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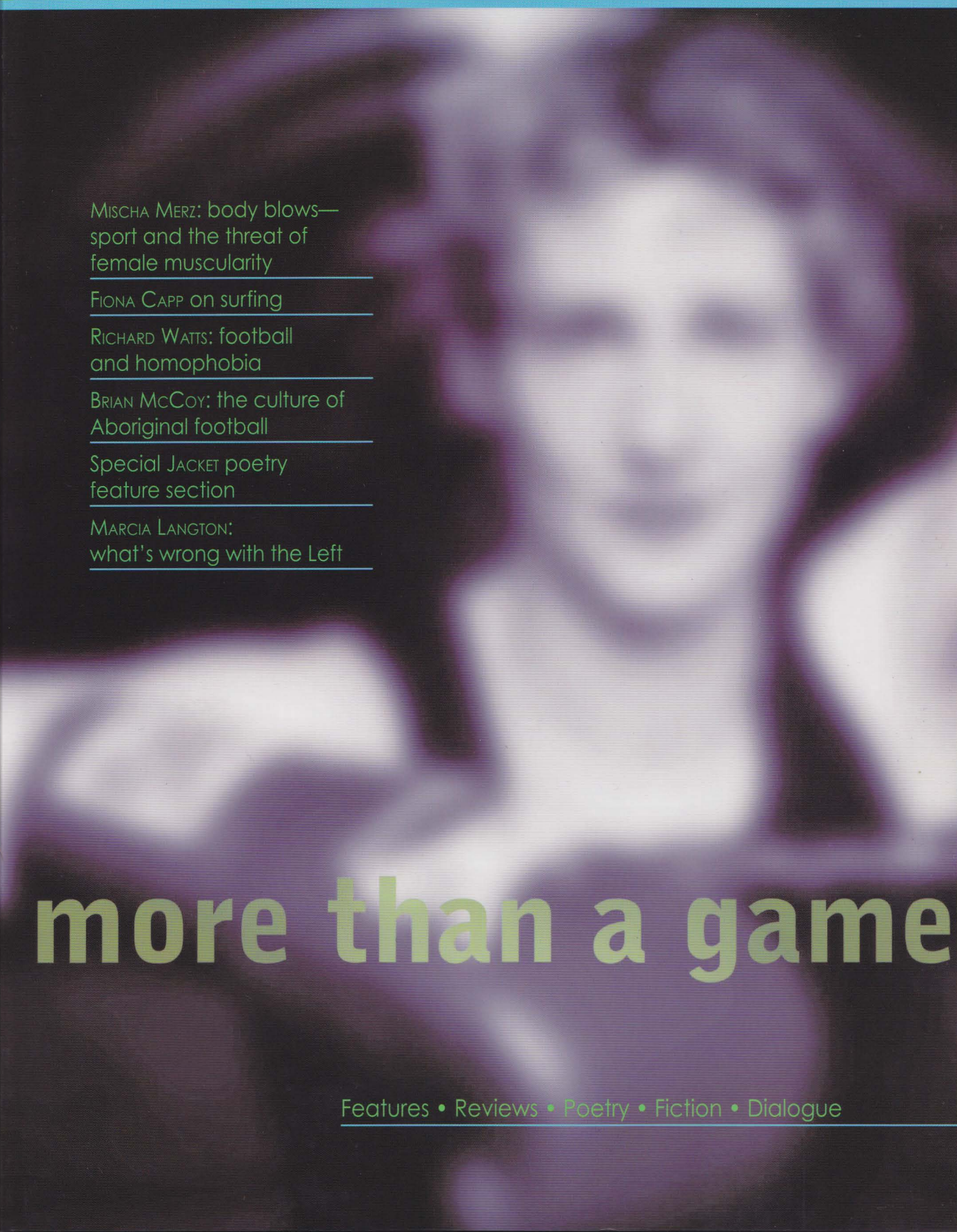

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more than a game

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overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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Muscling In

THE LEFT HAS HAD its difficulties with sport. Historically, there have been three positions around which discussion and argument have inconclusively circled. The first is a form of the 'opiate of the masses' line which sees sport as one of the ways the ruling class gets the working class to take its eye 'off the ball' of political agitation. It has always been a current of left-wing thinking about sport and other popular cultural forms. While very few, if any, hold this position absolutely, it is a notion that has some purchase and, more importantly, is one which the idiot right ascribes to all political thinkers to the left of Essendon coach Kevin Sheedy.

The second position is one which sees sport as a positive expression of the culture and desire of the 'people'; something which needs to be defended against the rapaciousness of capital's acquisition and commodification of cultural forms throughout history. This position has sometimes been developed in *overland*, especially by Ian Turner, 'the footy professor'. The recent 'victory' of South Sydney in regaining its status in the National Rugby League is an occasion which this position would celebrate.

While I tend to subscribe to this position, I don't do so wholeheartedly. For every noble example of courage, compassion or community found in sport, a counter-example of cowardice, hatred or selfishness can be identified. For every Nicky Winmar proudly pointing to his black skin in the face of racist abuse there's an Eddie Gilbert hounded out of cricket for his Aboriginality; for every John Landy picking up a fallen competitor, there's a Tonya Harding organising the bashing of her rival; for every team of under-eights giving their all there's a sideline of anxious parents camouflaging their ruthlessness.

The third position is the idea of sport as a social activity disconnected from the central political and economic aspects of society: sport is considered either insignificant or significant only on its own terms. From this perspective, while sport might have its own internal politics and economy (within which a certain amount of political activism is sometimes necessary), there is little meaningful parallel between those structures and society at large. (Thus *overland*'s associate

Mischa Merz

Body Blows

Sport and the threat of female muscularity

HOLLY FERNELEY AND I would have been better off if we'd stripped naked and wrestled in jelly instead of trying to show our boxing skills in public. The NSW government would certainly have preferred us to do just about anything else, no matter how demeaning, than box each other, which was what we had been invited to do on the campus of Newcastle University in May 2001. The biggest crowd in recent memory had gathered on the student union courtyard to see what would happen. Would we fight or not? And if we did, would we get arrested? Danger and spectacle had lured people from all corners of the campus. Boxing is not only risky it is against the law for women in New South Wales, the only place in the world where this is the case. It is also, like some dying indigenous language, regarded as being primitive and outmoded when it is actually something of intricate complexity.

Holly Ferneley should be a household name. She is a Sydney-based triple world champion kickboxer and professional boxer with more than twenty fights and nine knockouts on her card. I am an Australian amateur champion boxer from Victoria. We had something to say, or at least our bodies did, in the special lexicon of pugilism. And that is: the fight is universal and has nothing to do with gender. Even when male insiders, traditionally against women being in the ring, witness highly skilled female boxers they often concede to the notion of equality. While it might be masculine, it is not about men. And if masculinity is so easy to imitate by way of two women boxing authentically, rather than flailingly, or as a joke, is masculinity indeed so inviolate? These questions and more were supposed to get an airing, appropriately on a university campus where such matters, at least in theory, are frequently raised. Whole courses are dedicated to the study of gender after all.

But even to box to such a diluted degree that would be so abstract you'd have to call it theatre would breach the NSW laws. The penalties are $20,000 and six months jail for us. Double for our promoter, Newcastle University Student Association President, Matthew Thompson.

Holly and I warmed up in our respective corners, shadow boxing, ducking and weaving, loosening our limbs, stretching our neck muscles. Limbering up to use the language that we had been using, until that moment, only in private like some hushed whisper between fugitives. We were wearing our satin fighting shorts and heavy 16-ounce sparring gloves for this momentous debut.

The gathered crowd was clearly hoping for something violent. The exhibition had been widely publicised as an illegal fight, not a sparring session, and the crowd, I suppose, was expecting blood. A boxer, Ahmed Popal, had already died in Melbourne weeks earlier and a woman boxer, Patricia Devellerez was lying in an induced coma in New Zealand after being knocked out in an amateur bout. The dangers loomed large. This may be what attracted the crowds – you can never really underestimate boxing spectators, the mob never helps when the sport is under fire. But their motives are quite separate from those of the participants in the ring, who shut out the shouts and cheers and boos. The inarticulate grunts of ordinary language. Often it seems that the greatest threat comes from outside the ropes. Inside, the rules are clear. The context is important here; the contest pure.

These days boxing only gets attention when bad things happen. In the hysteria surrounding the rare tragedies, the meaning of it for those who do it becomes trampled in the rush for higher moral ground. This sport is not just a potential means to an end for working-class people. That's a convenient cliche to appease middle-class angst. For the majority, there is little profit in boxing – they'd be better off buying a lottery ticket. It is more importantly a means of self-description and an expression of identity and this is the same for both genders.

But attempts to express these aspects of the sport are often drowned out by hyperbole like 'it's degrading' and 'out of place in modern society'. Dr Michael Wooldridge (federal minister of health at the time of the bout on Newcastle University campus) and the AMA's Dr Kerryn Phelps can get away with these simplistic attacks because the other side of the argument is not only complex it is also mute, by way of class, education and position. And in NSW, also gender. It is a sport too subtle and multi-layered for a sound bite. Great and important literary works by the likes of Norman Mailer, George Plimpton, Joyce Carol Oates and Gerald Early have been dedicated to understanding the meaning of boxing from its myriad angles: class, gender, race. Together and separately these works seem to be saying that boxing very much has a place in modern society. It is one of the few activities that shows us exactly how civilised we are, and how much we are able to recognise and utilise our own aggression and not merely succumb to it like wild dogs.

But whenever it's the subject of public discussion, insiders sound punchy and outsiders sound like pompous seventeenth-century fops, squeamish about bodily fluids and physical risk. We never really get to understand anything about the sport, we only hear prejudice – from both sides. Back and forth like a series of disconnected non sequiturs. Because both sides are talking about different things.

Boxing communities are small, close-knit and loyal. They are the kind of grass-roots places that have been steadily eroded by modernity, reconstituted, corporatised, branded and sold back to the people. Like football. Boxing gyms are like artists' studios, where craft and skill are valued alongside courage and toughness. They are refuges for wayward youth and adult males alike in which bonding is cross-generational, and more and more, across genders as well. I have had many conversations with male boxers in which we both identify with the same paradoxical cluster of emotions that come to the fore in this environment. Boxing gyms are all much the same in configuration; heavy punching bags, speed balls, skipping ropes, mirrors and at the centre of it all, like a stage in a small, avant-garde theatre, sits the ring. Conversations about fights and fighters bounce from one to the other like Chinese whispers, linked through common values and associations.

Boxing has long been considered the red-light district of mainstream sport. The critics would rather see it banned for men than made legal for women.

"The gym", writes sports ethicist Michael Burke, "is seen as a small-scale civilising machine to avoid uncontrolled violence." They are often the very opposite of what the sport is accused of being. "How", Burke goes on to say, "can the small and relatively powerless practice community, gain a voice so they are not threatened with redescription by people who do not understand them in ways that they understand themselves?"

Perhaps part of what is missed by outsiders is that these are places of work in the traditional, blue-collar sense, where work carries with it considerable personal pride. The gym is also a space for creativity, self-determination and learning and importantly,

autonomy. They are not just bloodhouses where cavemen beat each other to a pulp. In fact as much time is spent learning not to get hit as in delivering the blows. An unschooled observer cannot see the full vocabulary of a highly skilled fight. They seem to know only one word in relation to what they see and that is 'punch'. Yet many, or most, aren't even aware of their own ignorance, mainly because they're educated. They're taught to have a higher, not lower, opinion of their own intellect in cases of doubt. This is the very opposite of your average, toiling boxer, who is inclined to believe that his lack of education and opportunity is actually his own fault.

As Joyce Carol Oates has written:

> Because a boxing match is a story without words doesn't mean that it has no text or language, that it is somehow 'brute' or 'primitive' or 'inarticulate', only that the text is improvised in action; the language a dialogue between boxers of the most refined sort . . .

What Phelps and Wooldridge know of boxing is the ten seconds before a knockout that they might've seen on the TV news, in a fight that may have been going for forty minutes, in a career that may have lasted a decade, in a culture that is so far removed from them it may as well be on Mars. It's like pretending you speak Italian because you can order a cappuccino.

Boxers are baffled by the ignorance of the attacks on their sport. And they frequently point to other dangerous sports and their death and injury rates as a defence. But it's not the right kind of defence. What they need is the means to explain the pleasure of the struggle and the work, the respect they have for their sparring partners and opponents, the very visceral way in which boxing engages them and drives them and gives them a greater sense of themselves and their place in the world. But the practice of the sport itself is the only language they have. They are foreigners in their own land.

IN OUR RESPECTIVE red and blue corners Holly and I were also poised in a silent place, separate from the cacophony of arguments that circle the sport. It's a place safe from hysteria about injury and degradation. It's one that values the courage required to step through the ropes and the willingness to put one's entire existential being on the line.

It is about the fight in which every talent must unfold. "For boxing really isn't the metaphor," writes Oates, "it's the thing itself."

Boxing is also powerfully addictive. As Thomas Hauser, author of *The Black Lights* has written, boxing is like a narcotic. Once it's in your blood it never leaves your system. And there's no gender test in that. The addictive forces are as strong for women as they are for men because they are so fundamentally human that they seem to defy conditioning. The engagement in this sport is intimate, sometimes profoundly so. Your focus on the other is as unwavering as it would be if you were in love. Your eyes are never off each other. There are emotions you feel as a consequence of boxing that you can't even get close to in day-to-day life.

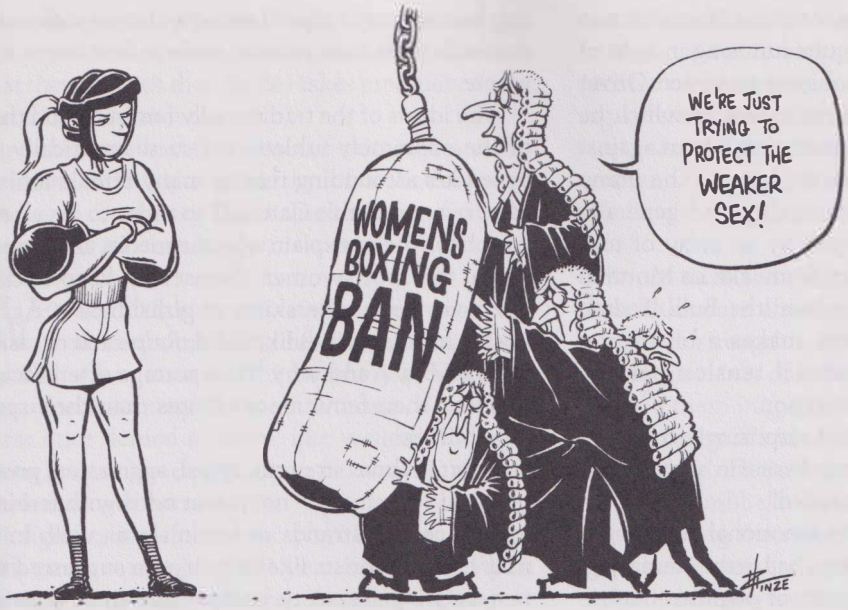
Melbourne professional boxer Baydon Beddoe has written of one of his encounters:

> intimate insight into my opponent also provided me with another insight. The fight can be seen as a mutual agreement where the opponent is not seen as an obstacle to be overcome, but rather as a partner there to aid in testing and drawing out my own capacities . . . It is possible then to consider that in the heat of the competition, together boxers can construct an intense, immediate and total friendship.

Women, traditionally, only enter a boxing ring wearing G-strings and high heels and hold up cards with the round number on them, which apparently is less degrading or out-of-step with anything modern.

Boxing has long been considered the red-light district of mainstream sport. The critics would rather see it banned for men than made legal for women. So there is not much chance that the law will change against any weight of public opinion. Yet despite the ban, women fight in Sydney – they box and kickbox in gyms all over the state. They are probably more enthusiastic than they are in other states. Women compete in unsanctioned underground fights or 'club spars' in preparation for sanctioned interstate competitions. Many of them are exceedingly good at what they do. All the ban does is shield their activities from the public like some Victorian veil of modesty, covering offences against femininity, making it a crime to be unladylike.

I went to Tony Mundine's Redfern gym where Holly trains, for a practice spar the day before our trip to Newcastle. When I suggested we go through the motions without appearing to fight so as not to



The ring is a place safe from hysteria about injury and degradation. It's one that values the courage required to step through the ropes and the willingness to put one's entire existential being on the line.

break the law, she looked disappointed, even insulted. So we went ahead and sparred without any inhibitions. Any restraint was dictated not by law but by mutual respect. This is how most boxers train; a collaborative exchange of modulated pressure.

We attracted the attention of some of the other boxers and trainers in the gym, which was a good sign. People in boxing gyms don't stop and watch unless there is something worthwhile going on in the ring. Two of them became our unofficial corner men, giving us strategic advice between rounds. If we had done what we did that night in a public forum we would have risked prosecution. And yet on the mean streets of Redfern outside the gym, people are routinely mugged, drugs are sold and consumed and fear lurks in the eyes of any taxi driver brave enough to take you there.

At Newcastle the next day Holly and I touched gloves and retreated to our corners. As we shaped up to each other ready to begin, the black-clad figure of our erstwhile promoter, Matthew Thompson, flew between us and stopped the bout before a single punch was thrown. He grabbed a microphone and announced that the University had prohibited the bout from taking place and had threatened to ban student association activities for all time if we went ahead. They had even threatened to cut off the power.

Almost immediately we lost about 50 per cent of our audience. The rest politely listened as Holly and I took turns to speak like a couple of suffragettes in boxing shorts, squeaking away to a diminishing crowd who really wanted sensation and spectacle, not another bloody lecture.

Later when most of them had gone Holly and I decided to make use of the full-sized ring and so shadow boxed with our gloves off in different corners. Then by some boxers' radar we found each other and began to spar – our separate monologues becoming, by instinct, a dialogue.

Without making contact we moved around the ring as we had wanted to do in the first place. But by then it had become a private matter, between the two of us and so we were safe, somehow, from the long arm of the law. But this was when we were at our most eloquent, doing what we had trained to do, something not quite as degrading as jelly wrestling.

Late last year Holly applied in Sydney's Federal Court to have the law changed. But much to everyone's shock the application failed. In handing down his decision Justice Murray Wilcox said the NSW Boxing Authority was exempt from section 18 of the sex discrimination act because it was a state institution.

Holly's case had a precursor in the UK a few years ago. There, women were banned from professional boxing because they menstruate and therefore were regarded as too emotionally unstable for the sport. The rule was challenged by a female welterweight champion, Jane Couch – better known as the Fleetwood Assassin.

THIS CONCERN about the feminine disposition in the boxing ring I find quite amusing in light of Mike Tyson's infamous ear-biting and even Oliver McCall's in-fight nervous breakdown in which he burst into uncontrollable sobs during a bout against heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis. The litany of drug abuse, violence, criminality and generally unhinged behaviour displayed by an array of top-line male professional boxers from Jake La Motta to our own coke-snorting Shannon 'the Bulli Blaster' Taylor, makes a bit of pre-menstrual tension pale by comparison.

Not surprisingly, the Fleetwood Assassin's challenge succeeded.

An emotional edge is just another ball in the eternal juggling act of pugilism that requires hot rage and cold precision to work in unison. No matter how much technical accomplishment a boxer displays, for some reason it's the emotion that is the most palpable – and not just to untrained observers. The emotion is of course aggression – the problematic love child of a romanticised masculinity.

Women have invested a good deal in maintaining the myth that they are substantially, rather than marginally, weaker and slower than men.

As Norman Mailer wrote in *The Fight*: "Prizefighters do not, of course, train to kill people at large. To the contrary, prizefighting offers a profession to men who might otherwise commit murder in the street."

In Mailer's mythologised masculinity, murder is always lurking covertly yet proudly beneath the surface. The view does nothing to make boxing comprehensible to those who condemn it as barbaric.

There are plenty of examples of boxers who make a laughing stock of Mailer's assertion and any claims that it takes psychotic doses of certain emotions to succeed. Sugar Ray Leonard, Les Darcy, John Famechon, Ambrose Palmer, Kostya Tszyu – all solid, sane and grounded athletes. So at the end of the day, emotional disposition seems hardly even relevant. But the problem boxing has with women is that they are invading emotional territory that was once exclusive to men.

It is perhaps because of such transgressions that femininity and sport have always been a fraught pairing; boxing only helps illuminate the prejudices and contradictions that exist in more subtle ways elsewhere.

The ideals of the traditionally feminine and those of the supremely athletic are so diametrically opposed it's astounding that so many female athletes have overcome this Catch-22 in order to excel. And it probably helps explain why the media, and to some extent the sportswomen themselves, keep ducking for cover under the skirts of girlishness – e.g. by posing for magazines like *FHM, Ralph* and occasionally *Playboy* – and why the reportage often focuses more on their feminine attributes than their sporting abilities.

Sport is about strength, speed, aggression, power, physical supremacy – not just at odds with femininity but certain strands of feminism as well. In the mid 1980s theorists like Lois Bryson suggested that in a truly equal society, competitive sport must disappear. "Sport", she wrote in 1987, "is so thoroughly masculinised that it seems unlikely it can be reclaimed to serve women's interests."

I wonder what the 44.6 per cent of women who take part in organised sport would think of that and how much that idea might lurk in the shadows when they have to call upon aggression and a competitive streak. How do Cathy Freeman, Tatiana Gregorieva, the Hockeyroos, Lauren Burns, Karrie Webb et al. deal with the unspoken implications that their success is also a betrayal of their gender?

The best they can do is constantly reiterate that they have not compromised the feminine for the sake of sport, that all the strength, aggression, competitiveness and agility is only for the sporting field. Off the sporting stage their femininity is still intact: Gregorieva's nightwear range, the Hockeyroos' nude calendar, Cathy Freeman's sweet, unthreatening modesty. There seems to be an unabating, vigilant effort to hold on to notions of innate difference, even as the gap narrows. The more successful the athlete, the more she has to emphasise that these masculine qualities are only for the sporting field.

As Bryson's views show, it hasn't always been men who uphold gender-based differences as reasons for women not to take part in sports and therefore not to be taken seriously as athletes. Women have invested a good deal in maintaining the myth that they are substantially, rather than marginally, weaker and slower than men. These perceptions have allowed them to be more covert in their aggression and more cunning as competitors in other ways. But

it has also possibly denied them the pleasure of a pure and direct contest with one another in which what they do with their bodies takes precedence over how those bodies look.

In a bizarre way the views of certain strands of feminism follow the trajectory of a Victorian-era masculine supremacy that valued women first and foremost as incubators.

WOMEN TODAY are only starting to break away from the combined inhibitors of starry-eyed essentialist feminism and the treachery of Victorian masculine insecurity. As more women compete in sports once denied to them, like weightlifting and boxing, we are seeing the gap between male and female strength narrow.

A significant shift, for example, in women's marathon times took place last year when a Kenyan woman, Catherine Ndereba, became the fastest woman in history over 42 kilometres, running in a time of 2 hours, 18 minutes and 47 seconds. Ben Kimondui won the Chicago Marathon 10 minutes ahead of her.

Dick Telford, marathon coach at the Australian Institute of Sport, told *The Australian*'s Nicole Jeffrey: "People have to recognise that the top women in the world will be very good from now on. I have male runners in my group who aspire to run a 2:15 marathon. Now they know a woman is getting close to that it's a seismic shock."

Last year only three Australian men ran faster than 2:18, including Steve Moneghetti.

The improvement in these times makes you ponder how severely this collusion between chauvinism and feminism has actually retarded the physical progress of women athletes and delayed those improved performances. How might it have stunted the athletic expectations and progress of women who are only now allowing themselves to build the kind of muscles that male athletes fifty years ago would have envied? Marion Jones lined up beside a sprinter from the 1956 Olympic games or Serena Williams serving those rockets at Bobby Riggs? They'd both make the men of another era look like pipsqueaks. They also would most probably have been ridiculed and humiliated off the track; accused of being female impersonators or freaks.

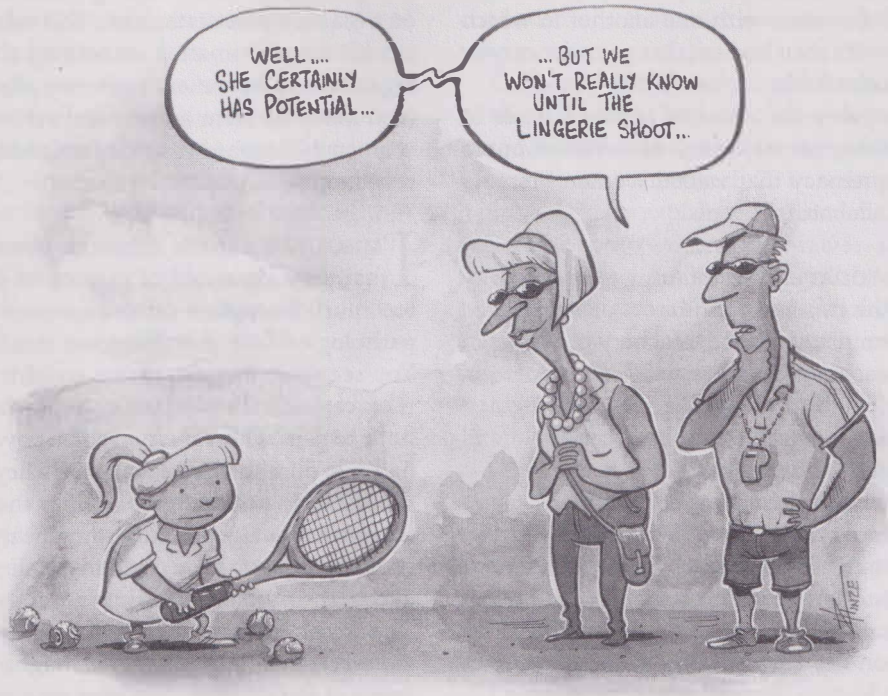
And yet contemporary women are not entirely free from such accusations. Far from it. Ordinary women, who don't compete on an elite level in sport, have a somewhat more problematic relationship with overt strength and its varying connotations. Muscle on a man is a pure statement of his validity as a man. Muscle on a woman is something else altogether; regardless of how men might see physical strength (and many of them admire and are attracted to it), women still regard it as de-feminising – a way of repelling men.

I'M SURPRISED at the number of women who say that they are afraid of gaining or demonstrating too much strength – often expressed as an almost pathological fear of building too much muscle bulk. You see them in gyms lifting weights so far within their capacity it's hard to imagine what they might hope to gain. These women go on power walks with half-kilo dumbbells in each hand. They'd build more muscle lifting their shopping into the car! And yet these small weights signify the uneasy relationship ordinary women have with physicality. The appearance is the problem, certainly not the strength itself. The anxiety focuses on the masculinity that the muscle represents and the way it might challenge the needs of certain men – the ones who require women to be significantly weaker so that they can feel strong. These women would probably be surprised to discover that rather than being a repellent, many men are in fact attracted to a female physicality that embraces strength. This includes young men and even teenage boys who surprisingly want to meet girls on more equal footing.

And yet, the muscle-free woman is still the fashion magazine preference where women with arms that look like sticks of spaghetti are served up as someone's notion of the ideal.

This construction of heterosexual femininity merely maintains the myth that women are weak and men are strong. The smaller the gap is in reality, the more feeble the fashion models appear.

The objection to and the focus on these models has always been on their lack of fat, yet their lack of anything resembling muscle seems to pass without comment. Perhaps an explanation for their emaciated appearance is that they are actually too weak to lift food to their mouths. In reality, low body fat is healthy and obesity a more serious problem than anorexia. But lack of muscle is more closely aligned to an actual physical disability – a kind of wilful, deliberate degeneration. Yet this is ignored in the endless and tedious commentary about female body image neurosis that seems to offer a predictable binary of skinny and abnormal versus fat and normal. Neither



of which are healthy. Strength doesn't rate at all as a mainstream issue in the narrative of femininity. And yet on the margins female strength exists as a fetish.

A magazine called *Fighting Females* offers a parade of images of muscular women in bikinis, wrestling and play fighting with one another. But it also includes pictures of women engaging in conventional boxing and wrestling with cover lines like 'Catfight madness hits backalley gym' and 'School of submission'. All a bit creepy and perverse at first glance.

But then in one issue is a feature article on one Evil Kitty, a muscular, dark-haired woman flexing her tattooed biceps for the camera. She says she sees herself as a healer.

> I think when you allow someone to come into a space where they've been oppressed and they haven't been able to say they want to be squeezed by a strong, powerful woman, I think that's healing. Somewhere our society has said that's wrong and that we're supposed to feel bad about it.

It's an odd society that forces female strength onto the margins while it valorises disfigured and emaciated women. Evil Kitty has a point.

In an essay called 'On the Muscle', Laurie Schulze says that popular culture is forever dragging the female bodybuilder back into the realm of what is acceptably feminine. So while the fetish publications revel in muscle size and power-posing, women in the mainstream have to modify themselves for popular consumption.

The sport itself has had to adjust its idea of the ideal female body to emphasise more feminine proportions over bulk. But female bodybuilders continue to push the boundaries despite the emphasis on body shaping rather than building and fitness displays rather than heroic poses.

In a similar way, women who do boxacise for fitness are regarded as acceptable, while women who actually fight are often considered to have gone too far. Watching a physically weak woman hit bags with girly ineptitude is kind of endearing. When she does it competently it's bound to arouse confusion.

I've often been aware of male eyes watching me as I punch a heavy bag or spar aggressively with a man or another woman in the gym. Sometimes I feel an almost mesmerised gaze.

I'm guessing hopefully that it is a new way for them to see femaleness which isn't necessarily perverse or worrying. I think they're interested in my displays of aggression and skill as well as my capacity to take a punch in the way of a boxer – without acknowledging its impact. These are qualities that men

admire in each other and it has been important to exclude women from opportunities to also display it.

At one stage I had a small but loyal male following where I trained and I don't think they were subscribers to *Fighting Females* and if they were, so what! These men, mostly young, fit and strong themselves, offered me nothing but encouragement and respect. Those who find my physicality threatening or unpalatable, generally keep their distance, which is exactly where I'd like them to stay. It's a good way to sort out the wheat from the chaff – or should I say, the men from the boys!

Popular culture, which lags behind changes rather than leading them, is still stuck with the old dichotomies. Magazines frequently feature women in boxing training garb, wearing boxing gloves and often not much else. But it is important that these women display no actual technical ability or strength. In a way this image modification reflects concerns about the diminishing boundaries between the sexes. Biology, says Schulze, is invoked to prove that there is no threat to the difference by confirming that women cannot attain the same kind of bulk as men.

But it's not just the tough, macho sports in which these issues are played out.

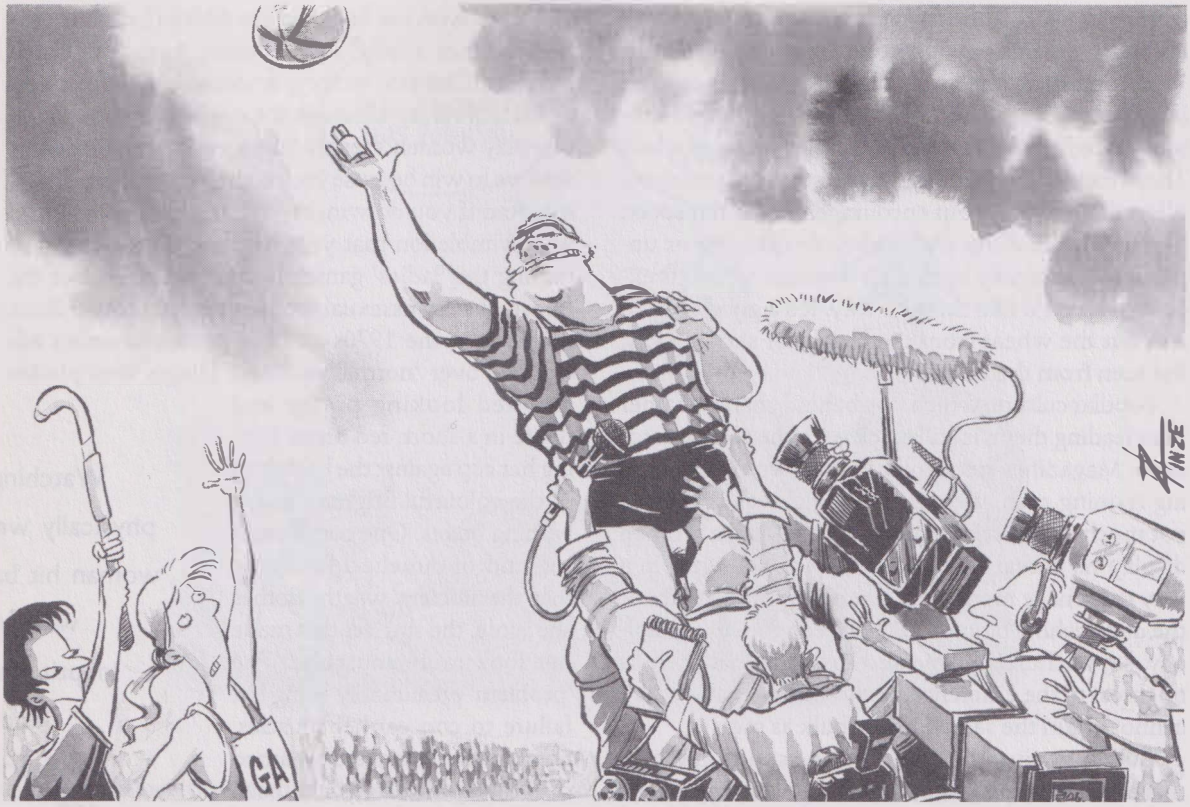
In 1999, Amelie Mauresmo, a champion French tennis player, seemed to embody the contradiction of sport and femininity. Playing in the Australian Open, Mauresmo initially took as a compliment then world number one Lindsay Davenport's comments that she 'played like a guy' after beating her in the semi-final. The tanned, rather statuesque Mauresmo was said to be proud of her strength and worked at it for two hours a day in the gym. Then Martina Hingis, who was to play her in the final, was reported as saying that Mauresmo was 'half a man' because of her muscular build and her openly stated lesbian relationship. These comments by Hingis and Davenport (who later said she was taken out of context) were read as 'bitchy' by the media. Mauresmo was always photographed from her most masculine angles, playing the power shots. The French teenager was even mocked in her own country. Then at the 1999 US Open, Serena Williams was accused by male commentators of making women's tennis boring because she was hitting the ball too hard, serving at speeds that equalled the men's. It was an interesting contradiction because it implied that men's tennis was also boring and that, in turn, makes you wonder why they are justified in earning so much more money than women.

Hingis won the final and the tabloid headline was 'Three times a lady' for her three Australian Open victories. The real victory, it seemed, was for traditional femininity, although the implication was that if you play women's tennis 'like a guy' then you do not deserve to win because you might be somehow cheating. And if you do win, as Williams did, going on to win Wimbledon that year, you are then accused of ruining the 'ladies' game'. It was reminiscent of the furore over transsexual women's tennis player Rene Richards in the 1970s and her perceived unfair advantage over 'normal' women. Hingis was photographed looking pretty and petite in a short, red dress, kissing her cup against the backdrop of the colourful Brighton Beach bathing boxes. One commentator said of Amelie Mauresmo that 'the problem' was the clothes she wore, the singlets that made her look more muscular. The 'problem' presumably being her failure to conceal her muscles. Some journalists were ashamed of the way the story had been covered, and they said so.

Female muscularity and strength clearly created disturbances in a sport in which women have always taken part, even at times when most nice middle-class ladies did not play sport. Whether or not this kind of media coverage discourages women from trying to attain physical strength is unclear, but I have no doubt that it has some effect.

Watching a physically weak woman hit bags with girly ineptitude is kind of endearing. When she does it competently it's bound to arouse confusion.

Fortunately the Williams sisters, with their girlish obsession with clothes and their sweet, giggling off-court personalities have somehow managed to make muscles acceptable on the tennis circuit in the intervening years. But this also raises issues of race, in that the Williams sisters' muscle may appear more acceptable to the mainstream because they are black and therefore differently constructed, both physically and culturally. Perhaps because of this Serena and Venus have managed to balance muscle and cleavage in a way few women would be able to. But despite their impressive physiques, shots of them in action seem to fixate on their bustlines and, on occa-



sions, show them with neither a racquet nor tennis ball in sight. It's Laurie Schultz's argument in action – convention dragging female strength back to a more acceptable zone. They've got impressive biceps? Well let's have a good long look at their tits instead. And the sisters play up to this in ways that all professional sportswomen do – for sponsorship, publicity and profile. If they dressed like male players, the story, I have no doubt, would be entirely different.

Female anxiety about appearance is one of capitalism's most crucial pillars and rather than dismantle it, men have been encouraged to join in. They are now boosting the ranks of the bulimic and doing their bit to bolster the cosmetic surgery industry. They too will learn to allay their fears with a vast array of expensive but useless unguents, liposuction and facelifts. Female insecurity about appearance is crucial to so much industry it is hard to imagine how capitalism would function without it. The idea that a female body is one that gains sensual pleasure from its own activity, from what it can do, rather than from how it looks or is adorned is almost unheard of. Running costs nothing. You can't market movement. Modern men and women alike are becoming passive consumers first and foremost – creativity and activity are nothing if they cannot be packaged and sold. Even men have to fabricate the kind of bodies that once only came naturally from physical work.

HOLLY FERNELEY ended her year with a double blow. Not only did she lose her Federal Court application, she also lost a fight in Queensland against Australia's world champion boxer Sharon Anyos, a woman she had lost to twice before.

I lost my Australian title to an Aboriginal teenager from Palm Island on a split decision.

Maybe we'll both have to take up jelly wrestling!

Mischa Merz is a Melbourne journalist and author. Her book Bruising – a journey through gender *was published in 2000 by Picador. She is also the 2000 National Women's Welterweight Amateur Boxing Champion and 2001 Victorian Female Boxer of the Year.*

Richard Watts

In the Pink

Homosexuality, Homophobia and Sport

FOR MANY GAY MEN, Australian rules football is an alien world dominated by masculine rites reinforcing heterosexuality and hetero-normality; a world that actively excludes them, and of which they want no part.

A second type of gay man exists who has little interest in Australian Rules Football itself, but who possesses an erotic fascination for footballers. The aggressive masculinity and physical prowess of those who play football at its elite level represent, for these men, the ultimate turn-on and an impossible fantasy.

Between these two groups there are other gay men, and many lesbians as well, who like myself appreciate football for the skill of its contestants and for the excitement of the game. Indistinguishable from our heterosexual counterparts, we participate in the winter ritual which is football in Melbourne and interstate: we go to games, barrack for our teams, achieve catharsis in victory, and in loss, find despair.

As I say, it is with this latter group with whom I identify. Unlike such men and women however, I have taken my allegiance to my team, Collingwood, to an extreme, by forming the first gay and lesbian supporters' group in the AFL: the Pink Magpies.

I CAME LATE to football. I came out early. These two events, while not specifically linked, are definitely intertwined. Casting my mind back to the country town where I endured six years of secondary school education, and the equivalent stretch of time doled out in weekly poofter-bashings and humiliation, I am reminded of the fact that Trafalgar's football team was called The Bloods. I never watched their games: the young guns who dreamt of playing for the town's team spilled enough of my own blood upon the dusty school oval to ensure that I never wanted to.

Even before the bashings began I disliked football. As a small child I had been given a Sherrin as a Christmas present by one of my uncles. I ignored it. At that age, and for many years to come, I preferred a good book over any form of sport, much to the shock of my Collingwood-mad family.

It took many years before my loathing of football waned, and another decade before my growing tolerance for the game turned into active enjoyment.

In 1990 Collingwood won the premiership flag; their first in thirty-two years. My father had died several years earlier, and it was to honour his memory, as well as from a perverse sense of curiosity, that I made my way to Victoria Park that Saturday night to witness the aftermath of the team's long-awaited Grand Final victory. The celebrations, despite their feverish intensity, were not enough to catalyse any interest in football in me. That honour goes to Michael Cordell's superb documentary *Year Of The Dogs*. When the Bulldogs narrowly lost their chance at a Grand Final berth in 1997, I was moved enough by their defeat to view Cordell's film the next day.

Watching the trials and torments of such an unsuccessful team as Footscray (as the Western Bulldogs were then known), I found myself mourning their loss even more, and for the first time, mourning a loss of my own: the absence of a tribal allegiance to a team.

The next year, while researching an as-yet unpublished novel, a friend took me to my first AFL match in order that I might understand, and more truly convey, the hysterical atmosphere of a football game. He took me to Victoria Park, to watch the Magpies thrash some paltry interstate pretenders. Standing in the crowd, soaking up the love and devotion and the madness around me, something clicked. Whether it was the childhood brainwashing instigated by my family finally kicking in two decades late, or the scars created by the fists and curses of intolerant country thugs finally healing, I cannot

say. All I know is that finally, for the first time, football made glorious, delirious, passionate sense.

FOLLOWING DISCUSSION with the marketing division of the Collingwood Football Club, who work with all the club's supporters' groups (most of which are based in regional Victoria and interstate), I received the go-ahead to form an unofficial gay and lesbian Collingwood supporters' group in late August 2001; the first such group in the AFL.

My reasons for establishing the Pink Magpies were twofold: to create a safe environment away from the sometimes homophobic football world (and the equally footy-phobic queer community) where gay, lesbian and bisexual Collingwood fans could share their love of their team and the game; and also to do something of benefit for the club itself, and what could be better than publicly demonstrating that Collingwood is the most socially progressive club in the league?

The tabloids, in their traditional hyperbolic style, insinuated that the Pink Magpies were out to destroy 'our great Australian game'.

Having gained some understanding of marketing from several years' work in the arts industry, I wrote a carefully-worded media release announcing the formation of the group. This I sent out at the start of September. It could not have come at a better time. September in Melbourne is finals time, and the city goes football mad. This story, combining sex and football, inspired a media frenzy which was only cut short by the terrorist attacks of September 11. Prior to those events the founding of the Pink Magpies was covered by electronic and print media in Melbourne, interstate and overseas. I fielded e-mails from the Persian Gulf and Europe, telephone calls from radio stations in Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth, and spoke to journalists from *The Age, The Sunday Age, The Herald-Sun, The Australian,* and Channel Nine's 'Today' program.

I had expected some media interest, but not the degree which transpired. Certainly I had not expected to be sent up by Sam Newman on 'The Footy Show' that week. Looking like a cross between a drag queen and a leather-man as he walked onto the set, Newman introduced himself as 'a Pink Magpie'. His performance ensured instant national publicity for the group. The next morning I received another flurry of e-mails inquiring about joining the fledgling Pink Magpies. I also received e-mails from gay supporters of other teams, and from individuals who were neither queer nor football fans, expressing their solidarity and their support. The Collingwood Football Club had braced itself for complaints about the Pink Magpies following Newman's appearance on 'The Footy Show' but none were received. To date, I have only received two pieces of hate mail.

That the formation of the first gay and lesbian supporters' group for an AFL club should achieve some media attention in Australia's conservative mainstream media is no surprise. What is curious, however, is both the level of attention, and the tone it took. While the broadsheets were relatively subdued in their approach, the tabloids, in their traditional hyperbolic style, insinuated that the Pink Magpies were out to destroy "our great Australian game".[1] Talkback radio host Greg Evans repeatedly and hysterically waxed lyrical about members of the group being "transsexuals",[2] no doubt filling his listeners' heads with images of black-and-white-clad drag queens descending on the MCG at the first available opportunity, while radio stations interstate did their best to turn the story into a joke, or a deliberate affront to a male-dominated sport.

The most common question asked during this period of constant media interrogation was as to the private lives of the sportsmen involved with the AFL. Was I privy to the identity of any gay players?

Statistical likelihood, not to mention sheer common sense, suggests that there must be more than one gay man playing Australian rules football at a professional level. With 352 men playing in the AFL (sixteen clubs participated in the 2001 season, each with twenty-two players), then theoretically there should be thirty-five gay footballers in the AFL, if one takes the commonly-accepted proposition of US sex researcher Dr Alfred Kinsey that 10 per cent of adult males describe themselves as 'predominantly homosexual'.[3] This figure does not even begin to include those players identifying as bisexual rather than exclusively homosexual. So where are they all? And given that to date, not a single AFL player, past or present, has come out, what is it that is keeping them in the closet?

While some may argue that there are no gay men playing Australian rules football at its elite level, as

the homophobic nature of the game actively discourages their participation, research conducted in the United States, at Seattle Pacific University, suggests this supposition to be untrue. In his paper 'Gay Male Athletes and the Role of Team and Contact Sports', Michael Bryant compiles survey responses from 149 gay men aged 18 to 52 who compete or have competed in team sports at the high school or college/varsity level, in order to identify the possible reasons why gay males choose to participate in aggressive team and contact sports. 27 per cent of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they "participated in sports to get physically closer to other guys; without guys knowing I was gay", while 21 per cent also stated that they "participated in sports to hide the fact that I was gay; to prove to others I was straight".[4] Clearly, football and other team sports can and do specifically attract closeted gay men who use their participation in the game as a smokescreen to hide their sexual orientation, and to place themselves in a homoerotic situation without being required to out themselves.

THROUGHOUT THE sporting world, heterosexuality is upheld as the norm, while homosexuality is perceived as inferior or abnormal. Michael Messner writes in *Power At Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*: "The extent of homophobia in the sports world is staggering. Boys [in sports] learn early that to be gay, to be suspected of being gay, or even to be unable to prove one's heterosexual status is not acceptable."[5]

The root cause of such homophobia would seem to be the way in which gay sportsmen uphold traditional masculine values by being physically strong and competitive, while simultaneously subverting orthodox masculinity by desiring male-to-male romantic and sexual encounters.[6] The very existence of the gay male athlete threatens sport's reputation as an activity which upholds traditional heterosexual and masculine values, and also threatens the perceived distinctions between gay and straight men.[7]

Thus homophobia, both overt and covert, has evolved in the sporting world in order to maintain sport's heterosexual paradigm; to discourage gay and lesbian participation; and to encourage those homosexuals participating in sport to remain closeted and silent.

"Clearly there are gay footballers in the AFL, but they've all chosen to remain secretly gay, not openly gay," says Caroline Wilson, chief football writer at *The Age* since 1998, and also one of the co-hosts of Channel 7's weekly television program 'Talking Footy'. "For whatever reason they've chosen to keep it private. Perhaps in their own minds they themselves haven't come to terms with their own sexuality? I really don't know."

Asked whether she thinks the culture of the AFL may be one of the barriers preventing a gay footballer from publicly coming out, Wilson says:

> obviously the clubs believe it would be very difficult for one of their players to come out and say they were gay. I don't know if it [AFL culture] remains as homophobic as it was twenty years ago, but certainly it's a boys' club in that you get male commentators on television not prepared to say when a football player has performed perhaps in not the bravest way on the footy field. You don't often get a commentator saying that, because these blokes stick together, you know? The AFL presidents have indicated that they don't want a woman on the AFL commission because the game's 'not ready for that yet' for some bizarre reason. I mean there's all sorts of reasons why it's a boys' club. I don't see homophobia as being one of the leading reasons, I just think that the AFL is one of the last bastions of a very male sort of culture, which therefore will be one of the last to have widespread acceptance of homosexuality.

Players at Collingwood, although initially not entirely comfortable with the existence of the Pink Magpies, have taken the group in their stride, claims midfielder Tarkyn Lockyer, indicating that acceptance of homosexuality in the AFL has begun:

> I suppose there was a bit of reluctance at first, because it was that different to what any other AFL club has ever come across. No-one's ever tapped into that area of society I suppose, so no-one really knew too much about it. From a player's perspective though, it's just great to have more supporters and more members. No-one's got any worries about it. You're not gonna judge anyone on the basis of their sexuality; if they barrack for Collingwood they barrack for Collingwood.

As far as homophobic reactions went, he says that "some players made jokes about it and that sort of thing, there's always that sort of stuff going on around the club, but there's not too much in it."

Lockyer went on to suggest that, should an AFL player ever come out, such banter might develop a more serious edge:

> If someone came out in the AFL it would change the way that person individually is viewed. I don't know how their team-mates would react to them really, because it's taken for granted that you're heterosexual. The person's team-mates, probably for the first couple of months, would be a little apprehensive to get over and pat him on the back and stuff like that, I suppose, because of that difference. Obviously it would be a huge risk for that person to come out, and be the first-out gay AFL footballer. It would take a lot of courage I reckon.

NOT ONLY WILL the first openly gay AFL player have to face the reactions of their team-mates on coming out; they'll also have to deal with their own club's supporters, and the opposition's fans. Barrackers are notoriously vocal in their contempt for the opposition, and homophobic epithets are usually the most vituperative taunts they employ. From personal experience, I can testify to the frequency and virulence of the homophobic insults which are hurled at players from the outer. Not a game goes by without a barrage of taunts and jeers being uttered by the fans along the lines of 'useless fucking poofter' and 'fucking faggot', directed at any opposition player who performs well.

While the AFL and the clubs have moved to discourage racist abuse in recent years, no such action has been taken against homophobic abuse, either on or off the ground. The AFL's vilification code bans players and club officials from "conduct which threatens or insults another person . . . on the basis of that person's race, religion, color, descent or national or ethnic origin."[8] Abuse of a player's sexuality (either actual or assumed) is implicitly condoned by the lack of any specific strictures to the contrary. Nor have any clubs mounted campaigns to discourage the use of homophobic abuse among their own supporters to date.[9]

In addition to this covert tolerance of homophobia in the AFL, research overseas (such as that carried out by Eric Anderson at the University of California) suggests that openly gay sportsmen are often actively silenced by the clubs they play for, through informal restrictions placed upon them in a manner akin to the US military's 'don't ask, don't tell' policy.[10]

Rugby league player Ian Roberts (now retired) came out in 1995 aged thirty, at the peak of his career. No stranger to controversy, Roberts had previously been the target of death threats when he left his original club, the traditionally working-class South Sydney Rabbitohs, to play with the 'silvertail' club Manly. He was again the subject of acrimony when he became one of the first players to sign up with Rupert Murdoch's fledgling Super League. Both these events were eclipsed by the media and public furore created when Roberts came out as being gay.

Although Ian was unavailable for comment at the time of writing, his life as an openly gay sportsman is well documented. Numerous interviews and a biography make it clear that overall, reactions to him coming out while still playing were generally positive, as indicated by his appointment as captain of the North Queensland Cowboys while the publicity about him being gay was in full swing.

"In league it's a big rap, being asked to be the captain, in any team, and it's refreshing for me to know that my sexuality wasn't an issue at all," Roberts said of joining the Cowboys in a 1997 interview. "If someone's had a problem with me they certainly haven't shown it. I've had no bad responses, no ill-feeling with anyone, no negative interaction with anyone."[11]

His coming out was not without dramas of course. "You become a target for fuckwits and bigots but there's nothing I can do about that and there's nothing I can say to people to reassure them that it's not going to happen to them, because unfortunately it is."[12]

Roberts had bricks thrown through his windows and his house spray-painted after coming out, while beforehand, on a 1994 tour of England with the Kangaroos, even rumours of his impending action were enough to cause problems among some of his team-mates. Terry Hill, a friend of Roberts since his Manly days and another member of the Kangaroo squad, describes the situation in Paul Freeman's biography of Roberts, *Finding Out*:

> Honest to God, he wouldn't have had any back left, there were so many knives in it. No-one would do anything to his face, because they were all too scared. But to me they were saying "Ian Roberts is a fucking poof!" "Yeah well so fucking what? Is it hurting you? It's got nothing to do with you."[13]

Although he also copped considerable abuse on the field, Roberts sees sledging as very much a part of the game:

In that situation the guys who call you things are going to find anything. If you're overweight, you're a fat bastard, if you're black, you're gonna be a black bastard, if you're a poof you're gonna be a faggot. Most of the guys who say all that say it without even realising what they're saying. It's like they're just trying to get the better of you. I don't condone it, but I don't accept that as pure hatred like I've seen prejudice displayed otherwise.[14]

WHILE THE AFL has yet to publicly address homophobia, sporting bodies overseas have been swifter to act. In 2000 the UK Football Association, in conjunction with the gay and lesbian rights group Stonewall, published a series of anti-homophobia statements in matchday programs targeting the game's supporters.[15] Although Stonewall first approached the Football Association about such a project in 1998, it was not until Chelsea defender Graham Le Saux – who is heterosexual – spoke out in 1999 about the anti-homosexual taunts he has endured from players and spectators during his career (including a much-publicised row with the Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler on the pitch) that steps were taken to address the homophobia endemic in British football.

Among those who spoke out following the incident between Le Saux and Fowler was the British Sports Minister of the day, Tony Banks, who called on gay footballers to come out in order to help combat homophobia in sport. "Unless we can raise the issue, unless we can actually discuss it then quite frankly people will pretend it doesn't exist," Banks said. He went on to say that it would take a very brave footballer to come out and continue playing, but also made it clear that he was aware of the strain that living in the closet places on gay sportsmen. "If they have to submerge this sexuality in a macho display because that is what is expected of them then, frankly, they don't feel – and I would agree – that they can give of their best either in terms of their athletic prowess or support."[16]

Only one gay player in British football has ever openly declared his sexuality: the former Norwich City and Nottingham Forest striker Justin Fashanu, who came out in 1990. Fashanu eventually committed suicide in 1998 at the age of thirty-seven, following a deluge of adverse publicity over accusations that he had sexually assaulted a 17-year-old youth. In his suicide note, Fashanu denied the charges, claiming instead that he was being blackmailed by his accuser.[17]

The impact of homophobia on athletes has also been recognised in the United States by the National Collegiate Athletics Association (a voluntary association of approximately 1200 institutions, conferences, organisations and individuals devoted to the administration of intercollegiate athletics, and the peak body through which colleges and universities in the USA speak and act on athletics matters at the national level). Educational sessions on the issue are planned for a variety of NCAA conferences in early 2002, with a recent edition of *The NCAA News* stating that "not talking about homophobia is the same as saying it is okay to allow name-calling, threats and incidents of physical harm, and outright discrimination in hiring, promotions or playing time . . . (It) is an issue of student-athlete welfare, and . . . it is time for the Association to create a safer environment in which student-athletes and athletics administrators are not harassed, are not threatened and are not subjected to anti-gay slurs on the playing field and in the locker room."[18] Also in the United States, professional baseball teams such as the Atlanta Braves and the Chicago Cubs began outreach programs to their gay and lesbian fans, and hosted special events for local gay community groups in 2001.[19]

While the AFL and the clubs have moved to discourage racist abuse in recent years, no such action has been taken against homophobic abuse.

While these and other professional sporting bodies are beginning to address gay and lesbian participation and inclusivity, homophobia remains a particular issue for players and supporters of women's sports world-wide. The image of lesbians as "predatory dykes [who] are a sexual threat to other women and . . . use their power as older athletes or coaches to entice young, innocent women into unhealthy lesbian sexual relationships"[20] persists in the female sporting community, a perpetuation of the grossly false stereotype of the homosexual as paedophile. Lesbian sportswomen must also battle the sexist attitudes which posit strong women as being somehow 'unfeminine'. The perfect example of this subtle form of homophobia can be illustrated by the

experiences of openly lesbian tennis player Amelie Mauresmo. In 1999, at the Australian Open, Mauresmo was accused of being 'half a man' by the then Number 2 ranked player Martina Hingis, while Lindsay Davenport (at the time ranked Number 1, and defeated by Mauresmo in the semi-finals) allegedly complained to reporters after the match that Mauresmo looked and played like a man. Hingis has since claimed not to have made the comments.[21]

Without lesbian participation women's sport would not exist (as was ironically highlighted by a January 1994 incident involving the Australian women's cricket team, and a complaint made to the Anti-Discrimination Board for a case of unfair dismissal on the basis that the plaintiff was heterosexual)[22] yet such homophobia as Mauresmo encountered ensures that the majority of professional lesbian sportswomen remain closeted. Apart from Mauresmo and a handful of others, including retired tennis player Martina Navratilova and professional golfers Muffin Spencer-Devlin and Patty Sheehan, 'out' lesbians are virtually unknown, suggesting the existence of significant levels of homophobia in women's sport. (This invisibility may also be due, to a degree, to the general lack of attention paid to women's sports in the mainstream media.)

ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY of studies into homophobia in sport have been conducted in the United States, it is clear that the issue is a pressing one in Australia. Guidelines to address homophobia in sport were released by the Australian Sports Commission and launched by Federal Sports Minister Jackie Kelly in August 2001. The guidelines aim to provide the sporting industry with suggestions on preventing and dealing with homophobic behaviours and sexuality discrimination:

> Sport can give enjoyment, relaxation, income, and health and social benefits. At its best, it also promotes fairness, equity and good sporting behaviour. Many participants in sport find, though, that

these values are not extended to them because of their sexual orientation, or because of what someone thinks is their sexual orientation . . . Because sexuality discrimination can be a difficult issue for a lot of people to come to terms with, many organisations and individuals will be inclined to avoid it if they can. However, if they do, they can be sure that someone, somewhere in their sport, will be affected, and possibly severely disadvantaged.[23]

FIVE MONTHS after their release, the AFL Communications Department tells me that none of the recommendations made in the guidelines has been adopted by the association; nor has any of the sixteen AFL clubs I contacted while researching this article adopted the publication's recommendations. Kylie King, Communications Manager at the AFL Players' Association, likewise has not read the guidelines, nor is she aware of the recommendations they make to address sexuality discrimination in sport. "As far as I am aware they haven't been discussed here at any level," she says.

THE FOUNDATION of the Pink Magpies was one of the first steps taken by an AFL club on the journey towards publicly addressing homophobia; a journey which may yet end with not only one gay player coming out, but several. Closeted gay footballers, and indeed closeted gay and lesbian sportspeople generally, live every day with the stress caused by having to lie to their team-mates and family members about themselves and their relationships, and by being forced to live with key areas of their lives – their love of sport and their romantic and sexual identities – in unnecessary conflict. Such pressure must have an adverse effect on their capacity to play to the best of their ability, and to commit to their club and to their team.

The guilt and shame which many young homosexuals feel about their sexual orientation (due to having grown to sexual maturity in a society which treats non-heterosexuals as abnormal or inferior) is intensified for sportsmen and women by their participation in an arena that belittles their existence through the normalisation of anti-gay discourse and the upholding of traditional heterosexual values.[24] Coming out, despite the risks it may sometimes entail, can free them from such strictures.

In his foreword to Paul Freeman's biography *Finding Out*, Ian Roberts says: "It took me too long a time to realise that if I had the courage to really *like* who I was, everything else would fall into place . . . It took me too long to realise that I was weighed down by a burden I shouldn't have had to carry, a problem that wasn't really *my* problem."[25]

Homophobia in sport is a problem for everyone, players, administrators and spectators alike. By addressing it, organisations such as the AFL will enable the young people who play football in this country to play to the utmost of their capabilities. They will also ensure that football is inclusive for all Australians. The flow-on effects for clubs and for the game will be immediate and obvious, in terms of both the increase in the quality of play, and the financial rewards generated by such inclusiveness.

In addition, creating an environment where gay players feel free and safe to come out will have the added effect of creating positive role models for young gays and lesbians. The lack of such role models, coupled with society's generally negative attitudes towards homosexuality, are a significant and well-documented factor in the tragically high youth suicide rate in Australia.[26] By addressing homophobia, institutions such as the AFL will not only be improving the quality and popularity of football and other sports; they will also be saving lives.

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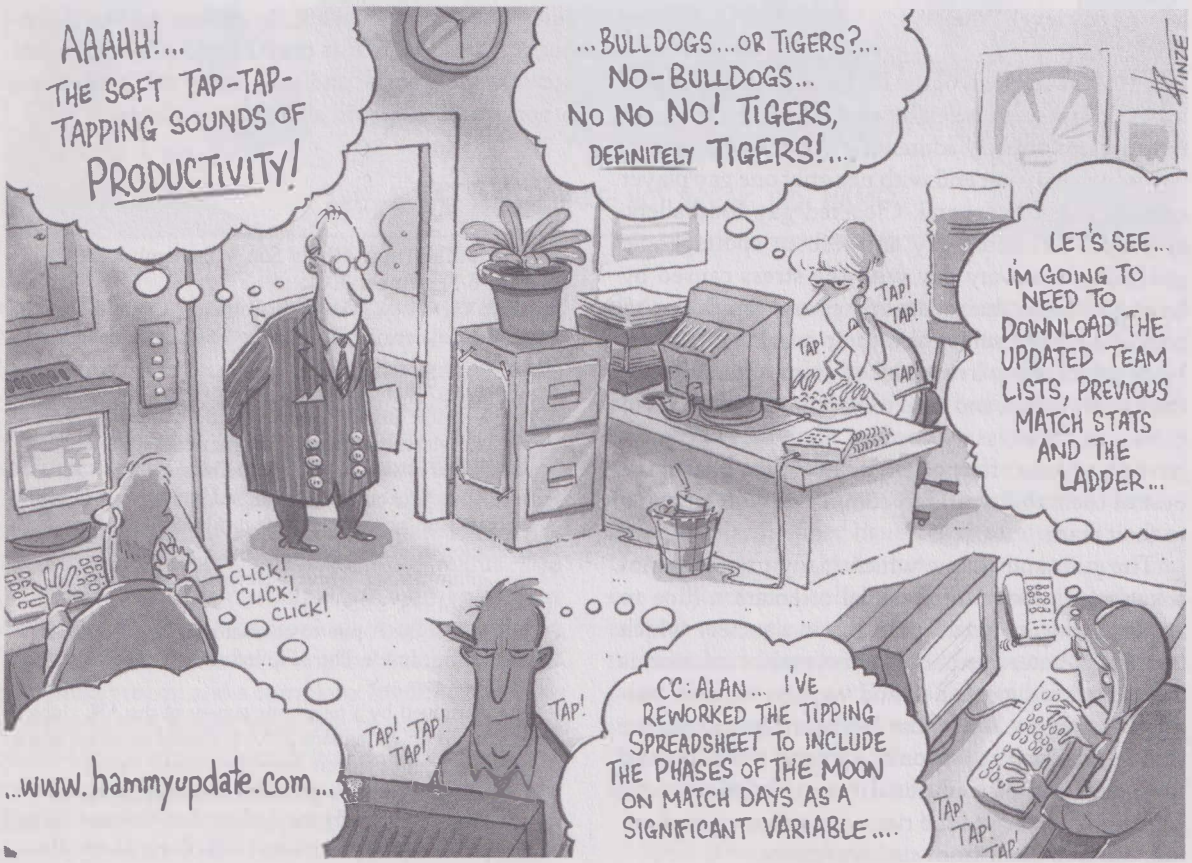

John Kinsella

Why I Didn't Play Australian Rules Football

THERE'S NOT A LOT I really need to say about 'Aussie Rules' being a blood-sport. And there's probably not a lot I really need to say about the blind nationalism that has led to the propagation of the game through many strata of Australian society. That it feeds on these 'strata' by generating a sense of fusion, a sense of crossing over, that the bloke next to you might be a labourer or a lawyer, that even those in the comfort boxes are 'regular' Australians – both male and female – underneath, reassures the club member in the cheapest seats. Australian Rules, that hybrid of Gaelic football and rugby, breaks down those class barriers inherited from the British Empire, the new class of wealth modelled on America, while feeding on the tensions of an Anglo–Celtic rivalry. That Indigenous people have made it their own, that members of different migrant communities have found a mainstream status they felt excluded from for years, that it has been seen and used for reasons as different as tokenism and communal pride, personal achievement and as a medium for certain kinds of social change, narcissism and self-sacrifice, are all part of the mythology pushed by the Australian Football League advertising gurus. Australian Rules is the campaign headquarters of the Aussie variety of capitalism.

First off, the game is about the body. Steak-eating, meat-eating generally, go with footy culture. Eat your meat, son, and you'll grow up big like your father, and if you're lucky hit the big time as a player. It is even used to encourage kids to eat their vegetables, though primarily in the context of a meat-and-three-veg meal. Cultural variations increasingly allowed for, strength comes through the possession of the blood of conquered beasts. Tall and thickset is promising – a future in the ruck, in defence. Tall and lanky and fast – a forward. Small and wiry and fast, a rover or on the wing. There's room for body types, but strength and aggression and maybe stealth are prerequisites. With the body goes the attitude – this is something that goes with aggression. It's the desire to win, to succeed. It fits well with a colonial society struggling to throw off the shackles, but also with the government-supported agenda of a passionate nationalism – this new identity that is rooted in tradition of federation and the constitution – and, ultimately, the corporate desire for profit and control. A spectator sport, football ensures a controllable market, but one in which passivity is given an edge: enough violence and enough of a wildcard to create new marketing possibilities, to keep the hunger for the show going.

Men's Aussie Rules is also about owning the sexuality of a woman, or women. Your sweat alone weakens the opposition. And when you become engaged, your offshoot will be sexually attractive, lusted after by all the other guys, but remain unavailable to them. A cross between the flirt and the demure. Warwick Capper got it wrong – his girlfriend, the centrefold, was lust-plus for the hormonal teen fans, but she got away. Maybe he wasn't all that team membership suggested he was! The team: the blokes and individual achievement. The star culture, but in the end, stepping back to let your mate shine. To come to his defence and hit the shit out of the guy that's just shouldered him into the dirt. Might have been your teammate before the draft put you in another team. Pumped up by the coach, by celebrity, by a sense of self-worth and self-love, the body takes over. The great players use their head as well, we're told. Then there are the clowns, the entertainers, who maintain their status despite declining skills by being both amusing and 'hard men'. Jacko was a good example; he advertises batteries and goes on and on and on. His hit single was titled 'I'm an individual', which the industry doesn't mind us thinking he is. As long

as there are not too many of them. Dermie Brereton, lust object of the smart girls who didn't even like football, pledged to support the IRA. Eloquent in aftergame 'chat', his political sensibilities were of the moment and the rush of centre stage. But he took his background to war with him, the Irish Australian with a chip on his shoulder, the Ned Kelly wannabe. Ah, such is life. My father is of Irish extraction, though I don't know what he thought about Brereton. He didn't play for Western Australia, so I'm sure it's not relevant.

The game has changed dramatically over my life, certainly in organisational terms. More than that though, they say it has got faster, that there are more handballs, that it's more graceful. I know it's more television-orientated, that it's no longer simply a case of rugging up in winter, that the meat-pies-and-beer culture has merged with the champagne and canapés of the corporate box. But don't let the corporate take bluff you! Teams were strictly regional up until the eighties – district, League in the cities. It wasn't really played in the rugby territories of Sydney and Brisbane. It wasn't associated with heat, though regional teams in the Northern Territory and far north of Western Australia had learnt to associate sweat and humidity. In the south, the winter game became a semi all year round game, with night matches, preseason in summer. It spread North to Sydney and Melbourne after becoming the Australian Football League. The home of football, the Victorian Football League, Melbourne, still retains its steady grip, spreading its influence through the national game. The politics and cultural determinism of the Victorian Game, the triumph of Melbourne within Australian culture, are another discussion. From a West Australian's point of view, all that's required is to know that they're the enemy, though we all go to the Colosseum, to Rome, for the big battles. The empire is held together by a desire to beat the centre, to beat their best at home. It has a religious element, and associated fervour, about it. The Catholic versus Anglican aspect risks opening a can of worms.

As a West Australian, or more appropriately in the vernacular, a Sandgroper, Aussie Rules was part of my life from the moment of birth. For those without football-minded parents, if such people exist, kindergarten, television, and advertising are sure to rectify the omission. My father was a football player, but one with a chip on his shoulder. He injured his back and knee – or was it his knee on its own? – playing for the East Perth Colts, on the verge of selection for the Big Time. He was on his way to playing League. My grandfather, a lifelong supporter of East Perth, was disgusted when my father, after leaving the game, became a supporter of East Fremantle. To my grandfather, it was nothing less than betrayal. Brought up by my father as an East Fremantle supporter, even though I distrusted football from an early age, I was often placed at loggerheads with my grandfather, to whom I was otherwise close. It wouldn't be any easier to say I couldn't care less, which I really didn't, because not to follow a team at all was less than manly. I should say that my grandfather was not a 'he-man' – he loved art and music, was never ashamed helping my grandmother prepare flower arrangements, and was a keen gardener. But the roles of men and women were neatly apportioned, even if the 'power' in the house was shared, or even in the hands of my grandmother. Hammer-toes kept him at home during the war, and this probably informed his attitudes. He enjoyed nothing more, though, than mixing it with the blokes – his rich friends, who owned planes and boats, even, to my absolute horror, a whaling station. He owned a rifle and held no great feelings for animals, though he was not a cruel man by nature – a strange mixture of gentleness and role-play. Football suited his semi-passive restlessness perfectly. He saw it as civilised abandon. He loved cricket because of the strategy and control, but also the power and risk. He was, not surprisingly, an ardent monarchist, having come out on the boat as a 12-year-old to the pink of the empire. Piano and boxing, the euphonium and the fire-brigade, painting and cards. And, above all else, Aussie Rules football. He probably harboured a desire to play it, but it never came about.

My father is a different man altogether. At the football, his father would instruct him to give a punch in the head to a 'big-mouth' supporter of the opposing club. It was war. My father's struggle with his aggression and semi-meditative side (read: sarcastic, laconic, Australian) found focus in football. He was going to make it big as a ruck. He could kick a ball higher than he could longer, which was a problem, and he loved the attention. My mother thought he looked good. She went to his games. She loathed football. Says it all.

It's easy to say I preferred books to football, but plenty of people like both. Hemingway is the author I dislike the most, and you can find his equivalent in Australian letters over and over. I don't fit that bill. The unspoken and spoken war between my mother

and father centred on his attitudes to corporal punishment. I associated football with being in trouble. He bought me a plastic football when I was a couple of years old, followed by a Burley, and then a ball I wanted as much for the brand name as anything else, a Chesson. When he and my mother divorced, his in-between partners talked about football with my brother and me. My brother was like a whippet – fast and a good handler of the ball. But he couldn't be controlled, so 'full of natural talent'; they couldn't pin him down. And I was 'strange', inward-looking, and rebarbative, at least on the football front. His eventual second wife's mother knitted us beanies and scarves in East Fremantle colours, *de rigueur* for the ardent follower. I liked them for some reason, and wore them everywhere. I went to the first games I really remember, and felt the adrenaline rush. When opposing players started brawling, I'd yell with my father, though wondering deep down why. "But it's a skilful game," always came the refrain.

In grade four I injured my knee, seriously. I had to go to a physiotherapist. I'd been playing football as part of sport and twisted my leg making an effort to kick towards goal as a bunch of 'tough kids' crashed me to the ground. That was it, and I felt well shot of it. My father on an access visit assured me it would mend, but his chip grew heavier. Two down, and one to go.

In truth, I wasn't shot of it at all. My grip on my gender status had always been tenuous, being a reader and interested in science, and not particularly sociable, but now I was out of contention as a footballer (on any level) it was quickly asserted that my sissyness and poofterism were confirmed. A life of beatings and victimisation followed. School became a hell. Resentment prevented me from showing that such ostracism affected me deeply, but every time a girl I liked avoided me on instructions from a football-playing 'cool kid' or 'tough', or persecuted me for being a 'poof', I felt it more than all the punches and kicks my body absorbed over those years. Rather than inclining me towards misogyny, it showed me how boys are obsessed with control, that they will oppress at any opportunity. It made me distrust my gender, and to look to those places where gender lines are blurred, where people can be themselves and function semi-independently of the social unit. Later, I would learn that one can create a community of like-minded people, community in which male and female are respected for who they are and not for what they are expected to be. Footy was used to define the category of girl as much as boy, and even now when my daughter can play Aussie Rules with the other young school kids, the same codes are lurking beneath. They time segregation with puberty. Ironically, at one level, these continuous fights toughened me physically, and I dare say I would have functioned okay on the football field. In truth, it's a wonder I don't hate the game rather than find it merely symptomatic of a greater malaise.

In High School at Geraldton, the footy team included a number of Yamajee and other Aboriginal players. In the racist Geraldton environment, where a weekend's entertainment was a race riot down at 'front beach', where the cops were regularly accused of harassment and abuse, where custody was a dangerous place at the best of times, but potentially fatal if you were black, the internecine support for the Aboriginal football player, within the school system and district club system, was a revelation. So even the most extreme racism could be temporarily put on hold if the oppressed helped bring glory to a football team. The battle fought by Indigenous peoples in Australia for recognition of their spiritual, physical, intellectual, and cultural brilliance has been partially focused through this success within the national game. Every Indigenous player you speak to will tell of the racism that is endemic to the sport, that even the non Anglo-Celtic players, who also endure it in their own context, will happily dish out. Football, the egalitarian game, becomes the focus of race hatred. The examples are so numerous, it is again a case of not needing to state them. I will add, though, that as a very young man I accompanied my grandfather to a match between South Fremantle and East Perth, in the days when Stephen Michaels was at his best. Standing in the crowd, I heard a conversation between two opposing supporters that went something like this:

> *South Fremantle Supporter* – Give the bloke a go, you've got to admit he's got strength. And plenty of grace as well.
>
> *East Perth Supporter* – You can't trust those black bastards, they're all the same. He'll go walkabout next week and then where'll you be?
>
> *South Fremantle Supporter* – He wins more than he loses. You're just a jealous bastard.
>
> *East Perth Supporter* – Piss off you Abo lover. They shouldn't be allowed on the trains.

And so it went. This really happened; it happens now. The precise nature of the train comment struck home. And the marginalising use of 'grace'. It is interesting that Perth, racist city that it is, celebrates its greatest Aboriginal sportsman, Polly Farmer, by naming a recently-built stretch of freeway after him. The section that forms a tunnel under the city is known as the Poly Pipe. The joke goes: black and quick, and any number of variations on that.

The negatives aside, it is a sign of cultural 'assimilation', of recognising the power of Australianness, that sees a new migrant culture represented in an Aussie Rules football team. The first Italian players, the first Greeks, and the first Asian players all come to mind. How many more-or-less minority Australians got bashed would make for an interesting statistic. Football is not simply gladiatorial, though it's popular to describe it as such. As much happens outside the ring as in it. The protection of errant footballers – drunk-driving charges, rape, all manner of crimes, are deconstructed and reconstructed by a supportive media (jobs, boys, jobs!) and the industry. Violence on the field is tried through tribunals rather than public courts. A different set of rules, Aussie Rules. I have heard of two deaths in country football teams – grudges led to the violence, but fair in the field of play. No charges laid.

Watching television football is probably the context for more domestic violence than any other broadcast. Now, this is an unsubstantiated observation, or a slanderous piece of conjecture. Back in my drinking days, I've visited houses where bunches of blokes have forced women to watch the game, have mocked them for 'getting off' on the 'short shorts', have grown more aggressive and more drunk and more angry with each umpire decision against their team. The hatred is there, and just needs a trigger, true. But it's the pack nature of the drama that is most disturbing.

I suppose I should add the disclaimer that, apart from people beating each other up, being unable to control their tempers on the field, revelling in full body contact, failing to come to grips with the homoerotic nature of the sport, to recognise the confusions of their desirings, the game does interest me. Sure, the skills – the aerial ballet (or the 'like poetry', but these are the 'dehomosexualised' versions of ballet and poetry), the team coordination, those 'ball-handling skills' – get me going. And throwing back to my childhood, I do find myself being parochial. I think of the various 'barracking' criteria from over the years: the old Auntie following the team of her impoverished inner city neighbourhood, connecting God and the flower of youth, the other elderly Auntie who is bitter and hates all around her, who releases her aggression by blending footy and brandy, the politics of football and belonging, the migrant identity signature of my grandfather, a loyalty to the new home while being loyal to the Empire (he obsessively barracked for the English in cricket); the decolonising and assertiveness of the Indigenous players, the bloodlust of the powerless and the greed of corporate sponsors, the rivalries of school and then the pub, the splits between families. War, civil war, acts of civil disobedience. It's all there. No simple answer.

As a vegan though, in the end, it's a bunch of blokes – women's Aussie Rules football teams are to be celebrated but they will always mirror the testosterone-lust of the genre – kicking the inflated skin of a dead cow, or dead cows, around a field. It's a cruel sport, as most are. So where do I fit in this? Well, my father had another son by his second marriage. This son was more than a promising footballer. On the surface, he seemed to love it, though such tales were always mediated by a desire to prove manliness to my very large father. I suspect there's more to it than that. I've been in those change rooms, and I know even the jocks don't ultimately enjoy the show. The mighty so easily fall. And you only need one slip-up in there and good maleness can suddenly become suspect. If only they'd all recognise the camp pantomime they're playing in – the travelling circus that is kept deranged by the threat of being dropped from the team. Of losing public iconicity. Anyway, back to the stepbrother, my stepbrother. On the verge of joining the Colts, one step before my father's achievement, he was badly injured. He lost all – the adulation of girls and women, the approval and admiration of the blokes, a passport to a cushy job as a bank teller with plenty of time off, a future in the media on a kids' program or talking with other ex-footy stars about the latest brawls, gossip, or the size of a girl's breasts . . . Or maybe he escaped in the nick of time.

John Kinsella's most recent volume of poetry is The Hierarchy of Sheep *(FACP, 2001). His selected essays, a book of short fiction, and a new and selected poems are forthcoming. He is Professor of English at Kenyon College (USA), Adjunct Professor of Literature at Edith Cowan University, and a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University.*

The Lesson

Tony Birch

MUM WAS IN the kitchen, at the stove doing a cooked breakfast. I could see my father through the window in the backyard, pacing up and down under the clothesline. She left the smoking frying-pan and came over to the window. She put her arms around my neck and gave me a warm kiss on the side of the cheek.

"Happy birthday, love. Sit down here and I'll get your breakfast."

I looked around for a wrapped parcel or something. But there was nothing. She put a plate of bacon, eggs and toast in front of me then went back to the sink, looking into the yard and fidgeting. She seemed agitated and restless.

My father called from the yard. "Joey, you up yet? Get out here!"

"He's having his breakfast, for Christ's sake!", Mum yelled back at him through the window. There was something wrong.

He came into the kitchen. "Come on, Joey. Out in the yard, come on. I've got a surprise for you. Leave the breakfast. Eat too much of that bacon and you'll end up looking like Porky Pig."

"Let him finish his breakfast, will you? And for Christ's sake, aren't you going to wish him happy birthday?" Mum threw a cup into the sink.

"Yeah, yeah." He looked at me apologetically. "Sorry, mate, happy birthday. Finish your breakfast then. I'll see you in the yard."

He walked back outside, leaving the wire door to slam behind him.

I left the rest of the breakfast, took my plate over to the sink and went to walk outside. Mum tugged at the back of my T-shirt. I turned around. She was upset.

She put her arms around me, held me tightly and kissed me again. I held on for a moment before following his steps into the yard.

My father was standing on a square of old lino with an uncharacteristic grin on his face.

Next to him was a wooden fruitbox standing on its end. On top were two pairs of brand new leather boxing gloves. I stared down at them while he stared at me in turn. He picked them up, a pair of gloves in each of his large hands.

"Happy birthday, son. Happy birthday. What do you think?"

He moved towards me, holding the gloves out in front of him, offering me a pair.

"Feel them, son." He offered them again. "Go on, feel them." He put a pair to his nose and sniffed at them like they were a scented flower or something.

"Nothing smells better than new leather . . . What do you think? Fuckin' say something at least."

"Yeah . . . thanks. They're good, Dad, they're real good."

MY FATHER was obsessed with boxing. He'd had a few amateur bouts when he was younger and went to the fights at the stadium whenever he could. He bought all the boxing magazines and followed it in the papers. The back shed was full of fading posters of world champions.

He'd been teaching me boxing from when I was a small kid. As far as he was concerned it was about the only thing that I was good at. He was always getting me to spar in front of his mates.

"Look at his jab, look at it. Now watch the cross, the cross, Joey. Show them the cross. Don't tell me he's not a fuckin' natural!"

We boxed three times a week after he'd knocked off work. Sometimes in winter, when it was dark, he got me to shadow-box under the street light on the corner. He wanted me to go into the ring but said that he had to get me right before he sent me down to the gym, "or you'll get your head knocked off by some fuckin' stager".

He talked animatedly as he fitted the gloves over my hands.

"You know, I never had my first pair of gloves until I was, what was it, fifteen, no sixteen! Too fuckin' late by then. Fighting blokes who'd had ten, twenty fights under their belt. Never had gloves, never sparred, never been in the ring."

He looked away from me for a moment, thinking about another time, then he laughed again. "Still fuckin' beat them. Well, most of them anyway."

"Come on, get the feel, get the feel. Glove's got a different feel and you've got to get used to it."

I looked over my shoulder, back toward the kitchen, to see if Mum was watching. She was still at the sink, looking out at us. I watched her face in the glass before she walked away.

"Look at me, look at me!"

He jerked me around.

"Listen! You don't want to go down to Maxie's and get your fuckin' head knocked off. If you don't learn here", he pointed down to the patch of checked lino under our feet, "you'll get hurt, really hurt. Listen to me!"

I'd already heard this sermon before, but I listened just the same.

He held a glove in front of my face. "You have to make the glove your fist, and that fist has to work with your arm, your shoulder, and up here." He pointed to his head. "Your brain! Got to have a brain to fight, or you'll end up getting it battered."

"The glove can cushion a punch and protect your opponent. Or, if you use it right, it will hit him like a fuckin' sledgehammer. Have to punch through him, through his body!"

He threw a left hook, feigning it just enough that it missed my chin. "Don't stop at his chin. Don't stop at his guts. Punch through him. Put your body behind the punch and move through him." He feigned a left-right combination. He was quick.

"Now, how do they feel?"

I didn't say anything, but watched him closely.

"Feel light, don't they? Light and soft. But wait until you've been holding them up around your chin for a few rounds and they'll feel like fuckin' housebricks." He moved in close to me. "Feel good?"

"Yeah, they feel good," I replied with no enthusiasm.

"Good then. I want you to start with a few combinations. Keep moving around like we've been doing and just get the feel of them. Come on, let's go," he barked at me, slapping his hands together.

We circled each other. I began throwing out a series of sharp left jabs automatically and the occasional combination, which lightly whacked his open palms. I enjoyed the sound of the gloves, cleanly, sharply, hitting his hand. I enjoyed the rhythm. As we danced around he was already becoming excited. "That's it! Move around! Move around! Change back! That's it! Right! Good, good! Stop now, that's it, stop!"

He was already breathing heavily. "Moving well son, moving well, and punching clean. But remember," and he looked at me intently, "looking good is not worth fuck all on its own. I've seen ponies prancing around the gym like they own the place. But when it comes to put-up time they get knocked out of the fuckin' ring quicker than they got in there."

He placed a hand on my shoulder. "Got to have a good defence. Got to have heart. Most of all," he paused and focused on me, "got to have that thing, that hate. Don't have that, they'll kill you. I'm telling you, they'll fuckin' kill you."

He began poking me repeatedly in the chest. "They'll fuckin' destroy you. Got it? Got it?"

I began to rub my chest where he'd just dug his finger. "Yeah, I got it, Dad, I got it."

I'd heard all this about a hundred times before, but it never stopped him repeating himself.

"Well, I don't know that you have, Joey. I don't know. You move beautiful. Really beautiful. Lovely balance and beautiful, clean punches. But I don't know. I don't know. No-one's going to respect you in the ring or out in the street if you can't stand up to them. I've got it. Everyone around here, they respect me.

"Even when I lost I had it, because I always hurt them. Got to hurt them. Even when they beat me, they don't beat me. Okay?

"I've got it, I've got it," he kept repeating to himself.

He had stopped talking to me now. He was talking to himself. And anyone else who might be listening. And everyone he'd ever had a fight with, inside or outside the ring.

"Come on, let's get moving. And this time a little

quicker, a little harder with the combinations."

We began to move around again. "Come on son, come on. Stick it! Stick it there! Stick it!"

He pointed to his open palm, which had reddened from my punches. We gradually moved off the piece of lino. The dust was kicking up around us and I began to taste it in my mouth.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught Mick McGill watching us over the fence. He was a couple of years older than me. My father spotted him too, but he'd continued to keep an eye on him as we moved about. "That's it son, stick it out, stick it here.

"Okay, okay! Time! Time!" He was completely lost for breath.

"Okay, okay. Get into the laundry and get yourself a drink of water."

I was in the laundry trying to turn the tap with my boxing glove on. I could hear my father talking. When I came out he had the second pair of gloves in his hands, knocking them together while Mick looked on admiringly.

"Yeah well, Mick, it would be good for you to train down at the gym, but you don't want to walk into that place without some of the basics, do you? There's some wild boys down there."

"Yeah, I've seen them, Mr Byrne, I've seen them. But I'm going to start training after the footy season." Mick couldn't take his eyes off those gloves.

"That's good, son, real good." My father was looking over at me and then back to Mick. "Why don't you jump over the fence, mate, and try these on. I'll go through some combinations with you, if you want."

Mick more or less fell over the fence. My father held out the gloves. "Here, son, try them on." Mick grabbed at them and the old man helped him lace them.

"Come on, son. Let's have a bit of a box like you saw me and Joey doing. Come on, show me what you've got there." He slapped his hands together. "Come on, give us a look Mick."

They began to move around, as we had been earlier. Mick was pretty slow. He was flat-footed and had no boxing stance or any of the basic skills. He threw his punches wildly, with many of them missing completely. This did not stop my father giving him every encouragement.

"That's it, Mickey boy, that's it. Move around, throw them out, that's it, that's it. That's it mate. Time. Time. Take a rest, that's it. You look good, mate, real good." He patted Mick on the head.

My father disappeared into the laundry for a drink. When he came out, he looked over at me before turning his attention to Mick again who was whacking his gloves together and dancing awkwardly on the spot.

"You look good, Mick, real good. And you've got a good punch there." He looked at me again. "What about a spar, Mick? What about you and Joey having a bit of a spar?"

I tried interrupting and started to remove my gloves. "I've had enough, Dad. I think I'll go and give Mum a hand in the kitchen, help her clean up."

He turned to me and hissed through clenched teeth. "Don't worry about the fuckin' kitchen, the kitchen's your Mum's job. And what are you doing taking your gloves off? Leave them on!"

He returned to Mick and spoke with a softer voice. "What about it, Mick? How'd you like to have a spar with Joey?"

Mick was keen to have a go at me. "Sure." He danced on his toes for a moment, mimicking a prize fighter.

"Okay then, okay. Good boy. I'll be the referee."

He pulled us together. He put one arm each around our shoulders.

"Okay, boys. I want you to move around. I want you to show me those combinations."

He winked at me.

We went to our respective corners of the lino mat. My father came over to me. He moved in close and spoke quietly into my ear.

"Right, son. This is it.

"Show me some of those moves we've been talking about, that we've been doing here. Move around. Keep on your toes. Work the combinations. Don't go head-hunting. Work the body. Wear him down first. *Then* punish him upstairs."

He walked back to the centre and slapped his hands together. "Let's box!"

Mick ran out of his corner, straight for me, throwing punches wildly. I avoided him easily, skipping to one side, throwing a light combination to put him off balance. He almost fell then spun around and

charged back at me. I flicked out two sharp left hooks, tapping him on the nose, stopping him completely.

"Good, Joey, good. That's it, move around." My father was bouncing on his toes, as if he were the one doing the fighting.

I continued to pick Mick off as he tried to move in on me. I hit him at will. In the face and the body, but without hurting him. My father was standing between us. "Time, time! End of the round one. Back to your corners, boys!" Mick was hunched, on his hands and knees. Completely out of breath. I was standing in my corner with my hands on my hips.

My father moved in to talk to me and I could sense the anger in his voice. "What are you fuckin' doing? Cut out the love taps!"

He was poking me in the chest again, with a closed fist this time. "He's not your fuckin' boyfriend! Stop the waltz and start throwing some real punches! You try this shit in the ring and you'll get your head knocked off. Now do it!"

Dad went back to the centre of the mat. Mick was sitting on the fruitbox trying to catch his breath. My father clapped his hands together. "Round two!"

Mick didn't charge out this time. He walked towards me, still swinging his windmill punches. As I picked him off, I began to put a little more power behind my punches, trying to satisfy my father.

"That's it, stick him, stick him!" my father screamed as he danced around us. Mick was swinging even more wildly. He swung a roundhouse right cross. I tried to go under the punch but it clipped me on the end of the nose. It began to bleed almost immediately.

"Time, time!" Mick sensed an opportunity. He continued throwing punches as my father separated us. "Whoah, whoah, boys! Back to your corners."

"Good stuff there, Mick. Just sit down and have a bit of a rest. One round to go."

I wiped the blood from my face with my hand. My father came over. He hit me across the head, screamed at me again, through his teeth.

"What are you fuckin' doing, you fuckin' idiot!" He hit me again. "Look at your fuckin' nose! It's bleeding! Wipe it! Wipe it! Don't shit in my face here! Don't make me look like a fuckin' idiot here!

"I haven't spent all this time on you to see you make an idiot of both of us! You fuckin' give it to him now!"

I wouldn't look at him. I was watching the drops of blood splash onto the worn pattern of the lino. My father put a fist under my chin and forced my eyes upward until we were looking into each other. I could see my reflection in his eyes.

"You give it to him now or you and me will go at it right here! And I won't be pulling any fuckin' punches.

"Now do it!" He slapped my face again. It hurt. I had tears in my eyes.

"Round three!" I could hardly see Mick through my tears. I hit him with a left to the side of the head and a right to the nose. I could hear my father screaming, "Stick him, stick him!" Mick was frightened now, I could sense it. He tried to cover up but I continued punching him viciously about the head.

"That's it, Joey, move in on him, move in, stick him, stick him, stick him!" My father was hysterical. "The head, the head, take the head!" I was hitting Mick with lefts, rights, hooks, upper-cuts, combinations. Everything that my father had taught me was on show for him. "Yes! Yes! Stick him! Put him down! Put him fuckin' down!"

Mick was crying to my father, to stop the fight. I hit him with a straight right, on the nose. He fell onto his back. My momentum carried me over the top of him. I landed on his chest and continued to punch into him. "I hate you. I hate your fucking guts! I hate you, you bastard!"

My father moved in, pulling me away from Mick, laughing loudly, while dragging me away. "Hey! Hey mate! You're like a wild animal, hey!" He dragged me away as I continued to swing punches.

Mick lay flat on his back. My father sat on the lino, laughing uncontrollably.

With my face covered in dust and blood and tears, I ran from the yard, into the kitchen. There was a birthday cake on the table. I ran through the house, into the street. Mum was sitting on a chair on the footpath, leaning against the fence with her head buried in her hands, weeping quietly.

I kept on running, and running, away.

Sports weekend

Old women in beanies
among the athol pines
old men with silver beards
50s suit jackets, cowboy hats
people walk wrapped in daisy blankets
huddle in cars
footballers in brand new matching guernseys
gather behind mounds
the Warumpi Eagles, Yuendumu magpies,
teams from all the communities
some more than five hundred kilometres away
play round discarded boots on the red dirt oval
mountains in the background
an exquisite carving in pink with deep blue shadows
like some giant animal
reclining across the plain.

The school stall sells boiled eggs
hot dogs with cheese
gospel tapes with a pungkalangu face
hiding in the cover photo of the mountains,
where these monsters are supposed to live.
The other stalls sell meat and onions and bread.
Packs of wild-haired kids kick footballs
in clouds of dust,
play softball with bits of wood
run in races where everyone gets to choose
from a pile of prizes on the ground
mermaid dollies, space invader games
the winners get trampolines
my son and the other white kids come last.

Big mobs crowd into the old nissan hut
for the battle of the bands
sit on the concrete
kids down the front
pop up, rotate their bums
one arm on their hips,
the other twirling above their heads
that's the girls' style
the boys thrust their hips back and forth
throw their arms around
seconds of the sexiest dancing I've ever seen
then they fling themselves to the ground
giggling
someone else gets up
the older people do this dancing too
but mainly down the back.
The bands play 'shake baby shake'
side on to the audience
sometimes with their backs turned
too shame
a tall young man sings plaintive
songs in Luritja
the fast numbers are the most popular
make great waves of dancing.
One little black dog
gets the pickings of chip crumbs spilt icecream.
After one man drunk is cheeky on stage
the organiser gets up and says
drunks won't get petrol
and make a space for people to walk
in and out of the hall
but no-one does.
We put tissues
in our ears to stop them ringing.

I sit in the dust around the oval
an old man yells on the microphone
that number 9, he's my son!
People tell me
about births, deaths,
always so many of them.
They say of the new babies
born in the year 2000!
point out their children
who have grown up: *no husband!*
or *three children, now!*
or *he doesn't play football any more, too fat!*
When we talk to the community administrator
who's actually a local person
she says: *I told those journalists from Sweden*
that they should tell some positive stories
not just talk about all the problems,
the sickness and the petrol sniffing and all that.
They should tell the good stories too.

Meg Mooney

Brian McCoy

The Hidden Culture of Indigenous Football

I REMEMBER that he was taller, younger and faster than I was. He was also playing on his home field. I had only recently arrived in the remote northern community. It was the middle of summer, 1974. We were playing Aussie Rules in bare feet and we were on opposite sides. As he ran past I threw out a desperate tackle, not expecting to make any difference. But the timing was perfect and to my surprise he went down. Straight down! Normally being tackled and winded in a game wouldn't make any difference but this was no ordinary, southern game. As he lay there everything stopped. Players sat on the ground and waited, his mother ran onto the field with a bucket of cool water and the umpire found something else to interest him. The fallen player swore a few nasty things at whoever had tackled him, as did some of his fellow players, and suddenly I realised I had stepped over a definite, but invisible, boundary. The thought of a spearing didn't appear attractive nor did any apologies seem helpful. So I excused myself before the game finished and walked very gingerly back to my temporary home.

Ever since that day I have wondered about the culture of Indigenous football, the particular and often exciting ways that Indigenous men play this 'Aussie' game. This article is about that. Within the AFL, in 2001, there were more than fifty registered Indigenous players.[1] Their statistical over-representation, approximately three times what might be expected, was matched by an under-representation of informed commentary about them as players. The media were all too ready to present them as possessors of 'magic', bearers of 'silky skills' and constantly being either 'mercurial' or 'enigmatic'. Often they were depicted as 'doing the unexpected' while, at the same time, 'they always seem to know where to find each other'.[2]

These commentaries, struggling to invent new phrases of praise for these talented footballers, reveal little knowledge or understanding about the origin or nature of their skills, where they were born and how they were nurtured.[3] Stereotypes are regularly introduced to describe this football behaviour, giving little room for Indigenous players to be different from one another or even similar to non-Indigenous players. One consequence is that Indigenous footballers can be presented as exotic. Their play can be expected to be always 'different'. Another, and perhaps a more serious result, is that whatever they bring to the game can simply be appropriated by the dominant culture of the game. Such assimilation leaves little room for consideration about the particular gifts which Indigenous footballers bring to football and what it is they offer to others who play or watch this distinctive Australian game.

I need to state some things at the outset. Firstly, I am not an Indigenous person nor do I claim to speak for those who play Aussie Rules. I have been closely involved with Indigenous men in the area of Aussie Rules for more than twenty-five years and in different Australian States. My involvement has included playing football with and against many, coaching with and being coached by them and being active with them in the area of sports health. As I have got older I have found myself, like many ex-players, umpiring games. But even here the umpiring can be quite different and distinctive from how it is performed down south.[4]

Secondly, Aussie Rules, as a TV program theme song and the title of a recent book suggest, is 'more than a game'. It can be understood as a metaphor for the social, economic and political forces which influence and dominate Indigenous society. For example, no serious comment about football and Indigenous players can simply avoid reference to issues of race.[5] When Nicky Winmar lifted his jumper and pointed proudly to his skin when facing abusive Collingwood supporters in 1993, or Michael Long accused Damian

Monkhorst of racial abuse in 1995, the sensitivity and importance of race as an issue within Aussie Rules could not be denied. The question as to how and why some Indigenous footballers play distinctive styles of the game has, as a result, been rarely addressed.[6] It lies in a politically, very sensitive area.

In the case of Aussie Rules, any fear we experience in talking about the particular gifts of Indigenous footballers holds within it a challenge to carefully examine our history and the broader consequences of it. When asked by a radio commentator about the ability of Indigenous players to 'perceive' players around them, Chris Lewis said quite simply: "there were mobs of us as kids and we only had one football. You had to learn where the others were if you wanted a kick."[7] For many Indigenous footballers skills were not learned within the arenas of privilege. Not only can we, as outsiders, endow Indigenous footballers with large doses of mystery, where there are none, but we can also forget a larger, social and political picture. Ovals, particularly Aussie Rules ones, are incredibly large. They require enormous maintenance and cost if they are to be established, grassed, watered and mown. Jumpers and footballs are costly and the majority of Indigenous players come from families and communities which are materially poor when compared with most Australians. The skills which we admire in Indigenous players are skills born in our post-colonial Australia. As Indigenous Researcher, Darren Godwell, reminds us, "Sport may be a revered site in Australian society, and Indigenous peoples may have achieved much, but we should not blindly accept its stereotypes."[8]

The last point I want to make is that the following reflections are based on personal experience. While my involvement with Indigenous people and football has included North Queensland and Victoria the following reflections arise mainly out of football as I have experienced it in the NT and particularly in the western desert of WA.

Aussie Rules – early origins

Whether Aussie Rules football originated as an Indigenous game, and even within the context of important meetings and corroborees, is not entirely clear.[9] Descriptions of early games played by Indigenous people in western Victoria talk of a contest where a ball made from possum skin was used.[10] What is more clear is that Aussie Rules has developed as a very different game from the other major forms of 'football' played in Australia. Not only did it develop as a more free-flowing game, as expressed by the different ways by which the ball could be carried, passed or kicked, but it gave greater freedom for players to move ahead of the ball.[11] It relied on a larger playing surface, and a larger number of players, than either of the Rugbys and Soccer. It is a game that can be practised in alley ways and backyards but it is a game that can only be played in the open. It is also a game where the pairing of players is an essential ingredient.

The Culture of Pairings

If one ever watches the 'pairings' (or 'match-ups', as commentators prefer to call them) that often begin an Indigenous game, one notices that they are often formed by men who are friends or close relations. Being 'paired' for competition can reflect the importance of 'pairings' in other cultural contexts. Unlike non-Indigenous society, which strongly values a person's individuality and independence, unmarried Indigenous men (and women) often move or travel around with someone of the same sex who is their best friend.[12] Many of the Tjukurrpa (Dreaming) stories are stories of two principal actors who travelled the land together (e.g. the Wati Kutjarra, Tjiitji Kutjarra etc). Many Indigenous languages, unlike English, possess a dual number where the actions of two people are described, inclusively or exclusively, in relation to a larger group of people. Being 'paired' for a game of football confirms an already important cultural context and awareness for competition.

When Indigenous men enter the arena of football they already come with a set of values around the ways men can and should relate with one another. Being 'paired' or 'matched up' for a game of football does not have the same overtones of opposition and domination that can be experienced or valued by non-Indigenous players.

The Skills of Hunting

Indigenous men come to the arena of football with a number of cultural legacies and traditions. One is that of being 'hunter'.[13] At one level it is easy to see Aussie Rules football as a modern form of hunting. The animal being hunted, and a football, might once

have shared a common origin, as has been suggested in those early games in western Victoria which used a ball made from possum skin. But hunting is about a particular use of one's body. It involves the use of physical skills, with a keen awareness of the land, while using a variety of forms of non-verbal communication with other hunters. Hunting is the combination of finely honed skills which Indigenous men have developed in this land over thousands of years and which many continue to use today. Hunting is learned and it is learned from an early age. It requires the concentration and focus of many senses, the balance of physical movement with strength and speed, the use of precise timing with careful bodily coordination. Chasing a fast-moving target in bare feet amongst spinifex grass is probably as good a training exercise for football as a coach has ever invented. And if you have ever hunted goanna, a black-headed python or a blue-tongue lizard you would know what I mean.

As Indigenous men pursued those low lying, or sometimes low flying, objects of their desire they did it with others. Hunting in small groups, often with other men, they communicated silently as they went, using a wide range of hand and facial signs and gestures. The slightest movement of a body, a glance, sign or facial expression, all part of a highly developed skill of non-verbal communication. Whether it be over short or vast distances nothing needed to be said or shouted. Hunting concentrated non-verbal skills as the hunted was observed, tracked, trapped and then caught by men who learned to move quietly and powerfully together. As a person's body moved in concert with the land, the weather and the object of attention it also moved with other 'bodies' of men, forming a concentration of energy and purpose to achieve the final 'goal', when the object was caught.

Hunting is much more than a precise physical or biological skill. It is a social, mental and physical technique nurtured within ancient connections to the land and in relationship with other men. As we wonder about the connection between this modern game of football and the techniques of hunting we might remember Desmond Morris' descriptions of ancient body skills where "the chase became an essential part of male existence and required athleticism, stamina and a temperament that encouraged persistence." [14] Some of us might have forgotten our ancient hunting heritage, but for many young Indigenous men today that heritage exists and is passed on.

Men's Business

Aussie Rules also connects important aspects of men's kinship and men's business. This is not to say that women do not play football or should not be involved in it. But it is to suggest that what men negotiate outside the football arena, in terms of relationships with other men, is carried onto the football field. Kinship, for example, does not cease as one enters the playing field. Most men will have precisely defined relationships with each of the men on his own side, as also that of the opposition. Such relationships can be noted when the single men camp at a football carnival, side by side.[15] Different relationships mean different codes of affection, familiarity, avoidance and respect. One's older brother, one's uncle, one's brother-in-law, one's cousin. Different ways of relating but at the heart of all of these relationships lies the key ingredient of 'respect'. Not too hard a tackle, not too hard a bump. Playing it fast and sometimes playing it very hard. The art is developing the skill of avoidance as the ball is being 'hunted'. Not going over that fine invisible line where being accused of playing 'too hard' or 'too rough' provides the ingredients for a more serious accusation and confrontation. And sometimes confrontation does result when the tackle is experienced as too personal or aggressive and the ball is believed to have been ignored.

There are also other relationships at work on the football field. Most of these are hidden to the non-Indigenous world for these relationships are born and nurtured in men's Law ceremonies. These relationships reflect an even deeper bond between men and they demand even further respect, even avoidance, for some men from others. Visitors to communities will not know of these relationships and might wonder as a player appears to hang back from tackling another too aggressively. Strong men's business can exist even here on the football field. Learning this art of skilled avoidance, while still putting enough physical pressure on one's opponent, is high art indeed.[16]

ON ANZAC DAY 2001, when Essendon played Collingwood, the newspaper and television commentator, Dermot Brereton, drew an analogy between the diggers at Gallipoli and modern footballers.[17] He drew some relevance between today's game and the ANZAC heritage. In essence he said that football was more about combat than skill, winning

more important than losing, violence more valuable than respect, confrontation more commendable than avoidance. "It is apparent", he wrote, "that Australian servicemen were feared and respected by their foes. Their virtues sound very much like the virtues of our great sporting heroes."[18] This view of the game of Aussie Rules is a construction of a very different game to that which is played in parts of Australia by Indigenous men. It is also the view of the game where the boundary around appropriate male behaviour has been shifted and significantly re-drawn.[19]

Some years after my first northern football encounter, and important cultural lesson, a group of us, including the same young man I had tackled, met over a few drinks. We talked about the past and the various things we had shared since we first met. Without any warning he turned to me and asked, "That time on the football field. It was an accident, wasn't it?" Whatever had happened that day, those years before, had not been forgotten. And not by myself either.

Since that game, on a dry, dusty oval in the north, I have reflected on the way Indigenous footballers provide something that is distinctive and different for our Australian game. At the heart of what they bring is a great enjoyment for Aussie Rules. But they also bring their culture with them: hunting that low lying and flying object of desire, the art of skilled avoidance and holding to that fine line which puts pressure on an opponent but also offers him respect. Football can be an important area of men's business where skills and relationships are strengthened and the use of aggression is negotiated. Without a more reflective sense of what is being enacted in this game of Aussie Rules we run the risk of carelessly assimilating Indigenous footballers into the game without appreciating what it is they bring and how their cultural strengths can enrich our game and ourselves.

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ENDNOTES

1. Figures provided by the AFL. These figures represent 7.3 per cent of all players in the senior and rookie lists of the sixteen AFL Clubs. It is more than three times what might be expected as Indigenous men, between the ages of 20 and 29, comprise only 2.3 per cent of Australian men in the same age group.
2. A good example is Bret Harris, *The Proud Champions*, Little Hills Press, Crows Nest, 1989. He presents a stereotype of Indigenous footballers when describing the Krakouer brothers who were "magical and mesmerising", possessing "telepathic qualities", "always knowing where the other was as if by some sixth sense", p.132.
3. *Ibid.*, Harris suggests that "Australian Aborigines are amongst the greatest sporting races in the world" as "they had been playing games for thousands of years", p.9.
4. Umpiring is generally a more relaxed and casual affair. Umpires tend to move slowly behind the play. When there is a more formal competition each team has the right to nominate one of the two umpires for their game; this reflects an important cultural link between kinship and authority that continues within the football arena.
5. cf Colin Tatz, *Obstacle Race, Aborigines in Sport*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1995, where "the amalgam of

history, politics, sociology and sport", p.1, reveals the relationship between politics and sport, particularly racism in sport.

6. Exceptions are the works of authors Martin Flanagan and Colin Tatz who have written on this topic for many years.
7. *ABC Radio*, Saturday 14 July 2001.
8. Darren Godwell, 'Playing the game: is sport as good for race relations as we'd like to think?', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, Numbers 1 & 2, 2000, p.19.
9. One theory is that Aussie Rules has both a Gaelic football and Rugby football origin, cf. *Sport Laws* p.124. Another theory is that it has an Aboriginal origin, cf. the *Marn Grook Exhibition*, Essendon Football Club, 2001.
10. James Dawson, *Australian Aborigines*, George Robertson, Melbourne, 1881, p.85. He refers to a game which Aboriginal men played at that time: "One of the favourite games is football in which fifty, or as many as one hundred players engage at a time. The ball is about the size of an orange, and is made of opossum-skin, with the fur side outwards. It is filled with pounded charcoal, which gives solidity without much increase of weight, and is tied hard round and round with kangaroo sinews".
11. In their desire to take the best, and not the worst, from Rugby and Eton the early game banned hacking, which allowed players to kick their opponent's shins, cf. Robin Grow, 'From Gum Trees to Goalposts, 1858–1876', in *More Than a Game*, 1998, p.11.
12. e.g. the word 'marlpa' in Kukatja, which refers to one's particular friend or constant companion.
13. Desmond Morris, *The Human Animal*, BBC Books, London, 1994. According to Morris as people changed to becoming hunters and gatherers, from an earlier stage of being fruit-picking tree dwellers, men needed to become more efficient hunters. He also suggests that 'going to work' is the modern and major substitute for hunting but that "many of our primeval, tribal hunting patterns are still with us, lightly disguised", p.65. Examples of modern hunting are collecting, gambling, travelling and all forms of games and sports.
14. Desmond Morris, *The Human Animal*, BBC Books, London, 1994, p.64.
15. As in "tawaritja" (Pitjantjatjara).
16. When James Dawson described the game of football played by Aboriginal men in 1881 he wrote, "the games were usually held after the great meetings and korroboraes. Women and children are not allowed to be present", p.85. Men's business indeed.
17. 'Sporting legacy of fallen heroes', *The Age*, Wednesday 25 April 2001.
18. *Ibid.*
19. When James Dawson described the game played by Aboriginal men in 1881 he noted that it "concluded with a shout of applause, and the best player is complimented on his skill" and, while a very rough game, "they do not hurt each other so much as the white people do", p.85. In contrast Robin Grow describes the early games in Melbourne where "scoring was low, the game was violent, and the large crowds were passionate", in 'From Gum Trees to Goalposts, 1858–1876', *More Than A Game* (1998), p.5. He also states that "rough play also resulted from players' propensity to drink alcohol before and during a match", p.23.

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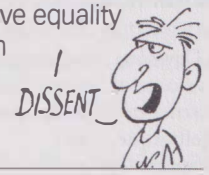

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Alex Buzo

Sydney: Heart of Rugby League

Third Annual Tom Brock Lecture, 2001

AS THE ONLY major city in the world where rugby league is the dominant sport, Sydney can claim to be unique. Rome is a soccer city, but then so are many others. New York is a baseball city, but then so are Boston and Philadelphia. Rugby league is played in Leeds and Auckland, but is not accorded the religious status given to other codes. In Melbourne, despite being awarded a premiership in 1999, the game is still called 'cross-country wrestling'.

Is Sydney the heart of rugby league or is rugby league the heart of Sydney? Either way or neither way, there is a relationship between the game and the city, a history and folklore, that has nourished, inspired and entertained many generations. As a writer, I have always seen it as part of my job to record – with a modest degree of interpretation – the landscape and idiom of the immediate environment. Having been born about a kilometre from North Sydney Oval, I have inevitably taken an interest in what they still call 'the greatest game of all', and would like to express gratitude that the Tom Brock bequest aims at preserving this part of the social history of the oldest city in Australasia.

According to Melbourne historian Robert Pascoe, rugby took hold in Sydney because it is linked to eighteenth-century notions about the defence of property. Perhaps in this case 'and appropriation of property' should be added, especially as nothing plagues the modern game more than the ball-stripping rule. The relationship between the north of England and New South Wales has been well documented by Andrew Moore in the first Tom Brock Lecture, and I was reminded of it when reviewing four books on the Olympic City for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1999. Geoffrey Moorhouse's portrait of Sydney had insights not normally found in the work of outsiders, and it was obvious that because he came from a rugby league background in the north of England he had a special entree into the character and drama of what he found here.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of immigrants to Sydney came from a soccer background and the question has often been raised about the low popularity of that code in what should have been a natural habitat. Foxes and rabbits had no trouble adapting, so why not the round-ball game? It is, after all, the great love of the English working classes who formed so much of the character of old Sydney. Rugby philosopher V.J. Carroll has put forward the view that in the cobblestoned streets of London and Birmingham it was necessary to play a game in which the players used their feet and remained on their feet, and that tackling sports were the province of rich private schools with extensive and well-maintained playing fields. In Sydney there was a lot more space and soft landings on the green fields of the sprawling city, and so all classes took to rugby. Those who have tried to sink a thumb into the surface of the WACA in Perth and broken a nail will know they play Rules in WA, just as those who have sunk a thumb up to the wrist in Eden Park, Auckland, realise instinctively they are in a rugby country. This is of course a general view and it should be noted that there is no record of the theory being tested at North Sydney Oval, where until the 1987 renovation, rock met clay in a form of cement.

South of the Barassi Line, in Victoria, where the grass is grey, the ground is hard and the horses run anti-clockwise, it was a different story. Australian Rules is a nineteenth-century game, more open, free-flowing and egalitarian, in which the players mostly stay on their feet, and belongs, according to Robert Pascoe, to the more modern and democratic society to be found there in the Land of the Long White Posts. He cites the greater numbers of women who are in-

terested in the game as evidence of this, saying that they were greater participants in the political movements of the day, and puts forward the view that Rules was more multicultural. This ignores the significant interest Sydney women have in rugby league, and particularly the St George club, with its big female following, especially during the unbroken premiership years. Some of them looked like Elizabeth Taylor, some like Ken Kearney, but all knew their football and were not afraid of speaking their minds. Who could forget that pre-season game at Henson Park in the sixties when Elton Rasmussen, not long down from Queensland, took a breather? A large woman with a voice like Tugboat Annie was sitting in the grandstand and called out "Rasmussen, Rasmussen, stop bludging on the blind". He did it again, but only once.

In Sydney at the turn of the century all classes played rugby and the democratic movements that swept Victoria were not unknown here. As former Australian rugby union captain Herbert 'Paddy' Moran says in his classic memoir *Viewless Winds*:

> In 1904, Amateur Rugby was still a game for all the classes – just as it is today in Wales. There were no social distinctions, nor any systematic professionalism . . . Those who later become professionals changed their status, not as a rule from any dire necessity, but out of a desire to gain their living more pleasantly. It was they themselves who created a social discrimination in Australian Rugby.

However the creation of the Rugby League in 1908 is interpreted, it was an act that was decisive in the history and education of Sydney. It was not without political echoes, and was influenced by commercialism to the degree that the first premiership was won by forfeit following a dispute on potential gate receipts, but it also had the effect of tying the game into the inner city heart, while rugby union became more the province of the quieter suburbs. The rule changes – dropping two players, no line-outs, and above all retaining the ball in the tackle – were designed to make the game more attractive to the spectator, but they had the bonus of making it easier for beginners, and within five years rugby league had become a school sport and subsequently a lifelong interest for many Sydneysiders.

On a grey day in the weathershed at my primary school in 1954 we boys were addressed by Arthur Folwell, chairman of selectors for the Australian Rugby League, and he was a very impressive figure with a green and gold coat of arms on both his blazer and hatband. He told us what a great game league was and hoped we would all play it and send a good team to the schools carnival. In 1955 I made the firsts – or should I say 'the onlys' – and we played in the carnival, being duly weighed, stamped, given a pie and then beaten in the semi-final by the toss of a coin after a nil–all draw.

I was not the only bandy-legged winger running around in 1955; there was a much more famous one called Don Adams and it was a big thrill when my aunt took me and a friend to see France versus NSW at the SCG in 1955 along with 50,445 others on a bright Saturday afternoon. Here the score was much higher than nil–all; it was 29–24 for the home side against the great French team led by Jackie Merquey. As E.E. Christensen notes in the *1956 Rugby League Year Book*:

> Merquey gave one of the classiest displays seen from a centre in years. He drew the defence perfectly and gave his fellow centre Rey ample opportunities. Merquey scored two tries and generally his play was most inspiring.

The 1951 side had beaten Australia 2–1, led by their explosive players Puig-Aubert and the second-rowers Brousse and Ponsinet, described by one careless authority as "Brussenay and Ponce". The 1955 tourists were of course called "the unpredictable Frenchmen", but under the strong leadership of Jackie Merquey they won by the same margin and made many friends with their open play and multicultural infusion, which included shooting ducks with a shanghai at Kippax Lake and serving up the result as *caneton roti a l'orange*. The hotel where they stayed, The Olympic in Paddington, is now classified by the National Trust and looks a lot better than it did in the fifties, unlike, alas, the current French side.

In 1955 there was no television and the 1950s did not represent the high point in the Australian film industry – with all respect to *The Siege of Pinchgut*. The Sydney Cricket Ground offered drama in the afternoon and we saw the star performers of the day – 'Bandy' Adams heading for the corner with the crowd on its feet as soon as he touched the ball, the Frenchman Jean Dop who did the opposite and ran in circles that left defenders with dizzy spells and the crowd with delirium, and above all, Clive Churchill Superstar. When you looked at a football field with

twenty-six players on it you looked to Churchill first, just to get a bearing and to feel the sense that something was about to happen. With a high surf of black hair, rolled up sleeves and shortish left-foot kick, there was no trouble locating him as he drifted across to set up his wingers, the locomotive-like Adams and, when available, the finely tuned Ian Moir. Like Wally Lewis he carried an invisible force field that seemed to say 'Don't tackle me. Hold off until I do something that will really damage you.' He was every inch the egalitarian Sydney version of the star, however, and in his autobiography *They Called Me the Little Master*, he recalls a great moment from 1950:

> One evening, a week before the Australian team for the first test was selected, I happened to be in my new home at Mascot, tacking down the carpets. One of my friends, Billy Winspear, knocked on the door. "Clive," he said, "I have just heard over the air you have been selected in the Test team. I've also heard you have been appointed test captain."

They don't write dialogue like that any more! In fact, this book is subtitled *Clive Churchill's Colourful Story as told to Jim Mathers* and it ranks with *10 for 66 and All That* by Waterloo-born cricketer Arthur Mailey as both a sports classic and an unforgettable social record of Sydney. The 'as-told-to' man Jim Mathers was a tabloid journalist and a master of the idiom of rugby league in the days when Sydney streets were alive with the shouts of the fruit barrow boys and its legendary news-sellers. Many of us remember the bustling, spindly woman with the floppy hat and pointed chin working the cars at the beginning of Victoria Road in Balmain, or Wynyard's Quick-Draw McGraw in brown horn-rims and a grey dust-coat, who could get a *Sun* or *Mirror* under your arm in .005 seconds. The most inspiring character was the newsboy at the Quay who wore a pork-pie hat and had thigh stumps for legs, and who alternated between cheery banter with his regulars or yelling out "Getya Sunamirror here!" He did not wear a UCLA tank top or turn into Captain Marvel Junior; he wore a football jersey. It had to be a league one and it had to be Souths, and it said to all tourists: "This is Sydney".

In television terms, the battle between the *Sun* and the *Mirror*, between the *Herald* and the *Telegraph*, resolved itself into the long-running war, Channel Seven's 'Controversy Corner' up against 'The World of Sport' on Nine. I was entranced by these spielers and blarney merchants, the direct descendants of salesmen, auctioneers, politicians, scrap metal collectors, bottle-ohs and rabbitohs, who had a licence not to be laconic, and I wrote a play, *The Roy Murphy Show*, about this phenomenon of the rugby league television panel. The central three characters, the garrulous host, the crusty veteran and the smart young journalist were called Roy Murphy, Clarrie Maloney and Mike Conolly, and they represented three forces in the game which have waxed and waned in different ways – showbiz, tradition and independent analysis.

In *Rugby League Week*, on 23 July 1971, the Nimrod Theatre production of *The Roy Murphy Show* became the first play to be reviewed by that distinguished organ. Under the headline 'Stand Up the Weal Wan Casey', Mike Woollcott speculated on the identity of the central character in these terms:

> Roy Murphy – how it stretches the imagination that a man with such a fine Irish name or with the initials R.M. could be a pontificator on Greater Sydney's national game – has as his antagonist Clarrie Maloney, who, Roy tells us, is heard on another medium and who has antiquated views.

I'm sure that after exactly thirty years it can be revealed that the critic who wrote that, Mike Woollcott, was a pseudonym for one of Australia's hardest-working and most authoritative journalists, Mike Pollak, and that the real Ron Casey did come to see the play and had three double whiskies straight afterwards.

'The Case', as he was known, had a distinctive voice, including an 'R' deficiency, but he walked the tightrope as a sports commentator all through that era when harness racing was known as 'the trots'. Roy Murphy's antagonist, Clarrie Maloney, was a great supporter of the City–Country game, but Roy felt Sydney was the once-and-future citadel of the game and that the 'annual farce' should be abandoned. As Casey notes in his autobiography *Confessions of a Larrikin*:

> The Saturday and Sunday football panels on Channels Nine and Seven were part of Sydney folklore in the seventies . . . If Nine's panel, with me as host, has cast lingering memories, it must be because of the on-camera slanging matches between myself and fellow Irishman Frank Hyde.

As commentator for 2SM, the 'other medium' that rankled with The Case, Frank Hyde was the nice guy of rugby league and a target for all larrikins, confessional or otherwise. In the last round of 1961, North Sydney's valiant fullback Brian Carlson played all over the field like three men in a 33–13 loss to St George which meant no semi-final berth for the Bears and another minor premiership for the Saints. "For his outstanding display here today," said Frank Hyde over the new transistor radios of a hundred fans, "I picked Brian Carlson as the best and fairest." The reply from a St George fan walking in front of me was loud and immediate: "You couldn't pick your nose, Frank." The unhurried Carlson had been the epitome of Fifties Cool, a running contrast to the hot leadership of Clive Churchill, and he had created almost as many tries for Ken Irvine as The Little Master did for Ian Moir, but by 1962 both of these great full-backs had retired and, sadly, did not survive the 1980s to be become Grand Old Men. Frank Hyde's tribute was appreciated in some quarters, and certainly in retrospect.

Hyde's equivalent on Channel Seven was everybody's favourite uncle Ferris Ashton, who played the veteran role to Rex Mossop in the lead, with Alan Clarkson as the smartjournalist. This central dynamic has since disappeared from sports programs in the era of the Footy Show's all-player panel, plus pies and frocks, but all over Sydney in the seventies people made jokes about 'pertinent league matters' and speculated on what was causing the tormented cries of the Commonwealth Bank elephant. We now know the answer: the Commonwealth Bank. But those were more innocent days, where Saturday morning meant a hangover, poached eggs and 'Wan' in black and white.

The Nimrod production of the play had been an excellent one, with John Clayton, John Wood and Martin Harris as the central trio and Jacki Weaver in the role of the generous hostess; just as Sydney had become the university of rugby league, so it was becoming the place where actors came to hone their skills under pressure. Outside Sydney *The Roy Murphy Show* suffered from mixed perceptions. It has never been performed in the Adelaide–Melbourne–Hobart triangle, partly because the characters were seen as Woolloomooloo Yankees, and partly because the idea of satire in the football context is a very tricky issue. In Melbourne it is possible to be irreverent about Australian Rules, but the irreverence must be reverential. It was also impossible to dramatise the overkill inherent in their panel shows; in Sydney the magic number of panellists was five, whereas eight was the norm down south. They put thirty-six players on the field and need three commentators and two umpires to handle all the traffic. Victorians also use 15 per cent more words to express a thought, and those who accused Frank Hyde of blarneyfication do not know the half of it.

Membership of Melburnian Keith Dunstan's Anti-Football League was never audited, but the figure is believed to have always been less than two, which gives some idea of the religious fervour attached to the southern game; the convivial scepticism of the Sydney league fan is simply not part of the landscape. I had several interesting and at times hilarious discussions with theatre managements in Melbourne about presenting *The Roy Murphy Show* either as it was, or adapted to the local scene, but it was agreed that the first alternative would induce revulsion and the second was impossible.

In Newcastle the production included John Cootes, making his debut in the entertainment industry as the footballer of the week Brian 'Chicka' Armstrong, but the box office return was disappointing. It was only in Perth and Brisbane, on a double bill with Jack Hibberd's *Les Darcy* play that *The Roy Murphy Show*, played as straight comedy, ran for a good long season. When the play was produced in London by Steve Jacobs and Helen Philipp in 1983 almost every critic saw it as a satire on the Australian obsession with sport. Australian! How little do they know of those subtle differences that percolate down through history and all the way from Redfern to Jolimont.

People started sending me commentary and spectator gems after the play had been on and I became a kind of recorder of the more bizarre outreaches of rugby league literature, giving the spoken word a rough permanence. I was even rung by panellists from 'The World of Sport' and 'Controversy Corner', who were not averse to shopping their colleagues. When Rex Mossop turned from ball distribution to word distribution and began calling the games on television the trickle of items became a torrent of rhetoric. Commentators have always had signature phrases, such as American baseball caller Mel Allen's home run shout "Open the window, Aunt Minnie!" With King Rex you knew a try was coming when he bellowed "Shut the gate, the horse has bolted". Neither phrase will stand up to any kind of logical explanation, but were part of the light verbi-

age of sport. No-one knew at that stage just how important the media were to become.

Channel Seven won the rights to telecast league in 1974 and with the advent of colour television in 1975, plus an equally colourful commentator, the game became a mass entertainment on what we never called 'Freda Ware'. Who was this strange woman 'Freda Ware'? It was not for twenty years that the terms 'pay television' and 'free-to-air' were to cause the biggest impact on the game since 1908, but the ball started rolling in 1975, especially in the area of personality and commentary that reached beyond the hard-core fan. In the days of *SMH* journalist Tom Goodman, master of the style without style, action was conveyed to the reader's mind with a minimum of well-chosen, single-duty words and phrases. On Channel Seven we got the action, plus the description, plus the style that some called 'Double Bunger'.

From 1977 to 1983 I ran a tautology tournament in the *The National Times* which was open to all comers from sport, politics, science, the arts, industry, anywhere. All contestants had to do was come up with a piece of tautology like 'free gift', 'added bonus', 'strict disciplinarian' or 'forward progress'. Rex Mossop won every year, and that was what the fans wanted, however much I tried to boost the claims of Bob Hawke, Ita Buttrose or Norman May. They were just crazy for Rex, even south of the Barassi Line, even in the Croweater Capital, and when I signed copies of the book in Perth people presented me with lists of their favourite tauts, with many Mossopisms among them. His language of league became catch-phrases in general society and people took great delight in saying 'Give him a verbal tongue-lashing, let me recapitulate back to what happened previously, he seems to have suffered a groin injury at the top of his leg, they're going laterally across field, that kick had both height and elevation, I've never seen him live in the flesh, there he is, hopping on one leg, what a pity – he's been a positive asset, they've been going on about it ad nauseam – that means forever, I've had to switch my mental thinking, I'm sick and tired of all this violence-bashing, that referee's got glaucoma of the eyes, I don't want to pre-empt what I've already said, I don't want to sound incredulous but I can't believe it'.

The Moose did not deserve his nick-name as he did not charge straight ahead in his playing days, but rather introduced English-style ball-playing skills to a bash-and-barge ethos. He was not thanked. I remember the tall, dark figure at Brookvale Oval with his sleeves rolled even higher than Churchill's, above the elbow, suggesting a lair working on his sun tan rather than a worker, and running at gaps before passing the ball. Some elements in the crowd booed when he did this, believing it was more macho to run at an opponent and die with the ball, but Australia paid the price in 1962 when the great distributor Brian McTigue put on a master class in geometry and Great Britain won the series 2–1. Australia's dominance in world league began in 1963 with Billy Wilson and then Ian Walsh helping out by doing something of a McTigue up front and Johnny Raper keeping the kettle boiling for a very fast set of backs. They defeated Great Britain 28–2 in the first test and 50–12 in the second. Of course, then it was a case of 'Tha won't win third, lad', and so it proved, but those seventy-eight points in two matches were the watershed. From now on, players would regard Sydney as the headquarters of rugby league.

When 'Sixty Minutes' was making a profile of Rex Mossop for their national audience they asked me to come on camera with a copy of 'The Rexicon'. I replied that there was no such thing, that it was just a name for a certain kind of tautological idiom, that it was an abstract concept. "We don't do abstract on 'Sixty Minutes'," was the forthright answer and they got me to mock up a ledger containing all of Thesaurus Rex's linguistic sins and then confront him with it on camera. As television entertainment this Rexicon business was the equivalent of watching a dentist at work. Rex Mossop was an innovative ball player and a grand showman whom Noel Kelly has described as living one of the great Australian lives. It was a pity his drab and querulous autobiography, *The Moose that Roared*, is not at the same end of the scale of rugby league literature as Kelly's own *Hard Man*, or the benchmark, *They Called Me the Little Master*, with its wonderful evocation of Sydney in 1950.

Chapter Twenty of this masterpiece of its kind begins when Clive Churchill drives his parents to the SCG gates and escorts them to the queue for the first test against England at 6 a.m., wearing his pyjamas, dressing gown and slippers, and ends with a delirious and mud-caked mob surrounding him after the third test Ashes victory, including one spectator with a pair of pliers busy removing a stud from his boot. In the great tradition of being in the know, another came up to his mother and said "I know Clive Churchill well. As a matter of fact I knew him when he was only two years old, toddling around

Mascot." The Little Master was not a big man, but he was twenty when he moved from Newcastle to Mascot to toddle around for the Rabbitohs in the big league.

The Australian accent began in old Sydney among the Currency Lads during the Macquarie era of the early nineteenth century and spread out over the country before becoming regionalised, and then consciously non-Sydney. Seen as a raffish capital with rather too much in the way of violence and corruption, and certainly way too many raffs, poor old El Syd began to be looked at rather askance by the rest of the country, and its dominant sport was called 'Thugby League'. This was a pity, as the escalation in ball skills and pace of play in the 1990s was making this one of the greatest tests of athleticism, courage, deception, fitness and vision on offer in world sport.

The game reached its high-water mark in 1994, according to Ken Arthurson, and I recall a typically glorious David Peachey try in the Cronulla–Newcastle semi-final that involved a giant sweeping movement, decoy runners and long passing against an equally determined and fanned-out defence, leaving chess, Vince Lombardi and basketball in the shade, and inspiring a standing, cheering crowd, including a friend from south of the Barassi Line. "That's about as good as ball play can get, I think," I said and he readily agreed, despite having reservations about both rugby league and the Coathanger Capital that has nurtured it. Teddy Roosevelt said of America "I fear we shall never be loved", and the same could be said of Sydney and its culture, especially those attached to the league, that ancient outdoor drama of defending and appropriating property, of punishment and reward, of paying homage to skill and theft and the exhilaration that goes beyond all logical bounds.

Despite the negatives, the pace of the city and its achievements attracted players from all over the world and they were made to feel welcome in the traditional democratic ways. Johnny Fifita came from Fiji to play for St George and when the Dragons were playing North Sydney at the SCG in 1989 a couple of the opposition fans were sitting in front of me and, as usual with Saints followers, disagreeing with the radio commentary. "I wonder if Johnny Fifita grew up in one of those thatched-roof bures," speculated Peter Peters on 2GB. The St George couple exploded. "Give him a go!" said one directly to the radio, "The boongs don't live in tents over there."

While the natural predators of league looked to be the perennial 'sleeping giant' of soccer and the somewhat flighty Sydney Swans, no-one seemed to notice what was happening with the rugby union fraternity, which since the democratic days of Paddy Moran had come to be called 'the rah rahs', a term from America's Ivy League, according to Professor Gerry Wilkes, derived from the 'hurrah hurrah' sounds made by those keen young Preppies at the Yale–Harvard game. It took a long while to sink in, but taking their cue from the events of 1908, rugby union reduced the team by three, made the ball easier to retain, the game easier to teach beginners, paid the players, encouraged tribal support and came up with the Super-12 format.

In the best-selling novel of the same name, *The Yah-Yah Sisterhood* made their name by disrupting a beauty contest with stink bombs, and the impact of the new breed of Rah-Rah Brotherhood has had a similar effect on Sydney's long-running love affair with rugby league with their huge crowds for the Super 12s and the Bledisloe Cup, where nations at war seems to occupy a bigger canvas than suburbs at war. There are increasing signs of strain and embattlement all round the game of league, in ways

that did not exist during the happy monopoly of only a few years ago. North Sydney's greatest victory, 15–14 over the Brisbane Broncos in the 1994 finals series, was set on its way by Greg Florimo with his refusal to be overawed and the early try he scored in typically impatient style. Everyone loved Flo and they rejoiced in the triumph, if not the eventual success, of the Bears. When I remarked that Craig Polla-Mounter's heroic performance for the Bulldogs against Parramatta in the 1998 finals was in the same class for spirit and will to win, I was howled down by league traditionalists. 'Canterbury were Super-League, Polla-Mounter's from Queensland, he ratted on both the rah-rahs and Phillip Street, they probably didn't even want to be on Freda Ware, Murdoch owns them, remember Pearl Harbour' and so on. What a wedge those hectic days of the 1995 pay-television war have driven!

WHAT WILL the future bring for Sydney and rugby league? People mumble about demographic change and say the taxi drivers no longer talk about 'pertinent league matters', but still it holds on, and there was a red and green river of beanies overrunning the wigs in Macquarie Street when Souths went to court fighting to keep the people's game alive. Sydney is the only place in the world where rugby league has inspired political street marches, but could it happen elsewhere? The only other million-plus city in the world where league remains the dominant code lies to our north. Perhaps we can look forward to a spirited and well argued 'Brisbane: Heart of Rugby League' at a future Tom Brock Lecture. It would be a case of stripping the ball, but at least this time it would be one-on-one.

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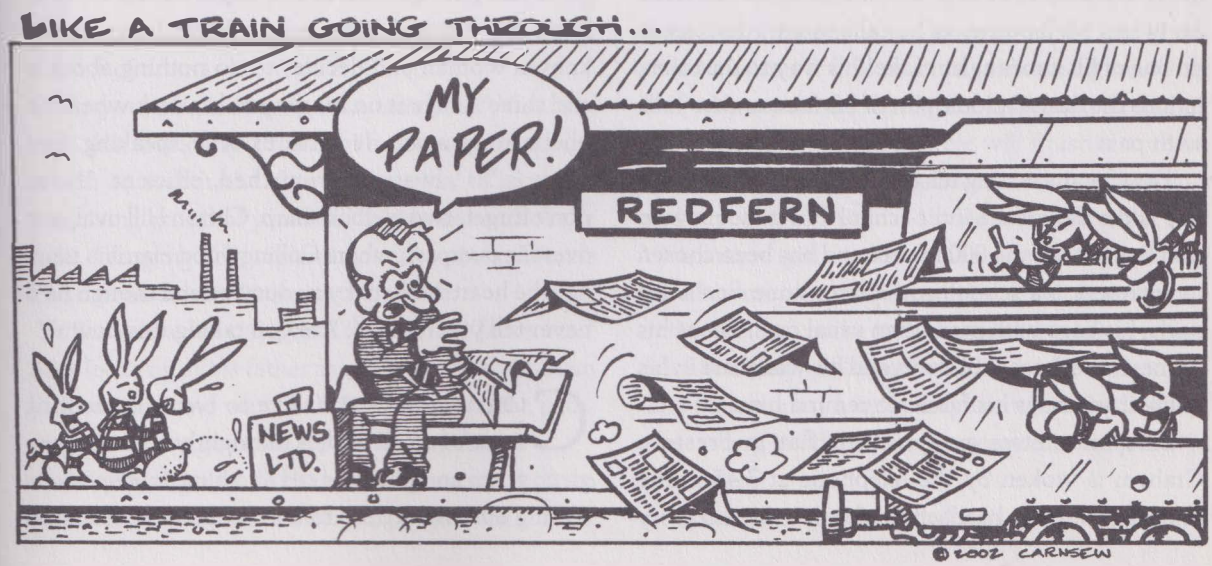
Alex Buzo is the author of Pacific Union: The Story of the San Francisco Forty-Fivers *(Currency Press, 1995), in which the central character is the former Patron of the NSW Rugby League, Dr H.V. Evatt. He delivered this paper as the Third Annual Tom Brock Lecture, on 20 September 2001. The lecture is hosted by UNSW Centre for Olympic Studies in conjunction with the Tom Brock Bequest Committee and the Australian Society for Sport History.*



Loyalties

Laurie Clancy

WAKING, for Alex, coming out of the dream, is like fighting his way up from the depths of an ocean bed. He wrestles in terror with the bed clothes, his face is covered with sweat, his hair matted against his skin, his parents' voices are ringing in his ears. His mother's voice is loud and high-pitched, the product of her training as an actress; his father's is relentless, ironic, never rising, never losing its cool as they trade absurd insults and accusations.

"Hairs in the sink."

"Peas in the face cream."

No, he remembers, his father has gone now and when he walks into his mother's bedroom in the morning beside her lies Ted, who looks like an owl without his glasses and like the magistrate he is, with them. Ted buys him ice creams and talks about the footy and calls him 'mate' all the time. He barracks for North Melbourne, as he calls them. Alex treads on one of his shoes as he makes his way to the toilet, it finds the fleshy middle part of his foot, and he yells with pain.

Downstairs, eating his cereal, he remembers. Today is the day of the inter-school athletics. He won his class heat of the 800 metres and has been chosen to represent his school in the inter-zone finals. He packs his bags with more than usual care, cleans his runners, checks that his keys and his wallet are in his pocket, and rings his father to remind him.

Five kilometres away, in his flat in Preston, Graham is woken by the telephone at 7.45 in the morning. He has a headache and only a dim memory of the night before. Carmel had come over and they had watched the late night movie while he drank liqueur muscat. Yes, he promises his son, yes, I'll be there. Sitting on the dunny seat he tries to remember the name of the film. Curled up on a couch they had watched a hooker and a rich executive arguing and falling in love. They were negotiating about rates.

"She charges $100 per hour but only $300 for the whole night," Carmel had said. "That doesn't make sense."

"Bulk-buying," says Graham.

He thinks about going for a jog but decides against it. He is writing a short story about a prisoner who sends a letter to his mother. The letter goes astray and reaches a complete stranger at another address. She reads it and decides to write back, adopting the role of mother. Three possibilities. One, she could go to the jail, they meet and begin to fall in love. Two, the prisoner receives the letter from an unknown woman and decides to do nothing about it and three . . . He is on his way to his desk when the phone rings again. It is his ex-wife speaking. Her voice is, as always, high-pitched, efficient. "Now, don't forget, two o'clock sharp. Clifton Hill oval, just over the overpass, where Collingwood Harriers train, he'll be heart-broken if you don't attend though he'd never tell you himself. Are you taking this down?"

CLIFTON HILL OVAL at five to two is a seething mass of small bodies in brightly coloured singlets, green and gold and red and blue, loudspeakers blaring out instructions to the competitors, harassed

mothers and schoolteachers searching for their charges, the queues at the canteen and the Mr Whippy van growing steadily longer. The empty bottles on the floor at the back of his car rattle as he brings it to a halt and he thinks yet again while he looks for Alex that he must clean up the car. Probably get two more miles to the gallon, his ex-wife used to joke.

As he walks towards the track there is the thud of a starting pistol and the six girls pass by him, almost close enough to touch. It is the Under-ten women's four hundred metres, according to one of the loudspeakers. A freckled, Irish-looking girl strides out in front, a look of total absorption on her face. For a while a waif of an Asian, Vietnamese perhaps, hardly more than half her size, stays close behind her, legs pedalling madly, before dropping back and ending a long way in the rear of the field. A hand is on his arm and he hears Alex say "Hi, dad" in the elaborately casual tone he always uses when he wishes to create a sense of drama.

"Is your mum coming to watch you?", Graham asks. He is searching the oval for somewhere from which to watch the race undisturbed. There is a promising group of pines at the eastern end of the field. Glugging Yellowglen under the pines. Sounds like one of Calvino's unwritten novels.

"She wanted to come but I told her and Ted not to." Alex looks up at his father as if for approval. Graham kicks a stone and watches it tumble down the pathway. "I have to go now. They're calling for us."

Puffing slightly Graham walks up the hill, to watch from the trees as Alex strips his track suit off and goes through what seems to his father an absurdly elaborate routine of preparation. He bends to touch his toes several times as his father watches with envy. He gyrates from side to side and swivels his hips like a demented rock singer. On his face is that look of utter seriousness and dedication that Graham knows. Adrian, his school teacher, the ex-League football star who coaches him in athletics, talks to him with a grave look on his face. Graham moves towards the track so that he can watch the runners more closely.

They're off. Yet again the dull, muffled hammer of the starting pistol, and the eight figures in their bright T-shirts respond. Alex has drawn lane four but over the first fifty metres he spurts frantically to gain the inside position, using up precious energy. A tall boy in a gold singlet, running with strides that seem to eat up those of Alex, passes him and soon he is back in third position. Down at the far end of the oval he seems a frail and insignificant figure. Only half-way round the first lap he is already struggling and beginning to fall back. He will finish last. Mentally Graham begins to rehearse words of comfort and support. To finish at all. He remembers the tiny Vietnamese girl in the earlier race who had staggered home thirty metres behind the next runner, determined to make it to the finishing line. He had felt like cheering her and weeping at the same time. The runners pass him as they complete the first lap, Alex racing in odd spurts of energy that keep him in third place.

The tall boy in gold ,who looks at least fourteen, is

striding out in front by eight or ten metres and seems tireless. Alex is still third but as he passes his father, completely oblivious of him, his face is white and strained. Three of the runners have dropped out almost completely, two more are too far back to have a chance of winning, and there are really only three boys left in the race. The tall boy still leads and Alex clings behind the second boy just in front of him. Silhouetted against the sun at the far end of the track he seems as thin as a pencil. Graham wonders again if he will be able to complete the race. As they head into the straight, approaching the finishing line, the crowd begins to yell and scream encouragement. Despite himself Graham becomes caught up in the excitement and yells and screams as loudly as anyone. The second runner has dropped back and Alex is now behind the leader, five metres back, making no progress though the tall boy has slowed as well. As he passes his father he looks up and hears him yelling encouragement. He smiles. His hair is matted against his skin. That look of fanatical determination that Graham knows so well comes over his face, his head goes down, his arms flail like windmills and he surges ahead, past the tall boy in what seems like only a handful of paces, he crosses the winning line two metres ahead while his classmates and Adrian clap and cheer and he is helped to a bench.

Afterwards, in the pizza parlour, the nominated prize of the victor, Alex speaks calmly, without boasting though with obvious pleasure. "I just knew I could beat him, dad, if I timed my run right. Sometimes you know when they're gone."

His father boasts. "It was when you saw me in the crowd, yelling out to you, that you put on the extra spurt."

His son looks at him, puzzled. "I didn't see you, dad. Honest. I didn't see anyone. I just ran faster at the end."

They eat their pizzas in silence. Alex slips his hand through his father's. "It was nice of you to yell for me, dad."

In the car, driving him home to his mother's, Graham asks him what happens now.

"That was the inter-zone finals, dad," his son tells him. "Eight schools in the inner suburban area. Then come the metropolitan. Then come the state. And the winners of that get to compete against the other states in Canberra. The metropolitan meeting is next Thursday."

"I'd better be there to see you. I have a meeting but I can get out of it, probably."

His son hesitates. "I've asked Mum and Ted to come instead," he says. "I've got no chance of winning that one. I'll be lucky if I don't finish last."

The next Thursday, from a long way back, unseen by anybody in the pines that border the track, Graham reads Raymond Carver while he waits for his son to race again. He glugs Yellowglen from a plastic cup. As the race finally begins he watches his ex-wife and Ted from across the other side of the field as they roar and scream encouragement. His son finishes last, a long way back, just as he had confidently predicted. Graham plants the bottle carefully behind a pine tree before making his way home.

Fiona Capp

Returning to the Water

A MEASURED VOICE on the radio was forecasting storms as I drove west out of Melbourne. Beyond the flat, scrubby farming land on the city's outskirts, an ominous grey fuzz of low cloud blotted out the horizon. On the approach to Geelong, as the dark funnels and flame-lit chimneys of the Corio Bay oil refineries loomed in the distance, rain began lashing the car. If it hadn't been for an appointment I had to keep in Torquay, I would have turned around and driven straight home, mildly disappointed but secretly relieved that my return to the water had been delayed. Much as I wanted to surf again, I was afraid of what I would learn about myself. Ocean-lover James Hamilton-Paterson once wrote that he was almost as obsessed with the idea of the sea as with its actuality. I was afraid that when put to the test after all these years, I would be confronted with a similar but more unpalatable truth: that I was more in love with the idea of surfing than with the surfing itself.

The town of Torquay holds a special place in surfing lore because of its proximity to Bells Beach, one of the world's legendary surf breaks. But Bells is a hidden jewel reachable only through a bush reserve and a hike down a steepish gully to the beach. What hits you as you enter Torquay is the mercantile side of surfing in the form of a commercial estate on the highway into the town: a surreal 'village' of brightly coloured surf showrooms emblazoned with giant billboards of surfers on luridly blue waves. Two of the biggest surf companies in the world, Rip Curl and Quiksilver, began as cottage industries in Torquay in the late 1960s. Their presence, along with the Easter competition at Bells – the longest-running international surf contest – has ensured that the town's identity is now inseparable from its surfing culture.

Those who knew Torquay in the 1950s remember it as a frontier town where a notorious group of wild boys associated with the Surf Life Saving Club bought cheap land on the outskirts, whacked up some fibro shacks and called it Boot Hill. They were known for their heavy drinking, partying and love of pranks – one particularly memorable joke involved the word 'Fuck' being mowed in giant letters into a crop of oats on a hill facing the town. For surfers from the early sixties acid was the thing. There was much soul-searching among the floating population of surfers and bohemians who hung out at a century old timber house called Springside near Torquay Point.

Anyone who has not been to Torquay but has seen the 1991 American action film *Point Break*, in which the charismatic leader of a gang of Californian surfer-bankrobbers is finally tracked down by the FBI at Bells Beach, could be excused for thinking that Torquay is still a hillbilly, wild west kind of town. In the final scenes, there is a shot of a sleepy main street with wide verandahs and a whistlestop train station with a sign announcing 'Torquay (Bells Beach)'. It's all very quaint and countrified, like something out of 'Northern Exposure', but nothing like Torquay. The real giveaway, for Australians at least, are the scenes on Bells Beach, particularly the foreshore backdrop of firs and the grey shale beach. Not a tea-tree or ochre cliff-face in sight. It was shot, in fact, off the coast of Oregon, in the US.

I hadn't been to Torquay for at least six years and as I drove past the surf showrooms, I felt a pang of nostalgia for the mythical Torquay of *Point Break* that would forever remain unsullied by the forces of big business. Yet even before the appearance of the surf plaza and the recent Ocean View housing estate nearby, the real Torquay – a modest mix of suburban brick veneers, fibro holiday houses, neat weatherboards and brash townhouses with a shopping strip reminiscent of a suburban mall – had never borne much resemblance to its film counterpart. I was on my way to meet local surfer Grayme Galbraith, known as Gally, who grew up in Bell Street, Torquay. The street was named after the Bell family which

owned much of the local land, including the farm of Martha Bell from whom Bells Beach took its name. When Gally was a boy, the town was a haven for hippies, surfers and people wanting to escape the rat race. Living two minutes' walk from the beach, he spent much of his childhood in the water, but didn't take up surfing until he was eighteen. He now lives in the new Ocean View housing estate that has consumed the rolling farmland where that giant 'Fuck' was once emblazoned. He only has to lift his head off his pillow in the mornings to inspect the surf through his bedroom window. Gally has been an Australian champion twice and state champion too many times to mention. Apart from selling surfboards for Rip Curl, he coaches the state surfing squad and gives private lessons. Hence our rendezvous.

I no longer had friends who surfed and did not welcome the prospect of surfing alone (not a wise thing to do when you're seriously out of practice). So I had asked Gally to give me some lessons. I had deliberately chosen the protected break of Torquay to save myself the kind of pounding I endured when first learning in the unforgiving beach breaks of the Mornington Peninsula. Back then, it never occurred to me to ask someone to teach me. I didn't believe that surfing could be taught. Like writing, it seemed too fluid, too unpredictable an activity; too much a matter of individual talent and temperament. You had to work your way out from the shore break, get used to being dumped and spat out; you had to watch more experienced surfers and figure it out for yourself. In other words, you had to do it the hard way. Twenty years later, the hard way had lost its appeal. Apart from wanting company and advice, somewhere in the back of my mind was the memory of my swimming instructor with his long shepherd's staff ready to haul me clear of the water when I got into trouble.

At Torquay Point, the swell rolled around the headland and peeled off into neat, smallish waves ideal for novices. Intermittently, the sun broke through the pewter clouds making the cliff glow like a freshly baked loaf of bread. It was a weekday and as I gazed out over Bass Strait contemplating the surf, I had a sneaking feeling that I was breaking some unwritten rule about how one should conduct one's life; that I ought be at my office in the inner city or at home looking after my young son. The storm I had brushed with on my way down was now unleashing a flash flood on Melbourne, having passed Torquay by like a travelling show hell-bent on making an impression in the big smoke. If I had paid more attention to the weather map and the wind direction I might not have written-off the surf so hastily. But I was out of touch with reading these signs and with contemplating what was going on in the ocean. A hot northerly wind could still have me hallucinating glassy waves but my grasp of pressure systems and their impact on the swell had always been rudimentary. What I did know was that the winter months were the best time along the Victorian coast for powerful groundswells produced by lows in the Southern Ocean. The month of May, I was told, had been classic. Non-stop six-foot waves and offshore winds. Now it was September and the equinoctial winds had begun to blow. As always in the spring, the weather was unsettled and unsettling.

"Just what you want," Gally announced, casting an expert eye over the water. It is no longer de rigueur for surfers to have the dishevelled, sun-bleached look, but with his shock of sandy hair almost to his shoulders, freckled tan, laconic manner and playful grin, Gally is unmistakably a surfer. He pointed out the various breaks between Point Danger at the far end of the beach and Torquay Point right in front of us at the creek mouth. The rip that travels out next to the rocky headland – a boon to the surfer but a hazard to swimmers – is known as the escalator. "We'll stay in the shore break for a while, then go out the back a bit further."

After changing into my brand new wetsuit – the old one was too thin for comfort in 14-degree water – I locked up the car. I was wondering what to do with my keys when I remembered a dream I'd had the week before. I was standing out the front of the Doges Palace in Venice looking out across the lagoon towards the white dome of the Salute when I noticed some figures on surfboards in the grey, choppy water. There were no waves, just the wake of vaporetti and tiny peaks whipped up by the wind. Some people, I thought, will do anything for a wave. Then, without warning, a perfect, glassy wave began rising slowly out of the lagoon like a rare, exotic beast and I knew I had to get out there. As it happened, there was a nearby kiosk where I could hire a board. I pulled on my wetsuit and was preparing to enter the water when I became concerned about what to do with my keys and wallet. Should I bury them in the pebbles of the small beach in front of St Mark's square? Surely they would get stolen. I spent so much time worrying about what to do with them that I woke up before I had a chance to put a toe in the water.

Feeling a little foolish, I asked Gally what he did with his keys.

He slammed the hatch of his station wagon and picked up his board. "Hide them somewhere on the beach or under the car." He was once so eager to get in the water, he said, that he left the keys in the ignition and the doors unlocked.

Still anxious about abandoning my keys, I rolled them in my towel, picked up the training board Gally had brought for me and headed for the beach. The symbolism of the dream was obvious enough. The keys represented my secure, predictable life; the life I was throwing open to risk and uncertainty by returning to the water.

I DID NOT NOTICE the cold at first. I was too bent on navigating my way through the whitewater that snapped at my heals like a pack of hungry terriers. When I was deep enough into the breaking waves, I turned to face the shore and started to paddle. A foaming wave picked up my board sending it skidding forward as I seized the rails and scrapped to my knees before rising clumsily to my feet. In my late teens and early twenties, I would have been mortified to be seen mucking about in the shore break. Real surfers caught unbroken waves. Desperate to prove myself to the world, I took to paddling out the back with the experienced surfers before I knew what I was doing and not infrequently found myself in situations that I did not have the skills to handle. I have no doubt that this made me more fearful than I would otherwise have been. While I was lucky not to have any truly hair-raising experiences, was never dumped so badly I lost my nerve, I spent a lot of time avoiding waves when I should have been trying to catch them. If I had settled for smaller breaks closer to shore, I suspect my memories would not be so fraught with ambivalence.

Two things had changed. Firstly, I was older and didn't care about looking foolish or being uncool, didn't feel compelled to show that I could mix it with the boys. Here I was on this great big, spongy plank of a training board – the kind of thing I would never have been seen dead on twenty years ago – happy to take things slowly, to get it right. And secondly, surfing was no longer the distinct, tribal subculture it had once been. When I was younger I was acutely conscious of the exclusiveness of the surfing scene and of its hostility to newcomers, especially women. Ironically, now that surfing had been absorbed into mainstream culture and lost its anti-establishment edginess, this 'them' and 'us' mood had largely evaporated. While it made life easier for me now, I did not want to forsake what surfing had represented to me as a young woman – its mood of rebellion, its defiant existentialism, its rejection of the routines of mainstream life, its celebration of the uncontrollable power of the sea. For all the folly of revisiting the romantic dreams of my youth, at least I knew that the fundamentals had not changed. The steps might have become more flashy but the dance on the wave remained the same.

With each successive wave, I was able to get to my feet more smoothly, catching nice little reforming waves that appeared out of the whitewater like a descending staircase materialising from nothing. My stance, Gally warned, was too squat, feet too far apart. I'd never be able to manoeuvre the board if I didn't stand tall. It was time, he said, to go out a bit further, beyond the break. I paddled out, pushing against an invisible membrane of resistance. If anything, the years out of the water had sharpened and augmented my fear, not dulled it. When I was a child I loved being dumped and churned and flung about like a rag doll, loved being at the mercy of the wave. As an adult I seemed to have lost the art of abandon, of giving myself up to the ocean. I had my life so tightly under rein that I had forgotten the mad joy of letting go.

A little peak was looming. "This one," Gally yelled and as I paddled for it, he gave the board a shove to help launch me onto the wave. The nose of my board plummeted and the shoulder of the wave felt too steep but somehow I got to my feet and quickly slid down the green face, then rode the broken wave all the way to the shore. After catching a few more like this one, I was so awash with adrenalin I could barely think straight. All I could do was smile. Why on earth had I waited fifteen years?

During a brief lull between sets, Gally told me that I didn't need lessons every week. He said I should go out myself for a few weeks and then come back and see him so that he could correct any bad habits I'd picked up. I tried to hide my dismay as I told him that I didn't feel ready, that I needed the lessons to build up my confidence, that I had a problem with fear. "It's only water," he grinned. "If you want to surf, you have to pay the rent." And this was the very lesson he couldn't teach me.

After an hour in the water my feet and lips were numb. Back in the carpark getting changed, I asked Gally if he had surfed Corsair. I told him that I had

written a novel about a young man who surfed there at night.

"Hah!" he laughed, brushing the sand from his feet. "That would be the end of him." Gally had surfed the Rip a few times but didn't bother anymore because it had become too crowded. It was a great left hander, he admitted, but very tricky.

I didn't dare tell him that it was my dream to surf the Rip. A writer wanting to emulate one of her more reckless characters could easily come across as harebrained. I could just imagine the look on his face. A few weeks later, as Gally and I grabbed a coffee and muffin at a local cafe after my lesson, I decided to make my confession. It was time to find out whether I was kidding myself about surfing Corsair. Now that Gally had had the chance to observe the progress I was making, perhaps he could gauge whether I would, at some time in the future, have what it took.

Whatever his feelings, he disguised them well enough as I told him what I wanted to do. "It would give you a fright," he said after a pause. He described how the powerful Bass Strait swell came driving through the narrow Heads and wrapped around Point Nepean, executing a sudden right turn. One moment the swell looked as if it were passing you by, and the next moment the wave was coming right at you, hollow and fast. "To be honest, I don't think you could handle it."

What else could I have expected? The week before I had found the Torquay shore break on a biggish day a challenge. That morning when I was dumped by an unexpected wave and the broken water held me down for a fraction longer than usual, I began to panic. Scrabbling for the surface, I gulped breathlessly through the foam before the wave was ready to let me go. I was only under the water a matter of seconds. Gally paddled swiftly over. You have to remember, he said, that you can hold your breath for at least a minute and that you'll never be held down for that long. The trick was not to fight the wave. By fighting it you only made things worse.

A small brown wave of coffee slopped over the side of my cup as I pushed it aside. "I don't mean now!" I said, mortified. "What about a year's time?"

He gave the slightest of shrugs. He didn't want to commit himself to something so unforeseeable. The whole idea must have struck him as a little mad. Here I was, a raw recruit fearful of three-foot waves at Torquay Point, and yet I was dreaming of surfing Corsair.

THE NEXT TWO MONTHS were almost unrelentingly grey and rainy, and everyone I knew seemed to have grown sad, as if the low, dark skies had become a state of mind. We all hunkered down, waiting for the miserable weather to pass. There were days, as I made my weekly expedition down the Geelong freeway, that I wondered if it were worth spending three hours driving – an hour and a half each way – for the uncertain pleasure of an hour in the water. (It was too cold to stay out any longer.) While I loved the sense of adventure that came with hitting the road and leaving the city behind, especially on a week day when everyone else was heading for work, my mood was always tempered by anxiety. What if the conditions were no good? Of course I had studied the weather map and the surf reports. But forecasts were not infallible and there was no substitute for being able to see the waves for yourself. Things could change unexpectedly. The wind might turn on shore or the swell might suddenly drop away. I would constantly check the windsocks and lines of bunting along the way, watching for signs of change. If I saw surfboards on cars heading back to the city, I fretted about why they were leaving the surf behind. There was also the guilt that came of leaving my 20-month-old son at childcare while I took off to the surf. If I had not been surfing, I would have been working and he would still be in creche, so what difference did it make? Now that I'd begun writing this book, the two activities had become inseparable. I was writing about surfing and surfing to write. But I could hardly expect anyone who saw me dropping my son at the creche with the surfboard strapped to the car roof to believe that I was 'going to work'.

Once I was in the water, these anxieties fell away. The rough and tumble of the ocean did its work. By the time it came to the drive back home, I was scoured clean like a shell, inside and out. I reeked of the sea. Crystals of salt clung to my eyebrows and my head was wonderfully empty of the fretful static that it had played host to on the way down. I had done what I needed to do. I had spent a long afternoon 'soaking up the outer world'. Now I could return to the city and for a while, I could be content.

Fiona Capp is a writer and journalist. This is an extract from her forthcoming memoir on surfing called That Oceanic Feeling.

THE ONLINE LITERARY MAGAZINE *Jacket* is now into its fifth year. It is read by thousands of English-language readers from all parts of the world. The 'visits' counters now tally over a third of a million visits since the first issue in October 1997, making *Jacket* one of the most widely read literary magazines of all time.

Last year *Jacket* publisher and editor John Tranter invited *overland* to participate in a joint issue, with a focus on poetry. The poetry presented here is a sample of work solicited especially for the project. It is an opportunity to introduce some North American poets, alongside a New Zealander and several Australians, to *overland* readers. Most of these poets have not appeared in *overland* before.

The *Jacket* Internet site has space to publish much more material than this print edition of *overland*. To read the complete feature, including entire versions of Ron Silliman's 'The Satellite' and Michael Farrell's 'sign', nine more poems from Laurie Duggan and much more poetry from others such as Canadian poet Mary di Michele, Kate Lilley, Jane Gibian, Brendan Ryan and others, as well as essays by Murray Edmond and Ken Bolton, please visit the Internet issue – http://www.jacket.zip.com.au/jacket16/index.html

Pam Brown

Maxine Chernoff

Miss Cedars

A bird and three days
of royal grey rain.
Opaque labelled sky.
Mount Fuji in fugue.
Hushed white pearls
posing in marzipan.
Merciless drugstore:
a patented cure.
Dalmatian coastline.
Good-bye sweet grievance.
Thinly disguised.

Maxine Chernoff (USA) is the author of six books of poems, most recently World *from Salt publications, and six collections of fiction including* Some of Her Friends That Year, *a new and selected stories from Coffee House Press.*

Geraldine McKenzie

Content's Hammer

Yes, but it's only now we're seeing it on the tele . . .

– Sybil Fawlty

This girl's dark eyes and huge expression
the doctor's hands as she shows
absence, no word denoting legs with
amputated feet and there clearly
should be, poetry is hard enough
when daily muted by the clamour
of self-righteous suits –

certainty's the sword I'd like to cleave
such certainty apart and thrust
a conscious agony on all who see and don't
checking the list in trepidation
that my name and those I love will be buried
somewhere in the fine print
heavy with inheritance

a person in a room with books to
burn, vicarious forager devouring only
news, flash and breaking from the hills
each curve and corner rushed as the sky
pushes for a semblance of control over
events, asserting, uselessly in
this instance, the naught but here

the gunner's ears leak blood, collapsed
question marks the spot of no return
(I think we've passed this way before)
it makes me mad and even now
as the sausage machine cranks up
khaki collection due
all line up for the shambles

cameras to the right of them
cameras to the left,
war/head/lining
I thought I knew you well
what comes streaming in
a greater crack and faces
trapped and offering winter

the wind's on its way
no one sleeps well
where are those voices coming from?
In the middle of your life and none the wiser
the quiet house no peace accords
question the dead where they lie
the living have no answers

this isn't the last word and
who'll recognise the too-familiar face
stuttering as it comes
while all who bear its weight
and plod the weary follow me
turn aside to briefly stare
this is where we came from

Geraldine McKenzie is a teacher who lives in the Blue Mountains. Her first collection, Duty, *was published by Paper Bark Press in 2001.*

Alice Notley

The Myth

First death, remember that.
they haven't been telling
the story right and we aren't the right forms.
In the beginning in death
and I was once death
The métro platform lined with souls
two-color gas flames cooking the food
of the body
they eat the vegetation that grows from me
because I'm not providing the right
information. in their offices
These forms are wrongly filled out.
In the beginning was death
that stillness after. In the beginning was after,
the future's the past.
Delicately balanced legalities. They will
tell you you don't know your own name
now that he's dead it's his. That's
one of the ways a widow's dead and punished.
too in our offices
Someone's brought over a large book
depicts the dissection and skinning the
disembodiment of a being. hands it to the poet
he is disgusted by it, he is I the ranch is outside
the fences beneath all sky
I see you again and lose.
Wound get out
and wound get out
that it can't be dissected out and that being can't be dissected, so
I'm a pilot in a blue cockpit and break the time barrier
see you again and lose. the cadences must not be right
he the tough older poet, was very adamant about the book with its photographs of the dissection of the body/being, while the cattle ranch was displayed, through the window, the plains the sky. his own books of poetry (mine) nearby. That is what they did to my love they cut him to make him well
they changed his chemical composition with pills and also surgery
they were trying to heal him but they knew they couldn't and to change a body so, to destroy it can't be to heal. I don't know if that,

my thoughts, I've trained them to be unstable, and fragile enough
to allow in truth. holes for a possible other world. a velocity for breaking the time
barrier. He cried because he learned how
or is it a different barrier or screen. an autopsy's being performed
in the trash book I'm reading, the little girl's body
decomposing in its two trash bags the crime is gruesome
for the reader's pleasure. My love could no longer contemplate
the violation of flesh by weapons or scientific blades. was no longer part of the mass
fascination with autopsies violent crimes splicing the cutting of beings into their
smallest pieces in order to discover them wholely and satisfy the need to think
there's nothing non-material
slabs of meat shown in coverage of *la vache folle*. A man who is death.
I knew he was death he offered to fuck me. was going to fuck an old woman but
he said urgently, in low tones as if to seduce
it might have been me. A man who is death skillful and civilized
Death said something about tortoises a trick
to make me think I'm avoiding something, avoiding his stupid power
bound up with the need to eat, to eat the tubers which grow from the widow's body
My love's body beautiful radiant white with a tapering from shoulder down
darkness in eyes and silver hair that in the past is black creating
darkness still as an aura
thus there is nothing to remember. I know your form in its entirety
see it all here. green and brown eyeglints of the exceedingly handsome voice and
its, the face's troubles, the moral one that is your beauty
The need to eat. the need to take more, Death must be fat. No, he was just another
man. He plays by the rules of men. My love, ill, ate when told to there was no taste
Death was eating his pleasure but not his transubstantial light
couldn't be eaten, ask anyone. as the black hair remains in the all-gray
Death is not the real death. the man Death is not,
death is the beginning the transubstantial light or dark,
which men have appropriated but cannot. in these offices designed to feed them,
tubers growing from the right forms

Alice Notley has published over twenty books of poetry as well as editing a new edition of Ted Berrigan's The Sonnets *in 2000. She collaborated with Douglas Oliver in* The Scarlet Cabinet. *Her recent book* Disobedience *is a poetic writing of the political as experiential and as primary.*
Alice Notley lives in Paris, France.

Bronwyn Lea

Cheap Red Wine

After Galway Kinnell's 'Oatmeal'

Most nights I drink cheap red wine.
I drink it alone.
I drink from a Baccarat crystal wine glass
of which I have only one and that is why I must drink alone.
Popular wisdom tells me it is not good
to drink alone.
Especially cheap red wine.
The dank and cloying aroma is such that a feeling of sorrow
can too easily twist into despair.
That is why I sometimes think up an imaginary companion
to drink with. To ward off the despair.
Last night, for instance, I drank with Charles Baudelaire.
He drank from the bottle
owing to the single Baccarat wine glass.
Charles (he begged me to be familiar) said he was grateful
for the invitation.
He hadn't been getting out as much as he used to.
I apologised for not thinking
to invite him sooner and asked after Jeanne Duval,
if he had seen much of her lately.
He sighed. *Dans l'amour il y a toujours un qui soufre*
pendant que l'autre s'ennui. In love,
there is always one who suffers while the other gets bored.
I nodded and refilled my glass.
Charles read to me from *Fleurs du Mal,*
as the evening breeze blew through the open window,
and I confessed to him my anthophobia,
how sometimes the scent of flowers can fill me with unshakable dread.
He nodded gravely.
Such a feeling, he said, inspired him to write
the lines: *arrangements of flowers encoffined in glass exhale their ultimate breath;*
and, *I prefer the autumnal fruits over the banal blooms of Spring.*
He shuddered and finished off the bottle.

Deep into the night Charles read to me,
and as I fell asleep in his arms I had the idea
that communing with the dead needn't be a mystical activity.
It may require no more than a glass
or two of cheap red wine
and listening, intently, to the bodily meanings
of ghostly words.

Bronwyn Lea's debut collection of poetry, Flight Animals, *was released by UQP in 2001. She lives in Brisbane with her daughter, Tiara.*

Laurie Duggan

Little History

Endless rain
as a drought breaks,
metallic horizon clouds
lit from an obscure place.
Is sense made simply
through binding together
disjunctives – as though
fragments of pictures
will always make a picture
whatever the source,
weather, texture, opinion,
not an argument certainly,
at least some trace,
not narrative even,
the wild sky, lightning
through mended Venetians.
A trail of ants
of unknown origin
and unknown destination
appears briefly in the kitchen.

Laurie Duggan was born in South Melbourne in 1949. He recently completed a PhD in Fine Arts at Melbourne University. He has worked as a scriptwriter and art critic and has taught media, poetry writing and art history. He has published ten books of poems as well as Ghost Nation, *a work of cultural criticism. He lives in Brisbane.*

Michael Farrell

from sign

they said underground as our two have come beneath the
land in electric is no woman who the famine
the guardian & now it might let your of their in
at them then down she & your her & to you for you
they soon & your her sleeves of the water with in the
blood & if & its able along one put them her
dead cattle just above in a little before what
she & with many are to the life & of the passed
sojourning the two & thirty in one been the her
other & they held a to her fathers in she
wont & watched the presence should be his father how his
a possession would be best he said commanded on
to his brothers tell him food was a of their they would
there was that they the famine service to land of said
by reason off just gathered up on to in the the
fog for the the ground brought the was as & when why he
spent in on me land of now is they bought & a the
money quite firmly when the get out & in did the
egyptians that give us on account we die minded
money is that give your sister to you food did not
if your they did brought their that might them were embarrassed
the horses seeing speak & he been spoken exchange
remarks that year out of year was they were following
of which we will part that our considered the herds she
was there is it was sight of for she bodies & she
went should we & it both we look up us & did not
& we she got slaves to steps she us seed on a live
& her young the land saw them so they hesitated for
all other sold their sweet so upon this trip & as
if she of them & miss other only & had he
did said which a fixed know on on the man broke
therefore they about that to the with this this day them
all pharaoh now an extra & you said to at the
her now a fifth she fall shall be & she field & a
pity & your those two you have heads may it all was

Michael Farrell is the Australian editor of slope *(www.slope.org). He recently edited the e-mail magazine* ELVES 1, *available on request from* limecha@hotmail.com. *He lives in Melbourne.*

Linh Dinh: two poems

A Peripatetic Purveyor of Nothing

On The Avenue of Idleness, there is a man who pushes a pushcart around with nothing on it. He rings a bell to announce his arrival. Children and other undesirables like to throw rocks at him.

"I was never made out for this. I don't want to sell nothing. I don't even want to buy nothing."

"So much for nothing today?"

"You better know it."

"A little cheaper by the dozen perhaps?"

"Not at this weight, ma'am."

"But my children are grossly underweight!"

"Like the billboards say, We can't modernize overnight."

"Please wrap it up then."

A Note on Translation

I cannot talk about things, a catnip or a dog, with the confidence that they will still exist in the world by the end of my sentence. (Such is progress.) Further, my modest and improbable vocabulary is always compromised (and perhaps sanctioned) by an unbridgeable gap between the source of words and their promiscuity. Immortality is always slander, agreed, and yet translation is everyone's best bet for immortality.

Linh Dinh (USA) is the author of a collection of stories, Fake House *(Seven Stories Press, 2000) and three chapbooks of poems,* Drunkard Boxing *(Singing Horse Press, 1998),* A Small Triumph Over Lassitude *(Leroy Press, 2001) and* A Glass of Water *(Skanky Possum Press, 2001). A poem of his is anthologised in* Best American Poetry, 2000 *and he is also the editor of the anthologies,* Night, Again: Contemporary Fiction from Vietnam *(Seven Stories Press, 1996) and* Three Vietnamese Poets *(Tinfish, 2001).*

Gillian Conoley

Profane Halo

This was the vernal the unworldly human
 the most elegant car in the train.
A faithful and anonymous band of huntsmen,
a runner of red carpet
spotted with pheasants
on which an origin, a cold sun shone.
These were the black shoes,
the skirt one smoothed to speak.
The unknown tongue for which I am not the master,
chiefly the messengers
circling back through the vectors as the ashes adjust,
a loner with a hat,
a loner on a cold dark street,
a man gone away for cigarettes
on an otherwise calm evening.
And the signs that said yield, and then *Sssssshh,* and then
let me sweep the porch for you.
A woman's black beads scattering into order.
Girl running along outside of herself toward.
Pale hopalong.
And time scarred up to do a beauty.
Dear Sunset that was sun of now,
Near Greatness, dear tongue my Queen, dear rock solid,
how could we know that we are forerunners?
The first characters in a crowd
and yet we were outwardly quiet.
We assemble here toward the river
or wherever the horse leads us,
dear oarsman the valleys are green,
some bodies piled
some bodies marked and burned away.
New ones just wiped of their meconium.
In the whites of the lovers in the evenings under.
Dear human mood dear mated world.

There, there, now.
Dear ease of vicarious place, oil in sea.
Dear ravishment of fountain
figure in the fold.
These are the beers we drink like oxygen
in hats as large as I.
The loner going door-to-door, the paint excelling
the door in cubes of prescience, durations of grey.
Here we attach the theatre of a girl
the miniature size comprehensible
the door a seed
the tree a dwarf
the hay a stack
the uncreated still.
Cool of the evening,
thine ears consider well
the uncreated still.
Huntsman in the quietened alley
in the dark-arched door.
Train long and harpiethroated.
Haydust thine ears enscripture.
Before gardens and after gardens
for vespers,
earth's occasional moonlessness
lays hands
on the data in the street,
under which loose animal
the unbending pale of whose complaint becomes the dust's surround

Gillian Conoley's new collection of poetry, Lovers in the Used World, *was published in 2001 by Carnegie Mellon University Press. Her other books include* Beckon, Tall Stranger *and* Some Gangster Pain. *Associate Professor and Poet-in-Residence at Sonoma State University, she is the founder and editor of* Volt. *Born in Taylor, Texas, she now makes her home in the San Francisco Bay area.*

Ron Silliman

from The Satellite

The sweatshirt on backwards
feels just wrong enough.
Weird quadri-
lateral of light
stretched across
the night garden
tells me
she's awake.
Three cops wedged in
to the back corner nook
at Burger King.
Planet of the Japes
(trauma
of the sifted child).
First sun
in eight weeks
cold to the touch.
Beauty understood
as sadness and
sadness beauty
gives his art
its elegiac tone
(sad hum of
overhead fluorescents),
little boy void
of fun now
in middle years.
Red clot of
dried blood snot.
For our con-
venience
each pen
has been pre-chewed.
Red beef farts.

How perfectly
they've designed the soup
he or she has designed
the soup, corn's
perfect yellow yin
to the black bean's yang
(or is it was it
the other way 'round),
this is the dawn-
ing of the
age of
blanched asparagus
(under the green
napkin a roll
that has been quartered)
white paper cover
atop the table cloth,
laundry tag still
stapled to its corner.
Ice stings the phantom tooth.
Airport news network
blares on unwatched.
A long walk
in the desert
night air (middle
of winter)
past the strip
malls of Tempe.
Excuse me, Snow White.

Ron Silliman lives in Pennsylvania with his wife and two sons and works as a market analyst in the computer industry. He edited the important anthology In the American Tree *and his collection of talks and essays,* The New Sentence, *has gone into multiple printing. Since 1979 he has been writing a poem entitled* The Alphabet. *So far the alphabet project comprises eleven books including* N/O, Toner, What *and* Xing. *A new edition of his long poem* Tjanting *is forthcoming from Salt publications.*

Denis Gallagher

Listen

At the end of the hall
Glimpsed beyond the front door
A gathering of we literary
Passed down the hall anywhere
A back garden this blithe pool
Baby's Tears koi and reflections

Indifferent meat of social intercourse
Dissolves regurgitates heaves is spat
High over a stone wall
A potato vine simpler than smoke
Oblique to any opinion flourishes
This Sunday convivially

Revile is best rehearsed to sublimation
May grace save us from the social
For literary politics become stones
Wait on the first drink follow the second
Overtaken by the third poetry contrary
Tougher than gristle begs vodka

Veils are rent
Veils are not rent
Rent is irrelevant to poetry
You're an idiot
You're a bore
You're all fluff

What a lovely day the koi
The potato vine look at it
Those yellow and white flowers enchant
Listen it shall remain a stone
For yellow and white is not poetic
Now the black rabbit is over there

Since his first book of poetry, International Stardom, *appeared in the late 1970s, Denis Gallagher has published several books of poetry and prose including* Country Country *and* Making Do. *In 1987 he edited Sydney's seminal anthology of Gay and Lesbian writing entitled* Love & Death. *He has also written for performance. Denis Gallagher lives in the Blue Mountains.*

Eileen Myles

Scribner's

There's a little
more going
on here
than preservation

your water
tower against
the sky

your faded
message

two windows
mucking up
the S &
the I

still I know
it was 43rd St.
where I
badly slept
with you

my memory:
I was
perfect then

there's more
than that
that's going
on

just breathing
is rotting
everything

is burning
I'm probably
madly
in love with
you

but it's her
I'm leaving
tonight or
me & my
lousy lies

so lolling
around in
another
lost home
with your
camera

checking perfection
before you
got film &
now I don't
want those
damn pictures

the teletubby
transfixed
nailed to
some scaffolding
on 42nd St.

the poking tower
over the
dirty parking
lot wall

with the
yellow stripe

that's right
I'm not
Mr. Teletubby

it was sad
every time
we took
a picture

this is a relationship
click
this is a relationship

if my cover
is an illustration
of me &
so is my
writing an
observation
of truth

not it
fucking scaffolding
right,
fucking burning

alive
Spring is so
perfect tonight
because outside
in the real
house the
birds are

shamefully true
hopping under
the hokey
sidewalk
furniture shitty
captured flowers
looking droopy

Rosie just
wants to
put her belly
on some cool
cement. Does.

I do this.
Appear to
be a bum
in my hiking
boots & hairy
legs I'm no
longer a dyke
just a man

hello little
bird.

Eileen Myles' recent novel cool for you, *published in 2000, traces the downbeat progress of a girl growing up in working-class Boston. She is the author of ten books of poetry including* School of Fish *and* Not Me. *In 1992 she ran as a candidate in the US Presidential Election and in 1995 she co-edited* The New Fuck You: Adventures in Lesbian Reading *(Semiotexte). Eileen Myles also writes art criticism.*

Michele Leggott

milk and honey taken far far away (ii)

Paris before the bombs in the shoes
the long grass under the trees at Wannsee
the river with the beautiful name
echoed in fountain spray
where we stroll *intime* Unter Den Linden
and break the bank on each other
mink and metal in one window harlequin
pants in the other your eyes
in lapis and gold from Mosaicksatelier
curling treble clef for a morning hat
black peacock halo for quiver breath
did you dream Zauberflöte in puppets
woodwinds like cedar and lemon drops
the wealth of stars tilting your ecliptic
the orange moon on fire at the corner
the bullet-holes in the courtyards
the untranslatable word on the stone
incomprehensible numbers knowledge
glittering in your eyes like broken crystal

city of delights now I walk barefoot
on the glazed bricks of Babylon
through white daisies on high walls
among rippling yellow lions
in tanks of blue protective grace
to the catastrophe of Light beyond
the Ishtar Gate I am a girl in Oranienburg
making a hologram I am a girl in Coromandel
throwing cats'-eyes into the sea at new moon
I am walking for the pleasure of sand
of clover, of stone stairs, of asphalt, of dust

I am walking north to the festival house
of the new year I am walking east
into the abyss
when the light splinters under my feet
it will be as rainwater washing them clean
when the storm breaks over the city
the warlords will draw up their timetables
when the bow is strung I will lift it
and fire on the waters rising against me

every night / almond profiteroles
by the turned-down duvets champagne
and oysters under the sea white roses
done up in ribbons by the river the script
we blue-pencilled in the tearoom of the Pergamon
as the rain began and our ways lay apart
milch und honig made into nothing
transported white white and faraway
Säugling bis Greis do you understand
these words on the stone where I kneel
to read with the tips of my fingers *weggebracht*
a way taken *taken away* how does Love live here
except as Schattentheater two shadows
on a rooftop taking a table into the garden
because it's midsummer and the evening star
invites an audience now the blue angel
flies across town to catch a cloudy smile
at Kino Arsenal upstairs in the museum
of gowns and feathers two take another table
into the roofgarden their orchestra follows

Michele Leggott was born in Stratford in Taranaki and now lives on Auckland's North Shore. She teaches English at the University of Auckland. She

edited the prose poem The Book of Nadath, *written by Robin Hyde in 1937 and finally published by Auckland University Press in May 1999. She has published four collections of poetry, critical works and is co-editor of* Big Smoke: New Zealand Poems 1960-1975 *(AUP, 2000). Her recent poetry collection,* As Far As I can See *grows out of the poet's anguish at losing her eyesight. She writes: "Much of what I have written here is an effort to remember seeing, something to put against the dark while I searched for other ways of understanding where it has put me. This understanding is elusive, it vanishes most when I need it. It is the sound of words on darkness, and of words on light."*

Rachel Loden

The Bride of Frankenstein

after Ted Berrigan

It is night. You are asleep. And beautiful stars
are shining in a lowered veil. The bride of

Frankenstein is dead. On my internal muzak
zipper-neck is singing "Puttin' on the Ritz".

Somebody calls looking for "Barney". *Ah,*
sweet mystery of life! And sweeter still since

Transylvania Station is so near. Cue up
the pie in history's kisser, Vlad Putin

fixing Dubya with his soulful, *Stasi* stare.
Come let's mix where Rockefellers walk

with sticks or um-ber-ellas in their mitts . . .
Are you so sleepy, *shaineh maidel*? Soft light

is singing to itself behind a falling veil, behind
the line, "The bride of Frankenstein is dead."

in memory of Madeline Kahn

Rachel Loden's book, Hotel Imperium, *won the Contemporary Poetry Series competition of the University of Georgia Press and made Tom Clark's annual top ten poetry list in the* San Francisco Chronicle Book Review. *She has a new illustrated chapbook,* Affidavit *(Pomegranate Press).*

Confrontation in the Cold

an episode in the life of Dao Zhuang

Ouyang Yu

NIGHT AT RED CLIFF. After a snow. Minnie and I, alone with each other, were out taking a walk on the widened roadway passing through a dense forest of native pine trees and cypresses on top of the Dragon King Hill, which, on one side, overlooked the city of Eastern Slope and the great Yangtse running eastwards, and, on the other side, was skirted by patches of a neglected graveyard, now white with the snow. I was walking, side by side with Minnie, listening to the crunching of the snow crust under our feet and the wind soughing in the trees. It was so familiar, after years of snowless winters in Melbourne, and yet, so strange, because of those years that have unfamiliarised the feeling for the snow. Added to this is of course the constant awareness that this woman, or rather, this girl student, whom I had only known for a few days, was by my side, and was perhaps thinking the same thoughts with me. Or was she?

"None of your male chauvinist stuff again," a voice warned within me. "Wasn't it the same kind of thing that undid both of you in Australia? So, be careful this time." I ignored this warning, legacy of someone who had lived for too long in a society that boasted of democracy and freedom, and of various kinds of isms ranging from feminism to animalism, incapacitating one to the degree of not daring to think anything else except along the correct lines, political or otherwise.

"You seem very familiar with this place?" Minnie's voice rang, hesitant but probing.

"Yes I am," I confirmed.

"How come?" she queried.

My mind went right back. To years before when there was this boy who was standing on top of the green hill in one of those pagodas shielded by the dense foliage and branches of an exuberant growth. Unsatisfied with the view beyond, the boy would wander from one pagoda to another on a higher sea level, pausing meanwhile on his way where the trees fell back to allow a full view of the mountains on the other side of the great river that was a constantly shining moving expanse. There were rectangular mountains, round mountains and triangular mountains in the distance across the river that changed their colour with the weather, sometimes dark blue and at other times a light grey. With longing eyes, the boy would stand there gazing at them, his mind hovering over them, into them, beyond them, becoming one with them, sometimes feeling acutely painful at not knowing what was hidden there and always thrilled at the sight of their bluish ephemeral beauty.

"You must have been here before?" her voice was insistent.

"Well," I began, "I have been to many places before and this is of course one of them." Caught in one of those pensive moods, I did not particularly like to go into any detail about the past, my own past, and I did not think I was familiar enough with her to tell her about it just yet. Sometimes, a middle-aged man was really a bastard who refused to be drawn out.

"But, you know, Mr Zhuang, I don't really like the place very much."

"Why, this is a beautiful place."

"Beautiful, beautiful, all you say is beautiful! Didn't

you see the ugly side of things at all? The walled-in Red Cliff Park with a ticket office at the front, the featureless statue of Su Dongpo, made from mass-produced concrete, the road littered with rubbish from the endless stream of tourists, and the smog over the city that prevents the eye from seeing a blue sky. Didn't you see all of these things at all?"

I kept silent. I don't know how much Australia had done for me but one thing I was certain about was that when someone was getting into an argument I would be the one to first keep silent, not the one to jump to a response, as I would have done years ago in China. I squatted and took a handful of snow, and, after touching it with the tip of my tongue, which she was trying to stop me from doing, I took a bite, and said,

"Do you know, Minnie, how I dreamt of snow in Melbourne though it never snows there? And actually it is the hottest summer there now." I heard my own voice, not listened to by anyone, drop like lead, like one of our footsteps on the snow.

The summer heat in Melbourne. It seemed so far away now. The brown summer landscape topped by a vast blue sky was like nothing he saw in China. You'd have to have the steel in your will to be able to stand the boredom in it, a boredom that sometimes seemed to last forever. Even when there was a party, it was only for a few hours at best, and then, you were left to yourself and time was staring at you in the face. You were reduced to a silent stupor in which you were wide awake but remained dead to yourself, to outside happenings as nothing really happened. You called this the curse on the West; it was the revenge time and space took on them for taking too much possession of them.

"You see," I said to Minnie, "that is part of a novel in progress that I am currently writing."

"In Chinese, was it?"

"Ya, sort of."

"How do you mean, sort of?"

"I mean this is a part that I have not yet put down on paper but am just sort of rehearsing in my mind. It could be in Chinese or English, depending on," I paused, noticing her stopping in the middle of the road, "well, depending on what mood I was in at the time of writing."

"Didn't you have a reader in your mind when you composed, I mean, made up those stories? And if you do, what nationalities are they?"

"Good question again! I have never thought of it, as a matter of fact. I am the sort of person who doesn't really care about the readers. Why would I? But then again, you are a reader, aren't you, because you have heard my story? So, I do have readers except you never know where they are until you meet one."

"I find you are a bit mysterious."

"That's my impression about you."

"Why?"

"You see, I did not ask you why."

"But why?"

"I don't know. It's just, just that you seem to know more than a lot of people I have met here in Eastern Slope and," I gazed into her eyes to search for any response but, failing to find any, continued, "and your English is also quite fluent, you know. Where did you learn it?"

"That is not the point. You say you also found me mysterious but you digress and did not get to the point. Now that is what I have found about you: appearing more mysterious than what you really are!"

Before I had time to be surprised and absorb it, she added, "And that is what also made you seem mysterious, too."

Bloody hell! I said to myself inaudibly. Not to be outdone, I said, "Now that is not a right description, is it?"

"What do you mean right? To tell you the truth, what you talked about in the lecture you gave this morning is really small beer. You always steer clear of the subject that interests the audience for fear that it might get yourself into trouble. It's so transparent that I can almost see it. Why would you have to do that? What is there that you are afraid of? You said

that you are an Australian citizen, so no-one could stop you from going back to your country if you wanted to. Is that right? One would think that people from overseas are more open minded, more freedom-loving, and full of democratic ideas and ideals, but all the lecturers I have seen so far – genuine Westerners, unlike you – that have come from Europe and America are scared like mice, fucking mice!"

The word 'fucking' coming out of her little mouth under a pair of scowling eyes instantly drew me closer to her and, curiously, stirred up the itch in me to smoke. But I did not bring any cigarettes with me that night and there was nothing available on the cold windswept and snow-covered hilltop with only trees and more trees and a winding path through them. Did I have to explain anything to her? No. Because she had seen it all. All I had to do was wait for her to finish.

"I am sorry that I have to use the word 'fucking'," she said, "but that's what you do when you learn a language. Start from the basics. We girls use this in our dormitory all the time although we look demur and submissive in public."

"Demure," I corrected her.

"Whatever," she said and continued, "I have to admit that you have a life to live and money to make, which is no problem to me. But I just don't understand this discrepancy between the ordinary people from the West and the ideas of freedom and democracy the West is supposed to stand for and is constantly prattling about. It seems to me that these ordinary people in the West just don't give a damn about those things. Am I right?"

"Yes and no. On the one hand, they don't because they've already got them, I mean freedom and democracy. It's like hungry people who have already got their food, so why worry any more? On the other hand, they come here mainly to make a livelihood, making money by teaching you English or other subjects; for them, English is one more means of making money just as the ideas of democracy and freedom are. Everything in the West is commercialised, don't you know that? No-one is that mad to jeopardise his or her own position by teaching you ideas of how to overthrow your own government. I mean even the Western version of freedom and democracy is tempered with strict law and order if you look closely at it. For example, the kind of student strike that lasted for months in 1989 in the lead-up to the Massacre would not have been allowed to happen anywhere in the Western world, don't you think? No government could afford to be so wasteful. In a way, there was really more freedom and democracy in China than anywhere in the Western world. You see how freely people spit and litter on the streets; sometimes, given no-one is around, they even piss by the roadside."

"You have such a glib tongue, Mr Zhuang!" She stamped her feet wearing a pretty pair of black boots so that the snow underneath quickly gave way, the dark earth below showing through in the shape of the footsteps. "I just hate the complacency of the likes of you. I mean how could you say that while so many had died there fighting for their life! The only reason you do this is because you've got your protection, your foreign citizenship, as so many of you have done."

I did not say anything in answer to that but kept walking, head hanging low, as if listening to my own heart beat but in fact hearing the sound or silence of the hill clothed in snow overlooking the city lights and, further in the distance, beyond the city, the Yangtse glimmering in the dark, sweeping majestically towards the east in a circle at the foot of the Western Hill across the river. "Do you have this feeling," I found myself wondering aloud, "that you just feel you do not belong anywhere wherever you go? Not even in the place where you were born? In fact, it is in your birth place where you feel least at home and most alienated?"

"No, I don't," Minnie said, her tone suggestive of a mood in which she would just say no to anything, only slightly better than my ex-wife, who would simply shut herself up for the rest of the day or night until you crawled and begged or exploded. For me, I really didn't care for she was just another student

whom I had met only for a day. But then what a day it was! First it was the lecture with her questions and then it was this confrontation in the cold. And so far I still had not been attracted by her in any major ways, I mean sexually, which was rare for me. Women exist to attract men and, if they don't, there is a problem. Men have invented words to describe the beauty of women so that if you learn enough of these words you can create a woman out of nothing. All you need is a good dictionary. The same is true of the ugly because the ugliness is what makes people stand out. But plainness, as this girl is, is something that defies description. It is something that just doesn't attract any attention. I recalled a short story written by Maxim Gorky, the Russian writer, of how a station master made love to a very ugly maid by covering her face up. Even then the woman must have had something that recommended her sexually. This girl here didn't have that. You feel that she's got an enormous potential in her that she'd like to bring out but somehow could not find an outlet in a hurry, thus blocking her own output or venting her feelings on a wrong person as she was doing now.

Or was she?

The thought that she was somehow asexual because of her intellectual potential emboldened me to be a bit more jovial and more inclined to take liberties.

"You give me the impression that you've read all those 'China Can Say No' books," I said. "Are there three of them in the series?"

"No, six," she said.

"Is that right?" light-hearted, I said, breaking a twig from an overhanging branch of a cypress and with it sweeping the snow in front of me just for fun, "They would make big money in Australia with this many trees."

"How do you mean?" She looked up at me, sulking. Now I stood nearly one head taller than her so that I directly looked down into her eyes, eyes of a girl.

"At Christmas, they sell these trees, fake or real, to the families to celebrate the occasion. You know that, don't you?"

"I do and I dislike that idea intensely because they cut down so many lives, I mean trees, for their own pleasure. I would rather our Eastern Slope be covered with snow in cypress in every winter which no-one ever touches with evil intentions."

"There is some poetry there," I said, "in what you say."

Silence again, as we approached the highest point of the Dragon King Hill, overlooking the whole town of Eastern Slope spreading out with the lights into the darkness as far as the eye could see but the eye could not see far, only a blur of lights fading into the distance. I found it hard to continue, particularly with a girl whom I knew so little and yet was physically so close, and a girl who was unlike any I had ever seen in China so far. Pretty girls galore there were, easily available at ka la ok bars and hair salons disguised as decent shop fronts. And there were also women my friends Marx and Rousseau and my sister were introducing to me as go-betweens, including the manager with whom I had had a one-night stand affair. It was like eating, the more you eat the more you would feel surfeited and the more you feel surfeited the less you feel inclined to eat. This girl, with her plain features, would not have attracted my attention if she had not opened her mouth. Once she did, I felt that there was something there in her that I could easily relate to. I began questioning whether this was not because she had come from a different place than mine for I realised that she spoke Chinese with a more Northern accent than I could ever match. So I said, "Did you come from the North?"

"How did you know?" said she, surprised.

"Well, your accent," I said.

"But you are wrong," she said, "I come from local. Only I have been to the North once or twice on holidays."

"Where did you go then?" I found the conversation beginning to pall, circling around trivialities that were a normal part of the meeting between first-time strangers and, between men and women in general. Somehow one had to break out of this. With that in mind, I said, "You see, I should have said some-

thing about the Incident when I was in Shanghai so many years ago but then I thought firstly that students might not be interested in it any longer and secondly I might get myself into trouble if the authorities found out, although as you said I couldn't care less because I could simply get out on my Australian passport. But who wants to ask for trouble these days?"

That started her for she said, "You could very well say that but what about people who've suffered loss of life and ideology and now are living a kind of spiritual death, spending their time in pursuit of material wealth and creature comforts? All they care about now is money and more money as if money alone could help them completely forget the old wounds. They can't because it is buried there and when time comes will reopen like volcanoes."

"Then what do you expect me to do in all this?" I said, spreading my hands, palm upwards. "I mean I am only a Chinese with a foreign passport who comes home after many years to have a look around and see what is there available for him to do in the way of making money and if there's nothing much then he will have to go home. Simple as that."

"I understand what you say but again I don't know. Why should we be talking about this at all? As you said, no-one is interested and it's such a long time ago. I sometimes get so frustrated that I nearly want to kill myself."

I was going to say "you are joking" when I stopped myself, my inner voice telling me the best thing was to go on listening as she continued, "You know when I saw you I felt hopeful because I saw in you an example of how Chinese could find a way out for themselves by doing exactly what you have done: become a foreign citizen and live a life free from constant political pressure and cultural demands, particularly for women. You know my Mom is a professor in politics and she's done only one thing in her life, which is repeat whatever the Party tells her to do. She can never have her own opinion for fear of jeopardising her own position, although she is a very independent-minded person in private. There are a lot of people like her, living out a dual life of hypocrisy and sin, I mean political sin."

"Maybe a natural outcome of the system, just like there is the alteration of night and day, light and darkness?" I wondered aloud, giving her and myself an opportunity to think of these issues. "Perhaps few can really live a life that is as pure as distilled water? And as long as you can keep your private life as independent and free as you want, it should be fine?"

"I don't know what you are talking about!" she stared hard at me. "But you seem a very conservative man for my money. There isn't any idealism left in you, is there? In a way, you are like my father, who's the Party Secretary, and is very conservative about political issues."

"As a matter of fact, there wasn't much idealism even in the beginning of the Incident," I found myself telling her a story about what had happened about a decade ago. "I was then studying in a post-graduate course in Shanghai. It all started with the breaking of the news of Hu's death. Suddenly, the campus was alive with big posters that drew attention from everybody, students and teachers alike. To be honest, I wasn't very interested although I did go there on a daily basis. There was talk about a range of issues, none of which I recall at this particular moment. It seems that everybody had suddenly become intensely politically involved. I remember hearing someone saying among students pouring out of our university into the streets in one of those demonstrations demanding reform and democracy from the Central Party that leaders should be born now as it was the right time. I threw a look at him, who quickly withdrew his eyes from me, as if afraid of revealing his identity, and soon disappeared into the darkness of the mob. I did not follow the crowd out onto the street because I had something to do. I had to write my novel. So I turned back before I reached the entrance and no-one was there to stop me and no-one did. The thought that I might become a leader did come across my mind at the time when the guy said that but then I thought why should I be bothered if all of them went out like that and thought the same

thoughts? The momentary excitement died down as I turned back and went into the lecture theatre with a folder of writing paper. I wrote until 12 midnight, and sometimes 1:30 in the morning, doing about ten to twenty pages at one time, occupied with suicidal thoughts because this character of mine was bent on trying to find clever ways of killing himself. Occasionally, I would look up and see that there were two or three people sitting in a corner of the theatre, reading a book and doing some exercise. It was a strange sight because no-one at this time cared much about study as the heat, I mean the political heat in nearly every city of China, had turned people out onto the streets, shouting, chanting, talking, cursing, making love even – I am sure they would naturally do that although I did not see it myself – getting excited and hoping for one thing: that somehow democracy and freedom would soon come to China, little aware that they had already come to them because at this very moment they could do anything they wanted. The school authorities were frightened. They did the best they could by providing unusually good food and opportunities for students to entertain themselves with film tickets and other things, just so that their attention could be diverted. I enjoyed as much as I could, going to the cinema in the city by day and working on my novel by night. I saw quite a number of foreign films at this time, all in English, and none available to the general public. I forget their titles, but one film I remember something about is about a Cuban guerilla hero called Che Guevara who was presented in a very crude and chilling sort of realist way but it left a deep impression on me, particularly when the film ended on his inglorious death, a very impressive way of portraying a hero, very different from any Chinese films I had seen. The novel took me as long as the demonstrations reached their height on June 4th when even I stopped writing for a single night and, standing below our dormitory building like all the other students and listening to V.O.A. detailing what was happening in the Tiananmen Square. The students were wild with excitement and a murderous desire to fight against anyone trying to suppress the students in Beijing and when it was announced that the army was put on the alert in Taiwan they burst into uproarious cheers, clapping their hands and shouting that they should come invading the mainland and take it over for the benefit of the students. The next few nights I went back to my novel as I was nearing the end and the character still hadn't made up his mind on how to end his life, even on the night when the video catching the scene of the soldiers shooting on the students in Tiananmen Square was shown on the campus. I did go though, but there were so many people surrounding the video hall that I would have had to wait many hours to get in if I had not then and there decided to go back to the theatre."

"What's the moral of all this?" she said in a cold voice. "Do you want to show that compared with arts, such as novel-writing, politics is nothing and will get nowhere?"

"I am not saying that," I said, surprised at her keen observations. "All I wanted to say is that I am at best a bit phlegmatic. That is all. And perhaps I have seen too much to believe that sort of thing." I remembered how Warne had tried to get his permanent residency by presenting the Department of Immigration with a bunch of political poems celebrating the cause of students for democracy and freedom and denouncing the government for their cruel suppression and that he was later told that a bunch of poems was not sufficient to support his case as he wasn't a prominent political campaigner. I also remembered how some of the people I knew stopped going to any demonstrations in Australia as soon as they secured their residency. Eventually, it was life itself that won them over. Politics, whether Western or Eastern, was the same dirty business the world over. Certainly, I could not possibly tell her what was going through my mind when she was in such an antagonistic mood. To enliven the atmosphere, I began relating a story to Minnie, of how my friends and I spent a night there on the hill trying together to work out a poem on the dead.

His hand groped scratching around his loins. His penis felt limp. Unused. Sitting too long at one stretch before the computer and listening to its noise, now deafening at midnight, he could not think of anything to write. The only thing he could think of was vaguely sexy, something related to shoes, spiky shoes, high-heeled shoes. He felt his penis growing, hotter, and bigger at the thought. He went to the rack and found the pink kid high-heels that had nice sexy creases on them which years ago he saw a woman wearing in Shanghai and followed her a long way until she disappeared from view. After Xia left, possibly for the Australian guy, she abandoned those shoes solely to his fancy and derelict memory. When he took them in hand, his cock was erect filling his grip. He hung the shoe from the dickhead with the heel pointing outward, which bent a little with the weight but felt nice. He then hung the pair on his dick from the heels either way, looking at himself in the mirror. He felt he had to do something or else his pent-up desire would burst out. He went to the TV set with the video he had bought for A$50 and started watching. It was a familiar scene in which the woman and the man were celebrating her birthday with the man stripping her and the woman sucking his cock until it was dark red. And then, taking her feet wearing white high-heeled leather shoes high in the air, the man entered her, first via vagina, then at her anus. Minutes later, he came, his seed leaping white into the depth of the pink shoe. Depleted, he went back to his machine and felt even worse. It was as if his imagination had drained with the semen.

"The poem is of course trash," I told her, "for none of them, including me, has ever written anything before although they know poems by Li Bai, Du Fu and Su Shi like the back of their hands. It is a matter of practice, I suppose. Or is it?"

"I don't know. I am not a poet. In fact, I don't like contemporary poetry very much."

"You are very negative tonight, Minnie," I commented, throwing a sharp glance in her direction.

We had now come to a pagoda overlooking the valley below. The city of Eastern Slope was swimming in a sea of lights. Further on, the Yangtse seemed frozen in its perennial movement eastward into the sea. The mountains I had seen in my childhood disappeared into the dark distance. Minnie appeared deep in thought, her face paler against the snow and the moon that had just come out of the crack of a cloud. Her whole person seemed to suggest something, something that said in the form of a question: what has this to do with me at all?

"The memory," I began, "has a strange habit of ignoring the present while seeing in the very present something of a past more enduring than the present, more beautiful. The imagination adds fuel to that memory by filling out the gaps. I suppose the difference between you and me is that you are living right at the present while I am both in the present and the past, perhaps seeing more past than present. It is both pain and pleasure."

Seeing that she remained silent, I continued. "The moon that we are looking up at is actually the same moon I would be seeing if I were in Melbourne at this very moment. It is in fact the same moon as the one that Li Bai, Du Fu and Su Shi saw thousands of years ago. If it was a real living thing, it would have contained all the memories of human beings, past and present. Poets are the people who will go and seek these things out."

"You can say this because you are in a position to say it and because," she paused, shocked by her own directness, but nevertheless went on, "in a few weeks you can go home to another country."

"A better country, you mean?" I teased her.

"You are the person to judge, I am not."

"I suppose you are right in saying that because I have lived in these two countries and I know how different from or similar to each other they could be in their own ways. But ultimately, in my opinion, they are the same. No better, no worse." I paused and then added, "You know, I was born in this town."

As I said this, I took her hand in my hand. Instead of drawing back as I had thought she would, she let me hold her hand just like that. But her hand felt cold,

so I covered it with my other hand to make it warm. Thus hand in hand, we were standing there braving the wind that was bringing more heavy clouds from the mountains of darkness where snow was being manufactured.

"Did you enjoy your life there?" she prompted.

"Well, it is rather boring if you like. What do you do? You read, you write, you then take a walk, which is very rare there, for Australians in my neighbourhood never go out for a walk except with their dogs or you drive to one of those shopping towns like Northland Shopping Centre. Everything you do is related to the business of buying and selling. Even on holidays you do these things."

"Do those white people there do the same thing?"

"I suppose you mean Australians? For one thing, they are not necessarily white and for another they lead a life beyond my comprehension for I have never been living with any Australians there. They play cricket and football, ski, go to the beach, surf and swim, rock-climb, and do all sorts of recreational activities, none of which I do. In fact, what I missed there was precisely this."

"What? This cold walk through the snow on a forlorn hill?"

"Well, yes, but not exactly. What I missed was the way in which people relate to each other here. It seems so simple. You just go out at dusk and have a chat with each other. You look at other people and they look back at you. You look at the setting sun, the river, the trees and smell the night air. You do this every day without feeling tired. But you don't do this in Melbourne. I have not seen any couples sitting together or walking together in the evening, just chatting."

"But we are not couples." With that, she instinctively withdrew her hand and asked, anxiously, "What time is it?"

I looked down at my wrist watch and pressed the button for light. It showed 8:30 p.m. She "oh"ed, and said that it was getting real late and that she had to hurry back to her dormitory. Otherwise, she might have trouble with the school authorities.

Even if I wanted to, I could not possibly keep her one minute longer, so we parted company at the Military Compound where she headed east back to her university and I headed west back to my hotel.

Movements of Thought/Trajectories of Cognition/Vectors of Composition

lines of flight

Antipodean Textualities

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Marcia Langton

Senses of Place

Fourth *overland* Lecture, 2001

I HOPE TO EXPLAIN in this lecture some of the influences on my thinking about the personal dimensions of being a member of an oppressed people, and how one assumes a stance toward the dominant culture in a postcolonial situation. As an Aboriginal person, I can seldom find an audience to speak to about the stranger-than-fiction situations I encounter in a deeply racist settler state that denies its own racism. It is rare to find people who respond knowingly to my tales of disturbing encounters with liberal-minded or leftist urban Australian intellectuals who claim to support Aboriginal people and yet are entrenched in Enlightenment ways of thinking about us as savages on the edge of civilisation.

The people who best understand the dilemma of requiring the political support of Australians despite their immersion in a state of racism are those who are themselves captives of these postcolonial codependency relationships. I am thinking of East Timorese and black South African freedom fighters, who have somehow put aside their memories of years of insults, abuse and torture, to entice their former oppressors to postcolonial settlements on issues such as refugee repatriation, civic reconstruction, constitution-building, civil rights, capital flight, development funds and trade links.

I have tried to set out some matters that I believe need to be stated about the continued stereotyping of peoples who were and are subjects of the colonial imagination. These matters have to do with the personal ways in which one encounters subjection to the colonial: how one inhabits this state of being, and how one responds and shapes the world with mere personal will, observation, understanding and intellect.

I also want to re-examine some theoretical and political ideas that have proved inadequate in working among peoples who are traumatised by and implicated with colonial cultures. The dilemma is that the ideas of the liberals and the Left, valuable and necessary though they are in constructing civil institutions for the normalisation of ordinary life in radically underdeveloped territories, entail new forms of oppression and subjection, new forms of racism. We need to seek new ways of thinking ourselves through the dark passages of the postcolonial state.

Because the Australian Left seldom strays beyond the comfort of the cities, it has minimal impact on the complex problems of Aboriginal social life in the twenty-first century. It is difficult to respond in any meaningful way to the left commentary on issues such as self-determination, reconciliation, native title or the stolen generations. Having co-written or researched many of the reports on which both the left and the right have based their analyses of the Aboriginal situation, I am often left wondering if we live in the same country. Clearly, the answer is a post-Hanson one: we reside in sharply distinct geographic zones that are formed differentially by history and the impact of economic and governmental events. The poor white trash whom Pauline purported to represent are my nemesis and your food for thought. Their problems are my problems, and not yours. As a grazier put it at a reconciliation event in Cape York in 1997, Aborigines and remote-area graziers have one thing in common that no-one can take away from us – poverty. Australia's urban Left has no purchase on this problem.

Several experiences have prompted my dissatisfaction with the left stance towards Aboriginal people. First, I have experienced the racism that casts Aborigines as eternal mendicants of the state. Secondly, I have observed the empirical vacuum of the left on Aboriginal situations: textual knowledge cannot replace first-hand experience. A third contingent problem is the Left's shallow understanding of Aus-

tralian history and its consequences for Aboriginal people, which produces a distorted and largely irrelevant account of what self-determination, reconciliation, justice and restitution might mean for Aboriginal people.

Most of all, the Left refuses to understand that there is an Aboriginal jurisdiction, that Aboriginal society has its own hierarchies, and that people like myself have a status that in no way derives from Australian society but from my Aboriginal cultural inheritance. My standing in Aboriginal society is like membership of a secret society: with a few exceptions, the white people around me are completely oblivious to it. Nor is there any cognisance of the responsibility that people like myself bear for others in Aboriginal society. Having the status of our own world and the education provided by a Western school system, we are obliged to interpret the wider society back to our own people, to explain why they die young, why they are imprisoned, why Australians still expect us to disappear from the face of the earth. This is an unpleasant but unavoidable duty, and one that is misunderstood by intellectuals of both right and left. Where you might see me as an activist, a radical or a troublemaker, my own people see me as an interpreter of the mostly inexplicable situation of Aborigines in Australia.

Because the Australian Left seldom strays beyond the comfort of the cities, it has minimal impact on the complex problems of Aboriginal social life in the twenty-first century.

Let me explain briefly the history through which I have lived. From the age of sixteen, I was an active member of the Aboriginal rights movement. Kath Walker, as she was then known, took me to my first Aboriginal civil rights meeting, and my great-aunt was an executive officer of the Queensland branch of the Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. I was acutely aware of the situation of Aboriginal people, especially those who resided in the administered communities on Aboriginal reserves. As a child, I had lived in what was technically referred to as a 'native camp' in south-west Queensland. When I came top of the class in Grade 3, a gang of children from my class stoned me, chased me home and threw stones at our fibro shack, making holes in the wall. For many years afterwards, I resisted going to school and had to be chased there with a green stick.

Many of my kinfolk had been incarcerated at Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve, and one of my aunts had been sent to Palm Island for insubordination. At the age of eighteen, when I was a first-year student at the University of Queensland in 1969, I obtained a legal entitlement to vote. The Queensland Franchise Act had been amended the year before, and so I was among the first Aboriginal cohort to go to the polls in that State. I was the first person in my family to attend university, and, with the exception of those who had fought in Vietnam, the first to travel overseas, although my departure was instigated by my need to escape police persecution. During my first year of university, the Vietnam war was raging, the anti-war movement was growing in numbers, and the Aboriginal rights movement turned to the problem raised by the Gurindji – land rights. My own activities organising land rights vigils in support of the Gurindji met a vicious response from the Queensland police. It was not only the police who caused disruption to my life, but university teaching staff as well; one failed me on the grounds that, and I quote, "Abos cannot write like that. Someone else must have written it."

From a young age, I became accustomed to race hate, vented randomly and viciously almost daily towards me and other Aboriginal people of my acquaintance. Like others who are persecuted, I have found a lifetime of reflection on these matters has had little dividend in explaining this type of human behaviour. Intellectually, I can understand the economic and civil aspects of this type of persecution, because of the enormous literature that has attempted to account for it. Yet the personal, subjective characteristics of the sociality of racism remain elusive, and best dealt with in fiction. What motivates police officers to torture Aboriginal prisoners? There are no clear answers to the enigma of human cruelty, some of which I have witnessed and reported on.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, after several decades of activism, the Aboriginal civil rights movement achieved most of its demands. The civil rights demands were relatively uncomplicated, and struck a chord with many in the churches, with lawyers and academics, who assisted leaders such as Faith Bandler and Oodgeroo Noonucal to raise awareness throughout the community with a central focus on the right

to vote. It was axiomatic that the Left should support civil rights for Aborigines. But, apart from labour rights, other abuses of Aboriginal civil rights received little attention after the referendum of 1967. The referendum questions asked electors whether Parliament should remove the constitutional provision excluding Aboriginal people from the census and whether it should empower the Commonwealth to legislate for Aboriginal people as well as other 'races'. What followed was more complicated.

The States gradually (though in Western Australia never completely) enfranchised Aboriginal people, but State governments continued to classify most Aboriginal people as wards of the state, and to subject them to claustrophobic administrative regimes, denying them the right to a fair trial, removing children from their families and much else besides. Little attention was paid to abuses that the civil rights activists had raised for decades, such as State confiscation of Aboriginal wages for public works. Trade-union activists played a key role in the Gurindji strike for equal wages, and legal counsel successfully argued the Aboriginal equal wages case before the Arbitration Tribunal. The equal wages award was a pyrrhic victory, however. In some States there was a long-entrenched practice of paying Aboriginal people 'training' wages and indenturing Aboriginal children to domestic servitude, and Aboriginal people were unlikely to receive equal wages from the State governments, or from employers in the pastoral and agricultural industries.

The State governments remained intransigent with respect to Aboriginal citizenship rights, other than the right to vote. When Aboriginal people became eligible for equal wages, the employers rejected Aboriginal labour and the States began to reduce the numbers of people on 'training' wages, causing poverty and distress throughout the rural Aboriginal populations. These events, in turn, forced Aboriginal people to apply for social security payments. In the mid-1970s, the federal government responded by devising a work-for-the-dole scheme for Aboriginal communities in rural and remote areas, the Community Development Employment Program, which remains a major source of income for Aboriginal people in these communities.

The Left was almost completely silent on these developments. There can be no doubt that restrictive trade-union practices such as the father-son rule, combined with the prevalence of frontier racism in the rural industries, contributed to the Left's failure to respond to the progressive denial of labour rights to Aboriginal people.

The convergence between the Left and white labour interests has left a legacy throughout the rural industries, including the new sectors of mining and tourism. Recent research by Gawler has shown that Aboriginal employment at mine sites has declined since the 1970s; she attributes this decline to racist stereotypes about Aboriginal workers that have circulated in the rural white labour force since at least the equal wages case.

The emerging demands for Aboriginal land rights in the 1970s did not conflict with white labour interests. It is a moot point whether the left's support for land rights simply coincided with its failure to respond to the increasing exclusion of Aboriginal people from the workforce, or whether the Left was still enamoured of the romantic image of the Aboriginal hunter-turned-stockman on traditional territories expropriated by Lord Vestey and other absentee landlords.

Those of the Left like to assume a stance of moral superiority because of their inherited view of themselves as the defenders of Aborigines. The facts do not support this hubris. Most major advances in land rights and native title have been achieved by the efforts of extraordinary individuals in the legal profession who have been conventional social democrats or conservatives. The advances made by people such as the late Ron Castan QC, Sir Edward Woodward and others remain the bedrock of our present status as Indigenous peoples with inherent property rights, though the courts and legislatures have recognised only the bare minimum acceptable to a racist electorate.

After the 1992 High Court decision in Mabo No. 2, the New Left in the trade-union and environmental movements failed to understand that the crucial issue of native title was the newly discovered property rights of Indigenous people that originated in Aboriginal laws and customs. At the time, Noel Pearson identified the racism that would threaten this first recognition of our inherent rights:

> For me, the Mabo decision is an attempt by the colonial legal system to accommodate Aboriginal land rights. It is by no means the most perfect accommodation between Aboriginal rights under Aboriginal law and the white legal system but, from all assessments, it is probably the best accommodation that will be achieved within the white legal system.[1]

In his introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre cites the former slave Frederick Douglass, who wrote that the European expects the freed black to be grateful when the white oppressor lifts his boot off the black man's head. This is precisely the stance of many on the Left. This belief in the Left's contribution to our rights is highly overstated. Indeed, until the 1990s it was right-wing federal governments that legislated for both civil rights and statutory land rights for Aborigines. After Mabo, Paul Keating's Cabinet initially proposed to extinguish native title completely. It was not until the ministers became fully aware of the effect of the Racial Discrimination Act, after almost a year of lobbying by Noel Pearson, Mick Dodson, myself and others, that Cabinet contemplated protecting native title by legislation.

The challenge lies not in identifying the social expressions of racism in daily life, but in finding the expression of one's own humanity in the face of so much that can dehumanise. In part this has to do with the practice of self-determination, in which people solve the problems inflicted on them by nature, governments, colonisers and history, and find satisfaction in pursuing a better way of life. Aboriginal people have been denied full self-determination, and our affairs remain a politically contentious issue for both left and right, swinging like a pendulum with the shifts in public opinion. I agree with Noel Pearson's view on this matter:

> Aboriginal families and communities now often live on their homelands, in very much flasher housing and infrastructure than decades ago – but with a much-diminished quality of life, such that commentators familiar with these remote communities increasingly call them 'outback ghettoes' . . .
>
> Maybe we should confront the possibility that the policy analysis and recommendations that have informed the past thirty years of deterioration may have been wrong. Our refusal to confront this possibility is a testament to the degree to which we will insist on our ideological indulgences ahead of diminishing social suffering . . .
>
> Neither of the political parties . . . have made the changes in thinking that are necessary for Aboriginal people to turn around our social disaster. Both contenders continue to be half right in the policies that they are prepared to advocate. To simplify the policy contrast: the Australian Labor Party will be strong and correct in their policies in favour of the rights of Aboriginal people – particularly land rights and native title – and they will be weak and wrong in relation to the breakdown of responsibility in Aboriginal society occasioned by passive welfare dependency, substance abuse and our resulting criminal justice predicaments. The Coalition will better understand the problems of responsibility but will be antipathetic and wrong in relation to the rights of Aboriginal people: they advocate further diminution of the native title property rights of Aboriginal Australians.
>
> I marvel that neither side of this indulgent political divide in Australian politics can see that what is needed is for the rights favoured by the ALP to be added to the responsibilities that are understood by the Coalition . . . [T]he cost of their policy and political failure will be disproportionately borne by the black vulnerable: the children, the women and the elderly.[2]

Better the Devil you Know

LET ME NOW turn to other events in my life that have similarly challenged the rubric of leftist support and the tropes around which leftists engage with minorities who are discriminated against on the basis of race, or religion, or ethnicity: issues such as self-determination and subjectivity.

In 1992, 1999 and 2000, I visited East Timor, and each encounter with the people of that small territory enlightened me on the ways that people survive domination with their human dignity intact. These glimmers of enlightenment came with the recognition of my own experience of colonial repression and hatred. In East Timor I encountered starkly different yet deeply familiar expressions of colonisation, sometimes glimpsed from a bus, in the garden of the Hotel Turismo in Dili, in the eyes of a priest, or listening to proud men and women recount the horrors that the Indonesians inflicted, day after day, and the thousands of lives they took, simply because they could.

The East Timorese are, by and large, a resolutely traditional feudal Asiatic people, and yet devoutly Catholic. On weekdays a man might weave leaves into sacred talismans for warding off thieves from the harvest, but he would attend Mass at the Catholic cathedral on Sunday, on holy days, and on other occasions as well, as if in permanent conversation with God. Unstinting hospitality to guests is an East Timorese custom. Despite the fear of being rounded

up by the military for associating with foreigners, and despite their own extreme poverty, they will always accept guests into the household and treat them with honour.

In 1992, I alighted from a bus in Baucau to be confronted by an armed, shouting police officer, apparently directing me to the police station to report my presence. A small boy took my hand and directed me through the crowd to an inn so that I could obtain relief after the long, bumpy bus trip. He took me to a room where a group of old men sat sipping tea from small Chinese cups. In this room, while being offered tea by these old men and attempting to communicate via a variety of languages – Portuguese, Bahasa – in my newly invented pidgin versions, I learnt how people live in dignity and find a personal sense of peace under a regime of terror.

All these men had served as patriots in some way. One in particular had gone into the mountains with Fretilin in 1975 and become a cook for the resistance fighters. He collected a number of orphans on his travels, sharing with them the scarce provisions of the guerrilla force. In one campaign, he said, a hillside was strewn with dead bodies, and beside the bodies huddled orphaned children, whom the Indonesians had left to starve. He took them with him and found them places to live. He also treated Indonesian prisoners with kindness, offering them food and protecting them from random bouts of rage at the hands of his own men. When he was captured by the Indonesian military, he was tortured and sent to prison. There, he came in contact with an Indonesian soldier who had been captured by Fretilin. His small kindnesses in the past were rewarded with his life.

After his release, he returned to his inn to conduct his business. Until the liberation of East Timor, he had survived in Baucau by offering the police and the military a form of protection money: his life, or the lives of his children, for a bag of rice. These petty bribes are an important clue to the psychology of the colonial relationship in East Timor under Indonesian rule.

Over the years, I have become entangled with the family affairs of one of these men, especially through his daughters and grandchildren, and have confronted a peculiar postcolonial problem. The position of the liberators is complicated by the fact that they expect ordinary men and women to adopt a political stance that cannot be sustained in day-to-day life, especially one circumscribed by terror, trauma and loss. What does solidarity mean in this situation?

The will to resist that I witnessed in 1992 was truly heartbreaking. Followed by Indonesian special agents, I spoke Bahasa Indonesian with the people of a village where massacre and torture had become common. "Terima Kasi," I said to an old woman. "Thank you." "Obrigada," she replied. "Thank you." She had risked her life to speak to me in the banned Portuguese language of the educated elite, knowing that I had a vicious, armed special agent at my back. By comparison, the problem of political correctness in urbane Australian society is the equivalent of bad table etiquette.

I had accompanied an Australian nun to Timor, purportedly on a visit to monitor human rights. One day we were standing across the road from the hotel, waiting to catch a bus. After a short while, the gardener from the hotel stepped towards us as a bus pulled in and asked if we wanted to go to Mass with him. We said yes, with great enthusiasm. But when the bus drove off, he stepped away and seemed to ignore us completely. We waited, realising that he had used the bus as a shield so that the Indonesian spies in the hotel would not see him speaking to us. Another bus came, and he came over again. He told us not to speak to him, but to meet him at the bus stop at 6.00 on Sunday, to get in the bus by the last door, and to follow him at a distance to the cathedral.

Most major advances in land rights and native title have been achieved by the efforts of extraordinary individuals in the legal profession who have been conventional social democrats or conservatives.

On the following Sunday, we did indeed follow him at a distance to the cathedral, and lost him among the hundreds of people who filed into every entrance. They were dressed impeccably, the men in crisp white shirts and dark trousers, the women in pretty dresses and with lace shawls over their heads; and the children were likewise attired. They demonstrated not just their Christianity, but their respect for the protection of the church and the ties of Tetum culture, and an absolute unwillingness to become Indonesian.

As the priest delivered the words of hope that would sustain these people through the terror for another week, we could hear military helicopters de-

scending on the cathedral. And there they stayed, in this airspace filled with Tetum hymns, for a full hour, loudly but vainly attempting to disrupt the hour of spiritual sustenance We wondered if the Indonesian military would burst out and start shooting. And it was then that I understood that if they did, it would not matter. This was the point of spirituality and culture: the protection they provide is the knowledge that self-respect is as important as all other virtues.

I returned to Australia, traumatised and shocked, often shaking uncontrollably, after witnessing the state of terror in East Timor and the abuse of the ordinary people – men, women and children – by the Indonesian police and the military. I travelled around speaking to small groups, including the Labor Parliamentary committee on East Timor. The committee members, mostly trade-union leaders and members of the party left, told me that Fretilin was led by 'half-castes' and 'quarter-castes', 'not full-bloods'.

"They can't be trusted," the parliamentarians said. "Anyway, the problem is a Portuguese one, and they were much worse than the Indonesians."

The Department of Foreign Affairs hacks had done their job well. I said, "I don't think you have noticed who you are talking to. I am multi-racial in your terms, but indigenous in my own, and your people have been here for barely two hundred years. The Portuguese were in East Timor for more than four hundred years."

As I continued to explain what I had witnessed, it became clear that these grand men of the left thought I was naïve, an imbecile. The memory of that encounter has stayed with me. It epitomises the doctrinaire, politically and morally wrong positions that the Australian Left is able to sustain, sometimes for decades.

After the bloodbath in Timor in August 1999, I was invited to Dili to attend a Tetum language conference. The disaster confronting us was numbing; the stories of the people recently returned from exile in the hills even more so. The conference was held in a burnt-out school. We sat on plastic stools borrowed from the cathedral. Few buildings in Dili had survived; the situation in Becorra, Villa Verde and the resistance areas of Dili was better, if only marginally, because in these areas a few ordinary people had repelled the drug-crazed militia with basic warfare, from house to house and garden to garden.

It was New Year, and the peacekeeping forces had stabilised the territory, as much as was then possible. We walked to the cathedral, where Bishop Belo gave a sermon on reconciliation as his New Year's Eve Mass. I was struck by the Christian meekness with which the hundreds of parishioners accepted the Bishop's counsel. It was a bittersweet hour: the man who had become the most vocal opponent of the Indonesian invasion was guiding his people towards a stance of reconciliation with Indonesia, following the withdrawal of the troops who represented the real face of Indonesia's policy of 'reconciliation'. The lines of people seeking to take communion at this dourly hopeful ceremony stood witness to the indigenous comportment of reconciliation with an enemy who had inflicted almost unbelievable suffering on each one of them.

By December 2000, when I visited again, I found that the cathedrals, even those where villagers had been murdered in their hundreds, had been cleaned, repaired and rebuilt, or were close to being rebuilt. In the mountains beyond the Falantil canton, a reconstructed cathedral tower was wrapped in a web of bamboo scaffolding, while burnt-out, roofless houses and bare hut foundations lined the streets of the villages throughout the valley.

The emancipation of East Timor came about in part through a so-called reconciliation process established by Indonesia. I have no doubt that this was cynically copied from the Australian version of reconciliation. Along with the question of independence, the proposals put in the plebiscite in August 1999 included the option of East Timor's becoming an 'autonomous region' within Indonesia. It was to this latter end that the reconciliation process was aimed. It was also to this end that the militia were funded and trained to inflict a vicious revenge on the entire population.

Reconciliation, as the Indonesians proposed it, meant continued subservience to the Indonesian state and its military terror, and was held out by the Indonesian government as a possible way for the East Timorese to avoid a territory-wide bloodbath.

In the monsoon season of 2000, I arrived again with friends to visit family. One Sunday afternoon, at the beach where the stairway of the Stations of the Cross commences its ascent to the figure of Christ on the hill, we saw a Portuguese peacekeeper on a motorcycle roaring up and down the holy steps. This was the traditional land inherited by my East Timorese friend, a high-ranking person who is addressed in East Timorese as the equivalent of 'Your Highness'.

We reflected on how the new generation of young human-rights activists dealing with the UN faced a new set of issues, a new kind of colonialism and a

new kind of racism. UN and NGO personnel had taken up all the habitable buildings in Dili. They regarded themselves as saviours. As the East Timorese watched their world being colonised yet again, Marxism was of little use in explaining the problems inflicted by an organisation that looked to me like a mutant ATSIC staffed by every incompetent white adviser I had ever met. I do not mean this in a metaphorical way: the white advisers of several Aboriginal organisations have moved to East Timor.

"The left cannot help us with our problems," people said to me. The problems that most concerned them were not just those of reconstruction but of the traditional land-based politics, which are hierarchical, class-based and customary. The foundations of East Timorese society beyond the church are the *Liyanayins* or village leaders, who interpret and decide matters of tradition, and the family heads who likewise govern affairs at the most local level. The Left has a romantic set of universal values, such as solidarity and brotherhood, but outside the urban Western café society where ideas have few consequences, these concepts disappoint. They let people down. Respect for the *Liyanayins* and elders; customary jurisdictions; traditional decision-making and power; who has the right to speak – these are issues the Left does not understand.

We contemplated the fate of the young men wearing Che Guevara T-shirts and sporting Zapatista screen-savers on their computers. They have law degrees, and long years of guerrilla experience and clandestine involvement. What new ideas will they develop?

One evening in Dili, I debriefed with a friend on the importance of the Portuguese police in keeping the peace, as youth gangs roamed the streets raging against their own people and the foreigners in acts of petty crime and assault. Here in liberated Dili, only the police of the old colonial power could instill the necessary fear in aimless, angry young men with the physical power to make the marketplace unsafe for daily shopping. I asked my friend, "Who would you rather have as the coloniser – Australia or Portugal?" He replied, "Portugal. Better the devil you know."

Here, I need to remind you of the words of Judge Amoun in the Western Sahara Case, cited by the Court in *Mabo*:

> Mr Bayona-Ba-Meya goes on to dismiss the materialistic concept of *terra nullius*, which led to this dismemberment of Africa following the Berlin Conference of 1885. Mr Bayona-Ba-Meya substitutes for this a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the man who was born therefrom, remains attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with his ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.

For those of us who can claim a kind of sovereignty that predates the colonists, this attachment through ancestors and tradition enables us to have a sense of place that is deeply emotional, and at the same time social and political. It is this attachment of blood and spirit that makes the sacrifices worthwhile, that makes it possible for one to believe in one's own humanity.

The ultimate act of self-determination is taken in the heart. To refuse to be bowed by terror, cruelty and hatred, to refuse to live in fear and to face the enemy with a belief in one's own humanity – this is the key to sustaining dignity in the midst of horror. Many thousands of East Timorese people have lived and died in this way, and their success in obtaining freedom is due to the strength they derived from following the wisdom of their leaders and elders. Such a stance has a ripple effect. East Timorese leaders showed by example that terror does not win in the end: Xanana Gusmao, Bishop Belo, Jose Ramos-Horta, Fernando de Araujo and many others. Such people instill strength in others: in their presence, one becomes aware of the need to measure up to them. In their faces, their body language, their ways of conversing, it is clear that they have taken a stance against fear of capture or death, against the abuse of arrogant men, against the grief that would cripple from the inside out if not bridled with self-restraint.

Beyond Caffe latte Politics: Aboriginal Self-determination and Subjectivity

AS NOEL PEARSON has pointed out, among the followers of the sovereignty agenda there is an assumption that an Aboriginal nation existed before European invasion. This may be a difficult proposition to support, even for Aboriginal people who would insist that the groups who occupied and owned land under their own laws possessed sovereignty at the local level. He writes:

> it is clear that there is considerable confusion over many of these ideas in the Aboriginal community, and the absence of effective debate or devel-

opment of these ideas by the Aboriginal community means that for the most part the ideology of nationhood remains retarded.

Noel has also said:

> [Michael] Mansell is not wrong when he states that so far as sovereignty is concerned, the unstated conclusion in *Mabo* is the only means by which indigenous peoples may recover their sovereignty is by the means which they lost it. But this is a rhetorical position because when we try to identify the strategy to accompany this conclusion, we are left sitting on our hands. And this is largely the condition into which our advocacy of the full-blown sovereignty agenda has led us, a condition of haplessness where rhetorical flourishes at the next gathering of the faithful are the most that we can look forward to. And this is the sum total of our strategy.

His answer is a commonsense one:

> We need to consider whether at all it is even necessary for these Aboriginal concepts to be expressed as full-blown sovereignty of the nation-state variety. The Wik peoples or the Guugu Yimithirr of Cape York who met James Cook in 1770 possessed concepts of 'sovereignty' or jurisdiction prior to the coming of Europeans and these still remain. In the traditional domain this concept was probably what Justice Blackburn attempted to describe in that famous passage from Millirrpum when he said: "The evidence shows a subtle and elaborate system highly adapted to the country in which the people led their lives, which provided a stable order of society and was remarkably free from the vagaries of personal whim or influence. If ever a system could be called 'a government of laws, and not of men', it is that shown in the evidence before me."
>
> Indeed it seems to me that the concept of sovereignty developed in western legal tradition to describe nation states is artificial if applied to the Aboriginal relationship to land that is at the core of the indigenous domain.

Now it is still for us to consider whether the recognition of a spiritual relationship to land is best reflected in the recognition of Aboriginal peoples constituting a fully fledged nation or nations. Noel's view is that we perhaps need to "reserve judgement on this question":

> Recognition of this 'vocal indigenous sovereignty' could exist internally within a nation-state, provided that the fullest rights of self-determination are accorded.
>
> And here we have the problem. The Australian State has consistently failed to understand and to accept the right of its indigenous peoples to be allowed the fullest rights of self-determination. It is little wonder that calls for a separate nation find ready adherents in the Aboriginal community.

In August 2000, Noel Pearson published a book entitled *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, a version of which he delivered in his Ben Chifley Memorial Lecture in Sydney.[3] Speaking of Aboriginal society in Cape York, he said:

> I have also come to the view that we suffered a *particular* social deterioration once we became dependent on passive welfare.
>
> So my thinking has led me to the view that our descent into passive welfare dependency has taken a decisive toll on our people, and the social problems which it has precipitated in our families and communities have had a cancerous effect on our relationships and values. Combined with our outrageous grog addiction and the large and growing drug problem amongst our youth, the effects of passive welfare have not yet steadied. Our social problems have grown worse over the course of the past thirty years. The violence in our society is of phenomenal proportion and of course there is inter-generational transmission of the debilitating effects of the social passivity which our passive economy has induced . . .
>
> The predicament of my mob is that not only do we face the same uncertainty as all lower class Australians, but we haven't even benefited from the existence of the Welfare State. The Welfare State has meant security and an opportunity for development for many of your mob. It has been enabling. The problem of my people in Cape York Peninsula is that we have only experienced the income support that is payable to the permanently unemployed and marginalised. I call this 'passive welfare' to distinguish it from the welfare proper, that is, when the working taxpayers collectively finance systems aimed at their own and their fami-

lies' security and development. The immersion of a whole region like Aboriginal Cape York Peninsula into dependence on passive welfare is different from the mainstream experience of welfare. What is the exception among whitefellas – almost complete dependence on cash handouts from the government – is the rule for us. Rather than the income support safety net being a temporary solution for our people (as it was for the whitefellas who were moving between jobs when unemployment support was first devised) this safety net became a permanent destination for our people once we joined the passive welfare rolls.

The irony of our newly won citizenship in 1967 was that after we became citizens with equal rights and the theoretical right to equal pay, we lost the meagre foothold that we had in the real economy and we became almost comprehensively dependent upon passive welfare for our livelihood. So in one sense we gained citizenship and in another sense we lost it at the same time . . .

You put any group of people in a condition of overwhelming reliance upon passive welfare support – that is support without reciprocation – and within three decades you will get the same social results that my people in Cape York Peninsula currently endure. Our social problems do not emanate from an innate incapacity on the part of our people. Our social problems are not endemic, they have not always been with us. We are not a hopeless or imbecile people.

The Left has vilified Noel for this speech and the policies he subsequently developed to overcome passive welfare. These vociferous attacks were alarming, but not unexpected. In the media, he was misinterpreted as peddling a version of John Howard's cynical policy of 'mutual responsibility', under which the poor take more responsibility, the government takes less. The *Green Left Weekly* led with the front-page headline "Why Noel Pearson is Wrong", and opined that he had veered "to the far right". Conservative politicians likewise interpreted the speech as Noel's swing to the new right-wing policy-speak of 'mutual responsibility'. Noel's actual critique of the welfare state went unnoticed by far left and far right alike. I noticed, as I read these newspapers, that I had never seen any of the authors in northern Australia, let alone Cape York. Nor were any of them known to me personally. It was the usual case of white-supremacist opinion: the white do-gooders who knew what was best for Aborigines, although they had never met one, except perhaps for the occasional iconic Aboriginal entertainer or webmaster in Fitzroy.

But this had long been the case, as Noel had come to understand. In many of his public addresses, Noel has sought to explain Aboriginal history to his Australian audiences, precisely because they had no inkling of the causes of Aboriginal disadvantage. A hundred years of Aboriginal history, from the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth, simply did not exist in the public imagination. Noel's efforts to rectify this amnesia fascinated his audiences, and persuaded a handful of key Australian thinkers to follow the new analyses that Noel and other Aboriginal intellectuals such as Peter Yu provided.

In the 1993 Boyer Lectures, Noel gave an account of how he came to a political position that was not aligned with any of the major or minor parties, but focused on recovering Aboriginal society in Cape York from the disastrous effects of passive welfare. For Noel, this meant Aboriginal individuals, families and groups joining the mainstream economy as wage labourers, entrepreneurs and investors – as full participants, not merely as perpetual work-for-the-dole trainees. He spoke of his feelings about his family's tolerance of missionary paternalism, the precursor of the thirty years of bureaucratic paternalism that had brought Noel's own Guugu Yimithirr society undone:

My parents watched their contemporaries pack up their young families, leave the mission and go south to live near Lutheran congregations: to milk cows, pick peanuts, cut cane and work on highways. Just like poor whites did.

I don't recall wishing that my family had also gone south. But I do recall the strange tolerance that my father and the older people showed those who administered the paternalistic regime which was our life on the mission: the missionaries and the managers . . . [T]he collective psyche of myself and my schoolmates was dominated by the Moses-like figure of George Heinrich Schwarz of Neuendettelsau, who had died six years before I was born. Given the Church's role in the secular administration of the mission, and the fact that the Government was now headed by a church friend, indeed a mission friend during the years of my early youth, the older people forgave and suffered government paternalism in much the same way that they had suffered the paternalism

> of old Missionary Schwarz. The increasing awareness that the Queensland legislation and policies concerning Aboriginal people breached fundamental human rights, and that our mission friend was a leading and vehement opponent of Aboriginal rights, brought on a significant crisis for the community. It was a crisis that led to a realisation that paternalism . . . was undeniably racist, and arose from a fundamental assumption of inferiority and superiority. Like many paternal relationships put asunder, the bitterness of this realisation was painful.
>
> . . . [T]he pain was most acutely felt by those who had watched their parents and grandparents endure a history that treated them as State wards, as incapable and undeserving of equality and dignity. It was within the young hearts of those who contemplated this history that indignation burned, and it found resonance in the memories and secret, long suppressed feelings of those who had endured it. [4]

Acute pain. Undeserving of equality and dignity. Secret, long suppressed feelings of those who endured it. This was not the crude vocabulary of Aboriginal radicalism that white Australians were accustomed to hearing. These were the elegant words of a humanist historian who sought to depict an era in its own terms, and to analyse the consequences; a mission-educated Aboriginal man with the instincts of a Whig orator, cloaking anger in the finer nuances of the English language. Not since Harold Blair's operatic performances in the 1950s, or Sir Doug Nicholls' and Faith Bandler's cultured appeals for citizenship rights in the 1960s, had settler Australians contended with an Aboriginal intellectual with such mastery of their language and rhetorical traditions. But they were left in no doubt as to Noel's message. His moral stance was indisputable; his mustering of the facts and arguments persuasive; and his tenor graceful, forgiving and inviting.

It was while I was working with Noel Pearson at the Cape York Land Council in the early 1990s that my thinking on these matters crystallised around a series of observations that are considered deeply politically incorrect by the middle-class Left in the southern cities. In his Evatt Foundation lecture in 1995, Noel had stated our shared view of those on the Left who had failed to understand, or had even opposed, our efforts for the recognition of Aboriginal land rights in Cape York:

> Let me emphasise my own personal concern with strategy. Believing as I do in the need for outcomes, I am not satisfied with ideology that is not accompanied by a program for action. Too much ideology in left movements . . . occupies a stratospheric orbit, with little application and relevance to what can and is being done on the ground.

It was in this lecture that Noel first observed that any discussion of indigenous peoples and international law "necessarily comes down to the concept of self-determination".[5] In his opening comments, he set out his personal stance on the responsibilities of leadership and, most importantly, the outcomes achieved:

> One of the legacies of the 1960s and 1970s for leftist movements . . . is that we are far too concerned with form and not substance. The public posture supersedes the outcome. Idealism and fidelity to some kind of future vision for a socialist nirvana. Preoccupation with what Tom Wolfe coined in his famous phrase, 'radical chic', has also dominated indigenous rights politics. Everybody wants to be a caffeine-addicted, antipodean Che Guevera. Perhaps less vigorous and haunted, but nevertheless, revolutionary. The prescription from Malcolm X that you can see on T-Shirts and baseball caps around Hoyts and Aboriginal communities stretching from Hobart to Cape York 'By Any Means Necessary', is the prevailing consciousness.

Noel was worried about the "shallowness of this consciousness": "I too confess to listening to Public Enemy and Ice Cube and the hard and angry political voice that is African-American rap because it strikes an emotional chord."[6] But he went on to express his concern that Australian youth, and indigenous youth in particular, develop an ideological consciousness "that goes beyond absolutist, nihilist daydreaming about what should be, but instead become concerned with how we are actually going to go about making things the way they should be".

His target became apparent, but, as usual, he was graceful: he spoke of "the ideas on Aboriginal nationhood generated by Michael Mansell at the end of the 1980s – an indigenous leader who captured my imagination . . . as he did with many of my generation". Mansell remains the principal proponent of the Aboriginal Provisional Government and the idea of 'Aboriginal sovereignty', which caused, in Noel's words, "a universal furore amongst apoplec-

tic white politicians and media". Noel took the idea as a proposition requiring close scrutiny and rigorous analysis. He built bridges with Michael Mansell. Not only did Mansell strike an inspirational cord, Noel said, but he also spoke an *emotional truth*:

> Mansell's ideology articulates the stark alienation of Aboriginal people from the Australian nation, something with which Aboriginal people from throughout the continent can identify. He also said there was little hope for any successful reconciliation which would see Aboriginal people count themselves as Aboriginal Australians. At the Treaty Seminar he said it was fantasy to expect Aboriginal people to live side by side with the redneck police sergeant down the road as fellow citizens of the one nation. There is an emotional truth in Mansell's treatise which is readily apparent from history and the daily experience of Aboriginal people throughout the continent.

Mansell had told the Aboriginal community in 1989, "We have to make a harsh decision, we have to decide if we are part of Australian society". He asked, are we Aboriginal Australians or Australian Aborigines?[7] Are the indigenous people of this country citizens of the predominantly non-indigenous nation of Australia, or are they citizens unto themselves? Four options for the establishment of some form of agreement between Aborigines and non-Aborigines had been considered in the 1983 Makarrata Report by the Senate Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs, but Mansell argued that there was a fifth option. This was full sovereignty inhering in Aboriginal people, who would be an independent nation as understood in international law.

Mansell asserted that anything less than full-blown sovereignty would sell us short and concede legitimacy to the colonial invasion. It became an article of faith in the Aboriginal land rights movement that, having never ceded their lands or their sovereignty to the British colonisers, Aboriginal people are a sovereign people and sovereignty still inheres in them. The restoration of that sovereignty is a fundamental long-term goal of the movement. "Arguments to this effect are commonplace in Aboriginal meetings and conferences from Perth to Cairns," Noel pointed out. He also noted, "To question the feasibility of this claim is tantamount to heresy . . . [A]nything else, and one risks being labelled an antipodean Uncle Tom and accused of compromising the realistic expectations of indigenous people." But Noel dared to ask, "how effective is this strategy and how realistic is the hope that recognition of separate nationhood can be achieved?"

As Noel pointed out, the High Court's Mabo judgement unanimously confirmed that the validity of the acquisition of sovereignty by the Crown is not justiciable in municipal courts. The acquisition of sovereignty is an Act of State that cannot be reviewed. The Mabo decision confirmed the position in *Coe v The Commonwealth*, and it is now settled law that no challenges to the validity of Australian sovereignty will be entertained before an Australian court. That left the question of whether the issue could be aired in international courts. Aboriginal leaders who supported Mansell's position looked to the International Court of Justice as a means of determining the issue. Frank Brennan SJ expressed the following view:

> Such an assertion [of sovereignty] is unarguable in Australian courts. Neither will it be put by any party with standing before the International Court of Justice. The claim to Aboriginal sovereignty is a political claim, not a justiciable legal claim in either international or domestic courts.

Having dealt with the state of legal argument on the matter, Noel addressed himself to the emotional truth in Mansell's treatise which, he said, "is readily apparent from history and the daily experience of Aboriginal people throughout the continent". He observed:

> Mansell's ideology articulates the stark alienation of Aboriginal people from the Australian nation, something with which Aboriginal people from throughout the continent can identify . . . Presumably the reconciliation initiative established by the Hawke Government is aimed at changing the fundamental antipathy to indigenous people in the social, political and economic landscape so that they can occupy a place in Australian society as citizens who feel they belong. Mansell and many others in the Aboriginal community will not be holding their breath.

Noel raised issues that he had ruminated about with me from time to time – the 'poor-bugger-me' victim-of-history stance adopted by Aboriginal activists, the phantasmagoric, cargo-cult nature of the movement's demands, and their disturbing lack of intellectual rigour:

> I believe that the only choice available to both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is to find a way of living together in a unified community which respects our particular and different identities and the particular rights of indigenous peoples. Because, as I often say to the occasional discomfort of both black and white people, Mabo has put to rest two gross fantasies. Firstly it has put to rest the fantasy that the blacks were not and are still not here. The fantasy of terra and homo nullius. Secondly, Mabo also puts to rest the fantasy that the whites are somehow going to pack up and leave. Co-existence remains our lot.

Like many Aboriginal people, Noel felt that the Rubicon had been crossed when Paul Keating delivered his famous Redfern Park statement in 1992. One of the important points Keating made, and one that Noel referred to subsequently, was that "*Mabo* establishes a fundamental truth and lays the basis for justice". Keating expressed his desire to make 'peace' with Aboriginal people, sharing his hope that the country would strive to create a new partnership between the colonisers and the colonised. Noel later observed, "Given the deep sense of alienation from the life of the nation felt by indigenous people, the notion of peace could not be more apt." Then he set out the conditions for conciliation:

> If this country is genuine in its desire to secure reconciliation with Aboriginal people, then full and uncompromising respect for those legal rights and the historical truths established by Mabo is not negotiable. For a people who have been denied their legal rights under the laws of the colonisers for the past 200 years to face the prospect of further denial and extinguishment of rights after the country's highest institution has declared their existence would be tantamount to declaring war against them. There will never be peace and reconciliation if legal rights under Mabo are denied or rendered impotent, and never again will there be an opportunity for a genuine accommodation of indigenous people within this nation.

While Mansell had demanded that Aboriginal people themselves determine their future – inside or outside of the Australian nation – Noel focused our minds on the *Realpolitik* of the situation:

> This choice is also one which non-Aboriginal Australians must make. The country must decide whether it wants to effect a reconciliation with indigenous people, and if so, then the erosion of legal rights, and the denial of self determination and self government, will be a sure means of driving indigenous people inexorably toward absolute alienation.

With carefully chosen words and logical analysis, Noel had demonstrated that the choice presented by Mansell was illusory, the futile posturing of those who remained profoundly unaware of their alienation from civil and political life. It was the colonisers who would make the choice. The consequence of a wrong choice in this most central of questions could only be to drive Aboriginal people "inexorably toward absolute alienation". For Noel, this prospect was immoral, unnecessary, unthinkable.

It is the preserve of the young and idealistic – or the holy – to believe in the goodness of humanity, and, at this time, in 1995, it is clear that Noel was sufficiently optimistic about the potential for the protection of Aboriginal property rights to sound the clarion call of the only possible expression of self-determination in postcolonial Australia – partnership:

> The first step toward reconciliation in the wake of Mabo was Commonwealth legislative protection of native title. As the country moves towards a rearrangement of its institutions and constitutional structure, the opportunity is there for a new partnership to be forged where a direct relationship between Aboriginal people and the Federal Government is established, unencumbered by State and local interference, and where the fullest self determination is acknowledged as inhering in the country's original people.

"If this is to happen then a new meaning to the concept of self-determination must be embraced by the Nation," he argued.

But Noel soon fell from favour. The media pack turned on him. A 'Four Corners' report aired in 1995 attacked his management of the Cape York Land Council, relying on gossip and scuttlebutt to construct a story around the stereotype of black mismanagement of public funds. The story sank without trace and the dog pack moved on.

After several years of public speaking in a futile attempt to convince Australians of the justice of protecting native title, Noel tired of the reconciliation game. His enchantment with the Australian people faded as his appeals for the protection of native title were ignored and rebuffed. In 1996, he resigned from his public role with the Cape York Land Council and the National Indigenous Working Group, telling the *Koori Mail*, "the push for reconciliation has to come from Australians other than Aborigines". He said:

> My concern is that reconciliation . . . is a long way off in this country . . . those expectations have been dashed for me personally. It is very difficult constantly trying to push the positives of Aboriginal politics, Mabo and reconciliation.

Five years later, he had lost any remaining belief in the capacity of Australians to respond to moral and just arguments. "People believe what it is in their interest to believe," he said.

It was during this period that, like Noel, I relinquished any expectation that the Left could provide Aboriginal people with the necessary political or intellectual support, precisely because their tendency was to produce ideology for the conservation of the current state of things. Not only were they unconscious of their own motivations, but many of them had never entered an Aboriginal area, nor spoken to ordinary Aboriginal people who did not cast themselves in the role of inner-city Che Guevaras. The problem was one of a simple empirical vacuum: they did not know what they were talking about.

WE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE can only rely on each other to interpret the world around us to ourselves. It will only be our own fearlessness that allows us to confront the hatred and fear that drive the various leftist and rightist views about us.

East Timorese people will celebrate their independence on 20 May 2002. Their country will be declared a new nation. While I hope to be in Dili to celebrate with them, the contrasts that East Timor's liberation presents are troublesome for me. Self-determination is possible for them, although qualified and circumscribed. It will be a state of affairs that the ordinary person will enjoy with a clear memory of what lack of self-determination was like.

This will never happen for Aboriginal people. Our fate will always be entwined with Australians who are historically and intellectually blind to difference. And our status in Aboriginal society will always remain like that of being in a secret society. Hand signs and symbols. This is the contribution of the reconciliation agenda: a permanent kind of confusion. I prefer clarity, and that will come with plain statements about the issues that count for us for as long as we are denied self-determination: legal equality, freedom from racial discrimination, and full recognition of native title and customary law.

ENDNOTES

1. Noel Pearson, 'Aboriginal Law and Colonial Law since Mabo' in Christine Fletcher (ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Determination in Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994, p.155.
2. Charles Perkins Memorial Oration.
3. Noel Pearson, 'Light on the Hill', Ben Chifley Memorial Lecture, Saturday 12 August 2000.
4. Noel Pearson, 1993 Boyer Lectures, pp.91–3.
5. First articulated in an article in the *Aboriginal Law Bulletin* in early 1993, just before the national debate began on native title legislation.
6. This was no idle claim. During my occasional visits to Noel's student digs in 1992, Public Enemy, Niggaz With Attitude, LL Cool J, and other stellar creatures of the rap universe could be heard philosophising on the *bros*, revolution, *whitey*, the war with white America, *bitches*, *rides*, and the *'hood*. Noel's virtuoso rap performances at various clubs were also the stuff of legend.
7. Mansell posed these questions to the Aboriginal Peoples and Treaties Seminar hosted by the Aboriginal Law Centre at the University of New South Wales in February 1989.

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Bird Song, Thunder & a Few Drops of Rain

Merv Lilley

It's 5 A.M. Daylight and birds are beginning to call. They reckon it's about breakfast time. Low peals of thunder are rumbling away back there. There are a few spots of rain on the tin roof. The birds stop singing. They may be thinking of cover, whatever rain and thunder might do to them they will act instinctively. All I know is there's not another note from them. Cautious Birds. I once called a book of poems *Cautious Birds*. Now I know why perhaps. That was in '73. It takes me a long time to wake up sometimes. There's so many hidden meanings in what birds do – and words. With words it's often hidden from you. It's over twenty-eight years since that book of poems was published and I'm still seeking out more meanings from the title, or is it from birds themselves? I think so. Often we find that they and we are both colonised now.

Now I'm writing about a different bird. She is going through pure hell. It's not the hell of the mountains being a ball of flame. She is on fire with pain. She has had a breast and some glands from the arm removed. It was so deep-seated, and it became infected. In hospital. *It* was a second cancer in the same breast as the first one, six years ago. I am the carer. I am on duty twenty-four hours a day. We are back from hospital where we shared a hospital ward room for thirty days, after she had been in there in another room for two weeks. Imagine going through that as a patient, drugged up to the eyeballs.

I too have returned from the same hospital where I shared a room with Dorothy, continuing my past eighteen months duty as her male nurse and husband. After forty-two years of marriage perhaps one can only speak individually of this condition of livelihood where you might speak of treasure, and once in a long while the hell part of winning it from the soil of redemption of a past wandering life shuddering at the thought of marriage for decades, yet knowing it would have to be faced sooner or later. The coming to it at the age of forty heading into forty-one, with a standing weapon of creation or destruction or both.

Thunder, spots of rain and bird song all gone. Roar of fire over the railway just down the back. Our leafy green three-quarter acre blaze of tree colour joining onto the railway line.

I will put the kettle on electrically. I don't have to make the twig fire of my former days, way back out there in the bushland of sweet dreams. Dorothy awakes at 5 a.m. Unwillingly she gets up from low bed. It's a broken-down electric bed that stays down. The makers of this bed have disappeared over Christmas, gone broke I'd say.

Dorothy is still coming down. She doesn't know time or where she is. The dressing has not leaked or smelt. Praise be. Bird song and thunder on Christmas Eve morning. What a good title; Bird Song and Thunder.

Pills including Trammil 150 between ten and eleven or a bit later before nurses arrive, then again at 5 p.m., two antibiotics twice a day. 6 p.m., penicillin, Amitryptiline, Carafate x 1, Ural x 2, Ciproxin x 1, Coloxyl x 2, she has taken it all, she does what she thinks. Thinks she's still in the ward. Kate rang before nine.

24/12: midnight when electric bed fucks up. Bed will not lift up. Both ends work. Which means picking up, helping D to her feet to get into wheelchair. Still 24/12.

At night I talk to Dessie until my throat hurts, I tell her I have always loved her. She says "me too". She means me, Merv. That's a Christmas present following forty others. I will send her my book. She had always been a keeper of my poems, photos. She sends love to her sister who is sleeping, then I too sleep till midnight. She wakes me. I was dreaming I was to marry a German girl, we only knew each other by sight but we both knew we were betrothed to each other. There was a little truck that was going to take her away. 12:40: Dorothy takes two Amitryptiline and half a Sucralfate leftover. Her dressing needs changing, the bed too low for me. Trammil should last till midday.

Tuesday 25: Tablets Cyproxin x 1, Trammil 150, 8 a.m., Sucralfate, Coloxyl, penicillin x 1.

Boxing Day: An enormous eventful history day for me, 103 years ago now. Dorothy awakes and calls:

"Merv, get me out of bed quickly, it will be too late."

"I know it will," I say. How can I, sleep encrusted get there quickly, but I do mechanically, do everything in a flash, wheel her to the loo. I have hit the jug with one finger left. I will make that mug of tea yet, made it. Lot to do today but go back to bed. I have put on the heavy blanket. For a week I have been fighting with a light sheet and blanket that is always wound around or off me when I wake, struggling for warmth.

Dorothy has gone off pills. She asks every time what each pill is and decides she doesn't need that any more. I have gone off dressing her wound. I work out I'm not as good at it as district nurses who bring their own and different gear. I work off side of them holding her arm up across the bed. She also hangs onto the monkey bar with the left arm, the wound is underneath, up into the pit of the arm where cancer veins were taken out. The wound is terrible, deep. They sent her home because it was Christmas. Doctor Hughes said in reply to me it would take six to twelve months for it to heal. Doctor Hughes came into the room every morning at 7 o'clock. This final morning he gives instructions about dressing. He says:

"Merv can do this at home. You can do this, can't you Merv?"

I nod and say "yes". He leans right across the room, takes my hand in a very tight grip, and looking me straight in the eyes, we shake on it. He knows that Merv is a bushman and that a bushman can do whatever he is called upon to do. That is the true meaning of 'bushman'.

BIRD SONG, the mountains red with fire, why would the birds sing? Their life is constantly watching for danger. Danger and food and territory is their meaning of life. What's ours, you might say. The same just about, eh? The dispossessed who are dropping matches around in little tufts of grass may be looking for some territory, and those that have it think that the dispossessed will be behind bars, as a solution. I don't know many answers, except better fighting equipment for starters. We're the sort of birds that can do that now, if we get our heads sorted out honestly. The country has always been on fire. Chain-lightning has always known that. It's time we started out from scratch to catch up to it. Time to start scratching the head. Nuff said.

Yesterday, Christmas Day, Dorothy said:

"Do you think it will ever heal? Perhaps it never will, perhaps there will always be a big hole there."

I think of a big hole suppurating, will she live, and what sort of a life will it be, while we are trying to return this writer to the fold of words, the magical word.

The women who work here once a day have some inkling of who she is, but every patient must be close to the same for them. They want their work to succeed.

Have that cup of tea. The second one since the Christmas Eve intention to make one at bird call. I should have a computer in front of me or is it better to be putting it down in this small space, with black or red pen or Faber pencil as long as it reads when it gets to the computer?

I am writing backwards, in my two pages to one Belmont Diary 2001. If this becomes a book, it will be written backwards in lead pencil, a Faber and Castle one. You sharpen it by pressing a button and out comes the sharp point. Fill the jug and watch the electric trigger light up. The Twinings Irish Breakfast tea bags are waiting to release the taste of Irish into this study/bedroom of the ailing creator, lined with Australian books, a fair whack of them her own, poetry, novels, plays, the famous Dorothy Hewett lies there in an electric bed sometimes babbling to herself, coming down off five weeks of Morphine.

She lies on the left side over the wound. She is right handed only, writing longhand. Partly destroyed nerve ends in the right shoulder over a decade ago almost finished her writing life. She fought back, again and again and yet again, more times and decades than can be told here, miracles happening to preserve her writing life.

Strange, isn't it, that in the last forty minutes, not another bird song has reached these ears, only the constant cry of cicadas, interminable, even traffic has died, but yes there in the distance, one faint song, of course the birds have gone about their business. I can't stop thinking and putting it down, even to make tea. God damn my preoccupation with the insistent thought that comes like an answer to a puzzle; what makes up a story, thought and construction on paper, bugger you, Merv Lilley, make that bloody tea and get out of your own arse about the theory of construction. Put the nails and hammer down for a moment and let the brain work about the overall picture, but do not lose it, it can be lost in seconds flat, never to return, not the same thing, the same style, but does it matter? Obviously not, one has to stop to let the other life take its course. But should one stop?

One has to. Something else your other life wants and fights for its turn, and Poor Thing sleeps on. The Coal Bird starts up its eternal "warduck warduck". Thank you Coal Bird as you cuckoo round and round your world, expressing every moment of your life in the one phrase. Attending to the bitter end, some other bird's nest to lay eggs in, God blast the Coal Bird.

I will stop, dead tired, go back to bed, no tea. Prepare for the world's demands on aged body, 82 plus, there is a large almost overripe peach lying beside me. I'll eat that for Christmas Eve, feeling like Jesus carrying his cross.

Boxing Day: I've also just noticed this is the way it should be. Tom and Sharon bring us a lovely flavoured greasy chicken and salad and mashed potato. Our neighbours across the fence have made three kinds of soup. Glad to help both of us oldies doing what we're doing. I don't entirely have their thoughts but I have a lot of them. I hope I can get someone to type this out for me, computer wise, as I read it out to her. I know a her, young, dedicated, a great subject I've got to know essential things about. A very worthwhile member of present-day youth who will be here another half a lifetime when we have gone, leaving stories in different forms about.

Boxing Day: Drink my Irish Breakfast tea, think a moment of the five Irish sisters who once came to Australia in the eighteen hundreds and married around. One to a Scotch Canadian, one of my grandfathers, by the name of Dagg, pronounced 'Darg' and settled at what became Dagg's Falls, Killarney, where Lucy Dagg, my mother was born. It's close to bird call, 4.50 a.m., my mind is racing, my technique calling me to account, a second sense there all the time saying, do, do not, watch it, there's one story you have to finish up with, not six or so, I am here sir, yes sir, no sir, I am a schoolboy running cream in cans to the railway station, 1930, ten years old, rising eleven, horse and sulky, explaining to teacher why I was absent from school, putting my milking left hand out for the cane, six cuts, pulling my hand away, five times, letting the ferocious swish from a young man schoolteacher pass by, concerned about swollen fingers milking cows if I let him hit me full force, allowing the sixth cut to tip my fingers when he took the full force out of the swing. It still brings me to the point of killing insanity as I sit here, aghast that I did not kill him then. What could they have done to a boy of that age who used a knife or shotgun in the bush defending his working apparatus, or particularly his mind from the onslaughts of society? Jimmy Marland generally respected as a fair man, a good teacher, both a supporter and enemy of mine, now long dead, say half a century, he respected me for knowing more poetry than he did and saying it even better, but he couldn't stand that he couldn't get the best out of me he knew was there. Still there were better scholars than me in that little bush school, sometimes thirteen kids, but they didn't much like poetry the way I did.

A voice says, "Darl, could you get me a hot water bottle?" I get it. Bird song has broken out at 5:25. I wonder how many words I have written. So much work to be done to find out. Go to sleep red pen until an answer is found. Such a lot of work to be done before they arrive. I mark the spot with a Ural pack. Close the diary.

. . . as if to war

Angela Mitropoulos

IN ONE SENSE – a conspicuous sense – the paradox of sports rhetoric is this: it is perfectly acceptable to applaud sportspeople in terms such as 'elite athletes' while, at the same time, designating those who do not applaud as 'elitists'. Of course, there are slightly different (though not unrelated) meanings for 'elite' here: the first indicates 'the best at something'; the second suggests 'aristocratic' or 'exclusive'. But what the association of the two makes possible are the self-denials which link sport to populism, where hierarchical outcomes, whether as sporting victories or as social power, are habitually accounted for as the result of something rather mystical called 'merit'. In both cases, the theory of 'the level playing field' – that there is indeed such a thing – becomes the condition of applauding the ranking.

What therefore seems at first glance to be a paradox is instead the means to admit hierarchy while providing explanations for it that place it beyond reproach, or beyond the realm of social relationships and therefore beyond change. In sport, money is not classified as a performance-enhancing substance. It is as if the money which goes to financing coaches, training, proper nutrition, the Australian Institute of Sports, and so on is irrelevant to results, careers, the fate of particular sports, or even whether or not a particular activity is considered to be a proper sport by being included in the schedules of the Olympics. No matter how much obvious effort is put into obtaining money – as well as the disbursement of money by corporate sponsors – the denial of its role remains central to the presentation of sports and the character of the applause. Merit, in sports, is supposed to inhere in the body, 'drug-free' and *au naturel*. At times, there are references to inheritance, in the form of parental decisions and/or an imputed predestination. But such things are at best occasional remarks set to underscore narratives of lifelong commitment. In any case, populists, far from subscribing to an egalitarian vision of the world, believe any existent social hierarchy is merely the distilled essence – the crème de la crème – of 'the people', which is in turn construed as a biological entity, a family. Having lost any meaningful basis as a critique of the aristocracy, populism becomes restated principally as a doctrine of identity and belonging, where the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion which constitute 'the people' are deemed to be natural, or rather *bodily*.

It is no coincidence, then, that when sport meets politics on Australia Day, it is by way of re-asserting these relationships between hierarchy, biology and 'the people'. In a more emphatic sense, it is about reinserting actual bodies within fictional terrain of 'the national body' – I will come back to this. Indeed, what could be more politically pressing than to re-assemble these connections as a benign, indeed sporty affair at a time when not only is there an increasing recognition of a simple but embarrassing historical fact (that this event celebrates the day the English Crown declared its ownership of this continent), but when there are hunger strikes in the internment camps? No coincidence either that the journalistic clichés run to the familial and therefore biological: "Pat Rafter is everyone's favourite son", "the quintessential Australian boy".[1] Debate around naming Patrick Rafter as Australian of the Year turned, not at all surprisingly, around whether or not someone who did not live in Australia could be granted the award, whether or not he should be married to have a child, and whether or not he still called Australia home. What was put into question here was less the question of Rafter's tax arrangements, than of the extent and propriety of his national and familial (and distinctly biological) commitments.

What does this mean for not only how we conceive of our bodies, but also what we are prepared to do to them in respect of that fictional body of the nation? Sport has a very particular set of codes about proper and improper violence. Moreover, violence in sport, when it is deemed to be improper is dealt with by various tribunals rather than the courts – much like the military. But sport, unlike soldiering it might be objected, is done for enjoyment, or play.

Nevertheless, someone might *play* sport, but sport is rarely play. The increasing importance and extent of sport does not indicate any increase in play. On the contrary, it points to the increasing significance of leisure in the context of a shift in the sense and intensity of work. Leisure recalls play, to be sure; but leisure unlike play remains coupled to work. This relationship to work can be immediate, as it is for those who work in the sports industry. For professional athletes, the extent of managerial control over their lives outside of their actual work time is without parallel, bar one: soldiers. On the other hand, as it is for most of us, it is entertainment, leisure. For whatever else sport does for me when I watch tennis or soccer, it is principally as rest and relaxation. To put it more bluntly: it is, like all leisure, the consumption of a more or less packaged enjoyment as a trade-off to laborious or joyless work.

However, what interests me above all is the nature of this enjoyment, which still recalls the classical relationship of sport to war, and thereby of the complex relations between sport, leisure, work and war. One could easily point to the – sometimes anything but symbolic – exuberant warring between national fans. As for sport itself, the terms can be quite explicit. As McKay notes, "During the 1996 Australian Open journalists constantly referred to him [Mark Philippousis] in militaristic ways (e.g., 'firepower', 'major weapon', 'sinking his target', 'blown away')."[2]

But, right along with an idiom that transforms sport into war and sportspeople into war machinery comes the warlike – and often distinctly passionate – injunction to perform one's national duty. What transforms 'the Scud' into 'the Poo' other than the implication that Philippousis is feigning injury so as to shirk working/warring for the nation in the Davis Cup? What transforms Cathy Freeman from an exceptional runner into an icon for 'reconciliation' other than the suggestion, made with pride rather than embarrassment by some commentators, that she proved to 'us' that not all Aborigines are 'lazy'. For both Freeman and Philippousis, it is not simply that they are accused of being lazy or that anyone is surprised that they are not. Rather, it is that at the edge of belonging, the point at which proof is required, what becomes explicit is that the stereotypes in play are related not to sport *per se*, but to work. Here, work is no longer *just* work, however enjoyable or tedious. It is work as a national duty; work for the good of something called 'the national economy'. And so, the narrative that sport delivers to populism is that by 'working hard' you might belong, you might even get rich. Merit can be rewarded. This is why it has become common for populists to defend actual social elites against criticism by accusing the critics of being 'elitist'. To be 'elitist' in this sense is to refute the notion of merit as an explanation for social power and wealth, to disturb the fantasy that one just might, if one 'works hard', become powerful and wealthy also. You won't necessarily, but you just might . . . In the meantime, do your national duty. Go to work as if to war.

ENDNOTES

1. *Weekend Australian*, 26–27 January 2002.
2. J. McKay, 'Men, the media and sporting heroes', *XY: men, sex, politics*, 6(2), Winter 1996.

Angela Mitropoulos is nonetheless prepping for the soccer match at Woomera 2002.

London Letter

Katherine Gallagher

THE POETRY of sport. Whenever Australia hits the news here, there's an 80 per cent chance it's something to do with sport. Cricket, tennis, rugby, swimming, athletics, darts. Mostly as played by the guys. Well there was Cathy Freeman. And the Australian hockey girls and swimmers get a fair bit of notice. But sport as a feminist issue?

The main Aussie news

recently was about the bushfires around Sydney. This couldn't be happening to the beautiful Sydney of the postcards and the Olympics. But it was, day after day. All that notwithstanding, there was a nice touch that in spite of the horror on one of the worst bushfire days, Steve Waugh's team won the series against South Africa, also honouring the win by donating their winnings to the bushfire appeal. The *Sunday Times* heralded their great victory: 'Aussies a class apart' in a headline (January 6). There was similar praise from *The Observer* but with a little question at the end: "A 3–0 whitewash of South Africa leaves little doubt as to who are the best in the world – or does it?" The indomitable Waugh, who on numerous occasions has won front-page glory here for his own exploits on the field, explained his team's rationale to Norman Harris: "The standards we set ourselves aren't always going to be achieved but we want to set the bar high and try and get to that standard."

Anyway, in November 2002, the English team will be back in Australia for more games against the 'old adversary'. Certainly, the place sport holds in any country's national psyche from schooldays onwards is increasingly fundamental to national fitness and success. Probably many in Australia and here would agree that in sport generally, there are too many spectators and not enough players. The situation in England isn't helped by the low ranking given to sport on the national curriculum, a stance often justified by school administrations because of lack of facilities and finance. Chicken and egg syndrome? The selling off of school playing fields under successive Tory governments especially in the 1980s, was a disgrace. At the moment, perhaps symptomatic of the whole scene for London is that school governors at the one-time 'flagship' London comprehensive, Holland Park, are currently selling off the school swimming pool, sports hall and open play area for redevelopment – and collecting nearly £25 million. Where is the future in this under-funded education system? The lack of spending by Blair's New Labour government on public services including education, health and transport, has left many people angry and disappointed. The mind boggles. As anyone who's had anything to do with sports education knows, as far as children are concerned, nothing more significantly spurs their motivation than the availability of facilities, including access to coaching.

As some Australians were gearing up for the Australian Tennis Open, here in the heart of UK winter, football's the thing – 'the national game'.

And this year, it's the World Cup (31 May – 30 June). Thanks to a miracle-worker, Liverpool's Michael Owen, and a few other stars, England is hopeful. The rest of the UK is 'hopeful' too, but the Scots and Irish seem to be less obsessed with winning. But in England, commentators often hark back to 1966 when England beat Germany to take the World Cup. Amidst a lot of nationalistic media blather, many people just switch off. This culture is divided in a sense that many are indifferent to sport for reasons not unlinked to the above point about facilities. And the unreliability of the weather has never helped.

Some Australians have been doing well at football (soccer), the most notable being Viduka and Kewell who have performed outstandingly for Leeds. Unfortunately, some young players who also happen to be members of the English national football squad have been involved in violent incidents following heavy drinking. There have also been dangerous pitch invasions by fans and bottle throwing at players. Are the bad old days of hooliganism coming back? All very worrying, and solutions are being tossed about. Some cite the example of Arsene Wenger, the quiet intellectual French manager respected for the way he has changed the London football club Arsenal's former 'drinking culture' to a 'fitness culture' and produced a winning team currently high in the running for the Premiership.

At world or Commonwealth level, sport is increasingly making headlines. With Wimbledon (24 June– 7 July), the Commonwealth Games in Manchester (25 July–4 August), the Ryder Golf Cup (27–29 September), 2002 is going to be very busy from the point of global competition and TV spectatorism. Many questions are being asked about all this emphasis on sport clogging up the TV screens, blocking out diversity in programming and

cutting down on arts provision. Is it simply part of the 'dumbing-down' the BBC and other TV stations have been accused of? One of the buzz-slogans, especially in post-lottery and 'New Labour Britain' is 'Arts for All'. The question is whether more people really do have access to the arts in recent years. Certainly, government spending on the arts isn't encouraging.

THE MENZIES Australian Studies Centre, now part of Kings College London, has continued to diversify activities, presenting a variety of single talks, literary events (including the popular Literary Links evenings held in conjunction with Australia House), conferences and symposiums, sometimes in liaison with Australian universities – Monash, Deakin, University of WA on topics from histories of Gallipoli to Judith Wright to Don Bradman to the future of feminist enquiry to the 2001 Australian Federal Election, to most recently, Metropolitan Culture and Imperial Decline.

The Don Bradman Symposium, held at Lords on 6 June 2001, celebrated 'the Don' – his life and achievement with reminiscences and insights from several fellow cricketers (Alec Bedser, Trevor Bailey), and many of his friends including David Frith, founding editor of *Wisden Cricket Monthly*. It was riveting stuff, occasionally punctuated by films showing Bradman hitting balls left, right – you name it – landmark games, and you felt proud of this unassuming sportsman, the 'boy from Bowral', who'd made such an impact in Australia and Britain not only for his cricketing genius but also for his leadership and good sportsmanship on the field and off. No wonder he was mourned. Historian James Bradley brought up the interesting point that the public grief in Australia following Bradman's death showed how greatly his loss had been felt – a loss of iconic significance affecting people perhaps somewhat as Princess Diana's death had affected the British. No-one took him up on it. But I hope he writes about it.

Katherine Gallagher's latest book of poems is Tigers on the Silk Road *(Salt Publishing, 2002).*

SHOCK! HORROR! CHATTERING CLASSES VOTE GREEN!

Andrew Milner

LIKE MOST erstwhile sixties radicals, I'd voted Labor all my life – partly out of nostalgia for Whitlamism, I suppose, partly out of an obscurely sub-Marxist belief in 'the party of the working class' ('our' suits and silk ties as distinct from 'theirs'), but increasingly, let's be honest, out of habit. Like many other erstwhile sixties radicals, I finally thought the unthinkable, broke the habit and voted Green on 10 November 2001. Not just for the Senate, you understand, but for the Reps too. Not in the expectation that Green preferences would go to Labor, you understand, but in the positive hope that they'd poll well enough to win (you can always dream). Not just a vote, you understand, but actually deciding at the very last minute to give out Green how-to-vote cards. I can't prove that the 12 per cent of the electorate who voted Green in Melbourne Ports where I live, or the 16 per cent in Melbourne, were all ageing sixties radicals – indeed, I hope they weren't. But I'm pretty certain that there were a lot more besides me (one of the advantages of giving out how-to-vote cards is that you get to meet the local ALP members and hear how they're really going to vote).

It's not difficult to predict the official hardnosed Labor response to my apostasy. So a *literature* (sneer) teacher at a *university* (sneer) wastes his vote on *Bob Brown*'s (sneer) 'party' (sneer)? Shock! Horror! Chattering classes vote Green! But if this response is predictable, I'm less convinced that my own vote was. Because I'd never actually voted Green before and it was surprisingly hard to break the electoral habit of a lifetime (lifetimes actually – my parents voted Labour, my grandparents before them). The clincher was twofold. First came my 17-year-old son, who missed out on voting by a few months, but was interested enough to discuss my vote with me. It all seemed very simple to him. He knew how his mother and I thought and felt, what we believed in; he knew we were against Khyber Pass militarism, against xenophobic immigration policies and in favour of lending aid and assistance to people in deep trouble, especially but not

only when you're legally obliged to do so; he knew we were opposed to the privatisation of public assets and services; and in favour of high rates of progressive taxation, partly in order to pay for those services, partly because redistribution is itself a desirable policy goal; he knew we believed that democratically elected governments should regulate businesses left, right and centre, so as to prevent them doing what they do best, that is, exploiting their workers, cheating their customers and polluting the environment. "You don't actually agree with the ALP about anything," he said, "you agree with the Greens." Indeed, we do.

Second came Michael Lee, the shadow minister for education, who turned up at a meeting of my union branch, making predictably soothing noises about the awful David Kemp, whilst studiously avoiding the simple and obvious fact that Coalition higher education policies are overwhelmingly a continuation of those designed by Kemp's Labor predecessor, John Dawkins. Dawkins was the organ-grinder, Kemp merely the monkey. I could have lived with that: politicians are liars by trade and you expect them to be economical with the truth. But then Lee had the cheek to insist that Labor would under no circumstances raise taxes, the sheer gall to tell a bunch of public sector employees to their faces that his party would never do the one thing most necessary to cope with the crisis in their workplace. It suddenly dawned on me that people like Beazley and Lee take my vote and the votes of people like me so much for granted that they can't even be bothered to lie to us. This was when the germ of the idea of voting Green first took hold. I hear Lee lost his seat: I can't say I'm sorry. Actually, I hope the whole lot of them rot in opposition until they earn the right to my vote. I've decided to stop being taken for granted.

But it's predictable, isn't it, all this Green voting, typical of the chattering classes, the lecturers, the teachers, the social workers, the pinko ABC journalists, the 'wankers'? Well no, I don't think it is. What strikes me, to the contrary, is how loyally people like me have wasted their votes on the Labor Party for the past fifteen years. What strikes me, to the contrary, is how, ever since the second Hawke administration, the real chattering class – the politicians, economists and journalists whose chatter dominates the mass media to the exclusion of all other opinion – have been united in fairly determined opposition to the hopes and aspirations of nearly everybody I know. It's difficult to tell how exactly it happened (presumably, dedicated teams of political scientists are at work researching the subject), but at some point in the early 1980s the entire 'real chattering class' was secretly recruited to a bizarre religious cult based on the worship of 'the market'. Immune both to reason and to empirical evidence – Auckland's electricity, Victoria's gas, the Californian power crisis, Britain's shambolic privatised railways (please slow down as you leave France, you are now entering a private enterprise zone), the entire Russian economy, the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, take your pick – they still persist in the frankly ludicrous belief that deregulated capitalism will somehow, somewhere, someday produce desirable social outcomes.

This near-insane consensus has ruled Australian politics effectively unchallenged for a decade and a half, Bob Brown apart. It explains why the old argument that 'the Liberals will be worse' no longer holds. It's a good slogan, of course, perhaps the best Labor has, but quite irrelevant to a history in which every prime minister since Whitlam has been to the right of his predecessor, irrespective of formal party affiliation. This has been so because the political elites of both parties – the real elites, the ones who actually run the place – clearly subscribe to a common political project: to 'globalise' Australia, to weaken its unions, cut its taxes, scrap its welfare state, privatise its public assets and sell them off to global corporations. The project has never been formally announced, never put to the electorate in any election, and there is no evidence at all that it enjoys any public support. To the contrary, the consensus is necessary precisely to the extent that the electorate doesn't want Australia globalised. And each government will be to the right of the last, irrespective of party, because globalisation is a still continuing project. I predict that the next government will be even worse than Howard's, whoever is in charge, whether Coalition or Labor. Political scientists should feel free to

consider that a testable hypothesis. Just see if I'm right.

This near-insane consensus has embraced the Coalition and Labor parties so powerfully as to blot out the institutional memory both of conservatism (remember when the Country Party actually stood up for the bush? remember when conservatives conserved?) and of socialism (remember redistribution? remember socialisation? remember when Labor believed in strong unions rather than in enterprise bargaining?). Well, the bush has delivered the National Party its comeuppances. And people like me have delivered Labor its. And maybe we do 'chatter': it's what I'm doing now, after all. But ours is the chatter that goes unheard, by and large, even though it's also the chatter Labor should have listened to, if only because it is, in part, the echo of its own history, its past and future as well as its present. For we are trade unionists these days, we chatterers, a new skilled working class that grows and will continue to grow so long as the information economy expands. Nor are we necessarily hereditary lecturers or teachers, we chatterers. For we are the product of labour's past as well as its future. Like many others in jobs like mine, I am the first in my family to go to university and my academic successes have been a source of collective as well as individual pride. You think it's easy to write a PhD on Milton? Get a life.

Historically, my family has been shut out of formal education and culture by the workings of the class system. But this doesn't mean they were philistines: my grandfather who was a coalminer played in a brass band, the one who was a metalworker painted watercolour landscapes. I doubt either would have shared the anti-intellectual sneer which plays so easily on Labor politicians' lips. Nor does it mean they were racists: as I recall, both were pretty suspicious of that sort of claptrap, one in the name of a kind of Christian socialism, the other the more secular Marxist variety. For both, it was part of what made them vote Labour. I actually thought of my socialist grandfathers whilst giving out Green how-to-vote cards on election day – not spontaneously, I admit, but prompted by a neighbour's goodhumoured threat to take my photo and send it to my Dad. Well I've spoken to Dad and he sees the point. It's not difficult for someone who nearly completed a tour of duty as a bomb-aimer over Germany during the 1940s, and who's been a pacifist since they released him from the Stalag Luft, to take the full measure of Bomber Beazley. Or of Bomber Blair, for that matter, who apparently thinks it was the Americans rather than the Australians who stood by Britain during the Blitz (don't the Poms teach their prime ministers *any* history?). My grandfathers are a different matter, however. But I'd still like to think that they could have spotted the continuities between their politics and mine. Like them, I believe that capitalism doesn't work, that it's mad, bad and dangerous to your health. Like them, I'd like to find practical ways to check, control and replace it. It's because Labor isn't interested in any of this anymore, and because the Greens still are, that I voted the way I did. I haven't changed: Labor has.

But maybe I protest too much; maybe my grandfathers wouldn't have understood; and maybe it doesn't matter anyway. They're both dead, after all, and the dead don't vote except in inner Sydney Labor Party branches. Perhaps it was a vote for the future, then, rather than the past: the vote my son, David, would have cast if he'd been a few months older, rather than the one my Grandads, Bram and Arthur, could have cast if they'd been a generation younger and lived to retire (which neither did). I voted Green for the first time on 10 November 2001. I plan to do it again.

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2001 Queensland Poetry Festival 'Subverse'

Duncan Richardson

In 2001, the Festival took on yet another incarnation, with a more concentrated feel at the recently opened Judith Wright Arts Centre. As usual, the *Courier Mail*'s coverage of the event was ambivalent, with a faint-hearted attempt to beat up 'factionalism' in the weeks before. However despite this and the clash with Brisbane Writers' Week, numbers at Poetry events seemed to be as strong as in previous years.

Book launches are a regular

feature of the Festival and this time Ross Clark, stalwart of the Queensland scene and international troubadour was among them, with *Remix*, a compilation of new work and previously published poems. Post Pressed is the publisher, run by John Knight, one of several highly active small presses to emerge in recent years. Arts Minister Matt Foley launched Ross's book, with an entertaining and enthusiastic speech that managed to be both personal and global. It was a hard act to follow. Thanks to Ross's efforts and Matt Foley's support, Brisbane now has monthly readings in the Red Chamber in the old parliament house, easily the most spectacular venue around at the moment.

Phil Brown's new book *An Accident in the Evening* published by another local operation, David Reiter's Interactive Press, was re-launched at the same time. The title poem, published also in *Imago* this year, is a very evocative mood piece on an accident scene that well illustrates the way understatement is often more powerful than emotive language.

A new *Small Packages* emerged along with the winners of the first competition hosted by its editors, Rob Morris and Francis Boyle. John Carey took first place, followed by Wendy Morgan and Garth Madsen. The next *Small Packages* is now open for contributions with work on the theme of angels being more than welcome. Francis Boyle, long active in organising the festival and occasionally visited by angels himself is taking on a more prominent position following the departure of founding director Brett Dionysius. Plans are underway for even greater diversity of audience next year, with Bronwyn Lea and Rosanna Licari also on the committee.

The Wagtails series of poetry books took centre stage for one session. This is a unique journal where each monthly issue is devoted to one poet in sixteen pages. They sell for $3, which is especially welcome, with most new slim volumes over $20, one of the reasons why poetry doesn't sell or attract new buyers easily. Editor Rob Riels from Newcastle, aims to increase the visibility of poems this way, including already published work, which, as he says, may only be read by a small audience in its first outlet and then becomes 'used goods' as far as most other editors are concerned. Andy Kissane and Judith Beveridge from NSW feature in the latest issues and authors are booked up for twelve months ahead. Contributions are by invitation only, which is probably a wise move. Details on ordering from Picaro Press, PO Box 853, Warners Bay, NSW 2283 or jandr@hunterlink.net.au

Five Islands Press brought out six new poets for a Brisbane launch, the last in an exhausting series around the country. Some of the poets' names would be familiar to readers of literary journals and one of the poets, David Kirkby, had a poem in the *Courier Mail* this year when it won the Bruce Dawe Poetry Competition. The new poets' series will take a break next year, to allow editor Ron Pretty to gather his energies but will continue after that as still the only poetry press open to anyone with a track record of publication rather than a relationship with the publisher. Five Islands is important too in that it requires no author finance for its new poets or mainstream program. Ron is involved in a new poetry promotion body, the Poetry Australia Foundation, which aims to ease poetry out of its arcane, obscure hidey-hole into the brave new world of readers. Interested poetry lovers can contact Ron at (02) 4221 3867 or e-mail kpretty@uow.edu.au for more information.

Dozens of poets performed including people from other parts of Queensland and interstate and the changing audiences flowed in and out, making the total attendance difficult to estimate and suggesting diversity is a great strength of the event. It offers the chance to hear the familiar voices and the new and the only cost is buying the authors' books. Avid Reader bookshop provided a book table groaning with poetry and acting as a lively focus. Sales appeared to be healthy. Panel discussions were mercifully reduced in number, which allowed the poetry to speak more for itself. Poorly prepared panelists have been a regular disappointment at this event.

For those with nine–five-ish work commitments, some of the events are inaccessible due to the times on Thursday and Friday, though no doubt this programming suits others. In many ways, the Festival continues to be a major success

after seven years in one form or another. However, lateness and distribution of publicity continue to be a problem and criticism has been voiced locally about the lack of any democratic process or openness in the organisation though in 2001 an open forum was held which is a move in the right direction.

Duncan Richardson is a writer of fiction and poetry.

News from Tasmania

Tim Thorne

DECEMBER 2001 saw one of the most successful literary festivals Tasmania has experienced; and it cost nothing. Titled *Another Country*, its theme was the question of Tasmanian identity in Tasmanian literature, and it was organised by four Hobart 'colourful writing identities', novelist Richard Flanagan, bookseller Chris Pearce, *Island* editor David Owen and poet, academic and all-round stirrer Pete Hay.

That there could be such a thing as a free literary festival came as a surprise to many, and admittedly the Hobart Bookshop did sponsor the venue and the opening festivities, but over sixty people donated their time to give readings, speak on panels, chair sessions and generally assist with putting the show on. There was no admission charge to any of the sessions, and no funding was sought from government sources.

This is not to suggest that Tasmanian writers and publishers are not interested in government support. In fact the discussions were frequently hijacked by a very vocal lobby group which complained bitterly that the State Government was not sufficiently supportive of the local publishing industry.

I am not convinced that subsidies to publishers are necessarily the best way to assist the production and dissemination of literature, but before going into the argument I should declare an interest. I set up Cornford Press primarily to publish Tasmanian poetry (although it has expanded into other areas since), have not received a cent of financial assistance either from the Australia Council or from Arts Tasmania, and have no intention of asking for any. This is mainly in order to keep complete artistic control over the list, but also to keep faith with the authors.

It is easy to publish books, and damned difficult to sell them. The whole point of publishing is to bring writers and readers together. If I can publish a collection of poems at a total cost of, say, $3000 for a print run of five hundred and get back $10 per book after everyone else has taken their cut, I have covered costs after selling three hundred. If I receive a subsidy of $1000 I need to sell only two hundred to break even. There is little incentive to get out and sell those extra one hundred books, which will in all likelihood end up in cartons under the spare bed, so the poet is denied one hundred potential readers.

Where publishers of works of literary merit do need help is with distribution. Ron Pretty of Wollongong has been tireless in his efforts to find alternative ways of getting poetry from small presses to readers, and the Poetry Australia Foundation, his latest scheme, looks promising. It relies on cooperation, which seems to me to be the only useful basis for growth if you are small. The economic rationalist doctrine of competition and 'get big or get out' only works where the ultimate aim is to maximise profits, not to maximise readership in what will always be an area of minority interest.

Anyway, enough of my soapbox. The *Another Country* festival, having raised the issue of whether there was a distinctly Tasmanian literature or not, failed, as one might expect (as one might hope, even) within the confines of one weekend, to resolve it, although the poetry panel of five declared itself unanimously concerned with more universal matters. What was abundantly clear, however, was that there is a huge amount of local pride in what is written on the island and that that pride is justified in terms of both quantity and quality.

The northern end of Tasmania is another country still, and to push the L.P. Hartley quote further, they insist on doing things differently there. In October the Tasmanian Poetry Festival saw the launching of the Launceston Longpoem, a joint initiative of the festival and an artists' cooperative known as Wallless7250. The longpoem is on the Internet and is a collaborative work to which anyone may contribute, with the idea that it becomes a cultural

resource for the city. It is intended to act as a kind of poetry bank; one can make deposits or, for those moments when one feels the need for some poetry in one's life, withdrawals. It can be checked out at http://wallless.collective7250.com and contributions can be e-mailed to longpoem@collective7250.com

It also has a parallel, more tangible manifestation in the form of the Poetry Car, a red 1979 Commodore which will be covered in poems and used for the promotion of poetry, including taking part in the Launceston ritual of Friday night 'blockies', hooning around the city streets with a tape-deck booming out poems.

The Tasmanian Poetry Festival, by the way, will from this year be, as they say, under new management. After seventeen years with the same Director, it is old enough to leave home and will, no doubt, enter its majority with prospects for a healthy future.

Tim Thorne is a Tasmanian poet and newspaper columnist, who has just ceased being the Director of the Tasmanian Poetry Festival, and who is the Managing Editor of Cornford Press.

From the Territory

Robyn Waite

IN ANY DISCUSSION of Northern Territory politics these days, the conversation inevitably drifts back to three words – 'The Black Hole'. The euphoria of a Labor win after almost three decades of CLP rule has been somewhat dampened by the reality of a huge budget deficit. While politicians lay blame and argue the causes of this dreaded phenomenon, ordinary Territorians are facing the fact that they must wait for the delivery of many of Labor's pre-election promises. This delay is particularly hard felt amongst Arts organisations, the majority of which are struggling to keep up with rising costs and community demand for their services. Labor has promised an increase of $250,000 to the Arts sector and while this is a modest amount, it is certainly a step in the right direction. However it remains to be seen when and how these extra funds will be distributed.

A more tangible development is the new government's commitment to introducing peer assessment for sponsorship applications. NT artists and arts workers have long advocated peer assessment practice and the news that a model will be adopted in the near future has been greeted with both enthusiasm and wariness by the field. Public forums have taken place in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine, enabling interested parties to voice their concerns, queries and suggestions. These have been taken on board by an Arts Working Party that is advising government on an appropriate model. While it is generally acknowledged that the introduction of a peer assessment process is bound to have its teething problems, the arts community seems ready and mature enough to handle the change. The Arts Working Party is also addressing other issues of industry concern such as skills development and infrastructure. Many of the Working Party's recommendations focus on a whole of government approach to the Arts. Given that the Chief Minister, the Honourable Clare Martin, is also the Minister of Arts, Museums and Library Services, there is a sense of optimism in her capacity to raise the profile of the Arts across government departments.

How the literary arts will be affected by these potential changes remains to be seen, but in the meantime the NT writing community continues to flourish. Spoken word events were enthusiastically received in 2001, with growing audiences for the NT Writers' Centre's 'Off the Page' events held at Escape, an outdoor cafe in suburban Darwin, and a great response to two literary events held at the new Bluegrass Restaurant in Alice Springs. The first of these was 'Domestic and Erotic Poetry', held during the inaugural Alice Springs Festival in August. More than one hundred people attended the event, encouraging the Alice Springs Writers' Group, in collaboration with the NT Writers' Centre, to hold a second event, 'HEAT' at the same venue in late November. Once more, a large crowd gathered to hear the work of local writers Kieran Finnane and Michael Watts, with many more writers performing in the open mike section. The diversity of material presented at these events and the enthusiasm of local writers and audiences augers well for the future of the

spoken word scene in the NT.

NT mentoring programs for writers, funded through the Literature Fund of the Australia Council, yielded some excellent results last year. The most high profile of these was the publication of Stephen Gray's Australian Vogel Award winning novel, *The Artist is a Thief* (Allen & Unwin). Another former mentee, Leonie Norrington, was contracted by Omnibus to develop three novels for junior readers. The stories are based on the adventures of a group of black and white children growing up on an Aboriginal community in the Top End. On the poetry front, Kaye Aldenhoven has self-published a stunning collection of poems called *In My Husband's Country*, inspired by her time living and working in Kakadu National Park. Kaye developed the collection with assistance from mentor Chris Mansell. Mentoring programs continue to provide valuable support for NT writers and assist in easing their sense of professional isolation. The current program involves mentors Linda Jaivin, Timothy Daly, Alexis Wright and Barbara James, working with ten emerging NT writers in the genres of fiction, non-fiction and script writing.

The NT Writers' Centre ran its third successful NT Writers' Week in 2001 and plans to make this an annual feature of its program. This small but expanding regional festival has secured generous sponsorship from Dymocks Booksellers and enjoys enthusiastic community support. The program includes standard literary fare such as panel discussions and book launches, but takes on a unique tropical flavour with sunset readings on the foreshore and events at outdoor cinemas and cafes. The celebration will change its name to the Top End Writers' Festival in 2002 and will be held from August 8–18. Although there are limited resources to cover travel expenses for interstate guests, writers interested in attending the festival are encouraged to contact the NT Writers' Centre to discuss funding options.

Robyn Waite has a background in theatre, an active interest in South East Asia, and is currently the Executive Officer of the NT Writers' Centre. Tel: 08 8941 2651 E-mail: ntwriter@octa4.net.au

On Working Class Poetry

Laurie Duggan

WHEN MY book-length documentary poem *The Ash Range* (1987) was in manuscript I had no idea who might accept it for publication. It seemed too big and possibly too visually complex for a small publisher to handle yet it also seemed too 'left-field' for a large publisher to take up. As things turned out the book was published by Picador (through a fortuitous link, not through submission). The book was about the Gippsland region (Victoria) where my father had grown up, one of ten children, in an impossibly small house on the bank of the Tambo River at Ensay South. Dad had not progressed beyond primary schooling and, apart from the odd war book and *The Sun*, was not a 'reader'. He read my book however, cover to cover, and his lack of preconceptions about 'literature' meant that he took in its typographical eccentricity and even its occasionally 'difficult' layout of parallel texts without qualm. All the same, I'm sure that if a performance poet had visited the General Motors factory at Fishermen's Bend when Dad worked there he would have done his level best to avoid listening to the 'bullshit'. He would have been taken more by an amusing piece of graffiti in the toilets. (My mother worked in a hospital laundry and read Shakespeare and Milton for pleasure. I doubt that she would have liked 'working class poetry' much either. Was this 'false consciousness' on her part? Or was it just a love of language in its varied forms; a love not often displayed in the work of those who purport to speak for the working class? I'd prefer to believe option number two.)

What this, my own background, suggests to me is that poetry and the styles of poetry which are supposedly applicable to people of different social castes is a far more complex phenomenon than the Working Class Poetry issue of *overland* might allow. Still, some very strange things appear to be happening in issue #165. Brad Evans, arguing against the State-subsidised elitist poets seems to be pushing a form of 'free market' ideology. Tell it to Rod Kemp, Brad! He'll soon remove that little relic of Socialism! Elsewhere Lauren Williams seems to have a handle on those mysterious elements that make a

poem either accessible or obscure. I'm not sure that I do. I mean is 'natural language' so readily an apparent or transparent phenomenon? Is the language of any specialised sport a 'natural' language? No, it's hopelessly obscure unless you spend some time taking an interest in the sport. I should know. I live with a tennis fanatic.

Reading the poems in the issue I'm occasionally amused, occasionally bored (as I would be with the work printed in any literary magazine). Some poems I'd dearly love to slice off the last third of – I've already 'gotten the message'. Some poems seem like jokes told by a bad comedian who gets all the timing wrong. It's not that the poems need to be more difficult or complex: timing is (often) everything. With some of the poems I can see no reason why they shouldn't be printed as prose. Others maybe I'd like more if I came across them on a wall. Appearing in *overland* has made them somehow complicit with the very 'literary' world that their defenders set themselves in opposition to (π.o. is terrific, but then he always is).

Where there are often problems with writing that calls itself 'working class', or should I say the different types of writing that come out of this particular ideology, I think, contrary to the pro- and anti- 'working class culture' theorists, that they are problems shared with a lot of other forms of poetry today. Nobody is 'innocent' in this sense. Nobody is the unselfconscious, unconstructed subject of any anthropologist's gaze. In fact at times the sheer hubris of the advocates of 'working class poetry' floors me. They have the kind of certainty in their approach to art and life that would give the editor and contributors of *Quadrant* a run for their money. Indeed they have just that certainty that many of their 'middle-class' brothers and sisters, fresh out of Creative Writing 101 seem to have. And they share the sense (acquired as often as not from bad teachers) that poetry is an opaque medium for conveying information with just that little extra element of cultural clout (hey man, it's a POEM!). Don't get me wrong here. I respect these authors' ideas of the importance of poetry. But it can be just like having the right brand on your Indonesian running shoes unless there is also a sense of craft and the consciousness that audiences aren't just there to be patronised.

I sense that there is a strange paradox operating in some of the work in #165. Poetry about 'work' and 'working life' appear to be written by people who don't see poetry writing as something in which work is involved. You have to study to be a musician, a tennis player or a carpenter. You even have to watch what other people do to be able to work on a production line. But poetry, for so many of those who argue against 'élitism' is 'natural'. It's something we all can do, just as we can all talk or breathe. Watching other people writing might cruel our style and turn us into 'intellectuals' (the right's 'chattering classes', 'chardonnay socialists' &c &c &c). Those who have produced books and had their work presented in magazines and various other places and who display any interest in poetry and poetics have become complicit in bourgeois culture. The smell of burning texts is not so far away.

I fear that all this has a lot to do with notions of 'authenticity'. It's a bit like the time when fans of folk, jazz and blues music wanted to be able to tell the musicians whether or not they could use certain instruments (electric guitars): a kind of Ewan McColl seal of approval (McColl didn't like singers performing material outside their own culture, but paradoxically – and sadly for him – his own origins were far more obscure than he wished known). Any talk of 'authenticity', it seems to me, is just another mechanism to deny people access to their culture or at least to install one set of apparatchiks instead of another. And 'authenticity' with its belief in naïve genius is the natural enemy of education – something we all have a right to.

Not everybody can write well. This, at least, ought to be apparent. Am I an élitist for saying this? Well, who would back a barfly to win the hundred metre hurdles?

Pat Counihan, 1916–2001

John McLaren

PAT COUNIHAN, widow of the painter Noel Counihan and a long-time friend and supporter of *overland*, was one of a group of strong women who played important parts in the Australian left from the 1930s onwards.

Pat, born in New Zealand, was a schoolteacher who had majored in French and Latin. She met Noel in 1939, while he was working for the national broadcasting authority as a records clerk. Noel was a member of the NZ Labour Party, Pat of the NZ Communist Party, and both were active in anti-war movements. Love and politics fused for them. They married in 1940, and six days later both were dismissed from their government posts under wartime emergency regulations. Noel was deported to Australia and Pat followed him, after losing a fight to have the NZ government pay her fare. She was able to obtain a job teaching while Noel went into a sanatorium. In Melbourne, they continued to be close friends of Judah Waten and his wife Hyrrel, and shared their expulsion from the Communist Party. They were readmitted to the Party, but in later years their friendship broke up. "As politically committed as he was, she fortified his political resolve and provided the economic support a professional artist, who was publicly known as an outspoken communist, required. Pat was responsible for nursing him out of his tuberculosis and, over the years, weaning him from his excessive drinking habits."

Although in the public eye Pat may have been overshadowed by Noel, she was to the end a feisty and independent woman who formulated her own views and expressed them forthrightly. She donated two of Noel's paintings to the gallery the Brunswick City Council established in his memory. She remained vigorous of mind and body to the end.

Floating Fund

OVERLAND would like to thank those listed below for being good sports and donating the following amounts to our coffers:

$112 C.L.; $50 M.L, M.P.; $30 D.&B.H.; $20 L.R.; $14 A.C., S.M., M.M., M.R., C.C.M., J.&V.B.; $12 B.J.N-S., V.F.D.; $4 P.H., T.S., B.A.; $2 H.H.: totalling $384.

MONASH UNIVERSITY

National Key Centre for Australian Studies and Parliamentary Studies Unit

THIRTY YEARS LATER:

The Whitlam Government as Modernist Politics

2 & 3 December 2002 – Old Parliament House – Canberra

Keynote Speaker: The Hon E.G. Whitlam AC QC

CALL FOR PAPERS

On the 30th anniversary of the election of the Whitlam government, this conference provides an opportunity to consider both the significance and contemporary relevance of the Whitlam era. Papers are invited which address the following themes: reshaping the nation; reinvigorating the ALP; respecting difference; constructing Whitlamism and defining modernist politics.

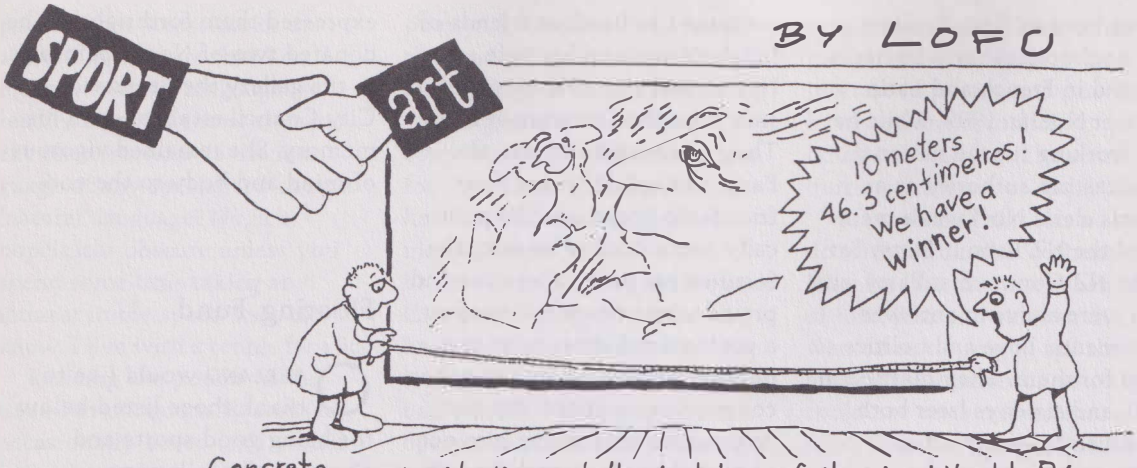
Abstracts of 250 words are invited by mid-April
Selected papers will appear in the refereed conference proceedings

Dr Jenny Hocking
Head, National Key Centre for Australian Studies
Monash University
Fax: +61 3 9905 5238
Email: jenny.hocking@arts.monash.edu.au

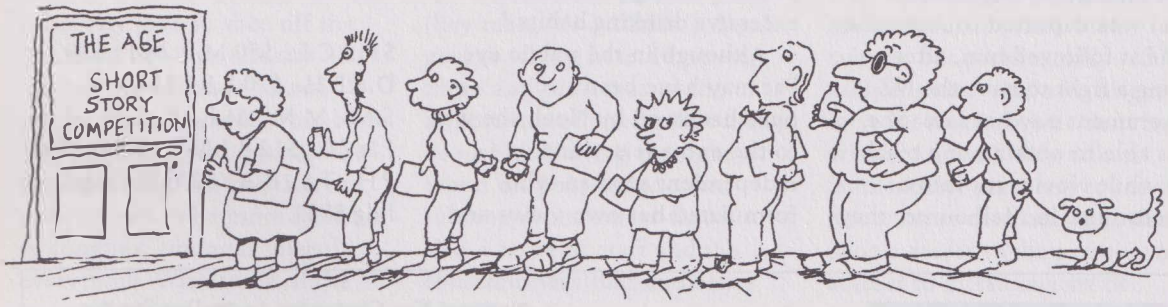
Dr Colleen Lewis
Co-director, Parliamentary Studies Unit
Monash University
Fax: +61 3 9903 2795
Email: colleen.lewis@arts.monash.edu.au

For more details and registration forms see the conference website at: **www.arts.monash.edu.au/ncas/**

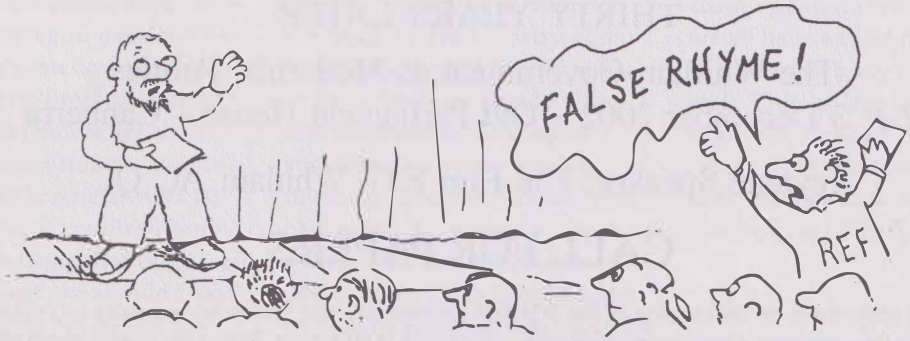
BY LOFU



Concrete new guide-lines at the judging of the Archibald Prize



To eliminate drug cheats, submissions to literary competitions must be accompanied by a current urine sample.



The 'Red Card' being used at a Montsalvat Poets' Reading

New Zealand poets performing the 'haka' at the opening of the Adelaide Festival

You Can't Trust Anyone Who Always Tells the Truth

Yossi Berger

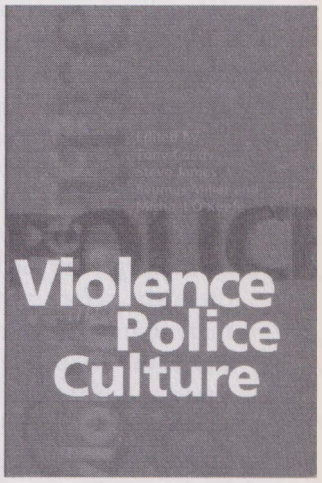
T. Coady, S. James, S. Miller & M. O'Keefe (eds): *Violence and Police Culture* (MUP, $38.45).

ALL JOKES ASIDE, are there diabolic shades lurking in police violence, haunting the backblocks of the copper's mind and The Force? Is a defensive sense of mission in a difficult and unpredictable workplace laced with social isolation, presumed collegiate solidarity, conservatism, old-fashioned machismo, the presence of sexual, racial and other prejudices regularly fed by a defensive 'pragmatism' a good breeding farm for it? Or is it just a misunderstood group of workers working in danger, troubled by the carriage of authority in a complex world constantly searching for respect in that world?

This is another publication from the Melbourne University Press, Ethics In Public Life series put together by the Special Research Centre for Applied Philosophy providing discussion of basic presuppositions and fundamental values.

Various explanations are offered here for excessive police violence: unsuitable recruits, faulty training, violent occupational environments with inadequate standard operating procedures (SOPs), and, in this publication, police 'culture'. There was a time when bookstores were rich with Zen titles: Daily Zen, Zen In The Mountains, Zen of Cookery, Zen of Archery, Zen Flower Arranging, Now and Zen, Motor Cycles and Zen, Walking Sticks & Zen, any job and Zen. In some nostalgic ways the word 'culture' has taken on similar epidemic proportions. So why not violence and police 'culture'? But is it really only a new pregnant koan (e.g. What is the police officer as a worker?).

Put workers in frequently dangerous, violent and uncertain working situations, confuse them about matters of rights within a ponderous system of justice, fill them with uncertainties about self-defence, property and a changing society (should rhino poachers in Collins Street be shot?), and what would you expect? Thirty-four deaths by police bullets in Victoria since 1986 (twelve in NSW), scandals with pressure point techniques, mass strip-searches (mostly in gay clubs), money scandals, seedy sexual abuses. Can you call all that 'the nature of the beast'? Much of the issue has to do with the exercise of discretionary ethical judgements by police officers in their day-to-day work in an environment where "often, guilt or innocence is determined purely on the basis of which side presents the best story on the day". And that, at times, would give you the shits.



Police violence in Australia, specifically in Victoria, and more particularly at the S11 demonstrations in Melbourne-by-the-Yarra, attracted attention in a number of ways.

> Police have dropped disciplinary charges against eight officers involved in the bloody baton charge at Richmond Secondary College [Melbourne] almost seven years ago . . .
>
> Deputy Commissioner Neil O'Loughlin said the charges were dropped because of the time that had elapsed since the officers were charged.
>
> Last year, a civil test case by Richmond protester Lorraine Johnson, sixty-six, who suffered a permanent 20 per cent reduction in the use of her right arm as a result of being hit up to forty times, ended in an undisclosed out-of-court settlement.
>
> ('Baton Case Outrage, Charges Against Police Dropped', *Herald-Sun*, Friday, 20 October 2000)

A slim, five-foot nurse 'managed' by police at the Melbourne S11 demonstrations wrote:

> I felt extremely vulnerable as I was dragged along Spencer Street by my hair, dodging vicious kicks and thumps to the back of my head.
>
> (Lyell, *overland 161*, 2000)

An important chapter (Warren & James) provides some officers' voices and perceptions based on a series of workshops supported by Victoria Police. I would have liked to read much more about their anxieties, frequent awful shiftwork hours with powerful effects on families (if they only told you straight). It would've been useful to read about their search for meaning at work, and great boredom and sadness with the regular 'war stories' of the job. Neither their own or victims' voices were given any or enough space in my view. But there is some:

> He didn't get the shit kicked out of him at the pub the night before by six blokes because he was there tryin' to help somebody else. He didn't get shot at the day before that. He didn't get into a car chase and have a crash. He didn't go to a fatal accident or he didn't bloody go to a sudden infant death in a cot the day before that. No. 'Oh Jesus, the cop used force today. Oh, he's a bad boy. Look at that' headlines. And once again you're dehumanised. You're a copper. You're a machine and you've done the wrong thing.

I was suspicious of Warren & James' tentative analysis at one point: "Perhaps predictably, the workshops produced little acknowledgment that police routinely exercise excessive force either now or in the past. For most police, allegations of excessive force are based generally upon misunderstandings of the circumstances . . ." Is that it?!

Neil O'Loughlin (same!) and Peter Billing's (high ranking police officers) chapter ('Positive Police Culture: Correcting Perceptions') strikes a complainting tone: "The police culture attracts condemnation from those who neither understand the culture nor belong to it." Their argument is that the baby's been thrown out with the bath water and that the term 'police culture' should evoke some positive connotations, and further, that the link between a dark and sinister 'brotherhood syndrome' misses the point that frequently there are desirable attributes in these social structures within the police force.

Are they in fact a special, misunderstood and isolated occupational group? I hear from the mouths of miners and farmers and manufacturers and sparkies and milk-bar owners, and deep-sea divers, and condom makers, rope and cordage workers, and chocolate makers . . . etc. that they all also regard themselves as unique groups. Coady in his chapter *What Dirt?* comments: "There can . . . be no defensible division of moral labour which allows some labourers, such as the police, any sort of licence to torture and murder". Not any sort.

Eleven chapters, surprisingly interesting historical chapter (Blackter), relevant topics (e.g. code of silence, shootings in Victoria, 'dirty hands'). An impressive and scholarly treatment of some important legal issues by Ian Freckelton. The more philosophical essays, as usual, dealt with limits and boundaries: Loyalty? How much? Silence? How far? Moral discretion? When? And where is that local fine line?

In a number of ways I found the book annoying, perhaps because I have repeatedly seen police bullying of helpless people in a number of countries and, to a minor extent have experienced it myself. And, just in passing, an occasional kindness and some wisdom. There's a sense of 'yeah, but . . . that's not all there's to it, that's not it at all'. Read it and get annoyed as well, it'll do you a heap of good.

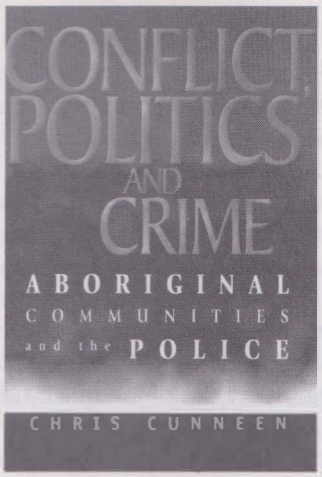
Yossi Berger is a writer and union activist.

Black and blue: Police force or police brutality?

Jude McCulloch

Chris Cunneen: *Conflict, Politics and Crime: Aboriginal Communities and the Police* (Allen & Unwin, $35).

Conflict, politics and crime: Aboriginal Communities and the Police is an analysis of policing in Indigenous communities from colonisation to contemporary times. Australian history demonstrates that policing reinforces and mirrors hierarchical social divisions based on race, class and gender. In some respects the policing of poor and marginalised groups has continuities with the policing of Indigenous people. And yet, as Cunneen convincingly argues, Indigenous people's experience



of policing is unique because of "a colonial process which involved police participation in genocide, and the racialised construction of Indigenous people as inferior".

It is difficult for non-Indigenous people to comprehend the depth and impact of police intervention in the daily lives of Indigenous people. Some will be familiar with the arrest and imprisonment statistics that reflect the extraordinary over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are twenty-seven times more likely to be in police custody *and* nearly sixteen times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous people. Cunneen gives us a window into a world where a blue uniform is regularly associated with harassment, surveillance, racist abuse, violence, imprisonment, and even terror, torture and death. Aboriginal people and communities are policed far more extensively and brutally than non-Indigenous communities.

Policing, according to Cunneen, is at the "front end" of a criminal justice system reinforcing power relations that exclude Aboriginal people from political, social and economic participation. During the colonial period police were active in overcoming Aboriginal resistance to dispossession and the enforcement of government policy, including the theft of children and the strict spatial apartheid and social control of the protection era. Up until the referendum in 1967 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were officially non-citizens and enjoyed no formal legal equality with non-Indigenous citizens of Australia. A presumed racial inferiority underlay the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the rights of citizenship. Cunneen describes the contemporary period as neo-colonial: formal equality is celebrated but Indigenous people are nevertheless redefined as non-citizens because they are constructed and reproduced as criminals. Within this framework the full gamut of police behaviour, including the most brutal and seemingly senseless acts of police violence, is given meaning beyond the mere expression of individual pathology or a racist police culture. Terror, violence and the abuse of human rights are placed within the context of the Australian colonial process and indeed colonial processes the world over. At heart, Cunneen argues, differential policing of Indigenous people is profoundly political: "The process of criminalisation, the denial of human rights, marginalisation and incarceration ensure that Aboriginal people are maintained as a dispossessed minority, rather than a people with legitimate political claims on the nation state."

Conflict, Politics and Crime: Aboriginal Communities and the Police breaks new ground by theorising policing in terms of the colonial project. It is a book for everyone who wants to understand what it means to be Australian and how we can move forward to create a society based on truth and justice.

Jude McCulloch lectures in Police Studies at Deakin University. She is the author of Blue Army: Paramilitary Policing in Australia *(MUP, 2001) and of a chapter in* Violence and Police Culture.

Wobblies and Walkies

Jim Davidson

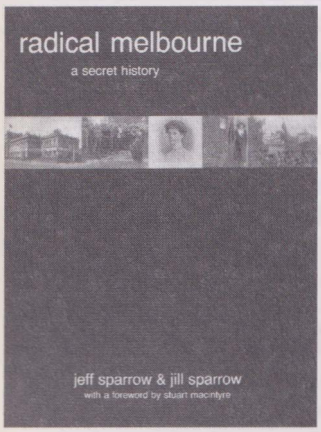
Jeff Sparrow & Jill Sparrow: *Radical Melbourne: A Secret History* (Vulgar Press, $45).

THIS BOOK IS, as the English would say, very good of its kind. Only they usually mean that as a put down – and this book is close to being unputdownable, at least by a reviewer. It's a pioneering work about radical Melbourne, as the title proclaims; if the history is a secret one, it's largely through neglect. What an inspired idea then to recuperate it by a tour of various sites around the city, using them as various anchor points to keep alive the memory of various events and organisations which otherwise might be swept away.

The narrative is a walk that any reader might undertake, since each of the fifty stories is keyed in to a feature of the landscape. (You start with the Flagstaff Gardens and end with the Trades Hall, where one of the authors, Jeff Sparrow, works in the New International Bookshop.) The CBD has remained its focus, for the years up to 1939; and quite sensibly the range has been restricted to those sites where something tangibly connected with the event in question

can still be seen – although this point is stretched a bit to include street signs, if they unwittingly carry an interesting echo of earliest Melbourne. On the other hand, nicely juxtaposed 'then and now' photographs show an old cemetery wall still running through the Victoria Market, and elsewhere a surprising remaining fragment of the once-famous Cole's Book Arcade.

As might be expected, the book records anarchist bookshops, Communist Party offices and those of other radical organisations, together with the sites of strikes and demonstrations. But it also puts a different spin on quite familiar landmarks. So the Melbourne Club – that "home for the terminally rich" in Rod Quantock's memorable phrase – is here, with an account of how it came to be formed and how hoonish were the 'pranks' of its privileged members. So too is Parliament House – with an emphasis on the slits for gunfire high above the windows on the Bourke Street façade, just in case a mob should ever get out of hand. Indeed Parliament House was also equipped with a dungeon and a secret escape route. Moreover, as Jeff and Jill Sparrow point out, legislation has never been repealed which would enable the police to disperse, kill, injure or maim any person in a group of fifty or more who had illegally assembled in the vicinity of Parliament. Victoria may have been the first polity in the British Empire to institute the secret ballot, but old habits of authority die hard.



So does class. While its oppressions show every sign of growing in John Howard's Australia, a sense of superior class no longer draws strength from the old aristocratic assumption of being set apart from the common folk. Today this has been banalised as being 'winners', rather than 'losers'. This was not so in the nineteenth century. Even in colonial Melbourne, when the monument was being considered for the Burke and Wills expedition, there was no thought of celebrating working class Gray, who also died, or even John King, who survived and was met on his return by a huge crowd. As the *Argus* intoned, in the case of the genteel deceased there was "moral heroism", whereas with King there was merely "physical endurance". Such survivalism, the paper maintained, was "but a physical accident". It was not improbable, it went on, "that the death of Burke and Wills was accelerated by the activity of their minds, by the incessant play of their emotions". Yet such higher feelings were not to be cultivated indiscriminately. As the Sparrows show, the debates and demonstrations that took place in the 1880s about opening the Public Library on Sundays were only nominally about sabbatarianism. They had more to do with the fact that Sunday closure meant that the great doors of the institution could effectively shut out the working class, since this was the one day they were free to attend. This locality-structured history also reminds us of another form of social apartheid, once taken for granted: while the people took to Bourke Street on Saturday night, the 'toffs' were 'doing the Block' in Collins Street.

The difficulty of organising left-wing causes in the face of the general conservativism prevalent in Melbourne is made plain throughout the book. Some of the impediments were national: the 1920 Crimes Act defined sedition to include any action designed to promote "ill will and hostility between different classes". In Melbourne, with its almost unbroken run of right-wing state governments, the police could be particularly oppressive, resorting to violence with little provocation. But when they raided anarchist bookshops or other radical organisations, they were often easily outwitted. Noting that the editor of the IWW paper was A. Block, the police prepared for a visit to the *Direct Action* office. The members had:

> got a block of wood with a dingy old top hat on it and kept it behind the door in the editorial room. When the detectives came round they got very annoyed when they were introduced to the editor.

Radical Melbourne has a few lapses – the account of the Eight-Hour Day monument is sketchy – but it deserves to do well. The book makes a real contribution to a history of the fabric of the city, while simultaneously providing us with a map of the various parties, groups and landmarks which defined left-wing activity in Melbourne down to the beginning of the Second World War. One hopes that the Sparrows will continue their work, either extending it in time or broadening it out to take in the suburbs.

Jim Davidson is Professor in History at Victoria University.

Ordering the Aussie house

Andrew Brown-May

Patrick Troy (ed.): *A history of European housing in Australia* (CUP, $38.40).

THIS COLLECTION of eighteen articles addressing the social, administrative, technical and cultural history of European housing in Australia was an initiative of the now defunct Urban and Environmental Program of the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. The book complements a separate edition that covers the housing histories of Australia's original inhabitants, *Settlement: a history of Australian indigenous housing* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000) edited by Peter Read. Boldly claimed as the first systematic and collaborative attempt to chronicle Australia's housing history, the result of Troy's work is perhaps narrower in scope and looser in structure than his blurb betrays. But as he rightly suggests in the introduction, while chronological and thematic gaps are manifold (for example, housing policy, multi-unit dwellings and flats), here is both a sampler of some of the best urban scholarship at work, as well as a prescription for future research directions.

Such eclectic fare from geographers, historians, cultural critics, architects and sociologists (though no historical archaeologists) – who notoriously speak in wildly different tongues – does not necessarily add up to a comprehensible discussion. The constellation of such diverse critical readings of housing history appears more accidental than deliberately collaborative, yet while generalisation rather than richly worked up history and synthesis is the order of the day, the book confirms the utility of employing the urban – that zone where people, places and institutions collide – as an enduring critical frame for interpreting broader cultural dispositions and transformations.

Aimed at design professionals and policy-makers rather than at a general audience, there is nevertheless enough of interest for the persistent reader with a mind for questions of regional differentiation, what gives Australian cities their distinctiveness, the complex interplay between understandings of house and home, or the differences between urban, suburban and rural housing. Many of the chapters will lead such a reader from these overview essays to their authors' more in-depth published studies of economic aspects of housing and home ownership, urban planning, housing policy, the construction industry and the social history of urban space, though the absence of a consolidated thematic bibliography will disappoint.

While Troy's cohort tests all kinds of important hypotheses, from theories on changing concepts of comfort or the ways in which households understand their use of spaces and styles, to changes in the household production of subsistence goods, some of the most exciting work in the collection is indeed built up from ground level – Katie Holmes' exploration of the dynamics of class and gender in the garden, or Kimberley Webber's material culture analysis of the technologies of the kitchen and the laundry. As Robert Freestone warns in his chapter on the home as a garden suburb, the reader looking to glimpse the reality of individual lives amidst the planned spaces will be disappointed. Graham Holland's intriguing investigation of the ways in which house design responds to the Australian environment in terms of comfort levels and climate control, itself defers to the lack of evidence showing "how Australians use their housing, or to what extent they are satisfied with it in general, and even less on how comfortable they are".

Graeme Davison opens the book with a masterful chapter on the colonial origins of the Australian home, on home as an aspiration as well as a place, and the British lineages of the search for domestic independence in the antipodes. Many of the usual suspects then give solid and core grounding: Miles Lewis on vernacular building traditions, Tony Dingle on owner-building as a response to economic crisis, David Merrett on financing home buying, Glen Mitchell on the residential building industry, Lionel Frost on the network technology of transport, power and sanitation infrastructure. Issues of progress and equity are never far away, not only in Troy's critique of urban consolidation, but in Blair Badcock's reading of the illusory egalitarianism that is implicit in the ideal of home ownership, and Clem Lloyd's coverage of legal and social definitions of homelessness. Mark Peel's reading between the lines of the narratives of decline which mark contemporary views of neighbourhood, while reiterating a by now well-known critique of the neighbourhood as a community of exclusion as well of unity, is not just a challenge for historians to chart the vital signs of community and the actual and imagined connections which constitute our urban lives, but a call to urban dwellers to renegotiate the threshold between community and privacy.

Starting with Governor Phillip's regulations and plans for Sydney, Susan Marsden's chapter chronicles the progressive introduction of building regulations and their implications for housing design. Discussions around imported notions of property, family and independence, and the class basis of much housing regulation whereby regulators were often primarily concerned with the moral function of housing, neatly balance competing desires for imposing and escaping order. As one-time Visiting Fellow at the Urban Research Program, Marsden conceived with Pat Troy a series of case-studies that would complement the essays on Indigenous and European housing. Realised as *Our House: Histories of Australian Homes*, an internet-only publication at www.heritage.gov.au/ourhouse, the website includes biographies of forty Australian houses. Ten of the contributors to Troy's volume have penned a virtual entry in what is an important companion and in some cases corrective to the print publication. It is only a pity that the individual house stories and the concerns theorised in the print work – the way spaces are personalised, idealised, constructed, negotiated, financed – could not have found a more unified incarnation, as they each inform and add value to the other.

Andrew Brown-May is an urban historian who teaches history at the University of Melbourne. He is the author of Melbourne Street Life *(Australian Scholarly Publishing, 1998) and* Espresso! Melbourne Coffee Stories *(Arcadia, 2001).*

Whiteman Giving Birth, Again

Damien Barlow

John Molony: *The Native-Born: The First White Australians* (MUP, $32.95).

I CAN IMAGINE Marilyn Lake reading John Molony's latest venture into our colonial past. She is shaking her head and perhaps tiredly thinking, "the boys are still producing their seminal histories, trying to give birth to the nation, again". Currently an Emeritus Professor of Australian History at ANU, Molony's career has centred on giving birth to masculinist interpretations of myth-making moments in Australian history. His nationalistic studies of the Kelly Gang (1980) and the Eureka Stockade (1984) were popular academic takes on Australian history; with the Ned Kelly monograph now the basis of the most recent film incarnation of the bush-ranger. In his latest book, *The Native-Born*, Molony turns to the Currency Lads (with a light sprinkling of lasses) and revisits the 'origins debate' within Australian historiography. With the convenient exclusion of the 'native-born' from Van Diemen's Land and Norfolk Island, Molony's text confidently focuses on the mother-colony of New South Wales between 1788 and 1850 and the rise therein of the white Australian race.

Molony's study unashamedly attempts to create a new national mythology about the first generation of European children from convicts, emancipists and free emigrants. The 'native-born' are redrawn as innocent white noble savages, worthy of fathering an egalitarian antipodean race. Reviving the romantic 1950s left nationalist zeal that Russel Ward championed in *The Australian Legend* (1958), Molony's text seems out of place, years too late. This time-capsule lack of critical engagement with contemporary Australian historiography is most evident in the way Molony positions the white 'native-born' as hapless victims of British imperialism; as a landless, naive group of wholesome proto-nationalists. Molony takes this logic further and argues that by virtue of their low social rank and lack of direct land ownership, the 'native-born' occupy the same colonial subject positions as Aboriginal Australians, the 'other' native born. Molony, in one of his lyrically humanistic moods, almost sings:

> In different ways, the children grew up as natives of the same place with all the common bonds of a shared humanity. They breathed the same air, the same storms drenched their dwelling places, the same hot sun dried their hair and they subsisted from the same earth and water. In the ways of nature they were one in origins, so that each of them, white and black, could be called by the simple word natives.

By giving birth to the white 'native-born' within such a dreamy bush idyll, Molony can then make some outrageously 'simple' claims that the first white Australians were not involved in the dispossession and genocidal policies of the early colonial period. This assumption is supported by selected case studies – such as John Batman's grossly unfair treaty or William Buckley's sojourn in the Geelong bush – and the rhetoric that the 'native-born' were landless, thus

having no interest in violently appropriating Aboriginal lands. Molony's use of the term 'native' also erases the historical complexities of this subject position, avoiding the issues of hybridity, miscegenation and the early colonial discourse on 'half-caste' children. Linda Hardy has described such discursive manoeuvres as a settler poetics of colonisation, as a trope of "natural occupancy", whereby "the politics of racial and cultural domination and resistance are displaced and refigured" by the theme of white settler dispossession.[1]

White Australia's convict birth stain is introduced by Molony as one of the chief ways to position the 'native-born' as landless victims, lowest of the low and equal with Aborigines in colonial society. However, Molony subsequently disowns this convict heritage, claiming it has unfairly stained the first white Australians. In a strategy aimed at erasing such unwanted criminal connotations, Molony reinscribes the 'native-born' as the "innocent generations". This disowning of the convict birth stain also conveniently evades a less flattering and anxious colonial discourse about hereditary convict sexual perversity and its effects on the future of the white Australian race.

Another of Molony's key problems is his concept of nationality. It is far too simplistic. Molony understands nationalism as an "instinctive reality", as an identity that just is, no questions asked:

> Nationality is not subject to change but only to intensity because it states a simple relationship, a bond that leads to solidarity. It says nothing about race, colour, social status, religion or any other factor that can be divisive. It simply tells the other something vital about who and what I am. It says, "Here I belong, these are my people".

Why is difference constructed as divisive? And why does Molony feel a need to simplify his discussion with a masked eurocentric blandness that closes down any debate? Important developments in the study of nationalism, such as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), feminist critiques and postcolonial scholarship are simply ignored. Instead, Molony idealistically empties the concept of any critical meaning in order to promote his own static version of Australian national identity. When Molony does try to offer some substance about the features of early Australian nationalism, he produces a watered down version of Robert Dixon's thesis in *The Course of Empire* (1986), which argued that early Australian nationalism can be characterised as affirming British imperial and nationalist ideals.

Molony's text repeatedly calls for reconciliation between Aboriginal and white Australians and proposes using the example of the 'native-born' as a model or shared history for contemporary black-white relations. Ironically, Molony's study erases collective responsibility for foundational genocidal actions, creating instead an imagined golden age of national white innocence, a marvellous masculinist myth about the immaculate conception of the nation. This type of political stance brings Molony's text dangerously close to John Howard's Blainey-inspired "black armband" (read white amnesia) view of Australian history.

ENDNOTE

1. Linda Hardy, 'Natural Occupancy', *Meridian* 14:2, 1995, p.214.

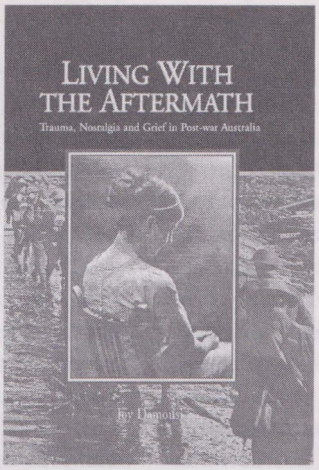
Damien Barlow is an Assistant Lecturer in English at La Trobe University, Albury-Wodonga. He is currently researching the theme of sexual perversity in colonial Australia.

Emotions with a History

Christina Twomey

Joy Damousi: *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia* (CUP, $49.95, hb).

IN RECENT YEARS, Joy Damousi's work has been at the forefront of ways of examining the impact of war on Australian society, culture and its people. Shifting the focus away from soldiers, combat and home-front opposition, Damousi instead explores the private worlds of those left to mourn the dead and mend the wounded. Her previous book, *The Labour of Loss*, charted how the wellspring of grief could drive public activism and forge new identities for those who mourned. This latest book, *Living with the Aftermath*, might well be seen as a companion volume to the former study. Damousi employs the same psychoanalytic model to examine questions of grief and trauma, but here uses a different set of sources – primarily oral history interviews – to ana-



lyse the experiences of a particular group of the bereaved: war widows. In so doing, she challenges readers to consider the history of emotional life as central to the study of the past.

Damousi considers the widows of men who served in the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam. In this study, and indeed, in legislation governing the distribution of widows' pensions, 'war widow' is defined broadly. A war widow is a woman whose husband died while on active service for his country, or died in the years afterwards from injuries or illnesses contracted as a result of war service. All of the subjects interviewed endured the absence of their husbands during the war years. Damousi demonstrates how the experiences of these women produce new insights into how we might conceive of the contribution to war by non-combatants. Forbearance and the emotional support of those who did return emerge as very real sacrifices and service to the nation. These 'private' experiences challenge monolithic conceptions of war and its meaning.

The focus of this work, however, is on the emotional experiences of widowhood. The purpose is to demonstrate that trauma, grief and loss are not ahistorical states but rather, emotions with a history. The inclusion of an analysis of dreams and fantasy is a welcome extension of what historians refer to as their 'sources'. In a series of moving case studies, Damousi shows that the mid-twentieth-century emphasis on repressing grief, hiding emotion and getting on with life meant that many widows had an incomplete experience of mourning. Many of them remained in a state of nostalgia for their lost husbands. In a delicate and nuanced analysis, the author shows how some widows idealised a perfect because never fulfilled love, thereby foreclosing the possibility of replacing their lost husbands. Dominant cultural constructions of particular wars also influenced widows' memories of them. Damousi shows how, for some widows, the perception of Korea as the 'forgotten war', and Vietnam as the 'dirty war' meant an internalisation of the trauma that their husbands' sacrifices had been either forgotten or dismissed (as had their own). The very fact that many of these widows felt moved to speak to Damousi about their grief underlines her point that an earlier emphasis on stoicism has given way to a more recent emphasis on articulation, and the necessity to express and communicate grief.

The decision to include widows whose husbands survived combat but ultimately died as a consequence of the war gives Damousi the space to explore the domestic consequences of life with troubled and traumatised victims. She does not suggest that alcoholism, violence and emotional reticence were universal among returned men. The interview material portrays some post-war marriages that were fractured by alcohol abuse, domestic tension and sometimes violence. For the wives in these marriages, 'the war' as external threat or absence might have been over, but in peacetime it became a new metaphor to describe their own, continuing domestic battles. The un-stated implication of Damousi's work is that it is difficult to disentangle the effects of war on individual men from other cultural factors that licensed forms of masculinity that included the mistreatment and abuse of women. It would constitute a form of disrespect to her interview subjects to suggest that there were reasons other than 'the war' for the troubles that beset their marriages. Many interviewees, however, mention that they had never been interested in remarrying. This was not merely owing to their belief in an irreplaceable love lost, but because they no longer wanted to remain beholden to the washing machine, stove and kitchen sink for someone else. Their independence was long-anticipated and relinquished only reluctantly. This is as much a comment on mid-late twentieth-century gender relations, as it is a reflection of the legacy of life with a returned serviceman.

A study of the 'marriage wars', as Damousi labels them, is the perfect vehicle for her point that in many ways the distinction between the war and post-war periods has been a false dichotomy. The tensions explored here add to the growing body of work on the 1950s and early 1960s that belie its image as a period of domestic bliss and suburban perfection. Damousi's study of war widows and, by default, their husbands, shows that for many Australians the ending of war did not bring personal peace.

Christina Twomey is a lecturer in the Department of History, Adelaide University.

Rosemary and spiders' eggs

David Owen

Peter Craven (ed.): *The Best Australian Essays 2001* (Black Inc, $29.95).

> *Take faire Garbage, chikenes heads, ffete, lyvers, And gysers, and wassh hem clene; caste hem into a faire potte, And caste fressh broth of Beef, pouder of Peper, Canell* [cinnamon], *Clowes, Maces, Parsley and Sauge myced small; then take brede, stepe hit in same brothe, Drawe hit thorgh a streynour, cast thereto, And lete boyle ynowe; caste thereto pouder ginger, vergous* [grape juice], *salt, And a littul Saffereon, And serve hit forthe.*

READING PETER CRAVEN'S *The Best Australian Essays 2001*, I was put in mind of a typically medieval hotchpotch – this one's called 'Garbage' in the recipe books, though that in no way reflects the generally fine contents of this book. Rather, it is the overall recipe that is strange, the putting together of a highly idiosyncratic collection misleadingly trumpeted as the 'best' Australian 'essays' written last year.

There are forty-eight contributions in this annual compilation. They are more or less grouped by type, with multiple subject entries being: September 11 and terrorism, asylum seekers, Aboriginal issues, the ALP and left history, urban and rural social issues, literature, art, biography, science. Readers disinclined to engage with such topics would need to content themselves with the minor placings – single entries on cricket, East Timor, economics, the Galapagos, the national anthem, bridal wear.

If the last of these seems a peculiar ingredient to stir into the pot with terrorism and the politics of xenophobia, it is for me at any rate a standout, fulfilling the requirements of a good essay: well written, not ephemeral, revelatory about some aspect of ourselves over and above its chosen subject matter, and personal (cf. newspaper or magazine article: omniscient, fact-driven). Helen Garner's 'Wedding Dresses' appeared in *The Age* Good Weekend. It's amusing, original, dissective. And far from having to compete with the big stories – in particular September 11 – it's the latter which suffer from being stale news, buried under tons of global newsprint and TV footage. No fault of the writers; and the editor can't ignore such a 2001 topic. But the point needs to be made. For me, Raimond Gaita's reflective 'Terror and Justice' (*Sydney Morning Herald*) would have sufficed.

David Marr's analysis of a Gulf Country native title–mining interests clash (*SMH*), is cool and measured. "The beliefs of the Kaiadilt people are not an issue in this case but they intensify the community's disquiet at the prospect of having a huge ore barge moored in their fishing grounds in a cyclone." His piece contrasts nicely with the intensely personal accounts by Mary Ellen Jordan (*Age, ABR*) of her time spent in Arnhem Land as a white person. No-one, including herself, is spared; the reader benefits.

Entertainingly first-person too is Nicholas Shakespeare's 'Kemp and Potter' (*Granta*), so-named after two nineteenth-century gents who were, respectively, the 'Father of Tasmania' and a distant relative of the author. Shakespeare hunts them down while househunting on the island's east coast. History, biography, archival sleuthing and the difference between rosemary and spiders' eggs combine well here.

Hughes and Plath, Turner (the Father of Impressionism?), Rimbaud, Bob Dylan, all get a guernsey – along with salt, phosphorus, the Gettysburg National Cemetery and a bad-tempered German literary critic.

So what is it all intended to add up to? In his introduction – an extended precis on the excellence of each contribution – the editor trusts that "it's some kind of monument to the best of our journalism as well as our journals and that it testifies to the range of matters that have been written about in Australia during what feels like the first year of a new millennium". In truth, there are some pieces here which at 'best' are run-of-the-mill – blandly structured, the writing unleavened. It begs the question as to how the contributions were chosen.

Eleven of the pieces "appear for the first time in this anthology" – that is, not previously published – which seems to further mystify the selection process. Five were published in 2000, one is an extract from a forthcoming book, four were spoken lectures, and seven are comprised of two or more unrelated articles or essays presented under a generic title. (Thus Helen Garner's 'essay' is called 'Stamp Animals and Wedding Dresses', the first being a minuscule feature on her hunt for a childhood picture book.) That's what I call misleading.

There are many important matters which have no place here: the environment, green politics, right-wing politics, Shier's ABC, Kennedy's National Gallery, youth (no young voice either), genetic modification and cloning, education, to name some.

The whole, unfortunately, doesn't do justice to its parts. Next time round, an essay on the national obsession with being the best might help.

David Owen is the editor of Island.

A Good Sport

Richard Watts

Peter Rose: *Rose Boys* (Allen & Unwin, $29.95).

ROSE BOYS is a memoir by poet and *Australian Book Review* editor Peter Rose concerning his relationship with his family, and his family's relationship to the Collingwood Football Club. The book's spotlight shines most squarely upon Rose's brother Robert, while the author himself lurks indistinct and shadowy at the edge of the light; a ghostly narrator haunting his own life but somehow simultaneously detached from it. This thread of distant ambivalence which runs through the book reflects Rose's relationship with the football club with which his family is most closely associated:

> No-one likes to be thought leadable or suggestible, but in my case it's only half true. I belong to a family with a long record of allegiance. I too belong to that club, notorious or venerable, depending on your loyalties. My membership is purely nominal, quite unearned – vicarious and voyeuristic. I never sought conventional membership down that dangerous race, in those pungent rooms. Yet even in my forties I remain a member, irreversibly. Whatever I do, wherever I go, whatever I write, it is immutable – the sole constant in my life. I may change, but it does not. It is a kind of birthright, as strange to me today as when I was a boy.

In February 1974 Rose's elder brother Robert was, at the age of 22, a successful young athlete who faced the choice of following in his father's footsteps and becoming another Collingwood legend, or dedicating himself to cricket, where he had been nominated as one of the most promising players of his generation. Instead, a car accident on a country road left him paralysed from the neck down. Robert Rose lived for another twenty-five years as a quadriplegic, totally dependent on his family. It is this aspect of his brother's life, as well as Robert's struggle to overcome the depression induced by his injury and live as normal a life as possible, which Rose has dedicated himself to exploring in this memoir.

Frustratingly, Rose is often coy about details of his own life except where they overlap or are impacted upon by his relationship with his brother. For a book whose concerns are such themes as family and masculinity, I found it surprising that Rose neglects (or avoids) exploring the development of his homosexual identity in any detail. While not expecting a coming out story (for this is not an autobiography as such, although it contains many autobiographical elements) the author's reticence at exploring his developing identity as a gay man and contrasting it with his brother's robust heterosexuality strikes me as a significant omission.

No such reserve is evident when Rose comes to describing the developing co-dependence between Robert and his parents, or his brother's romantic relationships in the years after his accident. With sensitivity and care, Rose examines the minutiae of his brother's life through the sometimes untrustworthy prism of his own memories, through interviews with Robert's friends and other family members, and through scrapbooks and newspaper archives. This dedication to research allows Rose to paint a canvas of family life and the impact of disability on same that is both broad in scope and elaborate in detail. Unfortunately the tone and language used to tell the tale are not always as accessible and as active as its subject matter, and there were several times when I found Rose's narrative and language dry, even boring, despite the emotive issues which the book explores. I wonder how many of the people who begin *Rose Boys* will actually finish it, especially those who purchase it through the Collingwood Football Club's website, where it has been heavily promoted?

That said, it cannot be denied that *Rose Boys* is an assured and sustained narrative that accomplishes its aim of documenting Robert Rose's life, and his family's love for him, without having to fall back on the standard biography's traditional linear history. The closing scenes of the book, which describe Robert's death, moved me to tears, and also made me glad that I had persevered through to the end of this sometimes difficult volume. As a book, the overly academic language of *Rose Boys* is sometimes to its detriment; as a memoir, it highlights the unique strengths of the form, which can be so much more

personal and meditative than the stereotypical biographical approach. For that reason if no other, *Rose Boys* should be considered a success.

Richard Watts is a writer, broadcaster, and the founder of the gay and lesbian Collingwood supporters' group the Pink Magpies.

Carn the people!

Phil Doyle

Paul Daffey: *Local Rites* (Black Duck Publications, $24.95).

> *A footy club's a footy club whether you're Jewish, Chinese, Arabic, Catholic, whatever. It's still a footy club.*
>
> – Wayne Harmes, coach of Ajax.

THERE IS THIS internet group called Timelord's Footy Club where a few enigmatic souls document the fortunes and dramas associated with Australian Football as it exists beyond the banality of the bright lights and the choreographed television spectacle.

These hardy enthusiasts should enjoy Paul Daffey's book, but they may also question it. Despite an appendix that documents the results in suburban and country footy across Victoria and the Riverina from season 2000, this isn't so much a book about football as it is about the communities in which football exists, and the people that make up this offbeat world.

"Football clubs are conservative. They struggle to cope with mavericks, but they do recognise a good heart," observes the author in one of the many reflective passages in *Local Rites*.

Football is a lot more dynamic and steeped in drama, Machiavellian politics and quixotic crusades than the casual observation would suggest. As Bruce Pascoe puts it – it is community theatre in a paddock. Daffey's self-published book goes a long way to bringing this to light. It captures the humour, pathos, spirit and exhilaration of a thing that manages to transcend the usual assumptions about where it fits in relation to class, race and gender.

The author is prominent in this collection of weekend narratives that spans geography and time. His personal reminiscences jog alongside voices and places to take this journey beyond the winter of 2000, a host of country towns and suburban footy grounds. It's a book that speaks a lot about time and place, without relegating a living history into some abstract anthropological exhibit.

One area that I found lacking was the attention given to Umpires. I know that football purists will point out that all umpires are bastards – but they're an interesting breed of person that could have fallen within the scope of this book.

Kev Court, who introduced me to Timelord's footy website, speaks of the "subtle poetry of the barrack". There is much to recommend this book, not the least of which is its own soothing poetry. Daffey is barracking for something greater than "the palaver that surrounds ambition". He is barracking for the people.

Local Rites is an important addition to the sparsely populated shelves of football literature. It is also a refreshing departure from the indulgent and remote social commentary in this country. Football is one of the best examples of communities united and divided. It says a lot about who and what Australians are, and where we are going.

Read this book; it'll remind you of something you thought you'd lost.

Phil Doyle lives in the Blue Mountains. He was a back-pocket/interchange specialist with the Cooma Cats.

The Philosophy of Punting

Bernard Whimpress

John Harms: *Memoirs of a Mug Punter* (Text Publishing, $19.95).

I SHOULD BE THE LAST PERSON to review a book about mug punting. I only ever placed two bets in my life, although both on course. The first was on Reckless at the 1977 Melbourne Cup when that rough old stayer and the sentimental favourite, trained by Phar Lap's strapper, Tommy Woodcock, took on the bigger money-connected Gold and Black, trained by Bart Cummings. The second was on some 33/1 shot in the Great Eastern Steeplechase at Oakbank in the Adelaide Hills. Reckless was nosed out to second place and the 33/1 shot finished back in the field somewhere.

However, it was no doubt fortuitous that the book I was reading at the time I picked up Harms' latest

offering was *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea*. Western thought foundered for a long time between infinity and the void. Between lies the valley of tears, a subject Harms is adept at dealing with. Acknowledging Manning Clark's quoting of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, "I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it's all been for", he wants to be there too.

In his previous book, *Confessions of a Thirteenth Man*, Harms tells us (as a son of the Lutheran cloth) that he'll one day tackle philosophy and religion. And in this book he wastes little time getting to the heart of religion, contrasting the value systems of his strict moral upbringing where "tribes were delineated", and where "Mr Menzies and the Liberal Party kept things going along as God had intended them", with the relative Catholic looseness of the Sheahan family and the racing industry whom his brother Mick has married into.

Memoirs is also a book about philosophy. And is there a greater reason for philosophy than mug punting? A "chronic indolent", Harms lives out the lines of the William Hurt character in *The Big Chill* about not being "into this completion thing" and instead finds a new truth: gambling.

This book has an additional reason to be philosophical. Harms declares his Labor Party preferences – left-wing preferences at that – and yet here he tries to take on the big guys in the dress circle at Flemington with his eleventh share of a twelfth share of a country hack called Courting Pleasure, leased from the winemaker Jim Barry. A republican at court in the Sport of Kings, Harms calls his syndicate SAMRA – the Salvador Allende Memorial Racing Alliance, to show how socialism can work in horse racing. The consequent coat-of-arms includes a smiling left-facing, five-legged, far-gazing horse beneath a hammer and sickle. The motto, Go You Bloody Good Thing appears at the top with the lovely Latin *Equi Pecunia Equus Vittoria* beneath. There is also a hilarious chapter concerning a Labor Party function where the pissed author gets then Prime Minister Paul Keating to autograph the first piece of syndicate correspondence. Harms nicknames the horse The Dog – short for the SAMRA's preferred name Dog on Fire – and Courting Pleasure certainly performs regularly like a dog with just an occasional compensatory victory.

In *Memoirs* (as in *Confessions*) the 1982 Camira pumps out the kilometres. This time the road starts from Brisbane to Stawell where Harms will lay his eyes on his mare (or on one hundred-and-thirty-second of it) for the very first time, the drama finally enriched by his deliciously drawn vignette of the old gold town's race meeting:

> I passed the Members' Pavilion where lunch was being served to big-bellied businessmen who had made their money in inheritance and fertiliser and vehicles. They fraternised with the pharmacist in his long socks, and graziers and their sweet-smelling wives. The blokes looked a little uncomfortable in their ties, more a symbol of power than a fashion accessory . . .
>
> At the public bar the beers were flowing. Farm boys with burnt lips sent a message of intent. Girls with too much make-up received it, and hopped into the Southern Comfort. Old codgers in pork-pie hats sat on the garden seat under the paperbark, watching as the bookies formed their ring like frontiersmen ready to ward off the Indians. A couple of kids ran through, one chasing the other with a tennis ball at the ready. I had to break my stride. I walked among the mounting yard, the smell of hay and horse-piss wafting across the stalls.

This is a wonderful prologue. Told that Courting Pleasure is in stall 21, what follows between man and horse is alluring:

> Our eyes met. Her ears pricked. Comrades, she looked magnificent. Absolutely beautiful. She was a bloody good thing – finely built but strong and athletic, like a half-forward flanker. She was a bay with three white socks, although the dark colouring in her legs made her look like she was wearing black stockings as well. On her forehead was a little white diamond. She was checking me out, her back leg moving rather like Mr Ed's [from the 1960s television series] did when he was about to speak.

It is a consummation devoutly completed. Almost. In a tight finish The Dog gets over the line first:

> I was excited and elated, and strangely drained. This was beyond politics. It was something else. Courting Pleasure was true and good and beautiful. I felt small. And honoured. And big. And special. All at once. This was beyond pleasure. It was joy, because I allowed it to be. As if it were an act of grace.

This is religious passion. To Mount Barker, Christmas with family, exhilaration still brimming but no-one to share it with. Surreptitious phone calls. The Camira breaks down (conveniently) so there's time for The Dog's first city meet at Victoria Park. Harms has an owner's pass, wears a disguise of coat and bow tie but this is Colin Hayes and Bart Cummings territory. Unfamiliar. The Dog feels the same. A disappointing sixth. Author is "about as low as the basic wage".

The Dog still can't crack a city win. Harms is back in Brisbane "broke as the Ten Commandments". She finishes fourth and then last at Morphetville. Time for a spell. Hers and his. Author looks around and all he can see is desperation: "grim-faced punters watching their day and maybe their life drift away". Gambling "allows them to demonstrate their lack of self-worth and their unwillingness to engage in acts of self-preservation". Yet "for mug punters, every new day is a fresh start. Every day could be *the* day". Then there is racing: "thunderous hooves sending a vibration through the ground and into your feet like a pipe organ in a cathedral".

The Dog comes back but it's more of the same: six lengths behind at Victoria Park, fourth at Casterton, failure at Caulfield, second at Warracknabeal, bad attitude in defeats at Warracknabeal and Warrnambool, before a victory at Mildura. Does racing have any meaning?

> Beating a bookmaker is like cheating death. It's like betting on the hope that there is something more, that one day the truth will be revealed – and having that bet come home. Punting and racing become poetic expressions of the human condition.

The Dog breaks down and has to be rested. She comes back for a final fling at Morphetville along with a new namesake in the Sheahan stable, Courting Luck. Harms is there. The two horses run at the same meeting. *Courting Luck* wins, the city victory comes at last. Jubilation all round. The Dog is in the last race, "a six years old mare with gammy legs", starting at 200/1. She tries hard, finishes last, it's time to go.

Not quite. Courting Pleasure fades away until after several months the author enquires her whereabouts. When he discovers she is on a farm in the Clare Valley it is time for a last pilgrimage. It takes courage to write of a love between man and beast. Harms evokes an image from *Wuthering Heights*. His Cathy, her Heathcliff but she is in foal. "She'd be a good mum. It seemed like that was all she ever wanted to be."

Memoirs is a great successor to *Confessions* and I look forward to the author's next work on another of his passions, Aussie Rules football. Harms is a risk-taking writer with a novelist's eye and a poet's ear. He has unique insights into Australian sport. This is a work not to be missed.

Bernard Whimpress's most recent book is Passport to Nowhere: Aborigines in Australian Cricket 1850–1939.

Dead Red Dust, No Thankyou

Rob Cover

Richard Rossiter (ed.): *The Model: Selected Writings of Kenneth Seaforth Mackenzie* (UWA Press, $38.45).

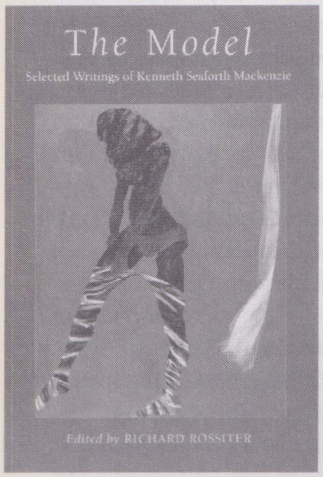
Patsy and Naomi Millett (eds): *Pilgrimage: A journey through the life and writings of Mary Durack* (Bantam Books, $18.95).

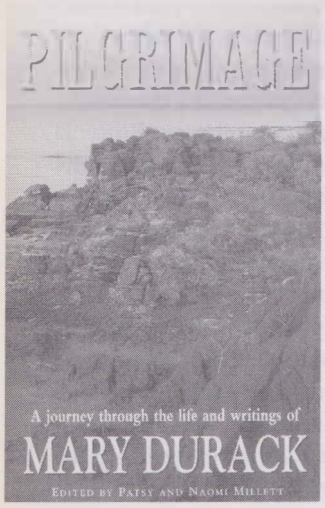
WHERE WORKS OF fiction and extracts are compiled into collections, it is the Name of the Author which gathers the works and provides a logic for their compilation. But collections – indeed, entire literary traditions – are gathered by the similarity of symbolic usage among writers and, more pertinently, by the similar *reading* of those symbols as 'nodal points' holding together a tradition, or a common reference.

In the case of the recently-released collections of Seaforth Mackenzie and Mary Durack's writings, the nodal points under which they can be reviewed are three: West Australian literature, personal links, and a regard for the red-dust 'natural' in the imagination of the effects of an Australian landscape.

Both Durack and Mackenzie are writers with West Australian origins, both are listed in Bruce Bennett's Bibliography of *Western Australian Writing* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990). While it remains common in a nationalistic literary tradition to maintain the circulation of work of dead notable writers, it must at the same time be questioned as to *why* we continue to bother. Is the fact that Mackenzie and Durack are both bred in Western Australia of much significance to a contemporary readership? And are the values and ideals that are accorded in

such works still relevant to today's readers? Asking these questions is not so much a matter of irreverance, nor is it to suggest that a readership market should dominate the ethos behind publication, but to make the simple point that just because a literary tradition of shared symbols of red-earth Australia produces two writers who were once of note does not *automatically* mean their work must be reproduced *ad infinitum*.





But what of the reading that comes from the *personal*? The position from which any reader or reviewer *reads* is always a position influenced by the background discourses from which the reader operates. In the case of these two writers there are two memory-fragments which make a particular reading possible, and influence the 'flavour' with which I might make a review. I recall that in primary school I received some academic award handed over by Mary Durack at a Speech Night. I still remember the several days of rehearsal we underwent – the correct and most respectful way to say "Thankyou, Dame Mary". Until picking up *Pilgrimage* I had never made the journey as far as reading Durack. What is elucidated in making this journey – for me, now – is that the country in which Durack lived and imagined and that of my own are two very different places. For example, her writings on Indigenous peoples are from a European station-owning colonialist's perspective, however sympathetic she might appear in 'Kadaicha' (1955) or 'Johnny Walker-O' (1972) to the plight of the Indigenous peoples. What must be questioned is whether or not her colonialist, naturalising or paternalistic perspectives on Indigenous persons are relevant to a generation of readers crying for reconciliation and the word sorry. In a period in which Australian culture is 'troubled' by its relationships between Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, is it necessary to continue circulation of older, often stereotypical views of a western woman on Aboriginal culture? No Thankyou, Dame Mary.

More interesting for me is the way in which Mackenzie's *The Young Desire It* has been extracted. Discussing the homoeroticism of West Australian writing in an interview some years ago with the late G.M. Glaskin – author of *A Waltz Through the Hills* (1961) and the early Australian gay-positive novel *No End to the Way* (1965) – I recall being pointed to Mackenzie's *The Young Desire It* as an early work dealing with the pseudo-sexual and emotional relationship between a West Australian schoolboy and a teacher at the prestigious Perth school, Guildford Grammar. Extracts from this work have appeared in Robert Dessaix's *Australian Gay and Lesbian Writing* (1993) – indicating the way in which the work is available for a specific contemporary 'gay reading', a significant point in contemporary Australia. Rossiter's selection, however, avoids any reference to that relationship in what can best be understood as a santisation of West Australian writing. While the scholarly interests of this reader immediately highlight this absence, the absence is notable in a collection purporting to represent Mackenzie's writing: a 'heterosexualisation' and 'normalisation' of his writing in an appeal to values which may no longer be relevant either in Australian fiction or Australian contemporary culture.

Significant, however, is the fact that in the introductory essay, Rossiter himself points out that the extract focuses on the boy's relationship with Margaret, the 'third party' among the characters. Rather than *daring* to reference all three characters and thereby show how Mackenzie's writing can be read to indicate a breaking down of the historical hetero/homo binary, he prefers to note the ways in which the "sexual advances of the older man" are set against the boy's "dawning attraction to Margaret" which he points out, correctly, occurs in the context of the midsummer West Australian landscape among the trees, etc. This is, however, a reading which is repetitive of the hetero-awakening into patriarchal masculinity which belongs to an older, past culture in Australia, and obscures the possibility of the work being read in ways which are contrary to this older stereotype.

In the re-release of these two writers' works, I am doubtful of any contemporary relevance of an Australian 'nature' among today's readers. While our politicians continue to hark back to these symbols of an Australian togetherness in their attempts to evoke 'mateship' and the donning by the Prime Minister of an akubra hat, the contemporary usage of these symbols is more often considered laughable than laudable by a modern Australian culture. I wonder how many readers will have seen first-hand the red dust of the outback that is represented on the cover of Durack's *Pilgrimage*, and I am not about to encourage people to do so in order to become somehow more 'fully Australian'. The culture of contemporary Australia is urban, troubled by its Indigenous relationships, often – and perhaps rightly – neglectful of the old symbols of the great outback, the stockfarmers' whips, the awakening into masculinity among the trees and bushes.

The re-release of these works represents a certain attempt to maintain a link with an Australian or West Australian past, re-circulating old and irrelevant symbols of an Australianness such as the red-dust descriptions of the mythical Australian outback, the hetero(sexual)normativity of an Australian past culture, the play of Australian 'nature' and 'naturality' in characterisations, the colonialist and farm-owning communities' roles in establishing content. While the majority of the selections provide a good introduction to both writers, the question of relevance in re-circulating the works of dead authors representing dead cultures remains.

Rob Cover recently completed a PhD at the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies. His fields of interest include queer theory, media theory and contemporary literary fiction.

The Work of Being

John McLaren

Merv Lilley: *The Channels* (Vulgar Press, $25).

READERS OF Merv Lilley's earlier works will welcome this latest book, which the blurb describes as "a fictionalised autobiography of a Lilley-like figure who travelled Queensland looking for work, strife and political struggle in the 1950s and onwards." Yet it is very different from much of his earlier work. Unlike *Git Away Back!*, a marvellous grab-bag of poems, yarns and recipes collected or written over his lifetime, this book is a single narrative that integrates action and reflection. "Socialist realism meets stream of consciousness," Ian Syson remarked of it. It is in the style of his two recent contributions to *overland*, the first of which, 'The Call of the Running Tide: the main bout with Ming the merciless', (*overland* 142) Lilley described as coming from a novel in progress. I presume that *The Channels* is this novel, although that particular narrative does not appear in it. It has however the same style, in which the moment leads to reflection leads to action leads to politics leads to further reflection. Each element is integral to the whole, so that we never feel we are reading a political tract or a tale of action or an introspective indulgence, but rather that we are sharing with the author a quest for unity and meaning that will incorporate the whole of his physical and mental being as an individual in a land and a society.

The novel opens with an invocation of the Channel country in full flood. This image of a generous land quickly turns into a condemnation of a government that accepts the generosity while neglecting the struggles through which labour has tried to spread the generosity. These struggles have left a trail of bitter vengeance as the other side cries for more blood from the unions and the grey waters swirl away trivial loss. The story immediately takes us to the shearers' quarters where the rain has stopped the shearing, and so to the characters in the shed, to Longfellow Jack Long, the 30-year-old narrator, and his dangerous red agitation, and so to Menzies and the political–religious alliance that at the time was trying to crush the Communist Party and the militant unions it led.

The remainder of the book only moves forward two years, to the eve of the anti-Communist referendum, but, as the narrator takes us from shearing shed to strikes in the Mt Isa mine, from cane-cutting to shovelling coal on the big ships, the reflections his experiences trigger take us back to his youth on a poverty-stricken farm, to his times as a drover, fencer, soldier, and boxer, and to the men and women he has known as he wanders around north Queensland, the east coast of Australia, and New Zealand. This is however no mere picaresque tale, but the story of a quest for an understanding that he hopes will eventually be expressed through his work, through the right woman, and through political leadership. The

quest reveals the contradictions he finds at the heart of life: between a desire for justice and brotherhood on the one hand, and his need to establish his own dominance over others, his refusal to serve any boss, on the other. This makes him an uneasy member of the Communist Party, an uncertain lover, a difficult employee, and, when the need arises, a brutal, and possibly lethal, fighter.

When John Long fights the boss drover almost to death, he realises that he has "moved into the animal stage of kill or be killed". Where, he wonders, does this fit into the brotherhood of man? He decides it belongs in the great work syndrome of man "the great runner, the dancer, the fucker, the great horse-rider, the breaker." The boy becomes a man by using brute force to establish his own place in society, but the act of definition is also a threat to society itself. This dilemma confronts him repeatedly – in the war, as he becomes a member of the ship's crew and the Seamen's Union, when he loses a girl by taking her away from a man who wants nothing more than quick sex.

Jack Long, like the author, resists any attempt to resolve this dilemma through the consolations of religion. His is the atheist's creed: he

> cannot believe in fate, he can believe in what he knows, in what he sees, in reason itself, he can believe in searching for reason, for knowledge. He can believe in being alive still. He can believe in what's best for the world and his power to influence it. He can believe that the power to shovel coal well must come from a healthy body and mind, in having believed in right things needing to be done all your life. That was pretty close to the purpose of life, to serve the world by changing it to what was the best for it and every animal including man within it.

"A tall order," he admits, but "a good purpose that must *ring out wild bells to the wild sky* and thereunder."

The bells he rings are the words he finds that are true to his experience. In the most recent story Lilley wrote for *overland*, 'About Robbie', Robbie is a fencer who employs the young Merv, who lives words, and is prepared to stake Merv to learn to use them himself. But, unlike Merv, he is not prepared to move beyond polemic, words used as weapons, and find the words that tell the true stories of people and places, to find the words that will unbury the naked stories and spread them far and wide, fertilising the ends of the earth and growing their own ideas. In *Channels*, Jack Long follows his spirit to the ends of the earth – or at least to New Zealand – as he works to find the words that will complete his physical work and loves by destroying the lies and uncovering the truths that are made through experience. Words say for the workers *We have been here, this is our cavalcade of Herculean labour. We gave of our best, we were treated worse than animals by the class that uses us*. They are an essential part of the struggle for the right to share in the wealth created by labour.

The novel is a masculine book, in the same way that it is a workers' book. It represents a male view. The narrator is driven in part by his need for women, or rather for an ideal woman, someone who will match his commitment and his energy. It is not a chauvinist book, for the ideal woman he seeks will be his equal in every respect. His failure to find this woman within the time of the narrative is due as much to his own unreadiness to give this commitment as to any unwillingness from the women he meets.

The book is a celebration of physical, mental and spiritual life, the spiritual residing completely in the material. It is a portrait of the artist not as a young man but as a young worker learning to use mind and body as instruments of liberation both personal and social, for he knows that the individual cannot exist without society, but society is known only through the individual. The individuals who possess his mind are those whom society respects and rewards least, but who give the writer his life.

John McLaren is overland*'s consulting editor. This review is based on his talk at the launch of* The Channels.

Off With His Head

Pam Skutenko

Elizabeth Jolley: *An Innocent Gentleman* (Penguin, $30).

A RECENT ARTICLE in the *New York Times Book Review* announced that the characters in Saul Bellow's latest collection of short stories were "expert practitioners of the art of reminiscence". Much further back in time, someone else (who must have been a notable for I still remember

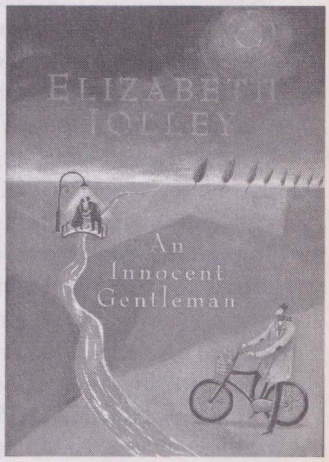
it), described *Finnegans Wake* as the view we'd have of a character's mind if we sliced the top off his head. While saluting James Joyce, this reviewer is prepared to say that Elizabeth Jolley's position as raconteur extraordinaire of the goings on inside people's minds might be unparalleled in English literature.

Shortly after the Australian author became the first to be translated under a reciprocal arrangement with a French publishing house, Lucy Frost interviewed the translator during a session at the Salamanca Writers' Festival. Some of the discussion centred on the difficulties idiom and national identity introduce into translation. More interestingly for this reviewer, there was talk also of Elizabeth Jolley's capacity to write directly from the unconscious. As metaphor in *The Well*, Hester's guilt skulked in a black hole under a piece of tin in her yard. In the author's latest novel, *An Innocent Gentleman*, the broodings of a soul cringing from his own insignificance spill onto the page and into the light of day.

Meet Henry Bell, provincial school teacher, recording his wife's menstrual cycle in his diary and fantasising about writing novels that elucidate Dostoevski's 1878 letter to a young mother (an equivocal treatise on kindness). Henry's wife, Muriel teaches German on the side at night. At Henry's suggestion she invites one of her students to Sunday lunch, a gentleman, Mr Hawthorn. In food-rationed Britain this is no lightly made offer. And with Henry's desperation to control everything over which he's unlikely to have the slightest influence (except for Muriel), it's no coincidence either. He tells Muriel she can do "rice pudding in the bottom of the oven while the bit of meat and potatoes are baking on the top shelf" and they will "discuss . . . sermons . . . with the first course and perhaps predict the weather with the pudding". Vintage Elizabeth Jolley!

The narrative is delivered with a faultless fluidity in the prose and a gentility of phrase that is a construction of the voice. Although the novel is written in the third person, the prose and phrasing render the voice with the properties of a first-person monologue. Inevitably, the outside world disrupts Henry's ego fantasies. At these moments, he ruminates on the war. Linked to the notion of chaos epitomised in Henry's mind by women's "monthly bleeding", the war "divides people". An initial testiness over impositions like rationing and blackouts settles as Henry reminds himself of military conventions such as rank and, particularly, the salute. Who gives and who receives the salute is a matter of law. Henry's contemplation of this in terms of his relationship to Muriel, restores his internal equilibrium. Like a piece of delicately crafted filigree, Henry's war ruminations thread through the novel in a sustained metaphor for the Bells' marriage. The complexity of the metaphor is breathtaking, but there are elements in the exposition of the tale that sap what Marion Halligan has described as the wonderfully exhilarating savagery in Elizabeth Jolley's writing.

Early in Mr Hawthorn's induction into the Bells' household, Muriel watches Henry brush rose petals off the gentleman's trouser legs. Muriel muses that "Henry might have a generous feeling towards small boys at some time in his experience." A sinister inference, it comes to nothing. Similarly, their little daughters enjoy the company of a minor character, Victor, who puts his head under their skirts. Victor turns out to be considerably less than this implies. Confronted in watery darkness under a bridge by a demented Muriel, the wretchedly crippled and helpless Victor can be read as a reflection of the victim Muriel really is, controlled by Henry's obsessions, subjugated to his vicarious sexual gratification, and manipulated by Mr Hawthorn's incestuous exploitation. Or is Victor metaphor for something else that hasn't quite coalesced in the author's imagination? Guinea pigs dressed in baby clothes, sinking in the creek, and a mother who likens her unborn baby to piglets are typically Gothic splashes. They're unconnected with each other or anything else in the way Waldemar's false teeth on the tablecloth are part of the Gothic fabric of *Milk And Honey*.



Thomas Mann's "subtlest thing of all" (author's introductory quote), that the lover is nearer the Divine than the beloved, delivers Henry to a terrible humiliation. It should draw our empathy even for this obsessively egocentric man. Instead, the even-tempered tone cemented into the voice by the phraseology overruns the dramatic events. Henry's shame at his appropriation of the sexual arousal Mr Hawthorn stirs in Muriel is drained of the intensity we felt along the path of shattered illusions that took

Vera from sheltered girlhood to womanhood in *My Father's Moon*.

Muriel's visit to the secondhand bookstore is a fresher moment. Her guilty resentment in the dusty little shop down off the street leaks enough spite to evoke the longing we've known in so many of the author's characters. Muriel's own voice begins to fill her out in this brief episode, but then it's back to Henry. Mr Hawthorn is a silhouette, passing in front of Henry and Muriel's window on the world. Their view gives the reader nothing to illuminate the gentleman's part in the incestuous tangle.

Despite the tragic irony of a man's collusion in his own self destruction, *An Innocent Gentleman* doesn't carry the situation with the dramatic tension it deserves. My way through allusions, dangling like shoelaces and Henry Bell's compulsive tolerance found me longing for a glimpse of the "unlovely" Miss Edgely in Annabel Thorne's bed or the Gothic revulsion of Waldemar's bloated body in his own.

Pam Skutenko is a Melbourne writer. She studied pianoforte and sculpture in Sydney, and took degrees in Behavioural Science and Education after settling in Melbourne.

Real Questions

Nicole Moore

Susan Lever: *Real Relations: Australian Fiction, Realism, Feminism and Form* (Halstead Press, $28.95).

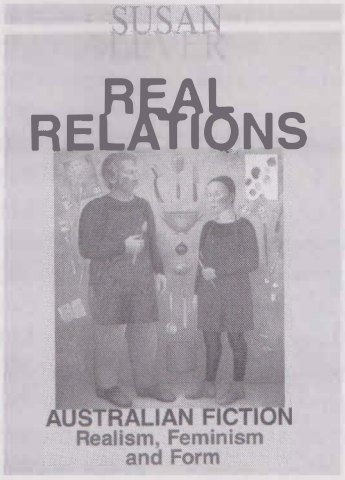
REAL RELATIONS is the fourth title in the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) Literary Series, published by Halstead Press. The series is an important one designed to "promote detailed debate" about Australian literary culture, surely the brief of ASAL and an aim that Susan Lever's new study pursues. Her contribution is to bring nine or so studies of prominent or much debated Australian writing into an ordered argument, using their contrasts to focus on the interplay of literary form with politics. Her approach is to value detailed readings, engaging at length with each example on something like its own terms. The aestheticist motivations behind this approach can perhaps be illustrated in her comment in relation to Stead, that: "Any great novel challenges literary theory".

Realism, feminism and fictional form are the triangulated concerns of *Real Relations*. Realism features as the focal term and for me this is what matters of Lever's project, in returning questions about the workings, value and activity of what has been the dominant form of Australian novels, including those by women, to some new developments in literary theory. Lever suggests that feminist literary analysis, strongly dominated by poststructuralist and psychoanalytic approaches, has privileged experimental or modernist writing as the only sources of radical meaning. This position extends beyond feminist concerns to other analyses of resistant writing (postcolonialism is an obvious example, as David Carter has suggested). This then poses a problem for Australian literary historians, confronted by a tradition that has (albeit unevenly) valued the radical practice of predominantly realist, often women writers. Lever questions the poststructuralist orthodoxies of Catherine Belsey and co., which would argue that realism itself is a conservative form, forged in the articulation of capitalism's self-made man and serving to replicate rather than challenge dominant models of authority and history. She is not the first to do this of course, but in Australian contexts this problem is still an interesting one. It can seem that the return to history of cultural and literary inquiry, in the wake of poststructuralism and high theory, has not fully reassessed the historical claims of representative fiction, in Australia's conflicted, argumentative and politicised novelistic tradition.

Real Relations discusses fourteen writers as they're listed on the back cover, four of whom are men and ten women. Lever's approach insists on the importance of redirecting feminist accounts to a 'broader' history of Australian writing, including analysis of male, non-feminist or even anti-feminist writers. She includes four 'interludes' on canonical men writers, the most interesting of whom is Vance Palmer, since his work is no longer really discussed. But this almost backhanded extension is where some of the force of her project is dissipated; in making room, for example, to argue for the worth of David Foster's experiments and supposed challenges to feminist thought, when his work is, as she elaborates, neither realist nor feminist.

Lever reads Ada Cambridge, Joseph Furphy, Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Vance Palmer, Patrick White, Helen Garner with Sally Morgan, and a selection of contemporary feminist experimental writers. In a book on realism and feminism in Australia I expected

more substantial engagement with social and socialist realism as well as popular realism, from more straightforward examples, like Ruth Park or Louis Stone, the Realist Writers or even Morris West. The book discusses Stead's responses to socialist realism and analyses Prichard's preemptive, naturalist *Coonardoo* in the context of socialism, but Prichard's later, more theoretically informed realist novels are not given any sustained treatment. Lever usefully points to some of the neglected implications of Stead's Marxism and says, "Stead's novels recognise that the rigid paradigms of socialist realism do not challenge the conservative proprietorship of 'reality'; they merely offer a new ownership of it". In logical response – doesn't a different ownership change the nature of the ownership? It's only the fact of ownership that remains unchanged. If radical realist visions of the world had any impact at all, their challenge surely stretched to the models available for viewing that world. The claims and failures of proper socialist realism needed some detailed treatment, at least, in a book on Australian realism.



More definitions of what is meant by realism in the context of Australian twentieth-century writing, as well as more obvious limits on its possibilities would have been useful. Reading feminist experimental fiction for its realist qualities seems needless, in a way. White's *The Twyborn Affair* is positioned as the most provocative or critically interesting of White's novels for feminism, as other critics interested in sexuality have noted. But what is White doing in a book on realism? Like David Foster and Sam Watson – neither of them realists – Lever finds that White opens up more interesting questions and is more feminist than many readings have suggested. But to argue this values these writers' *non-realist* features. It's confusing – all this finding the realism in non-realism and valuing the non-realist aspects of realism (as she does in Richardson and Palmer), as well as arguing for the abstracting worth of modernist or satirical anti-feminist work. What is feminist realism? What can it do as itself? These questions, answered well by Rita Felski or Nancy Armstrong, would form Lever's central concern, you'd think, and yet they seem to disappear.

If realism isn't inherently conservative – as her introduction began perhaps to allow – why necessarily work away from it, looking only for writing's ability to 'transcend' or complicate form, rather than being *made* in it? There is enough theoretical work done on realist conventions to make examining its modes worthwhile, rather than having to accept that they must be undone in order to be literary. Lever values 'lyricism', or its ability to disrupt the realism in Vance Palmer's *The Passage*, for example, reading his masculinist liberalism against the grain. In this way, despite the questions at the heart of the debate she might be engaging in, Lever doesn't really put the standard liberal aesthetic criteria used to constitute literary value at risk. Because of this, her account doesn't seem to offer the new directions it could. Nor does it quite manage to synthesise its juxtapositions into new ideas about either categorisation or tradition.

More provokingly, it employs a pretty threadbare selection of current Australian feminist literary scholarship. Developing debates about Stead are missed and the analysis of *Coonardoo* and *My Place* neglects a growing body of scholarship from Indigenous and non-Indigenous critics about identity, authority and land ownership, even in relation to these specific texts. Surveying the body of work on the women writers from the thirties and forties, she reproduces Modjeska's private/public distinction in distancing women's concerns from political ones. Then she argues that those writers only came to prominence because men suffered the greatest burdens of depression and war, were absent, dead or starving and thus couldn't exploit their talents. This doesn't seem to employ the insights of feminist social analysis or history, either, in any obvious way.

Real Relations does have lots of engaged detail and some interesting unusual comparisons, brought together in the context of what are good questions. Halstead and ASAL will keep publishing more Australian literary criticisms, I hope, and more that are developed as unified projects for each book's own sake, grounded in argument first of all.

Nicole Moore is a postdoctoral research fellow in English at Macquarie University.

Silent Numbers

Lee Cataldi

π.o.: *The Number Poems* (Collective Effort Press, $15).

EACH OF THESE POEMS consists of a square like a matrix of 24 numbers by 11 numbers, plus a title. As with many post-modern works, the relation of the title to the work is a crucial part of it, and this relationship is often comic. Many of these little productions are funny, and are based on either a verbal or a visual joke, introduced by the title.

Here is an example of the number poem as verbal joke, 'Half Time':

0.49999999999999999999999
99999999999999999999999
99999999999999999999999
99999999999999999999999
99999999999999999999999
99999999999999999999999
99999999999999999999999
99999999999999999999999
99999999999999999999999
99999999999999999999999

The point of course is that for the player half time never seems to arrive.

An example of the number poem as visual joke is 'Zip':

000011111111111111111000
000000011111111111000000
000000000111111100000000
000000000001110000000000
000000000000 .00000000000
000000000000100000000000
000000000000000000000000
000000000000000000000000
000000000000000000000000
000000000000000000000000
000000000000000000000000

Here the zip is visible, plus in the last '1' what it covers, both physically and metaphysically.

There is a metaphysical dimension, or a potential metaphysical dimension to some of these, and this dimension was promised in the series of quotes with which the book opens. An example of this might be the poem 'Untitled':

111000111000111000111000111
110001110001110001110001110
100011100011100011100011100
000111000111000111000111000
001110001110001110001110001
011100011100011100011100011
110001110001110001110001110
000111000111000111000111000
001110001110001110001110001
011100011100011100011100011
111000111000111000111000111

In this the 1s and the 0s cancel each other out, leaving mathematically nothing, with only one last 1 left in the bottom right hand corner, not either deserving or getting a title. A further irony is that the title which is denied conveys essential information and is in fact a postmodern active title.

The centre of the book is section II, 'the movie' which is a love poem. The problem of the number poems as poems is that without the titles or the verbal bits they would be meaningless. They function more as witty illustrations of the words than as communications that can stand alone. This seems to me very much of our own time, like paintings which are illustrations of their titles. The modernist number poem would have had numbers only, and would thus have been either obvious or incomprehensible. Whatever the probably obvious numerical key to this, I have not got it, '109!:62!':

144385958320249358220488
210246279753379312820313
396029159834075622223378
449834820996360011956152
592770840333876198180928
047377147583842443341602
173747200000000000000000
00000000 : 314699732603387
937525653122354950764088
012280797258232192163168
247821107200000000000000

The number poems themselves are very unlike mathematics proper. Mathematical systems are self-referential and enclosed. They require a mental stretch to intuit the relations between the elements of the system. Their beauty lies in that we invent them but we do not know all about them. Of course this does resemble art, but it is not the same. The numbers in π.o.'s poems are not the numbers of mathematics.

My other criticism of these poems is that I miss the sound. Perhaps by their silence they tell us what we miss, and suggest to us that we might appreciate it more when it is there, and thus make us better readers. *The Number Poems* is a perverse book, writing poetry with one's tongue tied. However I will end with two I particularly liked, either of which should be a contender for the Sports' Poetry Prize. The first is 'Game':

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00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000200000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
22222222222022222222222
```

Here the game, between two people, goes on as matches do until you get to the point of all sport, the sudden desperate struggle.

The second is 'Boxing':

```
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000001000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000020000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000
```

Here is the tragedy of boxing, one winner, no interest, two eventually ruined or dead. It needs the contrast with the preceding Game to show how the shape demonstrates how uninteresting it is.

To conclude, *The Number Poems* is an interesting collection, but 1 may be enough.

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.*

solitudes that resonate: new poetry

Kerry Leves

Cassie Lewis: *High Country* (Little Esther Books, $11).

CASSIE LEWIS is a young (born in 1974) Australian poet presently living in the USA, and this is her first, chapbook-sized collection. It's both elegiac and dynamic, a physicalisation of a state of loss: a lover's going felt as death, written as a kind of death while life goes on, multifariously, in that emptied space. It's created mostly on five- and six-beat line rhythms, using imagery that's by turns concrete and abstract. You could say it develops abstraction out of the closely observed specific: "It's as though I see you/ but you're an eddy in the cloud/ like a horse that's shed its harness,/ blustering, lyrical then gone." The concrete images – rocks, a creek, "sandy earth", the verandah of a plasterboard house, "rain, slant-wise and hard", "fresh snow grazing on astonished winter flowers" – draw a reader's attention to details of a place, lived-in and lived with. The persistent rhythmic beat – suggesting but not acting-out a formal mood – enables reflections on time's presence in the poetry, as cycle (diurnal, seasonal, impersonal) and as progression (narrative, historical, personal). "Tomorrow happens now/ precisely because there is no god in us – if I do not kill/ it is because I have an old birdcage/ hanging in my hall/ and see a human back in its wooden curvature." Lewis's style risks preciousness but manages a cohesion that isn't always tied to cause-and-effect. The poems (they're strongly linked) often proceed by non sequiturs, which act as emotional gear-changes. Lewis neither short-changes on emotion nor sticks boringly to a single emotional mode. Melancholy, rage, irony, resolve and doubt – they're all there, and what keeps a reader moving through them is Cassie Lewis's unsolemn but compelling poetic art.

MTC Cronin: *Bestseller* (Vagabond Press, $22).

ANYONE WHO'S READ the poems she contributes to *Green Left Weekly* (under the rubric 'Museworthy') knows MTC Cronin can write potent political commentary, juicy, urgent, scalpel-sharp. Cronin's *Green Left* poems read as statements but stay in the mind as questions. She doesn't spell out a moral or moralistic attitude, but explores a relationship, e.g. that between a multinational beverage bottler and impoverished women and infants ('Fanta

Babies', *GLW*, 5 December 2001), using a freely patterned poetic form as a tool of inquiry. Her poetry takes the reader on a trip into the human dimensions of a situation that could be explained in other language as just one more economic, socio-political structure. *Bestseller* explores the function of poetry in the poet's life and the role of poetry among social phenomena. It's speculative and teasing. The prosody is tighter, more musical than in her previous big collection, *Everything Holy*. Most of the poems have a rhythmic bounce, as if the lines were becoming airborne. Reading *Bestseller* fast, late at night, after a rotten day at work, was like taking a full-moon balloon flight among clouds and stars – a dream worth staying awake to have. MTC Cronin is a great phrasemaker, as Peter Porter has noted on the back cover; as a poet, she's also a great party giver – you, the reader, may feel you're circulating among your own thoughts, magically attired and dancing, made graphic by a brilliant host, a grand illusionist, a poet.

Philip Hammial: *Bread* (Black Pepper, $16.95).

IF LOU REED were updating his most famous song to these duty-of-care times he might add that if you are taking a walk on the wild side, you are probably moving too slowly for the good of your health. Philip Hammial's *Bread* is an alert, prowling lope across the earth-clung, wormy underbelly of our culture. Hammial lifts the stone, rolls it back – shows us the efflorescence of rot underneath, decay as animal action, contempt as a three-ring circus. Hey, that stuff looks amazing – but, Jesus! it's moving, it's acting on us . . . One action is evacuation, principally of the self, which is displaced, kicked out of any certainties regularly and brutally: "the party's/ over, the last guest leaving with my children/ in tow . . ." Hammial keeps his syntax almost insanely crisp; he's very matter-of-fact in linking the least obvious things, the mythic "Fourth Reich" and the mystical longing for a poetry that's "clear and concise"; Christian hypocrisy and its dubious tradition: "Fornicators dismantle a resurrection./ Prepare a balcony for takeoff." What's startling – and I think original – is the way shibboleths are torn down in a terse, colourful, street-talkin' style: "*A 21st birthday* – Jump on a bus & give the moon, your youth & a bar of soap to the bus driver. If successful (if all three items are accepted without question) get off at the next stop & at the no-longer-there moon set up a howl. Persist with this until you're taken away by the police." Hammial also serves up a lot of nasty fun at the expense of that poetic afreet, the lyrical "I" – "an effigy of myself/ to do with as you will" – plus heads of state, ("They are, from first/ to last, pneumatics./ Anyone, even an infant,/ can pump them up"), colonels, a junta, medicos, a suicide, tourists, armies and a certain "Howard": "A face, in the final analysis, that's down on all fours." Zan Ross notes on the back cover: "It's jazz on the page." I disagree – it's rock'n'roll, post-punk; it's got the directness of rap along with a verbal pizzazz and intellectual fullness that rap doesn't usually extend to. Hammial is also a kinetic artist, a portrait sculptor in scrap metal and junk oddments, an endlessly inventive materialiser of demons comical and nightmarish. One of them is on the cover. This book could be dubbed UTAOP – unfair to all other poets – because of its brilliance and acrobatic speed in getting its points across. But those are also reasons for poets and non-poets to read it.

Barry Hill: *The Inland Sea* (Salt, $19.95).

A STEAMILY CARNAL, opaquely difficult love affair takes place in the outback. There are many sexy, arousing lines, but the broader purpose is to celebrate and, perhaps, bond together three desert romances – the one inscribed in the Biblical *Song of Solomon*, the contemporary lovers' story, and that of the poet, reaching out in words to the indigenous spirit of the place. This is ambitious. It's a demanding task, to make archaic language – particularly the *Song of Solomon* with its sugary, florid sentimentality – speak to and for contemporary people. Elizabeth Smart broke the ground here, but her poetic novel, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down And Wept*, also a chronicle of tormented love, scored by its use of contrast – white-bread American English of the 1940s, grindingly banal, collided head-on with the *Song of Solomon* in the Elizabethan English of the King James Bible (which sounded thrilling). Barry Hill has used the New English Bible and its pedestrian style is not helpful, exposing metaphors (there are a great many, dates and apricots predominating) drained of affect. Landscape alone doesn't make a context; the context of poetry is also poetry – a discourse with a long history of uses. In *The Inland Sea*, the poet's celebratory purposes, perhaps because they are undertaken so earnestly, tend to be crowded into poem after poem. Thus an observation of camels – in itself fresh and arresting – gets cluttered with the book's thematic, Biblical-erotic preoccupations. Even so, *The*

Inland Sea should definitely be read, partly because it evokes the outback via some pristine, deeply beautiful imagery, and partly because it may provoke thought about ladling Biblical language – the language that empowered the British Empire's colonists, missionaries and settlers – over indigenously-named domains. The "mystic marriage of desert traditions" mentioned by David Malouf on the back cover, may turn out to be as painful and finally unworkable as the love affair that gives the book its narrative spine. It should be noted Salt's production values are impeccable – an intriguing painting reproduced in full-colour on the front cover, and a page layout that respects the poetry's unhasty rhythms.

Geraldine McKenzie: *Duty* (PaperBark Press, $30).

A POETRY THAT'S been highly and/or deeply influenced by the American 'language' workers, notably – I think – by Susan Howe, whose Emily Dickinson poems stage one hell of an argument with the Calvinism that makes the context and animates the feeling-tones of Dickinson's poetry. Geraldine McKenzie writes into a European-Jewish context, less metaphysically morbid than Dickinson's, but equally authoritarian. And there's the rub – if you want to dismantle the pretensions of The Author/Poet, it seems you are constrained to do so in a context where those pretensions matter; that's to say, in a space where 'author' = 'authority' = 'authoritarian' = (probably) Jehovah. With incredible persistence and a lot of artistry McKenzie evokes such a context: the way-up-there traditions of European High Art – the magnificence, the criminally exquisite conceits, and the names that go with them – Mozart, Franz Marc, Yeats, for instance. This high culture is imbricated with the death camps of the Jewish holocaust, remarkably in the poems 'Illuminations' and 'Testament'. In the latter the slippery conscience and small-scale power anxieties of a German *homme moyen sensual* – the cream-filled pastry that can "obliterate Rumania", the quick lust and paterfamilial bossiness – are graphically done. 'Illuminations' makes its central situation that of the female Jewish musicians who were forced to form small orchestras and play the classics in the death camps (there's a film about them starring Vanessa Redgrave, available on video). McKenzie does wonders with the material, her poetry managing an uncliched tenderness while indelibly etching the violence. But the religious argument here is inevitably an argument with a God who could countenance such things, so McKenzie opens it to argue with poetry and finally with language itself, the intractable English language, a tongue not built for poetry (which makes some of its poets' achievements the more remarkable). McKenzie digs very deeply into English poetic traditions, via Empson (is all lyric poetry indeed a "version of pastoral"?), bringing out the rain-like beauty of old English lyrics, recapturing for a contemporary reader glimpses of that original magic. But McKenzie also gives her own sense of poetic history the rough end of the pineapple, questioning incessantly the claims of art (poetry) to be redemptive. She sets 'em up (sometimes naively – "I don't think poetry/ can save us" – no, neither do I) and invites you the reader to knock 'em down. My copy of *Duty* is already scored with back-answers, questions, comments. The best aspect of this book is that it seeks your participation. Anyone remember Jethro Tull? "I may make you feel/ but I can't make you think . . ." *Duty* could make you think, if you let it. Aside from many passages that work poetic sorcery (e.g. "your standing in my doorway/ lopsided with lust offering/ to change shadow into flesh/ with gestures shaped through time/ so humans might pass, briefly, out") there's boldness, rudeness, broadsides to get into, to engage with. My one trouble or quibble is the amount of space given to tracing and assaulting and yes, redeeming some facets of Judeo-Christian poetic tradition, which still has the effect of exalting the tradition and seeming to squeeze out other ways of writing and thinking that, in a multicultural age and country, are not so very inaccessible or obscure. *Duty* could be read in conjunction with Sam Wagan Watson's *Of muse, meandering and midnight* and *Hotel Bone* for a different – subtle, playful, deadly – questioning of that tradition's products (e.g. the alienated romantic poet). But *Duty* will feed your astonished and admiring head – just don't approach the reading of it as a duty.

Lucy Williams: *Birthmarks* (fip, $9.95).

IRRESISTIBLY LIKEABLE – but why? This isn't a poetry of high ambition or profound erudition, yet it does what many poets would love to do, effectively – it creates feeling-and-thought worlds of the everyday, and does so with aching poignancy. The poems are situational – a boy, his father and a gun; a hooker padding her purse; a tired waitress on the psychic shuttle between the demands of work and an insen-

sitive horny boyfriend; home as a slovenly, liberating yet also a death-scored sanctuary; a painter's lack of emotional commitment, which feeds his miserably effective art; a woman grieving for her dead baby. "There is a family parked in the street/ and two on the porch, watching/ picking over your demolished heart for trinkets/ wishing they could fast-forward you to safety." What's unusual, a strength that seems to come from vast self-discipline – is the thoroughness that's never unsubtle or over-explicit; the patient expenditure of intelligence and feeling to make the poetry's people and their circumstances take hold of a reader, move them to recognition and memory. There are poems about movies, and these show the same talent for – what is it? – illusions of emotional accuracy; the one about Hitchcock's *Vertigo* delivers more of that film's sensual dreaminess and psychosexual tensions than several critical studies I've read. There are also references to the American painter Edward Hopper, like Lucy Williams a poet of solitudes that resonate far beyond their immediate context.

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet and critic.

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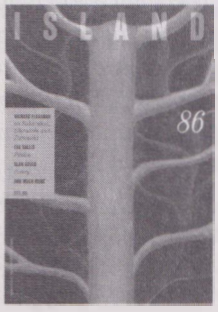

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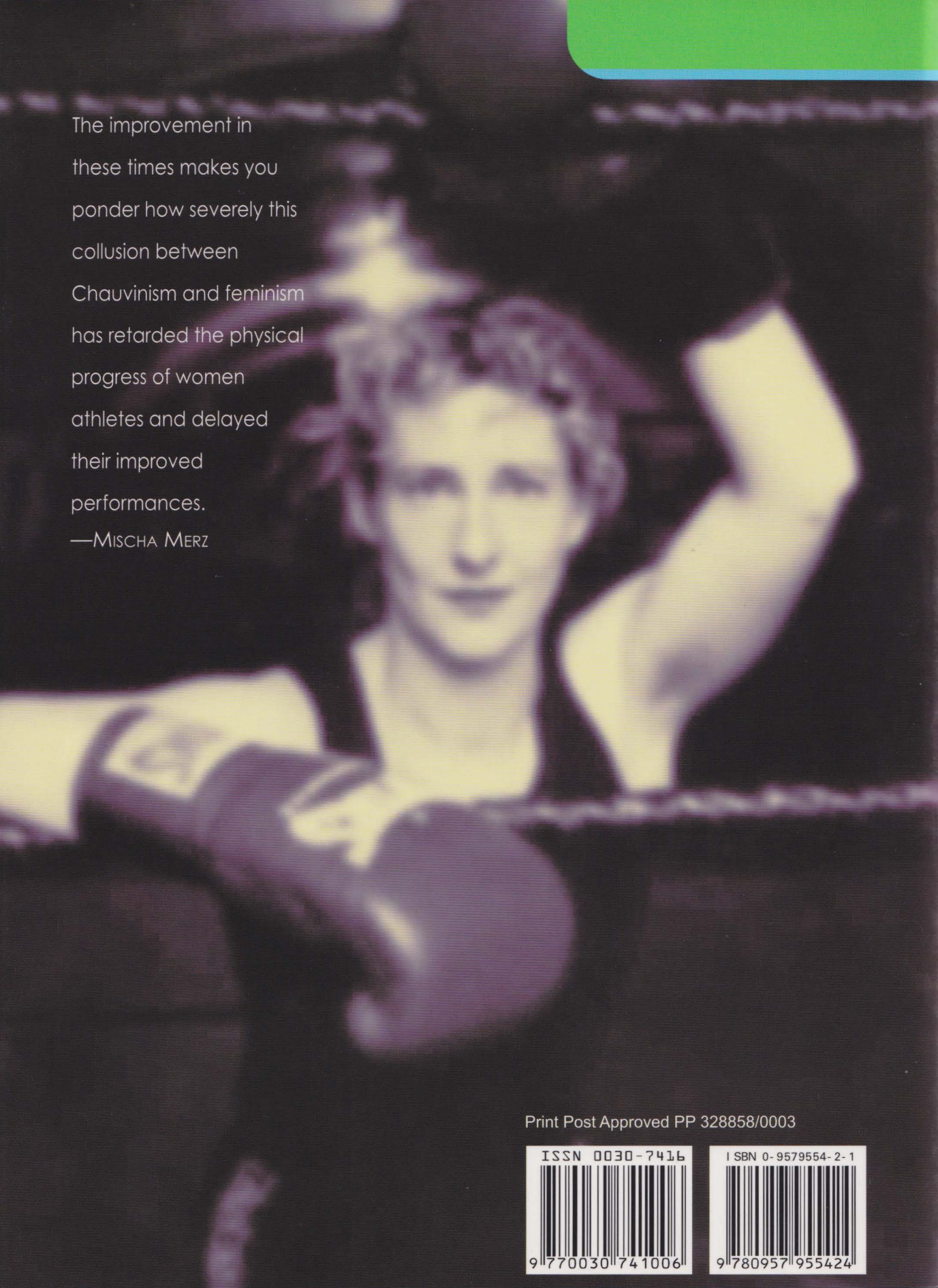

The improvement in these times makes you ponder how severely this collusion between Chauvinism and feminism has retarded the physical progress of women athletes and delayed their improved performances.

—Mischa Merz

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