overland

FEATURES | FICTION | POETRY | REVIEWS

169
$12

SYDNEY AND THE BUSH

Bumper summer edition | 48 bonus pages

Dorothy Hewett tribute | Bob Ellis lecture | Whitlam essays

overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

169

summer 2002

ISBN 0 9579554 5 6 ISSN 0030 7416

Overland is a quarterly magazine founded in 1954 by Stephen Murray-Smith.

Subscriptions: $36 a year to addresses within Australia; pensioners and students $28; take-3 $85; life subscription $600; overseas US$60. Payment may be made by Mastercard, Visa or Bankcard.

All correspondence: PO Box 14146, Melbourne Vic 8001, Australia. Ph: 03 9688 4163 Fax: 03 9687 7614 e-mail: overland@vu.edu.au Home page: www.overlandexpress.org

Manuscripts will be returned or replied to only if stamped and addressed envelopes are provided. All care is taken, but no responsibility can be accepted for lost manuscripts. Minimum rates of payment: stories and features: $100; poems and 'shorts': $70; reviews: $75.

Scholarly articles will be refereed, and must be submitted in triplicate hard copy.

PUBLISHER: O L Society Limited, 9 David Street, Footscray 3011, Incorporated in Victoria, ACN 007 402 673, ABN 78 007 402 673

PRINTING: McPherson's Printing Group, Maryborough, Vic

ISSN 0030 7416 ISBN 0 9579554 5 6

This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. *Overland* is supported by the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria—Department of Premier and Cabinet. *Overland* gratefully acknowledges the facility support of Victoria University of Technology and the financial support of its Faculty of Arts and Department of Communication, Language & Cultural Studies.

The *Overland* index is published annually with the spring issue. *Overland* is indexed in APAIS, AUSLIT, *Australian Literary Studies* bibliography, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* bibliography. *Overland* is available in microfilm and microfiche from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, USA.

ARTS VICTORIA Victoria The Place To Be VICTORIA UNIVERSITY Australia Council for the Arts

editorial / **IAN SYSON**

SYDNEY AND THE BUSH

In Sydney recently I had the privilege of watching NIDA students perform *Jarrabin*, an edited version of Dorothy Hewett's never-performed *Jarrabin Trilogy*. The students' energy and capacity to embody the play's spirit and values were inspiring. It gave the lie to those who suspected that Dorothy had written for a world that had passed us by. I left the theatre quietly confident that she would be remembered as she should be, as one of Australia's greatest writers. We hope our readers enjoy the tributes to her in this issue by Merv Lilley, Barbara Milech, Nicole Moore, John Kinsella and Jasna Novakovic.

I was able to see the play because I was in Sydney for Tom Keneally's launch of *Overland* 168—at which I observed that Sydney was *again* being difficult. Despite the quality of the issue, the prominence of the figure launching it and the publicity we and the NSW Writers' Centre generated, the turnout was about a third of what we might expect with the same effort in Melbourne. It brought home the central challenge to *Overland*'s attempts to grow as a national magazine: Sydney.

And the Bush. The problems of product distribution, communication, marketing and promotion, service closure and shrinkage, population stagnation and the tyranny of distance that still face rural Australia are also ours—especially when it comes to letting the Bush know of our existence.

So this issue of *Overland* is entitled 'Sydney and the Bush', on the one hand as a shameless marketing ploy and on the other in recognition of the fact that the tension between rural and metropolitan Australia is significant and ongoing. The bulk of the essays, poems and stories in this issue are focused in some way on the notion of place and tensions or connections between one place and another. Rowan Cahill writes of a little-known mutiny during which soldiers travelled from their Liverpool barracks and rioted in Sydney. Xavier Herbert (via Laurie Hergenhan) and Greg Manson tell of their travels through outback Queensland more than half a century apart. Manson's is chilling in its 'Wake in Fright' echoes. Paul Genoni and John Gooley both write on the impact of mine closures on towns and individuals. John Kinsella combines two of this issue's concerns. He looks at the City and the Bush through the prism of Dorothy Hewett's poetry.

A number of pieces develop our theme in international directions, though even here a cultural tension

between the Bush—the repository of 'old Australia'—and the predominantly urban present implicitly shapes much of the discussion. David Carter looks at what has happened to English cultural influence in Australia and Michael Leach looks at the remains of Australian socialism's great heroic failure, the Paraguayan experiment. It is a beguiling piece by Leach because he has managed to communicate his own sense of joy in discovery. As he writes, it "is extraordinary to hear the voice of Eduardo Bruce Murray, speaking an isolated English remnant, the last of an aging few who speak nineteenth-century English in central South America".

This issue's *Overland* lecture, by a typically combative Bob Ellis, is his 'spin' on 'the age of spin'. It is a coruscating examination of the rhetoric of the 'war on terror' and its obscene justifications of mass murder, xenophobia and cruelty. Ellis too evokes the notion of an 'old Australia' cowering behind the barricades of racism and isolationism.

Like many other Australian artists, Dorothy Hewett credited the Whitlam government with providing the necessary resources for her to return to writing professionally in the early 1970s. Ian Turner and John McLaren, in particular among *Overland* intellectuals, were enthusiastic supporters of and direct contributors to this government's social democratic vision. In an earlier issue Andrew Milner has referred to a lingering personal attachment to Labor, influenced partly by nostalgic memories of Whitlamism, a feeling probably widespread in those concerned with social justice and aware of Australian history. As 2002 represents the thirtieth anniversary of the election of the Whitlam government, and scholars, politicos and activists from around Australia will gather in early December at old parliament house in Canberra to ponder the significance of this event, we engage philosophically, historically, politically and imaginatively with the Whitlam era, via pieces by Nathan Hollier, Dennis Glover, Joanne Scanlan and Alicia Sometimes.

'Whitlam' is an issue I feel personally: if it weren't for his government and the educational 'regime change' he implemented, I would never have developed either the knowledge or the skills to edit *Overland*. My connection with Australian literary culture was enabled by the free education I received at the University of Queensland. Sadly, such an education seems neither practically nor conceptually available to an alienated Mount Isa electrician in his or her mid-twenties today.

With the present issue my editorship comes to an end. I took over from John McLaren at issue 147 and have spent six years in the role. They have been six terrific years in which the editorial team, and a generally supportive magazine board, have turned around *Overland*'s fortunes. The magazine is in good shape for the new co-editors, Nathan Hollier and Kath Wilson, to maintain the steady growth in recent years of circulation, critical reception and cultural standing.

I have a number of people to thank for their support during my editorship: my employer, Victoria University; a great team/procession of volunteers too numerous to remember in totality but including Vane Lindesay, Betty Freeburn, Joy Braddish, Neil Boyack, Thea Calzoni, Mark Davis, Ingunn Downie, Michael Dugan, Monica Dux, Phil Edmonds, Antony Giummarra, Stephen Gray, Robert Hodder, Susan Holmes, Foong Ling Kong, Jennifer Kremmer, Dan Leach, Jenny Lee, Phil McCluskey, Angela Mitropoulos, Elyse Moffat, Mark Olszewski, Judith Rodriguez, Jeff Sparrow, Marion Turnbull, Eddie Vukovic and Donalee Weis; Dean Kiley, fiction editor for two years, who infused the magazine with a new spirit; Louise Craig, a terrific copy editor and proofreader, voice of reason and hard-but-fair criticism; Kath Wilson who has of late added a new energy to the magazine; John McLaren, a generous man of great wisdom and experience; Pam Brown, poetry editor for five years (while I never really saw eye-to-eye with her we never went toe-to-toe); Nathan Hollier, a tremendous associate whose intelligence, commitment and good humour have always been there to rely upon; and Alex Skutenko, *Overland*'s manager, mainstay, memory and savage critic of pomposity and foolishness—without her there probably would be no recent *Overland* worth mentioning.

I also thank my family, Eris Smyth, Dan Syson and Harry Syson for giving me lots of space and time, sometimes reluctantly, and who still seem to recognise me when I walk through our front door.

editorial / **PAM BROWN**

LAST EXIT FROM SYDNEY

Selecting poems for *Overland* has been pretty much a pleasurable experience. Over the past five years I read roughly 200–250 poems every six weeks—totalling thousands of unsolicited poems.

Although Barrett Reid had not been the editor of *Overland* for years (and Michael Dugan had edited the poetry, with input from John Jenkins and, immediately

prior to me, Judith Rodriguez) for some time I would receive responses from a number of poets complaining that Barrett had published their poems so why didn't I? Basically, I published poetry that I thought was good enough, that is, 'poetic'—aware of poetic form and tradition, whilst being intelligible and varied enough to suit the magazine. Sometimes I didn't like the poem but could see that it was certainly a 'good' poem and should be read and I'd accept it for publication.

Persistently, some poets send in what they think is an '*Overland* poem'—that is, a poem that overtly relates to a political issue. Some of these poems, although exceedingly *worthy*, are quite often not their author's best effort. Occasionally though, a good issue-oriented poem would turn up in the *Overland* submission pile and have a reasonable poetic content and might not get a look-in anywhere else but seemed to deserve an airing—then I'd take it.

Often, I made suggestions on poems. This was generally well-received. Sometimes however, this practice led to frustrating experiences. Like the time when a well-known poet wouldn't bother to so much as respond to my suggestions. In this case, I'd read the poem closely several times and spend time thinking about it because, not only was it flawed but also it was abnormally long considering the usual exigencies of space. The poem had also been given to the magazine editor directly, in expectation of unquestioned acceptance, rather than sent in to undergo the usual process. I would have liked to know why my suggestions were irrelevant. That poet revealed (to my disappointment) an extraordinary arrogance in expecting non-critical or unconditional acceptance. What could so closed a writer expect of readers? In spite of occasions like that, to my knowledge, I've irritated only three poets during my stint—but then, who ever knows what some calumnist or other might have been saying?

I think if I lived in Melbourne I would have had a greater hands-on engagement with *Overland* in general. I would have liked being more involved, especially in the reviewing process—taking a look at the books received and perhaps choosing appropriate reviewers more often. Had I been able to read poetry reviews before publication I would most certainly have had some suggestions to make.

Of course, Ian Syson and I differ on the merits of several local poets and in our poetic tastes but he allowed me total freedom in my choices for the magazine. Ian never withdrew a poem or restricted or altered my selection, without consultation, in any way. He supported ideas like my 'high art' project of a joint issue with the online magazine *Jacket*, which was also of an international bias rather than *Overland*'s usual Australian one, straight after his own issue on working-class poetry.

I enjoyed deciding with Ian not to publish old, chestnut-pieces like Patrick McAuley's unconvincing article on the so-called division between performance poetry and poetry-on-the-page. That kind of distinction is like comparing playing a musical instrument with listening to music on a radio. They are different genres! (The end!) It's also such a ho-hum issue these days that most poets and readers of poetry are bored to tears by it. (This particular article also attacked, unfairly, Melbourne poet Emma Lew.) It was therefore definitely amusing to see it turn up a year later, in September 2002, utterly yellow-edged and redundant, in Paddy McGuinness & Les Murray's *Quadrant* magazine.

I have one small gripe I'd like to mention. For some years now Australian literary magazines have developed thematic criteria for each issue. I think themes impose incredible restrictions on journals and it seems to me to be a limiting rather than generative editorial policy. It is especially limiting to poetry and fiction where work is selected or commissioned on the basis of addressing or fitting a topic when there's very probably better writing that's not suited or is held over for a later issue. However, I think Ian will disagree with me on that.

I hope in my stint as poetry editor that I enabled a fresh angle on Australian poetry. *Overland* gave poets like Lidija Cvetkovic, Dennis McIntosh, Tricia Dearborn and others their first publication during this time. I wanted to publish a range of younger or not-yet-well-known poets like Cassie Lewis, Michael Farrell, Kate Fagan, Ashlley Morgan-Shae, Dan Disney, Michael Brennan, Jane Gibian, D.J. Huppatz, Ted Nielsen, Tim Denoon, Kieran Carroll, Peter Ball and others. In order to get independent presses the attention they deserve, we revived a poetry roundup with Kerry Leves covering as many titles as he could fit into the column. To ask poets like Leves, Lee Cataldi, Ouyang Yu and Gig Ryan to write for *Overland* was for me, a privilege, as was the opportunity to work on projects with the late great Judith Wright and Dorothy Hewett.

I'm not sure that writing and publishing poetry has any effect at all on moral, social or political issues. It takes an enormous depth of commitment to believe that it could. I think *Overland* is a venue or forum where that kind of problem can, at least, be canvassed.

I'm only the poetry editor but why not try *temper democratic, bias australian, connectivity global, keep acting loco!* Thanks contributors, readers, Alex Skutenko, Nathan Hollier and Ian Syson.

THE AGE OF SPIN

'The lesson of September 11 is that you must not let weapons of mass destruction fall into the hands of rogue nations that, like Iraq, have links to terrorism.'

'But there were no weapons of mass destruction on September 11. There were nineteen paper knives.'

'You're not supposed to say that.'

IT'S POSSIBLE THIS CONVERSATION did not take place, but it may well have since it shows what happens most days among backroomers in the age of spin. The present *reality* in fact is a dyslexic ex-alcoholic President with a family grudge and an oil business background who wants to kill Saddam Hussein ("this after all is the guy who tried to kill my dad at one time") and capture his oil and make his family some money. And the spinmen's task is to make this bee in his bonnet acceptable, attractive even.

September 11, they reason, gave us permission to make war on somebody. Not on the young men who did it, whose brave bones lie compounded in dust with the brave bones of the victims of that day of infamy. Not on Osama Bin Laden, who may be dead and can't be found. Not on the Taliban's Mullah Omar, who is certainly alive and also can't be found. We must make it, George Bush says, on Saddam Hussein. How to pin it on Saddam?

Is he a friend of Osama? No, Osama volunteered to fight against him in the Gulf War on the Saudi side—on, in fact, the US side. Is he a co-religionist? No, Sunni versus Shi-ite, and Sunnis hate Shi-ites. Did the slaughterers of the Twin Towers come from Iraq? No, they're mostly from, oops, Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis are our friends; the friends too of *al-Qaeda* (and the generous hosts of Idi Amin) and logically our enemies; we must hush this up.

How to do it? Well the way it's always done in the Age of Spin, which is to *change the subject*, and use a couple of resonant phrases.

'Weapons of mass destruction' is one. 'Chemical weapons' is another. A third is 'he has used chemical weapons on his own people'.

The first phrase is usefully vague. Its true meaning, the A-bomb, a weapon that was out of date in 1952, doesn't sound too dangerous when you put it like that, and you note that Israel has one too, and would cheerfully use it, and Saddam knows this, and so wouldn't let fly lest Israel bomb his country to hell. Best keep it vague. Use the bogeyman word, not the scientific description. Always the bogeyman word.

Likewise 'chemical weapons'. This means napalm, which America used on Vietnam (and a particular famous little running terrified naked girl), and teargas which Sharon uses daily on stone-throwing Palestinian boys, and mustard gas, which, yes, Saddam Hussein used, with George Bush Senior's approval, and Donald Rumsfeld's approval, in his war on Iran. Chemical weapons include, I suppose, the gas used in American gas chambers and the lethal injections George W. Bush in record numbers gave to the Texans he liked least when he was Governor. They also include the billions of tons of chemical weapons America is amassing and won't let the UN inspect. In logic, they shouldn't mind too much if Saddam has them (we can bomb him to hell, we can nuke him if he uses them), but logic is not what we are here to serve. The President has a grudge and we are here to serve our President.

'He uses chemical weapons on his own people.' 'This sounds really good, what eloquence; we'll print that.' By 'his own people', however, is actually meant the Kurds, an utterly different people, deprived by four Arab nations of their country, who exist in relation to Iraq as Belfast Irish Catholics do to Londoners. Teargas aimed at demonstrations on the Falls Road can by the same logic be reported as,

'Margaret Thatcher uses chemical weapons on her own people'.

Spin works mostly in this way. You invent a category of evil, and you charge your adversary with it. You omit from your reasoning all human motive. And you never compare what he's doing with what you yourself have done.

This makes it, roughly, the most dangerous thing there is in the modern world. It cheerfully argues anything, and has no basis in morality. It serves a customer's whims, and those whims can come from anywhere. Want to kill Saddam? Sure, you're the boss, we'll fix it. Want to win the Presidency by stopping the vote counters counting the votes? No worries. We'll say 'the American people want closure', which means they don't really care who's President, they just want it ended, Bush or Gore, it doesn't matter, who cares, it's urgent we have a result; any president will do.

(It wasn't urgent at all. Under the Constitution Bill Clinton was President till January 20. A result reached on January 19 would have been soon enough. The spin doctors—which included the Supreme Court—made it 'urgent' it be December 11, and the 300,000 disfranchisements, for instance, of black voters in Florida be overlooked.)

The big worry with spin, which is a way of changing the ground rules of the way things are done, is it doesn't solve problems, it simply denies them. Where once we would, say, *analyse* the problems of the Middle East and ask what should be done about them, we now only wait for a leader's unfounded boyish impulse, and then call in the spin doctor to make it palatable.

Let us look at it from another perspective, to show what is happening around Iraq, and the Bushes, and Israel. Let us propose, as they say, a scenario.

2

Let's imagine General Wiranto in a bloodless coup seizes power in Indonesia. General Wiranto, the one who sang 'Feelings'. Let's imagine he now rules that country of 180 million people.

Let's imagine he decides he wants the undersea oil we share with East Timor. Let's imagine he buys up a couple of nuclear weapons from Pakistan, his Muslim co-religionists, and a couple more from a drunk ex-Soviet general in Uzbekistan.

Let's imagine he steps up his rhetoric against Australia. We imprison innocent Muslims, he says, in our detention camps. We sabotage their boats and sit idly by while their women and children drown. We persecute their young men with our rape laws. We have a constitution that nowhere mentions Allah. We stand by while mosques burn.

Let's imagine he then demands a 'regime change' in Canberra. John Howard is hated by half his people, he says, with some truth, and he has 'declared war' on his Aboriginal population.

Let's imagine he says he's heard Australia has 'weapons of destruction' at various places round the map, including East Timor and on the Arafura Sea. Hand grenades, mortars, tanks, battleships, patrol boats, F111s are, he says, 'unacceptable weaponry' in a 'peace-loving region' and we must get rid of it.

Let's imagine we refuse.

Let's imagine he then signals that if we do not remove John Howard by force (that is, kill him) and completely disarm our army and navy he will atomic bomb Canberra, Lucas Heights and whatever 'military installations' he can find that are hidden in our leafier suburbs. Let's imagine he puts this threat in the most humiliating possible terms, calling our government 'evil' and fit only for extermination.

Let's imagine then he says if the United Nations don't get rid of us, he will.

Feeling angry and worried, are you, Australian citizen? Well, it's how the Iraqi people feel. They don't like Saddam very much, any more than I like John Howard, but this is our country, damn it, and Wiranto should keep his bib out of it. If we've got problems, we should deal with them. He should stay away.

You can see from this how spin works—by making the Other so subhuman he might even agree to change his country's culture, and surrender himself to execution, because you have bigger bombs. Of course he would. He's a grub, with no human bravery, no dignity, no pride. Of course he would. A similar dehumanisation was tried, with less success, on the boat people.

3

When boat people came here after September 11 they were mostly, not always, fearfully fleeing catastrophe at home—economic, political, religious, ethnic—in tyrannous countries like Saddam's Iraq or the Taliban's Afghanistan, and keen to raise their children in a better place. To get to this better place they *of course* used forged papers if they had to, bought passages on leaky boats, if they had to, from shady characters

with mixed motives; so would any of us when the alternative was death, persecution or lifelong poverty. They were in motive and plight no different from the refugees in *Casablanca* who, fleeing Nazi Germany, bought forged papers from the crooked casino manager Rick, played by Humphrey Bogart, a people-smuggler of the day whom the world for sixty years has judged a hero, as they did another crooked people-smuggler, Oskar Schindler, and the lawbreaking Dutch who sheltered Anne Frank, and so on.

So the spin doctors had a problem, a problem of genuine refugees; and this is how they dealt with it.

First they said the refugees, the boat people were terrorists. They said they 'couldn't rule out the possibility' that each leaky boat of Afghans was thronged with secret serving soldiers of the Taliban or *al-Qaeda*, armed with hand grenades and flask of germs. To make that seem more likely it was arranged that none of the faces of the arriving people appear on the news broadcasts. Afghans are very beautiful people, the women and children especially, and the presence of women and children and babies made this evil-swarm-of-cruel-terrorists notion difficult to sell. What was needed was a generic image of a lean, ill-shaven 34-year-old male, earnest in expression with foreign headgear and an ammunition belt, shouting death to the infidel and raising a sword above his head. This *impression* was supplied by news footage of demonstrators in Muslim cities, dramatically chanting and shaking fists in unison, and distant shots of the actual refugees, waving their hands in silhouette like ants' feelers, blurred and far away.

This worked for a while with certain sorts of voters, one of them Premier Mike Rann's hairdresser. "I'm voting for you in the state election, Mike," she said, "but I have to vote for John Howard in this one." Mike asked why. "Because," she said, "he was so brave when he was in New York, and he stopped the Taliban when they tried to come here on the *Tampa*."

Soon, however, it was clear there were women and children among them. This made things much harder; you can't say harsh things about women, especially young mothers, or hardly ever, and the first law of all propaganda is that children are never ever villains, only ever victims, innocents, human flotsam, foundlings. And so the children-overboard fantasy began: 'these people'—new code phrase for 'swarthy unshaven Islamic scum'—journeyed thousands of miles over deserts and mountains and stormy seas and then *within sight of their objective*, their new-found land, their brave new world, tried to drown their own children. That's how subhuman they were.

When this proved to be unbelievable, and the evidence a fraud, the story was changed again. They were not in fact their children, Ruddock said, but children that unscrupulous single women had *kidnapped* and introduced to gullible customs officers as their own. When this likewise proved to be unbelievable (why would the children not beg the customs officers to rescue them from their cruel kidnappers?) the story changed again. The children were their own, it seemed, but they were, like bad parents, harming them, mutilating them, sewing their lips up, bullying them into hunger strikes and rehearsed false tales of institutional persecution. A moment's thought will tell us how hard it is to sew up any uncooperative person's lips without first chloroforming them or putting a gun to their head, but even this was believed for a time. And soon, on election day, and for about a week thereafter, guided the votes of the uncommmitted.

But only for a time, and then the story, as always, changed. 'Queue-jumpers' became, when it was shown there was no queue, 'illegals' who became, when it was shown they were doing nothing illegal, 'asylum-seekers' which suggested, however subtly, that they were, maybe, lunatics. But they were never called 'refugees' or 'apparent refugees' or even 'self-proclaimed refugees' because the very idea of 'refuge', however smeared and sneered at, might somehow makes us feel for them, and that would never do. Razor-wired desert emplacements were likewise never 'prisons' but 'detention centres', the prisoners within them (identified not by name but number) were 'detainees', their arrest on the high seas on boats that were then sunk was not 'piracy' but 'border protection' and so on.

You see how it works. Kidnapping, gaoling, mental torment, physical torture, despair, grief, suicidal depression, the brutalising of children, the humiliating of women, the breaking of the pride of men must be given other names. Better words must be found, and they are, as in Orwell's *1984*, for all the evil we must not think is evil, lest Big Brother be questioned, and seem less kindly than we see him, as an ideological given, to be.

4

And so it is we have more soft words for torturing and killing innocent people than we have now for

even drunkenness or sex. They include, in roughly chronological order, atonement, sacrificing to Yahweh, cleansing the sanctuary, smiting the Philistines, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children even unto the third and fourth generation of those that hate me (a quote from the Ten Commandments), ridding the earth of the uncircumcised, crusade, Inquisition, forced conversion, saving the soul of the heretic, conquering for Christ, reformation, counter-reformation, annexation, colonisation, declaring and defending a protectorate, revolution, counter-revolution, a Committee of Public Safety, pacification, liquidation, providing military assistance, interdiction, insurgency, counter-insurgency, friendly fire, crowd control, resisting communist infiltration, combating anti-Americanism, fighting terrorism, the deploying of anti-personnel weapons, targeted killings, peacekeeping, preserving the peace, protecting America's overseas interests, defending the Free World and, lately, 'regime change'. All these different sorts of words and phrases mean punching, smashing noses and teeth, beating to death with clubs, knifing, bashing, shooting, electrifying the testicles, blowing up or beheading or shooting in the back of the head people whom a jury would acquit of doing any wrong. Like all spin, they move our eyes from what is really happening, move the mind away from the subject into something pleasanter to think on.

5))

5

Spin also deals with failure by calling it something else, a tactical retreat, the Vietnamisation of the war, peace with honour, or whatever. The Jews were early masters of it, calling defeat in battle God's wrath at Israel's idolatry or harlotry or blasphemy, and Jesus's crucifixion a necessary sacrifice or atonement for our sins. He died but his undaunted spin doctors (aka apostles) claimed he had come back from the dead, and when doubters desired to see him, touch him, fondle his nail-holes, explained he was now in heaven but would return to earth extremely soon and build a New Jerusalem and inaugurate a Golden Age, a lie that for nineteen hundred years has kept a lot of Christians anxious, vigilant and believing. A precisely similar spin attends the death of Elvis Presley, who many believe is not dead either but being kept in secure anonymity by the FBI in a small town somewhere, lest Mafia hit men shoot him for testifying, or something.

Spin is the public, political equivalent of denial. Thus when John F. Kennedy was shot, it was not thought prudent to ask who with power in Dallas had a motive to kill him and come up with the obvious answer, LBJ, his successor and, Robert Caro says, the actual villain; it was better to say a 'lone madman' had done it, and to rewrite every other American assassination along these lines. Even John Wilkes Booth, a part of a Southern conspiracy to kill not only Lincoln but also Johnson and Stanton, became a lone madman too. So when Sirhan Sirhan, a Palestinian, shot Bobby Kennedy, a pro-Israeli candidate for high office, he was mad too; it was simpler that way. Otherwise the assassination might raise issues of Middle Eastern policy, and that would never do. JFK had to be killed by a lone madman too; if there were, as some say, three marksmen involved this might mean a group of plotters with something to gain by taking out a pro-black, anti-Mafia, soft-on-Russia Boston Irish dynast raised on a bootlegger's millions. The lone madman cured all that. He was mad, that's all; he had no reason for any of it.

No *good* reason, anyway.

6))

6

When in Bali bombs blew up ninety Australians a kissing cousin of the 'lone madman' theory, the 'crazed fanatics' committing a 'senseless crime' excited all the media. We didn't deserve this, Australians were told. We did nothing to so enflame the Muslim world. We were innocent of any provocation.

Not so, I think.

We sent a newborn Muslim baby back into the open sea in a leaky boat, there, perhaps, to drown. With the *Tampa* storming we frightened a lot of nearby vessels into not rescuing anybody when 354 people drowned, including three little girls. We refused to let their mother, a Muslim, visit her husband in Australia. We stopped a Pakistani Muslim from bringing his family to Australia, and so upset him that he burned himself to death on parliament steps. Alone among 187 nations, we imprison children in concentration camps if they come from the wrong country, always a Muslim country. We deny them an education and confiscate their toys. We invaded a Muslim country, Indonesia, in defence of a Catholic province, East Timor. We shot and killed a number of Muslim-Indonesian soldiers. We made no protest when a young American fool blew up an Afghan Muslim wedding, killing thirty-two including the bridegroom. We did not demand his arrest, though his name was known,

in the way we demand the arrest of the bomber of Bali. We made no protest when Israel bulldozed Muslim houses, killed babes in arms and with 'targeted assassinations' murdered young men for political incorrectness. We declared we were America's 'deputy sheriff' in our region and said we would breach international law to help out George Bush in his vendetta on Saddam Hussein. We made no protest when Ari Fleischer urged that Saddam be killed. We let mosques in Australia be bombed and burned and imprisoned Muslim women and children on Nauru. We treated, very badly, Muslims that New Zealand then treated very well. We imprisoned young Muslims from Lebanon for fifty-five years for rape and let elderly-Anglican pederasts go free. We drove Muslim inmates in Villawood and Port Hedland to successful suicide, and Muslim inmates of Woomera to attempt suicide. We called Muslim boat people terrorists, kidnappers, child-abusers, child-drowners, the kind of people 'we don't want here'. We ran an election campaign whose clear theme was keeping Muslims out. We decided we were in 'a war on terrorism' against, in particular, Osama Bin Laden. We applauded the bombing flat of an entire Muslim country. People fleeing from that bombing we sent back, into harm's way.

And yet we are told by the media and the Prime Minister's office that Muslims have no reason to hate us, or to want to kill us, or humiliate us. 'They're resentful of our happiness,' we are told, of our 'superior civilisation'.

Imagine an Australian-Christian woman and her newborn baby being sent back into the Persian Gulf in a leaky boat perhaps to drown there, and then imagine an Arab leader saying we have no reason to hate Islam. That is what Australia sounds like to many Muslims, and many Indonesian Muslims. But spin hides all this, and keeps it silent. We print the legend, that Australians are guiltless of any provocation.

7

When the answer might be inconvenient, silence is best. And silence is another kind of spin, a story not told because of lack of space in a newspaper, or lack of time on television, a story forever hidden for want of what, with remarkable percipience, Margaret Thatcher called 'the oxygen of publicity', coining the phrase. It is what John Howard does when he refuses a second television debate, what Kerry Packer does, *hello darkness my old friend*, when he cancels the *Sunday* program during an election (though not *Business Sunday*) and instead puts on the Commonwealth Games. It is what all commercial television but SBS does every night, *the sounds of silence*, when eight minutes out of thirty are commercials, eleven sport, three road accidents, five a foreign catastrophe, like September 11 or O.J. Simpson, and only two attend to politics *during an election.* Their excuse, that people aren't interested in politics, is another big lie. The viewing figures for the Great Debates prove this, and the listening figures for Alan Jones, John Laws and ABC Drivetime in every city.

It is what the *SMH* does too when it each week prints the opinions of Gerard Henderson, a former John Howard Chief of Staff, Miranda Devine, a Liberal Party cheerleader, P.P. McGuinness, a Liberal Party cheerleader, and Alan Ramsey, a sworn enemy of Beazley, and, for balance, Robert Manne, a former editor of *Quadrant*, and Mike Carlton, who treats all parties with contempt. It is pretty certain no-one *reads* McGuinness or Henderson but they don't read any regular pro-Labor writer either—me, for instance, as they used to like to do—because the space has been taken up and, as in *Pravda*, the dissenting opinion is not heard, and therefore, in a very real sense, does not exist.

It is what the Shier ABC did when it took *The World Today* off Radio National at 1 p.m., so office workers could not hear it any more at lunchtime, and *PM* off it at 5 p.m. so they could not hear it driving home. It is what CNN does when it has news every hour, on the hour, for twenty-two minutes only, all the news there is in the world in only twenty-two minutes, seven minutes of it sport and two minutes the weather. Forty-four minutes, or sixty-six, or eighty-eight, not hard for a channel that broadcasts all the time, would mean we would see all the news in the world in some depth and breadth. And that would never do. Better keep silence. Silence is much simpler. And the dissenting voice is never heard. Gorbachev ran for President against Yeltsin. But Yeltsin, controlling the airwaves, made sure his rival's familiar splotch-topped face was never seen. In Australia Bob Brown is marginalised in this way by commercial television, in England Ken Livingstone. Men easily able to serve as Prime Minister are treated as lovable nutters though everything they say is what most people believe. You see how it works.

8

One of the slyest spins of all was to mix up the concept 'terrorist' with the concept 'suicide bomber'. If, say, an 18-year-old girl who, with her parents' approval, blows up herself and a shopping mall, or blows up herself and Rajiv Ghandi, is a 'terrorist', then so were the kamikaze pilots of the Second World War who aimed their planes at US battleships knowing they would die in them. And so were the young airmen who bombed Hamburg and Bremen and Dresden, aware how slim their chances were of survival. This patriotic self-sacrifice is not, or not quite, or not really, the same as 'terrorism'. Terrorists, like the Washington Snipers, or the Boston Strangler, or the Kingsgrove Slasher, or those young firebugs who each Christmas immolate vast tracts of the Blue Mountains, are those who repeatedly torments the innocent with daily fear of death or destruction of property *and lives to observe their insecurity and kill or burn again*, and to gloat over his handiwork. A suicide bomber is one who dies in battle willingly, suddenly, climactically at a particular time and place, at age 20 in Gaza City, the sort of young person of whom Jesus Christ once admiringly said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend', and is seen by his (or her) fellow countrymen and family as a national hero.

So the very idea of a 'war on terrorism' is *itself* a spin. It means in most cases a 'war on patriotic young heroes prepared to die for their country'. It is no more special, indeed, than 'war', as it always has been fought, by young people prepared to die.

But in John Howard's spin it is a war that is also not a war. After Bali he said that 'none of us a week ago could have imagined' that Saturday night in Kuta. This is after a year of a War on Terrorism, begun on the day when he, personally, witnessed the attack on Washington. 'Could not have imagined'? A war on terror that included battle casualties? Of course he could; he especially, a witness of the day it started. That sentence, too, is spin.

So too is the notion that George Bush is the head of a great democracy opposed to war and killing and keen to 'preserve the peace'. Democracy in America was trashed when George's brother hid the Democratic vote against him and gave him, crookedly, the Presidency. George who personally ordered the killing of 131 people he might have pardoned. One still believed in Santa Claus. Another was the first Texas woman executed in 120 years. The number killed was an American record for any governor in any state in all American history, an average of one a fortnight. So George is not a man opposed to killing at all, he likes it; he must like it. He proved this when he ordered the bombing flat of Afghanistan because Osama might be hiding somewhere in it. He should logically order the bombing of all thirteen thousand of Indonesia's islands because an *al-Qaeda* cell might be active in one of them, gloating over the Bali bombing.

It is spin to imagine terrorism can be fought by 'targeted' bombing, just as it was spin to imagine the US could 'win the hearts and minds' of the Vietnamese by cutting off the ears of young men's corpses and piling them up in a field. Every young man you kill has a mother and probably a brother who will mourn him and want to avenge him. And so 'terrorism' spreads. It isn't terrorism. It's only human nature.

And it's visible human nature now. Every night on television, some of the effects of the aerial bombing can be seen: the shattered houses, the refugees in trucks piled high with mattresses in multitudes approaching through rising dust or falling snow. Evil can be seen now, and the words, the spin, that is used to hide it are overwhelmed—or sometimes overwhelmed—by what is seen.

9

Because spin always deals with new political emergencies by inventing new rules of conduct and new ways of talking, it often brings out of hibernation old English words. When it was noted that John F. Kennedy, then running for President, hadn't actually *done* much in his fourteen years in politics, the word 'charisma' came out of the dusty attic of a classic language—it hadn't been used for about two thousand years—to explain the special quality he radiated and the nation might like. 'Ticker', similarly, was used brilliantly against Kim Beazley. They needed a word for whatever it was Kim did not have. 'Courage' was wrong: he had survived polio, grade football, a year of busking in India, the Oxford Union, the Labor Right and Keating's derision. 'Competence' was wrong: he was well-known as our best Defence Minister ever. So 'ticker' became whatever Beazley lacked—self-discipline when dieting, weakness when tempted by Tim Tams, self-importance, portentousness, earnestness. He laughed self-deprecatingly, so 'ticker' meant a straight face. Beazley couldn't keep

a straight face, so this meant he lacked ticker. And for this, of course, he had to be denied the Prime Ministership. He had many more qualifications than John Howard (he had, for instance, read at least one book on Asia since high school), but he lacked 'ticker', whatever it was, and that was that.

Sometimes words acquire companion words, as in the oxymoron 'targeted assassination'. Now any assassination, if you come to think of it, is targeted, but the added word takes the shame, somehow, out of murder; 'targeted killing' even more so. The KGB used to call it 'liquidation', the CIA 'executive action'. A dictionary of killing seems in order. There is no word yet for the 131 optional executions George Bush, who didn't have to, approved as Governor of Texas, a new American record for his forty-eight months in power. There should be. A word too for John Howard's approval of the sabotaging of boats that, when sinking, attracted no rescuers because they feared being boarded and prodded with guns by the Royal Australian Navy. Ogden Nash once noted that there was a word, 'defenestration', for being thrown out of a closed window, but none, amazingly, for 'being beaten to death with a putter'. Spin is here to supply such omissions to the language.

10

Words are very powerful things. It is hard to remember that 'peace-keeping' means 'subduing with menace or force of arms'. Or that 'winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people' means shooting teenagers, torching villages and moving at gunpoint whole populations to distant, less fertile parts of the country. It is hard to hold in your head the many, many ways that lies are told.

A lot of it began with religion. 'God moves in mysterious ways' was the Church's spin last century on the fact Auschwitz, say, and a loving, all-powerful God are two adjacent conflicted concepts that cannot co-exist. At every 6-year-old girl's funeral is a similar difficulty. 'She's gone to God,' some people used to say. 'The angels grew lonely, and took her.' Even so for thousands of years were opportunistic diseases or fatal accidents explained to a half-believing congregation. It was crowd control. It worked, for a time, and the great religions grew, perhaps, out of this great need to explain youthful death.

One of the Church's finest spins was to print the Bible in Latin, so ordinary folk couldn't read, or hear read out, its litany of slaughter and tribal revenge, the 'spare no women and children' ethic of the Israelites which, vestigially perhaps, persists in the heart of Ariel Sharon. The concealing spin of Latin was so important to the Church that Tyndale was burnt at the stake for printing God's word in the common tongue—before he got far into the Old Testament (he did the New Testament first) where cruelty and bloodshed was the rule.

It's almost certain the Englishing of the Bible caused, or helped cause, the behavioural agnosticism, lustful, bibulous and blasphemous, of Shakespeare's time, and the Age of Reason that followed hard on Cromwell's theocratic Republic. Without evidence in clear English of God's injustice (or His impotence in the face of injustice), it might not have happened.

A secular version of Latin is now upon us, what might be called 'emotional correctness'. This is the tendency of Tory politicians to deny all emotions that are not good ones. One never admits to 'anger' or 'bitterness', only 'disappointment'. One is never 'ambitious', just 'ready to serve my country in whatever capacity I can'. One never gloats at a factional opponent's defeat, one says he has 'served the party magnificently and I hope to be able to carry on his good work'. The 'hard but fair' spin of Philip Ruddock, likewise, hides a maggot-heap of cruelties and, probably, uncertainties. Emotion of a human sort, 'I want to rip his lungs out', or 'I think I need a night on the piss' is never admitted, only a gentle, magnanimous, humble, patriotic decency, all of which, of course, is spin.

But the situation is altered now that on television, and on the Internet, evil can be seen, and the words used to hide it are sometimes contradicted by what is seen. And so it was that in the Gulf War photojournalists were allowed nowhere near the action. Nor were they allowed on the *Tampa*, lest children's beautiful faces, and the beautiful faces of their weeping mothers, dispute the myth of the sinister unshaven disease-bearing terrorist horde swarming south to swamp our nation.

We live in Orwellian times, we truly do. And it is really hard to know any more what actually is happening. Spin is there to hide it from us. And God knows what is real.

Bob Ellis is a well-known essayist, raconteur and public commentator.

tribute / **MERV LILLEY**

HIGH POINTS OF MY LIFE WITH DOROTHY HEWETT

These years of continuous pain
the certainty of destruction
eating through her bones
the beautiful woman living poetry
the central word love
a raging storm in that mind
she says it's time to go now
there is no second time round
goodbye my love, so good
to have known you, goodbye now,
a faint smile, unutterably tired
she is going, taking me with her.

I REALISE I MUST HAVE met Dorothy as Toddy Flood. That was her name in Sydney, the Toddy part of it came from Perth, turned around from Dorothy by other young married friends before the Flood came into it from a boilermaker lover, with whom she fled Perth, her family and friends, who ganged up on her in favour of her husband Lloyd Davies; including her sister, who stood holding her child from her as she left, Dorothy knowing that if she snatched her child and ran, she would be pursued through every town and court in Australia. I know because she told me, and she told truths as she saw them. She was more of an outsider in her family, they had once tried to have her committed, she had said she had blood in her mouth. The shrink told them young adolescents often said things like that.

Her father and mother had once set the law upon her, dragged her through children's court over a youthful love affair. I know because she told me, and I revere her word above all others, including my own. These are high points in my remembering of Dorothy.

I remember her after going to a Realist Writers meeting one time in Sydney, at Vera Deacon's house. I know I was on a ship, no doubt berthed at the bottom of King Street below the Seamen's Union office which I think shared a building with New Theatre, the left-wing theatre of Sydney at that time, which had put on the play *Reedy River*, a high point for Australian folkies. I didn't see it, I suppose I wasn't in port. In any case it had nothing to do with Dorothy's writing. I think I had heard her name once at the end of a state conference of the Communist Party in Townsville, when I was a canecutter? I'm not talking dates, a member read a poem called 'Testament', using the name Dorothy Hewett. I thought how unusual the poem was, I'd never heard anything like it, but something about it stayed in my memory box.

Much later, few years, I'd apparently been to the Realist Writers because I had been writing a poem, and the poem had some echoes of 'The Ballad Of Reading Gaol'. A woman who was there that night said this, and I said "do you know 'Reading Gaol'?" She said "Yes" and that was it, a story told by her many times since, with some embellishments to describe me asking her such a question!

When I come to think of it, it was earlier that I first saw her. I had caught a tram up King Street to the Sydney Domain. Always on a Sunday you went to the Domain to hear the speakers rave on if you were that way inclined.

There was a woman up on a platform, she was

reading a poem which turned out to be 'Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod'. I thought what a good poem. I would like to know it to recite. I went up to speak to her when she got down off the platform, but a number of others surrounded her. I tried to speak to her but she hung her head with shyness, as I would come to learn was her normal carriage. Standing or walking, she was within herself.

A man on the platform was saying where to go and get that poem if you wanted it. You go up to the Ironworkers' building and he would give it to you, or someone would.

I did that. I said I'd like to be able to write like that. The guy who gave it to me said "go up to the next floor and see Zoe O'Leary of the Realist Writers". Up I go, introduce myself perhaps, say I thought about writing, she says "Have you got a manuscript with you?" I say "What's a manuscript?" She says "Oh something you have written, a story." I say "No I used to write job bulletins the party published on a flatbed". She says "That's fine, you can use a typewriter, you have one?" I say "No, I've never owned or used a typewriter, Eddie Heilbronn was the only one there that could do that. I write long-hand". She says "Get a ream of paper and start writing". So off I go posthaste to find a ream of paper, still clutching 'Clancy & Dooley & Don McCleod', get some weird pack of paper from Sands, who weren't the right people for typing paper, it was very long soft stuff, crumply, so that's how Dorothy Hewett started me towards writing stories, poems, without knowing anything about it.

I took it into the focsle and put it on a box or something by my bunk, a lower one. The firemen-greasers looked at it and said "What's that?" I said "Something to write on." One bloke looked at the others and said "Merv's a writer!" He said "We're going up to the pub for a beer, Merv can't come he's got to stay here and write". To me he said, "We'll bring you back a beer and a woman." And away they went.

I sat stupidly looking at this ream of tissue-like paper for ages. They did what they said they were going to do, they brought back two women, but went ahead on the most attractive one themselves. I'm not going to tell you the rest just now, because I'm telling you about the high points of meeting Dorothy, and just in case you think one of them was Dorothy, you're way wrong.

I think Dorothy was at that time on the point of having a child. No wonder I had thought she looked a bit sort of overblown on that platform fifty years ago or slightly more.

A secretary trying to be a writer and a member of the Realists, whilst in the Domain with me, came across Dorothy and her partner wheeling the aforementioned baby to be born between times out of the Domain and I was introduced.

So this was her of the Realist Writers meeting who had said 'Reading Gaol'. So this Domain meeting is the third time I have seen her.

After introductions she said to my friend and I, "Come to dinner tonight," then added, "you won't get much to eat," so I didn't go. I took my friend somewhere else, a café and a bed. I learned much later that Dorothy had cooked a big roast, and when we didn't turn up her partner said "Why would he? He's taken her for a fuck". Which was right. It had worried me that if I went to her dinner where there wouldn't be much to eat that I would be taking the food out of babies' mouths. In fact she was only doing the Domain thing of cracking poverty, which in its own way was right, but not that night. She wanted to meet me.

Her partner didn't want us to meet too much, so someone got what they wanted out of it. I had to wait for a later date.

Once again coming back from the Realist Writers with my friend, I find myself in the back seat of a taxi with Dorothy while my friend is in the front of the taxi—I probably did that bit of it—we found ourselves sitting close together, closer than was needed, squeezed up against each other, while my friend was either watching through the driving mirror above her, or glancing half round. She was a furiously jealous woman. I knew I had no way of getting off with Dorothy, with my friend of some time in the front seat, so the chance was gone when Dorothy dropped off, which she was thinking of not doing, but she knew we couldn't be that barefaced about it, so we sailed off in different directions, leaving another meeting to fatal time.

It was a long time. Might have run into a few years. I had probably been to New Zealand with timber, Fiji sugar run, around the West, an awful story to that one. No further meetings. Fifty-six had passed, with the Khrushchev report at the twentieth Congress of the CPSU about the killing insanities of Stalin—this became the history now of the Communist Party all over the world on the verge of collapse. I am now known as a revisionist. I am no longer a member of the Party. They saw to that, the


Sydney, 1952

Stalinist leadership who would not recognise the Khrushchev report to the twentieth Congress, who would not admit that they knew all about that history and kept using ignorance.

Where Dorothy figured in this I did not know. She was going to be hung onto by the central leadership, they knew she was a gift as a writer, and they needed her.

After this general hubbub she wrote her first novel, *Bobbin Up*, about a spinning mill she worked in, plus the Party girl in action.

I was a member of the book club and on my way up to the book club in Collins Street, Melbourne, I met her at the bottom of the lift. I say "You're Dorothy Hewett aren't you?" She says "Yes", I say "Would you care for a drink?" She consents and that's where it started.

We had that drink, I asked her if we could go out together, she had a meeting to address with the book club selling her book. I said "Oh well." She quickly said she could perhaps meet me after her meeting, so we agreed to meet somewhere out where she was staying, I think it was Richmond. About nine that night I got off the train, wearing a big heavy raincoat, she was there, coming towards me, wondering if it was me or someone who would murder her.

There was a coffee shop in that desolate rainy night. We went in, I poured out my savagery about the Party that would not be reformed; she wondered what she was doing drinking coffee with this renegade, should she excuse herself and go to her lodgings?

She did go to her lodgings and took me with her. On the way I said that perhaps we should think about getting things together. I knew I had hold of someone, a woman of intellectual qualities, though not with me entirely about the Party. She warned me that I'd better be sure of what I was saying. It was something she knew a lot more about than I did.

I went back to *The Ellaroo* early in the morning. Then I remembered a night in Sydney, a year or so ago, when at a folk music night I was told by Vera Deacon that Toddy was there, ready to get on a plane with her three sons and fly home to WA that night.

She was fleeing from a schizoid man who was going to kill her that previous night, because she was allegedly poisoning his cups of tea, food etc., he knew because he felt poisoned, and that wasn't any good to a man who thought he was having meetings with Stalin and Mao Tse Tung about how to fix the world up, which was being run from outer space. Only he knew about it, and what to do about it, and was therefore needed by those two leading dignitaries, killer dillers.

So Dorothy flew out, now here she was, and here I was, contemplating something I'd shied away from, close then to 40 years old.

I'm finishing this part of the story here in Melbourne at the moment. There may be a novel for you to read say next year, I can't write a full account of forty odd years with her in one article, can I?

But I can say on behalf of her followers, her family and myself:

we have laid her where wattles
their sweet fragrance spread
and tall eucalypts bow over
Toddy Flood's last bed.

With massive love, eternal gratitude that you once lived Dorothy Hewett.

tribute / **NICOLE MOORE**

DOROTHY HEWETT

Twentieth-century writer

> *It seems to me that only now in this last period of my life that I know who I am. I'm Dorothy Hewett.*
>
> Interview with Sue Thomas in *Meridian*, 1988

AGED SEVENTY-NINE, Dorothy Hewett died surrounded by her family and loved ones, her last days peaceful and her long battle with pain over. She was a brave, wilful and determined voice in Australian writing, a reader's writer and an actor's playwright. Her mode was passionate yet allusive, searching for that join between the mythic and the felt—that fold in sensibility—using the materials of a truly adventurous life, reflective and rebellious at once.

Perhaps more than other Australian writers, Hewett belonged to more than one generation. Her work caught the mood of more than one moment, and participated in more than one crisis of history; more than one quest or generational transition. Successful as a poet, playwright, novelist, memoirist, short-story writer and public commentator, Hewett's writing career also spanned more than sixty years. In these different forms and across those decades, the face of her writing turned always from the 'cracked mirror' of the writer's ego to the big world and back again. Gaps or transitions in her output were marked by a shift to a new form: poetry to novel, novel to theatre, theatre to memoir, and from memoir back to novels. Each of these shifts marked a new embrace of the issues of the moment, following what could appear, now, to be a commitment to the form of an age or its overriding *style*.

Perhaps part of Hewett's ability to reach audiences of different generations was not just an engagement with the issues of the period, but an interest in experimenting with form, or with transformations in her medium as a writer. Unrelentingly self-referential, elements of Hewett's work feature in other pieces: the repeated details of the lives of very similar heroines, the poetic phrases repeated in her autobiography, the first person confessional mode and the practised, performing mythic figures. Not wholly fictive, this material figures as Hewett's principal *topos* and unites her work across the varying conventions of genre and the differing practical demands of theatre, memoir, novel, and all that poetry. If the themes repeat, perhaps we should look to the forms for the impact of social change in Hewett's work, to trace the ways she responded to history and its demands. It could be that history demanded she change how she said what there was to say, rather than determine straightforwardly what could or should be said.

Towards the beginning of *Wild Card*, the first volume of Hewett's autobiography, Hewett lists the roles given to her by her life, in a paragraph often quoted:

> Daughter, sister, lover, wife, mother, grandmother, domestic treasure, I will be suborned into all these roles (except perhaps domestic treasure . . . there I am always clumsy and half-hearted), but I have my vocation. It is outside sex, and yet my sex is part of it. It is already fixed, brutal, implacable, complete. There is nothing I can do about it, except get better at it. It shakes me, seductive as love. Words fall out, I am possessed by them.

When I write them down, there seem to have been six stages in Hewett's career. These stages will be familiar to anyone who has embraced or been a fan of Hewett's work, and readers and critics have

sought to explain the shifts between genres in various ways.

Hewett began as a poet and could be said to have always remained one. A poem from her teenage years, which survived only in a school mate's autograph album, begins the *Collected Poems*. Even then her writing was exploring loss, memory, and the agonies of imagining a self for the outside world:

> *The dark fires shall burn in many rooms;*
> *will they sometimes miss me with my tangled hair—*
> ('Dark Fires')

This first stage was a distinguished one: the early prizes, the intensity of 'Testament' in its bitter melodrama (T.S. Eliot peopling the mourning landscapes of Judith Wright), and the wonderful, incomparable 'Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod', written in the heat of engagement and for a singing readership, not primarily reflective but grappling with a reality of change and conflict. Hewett's distinctive voice was established in this stage. But she had left this voice by her late twenties, buried it in the Toddy Flood of her years as communist, mother and wife, taking on a life and work that demanded other kinds of discipline.

Much of this second stage was spent writing only as a journalist and columnist in the communist press or as an advertising copywriter. The *Collected Poems* calls this stage 'Another Beginning' and from 1957 Hewett began writing in a literary way again: amazingly, a novel, written on the kitchen table from an initial short story, 'Bobbin Up'. The social realism of its account of a textile workers' strike, in the semi-fictional 'Jumbuk' mill, is rounded out with a poetic portrait of a city, of working Sydney, and a circling structure relating the lives of a group of working women, their families, lovers and friends. It is a novel with no single central character and is experimental in that way, at the same time realistically reporting the details of a Sydney that was soon to disappear, as Hewett said in her introduction to its Virago republication. In a quite different voice, *Bobbin Up* did set her writing again. In this period Hewett spoke up as a people's poet, the writer of songs of yearning and struggle, anger and the hard grief of life and romance. This is the period of 'Go Down Red Roses' and the legendary 'Where I Grew to Be a Man', Hewett's most famous poem, known as a song with its familiar chorus line: 'There's Weevils in the Flour'. Then 'Legend of the Green Country', again with Eliot as an influence, about European guilt and memory in a West Australian wheat landscape peopled with ghosts and bitter kinds of love. In 1963, Hewett published some of her poetry in a volume of ballads and folk poetry with her husband Merv Lilley, *What About the People!* By then Hewett was writing as a chronicler of those wheatbelts of WA, a regional writer with a regional audience.

She had always written novels—one in her childhood called *Wheat*, another when she was 18, burned when she was 22, called *Daylight*—so the transition to novel-writing from poetry was perhaps less of a shift than it could appear from her published record. What's interesting about this cross into another form, successful as it was (despite the reviews which disliked *Bobbin Up*'s concern with sexuality), is that Hewett kept writing as a poet. She wrote substantial and wonderful poetry in this period, when another writer would have let go of that old form and become a novelist. Hewett never let go of her skills in any genre. She never wholly discarded the old but added a new mode while continuing to write in the others, an accretion of multiple ways of speaking.

Next, in a more radical and transformative shift, Hewett began writing plays. From her first and least experimental production, *This Old Man Came Rolling Home*, her plays took Australian theatre in new directions. Peter Fitzpatrick noted that Hewett's "kind of theatre" didn't completely fit the new wave of the early seventies in Australia, pointing to the generation gap between Hewett at fifty, and the new graduates Williamson, Buzo and Hibberd. Supplementing the concerns of her earlier writing, such as politics and sexuality, memory and desire, with the freedoms and broader scope of performance, her move into theatre gave her work the added dimensions of song, movement and embodied imagery. And Hewett's plays were about women in new ways, criticised by second-wave feminists for their individualist focus and rampant romanticism, but by the 1980s the central concern of these plays with the late twentieth century 'crisis of the subject', explored precisely as a feminist crisis, was obvious. This period saw about fifteen produced scripts, a volume of collected plays, a collection of essays from scholars and a critical monograph about her work titled *The Feminine as Subversion*. By the late 1980s Hewett sustained an national reputation as an incomparably provocative and intellectual playwright, whose theatre nevertheless put sex and desire on stage in ways that had not been seen, and that will always be asso-

ciated with her work. These were the decades of Hewett's greatest productivity and success, as the wonderful poetry collections also succeeded each other and articulated a new feminist iconography, wrought from the Romantic and sentimental Victorian poets and Hewett's ferocious self-consciousness and wit—*Rapunzel in Suburbia*, *Greenhouse*, *Alice in Wormland*, and *A Tremendous World in her Head*.

At the end of the 1980s, Hewett moved to consolidate this productive life in memoir. The magic of *Wild Card* is its perpetual present tense, the way it tells the past as stories for the future, for the future of Dorothy the writer, who is both in the past and the speaking, remembering present. Leaving her 'first house', she says: "I'll make legends out of this place . . . I'll write poems and plays and stories full of ghosts." *Wild Card* was her most popular venture and combined with a large volume of press and commentary on her life by the early 1990s. In this stage, Hewett took up a role as a public figure: as a maverick writer and rebel, feminist icon and loved eccentric. Writing *Wild Card* took her back to the freedom of writing prose and in her later years she reinvented herself again, producing two new novels and collecting a volume of her short stories from the various forums where they'd been published since 1961. The move into novel writing was made even as she continued to write as a prominent poet and to push for the staging of her last big trilogy of plays, *The Wire Fences of Jarrabin*, at the time of writing being performed by NIDA in a single play titled *Jarrabin*, adapted by John Clark. This completes five different stages and one could say, as perhaps Hewett would have, that this last was her final transition.

It's important to emphasise the success of her last volume of poetry, *Halfway Up the Mountain*, in marking the end of Hewett's life. Hewett herself loved poetry best, as she said more than once in interview. And her 'true voice' was perhaps in her poetry, as Peter Bishop, the director of Varuna, remarked in an interview soon after her death. In this and *Peninsula*, as well as in her late novels *The Toucher* and *Neap Tide*, Hewett turned to face the bleak compromises and tragic banalities of aging and death, articulated with the strains of loss and the hollowness of idealised memory always present in her work. In a poem written at 40, she signalled something of the work that this was and is for any writer; the burden of inhabiting a life at the same time as continuing to turn it inside out for others, for its music and mythic ghosts:

> *For I must carry with me on this journey,*
> *The burden of my life, unburdened, gladly singing;*
> ('My Fortieth Year')

Hewett's enormous body of work transits some of the great cultural and political shifts of the twentieth century. Inspirational in her ability to shrug off some of the most burdensome claustrophobia of Australian cultural life, she supported many younger writers and carved a place for a woman writer to be at once intensely confessional and publicly political—a new mode.

Hewett should be remembered for her courage to live as she wrote and her ability to write with a will to be in the world she conjured, in all its bitterness and farce, mess and breezy joy. At seventy-nine, with the second volume of her memoirs unfinished, Hewett was perhaps not ready to leave the writing world in which she had made and lived so much—a world ready to let her go.

Published works by Dorothy Hewett referred to:

Bobbin Up, Australasian Book Society 1959, Virago Press, 1985, Vulgar Press, 1999.
With Merv Lilley, *What About the People!*, Realist Writers, 1963.
Rapunzel in Suburbia, Prism, 1976.
Greenhouse, Big Smoke Books, 1979.
Alice in Wormland, Paperbark Press, 1987.
A Tremendous World in Her Head, Dangaroo Press, 1989.
Wild Card, Penguin, 1990.
Collected Plays, Currency Press, 1992.
The Toucher, McPhee Gribble, 1993.
Peninsula, FACP, 1994.
Collected Poems, FACP, 1995.
Neap Tide, Penguin, 1999.
A Baker's Dozen, Penguin, 2001.
Halfway up the Mountain, FACP, 2001.

Nicole Moore is a postdoctoral research fellow at Macquarie University. In an interview for Overland *in 1999, she asked Dorothy Hewett, among other questions, if she was a twentieth-century writer.*

tribute / **JASNA NOVAKOVIC**

FICTIONAL CHARACTERS TAKE OVER

Conversations with Dorothy Hewett shed light on her dramatic oeuvre

WHO WAS SHE? The *femme fatale*, the indiscreet seductress, a shrewd female, feminine dreamer, communist, humanist, academic, theatre critic, poet, playwright, prose writer, wife to Merv Lilley of forty-four years and mother of five successful professionals, a temptress, supporter and inspirer, a Hollywood beauty on the front cover of her autobiographical *Wild Card*, a witch-like figure painted by Geoffrey Proud, Archibald Winner in 1990. *Wild Card*, covering the years between her birth in 1923 and her life's turning point in 1958, is the closest personal record of the truth of herself as Hewett saw it. The epilogue with which this text folds tells of the last visit she paid to the farm and the nearby country town of Wickepin in Western Australia where her childhood vision of happiness and contentment took shape: "Turning away we climbed into the car, saying, 'We'll never come back'. There is no need because in the Dream Girl's Garden, in Golden Valley, in the districts of Jarrabin and Mukinupin, the first house lies secure in the hollow of the heart. Only the ghosts keep walking in our sleep, ringing us up out of nowhere . . ." Hewett's last play, produced in a professional theatre in October 2001, after eighteen years of forced absence, is titled *Nowhere*. In the absence of the planned second autobiographical volume, Hewett's imaginative engagements with the world endure as testament to the vision of this larger-than-life author.

Like her most popular play *The Man from Mukinupin* of some twenty-odd years ago, *Nowhere* begins with a dream. Two men, representing two generations of Australians, have selected an abandoned old showground for a home site, on the edge of the town that has lost interest in its dormant magic. They are soon joined by a young female, an outcast like them. The town's name is Dry Torrent. Thus again, with symbolism belying an 'authentic' setting, there opens a Hewett play which seems straightforward enough and yet is as elusive in its meaning as all of her works of fiction, especially those for theatre.

"I love that sense of community, working with other people, you know, getting out of that lonely situation where you sit at the desk by yourself. It's so different," Hewett told me in our first interview in March, 2000, explaining how she got suborned into writing the whole trilogy despite being "pretty pissed off with the theatre". The Melbourne Theatre Company and the Black Swan in Perth shared the feeling in the mid-1990s that Dorothy Hewett was "long overdue for a major revival". They commissioned a play, Hewett proposed a trilogy and when the script was almost ready the MTC went into huge debt and the Black Swan fell apart, so the *Jarrabin Trilogy* never saw the light of stage. Then in late 2000, Aubrey Mellor set about commissioning plays for the Playbox's twenty-first birthday. Hewett was one of the theatre's three playwright patrons. Her initial response to the invitation was "No, I can't," she said, but later changed her mind.

In the Blue Mountains, where Hewett lived, reside about ninety actors, so one day she sent out invitations, cleared out all the furniture in her study, and placed the guests in a semi-circle for a sit-down reading of the *Trilogy*. "We did it all day because that's how long it takes, from 10 a.m. until about 7 p.m., with breaks for meals and coffee and stuff."


Perth, 1979

With the 1836 stone house, once a Cobb and Co. stopping place, as setting, there was no real need for additional décor. And then May-Brit Akerholt made her last-minute decision to include the *Jarrabin Trilogy* in the Playwrights' Conference program in Canberra. "My favourite director Rodney Fisher came all the way from Adelaide where he then was, and we rehearsed it for three days. It had a marvellous reception, but still nothing happened," recalled Hewett. The trilogy, which remained unstaged and unpublished in her lifetime, is set in the West Australian country like *The Man from Mukinupin* and quite a few of Hewett's plays. "I still felt I had things to say about that area which, in spite of the fact that I've lived in and around Sydney for years now, still fascinates me." She toyed with the idea of turning the trilogy into a novel for a while. "Not that it can replace the theatre; I love theatre," a tremor tinged Hewett's voice. Fortunately, she has always enjoyed taking risks; both in life and in art.

"I was 45 and a woman living in Western Australia, when I resumed writing. In theatre, it was virtually a masculine take-over. All these young, feisty university students from Melbourne and Sydney, they transformed the Australian theatre. But I was and yet I wasn't part of that whole movement." Aubrey Mellor agrees. "She was just a bit ahead of her time," he said, paying homage to Dorothy Hewett's dramatic vision. The complexity of signification clothed in the form best suited to the confronting idiom of her themes is the feature that has earned Hewett an outstanding position among Australian playwrights.

The Lady of Shenanigans also admitted in our interview that if she knew one thing for certain right from the start, it was that straight naturalism was not 'her thing'. Even Hewett's first play, *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home*, had the chorus of three old women in the manner of an ancient Greek tragedy as well as an old man, "old Father Time sort of a thing", on the bench. Unmoved by its poetic reverberations, the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s critic Harry Kippax got up from his seat after the applause had died, with the often-quoted exclamation on his lips: "Old, old, old. Call me a taxi." Hewett first thought that it would be a very good title for a comedy, but then she put aside her typewriter and went back to reading "all sorts of new playwrights, European playwrights in particular, whatever I could get". Frank Wedekind's *Spring's Awakening* hit her like a bombshell, then *Entertaining Mr Sloan* and of

course *Waiting for Godot*, and Patrick White. "Bond amongst the English," she added hastily, but then remembered: "Quite a bit of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, too. The whole expressionist movement in Europe just fascinated me. I loved the masks, all that."

When *her Mrs Porter And The Angel* eventually came out, Hewett was an academic teaching in the University of Western Australia English Department. She could not stay in Sydney for the opening night, but her friend Philip Parsons who directed the play and Aarne Neeme as his assistant were both terrified of the shock waves that the production caused. Hewett responded with a decision: "Now, I am going to try something larger," and started writing *The Chapel Perilous*, the play she later considered "the most important thing that happened to me at that time". Helen McDonald played the lead and Hewett said she was stupendous. "She is the most marvellous actress who has never been appreciated in this country and acts just occasionally now. You get a lot of these stories in the Australian theatre."

The Perth production was very successful and perfectly suited the space it had been written for. But the Sydney one, which was the second play shown in the Opera House theatre after it had been built, was "very disappointing", thought Hewett. Not because it offended most men in the audience and some women too—for it offended conservatism altogether—but because the play came out "as a Gothic mish-mash and the actress who was Sally Banner played the role as a kind of a sex-pot and that was all". The *Sydney Morning Herald*'s reviewer—not Harry Kippax this time—loathed it, but Patrick White sent a letter to the editor in defence of the play. "Now, they [Kippax and White] were never friends again," laughed Hewett mischievously, remembering her acerbic critic who relentlessly condemned her effort to put the woman dead centre in the story. "I don't think it's as bad now. But in those days! I think because audiences were so uncertain, so unsophisticated, they tended to take the word of someone who was an accredited critic as Holy Writ."

Was it the Victorian upbringing she was fighting all the time? Hewett nodded: "All the time." Not everybody responded the same way, though. While she was living in King's Cross, she used to hear knocks on the door and there'd be some young woman standing in front of her, looking very naive and hippie, saying "I am Sally Banner". And a young man once came into one of Hewett's tutorials and complained: "I've looked all over Australia for Sally Banner and I can't find her." People were simply not exposed to the modern European theatre enough and they took the events on stage at their face value. Hewett's interest in the human psyche also far exceeded the common Australian practice. She did attend a course in psychology at the University of Western Australia which, in 1941, had the only department in the country where Freud, Adler and a bit of Jung were taught. *The Chapel Perilous* proved to be one of Hewett's most frequently performed plays and she even turned it into a radio play specifically to be broadcast on BBC, Scotland.

Artists tend to tell unpalatable truths. Hewett, for instance, exposed people's deepest secrets, because she believed that this is what drama should do. With *The Chapel Perilous* and her subsequent play *Bon Bons and Roses for Dolly* she set out deliberately "to try and redress the imbalance of the depiction of women in the Australian theatre. For, in all those young Pram Factory writers' plays women are either bimbos or else they feed lines to the magnificent male." The public however received mostly a distorted view. Everything was seen through a sort of sexual haze, as expressions of extreme egotism from "these sex goddesses"; whereas Hewett was fascinated with a woman figure who used her sexuality in various ways "which, when I was young, was one of the few places I suppose we could use . . . any sort of power. There wasn't any other."

In those early days, she also read a lot of drama theory because she was teaching Brecht, some Dürrenmatt, some Frisch, as well as the Elizabethans—Shakespeare, of course, but also Webster and Tourneur. And she used to go down to that big empty space at the University of Western Australia, which was just a huge platform stage called the New Fortune Theatre, three tiers up, with a little balcony, and the audience sitting wrapped around on three sides. She would let her imagination flow freely in space and time, and it somehow always made room for the grotesque. All Hewett's plays were open-ended, their structure eluding the well-made form of beginning, middle and end. They emulated the spirit of the avant-garde which encouraged people to use a bit of imagination and be more active in helping make the real world a better or at least more interesting place to live.

The Tatty Hollow Story was characteristically received as more or less straight autobiography. Most people thought that Tatty was modeled after Hewett and yet the *femme fatale* character came out of a perspex telephone booth, on a rainy day in Sydney. There, illuminated by a single shaft of light, stood a woman with long blond hair, in a raincoat, with her back turned to the playwright. "I transposed her into a dummy in the cupboard and then just tried to put some flesh on her bones." People's delusion was perhaps mostly Hewett's fault, because she did include some real characters, real events and dates into her writing which led some of the public to believe that she was too overtly autobiographical. But the technique she has developed is, like everything else about Hewett, more subtle and sophisticated than that. By externalising some highly personal moments and her emotional responses to them, Hewett opened up new avenues of expression which tended to subvert rather than reinforce realism; especially the assumption that 'grasping' reality "conceptually means possessing and controlling it", as the American theorist Richard Murphy put it. If psychoanalysis and expressionist devices, along with melodrama and pastiche in her later career, proved to be her favourite techniques, then the patient on the couch was not just Dorothy Hewett; it was the society she was the product of.

In 1976 when three young men, Graeme Blundell, Garrie Hutchinson and Carrillo Gantner, made up their minds to set up a new theatre that would show the plays which otherwise stood no chance in Australia, they called it Hoopla, and one of the plays on the double bill scheduled for the opening night was *The Golden Oldies* by Dorothy Hewett. Much later I went to see Edward Albee's *The Three Tall Women*. As the scenes passed my astonishment grew, for I could not believe how similar it was in theme and structure to *The Golden Oldies*. Albee won the Pulitzer Prize for his play in 1994, so it was written almost twenty years after Hewett's nostalgic drama about the suppressed love and emotional inarticulateness of the members of society who should be the custodians of family affection. Hoopla Productions is now the Playbox Theatre.

The Rising of Pete Marsh, the final production before *Nowhere*, was commissioned specifically for the New Fortune Theatre, the same space for which *The Chapel Perilous* was created. The director was again Aarne Neeme and again the critics thought the play was impossible to understand. Is that why Hewett's most recent plays have a simpler structure and an apparently clear-cut story? Hewett herself always insisted that her plays started off with an image of the landscape in her mind's eye, not with an idea for a character. The same motifs and images recur over and over again throughout her dramatic *oeuvre*, forming a pattern which gives a clue to the secret of Hewett's writings and her personality. Being an idealist, she believed that authors have a mission in life. In her Colin Simpson lecture to the Australian Society of Authors in Sydney in 1998, published in *Overland* 153, she quoted the Peruvian novelist, Mario Vargas Llosa: "In an age of brutal indifference artists are the creators and guardians of freedom through their idiosyncratic dissent."

In *Nowhere* Hewett for the first time assumed the form of a male hero. She emerged as an 80-year-old prophet, "once a Communist", who rejoiced in the promise of rejuvenation of Australian land and of the revolution of social habit. She left a campfire burning outside Josh's shack all the time. His memento song, a variant of 'Joe Hill' was quite explicit:

And standin' there beside me bed
And smilin' with 'is eyes
The part of me they couldn't kill
Goes on to organise.

The play's last lines, however, refuse closure. The saga inspired by the belief that "Dorothy Hewett was long overdue for a major revival"—her *Jarrabin Trilogy*—was eventually produced by NIDA in mid-October this year, as an 'abridged' adaptation created by director John Clark. Hewett gave his creation a seal of approval while in hospital. The efforts of the Playbox and NIDA are, regrettably, hardly enough for a major revival. Only by observing plays' on-going relevance to people can authors like Dorothy Hewett win a place in the heart and imagination of the Australian nation.

Jasna Novakovic is doing a PhD thesis on Dorothy Hewett and her contribution to the theatre avant-garde in Australia, at Monash University.

essay / **JOHN KINSELLA**

THE SHIFTING CITY AND THE SHIFTING BUSH

From paranoia to celebration

MY BROTHER WAS TELLING ME of a guy who had his arm ripped off by the belt driving a shearing plant—just like the one in *Sunday Too Far Away*, shearing technology having remained pretty static other than the move from narrow to wide combs. It's a story that along with overturning tractors and drowning in dams, augers eating limbs and accidents with rifles, forms the stock of country horror stories, or what we might call wheatbelt gothic. On the one hand, these stories are a clear demonstration of appalling working conditions, where safety standards of larger, more centralised industries haven't taken hold. On the other, they're part of the language of protection deployed by some, maybe many, country people to ward off city slickers and/or prospective intruders in general. The city markets are about buying produce, not sticking their nose into the business of the bush.

Bush humour might form the backbone of the myth of nation, but it's also a private matter. My brother told me another story concerning a guy he generically termed "the most miserable bastard I've ever seen in a shearing shed".

This guy was a tall shearer, and consequently walked with a stoop, spending much of his life bent almost double. He'd sit on his esky at smoko and chew slowly, a pained expression on his face, saying nothing and staring at the other shearers. His wife was a wool classer, so she occasionally spoke to him, but in a private muttered language that only increased the sense of alienation in the shed. One day he erupted into life while shearing a sheep with "I've swallowed my bloody tooth!" Turned out that he'd swallowed one of his gold fillings and, being a "miserly man", he proceeded to spend his smokos out in the scrub analysing his stools. Given the filling didn't appear for a week, it was suggested that he might consider changing his diet to make himself a little more regular.

My brother told this story in an animated and affectionate way after work, as a way of unwinding after a hard day. He told it to family, in the country. We were on the floor with laughter. Now, stories like this circulate from shed to pub, pub to pub, and become folklore. A relative takes them to the city. They appear in books of anecdotes, become part of the myth of place. They become public and gentrified, and, one might argue, citified. I'd like to consider the tensions between the city and the bush, but more importantly the reliance each has on the other. And moving on from these concerns, I'll consider in this light the poetry of Dorothy Hewett, for whom the city and the bush were inseparable, both necessary and overwhelming.

The *Bulletin* Debate, or so-called 'Bush Controversy', of the early 1890s, involved the poets Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson. It's a well-known story, so I'll look at it only briefly. Here is a taste of the tones used in the exchange between the two mates, cooked up to prompt reaction. Lawson took a dark view of the bush and Paterson defended it. Others chipped in on the way. Here's a stanza of Lawson's 'Borderland' (or 'Up the Country'), the first poem in the pair's exchange:

Miles and miles of thirsty gutters—strings of muddy waterholes
In the place of "shining rivers"—("walled by cliffs and forest boles").
Barren ridges, gullies, ridges! where the everlasting flies—
Fiercer than the plagues of Egypt—swarm about your blighted eyes!
Bush! where there is no horizon! where the buried bushman sees
Nothing. Nothing! but the maddening sameness of the stunted trees!
Lonely hut where drought's eternal—suffocating atmosphere—
Where the God forgotten hatter dreams of city-life and beer.

Now from Paterson's reply:

But you found the bush was dismal and a land of no delight—
Did you chance to hear a chorus in the shearers' huts at night?
Did they "rise up William Riley" by the camp-fire's cheery blaze?
Did they rise him as we rose him in the good old droving days?
And the women of the homesteads and the men you chanced to meet—
Where their faces sour and saddened like the "faces in the street"?
And the "shy selector children"—were they better now or worse
Than the little city urchins who would greet you with a curse?
Is not such a life much better than the squalid street and square
Where the fallen women flaunt it in the fierce electric glare,
Where the sempstress plies her needle till her eyes are sore and red
In a filthy, dirty attic toiling on for daily bread?
Did you hear no sweeter voices in the music of the bush
Than the roar of trams and buses, and the war-whoop of "the push"?

—and so it progressed. In contemporary poetry, Les Murray has been the most vehement separator of the city and the bush. The division by critics, per his early 70s exchange with Peter Porter, of the Boeotian (Murray) and Athenian (Porter), is as well known as the Lawson–Paterson construct. One might have imagined something similar in discussions between Marcus Clarke and Henry Kendall.

Considering a prospect-and-refuge scenario, it is easy to paint a picture of the refuge quality of the city, from the walled city-state or medieval town, through to the modern metropolis protected by suburbs and often geographical peculiarities, or in the case of a city like London or Columbus, Ohio, hemming themselves in behind giant orbital roads that encircle population and structures like a moat. In the case of Perth, the river, the coast, the hills. The bush town will follow the same geographical inclinations, but will obviously be smaller and thus more vulnerable. In terms of people to hide among, it's more difficult—most people know, or know *of*, most people in a small town. In my younger years I lived in Bridgetown—being loaded with dreadlocks, staying in a shack without electricity and growing organic vegetables made me and those I lived with into 'targets'. The townsfolk didn't know us by name, but certainly knew us by sight and reputation. Generally, people smiled and let us be.

One family, however, gave us the nickname 'dyke fleas' and set about running us out of town. They poisoned our water, shot at the shack, and actually wrote across my poems that lay on a makeshift desk, "we have been read". This was before 'feral' became a byword to deal with environmental-minded youth living on the edge of the forest. The opposition to our presence was less about the prospect of us being from the city (we'd actually come from the south-west town of Yarloop), than about seeing us as a threat to the unaudited secret world of their 'country' space.

The openness of the farmlands, the prospect hemmed in by hills and forest, was threatened by our seeing and potentially reporting to an outside world, maybe taking the message of their violence—shooting animals, racism, bush-bashing and so on—to the city, to the media. Even more worrying from their point of view, we might surmise, was that we were precursors to more of the same. Now, this also applies to living in the more open space of the wheatbelt with which I am familiar. You might be

seen in the middle of the paddock, but it depends by whom. Farmers tend not to like scrutiny. There's a private world, in which many crimes of violence toward animals and land are hidden.

Before you assume that I am setting up a dichotomous model, one might level a similar accusation at those who live in the city. The city is a place where you are never alone—outside the privacy of your immediate living space, others will see you. But anonymity comes with numbers. Because of familiarity with social contact, you are less *seen* than you are in the country, where something even slightly out of place will be noticed. The city creates anonymity through proximity. The outback represents the ability to get lost. And when the bush is feminised it becomes a place of fear, a place that will, dentata-like, consume you. We might think of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, or *The Long Weekend*, or numerous other films, paintings and novels, in this light.

I worked on the wheatbins at Mingenew. A classic rite of passage for university students, the wheatbins—with their weigh stations, sample huts, and portable housing—become places where the bush does its best to test the resilience of city kids. In my case, I knew what to expect, having spent a lot of time on farms and having lived in Geraldton for a number of years. Geraldton is the closest large town, or now city, to Mingenew, so on weekends off, which were rare, a friend from another bin would meet me, or one of my workmates, and we'd hitch a lift to Geraldton.

To those in the capital city, Perth, Geraldton seems a country town, but to someone from Mingenew it has all the aspects of a city. Suburbs, the odd multi-storey building, and a social life. It's all relative. The people in Geraldton were refined in ways that seemed ironic and humorous, whereas when I first went to the University of Western Australia, I'd hear things like "country boys are all wild", referring to the fact I'd schooled in Geraldton. In the same way you hear this from Sydney and Melbourne regarding Perth, and from London regarding everywhere else. The centre makes of itself the centre, and distance means ignorance in the centre's terms.

Randolph Stow's novel, *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, is set in Geraldton and surrounding stations, and captures the tension between the encrypted freedoms of the 'bush' and the fragile protections of the town. Towns and cities work to make themselves secure, but are always reliant on outside resources and thus vulnerable. Cities resist siege by expanding, by consuming more and more of their surroundings. Occasionally they fragment into mutually supporting satellite cities, or join up with other centres of population, as you see around Birmingham in England. But ultimately they fear their own passing, being consumed by the landscape and geographical properties of the bush. Stow writes:

> The boy was not aware of living in a young country. He knew that he lived in a very old town, full of empty shops with dirty windows and houses with falling fences. He knew that he lived in an old, haunted land, where big stone flour-mills and small stone farmhouses stood windowless and staring among twisted trees.

We read a few pages later:

> The town was shabby, barren, built on shifting sandhills jutting out into the sea. To the north and south of the town the white dunes were never still, but were forever moving in the southerly, finding new outlines, windrippled, dazzling. If ever people were to leave the town the sand would come back to bury it. It would be at first a town under snow. And then no town at all, only the woolwhite hills of Costa Bianca.

Now, station buildings and fences will suffer the same shifts in time, which for the 6-year-old Rob Coram is the prime concern of life—that the moment can never be recaptured, that it passes and is gone—but the elementalism of the haunted land will win out.

Speaking generally, the hubris of the city in rendering plaques to its own immortality, climbing into the skyline, creating an art of design over the earth it rests upon, becomes the prime focus for much of the bush's contempt for the town or city.

The wheatbins functioned exactly as Tom Flood has indicated in his novel *Oceana Fine*. The wheat becomes a city. In my first season on the bins the residents of the hut consisted of a local roo-shooter, aged about 22, an Army-Reserve guy of the same age who spent most of his spare time in the bush, hunting, a guy nicknamed 'Pom' because he'd come straight out from the UK, a medical student, and myself. All male.

Pom became the butt of jokes on the bin—people 'toughening' him with a variety of malicious tricks—such as strapping a half-alive dugite snake to the lever of a piece of machinery he was operat-

I've often heard it said in the bush that the city is like a prison. We are watched in numerous different ways—by our neighbours, multanova speed cameras, surveillance cameras on city corners hidden in smoky plastic bowls suspended like sightings over Roswell.

ing, and placing another in his sleeping bag; the two shooting guys spent their time killing cats, and the medical student sat on top of the grain tower during his private moments staring into the sunset, tripping on LSD. He said that he could see into the truth of the country by doing this, that it opened the doors the farmers wouldn't open for him. He also got very friendly with the two barmaids, and that helped his perception as well. Interestingly, although he was pure city slicker, people left him alone.

Because I was from both the country and the city, I unsettled them, Pom aside. The medical student saw me as a wheatbelt foreigner, and the country lads saw me as a book-reading city bloke. I was caught in between. It sounds amusing, but I received some quite severe beatings over this and the only people I felt any kinship with were the Aborigines who lived in the tin shacks on the edge of town. They didn't judge me, and were interested in talking about the names of plants and animals.

One night, a group of young men from surrounding farms, who'd been trucking in grain, joined forces with workers from the pub, shot the Aboriginal people's shacks to pieces and burnt them to the ground. This was hushed up. One of the guys I lived with, who said he wasn't involved, secretly said to me: "They'd be safer in the bush", 'they' meaning the Indigenous people. This was actually an expression of compassion, but said much about the relative nature of what we call the outback. The noble savage exclusionism, the 'in their place', the place that is constantly renegotiated and resurveyed, comes into question.

To the Geraldton people, Mingenew is the bush; to Mingenew the bush is the outlying farms. To those on the farms, it's the arid zone beyond. The bush brings legitimacy of hardship and a secret knowledge, but it's also the place of outcasts. It's the place where Patrick White's Voss is destroyed for both his hubris and his vision.

For a child growing up in the sixties and seventies, going North was a euphemism for separation or divorce of parents. I wasn't the only child whose father 'went North'. For my father, and other men like him, it was a journey that moved him away from domesticity, and possibly responsibility. It was a place where a new life might be forged. The mines fed the structures of cities, and created an anti-city in their place—vast open pits that denied landscape, that flaunted their denial of refuge. Manliness was associated with openness, and the mining towns that companies established to house their workers became as Flood's city of wheat. Privacy was second to community, but a community held together by work and dedication to the corporate structure, despite the ironic rejection that accompanies drinking sessions and barbecues. In time, these communities changed, and with shopping-centre culture came families, or maybe vice-versa. The bush became the town proper, and the outback was where 'bushmen and blacks' were found. The communities made an exception for a distant place like Millstream, because it was a good family picnicking area.

The cosmopolitanism of the metropolis could be rejected by a comparatively intimate social control, still signalled by the company, or eventually companies. As communal infrastructure developed, and government monies flowed in, and diversity in product was required, slight changes in social homogeneity came into play. My father married in Roebourne, not far from the mining town he worked in. Among confusing factors about occupation and ideas of the bush are the links, the veins that reach out and then establish themselves as new centres, new hearts. Where the dead men were lying, soon the municipal follows—to celebrate them, or to search out what they might have known. To quote Barcroft Boake:

Out on the wastes of the Never Never—
That's where the dead men lie!
There where the heat-waves dance forever—
That's where the dead men lie!
That's where the Earth's loved sons are keeping
Endless tryst: not the west wind sweeping
Feverish pinions can wake their sleeping—
Out where the dead men lie!

It is said by many men in the bush that it's hard to get a woman to go out there unless she was born there or has a fantasy of escape that will soon turn sour.

Where brown Summer and Death have mated—
That's where the dead men lie!
Loving with fiery lust unsated—
That's where the dead men lie!
Out where the grinning skulls bleach whitely
Under the saltbush sparkling brightly;
Out where the wild dogs chorus nightly—
That's where the dead men lie!

The sexual intensity of the first line in the second stanza fits well with the single men's quarters and pornography stories of the bush. Papers often carry stories of these 'miners and bushmen' being arrested for illegal sexual activity in south-east Asia, and the buying of so-called Filipino brides is commonplace. Most often, the nominated reason for such purchases is that "they [the women] are subservient". A language of racism and oppression from the open lines of prospect. It is deceptive; the sharing of pornography and the drink-talk of sex contains its own hidden agendas. The most open communities are often the most closed. Scrutiny is fluid.

Pipelines from metropolitan fringe catchment areas, the State Emergency Service, the Bureau of Meteorology, the city offices of Co-operative Bulk Handling where I learned to be a grain protein sampler, stock-buying firms and insurance agents; the city anchors the organic machinery of the country. The two are inseparable. In many ways the city attempts to construct the 'bush' in the city, not only through the simulacra of parks, but through the preservation of 'native bushland', as in the case of the bush areas of Sydney and King's Park in Perth. There's the obvious desire for taxonomy, for recording and archiving species as a databank of identity, but also to provide an inverted *cordon sanitaire* over which city people can cross into the wild without leaving the security of the metropolis. It's a place of refuge inside refuge, and in the case of the elevated King's Park, its non-bush river frontage carries the best views of the city and hills.

It's a control mechanism, a surveillance that brings a sense of order and destiny. It's where the lyrical self of poetry meets with the social self of the public voice. That's why the war dead are memorialised there, and it's why they fly the flag there. I've often heard it said in the bush that the city is like a prison. And it is a panopticon in which we are watched in numerous different ways—by our neighbours, multanova speed cameras, surveillance cameras on city corners hidden in smoky plastic bowls suspended like sightings over Roswell.

The alien connection is an interesting one. Reports of sightings over the city seem rarer—people don't want to seem fools when so many can see the same thing, and there's a sense of technology, that anything seen will be proved to have a logical explanation. Out in the bush, isolated, a strange sighting, especially at night, enhances and emphasises isolation. There are few if any to validate, and vulnerability is foremost. A language of seeing and being seen centres on vulnerability, exposure, and the ability to claim anonymity. To hide behind a York gum or an ironbark is not the same as being lost in the crowd! They sense your body-heat out there!

I have travelled this far without mentioning the pastoral, because pastoral has little to do with it. Pastoral has always been about negotiating issues of display and presentation, and concepts of the bush are about the beyond. The wheatbelt which seems 'bush' to the city might produce grain to feed cities, but it also relies on lifelines to the city. It presents itself for sale and profit, be it financial or in some social orders for the kudos of supply, and consequently is part of the staging of the rural drama. It provides the raw materials for the city players to act, if you like. The real bush, the outback, is beyond this. The lines of supply thin. Many days' journey by car or a long plane flight. And with telecommunications being what they are, the isolation of the outback station changes in nature, it becomes a centre in itself. Beyond that, the desert. The spinifex as bush.

In the pastoral belt, towns offer free land if you'll build, to stop the haemorrhaging to the city. This haemorrhaging is a familiar pattern in industrial and industrialising societies, but in the case of Western

Australia, with its single large city and massive surface area, it has different meaning. A sense develops that those people leaving should never have been there in the first place, and the pastoral idyll comes unstuck at the seams. Salinity, drought, erosion . . . a display to preserve a social hierarchy that can't be maintained. The centre that cannot hold.

It is interesting to consider the Indigenous rural as counterpoint to a European construct of pastoral ideation. The rural aspect of indigenous culture is always seen in terms of the outback as, by associating it with the city—or the near—it becomes clear that a language of exclusion and occupation is at the basis of the discussion. In Olga Gostin and Alwin Chong's chapter 'Living Wisdom: Aborigines and the Environment', from the book *Aboriginal Australia* edited by Colin Bourke, Eleanor Bourke and Bill Edwards, we read:

> Permaculture is also finding acceptance and respectability as a more sustainable form of land use (Mollison and Holmgren, 1984). In effect this mirrors the Aboriginal practice of harvesting a variety of crops in a sustainable way in the natural environment. One of the benefits of this newfound respect for Aboriginal botanical knowledge and land management skills is a rediscovery of Aboriginal pharmaceutical and medicinal practices (Low, 1990, 1991; Aboriginal Communities of Northern Territory of Australia, 1988). Many of these are firmly based on verifiable scientific facts and have generated a flurry of activity to retrieve and safeguard this knowledge lest it be lost to humankind.

A subtext here: cities aren't the only repositories of technology and learning (leaving aside the authors' apparent need to rely on 'science' for verification). The consolidation of information happens outside town structures and works within communities, outback or otherwise.

They continue:

> The same point is made in the ABC TV series *Bushtucker Man* which explores the rich diversity of the Australian environment and, most importantly, reveals the depth of knowledge and understanding of the natural environment of the original Australians. However, many Aboriginal people believe that the series would have been more appropriate with Aboriginal persons identified as the focal and unifying point. As it stands, the series is regarded as a form of cultural appropriation. While they are proud of the belated recognition given to the richness of their cultures, Aboriginal people resent the way aspects of their ancient knowledge and wisdom were recorded and interpreted and are handled today.

Programs like *Bushtucker Man* are also about constructing notions of an outback in which the other is both place and people presented as an unmediated, natural pastoral. A panacea for the ills of the city. One of the more disturbing manifestations of this, done in the name of the good cause, is the annual Variety Bash, in which cars 'bash' the back roads like carnivale, perversely pastoralising the foreignness and inaccessibility of the outback.

As someone who spent many years moving between city and the bush, and is in some sense still doing so, I have found that it is impossible to have anything but an ambivalent relationship with both places. When in the city I crave the country, desiring the space, the 'nature', but also the sense of refusal and rejection of the values of the city. The Big Smoke and any string of clichés you care for. In the country, I find a constant need for the services and creative environments of the city—its libraries, galleries, and theatres. It's a construct of civilizing, a notion of artistic dialogue that comes with concentrations of people, of the tension induced by building at close proximity. Proximity again.

A great articulator of this conflict was Dorothy Hewett, who says in her 1982 essay 'The Garden and the City' (*Westerly*, No.4, 1982), in the context of moving from Western Australia to Sydney:

> The garden is, of course, eternally paradoxical. How to make a garden out of stinkwort, salt lake and scrub? But the garden is a garden of the spirit and bursts into a wild and unpredictable flowering, like the West Australian spring.

She continues later with:

> Leaving that wheat and sheep farm, fourteen miles from Wickepin, at the age of twelve, has become for me a symbol of exile; the impossible struggle to get back to the peace and harmony of the psychic garden.

A few more quotes are useful in painting a picture of Hewett's complex relationship with her home state. Sydney, of course, is exemplified as the city, with Perth a provincial town in the same way that Geraldton is to Perth. In some ways, Hewett's later move to "halfway up the mountain", that is, to her dark cottage in Faulconbridge in the Blue Mountains, is a 'reconciliation' of the city and the bush. On the rail line out of Sydney, and high in the blue air and eucalypt oils, Hewett became a medium, a point of transference for the language of city and bush—something she couldn't realise in Western Australia.

She writes of WA:

> I am not grateful for the loneliness I endured here, for the alienation, the contempt, the mediocrity, and the narrow, right-wing provincialism, that always hides a brutality at its heart. But then the role of the woman writer is always doubly subversive in a predominantly male ethos. She *thinks* subversively by nature and experience, and she writes from that other country of spirit and physicality, which still remains, for us, largely uncharted.

Consider 'the bush' in this context. It is said by many men in the bush that it's hard to get a woman to go out there unless she was born there or has a fantasy of escape that will soon turn sour. There's little community, and attempts at community through such organisations as the Church or CWA, quickly become vehicles for control and role-play enforcement. A particular notion of role-play and work informs this view. It's assumed that the man, if not closer to the land, is the one who will make it work. He will make the female earth fertile.

In the Barbara Baynton story 'The Chosen Vessel', in some ways a warning story to the urban woman, the isolated bush woman is threatened, raped and killed by the vagrant male, who, being disconnected from land or property or an immediate working attachment to it, wanders and becomes dangerous. Note that it is not the bush per se that's inimical to the woman here, but the transgressing male. His inability to make the earth fertile leads him to corrupt and pollute the female body. The woman's shearer husband himself is indifferent to her sufferings and has even ridiculed her pleas in the past when she tried to make him aware of the dangers: "'Needn't flatter yerself,' he had told her, 'nobody 'ud want ter run away with yew.'" The husband's absence exacerbates this contradiction of the codes of settlement, of making the land subservient and tame in the traditions of the pastoral, which entails a complex relationship between the male and the female earth, the provider. Without harmony, there can be no yield, nor fruits. It is the stuff of true horror, of abjection in the sense that the eye that sees through the cracks in the house flows into the body of the woman trapped, imprisoned, and certainly not protected by the building.

In terms of prospect and refuge, the bush or landscape might be seen to allow him to see her and yet not her to see him. The house is porous—she can see the swagman moving outside, as he searches through the cracks into the darkened room for her. Refuge and prospect are entangled and traumatised. However, it's more a matter of how the swagman-intruder is using the landscape to his own ends, rather than the landscape conspiring with him against her. This said, nature reflects or mimics their roles in this horror. As perpetrator, he makes use of the creek to hide himself, in a sense becoming one with the landscape, and reaches out of it to capture her when she runs from the house with her baby. When he murders her, the curlews take up her cry of murder—not so much in sympathy as in mimicry.

The 'bush' of 'The Chosen Vessel' is specified in terms of its isolation from the town:

> There was a track in front of the house, for it had once been a wine shanty, and a few travellers passed along at intervals. She was not afraid of horsemen; but the swagmen going to, or worse coming from, the dismal, drunken little township, a day's journey beyond, terrified her.

The swagman, of course, is both without place and of all places. He signifies intrusion and the violation of fences and boundaries. Even the good man in the story, the horseman, fails her, projecting a vision of Virgin and Child into the wilderness that is ultimately sterile, horrific. It has been said that the bush in this story also has 'malice' (see Krimmer and Lawson in *Barbara Baynton*, UQP, 1980), but the malice is really an amplification of human cruelty. The terror is manifested through human behaviour. The woman's body is the vessel in a religious and physical sense for the child. The house, with its portholes, is also a vessel, being violated by the swagman. The bush/nature (e.g. the cow), is witness to the vicious irony that the sacred is unpro-

tected by all but the female, the mother. Baynton wrote this story, along with the other stories in her collection *Bush Studies*, from the vantage point of the city looking back at the bush days of her childhood. And while she certainly doesn't see the bush in an idyllic sense, her comments on the dark side of human nature are inflected and deflected off 'nature', and through isolation.

We might consider the crimes of isolation in the city as well—the unlit street at night, the identical doorways in a high-rise apartment building . . . The bush is the house next door, the park across the road.

In the *Georgics*, Virgil writes of the order of things, and we might overlay a sexual reading of invasiveness, control, and rape-threat—a kind of patriarchal propaganda. Noting that Ceres and Dodona are female, and that the woods represent the wild:

> Ceres was the first to teach men to turn the earth with iron, when the acorns and the arbutes of the sacred wood began to fail, and Dodona withheld her food. Soon, too, on the corn fell trouble, the baneful mildew feeding on the stems, and the lazy thistle bristling in the fields; the crops die, and instead springs up a prickly growth of burs and caltrops, and amid the smiling corn luckless darnel and barren oats hold sway. Therefore, unless your hoe is ever ready to assail the weeds, your voice to terrify the birds, your knife to check the shade over the darkened land, and your prayers to invoke the rain, in vain, poor man, you will gaze on your neighbour's large store of grain, and you will be shaking oaks in the woods to assuage your hunger. (p.109; trans. H.R. Fairclough, rev. G.P. Goold)

Returning to Dorothy Hewett's essay 'The Garden and the City':

> Western Australia gave me a country to write about and to begin from, a landscape and a society that will forever be central to my imagination. It gave this earth, for the first time, for me, 'a habitation and a name'.
>
> *The Man From Mukinupin*, commissioned for the 150th Anniversary of Western Australia in 1979, was my attempt to come to terms with this conflicting love/hate relationship with my native place. The little country town on the edge of the creek bed, with the plovers rising into the limitless sky, stands in for Western Australia, its benevolence and its racism, its dreams and its nightmares. The light and the dark side of town are reconciled in the imagination in the figures of the two pairs of lovers: one off to fame and fortune with J.C. Williamson's, the other off to find a dubious Paradise on the other side of the saltlakes.

Bruce Bennett, in his essay 'Dorothy Hewett's Garden and City' in the volume he edited, *Dorothy Hewett: Selected Critical Essays*, makes a vital point regarding Hewett seeing Perth as a set of suburbs, and in some ways a small country town itself in the context of the great metropolis Sydney:

> To some extent, her Perth recalls Tom Stannage's memorable history, the *People of Perth*, in which he characterises the central tendency of successive communities there as a particularly successful but ambivalent and in part self-destructive quest for 'internal peace'.

Let's consider a later Sydney city poem of Hewett's:

> Winter in Sydney
>
> *The trees are sticks*
> *in the back garden*
> *rain stars the windows*
> *the sky is a blaze of light*
> *blackened with cloud*
> *Centrepoint tower*
> *cobwebs the wintry city*
>
> *two miles away*
> *you sit sober*
> *subdued bleak faced*
> *in a new house*
> *with a new wife*
> *and a new circle*
> *I live with the same husband*
> *in the same house*
> *redolent with memory*
>
> *only I am different*
> *because you have ceased*
> *to love me*
> *I have turned*
> *into an old woman*
> *I write poems*
> *full of light and patience*
> *I am reconciled*

to dying
life paid me out eventually
for having the courage to love

only I miss you
I will always miss you
coming in from the street
your briefcase
bursting with poems

but I don't weep
my eyes are dry
with watching . . .
the sky turns violet
the storm gathers
snow falls in the mountains
thunder rolls overhead
as the rain sets in
my bones begin to ache

once you told me
a survival story
in a miracle of adaptation
storks were found
nesting on the ledges
of New York skyscrapers.

The disparity between love and carnality, the despair felt when one is without the other, is palpable and tied in with visions of place, of the intensity of the city versus the 'wild'. Centrepoint tower becomes a living entity, the spider that binds the city within its prospect—all-seeing. The clouds are blackened and closing in, trapping the inhabitants. Age means a betrayal for a new love; weather—nature—renders the city victim. Poems full of light will not relieve the pain, and like the insurance policy, capitalism's Dead Sea Scrolls, life pays her out. But she will survive, like the storks making their home in the centre of capitalism. The most indifferent city can't be entirely indifferent to nature. Which is where Hewett and Baynton differ. The horror of Baynton's victim is as much in the alienation of the bush towards her plight. Nature is never indifferent in Hewett, even if it feigns being so. The city and the bush—Sydney and the bush—are inseparable.

In a later poem entitled 'The City', collected in Hewett's last volume of poetry published in her life, *Halfway up the Mountain*, Hewett seems to have lost faith in Sydney, and the intoxication it meant for her:

I grew old in that city
I lost my last dreams in it
now when I go there
it's like a cemetery
with all the gravestones
facing east from Bondi
the Icebergs surfing in
on the last big wave.

This poem of loss and rejection, if not despair, indicates a hollow place, a place in which the country has been expunged, extruded from the city. Arcadia has been vanquished or lost. But if we consider earlier poems, especially of the transitional figure of Nim in the autobiographically challenging and displacing sequence, 'The Alice Poems', that darkness is already built in. And once again, it's related to love. If the love wavers, the fabric of the natural world wavers, hardens, becomes empty structures. But love can rebuild them:

49

& she knew now
that there was no garden
the garden the fire & the last day
were every day
love lust sin wisdom
coexisted
& every moment
was the last moment
but the garden was a continual yearning
for what must always be lost
& found & lost again

twice she had gone with Nim
pushing open the gate
once it was ringed with hills
once with the city
they had recognised it instantly
yet each time
had been driven out howling
twice they had laid it waste
& yet it had never existed
that plants withered
& grew up again
the walls the hills
& the cubist towers
cracked fell & were resurrected

Hewett had no delusions about the betrayals of age and the vanity of love. She resented it being taken from her, but never lost the sensuality of carnal knowing, of the immensity of love. Love and nature were one and the same, and the city became a disconnected, dead thing only when nature—the bush—was totally alienated through a loss of love. In the poem 'From the Dark Cottage', we see the carnality and sensuality of touch, of the natural world, of the fringe world that connects her still with the bush of her past. This poem is also from the book *Halfway up the Mountain*, whose title resonates with optimism as well as irony, a distinct atheistic spiritualism. This paradox is not really a paradox, for as *Wuthering Heights* was one of her favourite novels, Hewett believed in passion no matter how destructive, and almost implied that true love must desert you, must collapse and leave you lonely. Briefly, out of exile, in 'From the Dark Cottage', a poem of loss, we have a beginning:

1

My skin itches for it
the darkness out there
under the oak tree
the daffodils springing up
like small wild trumpets
ringing the bird bath
the currawong floats by
a shadow from bough to bough
hunting the small birds away

only the neighbour is busy
controlling the autumn
shaking the leaves from the trees
before they fall he likes
a high fence with a tidy garden

but what is the use of complaining
there are no more words
we are the translators
as the feathers float from my quilt
they scatter in front of the fire
and everybody is too embarrassed to listen.

The evocation of Wordswoth's daffodils is a romantic confrontation. The shadows of past physical sensuality are blurred by physical incapacity and agedness. The language of touch and the senses is between nature and the persona. It's subtext, and not about speaking or listening—that's for a human world that grows more distant. The garden has been tamed, the small birds—always metempsychotic animals in Hewett's poetry—hunted away, but the death, darkness, the flipside of the bush, the essence of nature, maintains dialogue.

In Dorothy Hewett's autobiographical *Wild Card* we read:

> In 1912 my grandfather rode out the fourteen miles from Wickepin with his two brothers-in-law, and took up three thousand acres of virgin land. They called it Lambton Downs. The rather pretentious name was significant. These first-generation Australians always referred to England as 'home', and the Lambton came from my grandmother's background. Her stepfather was once owner of a plaster works at Lambton in County Durham [. . .] I discover L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon* and identify with Emily, a girl living in an isolated place (Prince Edward Island in Canada) who dreams of becoming a writer. My favourite book is *The Dream Girl's Garden*. It has a story about a fairyboy called Nim who has a wicked heart but beautiful face and body. Gradually, like Dorian Gray, his face distorts and his body twists grotesquely to match his cruel deeds. Only when he begins rescuing beetles, ladybirds and dragonflies from pools of water does the tide turn. He recovers his great beauty and becomes a boring Goody Two-Shoes. The morality tale is completely lost on me. I love the wicked Nim . . . the brilliant face with the beautiful, lying eyes.
>
> But the days are numbered. We can feel them passing, and everything seems to be haunted by . . . 'for the last time'.
>
> I ride out on Silver and come home at dusk when that weird primitive fear of the Aboriginality of the Australian bush shuts me out and sends me riding fast into the lighted circle of the farmhouse, that little stockade of European civilization.

The house as city in the bush. As walled place. Once again, undertones, or maybe overtones, of Marcus Clarke's famous comments:

> In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see no beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without

As *Wuthering Heights* was one of her favourite novels, Hewett believed in passion no matter how destructive.

> perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. He becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness.

This is the garden of guilt. From this contradictory Idyll in which the child creates an arcadia where contradictions are vital and evocative, where bad is enticing and good, where the romantic sensibility is fuelled, she is displaced, exiled to the city.

> This is the house of my adolescence, tantrums and tears—House and Garden, 1935—a monument to the thirties, an Art Deco museum in the dress circle facing the Swan River. 'Autumn tonings', my mother says, and autumn tonings it is.
>
> Textured walls, tapestried fireplaces, folding leadlight doors, an orange and brown geometric pattern carpeting the sitting room. The picture rail is hung with 'Autumn Fires' and 'Bluebell Wood' . . .

Interestingly, this description of the house is something like a stranded colonial house wrestling with its European heritage. It's Dransfield's Courland Penders in some ways—the house as pastoral stage where masques are played out for genteel audiences. It's the fear of the bush without the mediating spirit, without the romantic escape.

We learn that:

> Perth in 1936 is an innocent little city, not much bigger than a large country town, lost in time and distance, floating like a mirage on the banks of the Swan River. We live in a middle-class suburban street south of the river, lined with lopped-off plane trees, in a hideous, dark, liver brick bungalow I immediately christen 'The Castle of Despair'.

This is the house as limbo, then hell. Outside city and bush, it is a transfiguring place of alienation. It is a large town. It is neither one extreme nor the other. Eventually Hewett finds herself in Sydney, a real city:

> Sixty-five Marriott Street, Redfern, in the Cold War fifties—my very own Wigan Pier. This is a card house with a difference. Dying asparagus ferns, dead pot plants and chamber pots, hanging baskets draping a dismal curtain, three stands of rusty barbed wire looped along the front fence, it is a fitting memorial to Miss Donithorne and her maggot. The maggot is love, both spiritual and carnal. I have embraced the working class, and the symbol is this decrepit brick corner house where we squat one dark night with our two pink blankets, amongst the chocolate boxes, scent bottles, rice-coloured face powder and laddered silk stockings. The newspapers under the balding lino date back to the thirties. We are pulling up the giant weeds, throwing out the cracked chamber pots, the wire baskets and the mountains of buried tins.

Redfern, inner-city suburb, is rife with the codes of the garden and the city. It's as if even in pure metropolis, place arranges itself within the visual framework of the pastoral. This is the anti-Georgic, the result of social inequality, of class warfare. This is the stuff of Hewett's Communism, as much as the factory. The conflation of gender with work and productivity, of work and fertility is here. The result is the carnal.

An early poem comes to mind, set in the West Australian wheatbelt, in which the indifference of a girl's lovers might be seen as reproduced in the later indifference of the Party to Hewett's identity, to the contradictions between working for the proletariat and being subjected as a woman to sexism. In other words, equality is subjective and relative.

Country Idyll

A glittering girl went out one day
On a dappled horse through the meadow hay,
And the quail rose clumsily, freckled brown,
In the morning light he rose up high
and then dropped down.
And 'Sweet, sweet, we all must die'
Sang the glittering girl on the louring sky.

O she rode down to the gliding river
And the water covered her face forever,
And she prayed on horseback all of the way,
Crying, 'This is the judge of all the days,
this is the master day.'
And the sun rose up in a dusty haze,
And the plover sank in his song of praise.

O the girl went out on the gladsome water,
And the farmer searched for that whore, his daughter.
He smashed the haycocks, rattled the barn.
He said he'd find where the slut was laid
if he wrecked the farm.
While her lovers squatted in dust and played
Two-up under the peppermint shade.

And the river hid that she'd never been married,
And the river hid the child she carried
From the tea-cup tongues of the town.
It hid her breasts and her high round belly
as she floated down.
But her lovers never came out to see,
Playing two-up under the peppermint tree.

In contrast to the indifference of the lovers is the father's fury, his desire for absolute control of his daughter. This might be read as a form of sexual displacement. In terms of dialectical materialism, the girl has lost her worth, is damaged goods. This is a bitingly ironic contrast to the delicacy of the lyric. It trips along lightly, with half repetitions and refrains: the "glittering girl", "Two-up under the peppermint (shade)". The "glittering girl" is linked with the forces of nature which the father punishes and destroys in revenge for its and her betrayal of his authority, his ability to control his daughter. The worker of the land punishes the land itself, and the land/nature takes the girl in death, though she has chosen this to some extent herself ("this is the master day")—her death flowing in the fluid of the earth body, the river.

As in 'The Chosen Vessel', the female is alone in her distress, but here nature is in sympathy up to a point—remember, the lovers are playing two-up under the peppermint tree, which is obviously indifferent. The pathetic fallacy is equivocal. The women of the town, within the patriarchy, are conveyed as having tea-cup tongues—malicious and polite at once. It's as scathing as the two-up of the lovers. In a sense, male or female, there's a contradiction in the drives of the body and nature, and the social forces that seek to control or ignore them. Without the passion there's death. And maybe carnality always brings death.

This delicate lyrical ballad resonates with the history of English poetry, with its tones of poets as diverse as Chaucer and Tennyson. Actually a subtle variation on the Rhyme Royal stanza, the narrative drive of that form and its moral concerns are ironised by the elegiac content linked with the tripping metre. It's a potent mix in what's a signature poem. As Jennifer Strauss has noted in her essay, 'Writing the Legend of a Glittering Girl': "The mixing of modalities between romanticism and realism in 'Country Idyll' is characteristic of Hewett's style".

The city and the bush require each other—both are constantly shifting in their relationship. They tend to create paranoid mythologies of one another—both are vulnerable while claiming strength, indifference, and distance. The relationship is, in fact, entirely relative. The Australian suburban quarter-acre block with its 'wilderness' backyard is a passing thing, and more and more bush areas surrounding the city are being turned into British-style estates. Just take a drive from Murdoch to Kelmscott in Western Australia if you want the evidence—rare species of flora and fauna make way for parks with replacement trees, and the bush 'adventure' packaged as a playground or feature lake. The views over these parks elevate housing prices, and people watch shows like *Bushtucker Man* after commuting from their often distant places of work.

John Kinsella is Professor of English at Kenyon College (USA), Adjunct Professor of Literature at Edith Cowan University and Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University.

fiction / **MELISSA LUCASHENKO**

THE VERY IMPORTANT MEETING

There came a time when it was right for Teapot to move in smaller and more sober circles. At the reckless indigenous age of forty-nine, he at last let his vinyl TAA bag fall on the greying floorboards of Aunt Mary's verandah. Aunt Mary didn't rise. She called out, the larger part of her mind still on her knitting.

"That you, Ronnie Teapot?"

Teapot coughed in reply. It was a reserved and cautious cough, the cough of a verandah-dweller looking to move up in the world. Mary's needles porpoised in and out of aqua wool.

"You drinkin or what?"

Another probationary rasp. "No."

"That gunjibal chasin you?"

"No."

"Come in."

Over the summer it gradually became evident that Teapot had reformed. A damaged window was replaced; a splintery fence that made Mary flick her careless hand in regret, repaired. On turning fifty, Teapot was summoned by the desiccated brown widows who ran the local mission with four sharp minds but only three functional eyes between them. In an indigenous version of a letter from the Queen, they sat Teapot down for a good long gossip. He stood up two hours later, officially re-christened. Children who that morning had safely ignored him in the street were blasted home, their ears ringing, by the withered women.

You young ones! In my day youda bin feelin that stockwhip! That there your Huncle Ronnie—quick! Run open that gate for im, you sorry lot! My Lord

* * *

Uncle Ronnie's enthusiasm for being an Elder lasted a good four weeks. A great deal now hung upon him, it seemed. It was one thing to give the grog away because a man was sick of waking up looking through bars in the Lismore lockup; it was quite another to be pointed out in the streets of Whitesville as a living parable, an Example to Youth, the Way Forward for the Next Generation.

It was one thing to wander irregularly to church to find out who had died or gotten who else's wife pregnant; quite another to be uncontroversially ushered to the best—and most visible—seat at the front of the congregation, right next to Pastor Fingerbone's three-bar heater. Uncle Ronnie felt quite exhausted under the strain. What if—hypothetically—he weakened and went on the charge at the Middle Pub next Saturday arvo? What mightn't the Next Generation do then? Uncle Ronnie began to lose sleep.

"Now, my Tidda," he began one Wednesday morning in July, both bony brown hands woven around a cup of steaming tea.

"Mmmm."

"You seen that letter eh?"

"Mmmm."

Mary hooked and purled her way towards her Maker. The fire creaked and spat as Teapot anxiously wondered whether Mary would laugh at him.

"Says I gotta go town. Nex' week."

A lengthy pause ensued. Clickety, clickety from Mary's sticks. She and Teapot both gave their bemused attention to such a proposal. Eventually:

"Whaffor go town?"

"A very important meeting. With some gubbas. Native Title, they reckon. Or somethun."

Mary stopped knitting, and stared at Uncle Ronnie.

"A very himportant gubment meeting," she repeated.

"Hmm," Uncle Ronnie agreed, flapping a taxi voucher at her. "Look, they bin sent me a . . . money . . . thing."

"Why'nt they sent fer them old girls?" Mary asked slyly.

Uncle Ronnie straightened where he sat and put his palms flat upon the laminex table top.

"You bloody deaf? This a *very himportant meeting*. Not for womans. For mans."

"Pucken gubment bullsheet," said Mary under her breath, and returned to her niece's babyjacket.

The day of the meeting finally came. Uncle Ronnie was careful to make a great deal of noise in the kitchen. He draped himself in a fourth-hand suit and lingered in the hallway, thereby forcing the taxi to honk again. Then he stalked down the front stairs, red headband obscured by his heritage-listed Akubra, and folded himself into the cab.

"George Street, Whitesville," he ordered loudly as he dared. "And it's gubment business, so you better step on it, thanks."

The taxi driver, who had grown up every school day and most weekends being flogged by the Aboriginal inhabitants of Moree, was only too happy to step on it. Stepping on it gave him almost as much pleasure as explaining to Uncle Ronnie that the taxi voucher was meant for the return journey also, and that if Uncle Ronnie would simply sign it, he, the taxi driver, would take care of the minor administrative inconvenience of filling it out.

The very important meeting was being held in the conference room of the Burke and Wills Hotel. At first Uncle Ronnie was puzzled about this whole business. The blank whiteboard gave him no clues, and the other Aboriginal men (and to his disquiet, women) were strangers. He kept his own counsel until a white man entered the room and distributed a thick wad of paper to everyone else. Uncle Ronnie gazed in trepidation at the document. Informed by forty thousand years of conservatism, he let it stay on the table where it belonged.

After five minutes Uncle Ronnie was absolutely convinced that the whitefella was speaking English. He caught many words—as many as one in three—yet nothing that came out of the gubba's mouth helped illuminate the situation. It finally struck Uncle Ronnie that he had been in this very important meeting before, and it then became clear to him that what was required here was silence.

The white man finished speaking.

"Amen," said Uncle Ronnie automatically.

A ripple of silent laughter ran around the room, and he looked at the floor. The silence grew and grew. Then finally someone courageously took responsibility and broke it.

"Well. This native title one . . ." said one of the other Koori men to the ceiling. "Must be they gonna give us back our land, eh."

There were murmers of agreement all round at this eminently sensible proposal. The white man took a long time to clear his throat and explain the misunderstanding.

"If you aren't givin us back our land," asked one of the women slowly, as if to a child, "why is it called native title?"

The white man referred the woman to appendix three, subsection one, of his very important report. An idea began ratscrabbling in Teapot's head, and to his own shock he heard himself suddenly voice it.

"Mister Heddie Mabo, he bin get his land back!" said Teapot. The white man began to feel sweat bursting upon his forehead. He spoke about important business concerning land and justice and extinguishment and certainty.

Certainty was the issue alright, the meeting agreed with enthusiasm, feeling that at last they were getting somewhere. You had to be certain that was for true. Else somebody might end up with the wrong land! Terrible! What a mess that would be to sort out! The white man grimaced and wondered if the Native Title Unit was paying him enough. The very important meeting ground to an agonising end. As Uncle Ronnie left the room, the white man chased after him.

"You forgot your report, sir," he chastised him gently. "It's for circulation and community comment."

"This one's to keep?" Uncle Ronnie asked in surprise, taking the heavy brick of paper in both hands.

"How was your very himportant meeting?" asked Mary as she put lamb flaps on the table and knocked the neighbours' cat away with her elbow.

"Good!" said Uncle Ronnie hotly. "Real good. Real . . . good."

His fork ricocheted off the tin plate as he ate. It was a whole week before he allowed Mary to light the fire with his report.

Soon Uncle Ronnie received another invitation to another very important meeting.

"Two in one month," said Mary. "My, my."

This time Uncle Ronnie felt less worried as he sat down in the room at Lassiter's Lodge.

"Good morning," today's whitefella began. "Some of you know me, my name's Gordon McAvaney, and I'm from the Indigenous Health Unit of the New South Wales Administrative Authority . . ."

While Uncle Ronnie was distracted, wondering exactly what the New South Wales Administrative Authority might be, he lost the white man. McAvaney ducked and weaved through the scrub of Hospital Administration and then headed off to some high country called the Health Rights Commission. Uncle Ronnie's face was a perfect brown blank, but inside he churned with shame as a dust cloud (Temporary Employment of Indigenous Health Liaison Officers) marked the horizon.

Then Gordon McAvaney paused for almost three quarters of a second.

"Any questions?" he asked. "No? Very good. My contact details are in the front of the green paper, and we're very happy to help you with your enquiries at any time."

Then Gordon McAvaney was gone, bolted into the long paddock and not a leg-rope in sight.

Uncle Ronnie picked up the green paper in one hand. It was heavy, it had weight and a name in capital letters, and a government stamp on the front. He put it back on the table.

"That's a real important paper, Unc," said Gordon McAvaney's breathless young Koori assistant. "We hope its gunna make real changes to the way things are done in Koori health in this state. No more assimilationist agendas, Uncle."

"Oh," said Uncle Ronnie, heading towards the door. "Oh, real changes, I see."

"Uncle Ronnie, you forgot the paper!" said the breathless young Koori assistant.

"So I did," said Uncle Ronnie, taking it from him.

"Phone call today," Mary informed Teapot as he sat down to dinner.

"Huh." Teapot closed his eyes.

"Gubment fellas."

"Very himportant meeting?" Teapot asked tiredly.

"Mmmm hmmm. Tuesday, Leichhardt Convention Centre."

"Pucken gubment bullshit," said Teapot.

Two white women in suits stood at Mary's front door on Tuesday afternoon, asking for Uncle Ronnie. Their taxi's meter was still running.

"What would that be concerning?" Mary stalled. "Cos he not ere, see, he away. On gubment business . . ."

"We're hoping Mister Teapot can come along to our conference in Canberra next week. It's a very big national conference, to talk about the future of your community, Mrs Teapot. We sent the paper-

work the day before the day before yesterday, and when we didn't hear back—"

"Oh," said Mary, hurling a shoe at a leathered mongrel that was considering stealing past her front door with a soiled sanitary napkin trophied in its mouth. "Oh, the future of my community. Why didn't you say?"

Luckily the white women had brought plenty of forms for Uncle Ronnie. They even produced a copy of their agenda, just in case the first one had gone missing somehow.

"You won't forget to give it to him, now, Mrs Teapot, will you?" asked one of the women, her face crinkled with concern.

"No, no—I won't forget," Mary assured her, weighing the agenda carefully in her right hand.

It was not quite dusk when Teapot walked up the front steps.

"Do any good?" Mary asked with her eyebrows.

He tilted his plastic bucket towards her, wherein three flashes swam in Brunswick River water. The eyes of the bloodied bream rolled in alarm at this new and incomprehensible development.

"Sree. I chucked dem little fellas back."

"Bream. Fancy that. 'N'ere's me tellin them gubbas you was at a very important meeting," said Mary, rising to boost the kitchen fire with something called Draft Only: Not For Distribution. The corners of her mouth twitched.

Teapot laughed, and gazed quietly out the kitchen window. He paused before he spoke.

"I wasn't at no very pucken important meeting."

The old man lifted with his right hand the bucket, the clear river water, the thrashing silver fish, the frantic fishes' entire incarcerating universe.

"But I reckon these fellas were."

Melissa Lucashenko is a Murri novelist and critic. Her books include Hard Yards *and* Steam Pigs *(UQP).*

fiction / **ANGUS STRACHAN**

THE RAPE AND MURDER OF EMMA HARRISON BY GEORGE ARCHER IN 1893

Being a last record of interview prior to execution, based on fact

She livz in the downstarz room next to us n my wife is out. She duz fings with needles and cottin and fred. Shez a woman. A seemstres. Needls are sharp. Her namz emma.

I am a man. I din touch her.

Its neerli sunup. Thay say I shuda pleeded gilty but I cunt. I dunno how it happnt so how kan I. I din touch her. I erd sum screemin tha nite but it wernt emma it musta been sumbodi elz. I dunno who. It wern me. I din tarch ha.

The Osbornz run the place we live. Thay bunk upstairz. Snuggl up n close. Kidz n all. Five of em.

My boss calz me donki boy. I hate the stablz n I hate him too. I love the horsz but. He's the one I shulda done. My boss. Not miss Arrison. Emmas her reel name.

If that littl Irish boss bastard calls me donky boy agayn ill do him propa. Much more propa than I dun Emma. At least she said my naim right before she clost her eyz.

I had toest tha mornin for brekfarst lik I alwaz dun.

The brindl stallun was off his feed that day. Shittin hisself stupid as well poor ol fella.

My eds goin roun n roun from all this writin. I got ta ave a pull on me snake for I go on. Itz the onli way. Wen I carn get ta sleep at nite i got ta go on me snake or i got ta go on top a dulci or bof sumtimz. Dulcis me wif. I hate it wen I doan sleep. The bad peopl cum inside me scon an try an take me away down tha blak hole.

Miss Harysonz a lot older n me. Shes prity too. Shes a seemstres. Her namz Emma. Shes More pretty n Dulcie. Dulcis me wife. Shes a bit of a pig dog sometimz Dulci is. Shez expectin agen Dulcie is. I like Dulcie. Wear usta eech uver. I get sikuv a two.

Miss Emma would have real good childrn shez so propa an rite n everifin. Thayd sit up strayt n shine ther shoez n call me poppa. Wed go ta pikniks on weekenz n have pink limonade n wite chikn sandwichs.

The kidz nex door usta larf behin me back. Iken stil ere em.

My wife is short like me.

I hate sweepn out the stablz. Thats all I do everi day. Donky boy do this. Donki boi do that. Hay n muk n orse poop all day everi day for to shillinz and sixpenz a week n I karnt evn ride tha orses. Tommi

duz that. Hes the bosss kid. N its freezin kold two on them cobbl stonz.

I cud do pig boss wif the orse shoe ammer. Bang. Rite on is mellon. Bang bang bang. Krak is melon rite open for im. Klaret everiwer.

My wifes in the Ostible when everithin appnt. Shez avin a babi. Swelled up like a fat chook she wuz. Her hairs fallin out and shez onli twene seven.

Im George Archer. Im twenty free.

Dulcie n me got married soon as she let me do it inside her. Rite up her I dun it. If shes not cryin when I do her then she falls asleep. She never says nuffin about it. Jus openz her skirts whenever she knoz Im keen.

I like hearin dulcy whissl in the afternoonz when shez on the khazi. Ringa ding ding plop she goze. Itz funni.

Emmas very propa. A rite lady. She would never whissl on the khazi. She has one of them enamel pans under her bed wif a nice littl clof karva. I always meant to ask her where she put it when it was full. And did she do her big jobs in there as well. Geez thayd stink reel gud i rekon.

Her harez red. Evn tween her legz.

Emma smiles at me. No one else duz. Hello George did you ave a nice day she saiz late everi afternoon. We meet on the back steps. I say Yes thanku veri much Miss Harrison I ad a veri nice day thankyou veri much for asking i say.

She mended me butten wunce. She wont have to do that when were married. Well ave servance then. I must by meself a top hat. Shed like that. She says Im a proper gennelman wiff me manners n all. I told her I was the livery boy. I aint but. Not yet. Ive onli been at Irish Joes four years. Im still jus donky boy. Before that I was at Scillas stablz but they kickt me out when they cort me jigglin with the mares. I was jus trying to unnerstan how it all worked. I like them mares. Ya ave ta use a stool ta get up ta thair twatz.

I been workin in the stablz since I was firteen n a alf n dad died of the pox. It ate away most of his face n his bum hole n bollokies too. Everifin wuz up ta me then. I ad to take kair of me bruvverz n siterz. Mum coppt it much earlier in a blu with dad. Out cold she wuz. King hit her. She cudnt get up when the ouse went on fire. We all stood out the front with the nayboors n listent to mum burnin up n screamin n everithin. She stank like cooked pig. I can still smell her. She neva evn said goodbi. I carn remember her name now. Her face neeva. I jus remember all them flamz an her screamin an scremin an screemin.

Emma said my name just before closin her eyes. George, she said.

Thats my name.

Emmas firty five.

I din mean ta urt no one.

Emma mus be abl ta ear me doin Dulcie over of a nite. I pretend its emma.

Pig bos sayz them horsez get restles an kranky roun me. He sayz thay don truss me rite. Thatz bullshit I reckon. I luv them horsez. Ya ave ta use a stool ta get up ta ther goosies.

Dulcy looks lik an olt woman al of a suddn. She usta cum ta visit everi mornin. All tha bloaks larft at her. I arxt em not to. Er airs fallin out. An er breff stinks worse than that stalluns bumole afta he dun al that shit. I smeld it.

I reali mis Miss emma. She n I r gunna hitsh up propa when all this is ova.

Thay say wen a blok getz hung he loosez his bumole an shits hisself rite down to is shoez. Everifin jus cumz racin out. Ya nek brakes an thatz ow ya dy. It cumz apart or somfin an ya bakboan snaps. Kerack it goze. An if thay doan way ya propa then ya doan dy firs time n thay ave ta hall ya bak up an give ya a secont go on tha rope evn tho ya neks probabli broak a bit but not enuf.

All the bloaks in ere ave been explaynin it ta me. A cuppl timz a day somtimz. Thay hol me down an mak me lissn. I get a bid sik a lissnen to em but theer jus been frendli i supoze.

If thay make the drop two long a bloaks ed cumz clean off is sholderz an sum poor barsted as ta kleen up all tha blud wich i supoze is betta n kleenun up al tha shit tho ya get usta tha shit arfta a whil if yarv been doin it longs I av.

Also ya twich n jiggl about till ya bodi getz usta the ideer yor al ded an it givz up but thay leev ya angin ther for a few hours till thair shore the jobz dun jus rite.

Yer ibalz pop out an burst too i fink. I forget whi.

I met the angin bloak the ovver day. E weer a orribl peece a work he were. Greenz is name. Nok need crooket walkin pokkish skin wif blak nashin stumps an a lear on im ta make ya curl up n shivva.

I woan forget im in no hurri.

He cum an mezzured m up an wayd me n all. Hez got reel sof ands lik a babi. E put em roun me nek an we bof giggl. He doan talk nun but e sure doan mind lookin a bloak fare in the squonkers. I ad ta shut me eyez. I tol im therz no ill will from mi side but he din say nuffin bak.

I ope sumbodi looks afta Dulcy. Shez probabli irenin rite now. The new nippa din make it. I carn elp finkin Dulce mabe lay on top of it an stpt its art afta she foun out wat I dun to miss Arison.

I wish Dulcie was ere now. I carn sleep propa wif all theze bloaks makin so much noiz. Sum timz they all get togevver an tayk me pans down an do me over real ard. Lotz of em. At chapel mostli. On sundees. Thay old me down an take it in turns wif evribodi watchin on an yellin Hee-Haw Hee-Haw. Thay call it pinin tha tale on tha donky.

I hate sundees. Altho itz a bit betta now thay give me me oan sell. But its freezin an wet an col. I cri a lot now. I dunno ow thay foun out ta call me donky boi. I hait that naim.

Cept I doan kare no more now.

Mis emma din say nuffin wen I broak in her winda. She jus stairt at me wif big eyz. Her maowf waz opin. As I walkt ova to her she startet frownen an shakin her hed. Jusa litl bit at furst. Site ta site. Slole. She put her armz oud towardz me. Flappin em aboud lik shez mad or somfin. Wen I start takin her dres of she beginz to cri. Noizy n moanin. I try to do her ova reel propa lik a gennelman cept she doesn wan me to an I get mixt up or sumfin an start callin her dulci dulci dulci. Shez starin at me an shakin her ed an frownen an sayin orribl fings an Im calln her dulcy an shez talkin nasti an I do her harda an harda but she keeps hittin me an she smells lik cookt pig an I go harda n harda until Im all burnin ta pieces an I think maybe thatz wen I wake up. Jus for a secont or so. Like my hed comez outta a clowd or somfink an I can se wat im about. I got skairt. I hadta put the cord rown her nek then ta mayk everifin go awa. The cord she waz sowin on her dres. I tri ta pull tha cord reel ard but she woan let me. She startz fytin harda an makin mor an mor an mor noiz. Bitin an kikin n screemin. She dosn unnerstan everifins got ta stop. No no no shez sayin. Bad George shez sayin. Now everythin turnz upsidown an goz roun an roun an bakwardz insid me scon. An then the walls an the furnitcha an evrybodi startz goin heehaw hee-haw an clappin an yellin an sayin bad jorg an cheerin an heehawin an yellin an goin roun an roun an sayin bad jorg bad jorg bad georg. I havta mak evrithin stop so I bang Emmas hed reel ard inta the flaw. Bangin her hed. Bad jorg. Bang, bang. Bad jorg. Harda n harda I have ta bang. Bad jorg. I whish she wudn say nufin. Bad jorg. Bad jorg. Bang bang bang. Shez so butifl. An the lars word she sez wen I giv her melon a mity crak is Ggggoooorrrrjjjj. Like a whispa. It jus leekt oudda her.

I lik all the blud comin owtova her ears. Its reel sweet. I luv Mis emma Arrizon. I tri to put er in bed afta that n mak her cumftabl. But shez uncoomin heavi an i carnt shift her. So i karva her ova wif her

pink shorl an i giv her a wite pillo an fingz to mak her hapi. I evn mak her a cup a tea but she doan want it an she woan drinkt.

Its sundee nite an I doan no wat ta do so I fink ta go an ave a sarsparela at Farrells. Thn I go an see dulci in the hostible to tell her wat I dun an arx her wat I shud do now but sheez to sick with the nippa cummin an all so i go om an tri ta sleep. All nite I tri an sleep but I fink me eds gonna expload or sumfin cors its ful a voicez so I crak my ed on the wallz n therz blud all ova me pillo but they wont go away them voicez. An then this big thing cumz outa me from rite down deep inside me where the blak peopl liv an suddeli im cryin lik a baby cryin sumthin orrful cryin my eyz out an I carn stop. Like a baby Im cryin. Cryin an heerin voices an things.

I neva evn tucht her bosoms.

I aint neva criet befor. Not evn wen mum got burnt up lik a stuk pig. Not evn wen i waz a kid an me da cut orf one of me finguz wif is raza corz i was hollerin so much. E waz gunna cut orf anover wun but i shudup. N i din cri evn wen me best bruvva died corse there wernt nuffin to eat. N not evn wen thay let tommi ride tha horsez n not me.

Lyin ther in mi bed I criet all thm fings at wunc I rekon.

Itz not until mondee mornin that i rememba propa bout Miss Arrison. I go an nok on her door ta say im sorri but she dusnt ansa.

Nobodi cums ta vizit me in ere. Thay say if id a pleeded gilty then id a got off but I dunno ow it happnt so I culdn say I did aye.

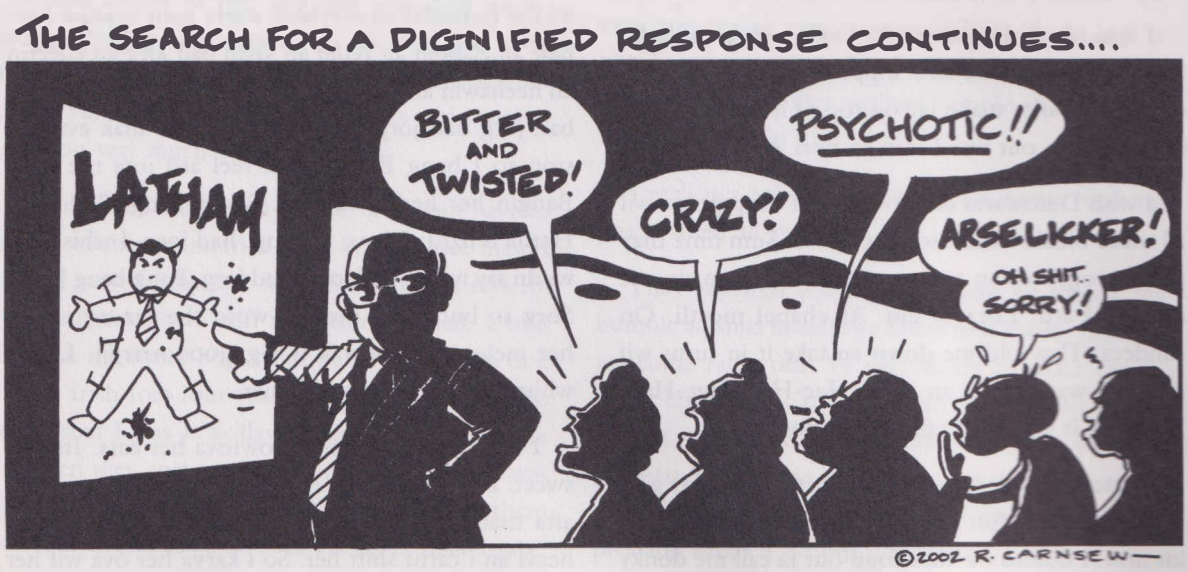
One of the bloaks in here sed hed give me ten quid if I cut me dikki snake off. So I dun it wif a sharp spoon an held it in me and an give it ta him. He past out unkonshus rite in fronna me an e aint neva paid me me ten quid neiver. I wuz gonna giv tha ten quid ta ducli.

Its sun up. Iken ear tha green bloak cumin. Rattlin his keez.

I luv miss arrizon. Wif me hol hart. An thm hawsez. I also luv Dulci. An pig boss to.

N now me nek getz strecht good an propa. An thatz that.

This piece won the international 1998 James Joyce Award.



poetry / **4 POEMS BY ERIC BEACH**

TO UNDERSTAND TH LANGUAGE OF POETRY

love a line that goes nowhere

if somebody gives you th flick
get your horizon pierced!

illusion's unfaithful
like a miser's silver window

a gift to th ungrateful
hope's a jig of eels!

stupid advice—
find your own voice!

I'M LEARNING TAI CHI

just
in case
I ever
get
attacked
in
slow
motion

& ZEN

to go inside mountain
believe
that mist will pass
that mountain will remain
that rock is mist

try to drink rock

LATE LOVE

my bachelor friend writes me
'autumn! leaves! no rake!'
I scrape leaves from stone
to earth
rare for me to see
seasons return to my garden
I place stars in bare trees
as though they were candles

KNOX CITY: A BALLAD

She kept me waiting out the front of Target.
After an hour it seemed the surest sign
this love was like all others: set to cark it,
yet I trawled my brain for ways to make her mine;

knowing how all that high octane, madly
This one's the best and it is going to last
lava'd passion of Beverly and Bradley
seemed like a puddle, evaporating fast.

*

We'd met when I got hired to clear her
guttering.
Given a week, falling pretty bad,
she sighed (although you sensed some neighbours
muttering)
"We kinda love sortov each other . . . Brad?"

Wide hips, great tits (doubt if they'll see
saggage!)
a heavy moaning gurgle, then she'd come;
followed by that introductory baggage
to the juggling, stop-start life of a single mum:

"My ex? A deadshit!" (No need to blurt out *Really*?)
"He reckons remand's like waiting to be paged."
Sibling rivals? And Bev shrugged up *We're nearly*
just this low key side of disengaged.

(Her older sister sniffs aromatherapy.
The brother's backing Richmond, for his sins.
The younger one lives heading towards Werribee.)
Tuesdays I rolled out the wheelie bins.

Wednesday nights it always seemed Red Rooster.
In the backyard grew sandpit, swing and slide.
Who, you ask, took Kai to get his booster?
And like Bob Hawke *I* was the one that cried.

Then add a man's tears to all the local data,
and though it may seem a minority report,
chamomile, wind-chimes, crystals, Desiderata,
aura'd every third house in the court.

And a decade on from dropping out of uni
this lumpenproletariat ding-a-ling
finds he's the very newest New Age loony
shuffling tarot, tossing the I Ching.

*

For what? For what? Answer *that* Knox City!
This bunny-with-women always gets the gong!
And options arrived, propped by my best self pity
which goes with your finest easy-listening song.

Should I work-out until my pecs turn granite?
Or reinvent that more basic bloke?
(There's girls-a-plenty down at The Daily Planet
for cuddles, sex and, sometimes, share-a-joke.)

When suddenly my eyes are being covered!
By some Wantirna scrubber on the make?
Not so! It's Bev guess-whoing her beloved
as head-in-hands he prays for this circuit break.

So time to repent, time to quit my fuming,
a junkyard dog can turn to the meekest hound.
She'd been for tests. Our future started looming.
Within a month we view the ultra-sound.

*

Yet, with a howl shoppers mistook for
heinous,
"Before," I cried, "it's home to a queen-size tryst,
just this once let a man come Venus.
you sit here, give *me* the shopping list!"

And ahh Knox City view your poor petitioner:
fatherhood-charged, rushing into Coles
he grabs shampoo (mistakes it for conditioner!).
Then we resumed our mainstream gender
roles . . .

ALAN WEARNE

DRACULA ON THE MONARO

In humility, I should remember
that God did not give me
George Bush Junior of Texas, but
I'll admit before that an apathy
of sorts had descended on the bow-
of-burning-gold for a while, and arrows-
of-desire. The Monaro
is not dry with winter and no place
ever does clouds better. They do
unfold and are also
fat like knobby cherubs, layer
upon layer of plump cream, which must
have reminded the tribespeople
travelling to the feast at Mt Jagungal
of the most delicious Bogong moths:
a smoky trance, a feast. I
have needed to be on the Monaro
so much that it seemed impossible
to see these vast clouds, these poplars
slivergilt in the wind again, but
now here I feel nothing: when you are
thirsty, the water has no taste,
though clouds are a fistful, mouthful.
On the horizon, a white parade
of ark animals. Even in the mountains,
in spring, these clouds remain clouds
grounded, circle the frozen wattle's
lemon sequins, blend with snow
crystal to drifting crystal, remind
me how once I thought most beauty
was indistinct at its edge, remind
me how before Barrett Reid died
he wrote me "warm wishes from this
winter garden" in a letter. I
think of the current fashion
to object to writers who write
about other writers, and of how
Campbell farmed this Monaro, and Les
Murray rabbited for him. Maybe
Les was successful. I can't see any
Campbells or rabbits and the few
roadkill bodies are fox and kangaroo.
You know,
in this autumn we will know
warm wintergartens trellised red with snow,
and writers write of writers as earlier ones drew
living food or the spirits of lightning, as any
schoolboy or soldier who draws
nudes on his notebook or wall, not
thinking the art will achieve
a storm or full stomach, a girl. Any
writer is a private revolution, all
writing is desire, although such
axioms are vulnerable. The high
plains wind thins charcoal
cloud into string hearts. The Monaro
does darkness well. My father
told me of running wildly home
across a bridge here after
he read *Dracula* as a boy. Bram Stoker
would understand the Monaro, its
vulnerable desire, and Texas
is never empty, if the blood
like water does not taste when one is thirsty.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

FIFTY DOLLARS

She rings to say
she runs an art gallery in South Yarra
and her next artist
wants me to read poems at his exhibition launch
and they can pay me
$50
so I say yes
and she invites me to meet
at her gallery/bistro
and when I walk in
there's no-one there but
Molly Meldrum
just Molly Meldrum and me
Molly Meldrum at the bar with an espresso
He looks like he's hiding from something
so I walk down the back
and she's suddenly there
smiling like a shopkeeper
sitting me down
getting me coffee
sitting herself across from me
saying how nice it is to meet me
and I can of course
bring my books and sell them
and it will be a great night
there will be lots of really important
people there and
lots of food and drink
and she's checked their budget
and they won't be able to pay me any fee now.
I look at her
I look at Molly
wondering if he has anything to do with this
or is it
the way I went for the coffee
the fact I roll my own smokes
my broken teeth
So you got me here
on the pretext of a fee, I say
It wasn't a pretext, she says
I overestimated our budget, I'm sorry
Well, I'm sorry too
but I gave up working for nothing
in the nineteenth century
I stand up to get out of there
Yes, I understand, she says, standing too
Maybe we can do something still
I'll call you in a few days
She calls me
two days later
saying they had managed
to juggle things
so I can get my fifty dollars
And I do the reading
I don't see Molly
or any other really important people
but there's a big crowd
and they like my poetry
and I drink and eat
as much as I want
I get my fifty dollars
and sell ten books
and sail home to Brunswick
in my tram.

GRANT CALDWELL

OUR FACE

I leave peace for those
who find their way home

and love for the dogs
who know how to use it

For today the continents
are cracking from the seas

and all times are rushing
toward the zenith of understanding

This is how cells die
like a house collapsing

or a piano rushing
towards the earthquake's shaky stair

We call it death in the place in our heads
that is empty except for that

We think it is what the eye doesn't see
but it is the eye

for death gazes longingly
from our own face

and looking inwards sees nothing
unless it be dream

MTC Cronin

SALUTE THE NEW PROSPERO

whatever you do don't inhale the weapons.
while the antique holocaust breaks
over the head of my tv the terracotta
Confucius and plastic metal robot stand
fast. no point flicking yellow pages
for the broken Ariel when I know
her to be shackled in the cold
bark of your steel trees, pining
like napalm for children, weeping waves
of radio tears for vile puddles
now huddling on the horizon like stealth bombers.
violet sky, hovering over a mosque in Turkmenistan,
I cannot know your fever,
nor the dusty towel of your resolve.
we've but assassins who scamper with cameras
through cribs of crack-shot snipers.
the problem is this: I don't think I have
the same relationship with death
as you do. not yet anyway . . .
out in the backyard blackhawks flex
in circles preparing for the queen. beside the
blanket two ants tussle over a maggot, become
two-headed monster.
nearby wasps with dismembered antennae
attempt to tune in.

Jaya Savige

NARINGAL LANDSCAPE

after Clarice Beckett

Silences you enter
when the last run has just left the dairy.

Something stops you—wind and light shifting.
On the boundary fence, cypress trees darkening.
All around you are the places you have dreamt:
ridges of cape weed, tussocks lining the drains.

Waiting for sleep
you glide over cow tracks
past dead trees into flat, harvested paddocks
you know so well
you never think about why
you are drenching the heifers tomorrow,
milking early to make footy training on Tuesday night.

After the Ash Wednesday bushfires
Naringal was rebuilt into an ugly new school,
a new Uniting church and now lingers
as an area in the minds of locals.
Are the paddocks around the township as Clarice saw them—
rows of cypresses turning farms into parks?

In the 1920s, Naringal was a wood-chopper's paradise.
The Depression helped clear the view for large, Catholic families.
Did Clarice throw darts in the Boggy Creek pub?
Did she take short cuts up Rollo's Road
just to dream between the ferns and blackberry?

The bush we don't see closes in like memory.
A clump of eucalypts floats above the horizon.
The silence of the paddocks creeps outside the canvas.
Late afternoon, smells of heat and rye grass thickening in your head.

BRENDAN RYAN

DISKSPACE/YOUR HEART

Each different city
requires a new program
for your effective operation:
you are always spawning another
external viewer which competes
for diskspace with the last
that somehow will not close.
Your heart is strangely empty
yet newly full with gothic tryptichs
& the echo of numbers 1 to 10

The guided tours become more surreal:
in the opulent parliament
with its 7km of carpet and 23 internal staircases
we learn the money it cost
could have financed a functioning town for 30,000
& then we are allowed to peek
at the special chair made for the MP
who weighs over 200kg.
The café visitors' book seems
excerpted from some larger absurdist play:
Cornflakes should be served before the main
omelette dish
I made a wrong choice—it's not your fault
but I don't like the noise from the coffee machine.
Fine are your clean clean restrooms!

The squeaky bus overtakes a man with horse
& cart in the east-european countryside
& the radio croons sympathetically
My heart goes sha la la la laa in the morning
My heart goes sha la la la laa in the evening
until we shiver with understanding

JANE GIBIAN

WHITE FIRE

for Bruce Hackett

that night the gravel in the carpark burned
white like snow

when a taxi rolled around the corner
its twin lights raked across an old tree
dark arms scraping at the face of the moon,

she with her heavy pituitary gleam
drooped slowly down the empty sky not a cloud
& the stars smouldered in the glow

i pressed the glass door open that divided me
from the electric deep

soft tyres whispered from the road
then a cold wind opened me like a fan

RAE DESMOND JONES

DAVID KELLY: ROADRAGE 8

essay / **ROWAN CAHILL**

THE BATTLE OF SYDNEY

CENTRAL STATION; Sydney's rail terminus, officially opened in 1906; a handsome landmark, intended by its political initiators to become one of the world's great railway stations. In part the station site includes the Old Devonshire Street Cemetery, originally known as Sandhills Cemetery, a major colonial burial ground. The grim, large-scale eviction of skeletal residents to suburban cemeteries took place during site preparation in 1901.

For one day in 1916 this station had a central role in an extraordinary act of protest and rebellion, a mutiny perhaps, that culminated in military gunfire, the use of bayonets, the shedding of blood, and death.

Mutiny is a contentious legal term and definitions vary according to the laws and cultures of nations. The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines mutiny as "a revolt or rebellion against constituted authority". Depending on circumstances and definitions, a mutiny can involve one or more persons. Punishment for mutiny in a martial context can be the death penalty.

Under the rigid discipline code of the British army during the First World War, for example, 346 British troops were executed for crimes such as mutiny and desertion. Australia had a different military legal code and no Australian soldier was executed; but for every one thousand Australian troops there were nine in prison for military crimes, an incarceration rate far exceeding the incarceration statistics of allies New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and Britain.

Mutinies in the armed forces are controversial and messy events. Generally they indicate that there are grievances to be addressed, some problem regarding conditions of service; a failure of command may be indicated, and certainly the breakdown of grievance-handling procedures.

Since federation in 1901, mutinies have not been uncommon in the Australian armed forces. The Royal Australian Navy has had at least eleven mutinies, possibly nineteen; mutinies have also been part of the Australian air force and the army, though not to the same extent. The army set an Australian record in 1942 with its conviction of twenty-one troops for mutiny in Palestine during the Second World War.

Australian defence authorities have successfully swept mutinies under the carpet; they also tend to be deleted from official histories. To minimise the number of actual mutinies, it seems the preferred Australian option has been, where possible, to treat alleged mutinous behaviour as something less legally controversial, thereby attracting less attention and scrutiny, and avoiding political fallout. Mutinies can be political and legal quagmires; and they are not conducive to recruitment.

And so to an almost lost piece of Sydney, and military, history: what the official war historian Ernest Scott euphemistically described as "serious trouble" at Casula in 1916, glossing over it in twenty-four lines without mentioning bloodshed, but is variously known elsewhere as the 'Liverpool Mutiny', the 'Battle of Central' and the 'Battle of Sydney'.

February 1916: the war is not going well; the Western Front is a fetid bog of mud and blood; Australia is uneasily settling into its second full year of the First World War. The nation is still trying to come to terms with the blood-soaked disaster of Gallipoli the previous year; recruiting figures have plummeted; war-weariness is creeping into the national soul; initially many people thought the war

would be a short, thrilling adventure, but mounting casualty figures and the passage of time are shattering the illusion; the notion that the war reflects British imperial interests rather than Australian national interests is gaining ground; before the end of the year an attempt by the government to introduce conscription will traumatise and divide the nation.

With this in mind, imagine breakfast time in the Light Horse training camp at Casula on the outskirts of Sydney; it is early morning, Monday 14 February. Unrest is apparent as the men eat. There is a lot of anger and excited discussion. There is plenty of 'should' talk: 'we should do this' and 'we should do that'. The raw recruits have just been informed that the army has changed the training syllabus, increasing their training from thirty-six hours to forty hours a week; the change and its sudden imposition are deeply resented.

There is a background of grievances at the Casula camp. A lot of the recruits, some only 17 years old, feel the food is not up to scratch. Others feel they have been worked too hard; some have recently been involved in camp earthworks, twenty-seven hours without break. There have been problems with leave. Some of the officers are martinets. The syllabus change is the last straw.

Over a mug of tea, someone seriously suggests taking action; a walkout, maybe a strike, but certainly some sort of protest. There is a general feeling of being fed up with grumbling and trying to go through the right channels. Among the breakfasters are men who have been involved in trade union activity in the past. Some may even have been influenced by the militant Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organisation, a claim made years later by IWW veteran Tom Barker.

So protest it is; speeches are made with varying degrees of sophistication; there is debate; delegates are elected; a quick plan of action is drawn up. Then at least two thousand men, possibly many more, all in army uniform, walk out of the Casula camp and head in an orderly fashion for the great training camp at nearby Liverpool. For the moment they intend to confront higher military authorities with their grievances and concerns, though some may have further plans in mind. Because of the mass of men involved, Casula camp authorities are powerless to stem the tide.

Liverpool military authorities listen to the Casula men and agree to investigate grievances. But the forty-hour matter, they point out, is Commonwealth business and not a local issue. Basically it is in the realm of the non-negotiable. Some of the men are satisfied, and decide to return to Casula.

But the audacious example set by the Casula walkout is having a flow-on effect within the Liverpool camp. There are uneasy undercurrents among the Liverpool men. Apart from the news about the training changes, the camp has had problems with leave, and there is the conviction, possibly unfounded but part of 'camp culture', that the camp is unhealthy and has an abnormally high mortality rate. During the year ending 30 June 1916 cerebrospinal meningitis would kill 256 recruits in Australia's crowded training camps. So thousands of the Liverpool men join the protest and quit camp. For the protesters, the issue of the forty hours rankles; if nothing can be done locally, then why not take our concerns to the wider world? We are on a roll. And with this in mind the men head for the town of Liverpool, and the railway station.

Figures relating to the number of troops involved in the Casula event, and subsequently, are shrouded in confusion; they have been consistently, and understandably, downplayed by military and political authorities, possibly fearing future emulation of the Casula events; most historians have simply echoed the official line. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s account of the day, and a few political memoirs, some fifteen thousand men were involved; official sources claim it was only "a small number" and figures in the hundreds are cited. In Ernest Scott's official account, the rebel troops apparently never reached Sydney. Contemporary photographs of the protesters in Sydney, however, indicate large numbers were involved, and this is supported by the logistical extent of the operation eventually mounted to end the protest.

Reaching Liverpool, some of the protesters decided to call it a day and broke off to commandeer the town's extensive alcohol supplies from the various hotels. Liverpool was a camp town and had a lot of grog. Because of the amount of alcohol liberated from bars and cellars, and the number of available drinkers, shops were relieved of cups, glasses, pots, pans and buckets for use as drinking utensils. Bread, pies and fruit were also appropriated. When retailers demanded payment for goods, the reply was "Put it down to Kitchener", a reference to Lord Kitchener, Britain's war secretary. Any opposition encountered by the soldiers was met with vandalism, and there was extensive property damage during the day.

Figures relating to the number of troops involved have been consistently, and understandably, downplayed by military and political authorities; most historians have simply echoed the official line.

Overwhelmed by the invasion, Liverpool police maintained a low profile until the arrival of reinforcements from Cabramatta and Parramatta later that afternoon; by which time the majority of soldiers who had stayed in town were exhausted, or drunk, and order was restored with only a few fist fights between the opposing forces. "Several arrests" were made.

The bulk of the protesters had pushed on to Sydney before midday. They established a cordon around Liverpool Station, blocked the tracks and commandeered trains until railway authorities cottoned on and stopped the supply. The last train out of Liverpool was jam-packed with troops, the carriage roofs precariously crowded with men.

A large number of troops who made it to Sydney simply went home for the afternoon, but the last train-load had a political agenda. Disembarking at Central, they lined up on the platform in fours and began to march in a very long column towards the city. They were led by two buglers, a placard plainly announcing they were on STRIKE and would not train the forty hours, battalion flags, and the Union Jack surmounted by the Red Flag.

As the column moved through the city, down Pitt Street, into Hay Street, then George Street, soldiers snatched time to explain why they were on strike to ever-increasing crowds of onlookers, while keeping formation; they "made a really fine picture, and, keeping good time, the fours properly dressed, the men marched as if on parade". So wrote a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist, noting also that the organisation on display indicated they were "evidently under someone's leadership".

The column wended its way down town to the Quay and then on to the Domain, where a 'smoko' was called. After that the column broke up. Troops spent the rest of the day drifting about the city in small groups, sightseeing, others apparently bemused, wondering what was going to happen to them when they returned to camp. Many got into trouble. Food, tobacco, alcohol and lollies were appropriated in large quantities; some hotel windows were smashed, as were the windows of shops apparently owned by people of German origin; the windows of the German Club in Phillip Street were smashed; foot-police were taunted, squirted with soda siphons, and assaulted with projectiles, including beer bottles, but mainly fruit and vegetables; there were reports of police being punched and kicked. A ground-floor window of the *Evening News* was smashed following evening headlines critical of the protesters; a verbal apology was extracted from newspaper staff. Civilians also got into the act and tried their hand at stealing and vandalising.

As night fell, sightseers crowded into the city. The *Daily Telegraph* was "astonished" by the number of women who joined the crowds, "some of them shamelessly arm-in-arm with drunken soldiers". There was a knife-edge air of expectancy as crowds variously followed protesters around, waiting for anything to happen and for something to give, and hampering police in the process. When shots were heard near Town Hall about 9 p.m., a large crowd of protesters and camp followers scattered into the grounds of St Andrew's Cathedral.

A number of protesters engaged in a form of standover. Selecting wealthy looking men, they inquired "Are you the sort of person we are going to fight for?" When the answer was "yes" the men demanded, "Well dig into your pockets and pay us".

The strategy for ending the protest developed during the afternoon. An over extended police force confined protesting troops to the city centre as much as possible, away from the waterfront and the Quay and possible further dispersal and mayhem. An official army notice was posted around the city, ordering the troops back to their camps and an 11 a.m. muster the next day (Tuesday); they were advised that failure to comply would be in breach of military law.

Understandably the invasion of Sydney had caught the authorities unprepared. Like their Liverpool colleagues, they were temporarily overwhelmed and had to wait until evening before sufficient resources had been marshalled, and the process of herding the protesters back to Central Station, and entraining them to Liverpool under the direction and supervision of police and an armed military picket, could begin.

Six protesters were wounded: there were bullet wounds to heads, severe enough in one case to result in a coma, and a bullet-shattered kneecap, a civilian trying to get home was clubbed, another shot in the leg . . .

Paranoia was probably also involved in the response; the following day two ministers in the state government expressed the view that the rebel troops had been manipulated by German agents with sabotage in mind. This was the sort of mindset that later in 1916 helped jail twelve anti-war labour movement dissidents for between five and fifteen years, basically for conspiring to burn down Sydney. Eventually, after a lengthy release campaign, these men were cleared of most of the charges against them and released during 1920 and 1921.

By 7 p.m. all hotels in the city, Redfern, Newtown, Glebe and Paddington were ordered to close for the next twelve hours. Most city stores had closed doors and put up shutters by 3 p.m., and locked away valuables. City eateries similarly closed. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted, the popular fish and oyster shops were amongst the first to close; by 3 p.m. "there was not a crustacean on display in the city".

All available metropolitan police were brought into the city, dispatched to the city police stations and onto the streets. Posses of mounted police went into action early in the afternoon and were targeted by protesters with blue metal and lemonade and beer bottles; police and horses were injured. Motorcycle police acted as scouts, and all police and State motor vehicles were pressed into service, ferrying squads of police to trouble spots as needed. On standby was a reserve of 250 civilian volunteers, including ex-servicemen. By the end of the day, thirty-two soldiers had been arrested by civilian authorities.

A large contingent of armed loyalist troops was brought into the city and Central Station virtually placed under martial law. From about 7 p.m. onwards the threat of fixed bayonets quelled disturbance once the protesters had reached station environs. Back on the streets, police used their batons. The dispatch of protesters to camp began around 8.30 p.m.; the *Daily Telegraph* noted that many "decent fellows who had been menaced into accompanying the rioters" went peacefully. The rounding-up process continued well into the early hours of Tuesday 15 February. Loyalist troops remained on duty at key railway stations between Central and Liverpool throughout day and night on Tuesday.

Some time after 10 p.m. (Monday), possibly closer to 11 p.m., violence erupted at Central. As the entraining process continued, an iron gate was closed on thirty protesters. Apparently fearing an ulterior motive, and of being trapped in the area near the station's toilets and lost property depot, the men grabbed a fire hose and turned it full bore on the military picket, calling its members "scabs" and "blacklegs", and knocking a few over "like ninepins".

Ordered to desist, the men maintained the water flow. A revolver was then discharged in the air, allegedly by a protester; rumours aside, this was the only suggestion all day that any of the protesters might have been armed. The picket was ordered to "fire low", and shots were loosed off into the protesters. Men fell. The firing was followed by a bayonet and baton charge. Press reports claimed the picket fired twenty, disciplined, rounds; bullet marks in the station's roof and a wall, evident for many years afterwards, indicated a less restrained response.

In the melee, six protesters were wounded: there were bullet wounds to heads, a variety of baton and rifle-butt wounds, severe enough in one case to result in a coma, and a bullet-shattered kneecap. A police constable in the charge sustained a facial wound requiring X-ray. Two civilians trying to get home were wounded; one was clubbed, the other shot in the leg. The station's refreshment rooms served as a makeshift hospital; an army medical team tended the wounded.

A protester from the 6th Light Horse was killed by a bullet through his left eye and bayonet wounds to his neck and shoulder; he died in the arms of a police constable who risked personal injury to comfort him. The corpse was spirited away to the city morgue, and official attempts made next day to depict the soldier as the man with the revolver, and a protest ringleader. If so, he must have been a talented and inspiring organiser, given he had helped bring two army camps to a standstill, possibly involved some fifteen thousand men, and was 19.

The *Daily Telegraph* was "astonished" by the number of women who joined the crowds, "some of them shamelessly arm-in-arm with drunken soldiers".

At the 11 a.m. muster the next day, most men turned out. There was an average of six men missing per company. An official warning was given that the new training syllabus would go ahead, and that any refusal to train would be regarded as "assisting the enemy". It was a clear indication that any future protest would feel the full weight of military law.

The rest of the day went ahead normally. It was payday, so the men were paid; those normally entitled to leave were granted their leave. The army pragmatically took the view that no direct order had been disobeyed by protesting troops, and there had been no intention to subvert military authority; therefore no mutiny had taken place. No strike had taken place because in the lexicon of military law the word 'strike' does not exist.

However, soldiers identified as protest leaders were arrested upon their return to camp and later summarily discharged; there is evidence suggesting some were subsequently charged, convicted and jailed under civilian law. The grievances they had raised were investigated, and enough changes made to restore calm. The Casula camp was duly closed. The new training syllabus went ahead. The rank-and-file protesters completed their training and, according to the official account, acquitted themselves well on the battlefield.

According to Ernest Scott, news of 14 February "went the world over". And it wasn't the last time the military authorities heard of "serious trouble". In September 1918 there were two incidents of large-scale rebellion by Australian front-line troops in France, one resulting in 119 men being charged with mutiny—118 of them were subsequently convicted of desertion—the other a strike by eight battalions in which democratic and self-management processes were evident. Both events tended to disappear under the carpet in the euphoria of armistice.

Despite claims the invasion of Sydney by rebellious troops had been instigated by German agents and saboteurs, a view supported by Sir George Pearce, Minister for Defence, most people were happy to settle for something less dramatic; the *Daily Telegraph* preferred a less inflammatory explanation, and confidently put it down to the work of "a few malcontents". The behaviour of troops in the camp town of Liverpool suggested alcohol was to blame. This interpretation appealed especially to the strong prohibition lobby in NSW, headed by Brigadier Albert Bruntnell of the Salvation Army who was also the State Member for Parramatta.

Following a referendum in June, all hotels in NSW closed at 6 p.m., ending late-night trading. This was intended as a war precaution, but continued until the restoration of late-night closing in 1955. The long 'six o'clock closing' interregnum was a shot in the arm for the Sydney underworld; the illegal provision and supply of alcohol generated criminal fortunes and careers, created networks of corruption, and laid the foundations of organised crime in NSW.

REFERENCES

This account draws on contemporary newspaper reports. Details regarding mutiny in Australia's armed forces are based on my reading of Tom Frame and Kevin Baker, *Mutiny! Naval insurrections in Australia and New Zealand*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 2000; Chapter 15 discusses mutiny in the Australian army and air force.

Ernest Scott writes about the protest, and military camp conditions, in *Australia During The War*, UQP, St Lucia, 1989, pp.228–230, 294–296.

Tom Barker mentions IWW influence in his reminiscences *Tom Barker and the I.W.W.*, E.C. Fry (ed.), Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra, 1965.

Jack Lang writes of the 'Battle of Central' and the politics behind six o'clock closing in *I Remember*, McNamara's Books, Katoomba, 1980, pp.154–158.

For the link between alcohol and organised crime in Sydney, I owe David Hickie, *The Prince And The Premier*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1985.

Rowan Cahill is a writer and journalist. He is working with Terry Irving and Lucy Taksa on a history of radical Sydney.

essay / **JEREMY FISHER**

BY PERMISSION OF G.M. GLASKIN

THE FASCINATING CROSSCURRENTS in the life of G.M. Glaskin charted by Carolyn van Langenberg in *Overland* 164—spring 2001 were extremely illuminating.

In her final paragraphs she notes that she was "not able to find a copy of *No end to the way*, a novel he [Glaskin] wrote under a pseudonym when writing queer was not mainstream."

While I doubt that writing queer is now or has ever been mainstream, having read *No end to the way*[1] I'd also question whether or not the 'queer' label could be fitted to it. I don't intend to do so.

I first encountered the book in a newsagent in Gympie in 1974. I'd arrived there on a train to North Queensland. Fresh from the cocoon of Sydney, my lover and I suddenly realised that the trip North was not just a few hours, but well over twenty-four hours. We tumbled out at Gympie in our Sydney gaylibness and found a hotel room. We didn't ask for, and weren't offered, a double bed, so we must have passed muster as a couple of young lads.

I was at a critical stage of my life. The year before, at 18 years of age, I'd enrolled at Macquarie University, aware from the final months of my secondary schooling in Goulburn in 1972 that I was homosexual. Making the move to Sydney, I made contact with Gay Liberation in its headquarters at 67 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, and, at Macquarie, I joined the small gay students' group. Macquarie University, then, was quite isolated. The bus services into the city were infrequent. I arranged accommodation in the still being built Anglican-run Robert Menzies College.

It was a difficult time. I felt isolated. I was unable to share the knowledge of my sexual orientation with my parents, and the (at that time) all-male students at Robert Menzies College were much more into football and sport than ever I was or would be. My room was in a relatively empty section of the college. So, even had I wanted to, I saw few of the other Menzies students.

I caught the bus (the 288 and 290) down Epping Road and into town on Fridays and Saturday nights, going to Capriccio's in Oxford Street, the only gay venue I knew. A man picked me up there one night and took me into the Domain, where I was raped. I can put it no other way. I was 18; he was in his 30s. He had the power; I just lay there.

There was nothing to do afterwards except catch the last bus home, and hope no-one noticed the blood on my jeans. It helped that they were a russet corduroy.

Some weeks later, after another night going out and feeling very lonely, I tried to kill myself by cutting my wrists and overdosing on antihistamines in my room at Robert Menzies.

I was successful in that I was at one point clinically dead. Found by the cleaner, I was taken by ambulance to the nearest hospital, which happened to be North Ryde Psychiatric Hospital,[2] where I was revived and also scheduled.

My parents were contacted and came to look after me. The Master of the College told my father I was possessed by a satanic mask I had on my wall. The mask was Chinese, given to me by my father as a gift from a trip to Singapore. My parents were discomfited to learn of my sexuality this way, but after reflection they told me that, while they couldn't quite understand this homosexuality thing, above all

they wanted me to be happy. They set me up in a flat in North Ryde, away from the College. They did not want me back in the care of the Master who thought Satan had possessed me.

I was naïve enough to take my story to the gay group on campus, and was listened to by the radicals on the students' council. For a time I felt myself radical, too.

At this time, the Anglican Church in Sydney had its own issues, and perhaps I was a victim of ideological struggles in the Church. The view has been put:

> Leading figures were prepared to take extreme measures against known homosexuals in their ranks. In June 1973, Jeremy Fisher was confronted by the Reverend Dr Alan Cole . . . Cole had found gay liberation materials in Fisher's room [in the College]. Cole demanded that Fisher live a celibate life and seek treatment as a condition for continued residence. When Fisher . . . refused, he was expelled. Fisher was supported by the student union, the Builders' Labourers Federation (which placed work bans on a number of university building projects) and gay activists . . . While the action on Cole's part was probably not premeditated, as late as September 1973, *Australian Church Record* was defending his actions, pointing to a recent opinion poll which found that only 29 per cent of people thought homosexuality was 'right' as evidence of "how widespread the support for Dr Alan Cole is on his stand at Robert Menzies College".[3]

Today, the doctrinal view of Moore Theological College, to which institution Cole owed his training and background, is paramount in the Sydney Anglican Archdiocese. The current Archbishop, Peter Jensen, is also from Moore Theological College, and the views he expresses are not inconsistent with those expressed by Cole.

The Anglican Church in Sydney (though not in most other Australian dioceses) continues to denounce homosexuality, oppose the ordination of female clergy and recently even excommunicated Freemasons for keeping a faith divergent from that of Christ's.[4]

In 1973, the events surrounding me caused a brief ripple on television and in print, but they affected me deeply. For instance, one morning I was taken by taxi to the Channel 7 studios in Epping to be asked by the host of a breakfast program (he is still on air) was I a communist? What did it mean that I be asked this question before breakfasting Sydneysiders, except to try and equate the perversions of homosexuality and communism? I was also subjected to a terrible inquisition by the University Deputy Chancellor,[5] Justice Rae Else-Mitchell. That an eminent jurist would demean a student before a university committee because of the student's sexuality seems an impossibility these days, but it happened.

There were others who tried to make something more of my little hiccough on the road to self-acceptance: "When a student, Jeremy Fisher, was expelled from a residential college at Macquarie University for being gay, the BLF refused to finish part of the university until this was overturned."[6]

Another perspective is: "One of the famous early battles of gay liberation was over the expelling of Jeremy Fisher from a residential college at Macquarie University, for being gay, in June 1973. The NSW Branch of the Builders' Labourers Federation stopped work on the uncompleted college in protest, in solidarity with gay liberation."[7]

But the aftermath to this event was the context in which I discovered *No end to the way*.

I had gone out in Gympie in search of some reading matter. It was the lurid cover of *No end to the way* that attracted me, the naked torso of the blond on the cover. The blurb, "A novel about hidden sex between men—penetrating—honest—telling it like it is", suggested even more. I bundled the book below a magazine and nervously paid for it at the counter. I can't recall the price. My copy is printed with a price of US$0.75, and it would not have been much more in Australian dollars then. Otherwise I could not have afforded it.

In hindsight, the book was an illegal import. It was first published in 1965, in the United Kingdom. My edition was published in New York in 1969. How this came to be published in the USA in 1969 is worthy of research. Nevertheless, the conventions of publishing contracts mean that the rights for Australia are unlikely to have extended to the US edition. I presume it came to be in Gympie in 1974 because, at that time, American publishers were attempting to extend their reach into the Australian marketplace, and some booksellers were challenging the dubious practices controlling the Australian marketplace. In other words, it was likely to have been 'dumped', and Glaskin's authorial rights usurped. Now, the forces of globalisation that encourage 'dumping' have almost convinced all politi-

I was taken to the Channel 7 studios and asked by the host of a breakfast program, was I a communist? What did it mean that I be asked this question before breakfasting Sydneysiders in 1973, except to try and equate the perversions of homosexuality and communism?

cal parties in Australia that an open copyright market is a logical extension of the 'level playing field' so beloved of economic rationalists (but of benefit most of all to megacorporations). But I digress.

In 1974, there were few Australian gay texts about, except the ones we were writing ourselves.[8] It was both a shock and thrill to begin reading *No end to the way* and realise it was set in Australia, in Perth of all places, though this is not immediately obvious. The description of the gay bar starts to define Australia: "If the cops come in to scour round, it always looks respectable enough. And the rest of it's a very respectable pub, one of the city's best. Just a bit old and in need of a face-lift. Country people use it a lot, in the residential part."[9]

Cor, the blond 'god' Ray Wharton, the narrator, falls for, is from Holland. He studied architecture there, but didn't finish, not that it matters in Australia. "'I'd still have to do it all again. Europe's architecture just won't *do* for Australia,' he adds. And it's not just sarcasm, but more a kind of light amusement. 'Like medicine and law, and several other things,' he goes on, 'and the whole silly point of it rubs you raw, you almost hate the country, the way it wantonly makes so much waste of its new migrants and, much more personally, treats people like yourself as some kind of criminal.'"[10]

The book says a great deal about Australia in the 1960s, especially life in the West: "His guest from the east is fattish, fortyish, with red hair going bald, freckles. Bruce tells you he's the chairman of some government tribunal, just visiting the state for a few days before going back again."[11] It is also overtly gay, and this is why I shrink from labelling it queer.

The pub is "the kind of pub the gays always seem to pick out and make their own, the world over"[12] (an early Australian use of 'gays'). Ray has gone there for "the ones that *aren't* obvious . . . that most everybody wants; what's called 'rough trade' or, if it's not so rough, just 'trade'. Casual adventurers. Or week-end dabblers. Sometimes only once-a-month, once-a-year. And bisexuals. There's no end to the variety of types in the game."[13] The reference to bisexuals is important: Cor turns out to be married, and a bisexual. And this leads to the true gay conclusion to the book, not a 'queer' one: "But about six months later you get another short letter, just to say that he's marrying again, to an Australian girl this time, yes a real girl, but one who understands, he says. Her father owns a string of chain stores; he's taking her up to the north of Queensland, to manage one of them. If there's one thing he can't face, he says, it's loneliness; just the mere prospect of it frightens him to death. And he can't see anything but loneliness ahead of you in the *gay* life, not these days. So he wishes you luck, and again sends his love."[14]

For me, in 1974, this revelation that Ray Wharton would continue in the '*gay* life' (the italics are in the original), while Cor departs for nervous bisexuality, was an inspiration, and evidence that there was honour and respect in the love I had been blessed with. Jackson (Glaskin) keeps his narrator proudly, determinedly gay. That I identified so strongly with this is perhaps due to the book's best feature. It is written, intriguingly, in sustained second person, a technical device that gives it both an intimacy with the reader, for the 'you' is 'me' and a narrative distance I did not first appreciate. In terms of the point of view, the reader is continually seeing through the eyes of the narrator: "Impossible to think that he was the first one to seduce you, when you were just eighteen, almost as many years ago. The first one after Uncle Kev, that is."[15] That leads, like this, to other understandings outside the 'ego' of the reader. However, Glaskin successfully manipulates the second voice so that the reader identifies, and distances, but ultimately must accept a 'gay' (homosexual) narrative point of view. By avoiding the first person, Glaskin allows his readers to place themselves in Ray Wharton's place ("you get another letter"), and even understand "Uncle Kev" (the 16-year-old uncle has sex with his much younger nephew Ray, a relationship that lasts for some years until Uncle Kev is killed on his motorbike at twenty-one).

Read today, *No end to the way* is still as strong a

text as when I read it in 1974. Then, though, it was a revelation: a work that actually described a world not so dissimilar to my own at the time, where men in Australia went to bars and met other men. And younger ones might be raped.

There are some difficulties that distance brings to the fore. There is a concentration on social status that seems at odds with the other liberated views of the narrator. For example, Ray wonders what a school teacher and a shop assistant (Roy and Andy) are likely to have in common, and is briefly disappointed when he finds out that Cor is a bar steward in a club, since it doesn't align with his own job as an advertising agent.

Still, in 1974, my point of view as reader helped define the greater narrative of that work for me, the meta-narrative. It seemed to be speaking with my voice but, now I can see the narrative technique at work, that was an illusion that use of the second person can create.

Nevertheless, it was the first book I read of which I could say "this has a homosexual point of view", and it was Australian as well.

There is some doubt about the existence of homosexual narrative. Dennis W. Allen[16] has explored some ways "to open a space for homosexual narrative that is more than just the subplot of heterosexuality,"[17] since he posits that market forces are the true arbiter for all points of view in cultural expression. In analysing the "hetero-narrative" that provides the "cultural story of the individual's progress through the 'inevitable' cycle of love, marriage and family",[18] Allen suggests that there may be no such thing as a homosexual narrative: "If the traditional function of the coming-out narrative has been to recount the individual's discovery of his or her emergent (gay) identity and hence to retroactively constitute that identity . . . what becomes clear . . . is that its function is really to constitute not gay but *straight* identity."[19]

In *No end to the way*, it could be argued that use of the second person helps keep the 'hetero-narrative' in place: "And there are just the ones you need: young Roy and Andy, a pleasant enough couple, especially now they've been *married* to each other—what is it?—five, six years? They're always safe so far as competition is concerned; never want anyone else but each other."[20]

But the italics are in the know—mocking. Roy and Andy are in the '*gay* life', after all.

ENDNOTES

1. Neville Jackson, *No end to the way*, MacFadden-Bartell Books, New York, 1969. The copyright date is 1965, and the paperback edition I have states it is the "complete text of the hardcover edition". The copyright notice is extended with this comment: "Published by arrangement with G.M. Glaskin."
2. There was an interesting outcome to this. Some years later, in 1987, after the end of a long relationship, I wondered if I wasn't too fond of alcohol. My G.P. sent me to a Macquarie Street psychiatrist, who spent the first two (and only) sessions I had with him apologising to me for not assisting me more in 1973, when he was registrar at North Ryde. He hadn't 'come out' himself then, and he'd spent years worrying about the treatment he'd given me. Needless to say, I no longer worry about my drinking (and I drink much less).
3. Graham Willett, *Anglicanism and homosexuality in the 1970s*, <www.stpeters.org.au>, p.27.
4. Malcolm Brown, 'Freemasons lockout embroils archbishop', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 January 2002, p.5.
5. The Chancellor at the time was one Justice Garfield Barwick of the High Court of Australia. It is not recorded that any confrere of the Prime Minister of the time ever accused Barwick, under parliamentary privilege, of having sex in any way, shape, place or form. This was not the case with another Justice of the High Court, Michael Kirby, whose only fault was his honesty in admitting that he was gay. The people who call us 'dogs' are still with us, and we must continue to resist them.
6. Anonymous, 'From struggle to sex-obsession—what happened to sexual liberation?' <www.sa.org.au/3814.html>, p.3.
7. Verity Burgmann, *Power and protest*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1973, pp.160–161.
8. J.A. Fisher, 'Fragments', *GLP: A journal of sexual politics*, January–February 1975, pp.62–67.
9. Ibid, Jackson, p.11.
10. Ibid, Jackson, p.20.
11. Ibid, Jackson, p.44.
12. Ibid, Jackson, p.11.
13. Ibid, Jackson, p.11.
14. Ibid, Jackson, p.191.
15. Ibid, Jackson, p.12.
16. Dennis W. Allen, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 1995, vol.41, no.3–4, pp.609–634.
17. Ibid, Allen, p.612.
18. Ibid, Allen, p.613.
19. Ibid, Allen, p.621.
20. Ibid, Jackson, p.10.

Jeremy Fisher is completing his Doctorate in Creative Arts at the University of Technology, Sydney. He is the author of a novel for children, Perfect Timing *(Pascal Press), and numerous stories, articles and poems.*

essay / **LAURIE HERGENHAN**

XAVIER HERBERT ON THE ROAD

Hitching from Brisbane to Darwin, 1935

WITH HOPES DASHED of getting Capricornia *published, and of stepping up his fight for a just Republic, Xavier set out to hitchhike from Sydney to Darwin.*

He wrote and posted a graphic series of [sometimes inaccurately- dated (ed.)] letters along the way to re-ignite his hopes and to keep in touch with his partner, Sadie, and his young friend, Arthur Dibley, champion of Capricornia. *Dibley supplied funds for the trip. Herbert walked both to find himself and outstrip failure. He hoped to gain employment in Darwin, an old haunt, so that he could continue writing.*

Herbert saw himself as an Overland *person, with 'temper democratic, bias offensively Australian', as well as an 'overlander', making adventurous trips across the North studying the country and its inhabitants.*

These letters, previously unpublished, and not included in the recent Xavier Herbert Letters,[1] *revolve around two preoccupations of Australian writing: place, especially life away from the cities, and the politics of the left. Writing with passion and gusto, he offers pictures of outback life during the Depression, its social classes, personalities, and fellow travellers.*

HERBERT WROTE his first two letters from Roma and Charleville. He differed from Depression victims because he had small financial resources, together with a clear goal of reaching Darwin as soon as he could.

Throughout his letters he pays tribute to the hospitality of the bush, its workers and even its 'managers', a male world as he sees it: drovers, stock-riders, cooks, mailmen, truck drivers, battlers camping in showgrounds and police paddocks, railway workmen and officials. It is not a mean bush Herbert encounters, not as mean as in his fiction, but meanness is to enter in. The 'bums' he mentions are apparently bludgers.

Herbert refers rarely to Aborigines, who were such a dominating interest in his life, possibly because they were not among his fellow itinerants, not prominent in towns or on main routes, and because he was moving fast. He does sometimes mention 'half-castes'.

Roma, Western Q. Friday Morn. [8 Feb. 1935]

My immediate aim since leaving Brisbane last Saturday has been to complete the first thousand miles of the trip in the shortest possible time. I have done that, as you know from my wire I sent Sadie last night. Now my aim is to get to Charleville, about 140 miles from here, by a weary track. Up to Toowoomba, I was averaging 100 miles a day; since then the average has dropped to 50; hence my hurrying.

The further one gets out here the thinner the traffic becomes. I am sticking to the road because I find that there are too many bums making use of goods trains; I fear that I might get pinched . . .

Charleville, Sunday [10 Feb. 1935]

After struggling along for six full days I reached Roma, 330 miles . . .

I was camped [at Morven] in the local Police Paddock, where, as you will have learnt from *Capricornia*, the indigent & unconventional of the populace live in humpies. I was directed hither by two young men. I called at the first camp to ask my way about (it was then dark) & was very well received. The occupants were having tea & brownie, of which they invited me to partake. I was shown an empty humpy and offered every assistance. This morning a neighbour offered me the use of his fireplace & his supply of goat's milk & told me where to go & arrange to get a lift to Tambo, my next

stage. I went to the house of a wool-carrier, who told me that he would pick me up in his motor truck & take me to Tambo in the morning . . .

Such is outback hospitality. I have been counting on it. You may rest assured that I shall not have to walk much henceforth. [He was wrong.] Really, it would be very difficult to do so about here. The heat is excessive & the country bone dry. The temperature at 3 p.m. in Charleville yesterday, so I am told, was a bare 118 degrees in the shade. There has been no rain in this district for eighteen months. It would be a sight for your town-bred eyes to see the place. However, I am well equipped for dry tracks. I bought a water-bag in Brisbane, & suck a pebble all day. I am really very well & happy. The overcoming of the continuous difficulty of getting along does me, I find, the world of good. I never pause, never feel beaten. I am sure it will all do me a power of good.

The man who carried me the 80 miles from Mitchell to Morven yesterday was an official of the AWU. He became very friendly with me, & told me that his organisation needed the service of such as I very badly. He seemed a wise & kindly soul. I told him the truth about myself. He is a man well up, a brother of Holloway, who used to be Labor Premier of Victoria, & a friend of Piddington's & Crockett's [Sydney literary contacts]. He claimed to know Vivian [Crockett] well. He has similar dreams to mine about the future of the country, & said that they are shared by countless others . . .

Contact with that man did me the world of good. My self-confidence has increased amazingly. I feel a new man.

It will be necessary for me tomorrow to ask to have more money sent me . . .

When I first got on the track I ate very little. Soon I felt the need of it, & decided that I should not hurt myself for the sake of a few shillings. Meals cost 2/- out here—but what slap-up meals they are! One does not need to eat again for 12 or 16 hours . . .

The following two letters show Herbert's first experiences of jumping the rattler. His story of riding in a wagon with sheep typifies his anecdotal style. While he never ever let truth get in the way of a good story, 'creative' touches of exaggeration may be involved here and elsewhere rather than fabrication.

His frustrated arrival at a putrid water-hole when expecting fresh water rings true. I heard him retell this story to illustrate his bushmanship: birdsong led him to a pristine spring and saved his life. The 'disreputable' and mean-spirited shearer presented here typifies 'bums' he referred to earlier but seldom dwells upon.

Blackall, Friday 14th Feb. [1935]

I have now done 1,400 miles. Don't think that much. I have over 2,000 to do before I reach the Territory border. Progress is still slow. I have hopes of more swiftness henceforth, because I've reached the railway again. I have just come in from Charleville, which is 200 miles across country from here. The journey took me 3½ days—& what days! The land is like a dead one. I'll be glad when I get across the tropic & into parts where there is grass & water. I have arranged to jump a sheep-train to Jericho (70 miles) tonight . . .

Jericho, Friday, 15th [Feb. 1935]

At 4.30 I arrived [at a sheep train] with my water-bag filled & climbed into a car to which the drovers directed me. Fortunately they were large cars, of the kind in which bovine beasts are carried. The one to which I was directed was not overpacked. I found a place in a corner, much to consternation of the sheep at first. The guard peeped in when passing & had told them that there was "more than sheep in the sixth car"; & he added that he didn't mind so long as the strange beast kept out of sight.

What a journey! The heat was terrific & the air dead. The sheep, used to crushes, were panting . . .

Well, to continue, I got that lift to Tambo, 120 miles, about which I told you from Charleville. I arrived in Tambo on Monday night, in company with a disreputable-looking out-of-work shearer, who had also bummed a ride. He was like a balloon, but a cheery fellow, so pleasant by nature indeed that I shared my tucker with him without anything like as much resentment as I tried to feel. Don't think I am getting stingy . . .

I had walked about 6 miles next morning when I came upon water in the river. I had not drunk from my bag since rising, & was parched as I've never been before. At sight of glinting water (which I was sure was no mirage, though I was travelling in a land of mirages), because I saw kangaroo tracks leading to it & many birds flying over it, I drained the last few drops from my bag. I went to the water. I surprised two eagles on arrival. Then to my horror I found that the water was unthinkably putrid. Never in my life have I seen & smelt such filth. The surface was dotted with thick cakes of pinkish scum among which squirmed countless maggots. Pah! And

I was thirsty as never.

So this was the water! thought I. And it was a 25 miles stage to the next! . . .

I wonder what is going to happen to this writing [career]of mine? Doubtless my reason for overlanding was that which I stated long ago, namely that the labour of it would expurgate [sic] my mind of false conceptions . . .

HERE HERBERT relates another episode of train-jumping. The railway guard colludes with them at night as do the friendly mailman and station manager, but 'station staff' could reject the practice, as later the police do, as illegal.

The young man who picks him up and tells macho stories may have been 'a delightful companion' to Herbert, himself macho, if not coarse, but this may be because he appealed to the novelist's curiosity. Herbert never avoided the sexually sordid.

The anecdote of the drunk stock-riders shows Herbert as cunning and designing as ever. Here is the dramatist in action. It also demonstrates a manipulative, bullying side with an eye for the main chance. The Syrian family he meets emphasises this, though his appreciation for their generosity is genuine. As a dependent, Herbert had a way of wooing people's kindness.

[Winton] Sunday, 16th [Feb. 1935]

I fell asleep [on the train]. I woke to hear myself emit a snore. I was wakened by footsteps. A moment later a voice cried, "Ilfracombe"; and hands began to fiddle with the couplings. I guessed that I was about to be shunted off . . .

I alighted & slipped away, saying to the driver as I passed the engine, "Thank you, brother." Thus I travelled 125 miles.

Cloncurry. Thursday [21 Feb. 1935]

. . . I was sitting down in the sun at the 13th mile [out of Winton], having passed no shade for 6 miles, when the truck came along. The young man proved to be a delightful companion; & he took to me so well that he asked me to come with him out to the station (14 miles off the road) to which he was going, promising to get me a good supper there & something to carry away. He tickled me all the while with innocent confessions about his troubles with women. Although but 26 he had, he said, four children; two by his wife & two by victims; & he claimed to have, as he confessed it, "plenty more down the shit-house" . . .

The mailman [from McKinlay to Cloncurry] was willing to take me. Then we set out, carrying three drunken stock-riders as passengers to Gilliat. One of these men rode on the back with me. I blarneyed him & soon had won the somewhat contemptuous friendship of all. They offered me beer; but I would not take it. Through acting the sneak to the monsters I was promised a gift of tobacco & a pair of elastic-side boots.

Well, at Gilliat the stock-riders gave me the pair of riding boots, which I promptly donned. Still I refused to drink; & still I remained obsequious yet attractive. By reason of their spending money freely at the pub, I was able to get a bath there . . .

I boarded the train with these men [they paid for his ticket], telling them how glad I was to be with them. I let them try wrestling-grips & fancy punches on me & make me the butt of their disgusting jokes. They were riotous. There was a horrible scene at departure when one of them [illegible] with a halfcaste with whom they had been drinking. Still I would not drink . . . Soon I had them singing; so I produced the accordion & now drank three beers. They staggered out & bought me a ticket for the rest of the journey . . .

[At Cloncurry] I ran into a youth who looked like a Greek, who was chopping at the back of a dilapidated iron shop that backed on to the river. I asked him might I wash under his tap. He took me inside & gave me a dish. While I was washing, the whole family viewed me. The fat & handsome lady of the house asked me would I like a cup of tea. I said I'd had one, but would pay her for a breakfast if she would give me one. She said she would give me one for nothing. So I asked if I might shave in a shed out the back & later leave my swag there. Later the lady called me to breakfast of grilled steak & bread & honey & tea. She told me I was a gentleman & that she and her family were Syrians . . .

So I am going to have a fly at jumping the train to Mt Isa at midnight tonight . . .

By another incredible coincidence Herbert met at Newcastle Waters the replacement (Dr Kirkland) of the Chief Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines (Dr Cook), and immediately began manoeuvring for a Darwin job. This manipulation did not immediately pay off. Herbert was genuinely involved in Aboriginal welfare work but he had no scruples in pursuing it, like many writers impelled to find jobs so as to keep on writing.

[Blue Bush Bore, via Brunette] Monday, 4 March

I am at the moment camped at what is called the Blue Bush Bore, 40 miles out of Brunette & 22 from Anthony's Lagoon. So you will see that I have travelled far & fast since writing to you five days ago.

Since it is unlikely that I shall get any more lifts till I reach the railway, it is best that I travel light, imperative indeed, because between Anthony's Lagoon & Newcastle Waters, a distance of 174 miles, I shall have to carry about 5 days' supply of food. Brunette is a post-office & a stopping place for the air-mail . . .

I have now 22 miles to make to Anthony's Lagoon. I hope to make it before I camp tonight.

Tuesday 13th [March 1935], Newcastle Waters

I have been well received here. I know the manager of the cattle station, who had introduced me to everyone, including Dr Kirkland, who is on his way up to Darwin to take the place of Cook [Chief Medical Officer and Chief Protector of Aborigines. Herbert hoped to get a job by ingratiating himself with Cook]. I'm beginning to work on Kirkland already. I've spun a great yarn about my reason for travelling overland so that I won't be misunderstood & stared at. Unfortunately he is going on by plane tomorrow. I wish I could go too. The fare is only £8/15/- to Darwin. It would be a wonderful experience, & no doubt helpful to my plans, because Kirkland will be the boss of the medical department for a while, & I could work him on the way . . .

It is only 130 miles from here to Birdum; but the road has been stopped by heavy rain, & no traffic is going through. I could get a lift to Milner's Well, 50 miles from here, tomorrow; but I could not get to Birdum in time to catch the weekly train, which would mean my having to walk for another week, which is beyond me. I am just about knocked up. My hands are covered with festers [sic]. My feet have given way. I need a couple of days' spell . . .

[Lettergram from Darwin to A. Dibley] 15 March 1935

COMPLETED JOURNEY PLANE/COST SIX POUNDS ESSENTIAL POISONED FOOT/WILL YOU SENT AMOUT IF THINK PROPER NOT UNLESS/AM AFRAID IMPOSING BECAUSE SUSPECT DWINDLED AFFECTION/PROSPECTS NOT BRIGHT HERE/HAVE YOU ABANDONED PUBLISHING/SEE SADIE/WRETCHEDLY XAVIER

Herbert's hopes, both as a writer and a political visionary, collapsed on arrival (though Capricornia *was soon published and he became acting superintendent of the Kahlin Aboriginal Compound) . . .*

He was amazingly resilient, and always a victim of mood swings. The depths he touches in this letter gave way to confidence, to his old egotism and yet, also to recovery of the dedication to his project:

Darwin, 19/3/ [1935]

I don't know what to write. I am here, but wish I weren't. Throughout the terrible journey I was haunted constantly by a feeling that I was fleeing from a fight [with P.R. Stephensen over the publishing of *Capricornia*]. Only the trials of the way kept my mind free . . .

Oh it is so difficult to tell you how I feel . . . But what am I to do now? . . .

Oh what am I to do? . . .

Please help me, Arthur. I feel like a child. Do you think I ought to come back & fight for what I want? . . .

Perhaps my general wretchedness is all due to my condition. I arrived here utterly exhausted. In order to catch the aeroplane I had to walk 35 miles in one night through rain & mud. I had to walk barefooted. Thus I got my foot poisoned. [Earlier in a telegram he said he had to catch the plane because of the poisoned foot, but it developed only when he walked to catch the plane. This is typical of Herbert's deviousness where his own interests are concerned.] . . .

Still wretchedly, With all my love. Your impotent Xavier.

If this journey of Herbert's was one of self-searching, a main motif in Capricornia *in Norman, and in* Poor Fellow *in Prindy, his search was for the moment an unfinished one, awaiting integration into Herbert's life and work.*

ENDNOTE

1. UQP, Ed. by Frances de Groen and Laurie Hergenhan. Only parts of the first and last letters have been published in *The Courier-Mail*. The letters of Xavier Herbert are held in collections at the National Library of Australia. These previously unpublished letters are reproduced here courtesy of the NLA and of the Herbert Estate. The punctuation is Herbert's.

essay / **PAUL GENONI**

'SINCE THE MINE CLOSED DOWN'

Mining town closures in the songs of Mick Thomas

THE AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE is littered with the remains of former mining towns. There are various reasons for the passing of these towns: ore bodies drying up; falling demand for minerals; rises in the costs of extraction and processing, and mismanagement. Some of these former mining towns have been transformed into regional centres and survive on new forms of rural income, others exist as little more than tourist attractions, and some are all but forgotten.

The decline of mining towns is often accepted as an inevitable outcome of an industry which depends upon access to a non-renewable resource. Mine workers have learnt to live with their tenuous job security. In the wake of closures the workforce inevitably moves on, often to work in other mining centres, or perhaps to the cities in search of other forms of work. It is a social phenomenon that attracts only fleeting interest alongside the attention given to the broader political and economic impact of mine closures.

In a series of songs, Melbourne-based singer-songwriter Michael (Mick) Thomas has focused on the impact of mine and mining town closures on workers and their families. Thomas is best known for his period as the frontman for the band Weddings, Parties, Anything. The group released seven albums between 1987 and 1996, with most of the material written by Thomas. Since Weddings, Parties, Anything disbanded in early 1999 he has fronted a new group, Mick Thomas and The Sure Thing.

Although difficult to pigeonhole, Weddings, Parties, Anything is usually described as being a 'folk-rock' band. Certainly the two musical styles coalesce in the group's attitude and musical aesthetic, with their instrumentation melding a guitar rock base to ostensibly folk instruments such as piano accordion, violin and mandolin. And although the audience for the band was close to a mainstream rock crowd, their folk credentials were further evidenced by Celtic influences and an affinity for traditional Australian songs ('Streets of Forbes', 'Sergeant Small'), plus original songs by Thomas which drew upon a similar repository of colonial folklore ('A Tale They Won't Believe'). Canadian commentator Jeremy Mouat, in seeking to place the band within a post-colonial context, concluded that their "music is largely concerned with the connections between past and present, whether it be the bond of memory or an identification with tradition".[1]

Thomas's songs also frequently carry political positions and nuances which place him within left-wing folk traditions. One element of this folk influence emerges in his dependence on storytelling as his preferred mode of expression, rather than the strongly rhetorical approach of more obviously political bands such as Midnight Oil. Thomas has stressed, however, that while his songwriting may not be overtly political, he is nonetheless acutely aware of the political implications of stories and songs which deal with the lived reality of working-class lives:

> I've always been a talker, telling stories . . . I reckon that's political in itself, in an age when entertainment is increasingly generated from electronic sources, and homogenized, and stories are watered down . . . I'm not a Marxist, but to use a Marxist term, I think the way modern media is generated creates a lot of alienation . . . The mes-

> sage it generally gives people is that your lives, your real lives, are not good enough for drama or fiction or songs . . . To sing about things that are real and honest and open is a political act.[2]

Accordingly, many of Thomas's songs are concerned with exploring the consequences when 'real lives' are determined by economic necessity. Be it the couple struggling with a relationship shaped by shift work in 'Step in, step out'; or striking nurses fighting to argue their case despite public indifference and media manipulation in 'Sisters of Mercy'; or the plight of strippers plying their craft in north-west mining towns in 'Five shows a day', Thomas has crafted stories-in-song which derive their political impact by exploring the lack of control individuals often have over their working and living conditions.

In so far as Thomas's songs are associated with any particular region or city, then it is his adopted home of Melbourne. His songs are peppered with references to the city's inner suburban areas, and he may be the only Melbourne songwriter to dedicate a song to one of the city's restaurants ('Stalactites'). He has, however, also written numerous songs dealing with rural and regional Australia. These include both the agricultural areas ('Hungry years', 'The year she went away', 'Where the highway meets the cane') and mining towns. And when Thomas has written about mining towns, he has often done so in order to stress their transience and the impact of mine closures on the lives of those who depend upon them.

Thomas's earliest song dealing with the changing fortunes of a mining town was 'Industrial town'.[3] The song was included on the first record released by Weddings, Parties Anything, a four-song collection issued in 1985, and it was also included on the band's second long-playing record, *Roaring Days*. Although the 'industrial town' referred to in the title is not specified the song appears to be autobiographical. It tells the story of Thomas's relationship with the town of Yallourn, where he spent a part of his childhood. Situated in the La Trobe Valley, 130 kilometres south-east of Melbourne, Yallourn is at the heart of an area that has been a coal mining centre since the 1880s. The town was designed and built during the 1920s as a rare Australian example of a model town, in order to house the growing population working in the mines and associated power industry. Yallourn grew rapidly following the Second World War, only to have the announcement in 1969 that it would be demolished to allow for the expanded mining of brown coal deposits. Demolition took place throughout the 1970s and was completed in 1982.

Despite coming early in Thomas's career 'Industrial town' is one of his most sophisticated songs. The song is broken both lyrically and musically into three quite distinct sections. It opens with Thomas singing *a cappella* for the first verse, with a slow elegiac tune—almost a hymn—emerging as he commences the second verse:

> *Down in the valley, the valley so low,*
> *Lay the town over and hear the winds blow,*
> *Lay the town over and dig it all in,*
> *For what we once had will not come again.*
>
> *The people are crying, the people are down*
> *They look at the crevice where once lived a town,*
> *And it's not for the money, they cry not for the blame,*
> *They just cry for a ghost town, such a great shame.*

This lamentation invokes a group of mourners, a mining community, standing around a graveside where the body of their town has been laid to rest. At this funeral, however, the grave is a 'crevice'—the open-cut pit—which marks where the town once stood. Tellingly, it is for the town itself that the mourners shed their tears, rather than from concern for any financial implications the town's closure may have for them.

The second section of the song is introduced by the addition of a heavy drumbeat which transforms the still nascent tune into a funeral march. The singer has now become the town, voicing bitterness about its own demise. It is a bitterness which confronts and challenges those who have come to expedite the town's demise or gain mileage from its passing:

> *Take six politicians to dig me a grave,*
> *Take six intellectuals, my soul try to save,*
> *And six union workers, a red flag to wave,*
> *And one stupid singer to rant and to rave.*

The opening of the third section of the song is heralded by a short intense drumburst, followed by a sudden uptempo shift. Thomas is now transformed into that 'stupid singer', and the rest of the song is told in his own voice, as one of those who have only memories of a place that was their home. His intention is not to debate the political implications of the town's demise or to apportion blame, but to record

the personal loss for those who made up the community.

The singer is thrust back into his childhood memories of the town, a change of perspective which is indicated by the use of a familiar nursery rhyme, 'Old King Cole'. The punning on Cole also reveals that this was a mining town where coal was 'king'; a benevolent monarch who provided a secure home for those who lived there:

Now Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
Such a merry old soul was he,
Cause he fed my dad, he fed my mum,
He fed us children three,
And I remember the Old Coach Road,
And the pine trees by its side,
And I remember the playground there,
And every swing and slide.

The song then enters the chorus for the first time. It emphasises the emotional attachment between the singer and the town, as he addresses the town as his 'friend', and returning to the elegiac air of the song's opening, he has come to say farewell:

It's goodbye to you my old grey friend,
Soon your days are at an end,
They'll dig you up, tear you down,
Goodbye to you—Industrial town.

The reminiscences tumble into the following verse. The singer declines the opportunity to make a political point about the living conditions in the town, choosing instead to proclaim his attachment to a place that provided him with a secure childhood:

In the morning when the sun came up,
On commission housing there,
You could feel the ash from the mine some time,
Come floating through the air,
But times were good and we didn't mind
About the chimneys and their mess,
Three meals a day, a sleep at night,
We couldn't have cared less.

In the final verse the singer regains his adult perspective, recalling how he returned to the town after a dozen years to find its streets and houses deserted. As the music gathers in intensity, he finally cries out in anger and frustration at the demise of his town:

Time moved on, we moved away,
How a young child soon forgets,
Twelve years later I returned,
And I see with regret,
Empty houses, empty streets,
Not a single soul to meet,
Sold right out, damned on a whim,
Sing this chorus, sing this hymn.

That final line pulls together the different musical and narrative threads. The singer calls for a last chorus of farewell to his town, and the use of the word 'hymn' recalls both the mood and the funereal setting of the song's opening. The final chorus is granted, followed by some more rapid-fire drumwork and the song slams to an end.

Whereas 'industrial town' is sung from the point of view of a member of a mining family rather than a mine worker, and evokes the loss of a fondly remembered home, in 'Rossarden'[4] Thomas focuses on the individual miner who needs a job in order to support his family.

The Rossarden tin mine in north-eastern Tasmania was closed in early 1982 after half a century of operation. The mine had been acquired the previous year by Kerry Packer's Forestwood Holdings, who initially invested substantial sums on upgrading the mining equipment and the miners' accommodation. The closure was therefore sudden and unexpected, and unions and miners believed that the acquisition, expansion and subsequent closure of the mine had been part of an elaborate tax avoidance scam. The workforce left the town rapidly in the wake of the closure, and the entire town was auctioned off in October 1982.

The song opens with a summary of the Rossarden situation, in which the workers welcome the good times and ignore the prospect of trouble ahead:

It wasn't all that long ago when our mine changed hands,
We were getting mechanised and the money flooded in,
But some remained sceptical, and spoke of future falls,
But since our mine's been flooded we've not lacked for mates at all.

But if this opening brings the promise of community, it is immediately shattered by the first use of

the chorus that follows. It is a powerful two-line burst of anger, cried out over an intense, hammering beat, which announces the mine's closure and tells us that the shutdown has turned the community upon itself:

An ugly vicious rumour has been flying through this town,
Nobody says much to your face since the mine closed down.

In the second verse the singer puts the workers' case; that the closure of the mine is due not to the lack of profitability, but rather the tax benefits that can be accrued for the ownership by using the mine—and the miners—in this way:

Don't tell me it's not workable, all know that it is,
It always has been, things ain't changed, there is plenty of tin there yet,
There's plenty there for us to do, if they would let us back,
But it's more use to the owner as a way to dodge his tax.

It is part of the singer's estrangement as registered in the chorus, however, that he believes the workforce are unsupported in their crisis. The owners and the management are 'playing God', controlling not only their asset but the lives of the workers and their families. The singer, however, feels equally neglected by his union, and his condemnation of them is also swift and brutal:

Now some like playing football, some like playing God,
But none like being out of work, when the kids they must be fed,
Where was our glorious union, when Rossarden felt the crunch,
Well they debated ideology, perhaps just out to lunch.

Thomas chooses not to pursue the political issue of responsibility for the closure, or the particular outcome for the singer and his family. Rather, a final verse pulls the listener into the aftermath of the closure. Just as in 'Industrial town' there came the point of reflection provided by the singer returning to the town to find it stripped of life and meaning, a similar moment, accompanied by a momentary halt to the restless drive of the music, serves as the climax of 'Rossarden'. On this occasion it is through the eyes of uncomprehending tourists that we glimpse the now deserted town that such a short time ago had provided a living for the singer and his family:

And the tourists they stare blankly now,
When they pass through our town,
For Rossarden is not a pretty sight,
Since the mine closed down.

In yet another song, 'Walkerville',[5] Thomas provides a further example of the impact of a mining town closure on an individual. In this case it is not the damage done to childhood memories or the hopes of a father trying to support his family, but to a young man and his relationship which is forced to a premature conclusion by the closure of a mine.

'Walkerville' uses as its setting a former limestone mining town of the same name located on the coast 190 kilometres south-east of Melbourne. The limestone was loaded for Melbourne where it was used in the construction of the mansions and large public buildings in the rapidly growing city. The mines were eventually closed in the 1920s after some fifty years of operation.

The song leads off with violin, piano accordion and a lightly strummed guitar, which carry one of Thomas's loveliest melodies. The tune is simple but immediately engaging and satisfying, and brings with it a deep feeling of acceptance. When the delicately delivered vocal commences, it carries the same sense of resignation that is implied by the music, and made apparent in the lyrics:

For the last time, I'll walk down to the jetty,
Watch the ships arriving and unloading at the quay,
For the last time I'll ask for news of Melbourne town,
Though now I am heading homewards it means nothing much to me.

The first appearance of the chorus establishes the singer's reluctance to depart:

I never thought that I would be the one so sad for leaving,
As they're loading down the houses from the town upon the hill,
It's a peculiar respite, it's a bitter valediction,
As the morning sun was breaking on the cliffs at Walkerville.

In the second verse he declares his reason for not wanting to leave the town—and it becomes apparent that his primary affinity is for a woman rather than the town itself:

From 'round by Stamford Bridge she came, arrived here with her Dad,
He earnt his money at the kiln, though I could never earn his trust.

It appears that the woman's father disapproves of the relationship because of the difference in the lovers' social standing. Her father is a company man while the singer labours in the mines. The couple have, however, managed to establish a clandestine relationship:

But there are venues adequate, between Liptrap and Walkerville,
For a mis-match made in heaven, when needs they turn to must.

The incipient relationship is, however, thwarted by the closure of the mine. It is a closure ordered by the company, and the same social and financial privilege which opposed the singer's relationship is now exercised in a manner which ensures that it is brought to a definite and premature end:

When the mine had finished, the company sent orders,
And you were bound for Melbourne town,
But I was heading home.

Although the singer twice declares that he is heading 'home', it seems that he will do no such thing. Home for him is simply the next mining town where work can be found. The music and the lyrics both expand to fleetingly capture the possibilities seemingly offered by the truncated relationship, and which for the miner at least, must now be transferred to the prospect of his next job. Despite the rupture in his personal life the singer's voice sustains the song's note of acceptance. There is nothing, he is saying, that can be done about this situation, and he will 'give thanks' for what love has come his way under these unlikely circumstances:

They're finding pearls up in the north-west,
Diamonds out in Africa,
Gold up on the Palmer, it's all money in the bank,
But I never thought I'd be finding love here in South Gippsland,
But that is where I found it, and for that I must give thanks.

As the song climaxes we learn the importance of the reference in the chorus to the 'bitter valediction' on the 'cliffs of Walkerville'. The cliffs were the place where the lovers finally parted. Accompanied by rising guitars that suggest the difficulty of the separation, the singer finally embraces his personal loss:

Could you feel my heart a-shaking on the cliffs at Walkerville?
And could you blame my soul for quaking on the cliffs at Walkerville?

The guitars carry the song and the tune to what seems to be their troubled conclusion, but both are finally resolved by the re-emergence of the violins and the melody that opened the song and now serve to re-establish the prevailing note of resignation.

'Walkerville' has a companion piece in Thomas's repertoire, in the song 'Lights of Devonport'.[6] Both were first issued on the 1996 album *River'esque*, and like 'Walkerville', 'Lights of Devonport' is also a story about a man leaving a difficult relationship that has commenced in a mining town.

'Lights of Devonport' features another violin-led opening. On this occasion the tune scrambles up from an abyss, the violin supported by a jagged guitar which invokes the anguished tale to come. The singer is escaping an unspecified Tasmanian mining town, and the song takes its title from his final view of the island as he departs for the mainland. As with 'Walkerville', this song also commences with the singer on the point of leaving the town in the wake of an abruptly terminated relationship, but this time the lyric and its delivery carry a tension quite removed from the grace and lightness of tone which characterised the other song:

Can't say I'm sorry to be leaving here tonight,
But there's not much that I will miss,
And anyway to say I feel betrayed is not quite right,
But like betrayal this all started with a kiss.

The singer's departure on this occasion is not driven by the closure of a mine or town, but by the town's disapproval of his relationship. The exact nature of the offending relationship is not specified, but there

is a suggestion that it may have been a homosexual liaison:

But how could they understand,
That a man could get so lonely?
Could they ever realise what it takes,
To be the one and only?

If such relationships are a by-product of male dominated mining environments, they are also inevitably bound to attract the opprobrium of those towns. As the singer notes, "in this mining town the only thing not mined is your own business". Whereas 'Walkerville' was concluded at a point of regret married to optimism, the conclusion to 'Lights of Devonport' is unremittingly agonised, with the singer confronting the extent of his rejection and isolation:

I don't know quite where I'm going,
I don't know quite where I'll stay . . .

And unlike the sense of acceptance which characterised 'Walkerville', 'Lights of Devonport' features a rising note of resentment. The barely contained tension that characterises the verses explodes with each repetition of the chorus, which is spat out with increasing venom as the song progresses:

And the bastards in the bar,
I bet they say good luck good riddance,
And I say each to their own,
You pack of filthy sodden pissants.

On this bitter note, the song builds to a turbulent swell before finishing on a protracted scream from a guitar.

Elsewhere, however, Thomas does take a more romantic view of the possibilities of mining-town closures, by suggesting that even after the mines are closed and the pits are quiet, the spirit of the former inhabitants may still linger. 'The Ghosts of Walhalla'[7] is situated in the former mining town of Walhalla, located in the Baw Baw ranges in south-eastern Victoria. Now all but deserted, at the end of the nineteenth century it was a major gold-mining centre. The most substantial reminder of the town's former prosperity, and the focus of the song, is a sporting ground. A cricket club had been formed at Walhalla in the 1880s, and due to the lack of suitably flat ground, the top of a hill was flattened in order to acquire sufficient level playing space. The field survives as an attractive arena surrounded by tall trees.

The song opens with Thomas lightly sketching in the history of the town:

As the century waned well a town came alive,
They came in their thousands and tried to survive,
In knockabout shacks, in a valley so steep,
Where the river ran softly, the gold dust ran deep.

The singer pauses to reflect on the fate of the town, and to ponder the accidents of history that separate those towns that survive from those which perish:

They say luck's a fortune and fate's a surprise,
While one town kicks on then another dies,
Did the war come too soon or the rail come too late?
But swift was the verdict and cruel was the fate.

But even though the town may be gone in the usual sense, Walhalla remains a true 'ghost town'. Time and fate may have accounted for the town's physical presence, and the former miners and their families have moved on and passed away, but so long as the cricket field remains their spirits shall both linger and play:

Now the ghosts of Walhalla are playing tonight,
On a ragged old cliff, in the pale moonlight,
On a mountain top high, where the crowds never roar,
The ghosts of Walhalla are playing once more.

In the chorus Thomas names a ghostly cricketing trio, who undefeated by temperamental metals or economic fluctuations, and defying the levelling of the town where they once made their living, continue to test their skills:

Stewie-the-gov'nor and Teddy McGee,
They're still slugging it out on the pitch in the trees,
Hitting a big score off Arthur-the-kid,
He's not bad with the bat but he can't bowl for quids.

These ghosts of Walhalla serve to provide something which was lost to the singer of 'Industrial town'—a form of social memory which allows the past to be perpetuated, and perhaps to stave off some of the desolation and loss that inevitably follows in

the wake of a town closure.

In a recent discussion of the lack of academic consideration of ghost towns in Australia, Perrie Ballantyne argues that they are troublesome in that rather than embracing the dominant narratives of "comfort and permanence" they "have often been a focus for thoughts of rootlessness and alienation". She concludes: "For a nation which has invested much in its histories of settlement and progress, the idea of its settlements disappearing is particularly chilling".[8]

In addressing the impact of mining-town closures on the individuals directly affected, Mick Thomas focuses on these anxieties of permanence and belonging, while eschewing the imposition of a political meta-narrative. His songs address sympathetically the dilemmas "of rootlessness and alienation" faced by those whose lives are coerced by the fate of failed mining ventures, while only rarely and briefly touching directly upon the political issues raised by these stories. Thomas nonetheless manages to remind us that the closure of a mine or mining town involves not only a loss of jobs or economic potential, but a profound personal loss of place and community. Such closures are therefore political in the most personal sense imaginable.

ENDNOTES

1. J. Mouat, 'Making the Australian past modern: The music of Weddings, Parties, Anything', *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada*, 6, 1991, p.8.
2. Michael Thomas, quoted in Mouat, p.3.
3. Weddings, Parties, Anything, 'Industrial town', *Roaring Days*, WEA Records, 25–54301, 1988.
4. Weddings, Parties, Anything, 'Rossarden', *The Big Don't Argue*, WEA Records, 25–67964, 1989.
5. Weddings, Parties, Anything, 'Walkerville', *River'esque*, Mushroom Records, TVD 93467, 1996.
6. Weddings, Parties, Anything, 'Lights of Devonport', *River'esque*.
7. Weddings, Parties, Anything, 'The Ghosts of Walhalla', *River'esque*.
8. P. Ballantyne, 'Unsettled country: reading the Australian ghost town', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 70, 2001, p.35.

Paul Genoni is a librarian but teaches at Curtin University of Technology and has followed the music of Weddings, Parties, Anything long enough to remember Pete Lawler playing with the band, but not Dave Steele.

THE TRUTH ABOUT YANKS

Have you ever noticed that American tour buses seem to be bigger and larger? Well the truth is they are. If you think it's because of the need for greater security and safety due to the way that many in the world hate Americans and their government, you'd be totally wrong. Americans are cellulite blobs on legs. Yes they are fat, mega blubber fats. I can reveal to you now there are no thin people in the US except for sports people, actors, TV hosts and drug addict rock stars. Americans always brag that everything they have is bigger, better than the rest of the world. Their cars are bigger, their planes bigger, their trains bigger and their plates are bigger because they have to be bigger for one reason and one reason alone, they are huge fat bastards. Have you noticed that every time the US executes covert military operations it fails and it's pretty obvious why. I think you'd notice four-hundred-and-fifty-pound commandos with thick shakes attached to their helmets and a hamburger in one hand and a greasy machine in the other hand, while making sucking sounds through straws and leaving a trail of hamburger wrappers in their wake as they're sneaking up on you. It's no wonder that the US military loves to use aerial bombing. You don't have to be quiet doing bombing. The US is the world super power. They are bigger, fatter and grossly more overweight than anyone else in the world. I believe the US should change its name to 'THE UNITED FATS OF CELLULITE', home of gross, land of the pig troughs.

R.J. Conlon

fiction / **JOHN GOOLEY**

SHUTDOWN

Bryson Laing is fifty-five and he's worked at the Tarrawanna Colliery for all of his twenty-nine years in Australia. But on Monday morning the colliery will shut down, the mine gates will be locked, management will disappear, the company through its lawyers will say that it's broke, and Bryson will discover that the money he would have been due on retirement will never be paid.

But that'll be on Monday and today is only Friday and so Bryson as yet knows nothing of what's to come, and it's been work as usual and he arrives home tired and dirty and walks through the back door into the kitchen and his wife Madeline is sitting naked at the kitchen table. She smiles.

Bryson takes off his boots. He slowly unbuttons his shirt and slides it off and lets it fall. He unbuckles and unzips his trousers and they drop to the floor and he steps out of them. He removes his underwear. The coal dust is thick on his face and neck and arms. His body is white. Other days he showers before leaving the colliery, but never on Fridays. He sits down and they drink the just-brewed tea and eat shortbread biscuits and look at each other and say nothing.

And later in the steaming bath Madeline performs the long and gentle ritual of soaping and sponging Bryson all over. And under a bright light she examines him thoroughly for blackheads, because as a child she'd seen what a lifetime down pit could do to a man's skin and early on she'd told Bryson she didn't want that happening to her husband. So one of her lifelong tasks has been to keep his pores unclogged.

"There's a beauty here."

"Oh aye."

She squeezes what she finds, they both rinse off under the shower, they rub each other dry with thick rough towels, and then, it now being more than two erotic hours since Bryson arrived home, they move to the comfort of the bedroom where they finish things off with a slow easy fuck.

It's Saturday, two days before the mine will shut down, though Bryson still knows nothing of that, and he's in the Tarrawanna pub, sitting in the beer garden, just after midday, a steak sandwich ordered for lunch as usual, drinking a beer, talking with his mates, looking at the escarpment that is so full of coal.

"Nearly thirty years I've been drinking here and nothing changes. But now . . ."

"Yeah, now the bloody place changes every time you turn round."

"And what's all that bloody scaffolding going up out the back?"

"They reckon they're going to put a restaurant there."

"Jesus."

"It's the bloody card machines, the pokies, the TAB. Pub's got more money than it knows what to

do with."

"It's all fucking bullshit."

Bryson drinks exactly six beers then walks home in time for tea. His other drinking days are Tuesdays and Thursdays after work, for three hours and four beers. This is the way it's always been. When he arrives home tea is on the table. Madeline has spent the day in the garden.

"The roses are coming along," she says.

"You've done a great job."

"Thank you."

They eat, they watch TV, they each have a couple of beers, they go to bed.

On Sunday Bryson rises early and walks. He carries a sandwich, a drink and an apple in a small backpack. Madeline gets up just before he leaves and kisses him goodbye at the door.

"Have a good walk."

Bryson and Madeline rarely spend a day together.

He walks the few blocks uphill to where the bush begins at Mt Morgan and then heads off along the fire trail and various walking tracks towards Mt Douglas. When he was younger he sometimes used to make it all the way to Mt Douglas, have a beer and a feed in the pub, and then walk back. But these days he doesn't get too far past Mt Morgan.

The company used to mine Mt Morgan. But they closed the mine not long ago and subdivided some of the land for housing. There were protests, people saying the land should be preserved as a State Recreation Area, marches in the town, speeches, threats from the unions. But now the houses are being built, big expensive houses.

And now Bryson is walking past this new estate. Two weeks ago he stopped to look at what was going on and he started talking to a man who turned out to be a company executive partly responsible for the whole thing happening.

"They're going to look great when they're finished," this man said proudly. "Once the landscaping's done and everything."

"I marched," Bryson said.

"You what?"

"I marched. The protests. Everything. You know what I mean?"

"I'm sorry, the . . ."

"The protests against this whole bloody thing."

"Oh . . . I . . ."

"There's so many walking tracks starting from here. You could've made this a park or a picnic area. Anything."

"The houses are going to blend in . . . You know, with the bush."

"Oh yeah, I can see that."

"There's a lot of land we haven't touched."

"I'm not saying the houses don't look good."

"I can understand your position. I really can."

"I wouldn't mind living here myself. Bit outside my price range though."

"Yes, it'll certainly be a nice place to live."

"Yeah . . . it's just a pity . . ."

"Yeah."

Monday morning and Bryson is leaving for work for what he still doesn't realise is the last time. He walks along the rough tracks through the bluegum forest. He once read that these are among the tallest trees in the world. The early morning sun angles down, hazy and flickering, and a wallaby hops away at the sound of Bryson's footsteps. He's been doing this walk five mornings a week for twenty-nine years. He walks and feels the morning and lets his mind be empty.

Usually when he gets to work there would firstly be the casual greetings, the talking and joking, then there would be the tram ride several hundred metres into the mountain, followed by the lift ride half a kilometre or more straight down. Some call it the descent into hell and whinge and say they'd rather be anywhere else. But Bryson doesn't know where else he could be, how else he could pass the long day. He wears earmuffs and his world is all bright lights and dirt and the noise of machinery. Back in Scotland you could barely stand upright when you were mining, but here in Australia the mines are sometimes as large as cathedrals. They are cathedrals.

But then Bryson comes off the track out of the bluegum forest and onto the sealed road that leads through thick bush to the mine, and ahead he can see that the mine gates are closed and that there's a crowd. As he gets closer he hears anger and shouting coming from his colleagues, he sees the gates are chained and padlocked, he sees security guards dressed in black and with large dogs on leads. And then suddenly he's in the middle of the melee.

And thus it ends. And thus it begins.

The rest of the day is a confusion of meetings and drinking and talking and pleading and desperation. Bryson gets home late that night and he's drunk. He falls into a chair.

"I saw it on the news," Madeline says. "What are we going to do?"

"How the fuck would I know?" he shouts.

Then he apologises. They watch the late news and go to bed. The next day is the same. And the next.

But as the week progresses the story stays in the news. The media, forming public opinion and then riding it, become more and more sympathetic to the miners' position. And eventually the government, adjusting policy daily to accord with the public mood, begins to make guarantees. The miners are assured they will receive "not all but certainly a large part" of their entitlements. And while the general opinion among the miners is that they are being lied to, at least now there is some hope.

But for Bryson there is no hope. He realises that no-one is talking about the possibility of the mine reopening.

On Friday night he arrives home very late.

"You missed your bath," Madeline says.

"I'm sorry."

On Sunday he walks as usual. He stops to look at the new housing estate at Mt Morgan. He stares at the half-built million-dollar houses. He begins to imagine them in flames. And then he begins to plan how he could do it, how he would start the fires, how he would transport the fuel, exactly when he would do it. He continues on his walk. In the middle of a wide track, with the sunlight and foliage stippling the earth, and to the tune of a lyrebird, Bryson falls to his knees and cries.

When he arrives home Madeline is sitting on the lounge watching television. He looks at her and thinks: I don't know anything any more.

She says, "We'll be right, won't we?"

He wants to say, "Who are you?"

He sits down and holds her hand.

John Gooley is a full-time writer based in Corrimal East, NSW. His articles and stories have appeared in a number of newspapers and magazines. He is currently writing a novel, and is in receipt of a Commonwealth Government Arts Grant (the dole).

fiction / **FIONA HILE**

THE SIX O'CLOCK SWILL

In the days before John Cahill's referendum put an end to six o'clock closing, Barbara was able to imagine Balmain as a series of drains, and the various jetties that punctuated the peninsula as the inevitable destinations for a variety of local outpourings. In the humid afternoons, she would be drawn to the jetty at the bottom of Thames Street. Sitting on the end of the wooden pier, bobbing slightly, the water lapping heavily against the straining moorings, she would think about Mrs Lang and her trademark crust, carefully preserved in a cup of Bushell's. Or Mrs Haughton, who would invariably leave a little something of herself for you to remember her by—a denture or a smear of ear wax, to be returned at your convenience. Mrs Cox, on the other hand, would often surrender her lunch in the state in which it had been delivered and Barbara had been instructed to return the mashed potatoes and corned beef to their respective containers, so that they might re-join the merry-go-round come dinner time.

As Barbara mused on the ferry's infinitesimally slow progress around the headland, her breathing began to deepen and thoughts of overflowing waste bins and jellied surfaces lapped into view. The first waste basket of the morning, she remembered, had been crammed to the brim with enormous white pads and she had quickly learned that odours can be inhaled through the mouth as well as through the nose. There was, without a doubt, a certain underwater quality to bathroom cleaning—one needed the agility of a synchronised swimmer and the lung capacity of a pearl fisher for, if one could help it, one didn't suffer to draw breath whilst stuffing garbage bags and hosing down urine-soaked tiles.

But now, the passengers were upon her, men in brown trousers and women in bursting frocks, a little boy clutching the fist of a stout woman, handfuls of greasy newspaper, a glint of red hair in the sunlight, "See you up at the Commercial, then," called Xav, "Don't leave me waiting this time," peachy complexions gone to salt and all the gulls shrieking their approval, a sea of sardines sliding from a smoking tin. "All I hope is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs," Keats once said and so, as the ferry disengaged from its lock Barbara jumped headily into the froth. It was all perfectly straightforward. She felt the hem of her dress tickling her armpits but she also experienced a rushing between her thighs, the mistimed acquisition of salt water in her nostrils and throat. And as her head broke through the harbour's tenacious skin she intuited the caresses of jellyfish and a patina of oleaginous offerings from the fleeing ferry's bilge.

Barbara thought they really were the perfect couple, the young woman with her corrugated blonde hair and demure bathers, her long legs rising up towards a breathlessly cinched waist. And her broad-jawed companion. She wondered what he could be thinking. He looks like a man of lei-

sure, judging by the swimming costume and tan. And those bulging muscles! As if the enormous, frothing glass he is holding contained an idealised version of the very beverage that currently passes over the counter for a shilling a shout.

Barbara caught sight of herself in the reflection offered by their glassy eyes and smoothed down her hair.

"Geez, Barb, you been in the drink again?"

She could hear the insistent buzzing of flies and wondered if someone had left some meat out.

"You smell like a bloody oil rig."

As she opened the heavy glass door, the buzzing rose up to a roar and she thanked the saints that she didn't have to fight her way through the throng of men, standing six deep at the bar.

She could hear the click, click, clack! of someone losing a handful of reds.

"Got ya, ya bastard!"

Through the hatch that looked out of the Ladies' Parlour into the main bar, she could see Soapy lining up his red-eyed soldiers. Head to head, he'll station them, or side by side, from now until closing, so that not even Mrs Taylor can tell where one six ends and the next begins.

"Soap, what've I told you about boozin' on an empty stomach?"

"Mind your beeswax," he growled, a fleck of bloodied spittle elevating a four-spot domino to a higher rank.

"Go on, off you go. And don't come back 'til you've got a decent meal inside you." Mrs Taylor picked up the potato-peeler, took another potato from the saucepan, and started unwinding the skin. "Don't hold your breath for the service," she told Barbara. "They'll take care of the men before they bother with you. They know what side their bread's buttered on."

The barmaid, Delia, was locked in an arm wrestle on the far side of the bar, the right side of her head pressing against the gang of men leaning on both elbows across the counter.

"I'm telling you, Barbie," said Xav, unloading four shandies from an aluminium tray, "there's really no difference between us and them."

Barbara scrutinised the picture that had been painted onto the tray. From her position under the sunlit window, the tinted kangaroo and its emu companion, one leg cocked possessively around a coat of arms, seemed to be dancing for their aluminium lives.

"I suppose language might be something."

"But animals have language. When Mabel jumps up onto the kitchen table and makes that chirping sound, I know exactly what she's saying."

"A cat? You may as well say babies have language."

"Of course they do."

"How do you know? Have you ever asked one?"

"Look, just because *we* can't understand animals . . ."

"Or babies . . ."

". . . doesn't mean they can't communicate. It's *our* deficiency, not theirs."

"So, you're saying animals do have language, it's just different to our language."

"Exactly."

"Well, is it the same language or do different species have different languages?"

"Different, of course."

"So one species can't talk to another? They can't talk across species . . ."

"No, but then neither can we."

Over at the hatch, Mrs Taylor was setting aside the saucepan of potatoes and taking up a colander full of long green beans, as Jodi ran out of the powder room.

"Hey, Barbie, love, you got a plug?"

"Language!" said Mrs Taylor.

Jodi turned her elaborately constructed hairdo in Mrs Taylor's face.

"A plug. Something to shove up me so I can go out the back with John."

"Her boot's pinching her," offered Mrs Taylor.

"Oh?"

"I'm on the rag."

"Angry?"

"A tampon, for Godsake. Have you got a bloody tampon?"

Out on the footpath, Jodi adjusted her spiralling plaits in the mirror of the Pilsener sign. Ten to six, and already the men were lining up along the gutter, staring into freshly made rivers like panners searching for that one last fleck of gold. Out of the corner of her eye, Jodi could see a woman's grubby nylon cardigan stretched inexpertly across her bulking shoulders, her stockingless feet mushrooming from the soiled depths of black suede evening shoes. The smell was what she knew first, then the voluminous splash delivered abruptly onto the pavement. Like someone dumping a plastic bag full of water into a cistern, she'd say later, imagining the woman's insides, drawn together with the force of the sudden emptiness.

"Jesus, ya dirty bitch!"

One false move could send the lot of them toppling like dominoes.

"Oi, Love, what about you? Would you root for a truffle?"

"I'd do it for less than that!" sang Jodi, her arms flying so that the door swung shut, the noise receded and the men on the footpath returned to their form guides and drinks.

The three girls swam through the heat up to Glassop Street where Jodi's father rented a dilapidated double storey terrace that looked out over the rat-infested foreshore. Barbara was thinking of the creek back home. On days such as this she would have risen up out of the water on crystal wings. Back then, the yellow paddock that had stretched between the creek and the house had seemed utterly devoid of danger and yet she could not swear that this had always really been so. What would she think about that place if she went back there now? Happiness seemed to be in the habit of spilling out behind her like an aberrant thought or stretching unreasonably before her like a dark sea. Nature as she had once experienced it seemed to no longer exist and yet all of her experiences of quietude were somehow formalised by its imaginary proximity.

"What are we going to do about your hair, Barbie?"

"I'll be alright."

"Look at it! It's nothing but a bunch of rats' tails!"

"Come on, Ratty, let's have a go at it. We'll put it right."

They sat Barbara out on the back step and dragged combs through her hair until they had something to work with.

"Isn't it strange to think that the sun's not really sinking behind those factories," Jodi laughed. "That the earth's rolling over ever so slowly, stealing more of the sun as it goes."

The steps down to John's house were carved straight out of the rock and as the three of them picked their way down to the front door like fastidious mountain goats, they adjusted their brassieres and hitched at their blasphemously dark stockings.

In the kitchen, the three women positioned themselves against the sink and scrutinised John's attempts to seduce a depleted blonde.

"I'm just gonna lie back and think of the good years I've got left," he said, staring directly into the woman's eyes.

"That's not going to take as long as it used to," muttered Jodi, splashing a taste of Bordeaux into her décolletage, fanning the contents of a pack of Pal Mal's in Barbara's general direction.

"You'd think he'd have clocked onto her assets by now," Xav whispered.

"Yes, he's showing remarkable restraint for a man of his proclivities." A tall, weary looking man with olive skin and dark circles under his eyes ashed his cigarette into an empty wine bottle.

"Proclivities? What are they when they're at home?" snorted Jodi.

"You know, the things a fella likes. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, but gour-more rather than gourmet," he said. "Oh, here we go, watch the raising of the glass."

The four of them stood in formation, eyes fixed, as John raised his glass to his lips.

"Note the direction of the gaze. Usually a person will lift the glass high and glance towards the ceiling, especially if they're draining it completely, as this man is doing."

"But he's staring right through the bottom!"

"That's right."

"Straight at her whatsits!"

"Yes, yes! Clearly an old hand at this sort of caper."

A series of uneven steps led to a small sandstone kitchen, a laundry, another small stairwell, and a limp weatherboard construction containing gardening implements, an ancient mangle, and two mousey heads from which emerged a romantic feather of smoke. The backyard had the appearance of a moonlit shopping strip, with full skirts and tight waists circulating rapidly between various herringboned pulsations and subtle plaid flarings, a thoroughfare so busily coagulating that even the bushes clamoured for conversation, the trees danced, and the water lapped melodically at the boat ramp in imitation of a style of music that had not yet been invented.

"Seriously, though, Xav. Don't you think it makes a difference? That we can speak to one another?"

"Absolutely not!"

"What about cities and cars and education? What about music and books and . . ."

"Animals leave their marks on things all the time."

"So books are excrement now?"

Xav heaved a log onto its end and perched her bottom there, her full cotton skirt concealing the seat entirely.

"We're just matter. When you get right down to it. That's all I'm saying."

"But if we didn't have language, we wouldn't exist."

"Try telling that to a deaf person."

"Deaf people have language."

"Of course they do."

"But you just said they didn't."

"Look, Barbie, we just *are* like animals. When you get right down to it, we just *are*. Why don't you want to admit it?"

In the alcoholic half-light, a school of dark eruptions was swelling against the surface of the water.

"It's like when you're in love," someone was saying. "You want something from the other person but you can never seem to get it."

"Exactly. I mean, it's only when one doesn't seem to care about someone, in a funny sort of way, that one can ever seem to feel satisfied."

Boundaries were dissolving marvellously, so that one could hear the chants of school children embroidering the scalloped coastline:

I honour my God,

I serve my King,

I salute my flag.

A row of dark figures was standing on the edge of the boat ramp, each body swaying in the accommodations created by the circulating breeze.

What was it Barbara had once heard about silk being made from petrol?

"Can't we be friends, Patty?"

It seemed believable at times. The way she imagined it to be feeling, slipping between his fingers. Sort of greasy. She could feel each fibre catching on the swirling lines of her fingertips. And now, his finger, shaping the curl of her breast, marvelling at the sheer weight of it.

"The mongrel works me like a friggin' black. What do I care if the slops don't get doused? If he can't get the bludgers out by six, it's none of mine."

Not that they were heavy, not by any means. Light as the fabric that concealed them and yet, as heavy as silk could be, with all of its flowery punctuations, the disorderly tangle of vines and roses administrating the parameters of her chest and throat.

"Fair dinkum, if I have to hear her scrapin' that spoon one more time. Oireek! Oireek! Oireek!

Sounds like a bloody pig squealin'."

She found herself thinking of fish, soft and shiny, all too easy to catch a bit of skin on a scale, to deliver a thin red stripe along a bulging white body. Could fish really be said to have bodies? What were they called, then? Not torsos, nor bellies. Bellies. That was it. Her buttons seemed to be disengaging of their own accord and she cringed, knowing he would falter at the safety-pin barrier she had erected earlier.

". . . they'd drive 'em through the bush, the bastards, all the way from Glebe and up round Annandale. Once they'd got 'em onto this little jut of land, they'd be trapped. Nothing to do but swim. Poor little buggers."

She felt herself to be coming apart at the seams and wondered what it was that he was feeling. Was he holding her in place, somehow? What did he think would happen if he were to let go?

She could hear a child yowing in the bushes. The kind of playful but insistent calling that seemed to annoy mothers but had the capacity to delight those who rarely had to experience it. Yow, yow, yow. The long-drawn-out vowel exemplifying through sound something unspeakable within.

She disengaged the tall man's hand from her breast and swivelled around onto all fours. Kicking back with her sandalled foot, she scrambled up the slope, clutching at daffodils and lantana, heaving herself onto the straight with the aid of the trunk of a young datura tree.

The party seemed to be dissipating, although there were still a number of dark figures set against the brightly lit windows, jigging about like paper cut-outs against a diorama.

"I can't believe you want to destroy everything!"

The wonder of sandstone, the propensity for each rubbed grain to disengage itself from the whole in favour of a single, solitary life.

"You're nothing but a monadic goddamned fool! Barbie, come here a minute. This fool's fallen right into Leibniz's trap."

"The sea's made up of drops. You can't argue with that."

"Yes, but for all we know, I mean, what do the ruddy drops turn into when you're not looking?"

The moon is projecting itself prophetically onto the inky water. Some intuitions lack a destination. Down by the boat ramp, the dark eruptions have been further exposed by the receding tide. A ragged figure is balancing from one protuberance to the next, urged on by a swaying strip of onlookers. The moonlight is harvesting pearly reflections from the tall figure's diminishing torso.

The window is jammed shut so Barbara picks for a moment at the flaking paint with her fingernails. The children are crying in the bushes and through the oily window pane she can see a long woman stretched taut across the laundry floor. A man is kneeling down between the woman's legs, clutching her long blonde hair with one hand and her left ankle with the other. As Barbara shifts into a more comfortable position, the man turns his head to face the window and seeing, through the oil and the dirt, only the face of the shining moon, closes his eyes and parades his tongue in long slow strokes, as a cat would lap lovingly at a freshly opened tin of aspic.

Fiona Hile studies and teaches Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne.

floating fund

We are always heartened and encouraged by the generous support of our subscribers, donors and volunteers, who help make it possible to publish articles and graphics which—for reasons of length or subject matter—are not able to be published in the mainstream media. *Overland* is grateful to the following people for their donations this quarter: $1000 R.W.C.; $100 K.W., R.E.McG.; $64 J.H.; $50 D.&P.G.; $24 J.G.B., D.R.; $22 K.J.S.; $20 R.D.; $15 S.H.; $14 E.R., F.S., I.P., P.R.; $12 N.G.; $10 A.J.D.McG., G.K-S.; $9 D.J.O'S.; $8 B.B., D.D.; $5 A.B.; $4 J.J.R., Z.D., J.F., R.I., H.N.; totalling $1557.

memoir / **GREG MANSON**

YOU'LL NEVER EVER KNOW . . .

1976

WHAT THE BLOODY HELL'S that noise? There can't be any machinery out here, there's nothing for miles.

I hadn't even seen a tree for two days. Then it dawned on me, it was the blood pumping in my ears. It was so quiet on that god-forsaken plain you could hear your own body ticking over. Never come across that before, talk about the bloody middle of nowhere. It was also getting cold, and out in these parts you have to be lucky to get rides after dark. Still, it was better than being in the company of the lunatic who'd dropped me off there: fuck, what an idiot. I knew the risks of hitching through North Queensland. I'd been repeatedly searched by the cops, and back down the track I'd been told by one surly bushy to get out of town by dark or "end up in the river with ya hippie mates", but nothing too serious had happened so far. My last lift, however, had been a classic—this bloke defined troppo. Totally bald with a badly sunburnt dial, he had eyes bigger than a possum and weighed about 200 pounds. The endless Viet-vet rave: "You pricks'll never understand because you weren't fucken there mate" was punctuated by wild gesticulations from hands featuring the most horrendous accretions of knuckle-scar tissue I'd ever seen. I decided early on to stick with my standard "Yeah mate/no mate (slight pause) . . . the bastards," repeated on a regular basis. I'd developed this over the years to deal with those who froth at the mouth and never shut up, and it worked in most situations.

The sun had been well on its way down when he pulled up. I'd been there since about eleven and the desiccated chicken sangers I'd had for lunch were long digested. You could have held a cricket match in me guts, but I wasn't going back to the Olympic Cafe. There was no way I was going to part with any more of my meagre cash reserves to keep that fly-blown shithole in business; fuck 'em, I'd rather starve.

The ute door opened in a cloud of red dust. He bellowed:

DAY MATE WHERE YA GOIN?

Darwin.

NAH NOT GOIN THAT FAR.

Where can ya gettus to then?

OW BOUT WILLABEEN?

Dunno that one mate, how far up the track's that?

WELL OW BOUT YA GET IN AND FINE OUT?

Is it a town?

COURSE IT'S A TOWN . . . IT'S GOTTA PUB!

Good enough for me digga I'd do anything to get outa here.

By the time a hundred clicks had gone under the bumper I'd been ear-bashed to a degree unknown in several previous lives. The front seat of a ute is rather claustrophobic compared to a sedan and this bloke had been barking at me like a mad dog about commos and freemasons and such as we roared through the dark. I was hungry enough to eat me own bum if I could get at it.

He pulled a sharp right off the road and headed into the scrub:

Where are we goin?

WILLABEEN FOR A BEER WADDYA RECKON?

Isn't it on the highway?

NAH MATE . . . IT'S A RAILWAY TOWN!

That was an understatement. There was a pile of sleepers, a couple of pump trolleys, and a large rusty tin shed full of spare rails and the like. Opposite this was a wooden building with figures staggering around it brawling in the glare of the headlights. The Pub. Open-cut pot-holes and pampas grass clumps in the middle of the street made it look like something out of a sixties movie about the American south. The similarities didn't end there. The place was packed with ill-educated low-class whites, the sort who spoke with vicious contempt and loathing for the blacks around them, but had no compunction about using the women for abusive sexual release when they were drunk.

I'd come across 'white boongs' before: pig-dog breeders with twelve kids, living on dirt floors an hour and a half from skyscrapers, but nothing could have prepared me for the denizens of this place. Twenty-stone cackling biddies with torn old frocks and hairy tattooed legs spilt beer on the moth-eaten pool table as they stumbled around on rotted thongs wearing old diggers' hats with yes, fucking corks on them. An old scar-headed Pole punched himself in the face because nobody else could be bothered. In one corner a round-shouldered skinny girl, with a black eye, stringy hair, and no teeth, poured beer into her baby's mouth to shut it up as she whined at her husband slumped comatose on the bare boards with his balls hanging out of his stubbies. Wiry bearded little men with the general demeanour of disturbed snakes lined the walls glowering at all and sundry. It was also obvious that the washing of either clothes or bodies rated very low in the priorities of the district.

The decor was that slime green daubed with brown so favoured by the Queensland Railways in the old days to disguise shit and graffiti in the wooden dunnies. This colour scheme even extended to the cyclone wire that fully enclosed the bar except for a slot through which a six-pack or bottle of rum could be passed. The pink laminex tables might have added a slightly homely touch if they hadn't been covered in a putrid sludge of beer, ciggy-ash and mouldy coasters. The din was incredible and there was no escape. I had to hang around or face a long walk back to the highway in pitch darkness halfway between Townsville and the Territory.

You couldn't order a single beer, and the barman, when asked if they had any pies or sandwiches, roared at me "What do you think this is, a fucken restaurant?" To accompanying gales of laughter, I ordered my six-pack of Fourex and sat down to drink my way out of there.

Half a dozen beers on an empty stomach will make a mess of most people. I was soon playing rubber-legged pool and telling jokes with the best of them, but I wasn't too out of it to remember to keep my eyes averted from the women in the room. With these horrors the beer wasn't working it's usual tricks in regard to sexual blindness, but I didn't want to get into a blue with some evil smelling dingo-trapper if it was at all possible. These bastards were all mad, and most carried knives. One needs diplomatic skills in places where a fight is considered a mandatory form of social introduction. Several chairs and glasses had already been broken, and the night was young.

Relief washed over me when my companion, seemingly no worse off for twenty beers, approached me and said it was time to go.

We headed off in a convoy of assorted bush-bashers. The locals enjoyed highway driving. They jousted with each other like speedway drivers, and roared up the wrong side of the road at oncoming trucks for a bit of a laugh. The bald one suddenly pulled over and addressed me:

WIREYA GONA DARWIN?

Lookin for work.

THERE'S WORK HERE MATE.

Oh yeah, where at mate?

ON MY PLACE.

I'm actually meetin a mate up there.

I SAID, THERE'S WORK HERE!

He reckons he can get me on the trawlers with 'im.

DIDNT YOU FUCKEN HEAR ME?

Mate thanks for the offer, but . . .

LISTEN CUNT, OUT HERE, WHEN A MAN OFFERS YOU A JOB . . . YOU FUCKEN TAKE IT.

I appreciate that, but I gotta meet this bloke.

DIDN'T YOU FUCKEN HEAR ME?

Mate, he's waitin for me now.

RIGHT YOU LITTLE CUNT . . . GET THE FUCK OUTA MY UTE.

What, here?

YEAH. FUCKEN RIGHT HERE YOU CUNT . . . GET OUT NOW GET OUT FUCKYA!

I did as I was told, and stepped out into the vastness of the night. He took off at high speed after his mates and the faint glow of the tail lights gradually disappeared.

Once I'd taken stock of the situation, the cold night air sobered me up a bit. My position wasn't that bad . . . someone would have to pick me up, although they'd be wondering what the hell I was doing all the way out here.

One of the phenomena of really flat country is the capacity of headlights to appear quite close when the vehicle can actually be a good twenty minutes away. Maybe the light is refracted in the night air or something. The main thing is, you see vehicles coming from a long way off; and it's a bloody long time before you hear them.

I was therefore unsettled when I heard the roaring of engines quite close to me, and coming from the bush at right angles to the road. There was no vegetation except knee-high spinifex and the globes of light bouncing up and down soon made it apparent that several vehicles were approaching from out of the donga, and heading my way at a fast clip. I didn't like this very much, and quickly decided that the approaching illuminated dust cloud was ominous. I knew I had to get out of there, but where to? There was nowhere to go. There were no gullies, no hills to climb, and no trees to get behind. I was out in the open and starting to worry. I took off blindly into the night, running like hell as the four-wheel drives got closer. I could see that they had spotlights, and before long they were sweeping the road where I had just been standing. The sensible thing to do was to go to ground quick smart. This was serious; as I crawled along I could hear them arguing: WHERE IZZY JOHNNO . . . CUNT MUST BE HERE SOMEWHERE?

The spotties swept over my head as I tried to think of a way out of the bind I was in.

In an area of prevailing winds the sand gets sucked out from behind spinifex bushes and forms a bit of a hollow on the downwind side (I think they call it a draw). I slithered into one of these and began frantically digging with my hands to throw sand and dirt over me and my pack. My erstwhile drinking buddies jumped back in their vehicles and started to fang around in circles yelling and yahooing. The odd shot rang out as they threw beer cans in the air for targets and revved the engines, doing donuts around the whole area. I was trapped inside the circle, and in serious danger of being run over in the dark.

I was too pissed to panic, but I still had the presence of mind to realise that if I broke and ran, they'd kill me, and no doubt fuck me before and after. It would be a very lonely hole I'd end me days in.

This motorised rodeo went on for a good twenty minutes before they pulled up not fifteen yards from me and got out to piss and open more beers. The fun had gone out of it: their prey had flown the coop, and they were sorely disappointed. They couldn't work out how I'd managed to disappear. I couldn't have got a lift in the short time it had taken them to get back.

"ROOS'LL HAFTA DO," I heard one say as they climbed cursing and mumbling back into their trucks and utes and trundled off to the north again. I stood up when they were out of sight and had a well-earned piss myself, then collapsed. I woke with the dawn, and a bloody nice one it was too.

I stayed doggo until I heard a car coming from the east, then leapt over to the road and flagged him down. I was sitting down to a roadhouse breakfast at the Isa within a couple of hours, a long way from the desperate bastards of the night before, and fairly pleased with myself. I'd held me mud and survived.

I haven't been back to the Deep North.

They tell me it's a lot different up there now with the tourism and everything.

I would take some convincing.

Greg Manson is a broken down builder's labourer and occasional soul/blues musician who spent many of the 'knockabout' years hitching all over Australia, Europe and the deep south of the USA. He worked as a rock journo for street mags in Sydney in the Roaring '80s. He now lives on a farm in northern NSW (who doesn't these days?), has just completed his first novel, a crime/noir set in WWII Brisbane, and is looking for a publisher. He is also working on a history of early eighties inner-city music mecca, the Hopetoun Hotel. A film-maker/occasional actor/extra at Gold Coast film studios, he is president of the local Arts Council, and organiser of short film events at the restored local art-deco cinema. He loves driving his tractor and bodysurfing. He needs work.

essay / **DAVID CARTER**

GOING, GOING, GONE?

Britishness and Englishness in contemporary Australian culture

THERE IS STILL a faint flicker of life in the old notion that in Australia ruling-class culture was or is Anglophile and therefore conservative while working-class or popular culture is or was robustly 'Australian' and therefore democratic. But if this was ever true or even half true it certainly has no currency in contemporary Australian culture. I suspect it was always too simple, especially since the emergence of the new technologies of popular culture and of English modernism early in the twentieth century. Now, if anything, it reverses the order of cultural value in Australia. Britain is about the last place that matters culturally to Australian writers, artists, intellectuals and consumers in the elite or minority arts, while it remains persistent or returns in new guises, like John Howard, among certain lower-middle-class cultures.

In her recent book, *Tracking the Jack*, Tara Brabazon has traced the 'phantoms of Englishness' or 'British phantoms' still haunting antipodean cultures in Australia and New Zealand. If postcolonialism means anything it means such haunting; it means that we live in the ruins of colonialism, in Chris Healy's phrase, or "in a patchworked moment of British debris", as Brabazon puts it. But without wanting to claim that Australia has left these ghosts behind, I want to push the argument in another direction and claim that what's most remarkable is how suddenly and completely Britain and England have become irrelevant to contemporary Australian culture; even more so, Britishness or Englishness. Of course these still circulate as possible sites of meaning and identification—and most importantly, now, as commodities—but so do Frenchness or Chineseness. The Britishness of any contemporary English cultural influences, if I can put it that way, is pretty much beside the point. This can be the case, I think, while we remain antipodean and postcolonial. The point is not triumphalist: if Britishness has evaporated, whiteness has returned with a vengeance. But the ghosts are now 'our' ghosts not imported ghosts.

I want to browse across a range of cultural levels and forms looking for the presence or absence of Britishness or Englishness as a cultural influence, value or source of meaning. Behind this task is an argument for the 'disaggregation' or 'under-generalisation' of the category of Australian culture, for Britishness will be unevenly distributed across different cultural domains and for different audiences. There is no 'British culture' as a single, whole thing to be contrasted with 'Australian culture' although this is often the form that arguments have taken.

To begin with the elite or minority arts, specifically the visual arts and literature. Here, as already suggested, Britain is about the last place that matters as a source of cultural significance, as a 'centre' from which meaning emanates, as an intellectual or stylistic reference point. Obviously, individual influences remain—a novelist here, a painter there—but Britain scarcely figures on the horizon of influence or inspiration (or even irritation) for contemporary Australian artists and writers. If it figures at all, it is a multicultural, diasporic and European Britain (often a black or Asian Britain) that seems interesting. Even so, in the visual arts for example, on the evidence of contemporary exhibitions, publications and criticism, it rates a long way behind East Asia, Latin America, USA, France, Italy or, for that matter, Ireland.

The internationalisation of the art scene—with its twin dynamic of simultaneity and decentralisation—is one reason for the decline of Britishness and Englishness as either overt or unconscious cultural reference points. The sudden disappearance of the phenomenon of cultural expatriatism—some time in the 1970s—is symptomatic. The point is not that people stopped travelling to bigger cultural centres outside Australia, but that they stopped travelling as 'ex-pats'.

The idea that the influence of Britain on Australia declined some time in the 1960s is now commonplace, so much so we need to revisit it. Taken as self-evident, it's prone to both over-statement and under-statement around the idea that finally Australia's cultural maturity had arrived. But the fact that from the early 1970s the relationship to Britain was no longer an issue around which cultural politics would be fought out, no longer an irritant producing movements and manifestos, has less to do with Australia 'growing up' than with a series of demographic, technological and geo-political shifts which have affected both Australia and Britain: patterns of immigration to both countries; shifts in global political and economic power towards Asia (which have produced a shift in cultural power as well); the relative and, in many instances, actual simultaneity of modern forms of communication; the new, post-seventies density of local cultural institutions, industries and markets; the 'mass' influence of television and pop; and the fact that all these coincide with the careers of the postwar baby-boom generation. The effect of such changes has been to relativise, and in some cases reverse, the cultural relations between the two countries. London can no longer stand in for the world.

The visual arts have been the most generous, flamboyant and voracious in the diversity of influences and cultural flows which now constitute their field. Images of cultural 'influence' or 'importation' are scarcely adequate to describe the way in which the art of East Asia and the Pacific, American and European art, and, not least, Aboriginal art circulate within the field of contemporary Australian art. Of course such changes in the field of art have not happened to Australia alone; they are symptomatic of a general internationalisation of art networks, concepts and markets. But they have happened in Australia in a peculiarly intense form because of the relatively sudden 'discovery' of Asia and, belatedly, of the Pacific—the discovery (or re-discovery) of their proximity—and the unprecedented emergence of contemporary Aboriginal art. English art is one node among others in the network, sometimes prominent because of the language familiarity or because of spectacular or quaint controversies, but otherwise relatively remote from what seems exciting here and now. From an Australian perspective, in the midst of trans-cultural, trans-Pacific, flows, it can even seem a bit like a colonial outpost. In some ways the cultural 'time lag', so often taken to characterise the belatedness of colonial cultures, has been reversed—in this area at least.

One of the interesting things about Australian literature, by contrast, is that questions of overseas influence have played such a small role in criticism over the past two or three decades. As the 'old' nationalist agenda retreated in the seventies, with the changes in British–Australian relations mentioned earlier, and as new fiction, poetry and drama—especially drama—broke the familiar moulds of genre and voice, the issue of contemporary overseas models promised to become a major theme of criticism. As British influences shrivelled, American, European and Latin American influences grew in importance. But this critical interest has not been sustained.

While recent calls for Australian criticism to become more comparative are justified, there are also good reasons why it has looked to itself. In literature, as in film, television, music, and the visual and performing arts, a dense cultural 'system' has come into being since the mid-1980s, defined by an established production industry, a diverse local market, a regime of regulation and intervention, and a professional infrastructure of agents, critics, administrators, venues and outlets. None of these achievements is secure; none translates automatically into wealth or fame. The point is, rather, that there is now in Australia a substantial 'ecology', an institutional density, for these different domains of culture; a system which takes its bearings primarily from its own market, its own audience, its own structures and traditions. Australia now has a diverse book culture at the high, middle and mass ends of the market. The point is not that local writers and critics are no longer interested in the international, quite the reverse. Rather Australian literature—and culture in all these fields—is more integrated than ever before within international cultures and markets,

There has been little active, contemporary cultural exchange between Britain and Australia since the 1970s. I need only mention the Australian issue of *Granta* to argue the case back the other way (it wasn't just that it missed key writers or texts but the whole 'chronotope' was wrong!).

although again unevenly. Australia's significant role as an exporter of culture and cultural producers is both cause and effect in this equation.

Australian literature, then, for both writers and critics, can take its bearings primarily from its own 'here and now', its own local occasions, without any sense of lack or belatedness. The international cultural traffic is such that contemporary British culture seems as foreign as any other external culture, while, simultaneously, a wide range of 'foreign' cultural styles and concepts present themselves not as exotic imports but as part of the meanings of the local culture. Britain is only a small speck on the Australian literary radar—more significant in theatre I suspect than elsewhere. Britain also remains powerful in publishing but that's another story, no longer a major part of what governs writing, criticism and consumption of Australian literature.

There is a general point to be made here about the contemporary social function of the high art forms—literature, painting, dance, theatre and so on. Whether or not we see these cultural forms as nothing more than lifestyle accessories for the Qantas Lounge lizards, it's the high art forms that are now regularly disposed towards forms of national responsibility and critique—in this sense, they are no longer 'the dominant culture' although they are the publicly subsidised forms of culture. Dance, theatre, visual art—these are the forms likely to push Indigenous, feminist or multicultural rather than homogenising nationalist themes, if only by incorporating Indigenous or ethnic styles, much more so than cinema or television (except at the high art end).

In one sense or another, then, it's 'high art' that's likely to be radical or at the pointy end of liberalism. While the high cultural domain is more often than not at odds with the immediate political agenda of governments, especially conservative governments, its critical or oppositional role exists alongside and is partly a *result of* the fact that it is publicly subsidised. In the broader sense of the 'governmental' these are the forms that in their very criticism are consonant with the governmental aim of producing culturally literate, democratic, multicultural, modern citizens. Of course, all the ambiguities and compromises of liberal culture will be in play—but the point remains. This function isn't always recognised in cultural studies attacks on high art for its social or aesthetic elitism.

What about cinema? In the early years of the revival, in the seventies and early eighties, there was a great deal of signifying energy put into the task of defining the Australian identity against the British—a curious, if telling anachronism or displacement given the state of the British industry and the dominance of Hollywood at the time. The cultural neo-nationalism of the period extended from Barry McKenzie to the Man from Snowy River. Even here, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972), to take this one instance, seems double-edged. While it took the Australian–British relationship as its premise, much of its comedy depended upon the sheer anachronism of the British connection.

As critics have noted, there was a compressed reprise of Australian literary history in the cinema, as if making up for the lack of an Australian cinematic history. The importance of making Australian history both interesting and good to look at shouldn't be underestimated. My point for the present, though, is to note how thoroughly and suddenly this theme of Australian versus British identity disappeared from Australian cinema to be replaced by the contemporary, urban and youth-centred romantic comedies, the 'quirky comedies', which are now in danger of becoming *the* Australian genre. The first *Mad Max* (1979), in this context along with many others, might be cited as another decisive moment, prefiguring the present-day integration of Australian cinema into international cinema. By contrast, we might recall Michael Blakemore's film *Country Life* (1994)—a quality film that had

almost no resonance with the kinds of films being made around it in Australia at the time. It was a 'British' film and seemed to belong to a way of seeing Australia (from Britain) that was twenty years out of date—still the missionary position of importing 'quality' to the colonies.

Of course British cinema and Australian cinema are in a similar relationship to Hollywood. Both are now 'national cinemas' in relation to Hollywood's global cinema. They can achieve occasional mainstream box-office success, otherwise they inhabit the quality fringe circuit of art house, festival and foreign-language cinema. It's interesting that British cinema in Australia, apart from a few big hits like *The Full Monty* or *Bridget Jones's Diary*, follows the same circuits as foreign-language cinema. But then again so does a lot of Australian cinema (which suggests once more that cultural explanations for nationally-organised differences are seldom sufficient).

If the cultural domains mentioned so far suggest that British culture is largely irrelevant to contemporary Australian culture, popular music and television are areas where the evidence would seem to point in the other direction.

Although popular music originating in Britain is still a major part of the contemporary music scene in Australia—up and down the scale from boys' bands to rap or techno—its 'Britishness' is of almost no significance to its Australian consumers. It is, for example, of much less significance than was the Britishness of sixties pop; and much less significant than is the Americanness of American music (usually divided into subnational 'identifiers'—Detroit, Chicago, Seattle etc.) or the Irishness of Irish music (even in pop forms). UK Pop or Britpop constitutes a market segment, a product label, a set of expectations. But here the transnational cultural flows seem to work horizontally in terms of musical and sub-cultural styles rather than vertically in terms of state of origin. Individuals and subcultures develop 'portfolios' which might include Australian, American, British, Norwegian (etc.) performers. This is especially so outside the dominance of American music at the mainstream end of the market.

What this situation also means is that Australian music takes its place in a transnational musical field. Although the balance of cultural power is still massively uneven, there is probably more opportunity in music than in most other domains to reverse the pattern of cultural flows, as groups such as *Savage Garden* or individuals like Tina Arena have shown. (One place where Britishness still carries a sort of authenticity, oddly but typically enough for popular culture, is blues music.)

Television, because of its different economics, institutional history and audience-reach, presents a more complex picture. The British presence on Australian television is still significant, especially, but not only, on the ABC. In fact, there is almost as much British TV on the foreign-language station, SBS, as there is on the ABC, although in different genres. Despite the long history of British 'low' culture (I need only mention Benny Hill), 'British' does carry a specific cultural meaning in the television system: that of 'quality' opposed to American commercialism. What exactly the significance of this is for contemporary Australian culture is less clear.

Britain, after all, is the second largest producer of English-language TV after the US, so it would be strange if Australian networks didn't buy large amounts of it. On the one hand, the percentage of British television on the commercial networks appears to be increasing, partly for economic reasons (often with programs that have already been successful on the ABC), partly because of the success of the British production industry in remaking itself as a TV exporter. On the other, American and Australian programs consistently out-rate British programs. The ABC buys British in part to meet its specific audience; in part because it can't match the commercials in the US market.

Television, unlike the cinema, can address itself intimately to a range of different audiences, from the national to the niche. For many, I suspect, British programs are just one part of the international programming available on Australian TV. For others, the British presence still does carry the full burden of 'quality' and acts as a way of making caste distinctions. This is one of the few places where Britishness still matters. More generally, we consume 'Britishness' in quite specific, quite limited, ways.

Many Australians, like many British (and Americans and French etc.), are suckers for the old Britain, the pre-1970s tourist Britain of fields and hedges, villages and eccentric old codgers; or the small houses in small suburbs, the pubs and the likeable coppers;

the small, the slow, the un-cool. This version of little England is endlessly recycled by British TV—*Heartbeat*, *Ballykissangel*, *Inspector(s) Morse*, *Frost* and *Wexford*, *The Bill*, even *Mr Bean* (being set in the present doesn't change the point; one trick is a remote setting where distance imitates time). It has a faithful market in Australia. But there are many, especially younger Australians who find it immensely tedious or simply fail to notice its existence.

The other Britishness we consume through television is the inverse of 'little England' and imagines a different relation to Hollywood—a dark and decadent cityscape characterised by bizarre murders, incest, female forensic scientists and/or amoral yuppie go-getters. This is a mini genre of its own, with its own niche audience and a time-slot to match (late Friday or Sunday evenings on the ABC). This is a new British influence but again one which has nothing to do with the ghosts of colonialism and everything to do with international mediascapes. The same goes for the parallel fashion in fiction—for forensic novels—where certain kinds of Britishness have been restyled and which carries significant brand power in the international literary marketplace.

ABC loyalty is one thing. As indicated by a recent major survey of Australian patterns of cultural consumption, ABC viewing is unevenly correlated with education but strongly linked to age (it rises steadily with age) and class (being strongest amongst professionals, weakest among manual workers). But the most stubbornly persistent—or, better, actively engaged—attachment to British culture is found elsewhere: it is distinctly working class/lower-middle class.

I was reminded of this recently while watching a retrospective of the *Mike Walsh Show*, a midday variety show of the 1970s–80s. It vividly displayed the long tradition of British 'low' comedy—which the ABC has also been deeply committed to. The *Mike Walsh Show* seems to have been full of small-time, middle-aged, middle-talent male British comedians, the kind who play the small clubs and pubs and probably do the Christmas pantomime (and the last Mike Walsh show of each season was indeed a pantomime). The audience was live; it was I suspect an audience that would have been totally at home at an RSL or Leagues Club—which in turn suggests that these 'uniquely Australian' institutions might after all be residual British. As chance would have it, at the time of writing my local suburban newspaper carries an ad for the Broncos League Club's 'Best of the British Pub Show'. The kind of British TV that crosses from the ABC to the commercials—or like Benny Hill never makes it to the ABC—usually belongs to this same stretch of popular culture (*Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em*; *Are You Being Served?* etc.). In fact we should resist seeing such attachments to old Britishness as merely 'residual' as this implies a false teleology. Britishness, as I've suggested, is a contemporary commodity even in its retro forms.

I think this is where the influence of British culture lives on most strongly in Australia, not among artistic or intellectual elites, not among the 'ruling class' or the new professionals (although time spent working in London is still an attractive option), not even among the middle-educated middle classes, but in working-class and lower-middle-class Australia. I suspect this is also the demographic of the majority of those we now call 'British migrants'—our use of the term suggesting that in some sense at least we recognise that they come from another culture.

A general conclusion, then, is that although their presence is unevenly distributed Britain and Britishness are pretty much irrelevant to contemporary Australian culture except in this significant fragment of television and live entertainment. In crude terms, the higher up the cultural scale we go the less 'British' matters; the lower we go the more it's likely to matter. It is only in a few areas of culture where Australia still bothers to define itself against Britain—in sport, but perhaps only in media spectacle sports; in certain kinds of comedy; maybe in print journalism too.

●bviously the shared language and relative cultural familiarity (for some Australians) still make a difference. In a number of fields, in dance, theatre, music and publishing, there are still good professional reasons to look towards Britain during a career—although in some of these areas it might equally be New York, Paris or Beijing. But the thoroughness of Britain's disappearance as a significant cultural influence or reference point over two or at most three decades, a remarkably short period historically, is still the most important thing to be noted. Further, the dramatic decline of British cultural influence has not been caused simply by a dramatic increase in American culture, although the American influence on youth cultures since the sixties has been decisive in reorienting cultural flows and breaking the mould of earlier cultural habits.

It might be objected that the Australian sense of England or Britain implied above is itself a decade or more out of date. I'm sure this is true. If so, I think it only helps establish the point that there has been little active, contemporary cultural exchange between Britain and Australia since, say, the 1970s. I need only mention the Australian issue of *Granta* to argue the case back the other way (it wasn't just that it missed key writers or texts but the whole 'chronotope' was wrong!). Again there are almost certainly exceptions, in fine music and theatre perhaps, and in academic work in a different way, but these are local, professional, structural links, quite different from the power that the structures of imperialism once embodied.

The widespread criticism in the Australian media of the Centenary of Federation celebrations in London—both in opinion pieces and letters to the editor—also tells us something about these shifts of cultural power. I'm less interested in the rights and wrongs of the immediate debate than the form the argument took. More striking than the more or less predictable criticisms of snouts in the trough and cap-doffing were the defences of the Celebrations junket put forward by those involved—first, a weak, almost apologetic, historical case based on the British parliament's passing of the Constitution Act, but then a marketing argument which all the spokespersons seemed to find much easier to make with conviction. In other words, the 'historical ties' carried little conviction; bringing the new 'news' about Australia carried a great deal.

The other interesting turn of phrase concerned the stated aims of the cultural component: to "educate the British about Australian culture" or, better, to show "the impact of Australian art on the British" (ABC TV *Arts Show* 10 July 2000). Both the marketing and cultural arguments seem to me to be specifically 'postcolonial', to use the term in a special narrow sense for the moment, testifying to the sheer cultural distance between the two countries. Even Paul Kelly, as usual the most historically articulate commentator, had recourse to the "unrepeatable promotional opportunity" argument (*Australian* 12 July 2000). He was also right to argue that (even) John Howard "came to London as an Australian nationalist".

The other moment of significance was Tony Blair's slip during the celebrations when he meant to say 'Australia' but said 'America' instead. What seems interesting to me about this is not just that Blair couldn't concentrate for long enough on Australia to remember it, but more specifically that he substituted 'America'. This is the element of the slip that speaks the truth. He rightly linked Australia to America; rightly, that is, in terms of the cultural relationship from Britain's perspective, from which Australia is as foreign and as familiar to Britain, as similar and as different, as is the USA.

As a footnote it's also clear by now that the 1999 vote against constitutional change to an Australian republic had virtually nothing to do with continuing cultural ties to Britain. What made the 'no' vote possible was precisely the fact that such ties played no serious role in the debate, even rhetorically: it was the Queen's and Britain's irrelevance that made the 'no' arguments possible. And there was enough truth in the claim that the change to a republic would make no real difference (because Australia was already independent) for many to feel comfortable about voting 'no' even if they felt little affection for the present system. As Robert Dessaix commented, the Pope has more influence now in Australia than the Queen.

Australia has developed a relatively distinctive set of cultural institutions, products, styles and occasions. But this Australian originality is by no means incompatible with the fact that these institutions and styles have shown and will continue to show strong similarities to US and, to a lesser extent, British models. Australian cultural institutions, products, tastes and practices will continue to be "both the same and different", in Tom O'Regan's neat phrase, as those from the USA and the UK. If British and Australian cultures are, in many ways, further apart than ever before, it is nevertheless worse than useless to think of them as opposites. This becomes especially clear when the relationship is triangulated with America, and then mapped further in terms of regional and global cultural flows. It will become increasingly difficult to predict where local authenticity might be found, but I'll predict that Britishness won't be much more than a novelty item—perhaps even a taste of the exotic.

David Carter is Director of the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland and editor with Tony Bennett of Culture in Australia: Policies, Publics and Programs *(CUP, 2001).*

memoir / **GRAEME KINROSS-SMITH**

TIME'S PLACES

1. Bairnsdale Bared—1944

WELL, there's Victoria first. Victoria starts from Melbourne. Melbourne, Victoria, I hear myself saying. I'm six or seven. I think: Victoria, yes: Victoria, the southern state. Then I think Melbourne: Melbourne, the jewel of the south. I think how Melbourne shows as a fat, red slur on the maps, the Bay hanging south of it like an off-centre agate. And outside the Heads the map says Bass Strait where Tasmania waits below. To the west though, beyond the coast where the ships are wrecked, it says Southern Ocean and further to the west the Indian Ocean creeps into the Bight and from there it's a long blue plunge to Antarctica.

When we're kids I think how Victoria has a narrow waist, from Melbourne to Echuca. But in the west it is wide and deep. In the north-east there is a rich balloon that takes in Beechworth, Myrtleford, Tallangatta and Corryong. Then the border of Victoria slips away to the coast, drawing a bead through those interlocked green ranges blued by distance, down through the Cobberas, my father Will tells me, and Delegate and Bendoc and Genoa. It's a border hurrying down to the sea before Victoria has to become New South Wales. Henry Lawson, says Will: old Henry once stumbled and plodded with aching calves along that beach from Mallacoota to the coves where the Genoa Range gives in to the sea. I try to imagine it.

With Victoria the Divide is the thing, my father Will says. North of the Divide. South of the Divide. It makes all the difference. My father, a New South Welshman, talks compulsively, longingly about the Divide, as though beyond that bright line sleeps everything good. Once we're north of the Divide we'll see the sun, Will says, driving north, driving north in the Chrysler 66. Oh, stop complaining, my mother says. She comes from the Mallee and then Melbourne. Even then I can see the Divide in my mind's eye. It's like looking along the pitch of a tent: that's how sharp it is. I look at the map of Victoria in the atlas in the dim tiers of desks in the fire-smoky schoolroom in Camberwell and I can see the Divide running down from New South Wales in yellow and pinches of brown, rising above the green fringes of forested hills that separate the mountains from the sea through Gippsland. I can see the tailing away of the yellow ranges into the plains of the north-east near Wangaratta and Benalla and Euroa. But it's a long way across the Divide. I think of Will's Chrysler driving through all the country where the yellow and the brown are, its engine protesting, grinding, becoming hysterical, overheating. Blasted overheating, Will says. We'll have to give her a rest.

We drive over the map when we go to Sydney—over the blue lines of the rivers, over the little thin lines of the creeks, along the red roads and the black roads. We know what's coming if we look at the map. Dandenong, Berwick, Nar Nar Goon. But there are so many names, so many places with their stores and their hotels and their railway stations. It's hard to think about it. Warragul, Trafalgar, Moe, Sale. We drive all day. When we start it's so early the streets are quiet and there's only one bike and a paper truck on Riversdale Road. We drive and I sometimes feel sick and Alistair complains too. Will just keeps on driving. Alistair goes to sleep beside me. When he wakes up at Trafalgar his eyes are narrow and he's cross. I tell him we've been through

Warragul and there was a steam train. Alistair says who cares and turns towards the other window. I can sit up and see the trees washing the Chrysler's bonnet. I like watching the strong water cap far up front on the radiator with its silver wings. It forges ahead and ahead through the country.

We drive until it's late and cars are putting on their headlights. When it's getting dark and the trees are reaching down to the Chrysler's lights we come out of the bush and there's Bairnsdale. We stay the night in Bairnsdale, because we're in East Gippsland and it's all bush and it's all dark. Will wants to cross the Drummer in the morning, taking it steady. She might boil on the Drummer, he says. Will we all have to get out of the car? The Drummer is a big mountain. The Princes Highway has to go right over it.

We stay in a hotel. It's very smart and modern, with cream walls and polished wooden stair rails. In the bathroom there's a hot water tap. Will gives Mum a quick kiss while they're standing looking round our bedroom. Then he unsnaps the suitcase on the bed. Tomorrow, he sings, we'll be in good old New South. Mum looks at him across the strange bedroom with its wood varnish smell and makes a face.

I go to sleep with a headache when I've had tea.

In the morning I wake up and for a while I can't see and I don't know where I am. Then I remember. The bedroom is dark. I look at Alistair. This is my brother. His arm is down the side of the bed against the wall. His mouth is open and he's neighing quietly as he breathes. I know it's morning. I want to see where the daylight is. I get out of bed, go to the door. I can open it quietly by pulling down a bit on the knob. I'm quiet going along the hall in my bare feet. There's light. There's a room with a window. I can hear a horse clip-clop outside. It goes past. I want to see down to the street. I find a way across the room. There are sheets on the floor, and a towel and some clothes and a hair brush. I pull back the window curtain to look out. I can see the street down below and some verandahs and roofs. I can still hear the horse's shoes, sharp on the street somewhere, but I can't see it.

"Hey!" a voice says and it frightens me. I look round. I can see better in the room now. There's a man in bed.

"Hey, what do ya think you're doing?" says the man. He's getting up. He hasn't got pyjamas. He's red furry. There's a lady in the bed too.

"Where did you spring from?" says the man. His hair is messed. He picks up his pyjama pants from the floor. He's putting his leg into them. He's grunting. I want to go back to Mum and Dad. The lady in the bed gets up on an elbow. She's yawning. She says: "Room 23, I think."

The lady hasn't got a nightie. She's tired. She yawns. She's the lady who owns the hotel. I remember her now. She showed Dad where our room was, but her hair was shorter. Now she's sitting up, swinging her legs round and out of the bed. I can see her back and her long hair and her bottom. She reaches down and when I look again she's got a nightie on.

The man puts a hand on my shoulder. I don't like him. "C'mon, back to your Mum," he says. "You know where to go? Just near the stairs. See ya." He pushes me into the hall.

That's Bairnsdale. The sound of a horse's hooves in the morning before anyone's up, and the red furry man and the lady with no nightie. That's Bairnsdale, always, no matter how many times I go there.

2. Going to Alsace—2001 going on 1628

NO-ONE will know me when I go to Alsace. I will seek out a little local train, knowing it will take me to the hilly recesses that lie before the mountains. It will be a place where I have never been. So when I come to Alsace I will speak to no-one. I will step down into a crooked, silent village street, hearing only my footfall, smelling only fallen leaves and winter's coming. I will carry a drink bottle and a banana in my pocket from the Strasbourg shops—but I will have no need of them. I will look at the waves of spent golden leaves rising beyond the village to the mountains. And immediately I will spy my goal, a stone tower far up, sheathed in forest trees. I will stand for a time, thinking. I will place myself in the silence. Then I will walk.

It will be an ascension. Up the hill crows will flap from trellises ahead of me and I'll see a hawk with white under its wings tipping against the sky. I'll pass a sandy-haired mother with a child on her hip and her own mother, like a long scarecrow in her chemise, coming on behind. They will step past down the hill, having no regard for me. It will be as I expect. I will hear the dim, small booms of their vowels retreating as they melt from sight among the vines. I will look back to see fold after fold of misty landscape, one village and then another down there, each with its church steeple etched as delicate as

pastel, villages receding into mist. I will see clutches of traffic hurtling silently along the expressway halfway to the horizon, but I will not believe it. Then the forest will swallow me.

There will be a clearing in the forest where I know that time and place must meet. Although I have never been there, when I reach it I will know where I am. I will look at my watch to find that it is willing only to shine the pale blue overcast of the sky back to me. That's when I will begin to doubt the little train that brought me, to doubt the small gravel siding, to doubt the driverless tractor that I saw hugging a house wall back in the village, earth on its fender and tyres. Now I will climb. I will be tramping among the tree roots. I will become so knowingly lost I will be found at last. I will find myself standing at the edge of the clearing. There will be three bay horses far over and near them a glowing surfeit of apples in an apple-tree's branches and in a pool of fallen colour on the ground. I will glimpse the sensuous shifting of a horse's rich bay rump and the slow sweep of its tail. Somewhere I will hear the panting, muffled blows of an axe. As though it has been suddenly painted there I will look up to see my stone tower where I know it has to be, the trees like tall wraiths around it. That's when I'll catch the sound of voices and discern the small circle of faces, part hidden in the long grass. They are people talking—but I will be too far away to catch their words. As I watch them I will see a woman get to her feet, see her brushing her clothes. I will pick out the dark sweep of her skirt as she turns to leave the others. All the faces will continue looking up at her, looking after her, like pale dishes . . .

I am home. This is the place where I have never been and yet have always known. I have come home. Although in my mind's eye I can picture the train, its watery light coming down the rails in this day's evening to take me back, its carriages filling with schoolkids—roving boys, nervously attentive girls—although I can catch the smell in the compartments of rain in hair, of rain on blazers, I will have no need of any of it. It will not touch me. None of it need occur—because somewhere deep in time's armature it has already blazed briefly, has already happened.

Graeme Kinross-Smith is a poet, writer of fiction and teacher of writing, who works in Melbourne, Geelong and Port Campbell.

essay / **MICHAEL LEACH**

DON EDUARDO IS SLEEPING

A return to New Australia, Paraguay

CLERMONT, QUEENSLAND, 1891: Following a drop in the wool price, the United Pastoralists Association demands new contracts for shearers—cutting wages by one third, and insisting upon 'freedom of contract'. In response, an Amalgamated Shearers' Union strike camp is formed at Clermont. By February strike camps have formed throughout rural Queensland, to defend the right to collective bargaining won in the wool sheds in 1890. The colonial government of Griffith and McIlwraith responds with repressive measures, deputising 1100 special constables and dispatching military forces to Clermont.[1] Hugh Blackwell, a member of the Barcaldine strike committee writes to Alec Forrester—"Things are quiet at Clermont. First shot fired there may be the cause of the Australian revolution".[2]

By March, much of the country between Emerald and Clermont is on fire, as woolsheds are torched on the stations. 'Shear Blade' Martin is arrested for advocating resistance to the soldiers, and fourteen unionists are taken into custody after the riot act is read at Augathella. On the twenty-third, ten men are arrested at Capella, and taken in chains to Clermont. An assembly of unionists confronts the train. Before he is arrested and cuffed, George Taylor throws some papers into the angry crowd. Mounted policemen charge with drawn swords and seize the leaflets.[3] Over the next week, eight members of the Barcaldine strike committee are arrested. Seven of them are among the twelve convicted under mediaeval statutes in the infamous Rockhampton conspiracy trial. William Lane, editor of the *Worker* commences writing *The Workingman's Paradise* as a fundraiser for the 'union prisoners', who quickly enter labour folklore. The eighth man arrested at Barcaldine, too young to be considered a leader, escapes the indictment before trial.

He is a young horsebreaker from Muttaburra called Ted Murray.

CORONEL OVIEDOS, PARAGUAY, 2001: It's a warm, sticky day in central Paraguay. I wait by the dusty intersection just south of a highway town called Coronel Oviedos, and hail a taxi. Here, the two major national thoroughfares—the East-West *ruta* one and the North-South *ruta* two—meet in a cacaphony of buses, ticket touts and Guarani women selling refreshments. It is Paraguay's major crossroads, and there is no shortage of cheap public transport. But I am close to my destination, so I negotiate a taxi fare and head west along the *ruta* one. Five miles from the main intersection of the nation, we turn north. The rusty cab bundles along a dirt road to Nueva Londres (New London). Dry grasslands roll away for miles, either side of the road. In the distance, patches of forest *monte*, like small islands, rise from the plain. The driver tells me this whole area was New Australia. Unlike many locals from Coronel Oviedos, he knows of the Australian connection. I nod, discussing with a feigned air of detachment those facts about the original settlement I can express in Spanish. But in truth, like other Australian historians and journalists before me, this is more homage than research trip. And I have read too much to truly witness the present. Already, I am seeing the ghosts of utopia . . .

. . . their bullocks straining under the weight of the carretas, eighty families, many of them refugees from the great strikes and the depression trudge forward, they believe, into history. An Australian

communist paradise in the heart of Latin America, a model for the world . . .

This is New Australia. In September 1893 and early 1894, four hundred Australian socialists, single-taxers and fellow travelers arrived here as members of the New Australia Cooperative Settlement Association. Led by the charismatic labour journalist William Lane, a key agitator in the great strikes and founder of the Queensland *Worker*, the settlers aimed to found a communist utopia in which "every man will be a mate and in which no man would dream of taking advantage of another".[4] Despite his early role in the formation of the Labor Party, recent scholarship suggests that Lane had been planning a utopian settlement for some years.[5] Throughout late 1891 Lane had written *The Workingman's Paradise*, a novel which portrayed a modern vision of urban decay and racial decline, and envisaged a socialist future of cooperation, rural communism, and manly independence. The promised sequel to *The Workingman's Paradise* was to be set in New Australia, where a 'happier life' would be found.

For Lane and many other socialists of the early 1890s, collective land settlement on cooperative principles offered solutions for a range of social problems, and a guiding light for those frustrated by the parliamentary road. Following the failure of the great strikes, and in the context of economic depression and rising unemployment, some thousands of Australians were briefly drawn to cooperative land settlement schemes.[6] Lane's proposal for New Australia, an 'experiment in practical communism', promised a settlement based upon the principles of cooperation, racial purity, gender equality and teetotalism.

'The men of New Australia', an anthem published in the cooperative society's journal, highlighted the centrality of 'mateship' to Lane's utopianism:[7]

Shoulder to shoulder, mates,
Shoulders together,
Hand clasped in hand, my mates,
Fair and foul weather,
Hearts beating close, my mates,
Each man a brother,
Building a home, my mates,
All for each other

While emphasising the cooperative value of mateship, Lane also appealed to contemporary visions of 'manly independence' on the land. Indeed, one of the great significances of William Lane lay in his attempt to wed a socialist ethic of cooperation to some key values of the 'yeoman dream': a pre-existing radical vision of a society comprised of 'independent' small holding farmers. This distinctive hybrid discourse of mateship and independence characterised Lane's utopianism, and symbolically reflected the political alliance in the early 1890s between socialists and single-taxers around the issue of land reform. Inspired by the land tax proposals of Henry George, the single-tax leagues advocated taxes on unimproved land to break up the big estates, and became an influential progressive force in the early 1890s. To some extent, the single-taxers were supported by moral agrarian philosophies of the Anglican Church. These philosophies emphasised independence, based on the symbolic figure of the self-sufficient man on the land, providing for his family. For the single-taxers and agrarian thinkers, this social structure formed the most solid basis for an enduring moral and social order, away from the corruption and degradation of urban life. This ideal of the 'yeoman farmer' lived on well into the twentieth century in the form of soldier settlement schemes.

Though he eschewed individual land settlement, Lane shared the anti-urban ideals of single-taxers. In *The Workingman's Paradise*, images of Sydney slums replete with "thin dwarved children" and "unkempt vile-tongued women" form the background to Lane's analysis of the social problem throughout.[8] Lane contrasted the strength, manliness, and independence of spirit of his idealised Australian bushman with the degeneration of 'enervated' town dwellers.[9] Civilisation, he wrote, and particularly the urban slums of the great cities were 'slaying' all that was 'manly and true' in the Australian worker.[10] The great towns were 'sterile', and no place for society or 'the race' to fulfil their historical destinies. In his appeal for single women to join the New Australia venture, Lane boasted that the settlement would have many bushmen, "strong and straight and manly with a manliness that town life destroys".[11]

Lane embraced the pre-existing ideal of manly independence, but sought to redefine it along socialist lines. He maintained that independence could only be found in the escape from the degradation of wage slavery—most poignantly expressed as the indignity of having to beg another man for "the right to work and live". For the majority of workers, Lane argued, the right to independence would have to be

secured collectively in the joint ownership of land. In this sense, two separate visions inspired the co-operative land settlement movement, with a rhetorical commitment to both 'manly independence' and cooperation; it attracted a wide range of followers with little more in common than a desire for land.

Lane and the first batch of arrivals laid out the wide streets of a communist utopia at a place then known as Las Ovejas, on the generous land grant offered by a Paraguayan government desperate to repopulate after the War of the Triple Alliance. Here, in the heart of Paraguay, some descendants of those who followed Lane away from the depression of the early 1890s remain.

I arrive to find a quiet Paraguayan village, built around a well-treed town square, and surrounded by farms. Yet there is something different about the houses here, a few of them anyway.

I grab a softdrink, and ask the storeman at the sleepy *tienda* for news of the Australian descendants. Ask the policeman he says. Across the road, the police building is an empty shell, a façade without rooms or a back wall. Inside, the policeman is shirtless in the courtyard, barbecuing meat for his lunch. He seems embarrassed, and hurriedly dons his shirt. I ask him about descendants of the Australians. He is friendly, and directs me to the house of 'Don Moo-rye', assuring me that the Don speaks English 'muy bien'. Moo-rye? I can't work out the name . . . and it doesn't sound Anglo to me. I run through my Spanish vowels: ah, eh, ee, oh, oo. Could be 'u'. Mu-rye?

Ah. Don Murray. Mister Murray.

I set off in search of his house. Walking by the main square, I am struck with the oddities of this village. A memorial to the socialist colonial founders in 1893 also commemorates the ex-dictator's father, Hugo Stroessner, after whom the town was named during his son Alfredo's regime. *Calle Juan Kennedy* remembers one of the town's most famous sons, a successful businessman of English descent. The wide streets are peppered with gums—not entirely unusual in South America—but also, more distinctively, with silky oaks (native to Queensland).

It was here that the colonists split after a few short, hard months. The New Australians split over a variety of issues, but the core problem appears to have been Lane's latent authoritarianism, which became manifest under the stress of difficult living conditions. Other factors included the distance from running water and transport, compounded by the lack of single women in the colony and the strictures of the colony's teetotal rule. The undemocratic expulsion of three colonists for breaching the temperance pledge became the spark which motivated the departure of eighty dissatisfied members in December 1893. The tensions continued after the arrival of the 'second batch' of two hundred colonists from Adelaide in March 1894, leading to a major and permanent split in the colony. In May 1894 sixty of Lane's followers withdrew from New Australia to form a new colony further south. Cosme was run on communal principles until 1906. By 1896, New Australia had reverted to individual freehold.

So who is here at New Australia? Aside from those who left for Cosme, many New Australians departed for Patagonia, and many returned home. Anne Whitehead admirably traced the descendants of those at Cosme in her *Paradise Mislaid: In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay.*[12]

At least 217 colonists remained at New Australia after the split.[13] Led by the socialist firebrand Gilbert Casey after Lane's departure, another seventy-five arrivals came before 1896, partially replacing the slow trickle of departures. When Gavin Souter visited in 1965, two hundred Australian-Paraguayan descendants lived in and around Nueva Londres.[14]

Unable to find Don Murray's house, I stroll by a farmhouse, double story yet modest, with an open

Above: The McCreen family at Nueva Londres

The police building is an empty shell, a façade without rooms or a back wall. Inside, the policeman is shirtless in the courtyard, barbecuing meat for his lunch.

yard, shaded by old trees. It looks like something you might see in North Queeensland. I talk to a woman in her late thirties, and ask her about Don Murray's house, telling her I am from Australia. "Ah, my husband is a descendant of the Australians as well," she says, calling him over. His name is McCreen, Ernesto McCreen. Ernesto and his wife, Yris, invite me to have lunch with them. She herself is a descendant of English settlers, the Kennedys. According to Ernesto, his great-grandfather Syd McCreen arrived after the split, sometime between 1902 and 1904.

Syd McCreen was an Australian seaman, who, according to his own account, had bored holes in the hulls of blackleg ships during the maritime strikes of the 1890s.[15]

The McCreens are very hospitable. Ernesto politely approaches the home of Don Murray to enquire after him. His Paraguayan wife tells us that 'Don Eduardo' is sleeping, that he has not been well, and it would be unwise to wake him. Come back at 2 p.m., she says.

So I sit down for lunch with the McCreens. They speak only Spanish and the indigenous language Guarani, though Ernesto tells me he spoke English at home as a child. They certainly look Anglo-Australian. Were Ernesto and his son Malcolm to walk down Queen Street in Brisbane few people would blink. Despite all I've read, I can't help but find this scene extraordinary—lunching with the Spanish-speaking descendants of 1890s Australian socialists. They are, as Whitehead comments, the only Australian diaspora. The McCreens run Paraguayan cattle on their land, employ a couple of farmhands and seem to be modestly well off by the standards of the township. After a delicious beef and mandioca lunch at their farmhouse, the McCreens serve up the local tea *mate* and debate where the other two settlements on New Australia were. The McCreens talk among themselves in Spanish, but perhaps only because I am there. Ernesto, 52, speaks Guarani with the farmhands who join us for lunch. He tells me that some locals think the township was always called New London, but this is because it changed so long ago only a few recall its original name. The district, however, is still known as New Australia. According to Yris, Ernesto's wife, a nearby village called Capilan was another of the three original Australian settlements on the land grant.

Yris is one of the many descendants of James Craig Kennedy, who arrived from London in 1899. Kennedy was active in labour politics in London and came to new Australia apparently unaware of the disintegration of the original ideals.[16] *Kennedy brought a huge library with him, and 2000 pounds capital. He succeeded Gilbert Casey as president of the New Australia industrial co-partnership in 1900. His sons, Nigel and Alan are now major landholders in the area.*

After lunch, Ernesto approaches the Murrays' house again. Don Eduardo is still sleeping. So instead, Ernesto takes me to the house of his uncle, Harold Smith, 64, telling me that he can speak English quite well. Like McCreen, Harold is the descendant of later arrivals to New Australia. And like the Kennedys, the Smiths were English, not Australian. Harold sits on the tiled patio of his small, neat cottage. It's an idyllic warm day in Paraguay. He rocks slightly, looking like a sun-weathered Englishman, with graying blond hair. I am unsure as to whether he really speaks English, but I try, moving from Spanish. "If I speak in English, Harold, would you understand me?" Harold laughs uncertainly "hoho . . . yes, yes", and slowly begins to speak in his parents' language. Harold has a heavy Spanish accent, but I quickly learn that his English is fairly good. "I . . . have forgotten lots of my English . . . But when I was a boy, we always spoke it at home with my parents." Hearing Harold speak seems to give Ernesto courage, and he offers a word or two. "Have . . .", Ernesto pauses and thinks, ". . . a chair!" He laughs as he offers me a seat, remembering something from long ago.

Henry Alfred Smith, a retired British naval captain, arrived in 1909. He sympathised with the socialists, and had been a subscriber to the New

Australia movement in earlier days. While many new arrivals came in pursuit of commercial opportunities, Smith was one of the last to arrive because of an attachment to the colony's original socialist objectives.[17]

After another round of *mate* with Harold, Ernesto and I make our way back to the house of Don Murray. This time we are ushered in by his wife, and seated in the small but well-appointed dining room. Señora Murray maintains a very formal tone with guests, and I never discover her name. She tells me Don Eduardo is waiting out on the patio. The Don is far less formal, and after initial greetings in Spanish, his wife leaves and he breaks immediately into English.

"Bruce Murray. Pleased to meet you."

Before I can respond he says "1893!" and shakes my hand, laughing. We sit on the patio, in the shade, by the grove of orange trees that adjoins the Murrays' house. Bruce is 72, strong looking and fit, but otherwise looks much like any number of Anglo-Australian grandfathers. He has bright blue eyes, chews tobacco and spits constantly. It is an incredible experience to talk to Bruce. It quickly becomes apparent that he, unlike Harold, speaks fluent English without a hint of a Spanish accent. Bruce is talking to me in his rusty, but entirely functional first language. His accent is one of the English-speaking world, but just unplaceable. The only way to describe it is *colonial*. It has elements of antipodean long vowels, shorter southern African intonations, and a Scottish 'r'. At times, Bruce sounds Australian, at others English. Bruce is the grandson of Ted Murray, one of the original New Australians, a 'second batcher', who left on the *Royal Tar* from Adelaide in December 1893. It is extraordinary to hear the voice of Eduardo Bruce Murray, speaking an isolated English remnant, the last of an aging few who speak nineteenth-century English in central South America.

Bruce is aware that he is the only English speaker at Nueva Londres who can trace lineage to the first Australians. "I don't get to speak English very often nowadays," he tells me, "only Alan and Nigel Kennedy speak English with me. And they aren't long for it!" he adds with a wry smile.

Bruce was born in 1929, and Harold in 1937. It suggests that the 1930s were the end of English speaking as a significant force. Ernesto McCreen, born in the late 1940s, speaks virtually none.

Bruce forgets only one or two nouns in the hour or so we talk in English. Otherwise, he is perfectly fluent. He doesn't know or use much Australian slang, but does use general English slang, like 'kicked the bucket'. He tells me he can read a little in English too, but only slowly. Bruce is reading the Spanish-language daily as I arrive.

I ask Bruce where his grandfather came from. "I'm not sure, I think it might have been . . .", Bruce reflects, "Queensland." Bruce doesn't know a lot of the political story, though he remembers his grandfather mentioning William Lane as the original leader of the colony. Bruce tells me that the Australians "initially lived together, then spread out . . . some went to Cosme, others to other parts". Bruce is aware that eighty families came around 1893. "I believe there were going to be one or two more batches of arrivals, but they never came," he adds.

I ask Bruce where the original settlers lived. He has a good story about this one, and smiles as he recounts it. "Someone came here, years ago, a film . . . from Australia, and they went ten miles off course . . . to another settlement. But I can tell you it was here. They were either right here, in the present township, or up on the island, I'm not sure which." The 'island' is about one hundred metres away, an area of raised land. The term puzzles me until I remember that the New Australians used to talk of 'islands' of *Monte*, or Paraguayan forest, rising from the plain.

How did the original Australians get here? This is family and local legend to Bruce. "They came to

Above: Harold Smith

Don Eduardo is waiting out on the patio. He is less formal, and after initial greetings in Spanish, his wife leaves and he breaks immediately into English. "Bruce Murray. Pleased to meet you."

Buenos Aires, up river to Asunción, took the train to Villa Rica and walked from there . . . forty miles." When discussing the land around Nueva Londres, Bruce uses yards and leagues to describe distance.

What do you remember of your grandfather?

Ted Murray, trade unionist and Barcaldine strike committee member, sailed for New Australia as one of the 199 'second batchers' who left Adelaide in December 1893. Among the passengers were four of the recently released union prisoners Ted had been arrested with in 1891: Hugh Blackwell, Alec Forrester, William Fothergill and Henry Smith-Barry. Ted Murray met Maggie Dow, a Scottish nanny working at the other Australian settlement, Cosme, while on a social visit from New Australia. Ted Murray died in 1940, when Bruce was eleven. Bruce's father was Mitchell Murray.

"My grandfather smoked a pipe. He was always smoking that pipe. He also drank tea, a lot of tea, whenever he could. I don't know whether that's an Australian habit." I tell Bruce it was certainly an Australian habit, and that pipe smoking in particular was typical of men in the 1890s—especially those in radical circles. It was iconic of the 'lone hand' image popularised in *The Bulletin* and other radical nationalist magazines.

"His trousers were always burnt from the pipe. Whenever he was cleaning it out, he would knock it on his trousers, and bits would fall and burn," he laughs. "His trousers had no . . .", Bruce forgets the English word he is searching for, and says the Spanish 'bolsillos'. I remind him of the English term. "Yes, his trousers had no pockets. I thought that was strange when I was a boy."

"My grandfather could sit [ride] anything—horses, cattle . . . anything at all. He could also shear, very quickly. He was famous around here for it." I mention the great shearers' strike of 1891, and Bruce says that his father told him something about that. Following up on this, I ask Bruce why they had come here, why his grandfather and the rest had come to Paraguay. Bruce just shrugged, "I think the unemployment was bad in Queensland, and in Australia." I push a little further—"But of course, they were socialists weren't they, here to found a utopia?" Bruce nodded, "Yes, dreamers . . ."

Unlike many Paraguayans who are only familiar with the town San Cosme near Encarnación, Bruce is well aware of the old Australian Colony Cosme, near Caazapa. His grandmother had worked there, he reminds me. "Some of the people left here and went to Cosme. I don't know if they ever paid for it . . . maybe half."

Bruce goes on to tell me that everyone took Paraguayan wives, as "there was no option". He clearly has no issue with this himself, but is well aware it had once been an issue for the older generation of Australians. Lane, of course, had been particularly obsessed with maintaining the 'colour-line'. Bruce's wife returns, and we speak in Spanish whenever she and their daughter, who has an intellectual disability, are present. Bruce tells me he has two other children, including a son in the army. They speak only 'bits' of English. Señora Murray asks if I could help her son to get to Australia. I offer to try, but am privately uncertain of the Howard government's likely response ("Er, Mr Ruddock, here's a non-English-speaking Paraguayan descendant of Australian socialists"). I leave my address, in case they want

Above: Eduardo Bruce Murray with his wife and daughter

Señora Murray asks if I could help her son to get to Australia. I offer to try, but am privately uncertain ("Er, Mr Ruddock, here's a non-English-speaking Paraguayan descendant of Australian socialists").

to follow up. Bruce also has two brothers who speak English, but they do not live at New Australia.

After an hour or so, Bruce says "cheerio" as I leave his house to take a walk around New Australia. According to Souter, about 50 per cent of the land was still held by families of Australian-English heritage in 1965.[18] The town is pleasant, calm, with silky oaks and wide streets. It looks like Australian pasture land, though noticeably greener. There are clearly poorer subsistence farmers in town, compared to those like Bruce and Ernesto who own larger holdings. Some of these farmers are also Australian-Paraguayans, but with English surnames—such as Jones, Drakeford, and Butterworth—as the only marker of their mixed heritage. A declining few have remnant English and consciousness of their ancestry which separates them from others. Bruce is among the last of these.

There is a 1965 photo of Bruce in Gavin Souter's *A Peculiar People*, but both Souter and Anne Whitehead's excellent *Paradise Mislaid* largely miss Bruce Murray. Of course, for Souter, there were still original settlers to speak with, including Bruce's grandmother. And for Whitehead, researching through the 1980s, it was no doubt more fruitful to focus on the surviving children of original settlers: the Kennedys and the Woods from Cosme. Whatever the reason, I am more than happy to correct the omission of Bruce Murray. At 72, he is nearly a generation younger than the other two remaining English speakers, Nigel and Alan Kennedy, who are in their 90s. Bruce Murray may well become the last English-speaking Paraguayan from either settlement. He is already the last one of Australian descent at Nueva Londres, a grandson of the socialist pioneers of 1893 and 1894.

Unlike the Woods who always felt a little like 'gringos', and somewhat ill at ease with their mixed Australian and Paraguayan identifications,[19] Bruce, a grandchild, always considered himself Paraguayan. "Did you consider yourselves different?" I asked Bruce before I left. "No, *Paraguayos*," Bruce replied, emphasising his feelings by lapsing into Spanish. Yet, identity is more than self-identification. It is also about recognition. Everyone in town recognises Don Murray as an *Australiano*, or at least, as a descendant. Equally, he speaks English, and is clearly proud of the mixed Australian and Scottish heritage reflected in his accent. And even the McCreens, who speak no English at all, have chosen to maintain something of their cultural heritage by naming their sons Malcolm and David.

New Australia is often considered nothing more than a curious footnote to Australian labour history. But it has something more substantial to say, particularly given the recent obsession with the 1890s. New Australia and Cosme appear to have maintained fragments of 1890s Australian culture for a considerable period of time. Architecture, cultural forms, language and slang all seem to have been preserved and treasured, especially by the first and second generations. In particular, Henry Lawson remained central to the culture of the two colonies well into the second and even third generation. Lawson had, of course, been part of the original New Australians' radical milieu. He wrote poems for *New Australia* journal, and was rumored to have considered following Mary Gilmore to Paraguay in 1895. Indeed, one of the Cosme settlers, Billy Wood, was a character in one of his poems. The enduring nature of these cultural attachments is especially captured by Whitehead, and in the image of the Wood family singing 'Waltzing Matilda' in the early 1970s, and reciting Lawson's poetry. And again, Ted Murray chose to call his son Mitchell. Was Bruce Murray's father named after Henry Lawson's renowned 'Mitchell stories'? I wouldn't be surprised. Equally, Bruce refers to his grandfather constantly smoking his pipe, and drinking tea, bringing to mind iconic images of 1890s masculine and national identity.

In a more direct way, it is arguable that the co-operative land settlement movements of the early 1890s had a disproportionate impact on some influential understandings of Australian national identity.

For Russel Ward, in his *The Australian Legend* the 'typical' Australian was held to be both collectivist in nature yet strongly self-reliant: "He is a fiercely independent person . . . Yet he is very hospitable and, above all, will stick to his mates through thick and thin. No epithet in his vocabulary is more damning than 'scab'".[20] This seemingly awkward combination of independence and mateship probably owes much to the cooperative land settlement movement, and Lane's particular attempt to marry the 'yeoman dream' to a collectivist ethic of cooperation. Certainly, this distinctive sort of rhetoric was never as prevalent in the radical nationalist press, or in mainstream labour journalism after Lane's departure in 1893. Lane's 'hybrid' discourse probably represented an attempt to resolve tensions in the radical alliance between socialists and single-taxers in the early 1890s—a specific conjuncture in Australian history which Ward declared to be 'typical' of the pre-federation era. McQueen, for example, found Ward's frontier thesis, in which independence was secured through solidarity and mateship, to be a logic "hard to follow", and one which neglected abundant evidence of "petit-bourgeois individualism" among land reform radicals.[21] For all its brief popularity, the conflicting values of cooperative socialism were difficult to reconcile. Indeed, these tensions within the socialist vision of "collectively secured independence" directly reflected those within the radical alliance, which had collapsed by 1895. While there were many factors involved in the splits among the New Australians, Lane's successor as editor of the *Worker*, W.G. Higgs, attributed the rift to the inevitable conflict between socialists and single-taxers, who could no more agree "than water with oil".[22]

As I leave Nueva Londres, I encounter the policeman again. This time he is in full uniform, with polished boots, evidently embarrassed by his earlier performance and keen to make an impression. He is friendly, and interested in what I earn as an Australian university lecturer. Talking with him, it becomes apparent that Bruce Murray and Ernesto McCreen are significantly better off than many of their neighbours. Lane's collectivist experiment had foundered by 1906, yet many of the Paraguayan-Australian settlers who stayed became relatively well-to-do, and a few became large landholders. Perhaps there is an irony here, for the descendants of those who escaped the squatters, but I do not care to dwell on it. Instead, I raise my glass for old Bruce Murray, the last English-speaking Paraguayan-Australian, and hope that for some at New Australia, a sort of independence was found after all.

ENDNOTES

1. Ross Fitzgerald & Harold Thornton, *Labor in Queensland from the 1880s to 1988*, UQP, St Lucia, 1988, p.3.
2. Gavin Souter, *A Peculiar People: the Australians in Paraguay*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1968, p.7.
3. Souter, pp.6–9.
4. *Worker*, Union Trustees, Brisbane, 31 October 1891, p.3.
5. John Kellet, 'William Lane and New Australia: a Reassessment', *Labour History*, 72, 1997, pp.1–18.
6. William Metcalf, 'A Brief History of Communal Experimentation in Australia', in W. Metcalf (ed.), *From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality: Cooperative Lifestyles in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1995, pp.15–40.
7. *New Australia*, 25 March 1893, p.4.
8. William Lane, ('John Miller'), *The Workingman's Paradise: An Australian Labour Novel*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1980 [1892], pp.16–17.
9. *Worker*, 6 August 1892, p.2.
10. *Worker*, 22 October 1892, p.3.
11. *Worker*, 31 December 1892, p.4.
12. Anne Whitehead, *Paradise Mislaid: In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay*, UQP, St Lucia, 1997.
13. Souter, p.113.
14. Souter, p. 274.
15. Souter, p. 215.
16. Whitehead, pp.245–6.
17. Whitehead, pp.218, 247.
18. Souter, p.274.
19. See Whitehead, p.520.
20. Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, OUP, Melbourne, 1958, p.2.
21. Humphrey McQueen, *A New Brittania*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1970, pp.149,165.
22. *Worker*, 17 April 1894, p.2.

Michael Leach is a Research Fellow in Citizenship and Globalisation Studies at Deakin University.

fiction / **LIBBY SOMMER**

AFTER THE GAMES

1: I saw him again today. He looked older. Our paths crossed on the cliffs between Bronte and Bondi. He walked with a woman I had never seen before. The woman had long beautiful legs—bronzed a clear nut-brown. She was wearing a man's undershirt and brown shorts and had a crochet bag hanging loosely from a black nylon strap draped over her hips. Her hair was long and it flicked out in golden corkscrews over her shoulders and down her back. They were laughing. He walked right past me and kept right on walking.

2: The beach seems unusually quiet today apart from a yoga class taking place on the grassy verge behind the Pavilion. On the ocean, surfers in wetsuits loll motionless on surfboards. On the sand, a gaggle of seagulls stand rigid as Irish dancers. And over on the rocks at the southern end of the beach other seagulls laze in the early sun in groups of three or four, or six or eight—their chests puffed out, feathers bristling in the spring breeze, as they nestle into the face of the rock.

It is shortly after the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and I am on a rostered day off from my job with the ABC. I am also a poet but I do not refer to that unless it is something people know already. I don't think of making a living as a poet, not only because the income would be non-existent, but because I think, as I have innumerable times in my life, that probably I will not write any more poems.

On the grass a woman works out with her female personal trainer. The trainer holds an oblong plastic cushion at waist height while the woman kicks the bag.

One, two, three, calls out the trainer.
Kick, kick, kick, goes the woman's leg hard into the cushion.
Four, five, six.
Kick, kick.
That's the way, the trainer encourages.
Nine, ten, she continues with a rising inflection in her voice.

The trainer is forced backwards slightly with each kick but makes a quick recovery to her original position.

3: A man and a woman lie together kissing, sheltered by the shadow of the rocks at the southern end of the beach. I came here at night with Howard and we sat over there near the rocks with our arms around each other into the night. The pull of the tide kept bringing the waves closer to our feet. I saw the froth advancing and retreating and my own toes digging into the sand. All the time he spoke I saw my feet and when they started to go numb in the damp sand I knew without looking up what he was going to say; the whole of me seemed to be in my toes. My love was in the waves. For some reason I thought that if the waves reached me, things would work out between us. The waves advanced

and retreated but never quite reached the rock where we sat: never quite bridged the gap, the space between us and the ocean.

4: On the sand a one-legged seagull hops towards the water labouring over the crumbs of loose sand which break away and roll down as he passes over them. The one-legged seagull seems to have a definite goal in sight differing from the high-hopping tangerine-footed bird who attempts to cross in front of him, and who waits for a moment with his black beak trembling as if in deliberation, and then hops off as rapidly and strangely in the opposite direction. A line of seaweed with deep green lakes in the hollows lies between the seagull and the water's edge where the other gulls are pecking for food. The seagull waits, undecided whether to circumvent the mountain of seaweed or to breast it.

I stop and watch the struggle of the seagull.

5: The ocean is grey and flat today. It is so quiet in fact that I can hear the tiny whisper of the breeze, the rustling of the waves approaching the shore, the creaking of the wings of a gull-like bird which flies low over the Promenade and the flapping of my own thin skirt as it blows against my legs. But there is no wind, nothing but a steady pressure forward as I progress along the beach. Somewhere behind the veil of clouds there is a pale sun which can be seen, in the far distance, that casts a white gleam on the water.

Who would know there had been a Beach Volleyball Stadium here on the beach at Bondi? I bought tickets for the preliminaries for myself and my son. We hadn't been out, just the two of us, since he was a little boy when I took him to a Kiss concert.

After the game we walked back to my place and he came in briefly for a glass of water before saying goodbye. I kissed him on the neck—on that soft groove that I used to know so well when he was a little boy.

When he left I couldn't think of anything for the rest of the afternoon except that soft part of his neck and the kiss.

6: Near the end of the Promenade a woman cradles a baby in her arms. I can see the baby's face clearly as it is lit by the sun. I can almost smell the baby's soft hair, that familiar baby smell I once knew so well. The woman strokes the baby and looks down at it and the baby looks back up at her. She looks up again with a faraway gaze that all new mothers seem to have and rocks slowly from side to side, her feet shuffling against the cement. The light picks up the woman's high cheekbones and glints off her glasses.

I move to the left as a woman pushing a three-wheeled stroller runs past. The baby clutches the sides of the pram, the front wheel lifting as the woman negotiates the corner.

7: I first met Howard at a dinner party at a mutual friend's house. He'd talked business with the host and I hadn't really connected with him. It was only towards the end of the meal when he passed me the chocolate-covered strawberries and encouraged me to eat one that I'd warmed to him slightly. Go on, he said. Have one. Chocolate is good for you. He was a chunky sort of a bloke, a thick head of brown hair, greying at the sides. I have to admit that I wasn't attracted to him when we first met. You were disappointed I could tell, he said later. A week after the dinner he rang and asked me out for dinner. He came over to pick me up and we walked down to Bondi. Coming back to my place later he told me he knew I was interested in him because I kept brushing into his arm as we walked up the hill.

8: I trust what I make of things—usually. I trust what I think about friends and chance acquaintances, but I feel stupid and helpless when contemplating the collision of myself and Howard. I have plenty to say about it, given the chance, because I like to explain things, but I don't trust what I say, even to myself; it doesn't help me.

Because everything and everyone else in his life came before me, I might say. His two businesses, his children, his ex-wife who lived across the road.

9: The one-legged seagull has now considered

every possible method of reaching his goal without going round the line of seaweed or climbing over it. Aside from the effort required to climb the seaweed, he is doubtful whether the slippery texture will bear his weight. This determines him finally to creep beneath it, for there is a point where the seaweed curves high enough from the ground to admit him. He inserts his head in the opening and takes stock of the high brown roof and is getting used to the cool brown light before deciding what to do next.

10: Howard had said he uses his air rifle to kill birds. He said he's proud to shoot introduced birds around his house—and has no hesitation in killing dive-bombing magpies and noisy possums.

I remember his house well. Big, two storeys, red-brick, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a swimming pool out the back. Black leather and chrome, art books on the coffee tables. Huge original paintings on the walls.

He'd stay in the family room when his children were visiting, which was seven days out of fourteen—everyone in their own special seat at a computer or watching television or talking on the telephone. There was no spare seat for me and not enough light to read by.

I bought flowers. I bought presents for his children; clothes for the girls; I talked music with his son. I learned pathways around the house and found places outside where I could sit.

I felt flattered when he said that he wanted me to move in with him. He offered to build me a studio out the back. A dog house, a friend said. He wants you out the back in the dog house so he can keep an eye on you. So you can be on hand whenever it suits him.

Howard talked about all the women his friends had lined up for him—waiting to be introduced. He spoke about a former girlfriend and how he wanted her to move in with him but she wouldn't, so he ended the relationship. Later I found out he'd kept on seeing the former girlfriend, even ringing her from Paris from the conference I'd foolishly agreed to attend with him. I'd stupidly insisted on paying my own business-class airfare, which I couldn't afford, in order to be by his side.

I didn't know any of this until it was too late—until I'd become needy and dependent.

You just want a handbag, a doormat, a warm body in the bed, I accused him.

I have a fatal flaw, he explained. I only want what I cannot have.

And what are my flaws? Angry, demanding, uncooperative Cybella. Cybella, the unsatisfactory poet.

11: Two pigeons waddle along the concrete in search of food. Their tails wag back and forth, their necks jut in and out like finely linked springs moving to the rhythm of their webbed feet. On the grass the men and women practicing yoga twist their bodies into unimaginable knots and drop into breathtaking back bends, seeming to hang suspended in the air as they jump from one position to the next. The clear measured voice of the female yoga teacher calls out instructions:

Push down through the buttocks
Pull up through the rib cage
Relax the head down
Spread the fingers out wide
Toes under
Push the hips up
Keep the mind focused in the moment
Roll over onto your back
And come into the corpse position.

If you live alone and you can't close your hand, it makes life very difficult as you get older, says the yoga instructor. Not being able to open a jar or turn a key in the lock. Every morning when I wake up I take the time to stretch out my body, she continues. I rotate my ankles, stretch out my feet and arms, and then I stand up and stretch out my neck. How many of you stretch in the mornings? Living in the city takes a toll on our health. We sit at a desk writing or sit at the computer—but we need to stretch the hands, the wrists, the hip flexors and to keep our bodies moving.

I wonder if the early morning stretches are only for people who live alone—for people who don't wake up with their lover beside them.

12: The last time I saw Howard we sat in my car near Ben Buckler in the rain. I rested my hands against the steering wheel, then leant back and listened as the windscreen started to fog. I felt the rise and the fall of my own breathing but I couldn't hear my heart or my breath. I knew without seeing that the waves were colliding. Below, the swells rolled against the brown cliffs that I couldn't see.

When I drove back to my apartment I sat down on a chair in my bedroom. I sat for an hour or so, then went to the bathroom, undressed, put on my nightgown, and got into bed. In bed I felt relief, that I had got myself home safely and would not have to think about anything any more.

In fact my only memory now is of the sound of the windscreen wipers swinging back and forth as Howard and I sat in silence in my car.

After the Maccabi bridge collapse I rang to see if his daughter had been involved. I left a message on his answer machine but he never returned my call.

He wrote to me care of the ABC, to say he'd pack and send my things.

13: The grey underside of wings flap as a triangle of seagulls fly past in perfect formation above the rocks. They climb to a thousand feet, then, flapping their wings as hard as they can, they push over into a blazing steep dive toward the waves. They pull sharply upward again into a full loop and then fly all the way around to a dead-slow stand-up landing on the sand.

14: Effortlessly the one-legged seagull spreads his wings and lifts into the air. In the light breeze he curves his feathers to lift himself without a single flap of wing from sand to cloud and down again.

He climbs two thousand feet above the sea, and without a moment for thought of failure and death, he brings his fore wings tight in to his body, leaving only the narrow swept wingtips extended into the wind, and falls into a vertical dive.

With the faintest twist of his wingtips he eases out of the dive and shoots above the waves, a gray cannonball under the sun.

He trembles ever so slightly with delight.

15: She had his sweater draped over her shoulders. They were laughing. I watched their backs move away. I waited by the sea until the sun went down.

16: The swell is up, the Pacific Ocean expressing its power across the rocks below me in spectacular explosions of spray.

It is colder now and the day is fading. A little wind has blown up. The wind tears at my hair. With a wild gesture I pull my hair loose from its sidecombs and let it stream across my face and then let it fly back in the wind.

A weak sun emerges. I stand still and lift my face.

17: *Keep your hips still, swing your arms, keep your lower abdominals tight to protect your back. Try to keep your chest high, a nice long neck. Keep your arms out nice and long. Relax the shoulders. Stand tall. Go over to the right side, keep your knees soft. Very slowly. And the other side. Forward roll. Drop the chin into the neck. Hold it. Keep your knees soft and come back up. Really concentrate on spinal articulation here—vertebrae by vertebrae slowly roll it up, shoulders relaxed. Chin in, roll it down. Keep those knees soft. Bend your knees as much as you have to. Go down for four, push it in. Stretch out the shoulders there. Hold it and release the hands on to the ground and roll it back up. Take your right leg out in front. Hands on the hips, keep the hips square. We're going over in a nice square line. Should be able to stretch the hamstrings there.*

And . . . coming back up.

Libby Sommer is a Sydney writer and has recently completed a novel.

fiction / **RACHAEL WENONA GUY**

SAVASANA SHOULD NEVER BE OMITTED

I decide to take up yoga: The first time I attend, I enter a classroom which is sparse and puritanical. Bolsters are stacked in an orderly fashion, yoga mats rolled like flaps of blue tripe. There are blocks and straps, and a little statue of Buddha on the window sill. The atmosphere is reverent.

The teacher: The first time I meet you, I am struck by your formidable manner. Impeccably neat, unswervingly didactic, your skin emits a honeyed glow.

I am unprepared for the forcefulness of such beauty.

I try to be a good student: And not allow my mind to wander during the postures.

The Asanas

Mukha Svanasana (Half Dog Pose): *Place the hands on the wall about hip height, ensure the fingers are evenly spread.*

I spread my hands and the spaces between my fingers seem taut and expectant.

Now walk the legs out keeping the knees slightly bent . . . and draw the thighs upwards! You trace your fingers up my thighs with light, instructive strokes and I raise and firm them to your touch.

Don't overarch the back. Sometimes I make myself a little careless in this posture, dipping my chest so that you might 'adjust' me and leave me heady in the wake of your tiny corrections.

Vrksasana (Tree): *Now stand with your feet hip-distance apart—draw your leg up onto the opposing thigh*—You raise the leg of your shorts a little higher to expose the platform of your thigh, the skin at the edge of your groin is soft, infantile.

Be steady in the posture—raise your arms above your head, join your palms together. I see patches of sweat darken your T-shirt in secret underarm places. Wisps of hair protrude disclosing your maturity.

Breathe there, feel yourself stretching. I follow your example, breathing rhythmically and my senses unfurl and stretch towards you.

Dandasana (Staff Pose): *Sit on the edge of your bolster with your legs straight out in front, ensure that the knees and thighs are aligned evenly.* You are so evenly aligned, a masterpiece of self-discipline. I ache to find a crack in your edifice. I wonder who you are in your private hours.

I want you to draw the flesh of the buttocks apart, so that you are sitting evenly on your buttock bones. This is the moment where you grasp your own buttocks with pragmatic, slender hands and shuffle your body forward with a devastating motion.

Now take your arms behind you, balance evenly on your fingertips and lift the ribcage. You expand

your chest and your nipples come into view. Your Adam's apple is framed by the tendons in your throat—a golden delicious.

Look straight ahead, ensure that the eyes are soft.

Setu Bandha (Bridge Posture): *Lie on the floor knees bent.* I am standing behind you looking down on the crown of your head. Your skull is very round and cupped with a swath of tightly curled black hair. Your temples are flecked with grey—a perfect concentric cowlick accentuates the crown of your head.

Lift your back off the floor, tucking the coccyx beneath you. Be firm in the thighs, draw your shoulders away from your ears. Your expression is focused, the arch of your back, magnificent. Your groin is acutely visible in this posture, yet somehow your masculinity remains understated. I am deeply moved by your discretion.

Be sure not to crush your throat with your chest.

Supta Baddhakonasana (Lying down in Baddhakonasana): *Take a strap, loop it around your ankles and now lie back over your bolster and draw your heels up towards your pubic bone.* For a moment you look directly at me. Your mouth is as rich as burgundy, your chin hard.

For those who don't know where the pubic bone is situated . . . You begin walking your fingers down your abdomen with tormenting deliberation.

. . . it is here just below the navel. You press your fingers violently into that private place of yours. I wish to taste your cheekbones.

Savasana (Corpse Pose): *Now prepare yourself for Savasana, place a bolster beneath your knees, have a support there for your head if you need one. As you settle be attentive to your breath and to the subtleties of how your body feels as you lie there.* Now in this final posture, I am patient as you make your way around the class making little adjustments to the students. Finally you crouch over me and your body heat suffuses me with a rich contentment. I feel your fingers toss my ankles apart, coaxing release. Your thigh brushes my cheek and I am smug at this tiny apprehension of contact. You sink your fingers into the flesh of my shoulders and linger there. I am persuaded to relax with every fibre of my being.

Remember, Savasana should never be omitted.

One night you ring me at home

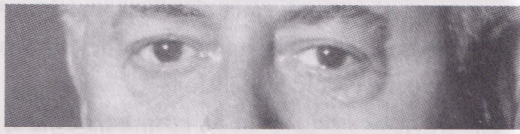
You give me the details of a new class, your manner is impersonal. In the pauses of our conversation I hear bland ambient music piping in the background. For a moment I imagine your home environment.

There are minimal furnishings, new-age trimmings. A stick of incense burns. Your home is a space in which to be pared down. In which to be censorious and strictly vegetarian. I imagine you making tidy, instructive love to your wife. Yours would be a home of ascetic tendencies. Of Zen sensibilities.

I realise that I must never get to know you personally.

Rachael Wenona Guy lives in Hobart. A visual artist, writer and performer, she is currently writing a one-person adult puppetry show combining text, song and mobile figurative sculptures.

review essay / **NATHAN HOLLIER**



THE WHITLAM PROJECT

Lindsay Barrett: *The Prime Minister's Christmas Card: Blue Poles and Cultural Politics in the Whitlam Era* (Power Publications, $21.95)

THE DISMISSAL OF the Whitlam government by Governor-General Kerr looms large in the Australian cultural imaginary. Kerr's act brought to an end this government but also a decade of progressive social change termed by Donald Horne a "time of hope".[1] Many of Whitlam's social policies continued and expanded Liberal-Country Party initiatives established on the bipartisan assumption of continuing worldwide economic investment and expansion. Social justice was widely believed to be affordable and therefore basically inevitable. These policies continue to define the battleground of much current debate. A search of the Dow Jones interactive database, for example, which indexes major Australian newspapers, reveals that the Whitlam government is mentioned 923 times between 1999 and 2002, in comparison with forty-two references to the McMahon government, 570 references to the Fraser government and 820 references to the Hawke government.[2] Whitlam's policies of ending conscription, boosting education, granting equal wages to women and to Aborigines, introducing no-fault divorce, ending the last elements of the White Australia policy and conducting an independent line in world affairs, were attacked at the time by personas like Joh Bjelke-Petersen and subsequently formed the basis of conservative diatribes about the causes of Australia's social and economic difficulties.[3] It is no longer assumed that social justice is affordable and many suggest that this goal is actually the cause of economic inefficiency.

Attacks on the Whitlamite legacy in the reactionary post-1996 era of Howard and Hanson have reached a crescendo. Curiously, these attacks are supposedly often motivated by a dislike of 'latte-drinkers'. Where feminists, non-Anglo migrants, Aborigines, gay people and the unemployed were, during the seventies, eighties and nineties, routinely identified as the enemy within the noble project of Australian economic rationalism, a new focus of this attack has emerged: a vaguely defined middle-class grouping, the 'latte-set'. The progressive philosophy of some relatively privileged members of the middle class is now to be held up to an expanding sector of working poor, by battlers of the Tony Abbott ilk, as cause of Australia's social and economic woes. To further complicate this situation, many left or progressive thinkers, particularly those influenced by postmodernist and/or Third Way ideas, have criticised Whitlamite social democracy and the prospects for social and economic planning in what they believe is a postmodern age of radically fragmented power.[4] There now seems a real danger that basic progressive reforms of the Whitlam era will be overturned.

Clearly then, a study of the Whitlam years is a worthwhile and socially significant project. Analyses of this era almost inevitably become, to a greater or lesser extent, analyses of the present, because our present can so obviously be distinguished from and traced to the Australian society that elected and then rejected the reformist government of 1972–75. In *The Prime Minister's Christmas Card* Lindsay Barrett has produced a history that is as much, if not more, a commentary on our present reality. He argues that the era of the Whitlam government is best understood as 'modern', and as definitively marking off the modern from our own postmodern age. But while the profound nature of this social change may be beyond question, what Barrett means by 'modern' and 'postmodern' and his understanding of the bases and nature of this historical shift,

are not. Though he doesn't offer dates, Barrett's definition of postmodernity in Lyotard's terms as defined by the breakdown of credulity towards metanarratives suggests that his modern period corresponds with the period of dominance of the grand theories of science and the humanities, roughly from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century. For Barrett, all thought, from the creative to the analytic, is an expression of the epoch in which one exists, of a Foucaultian episteme that dominates during that epoch. There are two obvious implications of this view of the world: firstly, no individual or group can influence the direction of history; and secondly, there is no way of individuals or groups changing through their own actions the historical conditions in which they live. In this text Barrett argues that the Whitlam government coincided with an epochal shift from modernity to postmodernity. He identifies many different cultural and material factors involved in this shift, but eschews any suggestion that one factor was more important than another in bringing it about. Indeed, it is the very indeterminacy of this historical movement's causes that serves for Barrett as evidence of its depth and inevitability.

Beginning as he does from this conceptual framework and political position, the conclusions that Barrett reaches are foregone ones: the Whitlam government was both an expression of its modernist age and doomed for that same reason; there was nothing that anybody or group, on either side of the political fence, could have done to halt or significantly shape what was a tidal wave of history; the society in which we now live may have its problems but is basically an expression of our postmodern consciousness and set of physical circumstances, and cannot be meaningfully changed. Despite the readable nature and interesting subject matter of this text, its questionable intellectual method and unsatisfactory politics mar it throughout.

In chapter one the general hypothesis and terms of discussion are mapped out. The abstract expressionist school of Jackson Pollock, painter of *Blue Poles*, is identified as modernist, since these people painted on huge canvasses and understood themselves as geniuses, seeing more clearly than others around them the reality of their age. Whitlam and his government are expressions of modernity also, because of their "stress and reliance on two givens, the twin concepts of expansive, pervasive social management at the hands of a benevolent bureaucracy, and faith in the eurocentric ideal of continuous social and technological progress". Thus, it is asserted, Pollock, Whitlam and their respective groups and institutions embodied their age, and Whitlam's liking and purchasing of *Blue Poles* evidences this: "The painting's aggressive, confident modernism matched in turn the Whitlam Government's understanding and appreciation of itself". However, to say that Pollock and Whitlam were of their time is quite a different thing from asserting an innate connection between abstract expressionism and the principles of Keynesian social planning. Strong parallels can be seen between the philosophy of the Abstract Expressionists and that of the Romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, while it is difficult to find a 'modernist' commitment to social progress in their determinedly abstract, seemingly postmodern aesthetic. Similarly, if the modern period begins prior to the Second World War, the Whitlamite faith in an expansive bureaucracy and continuing growth was clearly not always characteristic of it. Modernism, then, is both an aesthetic and an historical concept and while art and politics are of course related at any time, it doesn't make much sense to conflate the different and incommensurate meanings of this term into a single overarching *zeitgeist*. Given this, Barrett's notion of a modern consciousness, transcending and traversing different forms of thought and politics, must be drawn into question.

The further evidence for Barrett's central argument, taking up the bulk of the book, is a reading of the national and international dimensions of the broad-based change which made circumstances difficult for this government. This reading contains interesting material and builds a readable and insightful narrative, but does not draw on new evidence or offer a significant re-assessment of specific events. Rather, the historical narrative serves as evidence for the author's commentary on the inevitable arrival of postmodern social conditions.

Chapter two deals with the purchase of *Blue Poles* by the National Gallery and the ensuing public furore, led by conservative politicians and the metropolitan daily newspapers, about this use of public money. Chapter three deals with "the machinations of international power politics in the 1950s" and "the direct effects of the Cold War on Australian and regional political life". Chapter four examines interconnections between the American *Life* magazine, the 'newness' of American abstract expressionist paintings, US government efforts to promote this

Australian labourism was, in fact, famously a socialism *sans doctrines*, a pragmatic mixture of market and communitarian approaches to achieving economic growth with wage justice. It was never utopian.

work as a means of promoting American consumer culture, and Whitlam's attempts to co-opt this art for his own "avant-garde" government. Whitlam's values, Barrett suggests in chapter five, were modern and urban, and his government rose and fell on the support of the newly-developing middle class, the suburban white-collar employees of the new service sector. Neither this nor any other class is defined in adequate sociological terms and the assessment that it was this 'class' which was most offended by the largesse of Whitlam's purchase seems at odds with earlier comments about the strong reaction against *Blue Poles* amongst working-class people and the establishment. Chapter six discusses the 1972 election campaign as a defining moment in Australian history, when the society voted on whether or not it would be culturally permissive. Chapter seven looks at Whitlam's attempt to construct an independent place for Australia in international relations in the context of a radically changing global situation. Chapter eight deals with the 'Loans Affair', suggesting that Connor's huge investment project was modernist and utopian and bound to fail because it was dependent on the "postmodern finance" of Arab petro-dollars. The precise sense in which petro-dollars are postmodern and why postmodern money will doom a modern project remains unclear.

In the penultimate chapter Barrett turns to the economic crises confronting the Whitlam government and examines the process by which monetarist and economic rationalist means of dealing with these crises came to dominance. Since Barrett's whole argument, which is essentially an argument about the present, rests on the contention that the arrival of postmodernity was inevitable, he is left with no option but to conclude that the dominance of economic rationalism in the postmodern era is simply an expression of this new age, just as Whitlamism was apparently an expression of modernity. To arrive at this conclusion, Barrett is forced to accept the dominance of economic rationalism on its proponents' own terms, as the logical or inevitable outcome of their own superior handling of a natural, rather than a social, science. There is no consideration of the relationship between economic rationalist analysis and the political ideology informing it. Barrett is completely uncritical towards right-wing sources of economic assessment such as the *Australian Financial Review*, Robert Haupt, Max Walsh, Laurie Oakes, P.P. McGuinness, Treasury and even Milton Friedman. There is no mention of the neo-Keynesian and socialist economic alternatives to economic rationalism that existed at the time and were extended later. Economic planning is supposedly outdated because the world has 'fragmented', but there is no acknowledgement of global economic trends towards corporate conglomeration and monopoly and massive and rapidly increasing inequity. These conditions are definitively characteristic of 'postmodern' capitalism, but fly in the face of free-market dogma and postmodernist delusions about currently dispersing power. Nowhere is the possibility considered that, rather than being an expression of its age, the age is an expression of economic rationalism.

The final chapter expounds Barrett's contention that the dominant policy framework is the only possible contemporary model of government. Referring to 1995 speeches by former Whitlam government ministers Hayden and Keating, he summarises:

> The statements by Keating and Hayden on the illusory nature of a Laborist utopia are of the greatest relevance precisely because they emphasise the distance between the Australia of the 1990s—the Australia of postmodernity—and the Australia of the 1970s, when it was still possible for many of the political left to publicly affirm their belief in an ideal like Progress, and maintain their faith in the possibilities of national reform through the management of change.

Australian labourism was in fact famously a socialism *sans doctrines*, a pragmatic mixture of market and communitarian approaches to achieving economic growth with wage justice. It was never utopian—arguably this pragmatism was one of its great limitations. Barrett seems intent on embodying what E.P. Thompson criticised as "the condescension of posterity": reducing this political struggle of Whitlam and others against the far Right to a struggle of

those clinging to the past against those embracing the future.[5] The Whitlam "project", writes Barrett, was "doomed from the beginning".

It has been said of economic rationalism that far from being empirically true, it simply ignores the evidence. The same could be said of much postmodernism; indeed, an interesting feature of the final two chapters of this work is the extent to which they clarify a possible connection, even synergy, between postmodernist and economic rationalist positivism. Each body of thought constructs a world that operates according to certain ontological laws. As these laws are held to best explain and interpret the world, any normative claims which contradict them can only be seen as subjective and irrational, outdated and immature. Each body of thought constructs a model of reality in which relations of power and domination are merely expressions of laws, rather than the dialectical result of human interaction and activity. And in their overt refusal to make value judgements on the basis of culture, to be subjective or ideological, each body of thought actively denies its own ideological basis.

Clearly, postmodernism can be seen as a recent rather than a 'post' meta-narrative, and as a meta-narrative which is, moreover, wholly parasitic on the modernist discourses it claims to have superseded. The appeal of postmodernism lies in its claim that it alone can grasp and explain the complexity of the world, as though the political refusal of its practitioners to make value judgements about causes and effects of events and actions equates with intellectual sophistication: "Though it claims to be a science of the particular, (it) thrills to the idea of the generic—the paradigmatic instance which will serve as a microcosm of a large whole".[6] Like the grand narrative of economic rationalism, this is certainly not a liberatory doctrine. As Mark Davis argued recently in *Overland*, the history of the New Right publicity machine since the dismissal of Whitlam is "testament . . . to the possibility that people can intervene in the operations of markets . . . None of these things is about a natural process of inevitability. All of these things are about human agency".[7]

Towards the end of his narrative, Barrett expresses his discomfort with certain social outcomes of economic rationalist policy and his support for the egalitarian principles of Whitlamism. He is unable or unwilling though to advocate such principles as more important than the seemingly rational outcomes of the market. Instead, perhaps to assert that he is not a member of the Whitlamite 'latte set', Barrett criticises John Howard's now firmly established New Right sloganeering, via criticisms put by the Aboriginal public figure and anti-latte activist Noel Pearson. But is it meaningful to express sympathy for progressive political causes while accepting free-market economics, including the dictum that social justice and economic growth are mutually exclusive? This may be the belief of Mark Latham, Tony Blair's chief Australian hawker, who launched this text in Sydney, but ignores the fact that, as Ted Wheelwright noted several years ago, economics is not simply any old discourse but "a powerful system of belief, strongly supported by a variety of vested interests, which includes most of the media, transnational corporations, especially in finance, and key . . . institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD".[8] In refusing to differentiate between the world and representations of it, Barrett irrationally asserts that the postmodernism he has enunciated has been a generative feature of, rather than a response to, the major social changes detailed here.

ENDNOTES

1. Donald Horne, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966–72*, A&R, Sydney, 1980. This epithet is broadly consistent with the representation of this period by other left-liberal historians such as Geoffrey Bolton, Russel Ward and Stuart Macintyre.
2. Search conducted on 29 January 2002.
3. On the Liberal Party intellectuals' tracing of Australia's social and economic woes to the Whitlam government, see David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia since 1944', in Brian Head & James Walter, eds., *Intellectual Movements in Australian Society*, OUP, Melbourne, 1988, pp.322–361.
4. Meaghan Morris has noted for example that "for me and for quite a few kindred spirits, those events [surrounding the dismissal] in 1975 marked the end of a whole period of classical political activism", going on to suggest the need for the development of new forms of political theorisation and mobilisation in the postmodern era. See her 'Politics Now (Anxieties of a Petit-bourgeois Intellectual)', *Intervention* 20, 1986, p.6.
5. E.P. Thompson, 'Preface', *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin Books, 1963, p.13.
6. R. Samuel, *History Workshop Journal* 33, 1992, p.232, quoted in Sean Scalmer, *The Career of Class: Intellectuals and the Labour Movement in Australia 1942–1956*, PhD, Department of Government, University of Sydney, 1996.
7. Mark Davis, 'Towards Cultural Renewal', *Overland* 163, p.13.
8. E.L. Wheelwright, 'Economic Controls for Social Ends', in Stuart Rees, Gordon Rodley & Frank Stilwell, eds., *Beyond the Market: Alternatives to Economic Rationalism*, Pluto Press, Leichhardt, 1993, pp.15–16.

Nathan Hollier is Overland*'s associate editor.*

The Gough Suite

by alicia sometimes

Parliament,
Canberra, A.C.T.

July, 1973.

Dear Mr. Whitlam,

You must thank your department for sending me your autograph. I'm such a big fan. I was really proud when you stuck it up the Libs in December. As an ordinary Australian girl, I think I speak for all of us when I say, we will never forget the look on their grey, money-hungry faces.

I see in the papers that you are mixing it with Kissinger and Nixon this week. I'm glad you gave an earful to the newspaper reporter who said that Australia was merely a satellite of America, laced with kangaroos in the street and too right, Australia should not be open to charges of racism. We're multicultural, not empty. So much for Nixon's Guam speech though, is he sticking to his guns? He was like the bored teacher pissed off with a student when he spoke of Vietnam and that whole "greatest week in human history bullshit, are the Americans buying it or are they like us, fed up and ready to move on? See, that's why I like Jim Cairns - there were thousands of us in Bourke Street punching our fists in the air, we were all behind him on stopping the killing, he's a man of convictions - believing in all the right things like you do. Nixon's a dick.

I think you're a good looking sort, too. I know you're married to a wonderful bird but I had this 'fantasy' about you when I was in Sunbury last year. I was on top of someone's car bonnet when Spectrum came on and it may have been the dust or the sweat (I don't do drugs) and I just had this vision that you'd be a great Prime Minister. My art teacher thinks I was just dehydrated but it was more than that, I knew you were destined for big things. When you spoke of free education and that it doesn't matter how much my dad earns, it's what's in my brain that counts, that was amazing. And the voting age, that was a good call. I have feelings too.

You must tell me what art you hang in your room.

Thanks for your time. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Love always,
Becky

PS: I'm glad you're changing PMG to Telecom and Australia Post. For lots of reasons, but mostly because my last boyfriend was Peter Michael Gaddon and he's a bigger dick than Nixon.

Parliament,
Canberra, A.C.T.

August, 1975

Dear Gough,

I know you must be too busy to write, after the whole double dissolution thing, the Cairns saga (did he really say that conventional economics should be replaced with "economics of love"? - that is so cool), the Loans Affair and "Arab Schemes" but I was hoping to hear from you. You must need a shoulder to cry on sometime, so if you ever feel like sharing, let me know.

Why does everyone refer to Connor as "The Strangler"? He used poetry in his defence, he can't be too bad. I like the line "creation in their brains" but he could have spoken about the ideals of Australian men and women. I heard it was from a poem on America though, might want to point that out to him.

So much has happened in my life since I wrote last. My dad says I should stop writing as unemployment is way too high and you have your head up your arse. Don't worry, I'm not listening. I think the Australia Council is crucial, I want to be a writer and an artist and I'll need money some day. My boyfriend likes you, we're buying a home soon in Oakleigh.

I'll always be glad you stopped the French bombing in our back yard. Let's hope it will never happen again.

Always,
Becky

PS: What size shoes do you wear? Rachel thinks you are a big man in lots of ways, I just think you're tall because you're stoic, like a good beer.

Parliament,
Canberra, A.C.T.

December, 1975

To the Hon. Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, MP

It can't be true, it just can't be. I cried when I watched 4 corners, when Jessop and Misson said they would have eventually crossed the floor. What can we do? I'll paint signs, I'll campaign for you. You are the voice of the people. Kerr is a wanker. He could have waited, he should have waited. All my friends the other day at Rachel's BBQ said they will get you re-elected. They don't even like politics so it must be a good sign. We care. Don't worry.

You are a brave man. Look at all the things you've done - your strong stance with the UN and South Africa, Equal opportunities for women in Federal Government Employment (Rachel works somewhere in the Public Service and she says things are far more relaxed now) and so much more. Dad, of course, thinks you are the sole reason for inflation - he doesn't even blame the ALP, just you, but he did say the other day that Fraser was a bit of an asshole for doing what he did. I will hate Frazer for ever, but not as much as I hate Kerr.

It's time for me to stand up, I'll do what I can.

Your humble fan,

Becky

A.L.P. Headquarters
December, 1977

4 DEC 1977

Dear Mr. Whitlam,

I know it's been a while and I hope I can reach you here at the A.L.P. H.Q. I hope they pass this on to you. You probably have some deranged fans but just tell them, it's me.

Jim and I have a daughter now and we're renovating the patio. I know you're still very active (I think you should be a national treasure) so I'll just tell you my quick tale and I'll be off.

I was at the Melbourne cup the other day and betting on a beautiful chestnut colt called Luckain Star. She's the one who won the Triple Crown - the A.J.C. Sires' Produce Stakes and the Golden Slipper and the A.J.C. Champaigne Stakes. A real beauty. After a few champaignes I was a little pissed. And that's when I saw him. Kerr. Drunker than me. John Wade, the Jockey, looked horrified.

I knew he'd be crucified for being blind in front of all those punters, but I couldn't help myself. I leaned over the rail and shouted "You white haired bastard." Everyone frowned at me.

I Just thought you should know, I gave it to John Kerr.

Best wishes, Becky

The punters know that the horse named Morality rarely gets past the post, wherease the nag named self-interest always runs a good race. —Gough Whitlam

review essay / **DENNIS GLOVER**

TRADITIONALISM VERSUS MODERNISATION

The Cairns–Whitlam duel for the soul of the Labor Party

Paul Strangio: *Keeper of the faith: a biography of Jim Cairns* (MUP, $49.95)

ON 19 APRIL 1968 Gough Whitlam resigned the Leadership of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party and announced that he was recontesting the position. Whitlam wanted it to be a vote of confidence for his plans to reform the Victorian Branch of the ALP, then run by the Stalinist Victorian Central Executive. He expected the contest to be a walk-over. Ten days later, however, with disgust at Whitlam's arrogant behaviour gathering support in the Labor caucus, Jim Cairns announced his nomination against Whitlam.

In a famous letter to Caucus members Cairns asked: "Whose party is this—ours or his?" The question summed up the left's opposition to what it saw as Whitlam's attempt to use the cloak of 'modernisation' to strengthen his own power within the ALP. Unlike Cairns's usual overly intellectual prose, the letter was punchy, full of table-pounding rhetoric that had been crafted by a newspaper columnist and advertising executive named Phillip Adams.

Whitlam failed to obtain the decisive victory he sought, only winning by 38 votes to 32. If four votes had changed hands the major opposition party in Australia would have entered the 'summer of love' led by a true radical left-winger; a man opposed to the US alliance and the Vietnam War, who regarded capitalism not as reformable—as most left-wingers in the ALP today tend to regard it—but as morally irredeemable.

This episode and the truly extraordinary political life of Jim Cairns illustrate a point not generally realised by left-wing critics of the ALP today—that until his political martyrdom in 1975 Gough Whitlam was regarded by the Australian left as a betrayer of the socialist cause. Cairns, not Whitlam, was the left's hero. Cairns was seen as an idealist, Whitlam as a compromiser. It is ironic that many who believe that there has never been a real Labor Party since 1975 actively opposed Whitlam's attempts to modernise the ALP in the 1960s. As we have seen, this includes commentators like Phillip Adams.

Although he defeated Cairns, Gough Whitlam's achievements today inspire people across the whole spectrum of the Labor Party, particularly the left. In retrospect the left now tacitly acknowledges that Whitlam's modernisation program was the vehicle not for betrayal of the Party's traditions, but for the creation of a new radical tradition. It's a point that all members of the Party today might want to contemplate. Modernisation does not necessarily mean conservatism.

Paul Strangio has produced a fine biography of Jim Cairns that not only recreates his life but reminds us that there once was something called the left and it was different from anything we know today.

Cairns is two years older than Whitlam and approaching his nineties. His journey began at the outbreak of the First World War. His father joined the AIF, and, unknown to Cairns until 1974, was cashiered for theft from his regiment and absconded to South Africa. Whitlam maintains that it was learn-

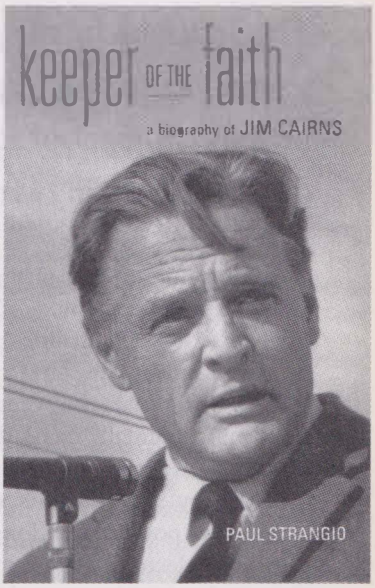
ing of the family shame that helped unhinge Cairns at the crucial moment. Unlike Whitlam, whose comfortable upbringing insulated him from the effects of the Great Depression, Cairns's background predisposed him to alienation from and grievance with, the established social order. Cairns was brought up by his mother and then his grandparents in circumstances that were comfortable but lacking in warmth and affection, and he believed that this led to his diffident personality. Even close friends never really got to know him.

It was an attempt to overcome the handicaps of his background that led Cairns late in life to adopt theories that emphasise the importance of personal relationships to ensuring rounded personalities and peaceful communities. This was a dramatic change, because for most of his life Cairns was philosophically a Marxist, believing that economic, not psychological, deprivations were the main influences on the formation of human personality and social relations. Cairns started off firmly 'old' left but later became the leader of the New Left.

After stints in the Victoria Police Force, the wartime Army (belatedly and in a non-combatant role) and Melbourne and Oxford Universities as a committed but not first-rate academic, Cairns entered Parliament in the 1955 federal election that followed the Split.

Between then and the beginning of the Vietnam War, Cairns emerged as the most articulate defender of traditional democratic socialism as the Party made its first moves in the direction of Croslandite revisionism. While the revisionists argued for an accommodation with capitalism based on the guarantee of full employment and the welfare state, Cairns believed that capitalism was untameable and had to be brought to heel through a substantial extension of public ownership of industry.

Even at this early stage, Cairns displayed an essential unsuitability for parliamentary leadership. From the beginning he was ambivalent about power. Departing from mainstream ideas and values made Cairns unique, but in its extreme form this departure was hard to reconcile with electoral success. As Strangio comments: "He measured political success in a different currency, in terms of minds converted over the long haul rather than in votes won at the next election." He might have added that while all good politicians need a strong set of beliefs, Keynes was right—in the long run, we're all dead. Whitlam had no such qualms about winning power as the first step to using it.



In 1963 Labor lost its sixth election in a row. Many argued that the assassination of President Kennedy in the last week of the campaign was the *deus ex machina* that handed victory to then Prime Minister Robert Menzies; that his boat had come in. But few were satisfied that this was the whole explanation. Debate raged over why Labor lost and what needed to be done. Whitlam became the leader of the 'modernisers' and Cairns the leader of the 'traditionalists'. As Laurie Oakes detailed in his 1973 biography, *Whitlam PM*, Whitlam believed that the reasons for the loss went deep—that the Party machine was run down, corrupted by factions and had an amateurish approach to winning power. Labor, Whitlam believed, was increasingly unrepresentative of the changing community. In his report to the Federal Executive after the loss he wrote that: "The Labor Party cannot achieve office unless it attracts support from more and more electors who are not eligible to join unions." (While union membership was still growing in absolute terms, as a proportion of a changing workforce, it was declining, beginning a long march to statistical minority that still continues.) Unless Labor's membership was more representative of the community, it was unlikely to come up with policies that appealed more broadly or put forward appealing candidates. Whitlam's policy direction attempted to create a broader base of support by appealing to the needs of suburban homeowners, migrants and women.[1]

Cairns argued instead that the answer lay in insufficient adherence to principle. He dismissed Whitlam's call for thorough modernisation as "Beatlemania" (perhaps an unfortunate choice to describe a passing fad) and called for a stronger commitment to socialisation. Cairns disagreed with Whitlam's assessment that the changing structure

The left had finally got what it wanted—a policy triumph and a national leader—but, never satisfied, it always demanded more and engaged in unremitting sabotage and personal attacks that drained Cairns's elan and dissipated their own momentum.

of the economy was causing class conflict to fade away. Class conflict would only disappear when structural economic inequalities were removed through strong action by the state.

The differences between Whitlam and Cairns more fundamentally came down to this: while the former wanted to increase the electoral appeal of the ALP by reforming its structures and policies, Cairns saw politics as a long-term process of educating the electorate to accept that the Party's structures and principles were right.

The Vietnam War provided the testing ground for Cairns's approach to politics as a vehicle for long-term public education. On 29 April 1965 Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced that Australia was sending a combat battalion to Vietnam to support the United States. The then Labor leader, Arthur Calwell, was under threat of challenge by Whitlam, and he needed support from the left. When parliament resumed the following week, Calwell made a strong speech, over which Cairns was consulted, opposing Australia's involvement. In doing so, he set the ALP on a collision course with popular opinion and set himself and Cairns on a collision course with Whitlam. Many today idolise Whitlam for withdrawing the remaining Australian troops from Vietnam in 1972, abolishing conscription and releasing draft resisters from prison. But before becoming Prime Minister, Whitlam's opposition to the war was less enthusiastic. Whitlam believed that the majority of Australians supported Australia's involvement in Vietnam, and rather than a direct withdrawal of troops, Whitlam wanted to use Australia's continued military involvement as a lever to influence the Americans to bring the war to an end. Whitlam eventually called for the withdrawal of Australian conscripts but not our regular forces, as Calwell had done. He and Calwell clashed over this difference during the 1966 election campaign. Later Whitlam refused to lend his support to the Vietnam Moratorium movement. At the time the Australian left despaired at Whitlam's failure to unambiguously condemn Australia's involvement in Vietnam.

Labor was to pay a heavy price for cocking its snoot at the findings of pollsters over Vietnam. The Party was routed at the 1966 election when Vietnam was the dominant issue, helped by the recent and controversial visit of US President Lyndon Johnson. The primary vote fell from 45.5 per cent in 1963 to just under 40 per cent. Many, presaging arguments about Labor's failure to more strongly oppose John Howard's asylum-seeker policy in 2001, argue that this principled stand strengthened Labor and set it up for eventual victory in 1972. The facts, however, allow another interpretation. The loss in 1966 was so devastating that neither the steep political decline of the Coalition nor the electoral appeal of Labor's new leader, Whitlam, enabled Labor to make up the losses at the 1969 federal election. Despite a 7.1 per cent swing to Labor, Whitlam was still not able to win enough seats to form government. When Labor did win in 1972 it was with a majority of only nine seats, which was reduced to only five in the May 1974 election. It could be that the unworldliness of Calwell's and Cairns's opposition to the Vietnam War cost Labor the chance to govern during the economically propitious circumstances that preceded the era of stagflation of the 1970s. If the leadership in 1966 had lived to fight another day and held the Labor caucus together, would the outcome in 1969 have been different?

The Vietnam War led Cairns on to new political directions. While both Whitlam and Cairns aimed to refashion Australian society, their methods diverged. Whitlam wanted to do it through the state; Cairns through new social movements associated with the New Left. This is the great irony about Cairns; just at the time he was coming close to exercising real political power within the state he began to doubt the capacity of the state to effect real change. This phase of Cairns's life culminated in his leadership of the Vietnam Moratorium movement, which brought between seventy thousand and one hundred thousand people onto the streets of Melbourne on 8 May 1970. Ian Turner saw the success of the march as the rejection of the postwar con-

Many today idolise Whitlam for withdrawing the remaining Australian troops from Vietnam in 1972, abolishing conscription and releasing draft resisters from prison. But before becoming Prime Minister, Whitlam's opposition to the war was less enthusiastic.

servative political hegemony. It was a high point of Cairns's career and catapulted him to national prominence. But Max Teichmann put his finger on another irony—while the Moratorium movement and the left made Cairns's reputation, it also helped destroy him. The left had finally got what it wanted—a policy triumph and a national leader—but, never satisfied, it always demanded more and engaged in unremitting sabotage and personal attacks that drained Cairns's elan and dissipated their own momentum.

It was almost inevitable that Cairns's career as a minister would be a disappointment. For a while, however, he showed real promise and caused extreme consternation in the Australian establishment. Strangio argues that for a considerable portion of the life of the (albeit brief) Whitlam Government, Cairns was one of its most influential and effective leaders. He had lowered his sights and accepted the constraints of office, but in return for accepting the mixed economy he and his fellow ministers set out to put the wealth generated by the capitalist system to the use of the people. For a while it seemed to work, and Strangio contends that "the period December 1972 to May 1974 can be seen as the high-water mark of postwar social democracy in Australia". Cairns impressed people with his capacity for compromise and moderation. As Minister for Trade and Secondary Industry, he played a key role in steering the 25 per cent general tariff cut through a divided Cabinet—a decision that according to the *Australian Financial Review*, was "a watershed in Australian economic history".

In 1974 Cairns's career reached its zenith with his election as Deputy Prime Minister in May and, in November, Treasurer. With Whitlam's seeming withdrawal from economic decisions over the next twelve months, Cairns became the senior economic figure in the Government, using his popularity in the Caucus to force the Cabinet to adopt expansionary Keynesian policies. For a brief moment many regarded Cairns's role as similar to that of Paul Keating under Bob Hawke's Prime Ministership—as managing director to Whitlam's chairman of the board. Cairns combined with other members of Whitlam's large and unwieldy Cabinet to defeat Treasury's policy of combating inflation through unemployment and cuts to Labor's social agenda. In the 1974 Budget, outlays grew by 32.4 per cent, mostly off the large rise in income tax due to bracket creep caused by high levels of inflation. The Budget remained in surplus but only at one-tenth its level of the previous year. The commentators grew increasingly anxious about the direction of economic policy. A youthful Ken Davidson was one of the critics of Cairns's policy of pushing on with a high-spending reformist program in the face of spiraling inflation, warning that it would lead to a collapse in company profits and investment.

Such was Cairns's influence over economic affairs that Whitlam engineered his replacement of Frank Crean as Treasurer in November 1974. If Cairns was going to have power over economic policy then Whitlam wanted him to exercise responsibility as well. As Strangio remarks, this was probably the only time in Australia's history that a true man of the left had been so close to the centre of power. It represents perhaps the high-water mark of the Australian left, but the tide quickly retreated. Just as the left's man got so close to power, he surrendered it almost without a fight. Cairns's eyes and then mind were turned by Morosi, whose influence angered his comrades, cut his support in the Caucus and reduced his office to a pathetic shambles—which led to the 'cock-up' of signatures and letters that entangled him in the Loans Affair. He refused to surrender Morosi when her presence was dragging the Government into scandal. He allowed his son to mis-use his name for commercial advantage and embarrass the Government. His thinking took on mystical overtones, which was bound to distance him from his powerful Treasury Department. He displayed an unwillingness to retreat tactically as the stagflation crisis overwhelmed economic policy, refusing to contemplate a tough Budget in 1975. In short, as Strangio puts it, although Cairns had correctly forecast the entrenched conservative resist-

Cairns's eyes and then mind were turned by Morosi, whose influence angered his comrades, cut his support in the Caucus and reduced his office to a pathetic shambles—which led to the 'cock-up' of signatures and letters that entangled him in the Loans Affair.

ance encountered by Labor in government, he failed to take precautions to arm himself against it. In July 1975 he was sacked as Treasurer and soon after was removed from the Government altogether.

Jim Cairns was ahead of his time on many issues. He opposed the White Australia policy when it wasn't fashionable to do so. He pushed for a strong direct relationship with Asian countries—not mediated through US interests—well before Paul Keating. Even in his counter-culture phase he was thinking through issues that have subsequently become relevant. His interest in the alienating psychological impact of modern capitalism and his dreams of a post-industrial, post-capitalist age of strong local communities and personal fulfilment are gaining ground not only among the counter-culture movement but even quite mainstream varieties of 'third-way' thought. The growing realisation that there's more to life than career and money is a feature of the work of Anthony Giddens and social capital theorists. As society comes to terms with the rise of single parenting, two-income families and childcare, Cairns's ideas on the importance of the role of mothers in nurturing children don't look so wacky either (or at least wouldn't if they were stripped of their absurd Reichian philosophical clothes). They're in fact ideas that ordinary families and social and political commentators grapple with every day.

But despite being ahead of the community in so many areas, Cairns has turned out to be a largely negative role model for the Australian left. His demise raised some fundamental questions about the left's approach to power and the need for political realism. Perhaps a younger and less dreamy figure, having become Treasurer, would have been able to tack at the right time in 1975 and wait for a new breeze to fill his or her sails. If Cairns hadn't fluffed his moment in 1975 and the Government had been able to recover, he may have succeeded Whitlam as Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition. Some smart, hardheaded politics could have created big opportunities for the left, but Cairns gave up his offices without much of a fight, almost as if he'd been relieved of a great burden. This greatly annoyed his old supporters like Tom Uren.

Left figures in the Labor Party were to rise to prominence again during the Hawke and Keating governments, but as electoral realists and believers in the power of the state, not as dreamers who thought they could educate voters into accepting utopias. Brian Howe, who became Deputy Prime Minister, rivalled Jim Cairns as one of the most powerful leftists to make it in Australian politics, but he was a hardheaded and economically cautious social policy expert, not a romantic reformer. Although many left-wing trade union officials today oppose attempts to modernise the ALP by broadening its base and cutting direct union representation, most senior left-wing parliamentary figures support the modernising tendencies of Whitlam rather than Cairns. Today's left figures mix Whitlam's modernising drive and belief in the state, Howe's social policy expertise and economic caution, with a new post-industrial radicalism based on liberating national and individual potential through technology, skills and education, rebuilding community, and even exploring how we can tackle problems like loneliness and lack of personal fulfilment. Although we're unlikely to see the likes of Jim Cairns again, the fact that such agendas are creeping back into the left's language shows that his policy message may still have some relevance, but it appears that it was Whitlam, rather than Cairns, who won the battle for the soul of the ALP.

ENDNOTE

1. See Laurie Oakes, *Whitlam PM*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney 1973, pp.105–09.

Dennis Glover is speechwriter to the Leader of the Federal Opposition, Simon Crean.

essay / **JOANNE SCANLAN**

A FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS?

Whitlam and the *Blue Poles* metaphor

> (*Blue Poles*) is an abstract painting, with no reference to the world outside of the frame. What could it possibly say beyond the fact of paint on canvas?
>
> —Anthony White, 2001[1]

> A painting has a life of its own. I like to let it live.
>
> —Jackson Pollock, 1950[2]

JACKSON POLLOCK'S painting *Blue Poles Number 11, 1952* certainly has had a life of its own since its purchase by the (then named) Australian National Gallery in 1973. Its acquisition has been described as "the most contentious . . . public art purchase in Australia's history".[3] So much has been made of the painting that it is represented as a "metaphorical structure" in *The Garden of Australian Dreaming* at the new National Museum of Australia.[4] A metaphor for what? How could an American painting have anything to say about our identity as Australians?

Much of the meaning ascribed to *Blue Poles* was (and still is) deliberately contrived and manipulated. Ultimately, the controversy had less to do with the artwork itself than its acquisition. The opposition Liberal Party focused on this because it was politically expedient, while the Labor government wished to create an identity (for both itself and the nation) of enlightenment and progressiveness. This involved appropriation of the irresistible symbolism of the Jackson Pollock style and persona, but such appropriation distorted the truth and created an enduring and divisive mythology.

Was there animosity between the Liberal Party and the Australian National Gallery (ANG) prior to the Whitlam years? In 1973, the ANG was but a fledgling institution; in fact it wasn't officially opened until 1982. (Meantime, it housed its collection in a warehouse in Fyshwick, an industrial suburb of Canberra.) Although the idea of a national art gallery had existed since Federation, it was not acted upon until 1965, when Robert Menzies established the National Art Gallery Committee of Inquiry. The collecting of art was to begin almost from scratch, once an initial report had been completed.

Most of the earlier great art collections established overseas had been built around the concept of 'the masterpiece'. This was "frequently determined through a subjective aesthetic evaluation supported by tradition and notions of connoisseurship".[5] However, by the mid-sixties, an alternative philosophy of art collection was gaining popularity worldwide. This view was that art was a reflection of the society in which it was produced—"a collection of art, apart from being a collection of aesthetic objects, was also considered as a social document."[6]

The establishment of the Canberra collection was to reflect both of these philosophies. In 1966 the Chairman of the Committee, Sir Daryl Lindsay, recommended that the Gallery extend its collecting beyond Australia and have "special financial provision to acquire an outstanding work of art of any country or period".[7]

Modern American art would certainly be worthy of any collection aiming to be a 'social document'. And many art critics, over the previous thirty years, had used the word 'masterpiece' when describing Jackson Pollock's work. He was indisputably an artist of great renown. Although the answer was debatable, *Life* magazine had asked as far back as 1949: "Is he the greatest living painter in the United

States?"[8] Ten years later, *Life International* declared Abstract Expressionism "the most influential style of art in the world today" and named Pollock the "master of the school".[9] Robert Hughes calls Pollock "the most publicized and celebrated artist in American history".[10]

The man responsible for the later acquisition of *Blue Poles*, James Mollison, was appointed Acting Director of the ANG in 1971 by William McMahon. He had worked for several years in the Prime Minister's Department, in arts-related roles. Mollison's first purchase for the ANG was *Bobine*, an Alexander Calder sculpture, bought for $US90,000. According to NGA (the gallery's contemporary acronym) curators Michael Lloyd and Michael Desmond, *Bobine* "presaged a dramatic shift in the acquisition of modern art from Britain to the United States".[11] Mollison made his first trip overseas for the Gallery in May 1972. Through his contacts with a number of art dealers in New York, he organised the purchase of paintings by Willem de Kooning and Arshile Gorky, prominent members of the New York school of Abstract Expressionists.

The appreciation of modern American art by the Gallery was already very clear by the time the Whitlam government was elected in December 1972. As Barrett states: "Mollison had been after a Pollock for some time".[12] There was no discernible public debate about the Liberal government pulling a reluctant Australia in a particular cultural and political direction, through its sanctioning of such an art collection.

On 16 July 1973, the Acquisitions Committee recommended the purchase of *Blue Poles* in a submission to Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Although the Committee expected controversy over the $1.3 million price tag (at the time the highest price ever paid for an American painting), there was never much (real) doubt that it would prove a sound investment for the gallery. Says artist James Gleeson, who was chair of the Acquisitions Committee at the time: "(Modern art) arouses very strong emotions, for and against . . . I thought we were on safe ground with *Blue Poles*. I thought it would prove itself in time. Gough Whitlam agreed".[13] Gleeson continues: "It didn't take long for politics to rear its ugly head . . . I don't really know if the Federal Opposition really hated it, as they claimed. I think it was more a political manoeuvre."

'Political manoeuvre' it was. The interest of the ANG in *Blue Poles* was probably mostly as an example of groundbreaking, historically contentious art. Aesthetic judgement was taken away from the relative neutrality of experts and given to the Prime Minister. In the hands of politicians, the acquisition became a form of cultural colonisation—it was held up as something to believe in. It's worth noting the unusual circumstances of Whitlam's role in acquiring *Blue Poles*. It was unprecedented that a national leader should be so involved with the purchase of a work of art; Whitlam's approval was necessary for two reasons.

First, there was no separate arts portfolio in the first Whitlam ministry; it was covered by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.[14] Secondly, legislation to give the gallery autonomy in its purchasing decisions—*The National Gallery Act*—was being prepared and was not passed until June 1975.[15] However, Gough Whitlam was very comfortable in this role and was happy to lend his support to the purchase. We cannot underestimate the influence of Whitlam's own philosophy and personality. As Mark Latham says, the acquisition

> embodied all the key elements of Gough Whitlam's approach to public life: the embrace of internationalism, the pursuit of excellence, the importance of public goods and, in the face of unrelenting political reaction and controversy, an optimistic belief in the reason and rationality of the Australian people.[16]

Phillip Adams agrees with this, in a slightly less partisan way, when he says on the documentary *Poles Apart*:

> The painting was, in effect, irrelevant. It wasn't that Gough had a deep, deep passion for dribbly, dotty paintings. He had, however, a great love of the theatrical gesture. And the mere fact that this painting was seen to symbolise some sort of revolutionary spirit in America and was being opposed by a lot of—to say the least—recessive and backward-looking people, was enough for Gough.[17]

Here we arrive at the heart of the metaphoric meaning of the painting and of the name Jackson Pollock. In this public debate, as Donald Brook states: "traditional art was identified with ideological conservatism; modern art with enlightened social radicalism."[18] Pollock's art, in its genesis, was indeed revolutionary. He strived to make an individual statement and

Asked to sign a petition against *Blue Poles*, Patrick White responded: "You are the kind of person any creative Australian has been fighting against as long as I can remember; the aggressive philistine, often in disguise, who has held us back."

to break away from the established masters and influences. It is easy to see how irresistible Pollock would have been for the Labor government of early-seventies Australia (and for the party ever since).

Pollock's life story was one of humble beginnings, a slow rise to celebrity, difficulty coping with fame, then in 1956 a fatal car crash when drunk. It had all the hallmarks of a Hollywood drama. Michael Desmond says of a photo of Pollock, which was part of a 1949 *Life* magazine spread: "The image reeks of bad-ass attitude, a balding James Dean with a drip on his shoulder".[19] Desmond goes on to explain how "doggedness, desperation to succeed and openness to new approaches" enabled Pollock to challenge the supremacy of the European modern masters.

By the end of the forties, Pollock had absorbed all the lessons of the Europeans and had developed a unique style. He painted with "calculated abandon, applying paint directly from the tube, splattering and mixing techniques to affect a rude vitality that was seized on as distinctly American".[20] As Robert Hughes says: "Pollock became an exemplar of risk and openness . . . and forced American art onto an international stage".[21] The perceived parallels to Whitlamism are obvious. Graeme Turner considers the purchase of *Blue Poles* to have been a "deliberately provocative challenge",[22] as was Pollock's life as an artist.

What is ironic is that, internationally, the concept of 'revolution'—as applied to Abstract Expressionist art—was by 1973 both hackneyed and compromised. The contradiction of the Labor Party's position that it was supporting "enlightened social radicalism" lies not in the fact that Pollock was American (although this was a common enough complaint in the media) but in how Pollock's work had already been politically manipulated in his own country. Despite his spirit of rebellion, Pollock had become a 'darling' of the American media and of wealthy, influential philanthropists and The Museum of Modern Art in New York, which was (and still is) a powerful institution. In the 1940s the Chairman of Trustees "argued that the Museum could serve as a weapon of self-defence".[23] As Anthony White explains:

> During the Cold War, tours of American abstract painting—which included *Blue Poles*—were organised by the Museum to travel to Europe and Latin America . . . The aim of these exhibitions, similar to the cultural programs promoted by the CIA, was to promote international trade and to sell the idea of America as the land of freedom and individualism.[24]

The real effect of these exhibitions is that they hastened the demise of 'social realist' painting—"a kind of art that was often strongly critical of American-style capitalism".[25] In Italy, the leader of the Communist Party "condemned abstract art for its failure to engage with society or present a social message, declaring it to be the product of a decadent capitalist society".[26] However, by the end of the 1950s, leftist Italian critics were recanting. One stated "it is impossible not to accept [Pollock's] formidable and indubitable results . . . Pollock declares to us that painting has no need of external points of reference".[27] As White goes on to say: "the presence of paintings such as *Blue Poles* in Italy in the late 1950s helped prepare the way for a more favourable view of American society and of its influence in Europe".[28] This could be interpreted as the triumph of either Jackson Pollock's genius or of American imperialism. Either way, internationally, Pollock's work was well and truly accepted in all political quarters by the end of the 1950s.

Donald Brook argues strongly against the "myth that (the acquisition) was an act of cultural enlightenment performed on behalf of a visionary Australian left". He declares:

> On the contrary. Its deference to American cultural imperialism, its implicit endorsement of the virtue of individualism and the values of the marketplace, made it an act that would better have

> expressed the mind-set of the Australian Right. Paying too much for *Blue Poles* is just what Holt, McEwan, Gorton or McMahon would have done, if only they had been blessed with the wit for it. Under Whitlam's patronage it was—to put it politely—a deeply confused adventure.[29]

It may well be the case that Whitlam was leading Australia on a 'deeply confused adventure'. However, the fact remained that most Australians knew nothing of such things. Lindsay Barrett states: "In Australia . . . the only real certainty was that it had come from somewhere else".[30] He notes that "Australia was not visited by a touring exhibition of Abstract Expressionist paintings until 1967".[31] This was because of our distance from the United States and the fact that the large canvases had to travel by ship; our small population and relatively unimportant strategic status were also factors.

The 1967 exhibition, *Two Decades of American Painting*, showed in Melbourne and Sydney only. It greatly enthused Australian artists and critics, who felt that at last the 'avant-garde' had arrived in Australia, however late and however focused it now seemed to be on America. As Barrett notes, 'avant-garde art' had not been on Australia's cultural agenda since thirty-five years before when William Dobell had had to defend in court his *Portrait of Joshua Smith*.[32]

Blue Poles was probably always going to be difficult to 'sell' to a sometimes insular Australian people. Although open to change, Australians were not about to believe that American modern art was tantamount to the path to enlightenment. Australia may have been, finally, at a cultural crossroad but what did a huge, expensive, indecipherable American painting have to do with it?

Whitlam stated right from his first press conference on the matter that "Pollock is one of the great figures in modern American art and this is his masterpiece."[33] A month later in parliament, Doug Anthony, the leader of the Country Party, asked a question about the choice of *Blue Poles*, though he was not concerned about "how the painting was made or about the merits of it, which I cannot comprehend". Whitlam replied: "If Australian galleries were limited by the comprehension of the right honourable gentleman they would be very bare and archaic indeed."[34]

The debate quickly created a cultural and social divide. Patrick White was asked to sign a petition against the purchase of *Blue Poles* and wrote back to the woman concerned: "You are the kind of person any creative Australian has been fighting against as long as I can remember, the aggressive philistine, often in disguise, who has held us back."[35] Obviously the need was there in Australia for a breaking away from this perceived 'philistinism'. But to judge a nation's cultural progress by its willingness to invest in a single painting seems narrow, to say the least.

Although Pollock may not have really been what Whitlam's supporters wanted him to be, the parochial perspective was enough, as it always had been for most Australians. Pollock's anarchic art and nonconformist personality—1940s-style—were enough to 'seal the deal' on symbolism and metaphor. Almost thirty years later, it is still said that the purchase was "emblematic of the government's desire to cut Australia free from Britain's apron strings and forge an identity of its own".[36] Amanda Dunn quotes the director of *Poles Apart* (2001), Judy Rymer, who goes so far as to say "it was an announcement of a new direction in Australian politics".[37]

This view is in no measure universally accepted. Brook comments that there were some in the Labor Party at the time who warned "that a transfer of allegiance from the politics of London and the art of Paris to the politics of Washington and the art of New York was a change in fashion accessories, not a paradigm shift in character or culture".[38] The symbolism of *Blue Poles* (in its Australian context) can be seen as simplistic and lacking real meaning. Sebastian Smee discusses the projection of "false consciousness" onto paintings and other artworks and of:

> the disease that still afflicts cultural life in Australia more than any other . . . an inability to separate questions of national identity from an appreciation of the arts . . . (even though) art isn't suited to carrying such burdens. The fact that even an abstract painting by an American can be called on to do the work of symbolising Australia's national consciousness only shows how deep the malaise runs.[39]

Australia's war of words over *Blue Poles* was vitriolic and passionate; as time went by it was less obviously about art and more about economics and politics. Barrett notes that the *Blue Poles* debate saw "loose alliances formed between the Labor government and . . . the Fairfax press on one side, and traditional working class Labor voters, tabloid

editors and conservative politicians on the other".[40] These alliances were not just concerned with the *Blue Poles* question and they would prove to be lasting.

Barrett says, when "the tabloids turned against Whitlam with a vengeance in 1975 they were read sympathetically by many of Labor's traditional voters, fed-up as they were with the indulgent 'trendiness' of Whitlamism".[41] Barrett maintains that a similar 'defection' caused the electoral defeat of Paul Keating—"Whitlam's political and cultural inheritor"—in 1996. Graeme Turner (while praising Whitlamism generally) states that it "laid the foundations for . . . the distrust of elites we see revived in Hansonism and the decline of public faith in the vision of government as reflected in the more mainstream political attitudes".[42]

Today, *Blue Poles* is thought to be worth upwards of $A40 million. It did not leave Australia again until it played a triumphant role in the 1998–1999 Pollock retrospective exhibition in New York and London. *Time Magazine* enthused: "It's the show of the century"; the *New York Times*, "A landmark . . . You live for exhibitions like this".[43] Back in Australia, it's still a "destination work"[44] for the National Gallery of Australia, attracting 650,000 visitors each year.

Gough Whitlam's ownership of the painting's mythology is as strong as ever—the current member for his old seat of Werriwa has a reproduction of it on his living-room wall.[45] The idea of *Blue Poles* as a reasoned, even safe, choice does not sit well with our collective consciousness of Whitlamism. Because of this, the ironies of Australia's (eventual) self-congratulatory acceptance of America's long-revered son are largely unexamined. This is probably a good thing for those who still want to believe in the possibility of a progressive, independent Australia.

ENDNOTES

1. Anthony White, NGA curator, quoted in 'After *Blue Poles*' (edited speech), *Art on View*, Spring, 2001, p.46.
2. Jackson Pollock, interviewed by Hans Namuth, quoted in Ann Stewart, 'The power and passion of Pollock', *The Canberra Times*, 24 November 1998, p.15.
3. Susan McCulloch, 'What a difference 25 years makes', *The Weekend Australian* (Review), 25–26 July 1998, p.4.
4. Susan Gough Henly, 'Pieces in the puzzle of Australia', *International Herald Tribune*, 9 June 2001, p.7.
5. Sasha Grishin, 'Art works as a ticket to pride', *The Canberra Times*, 31 July 1999, p.5.
6. ibid.
7. Lindsay Barrett, *The Prime Minister's Christmas card: Blue Poles and cultural politics in the Whitlam era*, Power Publications, Sydney, 2001, p.29.
8. ibid, quoted on p.82.
9. ibid, quoted on p.78.
10. Robert Hughes, 'Dappled glories', *Time*, 16 November 1998, p.85.
11. Michael Lloyd and Michael Desmond, quoted in Lindsay Barrett, p.30.
12. ibid, p.31.
13. Glen Williams, 'I was there' (interview with James Gleeson), *Sun Herald* (Sunday Life), 1 July 2001, p.35.
14. Lindsay Barrett, p.18.
15. Edward Gough Whitlam, '*Blue Poles* comes home' (transcript of speech at NGA, 21 July 1999), NGA Research Library folio.
16. Mark Latham, quoted in 'After *Blue Poles*' (edited speech), *Art on View*, Spring, 2001, p.45.
17. Phillip Adams quoted in Judy Rymer (director), *Poles Apart: The Blue Poles controversy*, Ronin Films, Canberra, 2001.
18. Donald Brook, 'Two myths about *Blue Poles*', *Artlink*, vol.21, no.2, 2001, p.72.
19. Michael Desmond, 'Return of the native', *Art Monthly Australia*, no.117, March 1999, p.15.
20. ibid.
21. Robert Hughes, 'Dappled glories', p.86.
22. Graeme Turner, 'Poles apart', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Spectrum), 9 June 2001, p.12.
23. Anthony White, quoted in 'After *Blue Poles*' (edited speech), p.46.
24. ibid, p.46.
25. ibid, p.47.
26. ibid, p.47.
27. Quoted by Anthony White, 'After *Blue Poles*', p.47.
28. Anthony White, quoted in 'After *Blue Poles*', p.47.
29. Donald Brook, 'Two myths about *Blue Poles*', p.72.
30. Lindsay Barrett, p.40.
31. ibid, p.90.
32. ibid, p.96.
33. NGA Research Library folio: transcript of press conference, September 1973.
34. Edward Gough Whitlam, '*Blue Poles* comes home'.
35. Patrick White, quoted in Whitlam, ibid.
36. Amanda Dunn, 'How *Blue Poles* polarised Australia', *The Age* (Green Guide), 25 January 2001, p.14.
37. ibid.
38. Donald Brook, 'Two myths about *Blue Poles*', p.71.
39. Sebastian Smee, 'Poles apart: a painting and our identity', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 January 2001, p.16.
40. Lindsay Barrett, p.39.
41. ibid, p.39.
42. Graeme Turner, 'Poles apart', p.12.
43. Quoted in Ann Stewart, 'The power and the passion of Pollock', *The Canberra Times*, 24 November 1998, p.15.
44. Sasha Grishin, 'Artworks as a ticket to pride', p.5.
45. Mark Latham, quoted in 'After *Blue Poles*', p.46.

Joanne Scanlan is a former secondary school teacher. She currently works as a freelance editor and writer.

fiction / **BEN AARON**

THE STRANDED PEOPLE OF 11 MOTI BAGH LANE

There is a neem in the centre of the guesthouse garden. At midday, beneath the tree's great arching bows, its trunk is like a wall between two pools of shade. Marianne shelters in one. Georges in the other. They are, for the moment, invisible to one another. She is sitting on the edge of a rattan chair, hunched over a low table, writing in a diary. He is lying on the grass, reading a newspaper. His head is propped up on a chair cushion. On a table next to him, there is a bottle of Rosy Pelican beer and a glass.

In her diary, Marianne is recording the first day of her stranding at 11 Moti Bagh Lane. At dinner that evening she seems preoccupied and distressed, not just tired and jet-lagged. She gestures a wordless grace over her plate, and having done so apparently thinks it only courteous to explain to her immediate neighbours that she is a Christian, and incidentally, saying no more than for the sake of politeness, a German and a schoolteacher. Otherwise, she says nothing. Neither does she the next evening. Nor the next. She sits at the common table, but apart from its company, and responds only to the arrival of her food, for which she silently and unfailingly, though with no indication of routine, but rather of thanks original to each meal, asks God's blessing.

Georges is the navigator of number eleven's dinner table conversation. He is a Seychelles' Creole: a motor mechanic by trade, "trained on Fords". By profession, he is a car workshop manager, at one time or another in every big city south of the Sahara and north of the Kalahari. For the past several years he has been with UNESCO: setting up fire and ambulance brigades and training their mechanics. It's a year here and two there. But that's all right. He has no fixed place: a widower, for a while, yet not so long a while that she isn't still in conversation, "my wife, Marie Antoinette"—spoken of in the past tense, but the noun unmodified by 'late', so that only an attentive listener could have said with certainty that Marie Antoinette was the deceased and not her successor.

She was a Goan. Georges came to Delhi from Goa where he had been visiting his in-laws, for the first time since Marie Antoinette's death. But after a week or so he had enough. He went to Bombay and asked at the UNESCO office if there was a job for him, anywhere but in India. There was: in Conakry. He flew to Delhi to collect at UNESCO headquarters his *laissez-passer* for Guinea and an air ticket. But a week later neither had arrived; and he, exchanging luxury for company, shifted from a five-star hotel to the guesthouse at 11 Moti Bagh Lane.

Though they eat separately at the same table in the evening, and during the days of their stranding shelter separately from the same sun, there are times during which Marianne talks to Georges, even seeks him out, recognising, in spite of his dinner table affability, and perhaps because he calls a dead woman "my wife", another sorrower. Georges knows that Marianne is unhappy, and he knows why.

"Simple. She is unhappy because she did a foolish thing. It can be undone. But she can't undo it. So others are undoing it for her. But her heart won't

let her understand this, and so her misery increases. What a thing. An educated woman, a European, a schoolteacher falls in love with a Sikh taxi-*wallah*. A rogue! Look here: I carry a little torch. Do you know why? To check their meters, at night. It does no good. Even their meters are crooked. Everything about them is crooked."

Except in Georges's books, where all Sikhs are taxi drivers, the Sikh in question is not. Rather, he is the university-educated son of a well-to-do farm family; a political activist in the cause of Sikh separatism; in the Indian government's lexicon of people it dislikes, an 'extremist': someone who kills policemen or, more likely, gets killed in an 'encounter' staged by policemen. So, he fled to Germany. Some of Marianne's good works were with political refugees. She met Gulab Singh, and fell in love with him. A divorcee, she had been unmarried for many years. Gulab showed her a deposition from his wife, on Indian legal paper, suing him for divorce on grounds of desertion. But he did not desert her, Marianne insists. His flight from India was his act of faith and a test of hers. His wife deserted him.

"Women are usually smarter than men," according to Georges. "But when they are in love they are more foolish. Tell them anything that they want to believe, and they will believe it." Gulab asked Marianne to marry him after his divorce. Yes, but only after he became a Christian: that was Marianne's condition. Her pastor advised her not to impose it. If Gulab loved her and wanted to marry her, and if he was a good man and she accepted that fidelity to his faith was an indication of his goodness, why insist that he become something else? That advice so troubled Marianne, the argument more sinful for its reasonableness, that she left the Evangelical Church and became a Baptist.

In her insistence on Gulab's conversion, Marianne was not entirely unmotivated by caution. To be sure, her primary concern was with the safety of Gulab's soul, for which she, as his 'intended' and a Christian woman, accepted responsibility. But there was also in her condition a test for Gulab. Did he love her enough to share her faith? She had heard stories of Sikh refugees marrying German women in order to get German passports; and then disappearing, back to their byzantine, incomprehensible Punjabi politics, their wives and children. So, to make a metaphor of Georges's mistrust of Sikh taxi-*wallahs*: Marianne had at least tried to check Gulab's meter.

They read the New Testament together. She taught him to read it in German. He taught her to read it in Punjabi. They read it together in English. At some advanced stage in this divine courtship, Gulab Singh gave his life to Jesus; and Marianne, in exaltation, gave herself to Gulab. All this happened shortly before the Indian government granted Gulab an amnesty to return to his village. For about a year he and Marianne corresponded regularly. Then she received no reply to her letters. Four, five, six, a dozen letters, and no reply. She wrote every week, twice a week, daily: frantic, imploring letters. She sent wires, to Gulab and to his family, often, more often than she could afford on her teacher's salary. But there was never any reply. She flew to Delhi.

From there she planned to travel to Gulab's village. But they won't let her on the train or the bus. Punjab is closed to foreigners. It is a dangerous place. On the day of her arrival in Delhi, a police superintendent was shot dead in a town not far from Gulab's village. It is less than three hundred kilometres from Delhi. To get there Marianne flew six thousand kilometres, from Frankfurt. And now she is stranded at 11 Moti Bagh Lane. She spends days waiting in the corridors of the Home Ministry. If, at Marianne's invitation, the ministry officially informs her, Gulab agrees to meet her in Chandigarh, Punjab's capital, she will be permitted to travel there. But Gulab doesn't agree. He doesn't respond to her invitation. Marianne wires him twice. No reply. She has letters of introduction to Protestant ministers in Delhi. They are sympathetic, but unhelpful. They do nothing. Nor does the pastor at the German embassy. None of them, Georges says, wants to be a party to breaking the poor woman's heart. They know that Gulab's reply to Marianne's entreaties is in his silence. They want Marianne to understand the terrible import of what Gulab is *not* saying, to accept it and go home. But to her—Christian, German, schoolteacher—silence is only ambiguous, indeterminate and, as such, hopeful.

So, she continues to implore the assistance of bureaucrats and churchmen. And more and more, they ignore her, mock her anguish with transparent evasiveness, demonstrate by their apparent indifference to her persistent entreaties, their contempt for

her failure as a woman to respond to the finality of Gulab's rejection with resignation, defiance, shame, bitterness, scorn, anger, vengefulness, anything but dogged incomprehension.

Georges invites Marianne into the dinner table's conversations: gently, circumspectly, so that as easily as she lets pass the water pitcher she can his invitation. Some evenings she takes it up. Her English is halting, and Georges protects her from interruption and gives her words. Sometimes, he can coax her on to gaiety. Then, laughter makes discernible what in her grief she hides: clear blue eyes; the outline of her breasts, hidden under *kamiz* and shawl; strands of long black woman's hair, shaken from the fastness of their knot's pinned moorings. But there are evenings when she lets the invitation pass. Then Georges carries it from her with the same gentleness that he extended it. On one such evening, and not the first, they sit talking together, long after the dinner table was cleared. Marianne had been rebuffed, again: kept waiting all day in someone's office, and then told that he was too busy to see her, and come back tomorrow. Georges takes her hand, and whatever he meant to say, he says, "you are a courageous woman". She almost smiles, wearily, as she might have on discovering from a student that what she assumed to be self-evident was only so to her. "I am not at all courageous," she says, "I only long for Gulab." Tears rush to Georges's eyes.

When Marie Antoinette was pregnant with their first son, she returned to Goa and never left it. Georges went to work in Dar Es Salaam and then Nairobi. The longing brought him back to Marie Antoinette. Another son was born. Georges begged and bullied her to come and live in Africa with him. He had plenty of money. Wherever he worked, they could have a car, a nice house, servants. She said no. Families don't live out of tea chests and suitcases, in rented houses and flats, a year here and two years there. Families live in their families. He abused her, accused her of caring more for their sons than she did for him. She said no. She was keeping a family for him. He threatened to take a mistress, have lovers, go with whores. She said that he would do as he pleased. Except for going to mass, Marie Antoinette took to wearing no costume other than a shapeless cotton shift and rubber thongs. The fancy dresses that Georges brought back from Dakar and Abidjan, and the jewellery, the perfume she put away for her daughters-in-law to be. He told her about the beautiful women in Lagos and Accra. She said that she didn't care about beautiful women, and it was his business if he did. But he didn't. He only longed. His life took its irregular rhythm from his longing. Africa took him away and the longing for Marie Antoinette brought him back.

After she died the longing didn't stop. Only its rhythm. Then the longing drove him on fitfully from job to job, city to city. He signed up with UNESCO because the job kept him moving. When the longing tore at him, there was always some bright, ambitious young fellow whom Georges could bring up quickly, train his arse off, then leave the workshop to him and move on. But lately Georges had been lasting in places. The longing seemed to come less often in spasms of pain. There was a dull, enervating ache now, with him always.

UNESCO rings. Georges's *laissez-passer* has arrived. His air tickets are booked. He tells the resident director that he waited long enough for UNESCO, and now UNESCO can bloody well wait for him. He has business in Delhi. He has business with Marianne. He has a plan for contacting Gulab Singh. Will Marianne allow him to speak to some people? She says, yes. Georges goes to the landlady of the guesthouse. Does she know the name of the local taxi stand's proprietor? She doesn't. Is he a Sikh? She assumes so: most of his drivers are Sikhs. When the stand is rung, do taxis come reliably and promptly? Usually, yes. Has the landlady heard guests complain about being cheated by drivers from the stand, or propositioned by them to change money or buy the services of prostitutes? She has heard no such complaints.

Georges walks to the taxi stand and introduces himself to the proprietor. He is a small-businessman in the taxi and hire-car trade. But for his Sikh's get-up, he is indistinguishable from his counterparts in every town in which Georges has worked. Georges tells him what he does for a living. The proprietor

orders tea. They talk about Morrises and Fiats, although the proprietor knows and Georges knows that he knows that he hasn't come to talk, but that they are talking only to see if they speak the same language. Can they do business together? They can. Georges wants to hire a car with the stand's smartest and most reliable driver, to deliver a message to Gulab Singh's village and return to Delhi with a reply. The proprietor knows the village. His is in the same district. Georges tells him the nature of the message. The proprietor says that he can arrange things. They agree on a price. It's high. Georges returns to Marianne. He is afraid that she will object to his plan's diversion from regular channels. But she doesn't object. Only because she doesn't know what else to do, Marianne perseveres through regular channels, but she knows that they will never take her to Gulab. How much will Georges's plan cost? He is prepared for the question. He halves the sum and asks Marianne to please take it as a gift. She will not. She will take it only as a loan. He agrees. Together, but in Marianne's hand and in the style and language of all her letters to Gulab Singh, she and Georges compose this message:

Lieber Gulab,

I hope that this letter finds you and your family in good health and prosperity. I am now in Delhi, but I am not permitted to come to you in Punjab. I have sent you many letters and wires, from Germany and here. But I have had to none of these your reply. So, now I am sending a messenger. His name is _____. I have given him my ring so that you will recognise it and know that this letter is certainly from me.

I have only to ask you three questions. Are you still a Christian? Are you finally divorced? Am I still your intended? I pray to God that you should answer, yes. If my prayers are answered, please come with _____ to me in Delhi. Or if you cannot for some reason come now, please give to him a message for me in your own handwriting to arrange within a fortnight our meeting in Chandigarh.

If God does not answer my prayer, and you say no to my questions, please return to _____ the little cross that I gave you when you were baptised, or write to me a small note saying that you will not marry me.

But on my knees, I beg you to give this letter some reply. I beg you in the name of Jesus, to whom you had once given your life. I beg you for Marianne, who gave you completely her love and offered you her life. Gulab, *meine Rose*, I do not want to live without you. But if I must, then I will—for God, for myself and my children. But please do not continue to make my life a misery with your silence. Say yes or say no. I suffer from your silence, and already I have suffered much.

Herzliche Gruesse,
Marianne

P.S. Please read this letter carefully, Gulab. I have tried to write in good English. But neither is it my language nor yours.

The next day, the taxi-stand proprietor's chosen messenger arrives: his son, Harkishen Singh. Georges introduces him to Marianne. Tea is served in the garden. Barely hidden in the politeness of its tone, Georges's conversation with Harkishen has the substance of a job interview. Isn't Georges an expert judge of young men? That he judges this young man favourably is clear to Marianne after only a few minutes. She nods her approval to Georges, and excuses herself from the men's company. She and Georges agree that it would be best if he by himself instructs her messenger.

Georges asks Harkishen Singh to read the letter that he is to deliver, and tells him enough about Marianne's and Gulab's courtship for Harkishen to understand what he is reading. Then to make him understand that he carries a serious message and not some foreign woman's fantasy, Georges shows Harkishen some of Gulab's aerograms from Marianne's collection and her photocopy of his wife's divorce petition. As Marianne described Gulab to him, Georges describes Gulab to Harkishen. Except for his eyes! Harkishen is to pay particular attention to Gulab's eyes. Georges will ask him about them when Harkishen returns to Delhi. Of Georges's plotting this is the *pièce de résistance*. Gulab's eyes are of different colours: the right, more green than grey; the left, more grey than green.

Finally, and for whatever good it will do, Georges asks Harkishen to treat his mission with a man-of-the-world's discretion.

Marianne dates her letter, fits "Harkishen Singh" into its blank spaces, puts it into an envelope addressed to Gulab Singh and seals it. Georges gives Harkishen the letter, Marianne's ring and half the sum of rupees payable to his father. He will get the balance when he returns to Delhi. That is to be within a fortnight. If there is some delay, Harkishen is to phone or wire at Georges's expense. Then having shaken Harkishen's hand and seen him off, Georges returns to Marianne. He feels satisfied with the arrangements, pleased with his cleverness, reasonably certain that he provided for every contingency.

He didn't. Harkishen Singh returns to the guesthouse in a few days. He went to Gulab Singh's village. But he never saw Gulab. Gulab wasn't there. He is working in Canada, according to his father. He knows that during his son's exile, he was befriended by a German woman. But that's all he knows. Harkishen opened Marianne's letter and read it out to Gulab's father in roughly translated Punjabi. He said that there is some mistake. Perhaps the German woman misunderstands. Gulab is certainly not a Christian but a proper Sikh with untrimmed hair and beard. Hadn't he fought against that accursed widow's *sarkar* in Delhi, and been forced into exile because he is a faithful Sikh? And certainly, Gulab is married and, more, father to four of the old man's grandchildren.

He called to Gulab's wife, and introduced her to Harkishen. Perhaps she knows more than her father-in-law. Yes, after Gulab fled to Germany, she went to live with her parents and filed a deposition suing for divorce. But these are only the routine measures taken by the wives of 'extremists' to discourage police harassment. Clearly, there is some misunderstanding. A little Christian cross? She didn't remember seeing one among her husband's things. He brought home so many trinkets from Germany.

Georges feels sick with shame. Marianne's search for Gulab was so singularly focused on his village that Georges completely overlooked the obvious possibility of Gulab not being there, of his being somewhere else—in a world where Sikhs are everywhere—other than in some piss-hole of an Indian village. There is not a shred of evidence to substantiate Harkishen's story. It may be true. Or he may have made the whole thing up: having neither met Gulab's father nor his wife, nor gone to their village, nor, for that matter, ever driven out of Delhi. One could no more trust their odometers than their meters. Georges knows that Marianne understands all this as well as he does. He took Marianne's trust and paid with his money and hers for what? To play the fool? To ask to be tricked by some taxi driver whose meter Georges would have questioned over a Rs 20 fare? He turns from Marianne's eyes and faces away.

The neem's shadow, in late afternoon, folds in dense, unbroken shade that half of the guesthouse garden in which this drama is being played. Marianne motions to Harkishen to return her ring and her letter. She puts the ring back on its finger. The letter she tears in half, then half again and again, and stacks the pieces neatly on the table next to her. *Genug ist genug.* That evening, she and Georges dine by themselves, in the Black Marble Room at the Shah Jahan Hotel.

She went to Conakry with him. Not as a lover, she insisted, but as a dear friend. As his "intended", said Georges. And why not? To the questions unanswered by Gulab in Marianne's letter to him, she knows what Georges's answers would be. He is a Christian, or at least a Roman Catholic. He is free to marry her. Gulab had been her 'intended'. But what had she been to him? She has no doubt but that she is Georges's 'intended'. Was Georges's caring for her born of compassion, our imitation of God's perfect love; or was it, so marked by its imperfections, the ordinary love of a man for a woman? Perhaps that is one question too many. For Marianne, Georges has no questions. But to one that he hinted at so many times to Marie Antoinette and in all those years received no hint of an answer, he knows what Marianne's answer would be. Yes, she, too, has longed.

Ben Aaron is an author of non-fiction in the field of modern Indian studies.

Planted on probability

FAY ZWICKY

When asked if there was an Australian book that had changed my life I hedged and bantered defensively, reluctant to admit that I didn't meet any serious Australian literature until my late teens. Apart from children's novels (Mrs Aeneas Gunn, Frank Dalby Davidson) and the poems of Banjo Paterson and Adam Lindsay Gordon, Australian books weren't on the middle-class female menu. The only novels available during the war came poorly bound, on coarse paper in featureless drab jackets: dry, male-oriented, set in the waterless outback or on desolate farmsteads. Talk, such as it was, took place in pubs, at the race track, on mine sites, at union meetings and there was a lot of fighting and bellicose boasting. Not my scene at all, and I couldn't wait to discover what that was or if it actually existed.

How and why do we gravitate towards certain books? Do we choose the book or does it choose us? François Mauriac thought our choices were not accidental, that all our sources were interconnected, and that temperament and emotional development determined the books towards which our curiosity moved us. Thinking about it later, I decided that only life can change a life. A book can, at most, only nudge into consciousness what's already germinating. The best age for a voracious reader's transformation is probably twelve or thirteen when you're at your most malleable. If, like me, you'd been a budding romantic who'd endured the torment of a musical upbringing with its long hours of solitude and for whom the strain of public performance was an introvert's nightmare, you, too, might have looked to literature for confirmation of a shaky identity or as sanction for rebellious stirrings.

Reading was the great escape route, the chance to live intensely or to opt for submergence, forgetfulness, for furtive migration via the imagination, to leave home and settle unfettered in a world of one's own choosing. To be no-one, to have no name, with the limitless possibilities of the orphan and the changeling. Anywhere but home. Anyone but me. In the opacity of the foreign, all specific references to yourself are blurred and you're free to provide your own outline to that shapeless blob of protoplasm you imagine yourself to be. The fate of the shadowy outsider, the noble despised figure of the One who was Different was usually where my sympathies were narcissistically engaged in both life and literature.

Wanting to write myself, the cold little virgin heart needed educating. The lesson that male writers to whom I extended adoration, awe, and total ignorance seemed to be offering was the need to live untainted by what we call Life.

No messy relationships, families, children, trivial distractions—only monkish dedication. Ahem. This wasn't going to be my scene either but there seemed to be no choice if you were naive enough to be a communicant at the shrine of the Great, that curiously dated reminder of Australian provincialism at the time.

You postmodernists can snicker, but when Goethe pontificated: "In order to be a great writer, you must kill off the romantic in yourself," I believed him. Life and exposure to *Madame Bovary* would eventually perform this murder without much exertion on my part. What I didn't know till much later was that, as an 82-year-old, revered by an endless stream of visitors to Weimar, Goethe fell in love with an 18-year-old girl and reverted to the soft-headed languisher of *The Sorrows of Werther*. Like Flaubert, he preached solitude yet practised cohabitation when the need arose.

I trusted Henry James, the James I thought I knew from the elderly perfection of his later novels, giving precedence to Art over Life. But I was forgetting that he, too, was once young and

unconfident and had a full head of hair. That he'd had a breakdown and had spent barren months confined to a couch. That his deepest sadness lay in his inability to live out his desires—to live, whatever the consequences. Though I didn't know it, his real message was never to venerate what is complete, marmoreal, burnished and whole. Never to be fooled by the stunning perfection of the finished product. Never to worship ripe art or the fully-fledged artist but to be young while young, awkward, ungainly, crude, and cherish one's ignorance and naiveté. It was Henry Handel Richardson's brave, flawed first novel, *Maurice Guest*, which appeared on the English syllabus in my second year at university that acted as the necessary antidote to my paralysing homage to perfection.

I first saw her name on the spine of my grandfather's copy of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* which stood next to two hardback volumes of short stories by Henry Lawson. My immigrant grandfather who arrived from Lithuania in 1870 knew that the most direct way to learn about the mores of his adopted country was through its writers. My mother, born in Australia in 1907 and secure in belonging, enjoyed the freedom to daydream past the limits of utilitarian survival. Always a romantic Francophile, she possessed the complete set of Guy de Maupassant's short stories, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and *Resurrection*, the Brontës, *Madame Bovary*, and shock, horror—Isadora Duncan's autobiography. They were about women who sought love and passion, defying convention in all their folly and vanity and, more often than not, coming to a sticky end. I wanted to be part of their daring yet felt too removed from their glamorous orbit.

Apart from the fact that the hero was male, the bridge to that glamour was to be *Maurice Guest*, the first Australian novel to fire my imagination because it was preoccupied with art and lives unlike any I'd yet met within my own country. Reading towards self-discovery in much the same spirit as that in which Richardson wrote it, I found this passionate *Künstlerroman* riveting. With its uneven ironies and raw edges it told how the young provincial Maurice Guest went to Leipzig to further his musical training. How he became obsessed with the exotic and worldly Australian, Louise Dufrayer (still in love with but abandoned by the Nietzschean genius Schilsky) and how this ill-starred relationship would eventually lead to his suicide. Not the least of my interest arose from my own long mother-dominated musical apprenticeship.

Set in the 1890s, Richardson, an exile by nature well before leaving Australia, was drawing on her own experiences as a self-doubting music student in Leipzig and the rich musical life of the period: students from all over the world, God-like teachers, concerts, recitals, operas, visiting musical celebrities. All combined to form an animated backdrop to the actions of the central characters. It was of special fascination to me that my paternal grandmother, Harriet Wittkowski, born in 1874 in Ballarat, was sent to study music at the Leipzig Conservatorium at the same time as Henry Handel Richardson. I believe that they met for both studied composition and harmony with the same teachers. Unfortunately, my grandmother died in 1951, the year before I read *Maurice Guest* and I wasn't sufficiently aware of the questions I might have asked. Missing such an opportunity has always been a source of regret.

For the colonial writer, to be concerned with youthful dissatisfactions and unrealised ideals used to be regarded as indulgence, immaturity a luxury afforded the very few. Even to set one's goals in youth was considered priggish and conceited in Anglo-Saxon culture. In French literature, the young prig is taken at his own valuation as we see in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et Le Noir*. Flaubert's *L'Éducation Sentimentale* is generally admired because the French respect the notion of the gradual formation of the mature personality. They are also interested in the formation and development of the artist. But Richardson grew up in a community where the biography of an imagination, especially that of the female, embarrassed readers, precluding a sympathetic response.

That she was aware of and sensitive to this is clear in the conclusion she drew from the teacher's reaction to Laura's story in *The Getting of Wisdom*:

> In your speech, your talk with others, you must be exact to the point of pedantry, and never romance or draw the long bow; or you would be branded as an abominable liar. Whereas, as soon as you put pen to paper, provided you kept one foot planted on probability, you might lie as hard as you liked: indeed, the more vigorously you lied, the louder would be your hearer's applause.

This was a lesson painfully learnt not only by Richardson but by others who followed her either as literal exiles or expatriated through temperamental bias. Looking for ways to get beyond the pedantic exactness of the literal-minded is still as much a creative issue for the writer as it ever was. Laura's subjection to such suppression initiated the definition of a problem confronting all writers: how to mark the boundaries between fact and fiction without drawing too long a bow, and how to keep the balance between moral and imaginative truth.

To have formulated these problems and discerned other cultural complexities in isolation was a remarkable feat, and I've always been grateful to Henry Handel Richardson for extending my insight into the moral implications of the artist's adjustment as an individual within the collective. She pioneered an area of human experience reaching beyond national limits: I was only too ready for what she had to offer and received it thankfully.

Fay Zwicky is a poet, short fiction writer, essayist and author of The Gatekeeper's Wife *(Brandl & Schlesinger).*

Reading *Coonardoo*

ENZA GANDOLFO

> *Literature . . . is humanity thinking aloud—communicating its experience of all that is, holding a great continuous discussion throughout the ages and across the world.*
>
> —Dorothy Green

In the 1970s when I first read Prichard's novel *Coonardoo*, I had never slept under the stars; never seen dusty red plains or the chalk-white trunks of trees beside a dry creek bed. The first kangaroos I saw were behind zoo enclosures—I never saw them do their devil dance in the twilight. But the novel's impact was not only due to Prichard's ability to bring a 'foreign' landscape to life for a city teenager—most importantly, for me, this was the first novel I had read that attempted to tell the story of an Aboriginal woman.

Set on the cattle station, Wytaliba, in the north of Western Australia, *Coonardoo* is essentially the story of life on the station and the relationship between the white owners, Mrs Bessie and her son Hugh, and the Aboriginal people who work for them as domestics, farm hands and stockmen. The novel opens with Coonardoo, a young Aboriginal girl who has grown up with Hugh. We see Hugh leave the station for boarding school in the city through Coonardoo's eyes and understand that there is a special relationship between the two children. By the time Hugh returns as an adult many years later, Coonardoo is a married woman with a child. When Hugh's mother dies, it is Coonardoo who comforts and cares for him; they make love once during that time and Coonardoo falls pregnant. She bears him a son. Years later, after Hugh's wife, Mollie, has left him and Coonardoo's husband, Warieda, has died, Hugh takes Coonardoo as his woman to stop other Aboriginal men claiming her and taking her away from Wytaliba but he never touches her again.

It was obvious that Hugh was a good and decent man and that he loved Coonardoo, but love and marriage between black and white were not acceptable—"A man doesn't love a gin, not a white man."[1]—not acceptable to Hugh or his mother and not acceptable to Prichard's readers.

Conscientious young teachers who taught me about the evils of racism focused mainly on South Africa and apartheid. There were also my own experiences of discrimination (much milder versions of course), as the daughter of Italian migrants, picked on as a wog and a dago. I must have had some knowledge of the plight of Aboriginal Australians but I could not understand how the white South Africans could treat their black neighbours as if they were less than human and did not believe that such hatred and fear could exist in Australia.

The philosopher Rorty said:

> Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and the humiliation of other unfamiliar sorts of people . . . This process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of detailed description of what we ourselves are like. This is a task not for theory but for genres such as . . . the novel.[2]

Rorty's premise, that the novel allows us to see others as 'one of us' and to identify with characters whom we normally see as different and 'other', means that the novel can bring us closer to an understanding of the world that occurs for other people than any other genre. Certainly, as a reader, this is my experience; on the whole the books that have challenged my

view of the world have been fictional works.

I was fifteen when I read *Coonardoo*. The young woman I was then was both a romantic and an idealist. I believed, though there was little evidence in my own real world, that true love could conquer all. As I read *Coonardoo*, I hoped and longed for Hugh to overcome the racism, to stand up to his neighbours, to express his love for Coonardoo. It was more than the desire for a fairytale happy ending; I understood that if Hugh could not allow himself to love Coonardoo, to accept her as an equal, they would both be destroyed. More importantly, Hugh's failure—I understood Prichard's warning—was the failure of white Australia to come to "terms with Aborginial Australia"[3] and could lead to the destruction of both communities.

The novel made me angry—angry not only that prejudice could blind and keep Hugh from expressing his love but that so ingrained were the attitudes towards the Aborigines that even Prichard herself could only represent them as loyal and naive savages.

Re-reading the novel recently, it is obvious that while much has changed since the 1920s, and even since the mid-seventies when I first read the novel, much has stayed the same. I admire Prichard's courage. Writing this novel in 1929 was a brave act. It was a controversial novel when it was serialised in *The Bulletin* and many readers were offended. It was also courageous because Prichard exposed her own attitudes and prejudices as well as those of her characters. She gave us "a detailed description of what we ourselves [were] like", and forced me to question my own prejudices.

As a writer I especially admire her struggle to give Coonardoo a voice and understand now, though I didn't then, that it must have been difficult for a white writer to know what Coonardoo was thinking and feeling. It may be that Prichard, as Susan Lever argues, wanted the reader to be aware of these difficulties:

> . . . [that] by recognising the division between Coonardoo's language and the language of the novel, Prichard acknowledges that while her novel must adopt the Western language conventions there is an inexpressible order which it cannot code. The novel declares its awareness that its literary forms are inadequate to the experience of its subject.[4]

Certainly, I recognised the inadequacy of the text to represent Coonardoo and I was disappointed that even though the novel claimed to be Coonardoo's story, most of the time I could not hear Coonardoo's voice, I did not know what she thought, what she wanted, what she desired.

Did reading *Coonardoo* change my life? The memory of reading *Coonardoo* is framed with the smell of chalk dust, of the frankincense oil my best friend and I dabbed on our wrists and temples. With the sight of a long-haired blond boy from a neighbouring school who I loved from a distance, who I was sure would never love a chubby Italian girl. With the sound of my own voice raised in passionate debate and my belief that racism could be ended forever. Thinking about *Coonardoo*'s impact on my life I try to stay faithful to my experience of the novel back then. It is difficult. The experiences and books of all those years in between are hard to ignore but their demand for a more critical approach to the novel and its representation of gender and race is not appropriate; *Coonardoo*'s significance for me was due, in part, to the fact that I read it when I was fifteen.

What does it mean to say a novel changed your life? There is no question that *Coonardoo* made an impact on mine. I read *Coonardoo* in the wake of the increasing public debate about land rights. I read it before I read the feminist, literary and political texts that I discovered in my twenties and have continued to read for the next twenty years. I read Prichard's novel about two races living on Wytaliba station, each with its own very diffferent claims on the land; it captured my imagination and heightened my awareness of those issues. It raised questions, it opened up the *discussion* (to use Dorothy Green's word) and set me on a journey—I began to search out autobiographies, novels, poetry, songs and plays written by Aboriginal women and men. *Coonardoo* lead me to Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Faith Bandler, Ruby Langford, Sally Morgan, Patricia Sykes, Archie Weller, Ruby Hunter, Wesley Enoch and others. From *Coonardoo* and from the books that *Coonardoo* lead me to I learned that racism in Australia was just as dangerous, just as dreadful as that in South Africa. I learned to be ever vigilant and to interrogate my own assumptions, attitudes and prejudices. I learned that silence in the face of racism is a kind of compliance as dangerous as racism itself.

ENDNOTES

1. Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Coonardoo*, Pacific Books, Sydney, 1971 (1929), p.198.
2. R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, CUP, New York, 1989, p.xvi.
3. Drusilla Modjeska, 'Introduction' in *Coonardoo*, A&R, Sydney, 1993, p.vi.
4. Susan Lever, *Real Relations: The Politics of Form in Australian Fiction*, Halstead Press in association with ASAL, Sydney, 2000, p.61.

Enza Gandolfo is a Melbourne writer and a PhD student at Victoria University.

A paperback education:

Atticus Finch, Camus and Kenneth Cook's *Wake In Fright*

TONY BIRCH

When I was a kid there wasn't much that my older brother did not do better than me. He was good at almost everything, particularly sport. He won the school handball championships every year, captained the football team and never lost a game of marbles. He even excelled in business. When the school tuckshop was on its knees the headmaster put him in charge. Within a term the tuckshop was turning a profit, even after my brother had creamed a percentage so he could buy a friendship ring for his girlfriend.

He was not quite as good at the books though. He was a walking slide rule and for reasons still unknown was the only student in the history of our school to get 100 per cent in his Latin exam; (it was later rumoured that he cheated, but as the exam was an oral it seems hardly possible). He struggled with most other subjects though, with English Literature being his nemesis.

Forever determined to establish difference between myself and my brother, literature became my thing. I read every Penguin 'classic' and modern 'masterpiece' that he was set during high school. I cruised through Dickens and Hardy before moving on to the modernists, devouring Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (naturally), and one of my all-time favourites, *The Outsider*, by Albert Camus. My brother could out-kick and out-run me. He could also punch the shit out of me when necessary. But he didn't know plot development and characterisation if they bit him on the arse.

He realised this very soon after coming close to failing his first year in high school. He made a decision to stop reading books altogether, turning both the reading and essay writing over to me. And on the night before an English exam we would go up to the roof of our Housing Commission flat and feed the pigeons while he fired questions at me.

"In *To Kill A Mockingbird* is Atticus Finch aware of his complicity in the act of racism?"

I would begin by teasing him with a "fucked if I know", before strutting my stuff.

"Yes, Atticus is aware of his complicity, but to what degree he is conscious of this is a debatable point. What however is more central to the question that you pose is how and to what extent he acts on this awareness. It is clear that through both the guidance he provides for Jem and Scout and the understanding, even tenderness that he displays toward Boo Radley, Atticus is attempting to live a moral life, which of itself is a somewhat over-inflated liberal notion considering the level of violence being acted out against the black community around him at the time."

"Does Camus encourage the reader to see Meursault as a nihilistic character or do we actually come to value the need for an ethical life through his vacuous state of mind?"

This was a difficult one to answer. Meursault was a hero of mine at the time. I do not know if it was the intention of Camus or not, but *The Outsider* was always worth reading if one had any self-doubt before a night of car-theft and freeway cruising. Meursault was a cult-figure on our public housing estate and the shared reading of his moral psyche was that "Meursault doesn't give a fuck", regardless of the book's somewhat ambiguous ending.

But I had to provide my brother with something a little more sophisticated than this if he was to impress the examiner.

"It's matricide. That is the answer to your question, brother. Matricide."

"How do ya spell it?"

"Forget the spelling, for now. Just know the question in order to know the answer. How does *The Outsider* begin?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He hadn't read the book, of course.

"MOTHER died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure."

"See, matricide. Meursault emotionally assassinates his mum in the first passage of the text. What

happens from there, the funeral, the emptiness contained in his love-making with Marie, the murder . . . the subsequent plot is small potatoes for Meursault's attempt to reconcile with his mum."

I placed a hand on his shoulder while looking up to the vastness of the clear, empty universe above.

"I'm sorry about this one. It's a slim volume but that's Camus, always asking the big questions."

I did not take my reading and understanding of writing too seriously. After all, it was done so that I could prove to my brother that I had something over him; that I was better than him at something. I only read what he had to, or was supposed to have read. I didn't really care about books. They were useless. Or the characters and the writers themselves. Then I found Kenneth Cook's *Wake In Fright*.

During my third year of high school I was given a one-week detention for setting a grass fire in Burnley Park. My punishment was spent in the library stacking books. I was supposed to be under the supervision of the duty librarian but when I reported there she was on the phone talking to a boyfriend. So rather than stack I grabbed a copy of the first paperback that fell into my hand and sat on the floor and began to read.

Wake In Fright felt both familiar and distant. I had never been out of the city and all that I knew about 'the bush' was through stories that I'd heard when I was quite small; aunties and uncles talking about 'the bush' as a place that they escaped to as young Aboriginal kids living on reserves in country Victoria and New South Wales. 'The bush' was both a place that their families had come from 'before mission days' and a sanctuary they sometimes returned to, if only occasionally.

In Kenneth Cook's 'the bush', or 'outback', there is no escape and no sanctuary. From the opening pages of *Wake In Fright*, with schoolteacher John Grant stuck in the one-teacher, one-pub town of Timboonda, to his decline from (somewhat pompous) respectability during a journey through hell in 'the Yabba' (Bundanyabba), the Australian landscape is presented as genuinely 'frightful'.

As I read the book in a single sitting on that detention afternoon it struck me, even then, that the landscape of *Wake In Fright* was represented in a vastly different way to the narratives contained in the stories of the people I knew. 'The bush' was a place they wanted to get back to, while the landscape of 'the Yabba' and the country around it was alienating and violent.

While I could not express an understanding of Cook's view of the Australian landscape, I did relate strongly to other aspects of the book, that I see now as representative of some of the universalities contained in the text. The place of alcohol in *Wake In Fright*, the violence it created and the claustrophobic presence of men who spent too much time with each other 'sharing a drink' was something I knew then as an entirely negative experience during my own childhood. I knew the men in *Wake In Fright*. I knew the corrupt copper, the no-hoper alcoholic doctor, and the text's version of 'mateship' based on a shared violence.

So while *Wake in Fright* has most often been discussed as a book about the violence surrounding 'the bush' or big, wild country towns in rural Australia, for me, as a teenage boy, it was centrally and more simply about men; men who drink too much and don't look after themselves or those around them.

Toward the end of the book when John Grant eventually becomes degraded by his own stupor to the point where he attempts to take his own life, I thought of some of the men I knew and the momentary shame on their faces on mornings before they forgot themselves with another drink. I left the library with that thought.

When my brother was about to start his final year at high school his girlfriend became pregnant. He left school and went to work in a printing works in Fitzroy. They got married and I was best man at the wedding although I was only sixteen. So I am not sure if it was legal. If he had stayed at school that year *we* would have done very well. The set text was *Wake In Fright*.

Tony Birch is a writer and academic based at the University of Melbourne

A Curate in Bohemia

JEFF SPARROW

Like everyone else, I first encountered Norman Lindsay through *The Magic Pudding*, a book which, though it arrived with the grim warning that it was 'an Australian classic', I actually

enjoyed—largely, I suspect, for its cheerful amorality. This is, after all, a text which wholeheartedly endorses Sam Sawnoff and Bill Barnacle's acquisition of their pudding through the unorthodox method of drowning its previous owner ("If he hadn't been so round you'd have never rolled him off the iceberg, for you was both singing out, 'Yo heave Ho' for half an hour, an' him trying to hold on to Bill's beard.") What's not to like about that?

I took the *Curate in Bohemia* (attracted, I suppose, by Lindsay's name) from my grandmother's bookshelf when I was about ten and read the entirety of it in an afternoon—unhampered by having not the slightest idea as to what a curate actually was. Since then, I've returned to it over and over again. Indeed, despite the best efforts of the higher education system and various Marxist study groups, I can admit that *Curate* remains the only book from which I can actually remember long passages word for word ("A very young curate had been wandering up and down Collins Street, from the corner of Swanston to the corner of Elizabeth Street, as though he were under penalty to go so far and no farther . . .").

Why? Well, George Orwell defends Kipling on the grounds that "you are bound to find yourself thinking the thought his poem expresses sooner or later; and then, if you happen to know the poem, it will come back into your mind, and seem better than it did before". I think *A Curate in Bohemia* works the same way for me. A few years ago, I found myself selling books at the National Labour History conference in Canberra in 2001, while the assembled ranks of left-wing academia gathered to bellow out the '*Internationale*'. All I could think about, as verse followed verse, was Lindsay's description of a drunken singalong which featured:

> a tremendous voice, without any tune whatsoever, and which, without being a bass voice, or a deep voice, was simply a terrifically loud voice, which invariably dominated all the rest of the voices, and led them all wrong.

The narrative of the *Curate* concerns the hapless Jimmy Bowles, who, en route to a curacy in Murumberee ("it's a small place, in the Western Districts . . . in our profession a chap has to work up by degrees"), visits the Elizabeth Street studio of Cripps, an old school friend. Now an impoverished painter with an appetite for the luxuriously sinful, Cripps acquaints the young Reverend Bowles in rapid time with the bottle ("this was no gradual transition, as of one yielding to the influence of the demon Drink, but an uproarious going forth to greet the enemy and make a bosom friend of him on the spot"), the weed ("Cripps selected from his store a battered pipe that looked as if it had been dug up with a corpse, and smelt worse than it looked, which he handed tenderly to the curate, with an air of conferring on him a sacred trust") and Miss Florrie Gimblet, part-time artists' model and "umpty doodle" dancer. The curate's future is eventually decided when, after a chain of circumstances too complicated to relate, the congregation of Murumberee receives, not the expected Jimmy Bowles, but Cripps, in a state of advanced intoxication and adorned in a dishevelled dog-collar.

Of course, Lindsay himself was something of a pig, with political views best described as proto-fascist. These days, when he's vanished from public consciousness other than for his connection with children's literature and a naked Elle Macpherson, why would anyone from the left want to recommend him?

Well, for a start, the *Curate* constitutes an open attack on the morality of Melbourne's Presbyterian ruling class. During Lindsay's era (and for a long time thereafter), the city fathers debarred drinking, tabooed tobacco and enforced a Sabbath so joyless that—as late as 1900—the constabulary could fine a barber five shillings for giving a shave on Sunday, under the provisions of an Act dating back to the reign of Charles the Second. Indeed, at one stage, this war on pleasure emboldened the Dean of Melbourne to advance a theory that Man fell from the Garden of Eden not because Eve gave Adam an apple but rather because she presented him with a grape!

The curate's enthusiastic descent from the teetotal Victoria Coffee Palace to the tea-and-toast restaurants ("it's just as well to pay, if you have the money; it makes your name good for another time") and seedy bars frequented by Cripps's crowd thus represents a conscious challenge to respectable society—a challenge made more explicit by a Lindsay cover illustration of a semi-naked Miss Gimblet that more or less dared prosecution.

Is an attack on wowserism progressive? Honesty must acknowledge that the Australian

left has on occasions taken positions more reminiscent of the curate's Wesleyan Uncle Tinfish ("I find you wallowing in an atmosphere of drink and tobacco and wearing on your head a filthy and degrading cap . . . I wash my hands of you, sir—I renounce you—I—I will pray for you.") than the bohemian Cripps (or indeed Lindsay himself). The communist novelist Frank Huelin once recalled:

> standing in the Party rooms, looking out the window at a sunset, [when] a State Committee man came in. I said, "Did you see the sunset last night, comrade?" Just like that. He looked at me as though he was a bloody naturalist finding some new species of insect. "Comrade," he said, "if you've got time to watch sunsets, you're not doing as much Party work as you should be doing!"

Yet there's another left tradition, one that dates back to the founder of scientific socialism himself. After all, we have the Prussian police report where a clearly awed informer records how a certain Dr Marx:

> leads the existence of a real bohemian intellectual. Washing, grooming and changing his linen are things he does rarely, and he likes to get drunk . . . He has no fixed times for going to sleep and waking up. He often stays up all night, and then lies down fully clothed on the sofa at midday and sleeps till evening, untroubled by the comings and goings of the whole world.

Karl Marx thus stands (or perhaps slumps) with the curate and against the killjoys—priests and Party apparatchiks alike.

There's a final reason why the *Curate* sticks in my mind. Lindsay drew the inhabitants of Bohemia fairly directly his from own immediate circle of the late 1890s. His characters include Norman himself, his brother Lionel and a youthful Max Meldrum, rendered in delightfully slanderous fashion as the MacQuibble:

> "There are no lines in Nature–r–re," was his war cry, and certainly there were no such defects in the MacQuibble method of treating the subject, as the curate modestly noted after contemplating that gentleman's efforts, and with the utmost confusion of mind trying to locate a large red smudge in the foreground, which the MacQuibble said was the hot note that gave the blues a chance.

Lindsay, obviously, is exquisitely conscious of the absurdities of the art scene—indeed, he fairly delights in them. Yet you cannot finish his book without sensing that, despite everything, its author remains devoted to Art.

That seems to me to be important—the idea that one can retain both a sense of humour and a sense of commitment. We're a tiny movement, with risible resources devoted to the most ambitious of goals. Naturally, we produce our share of idiocies and follies—and we should be able to acknowledge them without retreating an inch from the overall project.

Lindsay's book concludes with the financially and morally ruined curate turning to Cripps for support. If we substitute 'politics' for 'art' in the last sentence, the passage makes an excellent credo for the activist left:

> "It's all very well," said the curate, "but what am I to do now?"
>
> "Oh, that's all right," said Cripps. "You can doss on the floor. I'll fix up a bed for you."
>
> "I wasn't so much thinking of that, you know," said the curate, though obviously grateful for Cripps's hospitable attitude. "What am I to do—to earn a living?"
>
> "Do!" said Cripps, summing up the business of life in a sentence, "What's the good of trying to earn a living! You'll be all right. Go in for Art."

Jeff Sparrow manages the New International Bookshop at Trades Hall in Melbourne.

Remembering

BARBARA MILECH

1941—*I am entranced by the university—the Spanish mission buildings in pale sandstone, the tall clock tower, the Christmas trees, orange tails blazing against green lawns, the wooden stile that leads on to the football oval with its grazing sheep from the Faculty of Agriculture—all this circled by the calm reflecting waters of the river.*

Dorothy Hewett, *Wild Card*

2002—I am moved as I join Dorothy Hewett's West Australian family, friends, and readers who gather at the University of Western Australia to celebrate her life, following her death on 25 August 2002. They gather at midday on 15 September, a blustery-sunny Sunday. They come together on the veranda of a white-painted, weatherboard building whose main part is the original University building, transported from Irwin Street to Crawley campus—the campus that entranced Hewett as an undergraduate in the early forties, and to which she returned in the early sixties to finish her studies and to tutor in the English Department. The some seventy people who gather on the verandah spill out onto the surrounding lawn.

That elegant University building, now tucked mid-campus amidst later brick and sandstone buildings, is sited where in 1941 bush met an oval manicured by grazing sheep. It now houses the University's Institute of Advanced Studies, whose Director, Terri-ann White, hosted the gathering. The occasion, however, is an expression of friends and admirers who wish to celebrate Hewett's life and works—Dr Lesley Dougan, Hewett's sister; Bill Grono, poet and editor of *Dorothy Hewett: Collected Poems*; Lucy Dougan, poet and niece; Pat Skevington, actress and friend from early university days; Fay Zwicky, poet and colleague from university days in the sixties; and Bill Dunstone, theatre director/academic and another colleague. Remembering Dorothy, they planned an occasion where people brought hampers and found wine and coffee, where they found space to yarn, eat, drink and remember . . .

Remembering included readings midway through the occasion. Bill Grono, who conducted the celebration, called people together by way of a story told by Pat Skevington (wonderfully reminiscent of the opening of Marguerite Duras's *The Lover*)—Skevington recalled arriving at a bus stop, and seeing the young Hewett, dressed in black slacks, a red bolero, and a black beret; she remembers thinking "here is someone special, someone unique." It was 1941:

> I hide my black slack suit and my black velvet beret in my locker, change into them in the Women's Common Room, and sally forth, playing my version of the emancipated woman artist. (*Wild Card*)

The voice of that 'emancipated woman artist' as it spoke over the next sixty years, in different genres and with growing wisdom, was then invoked by friends. Fay Zwicky read her letter to Hewett published in *The Age* (The Culture, 26 August 2002)—it tells of the "theatre-stricken, language-drunk girl from Malyalling via Wickepin with the true poetic vocation who, in the Cold War fifties, will morph into Toddy Flood, revolutionary proletarian and joiner of the Communist Party", and then will grow to be the writer whose mark is "passionate commitment shot through with redemptive irony".

Next Lucy Dougan, daughter of Hewett's sister Lesley, read a poem by Merv Lilley that he sent her to be shared on the day—'High Points with Dorothy'.

In an interview with Nicole Moore, Hewett spoke of meeting, marrying, having two children by, and being supported by Lilley as she returned to study and writing in the early sixties—"I could never have done any of that without him. He was fantastic. He was the antithesis of all those men" (*Overland* 157, Summer 1999). The opening line of Lilley's poem—'I tried to give her comradeship'—echoes that meeting/marriage (and perhaps alludes to their commitments to, then disillusionments with, (Stalinist) communism), and moves through an allusion to Hewett's choice of lines from Wordsworth's 'A Slumber Did My Spirit Steal' as part of her grave-marker, to a care-full, diurnal measurement of loss.

Lucy Dougan's reading was followed by those from Jenny

McNae and Rosemary Barr, each reading from Hewett's play *The Man from Mukinupin*—both are from the original cast of a play commissioned by Perth's National Theatre as a festival piece for the West Australian 1979 sesquicentennial celebration. McNae read from her part as Mercy Montebello, an exuberantly bad Shakespearean actress; and Barr from hers as Clemmy Hummer, a failed tightrope walker. Both characters land at the end of their careers in Mukinupin, a mythic/quintessentially West Australian townscape. Together McNae and Barr celebrated a success—an occasional play, whose comedic epithalamion-like structure celebrates (rural) 'Australia', even as it presages the complex, necessary negotiation of differing Australian histories that, as they are told, help us through the process of reconciliation.

Following those re-enactments, Jenny Dougan, also Hewett's niece, read 'The Golden Mean', the last poem in Grono's edition of Hewett's *Collected Poems*, whose elegant cover illustration—a blonde, smiling girl in wind-blown dress, holding a bouquet of wattle, kangaroo paws and leschenaultia—invokes Hewett and her West Australian origins. The poem's narrator recalls that, being told not to do things:

> *so we did them*
> *fragile as cabbage moths*
> *our white dresses flicking in*
> *sunlight*
> *with a quiver of arrows*
> *and a taut bow*
> *we hunted through the Paradise*
> *gardens.*

Jenny Dougan's reading honoured both the poet and the sister.

Last, Bill Dunstone read from the Epilogue to Hewett's memoir, where she describes how she, sister and husband returned in the late eighties to the place of childhood, to the powerful landscape of the opening of *Wild Card*, only to find desolate paddocks, ruined buildings, a landscape where "nothing was the same". And Hewett concludes: "There is no need [to come back] because in the Dream Girl's Garden, in Golden Valley, in the districts of Jarrabin and Mukinupin, the first house lies secure in the hollow of the heart."

Celebrating with Dorothy Hewett's family, friends, and readers, I thought that she too was secure.

On Sunday, 21 September, Associate Professor Glen Phillips of Edith Cowan University launched Alec Choate's *My Days Were Fauve: An Autobiography in Verse* (Victor Publishing). *My Days Were Fauve* is Choate's seventh volume of poetry, four by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, two of them winning major prizes—his *A Making of Fire* (Fremantle) won the 1986 West Australian Literary Prize, and his *The Wheels of Hama: Collected War Poems* (Victor) won the 1997 West Australian Premier's Book Award. At 87, Choate is probably Western Australia's oldest publishing poet—his is a career that began by his being published in every annual *Jindyworobak Anthology* since the Second World War. This collection of some 275 sonnets is a moving record of how his war experience punctuated his life before and after that event. It is a testimony and remarkable achievement.

Three Cambridge-connected, highly published poets recently visited Perth in the second part of the year—Jeremy Prynne, Rod Mengham, and John Kinsella. Prynne gave readings in Perth and Bunbury from his new *Collected Poems* (FACP/Bloodaxe Books), and presented a seminar on the Gunslinger cycle of poems by the US poetic prodigy, the late Ed Dorn, which included tapes of Dorn reading from *Gunslinger*. Mengham gave a reading at Edith Cowan University and a seminar on British Artists and British Walk Trails. And Kinsella inaugurated the Edith Cowan University Kinsella Landscape Lectures with four talks—on Michael Dransfield's poetry, on the new on-line *Anthology of WA Writing*, on his 'modern dress' translation of the Ring Cycle for the next Festival of Perth, and—by way of tribute—on Dorothy Hewett.

And 2002 saw the publication of two critical works by indigenous West Australians. Rosemary van den Berg's *Nyoongar People of Australia: Perspectives on Racism and Multiculturalism* found international publication by Brill (Leiden, Boston, Köln). The book arises out of doctoral work done with Dr Ron Blaber at Curtin University's School of Communication and Cultural Studies. It tells the history of Western Australia's Nyoongar people since settlement, weaving together contemporary accounts of the experience of racism (interviews are included as appendices), postcolonial theory, and analyses of official attempts to address questions of racism through policies of multiculturalism. And, comparably, *Echoes of the Past: Sister Kate's Home Revisited* retells the history of an institution that was first a cottage-care refuge for unwanted babies in the first decade of the

twentieth century, next an orphanage under the 1907 WA State Children's Act, and then—toward the end of A.O. Neville's notorious assimilationist regime as Chief Protector of Aborigines (1915–1940)—a "home" for "fair-skinned" children of the Stolen Generation. *Echoes of the Past* powerfully recovers the later history of Sister Kate's Home through the stories of those who lived there—sometimes remembered by kin. It is a beautifully made work, produced through the creative project management of Tjalaminu Mia, edited by Sally Morgan, and launched with an accompanying photo exhibition. It brings together photographs, oral histories, and incisive editorial contributions to help us remember—differently.

Remembering. Recovery. Reconciliation. They are connected through the stories and poems that help us deal with unacceptable loss.

Barbara H. Milech is Humanities Dean at Curtin University of Technology.

Max Marginson

JOHN McLAREN

Overland has lost another good friend and staunch supporter in Max Marginson, who died in September after a return of the cancer that had attacked him earlier in the year.

Max was one of the group of supporters who rallied to the magazine after the death in 1988 of its founding editor, Stephen Murray-Smith, and took part in the discussions that set up the structure that has allowed its continuing publication. Although he never held any formal position, he read *Overland* avidly from the time of its foundation, and, as a friend of successive editors, was always ready with comment, encouragement and criticism.

When the *Australian Book Review* commenced publication in Melbourne, Max became its unofficial scientific adviser and editor. He examined all the science books that came in for review, and either allotted them to appropriate reviewers or wrote his own succinct and penetrating notes on them. He was scathing of superstition and pretentiousness masquerading as science.

Max spent his entire career at Melbourne University, where he lectured first-year medical students on biochemistry. He also had a marvellous lecture on food and capitalism that he delivered as a guest lecturer at various other institutions. In one part of this he used units of renewable energy rather than dollars to analyse the efficiency of various national agricultures. This produced remarkable results: Holland, for example, became a deficit economy, Hong Kong lost efficiency when it introduced herbicides and pesticides, and China and India topped the productive table. Although he kept this lecture constantly updated, he could never be persuaded to publish it, and I presume it is now waiting for some later scholar to discover among his papers.

Max was one of the intellectuals who left the Communist Party after the revelation of its perfidy in 1956. He became a Fabian, and remained a lover of food, wine, song and talk.

John McLaren was editor of Overland *and* ABR *and a friend of Max for many years.*

SA Lit. News

CATH KENNEALLY

Jared Thomas is a Nukunu person, a writer and the newly appointed Indigenous Project Officer at Arts SA. His first play, *Flash Red Ford*, toured Uganda and Kenya, and *Love, Land and Money* was a highlight at the last Fringe. He's already a multiple award-winner for his writing, and is now in a position to help other indigenous artists forge ahead. His novel was shortlisted for the Unpublished Manuscript award at this year's Adelaide Festival, and should appear next year.

Era Publications, a publisher of educational books, is a South Australian success story: an all-SA team of authors and illustrators, they have just signed up with ETA/Cuisinaire in the US to supply a series of primary readers. This is a significant coup, as ETA have huge resources and distribution. The proceeds should keep Era in the red for some time. Director Rod Martin is not resting on his laurels; he's just left for Sweden, Norway and the UK to firm up deals there.

That shed bloke is at it again. Mark Thomson, author of *Blokes and Sheds*, issuing out of the Australian Institute of Backyard Studies, has published *Rare Trades* (HarperCollins). It looks at the special tools, traditions, languages and secrets of disappearing trades, such as wheelwright, tinsmith, wigmaker and haystack builder. The National Museum is jumping

on board with a major touring exhibition, Rare Trades: making things by hand in the digital age. It will showcase stories and work by twenty-four tradespeople featured in the book, and tour the country from next February. The Museum also worked with Thomson to get up a display on one of the *Blokes and Sheds* blokes.

Other Adelaide authors with recent books to their name are Stephen Orr, a Vogel shortlistee in 2000, whose *Attempts to Draw Jesus* (Allen & Unwin) is the fictional re-creation of the story of two 16-year-old SA boys who went jackarooing and died in the outback in 1987. Eva Sallis published *The City of Sea Lions* (Allen & Unwin) at Writers' Week. Kirsty Brooks's crime novel *Lady Luck* (Wakefield Press) has just appeared. Ben Kozel wrote *Three Men in a Raft* (Macmillan), about his journey down the Amazon. Janeen Brian's *Where Did Thursday Go?*—a CBC Awards Honour Book this year—has already gone into German and (soon) Korean editions. Poets with runs on the board are Cath Kenneally, whose *Around Here* (Wakefield Press) won the John Bray National Poetry Prize at the Adelaide Festival and Geoff Goodfellow, whose *Poems for my Dead Father* (Vulgar Press) was shortlisted for *The Age* Book of the Year.

Ken Bolton, Sydney-born but Adelaide-dwelling for twenty years now, won this year's James Joyce Suspended Sentence Award, which he received at a Sydney ceremony in July. The James Joyce Foundation offers yearly a Cathay Pacific trip to Dublin and other Joyce habitats. The prize-winning entry was a long poem called 'Rumori', written while Ken was at the Australia Council Studio in Rome. Ken stayed four weeks in Dublin meeting other poets, spent a week in Trieste, and came home via Beijing, where some of the folks associated with the Writers' Centre (a monolithic, lavishly-endowed place) are translating Joyce into Mandarin. Ken's now back at his post at the Dark Horsey Bookshop, stocking otherwise unavailable small-press literature, art books and theory, and keeping Little Esther Press going: next cab off the rank is Pam Brown's next book of poetry, *Text Thing*.

Gillian Rubinstein has been outed as the author Lian Hearn, creator of *Across the Nightingale Floor*, new out from Hodder Headline, the film rights already sold for a seven-figure sum. Still most famous for *Galax Arena* (and lately *Terra Farma*, the sequel), SA writer Rubinstein/Hearn is looking forward to seeing this new fantasy published in twenty countries. Her identity became an open secret when leaked to newspapers, but is still, at time of writing, not divulged on Hodder's website.

The major print venue for young writers around town is the street-mag dB's Young Writers Page in every issue. The SA Writers' Centre runs this page, taking unpublished poetry, short stories, anecdotes and cartoons from writers between 15 and 25. There are two yearly prizes for young authors, the Independent Arts Foundation scholarship and the Colin Thiele prize (both worth $6,500); winners this year are Amelia Walker (one of the dB Page editors) and Samantha Schulz. As part of the sixth Feast Festival this November, young GLT writers are getting up *Entree*, a Queer Youth Zine, which will be online on the Feast website. Feast's themes this time are Wisdom, Home and Food.

Baterz, beloved writer of hilarious songs for The Bedridden and himself as solo performer, died in Adelaide on 22 July this year at age 33, surrounded by friends and family. Born Barnaby Charles Ward, and raised by academic parents in Canberra, he and other Bedridden members came to Adelaide around the beginning of the 1990s; Baterz stayed. A great lyricist and comic, and knowing his time on the planet was limited, Baterz aimed to be the most prolific songwriter in the country, and may have succeeded. His CDs, with their unmistakable hand-written and illustrated covers, are all out there, the most recent being *Inland Sea*, with The Bedridden, and before that *Baterz, Live and Well*.

Peter Goldsworthy, Adelaide novelist and librettist, has had his early novel *Maestro* chosen for the first community reading project, *One Book—One Town*. Goldsworthy is currently Chair of the Literature Fund of the Australia Council.

Rebekah Clarkson has just returned to Adelaide from a long stint in other capitals. She is doing the Creative Writing MA at Adelaide University, and has just performed the feat of being both winner and runner-up in the 2002 *HQ* Short Story competition, with 'The Blue Suitcase' and 'Morning Tea'. Her first novel will be one to look out for.

Creative Writing Courses, by the way, are proliferating around Adelaide, with Higher Degrees available at Adelaide and Flinders, plus a plethora of other courses at nearly every tertiary institution.

Those clever Wakefield Press people have leapt onto the Potter/Rings bandwagon with two books

written by David Colbert (former head writer for *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*). He wrote *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*, which sold twenty thousand copies in under a year. And now *The Magical Worlds of the Lord of the Rings*, timed for this Christmas, with lots already on order. They provide myths-and-legends background for both books, tapping into the Tolkien and Rowling industries. Wakefield have taken on distribution for a number of other presses, too: Allison and Busby, Akashik (New York) and Encounter. These are offbeat, non-mainstream titles in crime, politics, environmental issues. Stephanie Johnson, a Wakefield director, says the plan is to go with like-minded, independent presses with high production values, and subject matter that matters.

It's time to visit the witch-doctor, dear

JULIA SVOICE

My Nonna was a passionate woman—loving, energetic and funny. Admirable qualities you might say, yet mixed with a terrifying paranoia and bizarre superstitious beliefs, this dark, dizzying mix—inextricably swirled together—left those who knew her shaky and cautious.

She loved us "to death" and constantly reminded us that she would "gouge out" her eyes for us if she had to. (Keep in mind the intensity and graphic nature of such expressions is lost in translation. Just hear the expressions and magnify them by about ten.) She forced food upon us incessantly, irrespective of whether or not we were hungry, so we would have roses in our cheeks. She sheltered and ardently protected us. She met us after school at the bus stop with bright red parkas so we wouldn't "tremble, shiver and die" from the light specks of rain that had started to fall. I would shrink with embarrassment, at age fourteen, about being met by a rotund, heavy, short Nonna, dressed in black from head to toe, sometimes balancing a carton of groceries on her head.

She regularly told us how beautiful we were, but quickly, with frightened eyes, made the sign of *i corni*, or 'the horns', which wards off the evil eye. To comment on someone's beauty, or any other virtue, was to expose them to the dangers of being cursed by a jealous other. Many times, we were shuffled off to the local witch-doctor to have the curse removed.

She didn't mince words. Whatever had to be said was said, without extraneous niceties. Typical terms of endearment were *stroka* and *putana* or prostitute and bitch. She used such terms loosely, loudly, joyously. When she was angry, she would shriek, "May lightning strike you and split you in half". (Remember to magnify by ten.) She had a tiny head, a small hole for a mouth, with rotting teeth visible inside. Her shroud of love for us was based partly on her terror of the world around her. She would make the sign of the cross before we went on a car trip, for fear that we would be smashed to death. Her fat, flabby-skinned arms engulfed us suffocatingly on our return. "Did you hear the story on the radio?" arms crossed in self-righteousness, glaring at my mum for taking us out. "This man attacked a woman, hacked her into pieces, right in the middle of the street. Tore her right apart. You'll be killed out there. Now come in here. I've made you some lovely chicken soup."

She was as strong as an ox, despite her suffering. Her mother was murdered by her own husband, her 21-year-old daughter died while giving birth, and she raised an illegitimate son (my father) in the punitive, sexist, moralistic culture of peasant Southern Italy. But at age 85, she regularly pulled on black gumboots and heaved and dug the vast vegetable garden with all her might. She climbed a wall (over six feet high) on the side of the house when she'd locked herself out. She laughed, she cursed, she cried, she wailed when in pain. She had my mother twisted around her little finger—a finger that ended in a round stump, the top third of it missing. She'd done this at one of those fabulous, annual sausage-making family gatherings. While we ran outside, played make-believe games with our cousins, sucked lollies from the milk bar, she'd shoved her fingers too far down the meat grinder.

And now, many years on, do I reject her and all of her haunting ways? Do I continue to cling onto the fantasy that I do not, cannot possibly belong to this family? I do love the bottled tomato sauce she taught me to make. Or do I sift, pick and choose from the seemingly impossible extremes she's imprinted on my mind and soul? She's gone now—free, just wreaked her terrible havoc, loved me to death and vanished. Thanks a lot!

Julia Svoice studies Writing for Publication and Multimedia at Swinburne University of Technology.

Clinging to the wreckage

LUCY SUSSEX

Henry Handel Richardson (ed. Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele): *The Getting of Wisdom* (UQP Academy Editions of Australian Literature, $80)

Marcus Clarke (ed. Lurline Stuart): *His Natural Life* (UQP Academy Editions of Australian Literature, $80)

"In literature," comments Arturo Pérez-Reverte in *The Club Dumas*, "time is like a shipwreck in which God looks after his own." Amid the plethora of books produced by the publishing industry, some are fated to justly drown, and others to float to safety and a nice dry library. In the shipwreck of time, some authors may prove to be too much part of their era to survive; others transcend it, and can say something to generations yet unborn.

As Paul Eggert, the General Editor, states in his Foreword, the Academy Editions project is "the first series of critical editions of major works of the nation's literature". It aims to produce definitive texts, accurate and faithful to the author's intentions. As Eggert notes, much of the nineteenth–mid-twentieth-century Australian literary texts circulating in universities and second-hand bookshops are not reliable, having suffered change during the processes of book production and transmission. Such textual variance occurs particularly when the literature concerned is not valued, either because it is emergent (as with the development of a national literature), popular or generic (woe betide anyone faced with the collation of a pulp text suddenly canonised, like *Dracula*).

For the Academy Editions, the various forms of a text are collated, and the alterations due to, say, the progress from serialisation to book publication, then overseas editions (usually a key point of editorial intervention) noted. It is a costly, time-consuming process, necessitating much research funding. Indeed, in the current state of the Australian university, such a project seems increasingly difficult for academics. Critically editing a text with variant forms does not garner many Brownie points for departments; nor is it newsworthy in the same way as a vaccine, or a study of how childcare warps young Australians.

So, we might regard the tomes under discussion as a labour of love, unfashionable though such activity might currently be; and of two greatly-loved texts, *His Natural Life* and the excruciating but brilliant *The Getting of Wisdom*. One is short, the other enormous. Each are provided with chronologies of the author's life, introductions by the editors, and additional material. In the case of Clarke's novel, others contribute, with essays on the book's historical background by Michael Roe, and its dramatic adaptations by Elizabeth Webby.

Of the two, *His Natural Life* has to be regarded as problematic, given that its textual variance is greater than can probably be accommodated in a single volume. Its first appearance was as a serial in the popular *Australian Journal*, and Clarke revised the text considerably for book publication. I would disagree greatly with editor Stuart that the serialisation was 'transient'—among other things, in this original version it contained a murder mystery. As such, it is an important precursor of the Australian crime genre; indeed, Clarke almost certainly wrote the first Australian detective short story (the 1865 'Wonderful! When You Come to Think of It!'). The serialisation also originally concluded with the Eureka stockade; a significant early fictionalisation of the event. Ideally, a critical edition of Clarke's classic should comprise *all* its versions, even if a second volume has to be added. As Stuart herself notes: "there is room for both versions in the canon of Australian literature".

The Getting of Wisdom is a far less protean text, and occupies just over two hundred pages of text in this edition. Three appendices appear, of valuable

related material: a school story probably drawing upon Richardson's experiences; an early poem of hers; and a memoir by a schoolmate, Mary Kernot. The editors have restored the occasional epigraphs from Nietzsche originally used in the novel, and subsequently lost in school editions. As they note in their excellent introduction, the epigraphs provide an "overarching commentary" on the text, and a signpost to Richardson's intentions.

So, to sum up—despite the problems already noted with *His Natural Life*, the two books under review do provide estimable, authoritative versions of two Australian classics. And more is planned in the series: an edition of colonial plays by Richard Fotheringham, *Robbery Under Arms*, and Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl*. It is to be hoped the labour of love continues.

Lucy Sussex is a writer and reviewer.

The question of identity

LAURIE CLANCY

Arnold Zable: *The Fig Tree* (Text Publishing, $27.50)
Kate Jennings: *Moral Hazard* (Picador, $28)
Phil Leask: *The Slow Death of Patrick O'Reilly* (Black Pepper Press, $24.95)
Robert Hillman: *The Deepest Part of the Lake* (Scribe Publications, $27.50)
Gillian Mears: *A Map of the Gardens* (Picador, $21)

The habit of reconstruction, of looking back and assessing our lives, is a ubiquitous one in Australian literature, whether it's autobiographical novels and short stories or more overt autobiography. The question of identity is an almost obsessive one and many of our writers believe it can best be resolved by returning to the past, whether it is the more or less immediate past or much further back. In particular, the memoir or autobiographical essay—call it what you will—has made a spectacular comeback in Australian literature in the past decade or two. Writers like Drusilla Modjeska, Robert Dessaix, Brian Matthews and others have trodden a thin line between autobiography and fiction. Zable writes within this tradition. His previous book *Café Scheherazade* mined the extraordinarily rich material of the Jewish experience of suffering and persecution, treating it (a little uneasily, I thought) as fiction. *The Fig Tree* is more clearly based on fact.

Zable is, as his blurb writer notes, a storyteller, a performer; the first essay is called 'Telling Tales' and is a celebration of the wonder of stories that confront "the mysteries of behaviour", that detail "in parable form codes of ethics, guides to behaviour". The starting point for these ten essays is the birth of his son Alexander, who is the next link between his family's past and future. The birth of the boy paradoxically sends him back into the past and the family and friends he knew, expanding from his own Jewish Polish ancestry to his wife's Greek-Australian identity.

He talks about his father who towards the end of his life began to write poetry again, in Yiddish, for the first time in almost fifty years. Meier Zabludowski was born in Bialystok in 1905 and died in Carlton in 1992. But when a pogrom took place in Przytyk in 1936 and he was forced to flee Poland he fell silent as a writer. Where would an audience for a Yiddish poet be in the new world? How would he find time to write in between the exigencies of making a living? Only towards the end of his life, as he began finally to relish the luxury of freedom, did he return to his lyric verse.

"For my father, the poem; for mother, the song; and for both, a love of the Yiddish language, and of Bialystok, the Polish city where they met." In a similarly remarkable gesture of affirmation and pride Hadassah, who was a fine singer but who rarely ventured outside of her house except to shop, made a record of some of the Yiddish songs she sang—at the age of sixty. "Within the four songs", comments Zable, "resides a vanished world . . . They reflect the struggles and journeys of her generation." It's hardly surprising that Zable feels he has inherited a legacy of storytelling as celebration, self-definition.

Most of the essays concern the Greek parts of Alexander's ancestry rather than the Yiddish-Polish but in 'Walking Thessaloniki' the two converge. By 1900 there were 80,000 Jews in the city out of a population of 170,000. Most of them were deported during the Second World War to Auschwitz-Birkenau. 'The Treasure' brings us back to home with Zable's account of going to the Yiddish theatre in Carlton in 1958, while 'Between Sky and Sea' is an account of the visit of the Yiddish poet Melekh Ravich to Australia in 1933. It expands into an account of Yiddish literature in Australia.

The essays in *The Fig Tree* have a unity and con-

tinuity which is not merely one of content but of tone and theme. It is concerned with voyages—stories are another kind of voyage—and with the links between past and present. It ends: "The sounds of a community gathering drifted from the hall below. My elders had also arrived in boats, and they too had brought with them tales of epic voyages and aborted dreams. I could imagine a child of Aeolian immigrants, listening enthralled to tales of volcanoes and sea wanderers, and the journeys of their elders from ancestral isles. We shared a common fate."

Kate Jennings writes about a much more immediate past and out of the painful experience of losing a beloved husband to Alzheimer's Disease. 'Moral hazard' is a financial term meaning the tendency to ignore the risks involved in rescuing mismanaged financial institutions for the good of the entire system: "Where's the incentive *not* to screw up?" In this new novel the heroine is an Australian freelance writer in New York called Cath; to paraphrase Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*, Jennings does not go far for her pseudonyms. She is happily married to a man twenty-five years her senior until one day she notices the beginnings of the onset of Alzheimer's Disease in him.

With the help of an influential friend she gets a job working with a large investment bank in New York, Niedecker Benecke, knowing that she will have to earn a great deal more money in order to have him looked after properly. It is a job this unreconstructed left-winger loathes. As she describes it, it is "A firm whose ethic was borrowed in equal parts from the Marines, the CIA, and Las Vegas. A firm where women were about as welcome as fleas in a sleeping bag."

'Moral hazard', then, has a double meaning. As Bailey declines physically, Cath is forced into making more and more difficult decisions until finally she comes to the inevitable, most agonising choice of all. At the same time she is caught up wearily in a financial world she both hates and despises, but which she shows a certain fascination with. On the advice of a friend and confidant named Mike, a fellow closet rebel at Niedecker, she remains sane at the bank by taking an "anthropological approach" to it but in the end this doesn't avert the moral hazard of a minor betrayal of him. The two stories, with their implied parallels, are juxtaposed against one another.

Her friends are of little assistance with her husband. When they visit him he turns on the charm and they go away with suspicious glances at Cath. She doesn't tell them that as soon as they left Bailey turned to her in bewilderment and said, "Who was that?" Later she finds a wonderful black nurse who helps her look after Bailey. Mostly, though, this is a factual documentation of the decline of a human being under the impact of a dreadful disease, a record that would be deeply depressing were it not written with such wonderful restraint and lack of self-pity. It is a much less clever book than Jennings' previous novel *Snake* and a much more interesting one. Over half way through her account Cath looks back and says to the reader, "Looking over what I've written about Bailey in the nursing home, I realize I'm giving you the pathos of the situation, not the awfulness. A sanitized version." She then proceeds to delve even further, even more remorselessly, into that 'awfulness'.

Phil Leask comes with the recommendation of no less distinguished a writer and reviewer than Delia Falconer. All the more disappointing, then, that this second novel fails to live up to expectations. It is the story of the eponymous O'Reilly, who lives in the hills of Tasmania in 1952, a source of constant discussion and conjecture to the citizens of the tiny local town, some of them believing he is over a century old and most of them, for reasons which are unclear, deeply hostile to him, regarding him as a troublemaker.

The opening sentence of each of the first four chapters introduces us to one of the protagonists: O'Reilly, the young girl Cathy Connolly who has seen him, the Frenchman Bernard Laurent who has deserted ship, and Anna McCluskey, who has just got married. Later we meet the other important character, an old lady named Elizabeth Morgan, who is more or less in love with O'Reilly.

Elizabeth has bought some journals in Hobart and Leask juxtaposes one of these, the story of a French sailor Clement Hebert at the beginning of the nineteenth century, against the contemporary narrative. Hebert, like Bernard, is a deserter who spends a virtual lifetime alone in the Bush, writing his journals with an ink he has made out of "berries and some sort of earth or clay" and carrying paper on his back that somehow lasts thirty years. Perhaps we can say of him also, as O'Reilly says of Bernard, that he "carried his suffering with him like some Biblical mark upon his forehead". For over thirty years Hebert, like Paddy, wanders alone in the bush except for one

incident in which he fathers a child. When we find out the child's identity it is both predictable and, like much in this book, implausible.

The prose is filled with quasi-poetic meditations:

> . . . and sometimes when he came down into the towns or did odd jobs on the farms there would be a woman waiting for him, who would turn and look at him and reach out to him with welcoming arms, and what they did together then, on an empty bed or behind the garden shed, was what they always did, men and women everywhere, the same but different every time . . .

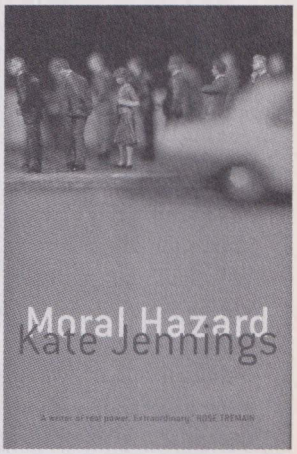
This is fairly typical of a novel which seems to be making attempts at immense but obscure significance.

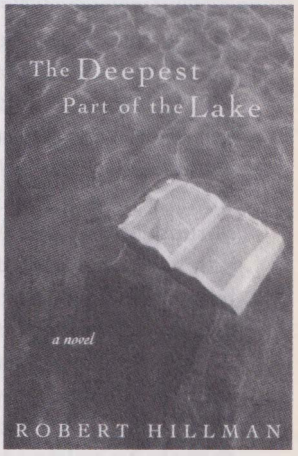
Coincidentally, Robert Hillman's novel is also set in 1952 but this time in the small Victorian town of The Weir, to the north-east of Melbourne. Given that an American company is building a huge dam there it seems almost certain that it is actually Eildon.

Four boys, David, Wolfie, Dennis and Frank, set out to swim across the man-made lake ("the size of an inland sea") to the mountains on the opposite side. Interspersed with the story of the swim are the tales of various citizens of the town, as the novel cuts from voice to voice, sometimes in the third person, sometimes in the first.

There is Dulcie, a battler with little money but a lot of heart, fiercely protective of her five children, who lives in the slum end of town called Temporary, which is in stark contrast to the affluent American quarters. Or a man known as Shabby Saunders, who is filled with memories of his angry, beautiful wife Elizabeth who died far too young. Dulcie goes to him for sexual comfort. Olly and James are adolescents, filled with socialist ideals, both in love with another beautiful young woman Jilly, who in turn is more interested in sexual experimentation with the teacher Alun. The three young people plan to go to university in a few months' time. There is Bernie Marr, winner of the George Medal, but whose talents don't exist beyond brutality, his wife Glenda, and Vern Dawson, the man she is quietly in love with, and the Marrs' son Richie. Or there are the Americans—the beautiful Shoosie Manx and her lover Clay Coburn.

Hillman has assembled an interesting group of characters and his command of idiom is convincing. Much of the description is very funny—like James and Olly's earnest discussion of how long sex takes, or the newspaper stories David keeps imagining in his head, or the boys' adventurous use of words like 'indubitably' and 'halcyon'. It is a portrait of a small town frozen in the past, a fact of which the author reminds us by using a distanced, retrospective voice from time to time: "I didn't read *The Catcher in the Rye* until 1969", David, who is now a schoolteacher informs us, before talking about the Beatles' visit to Melbourne in the early sixties.





Many of the exchanges, like David's newspaper fantasies, remain unspoken. Jilly's mother Lynette silently and mentally addresses her daughter, pleading for understanding. Jilly begins a diary, and when she informs her parents of the loss of her virginity speaks in French so they won't understand. The long-suffering Glenda can express the misery of her love for Vern and fear of her brutal husband only in interior monologue. From his detached, omniscient point of view Hillman can explore the pattern of misunderstandings and non-communication, the range of responses to the American presence for instance, though he is never patronising or superior towards his characters. Running through this series of tableaux is the story of the boys' swim. It is a pity that the publishers have spelled out the tragic nature of the narrative, though one would probably have guessed it anyway.

What is this thing about women not being able to stand up for themselves? Kate Jennings' title story in the collection *Women Falling Down in the Street* has no fewer than five women losing balance in New York. Mears has characters who lose their legs in story after story. *A Map of the Gardens* is a rather strange collection for a woman of 37 to write—it is much more the kind of writing one would

expect from a writer who is acutely conscious of impending old age—until one discovers that Mears has become inflicted with locomotor ataxia, an obscure illness that causes the victim to lose the energy in her legs to the point of being unable to move.

In 'Swan Dives', for instance, the protagonist is a grandmother who is very wonky in the legs and bladder. She has to decide how far she can go to protect her grandsons from their new stepmother who has no qualms about putting their heads down the toilet when they are disobedient. The grandfather in 'Calm Abiding and the Monk from Sarnath' had his legs amputated many years before. The granddaughter protagonist who is only 29, has just discovered she has multiple sclerosis and has difficulty in walking. The title story has two old people, Linkie and Oona, deserting their cruel employer; Linkie takes Oona in a wheelbarrow because her legs are giving out, "like an old nearly-dead dog's legs". The eponymous Farina has a club foot. In 'Sad Quarrion' Bobo's father had been a lame man. In 'The Friendship Garden' Ron can see how just as suddenly his wife Muriel's energy "had arrived it was gone and she could barely get back into the house. He could see his old Muriel leaving as the power fell out of her legs". But the story which deals most directly with the affliction is 'In the Heart of the Sky'. The 38-year-old, bi-sexual protagonist is inflicted with a numbness in the legs: "Steadily though, his walking became a totter he could barely manage, as if in the writing years his limbs had forgotten what should most have been so easy." He is raped by a gang of men and eventually becomes Jim Ling, an emblematic figure of self-sacrifice.

In this story, as well as 'Le Moustiquaire' and 'Sad Quarrion', the familiar realm of the domestic is abandoned and the writer ventures into strange sexual worlds, curious studies of dependency between young and old men, between elderly couples, between mother and daughter, between the two sisters of 'Severed Land', Verity and Thea Flower, whose relationship forms the substance of that relentlessly painful story. They are women whose only expression of love seems to be competing in destruction of one another. These stories seem to strain towards a form of self-abnegation; they experiment with forms of surrender of the will. 'I Shall Not Pass Along This Way Again', on the other hand, seems to be a parable of the author's escape from her large, friendly, oppressive family.

A Map of the Gardens does, as the blurb suggests, indicate a departure of many kinds but much of the writing is still based on personal experience, even if the experience is of a more novel and mysterious kind than previously.

Laurie Clancy is a Melbourne novelist and writer.

Australians in other places

SUSAN HOLMES

Tracy Ryan: *Jazz Tango* (FACP, $22.95)
Lydia Laube: *Llama for Lunch* (Wakefield, $19.95)
Jane Watson: *Hindustan Contessa* (Picador, $22)
Saskia Beudal: *Borrowed Eyes* (Picador, $22)

The protagonist in *Jazz Tango* is Jas (short for Jasmine), a young Australian woman in England working in a bookshop and trying to make ends meet. In steps Todd, young academic from a wealthy background, and they marry. And do they live happily ever after? Not quite. It is a strange marriage of convenience. Todd seeks respectability and acceptance by his peers. Jas gets an out from her drab existence as a wage slave.

At first Jas is a childlike figure, eternally unsure, convinced that others 'belong' to their surroundings where she never has. However, as the novel progresses Jas is the strength and has the solidity that others, including Todd, lack. Jas's miscarriage is the vehicle which draws her closer to women as friends and to their difference. When Jas meets Miriam she is drawn by their likeness of mind as much as lust.

We are given hints that all is not tickety-boo with Todd but in a beautiful twist on the old double standard he insists that his own same-sex dalliances mean nothing—they are purely physical—whereas Jas's affair could ruin reputations. This begins to sound like a melodrama whereas the novel is anything but. Tracy Ryan has not only a fantastic storytelling style but an amazing insight into the core of the human interior with all its fears and possibilities. She also understands social class and uses Jas's memories of her father and his distinctly Australian idiom to create a startling contrast between the haves and have-nots. "She had never really understood what Toorak was trying to be until she came here."

Lydia Laube is a truly intrepid explorer of our times. In *Llama for Lunch* we go on an action-packed trek from North America down to Mexico, on to South America and the Amazon River. It is a thoroughly enjoyable journey thanks in part to Laube's writing style. I was reminded time and again of Sue Grafton's detective fiction with its witty and self-denigrating narrative voice. Even more delightful was finding a committed traveler who freely admitted to strong fears of flying!

Laube's descriptive powers are endless. From life's necessities (food, toilets, beds and bathrooms) to grand buildings and streetscapes Laube keeps our interest by her eye for detail and wicked wit. People too never escape the writer's eye. Laube is constantly on the lookout for those archetypal and quirky characters we have known in fiction since Dickens introduced us to Ebeneezer Scrooge and Mrs Havisham.

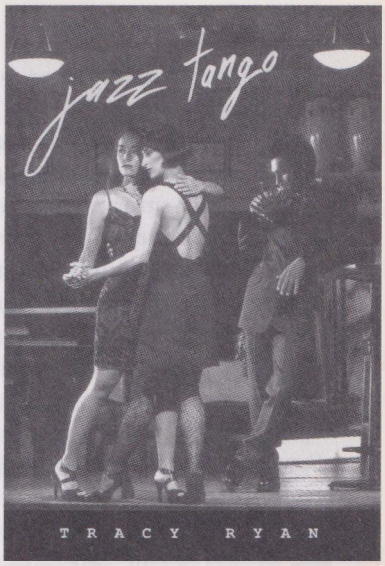
Laube provides interesting snippets of historical information in the major areas, giving us a good sense of the struggle for ownership over the ages and the different cultures intersecting within the population. For example in Machu Picchu we learn that in fact this Inca city never was lost but that "most local Indians knew about it". We are also witness to the Incas as a race that was every bit as technically innovative as the Romans.

Laube travels by plane (only when necessary), train, bus, ship, taxi and hire car and each allows the reader differing perspectives on the landscape and insights into cultural traditions. Laube's idiomatic style, "Boy, was she on the nose", never lets us forget we are travelling with a fellow Australian.

This was my first experience of travel writing but I guarantee it won't be my last.

Storytelling, gemstones and goddesses are recurring motifs in the tale of clashing cultural identities in *Hindustan Contessa*. Tilly, an Australian of Anglo background is married to Milan, an Indian. In order for Tilly to understand Indian culture and traditions they travel to India. The couple, plus "Small Auntie" and their local taxi driver are kidnapped by robbers and held in a cave in the hills while a ransom is demanded.

It is the voice of Tilly that takes us back and forth between the cave, the travels in India and their life in Australia. As they travel through India Tilly is conscious of her 'otherness', a bride in a sari who has an Indian husband (and one of quality!) but is not herself Indian and indeed has red hair. Jane Watson provides us with beautifully drawn portraits of Tilly's mother and mother-in-law. They are archetypal Australian and Indian mothers, forever proclaiming their robust views on marriage.



The story is essentially a 'coming of age' for Tilly, a gradual acceptance of the dualities of her new life and in the end a blending of the two. At Milan's grandmother's house Tilly gains insight into her husband's emotional life as well as acceptance within the heart of the family for the first time.

Tilly learns to take nothing for granted in her husband's homeland, not even the separation of reality and illusion, so clearly delineated in Australian society. In India they intersect and bounce off one another like sunlight on precious jewels.

Borrowed Eyes is based on the true story of a woman who survived the massacre of a group of nurses in the Second World War at Bangka Island in Indonesia. Vivien Carmichael is faced with the eternal dilemma of a sole survivor, the unanswerable question of why she has been left behind as the keeper of the memories.

We move back and forth from coastal Victoria to tropical Indonesia and the prisoner-of-war camp where Viv saw out the remains of the war. The images here are graphic and memorable, e.g. the women sleeping with a stone on their stomach to counter the constant sense of an empty stomach.

The title of the book comes from Viv's vow to her friend Iole who died in the massacre, that "I would keep looking at the world through borrowed eyes, looking for her and me, looking through her eyes as well as my own." Curiously though, we hear very little of Iole—one or two fragmentary glimpses at best. Rather it is Martin, a Dutch youth befriended in the POW camp who becomes the focus for seeing new places and new ways of looking. Both Martin, who later comes to stay with Viv in Australia,

and Viv's departed father occupy central roles in the narrative.

Viv uses the 'borrowed eyes' of her father to notice every tiny section of her surroundings. She records in memory what he recorded in endless photos and slides. Thus every inch of coastline is etched carefully until we can feel the sand and wind in our face and smell the seaweed.

This reader found *Borrowed Eyes* to be beautifully written but unable to live up entirely to the promise of the starting point.

Susan Holmes is a Melbourne teacher and writer.

Australian woman as consumer

DI BROWN

Susan Sheridan with Barbara Baird, Kate Borrett & Lyndall Ryan: *Who Was That Woman? The Australian Women's Weekly in the Postwar Years* (UNSW Press, $39.95)

Alison Alexander with Prue Torney-Parlicki & Suzi Hutchings: *A Wealth of Women: Australian women's lives from 1788 to the present* (Duffy & Snellgrove, $30)

"There is no-one in the world so important as the woman in the home." This was the early motto of the magazine that became Australian Consolidated Press's flagship, launched in 1933. *The Australian Women's Weekly* was first and foremost a national cultural institution, connecting its women readers to the rest of the world through news of labour relations, politics, the economy, the environment, education and the arts. The popularity of the magazine peaked in the 1950s and 1960s when it was read in one in four Australian homes. The *Weekly* far outstripped its rivals, *Woman*, *Woman's Day* and *New Idea*, enjoying the biggest circulation per head of population of any women's magazine in the world.

As contemporaries born in Australia in the 1940s, Susan Sheridan and Lyndall Ryan invoke personal memory in researching *The Australian Women's Weekly* in the postwar decades. When Lyndall was 8 years old in 1951, she identified with the *Weekly*'s portrayal of "the normality of the white Australian girls in the advertisements" and was also connected to her mother's world of politics and the status of women, through the magazine. Kate Borrett was linked to her family's past, when she uncovered a pristine collection of old wedding photos and family portraits belonging to her grandmother, framed in an ageing and fragile copy of the *Weekly* from 1963. When Borrett was 12, she frequently desecrated the pages and visuals of *Weekly* magazines from the 1970s to embellish her presentation of school projects. I recall doing the very same thing in the mid to late 1960s and I'm sure many other women also share this memory.

A selection of images and texts from the *Weekly* in 1946, 1951, 1956, 1961, 1966 and 1971, enabled researchers to take slices at five-year intervals over a twenty-five-year historical period, underpinning massive social and cultural change during the life of the *Weekly* and its readers. This is supported by a detailed Index to every item, compiled by Barbara Baird and Kate Borrett. The book consists of three main sections that deal with the immediate postwar period in 1946, the 1950s and 1961–71. Eight chapters discuss themes of femininity and domestic culture in the *Weekly*, including the construction of the housewife as consumer; sex, romance and marriage; motherhood; women's work; house and garden; food and cooking; health; and fashion and beauty.

Magazine editors play a powerful role as cultural gatekeepers in commissioning content and influencing the lives of women who are regular readers. It is extraordinary to think that one woman, Esme Fenston, was the *Weekly*'s editor for twenty-two years, from 1950 to 1972. She was assisted by long-serving journalists, including senior columnist Dorothy Drain, who never married and eventually succeeded Fenston as editor. Sir Frank Packer and his editorial staff undoubtedly shaped the magazine's content over time, offering a changing and complex picture of 'the Australian woman':

> Magazines like the *Weekly* taught women what they ought to be, what they could dream of, how they should appear.

In 1946, Esme Fenston's editorial carried a clear message to its female readers: "Marriage is the best career" (1 June 1946). This career was best carried out in the home where, through regular sections in the *Weekly*'s pages, female readers could move from the bedroom, to the living area, to the kitchen, to the laundry, to the back porch. Clearly, representations of women's work—childcare, housework, shop-

ping, cooking, sewing and gardening—were in the home. Women could overcome the drudgery involved by purchasing the latest in labour-saving devices and products promoted and advertised in the *Weekly*. Fenston became editor at a time when Australia was experiencing economic restructuring. The postwar shortage of goods and services was followed by a population explosion and an unprecedented growth in home ownership. The 1950s was the modern decade marking an era of new consumerism, consolidated by expansion during and after the war of the manufacturing sector, in which every Australian family was the proud owner of a house, a car and, after 1956, a television. By the 1970s, women were moving out of the kitchen and into the bedroom but heterosexual relations had broken free of the confines of marriage to embrace values of 'free love'—an expression of the 1960s sexual revolution.

Australian society underwent radical redefinition with the youth revolution gaining momentum in the 1960s, the introduction of the oral contraceptive pill in 1961 and subsequent agitation for abortion law reform. This was followed by legislative reforms in social welfare and family law in the early 1970s. By the time this study of the *Weekly* ends in 1971, the women's magazine market has diversified, threatening the *Weekly*'s dominance; middle-class women are leaving the confinements and isolation of their suburban homes and entering the paid workforce; the new Women's Liberation Movement is beginning to impact on Australian politics and government policy; and the second wave of feminism is challenging homogenised definitions of what it means to be an Australian woman.

Sheridan and her colleagues primarily focus on the construction of women as consumers and argue how such an artificial and strategic role places them at the centre, not the periphery, of capitalist societies in the second half of the twentieth century. The various sections in this book reveal perpetuated myths and constructed truths, as told by the *Weekly* and published to millions of female readers across generations of Australian women. As Sheridan et al. point out, the *Weekly* successfully constructed the 'housewife as consumer' and applied this universality to 'Everywoman'. This blanket approach blatantly ignored race, class and difference, excluding and alienating Australian Aboriginal women and many European immigrant women who came to Australia in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

In her concluding remarks, Susan Sheridan returns to the questions that drove the researchers in the early stages of the project: Who were the women for whom the magazine was fashioned? How did the *Weekly* expect that she would fashion herself? and how did she change over the twenty-five years after the war ended? The readership of the *Weekly* was not for Everywoman but for the overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, Anglophone and middle-class women who lived in Australia. She was both the 'object' and the 'agent' of consumer culture.

The Epilogue focuses on how the magazine's content and market has evolved since 1971. This is accompanied by an interesting commentary on the personalities of successive *Weekly* editors and editors-in-chief, who set the tone and pace of the magazine with very individual styles. In the mid to late 1990s, across magazines and books, came the era of chequebook journalism and publishing, with exclusive scoops and up-front advances. This buying into the international celebrity market was a shift away from the traditional Australianness of the *Weekly*. Sheridan argues that under Deborah Thomas's editorship in 2000, the emphasis returned to contemporary definitions of Australianness. The two biggest women's magazines in Australia, the *Weekly* and the *Woman's Day*, declined in circulation between 1994 and 1999. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twenty-first century the *Weekly*'s circulation was approximately three-quarters of a million, with a readership of around three million. For the record, the *Weekly* still claims to have the greatest readership per head of population of any women's magazine in the world, and still leads a crucial market for the media industries in Australia, which has the highest per capita consumption of magazines in the world.[1]

A Wealth of Women is a history commissioned by the Office of the Status of Women and funded by the National Council for the Centenary of Federation. The OSW conducted a History Search in 2000, uncovering four hundred stories of Australian women's lives and this is the primary material the author has sourced for this study. Like Sheridan et al.'s study of the *Weekly*, these stories show that the British tradition of women staying at home was never totally accepted in Australia. Alison Alexander's analysis is brought to life through the stories of ordinary yet extraordinary achievers, from the 1780s to modern day. The book was written to explore the opportunities women have had, the hard-

ships they have endured and the contributions they have made to Australian life. Due to hidden factors, such as selective memory and lives that were lived but not recorded, the stories in this history are described by the author as "a selected characterisation of Australian women".

Between 1788 and 1856, 24,000 convict women were transported to Australia as part of the British settlement. Alexander's study begins by focusing on convict women and their lives in the new colony. They were the founding mothers of families and homes and "were largely responsible for turning giant prisons into communities", laying the foundation of modern Australia. The experiences of the white women who followed them in the mid nineteenth century was that they were expected—and usually hoped themselves—to marry. Most found that pregnancy, rearing children and keeping house dominated their lives. Their activities inside and outside the home were family-oriented and this was reinforced by ways in which society viewed their role. They had no voting rights, their husbands owned their property and few were acknowledged in public life. During the late nineteenth century, women came to Australia from non-European cultures. Asian women were mainly from China and Japan. Chinese men were attracted by gold and Japanese men arrived in the 1880s to work in the pearling industry. Japanese women were bought from poor families in Japan by a procurer who sold them in Hong Kong. They were then brought to Australia as servants or comfort women for Japanese and European men. Some ran brothels or other businesses in Australia with considerable success and personal wealth. The White Australia policy was in full force and racism was widespread. This was reinforced from 1901, when non-European immigration was entirely prohibited.

The hard work and hardship endured by women throughout the Depression, the two world wars and beyond, is a recurring theme in Alexander's book. The conditions for some women and their families improve in the boom years in the 1950s, with technological advances improving the lot of women in the home and birth control, with the introduction of the Pill in the early 1960s. The arrival of migrant families throughout the 1950s and 1960s brought new ideas and traditions to Australia. Nevertheless, racism was entrenched and Indigenous women in Australia suffered from the double disadvantage of racism and poverty. While 'second wave' feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement brought about radical social change and political reform from the 1970s, not all women experienced these gains. Among other narratives, Torney-Parlicki quotes Indigenous historian Aileen Moreton-Robinson, in her critical study on white Australian feminism, *Talkin' Up To The White Woman*.

Two chapters in Alexander's book are dedicated to the continuing struggles of Aboriginal women in white Australia. They are written by Prue Torney-Parlicki, working with Aboriginal consultant Suzi Hutchings. Torney-Parlicki problematises writing about the lives of Aboriginal women as a white historian. She acknowledges the rich oral tradition of Aboriginal storytelling and the recording and transcribing of Indigenous community knowledge, although much of the historical recording and transcribing was and is undertaken and interpreted by white anthropologists, historians and other non-Indigenous researchers. This continuing practice poses a moral, ethical and cultural dilemma, because non-Indigenous studies of Australian Indigenous peoples will always be flawed.

Torney-Parlicki argues that "writing about the colonial period, however, necessarily relies on European accounts" and "the task of documenting the lives of Aboriginal women before contact with whites is even more problematic, for there are no available accounts of Australian life before literate people produced them". This may well be the case with written records, but what of Aboriginal art and oral history? The author also makes reference to the plural 'we' as the ones who are reliant upon the impressions of early white male observers. In doing so and probably with the best of intentions, Torney-Parlicki reinforces the myths and deceptions of white Australian history. It is also regrettable that the black and white photos and illustrations selected for inclusion in her chapters dedicated to Aboriginal women, almost exclusively portray white women and children.

In the final chapter, Alexander constructs a typical contemporary Australian woman, 'Jessica' (the most popular name of the 1990s) and follows her life through to her death in the early eighties. This can be contrasted with Alexander's earlier construction of 'Sarah' (a popular name of the period), a typical woman who lived in the 1830s to the 1870s in the Victorian heyday, following her life through episodes from women's diaries and letters. It is interesting to compare and contrast these two women

and draw your own conclusions. A series of real-life vignettes also appears in the final chapter, in which the author notes that the qualities of pioneer women also characterise the stories of women in the twenty-first century, and argues that if Australia was to really treat women equally and use their talents in building up the nation, "where could we not go?"

ENDNOTE

1. See Frances Bonner 'Magazines' in Stuart Cunningham & Graeme Turner (eds), *The Media in Australia: Industries, Texts, Audiences*, 2nd edn. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, pp.112–23.

Di Brown recently completed her PhD, entitled 'Publishing Culture: Commissioning Books in Australia, 1970–2000'. She freelances as an editor and literature consultant.

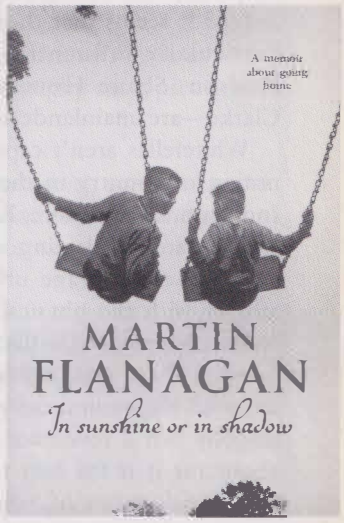
Buy a second copy

DAVID OWEN

Martin Flanagan: *In Sunshine or in Shadow* (Picador, $22)

Dewey cataloguing practise allows for auto/biographies to be shelved by subject or at 920. There's a compelling case to assign by subject, although many public libraries shelve them together to satisfy users. The National Library of Australia does both. Thus Leonard Huxley's *Charles Darwin* is at 575 as is the evolutionist's son Francis Darwin's *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*. But Sir Arthur Keith's *Darwin Revalued* is at 920, as is Darwin's autobiography. And Charles Holder's *Charles Darwin: his Life and Work* is at both locations. Puzzled? In respect of Martin Flanagan's *In Sunshine or in Shadow*, I am, since the NLA has classed it at 070.92 —Journalism.

Certainly, Flanagan is a journalist. But if this, his latest book were to be reviewed in a tabloid as 'Hack Looks Back', that would be similarly misleading. It's neither about journalism nor, really, the profession of being a journalist. Simply written, it's fiendishly complex; to properly catalogue, at any rate. There isn't a number for it. Flanagan uses Australia past and present to search for his own soul and the potentiality of a unified national soul—not possible yet, given over two centuries of fractious and at times genocidal interaction, and probably never likely. But by the author's own admission he wrote this in a "uniquely Australian spirit of optimism" and the best lesson to come out of it is that integrity, honesty, and a determination to journey, repeatedly, where most won't even go once—into blackfella country, literally and intellectually—have afforded him a rare insight into Australia's confused sense of itself.



It is "a memoir about going home". That's Tasmania. Elsewhere is the big island and, for a short spell when he was a young man, Europe. Flanagan hasn't lived in the island—"the play within the play that is Australia"—since 1985, when he joined *The Age* newspaper. But, it seems, it is that absence which fuelled his desire to reassess the "strangely deafening silence" of Tasmania's past. For him, "the inquiry that is at the heart of this book [is] another view of Tasmanian history". One starting point is his own family: a Flanagan was transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1849, his crime being that he was an Irish Famine victim. On his mother's side were the English Greens, who "longed for a respectability the Flanagans silently loathed". But class snobbery and anti-Irishness weren't the only British imports. Truganini is central to the book (which Flanagan originally conceived as a novel about George Augustus Robinson, the controversial conciliator who may have been her sexual partner), and she, for her sorry sins, represents the other Tasmanian history, of near-genocide.

Flanagan's profession has enabled him to meet many people over the years, as has his tireless devotion to footy. Add this to a family with deep roots in "working class culture, which basically meant labor politics and sport" and his innately enquiring nature and the result is a literary work of many voices, each contributing to the author's quest. But he roams well beyond Tasmania, for this work is more truly an Australian odyssey; the island state doesn't have a monopoly on injustice, intolerance and inequality.

Indeed it seems that those who for him have been particularly influential—Archie Roach, Patrick Dodson, Shane Howard, John Embling, Banjo Clarke—are mainlanders.

Whitefellas aren't capable of understanding the notion of country in the way that the continent's Indigenous peoples are. Rank materialism goes some way towards explaining why. And it can hardly be said that the average urban Aussie has a mystical affinity with the physical land. Martin Flanagan—white, disappointed to discover he wasn't 'Irish' when he went there—has cultivated an intense communion with the natural environment. Not a green philosophy but a reverence which isn't easy to write about (as it is for him to describe another reverence, arising out of "the magical power that accompanied the swerve of a ball"). It seems to be his way of developing a personal understanding of what is, for sure, his country—that of Truganini, Martin Cash, Tunnerminnerwaite, Governor Arthur, Smith O'Brien, today's Auntie Ida, Darryl Gerrity, Lyn Flanagan and many more, with family always at the centre.

The book doesn't proselytise, has no answers, is full of humility (and humour)—these are the strengths ensuring the complexity. It's a fine, thought-provoking read. But where to put it? Please, not spine-to-spine with *Barefaced Cheek: the Apotheosis of Rupert Murdoch* and *Scoop-Wallah: Life on a Delhi Daily* and *Early Edition: My First Forty Years* by Ita Buttrose. Memo to NLA: buy a second copy and try 305.800994.

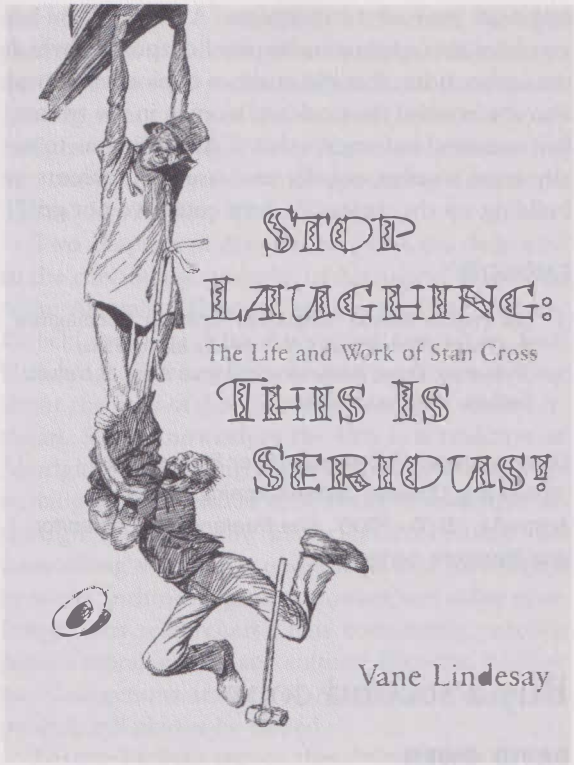
David Owen is the editor of Island.

Black & white humour

DAVID POPE

Vane Lindesay: *Stop laughing: this is serious!: The life and work of Stan Cross, 1888–1977* (MUP, $39.95)

Writing in the pages of this journal in 1980, historian Russel Ward described it as the funniest joke drawing ever produced in Australia, if not the world. Two building workers dangle high above the city from the girder of a skyscraper, one holding on by his fingertips, the other clinging desperately to the trousers that are now around his mate's ankles. As



we anticipate their terrible fate, the pants-down slapstick leads us to the cartoon's dry caption—"For gorsake, stop laughing: this is serious!".

It is a gem, drawn by the cartoonist Stanley Cross in 1933, and providing the title to a new biography of Cross by the unofficial historian of black and white art in Australia, Vane Lindesay.

It is a cartoon the like of which would not be drawn or commissioned today. Too much of that old-fashioned over-etched comic realism from a distant Australia that truly does seem like a foreign country today.

And yet, like the building worker clinging by his fingertips, this cartoon continues to cheat the fate that claims most other cartoon ephemera. Not, for me, because of the supposed timeless quality of its humour, but for its resonance of the times that produced it (coincidental to the more modest aims of the artist who seemed completely focused on simply crafting a comic drawing). While other, more political, cartoons of the day were striving for noble statements that portrayed the dignity of the working class as it struggled with unemployment and poverty, Stan Cross's cartoon eclipses them all with the resilient dark laconic humour of his positively undignified working men in desperate times.

Despite an active interest in the Social Credit movement in the 1930s, Stan Cross was not a political cartoonist, and he saw out the Depression on a good salary as a senior artist with the popular illustrated broadsheet newspaper, *Smith's Weekly*. Cross became one of the first comic artists to be employed by *Smith's* shortly after it was founded in 1919, and worked on it through its heyday for twenty years.

Born in Los Angeles in 1888 and raised in Western Australia, Stan Cross left school at 16 to work as a clerk on the railways. Encouraged by his mother, he developed an interest in painting and drawing from an early age, and became an active member of Perth's art colony. At 24 he left the railways to study drawing for a year or so in London. He returned to freelance full time as a cartoonist, before landing the job at *Smith's Weekly* and moving to Sydney.

In his time at *Smith's*, and later with the *Melbourne Herald*, Cross developed three major national comic strips, including 'Wally and the Major' (1940–1970). The proscriptive atmosphere in which Cross developed his later strips produced a fairly homogenised and inoffensive body of work that seemed to typify the cultural landscape of 1950s Australia as much as it contrasted with the more loose and spirited simplicity of his earlier strips. There is a Krazy-Kat-like elegance to the earlier work, before Andy Capp-style jokes of drunken husbands confronted by saucepan-wielding nags had ossified into cartoon cliché. But it is in the examples of Cross's highly-rendered single-panel cartoons that his real power becomes evident. His draughting ability has ensured that even when time has eaten away at the foundations of his gags, the caricatures and rendered backgrounds continue to offer insights of a time and a place keenly observed.

With a nod to the social context in which Cross was working, and an ear for anecdote, Lindesay weaves a detailed retelling of this cartoonist's life around a mosaic of photos, sketches and beautifully-reproduced cartoons.

Like all good Hollywood box-office hits today, Stan Cross's most popular cartoon also spawned a sequel. His aim, however, was not to milk the audience, but to reply to the concerns of countless fans who "found themselves in uneasy wonderment as to if or how the precarious situation was happily resolved". I can't help reading 'the rescue' as a metaphor for the fortunes of the modern Australian economy in this era of global crisis and uncertainty. "Cripes, that was a narrow squeak! Yairs—we were lucky to get out of it."

You'll have to view the rescue yourself in Vane's warm and affectionate biography to appreciate the intended irony.

David Pope is a freelance cartoonist, a regular on the pages of Overland, *and last year's winner of the 'Stanley' award for humorous illustration.*

Elwyn Lynn's art world

BERNARD SMITH

Peter Pinson: *Elwyn Lynn: metaphor + texture* (Craftsman House, $100)

Patricia Anderson: *Elwyn Lynn's Art World* (Pandora Press, $49.95)

One needs both these books in order to gain a balanced perception of the fiery path that Elwyn (Jack) Lynn cut through the Sydney art world of his day. Peter Pinson's book is the approved account of his life; Patricia Anderson's, the heretical substitute, rejected by the family. In death, as in life, Jack continues to stir the pot.

As Pinson's title implies, his book concentrates on Lynn's achievement as a painter. The text is written around a series of very fine colour reproductions and he provides a cool and spotlessly positive assessment of Lynn's contribution to Australian art. It is widely known that Lynn introduced 'matter' (or texture) painting to this country after encountering the work of Antoni Tapies, and other Spanish painters, at the 1958 Venice *Biennale*. Pinson argues convincingly that his paintings evoke metaphors of decay and death.

Lynn grew up in Junee, in southern New South Wales, remembering its "fly-infested summers, its bushfires and droughts". His paintings reflected perceptions of nature as "hostile and unwrought . . . landscapes . . . inimical to human comfort with lesions and fissures recalling distant catastrophies". And they reflect also something of his own personal nature. The pastoral idylls of Streeton and Heysen were not for him. Like a smouldering volcano ready to erupt at any moment Lynn made his presence felt wherever his interests were at stake. Bryan Westwood's Archibald prize-winning portrait of him is not only good photo-realism, it is a raw, psycho-

Blake's God and the People, 1950, oil on cardboard, 46 x 76cm. Collection of James Agapitos and Ray Wilson

logical study of a bully-boy who felt perpetually embattled. But Lynn was also a very fine artist and Pinson's book makes this central fact abundantly clear.

Nevertheless it presents a highly sanitised account of his journey through life. The opposition he faced, ideologically and critically, is muted. Wallace Thornton, critic of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, is only quoted in praise of his work. We have to turn to Patricia Anderson's book to read Thornton's ambiguous reactions to it. Nor does Pinson mention the intensities that developed in the Lynn family around Christopher Allen's critiques. Pinson's book leaves the impression that few, if any, critics wrote unfavourable reviews, that there was little in his path but roses all the way. Anderson's book provides a much more lively and controversial nature of the reception of Lynn's work.

In 1996 she suggested to Lynn that she write a book about his work, a project readily agreed to by the artist, and his wife and daughter. But after Lynn died in January 1997 the project began to turn sour. When widow and daughter were presented with Anderson's manuscript towards the end of 1997 they scrutinised it in detail; a year later the book was ready for the publisher and the family provided photographs to accompany the reproductions Anderson had decided to use. At this stage widow and daughter decided that a more appropriate book might be written by Pinson, who had been responsible for the production of two important exhibition catalogues on Lynn's work, the first in 1977, the second, the *Elywn Lynn Retrospective, 1956–1990* for the Art Gallery of NSW. When they realised Anderson was persisting with her own book they did all they could to prevent its publication.

Anderson tells of the problems she faced in the Foreword to *Elywn Lynn's Art World* published prior to Pinson's, last year:

> The book has been written and re-written—four times. The first with the generous assistance and encouragement from the estate . . . the second time to accommodate the loss of all the images held by the estate; the third time to avoid any possible copyright entanglements, and finally when the writer realised that the restrictions imposed—including threats of legal action to the writer and the publisher . . . paradoxically encouraged other quite legitimate freedoms.

These 'legitimate freedoms' made it possible for Anderson to write a much more entertaining and readable (and less expensive) book than Pinson's. She decided to place Lynn in the art world of his time; the social, aesthetic, ideological, and careerist, contexts within which he moved all his life. He made a constant practice of responding to critics, or writing to their editors, if he disagreed seriously with their judgements. No doubt he was sometimes justified but he could be intimidating. When Daniel Thomas, in developing a 'skin' metaphor in relation to his 'matter' paintings used the terms "rotting and gangrenous" Jack wrote to the editor of the *Sydney Telegraph* complaining that Thomas was suggesting that he "possessed a perverse sexuality". He could hand out criticism but was over-sensitive in receiving it.

Anderson's book provides an excellent overview of Sydney's combative and incestuous art world; the anecdotes, gossip, and scandal that vomited from it, as artists struggled for their place in the sun. But her approach is even-handed and offers the best survey I have read of Sydney's art world and its fascinating shenanigans during the second half of last century.

So the Lynn family should be pleased with the outcomes. Pinson's book is admirably designed to serve the art industry well: collectors, dealers and auctioneers will find it an important addition to their libraries. Anderson's book will, however, provide a more realistic account of Lynn's life and art as it actually happened.

Of course I must declare an interest in all this. I knew Jack Lynn for most of his life and from time to time played a major part in it. I probably bought the first painting he ever painted, had close contact with him when he took over the editorship of the *Contemporary Art Society Broadsheet* during 1955. We were both then keen that Paul Haefliger's criti-

cal domination of taste through his column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* should be challenged and I recommended that he be appointed Curator of the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art in 1968.

This is not the place to discuss our long-standing disagreements about the place of figurative and abstract art in modernism and the attendant politics involved, or the role I played in writing the *Antipodean Manifesto* and my reasons. Australian culture will have to develop a greater maturity before it is capable of placing the *Manifesto* in the international setting to which it belongs, and it will have to develop a better understanding of the role art history plays in our culture.

Bernard Smith is, among other things, an art historian.

Read this, Philip Ruddock

ROWAN CAHILL

Colin McPhedran: *White Butterflies* (Pandanus Books, $29.95)

At the age of 72, Colin McPhedran is a first-, and possibly last-time, author. His autobiography *White Butterflies* was released on 20 April 2002. Some 5000 copies sold in the following seven weeks, exhausting the first print run, attracting generous media comment and enthusiastic reviews, but not officially ranking as a best seller. The pain of remembering his past and writing the book took the author the best part of twenty years.

White Butterflies began as a history intended for family and friends, limited to fifty copies. But the manuscript was shown by a family member to Ian Templeman of Pandanus Books, the new publishing venture by the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University.

With Fremantle Arts Centre Press Templeman helped bring the autobiographical works of Albert Facey and Sally Morgan to public attention and widespread acclaim. Templeman encouraged the author to expand and amplify his account and allow the book to reach a wider audience than originally intended. Just how big that audience eventually is, and how the book will weather, remain to be seen.

White Butterflies takes its title from the white butterflies that sometimes shrouded the thousands of refugee corpses the author encountered in 1941 at the age of 11 when he trekked from Burma to India via the arduous Hukawng Valley trail, fleeing Japanese invaders with his Burmese mother, brother, and sister.

The book deals with the trek, the death of McPhedran's mother and siblings on the trail, and his subsequent life in India and England, including an unsuccessful attempt to come to terms with his bigamous Scottish father, a Shell Oil engineer, who deserted his Burmese family at the outbreak of war. The story ends in 1951 with the author's arrival in Australia as an immigrant.

It is a strong and painful story, told simply in a matter-of-fact way, without artifice or self-indulgence. Two emotions thread through the book: contempt for racism and racist attitudes, and great warmth for the Indian and English people who cared for and helped McPhedran after the trek, and during his remaining childhood and adolescence as an 'orphan' of the British Empire. As his mother told him, reflecting her own trusting faith that was both Christian and Buddhist, the world may seem threatening and hostile, but there are always people who care.

For the best part of thirty years McPhedran kept his Burmese background a secret, telling no-one, not even his children. For all intents and purposes he was what his gently rolling accent indicated—a Scottish immigrant.

According to McPhedran he initially kept his Burmese identity a secret on the advice of an immigration official who okayed his application to come to Australia. This advice was reinforced during the 1950s when McPhedran variously worked as a labourer, concreter, tyrefitter, in a small, conservative, rural town in NSW that gave many indications of being hostile towards people who were not 'white'. The town became home; McPhedran became a service station proprietor; the secret became a habit; and the traumas of childhood were shelved, and shrouded.

After heart surgery in the early 1980s McPhedran changed, initially in an edgy way, but eventually deepening in a transformative sense that lead him back to the Buddhism he had courted in childhood. Around the same time he developed a friendship with author Ronald McKie (1909–1991), who had not long moved into town. With McKie, a war correspondent in Burma during the Second World War, McPhedran therapeutically opened up, and together they began to explore the Burmese memories that had been closeted for decades.

Published at a time when the term 'refugee' has been demonised by the Howard Government, McPhedran's story individualises the nature of the refugee experience. The story is all the more confronting because it happened to a person who is outwardly an Anglo-Australian.

White Butterflies also testifies to the healing power of the human act of reaching out to help fellow human beings in distress, of caring for refugee strangers precisely because we all share a common humanity. It is the book Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock should read instead of playing with his stamp collection.

A sirocco of whispers

BERNARD WHIMPRESS

Gideon Haigh: *The Big Ship: Warwick Armstrong and the Making of Modern Cricket* (Text Publishing, $49.95)

Encomia, climacteric, plenipotent, maven, adamantine, caparison, prelapsarian, homilectic, mutable, tranche, sedulous, punctilios, inchoate, procrustean, ductile, lambent, fungible, recrudescent, condign, valetudinarianism, rebarbative, *entrepot*, *pari-passu*, *soi-disant* and *ultra-vires*—not the average words one might expect to find in a cricket biography.

But Gideon Haigh is not an average cricket writer and *The Big Ship: Warwick Armstrong and the Making of Modern Cricket* is no ordinary book. Essentially it is two books, a biography and a history of Australian cricket in the age of Armstrong, the first two decades of the twentieth century. Haigh always extends his readers and if some think the twenty-five words above showy they should allow that the other 160,000 words of text are delivered in clear sharp prose.

The economics and politics of cricket become twin sub-threads in the story. Australian cricket, as Haigh sees it, is centralising its management. However, it faces conflict with the Melbourne Cricket Club which seeks to maintain its entrepreneurial role, especially organising English tours. If New South Wales administrator Billy McElhone and Victorians Ernie Bean and Harry Rush loom large a third of the way through the book it is because they represent many ideas whose time has come. Haigh makes a strong case for what he calls the 'Big Ten' dispute of 1906 rivalling World Series Cricket in 1977 as being the most disruptive influence in the Australian game, and that the widely known 'Big Six' dispute of 1912 is merely an afterthought.

Tours and Test series are recounted well and never as match-by-match plods. Haigh observes that the acrimony associated with the lead-up to the 1909 Ashes tour is a rehearsal for the strife of 1912. Traditional accounts of the 1911–12 Ashes series have viewed Australia as a victim of England's superb new ball combination of Sydney Barnes and Frank Foster when team disunity could be seen as a major contributing factor to Australia's defeat.

Armstrong remains a great player after the war but a one-match appointment as captain at the start of the 1920–21 Ashes series is a slight. Officials keep sniping with fifteen-year-old feuds to settle. Even though he is subsequently appointed for the remainder of the series, achieves a 5 : nil result, and makes three centuries himself, there are still attempts to replace him as captain of the English tour to follow. Haigh terms such manoeuvring "the political becomes the personal". The fight for Australian cricket becomes the fight for control of Warwick Armstrong.

The 42-year-old, twenty-one-stone hero triumphs in England with eight Test wins on the trot yet Haigh finds several things which resonate with the modern game: imaginative appealing, match fixing proposals, complaints over scheduling and wariness about gambling. The team functions smoothly although there is inevitable friction between players in and out of the team. Armstrong's Test career ends in England. Sidelined by bruising to the legs—an after-effect of malaria contracted a dozen years before—he plays no cricket in South Africa on the way home. The Test captaincy passes seamlessly to Herbie Collins.

For a man given to dispute and controversy Armstrong moves easily into retirement following a £2,500 testimonial in March 1922. He slips into business life as a whisky agent and maintains a strong sporting profile during the 1920s. The only blip is as a correspondent for the London *Evening News* where he reveals himself lacking courtesy, damning Bradman and living in the past. For someone so casual about work in his early years he proves successful in business, adroit in personal investments and dies a wealthy man in 1947.

Overall, this is a fascinating study. As in his previous book on Jack Iverson, *Mystery Spinner*, Haigh

has a connection with his subject. In Iverson's case the author attended the same school (Geelong College); in this he lives in the same area (Caulfield) where Armstrong spent much of his life.

Although a densely written book, in it Haigh provides more ringing phrases than usual. Perhaps the best of all refers to the Victoria–New South Wales match beginning on Boxing Day, 1907 in which Armstrong did not play: "The crowd was a sirocco of whispers."

As in previous works Haigh is not afraid to take detours and there are some wonderful disquisitions here on religion, football, divorce, alcohol, malaria, fitness and the psychobiology of fat. The thought of modern-day players working as firemen in the stokehold of an ocean liner for two hours each day in order to gain fitness (as Armstrong and Ted McDonald did on their way to England in 1921) is difficult to imagine.

The Big Ship maintains the author's high standard as Australia's leading cricket writer and historian.

Bernard Whimpress's most recent book is Passport to Nowhere: Aborigines in Australian Cricket 1850–1939.

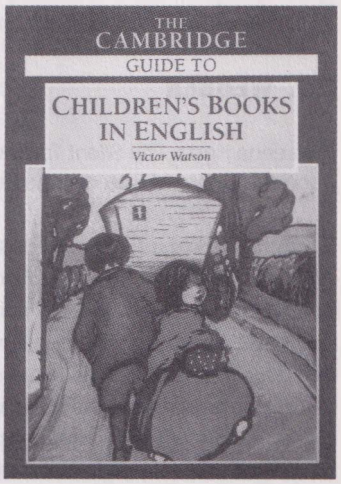
Large minds on small minds

JO LAMPERT

Victor Watson (ed.): *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English* (CUP, $99)

The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English is an 814-page reference book, providing both a critical and appreciative overview of children's books. As a reference, this thick text appeals on many levels. First, flipping through the titles listed gives a great nostalgic rush (I looked up the obscure Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* books). Many of the entries examine how these books have shaped us. *The Guide* is also a good resource on popular culture, including entries on popular magazines for children, TV shows of influence (a serious entry on *Teletubbies*), and due biographical credit is given to the authors who write for children.

Fascinating in its thorough examination of children's texts, it is what anyone might safely call 'a good browse'. Entries, contributed mostly from academics from English-speaking countries, attempt to cover the history of children's books in English from Norman times right up to the phenomenon that is Harry Potter. Look up any favourite, and there it is. For instance, let's say you have a fond, inexplicable memory of Enid Blyton. Here you'll find not only a biography of the writer, but also a one-page discussion of her style, criticism of the sexism and racism in her books, and a theory about her popularity (". . . she empowers her child characters at the expense of adults, showing the latter to be inadequate and deceitful").



The Cambridge Guide mostly lives up to its commitment to the recognition that "children's books exist in a world of social, political and economic change", and entries can be found on such controversial issues as race, drugs, and gay and lesbian themes in children's books (with the interesting claim that *Wind in the Willows* can be read as an example of homo-erotic relationships). This serious analysis of kiddie-lit is rewarding. Not all contributors have chosen to write critically, however; I would have liked the entry on May Gibbs to have explored the racism in *Snuggle-Pot and Cuddle-Pie*, but that entry is more generally descriptive. There are, happily, quite a few Australian references, from *Ten Little Australians*, to *Blinky Bill* (who we are told is "unfailingly condescending to girl koalas"). It's good to see recognition given to Australia's contribution to children's literature, as well as healthy contributions from Canada, East and West Africa, New Zealand, and India, Ireland and South Africa. Although *The Guide* will most likely be used by teachers and librarians, it's hard to imagine many of us who would not be happy to immerse ourselves for a couple of hours in reflecting back on what shaped us as children.

Jo Lampert is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at QUT. She is currently working on a PhD looking at issues of race in children's books post-September 11.

Buried, presumed dead

E.D. WEBBER

Noreena Hertz: *The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (Heinemann).

First it was *When Corporations Rule the World*, then *No Logo*, followed by *Fast Food Nation*, which was not all about hamburgers; now *The Silent Takeover*, which really is about global capitalism and the death of democracy just as its sub-title says it is. All were granted passing reviews in the mass media, yet all are rarely seen occupying pride of place on the shelves of the nation's bookstores where the lesser shareholders, called readers, of the corporate state of affairs they're all about might have access to them. Rather, they're buried and presumed dead in the bowels of the public library system and, in this reader's suburban case, effectively available only upon request.

It is not that their authors are without authority. All have not only done their homework and know of what they write, but their cover blurbs drip with establishment credentials as well. Noreena Hertz,for example, has a day job at the Centre of International Business at Cambridge University. Rather, it's that they're not the average hacks of academe indulging in book chat for a footnote from the teacher and/or some quiet room in the house of literature whenever a grant becomes available from the landlord. In fact, had any of them submitted their work at even a graduate level seminar it would have been returned for remedial work on where they'd strayed from the path of success through excellence.

For openers, all are multi-disciplinary studies and therefore ignore the golden rule of only one room to be allotted in the cloistered house of academe. Their degrees notwithstanding, none of these writers speak of the cloistered existence of *argumentum ad authoritatum*. It's probably their favourite classical fallacy and all undoubtedly see that what's ailing the body politic the most nowadays is the edifice complex brought on by so much socio-political power radiating from so many tall buildings owned by so few yet so major shareholders in the corporate state of things.

One discipline that all adhere to, however, is history, the 'true facts' as Thomas Jefferson liked to say and without the counterfeit history so common to edifice complexes nowadays. Cambridge don Hertz can be very pedestrian while dispensing the true facts of the corporate world, in fact, so much so that many of her observations might be taken as asides the way Sir Denis Brogan's, also of Cambridge, gave an aside at Berkeley in 1962 was—that America is not a democracy at all but a corporation. This was before Reaganomics came to the fore, mind you, as well as before British Labour took the 'third way' in reaction to Thatcherism. By logical extension, British Labour's 'third way' as interpreted by Hertz also explains the current way of the ALP. True facts are important, and all the more so when confounded by the popularity of so much counterfeit history presented via the mass media and hacks of academe alike and as never before. Accreditation is actually valued more than education, as the largest academic generation of working-class origin in history who loudly thought otherwise will attest, hence it's no small accomplishment at all for Hertz and like minds to have been even able to cite true facts instead of howsoever popular false ones.

She is particularly good on focusing on the Anglo-American corporate ascendancy being outrageously and often illegally ascendant throughout the rest of the world in its quest for 'free trade' with its raw materials and markets for its finished products. Such is what empires have always been all about, after all, though few have had the honesty to say so. Nation-states throughout the world as well as throughout history have always had immigration laws pertaining to the movement of people and rarely, if ever, to the movement of capital and even less so when capital moves in the guise of corporations as often as not to the disadvantage of people. The American corporation, Mayne Health, which has little to do with Australian or anybody else's health, is a prime example uncomfortably close to home.

It is uncomfortably close in that the American health system takes 16.6 per cent of the not exactly United States GDP, compared with civilised countries' average of 8.5 per cent, which is very good for the corporate state's health but not at all well for whatever's ailing the pedestrian class of the nation.

Although very good at citing instances and examples, which is part but not all of what history's about, Hertz is even better at recounting the larger view of how and why supposedly socio-political events occurred while the rest of us weren't looking

as closely as we should have. She is particularly good at how the Third Way was a sell-out by the Anglo-American political class to the corporate one, as well as how the national part of the nation-state equation was left out of the process, just as it repeatedly has been in any interpretations of our reactions to the globalism which virtually all our leaders urge their national followings to embrace.

E.D. Webber is a commentator on current affairs.

Wagtails Poetry Series

DUNCAN RICHARDSON

joanne burns: *people like that*
Peter Boyle: *November in Madrid*
Lauren Williams: *Eloquent*
Mal Morgan: *Ma Non Troppo*
Andy Kissane: *Glass Dream*
Judith Beveridge: *How to Love Bats*
(Picaro Press, PO Box 853, Warner's Bay, NSW 2282, $3 each)

It's more a feeling in the air than something often spoken aloud, that much modern Australian poetry is overblown and overpriced. It's part of the deafening silence around poetry as it is resolutely ignored by large-scale publishing and most other media. The Wagtails series though is a powerful antidote to this malaise, attacking both points of weakness as well as providing a fresh look at previously published work that is now out of print. These sixteen-page booklets present a highly condensed 'best of' look at the work of poets whose work has already been published in book form but who, like most poets, have not become household names. The selection of poems is finely done, offering a range of styles, subjects and moods in a short space as well as accessibility of form and language.

joanne burns's book has the gently deceptive rhythms that her readers will be familiar with, often leading to a sting at the end. She has an unobtrusive conversational tone that allows the message, where there is one, to creep up on you. In the title poem for example, people wearing super crisp and stiff suits find that the distance between their hearts and their lapels has become dangerously great. 'split infinitive' is short enough to quote in full:

To be unblemished
is itself a blemish—
the world shines
through like a delicate rash—

There's a careful building of impressions in Peter Boyle's work, often from a personal intense moment of being, then fanning out to the wider view of violence or poverty for example. Not that these pieces are all about the woes of the world. Instead they add to our understanding of it, with endings like this from 'Paralysis', which relates one of those sharp moments of experience from youth, looking up at the sky from a moving car:

. . . the wealth of the leaves
falls forever
into my small still watching.

Lauren Williams's 'Eloquent' has many strong poems but unlike the other poets she seems to lack the confidence that the point is made and re-makes it, sometimes with just one line too many or titles that simply repeat themes or images that are then well developed in the poem. The result is work that appears to be aimed at an inattentive audience at a live venue. With slight editing, the poems could have also achieved the intensity of the other collections.

Having not been a great fan of Mal Morgan's poetry, because of the often oblique references to personal details in his earlier work, I was surprised to find a much wider scope in this book. Here too development of themes and moods is key and it is difficult to quote fragments that give any impression of the depth of the whole but these lines from 'In the Slow Lane' illustrate its simplicity and force:

Choose your dream
as if it were a highway
and you had
a special place
to go.

The essential comedy of life makes a welcome appearance in the batting order of Andrew Kissane's book, alongside the more serious stuff. In 'Facing the Moon' the narrator recalls kissing his girlfriend on the school cricket pitch at night:

as the moon bowled unchanged from
the nursery end.

One of the more moving and challenging is 'Nineteen Weeks' on the experience of having a stillborn child. Kissane risks the first person perspective and it comes off brilliantly, hitting home without resorting to easy pathos.

While Judith Beveridge will be familiar to many readers of poetry, this was my first incursion into her work and I discovered an impressive variety of voice as well as the skill with language evident across the series. In 'The Dung Collector' for example, she achieves an empathetic portrait of a woman glimpsed in a scene of stark poverty, yet Beveridge manages to show the woman's dignity without imposing herself as the benign narrator, a balancing act all too rare. In 'Grass', we find her:

wishing I too could find precision among
unweighable songs

and if you read this and the other Wagtails books, you will come pretty close to doing just that.

Revisiting familiar writers and discovering new ones has become so much easier, through this series. With a new one due out each month, there is now no excuse for not buying contemporary Australian poetry.

Duncan Richardson is a poet and Overland*'s Queensland correspondent.*

Words & human heads: new poetry

KERRY LEVES

John Kinsella (ed.): *Michael Dransfield: A Retrospective* (UQP, $19.95)

Narrative collapses, and time goes subterranean—"the sun is a seed/ cast at dawn into the long/ furrow of history". Michael Dransfield's poetry speaks more sombrely now than it seemed to during his short life. But can a writer avoid revealing—or constructing—in the work he or she does, an attitude towards the work? I ask by way of a response to John Kinsella's phenomenally astute selection from the posthumous *Collected Poems*, edited by Rodney Hall, 1987. As an editor, Kinsella blends connoisseurship with a searching, wide-awake intelligence and an ability to listen for cadence (his introduction reads less decisively—informative, but uneven in tone, it carries some brilliantly suggestive remarks on a litter of buzz words). Kinsella's selection, which omits the prolific poet's many throwaway poems, may help to explain Dransfield's popularity and durability. To start with, there's Dransfield's word-music—the subtly controlled rhythmic changes that make a free-verse poem into an enticing, arresting soundscape. The latter is hard to do, and this book demonstrates Dransfield's fluency—his technical skill and exquisitely cultivated ear for the sounds of English words, and for the sounds of Australian English. The prosody is at once reticent—reserved, wary of hyperbole—and demonstrative, loaded with emotion; the tension between these polarities is seductive and a little uncanny. Then there's Dransfield's intellectual subtlety—the floating, seemingly transparent lyricism that can carry the sting of a hornet, wasp or cobra; the sense, even in the most delicate lyrics, that the writer's position has been thought through. Patricia Dobrez's argument (in her 1999 biography, *Michael Dransfield's Lives*) that the poet was an early post-structuralist, is supported by the self-reflexiveness of the work that can be read here. Kinsella begins the book with some 'Courland Penders' poems—tales of the Dransfield poet's provisional heartland, the dream of a once-great house that is now a decaying repository of past fables, corrupted beauty. Interpolated throughout, the 'Courland Penders' poems can be read as Dransfield's intricately worked statement about poetry—its place in the world as he sees it, and his own commitment to the art. On a social level, the defeatism is absolute—there is nothing to hope for, unless you can identify with the calculating salesman-bureaucrat so crisply satirised in 'The man from Prudential adds it all up', or (God forbid) with the rich, exploitative poetasters in the passionately contemptuous poem 'Wine Tasting'. But Dransfield's art is multi-layered—his worn-on-the-sleeve romantic pessimism facilitates more interesting explorations of what it may mean to live—to be sentient, active, cognitive and sensuous—in strenuously abstracted, yet greedy and scare-making times. Despite the drugging—and his poems of drug-taking go beyond histrionics, into areas of desolation that are appalling to behold—I don't think Dransfield was an 'outsider' artist. On the contrary, his writing about drugs creates, and plays cruel but illuminating games with, the persona of a consumer—a persona

entirely apposite to his time and ours. And something else happens. The poetry begins to follow a divergent trajectory, creating the palpable semblance of spiritual poverty, a willed descent on the losing side. The poet seems to be teaching himself to be humble before the universe, and sharing what he learns with the reader, as he goes. Maybe that's why the mornings in Dransfield's poetry appear so pristine. And maybe that's why his poetry is likely to last, against all odds. Some of the devastatingly negative attitudes enshrined therein remain a problem—to be engaged with, rather than rhapsodised over. Masochistic narcissism and solipsistic nihilism are not, in themselves, art forms, and Michael Dransfield's pathetically youthful dying (aged 24, in 1973) didn't necessarily consummate his art, whatever he may have thought. It's these lovely contraptions, these symbolist thresholds he built along the way, which bring us a living poet.

David Kelly: *Book* (Eaglemont Press, $20)

Flicking through it, you come upon a spread of two completely black pages with the word 'void', in white art-deco lettering, signalling discreetly from the lower right-hand corner; another flick reveals two grey pages (the grey is made of tiny dots, like photos in newspapers), with a white 'word' similarly located, only bigger and more assertive; further wrist action and you're on a dazzling white spread, with 'Ovid' in the same place, bigger again and very black and startling. The final spread in this sequence is all black-and-white squares, a miniaturised chessboard effect that the eye can't quite settle—and the word on offer this time is 'video'. It takes an unconscionable number of words to tell, but that's a witty, suggestive progression. In the beginning was the void, then language (the 'word'), then Ovid, ancient Roman poet of changes—people into things, things into people, people into other creatures; everything into words. It's a concentrated tribute to the old magician of metaphor, the writer of the *Metamorphoses*. And it's fitting that the final spread pays tribute to 'video'—the metamorphic medium of now. Is a concrete poem a metaphor? Why not? Language is metaphor—a fact of which Jacques Derrida may or may not have succeeded in convincing us. Language is David Kelly's metier, as the lucky few who've read his self-published, utterly original book of non-concrete poems, *Things*, have realised. The concrete poems of *Book* seem to be a form of considered lovemaking to—okay, fucking with—language itself. Kelly takes trouble—teasing out relationships between the look of a word or a phrase, and the way it may mean. Thus the simple, rather dry descriptive dyad 'Hawkesbury Sandstone' becomes bedrock from which clouds of birds fly up—the stone, the birds are words, fragmenting into new meanings on a white page sky. Peter Murphy (in *SideWalk*) has accurately described Kelly's technique as "computer massage"; these concrete poems massage language into its primal flexibility. Bend it, stretch it, make it 'stand for' something, language is also—always—only itself; that's a political consideration. And David Kelly's *Book* is a considerable exploration of what human heads (abetted by IT) can do with words, and words can do with human heads. *Book* is as full of play as its merry infant, beached but ebullient on the front cover, looks to be. Fast-lane cousin to Richard Tipping's wry concretions, *Book* is a big surprise and a dazzling contribution to Australian poetry.

Winifred Weir: *Isabella* (fip, $16.95)

One of the most exciting innovations enabled by post-1970s feminism is the revisiting—by reading primary sources—and reconstruction—by thoughtful creative work—of distant historical time periods. Marilyn Lake's *We Should Have Listened To Grandma*, which valorised women as informal family and social historians, broke the ground here, along with forceful academic works such as Anne O'Brien's studies of class and gender bias affecting social welfare practices in earlier eras. Winifred Weir's *Isabella* is a verse novel, which extends this relatively new tradition. It's surprisingly juicy, a page-turner, and moving without being at all sentimental. Working from skerricks of factual information in First Fleet documents—a surgeon's journal, convict papers—Winifred Weir has (re)constructed the story of Isabella Rawson/Rosson, a First Fleeter convicted of theft, sentenced to transportation on the *Lady Penrhyn*, and delivered of a daughter on the journey. Various speakers flesh out Isabella's story—mainly Isabella herself, but also, and crucially, her wealthy London employer; a lusting Lieutenant of Marines on the *Lady Penrhyn*; the same ship's surgeon; Rebecka, a fellow convict who becomes a friend; Isabella's common-law husband Joseph Abbott and her (later) legal husband William Richardson. The poetry that comes from their various mouths is cogent and lucid, striking as it goes

along an always-new, always-judicious balance between archaic density and roughness, and elegant plainness that makes good sounds in a contemporary ear. Winifred Weir's poetic language is never anachronistic; it doesn't import 'now' attitudes into 'then' characters. Instead, it's as if time were a house, and these are voices speaking to us—urgently—from other rooms. The First Fleeters did it hard; there were severe food shortages, regular acts of internecine violence and continual fighting with the poorly armed locals. In this context, Isabella and the people closest to her are sharply delineated, and their emotional lives come across with a growing clarity and richness. Each poem is relatively short—few are longer than a page—and Weir uses the silences and time-gaps between the poems to keep the story in constant movement. It's doubtful that a prose narrative could reach as many peaks of suspense and vividness. On the downside, however, *Isabella* is impeded by one of the worst proofreading jobs I've ever seen; Winifred Weir's writing is very fine, strong enough to pilot a reader through—or past—Five Islands' typographical messes. But no reader should have to contend with so many muddled dates and mangled words.

Ron Pretty (ed.): *wild about the roof: poetry anthology from the wollongong workshop 2001* (fip, $16.95)

This book collects poetry from thirty-two participants in the 2001 workshops. The latter are part of a process whereby manuscripts are worked over, in a group setting, in the hope of their being selected for Five Islands publication. One of the payoffs is encouragement to those not yet selected. This anthology mixes the two categories of poet—the 'booked' and the 'not-yet-booked' and provides some eclectic fun for a reader. The most engaging poems have a social focus—e.g. Ross Donlon's funny and pointed mini-epic on the Sydney Olympics; Lauren Williams's video-fraught bus journey ("*007, Doctor No* leaking tinnily/ out of little square grilles above every seat . . ./ It seems wrong/ watching cars crash and burn/ on one screen/ the road/ through another . . ."); Shen's 'It's always rating season', a satisfying, thoughtful comparison of two different minds' ways of receiving each other; and Phil Ilton's tasty, affectionate 'Ode to The Gong'. David Kirkby's first book, *Spinifex*, demonstrated his range and incisiveness as a social commentator; here, he offers three poems of landscape that credibly and enticingly capture the transience of sensation, making the point that any 'landscape' is both less and more than the sum of its impressions on a mind. Kirkby's debut book occasioned an italicised but ill-judged lament from Richard King in *ABR* (November 2001): "There's just so little *technique*." Nonsense. Kirkby's writing shows how a fairly sophisticated technique can be embedded in a poem or, if you like, subsumed to a poem's representational task—when what's being represented is more than the appearance of things. Here, Kirkby's fine evocations of the brevity of what-appears-solid play well against Jenni Nixon's tripartite 'happy families', a social portrait (coastal town; family members stranded on a reef of language; the easy relief and numbing seduction of RSL club pokies; mythos/ ethos of 'winners' and 'losers') that fixes its lines into place with the precision of a rivet gun, yet leaves space for imagined deaths and entrances. The contrast between Kirkby's and Nixon's contributions could prove a highlight of this busy anthology, which proffers a further boon: the year's most appetising and apposite poetry-book cover design—the nifty title, in blood-red lettering, floats above a sun-bleached, blue-shaded and hectic city streetscape; the photo's horizontal perspective deepens to infinity along rooftops and parapets, while the miniaturised evidence of moment-by-moment human activity is framed by the chilly verticals of an 'endless' urban canyon.

Marian Maddern (editor & translator): *When Poetry Comes: poems by contemporary Bengali women poets* (Sahitya Akademi, unpriced)

Marian Maddern has translated Bengali poetry into English for some decades, and her PhD thesis involved a linguistic comparison between Bengali and English. The twenty poets collected here, born (those whose birth years are given) between 1927 and 1970, offer a generous entrance into Bengali poetry. It's perhaps important to register that the poetry here emerges from a 5000-year-old culture, a polytheistic culture where children grow up in a world both holy and enchanted. Trees, flowers, bodies of water, stones and urban places have flexible but insistent significances; words and scenes accrue meanings from a long, continuous past that is constantly being remade into the future. Metaphysical images—"On the footpath at every step, Krishnas in chalk" (Rupa Das Gupta); "Knowledge is the necklace around

Kali's neck on Diwali night" (Debarati Mitra)—are part of the texture of everyday life and, when used in poetry, can function as signs, as potently as, say, railroad tracks, the sun, kitchen pots, babies, semen or crematory ash. The neat boundaries—e.g. between metonymy and metaphor—that seam Western literary discourse, become permeable: "God forgot to set a barrier at the blood's border./ So sand has entered the blood,/ poisonous foam has entered the blood,/ liquid decoctions of aquatic creatures and fossils . . ./ the ocean is entering the blood" (Debanjali Mukhopadhyay). Within India, Bengal has specific literary, cinematic and political traditions, a historically very active left. These poems, many of them assertively, even violently feminist, speak also to a growing Indian political movement. As Marian Maddern notes in her introduction, Hindu scriptures honour women rhetorically but the culture does less well by them in practical terms: "women become sewers/ women become the gates to hell/ but they need women, they need women/ so women must be without souls/ the scriptures are masculine" (Sutapa Senugupta). Sometimes the politics is socially explicit, very strongly in Urmila Chakraborty's poems: "just six months ago/ she had gone home/ to where the city had swept, like refuse,/ the black huts of the slums;/ where the children, all year,/ keep hoping/ their mother will bring home with her/ gathered-up discarded food,/ rations for several days of joy." Along with Chakraborty's graphic witnessing, there is a ravishing variety of poetry—sensuous, magically intense, with a fluidity that may strike many readers as kin to the emotional language of film—the fast transitions, the pungent details, the ordinary moments that become, by a shift of perspective, luminously symbolic. "The drowned sky is a blue unbarred window/ less heavenly than dreams/ why are you afraid, thinking you will fall?" (Debarati Mitra).

Greg McLaren: *Darkness Disguised* (SideWalk, $5)

I'm not sure this entirely 'works'—if you'll let me slip into the jargon of time-pressed workshops or editors—but it's focused, disciplined and thoughtful, and it gives the satisfaction of a consistently developing pattern. To put it crudely—the more you read, the deeper you seem to go: the skinny, tautly phrased poems work into a heart-rhythm that's skilfully sprung, so it's bracing rather than lulling. The subject matter is, as the title suggests, darkness: night, fear, death and absence. And the sequence works from immediacy—a (probable) suicide that is (somewhat) contextualised to a very unhappy relationship—into the flow of time, which, in this poetry, accretes disappointments, involving a family, maybe even a community. 'Relaxed and comfortable' reading-matter it ain't, but the total effect is clarifying rather than tenebrous—reading it is a bit like going through a fairly rigorous meditative process. (There are references to Buddhism, especially to 'emptiness', which is a key Buddhist concept, but the writing rarely descends into cant.) The poetry questions what we fear, it digs into the foundations of what we hold against primal night—thoughts of self and community. The poet uses darkness—nocturnal images, crows, cold—as a painter might use different shades of black, the way the American 'abstract expressionist' Mark Rothko used variants of a single colour on a canvas, as a focus, to give dimensions to thought and to the relationship between painted canvas and viewer. In *Darkness Disguised*, the relationship between poet and reader gains dimensions, even on a first reading. I could wish that the opening poems, which use shock to set a mood of crisis, were less opaque; they seem to ask too boldly that one take the project on trust—although, later in the work, ideas of trust and faith come up and get some briskly riddling treatment. The poet sketches himself in words at the end, chanting among the stage-trappings of Buddhism ("the prayer flags/ the wind shapes in the half light"); lyricism aside, there's something a bit irritating in the gesture, as if all the angst he's been describing (by no means solely his own) could be subsumed by a personal, ritual act. Still, *Darkness Disguised* is for much of its length rather gritty. The poem 'He spreads the tablecloth like a wing' is a time-looping chant, a poetic direction that might be good to pursue.

Alison Croggon: *Attempts at Being* (Salt, $21.95)

One doesn't want to get caught in the trap of writing reviews "so brief, so insubstantial that they can provide no real sense of the poem's achievement" (Ron Pretty, *Blue Dog 1.1*—but surely Ron means 'book' rather than 'poem', or is someone planning a telephone-book-sized poetry-reviewing journal, to be published fortnightly?) A substantial volume from a poet of Alison Croggon's skill and commitment is likely to be keenly looked-for by many readers, who are hereby put on notice. I'm afraid my caveats start

at the title: would it be too rude to suggest that what every living creature is doing, aside from anything else, is 'being'? An 'attempt at being' evokes an entity so glass-boned as to be barely able to get itself to a keyboard, much less write poetry, prose, criticism and 'texts for theatre'. Most of the latter genres (not criticism) can be sampled here. Some readers may find the phrasing (e.g. "neurones quick with/ such music/ as shakes out angels"; "the heart sobs its fire on a plate of ice"; "o my love how the windows shudder") a tad precious; others may revel in the rhapsodies. But anyone even remotely interested in poetry now, then or hereafter ought to read 'on lyric', an inspired poem-essay that develops into one of the most generous, searching and brilliant inquiries into poetry-writing that's ever gone into print in this country. It's beautifully written; it's not about attitude; and it's in this book.

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet and author of Water Roars, Illusions Burn *(Vagabond 2002).*

IN THIS ISSUE

We sent a newborn Muslim baby back into the open sea in a leaky boat, there, perhaps, to drown. With the *Tampa* storming we frightened a lot of nearby vessels into not rescuing anybody when 354 people drowned, including three little girls. We refused to let their mother, a Muslim, visit her husband in Australia. We stopped a Pakistani Muslim from bringing his family to Australia, and so upset him that he burned himself to death on parliament steps. Alone among 187 nations, we imprison children in concentration camps if they come from the wrong country, always a Muslim country. We deny them an education and confiscate their toys. We invaded a Muslim country, Indonesia, in defence of a Catholic province, East Timor. We shot and killed a number of Muslim-Indonesian soldiers. We made no protest when a young American fool blew up an Afghan Muslim wedding, killing thirty-two including the bridegroom. We did not demand his arrest, though his name was known, in the way we demand the arrest of the bomber of Bali. We made no protest when Israel bulldozed Muslim houses, killed babes in arms and with 'targeted assassinations' murdered young men for political incorrectness. We declared we were America's 'deputy sheriff' in our region and said we would breach international law to help out George Bush in his vendetta on Saddam Hussein. We made no protest when Ari Fleischer urged that Saddam be killed. We let mosques in Australia be bombed and burned and imprisoned Muslim women and children on Nauru. We treated, very badly, Muslims that New Zealand then treated very well. We imprisoned young Muslims from Lebanon for fifty-five years for rape and let elderly-Anglican pederasts go free. We drove Muslim inmates in Villawood and Port Hedland to successful suicide, and Muslim inmates of Woomera to attempt suicide. We called Muslim boat people terrorists, kidnappers, child-abusers, child-drowners, the kind of people 'we don't want here'. We ran an election campaign whose clear theme was keeping Muslims out. We decided we were in 'a war on terrorism' against, in particular, Osama Bin Laden. We applauded the bombing flat of an entire Muslim country. People fleeing from that bombing we sent back, into harm's way.

And yet we are told by the media and the Prime Minister's office that Muslims have no reason to hate us, or to want to kill us, or humiliate us. 'They're resentful of our happiness,' we are told, of our 'superior civilisation'.

Bob Ellis, Overland lecture, pages 5–11

PRAISE FOR OVERLAND

"The most exciting in its field"
Ross Fitzgerald, *The Australian*

"Uncomfortable food for thought"
Debra Adelaide, *Sydney Morning Herald*

"A blunt challenge to the Australian media"
Fiona Capp, *The Age*

"A journal of variety, ideas, opinion and heart"
Christopher Bantick, *Canberra Times*

ISSN 0030-7416
ISBN 0-9579554-5-6
PRINT POST APPROVED PP 328858/0003