Social Services. Its operating manual stated that the tuberculosis allowance was not to be paid to "aboriginal natives of Australia whatever their caste or whether they are under the control of the appropriate authorities and otherwise if they are unable to manage money or likely to waste it". *Instructions, Pensions and Associated Payments*, Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Australia, 1961.
13. B. Christophers, *Medical Journal of Australia*, 17 August 1963, p. 296.
14. W. D. Refshauge, Director General of Health, to C. J. Ross-Smith, General Secretary Australian Medical Association, 3 February 1965, AMA, Canberra.
15. S. Andrews, FCAATSI Oral History Project, 26 September 1996, p. 6, AIATSIS Library.
16. B. Christophers, letter to the editor, n. d., but October 1969 and sent to capital city dailies, Christophers personal papers.

Sue Taffe is writing a history of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Jennifer Jones

Reading *Karobran* by Monica Clare

an Aboriginal engagement with socialist realism

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES by the first generation of Aboriginal women writers have received meagre public recognition or space in the public memory. The high tide of Aboriginal women's autobiographical writing was marked instead by the reception of Sally Morgan's *My Place*. Aboriginal women's autobiographical texts published before *My Place*, it has been argued, "maintained a strong correlation between Aboriginal politics and literary production".[1] In this article I examine the literary links that Monica Clare's *Karobran*, the first 'novel' by an Aboriginal woman, establishes between Aboriginal and left-wing politics. *Karobran* strategically adopts and adapts the socialist realist form to suit the needs of an Aboriginal testimony in a way that responds to the changing realities of the socialist and Aboriginal rights movements. This adaptation destabilized, but did not abandon the constraints of the socialist realist form.

Karobran is grounded within and affected by particular personal and social histories. Clare was born in 1924. Monica's white mother died giving birth to her third child. After this her Aboriginal father attempted to raise his children alone, but during the Great Depression the children were forcibly taken from him and institutionalized in Sydney. They were then placed in a white foster family in 1932.

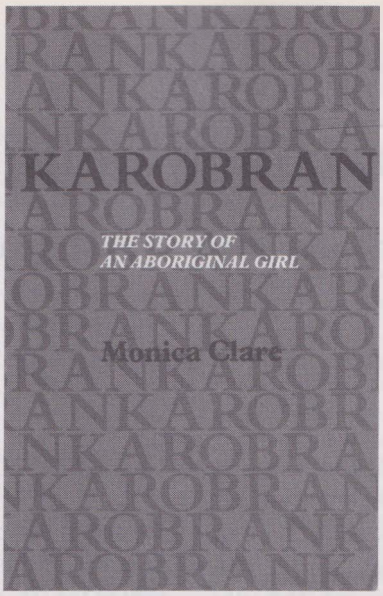
As was the experience of many Aboriginal girls, Clare was again institutionalized as an adolescent, in order to be trained as a domestic servant. In her adulthood she took on domestic and factory work and later became a campaign organizer for a Sydney ALP candidate. After the failure of her first marriage and the loss of custody of her daughter, Monica moved from Sydney to Wollongong where she became involved in the union movement. When she was thirty-six years old she married Les Clare, an organizer with the South Coast Trades and Labour Council (SCTLC).

By all accounts Monica Clare was a tireless worker for a number of political organizations. She was a member of the Union of Australian Women, secretary of the regional International Women's Day committee and served on the May Day committee. She served as secretary of the SCTLC-endorsed South Coast Aborigines Committee and was founding secretary of the Illawarra Tribal Council. Monica Clare used her union links to fight for Aboriginal rights, particularly access to land and housing. Clare's surviving correspondence suggests that she was vitally interested in education as a tool to fight racism.

Clare was actively involved in and respected by the Illawarra Koori community. She possessed skills that enabled her to liaise between the Aboriginal and white communities. Friends remember her as a woman of compassion and action, "a mediator, adviser and helper for Aborigines on the Coast".[2] Clare commenced writing her autobiographical novel in the early 1970s, determined that (white) Australians should know the struggles and sufferings of Aboriginal people, particularly children such as herself who were stolen from their parents. She finished the manuscript some time in late 1972. However, on National Aborigines Day, 1973, Monica Clare collapsed, and was rushed to a Sydney hospital. She died that day of a cerebral haemorrhage at the age of forty-nine.

Clare's unexpected death meant that the intervention of a team of motivated sponsors was required to bring the manuscript to publication. Mona Brand and Jack Horner were both reading the manuscript before Clare's death, after which they sought grants to fund the editing of the book, solicit a publisher, and to finalize the now complicated copyright arrangements. The devotion of such energy, over a five-year period, was based upon shared philosophies and a belief in the

importance of the eventual publication of *Karobran*. During this five-year period organized communism also virtually collapsed in Australia. *Karobran* was launched into a political environment that derided socialist realism and discounted its strategic adaptation.



The novel was among the first to expose what have become known as 'the stolen generations'. *Karobran* discusses the meanings of Aboriginal land, the impact of white exploitation of Aboriginal people and land, racism and the treatment of Aboriginal girls and women. It also portrays a groundswell of Aboriginal activism at a time when Aboriginal politics was portrayed in the white community as the work of "a handful of unrepresentative militants".[3]

Both Brand and Horner were seasoned activists for Aboriginal rights who actively campaigned for the 'yes' vote in the 1967 referendum. Both worked from a socialist standpoint, Horner identifying as a Christian Socialist, Brand as a Humanist Socialist. Yet Horner and Brand's reputations as socialist activists and the unusual circumstances surrounding the completion of the *Karobran* project dominated public discussion of the book. Critics have stressed the intervention of "the socialist ideals of its editors"[4] without reflecting upon the primacy of the Aboriginal rights platform in their actions. Critical perceptions of socialism overshadowed the adaptation of the discourse for the Aboriginal cause.

Political activism on behalf of Aboriginal rights has a longer history than is often popularly imagined. Aboriginal people have been organizing and protesting politically since invasion, with surges of organized protest in the 1930s, 1950s and 1960s. Non-indigenous people have often supported Aboriginal people in their actions. In the twentieth century many organizations – with many different agendas and priorities – took an active interest in Aboriginal welfare. For example the CPA first enunciated a pro-Aboriginal stance in the mid 1920s, following the Comintern's support of native races as part of an anti-imperialistic policy. By 1931 the CPA sought to emancipate Aboriginal people, now recognized as "the slaves of slaves". It was determined that "no struggle of the white worker must be permitted without demands for the aborigines being championed".[5] However, for Aboriginal people who aligned with the CPA its main agendas were often peripheral to the desperate and immediate needs of their people.

Adopting and adapting white institutional structures for Aboriginal ends was not an unusual practice. Aboriginal activists such as Jack Patten sought assistance, sometimes simultaneously, from groups as divergent as the CPA through to radical right-wing nationalists such as P.R. Stephensen's 'Australia First' movement. Such flagrant crossing of political affiliations suggests that sponsors were adopted where they could be found and used for the Aboriginal cause. As Heather Goodall remarks, many white activists found, "engagement with Aboriginal matters did not sit comfortably within the categories of political alignment which white Australians fashion for themselves".[6] As I have recounted, Clare was primarily aligned with United Front groups and her affiliation and connections primarily exploited the potential for action in Aboriginal politics. The United Front organizations she belonged to offered a forum from which progressive people

> could join other men and women in doing something about the evils of [the world]. It was not strange that the Communist Party, whatever its weaknesses and limitations, appealed to many of these people as a body in which they could work.[7]

Many activists in the Aboriginal rights movement harnessed the organizational and discipline structures of the Communist Party and the United Front. Aboriginal activists like Clare saw gaining a public voice on behalf of her people as a political imperative. The goal of achieving the public ear and the outcome of equal rights and conditions often required harnessing the interest of political groups such as the CPA which had the organizational mechanisms to generate public awareness. Significantly, the first three Aboriginal women to have their work published – Oodgeroo, Margaret Tucker and Clare – all had periods of CPA affiliation which were formative in their development as Aboriginal activists.

The correlation between literature and politics was critical for first-generation Aboriginal women writers. *Karobran* aimed to publicize and help put an end to the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, a practice then still officially endorsed by the NSW government. Although the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board had been abolished in 1969 and the infamous Cootamundra and Kinchela homes closed, Aboriginal children were still being institutionalized at Bomaderry near Nowra until 1980.[8] These urgent political goals went all but unnoticed by the critics.

The public reception of *Karobran*, rather than focusing upon the text as a new voice for Aboriginal experience, instead critiqued the generic style and speculated about the extent of editorial intervention. The socialist ideals of the editors and the socialist realist method employed in the novel became the focus of speculation by critics. Mudrooroo remarked in *Writing From the Fringe*, "the text itself has been heavily compromised by Jack Horner and others. This may account for the socialist realist tone of the finished product".[9] Here the political allegiances of those involved in the editing have been extrapolated and imposed upon the text itself.

I had the opportunity to examine the editors' copy of the pre-publication text. Their marking of the original manuscript suggests, contrary to Mudrooroo's supposition, that the socialist realist themes were present in Clare's first typescript. Here she adopts the socialist realist method to suit the primary concern of racial politics. The most pronounced changes effected by the editors after they took over the project was to redirect the focus of the novel away from the emotional experiences of a stolen child, intensifying instead the agenda of Aboriginal rights.[10] My reading suggests that the editors did not emphasize or impose a CPA agenda via the socialist realist form. The form was present from the outset, although the preoccupations of the original text centre on Aboriginal rather than workers' rights.

Socialism as a political philosophy and socialist realism as a genre are all deployed to make possible a discussion of Aboriginal rights. The themes of the text are mediated by two styles which I would designate as naturalism and socialist realism. The childhood days of the Aboriginal protagonist, Isabelle, are represented primarily in a naturalistic mode. A significant sentimentality is built around the description of the loving Aboriginal family. This accentuates the pathos of the children's forced removal from their father. In chapter six (of the seven chapters in this brief ninety-five-page volume) the preoccupations of socialist realism come to the fore. This shift mirrors the development of adult understanding and political consciousness for Isabelle. Critics have identified this shift in style as abrupt and conclude that it is a result of editorial interference. Joy Hooton remarks:

> Monica Clare's autobiographical novel, which was edited after her death, shows signs of editorial interference. The last section of the novel, in which Isabelle fortuitously discovers a common fellowship with the white working class after a chance meeting with strangers in a city milk bar, rings false.[11]

The (albeit few) critics who discussed *Karobran* were repelled by the socialist didacticism identified in the text; typically they assigned responsibility for the socialist realist effects to the editors. The largely unprecedented transparency of Horner and Brand's positioning as editors (as discussed in their prefaces) and their socialist reputations outside the text seem to invite this extrapolation. However, the abrupt shift in style identified in *Karobran* is not the product of editorial interference. Although an abrupt shift may not have been the best choice on aesthetic grounds, the shift to socialist realism allows for the politicization of what comes before. The critics' condemnation of the overt socialist realism misses the mark as it overlooks Monica Clare's strategic adaptation of the method as a vehicle for Aboriginal concerns.

Karobran both complies with and adapts the conventions of socialist realism in order to develop Aboriginal political concerns. It is in the development of these Aboriginal political concerns that *Karobran* engages with the socialist realist textual practices – such as typicality and didacticism, optimism and militancy.

Karobran does not call for socialist style militancy as a means to effect political solutions. The class template identifiable in the text shapes the way *Karobran* engages with the struggle for Aboriginal rights. The class template suggests the shape of the problem without providing an 'appropriate' socialist realist solution. Instead *Karobran* privileges an emotional response to the hardships of Aboriginal (not class) experience, even after the interventions of the editors, which substantially minimize the sentimentality of the text. Also, the strident Aboriginal activists depicted in chapter seven seek equal rights through an assimilationist program. From this standpoint the

"justified hatred of white people"[12] is acknowledged but eschewed in preference for understanding and cooperation. Isabelle hopes that in the future, "Aborigines would take their rightful place and become a part of society, working for a better way of life for all people in this country".[13] *Karobran* accommodates social alteration rather than revolutionary overthrow. As such it promotes social-revisionist attitudes based on racial problems rather than socialist outcomes based on the class conflict. Activism is premised upon political coalition with white people, encouraging assimilation into the wider community as a means to achieve equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

The radicalization of Isabelle is aligned with a traditional socialist realist plot structure, but this initial conversion to trade unionist ideals is quickly translated into activism for the Aboriginal struggle. Isabelle receives a complete education when she overhears unionists talking in the neighbouring cafe booth:

> Yes, I'm in a union too . . . a while ago a bloke asked me to go to a meeting . . . he said that 'the unions were only as strong as the men that made them'. In fact we are the unions. I ain't seen him for a while now, but I've been doing a bit of reading lately, and my union paper helped me.[14]

While exposure to unionist ideals serves as the basis for Isabelle's radicalization, the primary educational aim of the text then moves to issues of Aboriginality.

Aboriginal people are presented as members of the universal proletariat, but with particular needs stemming from their racialized experience. Isabelle encounters oppressive work conditions which (after her radicalization) she identifies as stemming from racial prejudice. The text instructs the reader about the litany of injustices suffered by the Aboriginal community. As Isabelle works with Aboriginal people, she challenges the economic power of the bosses. In this way the text engages with a class-based political agenda that is inflected and highlighted by racialized experience. In chapter seven, the narrator reflects:

> although the outdoor life was one to her liking, she was shocked by the paltry wages the Aboriginal people were getting. She would often speak out, making no bones about how unreal she thought it was; and soon it would not be long before she would lose her job, usually because the boss would let her know in no uncertain terms that he did not want any know-all 'Abo' disturbing his workers, and Blacks should be grateful that he employed them . . .[15]

Isabelle persists in speaking out against such discrimination, managing "to have her last say before being shown off the property".[16] However, the protest and proselytizing function of *Karobran* is not overtly optimistic. The book closes with Isabelle anticipating but not yet witnessing social change for the benefit of Aboriginal people. Hope for the future is invested in the spirit of the new generations of Aboriginal people, not in a revolutionary structural change. The tragedy and despair that have characterized much Aboriginal experience do not lead to the imposition of socialist-style optimism. The final scene of *Karobran* suggests personal healing for Isabelle, but does not provide the romance of a rousing climax that would 'build a mass movement of cultural workers'.

In keeping with socialist realism, *Karobran* does present 'typical' worker characters. However, in contradistinction from a socialist realist class-based analysis, *Karobran* does not portray worker characters in a consistently positive light. Tom Wall, the white man who offers to care for the Aboriginal children, is developed as a typical 'battler' figure. However, this naturalistic portrayal is overwhelmingly negative. Hatred, alcohol and violence consume Wall. Mrs Wall's dejected words, "I ain't got nothin' inside me to fight him anymore!"[17] do not suggest hope and optimism. Her situation illustrates the oppressed conditions that Isabelle and her fellow workers struggle against.

Monica Clare strategically adopted and adapted white political frames to suit Aboriginal political purposes, yet this aspect of the text was hardly noticed upon its public release. When *Karobran* was referred to by critics such as Mudrooroo or Hooton, the readers' assumptions about socialist realism or the political affiliations of the editors led to a narrow critical reading. *Karobran* was not received as a new voice representing Aboriginal women's experience in Australian literature, but as an outmoded reworking of socialist realism. This critical template ignored both the cultural sensitivity of the editors as activists in the Aboriginal rights movement and the author's adaptation of available tools for the Aboriginal cause. *Karobran* engages with and redirects socialist realist requirements for the demonstration of militancy, didacticism, optimism and typicality to serve Abo-

riginal political outcomes. The adaptation of white institutions and practices for Aboriginal ends is a significant nuance that has been overlooked. It marks one of the many achievements of *Karobran*. This is a novel written by an overtaxed Aboriginal woman in poor health and with little formal education. The manuscript was edited after her death by dedicated amateurs for little reward. After a struggle to gain the interest of publishers, *Karobran* was finally published by a small-scale cooperative press, The Alternative Publishing Cooperative Limited. Its valiant struggle to be heard was released into almost immediate obscurity.

ENDNOTES

1. Janine Little, 'Placing Authority in Aboriginal Women's Prose', *Voices of a Margin: Speaking For Yourself*, Leonie Rowan & Jan McNamee (eds), Central Queensland University Press, 1995, p. 46.
2. Mavis Miller, 17 March 1998, Letter to Jennifer Jones.
3. Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1996, p. 350.
4. Joy Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of childhood by Australian Women*, OUP, Oxford, 1990, p. 330.
5. Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1998, p. 265.
6. Goodall, p. 273.
7. Len Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left*, Len Fox, Sydney, 1982, p. 60.
8. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 'Bringing Them Home', *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Sydney, 1997, p. 49.
9. Mudrooroo Narogin, *Writing From the Fringe*, Hyland House, South Melbourne, 1990, p. 175.
10. Jennifer Jones, 'Yesterday's Words', *The Beautiful and the Damned*, Journal of Australian Studies, no. 64, 2000, pp. 128–134.
11. Hooton, p. 332.
12. Monica Clare, *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl*, Alternative Publishing Cooperative Limited, Sydney, 1978, p. 90.
13. Clare, p. 90.
14. Clare, p. 75.
15. Clare, p. 90.
16. Clare, p. 90.
17. Clare, p. 27.

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taking Margaret Atwood for a cut-and-colour

Margaret Atwood in my lap
keeps me occupied while
the cold jelly tongue licks at my scalp.

She speaks of war and grandmothers and pigs
as I'm offered cappuccino, and the blue solution
leaches out the winter dark.

She suggests *to move beyond the mirror's edge.*
Rinsed and dried I see
in the full-length gilt-rimmed glass

my head an autumn maple.
I leave with Margaret Atwood in my bag
and she is silent on the journey home.

Tricia Dearborn

symposium

50 years of power without glory

POWER WITHOUT GLORY has taken such a sure place in the tradition of Australian working-class literature that it's a surprise to reflect that it was also a first novel by an author who turned thirty-three during the year of its publication. In 1950 Frank Hardy was one year younger than this year's Vogel recipient, Stephen Gray. As a first novel *Power Without Glory* seems too ambitious, too epic in scope. But it also tells a history that no-one else seemed prepared to record, of the betrayal of the labour movement, Labor Party and working-class Australians by a self-regarding gangster.

In its fiftieth anniversary year, *Power Without Glory* has again been re-published, by Random House. We asked four critics to respond to the novel and its place in Australian society then and now. Presented below are their responses, remarkable in their variety of focus and concern.

kylie valentine points out that despite its heroic legacy, the novel is often gauche in its style and attitudes. Nadia Wheatley makes a convincing argument that *Power Without Glory* has dated very quickly over the last twenty years. Fiona Capp questions the priorities of a publisher who would publish such an anniversary edition without including an up-to-date introduction to the book's long career (or, we might add, without reproducing Ambrose Dyson's splendid artwork in the original edition – some of which we have used to illustrate this symposium). We begin our responses, however, with Chris Wallace-Crabbe's reflections on just how significant *Power Without Glory* was in its own time and place.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

THE DECADE THAT BEGAN around 1946 was an exciting time, a short period of post-war realignments, old enmities and new ideological strategies. It was a period within which a Labor Government intervened to break a national coal strike, a conservative Prime Minister strove without success to ban the Communist Party, and the ALP split destructively and bitterly into two.

Many aspects of the period turned on decisions made by Catholics and ex-Catholics, Frank Hardy being one of the latter, notoriously.

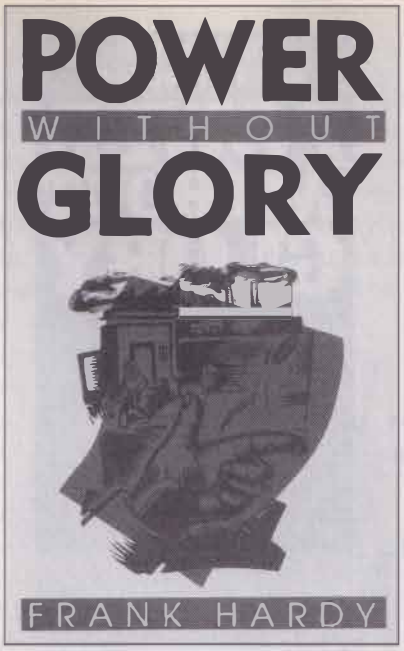
My father was a professional journalist, with a bohemian interest in politics which swayed merrily between admiring the Communists and rejoicing in the efficient face of capitalism. For those two warring parties, Masons and Catholics, who loomed so prominently in large organizations, he had no time at all; the former were boring plotters, the latter 'whining Micks'. They deserved one another.

One day in my Matric year Dad came back from the *Herald* office gleeful about a book he was carrying, a thick novel wrapped in brown paper. He had 'got hold of a copy' of *Power Without Glory*. Seemingly, the lads in journalism had been waiting for it to hit the streets, the low buzz of gossip having run far ahead of its printing.

It was easy to read, rather than well written, and certainly too long; but the story had that peculiar grip that comes from immediate locality and recent events. A few of the characters were identifiable from the start, but soon Dad turned up with a flimsy typed sheet which translated the names of some thirty characters. We kept this sheet tucked in the back of our *Power Without Glory*.

Soon enough Frank Hardy was in the news. Arrested before the end of the year, he struggled on against the criminal libel case which the Wrens brought against him until he was acquitted in the middle of 1951.

The first half of the book retains much of its original vitality, half a century on. At the time, it had given a dark, mythological life to suburbs like Collingwood, Richmond and Carlton. And the name, Carringbush, has passed into our language.



Nadia Wheatley

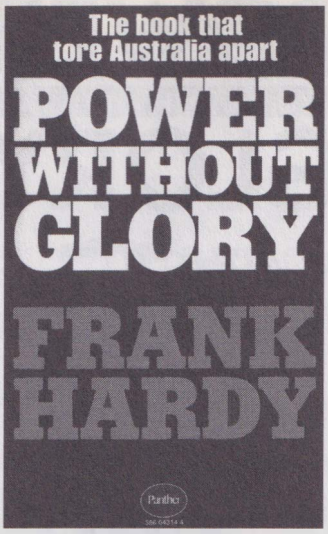
WHY DO PEOPLE read historical fiction – whether 'faction' books about comparatively recent events, or novels depicting the distant past? For that matter, why are television audiences attracted to shows like 'True Believers' or the mini-series based on Robert Graves' *Claudius* books?

Of course, beneath the umbrella of historical fiction there shelter a few different types of novel. First, there is the sort of story based on real people (sometimes with fictionalized names) involved in real and often momentous events. (Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* is an example, as is *Sister Kate* by Jean Bedford. Roger McDonald's recent literary and popular success, *Mr Darwin's Shooter*, is part of the same sub-genre.) Second, there is the period novel, in which the characters as well as the plot are fictionalized, and the aim is to give a 'feel' of the times. (Examples include *A House is Built* by M. Barnard Eldershaw, *My Brother Jack* by George Johnston, and Kylie Tennant's *The Battlers*. Or more recently *The Drowner,* by Robert Drewe.) Thirdly, however, we must also include within this genre the problematic sort of book which begins as a contemporary realist novel but which becomes historical as time goes on. Thus *Come in Spinner* – which Dymphna Cusack and Florence James wrote during the Second World War – was an up-to-the-minute account of life in Kings Cross during the American occupation. By the time this was published in 1951, that world no longer existed; and now the novel's main appeal is as a window into women's lives at that time.

So where does *Power Without Glory* fit, among these varieties of historical novel? Obviously, it comes into the first group, for it is crammed with real historical figures – from the Archbishop of Melbourne to a few Prime Ministers, a bunch of Premiers, a bundle of politicians and any number of bent coppers and colourful racing identities. Oh yes, and there's a crooked capitalist in it too, and his adulterous wife. Between them, they play out real and decidedly momentous events on the stage of Victoria (and to some extent Queensland and Canberra) over the first half of the last century.

The reference to the book's time-setting raises some of the problems with defining and discussing Hardy's novel. Although Part Three of the text goes up to 1950 – the year of publication of this book – that is now ancient history. Like *Come In Spinner,* this text has become a period piece.

Of course, when I first read *Power Without Glory* – in 1968, when I was nineteen – it was already nearly two decades since the character called John West recited the Confiteor and fell into his troubled sleep on the last page of the book. Yet the world of this novel still seemed more or less like the world in which I lived. For instance, the meatless butcher's shop on the corner of my inner-Sydney street was really an SP bookie's premises. More pertinently, the effects that West/Wren and Malone/Mannix had had on the Labor Party were still terribly evident in the power which the DLP wielded in both parliamentary and union elections. Some of the characters in the book (such as Lane/Lang) were still alive. So was the author. Indeed, I got arrested in the same demonstration as him when the Gurindji came to town to present their land



claim to Vesteys in 1969. I will never forget sitting alone in the women's cell at Phillip Street Police Station, listening to the uproarious laughter coming from the men's cell as Frank Hardy told yarn after yarn to a couple of dozen male demonstrators. It is the only time in my life when I wished I was a bloke.

But that era is gone. And in this globalized and virtual world of the Third Millennium, I fear that this Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of *Power Without Glory* would fail to get its message across to many new readers. To understand why this book has lost some of its appeal, I have to go back to the question I posed at the opening of this piece. What do readers want from historical fiction?

I think we read this genre for a couple of reasons. In regard to what I have identified as the first sub-genre – the novel based around real people and events – historical fiction is able to tell us about some of the things that cannot be put into non-fiction history books because there is no evidence, especially of the documentary kind. Of course, evidence may be missing because written records have gone astray. This obviously happens with texts from the past – lost through catastrophe or ignorance or sheer entropy – but it is also common for contemporary documents to disappear into the office shredder. More tantalizingly, there are those deliberations and decisions which are potentially so explosive that they are never written down. Secret deals – whether done by businessmen, politicians, judges, union officials, church leaders, or hired hitmen – are by definition off the record. Often historians can see the proof that such a deal must have been struck; yet without the paperwork available for footnotes, it is difficult to include such information in a standard historical text. Even oral history is not able completely to solve the problem.

It is here that good historical fiction can fill the holes which non-fiction must leave gaping. By 'good', I mean a text which has been comprehensively and rigorously researched – whether that research takes the form of reading secondary sources, or working through primary sources, or conducting oral history interviews, or a mixture of all three forms.

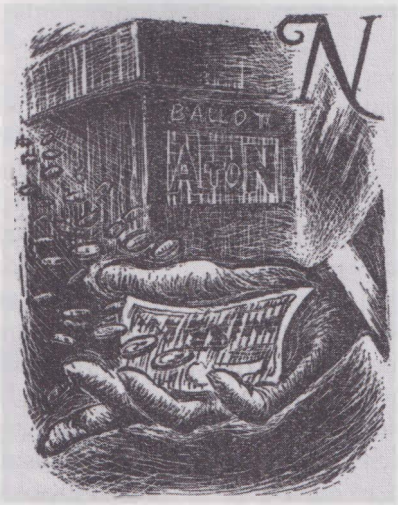
In regard to this particular function of the genre, *Power Without Glory* would have to be the most successful and significant example in Australian literature. As a Secret History of the Labor Party – and incidentally of both the Catholic Church and the gambling industry – this text is of prime importance to any understanding of how this nation developed. Obviously, the author's research method – of collecting oral history around the pubs and racecourses, often from people who were desperate to remain anonymous – was the only available method. Further, the author's particular talents as a yarnspinner and barfly and punter gave him an extraordinary advantage. So did his political commitment. Like other social realist writers such as Jean Devanny or Judah Waten, Frank Hardy had a message which he believed the masses needed to read. In Hardy's case, he was so desperate to deliver the message that he would risk his life as well as his liberty in order to tell it.

The author's urgency still comes across in the novel. And yet I was very saddened on this rereading to find the book often failing to hold my interest. The reason, I think, is that the primary appeal of the historical novel is neither the plot (the 'facts' of history) nor the period setting. The main attraction of this genre lies in character. Whether the novel portrays real historical figures, or whether it depicts completely fictionalized characters, these people from the past must seem to breathe and bleed – and breed! – as we do. They may be long dead, but they must be alive on the page.

This is where *Power Without Glory* falls down. Of course, in the social realist mode, characterization often relies upon cartoon stereotypes such as the top-hatted, cigar-smoking boss, the spivvy petty criminal, or the handsome and noble working man. Though such depictions are evident in Hardy's novel, the source of the problem lies elsewhere. As David Carter has pointed out, in *Power Without Glory*

"the narrative frequently turns to a 'history voice', directed at a contemporary audience"; the text assumes that the reader shares the specific history unveiled through the story. I believe it was this assumption which caused Hardy to skimp on characterization.

After all, people such as Archbishop Mannix and Red Ted Theodore and Les Darcy were well known to the book's intended audience. Further, the names of the fictional characters were so close to the names of their models that Hardy could rely upon readers 'translating' the text as they read, and bringing the novel alive with knowledge they had gained either from newspaper stories or from hearsay. It is relevant that the working-class community – which Hardy saw as his target audience – had a strong oral tradition. And everyone in the pub knew some gossip about John Wren and his multifarious connections! As the author expected the reader to collaborate in the text in this way, it seemed unnecessary for characters to be fully realized. It is also relevant that the author expected his novel to be ephemeral. As far as Hardy knew, it might be lucky to sell out the first print run.



New readers of today, unfortunately, cannot read the novel in the way the author intended. The problem isn't that the world has changed. Readers can still access *My Brother Jack*, which covers more or less the same time span and geographical setting, and which is also based on real people. The difference is that George Johnston knew that he could not expect his audience to be familiar with his family and colleagues, and so he had to create them as rounded individuals. Reading Hardy's text, on the other hand, it seems as if human beings of fifty years ago were somehow flat and two-dimensional.

In short, if a historical novel is to have a lasting appeal, it must work as fiction as well as history. Yet while *Power Without Glory* falls down in the fiction department, it remains our only source for a vital part of our history, and for this reason it is terrific to see it back in print. Despite the brave new world of the Third Millennium, the Australian Labor Party is still subject to some of the same sort of pressures, as evidenced by the role the Catholic Church played in the recent debate over the extension of IVF to lesbians and single women. However, if Frank Hardy's timely message is to get across to a new generation of Australians, I think we'll have to wait for someone to make another up-to-the-minute television mini-series of the novel. I can just see it: like a cross between 'True Believers' and the 'Claudius' series, it would be a real ripper.

Fiona Capp

THEY MAY NOT SELL like cook books but when it comes to safe bets and long-term investments in publishing, novels which have become 'classics' are hard to beat. Production costs are minimal, the 'product' is tried and true, and it requires little publicity because its reputation precedes it. And in most cases, the pesky author has long since gone to the grave. Chances are that these highly regarded works of literature will be set texts either at a secondary or tertiary level and therefore have a guaranteed market. It would not seem much to ask, therefore, that publishers take it upon themselves to incur the small cost of occasionally commissioning fresh introductory essays that address what these works might mean to contemporary readers.

Publishers obviously see it differently. A few years ago, Penguin re-issued a list of twentieth-century classics from *Animal Farm* and *The Outsider* to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, all with very hip covers designed to catch the attention of the youth market. The production values of these editions was low and, of course, there wasn't an introduction in sight. What seemed to have been forgotten was that all these novels are significant not just because they are acclaimed works of literature but

because of the historical moment at which they appeared. And to fully appreciate them, you need to have some understanding of the political and social conditions that inspired them. This assumption has always been implicit in the Penguin English Library series with their orange spine and the black-spined Penguin Classics. It was also assumed that introductions needed updating because our reading of these works is never static.

When the latest re-issue of *Power Without Glory* arrived in the mail a few months ago I was impressed with the gold-embossed print and the gold banner announcing the fiftieth-anniversary edition. Such a cover seemed to suggest that the publishers, Random House, recognized that this was a special occasion that ought to be formally acknowledged. Not special enough, I realized when I opened it up, for them to bother including even the briefest of prefaces, let alone a new introduction. This is not in any way to disparage Jack Lindsay's fine 1968 introduction which has been republished with this edition. The point is that the publisher's failure to do more than change the cover casts over this new edition an aura of opportunism and indifference. The overall impression is of a product being recycled, not an important work of literature being celebrated or re-appraised.

Similarly, as delighted as I was to see the twentieth-anniversary re-issue of John Bryson's *Evil Angels* published by Hodder Headline, with an afterword by John Bryson on the discovery of the matinee jacket and the release of Lindy Chamberlain, I was amazed by the complete absence of any introduction or preface. In the mid-1990s, I taught *Evil Angels* to first-year university students, most of whom were too young to remember the death of Azaria Chamberlain at Ayers Rock and Lindy Chamberlain's subsequent conviction for the murder of her daughter. For readers such as these students, who have no knowledge of the case or of the role played by the book in changing public opinion about Lindy Chamberlain's guilt, an introduction can make all the difference to their desire to simply start reading the book, let alone their understanding of it.

In light of all this, Text Publishing's recent edition of *The Getting of Wisdom* by Henry Handel Richardson in an attractive, large format, with an appealing cover and an introduction by Germaine Greer is to be applauded. The idea of having a high profile literary figure providing the introduction seemed a great way of encouraging a whole new generation of readers to discover this marvellous novel about a young girl's initiation into the class-ridden world of an exclusive Melbourne girls' school late last century. Unfortunately, it is debatable whether Greer's introduction will facilitate a fresh appreciation of this work. In typical Greer fashion, she mixes lively literary criticism with bursts of spleen over a country that is "utterly philistine". Her insistence that *The Getting of Wisdom* is Richardson's only "great book" – a questionable claim – leads her to harshly critique *Maurice Guest* and to deride Australians for bothering to study Richardson's epic *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. What is to be gained from these swipes at Richardson's other work is not clear, except that it gives Greer the opportunity to show that she has left such "provincialism" behind. Ironically Greer betrays the very snobbishness which Richardson so brilliantly dissects in *The Getting of Wisdom*.

There is, however, something to be said for this kind of controversy. At least it gets people arguing and debating and challenging ossified critiques. Imagine Germaine Greer on Frank Hardy . . .

kylie valentine

THE SPINNING SOVEREIGN that opens *Power Without Glory* has come to stand for the whole book in ways not dissimilar to the madeleine cake near the opening of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Both are remembered as central to their respective texts; the first reading of each text is consequently surprising for the slight role each has to play. Proust and Hardy, to make a surely winning bid for most obvious statement of the year, have little in common. Yet both wrote what have come to be famous books, and famous for things that have little to do with their content. Anyone who has read Proust will remember the madeleine as significant enough in inaugurating the plot, but not as the central device. Anyone who has read *Power Without Glory* will remem-

ber the sovereign that features at beginning and end as bookends to the main action, but again hardly as the overwhelming image. *Power Without Glory* is, like Proust, it would seem, both famous and unread. Indeed, it sat on my bookshelves for fifteen years before I read it.

When I did, I was surprised by more than the cameo role played by the sovereign. I was also surprised, though I confess not much, by all that is wrong with it. The book, it must be said, is stylistically awful. Hardy proves elsewhere to have a great ear for dialogue, but throughout *Power Without Glory* the dialogue is ludicrous, as is the characterization. If this was an early attempt to represent the socialist-realist set of character 'types' then this might explain the absurd caricatures of the crim, the Irish layabout, the garrulous lawyer and so on. If so, then the attempt to render the characters of John West, Danniel Mannix/Malone and Anstey/Ashton as subtle, complex, and contradictory characters would suggest a kind of mixing of genres at best, counterproductive at worst. The narrative perspective is inconsistent, moving from internal monologue to omniscient and back again to little apparent purpose and without explanation. Some episodes are powerful and finely rendered; a lot are not. The relationship between West's brother Arthur and his 'brother of the lash' Dick Bradley is so overheated as to just about fall into the category of camp. The same thing can be said of most of the sexual relationships represented. It is unfair to impose a contemporary feminist analysis on *Power Without Glory* and expect it to emerge impressively, and the text is no more misogynist than most other male-authored texts of the time. That said, Hardy's sexual politics are here as elsewhere problematic, and if little purpose is to be served by condemning him then neither is any to be served by failing to notice that no woman born has ever looked, talked or fucked like any one of Hardy's women, that a disquieting number of them are brainless harridans and nags, and that none of them come even close to being a fully drawn character.

It may be objected that the foregoing is an indulgent, formalistic reading that misses the point, and that the basis for such a reading is an unstated New Critical fantasy of 'close reading' with no regard for the political impact, audience, or purpose of the text. Such an objection deserves some room, but raises the question: what service is done to the dignity of the Australian left by telling a large slab of its history as the story of one man? More specifically, why should a book in which working-class characters make only brief and unsubstantial appearances be understood as a Communist history? John West of course begins as a member of the lumpenproletariat, but quickly begins to make money and escape that class position. The first 150 pages or so are populated with working-class characters, but these characters are largely gamblers or henchmen of West, or married to them. The trajectories of E.G. Theodore and Frank Anstey are glossed, but their primary function in the text is again served once they have escaped and betrayed their working-class origin. Left political agitators, most notably Egon Kisch and Tom Mann, appear episodically and make little impact on the momentum of the narrative logic. *Power Without Glory* is overwhelmingly the story of West, his wife, children and collaborators: the story not of those who are defeated by West, but of the ways in which he did the defeating. Those members of the working class who were not in West's pay, or gambling themselves destitute, or beating each other up, but instead organizing, agitating, striking, and voting, remain voices off throughout.

It may be objected, again, that these questions have already been raised and answered. John McLaren's rebuke of *Power Without Glory* for its lack of a trade union presence, and Paul Adams's fine defence of both Hardy and the text, are both to be found in Adams's literary biography of Hardy, *The Stranger from Melbourne*.[1] Adams is concerned, as I am not here, to delineate the differing political philosophies of left intellectuals in Australia during the Cold War; his response to McLaren is consequently subtle and multi-layered. Nonetheless, the argument that:

> It is not the union movement which provides the novel's political focus but rather a broader philosophical and historical notion of the 'people', rendered figuratively through various movements, groups and individuals, and through the tension between the profit motive and community in West's internal and external development[2]

seems unconvincing. There is barely any community represented at all. West's internal development consists largely of the repetition of his desire for power, his external development is restricted to his transformation from an unpleasant young man to an unpleasant old one, and the 'people' are barely rendered, figuratively or otherwise. Adams's other argument – that *Power Without Glory* was intended as the first in a series of Communist histories, and subsequent books in that series would tell history from 'below' as this one does from 'above' – rings truer, and places the novel back into Hardy's *oeuvre*, a context from which it has often been displaced by its fame.

There is one final point to be made about the connection between what is simplistically called 'bad writing' and what are equally simplistically called 'working-class readers'. Terry Lane's recent sledging of *overland* 159 is an unimpressive contribution to a long-standing argument about the readership of avant-garde literature, and the literary representation of the working class.[3] At its best, this argument has foregrounded the ideological apparatus behind the construction of the canon, the quietist implications of valuing 'great' writing, and the radical political uses to which forms conventionally understood as 'genteel' have been put. At its worst, it simply says that working-class readers cannot make sense of any literature that doesn't transcribe their own language and repeat it back to them. This argument has obvious problems, perhaps none more obvious than the fact that not all working-class readers share the same language. It is always important to be watchful of the reasons for the diminishment or dismissal of working-class writers like Hardy. It is also important for university-educated reviewers to remember that not every ambitious political writer striving to mobilize populist, realist, modernist, scientific, and critical rhetorics – ambitions which Hardy clearly had – can be dos Passos. However, it has always seemed to me to be vaguely insulting to assume that working-class readers will not find dialogue like "It's swearin' by the Mother a' God I am, that I haven't had the soight nor soign of a pair all day" jarring. Reading *Power Without Glory* as literature, as opposed to a pamphlet or instruction manual, must raise questions about its literary devices and the skill with which these devices are used.

The impact of *Power Without Glory* on Australian literary and political life, of course, goes far beyond its contents and form. There is not the space here to pay tribute to Hardy's life and work, to acknowledge that the formation of the Australasian Book Society was in large part a result of *Power Without Glory*'s publication, or that the publication itself recalls, in its innovation and political inflection, yet another famous and scandalous book: Joyce's *Ulysses*. Fifty years after its publication, however, it is the circumstances of its production and reception that loom as its most substantial legacy; a legacy that is not diminished by a recognition of its failures.

ENDNOTES

1. Paul Adams, *The Stranger from Melbourne: Frank Hardy – a literary biography 1944–1975*, UWA Press, Perth, 1999, pp. 162–165.
2. *ibid*, p. 164.
3. Terry Lane, 'Postcript', *The Age Extra*, Saturday 15 July 2000, p. 7.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe is a poet and Professorial Associate in The Australian Centre, The University of Melbourne. His forthcoming collection is By and Large *(Carcanet).*

Nadia Wheatley has recently revised and expanded her historical novel The House That Was Eureka. *The new edition will be published by Penguin in February.*

Fiona Capp is a Melbourne writer and reviewer. Her Writers Defiled *dealt with ASIO surveillance of Australian left-wing writers. She is the author of* Night Surfing *and* Last of the Sane Days.

kylie valentine is a Sydney writer and regular contributor to overland. *She is currently visiting Europe and the United States on an extended research trip.*

Self-Publishing Writers Beware

A New Form of Discrimination

Euan Mitchell

WILL GLOBAL market forces determine your equality of opportunity? Will equal opportunity legislation be circumvented by a new and more subtle form of discrimination which is extremely difficult to redress? And what if a government body, whose role it is to stand above market forces, actually reinforces this new type of discrimination?

Before examining one such scenario, it is worth noting how discrimination is defined in the Commonwealth's *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*:

> Any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin that has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.[1]

Perhaps another basis for discrimination which should be considered in our new global economy is 'access to economic means'. To explain the application of this term, I would like to draw on an example from the book publishing industry.

Over the past decade of economic rationalisation, book publishers have attempted to operate with fewer staff[2] while weeding out the least profitable authors. In business terms, this is an approach which accountants find easy to sell to shareholders. However, what looks good on paper does not necessarily translate into reality. Poorer quality books and a less diverse range do not help long-term profitability. No wonder total operating profits in Australian book publishing plunged more than 40 per cent from 1994 to 1998.[3]

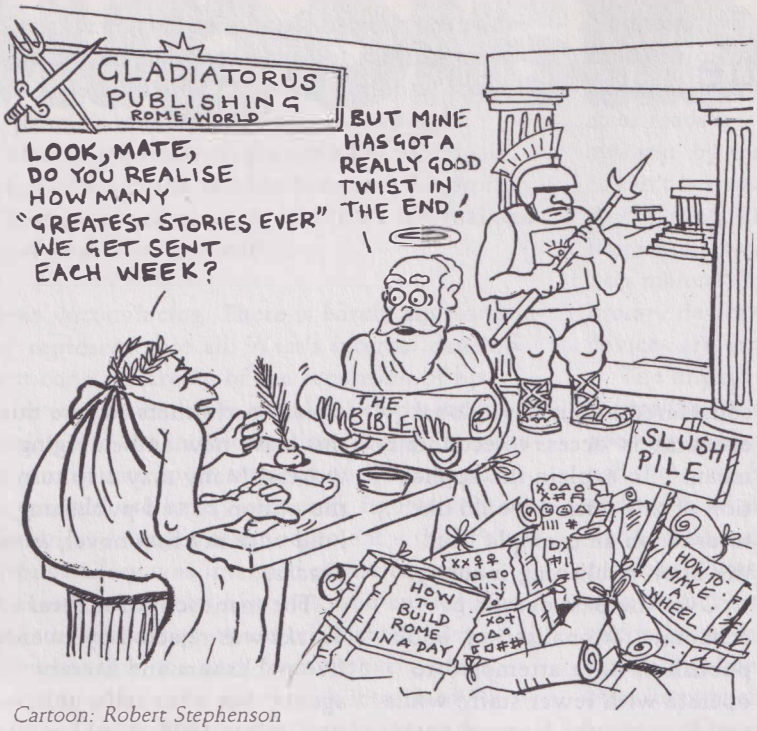
This climate of rationalisation and falling profits has induced a literary conservatism in mainstream publishing, which means even celebrated authors can be rejected for being 'too innovative'. For this reason, three-time Booker Prize nominee (1982, '86, '91), Timothy Mo, had to self-publish his latest novel in 1999.

So if publishers are less willing to take risks and only want to back proven mainstream performers, where does this leave new and emerging writers? Many may also turn to the option of self-publishing, as I did with my first novel, *Feral Tracks*.

The manuscript for *Feral Tracks* was rejected by twenty-five publishers and literary agents, but after self-publication in late 1998, it sold more than 5,000 copies in Australia and New Zealand over its first twelve months. The novel was nominated for a readers' choice award in WA, and the movie rights were optioned by a Melbourne-based film company in July 2000. The screenplay has been written and is currently in development.

Imagine my surprise when I discovered this track record was still insufficient to be eligible for any sort of financial assistance from the Literature Fund of the Australia Council towards writing my second novel. Why? Because *Feral Tracks* was self-published. However, the author of any Australian novel released by a publisher is instantly eligible for a 'Developing Writers' Grant' for their second book even if their first book had poor sales and negative reviews.

Due to my lack of "access to



Cartoon: Robert Stephenson

economic means", i.e. a publisher willing to publish my novel, I was being discriminated against by the very body which is meant to assist emerging writers. This exclusion does have "the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity . . . in . . . occupation" and therefore should be considered as a form of discrimination.

I wrote to the Australia Council to find out why they would not consider self-published books, regardless of their merits. Their illogical reply revealed a serious lack of understanding as to how the publishing industry actually works.

The Australia Council asserted that self-publishers do not have access to professional editing, design and production skills. This is simply incorrect. All these skills can be accessed via many means including directories of editors and designers, the *Yellow Pages,* writers' centre newsletters, word-of-mouth recommendations and literary journals. The same freelance sources which so many mainstream publishers use. As a former senior editor for a multinational publisher, I can attest that the majority of book editors are freelancers working from home.

The Council also tried to argue that self-publishers do not have access to national distribution systems. This is also incorrect, and indicates a serious misconception or lack of awareness about independent book distribution. Self-publishers most definitely do have access to national distributors, including the five leaders: Dennis Jones & Associates, Gary Allen Book Distributors, Gemcraft National Distributors, Herron Book Distributors and Tower Books.[4] *Feral Tracks* is distributed nationally by Dennis Jones & Associates.

I had anticipated that the Australia Council's real objection to including self-published books was that they would be swamped with vanity publications or substandard works. To prevent this, I suggested applying some selection criteria to self-published books such as minimum sales of 1,000 copies and/or a positive review from an established literary body such as the *Australian Book Review* or Children's Book Council of Australia. In this way, the Australia Council could handle what would probably amount to, in reality, only a handful of additional applications, while addressing the serious issues which the current rules raise of access, equity and diversity.

Their objection to this first criterion revealed a breathtaking lack of industry awareness: "1,000 minimum sales would be almost impossible to audit since aspects such as price, number and location of bookshops selling a self-published title would have to be determined". However, a distributor's monthly sales report lists: a sales code; the name and location of the bookstore which purchased the book; the date; the quantity; the price charged; total sales for the month; total sales for the year. These monthly reports are good enough for the Australian Taxation Office, why not the Australia Council?

Their objection to the second criterion, taking into account reviews from respected literary bodies, was that the

Council wanted to make up its own mind about literary merit. Fair enough. However, this totally undermined their argument about using commercial publishers to screen books for the Council, because it begs the question as to why they allow these publishers the exclusive right to determine candidates for grants each year? Surely a favourable critical review from a respected literary organisation has more credibility than the self-interested biases and profit motives of publishers?

The Council steadfastly believes that commercial publication is distinguished by "an objective external decision on publication potential by a professional publisher with a wide range of knowledge of other publications available". This was true enough a decade ago. However, this has been seriously undermined in recent years by many commercial publishers' desire to make a quick buck with minimal risk – not unlike vanity and subsidy publishers where authors pay to have their books produced. Also, an "external objective decision" can be used to stifle innovation and limit diversity of opinion and views, especially if this so-called 'objective' decision is increasingly conservative in its estimation of value – as it clearly is.

However, it was the Australia Council's closing comment which was the most dumbfounding. They pointed out their aim is to look after "practising writers as a whole rather than the situation of any one individual writer". Which is, of course, exactly why I raised the issue in the first place. By discriminating against self-published writers, the whole is being ignored in favour of only those voices deemed fit for publication by the commercially-driven literary gatekeepers.

When I argued the above points in a reply letter, the Australia Council deferred it to a meeting of the Literature Fund in February 2001. Time enough for anyone interested to add their voice to this issue. The Federal Minister for the Arts, Peter McGauran, has washed his hands of the matter. He replied to my written concern, saying: "it would be inappropriate for me to offer the Council advice about its criteria".

I believe self-publishing will be the way of the future for many new writers wishing to break out of the vicious circle of anonymity which prevents so many from being published. One of the realities of the publishing world is that public profile can count for more than actual talent. Hence the writers' catch-22: how do you get published without a profile and how do you get a profile without being published?

Doggerel for Old Dreamers

When we were young
Our parents said,
If we wanted to write,
We'd better get
A proper job,
And do the rest at night.

Our lot were all
Depression kids,
Then sent away to war,
Our 'hobby' put
Aside until
All else had gone before.

A hobby was
What writing was,
No way to make a life,
We worked all day
And toiled away
As husband, mother, wife.

We wrote our books
When, kids asleep,
Typing their lullaby,
We put our dreams
On paper and
Refused to let them die.

No copiers or
PCs then,
Five years to write a book!
We battled on
Against the odds
To lose the 'hobby' hook.

Now whether we
Succeeded or
The battle wasn't won,
The new Tax law
Defines us all
Hobbyists every one.

It seems a shame
That we should name
Old writers in this way –
Who once were called
Professional!
But that was yesterday.

Betty Collins

You could hire a leaky yacht and set a course for the Antarctic, apply for an intern job at the White House, or self-publish. To ensure everyone has access to the information needed to self-publish without risking a garage full of unsold books I wrote *Self-Publishing Made Simple: The Ultimate Australian Guide.* Somewhat ironically, this book was picked up by an independent Australian publisher, Hardie-Grant Books, and released in mid-2000.

In the section of *Self-Publishing Made Simple* which deals with grants, I urge interested parties to write to the Australia Council about its discrimination against self-published books. The criteria won't be changed overnight, the earliest would be 2002, but it is clearly in the writing community's best interests to give self-published books a fair go in the future. Of course readers will also benefit from a more diverse choice.

In defining and illustrating 'access to economic means' as a new form of discrimination, I wish to draw a distinction with the argument that all discrimination is ultimately based on economics. While this may well be true, I had access to the means of producing and selling a book, I even owned some of the means of production, i.e. my personal computer and software. But I did not have access to the 'right' sort of economic means when producing my novel, according to the Australia Council.

How ironic this distinction comes from the very body whose reason for existence is to assist writers and other artists to build a critical mass of work, in order to become self-sustaining, in the face of ruthless global market forces.

How long will these convenient arrangements which the Australia Council has with the commercial publishers, continue to discriminate against those writers who use their initiative to get a book into orbit, sell it nationally and even earn a few export dollars? You'd think they would be rewarded.

ENDNOTES

1. Commonwealth Government *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986,* Section 3: Interpretation.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (Surveys of) Book Publishers, Australia, 1994, 1997–98.
3. Ibid.
4. Angus & Robertson Bookworld, *Preferred Independent Distributors,* Melbourne, 2000.

Euan Mitchell is a former senior editor for a multinational publisher and the author of the top-selling self-published novel Feral Tracks.

What Writers' Festival?

Phil Doyle

"IT'S A JOKE DEBATE, Phil," were the placating words of Adam Ford. It was a statement that seemed to sum up this year's National Young Writers' Festival.

The debate in question was the spoken word debate – 'What is spoken word?' Far from resolving anything, or being really entertaining either, it highlighted two things: Firstly, it underscored something the Sydney poets (led by Tug Dumbly) seem to have understood for years – namely, that spoken word is pretty much stand-up comedy. Secondly, it highlighted just how shallow Australia's young writers have become in order to grab an audience.

To see the Melbourne contingent get sucked into this along with everyone else was pretty sad, pathetic really. As Gerry Keaney (who unfortunately wasn't at the festival) has pointed out elsewhere, poetry is more than a retirement home for ideas. Then again, Gerry's from Brisbane via Canberra, so he isn't really in the Sydney–Melbourne loop that obviously has a monopoly on wisdom in this country.

The dumbing down of Australian ideas was alive and well at Newcastle from 5–9 October. This festival tried to formalize all the anarchic strengths of last year's festival. From an 'official' graffiti wall (Jesus!), to Richard Watts standing in Civic Park trying to recapture some of the informal brilliance of the 'dickhead workshops' that, last year, were held in the park late at night. This time they used a PA and held the thing on a Sunday afternoon jammed between the zine fair and the electrofringe, er, performances.

Later on an MC introduced a Newcastle poet with the observation that "I haven't met anyone from Newcastle yet".

The writer Raymond Carver once said that a good writer pays attention to what is going on around them. How you could spend five days in Newcastle and not notice that

there was a city full of people going on around you, and subsequently fail to engage them, is nothing short of breathtaking. But then again the little people of Newcastle aren't really quite the stuff of literary networking I guess.

And there's the rub.

Newcastle was a classic exposition of the fact that we're producing a generation of networking schmoozers and grant junkies that call themselves writers. The only thing that suffers from this is our stories, and, hell, who needs stories when you can hang a culture around a hook line or a gag? This year's festival had all the spontaneity of drying concrete.

Newcastle itself is a great city full of interesting people.

On the Thursday night a mysterious character, who became known as Mullet Girl, was selling chocolate dope cake at five dollars a slice. This rather strong concoction cut a swathe through the Melbourne poets, amongst others, producing some rather interesting out-of-body experiences.

Newcastle's beaches are great, there are some great op shops, and this writer managed to box a quinella on the Friday afternoon that paid $110.80, so the weekend wasn't a complete write-off, even if we did have to buy speed by the line (a curious local practice).

The vibrant Newcastle music scene provided more than a little relief, with a range of bands playing venues along Hunter Street on Friday and Saturday night.

On the Saturday I met a local young filmmaker taking some sun in the park. He asked me what all these people were doing near the Town Hall. I told him about the This Is Not Art Festival, which the National Young Writers' Festival was a part of. He had never heard of it even though he was a part of Newcastle's creative arts community.

Ironically Adam Ford was also partly responsible for the highlight of the festival, at least in terms of spoken word, which was the *Going Down Swinging* launch. This introduced some good new young talent, including Daniel Donahoo, Emily Zoe-Baker and Luke Whitby from Adelaide.

Another notable success was the zine fair. Sadly this appears to be the only truly innovative and challenging area of new young writing in this country. From the unambiguously titled 'Shit For Dickheads' (which is pretty much what its name suggests), to Andrew Sutherland's serialized novel, and many more others besides, this was where the real talent at the festival raised its ugly head.

Other highlights? The Fables and Myths seminar, where a bunch of circle jerks sat around discussing *Star Wars*. The Freelance Writing panel engaged the rather noble idea of being a paid liar. The advertising panel, which skipped around the idea that advertising drives magazine content. And the sports panel that never really seemed to fire up at all.

In fact the general tone of the panellists this year was '**why** we're successful and you're not'. The primary reason these people appeared to be successful is they generally knew someone in the industry to start with.

So, young writers! Throw out your ideas, get yourself smartened up and get along to some literary soirées. No-one is interested in your ideas, but you can always tailor your opinions and attitudes to your betters, and voila! You are now part of the machine.

shane xmass who was attending his first Newcastle festival commented on how alienating the whole festival was. I think it's something that those at the core of this festival tend to overlook.

I don't know why it is but the creative areas of this country seem to be dominated by tertiary educated wankers. No-one seems to think that there's something wrong with a creative community that demands attendance at a tertiary institution before a person can contribute to the cultural life of a country. Of course this is a generalization, but if you take out the published writers who have been to university you are left with a pretty small number of practitioners in this country.

The Classy Panel – which featured some good input from the poet Sarah Attfield – tried to tackle the exclusion of working-class voices in Australian writing. Forgetting Vanessa Badham's rather bizarre assertion that working-class Australians aren't racist, this panel established that working-class voices exist – despite the best efforts of the Australian publishing industry.

On the panel I posed the question "why do you need to go to uni before you can tell a story?"

University is a bourgeoifying experience, writing for publication is a bourgeois activity. The main loser in this equation is Australian culture, which ends up with fluff and dross like *The Castle* as being representative elements of our national identity. The only solution was to go and get good and pissed.

The 2000 National Young Writers' Festival is a dangerous but sadly predictable barometer of the conservative times in which we live. Under Marcus Westbury's valuable direction over the last two years it seemed to offer a refreshing and energetic face to Australian writing. This sort of challenging vibrancy never seems to last.

What's the bet that those who are out there challenging nothing are the ones pushed forward by the publishing industry in this country as our new young voices?

And the double? Put your rent on anyone who is making waves with their writing being pretty much silenced.

Phil Doyle is unemployed and lives in Coburg, Victoria.

Prices of Freedom

Cassie Lewis

ON THE SURFACE, California is a haven. The summer weather has been uncannily perfect with clear blue vistas like a baby's eyes. I'm living some distance out of San Francisco, between the hills and the sea, in a part of what's known as Silicon Valley. These hills are glorious, albeit often stripped of trees. In summer, they're brown like the Dandenongs, in winter they're green like Ireland.

But housing is short here. Homelessness is one of the most pressing social problems as rents and home prices skyrocket at the absurd rate of new technology. Things move so fast in this part of the world, you wonder whether anybody has time to reflect. Schoolteachers and nurses, despite salaries that would be good in other parts of North America, cannot afford the rent. And one must have medical, dental, comprehensive auto insurance to feel at all secure. There is no public health system to speak of.

On bad days, the serenity of North America – as distinct from South America; this distinction is important – feels like numbness or delusion. It's as if I had stepped into a dream, and nobody can wake up. I often feel for those new migrants who arrive with no prospects, nothing, and must not only pursue the American Dream but perform a kind of cultural amnesia on themselves, forgetting all other lives they've lived. It's okay to be black or Hispanic or Asian, but one must behave like a white in order to prosper. That's the sense I have.

In the lead-up to a presidential election there's very little talk of politics, as if the people feel it hardly matters who wins, or that it's a popularity contest. Indeed only 40 per cent of the population chooses to vote. It's strange to me that voting should be an optional extra in a large democracy. To me, it is a responsibility at the very core of democracy.

The paradox at the heart of many social problems here is the belief in choice and liberty and an unwillingness to accept responsibilities. The pro-gun lobbies are a key example of this. But it goes further. There is only the most minimal of social welfare safety nets. College is vastly expensive, factored into the family budget like a second mortgage. Community is a word you hear a lot here in California, and it is a novel concept to many Americans. Those local candidates who advocate gun control and more funding for public health seem radical, revolutionary, as indeed they are.

Empires rise and fall, but characteristic of most is the desire to revamp history into a long accolade for the current regime. Brilliantly, modern American politics disguises itself and its short past so that it is easy to believe that common decency is the only agenda here. And yet people are decent, kind, sunny, even humorous and innocent. Maybe they are just too idealistic, too insulated from the effects of this country's actions. Maybe there is a peculiar fundamentalism here that takes the form of nationalism and is blinding.

Some say that communism is an advanced stage in the development of political maturity. If this is so, North America has a lot of growing up to do. On so many levels, I just don't understand what makes this place tick. No doubt the founding fathers knew secrets about this land that I cannot. For now, I'm content to visit the forest reserves and look at that baby-blue sky and wonder.

Cassie Lewis is an Australian poet now living in San Francisco. Her first book, High Country, *will soon be published by Little Esther.*

A Womb of One's Own

Andrea Sherwood

ONE-LINERS, buzz words, and biography are all the fashion, just like heroin addicts, according to Dale Atrens (*overland* 158). He has no authority at all and he gets printed! Is it that easy to get published, I thought? A sloppy opinion piece that should have been cut to a hundred words max, or maybe used as an advertisement for something? Journalism and ethics, where are we heading? Not down the Garner path? I lay out the choices left for us writers:

Just recently I was told by an editor that he would be interested in reading my 'personal experiences' of addiction. Personal, biographical, is in. The Super Silly Scientist who had written in the aforementioned article for anyone to read (no sense of responsibility, of audience) was adamant that addiction 'did not exist'. Hands up those who think addiction is fashionable? I don't either. My father is a heroin addict, or a fashionable hero. Take him or leave him. My mother did just that and the six of us lived happily ever after. It was great without dad, the incessant debts, jail, ghosting around the house like a dead horse when he was 'hanging out'. So, under these circumstances, you learn a few things:

1. What was once a dog kennel is a great place to hide.
2. Money doesn't grow on anything, it's made-up.
3. Cause is not even remotely connected to Effect.
4. Mummy loves you even when she isn't there.
5. Addiction is addiction by any other name (like a rose).

And when life is too fast at that young age, you don't learn that things actually do end. Finito. The lack of this vital piece of information can age the young sufferer's skin, and dull her eyes. For three decades I thought that people could not change, at all. But people can change and that is called the Big Bang. People do change when the Big Bang happens in their life. In fact, not theory. And a whole new World View evolves, faster than slower. Then you have to go through the whole life cycle again, see the multiplicity of meaning you had missed before. In my house you have every stage of the life cycle right before (and behind) my eyes. There's my two-year-old, who thinks she shines, wet or dry, and wants to be a car, or a carplane. Speed is the quintessential key. That's why I had to put an eye on top of the fridge to watch my elder daughter. They're both too quick for me. Into everything. Except drugs. No drugs. Drugs are beyond the Bottom Line. "Look mum, no hands." I'd told her I'd chop off her hands if she ever touched them. We had long since banned drugs because of my father's addiction. We had even made up a jasmine noose to hang up on the clothesline; it's hardy, and beautiful to look at.

One-liners have always been in, the catchy phrase, the buzz words, the words you can quote without having to think, straight off the top of your head. Phrases like The Bottom Line have reached existential proportions; the bottom line is, literally, the bottom line. It is the end of the day, the traffic jam, the time between light and darkness where dreams we know not of may yet come to haunt us. It is the time of the Cause, the Beginning, the Secret of the Womb, the Hidden Place where life begins again and the old is made new, different. That is The Bottom Line: Difference. Is this the truth then, you ask, ears pricked, eyes bright with foible? Is it worth something? Will it sell? How can it be marketed? All discerning questions that we must, ineluctably, answer. The Womb is feminine. It bleeds monthly, it follows the moon's perfect pitch. The womb is not the bottom line, it is the sacred site where all things new begin again. So instead of having a simple line with a Top and a Bottom, we have a circle, and it is this circle that encapsulates us in everyday life. In Babyhood it takes the form of the Event. My two-year-old sets her sight on world discovery and discovers the Remote Control. She checks back to base. I nod. She aims, pure and true, and sure enough, a galaxy of mutating imagery appears. With a casual flick of the wrist, the world (it was real tv) was switched off. Here is a baby in control of her destiny, albeit remotely. Finally, baby reports back to mum and an Event has been accom-

plished, a slice of knowledge consumed *imaginatively*.

The adolescent's cycle is, of course, The Quest. These kids are out to create themselves, gods and goddesses, masculine and feminine. Sex is at the core of the adolescent quest for it is with that allusive garb that they are trying to dress themselves. Or go naked. Us adults have The Story, the beginning that contains the end (The Bottom Line), the climax, and the end (the bottom line) that contains the beginning of the next story. For us women, the story is the womb, or the womb is the story, either way, it makes sense. This Story, Event, Quest, Womb, is seen quite clearly in the cycle of music: Intro, verse, chorus, reintro, outro. Amazing isn't it? But then, that's the bottom line, which is always more, not less, than it appears to be, and that is where the bottom line becomes, as Effect, *of* the Womb, the Cause. Here comes the tricky part. Not the Leap Of Faith! I'm not asking you to see something that isn't there, am I? It's the Big Bang, the New World View. It is that vision which causes so much angst and anguish in the world, and that takes us back to the Difference of things, and that's frightening, but it's who we are. To discover who we are we must return to the womb; we women must have a womb of our own.

Andrea Sherwood is editor of the annual feminist issue of Australian Short Stories *and author of* One Siren or Another, *published by UQP.*

Floating Fund

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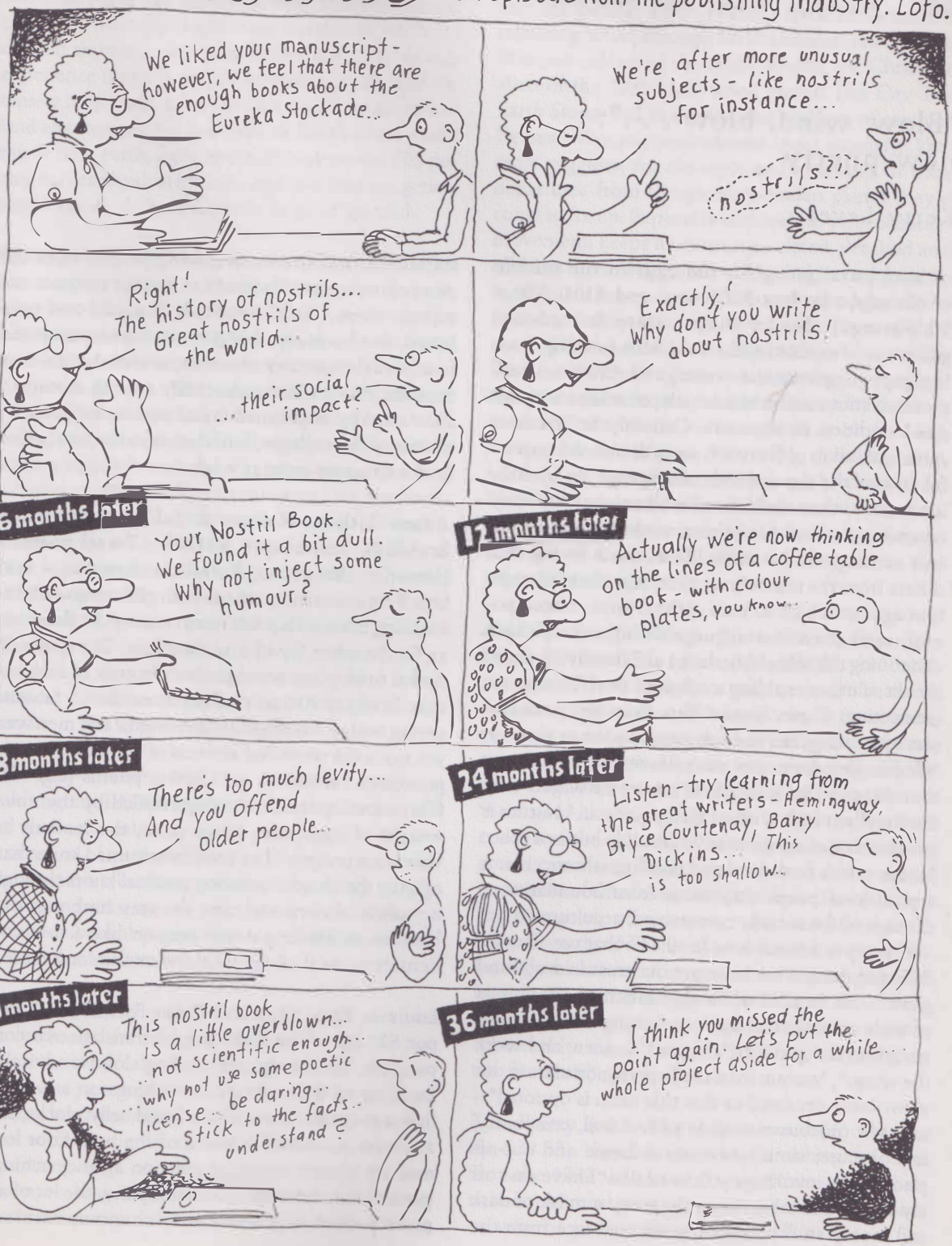
Steinbeck Country

Now the ghosts start coming. They skulk in poor suburbs, making claims on fountains, things. Gusts of America's past hit me, like smog that blows out to sea, so that I pity those who cannot shake the stares of the dispossessed. Every time I see a bulky figure in the street, I'm sure John Forbes has arrived in town, to help me shed an illusion. Once a bus driver looked so like him – Scots features, stern gaze, curiosity – I had no concept of 'destination' anymore . . . Is there a word for 'shape of a loss'? Here, old wildfire in the shape of a cross. In the aisle at the supermarket, American children play at shoot-outs. Cowboys and Indians. They know which they'd rather be, but I'm not sure, are the haunted luckier than those haunting? So it goes around. Australia's ghosts left instructions. Graffiti: a name loves another name. And a poem, not a life itself.

Cassie Lewis

Nostrildamus - an episode from the publishing industry. Lofo.



"Blow, wind, blow . . .": new poetry

Kerry Leves

cathoel jorss, *going for the eggs in the middle of the night*, po box 5865 west end 4101, $20 + $2 postage; also in shops, state & national galleries. Feminist critic Toril Moi (reading Luce Irigaray) suggested the writings of Christian religious mystics constitute a female, or at least a "feminine" tradition in literature. Certainly St Teresa of Avila and Julian of Norwich seem to inscribe powerful ideas of the slip and slide of language, its knobbly limitations, that could be related to contemporary concerns. As Toril Moi also remarked, these women's writings of the inner life evoke a seeing that differs from the masculinist gaze. It's a helpful tradition against which to read cathoel jorss, whose poetry seems to entrust language with the double task of defining the self's boundaries and dissolving them; the dissolution enabling a religious (= re-linking, re-connecting) vision. jorss differs from her predecessors by treating their metaphysical God as an absence: "God is gone from this place, leaving/ only the root that resists in the soil/ like a fish in the water/ only the excellent fruit with its glassy juice . . ." Nature is invoked not as an alternative absolute but as a space for the poet's ecological and ontological concerns. A typical jorss poem may move from boundaries as the sign of the socially constructed, acculturated self – "the city is a metaphor/ for the lie that we all want different things/ we have put our trust in walls and gates" – to fanciful or subtly-eroticized evocations of male or masculinist over-reaching – "small boys crouch in the god-king's chariot/ unseen, and work the wings"; "certain man-made perpendiculars in our view/ have deceived us that this earth is optional" – to a self (re)constructed as provisional, temporary, and obscure; simultaneously at-home and out-of-place in the involuntary flow of life: "I have cast off my name, and taken from the trees/ a mask of dark and mossy stuff to hide my shamed face from the stars/ who still rise unswervably perfect from the clasp of the stony hills/ that can neither embrace nor rupture them." Self-illustrated, designed and published, this book also foregrounds the sensuous and intellectual capacities of words, and makes its own prosodic music. The occasionally soaring rhetoric is chastened by well-timed visual and verbal puns, by photographs, collages, found poems; the total effect is of a first-rate artist at work.

Adam Aitken, *Romeo & Juliet in Subtitles*, Brandl & Schlesinger, $21.95. Travel poems – Hawaiian, Australian, Turkish, Indonesian – with bite. Post-colonial, cross-cultural, affiliating with and breaking from such prose romancers-of-displacement as Christopher Cyrill and Pico Iyer. The generally rueful tone gives an edge to moments of idealization. In one of Aitken's Italian cities, there's "a whispering bridge where genders crossed,/ and men were yet again the snow-fed streams of female selves/ the guards in Paradiso . . ." Certain poems (e.g. 'The Corrosive Littoral') may seem stalled by their own weight of figuration. More often, the readerly rewards are unique: "The swallows/ turned knife sharp against the clouds/ weaving nautical knots through/ a mobile of minarets, over the grey harbour,/ over basements drinking down despair/ like a sour condensation/ as if all the world were thinking there."

Louis de Paor, *Cork and Other Poems*, Black Pepper, $21.95. The poet's English translations accompany his Gaelic originals; reading aloud is advisable. Each bit of the ordinary – stockings on a washing line, a pregnant woman's back and belly, clocks, cars, a tweed jacket still redolent of the barn-floor love-making it once eased; an eviction at once achingly particular and deadpan commonplace, the lot of any poor person anywhere – is chanted, caressed,

growled, rasped into life. A woman is shot mistakenly by a sniper: a child on the way home from mass sees it happen, but there's no easy lament; instead, the painstakingly ingenuous narration, with its dogged rhythms, seems to follow the entry of this experience into the child's nervous system. The intensity may have to do with the poet's return to Ireland after ten years in Australia; de Paor's word-music mixes rain, earth, light, the body's alertness. His poetry makes physical inroads, and searches out generosities on its shifting Catholic-animist ground.

Peter Kocan, *Fighting in the Shade*, Hale & Iremonger, $18.95. Blood-stirring bivouac, or forced march, in "The Poetic Wars" (as the media release would have it). Equipment includes a stretched-to-the-limit pentameter, clarity of figuration, some dry wit ("The ancient word encapsulates a truth/ You understand the more you start to see/ How grimly you've persisted on a path/ To get to where you didn't wish to be") and an invincible commitment to closure. Kocan manages, via the business students of 'Tomorrow Belongs To Them', a decent swipe at what Peter Matthiessen called "the great fright-mask of the economy", and hammers away at other targets – media glibness, post-mod. newspeak. A poem casts Hal Colebatch and Les Murray as "two centurions/ Who've seen the era go from bad to worse"; I admit it seemed odd to me to consider the Christian Murray as a legion commander in the imperial Roman army.

Gabi Bila-Gunther, *Validate & Travel*, author + Holmesglen TAFE, unpriced. Tram poems rattle and spark; the ride may excite a feeling of social experience – of persons met, utterances overheard. Unpretentious booklet, enlivened by rangy graphics, opens urban seams; yet the tonal shifts in the young Melbourne poet's very mixed idiom can produce tenderness, empathy, humour.

John Kinsella, *Visitants*, FACP, $18.26. Inordinately thoughtful and provocative. Brings science fiction to the West Australian wheat belt. In these poems, the paranormal – crop circles, UFO sightings, ghosts – becomes a kind of shadowy fellow-traveller to an accumulationist culture. Those who aren't at the cutting edge of accumulation turn to the unknown, seeking comfort, even salvation, but finding mostly intimations of death – which is troped along with love (salted with rather superb irony) as a "biological problem" that's felt to irritate both scientist and lay person alike. History backtracks from a salinating 'now', through 1970s hedonism to the Cold War pop-culture of the 1950s. Klaatu, the Christlike alien of the 1951 Hollywood movie *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, is used as one emblem of saviour-figures, who are remembered most strongly, *Visitants* suggests, for the style and character of their departures from the problem-ridden planet they'd come to fix up. Expansive text feels to be in constant movement; keeps its meanings related, yet fluid and enticing to readerly construction and reconstruction. Incomplete knowing is written into the project (often very simply – see the love poem 'Rites of Harvest'). The American Mark Wallace has objected (in the journal *Verse*) to Kinsella's virtuoso displays, but this poet can without apparent effort parlay the sonnet form into blissful collision with itself (c.f. Ted Berrigan) and in 'Nature Morte. Oh, rhetoric', make comedy, perhaps classic, of the (non) erased author. The flash and dazzle relieve a dark mood – the melancholy evocations of ruined farm country; the undertone of dread; the fastidious skepticism; the urgency of change.

Ashlley Morgan-Shae, *New Cities*, Grendon Press, PO Box 231, Mont Albert 3127, $15 + $2 postage. These new cities may be invisible, magical, interconnected – a circuit of lucky illuminations, virtuoso puns, passions burnished in the "chemisphere". Whatever else, the journey is intense; the taut, tough little poems burn as if lit by Walter Pater's "hard gem-like flame". The life in them is youthful and playful – "the wiz/ mixing circuit-boards in green/ crannies to realize a new breed/ in the squeal and twists of silk-/ skinned hook-limbed loves" – but also menaced, wire-dancing, opportunistic; hence, escape-worthy: "The Doctor as busted as I am/ debating which way of getting wrecked/ tonight . . ." Mostly the poetry achieves lift-off from social realism, and sizzles with ambiguity through a stratosphere of its own – 'Loggers' (rant) and 'Pivoting' (a tad demurely) excepted.

Ron Pretty (ed.), *The Argument from Desire*, fip, $20.85. Brook Emery's 'Approaching the Edge' won the 1999 Newcastle Poetry Prize – Australia's richest and most prestigious, for an individual poem or suite of poems. Peter Kirkpatrick's 'Cote d'Or'

won second prize; Andy Kissane's 'The Separation Sonnets' and Doris Brett's 'Hospital Stenography' tied for third. Michael Sharkey's 'Triumph of the Takeaway: a Threnody for John Forbes' and John West's 'Mowing the Lawn with Michael Dransfield' were commended. Judges were Joanne Burns, Heather Cam, and the late Mal Morgan. Widely-scoped anthology provides rare space for the enjoyment of longer poems – including Michael Farrell's cineaste, off-beat 'Codas', in which the movie appears to be editing the moviegoer, to very lively effect. Forty poets get bio-notes, but not Farrell. Who is he?

Selwyn Pritchard, *Lunar Frost*, Brandl & Schlesinger, $21.95. "There are more courtiers in Western society today," commented John Ralston Saul, "than in any other time in any other society. More even than in imperial China." Is this the reason for the lasting appeal of Chinese poetry of the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties? The concubine Wu Ze Tian became empress in 683 and decided to require candidates for high bureaucratic positions to "demonstrate poetic ability"; she "encouraged the Tang renaissance of which poetry was the highest expression." But the poetry is saturated with melancholy; collectively it has the impact of a rhapsody of loss and suffering. Not surprising, as the crisp historical notes to this book reveal poet after poet rising to political prominence, only to endure demotion, exile, poverty, often because of poetic "outspokenness". One gets the sense of something Kafkaesque – lives lived walking chalklines that were constantly erased and redrawn. Nature becomes a touchstone of nostalgia in these poetries, while their once-blessed poets hit the alcohol, sell oranges, work as labourers and sometimes starve. Selwyn Pritchard has set the context with fine economy, and his translations – a team effort, involving a group of Chinese scholars – breathe and sing. "I have written good poems, but/ the way is long, the sun sets./ Let me soar as high as the roc!/ Blow, wind, blow/ my craft to the sacred isles." (Li Qing-Zhao, 1084–1151: an aristocratic woman, married to a poet/ antiquary, Li Qing-Zhao was separated from her husband during an invasion. The man died and Li Qing-Zhao drifted, grieving, finally settling at Hangzhou.)

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet.

Of Work, War Widows, Dads and Small Manageable Bits

Yossi Berger

Jeltje (ed.) *925: Workers' Poetry from Australia 1978–1983* (Collective Effort Press).

Paula Morrow (ed.): *Ribbons of Steel: Poems and Stories* (Hunter Writers' Centre, Newcastle).

P.P. Cranney (ed.): *Tailing Out: BHP Workers talk about Life, Steelmaking and the Newcastle Closure* (Workers' Cultural Action Committee Inc.).

Joy Damousi (ed.): *The Labour of Loss, Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (CUP, $29.95).

ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND palaeontologists know that amongst the endless sands of disappeared things, enriched and fundamental meaning best emerges from stable contexts and clear understandings of distinct processes of change. The four books reviewed here can be regarded as forms of social 'archaeo-palaeontology' carefully brushing clean decades of experience of harsh (sustaining and/or injurious) work, or terror, fear and grief to gently uncover a shimmering dream, moments of grace, and some joy. Curiously all of them evoke the quickening pulse of time, either in small and repetitive daily doses or great social slabs; if only things were different. Three of the books are about working and life around work, the fourth about the nasty work of war. All four are about that hunger for a decent life with a personal map for significance more powerful than external productive or destructive struggles.

Ribbons of Steel and *Tailing Out* were part- or wholly-orchestrated for the BHP closure of their steel works in Newcastle, a kind of useful funeral offering exalting labour, "a medal costs much less than a pay raise" (Primo Levi, *The Wrench*). *925* presents textures from working days, one at a time, and *The Labour of Loss* is about soldiers living and dying, writing letters-of-the-terrorized (and at times humanized) back home, "I was a friend of your son, Mort, & his death was a blow to me", where later some of the mothers, fathers, war widows and limbless returned soldiers lived on, searching and bitter (I'm sure mostly on a part-time basis) for continuing social recognition and respect for their full-time suffering. It's about grief and extended effort for a different social intersection of identity and place; you had to be there.

925 (summer1978–winter1983) is a collection of poems, prose, photos and drawings created by a group of poets and artists ("Poetry for the workers, by the workers about the workers' work") during six economically harsh years. You can see they put their hearts into it and you're moved reading it. The poems nudge you along, with a wink here and there, past the banal, the boring, the repetitious, the possible, detail on detail of the work-day, with minutes and hours and numbers creating artificial limits, as they do in the lives of workers. A photo by Peter Murphy of a large 'Clockface – Made By Convicts – Hospital for the insane', hanging on a wall nearly completely covering a (fresh?)-air vent punctuates that pursuing tension. Anne Moon conveys the worker's helplessness in 'Late':

Oh God! I'm late I'm late!
Almost fall to my death on the stairs
And skid out the gate,

Too late! . . .
At 8.02 the red line's ruled religiously in the attendance book,
So my name is beneath the red line, and I'm beyond the pale,

They've added up all my late attendances for the past fortnight:

Late seven days out of nine
Total of minutes – twenty nine . . .

It seems I spent those mislaid minutes living.

There are lighter (if gently ironic) moments in rushed lives that aspire:

If 'Rainy' pays off the Mortgage, he'll be happy,
if North wins, Norm will be happy.
"Whynotsky?!" – Macca says – (π.o.)

Chocolate eclairs, kids, family, sleeping-in, jelly beans, sunrise, the seasons . . . Yep. The good life is just around the corner, just after the next shift.

Christine Johnston in 'Waitress' describes other dehumanizing battles for some workers:

if they, he, want to give you a dollar
they ask for you especially
to come 'n' get it: cringe baby, simper,
bare your teeth, poke out your tits
and waggle your bum, smile suggestively,
false as it is,
maybe lean over, right over; tit in his eye
subtle pressure on the shoulder,
short of breath voice: Do you want ANYTHING else?

The images (drawings, photos, unusuals) are evocative and confirm the more silent dialogues within the poetry. You'll have to see them for yourself because (*a la* Wittgenstein), what I say about them ain't nearly what they show. But see them!

Finally, David G. Harris gasps in 'Untitled', haunted by a greatly-shared need to relax:

"Boss, I feel sick.
Will you go home?"

Good collection. Three-way conversations between the poet, implicit chorus of axioms in the workplace and the barely expressed aspiration for dignity. Is that a lot to ask for? Pity that in some ways things got worse for so many workers since then. Today *925* would need to be called *626*. Don't hold your breath!

Ribbons Of Steel is an anthology of poems and stories about industrial development in the Hunter region since 1901. Based on a 1996 competition sponsored by BHP marking the closure of their steel-making (not the rod or bar mills) in Newcastle. *Tailing Out* (interviews and writings collected and edited by Cranney) is directly about the closure of what Deacon describes as "some iron-clad animal growling and gobbling its thrice daily meal of working men and women" (*Ribbons*, 'Riversong'). In *Ribbons* the reader is taken through non-fiction, poetry and fiction categories in eighty-one pieces reeking with the smell of coal dust, carcinogenic diesel fumes and noise following workers who "Like dairy cows, . . . were herded to the factories and milked dry of their labour, while their women stayed at home devouring Bex and daytime television" (Stubbs). The poems explore a broad work-scape and emotional responses, and a whiff of the occasional cynicism:

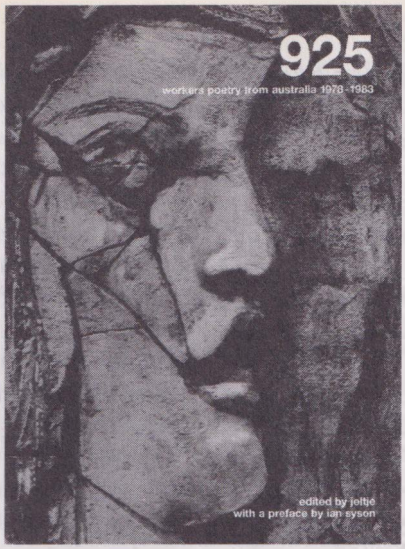
The shares went through the roof the day they said we'd close. The Board raked in a mountain of gold while a slag heap grew in my heart. (Kissane)

The Works were men's space-and-time where it was known for some women to be harassed, humiliated and terrorized, and unions not mentioned all that much (at least in the writings). Karen Gai Dean's (ex-Apprentice Electrical Fitter-Mechanic) piece 'The Kidney Machine' ("a love letter in several pages") should be made compulsory reading for all managers (for a start), "Whatever your social origin (and they were varied, despite the dream's insistence), Newcastle breeds a virulent working class iconoclasm, with the working class man as the ultimate referent." The detail is stark and clearly demonstrates the harassment that can happen when a woman somehow creates a warp-field in male working space. Too often by her just being there some male morons react. All workers however, were united in the "Year by year, the three shifts, day, afternoon and dogwatch measured their lives until retirement" (*Ribbons*, 'Riversong', Deacon). But there were others, we are told, harbouring a secret, with "grudging affection for the disparate mess of buildings and structures, operations and procedures, management and workforce which for nine decades have constituted the steelworks in production". It's a big place, thousands of workers, obviously plenty of rewards as well, and that's how it should be.

Tailing Out (some 170 workers are acknowledged by name!) is a different book not born from literature competitions. P.P. Cranney has done them all proud with this job; gets a gorilla stamp for excellence. It's beautifully presented, direct writing rich with the matter-of-fact voices of workers about their work. I was particularly struck by the softness of the comments just under the grime. Who was the mongrel who invented the stupid 'bloke-worker' image?

Here are men who surprised themselves in serving a lifetime *en passant*, "I've been in this shop for about thirty-seven years. Started on 13 February 1961. I came here virtually straight from school . . . And dad was here for forty-two years" (Aubrey Brooks). Ted, very sick and in hospital, wants to give his false teeth to Aubrey Brooks 'cause "the angels came to see me last night" and soon he won't need them. And the poor bugger didn't. [Ted] "was a hard man but he'd give you his arse and shit through his ribs, mate. He was so kind."

With The Works gone a new world-view will need to be forged. Will the cult of personality have much metal in it in a nearly BHP-less city with no giant steel works? What will happen to the language and symbols? "They did try to help us, with pack-



ages and that, but I think they could have done a little bit more, I don't know. I'm a little bit dirty with them because my attitude was BHP's going to be here for life. And that's basically why I come here. I thought it was going to be for life. But it's not. It's just a shock that they are going." (Stone)

The Labour of Loss is an historical study about various bonds that those two world wars and their pressure on presumed-firm assumptions about one's place in society distorted. It's about loss (which does not pass), the grief (many layered and complex), sacrifice and a search for recognition and status conferred by just that experience (and abiding pesky memory), a helpless calling-in of a tragic IOU society pretended to confer unconditionally on all of the victims, "But in their demands for remuneration they tried to shape an expression of grief which the myths of war sought to deny." The book is about forced personal transformations, projection of grief-profiles and abandonment by that illusive animal, The Caring Society, which first honoured only to invoke cruel and foolish limits later.

Damousi analyses some of the extended effects of loss and grief and their relationship to a necessarily evolving (newish) social identity. How does the sense of unrequited 'youse owe me' shape a presence and place within communities which themselves have changed? If it ain't a stone monument in a public place, what should it 'look' like?

She speaks about the effects of war on soldiers witnessing and being part of it. Of the letters and communications back home where immediately after the war the mothers and widows of the dead were particularly in favour, those "Women giving their sons become the quintessential emblem of feminine sacrifice". And of the fathers and returned limbless soldiers? Well! It's war ain't it?

MUCH OF THE MATERIAL in these books is about the contours of suffering. Of course you can find moments of kindness in a lifetime of work in mines, steelworks or even war. But who will understand the detail of fear and humiliation and suffering of those belted by sexism, racism or common exploitation at work? Or the anguish of the limbless soldier trying to wash himself, or sign a cheque, or play a game of cards out on a picnic, or eat a steak at a restaurant where he has to gaze helplessly as someone cuts it up for him in small manageable bits? Or hop (if he is lucky) limbless with his kids on the warm sands of the local beach?

Within the fine tempo of labour (not the punishment that it can be), or out of catastrophes a striving for a homely place-and-time of one's own emerges – with all the delicate links and subtle postures. So does a softer image of the not-so-tough (if the fucken truth be known) Working-Class Hero and BHP-worker ('Relationship with BHP was life.'), now reduced to muttering about how it was s'posed to be. These socially re-calibrating cultural forms hint with many voices from mixed ideals and fur-ball myths. And this, in my view, is the heart of it, and it's the heart that must be found. Whynotsky? That's life, mate, what d'ya expect?! The clue is that workers must not be employed as tools.

Overall, a sad read tempered by a mounting respect for the stubborn human spirit. And it amounts to nothing less than this: can the worker and his/her sustaining myths and cult figures escape all that and drag his/her being beyond only a functional status? Ask, see what answer you get:

Rover was a dog
The dog was Rover
When his master said roll over
His master would roll over
Over and over

Just like Rover.

(*925*, 'Rover (the worker's dream)', G. Neite)

[By the way, *Ribbons,* printed by Newey and Beath, completely fell apart in the read; pity.]

Yossi Berger is a writer and union activist. His A Kind of Violence: Australian Workers and Workplaces *was published by The Vulgar Press in 1999.*

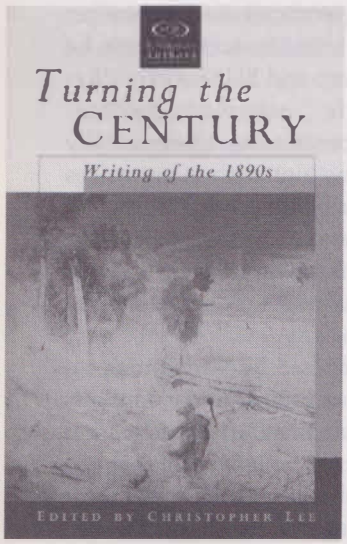
Beyond the Nervous Nineties?

Terry Irving

Christopher Lee (ed.): *Turning the Century: Writing of the 1890s* (UQP, $29.95).

Hugh Anderson (ed.): *The Tocsin: Contesting the Constitution* (Red Rooster Press, $35.95, $26.80).

EVERY TWENTY YEARS since the 1890s, it seems, we have been changing our understanding of the literature of that decade. We were nostalgic in the 1910s, romantic in the 1930s, defiantly optimistic in the 1950s, and sourly iconoclastic in the 1970s. Christopher Lee's new collection for UQP, with its penetrating introduction, brings the process up to date.



Much has changed since the 1970s, not just in the cultural mood but in how we think of the relationship between literature and society. When Leon Cantrell edited an earlier anthology in the same UQP series, *The 1890s – Stories, Verse and Essays* (1977), he worked with an idea of periodization which assumed that the study of literature was an ideal way to characterize a period. In the case of the 1890s, previous critical commentary had enshrined a nationalist interpretation, built around the values of "mateship, egalitarian democracy and the celebration of bush life". Cantrell's contribution was to reveal that these same values had also produced a literature of recoil, of "alienation and loss". He selected and arranged his material to illustrate these "hallmarks of the decade", excluding many works that were "removed from the spirit of the age". However, Cantrell's radical denial of the idea that the best writing of the decade "was affirmatively Australian" disguised an important continuity between his position and the earlier nationalist interpretation: that there was some "wholeness of the period".

A period with its own spirit and wholeness: who could write in such essentialist terms today? Christopher Lee's introduction reminds us of the recent theoretical influences – "psychoanalysis, new historicism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism" – that have turned our attention to plurality, subjectivity and representations. We can see their effects in his book. As a small sign, the period has been partially cut loose from the decade. Lee includes in his selection works composed or published between 1885 and 1905. My prediction is that in twenty years' time the separation will be complete, and we will be free to imagine a cultural history of simultaneous 'periods', closer perhaps to contextualized perspectives than to the artificial idea of succeeding ages. Already Lee is pointing us in this direction, organizing his selection around the idea of literature responding to a set of problems and uncertainties (here he acknowledges Docker's concept of the 'nervous nineties') rather than periodized fixities.

A more significant change is the discarding of parochialism. Twenty years ago the literary 1890s were still an Australianized construct, even though defined in recoil from earlier 'affirmative' understandings of nationalism. Lee, however, has selected writers who were responding to problems "typical of the empire" but "influenced by local experience". Foremost was the rise of democracy (which earlier interpretations translated as a local nationalist trait), feminism, religious doubt, a tentative and reluctant questioning of frontier masculinism and racism, and a liberal (rather than radical) state-building effort. The liberating effect of Lee's approach may be seen by contrasting his thematic arrangement of the literature with Cantrell's. Whereas Lee understands the imaginative response of the writers to these problems in terms of the universal themes of history, place and space, love, work and play, hopes and fears for the future, and of realism or romance in art, Cantrell relies on extrinsic and historicized categories of politics ('nationalism, politics and society'), geography ('the city or the bush'), or genre ('lyrical verse').

Not surprisingly Lee is more catholic in his selection of authors. His book is a third longer but includes almost double the number of writers. Has there been a descent from 'best writing' in consequence? I don't think so. The extract from Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl*, in which the young heroine's natural patriotism is set against the artistic pretensions of the mistress of a Melbourne salon, is worthy of *Punch*. For sheer vituperative force and sustained metaphor 'The Drivel of our Fathers', by James

Edmond, is simply amazing. In keeping with the anti-imperialism of the *Bulletin*, where Edmond was an editor, "the drivel of our fathers", is "borne across the seas,/Like Britain's half-mast flag it braves the battle and the breeze", but the argument of the poem is that generational tension is a universal phenomenon. Other topics are equally fresh. Alfred Deakin has an out-of-body experience. Francis Adams makes a vigorous defence of realism as artistic method. A patronizing Vance Palmer brusquely dismisses Ada Cambridge and Rosa Praed from the Australian canon, thus returning us to Cantrell, for whom also the gendered issues of their books were "removed from the spirit of the decade". No less than nine of the writers appearing in Lee but not in the earlier anthology are women.

Lee's anthology then breaks new ground with theoretical assurance and radical imagination. Don't assume you know the period until you read it. The same goes for Hugh Anderson's *Tocsin – Contesting the Constitution*. Whereas Lee confines himself to literature between hard covers, Anderson's selection from the Melbourne labour paper (established in 1897) draws on the vigorous and racy journalism of the period. In the present lead-up to the commemoration of Federation it is salutary to be reminded that the Constitution was not supported by democrats, that large sections of the labour movement opposed it, and the majority of electors never endorsed it. The documents in Anderson's book present the arguments against the federal bills in a variety of forms: polemics, cartoons, speeches, verses, as well as detailed clause-by-clause analyses. Bernard O'Dowd and Victor Daley are among the most prolific of a talented team of writers. The successors of *Tocsin*'s "advanced democrats" (republicans in today's terms) will read them with delight and profit.

Hugh Anderson's long and careful introductory essay places *Tocsin* and its campaign against federation in their labour history context. Best of all he brings to life the struggles to maintain a weekly labour newspaper in the face of trade union indifference, competition from the commercial dailies, and government hindrance. The story of the labour public sphere is rarely told these days. *Tocsin* was a lively, principled and effective agitator for labour, and Hugh Anderson's collection is a tribute to the labour intellectuals who produced it.

Terry Irving is a Sydney labour historian and an associate editor of Labour History.

Focus on the most oppressed

Jeannie Rea

Aileen Moreton-Robinson: *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (UQP, $22).

IN HER INTRODUCTION to her book, *Talkin' up to the White Woman,* Aileen Moreton-Robinson begins by introducing herself. She does this for two reasons. Firstly because it is a protocol amongst Indigenous people to provide such information about one's cultural location to enable connections to be established. Secondly, this enables her to utilize academic feminist standpoint theory, which also establishes that this is a theoretical work informed by contemporary feminist theory. Moreton-Robinson explains:

> This book is an extension of my communal responsibilities; I am representing an Indigenous standpoint within Australian feminism . . . My role as an academic analyst is inextricable from my embodiment as an Indigenous woman.

This is a very important book that will, hopefully, be read carefully by many people and not only those who are directly addressed: white middle-class feminists. Moreton-Robinson's interrogative work sheds light and explains the discomfort of many people with Australian feminism and academia because of the hegemony of the standpoint and perspectives of the white middle class. Moreton-Robinson's responsibility in this book is to her two constituencies: Indigenous women who have not found much common ground with (white middle-class) feminists, and educated white middle-class feminists who despite scattered good intentions have not understood why Indigenous women have little time for them and their causes.

I am recognizably amongst the latter group, as an Australian born non-Indigenous teacher of women's studies, who tries to work against the grain and decentre white middle-class perspectives. But as Moreton-Robinson persuasively argues, while Indigenous women know about white women, white women do not know Indigenous women. They think they do – and much research has been done by white women (and men) on Indigenous women (and men). This resultant literature is inadequate at best and

perpetuates racism at worst. This is a literature which is reviewed by Moreton-Robinson and with which I work in history and anthropology and often find wanting. I seek to find the voices of Indigenous people to represent themselves and draw upon Moreton-Robinson's colleagues in and out of academia and on the life writings of Indigenous peoples. But this is not good enough, as teaching against the grain still leaves the centre intact.

Women of colour, Indigenous, lesbian and working-class feminists, have resoundingly debunked the imagined homogeneity of the category 'woman'. This has become a discourse on 'difference'. However, as Moreton-Robinson argues, drawing upon the critiques of 'Black Feminists' and others in the Americas and Britain, difference remains positioned as 'different from'. The subject position white middle-class woman remains unexamined. 'Whiteness' is not problematized as a category; it is not construed as a difference. Until this changes, until it is not assumed that the 'woman' under discussion is white and middle-class, then Indigenous women remain on the margins of Australian feminism. Whilst feminist theory highlights the importance of addressing specificity in the experience and standpoints of Indigenous women, there is no such compunction to address the specificity of the white and middle-class.

This perpetuates difference constructed as 'other' and read as 'lesser'. As long as academic researchers continue to address Indigenous people as a subset of the general population, such as in employment or health statistics or as the extra topic or chapter, then Indigenous people continue to be objects of research. An Indigenous standpoint does not start with comparisons. But, centring Indigenous standpoints is hard to do in a knowledge system that demands Indigenous ways of knowing constantly justify their validity.

As part of her research, Moreton-Robinson interviewed a number of white middle-class feminists. She found that whilst a number of these women had worked at an intellectual and activist level on issues and campaigns important to Indigenous people, most were unable to recognize the limitations of their efforts as their privilege remained largely unconfronted. White feminists have been unable to understand that Indigenous women perceive their efforts as those of "white middle-class women who were acting from a position of dominance". Moreton-Robinson, maybe, is rather too dismissive of some of the work being done by some white middle-class feminist academics, particularly as she does draw upon their work in constructing her arguments. However, defensiveness on their (our) part is superfluous because of the importance of Moreton-Robinson's thesis in shaking the comforts of the standpoint of privilege, which is in part at the cost of Indig*enous Australia.*

A key question of Moreton-Robinson's that Australian feminists do need to answer seriously is why the issues of concern identified by Indigenous women are not their top priority. If feminists are working against the oppression of women, then shouldn't we focus upon the most oppressed? Feminist international development activists cogently make this argument, but it has not been a centre of discussion in this country. Indigenous women would identify different priorities than the current feminist agendas. At the top of the list are self-determination and cultural integrity. Are these too challenging from the subject position white middle-class woman?

At Victoria University we offer a course in partnership with a Koori community in Northern Victoria. It is called Nyerna Studies. *Nyerna* is a *Wemba Wemba* word meaning *to sit, to listen and to hear and to remember*. This is what mainstream Australian feminism needs to do with Indigenous women.

Jeannie Rea teaches at Victoria University of Technology and thanks students in the Women's Studies postgraduate class 'Feminisms of Difference' for their open and thoughtful discussions.

Practical Politics and Perseverance

E.R. Macnamara

Suzane Fabian & Morag Loh: *Left-Wing Ladies: The Union of Australian Women in Victoria, 1950–1998* (Hyland House, $19.95).

IF YOU ARE LOOKING for a rousing gift for a red-baitin' granny Fabian and Loh's book is not it; no-one could fail to respect these ladies of the left. This is the history of a generation self-described as 'a great bunch of stirrers': women who grew up out of a depression into a world war and then bore children of their own under the threat of nuclear annihilation, the story of those tough old biddies in soft-heeled shoes and K-mart cardies now seen waving a new generation of protestors on from Melbourne's post-office steps.

Left-Wing Ladies complements three previous histories of the Union of Australian Women (UAW): *For The Rights Of Women: Three Decades Of Struggle, 1950–1980: 30th Anniversary,* Union Of Australian Women booklet; *Daring To Take A Stand: The Story Of The Union Of Australian Women In Queensland* by Pam Young; and *More Than A Hat And Glove Brigade: The Story Of The Union Of Australian Women* by Barbara Curthoys and Audrey McDonald. There are also a number of autobiographies from key players in the union available. Fabian and Loh give a particular account of the Victorian Branch of the UAW pieced together from extensive oral histories, UAW publications and records, and ASIO files. The presence of surveillance ensured a prudent shortage of detailed records in the union's early years.

This is the sixth collaboration by Suzane Fabian and Morag Loh who specialize in the history of women, migrants and children. Their claim in the preface to be outsiders of the UAW proves a little disingenuous, as Loh later appears in the minutes of the Malvern group as an active speaker during the sixties. Certainly the writers' areas of interest make them fellow travellers, if no longer active participants, of the union. This evidence of informed insight is all to the good, and the perceived need to claim authorial distance is probably related to the fact that this is the most critical biography of the UAW published so far. Which is to say the book stops a little short of an institutional hagiography and asks difficult questions that centre on the influence of communist organizations involved in the foundation of the union, difficulties in the federalist structure and problems with overseas contacts.

The authors have chosen to anthropomorphize the union through chapter headings which follow the life stages of the founders' generation. Thus the youthful prefoundation years of 1945–50 are heralded as 'We Could Change the World' whereas by the 1970s the union is 'Middle-aged, Middle of the Road' and in the 1980s it represents 'Elders in the Women's Movement'. Such an approach reflects both the strengths and weakness of the book.

Its strength lies in the fascinating tale of the group of women who formed the union. Their ingenuity and persistence is observed in the details of their activism which showed the most immediate results on local and consumer issues, but which eventually saw the rest of the country catch up on issues such as Aboriginal rights, the environment and nuclear disarmament. We follow campaigns taken up through the education of members by speakers at local group

meetings and luncheons, liaison with other unions, petitions to local, state and federal parliaments, leaflet distribution, surveys, marches, and representation at international conferences. We begin to understand why feminism was often a painful adjustment for the women, as well as the men, of this generation.

Its strength is also in snippets from the lives of women who are intertwined through their involvement in the UAW. Women of practical politics and perseverance such as Alma Morton, photographed leading a group of protesters with slogans written on their aprons in an attempt to subvert a ruling against placards at Parliament House. Later they added slogans to their babies' carriages and marched regularly in single file on peace walks through Melbourne from 1957 to 1970: "People used to spit on us telling us 'Get home. Look after your kids. Cook your husband's tea'." And women like Sylvia Fitzgerald – a unique fundraiser who eschewed the usual street stalls and collected donations, the main sources of income for the union. As one member tells it the ingenious Fitzgerald however, "got us to conferences. She set aside a certain sum out of her housekeeping every week and put it on the horses, win or lose. She must have won quite often because she got us to Melbourne and as far as Sydney."

The weakness of this personal approach is that it encourages the reader to assume that the UAW is an organization which will die out with its membership. This is a misleading impression. While it is true that several state branches have disbanded leaving only local groups to struggle on, the Victorian UAW is still very much alive and kicking. Women continue to join the UAW which, according to its current president Anne Sgro, now attracts two groups: working women with an interest, but little time to participate, and recent retirees who enjoy the chance to get involved.

The UAW is fifty years old and still going strong. *Left-Wing Ladies* is a clear and easily read account of the history of the Victorian UAW with enough personal narrative to make it enjoyable for the general reader. Its critical insights would also prove valuable to those interested in the operations of left-wing groups, consumer advocacy, local activism, and the important role of women in the peace movement.

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The New English

Douglas McQueen-Thomson

Sue Hosking & Dianne Schwerdt (eds): *eXtensions: Essays in English Studies from Shakespeare to the Spice Girls* (Wakefield Press, $19.95).

FOR YEARS, English studies has struggled to shake off its reputation for dilettantism. In the late nineteenth century, literary studies were seen by some as mere chatter about Shelley. By 1976, Terry Eagleton was calling for a kind of criticism that would be theoretically rigorous, and would produce scientific knowledge about texts. The intellectual legacy of the relationship between these two extremes – idle speculation versus objective science – still limits most English studies work today.

eXtensions, a volume of literary and cultural criticism edited by Sue Hosking and Dianne Schwerdt, makes its own intervention into this dispute. It uses these terms to make an argument for what English studies should do today. *eXtensions* comes largely out of the English Department at the University of Adelaide, with most of the contributors being academics or students there. *eXtensions* can be read as a snapshot of this department, showing its preoccupations and strengths. And read like this, the volume displays confidence, breadth of subject range, and pedagogical relevance.

However, *eXtensions* has greater ambitions, and professes to demonstrate "new reading practices". The volume's introduction, by Hosking and Schwerdt, makes an argument for English as a discipline that illuminates texts and their multiple social meanings. And by 'English', the authors refer also to its interdisciplinary cousins, such as cultural studies. They go as far as to claim that English is the discipline which, "foremost among the humanities, provides the opportunity for intensive study and reflection on human interactions".

Sociologists and anthropologists, understandably, would dispute this claim. However, Hosking and Schwerdt distinguish English studies from the social sciences by arguing that English particularly can provide balance against the dehumanizing forces of "economic rationalism and complex technologies". So English has its special character because it is *not* scientific in its orientation, and provides respite against the complexity and hurly-burly of the world. This

argument sounds disturbingly close to Matthew Arnold's ideal of literature as a civilizing moral force. Rather than providing 'balance' against these technological developments, wouldn't English be stronger if it could engage directly with the social impact of new technologies, changing economic conditions, and emerging political forms? Surely English is better able to interpret texts when it confronts – not eschews – complex cultural transformations.

Hosking and Schwerdt's argument poses the question of whether English can really maintain credibility and significance if it defines itself in opposition to disciplines of hard knowledge. It leaves English with the less defensible role of providing amateurish insights into 'being human'. It turns English into a dispensable luxury, which in current economic times is courting disaster. This makes English like the extra cream with dessert.

Fortunately, I think *eXtensions* exceeds these stated aims. It presents English as a challenging, relevant discipline which provides vital insights into contemporary culture. It shows a progressive discipline on the leading edge of contemporary politics, providing a locus for examining Australian and global identities. Throughout, an interest is shown in social margins, both of empire and society. Plurality and diversity are celebrated; boundaries and limits are confronted. As the volume's title suggests, *eXtensions* aims to show how English studies can successfully reach out beyond a narrow aesthetic focus on high Literature. *eXtensions* successfully meets the challenge of showing how an expanding discipline can retain coherence.

The volume gives special prominence to Shakespeare, with two essays solely on the Bard. However, the introduction suggests that Shakespeare is not the most "read or viewed" author today. Certainly there are authors whose books sell more, though I can't name one who is viewed more. Several big-budget Hollywood films of Shakespeare plays are due out in the next twelve months, not to mention countless stage productions. This fact alone demands that English come to terms with Shakespeare as a central figure in popular culture – a subject *eXtensions* does not address.

David Smith's highly readable introduction to *The Tempest* discusses the play's power relations, and particularly the role of Caliban. Lucy Potter's excellent essay on *Hamlet* argues for the centrality of Ophelia to the play's logic. In her deconstructive reading of *Hamlet*'s gender dynamics, Potter argues that Ophelia acts as the feminine flipside of Hamlet, and that the stability of Hamlet's identity depends on his opposition to Ophelia's irrationality. However, Potter persuasively argues that Ophelia becomes the play's hero as the coherence of Hamlet's subjectivity disintegrates.

eXtensions stands out especially for its readability. It has a consistent style, and has obviously been carefully edited. Every essay is clear, direct and easily understood. Technical terms – such as 'subjectivity' and 'Gothic' – are explained in simple language. The volume is not over-burdened with long footnotes or bibliographies, though supporting material is provided when absolutely necessary. Each chapter concludes with a handful of suggestions for further reading. *eXtensions* is that rare occurrence in English studies: a book that can be enjoyed by a non-specialist reader. It would be of special value to year-twelve students or undergraduates, but also contains sufficient analytical depth and sophistication to interest more specialist researchers.

Occasionally this accessibility and brevity becomes a weakness. Some of the essays seem too cursory in their treatment of texts to present much depth, even for a newcomer to the field. For example, Philip Butterss spends seven pages of an essay trying to elaborate on representations of masculinity in four separate novels.

Catherine Driscoll's essay on 'girl culture' and society's consumption of the Spice Girls is the most ambitious and provocative piece in the volume. It gives a historical outline of the development of the category of girlhood, and examines how girl culture works in mainstream pop culture. Driscoll also examines how these modes are subverted by riot grrrls and the fringes of alternative girl culture. Her essay raises some fascinating questions about how well English studies is dealing with the representational complexity of these cultural forms. However, with such a broad focus, Driscoll's analysis seems too sketchy and provisional.

Within the pluralism embraced by *eXtensions*, three subjects are given special prominence. These are gender, ethnicity and genre. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* are discussed via their gender representations, and their use of black–white oppositions. *The X-Files*, *Silence of the Lambs*, and *The Piano* are all explored for their manipulations of Gothic and other genres. Amanda Nettelbeck's essay on Elizabeth Jolley's *The Well* is an outstanding exploration of how utilization of

feminist genres can address a masculinized Australian landscape. Other subjects covered include more contemporary Australian writing (*An Imaginary Life*, *No Sugar*, and two Archie Weller books), and poetry by Blake, Coleridge and Dickinson.

The book has several minor production flaws, such as a reference on the copyright page to a non-existent essay, and some footnote problems in the final essay. These aside, the all-round standard of this volume is very high. It is an excellent indication of the strengths of English in Australia today – a discipline which is being extended and diversified, but, as *eXtensions* proves, still manages to retain coherence.

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Belonging

Dîpti Saravanamuttu

Lisbet de Castro Lopo: *The Goblin Child* (Catchfire Press, $19.95).
Michele Drouart: *Into the Wadi* (FACP, $21.49).
Sandi Hall: *Rumours of Dreams* (Spinifex, $21.95).
Chandani Lokuge: *If the Moon Smiled* (Penguin, $19.95).
Ken Spillman: *blue* (FACP, $19.34).

THESE FIVE BOOKS published in the past year, by Australian writers of diverse ethnic backgrounds (and one by a New Zealander, Sandi Hall), have a curiously strong theme in common. They are concerned, in various ways, with belonging – how we fit in, what makes us what we are. In the process of movement from one country to another, one place to another – one time zone to another, in the case of Sandi Hall – what gives us emotional cohesion and makes for happiness? It's probably information that Jeff Kennett's institute for depression should take note of.

The Goblin Child is a thriller and adventure story about an older woman pursued by intimations of evil – and the Mafia – following the death of her husband. De Castro Lopo grew up in Denmark and studied there and in the United States. She has lived in Australia for over three decades. The trouble and strife encountered by Vanessa as she betrays the family bond, and then disappears out of the ken of friends and relatives, reaches such metaphysical proportions

as to suggest the phantastic, the gothic. The goblin child of the title proves to be the magic link that renews the bonds of trust and love, for Vanessa and those who stand for her at the novel's shock conclusion.

The beautiful descriptions of sea and coastline provide a horizon and a lightness in this tale, a counterpoint to all the dark notes. It is a tale, rather than a story, the psychological characterizations were rather sketchy. For instance I found Vanessa's propensity to have unpremeditated sex with just anybody – presumably because her usual sexual partner has just died – a trifle inconsistent with her character.

Michele Drouart's *Into the Wadi* is a spirited and thoughtful account of her marriage into a Jordanian family, and life within an extended family, in her husband Omar's village. Whilst a student in the United States, Drouart, born in Australia of French and Australian parents, meets and marries a Jordanian student. They are both teachers, and return to Jordan to live.

The book is constructed as a series of meditations or mini-essays on various aspects of Drouart's life in Koufr Soum, and this poetic style achieves a truly engrossing account of the habits and customs of a different region of the world. It is narrated with great understanding of the emotional and material circumstances of the other. And that this life is not so much an "adjustment" as an extension of the self: "I still desire this mixture of two kinds of living, of movement between two worlds . . ."

It is also a love story. Amongst its descriptions of bonds between family members, and events in the village, the heart of the book is a poem – in medieval French, Drouart's elegant 'Chanson Courtoise' to her lover. A book to treasure, not just for the poem.

Sandi Hall's book moves between contemporary New Zealand, and Jerusalem and Egypt in ancient times. It is not a religious book, but its central story is a dramatization of the events behind the life and cruel early death of a man who is told from his earliest years that his life is to follow a pre-ordained pattern. It is richly atmospheric and carefully researched, and enjoyable for that. The characterizations of Joseph, Mary, Mary Magdalene and the other central figures are believable and compelling, although they can sometimes seem almost too contemporary for any fiction that purports to dramatize aspects of a historical series of events. But the very willingness to name contemporary concerns, and the threatening elements of our age, is one of the best features of this novel.

Chandani Lokuge's book is in part a memoir of a girlhood in rural Sri Lanka, and a tracing of the conflicts and dislocations of a life in which one feels ties with two countries. For expatriates returning to Sri Lanka today, the normal changes of time and development are not all they encounter. A capital city bristling with security guards and armed personnel, a lifestyle based on survival in a war zone, this circumstance that is at complete odds with the childhood memories of most Sri Lankans. Or of anyone, who knew it in its more peaceful days.

Surprisingly, what is equally powerful in this book are the raw feelings engendered by the problems of adjusting to a different culture, a different way of life. Like the blackened araliya tree that won't grow in the Adelaide winter, the novel's central female character has a stroke, is left bereft and lonely in old age. She loves but cannot understand her daughter who leads a busy, successful life, and seemingly has no need of a partner.

Comparisons are odious, but this book reminded me of Anita Desai, particularly her first novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* And of another writer of poetic deftness, Arundati Roy; particularly the dream-like early sections, entire in themselves and perfect as only our nostalgic memories can make the past. This novel has passages of great lyric beauty; it is both honest and moving.

blue is a collection of stories set in Perth, the Indian Ocean being as much of a presence as the characters whose stories provide the interwoven strands and connections in this novel. Family, lovers, friends – a piece of how we live. These are suburban stories, with their attendant rendition of all the notes, from happiness to tragedy. Written in a conversational, matter-of-fact style that more or less clearly sets out an idea about belonging that is in all the other novels.

Whatever locations and places we live in or pass through, or exist as part of, our sense of belonging derives chiefly through people – family or other individuals who accept us and make us feel we belong with them, with whom we feel understood and at home. As Sally decides, during her homecoming surprise birthday party (yes, it's as daggily true-to-life as that) – "wherever she landed and however she felt, this would always be her luggage, a few extra suitcases full of milk and honey, artlessness and love".

Dîpti Saravanamuttu is a Melbourne poet. Her latest book is Dancing From the Edge of Darkness, *Papyrus Publishing, 2000.*

A Mystico-Occult Redemption?

Kirsti Sarmiala-Berger

Lucas Finn: *Psychic Wallah in a Charmed Circle* (Aquila Books Limited, $34.95).
Christine Mangala: *Transcendental Pastimes* (Aquila Books Limited, $34.95).

TRANSCENDENTAL PASTIMES by Christine Mangala, and Lucas Finn's *Psychic Wallah in a Charmed Circle*, belong to the category of occult and mystical fiction. The mention of this category immediately conjures up such esoteric predecessors as Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni*, *High Magic's Aid* by the English witch Gerald Gardner, and the novels of the Golden Dawn initiate, Dion Fortune. The central theme of such works in the past has been the evolution of consciousness towards more spiritual states of being, a "personal or collective *renovatio*", entailing, as the anthropologist Mircea Eliade has said, the "mystical restoration of man's original dignity and powers". For the discerning reader, these fictional antecedents were also a rich source of esoteric insights into how such spiritual evolution might be achieved. *High Magic's Aid*, for example, was written in 1949 to reveal Gardner's knowledge of witchcraft. At the time, witchcraft practices were still illegal in England, and the book was set in the fictional mode to protect the author and his circle of friends.

In this context, then, what are the esoteric insights that the reader might anticipate in Lucas Finn's *Psychic Wallah* and *Transcendental Pastimes* by Christine Mangala? Both authors evidently lean upon the current widespread interest in New Age themes; yet, the esoteric discourse they impart is as superficial as much of the New Age activity itself. In truth, it is only the happy endings in these works which lend themselves to a substantial mystico-occult interpretation.

Finn (a pseudonym for an Australian-born Cambridge academic) presents a curious mixture of satire and romance in an affected, artificial style that, in the long run, becomes rather trying. Rationalism, scientism, academics and academia, political correctness, sexual mores, religious figures and Christian dogma are all equally the targets of Finn's parody. Cambridge itself, he proposes:

> is a Charmed Circle. The chief thing is to belong. We teach an economics that only works for twenty miles around . . . and our divinity . . . look[s] suspiciously like unbelief. But it doesn't *matter* . . . Within the circle we're *safe*.

In this hallowed environment, Finn, the psychic wallah (fellow) of the narrative, endures a series of debilitating psychic attacks engendered through the methods of witchcraft by an ex-wife and her malevolent female coterie. A highly educated intellectual, and a Westerner to boot, the protagonist remains ambivalent about the real possibility of such occult goings-on: despite certain hilarious and, in the long-term, entirely unsuccesful attempts at psychically 'binding' his opponents, he speaks of his experiences as "going through something strange which is as yet . . . unaccounted for in modern thought", but confesses that he nevertheless recoils from the occult interpretation of events "as sounding somewhat potty". In desperation, he seeks help from colleagues and family members, visits a psychiatrist and a priest. His affair with a young Indian student leads him to embark on the obligatory 'journey to the East', in search of a cure for his predicament.

As the founder of the Theosophical movement, H.P. Blavatsky, has commented, traditionally India has been seen "as possessing an ancient and valued culture, as 'the cradle of the race', as holy". The confrontation of the rational West with mystical India, is also the theme of Christine Mangala's *Transcendental Pastimes*. Mangala, an Indian-born Australian, educated at Cambridge, commands a fluent, literary style which is altogether an easier read. She tells the story of Jonathan Bexley, a film director, and his all-Western film crew, who encounter modern-day India while on an assignment to film the Guru Chinnaswami for a New Age sponsor. The illustrious Guru is the representative of the ancient wisdom, at least four thousand years old. Expounding the illusory nature of the material world after the manner of the Rig Veda, he recommends the path of self-realization: "The only journey is the journey inwards," he discloses to Bexley and his assistants. Mangala shows the Western individual, on the contrary, as one who "has chosen the path that desiccates the spirit". "My rhythm's all wrong," says one of the crew, Brian Lang the sound-recordist, "like most of my fellow Anglo-Saxons, I'm out of tune."

But India is no longer able to effect a spiritual cure. Finn finds India to consist of a bewildering array of

mysticism, commercialism, and multitudes of strange, foreign deities; and his psychic attacks continue unabated. In *Transcendental Pastimes*, the view of India as a land of contradictions, of false and authentic gurus and blatant commercialism, has been maintained. Finally, the Guru Chinnaswami and the Western film crew are both made to confront the ugly face of terrorism – now an inescapable aspect of Indian life.

If the journey to the East is no longer the journey into spirit, to what must we look for the *renovatio* of consciousness? The answer in Finn's *Psychic Wallah* and Mangala's *Pastimes* is – love. On the point of a final desperate act, Finn is saved by the love for his unborn child. Similarly, Bexley becomes "a born-again father in quest of a lost daughter". Brian Lang, the sound-recordist, falls in love with a young Indian girl, and even Bexley's assistant, the unlovely and unloved Carol, finds her true path with Tigger, a follower of the Guru Chinnaswami. Is this really a mystico-occult redemption? The hero in Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* had lost his immortality by falling in love with a mortal woman. Nevertheless, the major esoteric insight in *Transcendental Pastimes* and the *Psychic Wallah in a Charmed Circle* may be interpreted as follows: for us mere mortals, love is fundamentally a symbol of life and the spirit, and the higher aspects of love are, indeed, a part of the function to realizing our original dignity and powers.

Kirsti Sarmiala-Berger is currently completing a PhD at Monash University, on the subject of occult and mystical influences in Australian art.

Making the Brutal Benign

Adrian Caesar

Mark Taylor: *Dogs are Barking* (irrePRESSible Press, $15.95).

Gary McKay (ed.): *Bullets, Beans & Bandages: Australians at War in Viet Nam* (Allen & Unwin, $21.91).

GARY MCKAY'S *Bullets, Beans and Bandages* is an edited reprint of his 1992 book *Vietnam Fragments: An Oral History of Australians at War*. The book comprises the edited responses of men and women to a questionnaire about their service in the army, navy or airforce during the Vietnam war. The material is arranged in an entirely conventional chronological sequence which moves from 'Preparing for War' to 'Returned to Australia' via chapters which deal with deployment, first impressions, the fighting, the humour of war, the tragedy of war and medical evacuation.

McKay, himself a veteran of the Vietnam war, is still a serving officer in the Australian Army, and the attitudes implicit in his editing and arranging of material in this book are broadly indicative of this. As in other of McKay's books, there is very little here about the brutality of war or the physical and mental pain imposed by the conflict. There is even less attempt at disinterested political analysis; the sufferings of the Vietnamese are rarely touched upon. Instead we have stories of how Australian men and women 'got the job done'.

The placement of a chapter dealing with the humour of war between one entitled 'Fighting Talk' and another called 'The Tragedy of War' is entirely symptomatic of McKay's anxiety not to let the reader dwell too much on any potential negativities. And it is hardly coincidental that the chapter dealing with 'tragedy' is the shortest in the book. A further peculiarity of this reprint is that accounts of fighting by infantry soldiers included in the original *Fragments of Vietnam* have been excised. In order to generate enough 'tragedy of war', however, McKay has been obliged to retain at least some remembrances from the infanteers.

But there are not enough such memories to deter McKay from including, in the same chapter, Flight Commander Terry McDonnell's one-sentence summation of the sorrows of war: "The saddest thing was the protest movement back home." This is the prelude to a closing chorus of complaint about the anti-war movement in the final chapter, 'Returned to Australia'.

There is something to be said for the argument that the target of the anti-war movement should have been the government of the day and not the servicemen and women who were involved. On the other hand, many of the interviewees here are prepared to say that they *wanted* to go to Vietnam. This being the case, there is, I think, an ethical problem with then complaining that others should necessarily agree with their decision.

Nevertheless, there are some interesting memories in *Bullets, Beans and Bandages* and not the least of the book's interest is the way in which it demonstrates the abiding power of military traditions and discourses in Australian culture.

Mark Taylor's *Dogs are Barking* is working in the opposite direction to McKay's book. Whereas the tone of the latter is resolutely, if quietly, celebratory, the former is intent upon revealing the pathological violence which is seen by Taylor to be endemic to the Army and its training methods. Taylor, we are told, "trained to be an army officer at the now defunct Officer Cadet School, Portsea". He served for nine years and retired as an acting Major. The 'inspiration' for *Dogs are Barking,* Taylor avers, came from reading Coulthard-Clarke's history of Royal Military College, Duntroon, with its accounts of bastardization at the college, and from the author's experience of hearing fellow-officers reminisce about bastardization at the college. The 'message' of the book, the epilogue tells us, is that "it is possible to stand up and fight such injustice wherever it occurs". It is as well Taylor makes this clear, because the novel he has written does not entirely support such a conclusion: the protagonist who stands up to the bullying ends up dead.

The book itself is the story of a 'fourthie' (a first-year cadet at RMC) who from day one is systematically brutalized by the 'Morals Officer' and his henchmen. The 'Morals Officer' (named with a startling lack of subtlety, Robert Steel) is a senior cadet who, with the tacit support of the military hierarchy at the college, is made responsible for weeding out the 'weak' and 'unsuitable'. In this case, the Morals Officer and his friends are given to wearing Nazi regalia and indulging in the most physically vicious 'punishments' of erring cadets. In between times they get drunk and reveal their horribly racist, sexist and xenophobic attitudes.

When the first-year cadet, in collusion with an honourable senior, leaks stories of bastardization to the *Canberra Times,* the reader hopes for justice. But we know, because there are so many pages left, that this is an unlikely outcome. Rather, the Morals Officer is supported by his commanding Colonel in finding a scapegoat and the 'squealers'. Subsequently, the Senior Cadet is forced to resign, and the first-year is murdered by Steel and his cohorts as the 'punishment' for squealing gets out of hand.

The story has a horrid fascination, and Taylor is not without skill as a writer. Nevertheless, there is some terribly stilted dialogue here and a certain clumsiness in the characterization. Taylor would have benefited from the ministrations of a professional editor. But the more substantial problems of the book lie beyond these technical difficulties. The real issue is the relationship between the non-fictional frame and the fiction itself. All the framing information about Taylor, his life and his sources, is designed to suggest that he knows what he is talking about and that the fiction is substantially drawn from non-fictional sources. But the fiction (or is it non-fiction) is very hard to believe. This is not because it is difficult to believe in bastardization at RMC (occurrences have been well documented) but that the nature and extreme extent of it in this book tips into melodrama. It is too easy for the reader to dismiss what happens here as fanciful. The book, then, works against its avowed intent, and lets the reader off the hook. It is too easy to put the book down and say, "that can't have happened".

There is a further problem here. The character of Robert Steel is developed in such a way as to suggest that his pathological violence is symptomatic of a loveless and abusive childhood. The effect of this is to imply that the bastardization at Duntroon is not merely the function of group ethics and dynamics instilled and supported by the military, but that it arises in its most extreme cases from individuals who are sick. Recent reports at ADFA, however, suggest the opposite: that in cases of bastardization, some otherwise honourable and well-behaved individuals are led into brutality by a misplaced adherence to a group mentality and ethos. Mark Taylor, I think, has not shown this. Rather, his book concentrates on a few rogue cadets who are a law unto themselves and whom the army tacitly condones.

In the end *Dogs are Barking* does not do justice to the seriousness of its subject matter. A good and well-documented non-fiction book on this subject would be welcome. But, of course, the difficulty of writing such a book would be to find enough 'squealers' whose testimony could be relied upon.

Adrian Caesar's The White *won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Non-Fiction in 2000.*

Seeing the City

Cameron Logan

Lynette Finch & Chris McConville (eds.): *Gritty Cities: Images of the Urban* (Pluto Press, $27.95).

Tim Flannery: *The Birth of Sydney* (Text Publishing, $24.95).
Chris Johnson: *Shaping Sydney: Public Architecture and Civic Decorum* (Hale & Iremonger, $49.95).
Patrick Troy (ed.): *Serving the City: The Crisis in Australia's Urban Services* (Pluto Press, $32.95).

IN THE WAKE of the perceived demise or failure of centralized urban planning in the 1970s and 1980s a number of accounts that treated the city as a discursive figure, or necessary fiction, became influential. These new accounts noted the increased sense in which many cities no longer had verifiable outsides. The process of conurbation and the rise of what has been called the megalopolis caused geographers and social theorists, especially the influential group associated with the 'L.A. School', to focus less on service provision and the urban form as such, and turn their attention to the history, theory and politics of 'space'. However, the political economy, or should I say anti-political economy of globalization and privatization has in more recent times spurred a return to serious discourse in urbanism and planning.

The problems in Victoria affecting the production and distribution of electricity early this year, coupled with the recent problems in Sydney with water, Melbourne with gas, and Auckland with electricity, make *Serving the City* a timely contribution to this re-emerging field. The strength of the book is its cohesiveness. Despite having seven separate contributors the book maintains a keen focus on the planning, management and provision of services to property and people in Australian cities. Credit for this should go to the editor, Patrick Troy, who's own planning and choice of contributors was as well organized and justified as he would like our urban services to be.

The basic argument that emerges from the book is that the policy of privatization has done little to alleviate the problems facing urban services and infrastructure. While it aims to increase efficiency through the supposed discipline and rigour of market responsibility, privatization has failed to transform the highly centralized structures of the utilities, especially water and sewerage. Nor does the policy address the historical failure to integrate the different areas of planning. In particular, the piecemeal efforts in transport have not created effectively integrated networks, and have given little consideration to land management issues.

Moreover, in the context of a policy that emphasizes what Patrick Troy calls "consumer sovereignty", the power of local communities and regulatory authorities to determine the standard of housing and level of amenity is regularly reduced. He argues that this often "originates with pressure from developers who seek opportunities to maximize their profits but who have no continuing commitment to or engagement with the communities within which they operate".

The book is by no means a straight polemic against privatization, however. Its main concerns, as the subtitle indicates, are the irrationalities, inequities, and unnecessary environmental pressures produced by the history of planning policy in Australia. It is the manner in which the value of planning itself and public participation in planning processes have been eroded by the policy of privatization that is a prominent concern of most of the contributors. Indeed, as Paul Stein remarks the word 'planning' has become a misnomer at the state government level and should in most instances be replaced by the word 'development'.

My hope is that this book is able to find an audience not only amongst the 'nuts 'n' bolts' planners and geographers but also amongst those more concerned with the culture of cities. Knowing something about the hydraulic services needed to operate the sewerage system of a large city provides unexpected insights into our historically determined understanding of, for example, the relationship of the healthy city to the healthy human body. This is surely a relationship of considerable interest to anyone wanting to link the recent interest in the body as text, or culturally inscribed surface, with the urban form considered in similar terms.

Another reason for those concerned with the cultural city to read *Serving the City* is to erode the often glibly invoked image of the urban planner. This figure is usually a Corbussian caricature who comes across as a megalomaniac or neurotic perfectionist and cannot stand the messy human behaviour which characterizes life in real cities. Kathleen Ferguson's contribution to *Gritty Cities*, 'Walking on Swanston Street', is an acute critical analysis of the problems associated with the ongoing efforts of cities to imbue their important, busy public places with ambient value. Disappointingly Ferguson repeats the erroneous cliché just referred to by casting urban planners as the bogy-people of the piece, when in fact some of the more unfortunate attempts to 'pre-

cinct plan' and create a coffee friendly, cultural feel to Swanston Street should probably be imputed to the political leaders in the government and city council. Again it is the failure to engage a comprehensive plan, and the equation of commercial interests with the broader public interest, that might be blamed for some of the shortcomings of Melbourne's major public concourse today.

Considering the overall contents of this book the cover and title to *Gritty Cities* turns out to be quite misleading. The publication comes out of a conference held at The University of the Sunshine Coast a couple of years ago and reading it is a bit like being at a conference. The papers are often very engaging on their own terms but you commonly find yourself asking what any individual paper has to do with any of the others. While this can be tolerated, even encouraged in a conference, a book that is so disparate in its intentions and attentions comes across as badly edited, or a mere opportunity for the kudos that comes with publishing. Of course Lynette Finch and Chris McConville, who both make stimulating contributions to the book, are not alone when it comes to putting together collections of this type. Much of what passes for contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship comes packaged up in this way. The book's cover, however, should carry a warning for people interested in the crime genre not to buy it as it looks for all the world as though it is going to deal with depictions of the urban in popular crime fiction and cinema.

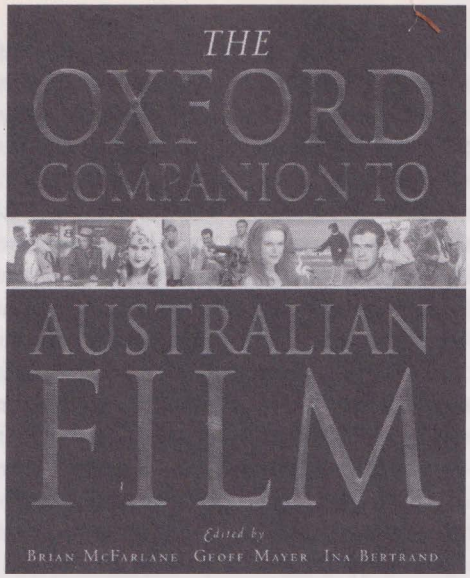
As I said, however, much of it is worth reading. This is true particularly for those who have taken an interest in recent discussions of cultural tourism and the increasing importance of leisure industries on the appearance and economic functioning of cities. Marshall Berman's lead chapter is, as expected, insightful and very entertaining. Among the less established scholars who have been included Sascha Jenkins' study of the changing image of Sydney Harbour is a timely one. She argues convincingly that those images have succeeded one after the other in reordering the social character and physical structure of Sydney in and around the harbour.

As might have been expected there has been a rash of books about Sydney in the past twelve months or so. Following Lucy Hughes Turnbull's celebratory *Sydney: Biography of a City* which reprises the fine Victorian-era tradition of what Anthony Trollope called metropolitan 'puffing', and Peter Spearitt's more historically rigorous and measured *Sydney's Century: A History*, come two more books which take Sydney and its history as their principal subject. *The Birth of Sydney* is a collection of writings about Sydney from the first moments of European colonization up until the assumed birth of Australian national identity in the 1890s. It is edited and introduced by the ubiquitous Tim Flannery and it could be thought that this very general collection of documents is little more than an opportunity to cash in on Flannery's current profile. I would agree with Scott Milson's assessment in *The Australian* (5 February 2000) that assembling these documents appears not to have required an enormous scholarly effort. I disagree, though, with his judgement that Flannery's essay is "strikingly banal". While Flannery's enjoyment of the 'exotic' often threatens to overwhelm his critical stance towards the imperial endeavour, his manner of making the sandstone plateau on which Sydney grew, along with its flora and fauna, comprehensible as active players within the story of the city's early development is both unusual and worthwhile in a book of historical documents such as this. Ultimately the book can probably avoid the charge of redundancy levelled by Milson by finding a place in high school libraries, where its obvious sympathy with the life and concerns of the Eora people, but evasion of a harder critical and political line on the issue of invasion and subsequent ethnocidal policies toward Aborigines, will no doubt be seen as an advantage.

The other book about Sydney, *Shaping Sydney*, was written by the current NSW government architect, Chris Johnson. It is a beautiful looking publication, very easy to read and well illustrated. Unfortunately it isn't very interesting to read. A history of the office of government architect in NSW, the book pays due respect to each of the worthies who has occupied the position since its first unofficial bearer, though certainly its most famous, Francis Greenway. Johnson argues that the great tradition of the office has been to uphold the value of civic decorum in the city's public architecture. However, after reading about each of the important projects and moments in this fine civic tradition I was left wondering why central Sydney, with a few notable exceptions, looks so poorly designed and planned, and has so few areas that exhibit the values of which he writes. Someone from outside the office, someone less obliged to give nods and accolades in all the correct and predicable places, would have been far better placed to write an engaging history of this institution.

Perhaps a history of the failures of urban planning in Sydney would teach us much more about the city. Such a study might provide also a reminder about the democratic, practical and cultural advantages of good planning. Good planning not necessarily meaning highly centralized planning, but something which does foreground values other than those of the consumer's right to choose. A book such as this might also seek to articulate a vision of the city and its civic life which goes beyond the creation of new apartments, cafes and shops in waterside locations.

Cameron Logan is undertaking an MA at Monash University on an analysis of the development of architectural heritage in Melbourne from the 1880s to the present.



Missed opportunity

Jack Clancy

Brian McFarlane, Geoff Mayer & Ina Bertrand (eds): *The Oxford Companion to Australian Film* (OUP, $79.95).

THE EDITORS ANNOUNCE their objectives as "to give a sense of the sweep of cinema in Australia", to be "comprehensive and to appeal to a wide readership" and to establish this *Companion* as "the book of first reference for anyone interested in the way in which Australian cinema has confronted the realities of Australian life".

There are several tall orders and some bet-hedging in all this; above all there is enough to raise the question of what precisely a *Companion* should be doing. The most recent of Oxford's many examples, the *Companion to Australian History*, claims simply to offer a "comprehensive, authoritative and lively guide" which "rests on the most recent and significant scholarship". The *Companion* under review might have benefited from a comparably focused objective for, in its absence, the final outcome disappoints not only the reasonable expectations that might have been held for such a prestigious volume, but the stated objectives themselves.

A 'comprehensive' work would surely have attempted to provide entries on all the feature films made in Australia. The editors duck this responsibility by rejecting any notion of being "encyclopedic". "Films, people and institutions" are selected, though criteria for such selection are not specified except that they are those which "convey what Australian cinema is and has been" or, presumably, which give the aforesaid "sense of the sweep . . ." etc.

So in 1978, *The Long Weekend* has an entry but *Weekend of Shadows* does not. *Summerfield* (1977) scores but *Summer City* in the same year misses as does *Summer of Secrets* (1976). The directional status of John Duigan is not enough to rescue *The Trespassers* (1976), nor that of Paul Cox to justify *Cactus* (1986), though both directors received substantial and sympathetic entries. Ken Hannam's *Break of Day* (1976) is excluded while a film like *Harvest of Hate* (1978) is included only to be savaged by terms like "exploitation", "comic-book plot" and "ludicrous". What selection criteria are operating here?

Compounding the problem, there seems to have been no editorial decision made on the form of individual film entries. One possible model, the *Literature Companion* (plot, outstanding characteristics, place in the author's work, cultural/aesthetic significance), is used occasionally; the rest is a wild mix of throw-away judgements with justice dispensed unevenly. *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975), surely a crucially important film in the early seventies revival, is treated almost dismissively ("a study in maleness and vulnerability . . . essentially a milieu piece"). Its achievement at the time, when there were few if any models to build from and audiences were a mystery, and the fact that it was a film about work, and that it was subversive of the myths of mateship are all ignored.

(There is the habit, too, of using one film to belt others, unnamed, over the head. *The F.J. Holden* is set apart from "most later 1970s Australian cinema" by

not being based on a novel, nor is it set in the past or concerned to project exportable images of Australia.) *Shame* (1988) gets an entry of twenty-one lines from one of the editors, but in the 'genre' entry by a different editor is treated in twenty-four lines.

Entries on themes are a round-up of the usual suspects: (city and country, Aborigines, rites of passage) without, it must be said, anything original emerging. Thus 'urban life' manages to suggest that city and suburban settings are sometimes negative, sometimes not. A disappointingly literal-minded essay on Rites of Passages misses the central point that, if this theme is more than usually common in Australian films, it is because the history of the country itself is often conceived in these terms. This makes it all the less explicable that *The Man From Snowy River*, where this is the very basis of the film's structure, is not seen in these terms (nor is it so seen in the film's individual entry). Similarly, to treat *Gallipoli* in these terms again largely misses the point.

The work does not fare much better in dealing with history. The revival, arguably the most significant development in a century of Australian cinema is dealt with in twenty-four lines, while ten times that amount is allocated to a confused essay on mateship. If space were a problem for the editors, they could surely dispense with eight rather pointless interviews (with people who are presumably to be taken as representatives of the industry) which belong in a different book.

It is disappointing to arrive at such a negative judgement. Perhaps the concept of the *Companion* is the problem. Perhaps there is a narrowness of vision; the work has an overwhelmingly Victorian basis, with more Victorian contributors than all the other states put together. The three editors are Victorian, two of them from La Trobe University, which has ten times as many contributors as any other university.

Whatever the reason, the volume represents an opportunity missed.

Jack Clancy was foundation professor of Communication Studies at RMIT University.

Sydney's Dark Heart

Michelle Arrow

John Birmingham: *Leviathan* (Knopf, $49.40).

WE ALL THOUGHT that he was just another nutbag. My friends and I – a mix of historians, academic odd-jobbers, and researchers, who would often spend a lot of our time working in the Mitchell Library, used to see John Birmingham working away in the library, day after day. Not knowing who he was, we just assumed he was another one of those guys who was transcribing alien messages for an unprepared and uncaring world, or that he was teaching one of his many personalities how to use the computer catalogue. But all those hours in the library were clearly well spent. They're certainly in evidence in his impressive "unauthorised biography of Sydney", *Leviathan*. Unlike other, more buttoned-up contenders in the recent wave of accounts of the history of Sydney, this is Sydney with its pants down and its bum hanging out the back window of the buck's night van, the old

bloke that bails you up at the bar with a dirty old uncle's ear for a good story. But ultimately *Leviathan* is a love story – not just of Birmingham's love/hate affair with Sydney, but his falling in love with history. His delight, his disgust, his engagement with his subject, shouts from every page.

The book is ambitiously structured. Chapters have been formed and shaped around four major themes: journeying; the environment; power; and violence. His account of Sydney is by no means exhaustive – it is highly subjective, personal and quixotic. The first two chapters are the best, where Birmingham's control of his material is strongest. In particular, his comparison between an early, bumbling revenge raid against the local Aborigines, led by Watkin Tench, and the police shooting of David Gundy in 1989, is an audacious, compelling piece of writing. Birmingham's journalistic eye for detail, drama, and narrative suspense (beautifully displayed in the passages on the 1994 Sydney bushfires) are some of the best qualities he brings to his ambitious project.

Leviathan sits somewhat uneasily between literary genres. Is it history? Is it journalism? Or something else entirely? Perhaps the answer lies in its critical reception. Reviewed favorably in broadsheet literary pages, university-trained historians seemed to regard it with a dismissive sniffiness. 'It's full of stuff that we already knew', was a common academic response to the book. But academic knowledge won't automatically translate to popular understanding without a translator. Many historians and students knew about the stolen generations well before the *Bringing Them Home* inquiry, for example, but it took that inquiry to put the issue in the national consciousness. Writing the books, knowing the facts, isn't enough – they have to be communicated to a readership and a public before they can be acknowledged and absorbed. Birmingham pre-empts this kind of criticism by taking an adversarial tone in his footnotes, which are full of disparaging remarks about "pointy heads". Despite this, he draws on research by some of the best pointy-heads in the business, and his text overall is a fantastic example of a popular approach to history that has a good chance of being embraced by that elusive creature, the intelligent general reader. Birmingham's colloquial prose can often have a forced edge to it, the striving too hard for that elusive 'hipster' appeal, but he is to be admired for making an attempt to communicate a complex historical narrative to a younger, popular audience.

No academic historian would attempt Birmingham's sweeping approach. Because he approached the project outside the historical profession, he can break the rules in ways that historians cannot, taking huge leaps across time and space, and not worrying about the unfilled gaps. There are problems with the subjective nature of his biography, its blokiness being the most obvious example. He notes that he planned to write an entire chapter on Sydney's women and its gay history, but they were clearly overtaken by the lengthy, but still effective, descriptions of contemporary police activity in Sydney's western suburbs that make up much of Chapter Four. After the clear thematic sweep of the first three chapters, Chapter four, with its focus on crime and police corruption, is less satisfying. Perhaps Birmingham wanted to avoid obvious choices, or perhaps he values longevity, but a chapter on police corruption that leaves out Neddy Smith and Roger Rogerson almost isn't worth writing. Instead, Birmingham leaps from the sixties to the Wood Royal Commission into police corruption, neglecting, in Rogerson, one of police corruption's best-known practitioners.

Leviathan is ultimately as unruly as the city it depicts and dissects. But beneath its turbulence, its glitter and beauty, Birmingham argues, Sydney has a grimy heart. Birmingham has written a self-consciously dark book, a fact he acknowledges in his epilogue. Yet he didn't intend it to turn out this way. Birmingham wanted to write a celebration of Sydney, but something happened along the way: he confronted the underbelly of the city he loved and he didn't feel like celebrating anymore. "History is never bloodless. Someone always gets hurt," he writes. This kind of stuff wouldn't have looked good on the Olympics brochures and still doesn't on the national 'balance sheet' – it makes people uncomfortable, including John 'no black armbands please, we're Australian' Howard. We can choose to ignore the Birmingham view – others have written Sydney's history in more orthodox, 'bloodless' ways. But in a nation whose leaders quibble over the numerical definition of a stolen 'generation', I think we leach the blood from our history at our peril.

Michelle Arrow is a regular contributor to overland. Her study of Australian women playwrights, Upstaged, *will be published in 2000/1.*

A cautionary tale

Michael George Smith

Jack Marx: *Sorry: The wretched tale of Little Stevie Wright* (Macmillan Australia, $27.41).

> *. . . the junkie's battlement of lies, impregnable and, after twenty years of camouflage training, completely impossible to detect – one simply knows it is there; embarrassment, the most senselessly lethal of human restraints; immense distrust of his fellow man . . .*

HEROIN CHIC seems to have seeped into the very fabric of contemporary society and for all the ghastly images presented to us almost daily by the media (before which we quite rightly squirm), the delusion of 'rebellion' and even a kind of 'romance' still lingers all too powerfully around this most addictive and destructive of drugs. The 'artistic' romance with heroin, at least in the West, goes back a good century and more, with the opium-inspired *Kubla Khan* of Coleridge and the dreamily illicit voyeurism of *Confessions of an Opium Eater*. But the current love/hate relationship comes more directly to today's young through a lineage that has its roots in the 1940s and the great bebop jazz experiment, with John Coltrane, Charlie 'Bird' Parker and Miles Davis. It then works its way through the Beats, William Burroughs in particular, and finds its first fatal intersection in Sydney's Kings Cross in the late sixties, when jazz, rock, drugs and American GIs on R&R from the horrors of Vietnam found fertile ground. Heroin was there earlier, in Australia's jazz community (just check out John Clare's *Bodgie Dada & The Cult Of Cool*), as young players listened with wonder to the sounds of Bird and Coltrane and sought out the source of those inspired sounds, mistaking the contents of a needle with creative genius, a mistake made by so many artists of all stripes that followed. Could Brett Whiteley have painted as he did without the junk that inevitably killed him? Or Michael Dransfield have written his poetry?

We'll never really know, but one thing cannot be denied – a lot of ordinary people have wasted and continue to waste their lives riding the illusions heroin provides them. Meanwhile, heroin chic has become an essential part of certain kinds of fashion photography, young people have made icons of junkies and ex-junkies like Iggy Pop, Kurt Cobain and our own Nick Cave, and a comfortable, almost benign and even innocuous form of heroin abuse has filtered into contemporary Australian fiction, even the pages of *overland* (see Jamieson Kane's short story, 'Biohazard' in *overland* 154). The reality is rather more tawdry. It's as simple as the girl, no more that nineteen but looking closer to a haggard twenty-nine, nodding off precariously in her seat, beer untouched on the table before her, in Tattersall's Hotel in Goulburn, or the singer in one of Australia's most successful pop groups of the 1960s throwing it all away:

> Heroin is the only drug that deals its users the same character traits as each other. There are violent drunks and happy drunks and loud and sleepy and honest drunks, but junkies follow a uniform pattern. They're all full of shit.

Jack Marx may or may not be telling the true story of 'Little' Stevie Wright, the singer of the Easybeats, in *Sorry*. He makes that plain towards the end of this extraordinary, impressionistic and iconoclastic book, and there is certainly no pretence to having written an 'authoritative' biography. Quite apart from the fact that, as Marx points out, Wright's memory is curiously selective, depending on (at least during the period in which Marx lived with him) what was in it for Wright in terms of 'scoring', a friend of mine with the recording company, Albert's, which still represents him, tells me Wright has no recollection of ever having even met Marx let alone allowed him to live with him in order to gather information for this book. It's more a book about trying to write a book about 'Little' Stevie Wright. Ultimately it doesn't matter, because *Sorry* is as much an exploration of the psyche of Jack Marx as about his attempt to pin down the story of a fallen pop star. And neither comes out of the process looking like a particularly nice person.

'Little' Stevie Wright, for those who don't know, was the hyperkinetic singer of the hit Australian pop group of the 1960s, the Easybeats. A migrant kid from the north of England, Wright was fifteen when he joined fellow migrant kids and guitarists George Young and Harry Vanda, who were still living in Villawood Migrant Hostel in Sydney's outer suburbs. Within a year, they had released the first of what would become an unprecedented series of Top

Ten singles and albums that, two years after forming, saw the Easybeats, already creating in Australia the kind of teen hysteria the world had first experienced with the Beatles, heading for the 'cradle' of sixties pop success, Great Britain. There was one incandescent hit single, 'Friday On My Mind', which seemed to distil every hope and dream of the universal working-class Joe and promised the boys the breakthrough so many other Australian bands had dreamed of but never achieved. But after it and a desultory tour of America, the band found itself incapable of repeating that UK success and in 1969, the band broke up, having been together barely five years. Stevie Wright had a second shot when the two songwriters of the Easybeats gave him a hit in 1974 in the epic rock anthem, 'Evie', and a couple of solid albums – *Hard Road* and *Black-Eyed Bruiser* – but by then he was a heroin addict. By the time I was touring the country in a band, in 1977, the stories of Wright injecting directly into his eyeballs were commonplace. The fact that he is alive at all defies logic, but again, my Albert's friend tells me Wright has 'died' so many times he believes himself indestructible.

Despite those aforementioned quotes, *Sorry* is by no means a sanctimonious diatribe against the folly of drug abuse. Marx's own scathing cynicism could never have allowed him to write such a book. Instead, with feet made as surely of clay as his subject's, Marx takes us into the gutter with him to try to understand what could have made this once-lionized character turn into the sad, shuffling creature he has become: living by stealth, his wife, son and career lost to the dubious release of every conceivable chemical he can pump into his veins (though again, the latest from my friend at Albert's is Wright is straight, his mind back on track and who knows? perhaps a return to the singing career is possible). On the way, not only do we get a possible potted history of the rise and fall of the Easybeats, delivered in an almost fairytale singsong kind of language part Wodehouse, part Captain W.E. Johns (Biggles, I'm sure, was a seminal influence on the nascent Marx!), but a gloriously hilarious demolition of the cult of the pop star, the blues, television commercials and the music industry in general. We also see a fool and his money easily parted as Marx ignores the advice of Wright's 'manager', a character as destructive to Wright's hopes and fears as any of the chemicals he's ingested over the past twenty-five years. We learn perhaps more than we'd ever really care to know about the personal habits of Jack Marx. We learn about the side of heroin addiction we don't see in the current flood of heroin-chic fiction – the inexorable vomiting, the degrading and dehumanizing curb-crawling search for the next hit; the variations in detox methods; the inanity of life barely lived between hits. Yet, as tawdry as it is, Marx is able to make the whole exercise at once profoundly moving and wickedly funny. Whenever there is a danger of the merest hint of moral pomposity, it's deflated by that self-deprecating cynicism, neatly contrasting the gritty and sometimes so honest in its disconcerting realism of Marx's descent into the world of which he writes.

This, for me (and I know this was and is very much swimming against the tide of critical opinion – see my review in *overland* 128), is the book that Andrew McGahan's *Praise* could have been. It's the tale of an accidental winner who chooses to become a complete loser written by a member of what's been dubbed the Slacker generation (McGahan's own), an ugly tale of ugly people written with all the gritty, brutal honesty and realism of Bukowski (McGahan's confessed literary template) and yet with such a profound understanding of the frail humanity that lingers beneath the squalor that the reader cannot but find themselves quietly caring about the characters in what is probably more 'unreliable memoir' or 'faction' than 'biography'.

This book then, without for one moment holding pretensions to any moral high ground – quite the contrary a lot of the time, considering the often reprehensible behaviour of the author himself, let alone his subject, as they shoot up together, or as Marx confesses to even greater moral transgressions – is, surprisingly, something of a cautionary tale of some moral force. As Marx suggests a couple of times in the book, there were moments when Stevie Wright announced that he could see a lot of himself in Marx.

> "Yes," he continues, nodding his head slowly. "And if you're not careful, son, this is your future too."

Michael George Smith is the Associate Editor of the free Sydney-based arts and entertainment weekly, The Drum Media, *which also employed Jack Marx as Art Director, until the frustrations of not being allowed to diversify his position there to include journalistic contributions demanded his departure to the "heady literary high life" writing sub-pornographic copy for the trashy pictorial weeklies,* The Picture *and* The World.

Instinctive political nous

Frank Bongiorno

A.W. Martin: *Robert Menzies: A Life, Volume 2 1944–1978* (MUP, $54.95).

THIS BOOK BRINGS to a conclusion Allan Martin's massive life of Menzies. The first volume appeared in 1993; with the publication of its bulkier successor, the whole enterprise runs to over 1000 pages. In the field of Australian biography, that makes it a whopper, and Melbourne University Press deserves congratulations for giving this fine scholar the space he needed to do his subject justice.

One reason for Martin's success as a biographer is that he is too canny to reinvent the wheel. Instead he contextualizes the results of his own massive labour in the research of primary source material with interpretation of the work of experts on subjects with which he is concerned. It is a method Martin, like any other competent historian, will have learnt at the beginning of his career: but to perform it as successfully as he manages – with generosity to the authors concerned and a scholarly thoroughness that never impairs the readability of his narrative – is an achievement of immense proportions.

Menzies was the giant of twentieth-century Australian politics. He served as prime minister for eighteen years, and was a major figure on the national stage for almost twice that long. With the possible exception of Whitlam, no political figure occupies a more prominent place in Australian popular memory; and no individual, including Whitlam, has come to stand for a decade – the 1950s – in the manner of Menzies. Bruce governed Australia for much of the 1920s, Lyons for most of the thirties, but who calls those decades 'The Age of Bruce' or 'The Lyons Era'? As Janet McCalman has commented, "it was not what he *did* that lives in the memory, but what he *was*".

A narrative as detailed as Martin's will inevitably say much about the *was* in the process of dealing with the *did*. The author announces from the outset that his focus is Menzies' public career; that he wants "to capture something of the flavour of his personality"; that he is interested in "the real live man". He eschews the "speculative and theoretical reasoning" of scholars such as Judith Brett. We do gain glimpses of Menzies' private life, and there is one particularly telling passage that hints at the dynamics of Bob and Pattie's marriage and its relationship to Menzies' public life. Here, the author suggests that Pattie "assumed a position of dominance" over Menzies at home, a source of tension in the marriage derived from her sense of intellectual inferiority and feeling that Bob's family disapproved of her. Consequently, Menzies "spent as much time out of the Lodge and in his office at Parliament House as was seemly". This observation is a gesture towards Robert Manne's criticism that Martin's first volume lacked an analytical or systematic treatment of "the dynamics of his family life and how they may have affected his political style". Whether the author goes far enough this time round is a matter of taste: mine is in the direction of a little more psychological probing than we find here.

One of Martin's targets in this study is the left-wing demonology that pictures Menzies as a cross between McCarthy and Verwoerd. He continues the demolition of this image begun in the first volume without losing sight of Menzies' faults and failures. For example, he argues that in attempting to ban the Communist Party of Australia, Menzies indulged in "a form of fanaticism". This "illiberal" measure was, in the author's view, a tragedy for both Menzies and Australia. If one accepts the demonology, and so dismisses Menzies as either cold warrior or political opportunist utterly unhampered by principle, there is no problem left to solve. Martin, however, is unprepared to endorse either caricature. Consequently, although he thoroughly contextualizes the government's attempt to ban the CPA by emphasizing Menzies' acute consciousness of a dangerous international situation, he ultimately comes up with more questions than answers in his effort to interpret an episode that was surely a defining moment in Menzies' career.

Martin provides a balanced assessment of the Petrov Affair in which he recognizes the ruthlessness of Menzies' attacks on H.V. Evatt, but on some other issues he does seem to err on the side of generosity to his subject. For example, was Menzies' sincerity really "not in question" when he called Chifley's bank nationalization measure "Fascism in Australia" and likened the Labor government's actions to Hitler's? Was Menzies merely ignorant of the Labor government's effort to assist Britain economically when he claimed Evatt and Chifley didn't care about the United Kingdom's problems – or was he just engaged in political point-scoring? Was it re-

ally "not unreasonable" for Menzies to regard Evatt's campaign against the attempt to ban the Communist Party as "wicked and unscrupulous"? On the other hand, Martin does reject the 'heroic' version of Menzies' reform of the universities by giving credit where credit is due rather than attributing all of the government's achievements to the Prime Minister. He also produces enough evidence to suggest that a view of the world as divided into inferior and superior cultures and races was very much a part of Menzies' make-up. How else do we explain Menzies' comment on Nehru after the two Commonwealth leaders clashed at the United Nations: "All the savage comes out in him"? Or his description of the "Gyppos" (Egyptians) as "a dangerous lot of backward adolescents"? Or even his total lack of interest in the Aboriginal population on a trip to central Australia in the 1950s? To the extent that Martin attempts to explain Menzies' attitudes on these sorts of matters (and he is often content to allow his readers to make up their own minds) he sees Menzies as a creature of his generation. Yet that judgement avoids the difficult question of why Menzies – after all, an *extraordinary* product of his generation in so many ways – was incapable of providing Australians with the kind of leadership that might have helped them to adjust more readily to a new order. Why, for example, did Menzies – his Britishness notwithstanding – find it so difficult to accept the transformation of the British Commonwealth in the years after the war? Even George VI seems to have found the changes necessitated in 1949 by the retention of a republican India easier to swallow than Bob did.

Martin defends Menzies vigorously against those who have mocked his "I did but see her passing by, and yet I love her till I die" performance during the Queen's 1963 visit:

> Anachronistically and mindlessly, this one sentence is generally used to lampoon Menzies' attitude to the monarchy, as if this was the only thing he ever said on the subject.

Martin's objection here is fair enough: after all, nobody ever mocks Evatt for his fulsome praise of the royal family. When condescending posterity went to work, Menzies was made to pay the heavier price for his greater eloquence, Prime Ministerial longevity, and position on the right rather than the left of Australian politics. Yet I became rather more concerned a few pages later when I read that:

whatever he said to the Queen about loving her as she passed by would quickly become for Menzies and his party – and for Australian history – far less important than the instinctive nous through which, just after that, he seized on the politically stunning image of Labor's 'thirty-six faceless men'.

No statement in this book – not even Martin's explanation in the introduction that his aim was to find out "what actually happened" – reveals more about his presuppositions than this sentence. It is the voice of the hard-headed political biographer, who believes that the role of history is to discipline a popular memory inclined to deceive us by its habit of reading the past with the benefit of hindsight. But as Tom Griffiths has pointed out, historians have much to gain by exploring rather than merely disciplining memory. A crucial question about Menzies' famous speech neither asked nor answered in this book is why it has become so prominent in popular judgements about Menzies' significance in Australian history.

There is a danger in this sort of criticism, however, of demanding of the author another kind of book. Martin's biography deserves to be treated on its merits, which are many. It is a testament to his skill as historian and biographer that he has produced such a lively, elegant and absorbing story. At times, it cannot have been easy, as Sir Robert embarked on yet another trip to London, passed another day at the cricket, or relished another chat with the Queen at the Palace. Yet Martin manages it. The two-volume work will take its place among the great Australian biographies.

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Ducks to Water

Gillian Whitlock

Anne Summers: *An Autobiography 1945–1976. Ducks on the Pond* (Viking, $43.74).

IN THE NOVEMBER 1999 issue of the *Australian Review of Books* Hilary McPhee uses her review of Rosamund Dalziell's recent study of Australian autobiography to lament her own shortcomings as an autobiographer. Despite time and effort, and the incentive of an autobiographical pact with a close friend, McPhee's own autobiographical project is hard graft. Her friend, on the other hand, has powered ahead, with a first volume in hard cover already. Anne Summers is, one suspects, the other half of that autobiographical pact, and *Ducks on the Pond* the first of what appears to be an autobiographical duet. This link with McPhee is speculation, for the friend and colleague remains unnamed. On the other hand a connection between *Ducks on the Pond* and another autobiographical project, Susan Ryan's *Catching the Wave: Life in and out of politics*, published earlier in 1999, is clearly established. Together these suggest it is time to begin to write the history of recent Australian feminist movements. This will be done not only through the projects of historians like Marilyn Lake, whose history of feminism here has also just appeared, but also in the form of autobiographical writing by that first generation of Australian 'second wave' feminists, many of whom are now leading public intellectuals.

Ryan and Summers piece together some of the fragments of this history as told through individual lives, and the similarities are important. Both women are the product of Catholic girlhoods, and Ryan is not reticent to suggest this is an important influence on the emergence of second wave feminism in Australia: "If convent girls did what the nuns told them – examined their consciences, tried to find the truth, stood up for themselves, strove for altruistic rather than individualistic motives – it is no wonder that they took to the second wave of feminism like ducks to water." Both Ryan and Summers were unsuccessful candidates for the position of first women's adviser to the prime minister Gough Whitlam in April 1973, and an early marriage and involvement in the Australian Labor Party features in both of these careers. Furthermore for both Summers and Ryan readily available access to university places in the 1960s and 1970s was critical to their success, and once there literary studies were the entrée to their thinking about the place of women in Australian history, society and culture. Summers' book, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, began as a Master's thesis on the sociology of women in Australian literature. Susan Ryan's Masters thesis is on Christina Stead. These similarities are important indicators of the social conditions which led to the establishment of brilliant feminist careers in the late twentieth century in Australia, and a reminder of the role of the Humanities in par-

ticular and Universities more generally in shaping contemporary women intellectuals and activists. The attack on both in the 1990s will clearly have significant long-term effects on the cultural, intellectual and social institutions which are fundamental to the shaping of future generations of intellectuals.

Despite these important and indicative similarities, Ryan's ducks to water are not Summers' ducks on the pond. Ryan avoids speaking intimately, and her memoir is shaped by the confines of what she calls "the parliamentary triangle". On the other hand, Summers writes openly of painful and deeply intimate events. And Summers, with a long history in journalism, can write! For example her account of leaving Adelaide to go east for an abortion in 1965 is a frank and moving reminder of the kind of trauma which unwanted pregnancy entailed then and there, and the perfunctory and scarcely consensual introduction to sexual intercourse she shared with many young women of her generation. These personal narratives give resonance to her later commitment to feminist activism. So too does her account of the estrangement which occurred between father and daughter with her adolescence: "Mine is a very Australian story. I am astounded by how many women of my generation have similar stories of alcoholic fathers, some of them very violent, almost all of them incapable of developing decent relationships with their daughters, and often their sons too." These family secrets which are, as Summers suggests, the hardest to talk about, are part of the unique language of autobiographical narrative, and a way in which it can flesh out understandings of gender and familiar relations in the Australian story of contemporary feminist activism.

In a quite different way, Summers witnessing the slow and traumatic decline of traditional indigenous culture amongst the Pitjantjatjara people at Musgrave Park and Ernabella in the late sixties is also fundamental to a contemporary Australian story. Newly-married, Summers and her husband went to Musgrave Park as part of Don Dunstan's initiative to address race relations in a progressive manner by experimenting with various ways of initiating economic self-sufficiency in Aboriginal communities. Summers'account of race relations at Musgrave Park occurs at a watershed moment in race relations – not only Dunstan's initiatives, but also the effects of the Gurindji walk-off of Aboriginal stockmen at Wave Hill and the 1967 referendum. Nevertheless management practices at Musgrave Park are organized from within the European compound, and are profoundly (and effectively) resistant to change. Later, when Summers goes on to write her highly effective feminist critique of gender and class relations in Australian society, what she sees and learns about paternalism, colonialism and race relations at Musgrave Park are not given due prominence. The place of indigenous women in the damned whores/god's police scheme of things is not addressed in the autobiography, although what Summers witnesses at Musgrave Park must be critical to any feminist account of women's history here.

Summers' book is one of the most stylish and expensive presentations to emerge from the Penguin Design Studio for some time. A semi-transparent crisp white jacket allows the origins of the title to be legible on the hard cover beneath: "'Ducks on the Pond!'a shearer called out if he saw a woman approach or enter that exclusively male domain, the shearing shed. The call was a signal to all the shearers to stop work or at least refrain from swearing until the woman had gone." Most obviously the title alludes to Summers' history as a woman who challenged the male domain as it was mapped out in Australia prior to the assault of second wave feminism. And yet it also serves to record her political connections and attachment to a particular fragment of the Labor Party. Both Clyde Cameron, closely associated with the Australian Workers' Union, and Mick Young were influential on her political development in her years as a student. One of the ways this autobiography is an Australian story is through its complex engagement with Australian masculinities and working-class traditions. For example Summers'struggle to understand the periodic violence and alcoholism of her father and its relationship to the 1939–45 War is relevant to this. And, in a quite different way, so too is her ambivalent respect for the bushmen and shearers, and their legacy to the ALP.

I remarked earlier that Anne Summers and Susan Ryan, for all the apparent similarities between their histories, are different ducks in different ponds. These two autobiographies indicate the varied social, political and institutional networks which generated feminist thinking and activism in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s, and these were by no means in agreement about strategy and objectives. The appointment and position of the women's advisor, an important moment in each of these autobiographical narratives, is one measure of this. Summers' book

includes a photograph of some of the candidates after the interview: Dany Humphreys (Torsh), Eva Cox, Suzanne Baker, Summers, Elizabeth Reid – who got the job – and Lyndall Ryan. In *Catching the Waves* Susan Ryan goes to some lengths to vindicate the committee's choice and to stress the success of Reid's appointment. She suggests, for example, that Reid was not only highly effective in Australia but also the most impressive speaker at the United Nations conference on women in Mexico in 1975. Ryan worked at the International Women's Year secretariat in 1975, and was active in the Women's Electoral Lobby, and was part of WEL-connected circuits in the ACT branch of the ALP which led to her selection as a senate candidate in 1975.

Summers was located quite differently in 1975, International Women's Year. By then she had relocated from Adelaide to Sydney. There she was part of radical liberationist feminist campaigns. Whereas WEL was, in Summers' view, more moderate and willing to work with government, Summers campaigned with those feminists who worked for immediate and very practical change – in her case through the establishment of the Elsie Women's Refuge in Glebe and the campaign for abortion law reform. Important ideological differences separate the feminist affiliations of Ryan and Summers. The activist 'seat of the pants' approach of the Elsie collective was seen by Elizabeth Reid as inappropriate, and led to a serious rift between the Sydney Women's Liberation Movement and Reid. Consequently Summers'account of International Women's Year in Australia is very different to Susan Ryan's, and so too were their careers. Coincidentally Ryan began her political career as an ALP senator at the end of 1975, and Anne Summers published her radical feminist critique *Damned Whores and God's Police* – by the end of 1976 it had been republished three times.

Summers concludes that she was born into perhaps the first generation in history whose destiny was not proclaimed by birthright, or by cataclysmic events such as depression and war. It was a generation – unlike the present – given the gift of education, "and it was that, more than anything, that created possibilities for us ... I learned it was possible to have big dreams and bold ambitions." Like Susan Ryan, Summers writes an autobiography which is personal, social and political history. Susan Ryan concludes her autobiography with some reminders of how the ideology which shaped her agenda as Minister for Education has been abandoned by both parties. She too is sharply aware that she writes the story of a generation of Australian women who came to feminism under circumstances which no longer prevail. The conditions which shaped their liberation are recent history, but history nonetheless. One can only wonder what fosters big dreams and bold ambitions in young Australian women now, and where they might choose to use these to effect social, political and cultural change with the same force as these ducks.

Gillian Whitlock's study of women's autobiographical writing, The Intimate Empire, *was published by Cassells in January 2000. She is currently Head of the School of Humanities at Griffith University, where she teaches Australian and Literary Studies.*

Making Shock Waves

Brian Musgrove

Helen Trinca and Anne Davies: *Waterfront: The Battle That Changed Australia* (Doubleday, $29.60).

IN THE LATE 1990S, the Maritime Union of Australia was to John Howard what Britain's miners were to Margaret Thatcher in the mid 1980s. In political reality, and symbolically, the MUA was the power that needed to be smashed; a strong labour organization whose destruction would send shock waves through the entire union movement, structurally softening it for workplace 'reform'.

Waterfront tells how the MUA's demolition was plotted at the upper echelons of governmental, corporate and banking sectors. Sunk first-time-round by a litigious Peter Costello – who demanded the pulping of an initial print-run, which innocuously repeated a well-known story – *Waterfront* has resurfaced to tell a squalid tale of collusion, crookedness, conspiracy, and of shady forces ranged against ordinary working people. It is not quite the 'thriller' some claim – stylistically inelegant, repetitious, unevenly paced, at times cliché-ridden – but the substantial information, the collation of detail, makes *Waterfront* worthwhile. It strives for professional balance (to the extent of noting, several times, Peter Reith's 'affability' and popularity with Canberra's press gallery); and it analyzes media coverage of the dispute with intelligence and the benefit of inside knowl-

edge – Trinca and Davies were on the spot as events unravelled, then candidly interviewed key players. On the media, the authors judge the ABC – which was savagely attacked for pro-MUA bias and leftism – as an exemplary, impartial reporter; thus endorsing the findings of an inquiry carried out on the national broadcaster's role by Philip Bell at UNSW.

Waterfront also keeps an eye on the absurd. When the MUA's John Coombs was alerted to the dubious business in Dubai, sensitive documents were exchanged at the Ettamogah Pub – a lop-sided hub of 'Aussie World' theme park on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. Queensland premier Rob Borbidge was mobile-phoned by Peter Reith with the 'all-systems-are-go' message to start the lock-outs, that 'something big' was imminent, as he bogged-in to a slap-up dinner in the drive-thru McDonalds at Gympie – official capital of the state's Gun Culture. This image of global corporatism meeting redneckism is resonant; and *Waterfront* reveals how transnational thinking joined with the normally protection-minded 'regional interests' of conservative Australia – expressed through the National Farmers Federation for example – as a double-wham against workers.

Then, there is the high farce of Dubai itself. In the 'industrial mercenary' training – prelude to the grand operatic strategy put in place by Howard, Reith, Chris Corrigan, the banks and many others – the weird instrumentalists in this orchestrated fiasco appear. Ex-army staff, still-serving military personnel, cloak-and-dagger fantasists and hustling opportunists teamed up for the black-op. The machismo with which they went about their 'business' is disturbing. Reith's involvement was troubling, too; he wanted a big share of the credit, and gleefully anticipated raising his personal political capital by scuttling the union.

'Industrial mercenary' is a telling and timely coinage. It proves the vitality of Australian idiom to recognize a thing when it sees it, name it, and adopt it into popular speech. It was also a phrase banned by the *Sydney Morning Herald* – Trinca worked there – because the boys in Dubai weren't technically 'guns for hire': "the word was deemed perjorative and incorrectly applied to the young men being trained to take on the wharfies". This happened, with an apparently logical appeal to what words simply mean, under the régime of an editor-in-chief who was a 'mate'. *Herald* boss John Alexander was married in the garden of Corrigan's home.

When industrial mercenary leader Peter Kilfoyle confessed to John Coombs and the ACTU's Greg Combet that he had hard evidence that "could bust the government open", this confirmed a tip-off that the Dubai plan went "from Howard down". The bedrock of a conspiracy case was laid; but as Trinca and Davies write, by the time Lindsay Tanner announced that the ALP had documentary goods on the government, "almost no one cared". What should have been a tidal wave of popular indignation washed out in the shallows of indifference and complex legal settlements. Thus, attempts to keep the core issues of the dispute alive – like *overland*'s 'Here to Stay' number (151, Winter 1998), and *Waterfront* itself – have a vital role in educating public memory, and in reminding us that working-class history is not a thing of the past.

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Preaching at the Converted

Sean Regan

Peter Botsman: *The Great Constitutional Swindle* (Pluto Press, $32.95).

WHAT READERS MAKE of this curious book will depend not only on their prejudices – the author being splendidly candid about his – but also their degree of self-control. Excitable constitutional monarchists, say, will lose patience about the beginning of chapter III, while well-tempered republicans are more likely to plough through to the end, but with increasingly clenched teeth. Knowing your friends is often more difficult than knowing your enemies.

Fired by the 1999 referendum "swindle", Peter Botsman's polemic focuses on the one he contends was perpetrated at Federation, when "a flawed text, written by a relatively unknown Australian and authorized by a minority of Australians, became the frozen constitution of Australia for 100 years". His purpose here is twofold: to expose the chicanery by which those "bearded men" orthodoxy calls the Founding Fathers – almost all of them middle-aged "lawyers, liberal politicians and land-owning conservatives" – forged a "nation built on acquiescence"; and secondly to help "create a new dialogue with Australians about their foundation laws and struc-

tures". For from the beginning, he contends, there has been a division between the people and the constitutional process. To remedy this requires not what can be dismissed as 'black arm-band' history but an essentially hopeful argument to restore "a balance to a 'triumphalist' view of Australian democracy which left the people out of the picture".

The "relatively unknown Australian" is Andrew Inglis Clark, the one-time Tasmanian attorney-general whose original comprehensive draft constitution Sam Griffith "and his fellow collaborators" appropriated on the famous *Lucinda* voyage of 1891 to design the "foundation stone of a new nation", on which Inglis himself was not to vote at the 1898 referendum. An "Australian Jefferson" who believed above all in "constitutionally enshrining the inalienable right that no man shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law along with other protections against state administrations", Clark provided a seven-part, 96-section draft for federation, of which eighty-eight sections survived Griffith's editorializing and eighty-six "are recognizable in the current Australian constitution".

That Clark's role is not widely appreciated is partly a matter of bad luck – he was ill for both the *Lucinda* voyage and the 1897 conventions – but in greater part because of his own diffidence. Preferring to work behind the scenes, through written comments and suggestions, he left the political running to self-publicists like Barton and Deakin, not even turning up at the final constitutional convention to argue for the more radical sections of his original draft. As the author admits, these "could not have been sustained in the Australia of the 1890s", but in the end they were not even heard.

In his first chapters recovering the story of the 'forgotten' Founding Fathers – apart from Inglis, such dissidents as Bernhard Wise, A.D. Piddington and Henry Bournes Higgins – and would-be Founding Mothers like Rose Scott, Secretary of the NSW Womanhood Suffrage League, whose objection to the federation of hairy men was made along strictly feminist lines, Botsman's case is cohesive, lively and, within his declared perspective, persuasive. But then things start to go awry. Most obviously, what has to this point been a relatively controlled narrative gives way to a collage of jumbled snapshots and diatribes (and Botsman is no postmodernist). Thus, in the same chapter, an encomium for Lionel Murphy pops up between an account of the younger Menzies' views on Commonwealth–State relations and those of certain Founding Fathers on financial relations. A general discussion of the Governor-General's effective powers is advanced by reference to Bill and Dallas Hayden's home improvements at Government House (not to mention Bill's "knobbly knees") and a passing reference to the Hawke–Keating

intrigues that is worthy of Paul Kelly. While another ALP rhapsody, this time for Evatt, leads straight on to a treatment of the implications of the 1994 Ah Hin Teoh case. And these examples are chosen more or less at random.

A more serious misgiving concerns Botsman's intellectual sloppiness. Clearly nobody expects an openly partisan tract – especially one originating in a series of backgrounders for a weekly discussion on ABC radio – to adhere strictly to the dictates of disinterested scholarship. But in turning those broadcast discussions into the written word, Botsman has not simply transcribed and tidied the original talks. Indeed, the professor in him devotes fifty-nine of his 224 pages to detailed references and endnotes, some of them distinctly odd. (For instance, "Kant was appointed to the chair of logic and metaphysics at the University of Königsberg when James Cook first sailed into Botany Bay. His lectures on 'perpetual peace' were being given in 1795 when the first Australian settlement was only seven years old.") We might therefore be justified in expecting his argument to rely on something more than a string of wild generalizations, elementary logical solecisms and downright insult.

Of course, some of it is good rhetorical fun. To learn that Higgins in 1897 "foresaw the problem of senators such as Harradine and Colston" or that Australia – because it does not institutionalize a purely hypothetical notion of global 'roaming rights' – may become "another white fortress in the twenty-first century" not only begs a major question or two but provides welcome comic relief from an otherwise very po-faced text.

But most of the time the clangers would disgrace an undergraduate essay. To the obvious counterfactual query – Well, what else could have happened or could happen now? – Botsman argues, past and present, for "sustained popular participation in the actual techniques and institutions of government": a position which in his qualified support for "direct democracy via popular referendums, citizen initiatives and even popular censure" takes him well away from his Jeffersonian hero Inglis and perilously close to the rightist fundamentalism he so clearly abhors.

The most serious fault, though, is Botsman's persistent use of argument from the authority of those who happen to share his opinions. "As Alistair Davison/Justice Michael Kirby/Stuart Macintyre/Manning Clark/Ginger Spice has written . . ." is not only his favourite but almost his sole form of reasoning. Fine as far as it goes – as illustration of his chosen conclusions; but hardly a reasoned position in itself. In any case a good polemicist deals with his opponents' arguments head on, or at the very least mentions them. He does not, as here, simply ignore or dismiss them with a badly chosen epithet.

The upshot is that Botsman undermines the impact of his early chapters and thus his own cause. The "meaningful, organic dialogue" about the ideals of government that he wishes to promote remains largely an off-stage monologue. (And what *is* an 'organic' dialogue anyway?) The 'triumphalist' tendency remains more or less unscathed.

All of which is a pity for those, like most readers of *overland* – including the present reviewer – who share Botsman's sentiments and objectives. For just as Tony Abbott is an embarrassment to the more thoughtful monarchists, so republicans might prefer that Botsman occasionally calmed down a bit, with a firm editorial hand on his shoulder. Preaching to the converted is one thing. Preaching at them is asking for trouble.

Something of a dog's breakfast, then; but enjoyable and worth reading, even if it is not only one's teeth that end up tightly clenched.

Sean Regan is Director of the New England Centre for Applied Policy.

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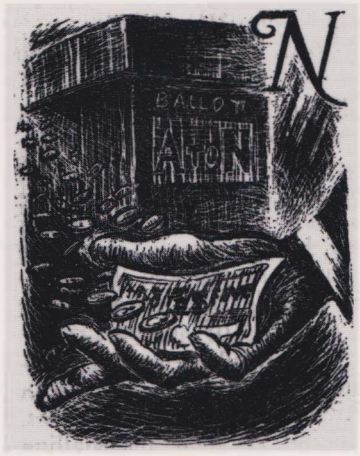

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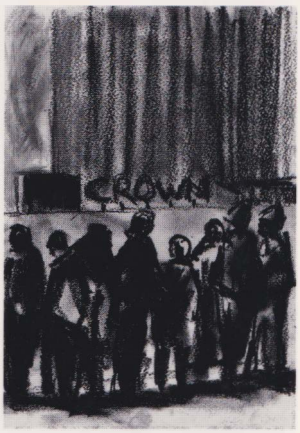

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