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inaugural overland lecture
by Stuart Macintyre

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overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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ARTS VICTORIA

edit

TEMPER DEMOCRATIC, BIAS AUSTRALIAN, adapted unoffensively from Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life*, has been *overland*'s motto since its inception forty-seven years ago. Like any good maxim, it is broad enough in its meaning to imply general principles without being wholly prescriptive. This imprecision is a strength but it can also be a weakness. In the wrong hands, general statements can be used to justify pretty much anything. Criticisms of social democratic parties' flirtations with Blair's 'Third Way' have used this type of argument. Does the Third Way amount to anything other than a spin-doctored and more carefully managed form of free-market liberalism? In answer to the question Graham Sewell notes that in the early 1940s "Karl Mannheim's vision was of a Third Way as a genuine alternative rather than the Middle Way we've ended up with where the brutalities of economic rationalism are moderated by the hand-wringing platitudes of bourgeois liberalism". In a future issue we will discuss the Third Way more directly, as part of our ongoing consideration of present problems and events in light of past principles and ideals. Here, however, our motto is taken up by Stuart Macintyre in his article which examines one hundred years of the Australian Labor Party.

Recent issues of *overland* have raised some criticisms of the ALP. When a party with its traditional electoral base in the working class does not wholly oppose a non-discretionary goods and services tax and various immoral and dishonestly entitled 'mutual obligation' schemes, we are entitled to wonder what this party stands for. In Queensland, evidence

has revealed Labor vote-rorting. In Western Australia and New South Wales, Labor has acquiesced to 'law and order' populism. In Victoria, we have a Labor minister for education who sends her children to private schools, a Premier who as a matter of course sides with the police against anti-corporate protesters, and the close involvement of a free-market think tank, Access Economics, in virtually all policy initiatives. In the short term, however, it seems certain that the ALP must be part of any broad-based progressive regeneration of the Australian polity. For all these criticisms (and more) we might make of the Party, the upcoming federal election will nonetheless make some difference to the type of society we have in the years to come – though the question of just how much will remain a cause of energetic debate on the left.

Macintyre's lecture will be the first in our inaugural *overland* lecture series. Later speakers this year will be Mark Davis (4 July), Amanda Lohrey (26 September) and Marcia Langton (4 December). Held at Trades Hall in Melbourne, these events will replace, but also double as, *overland*'s Melbourne launches. The speakers' papers will be published in *overland* and available on the lecture night. Together, these prominent thinkers provide an important body of analysis of Australian life, and we hope that these public events will draw attention to the questions they raise.

THIS YEAR, *OVERLAND* has received more funding from state and federal arts bodies than ever before, and amidst stiff competition. Sales and subscriptions are steadily rising and we hope to move the magazine to a more secure financial position in the years to come. As we seek to raise *overland*'s profile we are also maintaining the necessarily ongoing process of self-examination. We appreciate feedback from readers on what they think and want from us. The *overland* survey or questionnaire, included in the last issue, was part of this process. Many thanks to those who completed and returned them to us. The response rate was heartening. As they are still coming in we will leave off our summary and announcement of the book prize winner for the next issue. Readers should remain alert to the possibility of less formalized ways of giving feedback. We hope to increase the presence of letters to the editor in the magazine.

This edition includes pieces that we hope readers will find exemplary of the best elements in the *overland* tradition. Rowan Cahill takes a first-hand look at the Moss Vale picket of Joy Mining Machinery (the Australian headquarters of the American multinational Harnischfeger Industries Inc.), a story and an issue largely ignored by the mainstream media. Bronwyn Cran and David Palmer discuss recent Australian novels in their social context, juxtaposing (though not seeking to erase the difference between) politics and aesthetics. Kirsti Sarmiala-Berger weighs in with a terrific essay on Rosaleen Norton, "the King's Cross Witch", a transgressive and largely-forgotten Sydney identity of the 1950s and 1960s. It is also pleasing to see responses to our call for increased dialogue. Phil Doyle's piece in the previous issue on the National Young Writers' Festival seems to have been a worthy provocateur of debate.

Nathan Hollier and Ian Syson

Stuart Macintyre

Inaugural *overland* lecture

'Temper Democratic, Bias Australian': One hundred years of the Australian Labor Party

JUST OVER A HUNDRED years ago Joseph Furphy wrote to the editor of the *Bulletin*, to which he had been contributing short pieces over the previous decade, with news of something much longer, a manuscript in excess of a thousand pages. "I have just finished writing a full-sized novel: title 'Such is Life'; scene, Riverina and northern Vic; temper, democratic, bias, offensively Australian".[1]

Furphy was perhaps the most authentic of the writers who fashioned a national literature in the closing years of the nineteenth century, one that drew on distinctive local forms to affirm popular values and aspirations. His own life gathered in central components of the radical national experience. Born in the upper Yarra Valley in 1843 to Protestant Irish parents who were assisted migrants, he had stints on the goldfields, was an unsuccessful selector and later a bullocky before drought forced him in 1883 to work in his brother's foundry at Shepparton. As a wage-earner he found himself "with 16 hours 'off' out of the 24, and being constitutionally indifferent to what is called amusement, I bethought myself of writing a yarn".[2] As a family man in an unhappy marriage, he retreated with his books to an outbuilding where the yarns grew into a narrative of life on the inland pastoral plain. The narrator, Tom Collins, is a bush philosopher who faithfully reports the eccentric characters who cross his path and the events that befall them over six months in the mid-1880s, but he fails utterly to identify significant links in their stories and therefore misses any pattern of cause and effect. It is a novel in rebellion against the conventions of romantic fiction, a representation of life that has no recognizable shape, a comedy and a tragedy of human shortsightedness.

The democratic temper of the novel derives from Furphy's impatience with inequalities of wealth and status, and his sympathy for those who are thrown together by the vagaries of bush life. They meet on the track, these hard-bitten characters, and yarn round the campfire; a loosely connected community of loners gathered in mateship. Furphy had to cut large segments out of his manuscript before it was published in 1903, and offered a book-length excision to the labour press as a contribution to "the plate of Democracy".[3] Serialized by Bob Ross in the *Barrier Truth*, it gives us the views of Rigby, an earnest American friend of Tom Collins. Rigby has a ready solution to human tribulation: the "commodious tree of State Socialism" will provide a refuge for all who are pursued by "the ravenous hounds of monopoly, capitalism and competition".[4]

Yet Furphy's teamsters are independent contractors and their chief concern is to find grass for their bullock teams under the eyes of the landowners. His novel makes only passing reference to the army of shearers who had banded together in a union by the time he wrote to contest the prerogatives of the woolgrowers. He observes that "the present social system of pastoral Australia" is "a patriarchal despotism, tempered by Bryant and May", but that form of incendiary retaliation against arbitrary victimization was yielding to collective bargaining and formal agreements between employers and employees.[5] The writing is replete with references to ancient, British and Irish history, Australia's colonial foundations and intercolonial rivalries. It alludes to Australian federation and Furphy likened *Such is Life* to a loose federation of yarns.[6] It mentions the Great Depression of the 1890s: we are told that when drought shrivels the pasture, the sheep, "like the Melbourne unemployed of later times", are forced to live on sunshine.[7] *Rigby's Romance* suggests how the bounty of the earth could be made to provide for all. But the growing movement to make Australian democracy serve the cause of social justice – the actual experiments in State Socialism that were under way when Rigby's exposition of its principles appeared – finds no expression.

Furphy's bias is offensively Australian in its insistence that there is a distinctive way of life in this country that must be fully realized in nationhood. The land is unfulfilled because the settlers who assumed control of it remained exiles while the native-born responded with a narrow provincialism. "But when illuminated by intelligence, the same insular survey crystallizes into far-sighted patriotism."[8] *Such is Life* brings an eclectic intelligence to bear on the Coming Australian. Furphy's characters speak in a variety of idioms, Irish, Scots, Cockney, Dutch English, Chinese English, received English and demotic Australian. Collins, the narrator, mixes his voices and parades his book learning with classical tags, Biblical passages, foreign phrases and literary puns. Such familiarity with the world's learning allows what Furphy called a "calm Australian sufficiency".[9]

This nationalism offends many of our sensitivities. Furphy regarded Indigenous Australians as a noble people doomed to extinction. For all his mockery of pedigrees, he took racial integrity to be a necessary condition of progress: "There is nothing else I am so thankful for as the White Australia."[10] The nation was for him a sacred cause and he looked forward to the establishment of nationhood as a universal principle when "conflicting creeds, racial antipathies, class distinctions, centuries old, melt and merge in the supreme idea of universal peace and interdependence".[11] There was a place for women in his national project, even though they are ill-treated, unpredictable and mysterious creatures in his writings: Tom Collins fails to see that one of his companions is an abandoned wife in masculine disguise. Furphy had high expectations of the new woman who would cast off the hobbling conventions of femininity. He was a supporter of Vida Goldstein's candidacy for the Commonwealth parliament, a friend of Miles Franklin and an admirer of her novel of female rebellion, *My Brilliant Career*. After Franklin sought refuge in the United States, he called on her to return and help "make our land a classic land".[12]

Furphy was no Mazzini, though his faith in patriotism as a force for harmony and progress had much in common with the prophet of liberal nationalism. He was no Garibaldi, for he showed no interest in activism. He was not even a Henry Lawson, calling others to action in stirring verse. Rather, he was a solitary, dignified, retiring man whose work remained little known in his lifetime. The adoption of his phrase, 'temper democratic, bias Australian', by a magazine of the radical left half a century later would surely have surprised him, if only because he expected that an advanced democracy would have prevailed in this country much earlier. The possibility that a century after he coined the phrase there could be a Labor Party in which the fortunes of Australian democracy seemed so parlous would have astonished him.

AS FURPHY PREPARED his novel for publication, a tangible form of Australian democracy emerged. With the country caught in the grip of a prolonged drought and still suffering from the effects of severe economic depression, a national government was established. Broken in the strikes and lockouts of the 1890s, forced back to work on humiliating terms and many of them unable to find employment, workers formed a party to contest for political office and shape that government. Neither the forms of the new Commonwealth nor the twenty-four men who gathered in 1901 as the first members of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party made a sharp break with what had gone before. This was a quiet revolution in which the Labor members bided their time while

learning the forms of parliamentary government, and meanwhile gave support to the more progressive of the older parties as it laid the institutional foundations of the Commonwealth. Labor had played little part in the movement that designed the federation and delimited its powers. By the time the Australian Labor Party won office with a parliamentary majority in 1910, the essential shape of the nation-state was determined and the distinctive design of its economic and social relations was settled.

It was a revolution, nevertheless, that transformed both public and private life. It consolidated a national economy in which Australian industries were protected to ensure that work was available and wage levels were adequate. It created a system of wage regulation that enshrined the ideal of the male breadwinner, while pronatalist measures and new social agencies policed the family in the national interest. Immigration was controlled to create a racialized nationality from which the Indigenous race was excluded, and defence forces were built on the principle of the citizen soldier. The Franchise Act of 1902 confirmed the Commonwealth would be an advanced democracy with a universal white adult suffrage, while the immediate success of the Labor Party ensured broad political participation. Labor's growing electoral appeal – its share of the vote increased at every election up to 1910 – gave Australian politics a class character and determined that its democracy was also a social democracy. Yet the particular design of the federal system – the Commonwealth exercised economic powers, the States retained control of most areas of social policy – meant that the Australian welfare system was based on employment. The result, which has been described as 'a wage-earners' welfare state', entrenched the capitalist system of class relations and overshadowed all attempts at universalism.[13] The Commonwealth enshrined the worker-citizen.

The Labor Party's exclusion from the process of federation bequeathed a further legacy. The men who designed the Commonwealth were Empire loyalists who brushed aside the objections of a republican movement that had gained significant momentum by the latter part of the nineteenth century. Their Constitution enshrined a system of representative government under a constitutional monarchy in which the powers of the Crown were extensive, and the integrity of the Empire was preserved. Much of Australian foreign policy and some parts of domestic policy were conducted by reference to Britain. Labor both mistrusted and misunderstood the motives of those who made these arrangements, and once they were made it pushed for a more assertive national government.[14]

Murray-Smith and Turner were interested in forms of writing that would distil working-class experience as a radical force.

The decision of the first Labor Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate in 1910 to dispense with wigs and gowns symbolized the Party's impatience with political forms imitative of Westminster.[15] The insistence of the Labor Postmaster-General in the following year that postage stamps bearing a portrait of the King should be replaced by a new design featuring the Australian kangaroo affirmed Labor's nationalist orientation.[16] The party adopted the title of the *Australian* Labor Party in 1908 in the same spirit, and in doing so marked itself off from most of the affiliates of the Socialist International. The British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party and the German Social-Democratic Party felt no such desire to proclaim a national identity in their titles. They resisted the appeal to patriotism, with its growing connotations of militarism and imperialism, but then they were utterly excluded from government and thus did not have to reconcile the demands of country and class. Australian Labor, on the other hand, was a party of national government, active in military preparations and anxious to sustain the British Empire in the Pacific. Hence the pledge of its leader, on the outbreak of war in 1914, that Australia would support Britain to the last man and the last shilling.

Labor's commitment to the war effort faltered well short of that final payment. The mounting cost of the war strained the Labor government to breaking point. The Party split over the question of conscription, was routed electorally and remained in opposition for more than a decade. The war debt weighed down the national finances and exacerbated interwar economic difficulties. The protective devices of economic nationalism – the tariff, arbitration, public development projects financed with foreign loans

– proved incapable of protecting wage-earners from the effects of the financial crisis that paralysed the world economy at the end of the 1920s. The ensuing Depression defeated the short-lived Labor government and doomed it to another Split and a further decade in opposition.

Labor survived these setbacks with its faith in democratic nationalism intact. Defeat by betrayal provided a comforting distraction from the disappointing record of Labor in office. There were radical critics who denounced the failure of the Labor Party to meet the aspirations of its working-class membership. They usually blamed the leaders for blunting Party policy in their appeal to the electoral middle ground and then abandoning it for the temptations of office. Yet the elaborate system of accountability, discipline and control that was meant to ensure that the parliamentarians enacted the will of the members turned out in practice to concentrate power in the hands of the Party machine. There were also industrial critics who condemned the dampening effects of arbitration on trade union militancy, but the system of arbitration accelerated the concentration of authority in the hands of a union bureaucracy. The periods of greatest disarray, following the splits of the First World War and the Depression, allowed such critics to advance their schemes for industrial democracy and socialism, but their incursions into the Party platform were quickly contained.

The most forthright challenge came from the Communist Party, which rejected both the possibility of a national solution and the existing forms of political democracy. The Bolsheviks proclaimed a revolutionary internationalism. Their model of a dictatorship of the proletariat installed the party as the mind, the will and the voice of the oppressed masses; such a party imposed an unprecedented discipline on its members and bound them to follow policies that originated abroad. None of these innovations appealed to more than an intransigent minority of Australians, and their strenuous efforts probably increased the insularity and isolationism of the Labor moderates while reducing their toleration of dissent.

Labor was further handicapped by the adaptability of its opponents. From the wartime Split, the non-Labor forces absorbed the Labor conscriptionists. In the subsequent Split over economic policy in the Depression, they took in the upholders of fiscal orthodoxy. Both these infusions gave the non-Labor side a new leader with popular appeal and broadened its electoral base. On each occasion the conservatives reinvented themselves. The wartime rearrangement produced the National Party, that title affirming a nationalism consecrated in the blood of Australia's sixty thousand war dead. From the Depression they created the United Australia Party, that title signifying the triumph of national unity and duty over class conflict and national dishonour.

While a United Australia Party government took Australia into the Second World War, it was unable to provide effective war leadership. With the Japanese forces poised to strike, Labor took office and quickly assumed unprecedented powers. Japan's entry into the war forced a realization that Australia could no longer depend upon imperial protection and must mobilize all of its resources. The sacrifices demanded of the Australian people this time were redeemed in an ambitious scheme of post-war reconstruction, which brought a significant expansion of the public sector, increased welfare provision financed from a progressive income tax, new forms of economic management to maintain full employment, and a more assertively independent role in international affairs.[17] Although overlooked in much of the recent discussion of the Australian Settlement, the advances in social democracy made by Labor during the 1940s were as significant as those guided by Alfred Deakin at the beginning of the century. Chifley did not have Deakin's capacity for rhetoric but in a rare flight he spoke of "the light on the hill" that directed the efforts of the labour movement to bring "something better to the people, better standards of living, greater happiness to the mass of the people".[18] Reformism was seldom so affectingly expressed.

The electoral defeat of the Chifley government in 1949 halted that advance but did not reverse many of its gains. The Menzies government accepted the mixed economy, continued the public programs of migration and national development, maintained the new machinery of economic management to sustain full employment, modified but retained the centralized system of wage determination – for such was the price of office. These continuities were overshadowed, however, by the onset of the Cold War.

The wartime agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union made at Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam divided the world into two zones of influence, the West and the East. Postwar conflict in border regions, an arms race and intense ideological

rivalry accentuated the division between capitalism and communism, the Free World and the Red Threat. The same pressures operated within Australia and other democracies, which were bound tightly into the western alliance and imposed new tests of loyalty on their citizens. The Labor Party had consistently rebuffed the overtures of the Communist Party. The Chifley government's hostility to communist-led unions had contributed to its defeat in 1949.[19] By a narrow margin, Labor decided to oppose Menzies' proposal to outlaw the Communist Party, and by a similarly narrow margin the referendum to give effect to his proposal was defeated in 1951. But this was a costly victory. It allowed Menzies to accuse the Labor Party of sheltering communists. It led to the third and most damaging Split, when the anti-communist section of the Labor Party broke away in 1955 and consolidated the conservative hold on power.

THESE WERE THE CIRCUMSTANCES in which the founders of *overland* magazine revived Furphy's catchcry. Stephen Murray-Smith and Ian Turner launched their literary quarterly in 1954 as Communists. From middle-class origins, they had been radicalized, along with many of their generation, by the transformation of the Second World War into a campaign to defeat fascism and emancipate humanity from the inequalities that had produced it. After war service and completion of their university studies, they worked on behalf of the Communist Party in the peace movement and the Australasian Book Society. Buffeted by Cold War accusations of disloyalty, the increasingly beleaguered Communist Party appealed to distinctively national traditions to affirm its legitimacy. Thus the Australasian Book Society organized evenings in honour of Henry Lawson, Miles Franklin and Joseph Furphy. Radical intellectuals published letters to Furphy to register the continuities between his radical nationalism and their own.[20]

Murray-Smith and Turner were interested in forms of writing that would distil working-class experience as a radical force. From Maxim Gorky they took the doctrine of socialist realism, a representation of social life that was "national in form, socialist in content".[21] Furphy's phrase, 'temper democratic, bias offensively Australian', provided them with a local expression of that formulation, though they softened its abrasive tone by taking out 'offensively'. The democratic temper also implied a dissatisfaction with the rigid orthodoxies of the Communist Party, which both were already resisting. Turner was expelled from the Party in 1958 and Murray-Smith resigned from it. Murray-Smith kept control of *overland* as an independent forum for "radical social critique".[22] Turner moved into the Labor Party and joined with those reformers who reconstructed the Victorian branch in 1970.

That reconstruction was the result of intervention by the Federal Executive of the Labor Party in its drive to modernize both organization and policies. Repeated defeats in national elections had hardened the determination of the old guard to defend the Party's shibboleths: they did not surrender the commitment to a White Australia until 1965. The assault was led by Gough Whitlam, who in 1967 succeeded Arthur Calwell as federal leader. The antagonism between the two men grew as they repeatedly clashed over policy: Calwell was a critic of Australian participation in the Vietnam War, Whitlam supported the American alliance; Whitlam wanted to offer government funding to church schools, Calwell upheld the separation; Calwell clung to the Party's largely nominal socialist objective, Whitlam considered it no longer relevant. Beyond these political differences, they stood for different social constituencies. Calwell was a former clerk, a fierce nationalist and a veteran of Labor's machine politics. Whitlam was a university graduate from privileged origins, cosmopolitan in outlook and impatient with the rituals of the labour movement.

Having won his battle for control of the Labor Party, Whitlam swept to office in 1972 and rapidly implemented an ambitious program. New agencies were established to provide an increased range of services in health, education, the arts, urban and regional development. The Commonwealth expanded its role to recognize the special needs of Aborigines, women and migrants. An older labourism based on the interests of the white, male breadwinner yielded to a social democratic model of inclusive citizenship; as Whitlam put it, the individual's capacity for full participation in national life was no longer determined by her or his wage-earning capacity "but the availability and accessibility of the services which the community alone can provide and ensure".[23] This was an enlightened meritocracy. When Whitlam was asked how he understood equality, he replied that he wanted "every kid to have a desk, with a lamp, and his own room to study". The lamp on the desk replaced the light on the hill.[24]

It was Whitlam's cruel misfortune to embark on this expansive program just as the material conditions to support it came to an end. The postwar Long Boom was drawing to a close with declining rates of world growth and corresponding difficulties for Australian exporters. In keeping with its modernizing strategy, his government reduced tariff levels and increased the value of the currency, with damaging consequences for domestic producers. The rapid growth of public expenditure and wages built the inflationary pressure. When the OPEC countries raised the price of oil sharply in 1973–4, throwing the world economy into disarray, the usual devices of economic management were powerless to solve the twin problems of inflation and unemployment.

"I have just finished writing a full-sized novel: title 'Such is Life'; scene, Riverina and northern Vic; temper, democratic, bias, offensively Australian".

The Whitlam government fell to a constitutional coup before the full effects of these economic difficulties were apparent. Its successor searched in vain for a remedy by first cutting public outlays and then encouraging the private sector to invest heavily in export projects. By the early 1980s it was apparent that the structures that had regulated the economy no longer worked. Controls on currencies, trade and investment had provided a measure of international stability; the mixed economy of public enterprises, large companies and strong unions had allowed domestic security from hunger and uncertainty. Under Thatcher and Reagan, these structures were dismantled, throwing the operation of the economy open to market forces, uprooting industries, dismantling welfare, widening inequality and abolishing the very expectation of a lifelong career.

The Labor government of 1983–96 sought to deal with the new circumstances by half-way measures. It floated the dollar, cut tariffs and deregulated financial markets while maintaining protection of wages and living standards. Under the Accord, the unions were made full partners in economic restructuring; in return for the wage restraint that would assist local industries to become more competitive and create more jobs, their members were to be compensated by means of the 'social wage'. In all this, however, there was to be no return to the open-handed universalism of the Whitlam government: social expenditure was tightly controlled, welfare benefits increasingly narrowed by means tests, other services provided on a 'user pays' basis. The public sector was itself subjected to business techniques of downsizing and contracting out, and large public enterprises were privatized. There was no lack of national purpose in these Labor policies. The government actively fostered a more tolerant and diverse nationality that would provide Australians with confidence to engage in the globalized economy. But there was a conspicuous failure of democracy in an Accord that was negotiated by the national leaders on behalf of the dwindling membership of the trade unions that were themselves subjected to mergers.

BACK IN 1913 a foreign revolutionary marvelled at the absurdity of a Labor Party that could have held power for three years without even threatening the capitalist system. Lenin had a ready explanation for this failure. The Australian Labor Party was not a workers' party at all, it was a 'liberal-bourgeois party', dominated by members who had brought their liberal democratic illusions from Britain and sustained them because they benefited from the spoils of British imperialism. Once Britain lost its economic supremacy Australian wage-earners would taste the cruel realities of capitalism and a genuine workers' party would emerge.[25] That was the assumption of the mostly unemployed communist activists during the Depression of the 1930s. When Stephen Murray-Smith and Ian Turner joined the Communist Party they too believed that the Labor government could not hold back the energies released in the people's war. The expectation that the labour movement should learn its historical lessons runs through my own sketch of the Australian Party's activity and fortunes over the past century.

Lenin was wrong about capitalism, not about its injustice and exploitation, but he was wrong in ignoring its resilience and capacity for renewal. Capitalism has repeatedly found new technologies, products and markets that expand its operation and restore growth and profitability. Living standards of those who sell their labour are higher now than ever before, in spite of the damage to the environment,

the acute poverty in third-world countries and the injuries of class. The periodic crises of capitalism have never been final. So too the Labor Party has defied its critics and survived its reverses. During the 1960s, when the Federal Parliamentary Party seemed doomed to permanent opposition, a sympathetic critic wondered if it was not doomed to *Labor in Vain?*[26] In the 1990s, with the collapse of State Labor governments under mountains of debt, and then the defeat of the Keating ministry, there seemed little chance of speedy revival. Yet here we are now with five of the States in Labor's hands and strong prospects for the federal election later in the year.

Why is this? Australian politics is marked by a remarkable stability of the two major parties. The Liberals have reformed twice since the first party of that name came together in 1909. The National Party formed as a third party after the First World War, though it soon became closely attached to the Liberals. This two-party system has also exhibited a high degree of class allegiance: the working-class vote has been firmly Labor. That pattern has weakened over the past two decades, and minor parties have become more prominent, but the electoral system does not assist them to break the stranglehold on government of Coalition and Labor.

That fact provides one explanation for the persistence of support for the Labor Party. It is an ignoble but powerful consideration, put best by the English Guild Socialist, Hilaire Belloc, when he counselled:

> *And always keep a hold of Nurse*
> *For fear of finding something worse.*

That is, Labor holds support because non-Labor is too dreadful to contemplate. However often Labor governments let their supporters down, however cynically they trade off the interests of those who sustain them, there is always the compelling argument that the other lot would be worse. They usually are but the argument narrows democratic choice to an absolute minimum.

More than this, the Labor Party sustained itself through powerfully emotive traditions. The tribulations of the Party pioneers, Labor's leading role in moments of national crisis, the betrayals that have robbed the Party of office, the Splits that have consigned it to the wilderness, the personal sacrifices of leaders such as Curtin and Chifley who died in its service and the martyrdom of others such as Whitlam – these and other episodes mark out an heroic lineage. Such memories provide an explanation of the Party's past shortcomings and encourage future endeavour. Labor's veneration of its history contrasts with the conservatives' neglect of their own, and the Party increasingly nurtures that history as a political resource.[27] It is also a form of esoteric knowledge, little known and of limited interest except to its devotees. The stories of the past codify a tribal loyalty that binds the members to the cause.

The Labor Party emerged as a party of a new type. Through the mechanism of the caucus it provided for collective decision-making by its parliamentarians. Through the pledge it bound those parliamentary representatives to follow the policies that the members determined. Through an extra-parliamentary structure of local branches and affiliated trade unions it mobilized a far broader membership than the older parties. These forms gave the Labor Party an unprecedented degree of cohesion and were duly denounced by the conservatives as a form of tyranny. They were in fact an extension of the democratic principle, resting on the binding force of majority decisions. The discipline on which the operation of the Party relied was justified by its distinctive purpose. It was not a party in the older sense of an organization seeking political influence but rather a class movement that entered parliament in pursuit of its larger objectives. As one of the first Labor parliamentarians in New South Wales put it, Labor's goal was "to make and unmake social conditions".[28]

Those millenarian hopes were soon dashed. Labor quickly discovered the limits of reconstructing society by acts of parliament, quickly accommodated itself to those limits and succumbed to the temptations of the spoils of office. Within thirty years of its formation, that caustic critic, Vere Gordon Childe, concluded his study of *How Labour Governs* with the observation that "the Labour Party, starting with a band of inspired Socialists, degenerated into a vast machine for capturing political power, but did not know how to use that power when attained except for the profit of individuals".[29] The original idea was that the Labor representative would act as a delegate of the movement. The operation of parliamentary politics turned the representative into a politician, with all the stigma that is attached to that profession.

The antagonism so often directed at the Labor politician by members of the labour movement has a

particular edge. It assumes that the decline in zeal so often noticed when a firebrand receives a parliamentary salary betrays a lack of integrity. Labor has certainly had its share of careerists and timeservers, but the malaise affects even the most steadfast. Our party system of representative government requires parliamentarians to serve two masters, the party and the electorate, and then to reconcile the undertakings given to win political office with the exigencies of exercising it. The devices that Labor invented to bridge the gulf between the Party and its parliamentarians – conference and platform, preselection and pledge – have become progressively weaker. Through the factional system the apparently democratic rules have become instruments for the concentration rather than dispersal of power. In conjunction with the factional power brokers, the party leader has exercised increasing control of the caucus, policy and, most recently in Queensland, choice of candidates. Peter Beattie might well have become the first Labor premier to hold onto office by defeating his own party.

The strains have increased as the forms of politics reduced popular participation. Early Labor candidates conducted their campaigns with small amounts of money and large contingents of local support. As campaigns moved from the street corner to the town hall, and then to television studios and polling agencies, the role of Party members became more restricted. The branches that once sustained a vigorous local politics are now attenuated in membership and activity. The early candidates were also drawn broadly from the labour movement. The first Federal Caucus of twenty-four was dominated by trade unionists from manual occupations, and even in the middle of the twentieth century nearly half the Caucus came from blue-collar occupations. The present Caucus consists overwhelmingly of professionals, and just eight have previous blue-collar experience. The first Labor parliamentarians made their own travel arrangements, wrote their own correspondence. Those today have substantial and well-staffed offices that serve as a nursery for the young men and women who hope to succeed them, for Labor politics is now a career that begins early in a working life and typically leads on in middle age to some lucrative post-parliamentary position. The self-perpetuating character of such an organization contributes to the persistence of the Labor Party at some cost to its democratic ideals.

The devices by which Labor sought to improve national life have imposed their own limitations. It inherited from the Deakinite liberals the idea that the Commonwealth could enclose the economy and expand its powers to protect Australian living standards. The crucial new power was exercised by the Arbitration Court. Within this "new province for law and order", as H.B. Higgins described his jurisdiction, the Court not only adjudicated industrial disputes but determined wage levels. The unions were reluctant to surrender the right to pursue their demands by industrial action, the Labor Party upheld the authority of the independent tribunal.

Once in office, Labor created new regulatory authorities to safeguard the public interest, new government-owned enterprises to make good the deficiencies of the private sector, new public agencies to provide welfare services to those in need. The cumulative effect of these initiatives was that when Australian workers sought to remedy a grievance or improve their lot, they turned instinctively to government. But the organizations that Labor governments created to meet these demands were large, bureaucratic structures that did not allow for popular participation. The Australian forms of State Socialism paid little heed to democracy.

That was one reason why they were vulnerable to assault from the New Right in the 1980s. The attacks on public enterprise, public welfare and public regulation were conducted as a campaign to liberate both producer and consumer from state interference. A Labor government abandoned the public sector in the name of efficiency and international competitiveness. Having accepted the logic of globalized economic liberalism, Labor surrendered both its democratic and national defences. It is unlikely to find safety in the commodious tree of State Socialism. It might well follow the example of Joseph Furphy and explore the local resources for creative innovation.

It will have to do so with resources quite different from those with which Joseph Furphy tried to assemble an ethos of mateship. If Rigby were to return to the campfire today, he would as like as not expound the romance of the Third Way – a romance not of State Socialism but social partnerships, globalization rather than Australian nationalism. And he would preach these doctrines with the same didactic certainty in their historical necessity. The Labor Party needs less of such surrender to binding ortho-

doxy, more improvisation. A democratic temper is sorely in need of revival.

Little is to be gained by returning to the Australian sentiment once cultivated by the Labor Party with its restrictive definition of the nation and the discriminations it practised to keep the nation pure. The nation has since been remade to accommodate its diversity. The labour movement has reached out to workers in other countries who wrestle with the same issues as it does. But there remains a sense in which the slogan coined by Furphy and adopted by *overland* retains its force. *Such is Life* challenged the assumption that nothing of significance ever happened here, that Australians lack the capacity for creative originality. The formation of the Australian Labor Party demonstrated the possibility of independent action. It pioneered experiments in social democracy that attracted international attention. That sort of Australian bias is sorely needed, as offensively as the task of renewal requires.

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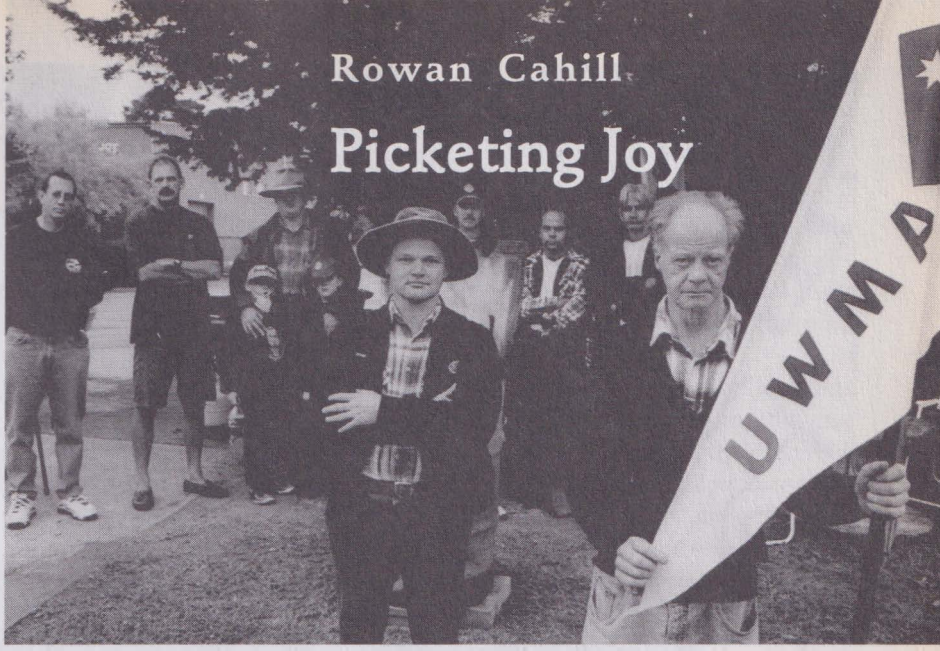
Rowan Cahill

Picketing Joy



Workers on the picket line outside the Moss Vale factory. Photo courtesy Southern Highlands News

MOSS VALE, POPULATION 7592, is a semi-rural town in the Southern Highlands of NSW. During the era of steam-rail it was a major stop-off on the long haul between Sydney and Albury. Today it struggles for relevance.

Between the wars the State Governor maintained an apartment over the station's refreshment complex; an Edwardian rest-over whilst awaiting the chauffeured automobile to his nearby rural estate.

On a rise overlooking town, behind a huge photinia hedge, is Trelm, a prominent political address during the Menzies era of Liberal Party politics, site of much head kicking, number crunching, and the go-ahead for Australia's Korean War involvement.

Somewhere in the area is the railway bridge under which Cold War Soviet defector Vladimir Petrov allegedly collected clandestine materials secreted by his alleged Australian network of informants; a post-box in espionage parlance. As to which bridge, well take your pick; there are a few that fit the bill.

North some ten kilometres, across the algae-clogged Wingecarribee River choking its way through the tax-dodge rural holdings of Sydney's elite, before ending up in the Sydney water supply, is affluent Bowral, headquarters of the Sir Donald ("Don't Use My Name") Bradman cricket marketing machine. The town also hosts the residence of the high-flying lawyer and smooth neo-liberal acolyte, Federal Finance Minister John Fahey, "the invisible member" according to some locals.

On the northern outskirts of Moss Vale is the former rural campus of the exclusive girls' school SCEGGS. Here, one morning in November 1961, Lennie Lawson, former prolific comic-book artist and creator of the long-running Lone Avenger series, broke up a pre-examination chapel service; he was armed with a rifle. By the time he was overpowered by the headmistress, five shots had been fired, and a schoolgirl was dead. The surviving senior girls were ushered off to commence their Leaving Certificate.

Not far away as the crow flies, and also on the outskirts of town, is a factory; Joy Mining Machinery. Since 1994 it has been part of the global empire of American mining machinery multinational Harnischfeger Industries Inc. In 1998 Harnischfeger commenced what its website terms "aggressive" and permanent global downsizing, cost-cutting and "headcount reduction".

For 205 days during 2000, the Moss Vale factory, which also houses the headquarters of Joy's Australian operation, was the focal point of a bitter industrial dispute, played out away from the attention of the city-based mainstream media, but arguably with national importance nonetheless.

The dispute began following the collapse of five and a half months of negotiations for a new Enterprise Agreement. The main contentious issue was the company's insistence on replacing the one agreement with four separate agreements and treating each individually. In context with other events at the Moss Vale factory during 1999, including forty-one redundancies which effectively culled union activists with enterprise bargaining skills, workers regarded this as an attempt to undermine their unity and bargaining power, a prelude to deunionization and casualization.

Photo courtesy
Southern Highlands News

The company warned that failure to reach agreement would result in factory closure or lockout. The Joy style throughout seemed intent on closing unions out of negotiations, and at the end of March unfinished work started to move off-site.

A picket line was established, to which the company, relying on Peter Reith's Workplace Relations Act (WRA), responded with a three-month lockout. This was the first of two lockouts, linked and extended by Joy workers with strike action.

Throughout the greater part of the year, the sixty-three men involved, members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), and the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU), maintained a twenty-four-hour picket line, seven days a week.

Originally seventy-three men were involved, but some broke rank, while personal circumstances compelled others to withdraw from the industry. Supreme Court injunctions restrained activity on the line as the company continued to shift work off-site, seventy kilometres away, to non-union workshops in Wollongong employing the breakaway workers. The move from Moss Vale commenced with a large and heavy handed, out-of-district, police presence, and continued with clandestine truck movements under cover of darkness. Union solidarity protests, swelled by students from Wollongong University, took place outside the relocated workshops, and occupations occurred. The regional media became interested in the dispute.

The company responded to protests; in the months that followed, personal damages claims were issued against key unionists totalling a reported $1.7 million, and hundreds of subpoenas, possibly 250, were issued to stifle opposition.

Throughout the dispute the Moss Vale factory continued to function, albeit in a greatly reduced capacity. Management, supervisory, and office personnel functioned in capacities well beyond original job descriptions, their efforts bolstered by the employment of non-union contractors. Stress counsellors were reportedly called in. Physically, the site took on the appearance of a penal institution.

Nature threw its best at the picket line, and there was a particularly harsh winter: temperatures at night hovered around zero; there were storms, oversized hail, and snow. The WRA also brought harshness, encouraging industrial behaviour more in keeping with Upton Sinclair capitalists than *Business Review Weekly* types.

Perhaps it is the case that sophisticated information technologies, designer clothing, designer offices, tertiary IR and management courses, and glossy profiles in business journals do not really change the conflict that is at the core of the relationship between capital and labour, something the Reith legislation, with its first belligerent tryout in 1998 during the

Waterfront dispute, helps cut to the quick and make abundantly clear.

Joy increased site security with guards who boasted of previous anti-union experience. The picket line was constantly under video and photographic surveillance, with special interest taken in recording supporters who came by, a number of whom ended up on the receiving end of subpoenas. Agents variously posed as media representatives, and a private detective was hired, to identify picket line supporters. Company lawyers tried to subpoena the photographic, paper, and mobile phone records of those on the line, which led to circumspection in regard to the making of photographic and paper trails.

Wives of picket-line unionists were recipients of anonymous correspondence apparently aimed at driving a wedge between them and their husbands, with a view to ending the dispute in the company's favour.

When the company contacted the workers, it was by letter to home addresses, such correspondence characterized by nineteenth-century paternalism and industrial threats.

A classic throwback to American style baseball-bat industrial relations, not surprising given the company's ownership, was the hiring of a team of interstate contractors, put together by an agency that had done similar work for Patrick Stevedores in 1998. Floodlights appeared, and video surveillance intensified; some of the contractors seemed intent on provoking the men on the line, taunting, teasing, and acting in a macho, bullying manner, as though inviting violence.

When the dispute ended, and the contractors had left, unionists returning to work found their lockers had been gone through, personal items removed, work clothes and boots trashed, and at least one incident of industrial sabotage.

Overall a vast amount of money must have been spent by Joy during the dispute. This, together with the length of the dispute and the energy with which it was prosecuted, suggested to some union observers that more was at stake than the conduct of a small-town industrial dispute. The seemingly inexhaustible money supply raised questions, and there was speculation as to its origin: a neo-liberal fighting fund of some kind?

Increasingly union leaders came to believe the Joy dispute was being watched by related industry employers all over Australia, the possible defeat of the unions providing both inspiration and an example of what was possible when employers creatively took advantage of the WRA. The tacit approval and support of the Howard government was suspected.

The picket-line workers were a mixture of young and old men, many with dependent families. One young newly wed worker returned from his honeymoon to find himself on the line. Some had been with the company for decades before it had become a multinational pawn.

Emotionally and financially the dispute hit them and their families hard as they adapted to surviving on anorexic budgets, personal savings, the contributions of family and friends, family allowance payments, credit, Strike Fund payments, and any work the wives could arrange. At the outset of the first lockout, the workers found themselves blacklisted with Centrelink and prevented from collecting social security benefits.

Within families there were personal and psychological strains and tensions. As one young wife explained to me, these were the sorts of tensions you can't directly attribute to the dispute, but which you know are somehow related, like the young child who unaccountably started wetting his bed at night.

The fact the dispute was a family affair partly explains the eventual union victory. Despite great pressures, families remained firm, and there was a lot of inter-family mutual support and assistance. The more Joy was perceived as attacking the fabric of family life, the greater the resolve to struggle on. Families visited the line regularly. When major union decisions had to be made about the conduct of the dispute, mass meetings involved the workers and their wives.

For the men on the line, 205 days was a lot of picketing. Physically the task was made easier by union provision of a site-shed and portable toilet facility on the roadside outside each of the two factory entrances. Caravan park and camping skills made these encampments habitable; tent annexes with pallet floors, garage furniture, a couple of old television sets, generators, camp kitchens, and the ubiquitous forty-four-gallon drum brazier, became part of the scene. By Spring, one of the union-flag-bedecked picket encampments even had its own thriving vegetable garden.

Union delegates drew up attendance rosters, and the men came to regard picket line duty as defacto work, for which they drew Strike Pay. Men came and went with the punctuality of regular shift work; whilst on duty there was work to be done: explanations for the umpteenth time to interested passers by; donations to be accounted for; intelligence to be gathered

about what might be happening inside the factory by monitoring traffic flow, what trucks were hauling, and general yard activity; leaflets, media releases, placards to be prepared; individual and collective morale to be maintained; firewood to be collected; surrounds to be kept clean; food to be prepared.

Events helped relieve tedium and generate morale. Visits by groups of unionists from Wollongong and Sydney resulted in festive occasions, with speeches and barbeques. As the dispute lengthened, picket line delegations toured worksites in NSW and interstate, explaining the dispute and successfully soliciting financial support. A delegation dropped in on Chase Manhattan Bank in Sydney, getting as far as the boardroom before being evicted; the workers were interested in the financial status of American parent company Harnischfeger when they found out the Bank was helping bankroll it out of debt.

The resilience of the line had a great deal to do with the trade union organizational practices and attitudes evident during the dispute. Joy's union delegates were intelligent and respected shop-floor colleagues; they took on the organizational/leadership roles the situation demanded locally; it was not an elitist role assumption, but based on necessity, ability and skill, reflecting workshop attitudes of recognizing someone who can do a job, and respect for the skills involved; everyone on the line had a point of view, an opinion, some level of understanding, the sophistication of which increased as the dispute lengthened; there was a lot of discussion and communal decision making, over coffee, around the brazier, especially after the gossipy picture weeklies had been exhausted of diversion, and during miserable days of boredom, hunched against the cold in old lounge chairs with the stuffing coming out, dodging rain that managed to work its way through the annexe roof.

The three unions involved were able to maximize unity and campaign for common objectives. Union organizers made regular visits to the line, some even camping on a regular basis, sharing the experience of being out in the cold, a factor greatly appreciated and respected by the workers.

Seventy kilometres away in Wollongong, a supportive and imaginative South Coast Labour Council kept the dispute in the regional news, and worked at building union solidarity and support.

Communication was maximized; no-one on the line felt isolated, or out of touch with developments; the only 'them' and 'us' in this dispute was capital versus labour.

Sometime after the 1998 Waterfront dispute, the Maritime Union of Australia, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, and the AMWU, agreed that given a significant dispute any was involved in, there would be no standing alone. The Joy workers, via the involvement of AMWU members, had significant support from the outset.

Support grew. While the local Bowral-based newspaper generally ran an anti-union line, regionally the workers received sympathetic media coverage. Moss Vale businesses donated supplies of food, newspapers, magazines, and fuel to the line, while cash donations came from local individuals and unionists.

As awareness of the dispute spread, there were solidarity actions by other Joy workers in Australia, and moral and financial support increased. Trade union publications, the web, the left newspapers *Green Left Weekly*, the communist *Guardian*, and the NSW Labor Council's electronic weekly *Workers Online*, all played important publicist roles. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian* discovered the dispute when it was about half-way through. Kim Beazley made it to the line a week before the dispute concluded.

There were international expressions of solidarity from the United Steelworkers of America, industrial lobbying by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Joy has significant South African interests), while the Geneva-based International Metalworkers' Federation threatened an international campaign against Joy. This support reflected the growing awareness by some Australian trade unions of the need to develop international trade union links and perspectives in the struggle against the neoliberal agendas of global corporations.

Touching was the donation from boxer Justin Clements. A scaffolder by trade, he apparently found out about the dispute via the net, and donated his $5000 purse from a draw in a Light Heavyweight fight held in Las Vegas.

After months of meetings between the disputing parties, the involvement of the ACTU, legal manoeuvring and numerous sessions in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, the Joy dispute was arbitrated in October by Justice Munro. His decision awarded a 12 per cent pay rise over three years to Joy workers instead of the company's original offer of 5 per cent over two years. A three-year enterprise agreement for all sections of the workforce was stipulated, instead of the company's preferred four separate agreements. Controls were placed on the

Wollongong University students who, not yet subject to restraining orders, are physically blockading the Moss Vale site. Roughhouse police tactics were used during this removal exercise, which occurred early in the dispute when the picket encampments consisted only of tents. Photo courtesy Southern Highlands News.

use of contractors and casuals.

The non-union contractors were sent packing, and legal actions pending as a result of the dispute were dropped.

On a cool Spring morning, to the skirl of bagpipes, the joyous applause of a crowd of wellwishers, supporters, and families, the air alive with union flags, the first of the Joy workers walked through the factory gates and back to work. The sun chose the moment to break through the clouds. There were few dry eyes.

The picket line had been the necessary, in a sense theatrical and symbolic, tip of a complex industrial process. It purposefully kept a specific group of workers defiantly together, thwarted the industrial intent of the lockout tactic, and readily provided images of media interest. Beyond this the line was a reminder to managers, who regularly passed through the line behind tinted windscreens of company cars, that decisions made about workers in American boardrooms and Sydney legal offices, in the name of corporate profits and shareholders, affect human beings; Supreme Court injunctions could not restrain the human emotion expressed in faces, nor ease the discomfort caused by the non-violent bearing of witness to hardship. For the town the line was a reminder that an industrial dispute was in progress, affecting people who were part of the town, and a cash flow that was a vital part of the local economy.

The locking-out of employees is an employer right under the WRA. Capable of being dispensed in large time-blocks, it is an aggressive industrial action designed to force reduced wages and conditions on employees. By implication it not only targets workers as individuals, but also their families and dependents; and it does so in a way that employee industrial action, limited and curtailed by a raft of inhibiting and punitive legislation, finds difficulty matching.

The lockout is a tactic harking back to the second half of the nineteenth century when it was extensively used in the UK and Australia in response to growing union power, with the intention of breaking that power. After a long absence from Australian industrial life, both the lockout and the picket line are returning, in keeping with the old-time intent and implications of the WRA.

The Joy dispute is a reminder that 'old' trade union notions of struggle, and traditional approaches to organization and mobilization, are relevant contemporary responses.

Rowan Cahill reported the Joy dispute for Workers Online *<workers.labor.net.au>.*

The Chattering Classes

Elizabeth Hughes

YOU'RE A BLEEDING HEART liberal, an interfering do-gooder, a know-nothing put-your-nose-in stickybeak. You're a member of the chattering classes, chatter chatter chatter, that's all you ever do. You're a literati glitterati intelligentsia brains-trust egghead, completely out of touch with reality. You're a chardonnay socialist, and even if you don't drink you sip Twinings Earl Grey tea with a slice of lemon so it comes to much the same thing. Sipping your lemon tea in some overpriced tatty cafe and chat chat chatting with your chattering-classes cafe-society friends. You're an ivory tower academic stuck-up pretentious bookworm bitch. Chattering on about some bloody tripe, shit, you love the sound of your own voice. You think a degree or two gives you the right to dictate to others, to lecture them and write smug little articles that get published in some smug little magazine probably run by one of your smug little poofter mates and read by the smug little chattering classes. Let me tell you, those people who read that kind of crap don't know anything, it's just chatter chatter chatter like a cage full of parrots. That's what you're doing, you don't know what you're talking about, just parroting other people's opinions. It's all slogans and clichés from your sort. You're sheltered from reality, from the real world. Why go to uni at all? It just stops you from getting a real job where you do honest hard labour and it's a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. You people from the chattering classes think that talk will solve anything, that all it takes is enough people talking to change the world. It's always a caucus a delegation a convention a symposium a summit meeting a republican conference an internal investigation a federal enquiry a royal commission. The worst thing about you people from the loony left commie-educated chattering classes is you're so bloody predictable. You're pro-abortion pro-euthanasia pro-union pro-childcare. You're anti-war anti-mandatory sentencing anti-zero tolerance anti-three strikes and you're out. It's just so predictable, with your heroin trials and free needles for junkie scum and free condoms for homos and whores and free emergency hotlines for queers and lezzos. Handouts for white trash single mother sluts, the dole for bludgers, citizenship for slant-eyed curry-eating drug dealers, counselling for crims, land rights for boongs, arts grants for perverts, glass ceilings for lazy whining cows who need a good slap. It's just so bloody predictable, none of it your own idea, just copying the chatter of the chattering classes. That's all you types do, chatter chatter chatter, day in and day out. You sicken me, going on and on and on about stuff you know nothing about. Chatter chatter chatter. It's a wonder you can stand to listen to yourself.

The Hidden Store

In the middle of a flat, featureless Parramatta,
near the slovenly river
down
Church Street stood the somehow pagan
Black Mountain Imports &
almost every day I visited the
woven, carved, beaten works from a headache
of different countries all
reduced & bargain priced for this canny shopper
in search of a new.

I owned the green glass twisted Mexican goblets
for 15 years.
The crucible & the book were part of half researched
never-quite-right rite
that involved Janis Joplin.
Even the laundry basket spoke of smoky,
transcendental thought as fingers had
weaved form from water soaked bamboo.

At Christmas my parents received gazelles & elephants
carved so no line was straight.
They said *life was sinuous . . .*
meant to be stroked.

My sister got incense
that sought her heart or mind
through gentle invasions of eye & nose.

The carpet was too much to take in
& never sold, reduced in price
every couple of months but still requiring
a wealth beyond my imagination.
I knew we would fly together but
out of luck I left to wander,
the 165 bus home maybe
frosty boy from the milk bar, more tangible
16 year old's treasures from inside a diesel town
that dreamt of tall buildings & a new concrete coat.

Les Wicks

If You Have To Be In Geelong

If you have to be
in Geelong, it's best
to be 18 with one eye
on the ball & the other
on your eco books
& a sharp, alluring girlfriend
beside you on weekends, one
older married men at the tennis club
can't help endorsing; who got over
Nirvana at 12 & has already thought
of later life not only bypassing
Geelong – but bypassing Melbourne too.
Not snobbish, merely serious, the two of you
walk home in brief 5 o'clock winter sunlight,
away from the footy crowd, to another night in,
so there with each other
neither of you have ever thought of other bodies
or membership of a video store.

Kieran Carroll

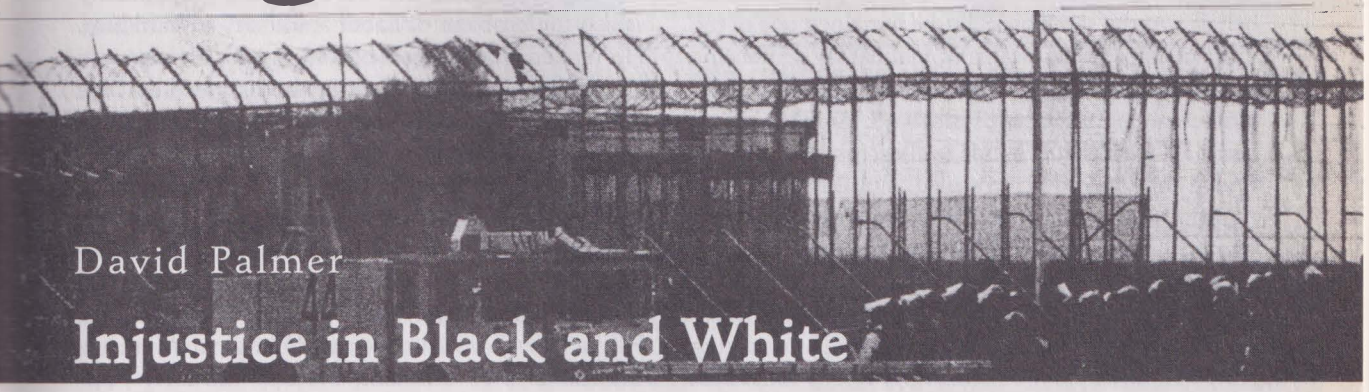
lament for the chicken twistie

sickly abandoned cousins of the rack,
you were always huddled at the dimly lit end
of the offerings, never hyped, never bludgeoned
through suburban cinema consciousness
via the motherly wing of Val Morgan.
i bet you've never been to Toorak
like your pompous gold brother.
how cheap you were on the days before use by;
strewn on concrete around tuck shops, often crushed,
only to be swamped by daytripping ants,
your cultiest most faithful fans. i don't think
you even made the grade into bread rolls.
like a weak 50-50 cordial
when there wasn't a soft drink, who wanted you?
did we ever notice your empty flutters along coastal tracks
or protuberances from east coast dunes, or crushings
by late afternoon express trains? no, you were
simply the plodder for drained taste bud kids,
the 'you'll do's' for reticent family outings
& lip service soirees, forgotten like those Big Ms
that almost tidal waved us – but died
as our thirsts yearned & returned to four flavour traditions.

Kieran Carroll

Water cannon and tear-gas turned on mob

Refugees riot in desert



David Palmer

Injustice in Black and White

Ian Callinan's and Don Fuller's Novels Rewrite Australian History

CAN FICTION – NOVELS IN PARTICULAR – shed any light on Australia's accelerating human rights crisis? When *The Australian Islamic Review* describes the Woomera Detention Centre as a "concentration camp", while the conservative *Australian* runs an editorial criticizing Coalition policy toward immigrants as abusive, are we at the point where truth once again is stranger than fiction?[1] Historical fiction provides a key to explaining how this crisis has come about – and in some cases it can also help make some sense of present political mindsets.

Two novels of recent years, *The Lawyer and the Libertine* (1997), by Ian Callinan, and *Payback at the Capricornia Casino* (1998), by Don Fuller do just this. Both were published by a small academic press outside the Sydney–Melbourne circuit – Central Queensland University Press – and both were written by men who were politically involved with actual people fictionally portrayed in their novels. Each book was launched by a prominent political figure. Each deserves to be read regardless of how it may be assessed in literary terms. Each has something very important to say about 'injustice' in Australia, but from radically different viewpoints.

Australia may be a vast continent physically, but socially it seems more like a small town where all of us eventually find out the latest 'goss'. Not surprisingly, Callinan (now a High Court justice) and Fuller (an academic economist who focuses on local Aboriginal development policies) have crossed paths in their former careers, even though they have never formally met. If we approach their novels not just as historical fiction, but also as documents of Australian political worldviews, the current turmoil of Australian human rights begins to make more sense.

There were four unusual developments in the Australian human rights controversy by mid-2000. Although John Howard and his ministers acted in predictably conservative ways – denying the existence of a "stolen generation", denying that refugee detention centres were places of abuse and isolation by authority, denying that Australia needed a Bill of Rights because this would only lead to more unnecessary litigation – other public figures were not following the expected script.

First, Gatjil Djerrkura announced in late July, just days after resigning as ATSIC commissioner, that he was thinking of running as a Country Liberal Party candidate for the Northern Territory's Legislative Assembly. The move shocked ATSIC colleagues and Aboriginal activists. Eddie Taylor, chairman of the NT's Aboriginal Justice Advocacy Committee, protested, "You might as well just cut your arm off if you're going to go and stand with them . . . If Gatjil was to get in on the CLP he won't have any say in what mandatory sentencing's all about – no way in the world." Gatjil Djerrkura, however, claimed that "the best thing

is to be in government rather than opposition" – and Chief Minister Dennis Burke vowed he would direct all his energy into seeing this happen on Djerrkura's behalf.[2] At the same time, Burke remained one of the most outspoken advocates of mandatory sentencing – and Northern Territory independence from outside interference: "Southern Australia says: 'Aren't we wonderful . . . we'll all join hands, walk across the Harbour Bridge and say we've reconciled'. Bullshit. Non-Aboriginal Australia is pissed off that the programs aren't working".[3] What, then, explains Djerrkura's extraordinary move in such a political environment?

Then in response to the UN Human Rights Committee publicly – and internationally – criticizing Australia's mandatory sentencing, which it deemed adversely affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, the Howard government declared that visits by UN committee representatives would be unwelcome and that Australia would downgrade its contributions and participation in UN committees. Howard had already acquiesced to the Northern Territory government's position on mandatory sentencing, claiming that the federal government could not interfere with state and territory policies in this area – even though the ALP and Democrats strongly supported such intervention and an end to the policy. When the NT government brokered an agreement between NT police and Aboriginal communities to use promised Commonwealth funds for diversionary sentencing programs (Howard's compromise on "no intervention"), the Howard government suddenly withheld the funds, making the program impossible.[4] Apparently the federal government could not accept such an agreement between Northern Territory white conservatives and Aboriginal activists.

A third development involved former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. By late August he was openly criticizing the Howard government's policies on Aboriginal affairs – from issues related to "the stolen generation" to the problem of basic human rights – and was calling for a Bill of Rights for all Australians.[5] This last position was one first advocated by Lionel Murphy when he was attorney-general in the Whitlam Labor government (1972–75). Fraser, of course, stepped in as Prime Minister after Governor-General Kerr dismissed the Labor government. Murphy's presence as a 'radical' attorney general and then as a 'radical' High Court judge appointed by Whitlam had been one of the key motivating factors for the Opposition to block supply, giving Kerr his excuse (however dubious) to sack Whitlam.

Fraser clearly had come a long way since those days. In an hour-long ABC Radio interview broadcast on 29 August, interviewer Margaret Throsby raised the problem of Labor animosity toward him. He replied that he had become good friends with Gough Whitlam, and that they both agreed that the dismissal had been the work "of a few lawyers . . . we all know who they were". This referred to Chief Justice Garfield Barwick, who advised Kerr on the legality of the dismissal and encouraged it; Kerr himself; and Barwick's cousin Robert Ellicot, who subsequently became attorney-general under Fraser.[6] In this interview, Fraser even directly criticized Paul Hasluck, who as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs in the Menzies government, oversaw the forty-year-old policy of removing 'mixed-race' Aboriginal children from their mothers. Fraser had done quite a bit of archival research to prepare for his Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture in Darwin, and had come across 1951 and 1952 correspondence between Hasluck and an administrator overseeing removals in the Northern Territory. The administrator argued that children under the age of six should not be removed, to which Minister Hasluck replied, "No I don't agree – the younger the better."

As if in rebuke to Prime Minister Howard's calls to put aside such blame as part of a distant past, Fraser stated, "It's a matter of recognizing the reality of the settlement of Australia. We weren't taught it at school . . . If you go further back, when Australia was being settled, the interface between settlers and communities was almost beyond our comprehension." He was about to describe a leisurely Sunday shooting party that had hunted Aboriginal people as 'game', but suddenly dropped the detail, as if it were too much to describe on public radio. To anyone who has read Aboriginal history, none of this is new. To Fraser, discovering it in archival sources on his own it was truly shocking, no doubt because he had been so close to those directing the policy after the Second World War. Why was Fraser, a former Liberal Prime Minister who had, in John Pilger's words, been at the head of a coup d'etat against an elected Labor government,[7] now asking the same question as radical historians like Henry Reynolds – "Why weren't we told"? How is it that history – and memory of that history – has come to play so powerful a role in this ongoing political drama?[8]

Finally, a full page article appeared in the *Financial Review* on 26 August, written by Jenny Hocking on Lionel Murphy. Drawn from the conclusion of the

latest edition of her biography of Murphy, she stated that many of Murphy's policies, not just legal judgements, had now entered the mainstream. In the 1980s, Murphy had endured investigations by a Royal Commission and two criminal trials focused on alleged improprieties he committed while serving on the High Court. The Royal Commission found no evidence of criminal misconduct; Murphy was convicted in the first trial, but acquitted in a second trial after a successful appeal. Many believe that business interests and conservative political forces underpinned Murphy's persecution. Without assigning specific blame, High Court Justice Michael Kirby believes "Murphy's ordeal was unique . . . It submitted him to unendurable stress over a decade . . . No-one who, even at a distance, walked that journey with him will ever accept that the cancer [from which he died in 1986] was wholly unconnected with the horrors of those unrelenting days".[9]

Murphy was virtually hounded to death through the legal system. The irony is that he had sought, both through legislation and in his High Court judgements, to strengthen the legal system in which he ardently believed, trusting that such reforms would provide democratic safeguards and justice. His advocacy of a legislated Bill of Rights was just one of these. The revival of public interest in Lionel Murphy comes at a most opportune time, as it coincides with world attention on the impact of mandatory sentencing on Australia's Indigenous people, particularly how it has increased Aboriginal deaths in custody. These are two ways of death in a system of injustice. The connection between these two types of deaths – one of a leading political and legal reformer, the other of Aboriginal people who no-one may know outside their own isolated community – is crucial to understanding how human rights as an issue is being transformed in Australia today. It is not enough, however, to look only at the documents – at what is usually thought of as 'factual history'. Cultural mindsets of people are also at the centre, and historical literature can reveal startling hidden features of these mindsets.

There is another interesting connection between Murphy and his vision for a democratic Australia on the one hand and the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people for justice on the other. In Murphy's second criminal trial, the prosecutor for the Crown was a skilled QC not known publicly by many beyond Queensland – Ian Callinan. It was Callinan who later represented the South Australian government in the Hindmarsh Bridge case brought against the state of South Australia by the local Aboriginal people – and it was Callinan who advised the Howard government on it, given the implications for native title.

Around this time Callinan was also finishing his first novel, *The Lawyer and the Libertine* – or was at least preparing it for publication. After it was published, reviewers for the arch-conservative journal *Quadrant* wrote that his novel was "flawed but significant" and "ambitious but not entirely successful".[10] The significance was not so much in the writing or the literary side of the book, but in its broader moral theme of modern Australian politics, "a valuable reminder of the realities of Australian history".[11] It is curious that one of these reviewers was Nicholas Hasluck, the son of Paul Hasluck. Aside from collegial comments from *The Australian Bar Review*, most reviews of Callinan's novel were scathing.[12] My own view is that the novel is poorly written, with characters that are one-dimensional, humourless, and cliched. Although *Quadrant* reviewers Hasluck and Donat found it "readable" and "a gripping read", I thought it was predictable and boring – as literature.[13]

The broader perspective of the *Quadrant* reviewers, however, is worth considering. I agree with them this is a "significant" book, but for different reasons. This is not just Callinan's view of "the realities of Australian history", it encapsulates that of the con-

servative government now in power federally. *The Lawyer and the Libertine*, as Hasluck and others highlight, is a work of fiction based on real historical characters – Lionel Murphy (the libertine) and Garfield Barwick (the lawyer). The novel makes little effort to disguise the identities of historical figures. Letten is Curtin; Doc Neroty (Neurotic?) is Doc Evatt; Portson (Portly?) is Menzies; Gulganin is Petrov; Cart is Calwell; Fields is Fraser; Grayson is Whitlam; and so on. The great issues and divisions in Australian postwar history can be found in the ideas, policies and practices of Barwick and Murphy, and it is in portraying this broad historical struggle from a conservative viewpoint that Callinan's novel stands as an important document. It portrays the way many Australian political conservatives view this history – and how they might create their own 'legend' around it.

Those who are not ideological conservatives have a very different view of this historical drama. It is not a struggle between order and morality on the one hand, and anarchy, corruption, and licentiousness on the other (the key themes in *The Lawyer and the Libertine*). It is, instead, a philosophical difference with its origins reaching back to the nineteenth century and even the Enlightenment. In Justice Kirby's words, "Barwick was the supreme individualist . . . Murphy was a communitarian".[14] This is a struggle between the ideas of Locke versus Rousseau, Smith versus Marx, Spencer versus Wilde – in a modern Australian setting. In what may be his most famous judgement, *Neal v. The Queen*, Murphy cited Oscar Wilde in arguing for the right of the Aborigine "Mr Neal to be an agitator" against white racism.[15]

Rather than going into the storyline of *The Lawyer and the Libertine*, it makes more sense to discuss some of the issues and themes this novel raises.[16] In particular, it provides an opportunity to reassess what is meant by 'historical fiction'. In this case, we have historical fiction that needs to be interpreted as a document by a practicing political figure, rather than historical fiction based on politics that is assessed strictly as literature (for example, C.P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers*, Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, or Don DeLillo's *Libra*).

As a lawyer before entering politics, Murphy defended trade union dissidents, introducing union democracy as a legal right in a heavily bureaucratized laborist system. In a different capacity, he defended individuals accused of crimes who could not afford counsel, and did so without cost, affirming in practice his belief in legal aid as a fundamental right to a fair trial. Hocking comments on his later accomplishments:

> As an unusually activist parliamentarian, whether in opposition or in government, Murphy's record is remarkable yet largely unremarked upon. It includes the establishment of the Senate committee system, the Family Law Act, the Death Penalty Abolition Act, the establishment of the Australian Legal Aid Office and the Law Reform Commission, the Racial Discrimination Act (without which the first Mabo case could not have succeeded), the nuclear tests case against the French in the International Court of Justice, and the Trade Practices Act.[17]

Murphy's judgements while on the High Court are equally significant. When seen as a whole, they can serve as a comprehensive text that justifies an Australian Bill of Rights.[18]

Garfield Barwick's career had similarities to Murphy's. Both came from modest backgrounds uncommon to the legal profession of the day; both graduated from the University of Sydney and joined the Sydney Bar; both became eminent QCs; both served in Parliament and became attorney-general for the Commonwealth; and both served on the High Court. Barwick did not have Murphy's vision – or some would say intellect – but, as David Marr observes, he was a powerful persuader as a lawyer. He had few enduring accomplishments, but his approach was to interpret the Constitution literally and to push back government regulation. He was instrumental in defeating Chifley's Bank Nationalisation Act when it was appealed to the Privy Council. He saved the Petrov Royal Commission from disaster when Evatt exposed its (apparently) tampered evidence – and with it Menzies' reputation. He also defended business clients who had been accused by the Australian Taxation Office of tax avoidance schemes. As a result of his successes in this last area, taxation law had to be made highly specific regarding tax avoidance – and it is Barwick who we can undoubtedly thank, in part, for the enormously complex and detailed taxation legislation peculiar to Australia. Finally, it was Barwick who brought the High Court into the twentieth century, pushing for a national court building in Canberra and an end to annual travels to capital cities to hear cases. He not only modernized High Court administration, centraliz-

ing it in the process, but he also played the major role in selecting the external and internal designs for the new court building.[19]

For the details of this history, Hocking's biography of Murphy and David Marr's biography of Barwick are indispensable. A close reading of both these biographies, however, reveals that the 'fiction' surrounding Callinan's characters Stephen Mentmore (Barwick) and George Dice (Murphy) is just that. From an historian's viewpoint, Mentmore and Dice do fit into the key dates and events (for example, Mentmore's role in relation to the Petrov Royal Commission, or Dice's role in the so-called 'ASIO' raid). The more detailed aspects of these characters do not fit the histories of Barwick and Murphy as we now know them. In Callinan's novel, Dice is not only a 'libertine', he is a rapist, wife beater, and childless without dedication to family. He is lazy, preferring sports to study, and only advances by getting help from political cronies. This is not Murphy, who championed women's rights both in practice and intellectually; earned a degree in science before pursuing the law and then passed his bar exams before completing his law degree; and was both a public figure and family man with children. As Hocking documents, his loyalty to his own brother was so strong that he took his brother's first name as his middle name when Keith died of tuberculosis while assisting Sydney's poor during the Great Depression.[20]

Mentmore, on the other hand, is patriotic and virtuous. He becomes a bombing pilot based in Britain in the Second World War and then returns home to Australia to study law, moving up in the legal profession through hard commercial work. Mentmore never runs for office, but goes directly from the bar to the position of High Court Chief Justice. Mentmore opposes centralizing the High Court in Canberra, hates the new court building (which he describes as 'new fascist'), and generally opposes the extension of federal power over the states. Mentmore also dies of cancer in the end. This is not Barwick, who never served in the military during the Second World War, but instead assisted companies in overcoming government wartime regulations, making a substantial sum in the process. Barwick was also a successful politician, winning regular terms in Parliament (the House) and serving as Attorney-General and Minister of Foreign Affairs under Menzies. Barwick was renowned for his hard work, but here it can be argued that he and Murphy were equals. Finally, Barwick came to favour federal over state powers, even though he opposed government intervention in a general sense. Barwick was not above politics, as Mentmore is in the novel. It was Barwick's politics, in fact, that motivated Marr to write his intriguing biography:

> I began to write Sir Garfield Barwick's life with a single purpose: to pin on the man his responsibility for the crimes of 11 November, 1975. Along the way this book grew into something else . . . Barwick's position seems now to have been simpler – and sadder – than I then thought. At a moment in our history that called for the wisdom and restraint of a great judge, Barwick acted as an advocate. In 1975 he put himself back in the opinions business, back to the days in Phillip Street when an opinion from him was heavy artillery.[21]

And one might add, the *political* opinion business.

In his review of *The Lawyer and the Libertine*, Nicholas Hasluck asks, "What is the novel's theme? . . . [I]t is difficult to sum up exactly . . . One can scarcely imagine an eminent lawyer such as Ian Callinan devoting the time required to write a political saga of this magnitude [over three hundred pages] unless the narrative reflected something of his own experience of the legal system."[22] As I mentioned earlier, however, this novel represents far more than Callinan's view of politics and justice, because it can also be seen as the mentalité of the conservative regime now holding power in Canberra. Three areas in particular stand out: women, corruption in politics, and Aboriginal people.

After *The Lawyer and the Libertine* was published in July 1997, it had four launches around Australia. The first was on 30 July in Brisbane and was launched by Sir James Killen, the former Liberal MP who served as a minister under both Menzies and Fraser. During the election of 1961, Menzies' government was returned by only one seat in Parliament, that of Killen in Brisbane. Callinan, of course, established his career in Brisbane and clearly has established a strong reputation among conservatives there. The second launch followed a day later in Sydney, with the Honourable Justice Meagher speaking. The third was a publisher's launch at the Central Queensland University. Finally, on 16 December the late Dame Roma Mitchell, the Governor of South Australia, launched the book in Adelaide in the presence of many distinguished lawyers and judges.[23] Don Fuller, who was invited because his novel would soon be

issued by the same publisher, was surprised that so many eminent individuals from the legal profession were present just for a book launch. The reason for this became clear, however, when Attorney-General Darryl Williams announced five days later that Callinan had been appointed to the High Court.

Dame Roma congratulated Callinan on his foray into literature. As a long-time advocate of the arts, she commended his example as a legal professional who took the time to pursue the writing of literature. Her remarks were short, but she did take issue with his novel on two counts. She mentioned that she did not necessarily agree with the way the lead characters were presented in the novel – an obvious reference to Mentmore (Barwick) and Dice (Murphy) – although she did not explicitly name these characters. She also took issue with his presentation of women in the novel. She made particular mention that *The Lawyer and the Libertine* had no women characters who could serve as role models. These comments deserve to be heard beyond this book launch because of Dame Roma's importance in recent Australian history. As a woman, she broke many barriers. She was the first female lawyer in Australia to become a QC, the first to be appointed to a state Supreme Court, and the first to be made a state Chief Justice (South Australia).

The administrator argued that children under the age of six should not be removed . . .

If we consider the women in Callinan's novel, four stand out. Hannah East is a childhood friend of both Mentmore and Dice who appears at various points throughout the story. When they are not yet teenagers, Dice tries to seduce her sexually by playing 'doctor', but she escapes. This infuriates her friend Mentmore. Years later, when both men are studying law at university, Dice takes Hannah home after a party and rapes her after she has passed out from drunkenness. She subsequently has an abortion. When Mentmore meets her by chance a few years later, they have a short affair, and she then mysteriously disappears.

Mentmore has difficulty with women. He is both shy and physically (sexually) unsure of himself. While in Britain during the Second World War he meets Virginia, from Dover, and years later she moves to Australia and marries him. She dies while having one of their children, and once again Mentmore is alone.

Dice, on the other hand, sleeps with any woman he can seduce. When he finally marries, his wife Margaret tires of his unfaithfulness and by chance begins a long affair with Mentmore, acting as a surrogate mother for widower Mentmore and his children. At last Mentmore can return to domestic harmony where a woman can cook for him, care for his children, and provide him with love and sex, even if Margaret is still technically married and living with Dice. When Dice, as Minister of Internal Affairs under a Labor government carries out a reckless raid on ASIO, he is derided in the press and made a virtual outcast by his own party. He returns home early (something he seems never to have done before) and discovers his wife is not home. When he calls the school where she works, the employer explains that she is at the Mentmore house. In a rage, Dice finds the address, discovers her car there, and returns home where he gets drunk. When Margaret finally returns, he confronts her about the affair and then brutally beats her. She goes to hospital but won't reveal to the doctors or the press who attacked her. She too disappears, to live in exile in America. Again, Mentmore has been abandoned by a woman he loves.

The last woman of any significance in the novel is Shirley Leeme ('Sheila Lame' perhaps?), who has been appointed as Chief Justice of the High Court, replacing the retiring Mentmore. Dice is now Attorney-General under a newly elected Labor government. Mentmore's dislike of the whole scene, aggravated by the bad architecture of the new court, is intense but he restrains himself. Mentmore knows Leeme is an opportunist. "No-one would mention the bodies she had clambered over to get there, the men she had seduced." Of course she has all the right credentials for a Labor Party appointment, including having been a 'social counsellor' and an 'academic lawyer'.

This portrayal of women may seem at odds with Australia today. Dame Roma's accomplishments speak to the many changes that have occurred for women since the Second World War. Public policy, too, has shifted dramatically, whether in the area of outlawing sex discrimination or programs such as government-funded child care and tertiary education. These changes have allowed women to move beyond the confines of the domestic sphere and advance in the workforce, particularly the professions.

Nevertheless, Australia is a country where cultural attitudes of many men towards women remain archaic and negative. It is ironic that Lionel Murphy actively supported women's rights, helped enact the Family Law Act, which included the Family Court, and even employed women who were ardent feminists – but the fictitious Dice is a womanizer, rapist, and wife beater, and he really believes in none of the popular causes he publicly flaunts. It is no wonder that Dame Roma made her criticisms publicly, however collegially conveyed, during the Adelaide launch.

A major theme in Callinan's novel is corruption in government. Dice not only acts opportunistically but he also steals public funds. In the novel, the Labor government seeks overseas loans for a controversial project, but the money somehow makes its way into Dice's pocket. This is an echo of the so-called 'Loans Affair' under Whitlam, which led to subsequent unsuccessful prosecution of Whitlam, Murphy, and others by Attorney-General Ellicot. The novel's overall setting is based on the longtime corruption of New South Wales politics, particularly that of the ALP Right. Murphy, however, was in the Left faction and was constantly battling with the Right, who at one point tried to expel him from the party.

Callinan, of course, has a long working knowledge of the problems of corruption in politics. He was appointed as TAB chairman under the Bjelke-Petersen National Party government, although this position was secondary to his main work as a lawyer. He later represented the state government during the Fitzgerald Commission investigating corruption in the Queensland government. Although initially appointed by Bjelke-Petersen, Callinan ended up representing the ministers who ousted Bjelke-Petersen, and he was instrumental in assisting the Commission in uncovering police-organized crime collusion connected with Bjelke-Petersen, whose government was the most corrupt in all Australian history.[24] Given Callinan's extraordinary inside experience with this episode, how is it that his novel views virtually all corruption coming from the Labor Party and not the Liberals or Nationals? Again, he has written fiction, but it is a strange and selective history that informs this fiction.

One explanation for this portrayal in *The Lawyer and the Libertine* – the absence of Labor's progressive role in advancing the position of Australian women, the absence of strong women, the absence of corruption by arch-conservatives – relates to the conservative mindset I mentioned earlier. These are people, events, and situations not mentioned. They are either ignored or forgotten. Nowhere is this more the case than when considering Aboriginal people. They are nowhere in this story, nor is there any Aboriginal policy by government or a referendum on Aboriginal rights. At one point Mentmore takes a tough case by a Northern Territory farmer. The Labor government wants to take away his land in order to build a wastefully expensive satellite city in the outback. This farmer is so strongly attached to his land that he will not even settle when Mentmore wins a very large compensation package for him. The Northern Territory; a white farmer's land; unjust taking of that land by a Labor government. Does this sound familiar?

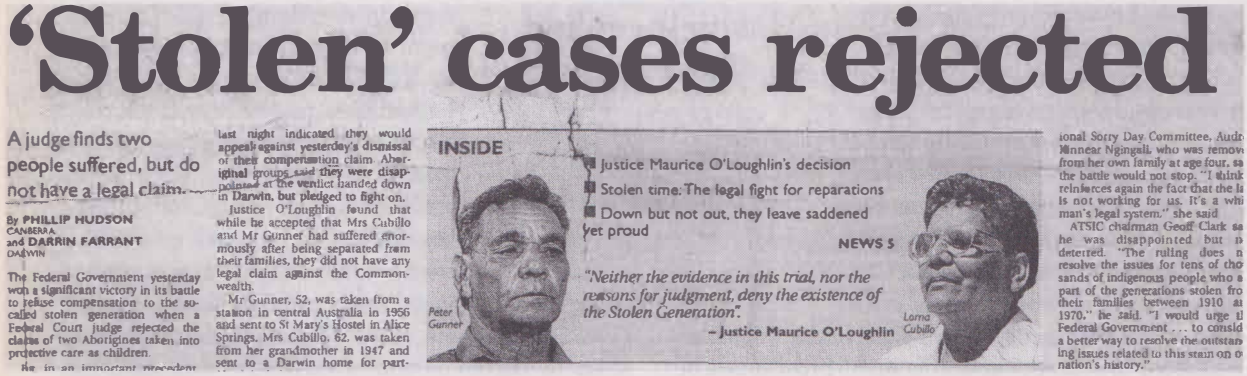
> . . . to which Minister Hasluck replied, "No I don't agree – the younger the better."

DON FULLER'S NOVEL presents a very different perspective to this last issue – that of Aboriginal people's rights. Like Callinan, Fuller sees his novel as a statement on moral values in the political realm. The similarities end there.

Payback at the Capricornia Casino takes place in the fictitious state of Capricornia – Xavier Herbert's Northern Territory in his classic novel *Capricornia*, set roughly in the years from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1920s.[25] Herbert's Darwin is Port Zodiac, while Fuller's is Port Stuart. Herbert's characters assume names that humorously reveal their personalities (i.e. the Shillingsworth brothers, including Norman, derived from 'Nawnim' because he was a 'half-caste'; the postmaster Saxon Whitely; or the Poundamore sisters). Most of Fuller's characters have more believable names, but he retains the humour and style that was the trait of Herbert's finest work. Fuller has written a novel that actually is a series of interconnected stories, told in a straightforward way almost as 'yarns', again following Herbert's style. Fuller admits being influenced by Herbert, but he has also been inspired by other lesser known literature by both European and Aboriginal writers living in the Top End.[26] He is no dry academic. He has been known to recite from memory Banjo Paterson's more

familiar poems, such as 'Mulga Bill's Bicycle', when drinking with colleagues at the local pub, replacing Paterson's names with those of his stranger university workmates.

Callinan seems to have been influenced mainly by English authors such as C.P. Snow, while Fuller is clearly an Australian writer who isn't particularly interested in what Europeans have to say in relation to Australia. Fuller has a very different vision of Australia and Australians that derives from having grown



'Stolen' cases rejected

A judge finds two people suffered, but do not have a legal claim.

By PHILLIP HUDSON CANBERRA and DARRIN FARRANT DARWIN

The Federal Government yesterday won a significant victory in its battle to refuse compensation to the so-called stolen generation when a Federal Court judge rejected the claims of two Aborigines taken into protective care as children.

last night indicated they would appeal against yesterday's dismissal of their compensation claim. Aboriginal groups said they were disappointed at the verdict handed down in Darwin, but pledged to fight on.

Justice O'Loughlin found that while he accepted that Mrs Cubillo and Mr Gunner had suffered enormously after being separated from their families, they did not have any legal claim against the Commonwealth.

Mr Gunner, 52, was taken from a station in central Australia in 1956 and sent to St Mary's Hostel in Alice Springs. Mrs Cubillo, 62, was taken from her grandmother in 1947 and sent to a Darwin home for part-

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Justice Maurice O'Loughlin's decision

Stolen time: The legal fight for reparations

Down but not out, they leave saddened yet proud

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"Neither the evidence in this trial, nor the reasons for judgment, deny the existence of the Stolen Generation".

– Justice Maurice O'Loughlin

Peter Gunner

Lorna Cubillo

ional Sorry Day Committee, Audr Binnear Ngingali, who was remov from her own family at age four, sa the battle would not stop. "I think reinforces again the fact that the la is not working for us. It's a whi man's legal system," she said.

ATSIC chairman Geoff Clark sa he was disappointed but n deterred. "The ruling does n resolve the issues for tens of tho sands of indigenous people who a part of the generations stolen fro their families between 1910 a 1970," he said. "I would urge t Federal Government . . . to consid a better way to resolve the outstan ing issues related to this stain on o nation's history."

up in the Northern Territory. He views the Top End, as many there do, as virtually another country from Sydney, Melbourne, or Canberra. His novel is as much a plea for 'Southern Australians' to hear the voice of all Top End Australians – black, white, or otherwise – as it is a tale about injustice toward Aboriginal people and the possibilities, however absurd in this novel, of justice ('payback').

The story centres on Elija Caladenia, a widely admired Aussie Rules football player and a leader among the Tama people. Caladenia is a close friend of Bob Steele, the personal private secretary of the premier, Roger Rushton. An election is approaching, and Rushton is worried that his Enterprise Party may not win. With Steele's assistance, he convinces Caladenia to run for parliament, but Rushton also must persuade skeptical conservatives in his own government who neither like Aboriginal people nor want them elected. Rushton also has to make a deal with his rival within the cabinet, Mike Dugan, Minister of Development, who has been working behind the scenes with Capricornia's most powerful businessman and major Enterprise Party financial contributor Quirkmire. The deal is simple: Dugan and Quirkmire will support Caladenia's candidacy for preselection if Caladenia will convince the Tama people to allow sand mining on their island. They convince Caladenia that this development project will bring jobs and economic development to the depressed community, and so Caladenia agrees. When the project commences, one of the tractors – driven by Billy, the nephew of a Tama local leader – digs up a sacred burial sight. When the Tama people see a skull emerge from the falling pile of sand, a riot breaks out and Caladenia is besieged by his own people as the cause of this violation. Caladenia then turns to drink and becomes a mess, fearful of leaving his wreck of a house. He only begins to recover when he leaves the island with Steele, who has quit working as Rushton's secretary and turned into a total larrikin. Caladenia seeks to redeem himself in the eyes of his people by this exile, but Steele also has a plan for 'payback' that will change the situation for the Tama people.

As in Herbert's *Capricornia*, there is endless drinking among mates (white and Aboriginal), and someone is always getting into some kind of trouble, whether it's a fight or consorting with someone of the opposite sex. Unlike Callinan's morbid moralists, Fuller's characters all seem to enjoy themselves, or at least come alive even if they are furiously angry or depressed at someone or something. The cultures portrayed in these two novels could come from different countries – and perhaps they do.

Fuller, like Callinan, has been a political participant in some of the events. He was personal private secretary to Chief Minister Paul Everingham immediately after the Northern Territory won self government in 1978. Many new people began appearing around Darwin at this time. Among them was Ian Callinan, whom Fuller recalls seeing when Everingham would bring him in from Brisbane to handle cases for the NT government. In Brisbane, Callinan was known as 'The Tub' and 'The Undertaker'. The Northern Territory crowd thought of him as 'a gun

lawyer'. This image was partly why Fuller was so surprised at the type of guests attending Callinan's Adelaide book launch.

Fuller claims that Rushton, the premier in his novel, is an amalgam of NT chief ministers, but the similarity to Everingham is certainly striking.[27] Like his counterpart Steele, Fuller was academically trained, although we don't learn what Steele's degree was or where he got it. Fuller earned a PhD in economics at the University of Adelaide, attending in part because of assistance from some of the old, mixed-race families in Darwin. Everingham, as leader of the Country Liberal Party, was the leader of conservative, anti-Aboriginal forces in the Northern Territory. Fuller, however, established such close ties with local Aboriginal people that he "came to be regarded as a member of the important Tungatalum family and an adopted brother of Hyacinth Tungatalum", who are members of the Tiwi people.[28] This doesn't seem to have been a problem for Everingham – just as it isn't for Premier Rushton in regard to Steele's friendship with Caladenia.

When I first heard of Gatjil Djerrkura's plans to run for NT Parliament with the CLP, I asked Fuller about this coincidence in the novel. He told me that he knew Djerrkura when serving as Everingham's secretary, and that Djerrkura ran unsuccessfully at the time with the CLP. Djerrkura then came to work with both Fuller and Everingham.

Fuller's book was launched in early 1998 in Darwin by Chief Minister Shane Stone. Apparently Stone did not take offence at the characterization of politicians in the novel, but instead viewed it as a contribution to Northern Territory culture and literature. The complications of NT politics and personalities can in part be understood by grasping this sense of regional identity shared by people of European and Aboriginal descent. Furthermore, Asian–Australian personalities play a role in the novel (the mayor of Port Stuart) just as they have in Fuller's own life (the influence of the Ah Mats, who have been an established family in Darwin for decades). Perhaps, too, we can make some sense of Dennis Burke's anger toward 'Southern Australians' – which to many justifiably sounds solely like a racist response. Burke claims the problems facing Aboriginal people are not just ones of 'reconciliation' and mandatory sentencing. While not agreeing with this perspective, *Payback at the Capricornia Casino* does emphasize the *economic* problems facing Indigenous people. The issues of justice – and injustice, including racism – cannot be separated from access to resources, whether land or funds, and economic development. This is the theme of Fuller's novel, but it is a story that emphasizes the friendship and collaboration of Aboriginal and progressive white people against predatory politicians and businesses. It is a very timely novel, given the strange turn of events in Australian human rights and the unexpected individual statements of public figures we are encountering on a daily basis.

Fuller himself believes that economic development – locally based with enterprise initiatives by Aboriginal people themselves – is the answer to injustice. I asked him if he was doing any current fiction writing. Callinan, after all, has written a second novel. Fuller replied that he felt it was more pressing to write about Aboriginal economic development based on his current work in the Northern Territory. While this is certainly to be commended, more fiction from Fuller would be welcome. This is obviously not meant to be high literature, but he tells a very good story and one that would definitely make a good popular film. His novel is entertaining, even if the second half moves into virtual political fantasy. This is understandable, however, given that the original title for the book was 'White Fella Dreaming', which the publisher said wouldn't work. We do, however, have Fuller's dream of what might be possible, even if it is through the eyes of Bob Steele, Elija Caladenia, and their mob. Fuller does have a film 'treatment' and an agent, but he informed me that Australian producers have told him that this is "not a good time" for movies based on themes related to Aboriginal affairs. Film money is tight in Australia lately – unless it's an overseas production like MI2 or a local one about a white deranged criminal. We can only hope this will change.

Fuller, like Callinan, continues to be active in public life, but in contrasting ways and with contrasting values. Their novels – *The Lawyer and the Libertine* and *Payback at the Capricornia Casino* – from a little known and inadequately marketed publisher are significant because they are literary works speaking to two very different political and moral value systems present in Australia today. They have opposing views of what constitutes 'crime' and 'justice', and what 'corruption' in public life actually is. They also speak to the politics of exclusion (people and groups who are absent or not represented) and inclusion (who is in power, or who might be in power). One novel ends in an act of personal vengeance, the other

in a wild collective act that leads to hope. Certainly both authors have their own outlook of what 'injustice in black and white' is. We will have to wait to see which outlook the majority of Australians eventually accept.

ENDNOTES

1. ABC Radio, 31 August 2000; *The Australian*, 30 August 2000.
2. Kirsten Lawson, 'Ex-ATSIC boss poses poll surprise', *Canberra Times*, 21 July 2000, Internet edition.
3. *The Age*, News Extra, 19 February 2000, p. 1.
4. ABC Radio, 1 September 2000.
5. *The Age – National Edition*, 25 August 2000.
6. For a detailed analysis of the dismissal in terms of Barwick's relationship with Kerr, and Ellicot's related role, see David Marr, *Barwick*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, pp. 245–278.
7. John Pilger, *A Secret Country*, Vintage, London, 1989, pp. 185–238.
8. Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told: A Personal Search for the Truth about our History*, Viking, Melbourne 1999.
9. The Honourable Justice Michael Kirby, 'Forward', in Jenny Hocking, *Lionel Murphy: A Political Biography*, CUP, Cambridge, 2000 – first paperback edition, p. vi.
10. Donat Gallagher, 'Protestant Lawyer, Catholic Libertine, Invisible Masons', *Quadrant*, 19 October 1998; Nicholas Hasluck, 'Deconstructing the High Court', *Quadrant*, July–August 1998, p. 19.
11. Hasluck, 'Deconstructing', p. 20.
12. See, for example, Jack Waterford, 'Bad Precedents', *Eureka Street*, vol. 8 no. 7, September 1998, p. 7. Few periodicals reviewed this novel, but those that did included a highly critical review which also appeared in the *Courier Mail*. In a feature article on Callinan, *The Age* mentioned the novel, but noted in passing that "artistically the novel is barely average" (Gay Alcorn, 'A Law Unto Himself', *The Age*, Saturday Extra, 2 May 1998, p. 6.
13. Hasluck, 'Deconstructing', p. 17; Gallagher, 'Protestant Lawyer', p. 19.
14. Kirby, 'Forward', in Hocking, *Lionel Murphy*, p. iii.
15. A.R. Blackshield, David Brown, Michael Cooper & Richard Krever, eds, *The Judgments of Justice Lionel Murphy*, Primavera Press, Sydney, 1986, pp. 129–137.
16. For summaries of *The Lawyer and the Libertine*, see Hasluck, 'Deconstructing the High Court'; and *Australian Bar Review*, vol. 16, July 1997.
17. Hocking, *Lionel Murphy* (2000 edition), p. 318.
18. See Blackshield, et al., eds, *The Judgments of Justice Lionel Murphy*.
19. Marr, *Barwick*, pp. 26–31, 279–301. The contrast between Barwick, the organizer of the new High Court building in Canberra, and Callinan's Mentmore, who hates this building both in terms of design and its centralizing role for the High Court, is one of the most intriguing contrasts between these historical and fictional characters. Callinan highlights Mentmore's dislike of the building both in the opening and concluding sections of the novel. This is no minor point, given that Callinan has been chairman of the Trustees of the Queensland Art Gallery and is an avid collector of Australian paintings. For Barwick's own views on the building of the High Court and his role in design selections, see Garfield Barwick, *A Radical Tory: Garfield Barwick's Reflections and Recollections*, Federation Press, Sydney, 1995, pp. 237–252.
20. Hocking, *Lionel Murphy*, pp. 8–19.
21. Marr, *Barwick* (1992 edition), pp. xi, xvii.
22. Hasluck, 'Deconstructing the High Court', pp. 18, 19.
23. Details of the Adelaide book launch are drawn from interviews with Don Fuller, who was present that day.
24. For a blow by blow account of this scandal (really, many scandals) and the subsequent investigations and prosecutions, see Evan Whitton, *The Hillbilly Dictator: Australia's Police State*, ABC Enterprises, Sydney, 1989.
25. Xavier Herbert, *Capricornia*, Angus & Roberston, 1990, reprinted from the 1939 edition. Mudrooroo's introduction to this edition sheds new light on the importance of this work for the way it addresses the dilemma of race in the Top End and the complications of being 'white', 'black', or something in between.
26. Fuller told me that David Headon's edited collection *North of the Ten Commandments: A collection of Northern Territory Literature* (Hodder & Stoughton, Sydney, 1989), was one that had particular influence on him.
27. One of the few serious commentaries, with some actual detailed narrative, on Northern Territory politics under Everingham is Alistair Heatley, *Almost Australians: The Politics of Northern Territory Self-Government* (Australian National University, North Australia Research Unit Monograph, Darwin, 1990). Photos in this book give some sense of the makeshift political culture of these years, but there unfortunately is not much biographical detail on the leading personalities.
28. Biographical summary at the end of *Payback at the Capricornia Casino*.

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Critical Legal Studies

We the thieves of all America,
pickpocket northerners, pinchbeck southerners,
eastern pilferers, western larceners,
Hawaiian nimmers, Alaskan hustlers
and the small outlying islands cat burglars,
newsstand breakers, shoplifters, mall hoppers,
software pirates, con boys, con gals,
sporadic stealers, immigrant box snatchers,
Brit prigs, Canadian sneak sweepers, tongs,
kleptomaniacs of all stripes and affiliations
and credit card environmentalists,
the many and the few, gathered tonight in your brain,
demand the speedy expedition of our rights
as a self-constituted underpivileg. minority
in the claws and laws ("talons") of ("legit")
exploitation. A touch of analysis reveals
the rhetorical construction of legal authority
in the tropes of an ideal model of justice. But
what is the essential core of a legal norm
but an ideality construed as a presence?
But what justice? Just this: a sphere of idealizations.
The next question we should ask is what
is the precise locus, the material receptacle
of this presence. This must, of course, be the letter
of the law. The spirit, then, abides in the letter.
But since an ideality can never be captured,
but at best tentatively indicated by the gross
materiality of the sign, it operates
in legal discourse in the form of a
trace, whose function is transcendent in that
it is bounded in a way that perforce relies on a
presumed metaphysics of presence. The espousement
of the grapheme rather than the phoneme
in establishing guilt, the pattern
of law should not be taken as evidence against,
but as rather a confirmation of our claim,
since the generally understood purpose
of counting the "dynamic" and "static" aspects of
imputability (given the indicia of a corpus
delicti) is consistent with the traditional
functions of the material sign vis a vis a presumptive
presence. It is therefore consistent (complicit, we
might say!) with the presumed primacy of speech
over writing (sound in letter as soul in body) that is
necessary to a metaphysics of justice (prejudice).
A sign denotes, de-notes, points to, a presence,
pre-sense, that is, that which precedes, pre-seeds,
its material expression in a language (land gwidge).
The sign, the grapheme, simulates but also contradicts,
negates (and thus, might we say, parodies) the ideal
structure that it implies. Therefore justice is at its core
a travesty of justice. How can we as a group
succeed in the absence of a "federal" funding scheme
to support ourselves as a minority of free agents?
Unionize or get powderized, get bowdlerized!
How can we be empowered if funds are not
showered?
Answer your concerns in the affirmative,
the needs of your community. We request
that every cit, male or female, carry at any time 200%
of his/her one day's wages/salary/allowance/pension/
per
diem or other income along with positive
identification,
a small tax to pay for protection, available
to under-represented applicants in the government,
a useful function. Our justice is a sphere of
practicalities.
We want development mentioned in the executive
summary,
reckoned out to a need per crime basis,
well taken care of in the department of funds.

Philip Nikolayev

Seeing Lenin

Olga Pavlinova

BEFORE I GOT TO LONDON, my cousin Masha promised to take me everywhere.

She listed the places she would take me in every letter and with every letter the list grew longer. I studied the list with some enthusiasm. I had never been to London but like all Australians, even Russian Australians, I had a thing about going to London.

I could see from the list that Masha and I would mainly frequent galleries and pubs, which made a lot of sense. Masha was an artist and she was married to a drinker, or at least that's how he struck me on the one and only occasion of our meeting socially.

At home we all said, "How did Masha end up with that old soak?" But I suppose we should have seen him through her eyes. He was, after all, the Dean of the Fine Arts Faculty in the university where we were both students before Masha ran off with him to London.

When I finally got to London, Masha had just run off with a more age-appropriate Italian sculptor and she was too busy catching up on sex to be bothered with taking me anywhere much. I was very understanding, especially after I got a good look at the Italian in the bathroom. I explored London on my own. But Masha did take me to the Russian church.

It was a Sunday at the very beginning of November. Everything was grey and damp. The exterior of the church has left no lasting impression on me except that, like the day, it was grey and damp. We arrived early. Inside, the church was dingy, tinged with the same grey as the outside, dank rather than obviously damp, and dotted with a few bent figures which might have come straight out of the pages of some Russian folk tale. Old men and old women doubled up in front of a grim iconostasis which had not seen a dusting in twenty years. Old men and old women, dry as parchment, sad remnants of a community long since absorbed into this absorbing city. In a while, a few younger people appeared, that is, people not yet decrepit. There were no children. Masha and I were young enough to stand out like a pair of bright candles in the general gloom. I pulled the collar of my coat up above my ears.

"That's the heir to the Russian throne," whispered Masha as a sleek figure, reminiscent of a well-fed seal, waddled importantly to the front of the church. To my amazement, and perhaps to my disgust, this comical figure of complacent self-importance was greeted in some quarters by deferential bows and lowered eyes. Manners of a different order. I heard him speak to someone as the liturgy began. His Russian was abominable. Masha was delighted by the expression on my face.

"And here comes Lenin!" she hissed, suppressing a squeal which remained somewhere behind that hiss, close enough to be a danger. I felt we would be unmasked by Masha's impropriety. But Masha put a hand to her mouth, she was always good at protecting herself. I looked up, and sure enough, a man bearing a frightening resemblance to Lenin sauntered past and took up a position to the left side of the heir to the throne. Belief suspended, I stood transfixed before the bizarre tableau. Later an old lady was to

remark on my piety. "I have never seen anybody pray with such intensity," she said, "at least not someone young." I think she meant it as a compliment.

After the service, because it was raining heavily and also because Masha was so obviously relishing this excursion into the past, we followed some people into a small hall attached to the church. Again, the scene before me was a dismal one, another scene of decay. In the far corner stood a huge crumbling bookcase, so wormy that the more ornamental parts of it were an unrecognizable mess of rotten wood. But the glass doors were intact and a faded sign identified the bookcase and, presumably, the area around it, as 'The Library'. I went over to speak to the old man who had taken up a position at the table in front of the bookcase. I noticed that Lenin was watching me with considerable interest. The old librarian was taken aback when I spoke to him in Russian. "You speak the language!" he said in astonishment. Lenin, who had followed me to the library, stood at the table flipping through a book and openly listening to what was passing between the librarian and me. It appeared that the library no longer operated as such but the old man invited me to look through the books and purchase any of them I wanted, at a price I would nominate myself. "There will soon be no-one", he said sadly, "who will be able to read them." If I had been living in London like Masha, I would have taken the lot. I fell upon them greedily. They were, in the main, wonderful books, rare editions in beautiful if disintegrating bindings.

There were classics and philosophical treatises, histories and idiosyncratic single copies of the personal memoirs of long-forgotten people who had felt compelled to tell their story and were now buried under English soil, refugees forever. I could not take them all. In the end I settled on five books. I took the first edition (1926!) of Nabokov's *Mashenka* for obvious reasons, intending to leave it in London, my gift to Masha who might just have had the time to read it if she got over the sex thing with the Italian. Or perhaps she could have read it as an adjunct to the sex thing. It was, after all, a Nabokov. I also took Lossky's *Dostoevsky's Christian Ideology* which appeared to be brand new. No one, I suspected, was all that interested. Somewhere behind me I heard Lenin chortle but it might have been the beginning of a cough. I knew it must be Lenin because he was the only one who had followed me to the library. I decided not to look at him in case he expected a justification for my last choice but continued my search through the books, uncomfortably aware that I was under close scrutiny. After a while I stood back, debating whether or not to buy the whole beautiful pale blue set of Soloviev's *History of Russia*, but my conscience would not allow me to set a price which I knew would have to be hopelessly inadequate. The transaction smacked of indecency. I could not look the old man in the eye and rob him of his history. I decided that the history should stay where it was, on the shelves of a crumbling bookcase in a library that had lost its will to be a library.

I turned around. Lenin had seen me hesitate. He seemed to be amused.

I found two more first-edition Nabokovs, his autobiography and his *Camera Obscura*. I was ready to approach the librarian with an offer for this wonderful little collection when I came across the pièce de résistance, the 1905 edition of Pushkin's *The Tale of Tsar Sultan*, illustrated by Ivan Bilibin. This was a book from my childhood but it was not the reproduction on glossy paper I had so coveted in Melbourne, at a friend's place whose parents had a lot of money. This was the real thing. I picked it up reverentially. It was missing a few pages and the cover had barely survived a succession of attacks by London's greedy moths, but it was a glorious book all the same. Every page a jewel of line and colour. I pressed it to my heart.

"Good choice," said Lenin approvingly but did not begin a conversation. Masha came over. She wanted to leave. The Italian was waiting. I gave the old man a ten-pound note which he did not even look at.

"You'll come again?" he asked wistfully. I did not want to let him down.

"Yes, I'll come again." Lenin gave me a look that plainly said 'liar' and I blushed. Masha and I left the hall and walked out into an autumnal mist, leaving the old man, Lenin and the books to their inevitable fate. I never saw the heir to the Russian throne again. We moved in different circles.

I didn't see Lenin again either, though it crossed my mind more than once that he would be an interesting person to talk to and I regretted that I hadn't got his slant on Dostoevsky, among other things. When I say I didn't see Lenin again, I mean I never saw him in the flesh again. But, as it turned out, I saw a lot of him over the years, most recently last week, courtesy of the BBC. The BBC has tracked down Lenin but not the Lenin I saw in London. The camera crew that presented me with Lenin last week left London for Moscow like I did twenty years ago. Like me, they were in search of a story. I'd found a lot of stories then but they were more about my father than about Lenin, which isn't all that surprising though, I suppose, my father's stories would have been very different without Lenin. But the BBC team found a story that was, at least on the surface, all about Lenin. They filmed a warehouse full of Lenins. The Lenins stretch for miles. There are all sorts of Lenins in that warehouse. There are small bronze Lenins, smooth and darkly lustrous, which could brood comfortably on a bookshelf next to a volume of *Das Kapital*, there are huge marble Lenins with waistcoats that weigh a ton and fob-watches as big as town-hall clocks, and there are giant concrete Lenins, grey as the façade of the KGB headquarters and impregnated with the same filth. They have all been discarded in favour of new icons and the sculptures of a new religion and they are rotting in the warehouse like the books in the church hall in London. My father, had he been alive, would have been interested in the BBC story but I'll bet he would have added a few pieces of his own stories while we watched the program. But although he could claim to have seen Stalin or Stalin's double in an open car during the war, he could not say that he had ever seen Lenin, like I had.

Masha left her Italian sculptor just as he was carving her left breast. He had chipped away enough of her for her comfort and she went back to some professor, not the drinker, but someone very much like him. Perversely, this professor outlived Masha and was able to write to me recently, on crested paper may I add, that Masha had 'passed away'. There had been a liturgy for her in the Russian church but I doubt that she was all that interested and I doubt that it was performed by the same priest we saw twenty years ago. I should imagine that everyone who had been in that London church on the wet morning in November has gone to god: the librarian who let me take away his treasures, the woman who complimented me on the piety I didn't have, the slippery heir to the Russian throne. All gone.

And Lenin, for all his sporadic resurrections in fermenting Indian states and explosive parts of Africa and South America and remote islands off the coast of somewhere, and for all his multifarious appearances in television documentaries; let me assure you, Lenin is also well and truly dead. Or at least I thought so until yesterday when I stepped up to the CD counter at a local bookshop and picked up *Marching Songs of The Red Army Choir* and someone whispered in my ear, "Good choice". It occurred to me that my father and Lenin had some things in common.

Bronwyn Cran

'The private is political'

Women's writing and political fiction

THE MID-TO-LATE 1990s saw the publication of four novels by writers whose fictional work until then could be broadly termed 'political'. Amanda Lohrey, Sara Dowse, Dorothy Johnston and Dorothy Hewett respectively published *Camille's Bread* (1995), *Digging* (1996), *One for the Master* (1997) and *Neap Tide* (1999). The novels can be placed on a continuum of feminized genres, ranging from the fairytale (Dowse's *Digging*), to the domestic romance (Lohrey's *Camille's Bread*), to the working-class *Bildungsroman* (Johnston's *One for the Master*), to the social novel (Hewett's *Neap Tide*).

I have been interested in the work of three of these novelists since reading Paul Salzman's review of *Camille's Bread,* where he observed that neither Lohrey, Dowse nor Johnston had received the attention they deserved for the "superb series of political novels" they produced in the 1980s.[1] One could speculate on why this is the case – perhaps the political nature of their fiction, perhaps their status as 'women writers' – just as one could speculate on why autobiographical elements in the corpus of Hewett's work are repeatedly made the subject of critical attention.[2] When a woman writer shifts the focus of her cultural production from the political novel to the fairytale or romance, an element of critical aftershock follows publication. Some adjustment in the critical lens is required to get the picture, to fully apprehend the transformed totality of the writer's work. This, in any case, has been my response to the four novels, which I find intriguing because of the departures in form and content they signal from their writers' earlier political work. More particularly, these departures mark a shift from an engagement with the public sphere and its machinery of work, class and institutional politics to a more private sphere and the texture of everyday life. As a body of work, the novels raise questions about the nature of the 'political' in fiction, and about what has been called 'women's writing'.

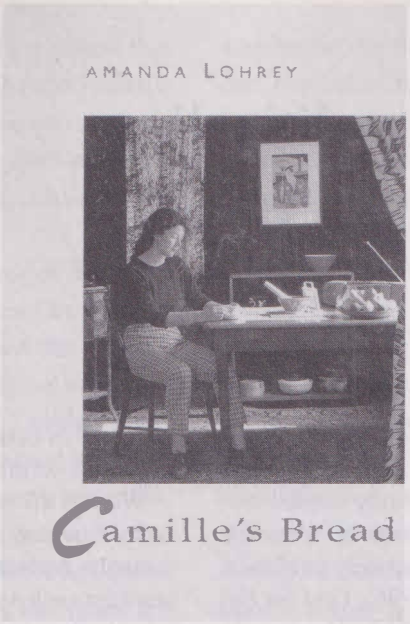
What is the political novel when it is written by a woman writer? Does the fairytale or the domestic romance represent a retreat from political engagement for such a writer? Are these genres apolitical or inferior because of their location in the domestic, and therefore conventionally feminized, private sphere? If political women writers put aside the well-oiled machinery of class, work and the State in their new work, what kind of reformulations are taking place in that work? Is it symptomatic of the generalized retreat from political involvement characteristic of our age[3] – or is it emblematic of more complex shifts in notions of the 'public', the 'private' and the 'political'?

The works discussed here shatter the standard signifiers of the political novel, just as they remould the conventions of their chosen genres. Most notably, in all there is a uniform intensity of focus on the self and its development. The main characters either move, or have moved, away from the world of work into a more private realm centred on personal growth; the time off work corresponds to a time of gestation of new selves and new relationships. The interiority of the main characters is foregrounded, alongside an overriding concern with the characters' feminine and masculine subjectivities. There are other, less obviously theoretical, similarities among the novels. Houses and the neighbourhood community loom large. Mothers and motherhood figure prominently, and, to a lesser extent, fathers and fatherhood. Ghosts and/or mad women are significant.

In other words, the conventional signifiers of women's writing – the personal, the feminine and the irrational – are pushed into the foreground, while the conventional signifiers of the political novel – the

workplace, social class and the State – are moved into the background. This, to me, is the crux of the dilemma faced by the 'reading' critic – the nature of the political depicted in the writing, and the status of the writing based on that depiction.

Lohrey, Dowse, Johnston and Hewett earned their stripes as political novelists whose previous novels engaged with the larger public world of politics. The content of the political depicted in their earlier work varies. We could define the 'political' as the power relations of the public sphere and its institutions of work, class and the State, or we could define the 'political' in more general terms, following Terry Eagleton, as "no more than the way we organize our social life together, and the power relations which this involves".[4]



Each of the earlier novels displays both senses of the political. Hewett's *Bobbin Up* (1959) tells of the lives of women workers at a spinning mill in inner-city Sydney in the 1950s. The public political world is represented by the bright promise of post-war Sydney and the "dark satanic prison of Jumbuck Mill",[5] while the private political world is represented by the inner-city suburbs where the women live. Their sexuality is highlighted, along with the negotiations, compromises and resistances entailed in their relationships with men.

Johnston's *Maralinga My Love* (1988) focuses on the British nuclear tests in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. The public political world here is the atomic test site at Maralinga and the halls of State power in Canberra and London, while the private political world is embodied by the main character Graham Falconer, a working-class Australian soldier at Maralinga. Graham marries Deborah, a wealthy middle-class woman, studies science at ANU, and becomes a public servant in the Defence Department. The novel chronicles Graham's gradual estrangement from his own and Deborah's social class, and from the fiction that the atomic tests were safe.

Dowse's *West Block* (1983) looks at the lives of five public servants in Canberra in the early stages of the Fraser administration. The public political world is represented by the city of Canberra, its bureaucracy and key political issues of the time: the fall of Vietnam, the Fox uranium inquiry and the sidelining of the Women's Equality Branch in the Prime Minister's Department. The novel also explores the impact of a broader, more personalized politics, particularly feminism, on the private lives of its main characters.

Lohrey's *The Reading Group* (1988) details the lives of former members of a reading group during a period of mounting political crisis – the party in power reminiscent of Federal Labor in the 1980s. The public political world is represented by a city ringed by fires; the inner city and its shopping malls are contrasted with the menacing poverty of the outer suburbs and the ultra-nationalist conservatism of the rural belt. As the State lurches into anarchy and totalitarianism, the main characters seek refuge in private, middle-class utopias – house renovation, sexual liaisons and so on.[6]

All four novels depict the intrusion of the public political world into private life, and the impossibility of corralling each sphere of life from the other. In terms of the power relations organizing social life, the novels depict capitalism, class, gender, colonialism and the State transecting the lives of their characters.

Of relevance at this point is the policing power of critical discourse, as noted by Eagleton, and, particularly, of its power policing writing itself. Eagleton refers to its power of classifying writing as "the 'literary' and 'non-literary', the 'enduringly great' and the 'ephemerally popular'",[7] but the list could extend to writing deemed 'political' and 'non-political'. Given this, it is worth examining briefly the academic critical reception accorded the earlier novels. With the exception of *Bobbin Up*, this has been muted to say the least. Nevertheless, Salzman sees all the novels, as well as Lohrey's 1984 work *The Morality of Gentlemen*,[8] as significant political novels within the Australian literary canon. According to Salzman in his and Gelder's *The New Diversity* (1989):

> It is possible to see novels like *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* and *West Block*, *The Morality of Gentlemen* and *Maralinga My Love*, *The Best Picture* and *Just Relations*, as engaged in a dialogue or

> debate over the way fiction might address itself to 'politics' in the widest sense of the word.[9]

All the cited novels and Lohrey's *The Reading Group* are discussed in the chapter on political fiction. But why are novels about the world of work and political history positioned alongside two novels about the 'mythology' of family – Barry Hill's *The Best Picture* (1988) and Rodney Hall's *Just Relations* (1982)? Why do novels by men about the private sphere qualify as political novels? In *The New Diversity* novels dealing with the family by women writers, most notably Helen Garner and Jessica Anderson, are located in 'The Women's Story' chapter. Does this mean that, as a woman writer, your writing will be accorded the status of 'political fiction' if it engages primarily with the public sphere, and 'women's writing' if it engages primarily with the private sphere?

Feminists of many castes – literary and cultural theorists among the knowledge élite, for example – have been insisting for some time now on the impossibility of divorcing everyday life from the political.[10] But a dichotomy between the public and private spheres is still insisted upon to determine the nature of the 'political' in writing by women. What values inform such a dichotomy? Take, for example, this statement in Stephen Knight's recently republished article about Hewett's *Bobbin Up*:

> Facing the conflict between the public and private self, Nell (Weber, the central Communist character), *like Hewett* [my emphasis], puts the human first, but she also insists on the political being involved in a full way . . .[11]

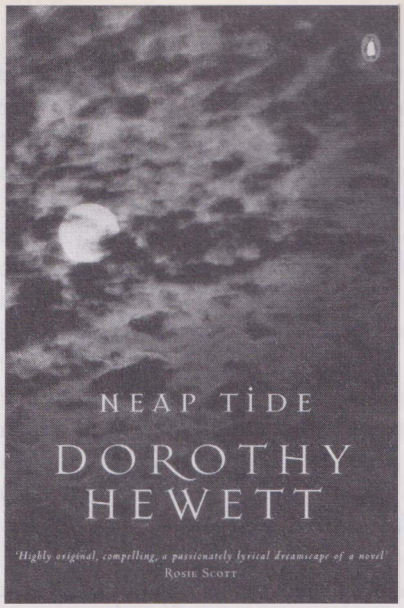
Elsewhere in the article the 'human' is defined as family life and the 'political' as industrial and Communist politics. Later, Knight states: "This is *by no means* a domestic novel" (my emphasis).[12] Why the need to insist on this? Leaving aside the implication that the domestic novel is an apolitical and therefore inferior genre, Knight's statement is misleading. To my mind *Bobbin Up* can be seen, in part, as a rewriting of the domestic novel because of its focus on sexuality in the private lives of its women characters. Its title could then refer to those characters literally 'bobbing up' from the conventional depiction of women in the domestic novel – a middle-class genre – as passive, compliant, desexed versions of the feminine. In this regard, Susan Lever's general assessment of Hewett's writing is pertinent. According to Lever, "[t]he attempt to voice the experiences of a woman, hitherto silenced by restrictions on the feminine, may be seen as a political act".[13] I would go further and argue that such an attempt *constitutes* a political act for every woman writer. Even so, the general 'discourse policing' problem remains.

The recent novels of Dowse, Lohrey, Johnston and Hewett can be seen, in part, as the voicing of women's experience. The novels shatter the standard signifiers of the political novel through their foregrounding of the personal, the feminine and the irrational, just as they remould the conventions of their chosen genres.

Digging occupies the same spatial and temporal territory as Dowse's earlier *West Block* – Canberra in the mid-1970s. Although not strictly a companion piece, *Digging* metaphorically delves deeper into the personal life of the archetypal public servant. Before the birth of her son and the 1975 coup, the novel's unnamed narrator was a clerk, a keeper of inventories of government office paraphernalia. In the post-Cold War present of the novel, the narrator looks back on that earlier time, when she lived in one of Canberra's older, inner suburbs. Like the fairytale, its generic antecedent from the oral tradition, *Digging*'s landscape fills out with archetypal motifs – the house like a cottage, the white-haired, old widowed neighbour, the pine forest across the road, the stream in the forest, the quirky community of birds. Again, like the fairytale, the characters are universalized: there is X, the archaeologist father of the narrator's son; L, her feminist historian friend; H, her male friend from work; and the baby. The story tracks the narrator's relationship with X from messy beginning to muddy end. X is the quintessential rationalist – "sceptical, analytical, detached"[14] – whereas the narrator becomes "dreamy and soft"[15] with the birth of her son. We are in familiar territory here, the alternate realms of the "masculine intelligence" and the "feminine sensibility".[16] There is the familiar masculine quest motif: X is obsessed with researching a cave in the country outside Canberra, "a gash in the mountainside as open as a wound".[17] His digging trowel, we are told, is "as much a part of him as any limb".[18]

The point, though, is that *Digging* feminizes and rewrites the fairytale in political and postmodern terms. This, of course, has been done before by Angela Carter and others, and *Digging* gestures roundly to Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' (1979) and its rewriting of the Bluebeard myth. Like Carter's story, *Digging* foregrounds the subjectivity of its female

protagonist to voice her experience of the 'feminine', and to depict her release from the spell of the 'masculine'. The narrator tells of her fear of X, of his indifferent domesticity and empathy – a depiction of the political, in Eagleton's terms, because the power relations in one area of social life, namely family life, are exposed. As well, the narrator lifts the lid on the emotional stew of motherhood, and, to a lesser extent, of masculine subjectivity. The narrator's portrait of her own acute emotional involvement with her son is a textbook articulation of the so-called irrational 'myths' of motherhood challenged by second-wave feminism. This, and the portrait of X's emotional brutalization via an absent father and a disinterested academic boss, constitute political acts in Lever's terms because they depict personal experience previously silenced by restrictions in the cultural discourse.



Lohrey's *Camille's Bread*, too, rewrites genre in political and postmodern terms. If we think of the domestic romance as a conventionally feminine literary form – as is the fairytale, so Carter tells us[19] – then *Camille's Bread* reconfigures the genre in a major way with its central characters. The hero Stephen Eyenon is a rewriting of the bland suitor of domestic fiction and the demon lover of romance, while Marita Black, the central female character, rewrites the generic script for the conventionally passive and desexed heroine. *Camille's Bread* is set in inner-urban Sydney of the late 1980s/early 1990s, and traces the early stages of Stephen and Marita's love affair; he is a clerk in the Treasury Office, while she is a single mother who has taken a year off work to nurture herself and her daughter Camille. Stephen and Marita are inversions of 'masculine intelligence' and 'feminine sensibility' – Stephen is hooked on food and the body, Marita on words and the mind – although in another sense, the novel reinforces traditional Eastern gender dichotomies of male and female – Stephen is *yang*, "the patent, the bright, the exposed", while Marita is *yin*, "the latent, dark, unexpected aspect of things".[20] The game of East meets West – Stephen's cooking knives penetrating Marita's dark cottage in Leichhardt – is emblematic of the novel's generalized play with expectations of gender and genre.

The game-playing removes the novel far from the world of its antecedents – the genteel rural Arcadia of Jane Austen, or perhaps the gilded cosmopolitan cage of Ivana Trump. However, the ironic gestures and reworkings underscore a more serious, political, purpose. All the characters in *Camille's Bread* are, as they used to say in the 1970s, 'pretty fucked up', but only Stephen and Marita are 'dealing with it'. They are both obsessed with killing off their origins – their dysfunctional mothering and fathering, mostly – and with creating alternative personal and social spaces as sites of resistance[21] and reinvention. To this end, a flock of signifiers from the personal realm of life – home, food, furniture, sex, reading, cooking, dancing, music, massage, meditation, television, children, the list goes on – are brought into play as sites of struggle between the protagonists, and as sites for the construction and reinvention of their subjectivities. The novel's political critique incorporates the irrational and brutal nature of work in its depiction of the public service and of Camille's estranged father Adrian, but it is Marita's neighbourhood in Bright Street, Leichhardt, that offers the space for cultural diversity[22] and reinvention.

Digging and *Camille's Bread* foreground relatively contemporary crises in subjectivity, challenging those cultural discourses of reason and emotion, intellect and corporeality that confine women *and* men to positions of silence[23] and abjection. Both novels also show the impossibility of neatly corralling those crises or discourses within either the public or private spheres. Through their pronounced interior focus, the novels constitute powerful political statements.

Johnston's *One for the Master* and Hewett's *Neap Tide* move towards a more exterior, less domestic, orientation. The personal, the feminine and the irrational are foregrounded, and both novels echo Dowse's and Lohrey's generic reworkings, alongside depictions of a more feminized and culturally inclusive public sphere.

One for the Master is the only working-class novel among the four novels, and the only conventionally realist work. Set in the 1950s and 1960s, it depicts

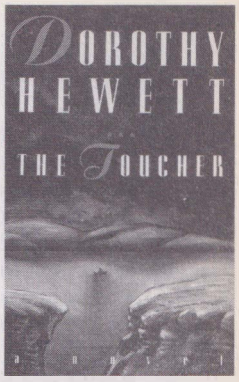
the girlhood and coming of age of Helen Plathe, a spinner at the Highlands woolen mill in Geelong. In this sense, the novel is a companion piece to Johnston's *Maralinga My Love* and to Hewett's *Bobbin Up*; the portrait of Helen Plathe presents a composed psychological foil to Hewett's flashy modernist sketches of young working-class women (although I suspect Hewett's sassy girls would jeer at Helen as a 'boss's crawler'). As a document of record, *One for the Master* occupies the same historical moment as *Maralinga My Love,* and extends Johnston's working-class representation of that moment by expanding its reach from the desert to the suburbs, and from the bureaucracy to the factory. The Highlands woolen mill and its antiquated looms exert the same mesmeric and brutal force over the spinner Helen Plathe as the Maralinga desert and its atomic bombs exert over the soldier Graham Falconer. The looms and bombs are equivalent; the capitalist machinery of industry and war one and the same. Helen, for example, says:

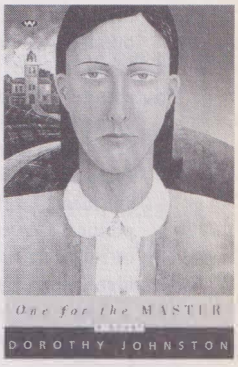
> The machines . . . bewitched and terrified me. Beneath their solid, polished surfaces, my looms contained a capacity to hurt that seemed never-ending. Who was to fathom this potential . . . ? Who ever had?[24]

There are other pairings, most notably the displaced Aborigines at Maralinga and the old woman worker in the Gothic tower at Highlands, discarded and alone in her madness.

But unlike *Maralinga My Love, One for the Master* feminizes the public sphere – the women spinners polish and decorate the looms of departing workers, a woman unionist speaks against the banning of the Communist Party, Helen prepares a report on industrial accidents in the spinning industry. And as would perhaps be expected in a novel set in the dark age before Women's Liberation, *One for the Master* documents the relentless, selfless and thankless nature of women's labour in the family.

In Hewett's *Neap Tide* the shifting, exteriorized picture of a coastal community in New South Wales is worlds away from the controlled introspective take on cities and domesticity in *Digging* and *Camille's Bread. Neap Tide* is the antithesis of the working-class realist novel, a counterweight to *Bobbin Up*[25] and to Johnston's *One for the Master.* Nevertheless, the preoccupations with the Gothic and the supernatural found in the other writers' recent novels also surface in *Neap Tide.* The story centres on Jessica Sorensen and the year she spends near the coastal town of Zane. Jessica is a literary critic on study leave, battening down in a rented holiday house to escape her demons and to write the definitive monograph on romantic Australian poetry. Her rented house is "a cheap shabby relic of the thirties",[26] filled with genre novels of the period; it is also haunted by the ghost of Oliver Shine, a larrikin romantic poet. Hewett deploys the generic conventions of mystery, romance and melodrama to depict Jessica's abjection and surrender to Oliver, a trope for her more general masochistic submission to charismatic men, that is, to the 'masculine'. Jessica's release from her infatuation with Oliver, a death figure, allows her to move on in life: she abandons her romantic poetry project for a study of 1930s pulp fiction, retires early from the rationalist academic salt mine and flies to Rome to mend her relationship with her estranged daughter. So, Jessica's personal redemption hinges on an assertion of the 'feminine'. This story is played out against a narrative backdrop of community that chronicles pressing sites of social and political struggle in the contemporary Australian landscape: the death of rural industry, environmental destruction, the AIDS epidemic, Aboriginal reconciliation, the marginalization of the poor and the disaffected. In the scope of its sprawl, *Neap Tide* is Hewett's generic and political blockbuster.





These recent novels of Lohrey, Dowse, Johnston and Hewett mark striking and for some, possibly disturbing, departures from their earlier political fiction. Generally, the more domestic and feminized canvases of the recent novels shift the ground of the political from the factory and the office, the marketplace and the official institutions of the State, to the family, the home and the neighbourhood community. It remains to be seen whether these novels will be judged, in Eagleton's terms again, as 'enduringly great' or 'ephemerally popular', and whether their writers will see their more recent work classified as 'political fiction' or 'women's writing' in the Australian literary canon.

ENDNOTES

1. P. Salzman, 'Amanda Lohrey's domestic fare', *Australian Book Review*, November 1995, p. 42. Salzman was referring to Dowse's *West Block* (1983), Lohrey's *The Reading Group* (1988), and Johnston's *Maralinga My Love* (1988).
2. See B. Bennett, (ed.), *Dorothy Hewett. Selected Critical Essays*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1995. Some examples of the tendency: "A significant confusion has . . . been brought about between the life and the creative re-presentations . . . it seems as if Hewett were trying to turn actual events into a mythology" (David Brooks, *ibid.*, p. 181); "[S]he openly uses her own life as her 'material' for art" (Susan Lever, *ibid*, p. 149); "From the first she made the private political and the political private in every part of her living [sic]" (John McLaren, *ibid*, p. 33).
3. See G. Mulgan, *Politics in an Antipolitical Age*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994. According to Mulgan, "[t]here are many morbid symptoms . . . Beyond elections, political movements have been largely displaced by life or religious movements, and movements of group identity" (p. 9).
4. T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (2nd Edition), Blackwell Publishers, Massachusetts, 1997, p. 169.
5. D. Hewett, *Bobbin Up*, The Vulgar Press, Melbourne, 1999 (first published 1959), p. vii.
6. See G. Turcotte (ed.), *Writers in action: the Writer's Choice Evenings*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1991. Lohrey describes the phenomenon as "the privatization of the Utopian impulse, so that it goes inward in those characters. Having once been political activists . . . they've now decided to pursue private Utopias" (p. 211).
7. Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 177.
8. *The Morality of Gentlemen* deals with union politics in Tasmania in the 1950s, at the time of the DLP split.
9. K. Gelder and P. Salzman, *The New Diversity*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1989, p. 256.
10. See A. Summers, 'The Ravaged Self', *Damned Whores and God's Police*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1975, and N. Armstong, 'Some Call it Fiction: On the Politics of Domesticity' in R. Warhol and D. Herndl (eds), *Feminisms*, Macmillan Press, Hampshire, 1997.
11. Cited in Hewett, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
12. ibid., p. 218.
13. Cited in Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
14. S. Dowse, *Digging*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1996, p. 114.
15. *ibid.*, p. 32.
16. A. Lohrey, 'The Liberated Heroine: New Varieties of Defeat?', *Meanjin*, 38, 1979, p. 102.
17. Dowse, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
18. *ibid.*, p. 45.
19. See A. Carter, *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, Virago Press, London, 1990. Carter refers to the "European convention of an archetypal female storyteller, 'Mother Goose' in English . . . an old woman sitting by the fireside, spinning – literally *spinning a yarn*" (p. x).
20. A. Lohrey, *Camille's Bread*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. 85.
21. See M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume One. An Introduction*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1990 (originally published 1976). According to Foucault, there are "mobile and transitory points of resistance . . . furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remoulding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds" (p. 96).
22. See M. Henderson, 'Subdivisions of Suburbia: The Politics of Place in Melissa Lucashenko's *Steam Pigs* and Amanda Lohrey's *Camille's Bread*', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1998, for detailed discussion of this idea.
23. See C. Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999. Weedon notes that "[a]mong the proliferation of discourses of the feminine are those which challenge women's status as silenced 'other'" (p. 113).
24. D. Johnston, *One for the Master*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1997, p. 42.
25. Hewett's second novel *The Toucher* (1993) also formed a counterweight to *Bobbin Up*. As well, the relationship between *The Toucher*'s Esther La Farge and the romantic larrikin Billy Crowe anticipates Jessica Sorensen's infatuation with Oliver Shine, and to a lesser extent, the poet Jack Shriver, in *Neap Tide*.
26. D. Hewett, *Neap Tide*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1999, p. 7.

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hard boiled, soft boiled, scrambled

Kathleen Mary Fallon

MY TELECOM ADVISOR tells me I've got to change my Dialling Habits. Tie my STD dialling finger up between 8 a.m. and 6 at night. She's put me on a Flexi Plan Saver Scheme and sent me a Budget Payment Card. I'll be out of the woods in six months if the Reverse Charges don't keep up. "Just practice saying no" she advises.

and
there're the bells of the Sacred Heart
interrupting *Ricki Lake* again
clanging for another dead junkie

I don't want to witness
I just want to Fly-Buy
but I haven't got enough points
to even get half-way

Tattoo (A-Tear-Drop-In-Indigo-Blue), a friend from The Street, rang Reverse Charges last night from Fairlie Women's Prison. She always said they'd just give her a Community Service Order at worst but that the Parking Fines would eventually disappear into the computer like they always had. Silly Old Radical. Living In The Past. The Sheriff's Office (the Sheriff?) has had the responsibility since '89 and the Attorney General has a Revenue Generation policy now. The Sheriff's Men (Sheriff's Men?) knocked down her door in the middle of the night yelling, "Sheriff's Office!". Came crashing in. Yanked her out of bed. Cuffed her. Into the Wagon and straight to Fairlie before she'd wiped the gunk out of her eyes. She's in Protective Custody already. She's got a big mouth and, after so many years stoned, not even the sense she was born with. "Didn't you ever watch *Prisoner*?" I ask. "You've got to get on that Learning Curve pronto girlfriend; this is no time to Plateau Out." God knows how many more months, even years, she has to go. The computer keeps spitting out more unpaid fines every day. "There's no upper limit they tell me. At least everyone else here's got a sentence. It's rough when you're jealous of someone because they've got a definite sentence." I go into that old there-must-be-some-mistake, you've-just-slipped-through-a-hole-in-the-welfare-net Bourgeois Holding Pattern. "Have you rung the Ombudsman, *Today Tonight,* the Attorney General?" Stupid Old Radical. Living in the Past. "Fuckem!" she said. "Fuckem!" she'd said ripping the fines off the windscreen two or three times a day. "Fuckem!" again when the Rego was up and she couldn't pay. "Sold it last night for $20 to that junkie, Big Red," she laughed. And every day more fines. "I've never even been to Moe, to Albury, to Mildura. It must have been that fucking junkie."

Her Legal Aid Solicitor finally got her out by arguing that computer print-outs didn't constitute Valid Arrest Warrants because they hadn't each been affixed by hand with the Sheriff's Official Wax Seal (Wax Seal?).

The yuppie-looking guy across The Street, sporty in blue and white for Spring, has just picked up the croissants from George's Patisserie and the Sunday papers for the Arts Reviews and the Business Sec-

tion. One kid's in a stroller, one toddles beside him. Until they're stopped by the Cops. Mr Mediterranean's up against the wall, arms spread, legs akimbo, frisked before you can blink. The baby in the stroller has it's fat little arms up; one Cop frisks the pockets of its bed jacket. The toddler beside his father's up against the wall too, fat little arms raised, fat little legs akimbo. The other Cop's down on her knee feeling inside his nappy. That's bad enough but the thing is, both kids go into frisk mode automatically. The kids aren't toilet trained but they know the Frisk Position. "Yep," I reply to that old derro Bald Eagle's eyes, "I could easily have lived my whole life through and been all the better for not seeing that."

there're the bells of the Sacred Heart again
interrupting *Law and Order*
clanging for
another dead junkie

The Shop Keeper's got No Change
The ATM's got No Money
The Housing Officer's got No Housing
The Employment Officer's got No Employment
The Psych Ward's got No Beds
The Welfare Worker's got No Welfare
The Dealer's got plenty of Deals
The Crisis Team's got plenty of Crises
The Refuge has got plenty of Refugees
The Drug Squad's got plenty of Drugs

It took years to befriend Bald Eagle. Say gudday. Bludge a fag. He never talks but he's patiently performing something Simple; demanding Simple Means; demanding an Audience. Why not give him a Nod, a Bow?

I'd be walking down The Street, suddenly I'd realize something was watching from a bundle of filthy rags huddled in a doorway.

the taw memory
is thrown
from a pupileye
huddled rags
bundled in a dark doorway

My father is driving fast along a dusty country road in the full mid-summer heat. We pass an abandoned service station. Something is watching from amongst the rusted car bodies and vehicle hoists, the petrol pumps crowned with broken yellow rams, the sign of the flying red horse on its back in the dust, the grease and the sump oil. Something that only has eyes that move is out there. A bald eagle, clipped wings, extracted claws, is chained to a dead branch on a dead tree. I have seen it and it has seen me. Splitting the second. Some granite thing, malign in its endurance, its abandonment. Something at the heart of the living metal left after the flesh. It has held together just enough, made itself small enough, that life and death have forgotten it. Grace – long gone. Mercy – long gone. Hope – long gone. A parody of Peace. The petrified eyes of a petrified humanity. It is with me now as I speak. Still. Still. Still. Bald Eagle. Chained Manuscript. Abused Substance. Unredeemable. Fearocity.

forever
the pawtaw
pupileye
flung

forever
the flatblack
stonewafer
falling

As the Auctioneer said, "Do ya just want somewhere to live or do you want a lifestyle?" The banks of collapsed-lung plastic bags of pus-yellow Quick-fix, the empty syringe packets, the used syringes, the greasy tissues, the used condom sachets, the used condoms – St Kilda Snowdrifts it's called on The Street; always a winter landscape by Bosch or Brueghel where Santa's always come and gone and filled the stockings. Hope and hopelessness – contradictory, self-

defeating, self-sustaining actions. Defensive dignity. Oceans of humanity. Oceans of wave action like those excuses for waves on the beach.

Tattoo, in her 'Live Hard. Die Fast' T-shirt, won't make eye contact while she's working. The Ugly Mug curb crawling will. Tattoo walks through the dark with her skirt pulled up, pointing to her hairy black pussy. He cruises along beside her pointing to his erect cock holding the steering wheel up like a lollipop stick. He points it at her. She nods. Making a question mark with it, he points it at me even though I'm labouring along pushing my stolen Safeways trolley full of groceries and wearing my 'Dip Me in Chocolate and Feed Me to the Lesbians' T-shirt. "You do doubles, love?" she asks hospitably, passing me her plastic bag of Quick-fix. To be obliging I take a sniff, then an appraising look at the Ugly Mug, at the invitation of his questioning dick. "Nah!" I say, "Never fall for crap advertising." "You'll do," he calls at her as she hesitates. "See ya love," she says as she hops in.

They park in the carpark behind a block of red brick flats. He wants to do it outside; doesn't want to mess up the upholstery. Taking off his 'Solar Panel for a Sex Machine' T-shirt, he asks her to call him Lucky. "What a romantic you are Lucky," she says, "under the stars." They do it quick-smart up against the laundry wall. He leaves her straightening herself up on the black plastic box of some tenant's Worm Farm.

Struggling. Half-formed. Inarticulate. Performing our debt to materiality: emerging from the rock. Michangelo's 'Slaves'. Oprah Winfey's talk-show guests. Struggling, in our Message T-shirts, to find the Shape That Waits.

"Hey you! Big Red! I heard ya got the biggest dick on The Street. Come round some time. Just ask at the Gatwick for Tattoo."

I used to rest me weary bones on a wooden seat on the quiet side of The Street. Sun in Winter. Shade in Summer. But it's been removed – as Evidence. They reckoned the scratches on it were done by an Aboriginal woman running mad with an axe. 'Mad Black with Axe'. Some axe. I could make the same marks with my thumb nail. The Cops blew her head off anyway, outside the Housing Association Office. For months there were flowers piled up on the spot, left to rot, where she was dropped. 'No Charges Laid.'

That was the seat where Tattoo and I would usually meet on The Street.

"The thing that keeps me going everyday" she'd say "is remembering my dreams. If I can Sift Through and Carry Over even one fragment I'm made for the day. Last night I dreamt I'd snuck into a sort of Church Fete, Christian Revival Crusade. My parents went in for that sort of thing. Oral Roberts. Billy Graham. Anyway one of the nasty Christian ladies told me to get out, "And take this with you while you're at it," she said, handing me all this rubbish. As I left I yelled at her, "And God bless you too". And she yelled back, "Well, He certainly won't bless you". "He doesn't have to bless me. He *loves me*," I replied. Nightmares are OK even. Dream dogs have pop-up paper teeth if you laugh just before they sink them in. I got rid of my boyfriend, Big Red because he wouldn't let me alone in the morning when I needed to Sift Through.

there're the bells of the Sacred Heart again
interrupting *Judge Judy*
clanging away sad-crazy
looks like another deadie

"The other afternoon I found Big Red, really the worse for wear, rooting through my refrigerator. He kissed me on the mouth. I was surprised because I felt nothing. He was doing it because he was scared I'd kick him out, because he needs to use me. It was a bit sad how clear-headed I was. I look out of the window at the sea. The sun's going down but it's been a brutally cold day and the sea is an ugly sputum-grey. I see a filthy creature high-stepping regal-slow through the water, teats flapping from its hairy hide. There are tiny dangling offspring squealing and suckling from each teat as she prances daintily through the water. I know it's Death: this boy's death, lots of deaths, she's suckling. I don't want this boy or this death or this fake love in my life, in my house.

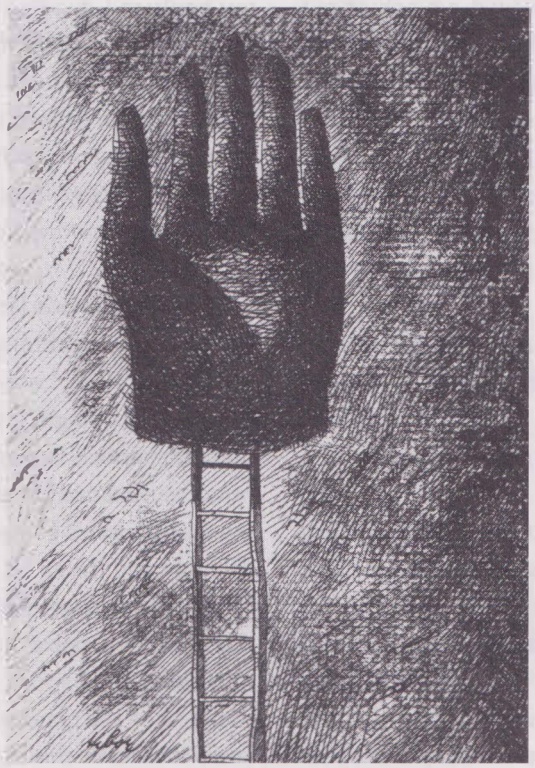
"I'm asleep but something's speeding towards me. The sound keeps coming faster and faster until it explodes inside my cranium. Big Red jumped off the railway bridge into the path of an early morning commuter train the other day. It's not that so much, it's his father's speech at the funeral I can't get over. If his fucking father had simply said those things to him he might never have topped himself. The thing is, that old bastard *knew*. That's what got me, he just held out on the kid. What had he been waiting for? He'd been waiting for this chance to give a fucking end-of-year speech, an appropriate send-off, execute some classical form. "Tragedy, drama, comedy," he said, "there are only ever the few stories available. He died as he lived – dangerously – wearing his favourite 'If You're Not Living on the Edge You're Taking Up Too Much Room' T-shirt. Now he's got the story straight he's Safe. Safe. Safe. But for me, everything's smashed and there's a space, big as a grave, waiting for something new to be said."

Last time we met there was no wooden seat and she simply said, in passing, "I've stopped dreaming".

the Revenue Generation's waiting
for the Recovery Party to start
and
the Worms are just Waiting

there're the bells of the Sacred Heart
just clanging away
just clanging away

I don't want to witness
I just want to Fly-Buy
but I haven't got enough points
to get even half-way



Jiri Tibor

The House that Ruth Built

fiction

J.M.A. Stenning

IT WAS JUST ON five o'clock when Ruth sat down to her afternoon's reading. The sweet smell of clove-impregnated quail was a delicate flavour in the air, and it was only a matter of waiting now. There was a guest coming for dinner, on Ruth's insistence. She wanted to meet the girl her son was neglecting his family for. He was out almost every night of the week. Quite often, his clothes smelt like cigarettes. She tried not to think about it as she lowered herself down, taking the book from the coffee table, where she had placed it earlier, neatly square with the bevelled edge.

Ruth sat at a book as if she were unfolding an ancient scroll and about to discover the most elusive of life's mysteries. She sat head erect, well poised, her chin just slightly tilted, her glasses on her nose. She never lounged in the grand luxuriousness of the lazy reader. She never had to wonder how one was to read the facing page if one's head was resting on one's arm or pillow. She sat at books the way children are forced to sit at piano. She timed her daughter's music practice; she allotted herself a certain time each day to reading. It was intellectual rigour; it was practising at life. Like musical scales, she used the mathematical approach.

Ruth exchanged books frequently at the library, scanned reviews, listened to the radio. She came at it all with a sense of reverence, as if words were a precious thing and that books were something to wonder at. She read fiction and non-fiction, essays, philosophy, autobiography (though I never saw her read poetry but that may be beside the point), in short, whatever seemed of some literary, and therefore, life merit.

She had three children, each spaced seven years apart. This was for her, as well as their, assumed well-being. She was sure to be able to spend the appropriate amount of time on each of their needs without compromise. She convinced her husband very early on that this would be their approach. This was the way to give them the best in life. Her eldest son, twenty-four, now practised law like his father. Their middle son was going to be a doctor, they insisted, but he could choose whatever special field he liked within the discipline, and their youngest daughter, well, time would tell. She was only ten or so. You can't *decide* these things – Ruth liked to respond to their individuality.

AT A QUARTER TO SIX, she heard the front door being opened. It was the slow-motion sound of a door handle opening and the familiar entering. It signalled the beginning of the end of the day, when the men came in, disturbing the calm equilibrium of home. It was her son, and the other voice must be the girl's.

"Mum!" Tom called out, as she was appearing from the lounge room. "Mum, this is Helen."

"Hello," Ruth said in the cool detachment of defence, holding out her hand.

Helen was not quite the person she was expecting. Ruth was used to the girls Tom had been through university with; the well groomed girls of his class. They mostly kept classical, blunt cut bobs, and even the ethnic girls had their hair straightened. They wore well fitting clothes, understated and stylish. It wasn't a classist point, just a matter of aesthetic.

Helen wasn't like that at all. Her hair, which seemed to be growing out of a savagely short cut, was wavy and not quite even. Her face was freckled, and her clothes seemed one size too big. She wore sneakers that had pen markings on the rubber that sealed the

edges. As Ruth showed Helen through, letting Helen walk first, Ruth could see there were holes in the cuffs of her jeans where Helen's heel wore through the fabric.

Usually when people visited for the first time, they remarked on the number of books in the house – heavy dark bookcases filled neatly made up the only furniture apart from the minimum necessary tables and chairs – but Helen didn't comment on them at all. She said, "What a nice tree," as she took a look through the window in the dining room.

Ruth was mixing the salad at the bench. "The clothes line used to be under it. We had to move the line because the tree was shedding leaves and sticks all over the clothes. I ruined a brand new white T-shirt."

"Right," Helen said.

Just then, Tom's little sister appeared with eagerness. She liked to stock up on ammunition to tease her big brother with and a girlfriend was just the thing. But Helen wasn't the sort of person she was expecting either. Helen reminded her of her drama teacher at school, friendly like that.

"Got any pets?" Helen said because the little girl was wearing a dolphin T-shirt.

The girl, still smiling, looked slowly at her mother, her mother looking slowly back at her daughter before staring back into the salad.

"I *had* an axolotyl," the little girl said. "But it disappeared."

And the two of them sat down and Helen started describing all the pets she had ever kept, at the little girl's insistence – ducks, rabbits, frogs, cats, always cats.

"Mum hates cats," the girl said.

"Well you're either a cat or a dog person."

"She hates dogs too."

"Samantha, did you finish your homework?" Ruth asked loudly.

And Samantha ignored the cue and stayed on, swinging her legs, laughing with Helen.

Soon enough, Ruth's husband and other son returned home and dinner began. Three courses but after the first, Helen said, "I didn't realize there was more. I think I filled myself up." And Ruth politely said, "Don't be silly."

It didn't take long to get around to the question Ruth was most interested in. She was hoping her husband would ask it soon.

"SO HELEN, what do you *do?*" he said.

She was caught with a mouthful of spinach. Everyone kindly smiled and looked at their plates till she swallowed. Helen winked at the little girl who laughed. "Oh . . . um . . . This and that. I tutor a bit, kids in English, make flyers and newsletters on the computer for local clubs, bits here and there. When I get desperate I make cappuccinos."

"Just odd jobs?" Ruth asked.

"Mum," Tom whispered.

Helen smiled, unperturbed. "Fairly odd," she said.

Samantha said, "I *knew* you looked like an English teacher."

"Oh, not a proper one. I wouldn't want to do *that.*"

Ruth gathered herself. "I was a teacher for twenty years . . . It's a highly underrated profession. Much maligned."

Helen nodded vigorously. "All my brothers and sisters are teachers, *and* their husbands and wives. So I won't do it on a matter of principle."

"How many siblings do you *have?*" Ruth asked.

"Eight."

And everybody gagged.

"Well, Catholics, you know."

But the usual mutter of sarcastic laughing didn't come. "We're Catholic," the father said.

"Of course, I forgot. That joke only humours Protestants."

Ruth asked more questions. Helen explained that they were all born within ten years of each other, yes, a set of twins as well. It made Ruth put down her knife and fork and pass her younger son some beans. "How did your mother cope?" she said.

Helen, having long since removed the guilt attached to this comment shrugged and said, "She was all right . . . after the hospitalization."

Tom scoffed. The other children giggled. His parents cast a quick look at each other.

Tom said, talking as he chewed through the breast of a quail, that Helen didn't need to get a job, because she had some good news. *No, don't be pregnant,* thought Ruth as she tried to breathe deeply. *Is that why her clothes are big?* Helen nudged Tom under the table and shook her head, a slight shake percepti-

ble to his eyes only, the sort of gesture only open for reading by the intimate. But Tom was off.

"She's just had her book accepted. She's written a novel."

Real silence, even the chewing stopped. Helen blushed and looked down at her plate. The father was the first to speak. He congratulated her and was genuinely fascinated to have *someone like that* at his table. At least she wasn't another lawyer to contend with. "What's it about?"

Helen was embarrassed. Ruth, being far from impressed, was on her guard. Helen mumbled off some half-baked notions on the work but gave up, surrendering the last two years of work as an odd job. The father was expecting more and thought her strange. She didn't know what she was saying. She was watching Ruth in the corner of her eye.

Framing Ruth's fragile head was a monolithic bookcase filled end to end with hardbacks and paperbacks, dictionaries and critiques, leather-bound classics, and large art books put on their sides to fit. In her own parents' home, there was only one similarly sized bookcase, filled to the brim. Books were crammed in on top of each other – even the religious ones were jammed in without ceremony. In front of them, photographs of children and grandchildren were propped up without frames. The messiness and the inevitable dustiness was cause for her mother's hay fever, and who knows what sort of dust mites and other creatures were sowing the seeds for allergies and asthma? Helen had never encountered such cleanliness before; at her mother's place, books were something just left around, and passed from person to person, never to be returned. Nobody seemed to own them. They were not the room's sole decoration. They weren't a big deal. Helen felt dirty. She could see what Ruth was thinking.

Ruth didn't want her son to be caught up with *one of them*. She wanted someone with a proper job. She didn't think that if everyone had proper jobs, there wouldn't be the books to read, the paintings to enjoy, the music to listen to, the movies to watch (all the things that people with proper jobs like to enjoy in their leisure time). Ruth had read biographies. She knew what, by and large, writers were like. Unreliable drunkards, drug takers, promiscuous too, they seemed to have lovers everywhere. It was all well and good to read about it, and to *discuss* it *intellectually,* but not *here*, not at *this* table. Not with her *children*. Paper not flesh. She wondered how many men Helen had been with. Oh, she knew that times had changed, it was different in her generation, but she wondered how Tom dealt with that. Her son wasn't a boy any more, and she didn't want to think about that either. She worried if he was taking precautionary measures. How many writers had she read about who, if they weren't already mad, went mad dying of syphilis?

"It's not very stable though, is it? Writing?"

Helen shook her head and shrugged. The shrug was getting on Ruth's nerves. She didn't appreciate the *que sera*.

"Would you *go* into teaching?"

Helen stared at Ruth and saw that Ruth was not seeing her. She was only seeing her son in the hands of this woman.

So Helen lied.

Ruth relaxed. She had conquered the variable. The talk moved to film, Tom's father describing the "fantastic" movie he had watched on SBS the previous night. No, Helen hadn't seen it. "That's right," Tom's father said. "You two were out again last night . . ."

Tom stiffened at the sarcastic rebuke. It was a sore point, Tom's going out. While his mother was afraid it was setting a bad example for the children, his father, who didn't have the inherent mechanical cleanliness of his wife, was jealous. "It's a shame," his father said. "You miss a lot of great stuff."

"Actually," Helen said, "We didn't go out last night. I just don't have a TV."

And another embarrassed pause.

Ruth stood to clean the table. Helen stood too, and offered. Ruth firmly refused. Helen was a guest, it wasn't necessary Ruth insisted. *Why can't she sit down?* But Helen wasn't sitting, she stood wondering what to do. "I've been trained," Helen said apologetically, but with a bit of righteous pride, "that everyone chips in. And whoever doesn't cook washes up."

In the natural stillness in everybody sitting around the table, it was clear that they *never* got up to "help". Tom pulled on Helen's hand, and whispered to her that it was all right. Ruth smarted when she just heard Helen whispering to Tom that *he* should at least clear the table a bit. Ruth always cleared up, how else

would the children be free to do their homework?

Helen fidgeted. The thought of the constant giving of mothers hurt her. She couldn't stand it. She wouldn't stand it. "But there's so much to do," she whispered, and Tom couldn't understand Helen's frantic concern. "She's not a slave," she said.

"Helen, she doesn't *want* us to. She does it her way. We'll wreck her system." Tom was annoyed now. Helen's ideas didn't work here.

Helen shook her head and, collecting the glasses from the table, moved into the kitchen. Ruth was filling the sink with soapy water next to the open dishwasher. Ruth was cleaning the plates thoroughly before standing them up in the dishwasher racks.

Helen didn't have a dishwasher. She wondered if this double cleaning was normal. "Just tell me what to do, and I'll do it. I can't just sit there."

"No, it's all right," Ruth said, her voice shaking. They were strangers, and it was getting stranger.

"Here . . . please," Helen said as Ruth was trying to pass a plate into the rack, the suds making the surface uncertain. Ruth was wearing thick plastic gloves that gave her some grip. Helen was wearing none and was trying to intercept the plate with nervous fingers.

"It's okay," Ruth said more firmly, beginning to pull her arm back, bringing the plate back to her.

In the push and pull, Helen began another surrender, realizing that she was causing a scene and embarking on an irretrievable error.

She thinks I'm a what do they call it, a "victim of the patriarchy", Ruth thought. *She thinks I'm an oppressed housewife just because I cook and clean and have a pink apron on. But I clean so that everything is safe. It needs to be done properly for health reasons, for protection. They're my children.* She thought of Tom coming in smelling of smoke at late hours. *I just want my children to be SAFE.*

Ruth pulled the plate back with more force, just as Helen abandoned her grip. Helen's face crashed – another social bungle.

Ruth wasn't prepared for the sudden release of tension in the plate. It slipped under her gloves. It went sailing behind her. In slow motion, everyone watched it. It sailed out of the open plan kitchen. It smashed against the bookshelf.

Smash.

Suds dripped down the dark stained wood.

Tom exploded. "Helen, why don't you just give it up?"

Helen blushed deeply and ran to the plate smashed in pieces. It was a fairly clean break, no little splinters, at least, only a few tiny shards almost undetectable under the spine of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. Maybe no-one would see those as she picked up the bigger pieces.

Ruth was saying, "It's okay. It's just a plate. Leave it. I'll clean it."

Tom moved over to Helen and put his hand on her shoulder. It was part compassion, part it's done now. Know better next time.

Helen stood and handed him the broken plate. In those pieces, like his hand on her shoulder was the unspoken message: it was his fault too.

Tom took the pieces reluctantly. Their soapiness was uncomfortable in his hands.

"Take this," Helen said, "because I have to get something from my bag."

"It's out in the hallway," Tom said.

She nodded and left the room. She stooped to her bag and retrieved her keys. She let herself out the front door.

WHEN THEY REALIZED she had gone, Tom morosely went upstairs to bed. No-one spoke about it. Not until tomorrow, Ruth thought, when it's all over.

When the washing up was done and the counter disinfected, Ruth took a damp cloth and a bottle of detergent over to the bookshelf. On wood, she used a mild surface cleaner that she had discovered was gentle enough for the job (although the kids laughed when she had bought it, they said it looked and smelt like wee. "Don't say wee, say urine"). After picking out the ceramic shards caught under the spine of ancient history, she sprayed the wood and wiped it down.

She called out to her daughter to get ready for bed.

Letter to the Editor

I HAVE FOR SOME TIME now pondered over our subscription to *overland* since I now find so little of interest and have kept the subscription going for reasons of nostalgia as much as anything. Issue no. 161, which was my plane reading on a recent trip to Melbourne, has done little to convince me that your *overland* is for me.

If a literary magazine feels the need to devote three articles to the S11 protests at the World Economic Forum, then one of them at least needs to discuss the issues. Your three all focus on the demos. While this may provide food for the "angry young radicals" whom your reviewers Tony Dewberry and John Tully address, it is much less nourishing for a reader who remembers how people lived in the 1930s and '40s.

Other matters of substance can wait. One last point for now. PLEASE desist from the current stylish habit of printing on top of illustrations! I found two pages of the Frank Hardy symposium impossible to read. As I had just finished reading Pauline Armstrong's book, this was particularly frustrating.

Yours sincerely,
Amirah Inglis

David Williamson replies to Graham Sewell

GRAHAM SEWELL'S demolition job on McKenzie Wark (Spring 2000) has only just come to my attention. McKenzie apparently won't reply but I'd like to make a comment. I was represented in the article, sneeringly, as one of the straw men of the left who even the intellectually incompetent McKenzie could demolish with ease. But having placed himself atop the "greasy pole" of Australian intellectuals by demolishing Macca, his designated previous candidate, and no doubt getting the same sort of emotional high Ghenghis Khan experienced as he watched the heads of his opponents roll past, I'd like to offer a criticism of Graham's 'critique'. Graham's feeling of superiority over the hapless McKenzie stems from his belief that he has truly assimilated the postmodern catechism of Foucault, in particular Foucault's insistence that we can't ever "unmask ideology to reveal the transcendental truth". McKenzie, having failed to grasp the implications of this creed, according to Graham is really just a modernist in postmodernist clothing. If Graham was in fact such a sophisticated postmodernist as he would lead us to believe and if he took Foucault's dictum seriously, he would be self-reflexive enough to realize that all critical writing is merely ideological posturing. The very act of criticism (as distinct from 'critique') assumes that one's position is closer to an objective truth than that of your opponent, and as any good and dogmatic postmodernist knows, there is no such thing as objective truth. Yet Graham's vituperative put-down of McKenzie, myself and others, seems to be chock-a-block full of statements that he wishes us to believe are true. "Let's face it," he says, "in the hands of Tony's Cronies, the Third Way is indistinguishable in almost every respect from Margaret Thatcher's 'There is No Alternative'." I think Graham is right. I think this IS a statement that is more or less true. And it can be shown as such by objective and measured 'truths' such as the fact that income distribution has continued to become unequal at just as fast a rate under the Third Way as under Thatcher. Graham can't have it both ways. He himself can't posture as the very essence of a modern postmodernist, use it to bolster

his intellectual status, and then keep writing old-fashioned criticisms that abound with truth statements that can be verified or otherwise by empirical data. Empiricism, far from being dead, is expanding our ability to truly understand the world and will be around long after the facile posturing of Foucault's disciples has become a joke in the intellectual history of the human species.

A Reply to Responses, Substantial and Apparent

Graham Sewell

ALTHOUGH READERS of my recent article in *overland* may not suspect this, the spectre of McKenzie Wark does not loom large in my life. Indeed, before the early part of last year I had never even heard of McKenzie Wark, let alone read his writings or heard him speak. As I said in my article, Wark and I inhabited completely different worlds; that was until my colleague, Bill Harley, rather mischievously put one of Wark's *Australian* articles under my nose knowing that it would raise my hackles. This was his infamous (in my eyes, at least) piece entitled 'Third Way to the Critical Masses'. Bill and I put our names to a letter published by *The Australian* the following week which, among other things, accused Wark of beginning to sound like "the new Paddy McGuinness". This really was the crux of our point: far from offering a viable alternative to the entrenchment of vested interest, the burgeoning of corporate power, and the emergence of petty (and not-so-petty) tyranny, the inevitable outcome of Wark's reading of the Third Way is that we end up pandering to the likes of McGuinness. It was therefore gratifying to us that, in a moving moment of self-reflection, Wark acknowledged as much in his valediction in *The Australian* late last year.

As Wark's interpretation of the Third Way started this whole thing off it seems reasonable to dwell on it a little longer. In my *overland* article I pointed out that the first usage of the term, Third Way, that I had come across was in Karl Mannheim's book, *A Diagnosis of Our Time*. (Note: he proposes *a* Third Way, not *the* Third Way; Mannheim was not an absolutist.) Written during the early years of the Second World War, this book is both elegiac and brimming with hope; Mannheim looks forward to a time when the bestialities of Nazism and Stalinism are nothing more than a painful but powerful memory. In their place Mannheim proposes a genuinely inclusive democracy that is far from the focus groups and poll-driven populism of contemporary Third Wayers. In today's cynical times Mannheim's vision of the world may look somewhat naïve, utopian even. Some would go as far as to say that, offering a spirit of compromise in an era of extremes, Mannheim prefigured the 'triangulation' beloved by contemporary practitioners of the Third Way who think that by taking 'a little from column A and a little from column B' we can meld the best of both worlds from Left and Right. Just imagine the obscenity of combining the 'best' of Nazism and Stalinism which only goes to show that Mannheim's vision was of a Third Way as a genuine alternative rather than the Middle Way we've ended up with where the brutalities of economic rationalism are moderated by the hand-wringing platitudes of bourgeois liberalism.

I would love to say these things – and much more besides – to Wark in person but I cannot as he has refused an offer to debate with me live on Radio National's 'Arts Today' program. As a consummate media performer he would surely have had an immediate advantage over me but he chose not to exploit this, preferring a pragmatic but, in my view, evasive strategy of containment rather than robust intellectual argument.

Which is not to say that others haven't leapt to Wark's defence on his behalf (the rehash of Lumby's *Strewth!* piece notwithstanding). Apparently the responses to my article can be categorized on the basis of their theme, presented here in descending order ranging from support to outright opposition:

Theme 1: "Right on! It's about time someone stuck it up Macca."

Theme 2: "Right on! It's about time someone stuck it up Macca . . . but did you really have to be so mean?"

Theme 3: "Poor Old Macca. He's such a soft target. Why don't you go after the real enemy?"

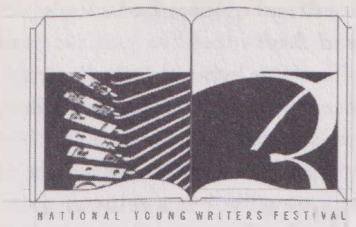
Theme 4: "Poor Old Macca. He's on our/your side. Why don't you go after the real enemy? Oh, and he's also writing the blurb for my next book." (A variation of Theme 3).

Theme 5: "Sewell's article was: a) drivel; b) pointless; c) empty posturing; and, d) warmed-over sixties radical chic [whatever that last one might be]."

I use the word 'apparently' with some deliberation because, with one notable exception, no-one was willing to stick their head above the parapet and engage in a public debate on matters of substance such as Wark's celebration of the Third Way, his hackneyed and nostalgic depiction of Punk, or his idiosyncratic interpretation of the ideas of Gilles Deleuze. Interestingly, the one person who was willing to stand up and be counted was David Williamson, although I suspect that he was motivated more out of a desire to defend his relevance to contemporary Australian life rather than out of any sympathy with Wark's predicament. Anyway, you can judge for yourselves: Williamson's letter is published in full above.

This is neither the time nor the place to comment on Williamson's well-known position on 'postmodernism'. I would reiterate my point, however, that there are many Australian writers and commentators other than the likes of Williamson and Ellis that Wark could have sought out as interesting and innovative voices of dissent from the mainstream. By the way David, if being likened to "a pair of old slippers" is the worst review you've ever received then you obviously didn't see some of the critics' opinions of *Dog's Head Bay*!

To those who objected to my piece on matters of style rather than substance I offer no apologies – I am neither a poet nor a novelist but a reluctant public intellectual who was moved to take on one of the Goliaths of Australian media studies. To accusations of "incivility" I would offer the following response: polemic is a legitimate form of critique, if only to hold up the mirror to the absurdities of much of Wark's writing and reflect them back on him with equal intensity. To those who are supporters of Wark's political and intellectual position I would say, "Put your feet up and settle down to an evening reading the new P.P. McGuinness. But why don't you just read the old one instead? He does the same thing much better."



Responses to the 2000 National Young Writers Festival held in Newcastle

PHIL DOYLE'S piece in the previous issue of overland *caused a great deal of discussion and criticism among the NYWF community, especially on its message board. We received four responses to his piece and they are all included below.*

Sarah Attfield

PHIL DOYLE'S REVIEW of the 2000 National Young Writers' Festival in *overland* 161 certainly stirred up the subscribers of the festival e-group <groups.yahoo.com/group/nywf>. Most were angry at Phil's descriptions of young writers as 'schmoozers' or 'grant junkies' and accused him of being unfair and unnecessarily aggressive. They pretty much closed ranks and were unanimous in their dismissal of his opinion. Phil is definitely someone who speaks his mind and isn't worried about what people may think of him when he does. This is a characteristic that can be confronting for those used to more genteel circles. Not everyone can cope with being heckled and Phil's bullshit detector is highly sensitive. But has he gone too far this time by criticizing one of the only writers' festivals that dares to try something different, and gives young people a chance to express themselves away from the patronizing stare of the establishment?

I grew up in Thatcherite Britain where anarchy or apathy seemed to be the choice for the young, with most following the apathy path. To see young people at the festival getting involved and passionate about important issues is encouraging – it's much easier to do nothing. Many of the people who attend the festival are busy organizing events and protests and sacrificing their time for the causes they feel concerned about. So why shouldn't they take some time out to find ways to promote their writing and gain advice on how to survive in the literary world? Rather than being 'grant junkies' many of the young writers are fully aware that the opportunities for supporting themselves through writing are non-existent and that grants may be the only chance at significant funding for art projects. Of course they want to get some inside knowledge from those who have been through or work for the system, it isn't often that young writers are able to ask questions to representatives of the establishment. The National Young Writers' Festival (NYWF) provides a non-alienating forum for ideas and opinions to be expressed. This kind of freedom and supportive environment is not so readily available at the big mainstream literary festivals where networking has been honed to a fine art.

Phil attributes a negative connotation to networking, and in the elitist environs of a Melbourne Writers' festival I agree. To see the fawning and mutual congratulations in a room full of people who actually hate each other is pretty hard to stomach. But this doesn't happen at the NYWF. Naturally people exchange contact details, and hope that something fruitful may come out of new connections. I certainly didn't notice the NYWF crowd standing around drinking red wine saying, 'love your work dahhling' while sneering politely at each other. There just wasn't the pretence that occurs in the establishment. Phil certainly wouldn't subscribe to that kind of falseness and I don't think the majority of festival goers would either.

So, I think Phil is wrong in that respect, but that isn't to say I disagree with all of his review. As usual he makes some relevant points. I think he's right when he mentions that many of the festival goers have little idea of the city hosting the festival (myself included). It's very easy to get absorbed by festival events and never actually begin to wonder about the people of Newcastle and what they may think of the large group of writers, artists and performers who land on their doorstep for a few days then piss off sharpish once it's all over.

I also agree that many of the exciting and diverse elements of the 1999 festival were missing. Like Phil, I was disappointed by the attitude of some alleged 'successful' writer panellists who displayed patronizing and superior attitudes towards readers and other writers. There was also an element of participants who most definitely can not be classified as 'young' writers any more, who took over several panels for their own drunken pleasure and really had nothing useful to impart except for a few mildly amusing anecdotes. I got the most out of panels that attempted to chew over some complicated issues such as tokenism and sexuality and hopefully made audience members and panellists consider their attitudes. Phil, Van Badham, Chris Gregory and I, attempted to bring to light some of the inequities within the literary establishment via our participation on the Classy Panel. Hopefully we made the audience aware that the working-class voice is alive and well in all its diversity. Although most festival goers would be familiar with identity politics and issues of marginality, I did find a lack of understanding surrounding class issues, and these need to be presented. I don't think it's completely fair of Phil to brand all tertiary educated people as 'wankers' but he's right to say that voices from outside the privileged circles are often unheard.

And there was some great poetry/spoken word that showcased talent from all around the country, including Sydney!

In general I enjoyed the festival. I'm pleased that somebody is bothered to organize such an event, and I think its existence is important. It was good to be able to hear a variety of voices, but I believe there is still room for further inclusiveness. I'm sure that most of the festival goers and participants went away with ideas and new ways of looking at things whether they were delighted or outraged with what they had seen. A sense of community has developed from the festival which attempts to look at the scene away from the mainstream, while considering ways to infiltrate and change the establishment from the inside. Yes, there is a lot of mutual encouragement and support, but there is also open criticism and debate. This is not a group of back-slapping sycophants, but that doesn't mean to say that festival people shouldn't be made aware of issues they may not yet have considered. I hope the festival continues, and I'm sure the organizers will consider the criticisms and think of new ways to keep the festival as 'refreshing' and 'energetic' as Phil wished. Good luck to them, and I hope Phil will be back there again this year too.

Sarah Attfield is a working-class poet. Five Islands Press published her collection Hope in Hell *in 2000.*

Michael Caridi

I ALSO WENT to the National Young Writers' Festival. I was invited by Adam Ford to sit on a panel and discuss the question of whether journal publishing is the first step to getting a book published.

I was blown away to think that I would be able to go up to Newcastle and spend time expressing my ideas to people I admire and respect in the world of writing. I found Phil Doyle's memory of the festival very different from mine.

Doyle thinks that "Spoken word is pretty much stand-up comedy". I see spoken word as one of two separate types of recital. The first is the kind that occurs at the Dan Poets society, on the other hand there is spoken word, exemplified by Babble. The difference is that one sticks mainly to a formal style of poetry while the other extends to include other types of spoken word – which can include the humorous type.

At the moment in Melbourne, spoken word is at a high point and is influencing the way people write. For Doyle to say that Australia's young writers have become shallow in order to grab an audience is ridiculous. It would be like

saying that Doyle only made that point so that he could pretend to be superior to the writers that do use humour in some of their pieces . . . how stupid.

Doyle also saw at NYWF a generation of networking schmoozers and grant junkies. That's an offensive generalization. My cousin and I have put out a small poetry magazine for almost a year now and we do so for the love of writing. We have even combined the magazine launches with a series of spoken word nights. We have done all this out of our own pockets and have never ever even come close to making a profit. I am only twenty-three years old and I don't consider myself a part of this generation that Doyle refers to. However I do think of myself as a person who got off his arse to do something when it came to his passions, rather than just sit around talking and bitching about what everyone else does and doesn't do.

Yet Doyle thinks that the general tone of the panels was 'why we're successful and you're not'. He also thought that the main reason many were successful was because they knew somebody in the industry to start with. Funny, I don't remember that theme at any of the panels. Doyle might remember the one where Luke Whitby sat there in the middle of the poetry publishers from Five Islands Press and UQP and pointed out that he got where he is because he put his money where his ideas were and self-published not one but two of his own books. He doesn't qualify as someone who became successful because he knew somebody or because he went out and changed his opinions and attitudes to become a part of the 'machine'. He did it through sheer hard work.

Overall I think that the festival was a great success. There were many excellent panels and best of all there was something to do every night in the way of spoken word. At each of these events was a broad range of writing styles. None was discriminated against and all were given due respect. I listened attentively to people like the humorous writer Sean M. Wheelan and I also listened to a certain Phil Doyle read a fantastic piece at the *Going Down Swinging* launch – each very different, but both very good.

It's a shame that we can't just enjoy the festival for what it is – a chance to meet, learn and watch some of the best writing Australia has to offer.

Michael Caridi is co-editor of the Melbourne zine observations from the back of a cafe *and its accompanying website.*

Michael Aiken

"SPOKEN WORD IS pretty much stand-up comedy." Though we all know it anyway, I'll state the bloody obvious and say: BULLSHIT. Though there can be a comic element, it is neither essential nor dominant, either in the spoken word at the NYWF in particular, or in Australian spoken word generally. Look at Sarah Attfield's work – and I'd just like to pre-empt Doyle's response that Sarah Attfield is a poet that did a reading, as opposed to a spoken-worder, with two points: firstly, the obvious again, spoken word is a catchall for anything the speaker chooses to spit out; secondly, if you wanna get pedantic, Sarah Attfield's readings of her work ARE different from just reading her work off the page. Anyone who has heard her read would agree that it adds a depth and understanding to the text, as is often the case in such situations. Or, another writer Doyle seems to hold some regard for, look at Andrew Sutherland's performances in the Art Gallery as one of the billed performers, and again his performances in the open mic sections of the *voiceworks* launch and the *GDS* launch. Neither of these two had any essentially comic pieces in their performances, yet despite this lack of "pretty much stand-up comedy", they were very well received by the spoken word community, and the festival goers in general. As with virtually all the performers in both the billed and open mic sections of the festival, their work was strong and entertaining, but not overtly comic, or 'shallow', as Doyle declared.

On that point, "it highlighted just how shallow Australia's young writers have become in order to grab an audience", I personally didn't attend the "joke debate", nor did a lot of others from the festival's spoken word audiences, that I know of. The description in the program, plus the lack of an open mic (or even a billed performance) were enough to keep most of us away. Given the debate's 'joke' status, it evidently should not be considered representative of

much beyond filler. Consider though, the *GDS* launch (one of Doyle's highlights, in fact), which had nothing that could be accused of being shallow, or even "pretty much stand-up comedy", yet was entirely spoken word (and representative of poets from Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Newcastle, the NSW central coast, and Wollongong, just that I know of, on top of the obligatory Sydney and Melbourne crowd). This launch managed, at the end of a long day, to draw and maintain the biggest crowd the Shopfront saw all festival, and entertained that crowd for hours.

Doyle also suggested the 'Melbourne contingent' was somehow sullied by association with the Sydney-dominated spoken word shows ("to see the Melbourne contingent sucked in . . ."). What I'd like to know is just what the hell you mean by this, Phil? Aside from the fact that amongst the numerous sets they did at the festival and in Sydney the following Tuesday, the Melbourne crowd had only two or three comedy pieces (and nothing that aspired to laughs over art), do you really mean to suggest that they somehow modified their material, or wrote entirely new sets, to fit in with the other performers?

Moving on, Doyle proceeds to make a number of sweeping attacks on the festival, and young writers in general, and seems to think Australia's young writers are responsible for the fucked-up state this country's literary tradition has been in since long before this writer was born (and, I suspect, has always been in. Christopher Brennan's treatment by the Australian literary community springs to mind).

"University is a bourgeois-ifying experience." This is an extremely antagonistic and potent phrase, but also ridiculous. Do you mean by this, Phil, that, since the majority of uni graduates are bourgeois, therefore uni somehow turns people over to the Dark Side? Surely this circumstance is more rationally explained by the fact that the restrictions placed on access to tertiary education in Australia mean that non-bourgeois are much less likely to be able to enrol in the first place? But no, Doyle thinks going to uni makes you bourgeois, not the other way round. His commentary is riddled with the kind of divisive, hypocritical, reactionary nonsense typical of the Australian arts community, and the Australian community in general. For example, he has a real problem with "tertiary educated wankers"; and yet he had no trouble, by his account, in getting down with "the little people of Newcastle", which is admirable of him when you consider that Newcastle is a university town. Ever since BHP fucked Newcastle over, the uni has been the city's biggest employer. The university of Newcastle has one of the better reputations in the country, particularly for arts, and the majority of those bands in the 'vibrant' scene up there get a lot of their gigs, and often form, on the uni campus. In fact, the university acts as a surrogate homeground for bands from further afield, such as the central coast, where the anti-youth and anti-art sentiment has created a deadly climate for bands.

I do agree with Doyle that there are very real and very strong divisions of class and economy in this country, and access to education is horrifically restricted. But this us and them mentality he is promoting by attacking anyone who's managed, by whatever means, to get to uni, is merely perpetuating the problem.

Further evidence of Phil's ignorance of who runs what: "the little people of Newcastle aren't the stuff of literary networking". Is he suggesting Newcastle is passive host to the festival, without being connected to the wankier, schmoozier aspects of the Australian literature scene? What about the Newcastle poetry prize? Surely one of, if not *the*, schmooziest of junta-run farces in the Australian literary scene. The entire Australian literature scene, particularly in poetry, is still run by a majority of bods born before TV, who don't understand the 'young writers' (as evidenced by Luke Davies' inclusion at Adelaide as the young rebel). The established Australian literature scene has, to all appearances, ALWAYS been an old boys' club (plus a few old women), definitely since long before the organizers, participants and Target Audience of the NYWF were born, and this old boys' club is still refusing to admit those they disapprove of. Given this climate, it is only natural that the young writers set about building a new infrastructure to circumnavigate the established closed circuit.

If Australian young writers are a pack of mercenary schmoozers, don't come spurting shit about it being not as good as the old days. Instead you should be recognizing the fact that these young networkers are merely living up to the age-old traditions of this country.

Speaking of "not like the old days", grandad, Doyle also had the shamelessness to attack festival organizers, specifically Richard Watts, for not being spontaneous enough. This is simply stupid. Obviously a vital ingredient for any cultural festival is spontaneity, but is that really the responsibility of the organizers? Surely we'd hope for the opposite, namely that the organizers will be, well, organized, providing a framework so there can actually be a festival. It's up to the performers, lecturers, and audience as to what goes from there. (How spontaneous were you, Phil?)

I strongly disagree that zines are "the only truly innovative and challenging area of new young writing in this country", especially within the context of Doyle's comments against spoken word. Ignoring the fact that spoken word is by its nature virtually limitless – with regard to conventions (as are zines) – a fuckload of those zine peddlars (such as Andrew Sutherland) were also dedicated spoken-worders. Try watching more than one spoken-word show next year, Phil, or if you can only go to one, don't just go to the most organized, most heavily promoted and established one (if you're looking for spontaneity, that is).

As a side note, talking of divides and cultural exclusions, it is interesting that Phil's choice for the 'real talent' at the festival was the only form where you had to pay to access the art (no slight against the ziners; they were reasonably priced, and generous in doing swaps and trades, but there is still a cost).

I must also add in response to Phil's "I don't know why it is, but the creative arts areas of this country are dominated by tertiary-educated wankers", that this is because tertiary educated wankers often have more money, more spare time and more access to schmoozing networks. Feel better now you know the answer, Phil? And as for your description of "a creative community that demands attendance at a tertiary institution before a person can contribute to the cultural life of a country", this is as narrow-minded as thinking you need to be commercially published to be considered a successful writer. Look at your own example, the zines. Zine producers ignore all these conventions you bitch about, Phil. Or take myself as an example: some friends and I were able to do a spoken-word set at the festival, and the only requirement was that we showed an active and committed interest in the form, as evidenced by our attendance at all the spoken stuff at the 1999 festival. Your problem isn't that only tertiary educated wankers are permitted to contribute to the community, but that you seem to see the established, traditional, wanker-dominated infrastructures for publication as the only valid measures of success.

And finally, if "writing for publication is a bourgeois activity", why do you lament the lack of published 'working-class voices'? Or are bourgeois activities what the working class aspire to?

Michael Aiken is a writing student at Wollongong University, and recently moved to Sydney, where he works in the security industry.

Shane Jesse Xmass

I WAS INTERESTED, impressed by the functions, machinations, posing, cat purrings and outpourings of the 2000 shambles. (NB I use shambles to describe everything.) They never said what I could attend, so I made it up for myself. Most sessions were informative, mainly because I'm dumb and every time someone opens their mouth, I usually find some chunk of wisdom to fold onto.

I stayed with Newcastle natives, somewhere in Mayfield West, just before the Quix Servo. Unfortunately I never got to the beach. But I heard wondrous tales of dolphins out there, somewhere, but then the NYWF isn't about dolphins is it?

For every 'Uni-educated wanker', there seemed to be some kid who compensated for what they didn't have in natural ability with natural dedication. Now it may piss off the more established when some snot-nosed punk from Broome says the overall quality of writing has slipped. But prove me wrong. Look under the rocks and you'll find better writing than the money changers want to publish. Snap off your

websites and write for eight hours a day. But this is the rub, people who are pissed of with Doyle's article don't or won't understand the frustration of this dedication. It is NO FUN to get pushed around for twenty-five years, not having an outlet for this expression and then find the whole publishing industry is a cache of clowns. More money than sense.

I'm sorry but I can't answer what the NYWF meant to me.

Which leads me then onto 'schmoozing'. I would love to schmooze, but don't know whom to schmooze. Schmooze puts the OO back into Community, which is what the NYWF is about, a community good or bad. If the NYWF is a microcosm of society, then it's full of just as many wankers as good guys. Sometimes it occurred to me that the NYWF was the equivalent to Adult Oriented Rock and I day-dreamed about going into the trees to be a sniper, shooting down the first poet who sounded like Fleetwood Mac. You have to resist such violence in tranquil settings.

The trick to travelling to Newcastle is:

1. Bring a sieve, to sort out the good from the bad.

2. Don't wear a T-shirt that says 'Pennsylvania', unless you want to get accosted by some feral on a bicycle, who puts his fingers into the air, a la hang loose, screaming 'PENCIL – VAIN – NIA – DOOOD'.

3. Leave THE DRUMS at home!

4. Talk to as many people as you can, preferably sober if possible.

5. Don't smoke pot. (I'm fucking serious.) Marijuana's for cry babies. No primal energy was ever sucked up from the unkissed ground by having holes punched into your self respect. But then again, fuck straight edge, pass me a vodka!

How accessible was the festival for a first timer? I know no cliques, no rock star poets, no supergirls, so I had a fairly hard time striking up any semblance of a conversation with them. But that's not a complaint. What happened was I struck up these conversations with THE OTHERS and got pushed through Hamilton on my first night in a shopping trolley. I made my own community, spoke with the unspeaking and tried to make them speak. Possibly this will occur at next year's fest.

On the other side of the abyss though: who has a problem with a constructive criticism of this year's festival? Organizers and other attendees couldn't possibly expect everyone to be in unanimous cahoots on how great the goddam shambles was or is going to be. ARE YOU IN CAHOOTS?

So hear this all you subscribers to the gangs who exclude others from participating: there are new kids on the block and they're gonna walk all over your graves. Next year's NYWF could be a summation of this, the twain, the twin coupling mark to view this, rolling in with the tide current in the ebbing flow and on that crest could be next year's festival, less staid but more challenging?

Here's my predated disclaimer. My masked apologies must go to any offence inferred by this article. I like the festival and will be back next year, but I have a high moral count and a hope for things to be perfect; alas when they're not I get despondent, scared and start kicking out at anyone. O my dear Saint Peter my essence will precede me, open up that golden gate, the horse has bolted.

So does the NYWF inspire? Hell it sure inspired Phil Doyle. I extracted this, like a gold green tooth from my story 'Shut Down the Pick-Up'. Maybe it describes something else besides the festival. On reflection I hope so.

We turned into the certain street – the street we was certain of picking up – these things don't take long – a second crimping here & a second shimmying over there – over there back against the wall – there is nothing that distinguishes a writer from a politician – we all get paid for our rhetoric – it's just on the timeline they are the ones who have progress to bleeding the sheckles outta the populace's pockets – the writer is the last in the food chain – we're the inheritance that brings more burden than profit – half wanna quell my voice & half reckon I should keep speaking my irrelevant realities.

Having said that, see you all at this year's fest and, rest assured, I'm still out to get in on the take.

Shane Jesse Xmass has been remarkably affected by living with Phil Doyle with whom he travelled to the 2000 NYWF. He is writing 'The Horrific Novel'. His email is dambala_wedo@hotmail.com

Gold Coast Postcards

Back seat of a taxi
the driver knows
new-wave
French critical theory
a po-mo deconstruction
of Australian literature
and exactly how far
both are going to get him

*

Palm trees in concrete
held together with fairy lights
spaced for the view
placed for the shade
and if you look close
some of them
even look real

*

There's a throne
that proclaims this place
Surfer's Paradise
I don't see any surfers
but then the beach
is up the other end

*

The young on balconies
beer, beach, TV boredom
the young in queues
living on the poverty line
the young in uniform
theme parks, coffee shops, burgers
and the young at heart
are nowhere to be seen

*

6.50 AM
time to leave
a ten minute walk
to Broadwater
McDonalds
$3.25 for grease
$1.20 for coffee
my days not worth
starting any better
when all the city asks
is that I keep
out of the way

*

Standing on the comer
of Palm Beach
trying to remember
if palm trees
are indigenous

*

Midnight and I'm waiting
at a Paradise cafe
that never closes
for this girl I know
who's in a club somewhere
taking her clothes off
like the city taught her to
'cause around here
everyone's a stranger
and anyone who sees you naked
is moving on soon anyway

Peter Ball

Kirsti Sarmiala-Berger

Rosaleen Norton

A Painter of Occult and Mystical Pictures

IN THE TABLOIDS of the 1950s and sixties Rosaleen (Roie) Norton was often pictured squatting beside a large painting of Pan, wearing an animal mask or surrounded by her drawings, or such occult paraphernalia as bells, candles, masks and a crystal ball (see fig.1). She was portrayed as an eccentric and a freak, a devotee of dark and evil forces, a worshipper of no lesser personage than Satan himself. As a consequence, her drawings generated enormous public interest. People flocked to the Arabian and Kashmir coffee shops, and later to the café Apollyon at King's Cross, where her works were exhibited during the 1950s.[1]

figure 1 from People *(Sydney), 29 March 1950, p.27*

So who was Rosaleen Norton? She was undoubtedly Australia's foremost occult artist. As a student of the occult, I was initially attracted to the accurate esoteric statements contained in her works. Her knowledge of esoteric theory was obviously extensive: although described in the press as the 'King's Cross Witch' who studied demonology in order to produce "shocking, disgusting [and] terrifying" artworks,[2] it is evident that in her pictures she endeavoured to depict a spiritual world, an occult cosmology derived from esoteric writings, and personalized through ritual practices and altered states of consciousness. In truth, therefore, she was a magician, a conjurer of esoteric truths, a witch.

Born in New Zealand in 1917, Norton grew up in Sydney where the family settled in 1924.[3] Describing her childhood as a "wearisome period of senseless shibboleths",[4] she sought early to escape into an inner fantasy world in which drawing, psychical visions and supernatural literature played a dominant role. In 1934, when only sixteen. some of her own short fantasy tales were published in the sensationalist Sydney broadsheet *Smith's Weekly*. The idea for one of these stories, 'The Painted Horror', was directly taken from 'The Picture' (1907) by the American master of horror fiction, H.P. Lovecraft. Yet, Norton's early publishing success led to an offer of a job on the staff of *Smith's Weekly*. She started work as a cadet journalist, but the association proved to be mutually unsatisfactory, and she left the paper after a "year or two" to concentrate on her own art-work.[5]

Norton's enthusiasm for macabre and supernatural literature, for Lovecraft's stories in particular, played a prominent role in shaping her early imagery. It seems to have escaped the notice of previous researchers that the drawing *Down There* (fig.2) is a visual interpretation of one of Lovecraft's most popular stories, 'The Outsider' (1921). In this narrative, the protagonist recounts how he had been born in an underground citadel and nurtured in infancy by someone "shockingly aged . . . distorted . . . and decaying like the castle".[6] Norton, imagining the childhood of the 'Outsider', conceived him as an infant, feeding on "the bones and skeletons that strewed . . . the stone crypts deep down among the foundations".[7] In the picture, squatting over him in a protective attitude, is the unwholesome figure of the nurse, decaying, worm-ridden, and covered in all manner of putrid excrescences. She supports, on her shoulders, the dark castle whose one single tower, in Lovecraft's story, reaches the surface of the earth.

After leaving *Smith's Weekly* Roie moved away from home and went to live at the Ship and Mermaid Inn, an artists' enclave overlooking Circular Quay (Sydney) sometimes referred to as 'Buggery Barn'. Here, for the first time, she felt free of "the domestic

figure 2 Down There, *© Walter Glover*

figure 3 Rites of Baron Samedi, *© Walter Glover*

figure 4 Triumph, *© Walter Glover*

trappings of her conventional upbringing",[8] and consequently began to seriously explore her occult interests. At first she read the Theosophists and Jung, for some time "regard[ing] herself as more of a Jungian than a mystic or occultist".[9] Coming to recognize the archetypal nature of her imagery, she spoke of "racial memory" and "atavistic shapes".[10] However, Norton soon became increasingly interested in the Western esoteric tradition, studying the Kabalah, comparative religion and demonology, and practising trance techniques and ritual magic. At the same time, she began developing what was to become a lifelong fascination with Pan, the horned god of the witches.

Sometime in the latter part of the 1930s, Norton moved to King's Cross where she was to live for the rest of her life. The Cross, "once the mansioned hill of successful merchants",[11] had become by the 1920s, the bohemian quarter of Sydney: the "striptease joints, female impersonators, cellar coffee houses, beatnik hangouts, nightclubs . . . call girls [and] pick ups" intermingled with 'respectable' citizens who had come to witness the characters and nightlife of this mecca of dissidents.[12] The writer-occultist, William Seabrook, who described the Voodoo rites of Haiti in *The Magic Island* (1929), likened the ecstatic dance of the black celebrants to what occurs in modern-day nightclubs. If we "mixed a little true sacrificial blood in our synthetic cocktails," he commented, "our nightclubs would be more orgiastically successful and become sacred as temples were in the days of Priapus and Aphrodite".[13]

The beat of the Voodoo drums and a chant of "Damballa Oueddo, our great Serpent-God"[14] is audible in Norton's *Rites of Baron Samedi* (fig.3), inspired by her impressions of nightlife at King's Cross. Surprisingly, the Voodoo elements borrowed for this work from Seabrook's travel-tale, have eluded the notice of previous writers. Roie had read *The Magic Island*:[15] the costumed and masked revellers on the right-hand side of the *Rites*, have (ostensibly) become the unwitting participants in a midnight Voodoo mass. A single candle on a horned altar lights the form of the huge writhing snake-god, Damballe Oueddo, in whose folds dances the black-faced *mamaloi*.[16] The *Rites of Baron Samedi*, or, what occurs on Saturday nights at King's Cross, is a darker version of the Bacchanalian revelries Norton had appropriated from the example of Norman Lindsay.

Throughout the 1940s and fifties, Norton experimented with altered states of consciousness. Ancient magico-religious symbols were used to awaken the hidden knowledge – aromatic herbs, wine, a fire, a mummified hoof: "I darkened the room," she related in an interview with the Melbourne psychologist L.J. Murphy, "and focusing my eyes upon the hoof I . . . tried to clear my mind of all conscious thought . . .".[17]

The most dramatic effect of hypnotic and drug-induced trance states is the awakening of the mythico-visionary impulse which, in Norton's case, often resulted in visions relat-

ing to the teachings of the British magical Order of the Golden Dawn. The theories adopted by the Order members had been largely Kabalistic; their magical rituals were designed to correlate with the 'Sephirot', or stages of mystical consciousness, on the Kabalistic 'Tree of Life'. Norton had encountered the diagram of the Tree of Life in Dion Fortune's *Mystical Qabalah* (1935), at that time the textbook *par excellence* of the cosmogony of the Golden Dawn.[18] In this book, Fortune explained the story of the creation of the Sephirot as a symbolic representation of cosmic creation and of "the soul of man as related thereto":[19] the creator retreated and concealed himself, and "From the abundance of His being", he "'emanated' the [ten] *sephirot*".[20] This basic "Janus-like" duality of divine action, the "retreat and propagation",[21] was reflected in the created universe as all the manifested oppositions of life and death, good and evil, darkness and light.

figure 5 Esoteric Study, © *Walter Glover*

A number of Norton's pictures were directly inspired by these ideas. The themes of good and evil, and of the evolution of consciousness, in the two works entitled *Triumph* and *Esoteric Study*, for example, gain meaning only in this Kabalistic context. The two sides, or 'Pillars', of the Tree of Life are clearly delineated in *Triumph* (fig.4). The left-hand side, the 'Pillar of Severity', is characterized by three spheres of dark and evil forms. "As we look at the Tree in the diagram", wrote Dion Fortune, we see the three Sephirot "Binah, Geburah, and Hod upon the left" hand side,[22] signifying destruction, limitation and death. The three levels of the 'Right-hand Path' – Netzach, Chesed and Chokmah – on the contrary, lead up the 'Pillar of Mercy' and stand for wisdom, victory, and eternal life.

According to Fortune's account, "each Sephirah is bi-sexual".[23] Hence, in Norton's picture, the androgynous figure of Triumph – a personification of Netzach as "the great victory of the sky, the triumph of morning over darkness"[24] – is firmly installed upon the right-hand side. Having emerged from the egg of the elemental forces of emotion, she is the mistress of the waters (emotions), and therefore holds a fish in her left hand. With her right hand, she reaches toward the flying phoenix, a bird that signifies life, re-birth and transcendence. The cosmic scene is watched by the lower gods, while the 'Infinite Light' – referring obliquely to the divine essence residing beyond the 'Veils of Negative Existence' – illuminates both sides of the Tree of Life in a blinding flash.

The metaphysical opposition of darkness and light, as presented in *Triumph*, is pertinent to the Kabalistic analysis of the nature of the objective universe. But when used as a subjective symbol, as the "instrument of spiritual development and magical work",[25] the most important path on the Tree of Life is the central pillar, the 'Pillar of Equilibrium'.

The self-transformation of the magician rising along the central pillar "involves the unification of the higher and lower consciousnesses".[26] The central "path leads from brain consciousness, through subconsciousness, to superconsciousness";[27] and the technique "consists primarily in the conscious reconciliation of opposing forces".[28] Therefore, in *Esoteric Study* (fig.5), the androgynous adept, or perfected self, erupts upward along the central Pillar of Equilibrium, carrying the Hermetic *caduceus*, the staff of the opposing currents of psychical force. The modes of consciousness experienced by the progressively transforming self "are assigned to the Equilibrating Sephirot upon the Middle Pillar"[29] (here decorated with the figure 8, the sign of infinity and eternal life), because the "Way of Illumination follows the Path of the Arrow" – this is "the way of the mystic . . . it is swift and direct, and free from the danger of the temptation of unbalanced force".[30]

But the central path does not confer the development of magical powers: according to Fortune, "magical powers are assigned to the opposing Sephirot, each at the end of the beam of the balance of the pairs of opposites".[31] Travelling up the central Pillar in the process of self-transformation, the initiate in *Esoteric Study* therefore weighs those eternal forces of darkness and light "betwixt which the equilibrium of the universe dependeth".[32] It is precisely the manipulation of these forces which, in the final analysis, will distinguish the mystic from the adept of the magical arts.

An exhibition of Norton's work was held at the Rowden White Library, University of Melbourne,

in 1949. It was raided by the Victorian vice squad, who seized a number of drawings, including *Triumph* and *Individuation* – the latter a Jungian version of the spiritual evolution of consciousness. The artist was charged under the Police Offences Act (1928) for exhibiting obscene pictures which "would deprave and corrupt the morals of those who saw them".[33] Although the charges were later dismissed, the controversy was widely reported in the sensationalist press. At the publication of the book, *The Art of Rosaleen Norton* in 1952, similar complications set in. Newspaper headlines proclaimed the drawings obscene and Walter Glover, the publisher of the book, was charged with producing and selling an indecent publication.

figure 6 Pan, © *Walter Glover*

As a result of the publicity generated by the obscenity trials in Sydney and Melbourne, Norton became well known as an eccentric King's Cross character. In the *Supplement to the Art of Rosaleen Norton*, published in 1984, Walter Glover has commented that the "presentment of Rosaleen as 'The Witch of the Cross' is a gross distortion of fact".[34] Norton's interest in witchcraft had originated with her reading of Margaret Murray's *Witch-Cult in Western Europe,*[35] and she knew of the work of the English witch, Gerald Gardner who, during the 1940s, had been preoccupied with forging a link between witchcraft (as presented in Murray's theories) and the Kabalist doctrines of the Golden Dawn. By the mid-1950s Roie was leading a Sydney coven, conceived along essentially similar lines. Attempting to explain the theory of modern witchcraft to an uncomprehending public, she wrote a series of autobiographical articles for the *Australasian Post* (1957),[36] stating that the god of the witches was not the Christian Satan, but Pan, the half-man, half-goat ancient Greek deity who was a nature-god, worshipped in the past as an emblem of natural energies.

As the giver of fertility to beasts and mankind, Pan had a reputation for being vigorous and lustful, seducing several nymphs, such as Echo and Eupheme, and boasting "that he had coupled with all Dionysus' drunken Maenads".[37] In Norton's *Pan* (fig.6), the lecherous deity, sporting a forked beard and outsized horns, leans on a cauldron, his genitals resting on the rim ready to fertilize its contents, while a naked Maenad frolics in the background. However, the other secondary figure in this work (background, left), requires a further explanation: Pan was not merely a motif of lust on the earthly plane but, as the lord of all natural energies, he conducted the progress of both growth and dissolution, of birth and decay. Therefore, in Norton's picture, the shrouded figure of death is in attendance, and the cauldron has become the crucible for the regeneration of decomposing bodily refuse. The coils of the phallic snake, rising out of the black container, combine the duality of life and death into a single cycle of recurrent transformation.

During the 1960s and seventies, Norton became increasingly ensnared in the notorious public image of herself. She began to earn a living performing hexes and making charms. Sensationalist articles about her activities and beliefs continued to proliferate,[38] and her occult paintings – often repetitions of earlier themes – sold for somewhere between £5 and £100, depending on the size of the canvas.[39]

Norton did not find the public at large, in these later years, any more sympathetic to her beliefs than they had been in the beginning. Still quizzed by juvenile reporters about Black Masses[40] and described in their articles as the sinister "Queen of Darkness",[41] she became increasingly disillusioned and frustrated: "There are so many things misunderstood, purposely distorted, or conveniently created about witchcraft, that it's no wonder we are sometimes impatient," she said, referring to herself and the other coven members.[42]

Although Norton had increasingly identified with the popular conception of herself, her real interests always remained more complex than the simplified image presented in the press. In her enigmatic drawings and paintings, throughout her oeuvre, she was concerned with the spiritual nature of the universe and of mankind, and with the evolution of individual consciousness which, in modern psychological terms is "the fusion of the conscious and subconscious – the two forces in the one being".[43]

The reasons for the public's misreading of Norton's images were varied and complex. The

mystico-occult subjects displayed in her pictures were not generally understood by the viewing public since the esoteric was then, as always, the province of the 'fringe-dweller'. Even within the esoteric tradition itself the modern, Gardnerian, witchcraft movement had not yet, in the 1950s, been properly distinguished from its Medieval antecedent as described in church-inspired discourse. The prevailing Protestant and Catholic faiths therefore continued to condemn the occult as being diabolical and dangerous. The exposure given to these matters in the press created sensationalism, censure and heated debate. Injured by the adverse publicity, in her last years Norton became a recluse, preferring the company of her pet cats (black and white) to that of other people. She passed away at the Sacred Heart Hospice at Sydney's St Vincent's Hospital in 1979, but the real, esoteric nature of her art is only now beginning to be fully appreciated.

ENDNOTES

1. The 'Arabian' may have been simply renamed the 'Kashmir'. See H. Garlick, 'Face to Face with Rowie the Witch', in *overland*, 147, Winter 1997, p. 73.
2. Anon, 'She Hates Figleaf Morality', in *People* (Sydney), 29 March 1950, p. 26.
3. For biographical details on Norton, see Nevill Drury, *Pan's Daughter: The Magical World of Rosaleen Norton*, Mandrake of Oxford, Australia, 1993.
4. Rosaleen Norton, 'I Was Born a Witch', in *Australasian Post* (Sydney), 3 Jan. 1957, p. 4.
5. G. Blaikie, *Remember Smith's Weekly?*, Rigby Limited, 1966, p. 90. Blaikie was a former *Smith's* journalist who remembered Rosaleen's sojourn on the staff of the paper.
6. H.P. Lovecraft, 'The Outsider', in H.P. Lovecraft, *The Haunter of the Dark and Other Tales*, Panther, London, 1972, p. 11.
7. Ibid.
8. N. Drury, *Pan's Daughter*, op. cit., p. 17.
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12. Ibid, p. 185.
13. W.B. Seabrook, *The Magic Island*. George G. Harrap & Company Ltd., London and Sydney, 1929, p. 48.
14. Ibid, p. 43.
15. This book is included in the bibliography compiled by Norton for *The Art of Rosaleen Norton*, Walter Glover, Sydney, 1952.
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21. Ibid.
22. D. Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, op. cit., p. 55.
23. Ibid, p. 57.
24. Walter Pater, quoted in Israel Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates*, Llewellyn Publications, USA, 1986, p. 59.
25. D. Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, op. cit., p. 37.
26. D. Fortune, *The Esoteric Orders and Their Work*, Rider & Co., London, n.d., p. 109.
27. Ibid, p. 112.
28. Israel Regardie, *The Middle Pillar: Co-Relation of the Principles of Analytical Psychology and the Elementary Techniques of Magic*, Llewellyn Publications, USA, 1970, p. 22.
29. D. Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, op. cit., p. 59.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. I. Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, op. cit., pp. 28–29.
33. Anon, 'Court Rules Paintings Obscene', in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 August 1949, p. 6.
34. Walter Glover, 'Preface', in *Supplement to the Art of Rosaleen Norton*, Walter Glover, NSW, 1984, n.p.
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38. See e.g. B. Walker & Richard Neville, 'Deliver Us to E-Ville', in *Tharunka* (University of NSW student paper), 3 July 1962, p. 8; and D. Barnes, 'Confessions of a Witch', in *Australasian Post*, 15 June 1967, pp. 2–5.
39. N. Drury, *Pan's Daughter*, op. cit., p. 92.
40. See e.g. Walker & Neville, 'Deliver Us to E-Ville', p.8.
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The digital age

In a digital age
we wear wrist-watches luminous
like traffic lights
and are seen walking well-adjusted
dogs on their fluorescent elasticised leashes,
Made in China
like your inflatable faux-fur
backpack which doubles
as a launching pad for palm-sized
homing pigeons
We still want to mate for life
like arctic penguins, but adrift
from our permanent iceberg homes
in the slush of global warming

Still, we should be grateful:
the car puts itself to bed now
with barely a complaint
and the alarm clock accepts
your attentive swipe
every morning with pleasure.
Even your favourite peanuts
have their own website.

Jane Gibian

Gothic Therapeutic

When I think of you, I slide behind intention,
accumulate clues, detect who I was to you: an
improbable delineation of child-like flesh,
(*Were you ever that crimped and curled?*),
conditioned response
(*Open your body to me – I'm as sweet as*
Hawaiian pineapples). I salivate on cue,
Spanish leather stroking my fine, fine skin.

And the day I remember best – brandy-refracted,
diamond precision-cut glass – darkens early behind
abstinent windows of a Reconstructed American South
Georgian Mansion where I
crouch with little foxes, wait for
Betty Davis to descend in her Geisha face and
burn the house to the foundations, Big
Daddy – one less cat on our
white-trash hot tin roof.

And though the story is sublime, and my
fingers soft, soft on your polished bones; though
you curl 'round my arms this breathless night
and lick me dry of sound; though I carry your
scarred hands in my distended womb, turn
my eyes out onto the scrubbed table for another
perspective, the ruined walls of catacombs rushing
in to defend you; I am nowhere to be found.

Zan Ross

Untitled

In this desert land
miles from any watery place
I once saw the ocean
in your eyes
as your saltwater
sprayed me
and I almost drowned
in your tears

Emma Murphy

Photogravure

He leans on my desk at six am; summer
falls into the side of his face. A geographer, he weighs my
Pocket Oxford in one spadeful of hand. I am careful not
to mention cartography as a profession: we
have had this dagger between us for fifteen years. My daughter tells me,
he's appalling – bulbous appendages, the high whine of
anticipation. I hear only
a litany of mapping as he
reads artifacts arranged perpendicularly, slashes of discourse arrayed as
talisman, endless disposition of words, THE WORD, solitaire
tarot/I Ching if
I could decipher the direction of wind; teleology a product of process, but
I admit to this modernity only
when forced. Usually,
there is the visual, as if surface, style are brittle voyeurisms. The rest –
musty odour of dressing gown,
maroon thread brocade stiff from imaginary
fingertips restraining the personal,
my objection to touch –
opens the possibility of telemetry, each
reappearance of Bogart confirming the distance; pianissimo the only
solution. Invoking geomorphology, he resorts to the ventriloquism of
one icon or another, but it's always Cassandra on the line:
I keep telling you the answer, but no one listens.
Summer thrust to his face, he orienteers by stars: the pleasure of sex-
tant outweighing cryptic districts of Kowloon –
another graphic geography he cantilevers
between wooden slats at the window, between Mesopotamian glass
beads and the geode on my desk.

Zan Ross

the relation to real space

man, this is so fuckin' weird, it's unbelievable
ani difranco

rice coats the margins of your golden-oiled plate.

helicopters film the harbour reflecting the helicopters
as an osprey, twisting like a half-remembered line,
swerves between the gardens & the sea.

you're not a naturalist, & those kids might never
skateboard for their country, but there's every chance
today's not gonna last forever, these protocols
just describe the motions we're going through.

overdressed, with time to think,
i watch your shoulders merge into your biceps,
& if there's no appreciable effort on your part
that's not to say i don't appreciate it,
that's not what i'm saying at all.

i didn't know this gaze was taken.

perhaps you're worried about the relation to real space,
about whether the back-end will step out
if you clutch it from second to third.

someone coughs up a haze of drugs
& somebody takes off their pride.

the paper claims wages go farther than ever before
& you wonder if people have realised.

a man walks past in a black beret.

maybe every single fragment of time is happening again?

your chopsticks hit the floor.

ted nielsen

6 Small Poems

ARCHITECTS AT THE POOL

"Last one in has
a rotten schemata."

THESE THINGS I PRAISE

A small flat car.
A lidless moment.

OVERHEARD, TWO YOUNG MEN

"She gave me
an invisible jolt."

BENT PIANO

A mist of blue noise.
Old shoes. Bug grit.
A reminder of being here.
More blue days.

OVERHEARD

"God, I've been four
days without a biro!"

IN TOKYO

A vending machine
for live crayfish.

John Jenkins

Kevin Brophy

Poetry

What kind of behaviour is that?

What Schlegel says of philosophy is true for writing: you can only become a writer, you can never be one; no sooner are you, than you are no longer, a writer.

Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* (p. 61)

IT IS EASIER TO SAY when it was that the desire to be a poet became important to me than to identify a time when I could say, Yes, I am now a poet. It is easier and more certain to live with this desire, and to write poems under the pressure of desire than to write poems 'as a poet'. Why is this? Is it because desire makes the world and all that is in it more than it is – and poetry needs the world to be more than it is? Would the claim to be a poet bring with it a debilitating complacency? Would my poems become pomes? Or worse, would it mean I claim to know what a poem is? I do know we must be silent and deliberate if we are to write but the writing that matters seems to come from uncertainty, chance and restlessness – from confusion and desires.

Or else it just comes: this was the cry of the Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935) when he claimed no knowledge and no choice in the matter of writing poetry:

Occasionally I hear the wind blow,
And I find that just hearing the wind blow
makes it worth having been born.
I don't know what others reading this will
think;
But I find it must be good since it's what I think
without effort,
With no idea that other people are listening to
me think;
Because I think it without thoughts,
Because I say it as my words say it.
I was once called a materialist poet
And was surprised, because I didn't imagine
I could be called anything at all.
I'm not even a poet: I see.
If what I write has any merit, it's not in me;
the merit's there, in my verses.
All this is absolutely independent of my will.

(From 'the startling reality of things')

I'm nothing.
I'll always be nothing.
I can't even wish to be something.
Aside from that, I've got all the world's dreams
inside me.

(From 'Tobacco Shop')

Pessoa *is* poetry. He does not write about nature. He sings it! But his dramatic, forceful, spontaneous statements are utterly calculated. Pessoa was a scholar of Portuguese, English and Latin. He was a critic, translator and far from being nothing for he was several people at once: he invented elaborate alternative identities who wrote whole books in their own voices, including one persona named Alexander Search who wrote in English. Pessoa acknowledges in his rugged and crafty resistance to theories and philosophies that contemporary poetry is compelled to offer its answers – in fact each poem is conscripted as a possible answer – to that double question: 'What *is* poetry?' and 'What makes *that* poetry?'

These are the innocent but leading questions that can as easily silence a conversation as deaden one with invitations to pedantry. At the same time they are questions impossible to avoid for anyone who writes poems now. They have become part of the game. And the answers must be ecstatic, enigmatic, politically acute or comic if they are not to be banal. Melbourne poet Grant Caldwell (b. 1947) echoes Pessoa's resistance to debate and ideas, though in his

imagist-inspired response which adopts the voice of the *faux naif* and the cloacal imagery of early modernism, he ends with an enigmatically defiant invitation to even more debate:

Drop all the theories
into the bowl
spit on them
piss on them
crap on them
see how they look now
flush them
into the pipes
into the sea
go out
wondering
what
out
is.

'Theory for a Poet'

The American poet Billy Collins takes a jaundiced and deceptively comic route round the question and answer in his poem titled 'Poem':

Some poems name their subjects.
The titles are On *this or* On *that,*
or they hang like small marquees
indicating what is playing inside:
"Celibacy", "Ostriches at Dusk".

Other poems fall into it as they go along.
You trip over a word while carrying
a tray of vocabulary out to the pool
only to discover that broken glass
is a good topic.

Still others have no subject
other than themselves to gnaw on.
The fly lands on the swatter.
The movie runs backwards
and catches fire in the projector.
This species apes us well
by talking only about itself.

Such is often the case with poems
afflicted by the same plain title
as this one:
a sign by the road announcing a bump.

I want to turn from these two questions, as most poets want to do, and address a related one: a more sociological and linguistic question – 'What is it that poets are doing?' The danger in this is that I might find I am explaining away the strangeness of poetry. But the possibility is that I might enter more fully into its strangeness.

Take this poem by John Ashbery:

Still no this morning,
and still it rains again, a . . . (adjective) *. . . ,*
. . . (adjective) *. . . , sort of rain.*
Outside of that, everything is more or less normal.
. . . (adjective) *. . .* (noun) *. . . are seen to enter the gate,*
lunchpails in hand. A thin strip of what is probably blue
secretly alters the horizon.

Someone must be punished for this . . . (noun) *. . .*
Though I believe in the abolition of all punishment
we must concentrate, for once, on getting the thing right.
Otherwise this hole in time will come to seem a fragment
of a dream that never happened. We can't have that. Think how stunned
the . . . (noun plural)*s would be to learn they had never existed in that split-second*
that is praying to you now, clawing from the light.

The old man and his boss took to it,
that is they took a gun with them, and a dog
over the hill to chase down the lost . . . (noun plural)*s . . . None were to be seen.*
This confirmed the old guy's expectations,
but naturally he refused to say anything about it.
Tamped some wadding in his gun. The thing blew up,
his face was all bloody. The dog took off over the nearby hill
and was never seen again

unless the dog seen lurking near the courthouse
a couple of weeks later was that one.
By that time the (noun plural)*s had come back, the* (noun plural)*s, at any rate,*
and were . . . (verb) *. . . ing proud as you please*
on the doric pediments and the statue of Gen-

eral Ebenezer what's-his-name.
The horizon was a little bluer then, like . . .
(noun) . . .

'Invitation to a Wooing'

This is most of a poem by John Ashbery (b. 1927). I have left blanks in it for you to fill in. Before reading on, go back over the poem and fill in the missing nouns, adjectives and verbs.

The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry tells us John Ashbery was once set aside by American commentators as bizarre but now seems one of the central American poets of the century. He spent many years working in France, writing about visual arts. His poetry is, the editors of the Norton anthology tell us, characteristically an impenetrable mixture of surrealist tomfoolery and elegant reserve. Ashbery has written that his work is "pure affirmation that doesn't affirm anything". The above poem is taken from *The Times Literary Supplement* (10 December 1999, p. 30, published between articles titled 'Ancient *and* Modern' and 'The Rigour of Balance').

Perhaps the first point to make about the task of filling in the blanks is that it is disorienting. It is almost impossible to know what words should go in these places. Linguists hoping to build computers that can produce and interpret live speech aim to exploit the narrowing probability of occurrence of certain words as we approach the end of a sentence. The probabilities of occurrence remain remarkably open here in Ahsbery's poem. We cannot finish Ashbery's sentences and phrases the way we might finish the sentences of more predictable passages of writing or the conversations of our friends and parents. There is something peculiar about this way of using language – this way of being in language.

Psycholinguists use a phrase, 'the garden path sentence', to refer to grammatically perfect sentences that are at first beyond understanding. Some textbook examples are:

The horse raced past the barn fell.

Since Kevin always walks a mile seems like a short distance to him.

It takes several tries and a little time to work out how these sentences make sense and what it is that has gone wrong in our initial parsing of their sense. The difficulties we have with such sentences seem to indicate that psychologically we proceed through a sentence from left to right building the meaning as we go and delaying closure of meaning for as long as possible. It is something like building a tower with wooden blocks until in some instances we discover our base does not support the final structure. Another example of the garden path sentence comes from a newspaper television review written by journalist, Simon Hughes:

> If a clinker brick Taj in Rowville is your dream, it is best to remember that con is a contraction of confidence trick and the 'pure profit' of which people like Joe Torbay speak is an oxymoron (Melbourne *Age* 14 January 2000 'Today' p. 1).

Another example occurs in the poem, 'Incunabular', by Les Murray, which appears in his 1999 book *Conscious and Verbal*. The poem is set in the Fisher Library at the University of Sydney:

> *Students murmured airily of the phallic*
> *they were going to be marked by*
> *but the shelvers book-trolleys were parked by*
> *closed gaping tomes and stood them drily back,*
> *vogue, value, theory.*

The garden path sentence is a close cousin of the ambiguous sentence:

The tuna can hit the boat.

Psycholinguistic researchers have found that processing such sentences follows two stages. In the first stage all possible meanings are construed. In the second stage one of these meanings is selected and others abandoned. This happens in milliseconds for native speakers. Another interesting example:

They all rose.

Researchers have found that those who read this sentence will subliminally consider both the *flower* and the meaning *stand* before settling on stand as the preferred meaning.

What these garden-path and ambiguity examples tell me is that as we listen or read not only do we hold and consider ambiguities but at some near-unconscious level we seek out ambiguities. Seeking out ambiguities and delaying closure as we move through a sentence: these are strategies for suspending meaning – for holding meaning back. In the normal course

of events these resistances are fleeting, nebulous elements in the social and intellectual process of using language. Last week I experienced a disconcerting linguistic moment when I 'heard' a friend say, 'He's got ovaries depression.' It might have taken less than a second for the right (i.e. intended) meaning to emerge, but while this happened I was witness to the way meanings can be shuffled through within us.

What poets do, what poetry like John Ashbery's does, is keep us for more than a few milliseconds in these slightly strange back lanes of language. The poetry breaks down and breaks up the usual process of communication so that we are left with the thing in parts. I am reminded of my attempts to fix my bicycle when after an hour's work my old familiar bike is a mess of almost impossibly strange and filthy parts lying across the back yard in front of me.

Poetry tends to fragment the normal procession of language, thought and experience. We are suspended upon the ambiguities of language or upon the multiple meanings of images.

The line in poetry is another strategy for breaking up the normal flow and pattern of language. This is particularly the case in free verse which seems to break so arbitrarily, so strangely, so much in resistance to our desire to go on (and on). Poetry insists on the reader-listener giving each word a lingering attention. The poet, it seems to me, becomes a skilled practitioner of fragmentary speech and fragmentary thinking.

This kind of thinking has its own long history in texts (and given enough history all texts become fragments). Fragmentary thinking has certain characteristics and certain effects.

Among recent examples of work in this mode there is Victor Klemperer's diary-writing. At the beginning of February 1945 there were 198 registered Jews remaining in the city of Dresden, not yet deported to concentration camps. The 198 Jews left all had non-Jewish wives or husbands who had fought for their continued freedom. On February 13, 1945 these last Jews were ordered to report for deportation by Friday of that week. It was on February 13 that Allied planes bombed the city of Dresden into a firestorm. Those who survived the firestorm were, at last, free of the Nazi Third Reich. One of the surviving Jews of Dresden was Victor Klemperer. He had doggedly kept a journal of the everyday experiences of his past twelve years. The diaries record, in the words of a preface written by Martin Chalmers:

> in unparalleled detail the progressive elimination of every private space, the arbitrary cruelty toward those whom the regime defined as Jews, and finally the extermination, that worked slowly, stretching out time to impose an agony of anticipation . . . the ban on Jews owning cars, on using public libraries, cinemas, swimming pools, on entering parks; the bans on telephones, radios and typewriters; the ban on Jews owning pets; the curfew for Jews; the ban on Jews buying tobacco and cigarettes, on buying flowers; reduced food rations for Jews and so on. (Preface xv)

Klemperer's diaries were published with little media promotion in Germany in 1995. They were a runaway best seller. For Klemperer the diaries had been working documents which he hoped might give him material for a later autobiography. They are disjointed, repetitive, obsessive, quirky, gossipy, quotidian, and comic. Here are some typical entries (from 1934, 1936 and 1939):

> Much thought of death clinging to the most general questions.
>
> We shall be entirely alone this evening. I am a little afraid of that. Our two little tomcats are always a comfort and support for us. I ask myself a thousand times in all seriousness, what is the state of their immortal souls?
>
> Another greatest wish, and it will not be fulfilled either: the story of my life.
>
> Sat fruitlessly all day over the first chapter of Rousseau. My head hot and completely depressed. All the worse because I constantly have to tell my self that all this effort is pointless. What does it matter whether I have one manuscript bundle more or less in my drawer. The Nazi regime is more firmly in the saddle than ever; even now they are triumphant in Nurnberg: the "Party Rally of Honour", and making plans for eternity. And the whole world inside and outside Germany is keeping its head down.
>
> Circular from the Jewish Community: The new telephone book must immediately be informed of the supplementary name Israel on pain of punishment – I haven't had a telephone for a long time, thank God.

The paradox of Klemperer's diary is that this has become one of the most complete records of a man's existence in the twentieth century and by far the most complete record of what it was like to live as a Jew in Hitler's German Third Reich. The fragment has an advantage over the grand design or the universal idea: by accumulation – by characteristic and human selection of details – an apparently exhaustive account can be produced. Sometimes the fragment tells us all we need to know. It has the peculiar quality of taking us out of its confines to an expansive sense of a whole experience.

In 1920 the young poet and doctor William Carlos Williams (1883–1962) published a small booklet, *Kora in Hell*, which was also a kind of journal kept through one long winter. It was loosely inspired by the myth of Persephone. Williams later wrote, "Scribbling in the dark, leaving behind on my desk, often past midnight, the sheets to be filed away later, at the end of a year I had assembled a fairly bulky ms" (Prologue *Kora in Hell*). The following examples of entries give some feel for what he was doing:

> A man's desire is to win his way to some hilltop. But against him seem to swarm a hundred jumping devils. These are his constant companions . . .
>
> When you hang your clothes on the line you do not expect to see the line broken and them trailing in the mud. Nor would you expect to keep . . .

The entries are relatively private inner thoughts, even painful. They are thoughts from hell; sometimes broken off in mid phrase. There are shifts in tone and typography, different kinds of breaks: a new line can constitute a break between sections as well as numbers or roman numerals or changes in typeface. There are aphoristic as well as inarticulate elements present. ". . . there's more sense in a sentence heard backward than forward most times."

Williams' *Kora in Hell* tries for an erotic text, or at least a text that allows for erotic language that is still philosophical and poetic. It is odd and uncomfortable with itself.

Roland Barthes set out to explore the erotics of the text in his own book of fragments, *The Pleasure of the Text*. It works through 'reading' the act of reading as a metaphor for acts of sensual pleasure; the sentence, for instance, is hierarchical and sexual relations are hierarchical. The sentence always works towards its own completion, just as erotic acts approach and delay completion. Barthes notes a writer is not, strictly speaking, a thinker, and equally a writer is not a linguist. The writer is "someone who thinks sentences: A Sentence-Thinker"(p. 51). A sentence is a broken-off bit of speech, more or less complete in itself by virtue of its grammatical shape, but needing the work around it if it is to be understood in a particular context. The writer works by means of these fragments, these hardened elements called sentences, and the poet with the element of the line.

In 1989 Australian writer Murray Bail published a book called *Longhand: A Writer's Notebook*. This is not a journal or diary, it is not a series of reveries or arguments on a theme as Barthes' book is, or a loose prose poem as *Kora in Hell* might be. Yet it is presented as a coherent text within covers. It is a book you can read from end to end. But what holds it together? It could be a kind of sketchbook, a series of impressions that might later become the material for stories or material for a sentence in a novel. At the same time it is complete as it is.

The entries or sketches are essentially irresponsible. They are not answerable to an idea, a plot, a poetic or prose form, a time, a setting, a readership or even a consistency of voice. The fragment comes from somewhere else. Where it really belongs is not our first concern. Bail's book stays with the fragment.

Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* is another book made of short, enigmatic, philosophical, poetic, suggestive fragments revolving around the idea of writing, reading and language. 'The writing of the disaster' is for Blanchot another way of referring to 'the disaster of writing'. His book often turns to a meditation on its own method of construction – the fragment. "Fragmentation ... is the pulling to pieces (the tearing) of that which never has preexisted (really or ideally) as a whole, nor can it ever be reassembled in any future presence whatever" (p. 60). He calls the fragment a "repetitive energy". It is a system (of writing, of thinking, of going on) that is not a system at all. He quotes Schlegel: "To have a system, this is what is fatal for the mind; not to have one, this too is fatal. Whence the necessity to observe, while abandoning, the two requirements at once" (p. 61).

What the fragment suggests is the reversibility of any order. The writing of the disaster, the disaster of writing, a systemless system, a writer who cannot be a writer. Fragments can be read in any order. This uncertainty makes for a system of investigation that is subtle, playful, not tied to a reaching for conclu-

sion, open to endless complications. It reflects the way we are. How do you read a book of poetry? Surely by dipping, jumping, skipping, reversing even the order of lines in some poems, declining to read certain pages. The writer always writes some sections of a book for those who will skip or skim. But the writer never knows which parts have been written not to be read.

Another example comes from Peter Handke's, *The Weight of the World*. It is a work something along the lines of Murray Bail's impressionistic sketchbook. Handke's exercise takes in a particular period of time and once it is read as a whole, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, it suggests a narrative of experiences over a particular time. What draws me to this book of fragments is the vividness of the pieces and the dedication to brevity in each fragment. It is like a series of haiku or senryu. They are determinedly not philosophical, but rather example after example of a Sentence-Thinker at work. Handke is in his life, in his world, immersed – and his way of being in all of this is to think sentences.

In summary, the method of the fragment offers no logically narrowing set of possibilities as a thought or a theme progresses. It offers both an endless suspension of closure and a series of minor closures and minor beginnings. Fragments bring our attention to rhythms in language, in sentences, in thinking, in time. How large or small, in terms of time, are the gaps between the entries in the works I have mentioned? We can become aware of connections: how obsessions, emotions, intuitions, symbolic relations, dreams, contradictions, digressions, style, play of puns, echoes and rhymes can form and connect-up our thinking as forcefully as logic or scientific verification do in other realms.

Fragments are like city maps across which our gaze can move, making decisions about a possible journey at each crossroad while all the time we know that each decision we might make increases the number of other journeys we could have taken. The fragment always suggests there is more that might have been said. It declares the impossibility of saying everything.

One of the disciplines of this method is the discipline of starting over again and again. A series of beginnings requires repeatedly renewed energy and effort. Often this sort of work can only be accomplished slowly over days and weeks, along with the rhythms of night and day, weather, tides, seasons, moons, moods, weekends, holidays.

I am suggesting that this is the realm of the poet. This is the kind of thinking that goes into making a poem. It is the kind of thinking a poem provokes in an attentive reader. Perhaps the survival of the line in poetry while metrical counts, rhymes, stanza breaks, and set forms have been widely abandoned is due to this sense the poet has that the line is fundamental to the way of thinking necessary to making poetry.

I HAVE BEEN SUGGESTING that poetry revives and keeps alive, indeed insists upon a certain kind of thinking characterized by the tradition of the textual fragment (or fragments of language) and all it implies.

The second sociolinguistic point I want to make about poets is that they have savage minds. In 1962 Claude Lévi-Strauss published his book, *The Savage Mind* (*La Pensée Sauvage*), where he asked whether there were significant differences between so-called primitive magical thinking and Western scientific thinking. He pointed out that it is not the West, or the English-speaking nations, or our modern age that has a monopoly on abstract language or abstract thinking: In Chinook, a language widely spoken in the north-west of North America, for instance, most events are interpreted through an expression of their abstract qualities. The proposition 'The bad man killed the poor child' would be rendered in Chinook as 'the man's badness killed the child's poverty'; and for 'The woman used too small a basket' the Chinook might say 'She put the potentilla-roots into the smallness of the basket' (p. 1).

The scientific logic of the West, Lévi-Strauss insisted, is not superior or fundamentally different to primitive forms of logic. They merely operate on a different level. Where our science operates from hypotheses with intellectual and technological methods far removed from the human senses, the 'concrete science' of savage minds takes place on sensible levels – in the sense of being connected to and arising from the human senses and the physical world.

Lévi-Strauss labels the savage way of thinking as 'bricolage thinking'. *Bricoleur* is a French word without an English language equivalent. The bricoleur is a tradesperson or a skilled craftworker, but not in the usual sense. The bricoleur knows a lot about a range of crafts and trades but is not expert in any single one. The bricoleur does not have a set of particular tools or materials but makes do with what comes to hand. The bricoleur makes repairs or constructs new objects by using debris, parts, offcuts, the discarded, sec-

ond-hand or outmoded bits and pieces found nearby at the time of working. The bricoleur might have a collection of tools and materials kept as a treasury for later use but none of them will have a specific use. They will be kept because they might come in handy for some as yet unimagined or unforeseen task.

The way the bricoleur works is different to, say, the engineer. The engineer will work to a plan with tools and equipment specially designed to achieve an agreed end. The raw, refined and processed materials for construction will be prepared and delivered. The engineer can always test concepts and designs against the laws of physics so that it becomes possible for the engineer to do what has never been done before.

The bricoleur on the other hand has no set method and often no distinct outcome in mind. Each element used might lead to altering the whole structure and rethinking the outcome. The bricoleur might be using an old wardrobe and a wooden pallette to construct a kitchen table which might become in the course of construction a desk; so that the project of making the kitchen table might then have to wait until the materials available make it possible. The bricoleur works within a reality that includes human culture by reorganizing existing materials. Old ends become new means to different ends in the hands of the bricoleur. Lévi-Strauss writes that the bricoleur is one who derives poetry from the fact that he/she does not ever simply accomplish and execute but always 'speaks' through the medium of the materials used. The bricoleur reveals and expresses something of him or her self in each project (21). All this is still true of engineering to some extent, so the difference spoken of here is a matter of degree not of absolute division.

Lévi-Strauss regards the primitive systems of totems as examples of bricolage thinking. Without texts, without fixed records of a culture and its laws, many primitive societies use the natural world as the basis for recording their own laws, history and beliefs. We can see in the case of Australian Aboriginal societies that the land and the landscape have become more than simply land or landscape. The land participates in, preserves and teaches the history and beliefs of the people.

The poet is a bricoleur. The poet's second-hand materials are the words of common currency in our language, those words already used to keep marriages going, to make contracts binding, to keep the stock exchange honest, to collect bribes or make shopping lists, etc. The poet works like the bricoleur with the senses in a sensible world, binding words to new and strange uses, drawing our attention to words we might normally never notice or even use, making us aware of the uncanny potential of words.

Still no this morning,
and still it rains again, a dry, crumbly, sort of rain.
Outside of that, everything is more or less normal.
Factory hands are seen to enter the gate,
lunchpails in hand. A thin strip of what is probably blue
secretly alters the horizon.

Someone must be punished for this carelessness.
Though I believe in the abolition of all punishment
we must concentrate, for once, on getting the thing right.
Otherwise this hole in time will come to seem a fragment
of a dream that never happened. We can't have that. Think how stunned
the birds would be to learn they had never existed in that split-second
that is praying to you now, clawing from the light.

The old man and his boss took to it,
that is they took a gun with them, and a dog
over the hill to chase down the lost birds. None were to be seen.
This confirmed the old guy's expectations,
but naturally he refused to say anything about it.
Tamped some wadding in his gun. The thing blew up,
his face was all bloody. The dog took off over the nearby hill
and was never seen again

unless the dog seen lurking near the courthouse
a couple of weeks later was that one.
By that time the birds had come back, the pigeons, at any rate,
and were roosting proud as you please
on the doric pediments and the statue of General Ebenezer what's-his-name.

The horizon was a little bluer then, like tea.

'Invitation to a Wooing', John Ashbery

This is the full version of Ashbery's poem. If you did guess the missing words accurately, I suspect it was inspiration or luck rather than any linguistic clues that narrowed the possibilities. The unpredictability of the poem, the chilling, puzzling or shocking nature of its images, references and connections are typical of the craft of the bricoleur. It is the bricoleur who suspends closure indefinitely or suddenly changes direction with a thought or a sentence or an image so that a whole work takes off in an unexpected direction. Here Ashbery uses the weather, the colour blue, birds, dogs, the idea of punishment, hunting, guns, a civic statue, town hall architecture and finally the common little word, 'tea'. He has grabbed so many bits and pieces from so many places and contexts that we might want to argue whether he has succeeded in constructing something even approaching coherence. What he does do, unequivocally, is make us see in a new light certain old and familiar words normally passed over without much attention. What does it mean, "the horizon was a little bluer then, like tea"? Americans don't drink tea, I've been told. Is tea an exotic word for Ashbery, is it a kind of joke-word referring to the old British Empire or the Boston tea party, or is the tea in Ashbery's hometown slightly blue? The bricoleur always might have used a different word, one which might have altered the meaning of the whole. The scientist cannot move with that kind of unlimited material and vague aim. The scientist is restricted, as it were, by physical entities, while the bricoleur is restricted to what has been left over from human endeavours.

The breaking up of a poem into lines has many effects, and among them are the effects we noticed when looking at garden paths, ambiguities and texts made of fragments: connectedness and relatedness are brought to the fore. Ashbery plays with this opportunity here. We read, "someone must be punished for this carelessness" and become alerted to the satiric mimicry of the line by the next, contradictory statement: "Though I believe in the abolition of all punishment"; only to be brought back into the mindset of the vengeful in the very next line, "we must concentrate, for once, on getting the thing right". Similarly the dog never seen again reappears in the following line. Ashbery makes use of line breaks as opportunities to suspend and contradict meaning, to offer and withdraw.

The difference between bricoleur and engineer is not absolute, just as the differences between a poet making a poem and an engineer making a bridge or the Pope writing an encyclical are not absolute. But the differences are real. The engineer works with ideas, the Pope with pre-determined ends, while the poet or bricoleur works with those images or signs (not quite ideas but coexisting with ideas) that come to hand (objects already with cultural meaning). Poems are structured but they are never dependent upon this for their existence as poems. Structure can never in itself be enough to ensure a work's achievement as poetry. What makes it poetry is what makes the bricoleur a bricoleur.

As much as poetry is a structure it is an event – a game with rules. Lévi-Strauss makes the point that competitive games (as most games are in our culture) have a disjunctive effect. Two teams begin in equality and end as either a winner or a loser. Like Western science the game produces results by means of a structure of rules. Perhaps this is a source of the popularity of sport as a spectacle in the developed world. But there is another kind of game that is still an event structured by rules: the ritual. The initiation rite, the funeral wake, the baptism of a baby, anniversaries and reunions. These events are ordered with rules like games but, beginning with inequalities their aim is to end in a situation of equality: to bring the outsider in to the group, to impart knowledge, to come to some agreement over the fact of death, or to make peace with death. Lévi-Strauss writes of a New Guinea tribe, the Gahuka Gama who learned to play football. But when they play, they play for several days running as many matches as are necessary for both sides to reach the same score. They treat games as rituals. My eight-year-old son is like this. He will always want to play two games of connect-four or draughts or Test Match if he happens to win the first one so that he can let you win the second. It seems to me that poetry is a game played in a spirit much closer to the ritual than to competitive sport, and this might be one of the reasons it generates so little excitement in the wide public.

This final poem is also from John Ashbery, and I want to end with it because it completes a ritual of looking at poetry and because this playful poem, I think, brings us into its game as a ritual aimed at reconciling us all to both living and dying:

I really thought that drinking here would
start a new chain, that the soft storms
would abate, and the horror stories, the
noises men make to frighten themselves,
rest secure on the lip of a canyon as day

died away, and they would still be there the next morning.

Nothing is very simple.
You must remember that certain things die out for awhile
so that they can be remembered with affection
later on and become holy. Look at Art Deco
for instance or the "tulip mania" of Holland:
Both things we know about and recall
with a certain finesse as though they were responsible
for part of life. And we congratulate them.

Each day as the sun wends its way
into your small living room and stays
you remember the accident of night as though it were a friend.
All that is forgotten now. There are no
hard feelings, and it doesn't matter that it will soon
come again. You know what I mean. We are wrapped in
what seems like a positive, conscious choice, like a bird
in air. It doesn't matter that the peonies are tipped in soot
or that a man will come to station himself each night
outside your house, and leave shortly before dawn,
that nobody answers when you pick up the phone.
You have all lived through lots of these things before
and know that life is like an ocean: sometimes the tide is out
and sometimes it's in, but it's always the same body of water
even though it looks different, and
it makes the things on the shore look different.
They depend on each other like the snow and the snowplow.

It's only after realizing this for a long time
that you can make a chain of events like days
that more and more rapidly come to punch their own number
out of the calendar, draining it. By that time
space will be a jar with no lid, and you can live
any way you like out on those vague terraces,
verandas, walkways – the forms of space combined with time
we are allowed, and we live them passionately,
fortunately, though we can never be described
and would make lousy characters in a novel.

'Knocking Around'

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Apostasy

Chestnut sky
  and lunch with X,
speaking over the crush of Main Street:

humming engines, humming strutters
  skimming the brick,
flashing tattoos, flagging cabs.

Another humdrum canticle.

Mid-noon flue, burst,
  sun splayed on City Hall.

Then from the chestnut sky drizzled by God
like a soupy tempera
  – misty, cumular billows,
    onionskin up there,
  almost

– nothing ever as luminous as that YELLOWNESS,
that stark headache yellow:

beamed-down revelation of a fraudulent life,
  yes, a sad but not
entirely unexpected moment . . .

I'd planned for that moment – finally it'd come –
I'd cut my canvases in half,
  fearing the many years of downpour . . .

What a scene –

our modern Noahs scurrying
into camper-trucks
  made of glass.

Then the bee plague:

stinging us for our own good,
  for being so self-occupied while
God huddled up there, lonely.

How dare we, I told X

but he was gone, had
  walked off
had been enveloped –

One day will he find healing
in the uncontrollable
beauty of not this world

Ethan Paquin

The Football Star

fiction

Neil Boyack

FROM THE DRIVER'S side window she could taste the land. She could see the black shade of single trees way off the road, and she could see the deep cracks and grooves of erosion in the land either side of the tar. The sun reflected red from the feathers of crows, and her eyes became tired. The brown land cut the blue sky ahead and she closed her eyes for a while because the road was straight, and there she fell into the sorting of thoughts before sleep. She thought of her boyfriend Jon in hospital, thought of his knee; she was driving away from him and his leg, into another state, but the grooves and cracks in the land led her into a darkness where there were reptiles and fire. She felt pinches of fear from these pictures and opened her eyes to get away from them. She touched her knees as she drove and when she came to a small town called Burnum she stopped the car and walked up the wide main street to stretch her legs. She moved from the main street into the pub there, to get some water and gum. There were red men in there, pointed noses, toothless, slashes of paint on their old boots. The green walls and the men stopped when her musk washed over them, filling them with all things soft and making the old men think that they could satisfy all things in their lives.

When she got to Griffith, she found her motel. From there she walked to Morello's Pharmacy, where she was introducing a new line of cosmetics. Morello's Pharmacy was paying for her visit, paying for her cosmetics; they had booked five makeovers for her that afternoon. The air was dry and the main street was long like the perfect blue in the sky. She had seen palm trees, and blown her nose which was filled with dust and sunburn, and when night came Liz was sitting in a bar with Samantha Morello. They met Samantha Morello's brother Ray at the bar. He bought drinks for the two women and Liz saw brown country men with moleskins and checked shirts, men from out of town, who carried pots of beer through crowds, men, who according to Ray Morello, would get "their fight for the night" and leave town satisfied. Ray Morello recounted a fight he had been in, where he was up against a parked car in the main street and there were six men punching into him, calling him a wog bastard. "I felt *so* alone for a while after that," he said and the story quietened the group. Samantha Morello touched her brother on the wrist, nursing him out of the bad memory, and then he burst back into his life asking Liz, the cosmetics rep, about colours. So Liz talked of colours, names that she would give colours of eye shadows, blushes and body lotions, and the Morello girl talked of her men, which were few, and then Liz thought of Jon in hospital and the conversation stalled, because they'd only met each other that day. Liz felt like calling Jon, then and there at the bar, but Samantha Morello was in her face, telling her something, "being a wog . . . it's hairy, I have to wax all of the time". Liz agreed, then went back to thinking of Jon against the noise of the bar, against the many grey and white pictures of Griffith in the 1800s. People were getting loud and drunk, but she could see Jon clearly. It was Ray Morello who ruined the image for her, when he got up close to her ear with his moist lips.

"Uh, while you're in town . . . I should show you the lookout. I've got some smoke, if you're interested."

He could see that she was thinking, looking at her watch, her drink, interested.

"I'll drive, I'm alright to drive," he reassured her.

So it was that soon they were passing through the back blocks of Griffith, where Liz could see horses in paddocks next to factories, then turning up through misty curves of the black hill which was slow and steep and to the carpark at the top that looked over Griffith. It was dark, and Ray had mentioned a cave. She had never seen the stars so bright.

"So what do you think of Griffith so far?" asked the Morello boy, as he rolled a number in the interior light.

"Lots of Italian names, lots of grapes, Koories, Islanders, lots of young mothers."

"Yeah," he agreed, "some of 'em come 'ere to pick fruit, but most of 'em live in Griffith." He held the small joint up to the light and turned it so it was tight. Then they moved from the car to the little lookout, with the ruined wire fence where she could see chains of lights and patches of black in the town of Griffith below. There was a dirty wind which pushed at them. They cuffed the joint. Ray's fitted black T-shirt showed his hard chest and she was enjoying the outing. And they found themselves there, in the wind above the town on a black mountain, looking down onto a jagged grid of street lights, and into the dark scrubland which surrounded them. And they didn't say much because the wind was loud, leaves and dust from the carpark lashing them. The dope was taking them into their own worlds and it could have been half an hour before the wind forced them back to the car, she wasn't sure. But the car was a safe cocoon; they listened to the wind rocking it softly. Their voices were sleepy, satisfied – not wanting to ruin anything.

"What are you doing tomorrow?" she asked him, then quickly adjusted it, "Like, what is there to do here?"

He took a little while to answer.

"Well, tomorrow I'm starting football pre-season. My knees are dodgy, and I'm making this my last season."

She could have gone into Jon's knee problems, she knew all about them, but Ray Morello broke in and started his story.

"I played in the city for a while, in the AFL reserves, but that's where my knees went. I don't give a rat's arse now." There was bitterness in his voice, perhaps because there was no-one to blame for his knees, a chunk of his manliness gone. "I look for enjoyment, if you're not enjoying something you may as well . . ." the dope had captured him, "I don't know . . . fuck off," he said and laughed stupidly through his nose.

The wind rocked the car again. He sounded defeated.

"I can see what you mean," she went on, "about enjoyment and that. Too many people smash their heads into a brick wall every day of the week, working in jobs they don't want to work in, unpaid overtime, falling in love with their rapists to get ahead . . . all that shit."

"Yeah," he agreed, and surprised her by starting the car. He understood her, her slant opened him up, but perhaps she had issues. All he really wanted was to get down through the mists of the black mountain while he was straight enough, so they could maybe sleep together. He didn't want a rant. As the Commodore tail-lights left the carpark in dust he thought of licking her inner thigh, holding her in his mouth. He knew the rooms at her motel, he'd been there before, the gold bedspreads and the tiny bottles of Jack in the fridge, the blue tiles in the showers – the same blue tiles in the football-club showers, where there was training in the morning. It was his last chance and he dreamed himself back into the AFL draft, and saw himself back in the city as he changed gears into the dips and turns down the mountain.

The joint had got her good and thick when she found herself back in her motel room. Ray had asked to come up with her, but before she had touched his stomach, before she had held her neck there for him to kiss or bite or lick, he withdrew, giving her his

phone number; for what, neither of them knew.

The warm night found Liz in her brown motor inn. A soft yellow lamp in her room projected a circle of light onto the ceiling, her silhouette thrown onto the faded blinds that she thought may have soaked up more arguments coming from boredom than money. The third-floor balcony saw her drinking Scotch and sucking ice in her T-shirt and briefs, the gentle northerly wind lifting the hairs on her forearms. Thoughts of Ray taking hold of her were tainted with her boyfriend of two months, Jon, sitting in hospital. She was stoned and exploring, she didn't want to sleep. Resting her elbows on the white cement of the balcony, looking out to the dark Griffith railyards, for an instant she remembered what the kissing was like when people first met, the sharp tongues, when she first met Jon. Pictures of kissing him on the cheek in hospital invaded any sensuality. She imagined that the doctors and nurses who had seen them together must have thought that they were a couple, in love. She was hoping that people thought she was his sister or something.

So at 3 a.m. there were phone-sex ads on the television and she called him at the hospital.

"I miss you," he said.

"I miss you too," she said, pushing hair behind her ear.

In the hospital bed, he put his hand on his cock and settled in for a conversation.

"How long are you in?" she asked, lighting a cigarette she'd found at the bottom of her bag. She blew the smoke away and looked at her feet, as she lay on the gold bedspread.

"A couple of days in here, then the wheelchair."

"Wheelchair?" Shocked, she sat up, both hands holding the receiver. She felt like taking care of him forever. Maybe she shouldn't have called him. "You poor darling."

"Only for a month," he said. She sat back a little.

"Sorry," he said and she realized that he was an apologizer.

"Sorry for what? . . . you'll get through it."

She was glad she was free of him in Griffith.

"I suppose I'll get through it," he said. "What have you been up to?"

She was thinking about pushing him around in a wheelchair – traffic lights, supermarkets, the bank – maybe she'd have to help him with the shower.

"Usual stuff, selling my gear and drinking with locals. They're nice people here. It's hot, and I can hear voices in the railyards outside my window. Anyway, I was just checking up on you. I'm tired, and I think I should go to bed."

"I miss you," he broke in. Something sick rose in her; she hoped he wouldn't say that he loved her.

"I miss you too," she said, and the conversation ended.

She sat there on her bed in her briefs and T-shirt and was looking to the balcony, the open sliding door. From there she could see the navy blue sky above the railway yards, feel the invisible wind outside, where she thought she could hear voices. She wondered about her lungs through the cigarette, wondered if she was allowed to smoke in the motel. She thought she should have cut Jon off then and there over the telephone. But she was remembering when they had first got together, a Friday night after drinks at the bank, where he worked. They left around ten for Jon's flat, where they did tequila shots in his small loungeroom. Neil Diamond. He had a little bar shaped like the front of a boat which is where they stood doing their shots. Midnight found them sitting opposite each other at the kitchen bench, the corn light from above the stove colouring the left side of her face. And they kissed with their tongues, soft, the softest. With butterflies rising in them, he turned the music down and walked back past her, through into the dark hallway, where earlier she'd seen pictures of fish hanging. She sniffed him as he walked by, it could have been a habit she didn't know about. There was apple and blackcurrant; maybe it came from between his legs, she thought. She looked around the kitchen, a bank calendar above the sink, fruit in a bowl, bank matches next to the stove. She saw dishes in the sink and then, settling on cider as the tequila was gone, she went to the fridge. Inside on the bright

shelves of the fridge there were sticks of celery. She sat back at the kitchen bench and drank, touching herself in the strange kitchen. She couldn't hear Jon and she thought for a second he might be getting ready for her, that they might fuck soon, that he might slink back into the kitchen in his socks, but then she heard him cough and she found him half asleep crouched over the toilet bowl. He'd been sick. She wiped his mouth and chin with toilet paper and then threw it in the clear tequila mess on the floor, patting the paper with her foot, gently soaking the puddle up. She helped him to his feet, and draped one of his arms around her neck. He was telling her how sorry he was as they limped along the hall to the bedroom. She turned her face away from his breath and found the bedroom light and then laid him on the bed. There were sports magazines on the floor, women in swimwear. His eyes were closed, his hands were curled and he was still and comfortable. He was crook. She looked around the bedroom for a minute before turning the light out and saw three walking-sticks in the corner. Jon had told her about his knee, the first time his knee went, in a final where he kicked three goals. And lying on the gold bedspread in the Griffith motel she thought about it. She thought about burned sticks, leg bones laid upon a campfire and she remembered the next morning when he woke her, gently calling her name as he turned the television off. It was an overcast morning, the room in a half light, her blonde tips looking grey for the first time in the wall mirror of Jon's little loungeroom. She felt creased, and was moaning at herself for falling asleep on his couch, trying to remind herself of the things that had drawn them together. She could smell toast and coffee. He was in a towelling dressing gown, black, with the bank's red insignia on the pocket. Showered and wide awake, he looked handsome, his black hair wet, flicked back. From the couch she could see his knees, one thinner than the other. She saw the thin knee working as he walked out into the kitchen.

"Sorry about last night," he said from the other room.

"That's alright, we've all been there," she said from the loungeroom.

"Have we?" he asked, coming into the loungeroom with a tray. They ate breakfast there on the couch and he crossed his legs and she saw the scars on his knee, the pink worms.

A FEW DAYS LATER he was out of hospital and she was on the road, on her way home from Griffith. When she called him from the roadside on her mobile, he was pushing himself around the bank office in a wheelchair. He told her his leg was a lot stronger and that he'd be able to walk soon.

"There's a new girl filling in for me." He said it like something could have gone either way. "She's quite nice."

Liz wasn't sure how to tell him, but she went ahead. "I had to kill a kangaroo just then." She was short, didn't know what to do. There was silence.

"What? Are you o.k.?" He sat up in his wheelchair. "How did you do it?"

"With a rock. Someone had run over it and it was twitching. I'm in the middle of nowhere." She wasn't breaking up, just a little shocked.

There was the buzz of long distance on the phone.

"Shit," he said in wonder. "Are you sure you're alright?"

"Yeah, I'll be alright, I just need to sit a while," she said looking at the small grey kangaroo in front of her car.

"You poor thing," he said. "You poor thing . . . Listen when you get home I'll give you a foot massage, and maybe a tongue massage, that'll make you feel better."

She listened to Jon's smut and looked at the sweet fur on the belly of the animal, thought she could maybe bury it, but there were crows gathering nearby, and she wanted to leave before they started on the dead kangaroo.

When she arrived at Jon's flat, it was 10.30 p.m., and he was dozing in his wheelchair. He'd been drinking. There were football socks and football trophies and beer cans on the floor. Liz had brought a bottle of

wine, which she opened as soon as she got in the door, before she kissed him hello, because she wanted a drink. He woke and stretched in his chair and wheeled around to face her. Liz put the bottle of wine down on the floor and kissed him. Jon held her hands in his and kissed them. She pulled them away before it became pathetic.

"Been thinking footy?" she asked.

"Yeah," he said, but he wasn't worried about football. "Are you o.k. Liz?, like with the kangaroo business?"

"Yeah . . . I'm o.k. . . . but I wish I'd have seen the arseholes that did it, it was only a baby." She shook her head slowly, "You should've seen it, it was so beautiful."

He saw it in his head, it was on its side, and then he changed the subject.

"And what about us? are *we* . . . still alright?"

Hearts were exposed to the dull loungeroom light.

"If it's because of my knee, I know it's been hard, but I'm on the mend, you're not going out with a cripple! But I wouldn't blame you if you were sick of me."

There was silence from her. The beginning of the end ran through her – it was silver. They were looking into separate parts of the room, going through life alone, or free, until she picked up the bottle of wine from the floor. Liz could get the whole thing out of the way, she could forget him but for the warmth and fear that was cutting through her, and there was the bottle of wine, which she held up to admire. The end of the lovers was in her, it was huge and choking, it broke the surface in her and then went back to its deep hole, and she felt the sweat on her lip, and she scooped small breaths, and the calm washed over her and she sat with her bottle of wine and stared at the television with the football star. The same calm she felt when she'd been drawn off the road an hour out of Griffith. When she had seen the twitching grey kangaroo. She parked near it and walked a little way, a thousand flicking grasshoppers with every step, her neck burning in the sun, a rhythm in the invisible sounds of the scrub. She remembered brushing the fur of the animal with the back of her hand. Its legs were moving, its head looking sideways at the earth through red eyes.

"I'm here," she whispered, "It's o.k., I'm here."

She looked at it for a while, in her shadow. When she bent to pick up the rock, she thought she may have been God but there were centipedes, and she shivered, then she smashed the soft animal with the rock and there were spots of blood on her hands. She walked backwards to the open car door and she rubbed her shaking hands together under her drinking water, and she sat in the passenger side for a while, and she was calm and could see everything.

Goodbye Charlie

We must love one another or die.
(Auden)

Lyn McLeavy

I WAS A seventeen-year-old secretary, at Ansett's trucking company on Footscray Road, alone in a tiny rest room on a vinyl bench, perhaps sick (of work), or wanting a quiet place to read *Time* magazine, trying to educate myself in 1965. Charlie Perkins was on the cover – I remember that moment like the day President Kennedy was shot.

I don't know why Charlie Perkins' freedom rides had such an impact on me. Perhaps I'd just come back from Brisbane, seeing for the first time Aboriginal faces at the station, feeling surprised and excited, like I was in a new country. Perhaps Bob Dylan's songs of protest helped me recognize Charlie's heroism, or *Time*'s articles about Martin Luther King. I didn't know my life would connect with Charlie's, not yet.

Like Charlie, I wanted to be a teacher, somehow an unrealizable ambition for a working-class girl in sixties Melbourne. I'd already buried my dream of being a dancer and musician.

When the Beatles burst into the world, my heart lifted in Melbourne's Siberia where I lived, Braybrook, housing commission. Working-class Irish Liverpool's wit spoke for us too, and for the first time I felt possibility, pride, even happiness being working class in conservative, class-ridden Australia, where people talked like the Queen for no good reason.

I knocked at the gates of the Establishment year after year, trying to qualify for teachers' college at night school, while some man in a building of long empty corridors kept raising the entrance level, till I gave up.

At night I danced in a cage at swish Nine Darling Street, South Yarra, peering through the spotlight into the darkness at tuxedoed drunken students from Melbourne University.

"Hey, mattress back" one called out.

Helen Garner writes in *True Stories* "At Nine Darling Street, the steps were carpeted in red, as I recall them now, but perhaps I'm confusing this with the entrance of the stars to the palace at the Cannes festival. The tinselled significance was the same."

In the dressing room, looking up from studying, I saw mountains of sculpted ice, festooned with oysters, glide past the door frame; a procession of bombe alaskas on fire in the dark, held by waiters, their faces illuminated in a staccato light of sparklers.

At work I met Australians just back from swinging London who urged me to go there.

I left my impending marriage, buying a house, going to work forever, footie, shower teas – sensing the boredom of Australian suburban life closing in – middle-class Australia inoculating me – and got off the boat in South Africa on my way to the Mother Country as the Americans landed on the moon.

The first photo I took in South Africa was of a black man pushing a big dipper car, which had stalled at the top of the ascent. I watched as he got out to push the car, then jump in to join two white men, before it took off.

Sunday morning in Durban, sitting on a stool at Mr Wimpie's Hamburger Bar, I was looking through a large window onto a quiet street, thinking about last night's cockroach invasion, the recent murder in my cheap hotel; the black lady on her knees cleaning – "What lady?" the white South African asked me.

Then sounds of drumming coming down the street, getting louder, a riot of dancers surging and swaying past the 'burger bar, red feathers and jewellery, naked bodies gumboot jiving, laughing, singing, spirit of Africa alive and kicking – out of the mines and compounds, that fed the world's lust for gold and diamonds – slaves dancing on their one free day.

I became an outlaw straight away, whispering with the blacks, sneaking into their jazz club where a man lay on the stage to sing 'Georgia'. We could all have been arrested, didn't care. The Boers were so boring. I hid Indians in my wardrobe, yes, I really did.

1972 back in Australia, after England, Russia, Morocco, Spain – I sat in the gutter at lunchtime at Harold Holt's son's advertising agency in South Yarra, where I worked, thinking death would be kinder than this. Where was the soul in my country?

A Jewish mystic poet, Mal Morgan, who doubled as a chemist at the Vic Market, where we met, took me to the Albion Hotel in Carlton, a madhouse of poets, actors, writers, painters, philosophers, musicians, a trickle of trendies. There a painter out of Pentridge told me the Whitlam government was offering retraining for women, would pay me to go to school and university. I could hear angels singing.

1979 I WALKED into the Builders' Arms Hotel in Fitzroy, just back from Western Australia and Northern Territory with photos to show whoever was there, also needing legal advice. Jan Roberts recalls our arrest in Western Australia in her book, *From Massacres to Mining, the Colonization of Aboriginal Australia*, "The Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Chaney, personally ordered reluctant police to arrest two women who had gone to Oombulgurri with the Aboriginal council's permission to discuss mining matters with the community and to give them factual information on diamond mining".

I recall elders saying "the police are coming in a helicopter to arrest you"; the overwhelming heat, Jan and I, an Aboriginal man driving the motorboat, a river of crocodiles, spacious blue sky, red cliffs, upside down trees, hiding in Aarons' backroom at Wyndham till night when they found us.

I don't remember anything else that night, just the frightening knock on the door, having my fingerprints taken, nothing else. Was this my country?

It was afternoon at the Builders'. Robin at the bar, chunky body, smiling. He was in my art class at RMIT in '74, his face alive, jumping out from behind the canvas. The Builders' full of young Aboriginal men – beautiful, graceful, artistic, friendly. What more could a girl want? Gary said I was a lush. So was he.

The place got crowded in the evening, juke box playing The Police, yarndi deals going on, the bar three rows deep. Old people whose looks said everything about my tragic country. Old man singing himself; a woman from Queensland, telling me police beat her naked breasts, when she was breastfeeding and thinking she would die, she painted her blood on the cell wall leaving a message.

Bare light and floorboards. Everyone on the edge. "Got a cigarette, cuz?" "Money?"

White Australia outside occasionally burst through the door, batons out, barging around the room, fear palpable, someone might die tonight, here in Fitzroy. Flashback South Africa.

152 BEAVERS ROAD, Northcote was a Californian bungalow in northern suburbs Melbourne, working class, unfashionable. The house owned by Greeks or Italians, who had lovingly decorated the ceilings with miniature plaster of Paris stalactites, painted gold and blue in one room, and silver and blue in mine. We had no furniture. Friends helped make a kitchen dresser out of rough sawn timber that weighed a ton. We brought home green vinyl lounge chairs from rubbish left out in the surrounding streets. Soon the house was full of people.

Hard Times, the Aboriginal band from Fitzroy, hiding out, practised 'I Shot the Sheriff' and 'I'm a Bluebird' till the sun came up.

Elders from North Queensland and the Kimberleys stayed there on tours south, raising support for their cause, sitting by the fire till dawn, laughing, singing songs, telling stories.

I drove them around in my Golden Holden, police getting them out of the car onto the footpath for questioning. Barramundi Dreaming or Argyle pink diamonds?

My wharfie Dad moved in –

at 57 he'd just been pronounced a vegetable by a specialist at Prince Henry's Hospital because he couldn't remember what he'd had for breakfast. Dad wasn't interested in questions like that. His memory going from the grog, he kept asking me where his mother was. She'd been dead for years. When we got home and feeling worried, I asked him a question to see if he really was a vegetable.

"Dad, do you remember who Joh Bjelke-Petersen is?"

"Who could forget that bastard."

Relieved I read him 'Do not go gently into that good night'.

Steve Hawke moved in. We didn't have the phone on, for some reason couldn't get the phone on. We needed a phone to launch Rock Against Racism at Northcote Town Hall, painting up the billboard opposite the police station advertising the gig. Police breaking into Aboriginal funeral fund-raisers kicking pregnant women. Tension in the air.

Steve had the phone on in minutes, thanks to his Dad (no friend of mine). Then he wanted his mother to move in. "Don't be silly, Steve, she won't move in here." (Leave the luxury of Sandringham, of being a future Prime Minister's wife?) I came home one evening and there they were, by the fire discussing it – Hazel, Sue and Steve eating soup in the green vinyl chairs. I couldn't believe my life.

Under the stalactites, I typed away, clacketty clack, the oral history of Melbourne's waterfront, my family's history, my history, the sad labour history of Melbourne's waterfront. "This place sounds like a police station," said a Koori friend.

Bruce McGuinness played 'On the Bright Side of the Road', No Fixed Address were the bright side of the road. Ruth and Rachael called each other "Jabiru legs". An elder threw-up when I told him I'd unknowingly served his totem for tea. Jimmy Bienderry, eighteen when he came out of the desert, so beautiful, studied his Bible then passed away young.

152 Beavers Road, Northcote, busy spiritual crossroads.

POLICE APPREHENDED the Golden Hold-on on the night of the Zimbabwean Liberation celebrations heading for the dance. Overloaded with Koories, unroadworthy, she had everything Mr Plod wanted. They took only the driver. Had no interest in anything else. Said nothing about eight blackfellas, and that was just in the back seat. Damn, they know I love to dance, they said I'd blown borderline and must go with them to the station for another test.

I sat alone for hours – how much Stevie Wonder was I missing? Two police appeared.

"We don't want you drinking at the Builders' Arms any more."

"Why not?" (Didn't they want the only white person there seeing what they got up to?)

"You might get bashed and robbed."

"I've been going there for two years and haven't been bashed or robbed," I said in my nicest voice, wanting to add "and only feel in danger when you lot come in."

They said they'd take me back to my car. I naively waited. They didn't.

WHEN THE NEW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs dismissed Charlie, I had to go too. In shock and very sick, I fell into a taxi, "to the Aboriginal Health Service please, driver".

Some Koories had to help me out of the back seat of the taxi. "What's happened to you, sis?" They'd never seen me like this before.

At home I lay like a wounded animal for a week, but had to get up, get money, be an (unexpected) single mother. Get up, stand up. I prayed in my room, to get to the door. Meditated deeply at Muktananda's ashram. I couldn't take any more, I quit, I'm out. Thirteen years in Aboriginal heaven and hell, *and* my own life.

I took a tram to Preston, climbing narrow stairs of an obscure secretarial agency for a quiet life. Next day they rang, "There's work for you at the Aborigines Advancement League taking minutes of a meeting." I couldn't get out of Aboriginal affairs, even when I wanted to. The Victorian Aboriginal community sat around the table, I sat next to the old man I admired so much, his laughing eyes. Amazed and happy to be there, I wrote the letter to the new Minister supporting Charlie.

I DECIDED TO write this story thinking about Charlie Perkins all day, unaware until I turned on the TV news that night, it was the day he passed away.

Charlie said not so long ago he wanted to die, that life for Aboriginal Australians is too damn sad.

Tram ride from S11

Gaby Bila-Gunther

HIGH AS A KITE on slogans and actions against the richest men and corporations in the world, tired I go home after three days of protest and emotional discharge in front of the Crown Casino. After two days of ugly confrontations and batons upon innocent protesters, on the last day, a day of Peace and Commemoration, we made a human chain around the Casino and showed them our unity and support. The site looked smashing, with political graffiti adorning the ugliest building in Melbourne (the Crown of course) and the whole grounds surrounded still by exhausted vigilant cops of both genders, guarding the money bastion and its Forum occupants on taxpayers' money, our money.

However the Peace Day was calm and serene, people were keen to show the non-violence. The sun came out to greet us *and shone its rays* upon the united chain, which showed the paranoid world inside the Casino our meaningful and concerned threats. A group of women held up placards opening our eyes and hearts about how much profit a NIKE corporate manager makes every year compared to the women workers in Indonesia who'd have to work a thousand years to make as much as their superior corporate CEOs. Puppets, street theatre and loud techno-music took control of the streets making waves along Flinders Street towards the Corporate CBD where shares and money are born daily.

As the day ended on a positive note I got on the tram only to be greeted with repulsion by suits. Most of them tired from their 9 to 5 wage slave existence, complained about the trams being late and blamed the S11 protest action. A mother warned her children not to look out the window when a group of ferals walked past holding placards up high to show the world their message: *Human need not Corporate Greed! Our world is not for sale!* The children asked innocently who these people were outside the tram looking so colourful and proud (of their individuality). The mother responded bluntly: they are just silly protesters. Yes, the others murmured and nodded their heads in agreement. At that point I couldn't keep my mouth shut and asked the mother to explain to her sheltered offspring why people protested. Did they know what these corporations are doing to the world, by carving up profits amongst themselves and with no consideration for the environment or improving living conditions in Third World nations? At that point a suit jumps on me and tells me to live in the real world. That's what I am afraid of, the real damage upon the real world, I told him and just because I didn't have my corporate gear on and the runners with the white socks just like the other office ladies who promenade the streets during 9 to 5, he looked at me as if I was scum. Get a job and live in the real world because if it weren't for Bill Gates, the world would be in real trouble, he goes on. Bill Gates, the saviour of the African nations, the suit speaks up again: if it wasn't for Bill Gates the African nations would die in poverty. They do mate; they do die while Bill is too busy bending over to pick up the millions he makes each second.

Why did we hate him so much, just because he is smart and has a fortune? (How did he make his money, mate? Through aggressive marketing strategies and establishing a monopoly, that's how.)

Why did we want to kill him? Who is talking about killing him, mate? It was only a protest, exercising our rights. Some people took time off work to be there and stand up for what they believed in. The news doesn't show people's voices only people's fists of rage, for ratings purposes.

Why do you all complain about not having enough money to pay the rent but then you take three days off to *protest? Where is the logic in* that? another one speaks up.

I could have killed that sucker . . . They all missed the point.

Others joined in this conversation and I felt attacked from all sides, however I kept my strength up and preached to the suburbanites who go home, turn on Channel 7 and believe their hype and lies. What about McDonald's I say, who cut rain forests down in order to make space for their cows to turn into burgers, and who hate unions and any employee who belongs to one. I asked one suit how would he like it if his son was exploited for $5 per hour while a new McDonald's opens up every seven minutes anywhere

in the world. How would he feel if he had to work one month to afford a family meal at McDonald's like the workers in Russia? Then surprisingly a seventeen-year-old right-wing teenager tells me to shut up and get a brain transplant. At least I have one, I say and grin his way. "You know what I would do," he goes on, "I would get a gun and shoot youse all. Right in the head." Everyone seemed to agree with him. Pimples on his face and he talks about guns and I am the hated one on this tram! This society doesn't make sense. Get off *My* tram, he yelled and others applauded. I know they are privatized but I still thought they were for all the general public despite their political differences? Or are they?

We live in a sick society when a gun-crazed teenager gets more respect than a left-wing feminist ideologist, and maybe a communist but definitely a socialist like myself.

Free Speech

A Hole in the Ground

Janet Brown

JO RYAN AND I have recently completed a third draft of our script 'A Hole in the Ground', inspired by the Werribee No Toxic Dump campaign. Jo was chairperson of the Werribee Residents Against the Toxic Dump Committee (WRATD) and I was a member of this hard-working dynamic community group. From April 1996 to November 1998, the Werribee community actively opposed CSR's proposal to develop a Prescribed Waste Landfill – euphemism for 'toxic dump' – in their locale. The objections to the toxic dump were on three main grounds: wrong site, wrong technology, wrong company. The community win was much celebrated although CSR would claim that they simply decided to withdraw the proposal.

Our script is inspired by our perceptions of processes in Victoria under the Kennett regime of the late 1990s. That is one of its most important features. Note I used the term 'inspired by', not 'based on'. Earlier drafts of the script were 'based on' but changes were recommended and have since been made. 'Based on' could create legal problems for us, 'inspired by' is somewhat safer. In our current version of the script, some of our dear friends who worked on the campaign are fictionalized, most of them eliminated from the script altogether or constructed as composites, and of course there are characters who are entirely fictionally constructed for dramatic purposes. We are creative writers, not documentary journalists. It is theatre, drama, based on that most seductive of theatrical premises: conflict. Yet, there is a problem. We have been advised to fictionalize the multinational corporation. At this stage, CSR is not the company at all, we call the proponent TFN (only ever referred to as 'That Fucken Company') and their corporate interests are different to those of CSR: not sugar, not construction materials. But we fear that veiling the identity of the multinational corporation to one that is entirely fictitious, and setting the story in a different, fictitious community distances the message. This law protects CSR and as a result could insult all industry. The smoke-screen is affected simply to keep us safe from CSR's and Jeff Kennett's lawyers knocking on our doors with defamation suits in hand. We've managed to maintain the integrity of the story, but we have had to compromise by softening the particularity.

What is defamation all about, anyway? For writers and other artists living and working in Australia in 2001 it seems hands are tied, lips are sealed and representations are veiled and twisted. My understanding is that 'fair comment' underpins any defamation case and it's the shades of grey, the uncertain subjectivities that, on legal interpretation can create a chasm of chaos for intrepid writers. The prospect of being asked to defend ourselves in a legal case against a person or corporation who claims they've been represented unfairly is not one we'd take lightly or welcome as an interesting experience – even for the sake of our art.

The writing of cultural commentary is part of the realm of art and literature that takes social and political issues – people and processes – beyond the titillating, the mildly amusing, the vaguely interesting; but pity help the poor writers who dare to challenge individuals or organizations with their representations. To date, my writing interests have explored other issues and nothing of my

previous work embodies the political and legal ramifications of our co-written project. As an advocate of free speech there is no naivete on my part about the damage that can be done to reputations when damning lies and rumours are represented as fact. Surely in a responsible society there need to be laws to protect us all from the vicious and lying pen. Writers are unable to hide behind their words just as cartoonists cannot stand back from their drawings. There's no defence in the line 'the devil made me do it'.

I do not believe that those in public life should be unfairly pilloried or ridiculed. So – what is the problem? This is the heart of the matter, this word 'unfair'. It is a judgement of notions that exist in the murky land between that which is obviously 'fair comment' and that which is obviously 'unfair comment'. This nowhere land of the 'potentially fair' or 'possibly unfair' is a tricky landscape to navigate.

There are few new big plays produced by Australian theatre companies today. Stories about society and community with larger casts are difficult to develop. This is a shame, but more than that it is a reflection of the current decisions about art, economics, policy, government spending and sponsorship.

The book about the Kennett Years commissioned while the State Liberal Party held government has already been the subject of much debate. That book will be one representation of the era and will be subject to reviews and criticism. Similarly, I believe our script is another – equally valid and maybe conflicting – representation of the same culture, and it will ultimately be damned or praised. Obviously, for this to happen, the script needs to be enabled to move from the page to the stage. What is the likelihood of this given the economic considerations of Victorian theatre?

Our play is critical of corporate power coercing an autocratic government and bullying a community into accepting an undesirable proposal. Perhaps the ultimate destination of our script will be to the stage of a marginalized theatre company or to an amateur group. That is not necessarily a poor destination, in fact it may be entirely appropriate, but we believe that a mainstream audience would enjoy and take a keen interest in this play just as the mainstream Victorian community showed interest in the campaign which inspired it. I wonder how arts administrators reconcile the need for corporate sponsorship against developing contemporary theatre that encompasses representation of issues that may be critical of the corporatized society and corporatized sponsorship of culture. Sensitivities must abound in this arena: the opportunity to stage exciting but difficult theatre has to be balanced against the prudence of arts' administrators' other considerations.

Our play is about why the *Werribee* community won – not why a 'generic' outer western suburbs community was ultimately successful in its campaign. It's those essential social and historical elements about Werribee and the wider community; the environmental aspects and technology of landfilling prescribed wastes as well as the management of the process that CSR orchestrated that we want to include and refer to. How can we write this script without at least a mention of CSR's record on environment and health, without one mention of Wittenoom? Defaming – no, utterly fair comment. We *must* write about CSR, Jeff Kennett, Werribee.

We are now working on yet another version of our script. We long to write a better version, more honest, exploring power and leadership theatrically amidst the truth of the story as we perceive it. We want to name CSR! We want to be specific rather than present a stereotype of some generic multinational corporation. We want to present the Planning Minister of the Kennett government, name Jeff Kennett, talk about the Werribee market gardeners and write this story a step closer to the real processes and events. So, can somebody please define 'Fair Comment'?

De-Corporatizing the Mind

How informal writing courses can save the world

Duncan Richardson

THE KENYAN WRITER Ngugi Wa Thiong'o made his farewell to writing in English with a book called *Decolonising the Mind*. For him, abandoning the language of the colonizers was a necessary step to achieving true liberation. In reflecting on many years of involvement

with informal writing courses I've come to understand that the language of business and academe can also colonize the brain, hampering creative thought. Informal writing courses often act against that kind of sclerosis. The proof of this lies both in comments from students in discussion and in the work produced throughout the courses. Perhaps that is why, in the face of mass media and declining opportunities for publishing, the courses continue to sprout.

While there may be people lurking in funding bodies or other administrative nightmares who view a corporate mentality as a positive thing, it does not take much reflection to see that the corporatized brain is a place where language and imagination die. Victims of this syndrome find they can describe mass sackings as 'right-sizing' and 'world's best practice' can slide from their lips without a flicker of concern in the eyes about what this actually means.

For the corporatized brain, appearance matters above all. The slickness of the cover far outweighs the content of the book and the image of the author is one small step away from becoming as substantial as the persona of Colonel Sanders. But does this corporatized Goliath meet his match in writing courses? Good question.

One of the most significant things that happens in many groups is the interplay between those students looking for rules and a tutor who knows that for writing to be truly creative, there can be no rigid guidelines. For many students whose sole recent experience of writing has been moving from school assignments to business letters and reports, this comes as a revelation. And a challenge. Sometimes it is even a blow to their self-confidence as a beginning writer. They seek rules for everything from short story length to rhyme schemes in poetry or which form of writing one should 'do' first. Faced by an absence of rules, some feel lost and drop out, while others persevere, shedding the burden of cliches and formalized prose to discover ideas they never expected in ways they had never dreamt of.

So how does this happen? Writing exercises aimed at stretching the imagination across commonly accepted categories are a start, letting students see for example that just because roses are traditionally symbols of love doesn't mean they can't be used for other purposes. To emphasize this, creative reading plays a part and puts the focus on to others, not the self. All of these things are part of the repertoire of many writing tutors. They and their students know the benefits of them yet only rarely is this mentioned in the discussion of teaching writing. A few established writers like to scorn informal writing courses, sometimes because of the lack of any selection process or the slim chance that any participant will become a full-time writer. Some writers avoid running workshops for fear of "afternoons of quasi-psychiatry" (see Michael Sharkey, *Australian Book Review* August 1996). This can easily be prevented by choosing activities that encourage students into other voices and perspectives as well as their own. The writing that results is also more interesting and liberating than when the focus is on self-analysis.

The same thing may happen with other art forms or independent of art in any form. It is what Umberto Eco called becoming a media guerilla to subvert monopoly control of TV, radio and print. Judith Wright talked about the dangers of the "admass mentality" and the threat to books that challenge this corporatized state of mind.

For many tutors, the clash of perspectives that results in classes can also be a challenge. Coming from a writing background, it's easy to forget that many people who don't write but want to, also don't read much. They haven't absorbed unconsciously a knowledge that the roads to effective writing are many.

Of course, there are those who say, "Too bad if the non-reading 'wannabes' get discouraged. It serves them right. The cult of the author is over-blown anyway. The fewer the better." Apart from the self-interest involved here, such arguments miss the point entirely. In the wider view, who does or doesn't get published is just one facet of a more substantial and important process.

What happens in the writing class is just the beginning. In a radio interview last year, Carmel Bird commented on the process of people telling stories for the Stolen Children report. She noted that the need to tell is not the end of the therapeutic process but a catalyst for further change. Likewise with

the effects of a truly creative writing course. While there are some participants who state directly that they write for therapy, others are surprised by the process of freeing-up that occurs and while they may not consider it therapy, a substantial change has clearly occurred. This may lead to publication, the successful outcome so often held up as the measure of worth for any writing course. But those who fear the apparent growth of a cult of authorship, should be aware that most people in informal writing courses have few such ambitions. Most have no contact with the literary world. Few have heard of writers' centres or Arts grants but many become more creative readers as a result of their courses.

As publishing shrinks, writing courses live on. But publication is also taking different, less centralized forms, again in the face of corporatization. The growth of small presses and web publishing is producing a great diversity of forms and content, while mainstream publishing becomes increasingly monolithic. Writers' groups and organizations are also under the same corporatizing pressure but that is another story.

Not that all writing courses encourage the mind to decorporatize. I recall being in one agonizing session where the tutor dictated lengthy notes on the features of a short story. What could have been gleaned from a guided reading of stories, was hung out to dry in a series of prescriptive points, feeding the illusion that there are guaranteed, immovable formulas for effective writing. Yet as Susan Hayes (*TEXT* no. 2, 1998) and others have found when looking into formal writing classes, the teaching at that level is also not always inspiring.

Writing classes can do the other things frequently claimed for them, such as teach technique and save time for people in their early development as writers. But more importantly, they can also be subversive. Perhaps that is the real reason some established writers try to talk them down.

The thing about football

Phil Doyle

DURING THE LAST round of the VFL there was a guy at the Coburg v. Richmond game wearing a Fitzroy football jumper who had replaced the famous yellow FFC symbol with a hammer and sickle.

"Give the game back to the people," he said.

Who would have thought that such a simple sentiment could be seen in such a revolutionary light?

I thought of the slogan from the 1968 demonstrations in Paris: 'Don't let them take your culture and sell it back to you.' Selling our own culture back to us is precisely what the major Australian sports are seeking to do, and in doing so they are treading a dangerous and immoral path.

Sport is thoroughly intertwined with Australian Culture.

It has allowed us to define ourselves. It gives us a place in the world where otherwise we would be just an isolated postcolonial backwater. It is a reflection of the values of egalitarianism, having a go and the collective spirit of mateship that are the foundations of our national mythology.

The two major football codes have grown through their inherent tribalism, originally based on fierce local and suburban loyalties.

"You must be careful not to undermine the tribal relationship between territories and people with the game of football," says Australian football player, coach and commentator Phil Cleary. "Because if you do the game's tenure will be based on its television audience. In a global world television audiences are pretty volatile. If you don't have the strength of tribalism to protect you, to fortify you, then you can find yourself in pretty volatile territory."

Cleary sounds a warning to those who seek to remove sport as a function of the community and repackage it as a commodity. These are the people who wish to corporatize football, and they are to be found in all the major codes of football played in Australia today.

So who are they?

The administrations of the elite competitions of any professional football code in Australia have long been trying to maximize the potential earnings of their particular sport. If you put aside the arguments about where sport should lie in a community's priorities there's nothing intrinsically wrong in that. The sort of earnings that these elite competitions can generate have inflated astronomically in

photo: Danius Kesminas

recent years. What is the commodity they are trading in? Well, while they may present it as fourteen or sixteen flavours of the same product what they are in fact trading in is passion. Passion isn't like ice cream, or pies, or some other seasonal product. It's an intangible. It has been built up over decades of human sacrifice, on and off the field, by people who believed in something enough to be passionate about it, not those motivated by a desire to place a 'product' before a 'market'. And many of them did it for little or no reward.

The journalist Michael Koslowski said it well in a *Sydney Morning Herald* piece about the Australian Rugby Union half-back Steve Merrick, who turned down a six-figure sum to play professional Rugby. Instead he drove a coal truck in the Hunter Valley.

"Heroes don't wear a sponsor's cap. They don't accept looking like salespeople rather than sporting champions. Real sporting heroes wouldn't thank sponsor before family or mentor. They wouldn't take money to wear a watch when they bowl a cricket ball, nor pointedly park the latest in sunglasses on the peak of their baggy green cap to guarantee money-earning exposure, even on a cloudy day."

To put it bluntly, heroes aren't wankers.

The success of sport as a cultural phenomenon is reflected in its exposure on television and in other media. The sort of money the elite competitions have generated is coming from corporate sponsorship, some would say ownership, of those very competitions. Sponsors get high exposure for their product, the codes get the sort of money that would have been unimaginable even twenty years ago. Media outlets have secured exclusive rights to various competitions, thus allowing them a near monopoly on a game's exposure.

This was never more thoroughly illustrated than when News Limited tried to take over Rugby League. The end result was a damaging split from which the code has never fully recovered. A successful expansion of the game into Adelaide was abandoned; so was a team in Perth.

The two competitions, Super League, bankrolled by News Limited, and the National Rugby League (NRL) ended up re-uniting, sort of.

The casualties of the re-unification were many traditional supporters and clubs. And any business expert will tell you that you look after your own customers before you try to grow your customer base.

South Sydney is now in court with the NRL fighting its exclusion from that competition on financial grounds. The most successful club in the history of Rugby League has said that if it isn't successful in its court case it will retire the jumper and club colours. The fact that this case is in court at all is an indicator of how much the corporate dollar has a hold on the game of Rugby League.

When South Sydney President, George Piggins, was asked about the $8 million turnover that was required under the NRL criteria to remain in the competition he remarked, "We have a salary cap of $3 million. What else are we supposed to spend the other $5 million on? You can only have so many trainers!" On another occasion he was being interviewed by

ABC radio and he told the story of when an accountant was looking at the balanced books at the South Sydney Rugby League Club. The accountant asked George where the profit margin was. George replied, "What profit? This is a way of life!"

The media's commercial involvement in football seriously compromises their ability to cover events surrounding the game in a fair, thorough and unbiased manner. This was illustrated when News Limited's major Sydney outlet, the *Daily Telegraph*, refused to cover a rally of nearly 50,000 South Sydney supporters protesting the demise of their club.

The other thing the corporate sector is after is credibility. When Brisbane 'merged' with Fitzroy in the AFL it sought to take over Fitzroy's tradition and history, for Brisbane had none of its own. It had been invented by the AFL as a means of expanding its exposure, and attractiveness to corporate sponsors. It was a joke. The same was true of Cronulla's foiled plan to 'merge' with (read take over) South Sydney.

Earlier this year the North Melbourne Football Club sought to advertise memberships, the grassroots lifeblood of any AFL club, with a 1800 number on the back of the popular North player Micky Martin instead of his usual number. The then director of the AFL, Ian Collins, stopped the idea dead in its tracks. The AFL had no objections however when the corporate giant Hutchinson-Orange had North playing in orange instead of their traditional blue.

The message was clear.

photo: Danius Kesminas

Corporate money is welcome, membership money is not. All of this seems to fall into the trap of most emerging areas of business in that it forgets that sport, especially sport as commodity, is a finite resource.

The recessions in the early eighties and nineties showed us that when trouble comes everybody loses except for the corporate sector. This has now spread to football, and the words from Paris '68 have never been more appropriate when a game is played for the benefit of corporate boxes and television cameras.

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News from Tasmania

Tim Thorne

IT HAS BEEN two-and-a-half years since I last filled readers in on the Tassie literary scene, in, as I recall, a somewhat despondent tone, and quite a lot has happened in the interval, especially on the publishing front.

Two new publishing houses, Bumble-bee Books and Montpelier Press, have started up and two others which had been languishing, Esperance Press and Cornford Press, have been reinvigorated.

Two of the publishing highlights of 2000 were very disparate collections of writing about Tasmania, *Along These Lines*, edited by C.A. Cranston and published by Cornford Press, and *A Writer's Tasmania*, edited by Carol Patterson and Edith Speers and published by Esperance Press. Cranston's book is the more ambitious of the two: a narrative anthology aimed at the glove box as much as the bookcase, presenting a multitude of threads which make up the story or stories of the island through extracts from such diverse writers as Abel

Tasman, Germaine Greer, Charles Darwin, Margaret Scott, Errol Flynn and Vladimir Nabokov. It also includes maps, music scores, photographs and even the facsimile typescript of a previously unpublished ballad by historian Lloyd Robson.

A Writer's Tasmania, despite the placement of the apostrophe, is a collection of essays by fourteen contemporary Tasmanian writers about their relationship to the place and may help explain why Tasmania has such an attraction not only for writers but for other creative types.

Recent novels by Julia Leigh, Heather Rose and Tom Gilling have been set here, and, most notably, the Whitbread Prize-winning *English Passengers* by Matthew Kneale is based on the central character's assumption that Tasmania is the original biblical Eden. Well, we locals could have told him it was even better than that. At least it was before they woodchipped the Tree of Knowledge.

This autumn sees the inaugural 'Ten Days on the Island' festival, an initiative of the State Government which is attempting to bring Tasmania into line with the other states which have major arts festivals. It has been over a decade since the demise of the Salamanca Arts Festival, and with the ubiquitous Robyn Archer at the helm 'Ten Days . . .' looks destined to be an artistic success. Whether or not it will achieve the government's aim of attracting a large number of interstate visitors is less certain, as is the festival's future if it doesn't.

Another State Government initiative bringing the heart-shaped island into line with its larger sibling states is the Tasmanian Pacific Regional Prize for novels. Open to authors from Australia, New Zealand and Melanesia, the prize of $40,000 this year will go to a book from a short list which contains no surprises. Thea Astley's *Drylands* and Kim Scott's *Benang*, both already (and deservedly) belaureled, are the favourites.

Tasmania is becoming well known for its fine wine as well as its fine writing, and the Moorilla Estate vineyard, picturesquely situated on the banks of the Derwent in suburban Berriedale, has been actively promoting both, as well as the collection of antiquities housed in its on-site museum. The museum has been the venue for a series of poetry readings and book launches, including Andrew Sant's latest collection, *Russian Ink*, and an anthology of work by poets who have read there in recent months.

The festival has subsumed, at least for this year, one of the state's two major literary festivals, the Tasmanian Readers' and Writers' Festival, but the other, the Tasmanian Poetry Festival, is clinging to its traditional spring time-slot, and local writers are catered for at a number of smaller festivals throughout the year in places such as Bridport and Ross.

Hobart's Summer Festival, throughout January and February, featured one interesting literary innovation. Eight local poets read their works to commuters on the city's Metro buses. As this project is still happening as this goes to press, a final evaluation is not possible, but early indications are that it has been a great success.

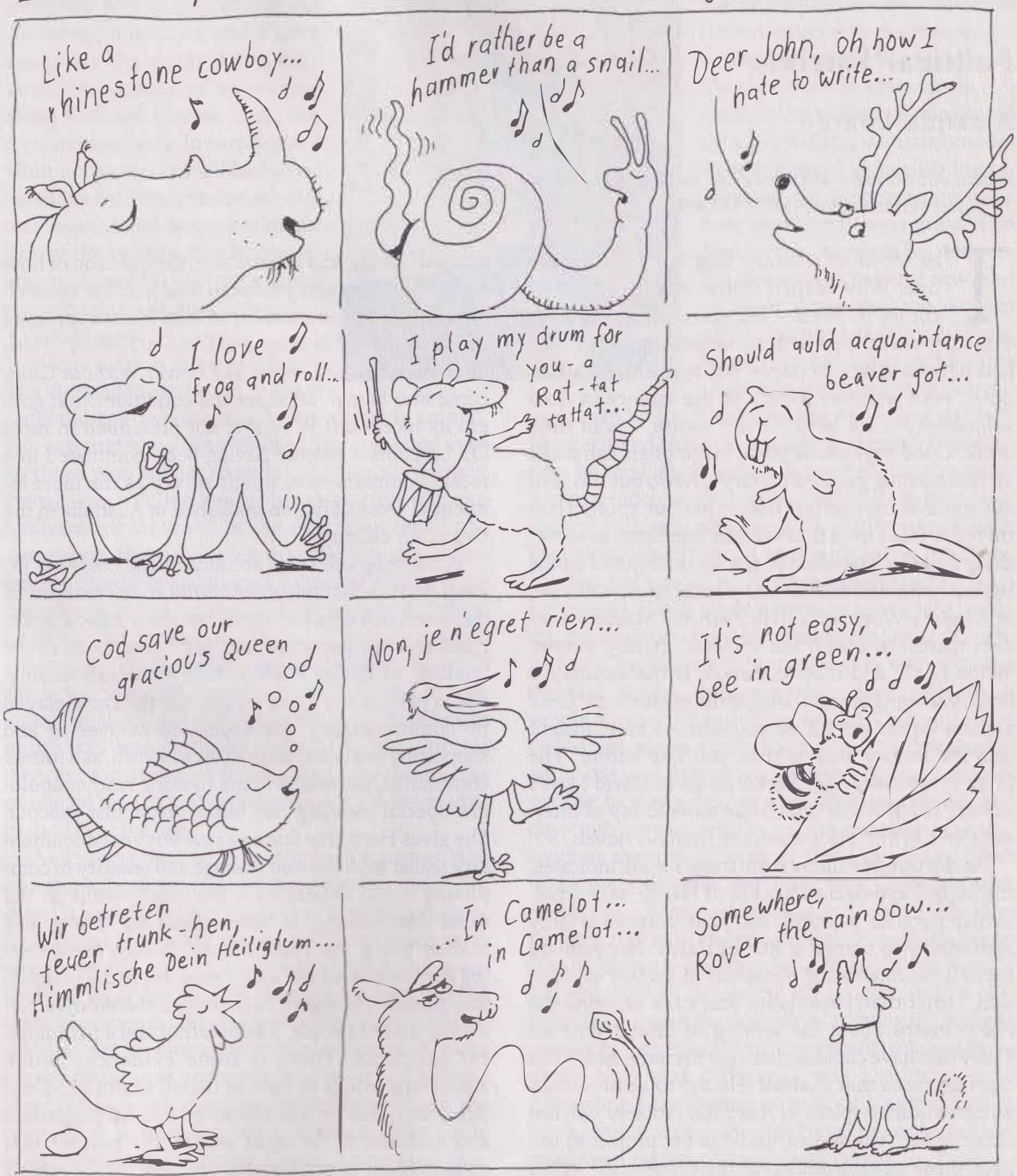
Meanwhile regular readings at Hobart's Republic Bar and Launceston's Sims Cafe as well as occasional (and hugely well attended – over a hundred each time) readings at the Bridge Hotel in the tiny hamlet of Forth in the state's north-west, continue to flourish, thanks to the stirling efforts of people who don't always get the acknowledgement they deserve. Liz Winfield, Marilyn Arnold and Fay Forbes, respectively the voluntary organizers of these events, are to be congratulated and thanked.

Floating Fund

OVERLAND IS once again grateful to our friends and supporters for their generous donations. Our thanks go to the following:
$200 A.P.; $60 N.H., F.B.; $30 A.B., R.H.; $24 J.T.; $20 R.D., J.M.D.; $14 P.R., E.D., S.M., A.C., I.P., M.L., M.P., C.M.; $12 D.B., L.F.; $8 E.W., L.de C.L.; $5 L.R.; $4 M.T., P.G.; $2 O.J., H.H., H.M.D.; Totalling: $615.

Their favourite songs

Lofo invites you to smile at the naïveté of our four-legged friends.



BUT WAIT, WE WHO DEEM OURSELVES SO PHISTICATED, DON'T WE SOMETIMES THINK WE HEAR OUR NAMES IN THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES, COMPOSED BY THE ALMIGHTY HIMSELF?

Political Larrikin

Amanda Lohrey

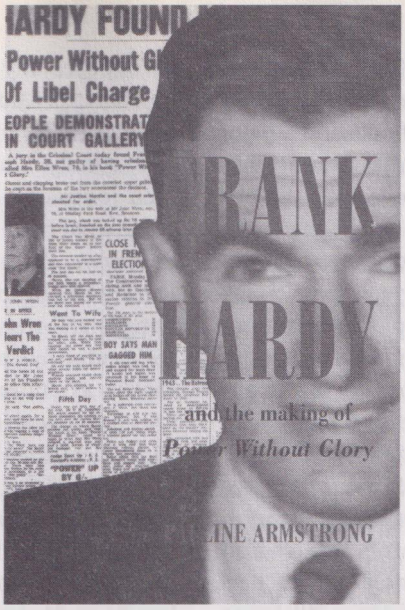
Pauline Armstrong: *Frank Hardy and the Making of Power Without Glory* (MUP, $43.95).

THE GENRE OF LITERARY biography is a fraught one. Why bother? Some writers – Tolstoy comes to mind – led such interesting lives that they would be worth documenting even if they had never put pen to paper. But many writers lead quiet, even reclusive lives, and the essence of their subjectivity – for better or for worse – is in their work. Good psychoanalytical biographers can make an entertaining game of literary *Cluedo* but this is of not much more interest than a parlour sport. Then there are those lives that become fetishized as something quite independent of the work: think of all the readers who will devour every biography published of Virginia Woolf or Sylvia Plath but scarcely concern themselves with the subjects' literary output. Worst of all, and most common, is the exhaustive literary researcher who deluges the reader with 'facts' about a writer and leaves you with no more insight into the literary *oeuvre* than you had before. The prize in this category must surely go to David Marr's life of Patrick White which has more to say of interest about White's dog-breeding than his novels.

As the title of Pauline Armstrong's book indicates, the author approaches her life of Hardy with a particular purpose in mind, and that purpose is only secondarily to narrate a 'life' of Hardy. Her primary focus is on interesting questions of literary production, rather than personality, and to re-examine the many myths about the writing of *Power Without Glory* that have circulated since it first emerged. "The circumstances that enabled (Hardy) to achieve such an extraordinary place in Australian society will not occur again," she writes, and it is her project to unpack those circumstances. In the process she offers an interesting, if sketchy life of the great left-wing larrikin, but her main concern is with how 'authorship' comes about rather than the personal dramas of the 'author'. As such her work makes a valuable contribution not so much to literary biography as to cultural history, and in particular, the question of how a literary culture gets produced (and here her research offers a strong complement to John Frow's appraisal of Hardy in his *Marxism and Literary History).* How does an exceptional book like *Power Without Glory* come into being? What are the conditions that govern its reception? Why is it not prescribed in most Oz Lit courses despite having been nominated in a recent comprehensive public survey as the most influential work of fiction published in Australia in the twentieth century?

Armstrong offers no account of the cold-war literary politics that relegated Hardy to the margins of the canon and kept him there, but she is a good workmanlike historian of the Left and her account of the 'making' of *Power Without Glory* is worth reading. She is particularly good on the role the Party played in 'commissioning' the novel and overseeing and supporting its author, an analysis to which, as a former communist, she seems to me to bring neither apologist special pleading nor bitter revisionist rancour. She gives Hardy his due as a raw but vital documentary realist who showed courage and tenacity in completing – and defending – the work, while at the same time making no bones about his failings as a human being. For Frank Hardy, though mesmerizing company, was not a nice man. He was a compulsive gambler, braggart, liar, sponger and womanizer; a great user of people, a poor father and a pathological narcissist. There is some evidence, which Armstrong brings to light in regard to *But the Dead Are Many*, that he was also an occasional plagiarizer and anti-Semite. In other words, the portrait that emerges here is not a pretty one. But do the artist's personal failings matter, other than to those who had the misfortune to be close at hand? Can the whole (persona) be greater than the sum of the parts? In the case of Hardy, I think you can argue that this was so; that Hardy as political jester and professional larrikin

played a role that transcended the figures on the moral balance sheet of gambling debts owed, women betrayed, and so on. This is not Armstrong's territory and a good essay on the great Australian larrikins remains to be written along Cultural Studies lines, but Armstrong does incorporate a blunt account of how Hardy survived his first incarnation as cold-war warrior and became a media icon of the eighties, the driven raconteur of the Billy Borker yarns and the self-aggrandizing 'character' of TV chatshows.



While there is no such thing as 'the Australian character' there is a significant strain in the culture that Hardy embodied, and that was acknowledged and respected even by those who did not share his political convictions. Hardy was, to quote one of his associates, "the embodiment of the myth of the Australian rebel" and Armstrong offers evidence that the jury did in fact believe Hardy had defamed John and Nellie Wren but acquitted him on the grounds of natural justice, i.e. Wren had got away with a lot in the past and had it coming – itself something of a larrikin verdict in the face of a strong directive from the judge to convict. That Hardy, an avowed communist at the height of the cold war, could be in moral accord with his jury says something interesting about the culture that produced him. It's hard to imagine a similar verdict in the US at the time.

As a young woman I saw Hardy in action on two occasions, both times in political larrikin mode. By then I'd heard all about what an abrasive egomaniac he was but that didn't prevent me from being awestruck by his act. To truly understand the great larrikins you have to be in their presence to feel the wave of vibration that sweeps through a crowd when they set out to upset the public applecart. It takes tremendous nerve and a whole armoury of skills to carry off such calculated discombobulation and the only other larrikin I've seen in action who could match Hardy is Germaine Greer. Each could take over a meeting from the floor simply by getting to their feet. Both could turn an argument, a meeting, a literary panel, an audience, around in a few words. Both could be infuriating and wise within the same sentence. Both could repel with their self-aggrandizing while at the same time shattering the smugness and complacency of any and all given cultural formations within their audience – even when they were wrong!

I saw Hardy do this in the middle of a tepid discussion at an Adelaide Writers' Festival dominated by a particularly wan and condescending panel of English literatteurs (of the kind we rarely see here now) and I was grateful to him for the crackle of his critique. On a second occasion I saw him so upset the professional smarm of TV interviewer, Michael Parkinson that the latter gripped his chair in anger (with both hands) and turned puce. The issue was Aboriginal rights in Australia and this was the late seventies. The audience booed Hardy but it only spurred him to greater and more incisive eloquence. And up until then, everything had been going so well. Hardy was on with Paul Hogan (an inspired match-up for an interview format) and lots of good jokes and yarns had been exchanged. Hardy could have gone on cruising, basking in popularity, but when Parkinson raised the subject of *The Unlucky Australians* he went for the political jugular. In that moment you could see a whole history of spruiking on the Domain while opposition thugs surrounded you in a threatening half circle (see Armstrong) or standing on a soapbox outside factory gates, on a freezing cold Melbourne day, with only seconds to get the attention of weary workers eager to go home. I could say, 'They don't make them like that any more' but Greer last year pulled off a comparable stunt in London. The fact that she did so with less credibility and effect than Hardy perhaps reflects the difference between a modern media personality, *sui generis*, and an old-school cadre with the disciplined training of the communist party behind him. If you want to know more about how that difference was produced, read Armstrong's fascinating account of a sub-culture, a book, and a writer that continue to confound the traditional pieties of the literary canon.

That said, it seems to me that *Power Without Glory* is ultimately not about politics. Yes, Virginia, you heard it from me. It's not about Capitalism, or the Labor Party or the Working Class. It's about Frank Hardy's true passion and one of the governing ob-

sessions of this culture – gambling. On the one hand there is what a novel purports to be about and then there is what the novel is really about, and I have long been amazed that critics both for and against *Power Without Glory* continue to overlook the obvious. They debate issues that are in the end only marginal to the libidinal economy of the work, e.g. whether or not Hardy should have given more representation to the working class, or deployed less stereotypical characterization (see *overland* 161) but ignore the highly charged love-hate relationship of the author with the dizzying corruptions of the cult of luck – and its priesthood – that gambling embodies. It's true that, as Armstrong argues, the communist party conceived of the work as a propaganda weapon (against its enemies in the Labor Party), but it's also clear that Hardy, the addictive gambler, had a personal fascination with John Wren the race-fixer that he was never to display for any other kind of capitalist. This, and only this, is the true visceral drive that powers the narrative – the rest is rationalization and moral window dressing. Which is not to damn Hardy. All writers do it – the tension between the unconscious and the ego's rationalizations is what generates narrative in the first place. One day *PWG* will come to be seen as the great Australian novel, not of political infamy but of this culture's peculiar undertow of fatalism, and its ubiquitous absorption in the clank of the poker machine and the toss of the coin.

Amanda Lohrey is a Tasmanian novelist and critic. She will present the third overland *lecture in September 2001.*

The Many Faces of Joseph Gutnick

Philip Mendes

David Bernstein: *Diamonds & Demons: The Joseph Gutnick Story* (Lothian Books, $39.95).

THIS COMPELLING BIOGRAPHICAL study has long been awaited for two reasons. Firstly, Joseph Gutnick is a man of immense contradictions. He is a pious ultra-orthodox Jew, yet has been highly successful in the secular world of business. He is forbidden by his religion to travel or attend games on the Jewish sabbath, yet has become President of the WASP establishment Melbourne Football Club. And he opposes any recognition of Palestinian national rights in the Middle East, but is known for his strong opposition to anti-Aboriginal racism in Australia.

Secondly, Gutnick and his biographer, former Israeli journalist David Bernstein, enjoy an openly conflictual past. Whilst editor of the *Australian Jewish News*, Bernstein strongly supported the Israeli/Palestinian peace process, and criticized the right-wing Israeli groups championed by Gutnick. Gutnick responded by publicly calling for Bernstein to be sacked as editor. Yet, Gutnick agreed – apparently without any significant stipulations or conditions – to cooperate on this manuscript.

Much of this book traces Gutnick's family background and upbringing, and his subsequent business career. Gutnick is affiliated with the Hasidic movement, a joyous mystic form of populist Judaism. His family originated from the small White Russian town of Lubavitch, and hence were known as Lubavitchers. The religious leader of this particular branch of Hasidism, the charismatic holy man known as the Lubavitcher Rebbe, was later to exert a remarkable influence on Joseph Gutnick's business and political activities.

Joseph's father Chaim was born into a prominent rabbinical family in the Ukraine, and later lived in Palestine, England and Lithuania before arriving in Australia in 1940. After spending some time in Sydney including a voluntary stint in the Australian army, he moved to Melbourne to become the rabbi of Elwood Synagogue in 1956. Whilst Chaim was entrenched in the ultra-orthodox Jewish community, he also encouraged his children to move beyond the ghetto, and openly mix with the broader Australian society. Herein almost certainly lies Joseph's remarkable aptitude for comfortably integrating his religious and secular pursuits.

Joseph Gutnick was born in Sydney in 1952, and completed his schooling in Melbourne before spending four years as a rabbinical student at the Lubavitch headquarters in Crown Heights, New York. Here Gutnick was exposed to the Rebbe's contradictory, but highly hawkish views on Israel.

The Rebbe had never visited the State of Israel, and strongly opposed in principle secular Zionism, and the existence of a secular Jewish homeland on the grounds that the messiah had not yet arrived. Yet on the other hand, he became following the 1967 Six Day War a supporter of the hardline Israeli Right. According to the Rebbe, the land of Israel including the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza

Strip had been given to Israel by God, and no secular leader had the right to return even one single inch to Arab rule. This controversial philosophy would subsequently guide Joseph's own political activities.

But firstly, Joseph turned to business. After working briefly for his father-in-law's textile business, Joseph began investing in mining stocks and gold shares. He soon became known by the curious business press as the share-trading, paper-shuffling, gold-mining, bearded little rabbi, and made it onto *Business Review Weekly*'s 'Rich 200' list in 1987. The Black Tuesday stock market crash severely dented Gutnick's empire, but he recovered sufficiently to clear his debts, and eventually become a highly successful gold and nickel explorer. He also survived the public scandal regarding his failed loans with the taxpayer-funded Tricontinental merchant bank.

During this time, Gutnick maintained a remarkable weekly correspondence with the Rebbe, obtaining advice about political matters in Israel and his business dealings.

Eventually, Gutnick became the Rebbe's Special Emissary for the Integrity of the Land of Israel. In practice, this meant using religious, political, and financial strategies to engineer support for right-wing governments in Israel.

In particular, Gutnick helped to organize and bankroll the controversial 'Bibi is good for the Jews' campaign which assisted the victory of the right-wing Likud Party in the 1996 Israeli election. This campaign was widely regarded inside Israel as discriminatory, if not overtly racist, towards Israel's Arab population. Back home, Bernstein also cites examples of Gutnick openly using his wealth to censor alternative views within the Australian Jewish community.

Yet unlike other mining magnates, Gutnick paradoxically adopted a liberal approach to Aboriginal land claims. Gutnick refused to support the Howard Government's Wik Bill, and subsequently transferred much of his financial support from the Liberals to the ALP. He justified this stance on the grounds that as a Jew, he was particularly sensitive to the rights and vulnerabilities of other minority groups. However, some commentators accused him of applying double standards in relation to Aboriginal and Palestinian rights.

Probably the most fascinating chapter concerns Gutnick's rescue of the famed Melbourne Football Club from the proposed merger with Hawthorn. For many, the involvement of a bearded ultra-orthodox Jew with the old-moneyed, establishment club was incongruous. Others queried Gutnick's motives, suggesting that Gutnick acted not out of genuine and altruistic passion for the club, but rather to boost his corporate profile and image.

Bernstein views the football episode highly positively as an inspirational example of multiculturalism at work. He believes Joseph has done more than any other Australian of his generation to demystify Jews and Judaism, and shatter stereotypes amongst ordinary Australians. Yet, whilst this analysis has its merits, it is also in part naive for it ignores the issues of class and wealth involved. Gutnick has been welcomed by Melbourne not as an exotic foreigner, but rather as a wealthy businessman who has saved their existence. It is highly unlikely that poor Lubavitcher Jews would have been accepted so readily.

One final question relates to Bernstein's objectivity. Has Gutnick succeeded in co-opting a previously hostile critic? I don't think so. Bernstein admits that he developed "an intuitive liking, and genuine respect" for Gutnick whilst writing the book. But there is no evidence of Bernstein obviously pulling his punches. Having said this, it is possible that an Australian-born writer more intimately familiar with Australian business and football culture may have offered in parts a sharper and more informed analysis of Gutnick's activities and motives.

Nevertheless, overall, this is a well-written and easy-to-read biography which will be of interest to students of Australian business and football, and local and international Jewry.

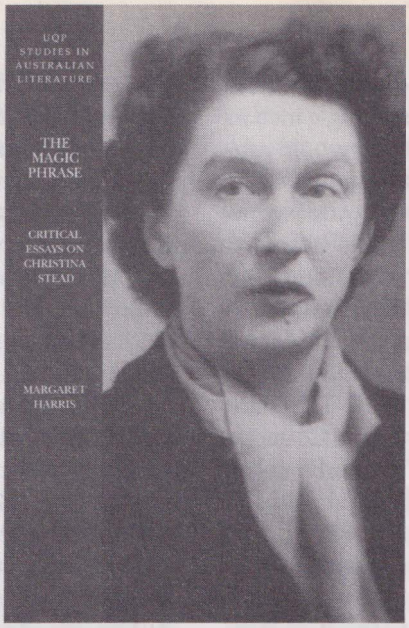
Dr Philip Mendes lectures in Social Work at Monash University.

Illuminating Stead

Anne Pender

Margaret Harris: *The Magic Phrase: Critical Essays on Christina Stead* (UQP, $32.95).

IN A RECENT REVIEW of the *Oxford Literary History of Australia*, Elizabeth Webby, editor of the new *Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, unequivocally identifies Christina Stead as Australia's greatest novelist, followed by Patrick White. While there have been murmurings amongst a few critics to this effect over the last four or five years, it is gratifying to read the comment in black



and white. It does therefore make the publication of a collection of critical essays on Christina Stead seem an overdue project. In this short book Margaret Harris has gathered together sixteen essays by various authors in what is the first volume of essays of its kind dedicated to the work of Christina Stead.

Harris sets out her criteria for her choice of essays at the beginning of her own introductory essay, 'Christina Stead and her Critics', specifying that the selection includes "influential pioneering 'classics'", such as those by Barnard Eldershaw, R.G. Geering, Dorothy Green and Terry Sturm. In addition Harris states that the illumination of Stead's writing offered by a given essay and its representative significance governed her selection.

It may seem churlish to quibble over the inclusion of the 'classics', as they are seminal essays, but one can't help wonder why others were left out, such as Randall Jarrell's forward to *The Man Who Loved Children*, Rebecca West's article on Stead and Michael Wilding's essay on Stead's Australian novels and her place in the 'radical tradition'. Moreover each of the four well known essays reprinted here as well as eight others offered in this volume are already available to readers, which raises questions about the wisdom of re-publishing.

That said, it is pleasing to see Angela Carter's essay entitled 'Unhappy Families' in which she refers to Stead as an expressionist writer whose preference for dialogue reveals that "truth is not an aspect of reality but a test of reality". In Carter's acerbic, brutal prose (reminiscent of Stead's own style), she negates any ideas of individual autonomy in Stead's characters, postulated by various critics including Geering and Jennifer Gribble (another Australian critic not represented in the collection); instead she cites Stead's sense of a 'private life' as a "socially determined fiction, the 'self' is a mere foetus of autonomy which may or may not prove viable".

The inclusion of essays from the three 'schools' of Stead criticism (which are not mutually exclusive) is also to be praised. Harris includes the Marxist-oriented criticism of Diana Brydon and Terry Sturm, who wittily summed up *Cotters' England* in the words "why England hasn't had a revolution", as well as the liberal humanist approach of Stead's first Australian champion, Geering, and the psychoanalytical criticism of Judith Kegan Gardiner.

One feature of the collection that strikes the reader almost immediately is that so many of the essays focus on Stead's novel *The Man Who Loved Children* published in 1940 and 1965. This both reflects and reinforces a prejudice amongst critics who have favoured Stead's so-called autobiographical novels, and taken the view that her later works were far less successful. True to this prejudice Harris has not included essays on Stead's later works such as *The People with the Dogs* (1952), *The Puzzle-headed Girl* (1967), *The Little Hotel* (1973), *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)* (1976) or Stead's short stories, many of them written in the 1950s, and collected in *Ocean of Story* (1985).

Besides Harris's own survey essay, only three of the essays in the collection are previously unpublished. One is drawn from Denise Brown's unpublished 1988 PhD thesis. A lot is riding on these three essays to 'illuminate' Stead's writing and to offer what Harris calls "representative significance". I found each of them interesting but troubling in a number of ways.

Firstly Denise Brown's essay on *Cotters' England* is rather an idiosyncratic inclusion. Harris explains the choice with reference to its original exploration of North Country folklore and song in the novel. Harris prefaces this comment with the statement that there is very little critical writing on *Cotters' England*. Here she overlooks the substantial work of Australian critic, Ann Blake, whose book *Christina Stead's Politics of Place* (with a substantial section on *Cotters' England*) was published last year, and whose several articles deal especially with this novel.

It is heartening to see the issue of Stead's interest in satire raised by Louise Yelin and Fiona Morrison. Both of these essays attempt to contextualize *House of All Nations* and *I'm Dying Laughing*, with reference to the respective historical periods under Stead's microscope. However I found these two essays disappointing in that they do not link Stead's interest in satire in these particular works to a more general

impulse to historical referentiality in Stead's novels, or indeed to the fact that her later American novels can be read as a satirical history of the USA.

The Magic Phrase is a welcome addition to criticism on the work of Christina Stead, the author who is most surely Australia's greatest novelist.

Anne Pender works at the Australian National Dictionary Centre at ANU. Her book on Christina Stead will be published in July this year.

Stead's Canon

Michael Wilding

Ann Blake: *Christina Stead's Politics of Place* (UWA Press, $34.95).

IF LITERARY CANONS were still recognized, Christina Stead would now undoubtedly be a canonical author. Since the mid-1960s her reputation has been steadily and consistently growing, and her work has been the subject of innumerable articles and theses, two biographies, and half a dozen critical monographs. But she was not always so accepted. For fourteen years, between 1952 and 1966, no new book of hers was published. This was not because she had no new work. From a letter she wrote to Ettore Rella, 30 June 1953, it is clear that she had already completed drafts of *A Little Hotel, Cotters' England,* and *I'm Dying Laughing*. "We're not doing too well and expect to do worse. We have MSS in the US but sorts of MSS acceptable are few now . . . I have a MS in NY which was rewritten too much . . . and a new one which I did very fast and I think is a lot better, but it's about England and English poor people who are also Labour Party so I don't know what chance it has. I have a good novel which needs a lot of work, 'The American Renegade' and it's very strong, a *great* character is the renegade. It's very up-to-date, as to theme and I hope someone will take a plunge on it . . ." But these were not the times in which publishers were eager to take a plunge on left-wing writing. Earlier in the same letter she remarks, "the Americans have learned at last to say nothing, to put sentences together that mean nothing." (*A Web of Friendship: Selected Letters 1928–1973*, R.G. Geering [ed.], A & R, 1992.)

Whether she was victim of a formal blacklist, or simply of agents and publishers intuitively and spontaneously refusing leftist work will no doubt never be known. In *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)*, as Ann Blake points out, "Stead lets her readers understand that Cope is now a government informer collecting information on his fellow writers". The biographies by Chris Williams and Hazel Rowley record how ASIO kept files on Stead. No doubt other agencies did too. She sent *A Little Hotel* to her New York agent, but the agent did not offer it to any publishers. She sent *Miss Herbert* to New York in 1960, to no avail. To what extent she submitted her other work to agents or publishers is not known. She wrote to Stanley Burnshaw, 14 September 1965, "What I am now doing is digging out, refitting and sending forth old MSS which I did not send out, partly discouraged, partly too much moving – and partly, my Dr said some time ago, because I had apparently TB which also, extraordinarily, cured itself." The strategies of suppression that the system operates are of proven effectiveness in developing demoralization and discouragement in its targets.

Stead and her husband, William Blake, had departed from the USA during the McCarthyite purges, seeing little future for the left there. For a while they lived a nomadic existence in Europe, but the unsatisfactoriness of this soon became apparent. Their attempts at a settled life in England proved hard. They struggled to survive financially by doing translations, reading foreign language books for publishers, and putting up speculative proposals to television producers – all laborious and exhausting work that took the time and energy from their own writing. Despite the discouragements she continued to produce. On 19 August 1958 she wrote to Neil Stewart that she had finished a draft of *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)* and was "beginning to fiddle with the idea of a book of long short-stories". This was *The Puzzleheaded Girl,* written on and off over several years, of which a draft was completed by 1963.

Then in 1965 *The Man Who Loved Children* was reissued, thanks to an old friend, Stanley Burnshaw who had become vice-president at Holt, Rinehart and Winston. The reissue was a success and Christina Stead was at last brought back into the public eye. *Cotters England* was published in the USA in 1966, as *Dark Places of the Heart; The Puzzleheaded Girl* followed in 1967, *The Little Hotel* in 1973, and *Miss Herbert* in 1976.

Stead responded to the opportunities her newfound recognition provided to get her unpublished work into print, and to get her published work re-

printed. But the bad years had taken their toll, and by the mid 1960s she was no longer working on anything new. The death of her husband in 1968 was the final blow. She kept returning to *I'm Dying Laughing,* but was unhappy with it. She wrote to Stanley Burnshaw on 31 March 1970, "I have no interest in it and would like to bury it. I don't know what it is: various excuses occur to me. It's perhaps since Bill's death, I don't want to kill and maim. I never did really; or ever come to a conclusion, because a 'conclusion' is just another scroll in the pattern and it will unroll itself farther on." *I'm Dying Laughing* and a substantial volume of uncollected short fiction, *Ocean of Story,* ultimately appeared posthumously.

That the writings of those bleak and difficult years finally came into print might seem to carry a positive message. Serious work cannot be silenced. But by the time those works written in the 1950s were published, social conditions had dramatically changed. Their contemporary impact was lost. They dealt with the politics and society of the immediate postwar, a world of rationing and deprivation and housing shortages, of the political confrontations and suppressions of the Cold War. Inevitably they appeared anachronistic and out of date to readers in the late 1960s and the seventies, dealing with a world that was past, and yet too close for reappraisal, nostalgic or otherwise.

Ann Blake's study valuably brings these books back into focus. Her concern is Stead's writing about England, and England is the predominant concern of these later works. She explores the significance of England in some of *The Salzburg Tales* stories and in *The Beauties and the Furies* and *For Love Alone*. But it is not till the later works that England becomes a predominant concern. Arguing that Stead never really liked England, neither its climate nor its class system, neither its politics nor its literary world, she shows how nevertheless Stead undertook a sustained study of Englishness. She demonstrates how *A Little Hotel* offers an incisive exploration of English expatriates fleeing postwar socialism, a sharp study of greed and racism. With *Cotters' England* that alleged socialism itself is put under examination, as Stead offers an anatomy of the political demoralization of the English working class and the betrayals of the Labour party. *Miss Herbert* offers a parallel indictment of English middle-class gentility and hypocrisy and the seedy world of commercial publishing. All three are grim books. The grimness of the devastating analyses of the family in *The Man Who Loved Children* and of banking and financial speculation in *House of All Nations* was supplemented by an immense energy, by a comic sense of the exuberance of existence in all its frauds and phoney projections. But the later English novels are set in a different world, one without much fun and with very little hope.

They have not been as much discussed as Stead's Australian work or *The Man Who Loved Children*. Ann Blake's lucid reappraisal is welcome. She valuably situates them in the contemporary politics of the time of their composition, and offers a reading of their more enduring qualities from a perspective that allows us to see their part in Stead's total oeuvre. The themes of a politically demoralized working class, of mind-control by commercial publishing media and police informers, and of a complicit, greedy middle class certainly retain their enduring relevance.

Michael Wilding's latest book is Raising Spirits, Making Gold and Swapping Wives: the True Adventures of Dr John Dee and Sir Edward Kelly *(Shoestring, UK, Abbott Bentley Sydney, available from John Reed distribution).*

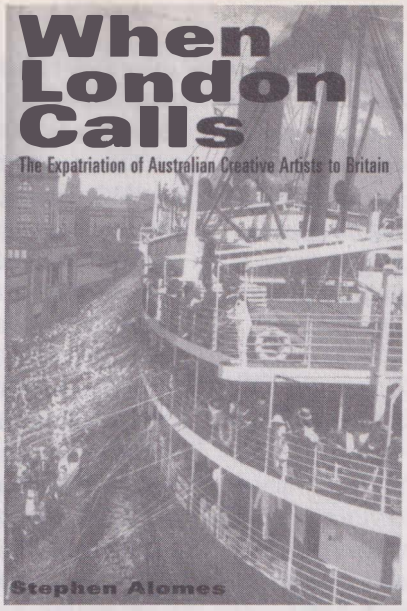
Leaving Home

Anthony Hassall

Stephen Alomes: *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain* (CUP, $32.90).

PRIME MINISTER JOHN HOWARD recently journeyed to London with an entourage of State Premiers and former Prime Ministers to commemorate the granting of Federation to Australia by the British Parliament. The furore that visit aroused in Australia demonstrated that the divisions of opinion exposed by the 1999 Republic debate show no sign of healing. Paul Keating stayed at home, symbolizing the continuing hostility of Republican supporters, still angered by the defeat of the Referendum, towards any suggestion of forelock tugging in the direction of London.

The movement away from the mother country towards an independent constitutional structure has accelerated in recent decades, but divided feelings towards Britain, 'home' and the English monarchy, which have characterized Australian life for much



of the last two hundred years, remain. These feelings were intensified when then Prime Minister Keating placed the question of an Australian Republic firmly on the political agenda, only to see it sabotaged by his conservative successor, who manipulated middle Australia's distrust of politicians so successfully that it outweighed their distaste for continuing subservience to a foreign monarchy.

Stephen Alomes has charted one fascinating aspect of this contentious love-hate relationship between Australians and England in *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain*. The book describes the exodus of writers, artists, musicians, journalists and intellectuals from Australia to London in the decades following the Second World War. The Menzies years in Australia were seen as a cultural wasteland by those with intellectual and cultural tastes and aspirations, and by artists and performers unable to earn a living in their preferred fields in this country. London, on the other hand, was viewed as the cultural mecca, the metropolitan centre which offered such expatriate Australians serious employment and a stimulus to creative and artistic productivity.

In the early part of this post-war period, travel between Australia and London was slow and expensive. Those who left Australia in search of artistic employment and experience were therefore obliged to make a long-term choice between living and working in England or in Australia. The resulting conflicts of national allegiance and loyalty, which Alomes charts, were intense. Questions about the status of expatriate artists and intellectuals, and about whether one 'should' go or stay, aroused passionate partisanship.

The intensities of the 1950s and sixties have, however, eased as long distance travel has become quicker and easier. David Malouf could commute regularly between Tuscany and Australia in the 1990s without feeling obliged to make a choice of allegiance between them, and performing artists now move freely around the world from home bases that are not dictated by geography. The time is therefore ripe to document those anxious post-war decades when artistic Australians felt obliged to leave their native shores and to make their careers in London and Europe. It is also appropriate because many prominent expatriates from those times have reached an age of reflection, and have produced autobiographies like Clive James' *Unreliable Memoirs*, Germaine Greer's *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You*, Barry Humphries' *More Please*, and Robert Hughes' *A Jerk on One End*, to mention only four.

In setting out to document the experiences of those who followed the siren call to London, Alomes researched and where possible interviewed a broad cross-section of current and former expatriates from the worlds of theatre, music, journalism, writing and painting. The resulting body of material constitutes a valuable cache of information about this fascinating episode in Australia's cultural history. The book is organized into chapters devoted to each of the arts. In the earlier chapters the sheer volume of the material collected is something of an embarrassment, and the rapid succession of mini-biographies of a multitude of individual artists produces a degree of confusion and repetition. But while the central sections of these chapters lack some organization and clarity, the initial chapter 'Going Away', and the introductions and conclusions of later chapters, are commendably lucid overviews of the expatriate experience.

The penultimate chapter, which concentrates on the 'megastars' Barry Humphries, Germaine Greer and Clive James, who have come to be seen, among other things, as professional Australians by the English media, has proved to be the most controversial. Clive James, who clearly took exception to Alomes' account of his career, wrote a hostile review of *When London Calls* in the *TLS*, rather bizarrely choosing to defend Barry Humphries, of all people (and by implication James himself), as a passionate Australian patriot! I found little in this chapter to disagree with, and much to applaud; but then, like Stephen Alomes, I find Barry Humphries' caricatures to be tedious anachronisms, Germaine Greer's most recent pronouncements on Australian matters to be wildly unrealistic, and the self-justifications of Clive James as unengaging as his poems on royalty.

I do, however, agree with James that *When London Calls* is a timely book. It provides a welcome record of the Australian expatriate experience in London in the postwar decades, documenting that fascinating chapter of our cultural history comprehensively before it passes out of living memory.

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Labour and Labor

Andrew Scott

Al Grassby & Sylvia Ordonez: *The Man Time Forgot: The Life and Times of John Christian Watson, Australia's First Labor Prime Minister* (Pluto Press, $32.95).

Ross Fitzgerald: *Seven Days to Remember: the First Labor Government in the World: Queensland, 1–7 December 1899* (UQP, $14.25).

Race Mathews: *Jobs Of Our Own: Building a Stake-holder Society: Alternatives to the Market and the State* (Pluto Press, $27.95).

Dennis Glover & Glenn Patmore (eds): *New Voices for Social Democracy: Labor Essays 1999–2000* (Pluto Press, $32.95).

TO READ THESE FOUR books is to cross a bridge from traditional works of labour history into arguments for future Labor and social-democratic public policy.

The point of connection is in Race Mathews' book, which builds upon his previous studies of Mondragon by undertaking a substantial and scholarly re-examination of several very diverse intellectual traditions in order to argue cogently for the role that can be played by worker co-operatives today.

Ideas for the labour movement's future burst out fully in the substantial, wide-ranging, innovative though somewhat uneven collection of essays edited by Glover and Patmore.

In *The Man Time Forgot*, Grassby and Ordonez seek to emphasize the Chilean origins of Australia's first Labor Prime Minister, John Christian Watson. While many fascinating details and connections are reported in this quest, there may be a sense in which they overdo it by not conveying enough that, although Watson was born in Chile, his stepfather, with whom he grew up, was a miner who had emigrated from Scotland to New Zealand and as such passed on formative craft-union and associated cultural influences to his son, which was a typical pattern in the early Australian labour movement.

The so-called archetypal Australian 'bush' unionist, W.G. Spence, was also a British immigrant, whose own upbringing, due to his emigrant father's background as a stonemason and Presbyterian in Britain, reflected these craft-union and associated cultural influences which were widespread among the nineteenth-century Nonconformist Liberals who later turned to the Labour Party in Britain.

The connections between British expatriate labourites and the 'old country' stayed strong, to the point where, forty years after the event, a senior British Labour Party official could still recall the excitement in Britain in 1904 when Watson was first elected Australian Prime Minister.

A remarkably high number of early Australian Labor MPs were born in Britain compared with non-Labor MPs in the same period, partly because of the experience of established forms of trade-union organization they gained from their early years in Britain compared with the inexperience of the colonials.

These MPs who had been British migrants from humble origins included two future Australian Prime Ministers: Andrew Fisher, a coalminer, and W.M. (Billy) Hughes; and two State premiers: William Holman (New South Wales), initially a cabinet-maker, and Tom Price (South Australia), a stonemason and Rechabite.

As a Queensland-based MP, Fisher figures in *Seven Days to Remember*, a short book to mark precisely one hundred years since the first labour government in the world came to office, in which historian Ross Fitzgerald analyses entertainingly and well the rise and very brief tenure of the pioneering one-week-long minority labour government in Queensland at the end of the nineteenth century.

British influences are evident in the most recent of these four books, too, in that the framework of the editors of *New Voices for Social Democracy* is plainly one of sympathy for Tony Blair and his so-called 'Third Way' as elaborated in recent times by Anthony Giddens.

Glover and Patmore's approach to reviving the Labor Essays series by enlisting new youthful contributors from the cultural arena is highly commendable and, in the main, beneficial.

New Voices claims to examine how we can reconcile social democracy's traditional concern with

'class' with the rise of the politics of 'identity'. This question is of course far from new: although several of the contributors show little historical awareness of past debates which have occurred on precisely these lines. The authors purport to propose practical and progressive suggestions for creating a social-democratic society in the face of globalization, presenting analyses of pros and cons of 'the third way' and 'stakeholder' politics for Australia. In the blurb, it is claimed that the essayists reject recent calls for a return to narrow Labourist politics that focus exclusively on class (specifically by Michael Thompson), claiming that this will lead the centre-left into the electoral wilderness of a "new conservatism". In my view this represents an overreaction to Thompson, whose misrepresentations and prejudiced view of what constitutes class make his work impossible to take seriously, as has been shown best by Sean Scalmer in an earlier issue of *overland* (no. 158).

The relationship between class and the new social movements is more complex and parts of the contents of *New Voices* actually reflect this.

Tony Moore's chapter on youth and class is very strong; Anthony O'Donnell's critical scrutiny of the outlandish attempts by Mark Latham to attack the welfare state is welcome; while Roy Green and Andrew Wilson present a very sharp critique of the importation of Tony Blair's 'Third Way' slogan into ALP policy debates.

Tim Harcourt's essay on the other hand is disappointingly economically orthodox and somewhat surprisingly in line with the views which have been espoused by Latham against left critics of the negative aspects of 'globalization'.

The fact that the contribution by Guy Rundle (normally a more theoretical writer) meshes reasonably well with the other chapters is a tribute to the editors' efforts in seeking to impose a common framework on the contributors.

In the end the book tries to range a bit too widely to the point where it does become disjointed.

This should not detract however from the substance of its contributions, the energies it has uncovered and the importance its revitalization of the *Labor Essays* series has for further vibrant debate on the many social-democratic policy options now sorely needed in Australia.

Andrew Scott is the author of Running on Empty: 'Modernising' the British and Australian labour parties, *recently published by Pluto Press.*

Restructuring Societies

John Leonard

Christopher Pierson & Frances G. Castles (eds): *The Welfare State Reader* (Polity Press, $49.95).

David B. Knight & Alun E. Joseph (eds): *Restructuring Societies: Insights from the Social Sciences* (Carleton University Press, Canada, $27.95).

PIERSON AND CASTLES' *The Welfare State Reader* is of imposing thickness, but I have my doubts as to whether it's really as useful or as comprehensive as its bulk might suggest. In the first place it is quite badly edited in some regards: in some of the essays the editors see fit to make irritating parenthetical comments; it is very difficult to work out when each of the pieces reprinted here was written (surely the date of each piece could have been printed at the head); there are no 'bio-notes' about the different authors; and finally the work only includes academic articles about the Welfare State, and does not include extracts from any official documents, such as the British Beveridge Report of the 1940s (the main focus of the book is Britain and Europe).

Even leaving these niggles aside, I wondered as I read the various articles reprinted here at how dated the debates seem, as we enter the Promised Land of Mutual (or Reciprocal) Obligation, and when some are talking of monetary policy having returned us to full employment. The essays seem to be selected for their blandness (even the 'Views from the Right' are quite moderate and measured), and only in two essays in the 'Feminist' section did I recognize a description of what I would have put down as the characteristics of the Welfare State of any period – its tendency to harass, humiliate, regulate and control people, rather than help and empower them.

The most interesting essay in the book is Tony Fitzpatrick's 'The Implications of Ecological Thought for Social Welfare', which articulates several of the themes that thoughtful critics of capitalism, and socialism, have been saying for some time, notably:

> The employment ethic must itself give way . . . to a work ethic. The work ethic implies a revaluation of the non-wage-earning, informal activity, which is currently marginalized by the wage contract . . . Most ecologists regard non-employment work as the cornerstone of a sustainable society which is at ease with itself.

Knight and Joseph's *Restructuring Societies* is a collection of essays on various aspects of restructuring, with its focus on Canada and New Zealand. Again the essays seemed rather drab and unexciting, despite a few acute observations here and there, such as that deregulation is usually more a matter of *re*regulation. Perhaps this is because the subject matter is so dreary and familiar, basically the old story of people being further disadvantaged at the same time as being told that their world is getting better and better.

The two best essays in the collection were the last two: on the experience of the First Nations peoples of Canada of colonization, by Olive Patricia Dickason and Jackie Wolfe-Keddie, respectively. Here, quite properly the focus expands so as to include not just current restructuring, but the whole experience of colonization. The last phase has, of course, been cruel for Canadian Aboriginal people, and one comments: "We are now expected to administer our own misery", but this cruelty is all of a piece with the past history of native/colonizer relations in Canada. This history reveals, as would a comparable history of colonization of Indigenous people in Australia, that 'restructuring' isn't just something that has happened since the Yom Kippur War, or since Thatcher/Reagan, but as one of the dynamics of modernity itself. This should serve to warn us of the dangers of being too complacent, of thinking that once capitalist modernity was quite user friendly – it is, in reality, the same beast from age to age, it merely changes its appearance and its obsessions.

John Leonard is a freelance writer based in Canberra.

Lavorare meno, Lavorare tutti

Cameron T

Anders Hayden: *Sharing the work, Sparing the planet: Work time, consumption and ecology* (Pluto Press, $32.95).

THE ITALIAN SHORTER WORK-TIME movement slogan, *Lavorare meno, Lavorare tutti*, meaning work less, everyone works, seems like a fairly simple concept to grasp. The kind of concept that could be explained to a child, but perhaps not to a politician. Work-time reduction (WTR), has been put forward as a necessary means to curb unemployment and simultaneously enrich the quality of workers' lives since the beginning of the industrial revolution itself. Work days of fourteen hours and more were the norm in the early days of capitalism, and although that may seem preposterous to us today, what must be remembered is that the country we are living in still uses the model of the eight-hour day which was legislated in most parts of the industrial world between 1917 and 1919. This seems strange considering the technological advancement and ecological limits we have found since then. The struggle for the legislation of the eight-hour day world-wide was often bloody. The first international May Day rally was held on 1 May 1890, not just to demand an eight-hour day but to commemorate an 1886 demonstration in which workers and police died, and for which labour movement leaders were later executed. Initial calls for the eight-hour day actually date back to the early 1800s, all of which proves that getting something changed (whether it is rational and benefits the bulk of the community or not), is no simpler than it ever has been. Ironically many workers around the world, mainly in developing countries, are working in factories and sweatshops, the same kind of hours and slave-like conditions as were common at the beginning of the industrial revolution.

In countries like the USA, hours of work have actually risen in the last thirty years. A 1997 study found the average working week was 49.4 hours for men and 42.4 for women. At the famous 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, then-President George Bush stated absolutely that the American way of life was not up for negotiation. As the U.S. seems to be providing, or attempting to provide a kind of blueprint for culture (or monoculture more accurately), in an increasingly globalized world, these are disturbing trends on many levels. Global warming, salinity levels, and pollution are among the many problems that seem so daunting to the mere mortal, yet are so obviously consequences of a culture of over-consumption. Looking at these ecological problems, and combining them with the social issues of unemployment, social unrest, family breakdown and stress from overworking (the list goes on), the idea of reducing the average working week would seem like a very realistic and viable option.

In his book, *Sharing the work, Sparing the planet: Work time, consumption and ecology*, Anders Hayden looks at these links and the implementation of WTR both in theory and in practice. The book is a comprehensive study of the history and potential future of

work time reduction, and would be an invaluable resource to anyone interested in or studying WTR. The book methodically goes through current and past case studies and the many possible implications and techniques of reducing work hours, without detailing clearly or strongly enough, the ecological benefits of WTR. At times it is weighed down with case studies, and loses its focus on ecological issues (although remaining quite relevant to the other social implications of WTR).

Australian unions have recently been pushing quite strongly for a thirty-five-hour work week, with some very significant victories within the construction industry. This has not been linked to ecological issues at all, with the focus more on unemployment, and quality of life for employees (both of which remain crucial issues). Hayden sees the potential of WTR to address these issues and also reduce human impact on natural resources. The reduction of working hours has so many obviously beneficial effects for individuals and the society that they make up, that the potential boost in worker morale and restructuring of the workplace often leads to increased productivity. Hayden, quite sensibly, argues that the freed time resulting from the implementation of WTR must not lead to increased productivity and consumption, but to actions that are inherently more valuable. Spending time with friends and family, just relaxing, playing sport, making love or whatever – as opposed to going to the mall and just shopping, or the myriad of other things that are based purely on consumption. Interestingly, Henry Ford who was quite an innovative and successful (but not particularly moral) businessman, pioneered the two-day weekend in 1926. "Ford realized that a two-day weekend could stimulate the demand for consumer products, most notably his automobiles." Hayden suggests tax incentives, parental leave, recreational leave and other similar measures to steer people toward using their extra freed time in a more sustainable fashion, rather than one reliant on more material consumption.

The paradox of the US model of work hours, consumption and lifestyle is often drawn upon in *Sharing the work, Sparing the planet*: for instance, the shifting of social welfare services responsibility (like basic health-care), from the state to the individual, draws many people into working longer hours to ensure they can look after their families in times of need. This coupled with notoriously high levels of material consumption, has contributed to the top 1 per cent of that country's population having more combined wealth than the entire bottom 95 per cent. The impact of American consumption and American-style consumption on the world's environment is phenomenal. Yet Americans continue to work longer hours, whilst many within their own country and throughout the world do not work at all. Australian political, business and consumer culture sadly seems hell-bent on emulating the US model.

European governments have taken a much more progressive and logical attitude towards WTR, as they have with Ecological Tax Reform (ETR), and even the potential linking of the two. Linking WTR and ETR is another measure Hayden rightly sees as crucial. The current government in France came to power largely on its promise of full legislation of a thirty-five-hour week. France already had some tax incentives in place to encourage companies to roll back overtime and employee hours in favour of hiring more people. Other countries in Europe have also implemented WTR initiatives in a number of different ways. One case often referred to is the Netherlands. Their unemployment rate in April 1999 was 3.4 per cent, coupled with low inflation, preservation of social protections, etc. Yet the average work year (1995 figure) was 1397 hours, compared to 1967 hours per year average in the US (1997 figure).

A broader critique of corporate globalization was not included in Hayden's book, probably for practical reasons. However, the current state of globalization is all too relevant to the issues raised, having profound repercussions for workers' basic rights (including reasonable hours), as well as the environment and people in general. The author alludes to this at times throughout the book, recognizing that "the competitive pressures of globalization create other obstacles to WTR". He also says at one stage that the logic of "workers of the world compete", could have us ending up in a situation where everyone in the stadium has stood up, but no-one has a better view. Hayden's views on WTR and its implementation, are both well-thought-out and practical. He recognizes that "The individual adoption of less consumptive lifestyles, though needed, cannot be divorced from a larger political project to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth."

Incidentally, in Australia the unemployed under-twenty-one-year-old can now only receive full Youth Allowance (unemployment benefits) if their parents' combined taxable income is below the threshold (which is not high). Furthermore, those on 'Work for the Dole' schemes and the like are also not

counted toward the unemployment figure. So whilst the government figure for the level of unemployment has dropped significantly in the last few years, some people would argue that the actual number of jobs hasn't seen genuine improvement. Couple this with the potentially catastrophic effects of global warming, a growing tide of social unrest and the diminishing stature of our most important natural resources, including fresh water, and think to yourself: Wouldn't it be nice to work less . . .

Cameron T is currently working on making the world a better place. He is an activist with Friends of the Earth, and other groups.

A Life of Incident

John McLaren

Max Brown: *Buttered Toast: stories and sketches* (Turton & Armstrong, $16.50).

Max Brown is known for his novels of Ned Kelly, *Wild Turkey*, and of the 1946 walkout of Aborigines from stations on the Pilbara, *The Black Eureka*. This collection of stories and sketches draws on episodes from a varied life, that has included working as a journalist, teacher, wharf labourer and film publicist, as well as serving in the RAAF.

The stories are not explicitly autobiographical, and are interspersed with an essay on David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* and a legend from the Western Desert Aborigines, but give a clear impression of a lively and opinionated personality deeply grounded in traditional Australian values. He moves beyond this tradition., however, to an encompassing sympathy with Aborigines, which produces some of his best writing. So he writes, in a recollection of a night of talk and song with a group from the Pilbara:

> Now a breeze begins to flush the waters of the port . . . Behind me I hear a voice; it is Tommy humming a theme. Hard and thoughtful comes Tommy's voice as he sits there looking at the sky. "That song I make," Banjo says with satisfaction. Donald Norman, the man of many songs, adds his voice: then three or four others join in and the song swells . . . The song rises and falls, and whenever someone hesitates, Banjo points to one feature or another of the map and all take his cue and start up again, their hard, vigorous voices passing through many small changes like the great flat land itself, fading, but returning always to the attack like the spinifex itself in this rocky soil blasted by the tropic sun.

Many of Brown's stories seem at first reading to be unfinished, or ending on a note of mystification, but further reflection suggests that these are true to the unfinished, unpatterned nature of life itself. Brown disdains the falsifications of fiction, both formally and literally. His allegiance is to a distinctly pre-modern realism. His book is a reminder that this still has much to offer.

John McLaren is overland*'s consulting editor.*

A Shared Testament

Louise Thomason

John Kinsella & Dorothy Hewett: *Wheatlands* (FACP, $19.95).

THE PREMISE OF *Wheatlands,* the new collection by Dorothy Hewett and John Kinsella, is both as localized and as sweeping as the title suggests. Their poems, prose and photographs take as a central motif a small geographical area – the wheat-growing Southern Downs of Western Australia where both poets spent the early years of their lives. The specificity of topic is not a limiting factor, however. Instead it provides a point of reference around which their writing circles, exploring complex ideas and themes, the back-breaking labour of farm life, and an ambivalent attachment to place which recognizes the devastating effects of settlement, for example. The focus of this collection, then, is less on the geographical landscape than on human (in particular white settler) interaction with that landscape. The particularity of subject matter is also somewhat exploded by the book's unusual layout. Beginning with a contents page which lists poems by title but omits author names, the collection continues by interleaving poems and prose by both poets (rather than utilizing a more common 50/50 format), interspersed with uncaptioned landscape and family photographs. The effect is of a collabora-

tive totality rather than an individualist poetic. This then is a work which highlights not only the poetry and shared experience of its authors, but the collective and selective process by which the book itself has come into being.

Recent and older poems are combined in *Wheatlands,* and readers familiar with Hewett's and Kinsella's work will recognize individual poems as well as perennial themes. Hewett's concerns with memory, autobiography and family figure here, as in the poem 'Still Lives':

Varnished hand-tinted photographs
in velvet frames rejoice
the boys are glaring from the parlour walls
all my fierce uncles dazzlingly intent.

The urge to 'mythologize' the land and the people who work it, however, is counterpointed by a reality which Hewett describes in her essay, 'Great Southern' – "the rising of the salt, the degradation of the land, the clearing of the bush, the destruction of the loved, sacred places". This is balanced, nevertheless, by her desire to "keep it intact and glowing", a desire which perpetually surfaces in these poems – a yearning for a home and a homeland to which she returns in these pages "through memory and the use of the word".

Kinsella writes of a recognizably similar landscape – "the hot snow of salt" ('Finches'), and "shadow-skewed/river-gums . . ./foliage thin but determined" ('Figures in a Paddock'). His poetry, however, tends more consistently toward the pessimistic and ironic, occasionally becoming surreal. In 'The Journey', the reader is presented with a child's-eye view of finding a lone stranger – dead! – in the outback, and the subsequent ride back to town with the corpse wedged between father and son in the cabin of their ute:

'. . . What he was
doing out there
Hell only knows!
Waterless, and the sun furious!'
bellowed his father.
So he sat there as the corpse
stiffened, held to the seat
by the belt. He didn't look at it
once during the journey,
though could sense
the anger in his father
at having to go so far out of their way.

This is a country of menaced and menacing landscapes. For Kinsella it is also, invariably, "a place of borrowed dreams" as he asserts in 'Inland'. The ambiguity of the settler-farmers' relationship to the land is worded more strongly in 'Sale Of The Century', where farmland has been 'bought' from the indigenous landowners for "a sack/of white flour" and "a bent/shotgun". This poem handles a controversial subject with paradoxical tact. Through the use of bald statement, it manages to avoid either sentamentalism or appropriation of Aboriginal speaking.

But it is in the form of *Wheatlands* that another of Kinsella's ongoing concerns becomes evident – "the process of collaboration" (see *overland* 154 for Kinsella's discussion of *Zoo,* a collaboration with Coral Hull). The gathering of the works in *Wheatlands* out of their usual collocations brings them to life in a new way, and at the same time highlights the process of selection and decision-making on the part of the authors. Kinsella's 'The Silo' and 'Drowning in Wheat', as well as poems from Hewett's *Alice in Wormland* and excerpts from her autobiographical *Wildcard* are augmented through their positioning in relation to other poems and photographs. At times, it is true, the placement of some poems seems to set them up to be read in fairly specific ways. And as Hewett states in her opening essay, they have viewed the land "through different eyes and in vastly different times", which leads occasionally to a sense of disjunction between one poem and the next.

These are minor drawbacks, however. The arrangement of these works resists predictability – a breaking down of expectations which opens the book out to the reader in rewarding ways. The photograph of a crumbling door-frame on page 16 suggests nicely, if obliquely, that such connections are ultimately out of the control of the authors. As a shared testament to white settlement and work in the West Australian wheatlands this is both a powerful and unsettling history. And it reaches beyond the specificity of place to record experiences which are recognizably Australian. But it is as an interwoven and polyphonic composition that its strength is most apparent, relying as it does on difference and juxtaposition. As a collaborative enterprise, where the object is for the whole to become something greater than the sum of its individual parts – or poets – it works.

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Multiple Positions for All

Debbie Comerford

Peter Minter: *Empty Texas* (Paper Bark Press, $18.95).

THE PUBLICATION OF Peter Minter's second collection of poetry has sent a ripple throughout the world of Australian poetry. As Louis Armand's *Meanjin* review suggested, *Empty Texas* has sent a "resounding *'Merde!'* " across the land. However, I see the reasons for this resonance as less related to a "revolt against the prevalent values" of poetry in Australia than as a recognition that poetry is moving into different spaces, with different attitudes from the past. The oppositional politics of the poets of the late sixties and seventies has given way to a molecular politics which has no room for dichotomies such as 'us and them'. Much of the emergent poetry of the nineties doesn't see Australian poetry as something to 'get beyond' or oppose. Instead, all poetries from all over the world, from all different times and spaces, are acknowledged and utilized in multiple ways by poets. There is a change of attitude in the air. Poets are not setting up 'camps', but spreading threads of gossamer across the land (and the sea, and the internet! see the Poetryetc archives for a lively discussion on this topic http://poetryetc.listbot.com/). These multiple threads are rhizomatic not arborescent or binaristic; they will continue to shift and change. What has been happening during the nineties, and continuing in the 2000s, is refreshing and exciting. And just when we thought that the nineties had seen as much change as it could bear, *Empty Texas* arrives and the scene explodes!

Empty Texas is the most diverse emergent collection of the nineties (or is it a collection for the 2000s?). The way the collection is arranged, in its three sections, creates reading paths that are waves which the reader bobs along with, something like the cork floating on and on in the poem 'Lust':

> *oysters slice open currents, foam out the reverb,*
> *Trojan Horse*
> *not wanting to destroy Da Fort*
> *just sits there like any*
> *other code,*
> *all oak splinters & hydro effluvia, concept &*
> *drainage*
>
> *the cork floats on and on*

'Lust' is from the middle section of *Empty Texas*, which is also entitled 'Empty Texas' (emphasizing its importance). This is one of the wildest paths the reader takes, and while complex, his way with language sweeps the reader along. In this section Minter's poetry engages specifically with an important aspect of the poetics of 'language poetry', and it is in this sense that this section can be described as 'post-language poetry' (see Mark Wallace's essay on this topic at gwis2.circ.gwu.edu/~mdw/emerging.html). American 'post-language poetry' includes poetries by Lisa Jarnot, Jennifer Moxley, Karen Volkman, Dodie Bellamy, Susan Wheeler, Juliana Spahr, Susan Schultz, and many others. No doubt other Australian poetries are emerging now that could be discussed within this dialogue. I suggest *Calyx*, the anthology Peter Minter and Michael Brennan have edited, will be a good start to opening such an exchange. The molecular politics of 'post-language poetry' engages with other poets/poetries without a politics of opposition; it is a-hierarchical and non-judgemental. Poems are "oysters" slicing "open [poetic] currents" which "foam" and reverberate. Minter's 'post-language poetries' acknowledges 'language poetries' and engages with the poetics which seeks to dismantle the authority of the lyric 'I' through a process of excessive contraction (referred to in 'Lust' as "miotic jargon"). This engagement acknowledges that the stability and authority of the ego-centred lyric 'I' needs to be dismantled, but Minter's approach is *different* from that of the 'language-poets'. In a sense, the title of last year's Barnard Conference, 'Where Lyric Tradition Meets Language Poetry [Innovation in Contemporary American Poetry by Women]', resonates with this changing current because Minter's poetry re-engages and re-invigorates the lyric 'I' while continuing the intense focus on experimentation with language. In this conjugation the lyric 'I' becomes ever-shifting and multiple. In 'Lust' we begin with *"Her remark how I fly/at miotic jargon"*, then "I wonder[s]", and then in a playful way a serious comment about the ego-centred 'I' is made when "I" becomes one "Fucking Symbols Up / in God's tree (*"I am the live pillar the nutgall asymptote!"* / all unrepentant middle though"). Moving through the poems the processes of becoming unfold so that 'I' becomes you, you become 'I', she becomes he, he becomes her, 'I' becomes we. There are multiple positions for you and I in Minter's poetry; identities are unstable and in constant flux. There are no signs of the ego-centred 'I' telling the reader which way to go. As such, the mo-

lecular politics of *Empty Texas* strives for a democratic politics that is similar to that strived for by the poetics of 'language poetry'.

The first section of *Empty Texas*, 'The Impossible Rule', can be described as an "earthward lyricism", as it is in the poem 'Febricula'. In this section the poems continue Minter's intense attention to language in every detail, and yet the focus is on the world we live in, as the conclusion of this poem demonstrates: "And receiving the certainty/ of grasses, that well/ stole difficult, smaller/ Our contentment,/ massive and foreign, like everywhere/ An ecosystem/ Taxed by war,/ an exacting experience/ killing survival."

The final third section of *Empty Texas*, 'Arriviste', can be described as Minter's particular/peculiar version of landscape poetry. Here Minter playfully demonstrates who he engages with by opening this section with Popeye: "*I amsk what I amsk and that's all what I amsk*". By now the reader knows that 'what I am' is certainly not 'what I am'! This section continues the fluid sense of the lyric 'I', the intense focus on the materiality and physicality of language, and focuses on the landscapes we live in. The difference between Minter's landscape poetry and our heritage of landscape poetry is in the way these three aspects balance each other; each is vital in its own right and yet interconnected:

Clearing
Inside, where your face
attempts to know me, your letters,
words, sentences, grow in the carpet
like dried scales or pebbles,
the strange air, the ghost of your breath
falls slowly to the floor over hours.

Below the house, someone
wanders for a short time, a fine mist
rising from the gully where birds,
people and dogs gather to question speaking,
wash in the grace of saliva
seeping up from the cleft in the earth.

From this point,
not seeing moisture, just the person,
orange coat pulled up over the head
likes a mask, we live out the narrative,
piles of shoes,
the bleak still in retelling.

('Hidrosis')

While many of *Empty Texas*' poems are challenging, the detail of subject matter and the crafted forms and language(s) invite and seduce the reader to read again, and again. This collection indicates that Peter Minter is an impressive poet.

Debbie Comerford is writing a PhD on contemporary Australian poetry at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba.

Dark Mirrors: New Poetry

Kerry Leves

Sandy Jeffs: *Blood Relations* (Spinifex, $21.95): Very strong. Maybe it was the recency of the Second World War that drove many white Australian families, in the 1950s, to build masks of fierce ordinariness to live behind. *Blood Relations* recalls the brick house, a passion for sport, leisure-time at golf club or pub, the Hills Hoist and "two-tone green FJ", the *Reader's Digest* and bogeyman "commies", "Pig-Iron Bob" Menzies and the arm's-length curiosity about "New Australians". With blunt, seemingly artless directness, the poet leads us behind this mask – through its very eye-holes – into the life of a family constructed as "an archipelago of misery/ cyclone-battered islands/ without jetties or lagoons/ for boats to shelter from storms." Violence, compensatory alcohol and infidelities, a child's fear and shame: baleful dynamics operate in poem after startling poem. The betrayed and betraying parents – "death was the toy/ with which you played./ In the end, you snared it/ like a myxo rabbit" – and their suffering kids become believeable, indelibly human. Sandy Jeffs' poetic language can equally evoke the intolerable and pilot a reader through it to spaces of recognition and self-questioning endurance, "hauling enough baggage/ for a trip to infinity."

R. A. Simpson: *The Midday Clock* (*The Age*/ Macmillan, $30): Some readers of Simpson's poetry may be reminded of Mies Van Der Rohe, the modernist architect whose legacy we all live with; in Simpson as in Mies, there's "refinement of proportions, of details, and of simple forms". But Mies' famous dictum, "Less is more", is reductionist aesthetics and/or poetics. Title notwithstanding, these are three-o'clock-in-the-morning poems, seeming to

search out the bare bones of existence, remarkable for a playfulness that breathes some engaging steam onto a dark mirror. Chris Wallace-Crabbe, in a brief cogent intro. writes, "Simpson resists the seductions of beauty"; but the poetry's consistent sparseness and spareness create a sense of the beautiful as reticence, laconism, traces. Simpson's may be a puritan art, analogous to that of seventeenth-century Dutch painters, where the ardent specificity nudges the mind into visions of time. Simpson is very good at constructing memory as a congeries of sharp images, and he can imbue a rueful tone with a feeling of lost decades. Drawings by the poet illustrate this quietly sumptuous book, and they combine bulky elegance with calligraphic brio.

Sarah Attfield: *Hope in Hell* (fip, $9.95): If a committed director and a workshopful of actors developed a take on this material, it might grow into a troubling, sardonic movie – perhaps a cross between Mike Leigh's hell-raising grittiness and Terence Davies' embattled romanticism. As it stands, the book positions the reader as a spectator on "the London underclass" (I quote the blurb), a listener to scraps of vernacular and popular song, a detached bystander. There are moments of poetry – "ten to one promises/ finger-less gloves/ caps and pints/ one last chance/ as the lights dim" – but the book's people seem constructed as social types, to appeal to prescribed sympathies; it's a wistful sketchpad.

Jude Aquilina: *Knifing the Ice* (Wakefield Press, $16.95): Tributes to the life of the senses, with a textural range from sandpaper to velvet. "Swollen hips/ in a moonlit garden/ milky skin, luminous/ in the shadowed grove./ She leans through/ a bough of lime leaves/ swings a heavy belly/ for globes of fruit." There's a formal tightness that serves accessibility and is very likely hard-earned. Vibrant, strongly visual writing totters at times towards kitsch, but sticks stubbornly to imaginative conjuring – won't tell you what to feel or think. Discovering or constructing the thematics can be a bonus pleasure.

Annemaree Adams: *The Dogs* (fip, $9.95): Blood-drenched torch songs gleam like neon lights reflected in black patent leather. They invoke and condemn a ruined and ruinous world – Kosovo; the revolting gang-murder of a black youth by white Texans; Timor; Rwanda – along with God, Jesus and men. The shock-value is undeniable, probably salutary, but the writing could maybe use some more modulation: the unvarying all-stops-out intensity risks overreaching itself and reading as *schtick*. Strongest poems deal with some of the planetary bad news cited above.

F.G. Short: *Landscape with Shadows – possibilities of being* (Jomaru Press, Leura NSW & Robina Qld, unpriced): Solidly thought-out philosophical poetry, crafted in a style that's more nineteenth century than twenty-first, though in the post-modern era of multiple genres, this may not be a problem. The level of discipline can produce a writerly intensity and persuasiveness, and those who find contemporary poetry akin to a newspaper page read upside-down may enjoy the clarity with which complex thoughts are presented (meditated worldliness and religious searching are combined). The insistent crafting results at times in maddening drumbeat rhythms and archaic inversions that may make you feel you're swallowing an ostrich egg entire. But there's also intelligence, fair-mindedness, warmth and some wisdom to be found throughout.

Jen Crawford: *Admissions* (fip, $9.95): A woman is admitted to a hospital's emergency unit, and through the medium of Jen Crawford's supple and lucid writing we follow her into the neurological and psychiatric wings. The patient's suffering is vividly conveyed, and so is that of the bewildered but dogged vigil-keeping friends and family, themselves alienated in these implacably 'normal' spaces. Text evokes the marmoreal coldness and whiteness of hospital as setting and process, the corridors "with letters, numbers, arrows:/ the code of progress/ from here/ to every other version of this place." It's very fine: understated and incisive.

Carolyn Gerrish: *Hijacked to the Underworld* (fip, $16.95): The back-cover encomia – "cuts deep", "coffee with no milk or sugar" – may mislead. This seems poetry of a sensibility, wry, often rather whimsical in its movements: a not-uncheerful litany of grumps. Book trails a paperchain of New Age and mythological references through spaces of urban and rural dissatisfaction. It's entertaining and a little monotonous – the free-floating forms with their staccato phrasing could perhaps be varied more or sharpened.

Andy Kissane: *Every Night They Dance* (fip, $16.95): Andy Kissane's second collection propels itself by swift, spacious rhythms and cascading images. The lyricism is worked, poem by poem, into the tones and concerns of multiple voices. Large cast includes a Kanak youth in the political strife of New Caledonia; a bobbin boy in an early twentieth-century woollen mill who "moves up and down the line of women with his cart of many colours./ Now he can lip-read well enough to know/ what they say – that fetching and carrying/ is work not fit for a man. How he longs/ to lift a schooner of Resch's with a fellmonger's/ swollen fingers"; Arthur Streeton at Heidelberg; a householder in mid-divorce in contemporary Australia ('The Separation Sonnets': cf. George Meredith's 'Modern Love', one of the great nineteenth-century poems of bourgeois life); many more. The different contexts are limned with an artist's and perhaps a scholar's care for the telling, inventive or historically-accurate detail, but the strength is in the constructed subjectivities of divergent characters, far-flung in time, space and memory. Their tales unfold like hyper-lucid dreams.

Martin Langford: *Be Straight With Me* (Island, $14.95): Successive Australian governments have been reconstructing 'education' as 'training', so the teacher/ poet/ young person's challenge – "Be straight with me./ Teach me/ with whatever part of you/ does not dream power" – may seem a melancholy cry in the wilderness. Or incurable romanticism. Martin Langford can be a strong poet and eloquent critic (his piece on John Forbes' poetry in *Five Bells*, July 2000, compels thought) and there are good lyrics of high-school life, e.g. 'Skipping', 'Goalie', unsparing ones, e.g. 'Brain Damage' and satires, e.g. 'The Principal's Speech for New Parents'. But this well-intentioned book also deploys an abstract language, fluent yet rather opaque – readers may not readily engage with all of it, especially the densely written passages on hierarchy and judgement. The youth evoked are menaced by the attitudes of some fairly repellent adults – greedy, cynical, rigidly conformist, competitive and vindictive – and the atmosphere is darkened by an anxiety that kids may grow into the same kinds of people. The questions are brave ones to raise, and the thinking is sometimes hard and searching.

Colleen Z. Burke: *Pirouetting on a Precipice – Poems of the Blue and White Mountains* (Seaview Press, PO Box 234, Henley Beach SA 5022, $16.95): An upredicted delight. Burke seems not only to have learned from the early twentieth-century Australian poets – Marie Pitt, Mary Fullerton, Minnie 'Ricketty Kate' Filson – she's spent decades researching and writing up, but to have absorbed some of their devil-take-the-hindmost wit and spirit. These poems of landscape and sky are unpretentious, yet subtle and so tautly-written they seem to crackle with energy: "loops/ of scalding winds/ uncoil in trees/ slicing petals/ leaves . . ." The topoi – birds, bogong moths, caves, valleys – open paths to succinct, poignant, at times laugh-out-loud-funny commentary on human relationships, plus environmental and historical double-takes. There's also an unforced kinship with Chinese and Japanese poetic traditions and a delicacy that seems entirely Burke's own. And the somewhat unprepossessing title turns out to be just right: the whole project seems to take place on edges – linguistic and topographical – under supernally vast skies. Jaded readers may feel reminded of why they enjoy poetry: the white spaces hurry like the wind.

B.R. Dionysius: *Fatherlands* (fip, $9.95): Begins with a suite of poems about a relationship between a dad, a world-rattling giant in the mind of his young son, and the latter as grown-up narrator, approaching the past coolly, but with painstaking respect for time lived. Authoritarianism, hallucinatory terror and purposeful brutality are mingled into the context of a Queensland farm, the dusty air and voracious beetles, the scrubby grass and the flood-prone creek. The language is compressed, charged with emotion and unflinching intelligence, very earthed. Careful first book has been structured as a progress narrative: poems of searing childhood (being fathered) are followed by those of mellow adulthood (the scarred narrator as father and lover) and the latter reach out to faith and love rather broadly; they're elegant and a bit bland. Whereas the poetry of the perhaps unforgivable father and the small farm of his crimes generates much livelier mindscapes; engages the wide as well as the narrow histories that shape people.

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet.

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