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contents

- editorial** Working Class Poetry *Ian Syson* 2
- features** The New McCarthyism *Jude McCulloch* 4
Federation, Globalisations and the Environment *Humphrey McQueen* 10
Working Class Poetry in Contemporary Australia *Sarah Attfield* 21
Interview with Geoff Goodfellow *Sarah Attfield* 35
La Trobe's Radical Street Theatre *Robert Darby* 53
- fiction** A Redeployment *Paul Mitchell* 16
Surfcheck *Emma Hardman* 62
Caught *Greg Bogaerts* 64
Harry *Barry Reville* 66
- poetry** *Dennis McIntosh* 20, *Brad Evans* 29, *Kerry Watson* 30, 52, *Lauren Williams* 32, *Mark Mahemoff* 32, *Graham Rowlands* 33, *Niall Clugston* 33, *Cathy Young* 34, *Coral Hull* 34, *Allan Eric Martin* 34, *Geoff Goodfellow* 42, *Mick Searles* 44-46, *Jim Aubrey* 47, 48, *John De Laine* 47, *Justina Williams* 48, *Bill Anderson* 49, *Chris Wallace-Crabbe* 49, *π.o.* 50, *Giovanni Malito* 51, *Michael Crane* 51, *Vane Lindesay* 73
- dialogue** Newcastle Revisited 2001 *Gaby Bila-Gunther* 67
On Working Class Poets *Brad Evans* 68 *Lauren Williams* 70
Here in Berlin *Pam Brown* 72
Literary Criticism Symposium *Nathan Hollier* 74
Simon During 76 *Ann Standish* 78 *Noel Rowe* 80
Fading into Silence *Susan Holmes* 82
An Accidental Suicide *Andrea Sherwood* 84
The Verse and Song of Irish Australia *Colleen Z. Burke* 85
Missile Defence or Threat? *Bruce Anderson* 87
- reviews** *Gillian Dempsey* 91, *Julie Evans* 92, *Patricia Grimshaw* 94, *Cameron Logan* 96, *Lyndon Megarrity* 97, *Guy Rundle* 99, *Phil Doyle* 101, *Simon Marginson* 103, *John M. Legge* 105, *Perrie Ballantyne* 107, *Donald Pulford* 108, *Paul J. Watson* 109, *Martin Mulligan* 112, *Cam Walker* 112, *Thea Calzoni* 114, *David Hayward* 115, *Mark Peel* 117, *Christopher Lee* 118, *Paul Gillen* 119, *Yossi Berger* 121, *Lee Cataldi* 122, *New Poetry Kerry Leves* 124
- graphics** *Hinze* 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, *Ross Carnsew/Streetwize Comics* 9

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Temper democratic, bias Australian

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Ian Syson working

IN MY ROLE as editor of *overland* I like, from time to time, to defy both convention and wisdom. This is why I decided, in poetry editor Pam Brown's absence, to select the poetry in this issue. Moreover, I decided to limit my selections to one of the most contentious literary notions I know of: 'working class poetry' – partly out of personal interest and my belief in the importance of such writing and partly in response to ongoing criticism from working class poets about the poetry in *overland*. Those following the debate in recent issues of the magazine (continued in this issue by Brad Evans and Lauren Williams) will know the passion that can be generated by the term.

Working class poetry has a long history which is paralleled by an equally long history of arguments about it. Sarah Atfield canvasses a number of these in her pieces in this issue: 'The Invisible Force', an assertion of the importance of contemporary working class poetry which includes a brief survey of some contemporary Australian writers; and her interview with Geoff Goodfellow, perhaps Australia's most prominent working class poet.

The main problem bedeviling working class writing in general is our culture's failure even to allow its existence. Many critics see the notion as oxymoronic: professional writing is a middle class occupation; literary writing is a middle class vocation. Writers, by definition, cannot be working class. Others see no point in singling out a working class form of poetry or culture generally, arguing that all culture is necessarily bourgeois in a capitalist economy. To talk about working class poetry is to talk a nonsense.

Other critics accept the term but believe that it is a form of writing that is almost inevitably poor; only rarely does a good working class poet or writer emerge and then only by virtue of their special insight, character or circumstance.

All of these arguments have some validity and if we limit our thoughts in this way then it is, indeed, hard to imagine a working class poet. If legitimate and valuable poetry is a product of the kind of literacy and education sanctioned and promoted by the contemporary Australian State with all its inherent class-bi-

**ARTS
VICTORIA**



class poetry

editorial

ases and oppressions, then yes, working class poetry is thin on the ground.

The argument can be turned by looking at the components of the term working class poetry. The 'working class' should not be taken as an adjectival qualifier of the larger concept, 'poetry'. Working class poetry is not merely one more generic form of poetry like baroque, concrete or romantic poetry. It is more productive to see working class poetry as a particular kind of *working class* activity. Furthermore it is not an activity restricted to working class people; though it is an activity that has the *interests* (in both senses of the word) of the working class at its heart. It is poetry written *for* the working class.

When viewed from this angle, the rules and conventional wisdom established by generations of literary critics and cultures – with little contact with or interest in working class culture or its politics – are irrelevant to many of the kinds of judgements we might want to make about working class poetry.

As Attfield points out in her article:

The middle class notion of 'quality' in poetry is often far removed from the qualities inherent in working class poetry. Middle class poetry is characterised by its use of lyricism, figurative language, metaphor, Latinate language, imagism, esoteric references to Classical, literary or fine art elements and the use of 'standard' English. Not to say that middle class poetry isn't varied. There are language poems, landscape idyllic poems, deeply internalised poems, poems that deal with abstract notions such as 'truth' or 'beauty', whimsical poems on the vagaries of urban life, surreal dream-like poems, political poems that look at other parts of the world and highlight some of the atrocities inflicted on humans or the environment – the list goes on. But they very rarely concern themselves with the daily lives and experiences of the working class or underclass – those who make up the majority of Australia's population.

There might be a number of things to quibble about in this lengthy condemnation of 'middle class' literary prac-

tices, but there are more than a few grains of truth in Attfield's words. Hers is a charge that demands real responses from those who manage literary culture in Australia – from the media, the magazines, the publishing houses and from the educational institutions.

It's a response that would involve taking seriously the kind of poems published in this issue of *overland*. Not by running the slide rule of conventional poetics over them or tripping them up on the hurdles of what we used to call bourgeois aesthetics, but by working out *what* they were saying, *how* they were saying it and *why* they were saying things in these ways.

Sometimes, one of the first things working class people do in times of struggle or adversity or political oppression is write, read and collectively appreciate their own songs and poetry. In the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland is a scrapbook kept by a Mount Isa newsagent during the big lockout in 1964–65. Aside from newspaper clippings and leaflets there are a number of poems penned, roneoed and distributed by workers during the dispute. None of the poems alone is ever going to make much impact – although one of them, 'Who put the W in the AWU?' does live in the memory of some militant unionists – but taken together and understood in context they intimate the radical possibilities of a poetry that comes out of or is addressed to working class life.

WE ARE SADDENED to inform readers of the death of one of our long-term supporters, Pauline Armstrong, the author of *Frank Hardy and the Making of Power Without Glory*. Pauline was a good friend to *overland* who always turned up to our launches and other events. She was refreshingly up-front when she felt we deserved criticism as well. Her research on Frank Hardy filled a great hole in Australian literary criticism's previously poor knowledge of one of our most important and revered (or loathed) writers. The poem by Chris Wallace-Crabbe in the present issue was written after he helped launch Pauline's book at Trades Hall in Melbourne. While selected for inclusion before her death, the poem stands as a fitting tribute to Pauline's memory.

Jude McCulloch

The New McCarthyism

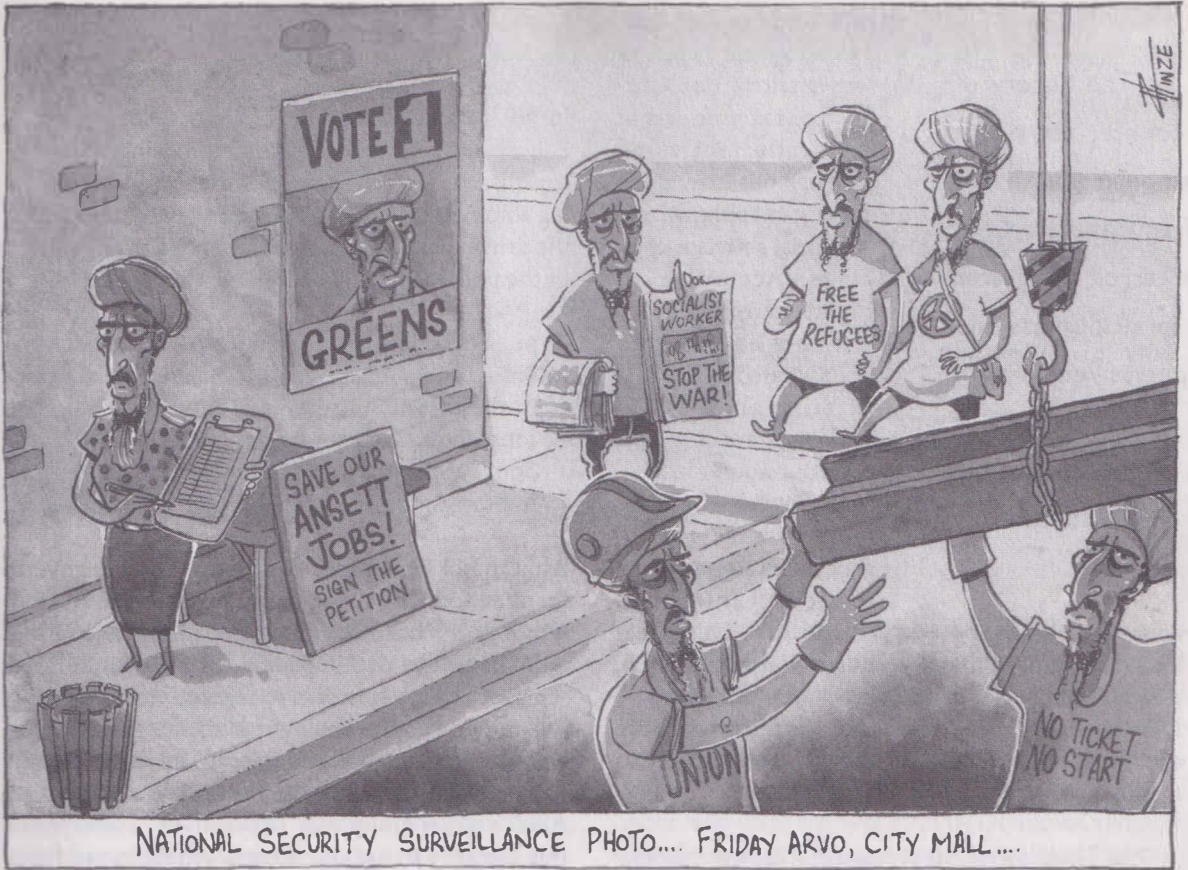
THE DECLARATION of 'war on terrorism' and the United States' military attack on Afghanistan in the wake of 11 September have led to a chorus of dissent and cautionary warnings around the world. There is no doubting that the attack on Afghanistan has the potential to result in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions of Afghans, whose only sin is to live in one of the world's most impoverished countries under one of the world's harshest and most repressive regimes. The inevitable civilian deaths are likely to fuel anti-western and particularly anti-American sentiment, inspiring attacks of the type that the military strikes are apparently aimed at preventing. With the calamity surrounding the international situation it is little wonder that repressive domestic security measures put in train as part of the 'war on terrorism' have received little attention. Nevertheless these domestic developments demand attention: they pose a serious threat to freedom from state terror and are likely to prove just as counter-productive in repressing 'terrorism' as the international military strategy. In addition they will undoubtedly impact on people's ability to engage in dissent and build an anti-war movement powerful enough to halt the military action.

Since the mid 1970s, and particularly post-Cold War, terrorism – along with the 'war on drugs' and organised crime – has provided the main rationale for major changes to national security arrangements in English-speaking democracies. These changes have seen sections of the military increasingly integrated into 'internal security', the militarisation of police, and the granting of more resources and powers to agencies involved in gathering intelligence on citizens. Traditionally the police and military have had separate roles, with police involved in domestic law enforcement and peacekeeping and the military confined to use against external enemies in times of

war. This separation is important because the military operate under a philosophy of maximum force aimed at killing and defeating an enemy whereas police are duty bound to use only minimum force against individual suspects protected by due process rights. Martial law implies the suspension of individual rights, while using the military against citizens and a close ideological and operational alliance between the police and military are usually associated with repressive regimes.

The 'war on terrorism' marks an escalation and intensification in the militarisation of law enforcement and a decline in civil liberties. Measures implemented or seriously contemplated in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia include the expansion of detention without trial, the removal of the right to silence and legal representation, the use of torture and drugs to force information from 'terrorist' suspects, increased surveillance of citizens by intelligence agencies, and vastly expanded resources to the sections of the military and paramilitary police involved in 'homeland' security.

By linking increases in the state's coercive capacities to shocking acts of violence that result in massive loss of life, governments exploit an emotional climate which makes it difficult to voice criticism and less likely that such criticisms will be heard. However, it is clear that domestic anti-terrorist measures are not simply a response to events but are instead pro-active measures coinciding with the trend towards an increasingly repressive state. History demonstrates that anti-terrorist measures announced after bombings, hijackings, and assassinations have sometimes been implemented in secret by governments months and even years previously. In 1978 the Fraser government announced a raft of counter-terrorist arrangements shortly after a bombing outside the Sydney Hilton where the Commonwealth



Heads of Government were meeting. Subsequently it became apparent that many of the measures announced had already been implemented or planned in secret prior to the bombing. In 1981 the Victoria Police announced the formation of a “supersquad to combat terror”. The press report announcing this declared that:

the decision to form the protective security group was made about thirty minutes before the Victorian police were told the Turkish Consul-General . . . and his bodyguard had been assassinated . . . The new group immediately gave protection to Turkish dignitaries in Melbourne.¹

The suggestion that the decision to form the group was made almost immediately prior to the assassination of an international VIP, and that the hundred-strong squad became operational simultaneously with the decision to establish it, is simply not credible. At the very least the measures introduced after ‘terrorist’ incidents fit comfortably with government

policy directions and demands for greater powers and resources by police, military and security agencies. The cart before the horse chronology of events and the coincidence of vested interest have on occasion led to allegations that the security services themselves have committed ‘terrorist’ incidents in order to gain power and prestige. The fact that Australia’s security organisations were the major beneficiaries of the Hilton bombing, coupled with the lack of other credible suspects, continues to fuel speculation that “the much-vaunted single act of terrorism in this country was in fact perpetrated by the very organisations established to protect us from it”.² Regardless of the provenance of particular ‘terrorist’ incidents it is clear that they provide an opportune political climate to announce changes that the public might otherwise reject as too draconian.

Another result of publicly linking repressive measures to terrorism is that it creates the false impression that the measures will be confined to dealing with the types of events popularly understood to be terrorist events: bombings, hijackings and the like.

The history of counter-terrorism demonstrates that it is frequently a source of terror far greater in viciousness and pervasiveness than the terror it is ostensibly countering.

However, in police, military and security circles terrorism is not confined to extreme acts of politically motivated violence but extends to dissent and political and industrial activism of all kinds. According to counter-terrorist theory it is 'but a short step from a march to a bomb'; terrorism and political activism are seen as part of a continuum. In Australia the police and the military have contingency plans to set up detention centres to

counter the threat posed by 'dissidents'. This threat is said to include, 'mass demonstrations', 'industrial, political and social disturbances' and 'terrorism'. A Detective Inspector, explaining the Victoria Police approach to protective security in the mid 1980s commented:

The island continent of Australia, for the majority of its settled years, has been relatively free of terrorism, insurrection, organised crime, and organised political demonstrations. Over the past twenty years Australia has lost its safety . . . Terrorism in one form or another has reared its ugly head; political activism has come out into the open; and organised crime has filtered through the community leaving no section of public life unscathed.³

Counter-terrorist theory also maintains that community, non-government, and activist organisations – knowingly or otherwise – serve as fronts for terrorist organisations. MacKenzie-Orr, former head of the Australian Protective Security Co-Ordination Centre, argued:

What we are finding is more often the lunatic fringes are infiltrating movements where ordinary people are honestly pursuing their ideals and exercising, quite properly, their democratic rights. They are moving into organisations such as the anti-uranium movement, Greenpeace and even the animal welfare movement. They lie low and

pursue their terrorist tactics, which have no connection with the objectives of these organisations.⁴

In 1997, after revelations in *The Age* that the Victoria Police had spied on and in some cases infiltrated the organisations of civil liberties groups and left-leaning community organisations along with individuals, the then Chief Commissioner defended the legitimacy of the police actions, maintaining that police:

must have information on the background, capabilities and intentions of the vast number of groups in the community based around political, environmental, ethnic, religious and other beliefs . . . Some apparently innocuous groups are nothing but front groups for terrorist activities overseas.⁵

After the 11 September events, the Howard government announced sweeping changes to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) that will allow it to detain people for forty-eight hours without charge or access to legal advice. Detainees will not be afforded the right to silence and failure to answer questions will be subject to a penalty of up to five years' imprisonment. In the Cold War past, when ASIO's target group was 'subversives' it interpreted this category to include citizens whose views fell to the left of an arbitrary centre line, despite the fact that right-wing groups have been responsible for at least as much politically motivated violence as groups on the left.

During the 1960s and 1970s the Yugoslav anti-communist Ustasha was responsible for, or the prime suspect in, a series of bombings and terrorist incidents in Australia. Although Ustasha violence was serious and persistent, ASIO was slow to treat the Ustasha as a subversive or terrorist organisation because they empathised with its anti-communist outlook. The Ustasha groups were allowed to flourish within the Yugoslav community while bombings and other incidents were automatically attributed to communist provocateurs.⁶ This same distorted political lens will no doubt be used to determine those of interest as 'terrorist' suspects. Terrorism thus provides a pretext for spying on, harassing, and incarcerating people engaged in political dissent, a right many take for granted in a democracy. In addition, measures initially justified by the need to counter terrorism are progressively normalised and integrated into everyday policing and security operations.

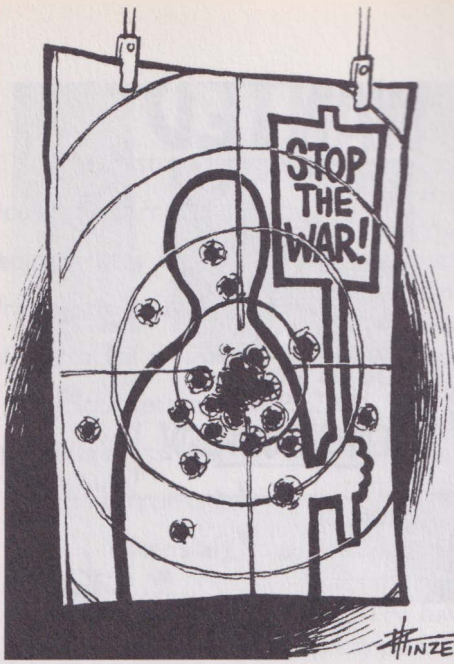


In Australia, consistent with trends in the United Kingdom and United States, ‘counter-terrorist’ paramilitary police are now used regularly in a range of policing operations. The paramilitary units train with the military, include former members of the military and use a range of military equipment and weaponry. Since their establishment in the mid 1970s, apart from using extreme levels of force in their own operations, the units have had a profound impact on the overall nature of policing, acting as trainers and role models for other police. Paramilitary tactics that emphasise confrontation and high levels of force have become routine, with the result that weapons and methods that were once justified on the basis of countering terrorism are now seen as part of normal police response. One symptom of the militarisation of policing in Australia has been an increase in the number of fatal shootings by police, as police have become more philosophically attuned and more tactically adept at the soldier’s craft of killing. Another symptom is the increasingly militarised approach to demonstrations. Protesters are not seen as citizens who may be breaking the law and subject to arrest and charge, but instead as ‘the enemy within’, to be defeated by use of overwhelming force. ‘Counter-terrorist’ police are regularly involved in spying on community and activist groups and recording the identity of those attending demonstrations. In the event that the military does establish detention centres, police intelligence gathered at demonstrations and through surveillance and infiltration of social

movements will be used to screen and clear ‘persons of good character’. The whole tone of the document outlining the arrangements for detention indicates that ‘good character’ and dissenting political opinions are considered mutually exclusive categories. Amendments to the Australian Defence Act, passed in the lead-up to the Sydney 2000 Olympics, although initially promoted as necessary to deal with terrorist threats surrounding the Games, open the way for the federal government to call out the troops in the case of political demonstrations or industrial disputes.

The terms ‘terrorist’ and ‘terrorism’ stand on hotly contested terrain; as the saying goes, ‘one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter’. Nelson Mandela was considered the head of a terrorist organisation under Apartheid, as was Xanana Gusmão during Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor. Terrorism is essentially an ideological construct “based on perceptions of legitimacy structured according to a benchmark of political and social normality”.⁷ States, through the military and the police, have enormous capacity to coerce citizens and inflict violence on individuals. It is not surprising then that state-sponsored terrorism, looked at in terms of numbers killed, is far more prevalent and significant than that of non-state actors. The history of counter-terrorism demonstrates that it is frequently a source of terror far greater in viciousness and pervasiveness than the terror it is ostensibly countering.

After the military regime was ousted in Argentina in the early 1980s a commission of inquiry con-



cluded that the 'terrorism' of the military regime was "infinitely worse" than the terror they were allegedly combating. Rob Watts points out that "Our century has been one of unmitigated, ceaseless and unprecedented state-sponsored violence and terrorism". And yet, the "social sciences largely construe crime and violence as something largely done by just about everybody except governments and their agents".⁸ Commentators, scholars and the media tend to adopt the categories of terrorism and counter-terrorism promoted by states – particularly powerful states – with the result that state terrorism – mass murder, police violence, sexual assault, torture, illegal arrests and detention, and legal arrest and detention based on political activity, ethnicity, race or class background (in other words kidnapping or hostage-taking) – is ignored altogether or at least permitted to masquerade as 'counter-terrorism'. The powerful state's ability to label people as terrorists or terrorist sympathisers, no matter how absurd or farfetched, works to position individuals as non-citizens, with the result that they are seen as outside the moral community and ripe for violence unconstrained by notions of human rights.

Apart from the reality that 'counter-terrorism' is frequently itself a form of terrorism, it may also inspire the type of terrorist acts it is said to be preventing. When more peaceful avenues for political dissent are cut off or repressed, movements will not disappear but may instead become more clandestine and

violent. It is well established that in Northern Ireland the incarceration of hundreds of Republicans without charge under internment in 1971 moved many away from political protest and civil disobedience and created support for the IRA. The British military's tactics directed at 'getting the hard men', created 'more hard men to get'.

Apart from exacerbating existing tensions, the intensification of state violence under the guise of counter-terrorism can motivate revenge attacks. In 1995, on the second anniversary of the death of more than eighty people, including twenty-seven children, at Waco, Texas in an assault by the FBI, Timothy McVeigh blew up a federal building in Oklahoma City, killing one hundred and sixty-eight men, women and children. In a letter to Gore Vidal, McVeigh explained that:

I chose to bomb a Federal Building because such an action served more purposes than other options. Foremost, the bombing was a retaliatory strike: a counter-attack, for the cumulative raids (and subsequent violence and damage) that federal agents had participated in over the preceding years (including, but not limited to Waco). From the formation of such units as the FBI's 'Hostage Rescue' and other assault teams amongst federal agencies during the 1980s, culminating in the Waco incident, federal actions grew increasingly militaristic and violent, to the point where at Waco, our government – like the Chinese – was deploying tanks against its own citizens... For all intents and purposes, federal agents had become 'soldiers' (using military training, tactics, techniques, language, dress, organisation and mindset) and they were escalating their behaviour.⁹

Such revenge actions are themselves likely to lead to further anti-terrorist measures – President Clinton signed the Anti-Terrorism Act in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing – resulting in an escalating cycle of attack and counter-attack.

The blurring of the distinctions between the police and the military and the increasing repression associated with this trend are not primarily a response, much less a solution to terrorist threats. The escalation of state repression is primarily associated with globalisation, the waning of a nationally defined capitalist class and the ascendancy of a new international class with global interests. The mili-

tary capacity of nations is being turned inwards because it suits the interests of multinational capital. Internal tensions have intensified as nation-states increasingly abandon the principle of social and wage justice in an effort to attract and retain mobile international capital. Conflict is also arising between nation-states and those participating in organised resistance against the decline in living standards, degradation of the environment and increasing inequality within and between states. Citizens responding to and resisting the negative impacts of globalisation are the 'enemy within' who states seek to put down by the use of force. While it is understood by many that globalisation involves a 'race to the bottom' in terms of labour and environmental standards, it is less understood that it involves a similar downward race in terms of the value states put on the lives of their citizens.

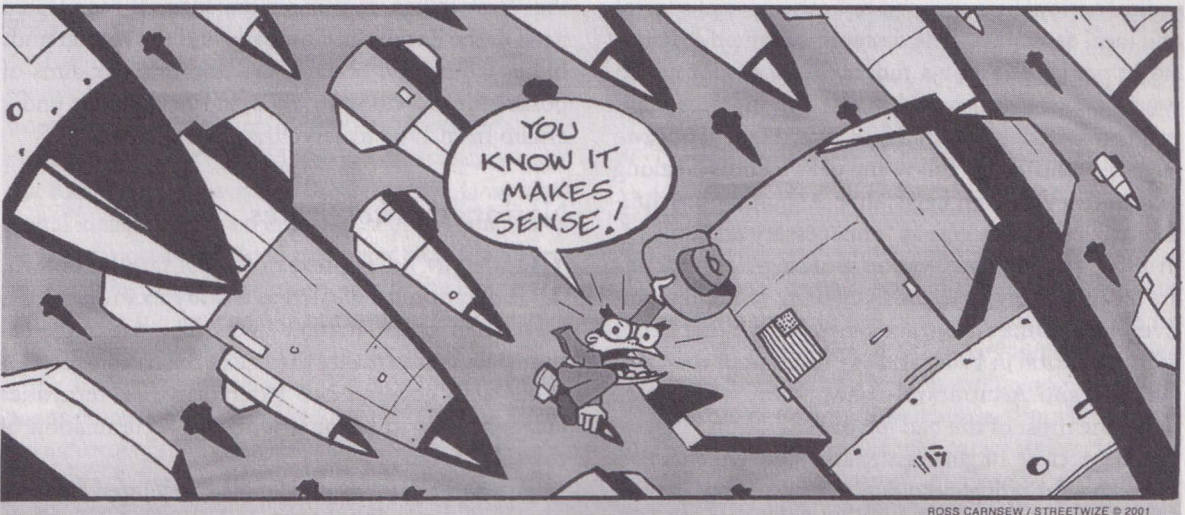
The history of counter-terrorism demonstrates that it is used as a cloak to punish, intimidate and make disappear politically inconvenient citizens. In the emerging context of the 'war on terrorism' politically inconvenient citizens will include peace and anti-war activists. In the words of President Bush, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists". In the same way that social justice aspirations and anti-war sentiment were previously associated with communism, such sentiments will be equated

with terrorism during the new war: anti-terrorism is set to be the new McCarthyism.

ENDNOTES

1. *Sun*, 19 December 1981, p.2.
2. J. Hocking, *Beyond Terrorism: The Development of the Australian Security State*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1993, p.196.
3. J. Barclay, 'Protective security – the Victoria Police approach', *Australian Police Journal*, vol.38, no.1, 1984, p.6.
4. Quoted in Hocking, *Beyond Terrorism*, p.181.
5. *Age*, 10 October 1997, p.19.
6. A. Mack, 'The utility of terrorism', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, vol.14, 1981, pp.197–224 at pp.220–1.
7. Hocking, *Beyond Terrorism*, p.1.
8. R. Watts, 'On cultures of violence: the nightwatchman state and modernity' in J. Bessant, K. Carrington & S. Cook, *Cultures of Crime and Violence: The Australian Experience*, La Trobe UP, Bundoora, 1995, pp.154–69 at p.154.
9. Letter by Timothy McVeigh quoted in Gore Vidal, 'The meaning of Timothy McVeigh' in *Vanity Fair*, September 2001, pp.129–35; 191–97 at p.192.

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Humphrey McQueen

Federation, Globalisations and the Environment

BERNARD O'DOWD won *The Bulletin's* 1900 competition for a Federation poem with his sonnet 'Australia'. Generations of schoolchildren obliged to decipher its complexities were turned off poetry. Despite O'Dowd's arcana, he counterpoised pertinent questions about the coming Commonwealth. "Are you", he queried,

*A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?*

O'Dowd and his mates around the Victorian radical weekly, *Tocsin*, were right to suspect that the Constitution had been fixed for the benefit of British bondholders and colonial plutocrats. For O'Dowd, the promise of a workingman's paradise lay in social revolution more than in the planting of a garden continent.

To challenge federation from the left in 1899 was to be isolated among the distinguished company of radical nationalists opposed to both imperial control and local capitalists. The dissenters wanted a democratic polity, and not a monarchical model which would be broken from the start.¹ Among those calling for a 'No' vote in 1899 was Henry Bourne Higgins, who, in the following year, lost his Geelong seat in the Victorian Legislative Assembly for characterising the Boer War as "unnecessary and unjust". In 1901, an inner-Melbourne working-class electorate returned Higgins to the first House of Representatives; he became Attorney-General in the first Labor administration in 1904, and as President of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission went on to make the most of the bad job of Federation.

At the close of this centenary year, with its bias towards celebrating individual politicians and deploring their racism or sexism, it is time to recall that Federation happened within a global economy and ecology. Throughout most of the European occupa-

tion of Australia, our story was treated as an appendix to the deeds that made the Empire. During the 1960s, Australia took centre stage. The lens has become so focused on the local that we have been losing sight of our place in the world. To counter that tendency, five of the interweaving contexts in which Federation was achieved merit attention: nation-building; competing empires; high finance; monopolising; and climatic turmoil. In short, Federation needs to be considered in terms of a previous stage in globalisation, the third of four eras deserving that name.

Globalisation Mark I had flourished around the Iberian seaborne empires, bringing Vasco da Gama eastwards to India (1497–98), Ferdinand Magellan westwards to the Philippines (1520–21) and Luis Vaez de Torres (1606) through the strait that bears his name. Globalisation Mark II took over during the seventeenth century with the triangular trade of slaves, molasses and rum between Africa, New England and the West Indies. In our region, Mark II manifested itself in the East India Company and the Netherlands Indies Company. Mark II saw the British claims of possession by Cook in 1770 and occupation under Phillip from 1788 to serve the China trade.²

Nation-market-states

PLACED IN THE context of Globalisation Mark III, Federation is revealed as a tardy example of the creation of nation-market-states. The rise of the nation-state was in reality the rise of the nation-market-state, with governments extending their territories and functions in keeping with the accumulation of capital.

After 1860, the United States accelerated towards a continental market through the war against Confederate independence, by completing the genocide of the Amerindians, and the building of transconti-

mental rail links. Guided by London, Canada's elites federated into a Dominion between 1867 and 1871, partly to ward off any takeover from the reunited power to its south. At the same time, wars advanced German and Italian political integrations, which were mostly complete by 1871. Elements in the Japanese ruling circles staged the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to do the same to their archipelago in a civil war. Legal and physical impediments to internal trade lingered in every case. The Union of South Africa in 1910 had been hammered into being on the battlefield at the time of our Federation. These states marshaled and inculcated the ideology to legitimise the nation-markets, often through compulsory military training followed by ex-service bodies.

Australia's first prime minister, Edmund Barton, could declare on 1 January 1901: "There is a nation for a continent, and a continent for a nation." Confined to geography and government, that slogan left out the key aspect of the federal impulse, which was to establish a state to promote a market across the continent. The heart of this drive was the abolishing of inter-colonial tariffs under Section 92:

On the imposition of uniform duties of customs, trade, commerce, and intercourse among the States, whether by means of internal carriage or ocean navigation, shall be absolutely free.

The federationists could not confine the market to their nation-continent because Australia's state, nation, continent and market were all inside the British Empire.

The new Commonwealth did exclude one element of Globalisation Mark III, namely, the switch from chattel slavery to indentured labour, "a new system of slavery". The Indian or Chinese coolie and the Kanaka made way for White Australia as a national ideal, not just a restrictive immigration policy.

Federation also helped to concentrate the allocation of investment. One example was the erection of BHP's iron and steelworks at Newcastle, instead of squandering resources in each of the six colonies. The rolling of the first steel there on 24 April 1915 has as much claim to be called the birth of an Australian nation as the landing at Gallipoli a few hours later. This rationalisation of capital funds continues to be weakened by the States' use of their residual powers to underbid for projects. For instance, the South Australians required BHP to construct a steel works at Whyalla in order to gain access to ore bodies.

A web of empires

SEVERAL OF THE new nation-market-states learned that in order to survive they had to become colonisers themselves. The Meiji oligarchs saw that the way to preserve their independence was to mimic the Europeans by setting up an empire, starting with attacks on Formosa and Korea in the 1890s.

In terms of territorial expansion, US Imperialism also peaked around 1900 with its annexations of Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Hawaii, and its occupation of Cuba. The prize in the Pacific was China where Washington called for an "open door" so that its firms would not be confined to one slice of the melon.

These rising powers challenged the supremacy of the British Empire. Australia was again caught within a web of rivalries, this time between France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Russia and the USA. An Empire-wide movement to catch up with German efficiency appeared in the recommendations of the 1901 Royal Commission on Victoria's technical education. From within Britain's industrial heartlands came the 1903 call for an Imperial Tariff by Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain.

The initial response by Australians had been to get London to rally around the flag against the Germans in the Pacific. But, by 1895, Britain's search for allies brought it closer to Japan. The rise of an Asiatic power quickened calls to strengthen Australian defences by integrating six colonial armies and five navies. The pooling of resources after 1901 meant that, by 1913, the national government could afford a battle cruiser, *HMAS Australia*, and maintain 300,000 volunteers abroad in 1914–18. Tariff-spawned factories supplied the British military with boots, jackets, jams and jellies.

High finance

REPORTING THE under-subscription of the May 1891 loan for Queensland, the *Economist* expressed the disquiet of London financiers at the rising labour movement in the Australian colonies: "Possibly the rates of wages in Australasia will suffer by a partial cessation of borrowing, but the trade of that important section of the empire will be far from suffering in consequences". As David Kynaston observed: "Thus the City and its commentators regulated the rhythms of economic life down under."⁵

The agitation to federate coincided with an economic contraction in the Eastern colonies and a gold

boom in the West. The Barings collapse in 1890, followed by bank failures in Victoria and Queensland, made investors more anxious to protect their funds. Throughout the 1880s, Australia had attracted a fifth of new issues on the London financial market, and returned to that level in the late 1890s only because of the gold rushes around Kalgoorlie. The proportion going to the older colonies halved.

Bank crashes in Australia contributed a too often overlooked reason for an alliance between the colonies. Melbourne financiers such as the Austro-Hungarian consul, Carl Pinschoff, urged that London would be more willing to lend if the debts of each colony were underwritten in a federation. A crisis in one part of the country could be compensated for by the resources of the rest. That reduction in risk offered the further advantage of lower interest rates. Section 105 allowed the new parliament to "take over from the States their public debts".

In the USA, promoters of railroad stock had been swindling British investors. To restore confidence, Congress established an Interstate Commerce Commission in 1887 to regulate the industry. In Australia, governments built the railways, making the loans more secure. Nonetheless, our politicians defaulted in their personal projects. In 1892, London investors charged the Queensland treasurer, Sir Thomas McIlwraith, with fraud over his handling of the Queensland Investment and Land Mortgage Company. When he won on appeal in the local courts, rumours reached London that he had forced the Chief Justice to resign, replacing him with the Premier, Samuel Griffith, godfather of the draft constitution, with whom McIlwraith had been in the 'Griffithwraith' coalition since 1890.

Under these circumstances, British capitalists and their political agents were keen to maintain appeals to Privy Council to protect investments in government and corporate ventures. In 1897, the Colonial Office worried that loans may not be secure if suits for their recovery were to be finalised in the High Court of Australia, as proposed in Section 74 of the draft. "Is it likely", a high official wrote, "that the House of Commons where such capital is largely represented will allow the appeal to be swept away?" Worse still, populist politicians might repudiate repayments.

The Secretary for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, conspired with the Premier of New South Wales, George Reid, to secure amendments to Australia's Constitution to protect British investors. The Adelaide Convention altered the clause dealing with

the Privy Council to allow unfettered appeals on non-constitutional questions. Another result of the Chamberlain-Reid understanding was that the Governor-General could act without the advice of the Executive Council, as Sir John Kerr did on 11 November 1975.

When the Australian delegates went to London in the summer of 1900 to watch over their draft being turned into the Act of the British Parliament that would grant the Commonwealth its legal status, the movement towards Federation almost stalled on the question of appeals. As one of the delegates, Alfred Deakin, put it:

The Conservative classes, the legal profession and all people of wealth desired to retain the appeal to the Privy Council and had heartily and openly supported Chamberlain's proposed abolition of clause 74.

Those interests wanted an absolute right of appeal in all cases. Chamberlain assured the House of Commons that he was protecting "the private interests of investors . . . a very large class . . . of British subjects interested in Australia". In the end, the Australians agreed to the High Court's having the power to allow appeals on Constitutional issues. That concession came on top of the one worked by Reid in 1897.⁴ (Appeals to the Privy Council continued until 1982.)

Monopolising

THE CRUCIAL REALIGNMENT during Globalisation Mark III was the creation of ever larger businesses, then referred to as 'Trusts', which needed larger markets and stronger governments. The expansion of capital had produced the modern corporation by the 1880s. This concentration of capitals was federation in the sphere of commerce and industry. The US Congress sought to control the monopolisers with the Sherman Act of 1890, but its provisions instead stimulated a wave of mergers in 1899–1901, after which 320 corporations held 40 per cent of US manufacturing capacity.

Australia's federationists were alert to the US situation, just as their drafts had been inspired by its Constitution. Their concern can be read in Section 51 (xx) which gave the new Commonwealth power to make laws for the control of "foreign corporations, and trading or financial corporations formed within the limits of the Commonwealth".

One such giant was International Harvester which had extended its price-fixing ring to Australia in collusion with H.V. McKay's 'Sunshine' company at Ballarat. In 1905, McKay alleged that its US partner was determined to drive him out of business by dumping machines here at whatever price would bankrupt his factory. This claim was credible given that McKay's production had grown from fifty to 1900 units during the decade after 1896. McKay turned to the Commonwealth which passed The Australian Industries Preservation Act.

Although sections of that Act were modelled around the Sherman anti-trust Act, the local law was aimed not at increasing competition but at guaranteeing employment and sustaining British industry against yet another US encroachment on Imperial trade. International Harvester already had 90 per cent of world sales. The US monopolisers were part of world-wide developments that squeezed the markets and profits for British firms, thus weakening the Empire's capabilities in every field.

With so many factories serving farms in Australia, it is not surprising that the key constitutional cases for tariffs, monopolies and the basic wage during the first decade of the Commonwealth should have been initiated by a supplier of agricultural equipment. The significance of that connection for the early Commonwealth lies in the natural environment viewed on a global scale, as O'Dowd had when he recognised Australia as home to "the cenotaphs of species dead elsewhere".

El Niño

THE YEARS 1895 to 1902 saw three back-to-back *El Niño* effects. Sheep numbers fell by a third and the New South Wales wheat harvest reached only one tenth of its usual total. The long drought did not drive Federation, but crimped its inaugural years. Projects that the first parliamentarians had hoped to initiate were postponed, or abandoned. One small example of the impact of retrenchment from the drought was that the first Governor-General, Earl Hopetoun, asked to be recalled in 1902 after the parliament declined to lift the gubernatorial salary from £10,000 to £18,000.



Political affairs are more subject to the weather than geographers have been able to teach historians. In Victoria, for instance, the long drought gave rise to the Kyabram Movement, a forerunner of the Country Party, to reduce the costs of government. That upsurge delivered a reactionary administration in 1902 which attacked public servants on both the industrial and political fronts, provoking a rail strike in 1903, and wholesale dismissals under a Coercion Act. One follow-on was the defeat of the first Federal Labor government in 1904 when it tried to extend the Arbitration Act to State government employees. The shelving of the Report on Victorian Technical Education was another effect of the stringency.

The rolling *El Niño* meanwhile had ravaged a sweep of societies from East Africa, through India and China, and the Netherlands Indies and the Philippines, and on to Brazil. In China, the failure of crops enflamed the Boxer Rebellion against the Christian missionaries who had been backed by the cannon of the foreign concession holders.⁵ One Boxer manifesto read:

*No rain comes from Heaven,
The earth is parched and dry,
And all because the churches,
Have bottled up the sky.*

New South Wales and Victoria dispatched naval contingents to Hong Kong in 1900 to suppress the Boxers. Britain learned from its dealings with the other

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GLOBALISATION!



1520: SOUTH AMERICAN GOLD STOCKS FLOATED ON THE WORLD MARKET!



1776: AFRICA GETS ON BOARD, WITH A DRAMATIC GROWTH IN EXPORTS!



1857: INDIA SAYS 'YES' TO FREE TRADE!



1915: EUROPEANS DISCUSS GLOBAL TRADING ARRANGEMENTS ON FLANDERS FIELD!



1945: U.S. REJECTS JAPANESE PROPOSAL FOR TIGHTER INTEGRATION OF ASIAN MARKETS!



1999: VIOLENT & SELF-INTERESTED LUDDITES THREATEN 500 YEARS OF ECONOMIC PROGRESS

Concession holders that the Royal Navy could no longer rule all the waves by itself and thus signed the 1902 Alliance with Japan.

The ending of that *El Niño* sequence opened the way to other environmental changes in Australia. Prickly Pear had been held back during the drought when it was used as stock feed. From infesting ten thousand acres in 1900, it covered 58 million acres by 1920.⁶

The drought refocused attention on irrigation, which the Victorians had been pushing since 1885, initially guided by Alfred Deakin. Control of the Murray waters became an issue at the 1897 Convention in Adelaide as the delegates debated giving the Commonwealth power over the “control and regulation of navigable streams and their tributaries within the Commonwealth and the use of the waters thereof”.⁷ The host colony sought to preserve its navigation and fisheries; Victoria wanted to irrigate; New South Wales had no immediate scheme in mind, but asserted its ownership of all the water to the South Australian border.

The Federal spirit flickered in the symbolically significant town of Corowa at the 1902 meeting that set up a tri-State Royal Commission on the use of the Murray River, which was then almost dry. In 1905, the Victorian government brought the management

of its rivers under a single authority, a precondition for any cross-border arrangements.⁸ Rivalries prevented an inter-State agreement until the next big drought encouraged the creation of the River Murray Commission in 1915.

The prospect of famine in Australia had stimulated research for higher yielding grains. Crops per acre had been falling since 1860 as the later maturing types in the higher rainfall areas were blighted with stem rust. Millers imported grain in 1890 from overseas after crop losses of £2 million. In 1900, after fourteen years of cross-breeding, William Farrer named his ‘Federation’ strain, an early maturing and drought-resistant type, which expanded the wheat belt beyond the Great Divide, thereby changing the colour of the agricultural landscape from golden to brown.

New strains, however, could not prevent the return of *El Niño*. In 1914–15, Australia’s wheat yield was the lowest since 1902. The following year, the crop was the most abundant ever, leaping from 25 million to 179 million bushels, ample to feed the Mother Country at war. To the promise of aiding Britain to “the last man and the last shilling” should be added “and the last loaf”.

The uncertainty of cereal output had implications for the clash of empires. Britain’s naval spending rose 300 per cent between 1894 and 1913 to protect the

conveyance of grain tonnage which had grown by only one quarter. As Anver Offer put it: "Free trade no longer came free. The cost of naval power became a subsidy for food not different in principle from the tariffs".⁹

German strategists anticipated that, once hostilities commenced, their import of grains and superphosphates would be disrupted. That fear encouraged the quest for a catalyst to lower the temperatures and pressures at which the creation of ammonia from the combining of nitrogen and hydrogen could be done economically. The answers developed in the Bosch-Haber process between 1908 and 1913 were applied to making explosives.

By the golden anniversary of the Commonwealth in 1951, the landscape of much of Australia would have been unrecognisable to the generation who had forged the Federal compact. Following a drought in 1944 as severe as that in 1902, the Australian earth was about to regenerate. The release of myxomatosis in 1950 killed off so many rabbits that the landscape looked greener than it had for some seventy or eighty years. Grasses and shrubs took off at once, but tree seedlings also had more of a chance to grow. This rebirth was a mixed blessing because exotic flora were no longer held in check while foxes and cats turned on native species.

In *The Reluctant Nation* (1994), ex-Director of the Australian Conservation Foundation, Phillip Toyne, recognised that the Commonwealth possessed the constitutional authority under the foreign affairs and the corporations powers bestowed in Section 51 to protect the environment. Sometimes that authority has been used, by both the Coalition over sand-mining on Fraser Island, and the ALP on damming the Tasmanian south-west. Just as often, the Federal government has compromised with the States, as in the Regional Forests Agreements. According to Toyne:

There remains to be found the approach which avoids the better confrontation generated by unilateral intervention by the Commonwealth, but abandons the 'lowest common denominator' of the consensus approach to achieving national objectives in environmental protection.

The answer is not adding a new power to Section 51. Despite the 1967 deletion of "other than the aboriginal race in any State" from sub-section xxvi, no Federal government has been game to override the

States on land rights. The same will apply to the rights of the land itself. They too will need preservation from States rights when used as a stalking horse for corporate plundering.

THE FUTURE for our Federal compact in the current round of Globalisation cannot be glimpsed by regurgitating Barton's slogan of "a nation for a continent, and a continent for a nation". His vision splendid dealt with demands within Globalisation Mark III for co-operation among the colonies to strengthen the Empire. Globalisation Mark IV is more likely to establish linkages between regions inside Australia and specific parts of other countries. Regions are the nodes for expanding trade, built around their comparative advantages. In place of clichés about Australia's becoming part of Asia, the point to ponder is which bits of Australia are likely to be tied to which bits of every other continent. Nation, market, state, region, empire and class remain the stars in our constellation but the latest wave of Globalisation is realigning them so that Eden needs fresh defences against Mammon.

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A Redeployment

Paul Mitchell

MAX RICHARDS IS SITTING across the table from me and stubbing out his cigarette. A slow grinding movement and it lies crumpled in a black plastic ashtray. From the top pocket of his suit he pulls out a packet, flips it open and taps the bottom of it. One cigarette rears up from the others. He pulls it out, then lays the packet on his palm in front of me.

I say no thanks, I'm driving.

Through the open doors of the coffee lounge I see a few eager suits making for work; strobed-up in the orange flash of street-sweeper lights. An empty tram hums past. Then everything's quiet again.

Max clicks once on a silver lighter and his cigarette comes to life behind a slow suck of air. He lets the smoke file through his nose and puts the packet on the green laminex table.

"The trouble with you journos," Max says, "is you don't really want to tell anybody about people like me. You think you do, but you don't."

I look around the coffee lounge. It's empty except for a man with a black moustache in a royal blue coat. He's moving around empty chairs and booths, polishing sugar dispensers and wiping down tables. The walls are covered in posters of Italian soccer teams from the eighties and I keep getting a waft of the toilet out the back.

What would I be doing in a shithole like this – at *this time of day* – if I wasn't interested in his story?

"Well, we'll see, won't we?" I say and take a bite out of my toast.

I pick up my mug and slurp on its contents, then look in Luigi's direction. How did he get the guts up to call this cappuccino? I'm starting to sound like the

wankers on the arts round, but I also know I haven't drunk coffee this bad since that trip to cover the by-election in Benalla.

I notice Max isn't drinking one. He could have warned me. But he's too busy getting all philosophical.

The boys at St Kilda Road gave me the juice last week. Said old Maxey liked to talk in circles. Said, too, that if I was to look him up I should keep smart.

McEwan had leaned back on his chair and puffed out that chest of his.

"You know what a rock spider is, don't you Drew? Well, Max Richards is another kind of spider altogether, mate. And we can't pin a bloody thing on him. But I'll tell you what the cunt's up to . . ."

We haven't covered Max's type before, not since I've been at the *Herald Sun*, anyway. Not *newsy* enough. And there's a good chance this bastard won't be *newsy* enough, either.

But, shit, I have to try something. If I don't get a few by-lines soon I'll be drinking cappuccinos in Benalla again. But this time I'll be on their fucking local rag.

SO HERE'S OLD MAXEY. Sitting and munching on a mixed grill – looking relaxed and comfortable, thanks very much – and talking to me as he chews.

"It's you guys who made me redundant, you know!"

He laughs and cuts hard into his steak. A fried egg jumps out of the way. His cigarette sits jealous and steaming in the ashtray.

"Well, at the very least you made me take a kind of different angle on things, didn't you?"

I'm looking at this Max Richards now. Solid bastard. But not fat. Long arms that look like he's stolen them from someone else. Hair's gone brown with an orange tinge. Old Maxey's hit the bottle to stamp out the grey. Must be the mid-forties crisis thing. Can't wait 'til I get to that little milestone.

And he's decked out in the slick black suit with a matching tie like the business man. Because, *apparently*, he is.

"So you run a couple of transport firms and a software company . . ."

"Yeah, that's right. And I'll have you know, boy, the software packages have nothing to do with sex."

He looks straight at me and grinds his molars on his steak. He keeps his eyes on me as he pulls out a bit of gristle from his mouth and puts it on the side of his plate. I take another gulp of whatever it is in my mug. He wraps the gristle in a serviette.

We eat and bullshit for a while about his businesses. I try to fit the Collins Street type with what he used to do after hours as a younger bloke. And what I've heard he's up to now.

Time to get down to it.

"You said before blokes like me are making you redundant. What's that all about?"

He stops eating. Puts his fork and knife at right angles on the plate and picks up the cigarette. It's almost out. He looks down at the tape recorder I've stuck between us.

"Look, you might by now realise that I'm not a fool."

The smoke's hanging around us like we're in a sauna and I almost want to cough.

"And I know you've heard at least a little bit about

me, haven't you, or you wouldn't be here. So I won't keep you in suspenders."

He grins and pulls back on the cigarette.

"I couldn't keep beating gays if you blokes were reminding everyone they're human, could I? If the man-in-the-street starts to think somebody's hard done by . . . well . . ."

I turn up the volume on the recorder.

"Everything's different then, *isn't it?*"

He lets the words hang in the air until they fall back towards the table and onto his food. He chops away at his eggs.

I look at him and don't say anything. I just start wondering how much rope I'm going to have to throw him to hang himself with. He stops eating and starts talking again. About his new pastime, I'm guessing.

"I haven't worked it all out yet. I don't know where things fit."

He looks around as if he means the coffee lounge then takes out another cigarette. He goes on, like he's talking to himself.

"It's just how things are. I don't know what I think of it. It just keeps happening. It's all a bit . . ."

He doesn't finish and he just looks at me with his brown eyes and gets a bit of a smile going.

"I suppose it's like a job or a business. You've got to keep adapting. You know, *evolve*. Or something like that."

HE DASHES AWAY SOME of the cigarette and tells me about his old life. He built up the transport businesses in the eighties during the day and gay-bashed at night. He was in his late twenties, early thirties. Him and his mates, drinking until the pubs

closed in Mount Eliza. Poor little rich boys heading off in an RX7 to St Kilda Esplanade. Looking for gays in public dunnies, kicking in the doors where they were having it off and beating the shit out of them. Leaving them lying in piss and whining on the floor.

"I must admit I loved to kick them in the balls. It's a bit bland looking back, I know, but I suppose I wanted to teach them what they were for. Not very creative . . ."

He's looking at his grill and not chopping any of it and I look at him again. My coffee mug is empty.

"Do you want another one?"

I shake my head.

"You think I'm a disgrace, don't you?"

I don't answer his question. I fold my hands in front of me and lean forward just a little bit across the table.

"Why did you start bashing them?"

He lets loose with a spiel.

"People'd say I'm a homophobe. But as far as I can tell, that would mean I was scared of them, wouldn't it?"

He grins and dashes at the cigarette.

"I couldn't have been too frightened of them if I went out looking for them and beat them up, could I?"

I can't believe this bloke. Sitting there giving the justification thing a whirl. What poofs do with their dicks is their business, I'm thinking, and half because I want to and half to keep things rolling, I give him the homophobia-for-beginners spiel.

He doesn't buy any of it.

"I'm not going to sit here and listen to that crap from you," he says and leans forward and stares at me. "You've got your nice new flat down on Southbank, or South Yarra or somewhere. Am I right?"

I just keep looking at him.

"You've got your girlfriend and she's got her gay chums, who have the facials and love Barbara Streisand and they're friendly with you, too, and they cut fucking hair in Chapel Street and they don't upset your little status quo, do they?"

I sit back. Grab another bit of toast. I'm thinking he's got the hairdresser bit wrong because Thomas is a chef.

Now Max swings into top gear. Tells me about the macho types who hung out in the pubs where he went as a kid. How they tried to pick him up. Sneaky blokes. Didn't know who they were half the time. No big moustaches like in the movies. Too smart for that. Kept quiet in the corners and didn't stick around too long. Just long enough to make a hit and go. Looking for little fresh ones.

When he shuts up he goes back to slicing and chopping at his grill. He keeps eating and doesn't say anything, doesn't even look up. I sit and munch on toast for a while and even think about another coffee. I watch him cutting his sausage and wonder how I'm going to get out what I want to say next.

It's one of those times when I wish I *did* smoke. I always want something to hang onto when I ask questions like the one I know is getting ready to come shooting out of my mouth. The boys at HQ didn't tell me everything, but I'm putting two and two together about why old Maxey's up to some new tricks.

"Did one of them rape you?"

Max pulls back across the table. I work hard to keep my eyes on him. He looks down at his cigarette pack and pulls another one out even though there's still a quarter of one hanging in the ash tray. He lights it and says nothing. Blows the smoke out through his mouth.

I back my gut.

"If you were that young, wouldn't that make the bloke who did it a paedophile - ?"

"They're all the same, all *sick!*"

He's almost shouting. The bloke in the coat looks across at us. Max shuts up quick and then starts fiddling with his folded-up serviette.

This dude's a case, I'm thinking.

I start imagining Richards in dunnies all over town. He's pounding those chunky fists into little blokes with buck teeth, their lips are splitting and blood's pissing down their chins. Then he's standing over

them and kicking them in the balls until their faces are white and they don't know how to scream anymore because it doesn't feel like there's anything left inside their guts to scream with.

I reckon there'd be a time to give old Maxey the stats about gays and rock spiders. But the whites of those knuckles hanging onto his knife and fork tell me now isn't it. Still, I'm worried what I've got for him next is going to piss him off even more.

I gallop up to the last hurdle, but keep an eye on the knuckles.

"But . . ." I say and then go quiet.

I've pulled up at the last fence. Max looks at me and puts the fork down and he's only hanging onto the knife. I need this story bad so I've got to jump. I want to shut my eyes.

"Aren't you a pervert, too? You root them now. *Rape 'em, actually. . .*"

I say the last bit as quick as I can. Then I do my best to hold Max's eyes.

He stares at me for a long time; keeps rubbing at his eyebrow like the idea that someone might think he's a creep has never crossed his mind. He puts his knife down and dabs at the corner of his mouth with another serviette. Then he goes through his cigarette routine again before he talks. When he does he takes his time and he's almost whispering.

"I said I don't know what's going on."

His eyes flick around the joint and then settle down and watch Luigi unloading frozen dim sims. Then he starts again.

"Some of them scream out *rape* and whinge about it . . ."

He keeps his eyes on me. Then he looks down and wipes some leftover egg from his plate with the cold toast.

". . . but others don't . . ."

He wipes and wipes at the egg yolk with his toast. When he finally looks up at me again his eyes have gone soft. I look into them for what seems like a few minutes and I start feeling like I'm sitting at a swimming pool, one of those ones in the tropics, with all the palm trees around them. I'm pressing my knees together under the table and his lips are sitting flat and red on his face.

Outside, the flow of pedestrians is getting heavier. Max wipes at the plate and doesn't eat his toast. Every now and again he's looking up at me and smiling. I don't know what to say and it seems that's good because I don't think he wants me to say anything.

In between us the tape inside the recorder keeps spinning.

Finally, he stops using the toast as a sponge and eats it, looking at me as he does. Then he puts his elbows on the table and rests his chin in both his hands. He looks straight at me and smiles. I'm spooked because as he does I get a buzz in my groin.

"I've got to go."

He's whispering again.

"Call me if you want to talk again."

He gets up from the table and I don't know why but I'm watching his legs. I try to take my eyes off this Max Richards. But I'm looking at him putting fifty dollars on the counter and joking with the man in the blue coat.

I've got to get into the newsroom but I keep sitting there looking at his plate, clean and white, not a drop of egg or food or anything on it. There's no more words to record but the tape's turning; over and over.

Just before he disappears into the stream of workers, Max Richards catches my eye and smiles again.

I don't smile back.

The Strike

The fucken rates came
then that fucken phone bill
and then that fucken s.e.c.
and the fucken rent
and then the fucken shop steward came
still out boys

Relationships

Boss

Take your ear plugs out
worker

What

Boss

Take your ear plugs out
worker

What

Boss

Take your fucken ear plugs out
worker

Can't hear a fucken thing

The Shop Steward

Gaver round boys, gaver round
So wha'da ya wanna do?
I say fuckem
They caused it, they can fucken pay

They been arguen for hours amongem selves
I know it's borin sitten around boys but
we gotta stick togever, see it frough

No leaven the fucken site eva
or turnen up for an hour an pissen off

If they shut the gate on us bruvvers
I'll start the picket fucken lines me fucken self
Are there any fucken questions?

What the fuck do you want Billy?
o'course we wanna work
We'll work when they fucken pay.

We gotta stick boys, the longer the better,
any more fucken questions?

Boots

He loved his new boots,
which the union made him get
even though he hated the union
he loved his new boots

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The Invisible Force

Working Class Voices in Contemporary Australian Poetry

The bourgeois, enslaved by social conditions and the prejudices involved in them, trembles, blesses, and crosses himself before everything which really paves the way for progress; the proletarian has open eyes for it, and studies it with pleasure and success.

Engels

ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE activity has never been restricted to the middle and upper classes. Australian working class voices have been present since invasion. A long list includes the protest verse of convicts, ballads of migrant women's working life, lyrics of popular songs from Jimmy Barnes or Archie Roach, the deeply political poetry of Aboriginal poets, performance poetry and spoken word in urban pubs, stories of hardship on the land in the bush tradition, prison poetry, union songs, hip hop rhymes, and page poetry dealing with working class experience.

By contrast it seems as though working class voices have all but disappeared from the literary scene. This becomes apparent when flicking through recent editions of mainstream journals and anthologies, selections of poets chosen for festival programs, major poetry prize-winners and so on. It seems odd that creative expression that has its roots in popular form could have become so far removed from the lives and experiences of the majority of Australians. Poetry in Australia seems to belong to an elite, privileged through background and education and who write poetry that is often esoteric and difficult for the many who do not share their world of erudite references.

But maybe the answer is straightforward: there just aren't any poets writing about working class experience. After all, class is not a big issue in Australia and the idea that a working class exists at all is an old-fashioned notion perpetuated by tired Marx-

ists. But I'm not going to get into a sociological debate about class. If you truly believe that class isn't an issue, maybe you should visit the western suburbs of Sydney or Melbourne and chat to some of the residents about whether they feel they're living in a class-free society. But even if we agree that there is an Australian working class, it doesn't necessarily follow that there's a body of poetry that can be claimed as 'working class poetry'.

The most common reaction I receive when I mention working class poetry is a suggestion that there can't be much of it around as people haven't seen it in the usual places. Names of poets writing about working class experience are usually greeted with surprise. There is enough contemporary working class poetry to consider as a body of work, and to warrant attention from both the literary and academic worlds. In terms of a definition, working class poetry is poetry written by, about or for the working class,¹ and reflects the experiences and diversity of working class culture. The working class is not homogenous and the voices are varied. The traditional Anglo-Celtic, predominantly male, blue-collar version of the working class still exists. But to focus on this group is to exclude many others. There are various identity issues tied up with class, and it's important to represent the many groups whose experiences of working class culture will vary. There is the migrant or ethnic working class, those who are from non-English-speaking backgrounds and who identify with a specific ethnic group, whether it be Greek, Lebanese, Vietnamese and so on. Women, who make up more than half of the working class, and who are often among the poorest members of the community as they find it difficult to obtain full-time, permanent work due to the added responsibilities of child care, and the further hardship faced by women who are sole parents; Aboriginal people who are over repre-

sented among the working class and underclass, and whose experiences of daily struggle are testament to the class inequalities within this country. Working class gays and lesbians can find themselves marginalised from the wider queer community. And maybe surprisingly for many, it is possible to find poetry that is written by, and deals with, the many aspects of culture experienced by these different groups.

If the poetry is being produced, why isn't it getting published and heard? Why can't we read working class poetry in the pages of *Southerly* or *Meanjin*?² Where are the anthologies of working class poetry;³ the panels or readings at festivals; the academic discourse; the literature courses that include working class poetry?³ Why is it ignored? A variety of factors have led to its exclusion from the literary and academic mainstream; the main one is that these establishments are operated by the middle class. It's no conspiracy theory, just fact – the editors, publishers, festival directors and literary academics are mainly middle class, and it follows that the poetry they select and support is influenced by their middle class values. And despite well-meaning intentions, middle class values can be restricting and lead to exclusions. The middle class notion of 'quality' in poetry is often far removed from the qualities inherent in working class poetry.⁴ Middle class poetry is characterised by its use of lyricism, figurative language, metaphor, Latinate language, imagism, esoteric references to Classical, literary or fine art elements and the use of 'standard' English.⁵ Not to say that middle class poetry isn't varied. There are language poems, landscape idyllic poems, deeply internalised poems, poems that deal with abstract notions such as 'truth' or 'beauty', whimsical poems on the vagaries of urban life, surreal dream-like poems, political poems that look at other parts of the world and highlight some of the atrocities inflicted on humans or the environment – the list goes on. But they very rarely concern themselves with the daily lives and experiences of the working class or underclass – those who make up the majority of Australia's population.

Working class poetry is often considered not to be poetry at all, because it is too political, or simplistic, reactionary, naïve in form, lacking in the qualities listed above, too focused on the ordinary or the unpleasant, unliterary, not art, not aesthetically pleasing – this list goes on too. Consequently, it is difficult for working class poetry to get published and be heard in the mainstream. In turn, the working class poet

gives up trying to get her work accepted and chooses the sites she knows will offer her a better chance of getting heard, such as the journal *Red Lamp*, or readings in the local pub, or she may channel her poetry into song lyrics instead of aiming for the printed page. She becomes disillusioned with the literary scene and becomes part of the invisible force.

If working class poetry is a legitimate body of work, how can it be characterised? What is the working class poetic? While working class poetry is not homogenous and a variety of styles exist, there are some common characteristics that can assist in its identification. Working class poetry is often direct, written in a vernacular and may contain phonetic spellings of working class dialect. The musicality of working class speech often provides the natural rhythm and form of the poetry. There is a noticeable absence of heavy metaphor and rarely any esoteric references, though there may be references to historical events that have impacted on the working class. There are also some common themes (which can jar with the middle class establishment), such as work, unemployment, poverty, violence, community, family, culture. People are generally the main focus of working class poetry and poems created from stories of the poet's own experience or that of friends, family, neighbours and other members of their community tend to dominate. Much working class poetry demonstrates a social conscience and is written out of the experience of dealing with issues that aren't very pretty.⁷ This can shatter the comfortable, non-threatening image of the working class that the middle class establishment prefers – the noble uncomplaining rural worker in an idyllic rural setting in the tradition of Les Murray.⁸ Often underlying working class poetry is a sense of dark humour that contrasts with the struggle being portrayed.

So who are these working class poets, and what does their poetry look like? You may have come across some of it in a fragmented fashion over the past couple of decades. If you've been a regular subscriber to some of the smaller journals such as *Red Lamp* or to those now defunct such as *925*, you could possibly have read poems that deal with work or other aspects of working class life. *overland* has published the occasional working class poem, as has *Social Alternatives*, *Ulitarra*, *Hecate*, *Four Wand Famous Reporter*. As far as I can tell though, there are no working class poems in any of the contemporary mainstream anthologies, with the exception of the odd middle class poet writing about working class life.

PROBABLY THE BEST KNOWN contemporary working class poet in Australia is Adelaide-based Geoff Goodfellow, who began to achieve success with his poetry in the late eighties and early nineties. He became known as the 'builder poet' or the 'prison poet' due to his choices of reading and workshop venues. Goodfellow's work is predominantly concerned with the lives and experiences of the working class, mainly from the perspective of a white, male, blue-collar worker – although he also explores the way in which this type of working class person interacts with those who do not share his race, ethnicity or gender.

His poetry is confronting and is not afraid to deal with the less savoury aspects of working class life, such as violence, racism and sexism. His work pulls no punches and often leaves the reader reeling from hard-hitting portrayals. People are central to his work, and many of his poems tell the story of an individual or group of people in working class settings. Goodfellow gives voice to labourers, trades people, barmaids, cops, and the forgotten and dispossessed members of society, namely the unemployed, junkies, homeless and the mentally ill, allowing them to speak for themselves in their own language. And he makes effective use of the cadences of working class speech.

His style is pared back, creating a sense of direct experience for the reader, without stumbling over heavy poetic devices. There is a natural rhythm to his poems, which leads the reader through the story, occasionally pausing to allow for a particular image to hit home. These are well-crafted poems and the simplicity of each poem belies the time that has been invested in their drafting. There is little sense of sentimentality or romanticism in Goodfellow's portrayal of the working class, just honesty and a desire to capture these lives authentically and accurately. He manages this task without passing judgement on the morals of some of the characters. He is using the medium of poetry to present life as it is – a medium that for centuries has been used as a tool for opening the minds of readers to situations and lives they may not have experienced first hand. Goodfellow is also aware of his responsibility to his working class readers and he reflects their lives and culture, providing a rare opportunity for working class readers to see themselves adequately represented in an art form that they have been alienated from.

The poem 'An Old Bloke' from his collection, *Semi Madness: Voices from Semaphore* provides a

good example of poetry written directly from the experience and the voice of the underclass – in this case a young man suffering from mental illness. Through the character's recounting of his experiences the poem highlights the inadequacy of the mental health system as the police are left to deal with the anti-social behaviour of the mentally ill in the face of limited health resources. In this poem it is clear that the police are not necessarily sympathetic to the needs of the mentally ill, and a group of people who can no longer rely on a place in hospital become further marginalised and abandoned by society:

chronic schizophrenia the shrink said . . .

*had some Pink Rock in me pocket
told 'em it was lollies
but they knew i whacked it up me arm
(they found a pick)*

*makes me think i can jump mountains
that stuff
just love the rush –
& it stops the ducks and drakes
when i'm comin' down . . .*

*that made 'em squeeze
the bloody bracelets
another notch . . .*

*it's a hard life on the pension
for an old bloke
of twenty eight*

The tone of the monologue is light hearted but the problems faced by those left to self-medicate and manage their illness are very serious. The character's speech leads to a free-flowing rhythm and the elements of slang used such as, 'they found a pick', 'bloody bracelets' and the rhyming slang of 'ducks and drakes' create evocative and ironic images.

The use of humour to juxtapose shocking situations is also managed effectively in 'Just Like Pirates Had', which deals with a culture of violence. The act of violence portrayed is extremely brutal, but the consequence of this assault is viewed as a trophy to be worn by the victim, as he has also played his part in the violent world of the pub. Again the language is colloquial working class, with words chosen carefully to recreate the story and characters convincingly:

*They reckon
 it came out as easy as a first tooth
 that afternoon
 in the pub at Semaphore
 & two weeks later
 in the same pub
 he's half declared himself
 a folk hero
 reckons now
 he's gunna cop it sweet
 the invalid pension
 better than the dole
 'cos you don't have to front
 the office each week*

*reckons he'll kick a goal with
 compo too
 heaps saw it*

*the other bloke just drove
 two fingers straight in
 ripped it out
 & stamped it
 into the front bar lino*

*so now
 he gets to wear
 this real neat eye patch*

just like pirates had.

Despite its nonchalance, the poem renders a violent world, where men are measured by their ability to use their fists, or to survive such an attack. Goodfellow is offering an insight into this aggressive and unpleasant aspect of working class culture, without making judgements or proscriptions. Readers are left with a conflicting set of possible reactions, from initial horror through to an uneasy sense of amusement at the character's attitude toward his injury. Regardless, the reader is left with a definite sense that this event could have happened, as Goodfellow has allowed the characters to speak for themselves.

Another poet writing from Adelaide is Mick Searles. His work delves into the world of the underclass in a gritty style, often dealing with drug culture and the destruction of life that often goes hand in hand with addiction. His poem 'Hot Shots' illustrates the despair of existing within a society that only views addicts as criminals and which is reluctant to acknowledge the human side of the problem:

HOTSHOTS

*found dead
 in the cross
 crucified
 from talking
 to the cops*

*A life of lust
 lust turns to rust
 A time of power
 a burnt out nose*

*A fix insane
 blunt fits
 in pain
 Money for dope
 no change for hope*

This poem employs the language of the street in short snappy lines characteristic of hip hop. There is an irregular rhyme and words are carefully chosen for their alliterative qualities. Searles paints a bleak picture suggesting that this kind of incident will continue long after the reader has left the scene: "Another junkie's / been murdered / Another life/ Long/ Deserted". Searles' poetry represents a youth culture abandoned by the rest of society and living on the fringe, with no immediate way out in sight. This world is in sharp contrast with the traditional working class culture of previous generations, where communities might have chipped in during difficult times. For the junkie or street kid there is no community or family to provide assistance once they have fallen this far.

THE EXPERIENCE OF working class women can be remarkably different from that of working class men. Women often have the added pressures of children and households to run and can be the lynchpin holding a family together. They often work in underpaid jobs and have little time for such luxuries as writing poetry. Their world is vastly different from that of middle class women and theories of feminism can appear to have little relevance to women who live and work daily within sexist environments and who may view feminism as rhetoric that has little practical application in improving their situation.⁹ These women must develop their own strategies to survive in a patriarchal environment that usually pays little heed to the advances made by the women's movement. Probably due to practical factors that limit the opportunities to find time to write,

there appear to be fewer working class female poets currently writing than men. At times the world of working class poetry seems to be dominated by the masculine voice and it is vital that women's perspectives be presented. Several of the working class women poets who were writing in the eighties have since disappeared from the scene and contact with them appears to be lost. One such poet is Caterina Passoni who featured in the magazine *925*. Her poem 'Varicose Story' highlights hardships endured in unsatisfactory working conditions, and the difficulties faced by women in particular when trying to get their concerns aired and acted upon by both the bosses and unions:

*I told them their cement floor turned my legs
blue!
– that is what the doctor told me.
The blue strings of pain
and the red drips on my calves
throbbed at the day's end . . .
I went to the foreman, and told him their
cement floor turned my legs blue!
–What about some compensation?
The foreman asked the boss,
who asked the company doctor,
who asked: "How do you know it is the floor?"
"Do varicose veins run in the family?"
I don't know. And the boss says:
"We need the cement floor to wash the blood
away."
The foreman takes me aside:
"We don't like troublemakers!"
I go to the union. He says:
"Why didn't you come and see us before
the operation?"
Why weren't you warning us about the floor
and
doing something about it before now?
They sent a legal man to the boss.
The company offers one hundred and the union
accepts.
We sold the car.
Now everyone exercises their legs.*

The female worker's medical condition is passed around unsympathetically between the various men in authority, and she is accused of causing trouble or failing to notify the union of the problem. There is no acceptance of responsibility by any of the men involved, not even from the union official who sug-

gests that the worker is responsible for her own occupational health and safety. The poem has a conversational tone as if the narrator is relating this story to the reader personally. The attitudes of the various characters are revealed through their lines of dialogue and their lack of concern for the worker as an individual is made apparent without overstatement. There is also a sense of inevitability in the outcome – the company is not severely penalised with a large compensation payout and the worker is left with the bulk of the medical bill and the poem finishes with an indication that something is being done albeit too late for many, with the onus still falling on the workers themselves rather than the bosses. Despite the hardship endured by the narrator, the poem maintains a humorous tone throughout, as the reader follows the exasperated worker's situation. The poet does not resort to overly dramatic descriptions of the workplace and the strength of the poem lies in its ability to deliver a powerful message in a deceptively simple style.

The instinct and ability to survive difficult circumstances are often demonstrated by working class women, and lives that centre around making ends meet, caring for children and so on have been expressed in poetry. Bobbi Sykes illustrates some of the specific injustices suffered by black women and paints a vivid picture of desperation and lack, matched with a determination and will to survive and a tenacious clutching onto hope. The women in her poems do not give up easily, despite having the odds stacked against them, and the images she creates are powerful tools in understanding life from the perspective of a black working class woman. In her poem 'Black Woman', Sykes points to the irony of black women being feted in the name of equality or reconciliation to present their views at official forums or encouraged to join political parties while their immediate circumstances and hardships are ignored and no solutions are offered to alleviate the problems of lack of food and basic essentials, absent partners, sick children and so on:

*your near meat-less stew
boils over in the kitchen
you stand at the front door
your baby in your arms
next youngest twisting at your skirts
you listen to the man
from the Australian Party
asking you to become a candidate*

*in the forthcoming election
 – in your hand today's mail
 advising you of scholarship benefits
 and black medical services
 your mind wanders to johnny
 lying in the back room
 wheezing his tiny life away
 and to the two you lost before
 the advent of black services . . .*

The political message and sense of injustice is clear, although the poem is not didactic in delivery. The images of the woman's poverty speak for themselves, without being overly melodramatic. Despite the fact that the woman has suffered the loss of children, there is no sentimentalising. The reader is given the chance to step inside the woman's life and try to understand that there is no time for melodrama when the daily needs of a struggling family must be met. Although the narrator is detached from the woman in the poem due to the use of 'you', the empathy of the poet is unquestionable, and it becomes apparent that the poet fully understands the circumstances and situation of the woman. This is important and without this deep understanding and subsequent sensitive treatment of subject matter, the reader cannot hope to be provided with a complete and authentic picture. The images in this poem are strong, as the woman is "asked to speak to groups / in your st vincent de paul dress". The narrator points out the condescending and hollow sentiment behind "demonstrations of the day" and "new I – liberal views / mouthing anti-racist slogans" but offering no practical assistance. The woman becomes a puppet for those wishing to do good, but she admonishes herself for feelings of bitterness or ingratitude toward her 'improved' condition. The poem ends with a sense of the inadequacy of belated political action that does little to alleviate the ongoing and ingrained injustices of black women's lives.

LANGUAGE IS an important element in the creation of working class poetry. Several poets use language innovatively, often leading to a 'subversion' of the accepted 'standard' English. Poetry that employs phonetic spellings of working class dialect or illustrates a hybrid version of English challenges the dominant mode and provides the reader with a striking alternative, which ultimately offers the privilege of access to a world they may not be familiar with.¹⁰ Melbourne poet π.o.'s use of language is extremely

effective in his epic poem *24 Hours*, which is over seven hundred pages long. It presents the lives of various characters in a working class area of Melbourne. This is a diverse world, inhabited by drug dealers, prostitutes, street kids, the homeless as well as those working and struggling to support themselves, lone parents, migrants and first generation Australian-born children of these migrants. For much of the poem, π.o. allows the characters to speak in their own voices. Often this involves a phonetic rendition of their particular language or accent, whether it be a hybrid version of English spoken with a Greek accent, or phonetic spellings of languages other than English: "Aafendik-o! – ENNA TSAI M-E LEMONI!" By recreating these speech patterns on the page, π.o. throws the reader completely into the world of the characters, and the reader is forced to share the characters' experiences on an immediate level, complete with misunderstandings and at times an inability to follow what the characters are saying. This gives the reader a very good idea of what it might be like to actually be one of the characters, especially the migrants, who experience the frustrations and problems, as well as the sense of hope and adaptation that occur when living and working in an alternative culture using a language that is unfamiliar:

*Yoo n-o howw much eye looz? 1: \$50s – wun
 pot!
 he goes over and turns-up the oven.
 Da pipol n-o hev much noww, the bloke sez
 : Holidai!
 Too HOT to werrking, mai fren!
 Liv tha shop.
 gon summwhair drink!, Mario sez.*

π.o. is not interested in sketching a comfortable world. He wants the reader to understand that the working class and underclass existence is often far from cosy, and his use of language means that the reader from outside this culture must be prepared to make an effort to find a way in.¹¹ His poetry also challenges an Anglo-Celtic version of the working class, and offers an insight into the particular difficulties and hopes of sections of a migrant community.

Although the characters' speech provides a strong sense of place and focuses in and out of scenes through dialogue and monologue, there are also various sections of the work that concentrate on descriptions of Fitzroy. π.o. maintains a simplicity in his description, but chooses what to present carefully, thus build-

ing a gradual picture of the characters' surroundings, which operates filmically as an establishing shot, allowing the reader a way into this particular world, as well as serving as a break from the frenetic pace and intensity of many of the conversations: " – A dero / is making his way up the street / . . . towards the Gardens. / – The nurses / from St V's are making their way home, down / the lane (over all the potholes / and excavations)". This is important to provide a general impression of life in a working class neighbourhood, where everyday events are often more significant than the larger world picture. In some parts of Fitzroy, the residents are occupied with the daily business of survival, which reveals genuine heroes; those who are able to find a reason for living despite the hardships they endure.

Lionel Fogarty creates confronting and challenging poems through his use of a Creole which draws on English and Aboriginal languages. Fogarty takes the language of the white oppressors and uses it against them, to speak a powerful message of injustice and determination to survive. He combines aspects of traditional oral Aboriginal culture with 'standard' forms of poetry to produce a unique and powerful approach which develops his aim to "put Aboriginal designs of art inside the lettering to bring a broader understanding to the meanings of the text".¹² He doesn't reject the oppressor's forms entirely, but manipulates them to work within his own specific context, thus turning forms previously used against his people as tools of liberation. The dispossession of Aboriginal people is the theme in his poem 'At Home: To Musgrave Park People', which highlights the human story behind a group of people living in a park, marginalised from the wider society and suffering from daily injustice and indignity at the hands of authorities, surrounded by the problems created by their dispossession, but maintaining a sense of community and family however tentative it may be. The people in the poem are also aware that they are not benefiting directly from any political advances in Black rights, that they are living proof of how society abandons those it cannot deal neatly with:

*Bludging no-hoper
This dopey blackfella
Who? you saying, uncle, boong.
Yeah! What a shame.
Poor boozed up old lad.
At Musgrave we is frightened
when you talk land rights, black power*

*cause we is live experiences.
Look boy, me braver than youse.
Remember when dumbfounded you were.
All youse don't sit parked,
don't drink flagon red on lips to tip
never flagon to flake out at Musgrave Park.*

Through the use of language, the reader is given a chance to experience this world closely while also being required to put aside preconceived notions of 'standard' English as the accepted rules of grammar are thrown aside to create an alternative version. Like *π.o.*, Fogarty allows the characters to speak for themselves, without compromising or attempting to force the poems into acceptable forms for non-Aboriginal readers. The poems are presented on their own terms, offering an insight into lives lived daily on the edge, with no reassuring references to accommodate the white middle class reader.¹³

Although the experience of an Aboriginal homeless man is vastly different from that of a white working class woman, it is possible to comment on poetry such as that of Fogarty under the umbrella of working class/underclass poetry. Many of the criticisms that have been levelled at working class poetry have also been used against Aboriginal poetry and poetry of writers from non-English-speaking backgrounds.¹⁴ These forms of poetry possess different motivations, styles and aims in their creation, but at certain points in Australian contemporary literary history have all been described as simplistic, naïve, overtly political or propaganda, unlitrary, unsophisticated, lacking in 'poetic' qualities, socio-economic 'material' or not containing appropriate subject matter for 'true' poetry.¹⁵ These criticisms can be seen as an attempt by the establishment to undermine any work that may present a challenge to the accepted rules of the canon, and an ignorance and lack of understanding for the subject matter being presented. It is much easier to deny the existence of class injustice than to be prepared to accept the reality on its own terms. When the establishment feels threatened due by the desire of its members to protect its class privileges, it reacts by using intellectual or academic influence to cut down any alternatives to its comfortable position. By dismissing working class poetry, the members of the establishment can continue to enjoy their safe poetic world and only need concern themselves with the intellectual problems of the day. Working class poetry shatters these illusions and provides a direct contrast with the abstract or theorised world of academia. It forces

the reader to acknowledge the daily injustices occurring outside the domain of literary scenes and academic institutions. Working class poetry invites the reader to face the reality of working class life rather than hiding behind the well-intentioned confines of intellectualised debate on injustice.

ENDNOTES

1. Working class poetry is not always written by those from working class backgrounds, and there are middle class poets, such as Dorothy Hewett, who have written on working class themes.
2. In contrast with Australia, the UK and USA seem to support working class writing in various ways, with several contemporary anthologies of working class writing as well as publishers and academics promoting working class writing through organisations and collectives such as the UK-based Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers and the Centre for Working Class Studies at Youngstown University, Ohio.
3. There are working class writing courses at the University of Queensland, the University of Melbourne, and at Victoria University.
4. Haslett suggests that notions of 'quality' were developed in the eighteenth century, during which time popular art forms were pushed aside and accepted measures of 'taste' became synonymous with middle class art forms. Moyra Haslett, *Marxist Literary and Cultural Theories*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000, p.156.
5. The use of 'standard English' has typically been defined by the ruling classes. Haslett, p.73. Oresick suggests that working class poetry does not feature in mainstream anthologies because the subject matter does not qualify as "proper subjects for literature" which usually include "love, death and nature". Peter Oresick, *Working Classics: Poems on Industrial Life*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1990, p.xxi.
6. Use of poetic metaphor is often considered to be inappropriate by the working class poet, and in terms of adequately expressing their lives and experiences also a frivolous luxury afforded to those who do not have the pressing and practical concerns of working class life to consider. Jim Daniels, 'Troubleshooting Poetry: The Factory and the University'. Janet Zandy (ed.), *Liberating Memory: Our Work and our Working Class Consciousness*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1995, p.90.
7. Daniels describes working class poetry as an assault on middle class senses, "loud raucous poems perhaps seem like cursing in class to those who associate poetry with gentility". Jim Daniels, 'Troubleshooting Poetry: The Factory and the University.' Zandy, p.91.
8. The romanticisation of the working class has been occurring for many years and there continues to be an element of the middle class who believe they are able to speak for the working class or underclass, but who essentially fail to fully understand their subject matter. Linda McCarriston, 'The Grace of Form: Class Unconsciousness and an American Writer', Zandy, p.98.
9. Feminists also acknowledge that feminist theory has traditionally come from a bourgeois position that does not always take into account the specific oppressions faced by working class women. Ruth Robbins, *Literary Feminisms*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000, p.28.
10. Corkhill suggests that these alternative versions of English challenge the authority of oppressors and indicate a sense of determination through positive appropriation. Annette Robyn Corkhill, *Australian Writing: Ethnic Writers 1945-1991*, Academia Press, Melbourne, 1994, p.1.
11. π.o.'s subversion of English can be seen as a tool of revolution, his "damaging of language" leading to a "radical realignment and restructuring of society", Corkhill, p.128.
12. Lionel Fogarty, *New and Selected Poems: Munaldjali, Mutuerjaraera*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1995, p.ix.
13. The white reader must overcome literary preconceptions to accept the literature of Fogarty on its own terms. Joan Newman, 'Commitment and Constraint: Contemporary Koori Writing', Wenche Ommundsen & H. Rowley (eds), *From a Distance: Australian Writers and Cultural Displacement*, Deakin University Press, Victoria, 1996, p.88.
14. Mudrooroo claims "white critics have been extremely harsh on Indigenous poets" and Indigenous poets often end up as "fringe dwellers unable to enter the elitist fairyland of bourgeois poetry". Mudrooroo, *Indigenous Literature of Australia Milli Milli Wangka*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1997, p.44. Gunew points to criticism of ethnic writing that labels it "with the marks of linguistic naivety and incompetence" due to the use of 'broken language'. Sneja Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*, MUP, Melbourne, 1994, p.71.
15. Fox states that middle class critics are not prepared to acknowledge the aesthetic qualities of working class writing and instead dismiss it as "crude, naive and reactionary". Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working Class Novel 1890-1945*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1994, p.46. Adam Shoemaker claims that Indigenous writers have had their work dismissed as 'protest literature', a form he states is not favoured by the Australian literary establishment. Shoemaker, *Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988*, UQP, St Lucia, 1989, p.189. Matha Vicinus cites examples of working class poetry being described as "thin and feeble". Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working Class Literature*, Croom Helm, London, 1974, p.1. Peter Hitchcock points to descriptions of working class literature as "too sociological, too political, too realist, too easy . . . too late". Hitchcock, 'They Must be Represented? Problems in Theories of Working Class Representation', *PMLA* 115:1 (2000) p.20.

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we are just all
monkeys performing
at our
masters' grinning teeth

did they tell you of your history before they stole it from you?
were they aware that your mothers, fathers knew something about solidarity before you?
did your teachers tell you that your fathers, mothers had once been the enemy?
did your teachers do their best at getting you to conform?
at getting you familiar with the drill of deadlines and timetables?
preparing you as good conformists in the business environment?

what is rebellion to you, new generation?

will it be a repeat of fashion? of flashing a tit to shock a crowd?
will it be your loudest & tamest songs that draw the best profits for your managers?
will it be a simple retort in family tradition?
will you spend more money in your life than your mother?
will you argue black and blue about issues to those who have long, lost an interest?
will you impress your mates by being the loudest, the strongest, the most violent, just as the
movies are showing you?

if the pond is that small
then

we are just all
monkeys performing
at our
masters' grinning teeth

Brad Evans

my father wore a blue collar

my father wore a blue collar
my mother washed his shirts
my father worked for walkers bus service
he got four shirts a year
we went to the walkers bus service christmas barbecue
every year
when i was fourteen
i said i was too old to go to a family christmas barbecue
with a santa arriving in a bus full of presents for the children
but dad said I had to
and mum said I had to
because it made my father proud
for the other bus drivers to see his educated daughters

my father wore a blue collar
he got four shirts a year
they had a logo sewn on them
it said walkers bus service
with a picture of australia
and a road
with broken lines down the middle

my mother and father grew tomatoes
seven acres of tomatoes
when you pick them without gloves
your hands bleed
everything goes a black kind of green
my mother's work dresses were stained black-green
my father's work shirts for picking tomatoes
were walkers bus service shirts
my father wore a blue collar
he got four shirts a year
the old ones made good work shirts
my mother washed my father's shirts
and the blue collar was rimmed with the white lining
where the cotton had worn away
where my mother scrubbed away the grime and the sweat

my father wore a blue collar
and the white lining of the collar came through
and the blue cotton hung in strands around the top
where the grime and the sweat
and the tomato plant black-green
would stick and eat away
at the cotton on the collar

at the walkers family christmas barbecue
the santa was always a bus driver
his big santa stomach was not pretend
he called us jim's girls
i said i was too old to go
santa had a present for every child
i got an avon soap set
all the kids got toys
my mother said the company was good to buy presents
my father said i had to
my mother said i had to
she said it made my father proud
for the other bus drivers to see his educated daughters

my father wore a blue collar
he did three shifts a day
he did the cleaning shift between school runs
and he said he hated kids who put chewy in the ash trays
and i had put chewy in the ash tray in a bus
and he hated the chewy in the ash trays
and he did three shifts a day
and when he got home he picked tomatoes
and the carport light would be on
till 1 or 2 in the morning
and my mother and my father would be classing the tomatoes
and my father would drive to kyneton
before his bus shift in the morning
to get the best price for his tomatoes

my father wore a blue collar
my mother washed his shirts
she said it made my father proud
for the other bus drivers to see his educated daughters

once i needed an art smock for school
my mother gave me an old walkers bus service shirt
the white was sticking through the collar
it said walkers bus service
i told my teacher i forgot my art smock
and he gave me a white business shirt with brightly coloured paint stains

my father wore a blue collar
he got four shirts a year
they had a logo sewn on them
it said walkers bus service
with a picture of australia
and a road
with broken lines down the middle

Cosy 1 brm cls transp

There are architects and landlords
who specialise in rendering concrete
the misery of the collective
noun a block
of flats

Zoo or pound or prison
Cell cell cell
Who do they think will live here?

If it's not a right angle it's wrong
Horizontally barred with turnkey runs
Rows of windows like free television
Screwed inside or zipped up each end
with institution grey zeds stair case
Every landing a blind stand-off
of doors thin, dented ply
with plastic stick on stencilled
freehand or absent number

The view a block of letterboxes
like the ugly child numbers
precursing the doors
Rancid pen of wheelie bins
Stunted Hills hoists
with lone stiff T-shirt turning
to rag
above concrete painted with car
spaces for the carless

The weeds grow tough, the tenants
behind distressed flywire
paralysed blinds bruised walls
on exhausted carpet beside crazed tiles
dislocated sockets weeping taps
Every jamb framed with a slam's crack

What do they expect for \$120 a week?
say the agents who collect the rent
for the landlords who paid good money
to the previous owners who also paid
good money
and someone
paid the architect

Not one had to step
every day on stairs and walkways stuck
with the unearthly moss of astroturf
full of grit and stain and dog shit
that can't be swept or scrubbed away
because it's trapped.

Lauren Williams

Grid Fault

Sudden darkness.
A photocopier halts
in mid duplication.
We gather in the foyer
like furry creatures
smoked out of burrows.
There's talk of abandoning the building,
walking out,
letting everything just take care of itself.
Someone emerges,
half dazed and laughing,
from a blacked out toilet cubicle.
Then we randomly disperse,
go back to our desks,
wait for power
from the powers that be.

Mark Mahemoff

Ali Alatas in Jakarta

All these microphones like a bunch of black tulips
I don't know how many television cameras out there
& even more photo-journalists & print journalists –
how could anyone believe I have anything to hide?
The world will not be able to take you seriously.
Your history is a few seconds, a few minutes at most.
Let me remind you we go back many hundreds of years
before the hundreds of years of Dutch exploitation.
We are a most polite people, a softly-spoken people.
Of course we are grateful for offers of assistance.
The Australians, in particular, are always assisting:
joint military exercises, officer exchange programs etc.
There is almost nothing the Australians will not do for us.
No, I have no idea why you would want to say that. Fear?
When will you stop drawing such simplistic conclusions?
There were the ANZACs; now there are the joint exercises.
We find the Australians to be great believers in mateship.
We respect that tradition as we respect all traditions.
So please don't hector us, please don't threaten us.
Don't tell us we have 48 hours to do this, that or the
other because it is just not helpful – to you or to us.
You are ABC. Is that correct? I remember Radio Australia.
When responding to the ABC or any Australian journalist
I always make a point of not mentioning your Aborigines.
I know that you find it distracting & disconcerting.
In my Javanese way I am coming round to your question.
Instead of criticising us & chastising us all the time
you should be congratulating the police & the military
for doing such an excellent job with the referendum.
Yes, it is true there have been one or two incidents
since then. I would be surprised if you were surprised.
The UN tilted ingenuous voters towards independence &
then failed to pin down the voting irregularities. No.
These are nothing but the usual Western fabrications.
Do you *want* to see the Balkanisation of our country?
There may be rogue elements letting off steam (guns)
but the militia is *not* directed by the military.
Pardon? Can I believe what I am hearing? Can I?
You have footage of military personnel on motorbikes
each piggybacking two armed members of the militia.
Yes, they are armed. East Timor is a dangerous place.

Do I need to explain it would be the height of rudeness
for those with transport to leave others to go on foot?
No, you seem to have no understanding of the situation.
The East Timorese packed in military trucks are leaving
because they want to leave. The military are helping.
I have been most patient. This is the last question.
No, not at all. Why would those heading for the hills
burden themselves with huge amounts of food & drink?
I said that was the last question. Well, don't you
always take the children when you go on a picnic?

Graham Rowlands

The Age of Austerity 2

The CEO's pleased to announce
That 20% will go.

It's been figured out by Accounts
What efficiency bonus will flow.

The CEO's pleased to announce
There's a tight new service plan.
The Magi have honed it for months,
With a ransom paid to each man.

The CEO's pleased to announce
That personal contact will grow,
Though as Internet access abounds
Distance will soon be the go.

The CEO's pleased to announce
A lean, mean tender's gone in.
The word is the lions will pounce
To contract with a firm so thin.

The CEO's pleased to announce
The golden parachute's taken.
Staff are reminded to bounce
Or else they're sure to be shaken.

Niall Clugston

*This poem first appeared in Red Lamp #8
(February 2001)*

Pinticketing

Garment Industry – 1972, Melbourne

Pinticketers pinticket the pieces placed in a pile by cutters' assistants chalk-marked cartloads continuously distributed suit size and order number singly stitched by a special machine onto material machinists machined into suit sections seams of sewing stitches of buttonholes layers of lining lots of lapels crates of collars all paid by the piece passing inspection before finishers fitted full garment and pressers pressed product into perfection

Cathy Young

My Brothers & The Garbos

The garbos went on strike from Liverpool Council.
The big moment of fame for Rose Street residents.
Dale & Brendon's boof heads appearing behind the
dirty shoulders & old grey singlets of the garbos
for their first & last time on television, Channel 7.
They'll be telling their great grandkids about it.
A lot of others from the street got on television,
filmed on the steps of court, or outside the prison.

Coral Hull

The Crossover of Dreams

For Kevin Brophy

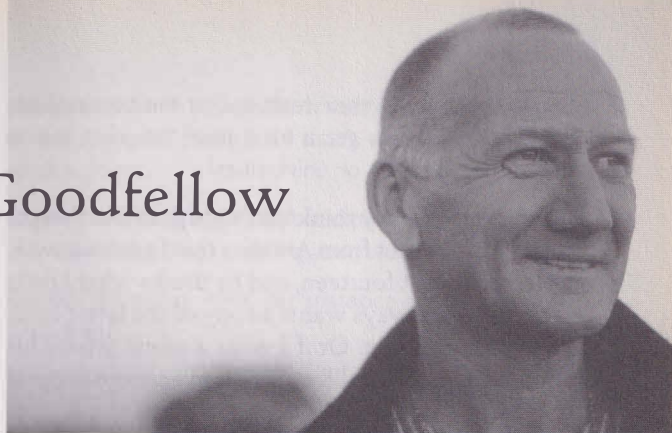
In my dream I've just escaped
down and out the tunnel I dug
beneath my blanket and sheets
under the walls and Sydney Rd
and run fast and far as I can
up and down cobblestone lanes
and catch a hold of my breath
fingers crossed none catch me
playing dead in leafy shadows
like I hid when a kid playing
the wag and, *Cops 'n Robbers!*
close yer eyes, count to ten!
Try to catch me if youse can!
Never ever giving myself away
but for mum's call, *Come out!*
Come on out wherever you are!
I'm coming, mum! I'm coming!
So is the morning!, she sings
as I straddle and try to ride
a wooden horse back to sleep.

Allan Eric Martin

Sarah Attfield

Interview with Geoff Goodfellow

Melbourne, March 2001



Sarah: In a 1999 review of your work, Graham Rowlands said that it would be impossible to read your poetry and agree that Australia is a classless society, so what does 'working class' in contemporary Australia mean to you?

Geoff: It's still valid, but it's getting harder to distinguish as the older generations of Australians die off. It seems that less people are interested in even stating what class they're from or knowing what class they're from or they're confused about what class they're from – the world has changed so dramatically in the last twenty years.

Sarah: There is the traditional sense of the working class like the picture on *No Collars No Cuffs*, of the male worker in the blue singlet – is that relevant? Does that exclude a lot of members of the working class today?

Geoff: Well, a lot of members of the working class are unemployed today! They're wearing those same blue singlets but they're a bit more faded. I know in the case of my brother who's on the cover of *No Collars No Cuffs*, it's been a long time since he's worked. Hands and feet people find it difficult to get work these days . . . And there's a lot more white-collar workers within the working class now – service industries – and it's quite confused. But it's the sort of values that you grow up with that make you working class, the family values. Like old tradition and telling of stories. My own childhood was far different from the childhood of my children because I grew up in a world without television, so it was very much an oral tradition – hard drinking, story telling, yarn spinning, life was theatre.

Sarah: How do you define working class poetry? What does that mean to you?

Geoff: I think of it as writing about the battlers and survivors, and that's how I see working class people,

as the battlers and survivors – people who don't have a lot, but have enough to be able to struggle on. Sometimes they do it easy and sometimes they do it hard. My whole life has been that way, I've had periods in my life where I've had some fucking dead-set good runs, and other times I've had an arsehole of a go. And that's the key to working class culture, they are survivors, they can ride through all those adversities.

Sarah: You still live in a working class community. Do you still participate in working class culture? Are you still 'authentic'?

Geoff: I think I'm still authentic. I live a pretty different sort of life I suppose in that I don't go off to a traditional job every day. I sit in cafes on Semaphore Road and drink coffee and talk to people walking up and down the street. I'm writing about those people too. I'm often using the things that happen on the street as part of the next poem, so in a way it is still working.

Sarah: Does your activity as a poet or writer alienate you from working class people, or from your working class family and mates?

Geoff: I think initially it was all very suspect, but I've been at it for so long now that any reservations my family had certainly went a very long time ago. Some of my mates think that my working life is a little bit strange – I mean they can't really get a hook on it but . . .

Sarah: Do they think that what you do has value?

Geoff: I think they do in the end.

Sarah: To begin with though, what kind of reaction did you get when you started writing poetry?

Geoff: Everyone thought I was quite strange!

Sarah: What about their reactions to the scene of poetry itself? Did you get a hard time for going out to perform at readings or universities?

Geoff: No, no. They think that's good, in fact I've got a mate coming out from America that I grew up with, he left school at fourteen, and he thinks what I do is fantastic. He always wants a copy of the latest book when it comes out. Or if I write a poem where his name is mentioned, I'll whack him across a copy of the poem – and he loves it.

Sarah: Once people see what you're actually doing, that you're writing about their kind of lives and situations then those suspicions can dissolve. Do you think if you'd been writing about kangaroos it would have been different?

Geoff: Yeah, but generally what I do is write about people.

Sarah: Have you ever been treated as an exotic specimen? Not within the working class scene but within the literary or academic scenes?

Geoff: I don't think I'd let them treat me in that way. They definitely see me as a bit rough, a lot of them. I mean, that sets the limit of my audience really, it means I won't get certain gigs where I reckon I should get a go.

Sarah: Are they scared then?

Geoff: Intimidated by the style, and I guess I don't have those little class manners. I'm not going to tug the forelock to them.

Sarah: What about being the only working class writer or performer on the program? How do you feel then?

Geoff: That doesn't bother me, I mean I travel solo anyway . . .

Sarah: I suppose it's better to be the token working class poet than have nobody.

Geoff: Yeah, and I quite like my own company!

Sarah: Do you think it's necessary for a working class writer to write specifically about working class experiences? Can't you write about kangaroos or gum trees or abstract notions like truth and beauty?

Geoff: Well, you have to be interested in them. As long as you're interested in them, then you can write about any subject matter.

Sarah: Do you think that if you don't write about work-

ing class experiences that you become a non-working class writer? If you started writing about raindrops, where would that place you?

Geoff: Well, I would probably feel like a bit of a phoney, because I don't really explore a lot of raindrops. Living in Adelaide, I don't really see a lot of rain! What I'm interested in is the way people interact, and I like dealing with people, and I guess that's why I write about people, because I want to understand what makes people tick.

Sarah: For the majority of working class poets it's really the people that are central to the work. I think people are often absent from a lot of the other contemporary poetry that's around. You've said that you don't really consider your poetry to be 'art' and that really interested me, because I wondered why not, and isn't it more a case of trying to challenge the bourgeois notions of what art has to be? Why isn't your poetry art?

Geoff: I don't do the things that 'high' art expects. Anthologists aren't rushing out to take my latest piece for the new Norton or the new Oxford! When I'm sitting down to write a poem, I'm not thinking, 'Is this a piece that's going to get into the new national anthology?' I'm sitting down to write because I think I have something to say. And I think I've got an angle on it that will maybe strike something with a lot of people.

Sarah: Is it because of that idea that 'art' is linked to bourgeois notions of what 'high' art is supposed to be?

Geoff: That's it.

Sarah: That links in with descriptions of you as a performance poet, and I wondered if that undermines the literary qualities of your poetry, and whether somehow it's acceptable to be a working class performance poet because as such your work is not actually claiming to be literature. It isn't therefore 'high' art.

Geoff: A mate of mine saw a piece on me in *overland* where it said, "He is, of course, a performance poet". My mate said, "How do you feel about that? I think it's a slur on you!" But I didn't take it as a slur. I am a performance poet. I like to get up there and do the business in front of an audience, and have some eye contact and some body language happening. He said, "Well what you do is much more than that, I think they should give you a bit more credit." And I said that I don't see it as a slugging. The main thing is that I'm doing it and ultimately they want me to do it.

Sarah: I think performance poetry in general tends to get put down as created by those who can't write poems for the page and have to get up and rant on. But I think that's starting to change. There's a bit of a cross-over now.

Geoff: Yeah, I think that's changed quite a bit in the past ten years.

Sarah: What do you think is the general perception of working class poetry? Has your poetry been described as 'simplistic' or as 'social propaganda' or in those terms?

Geoff: My aim is always to contrive simplicity and I draft poems many times to get that contrived simplicity without it being simplistic.

Sarah: So why would a critic or a reviewer say those kinds of things? Why does working class poetry get dismissed as simplistic?

Geoff: Because the cultural elite want to maintain the space for themselves and they're jealous and they find it difficult when someone like me comes along and sells their book – like *No Collars No Cuffs* is now in its ninth printing. They can't, in the main, put out a book that goes into nine printings. They have no fucking comprehension of a book that goes into nine printings. If they sell a hundred and seventy copies of their volume of five hundred after getting a fifty-thousand-dollar Australia Council grant they think they've kicked a goal. They think they've really made it!

Sarah: Did you find it difficult in the beginning to get your work published? Was there a lot of resistance from editors and publishers?

Geoff: There certainly was on that first book. But there was support and encouragement from Graham Rowlands to get that first book out. Other academics in Adelaide were saying that the book would get bad reviews, that it's just not poetry.

Sarah: What about magazines and journals? Did you find it hard to get into those?

Geoff: Yeah, it took quite a long time to get into *overland*. *overland* was my choice of magazines to get into, but I kept sending poems to Barrett Reid, and he was sending them back with a standard rejection letter saying, 'Interesting work!' Just those two words, it used to shit me to pieces! And one day I wrote back to him and said, "If this is such 'interesting work' why don't you do something about it and

publish it? Stop telling me it's interesting work and give it a crank!" Eventually that's what happened, he took a poem.

Sarah: What about other publications, are there any that you wouldn't bother sending your work to?

Geoff: I've never, ever, for instance sent a poem to *Quadrant*.

Sarah: Don't you think Les Murray would like your work? Isn't he a champion of the working class?!

Geoff: I don't send out a lot to magazines because I'm quite happy to publish poems in collections of poetry.

Sarah: I suppose because your books have been so successful, it hasn't been that necessary?

Geoff: It's not a major priority for me to get a poem in a magazine. I like to see the occasional poem of mine in *overland* and *Hecate*, but I don't worry too much about looking at the magazine circuit.

Sarah: Do you consider your work to be political? What's the difference between political poetry and propaganda?

Geoff: I suppose everything's political. And as far as propaganda is concerned, some people thought that some of the poems in *No Ticket No Start* were leaning towards propaganda. I think I'm trying to support the unions, I never saw them as propaganda. You can't really tell people how to suck eggs.

Sarah: Do you think that notion of propaganda is raised by middle class critics because they're threatened by the issues, and they dismiss what you're doing as propaganda? Do you think that the picture you paint of the working class is too unpalatable for your sensitive, genteel, middle class reader? Does it shatter their reassuring image of the working class as a non-threatening, quiet majority?

Geoff: I hope so!

Sarah: Most contemporary poetry doesn't usually lead to practical change, but yours actually has – you've been able to improve conditions for inmates in a prison among other things. Do you think that's to do with the poetry, or is it just you? Geoff Goodfellow, the bloke who is pushy and persistent enough to influence people to make changes? Can your poetry really change the world?

Geoff: I think that it brings issues up and that's the important thing, and as long as those issues are thrust

in the faces of people to make them aware that there are some injustices going on, then there's a chance for poetry to maybe right the wrongs.

Sarah: You wouldn't ordinarily be able to rock up to a prison and say, "I don't like what you're doing here." Or have that opportunity to actually see inside at what goes on. Poetry lets you in, doesn't it?

Geoff: Yeah. I'm not going into as very many prisons these days and I'm certainly not going into as many building sites or able to enter that domain anymore, it's changed so dramatically over the past ten years. The changes in federal government and the changes to industrial relations laws mean that I can't go on to a building site and stop work to read poetry – those days are gone.

Sarah: Are you causing trouble in other ways now?

Geoff: It's getting harder to cause trouble! I've had to go back to more performances in educational institutions to survive. I would rather be out among the broader audience.

Sarah: If you're reading in those institutions though, can't you change people's ideas on the issues that you raise? Hopefully, they'll go away and think about it.

Geoff: Yes, but it's nice also to see mature heads and to be looking at people the same age as myself rather than talking to seventeen-year-old kids.

Sarah: What sort of opportunities do you think there are for working class poets, such as writing collectives and so on? Are working class poets disadvantaged or is their work just not good enough to get published?

Geoff: Well, there's lots of people writing, and there's lots of people who are never going to get published because there's lots of people who write shit! That doesn't matter whether you're working class or middle class, there's still going to be people who write crap or think they can do it in one draft . . .

Sarah: But do you think that working class poets are more disadvantaged than non-working class poets? Even if they're working hard and producing good stuff?

Geoff: Yeah, well they're probably going to find it difficult because of the choice of language that they might tend to use, or the issues they write about won't appease the middle class editors who have control over the places that they wish to enter.

Sarah: Are there any working class editors that you know

of in Australia?

Geoff: That's a very difficult question! Michael Sharkey who used to edit *Ulitarra* – he's basically a working class bloke with working class values, but that's folded. Carole Ferrier of *Hecate*, but they're few and far between. Richard Hillman of *Sidewalk* and there's Les Murray of course!

Sarah: You've said that working class people build the cultural centres of Australia but then don't go back to enjoy these places, such as art galleries and so on. Why not? Some of these places have free admission, so what's stopping the working class person from using these centres?

Geoff: Well, they want to see representations of themselves. People want to see themselves reflected in mirrors. I guess when people go to an art gallery and look at the paintings on the wall, they want to see themselves in those frames, and they're not seeing themselves if they're working class people, because working class people aren't generally represented in those institutions.

Sarah: So, it's not a question of economics – that they can't afford to go to the gallery or the opera?

Geoff: Of course they can afford to go, but when they get there they feel distanced by it and they don't understand it and they're seeing something that's completely foreign to them. They can't find a connection, and people want to find connections in their lives and that's why they go to a certain pub or certain place, or go to a cafe to eat Turkish or Greek or Chinese food . . . or Thai . . . because they find a connection.

Sarah: In a recent article in *Labour History*, Mark Morrison states that you have said that you see your abilities as a 'story teller and mimic' as a 'working class tradition' – could you elaborate on that a little?

Geoff: Yeah, well when I grew up in Adelaide it was pre-television, and my old man would get home about twenty-five past six, when the drunks' bus would arrive, and he would stagger inside and he would make us tell our stories for the day. Even after television came in, he would still turn the TV off and say, "What's going on? What have you done for the day? Who'd you run into?" These were days of mass migration and there'd be Greek kids arriving, Italian kids arriving, Pommy kids, Irish kids, Scottish kids. You'd always have someone new at school to take off.

Sarah: I think working class expression often involves some kind of mimicry. Impressionists have always been popular in England as working class entertainment. And being able to take off someone's accent is considered a talent in working class culture.

Geoff: I can remember being at the Union Hotel in Adelaide about six years ago – and at the time I walked outside and I was talking to this guy and my old man came out of the pub. There's always a Scottish band playing at the Union Hotel on Anzac day and my old man was speaking in a Scottish accent to these band members (the bloke I was talking to thought that my old man was my grandfather). My old man switched then from a Scottish accent into an Irish accent and then into an English accent, and played three characters in a conversation. This bloke that I was talking to was completely astounded and he said that it was incredible, the ability that my 'grandfather' had to adopt those three accents and change them from sentence to sentence. And I said that's not my grandfather, it's my father, and he's always had that ability.

Sarah: That also brings me to questions about communication in poetry and you've said that communication is very important to you. A lot of contemporary poetry doesn't communicate much to the reader at all, either because it's deeply internalised or because it's so esoteric that you have to decipher meanings that you often can't be bothered with because in the end it's really hollow. Do you believe that your poetry provides a direct communication with anyone?

Geoff: Yeah. Mick Searles, in his article in *overland* 159, talks about 'vacuous desire' in middle class writing, and I think that there's a lot of vacuous desire and I like that phrase. I think there's a lot of that in middle class writing, and I read a lot of poems that say nothing to me and I think, what's going on here . . . am I dumb or what? It's not making any point to me. I don't want to write poetry like that. I want to write poetry that says something to someone.

Sarah: I suppose even if there are some references that the reader doesn't know in a poem, but it's still communicating something essentially, then the reader might be bothered to go and look them up. There might be things that the reader doesn't know about the historical events that surround your poems, that are to do with specific incidents, but they might think, well I'll have a look at that. As long as the poem is actually worth it in the end. How do middle class audiences' responses differ from

those of working class audiences?

Geoff: I went to a middle class Catholic girls' school the other week, and the year twelve girls bought about three hundred dollars worth of poetry books from me after the reading, so I guess that their response was pretty good. They related to what I was on about. I think if you go to a real working class school, you won't sell a lot of books, because they just don't have the cash . . . It's hard to know how you affect people when you're walking in and out of an audience.

Sarah: Are the working class audiences more likely to come up to you afterwards and ask questions?

Geoff: I think the middle class schoolkids always ask more questions because they've basically been brought up to question things and they're probably more inclined to have dinner at a diningroom table with their parents who are paying for their education and who are questioning them about what's going on in their lives. And they're probably more involved in adult conversations in many instances.

Sarah: I suppose being confident in how articulate you are makes a difference. A working class person may feel uncomfortable about expressing themselves in public in case they get put down. You've said that after a working class person has bought your book, that it might be the only book they have in the house. Do you think that after reading your book they might go and buy other books?

Geoff: I think sometimes it might open the way for people. I just got a letter from a bloke in Queensland. He bought my books a few years ago when I was on tour in Queensland and wrote to see if I had any new ones out and wanted to keep up to date.

Sarah: How important do you think it is to highlight some of the more unpleasant aspects of working class culture, especially prejudices such as working class men's attitudes to women, or white working class towards ethnic minorities, homophobia etc?

Geoff: I think that's terribly important, and I've always tried to do that, such as my new poem about the cab driver. I read that poem one night in the presence of an Aboriginal woman who I really respect and I found it really confronting to read that poem out, when I was voicing the words of the cab driver, which are so far removed from my own words, but those things have to be said.

Sarah: You've also said that a lot of working class people are hostile towards the unemployed, homeless or towards drug addicts and street people . . .

Geoff: Yes, I write a lot about oddball characters and people on the edge and those issues form a good part of what my poetry is about, I don't want to give people just purely palatable poems. I want to make them feel comfortable at times, but also I want them to feel equally uncomfortable, I want them to wriggle in their chairs and I want to make them feel 'fucking hell'!

Sarah: Do you think there's a danger then of sometimes romanticising the working class? That idea of say, Les Murray's notion of the noble working man, the uncompromising working man. Do you think that's something you have to be careful not to do?

Geoff: Well, exactly. I can remember when I was a young boy, my mother telling me that hard work never hurt anyone, but I've got two ruptured discs, and that's not very romantic! You can't romanticise hard work and say that hard work is good. Hard work might be good for some bosses who can find the slave who's prepared to be tortured.

Sarah: What about that romanticising of poverty? The idea of the 'good old days'?

Geoff: Yeah, well, we always go back and say 'the good old days'. Well I say, fuck the 'good old days' because they weren't so good. I want tomorrow rather than yesterday and you can't live in the past and you can go back on some aspects of the past and say, 'That was good, that was terrific', but the majority of times you want to move forward and get away from the struggle.

Sarah: No-one enjoyed being poor.

Geoff: That's right! I wouldn't enjoy having a cutout cardboard innersole in my shoe these days!

Sarah: How do you answer to criticisms that suggest your poetry is sexist? I'm thinking specifically of your poem *Tailor Made*, from *Bow Tie and Tales*, where a barmaid responds to a drinker who says he wants to get into her pants, by replying that she's . . .

Geoff: 'Got one cunt in there already'! Yes, that was a poem that was handballed to me by my first wife. She came to pick up the kids one Sunday night, and I said, "Sit down and have a yarn, what's happening, how's your job going?" And she said, "I hate it, I just

have to run into dickheads all the time." And she told me that story. When she told me that punchline, I thought, that's a fucking classic! And I thought that deserves to be a poem, and I didn't think many magazines in Australia would be brave enough to publish a poem like that. But I thought *Hecate* might, and I told a female poet in Adelaide that I was sending a poem to *Hecate* and she said they only publish women, they don't publish men. I said if they're fair dinkum about the rights of women, they'll publish the poem, and I sent it off and Carole Ferrier accepted it, and that was the first poem she accepted of mine. I really don't think that me reading that poem shows me to be sexist, I think quite the opposite. I've read that poem in numerous places to men, and it makes men question how they speak to women.

Sarah: It's the character in the poem who's the dickhead, isn't it?

Geoff: Exactly, and that was the point of the poem.

Sarah: I think that feminism means something different for working class women. A lot of middle class feminists don't understand that it's different for working class women, you can't theorise so much in a working class context.

Geoff: Some feminists have taken me to task on that poem and some people don't like the word 'cunt'. But the word 'cunt' isn't being used by a man, it's being used by a woman, so it gives it an entirely different meaning.

Sarah: Academic feminism can exclude women like the one working in the bar.

Geoff: She's a real person, and that's a real experience, and I know other women who've heard that poem and come up afterwards and said, "That's fucking great, next time someone comes up to me and says something like that I'll use that line, it's a fucking beauty!" And that's why I wrote the poem, because it is such a good comeback, and I thought comebacks like that need to be out there, they need to be graffitied across the walls and I put it up there.

Sarah: You've said that you don't pass judgement on your characters, so how do you manage that and why is it important, especially when you're writing about issues that most would consider to be morally wrong, like violence and sexual abuse?

Geoff: You've got to let people work it out for them-

selves, you've got to tell them what the story is. I'm just trying to tell the narrative without being the judge and jury. I can be suggestive of the way I think but I can't be prescriptive and say that there's only one way to think. Because there are many ways.

Sarah: I suppose there's some judgement in the selection of characters you choose to write about in the first place. What about your own prejudices? Do you consider yourself to be classist? Are you hostile towards the middle and upper classes?

Geoff: Well sometimes I can be, especially if they're smart-arses! I don't have middle class manners and I have got a larrikin streak in me. I am cheeky, I am antagonistic at times and I can give the middle class a serve.

Sarah: Do you write poems about middle class people at all?

Geoff: I have. There's a poem called *College Parade* where I stick it up middle class people. It's an old poem, and probably not the best poem I've ever written (recites poem) . . . I was living in Hallet Street in the city and I was walking around the corner to buy a packet of smokes for the afternoon, and there were all Toranas and shit-box cars on one side of the road, and mothers in tracksuits who send their kids to this really fucking exclusive school and on the other side of the road were all the financed cars and the leased cars and a bunch of mothers holding their Mercedes Benz key-rings so they can be seen!

Sarah: In a 1989 review, Kevin Brophy suggested that because your poems speak "for the disadvantaged" that it could be said that the "voices of the disadvantaged themselves" are not being heard. Is this a form of appropriation, are you taking people's stories and appropriating them?

Geoff: Of course I am! That's what I choose to do. And they're not going to have their stories heard in the main and often they've asked me to tell their stories for them.

Sarah: What about a non-working class person taking stories? Is that different?

Geoff: No, that's okay, the story is there for the grabbing and you won't grab them unless you've got a connection with it and some passion. To write about anything you've got to have passion, and unless

you've got passion for a particular event you're going to leave it alone.

Sarah: Do you ever get fed up with being called a 'working class' poet?

Geoff: No, it doesn't bother me, they can call me what they want.

Sarah: Some writers who are categorised into a certain group, whether it be an 'ethnic writer' or a 'woman writer' or 'gay writer', sometimes get fed up with that categorising.

Geoff: How other people want to put labels on me doesn't really matter a great deal. I've been the 'prison poet', the 'industrial poet', the 'builder's poet', the 'lunchtime legend'. I've been a whole lot of things and a lot of people think I only read poems to building workers in their lunchtime, but I've never done that. I've only read in the bosses' time!

Sarah: Maybe you could be the 'university student's poet'? Do you think there are any particular advantages to being a working class poet?

Geoff: Well I think there's an honesty in working class writing that you don't find in a lot of other writing. Working class writing is brutally honest, and tells it how it is. A lot of people don't like my stuff because I'm so confrontational, I'm right in their face and I guess many of the performance pieces I do are the 'in your face' pieces. That's not to say I don't have a softer, sensitive side, because I do, but I'm less reluctant to show that side of myself because it makes me more vulnerable.

Sarah: It has been said that working class writers tend to be more willing to confront things and challenge and be more innovative as well, because there's less . . .

Geoff: There's less to lose. I don't think I'm too shy to write about any aspect of my life.

Sarah: Why would the middle class writer feel they couldn't?

Geoff: Because they're pretentious and consumed by image. I think they are a lot more likely to be racist too. The middle class conceal by design, they are educated to it. They've got their social obligations and social customs to adhere to. Middle class manners often means a spade isn't called a spade. They have to be nice . . . they have to keep things tidy.

It All Happened in Copley Street

I grew up in the 50s in
Copley Street at Broadview
& up until my youth –
i'm sure that i had
tunnel vision
thinking each & every
street & suburb
must have been the same

i lived with my mum & dad –
my sister & two brothers
in a red brick house
with a tiled roof
& a paling fence

in fact everyone in Copley Street
had a red brick house
with a tiled roof
& a paling fence
not to mention medals
that got pinned to proud chests
on Anzac day

& everyone in Copley Street
had a war service home
& a war service loan
that ran @ four & a half percent
& most would put their
hands up –
to show an even lower interest
in the liberal governments
of the day
& most –
although perhaps not all
paid dearly over time
to qualify for that rate

in our household
we learned early on about
'Pig Iron Bob'
& about how things come back
to haunt us

& 'Honest Tom' too we knew how
he looked after us
gave all us kids a bottle of
lukewarm milk to drink each day
for fronting up to school
weren't we lucky –
& weren't our teachers lucky too
lucky to have less than forty
to a class

yeah & even then we knew our class
& not just from the sour milk
in the summer
back in Copley Street
we had reds on our beds
& nothin' to hide
we had nowhere to go

yeah that was back in the
good old days stuck out
in the northern suburbs
on a quarter acre block
with an un-made road
& piss poor public transport
yeah they were the days

they were the good old days
days when your old man
could still show you what a
shrapnel scar looked like
or even let you feel a bit

that they'd missed
or nights when your old man
woke screaming & raging
when you took cover
under the blankets
& Vietnam still to come –
(wasn't that something to
look forward to)

yeah the good old days
those days when you'd either
swelter or freeze in those
outmoded temporary classrooms
at the local Tech
where half your teachers
wore RSL badges
& were just as neurotic as most
of your fathers
& keen as mustard to punch on
with you in the classrooms
or try to pin you to the wall
of the woodwork room with a chisel
or nail you with a flying mallet –
yeah they were the days

ah the good old days
when you left school at fifteen –
under-educated yet still knowing
too much
going out into the big wide world
with Brylcream in your hair
strutting your stuff in your
stovepipe pants & your pointy shoes
your shirt collar turned up

to overstate your politics
only to get dragged down a laneway
& belted by the Anti-Larrikin Squad
because 'Honest Tom' said he'd have
the police clean up all the
bodgies & widgees
yeah they were the days –
it was always a class act
the way those coppers worked

ah yeah they were the days

most of those red brick houses
have been painted now
their tiled roofs resprayed too –
& the paling fences went long ago
helped along by kids who
made them into makeshift guns
to play their war games with
before they knew

most of those original men from
Copley Street are dead now
& some of the women too –
& those who are left grow old
& frail

when things get tough for me
today
i think back to the good old days –
& i always look forward
to tomorrow.

Geoff Goodfellow

All Day & All Night

Downstairs

1

the german
he's been here 32 years
he drinks in the park every day
with his greek mate
if the police are here
he rang them

2

the greek & his austrian girlfriend
last night she asked if i'd been
writing letters to the r.s.p.c.a.
i said *no*
she put her fist through his
bedroom window yelling
you mother fucker you fucken bastard
she threw the cat in her car
revved up – reversed back
& slammed into his

3

works at bedford industries
keeps to himself
he's got carpet & blinds
his parents are rich

4

he knocked on my door friday night
remember me?
er . . . no
i came here the other day to look at #4
oh . . . right
i just checked myself out of the r.a.h.
mental ward
the police are after me 'cause
my car's not registered
i'm not supposed to move in until monday
but i've got nowhere to go
can i borrow a knife?
er . . . sure
i haven't got the knife back

5

she walks like a man
talks like a man
punches like a man
& has a goatee

6

the dope smoking greek woman
belted up her daughter-in-law
a paddy-wagon reversed up
to her front door
4 cops went in
& came out carrying her
1 on each arm
1 on each leg
they threw her in
& off to glenside for 2 weeks
she came back & told us all
she'd been to kangaroo island

7

she's complained
since the day i moved in
so i poured weed killer over her roses
the german reckons she's a lesbian
– her fiancé was burned alive
in a semi-trailer crash
20 years ago

8

she's 2 metres across the hips
& 5 feet tall
she doesn't walk
she rocks from side to side
her tits hang down
to her belly-button
she invited me in for coffee
16 times before i said yes
she said *Oh! excuse the smell*
& carried a 20 litre bucket
full of shit & piss

out of her bedroom
& poured it down the toilet
her bottom lip drooped
to her chin
& in a wave of thick saliva
said *would you like a drink?*

#9
walks around
in long shorts & longer socks
singing *the dream police*
they live inside of my head
the dream police . . .
police . . . police . . .
wears black glasses
& rattles a white stick
– the german trapped him
with a dollar coin one night

Upstairs

#10
smashes up the public phone
at the shopping centre
every 6 months
she kicked the german in the balls
because he fed her cat
psychotic episodes
the r.d.n. reckons

#11
is friends with #10
he's nicknamed 'chuga'
he moves his arms like a train
when he walks
he rides a bright green vespa
but never without
his council red safety jacket

#12
moved in a week ago
someone stole his pension card

#13
walks like an ape

#14
sit in the lounge room in a circle
put a cassette player in the middle
& play pass the bottle
they throw t.v.'s
bottles, cans, needles & dirty clothes
off the balcony
they helped old #12 move out
they stole his tumble dryer

#15
told me how she used
to go with her mum in the '40s
when someone died
she'd pass the cotton wool
while her mum stuffed it
in their mouth, nose, pussy
& *up their bum*
then we'd wait for the undertaker

#17
cuts his own hair
follows happy hour
like others follow the football
hangs his laundry in his bathroom
my friends complain about the stench

#18
has flash backs
they called it a police war
the second intake
but mate i just bet the ponies now
reckon i was married to one
lost my house
my boat
the lot
ah fuck the bitch
– he gets credit at the pub
& then there's me.

Mick Searles

Economic Rationalism

i could put a bed
on lay-buy
i could stop writing
dud cheques
i could buy a c.d. player
& get a few stones c.d.'s
i could buy new clothes
i could run a car
or a motor bike
i could buy a lounge
or go on holiday
i could eat
i could get the phone on
pay the electricity
or have the gas
re-connected
i could drink at the pub
or buy a bottle of whiskey
i could eat out
go to the movies
or buy a colour t.v.
i could go to the football
i could play cricket
i could buy books
& magazines
or get the paper
every day

i could buy a computer
i could get a haircut
i could buy a video
& have pizza delivered
i could buy carpet
or rugs
or curtains
i could buy toilet paper
i could stop thieving
i could buy cuban cigars
i could buy a gun
i could get an air-conditioner
or a fan
or a heater
but i can't stop smoking.

Mick Searles

Writing at Home

i've had this 2 litre
'crusta - pineapple
& lime fruit drink'
carton
in my little writing room
for a month now . . .
it's 3/4 full of
piss
cigarette butts
phlegm
& a dead mouse
the room stinks
& my writing
isn't getting any better.

Mick Searles

Leading the Nation

Canberra 1996

Scumbag!
Mad dog!
Mr Speaker!
Mr Speaker!
The Honourable Gentlemen
will withdraw their improper remarks.
Degenerate drunk!
Pissed fool!
Mr Speaker!
Mr Speaker!
The Honourable Gentlemen
will withdraw their improper remarks.
Compulsive liar!
Liar Liar
pants on fire!
Mr Speaker!
Mr Speaker!
The Honourable Gentlemen
will withdraw their improper remarks.
Policy wanker!
Policy slut!
Mr Speaker!
Mr Speaker!
The Honourable Gentlemen
will withdraw their improper remarks.
Jellyback!
Captain Whackey!
Moonface!
Penguin arse!
Pig ears!
Chicken shit!
Take a flying duck to the moon!
Take a flying truck to the moon!
Mother . . . !
Mr Speaker!

Mr Speaker!
The Honourable Gentlemen
will withdraw their improper remarks
or they will be forced to retire
with a lump sum payment
and superannuation
equivalent to the lifetime income
of the unloved legions
of impoverished Australian families.

Jim Aubrey

Factory Hands' Lament

we wait to win X-Lotto
we will make
their pink cocktail umbrellas
until then

so tired from overtime
at the compulsory machinery

tired of our blood worth
less than grease
our time going faster
than conveyor belts which carry

their pink cocktail umbrellas
bring to us the pay rates

our reward
for the ball and chain of slaving
in a rational economy

the way it is

John De Laine

Spin Doctor

Dandenong 2000

Taxation will unchain my heart
and set me free, oh yeah,
but not the heart of a little man
who won't say he's sorry
cause the question is not whether
to be sorry or not to be sorry
but how to get ringside seats
at the Games for all me mates
which I'll sell to 'em at scalpers rates
then I can afford medical insurance
for the rest of me life,
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Praise the Minister!
Conditions for the workers!
We will take them to a land
of telephone shares and honey,
a Promised Land without burly
union delegates in navy singlets
and noisy blowies the size of
sausage rolls,
yes Sir, praise the Minister!
I can feel your guiding hand!
I can see the Promised Land
where even the snake has
a workplace agreement
where Eve is a happy
sweatshop mistress and Adam
runs a Kings Cross pawn shop
selling under-counter drugs
inclusive of GST
and that's okay because
Taxation has unchained my
heart and set me free.
Hallelujah!

Jim Aubrey

Hiroshima Never Again

When the mushroom cloud rose over Hiroshima
we were afraid and conveniently shut our eyes,
masked their agony with our indifference.
The limits of terror have now been passed;
we know all life on earth can be exterminated
and we know it can only happen once.

But we have the optimism of people whose eyes
are wide open. We begin to ask questions.
Who caused this hunger? Who makes the bullets?
Who is responsible for killing Salvadoreans,
Guatamalans, Chileans, Bolivians, Puerto Ricans?
We know each dollar invested returns four-fold.

Mr President, your lies sicken your own people.
Latin America can't be plucked like a ripe banana
nor megatons gambled like dice for oil-fields.
The world's oceans are not your back yard!
Launch your first strike – you will incinerate
the Pentagon with the rest of the world.

Who dropped the first atom bomb, who threatens
the liberty of Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola?
We identify death with B52s over Darwin,
with the Trident prowling the Indian Ocean.
The danger is growing, but we are on guard,
chanting in unison, HIROSHIMA NEVER AGAIN!

Justina Williams

Wharfies

On support for Spain
in 36 – the wharfies
were right – the Right
was wrong . . .

On Pig-Iron for Japan
in 37 – the wharfies
were right – the Right
was wrong . . .

On 'blacking' Indonesia
in the 60s – the wharfies
were right – the Right
was wrong . . .

On opposing the Vietnam War
in the 60s and 70s – the wharfies
were right – the Right
was wrong . . .

On opposing apartheid and racism
over many decades – the wharfies
were right – the Right
was wrong . . .

and in standing up to Patrick
in 98 – the wharfies
were right – the Right
was once again – wrong.

Won't the greedy
right-wing wrong-headed,
slow-learning bastards
ever learn?

Bill Anderson

The Left, The Left*

Above the bend on bend of eroded stairway
old Commos are sitting in snowy threes and fours,
allies at finger-food,

 mates over stubbies
remembering 'forty-eight and 'fifty-six.

One scans them for a leftwing deviation:
They smile and smile as former footballers
might do.

 It's resurrection arvo,
so many archaic voices middle-class

and many former beauties former-blonde.
Between them

 glide the ghosts of yesteryear:
Sam Goldbloom, Ian Turner, Egon Kisch
without frail spectacles or walking-sticks.

The past is capable of revolution
but issues are half-drained away like beer,
demo and strike and hardfought referendum
as on the sweet word,

 Comrade,
 all things pass.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

*This poem was written after the author attended the
launch of Pauline Armstrong's biography of Frank Hardy,
attended by over three hundred people, many of whom
are ex-communists.

Det Taym

Eye hev to tel yoo troo tinkz:

[Wit-ewt prejyootis.]

Fitzroi/Getr-oo' Strit [det taym] woz 7, 8 klupz.

[Kaa'paala Ekspresowz.]

6, 7 a'klok EVRITHING kloz!

Polis si yoo: [Daark hair].

[Shooz]. [Nayc dress]: "WOT YOO DOING HEE-A?!"

Tha "Maygrunt" [det][taym]

g-o to Ekspresow Bar

to eks'chaynch tha FILLLLING! [Thai g-o to playc
thet AAKSEP dem!] - [Da layf [det taym] woz "lonli".]

Pipol wit-ewt pipol kaaaaaan living!

Iz a "Hhyoomen" instinkt!

Tha g-elz [det][taym] [nech-yoo-raa'li]

dai pik da MENZ :[Shi kum to YOO!]

Whair yoo g-o? / Ekspresow!

Nothing too do — whair yoo go?

[Det][taym] woz veri straynj for mi.

Eye OPENT klup: ["Makay" woz.]

Koppas kum! [CHIF: Si -e-Bi!] [Aa'lkaa'holik!]

Hiz kum bikoz

hiz short for tha g-elz!

[Tink yoo mayn wot heppen!]

Det taym woz OPEN "prrostichyooshon".

Da feala hoo woz for mi sai "Don [brayb] dem"!

Yoo giv to him "wun"

yoo hev to giv to him toomorrow:

:Kum toodai?:

:Kum toomorrow!

[Yoo kun *seddisfay* dem!]

[Yoo think

yoo layk giv to him evridai

brrekfes?!

/N-o!]

.....Dai kum in.

Sedd.

Koppa sai: Brring wun "Aamerikaan-o"!

[[Det][taym] "Aamerikaano": Brendi-en-kokaakola woz]

Eye poot wun schoopet to giv him.

[Eye tel him to CHAAR] dem!]

[Thai looking to fayn wun woomenz].

[Eye n-o let him].

Dai drrink wun drrink en [aaftha] gon nudda playc.

Naym "Saava".

Aafta det, eye poot kaapaala Poofthaas to werrking!

Worri-yoo-worri-abewt?

Worrri-yoo-worrri-abew?????! another bloke sez:

Molis i'rthaam-e

N-o gglossa. N-o spiti.

No munn!

N-o ivin [ivin] trewwwez!

Bludi-Aastraalia-pipol KIK yoo — [N-obodi si!]

But aafta! Aafta wen MOR ov us

Diffren-stori!

Oposit!

E'ym for Sai'Kilda wun taym, Yanni sez:

[Plenti pootaanen up'n'dewn!] Wun gel kum to mi.

Sai: "Yoo looking for g-el?"

Howw much? -50 Dollaas!- (((((((((((((Too much!

[50 Dollas whair]]]]]]?!]

If yoo rich: O'rayt!

[Yoo hev goot taym]

Bu' n-o werrking pipol!

[[[Bi]]]]! Yoo bin?! Messaaj-paa'l-a? Yoo bin?!

Fukken shits!

Tel da TROO!

[Thth'imaas] i'Poostithth-es

p-oo efyaaan-aan "Striptiz"?

[Efyaaanan iN'hhris-i iki — then ihhaan-e BOOTS-O]

[Lipon]

enna merra irthaan iki [sto TOP HET]

k-e hhoorevaan.

V'yennam-e ekso apo tin koozina, k-e legghamm-e.

[Ma'']]

aa'ftes THEN inn-e yinekkes.

i'Hhaam-e ennan Aastraal-o [o'megghaalos

o'Kaakoorgghos]

[aaftos itaan-e "Tha King ov tha Kingz"]

[Lipon] ton leggh-o aaftos inn-e POOSTIS!

"(((N-o))) eye n-o aagri with yoo" m-e ley.

T-o "moonni" THEN INN-E "eth-o" paan-o aaft-o inn-e
inhhris-i.

T-o "moonni" inn-e E'TH-O [kaat-o]! ton leggh-o.

Aa'ma thelis na tin gghaamisis

a'pto goll-o tha t-o vaalis.

"Chizizkrayc" m-oo ley

"Yoo baastard: Yoo rayt!"

[Ta yellia!]

π.ο.

Choosing

Eating is not just
a matter of the jaw
I think as I wander
from doorway
to window
scanning bills of fare
until I hit upon
a dusty diner
with green drapes
its yellow menu
stuck but curling
on the inside
with once clear tape
and I just know
it will be as if
my mother were there
in the kitchen
wearing that apron
the one
with tall flowers.

Giovanni Malito

One Day on the Picket Line

"I got me hate back.
I got the balls for revenge.
Got the machine gun tongue.
Got the vehements real bad.
Screw all power hungry women.
Screw all petty spiteful men.
Going to stick it up the bosses.
Going to lead a revolution.
Years of their lies buzzing in my brain.
Years of hunger and squalor.
Going to kick the brains trust
In the guts, going to make money.
I can feel a scream coming.
My fists are tight, knuckles red.
I'm gonna get all the bastards."

Newspaper item page 17 reads:

*Today a man vented his rage.
Police fought with tear gas.
Dogs mauled his ragged body.
Batons hurled at his head.
Someone heard a gun fire.
Police claim self defence.
Unions claimed he was a hired
scab or political activist and stirrer.
Employees praise police protection.
Body shoved into a plastic bag.*

While his mother wept, at childhood memories
of a timid son who never, could express his anger.

Michael Crane

Abbotsford tab – one

bt e said imself

e said imself

you know what e said?

you know what e said?

e said

i think e said

one more an we coulda won

Abbotsford tab – three

i know

y know what i did

i give up gambling for five years

– yeah

yeah i know

five years

– yeah

n thats what happens

if some priest tries to make money

e takes it off somebody else

– yeah

everybodies got their own beliefs

– yeah

a mans entitled

– y know what i reckon

what

– theres nothin wrong

bt people take offence about it

Abbotsford tab – two

yeah na

yeah na

na

yeah na

yeah

yeah

na yeah

na

yeah na

yeah

yeah

yeah

Abbotsford tab – four

y know what you need

– yeah

y know what you need

– yeah

you need one them bulldog clips

holdt together

– yeah

i thoughta that

bt na

Kerry Watson

Robert Darby

Preaching to the Unconverted

Memories of La Trobe's radical street theatre

WHEN I WAS A STUDENT at La Trobe University between 1975 and 1977 I was part of a group of Maoist activists who wrote and produced several short political plays ('street theatre') in which we sought to put forward the ideas of our movement. We were adherents of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), following the line laid down by the Communist Party of China and believing that the world was menaced by the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union (an imperialist power since the heirs of Stalin had restored capitalism), each of which was bent on world domination and whose rivalry was leading to world war.

We did not like being called Maoists, rightly fearing that the term drew unwanted attention to our Peking affiliations; we preferred to be known as anti-imperialists, emphasising our opposition to both US and Soviet social-imperialism and our commitment to the national independence of the world's peoples. There was a definite irony in such a pro-Chinese body advocating a fervent and backward-looking Australian nationalism, a paradox that our opponents on the left, especially the Trotskyites, with their nation-blind internationalism, were eager to exploit. Not being as good at intellectual argument as our critics, we tended to ignore their existence, at least as far as print was concerned. Apart from the CPA (M-L) – a small, secretive organisation run autocratically by E.F. Hill and other old communists who had seen the light in the 1930s and forties – the independence movement consisted of a loose federation of activist groups, mostly originating in the anti-contradiction struggles of the 1960s and early seventies, all held together by the party newspaper, *Vanguard*. The increasing nationalism of the party's line is reflected in our decision, in mid-1976, to change our name from Radical Student Movement (RSM) to Students for Australian Independence (SAI).¹

When I arrived at La Trobe University at the start of 1975 the script for one street theatre, *The world chess championship*, was already a fait accompli. It was written mainly by Linda Heims, then partner of the legendary La Trobe activist Fergus Robinson, gaoled during 1972 and now setting an example to us all by working at the Ford factory. Linda was fanatical even by our standards, but she had a good ear for dialogue and was adept at giving appropriate new words to the tunes of well known songs. The scenario was the two superpowers, portrayed as Uncle Sam and a bearlike New Czar, contending for the favours of an innocent but desirable Australia. The action took place on a large sheet of canvas, painted in squares to represent a chess board, and centred around Bob Hudson's 'Newcastle Song', with suitably substituted lyrics: the New Czar is trying to chat up the "beautiful looking Aussie sheila" while her boyfriend, Uncle Sam, seeks refreshment in a Kentucky Fried Chicken joint. When he emerged we chanted, "Czar, Czar, it's her boyfriend, Czar", and a stoush ensued. There were a few other characters – a politician who kisses a baby at one point and, as a unique experiment in our propaganda, a player dressed in a witch's hat and academic gown representing Trotsky, who sang a couple of songs suggesting the counter-revolutionary nature of Trotskyism.

Looking back on this rather crude effort, I am struck by the directness of its political statements and by its naked appeal to ockerdom. The woman who played the Aussie sheila was quite embarrassed about the latter aspect and tackled Linda on this issue at the time; Linda conceded that the play was sexist but insisted that it was important to get a more urgent message across to ordinary people, whose readiness to accept our analysis of world affairs would presumably have been inhibited if they did not see women being treated as sex objects at the same time. The boys left this hot potato for the girls to sort out.

Our own reservation was that the inclusion of the Trotsky character only gave the Trots visibility. Linda replied ominously that the time was coming when we would have to expose and deal with the fake left systematically, and that this play was a step in the right direction.

In this prediction she was wrong: it remained a one-off experiment, and we soon returned to our normal practice of ignoring such people. We performed *The world chess championship* at least once during Orientation Week and a couple of other times, notably as part of the traditional anti-US demonstration on July 4 at the university and in the City Square. It got a few laughs, and we felt we had done the right thing, but it was no less transient than one of the leaflets we produced unfailingly twice a week for distribution outside the library. With the next street theatre it was rather a different story.

In the dying days of the Whitlam government in 1975, the refusal by the Opposition-controlled Senate to pass the budget created a parliamentary deadlock in which the Governor-General was raised to sudden prominence. Not to be left out of the media carnival, a number of independence movement publications caught up with the cloak and dagger background of Sir John Kerr and warned that he was likely to resolve the constitutional crisis in a manner favourable to business and US interests, possibly with the involvement of military force. Following Kerr's dismissal of the Labor government on 11 November, *Vanguard* declared that the "semi-fascist coup" (as we characterised it) was, like most terrestrial phenomena, an effect of superpower contention. US imperialism was in decline, menaced by the rising might of Soviet social-imperialism; this was already making inroads into Australia, hitherto securely within the US sphere of influence, and the Labor government was leaning its way. To shore up its strategic interests here, the US had organised a coup, just as it had done in many other places: Chile, Greece and Vietnam were particularly fresh in mind. We expected to be arrested any minute. Miraculously remaining at large over the summer vacation, we were quick to decide that our street theatre for Orientation Week 1976 had to present our interpretation of the coup.

Entitled *The sacking of an Australian government: Who'd suspect the Governor-General?* and later subtitled *How Sir John Kerr cured his body odour by using Uncle Sam*, it was written like a conventional play. The sub-title was a reference to an advertise-

ment for 'Uncle Sam' deodorant, then screening on Melbourne television. Linda again did much of the first draft, adding new words to well known tunes, but she could not work out how to finish it, so passed it on to the late John Herouvim, then showing evidence of the comic genius that would take him onto the professional stage many years later. He called me, and together we made a number of revisions to the script and added the wrestling sequence, plus the open but decidedly upbeat ending. The play was full of easily recognisable characters: Fraser in jodhpurs and an old Melbourne Grammar uniform, doing his best to crack a stockwhip; the CIA in a cream raincoat and dark glasses; Whitlam in a 'We want Gough' T-shirt; Hawke with bushy eyebrows and a can of Fosters; a policeman with a baseball bat for a baton; the New Czar in fur hat and a Russian Flag worn as a cape; Uncle Sam in his characteristic striped trousers; Kerr in a morning suit and top hat; workers wearing hard-hats and holding a Eureka flag.

The play tells the story of the coup from the Maoist point of view, sparing nobody: the US, Fraser, Whitlam, Hawke and Boris Detentovitch (the New Czar) are all mercilessly ridiculed. It begins with a narrator complaining that Australia has missed out on coups in the past, despite being a loyal US ally, and reminding the audience of what happened when "this tragic state of affairs was rightfully halted". Two characters sing:

*On the 11th of November Mal Fraser gave to me,
ten union bashings
nine US bases
eight phosphate bounties
seven Chilean generals
six bloodless coups
five army chiefs
four media bosses
three wage cuts
two jack boots*

The last line, "And a traitor for a G-G!", never failed to bring the house down: as soon as it did we knew the performance would work. Next a newsboy shouts headlines to cover the constitutional crisis, Fraser appears and Whitlam is criticised by two very class conscious and totally humourless workers. When they get a bit over-excited, Hawke is called in to calm them down with a gravelly "Err, cool it comrades". The CIA enters, looking for an agent to carry out the coup, and reads out Kerr's CV with mount-

ing glee. Its monologue is punctuated by interjections from Whitlam and Hawke like, "I think we're stuffed, Gough" and "I'm beginning to feel faint, Bob". The coup takes place to the tune of 'My bonny lies over the ocean':

*Gough Whitlam he asks many questions,
He wants to know where, why and who.
So please, Sir John Kerr, heed our orders,
We think that it's time for a coup.*

WHITLAM (*rushing in alarmed*):
Time for a what?

KERR, CIA, FRASER (*all singing together*):
Yes, it's time for a Liberal government . . .

WHITLAM:
But I was elected.

KERR, CIA, FRASER:
It's back to the good old days . . .

Fraser gives a speech about the need to restore business confidence; the workers get stropky again, and he calls for law and order. Hawke makes another appeal for calm, but they stuff a sock in his mouth. Enter the New Czar:

Good day. Boris Detentovitch is the name, helping you win your independence is the game. I'm glad you called me over.

WORKER 2:
We didn't call you over.

NEW CZAR:
I'm glad I came anyway. I'm here to help you. I hear you've been having some trouble with those yankee imperialist dogs and their lackeys. (*Spits in disgust.*) Well, you see, I'm different from those people, they are imperialist, whereas I am . . . (*Looks puzzled, as though he has forgotten what he is.*) . . . I am . . . er.

The New Czar is having trouble remembering that he was once a socialist country. He offers to help the workers drive out the yanks, but they do not like the idea of US bases being replaced by Russian ones. He appeals to the audience and prepares for combat, pointing at Kerr, who removes his morning suit to

reveal a "You need Uncle Sam" T-shirt.

The superpower contention scene was based on TV wrestling shows, with the narrator linking particular holds with various wins and losses of the US and the Soviet Union in different parts of the world. The US maintains its dominant position with a Chilean head-butt and the Greek drop-kick, but the New Czar gets ahead with the Czechoslovakian trip-hold, the Indian headlock, the Angolan head-cruncher and a stomp to the Indian Ocean, then lines Sam up for his coup de grace, the great Australian splash. Enter Fraser:

NARRATOR:
But in comes Uncle Sam's best friend, big Mal Fraser, and grabs the New Czar from behind.

(Sam leaps to his feet and kicks Czar in groin.)

CZAR (*in agony*):
Ooohh! Right in the joint enterprise!

(Sam and Fraser throw Czar off stage.)

NARRATOR:
And the winner of the November 11th grudge match is Uncle Sam. Sam's victory was rubber-stamped by an election in which a 6 per cent swing to the Liberals cost Labor 50 per cent of its seats. The prestige of parliament suffered irreparable damage.

The play was brought to a close with the newsboy shouting the latest headlines about inflation, unemployment, wage cuts, foreign bases, etc., and the narrator challenges the audience to face the future:

Does the future of Australia lie with this man?

FRASER:
You will have to tighten your belts.

NARRATOR (*Indicating Hawke*):
Or does it lie with this man?

HAWKE (*Speaking as though drunk*):
This program was brought to you by ACTU . . . hic . . . Solo.

NARRATOR (*Indicating New Czar*):
Or perhaps it lies with this man?

NEW CZAR:

Come on, let's be reasonable. You've got nothing on me, I'm a new character.

NARRATOR:

Or does the future of Australia lie with you, the Australian people?

WHOLE CAST (to audience):

The future is in your hands.

It was a very effective ending that rarely failed to leave the spectators with an optimistic glow.

The play was first performed at La Trobe during O-Week, and the response was sensational: the audience laughed and applauded in all the right places, and we could see it was a winner. As we did more performances, news of the play's theme spread, and we were asked to put it on at anti-Kerr demonstrations and independence movement functions. We were actually paid to act it at university union nights (free music and cheap beer), when we were slotted in between the popular bands of the day, like Captain Matchbox and Skyhooks; there were lively performances at Monash, Swinburne, Melbourne University, Caulfield Tech. and RMIT – wherever there was an activities officer sympathetic enough to make the booking. One weekend we did it at an alternative music festival in the hills outside Melbourne, a production notable for the response of the children there to the Fraser character. Being short and wearing a beard, I was sure I was the least plausible Fraser imaginable, but the hippie children were so convinced that they came up afterwards to throw sticks, and some started hitting me. They were very excited, and we joked that Fraser must have made them politically conscious by cutting off their parents' welfare subsidies.

It would have been easy to assume that the popularity of *Sir John Kerr* reflected approval of its interpretation of the coup (the result of superpower contention) and our prescription for political action (reject both political parties, parliament and the two superpowers and fight for Australian independence), but it would have been an illusion. Most of our audience liked the play because it denounced an event about which they were already indignant, and they loved our lampooning of traditional villains like Fraser, Kerr, Uncle Sam and the CIA. Audiences, particularly at university performances, were overwhelmingly pro-Labor, and they naturally enjoyed the jokes about Fraser and the anti-Liberal current

generally. More interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, they did not object to our pointed jibes against Whitlam and Hawke; they laughed enthusiastically at our portrayal of Whitlam as arrogant but ineffective and Hawke as a drunken trade union bureaucrat more concerned to keep the peace than to fight injustice. This response did not mean they were going to change their vote or join the independence movement, but it seems that they were glad of a safe opportunity to distance themselves from shameful aspects of party practice. On top of all this, it was a witty and entertaining piece that anybody with a faintly left consciousness could have appreciated.

What people made of the wrestling sequence is hard to assess. Nearly everybody found it hugely amusing, and it dramatised the Marxist-Leninist vision of great power rivalry with sufficient clarity for most viewers to be able to grasp the argument, but whether they were converted to our interpretation of world affairs is another matter; there were not many people apart from the Maoists and the old Right who were concerned about the Russian menace. Yet audiences generally seemed to accept the New Czar as part of the entertainment, even if they did not subscribe to the political points being made. Boris certainly got some good lines, as the devil always does, and the wrestling match was genuinely funny, politics aside. It was a well-constructed and fast-moving piece of theatre that probably took the street theatre form about as far as it could go.

Sir John Kerr was our first and greatest success. Although we put on another three full plays and a brief skit on woodchipping (the sole piece of street theatre proper we ever did) over the next two years, the drama got bogged down in our increasingly complicated and isolated brand of politics. For 4 July 1976 we tried to repeat our success by tackling the US Bicentennial, in a play called *Sam's party*. The idea was that Uncle Sam was celebrating and had ordered Australia to throw a party for him, the gifts at which would consist of tributes to aid his struggle against the Russians; to pay for the gifts, the people had to suffer deprivation, and this was why Medibank was being dismantled, welfare cut back, wages pegged etc. At this time *Vanguard* was calling for a united front against "Fraser's march to fascism", so we had to cram in a great number of victims: workers, students, the sick, the aged, women, migrants, Aborigines and all those affected by the new Prime Minister's policies. There were also problems in the dairy industry, so we added farmers – represented by a cow

which uttered the immortal lines, "I'm a victim of the moo-ooltinationals" before it expired. There was a quite funny slapstick sequence in which Fraser's hitmen attack various targets of the government's welfare cuts. They assault a single mother and overturn her pram; kick away a pensioner's walking stick and stub cigarette butts into her arm; and tear the bandages off a Medibank patient as he writhes on the ground. The hitmen were straight out of US television: "Medibank, shmedibank. There'll be no more of that commie rubbish. Boy, we haven't had so much fun since Vietnam." The scene was great fun to write and perform, but we always wondered whether the hilarity blunted the politics and trivialised the issues. The rest of the play was pretty stolid. At one point Uncle Sam and the New Czar have a confrontation in which they play the arms race game – "my missiles are bigger than your missiles" etc. – but the presentation lacked the impact of the wrestling scene in *Sir John Kerr*. The play overall – and thus its political message – was too complicated, and it never enjoyed anything like the celebrity of *Sir John Kerr*, with its straightforward narrative of a well known event.

Sam's party was longer than the previous street theatre, had duller speeches, attracted less attention and won fewer laughs. Sadly, this trend intensified in the next play, prepared for O-Week 1977. My memories of this effort are rather vague. Without a script I can't even tell you the title, let alone the details of the plot, but the general idea was to capitalise on the popularity of the Blinky Bill Brigade. This had been formed spontaneously by anti-imperialists, many only faintly or not at all connected with the party, to protest against the selection of Mickey Mouse as King of Melbourne's Moomba Festival and to propose the installation of Dorothy Wall's story-book koala, Blinky Bill, in his place. Attacked by the anti-nationalist Left,² the campaign won more support than any other independence movement initiative. Although it did not succeed in dethroning Mickey, it certainly drew attention to US cultural imperialism, thereby raising cultural nationalism to a noticeable level: posters, car stickers and badges showing Blinky Bill with the Eureka flag became a common sight, at least around the inner suburbs. The party never liked it, for both organisational and political reasons; it was an independent and increasingly mass movement which Hill could not control, and it did not have anything to say about Soviet social-imperialism – where was superpower contention? Our play was meant to correct this deficiency.

It might have worked better except for the ABBA tunes. ABBA was all the rage in the summer of '77, so there seemed every reason to do our normal trick of adding our words to their tunes. The problem was that ABBA tunes are slow and laid-back, just the opposite of the fast and energetic numbers needed to make street theatre effective. Worse, it was opened by part of "The puddin'-owner's anthem" from *The Magic Pudding*:

*The solemn word is plighted,
The solemn tale is told,
We swear to stand united,
Three puddin'-owners bold, etc.*

The words were probably adapted to the occasion, but such ponderous recitative could only have added to the slow tempo and earnest mood. Nor was there much action in the play, the message of which was that Mickey Mouse had been sent to rally Australia to the side of the US in the coming war with the Soviet Union; Australians should not fall for this, but reject both superpowers and aim to build an independent culture. At one point Blinky Bill throws cream pies at Mickey in a scene straight out of *The Three Stooges*. Whether the New Czar had a role I do not recall, but it seems highly likely; there was certainly a song (to the tune of 'Fernando') about the coming world war.

A performance at the Treasury Gardens after the Moomba procession was received quite well, though a couple of women in the crowd were heard to comment that the performers neither looked like nor sang as well as the ABBA women. Perhaps they thought it was some kind of entry in an ABBA look-alike contest, put on as part of the Moomba fun. But then there was trouble at the home base. During a performance at a union night at La Trobe, probably during O-Week, something unprecedented happened: the street theatre was booed. Even worse, the players were counted out with slow clapping and cries of "Liiilllee, Liiilllee". The audience was clearly bored. This reaction rather upset one of the actors, who started throwing the cream pies earmarked for Mickey at the crowd (or the ringleaders of the provocation, as he claimed later, when admonished for anti-people behaviour), and most people rushed out of the auditorium, expecting a punch-up. There was a bit of a scuffle, but nothing serious. Still, it was an ominous sign: the only other time that any street theatre had been booed was when a couple of his followers hissed our satirical presentation of Trotsky



in *The world chess championship*, and we didn't have to worry about them. But such a hostile response from ordinary students was a different matter, and there was much soul-searching. Was it the songs or the slow pace of the play generally? Were our politics out of touch? Were students getting anti-political? A number of the old RSM/SAI stalwarts had left La Trobe at the end of 1976: were the new leaders perhaps lacking in what it took to fill their shoes? The argument wandered inconclusively, but the play was rarely performed again.

Looking back, it seems to have been dogged by controversy from the start. During the writing of the script, one of our more doctrinaire members warned that we should not use the verses from *The Magic Pudding* because Norman Lindsay was a supporter of British imperialism, hence anything he wrote was tainted and untouchable. I recall that this objection was dealt with in much the same way as Linda had dismissed complaints about the sexism of *The world chess championship*: you may be right, but they are handy lines, and we must be pragmatic in these matters. It shows how little we self-proclaimed nationalists actually knew about Australian history that nobody challenged the assertion about Lindsay's politics. As I learned years later – when my retirement from

"Errr, cool it, Comrades": Hawke trying to deceive a sceptical Australian worker. Scene from a performance of How Sir John Kerr cured his body odour, in Garema Place, Canberra, April 1976, on the way to Sydney for the demonstrations against US Vice-President Rockefeller. John Herouvim, as Whitlam, with accentuated eyebrows, stands at rear; a trench-coated CIA seems more thrilled than alarmed by the proceedings; a cadaverous Governor-General looks more like Uncle Sam than Sir John Kerr; and yours truly stars as the world's least convincing Mal Fraser, despite the pipe and gumboots. The worker, holding the script, is obviously a hastily-recruited stand-in.

politics gave me the time to read the books I should have studied at university – despite his anti-Hun cartoons, Lindsay became quite bitterly anti-British after the death of his brother Reg in the First World War, and later even more so in response to the wowsers of the 1930s, beginning with the censorship of his novel, *Redheap*. But you can't expect activists with their fingers on the pulse of history to be aware of details like that.

Our final street theatre was prepared for 4 July 1977. After the disaster of our last offering and in the context of visibly declining support for SAL, we were anxious to score a success that would win us some popularity. We chose uranium, then becoming a major public issue, particularly among students, as the Liberal government gave the go-ahead for new mines in Arnhem Land and tried to boost exports. It already seemed to have everything – the environment, Aboriginal land rights, nuclear war, civil liberties, national sovereignty – surely it would not be too difficult to show superpower contention at work here! We certainly did our best, and we started off with a new idea: instead of inarticulate male workers in marginal roles as the goodies, we would have a positive character representing Australia in the central role; more than that, she would be a woman, called Matilda. In the resulting play, *Matilda on trial*, the scenario was that Uncle Sam, claiming overlord status, is demanding rent in the form of uranium, and Matilda has refused to supply it, citing the danger of world war, the environment, Aboriginal rights, the need to conserve natural resources and so on. Hence her trial. There were certainly some witty bits:

NARRATOR, MURDOCH PRESS, ON
MATILDA'S SUPPORTERS:

This tiny minority of terrorists and troublemakers included workers, students, pensioners, women, migrants, blacks, small farmers, small businessmen and other criminals.

PROSECUTOR TO JUDGE:

I'm afraid, your honour, these people are hardened patriots.

NEW CZAR, IN THE FORM OF OLGA FROM
THE VOLGA, THE NEW CZARINA:

You western capitalists are so primitive. In our country you'd have to be mad to oppose the social system. (*To audience.*) That's why we lock dissidents up in mental asylums.

There were a couple of good songs. Uncle Sam and the New Czarina do a rock'n'roll number in which the former sings:

*Well, bless my soul, what's wrong with me?
There's another superpower coming over the sea.
She looks so mean in her big bearskin,
I don't really think I should let her in.*

And Olga sings to the tune of 'Hey, Big Spender':

*The moment I came to this joint (baroom)
I could see you were a land full of minerals and
rich resources,
Uranium and iron ore:
Just the sort of things I need to wage world war!
So let me get right to the point: (baroom)
I don't offer aid to every country I see –
So Australia, get on side with me.*

There were, as well, some clever ideas. A pro-uranium academic, Professor Gammy Ray, is giving testimony as to the safety of uranium, but speaks slower and slower until he grinds into silence. At this point Fraser rushes across the courtroom and winds him up with a big key, and he resumes his spiel at top speed. But these were the high points; overall, it was too long, the speeches dull, the jokes too complicated, the humour often forced. Fraser is meant to announce: "I'm not prepared to believe that anyone who isn't willing to work their hands off with uranium mining really wants a job". Try saying that in the City Square in a voice that can be heard and with the right stresses to bring out the sense! Matilda proved to be our worst character ever, as positive role models so often are: earnest and dull, she says things like, "It's our country – why should we pay rent?" or "It's time to kick the multinationals out and have an independent country". She was as humourless and wooden as a *Vanguard* editorial and not nearly as appealing as our villains.

Set in a courtroom, the play is mainly speeches, and we were not sure how to bring it to a close. Eventually we decided to recycle the wrestling scene from *Sir John Kerr*, modified to show Uncle Sam and the New Czarina struggling over Australia's uranium, represented by a mutant. In the end they cause the mutant to explode, symbolising nuclear war and killing the superpowers, Fraser, Murdoch and all the baddies; Matilda is the only character left alive. Looking back, it's an odd and even disturbing conclusion:



The audience was clearly bored. This reaction rather upset one of the actors, who started throwing the cream pies earmarked for Mickey at the crowd . . .

we did not mean to imply that nuclear war would be a good thing if it led to Australian independence, but that interpretation was certainly possible. We were probably just trying to say too many things at once: that nuclear war could result from superpower contention; that uranium was part of the arms race; and that Australian independence was a desirable goal, without trying to think out the connection, if any, between these ideas.

Still, we were pretty happy with this play, and we performed it with reasonable success at La Trobe a few times, in the City Square at least once, and at the Melbourne Town Hall on the occasion of the public meeting called to establish the Australian Independence Movement in August 1977. But it did not really take off, and we were never asked to perform it at non-movement functions and certainly not at union nights or anything like that.

Considering why not, I think it is possible to distinguish between the reasons why people, especially students, did not want to watch the play; and the reasons why it did not work as a piece of street theatre. On the first question, the main reason people did not react enthusiastically is that they rejected the AIM-CPA (M-L) line on uranium. It represented an arid and old-fashioned sort of politics, when the inclination of the emerging green movements were towards a new kind of politics in which the environment, gender, race and other issues were paramount and traditional categories of left and right inapplicable; and it condemned only the two superpowers, when they were opposed to any country embarking on a nuclear power program or weapons development. Although we tried not to draw attention to it, our association (via the party) with China was deadly here. Everybody knew that the Chinese were unashamedly developing both nuclear power and atomic weapons, and the party had warmly hailed the people's bomb. As RSM or SAI we never had much to say about China, but we could not condemn its uranium policy, and this reluctance certainly counted seriously against *Matilda* in the eyes of most students.

As to why the play did not work effectively as a piece of theatre, it should be obvious that it was too elaborate for presentation in the street; even in the favourable conditions of a union night it would have been difficult to perform convincingly. As a whole, it was too subtle – more suitable for a properly staged political revue – while some of the individual scenes might have been more at home as topical skits on a satirical TV show. It is apparent in retrospect that we were not doing street theatre at all.

It is hard to find a generally accepted definition of street theatre, but essential elements would probably include propagandist purpose, political message, informal performance setting, simple plot, dialogue, props etc. and brief duration. Street theatre is always put on by dissenters from, not supporters of, the status quo. Within these limits there is a fair degree of freedom, but most would probably accept a minimalist description of it as simple, stylised and repeated short performances, intended to give passers-by the essence of a political message. If street theatre is defined in this way, it is apparent that we were putting on short amateur plays, usually with several acts, musical numbers, sophisticated dialogue and up to twelve characters, requiring at least eight actors and twenty minutes to perform. They were more in the style of the left-wing satirical revue, such as *I'd rather be left*, and plays about disarmament, pig-iron to Japan, the bomb and other topical subjects put on by the New Theatre League from the 1930s to the 1960s. We did not know this at the time: none of us was familiar with this tradition, and few would have even heard of New Theatre.

The reference points for most of us were US films and TV programs – anything from gangster movies to the Marx brothers or three stooges – and some Australian satire, such as ‘The Mavis Bramston Show’ of ten years before, plus memories of agit-prop scenes from the Vietnam protests. We were not dramatising issues that animated large numbers of people, but finding another way to do paint-up or issue a leaflet; in all the plays but *Sir John Kerr* we were just preaching our vision of the world to the doubting masses.

Despite our use of the term *street theatre*, university union nights thus offered far more favourable performance conditions than the great outdoors. At union nights we had the benefit of an auditorium, a stage, a microphone, and a captive audience, already primed with alcohol and eager to be entertained. The streets were the worst place to perform: it was difficult to gather a crowd; few of the audience could see; it was hard to make ourselves heard over the traffic; and with our minimal props and gestures, there was no visual compensation for missed lines. Yet if you missed the words you missed the whole point, political and humorous; even the wrestling sequence in *Sir John Kerr* meant little unless you could hear the narrator’s commentary. We were aware at the time that we needed to keep it simple. In a review of the year’s activity prepared at the end of 1976, it was pointed out: “The type of play we present should be short, tight and compact in its presentation. People’s interest cannot be held for very long, especially if they happen to be passing by, so whatever message(s) we want to get across should be done quickly, but clearly and concisely”.³ Recognition of what we ought to do was one thing; actually doing it was another. Despite these insights, our plays got longer, looser, more verbose and more obscure.

We often wondered why. Perhaps, without our realising it, we had outgrown the limits of the street theatre form and were seeking to achieve effects that could be successful only in a professional theatre. Perhaps, as we tended to conclude at the time, our political line had become too complicated for a dramatic form that worked best when presenting a few simple ideas. Neither explanation was tested. Most of the surviving SAI activists left La Trobe at the end of 1977, and those who remained in 1978 lacked the numbers, and probably the spirit, to try another play, or even revive an old one; by the end of the year SAI had faded away entirely. Perhaps the shrinking popularity of the street theatre was mainly a reflection of

the decline of student political activism generally, and it was just a conceited illusion to believe that anything we had done differently could have made an impact. Soviet social-imperialism turned out to be a paper tiger, and it was not the multinationals that ended up in the dustbin of history, but the movement for independence and socialism.

ENDNOTES

1. On the CPA (M-L), see John Herouvim, ‘The politics of the revolving door’, *Melbourne Journal of Politics* 15, 1983–84; and comments by Barry York, Fergus Robinson, John Herouvim & Albert Langer in *Arena* 66–71, 1984–85.
2. Any Communist Party of Australia or Trotskyite newspaper from that time, and with greater intellectual sophistication by Tim Rowse in *Intervention* 8, March 1977.
3. Report on the year’s activities, ‘Street theatre’, to be discussed at SAI meeting, 24 November 1976, copy in Robert Darby papers, NLA MS8928, Series 5, Box 13.

Note by Rob Darby on the text of the scripts: *How Sir John Kerr cured his body odour* is the only street theatre for which a script is known to survive. Our scripts were originally typed up and multiple copies run off on the RSM/SAI gestetner™. At the end of 1977, when I left La Trobe, I typed fresh versions of each play, incorporating stage directions and all the additions and modifications made in the course of production, and I left these with the members returning to university in 1978. Ten years later, photocopies of some of these scripts were in the possession of John Herouvim, who lent them to Barry York when he was doing a project on the history of the street theatre. I read out bits from these in an interview with me he taped in 1989, and that is how I am able to quote them here. When John Herouvim, an inveterate hoarder, died in 1995, I was keen to ensure that his papers were preserved, but when I came to pack them for delivery to the State Library of Victoria in March 1998, it was apparent that he had lost or destroyed a good deal of what he had once held. The large quantity that remained is now available at the SLV, and it is possible that some of the street theatre scripts are among that material. The excerpts from *Sir John Kerr* printed here are quoted from a photocopy of an original gestetner-duplicated performing script in the possession of Barry York.

Robert Darby was a member of RSM/SAI at La Trobe University from 1975 to 1977 and played Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in the street theatres. Today he is an independent scholar, book reviewer and editor. He is grateful for the recollections and comments of Dr Barry York and other participants in the street theatre who do not wish to be named in preparing this reminiscence. Correspondence is welcome: robjld@interact.net.au

Surfcheck

Emma Hardman

Friday

6.30 a.m. No swell. Not a ripple. The sky is bright and delicate like fine china. It's been like this for weeks.

Michelle says I should pay more attention to the outgoing tide of our relationship and less to the ebbs and flows of something over which I have no control.

Before she was pregnant, Michelle surfed a longboard. In fat slow waves she danced along the deck in balletic control, lifted up by waves too subtle for me. In bigger waves she would swoop down the line as I cut up her wake in buzzing pursuit.

I kiss baby Karina during her morning feed. She kneads her mother's breast like a kitten. Michelle's tired eyes remind me of something I can't quite remember.

I get home late from the nursery, smelling of fish emulsion and daydreaming of swell and sleep.

Saturday

6 a.m. Michelle plucks Karina from her breast with a pink popping sound. Karina's arms move in fat lost circles as she is held out to me. I take her with me for the morning surfcheck.

She squints warmly towards the sea and her fishy lips suck. She says "num num".

But the sun keeps shining and the horizon is stubbornly still.

Monday

7 a.m. I ask Michelle if she wants to come and check the surf with me and Karina. Michelle says that blue hurts her eyes.

I lift Karina out of her cot. Michelle says things

have to change. I tell her it's autumn now and the swell should pick up any day. She rolls her eyes and turns away.

Wind has picked up. Karina looks up from the hug-a-bub and puts her fingers inquiringly into my mouth. When I ask her what she thinks of the surf, she says "glub glub". I think she's learning.

A small bank has formed out front and a light offshore holds up short neat crests.

Back at home, Michelle steps meaningfully around my board standing in the hallway. I offer her the nice little bank out the front, as an apology, "Why don't you bring your board and I'll sit with Karina on the beach?" She looks panicked. "It's lost out the back somewhere," she says.

I catch a few small waves and tuck into a tube that collapses softly on my head. The wind begins to blow rain. The colour drains from the ocean. Swollen phallic bluebottles lie stranded and mangled in clusters at the high-tide mark. The horizon is jagged and unsure, and cold white tufts litter the ocean. My feet go blue as I walk home through the storm.

Wednesday

5.30 a.m. I wipe the dust off Michelle's nine footer, scrub it with wax and put it in the hallway.

I drive to Belongil. A lot of closeouts, but worth a go. The sky is low and dark and the rain hits the water at an angle. The wind pushes hard up the face as I take off, then releases me into a fast bottom turn. The lip closes in front and I push for speed to make it round the section, I beat it and jump up to the lip in a re-entry before the wave jacks up again and punches

me down to the sand. My chest aches with the loneliness of being held down.

Michelle has cooked dinner. Her eyes are swollen and dry, and there are two moist stains on her T-shirt where her nipples are.

Karina turns in her highchair and rubs mashed potato into the wall.

Michelle wonders how much I hate her. I wish I could tell her how she makes me think of a churning southerly swell at Cosy Corner, unprotected, beautiful and empty, too angry for anything to penetrate. I try and soothe her, I tell her that even the biggest southerlies can be surfable, if there's an offshore wind; a chance to straighten things out.

I'm waiting for Broken Head to line up properly. Day after tomorrow maybe.

Karina opens her mouth and screams like a banshee.

Friday

7.00 a.m. Rain and wind again. The dunes of Suffolk are washing away despite the work of the Dune Care people. Their thick timber logs lie useless in the sand.

There's no one else out, it's mid-tide and crunching on the sandbank.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow Broken Head will shape up.

Michelle's board has been moved to the front porch. I stand out in the sheeting rain to help her take the wet washing from the line. The water runs down her face and I catch it with my finger. She lets me hold her in the rain.

Saturday

9 a.m. Michelle stands in the doorway with her board. Our neighbour Jedda stands there too and Karina is on her hip. Karina claps her hands and laughs as dribble dances on the tip of her chin.

"Come on," Michelle says, "it's five foot and clean. Jedda's gunna look after Karina for a while."

It's breaking out on the point in clean lines, but we walk to the north where there are fewer people; it's not as predictable but it still looks good.

I hear Michelle suck in her breath as the cold water creeps into her wetsuit.

I pretend I'm not watching her every stroke.

Out the back, we rise and fall together, waiting, and I look away, thinking she'll wait out a few sets.

WHEN THE FIRST WAVE rolls towards us, I paddle over it. It's big and fast and the lip is thick. But as I look over my shoulder for Michelle, I see her turn and paddle for it.

She jumps to her feet in a steep, late take-off and glides high on the face, then drops out of view. I crane my neck looking for her. I begin paddling inside. I can't see her anywhere.

Finally I spot her.

Way down the line, she is flying high on the lip in a powerful floater.

Then she is paddling back out towards me, and her head is thrown back in laughter.

Caught

Greg Bogaerts

BOB TAYLOR PULLED UP in front of his house in Mayfield East; the street that led directly to the front gate of the works. The house he'd bought with Denise when they married, two months after Bob started at the works, twenty years ago. He sat in the car and he could see the fish he'd speared, not long ago, packed in plastic on the front seat. The final flare of the gills and the blood working its way in fans under the thick plastic.

Bob took hold of the fish, got out of the car, slammed the door behind him and went to the back of the house where he found the board he used to clean the fish. Took his knife to cut away the head; an unusual thing for him to do with Bob usually leaving the head on so his wife and kids could see just how big the fish were he'd speared and brought home for them to eat.

The man, averting his eyes, as the knife crunched through backbone and took the head of the groper from its body. Bob throwing the head into the bin and angrily slamming home the lid. Going back to the fish and scraping the saw-teeth of the knife back along the flanks of the fish. The scales a bright blizzard of silver and red that greyed his face and hair so that he seemed to have aged in a small passing of time. A storm of scales that reminded him of the difficulty he'd had in spearing the fish, the difficulty he'd had getting back home; took him away, for the time being, from his house, his anger, his disgust with himself and the works, to the sea.

BOB TAYLOR PEERED INTO the blizzard of small silver fish; a storm of scaled bodies catching the light from the sun that shocked the eyes of the skindiver. Bob stopped swimming, held his breath a bit longer and waited for the school of fish to pass him by. The small fry a scarf of silver movement that

whipped and stilled about him. Bob Taylor almost out of air and about to lose the big fish he'd sighted just before the school of small fish obscured his view.

He calmed himself. Told himself there was plenty of air left in his lungs, told himself he'd held on longer than this to spear a decent fish. Told himself to continue the pursuit and not panic. Told himself he'd pull the black rubber right back and load the shaft and aim it carefully at the fish he'd selected. Bob would not be turned away from the hunt and the fillets of fish that would steam on the dinner plates of his family later.

He saw a rent in the veil of silver scale and Bob Taylor swam through the opening into the green and blue with the javelins of light, that pierced the surf swell, falling about the body of the skindiver. Bob kicking hard with his legs and using his flippers to slide quickly through the water, after the big fish. The big silver drummer he was sure he'd spotted at the corner of a rock ledge. The small silver and black snout of the fish that was a length of muscle that usually snapped off the lines of rock fishermen.

Bob catching sight of the big fish again; the small mouth and head sticking out from the brown arch of rock that spanned deeply below the platform. The skindiver jackknifing his body and diving down clutching his spear gun. Seeing, feeling the shadows of the rock fishermen, standing high on the rock platform above him, slide over his skin.

The fish off and swimming; a long tubular length of large scale and muscle. Colours of bronze and blue-grey that had Bob Taylor indecisive because he'd thought the big fish was a drummer but he wasn't sure any more. Not once he saw the blue and the reddish line markings that didn't belong to a silver drummer.

But Bob Taylor, almost out of breath, was tempted

to shoot to the surface to fill his lungs. The panic losing him his judgement, his determination. The skindiver raising the spear gun and not bothering to think, to look closer to see whether the fish was a drummer. A quick aim and the shaft released and the barb shocking into the side of the fish. That struggled amongst the lengths of brown and golden seaweed and kelp growing broadloom carpet thick from the floor of the ocean. The fish struggling amongst the gaff-shaped swirls of its own blood.

Length of the spear shaft whipped back and scraping the ribs of Bob Taylor; blunt steel wounding the flesh taut on the tent-peg rib cage of the diver. Hooks of blood coming from the body of Bob Taylor and mixing with the scarlet escaping from the almost spent body of the fish.

Bob Taylor, taking hold of the shaft, acutely aware of the sear of salt water in the wound in the side of his chest. The diver shooting upwards and the sunlight in the water like knives in his eyes. Bob Taylor breaking the surface. Taking in the fresh sea air. Holding up the shaft. Seeing the body of the groper.

"Nice one mate. Spearing illegally now. Gropers aren't allowed yer stupid bastard," from one of the fishermen standing on the rock platform above the head of Bob Taylor. Above the funeral wreaths of red blooming in the water.

BOB DROVE AWAY from the sea and soon he could see the grey monoliths of steel mills growing out of the line of trees. The humps of black and grey like the backbones of dinosaurs rising out of the flatlands of mud and swampland. He could taste the smell of steel-making and associated industry already; a bloom of stench that flowered as far as Merewether and the coastline when the wind was blowing the wrong way. And Bob Taylor could hear the thump of metal in rollers and the shock of gas exploding in the flux of steel being born, as he snaked over the Tighes Hill rail bridge.

The sight and smell and sound of the steelworks taking hold of him and the clean salty smell of the big groper, in the bag next to him, lost. The sound of steel being made like a hypnosis that had him miss

the turn off the main road to his home. So he had to go the long way around, and as he drove he thought about the first time he'd seen the steelworks, in the first light of day, lying like a trick on the landscape. Transforming the mills so they seemed like rolls of money; coins tipped and rolled over the flatlands.

He came north from out of the cold of Melbourne and shot off the main highway that led on to the tropics of Queensland and the smoky Glass House Mountains and the Barrier Reef a line of coral coloured red and blue and green and too many other colours for Bob Taylor to remember. Heading for the university on the Queensland Coast where he had a place waiting to study marine biology.

Twenty years ago now; the time when he'd stopped in Newcastle for a couple of days with friends intending to surf the beaches and then head north to study. But stayed when he took a job at the steelworks because management was begging for operators and labourers. Bob Taylor taking the job and telling himself he'd quit at the end of the month and arrive at the Queensland uni with an extra couple of hundred dollars to help keep him in the first year of study.

He'd been seduced, he knew, by the big money to be earned working in the hot and dirty and dangerous conditions of the steelworks. The marine biology left behind him; Bob Taylor not bothering to write to the department to tell them he'd not be coming to study marine biology so caught up was he with work and three shifts and about the money that poured into his bank account.

BOB TAYLOR SAT at the table and watched his wife and children eating the fillets of groper.

"This is beautiful dad," from his daughter.

"Yes, this fish is the best-tasting fish you've speared," said Denise. "But are you sure you won't have any?"

Bob Taylor shook his head. Looked away from his family shovelling the illegal sweet meat of the groper into their mouths. Bob Taylor felt his hand go to his rib cage. Felt the blood soaking his shirt. Held up his hand and looked at the salt and spice of his life turned black.

Harry

Barry Revill

HARRY ALWAYS MAINTAINED that he had never been told about the dam. This is what he maintained when he went up to see Mrs Johnson at the town hall to talk about it all. She said she was sorry about his son and they were all sorry, she said. However all the residents of the district were told that the dam was to be run off from the creek, and, yes, the dam would be deep sometimes. No yes, I mean the blacks down at the camp had not been told but a notice had been placed on the wall just inside the police station door. Harry said blacks do not stand inside police station doors all that often, not unless they have to anyway. When his son drowned a lot of people in the little Gippsland town were sorry, but on the day after the funeral a note saying "one more less" was tucked under the door. Two days after the funeral Harry needed to go for a walk. He needed to touch the soil again, to get away from the Mill at the end of the town and the silence of the men when he got that dreamy look in his eye which told them it was time for him to go again, to go to the high country, to see the browns and greens of the snow gums, to feel the ground warm up in the early summer as the sun got to it, to sit and catch a fish, and to dream of the soil and the land and his people who once roamed the mountains high singing their hearts off with not one bit of paper amongst them to say they owned it.

Harry came back to the town. It had been three weeks. He stunk. It was hot, and the town moved slowly in the hot valley where it sat close to the hills. The mill put through a few logs, but not much, and

the manager never smiled. The shop had long since gone and the pub where it sat close to the curve of the road near the bottom of the town barely covered wages. He needed to see Mr Wardle, the manager, who knew something about the dam, something that nobody else had told him. Mr Wardle, who only had one eye and a squint in the other, told him that the men from Rotary were meant to build a fence around the dam. It never happened. Harry asked Mr Wardle why the fence had not been built and he said he did not know. Harry went to see the man from Rotary but he could not understand a bloody word he was talking about. He did not understand what he kept saying about setting goals and dreams and how his son should have learnt a trade.

All he wanted was a bloody fence around a whitey's bloody dam. That is all he wanted, not an electric jug and bloody Twinings tea from Safeway on special from girls with straight faces who giggle when you walk away.

The fence around the dam had never been built, the barbecue from Rotary had been set up, then a call came through from head office and it was scrubbed. His son should not have gone to the dam but he did, and the fence was not there and he had gone into the dam and the water is very cold a few inches down, very cold, and the mud on the bottom was thick, and loose and soft. And when they found the body they sent the girl from Safeway to tell him, and she told him, and she did not smile, and she did not giggle when she walked away.

Newcastle Revisited 2001

Gaby Bila-Gunther

THEY CAME from everywhere, as far as Darwin and Perth. Some of them spent \$1600 getting there by plane. The Ansett crisis worked against the young writers with Qantas charging up to \$800 return from Melbourne. However writers, poets and performers gathered, armed with ideas, zines, pens, poems, self-published books, stories, performance and other elements which give this Festival its unique eclectic flavour. This festival stays so far away from other mainstream writers' festivals, which are fabricated and aimed at the comfortable middle-class citizens who only enjoy what the publishing industries or the media make them believe is a good read.

Tiaras and roller blades seemed to be the logo and the 'new look' at this year's festival as well as diversity of works and performers who seemed to group themselves according to their origins: Ballarat poets, Adelaide poets, Wollongong poets and even Newcastle poets rose from steel-town streets. The Melbourne and Sydney Mafia of poetry laid low this year, which was a good move, allowing for the arrival and

worshipping of new icons. Experimental Writing Workshop was a personal highlight meaning that writers who crave for that style should not feel alienated by believing their writing is not good enough to be published. All roads lead to Rome but in this case all writing styles led to Newcastle.

Verses such as:

*anachronism to old skool
clunk,
like broken gearshift drama,
the machine rumbles forward
a spanner short
words unable to critique this
neo numb silence*

by Alan Boyd, Perth-based poet, found compassion and an attentive audience. There is life on shelves for this kind of writing. Go out there and demand it from the bookshops.

Alongside diversity and experimentation, content and complexity seemed to reign this year instead of comedy. So if last year, a writer didn't get a clap or two because they weren't stand-up comedians, this year they would have because the audience matured and realised there is space for writing that has other elements of beauty and groove. Not that comedy didn't have a presence this year. Lucky for us A.J. Rochester delighted the audi-

ence on many occasions with her slapstick jokes and performance. Political poetry stood up amongst the ashes of poetic ruins and its presence was very ardent and necessary since the rise of political garbage we endure as citizens of this country under the current government. Who runs this country? Who turns the refugees away without the citizens' permission? It is about time to forget about John Howard, the Queen, the crown and her bloody tiaras. All writers agreed when I performed those lines.

'Why not Poetry' debate on Saturday night was stunning. The poet lovers, being the underdogs, lost of course but nevertheless efforts to win hearts and votes were hardcore while the poetry dissenters roasted the poets and poetry. Some guy jumped up on the table and screamed: PIIIE! or something of that culinary flavour. A poetic duel followed only to prove that poets are really wild people. Conclusions of this debate were that poets wear gum boots, are not cool, only drink wine and are total bores, stereotypes we poets totally disagree with since we wear motorcycle boots, drink beer and whisky and we are as wild as rock'n'roll stars on heat and coke. If it was up to the audi-

ence the poets would have won but their voices and participation were low.

Going Down Swinging Launch was another highlight since it was about showing your bits. Which bits they showed was up to the open stage performers; one of whom actually showed us his lower bits that made this show M rated. Once again the diversity of works and performances made the launch a real glitzy spectacle. The Cabaret Night fused together magic (where rabbits should have come out of poetry books but didn't), spoken-word and music. Only the Can Can poets were missing. So many writers can actually sing and spin magic. Unbelievable efforts of echo laden between writers and the Electro-fringe participants, proving that sound and poetry groove arm in arm. The two components of the festivals merged well together and it was a breath of fresh air to see musicians interested in scriptwriting and other writing workshops. Journalism and Careers showed the writers how their writing could reach the 'big print' and fatten up their bank accounts. Comedy and TV writers dropped in to let everyone know how ratings rule this industry, making it impossible for anyone young to have their scripts taken seriously. Even members of the panel were discouraged to continue working in an industry where writers are not even allowed on sets, and where no script stays in its original shape or content but gets passed around from hand to hand in boardroom meetings. Any writer ambitious enough to

network in that world? I don't think so. But there is always hope on Channel 31.

Text was made sexy with the help of the fabulous Linda Jaivin where adjectives and verbs, "made the participants shudder with glee". Dancing on Paper was a workshop which explored the narrative language of Indigenous People, which personally I would love to taste more of. Girl writers were out there shaking those words and making waves while playwrights screamed with their pants down, an 'undignified' new writing genre for the theatre. Speaking of dignified, that was the mood of Phil Doyle's discussion/debate on his controversial article about last year's festival. His point however was taken seriously by this year's organisers who aimed to make this festival more accessible to the real, young and emerging writers, away from the stars and the ones who have cushy jobs in the mainstream writing and publishing industry. Once again the zine fair brought the practical yet very creative jokers together. "Zines are getting so much prettier" one enthusiast mentioned while passing the long table where zinesters were collating, cutting words and placing them inside matchboxes, envelopes or plastic tubes and then swapping them.

The venues were scattered around Newcastle giving us a chance to explore its streets, shops and rugby lovers. The venues were larger, giving more room for the audience to drink, think and mingle. More debates involving the audience are needed in the future however so we can hear their voices and

opinions. As a participant on a panel, I felt estranged by their silence. Rather than a performance-oriented debate, more real discussions should take shape where boundaries between the panels and the audience are blurred. The best quote, which summarises the need for the Newcastle Young Writers' Festival, was: "If I didn't write, I would die."

Thank you to Newcastle Young Writers' Festival and its organisers for saving our young writers from death.

Gaby Bila-Gunther (Romanian born) is a writer based in Melbourne since her departure from Berlin in 1995. She has self-published a book of tram tales, Validate & Travel, which she launched on a travelling tram. Interested in bringing her writing and performance direct to the public Gaby has been organising Flush (with Mishelle Predika), spontaneous poetry and performances inside public convenience places: lifts, toilets, laundrettes. "I am very much into pushing my boundaries as a performer and spreading my poetry through postcards, collaborations, concrete poetry installations and performing in site-specific environments. In February I will travel to Vienna to perform on trams and be part of Global Fusion, a visual arts/performance festival."

On Working Class Poets

Brad Evans

HAVING READ Sarah Attfield's response to Kerry Leves' critical review of her book in *overland* 163, we can begin to see an individual's

process of disillusionment that occurs with certain working class poets living in Australia. And when I see this kind of thing happening, particularly with the career-minded poets, it can be quite a revelation about just how naive some people can be. Has she ever read any basic texts on Marx? Trotsky? Unfortunately, Attfield appears to be focusing her energy on a response made about her own writing by Leves, rather than grasping the intents of the middle class at subduing any attempts by working class writers who may bear a leftist political drive in the wonderful backstabbing world of literature. Perhaps Attfield (or her publisher) should have taken a bit more care in considering who her book should have been sent to for a review – and what her options might be in finding a solution to her dilemma – the same dilemma that affects all working class writers around the world – State control of the Arts!!!

In 1997, I managed to borrow a tape from Geoffrey Lennie of Noam Chomsky lecturing in Sydney. During the lecture, Chomsky was offering suggestions as to how writers, particularly politicised working class writers, could go about exposing their work while surviving in a literary environment heavily controlled by the State. Chomsky's suggestion did not include whining about critical reviews of their work by middle class reviewers in a bourgeois, left-leaning magazine! Chomsky suggested that if you really want to give your progressive poetry exposure, without fear of censorship or a direct political

discredit, it might prove better if you send your progressive poetry (published or otherwise) to those outlets which can do something about this.

Interestingly, and in a similar fashion to how Leves criticises her own book, Attfield discredits those poets for sending their progressive poetry to what she terms as 'non-literary' outlets. The newspaper she mentioned, of course, was the *Green Left Weekly*. A paper which, at least up until recent times, offered a little space for some progressive poetry. Is this to say that poetry published in left-leaning outlets is not literary enough for Attfield's tastes?

If it isn't, then she appears to be treading a fine line with what poetry she considers as literary and non-literary. After all, she herself did seem a bit ruffled in her dialogue when she mentioned that working class poetry is seen by middle class literary types, such as Leves, as non-literary and, as such, may appear a bit below them.

Unfortunately, in making this comment, Attfield is not doing service to those outlets that do presently exist out there – thank heavens!!! At least there are a handful of outlets out there that are willing to take on some progressive poetry! One international small press journal that comes directly to my mind, of course, would be Tim Hall's US-based *Struggle*. On the rare occasion, I too have contributed to this magazine and thoroughly welcome what it publishes with open arms! As I welcome anything else that is attempting to fight and survive contradiction out there in the swirl of the capitalist marketplace!!!

Ideally, and as Attfield suggests, it would be very nice, thank you very much, to see politicised, working class poetry in a well-organised magazine – backed with some half-decent funding. Or even better, politicised working class poetry in a presentable, organised and independent working class vehicle that is produced, printed by (and for) the proletariat – striving for working class interests – to fight oppression, to obliterate the class structure that divides rich from poor, the privileged from the underprivileged; and to tackle meaningful issues in a bid to liberate the working class from their present oppressive conditions.

In reality, a magazine accommodating Attfield's notion tends to fall a bit short, especially when representatives of the middle class are quite content with the way things are in present society – and would not like to see their apple-cart upset in any way. And many of which would, without any moral thought or consideration, be quite willing to slit the throat of anybody who would seriously jeopardise such.

But to come pleading to the middle class, tugging at their sleeve and begging them to listen, in the way Attfield outlines in her response, is a complete waste of time!! If this woman can honestly think that the middle class are going to genuinely take an interest in what 'working class' poets are whining about in defence of their writing, then she can forget it! They're too busy *feeding* off the working class to be considering any cultural value from them. And Attfield

making any kind of approach in this way is simply expressing the point of just how enchanted this supposedly 'working class' writer is with the bourgeoisie.

But now that I've had my grey, cloudy rant, I'd very much like to offer Attfield an alternative option, which I extend to all working class writers who are fed up with present State-controlled literature. And whether people like her take this up or not, is entirely up to them. People like Attfield can continue to whine to the middle class about their so-called 'working class' gripes, or else they can take the issue up themselves and create their own much-needed outlets for working class writers: designing their own magazines (with the help of others if need be) and inviting a variety of working people the chance to have their say and give the working class a variety of outlets out there that are in a great and serious need. This, of course, requires a certain level of dedication and some considerable (selfless) interest in promoting working class poetry and would not be something appropriate for somebody who simply wants to pursue career-minded self-promotion!

In the past some workers have made this notion a reality – and have done it quite successfully. I have done this myself with *Red Lamp* and I can tell you that I've discovered a lot of poets out there who I never knew existed! There is an entire literary subculture out there that is presently being held under by the State's literary elite and getting completely ignored by the more traditional literary outlets. And

I am talking about worker-poets out there who bear real substance in the content of their poetry – Bea Jones, Geoffrey Lennie, Bill Nicholson, Glenn Stuart Beatty, Jean Frances, Niall Clugston, Dennis Woodley, Ralph Kelly, Maureen Sexton, Steven Katsineris, Susan Stanford; most of whom Attfield and a lot of other readers would have never heard of before (and these are just the Australian poets that I can think of at the moment).

As the editor of *Red Lamp*, I am not only getting inundated with some amazing poetry from these people and many others, I am desperately asking other people – like Attfield, Goodfellow, Searles and anybody else who appears to be fed up with what little outlets there are for this kind of poetry – to help harness and accommodate this talent by setting up their own progressive working class journals to deservingly support the good, neglected literary talent that exists out there. On the odd occasion I have had people, genuinely interested in such projects, approach me and ask me ways in which they can start creating their own outlets – and I am more than willing to offer any advice and hints on how to do this.

Of course, making a decision like this would certainly separate the politicised, working class writers from the career-minded poets who bear middle class aspirations, hint at their pretensions of loyalty with the working class – and would much prefer to just sit on their backsides, whinge about their present state of affairs and not do a fucking thing about it.

Lauren Williams

I SYMPATHISE with Sarah Attfield's complaint that 'working class' poetry is often inappropriately criticised according to 'middle class' poetic criteria (*overland* 163), but I am wary of using these categorisations on poetry without first being clear as to what kind of poetry they are meant to describe.

What is 'working class' poetry? Poems written about work by the workers for the workers (as in the *925* magazines and anthology), clearly. Poems from a working class perspective, in working class language. So what then is 'middle class' poetry – the rest? It is true that the English language poetry canon is dominated by poets born into middle class wealth and privilege, the more so the further back you go, till you arrive at the aristocracy. But I balk at awarding so much ground to 'middle class' poetry. There are too many exceptions and grey areas to make the working class/middle class division an accurate one in poetry. The best poetry reaches beyond 'class' to the universal, anyway.

That there is a major division in Australian poetry, though, is irrefutable. It is marked by language use and attitude to audience, and shares characteristics with the classic working class/middle class split. I prefer to use the terms 'inclusive' and 'exclusive'.

Inclusive poetry generally utilises 'natural' language (close to speech); there is a strong focus on content, with form serving that focus; it is 'accessi-

ble'. The work of Kristin Henry, Jas Duke, Philip Hodgins, Kate Llewellyn, Geoff Page, Billy Jones, and Dorothy Porter springs to mind, along with that of the upcoming generation of 'spoken word' poets, such as Steve Smart and Adam Ford.

Exclusive poetry is generally 'difficult' or obscure in meaning or goal; uses highly stylised language or heightened poetic 'tone', emphasising form over content. Examples can be drawn from the work of Peter Minter, Jan Owen, Adam Aitken, Michael Farrell, MTC Cronin, Emma Lew, and among the old schoolers, Robert Adamson, Peter Rose, John Tranter.

The term 'exclusive' here is not meant to imply the intentional exclusion, by the poets, of general readers, but refers to the undeniable effect of such poetry. 'Broadband' and 'narrowband' may be less loaded descriptions. Both poetics have their place, of course. Some poets' work encompasses both modes – such as that of Eric Beach, π.ο., Grant Caldwell, J.S. Harry.

The problem is that for some decades 'exclusivists' have dominated Australian poetry and show no sign of letting others in, to the detriment of *all* poetry in this country. With few exceptions, it is exclusive poetry that wins the big prizes, the grants, and the reviews, that lead to a public profile of sorts. That's because the exclusivists are the ones judging the competitions, awarding the grants, etc. Accessible poetry is rendered invisible with criticism generally along the lines of . . . *Lacking in craft/metaphor/imagery/literary awareness; excessive realism/*

naivete; reliance on content; plain language, etc., or worse, no criticism at all, or to be completely thorough, no publication.

It all keeps rolling along nicely – the exclusivist status quo signal each other via their 'difficult' poetry ('Their poems . . . are subtextual letters to like-minded practitioners' – John Kinsella, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 January 2001), the old poets pass the baton to the young anointed, who hold a flattering mirror to their elders, and all believe that they are upholding the quality of Australian poetry.

Jolly good, except that Australian poetry has never been in a worse state in terms of the general public's perception and mainstream publication – in the past few years virtually all major publishers have dropped poetry from their lists because 'it doesn't sell'. It doesn't sell because exclusive poetry doesn't talk to a general readership. Inclusive poetry does, and will sell if marketed with some nous (as Dorothy Porter proved with *The Monkey's Mask*).

If popularity became an issue in Australian poetry, the exclusivists' privileged position would be threatened. A fresh light would expose many poems as the *côterie* parlour games they are, and a new order of poetic values would arise. Some exclusivists are conscious of this possibility, nicely illustrated by this quote from the same Kinsella article: "A well-known Australian poet once said to [Kinsella] that while he admired many of the skills and qualities of 'the other side's' work, he could not do so openly. The

reason: limited government grants, limited publishing opportunities and a small number of 'places in history'." Excuse me while I gag.

More usual is the exclusivist claim that their dismissal of inclusive poetry has no agenda beyond personal taste . . . they just 'don't like it'. It doesn't engage them, is too direct/plain/mundane, etc. It is true that inclusive poetry reveals its flaws readily, unlike the obfuscations and window dressing of exclusive poetry, which facilitate poetic bluff. Critics also equate inclusive poetry with student writers, workshop groups, open mikers; 'amateurs' who often write in that style. So a whole poetic is given the brush-off.

My belief is that most exclusivists don't *want* to enter the inclusive poem, to read it on its own terms. There is an emotional resistance . . . it is too 'other', too alien. In theory, such resistance may also be said to work in reverse, with inclusivists reluctant to enter the exclusive poem, but here the issue is clouded by the exclusive poem's 'difficulty'. . . it's hard to differentiate between unwillingness to enter a poem, and an inability to find a way in.

So why *emotional* resistance? The subtle speech codes that we pick up at home and even more influentially, from peers at school, are an important marker for identifying our 'tribe', the people we feel comfortable with. These speech codes *do* have a strong connection with class or, more specifically, schooling (i.e. private versus public), and carry through in written language too. As language is the stuff of poetry,

it is no wonder that divisions of 'us' and 'them' arise in this artform, and class, that taboo subject among 'equals in art', enters the arena.

Some of the blame for this culturally-retarding scenario can be levelled at historic factors – the colonial cringe/fawn mentality, with self-styled elites emulating anachronistic and largely imagined overseas 'standards'. Anything (potentially) popular with the general public is held to be inferior. The joke is that some exclusive poets like to think of "their agenda . . . [as] be[ing] associated with a new Left" (Kinsella again). I'd like to hear the reasoning behind that!

There is no way to break down this entrenched division in poetry while it is operating at an unconscious or unacknowledged level, hence the vital importance of forums such as this in *overland*, where the topic can at least be aired. Good on you, Sarah, for saying in print what a lot of us mutter amongst ourselves!

Lauren Williams is a poet and lives in Melbourne. Her most recent book is Invisible Tattoos (Five Islands Press 2000).

Here in Berlin

Pam Brown

EVERYONE HERE is wondering where summer went. These grey, windy days complement the grey concrete stucco that's peeling off many of the unrenovated blocks of flats in former East Berlin.

Lunch today is a cheap baguette, eaten in a small, neglected weedy square that commemorates the socialist Karl Liebknecht who proclaimed the first Free Republic of Germany. Not long after, he was tortured and murdered, along with Rosa Luxemburg, by right-wing Freikorps officers who threw their bodies into the Landwehr Canal and were never punished for their crimes. A modest Soviet-style monument stands here, forlornly, next to one of the ubiquitous construction sites.

A few doors from here is Brecht Haus, adjacent to a graveyard where Bertolt Brecht, his partner Helene Weigel, Karl Marx's favourite philosopher (Georg Hegel) and Dada photomontagist John Heartfield are all buried. The cemetery affords some peaceful strolling along birch-tree-lined paths beyond the hectic pace of new Berlin.

I am here as a guest of the inaugural Berlin International Literature Festival. An ambitious event set in several venues across the city, it was conceived 'in solidarity with Sarajevo'. Quite a few of the invited writers have been in political trouble over their work, others have causes to pursue and others, like myself, represent broader literary interests like postcolonialism and transnational writing. The poet Bei Dao who was arrested in China and now runs his magazine from the USA; members of the Rwanda Memory Project; Gruppe '99 from Sarajevo are here. The South Africans include Nadine Gordimer, Antje Krog – an Afrikaans poet and journalist

working for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – and a seventy-year-old Zulu poet, Mazisi Kunene. From the USA there's Michael Palmer, Bill Clinton's favourite black poet, Rita Dove, and others; James Fenton from Great Britain; the Hungarian Peter Esterhazy; Italian Antonio Tabucchi; Chinese/English poet Yang Lian and others from Morocco, Russia, Japan, Ireland, New Zealand, Senegal and so on.

So, with the lingua franca being German (although in practice English is the dominant) there are complex considerations about presentation. Sometimes actors perform translations; otherwise, translated text is projected simultaneously onto a large screen behind the writer during the reading. There is a lot of discourse and some contention about the problems of multilingual presentation.

The festival includes an extensive children's literature section, a literary film program and the publication of an enormous catalogue (460 pages) of the event and a hardcover anthology selected by the participating writers.

I was also invited, with the New Zealand poet Michele Leggott, to do a reading and conduct a class at Potsdam University, just to the southwest of Berlin. The English Department is located within the ex-state surveillance training institute and so, although the exterior is drab – a typically plain Eastern Bloc building – its advantage is that it's well-equipped for technology – unlike the other faculty buildings in the very beautiful

grounds of the Prussian so-called philosopher-king Frederick the Great's eighteenth century pleasure palace – *Sans Souci*. The lecturers we met at Potsdam University are all locals who have lived and worked here before the Wall came down. Today, like all former-GDR residents who have been able to keep their jobs, they are paid 30 per cent less than their western counterparts. Australian and New Zealand writing is studied here as a component of the post-colonial literature course.

The City of Berlin is broke. The extraordinary architectural projects of Potsdamer and Pariser Platz which have little to do with ordinary Berliners, continue via foreign corporations' financings, but there is no money to cut the grass on

footpaths and nature strips, many of the fountains are not running because of water costs, and the city's cultural programs depend on a lottery.

For me, to visit Berlin is to revise any soft or romantic notions of 'left-wing politics' and to reinvigorate my scepticism of all ideologies. You only have to visit, briefly, the Topography of Terrors in the cells used for torture by the Nazis and then pass by the white crosses on a fence near the Brandenburg Gate memorialising those ordinary citizens killed in attempting to escape the socialist German Democratic Republic. Reminders of the complex histories of oppression and war from before the Prussians until the end of the last century are everywhere here. And what

remains of the Berlin Wall is a salutary reminder indeed.

Pam Brown is overland's poetry editor. This piece was written during her recent extended overseas trip.

Floating Fund

OUR SINCERE THANKS go to the following who have, once again, generously donated to keep *overland* afloat:

\$150 S.R.; \$75 H.G.; \$64 J.H.; \$50 D.&P.G.; \$36 J.K.; \$28 F.S.; \$24 J.T., J.M.D., D.R.; \$20 R.D., P.N., C.S.; \$14 S.H., P.R., L.McN., I.P., E.D., J.H., D.B.; \$12 P.G.; \$10 M.O'L., C.M., A.J.D.McG.; \$8 L.B., F.L.W.; \$4 Z.D., W.&R.W., K.S, G.R.S., E.G., D.B.; \$2 L.I., D.B.W.:
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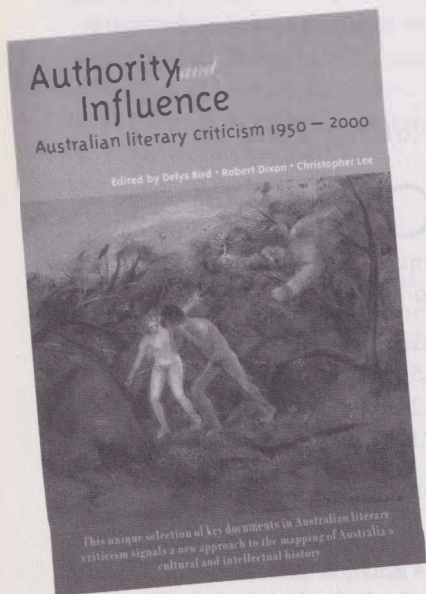
Fitzroy Hirsute

At a Christmas poetry reading

pony tails,
pig tails,
fur felts perched
on busbys,
mohawks,
Vladimir Ilich,
english sheepdogs,
shingled tomboys of Lesbos,
John the baptist
and there were those
who mimicked Christ
on this his celebration day.

Vane Lindesay

Authority and Influence: Australian Literary Criticism 1950–2000 (UQP), edited by Delys Bird, Robert Dixon & Christopher Lee



Nathan Hollier

SINCE ITS CREATION as a distinct university discipline around the time of the Great War, English has always had some difficulty in defining its proper objects of study and a desirable intellectual method. It was asked then, as it is often asked now, why we should teach at university something which many would do for pleasure anyway.¹ The spread of English as the central literary discourse, as opposed to classical or comparative literary studies, owed much to the fact that English texts could most easily be accommodated within the broader social project of English nationalism and imperialism.² The study of the great works of the nation was a means of binding society

together, of glossing over its internal fissures of class, gender, race and sexual difference and uniting sentiment against outsiders. This capacity was well understood by F.R. Leavis, whose patriotic 'universal' literary values were policed in Literature departments around the Empire.³ But there are good reasons for studying literature also. As Wesley Enoch reminded me in a lecture he gave at Victoria University a few years ago, literature conveys emotion, and the reader's emotional experience creates the preconditions for personal and social change. The university provides a space where dominant popular narratives about culture can be questioned.⁴

In the 1950s Raymond Williams drew into question the unitary model of national culture espoused by Leavis. Williams argued for the specificity and value of popular culture, in the process providing the impetus for the creation of modern Cultural Studies. At this stage of course, Australian texts were still wholly excluded from the study of Literature in Australian universities, the situation having changed little since an intellectual dilettante of the prewar period, Davey Meredith of George Johnston's *My Brother Jack*, referred to

Shakespeare, Keats and Milton as "crucified victims on the three crosses crowning the Golgotha of Australian education".⁵ The development of Australian literary criticism occurred largely outside of the university and within an interdisciplinary intellectual framework that actually anticipated Australian Cultural Studies.⁶ Williams's works, and his example in implicitly aligning himself with the 'common' people, were influential. According to John Docker in his 1984 study, *In a Critical Condition*, Australian literature came to be included within university English studies in part because (mainly conservative) university literary scholars wanted to control what they recognised was an increasingly popular area of cultural debate and discussion.⁷

During the 1960s, prominent university-based literary intellectuals, such as James McAuley and Vincent Buckley, fought to replace an historically-informed radical nationalist approach to culture with a supposedly timeless and universal – though in practice Anglophile and conservative – set of 'meta-physical' evaluative criteria.⁸ At the end of the 1960s, new social movements associated with feminist, racial and sexual politics were part of the profound social changes that led to

a questioning of the humanist and nationalist philosophies that had underpinned Australian literary criticism of the Left and Right. An Australian (student) New Left, comprised mostly of Althusserian and Gramscian-influenced historians and political economists, with the odd literary critic like Docker, were followed by structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to Australian literary studies in the 1980s and 1990s. These post-humanist approaches generally aimed at identifying and deconstructing the ways in which literary canons, even supposedly progressive ones, tended to reinforce rather than lead to a questioning of wider relations of social power. Miriam Dixson, Marilyn Lake and Susan Sheridan gave persuasive explanations of the masculinist basis, in particular, of radical nationalism. Other theorists like Sneja Gunew further developed the notion of a cultural centre, and of the ways this centre determines cultural value and social power in terms of whiteness, heterosexuality and masculinity.

The concept of a nation's cultural centre developed alongside the growth of 'identity politics' and was crucial to the development and output of women's studies departments and centres for the study of marginal, 'multicultural' and postcolonial texts. This concept enabled telling critiques of the cultural supports of existing relations of power. However, the notion of a cultural centre, involving as it does a static model of society, could not easily be brought together with

the dynamic or dialectical models of society important to materialist and Marxist-influenced critics such as the radical nationalists had been.⁹ A division between materialist and poststructuralist intellectual groupings became more pronounced as the 1990s wore on. Poststructuralist or post-humanist critics were sensitive to the possibility of implicit racism, sexism and hetero-normativity in writing, and emphasised the importance of politically sensitive, close textual reading. They were less successful in examining the social process by which some people had access to the personal benefits of this theorised form of close reading and others didn't, less capable of pointing to the historical causes of particular relations of power, less able to note tensions within the 'cultural centre', such as those of class, or to demonstrate the public value of their specialised and theorised forms of knowledge.¹⁰ In practice, the attainment of this knowledge was dependent on a university-educated close engagement with a body of relatively complex theory, but this theory could not in itself influence who gained access to it. As Mark Davis analysed in *Gangland*, the door was open for conservative cultural commentators to portray 'theory' as elitist, meaningless navel gazing. While *Gangland* tore these portrayals to shreds, the conservatives still hold the balance of power in the public relations war that will ultimately decide the fate of literary studies and higher education.

With changes in the education sector and the broader

society in recent years, it has become apparent that the continuing existence of Australian literary studies, indeed of independent Australian publishing itself, is not assured. Significantly also, the New Left critique of radical nationalism and the later assumption by poststructuralist-influenced critics that nationalism was virtually inseparable from conservatism, left the door open for 'the nation' to be defined by conservative thinkers and public commentators like Les Murray, John Laws, Alan Jones, Pauline Hanson and John Howard. In his recent *Temper Democratic, Bias Australian*, the seminal New Left historian Humphrey McQueen argued that a form of nationalism is the only possible means of opposing the complete domination of Australian society and culture by foreign capital.¹¹

To their credit, the editors of this collection of the past fifty years' criticism of Australian literature (the first collection of this specific type since John Barnes' 1969 *The Writer in Australia*), have recognised and responded to this contemporary situation. Bird, Dixon and Lee have eschewed an anthology of great names and seminal pieces and avoided throwing in their lot with a particular 'dominant' intellectual method. They have instead represented a dialogue within the history of Australian literary criticism, though in doing so they implicitly provide a theoretical basis for the historically-informed approach to literary criticism that they advance. In their introduction the editors put the important and exciting argument that

Australian literary studies is moving into a post-theory stage. By 'post-theory' they do not mean some return to the Leavisite and Kramerite days of supposedly universal literary and cultural value. The editors are influenced by a 'new historicist' impulse and seek to combine the critical and political insights of post-humanist theory with analysis of the historical and social position and role of literary criticism and critics in Australia.

The benefits of this approach are most clearly evident in Tony Simoes da Silva's critique of Gunew's ultimately essentialist categorisations of 'Anglo-Celtic' and 'migrant' Australian writing in her 1994 *Framing Marginality*. While not denying the existence of cultural, as opposed to material relations of domination, da Silva points out the inability of this essentialist approach to explain or predict changing social relations over time. Graeme Turner and Susan Lever suggest that in the present situation, critics and teachers of Australian literary studies need to work harder to demonstrate the public value of the objects and produce of their study. As Turner notes, it is in the public sphere, rather than the university, that the fate of Australian literary studies will finally be determined.

David Carter noted as early as 1986 that "nationalism might be argued so as to accommodate all or any of assimilation, 'ethnism' or multiculturalism".¹² In a more recent formulation drawn on by the editors of *Authority and Influence*, Carter suggests that "the category of the nation remains a

useful way of solving a recurring problem – the problem 'of conceiving an audience, a critical community, a society, a market, a history, a polity'.¹³ *Authority and Influence* hopes to stop students and critics reinventing the critical wheel, and the historicist approach of its editors provides hope for the continuing existence and importance of Australian literary studies.

ENDNOTES

1. See Andrew Milner, *Literature, Culture and Society*, UCL Press, London, 1996, p.4.
2. Milner, p.5.
3. As Leigh Dale notes, "there are now more students reading English Literature at [India's] Delhi University than there are in England itself". *The English Men: Professing Literature in Australian Universities*, ASAL, Toowoomba, 1997, p.10. See also John Docker's humorous description of his own undergraduate career: 'How I became a teenage Leavisite and lived to tell the tale', *In a Critical Condition: Reading Australian Literature*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1984, pp.1-14.
4. For a theoretically sophisticated and politically aware defence of the public funding of literary studies see Kevin Hart, 'Funding Literature: Ruskin, Eliot and Beyond', in *Arena* 81, 1987, pp.128-135.
5. George Johnston, *My Brother Jack* (1964), Collins, Sydney, 1989, p.57.
6. See Milner, 'Cultural Studies and Cultural Hegemony: Comparing Britain and Australia', *Arena Journal* 9, 1997, pp.133-155.
7. See Docker, *In a Critical Condition*, pp.86-87.
8. See 'The Metaphysical Ascendancy' in Docker, pp.83-109.
9. As Lucy Taksas notes, referring to work by Gerald M. Sider, while the concept of class "is dynamic, relational and processual and focuses on the material forces of production and 'the property

relationships through which surpluses are formed, transferred and transformed', the 'concept of culture – as shared values, beliefs, symbols and rituals – lacks a dynamic and processual core'. 'Pumping the Life-Blood into Politics and Place: Labour Culture and the Eveleigh Railway Workshops', *Labour History* 79, 2000, pp.14-15.

10. It should be noted that some theory enthusiasts, like Terry Threadgold and Tony Bennett, actively sought to bridge the gap between cultural theory and social practice.
11. *Temper Democratic: How Exceptional is Australia?*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 1998.
12. David Carter, 'The Natives are Getting Restless', in Bird, Dixon and Lee, p.175.
13. Bird, Dixon and Lee, p.36.

Simon During

IT'S A SOBERING EXPERIENCE, reading through this chronological parade of postwar pieces of Australian literary criticism. For what emerges most strikingly is the field's amazing instability – its sheer capacity for mutation. At the beginning of the period the note most often struck is one of promise: the promise that Australian literature as revealed and refined through critical interpretation, analysis and assessment would clearly articulate the 'Australian experience', or as Vance Palmer put it in 1954, would offer a "clear conception of [Australians'] qualities and limitations". And at the beginning it seemed as if such an articulation would not simply elucidate the form and patterns of the nation's most profound textual representations of itself but provide a means by which the culture – prone (as it

seemed) to cringe, dispersion, dissension and mere mindlessness – would, as Palmer again put it, achieve “coherence”.

By the 1990s when the collection ends, this promise has fled. Nothing at all remains of it. Literary criticism has become a beleaguered activity, crippled by its own sense that assessment or canon-making is a tool of elitism; threatened by its own professionalism since it is that professionalism (and the patronage by the state which has enabled it) that has rendered critics vulnerable to governmental and academic managerialism. Most of all, literary criticism is paralysed by the sense that literature is *not* the culture’s main vehicle of self-representation and self-understanding. Those functions have been delegated to the media, to advertising and to film. Literary criticism’s life-blood during the late seventies and eighties, namely its work on behalf of previously marginalised groups – especially women but also migrants, gays, lesbians and Aborigines – has itself become routinised and politically exhausted by the century’s end.

It is not as though between criticism’s moment of promise and its moment of exhaustion there was a period of accomplishment and consolidation. At least that’s how it seems from the perspective this anthology offers. The object of Australian criticism – Australian literature – is barely more clearly delineated at the book’s end than it was at its beginning. With two exceptions. The first of these is women writers’ contribution to the archive. The persistence of a way of living and writing,

improvised by at least some women against male-dominated structures and values, was demonstrated by feminist critics and historians during the seventies and eighties. The second exception is that the literary world of the colonial period is much better understood in 2000 than it was in 1950, largely as a result of work of highly professionalised literary researchers such as Robert Dixon and Andrew McCann. As to the rest, nothing much has moved on from the rather simplistic and repetitive propositions and debates that organised the field in 1950 and which continue to haunt it in the absence of any strong new articulations. To take some typical examples: that Australian literature is written under the sign of romanticism (which means what?); that Australian literature is divided by its spiritualising project on the one hand and its realist project on the other; that Australian literary integrity is endangered by its academic (in the eighties this becomes ‘theoretical’) commentators and proponents.

In particular the two major movements of the late eighties and nineties – poststructuralism and postcolonialism – provided little understanding of Australian literature’s larger patterns. The first – an import from Europe and the US – seems to have been deployed in the form of a set of formulae able to organise academic interpretation (and build academic careers). Here (though not in its birth-place) poststructuralism was almost always applied mechanically and listlessly. The second movement of the eighties and

nineties – postcolonialism – was, however, partly developed by local scholars such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. And indeed it helped us to understand Australian literature within a history of imperialism, although, as is often noted, Australian postcolonialist critics were too hasty in their assertion that Australian literature, in its efforts to separate itself from the metropolitan centre, is to be interpreted as subversive of imperialism (especially because imperialism is inseparable from racism). Nonetheless – partly because of the over-hasty ascription of subversive agency to the canon – postcolonialism (especially as represented in this book) failed to increase our understanding of – or to breathe more energy into – the internally segmented and continually shifting Australian literary heritage itself.

It may be that this sense of Australian criticism’s lack of progression is mainly an effect of the anthology and its principles of selection. This book is less a collection of the most insightful essays in Australian literary criticism and history over the past half-century than an assortment of (too heavily edited) reviews of critical texts and of interventionist position-statements (with some strange additions: what are the essays on the Ormond College affair doing here?). And because for the volume’s editors, Australian literary criticism means the writings of Australian-based critics about Australian writing, some of our best and most influential analysts of the literary institution are not

included – Tony Bennett and Ian Hunter for instance. Meaghan Morris is also absent. Her *Ecstasy and Economics* which is a wonderful work of literary criticism, though not just of literary criticism, displays too subtle and suggestive a sense of the relations between a poet – John Forbes – and a moment – Paul Keating’s – to be captured in a three- or five-page redaction.

But the realisation that Australian criticism over this period has passed from promise to decline without accomplishment is not simply an effect of the anthology’s having omitted the accomplishment. It’s a consequence of a powerful cultural structure by which literature occupies a more marginal place in Australia than it does in Europe and America.

After all, Australian national identity has been traditionally and effectively (if not intentionally) defined against the literary, and the institutions, values and figures that literature implies and carries with it. The ‘cultivated’, ‘polite’ (in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sense of the word), urbane, humane, imaginative, sympathetic, curious, bookish, relatively cosmopolitan, feminised figure of idealised literary subjectivity is more or less exactly what the typified figures of Australian cultural nationalism are not. They are matey, practical, down-to-earth, rural, masculinised, unlearned, disabused, laconic, commonsensical, passionately attached to the local. (Attempts to combine these two types, though frequent circa 1900, are doomed to failure.) And if in

this most urbanised of societies, the old bush-centred cultural imaginary is gradually losing force, it has not been replaced by anything much more literary. If, for instance, educated, wine-drinking, café-frequenting, travelled, prosperous (and hedonist) urbanites are slowly crowding their way into the gallery of national emblems, they too lack literary subjecthood.

The literary, then, is a counter-signifier of Australianness, despite authors such as Henry Kendall, Joseph Furphy, the *Bulletin* writers of the 1890s and Patrick White who have been harnessed, with more or less conviction, to cultural nationalism. And that structure of opposition is the condition through which literary criticism of Australian literature has been and continues to be so beleaguered, and hence so unstable, and so lacking in confidence and accomplishment. It is true that literary production has been increasingly absorbed into a transnational publishing industry, with many writers – whether established or not – producing highly competent representations of Australian life in global genres, such as magic realism, for a readership and market that spills beyond national borders. That is to say, Australian literature is no longer – if it ever really was – wholly written in or for Australia: let Peter Carey stand as the representative writer of this formation in its most recent shape. Indeed, the image of Australia has always been produced in and for (in particular) England, just as the image of (imperial) England has partly been pro-

duced here (if less so). Yet the transnationality of the local literary product (which is not analysed in the essays collected in this book) lacks the energy to counter Australia’s internal distance from its own modes of literary subjectivity and sociability. And it’s this distance of which this collection speaks most eloquently – even if (as the poststructuralists used to say) more in its silences and constraints than in the statements in which it seeks to account for its object, Australian literature.

Ann Standish

THIS BOOK MADE ME a little nervous. For a start, there is the threatening title, *Authority and Influence*, which implies that Australian literary criticism of the past fifty years is a very serious matter indeed. Then there is the cover text which declares it to be a “unique selection of key documents in Australian literary criticism”. I have always been a little suspicious of collections of documents, especially ‘key documents’, perhaps because of lingering memories of high school history classes. There is in the mediated quality of them a degree of pre-digestion and pre-ordering that seems to devalue the actual documents. They certainly lack the element of detection and discovery which can be one of the major pleasures of academic work, without necessarily revealing what the documents are the key to.

Thirdly, a glance at the table of contents seems to be enough

to discover what the main thrust of the volume will be. The documents are ordered thematically as well as chronologically, but it is the periodisation which predominates. The material is divided into decades, although the fifties and sixties are combined in one section. Within these groups, the same themes are revisited, with some exceptions. 'Race, gender, class and ethnicity' (a very broad theme indeed) appears first as a subheading in the 1970s; 'Looking abroad' and 'A national literature studies' are both dropped as subheadings by the 1990s. Even before reading the editors' introduction, then, it is possible to gain the impression that this volume will trace the progress of Australian literary criticism from a restricted undertaking, concerned with the quality of the national literature and with how it compared with the outside world, yet at the same time limited and inward-looking, in the dull, anxious fifties and sixties, to more confident, diverse and reflexive forms of criticism by the end of the twentieth century.

Exploring further into the body of the book revealed another irritating feature common to such collections: the intrusive ellipsis. Obviously limitations on length and the desire to include as many documents as possible made it necessary to make some cuts to the documents, and equally obvious, it is necessary that such omissions be clearly indicated. Yet, this again emphasises the selective nature of the volume, and acts to render what has been omitted far more

interesting than that which remains. You are left wondering what has been left out and why.

This might appear to be a slightly self-indulgent gripe about a particular form of book which unfairly gives no consideration to its content. And maybe to a degree it is. But it has its basis in a concern about how history is presented or represented in volumes such as these: what processes of selection are undertaken; what meanings, intended or unintended, are created by the ordering; how texts change as sources when removed from their original context. And, while this is a collection of literary criticism of various types – reviews, essays, excerpts from books – it is being presented very much as a source volume of historical documents, making strong claims for its ability to reveal continuities and developments in Australian literary debates over the past fifty years, and through doing so to reflect more generally on the history of culture and thought in Australia. While it is useful, convenient and instructive to have these volumes, there is the danger that they will limit, rather than expand, the perceived parameters of the field they are concerned with.

But, once I had got past these misgivings and prejudices, beyond the form and into the content, I found a lot to enjoy. The editors had addressed many of the concerns in their introduction, which contextualised the subject matter well, and I realised I had been approaching the book the wrong way. I should have taken note of the other part of the cover text, that

which claimed it to be a "mapping of Australia's cultural and intellectual history". It could, perhaps, be seen as a street map to guide the reader through unfamiliar back roads; a Melways for literary criticism. I decided to road test it. Literary criticism of the last half of the twentieth century is not an area I am overly-familiar with – I am an historian whose work deals at times with Australian literature, but mainly women's writing, and mainly from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – but nor is it totally foreign territory. It is, however, an area I could use guidance in. So I decided to follow just one strand of thought, that of feminist criticism, through the book, and see where it led.

This proved slightly trickier than expected. Despite the signposts of themed groupings, not all pieces concerning feminist criticism or women's writing fell into the section with gender in the title. Which is a good thing, as it acknowledges the contribution that feminist thought has made to debates in diverse areas, and shows the unexpected paths which thread through the book.

Once on track, it proved an illuminating task. With the exception of Jill Roe's 1973 piece on Ada Cambridge, work dealing with women began, not surprisingly, in 1975. The excerpt from Kate Jennings' introduction to her anthology of women's poetry, *Mother I'm Rooted*, with its powerfully angry, pessimistic and unapologetic argument for her volume; its opposition to perceived ideas about standards and its challenge to the acknowledged

literary canon, makes an excellent introduction to the ideals of feminist work of the 1970s. That it is followed by a review of the book, by Carl Harrison-Ford, which saw it as "an important and challenging cultural event and artefact" is even more enlightening. Still in 1975, the excerpt from Carole Ferrier's editorial in the first issue of *Hecate* provides another example of a strong and powerful claim for the journal's role in "providing a forum for discussing, at a fairly theoretical level, issues relating to the liberation of women".

The 1980s offers a much wider range of material, showing diversification of subjects under discussion: another excerpt from *Hecate*, addressing the issues raised in *New French Feminisms*; Susan Sheridan discussing women writers and nationalism; a review by Delys Bird of books on women's fiction edited by Shirley Walker and Carole Ferrier; an exchange between Kay Schaffer and Marian Aveling about Schaffer's book *Women and the Bush*. Quantitatively there is more material on women, and one of the benefits of this becomes apparent. The focus on particular debates enables a reading of material which relates to each other; there is a sense of dialogue.

This is reinforced by the first entry in the section on the 1990s. Susan Sheridan's 'Australian Feminist Literary History' (1993) presents an overview of the subject, drawing on many of the pieces included in *Authority and Influence*, providing the opportunity to reflect on the developments made. Also in the

1990s, a focus on *the first stone* debate, with articles by Kerryn Goldsworthy and Matthew Ricketson, allows for consideration of where feminism has gone since the 1970s, and the nature of generational change.

This was just one meander through the book. Other paths open to investigation include those of race and class politics. But I think a similar sense would come through. The volume is selective, but in a way that makes you think about the issues involved. In particular, the ideas about the relationship between history and literature, particularly as they are linked to ideas about Australian culture, are strongly evident.

While this book can be usefully read as a map, it is also in some respects an account of a journey. It is a journey that starts with A.D. Hope pompously declaring that "The confusion that exists about Australian literature today is partly a reflection of a general confusion about literary standards, and partly the result of special problems of assessment that face all colonial literatures, in fact most literatures in their early stages" and ends with Leigh Dale arguing, somewhat mysteriously when taken out of context, that: "Not by doing away with, but by acknowledging, the historical and cultural specificity of our cultural values, by conceding the necessary imbrication of the political and the aesthetic rather than grounding our criticisms in a sentimentality idealising universalism, we can far more easily, I think, see the connection between poetry and bull-leaping, and laud those who,

like Porter, are prepared to take that 'big sexy risk'."

It is not, however, as straightforward a journey as I had anticipated. There is plenty of allowance for detours, side trips and journeys within journeys, such as my tracking of feminist criticism. I still don't think it is the ideal form to be reading such material. But it presents it well: a serious book that is readable and enjoyable; an intelligent anthology which offers twists and turns.

Noel Rowe

I AM SITTING in the foyer of St Vincent's Clinic, waiting for my sister to finish her radiation treatment. *Authority and Influence* is in my bag, but I haven't really thought much about the symposium piece I agreed to write for *overland*. I'm not really in the mood for critics talking criticism. It reminds me too much of theologians talking theology, something they tend to do if they have no-one but theologians to talk to. For some reason I keep remembering that I once read a study that showed how institutions developed through three stages: inspiration, consolidation, and ossification. According to this study (I no longer remember its name), as institutions came closer to death they became more concerned with defining their identity and clarifying their proper work. But it was probably a study of the theological institutions.

Australian literary criticism has come a long way since *The Oxford History* was assassi-

nated. There have been considerable advances in historical scholarship, as well as in feminist, postcolonial and deconstructive reading practices. Even so, there was something predictable about *The Oxford Literary History*, making me wonder if it too might mark the passing of a critical style, an empirical and equalising way of assembling information about culture and writing. It did very little that was queer, considered ethics only briefly and only as an idea, and dressed in proper academic conventions. It survived because its ways are the ways of those presently in power, but it may soon be edged aside by practices such as life-writing. Maybe. Most of us are still content to think of critical writing as a work of the mind. While we may be prepared to think about the possibility that criticism is itself a work of narrative, involving autobiographical and corporeal factors, we generally write from our heads. (This is why most poetry, which is known through the body, continues to resist our increasingly ratiocinated advances on it.) We may have abandoned what we now see as the evaluative and discriminatory assumptions of naïve humanism, but our fundamental epistemological assumptions are still those of rationalism. The academic way of thinking is still hierarchical, and supreme authority is still given to reason (even if James McAuley is now a naughty man).

Here at St Vincent's I am looking at a notice board that contains a staff directory. It offers up the names and

specialties that constitute this little world of medical science. It might almost be a list of contributors in a critical journal. (Thus shall the power of sign be given over to the sign of power.) The oncologist did not tell my sister what her treatment was, or how long it might take, or even why it was. "We can answer questions next week. It's Friday afternoon and I want to get to the beach." I take small comfort in the knowledge that 'medical humanities' is now emerging as an area of interdisciplinary study. This work is informed partly by a pragmatic interest in more effective (whole-bodied) medicine and partly by a recognition that medicine needs to check its belief in the myth of reason and recognise the narrative character of medical knowledge. It cannot just go on making diagnoses as if they were dogmas.

For some reason this image of medicine rehumanising itself reminds me that I am supposed to be thinking about literary criticism. There has been a lot of talk in recent years about literature and the public sphere (we have almost admitted that sometimes when we say 'political' we mean 'ethical') and there is some evidence to suggest that criticism is experiencing an anxiety of audience. This anxiety exposes us to a minor dilemma: we want to exercise our role in the public sphere, yet too many of us write sentences that read like Gnostic scrawl. (No, I am not against theory; I am simply against bloated prose.) Some years ago, theologians like Schillebeeckx and Shea began

writing about a 'crisis' or even 'failure' in theological language. They argued that the crisis was caused by the way in which doctrines and ideas had slowly gained supremacy in theological thinking, assuming authority over stories and images, forgetting that dogmatic theology is derived from sacred story. The interpretations derived from the scriptures had gained the upper mind and then turned back to make the scriptures their servants. In an attempt to renew their language, theologians began developing metaphorical and narrative modes of theology in the hope that these would reconnect doctrines to metaphors to 'experience'. Some twenty years ago I was reading this material, but not with a great deal of hope. I didn't see that it had much chance of changing the power structures – poets are usually at a disadvantage when dealing with dogmatists, because poets do not know too much. Some twenty years ago I gave up theology for literary criticism, a way of knowing, or so I thought, that understood how to encourage conversation between thinking, feeling, sensing, and would not let imagination become the servant of reason. Now I suspect that literary criticism is making theology's mistake, and usurping the authority of imagination. (Yes, I did say that we need to recognise that criticism is an autobiographical act. No, I am not against theory; I am against handing authority over to ideas derived from stories.)

Once it hands authority over to ideas derived from stories, literary criticism begins to

forget the ways in which imagination can go on deconstructing ideology. I am aware that I am, once again, not quite saying what I intended, and that it is likely to be misconstrued. Mark Davis thinks cronyism is the problem, but it is not as destructive as enemism. The hidden history of *Authority and Influence* is not so much that it provides a genealogy for the kinds of literary history now being written, but that it half-shows the misrepresentations and antagonisms that attend the way of reputation. This may be part of the politics of reading, and it may be inescapable, but that is no excuse for it being as ungenerous as it often is or as unscrupulous as it sometimes is. Australian literary criticism talks of plurality and difference as if they are only political ideals, but they are also ethical ideals. Reading ought to include an act of respect for the other. Why is it necessary, in the introduction, to call Kevin Hart “condescending” because, we are told, he thinks he knows his Derrida better than most of us? If it was so wrong for *The Oxford History* to be evaluative about (creative) writing, why do we keep going on as if our (critical) writing is better? We haven’t really given up on evaluation; we’ve just started evaluating ourselves. The managers will be pleased.

Each day for the past two weeks I have been catching a bus up Oxford Street to get to St Vincent’s. On today’s bus two men were fighting for possession of the disabled seat at the front. One, young and able-bodied, was already sitting

on the aisle side when the other, old and irritable, got on. The old one began yelling at the young one to get out of his way, then tried to push past him to the window. The young one turned sideways, saying, “You’ve got enough room.” But the other complained even more loudly: “That seat’s for people like me, that’s where I sit. You shouldn’t be sitting here.” To which the young man replied, “But mate, I’m blind.”

This is my stop. Now what was it the editor said about sending this as an e-mail attachment? That’s right: “We prefer rich text format, not Word.”

Nathan Hollier is overland’s associate editor.

Simon During teaches at the University of Melbourne. His writings on Australian literature include a short monograph on Patrick White.

Ann Standish is completing a PhD thesis on British women’s non-fictional writing about Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Noel Rowe teaches in the English Department at the University of Sydney and is a co-editor of Southerly.

Fading into Silence

Susan Holmes

MORWELL, the town of my childhood where the open cut coal mine and paper mill dominated the landscape. Memories had lodged in the corners of my mind, ill-defined and shadowy like the smokestacks in Morwell on a foggy

morning. My sister Jan had been badgering me for months to revisit but I couldn’t see the point – until I spent Christmas in New Zealand with a friend. The days of his childhood were clearly etched in memory, but were there too in reality. He still knew the names of people in the street and what their children had gone on to. It set me wondering why my recollections were so hazy, nine years melding into one single vision of a dusty town. My friend’s childhood was blue-collar like mine, but his parents owned their house in a street of homeowners. There was continuity, people stayed. We rented our Housing Commission house, as did everyone else in the street. When you take away ownership it seems you also take away the desire or wherewithal to lay down roots. Work is often the sole determinant of where you live.

When we lived in Morwell in the 1950s there was plenty of employment, largely unskilled and usually for men. A town, Churchill, was specifically built to cater for the employees of the Hazelwood power station. My Dad worked at the paper mill and the chemical farty smell that surrounded his work wafted across to our house when the wind blew in a certain direction. By the time I was ready for secondary school and Jan had reached third form, however, employment prospects were waning, especially for girls, and so we left.

Morwell by 2000 had faded into silence. On the Saturday afternoon of our arrival the streets were vacant. We found the house we lived in but it too

was empty. Not only empty of people but bereft of plants or any vegetation save the rust-coloured front lawn. Jan claimed a memory of roses in the front but I couldn't recall anything of fragrance, just a few stunted fuchsias. We both, however remembered the big old tree in the backyard. We snuck around the back and discovered that it too had gone, stump and all. We were indignant. Our Dad used to sleep outdoors under that very tree on hideously hot nights in his Chesty Bond singlet and pyjama pants.

We drove up to see our old Catholic primary school and the new church built after we left. In our day the school doubled as the church and the priest lived in a Housing Commission house across the road. Now it was very flash with the presbytery a modern unit complete with an office. It looked like religion was the only boom industry left but then we didn't know how many seats would be full on Sundays. The surprise to both of us was the convent. Like many childhood memories it seemed huge, daunting, majestic. Now it was a small, brick building. Was this really the same place we stood with sweaty palms holding a message for Mother Superior with her giant set of keys and the big black cross hanging at her waist?

Smaller too, in retrospect, were our Holy Communion days. Mum still has a photograph of my sister in her white dress. We wondered where the dress came from, probably a cousin on the moneyed side of the family. Did the dress get passed on to me? We don't



know as the photographer in my year shot through with the deposit, Mum says. Of course that doesn't make much sense. More likely we couldn't afford the photos that year. In Jan's memory someone always fainted. In my memory someone always wet themselves at the altar rail.

It was a hot sweaty day so we soon stopped off for a beer. We didn't remember a Morwell Club but the barman said it had been there since 1950. We were sure Dad would know about it but he had died fifteen years ago. We sipped our drinks and felt his loss. He had taken some of our history with him; his version of events was always more lively than Mum's.

We walked around the streets and across the railway line which divides the town. I remembered Saturday afternoons at the pictures in the Town Hall and saving one last sticky lolly for Mum. Jan remembered a picture theatre being built just before we left. We finally located it, but it too was shut down. The posters outside indicated it had been

closed for over twelve months. We peered inside and saw what looked like the aftermath of a minor uprising. Soft-drink and popcorn containers were strewn across the floor. The decay of the theatre was reflected in the surrounding shops. Empty shop windows stared back at us and concrete resounded to our lonely footsteps. By late afternoon there was no-one about. No old person walking a dog. No skateboards or bicycles. Morwell was an abandoned movie set.

We were eating our counter tea at the largest, most inhabited pub (it had the pokies) when Jan declared she wanted to stand on the table and ask if anyone knew us. We laughed at the mental picture, both knowing she wouldn't do it. It was a reaction against the eerie feeling of being invisible in a land previously inhabited by our family. At nine o'clock we strolled back to our motel. We encountered no-one on our walk. The pub closest to our motel (it had no pokies) had no customers.

We sat on our balcony in the

balmy night air and dredged up memories of our old neighbours. The Martins, the first family in our street to get a television; the strange scruffy people with frightening dogs; the woman who, rumour had it, let her children have ice-cream for breakfast. We laugh about the strange rituals of our childhood. We never knocked at the door, instead we stood outside and called out the name of our friend until they came out to play or their mother told us to go away. Dee Dee and I pretended we were at a picnic when we ate our sandwiches on the back porch. The day that Freddie Green got a camera and took all our pictures. Jan's first pair of small heels and the green and white check dress she wore to the school social. I lost a hair ribbon, said a prayer to St Anthony and found it again on the way home. The long trek up the hill to our primary school on freezing cold mornings. Mum sponging down and ironing our school uniforms on a Sunday night. We supposed there were dry cleaners around then but our family certainly didn't use them. Our childhood was a small, uneventful world.

Family holidays were always spent at Grandma's house. Funny that, the house never belonged to Grandpa in our thoughts. All the Aunties and Uncles would be in what Grandma, who aspired to be upwardly mobile, called "the breakfast room" while we kids ate in the built-in back porch. Great sides of meat and puddings in big baking dishes. Playing cowboys and indians and hidey in Grandma's big backyard. Jan and my cousin,

Sandra, taking the best dress-ups and me crying like the little wimp I was.

The realisation gradually dawns that these were the times of most importance in our childhood, the true connection, the extended family. Morwell was just a place we lived in once; our real roots in life belong with our family who never leave us, even when they die.

In the early morning a dull drizzling rain begins as we leave Morwell, a place of our childhood, behind.

Susan Holmes is currently working at three jobs so she doesn't have to cope with writer's block or feeling guilty.

An accidental suicide

Andrea Sherwood

DRUGS AND MENTAL illness can be a fatal dose, as we recently witnessed in the 'accidental suicide' of Paula Yates. The grief one feels at the death of a loved one can place the sufferer in an emotional pit as bleak as that experienced by the manic-depressive. I am a diagnosed manic-depressive and I felt a keen sorrow, and disbelief, when a friend of mine rang up to tell me Yates was dead. When Paula stated in an interview that her goal in life was to "stay alive", I knew precisely, at womb pitch, what she meant. For her girls, Yates would haul herself back to life. Like her, I am a sole parent of still-young daughters and like her, they are my passion. But

when one is living and breathing within the depth of the black pit, one becomes careless of their own self. Yates was a very intelligent woman and would have known this while mixing alcohol with anti-depressive medication and opium (if reports are true). When I first met heroin it did not appeal to me as being good for me in any form. I had no need then for an illegal and lethal drug (it more often than not destroys your life slowly, if not faster by actual physical death of the body). Heroin waited patiently for me.

Finally heroin arrived a second time at my door. This time I was in pain and heroin came dressed as pain relief. I fell in love. I had slipped precariously and hard into one of my worst 'lows', a 'black and white'. I no longer had the ability to see colour. This is a common symptom of clinical depression, my psychiatrist informed me. Though I wondered remotely (another symptom of depression is the drastic reduction of one's IQ and it becomes a great effort to fit a single cohesive thought together. Memory is one such victim), so even while I was aware that what I was seeing was different, I put it down to the cynicism of aging. I remember opening my front door to an elaborate and enchanting Spring morning, my three-year-old daughter beside me. I saw still-dark shadows and I felt no joy. My daughter? She saw light breaking through the tree's shadows to perform a wild, tender and glorious dance at our feet, and she leapt in ecstasy, clapping her perfect

hands together while singing "O look mummy O look!" I remember thinking I would never see that dance again and my sorrow anchored itself to my womb. My mother was thirty-two years old when she finally left my manic and violent father with five children under the age of ten. I was the eldest and my mother confided in me: "My life is over now, I am finished. I must stay alive to look after you kids." Little was my mother to know that I would take those particular words (though she taught me many things when she had shed her despair) as being the truth, fact. Of course, then, my 'black and white' depression was merely the effect of growing older; hadn't my mother inadvertently taught me so? I was twenty-seven years old, closing in on thirty-two, the age when 'one's life was over'. I believe now that that was a powerful motivating factor in my desire to have children while still young. They would give me a valid reason to stay alive.

I was completing post-graduate studies when heroin appeared, in need of a partner. I was single, depressed mindless, and, like Paula Yates, neglectfully suicidal. I clenched death in my fist like a precious jewel. If things got too bad there was always death to placate me, take me. Heroin became more valuable than death. It put my pain to sleep, it put my life aside. To all appearances, I kept studying. I got out of bed. I did not hate myself in the early days of my addiction. Heroin will return your love only during the honeymoon period. When you

arrive back home heroin mutates into the deformed reality of your most secret fears. My pain became a daily ritual of physical withdrawal and the eternal quest for relief from the shame and pity my life had become.

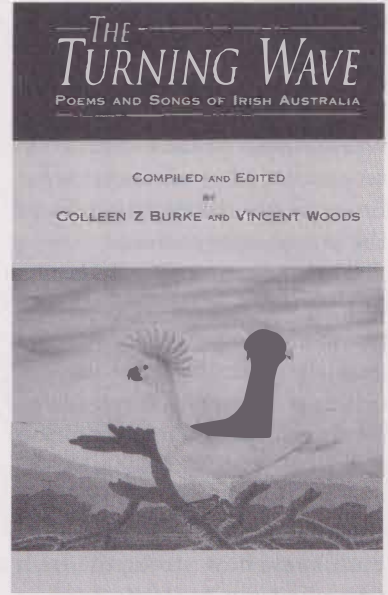
After too many years a psychiatrist began to feed me lithium, epilim, tryptanol, efexor-XR, zyprexa, mood stabilisers and anti-depressants. Some friends told me I was allowing men to chemically control my life. I told them I was a sole parent responsible for two young girls. I had to get a grip, what of, I am only beginning to discover. For now, my tree of shadows bears my weight. I see light, leap up, hold on for dear life.

Andrea Sherwood's collection One Siren Or Another, published by UQP, won the Anne Elder Award. She has had over a hundred individual pieces published both here and overseas.

The Turning Wave – the verse and song of Irish Australia

Colleen Z. Burke

IN 1990 I met Irishman Vincent Woods, who was a recent arrival in Sydney. As poets interested in literature, Irish and other traditional music and song, we had an instant rapport and decided to embark on an anthology of the verse and song of Irish Australia. I knew we had a rich seam of material, because my late husband, singer, musician, Declan Affley, and myself had



presented workshops at Australian folk festivals, and other venues, on Irish-Australian verse and song. Our presentations, in workshops and concerts of the radical song and verse of Australia also included a swag of Irish material.

At the time I was just completing a biography of poet Rickety Kate (Minnie A. Filson). So to my credit I now had a published biography of poet, socialist Marie E.J. Pitt and two unpublished biographies of poet and author Mary Fullerton, as well as Rickety Kate. Even though it's frustrating not getting work published, no research is wasted. Mind you I wasn't so philosophical at the time, but at least I knew that all these poets had some Irish ancestry. Over several years I had also been compiling an anthology of radical verse and song of Australia, a mammoth task in itself, so I had access to reams of material relevant to our anthology.

The first publishers inter-

ested in the anthology, Gore and Osmond, needed subsidies from Irish organisations to make it viable. Unfortunately it was the start of the early 1990s recession and as all requests for financial assistance were refused the project was shelved.

Vincent returned to Ireland, but we were still determined to get the anthology published. I continued sending relevant information to publishers, albeit without success. Poetry is a difficult area, anthologies even more so because of contributors' fees etc. But we both knew how strong the Irish community in Australia was, the interest in the Irish from other Australians (at times one third of the Australian population has claimed Irish descent), other ethnic groups. Properly marketed we didn't see how this project could fail, but publishers in their wisdom thought otherwise.

Over the ensuing years we had near misses with several publishers, found powerful poems/laments from nineteenth-century newspapers on the Irish Famine and Irish politics, and discussed the idea of self-publishing. It was possible – I had been involved in publishing projects in community contexts, had published some of my own poetry books, but to take on the anthology was a huge time commitment as well as financial burden. However, with continual knockbacks from publishers it began to seem like our only option — the only way this worthwhile, long-overdue anthology would ever see the light of day.

One of the highlights of the

National Folk Festival, held in Canberra each year, is union involvement and the Union concert sponsored by the CFMEU. But it wasn't until I attended a launch of a CD in Sydney, primarily funded by the CFMEU, that funding possibilities opened up. I discussed the project with Trevor Zeltner, then Assistant Secretary of the ACT branch. He was interested, said there was no money available for travel, but encouraged me to submit an application, which I did in April 1999. Trevor rang back immediately, and wanted some costings, as the meeting to allocate funds was to take place within a few weeks. He sounded optimistic, but so had a lot of people so I kept a rein on enthusiasm. When next he rang it was to confirm the success of our application. They would pay half in the next few months and the rest when the anthology was ready for printing. The grant gave us some financial independence. It was now feasible to self-publish, although it still wasn't our preferred option. Having the grant brought up other issues – if we found a publisher what was the financial relationship between the grant, us and them, and obviously some wouldn't be keen on union funds. We kept trying publishers, kept getting rejections, and finally decided that with or without a publisher we would bring the book out.

However, in March 2000, I met Tony Bennett from Kardoorair Press, Armidale, NSW. During our conversation I told him about the anthology, the grant, our desperation to

get it published. He was interested to look at the anthology, but said that even if Kardoorair didn't take it on, they are only a small press, he could organise cheaper printing, because they had a deal with the printer they used. Tony was very positive and I was happy because someone offered help. However, after seeing a summary of our material Kardoorair press decided to publish *The Turning Wave*. The union grant made it a feasible proposition. There were some negatives, a small publisher meant a small print run, but on the positive side it meant more hands-on involvement in decision-making etc. And getting the anthology published was the goal.

Vincent arrived at the end of June, 2000. Now we had a focus, a deadline – we were aiming for March, 2001. We went through our material, descended on the Mitchell Library and found more relevant material. Vincent had to return to Ireland so I continued chasing material, copyright, which is amazingly complex particularly for nineteenth-century material. We had to change the deadline several times. Vincent was supposed to be here late December, our deadline for the completed manuscript was the end of January 2001, but illness, work commitments changed that. Knowing I would have to do a lot on my own and via e-mail I pushed the deadline back into late February. It's a challenge working with someone twelve thousand miles away, sometimes without easy phone access, let alone e-mail access, which when established often

collapsed. At times I was overwhelmed, it was such a large project – the anthology spans from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present. A surfeit of high quality material also meant we had to cull extensively, but the anthology is stronger, tauter, because of it.

We are indebted to Trevor Zeltner, the ACT branch of the CFMEU and its social club, the Canberra Tradesmen's Union Club, for providing funding. *The Turning Wave* wouldn't have been published without their financial support. Our eleven-year journey towards publication illustrates, once again, the positive involvement unions can play in Australia's social and cultural life. A trend which will hopefully continue. When larger, and multi-national, publishers no longer have a vision, refuse to take risks, only pour money into mainstream projects, authors, regardless of their value, it's important that more socially conscious organisations such as unions fill the breach.

Until Australia acknowledges, and has access to its diverse voices, in this case the extraordinarily rich seam of songs and poems of Irish Australia, it will remain incomplete, seemingly homogenous when it is such a rich, complex and vibrant country. A country with many histories, cultures, stories, poems and songs.

Colleen Z. Burke is a poet, writer, biographer and the author of numerous books including eight poetry books. She is co-editor of The Turning Wave: poems and songs of Irish Australia, 2001.

Missile Defence or Threat?

Bruce Anderson

IN THE AFTERMATH of 11 September, America may successfully prosecute the terrorists but there could be worse to come if it persists with its 'Fortress America' mindset.

Never before has one nation so overwhelmingly dominated the world. And it hopes to make its dominance unchallengeable. But the strategy is flawed.

The ramifications of National Missile Defence, Strategic Defence Initiative, Star Wars, Missile Defence or whatever you wish to call it, are vast, and the list of unanswered questions is endless. Yet, while Australia is one of the few countries to have given Washington unqualified support, it has received little attention in our media.

For example, will it work? How does the anti-missile missile pick the warhead from the decoys? Or deal with multiple warheads? It has been described as trying to hit a bullet with a bullet or throwing darts at a flight of swallows. Now we are told that America will deploy warships near a likely take-off point and strike before the missiles achieve full speed. And how many ships would that require and how many missiles to achieve blanket coverage? But why not hit the launching site, I can hear someone ask in the West Wing? Or the factories thought to be making them? Or the people thought to be making them? Or the countries thought to be making them? And what

happens if it does hit the incoming missile? Where do all the bugs and chemicals go? Into the sea or someone's backyard? Or if it is a nuclear warhead what happens to the radioactive fallout? Into the atmosphere? And what happens if it misses? Does it just fly off into space? Or what happens if some crazy president like Nixon decides it is safe enough from retaliation to nuke anyone who doesn't happen to be flavour of the month? Or if some Dr Strangelove on the National Security Council thinks a missile is about to be launched or has just been launched and thinks he had better push the button just in case? Then we are told that the system may prove unreliable against primitive, wobbly missiles like those expected from Pyongyang.

Mind you, it is not essential that the system works. Just as dangerous, in terms of pre-emptive strikes, is if the US believes it will work and initiates its strategy accordingly. And if the main arsenal of 'rogue states' consists of biological and chemical weapons, how will the system detect local manufacture or entry in a suitcase, let alone suicide bombers in domestic jets?

Proposals to accept the nuclear option have been tabled in the oval office at least twenty-five times since Hiroshima – as in the Berlin Blockade, in Korea, where McArthur requested eighteen atomic bombs to look after China, to save the French at Dien Bien Phu, over Quemoy and Matsuo in the Taiwan Straits, while our former Prime Minister, R.G. Menzies is reported to have

suggested a few 'drops' to LBJ when the Vietnam War was not going according to script. Nuclear catastrophe during the Cold War was only averted by some kind of miracle. If Missile Defence goes ahead, what would prevent a mistake or its misuse? And how do you pick rogues from freedom fighters? "Easy," said one Senator. "The guys on our side are the freedom fighters." Always? Like Germany and Japan? Like the Taliban, who were supposed to look after Najibullah, like Saddam Hussein, who was supposed to look after the Ayatollah, like Hitler, who was supposed to look after the Bolsheviks, like the Serbs, our ally one day and our enemy the next, then our allies again to put down the Albanians who were first terrorists then freedom fighters after the CIA got into the act, and now, according to George Robertson, 'thugs'?

History shows that every ultimate weapon is superseded by a more ultimate weapon (if that is not a grammatical impossibility). History repeatedly illustrates how later events and facts contradict initial spin. Consider how we were told we had to send troops to Vietnam to stop the dominoes falling. Consider how those freedom fighters once funded by the CIA are now charged with mass murder in Guatemala. Consider the effects of American intervention in Iran, Iraq, Chile, Panama, Colombia, Haiti. Consider the American penchant for the Hollywood Shootout Solution – drop a few bombs, up goes the Presidential Popularity Rating while the UN is left to pick up the pieces.

And how often is the wrong target blasted? Like the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade or the refugee trains or the schools and all the other innocents in Kosovo – where it turned out most of the bombs missed their targets and left all that depleted uranium, PVC gas and unexploded cluster bombs – or the pharmacy factory in the Sudan. We are told that what went wrong in Vietnam was we did not bomb them enough. What went right in the Gulf War was "we kicked butt and beat the Vietnam monkey". Consider how many decisions are based on the next election time-frame. To show he was not 'soft on communism' LBJ concocted the Tonkin Gulf Resolution for the forthcoming Congressional election and started the longest war in American history. There are so many issues to be considered and so little attention has been given them. We are being railroaded into accepting what has the potential to destroy the whole post-Cold War settlement and set the world on a destructive arms race. Our leading columnists support it – Greg Sheridan said it is the only moral way to go. Alexander Downer supports it and has recently been reported as trying to silence Japanese objections. John Howard supports it. About the only local voice I have heard that does not is Malcolm Fraser's.

In a world where a few hundred billionaires control more wealth than the poorest two billion people, where 80 per cent of the world's population have never used a telephone, where more is spent on

dealing with obesity in the US and pampering pets in New York than dealing with hunger in half the world, where ecological disasters, salination, global warming, chemical and nuclear waste and oil pollution and other horrors like the AIDS pandemic, threaten the very existence of the planet, the US is proposing to spend more resources than on any similar project in history.

The objective is to protect the 'American Dream' – three cars in every garage and two chickens in every pot. As de Tocqueville predicted, 'democracy in America' has swept all before it. It is not that Americans are evil or different. They are all too human. They can't help it. Like most people they want more and will not accept less. The danger is that their immense resources and the dynamics of their society now give them the capacity to have what they want while the rest of us drift into irrelevance.

And what makes you think a failed Texas oil company executive (George W. Bush), and another Texas oil company executive who has just retired with a \$20 million handshake (Dick Cheney), who some say 'stole' the presidency with the help of friends and relations in Florida while others say he 'bought' it with oil company campaign funds (including \$2 million from Exxon), and without a majority of the popular vote (some 75 per cent of the registered voters did not vote for him) can claim the mandate to scuttle decades of negotiations and treaties to reduce nuclear stockpiles and missile proliferation? The White

House has become the branch office of the oil companies and the defence industry, preferring 'war' to 'international law enforcement'!

There is really no alternative to patient diplomacy and pursuit of long-term policies to strengthen international law enforcement, reduce human rights abuses and, above all, attack the poverty and inequality that fuels violence and resentment. As globalisation bites the refugee flood increases.

We are swamped by American culture, from Tokyo to Timbuktu. American accents increasingly dominate our entertainment, TV and radio – if they do not already own it, like Clear Channel and degrade it to 'the crudest and rudest'. Our newspapers publish American columnists while baseball and basketball are making inroads into our national sports, with our youth aping American headgear and some members of our teams placing their hands over their hearts for the anthem, just like the Bulls or the Lakers. Our orchestras are no longer conducted but 'under the baton of' while we are finding it increasingly difficult to know the time as radio announcers tell us it is no longer 'ten past seven' but 'ten past the hour'. Mercifully, the constant invocation of the blessings of God has not yet taken hold. The whole American value system is being foisted on us – unlimited consumption with Oscars and celebrity status for the winners

and more goals for the losers. Our exchange rate, our economy, our trade, are dominated by Wall Street and Alan Greenspan. The American powerhouse rolls on and the economy of the State of California is already greater than that of France.

And when they have finished soaking up whatever they want to satisfy their hunger for more and rendered our planet virtually uninhabitable, after militarising space they will focus on the next item on their agenda, the colonisation of Mars. Of course it will all be carried out with laid-back Southern charm and 'good old boy' manners but the bottom line is they intend 'to do what they have to do'.

But while some may be seeking answers to the technical questions there are others who claim to have the solutions. And even if they know perfectly well they don't it will suit them very well to claim they do. For they are the only certain beneficiaries, the arms merchants booking appointments right now with their old friends (and some former business associates) at the Pentagon to obtain appropriations for their high-tech gadgetry.

"A man needs to know his limitations," said Clint Eastwood, and so does the United States, says, surprisingly, Thomas L. Friedman.¹

President Eisenhower some years ago warned of the danger of the military-industrial complex and it is well to remember Lord Acton's famous

dictum, 'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. No nation can be entrusted with unlimited power and that is exactly what the United States wants.

There is so much that is admirable about America but there must be room for other seats at the banquet of life. Individual self-interest – the dynamo which has put America on top – is fine, but it comes with international obligations.

Since 11 September it has become common to denounce critics of America as guilty of 'relative morality' who are somehow defending terrorism. The bombing of the World Trade Centre was inexcusable but it would also be inexcusable if America brushed it off as merely the madness of 'evil people who envy our freedom'. The present administration's increasing determination to 'go it alone' is not tenable. America's role in the Middle East and the appalling poverty in the undeveloped world are issues that will not go away, while 11 September perfectly demonstrates the futility of Missile Defence, and the policy of 'Fortress America'.

ENDNOTE

1. Thomas L. Friedman, "... the message is ... we don't believe in rules, we believe in power – and we've got it and you don't." in 'America the chief rogue state', *The Age*, 7 August 2001.

Bruce Anderson is a 1947 Honours Graduate from Melbourne University School of Political Science.

Ruling Class Ruling Culture

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2002 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Ruling Class Ruling Culture* by Bob Connell. Along with *Class Structure in Australian History* written with Terry Irving, Connell's 1977 publication marks a high point in the analysis of class relations in Australia. Given the present conditions of Australian society, where class continues to structure much social interaction while the consciousness of class is perhaps in decline, the time seems apposite for a substantial revisiting of the conceptualisations and operations of the Australian ruling class and its culture.

Connell will present his key-note address as part of the *overland* lecture series on 19 July 2002, and update his study to look at the ruling class in and around Australia over the past quarter of a century.

The conference offers a chance to bring into dialogue the wide range of social and historical research currently drawing on the concept of the ruling class.

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Broken Circles

Gillian Dempsey

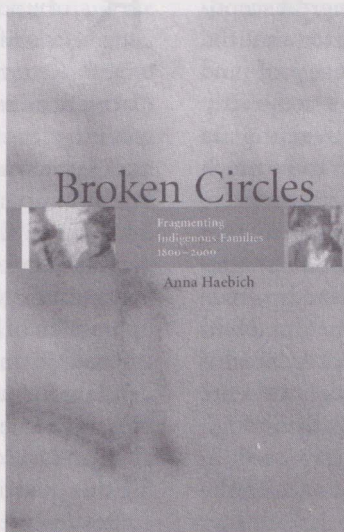
Anna Haebich: *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800–2000* (FACP, \$35).

BROKEN CIRCLES is the result of years of thorough research on the 'stolen generation'. It brings together for the first time the written and oral history records concerning two hundred years of government policy on, and treatment of, Aboriginal families. The book draws attention to the long history of the deployment of state power to separate children, particularly indigenous children, from their parents. *Broken Circles* takes the reader inside the institutions and mission homes where children were housed and explores their brutalising effects. It tells stories of lives cut tragically short and families devastated by high-minded, 'civilised' programs of assimilation. However it is not only a story of Aboriginal victimisation. Haebich carefully documents how Aboriginal parents resisted programs for the removal of 'mixed race' children and their political campaigns in the 1970s to regain control over their children.

Haebich explains the title of her book in the opening sentence:

Overlapping circles of extended family lie at the heart of the lives of most Aboriginal Australians. Networks of family relationships determine day-to-day activities and shape the course of destinies.

However, as Haebich powerfully and systematically illustrates, layers of administrative, political and ju-



ridical interventions have since colonisation, targeted Aboriginal familial systems. Rather than a single stolen generation there were many – an endless cycle of family fragmentation, repeated over the two hundred years of white settlement.

The book's great virtues are that it explores root causes, and offers a dispassionate appraisal of the facts of Aboriginal child removal and its contemporary relevance. As philosopher Raymond Gaita reminds us, a dispassionate analysis is not one uninformed by feeling, but one that is undistorted by it. There has been a great need

for a history such as this.

Broken Circles is an exquisitely constructed synthesis of material. The text begins with the deeply personal story of Louis Johnson, a young Aboriginal man, a member of the Stolen Generations who was murdered in Perth in 1992 by a gang of youths 'because he was black'. Here Haebich presents a moving account of one Aboriginal boy caught up in the minefield of assimilationist policies and practices and the effects of social and systemic racism. The central body of research then focuses on government policies and practices concerning Aboriginal familial relations, firstly concerning nineteenth-century policies with particular reference to Van Diemen's Land, with the bulk of the text concerning twentieth-century interventions. In the concluding chapter Haebich attempts to grasp the mechanics of cultural

memory and why we as a nation have failed to respond with sorrow and with shame to the continually emerging testimonies of the 'Stolen Generations'. The final pages are devoted most fittingly to the story of 'Nan and Pop', Aboriginal grandparents who devoted their lives to keeping their children and grandchildren within their extended family circle.

This book has to date won many awards, including the NSW and Victorian Premiers' Literary Awards and the AIATSIS 2001 Stanner Award because it is the best kind of public history. It engages one of the most significant moral issues faced by Australians at a time when the debate has been clouded by politics and accusation. In recent times Aboriginal people's accounts of their culture and personal history have been treated with great scepticism. Historian Bain Attwood has written that the return of a suppressed Aboriginal past has profound consequences for Australian history by conjunctly overturning its chronology and subverting its foundational narrative. There continues to be much resistance to the idea that Aboriginal narratives have equal validity within a national ideology. Claims that history has been fabricated are often made. Presenting detailed and thorough historical research, which Haebich does, is one of the best techniques for rebutting such claims. Indeed the strength of Haebich's analysis lies in her detailed reading of individual state and territory bureaucracies that dealt with Aboriginal Affairs, and in the process provides a body of knowledge that will offer greater substance to the Stolen Generations debate.

Whilst the sheer length and detail contained within *Broken Circles* could be intimidating, Haebich's skill in communicating extensive historical research with emotional depth, results in an eminently readable and accessible text. In this way, Haebich successfully crosses both academic and non-academic terrain.

"In the late 1990s Australia was haunted by the spectre of the systematic removal of Aboriginal children from their families over decades by our governments . . . Yet the evidence has always been before us", argues Haebich. Louis Johnson's adoptive parents have publicly apologised for his adoption, saying, "We thought we were doing a good thing. We didn't know Louis was taken from his family. The Aboriginal Affairs Department (in the Northern Territory) told us we were saving this boy". White society as a whole, and not just the government, must similarly accept responsibility for the deliberate frag-

mentation of Aboriginal families perpetrated in the name of the common good.

Gillian Dempsey is a social researcher and writer.

Relieving Settler Anxiety

Julie Evans

Peter Read: *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (CUP, \$29.95).

READING THIS BOOK precipitates a kaleidoscope of emotions as the reader comes to terms with its shifting messages. In this companion volume to *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*, Read resumes his quest to understand attachment to place but this time explores the question of how settlers negotiate a sense of belonging in a society built upon the dispossession of its Indigenous inhabitants. Given the critical importance of Read's personal and scholarly contributions over several years in bringing knowledge of past and continuing oppression of Indigenous peoples before the broader community in Australia, few people have better credentials for undertaking such a task. Read's book presents some incisive commentaries on settler anxieties (and, in some cases, settler certainties) surrounding this question.

Read writes fervently about his own search for belonging, describing his project as an attempt to "abandon the safe boundaries" of a potentially paralyzing self-doubt. In the first chapter he explains how the lands and waters around Cowan Creek and the lower Hawkesbury have become for him "breath-taking country of deepest personal and family memory" that continues to shape and enrich his life. Yet his capacity to belong to that country is constantly thwarted by his awareness of the original dispossession and his intimate knowledge of Australia's "truly terrible past". Read wants to belong here in his own way, "respecting Aboriginality, [but] neither appropriating it nor being absorbed by it" as others have sought to do. His chance meeting with Gaimariagal man Dennis Foley begins to indicate a way out of this impasse as Read discovers not only that he and Foley know and love the same country but that Gaimariagal attachments to their land and

culture had not ended with the original dispossession. This chapter and the last, where Foley and Read jointly go in search of their "proper country" and their "separate griefs", are the most integrated in the collection. Read's journey becomes a personal quest for "a shared and requited future" through his and Foley's joint love of the same land and their mutual awareness of history.

The strengths of this engagement are clearly evident but there are lingering reservations about the work as a whole. In the intervening chapters, Read discusses how attachments to place in post-invasion Australia have been expressed in certain creative genres (poetry, country and folk music), while particular individuals loosely drawn from non-Indigenous youth, men, women and professional historians are asked to reflect on how they negotiate belonging. But the ethical, political and historical grounding of Read's own search does not – and cannot – sustain this broader narrative, which he offers as indicating how settlers more generally ("We of the new millennium" – many of them Read's friends) have come to understand feeling at home here. These chapters offer important insights into how some settlers have experienced different ways of knowing the land through their close and continuing associations with Aboriginal people. Many of the observations reported in these middle chapters, however, particularly in 'Men's Business' and 'Women's Business', have little resonance with the broader question Read sets out to explore.

The focus instead becomes settlers' relationships with the land. Consequently, the book's political framework is easily subsumed in the attempt to articulate a 'non-Aboriginal' relationship with the land that is seen as analogous to that of Aboriginal people. As we know from the popularity of this discursive strategy with conservative forces in Australia, invoking a love of the land to legitimate a de-politicised sense of belonging neutralises the difference between settlers and Indigenous peoples. Artist Mandy Martin, for example, who "knows Aboriginality" and lives on Wapweelah station in north-western NSW, knows the land "intimately" and "cares for it deeply". Its "Aboriginal meaning" is not essential to her own sense of belonging. Martin observes: "One of the most crucial problems presently bothering second settlers in Australia [she means anyone non-Aboriginal]¹ is that same moral and spiritual connection with landscape."

The lack of comprehensive city-based settler com-

mentary further emphasises that this conversation about belonging is mainly, and ironically, confined to those who can draw upon or establish an intimate and continuing relationship with a loved and named specific rural locale ('country'). Where city views are sought out, the focus shifts from understanding belonging through a deep attachment to the land to understanding belonging through a similarly problematic undifferentiated notion of multicultural equality. Manik Datar, Indian-born but living in Australia, observes, for example, that "Aboriginals can know more about the land, they add the richness and complexity of their culture; but no... they have no deeper insights unless learned in the law and lore". Datar believes in land rights for the Indigenous but "is worried by ultimately privileging any group on the basis of ethnicity".

Even apart from these conceptual concerns, it is difficult to see how some of these highly idiosyncratic voices are meant to relate to the collective 'we' that Read is concerned to construct as being ready to embrace a new sense of belonging in settler Australia. It is unclear, for example, how the question of whether "Aboriginal life-forces" can help Bill Insch's "solitary journey" in Yuin country through the "dilemmas of masculinity in the natural world" or of how Chas Read's commitment to Hindu principles help him "get in touch with [his] psychic level" in the Deua valley can possibly strike a chord with the settler population more generally.

In the end, we are left with the uneasy feeling that was there from the beginning – beyond respecting Read's own informed search for belonging, in Australia of 2001 any general settler musing on this issue remains discomfortingly premature and introspective. The question Read poses to "non-Aboriginal Australia" more broadly draws forth little to convince us that the answer to relieving settler anxiety lies in anything other than unreservedly redressing injustices and continuing to expose and challenge misrepresentations and prejudices – much as Read's other work has more than amply done.

ENDNOTE

1. Read's interpolation.

Julie Evans is an ARC Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of History at the University of Melbourne.



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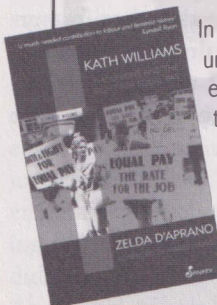


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Federation and a (White) Sentimental Nation

Patricia Grimshaw

John Hirst: *The Sentimental Nation: The Making of the Australian Commonwealth* (OUP, \$34.95).

IN *THE SENTIMENTAL NATION* John Hirst sets out to provide an accessible, detailed and comprehensive account of a watershed in Australian history, the federation of the colonies in 1901. Published with support from the National Council for the Centenary of Federation, and dedicated "To the 422,788 Yes voters who have no other memorial", Hirst aims to reverse the prevailing ignorance about federation, the significance of which he perceives as popularly undervalued as well as inadequately examined by scholars. He has covered a formidable range of relevant materials in his effort to re-tell the federation story in ways that might inspire in readers something of his own enthusiasm for the events and structures of this political transition. If, in the run-up in the 1990s to the commemoration of federation, it became apparent that most Australians were dimly, if at all, aware that Australia had a constitution, were ignorant of what it contained or where to find a copy, Hirst's book goes some considerable way to make good this knowledge gap.

Part of the attractiveness of the book lies in the fact that John Hirst does not simply relate deeds and events as innocent facts but engages in a conversation with his readers who therefore share with the writer the problematic nature of sources, the puzzles and choices involved in interpretation, and the shifting interests of citizens of Australia with whom he communicates in 2001, and the mentality of citizens of 1901. Hirst therefore does not disguise his immense respect for the politicians whose astute strategies through the 1890s turned federation from what at the outset appeared a distant possibility into a practical reality. In his account of federation he foregrounds the significance of a developing colonial identity for understanding in the final agreement of the disparate colonies to accept a central overarching authority, however circumscribed in power the federal government might be. The Commonwealth of Australia, Hirst argues, was created not simply out of shared economic interests, or the need to combine for stronger defence, or the wish to con-

trol immigration. These elements could have been – and were already being – met by alternative, discrete means. A sense of common identity as Australians, not just Victorians or Queenslanders or New South Welshmen, accounts for the majority's expressed wish for a shared political authority.

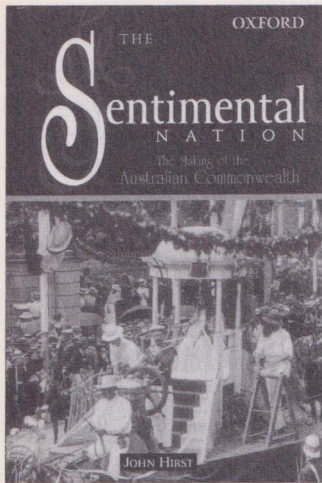
Hirst tracks the first suggestion that the colonies should unite to the British government itself. The British thought it useful for the same reasons that led them to engineer Canadian confederation in 1867: federation would prevent the annoying intercolonial rivalries that the British Colonial Office was forced to adjudicate. Colonial politicians were in the early 1890s remarkably lacking in interest in federating as a whole. Hirst traces in a clarifying fashion the divisions apart from massive distances that impeded unity, including free trade versus protection, free labour versus indentured labour and the city of the 'convict stain' versus the city of churches.

Hirst is at his most interesting when he presents his nuanced studies of the initiatives, interactions and personal propensities of the key figures in federation, Sir Henry Parkes, Samuel Griffith, Edmund Barton and Alfred Deakin prime among them as they interacted with each other and within the ranks of colonial politics. These men are often wooden characters in our written histories, despite previous historians' best efforts. With Hirst's gaze upon them, they appear far from 'dull but worthy'; they emerge as a fascinatingly complex and diverse bunch, though not, alas, heroic. Hirst portrays with nice judgement their ambiguous stances on varying competing attachments for their loyalties and affections. In particular he displays the paradoxes of these pro-federation politicians with their urge for manly independence from the control of the Colonial Office, their resentment of patronising British attitudes towards 'colonials' jostling with their often equally strong piety towards Crown and empire. They cherished at the same time pragmatic appreciation of the British navy and British markets. For anyone interested in constitutions comparatively, the detail of the choices taken or excluded in the writing of the constitution are fascinating when read against the grain of the originators' flawed personal attributes and haphazard legal talents.

Instructive and insightful as all this is, Hirst's treatment of federation in *The Sentimental Nation* poses wider concerns about the writing of Australian history in the twenty-first century that those of us in the field avoid to the detriment of our discipline. I refer

in particular to the initiatives on gender and racial issues that a minority of practitioners have forcefully promoted in the past two decades, to which Hirst pays scant attention. The key players extend quite appropriately far beyond 'founding fathers' to many more men who had a stake in colonial unity, including poets, journalists, writers of the decade of the nineties. This investigation would have been much strengthened if Hirst had seen the relevance for his narrative of the special ways middle-class women contributed to this developing sense of national identity through their writing, public speaking, reform associations and finally as political lobbyists. Suffragists and other public activists had much to say on their anticipated profile of a reformed society of the new nation that was influential among their sex, the churches and certain male politicians. Attention to white women's cultural expectations, their networks and their exclusions/inclusions would also have rendered the granting to women in 1902 of political rights in the Commonwealth considerably more illuminating of the national story.

Hirst's narrative, also, is less compelling than it might have been if it had been informed more fully by analysis of contemporary racialised thought and practices. The overwhelming 'sentiment' of the 'sentimental nation' rested above all on the settlers' compulsion to assert white supremacy over the continent they had so recently and unceremoniously taken. The very material that Hirst quotes shows that the "great Australian silence" had well and truly begun by the turn of the century as white men exerted every literary, legal and political muscle to proclaim Australia a white man's land for people "of one blood". That the land was appropriated through murder, rape and the spread of diseases in recent decades, that Aboriginal human rights were at that very moment denied and their civil liberties increasingly curtailed by laws, were facts barely mentioned by the main players in federation, but might well attract extended treatment from an historian one hundred years later. The politicians' treatment of Aborigines in the making of the Constitution and in the subsequent Act of 1902 that settled the question of the federal franchise, were both a culmination of decades of negative attitudes towards indigenous peoples and at the same time a fateful entrenchment of them. Hirst writes more openly on the background to the legislation that restricted non-white migrants, yet does not feel it appropriate to explicitly disapprove. "It is common now to denounce the White Australia policy as rac-



ist and nothing more," he writes. "It was certainly racist, but it also embodied the hopes for Australia as a better world." But racists across a century have called forth social harmony and standards of living to justify excluding or marginalising the people they designated 'inferior'.

In *The Sentimental Nation* Hirst writes evocatively of white Australians

as expatriate British colonials and descendants of colonists. Aspects of their cultural expectations and ambitions he communicates very well. When the question arises of white Australians as themselves colonisers, drawn together by a desire to deny their guilt for their devastating treatment of indigenous peoples and to exclude all but those of European descent from this newly appropriated land, his study unfortunately leaves crucial questions unexamined. Many of us in Australian history, this reviewer included, need to look critically at unexamined assumptions and practices.

Patricia Grimshaw is the Max Crawford Professor and Head of the History Department at the University of Melbourne. She has published widely in the area of Pacific and Australian history and most recently co-edited Women's Rights and Human Rights: International Historical Perspectives.

Civilizing the Past

Cameron Logan

Graeme Davison: *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* (Allen & Unwin, \$32.89).

THE VALUES THAT UNDERLIE Graeme Davison's vision of a healthy public culture and a healthy field of historical debate are civic ones. As an historian of the city, Davison's ideal model of historical scholarship and debate is one that reflects what he considers to be the proper functioning of the city and of civic culture more broadly. He perceives both the problem of how the past is used and

the nature of civic life as problems of balance. The position that emerges from the twenty-five year arc of Davison's research and writing is one that sees cities as being adversely affected by the excessive influence of one or other institution, group, or shared interest. For example, when the power of big business, or of governments, to determine the kinds of activity appropriate in a city is not checked by other interests the balance that guarantees the maintenance of civility is lost. Davison's 'civility' refers to the presence of a public urban domain that is open and relatively free of the threat of violence.

At the beginning of *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* Davison suggests that an analogous process is at work in the field of history, the implication perhaps being that historical representation and debate is to the past what public culture is to society in general. He argues that if a single way of using the past gains too strong an ascendancy an unhealthy imbalance in historical discourse is likely to ensue. Using Nietzsche's distinction between the monumental, the antiquarian and the critical modes of historical representation, Davison argues that the best historians weave the three together, thus avoiding the pitfalls that beset each when they are used in anything like an unadulterated form. The reader not familiar with Davison's work might assume that this is merely a basic opening to an extended engagement with Nietzsche's writing on history, especially *The Use and Abuse of History*, the book from which his title is derived. This reader will be very disappointed. Direct references to Nietzsche are few, the index recognising just five, and the engagement with his ideas hardly goes beyond an outline and basic explanation of the division between monumental, antiquarian and critical history.

Chapter one, where Davison introduces his discussion of Nietzsche, was written for this book. Much of the rest of the book, however, is composed of revised versions of previously published material. The result is that Davison's failure to elaborate more fully on the questions he introduces in chapter one is a problem that recurs in successive chapters. Interesting subjects for comparative historical analysis, such as 'Hero Worship' and the idea of 'The Great Voyage', to which he devotes a chapter each, are introduced and problematised in a cursory manner before being passed over for another topic. Just as he seems to be getting his teeth into a serious problem about the production of historical knowledge, or the various locations and obfuscations of such knowledge in

architectural heritage, the piece ends and a new subject is introduced with another set of questions and problems. While these are often closely related, the weakness of Davison's book is that he does little to illuminate those connections by way of analysis.

The problem is not only one of format. In fact the format of the book, which precludes lengthier consideration of questions as to the nature of historical knowledge, its production, reception and distribution, is itself the result of Davison's approach to understanding the uses of history. Davison often arrives at a point, both in this book and elsewhere in his work, where the problem of circularity, for example, becomes unavoidable. It is a question that arises again and again when considering the problems associated with heritage and its role in initiating and organising the contact people have with the past in their everyday lives. But rather than address this problem as being hermeneutical in character, where foundational questions and the historical phenomena they inform become indiscernible, Davison merely asserts the difficulty of the historian's task and the necessity of vigilantly seeking after truth. He eschews any reflexive theorisation of his work, maintaining instead a commitment to normativity or plain language in his writing, and so maintaining a permeability between his profile as public historian and intellectual, and the more specialised role of academic historian.

Commonly this results in entertaining and allusive essays that propose a set of problems for the field of public history, a field that he has given considerable time to establishing and promoting in Australia. However, it begs the question as to why he has chosen to publish a book that introduces itself as one which probes more thoroughly the nature of historical production, and the circulation of historical meaning. By its nature this is a task that demands theoretical reflection. Davison's refusal to adopt or develop any critical or theoretical framework, perhaps for fear of attracting a label (postmodernist, post-structuralist, Marxist, positivist), actually constrains his ability to communicate ideas about his subject. This set of essays touches upon many of the discursive lines that run through historical production in Australia, but in the end fails to propose any way in which these might be connected, or to provide any demonstration of the ways in which they continually resist co-ordination. Nowhere is this failure more evident than in his conclusion, where he commits himself to being against relativism and for a balanced,

'cultured' approach. His refusal to engage explicitly with hermeneutical questions leaves him with an understanding of his role as investigating subject that is neither Dilthey's nor Gadamer's. "But even if we can never completely escape our own prejudices," he says, "something is gained in the conscientious attempt to overcome them." He puts a bit each way on historicity and ontology. This sounds like the common sense thing to do, but for a book that carries this title, and introduces the questions that it does at the beginning, it is obviously insufficient.

Cameron Logan has completed an MA concerned with the intersection of architectural preservation, tourism and narrative history.

Australia, Nationalism and Federation: Three New Viewpoints

Lyndon Megarrity

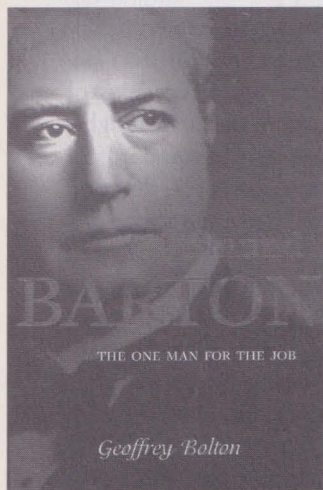
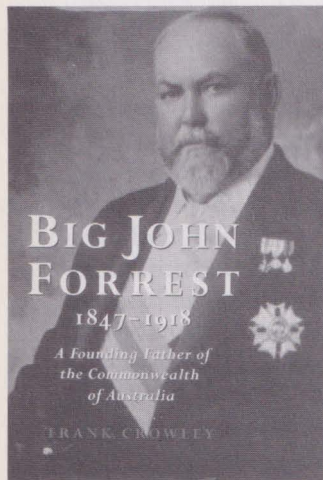
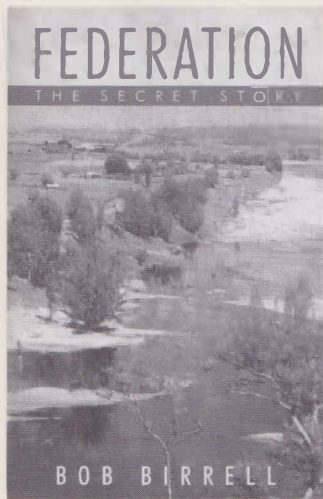
Geoffrey Bolton: *Edmund Barton* (Allen & Unwin, \$39.95).

Frank Crowley: *Big John Forrest 1847-1918: A Founding Father of the Commonwealth* (UWA Press, \$49.50).

Bob Birrell: *Federation: The Secret Story* (Duffy & Snellgrove, \$19.95).

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY is often treated with contempt by public intellectuals. All too frequently, a sensationalist, simplistic vision of the past is conveyed, with commentators thoughtlessly judging historical events by the standards of today. In contrast, three recent books on Federation by Bolton, Crowley and Birrell present a more balanced, contextualised view of Australia's past that will hopefully serve to stimulate valuable discussion.

Bolton's biography of Australia's first Prime Minister shows that the actions of Barton were crucial to the success of Federation. Despite being a leading Opposition protectionist, Barton joined forces with Free Trade NSW Premier Sir Henry Parkes to work for Federation: this action ensured that the 1890s Federal movement became bipartisan. Even more importantly, the democratic nature of Federation was largely thanks to Barton, who played a major role in popularising the notion that the Commonwealth must be created via an expression of support by Australia's electors. Later, Bolton demonstrates that



through his pragmatism, commitment and financial self-sacrifice, Barton was able to secure a Federal constitution that gained the support of all six colonies and the Imperial Government.

Edmund Barton contains many of the qualities which Bolton has brought to his historical writing over the years. He has an eye for amusing anecdotes that illustrate aspects of his subject's personality (it is somehow pleasing to learn that Barton was fond of puns!); he incorporates women and family concerns into his narrative with sensitivity and skill; and he is willing to undertake the unpleasant but necessary task of destroying the cosy political myths that we have come to accept as fact (see, for example, Bolton's sceptical treatment of Parkes pp.87-88).

Arguably, Bolton's greatest achievement is to present a realistic portrayal of the limits and possibilities of Australian nationalism during the 1900s. For instance, Bolton demonstrates that Prime Minister Barton's unwillingness to create an Australian Navy was firmly based on common sense. The early Commonwealth was cash-strapped, especially since

perial Admiralty to "provide vessels for training 700 men and 25 officers as a branch of the Royal Naval Reserve".

There are a number of issues that Bolton could have expanded upon in greater depth. For example, although he acknowledges that Barton was the "architect of the White Australia Policy", the lengthy debates on the legislation which the Barton government introduced to restrict immigration are not given very much space. The vexed problem of State-Commonwealth relations during Barton's administration could also have been given more weight. The first Premiers' conference demonstrated that Barton was capable of enormous arrogance, rejecting the Premiers' suggestions out of hand, as "It was not their [the Premiers'] business to comment on federal affairs, any more than it was the Commonwealth government's business to interfere with State matters." Barton's attitudes towards the State Premiers show him to be a more territorial and power-driven politician than Bolton seems prepared to admit. These criticisms aside, Bolton's *Edmund Barton* is a work of immense scholarship and readability, immaculately researched and well presented.

Crowley's *Big John Forrest* is also worth seeking out. Forrest rose from humble origins to become Premier of Western Australia (1890-1901). His decade-long reign was marked by projects which emphasised government intervention in the private sector; Forrest was also responsive to the popular mood for socially progressive legislation (such as votes for women). Crowley forcefully argues that despite strong opposition from his own political supporters and many powerful members of West Australian society, Forrest was a 'true believer' in Federation, and that it was largely due to his willingness to support the federal idea that WA entered the Commonwealth. At the same time, Forrest fought hard to get a good deal for his State, gaining a concession that allowed WA to collect interstate customs duties (on a sliding scale) for the first five years of Federation. Forrest subsequently became an important figure in Commonwealth politics for close to two decades.

Crowley is an obvious admirer of Forrest, but he is not uncritical either. Forrest's egotism, bad temper and lapses in political judgement are all dealt with thoroughly. Further, the author is keen to give credit where credit is due, noting that despite Forrest's close association with certain ideas (such as the SA-WA transcontinental railway), other individuals and groups were just as influential in making them a reality.

it was committed to returning three-quarters of customs and excise revenue to the States during the first ten years of Federation. Yet as Bolton points out, the Prime Minister also took a nationalistic step towards a local defence strategy by bargaining with the Im-

Big John Forrest is undoubtedly a good read. However, the lack of an introduction and conclusion serves to downplay Forrest's historical role. Furthermore, the chronological chapter format that the author employs sometimes obscures the points he is trying to make. For the period between 1890 and 1900, for example, Crowley darts back and forth between a bewildering array of subjects: bold development policies, constitutional and social reforms, the mining industry, local political wranglings, Aborigines, Federation, Forrest's personality and habits, etc. A thematic chapter structure would have highlighted Forrest's significance as a politician more powerfully.

Of the three books under review, Birrell's *Federation: The Secret Story* is the most ideological in nature. Contrary to the beliefs of many leftist intellectuals, Birrell contends that Federation cannot be dismissed as a petty "bargain with Britain to bolster Australia's role within the Empire." Instead, Birrell argues, Federation should be viewed as a great feat of positive nationalism executed by committed nationalists. The author is at pains to highlight the groundbreaking legislation of the early Commonwealth which reflected a nationalism based on egalitarianism and the destruction of social divisions. While Birrell acknowledges the shameful racism of the period, he also rightly asserts that this alone should not stop us from celebrating what is positive about Federation. The author stresses such Federal achievements as the growth in manufacturing sparked by national tariffs, as well as the improved working conditions influenced by decisions given by the Commonwealth Arbitration Court.

On the whole, Birrell's argument is convincing, but there are a number of problems with his research. In the first place, for a book on nationalism, it is extraordinarily parochial! The author's obsessive focus on Melbourne as the political heartland of Federation encourages a distorted view of Australian history. While Victoria is extremely important to the Federal story, Birrell's work would have been more effective (and accurate) if he had been willing to concede that all of the colonies had a significant role to play in shaping the national vision and political agenda of the new Commonwealth.

Birrell's use of terms is also troubling. John Forrest's record of liberal government intervention in economic and social matters makes Birrell's description of the WA Premier as 'conservative' seem rather unfair. Similarly, it is unfortunate that the term 'federalist' is used only for those politicians who agree

with Birrell's view of the Commonwealth as a platform for liberal reforms; the 'States rights' instincts of the smaller colonies are dismissed as the concerns of narrow-minded provincialists. The author has precious little empathy with or understanding of the justifiable fears which many colonial politicians had of a Commonwealth likely to be dominated by Melbourne and Sydney. Despite these flaws, Birrell's *Federation* is a lively and thought-provoking account of the egalitarian nature of early Australian nationalism.

It is a tribute to the writing skills of Birrell, Bolton and Crowley that these three books make the reader nostalgic for a time when national ideals mattered in the political arena – a sharp contrast to the present day, in which Commonwealth politicians frequently come across as the bland, unexciting managers of Global Capitalism.

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Warby Pulped

Guy Rundle

Michael Warby: *Ellis Unpulped* (Duffy & Snellgrove, \$19.95).

WHEN DID I FIRST read Bob Ellis? It must have been in the *National Times* in the eighties, the newspaper you could just slide into, with Patrick Cook, David Marr, Marian Wilkinson and a host of others. Ellis was, briefly, writing a column called *Ellis at the Movies*, before he was fired as – he never ceases to tell us – he is always fired, for writing one eulogy too sentimentally too many, or sleeping with the wrong person or eating his vanilla thickshakes in the office with a plastic spoon or whatever. Anyway he was reviewing, if memory serves, the wry English postwar fantasy *Ptang Yang Kipperbang* and a meditation on exile by a famous Pole. *Ptang Yang Kipperbang* he said was a "something something something evocation of a such and such caught between something and something. *Success is the Best Revenge*, on the other hand, is a wank." If I can no longer remember the exact words I can remember the attitude and the style – that a quotidian story told with wit, heart and

unassuming craft was a stronger proposition than a last-days-of-the-art-movie package. The columns were a model of how to write a stand-alone review – little essays that were as much about film itself as whatever particular flick he was discoursing over.

At the time Ellis was in the public prints principally for being the screenwriter of *Man of Flowers*, one of Paul Cox's best and most entertaining films. His more chaotic seventies persona was unknown to me, and it would be another few years before his nineties remix of it would emerge. He was, for a brief interregnum, less visible than his writings.

Yet even then he was beginning to build a mythology, although at first it seemed like a further investigation of the mysteries of life. The essays collected in *Letters to the Future* – such as the one about revisiting Sydney University with his young son, and 'On Turning Forty' – had the appearance of a raw emotional honesty, a determination to look life and time full in the face and work out what it was all about. Late adolescence is the best time to read those essays – what was most impressive at the time has more than a hint of the meretricious now. Ellis evoked Sydney University at a time when the first of the baby boomers were coming through and just about anyone – anyone who had a still-rare university education that is – could hang out their shingle as whatever they wanted to be. Lit in the golden hue of retrospect, Ellis's essays fully succeeded in their aim of making you feel like you'd missed a great party, a time of the gods. You wished you'd been there and you got the impression that the author wished he had been too – what was most poignant in Ellis's writing was the sense of failure, of missed opportunity. It hit the same note in non-fiction as American writers like Bellow managed to get in novels – the sense that somewhere it had all gone terribly wrong, but that he had survived to write about it. Ellis was tapping into an Australian variant of this tradition – the artist led astray not by the bitch-goddesses of success and corruption, but of a sheer lack of context.

The Australian tragedy – and Ellis and Boddy had touched on it in *King O'Malley*, as McAuley and Stewart had touched upon it in the 'Ern Malley' series, as Slessor and others had made it visible by simply stopping writing – was that genius existed without context and expended its energy into a vacuum. Manning Clark's invocation of Dostoyevsky's desire to be there "when we find out what it was all for" was all the more keenly felt down under, because there didn't

seem to be any possible answer to it, except to go back into the ground of life – to lose oneself in the quotidian domestic.

This performance of futility, loss and hope informs everything Ellis has written from the scripts to the articles to the vignettes for Radio National, is responsible for the best and worst of his style and I mention it because you won't find any hint in Michael Warby's brief biographical monograph that he has the slightest interest in reflecting on who Bob Ellis is or what he means beyond the smoke-and-mirror images of his media performances. Warby trawls over all the old news clippings – from the paternity suit through the Abbott and Costello case right back to 1970s encounters with the David Williamsons. Warby says that this monograph is an attempt to look at the way in which celebrity reputations are made in contemporary Australia, and that of Ellis's in particular. But it's nothing of that sort either. There's no sustained analysis of how the Australian media works, of how the particular currents of power flow, of what it all adds up to. All there is is a roll-call of the adventures of Ellis with the occasional comment that such-and-such a piece or script was "well-written". Throughout there is a virtually continuous sniping at much of what Ellis is taken to represent – the louche bohemian bourgeois-left state-subsidised boomer chatterati, the alien and exotic breed who have mysteriously taken total control of the means of communication and frustrated the attempts of average Australians and their representatives (and guess whose hand is up here) to have their say.

The principal object of Warby's attack is Ellis's late-blooming interest in economics, and the success he had with *First Abolish The Customer*, his tract against economic rationalism. Warby does not deny Ellis's rhetorical skills. On the contrary, it is the success that the book had in expressing what many felt about the Alice world of competition policy and other cults that makes the book Warby's prime target. Most of this section amounts to an actual argument about economic rationalism which is too truncated and haphazard to be of any real intellectual interest – it's merely a restatement of the standard IPA position, and curiously mismatched. Warby says, rightly enough, that an argument about economics could hardly be had on the terrain of Ellis's book, which mixes the plausible and the emotional in equal measure, and is far from the greatest challenge that free-market economics faces. He then proceeds to have the argument in a manner that ranges

from the reasonable to the *ad hominem* (Ellis sometimes gets paid by grants or film subsidies, so he's speaking from self-interest) to the ludicrous (Warby once asked a senior public servant if he had met an economic rationalist public servant, and he said he hadn't, so Michael Pusey's research on the changing ideology of the Federal public service is thereby discredited). At times he can't help himself and falls into the standard-issue resentment-filled Quad-ranting:

... the preeners and posturers of our present-day education system are creating a generation of deeply cynical students who repeat attitudes they do not believe (unless they are future teachers, journalists or academics) back to their teachers in order to get their certificating marks so they can escape from the propagandist penitentiaries of our public schools and humanities departments and get on with their lives . . .

You get the picture. Most of the book isn't like that, but enough of it is to make it an unengaging read for opponents and sympathisers alike. At other times the author engages in outright barracking:

[quoting Ellis] "even unmade films make money and unmade films pay mortgages and that's the pity of it". Particularly for the taxpayer.

And on and on like someone heckling at the wrestling "that Andre the Giant isn't even trying". Yeah we know Mike we know.

That the fragmented approach is an indication that Warby hasn't bothered to come to grips with Ellis beyond his clippings is confirmed by the key error that Warby made in the book's first, pulped, edition – believing that Ellis tried to persuade someone to procure an abortion.

For anyone who had even a passing acquaintance with Ellis's dishevelled Lawrentian approach to sex, life, men and women this should have set alarm bells ringing. Politically of the left in a matter such as, say, the waterfront dispute, Ellis has firm views about the centrality of family, children, seed and whatnot. Conservatism doesn't really capture it – he's a vitalist (as was Manning Clark and various Lindsays), a paddle-o on the waters of life and you only understand his textual and actual extravagance, wilfulness and narcissistic selfishness when you work this out. He is, as he has oft noted, substantially opposed to abortion as contraception for that reason.

Missing this – because it does not fit the neat picture of Ellis as innercity mouthpiece – shows the book for what we all suspected it to be. It's a political intervention designed to nobble someone whose literary skills allowed them to make a substantial contribution to the process whereby 'economic rationalism' became a term of abuse, and the free-marketeers were put on the rhetorical defensive. The usual 'aw-shucks-I'm-just-a-hardworking-researcher' routine went on when the first, badly researched, edition was released (an extraordinary letter from the publisher to review editors asks us to bear in mind that Warby was going through "difficult personal circumstances" at the time – i.e. the reversals in his own life made it tough for him to go the hack on the problems in someone else's. Chuzpah excelsior). Given that the other book in the series so far released – Riemer's *Hughes* – is a serious and cogent study it's a pity all the more that something better than this couldn't be come up with. Ellis's final importance in Australian literature is yet to be determined, but I suspect he gives it a Groucho Marxian fluidity, an ability to hit the high and low registers almost simultaneously (as do, in their very different ways, Hughes and Greer). That accounts not only for his enduring popularity but also for the fact that his words reverberate in the head long after the fish have been wrapped and the curtains have come down.

Guy Rundle is one of the editors of arena magazine.

Sticking Your Neck Out

Phil Doyle

Guy Rundle: The Opportunist: John Howard and the Triumph of Reaction (Black Inc, \$9.95).

THIS IS A VERY important essay, presented as it is in the context of the *Tampa* refugees, the 11 September business and the improved electoral fortunes of the Federal coalition that apparently result. As I dialled and redialled the overloaded Salvation Army switchboard in an attempt to organise a food parcel for next week it was reassuring to see Australia examined thus.

While this essay purports to examine the role played by what Rundle calls John Howard's 'dreaming' this is more than just a 'what makes the man

tick' expose. Our prime minister's naked ambition has been painfully obvious for a generation. What have been less marked are the contradiction between his social conservatism and his economic liberalism – with this in the open it becomes an essay about the consequences for Australian society generally.

In castigating Howard's mindless mantra of unity – a homogenous Anglo-Celtic, nuclear family unity – Rundle exposes the disunity of the Australian reality. He highlights the point that, despite the rhetoric, "John Howard and his government have been the most willing to ramrod division on both the cultural and the political front".

This essay carefully identifies alienation, the postmodern conditions: "boredom, depression, addiction, psychosomatic diseases, social exclusion . . . are to society what black lung is to coal miners". This is effectively done in his discussion on the family, a central tenet of Howard's world view. The dissection of the Federal government's anti-drug campaign is a highlight. As is the elucidation of how youth suicide becomes symptomatic of a broader social malaise: "a sign that something is wrong at the heart of our culture".

A nostalgic sensitivity pervades this essay, in its longing for "the most basic conditions of a pluralistic society". It seems like a rallying call for something most of us never had. Our criminal justice system, prisons, Centrelink offices and emergency housing shelters are too full of bitter departures from the mainstream to make 'a pluralistic society' a rallying point. (When it comes to Australian society I'd be inclined to let the bastard burn.)

Rundle defines his idea of conservatism as a respect for the institutions of society, and then presents these institutions – especially our legal system, pluralism, bipartisanship in presenting multiculturalism to "a far from convinced electorate" – as an ideal.

The tone is one of an anguished complacency – the cost is always to the 'other', be it the people in regional Australia, refugees, "the sugar-cane farmer who must try to compete – impossibly – against the world, the steelworker asked to retrain as a super-market storehand, the teenage depressive who is already being written off, and the one with no access to a fully funded education in the first place".

It may ameliorate some of the problems of alienation Rundle alludes to elsewhere if these people were considered a party to the debate and not a subject of it.

The ALP comes in for a much deserved kicking over its legacy under Hawke and Keating. Beazley is

presented as Howard's ineffectual doppelgänger. More surprising is the presentation of Costello and Kennett as some kind of enlightened alternative to the Howard leadership, with their many foibles glossed over. There is even a hypothetical on what form a coalition government may have taken under Costello. How quickly people forget Dollar Sweets. Menzies too is praised by faint damnation, with the history being sound, if selective.

Rundle raises many astute points in this guided tour of Australia's journey into illiberal reaction: The collapse of the liberal tradition in the Party that bore that name; how our prime minister managed to hijack the historical debate; as well as an amusing (well it would be funny if it wasn't so close to home) tour through some of our leader's political adventures – especially a neat dissection of the absurd semiotics of the Howard–Murray constitutional preamble; and there's more.

I don't buy the proposition that Australian closed-mindedness is but a passing phase. Tribalism is a powerful motivation, as any football supporter can tell you. With the post-11 September violence being played out daily in the schoolyards of Australia, and on the people I live with who look vaguely 'un-Australian', we will be living with the problems of difference for quite some time yet.

People like to feel superior. It's the basis of malicious prejudice. Rundle points it out himself when he articulates the appeal of Menzies to the amorphous concept of the 'forgotten people' – it made them feel superior.

Howard appears to understand the prejudices and self-interest of many Australians better than many members of the Australian Left. There are plenty of people out there who care more about their TVs and their VCRs than they do about their fellow human beings.

Democracy has passed from being the right to dissent to being the rule of the majority, with public opinion little better than the mob. In such reactionary times the question is whether to pull your head in, or stick it out and get it knocked off.

Thankfully Guy Rundle has stuck his neck out.

There is an irony in this essay. Despite its closing appeal to put aside "prevarication about old feuds or past histories, for diffidence about elitism, or reservations about the chattering classes or any of that nonsense", it actually does speak to, and for, a certain elite. There are elements of style which can be annoying, as when Guy shows off his library. "The

crystallisation of a ruby will change the course of a river, Borges once wrote, and nowhere has this been demonstrated more clearly than in the two terms to date of John Howard's prime ministership."

It may be more useful if Rundle could get his ideas across in a 250-word letter to the *Herald Sun*.

As I said at the start, this is a very important essay, one that should be read by anyone with half a brain, which will include most opinion leaders in this country at least.

Phil Doyle is a Melbourne writer.

Structured inequality

Simon Marginson

Richard Teese: *Academic Success and Social Power* (MUP, \$32.95).

IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS in the inner Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, only 9 per cent of the boys fail in preparatory maths at VCE, and every second candidate is awarded honours. There are schools where no-one fails at all. But "in a system of relative merit", says Richard Teese, "failure cannot be eliminated, merely exported". In western suburbs high schools, every third girl and 40 per cent of the boys fail preparatory maths. It is the same in every subject in which learning is overhung by social selection. Upper secondary schooling is a vast, bleak, pitiless competition. The winners need losers if they are to bring home the private advantages – income, property, a career, a life – that are promised to them in the competition game.

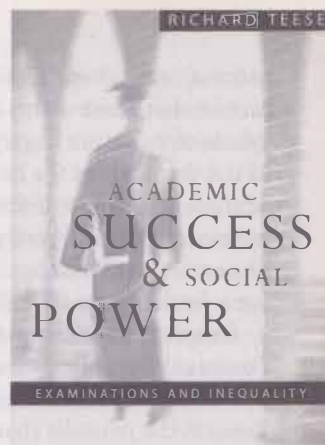
Why in an age of universal education, is social competition taking place on such unbalanced terms, and why are the outcomes of schooling so persistently unequal? Why, after seventy-five years of reforms designed to create equality of educational opportunity, are the same social groups as dominant as ever when the places in medicine and law courses are being handed out? What explains the extraordinary success of the handful of leading private schools? What is their pedagogical secret? Why isn't it imitated more widely? What is it that sustains this magical translation of parental investment into scholastic advantage?

Richard Teese has gone further than before in explaining the dynamics of educational inequality.

Previous explanations, and the reform policies that were derived from those explanations, focused mostly on resource inequalities between schools or between school communities. The 1973 Karmel report, the highpoint of government efforts to create equality of opportunity, believed that a standard resource level in all schools plus compensatory finance for the poorest school communities would enable meritocracy and educational justice. Educational radicals went further, focusing on the role of private schooling in sustaining a segmented system weakening the common government schools and generating unequal outcomes. Some railed against the dominance of schooling by academic requirements. However the sociological groundings of these critiques were rarely clear, and their political implications were risky and incoherent. Little came of them in practice.

But an essential element was missing from most of the social analyses of educational inequality. With a clear, subtle argument, a remorseless logic, and anecdotes that (like those of Janet McCalman's *Journeyings*) will resonate among all who grew up in Melbourne in the last fifty years, Teese supplies the missing element. That is the curriculum and assessment. For Teese the curriculum is not a fixed and neutral framework but a living, breathing, changing set of practices. "Curriculum structure is a translation of social structure," he says.

Academic Success and Social Power has been created by "juxtaposing the intellectual investment in curriculum over the past fifty years with the social patterns of student achievement arising from it". It focuses on curriculum and assessment in three of the subjects which determine the outcomes of secondary education: Mathematics, Chemistry and English. For each subject Teese draws together three kinds of evidence into an interwoven narrative: the annual reports of the examiners; the intermittent changes to curricula amid debates about reform and counter-reform; and the social patterning of success and failure as differentiated by geography and type of school. He sets this evidence in the context of the material and political advantages enjoyed by the leading edu-



cational institutions. This covers a good deal of the picture that Teese wants us to accept, though not the whole of it. We are largely left to infer the translation of the demands of the curriculum into the capacities of students, as few of the empirical data in the book have been drawn directly from the cultural practices of home and classroom. This suggests the potential for a further research program.

Despite this absence *Academic Success and Social Power* exhibits a Bourdieu-like insight into the formative effects of curriculum as a set of cultural demands. Beneath the periodic changes to specific subjects, the curriculum calls up the cultivation of deeper intellectual qualities: qualities indifferent to the circumstances of each student, yet congruent with the home life and school organisation of those most fortunate. Even as the examiners search for the ideal student, so the combined institutional power of the universities and leading schools shapes and reshapes the instruments of educational progression, reproducing that ideal individual student on a selective and collective scale. This process of reproduction is by no means automatic. What Teese calls the system of 'structured inequality' is subject to continuous tensions and strains – expanding numbers, reforms in tertiary education, changes in the labour market, the politics of schooling itself, etc. – and must be actively defended.

Having successfully ridden out the challenge of the early VCE, the universities retained their preferred form of Mathematics and the Physical Sciences: abstract, transparent and rigid; more rigid than the same subjects within the universities themselves. This minimised the potential for pedagogical variation, while it maximised the scope for standardised competition. The requirements of the leading universities determine the curriculum, though they take no responsibility for student learning. Teachers carry sole responsibility for student outcomes, but have little scope to interpret the requirements of the curriculum – despite the fact that the capacity to vary curriculum and assessment is a primary instrument for lifting the learning achievement of disadvantaged students. In opposing school-based assessment, universities are merely defending their own academic freedom: the freedom to determine education in schools and universities without regard to the needs of the majority.

Teese traces carefully how the epistemological structures and cultural contents of the curriculum dovetail with the technical requirements of selection. For example, in Maths:

Of all the subjects in which candidates might choose to be considered alike by virtue of their training, mathematics makes the fullest claim. That it is indifferent to student origins follows from its very nature as a system of logic. Abstract and self-enclosed, its internal integrity – its rules of definition and proof – make it, at least potentially, the most universal and accessible of all disciplines. Yet the philosophy of mathematics – the general and necessarily abstracted form in which its propositions have to be formulated, the economy of its symbolic and notational devices, the deductive rigour that links its theorems and arguments – imposes an intellectual posture and habits of thought that are not easily instilled and, thanks to this, are too readily reduced to routines fit only for exams and short-term learning. The universality of mathematics – the formal character of its operations as an intellectual discipline – contrasts markedly with its particularity as a pedagogical discipline. Difficult to teach widely, mathematics at its higher levels is marked by sharp social contours in participation and achievement.

The more the curriculum can be turned to the ordered differentiation of the school population, the more it can be made accessible to concentrated private investment in success. Elite private schools sustain the curriculum, and the curriculum helps to sustain them:

Segregated schooling – whether institutional or geographic, whether private, Catholic or public – acts as a relay for transmitting and amplifying cultural capital, and thus for increasing the productivity of teaching and the instructional effort . . . The more discriminating the curriculum, the more this response is encouraged, so that the curriculum philosophy of seeking the brightest students ends up by discovering the richest.

Yet when pressed these same schools made the most effective use of school-based assessment, too. Girls from high-status families did twice as well as girls from low-status families in external examinations, but found themselves doing five times as well according to the marks issued by their own teachers. Amid this zero-sum game, how can we move forward? Teese argues that the overriding objective must be to lift the average level of educational achievement and reduce the incidence of failure. "A collective response

on behalf of the most disadvantaged groups is needed to match the corporate power exercised by the socially most advantaged families.” He calls for targeted resources, pedagogical flexibility and a move away from selection by score, the single secondary competition and the vertical authority of universities, opening the way for positive-sumness. He wants the vocational training system to be built into “a mass, viable alternative to universities”, with closer teaching than is provided in undergraduate university courses. The lesson of the past is that reforms to school curricula cannot increase social equality without concurrent and complementary changes in the structures of tertiary education.

The argument is supported by a brilliant set of figures which draw visual correlations between social inequalities and educational inequalities, pinpoint the social character of the individual universities and schools, and ascribe social codes to the different school subjects.

Academic Success and Social Power might be the most important work of educational sociology ever published in Australia. It goes deeper than *Making the Difference* (1982) by Connell et al. who also understood the social significance of curriculum; though the times are now less receptive than they were in 1982 to sociological exposures with democratic vision. As Bourdieu himself notes on the back cover, Teese’s work is of world importance: “a major contribution to the theoretical and empirical analysis of social and academic hierarchies”. Melbourneans who take it seriously will never see their schools in the same light again. It is a book that will still be read in twenty years. Yet despite – or rather because of – the bite in the analysis, *Academic Success and Social Power* will be ignored for as long as possible. It is too subversive, too hard to accommodate; it disturbs too many vested interests, individual and collective. And though it has been written in an accessible style, it is also complex enough to be categorised as ‘academic’ and not ‘popular’ and left off the reviews pages of *The Age*.

How thin our public culture is! This book should be discussed everywhere, and the hard message should be faced. In a period when no policy conscience about inequalities is apparent, the schooling system takes the form of an unconscious cultural apartheid. It is segregated by school sector and real estate price, and marred by terrible mortality rates in the ‘Banthustans’, the poorest suburbs. Policy-makers never acknowledge these system-driven

mortality rates, except to crank up the competitive pressures, and to blame the outcomes on individual schools and teachers who face a deck permanently stacked against them. It is all so unnecessary – except to those who are the chief beneficiaries of the system. Schooling could be designed so as to maximise the potential of everyone in it. Instead, every year, thousands of young Victorian lives are permanently blighted. This is demanded by the systems of educational selection, backed by university authority, and legitimated in the curriculum.

Simon Marginson is the Editor of the Australian Journal of Education.

Aimless Enterprises

John M. Legge

Simon Marginson & Mark Considine: *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance and Reinvention in Australia* (CUP, \$34.95 pb, \$99 hb).

AMONG ANY GROUP of people, the quickest way to the possession of any desirable thing is theft, where the thief applies superior guile or force to avoid retaliation. If, however, in such a society the production of desirable things involves effort, producers who expect to be robbed withhold that effort: theft eventually becomes pointless, because there is nothing to steal.

Societies evolved to deter theft, partly by the erection of countervailing power structures but equally by teaching (or perhaps breeding) habits of behaviour that diminish or eliminate theft, at least within the group. Children are taught not to steal because theft is wrong, not because the policeman might catch you. Experience shows that some people will never respect social norms, and so a residual countervailing power is needed; but as the Romans fretted, *Sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

The crimes committed by governments through the ages dwarf those of individuals, and since (or before) Plato philosophers and political scientists have fretted over the problems of directing the state power without corrupting the directors. However it was done, concepts of duty, obligation and honour ranked highly, and major institutions emerged to inculcate these concepts.

The ancient universities were explicitly moral institutions, studying and teaching theology. In Western Europe, at least, practical issues of right conduct were comparable in importance to doctrinal ones, and the Catholic Church's moral teaching was held to be universal: the Church asserted, in theory and sometimes in practice, that even kings were subject to the moral laws and faced earthly as well as divine sanctions for breaking them.

Professional education, inside and outside the major universities, also had a strong moral element. A professional man would have clients who relied on his judgement, and only the professional man's moral stance protected clients or patients from being the victims of their professional adviser's self-interest. These moral principles, imparted during professional education, were enforced during practice by professional associations.

There was, of course, a form of collective self-interest: clients could trust individual professional men because they knew that the threat of peer sanctions discouraged opportunistic behaviour. While a selfish individual might have been tempted to exploit his own patients or clients, he was at least as strongly motivated to punish those of his peers who surrendered to such temptations.

The rise of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth century appeared to challenge this basis for order. Obligations came to be created, not by a person's place in the social order, but by contracts. Adam Smith praised self-love as the motivation for commercial activity, and his immediate successors included those for whom every act in the expression of self-love, in the absence of overt coercion, was not merely morally acceptable, but a moral imperative. "Each for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost."

These attitudes were not acceptable in the wider community, and political history from 1800 to 1975 is dominated by the enactment of laws that restricted freedom of contract and regulated commercial life. Over this period the universities and professional associations continued to assert the traditional moral values of duty and obligation, fair dealing and honest advice.

1975 marked the start of a resurgence of economic fundamentalism, also known as neo-liberalism or economic rationalism. The starting point of this group of theories is that greed is the only good, and anything that interferes with the working of greed, whether regulation, public ownership or professional

discipline, reduces the efficiency of the economy. To the neo-liberals, anyone who claims to be acting from any motivation other than self-love is a hypocrite and all those who support non-market institutions are captives of vested interests. (A special exemption is allowed to neo-liberal economists, whose advice is always assumed to be pure and unbiased, no matter who is paying them.)

Marginson and Considine discuss the result of letting neo-liberals loose on Australia's universities, the creation of what they call the "enterprise university".

Two things distinguished the traditional university: it was largely self-governed by its academics; and individuals pursued their own research interests, taking as little, or as much, notice of the world outside as they pleased. Teaching at the undergraduate level was undertaken as a duty, and by and large delivered as well as each lecturer's presentation skills permitted, but the critical focus of teaching was on the supervision of research students who might themselves join academia in due course.

Orthodox economists developed a model of the ideal enterprise, in which a chief executive articulates his (or very occasionally, her) vision, which is put into effect by a staff who owe their positions and their prospects to him. To the extent that this model has ever been widely practiced, it led to both the development and the eventual extinction of the Manchester cotton industry. In the enterprise university this 'Manchester' model of governance is widely praised under the false belief that it reflects the best practice of successful modern commercial enterprises. Most vice-chancellors interviewed by Marginson and Considine accepted this model as an ideal, but were restrained in its application by the need to maintain the morale and commitment of their university's academic staff.

The Federal Government, more than the ambitions of individual vice-chancellors, ended the freedom of academic scholars to choose their own fields of research. A substantial part of every institution's funding is determined by its research performance, judged on a one-size-fits-all bureaucratic model. It should probably come as no surprise that a 'reform' intended to create less bureaucracy and regulation winds up creating more.

My only personal disappointment with this book is with its relatively superficial treatment of the decline of teaching under the new regime. Neo-liberal

economists reject concepts such as morality, duty and professional conduct, but they also ignore innovation. They therefore make no distinction between a professional education and technical training; and in both cases they assume that the skills needed to be economically productive are immutable and equally known to all practitioners.

Teaching duties can, in the neo-liberal world view, be delegated to hourly paid sessional staff, people with neither the time nor the inclination to keep abreast of current research in their field. Teaching is denigrated, when universities boast of becoming learning, rather than teaching, institutions. If universities are allowed to become businesses, purveyors of services, a failure grade would have the same implications as salmonella in a hamburger: the service cannot have been delivered with due care and attention. The unpleasant rumours of favourable treatment for fee-paying students could become routine facts.

Marginson and Considine make no predictions, but I can. The enterprise model on which the restructuring of the universities has been based does not reproduce the critical features of successful commercial enterprises. Persisting with the model can only lead to stagnation and failure, as competition between education providers serves to legitimise every degree mill that the Internet has space for: pay my fee; accept my qualification.

We can continue down the road that Marginson and Considine describe, into a new dark age of boastful ignorance, or we can recognise that society demands excellence in teaching, and such excellence is inseparable from excellence in curiosity-driven research. I prefer optimism, and rejoice in its early signs: across Australia students in this market-driven system are rejecting economics and forcing economics departments into an apparently irreversible decline. Many economic departments have hidden in business schools; but there they face the awkward fact that the real market rewards successful practice, not failure in the pursuit of perfect theory. The very market forces so praised by neo-liberals are choking off the supply of neo-liberal proselytisers and disproving their assertions.

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The Big Prawn in History

Perrie Ballantyne

Jim Davidson & Peter Spearritt: *Holiday Business: Tourism in Australia Since 1870* (MUP, \$65.95).

TOURISM IS OFTEN frivolous. It moves people to build giant plaster prawns and sell souvenirs from their bellies. But as Jim Davidson and Peter Spearritt maintain, tourism and its history demand to be taken seriously. While *Holiday Business: Tourism in Australia Since 1870* is by no means the first consideration of tourism by Australian historians, it is the first look at this topic through a national (rather than site-specific, or theme-oriented) frame.

Holiday Business is an ambitious project, which seeks to chart some trends in the histories of both domestic and international tourism in and around Australia, from the 1870s until pretty much its date of publication (2000). Its coverage is fairly comprehensive, including sections on evolving styles of travel and accommodation, the development of state and commonwealth tourist bureaus, beach culture, heritage tourisms, national parks and zoos, 'the Centre' and 'Aboriginal Tourism'. Many of these discussions exist in self-contained chapters.

The authors admit that they took on a gargantuan task with *Holiday Business*: "It is no surprise to us that a national history of tourism, such as this one, exists almost nowhere else in the world." One of their aims was to "produce a map of the subject" and a context for future historical research, and to this end they have some success. *Holiday Business* works well as a map. It provides a good starting point for anyone interested in the histories of certain kinds of tourism (be it surfing or snow-sports), or in certain kinds of tourist sites (like island resorts or historic theme-parks). It is also a helpful resource, brimful of hitherto scattered dates and details, on everything from car ownership, to the reign of ABC's 'Bush Tucker Man' and the establishment of each state's National Trust body.

Like a map, however, *Holiday Business* is sketchy. In its 416 pages it covers extensive terrain, but doesn't have the space to properly analyse its findings, make links or develop conclusions. Some chapters are better than others, with the highlights being the well-rounded 'Mobility and its Consequences' and 'The Rise and Fall of the Tourist Bureau'. The

chapter on 'The Tourism Industry' reads like a marketing report, but the least satisfying chapters are those that centre on themes that have generated the most discussion amongst scholars over the past ten years. *Holiday Business* has little new to say about beach culture, heritage tourism or 'the rediscovery of the centre' (this section seems particularly lacklustre in the shadow of Roslynn D. Haynes' enthralling, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* [1998]). The authors have particular trouble navigating through a discussion of 'Aboriginal Tourism', unable to do justice to the various issues they raise.

The merits of *Holiday Business*, however, lie in what it brings together and what these collected observations might reveal. In 1964 Robert Menzies hailed tourism as a "smokeless industry" that created employment with minimal impact on people and place. Clearly the effects of tourism are much more complex and profound, and *Holiday Business* makes two important points: that tourism has had (and continues to have) a remarkable impact on Australian landscapes and societies, and that historians are only just beginning to understand how to read these effects. *Holiday Business* specifically allows us to see that tourism has affected and directed patterns of settlement all over Australia – towns and communities have been born, lived and died by its whims. In this light, tourism history begins to look like an important strand of settlement and colonial history. From the earliest lakeside resorts established in chilly, green Tasmania by homesick Edwardians, to the far-flung desert hubs springing-up all over the once despised, now eminently desirable, 'Dead Heart' of the continent, *Holiday Business* shows tourism as an important part of the literal and emotional possession of the continent by its colonisers and non-indigenous populace.

But tourism is also more than that. It may be as much about seeking experiences with people, as experiences with place. Future work might look more closely at the nature of 'tourists' in Australia, particularly in domestic terms. *Holiday Business* offers little discussion of how travel styles might differ between age groups, ethnicities, classes, genders or sexualities. There is no youth hostel in its chapter on accommodation and no Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in its discussion of the increasing importance of 'event' tourism. So too we might examine the relationship between the 'tourists' and the 'toured', an idea *Holiday Business* tests only in its discussion of 'Aboriginal Tourism', but one that also applies to the

small town that lays out a gingham cloth and Devonshire tea for weekenders from the big smoke. As the authors suggest, there is much, much more to be said about tourism and its history in Australia.

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"Fair Virgin of the South . . ."

Donald Pulford

C.A. Cranston: *Along These Lines: From Trowenna to Tasmania* (Cornford Press, \$29.95).

SEPARATED FROM the rest of Australia by the stormy waters of Bass Strait, Tasmania is a footnote to the main narratives of Australian life, a triangle of 'otherness' beneath the familiar bulk of our island continent. Most of us know little of it. Reports come back to the 'mainland' from friends who have driven around it on hurried fly-drive holidays. They confirm what the advertisements promise – a sort of colonial theme park, a 'little England' of hedgerows, cosy B&Bs, quiet waterfronts, country pubs and, sometimes, sweeping vistas of mountains and sea. But there is less benign news as well. Tasmania springs to occasional prominence when battles erupt to preserve rivers and forests or people go missing in the island's treacherous highlands and wilderness, their corpses probably devoured by 'devils'. Most memorable has been the ghastly massacre at a central site of a key Tasmanian narrative, the cruelty of convict transportation. C.A. Cranston's anthology, *Along These Lines*, is an attempt to fill out the picture.

C.A. teaches Australian literature at the University of Tasmania. I have been told that she was once a stuntwoman for Evel Knievel. But my informant has a sense of fun that propels him toward the ludicrous and his story presents an improbable collision: to be a stuntwoman requires more elan than is generally known in academia. Still, mindful of the postmodern model of the personality as play and pastiche, I did not dismiss the possibility entirely and entered *Along These Lines* looking for evidence of the stuntwoman in the anthologist.

C.A. has assembled a rich and dense collection of materials drawn from autobiography, historical records, and imaginative literature. As well as 'names'

such as Marcus Clarke, Hal Porter, Richard Flanagan, Cassandra Pybus, Henry Reynolds, Gwen Harwood, Margaret Scott, Tim Thorne, Errol Flynn, Germaine Greer and so on, there are a great many obscure and interesting writers and texts published here through the editor's assiduous research.

The material is organised temporally in the first section of the book, using as chapter headings the island's name in the three stages of its history: Trowenna, an Aboriginal name; Van Diemen's Land, its name up to the end of transportation in 1853; and its present, post-transportation name. There is only one item under 'Trowenna', an Aboriginal myth transcribed by Quaker settlers in the 1830s. The 'Van Diemen's Land' section begins with Abel Tasman's account of his claiming the island on behalf of Anthony Van Diemen, Governor General of the Dutch East India Company and sponsor of Tasman's expedition. According to the navigator's testimony, Tasmania's weather was recalcitrant. A sudden storm whipped up surf that made landing too dangerous to attempt. A luckless carpenter was dispatched to swim the icy water (even in December) and erect the requisite stake and flag. We cannot know what the Aborigines made of the absurd event.

Elsewhere in the 'Van Diemen's Land' section, Marcus Clarke and Hal Porter powerfully evoke the island's climate and dramatic landscape and two ballads express the convicts' sense of loss and exile. Richard Flanagan's words from *Death of a River Guide* well summarise the impression of Tasmania created early in *Along These Lines*, a "strange, mountainous island of horrors at the end of the world."

Caroline Leahey's upbeat 1854 poem celebrating the end of convictism, 'On Tasmania Receiving the Writ of Freedom', begins the third section, 'Tasmania': "Fair Virgin of the South, we call on thee;/ Receive with smiling courtesy the writ/ Which bids thee now from childhood's thrall be free". The rest of the section, including Trollope's impressions from a visit early in the 1870s, records the settlers' continuing anxiety concerning the convict past.

Onward from this point, the collection is grouped according to Tasmania's geographical regions and the lines of the major roads, the veins that pattern the heart-shaped island. On the face of it, the schema is appropriate to the distinct regions of Tasmania's varied topography. (The rugged west coast is a very different place to the often dusty paddocks of the midlands, for instance.) But potentially more effective as lines we could follow in the anthology are the

strands of the central narratives of Tasmania's past and present: the landscape and the contrasting struggles to overcome it and to preserve it; the various phases of Aboriginal occupancy, dispossession and repossession; transportation and its aftermath; the experiences of settlers and visitors; the unresolved question of what to do with the past in shaping the future. Facets of these narratives recur throughout *Along These Lines* but the geographical organisation of the collection is an obstacle to our being able to follow them easily. Also distracting are many of the historical details in the constant editor's notes and the irrelevance of some of the inclusions. For instance, what difference can it make to our appreciation of a house to know that it was once occupied by an author whose "great-great-grandmother was a lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette and suffered the same fate, on the same day, as her queen"? Similarly, Lord Casey's anecdote concerning his medico father's treating a midland farmer's son, later to become a member of the first Australian parliament, elucidates nothing much about Tasmania. Occasional historical errors and typographical infelicities of spelling and punctuation also provide potholes as we follow the anthology's lines.

Cranston has gone at her topic with a stunt-woman's gusto. That her enthusiasm has produced the odd hiccup in the text is not as important as her having brought to light many rare and forgotten texts as well as a selection of the standard ones. For those of us already familiar with Tasmania and the many who are not, *Along These Lines* provides fascinating reading.

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Wowers spun right round

Paul J. Watson

Tim Costello & Royce Millar: *Wanna Bet? Winners and losers in gambling's luck myth* (Allen & Unwin \$21.95).

The roulette table pays nobody except him that keeps it. Nevertheless a passion for gaming is common, though a passion for keeping roulette tables is unknown.

George Bernard Shaw

MANY AUSTRALIANS, including *Wanna Bet's* authors, are likely to want to challenge, or at least ponder, the modern truth of G.B. Shaw's second proposition. 'Passion' may not be the most obvious buzzword for the forces behind the explosive growth in the gambling 'keeping' industry over the 1990s, especially in Victoria and South Australia. No other single word quite fits the bill, however. 'Boom' is a discredited Kennett-ism, and now seems laughably callous and myopic. In the opposing corner, 'conspiracy' and 'addiction' are both too neo-wowser, a moral position that Costello and Millar take great pains to differentiate themselves from. 'Greed' and 'government ineptitude' are more suitably neutral descriptors, at least against the threadbare expectations of today's civil society. The 1980s' and 1990s' systemic dismantling of Australian institutions, including universities and independent government authorities, has certainly sent cerebral and civic passions underground, and perhaps thereby re-awakened other passions, long dormant.

That the gambling industry has indeed become possessed by an alien passion is consistent with the average Australian's old-fashioned fancy for a flutter having fallen by the wayside. According to Costello and Millar, there was a kind of historico-technological rupture about 1970. After this date, Aussie gambling lost much of its nuggetty lustre, particularly through the mass introduction of poker machines, although initially only in New South Wales. In fairness to the authors, the distinction they draw is considerably qualified. Pre-pokies gambling was not all good digger fun, and its romanticisation has been abetted by the modern gaming industry. Nonetheless, the authors' core position is that Australian gambling historically was much less harmful than that happening in today's pokie barns. As an 'action' corollary, the national and state governments should step in to remove pokies wholesale – from everywhere except legitimate non-profit clubs.

This conclusion only comes timidly, in the last few pages of the book. Readers of the initial twelve chapters who are in search of a considered and crafted viewpoint, or even simple consistency, will find themselves deeply frustrated. Any such persistent readers will probably feel cheated when the authors finally stop dilly-dallying in chapter 13, and pull a quite radical conclusion out of a hat, as it were. Much of the earlier rhetorical equivocation seems due to the authors' efforts, although probably mostly so for Costello, a Baptist minister, to avoid the

'wowser' tag being pinned on them. Costello's anxiety here shows. Anglo-Irish sectarian viewpoints on gambling are given extensive historical coverage, but they illuminate nothing of relevance to the problems in the pokie barns. The convoluted dissection of the lucky Paddy myth, and interspersed snippets of Tammany down-under, probably do successfully prove that (drum roll, please) there is a little wowser inside all of us. Yes, even Catholics can strongly disapprove of gambling. If the authors had rather less personal baggage, they might have been able to recognise, and pacify, their own inner wowsers – and then move on – in a much slimmer, better, and more passionate book.

The pain of losing is diverting. So is the thrill of winning. Winning, however, is lonelier, as those you've taken money from are not likely to commiserate with you. Winning takes some getting used to.

David Mamet

Deconstructing a national myth is the safest and least-intrusive way of dealing with Australian gamblers' psychology. The predatory tactics of the gaming industry, such as placing poker machines disproportionately in poorer suburbs, are transparently obvious. Such behaviour also neatly dovetails into the broader *zeitgeist* of Pavlovian punishing of the poor (try playing Centrelink roulette; after one hundred redials, you may get into the telephone queue – if you're lucky). Equal to the industry they feed, gambling's victims are both palpable to anyone and easily assimilated into the thriving community sector niche of social problems and harmful behaviours generally.

Costello and Millar retell, in a truncated fashion, several gamblers' personal accounts, in support of their own arguments. Apart from these distressing – but predictable – vignettes, the authors are quite unwilling to delve into gambling psychology. They foreclose on the topic by dismissing several leading psychological theories, including gamblers being addicted to losing, as neo-wowser, the old 'sin' model in new-fangled 'scientific' clothing.

With such symmetry between predator and victim, there is something rather lopsided about Costello and Millar's determined dissection of the gambling industry, but not the gamblers also. More than any other harmful behaviour, problem gambling is totally out in the open. Unlike with the smoking of

cigarettes, there is nowhere that gambling is legal, but in practice merely tolerated, if not downright stigmatised. In a different context, the pokie barns – with gaudy interiors and clinical facades, open to players and spectators alike – might be held up as exemplars of a harm-minimisation model. At these venues, player behaviour is both in full public view and occurs without the behaviour reinforcement that can result from furtiveness and public stigma.

The idea of a 'safe gambling room' seems intrinsically facetious, not because it would play directly into the industry's grasping hands, but because gamblers themselves would reject and ridicule it. Being able to gamble without guilt is an intrinsic pre-condition for the very activity. Even the most compulsive of gamblers has not abdicated his or her inner harmonic of personal responsibility and humility – for everyone playing, each roll of the dice is both a willed gesture and a small prayer for outside assistance. Gambling victimhood is far more complex, then, than Costello and Millar allow for. From many hours of enforced personal observation, it seems to me that problem gambling is a close analogue to religious mania. The obsessive gambler's multiple pious superstitions and dubious mathematical assumptions make for a quite encompassing and coherent belief system. Most importantly for this religion analogy, compulsive gambling – as with all communal gambling – is an act of public testifying, through and through.

Apart from their longwinded discussion of sectarian influences – Costello and Millar give little attention to the role of religion in gambling, and vice versa. A brief reference to religion and Chinese and Vietnamese gamblers, 'Buddha and betting', is disingenuous. After first pointing out that Buddhism basically frowns on gambling, the authors concede the paradox of gambling's popularity among Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhists. Community leader, Phong Nguyen, is quoted to explain the apparent paradox as a case of the public/private divide, with the gambler's personal karma often holding sway over his/her general religious precepts. While this basic paradox is probably a universal one, the very public nature of gambling rather stretches the 'exemption' – usually given only to private conduct. When combined with gambling's elemental mysticism – for all humanity, bar the pure maths hard cases – Nguyen's lone-agent karma theory seems a mere rationalisation.

The twentieth century's great truism is that sys-

tems of mass belief (religions) will respond to attack by mutating in their manner and form. Regarding gambling as purely private, secular conduct is a perverse type of wowsersism. Problem gambling's affront to all mainstream Australian churches (witness the Inter-Church Gambling Taskforce) is much more serious than the churches themselves admit – gambling is their competitor, plain and simple. The problem gambler does not proverbially leave his/her religion at the casino door, he or she gets it, by being smoothly inducted into a community of fellow-worshippers – the church of losers, as it were.

If they had but recognised gambling's psycho-social nature, Costello and Millar would have avoided some of the rhetorical knots they tie. They parry inconclusively over the difference, if any, between investing in the pokies versus the sharemarket (at its dotcom peak at the time of writing). There is a real difference here, one that the authors are oblivious to – sharemarket investing is about being in a club, while gambling necessarily takes place in the accept-all-comers outer. 'Investing' in the pokies is such a non-sequitur for Australia's middle class because there is no apparent membership floor, or ceiling, to be a pokie-barn player.

Only one stance in the raging debate over problem gambling is more opprobrious than that of 'wowsers' – the industry apologist. Again, Costello and Millar are scrupulous to be seen as clean; they rightly criticise the compromised nature of the bulk of gambling research – funded by the industry itself. Make no mistake about it, the gambling industry is Janus incarnate. It is even able to wear the wowsers' mantle, if necessary. The authors cite much higher average spending (per poker machine per head) in the United States than in Australia, as illustrating that lucky Paddy really traversed the Atlantic, and not around the Cape of Good Hope and onwards. The same figures could also be used to prove the Australian gambling industry's self-sacrificing moderation, in that the nation's poker machine numbers are far short of saturation point, by United States standards. Industry arguments about the tax and job windfalls

WANNA BET?

winners and losers in gambling's luck myth

Tim Costello & Royce Millar



that it supposedly generates are similarly catch-22; it is well-nigh impossible to conceive of a sensible political platform that couldn't be artfully trumped by the keepers (try it). In this game, one person's apologist is another's wowser. One thing is certain – we are all part of the problem.

Paul J. Watson is a Melbourne writer. In 1998–99, he worked as a croupier at Crown Casino, Melbourne.

Creative Environmentalists

Martin Mulligan

Michael Pollak & Margaret MacNabb: *Hearts and Minds: Creative Australians and the Environment* (Hale & Iremonger, \$34.95).

REFRESHING TO SEE a book that reviews the contribution made by a wide spectrum of creative workers to environmental thought and action in Australia. Too many people see environmentalists as being either 'ferals' camped out in the forests or very earnest (and primarily young) folk trying to chew the ears of politicians (a noble thing to do if taken literally). Environmentalists, it is often thought, need to know their scientific 'facts' and be able to present 'solid' rational arguments.

Well, I'm being a bit unfair. No-one will be surprised to see Peter Garrett being called an environmentalist because of his music *as well as* his work for the Australian Conservation Foundation. Poets like Judith Wright and Oodgeroo Noonuccal are well known for their ability to explore human empathy for the non-human in their poetry. The inclusion of Les Murray in a book about the environment will raise some eyebrows, but his love of the land has never been in doubt.

Eric Rolls and Tim Flannery have their admirers because they display a talent for communicating as well as for knowing something about science. It won't surprise environmentalists to see the admirable Wollongong academic Sharon Beder given some prominence in a book about the environment, but it will surprise plenty to see people like writers Dorothy Hewett and David Williamson profiled in the same book.

Pollak and MacNabb have drawn a long bow, but all the better to hit a distant target. Those who are not

inspired by stereotypical 'environmentalists' may find some inspiration from stories incorporated in this volume. The title *Hearts and Minds* has some unfortunate associations with the Vietnam war for this reviewer, however it does make the point that writers, poets, filmmakers, songwriters, and more, have had as much influence as scientists in shaping environmental attitudes and values in Australia. Pollak and MacNabb have taken a very broad sweep through the worlds of novels, non-fiction books, illustrated books, magazines, films and plays, songs and poems, and work in various media targeted at children.

The book is clearly a labour of love and it is very ambitious; perhaps too ambitious. Pollak and MacNabb are very experienced journalists and this shows in their ability to track down a good story (my favourites being Peter Corris' problematic relationship with Coochiemudlo Island, where he was living at the time of interview, and the efforts made by Meg Miller to produce *Grass Roots* magazine while living in a range of Victorian rural towns for over twenty-five years). However, it is a very eclectic work that doesn't hang together well. Probably a bit too journalistic! That said, I recommend it as a useful resource book and I think Pollak and MacNabb should be commended for the passion they put into the project.

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Green power or green co-option?

Cam Walker

Timothy Doyle: *Green Power: The environment movement in Australia* (UNSW Press, \$37.95).

GREEN POWER JOINS a number of recent histories about the environmental movement in Australia. Each has reflected the experience and politics of the author and, collectively, they give a broad analysis of 'the story so far'. Perhaps the greatest addition offered by this book is its willingness to look at contemporary issues within the movement. Many others have avoided the issues that have arisen since the election of the Howard government in 1996. Within the movement itself there is generally an unwillingness to address internal conflict or

political differences, for a variety of reasons. One of Doyle's strong points is that he is willing to look at internal differences and debate, clearly seeing this as being necessary for a healthy movement.

While much of the book focuses on the history of the past thirty years and, in particular, the anti-uranium and wilderness movements in Australia, Doyle also addresses recent developments at the national level. The professionalisation of the green movement, the current political situation under the Howard government and specific events such as the controversy surrounding the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act*. This saw a small grouping of green organisations enter into private negotiations with both the Coalition and Democrats to push the legislation forward. Other groups were explicitly excluded; in the short-term leading to considerable internal conflict, but perhaps more significantly in the longer term, indicating a perceptible shift to the Right amongst a number of green organisations. With the political reality of a Coalition government, which has launched a dramatic expansion of Australia's involvement in the nuclear fuel cycle, ongoing destruction of native forests and an appalling effort at the climate change negotiations, green organisations have been faced with a difficult choice. When the Coalition proposed selling Telstra in order to fund environmental initiatives, the movement was effectively split over what to do. Since then, a number of groups have realised that they are comfortable working with the conservatives currently in power. Groups that were seen as being aligned with the ALP have been squeezed to the margins, while others have achieved high levels of access to the current powers-that-be. This is against a backdrop of federal Government attempts to 'liquid-paper' out the advocacy and campaign orientated green groups in favour of less problematic 'hands on' environmental groups. Doyle addresses a number of the changes this has caused within the movement.

In addressing what constitutes 'the movement' he draws the net widely, rather than including only the formal, mainstream organisations. The informal networks of activists which constitute a large part of the movement, yet which are often ignored in other histories, are included in this analysis. Doyle also looks at the role of personal contacts and networks in movement politics; again, another significant aspect of how decisions are made and broad directions of the movement are set. He addresses the "myth

of the common goal"; the assumption that those in the movement have particular, shared values and objectives.

The book starts with a reflection on experiencing the movement in the Philippines, where resistance is based on community-based organising and environmental and social struggles are often a matter of life and death. In contrast, the movement in Australia is increasingly engaged with corporations and conservative governments. A key premise here is based on the observation that any sense of 'community' is eroded in Australia. But Doyle also points out the fact that green groups in Australia are consciously seeking engagement with large corporations as a way of securing funds and defining new, 'positive' niches for themselves.

Doyle describes the three stages of environmental activism since the late 1960s, which has seen a corresponding shift from 'outsider' to 'insider' politics. The current stage, which deals with the *EPBC Act* and relations with the Coalition government, is informative for anyone interested in understanding where the mainstream environment movement is placing itself politically. Doyle notes that the environment movement is the "most powerful dissenting social movement in our society". So, any shift to the Right will have ramifications for other social movements. In the wake of broad social struggles like the MUA dispute and the S11 protests in Melbourne, there is a growing tendency for social movements to work more closely with each other. However, an observation of the mainstream green groups sees a slight but perceivable shift in the opposite direction, from opposition to conservative political forces to conscious engagement with them. *Green Power* gives a useful insight into this shift. This analysis has, of course, made the author unpopular in some parts of the movement.

Like other books on this topic, there is a fair dose of social theory and summaries of the various ideologies that inform different parts of the movement. It also looks at the types of tactics used. The book itself is sometimes factually incorrect, but its strength is its 'big picture' analysis rather than the case-by-case summary of events. As in previous histories, certain key people and events are left out, but like the earlier books, this is probably a reflection on the fact that Doyle is an activist as well as an academic; hence his writing reflects the networks he works with most closely.

As mentioned above, perhaps the most useful con-

tribution of this book is its analysis of current events within the movement, including the sale of Telstra, relations with the major and minor political parties (this can be read in conjunction with *The Victory*, Pamela Williams, Allen & Unwin, 1997), the impacts of corporate money on green groups, co-option through consultation, and the shift from grassroots mobilisation to a more 'professionalised' movement. With the current dynamics in the movement, the brief assessment of 'free-market environmentalism' is also timely and useful. Doyle notes that the current government advocates "free market radical libertarian solutions to environmental problems" and is bringing in US-style 'wise-use' legislation. He notes the rise of right-wing think tanks, 'dirty tricks' campaigns, and anti-green front groups. Taken collectively, the 'wise-use' proponents and their government allies are essentially the economic rationalist forces being opposed by social movements and the Left all around the world. For green groups to align themselves with these conservative forces (or even to be seen to do so) sets them against the growing progressive forces currently mobilising on trade, labour and environmental issues. Doyle's solution is similar to that proposed by Tom Athanasiou (*Slow Reckoning: the Ecology of a Divided Planet*, Secker & Warburg, 1997): a revitalised and grass-roots focused movement which has a strong internationalist perspective and a much greater emphasis on social justice. This would make the movement more able to work with broader social movements, but is in contrast with the direction being taken by many of the key groups in Australia at present. Some of his other recommendations include: the need for more emphasis on Indigenous issues and a stronger community orientation in our campaigns, with urban issues coming to the forefront.

Neo-liberalism currently pervades the "operational and strategic reality of the environment movement in Australia". Postmodern analysis has allowed the movement to understand the world in more complex ways than just dualisms; yet amongst the larger mainstream groups there is a simplification of ideology, which has made it easier for organisations to work more closely with conservative governments and corporations. But there is a huge diversity within the informal radical networks which form the basis of the green movement. The mainstream groups must accept the value of these networks and find ways to nourish and support them. Finally, we should not

confuse government-funded networks (such as Landcare) with 'community' activism. Notions of activism need to be located in 'place': and to do this, the large mainstream groups need to engage with community activists.

Cam Walker is the campaign co-ordinator with Friends of the Earth in Melbourne.

All so evocative . . .

Thea Calzoni

Bruce Bennett & Susan Hayes (eds): *Home and Away*
(UWA Press, \$19.75).

BRUCE BENNETT AND SUSAN HAYES have put together West Australian stories from the 1920s to the 1990s under the banner of *Home and Away*, stories of participation and/or alienation. The first is 'The Shades of Difference', Alexander Hasluck's reconstruction of colonial records to build a tale of an isolated outback woman done away by an Asiatic(ish) predator. "It was not his brown face, but his black heart that at length brought Louis de Kitchilan to the gallows. His crime had been not only against Hannah, but against the code of the bush. He had been received and offered kindness with hearth and home open, as strangers always had been in Australia, and he had repaid this with treachery and death."

As a WA farm girl, I noticed how the 'code of the bush' was applied less to black strangers than to white. And in Perth, there were Nyoongahs, strangers all and none welcome but to their own, as in Archie Weller's 'Going Home', where trouble with the law looms for a promising young lad returning to his people.

How did that bush code extend to other strangers, like the Greeks in Yasso Kalamaras's story, 'The Fence'? There is no reference to it. We have a Greek family doing it tough on the land and in the home with the crude implements of impoverished pioneers. The woman laments:

*Full of life
her island
her passion
her body*

her soul
her skin
the light
the sun the sun
the tiny birds
the forest
the dark blue of the sky
the enormous karri trees
the sea, the sea, the sea embracing her island.

Her hands unclasped, they felt her face, then wiped it quickly as if she was doing something wrong.

In 'All that was Needed', Fotini Epanomitis writes of Greek migrants' tough inner-urban living, in ignorance, nigh on catastrophe, with violence, with comic relief and imaginings. I know that territory. Do you?

The stories that speak to me in this collection are those about the world beyond the cosy fireside. Like 'Ngoorla' (1959), Katharine Susannah Prichard telling it like she sees it, from the heart, from the gut, the plight of the half-caste. Condemn her for her white perspective, if you like. I never would. Nor do I blame Robert Drewe for the bitterness of 'The Needle Story', sniping at the racist institutions of prosperous provincial Perth. 'All those bloody young Catholics', Helen Garner's pubfeller monologue, is okay. Authentic. Probably ripped straight off some poor vainglorious working-class drunk hero thinking she was impressed. What about Peter Cowan's 'Mobiles'? A couple of Thelma and Louise-style predatory females laying siege to a decent enough red-blooded truckie. Yeah. I know that scene.

In 'Nilsam's Friend', Tim Winton explores the terrain of sensitive new age guys in a much-loved landscape. A great writer, but I hate him because I suspect he's smug. Like Terri Ann White, postmodern tense mixer and time traveller of now and then middle-class Christmas reunions when expats like me return to the Perth fold. You'd never know there's life beyond us complacent comfort zoners in the orderly suburbs and predictable nightspots. Thankfully, more than that is revealed in the collected tales of *Home and Away* and it's all so evocative of the place where I grew up and places like it where we experience many dimensions of the human condition from the comfort of our reading rooms.

Thea Calzoni is a community activist and writer.

Opportunity Lost

David Hayward

Paul Boreham, Geoff Dow & Martin Leet: *Room to Manoeuvre: Political Aspects of Full Employment* (MUP, \$32.95).

AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS have had a rotten time of it over the past twenty years, losing battle after battle to the neo-liberals. Nowhere is this clearer than in economic and budget policy, where neo-liberal values continue to shine despite such a decidedly patchy record. A number of problems have bedevilled the left. First, their critique has not been convincing enough nor sufficiently united to sustain a progressive assault. Second, their policy prescriptions seem to have more to do with the past than they do with the future. But perhaps the biggest problem has been the reluctance of our left political economists to say anything at all.

Room to Manoeuvre is a recent contribution to Australian political economy that tries to address these problems. Drawing on an enormous database of OECD economic statistics, Boreham et al. analyse the economic performance of western countries over the period from 1972 to 1993. Their focus is the number one economic problem in Australia – our continuing high levels of unemployment – and what can be done to solve it. At the core of their argument is that unemployment is the product not just of economics, but also of political choices that are made about the level, degree and type of interventions governments make. Or as the authors put it, "unemployment persists because there is insufficient political will to eliminate it". Why has the will been lacking? In part because successive governments have been misled by the simple logic of neo-liberalism which holds that the best government is smaller government. This is convenient justification for inaction just at the time when an active state is required. The casualties have not just been the unemployed, but also our manufacturing sector and the development of an institutional capacity within the state to steer us toward full employment.

Boreham and his colleagues use their data to assess key neo-liberal claims concerning the relationship between the level and degree of government interventions and economic performance. Their numbers show what most of us knew already. That

by western standards Australia has and always has had low taxes, government spending and debt, that there is no clear relationship between the size of the state and economic outcomes, and that Australia has relatively low wages and on-costs, but high levels of unemployment and inequality.

Boreham et al. restate the important point that the neo-liberals have been mischievous to imply that it is possible to distinguish between states and markets. In reality all markets presuppose the existence of states with significant levels of regulation and intervention. The issue is the degree and type of interventions and the extent to which public sector decision-making is open to union participation. The authors distinguish between different types of economic regimes: social democratic, characterised by big governments and high levels of union involvement (Sweden, Norway); statist, characterised by big governments (Germany, Belgium, France, Holland); non-union corporatist, in which the state is small but highly interventionist and union rates are low (Japan, Switzerland); and liberal regimes with their small public sectors, and low levels of union participation (Australia, USA and New Zealand). Their data shows that the social democratic and non-union corporatist regimes have been successes, whereas the other two have been failures.

The comparative data assembled by the authors are undoubtedly one of the book's strengths. There is much here that will no doubt be of use for undergraduate teaching purposes, and general readers will be surprised to see the very large gap that exists between the neo-liberal portrayal of the Australian state and the evidence. The value of this material is not so much its newness but its comprehensiveness.

But the data are also one of the book's main weaknesses. There is always a risk in projects like this that the numbers will end up being given a life of their own, that instead of being used to help illustrate a bigger story, they end up as the story itself. Boreham et al. seem to have fallen into this trap. Their data are averages for OECD countries over a twenty-year period. Lots happened during these years, and things did not unfold in anything like a uniform way over time or place in the way that averages imply. Some countries did well at some times, others did well later, while those that once burned brightly eventually went dim. The authors overlook this, and focus too heavily on their averages. As a consequence they repeatedly and quite mistakenly portray some of the star performers of the 1990s as economic laggards

still in need of reform. The Netherlands is a stand-out case here. Although it did not perform well on most of the aggregate measures covered in the book, over the past decade (and the past five years in particular) it has been Europe's star, growing consistently faster than the OECD average and with unemployment falling to less than 3 per cent – a rate we would normally associate with full employment. A similar argument can be made about the US, which rates very poorly on the averages presented in the book, but which has been the engine of world economic growth over the past decade. On the other hand, Boreham et al. present Japan as a success story, yet it has been in a recession for almost a decade and shows no sign of improving even though interest rates are now zero and have been that way for several years.

At certain points the authors could also be accused of overstating their case. The argument is developed – unconvincingly – that the west has been in continuous recession for twenty-five years. “The current recession began in 1974”, we are told over and over again. Indeed, the authors go so far as to postulate the formation of a new, flatter business cycle of much longer duration than was the case prior to the Second World War. Yet it is difficult to see how Boreham et al. could seriously reach this conclusion, for it strangely overlooks the 1980s and 1990s booms, which were punctured by a steep decline in the early 1990s, and which appears to be with us again. Perhaps this surprising conclusion once again reflects a questionable interpretation by the authors of the averages that form the empirical focus of their study?

The book could have done with a good editor to smooth out some of the rough edges that make parts of it a very heavy and tedious read. Consider these bits of technocratic nonsense, which are by no means isolated examples:

With such cynical and meretricious abrogation of responsibility, iatrogenic policies can be re-embraced.

Because ‘policy mistakes’ are not capricious, but are systematic biases introduced to economic policy through the forms of economic policy-making a country allows itself to develop, documentation and analysis of the policy distinctiveness that constitutes policy error ought to provide a basis for a political task – the reconstruction of a policy regime more in keeping with the requirement of the actual economy.

The most disappointing aspect of the book rests with the final chapter, which addresses the policy implications of the earlier analysis. Here the authors needed to do more than simply restate their already well-developed critique of neo-liberalism, and to trot out in general terms a social democratic case for more interventionist and corporatist policy interventions. Yet this is pretty much what we're offered, in the form of a review of the achievements of the Accord and, remarkably, a rather weakly developed critical assessment of *Australia Reconstructed*, which enjoyed a very short policy shelf-life way back in 1986. This discussion does not take Australian social democracy forward, but once again anchors us firmly in the past.

Overall, then, this is a mixed contribution from some of our foremost political economists. Indeed, the book is all the more disappointing when it is considered next to the consistently high quality work Boreham and Dow have been churning out over the past twenty years. With the Australian Labor Party an even chance to form government federally and apparently desperate for new policy directions, it is difficult not to conclude that an opportunity has gone begging.

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Straight Man Laughing

Mark Peel

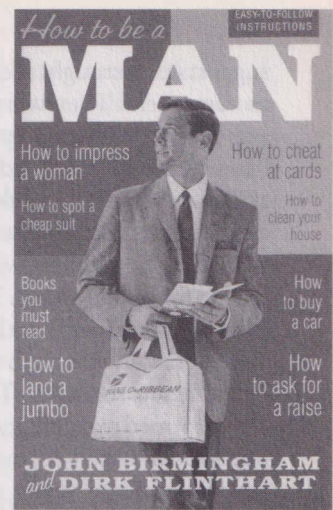
John Birmingham & Dirk Flinthart: *How to Be a Man* (Duffy & Snellgrove, \$19.95).

A BOOK LIKE THIS has to be very funny. Good humour, after all, is made more easily from the margins than the centre. It is a weapon of the weak against the strong, the self-satisfied and the ignorant. John Birmingham and Dirk Flinthart manage to make some funny asides, and a sympathetic reader might even find hilarious some of their illustrations of men's lives and aspirations. But to enjoy this book one has to share an assumption that heterosexual men – the 'real men' for whom this is

supposed to work as a kind of training manual – are somehow losing their potency and their power, that they are now on the margins, weakened and disarmed. On a good day, perhaps, I can smile at the floundering attempts of straight men to turn themselves into victims. But on a day when the Victorian Liberal Party decides that same-sex couples shouldn't share the basic rights of married men and women, and a newspaper journalist seems shocked that primary school children still enjoy mocking and bullying 'effeminate' boys, I'm less willing to be amused.

Perhaps I've become a humourless homosexual. It was difficult to tell at first what kind of book this was. I thought it might be a satire, a tongue-in-cheek 'guidebook' updating those popular catalogues of masculine activity from the 1950s and 1960s. I thought it might be laughing at as well as with the self-styled 'real man'. It eventually becomes a strange mixture, a 'how to' book for straight men that attempts to laugh at those who might want him to change, and its edge is more aggressive than gently satirical. Yet if all this blokey stuff for straight men is a joke, it's not a very funny one. It is more complaint than comedy, and it shares much of its territory with that xenophobic nostalgia that imagines the 'real man' (rather like the 'real Australian') as someone threatened and undermined by people they don't like and don't understand. It is the complaint of people who expected to be powerful, successful and superior, directed at those they now claim are 'taking over' and, most importantly, showing the 'real' people no respect. No surprise, then, that Les Murray is the favoured poet in this book's reading guide for real men. And no surprise that much of the unsuccessful humour in *How to Be a Man* stems from clumsy attempts to poke fun at a real man's enemies: the usual fascination with lesbian sex, of course, and really hilarious comments such as "AIDS is a real bummer". I could spend some energy trying to unpack that deeply offensive little *bon mot*, but there are better ways of wasting my time.

The 'real man' genre speaks most powerfully of desire and resentment. This particular guidebook



suggests that straight men want to be seen by others as competent. They want a *special* capacity, in fighting, loving, cooking, repairing, and even shopping. They want to train each other in apparently new skills – such as buying clothes at David Jones – they assume first, that gay men are born with and second, that straight women will find compelling enough reason for sexual access. This book reassures straight men that a real man can read books, seem cultivated and even converse with women, all the time secure in his heterosexuality. That, after all, is the fear of any reformed masculinity: how can you change without appearing to become a poofster? The problem is especially acute when up and down the country worried men – and a few worried women – claim that mothers and female teachers and all those other women who rule the world are also busy feminising boys. The palpable horror of that fate ensures that *How to Be a Man* shares the same basic antipathies as most other ventures in the remaking of men. Often written as an antipathy to homosexuals, it is more accurately an antipathy to ‘effeminacy’ and any other behaviour that might beg the question of gender as much as sexual identity. The boundaries that must be ever more sharply drawn, the distances that demand ever more careful policing, concern male and female as much as straight and gay.

Perhaps the greatest fear underlying this account of how to be a real man is that everyone is actually laughing at something else; indeed, that they are laughing at ‘real men’. There’s a real concern that maybe everyone else is having fun, finding contentment and getting it on, leaving the incapacitated straight man bumbling along behind. There’s a resentment that people who should feel inferior to and dependent upon real men don’t feel that way any more. To these authors, that is the real problem of the real man. No-one really looks up to him. No-one really values him. Worst of all, whatever his assumptions about man-crazy homosexuals, frustrated feminist lesbians and women blinded by their liberation, no one wants intimacy with him.

There have been some interesting attempts to talk about the problems of men and the inflexibility of common-sense manhood, about self-destructive masculinity, or the suffering of jobless young men who can’t and probably won’t meet their own expectations of male achievement as a provider, father and protector, or the terrors and torments that drive some men to hurt the people they most desperately want to love. ‘Real’ men who think that those problems

are the product of gay men, or lesbians, or feminists can probably find common ground in hokey nostalgia and a rather sad conservatism in which the only way forward seems to be taking over and making ‘masculine’ a few of the skills and capacities now regarded as ‘gay’. Many of the heterosexual men I know, especially the young, seem relatively happy with the changes in female lives and possibilities, and relatively unconcerned by gay men. I doubt they will find in Birmingham and Flinthart a convincing program for the future. And I don’t think they will find the basic premises of this book much funnier than I did.

Mark Peel is a man who teaches history at Monash University.

Buffalo Soldier

Christopher Lee

Garry Disher: *Past the Headlands* (Allen & Unwin, \$24.95).

GARRY DISHER’S NEW NOVEL is an historical adventure romance set in South-East Asia and North-Eastern Australia during the Second World War. This is a ‘good read’ book and, much to my wife’s annoyance, I ripped through it in three fairly long and thoroughly enjoyable sittings one weekend. Sorry kids.

When English-born Neil Quiller is orphaned at the age of thirteen by the death of his Australian-born mother, he is sent to Haarlem Downs Station on the Kimberley Coast in North-West Australia. Here he is raised by his disappointed Uncle Len and thwarted Aunt Crystal, along with their insecure son, Cameron Dunn. Neil and Cameron’s relationship is soon entangled with Jeannie Verco, who later becomes Cameron’s wife. These characters mingle with Asian refugees displaced by the war and their relationships are explored against the background of war-torn Malaya and the isolated cattle station where Jeannie waits for Cameron.

Neil is a mechanically minded fellow who acquires an interest in flying and its associated navigational challenges. He develops a method for navigating the tricky often-featureless country of North-West Australia and this serves as a metaphor for his cross-cultural relations and the pervasive sense

of cultural dislocation related to them. It also gets him a photo-reconnaissance posting to the RAF in Malaya.

Alas Neil's machines are never quite up to the task of keeping people and places at bay. His obsolete Brewster Buffalo fighter is tragically mismatched against the agile Japanese Zero-Sen. The RAF's technological disadvantage inevitably sees the hero back on unfamiliar ground where chaos reigns and Disher takes the opportunity to set the historical record straight about the ignoble behaviour of our boys in uniform during those desperate times. Needless to say, this is not a book for advocates of the Anzac Legend. More often than not in this story, Australian soldiers turn out to be insubordinate cowards, drunks, thieves, and rapists. The author is understandably keen to identify the historical sources that protect him from charges of mischievous invention here, but I doubt very much if that will be enough to stave off the RSL.

I must admit to some lingering doubts over Disher's exploration of masculine failure. Historically accurate or not, the ultimate test of a narrative strategy is its function in the literary project. The negative representation of Australian soldiers can appear simply as a politically correct inversion of the national legend. The novel does invert the structuring oppositions of Anzac but it does not go on to productively displace it in the way that is required for a full deconstruction of the heroic myth. This is borne out in the characterisation of the main male protagonists.

Cameron Dunn is the most fully realised representation of masculine failure in the novel. Following his cunning trail of cowardly deceptions and betrayals is one of the many pleasures in this book. I'm not sure though, if his crisis or failure of identity is sufficiently grounded in the imaginative poverty of this country's heroic myths of manhood; although the link with the disintegrating colonial situation in South-East Asia during the 1940s is more satisfyingly realised. The attempt to displace heroism extends as far as some qualification of Neil Quiller's claims to the virtue but the adventure conventions which structure the exciting escape narrative ultimately establish his credentials in this area. The resulting opposition between Cameron's cowardice and Neil's enduring heroism looks a little too much like goodies and baddies.

Past the Headlands inquires into the vexed question of Australian masculine identity, its racialised

connections to heroic rural landscapes, and the epic adventures of war. The narrative pull of the adventure romance really does manage to keep you going. The question of the degree to which Disher has managed to successfully marry cultural analysis with narrative adventure is a nice one to mull over after a good day's reading.

Christopher Lee teaches Australian literature at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba.

High Principles and Low Betrayals

Paul Gillen

Jack Beeching: *Poems 1940–2000* (Piccolo Press UK).

A FEW YEARS AGO I visited the Mediterranean island of Mallorca. Away from the coastal resort strip, which is occupied by a dazed army of German and English tourists, Mallorca is a fascinating and lovely place, but that was not the main reason I went there. I stayed with the poet Jack Beeching, with whom I struck up a postal friendship after I wrote to him about Jack Lindsay, Norman Lindsay's phenomenal son. The two Jacks were close friends for more than thirty years, and it is mainly through Lindsay that Beeching has a relationship with Australian literature. Their voluminous correspondence on literature and politics is in Sydney's Mitchell Library.

With many other mid twentieth-century writers, Lindsay and Beeching shared a fraught political trajectory. Radicalised by the Depression and the rise of fascism, they became Communist Party activists in the 1930s. The USSR's defeat of Nazi Germany inspired them with hopes for a postwar world of peace and socialism. These hopes unravelled painfully over the following decade and more of the Cold War and the unmasking of Stalinism. At the same time as their careers were being undermined or destroyed by political discrimination against communists, their communist convictions were being tested to the limit by the accumulating evidence of murder and injustice in the Soviet Union and its dominions.

There is a consensus among people who know the survivors of that history that they are a very im-

pressive bunch. Not that all did survive. Many were shattered by the disappointments of the 1950s, and their reputations erased by Cold War amnesia. I have on my desk a recently published volume of poems by Randall Swingler, another close associate of Jack Lindsay. The few critics familiar with Swingler's work urge that he is a poet of at least the stature of Stephen Spender or Louis MacNiece. Today he is almost forgotten.

Jack Beeching was a survivor. He served in the Royal Navy during the war and then worked as a teacher and journalist. Not long after Khrushchev's 'secret speech' to the Soviet politburo in 1956 denouncing Stalin, he left Britain for the Mediterranean. He has since made homes in many places, mainly Spain and Latin America, meanwhile earning a fairly tenuous living from writing. Novels and histories, some good, some written to keep the pot boiling. All the time he went on writing and publishing poetry.

His collected poems have now appeared in a beautifully presented volume. Like any good Marxist, Beeching always writes with history and class struggle on his mind, but his verse, over four hundred pages of work spanning six decades, has not the faintest whiff of the slogan or the textbook about it. Most of his poems are intensely personal. Many are about love. Their outstanding features are sharp observation, elegance, and toughness:

*She took her scarlet knickers off
To wave them at the sailors
And that was when we mutineers
Decided to be failures.*

*Her face was paint and varnish,
Her smile a cheerful grin.
Most of us called her Freedom,
But some, Original Sin.*

*She waved her scarlet banner
At the drunkard and the rebel
Who dreamed that all they'd dreamed of
Was needed, and was noble.*

*She opened wide her aperture,
Wide enough to swallow us.
We ran into her trap like mice
And there were more to follow us.*

*She took us in when we were boys,
And, now our hair is grey,
After a lifetime in her lap,*

How can we get away?

*Too many years spent spending,
How can we start to save?
A lifetime in that succulent pit
And one foot in the grave.*

'The Gaudy Camp Follower'

Decades after writing those lines, Beeching remains a convinced but ironical socialist, one of the types that bureaucrats, be they from the Communist Party or any other institution, are apt to label 'unsound'. He lives in Palma de Mallorca with his companion of the last thirty-five years, the artist Charlotte Mensforth, whose vivid, tasteful work adorns their apartment. She tends him with loving care, and he needs it. Crippled by strokes, and requiring regular dialysis, he is more than frail. Not that his condition stopped him tottering with me on his walking frame to the Rambla. In the cafes we drank beer and talked about Jack Lindsay, communism, George Orwell, the Whitlam government, the Green Movement, poetics, his children, and a thousand other things. We had a good time.

Today the old poet has lost the use of his arm, but still contrives to get his messages out. The other day I received a tape from him. I listened to the calm, melodious voice picking over the old scar: Stalinism, the dream gone wrong, the necessity of hope. The man is exactly as his poems are, I reflected. Elegant, sharp, and tough as anything.

*While last year's lovers, lifting woolly brats,
Fill prams, and other one-time troubadours
Improvise dialogue for sham encounters,
A man in yesterday's raincoat feels his way
Between high principles and low betrayals.*

*What passes through the vacant mind is real:
Order of words – economy, clarity,
Surprise. And may the verse outlive the man:
A face, a shabby raincoat and no shave,
Eluding creditors, dodging into doorways.*

'Yesterday's Raincoat'

Paul Gillen teaches in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Technology, Sydney. He is working on a biography of Norman Lindsay and his son Jack Lindsay, and is the editor of *Faithful to the Earth: Jack Lindsay's Quest* (Collins, 1993), a selection of the latter's writings.

Both Barrels

Yossi Berger

Brad Evans (ed.): *Red Lamp: A Journal of Realist, Socialist and Humanitarian Poetry* (#8, \$5).

AS A SMALL JOURNAL of poetry (seventy-one pages) from Australia, UK, Ireland, US, this is much more, and much less. Almost every 'What Do We Want?' page is confronting with a lexicon of suffering shrieking like angry bullets, e.g. 'convict', 'crime', 'conformity', 'punishment', 'cynical', 'greed', 'vanity', 'shame', 'mocking', 'contempt', 'fugitive', 'brutality', 'poverty', 'battle', 'alcohol', 'vice', 'poor', 'fear', 'hungry', 'respect', 'courtesy', 'hope', 'exploitation', 'land', 'home'. The general tone is of multi-layered plight, this being the mutter of substance (content, Barrel the first, according to Evans), packaged in more or less literary techniques to help (Barrel the-not-so-important second). A series of 'home truths' bulldoze their way in frequently breast-beating verse largely devoid of poignancy. But there are hints:

*After 10,000 shovings
of 1-ton steel bars into white-hot blast furnaces
a man
may put his hand around another man
in the sour steel dust stink of a steel mill.*

Fred Boss, 'He Doesn't Have To Hide It Anymore'

And at night the black mongrel dust will leave profiles on the sheets and the cough will splatter black, nothing will help.

Evans writes: "My greatest motivation for creating such a journal was feeling the sense of collective frustration, by these poets and many others, over the serious lack of half-decent publishing outlets for poetry within the realist, socialist and humanitarian veins." Good, but none of this mitigates against accurate poetry. More strength to Evans' hand but, push harder mate. The editorial tone ridicules those readers who may be interested in that motion between the lines and the whispered magic (oops!) . . . how could you possibly when there's so much suffering in the world and so much crap "poetry of appeasement and tranquillity"? "To write a poem about the sensuousness of a sunset while half the world starves is a political act" writes Geoffrey Lennie, the feature poet (fourteen pages' worth, including interview) and perhaps Evans' mentor.

So what is the importance of this poetry (significance is another thing), and seen through whose entrails? Is the measure of value related to how strong you can smell the sweat, or suffer? Forget René, "I work, I suffer, therefore . . ."

Across ancient and new iconography the bloody yoke is familiar alright:

*The wasted months, the disappointment with
destiny,
Of a chronically unfulfilled generation
In a downsized world?*

Niall Clugston, from 'Epigrams in a Time of
Civil Peace'

And:

*The curse, the whip, the eight-hour day,
The master and the chain.*

Glenn Stuart, 'Joseph K on pay day'

Lennie writes:

The language of modern poetry is not common language. It's as though words have become the object of poetry for a middle-class academic enclave. Poetry has turned its back on the common worker – and the common workers responded by turning their backs on poetry.

There's truth in this. His own poetry has an ironic immediacy and the poems go beyond the simply cascading denotation of pain and indignation. His sketches are discomforting, you cringe:

*In Wealthy Street, a landlord
kneels beside his bed
and prays to god in heaven
to deliver his weekly bread*

*The tenants must pay the rent, the rent
the tenants must pay the rent –
he prays to god in heaven
that his tenants will pay the rent*

Lennie, 'The Landlord of Poverty Street'

The special plight of women (still present) at work is captured by Andrea Porter who leads with snippets of old disgusting factory regulations (c.1930s). This is clever and bitter stuff: "Any female worker behaving in a lewd or suggestive manner in the presence

of male workers will be given a week's notice and dismissed without references." ('Players, 1936'). She etches a labyrinth of life's activities in the factory-city, male-female intersections, she and Zola both:

*A big city can be small and sticky
as a spider's web,
lives weaving through lives,
and jobs, even people, get caught up,
disappear, eaten up like flies.*

'Players, 1936'

Yep, he writes:

*just stayin alive becomes
a small victory.*

A.D. Winans 'The System'

No doubt, the substance-as-suffering is all over these works, for me – just because of such conditions – the searing of twisting words striking true would have been telling, but there are hints, I can tell you, when Winans spots those old abandoned workers:

*. . . sitting at neighbourhood bars
nursing their drinks like
a blood transfusion.*

'The System'

It's a hunger for the possibility of better things, and that urging need which carries this analogy, and in my view, this is true of the entire journal. Next shout's on me!

Yossi Berger is a writer and union activist.

Most Serious Business

Lee Cataldi

Susan Hampton: *A Latin Primer* (Cerberus Press, \$12).

THE TITLE POEM in Sue Hampton's first book, *Costumes*, 'costumes', does, with hindsight, seem to say it all, to follow the subsequent trajectory of her work inwards, from the

*ones with big tits pointy
at 50 the men with hidden cocks*

passing in the street,

to the glimpse at the end of the poem of what is at the heart of all this activity, that is, what is really cared about:

*and faintly,
breathing out, someone on a long distance line
says Jesus,
Jesus.*

In an interview with Sue that I recorded on 23 July 1999, she said that the problem for those who "write about matters of the heart" is to make the reader "care" about what is, after all, originally not the reader's business. This moment of another's most serious business is what is glimpsed at the end of the poem 'costumes'. What is glimpsed there becomes the whole subject of her most recent book, *A Latin Primer*:

*the shock on Rene's face
years later when I met her. The unavailing
quality of fate. The person lights your path then
crosses to another area code*

The poet of *White Dog Sonnets* and *A Latin Primer* is a love poet, but, unusually, she represents most often other people in love. The overheard instant of panic, passion or desperation which concludes the poem 'costumes' has moved to the centre of the poems in *A Latin Primer*. And in *A Latin Primer* she has moved from representing people in love (the two characters in *White Dog Sonnets*) to questioning love itself:

*Slow beast I suppose I should interrogate
you the way we interrogate
a discourse. Are you archeology?
Insanity? Depravity? Are you happy?*

Thus the muttered imprecation at the conclusion of the poem 'costumes', "Jesus,/Jesus." moves later into centre field. Its entrance in *White Dog Sonnets* is stunning:

*I flew or floated through Sydenham
and Petersham, INSTANT SMASH REPAIRS and
dominus past the brick pits and TRIDENT FOUN-
DRIES
past the engravers and die sinkers dominus past
the Coptic
Orthodox Church and SKYLINE SCAFFOLDING*

This motif (religious? metaphysical?) is the 'Latin' of *A Latin Primer*:

*This Latin grammar's my real theology,
since it shows in boxed sets the first conjugation
of the verb to love – arriving at the Future
Perfect Indicative of amare:
we shall have loved*

This topic, which moves from a peripheral exclamation to a central preoccupation is not religion in any obvious sense, although its genealogy can be traced within the poet's (and Australia's) own Christian history (Protestant but in the presence of Catholic). However, as it emerges in the love poems of *A Latin Primer*, this preoccupation (after all, is God love?) develops into a structuring, metaphysical argument. Thus, in these poems, history completes a circle: the sonnet, originally the site of Dante's vernacular exploration of his metaphysic of love, returns as the vehicle for a contemporary version of the same, as in this splendid poem:

*The ego, bored with its self-investigations,
spreads itself out thin so it can fit across
the sea's surface, each pocket a glitter for a god.
Each placket slit properly for the sower of that
cloud, where roiling each earlier poem can
coalesce. Later the sense will contract to a warm
pain in the knee-joints and elbows*

This is one of the most complex things written in Australian English; it is dense, witty, surprising but formally light and balanced, almost airy. The argument, about belief, about pleasure, is both about the body and about art (poetry in particular). It is an argument that seeks to demonstrate that love need not repress pleasure; it does so by itself describing the embodiment of pleasure and by enacting that embodiment in its own brilliance (one could say *jouissance*), "each pocket a glitter for a god".

In the poem which follows, also about aesthetic/ecstatic pleasure, the rhetoric of the poem is an expression of the pleasure:

*The lover who lit the path and then left
too soon is sometimes yourself, and looking
back you see the consequence of your action*

Note the assonance of the repeated "l" and the way it harmonises with the sibilant "s" in these lines. At the

same time the content is unforgiving. We cause pain as well as pleasure, and it is this paradox which drives us to argument, to examine the history of belief, to examine the history of ourselves.

This argument about pleasure takes place in the awareness of pain, the pain introduced in the first poems of the series, the pain of separation, which is the mark of the presence of death:

*The incredible quickness of small
birds. Whose movements press inside the sadness
and make it work.*

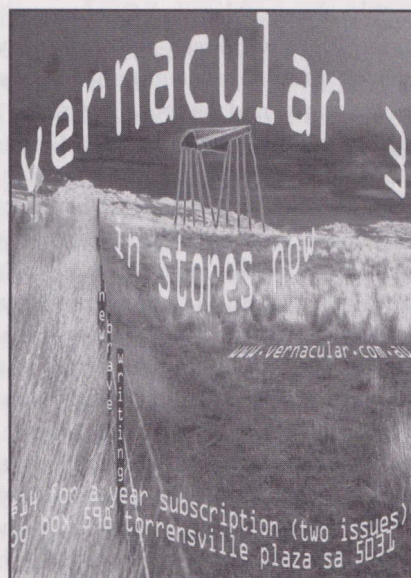
In these poems the outcome of this rigorous self and other examination is poised, light, and, the real mark of success in these games of life and art, comic:

*What are we to do with the ashes
of the adored person, that we carry
in a tiny urn under our bras?*

Well-wrought indeed.

Since all the copies of *A Latin Primer* have gone to good homes, it should be reprinted, at once.

Lee Cataldi is the author of *Race Against Time*, winner of the 1999 NSW Premier's Poetry Award, and *The Women who Live on the Ground*, winner of the Human Rights Commission Prize for Poetry. These books are now available from her. *Such is life.*



Different kinds of burning: new poetry

Kerry Leves

Jim Aubrey: *Between Darkness and Dawn* (Pigeon Press, unpriced).

JIM AUBREY was a performance poet in London in the late 1980s, and more recently an activist and lobbyist on behalf of the East Timorese people. These poems, “written in parliamentary corridors, in taxis, on trains, in airports and after demonstrations”, are a sharing of “down time/ or the incidental hours/ when vanished hope is reclaimed/ and the hot shower makes you clean”. They’re often analytical: nuggety, cogent meditations on time lived patiently, alertly and frustratingly. The commentary – on foreign ministers, ambassadors, parliamentary staffers, journalists, scene-stealers (a “Man from Ironbark” whose “art of prevarication . . . / kept his flag flying/ above the facts”), diggers, protesters, MPs, “breastbeating ideologues” and “cappucinoistas” – is very concise. Tensions, external and internal, are made palpable. ‘Media Conference’: “I’d given a lot of interviews/ but never inside Parliament House./ Nerves whipped around my insides/ like an angry autumn wind./ Surely the journos on the Hill/ are all sensitive and new age?/ It’s not every day that you get to present/ a testimony to a murder so brutal/ the facts are better left where – to the best/ of my knowledge – they’ve always been,/ filed away for eternity.” Rage – controlled, tracking rather than mauling its prey – seems to prowl behind the spare and energetic phrases; memorably also in ‘National Conference’, a poem for anyone who’s witnessed – or has yet to witness – bureaucratic protocols vacuuming the passion out of socially concerned people. The more personal sharings – a family visit in Israel, a Guinness-bugged scheduled event in Ireland – are inscribed tactfully: the feelings, of tenderness or multi-layered embarrassment, seem to speak for themselves. Some passages in the book are out-and-out agitprop, as semantically lush, and as fundamentalist, as wrath-of-God Biblical quotations; far less so are the mimetic satires, e.g. ‘Leading the Nation’, which is focused, funny and pungent, and the loudspeaker poems written in an exalted, anthemic style. With an amalgam of Portuguese and English phrases, Aubrey writes paeans to the on-the-ground activists, East Timorese fighting for their land, and to not be interned and tortured, and to not be killed. (These days

the East Timorese are struggling to put together an infrastructure that will support their devastated country.) *Between Darkness and Dawn* might companion Xuan Duong’s *refugee Refugees see the East Timorese?* (reviewed in *overland* 164), a different poetry, working into some of the same issues Aubrey puts on the table.

Tricia Dearborn: *Frankenstein’s bathtub* (Interactive Press, \$19.75).

THE GOTHIC title doesn’t seem appropriate: this poetry has (or creates, or reveals) a calm and thoughtful temperament, a cool wit, a penchant for lively and succinct elucidation. It’s very compressed. A poem about an astronomer’s ashes travelling through space with “only microns of silver metal” between the ashes and zero gravity, unfolds a surprising, persuasive vision of the connections between a human life and the surface of a remote planet. The poem does so in eighteen taut, image-rich, prosodically attractive lines: “. . . the rhythm of days eludes him/ two moons/ grace his airless nights/ and Earth’s an intermittent jewel/ flashing occasional blue/ as if to remind him of/ the fire that freed as steam/ his share of the ocean . . .” Tricia Dearborn holds degrees in arts and in biochemistry. Her literacy in science – which never becomes obtrusive – expands her poetry’s scope, enabling fresh perspectives on the body’s life and the resonant emotional worlds of family and friendship. The imagery is the most exciting aspect. It’s very physical, drawn from science – “mammal blood”, the smell of “bunsen-heated ethanol”; from the circus – “there are those whose senses are so refined/ they can pivot on the point of a chair leg”; from domestic interiors at varying degrees of intimacy – “body smooth and curved/ above the panty line”; and from a recognisable, sharable suburban life – “the red clang of boomgates”, a new baby “strapped against the heart that fixed/ the rhythm of all the days”. The total effect is of spontaneity, polish and clarity. This poet creates, with equal skill and care, some of the subtler shadings of human communion, as well as the grimness of “absolute violence”. Highly individual, her book runs a

gamut of considered experience. Its imaginative spaciousness could refresh any reader.

Jacob G. Rosenberg: *Behind the Moon* (fip, \$16.45).

TRAVELS from Poland in the Second World War to late 1940s Australia, and on into a language-present that is haunted by history, by personal and cultural pasts. *Behind the Moon* seems to witness the Jewish ghettos and Nazi death camps directly, from positions of intimacy. Rosenberg was born in the Lodz ghetto in the 1920s and during the war was put in Auchswitz and other camps. His poems are elegiac sonnets. 'Chayale', about a child who was born in a concentration camp and died there aged four, takes its reader to a number of edges simultaneously. The formal patterning, the plain, at times colloquial language, are almost lulling: "She was lucky, kids don't understand'/ How can adults be so wide of the mark?/ Chaya knew exactly what to fear./ A soldier's bootfall, a dog's vicious bark." The poem ends on the keeping of a horrible promise – that of its first line, "My little niece arrived without a future": murder without justice or passion or even curiosity. Rosenberg's poem may be the only trace of the child's stopped life; its effect is warm and casual, then bitter, very frightening, very cold. *Behind the Moon* has a cumulative impact. The apparent naïveté – the folk-art obviousness, the bald rhyming – in a lot of Rosenberg's writing, can be read as a deliberate refutation of Nazi aesthetics. For perfection go elsewhere (e.g. to the Leni Riefenstahl documentary films, with their formal sublimity and odious intent). Rosenberg's plaintive poetic English holds onto a sense of the ordinary, limited, even banal human lives Nazism set itself to obliterate. *Behind the Moon* is singularly, savagely poignant: in prosody remindful of folk songs and childhood rhymes, Rosenberg shows how deep and far the destruction extended. His book also includes a suite of poems about arrival and settlement in postwar Australia. They're sunny and expansive, a reminder of long-gone days that in the light of recent events, could appear radiant with tolerance.

X. Duong: *Hey, I've got a racist flu!* (Integration, PO Box 34 Bankstown NSW 1885, \$15 includes postage).

A BREATH of fresh air, that could blow away dust-defined cobwebs of cant. A poem 'Monoculture? Which one?' refers us to "the modern and huge beings gathering up on the super-cyber/ highway coolly

tossing the billions and occasionally/ throwing down a few dollars to the bony hands of the/ battlers' mass". Too polemical? Bit simplistic? Then consider this line: "Right! no thing is right/ for the picked upon./ No!" Is that dubious verbal territory in egalitarian, fair-suck-of-the-sap Australia? Don't most people work out strategies to survive bullying here (except, of course, those who don't survive it)? Don't we all feel safer as the schoolyard brutalities of youth recede with time, leaving "Only the murmurs in our hearts/ sounding like the huge Macquarie dictionary/ falling from the desk onto the big Pauline toe?" In this book the Vietnamese-Australian poet Xuan Duong breaks many silences. One effect is to correlate everyday Australian bully-culture with the various cultures of racism. The poetry would be horrifying, if its colourful expression, commonplace settings and spectacularly ordinary people weren't written with such a familial warmth and wry, but not at all indulgent, sense of fun. Broadly, it's about identity – its fluctuations, feints, defensive and offensive manoeuvres, enforced by continual meetings with prejudice, stereotype, abuse and violence. The project gathers together the thoughts, feelings and compelling stories of a wide range of bi-cultural youth, living in different Australian states. As a poet, Xuan Duong practises a Keatsian "negative capability" so that each poem makes the voice of a different character, conducting a particular life in a specific context. The word-music is not Keatsian however. It's contemporary: dissonant, full of the harshness of streets and high-school playgrounds, the laconism of factory floors, the multi-tongue of courtrooms. The vivid non-standard English can speak very plainly: "Hey, you're saying *you don't ask/ you don't get/ Well, racism!* I get heaps/ though I never ask." It can also be incantatory, as in these lines about the kinds of races anyone might be living next door to: "In the close-knit neighbourhood/ in the blossoming childhood/ they smear understanding/ they wipe out friendship/ they spray the wall of harmony/ with the paint of common mischief/ When caught redhanded/ they gloss it over/ with a can of thick scapegoat". The poetry creates also the sensuousness of being young, and the cognitive complexity of dealing with body changes, emotionality, social definition: "As soon as Year 6 holds my hands/ my head shoots up to the school's roof/ my shoulders weigh down with/ boiling power. My mouth full of heavy sounds./ I no longer avoid the known bullies/ I punch

them with my growing fists . . ." Bi-cultural kids have also to cope with nay-saying mouths, and eyes: "God rush me home/ right into the toilet/ for me to completely undress/ so every single eye can be picked/ off my skin . . ." For all its dark, at times very painful portraiture, this book is marked by enthusiasm – for getting things said that need to be said, in a language that combines deep feeling and tough-minded sociability.

Marjorie Pizer: *A Fortunate Star* (Pinchgut Press, unpriced).

THE VETERAN poet – this is her twenty-first book – doesn't divagate from certain commitments: plain statement, limpid diction, what used to be called clear thinking. These poems are brief, simple in structure, emotionally lucid. They're serious but by no means humourless, and many readers will welcome their resolve – they find poetry in life's quieter, contemplative moments, yet produce a strong and satisfying continuity. Some poems can seem so light as to blow away like dandelion spokes; most are unfussily and unpretentiously eloquent. Beyond these remarks, I find it hard to define the appeal of this poetry. Maybe it's the freshness of Pizer's outlook, apparent even when she's tackling subjects countless other people have written about. Or maybe it's her conviction, her use of silences and her dignified directness, which may remind readers of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poetry, though it's without the latter's rage.

D. J. Huppertz: *Sealer's Cove* (Textbase, PO Box 2057, East Brunswick 3057, \$5 includes postage).

AN INCISIVE book-length poem – it's twenty-four pages – that creates its own form; the linear variety and the white spaces are worked skilfully to build tensions between different representational styles. The poem portrays landscapes – mainly coastal, as the title suggests – using different means; for example, brief extracts from the journals of early nineteenth-century white explorers (George Bass among them); q. & a. between Sir Joseph Banks and the Commons Committee on Transportation, 1785. The austere prose of these interested historic white men is played against a contemporary poet's mimesis – sharp impressions of land and sea, birds and weather. The latter, in their tum, run against pithy observations – notes, really – that might have come from a built-for-speed late 1990s diary. All the above

are interspersed with patterned imagings of indigenous culture and practices. The matter inheres with the word-music, the total effect amounting to a gracefully rigorous informality – quiet thought in tensile action. And it digs deep, demonstrating how verbal portrayals of landscape – of any kind – create particular contexts while making others vanish. The text works against facile humanism: some of it depicts, and subtly interrogates, sealing practices of a blood-chilling if not stomach-turning brutality. These passages don't sensationalise or sentimentalise, only add to a reflective poem's considerations. Formally, *Sealer's Cove* is a palimpsest in which the traces of erased things become articulate. Succinctly evoking multiple viewpoints, *Sealer's Cove* also makes palpable the tensions between different viewpoints – between ways of writing, seeing, mapping, owning Australian spaces. My reviewer's copy of *Sealer's Cove* is number 40 out of 99. It would be a damn shame if the latter numerals represented the total readership. This is one print-run that deserves to multiply.

Lauren Williams: *Invisible Tattoos* (fip, \$15.95).

THIS ONE'S been subjected to some rather odd reviewing – a lecture-like snubbing from up-on-high in *ABR*; muddled condescension – "She is gifted with those *little* insights which occur while washing the dishes" – in *Five Bells*. A heady critical dyad perhaps, but sort of misleading. *Invisible Tattoos* is unusual – all up, the poetry creates a mood of romantic worldliness. The focus is social, e.g. on "the teenage beach tribe/ in their arrogant skin and involuntary beauty/ living on ice-cream and hormones/ bitten so deep by the season/ they wish it would never end." With salutary nonchalance, Williams dispatches her poetic 'I' into bustling, highly-differentiated contemporary spaces. The globetrotting reflections on media and mediation, on difference and the at times sexy, at times defeating excitements of difference, come across as thoughtful fun – with the strength to hold some *gravitas*. Why else is it good? Maybe because the poetic form is calibrated to vocal delivery. The backbeat sounds like pentameter, but effective variations, pauses and tonal shifts are written into the finely controlled lines – actually one of the more demanding writing tasks. Williams is a terrific performer (listen to her 'Killer Instinct' on the *Going Down Swinging 18* CD) but her poetry also delivers, from the page.

Geoff Goodfellow: *semi madness: voices from semaphore*
(Common Ground, \$17).

ABOUT PEOPLE who, like “the Chinese maple/ trees that sit in pairs/ all along the median strip/ . . . have no other place to go”. No other place, that is, than Semaphore, an Adelaide coastal suburb which, like Sydney’s Kings Cross, is home to a diversity of people who, supposedly, don’t fit The System. If by ‘The System’ you understand thirty-year mortgages and seventy-hour working weeks and time otherwise chewed into pellets by faxes, e-mails and important phone calls, then the Semaphore people depicted by Geoff Goodfellow may not be partakers. The poet, however, questions at least one possible relationship between the Semaphore-ites and their straighter and richer fellow-citizens: “is walking down Semaphore Road/ with your hand out considered to be/ cultural tourism?” Geoff Goodfellow is no cultural tourist – he too lives in Semaphore and in these poems exults in its tolerance and quotidian in-your-faceness. Many Semaphore residents appear through the medium of his writing in their complex aliveness, defiant, insouciant, needy, under siege: “It’s not just the thrill/ of spiking/ but of fronting/ the dealer/ day after miserable day/ . . . your ego/ urging your return.” The social dynamics are as rough as guts. But there are friendships and networks whereby people sustain themselves, against institutional vio-

lence (“ . . . doing his third night/ in the nut house/ it’s pyjamas and a straight-/ jacket for him/ & a big hypo full of stuff/ to shut him up/ to shut him down”) and normative incomprehension (“ . . . a couple at another table who don’t quite understand. Both the man and the woman have sad, lustreless eyes. I’d like to cry for them. If I were a godbotherer, I think I’d pray for them.”) It’s all mapped with a kind of blunt tact. There’s plenty of violence – “They reckon/ it came out as easy as a first tooth” begins a poem about an eye gouged out in a pub brawl – but there’s also restraint, buoyed by a benign humour; after all, Semaphore is also “the only suburb in this/ city where people can still/ shop in their pyjamas without/ being giggled.” Forget your dignity! Think instead about the myriad ways in which people make a life for themselves, based on what they can and can’t afford, manage, get away with. Reflect on what happens to our much vaunted needs for esteem – from self, from others – when survival needs overwhelm the rest. Just don’t expect to be guided how to respond: telling-it-like-it-is becomes an art form in this book. It has a rhythmic delicacy all its own, and for a work about poverty and the exigencies and often bitter fun of making do, an embracing spirit.

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet who provides a regular poetry round-up for overland.

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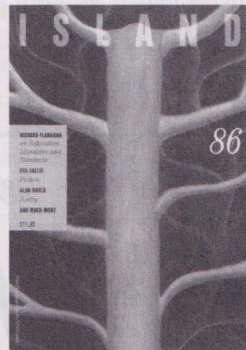
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