

SINCE 1954

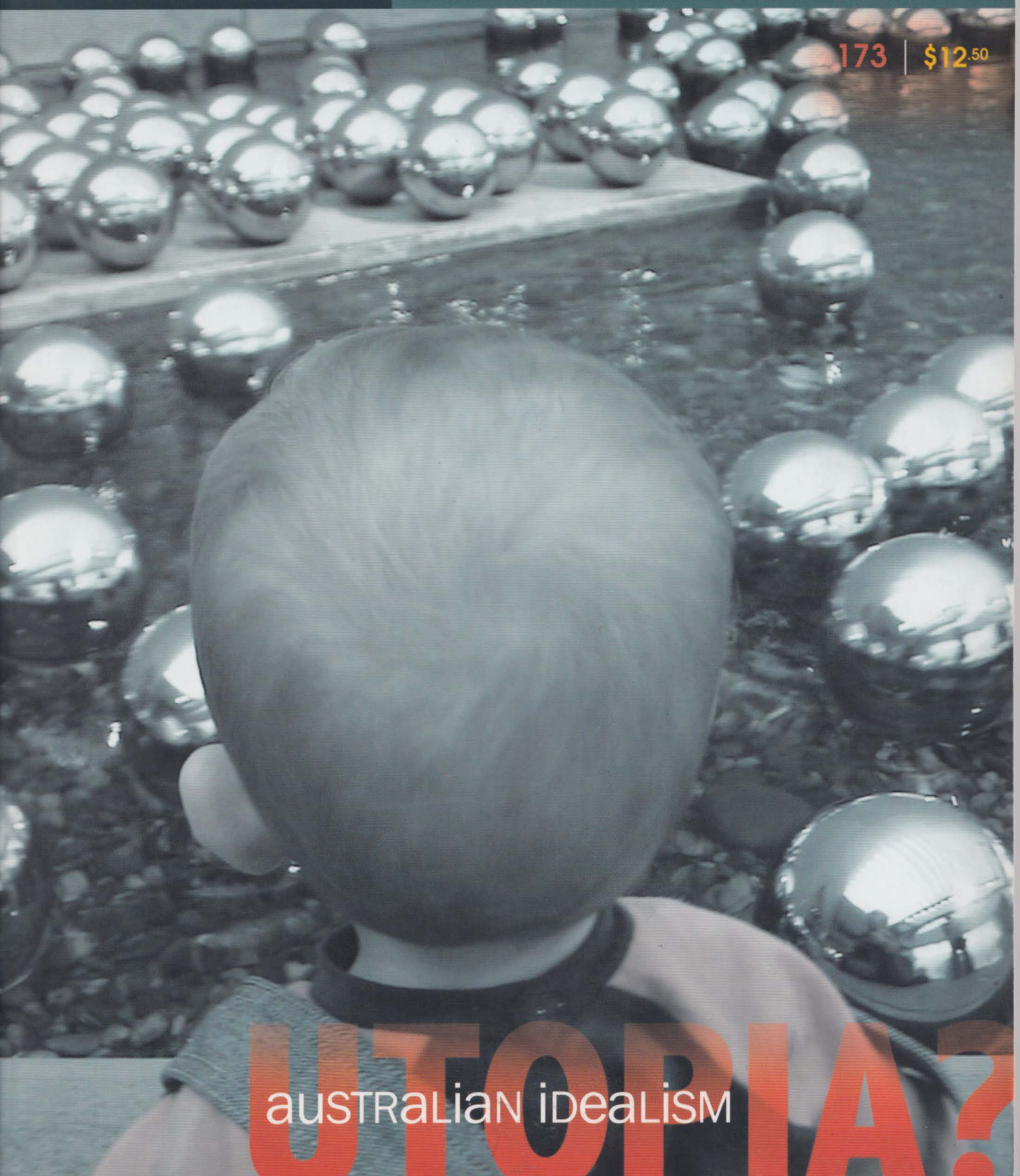
overland

CULTURE | CURRENT AFFAIRS | HISTORY | NEW WRITING | REVIEWS

173 | \$12.50

australian idealism

UTOPIA?







<b>EDITORIAL</b>	3	KATHERINE WILSON & NATHAN HOLLIER   Utopia? Australian idealism
<b>CULTURE</b>	5	ROBYN WALTON   Utopian and dystopian impulses in Australia
<b>LITERATURE</b>	21	KEN GELDER   Epic fantasy and global terrorism
<b>POLITICS</b>	30	SEAN SCALMER & SARAH MADDISON   Making the future: activism, memory and hope
	41	DENNIS GLOVER   Hard heads, strong hearts
	44	CARMEN LAWRENCE   The Australia we could be
	51	GRAHAM MADDOX   Revisiting tradition: Labor and socialism
<b>SYMPOSIUM</b>	36	MICK ARMSTRONG   JEANNIE REA   BEN ROSENZWEIG   Australian student activism
<b>CURRENT AFFAIRS</b>	58	TIM THORNTON   Policing the do-gooders: the Right's attack on NGOs
<b>FICTION</b>	68	A L McCANN   Heslop's dog
	73	FIONA CHRISTIAN   Paying baby
	78	PAUL MITCHELL   Driven from Darackmore to Toonenbuck
	81	WAYNE MACAULEY   A hair of the dog
<b>OPINION</b>	107	ANTONIA HILDEBRAND   Ordinary Australians
	109	JAY BULWORTH   Strategic policy alternatives for Australia
<b>OBITUARY</b>	111	PAUL STRANGIO   James Ford Cairns (1914–2003)
<b>POETRY</b>		JANE WILLIAMS 28   GEOFFERY QUINLAN 28   LOUISE CRISP 29   JOHN KINSELLA 64   GEOFF PAGE 67   GEOFF GOODFELLOW 84   PETER MURPHY 85   COLLEEN Z BURKE 85   CLAIR MACDOUGALL 86
<b>REVIEWS</b>		<b>POLITICS</b> SAMUEL PIETSCH 87   SEAN SCALMER 88   <b>ECONOMICS</b> SUSAN HAWTHORNE 90   <b>IDEAS</b> JANNA THOMPSON 91   <b>CRITICISM</b> IRA RAJA 93   BRIGID ROONEY 94   ANGELA O'BRIEN 96   LAURIE HERGENHAN 97   <b>POETRY</b> JOHN LEONARD 99   <b>FICTION</b> CHRISTINA HILL 100   KERRY GREENWOOD 101   JOHN McLAREN 102   LAURIE CLANCY 104   <b>HISTORY</b> ALEX McDERMOTT 106
<b>GRAPHICS</b>		K WILSON cover, 1, 3, 30, 31, 33, 35   RICK AMOR 5, 15



## UTOPIA? AUSTRALIAN IDEALISM

THERE'S A STARTLING asymmetry in Australian public commentary. Those who've followed its course over many years have learnt that the Left cannot speak for itself; it must be spoken for. Rarely are its apparent claims directly published or quoted; instead they are caricatured and then derided. You ratbag Trostkyites. You disgruntled relativists left over from Stalin's purges. You whinging ideologues, stuck in irrelevant dogma, contemptuous of the real world, devoting all your gravy-train funds to the production of revolutionary propaganda.

We saw this clearly in the media response to Margaret Simons' book, *The Meeting of the Waters* (see *Overland* 171 & 172), in which misrepresentation and personal attack were substituted for rational engagement with the issues. We see it daily in columns by the motley journalistic jugband of the Australian Right: Andrew Bolt, Janet Albrechtsen, Christopher Pearson, Piers Ackerman, Michael Duffy, Miranda Devine, P.P. McGuinness et al. So successful is the smear campaign that 'Left' is understood not as a broad and dynamic framework of ideas, but as a term of abuse. How Labor cringes when the government accuses it of leaning to the Left.

A trend is emerging as a consequence; a situation reminiscent of the office colleague who asserts: "I believe in equality for women but I'm no feminist". Those who advocate equality or social justice

feel compelled to qualify their positions as 'neutral'. Thus Clive Hamilton, of the Australia Institute, responding to accusations of leftist sympathy, says:

While declaring its commitment to social justice, the Institute has taken the view that we need to move beyond the ideologies of the past.

We've yet to see chambers of commerce or business councils declaring their dissociation from past ideologies.

Elsewhere Hamilton writes:

The Left has been wandering in the wilderness, continuing to declaim while no-one listens, mouthing the old slogans to a world that is no longer interested, distraught at its irrelevance, but not knowing where to turn. So bereft of ideas has the Left been that the vacuum has been filled by the pallid apologetics of the so-called Third Way—Thatcherism with a human face.

Perhaps if he substituted 'the ALP' for 'the Left', this assessment might ring true. But where are these people, these pathetic whingers and slogan-mouthers? And if they can't be found or directly quoted and challenged, why do they pose such a threat?

This is where the campaign contradicts itself. On the one hand, the Left is depicted as an irrelevant minority, nostalgic for a welfare-state moment of

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

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** \$42 a year (individuals) and \$45 (institutions); pensioners and students \$32; take-3 \$85 (*Island*, *Tirra Lirra*, *Overland*) within Australia; life subscription \$600; overseas US\$60. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible. Payment may be made by Mastercard, Visa or Bankcard.

**CORRESPONDENCE:** PO Box 14428, Melbourne Vic 8001, Australia.  
Ph: 03 9688 4163 Fax: 03 9687 7614  
e-mail: [overland@vu.edu.au](mailto:overland@vu.edu.au)  
web: [www.overlandexpress.org](http://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 payment: fiction and features: \$100; poems and 'shorts': \$70; reviews: \$75.

The Copyright Agency Ltd is authorised to collect charges for photo and electronic copying of published material. *Overland* distributes money received for copying in the proportion of 80% to authors and 20% to the publisher. Copyright remains the property of the authors.

Scholarly articles will be refereed, and must be

submitted in triplicate hard copy.

**EDITORS:**

Nathan Hollier & Katherine Wilson

**CONSULTING EDITORS:**

John McLaren & Ian Syson

**POETRY EDITOR:** John Leonard

**REVIEWS EDITOR:** Jeff Sparrow

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE:** Louise Craig, Neil Boyack, Blair Gatehouse, Clint Greagen, Angus Goswell, Dan Leach, Natalia Ibanez, Taliessin Reaburn, Michelle Ryan, Sean Scalmer, Michelle Almiron, Tim Thornton

**COORDINATOR:** Alex Skutenko

**DESIGN:** Katherine Wilson

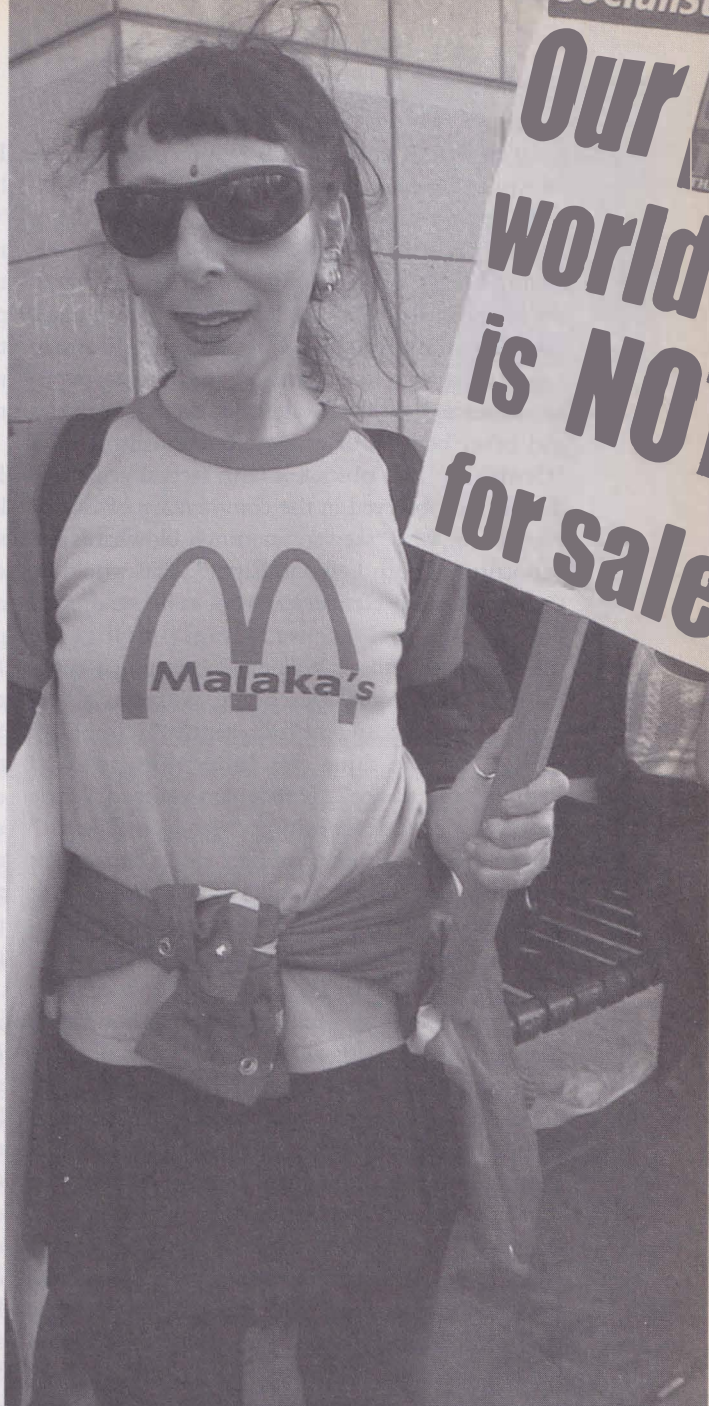


black skivvies and Che Guevara T-shirts, and on the other, as a dangerous threat to the Australian way of life. While it is unrelentingly negative, offering no positive alternative, it also silences practical-minded folk with its endless, loudly-proclaimed visions of utopia.

So pervasive is this myth that many within the ALP swallow it as eagerly as those on the hard Right. In a recent article for Murdoch's *Australian*, a newspaper which casts such liberals as Robert Manne and Philip Adams as the voice of the Left, former Beazley-staffer Michael Costello wheeled out this tired assortment of contradictions again. In 'Left whingers wallow in loss', he claimed that the Left's "lust for utopia and contempt for reality is keeping Labor out of office", writing:

It is a pity that so many of the Left voices in Australia are of a kind that wallows in nostalgia for glorious defeat and contempt for the tough, pragmatic political demands of democracy; that is, get 51 per cent or die.

That's right, Michael. If Beazley had only stopped listening to the Left back in 2001, and paid attention to those pollsters trying to stop him going on about the Government's disgraceful treatment of asylum-seekers, its sycophancy towards the United States and its shameless trans-



**CONSULTING DESIGNER:** Vane Lindesay

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

**BOARD:** Jenny Lee (Chair), Ian Syson  
(Secretary), John McLaren (Treasurer), Richard  
Llewellyn (Deputy Chair), Michael Dugan,  
Nathan Hollier, Foong Ling Kong, David Murray-  
Smith, Nita Murray-Smith, Robert Pascoe,  
Graham Pitts, Jeannie Rea, Jeff Sparrow,  
Katherine Wilson

**CORRESPONDENTS:** Sean Scalmer and Michael  
Wilding (Sydney), John Kinsella (Cambridge),

Katherine Gallagher (London), Tim Thorne  
(Launceston), Duncan Richardson (Brisbane),  
Robyn Waite (Darwin), Cath Kenneally  
(Adelaide), Barbara Milech (Perth)

**PRINTING:** McPherson's Printing Group,  
Maryborough, Vic

ISSN 0030 7416  
ISBN 0 9579554 9 9

This project has been assisted by the  
Commonwealth Government through the  
Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory  
body and by the Victorian Government through  
Arts Victoria—Department of Premier and  
Cabinet. *Overland* gratefully acknowledges the

facility support of Victoria University and the  
financial support of its Faculty of Arts.

The *Overland* index is published annually on our  
website. *Overland* is indexed in APA Full Text,  
AUSLIT, *Australian Literary Studies*  
bibliography, *Journal of Commonwealth*  
*Literature* bibliography and is available in  
microfilm and microfiche from University  
Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb  
Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, USA.

© Copyright by the editors and authors.

ARTS  
VICTORIA

VICTORIA  
UNIVERSITY  
The Place to Be

VICTORIA  
UNIVERSITY

Australian  
Council  
for the Arts

ferral of wealth from low to high-income earners, he would have surely won in a landslide.

Costello refers readers to *Orwell's Australia*, a book by Simon Crean's speechwriter Dennis Glover, endorsing Glover's view that "the publications of the intellectual Left are generally negative and lack constructive suggestions". The alternative, Costello suggests (apart, one assumes, from heeding popular demands for lower wages, fewer social services and other benefits of economic rationalism) is an "Orwell-like . . . obsession with factual accuracy" that he has observed in the commentary of Gerard Henderson, who "skewers unerringly blowhards and hypocrites of both Left and Right". This would be the same Gerard Henderson who, in his syndicated Fairfax column, accused Iraqi intelligence whistleblower Andrew Wilkie of fabricating a quote from John Howard. Describing Wilkie as a "remarkably self-indulgent", "resentful" "publicity seeker" whose fame has lulled him into "a Pythonesque trance", Henderson claimed Wilkie spoke at a conference with a "wall-to-wall leftist" attendance, and that he had become "a hero of the Australian Left". Having implicated him in this light, he claimed that Wilkie made up a statement attributed to John Howard.

There you have it. The Left is not only negative and utopian, it is also fundamentally dishonest. As Manne has observed: "One of the more unpleasant practices of certain members of the Howard Government is the strategic leaking of material to friendly right-wing columnists to damage troublesome individuals . . . the campaign to discredit Wilkie [has] moved well beyond political skulduggery". Within a day of Wilkie's whistleblowing, a member of John Howard's staff circulated a story to sympathetic columnists, suggesting marriage troubles may have made Wilkie seriously "unstable". A Coalition senator described Wilkie as "unreliable . . . flaky and irrational". Henderson, like other columnists, simply toed the line without checking his Hansard.

This is just one of the ways dissenters are discredited by Howard's culture warriors. As Tim Thornton writes in this issue, there is a strong ideological and even financial relationship between the

Howard Government and supposedly 'disinterested' bodies, including certain institutes loosely termed 'think-tanks'. Dissent is then apparently quashed not by the Government, but by 'authoritative' parties acting and speaking 'independently'. The gateposts of debate are then set; anyone arguing outside them is seen as extremist, or else has so much unravelling and explaining to do that their essential message is lost.

PERHAPS IF BEAZLEY *did* listen to the Left in the lead-up to 2001, he may have done his party better service in the long run. In this issue Carmen Lawrence argues that it is in fact Labor's loss of values and idealism that has turned ALP voters toward the party of Australia's *real* Opposition Leader, Bob Brown. Graham Maddox puts a case for the maintenance of the ALP socialist pledge, and Sean Scalmer and Sarah Maddison give voice to the activists and campaigners for social justice, so often characterised and derided but so rarely heard in mainstream media. Scalmer and Maddison find that most of their interviewees, being actual people rather than those imaginary beings who told Henderson that Wilkie was their "hero", are neither overwhelmingly negative nor wildly utopian.

The history of student activism, discussed in this issue by Jeannie Rea, Mick Armstrong and Ben Rosenzweig, is similarly one of struggling against the odds, finding comfort in small victories and hoping that somehow a generally undesirable situation can be changed. In his review essay, Dennis Glover is not completely wowed by the sometimes ostentatiously 'new' directions advanced in prominent books on Australian public policy. But as demonstrated by Robyn Walton in her important historical overview of utopian impulses in the Australian imagination, and by Susan Hawthorne and Samuel Pietsch in reviews of books detailing new opposition to free-market capitalism, the desire for a better world is not likely to disappear altogether any time soon. This desire, as Ken Gelder demonstrates in his highly original essay on epic-fantasy fiction and global terrorism, is sometimes visible in the most unexpected places.

FOR OVERLAND CORRESPONDENCE PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE, <[www.overlandexpress.org](http://www.overlandexpress.org)>.



# UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN IMPULSES IN AUSTRALIA



detail from Rick Amor: *The mill*, 2002, oil on linen 116 x 176 cm, courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne

'THE END OF UTOPIA' was the catchphrase at a utopian studies conference I attended in Europe in 1989, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the publication of Francis Fukuyama's essay 'The End of History?'.<sup>1</sup>

Feeling distant from the triumphalism of those forecasting the imminent collapse of Communism, and not having read Fukuyama, I did not take up the cry. When I later read the essay I saw that not only did some of the conference discussion of Fukuyama's claim misrepresent what he had argued,<sup>2</sup> but the bandied-about analogy to Fukuyama's words added a second layer of distortion. That is, if such pronouncements were to be taken at face value.

My unease was indignantly put into words by the Uruguayan historian Eduardo Galeano in a short, sharp essay published a year later. Welcome to the fall of the Berlin Wall!" Galeano wrote:

But the other wall, the wall that separates the poor world from the opulent world, is higher than ever ... Economic neo-liberalism, imposed by the North on the South as 'the end of history', as the only and ultimate system, consecrates oppression under the banner of freedom.<sup>3</sup>

To consider the 'end of utopia' claim in perspective, I had only to remind myself that there had been previous declarations in the 1890s that utopianism had reached its apotheosis and that no true utopias had been devised since.<sup>4</sup> Also, I recalled, the mid-twentieth century had produced a variant on the dead utopia claim: enthusiasm for industrial progress had led to assertions that utopia was not so much absent on sick leave as redundant.<sup>5</sup> Since

such claims had continued to be repeated, the implication was that utopia refused to remain dead. Every time some idealistic scheme failed, scholars felt obliged to re-announce utopia's demise. By 1989 utopia had retired more times than Melba.

The impending fall of East-Central European Leninism certainly indicated that one old utopian giant was losing its grip.<sup>6</sup> And there was no lack of evidence of more recent grandly-intentioned programs producing fatal outcomes: the late 1970s genocide in Cambodia/Kampuchea had taken place too close to Australia to be readily overlooked.<sup>7</sup> Wasn't such horror enough to make me believe that any remaining hope of bringing about utopia was misguided, that this time around the death of utopia was not a premature announcement?

Call it temperamental inclination, but I did not want to believe humans would abandon for all time such a user-friendly, all-accommodating, resilient and non-aligned mode of speculation. Nor did I think we could afford to lose the hopefulness intrinsic to the exercise of the utopian mode. It was scarcely credible that all future speculation would be dystopian and that all of our futures must be commensurately bleak. We at the 1989 conference had coasted through any ideological crises associated with the coming and going of 1984. We would most likely survive the millennium.

Looking for support for my faith, I considered late twentieth-century evidences of utopianism. During the 1960s, seventies and eighties, Australia had produced very little positive utopian literature, I had to admit, but we had seen the multiplication of counter-culture communes; feminist, black and gay iden-

tivity rhetoric; and calls for low-tech, ecologically sustainable ways of living. In the northern hemisphere there had been some utopian publications, and it was claimed authors were using a new 'critical utopian' form. Instead of following More's static utopian model, some authors were imagining a utopian process which contested both prevailing systems in the industrialised West and the authoritarian tendencies in utopian projection.<sup>8</sup> I recalled the frequently sceptical, pragmatic, anti-utopian tenor of Australian social thought, our rapid uptake of material advances and new information combined with our tendency to self-protective scoffing at idealistic suggestions. It seemed to me Australians were old hands at their own variety of critical, passive-aggressive testing and contesting of utopian ideas.<sup>9</sup>

The task now is to provide a reconsidered overview, and I am conscious of some problems endemic to writing about utopias. As social theorist Peter Beilharz has commented, authors in the utopian field marshal more information than they can interpret.<sup>10</sup> The tendency to reductionist interpretation is present. Those texts, ventures and influences chosen for mention can only be partially representative, and the begging of questions is impossible to avoid.

## NINETEENTH-CENTURY UTOPIANISM

Of the European nations, France made most unconstrained imaginative use of the Southern Hemisphere in utopian prose and plays before Britain's annexation of Australia encouraged French utopists to look away to other planets and to the future.<sup>11</sup> With Britons contemplating with distaste their own body politic's waste products and disputing the likelihood of a respectable society ever emerging in New South Wales, it remained for Germans infused with enthusiasm for Enlightenment values and the natural sciences to identify utopian possibilities in the penal colony. The infamous literary character Baron Münchhausen effectively became the first figure in German literature to make contact with Botany Bay, after he fell through the earth's core to the Southern Hemisphere. Burger's Münchhausen remarked that the area had been so generously gifted by nature that it ought to have been made a place of reward rather than punishment.<sup>12</sup> The first novel in world literature to be set in the Australian penal outposts is believed to be Therese Huber's 1801 *Abentheuer auf einer Reise nach Neuhoolland* (Ad-

ventures on a Journey to New Holland).<sup>13</sup> Having fled from the French Revolution in hopes of recovering his equanimity in a pure young land, Huber's protagonist found at Sydney Cove bountiful natural conditions, which would reward diligence, but also a lamentable convict population. On Norfolk Island he encountered emancipated felons who illustrated how dignity could be regained through land ownership and honest work.

By the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century Australia had its own free-settler and native-born residents ready to attract needed emigrants by picturing a place of unbounded material opportunities.<sup>14</sup> However, the convict presence remained, and the Indigenous population had failed to match Romantics' expectations of noble savagery. The few English writers who attempted to use nineteenth-century Australia as a site for utopia located their worlds well away from Botany Bay. An instance from 1837, *Account of an Expedition to the Interior of New Holland*, depicts a group of communities founded by English and German Christian refugees.<sup>15</sup>

The European revolutions of 1848 represent an obstacle for anyone wanting to follow Hegel in equating the 'end of history' with the 1806 victory of forces aligned with liberal democracy. For distant Australia, one flow-on effect of the 1848 revolutionary failures was the arrival of some well-educated and politically alert emigrés. South Australia's 'Forty-Eighters', from what was to be Germany, brought with them enthusiasm for the unified democratic nation-state.<sup>16</sup> Australia's first known utopian commune, Herrnhut, was founded in 1852–3 on idiosyncratic religious principles by an earlier German immigrant.<sup>17</sup>

Popular journalistic speculations about a bountiful future were not unusual in the 1830s and forties. Addressing a local readership in 1832, a writer using the pen-name 'Mephistopholes the Younger' took a secular, practical viewpoint: his 'Australia Advanced' of the year 2032 promised suspension bridges and fast locomotives. Another writer, 'PGM', championed copper mining as the source of the wealth which would by 1945 produce an enviable South Australian port and electrically-stimulated agriculture.<sup>18</sup>

Coast-based colonists were often unnerved by their ineffectuality in dealing with the vast scale and consuming vacancy of the country's interior, by the



It seemed to me Australians were old hands at their own variety of critical, passive-aggressive testing and contesting of utopian ideas.

---

“threat of an encroaching, engulfing emptiness”, as Jennifer Rutherford puts it.<sup>19</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that defiantly hopeful discovery fantasies appeared throughout the nineteenth century. Readers found reassurance in imagining that such daunting regions as Central America, Africa and Australia had supported marvellous cultures long before the contemporary indigenous peoples came; whites were therefore justified in mentally and physically traversing and where possible reclaiming these lands.<sup>20</sup> Colonists were also willing to entertain the belief that Australia was a remnant of the lost Atlantis-like land mass of Lemuria.<sup>21</sup>

Those eager for individual enrichment were lured inland by prospects of minerals and superior grazing land. Others sought recovery from the physical and moral debility of the Old World. And there were rare cases, such as that of William Buckley, in which an outcast or escapee from the local white community adopted a hermit's existence or lived with an Aboriginal group.<sup>22</sup> The 1847 *nouvelette* which seems to constitute the first published utopia by an Australian writer—“Oo-a-deen or, the Mysteries of the Interior Unveiled”<sup>23</sup>—combined all of these motives for penetration of the interior in a story within a story within a story format. At the fiction's centre was a neo-Medieval community of herders living with virtuous simplicity in a Place of Perfect Rest.

Although British-governed India was an object of admiration for colonists,<sup>24</sup> a xenophobic awareness of mobile, migratory Asians sprang up in the 1850s, when ethnic Chinese were attracted to the Australian goldfields, and it soon found expression in dystopian invasion stories. An 1856 article in *Melbourne Punch*, for example, described Mongolians ruling Victoria in 2000 AD.<sup>25</sup> After it opened to Western trade in the 1850s, Japan was well-regarded for its aesthetics and orderly government.<sup>26</sup> However, Australian writers became more defensive as they saw an increasing likelihood of injurious contact with the ‘awakening East’. As urban culture developed, with sociability filling the perceived void in the landscape, there was also a strengthening of moral

prohibitions and of deterrent gestures directed at outsiders who threatened to steal what Australians had. Good intentions were often cited to camouflage racism and other exclusionary ways of thinking and to justify middle-class campaigns to alter working-class behaviour.<sup>27</sup>

It was not until the 1870s and eighties that book-length utopian novels in the traditional descriptive format were published by residents of Australia. Robert Ellis Dudgeon's *Colymbia* (1873) is the earliest known Australian utopian/science fiction text in book form. Remarkably, the author located his alternate society outside Australia, implying that local European society was so intractably troubled that a clean start, far from contaminating influences, was required. Alarmist invasion tales, socio-spiritual allegories in the manner of Bunyan, and critiques of the Old World taking their tone from Gibbon, made up the bulk of 1870s and eighties utopia-related publications. A future prime minister, Alfred Deakin, was one of the allegorists. His biographer points out links between syncretic Spiritualism, Millenarianism, belief in a new Dispensation, nascent nationalism, the labour movement and calls for land nationalisation.<sup>28</sup> Had Catherine Helen Spence's *Handfasted*—another offshore utopia—been published at the time it was written, in the 1870s, it immediately would have stood out as not merely one of her well-constructed novels but as a comprehensive social document.<sup>29</sup> One could argue it was a ‘critical utopia’ in that it allowed for compromise, conceded its limitations and anticipated change. (US culture was expected to infiltrate, bringing both benefits and complications.) Spence's other utopian fiction, a novella titled *A Week in the Future*, was published soon after it was written, being serialised in 1888–9. It too was pro-socialist and applied openly-borrowed ideas, chiefly those of scientific meliorist Jane Hume Clapperton.<sup>30</sup>

Two contemporaneous writers who opted for radically new utopian locations were Joseph Fraser and Henrietta Dugdale, both Melburnians reacting against the congested, mercantile-minded city which

had boomed around them. Astronomical observations in the 1870s had provoked speculation that Mars could support life. Fraser, a phrenologist, became probably the first Australian to use the Red Planet as a utopian site when in 1889 he published his novel *Melbourne and Mars: My Mysterious Life on Two Planets*. Despairing of the unregenerate faces he saw in Melbourne, Fraser's merchant protagonist dreamed his way into a reformed civilisation on Mars.<sup>31</sup> Dugdale (*A Few Hours in a Far-Off Age*, 1883) scuttled Australia, replacing it with a far-future land in which women's parliamentary, scientific and educational powers were the key to a peaceful, humane community.<sup>32</sup> Her prose style was intemperate: to paraphrase an 1884 reviewer, Dugdale castigated male ignorance and depravity with verve, zest and savagely caustic tirades.<sup>33</sup> In a more moderate vein, the Kalizoc (beauty in life) Society, another protest product of 1880s Melbourne, argued for improvements in the urban environment—but it had little impact other than on interior decoration.<sup>34</sup>

Continuing female calls for the emergence of a 'New Woman', who was emancipated and enfranchised in the fullest senses of both words, and empowered to change all aspects of society, caused apprehension in both men and conservative women throughout the 1890s. Although Millie Finkelstein introduced a fully functional society run by women in her *The Newest Woman: The Destined Monarch of the World* (1895), her feeling about contemporary women's participation in public life was ambivalent. Susan Martin argues that Finkelstein's feminist Australia was ultimately dystopian.<sup>35</sup> Ethel Turner—remembered for her fiction for young readers, particularly her *Seven Little Australians* (1894)—foresaw a year-2000 Sydney which was brilliantly advanced, but to the detriment of family life. Her preferred alternative was a city where moderate reforms prevailed with women's beneficial domesticity preserved.<sup>36</sup> The feisty radicalism of Henrietta Dugdale reappeared, however, in Mary Ann Moore-Bentley's *Woman of Mars, or Australia's Enfranchised Woman* which, although not published until 1901, was a product of 1880s and nineties antipodean thinking.<sup>37</sup>

Present-day ecologists point to the non-viability of small-holder farming and rural resettlement schemes in the arid and El Niño-subject Australian environment.<sup>38</sup> Yet early-1890s labour activists and

liberal church people campaigned for public support and enabling legislation for farming co-operative schemes, seeing themselves as making prudent use of 'waste land' in the cause of the needy unemployed. They were anti-urban, anti-capitalist, and also anti-pastoral, in that they wanted to free bush workers from dependence on the squatters.<sup>39</sup> While most projects were small and short-lived,<sup>40</sup> Tucker and Strong's Protestant initiative to create co-operative villages was realised on a significant scale, as were state-sponsored Village Settlement schemes and German-style labour colonies.<sup>41</sup>

The collectivist message was reinforced by the publication of utopian novels depicting shared farms, low-tech industrial production on co-operative lines and the elimination of monopoly capitalism. A majority of these fictionalised schemes featured accessible geographical settings and contemporary or near-future time-frames, emphasising their authors' faith in the achievability of at least some of the stated goals. David Andrade's *The Melbourne Riots: or How Harry Holdfast and his Friends Emancipated the Workers* came out in 1892, as did William Lane's *The Workingman's Paradise: an Australian Labour Novel*, which humanised and localised the sentiments behind Lane's confronting offshore New Australia scheme. An oasis of intensive cultivation featured in Samuel Rosa's *The Coming Terror, or The Australian Revolution. A Romance of the Twentieth Century* (1894, republished 1895 under the title *Oliver Spence, the Australian Caesar*); the novel's benevolent dictator-hero led a middle class that had been politicised by financial losses. Horace Tucker's *The New Arcadia; An Australian Story* also appeared in 1894. And in 1897 an author using the pseudonym 'Eon' published *A New Industrial Era of Wealth and Prosperity, or Social and Other Problems Solved*.

Socialist rhetoric was present in most such publications and schemes. This was despite the known collapse of socialist communitarian ventures in Britain and the Continent from the 1820s to forties<sup>42</sup> and their decline in the USA since the 1880s, when expectations had shifted from the land to the growing urban entrepreneurial and industrial sectors.<sup>43</sup> Australian reformers of the 1890s persisted in seeing a romanticised Socialism as preferable to an unregulated, boom or bust capitalist system; the local variety of Socialism was semi-rural, labourist and relatively non-doctrinaire.<sup>44</sup>



Patrick White's Voss acted out the self-sabotaging impulse which is the dark side of utopianism. He illustrated Randolph Stow's contention that it is possible to "die of landscape".

---

Although not published until 1905–06, Joseph Furphy's *Rigby's Romance* can be mentioned here as an extension of the political economy debates of the 1890s.<sup>45</sup> While the book recalls nineteenth-century novels of ideas, it can also be likened to Izaak Walton's classic *The Compleat Angler; or, the Contemplative Man's Recreation* (1653). Walton used a placid rural setting and a mix of the pastoral, dialogic and satire genres to commend contemplative withdrawal. He implicitly counselled patience to conservatives disconcerted by political developments in London.<sup>46</sup> Furphy's scenario (men conducting a symposium while they fished from the banks of the River Murray) and his use of humour<sup>47</sup> were not dissimilar. However, forthright self-help was endorsed by Furphy rather than quietism, a term which in Australian political discourse has generally been given a pejorative meaning.

As a still sparsely populated and unprotected pair of islands supporting a cluster of colonies far from their imperial mother, Australia saw itself as vulnerable to infiltration, infection and takeover by older, wiler and stronger powers. Australia's first contribution to what was to become a huge international body of fiction about germ warfare appeared in 1892 after the germ theory of contagion became public knowledge.<sup>48</sup> Charles Pearson's 1893 *National Life and Character: A Forecast* caught worldwide attention with its predictions about the progressive 'Asianisation' of Europe and eclipsing of 'Anglo-Saxon democracy'.<sup>49</sup> Dystopian fiction continued to show attempted military invasions by 'Asiatics' and Russians and the taking of Australian jobs by foreign workers.

Distant, unreachable and uninhabitable locations appealed to those of a radically utopian cast of mind. Perhaps the authors reasoned that since their drastically different imaginaries would never be actualised they might as well be sited in impossible places.<sup>50</sup> In 1896 W.H. Galier set his 'Blestland' on another planet, describing a society in which there were no equivalents to Earth's "unhappy masses" and "sec-

ularian hate". William Little (1897) sent his traveller to a non-specific destination called Topos to witness the beneficial effects of such up-to-date practices as eugenics and thought transference. G. Read Murphy chose the Arctic: in his *Beyond the Ice: Being a Story of the Newly Discovered Region Round the North Pole* (1894) he described a regulated, technologically advanced society practising selective breeding. The Antarctic was an odd choice for an author recommending country living, yet G. McIver (1894) located his Neuroomians at the South Pole, in a green, cultivated land ringed by active volcanoes—a land which the now legendary Antarctic explorers of the early twentieth century would fail to find.

#### EARLY TO MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

Federation coincided with the assumption by government of responsibility for and funding of a number of hitherto lacking or privately-provided services. Australia was becoming a more regulated, uniform society. Progressives welcomed the consolidation of unionism and formation of parliamentary Labor parties, legislative gains by women, access to free secular education and moves to improve public health and housing. Applications of technology were making everyday life easier and creating jobs. The populace looked forward to affordable automobiles and telecommunications, powered flight and fast rail transport.

If the collective mood was jubilantly optimistic and collective thinking was directed to the public sector, this did not translate into sweet-tempered utopian fiction. Competent authors produced a string of overtly political novels lambasting socialist activism. Ambrose Pratt's *The Great 'Push' Experiment* (1902) showed a young visionary campaigning for election on a socialist ticket before recanting his beliefs. Randolph Bedford offered a cynical study of political conduct in his 1905 *The Snare of Strength*. In his 1906 *Hortense: A Study of the Future*, a writer using the name Lancelot

Lance described the return to civilisation of the descendants of the founders of a South Pacific utopian colony. And in *The Electric Gun: A Tale of Socialism* (1911) Harold Johnston told how in 1950 a group opposed to Australia's socialist rulers led a revolt to regain small-scale local government and self-management. About twenty-five other writers also published predominantly reactionary political fictions and plays in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century.<sup>51</sup>

America's so-called Gilded Age produced a number of pragmatically utopian novels in which market mechanisms, such as incorporation, were the means of producing enrichment for citizen-stockholders. Rational, enlightened self-interest was expected to bring into being and maintain a middle-class mass consumer culture which, in its all-embracing character, was every bit as radical as any previous utopian vision.<sup>52</sup> However, in Australia the economic recession of the early 1890s had hit hard and resentment continued against the banking and other capitalist groups which populist Labor stigmatised as the 'Money Power'.<sup>53</sup> While the Edwardian period in Australia was characterised by a mercantile ethos, with a particular desire for greater land productivity, promotion of 'national efficiency' was less emphatic than in Western Europe and the USA.<sup>54</sup> Early twentieth-century Australian fiction texts embodying a buoyant commercial spirit linked to social answerability are scarce. The allied idea that general prosperity serves as inoculation against dissent was also rarely expressed. A few local writers suggested redistributive reforms with philanthropy covering needs in the meantime. T.P. Deegan, for example, in his whimsical novel *The Rescue of Victoria, the Beautiful Nihilist* (c. 1909) had a young idealist propose a worldwide Millionaires' Sodality for the more impartial distribution of wealth: "[T]he trend of modernism is to break down the greatness on which Capital has so securely and selfishly established itself".<sup>55</sup>

Few fiction authors tried to convince their fellow Australians of the transformative and regenerative qualities of Art and Spirit. In a prose piece published in 1902 poet Christopher Brennan imagined an Australia of fifty years hence which, thanks in part to the influence of universities, was pervaded with spiritual and cultural values, with no corner left for barbarism, vulgarity and materialism. The formation of a Christian church for artists was put for-

ward by E.H. Tottenham in *The Man from Mars* (1903).<sup>56</sup> Although Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau influences were visible in Australia, their impacts were superficial.<sup>57</sup> Myths and medievalism inspired by William Morris's *New From Nowhere; Or, an Epoch of Rest* (1890), or by Wagnerian rhetoric, no longer accorded with the secular busyness of the masses in the newly-federated nation.<sup>58</sup> Nor did Futurism and Cubism receive popular endorsement.<sup>59</sup>

Rather, the local emphasis remained on physicality, on the embodiment of faith in progress and self-protection. By the end of the Edwardian era programs for the promotion and preservation of racial purity and vitality were even more widely endorsed than they had been in the previous century when Francis Galton, himself the author of two utopias, introduced the notion of racial betterment. Optimists regarded the Australian stock as having improved, in spite of its convict origins, the region's enervating climate and the colonies' acceptance of debilitated immigrants (among them tuberculosis sufferers).<sup>60</sup> Pessimists fretted that Australia's white population was headed for 'racial suicide' and 'racial decay'. While the Great War neared, both groups busied themselves with hopeful pronouncements that eugenics and 'mental hygiene' would increase the number and proportion of whites, fill Australia's empty land, improve health and reproductive fitness, and fortify the populace to repel uninvited immigrants.<sup>61</sup>

Horrific First World War casualties, the defeat at Gallipoli, the psychological and physical injuries of returned combatants and the international influenza epidemic all served to increase consciousness of Australia's susceptibility to harm and need for bodily and moral fortification.<sup>62</sup> Writers on both the left and right tested public willingness to contemplate drastic measures. Labor-movement writer Henry Boote depicted revolutionary socialism and First World War-style tactics in his *The Human Ladder* (1920). In *Out of the Silence* (1925) Erle Cox used a popular plot device, the discovery and reanimation of a superhuman from another civilisation, to give voice to ultra-rationalist proposals for population control and selective extermination.<sup>63</sup>

Although the 1929 Depression demonstrated that external economic factors could have as telling an effect on individuals as could heredity, narratives of biological engineering and child rearing under controlled conditions persisted into the 1930s. Two



In *Bliss* Peter Carey was one of the few authors to portray an idyllic drop-out culture. However, it was a case of the devil having all the good tunes . . .

---

examples were Eleanor Dark's *Prelude to Christopher* and Ambrose Pratt's *Lift Up Your Eyes*. A real-life instance of a child-rearing endeavour with goals dating back to turn-of-the-century ideals was the Hopewood experiment in New South Wales.<sup>64</sup> By the end of the 1940s almost all previously respectable eugenist organisations had dissolved or changed their names and emphases.<sup>65</sup> However, public knowledge of what Nazi scientific programs had entailed did not lead to cessation of experimentation which put populations at risk—as illustrated by the postwar testing of nuclear weapons in the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>66</sup> Here was a continuation of the spirit of W.T. Pearson's *The Temple of Sahr*, published back in 1932 under the pseudonym 'William Pengreep'. Pearson described a Central-Australian Aboriginal group being used in the development of an electrical appliance for anaesthesia.

It is against the backdrop of the considerable public sympathy for isolationist White Australia policies that we should recall the existence between the world wars of rural vigilante, counter-revolutionary and secessionist movements. Rank and file members unaware of the existence of urban-based, proto-fascist instigators like those fictionalised by D.H. Lawrence in *Kangaroo* (1923), believed they were subscribing to anti-urban, anti-industrialist, anti-communist and anti-big government forces to safeguard traditional values.<sup>67</sup> Their 'country-mindedness' was not nostalgia for a lost utopia—Andrew Moore recounts how 1931 allusions to 'delightful arcadians' and 'rural simplicity' provoked indignation and an electoral backlash<sup>68</sup>—but had more to do with the decline of the dominance of the property-owning sector.

By contrast, architect-author William Hardy Wilson's voice was one of a minority recommending not fear of neighbouring populations but appreciation of Asian philosophies and acceptance of Australia's oriental geopolitical position.<sup>69</sup> In his *Cow Pasture Road* (1920) Wilson had described an ideal town, Celestium, designed on zodiacal principles

and set on the outskirts of Sydney. In his fantasy novel *Yin-Yang* (1934) he went further, depicting the Australian city of Celestion, which had replaced Sydney and was a model of aesthetics and planning. Drastic reform was required in other consumer-capitalist nations also: Wilson turned his attention to America, wiping out its mass production, and to Europe, where a Rousseauesque return to Nature was judged necessary.

In Europe the rise of fascism brought home the realisation that a single reformer, well-intentioned or otherwise, might achieve global rule if equipped with sufficient charisma, propaganda, weaponry and means of mass communication. Just a year after Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was published in London in 1932, Australian expatriate Helen Simpson produced a satiric novella portraying an authoritarian and ruthless evangelist, the hermaphroditic Mrs Sopwith ('Mother'). Omnipresent through advanced telecommunications and seemingly omnipotent thanks to her airborne weapons of mass destruction, Mrs Sopwith had conquered every nation except Australia, where resisters maintained humane practices and robust recreations.<sup>70</sup>

The women novelists who predominated in Australia until the middle of the century tended to advocate egalitarian social reform through education and moral culture. In Jungian terms Australia was entering a 'national individuation' process, equivalent to the middle-aged individual's psycho-utopian inner journey into wholeness.<sup>71</sup> Psychoanalytic techniques were applied to character creation and plotting, with an increase in mental journeying and regression, inquisitive revisiting of eulogised past eras and retrospective analysis of idealistic communities. Vivian Crockett's *Mezzomorto* (1934) is an example. Historically minded authors such as Brian Penton set about a contentious retelling of the country's colonial past, a task for which they had been set a high standard by Henry Handel Richardson's semi-autobiographical Mahony trilogy (1917–29).<sup>72</sup> Robert Dixon points out the popularity between the wars of books about travel in less developed neigh-

bouring countries such as New Guinea. Vicariously experiencing the hazards in supposed paradises, readers felt a frisson of heightened awareness of their own bodily fragility.<sup>73</sup>

With war underway first in Europe and then also in the Pacific, authors were inclined to long for a peaceful retreat and also to fatalistically envisage the imminent ending of Australian society as it had existed for 150 years. Valerie Chick's *Of Things Entire: A Fantasy* (1941) was that rare thing in Australian utopian writing, an Arcadia. Escaping (even if only temporarily) from the horrors of war and commerce, Chick's Arcadians enjoyed harmonious spiritual simplicity, welcoming refugees and repentant materialists. In their far more ideologically, linguistically and structurally complex *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (written during the war, although not published until 1947) Barnard and Eldershaw intercut warm-hearted social realism, political warnings and anti-utopianism. They portrayed the demise of east-coast Australian society (following right-left conflicts, invasion and civil war) and the operations of the technocratic replacement society of 400 years into the future. This second society synthesised all the features of a leftist utopian's dream—it was socialist, agrarian, communal and free of war, crime, capitalist competition and violence—yet was chillingly unappealing, “over-utopian” as Marjorie Barnard later explained.<sup>74</sup>

The Allies' victories in both theatres of war carried the Western powers through postwar hardships into two decades of high employment, rising living standards and technologically based confidence. The USA's mixed mood of consumer buoyancy tinged with Cold War fearfulness found its match in a plethora of musicals, among them Lerner and Loewe's *Brigadoon* (1947) and *Camelot* (1960), set in romanticised enclaves of the past; the more thought-provoking *Candide* (Bernstein, Hellman, Wilbur, 1956) was less successful. In Japan, by contrast, the troubled years following the Second World War produced a revival in serious utopian speculation.<sup>75</sup> In Australia the postwar years saw the consolidation of materially comfortable suburbanism, a way of life which would later attract not only fondly parodic memoirs but scathing anti-bourgeois critiques.<sup>76</sup> The expatriate Sumner Locke Elliott used his dystopian novel *Going* (1975) to express distaste for coercive government and modern, lowest-common-denominator customs.<sup>77</sup>

The city, the environment in which a majority of Australians now lived and in which most postwar immigrants aspired to prosper, could be a risky place.

Why else did authors continue to depict citizens forced from or annihilated in the port cities as invasive forces struck? In the 1950s the best-known addition to this body of work was Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, which showed Melbourne's population facing death at the bottom of the world as radioactive dust moved in from the devastated Northern Hemisphere. Yet city and science demanded to be accommodated in any applied, future-looking philosophy. Harry Hooton was just one of the mid-century poets who—echoing the Futurists—wrestled with ideas of art, anarchy, technocracy, utilitarianism and militant materialism. The short life span and rarity of appearance of Hooton's periodical *21st Century: the Magazine of a Creative Civilization*—two issues, 1955–7—suggest the difficulties encountered.<sup>78</sup>

Australia had never been quick to elevate successful public figures to hero status, and authors who wanted to celebrate great missions and journeys into remote regions had to deal with the fact that intrepid leaders in this part of the world had rarely achieved all they set out to. James McAuley in his *Captain Quiros: a poem* (written 1958–60, published 1964) honoured a conquistador who believed he was claiming the vast Southern Continent all the way to the South Pole “for Cross and Crown”. In fact, Quiros mistook a Melanesian island for Australia and could be seen as a Don Quixote figure. Leo Scheps has argued that McAuley's treatment reflected his conservative anxiety about Australia's increasing preparedness to grant independence to the strategically valuable Papua New Guinea.<sup>79</sup> Patrick White was another major author who took up the explorer as subject, but his Voss was an anti-hero advancing into both the continent's interior and his own psyche with a willingness to sacrifice his companions as well as himself. Voss acted out the auto-destructive, self-sabotaging impulse which is the dark side of utopianism.<sup>80</sup> He illustrated Randolph Stow's contention that it is possible to “die of landscape”.<sup>81</sup> A generation of creative artists echoed White's themes,<sup>82</sup> among the most effective of them the dry-witted novelist Thea Astley, who since the 1960s has often dealt with remote communities, journeys and map-making in connection with personal searches.<sup>83</sup>



The “basic human problem”, Turner believed, was that aggression and violence were always looking for acceptable masks; therefore the opportunity to reconstruct did not produce a utopia even when rebuilders began with the best of intentions.

---

#### LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY UTOPIANISM

Exploration of outer space became a reality at the same time as free thinkers were testing the psycheliberating potential of narcotics, uncommitted sex and Eastern religious practices. In literature, science fiction, fantasy and utopia were the modes most suited to accommodating both subject areas. However, the one Australian utopia of the sixties and seventies—depicted in Leslie Nye’s *Escape to Elysium* (1972)—was a controlled, moralistic community in the hinterland of New Guinea, a throwback to the eugenist concerns of earlier in the century.<sup>84</sup> Most Australians stayed with their humorously derisive, self-defensive approach to new propositions. It could be said they had settled into what Fredric Jameson, writing of Wyndham Lewis, described as an “*esprit de contradiction*” and “sterile and chronic oppositionalism”.<sup>85</sup> Russell Braddon, for example, foresaw a year-2000 takeover of the nation’s government by mutated rabbits (*The Year of the Angry Rabbit*, 1964).<sup>86</sup> In his novel *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* (1971) David Ireland likened feebly resistant oil refinery operators to prisoners, slaves, lunatics, rats, bacteria and excreta. Then in *The Flesheaters* (1972) he used the surreal environment of Merry Lands, an amalgam of boarding house, asylum, hospital and refuge, and an alleged “good society”, as a “mini-stage” showing the effects of predatory capitalism.<sup>87</sup>

Accomplished and commercially astute science-fiction author A. Bertrand Chandler was alert to gender and biotechnology issues and in advance of the seventies interest in separatism when in 1968 he published *False Fatherland*.<sup>88</sup> In David Ireland’s picaresque but still pessimistic *City of Women* (1981), Sydney separatists had their solidarity right but not their economy. “THE FUTURE IS HERE. IT WORKS: WE DON’T.” stated a piece of graffiti. “We are the wrathful penniless . . .” complained a character.<sup>89</sup> The national hope personified by Ireland’s permissive young woman of the late

seventies (*A Woman of the Future*, 1979) had not been matched by a program of industrial and economic reforms, and Ireland could not deliver a utopia detailing their characteristics, implementation or outcomes. Australian women writers of the same period did not produce utopias either; their tendency was to naturalistically depict the difficulties of female existence in tersely-worded short stories and discontinuous narratives. However, there were affirmative initiatives to bring back into print a number of novels by women.

Australia was relatively early in recognising the need for environmental sustainability—appropriately so, given the degree of land, water and ozone-layer damage already detectable in the region. However, it was again the case that recognition did not translate into positive agendas expressed in literary form. America could trace a green path from Rachel Carson’s cautionary *Silent Spring* and Huxley’s *Island* (both 1962) through to Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1974–5).<sup>90</sup> Europe could point to public discourse energised by Scotland’s Findhorn community, begun in the early sixties, and to the ‘Deep Ecology’ activists inspired by philosopher Arne Naess.<sup>91</sup> Australia’s contribution was at the grassroots level, in numerous agrarian communes, back-to-earth gatherings and anti-development protests.<sup>92</sup>

Ghassan Hage points out that even when such activism emanates from the radical left it is not free of nationalist, racist and class-based biases.<sup>93</sup> Ulrich Beck goes further, arguing that fixation on technological hazards and damaged Nature is a projection of “social-human imperfections”: “The deluge of violence, destruction and disasters satisfies a (no longer merely latent) sadism of the epoch”.<sup>94</sup> Cultural pessimists who welcome bad news on the environment because it foreshadows the Apocalypse are being “almost sadistically redemptive”, Arthur Herman adds.<sup>95</sup> James McQueen’s *Hook’s Mountain* (1982), in which a war-damaged Tasmanian

loner carried through an early instance of eco-terrorism, brought together most of these concerns.

In his first novel, *Bliss* (1981), Peter Carey was one of the few mainstream fiction authors who attempted to portray an idyllic drop-out culture.<sup>96</sup> However it was, as so often, a case of the devil having all the good tunes: far more pages were devoted to Carey's protagonist's difficulties in the city than to his slow-moving new life growing trees. In a later book Carey exhibited a comparable ambivalence. *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994) presented two imaginary nations, with the policies of the imperialistic Voorstand clearly more deplorable than those of the naive Efrica. As he had in *Illywhacker* (1985), Carey worked through a number of issues pertinent to postmodernism and postcolonial studies, but ultimately the simpler society could not come out on top.

The science-fiction authors whose work flourished in Australia in the later decades of the twentieth century were far quicker to apprehend the wide-ranging consequences of both environmental neglect and ecosphere devastation resulting from nuclear, chemical and biological warfare. While fantasists looked back to pre-modern eras, as did the creators of computer and video games,<sup>97</sup> SF authors looked forward, and their future worlds were rarely appealing. George Turner's 1978–83 trilogy about a pragmatically ethical culture that had developed after a 1990s financial and ecological collapse made for pessimistic reading. The "basic human problem", Turner believed, was that aggression and violence were always looking for acceptable masks; therefore the opportunity to reconstruct did not produce a utopia even when rebuilders began with the best of intentions.<sup>98</sup> Global warming was singled out as a particularly pressing problem; indeed, as far back as 1911 satirist James Esmond had foreseen rising sea levels serving as a prelude to disaster.<sup>99</sup> In his 1987 *The Sea and Summer* George Turner spelled out in human terms the predictable consequences of complacency about the greenhouse effect.<sup>100</sup> The comparable dystopian scenario of widespread salinity was played out in Gabrielle Lord's *Salt* (1990). Lee Harding in *Waiting for the End of the World* (1983) and in several short fictions used the familiar story-line of a flawed coastal city ruined by nuclear and/or bacteriological attack, with survivors fleeing into an inhospitable countryside.<sup>101</sup> Damien Broderick's erudite SF of the 1980s inves-

tigated expansive intellectual and scientific possibilities yet predicted confining future regimes with only minor instances of anarchic/libertarian dissent.<sup>102</sup> One of the few Australians to predict an even somewhat utopian future was self-described fantasist Terry Dowling, and his 1990s *Rynosseros* short-fiction collections showed people living with, though not entirely eliminating, Australia's arid conditions. Gerald Murnane in his *The Plains* (1982) also imagined a cultured civilisation in the hinterland.

By the eighties Aboriginal people were more than ready to recount their own histories and comment on the dominant culture, which was still at base Anglo-Celtic but had an increasingly multicultural character.<sup>103</sup> Autobiography, lyrics and performance arts proved ideal media. One fiction text, an historical dystopian novel, is noteworthy here. *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983, by Colin Johnson, later known as Mudrooroo)<sup>104</sup> dealt with the fact that the Tasmanian Aboriginal people faced genocide despite the presence of a pseudo-fatherly Protector. The topic was not a new one in fiction. Mainstream author Robert Drewe, for instance, had used it (in his *The Savage Crows*, 1976). So had children's author Nan Chauncy.<sup>105</sup> Johnson's use of it was particularly skilful, however, allowing an alternate reading of the narrative as an account of one man's spiritual journey.<sup>106</sup>

In any period of accelerating social change and resistance to it, writing for performance is a natural resort for writers inclined to test utopian propositions. The spoken and enacted word is particularly suited to conveying contradiction. Two plays of the eighties which reworked utopian concerns dating from earlier in the century, as a means of contributing to contemporary debates, were Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age* (1985) and Alma De Groen's *The Rivers of China* (written 1970s–80s, first staged 1987). Nowra invented a white 'lost tribe' of inbred grotesques in a Tasmanian forest at the time of the Second World War.<sup>107</sup> Incarceration in Hobart of the remnant was judiciously carried out because general knowledge of its existence might lend credence to the Nazis' claims about heredity. The ending of the play offered a bleak hope as one couple—a sympathetic city man and a young woman survivor—started a new life together in the bush. De Groen interwove two story-lines: the last months of the life of New Zealand author Katherine





*Rick Amor: Wonderful life, 2002, Oil on linen 140 x 150 cm, courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne*

Mansfield in Gurdjieff's patriarchal Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Fontainebleau in 1922–3, and a present-day version of Sydney in which the reversal of gender roles had failed to produce utopia.<sup>108</sup>

Although they were ideally placed to show the human body as a primary site of meaning, playwrights were not the only ones doing so. While the general public in the West initially looked at manifestations of New Age thinking with some bemusement, and expressed bafflement at new cultural theories, a portion of the rising generation abandoned the goal of changing society in favour of rethinking the body. An aesthetic of ornamentation, extreme fitness and surgical sculpting looked to individual bodily perfection—but not necessarily

to inward cognitive, spiritual or ethical transformation. 'Care of the self' was emphasised. Libidinal energy was less available for channelling into social-change initiatives. Around the same time collectivism was displaced by individualism and fragmentation, rendering moral absolutes unthinkable and totalising utopianism impossible. Coexistence and mutual toleration in a pluralist or hybrid society marked by provisional, reflexive thinking supplanted notions of a unitary nation.<sup>109</sup> Globalisation joined environmental despoilation as a *bête noire*, one of the few causes which could induce individuals to jointly protest. Some of Australia's younger authors experimented with 'grunge' fiction focused on inactive, unhealthy 'slackers'. A retreat into wry anti-heroism indicated uneasiness about the solitary

cultivation of the body and the priorities of contemporary Australia, as well as low expectations for the future. Andrew McGahan's novel *1988* (published 1995) was typical. It described two disaffected young men who, having left suburban Brisbane in the year of the Bicentennial Expo[sition] in hopes of nurturing their creativity in a remote location in the Northern Territory, realised they were occupying "an abode of the defeated".<sup>110</sup>

The 1988 Bicentenary was not only an occasion for patriotic self-appreciation, commercialism and 'black armband' regrets but also a time when calls for republican government and complete independence from Britain gained new impetus. Millenarian forebodings were strengthening too. Foreign invasion and superpower interference carried out with the complicity of disloyal Australians of non-Anglo Saxon immigrant background was a common scenario. In the public mind Indonesia was now seen as more threatening than China, Japan or Russia. Britain remained disappointingly slow to come to her former colony's rescue, while the USA could be relied on to either aid or infiltrate, depending on the author's political stance. The dystopian novel *Kisses of the Enemy* (1987), by mainstream author Rodney Hall, was an illustration of how apprehensions could be readily expressed in parodic exaggeration.<sup>111</sup> A more subtle treatment of themes pertinent to utopianism in a settler society appeared in Hall's 1988–93 historic trilogy.<sup>112</sup>

During the eighties and nineties David Foster followed up his Swiftian *Moonlite* (1981)<sup>113</sup> with a series of allusive, anarchic and essentially conservative fictions. The most pertinent to this survey was *The Glade Within the Grove* (1996). The novel concerned a disintegrating community of former radicals now out of sympathy with the Zeitgeist. With frequent recondite knowledge and reference to myth, Foster worked out a story-line symbolically centring on self-emasculatation.<sup>114</sup> In the same year expatriate author Janette Turner Hospital published a novel about an outback Queensland cult-community led by an exploitative false messiah.<sup>115</sup>

In mainstream fiction the late nineties produced a predominance of psycho-historical novels.<sup>116</sup> Authors past their thirties seemed unwilling to engage with the present realities of urban living. There were also fresh non-fiction exercises in retelling history, for example John Birmingham's *Leviathan: the unauthorised biography of Sydney* (1999), and John

Marsden reached a large audience of young adult readers with a 1990s series of invasion novels.<sup>117</sup>

The beginning of the twenty-first century brought popular excitement and also relief that the forecast Y2K catastrophes had not eventuated. The period coincided with the revisiting of an exceptionally brutal and un-utopian episode in the continent's early modern history. The 1629 wrecking of the Dutch trading vessel *Batavia* off the west Australian coast led to a nightmarish period of inhumanity and multiple murder as Jeronimus Cornelisz and his cohorts lorded over the shipwreck survivors. The first known fictional use of the episode in Australian literature was in a sensational 1896 novel by Ernest Favenc, *Marooned on Australia*.<sup>118</sup> In the middle of the twentieth century Douglas Stewart used the *Batavia* story in a play while Henrietta Drake-Brockman dealt with it in a novel and a history.<sup>119</sup> Novelist Randolph Stow recounted the episode in mythopoetic terms in a 1971 paper titled 'The Southland of Antichrist'.<sup>120</sup> Then in 1990 Gary Crew described modern repercussions of the events in a fantasy-horror story for young adult readers.<sup>121</sup> And between 2000 and 2003 two new novels and an opera appeared. British-Australian Arabella Edge was the author of *The Company: The Story of a Murderer* (2000); Kathryn Heyman the author of *The Accomplice*; Richard Mills was the composer of the opera *Batavia* (premiered 2001), with Peter Goldsworthy his librettist. The opera ended on a contrived note of hopefulness: instead of two guilty young men being abandoned on the Australian coastline, a young male and female walked away together into Australia's future.

As had been the case at the opening of the previous century, Australia's more sociologically minded writers did not come out with hopeful utopian projections.

1. Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* 16, 1989. Reprinted in Australia in *Quadrant* 33:8, 1989, pp.15–25. Fukuyama expanded his argument in *The End of History and the Last Man*, Free Press, New York, 1992.
2. Fukuyama used the word 'end' not in its eschatological sense but with reference to fulfilment, while to 'history' he gave the meaning of a dialectical process. The gist of Fukuyama's claim, which derived from Hegel, was that modern liberal democracy was the best conceivable social system for fostering freedom.
3. Eduardo Galeano, 'The Other Wall', *New Internationalist* 213, 1990, pp.7–9.
4. See Françoise Choay, 'Utopia and the Philosophical Status of Constructed Space' in Roland Schaer, Gregory



- Clays and Lyman Tower Sargent (eds), *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, OUP, New York, 2000, pp.346–53. Choay argues William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1890) was the last true literary utopia, after which utopianism was annexed by urbanism.
5. Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Basil Blackwell, OUP, 1987; 'The End of Socialism? The End of Utopia? The End of History?' in Krishan Kumar and Stephen Bann (eds), *Utopias and the Millennium*, Reaktion Books, London, 1993; 'Utopia and Anti-Utopia in the Twentieth Century' in Schaer et al., *Utopia*, pp.251–67.
  6. See Krishan Kumar, 1989: *Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 2001 on this pivotal time and its aftermath. Kumar rejects the various 'endist' schools.
  7. One first-hand account is by Pin Yathay, writing with John Man: *Stay Alive, My Son*, Bloomsbury, London, 1987. A 1989 publication which I had not seen at that time was Karl D. Jackson (ed.), *Cambodia: 1975–1978: Rendezvous with Death*, Princeton University Press. See especially 'The Ideology of Total Revolution', pp.37–78 and 'Intellectual Origins of the Khmer Rouge', pp.241–50, both by Jackson. For a dystopian allegory of the Vietnam–Cambodia conflicts, see Geoff Ryman's *The Unconquered Country*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1986.
  8. Tom Moylan introduced the term 'critical utopia' for this kind of imaginary. See his study of 1970s science fiction: *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, Methuen, London, 1986.
  9. The comparative lack of research on the utopian thought of the Southern Hemisphere has recently begun to be remedied. See Ralph Pordzik, *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures*, Peter Lang, New York, 2001.
  10. Peter Beilharz, 'Review', *Thesis Eleven* 24, 1989, pp.152–3.
  11. Laurent Portes, 'Utopia and Nineteenth-century French Literature', in Schaer et al., *Utopia*, pp.241–7. France did take a continuing interest in Britain's penal experiment: see Colin Forster, *France and Botany Bay: The Lure of a Penal Colony*, MUP, Melbourne, 1996.
  12. G.A. Burger, *Wunderbare Reisen zu Wasser und Land, Feldzüge und lustige Abenteuer der Freiherrn von Münchhausen*, illus. A. Kubin, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Munich, 1979. Discussed in Alan Corkhill, *Antipodean Encounters: Australia and the German Literary Imagination 1754–1918*, Peter Lang, Bern, 1990, pp.3–4.
  13. Therese Huber, *Adventures on a Journey to New Holland and The Lonely Deathbed*, trans. R. Livingstone, ed. with notes by Leslie Bodi, Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1966. Discussed in Corkhill, *Antipodean Encounters*, pp.24–33. Listed in Michael Richards, *People, print and paper: a catalogue of a travelling exhibition celebrating the books of Australia, 1788–1988*, NLA, Canberra, 1988. Defoe's model was taken up by several German-language authors in the same period. See Corkhill, *Antipodean Encounters*, pp.6–7, 33–46.
  14. Ross Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1984, pp.60–76. John Molony (*The Native-Born: The First White Australians*, MUP, Melbourne, 2000, pp.162–6) notes that in the 1840s, when labourers and prospective wives were scarce, Irish settlers were accepted only reluctantly.
  15. Lady Mary Fox was named as the editor. Probable author was Richard Whately.
  16. Gerhard Fischer, "A Great Independent Australian Reich and Nation": Carl Muecke and the "Forty-Eighters" of the German-Australian Community of South Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies (JAS)* 25, 1989, pp.85–100.
  17. William J. Metcalf and Elizabeth Huf, *Herrnhut: Australia's First Utopian Commune*, MUP, Melbourne, 2002.
  18. Both publications are described in Russell Blackford, Van Ikin and Sean McMullen (eds), *Strange Constellations: A History of Australian Science Fiction*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1999, pp.7–8. Other sources of information on Australian utopian publications are: Nan Bowman Albinski, 'A Survey of Australian Utopian and Dystopian Fiction', *Australian Literary Studies (ALS)* 13:1, 1987, pp.15–28; Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Australian utopian literature: an annotated, chronological bibliography 1667–1999', *Utopian Studies (US)* 10:2, 1999; Robyn Walton, 'Heaven and Hell: A survey of utopian and anti-utopian prose fiction published by Australians since 1870', MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1977.
  19. Jennifer Rutherford, *The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy*, MUP, Melbourne, 2000, p.32.
  20. In relation to this and other patterns in nineteenth-century genre writing, see especially Janeen Webb and Andrew Enstice, *Aliens & Savages: Fiction, Politics and Prejudice in Australia*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 1998.
  21. On the concept of Lemuria see S.L. de Camp, *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme in History, Science, and Literature*, Gnome Press, New York, 1954, also J.J. Healy, 'The Lemurian Nineties', *ALS* 8:3, 1978, pp.307–16. On Madame Blavatsky's embellishing and popularising of the concept see Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief. Theosophy in Australia 1879–1939*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1986; and John Docker, *The Nervous Nineties: Australian Cultural Life in the 1890s*, OUP, Melbourne, 1991, pp.172–7.
  22. For a ghost-written account see John Morgan, *The Life and Adventures of William Buckley: Thirty-two Years a Wanderer Amongst the Aborigines of the then Unexplored Country round Port Phillip now the Province of Victoria*, Archibald Macdougall, Hobart, 1852. Reissued, edited with an introduction and notes by C.E. Sayers, Heinemann, London, 1967; and by Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2002. The 2002 edition includes the text of another account, by George Langhorne, written in 1837 and first published in the *Age*, 29 July 1911. The most comprehensive imaginative reconstruction is to be found in Craig Robertson's novel: *Buckley's Hope: the Story of Australia's Wild White Man*, Scribe, Melbourne, 1980.
  23. Anon, 'Oo-a-deen or, the Mysteries of the Interior Unveiled', *Corio Chronicle and Western District Advertiser* (Geelong), three instalments: 1:8, 2 Oct 1847, p.59; 1:9, 6 Oct 1847, pp.67–8; 1:10, 9 Oct 1847, p.75. Reprinted in Van Ikin (ed.), *Australian Science Fiction*, UQP, Brisbane, 1982, pp.7–27.
  24. David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850–1939*, UQP, St Lucia, 1999, pp.13–25.
  25. See Blackford et al., *Strange Constellations*, pp.36–41 on the 1856 article and other Sinophobic publications; and Andrew Markus, *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California 1850–1901*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1979, pp.14–43. On anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese sentiments see Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, OUP, Melbourne (second ed.), 1996, pp.16–28, 40–55.
  26. Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese influence on Western art since 1858* (trans. M. Whittal, J. Ramsay, H. Watanabe, C. Cardew, S. Bruni), Thames &

- Hudson, London, 1981, pp.8–14. Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp.50–67.
27. Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder*, pp.81, 125. For US and western-European examples of 'alibis for aggression' see Peter Gay, *The Cultivation of Hatred. The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, volume III, HarperCollins, London, 1994, pp.35–127, 430–3.
  28. Anon [Alfred Deakin], *A New Pilgrim's Progress: purporting to be given by John Bunyan, through an impressional writing medium*, W.H. Terry, Melbourne, 1877. See Alfred J. Gabay, *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin*, CUP, Cambridge, 1992, pp.102–6; *Messages from Beyond: Spiritualism and Spiritualists in Melbourne's Golden Age*, MUP, Melbourne, 2001, pp.73–6, 215.
  29. It was eventually published in 1984: Catherine Helen Spence, *Handfasted*, ed. with preface and afterword by Helen Thomson, Penguin, Melbourne, 1984.
  30. Published in *The Centennial Magazine*, Sydney, Jan–July 1889. Reissued with an introduction and notes by Lesley Durrell Ljungdahl, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1987.
  31. Joseph Fraser, *Melbourne and Mars: My Mysterious Life on Two Planets*. Extracts from the diary of a Melbourne merchant, E.W. Cole, Melbourne, 1889. See entry by Robyn Walton in Vita Fortunati and Raymond Trousson (eds), *Dictionary of Literary Utopias*, Honoré Champion, Paris, 2000, p.387.
  32. Mrs H.A. Dugdale, *A Few Hours in a FarOff Age*, McCarron, Bird and Co., Melbourne, 1883. See entry by Walton in Fortunati and Trousson, *Dictionary*, p.231.
  33. Review by H.G.T., *Melbourne Review* 9, 1884, pp.96–101. I am indebted to Michele McFarland for drawing this to my attention.
  34. Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2000, reissued MUP, Melbourne, 2002, pp.220–45.
  35. Susan K. Martin, 'The Newest Woman in a New World: gender anxiety and new women in turn of the century Australian fiction' (publication forthcoming in JAS).
  36. Ethel Turner, 'A Story of Strange Sights', *The Australian Town and Country Journal*, Sydney, December 1895.
  37. Mary Ann Moore-Bentley [Mrs H.H. Ling], *A Woman of Mars, or Australia's Enfranchised Woman*, Edwards, Dunlop and Co., Sydney, 1901. See entry by Walton in Fortunati and Trousson, *Dictionary*, p.705. For the contrast between Moore-Bentley's utopia and Helen Simpson's dystopia see Gillian Whitlock, '1901/1933: From Eutopia to Dystopia', in Kay Ferres (ed.), *The Time to Write: Australian Women Writers 1890–1930*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1993, pp.162–82.
  38. Among others see: Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters: an ecological history of the Australasian lands and people*, Reed Books, Sydney, 1994; William J. Lines, *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, pp.128–51; J.M. Powell, 'Snakes and Cannons: Water Management and the Geographical Imagination in Australia', in Stephen Dovers (ed.), *Environmental History and Policy: still settling Australia*, OUP, Melbourne, 2000, pp.47–71; Eric Rolls, 'More a new planet than a new continent', in Dovers, *Australian Environmental History*, pp.22–36.
  39. Melissa Bellanta, 'Clearing Ground for the New Arcadia: Utopia, Labour and Environment in 1890s Australia', *JAS* 72, 2002, p.14.
  40. One salutary case is described by William Metcalf in *The Gayndah Communes: From Aborigines and Squatters through Communes to Rural Depopulation in the Gayndah Area*, CQUP, Rockhampton, 1998.
  41. See William Pember Reeves, *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand*, Grant Richards, London, 1902, 2 vols; reissued by Macmillan, Melbourne, 1969.
  42. Gregory Claeys, 'Socialism and Utopia', in Schaer et al., *Utopia*, pp.206–40.
  43. One American title which tried to cover all bases was Henry Olerich's *A Cityless and Countryless World: An Outline of Practical Co-operative Individualism*, Holstein, Iowa, 1893. Reprinted Arno Press, New York, 1971.
  44. Andrew McCann argues late nineteenth-century Australian nationalism "is not simply haunted by Romanticism, it is fundamentally Romantic". 'Romanticism, Nationalism and the Myth of the Popular in William Lane's *The Workingman's Paradise*', *JAS* 70, 2001, pp.1–12.
  45. 'Tom Collins' [Joseph Furphy], *Rigby's Romance*, with foreword by R.G. Howarth, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1946. First published serially in the *Barrier Truth*, Broken Hill, NSW, 1905–1906.
  46. Izaak Walton [and Charles Cotton], *The Compleat Angler; or, the Contemplative Man's Recreation*, edited, with an introduction and commentary by Jonquil Bevan, Clarendon Press, London, 1983, OUP, New York, 1983.
  47. c.f. Docker, *Nervous Nineties*, pp.105–21.
  48. Robert Potter, *The Germ Growers: An Australian Story of Adventure and Mystery*, Melville, Mullen & Slade, Melbourne, 1892.
  49. Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp.45–9.
  50. Albinski surveys other possible reasons, 'Survey', pp.16–17.
  51. See Albinski, 'Survey'; Sargent, 'Australian utopian literature'; Walton, 'Heaven and Hell'. Also see Van Ikin, 'The Time is Not Yet Ripe and Contemporary Attitudes to Politics', *ALS* 8:3, 1978, pp.296–306.
  52. Gib Prettyman, 'Gilded Age Utopias of Incorporation', *US* 12:1, 2001, pp.19–40.
  53. Peter Love, *Labour and the Money Power: Australian labour populism 1890–1950*, MUP, Melbourne, 1984, pp.20–55. Trevor Sykes, *Two Centuries of Panic: A History of Corporate Collapses in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, third impression 1998, pp.138–223.
  54. 'Lauderdale', *Victoria's Representative Men at Home: Punch's Illustrated Interviews*, c.1904, facsimile edition edited and introduced by Michael Cannon, Today's Heritage, Melbourne, undated. Kevin Blackburn, 'Preaching "The Gospel of Efficiency": The Promotion of Ideas about Profit-sharing and Payment by Results in Australia, 1915–1929', *Australian Historical Studies (AHS)* 27:107, 1996, pp.257–80.
  55. T.P. Deegan, *The Rescue of Victoria, the Beautiful Nihilist*, publisher, date and place of publication unknown, p.34. State Library of Victoria copy stamped 1910.
  56. Christopher Brennan, 'The University and Australian Literature. A Centenary Retrospect', *Hermes*, University of Sydney, Sydney, Jubilee no., 1902, pp.85–8. E.H. Tottenham, *The Man From Mars*, Madgwick & Sons, Melbourne, 1903, pp.75–88.
  57. Andrew Montana, *The Art Movement in Australia: Design, Taste and Society 1875–1900*, Miegunyah Press/MUP, Melbourne, 2000. Ron Radford, *Art Nouveau in Australia*, exhibition catalogue, Ballarat, 1983.
  58. On connections between nationalism, vitalism, primitivism, Wagner, landscape art and futurism, see Shearer West, *Fin de Siecle: Art and Society in an Age of Uncertainty*, Bloomsbury, London, 1993, pp.122–39.
  59. John F. Williams, *Quarantined Culture: Australian Reactions to Modernism 1913–1939*, CUP, Cambridge, 1995, pp.20–2, 71–3.
  60. Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*, MUP, Melbourne, 2002, pp.28–31, 57–61. Diana H. Wyndham, 'Striving for national fitness: eugenics in



- Australia 1910s–1930s', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1996, pp.3, 216–22, 264–6. Robin F. Haines, 'Therapeutic Emigration: Some South Australian and Victorian Experiences', *JAS* 33, 1992, pp.76–90.
61. Stephen Garton, 'Sound Minds and Healthy Bodies: Re-considering Eugenics in Australia, 1914–1940', *AHS* 26:103, 1994, pp.163–81.
  62. The Darling Downs, Qld, and the Blue Mountains, NSW, were districts promoted in utopian terms for their salubrious and aesthetically pleasing characteristics. See Christopher Lee, 'Toilet Training the Settler Subject: An exercise in Civic Regulation', *Southern Review* 29:1, 1996, pp.50–63.
  63. H.E. Boote, *The Human Ladder: An Australian Story of Our Time*, Judd Publishing, Sydney, 1920. Boote's characters debate labour issues in a large number of unpublished novels, stories and essays—see Boote papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney. Cox's novel was serialised in the *Argus*, published in book form in Australia, Britain and the USA, translated into French and Russian, adapted for radio and reproduced as a picture strip.
  64. Deborah Ambery, 'The Hopewood Experiment', *JAS* 59, 1998, pp.93–100.
  65. Wyndham, 'Striving for national fitness', p.2, footnote 7. However, note that the Eugenics Society of Victoria was founded in 1936 and lasted until 1961: see Rob Watts, 'Beyond Nature and Nurture: Eugenics in Twentieth Century Australian History', *Australian Journal of Politics and History (AJPH)* 40:3, 1994, pp.318–34.
  66. For a succinct satiric commentary see Rosaleen Love's story 'Tremendous Potential for Tourism' in her collection *The Total Devotion Machine and Other Stories*, Women's Press, London, 1989. Also see Robert Milliken, *No Conceivable Injury: The Story of Britain and Australia's Atomic CoverUp*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1986.
  67. Don Aitken, "'Countrymindedness"—the Spread of an Idea', in S.L. Goldberg and F.B. Smith (eds), *Australian cultural history*, CUP, Cambridge, 1988, pp.50–7. Andrew Moore, 'The Old Guard and "Countrymindedness" during the Great Depression', *JAS* 27, 1990, pp.52–64. Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather, 'Fascism and Australian Town Planning Propagandists: Some Implications', *AJPH* 40:3, 1994, pp.335–50.
  68. Moore, 'The Old Guard', p.62.
  69. Walton, 'Heaven and Hell', pp.195–200. Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, pp.64–5.
  70. See Whitlock, '1901/1933', pp.174–82.
  71. Petteri Pietikainen, 'Dynamic Psychology, Utopia, and Escape from History: The Case of C.G. Jung', *US* 12:1, 2001, pp.41–55.
  72. Brian Penton, *Landtakers: the Story of an Epoch*, Endeavour Press, Sydney, 1934; *Inheritors*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1936. The third novel in the trilogy was not published.
  73. Robert Dixon, 'Prosthetic Gods: The Australian Colonial Body and Melanesia 1930–1950', *Southern Review* 30:2, 1997, pp.130–45.
  74. Interview with Marjorie Barnard, in Giulia Giuffré, *A Writing Life: Interviews with Australian Women Writers*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, p.140. The unabridged version of the novel was published by Virago Press, London, 1983. The abbreviated title *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* was used for the 1947 first edition published by Georgian House, Melbourne.
  75. Akio Sawada, *Thomas More in Japan*, The Renaissance Institute, Sophia University, Tokyo, 1978, p.66: "It may well have been that the catastrophe of defeat and the sight of thousands of homeless people in the burnt down and bombed cities made people long for a Utopia."
  76. See Alan Gilbert, 'The Roots of Anti-Suburbanism in Australia', in S.L. Goldberg and F.B. Smith (eds), *Australian Cultural History*, Cambridge in assoc. Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1988, pp.33–49. Also see John Murphy and Judith Smart (eds), *The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s*, AHS, Special Issue, 28:109, 1997.
  77. See entry by Walton in Fortunati and Trousson, *Dictionary*, pp.246–7.
  78. See Sasha Soldatow's introduction to *Poet of the 21st Century: Harry Hooton Collected Poems*, Collins/Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1990.
  79. Leo Scheeps, 'Unkelying Quiros: A Gloss on Part II of James McAuley's "Captain Quiros"', *JAS* 42, 1994, pp.18–31. And see Robert Dixon, *Prosthetic Gods: Travel, representation and colonial governance*, UQP, Brisbane, 2001, pp.149–75, for an analysis taking in New Guinea, James McAuley and suburbanism.
  80. Patrick White, *Voss: a novel*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London; Viking, New York, 1957. Carmelina Imbroscio (ed.), *Requiem pour l'Utopie? Tendances autodestructives du paradigme utopique*, Pisa, 1986. Barry Maxwell, 'The Paths in the Midst of Collapse: Utopian Direction in Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin', in Raffaella Baccolini, Vita Fortunati and Nadia Minerva (eds), *Viaggi in Utopia*, Longo, Ravenna, 1993, pp.217–30. Anthony Stephens, 'Sun State and its Shadow', in Eugene Kamenka (ed.), *Utopias*, OUP, Melbourne, 1987, pp.1–19.
  81. This phrase from Stow's poem 'The Singing Bones' is taken up by David Tacey in his *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, HarperCollins, Melbourne, 1995.
  82. In opera, see Richard Meale's *Voss*, libretto by David Malouf, premiered 1986; and Peter Sculthorpe's *Quiros* (1982): commissioned by the Australian Broadcasting Commission.
  83. Paul Genoni, 'Subverting the Empire: Exploration in the Fiction of Thea Astley and Peter Carey', *JAS* 70, 2001, pp.13–21.
  84. Leslie John J. Nye, *Escape to Elysium*, Wentworth Books, Sydney, 1972.
  85. Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979, pp.4–5.
  86. Russell Braddon, *The Year of the Angry Rabbit*, Heinemann, London, 1964.
  87. David Ireland, *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1971, *The Flesheaters*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1972. Ireland acknowledged his feeling of affinity with Sterne, also the impression made on him by "the humorous and humane pessimism, the completely disenchanting author, the economy of means, the classic point of view, the tragedy and selfbetrayal, the monumental indifference of the human environment to the individual's welfare" in the works of Machado de Assis ('Statement', *ALS* 8:2, 1977, pp.192–3).
  88. See entry by Walton in Fortunati and Trousson, *Dictionary*, p.221.
  89. David Ireland, *City of Women*, Allen Lane, Melbourne, 1981, pp.16, 27.
  90. Werner Christie Mathisen, 'The Underestimation of Politics in Green Utopias: The Description of Politics in Huxley's *Island*, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, and Callenbach's *Ecotopia*', *US* 12:1, 2001, pp.56–78; Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Utopia and the Late Twentieth Century: A View from North America', in Schaar et al., *Utopia*, pp.333–43.
  91. See Robyn Eckersley's *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach*, State University

- of New York Press, Albany, 1992.
92. William J. Metcalf, *From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality: Cooperative Lifestyles in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1995. Richard C.S. Trahair, *Utopias and Utopians: an historical dictionary*, Fitzroy Dearborn, London, 1999.
  93. Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1998. Comerford & Miller, West Wickham, Kent, 1998, pp.165–78.
  94. Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk*, trans. Amos Weisz, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp.55–6, 158–9.
  95. Arthur Herman, *The Idea of Decline in Western History*, Free Press, New York, 1997, pp.9–10.
  96. Ken Gelder uses the description 'ecological fairytale' in his survey 'The Novel', in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1988, p.511.
  97. Re gaming, see Ben Hourigan, 'The Map is the Territory: Maps and Mapping in Fantasy Fiction and role-playing video games', paper given at English and Interdisciplinary Conference, La Trobe University, 25 October 2002.
  98. George Turner, *Beloved Son*, Faber & Faber, London, 1978; *Vaneglorry*, Faber & Faber, London, 1981; *Yesterday's Men*, Faber & Faber, London 1983.
  99. James Esmond, 'The Fool and His Inheritance', *The Lone Hand*, September 1911.
  100. George Turner, *The Sea and Summer*, Faber & Faber, London, 1987. Published as *Drowning Towers*, Avon Books, New York, 1988. In 1988 Turner was the recipient of the Arthur C. Clarke Prize and Commonwealth Writers' Prize.
  101. Lee Harding, *Waiting for the End of the World*, Cassell Australia, Sydney, 1983. Some of Harding's short fiction was published under the pseudonym Harold G. Nye.
  102. A planet named as a tribute to Noam Chomsky featured in Brodrick's far-future parable *Valencies*, UQP, Brisbane, 1983.
  103. A number of related issues are discussed by Miriam Dixon in her *The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-Celts and Identity—1788 to the present*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1999.
  104. See Penny van Toorn, 'Mudrooroo and the Power of the Post: Alternative Inscriptions of Aboriginalist Discourse in a Post-Aboriginalist Age', *Southern Review* 28:2, 1995, pp.121–39. Concerning controversy over Mudrooroo's ethnicity see John Barnes, 'Questions of Identity in Contemporary Australia', in Adi Wimmer (ed.), *Australian Nationalism Reconsidered: Maintaining a Monocultural Tradition in a Multicultural Society*, Stauffenburg, Tübingen, 1999, pp.63–71.
  105. Nan Chauncy, *Mathinna's People*, OUP, Oxford, 1967; published in the USA under the title *Hunted in their Own Land*, Franklin Watts, New York, 1973. For Chauncy fictions of relevance to utopian studies see Berenice Eastman, *Nan Chauncy: A Writer's Life*, The Friends of Chauncy Vale, Bagdad, Tas, 2000, pp.64–8.
  106. See Mudrooroo Narogin, *Writing From the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1990, p.177.
  107. Louis Nowra, *The Golden Age*, Currency Press, in assoc. Introbox Theatre Co., Sydney, 1985. Second ed., with introduction by Gerry Turcotte, Currency Press, Sydney, 1989. Helen Gilbert, 'PostColonial Grotesques: Remembering the Body in Louis Nowra's *Visions and The Golden Age*', *SPAN* 36:2, 1993, pp.618–33.
  108. Alma De Groen, *The Rivers of China*, introduction by Elizabeth Perkins, Currency Press, Sydney, 1988.
  109. Laurent Gervereau, 'Symbolic Collapse: Utopia Challenged by its Representations', in Schaer et al., *Utopia*, pp.357–67. Ruth Levitas, 'For Utopia: The (Limits of the) Utopian Function in Late Capitalist Society', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 3: 2/3, 2000, pp.25–43. Lucy Sargisson, *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression*, Routledge, London, 2000.
  110. Andrew McGahan, 1988, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p.222.
  111. Rodney Hall, *Kisses of the Enemy*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1987. See entry by Walton in Fortunati and Trousson, *Dictionary*, p.337.
  112. Rodney Hall, *Captivity Captive*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1988; *The Second Bridegroom*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1991; *The Grisly Wife*, Macmillan Australia, Sydney, 1993.
  113. Discussed by Andrew Riemer in his introduction to David Foster, *A slab of Foster's*, Yellow Press, Darlinghurst, 1994, pp.1–10.
  114. David Foster, *The Glade Within the Grove*, Random House, Sydney, 1996, Vintage, Sydney, 1997. Companion volume: *The Ballad of Erinungarah*, Vintage, Sydney, 1997. See review by Leigh Dale in *JAS* 56, 1998, pp.189–92.
  115. Janette Turner Hospital, *Oyster*, Virago, London, 1996; Knopf, Sydney, 1996.
  116. Malcolm Knox, 'Stories in the wrong tense', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Spectrum, 8 December 2001, p.9.
  117. John Birmingham, *Leviathan: the unauthorised biography of Sydney*, Knopf, Sydney, 1999. The seven novels in John Marsden's *Tomorrow* series were all published by Pan Macmillan, Sydney, in the period 1994–1999.
  118. Ernest Favenc, *Marooned on Australia: being the narration of Diedrich Buys of his discoveries and exploits in Terra Australis Incognita about the year 1630*, Blackie, London, 1896. Further editions 1897, 1905, 1920, 1933.
  119. Douglas Stewart, *Shipwreck*, Shepherd Press, Sydney, 1947; H. Drake-Brockman, *The Wicked and the Fair*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1957; H. Drake-Brockman, *Voyage to Disaster: the Life of Francisco Pelsaert*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1963, new edition UWA Press, Perth, 1995.
  120. Randolph Stow, 'The Southland of Antichrist', Anna Rutherford (ed.), *Common Wealth*, Akademisk Boghandel, Aarhus, 1971, pp.160–7.
  121. Gary Crew, *Strange Objects*, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1990.

Robyn Walton is a PhD candidate in the English program, La Trobe University. She would like to thank Lyman Tower Sargent, Susan K. Martin, John Cargher, Ruth Carter, Wendy Dyson, Nathan Hollier and John McLaren for their input. A version of this article with a more extensive listing of sources and notes is available upon request from the editors or can be accessed via the Overland website.



## EPIC FANTASY AND GLOBAL TERRORISM

If fantasy is the means by which we in some sense place ourselves 'out of this world' at the 'end of the world', it is also a means for securing our adaptation to it.<sup>1</sup>

Eric L. Santner

THERE ARE MANY CUES for an article like this. Links have already been drawn between global terrorism and literary texts, of course: for example, Jason Epstein has compared the United States, in its pursuit of terrorists, to Melville's Ahab.<sup>2</sup> But a more relevant cue comes from Mike Davis, who situates the aeroplane bombings of the World Trade Center buildings in New York on 11 September 2001 alongside fantastic images of the fire-storming of lower Manhattan in a work by H.G. Wells, *War in the Air*, published eighty-four years earlier in 1907. Under zeppelin attack by Imperial Germany, "rag-time New York", as Davis describes it, "becomes the first modern city destroyed from the air".<sup>3</sup> Davis is one of a number of commentators on 11 September who reads the reality of the event through the logic of fantasy, as if it was a moment of terror, or terrorism, that made it impossible to distinguish between the two:

the attacks on New York and Washington DC were organised as epic horror cinema with meticulous attention to *mise en scene*. Indeed, the hijacked planes were aimed to impact precisely at the vulnerable border between fantasy and reality.<sup>4</sup>

That phrase—"the vulnerable border between fantasy and reality"—also resonates with anxieties about terrorist activity itself, planned and executed (in this case) from within the borders of the US, and so speaking to America's own sense of border vulnerability: of the possibility that the outside is already or always inside. This theme has preoccupied Davis

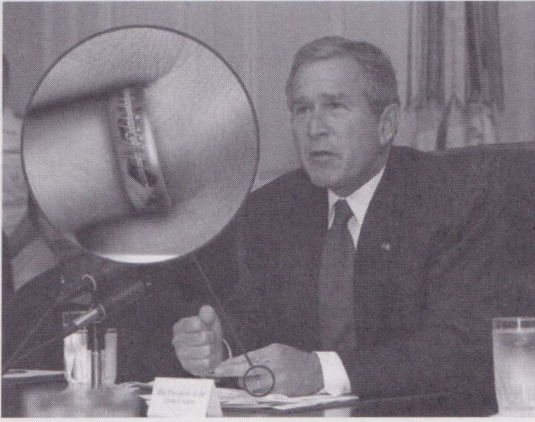
through his work on Los Angeles in *City of Quartz*, which shows the city constructing itself around Manichean differences, Us (white, rich Americans) and Them (immigrants, Mexican-Americans, blacks, the urban poor). One reviewer notes the way in which Davis constructs Los Angeles' "ruling classes" as "forces of evil" in the city as they fortify their strongholds precisely to *prevent* "border vulnerability".<sup>5</sup> Davis's article on 11 September ends with a similarly extravagant account of the ruling class intensifying systems of surveillance directed against others:

At a Halloween press conference, Colin Powell, sounding like he had just finished reading *Neuromancer*, gloated over plans for a vast centralized data warehouse that would store "every derogatory piece of information" on visitors and would-be immigrants.<sup>6</sup>

Here, the US administration meets William Gibson and cyberpunk in the context of Evil manifest: the 'forces of evil' come out on All Soul's Eve.

It can indeed be difficult to extricate counterterrorism policy from the realms of fantasy and fantasy discourse, the more so since terrorism (like Islamism, to which it is now so often aligned) became the US's demonised Other. Are US terrorist targets real or fantastic? Indeed, in a curious loop, Mike Davis came to influence William Gibson's later novel, *Virtual Light*, where *City of Quartz* is cited as an important source for Gibson's fictional representation of LA. These days, of course, film and





[www.myirony.com/archives/000206.html](http://www.myirony.com/archives/000206.html)

fiction may be working hard to prevent LA from being obliterated, as we saw with the counter-terrorism unit in the second series of the television thriller, 24.

Another cue that helps to develop the connection between terrorism and fantasy—and especially, Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*—is an image that has been circulating around the internet, showing George W. Bush wearing the Ring of Sauron and titled ‘Frodo has failed: Sauron prepares to invade Iraq’.

The image, above, is taken from just one of many sites showcasing it.<sup>7</sup> Myirony.com is an open website and people offer their own commentaries on what it posts. Here is one of them, posted underneath this image:

Sauron was trying to take away the freedom of the peoples of Middle Earth. Is Bush doing the same thing? Is taking away the freedom of a corrupt and dangerous government truly evil? OK—so I just set myself up for the comment that some people think the US is corrupt and dangerous. But, are we as corrupt and dangerous as Iraq? Is the current administration making up the stories of Iraqi horrors? It seems to me that Saddam Hussein is a very bad man and his regime puts the US at high risk. One thing is for sure. The current technology of weapons means that wars can’t be fought on old terms. The idea of preventing Saddam from hurting us before it happens might sound a bit like ‘Minority Report’ . . . but, what if none of the war-talk had ever happened? Would we have been the victims of an attack from Saddam or terrorists he’s funded? If so, wouldn’t we all wish we’d gone to war?

This posting captures an ambivalence found in much of the commentary on terrorism and the ‘war on terrorism’ today: a ‘what if’ ambivalence that wonders whether the ‘evil empire’ of the US is more, or less, evil than terrorism itself—or than the three so-called ‘rogue states’ that George W. Bush identified as the ‘axis of evil’. But it also captures something not quite there: ‘what if . . .’

As it is currently conceived, what is now called global terrorism has both an immediately felt and an ethereal ‘body’: a violently-registered presence, and a disconcerting absence that seems almost against the odds to continue to keep itself that way. For Binoy Kampmark, bin Laden is a kind of hyperreality, living as a perpetual ‘afterlife’, his body and voice needing ceaselessly to be verified or authenticated.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Kampmark argues that bin Laden *needs* to be absent for the ‘war against terrorism’ to properly function, especially through its globalised agendas (which means that, for the US, there is no place it cannot go in pursuit of this absence).<sup>9</sup> These various tropes, yoking terrorism to an absent source, to phantasm, but also to networks of alliance and to a potential apocalypse, should begin both to identify and clarify the connection between terrorism and fantasy—specifically, the modern genre of epic fantasy consolidated in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien famously disavowed allegorical readings of *The Lord of the Rings* (“It is neither allegorical nor topical.”), partly to distinguish himself from the fantasies written by his friend and colleague, C.S. Lewis.<sup>10</sup> But allegorical readings of his work are nevertheless commonplace, especially those that place the fantasy works in the context of Tolkien’s own experiences during the First World War, where he lost a number of close friends and was himself stricken with ‘trench fever’. The three parts of *The Lord of the Rings* were written during the 1930s and throughout the duration of the Second World War, with the first part—*The Fellowship of the Ring*, published in July 1954. Part two, *The Two Towers*, was published in November 1954, and part three, *The Return of the King*, was published in April 1955.

Peter Jackson’s cinematic version of *The Lord of the Rings* has become the most expensive set of films ever made; the film of the first part appeared just a few weeks after 11 September, and the annual release of the other parts mean that they are necessarily caught up alongside the ‘war on terror-



Tolkien famously disavowed allegorical readings of *The Lord of the Rings* (“It is neither allegorical nor topical.”), partly to distinguish himself from the fantasies written by his friend, C.S. Lewis. But allegorical readings of his work are nevertheless commonplace.

---

ism’, the invasion of Iraq and the search for ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (another phantasm, thus far), and the search for Osama bin Laden and global terrorist cells and networks. It is certainly possible to situate the *Lord of the Rings* cinematic project—which also saw Tolkien’s novels republished by HarperCollins and return to the top of US bestseller lists alongside non-fictional accounts of Osama bin Laden, terrorism and Islam—in this prevailing context. Indeed, several commentaries have already done this, to greater or lesser degrees.

The Center for Libertarian Studies (CLS) is a non-profit organisation based in Burlingame, California, with a website that links to Antiwar.com for coverage of US foreign policy. It also links to LewRockwell.com, a site owned by the CLS’s vice-president who identifies himself as “an opponent of the central state, its wars and its socialism”: an opponent, that is, of Colin Powell’s Halloween ‘gloating’ over increased internal US surveillance systems. Carlo Stagnaro, an Italian who is co-editor of the Libertarian magazine *Enclave*, has posted an article on this site: ‘Tolkien’s Lesson for September 11’. “The conservative and liberal élites”, he writes, “have been portraying Bush’s war on terrorism as a sort of crusade of good against evil. They have even tried to enlist John Ronald Reuel Tolkien . . . author of the ‘Book of the Century’, *The Lord of the Rings*, for this endeavour. In their view, the coalition led by the United States is like the ‘league of the free’ who fight against Sauron of Mordor—that is, bin Laden of Afghanistan”.<sup>11</sup> This is an informed article that counters this conservative appropriation of Tolkien’s work, placing Tolkien in a tradition of civil dissent: “J.R.R. Tolkien”, he writes, “would hardly have taken a position in favour of the war on terrorism”. The aim of Tolkien’s work is the destruction of the Ring itself, the source of unlimited and always-corrupting power—a point which leads Stagnaro not to read the fantasy of *The Lord of the Rings* as an allegory for reality, but the inverse, that is, to read reality as an allegory for fantasy:

today’s war on terrorism seems a war to own the Ring, rather than a war to destroy it. Neither Bush’s nor bin Laden’s supporters fight for liberty; they all fight to strengthen their own power. One can hardly choose to join one or the other—and should ask whether there is still a place for common, peaceful people in the lands of opposing war lords. Indeed, the only rational position is that of Treebeard [an Ent in *The Lord of the Rings*]: “I am not altogether on anybody’s side, because nobody is altogether on my side, if you understand me . . . And there are some things, of course, whose side I’m altogether not on; I am against them altogether.

Here, *The Lord of the Rings* provides the means of articulating one’s position on global terrorism: this epic fantasy text from the 1950s now accommodates a contemporary war scenario. “The analogy between bin Laden and Sauron is not an empty one”, writes Chris Mooney in the *Washington Post*, but “for the bearer of the Ring of Power, [one] would need to look no further than George W. Bush.”

Another commentary to note here comes from the *Asia Times Online*: a front-page piece titled ‘The “Ring” and the remnants of the West’, by a correspondent identified only as ‘Spengler’—named after Oswald Spengler, author of *The Decline of the West* (1918–1922). This commentary takes the release of the films of *The Lord of the Rings* as the “most important cultural event of the past decade”, since in these texts “No better guide exists to the mood and morals of the United States”.<sup>12</sup> Spengler reads the end of *The Lord of the Rings* as a return to ordinary life, therefore casting the work not as epic fantasy at all, but as anti-epic—and reading the US accordingly not as empire, but as anti-empire: “Boorish and gruff as the new American empire might seem, it is an anti-empire populated by reluctant heroes who want nothing more than to till their fields and mind their homes, much like Tolkien’s hobbits. Under pressure, though, it will respond with a fierceness and cohesion that will surprise its adversaries.”

In this article from the East about the West, Americans are like hobbits, content to remain *in* the West, insular, isolated from the pressures of globalisation, in this case, global terrorism. This is a commonplace view of the US, an empire-building nation that can also seem ignorant of the world beyond its own vulnerable borders.<sup>13</sup> Of course, if the hobbits have any equivalent nationality in the real world at all, they're probably English: certainly, Tolkien claimed them as such, locating the Hobbits' Shire just outside of Oxford where he worked as a Professor of Anglo-Saxon. But through the production and release of Peter Jackson's recent films of *The Lord of the Rings*, a further and even greater identification takes place: that of Middle Earth itself with New Zealand.

The three films in *The Lord of the Rings* series were filmed on location in New Zealand, using scenery in both the North and South Islands: when *The Fellowship of the Rings* won an Oscar for cinematography, tourist officials jokingly claimed their nation as the 'Best Supporting Country'. New Zealand has been quick to capitalise on the tourism value of its association with Tolkien's fantasy world.<sup>14</sup> In the wake of 11 September and the 'war against terrorism', this kind of fantasy identification has a particular resonance. New Zealand Tourism speaks of New Zealand as a 'safe destination' in an otherwise unsafe world: much like the Hobbit's Shire just prior to the events of *The Lord of the Rings*. New Zealand has demilitarised itself and no longer contributes to the Australian-US alliance. It also refused to join the 'coalition of the willing' in the war on Iraq, distinguishing itself carefully from Australia and so helping this fantasy of 'safe-ness' to materialise.

Epic fantasy grew, out of the experiences of world wars, to become literally the grandest and greatest of the literary genres: nostalgic for 'safe destinations', but charting the vulnerability of borders and identities with an almost masochistic intensity. The genre can therefore often refuse to resolve itself: a recent epic fantasy series by Robert Jordan, for example, is now in its tenth volume (each one around 600 pages), with no signs even at this stage of reaching (to use a word often associated with traumatic memory) 'closure'. Tolkien's sagas also grew, escalating into a series of volumes published posthumously by his son, Christopher, as if the battles and struggles can never stop or be stopped. Indeed, the genre charts what Dilip Hiro has called a "war with-

out end"<sup>15</sup>—or what Michael Taussig refers to as a permanent state of emergency, a phrase echoed by George W. Bush himself when he declared a "state of perpetual emergency" after 11 September, and now familiar. Bush advocates, as Fredric Jameson has also noted, "a new sort of war without . . . a foreseeable end".<sup>16</sup> Characters in modern epic fantasy are mobilised on a quest that may similarly be endless, sent to realms beyond their borders, as the hobbits are in *The Lord of the Rings* or as Lyra is in Philip Pullman's recent series, *His Dark Materials*, which actually begins in the ivory towers of Oxford; exile is necessary in epic fantasy. Indeed, they travel incessantly, almost obsessively, into other lands and other people's territories. It is evil that drives them outwards: it comes into their home (that is, it is proximate) and yet it remains utterly remote, distant, absent, unable to be seen even as its effects are continually registered: much like the perpetual absence of Osama bin Laden.

The best academic study of Tolkien's work is Tom Shippey's book, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Shippey's discussion of evil in *The Lord of the Rings* emphasises both its power and its intangibility, signified through the Ringwraiths: shadowy figures who were once men but who were utterly changed through their "addiction" to the Ring—and who seem able to go anywhere in Middle Earth, creating "panic".<sup>17</sup> These are certainly terroristic creatures: "The spectacle of a person 'eaten up inside' by devotion to some abstraction has been so familiar throughout the twentieth century as to make the idea of the wraith, and the wraithing-process, horribly recognisable, in a non-fantastic way".<sup>18</sup> Links between fascism and terrorism—drawing the mid-twentieth century into the end of the millennium—have been made by commentators such as Christopher Hitchens; but it seems to me that Tolkien's shadowy, panic-causing Ringwraiths are more terrorist than fascistic both in their devotion to abstractions and their sheer otherness.

Terror(ism) is both proximate and remote, here and always at the same time elsewhere. It has something sublime about it, as Ann Radcliffe had noted in 1826 through her classic distinction between terror and horror which, she noted "are so far the opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them".<sup>19</sup> Terror is a ceaseless, immanent threat here, like Taussig's per-



Modern epic fantasy is a literary form of fundamentalism that troubles secular ideals. But it also troubles the kind of political fundamentalism that relies on Manichean binaries of good and evil.

---

manent state of emergency—while horror realises that threat, bringing atrocities close to home, provoking a sickening disgust, a state of despair.

To borrow terms used by Jean Baudrillard, terror is fatal while horror is banal: the banal conclusion or realisation of terror(ism). It is the task of epic fantasy—fantasy on the grandest scale—to mediate between the two, to hold them in some kind of balance. A perfect example lies in the work of the architect, Daniel Libeskind, who won the competition to build a set of new towers in the place of the World Trade Center towers. Those WTC towers, designed by Japanese-American architect Minoru Yamasaki, were already, as Angus Kress Gillespie notes, “a global symbol, instantly recognised to stand for America”.<sup>20</sup> They had previously been a terrorist target and terrorism remained an immanent threat. Their bombing transformed the site into a place of horror, provoking disgust, despair, grief, anger. Libeskind’s new tower project seemed designed both to preserve these horrific features and at the same time to return the site to a condition of terror, of sublimity and immanence. Hal Foster captures this combination of horror and terror in the Libeskind design when he says it embodies “both the traumatic and the triumphal”.<sup>21</sup> Libeskind, who also designed the Jewish Museum in Berlin, created for New York a spiral of high-rise towers culminating in a 1776-foot spire, out-symbolising the WTC towers as a ‘spire of liberty’, through its echo of the Statue of Liberty—a work of epic fantasy, no less, a “liberation of the imagination”.<sup>22</sup> The memorial plaza is ‘Park of Heroes’, the museum is ‘Edge of Hope’, the spire is ‘Life’s Victorious Skyline’.

It was difficult not to notice the synchronicity between New York’s destroyed twin towers and the second book of Tolkien’s epic fantasy, *The Two Towers*—signposted as an already completed film-yet-to-come shortly after the 11 September attacks. Tolkien’s dark towers (and so many works of epic fantasy have dark towers) are evil and remote; New York’s towers became proximate; both functioned as ‘marvellous’ symbols, installed at the centre of

some sort of epic struggle. The fantastic aspect of the twin towers and of the 11 September attacks themselves was not lost on some of the better-known cultural commentaries that followed. Slavoj Žižek’s essay ‘Welcome to the Desert of the Real’ takes its title from Jean Baudrillard via *The Matrix* (1999), drawing on that film’s evocation of fantasy as false comfort—with the rubble of 11 September as the real and banal supplement to the fantasised abstraction of the towers themselves. Everything in this reading is infected by fantasy: the dream of the United States as a safe haven, for example; or the identification of Osama bin Laden as “the real-life counterpart of Ernst Stavro Blofeld, the master-criminal in most of the James Bond films, who was involved in the acts of mass-destruction”.<sup>23</sup>

These commentaries return to the question posed at the beginning of this article, namely, where is the greater evil: here or there? Inside or outside? In the West, or elsewhere? Epic fantasy’s ambivalent conception of evil, as I have noted, locates it inside and outside simultaneously—although, since hobbits survive the corrupting power of the Ring, it may finally lean towards the latter. Evil performs at its most terroristic as a remote Other, like Sauron and his network of alliances. It has in fact been commonplace to talk these days of terrorist ‘networks’, dispersed groups which affiliate across and beyond state borders to conduct what has been called a ‘netwar’, where the “protagonists . . . use networked forms of organisation, doctrine, strategy and technology attuned to the information age”.<sup>24</sup> Networked alliances have been crucial to modern epic fantasy: think of Sauron and the orcs, trolls, warcs and various birds and so on in *The Lord of the Rings*, or the witches, the gyptians and the armoured bears in Philip Pullman’s trilogy. *The Lord of the Rings* even deploys its own ‘coalition of the willing’ to deal with these networks, the ‘fellowship’ between men, elves and dwarves: it might be worth thinking of Bush, Tony Blair and John Howard as real-life counterparts to Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli. These leaders’ counter-terrorist discourse has absolutely relied upon a Manichean conception of evil

from which liberal democracy in the West is then earnestly distinguished.<sup>25</sup>

But there have been plenty of recent academic and journalistic commentaries operating in exactly the same way. Roger Scruton's *The West and the Rest: Globalisation and the Terrorist Threat* provides a spectacular recent example: an hysterical commentary which sees the West under threat from a network of "death-intoxicated" Islamist "brotherhoods" whose effect has been intensified and extended, paradoxically perhaps, by Western-driven globalisation. Here is a passage that might just as easily have been written about modern epic fantasy: "In the days when East was East and West was West, it was possible for Muslims to devote their lives to pious observances and to ignore the evil that prevailed in the *dar-al-harb* [house of war]. But when that evil spreads around the globe . . . old antagonisms are awakened, and with them the old need for allies against the infidel".<sup>26</sup> The work of Bernard Lewis (*What Went Wrong?*) or any number of media commentators following in the wake of Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' prognosis, reproduce the apocalyptic scenarios of modern epic fantasy: Manichean divisions between the West and Islam, but also an increasingly intense form of entanglement brought about through globalisation (which therefore often also produces auto-critique). The opposing anti-apocalyptic position is advanced by commentators such as Gilles Kepel and Edward Said.<sup>27</sup>

Modern epic fantasy is a literary form of fundamentalism that troubles secular ideals. But it also troubles the kind of political fundamentalism that relies on Manichean binaries of good and evil. For Said, Bernard Lewis and others satisfy a 'market' in the West for representations "of a monolithic, enraged, threatening, and conspiratorially spreading Islam" which is "greater, more useful, and capable of generating more excitement, whether for purposes of entertainment or of mobilising passions against a new foreign devil".<sup>28</sup> Modern epic fantasy can indeed generate an 'excitement' that can certainly rely upon a 'monolithic' representation of evil, terroristic in its incarnation. But in a work like *The Lord of the Rings*, the question of where evil actually resides is never fully resolved: it remains, as noted, inside and outside, here and there, simultaneously. Readers have remarked on the despair of *The Lord of the Rings*. "It's a struggle with despair," writes Jenny Turner, "a panoramic portrait

of the depressive state".<sup>29</sup> The Otherness of the novels lies not so much in an externalised evil at all, but in what passes as the world changes: the Elves in particular, who 'diminish' after Sauron has been destroyed. Michael White writes that Tolkien hated "technologists, modernisers, polluters and inveterate consumers".<sup>30</sup> His vehement anti-modern position can situate him, these days, perilously close to the prevailing caricatures of Osama bin Laden. For Colin Wilson, in fact, *The Lord of the Rings* was nothing less than an "attack", as he saw it, "on the modern world".<sup>31</sup> This is another reason why it is possible to see modern epic fantasy not as escapist, but as terroristic.

1. Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*, University of Chicago Press, London and Chicago, 2001, p.40.
2. Jason Epstein, 'Leviathan', *New York Review of Books*, 1 May 2003, pp.13–14.
3. Mike Davis, 'The Flames of New York', *New Left Review*, 12, 2001, pp.34–50.
4. *Ibid.*, p.37.
5. Paul Murphy, review of Mike Davis's *Ecology of Fear, Workplace*, 2001, <[www.workplace-gsc.com/books/murphy2.html](http://www.workplace-gsc.com/books/murphy2.html)>.
6. Davis, 'The Flames of New York', p.50.
7. Posted 2 February 2003.
8. Binoy Kampmark, 'The Spectre of bin Laden in the Age of Terrorism', *CTheory*, 11 April 2002, <[www.ctheory.net/text\\_file?pick=355](http://www.ctheory.net/text_file?pick=355)>.
9. Roland Jacquard's book, *In the Name of Osama bin Laden: Global Terrorism and the bin Laden Brotherhood*, makes a similar point about bin Laden's terrorist organisation itself: that "al Qaeda, bin Laden's creation, no longer needs either his physical existence or his funds; alive or dead, he has become a talisman for a diffuse, self-sufficient terrorist network with every intention of fulfilling its mission to 'lead the world into the apocalypse'". Vanessa Baird, review of Roland Jacquard, 'In the Name of Osama bin Laden: Global Terrorism and the bin Laden Brotherhood', *New Internationalist*, July 2002, p.31.
10. J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Foreword to the Second Edition', *The Fellowship of the Ring*, HarperCollins, London, 2003, p.xx.
11. Carlo Stagnaro, 'Tolkien's Lesson for September 11', <[www.lewrockwell.com/orig2/stagnaro3.html](http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig2/stagnaro3.html)>.
12. Spengler, 'The "Ring" and the remnants of the West', *Asia Times Online*, 11 January 2003, <[www.atimes.com/atimes/Front\\_Page/EA11Aa02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Front_Page/EA11Aa02.html)>.
13. See for example Naomi Klein: "In the weeks since September 11, we have been reminded many times that Americans aren't particularly informed about the world outside their borders". 'Signs of the Times', in Phil Scraton (ed.), *Beyond September 11: An Anthology of Dissent*, Pluto Press, London, 2002, p.146.
14. The capital, Wellington, was officially renamed 'Middle Earth' when *The Fellowship of the Rings* was released in December 2001 and, as Tolkien-based tourism flourished across the islands, the minister for tourism became known as the 'Minister Responsible for Lord of the Rings'.





Newline Cinema Productions Inc

Air New Zealand has painted two of its planes with images from the films and has adopted the slogan, 'The Airline to Middle Earth'. The New Zealand Tourism website has mapped out New Zealand according to the set locations of the films, imprinting the Shire, Mordor and many other fantasy locations onto the landscape of New Zealand: see 'New Zealand, Home of Middle Earth', <[www.newzealand.com/homeofmiddleearth/](http://www.newzealand.com/homeofmiddleearth/)>.

15. See Dilip Hiro, *War Without End: The Rise of Islamist Terrorism and Global Response*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002.
16. Fredric Jameson, 'The Dialectics of Disaster', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, 2002, p.310.
17. Tom Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, HarperCollins, London, 2001, p.125.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Cited in Fred Botting, 'Horror', *The Handbook of Gothic Literature*, Marie Mulvey-Roberts (ed.), Macmillan, London, 1998, p.124.
20. Angus Kress Gillespie, *Twin Towers: The Life of New York City's World Trade Centre*, Rutgers University Press, Piscataway, 2002, p.5.
21. Hal Foster, 'In New York', *London Review of Books*, 20 March 2003, p.17.
22. Cathleen McGuigan, 'A Tale of Two Towers', *Newsweek*, 10 February 2003, p.62.
23. Slavoj Zizek, 'Welcome to the Desert of the Real', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, 2002, p.387.
24. John O. Voll, 'Bin Laden and the new age of global terrorism', *Middle East Policy* 8, 2001, p.4.
25. For Shippey, the Ringwraiths and the Ring itself form the two sides of evil in the fantasy work. The first is 'Boethian', generated internally: absent as a thing-in-itself, and causes selfalienation and corruption. The second is Manichean, generated externally: an outside force, remote but powerful, and never inactive. The Boethian conception of evil is cast by Shippey as a literary

- trope, deployed especially by Tolkien's modernist counterparts: "the cosseted upper-class writers of the 'modernist' movement", as Shippey calls them (p.142) whose interests lie in what Foucault called the care of the self: in ethics. Epic fantasy, however, is able to deploy the Manichean conception of evil as well, which for Shippey thus makes fantasy (unlike modernism) more directly relevant "to the real world of war and politics": communal, not individualised, universal and not contingent, militant rather than dialogic—or dialogic only through its militancy.
26. Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalisation and the Terrorist Threat*, ISI Books, London, 2002, p.123.
  27. Kepel, in his book *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, takes globalisation as the means by which the necessary isolationism of Islamism is being eroded, which leads him to read 11 September as "a desperate symbol of the isolation, fragmentation, and decline of the Islamist movement, not a sign of its irrepressible might". He is, in short, against the rhetoric of modern epic fantasy: he is, in particular, anti-apocalyptic. Edward Said, like another recent commentator on the US and terrorism, Tariq Ali, advocates 'secularism' over 'fundamentalism', and is also anti-apocalyptic: Islamists, he writes, "have by and large lost the battle". Edward Said, *Covering Islam*, Vintage, New York, 1997, p.xxvii.
  28. *Ibid.* p.xxviii.
  29. Jenny Turner, 'Reasons for Liking Tolkien', *London Review of Books*, 15 November 2001, pp.23-4.
  30. Michael White, *Tolkien: a Biography*, Little, Brown & Company, London, 2001, p.209.
  31. Cited in White, *Tolkien*, p.209.

Ken Gelder works in the Department of English at the University of Melbourne. A longer version of this article will appear in a book on Tolkien in the twenty-first century, to be published by Rodopi in late 2004.

## The Clock Strikes Thirteen

The air is carbonising  
seas swelling  
plains salting  
lakes silting  
rivers thirsting  
crops wilting  
soil whirring  
garbage spilling  
waste pyramiding  
poisons seeping  
trees crashing  
birds fleeing  
fish sinking  
bones multiplying  
and the rich getting richer  
laughing all the way to—

GEOFFREY QUINLAN

## what happened to love in the last house of an industrial city

where he was the door-to-door salesman  
amateur theatre took in

where she traded her muse  
for life magazine

where there were bars on all the windows  
and the walls bled soot

where they drank the wine back into water  
and the bullets dissolved between their teeth

where she stared the ceiling back to clay  
and he hardened under the spotlight

where daytime TV flourished  
and the backyard never grew

where he came home late  
and she pretended sleep

where they dreamed the last act  
in tongues of silver

where his ears burned with applause  
where her hand shook with the word

JANE WILLIAMS



## words & numbers

1.

South Cape Spur Road      no 1  
no 2  
no 3  
no 4  
no 5  
no 6  
no 7  
no 8  
no 9  
no 10  
no 11  
no 12  
no 13  
no 14  
no 15  
no 16  
Clear felled

Arve Forest Road      spur 1  
spur 2  
spur 3  
spur 4  
spur 5  
Clear felled

Tahune Forest Air Walk      Boardwalk lowered by 10 metres  
so tourists won't see  
the clear fell

Geeveston roadside sign:      *Forestry Tasmania Growing our Future*

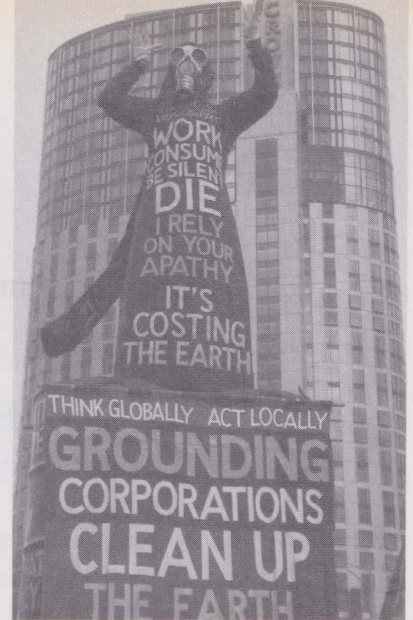
2.

Arve Forest Road—locked gates on every side road  
Road sign: *Forestry Tasmania manages for multiple uses.*

LOUISE CRISP

# MAKING THE FUTURE

Activism, memory and hope



THINGS WILL BE DIFFERENT. Can you see it? There will be no room for the idler, the middleman or the parasite. Tyrants will be knocked silly, and all workers will be owners. We might hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and criticise in the evening. We might live simple, natural, and unconstrained lives. Can you see it?

The early labour movement could taste the future. It forged a new unionism and then confidently predicted its transcendence. It imagined a socialist economy: a supreme economic council, a system of workers' control, a government planning commission. It quarrelled over the path ahead: would it be evolution or revolution? Orthodoxy or revisionism? Where did the straightest road lie? The prescience of the Marxist was matched by the bluff optimism of the reformist. Prediction befriended progress. What were labour's opponents? Reactionaries, conservatives, counter-revolutionaries—the self-interested, vainly trying to hold back a new, inevitable world.

The mobilisation of the labour movement was like the opening of a thousand eyes. Scales dropped, illusions lifted, slumbers ended. In the burst of working-class memoir we see the springtime of a new, more hopeful order. These were not simply exercises in personal reminiscence. They offered up the past to interpret the future; they were purveyors of lessons and inspirations for the making of a better life.<sup>1</sup>

The most important lesson was that of conversion. William Guthrie Spence narrated *Australia's Awakening* while Arthur Calwell explained 'The making of a socialist'.<sup>2</sup> Tom Mann chose to remember his life not from a birth in 1856, but from a rebirth in 1880:

because in this year I first began to realise that the faults of individuals, and the evils in the community, the existence of which I deplored, were not to be eliminated or cured by urging individuals of every class and station to live 'godly, righteous, and sober lives'.<sup>3</sup>

It would be wrong to say that these lights have all gone out. Working-class people still tell stories of achievement, discovery, and possibility. New visions blossom: a postmodern republic, a democracy of pleasure, a set of light footprints left on a healthier, greener planet.<sup>4</sup>

Still, in the past few decades, there has been a dimming. With the apparent defeat of socialism came the closing of a particular horizon of the future.<sup>5</sup> "There is no alternative," Margaret Thatcher famously announced. Francis Fukuyama discerned the end of history, and hoped thereby to abolish the possibility of a different kind of world. The rise of environmentalism brought a new fear of catastrophe and a more suspicious questioning of progress.<sup>6</sup> Unemployment became the norm. Can youth find their way through a thicket of injustice? Many argue that the confidence of the young to make a future has now disappeared.<sup>7</sup> Faith in prediction has been lost. The concepts of 'the accident', chaos and risk now together rule the critical roost.<sup>8</sup>

These social shifts are reflected in the most recent stories of labour activists. The passion of the converted has become the weariness of the defeated and the disenchanted. Eric Aarons admits that communism has failed, and ponders *What's Left?*, while Amirah Inglis picks over the personal cost of dec-





S11 protests at the World Economic Forum meeting, Melbourne 2000

ades of political struggle.<sup>9</sup> Labor members, it is true, sometimes adhere to a story of growth and possibility. This is now an individual, not a collective journey, however. Bill Hayden's rise leaves his old comrades behind; Fred Daly relays his keen study of Dale Carnegie;<sup>10</sup> and Bob Carr's own life is rewritten as the inexorable rise of Richard Carter—a young protagonist “twitching with political ambition”.<sup>11</sup>

What has happened to social vision? Has it disappeared? Is it true that defeat destroys the imaginary and the alternative?<sup>12</sup> Is it true that politics requires hope?<sup>13</sup> Is there hope left? How do activists keep going in moments of despair and challenge?

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS we talked with contemporary activists about their visions of the future. These include participants in the women's, labour, Indigenous, gay and lesbian, refugee, peace and environmental movements. Some of our confidants are well known; most are not. Some have elected to use their own names; others have claimed anonymity.<sup>14</sup> They span a range of ages, experiences, and ideologies. Sometimes they confirmed the verities of received academic wisdom; more often they contested the accepted truths of the lecture hall and the sociological treatise.

Social-movement theory depicts a ‘cycle of protest’, where victory is succeeded by defeat; where competition undercuts cooperation. For many theorists this process tends to be identified as a cause of sadness. Sometimes our informants agreed. Anyone who fights for justice suffers when those claims are denied. Rodney Croome, an activist for gay and lesbian rights, grimly notes that Australia has moved “straight from complacency to disillusionment” over the last few years. Francesca Andreoni of the Wilderness Society says:

you can be thinking, bloody hell, I'm banging my head against a brick wall, I'm getting nowhere, this is frustrating . . . why am I doing this? I could just go and work for Government or industry for three times the money, and have three fridges and two cars.

Mick Dodson has sniffed defeat in the battle for Indigenous rights. The Howard Government has been vicious:

If you dissent you get punished. That's what they do, they just take your money away if you're dependent on it. They are very vindictive people who are full of hate, and anyone who wants to try to stand up to their ideology or their philosophy is silenced.

How can the passionate remain unmoved by such hatred? How can they go on? "I don't bloody know," Dodson frankly admits, "I've got no bloody idea."

Yet the hard edges of doubt are dulled by the persistent force of memory. While Dodson looks around in anger, he also looks backward, conscious of what has been achieved:

we[ve] got organisations that are funded now to help with health, housing, education and that are community-run organisations that deal with a whole range of social and other issues in the community. And even though they get a meagre amount of money, there was nothing before we started struggling, before we got up and started fighting for them.

Vince Caughley, a labour and anti-capital activist, draws a similar lesson from trade-union history:

I can just imagine trying to say, "We want paid leave . . . I want to take a holiday and I want you, the boss, to pay for it." Like, how insane would you have seemed!

Sue Wills remembers the victories of the feminist and lesbian movements:

There are people who say 'there's no point in trying to change this or change that, because . . . they won't let us'. When I think back, I think that's not true. If I think back to the early seventies, if anyone had said 'this will transform the way that Australian politics and society thinks about women and homosexuals' we'd have said, 'you're pulling our leg'. But it happened.

From the confidence of past victories comes faith in future triumph. Beverley Symons, long-experienced in the peace and antinuclear movements, is sure that quiescence will never be permanent: "people reach a certain point where they sort of erupt". Hannah Middleton also drew on her many years in the peace movement to prophesy incipient success:

I've seen something arising which I find enormously encouraging. More so than ever in my life and I'm 60 now. So there's a temporary lull? Good! We can all get a second breath.

Middleton's optimism touches on a wider theme. The cycle of protest is a reality to be accepted. As Symons puts it:

some things you can't do anything about because it's politics beyond your control . . . Issues rise and

then subside. I mean, you could work your guts out for, you know, two years flogging some issue . . . but you might as well save your breath. If the politics has moved on, you can't really do anything about it.

Many other activists also recognised that periods of defeat and inactivity offer exhausted campaigners valuable 'down time' to 'rest and regroup' and to 'catch their breath'. Francesca Andreoni even suggests that "one of the keys" of a movement's survival is "actually understanding that dynamic and using it". As student activist Nick Harrigan puts it:

It should not just be seen as upturns and downturns, it should also be seen as opportunities for particular types of activism, particular types of organising, yeah?

Activists don't always seek to march forward.<sup>15</sup> Protest waves come and go. Committed activists look beyond them. As Francesca Andreoni puts it:

I see social change and social movements as almost inevitably a very long-term thing, and something that is messy. It's never neat. There's never a clear set of steps. As long as bits keep shifting more or less in the right direction, you're getting there incrementally. So I guess I see these wild peaks and troughs that you'll have in specific campaigns as just part of that dynamic of slowly shifting a much broader agenda.

Similarly, Bruce Knobloch sees the campaign for refugees persisting beyond the vagaries of daily defeats and monthly victories:

it's been really important early on to understand what a long campaign this would be, will be, you know, will continue to be. And then it's about the rhythm of the campaign, taking advantage of things when it's time to do something or planning something in quite a formal manner about, 'Well, on this day, we're going to do this for this reason even if nothing else is going on.'

From this perspective, it is no tragedy if some activists 'drop their tools' for a little while from time to time. Each new burst brings a new layer of people who have been politicised, a reserve army of social-movement labour. Lapsed activists are not traitors. They are more like distant relatives, forever tied together. Old bonds never disappear. Middleton glimpsed this in the campaign against war in Iraq:

people learn in struggle, and what you have to do is to help them get over that first hurdle of struggle.



After that, where they go is their business. They might, you know, they might decide to stand for local council, or they'll go and be difficult in a Harbour Foreshore protest group, or they'll, well, there's a multiplicity of things they can do. But they'll always be a bit stroprier afterwards because they've actually had that feeling, 'Ooh, I'm part of something which is potentially enormously powerful'.

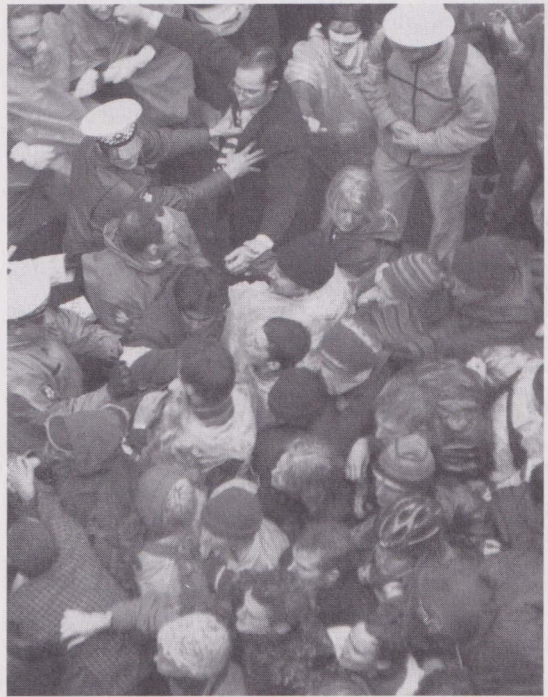
Amanda Tattersall makes a similar point:

individual experiences, even if they were years behind in the past, play a really important role in your understanding of your own politics . . . You might not go to a lot of rallies or whatever for three years, but that rally that you went to three years ago changed your life, and it's not going to change back. You keep your politics and you keep that experience; it builds your understanding.

Experience and opportunity make for a combustible mix. Political struggle has a random quality. Anything might happen. Social progress cannot be predicted, the way that the more dogmatic Marxists once hoped, but this may bring instability rather than dull persistence; political mobilisation, not inevitable defeat. As the young Nick Harrigan enthuses:

there's a big chance that you're going to get it wrong. And your guess is as good as anyone else's, you know? If you looked at the past, you wouldn't have predicted May '68 in France—that a bunch of students could take over the Student Union, spend the entire money reprinting the Situationist's 'Poverty of Student Life', blow the budget on that, and be part of the core of the biggest general strike in history in a developed country. I mean, that's a pretty low-probability tactic! I don't think anyone would have really predicted it!

Victories can emerge from failures. The academic orthodoxy would expect the collapse of a political organisation to bring despair. Yet Somali Cerise, an activist for gay and lesbian rights, argues that the financial collapse of the organisation around Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras was energising rather than constricting. Its effect was to "rejuvenate everyone's sense of community". With the parade under threat, a range of community members were inspired to 'pitch in' and ensure its persistence. Once active around Mardi Gras, they took up other issues. Cerise even suggests that the successful campaign to



change the age of consent in NSW is the direct result of the force generated by the campaign to save Mardi Gras. She is optimistic that while "a world without homophobia is really, really far away . . . full legal equality is very close".

Hope, then, has not departed. But neither is it essential. Many of our informants toiled without expectation of victory. They struggled on, doubtful of whether it made any difference at all. This is the case with the Aboriginal activist Elizabeth Jackson: "I don't often feel like I can change stuff. I just think it's your job to do the best you can and to try."

Amanda Tattersall has been active across the student, peace, refugee and labour movements. Why does she keep struggling? Why does she maintain a commitment while others drop away?

I've always been so involved, I've built my life around it now, it's become part of me. In some ways it's hard to sort of empathise, in a way, with people who've had only a peripheral engagement. I've got friends who only do stuff peripherally. I don't know why they don't do more. Because they have a life, probably! They have other interests.

Tattersall's identity is that of an activist. Her views are shared by Jackson. Activism is at the very heart of her identity as an Aboriginal woman:

Probably it just all seems a natural development through getting more involved with my community as I grew up and having activism around me all the time. It just becomes more normalised into your life because everyone around you is an activist and is doing stuff to change things. And it's like everyone's got their own little mish [mission].

Or as she puts it later:

You know what to do about social injustice, because everybody's doing it. Everybody's talking about it, people are arguing about it, it's very natural. Activism has become incorporated into our culture.

This narrative suggests that there is no choice. "I didn't first become involved, I don't think," Middleton emphasises, "I grew up with it". Vince Caughley, too, feels that his "predisposition" grew directly from his family tree. Francesca Andreoni recalls an equivalent process: "as an Italian family . . . you talk about it at breakfast. You know, politics is a very active, day to day, part of your life".

Interviewees are constructing an activist identity. There is an automatic passage from life to politics; struggle is presented as essential to subjectivity. Periods of inactivity are relegated to footnotes, and the main narrative remains saturated in the sticky mess of politics. In this way, the continuation of struggle is not a choice; it is more like a fate, a way of being.

SOMETIMES, SUCH STORIES emphasise conversion and discovery rather than birth and predisposition. Leading feminist Anne Summers remembers the anger she felt upon reading Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate*. This book shocked her out of privilege and complacency in the late 1960s, and remade her as a feminist. Bruce Knobloch also remembers a deep period of reading before he began to "take responsibility for my ideas", and to become politically active.

Rodney Croome tells a more complex story still—involving phases of confusion, repulsion, discovery and reintegration. Nourished on the "Enlightenment ideals" of a liberal education, Croome was shocked to encounter Orwell's portrait of totalitarianism, 1984. Its impact was powerful. Now, modernity seemed to "end in Room 101":

It all ended there. If we were blank slates as Locke had maintained—and for him it was a positive thing,

it led to a great optimism—but to me after reading Orwell it created nothing but pessimism because I thought [that] if the State can acquire a high level of power it can write whatever it wants on us. Is there any way around that?

Here Croome's discovery of the principle of 'intrinsic value' provided him with a kind of salvation. The belief that every tree, every animal and every human being possessed some intrinsic value, regardless of economic, aesthetic or personal worth, offered him a path away from pessimism and towards struggle. He holds to this principle still, arguing that it underpins his faith in politics. Intrinsic value can "rescue us from that possibility of, in Orwell's phrase, there always being a jackboot on a human face."

Across the different stories are common themes. The activist life has its own value. It marks the individual who has been involved in any way; it completes the individual who remains devoted. It cannot be destroyed by defeat. The life of struggle goes on—not as a burden, but as a joyful, affirming experience. In the words of Sue Wills:

it's really important to have fun while you're doing it, not to treat it as this earnest, earnest endeavour. I mean, if you don't enjoy doing it, then you won't last long, and it will become this real burden. And you get enjoyment out of minor successes, working with other people, and having that kind of enjoyment.

Struggle can be its own, pleasurable reward. This is how Michael Woodhouse understands his experience in the gay and lesbian movement:

There are people who meet one another who haven't met before, who become really good friends and create a network and a support system which is really important for major life events . . . It's creating community, it's creating social connection, it's building social capital, it's people coming together and working on something which is not entirely about themselves . . . That's, I guess . . . why I do community work and social movement work.

Former Prime Minister Paul Keating suggests that, in the future, all that will remain of the conservative, mean-spirited haters of our present will be "a smudge in history":

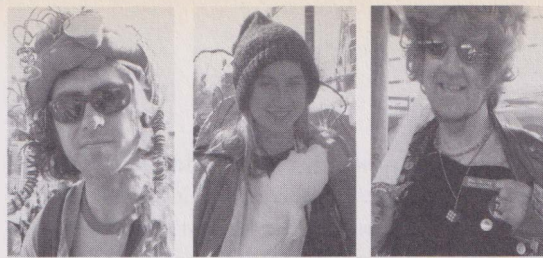
They absolutely insist on their view and the lessons they see in our history. Yet in their insistence, their



proprietaryness, their derivativeness and their ran-  
 cour, they reduce the flame and energy within the  
 nation to a smouldering incandescence. What they  
 do is crimp and cripple our destiny. It's like suffering  
 from some sort of anaemia; robbing the political  
 blood of its energy.<sup>16</sup>

Keating believes, however, that “the undertaking is  
 simply too big for them.” Despite their insistence,  
 “[n]o great transformation can come from their tiny  
 view of (Australians) and their limited faith in us.”

Our activists' visions for the future are not unifi-  
 ed; different movements dream different dreams.  
 Many believe that things will not always be as they  
 are; others are less optimistic but just as committed.



1. These phrases and images are drawn from Australian and international literature of the labour movement. On the removal of the idler: W.G. Spence, *Australia's Awakening: thirty years in the life of an Australian agitator*, The Worker Trustees, Sydney, 1909, p.595. On knocking tyrants: Henry Lawson, 'Freedom on the Wallaby', *Worker*, 6 October 1894. On workers as owners: n.a., 'Forward to Industrial Democracy', *Catholic Worker*, 2 March 1940, p.1. On hunting and criticising: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology, Part One*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1970, p.53. On simple lives: William Morris, 'The Society of the Future', in A.L. Morton (ed.), *Political Writings of William Morris*, International Publishers, New York, 1979, p.194. The transcendence of new unionism is predicted in William Lane, *Workingman's Paradise: an Australian labour novel*, SUP, Sydney, 1980, p.89. The various versions of the socialist economy are from: the *Worker*, 7 July 1921, p.15; Bernie Taft, 'Post-War Industrial Policy', *Australian Left Review* 28, December-January 1971, pp.51-5; Ralph Gibson, *Socialist Melbourne*, International Bookshop, Melbourne, 1951, pp.6-7. The rejection of reminiscence is in J.T. Lang, *I Remember*, Invincible Press, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and New Zealand, n.d. (1956), p.5. For memoir as a source of lessons, also see Ralph Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, International Bookshop, Melbourne, 1966, pp.6, 266.
2. A.A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, Lloyd O'Neil, Hawthorn, 1972. This is the title of chapter four.
3. Tom Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, Macgibbon and Kee, London, 1967, p.3.
4. On the maintenance of stories of possibility among working-class people, see Mark Peel's wonderful *The Lowest Rung: voices of Australian poverty*, CUP, 2003, p.42. For the postmodern republic, see Don Watson, 'A Toast for the Postmodern Republic', *Island* 55, 1993, pp.3-5; for 'democracies of pleasure', see R.W. Connell, 'Democracies of Pleasure: thoughts on the goals of radical sexual politics' in Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (eds), *Social Postmodernism: beyond identity politics*, CUP, Cambridge, 1995, pp.384-97. On the green ethics of leaving behind a better planet, see Bob Brown and Peter Singer, *The Greens*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1996, p.51.

5. Anibal Quijano, 'The Return of the Future and Questions about Knowledge', *Current Sociology* 50:1, 2002, p.75.
6. Douglas Torgerson, *The Promise of Green Politics: Environmentalism and the Public Sphere*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1999, pp.65, 97.
7. See Peel, *The Lowest Rung*, pp.136-7 and on finding an alternative to exploitative work: Kevin McDonald, *Struggles for Subjectivity: identity, action, and youth Experience*, CUP, 1999, pp.105-7.
8. For an accessible introduction to chaos theory see James Gleick, *Chaos: making a new science*, Viking, New York, 1987. On risk, see Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: towards a new modernity*, Sage, London, 1992. The concept of the accident is associated with the work of Paul Virilio. For an introduction, see Patrick Crogan, 'The Tendency, the Accident and the Untimely: Paul Virilio's Engagement with the Future', *Theory, Culture and Society* 16:5-6, 1999, pp.161-76.
9. Eric Aarons, *What's Left? Memoirs of an Australian Communist*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1993; Amirah Inglis, *The Hammer and the Sickle and the Washing Up: memories of an Australian woman communist*, Hyland House, South Melbourne, 1995.
10. Bill Hayden, *Hayden: an autobiography*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1996; Fred Daly, *From Curtin to Hawke*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1984, p.11.
11. This is Carr's own description, offered in Bob Carr, *Thoughtlines: reflections of a public man*, Viking, Camberwell, 2002, p.200.
12. This is the claim of Anibal Quijano, 'The Return of the Future', p.79.
13. This is claimed by Chantal Mouffe: Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, 'Hope, Passion, Politics', in Mary Zournazi (ed.), *Hope: new philosophies of change*, Pluto Press Australia, Annandale, 2002, p.123.
14. One of our interviewees could not be located to consent to the use of quotes. For this article, we have changed this person's name.
15. The metaphor of the 'forward march of labour' and its halting was made famous by Eric Hobsbawm in Martin Jacques and Francis Mulhern (eds), *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, NLB in association with *Marxism Today*, London, 1981.
16. From Paul Keating's speech at the launch of Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark's *The History Wars*, 3 September 2003.

Sean Scalmer is the author of *Dissent Events, a study of Australian protest movements*, is a Research Fellow in the Department of Politics at Macquarie University and is Overland's Sydney correspondent.

Sarah Maddison teaches in Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. In January 2004 she moves to the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of NSW.

Photographs of S11 protesters at the World Economic Forum meeting, Melbourne 2000, courtesy of K. Wilson.

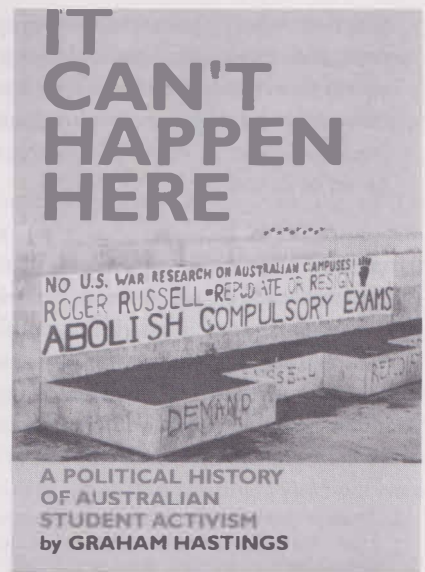
# AUSTRALIAN STUDENT ACTIVISM

Graham Hastings: *It Can't Happen Here: a political history of Australian student activism* (Students Association of Flinders University, Adelaide, \$25)

## Mick Armstrong

FOR OVER FORTY YEARS the student movement has been one of the most dynamic sectors of Australian political and cultural life. Student activists were central to the campaigns against White Australia and the Vietnam war, led the solidarity movement with the struggle against apartheid, were vital to the birth of the women's liberation movement and provided the activist base for the civil liberties campaign that defeated Joh Bjelke Petersen's ban on street marches. It is in student politics that many core activists of the union movement, the ALP, the Greens and the various socialist groups receive their initial training. Even Liberal leaders like Peter Costello and Tony Abbott cut their teeth in campus politics. Yet hardly any of the inspiring struggles—the occupations, the riots, the experiments in mass democracy, the fierce debates, the vibrant and creative demonstrations—have been documented, let alone analysed.

Academics, in their philistine fashion, have churned out unreadable tract after unreadable tract on every conceivable postmodernist fad but have almost universally ignored student radicalism and its impact on society. On the rare occasions that they have touched on student activism it is treated with at best bemused tolerance, more commonly with condescension. This condescension reached the pits in Robin Gerster and Jan Bassett's *Seizures of Youth: the Sixties and Australia*. Student radicalism was dismissed as little more than the adolescent frenzy of a psychologically disturbed baby-boomer generation.



So it was with relief that I read Graham Hastings' new book *It Can't Happen Here: a political history of Australian student activism*, which sympathetically documents the student movement over the past forty years. Graham performs a sustained demolition job on that annoying urban myth: 'Students may have been radical in the Sixties but today's student are just so apathetic'.

For at least twenty-five years, in between 'exposures' of the latest 'atrocities' committed by student revolutionaries, this has been the mantra of the media when commenting on student life. Students have continued to be active around a range of campus-based and off-campus issues ranging from uranium mining to Austudy, from upfront fees to East Timor, from voluntary student unionism to the 1991 Gulf War, from nuclear testing to the running down of library facilities. The mid-nineties saw a wave of occupations over funding cuts and more recently there was a sizeable student mobilisation at the S11 protest in Melbourne. While the scale of activism never approached the level of the late sixties, Graham shows that students in the 1990s and today cannot be written off.

Nevertheless, there is no use pretending that the student movement is surging forward. The response to the Nelson Review, the Liberals' latest assault on higher education, has been at best tepid. Moreover, student involvement in the anti-war movement was disappointing. While undoubtedly tens of thousands of students were among the one million protesters



who took to the streets over the weekend of 14–16 February 2003, the scale and intensity of student involvement was nothing like that during Vietnam or the last Gulf War. At the 1970 Vietnam Moratorium in Melbourne an estimated half of the 100,000 protesters were university or school students. But it was not simply that students provided a high proportion of the troops on the streets and the activist core of these movements. They were the revolutionary yeast pushing the movement forward, initiating radical actions like collecting aid for the North Vietnamese National Liberation Front or setting up the tent city outside the US consulate during the Gulf War.

Why aren't students playing the same leading role today? I can't pretend to have all the answers but I don't believe, as some have argued, it is because structural changes, such as the increasing number of students working, have made it impossible to organise students. For one thing, students in Europe and the US, who also work, did play a leading role in the anti-war movement. The student movement can't be walled off from events in broader society. Students can be a revolutionary yeast but the fermentation process won't work if the workers' movement is on the back foot as it has been over the past twenty years. Then there is the legacy of the defeats the student movement has suffered on education issues—upfront fees, HECS, cuts to allowances—since the late 1980s.

These defeats undermined the confidence of activists and student bureaucrats to wage a serious campaign against the Nelson Review, like the one against VSU when the staff and resources of the student unions were galvanised to defeat the Liberals. Another factor is that the student movement is more heavily bureaucratised than it was at the high point of struggle in the late sixties. When I was on the SRC at La Trobe in 1974 the only full-time officers were the SRC President and the *Rabelais* editor. Today on the major campuses there are five or six times as many student bureaucrats. This gives the bureaucracy a much greater social weight and if it does not mobilise, as it singularly failed to do around the war, it can have a major dampening effect on the movement.

The failure of the student bureaucracy to mobilise against the war was a wasted opportunity of monumental proportions. It meant that the massive numbers of students that protested against the

war were not cohered into a new activist base on campus that could in turn have revitalised the student movement to fight the Nelson Review. Nevertheless the hallmark of student activism is its volatility. The rapid turnover of the student population, the alienation of student life and the sheer concentration of tens of thousands of young people means that struggles can explode seemingly from nowhere. Defeats can be overcome more quickly on campus than in the workplace.

But to capitalise on future struggles the student left has to learn one very important lesson from the sixties: the momentum for the enormous movements did not come from activists relying on the student bureaucracy but from building from below and organising hundreds, at times thousands of students, in activist clubs and revolutionary groups.

*Mick Armstrong is the author of 1, 2, 3, What Are We Fighting For? The Australian Student Movement from its origins to the 1970s, and is a long-time socialist and former student activist.*

## Jeannie Rea

THE COMMON LAMENT of former left-wing student activists is that students today should be better organised and more active about the issues that we think are important.

Today's student activists may be thin on the ground, but as in the past, contemporary students are politically active around environmental issues and identity politics. They have also organised around refugee rights, international solidarity campaigns and the recent Iraq war. S11 and anti-globalisation actions have relied strongly on students and the recently graduated. Many of those who lament the apparent parlous state of student activism are not politically active themselves and so do not see these idealistic and committed young people.

There may have been more students actively engaged in politics in the good old days, but even then, large numbers were rare. If everyone who now claims to have participated in the Monash student occupations over the years actually had, they surely could have taken over the university! Student activism has always been composed of fragile and fleeting movements of consciousness-raising and outrage, spilling over into planned and spontaneous actions. Students have never been easy to

organise. It was always hard to get them to a student association meeting, lots of work to get a viable campaign group, harder still to get the numbers to a demonstration and an enormous effort to occupy the administration building. And then the summer holidays would come and the whole campaign would evaporate!

Student activists do have to constantly reinvent the wheel because there is a three to five year turnover. And it is tougher today. Students are more oriented to competing for often-precarious jobs and are under pressure to pay off their HECS debt. Additionally there are many more students these days and proportionally many fewer who have the luxury of family money to keep them going during their 'wild years'. But students are still in that same age group of young adults straining at the leash of independence, open to rebellion. Certainly their time is limited due to part-time jobs, but if the stimuli are around students do get interested and involved. It is the only opportunity many will have to see any alternative point of view to what is offered by the mainstream media and their family environment. This has always been the case for student activists, whether of the Left or Right. Students are challenged and inspired by their peers, even by the annoying Trot with the newspapers, the feminist with the megaphone, the feral without the shoes, and even their greying lecturers! Maybe it is the impoverishment of intellectual courage and the timidity of academics that is also to blame for our tame universities.

A recurring theme in Graham Hastings' *It Can't Happen Here* is the periodic rise and demise of activism. Hastings emphasises the resilience of student activism. His book will be read by left student activists of the past and present, and by those interested in Australian social movement history over the past forty years. This was a decade-long project for Hastings, commissioned by the Flinders University Student Association to document their history. For Hastings, it soon became apparent that the Flinders story needed to be contextualised within the broader Australian history. Not surprisingly, the experiences of Flinders are privileged and this is problematic. I do not say this because I went to Monash and Hastings' research and understanding of Monash is scrappy, but because the reality is that the population and political centres of Melbourne and Sydney are more central, significant and influential in student and general politics.

Hastings has assembled the book as a series of essays as a way to organise his materials and pursue various themes. It is overly ambitious. He tries to cover both student activism and the controversial story of national student unionism. These are not the same things. While much activism actually comes from organised and spontaneous gatherings of students outside local and national student unions, there is a tendency in Hastings' work to prioritise the role of the Australian Union of Students (AUS) and its successor, the National Union of Students (NUS), as the sites of activism. This is probably due to the records used and interviews conducted, as well as his own history as NUS-oriented activist and current staff member. But it is unfortunate, because activists, as distinct from trainee bureaucrats and aspiring politicians, have either eschewed or had uncomfortable relationships with the formal bodies. (I recall endless debates about whether to 'sell out' and contest student union elections, and then deciding to do so just to keep the other lot out of power.)

The absence of an editor means that there is a lot of repetition and contradiction, including getting names and positions wrong. I make these comments not to carp, but because it is important to document what actually happened. Hastings himself recognises this in explaining that he tried hard to get the AUS and the PLO story right, particularly because of the widespread acceptance of the Australian Liberal Student Federation's hysterical version, which is still revived in campaigns against student unionism. It is also unfortunate that there are errors of detail because this book is the first general history of Australian student activism. It will be the reference point and Hastings is to be congratulated. For all its faults, including sectarianism, it is an impressive achievement. If Hastings' book inspires others to write and debate, and even take issue with his version, all the better. He will have achieved far more than the modest aspirations of the Flinders University Student Association in commissioning the book. As Ken McAlpine said at the Melbourne launch, Australian writers, intellectuals and academics have not taken student politics seriously enough.

It is well known that many politicians and trade union leaders start their careers in student politics. Unfortunately these days this is a conservatising factor as ALP hopefuls in particular are far too staid. Student politicians should be annoying, radical



youth, giving their elders a hard time. The Liberals too have long had a problem with their student wing being more right wing than the party. The 1970s student politicians like Abbott and Costello are still seemingly obsessed with wrecking student unions. Voluntary student unionism is part of the latest package of higher education 'reforms'. Get over it boys! (Hastings' essay on this topic is particularly strong.)

Lesser known is the importance of skills learned and networks developed by student political activists. They use these through their lives. The skills of planning and running a campaign, of persuasive writing and debating, of public speaking, of being brave and taking on authority and power, and of contesting bad or silly laws, were learned by many of us as students. This learning and commitment to progressive social change have been important long after we have forgotten much of our formal education and even the factions we so passionately supported.

It is hard to predict what will next excite students' imagination and indignation. As I write this, the left-controlled Monash Student Association is trying to whip up campaigns about the federal government's cuts to the public funding of higher education and about the food on campus. This is typical—and they were probably also drumming up support for protests over the WTO meeting in Cancun. The 'been there done that' critics alternatively turn their wrath on students for only being concerned about on-campus issues or for just focusing on off-campus issues. However, the reality is, and has always been, that some students are doing either and others are putting it all together. The university's role in the military industrial complex, along with the directly-felt impact of conscription, launched student activism during the Vietnam War. Last year RMIT students opposed their university's complicity with the federal government's refugee policy in proposing to supply education services to detention centres. Students do make the connections.

In a more reflective section, Hastings argues that maybe today's activists are more focused on external politics because current students do not identify as 'students'. The experience of being a student is now so different; it is hard to compare it with that of a generation ago. This may be so, but I think issues will spring up that will anger and mobilise students. Around the world secondary and tertiary students continue to rise up periodically. Maybe those crowds of irreverent school students

at the rallies opposing the Iraq War will soon rock our universities. I hope so.

*Jeannie Rea is a senior lecturer at Victoria University and currently Victorian President of the National Tertiary Education Union. In earlier days she was a student activist at Monash University. She knows that Peter Costello was never President of the Monash Student Association as claimed by Hastings, because the position never existed. The position he held was chairperson of the administrative executive of the then Monash Association of Students. MAS, in those days, had a decentralised constitution relying on student general meetings for big decisions. Costello won the election in late 1976 standing as an evangelical Christian, beating Rea standing as an anarchist feminist on a Left Unity ticket.*

## Ben Rosenzweig

AS AN ACCOUNT of movements of students in Australia, Graham Hastings' book is certainly pioneering.

Graham's focus is largely on campaigns of the Left. In general his views are recognisable as a combination of the hegemonic views of the Left Alliance circa 1989, and the politics of the International Socialist Organisation: on student radicalism, NUS, the role of education and the nature of public policy, *etcetera*. Indeed, probably the first substantial political paper by a member of Left Alliance I ever read was Graham's argument against the active anti-National Union of Students position of Resistance and the Democratic Socialist Party, which manifested itself in Resistance campaigning to have campus student organisations disaffiliate from NUS, sometimes literally working side-by-side with the Liberals. This would have probably been sometime in 1990. Graham's views on the student movement have remained fairly consistent since then.

One effect of this is that the substantial debates of the early to mid nineties about the relation of education to capitalism, and the meaning of that relation for the Left on campus, are mostly invisible. On the whole fees appear as something opposed because of concerns for access to education: if HECS wasn't a direct barrier, it was a 'disincentive'.

These questions become all the more significant at the moment, when the student Left is in something of a crisis. Conditions on campus have changed: a vastly greater proportion of students are working to sustain themselves while at university,

and the tendency of people to remain students for some time, either as activists or bohemians or people just enjoying deferring a lifetime defined by wage-labor of some sort, has diminished dramatically.

This year has seen the threat of a massive neo-liberalising reconstruction of universities, and virtually no significant movements have arisen to contest the direction of government policy. In recent years the major political mobilisations in which students played important roles—from the anti-World Economic Forum blockade known as S11 to the Woomera 2002 anti-detention-centre gathering—have not been efforts to address the conditions of life at universities.

With regard to S11: the account of this defining event in Australian ‘anti-capitalist’ (or ‘anti-globalisation’) movements is unlikely to please many people, endorsing as it does the self-defined ‘official organiser’ status of the S11 Alliance, and indeed the ridiculous ‘S11 spokesperson’ pretensions of the ISO’s David Glanz. Indeed, given the access the author has to people very directly involved in all aspects of S11, there is little excuse for the distortions of this event (similarly, Jackie Lynch would probably not be pleased to have been described as having been a member of the Non-Aligned Left faction: she was a long-standing member of Left Alliance, and has more recently been a member of the Democratic Socialist Party).

The question of how to view the future of radicalism on campus requires a process of reflection for which this book can provide important material, but for which it provides little in the way of answers, even in the form of a question.

Tertiary education has changed a great deal in the past twenty-odd years. The neo-liberalisation of the sector has reconstructed the social relations of institutions in innumerable ways and is far from over yet, as the Howard Government’s Nelson Review has made clear. The creation of markets and competition between institutions, departments and academics, and the commercialisation of substantial parts of institutions, have imposed the discipline of money in new forms.

The most obvious consequence of neo-liberali-

sation has been the ever-more extreme commodification of education, in particular the realisation of profit through sales of credentials. As the ‘permission slips’ distributing many graduates to their respective factories, offices, dole queues and work-for-the-dole schemes, commodified credentials should be a contested area. This is so not merely because of concerns about the privileged having virtually exclusive access to these credentials, but because of the creation of new regimes of debt. The introduction of slave-labour conditions is inextricably linked to this redistribution of wealth; that is, to ever-increasing debt, falling annual and lifetime income, higher education fees, longer working hours and more intensive forms of work. In theory this situation represents an opportunity to make the imposition and reconstitution of exploitation a central part of a class analysis of education. But this has not so far been taken up.

The material realities of campus existence have already undermined radicalism: with people remaining at university for far briefer periods, the historical memory, politicisation and skills of the Left have declined. Any longer-term efforts to rebuild the capacity of students to form radical social movements will probably have to find forms of organisation that transcend the division of students from other sections of the population, such as those with whom they work in often insecure and unorganised workplaces. It will also have to address the forms of disciplining and social control constituted through the imposition of neo-liberalised social relations.

This book is really an account of a previous moment in the history of the student movement, of the end of a certain era of student politics. Though neo-liberalisation in particular has eroded the conditions in which student movements had been founded, the changing relations of the state to labour and capital, and the role of education in capitalist production and reproduction, may also create new possibilities: for developing radical theory and practice adequate to the present moment.

*Ben Rosenzweig is a former editor of the La Trobe University student newspaper Rabelais.*



## HARD HEADS, STRONG HEARTS

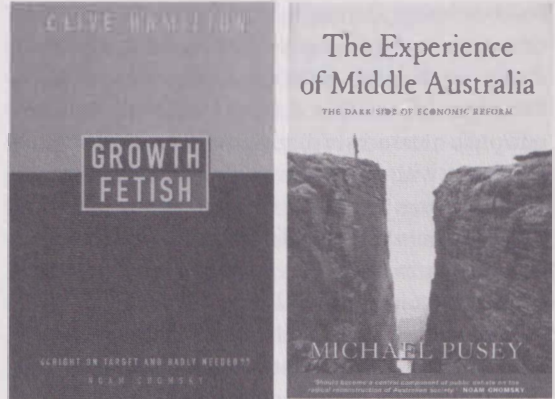
Michael Pusey: *The Experience of Middle Australia: the dark side of economic reform* (CUP, \$36.95)

Fred Argy: *Where to from here? Australian egalitarianism under threat* (Allen & Unwin, \$24.95)

Clive Hamilton: *Growth Fetish* (Allen & Unwin, \$29.95)

Peter Dawkins and Paul Kelly (eds): *Hard Heads, Soft Hearts: a new reform agenda for Australia* (Allen & Unwin, \$24.95)

Barbara Ehrenreich: *Nickel and Dimed: on (not) getting by in America* (Granta, \$24.95)



IS AUSTRALIA'S BIGGEST problem insufficient economic growth or an inability to manage affluence? The books reviewed here zero in on this question, which lies beneath the surface of the major political and social debates in Australia today.

Michael Pusey's *Experience of Middle Australia* is an analysis of the responses to contemporary political and social change of four hundred participants in focus groups drawn from 'middle Australia'—defined by Pusey as people earning roughly between \$36,500 and \$57,500 per year. Pusey finds a middle Australia that intensely dislikes the economic and political direction of the country. They are upset that the gap between rich and poor is widening, and that powerful elites appear to be benefiting at the expense of working people. Middle Australia, Pusey argues, wants more spending on public health and education, and industrial relations changes that will tilt the balance back towards unions and workers. They feel exhausted and overwhelmed by the intensifying of their working lives, and powerless to do anything about it. They are angry that the burden of paying for social needs like health and education is being taken off government and placed on the shoulders of ordinary Australians instead. Pusey's political message is clear:

the Australian people want a reversal of our nation's direction—away from economic rationalism and towards egalitarianism. It's a political wave that our politicians haven't yet dared to catch.

Fred Argy has a similar desire to save our egalitarian way of life, but unlike Pusey, he has no longing for a return to the days before the economic reform of the 1980s and 1990s. In *Where to from here?* Argy disputes Pusey's claim that the opposition to economic reform is growing, pointing out that people increasingly understand economics and are learning to live in a more entrepreneurial society.

Argy sees no contradiction between supporting growth-oriented economic reform and creating a fairer country. Economic reform, he believes, can create more wealth for us to share around. But he does believe that since 1996 economic reform has been taken to extremes by an ideologically motivated group of 'hard liberals' who believe that greater inequality is desirable in itself and that equality inhibits individual choice and economic growth. These claims are rejected by Argy, who argues that within certain bounds, egalitarian social policies can in fact significantly *lift* economic growth. Argy argues that we do not have to choose between egalitarianism and economic growth. We can have both.

Here's the nub of the problem with Dawkins' and Kelly's book. Anyone who has attended conferences such as the one that led to this book (as I did) will be struck by the atmosphere of complacency towards Australia's growing crisis of inequality.

---

As a result of the ascendancy of the 'hard liberals' in the Howard Government, Argy believes Australia is being increasingly polarised along social, economic and geographical lines. In this he, and Pusey agree. Argy supports further economic reform but believes that Australia is already by international measures a highly reformed and 'lean' economy, with comparatively low levels of taxation and spending. It's time, he believes, to put more emphasis on social spending and to invest, but not to go back to the earlier vision of the 'Australian settlement' favoured by Pusey.

Ironically, Clive Hamilton—easily the most left-wing critic of economic rationalism discussed here—is also the least concerned about social and economic inequality. Hamilton wants Australians to opt out of the economic rat race altogether. Growth, he argues, does not automatically lead to more equality or happiness. Instead, it turns citizens into crass and narrow consumers, denies us the fulfilment of our human potential and pillages our environment. Unlike Pusey and Argy, Hamilton is not arguing for *reform* but for peaceful, long-term, social *revolution*. Hamilton is not a mainstream social democrat like Pusey and Argy, but a theorist of the contemporary social movements, like the Australian Greens. He disparages contemporary social-democratic parties and is particularly scathing about the 'Third Way', which he believes is simply a Trojan horse that has allowed neo-liberalism to enter the citadel of reformist politics.

Hamilton sees contemporary society at a point of potential transition—from a virulent form of consumer capitalism to a new form of society that replaces consumerism with what he calls 'eudemonism': a form of society that rejects growth, practises 'ecological economics' and provides "a social environment in which people can pursue true individuality, rather than the pseudo-individuality that is now obtained through spending on brand names and manufactured lifestyles". His solution is for parties to adopt 'political downshifting'—policies that

"promote the quality of social and individual life rather than surrendering to the demands of the market". He wants a "post-growth economy", by which he means one that constantly evolves in a more ecologically sustainable, human and redistributive direction, but at zero levels of economic growth.

The strongest support for the need for more economic growth comes from Peter Dawkins of the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research and Paul Kelly of the *Australian*. While the book is a summary of the papers presented to an April 2002 national conference, it appears to be a vehicle for the editors' (purportedly) hybrid agenda of 'hard headed' economic reform and 'soft hearted' social reform. Those familiar with this line of argument—pushed daily by the neoconservative editorials of the *Australian* (currently written by the 'right-wing Phillip Adams', Imre Salusinszky)—know that when the going gets tough, the hard head always triumphs over the soft heart. Think of the 2001 federal election. The hard heads may have been appalled by the *Tampa* episode, but ultimately the thought of Labor rolling back the GST from gas and electricity bills was considered more appalling than Howard's naked appeal to xenophobia in order to stay in government.

Kelly and Dawkins argue that we must overcome the "battle between economic reformers and sentimental traditionalists imprisoned by the nostalgia for the old Australia and its egalitarian edifices". They claim we can have economic growth without sacrificing our national values of democracy, inclusion and egalitarianism. Growth is the silver bullet that will give us the capacity to create jobs, reduce inequality and increase national cohesiveness. That may be the case, and the more left-wing Argy concurs. The difference lies in the editors' choice of policies to achieve growth and egalitarianism. They want to sell Telstra, introduce 'price signals' into our health and education systems (read: raise the cost), and pass more industrial relations 'reform'



legislation. It's clear the editors aren't interested in retaining one of the key factors behind Australia's egalitarianism—a strong public sector. Nor are they interested in wage justice. The editors' solution to unemployment is that of 'the Five Economists' (of whom Dawkins is one) who published an open letter to the Prime Minister in 1998—a freeze on wages (but not economists' salaries!), with falling incomes for the lowest-paid offset by increased social payments.

Here's the nub of the problem with Dawkins' and Kelly's book. Anyone who has attended conferences such as the one that led to this book (as I did) will be struck by the atmosphere of complacency towards Australia's growing crisis of inequality. Welfare concerns are politely listened to, but, as this book demonstrates, are not considered the main game. There's something distasteful about highly paid economists and wealthy businesspeople arguing that the only way to give hope to the struggling single mother who cleaned their five-star hotel room that morning is to cut her wages and introduce 'price signals' into her local health and education services. Bullies always pick on the weakest person they know.

Most of us think that economic growth is desirable if it cuts unemployment, reduces poverty and is environmentally sustainable. Obtaining that growth will undoubtedly involve further economic reform. The question is: growth at what cost? Where do we draw the line when it conflicts with equality? This is the big question for the Australian centre left, and devising an economically responsible, practical and politically saleable solution is its big task. A recent book from the United States—*Nickel and Dimed: on (not) getting by in America*—gives a warning against those who want to pursue growth at the

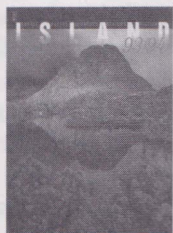
cost of copying America in all its ways. In an Orwell-like piece of reportage on life in low-income America, the journalist Barbara Ehrenreich gives us a picture of the sort of unequal society we don't want to become. It's a society in which the words 'working' and 'poor' don't seem incongruous when conjoined; in which the low-paid need food stamps to feed their families; in which high rents, driven up by an unequally shared prosperity, divide rich and poor into separate suburbs and force low-paid workers into caravan parks on the edges of cities; in which employees banned from joining unions are forced to work eleven-hour shifts, in two jobs, without weekends or holiday pay; in which Medicare is restricted to the unemployed and the old, and pain something working people have to 'get through'. In short, a society where the idea of equality is entirely absent from the workplace and the economy. This may sound apocalyptic, but it's what Australia might become like—at least from the vantage point of the single mother hotel cleaner that the conference delegate never gets to know.

Ehrenreich's account of her travels in the radically reformed and radically deregulated low-wage, low-tax, low-service America demonstrates the aptness of the title of Dawkins' and Kelly's book—*Hard Heads, Soft Hearts*. Note how the egalitarian heart is 'soft' and weak, no match for the 'hard' and tough economic rationalist head. People who take equality seriously know that what's needed to keep it isn't a soft heart but a strong one.

*Dennis Glover is Speechwriter to Simon Crean. His book, Orwell's Australia: from Cold War to Culture War, was published by Scribe in October 2003.*

## Take Three SUBSCRIPTION

OVERLAND & ISLAND & TIRRA LIRRA for just **\$85**



This represents 20% off the regular price for all three magazines.

or

Overland  
PO Box 14428  
Melbourne Vic 8001

Contact

Island  
PO Box 210  
Sandy Bay Tas 7006

or

Tirra Lirra  
PO Box 305  
Mt Evelyn Vic 3796

# THE AUSTRALIA WE COULD BE

## A vision for Labor

IF LABOR IS TO MAKE a difference to Australian society and win hearts and minds, as well as elections, we need to deliver an unmistakable message that Labor has changed, heard and responded to its critics, and is ready for office. We need a relevant, forward-looking agenda based on progressive, humane values.

Catalogues of policies without a clear and frequently repeated exposition of underlying values and objectives will go nowhere. We need to spell out the 'why' of policy, the justification, and make a clear appeal to principle, ideals and values. Modest reform and incrementalism will no longer suffice. It will merely compound impressions of inertia and weakness. The apparently low-risk option is, in reality, the high-risk option.

Many Australians understand that to conduct politics without its "essential, principled moral nature", as one commentator put it, is to engage in bad politics. At the very least, it is politics conducted in bad faith.

While I'm loath to engage in nostalgia for my youth, we need the equivalent of a Whitlamite agenda with its emphasis of the party, the program and the people.

### CURRENT ATTITUDES

Cynicism and a sense of disempowerment and helplessness among voters are now commonplace in the Australian political landscape. Many Australians I talk to are deeply resentful of the behaviour of the major parties and scornful of their parliamentary representatives. What they see is unsightly and

factionalised squabbling by self-interested, shortsighted people and groups.

Policy decisions seem to them to result from special pleading from those with the resources to pressure and manipulate the system. As a result many people are disengaged and display an almost monumental lack of political interest and knowledge. At the same time there is a significant minority who are vitally interested in political issues and wish to contribute to both analysing the problems we confront as a community and to devising policy solutions.

Many of these would-be activists are from the Left and they typically endorse values and programs that embrace equality, respect human rights, encourage active citizenship and protect the environment. They are sceptical of the so-called 'Washington Consensus' and are looking for new models of the economy that promote greater equality in the distribution of wealth locally and globally, that do not require excessive consumption and that are environmentally sustainable.

They are worried that ours is an age in which the value of everything we do is measured in monetary terms. What we *have* is often seen as more important than what we *are*. Feverish consumption and the acquisition of material wealth appear to be considered the only goals worth pursuing. The 'pursuit of happiness' is reduced to the satisfaction of ephemeral desires defined by profit—rather than 'profit of the soul'.

We appear to many to have replaced the question, 'what is good for the people?' with the ques-



While many of the people who are challenging these values are moving to the Greens, the response I got to my resignation suggests that a lot of them remain committed to the Labor Party, although some are only hanging on by the fingernails.

---

tion, 'what is good for the growth of the system?'. Some try to hide the sharpness of the conflict by claiming that what is good for economic growth is, by definition, good for people. But many people, myself included, are troubled by this assertion. In the past, economic behaviour remained human behaviour, subject to human values and ethics. Now the economy is seen as an autonomous entity, independent of human needs and human will.

Encouraged by the Howard government, a spirit of conquest is abroad, in which hostility to others is expressed defiantly. Too often there is a mean and tight response to others' needs and an indifference to growing inequalities. All too often we are encouraged to hold what we have and refuse to share. Some people clearly value personal success far more highly than social responsibility.

There is encouraging evidence that some of these attitudes may be changing. The Australia Institute has reported that there is almost no correlation between higher wealth and greater satisfaction and that about a third of people of working age are voluntarily 'downshifting' to lower paid, but more rewarding, less pressured jobs, which enable them time to spend on relationships and creative recreation.

While many of the people who are challenging these values are moving to the Greens, the response I got to my resignation [from the ALP front bench] suggests that a lot of them remain committed to the Labor Party, although some are only hanging on by the fingernails. They agree with the UK secretary of the Fabian Society, Michael Jacobs, who has suggested of the British Labour Party that "The spirit of the left has been extinguished. But there is still a case for radical ideology." They fear that the ALP no longer believes in the need to transform society or that we no longer believe we can persuade the community of the need to do so.

There is evidence of a growing decline in the bond, the allegiances that people feel to political parties in Australia. While this represents a loss of

the easy vote, it suggests that more people are open to being persuaded, that they are less fixed in their views. On the left, the Greens are attracting new voters, and perhaps more importantly, activists. The ALP is not. This is most evident among the young, the better educated and the more politically aware.

This, of course, is not unique to Australia. As Jacobs has pointed out, left-of-centre parties everywhere succumbed to the sirens' song of the end of history, the inevitability of the status quo. The idea that all that's required is to create the right impression. Here in Australia, the Party has been too clever for its own good, embracing simplistic, lowest-common-denominator social policies, often emulating the worst of the conservative agenda. In trying to accommodate all points on the ideological compass, the Party ends up losing its soul.

As one of the people who responded to my resignation wrote to me:

You are saying exactly what many ordinary members of the party have been saying for a long time now. It is absolutely clear that the party has got itself into the car salesman mode. You no doubt know what I mean, it's about closing the deal: 'What do I have to say to get you to vote for me?'

Policies are designed with one eye on the polls and the other on the immediate public reaction, especially from the media. Typically, such policies are based on a misreading of the problems they're supposed to address and, as a result, do not improve the outcomes and may actually exacerbate the initial problems. They also add to general community unease and further sully the reputations of politicians.

I include in this list the increasingly punitive law-and-order policies, 'blame the victim' welfare policies, 'repel the invaders' refugee policies and 'greed is good' health and education policies. There has been a growing tendency in Australian politics generally to ignore the underlying issues and causes of

problems we face; slogans replace analysis and the result is a general 'dumbing down' of the public political debate.

Paradoxically, this dumbing down of the political debate is taking place at a time when the democratic citizenry is increasingly informed and willing to participate in the political process. They're linked to many more and varied information sources through the internet and are less inclined to accept authoritative statements, no matter where they originate.

We are also witnessing a cycle of corrosive denigration—of political parties to one another and of media to politicians and vice versa. Pragmatism is seen as the only way to survive and the only motivating force for politicians. Negative political advertising is part of this cycle. We are becoming more and more inclined to emulate the negative tactics of our American cousins.

To paraphrase an analogy used by former US Senator Paul Simon:

If Qantas ran regular 30 second commercials saying 'Don't fly Virgin Blue' and showed a plane crashing into Mt Kosciusko, and Virgin Blue ran a similar commercial showing a plane blowing up and urging travellers not to fly Qantas, it would not be very long before fear of flying became endemic.

Politicians shouldn't be surprised when their negative campaigns succeed, not only in diminishing their opponents, but also in undermining confidence in all politicians. Tony Abbott's 'don't trust politicians to elect the President' campaign was a case in point. Negative campaigning only increases voters' cynicism about the electoral process and is taken as a signal of the dysfunctional and unresponsive nature of the political process itself, causing them to lose interest in how they vote.

We are also operating in a media environment characterised by increasingly narrow and uniform perspectives. Restricted media ownership inevitably diminishes the diversity of opinion, while there has been a definite lurch to the right by the *Australian*. There is also an increasing amount of invective directed against the so-called 'chattering classes' by those who actually control the airwaves and op-ed columns.

## GENERAL ATTITUDES TO CHANGE

Sadly there is a pervasive view that there is no real

alternative to the status quo. The neo-liberals have succeeded in convincing many sections of media and the wider community that the central issue of political life is the economy, and that there is only one way to manage it. You're all familiar with the nostrums—government should get out of the way, private ownership is preferable to public ownership, private choice is superior to collective and redistributive measures, and so on.

The result is that many have accepted the proposition that this is as good as it gets, and the few critics of the growing inequality in our society are likely to be caricatured as motivated by envy rather than altruism. There is a general reluctance to engage in more fundamental (radical) analysis, for example, of the assumption of never-ending growth and the equation of wellbeing with increasing consumption; of the consequences of local and global inequalities and environmental degradation.

There are alternatives and there are remedies. We need to look beyond the so-called 'Washington Consensus' and explore the range of capitalisms. We need to place economic decisions where they belong, in the wider context of the environment and society.

Robert Manne has outlined how conservative think-tanks and key individuals from the right deliberately constructed and sold a conservative agenda over a decade. We need a similarly determined effort. Being from the left, this enterprise clearly needs to be more open—through conferences, forums, networks and public debates. Our examination of underpinning philosophy and policy should reach beyond the Anglo-American into Europe and Canada, for example.

Labor's leadership also needs to be identified with this rethink of Australia's political objectives, to take up the big issues and the novel solutions. We need to enunciate clearly the view we have of Australia, what matters and where we believe we should be going. This needs to be ahead of the detailed program. We need to capture the terms of the debate. As David Malouf has said about Howard:

Howard is a master of forcing on his opponents the terms in which a contest is to be fought. If he can impose his tone and language on the debate, he will have determined the range—everything practical and down-to-earth, nothing flighty or fancy—to which all arguments will be restricted. Any deviation by his



On the left, the Greens are attracting new voters and, perhaps more importantly, activists. The ALP is not. This is most evident among the young, the better educated and the more politically aware.

---

opponent into the inspirational, the lyrical, the rhetorical, into big ideas—into any ideas at all, anything of the mind or the heart or spirit—can be represented then as suspect, as excessive, flaky.

I believe we should establish stronger links between like-minded political activists. The broader Left and Labor have to work together to define the political space. Instead of the ALP, the Greens and Democrats seeing themselves as inevitably in competition, we should seek to facilitate greater levels of co-operation to maximise the total progressive vote. We should also construct more conspicuous alliances with progressive lobby groups and form effective coalitions. Labor can, because of its history as a party in government, operationalise some of the objectives of other left groups. Our experience in policy formulation and implementation can be married with the fresh analyses and novel perspectives of political newcomers.

My son cautions me against succumbing to the temptation to draw even approximate parallels between the sixties and today. Nonetheless, I do see some similarities between my youthful introduction to the idea of 'transformative politics' and what is happening today, as some of the young again seek to challenge the status quo.

Global influences are again at work as they were in the sixties. As was the case with the anti-Vietnam activists, the student radicals and women's liberation movement, there is a plethora of organisations and networks, of varying degrees of radicalism and with a dizzying, and occasionally incoherent, array of agendas for change.

Some are wedded to single issues, like reform of refugee policies or opposition to the US attack on Iraq; others have more encompassing objectives which envisage fundamental economic and social change. Neither then, nor now, do these groups represent majority opinion, although there are many fellow travellers and sympathisers who are not on the streets.

They are also subject to much the same derision

and caricature by the mainstream media. Women who protested at the subordination of women were almost invariably characterised as 'bra-burning, ball-breaking' feminists. Those trying to propose better ways to reduce global poverty and inequality and to protect the world's environment are often dismissed as muddle headed, naïve neo-Luddites who cannot accept the inevitable.

Although this new movement is sometimes derided and labelled as 'anti-globalisation', it is in reality seeking to frame and answer the question: 'what values should govern the global age?'. Far from being anti-globalisation, most of these activists are comfortable with the idea of an interconnected world, of a truly global perspective, and they are skilled at using the tools of the virtual world to disseminate information, debate the issues and organise events to publicise their views.

They are, as one of them put it, trying to turn globalisation into a 'lived reality', genuinely understanding that our destinies are all tied together. The spread of terrorism into the United States and into our region is part of the dark side of that reality.

It is to my considerable dismay that the major political parties are so far deaf to these rumblings of change. As Michael Jacobs put it, "without a renewal of radical conviction the Labo[u]r Party, and possibly modern politics as a whole, is in serious danger of atrophy." His observations, I believe, are no less pertinent to Australia:

without a clear ideology, political parties are electorally vulnerable . . . their support may grow wide but remains shallow and may be swept away. Ideology gives a government roots. In providing voters with a strong sense of government's purpose, it gives them something to grip on. Policies are often weak instruments for attracting public support.

For most on the left of the political spectrum, piecemeal, technocratic and incremental social change is not enough to make them get out of bed in the

morning. Expecting young people to sign up because you're selling better management is a vain hope. Most of us need something to believe in—and it isn't the end of history!

Whitlam understood this, and although many carefully crafted policies were presented to the electorate in 1972, it was his clearly articulated philosophy which reassured a great many that his government had a predictable purpose and could be relied upon to craft policies which incorporated the principles that Whitlam and his colleagues articulated so persuasively to the coming generation.

There is another generation on the move, another generation searching for signs that their representatives recognise that there can be a better kind of world; that it is possible to change the structures that support and perpetuate inequality; that the obscene and now very public 'asymmetry' of suffering and disadvantage is immoral and unsustainable; that the interests of corporations do not necessarily correspond to the public good; that we can live on this planet without destroying it; that war is not a solution; and that we cannot continue to operate as if death and destruction are tragic and intolerable in some places, but banal and unavoidable in others.

While there is likely to be much pain between these ideals and their inevitably partial realisation, belief in the possibility that the world can be a better place if we act in concert is the only force to propel us from the quiescent embrace of mediocrity and decay. We need to give practical effect to these hopes and to explain them to the greater public.

#### WHO'S REALLY CALLING THE SHOTS?

Even if there are many people who believe, at least in theory, in the possibilities of transformative politics, they are often deeply sceptical of the capacity of existing political institutions to deliver change which is in the interests of the community as a whole.

There is a fairly general perception that a few wealthy and well-connected people really call the shots, that decisions are made in the interests of those able to pressure the political parties. This is often accompanied by the view—and the reality—that Parliament is largely irrelevant. Decision-making is almost entirely in the hands of the leaders and the executive.

Substantial campaign donations to the major parties by corporations and large organisations such as unions and business foundations foster the per-

ception (and perhaps the reality) that it is possible to buy privileged access to MPs and ministers and that this influence is in proportion to the amount of money donated. We run the risk of becoming a 'corporate democracy' in which the number of shares you have purchased in the party of your choice determines your effective voting power.

The substantive problem is the possibility that such donations can purchase influence. Retired US Senator Paul Simon observed in a recent speech that "anyone who has been a candidate for major public office and says 'Campaign contributions don't affect you' is simply not telling the truth" and that "the financially articulate have inordinate access to policy makers". By way of example, he cites his own responses:

I have never promised anyone a thing for a campaign contribution. But, when I was still in the Senate, if I arrived at a hotel in Chicago at midnight there might be twenty phone calls waiting for me. Nineteen of them are perhaps from people whose names I did not recognise, and the twentieth is someone who gave me a \$1,000 campaign contribution. At midnight I am not going to make twenty phone calls. I might make one. Which one do you think I am going to make?

There is no reason to believe the same observations do not apply to Australian MPs.

There are remedies to these problems and the reforms almost suggest themselves—cutting private donations altogether, funding the less well-off community organisations to enable them to act as advocates for the otherwise neglected voices, proper registration and publication of lists of lobbyists and strict rules governing movement of staff between government and the private sector.

Significant parliamentary reform is long overdue. The Parliament is unique among our public institutions in resisting substantial reform to make it more responsive to the demands of an educated citizenry in a pluralist society. While lecturing every other community sector about greater efficiency and modernisation, the Parliament remains stuck in the nineteenth century and largely irrelevant to executive decision-making. This has been brought home with great force to many people by the Howard government's unilateral and barely debated decision to support the US in attacking Iraq.



While the Parliament does seek the views of the community and of experts in various fields, most of this contribution occurs in committees whose deliberations and conclusions are ignored. A treasure trove of thoughtful and meticulously prepared submissions and reports languish in countless bottom drawers.

---

## REFORMS TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION

Popular dissatisfaction with present democratic structures is fuelling calls for a more participatory democracy.

The opportunities for electoral input are scandalously low in most democracies, limited to the chance to cast a few votes during a multiyear electoral cycle. Furthermore, declining voter turnout in advanced industrial societies (including here in the last election) suggests growing disenchantment with this form of democratic participation that has changed little since the nineteenth century.

While participation in elections may be declining, direct contact with government officials and politicians and work with community groups has been increasing. Participation in new social movements, such as the environmental movement, has also increased substantially over the past generation.

These new participation patterns are creating pressure on governments to develop forms of more direct, participatory democracy. Increased skills and resources in contemporary societies also make expanded participation a real possibility.

A recent review of the social movement literature describes other ways that institutional reforms can increase direct citizen participation in policy making. In Germany, for example, local citizen action groups have won changes in administrative law to allow for citizen participation in local administrative processes. Italian environmental legislation now grants individuals legal standing in the courts when they seek to protect the environment from the actions of municipalities or government administrative agencies.

Similar reforms need to be debated in Australia.

While the Parliament does seek the views of the community and of experts in various fields, most of this contribution occurs in committees whose deliberations and conclusions are ignored. A treasure trove of thoughtful and meticulously prepared sub-

missions and reports languish in countless bottom drawers.

It is possible to do much better, to open up decision making, to involve more MPs and engage the wider community, to actually thrash out the issues in real debates. Australia was once considered the 'democratic laboratory' of the world. It's time to conduct a few new experiments to revive our body politic and embrace the principles of openness, accessibility and accountability.

As a start we could:

- Commission citizens' juries or deliberative polls on contentious and complex issues;
- Invite expert and community representatives to address the chamber in session and engage in debate with members;
- Promote and sponsor the establishment of groups such as civic and youth forums to enable more regular and efficient consultation with the public;
- Ensure that legislation introduced by the Executive undergoes a substantial period of pre-legislative development and consultation through the relevant committees, interest groups and the general public;
- Give committees the power to initiate legislation arising from their inquiries, especially if the government has failed to respond to major recommendations;
- Provide for private Bills which allow private citizens or groups (with sufficient backing) to bring certain matters before the Parliament (probably through sponsoring MPs);
- Require all petitions to be investigated, if necessary by special hearings, by a dedicated petitions' committee.

## PARTY ORGANISATION

I have written elsewhere about the need for internal party reform. Only very modest steps were taken as a result of the Hawke-Wran review, and there is clearly still a great hunger amongst members and supporters for a greater say on both the policies and

the people who are selected to represent them.

My resignation produced an enormous *cri de coeur* from members and long-time supporters. It is clear that many of them still feel marginalised. Neither is the party fully engaging the young and the activists whose energy is being engaged in the spontaneous campaigns and networks around asylum-seeker and anti-war issues.

## A PROGRAM

As well as enunciating core values, we also need to identify a few key areas for emphasis, areas which clearly impinge directly on people's wellbeing and which are solutions to agreed problems. We shouldn't be afraid to take on the privileged and the special interest groups (e.g. in the health sector). Indeed we should seek to provoke debate. I believe this is essential in a healthy democracy.

Labor has to have the courage to tell the great stories, to depict the sort of Australia we could be. This requires a healthy level of optimism and the ability to spell out how people's lives can be improved. Part of this story requires us to encourage Australians to a mature reconciliation with our past—

particularly in our colonisation of this land and our treatment of Indigenous people. No group can be free until it recognises and comes to terms with its past, whether it likes it or not.

As part of this, we have to do what we can to dispel the current atmosphere of foreboding and fearfulness. Many people are convinced that we are under threat, that we face bleak prospects and they are, as a result, increasingly inward-looking.

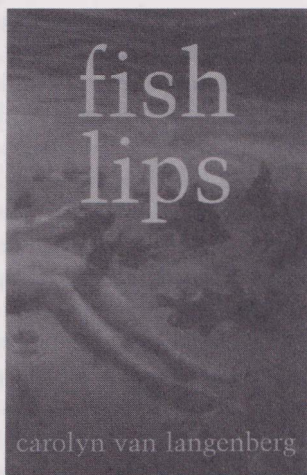
## VISION

Social democratic traditions may have been under attack for over a decade but there are signs of growing support for a return to the values of deep egalitarianism and social justice. There is far more dispute about the free-market economic absolutism of the 1990s and greater support for a return to government intervention to secure acceptable standards for all.

Labor should be helping shape this agenda, not bringing up the rear.

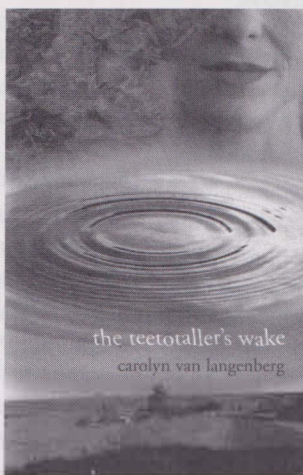
*Dr Carmen Lawrence is the Federal Member for Fremantle. This article is based on a paper delivered to the Victorian Fabian Society in February 2003.*

## The Fish Lips Trilogy by Carolyn van Langenberg



ISBN: 0 9585805 9 6  
RRP: \$22.95

"If I were to place bets on literary outcomes, my money would be on Langenberg"  
*Lucy Sussex*



ISBN: 0 9578735 8 1  
RRP: \$22.95

"Domestically eccentric, compelling and quirky"  
*Dennis Gallagher*

Siblings Jaq and Kel, cousins of the clever Hindmarsh girls, endure public madness and private nightmare as they shoulder together to make sense of their mother, the mad Lydia.

*Blue Moon*  
To be released October 2004

Published by Indra Publishing. Available at [www.indra.com.au](http://www.indra.com.au) and all good bookstores.



## REVISITING TRADITION

### Labor and Socialism

LABOR DOCTRINE, it seems, constantly spawns Labor revisionism. On 2 April 2002 the *Sydney Morning Herald* printed the manifesto of two Young Labor members, Troy Bramston and Ben Heraghty, beginning with the provocative: “It is time that the Labor Party’s key platform—the socialist objective—is dumped . . . This tired political statement is irrelevant to the modern party”.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the accusation of ‘sentimentality’ against those who cling to the ‘irrelevant’ objective, a worrying aspect of the statement is the reference to “the profound changes in the nature of world politics and economics and the emergence of global forces which shape our everyday lives”. Arguably it is for these very reasons that a commitment to the traditional objective is more relevant than ever. More plausibly, Bramston and Heraghty give a list of relevant issues which could be specified in an updated pledge: union affiliation, full employment, health, education and welfare—though the authors are quite wrong to suggest that the socialisation objective has nothing to do with “democracy and freedom” or “social justice”.

Elsewhere in the same issue of the *Sydney Morning Herald* the Labor Party’s communications spokesman is quoted as saying that the objective is an “expression of Labor’s soul”.<sup>2</sup> While it needs unpacking, and requires careful explanation to the impatient, Lindsay Tanner’s claim goes to the core of the Labor tradition, and may well be more profound than he intended. For the socialisation objective is Labor code for socialism and its various connotations, democracy, freedom and social justice included. The objective, and all the explanatory and hortatory rhetoric that goes with it, is urgently



Arthur Calwell with the 50,000th European migrant, 1949.  
Photo courtesy <[www.curriculum.edu.au](http://www.curriculum.edu.au)>

needed to confront the present crisis in Australian government.

The modernisers are right to the extent that a time-honoured concept requires reinterpretation to each generation, and adjustment to changing circumstances. Once ‘socialisation’ would have been taken to mean the elimination of all private property and the collective ownership of all goods and the means of production, distribution and exchange. Very early in Australian Labor’s history, however, the Party came to an accommodation with the idea of a mixed economy, allowing some virtue to the ownership of private property and to individual enterprise. The Blackburn Declaration of 1921 gave explicit point to this attitude by stating that collective ownership should be invoked to the extent needed to avoid exploitation of the people through certain industries. From a very early period the ‘socialisation objective’ was deconstructed to have it embrace wider concerns than the exact terms imply. Its retention signifies not so much a program for a precise set of legislation, but the Labor role as the operative criticism of capitalism in this country. Without this function, Labor would indeed be without a soul, and a purpose.

Recent Labor governments have chosen to dismantle and sell off utilities and public enterprises in the name of increasing competition. Competition policies are aimed at producing efficiency by appli-



cation of the profit motive, which all but eliminates the dimension of social service from public enterprises which now must hold profits, and the 'bottom line', as their chief indicators of success. Competition in the alleged free market is also the stock-in-trade of Labor's traditional oppo-

nents, who differentiated themselves from Labor as the parties of business. Since Labor has also apparently become a party of business, there is little political space left for working people to have their interests as employees or as small-scale self-employed, let alone as citizens wishing to occupy the public space, to be effectively represented. In fact, if some recent suggestions coming from Labor quarters are to be followed, there is scarcely space for working people to continue to exist at all. They are now to be construed as 'aspirational voters' who need to be assisted to become petty capitalists through the acquisition of shares.

Socialism, as embraced by the traditional socialisation objective, is still a necessary admonitory symbol to warn against the oppressions and inequalities of the class system, and to prompt the memory that the people still have an entity, and a role to play in politics through the mechanisms of collective action. In contemporary terms this argument could be couched in the form of the communitarianism-individualism debate, with socialism forcefully propagating the communitarian ethos. This debate is no mere talking point, but impinges on all the questions of politics, which seem to beg either communitarian or individualist solutions. It is evident in attitudes to such basic matters as taxation, health policy, education, welfare, utility supplies and agricultural subsidy—in short, it runs right through the range of public policy. Socialism still signifies the interests and welfare of the people taken as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

More than ever, a vigorous commitment to the socialist ideal is urgently needed to confront the present crisis in Australian politics. While the term 'crisis' can be overused, its deployment is warranted at the moment. It may not be of quite the same kind as crises involving wars both hot and cold, depressions and party splits. Nevertheless, there is

a strong case to be made for a current crisis of political legitimacy. The democratic state depends for its existence on the goodwill of the people. Although it takes it for granted that no government is 'good' in some permanent sense, the legitimacy of the democratic regime depends on a level of trust between the rulers and the ruled.

At present we witness a drastic erosion of commitment to Australia's traditional democratic ideals, which has aroused deep suspicion among many who observe and evaluate the political system. The problem is evident in the corrosion of our political vocabulary, a failing unmasked by Thucydides in ancient Athens,<sup>4</sup> and apparent in political charlatans ever since. So we observe the spectacle of the Prime Minister making a promise "never ever" to return to the policy of a Goods and Services Tax, only to reintroduce it at the subsequent election. We then learnt that, following success at election, he had decreed that pre-election promises could be classified into "core" and "non-core" promises, an expression apparently drawn from business parlance where firms identify their 'core' and 'non-core' business. The transfer of business-speak into politics implies a range of consequences, but there is no place within the fragility of democratic politics for politicians to exhibit blatant hypocrisy so that there is no remaining substructure of trust in the language they deploy. To say that some promises were 'non-core' was to say nothing less than 'when I made that promise I lied to the Australian people'.

The Leader of the Opposition, Simon Crean, has been complicit in the worst failures of leadership in a generation. These concerned the issue of immigration. Of course it is the responsibility of any government to maintain population policies and to regulate the flow of immigration into the country, but it was the manner in which these matters were dealt with prior to the 2001 federal election which exposed the moral bankruptcy of leadership in Australia. At least three important considerations arise: firstly, the willingness of the political leadership to pander to the worst instincts of a people which had once supported a White Australia policy. Secondly, there was the palpable mendacity of leaders over the alleged evidence to support their public stand. Thirdly, there are implications for democracy in the actual treatment in Australia of asylum seekers.

All this was bad enough, but members of the Government were also willing to lie in their public



The handing over of 'border-protection' management to a private company, and a foreign one at that, is an abrogation of one of the first duties of a democratic government. The very idea of running detention centres and prisons for profit is loathsome.

---

accusations against the 'boat people'. The essential point about the allegation that 'boat people' had thrown or had threatened to throw their children overboard was the blatant determination of the Government not to seek the truth about the allegations, even though messages were passed up the line from the naval personnel on the spot that the alleged misconduct on the part of the refugees had never happened.

The handing over of 'border-protection' management to a private company, and a foreign one at that, is an abrogation of one of the first duties of a democratic government. The very idea of running detention centres and prisons for profit is loathsome, and reeks with overtones of the slave trade, in which fortunes are made directly from human misery. More than that, there are intimations of the Government's attitude to its own citizens in the treatment of those arriving on these shores from elsewhere. Democracy rests its claims for support on the inherent humanity of all people. Even if and when asylum-seekers have been 'processed' and found to be outside the law, their status in no way warrants inhumane treatment.

The posture of the Government has been subject to hefty repudiation by Liberals of the highest credentials who perceive these same failings on the part of the Government. They include former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, former Liberal minister Fred Chaney, former Coalition leader John Hewson, and former Liberal minister Ian Macphie, who said of Howard that his "total lack of vision, history, geography and cultural sensitivity is evident to all who are capable of independent assessment. Howard is a throwback we must throw out".<sup>5</sup> Speaking of Labor and Liberal policy, John Menadue said "This is not strong leadership . . . It is cowardice". Archbishop Ian George spoke of the brutalising of the Australian people's attitudes, and Reverend Tim Costello characterised the election campaign as taking place "in a moral vacuum". Former diplomat Richard Woolcott said "We are witnessing in Aus-

tralia a recrudescence of those old barbarisms: racism, religious intolerance and jingoism".<sup>6</sup>

Labor's complicity in the failure of leadership may well be attributable to its relative impotence in the face of the "ruling culture".<sup>7</sup> Original Labor was very conscious of differentiating itself from the ruling ideology of the Australian colonies, which were governed through the influence of graziers, businessmen and professionals, mainly lawyers, a dominance which R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving summarise as the "hegemony of the mercantile bourgeoisie".<sup>8</sup> The fact that the ruling culture of the colonies was liberal-capitalist made this country susceptible to the implantation of criticism from within the liberal framework.<sup>9</sup> State intervention in Australia was particularly congenial to labour interests when the system of conciliation and arbitration was introduced—neither "an intervention of the capitalist class to secure the subordination of labour", nor "an achievement of the labour movement in the face of employer resistance".<sup>10</sup>

If social-liberal ideas were prevalent among the hegemonic liberal classes, however, they were also hospitable to an energetic stream of socialist thought swelling in Australia. No doubt many of the ideas espoused by democratic socialists overlapped with the thought of social liberals, but those willing to characterise themselves as socialists were sure that their position rested on quite different foundations from those of the liberals.

It is well known that many of the most potent socialist ideas among the Australian workers came from America. This is a strange paradox, since the torch of socialism was largely carried by British worker immigrants. The paradox is deepened in that American socialism struggled within a social context which had heavily espoused individualism, and within a constitutional structure which imposed prohibitive limits on the exercise of state power in the collective interest.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there flourished a strong, if now much neglected, tradition of socialist thought in America. Those American so-

## A party founded on change must approach the electorate in a quite different way from the parties dedicated to the status quo.

---

private property, the encyclical was also trenchantly critical of the random incidence of capitalist blows, and denounced the exploitation of working people by their employers. In its insistence upon a wage income geared to the needs of a healthy family rather than the vagaries of market forces, it anticipated the spirit of the arbitration system shortly to be introduced into the Australian Federation. The Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Moran, had no difficulty in interpreting the encyclical to Catholic voters as the highest expression of a true socialism.

On the Protestant side the divine imperative also pressed toward social reform. Contrary to much opinion which claims that Australia, being a post-Enlightenment establishment, had no religious foundations,<sup>23</sup> the Church was present from the start of European Australia. The First Fleet had its chaplain, the Anglican Richard Johnson, also a member of the Methodist society, who stood therefore in a tradition of evangelical revival which had a strong social conscience at its centre. The evangelical revival had broken out in England and America in the 1730s and had engendered a deep piety which, as part of the examined life, demanded action on behalf of the poor. It resulted in Britain directly in the reforms of Wilberforce and Shaftesbury, Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale, of Dr Barnardo and many others. The English founder of the revival, John Wesley, was politically a high Tory, and some of the parliamentary reforms following in his wake were enacted by Tory statesmen. In a generation after Wesley himself, however, the Methodist movement, despite the politics of its founder, was a movement of the poor. The paradox of it is that Wesley himself had construed Christianity as a religion of the poor, and had constantly adjured his followers to “save” and to minister to the poor, at the same time as he execrated the rich for having locked up resources robbed from the poor.<sup>24</sup> To cut a long story short, there were strong overlaps between the Methodist society and the Chartist movement and the Trade Union movement, and even the British Labour Party itself.<sup>25</sup> Three of the ‘Tolpuddle Martyrs’, transported for illegally forming a combination for the benefit of workers, were Methodist local

preachers. Several of the Luddites hanged at York were from Methodist families. The famous maxim of Morgan Phillips, long-time secretary of the British Labour Party, was that “Labour owes more to Methodism than to Marxism”.

Andrew Scott’s invaluable parallel study of the British and Australian labour parties notes the connections at several levels between Australian and British labour. Not least among these connections was the importation of the links between British evangelicalism and Australian labour. Many of the earliest Australian labour leaders were committed evangelicals who, as with W.G. Spence, exhaled socialism and religion in the same breath.

For some who would modernise the Australian Labor Party it seems necessary to expunge all association with socialism. For all the argument that Labor had no stronger intention than to ‘civilise capitalism’, and that there has never been any substantial connection between Labor and socialism, if one were to take Cardinal Moran’s approach seriously, then there could be a socialist project locked within the civilising of capitalism itself. In any case, if one is able to countenance a socialism broader than Marxism, then the foundations of Australian Labor are grounded in ethical socialism, and it is false to its history to suggest otherwise. When a Labor party, anxious to modernise, abandons its commitment to a more equal society, it has betrayed its trust and traduced its tradition. There is a paradox in this. Tradition is a typically conservative concept, yet the conservatism of Labor implies the cleaving to a radical position. It is a tradition which carries forward the seeds of radical change.

From the Labor side, tradition is under challenge. Andrew Scott offers a useful exploration of this process. Tradition and modernising are seen as mutually exclusive ideals. Scott follows Raymond Williams in imputing modernisation to the unanswerable theology of new capitalism. It short-circuits the formation of social goals and “crudely foreshortens the historical development of society”. It represents “the ideology of the never-ending present”.<sup>26</sup> The moderniser’s consignment of tradition to the unrecoverable (and unwanted) past



misconstrues the nature of tradition, and underlines the moderniser's own betrayal of the conservative position. 'Tradition' of course means the 'handing on' of values and ideals, of institutions and histories. In so far as it dwells in the past, it understands the nature of what has gone before to constitute what exists at present. It represents a deeper understanding of present institutions and—at least as far as the Labor traditionalist is concerned—indicates directions for reform.<sup>27</sup>

One mode of modernising theology has been to attack the alleged 'Australian Settlement', a stylised formulation of Hancock's recognition of Australia's bipartisan settled policies.<sup>28</sup> Paul Kelly, for example, presented the 'Australian Settlement' as a syndrome of five features: White Australia, which Hancock himself designated the cornerstone of all policy,<sup>29</sup> industry protection, wage arbitration, state paternalism and imperial benevolence.<sup>30</sup> In particular, it was what might be called the quasi-socialist elements of the 'settlement' which were presented as a stifling noose around Australia's development. Industry protection and wage arbitration were seen as unnecessary and inefficient interferences with allegedly benevolent market forces which would have modernised Australia if allowed free play. For this reason Kelly praised the market-oriented Labor governments of Hawke and Keating for their efforts at privatisation and deregulation, policies which ran directly counter to the Labor tradition. The approved orientation of course always downplays the obvious fact that the competition of the market produces losers as well as winners.

The almost universal acceptance of the benevolence of the market means that it is generalised into the paradigm of all social and interpersonal relations. As Benjamin Barber has perceptively observed, American hegemony over world trade has infiltrated the market ideology into all parts of life in many countries, a phenomenon which may in part explain the hostility towards America in 'Third World' countries:

Terror obviously is not an answer, but the truly desperate may settle for terror as a response to our failure even to ask such questions. The issue for jihad's warriors of annihilation is of course far beyond such anxieties: it entails absolute devotion to absolute values. Yet for many who are appalled by terrorism but unimpressed by America, there may seem to be

an absolutist dimension to the materialist aspirations of our markets. Our global market culture appears to us as both compelling (in the sense of compulsory) and corrupt—not exactly coercive, but capable of seducing children into a corrosive secular materialism. What's wrong with Disneyland or Nikes or the Whopper? We just 'give people what they want.' But this merchandiser's dream is a form of romanticism, the idealism of neoliberal markets, the convenient idyll that material plenty can satisfy spiritual longing so that fishing for profits can be thought of as synonymous with trolling for liberty.<sup>31</sup>

Republicanism will scarcely rectify the current crisis in Australian government. There is a crisis even were the present (inadequately opposed) Government not duplicitous and cavalier with the principles of democracy. The truth of democracy is that all governments are likely to be duplicitous, inefficient and power-hungry, and these perceptions are met with the determination to keep government under official scrutiny and to open up channels for constituted opposition. Former Senator Susan Ryan struck a note of constructive despair when, in response to the 2001 electoral defeat, she lamented Labor's:

weak acquiescence in much of the Coalition's crude populism and appeal to the narrow and selfish . . . Underlying a series of flawed policy decisions such as agreement with the private health insurance rebate and massive increased funding to rich private schools, alignment with the Coalition Government's treatment of asylum seekers, fumbling over the GST changes is one fundamental strategic flaw.<sup>32</sup>

The flaw is that a party founded on change must approach the electorate in a quite different way from the parties dedicated to the status quo. Our democracy has been significantly undermined because Labor has all but abandoned the theory which is the alternate of the present ruling culture. Capitalism reigns supreme, and its disfigurements are inadequately exposed. As Tawney argued when Australian Labor still had the semblance of a creed:

[socialism's] fundamental criticism of capitalism is not merely that it impoverishes the mass of mankind—poverty is an ancient evil—but that it makes riches a god, and treats common men as less than men.<sup>33</sup>

It is true that 'socialism' as a term is out of favour, no less in Australia than elsewhere. Yet it is also true

that its philosophy is more urgently needed than ever, especially after the ravages of privatising and deregulating Labor governments. Given this quite demonstrable need, is there reason to shy away from the term that best articulates it? The 'economic rationalists' have done very well (or rather, very successfully) with concepts from the bygone era of classical liberalism. The Labor tradition calls for the radical criticism of a disfigured society by the recollection of 'energising memories' which are nobly encapsulated in the historic term, socialism.

1. Troy Bramston and Ben Heraghty, 'Old-world pledge a sign of a party that has overstepped the Marx', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 April 2002, p.13.
2. Michelle Grattan, 'It ain't broke: a defence of Labor's goal', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 April 2002, p.2.
3. Socialism adjoins its followers "to learn a language and political culture that immediately and unproblematically makes the lives of others already part of a shared concern and notion of the good life". M. Luntley, *The Meaning of Socialism*, London, Duckworth, 1989, p.8; cf. T. Battin and G. Maddox (eds), *Socialism in Contemporary Australia*, Longman, South Melbourne, 1996.
4. Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 3. 82 (trans. Richard Crawley) Dent, London, 1910, pp.170-1: "Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question, ineptness to act on any."
5. David Solomon (ed.), *Howard's Race. Winning the Unwinnable Election*, HarperCollins, Pymble, 2002, p.235.
6. All quoted *ibid.*, pp.234-6.
7. R.W. Connell, *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture*, Cambridge, CUP, 1977, p.vii. There is a case to be made that the trauma of the dismissal diverted Labor towards adjustment to the ruling culture. cf. G. Maddox, *The Hawke Government and Labor Tradition*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1989.
8. R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1980, p.112.
9. See Marian Sawer, 'The Ethical State: Social Liberalism and the Critique of Contract', *Australian Historical Studies* 114, 2000, pp.67-90, at p.70.
10. Sawer, *ibid.*, p.80, and citing Stuart Macintyre, 'Neither Capital nor Labour', in Macintyre and R. Mitchell (eds), *Foundations of Arbitration: the origins and effects of state compulsory arbitration, 1890-1914*, OUP, Melbourne, 1989, p.182.
11. H. Wayne Morgan, *American Socialism 1900-1960*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p.108.
12. Albert Fried (ed.), *Socialism in America: from the Shakers to the Third International*, Doubleday, Garden City, 1970, pp.234-43.
13. L.G. Churchward, 'The American Influence on the Australian Labour Movement', *Historical Studies* 5:19, 1952, pp.258-77, at p.266.
14. Andrew Scott, *Running on Empty: 'Modernising' the British and Australian labour parties*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 2000, p.42, on "the comparative lack of an intellectual life in the Australian labour movement".
15. R.A. Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics 1850-1910*, MUP, Carlton, 1960, p.153.
16. T.A. Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia* (1918), Macmillan, Melbourne, 1969, 4 vols, vol. 4, p.1836.
17. Peter Beilharz, *Transforming Labor: Labour Tradition and the Labor Decade in Australia*, CUP, Cambridge, 1991, pp.67-75; Judith Brett has recently explained the affinity between Catholics and the ALP as the result of sectarian divisions which meant that Catholics were not welcome in the Protestant-dominated non-Labor parties: 'Class, Religion and the Foundation of the Australian Party System: A Revisionist Interpretation', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 37:1, March, 2002, pp.39-56. Brett usefully draws attention to the much neglected importance of the content of religious belief, but more could be made of the force of Catholic social theory.
18. Scott, *Running on Empty*, pp.23-4.
19. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993, p.243.
20. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559, bk.2. chs 1-2.
21. Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1965, p.63, and quoting Calvin, 'Jeremiah', lecture 2, l. 44.
22. Beilharz, *Labour Tradition*, p.63.
23. cf. Ian Turner (ed.), *The Australian Dream*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1968, and quoting A.G. Stephens, p.x.
24. G. Maddox, 'John Wesley and the Spirit of Capitalism', *Australian Religion Studies Journal* 11:2, 1998, pp.85-97; cf. Maddox (ed.), *Political Writings of John Wesley*, Bristol, Thoemmes, 1998.
25. R.F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800-1850*, Epworth Press, London, 1937.
26. Scott, *Running on Empty*, p.72.
27. Tradition looks backward and forward at the same time. It fosters memory and nurtures hope, while the modernising ideology means "everything must be held in the now, either an urgent now or an eternal now. Either way, a community rooted in energising memories and summoned by radical hopes is a curiosity and a threat in such a culture." Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978, p.11.
28. J.D.B. Miller, *Australian Government and Politics*, London, Duckworth, 1959, pp.68-9; K. Hancock, *Australia*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, pp.52-67.
29. *Ibid.*, p.59
30. Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, pp.2-12.
31. Benjamin R. Barber, 'Beyond Jihad vs McWorld: On Terrorism and the New Democratic Realism', *Nation* 274:2, January 2002, pp.11 ff.
32. Susan Ryan, 'Alas, my party has lost its great purpose', *Age*, 11 April 2002.
33. R.H. Tawney, *Equality*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1964, p.197.

Graham Maddox is Emeritus Professor in the school of Political and International Studies at the University of New England, Armidale.



# POLICING THE DO-GOODERS

## The Australian Right's attack on NGOs

AUSTRALIA'S non-government organisations (NGOs) have long been involved in an attempt to provide assistance for those in need of it at home and abroad. But the landscape in which they operate appears to be changing. It has recently come to light that the Howard Government has awarded \$46,000 to the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) to advise the government on how to manage its relations with NGOs. At the same time the draft 2003 Charities Bill proposes revoking the tax concessions of any NGO that makes any significant attempt to question government policy. For NGOs working in areas such as international development, welfare, the environment and human rights, there is a feeling that the government is attempting to silence its critics and constrain debate. These developments mark new low points in Australian public life.

### A SPECIAL PROTOCOL

Earlier this year the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership decided it required a 'protocol' to manage its relationship with NGOs.<sup>1</sup> The IPA was awarded \$46,000 in public funds to meet the following objectives:<sup>2</sup>

1. To make information about NGOs that have relationships with Government publicly accessible.
2. To increase awareness of the relationships between NGOs and Government.

The IPA has been specifically asked to report on the following:

- The links between key Commonwealth Departments and their client NGOs
- A framework for assessing the role and standing of NGOs, based on the information requirements of those Departments and relevant Ministers

- A framework for a database of NGOs, including their standing
- A proposed standard of public disclosure when dealing with NGOs
- A proposed trial Protocol (based on the foregoing points) that requests NGOs to supply information about their organisation that will be publicly available.

### IS THIS INITIATIVE NECESSARY?

The idea of the Howard Government and the IPA working together to create a regulatory protocol is not without irony. Both the IPA and the current government have been avowed advocates of deregulation; indeed the IPA even has its own 'Deregulation Unit'.<sup>3</sup> Both parties have not only come curiously adrift from their philosophical moorings, but have also lost any capacity for objective perspective towards the NGO sector.

This idea for special regulation of the NGO sector is a clear example of bureaucratic excess. No government in Australia is obliged to consult or liaise with NGOs. A politician will consult with particular NGOs to the extent that he or she feels it is useful. There is no statutory requirement for governments to do business with any NGO and rarely is there a requirement for government to direct funds towards the NGO sector. NGOs receive a hearing with government or win contracts to undertake government work on the basis of merit and competition (mechanisms which the IPA would normally applaud). For NGOs engaged in advocacy their success with government depends on demonstrating their right to speak on a particular issue. This may involve demonstrating their expertise and/or demonstrating their links with the relevant group or issue. NGOs already have enormous

## Leaving aside the question of whether this initiative is necessary, commissioning the IPA as a consultant is an outrageous choice. No Australian organisation has had a more biased and antagonistic approach towards the NGO sector.

---

incentives to demonstrate they are well run and effective or they will simply not secure government contracts and will lose the capacity to even speak with government.

There is also already a raft of requirements regulating how the NGO sector interacts with government. A visit to the Tax Office or AusAid websites demonstrates very quickly the extensive reporting requirements and conditions that NGOs are required to meet in order to qualify for a single cent of commonwealth funds. As many NGOs have limited funds and administration budgets, it seems particularly punitive to tie them up in more red tape when there is no need to do so.

The level of red tape may be very onerous indeed. The IPA has said how the protocol they propose may be similar to arrangements in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Nicholson and Hughes give an indication of just how intrusive and time consuming US requirements are:

Under US law, tax-exempt community and charitable organisations have to lodge annual 'Form 990' returns with the internal revenue department that lists total income, including what they receive from direct public donations and how much from government sources, and shows the amounts spent on administrative costs compared to direct service delivery. The annual returns—incredibly detailed and often running to more than 60 pages—also list the names and addresses and salaries paid to senior NGO staff and how their time is spent. The 990 returns are public documents.<sup>5</sup>

There are also problems of parity and consistency with this initiative. For example, why should NGOs be singled out for such special attention? Why not impose such requirements on lobby groups such as the Business Council of Australia or the National Farmers' Federation or the Australian Industry Group? These types of interest groups have had far greater access to government and have been far

more influential. There is no mention of such groups in the terms of reference.

### A STRANGE CHOICE OF CONSULTANT

Leaving aside for a moment the question of whether this initiative is necessary, commissioning the IPA as a consultant is an outrageous choice. No organisation in Australia has had a more biased and antagonistic approach towards the NGO sector. For the past five years the IPA has mounted a campaign against NGOs that has often been comical in its melodramatic use of clumsy propaganda. No issue of the IPA flagship publication, *Review*, is complete without an article attesting to the dangers that NGOs pose to the economy and to the process of democracy itself. The articles are often reminiscent of the 'reds under the bed' paranoia of the 1950s. One edition of the *Review* features a picture of Karl Marx, on a red background, asserting the NGOs and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations are the 'New Internationale'. Other choice examples of their 'think-tank' analyses include: 'World Wildlife Funds Say Jump: Government Asks How High?'<sup>6</sup> and 'It's Official: Greenpeace Serves no Public Purpose'.<sup>7</sup>

### UNDERSTANDING THE IPA CRITIQUE

The IPA has devoted a lot of time and resources to criticising its fellow NGOs. Its three persistent themes are:

1. They damage democracy and the process of government.
2. They are not accountable.
3. They publish poor quality ideologically-driven research.

It is worth quickly evaluating each of these three claims as they illustrate why the IPA was the wrong organisation to undertake a research consultancy of this type.

The first accusation, that NGOs damage democ-



racy, seems to originate in public choice theory. Interest groups such as NGOs are seen as evidence of the desire of a minority to seek advantage at the expense of the majority. According to the IPA discussion paper *Protocols with NGOs: The Need to Know*:

NGOs compete with other people for access to government and other centres of power. Democracy as an institutional concept needs to balance the interests of the organised and the unorganised. An organised and active citizenry on some issues may be good for the activists; but it may be bad for everyone else.<sup>8</sup>

This argument fails to acknowledge that public policy is informed by thousands of groups that compete and countervail against each other. The creation of one type of interest group invariably finds its counterweight. For example, the republican movement spawned the monarchist movement, the free-trade movement spawned the H.R. Nicholls Society. NGOs have spawned 'NGO Watch' at the IPA!

The creation of groups, and the right to vote, are the functional components of a democracy. There are a multitude of problems with the IPA trying to pretend otherwise.<sup>9</sup> Most notably, how can the IPA justify its own existence as a lobby group obtaining significant corporate funding to try to influence government policy? NGOs are just one type of group, pushing a range of views among many other competing groups and views. There is no evidence that they have been a particularly influential group. Indeed, the evidence is to the contrary.<sup>10</sup>

The IPA recently worked with the right-wing American Enterprise Institute to stage the conference 'Whose Democracy is it anyway?'. The focus was of course on NGOs. While you have to admire the IPA's tenacity to keep banging the drum on this matter, this does not make its arguments any stronger. If the IPA is concerned about interest groups perverting Western democracy, the obvious focus should be on the corporate sector and money politics. Why not papers exploring the role of the big oil companies behind the election and subsequent policy direction of George W. Bush? Why not a paper on how individual Australian companies, such as the ethanol company Manildra, have procured policy changes? The interest in promoting democracy is laudable. The actual focus is laughable.

The second criticism of NGOs is that they lack

mechanisms of accountability. A recent *Financial Review* article by the IPA provides a good illustration of this line:

They are governed by non-profit disclosure and fundraising laws at a state level, but these are vague and not enforced. The task of setting standards of behaviour and disclosure is left up to organisational insiders: the board, staff and active members. In short, no one is looking critically from the outside. This has bred laxity, poor standards and abuse.<sup>11</sup>

Yet NGOs are at least as accountable as similar types of groups in society. A highly demanding accountability mechanism for NGOs is keeping their membership base satisfied. According to Paul Wapner:

Developing a membership does not come as a matter of course; neither does sustaining it. NGOs must engage their members. They must act in ways that satisfy and even excite members and garner additional support. When an NGO fails to do so, it loses members and thus loses support and institutional strength. What is important to realise is that loss (or gain) of membership does not happen every two, four or any other particular number of years but happens immediately. When supporters no longer feel satisfied by the NGO, they are no longer available to be mobilised or otherwise advocate on behalf of the group. Members vote, as it were, with their feet.<sup>12</sup>

NGOs are not only accountable via the need to maintain the support of their members; many NGOs are signatories to demanding codes of conduct. For example, any NGO working in the field of international development that wishes to bid for AusAid projects must sign the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) code of conduct. ACFOA has exacting requirements in the areas of governance, organisational integrity, finances, communication with the public, management practice and human resources management. These are comparable and at times superior to the requirements of any relevant code of conduct currently operating in Australia. Compliance to the ACFOA code is monitored through a permanently constituted code of conduct committee which includes an independent chairperson and a representative nominated by the Australian Consumers' Association. It would be a fine day when the IPA developed a similar code of conduct for itself.

The third major criticism made against NGOs by the IPA is that NGOs (particularly environmental NGOs) publish irresponsible and unscientific publications on which they base their views. The Environmental NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace have come in for particularly harsh treatment for allegedly dodgy science.

The problem with the IPA putting forward this view is its capacity to be an informed and neutral arbiter on what is and is not scientific or reasoned argument. It has no meteorologists or marine biologists on staff but has confidently debunked various claims on global warming and damage to the Great Barrier Reef. To get a sense of the scientific credentials of the IPA one only has to look to their most recent guest speaker, the Danish statistician and 'eco-optimist' Bjorn Lomborg, author of *The Skeptical Environmentalist*. The IPA has been singing the praises of Lomborg for years, but *The Skeptical Environmentalist* was recently investigated by the Danish Research Agency after incurring a barrage of criticism from the scientific community, including researchers who felt that Lomborg had misrepresented their work. The agency announced in January of this year that Lomborg's book violated Danish standards of scientific practice.<sup>13</sup> It is the IPA, more than any other NGO, that seems to be in the grip of dodgy science.

When examined systematically the IPA criticisms of NGOs often reveal themselves to be a projection of the IPA's own failings. While there are industrious attempts to drape their criticism in the clothes of reason, the result is most often an embarrassing self-parody. While the IPA is entirely within its rights to say what it wants, its claims as an expert consultant on the sector as a whole is much more open to question.

Another interesting aspect of this consultancy is that the IPA has itself been campaigning to be given this role for just this type of regulatory approach towards the NGO sector for a number of years. 'The Protocol: Managing Relations with NGOs', is strikingly similar in its findings to 2001 IPA discussion paper: 'Protocols with NGOs: The Need to Know'. The recommendations are also uncannily alike:

One way of managing the relationship with interest groups is to use a protocol. A protocol, for the purposes of this discussion, means a publicly available statement containing the information about the

standing of the advocacy body. Those NGOs granted standing should make the information available by way of a publicly accessible register.<sup>14</sup>

The similarities between what the IPA was calling for in 2001 and what it is now receiving public funds to advocate are strong. Perhaps it is just coincidence, but if the IPA had been able to create both the supply and demand for this initiative, it has far more influence on government than any of the NGOs that it claims are 'running government'.<sup>15</sup>

Adele Horin has also observed the irony of the process by which the IPA was awarded the consultancy examining the need for an NGO protocol:

Some business leaders on the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership, through which the funds to IPA were channelled, were unhappy to be used for blatant political ends. The group of prominent Australians, appointed by the Prime Minister, has never before allocated funds for projects or research without first having them assessed by an expert committee or consultants. But under pressure from Amanda Vanstone, the deputy chair, they acquiesced to the directive to fund the IPA.<sup>16</sup>

NGOs represent and promote some of the best aspects of ourselves and our society. All organisations should be open to suggestions that improve accountability and transparency. However, NGOs should not be expected to comply to special protocols or regulations that no other group in society is expected to meet, unless it can be shown that the sector has unique and significant problems.

## REMOVING TAX-EXEMPT STATUS

In July of this year Treasurer Peter Costello unveiled draft legislation that would strip NGOs of their charity status if they make any serious attempt to change government policy. The legislation states that attempting to change the law or government policy, if it is more than ancillary or incidental to the other purposes of the entity concerned, will result in the charity status for the NGO being revoked. While Costello has subsequently issued a press release arguing that the government is not trying to silence NGOs, the legislation is unambiguous.

The draft legislation is a move away from the findings of the government-commissioned Charity Definition Inquiry in 2001—which concluded that advocacy was a legitimate activity for charities. One



now gets the impression that the government was hoping for a different finding from its committee. To see charity and advocacy as being some type of dichotomy really harks back to the eighteenth century. The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) has correctly noted that trying to determine whether public comments are ancillary to the charity's purpose will create a legal minefield and administrative nightmare.

Even some commentators at the IPA have recently said that the draft Charity Bill goes too far and that NGOs should only have to notify donors of how much they are spending on work in the field (as opposed to advocacy).<sup>17</sup>

The reason the government is uncomfortable with advocacy-orientated NGOs is that these operate in a rights-based, rather than a charity-based mentality, that stresses structural causes of poverty. This is in contrast to the neo-Malthusian set of ideas, focusing on the need for moral reform of the individual, favoured by the government.

In August 2001 Peter Costello gave the inaugural Sir Henry Bolte Lecture, titled 'The Spirit of the Volunteer'.<sup>18</sup> In the speech he challenged Australians to take on the ideals of volunteerism to alleviate social problems. This request obviously had its caveats as his Draft Charities Bill conveys to volunteers that while they can take the load off government by providing services to the poor, there is no room for them to identify the causes of these problems and relay this information back to government.

It is important that charities can continue to offer one of the few countervailing forces against the bone-dry classical liberalism that is so dominant. Constraining countervailing voices will result in inferior public policy and damage society as a whole. Victim-blaming is currently more prevalent than sophisticated understandings of the multi-faceted origins and nature of poverty. We don't need a Bill that will accentuate this further.

Robert Manne recently argued that our current government is engaged in a long march to quash dissenting views within the key cultural institutions of society.<sup>19</sup> The 'Protocol for NGOs' and the 'Draft Charity Bill' add support to such a view. For what feels like an eternity the government, large sections of the press (particularly the Murdoch press) and the right-wing think-tanks have been bellowing the same old propaganda and narrow ideology. The electorate is now so softened up by all of this that all

sorts of extreme policies and actions are being taken seriously. The initiatives examined in this article are but two products of this environment, but they are particularly disappointing examples.

1. The Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership is a liaison committee that operates through the Department of Family and Community Services. For further information see <www.partnership.zip.com.au/>.
2. IPA website, <www.ipa.org.au>, accessed 3 October 2003.
3. Martin Mowbray, 'War on non profits: NGOs: What do we do about them?', *Just Policy* 30, Victorian Council of Social Service, July 2003, pp.3-13.
4. Brendan Nicholson & Gary Hughes, 'Attack On Covert Project For IPA', *Sunday Age*, 10 August 2003.
5. Ibid.
6. Jennifer Marohasy & Gary Johns, 'World Wildlife Funds Says Jump: Government Asks How High?', *IPA Review* 54:1, March 2002.
7. Roger Bate, 'It's Official: Greenpeace Serves No Public Purpose', *IPA Review* 54:4, 1999.
8. Gary Johns, summary page for 'Protocols with NGOs: The Need to Know', 2001, <www.ipa.org.au/pubs/backgrounddocs/13-1summary.html>.
9. For a detailed discussion of these problems see Tim Thornton, 'The Hydra-headed Monster: Australian NGOs as a danger to democracy', *Overland* 168, 2002.
10. Ibid.
11. Don D'Cruz, 'NGOs Must Become More Accountable', *Australian Financial Review*, 22 July 2003.
12. Paul Wapner, 'Defending Accountability in NGOs', paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, 24-27 March 2002.
13. Danish panel criticises Lomborg, *BBC News*, 8 January 2003, <news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/2640057.stm>.
14. Gary Johns, 'Protocols with NGOs: The Need to Know' background paper, Institute for Public Affairs.
15. Gary Johns, 'Labor's Reform Must Heed the Electorate', *CourierMail*, 22 November 2001. On the comparative success of the IPA as a lobby group, see Wilson Da Silva, 'Signal Drivers', *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, 28 June 2002.
16. Adele Horin, 'More Intimidation as the "Hear No Evil" Regime Targets NGOs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 August 2003.
17. The IPA has been sending out mixed signals on this issue. For an article arguing that the legislation goes too far see Gary Johns, 'Conspiracies and NGOs', *IPA Review* 55:3, 2003. For an article that seems to support the legislation see Mike Nahan, 'Charities That Are Really Political Lobbyists Must Be Exposed', *Age*, 8 August 2003.
18. Peter Costello, 'The Spirit of the Volunteer', <www.australianpolitics.com/news/2001/01-08-15.shtml>, August 2001.
19. Robert Manne, 'Supporters of the ABC might have to open their arms to welcome a new friend', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 August 2003.

*Tim Thornton teaches and researches in the Department of Economics at Monash University and is a member/supporter of the Australian Conservation Foundation and Oxfam Community Aid Abroad.*

# Money is the root of all good.

For all money is blamed for, it can also be a powerful force in making a positive change. | By putting your money with Australian Ethical Investment, you are investing in portfolios dedicated to benefit society and the environment. | They're also the longest established ethical fund manager in Australia. | *Where is your money going?* |

PHONE 1800 021 227 FOR INFORMATION OR VISIT [WWW.AUSTETHICAL.COM.AU](http://WWW.AUSTETHICAL.COM.AU)

*Applications for investment can only be made on the form contained in the current prospectus or superannuation offer document which is available from Australian Ethical Investment Ltd. (ABN 47 003 188 930) Past performance is not indicative of future returns.*

**AUSTRALIAN ETHICAL<sup>®</sup>**  
**INVESTMENT & SUPERANNUATION**

© REGISTERED TRADE MARK OF AUSTRALIAN ETHICAL INVESTMENT LTD



## Surface Histories: A Town in the Wheatbelt

1.

The horse rails gone, then back again,  
an auntie tries the wheel  
of a car that almost looks the same—

searching for gears  
in an automatic, and caught  
by the realisation

that gesturing remains  
incapable of prompting  
the internal combustion engine

to connect, to drive  
the analogue, to drive the main street  
of town, and realising her mistake

an error of visual  
and spatial judgement, as if they  
could ever be separated

detected her own car  
two parking spaces away:  
same colour, same model

but manual version  
in the town where all cars  
are known by family name.

2.

It begins and ends  
in some ways  
with the closing of the banks.

With weekend dalliances  
with historic cars, and shady pasts.  
Boutique hotels

are softened out of hard drinking,  
exteriors of bad seasons  
washed away.

Mains power, scheme water,  
the old court house  
a museum.

It's all settlers  
and cottage industries  
only an hour's drive

from the city.  
Fringing a town of commuters,  
and those who won't let

sons do netball  
in case it turns them,  
like vampires, like 'poofters'.

3.

Recalling childhood  
doesn't mean nostalgia,  
even if swinging out on a rope

into the Avon brings pleasure.  
Amoebic meningitis, those caught  
by snags and roots.

4.

They move into town when kids  
take over the properties,  
or when they've sold up.

Living under the shadow of Mount Bakewell,  
in the vicinity of their former activities.  
High roofs keep old houses cool

on the slopes of Mount Brown,  
and the trucks roll past  
on their way to the bins.

That old man buying groceries  
is Uncle Jack, his wife dead,  
the farm broken up,

he's hard of hearing and frail.  
He's a diviner, though I don't know  
if the electricity's still with him.

5.

They're developing land out back  
on the edge of the river: for years  
claims were made to the shire

and turned down. But parcels  
are being doled out now  
and someone's making a packet:

councils come and go.

6.

The farmer's co-op  
stocks tractor parts and bullets.  
The company that owns it

has underwritten  
the purchase and curation  
of a great art collection:

of Australian art,  
of home, hearth, and nation  
of course.

7.

"There's less racism here  
because we don't want to talk about it."  
Not sure where to go with this . . .

It seems history steps in  
and locals' 'stories' are 'celebrated'.  
There are a variety of histories,

and the lines of the Wagyl are clearly there  
for those who know or want to know  
where to look.

A variety of nationalities  
attend the Catholic church, you'll hear,  
though "not in great numbers".

Location set up  
to speak for itself . . .

8.

Balladong Farm  
is not owned by hippies,  
despite bare feet and an avoidance

of pesticides. "New money  
is temporary," it is said in town,  
"they've let it go to seed."

The riverbank under their protection  
is growing back again, foxes and rabbits  
dialogue and the native birds flourish.

Heritage buildings work as studios,  
and small dramas are played out  
in the theatre.

9.

On the edge of town  
the birds come: at the town's heart  
they cull with guns.

The birdcall is saturation:  
you can see it, the white corellas  
change colour as they intone:

the red of their blood  
hazing paddocks,  
bringing blood vessels

to the surface.  
Consanguinity.  
Rose-coloured glasses.

10.

Holy Trinity,  
locus for an aspect of community.  
There are other churches,

other nationalities within nation.  
I guess all said prayers  
when the young girl

was lost on the railway line.  
Her beliefs are best known by her family.  
Wreaths still hang on the crossing: fresh, vital.

11.

That lot's got tickets on themselves,  
they're up themselves,  
and they're as rough as guts.

Think they're special,  
he drinks and she shoplifts,  
haven't heard of contraception,

so much money they don't know what to do with it,  
rich cockies, dole scroungers,  
a decent family of hard workers—

their daughter worked in the shop  
before going to the city  
to study, mix with the wrong crowd.



12.

That brother hasn't talked to the other  
in thirty years, despite only the railway  
and a vacant block dividing their houses.  
They'd already stopped when settling  
on their building spots: keeping an eye

out through the silence, seeing  
what the other's got. One day  
someone will build the vacant plot

out, though it's likely  
a paper trail will lead to one or both of them,  
the weeds and odd york gum

safe until they've given up the ghost,  
lost sight of each other  
through the growth.

13.

The windows  
of real-estate offices  
offer

that weekend retreat:  
good water,  
a view,

only a touch of salt.  
Tourists come in buses  
and cars, the latter

watched closely  
by realtors. The bush block—increasingly rare,  
the hobby farm—a fad from the 70s,

the horse plot—an active local racing industry  
studded with 'identities',  
the stone house not far

from the river—cellars cool  
to stock their wines. Turnover  
is high. Weekend retreats

are commodities  
that change hands rapidly.  
*Quid faciat laetas segetes . . .*

14.

Festival. Carnivale.  
The sheep in the fields  
embodied.

Harpsichords in the earliest houses,  
jazz in the town hall,  
the end-of-year dance.

A reporter from the Chronicle  
collects names of those he doesn't recognise—  
they come from a far way out,

and there's a percentage  
of the population that floats,  
shifts. A vegan won a baking prize

for a chocolate applesauce cake  
in the great halls of bounty  
last year. The keepers

tasted without knowing  
the absence of eggs and dairy.  
The silent revolution.

15.

Money saved  
in closing down  
the youth centre

is spent on repairs  
and the publicity  
decrying an increase

in vandalism.  
The Gods of Rome  
were lost with its statues.

16.

Drinkers see a different town.  
As if they've got special insight  
and can clearly see the dead

and lost occupying  
the same space  
as the living.

17.

There are still panel vans  
in Australia, and they gather  
in the gravel carpark

opposite the Castle pub  
on Friday and Saturday nights.  
They risk burnouts,

and blokes have it off  
with chicks in the backs.  
The blokes say "she's a good root",

or call her a bush pig if they don't get it.  
There are sluts in town,  
but their side of the story is somewhere else.

18.

Old families: 'settler' and Nyungar,  
are spoken of with reverence or hatred.  
There seems to be no indifference,

at least behind closed doors  
everyone has an opinion.  
Nyungars remember the names

of the whites who didn't murder  
as much as those who did. White  
families are mostly proud

of "treating them right"  
and take pride in the production  
of footballers. Nyungar people

take pride as well,  
but for different reasons,  
also, and at least.

19.

Anonymity of GM trials.  
Landcare for increased profitability.  
Red Bull girls

turning it on for the bike trials.  
The 'roo in Doc Jones' yard  
and the heronry

near the old railway bridge.  
The destruction of the only  
alpine bushland

in the wheatbelt.  
A pair of black-shouldered kites  
nesting just beyond

the point beyond  
which they'll deliver  
no mail.

Voting in the school classrooms.  
Field days and chaff in the air.  
Gradations of heat.

JOHN KINSELLA

## Jesus Christ and Henry Ford

Jesus Christ and Henry Ford,  
the lady will insist,  
explain the modern world between them.  
It's pointless to resist.

She never quite explains but, sure,  
they make a classy pair:  
Henry with his Model Ts  
and Christ to say what's fair,

Henry with his Yankee spanners  
and Jesus with his talk  
of riding camels into heaven.  
No one needs to walk

thanks to Henry's innovations  
back in 1910.  
She hardly knows which to prefer,  
they're both such splendid men—

Henry with his sleeves rolled up  
and underneath the car  
or Jesus with his beard and crook  
and almost on a par.

They'd make a team for vaudeville,  
a kind of soft-shoe pair,  
Henry more the grounded one  
and Jesus in the air.

Mahomet though, she says, and Marx  
will never make the stage.  
Jesus Christ and Henry Ford  
define the modern age.

GEOFF PAGE



## HESLOP'S DOG

PEOPLE WHO HAD NEVER met Heslop—ordinary readers of newspapers and miscellanies, casual consumers of literary dross—were never inclined to question his standing. They might have imagined a dandy, a peripatetic wit strolling from café to theatre vestibule with a circus troupe of foreign phrases ready to dance off the tip of his tongue, but in all likelihood, with thought at a premium in this town, they wouldn't have wasted much of it on him. And if they bothered to read his filler they'd have barely noticed the odd typographical error creeping into his columns, the odd anachronism, or the odd grammatical lapse, let alone the suspiciously derivative character of his most 'distinctive' passages, or the hint of desperation insinuating itself behind names like Dickens, Thackeray and Balzac whenever they popped up in his prose. No doubt their malice had other, more pressing objects to fix upon. But for those who claim to give a damn, the integrity of the Word is an article of faith. These so-called men of letters are like the just men of which the Israelites speak, sent among us to hold the order of things in its precarious balance. Naturally they are overtaxed, their resources stretched thin. Moreover, they are often forced to derive a living from the work of their inferiors—reluctant parasites feeding off unwholesome hosts. On that ground alone their resentment seems justified.

It was only when I met Heslop that the multitude of rumours and anecdotes passed along through newspaper offices, clubrooms and cafés

began to add up. The talk was always laced with poisonous terms like 'hack', 'dunce' and 'dilettante'. Once I even heard him referred to as a 'man without a forte' and Silus Gripper claimed on more than one occasion that his nervous system, like a good many other things at the time, was in the process of 'dephosphorising'. I took it all with a grain of salt. I never really believed that he stuttered, or that this speech impediment together with his relentless Frenchifying and his diminutive stature created something bordering on the ridiculous. I never believed the old story about the roof-tile hitting him in the head, unhinging him, or that chapters in his masterpiece (his 'so-called masterpiece' the cynics would add) were written by obscure associates while Heslop himself crawled in and out of an alcoholic stupor. Jacob Croakthorn, whose claim to fame was that he once met Dickens before his teeth rotted and he sailed for the colonies, used to complain that Heslop sucked his brains out over supper, but never had two pennies to rub together when it came to paying for the meal. And on it went. Resentment, I used to think to myself, recalling Croakthorn's yellow stumps, the laughing stock of the Victorian bar.

I met Heslop in the Exford Hotel, just after his last work, *Memoirs of a Bohemian*, was published, and roundly condemned. But before I get to that let me add, just to be sure there is no mistake, that I think his so-called masterpiece, accusations and innuendo notwithstanding, displays a mind at least

capable of penetrating the veil of things, of striving to articulate the hidden springs of modern life, the impossible, formless despair that finally turns us all into stone. If it is also a botch-up, it only goes to prove the old adage that an audacious failure outweighs a shelf of trivial successes.

But by the time he wrote his last work, literary society was sick of the man. His stutter, his mooching, his persistent ability to occupy precious column space and his tiresome aping of manners better suited to a world of decapitated aristocrats, had all taken their toll. *Memoirs of a Bohemian* was just the pretext the men of letters needed to hobble him, and opinion was brutal. Someone noted the something-or-other was misspelt on the very first page, that someone-or-other was misquoted a few pages later, that Aborigines were never 'lynched' in Ballarat and that no one prospecting for gold in the 1850s could have read *Les Fleurs du mal*, which didn't appear until some years later. A waste of paper, a farce, a monstrosity. Childish, careless, and incompetent.

I'd read some of these reviews by the time I was introduced at the Exford. Shocked by their vehemence, I was also amazed to find the man willing to show his face out of doors. But there he was, puffing away on a cigar, repose seemingly intact, while Henry Eastwood, as he was then called, introduced us.

"Pleased to meet you," I said, watching for the hint of something that might reveal, to the satisfaction of the little bit of malice lurking within me, that he knew how badly his book had come off in the press.

I can't pretend to recreate the oddity of the man's speech. As the conversation got going his repose vanished. He posed, postured, stammered and stuttered from one outlandish opinion to the next. Sentences contorted and syntax inverted, as his train of thought ran awry through forests of archaic nonsense, dipped and rose over absurd undulations of sensibility, and then capered about in buskins. "Io" and "doch" to this and that, and

"dear, dear Alcibiades" every time Henry tried to open his mouth.

I was thoroughly sick of the man by the time he ran out of energy and slowed to a weary mutter.

"Dear boy," he spluttered, drawing Henry closer. "Is that m-m-mongrel still giving me the proverbial?" He gestured over his shoulder with a jerk of his head. "Blasted creature."

In a doorway at the edge of the bar, a huge black Labrador-cross sat in a heap of loose, grey skin and greasy hair, its wet tongue hanging out over its blunted fangs, one bloodshot eye wandering lazily in its socket, the other firmly fixed, with all the pathos of canine longing, on Heslop. As poor an excuse for an ill omen—assuming that's what it was—as anything I'd ever seen. The mangy animal looked addled, beaten by the heat and irritated by the smoke.

Heslop glanced nervously at the dog. His haggard face flushed, and he looked a bit sick, grimacing as if he had just swallowed something bitter. He thought for a moment, then pulled a scrap of paper and a pencil stub out of his jacket pocket and scribbled out a note to himself. He re-read it, nodded, and then gave the dog a weary salute.

"I suppose you've s-s-seen the reviews," he said finally, looking a bit crestfallen.

Henry nodded.

"I suppose you th-think it's a wonder I can get out of b-bed in the morning?"

Henry shrugged.

"And you, Mr, Mr what's-your-name?"

I think I looked at my shoelaces and mumbled into my stout.

Heslop's hand was now trembling.

"A farrago, a hotch-p-potch, they said."

He patted his waistcoat absent-mindedly and then rummaged again through his pockets, finally picking out another fragment of paper from the jumble of rubbish and lint. Again he scribbled something out, writing quickly as if he were on the verge of forgetting his own idea.

"Clowns," he said, not bothering to look up at



us. “These cl-clowns, confident in their own opinions. Was there anything so crass as a man who t-trumpets his own opinion? Or worse, a man who, with all d-d-due humility, claims the t-title of his own opinion?” He leapt to his feet, in a fit of theatrics, and puffed out his chest. “I, the p-p-perpendicular, genius possessor of my b-brain’s good bloody sense, and ergo . . . and ergo . . .” His voice tapered off. He looked at the dog in the corner, then turned on his heel. “Well, good day my friends,” he mumbled.

As he made his way to the street, leaving Henry to pay of course, the miserable canine dragged itself to its feet and limped out after him, a string of saliva hanging off its tongue.

I have to confess I had no idea what he was talking about. But a little later, as I perused his last, failed work in the peace of my own study, I was struck by, well, struck by what? Not its incoherence. That would be too simple.

*Memoirs of a Bohemian*: it had a plot, of sorts, but when you thought it over, it ran through your fingers like a handful of fine sand. It had an omniscient voice, but when you listened, it seemed to splinter into a hundred different voices, each breaking down into sentences tortuously stitched together out of incongruous moods, impulses, phrases and idioms. It was a jumble, a medley, a preposterous exercise in confusion and disorder, deceptively bound together as if it all made sense. But that was the rub. It did make sense. If you came at it from a different angle, it read like a fairly conventional narrative, with all the standard melodramatic clichés and the pretentiousness of a writer trying desperately to disown them, as if they were poor relations he couldn’t quite shake.

As I thought about this, weighing the book in my hand, I recalled Heslop’s departing words and remembered a review I’d read in the *Argus* a week or so earlier. I hurried it out of the papers that cluttered my desk and quickly found the line that Heslop’s diatribe had echoed.

“Of course,” concluded the review, “this is just

one critic’s opinion. What else am I entitled to?”

It was a modest enough claim. Yet in the murky light of Heslop’s book it seemed suddenly absurd. I tried to conjure up an image of this writer—Wharton was his name—as a neatly attired first person pronoun, confident in the singular repose of his opinion. All I could see were two bulging, bespectacled eyes at the top of a long, inky stick. It was the only image my mind could dredge up to capture the grotesque conceit of a human corpulence—nerves, vesicles, organs and enough intestinal tract to run the length of the Royal Arcade—taming the utter chaos of its own fickle biology and settling on an opinion.

About a week later I bumped into Heslop again. It was late and I was making my way home after an evening stroll in the company of a cigarette. I suppose another week of awful reviews and relentless satire had taken its toll. The man looked dreadful. He staggered into me and clung to my neck for support. He spluttered something into my ear in a language I couldn’t for the life of me decipher. It wasn’t English, French or German, though it bore a remote family resemblance to all three. After a few moments of drunken pantomime, I understood that I’d be doing him a great favour if I could help him find his way home.

I put my arm around him and escorted the poor wretch towards Swanston Street. I knew he lived in St Kilda, and imagined that if I could trundle him into a cab and send it on its way down St Kilda Road, I’d have done my duty.

Not a bit of it.

“I’m not taking that wreck anywhere,” the cabby said brusquely.

“I’ll pay you now,” I said, hand fumbling in my pocket.

“Bah,” he laughed.

It was a hot night and I was ready to get out of it. I turned around, looking for a more obliging driver.

For a second, I swear, my heart stopped. The black dog from the Exford was sitting behind us,

eye obstinately fixed on Heslop's ragamuffin body slouched in my arms. Of course the thing looked innocuous in itself, but for a moment the idea behind its presence, the sense of coincidence, of predestination, touched upon some atavistic chord that had me shuddering at the sight of it.

I hastily pushed Heslop into the cab, ignoring the protests of the cabby, and then jumped in myself. Only as the cab rattled over Princes Bridge and the lights of the city faded behind the elm trees of St Kilda Road could I admit to myself that I'd overreacted to the harmless animal.

By the time we were at the junction Heslop had regained enough clarity to direct the cab to a drab, single-storey dwelling on Inkerman Street. He was still unsteady on his feet, so I asked the driver to wait while I helped him in.

It was hotter inside the house than out. Heslop lent into me as I escorted him through the hallway. There were no lamps on, but it was a moonlit night, and with the curtains in the front room open I could see that it was a neat, if crowded home. A small child slept quietly in a crib pushed up under the window. Another child, a girl of four or five, snored uncomfortably on a mattress beside a couch which held yet another slumbering child, a boy who seemed to be fending off the heat and the sound of creaking floorboards by flinging his arms up over his head like a sleeping lunatic.

Children everywhere. For a second I had the absurd impression that Heslop was hoarding them.

"The st-st-study please," Heslop mumbled. "Deposit me there."

The study? I must have raised an eyebrow, imagining sleeping children stretched out along its bookshelves.

We walked another step into a room not much bigger than a closet. I banged the tops of my knees against the edge of a rickety table, while Heslop slouched into an austere wooden chair, wedged in between the table and the wall, and fumbled about with an oil lamp, eager to illuminate the full extent of his decrepitude.

As the flame hissed inside the glass, the light flickered over his haggard, slightly scrofulous face. The tiny room was a shambles, overflowing with bits of paper, old journals, illustrated magazines, second-hand tomes, dog-eared paperbacks with disintegrating spines, chewed cigar butts and a coarse, brownish-grey substance that, not quite dust, resembled something between stale bread crumbs and flakes of dry skin. As I took it in and wondered, vaguely, about how the laws of entropy apply to the life of the mind, Heslop was emptying his pockets onto the table, divesting his clothing of a multitude of minute scraps of paper, each carrying a few hastily scribbled words. The man is made of memoranda, I thought, watching him spill handfuls of these tiny notes over his lap, then onto the ground. I could only make out the odd word or phrase: 'façade', 'dead duck', 'empty void', 'neurasthenia', 'cuckoo', 'modern times', 'agoraphobic'—fragments from some grand encyclopaedia of modern dementia.

"*Kleinprosa*," he said, slurring his words. "Try, just try, to gather these, these c-crumbs into your archive."

He tossed a handful of paper scraps into the air and cackled.

In the next room a baby whined and a woman's voice, gentle and patient, immediately tried to soothe it back to sleep. I imagined a mother lying awake, eyes glued anxiously to the ceiling, just waiting for Heslop's carry-on to disturb the repose of the house.

"A monstrosity," Heslop said, calming himself. "They called my book a monstrosity. And so it is, according to some Latin root. The thing revealed, like a f-f-freak of n-nature. Frankensteinian." He got down on his hands and knees, searching through the debris on the floor. "Something here to that effect. Let's see."

There was a scratch at the windowsill. We both looked up, startled. A wet nose in the half-light. A moist smudge of slobber on the glass. A bloodshot eye drooping towards us.

"Ha!" Heslop croaked.

"Please Georgie," said the woman in the next room.

"You can see it as well?" Heslop asked excitedly, "Yes? Yes? Carried!" He opened the window. "You'd think I could have had a c-cat, or a raven."

The dog hauled itself through the open window and sat itself down amongst Heslop's rubbish with surprising indifference for a creature that had tramped the length of St Kilda Road.

"I should be going," I said, backing away from the animal, but marvelling at the midnight vision of man and dog sniffing in the ruins.

"Yes," he laughed, patting the animal. "Yes, should be thanking you." He put a handful of paper scraps into my hands and closed them tight.

A baby screamed. The stench of the dog was overpowering, the hot air asphyxiating.

"Should be thanking you," Heslop repeated. "I, I, I," he was shaking with mirth as he spoke. The word seemed stuck in his throat like a bone. He stopped, still convulsing, and changed tack, addressing the dog, which was now rubbing its backside across the floor. "Got a case of the worms as well, have yah?"

Heslop died of pleurisy about six months later. His last days didn't pass without note. First there were loud objections, but gradually these dwindled to a few miscellaneous lines here and there to the effect that a once upright member of the press was making a sorry spectacle of himself, insulting so-and-so, threatening such-and-such, embarrassing himself and his former associates. I kept the memory of that night with him to myself for some time. Finally, in circumstances that I don't quite recall, I mentioned it to old Tom Ward, who had worked in the library for decades and had a weak-

ness for literary anecdotes.

When I touched upon the dog, Tom stopped me quite abruptly.

"A black dog you said?"

"That's right."

"And do you think it got a good look at you? Or a good sniff?"

"Couldn't say?"

He looked worried.

"If you ever see that thing again," he said, drawing in breath through his nostrils, "kill it. Do you take my meaning?"

I must have looked puzzled, incredulous.

"Kill it, because once that mangy thing has your scent, well, there's no throwing it off."

I knew Tom was superstitious. I was impressed that his imagination had the ability to fashion such a spectre out of Heslop's poor dog, and already I had the outline of some bestial Gothic fable of my own forming in my brain. Of course I'd neglected to add just how hopeless the animal looked, how utterly devoid of evil intent. And even then the city had outgrown my capacity for such invention. Crowds, trams, electricity, phone lines, sprawling suburbs—a chance meeting with the most ordinary of living creatures, let alone one loaded with such dubious allegorical properties, seemed remote, a fact that, in itself, is suggestive of how we have chosen to live here and the strange, truncated nature of our experience.

Naturally enough, that animal never crossed my path again. In its absence, I'm afraid, the story of Heslop's demise will have to remain a fairly pedestrian one, concluded, to no good end, in the obscurity that so often accompanies a career lived out—and killed off—in the colonies.

## floating fund

We would like to thank Songlines and once again our friends and supporters for generously giving

to keep *Overland* afloat. Thanks this quarter are due to: \$100 S.P., M.F., I.S.; \$58 J.H.; \$50 D.&P.G.; \$33 T.T.; \$25 M.R.; \$20 K.J.S., R.D.; \$18 D.N., I.P.; \$8 R.B., L.D., Z.D., J.C., D.B., P.R.; \$3 D.B.W.; Totalling: \$593.



## PAYING BABY

SHEER BLACK PANTYHOSE, cheapest brand on the shelf and knee-high black boots, scuffed and coloured in patches with a broken biro. Heels that were a killer. Hope bulldozes its way through her body as she wipes her mouth with the butt of a discount lipstick.

She has a short conversation with herself, pouting those cerise lips, in her rusty mirror.

*Hi, I'm Susanna, how are you? Yes, old school friends from the country. Hi, how are you?*

Smiling her sweetest smile, a quick flick of the hair. Imagination and projection of what could be, will be, quicken her pulse, and she appraises her reflection favourably. She particularly likes her cami-sole top and will not admit to being even a little nervous about making a good impression, having buried in her subconscious the suggestion that anxiety would ride as a bad precursor.

She picks up the invitation and reads it again, unable to suppress her smile, striking in its infantile delight. Inside the invitation her old friend has written her a note, a personal note, and she reads this aloud: *Dear Susanna, nice to hear from you again and to hear about your move to the city. Hope to see you Saturday night.*

She rounds her vowels, pronouncing the words slowly, savouring the semantics.

Saturday night, party night. Her big opening night, tonight.

The birthday party of this old schoolmate, in a big house with an ocean view and plenty of young,

beautiful people to make friends with. A bus ride to the sea. She hasn't seen the friend, birthday girl, for years, for more than ten years, but she remembers the day she left. Remembers standing on the broken bit of gutter wearing her budding breasts like a disfigurement, watching her one friend drive off, waving goodbye through the back window of her parents' station wagon.

Then fifteen years of great gulping mouthfuls. It had almost swallowed her, that town.

Until she had moved to the city, until she was here.

It had been a relief to escape her father's excuses of weak and limitless consistency and her mother's endless, endless cleaning. Scrubbing and scrubbing and washing windows, curtains, dishes, pots and pans, the tiresome slop of the mop manoeuvred around the ill-matching chairs, their legs sinking steadily into the mire of the drab patterned lino covering the kitchen floor. The buds of her mother's assumptions would always, in the end, bear fruit.

"He's had a little upset," her mother would say, her stomach clutching tenaciously onto its contents; cup of tea, toast spread with homemade jam, and then she would walk out the front door and continue walking down the long bland roads towards the outskirts of town, tracks well trodden, worn and tired. Always, she would close the screen door gently behind her.

Only once had Susanna followed her mother,

watched her watching the cattle trucks thumping their way out of town, stinking and groaning, and wondered what it was her mother saw on these walks that absolved her pain and brought her back through the front door; carried her over the threshold of the fly strip and the chipped cement stairs. Susanna saw nothing that day but the glint of tears staining her mother's eyes, trickles of mucus sliding through the pits and creases of her pursed lips. The spittle of panic growing from the corners of her mouth as she stood on the side of the road, the violence of her distress diminishing somehow in the heat. The cleansing would begin with her return, dusting and polishing her way through the disgrace of her husband having bedded the post office lady; the new schoolteacher, lonely and lost; the publican's widow. Lonely and lost. He was, is now, will be, the wreckage of a family man, marooned in a youthful mirage of what he was once. Her mother vacuumed around the carcass of a husband.

He hunted the exhausted, her father. Easy targets, simple prey—the tired having no resilience. Women whose skin wore the stench of sweat and tobacco masked with the spray from a bottle of cheap perfume. Breathing through bourbon-rusted teeth.

Susanna would never have thought that a town so small would people enough women for the enormity of her father's disgrace. Her shame had been insurmountable, had curdled her teenage years. She could have watered the dust and the rubble of the place with the pity she felt showered upon her. Her mother's sadness had been too evident for too many years and had spiced every meal she ever cooked. Gourmet chef of misery-flavoured chops.

No chops in the city. No chops ever again.

She looks in her mirror one last time and smiles to the imaginary group of people she will meet. Although she is dust-blown and wheat weary she still believes readily in the promise of opportunity. She has decided it is only the ghost of herself she wants to have ever lived in that town. In the mirror, far away from the small cluster of houses in that

rural town named nowhere, she envisages herself anew.

She wonders, as she picks up her keys and closes the door behind her, what she will tell these people she does for work. Here in the city. She knows she can't tell them the truth. Winding her way down the staircase she hears the grunts and groans of a cheap thrill as she passes flat eight and the screams of a broken woman in flat six, an echo of a slap; a contribution to her existence from a man whose life was broken long before. In her hand she clutches the invitation, embossed with a delicate floral pattern in gold.

Hi, I'm Susanna, how are you. Hi.

The discernible scent of desperation follows her down the stairs.

THE INVITATION he had placed atop a pile of many others and he pictures, imagines nothing about his fortunes at the birthday party tonight. Presumption plays no role in his mind. His fortunes are as organised as his life and as favourable and pleasing as his face is to look at. He has showered and changed, hair damp, and he is only a little sunburned from his day on the harbour.

From the view of his apartment window he could see, if the inclination led him, his boat but this view had become commonplace, morphing itself from a luxury into an unquestioned parameter of his existence. It simply was.

He is, has always been, an exceptionally good-looking man.

His persona has arranged itself into the summation of social aspirations. His status a mirror of the ideal and when he shaves, his blue, deep blue eyes rest upon a reflection of utopian properties. Publicly parcelled, publicly designated. A delicious mélange of character traits and situations deemed desirable (the more imaginative of his admirers describe him as edible). In turn, he regards some of them, these women, as edible too. His wealth of position has allowed him the time for occasional generosity, and he is everything everybody would want to be.

His availability simply startles them.

He laughed his way through an affluent childhood, charmed his way through opportune teenage times. Learnt his way with women well.

He is unaware of the comfort he finds in his assets, so ingrained is the presence of the enviable. He wears the shoes of his life well, strides unquestionably, confidently, through the Shangri-la of his existence. He just was, is, in all his resplendent glory.

He calls his father, with whom he has been sailing, to see if the old man is home yet. A courtesy call.

“Terrific day,” his father booms down the line. “Simply terrific. And listen Nick, your mother wants you over for dinner Tuesday night. Something about the daughter of a friend of a friend or something.” His father laughs and Nick hangs up with a smile. He has a beautiful smile and there has always been, will always be, the daughter of a friend of a friend. He has shared the amusement of his eligibility with his father for a few years; his parents ooze pride from every pore.

He brews himself a coffee, looks for the paper his housekeeper seems to move about and is just about to leave when his phone rings again. His mobile phone, whose call he hears for a while before he finds it.

“Well, hi,” he says, and his voice lowers slightly, recognition flavouring his tones with indulgence. “Going to the birthday party of a mate’s girlfriend so I don’t know about tonight.” As he listens to the words of enticement he looks out towards the harbour but sees nothing.

After a short time listening, he smiles, cedes, convinced.

“Well, if you’ll be wearing nothing, I’ll be there about twelve.”

He puts the phone in his pocket, picks up his keys and drives to the party with the top down, letting the early evening air rush over his face.

THIS EARLY EVENING AIR she breathes in deeply, on her walk from the bus stop to the house.

She thinks she can smell the sea.

Everybody starts at the bottom, a voice funnels through her mind. The sentence repeats itself over again, playing a silent tune, beating syllabically in rhythm with her heels on the footpath. When she thinks of her job she feels sick.

For the hopeful, the expectant, disappointment digs a devastating hole. In the middle of the room in the big house by the sea, the beginnings of descent begin after less than an hour.

She clutches in her hand the invitation as she walks through the front door, not knowing whether she will have to produce it to gain entry, tangible evidence, permission for admission. Propelled by the crowd she finds herself through the entry, down the hallway and into a room where she is surrounded by the beautiful, worldly, rich. A man offers her a drink, handing her a glass, which she takes with an anticipatory production of her well-practised smile.

Hi, I’m Susanna. How are you?

Her mouth cannot form the words and anyway he has looked away and is laughing with somebody else. She stands, holding her lifeboat liquid tightly and watches, waiting for the commencement of her new life.

And then the slow realisation of laughter and laughing and glances.

She quickly becomes a black and white snapshot of herself at a gawky 13; the effort, the ability, to colour herself in wilts rapidly in the heat of her displacement.

She thought, she had hoped, these beautiful people, worldly, rich, would welcome her into their world. Bus her away from her cheap bed-sit in the lower part of town. From the massage parlours and bought minutes of love to the sea. Her beginning, her rejuvenation, slides slowly down the wall upon which her back leans.

She searches for a face of kindness but instead stands next to isolation, mentally digresses into her own personal party of ostracism. Birthday of exile. She begins to doubt the surety of her presumptions.



She catches the remnants of conversations from which she is prohibited; samples food, finger food, party snacks, upon which she gags and summons all her will to swallow. Is aware, cannot possibly be unaffected by, sideways glances and surreptitious looks. She wishes, with all her being, her skirt were just two inches longer. She didn't know. How could she have known? Her prior examination of possible profession has been futile. The question never posed, her rehearsals of conversation falling into the world of the superfluous. There is not a single person present who has the compassion or forethought to talk to her. A small part of her fills with comprehension. The different, the inept, she knows, are fearful.

Again a photo, aged 13.

Of her attempts to wash the dust and the rubble, the grinds of wheat powder tattooed into her skin, she becomes embarrassed. Her metamorphosis no more than an ill-fitting and temporary disguise.

An uncharacteristically good-looking man, exceptionally detaches himself from the rest. Bravely smiles at her, nods, before he is coaxed, cajoled back into his world. A brief journey, she is thankful at least for a moment.

Hi, I'm Susanna. How are you? Hi.

Everybody starts at the bottom.

She is almost exhausted when her friend spots her across the room. I have been looking for you, she says, carefully, kindly, ignoring Susanna's inappropriate attire. As hostess, she owns the indulgence of being able to approach the disagreeable without fear of recrimination. Have you had something to eat, to drink? She is so glad Susanna could come. She has lost any dust years ago and Susanna wonders if she remembers the name of the town at all. For this friend it is long ago, absolutely left behind.

"You can stay here the night if you need to," she says and Susanna smiles and says thank you, knowing she will have to leave at eleven. Work at twelve. Under differing circumstances she would liken herself to Cinderella, but the essence of the tale is far removed from her reality.

"How are your parents?" the friend asks her, yelling above the music, the frenzy of clever conversation. Susanna says quickly that they are fine, well, happy, just the same, and her voice falls from its false bright tune, its party melody, to an unavoidably dull thud as her sentence draws to a close. It is Saturday night, pub night. It is beer night and her mind wanders to an image of an overweight widow, her breath reeking of cask wine and rings of sweat staining the underarms of her discount-store dress. Lucky recipient of her father's charms.

"Just the same," she repeats and the friend changes the subject. Unknowingly, her small talk takes on an unmistakably conciliatory tone.

Awkwardness has replaced friendship; Susanna fights for common ground. The present situation has lost the companionship of the past and feelings of intrusion shoot guiltily through her body. She feels, she is, has been, trespassing into a restricted area. An interloper in the life of the unattainable.

Depleted, she is deflated. The friend leaves, must mingle. She stands alone again. Watching.

HE SAW HER against the wall, the girl with the bad skirt, bad clothes, the lipstick, and was almost barrelled with indifference before her glance caught his. Later, just after eleven, he went looking for her, without knowing why and she was gone. Just her glass, still full, left on a counter top near where she had stood.

THE DILAPIDATION of her expectations is so absolute she leaves the stinking shreds of them behind at the party. Leaves them lying on the floor in the middle of the room in the big house near the sea. Stepped over, around, on, by the beautiful, the unaccommodating, ungenerous. It will be two years before she can again stomach sushi.

On the bus ride home she sinks into her seat, the shallow pit of herself widening into a gaping aperture. She fears she will fall to the bottom.

Everybody starts at the bottom.

She climbs the stairs to her dingy bed-sit with a

heaviness that threatens to overwhelm, but somewhere inside her there is something resisting the merciless. She packs her bag for work, drinks a glass of tap water and looks out of the small window to the streets below. The pimps and the pushers, the prostitutes, walk by and the drunken shouts will continue until morning. The sea seems so very far away.

When she closes her door and leaves again that night she is stopped momentarily by the beaten-up and beaten down woman in flat six.

“You dropped your key, honey,” she says. She is smoking and her eye is black, she is wearing a red teddy and Susanna can see her nipples through the net material.

“Thanks,” Susanna says, and is about to walk away when the woman suddenly smiles, sensing, it seems, the sting of tears in Susanna’s eyes. The price of delusion, she finds, has been more than she can afford.

“You’ll be all right, hon,” she says.

And with only the intangibly intended, Susanna feels the seeding of strength to believe again in the value of humility.

At twelve, she is on her knees.

Scrubbing, scrubbing a floor, wiping away the memory of her excursion to the sea. Like her mother, she thinks, she will cleanse her pain with a brush, a mop, the acrid smell of disinfectant, familiar, comforting.

At twelve, the cyclical strategy of coping, of management, seems abundantly innate. Or a learned behaviour? She doesn’t know. Rows of toilets to go, floors of toilets to sterilise.

From the hours of twelve through to five she will wash away her unworthiness. And it won’t be forever, she says to herself, cleaning the bathrooms of office blocks at night, from midnight till five wiping away the urine stains, drops, from the toilet seats of

the important, of the people at the party. Leaving them shiny and sanitised. She thinks of where she lives, of the red-teddy woman, and knows anyway, there are worse ways to start.

The clarity of this, at last, brings respite. Everybody starts at the bottom.

Fortuity is capricious; it will catch her she thinks.

AND AT TWELVE, Nick stands at the end of a bed; black satin sheets, draped with a leopard-skin throw and a quivering naked body.

As promised, this body is wearing nothing.

The fat man smiles and Nick sees the shiny sparkle of saliva in the corner of his mouth. He is licking his lips. Licking his lips and smacking his teeth together in anticipation of delight. When the fat man hears Nick come in he turns his balding head toward the young man and smiles moving his hips a little, arms behind his head. He sprouts thin, white legs, knobby knees, dark veins running thickly through the lower half of his calves. They mingle with the spider veins patterning his skin.

He licks his armpit, his hairy, saggy-skinned armpit and leers at the young man.

“You know what I like baby,” he says and the young man smiles and undoes the first button on his shirt.

He was, has always been, will always be, an exceptionally good-looking man. He is everything everybody would want to be.

“Yeah, I know what you like baby,” he says and stands before the bed, holding out his hand. “Money first,” he says, and he turns around to undress, pushing the wad of notes into his pocket. Furtive income, secret, so secret, lost hours.

And when he turns around the smile topples from Nick’s face. Just slides to the floor with his two-hundred-dollar shirt.

The sea seems so very far away.

## DRIVEN FROM DARACKMORE TO TOONENBUCK

THERE WERE RUMOURS all around Darackmore last night that unmarked police cars had screamed into Toonenbuck. Big, dark Commodores all the way from Melbourne. I was out for a girls' night so I heard all about it. But John didn't cos he was at home watching the footy. I couldn't hide the *Sunday Herald Sun* from him this morning, though.

He sat at the table, staring at page three. His spoon was in his cereal, but he didn't dig anything out. He just looked down at the paper.

I put my hand on his shoulder and he stayed sitting there for a bit. Then he was up and out the back sliding door. Now he's just sitting there on the kids' swing, lighting up a smoke.

He puffs the smoke out and swings back and forward a bit. He's got his shorts on. I like him in those. His legs don't look much different to when I met him in high school. I reckon it was a day when he was wearing his blue school shorts I decided I'd marry him. Or at least have his babies.

I WAS BORN in Darackmore and so was John. He lived on a farm five Ks out near Patterson but, still, between us we've lived in the area all our lives. Except for when we went to live in Heathmere for two years so John could play footy with them. He got paid, but not enough as far I was concerned to keep us two hours' trip away from our families. They said they'd give him more money to stay for another year, but I'm glad we came back.

John's had the Mobil servo for about ten years now. He's always been a car man. Reckons when he was 5 his dad showed him the ins and outs of an engine. Shone the torch all over an HQ's motor. His dad pointed out the head gasket, plugs, the fan. Wasn't much else in them, John told me.

Every now and again he gets in his head that he wants to pack up the tools and do something else. Says he's sick of working on late-model cars.

What the hell else does he reckon he's gonna do? I remind him about the years he did in Bonlac's factory before he became a registered mechanic. Does he want to go back to the stink of cheesy, milky crap spewing into silver vats all day? That usually shuts him up. Plus, I remind him the good thing about working on late-model cars is no-one's too cluey on how they work. He can charge a fair whack to do stuff that he hasn't got much idea about cos no-one else has got a clue about it, either.

Enough said. John's cheaper than any bastard in Melbourne and he doesn't get many complaints.

I PUT ME BOWL in the dishwasher and stick a couple of bits of bread in the toaster. I look out the glass sliding door again and now John's looking up at me, all sad eyes. I pull me dressing gown tight around me and head outside.

John, it's not *your* bloody fault.

He looks up at me and says, Keep your voice down.



He gets off the swing and walks over to the washing line. Looks at it like there's something more important than his overalls hanging there.

It's Sunday mornin, Johnny. No-one's gunna hear us.

There's always someone around.

I head back inside to get him some toast.

DARACKMORE'S not a big place. Last census we came in at 2500. But Sandra Mulligan at the council reckons they buggerise around with those numbers so we can keep our 'town status'. I dunno what that's all about. It's still a town as far as I can tell, no matter how many people live in it.

We're much bigger than Patterson and Mortdale, and definitely Toonenbuck. I don't think there's fifty people out there these days. The Bramsoko Council wanted to push the speed limit through the place back up to 100 Ks. Only the Crown Hotel car park stopped them. Tom Sheppard the publican got stuck into council one night and said his 'patrons' could get wiped out pulling from the car park into traffic.

Apparently George Sinclair from the council yelled out, That's if they haven't been wiped out by your mob already.

A few of the others had a snigger. Tom wasn't impressed by all reports. Stared at them all till they quietened down. Threatened to get his cousin from Melbourne to look into it all. The one that has 'a few different ventures'. And that worried them. Plus his cronies were sitting alongside Sheppard with their fat heads and arms full of tats.

I don't reckon Sheppard and his mob have done as many things as everyone's said over the years. If they have, Christ knows why they're still free to lean all over the Crown bar every night. John reckons for sure they did what they were supposed to have to Chris Harrison's eye. The poor bastard wears a patch now. He said it was a stuff-up with fencing wire flinging back at him, but John tells me that's bullshit.

Still, it's 80 through Toonenbuck and past the Crown, but you've gotta do 60 clicks through Darackmore. You've got the Avenue of Honour, pine trees on your left and right. If you're coming from Melbourne way, the bluestone Catholic Church

comes up on your left, and the school's next door to it. About a half a K on there's Macca's on your right, houses on both sides and the Three Maids Hotel.

You go past all the other shops, then there's another school, the Anglican Church and then John's Mobil out where there aren't as many houses. During the day there's usually a car in his garage up on a hoist and John there with his head up under it.

If you drove through Darack last Friday night, though, you wouldn't have seen much of all that because the streetlights are shithouse. But the Mobil garage light was on and John was in there still with his head up under a car. John should have told whoever's car it was to get stuffed cos he had a party to go to. But he's got a bad habit of trying to make everything sweet with everyone. That's why he's out there now on the swing, worrying.

Seven a clock he rings me and says the car's timing's all stuffed up and he'll probably be another couple of hours. I told him you're not bloody wrong the timing's all stuffed up, what about the party tonight? John said just get the babysitter to come a bit later and he'd get home as soon as he could.

I TAKE HIM out a couple of pieces of toast now with a bit of peanut butter on them. He asks where the kids are and I tell him Brent's still in bed and the other two are watching a video. He takes a bite out of one of his toasts and then looks up at me from the swing.

I've gotta go down the station and tell em what I know. He swallows then takes another bite.

I shake my head at him.

You're not goin anywhere. What can you tell em, anyway?

Tell em I could have done somethin.

I sigh at him.

Like what? That's bullshit, John.

He grabs tighter on the swing rope like he's going to pull himself up and head off. I get worried he might be serious.

Look, just sit there for a bit, will ya? Have a think about it. I'll go and make you a cuppa.

I put my hand on his shoulder and he looks down again at his toast.

WE'D BEEN at the party a half hour. John was sitting at an outdoor table, looking at his stubby. I said to him, What's the matter with you? You're quiet . . .

So he spilled his guts. What there was to spill.

He reckons he knew straight away they were from out of town. Even before he heard the tins rattling along behind their car and saw *Just Married* scrawled in white paint on a side panel. A bloke with darkish skin wound down his window. John said the woman leaning across from the passenger seat had a kind of, but not really, Asian-looking face.

He told them, Pump's closed, sorry.

The bloke said, No, not, not, we stay.

John was gunna give him a blast, but then he realised the bloke was looking for somewhere to stay the night. He gave him directions back into town: past the school on your left, the second big pine tree, to the sign that says 500 metres, the river alongside you then you're at Fenwick Guesthouse. It'll have a vacancy, everything else is probably full up. Footy finals and the flower show, too, you know.

John reckons the bloke looked at him dumb-like and the woman sniffed and blew her nose.

Playing the tour guide wasn't getting the car in the garage fixed or John any closer to getting home for a shower and spruce-up. He tried again to explain how to get to the Fenwick, but the pair of them came out with a heap of *whos* and *whats* all in the wrong order so John said, *Toonenbuck*.

He pointed straight down the highway, talked them through the right over the bridge that you couldn't miss, and then straight onto the Crown Hotel. They'd have a bed. The woman smiled, the bloke said, We thank, shoved ten bucks in John's hand and they pulled away.

John reckons straight away he felt his guts sink. Just the thought of this pair bowling up to Sheppard and his mob at the Crown. On a Friday night. Didn't like it one iota so he waved his hand and they pulled up. He ran up to the bloke's side and the bloke wound down his window. Not as far this time.

Mate, look, I'll grab me car and show ya the way to the Fenwick.

John tried to shove the ten bucks back into the

bloke's hand. The bloke said, No, no, you keep. The woman smiled and they pulled away, tin cans rattling down the highway pulled by a Nissan Bluebird.

I'VE BOILED the kettle twice. Put a couple of last night's pizza plates in the dishwasher. Keeping my eyes on John the whole time. I'm watching him when he's up and off the swing and in through the back sliding door. Straight past me and grabs the car keys off the hook.

Where are you goin John?

He looks at me, but he's still clammed up and heading for the front door. I go after him and we both end up on the front decking.

I grab his arm and it stops him.

Just stay put. You didn't do anything.

With his free arm he grabs me. Then talks through his teeth like he's some tough bloke.

If I didn't do anythin then it doesn't matter if I go down and tell em what I know . . .

I raise my voice and that gets him looking from one neighbour's yard to the other.

For Chrissake, John! You've worked bloody hard to keep the servo goin and you've got three kids. You don't want to go and get mixed up in all that stuff at Toonenbuck.

He goes to pull his arm away when we both see the dark-coloured Commodores, and a normal cop car behind them. There's blokes in suits with dark sunnies on, sitting in all the Commodores. I reckon I catch a look at a couple of the regulars from the Crown in the back seat of one of them. I ask John whether he thinks it is and he says he doesn't know.

It's all right now, I say. But John just keeps looking at the cars.

We stand there and watch them speed up as they hit the 80 zone. When the last one disappears over the rise, I head back inside. But John doesn't.

I come back out and bring him a cup of tea and sit down next to him on the edge of the decking. He sits there blowing his smoke out and looking away towards the rise in the road. I put my arm around him.

## A HAIR OF THE DOG

WHEN IN THE SUMMER of 1995 Trevor Hardle, a former process worker, was bitten by his neighbour Brian Patten's dog, Paul, no-one could have anticipated the consequences it would have for the two men involved, let alone the poor dog itself. The dog was in a sense an innocent victim in all this and would if it could have happily unbitten the bite that had caused the offence in the first place—though unfortunately, given the speed of events, it would never get the opportunity to do so. Trevor Hardle had stumbled into its path, Paul was really only doing what a dog is bought and kept to do, and even as it sank its teeth into the soft flesh of Trevor Hardle's calf it was as certain as a dog could ever be that a bone reward would be waiting for it upon its master, Brian Patten's, return.

It was the last in a long line of unusual events, and one which would ultimately push Trevor Hardle a little further towards the edge. No-one, least of all Trevor Hardle, would deny that the break-up with his wife had hurt him deeply, a hurt from which he had not recovered, despite the amount of liquid asuagements he had since consumed. She was the world to him, his three children the orbiting moons, and nothing could fill the void of her absence. But the loss of a job and a weekly wage and the consequent loss of self-respect had exacted a heavy toll on the Hardle household and Jodie had stayed as long as she could. She knew a violent end would crown their once happy relationship otherwise. One afternoon, while Trevor Hardle was out, she packed the kids and all their belongings into the car and took the coast road north.

It was at a time closely following on this—specifically as Trevor Hardle was therapeutically smash-

ing a concrete birdbath to pieces in his backyard with the blunt end of a tomahawk—that the neighbours, Brian Patten and Trevor Hardle, first became properly acquainted. They were, to their mutual surprise, both wallowing in the same slough. Brian Patten's wife and children had also left him the previous year for reasons not dissimilar to Trevor Hardle's, inasmuch as he too had failed to hold down his forklift-driving job and had sought solace for the fact that as a husband and father he was a miserable failure by falling profligately into the arms of the demon drink. Simultaneous with this, and so that he might be able to better revenge himself on the stinking injustice that was Life, he had also bought himself a dog, a Rottweiler, whom he had named Paul, after the assistant manager who behind his desk with the smart little desk calendar had obsequiously delivered the news of his termination and had from the early puppy stage used this Paul as a kind of voodoo-doll-cum-soul mate, alternatively kicking him in frustration and cradling him with affection, according to the mood he was in. Paul the Rottweiler, consequently, was a little bit disturbed in the head. But obviously even in the best possible world a dog's company could not in every way replace a human's and on hearing of his neighbour Trevor Hardle's misfortune the two struck up an immediate friendship.

It was a friendship very much based on drinking, in particular cans of bourbon-and-coke, for which they both had an unhealthy affection. From that day on they drank together every afternoon and evening, often finishing the night entertaining some girls from the local escort agency and playing their own controlled version of wife-swapping with



them. All summer they sat bare-chested on their respective front porches, drinking and abusing from the safety of their properties anyone who happened to be walking past. They turned up their televisions, played their music too loud. One afternoon Brian Patten tore all the palings off the fence to make passing back and forth between the properties easier. Their houses fell into neglect, the lawns grew to knee-high, junk mail cascaded from the letterboxes. In short, they had dealt with the twin yokes of unemployment and alimony in a way few could hope to emulate. Their lives were lived in a state of perpetual drunken bliss; every night they would go to bed insensible, every morning with a hair of the dog they would start the cycle again. And week by week the empty bourbon-and-coke cans piled up, like a monument to their debauchery.

But in much the same way that forced unemployment and an excess of leisure can sometimes strain the previously amiable relationship between a husband and wife, so too would this life of unprincipled abandon eventually strain the relationship between Brian Patten and Trevor Hardle. It began with a casual comment from Brian Patten that neither of them could recall but which Trevor Hardle would later insist had been intended to injure him deeply. It may have been something about his wife. But whatever the origin of the argument the fact was that the longer it went on the more abysmal the differences between them became. It was as if some dreadful germ had got into the relationship and was now spreading itself unmercifully through every part of it. They could find no common ground. A white flag, tentatively raised, became the signal to attack; a harmless jibe, intended only to smooth the waters, provoked another round of insults and violence that would rumble on for weeks. The honeymoon was over. It couldn't go on. Without officially declaring it, a temporary truce was enacted: the two men retreated to their houses and tried to drink themselves separately into their own state of contriteness. It was not easy—it never is. Trevor Hardle was the first to arrive. At around eleven o'clock that night, after watching a romantic comedy that had unexpectedly brought him to tears, he realised with the force of a vision the heavy price he would pay for sacrificing his friendship with Brian Patten on the same altar that had taken the rela-

tionship with his wife. Fortifying himself with one last can he made his way next door with the intention of heartily embracing his neighbour, feeling the scrape of whiskers on his cheek, and of bringing peace to their troubled houses again. But unfortunately on this night Brian Patten was not at home (he had in fact left some time earlier for the local pub where he too was hoping with one last Herculean effort to drink himself to penitence) and waiting instead down the sidewalk in the dark was the slaving Rottweiler, Paul.

It is not easy to unravel the psychology of a dog, much less a dog as confused in its upbringing as Paul, and although up to that night he had paid little more attention to his master's friend Trevor Hardle than to perhaps occasionally sniff the cuff of his jeans, for some reason something in him now snapped. He'd heard the arguing, the carping, the bitching, and for a dog who had suffered as much as he had in his short dog life, Paul the Rottweiler had had enough. As for Trevor Hardle, when he opened Brian Patten's front gate and heard a low growl he did not for a moment think of turning back. Though never having shown any great love for his neighbour's dog he saw no reason to fear it either. Fortified by drink, Trevor Hardle walked down the path calling its name and patting himself invitingly on the leg. That, for Paul, his dog's brain hovering on the edge of madness, was the cue to rush wildly out of the dark and sink his teeth into it.

The attack immediately threw Trevor Hardle to the ground from where with one flailing arm he tried desperately to shield himself—had he not by accident put his other hand on a rock lying beside the front tap the dog would surely have shredded him. One blow to the skull was enough to shut it up. But in the same way that something had snapped in Paul's mind, something now snapped in Trevor Hardle's. No, he had not yet entirely avenged himself on the ugly shambles his life had become—no, he might never—but a further series of blows (some to the head, some to the ribs, some to the head again) did at least incrementally improve what for Trevor Hardle had up to then been a very difficult few days.

No light was burning in his neighbour's house when Brian Patten arrived home late that night. Paul was unusually quiet. He opened his front door

and, checking its width along its length, staggered down the hallway to the bedroom where he collapsed fully-clothed into bed. When he walked out the next morning he almost fell over it. It was Paul all right, but not the Paul that Brian Patten remembered. The dead and battered dog had been shaved of every one of its hairs, and now looked instead like some kind of pig. Brian Patten leaned over into the garden to retch. Trevor Hardle closed the crack in the curtains and smiled to himself.

THAT DAY PASSED slowly and a little strangely for Brian Patten. He buried the dog in the backyard and raised a small wooden cross at its head. He hosed the blood off the path. It was well after lunch before he had his first drink. Clearly the message written in black Texta on Paul's depilated body was in his neighbour's hand and clearly it was some kind of sick and twisted revenge for some deep imagined wrong—but what this wrong was Brian Patten could not guess. The really strange thing though, stranger even than the message, was the fact that he could not get angry about it—in fact, the more he thought about it the *less angry* he became. It was as if something warm and gelatinous had flowed in his gut. The next morning, when he went to the fridge to get his first can for the day, an even stranger thing happened. He found himself stopped, his arm outstretched, wondering what he was doing. He didn't drink that can, or the one that would have followed. He didn't drink all day, or the day after that. On Saturday he went to the local pet shop and chose for himself a cute little brown Cocker Spaniel puppy and on Sunday evening interrupted his small bachelor's roast to ring his long-estranged wife. They talked for two hours, at an off-peak rate, and by conversation's end Brian Patten knew that his life had turned again. Towards the end of that summer his wife and children were returned to him, the yard was cleaned of its debris and the house restored to order and a kind of invisible wall raised up between his property and that of his increasingly unhinged neighbour.

For Trevor Hardle meanwhile—bewildered, alone—had discovered some astonishing things in the hairs of Brian Patten's dog. He had spread a

great handful of them out on the glass coffee table in the lounge room, and spent his days since the canicide arranging and rearranging them into an increasingly disturbing series of patterns. Of course Brian Patten had been fucking Jodie, had been fucking her for years—the hairs made that patently clear. But how many times since the birdbath, how many more times to come? How many times that night, while the dog stood guard at the door? They are like leeches these people, they latch onto you and suck all the goodness out. They take from you whatever they can—all the sunlight, all the meaning, all the love—and give nothing but dark thoughts back. He began drinking Island Coolers, in quantities exceeding the records achieved with his previous brand, and, believing these Island Coolers with their sweet bee-loved scent of frangipanis to be giving him even more profound insights into the intricacies of his neighbour's betrayals, he drank them without pause. Everything, everything: it all became clear. He sat all day in the armchair, the hairs on the coffee table in front of him, moving only between there, the fridge, the toilet and occasionally the window where he would look out through the curtains on the new world being born next door. The children played with the puppy; husband and wife kissed goodbye at the gate. It was only by breathing in that tropical mind-scent of frangipanis that Trevor Hardle could stop himself from falling.

Not long after this it all went quiet in the Hardle household and a For Sale sign went up in the front yard. His wife asked him what was going on next door and Brian Patten made some enquiries. Trevor Hardle had gone up north in search of his estranged wife and children and (he assumed) a new, less-troubled life. Then one day Brian Patten received a small parcel from him (it was Paul the Rottweiler's hair, there was a note attached, Brian Patten dropped it all into the compost bin and closed the lid very tight) and not long after that again he was sitting out on the back porch one day reading the paper in the sun when he saw the small article tucked away down in the corner about a murder-suicide up the coast. He let one hand fall down beside his chair. Sunny the Spaniel licked it. His daughter came up with a bug in a jar. The sky was very blue.

## The Grind

If i told you that the girl  
i'm seeing now  
    has bright sparkling  
eyes  
    soft tender skin  
& a cheeky grin  
    & wears her mousy  
blonde-tipped hair  
cut short  
    but still with little  
piggy tails that i often  
grip like reins  
    i wouldn't be telling  
lies

but if i said that she often said  
that she worked  
for a funeral director  
embalming corpses  
    doing things like  
stuffing wads of cotton  
wool into people's cheeks  
to fill out their faces  
so they looked as good as new  
for friends  
    & family  
        & loved ones  
on their last public outing  
    & if i said that only  
just last week she fixed up  
that apprentice plumber  
    the one you may have well  
read about in the morning paper  
in an article not much bigger  
than a cigarette packet  
    they said the young bloke  
had fallen into a trench in  
slippery wet clay & had been  
impaled through the left eye  
on a piece of ½" copper pipe  
    well if i said that she patched  
him up & had him looking  
just like the photo on his  
newly aquired driver's licence  
for his final farewell  
    then one of us would be  
telling porky-pies

if i said however that she was  
fully employed as a  
    baker's assistant  
    a cake decorator  
    & a checkout chick  
& that she followed  
Central Districts in the SANFL  
& flaunted it  
    & that sometimes she did  
swear like a sailor  
    & that she was proud of her  
working class credentials  
    yet sometimes did feel a little  
unsure of herself with academics  
& the conversations that they ran  
    & that she did confuse them  
with her fantasies when opportunities  
arose  
    & that she always despised  
the stockbroker types  
& their extraordinary interest  
in the All Ordinaries Index  
    & their blatant greed & disregard  
for anyone other than themselves  
    (& she loved to rev them up  
with stories of how the eye  
hung off something that vaguely  
resembled string)  
    but the reality remains that she is  
in fact a single mother on a pension  
    that she is 25 years old  
& has two kids under school age  
    that she did complete year 12  
& went on to uni only to drop out  
when anorexia overtook her  
& sent her bodyweight down to  
37 kilograms  
    & in telling you these things—  
i wouldn't be telling you lies

& if i said that every second  
Friday night her children went with  
their father & she came to me  
for a little bit of undivided  
attention



even though she'd still have to  
get up at 3:00am on those  
Saturday mornings to go & decorate  
a cake & create another Spiderman  
for yet another child's party somewhere  
out there in the northern suburbs

& she knows only too well  
that if she adds another call charge  
to her mounting mobile phone bill  
on those Friday nights when her kids  
are seldom ever picked up at the  
prescribed time

that i can then most likely  
have dinner on the table as she parks  
in my driveway

me leaning over the stove  
& listening for her disc pads to grind  
to a halt & her coming in  
out of the cold wondering aloud  
if she can get another week  
out of them

knowing that another car payment  
is already overdue

& the insurance is less  
than a week away

& that the tyres are just about  
as worn down as she feels after yet  
another early start

& as we raise our knives & forks  
we try not to get indigestion  
as we both try to sneak glances  
at the kitchen clock

knowing that time may never be  
on our side.

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

## Always Eating

The article is about where to go  
for the best  
cappuccino

and there's a large  
photo  
of a massive  
cup

with a cloud of froth  
and magnified  
chocolate  
dust.

You can never  
have

too  
much.

PETER MURPHY

## with frost

Waking early  
in cold dawn  
and looking long  
at mist shrouded  
mountains  
a tumult of words  
images  
clamour for release  
in air  
still riddled with frost

COLLEEN Z BURKE

## Herstory

1.

Pastel pink the building stands, a faded party dress, a woman sits starked.  
Dead vine stalks interwoven on fence, a faded landscape on the wall.

Scratched pews next to plastic playground and astro-turf  
A child plays on a pedalless bike.

Woman watches a burning cigarette, in fumbling fingers, crumbled ashes gone with the  
wind. Breaking their spines, half-smoked, pressing perfect, a black dot on the asphalt.  
She meditates.

Barren plants in plastic pots, white marble Mary in the middle, palms pressed open,  
Subtle smiles on tilted head and limp neck.

Cobwebs tremble over rusty fire-escape lock, wooden steps moulder. Veils of dust gather  
in the hatches of metal doors. Floors and flower-printed counter never bled upon.

Her smoked fingers fiddle in the entrance. She peers past like pendulum—the wall. Seeing  
if the son is there. Left side of face to palm, her head strung straight. No one. No one.

2.

White cotton flies like flag, so vivid against faded walls. Smiling with crumbled mouths,  
hearts flowered in flame, the eternal light flickers like whited eyes.

Singing out of time, out of tune, out of time, out of tune.  
Sweeping cracked biscuits back together.

Washed, washed, hung out to dry. Scuffling slippers on linoleum, clanging of dishes,  
banging of pots, everything put back into place, Mother Mary sits full of grace, on the  
shelf, in the corner, with palms pressed and arms wide open.

The second hand dies and starts. A woman hangs out the washing, the pegs spin, metal  
strings subsect her, like wire to clay.

Eyebrowless on face slapped slut. Crumbled eyes and bruised ankles, grazed knees  
kneeling. Bathed baby boy, dirty hand cradled gift. I thirst, I thirst. Nibbled fingers number  
nice.

Humming hymns. Still shadow divided face, dim, dim, dim, through lace curtains and  
stained glass. Looking at feet, all eyes and mouth, face scrunched. She tilts her head to  
Mother Mary and stilt a smile. Dark.

CLAIR MACDOUGALL

review / SAMUEL PIETSCH

## GLOBALISED POWER, GLOBALISED PROTEST



Verity Burgmann: *Power, Profit and Protest: Australian Social Movements and Globalisation* (Allen & Unwin, \$39.95)

Verity Burgmann's 1993 work *Power and Protest* was the definitive account of the rise of new social movements in this country. This updated version, *Power, Profit and Protest*, is a timely book which will likewise set the terms of debate about Australian social movements in the coming years.

Around three quarters of the material is new, including updated chapters on the Aboriginal, women's and environmental movements, a new chapter on the anti-corporate globalisation movement and a new conclusion. The revised introduction, which deals with new social movement theory, is a sustained attack on postmodernist tendencies in academia and their irrelevancy to real world struggles. *Power, Profit and Protest* is itself designed to address postmodernism's deficiencies, a goal which it achieves admirably.

The chapters on the Aboriginal, women's and environmental movements are solid political history. Burgmann remains sensitive to the internal dynamics of the movements, and details their weaknesses as well as their successes. The account of the Aboriginal movement and the strategies which successive governments have used to counter it is particularly relevant given recent developments.

However, the work's greatest value is in its account of anti-corporate globalisation. Burgmann charts the rise of this newest of social movements in North America, through to Australia's own 'S11' demonstration against the World Economic Forum meeting in Melbourne in September 2000. While

including a powerful argument in favour of the principles of the movement, the focus is on its internal workings. As a kind of supra-movement, it draws together people with many different political concerns, yet is unified by opposition to transnational corporations and economic institutions.

Two minor criticisms of this account: first, Burgmann describes the movement's organisational structure as both 'ultra-democratic' and yet 'tightly effective'. From personal experience, the organisational situation is far more ambiguous than Burgmann suggests. Secondly, and perhaps understandably given the upbeat political climate following S11, Burgmann is uncritical of the relatively shallow base of support for the anti-corporate globalisation movement in Australia.

The discussion of anti-corporate globalisation also draws together a number of themes which run throughout the book, and which address many key contemporary political issues. The first is the importance of class, both analytically and politically. Social movements have always needed links to the organised working class in order to develop real power. But for the anti-corporate globalisation movement this need is even more obvious. Ultimately, the movement is united by its opposition to corporations' drive for profit regardless of social cost. Successful opposition to this totalising phenomenon requires that the working class take a central role.

In discussing class, Burgmann's acknowledged debt to autonomist Marxism is evident. While she retains the traditional conception of the working class as a product of capitalist economic relations, she



also foreshadows the rise to prominence of a post-industrial 'new proletariat', which echoes Hardt and Negri's concept of the 'Multitude'. However, she never clearly elucidates the economic or political basis of this new agency, or how its emergence changes fundamental political dynamics.

A second unifying theme is the role of the state in social movement politics. There is an inherent contradiction in movements which eschew the taking of state power, but are reliant on the state to institute policy change. In a globalised society, where the power of the traditional nation-state to formulate policy has been superseded by transnational corporations and economic institutions, this contradiction becomes even more stark.

Burgmann's position on the state is nuanced, arguing that it has become 'supine', rather than 'powerless', but ultimately she stresses a decline in nation-state power. The latest war on Iraq, however, casts doubt on this decline. The conflict between the US and France and Germany resembled classic imperialist rivalries rather than a homogenous world order. While it would be unfair to criticise Burgmann for what she has written before these events, they highlight a certain weakness in her analysis of the state.

Finally, Burgmann discusses the issue of reform

versus revolution, which has plagued all social movements, old and new. She refuses to be drawn on her own political preference, but argues that even moderate reforms will be won by the radical currents of the movement, by scaring the state into action. However, whether the new transnational state is capable of effectively instituting reforms is an open question. A failure to reform could lead to more fundamental changes. This is a refreshingly insightful approach, which refuses oversimplification. It would, however, be enhanced by an economic analysis of the roots of corporate globalisation, which, Burgmann's emphasis on the "creative human energy" of labour notwithstanding, will limit any possible reform.

The book's conclusion returns to the condition of Australian intellectual life, highlighting the need for thought that is engaged with practical activism. The greatest contribution of *Power, Profit and Protest* is precisely in helping to fulfil this need. By focusing on the workings of power and the potential for political change, Burgmann has succeeded in writing a book which advances academic debate and addresses contemporary political concerns.

*Samuel Pietsch has recently completed a study of Australia's treatment of refugees.*

---

## Where are the phrases of yesteryear?

### SEAN SCALMER

Alan Barcan: *Radical Students: The Old Left at Sydney University* (MUP, \$49.95)

"Where are the phrases of yesteryear?" James McAuley posed the question in his attack on communist about-faces, 'Ballade of Lost Phrases'. Alan Barcan's book, *Radical Students*, provides an answer. McAuley's intent was mocking and inquisitorial; Barcan's is restorative and generous. He patiently chronicles the history of student politics from the First World War until the middle 1960s. The book is highly detailed, gently self-deprecatory, and consistently interesting. We learn not only what happened to the phrases of yesteryear, but what helped to summon them forth, and why they might have disappeared.

*Radical Students* is subtitled 'the Old Left at Syd-

ney University', but this underplays Barcan's ambition. In one sense, the book offers a quite engrossing personal history, as the author explains his own political entanglements and passions. He declares himself 'happy' to preserve the memories of the past, and of the 1940s in particular. But the book also has a wider focus. Comparisons with Melbourne University are frequent and often developed. Explanations of political advance and retreat are ventured. Broader still, Barcan engages with the shifting bases of intellectual life, and even with the meaning and scope of intellectual radicalism in the twentieth century.

The book has many strengths. The prose is clear and engaging. The many illustrations are impressive. Barcan draws upon his own experience to enliven the work with engaging anecdotes. Among many fascinating details, this reader learnt that as late as 1940 students were expected to stand still in the quad-

range whenever the carillon was playing patriotic or religious tunes; that Sydney's Andersonians tended to imitate the Master, adopting the Professor's stutter and Scottish whine; and that one successful technique used to disrupt left-wing meetings was the capture and then release of a flock of pigeons.

This is more than a stroll down memory lane, however. Barcan has a well-developed intellectual framework. As he puts it:

some sympathy for the Old Left, some acceptance of Marxian sociology, some appreciation of the intellectual principles of Andersonianism, and a strong commitment to liberal humanism and its by-product, liberal education.

With these eclectic resources, the author offers a persuasive analysis of the vicissitudes of student politics. He assays the changing structure of universities; the relationship between secondary and tertiary education; the pace of student life; the class background of students; and the impact of Depression, war, and Cold War. The doubting, historian's eye is present, too. The existence of cycles of radicalisation and conservatism is diagnosed. The contemporary complaints of 'student apathy' and 'falling standards' are both identified in the heyday of the Old Left, more than forty years ago.

Nonetheless, *Radical Students* is not without flaws. At times the recitation of votes cast and battles for office can be wearying. The content of debates and the substance of student argument might have repaid closer attention. We learn how many voted for and against a score of motions; we sometimes learn who the leading speakers might have been; we rarely learn what they argued, or who they drew upon. This is a political history of student radicalism, not an *intellectual* history.

More seriously, Barcan's sense of historical sympathy fails him after his own generation has left the campus. For *Radical Students* the year 1967 marks the beginning of a terrible cultural revolution. The New Left is associated with the decay of political theory and its many theoretical contributions are not broached at all. The author has little time for "special interest groups such as feminists or ethnic groups", who (in apparent contradiction to others) see education "as a means of access to power and attractive jobs". Contemporary student politics is described as a "bureaucracy" and a "welfare sys-

tem". These are not the radical phrases of yesteryear, nor the urgent voices of radical students today. They are disappointed and unsympathetic phrases, and they are not supported by equivalent research or understanding.

This is a disappointing lapse, though it is not so serious that it undermines the book's genuine achievement. Indeed, if Barcan's deliberate account of 'now' versus 'then' is unpersuasive, the book's research does provide the resources for a richer, more historical account of student politics. In particular, three important lessons, reflected but not developed in *Radical Students*, are worth considering.

First, the politics of the Old Left had a clear rational and deliberative basis. Its classic form was the debate; its respect for argument undoubted. Its respectability extended even to Communists, such as Barcan. This contrasts with a more theatrical and expressive politics that has developed since the 1960s. The demonstration or occupation has long been as important as the debate and the vote. Respectability is an insult, not a virtue.

Second, the Old Left on campus was a politics built around respect for liberal freedoms. The consistent story is one of the Left fighting for free speech, expression, and assembly. It is the Right, in the form of university authorities, political groups, or the press, which embodies the force of censorship and control. With a few exceptions (such as the prosecution of the editors of *Rabelais* in 1995), radical student politics today is seldom organised around these battles or questions.

Third, it is surprising to learn how important university staff once were to radical politics at the University of Sydney. They helped form many of the most influential institutions, occupied leading offices, and contributed significant arguments. In a genuine sense, radical ferment on campus was a *joint* product of staff and students alike. This has not been so true since the 1960s, either, and it implies a sobering retort to the nostalgic and radical academic of today: If you think that the campus politics of 2003 aren't what they used to be, then you, too, might be to blame.

In any case, the campus radical of yesteryear, today and tomorrow will be sure to benefit from Barcan's enjoyable labour of love.

Sean Scalmer is in the Department of Politics, Macquarie University.



## Economics and Autism

SUSAN HAWTHORNE

Frank Stilwell: *Political Economy: The Contest of Economic Ideas* (OUP, \$49.95)

*Journal of Australian Political Economy: 50th Issue. The State of Political Economy* (Australian Political Economy Movement, \$9.90)

I had a strange sort of feeling reading Frank Stilwell's *Political Economy: The Contest of Economic Ideas*. It was that so much of it was familiar, and yet the sources for this familiarity were not noted. The book begins with a chapter entitled 'The Personal is the Political Economic'. It sounded promising, because I know the feminist slogan 'the personal is political' so well. I know its source—Robin Morgan—and I have used the concept time and again in feminist theorising for nearly thirty years. So I was more than surprised to find no mention of the word feminist here, and very little of it in the rest of the book (the index gives two page references for 'feminism' in the entire book and they occur on pages 304 and 359; the category 'women' fares only slightly better, with three pages devoted to women and work). I mention this not just as a matter of pique, but because so many of the ideas discussed in the book seem to be derived from much feminist thought but with no acknowledgement of it. This is not especially unusual in the work of men from the theoretical Left. Just as white theorists ignore the work of black, Indigenous and other majority peoples, men from the Left continue to fail to acknowledge the work of feminists.

The book introduces a lot of useful ideas and concepts. For example, the chapter on land looks at the theories of David Ricardo and of Henry George, two nineteenth-century economists who considered rent and land taxes as useful ways of capturing the economic surplus derived from land. Stilwell briefly mentions the very different Indigenous perspective on land as more than economically productive. Unfortunately, he does not subject his discussion of land to an Indigenous analysis, although on page 316 he hints that this might be possible. If political economy is to be a useful critique of mainstream economics, the political aspect of this critique deserves more attention. He does not, for instance, mention how it is that a declaration of *terra nullius* changes the economic value of

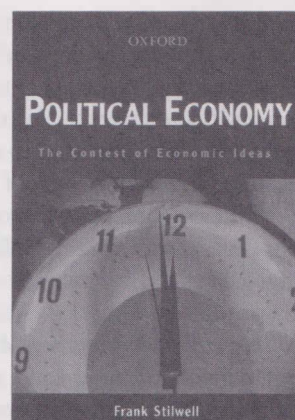
land, and how it is that the Crown located so far away from Australia or sub-Saharan Africa can declare all land free for its own use.

Once again, the fact of colonisation is not mentioned in this outline of political economy. A startling fact, given just how important colonisation has been to the suc-

cess of global capitalism. Indigenous views of land challenge not just paradigms of ownership, but also what counts as productive. The Australian experience of primary producers has for the most part resulted in the creation of conditions of non-productivity through over-exploitation of land and increasing salinity problems. This was land that remained productive for many tens of thousands of years under the stewardship of Indigenous people. Productivity is an ecologically determined value, not one that can be universalised from European or Asian or North American experience.

The strength of this book is its generality. It covers many of the broad ideas that underlie economic discussion. However, its weakness is also its generality and its tendency to always resort to mainstream ideas rather than to those ideas that really challenge the basis of capitalist, patriarchal and white-dominated global economics. It is a shame that Stilwell does not include the work of Maria Mies in his section on the international division of labour, an area that Mies so amply shows relies on the exploitation of people from poor countries, of women and of nature.

In the light of *Political Economy*, it is interesting to read about autistic economics in issue fifty of the *Journal of Australian Political Economy*. Interesting, because the definition of autistic which this so-called rebellious movement of post-autistic economics (PAE) from France has "latched onto is 'disengagement from reality'". An interesting insight, but certainly not an original one. Theorists like Marimba Ani in her extraordinary book *Yurugu: An African-centred Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behaviour*, as well as feminist economists—New Zealander Prue Hyman is a good ex-



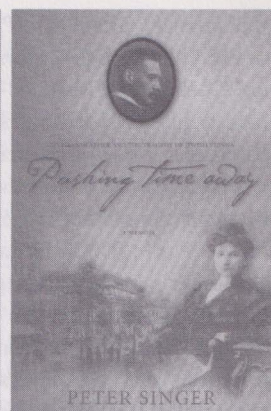


ample—and theorists (including myself) have discussed economic disengagement for many years. The post-autistic economics movement could perhaps benefit by subscribing to *The Journal of Feminist Economics* or *Ecological Economics*. Thank goodness students are rebelling again, but it would be helpful if they knew what had gone before and who else had raised similar critiques.

The articles about post-autistic economics begin what is a refreshing collection of articles by people who have been involved in developing their own critiques, journals and analyses of contemporary mainstream economics. And it does include acknowledgement of feminist as well as ecological and Marxist-feminist critiques. Katherine Gibson's reflections on the 'Hills Hoist' road to socialism is reminiscent of survival tales of other outsiders who have dared to be critical of the boys' club—whether of the Left or the Right. Edward Fullbrook's description of how he set up his own post-autistic economics journal is interesting for its illumination of the persistence that is required in making things happen. I was pleased to see in Ted Trainer's 'Limits to Growth' article a challenge to the Amory Lovins concept of natural capitalism as a too-too-easy tech-fix solution, one that does not adequately deal with long-term sustainability or a genuinely ecological approach. Stuart Rosewarne's article, 'Towards an Ecological Political Economy', gives a good overview of some of the threads of contemporary theory in this area, while the final article by Tim Anderson on human rights shows how the structures of global economics affect the actualisation or denial of human rights.

The discipline of political economy is alive and well, but it is at its best when a diversity of voices and views is heard. This is apparent from the work published in the *Journal of Political Economy*. Theorists need to listen more intently to economists from the margins. If they don't, then political economy will go the same way as autistic economics. Political economy has at its core the germ of an important idea: that economics can only be discussed in the light of politics, social systems, the environment and the structure of power. My hope is that these ideas can be built upon, not eroded.

*Susan Hawthorne is the author of Wild Politics: Feminism, Globalisation and Biodiversity and a Research Associate in Communication, Culture and Languages at Victoria University.*



## The world of Peter Singer

JANNA THOMPSON

Peter Singer: *One World: The Ethics of Globalisation* (Text Publishing, \$28)

Peter Singer: *Pushing Time Away: My Grandfather and the Tragedy of Jewish Vienna, A Memoir* (HarperCollins, \$29.95)

At the close of his memoir of his grandfather, who died in the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1943, Peter Singer looks forward optimistically to the realisation in a global community of the universal human values which his forebear believed in and tried to communicate to his pupils. *One World* is an elaboration of this theme. In the preface, written shortly after 11 September 2001, he states that it is short-sighted as well as immoral for rich nations to reject a universal ethical viewpoint.

This idea is developed in the following chapters. The impact of human activities on the atmosphere, economic interdependence, and the need to protect people from serious human rights abuses are strong reasons for international cooperation. But the need for cooperation raises questions about what counts as a just distribution of burdens and benefits. Any reasonable answer, Singer argues, has to appeal to a universalist ethics.

Singer is well known for his insistence that our ethical obligations are not confined to people of our culture or nation. If we truly believe that everyone counts equally from a moral point of view, then we must reject policies that benefit fellow citizens at the expense of people in other countries. From his universalist point of view he has no difficulty criticising the self-interested refusal of the US and Aus-

tralia to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on climate change or the US failure to endorse the International Criminal Court. His insistence on a universal ethics leads him to disagree with critics of globalisation who want to protect jobs or industries from competition from workers in poor countries—but to agree with some of their complaints against the neo-liberal policies of the World Trade Organisation.

Singer's understanding of the ethical problems created by globalisation is grounded in a theory about the tension between our biologically based inclinations and the universality demanded by ethical reasoning. Our biology, according to Singer, inclines us to be partial to members of our family, our friends, and, by extension, to our fellow citizens. But in coming to grips with historical developments, reason has pushed us beyond the limits of our natural sympathies and forced us to encompass strangers and outsiders in our moral calculations. Singer regards the problems of globalisation as opening a further chapter in this story of our progress toward the realisation of reason. They show, in his view, that the partiality associated with nationalism and patriotism has become pragmatically and ethically dysfunctional. This rather simplistic view of human nature, reason and history comes up against some well-known problems. It ignores that many of the worst crimes have been committed in the name of a universalist philosophy, that reason does not speak with the same voice to everyone, especially in ethics, and that reason has its undefeated rivals—above all, faith.

It is also misleading to treat the loves and loyalties that make us partial to the interests of particular others as mere atavistic inclinations. Many philosophers from Aristotle onwards have argued that certain kinds of relationships, for example political relations, are good in themselves. They encourage the development of virtues and give rise to mutual obligations. If so, the partiality required by these relations has a justification and the duties it gives rise to are not necessarily subordinate to the demands made in the name of universalism.

But in the context of *One World*, these objections are largely irrelevant. Anybody with a pretension to morality will be compelled to acknowledge that it is wrong for nations to break their agreements or to bully others to make an agreement in their favour, that the rich of the world should give more to the poor, and should avoid activities that cause them harm.

However, this book contains more than a rehearsal of positions that moral people accept. In a readable, non-heavy-handed way, Singer applies his philosophical expertise to discussing what would be a fair division of responsibility for avoiding the catastrophes of climate change, determining what is just and unjust about a global economy, and what rich countries and rich people should contribute to alleviating poverty. He takes care to ground his discussion in a careful survey of the facts, so far as these are known, about global inequalities, the costs and benefits of environmental reforms, the policies of the WTO, and other matters. The result is an open-minded, humane, reasonable, but passionate piece of work—displaying the virtues which undoubtedly would have made his grandfather proud.

The memoir of his grandfather, David Oppenheim, is a departure from Singer's usual preoccupations with animal rights, global ethics, and bioethics and a project that he worked on painstakingly for a long period of time—learning enough German to read his grandfather's writings, visiting the places he and his family lived in.

His motivations, as he describes them, were various. His grandfather too was a passionate humanist with an interest in exploring the roots of human behaviour and Singer feels a special affinity that reaches across the time and distance separating him from a man that he never met. But he was also spurred on by a desire that he admits is difficult to justify in the framework of his philosophy: to do something for the dead.

Oppenheim was not one of the intellectual giants of prewar Vienna, but he had relationships with a few of them. He attended Freud's gatherings and contributed his bit as a classical scholar to Freud's study of dreams. When Adler and Freud parted company, Oppenheim took Adler's side and became his loyal friend and follower.

Oppenheim was also a husband and father. The first part of the memoir focuses on the relationship between Oppenheim and fellow student Amelia Pollack who became his friend and later his wife. Drawn together by an unconventional willingness to confide to each other their homosexual desires, their marriage was as much a partnership of equals as was possible at that time and place.

Oppenheim eschewed an academic career and worked as a schoolmaster until Nazi edicts forced him to retire. He took seriously his mission to instil



in his students the virtues that he associated with the ancient Greeks. Singer describes his own visit to the school where his grandfather taught and remarks that his grandfather would have derived comfort from the knowledge that some day his grandson would be holding a discussion with pupils of the school that threw him out for being a Jew.

Singer is not a master of literary prose. But his book is an honest, painstaking attempt to do justice to a life. If his grandfather had known that someday his grandson would write about him in this way, he would indeed have felt honoured.

*Janna Thompson teaches at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Melbourne University.*

## Nation-building literature

**IRA RAJA**

John McLaren: *States of Imagination: Nationalism and Multiculturalism in Australian and Southern Asian Literature* (Prestige Books in association with ASP, 500 rupees or \$29.95)

John McLaren's *States of Imagination: Nationalism and Multiculturalism in Australian and Southern Asian Literature* looks at how literature from the new states in South Asia and South East Asia reflects and engages with the paradoxes, contradictions, conflicts and ironies that attend the process of nation-building. In a literary survey spanning India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Australia, the author identifies three points of commonality between the six nation-states: the civil institutions inherited from their colonial past; the problems of nation-building amid differences of culture, language, ethnicity, and religion; and the widespread use of the English language. McLaren argues that not only did the ruling elite in the new states fail to accommodate inherited institutions such as courts, parliaments, police, and civil service to the pressures of nation-building, but these institutions in themselves proved hard to integrate with older traditions. Governments in many of the new states, then, have often sought to impose order through the exercise of power. Substantive democracy, however, McLaren avers, cannot be attained until the ruling elite ground their authority in the lives of the people rather than the use of force.

Use of force is obviously not the only way in which governments have tried to impose order on their peoples. As McLaren observes, in order to contain the potential conflicts arising between the state and its citizens, modern governments are obliged to develop ideals of nationalism that support a collective interest overriding the individual interests of their citizens. Attempts to construct new

national identities are also made, as is the case, he writes, in the Philippines, through the adoption of Filipino as the single state language. The increasing use of the English language in the new states then often becomes a contested issue and it is one that McLaren explores at some length. He offers many interesting insights into points of connection between the use of English in countries as diverse as India and Australia; connections that are very rich in the possibilities they open for further research. In the context of an excellent account of the debate on the use of English in the Philippines, McLaren writes that Filipino identity is equally determined by the forces of global capitalism, on the one hand, and an imperial form of feudal subjugation on the other. He connects the writings of the Filipino diaspora with the battles of the farm-workers in California and Washington. The struggle of peasants against feudal landowners and global agribusiness in the Philippines could also be read alongside literature from the Indian diaspora, to explore ways in which each nations' colonial and post-colonial experience contributes to writers' approaches and concerns.

McLaren successfully demonstrates shared concerns across texts that differ vastly. He reveals his impressive understanding of the texts themselves and the contexts in which they are written. In its attempt to cover a lot of ground, however, the book is ultimately unable to focus sufficiently on many of the interesting issues that it raises. What is also lost, occasionally, in this bid to identify points of similarity, is a sensitivity to the points of rupture and difference.

For instance, the distinction the author observes between the ruling elite and the common people is not sustained throughout his analysis. In his reference to the "[w]hite settler colonies [which] share the cities of San Francisco and Sydney with communities of Asians who have chosen or been forced to live with them", McLaren argues that although modernisation is the force behind this diaspora, "the people it has driven bring with them the pre-mod-



ern traditions of their homelands". But surely the traditions which Asians, who "provide the labour that keeps the Californian economy booming", bring to San Francisco or Sydney, are not the same as, say, the traditions that the Asian immigrant feminist intellectual brings to the same places. In this homogenisation of discrete dislocations all movement from the developing to the developed world gets identified as a progression from the traditional into the modern. The latter is the monopoly of the West.

The binary opposition between the modern and the pre-modern, however unwittingly endorsed, hinders understanding of why modernisation has been unable to take hold in the new states. To attribute this inability to the failure of the local elite or to past traditions is to ignore the fact that, on the one hand,

the local elite is itself often propped up by the existing global power structure and draws upon a colonial past to further its hegemonic ambitions, while on the other, the traditions of the homeland are themselves neither uniformly pre-modern nor consistently traditional across the social and cultural terrain.

The book would have gained from good editing. Also, given that it discusses texts that differ so greatly from each other in so many ways, it would have been useful for the reader to know the criteria of text selection used by the author. On the whole though, this is a useful book for those working in the field of Australian and southern Asian literature.

*Ira Raja is academic editor with Macmillan India in Delhi and the Academic Liaison Officer at La Trobe University.*

---

## Stead's satire of the West in decline

### BRIGID ROONEY

Anne Pender: *Christina Stead: Satirist* (ASAL—Association for the Study of Australian Literature/Common Ground, \$30)

Since publication in 1993 of Hazel Rowley's biography, scholars of Christina Stead have felt compelled to respond, in the negative or affirmative, to its thesis that Stead's genius was deeply bound up in a psychopathology fed by a repressed sexuality. Anne Pender's monograph, *Christina Stead: Satirist*, is no exception, and it is a study that obtains urgency from this imperative. This is both the strength and limitation of a book which does make some timely contributions to the appreciation of Stead as a political writer who is still, as many have observed, both duly recognised and strangely ignored in Australia and elsewhere.

I confess I initially approached Pender's book with some scepticism. To discuss Stead as a satirist did not seem groundbreaking, since critics such as Margaret Harris and Susan Sheridan had already identified Stead's satiric bent in many of the less-widely read novels, particularly the American sequence—*Letty Fox*, *Her Luck*, *A Little Tea*, *A Little Chat*, and *The People With the Dogs*. I also wondered if the category of 'satire' would prove too confining for Stead's diverse and often bewilderingly complex narratives. Yet by expanding and

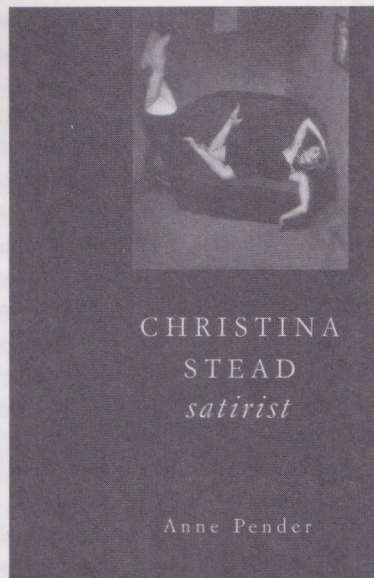
elaborating the range, features and provenance of satirical genres in classical Western literature, Pender establishes fresh connections among some otherwise well-traversed features of Stead's fiction. The satirical mode, as Pender elaborates it, aptly encompasses the oft-remarked grotesquerie, fantasy, contradiction and excess of Stead's narrative style; the tone and mood of particular novels, moreover, readily correspond, as Pender suggests, to Horatian or Juvenalian models. Strategically, Pender avoids applying the label of 'satire' to Stead's novels too restrictively; rather, she seeks to identify how the satiric impulse shapes their intensely political (though never doctrinal or formulaic) engagement with the social world.

A key argument to arise from Pender's analysis is that Rowley and others miss the point when they make negative moral judgements about Stead's alleged abuse of real people (particularly women friends) in the production of her monstrous fictional characters. For Pender, such uses and abuses of the social real comprise the very stuff of satire; she argues, furthermore, that Stead—as both person and writer—was perfectly capable of entertaining the strongest affection even for those whose attributes she savagely lampooned in her fiction. To expect otherwise, she points out, is to impose gendered expectations unlikely to be imposed on male counterparts. For example, in Pender's reading, Stead's

exceedingly disturbing depiction of middle-aged 'Venus' and hack writer Eleanor Herbert is not, as Rowley has intimated, about vengeance against women on whom Eleanor is notoriously said to be based—that is, on Florence James and Edith Anderson. Rather she represents a composite figure drawn for the purposes of satire, reflexively alluding, furthermore, to Stead's own experience of penury and literary obscurity in postwar London. In this analysis, the vapid and degenerate Eleanor functions as representative of middle-class liberal values in English suburbia in the immediate postwar era.

It is probably in the chapters dealing with *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)*, and other infrequently discussed novels like *The Beauties and Furies*, *Letty Fox*, *Her Luck*, *A Little Tea*, *A Little Chat* and *The People With the Dogs*, that Pender's readings are most effective and engaging. The specific paralleling of Letty's narrative with that of Don Juan, for instance, develops a fresh approach to this text, as does discussion of allusions to Thomas Love Peacock's *Headlong Hall*. Pender unearths useful connections between Stead's novels and other literary and satirical texts. Not only are these connections plausible in light of Stead's astoundingly prolific reading, but also because they mostly align well with narrative context. Pender's comparison of Stead's novels with those of (mainly male) postmodernist heavyweights, such as Rushdie, de Lillo and Pynchon, is an interesting attempt to situate Stead on the international literary map. She argues that recognition of Stead as a significant participant in the larger field of cosmopolitan modernist and postmodernist literature is long overdue.

Overall, Pender's argument for reading Stead as a satirist is forthrightly delivered, generally convincing and astutely supported by unpublished manuscript material. Several questions arise, however, about the limits of 'satire' as an all-encompassing rubric for Stead's writing. These questions apply to the more mythic and 'autobiographical' novels purposely omitted, such as *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, *The Man Who Loved Children* and *For*



*Love Alone*. They also apply to what I felt were the less than satisfying analyses of the brilliantly dark *Cotters' England* and of the unfinished masterpiece and culminating satirical work, *I'm Dying Laughing*. Pender's focus on satire implicitly marshals a notion of the author as vigilant and intentional designer of narrative—indeed as puppeteer (and Pender makes mention of Stead's fascination with puppets). This reconstruction of the author as deliberate, unflaggingly intentional satirist contends strongly against the effect of psychological readings of Stead which have resisted 'the author'

in their emphasis on desire and the unconscious. Though supplying a much-needed corrective, Pender's reading of particular novels also suffers from a similar kind of reductiveness. To insist so strongly on author-as-satirist—even as a way of reinstating the political—tends to preclude recognition of specific and sometimes contradictory ways in which the political is played out in Stead's narratives. Exploiting biographical sources as well as naturalist observation of contemporary society, Stead's fiction reproduces the paradoxical experience of being—as expatriate Australian white woman and as radical intellectual—both marginal to and complicit within particular fields of endeavour. The politics of *I'm Dying Laughing*, a novel which draws as fully upon epic and tragedy as satire, is forged through a kind of voyeuristic complicity in productive tension with its otherwise manifest political conviction and satirical intent. Though it is, as Pender argues, an 'encyclopaedic' satire of the West in decline, *I'm Dying Laughing* is also far more ambiguous, and its sources and significations more prolific, than Pender suggests. While satire is indeed central, it is rather in the flux, the dense convergence and the transformation of a range of literary forms and traditions, and in the play between intention and desire, that Stead's novels, in my opinion, take their challenging, extraordinary and radically political shape.

Brigid Rooney lectures in Australian Studies at the University of Sydney.



## Australian women playwrights

ANGELA O'BRIEN

Michelle Arrow: *Upstaged: Australian women dramatists in the limelight at last* (Currency Press, \$29.95)

*Upstaged* provides an account of the contribution of Australian women playwrights writing between 1928 and 1968. Author Michelle Arrow describes these dates as 'bookends' in that "they mark respectively the beginning and the decline of women's prominence in playwriting in Australia". Her thesis, embodied in the title of her text, is that these women playwrights were "effectively upstaged by their younger, brasher (male) counterparts in the 1970s". Arrow's purpose is primarily compensatory, an attempt to reclaim a place in theatre history for a group of twenty-four identified women including Mona Brand, Oriel Gray, Gwen Meredith, Dymphna Cusack and Catherine Duncan. It is clear from the author's introduction that she is fully engaged by her subjects, almost as though it has become her mission to rescue "these remarkable women" from the margins to which they have been relegated by the generation that followed. As such, *Upstaged* reads as a celebration of the lives and work of the playwrights rather than a critical evaluation of their contribution to Australian theatre or dramatic literature.

Since the 1981 publication of Drusilla Modjeska's *Exiles at Home*, there has been a growing interest by academics and cultural historians, generally women, in documenting theatre history prior to 1960, and particularly the unsung contribution of women. This has extended to their contribution to radio and television drama. Many of the playwrights of whom Arrow writes have become better known in the past decade because of their association with the New Theatre movement. This affiliation of left-wing theatre companies, which sprang up in most Australian capital cities during the 1930s, had no place in cultural history twenty years ago. It is now relatively well archived and documented, not only by historians in each state, but through a spate of autobiographies written (and often self-published) by the women playwrights involved. Arrow's thorough research draws from all these sources as well as her own interviews and correspondence with the subjects.

A strength of Arrow's text is her examination of the sociopolitical and historical forces which facili-

tated the emergence of playwriting as a potential profession for women during the thirties and forties. She outlines how the coalescence of a number of factors between 1928 and 1968, including the rise of repertory theatre, the growth of political theatre, wartime exigencies and the emergence of new entertainment media, particularly radio, created an environment which allowed women playwrights to reassess their artistic and professional potential. *Upstaged* documents a passionate commitment, by a number of the women playwrights, to use their art for social critique and change in a time of political upheaval. At the same time, many of these women began playwriting to earn money, often because they needed to. In Chapter 4, 'Writing for Cash, Not Immortal Fame', Arrow analyses the ways in which the rise of radio during the Second World War, and the temporary absence of men, provided women with an opportunity to earn money as 'career playwrights'. The remuneration was poor, and the profession unstable, but playwriting provided a viable occupation for women carrying domestic responsibilities.

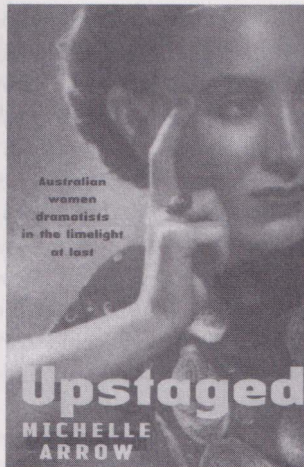
In the week that I was reading *Upstaged* for the purposes of this review, I was distressed to read an article in the *Age* (3 July 2003), 'Oriel Gray, "playwright of ideas", dies aged 83'. My response to Oriel's death included sadness and guilt. As noted by Arrow, while Oriel's play *The Torrents* shared equal first prize with Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* in the Playwrights' Advisory Board Competition of that year, the latter has become a legend in Australian theatre mythology while Oriel Gray "doesn't exist". One of Oriel's greatest desires was that *The Torrents* receive a professional production in Melbourne; she and I had discussed it optimistically on a number of occasions. My disappointment that it never eventuated was because of my commitment to Oriel rather than a belief that the play would still engage a contemporary audience. I suspect it wouldn't—but we still should have tried harder!

Because of my own relationship with Gray, Brand, Duncan and Roland, it does not surprise me that Arrow so passionately engages with her subjects, her "Dramatis Personae" as she describes them, arguing a place for them in 'the canon' rather than providing a much needed comparative evaluation of their works. What is the contribution of these women to Australian cultural history? Does it lie in the work or in their status as trailblazers and their



determination to construct and maintain themselves as career playwrights against all odds? More than twenty years after my own initial engagement with the works, I accept (reluctantly) that *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* is a better play than *The Torrents*. I also recognise that there are a number of neglected male writers of the period, particularly Jim Crawford, George Farwell, George Landen Dann and Sumner Locke Elliot, all of whom, to her credit, are mentioned by Arrow.

In her final chapter Arrow returns to her thesis that Australian theatre and drama criticism has been generated almost entirely from a post-1960s perspective and that the responsibility for the neglect of women playwrights rests largely with the New Wave generation. Her conclusion is



compelling but fails to recognise that, given the ephemeral and immediate nature of plays in performance, very few translate well to stage for later generations. It is timely that a re-evaluation of the New Wave is emerging, which might further assist in restoring the balance between them and the earlier generation of playwrights—men as well as women. Through *Upstaged*, Arrow has made a significant contribution to this much-needed reconstruction of our cultural history.

*Associate Professor Angela O'Brien is Head of the School of Creative Arts at the University of Melbourne. She was responsible for documenting the history of New Theatre Melbourne and is currently documenting student theatre at the University of Melbourne.*

## The Australian short story

**LAURIE HERGENHAN**

Bruce Bennett: *Australian Short Fiction: A History* (UQP, \$30)

In recent literary histories Australian short fiction has received brief treatment. This is the first book to take a full look at its history. Why this delay? Till recently the form attracted readers and critical interest here, but it is currently out of fashion as publishers and promoters push writers and readers towards novels and non-fiction. The genre's economic unattractiveness may explain why in a recent poll of ASA members' forty favourite Australian books no work of short fiction got a mention.

Bennett's book then is welcome. Even if it is not of its nature likely to turn the tide, it reaches out to readers, not setting up the barriers that literary history and criticism can. Without agonising over the difficulties of writing history, it keeps them in mind, invoking social contexts, along with authors' lives and personalities. In deference to current tastes, however, he pursues diversity rather than building a canon. (In my heretical moments I wonder whether some more definite selectivity, short of Leavisism, might stir up debate; after all canons

change and are themselves a means of change. But a 'first' history is no place for one.)

One of the engaging qualities of this book, however, is its skill in drawing the reader into a conversation if not debate: with the writing, the writers and other readers. For far from implying that he is the first to burst into a new world, as some critics do, he continually calls in an extraordinary range of opinion—of critics and of writers themselves who have contributed to the rich dialogue about the form, such as Vance and Nettie Palmer, Barnard Eldershaw, Jack Lindsay, Michael Wilding—not by way of deference or scholarly ritual, but to draw us into a dialogue and extend its range. Such conversations are a part of the enjoyment of literature, whether they take place outwardly, with friends, or in our minds—and most of us enjoy building here the canons whose names we dare not speak. Bennett is not opinionated, but concerned to widen the conversation and make it flow. This makes the book companionable in a way literary companions, though consultable, are not.

The treatment of Lawson and Baynton, examples of a revalued and a recuperated author respectively, puzzles me. This history synthesises rather than embarking itself on either of these processes. It laments the earlier distortion caused by the "can-

onisation of Lawson as national icon" (sic) but then takes an apologetic approach. Hence the chapter on the 1880s and 1890s, guardedly headed 'The Masculine Ascendancy?', begins by putting Lawson temporarily aside to give "a broader appreciation" of other writers and the context. (This has an unintended effect of tiptoeing around a figure that seems monumental if not a colossus.) After dusting off some interesting if minor figures, Bennett returns to "the Lawson case" now that he "may seem less of a monster to overcome". But it is the distortions of his adulators and promoters that have made him an artificial monster, in no need of stalking, rather than any revisionism of quality, as I am sure Bennett would admit, for he sifts and restates Lawson's quality admirably without diminishing it. Bennett sees himself as an historian who testifies rather than reshapes. But the de-canonisation of Lawson began some forty years ago with Harry Heseltine's article, 'Saint Henry: Our Apostle of Mateship' (one of the very few important articles not mentioned in this book), concentrating on the mis-shaping of his reputation. (Recent criticism that Bennett refers to has extended this connection of Lawson with the nation, rather than making anything really new of it.) Reaction against the "so-called Lawson tradition" in the seventies aimed to make way for the new, rather than to 'demote' Lawson as a writer. What Bennett does not do is to place the de-canonisation of Lawson firmly in the past and tell us what are recent attitudes to Lawson—is 'The Drover's Wife' still the most famous Australian story? Is Lawson criticism in a state of exhaustion? (Michael Wilding's important reconsideration, which includes Lawson's politics, is not mentioned.) Is he read much now—or has he become a languishing 'historical' figure in a present which devalues the past?

If it is a challenge to get Lawson into perspective so it is with his 'opposite number', Barbara Baynton. In Bennett's post-Lawson chapter, called 'Alternative Traditions', there are no really strong writers (though there are some interesting ones) apart from Baynton, and her curious isolation is part of her fascination. Her 'belated' arrival on the literary scene has seen her reputation soar, bound up as it is with feminism and feminist studies (and with what Bennett calls the 'rise and rise' of contemporary women writers). Yet this involves a new version of the national. Though this may appear a 'truer' one at this proximity, it raises the old question of whether

one reputation grows partly at the expense of cutting back another, a process that is the literary equivalent of Darwinian evolution. As Bennett puts it, perhaps "Baynton's reputation is not yet so high that a need is felt to lower it".

Baynton criticism, as shown here, concentrates on her forceful depiction of male cruelty to women in the bush, in her two justly famous stories, 'The Chosen Vessel', a tale of rape, and 'Squeaker's Mate'. Yet the latter (as I have argued elsewhere) is an ironic story about a battle between two women: one a wounded, sterile 'tigress' (the titular character) 'robbed' of her surrogate child, the worthless and dimwitted Squeaker, and the 'other woman', the pregnant and destitute usurper who claims and dominates him for her survival. Baynton's single theme is human persecution. Christina Stead (in a letter to me) considered Baynton's most successful story to be the overlooked 'Scrammy 'and', a battle to the death between two men.

Bennett further suggests, again appearing to do a sidestep, that "we should not regret the relative smallness of Baynton's output but give credit to her powerful presence", given the aim of his book to see short fiction as an essential part of social history. The days have passed when range and substantiality of output were regarded a test of literary stature, and it has become seemingly impossible to distinguish reputation, always bound up with social issues, from literary quality—rather like trying to exact Shylock's pound of flesh. The problem is not with Baynton's stature but with determining its nature. Would you choose to take Baynton's volume to that desert island over others by Astley, Barnard, Garner, Masters and Prichard, to mention only some women writers of short fiction? Has her reputation been made to bear too much cultural weight, as with Gwen Harwood, or even Christina Stead?

Reservations aside, this is an admirable book bringing out the rich achievement and scope of short fiction in Australia. For instance, it acknowledges the imaginativeness, sometimes underrated, of social realist writers, how their acute observation can rise to poetry and pathos in this form, in which arguably they have done their best work. Here brevity has enforced a compression, and a delicate implication, that can be spasmodic in their novels. There is room, however, for a placing of these writers in an ongoing political tradition and also for a consideration of a comic tradition.



Bennett points out, always keeping international contexts in mind, that short fiction is a genre “too often neglected by historians, critics and theorists”—if not by anthologists and readers. This history will stimulate and entertain admirers of

Australian short fiction as well as readers here and overseas who turn to it as an excellent introduction to our literature.

*Laurie Hergenhan is the editor of The Australian Short Story, just published in its fifth, enlarged edition by UQP.*

## Bruce Dawe's poetry

### JOHN LEONARD

Dennis Haskell: *Attuned to Alien Moonlight: the Poetry of Bruce Dawe* (UQP, \$30)

Dennis Haskell's study is arranged by thematic chapter: 'Language, Self and Place', 'Representations of Asia' and so forth. Apart from thinking cynically that many of the chapters are destined to end up plagiarised as high-school or undergraduate essays on Bruce Dawe, I found it difficult to picture exactly what sort of a readership Haskell is writing for. Dawe's whole poetry career, after all, has been dedicated to the writing of anti-obscurantist poetry, and I can't think of a single author who less needs explication. Those people coming to Dawe for the first time should not be dissuaded in any way from picking up his collected poems, *Sometimes Gladness* (five editions 1978–1997) and plunging straight in.

As it is, Haskell's discussions of the poems are pedestrian and plodding, and seem often to be exercises in pointing out the obvious; sometimes they are wrong, for example on pages 162–3 Haskell misunderstands Paul's Epistle to the Romans. In places too the tone is very old-fashioned, as for example in the first and second chapters, which are largely an earnest 1980s-sounding exercise in defining Dawe's place in the 'Australian Literary Canon'—as if anyone cared. For Haskell has already established Dawe as the best-selling Australian poet of recent times.

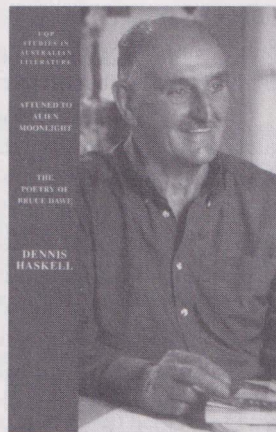
In fact I can offer independent corroboration of Dawe's popularity by the second-hand bookshop test. In my browsing I hardly ever come across a Bruce Dawe volume, indicating that although his books had large print-runs for poetry books, their owners have hung on to them. By contrast second-hand bookshops are full of newish books that were overpromoted at the time and rapidly resold by their owners.

The thing that I found most striking about this book is that Haskell makes much of Dawe's use of colloquial diction and speech rhythms in his poetry and figures him as a poet who inherits the oral culture of his family and working-class upbringing. No-one would argue with this.

On the other hand in the many extracts that Haskell quotes we see Dawe writing poetry which seems to contradict the 'rules' of consonant and vowel treatment, as found for example in traditional ballads and folk-songs, and even in carefully written literary poetry. Briefly, these are to avoid repetition of similar sounds (particularly sibilants) close together and restrict repetition to rhyme, assonance or vowel-rhyme, where these occur. This is simply to make the verse flow and not be clotted with similar sounds. But, as I said, we find Dawe transgressing these rules on many occasions, as for example in the phrase Haskell uses as the book's title: 'Attuned to alien moonlight'. The identical vowel of 'attuned' and 'moonlight' and the alliteration of 'attuned' and 'alien' hold up what should be a limpid line (and, to be very pedantic, how can moonlight be alien?).

The point of this is not to criticise Dawe's work unduly, for other poets are worse offenders, but to indicate how little modern poetry cares for the niceties of oral delivery and oral music, when one of its leading practitioners, who is rightly held to be heir to the oral culture of twentieth-century Australia, disregards it to such an extent. Poetry has become, more than ever before, a private and inner music.

*John Leonard is poetry editor of Overland. His latest collection is Jesus in Kashmir (proensa, 2003).*





## Historical and realist fiction

**CHRISTINA HILL**

Judith Armstrong: *The French Tutor* (Text Publishing, \$28)

Brian Castro: *Shanghai Dancing* (Giramondo Publishing Company, \$29.95)

Published in 2003, these novels are stylistically very different. Where Castro's is a playful discontinuous family 'history', Armstrong's novel is a well-written traditional realist narrative.

In *The French Tutor* Alison, pretty ingenue and tutor in French at a university college, falls in love with Lewis, an older man who lives contentedly with his mother for most of the week. Lewis is handsome, charming and a successful economist who is obsessed with his garden in the hills. His weekends are spent there working where he pays close attention to his roses. A genus of climbing rose called the Albertine is his special project. This is a reference to Proust's sexually ambiguous character Albertine in *In Search of Lost Time*, an intertextual ploy I found heavy-handed and self-conscious. When she is lucky enough to be invited for the weekend, Alison works in Lewis's garden where she learns to admire this rose.

Alison is frustrated that Lewis refuses fully to commit himself to her. He is charming but evasive about the intense friendships he conducts with men. In particular, his young protégé William worries Alison because he seems to claim so much of Lewis's time and attention. Although the reader has long seen it, Alison finally discovers that Lewis is bisexual. David, old school friend of Lewis and the well-known barrister husband of one of her students is the one with whom he has been betraying her. When Alison confronts David, he commits suicide to avoid public exposure.

If this novel is representing sexual mores now, it seems very dated to me, straight out of a 1950s melodrama but without the historical self-awareness informing the recent Todd Haynes film *Far from Heaven*. Would sophisticated people behave today in the way they do in this story? To me *The French Tutor* seems both naïve and heterosexist, strangely oblivious to recent understandings of sexuality.

Brian Castro's *Shanghai Dancing* is a dazzling piece of writing, so complex that conveying its essence in a review is impossible. It forces you to abandon attempts at understanding and be thankful for

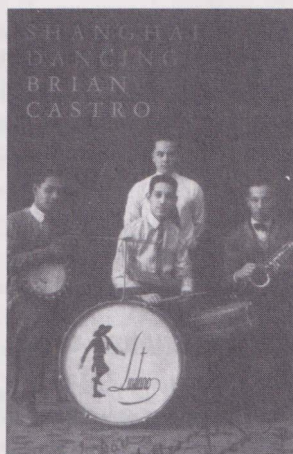
moments of insight. There is no point in struggling after certainty. To 'get it' you must submit to the pleasures of the text, accept the flow of words and images. Music, or perhaps dance, provides the closest comparison. Hence the title?

This is a fictional autobiography, that of the narrator 'Antonio', covering three generations of his family. It moves from the 1930s to the 1960s, through wars and revolutions, the Triads, wealth and bankruptcy and finally exile. The action moves from Shanghai, Macau, and Hong Kong and (briefly) to Australia, this last 'refuge' flat and prosaic in its dun-coloured realism. The narrative revels in its own textuality, using diaries, the pillow book, old manuscripts and photographs. A family tree helps us keep track of the maternal line, the Wings, and the paternal line, the Castros.

Although linearity is fractured, the basic shape of the narrative is the quest. Antonio returns to China in search of his roots after an absence of forty years. He is so deracinated that he muses "perhaps I am Japanese". The narrator warns at the start that truth is elusive, impossible even, that this will be a "history" of "words, memories, lies", which will demand "infinite patience":

Still in the dark, you remember that in Shanghai they used to wrap tomatoes in tissue paper. Like this story. Like the way everything in history is always wrapped in a tissue; of words, of memories, of lies. Dancing. Now that's another matter. You have to have infinite patience with that. Time and timing. Grace and desire. Swaying back and forth like the tide until something is washed up. Shanghai dancing. Nothing there yet. No bluish epiphany; no gas jet flaring over my head.

The chicanery of the characters is always delightful but the novel is also a poignant chronicle of displacement and loss. Identities are blurred and shifting as the Castro and Wing family lines blend



Portuguese, Chinese, British, Jewish, Indian (and possibly Japanese) ancestry.

Castro is authoritative on the post-colonial dilemma, attentive to the collisions between anxiety and pleasure in hybrid subjectivities. He is at ease with the literary allusion that everywhere inhabits his text. In the above quotation, for just one example, there is a trace of Ezra Pound. This effortless

linguistic play is characteristic of *Shanghai Dancing* and so seamlessly interwoven into the narrative that it never seems an intrusive or egregious display of learning. This is a difficult novel but worth the demands that it makes.

*Christina Hill is a Melbourne critic who has lectured in literary studies at Deakin University.*

## Not a detective story

### KERRY GREENWOOD

Finola Moorehead: *Still Murder* (reprinted by Spinifex Press with an introduction by Marion J. Campbell and an afterword by the author, \$24.95)

In her afterword, the author says that this is not a genre novel, that is, not a detective story. She ought to know. She wrote it. In her foreword, Marion J. Campbell says that it “radically dislocates the highly codified form of the novel of detection”. By which she also means that it is not a detective story. And it isn’t.

This rather abolishes any credentials I might have had to review it. I write detective stories, for both adults and children, and also science fiction and fantasy and historical novels and non-fiction both historical and true crime, and I have never dislocated a genre in my life. When I was at university, I was only required to believe in the gospel of the Great Novelists and I believed in it enough to pass English. Postmodernism has passed me by and I have no patience with literary theory as a substitute for plot, characterisation, and sense.

If you would still like to hear my opinion, read on. I promise not to say anything nasty about Foucault. This time.

*Still Murder* is not a detective novel, and it may not even be a novel. It is a jigsaw puzzle of newspaper reports, bits of monologue, poems, rap songs, psychiatrist’s notes and a first-person narrative from Detective Senior Constable Margot Gorman of the National Crime Authority. It includes quotes, the diary of a man who would now be called a stalker, and the ravings of Patricia Phillips who is mad, like Hamlet, when the wind is in any other quarter than the nor’nor’west. It is a long, complicated, infuriating, very clever rage against corruption, against rape, and against war, which corrupts everything it touches.

The basic plot is simple—and we know not only who it was who the nun found buried under a new setting of very illegal vegetables in a public park, but who killed him and how. Detective writers have done this before but it is very difficult and almost never works. This is, as I have said, not a detective story. The closest analogy might be from *Crime and Punishment*, where Dostoevsky studies the gradual pressures which bring Raskolnikov to confession, though there is no confession here. We know that Patricia killed her rotten husband, and we know why. Also, he had it coming. The victims in this book are the murderer herself, her lesbian lover, her faithless Peter who was sent away to Vietnam, perhaps even Margot Gorman who combines bike riding with alcoholism. She also picks up men in toilets, which may be ironic.

In a sense everything in this book is mad, because the times in which the characters live were mad. There is no closure. Margot Gorman finds out that Patricia did it, but she is insane and cannot be tried—and in any case, the crime scene may be imaginary and nothing can be proved. There are angry letters from Patricia’s sister Julie (“the family is the bed of corruption”) which range from cruel to kind and show that the sisters share the guilt of their younger sister’s death under a train.

‘Still Murder’ refers to a still life, a painting where the event is frozen in time and we can examine every leaf, every stem, every flaw in the plums and peaches. The murder is not central to this book. What we are examining is corruption, from the sleazy husband trying to rape Patricia’s female lover to the top cop complaining that “independent incorruptible women are proving to be the bane of my life”. We can examine violation, for example, ranging from the 10-year-old prostitute supplied to a soldier in Vietnam to the lesbian who has a different sexual orientation.



But what this book is really about commands our respect and justifies its re-publication. It's a long chaotic rage against war. The Vietnam war did major damage to the Australian psyche. This book cries out against it; against the pity, the cruelty, the corruption and pain and misery and fractured lives and civil life; against madness.

And now we need to read it all again.

Kerry Greenwood is a Melbourne writer. She has published twenty-six books. Her latest book is *The Castlemaine Murders* (Allen & Unwin).

## Confronting destruction

### JOHN McLAREN

Janette Turner Hospital: *Due Preparations for the Plague* (Fourth Estate/HarperCollins, \$29.95)

Janette Turner Hospital: *North of Nowhere, South of Loss* (UQP, \$24)

Pam Skutenko: *The Goose* (The Little Press, \$24.95)

These two writers both have a gift for finding openings that sweep the reader into the world of their imaginative devising. "*Brightness falls from the air*, and so do the words, which rush him. They swoop like starlings from the radio hooked to his belt . . ." From Nash's sorrow for mortality, wrapped in mythology, the play on 'air' takes us into the modern age where instant communication both liberates and threatens. The threat materialises in all its political reality to provide the theme of *Due Preparations for the Plague*, Janette Turner Hospital's latest novel. Her collection of stories, *North of Nowhere, South of Loss*, also opens with a voice, but this time it comes not from a radio but from "the black space between the two projectors". In this story, we watch, rather than listen, as the writer makes us, with her narrator, powerless spectators of the enactment of human cruelty. Pam Skutenko in her first novel confronts us immediately with people in their vulnerability and mortality: "The spring her mother planted pansies was the only time Olly saw her father cry." It will take us to the end of the novel before we fully understand the significance of this moment, but its conjunction of hope and loss gives her novel its drive.

*Due Preparations for the Plague* shows Turner Hospital at the height of her powers as a narrator. As in some of her earlier work, her theme is lost

childhood, lost children, a lost world, but this time set in the framework of a modern thriller, complete with the intrigue of espionage and the technology of terror. The book is political in its dissection of the nature of terror and the ease with which the agents of the state slip into the same mode. It chills with its portrayal of the mercenary who sells death to the highest bidder and reaps his rewards from his enjoyment of the game and from the sufferings of his victims. It goes beyond the simple thriller by analysing the consequences for those who, in working to combat terror, find that the interests of the state make them complicit. Her security agent is not simply world-weary, like John le Carré's Smiley, or guilty, like Greene's characters, but haunted by the destruction he has unleashed and which continues to blight the generation of survivors. It is this generation with whom the author is chiefly concerned as she traces their efforts to understand what their parents have done to them and to each other.

Yet, for all its skill, this novel lacks the density of some of Turner Hospital's earlier novels, like *Charades* or *Oyster*. The thriller form eventually defeats her, for all the literary allusions that move it towards a higher existential plane. We are in a bleak world where the brightness has fallen from the air, but our overriding concern is to find out what has happened, who has done what and what the outcome will be, rather than with why it has happened so. Certainly, the novel's 'Decameron', where ten hostages, each in their turn, confront their probable deaths, and the meaning this gives to their lives, is a *tour de force*. At the end, when the plague has become both the act of terror and a symbol for a force for evil unleashed on the world, the symbols of these lives—a violin, a blue coat, a dance—remain as signs of possible renewal. But the voices are too alike, the voices of a middle-class global elite, and remain too detached, too separated from each other, despite their arguments and passions, to take us out of the marsh of terror that has engulfed them all. Even the voice of evil, the treacherous double-agent, distracts us from the poverty and oppression that makes possible his conspiracies. We are left, as he is, entrapped in the game of terror.

*North of the Sun, South of Loss*, brings together seven previously collected stories with seven published together for the first time. Characteristically, these take one or two people at a moment when their lives are unravelling, and show them trying to

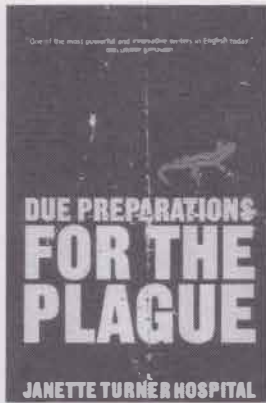


put the fragments together in a new narrative that will make sense of the past. Each has the richness of a novel, but they are no mere offcuts or try-outs for a larger work. A couple of the characters recur, but each story is satisfyingly complete in itself, leaving its characters to unroll in the reader's imagination. The settings move between France, North America and Australia, with the remembered nurturing heat of Queensland and the river view from Brisbane's Regatta hotel as recurring motifs that tie them to a coherent but lost world.

Yet even in this world the characters remain on the margins as they chase their unrealisable dreams: "Homeland is where the senses steer by instinct when the reins are let go." It is where the St Lawrence plucks at Canada and New York state, "on the dividing line between two countries, nowhere, everywhere, in the margins." It is where the flood sweeps away the Queensland pub, and when the rope of the swing breaks, leaving the child to fly in freedom, beyond the mango tree, beyond the broken legs waiting on the lawn below.

Pam Skutenko also takes us into a world of lost dreams. Her images of music, food and garden suggest the possibility of an imaginative fullness that can be completed through love, but the denial of love leaves men with only violence and women with an emptiness they hide behind social forms. Dreams come closest to their realisation in the brothel where Sarah is nurtured, but the marginal status of the woman who fosters her, saving her from a brutal father, and of the couple who take over this responsibility, ensures that she remains an outsider. For a time it seems her talent as a musician will free her, but this too is thwarted by her grandfather's shame and her brother's malice.

The goose of the title is the mother who builds her nest near the falcon, so saving her young from the fox. The mothers in the story marry weak or brutal men, but they do not save their daughters. Sarah's mother dies, and her father keeps her from her grandparents until his death. Her grandfather then gives her an education, but refuses to acknowledge her. She in turn enters a marriage that denies her talent for music, and in her turn is unable to reveal her truths or her talent to her daughter, Ollie.



Ollie's quest for these truths provides the frame for the novel.

I have been fortunate to discuss this work with the author from the time of its commencement, and the result fulfils all my expectations. It is intended as the first of a trilogy, and leaves the reader with questions that I am confident will be answered as the author delves further into the past of her families. But it is complete as it stands, stretching over three generations of Australia's settlement, from the last days

of gold to the wave of postwar migration. The particular fates of its characters are woven into the continuing struggle to implant a European culture on the foundations of a brutal struggle to force a harsh environment and its native people to yield to masculine desire. Although the indomitable mistress of the brothel, the "house with the high fence", makes it a place of "music, nurture and cultivation", its economics are a product of this desire. It is also a place of sanctuary for refugees who have been uprooted by slavery and revolution around the world. This sanctuary is violated when violence and law intrude, and Sarah is left without the support she needs to fulfil her talents. She flees to a town in the Victorian mallee, only to find that once again her integrity is breached by prejudice and male lust.

This conflict between the need for the security that allows growth and the passions that destroy it is maintained to the end, when the epilogue is split between an argument over which part of the cemetery earth should inter the remains of the former rivals, and Ollie's realisation that her mother's garden still lives. This conclusion takes us back to the novel's beginning, without trying to resolve its contradictory realities into a false unity. The style throughout is richly allusive, and demands careful reading to track the further depths and connections constantly being exposed in the narrative. Some will probably only be fully explained in the two further volumes, which promise to take the story deeper into the past. But like Turner Hospital's work, it leaves us on the borders between times and worlds that can neither be reconciled nor separated. Both writers find solace only by confronting the destruction we bring to each other.

*John McLaren is a consulting editor of Overland.*

## Novel reading

### LAURIE CLANCY

Michael Wilding: *Academia Nuts* (Wild & Woolley, \$26.95)

Bruce Pascoe: *Ocean* (Bruce Sims Books, \$19.95)

Nicholas Drayson: *Confessing a Murder* (Jonathan Cape, \$29.95)

Dewi Anggraeni: *Snake* (Indra Publishing, \$22.95)

These four novels are testimony to the variety within contemporary Australian fiction.

The so-called campus novel is still a comparatively rare phenomenon in Australia and likely to remain so. Given the way universities are going it is significant that the first chapter of Michael Wilding's *Academia Nuts* is titled 'Last Campus Novel'.

This is a funny and timely book and one that is in effect a kind of elegy for the golden age of Australian universities—roughly from the mid-sixties to the late eighties.

Much of the novel is taken up with conversations between a group of disgruntled academics—Dr Bee, Pawley, and a writer cum academic named Henry Lancaster, who is very obviously Wilding's alter ego. They sit around and muse on the rise of management and the campus security service at the expense of actual teachers, on the means by which professors are appointed, on the contemporary English teacher's dislike of books: "they had forced the changes on the syllabus, replaced books with the text, replaced reading the text with reading theory". The targets—business studies, tourism—are perfectly predictable as well as perfectly valid. The campus novel can only be written, Dr Bee insists, as an historical romance.

Wilding's special bugbear is positive discrimination, the preferential treatment of women. David Williamson states hopefully on the backcover: "This book will either make you laugh out loud or very angry, depending on your age, gender and ideological commitment" and there seems little doubt that Wilding is hoping to offend as many people as he can.

For the most part though he is having too much fun to make people angry. The celebratory puns, wisecracks, insults and *non sequiturs* contain so much relish that they leave the targets unscathed. His satire is more that of Dryden than Pope, though reaching higher levels of absurdity.

There are endless forms to be filled in, questionnaires on every aspect of university life, even questionnaires on questionnaires. Near the end of the novel, though, the author's rage at the evisceration of the university takes over and a central character indulges in a "tirade":

It was a tirade with no relief, no illuminating anecdotes, no parries of word play over the wine, no wit, no jokes, no sensuous pleasure of language or image, this was the burden of analysis, the unmediated message forbidden to fiction, the undiluted didacticism condemned by literary criticism, this was what had to be said and was never said and could not be said in any entertaining or engaging way. It was the irreducible, the condition and circumstance of their life.

It is impossible to doubt the genuineness of Wilding's feelings here, as if every horror he had tried to keep at bay with humour bursts in on top of him. This will be a fine book to keep and show your child when he or she asks what happened to universities.

DEWI ANGGRAENI'S special territory up to now, like that of a number of Australian writers of Asian background, has been the examination of the clash of widely different cultures. *Snake* has that as one of its concerns too. A Eurasian woman, Serena, is involved with an Australian man named Kurt and hopes that after three years he will make some kind of commitment to her. After a while, however, Kurt and the issue of two cultures begins to recede into the background of the narrative as he is shown up as a shallow and unimaginative man.

The author's interest turns more to the snake brooch that Kurt buys Serena against her will, to its destructive history and Serena's struggle to break free from its influence. *Snake* is unusually uncompromising in Anggraeni's generally secular work in the whole-heartedness with which it commits itself to the idea that a piece of jewellery can wreak havoc among those who come into contact with it. The novel opens itself completely to the worlds of the demonic and the fatidic, to omens and forecasts and spells.

The effect of the brooch is both intense and instantaneous: "When the manager handed the snake brooch to Kurt, Serena felt the blood drain from her head, and her knees nearly buckled". The history of the brooch started with a maid who hanged



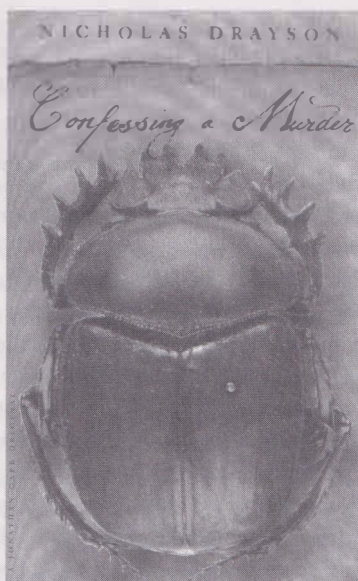
herself after becoming pregnant to Pek Hong and hearing him deny he was the father. The ornament from then on is supposed to be cursed. In turn we hear about Serena's new friend Nancy Tan and the troubled history of Nancy's mother Ay Ling, to whom the brooch once belonged. It was also owned by a painter called Yvonne Sigarlaki. Its power is such that it prevents Serena from menstruating so that she believes she is pregnant. All this sits oddly with the very matter-of-fact Australian sections and a brief account of the events of 11 September.

There are occasional clichés and awkward moments in the writing and the complications of familial relationships become overwhelming at times. Generally though, the transitions of place—Malaysia and Fairfield, Melbourne—and time are handled skilfully, as are the fairly frequent dream sequences. *Snake* is an intriguing novel, that represents something of a new direction for its author.

*OCEAN IS THE MOST* ambitious and probably the most successful of Bruce Pascoe's novels to date. Moving away from the individual story of Jim Fox he offers us, in effect, a kind of history of the Aboriginal people over several generations, told from different but overlapping points of view, from 1804 to the 1850s.

Captain Caleb Mathew leads a violent group of sealers in their debauchery of the Aboriginal women they come across in the remote community they set up. Though not a wholly bad man, even a person of some idealism, Mathew succumbs to the temptation to join in the cruel excesses of his crew. Though he marries a woman named Eugenie O'Bregheny, the relationship is unsatisfactory, especially sexually, and Mathew is constantly drawn back to a beautiful black woman whom he finally takes by force. Thirty-five years later he writes in his log with bitterness and remorse of the wrongs he did and the mistakes he made.

Meanwhile Mathew's wife Eugenie writes a diary to be read by Johnny Mullagh, whom she took



as her son when his Aboriginal mother Dilly was killed. She is surprisingly forbearing and even generous about her husband and his infidelity: "He was a good man, but just a man, struggling within his capacity to make sense of all that befell him". Feeling has been driven out of her by the brutality of the English soldiers in Ireland. Though shunned by most of society Eugenie opens a school in George Town, Van Diemen's Land.

So we go on down the generations, with recurring patterns of violence. One section deals yet again with the famous incident of the Protector George Robinson

leading an expedition that went through the entire island, herding the blacks into town where they died of disease. The novel is in part a lament for the way whites have destroyed a beautiful country. Hide tanneries and wool scouring works replace the pristine wilderness that Eugenie and Johnny once knew.

Only the forms of oppression change. The novel deals with whites who take children from their Aboriginal mothers. It shows the blacks' attempts to play by the whites' rules, building up a successful cattle ranch only to have it brutally taken from them by whites in yet another massacre.

Pascoe's intricate narrative structure allows him to weave his characters into and out of the action as he wishes. In one section he convincingly creates the language of a black woman, Aunt Ida, remembering some of the events we have already had described to us. There is another journal: Amaso Delano has written a narrative of a voyage to Van Diemen's Land in 1805. There are passages of interior monologue and long anecdotal changes.

The note on which the novel ends is not totally despairing: "And today you'd hear unusually attenuated silences. Not the sound of triumph, but the indrawn breath of survival." Perhaps that is all that can be expected.

CHARLES DARWIN seems to be very much in fashion these days, on television and in print. A few years ago Roger McDonald published *Mr Darwin's Shooter*, about a member of the great scientist's



party. In *Confessing a Murder*, his stylish and elegantly written first novel, Nicholas Drayson has a new take on Darwin.

There are layers upon postmodernist layers of complexity in this novel. It comes with a publisher's introduction, an editor's note (written by none other than one Nicholas Drayson), a map, a list of references and a series of learned footnotes—just about everything, in short, except a set of steak knives. In the introduction we are told that the manuscript was discovered in Holland in 1988 and its ownership is fiercely contested.

The book has all the appearance of factual, even tediously factual truth. But the incidents that appear in the 'manuscript' cannot be found in Darwin and the islands on which the events described no longer exist. Drayson has paradoxically created an historical background to set him free to invent whatever truths he pleases.

The result is reminiscent of Vladimir Nabokov, with its mock-learned parody of academic conventions. The editor has tremendous fun sending himself up: "Paragraphs and sentences are often long (sometimes torturously so)", he remarks of his own work. This is covering yourself against critics with a vengeance!

As for the narrative itself, it purports to be the confessions in 1883 of a man who has been exiled on a small island in the Java Sea. A vain but brilliant naturalist in his seventies, the narrator reflects on his dealings with 'Bobby' (Darwin), and his love for Bobby's brother Philos as well as Charley Allen, the young assistant to a pompous naturalist named Alfred Russel Wallace.

Drayson's training as a naturalist shows up in the detailed descriptions of the animals and fauna on the island—the goat-like creatures he calls 'gadzocks', for example, and the sargassum weed that they feed on. Far from seeing nature as ruthlessly competitive, he delights in the variousness and ingenuity its forms take.

But *Confessing a Murder* is also a detective novel. Only at the end do we learn why the narrator is marooned in solitude on the island and the strange means by which Darwin came to discover and eventually reveal The Theory.

*Confessing a Murder* is a remarkable debut. It will be fascinating to see what Drayson does next.

Laurie Clancy is a Melbourne writer and publisher.

## An honourable mongrel

### ALEX McDERMOTT

Ian Jones: *The Fatal Friendship: Ned Kelly, Aaron Sherritt & Joe Byrne* (Lothian, \$35)

In the Kelly Gang Joe Byrne was the man that Ned was closest to. Of all people, the man Joe Byrne was closest to was Aaron Sherritt. In the winter of 1880 Joe Byrne shot Aaron Sherritt, looked down at the crumpled, splattered mess at his feet and said, "That's the man that I want". Then he got on his horse and rode to Glenrowan, where he and the gang were preparing to derail a train full of policemen. Unfortunately for the gang, but fortunately for posterity—which tends to prefer a hero to be tragic rather than maniacal and blood-drenched—the train was forewarned and never made the final drop. In the ensuing gunfire Joe Byrne was shot in the groin and died. Ned Kelly was shot repeatedly, and lived. At dawn he rose up from the scrub and advanced on the police lines, a man encased in iron, swaying about and firing, looking, so the reports give it, like some ghostly, headless apparition. Arrested, he was taken to Melbourne, tried, convicted and hanged.

It is this human triangle that Ian Jones set himself to explore in *The Fatal Friendship: Ned Kelly, Aaron Sherritt and Joe Byrne*, a revised version of a book originally published in 1992. Ian Jones is Australia's foremost Kelly historian—few individuals have shaped the way the reading public imagines Ned Kelly and his world as this man. Even those of us who come after, and wish to overturn some of the basic assumptions which underlie Jones's Kelly, are indebted to the years of assiduous research which Jones has given to the pursuit of his subject.

This study of Byrne and Sherritt is the most subtle and nuanced, the most lifelike of any portrait which Jones has done. Although stock-thieving, opium-smoking, murderous Byrne is a little too polished and gallant for my liking, Sherritt is allowed genuinely human features and foibles. A flawed man, a likeable man, a troubled and troublesome man, both naïve and cunning, in the war between the police and the established order against the Kelly gang, Sherritt tried to make the most of both sides, getting money from both, telling lies to both, and tried to be liked by both. Finally Byrne snapped, and the gang used Sherritt's murder as bait to lure the special train. The drama, as Jones

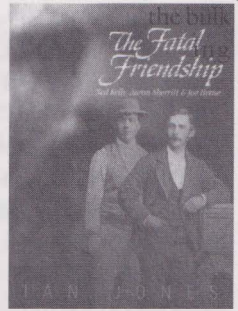
describes it, is very real, yet to my mind the world he gives us which surrounds it rings hollow. Although writing with both clarity and a wealth of detail he leaves out several vital things, crucial to any understanding of Kelly's rebellion and the people caught up in and destroyed by it.

In particular I am thinking of the extensive involvement of Kelly, Byrne and Sherritt, much of their families and practically all of their mates in widespread and extensive stock theft, preying off not only the rich 'squatters' in the region (as Kelly asserted in his Jerilderie Letter), but the poor farmers as well. Kelly and his mates were not well liked in the region, not when they stole stock, moved them across the border into NSW or down to Melbourne, changed their brands, sold them, then returned to jeer at the sight of a farmer lamenting the loss of his only draught horse. This happened repeatedly in the region of north-east Victoria, 'Kelly country', in the years prior to Kelly's outlawry, and was in fact the ultimate cause of the 'persecution' which the police—admittedly a fairly roguish bunch themselves, difficult to distinguish from the flash larrikins they were paid to catch—hounded particular clans and 'mobs' with.

Whatever your opinion as to the true context and causes of Kelly's outlawry, this book can be enjoyed as a moving, beautifully rendered version of the honourable Kelly myth, a study of two crucial supporting characters in the greater story. You won't find in it the marginal shanty culture which is intrinsic to understanding the Kelly world: people

at war with both police and the region's more law-abiding residents, engaged in a riotous life of stealing, of flash clothes and fast horses, governed by their own elaborate protocol of conduct, of honour and shame, loyalty and betrayal—a world made patently manifest in Kelly's two public 'manifestos', the Cameron and Jerilderie Letters. Instead you have Good People in Troubled Times, much put upon by Devious and Immoral policemen. It has the substance and power of myth, of biblical epic, but unlike the films and the novels, the problem is not that the facts are wrong. Jones's facts are right. It is, rather, the facts which are omitted. Naturally this is any historian's occupational hazard—which material, which accounts to leave out. But my feeling here is that Jones has a particular blind spot that renders him unable to acknowledge the possibility that Kelly, while often honourable, was just as often a mongrel, that there can be such a thing as an honourable mongrel. There is nothing in his view which gives room for, let alone explains, Kelly the liar, Kelly the braggart, Kelly the bully and thug. Yet for these parts of his nature there is evidence aplenty, as much, indeed, as there is for Kelly the honourable man.

*Alex McDermott is a Research Scholar at La Trobe University, School of Historical & European Studies.*



## OPINION | Antonia Hildebrand

### Ordinary Australians

MANY PEOPLE ADMIRE John Howard, because they see him as an ordinary, decent man. They see him as much like themselves; themselves writ large, perhaps—although in certain circles Howard is known as the 'Prime Miniature'.

Barry Oakley observed a man at a gathering in 1996 (the night of Howard's election win and a return to Liberal government in Canberra for the first time since 1983) repeating over and over, "A suburban solicitor".<sup>1</sup> That was how this man saw John Howard; as a humble, suburban solicitor. In fact, Howard had been a professional politician for years at this time and was already very affluent and

an influential political figure. The view of Howard as an ordinary bloke has only grown, the more powerful he has become. It is an image assiduously cultivated by the Liberal Party and by most parts of the Australian media. John Howard and his government have found a foolproof way to get re-elected: appeal to the basest instincts in human nature. Racism, sexism, xenophobia, elitism, religious intolerance, anti-intellectualism, militarism, conformity.

This has been remarked on many times: the way in which Howard is able to appeal to the worst in everyone and to make people feel it's okay to give



in to these instincts—instincts which they were told for so long were bad. All the ‘vices’ I’ve listed are not to be found only in Australians. One of the mistakes of Howard’s opponents is to link these tendencies to something evil in the Australian psyche. In fact, these same tendencies can be found in almost any nation, and in some nations they have been allowed, from time to time, to run rampant and wreak havoc. What happened in Bosnia, what happened in Rwanda, what is happening in the Middle East all illustrate graphically where lowest-common-denominator politics can lead. It will take much longer for the breakdown of civil society to occur in Australia because what made Australians unique for so long was not their vices, but their virtues.

The Australian ideal of ‘a fair go’ and of mateship, the commitment to the well-being of others and the compassion for those less fortunate, the distaste for elites and the class system, the belief that every Australian has a right to the help and protection of government, the belief in standards of ethical behaviour for those in the church, in the law, in business and in government, the desire to preserve the environment for future generations, for affordable, tax-funded health-care and education systems—all in all a belief in a partnership between the government and the people to create a just society—have been undone in a remarkably short space of time by Howard and his advisors. Public virtues have been made into private vices.

‘We can’t go back to the seventies’ they cry as if the seventies were a time of terrible hardship and suffering. Anyone who lived through the seventies knows that exactly the opposite was the case. Ordinary Australians had a higher standard of living in every way in that now-despised political era. Especially if things such as job security, working hours, protection of workers’ rights, health care and education—all those things that add up to that indefinable *je ne sais quois* called ‘quality of life’—are taken into account. So much for the small picture, but to really understand what is at stake we have to look at the big picture.

Rulers have always taxed the people to pay for wars and they have always preferred to tax the peasantry rather than the rich and powerful—it’s less dangerous for the government. All this is part of the long and dishonourable history of the Kings and Queens of Europe. Rulers didn’t concern themselves with the peasantry’s health and education,

with their nutrition or the wellbeing of them or their children. They didn’t see these things as their concern. The ideal of the welfare state has always been the *bête noire* of conservatives; not the cruelty and indifference which preceded it for thousands of years. But in a sense the argument for either arms or bread is a kind of phantom.

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a harrowing time for working families in Australia. Men were forced to keep on the move. They had to travel from town to town looking for work or their dole was cancelled. In reality the governments of the time were afraid that if large groups of unemployed formed in any one place, riots could break out. Yet, when the Second World War started, the government took over the entire care and feeding of these men—once they were soldiers. Rulers have always fed, clothed and housed their troops; this tradition is accepted because it has always been that way. The idea of social welfare is relatively new by comparison.

Ferocious taxes were often levied to pay for a monarch’s wars in past centuries and it was accepted that a certain amount of the money would have to be spent on the wellbeing of the troops so they could fight. The Howard Government has followed the time-honoured feudal tradition of the European monarchs, spending almost a billion dollars on the war in Iraq while arguing the toss over a \$5 cut to those who receive income from Centrelink. This pattern runs through all the Howard Government’s social policies. Or perhaps its lack of them. This Government seems incapable of approaching policy decisions with any ideas of its own, operating instead from a grab-bag of foreign ideas and ideologies which have grown out of foreign circumstances and history and have little or no connection with Australia’s history or ideals. Howard is only really interested in strutting the world stage. His welcome home to the Australian troops returning from Iraq is the equivalent of the baby-kissing politician. It all has an air of falseness to it; because it is false.

If Howard really cared about Australians he has had many, many chances to prove it in his policy decisions. But on every occasion he has stuck to ideology over compassion, humanity and genuine patriotism. Only Robert Menzies managed to outdo Howard in distaste for the Australian people. He spent most of the Second World War in England, apparently toying with the fantasy of being Prime



Minister of that nation. Not surprisingly, Menzies is Howard's role model.

The current frenzy to whip up a terrorist threat in Australia serves as camouflage for the Howard Government's real interests, which seem to revolve around alienating the whole of South East Asia and making Australia an American colony.

To say its interests are relentlessly international rather than national is an understatement. The idea that everything foreign is better, so prevalent in John Howard's childhood, drives all of their agendas.

The big picture is that the American government is using the terrorist threat to pound humanism and liberal ideals into the ground. It's very ironic indeed that this same government is ensconced in Iraq trying to teach it how to be a democracy.

If it wasn't so tragic it would be funny. In the long run the threat to humanism and democracy, if unchecked, will have a far more devastating effect on western society than the Islamic fundamentalists could ever hope to inflict. As for the situation here in Australia; it seems to me that the people who think John Howard is an ordinary Australian have forgotten what an ordinary Australian is.

When I went to night school, one of the teachers was a small, thin, rumpled man who had retired

from teaching but taught one or two nights a week. One winter night when the college had been painted and the heaters had been turned off I remember this teacher standing, freezing, before our class, and taking jumper after jumper out of his briefcase and putting them on as he lectured us on economics. I was completing my Senior year at the age of 26 so I could go to university and the class consisted of mature-age students and some soldiers from the local army base. I never forgot that teacher. He could have been at home near a fire with a nice cup of coffee and a good book but we wanted to learn and he could teach us, and that was his reward. He was paid almost nothing. I think it was the memory of this small, freezing teacher and his comically multiplying jumpers that drove me on through two degrees. I just couldn't let him down. He and others like him are what make Australia run, whatever is thrown at them by an uncaring, ideology-driven government. That teacher was an 'ordinary' Australian. John Howard is not.

1. Barry Oakley, *Minitudes*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, p.315.

*Antonia Hildebrand is a poet, shortstory writer and essayist. Her recent book is The Past is Another Country: Viewpoints, Essays and Reviews (Tangerine Books).*

---

## OPINION | Jay Bulworth

### Strategic policy alternatives for Australia

ANY MEANINGFUL DISCUSSION of strategic policy alternatives for Australia must begin with the question of agency: who is going to implement the policy? Certainly not our rulers, who have no intention of taking our advice to spend less on Collins-class submarines and more on health care. They already know that their policies will cause more militarism in the region and more inequality at home.

Those who exercise power already know what they are doing. No amount of intellectual or moral arguments in *Overland* will change their minds. What will change their minds, however, is resistance from below. Progressive policies are imposed on governments by their populations; they are not bestowed on the public by the goodness of their rulers. This article will therefore concern itself with

what we as citizens can do to impose a democratic agenda on our government in the area of defence and foreign policy. For reasons of space, I will limit myself to the subject of Australia-Indonesia relations, because Australian government policy is vulnerable on several fronts.

Since Suharto's resignation, brought on by the Asian financial crisis and massive public protests in 1998, complex and often contradictory forces have been unleashed. On the one hand, the Indonesian government spends more on debt repayments than it does on health care. Senior army officers who engaged in terrorism against the people of East Timor have not been punished. They have gone on to conduct operations against the people of West Papua and Aceh. Military links with the Australian

foreign minister, Laurie Brereton, had raised this very issue as a matter of priority in the lead-up to the 2001 election:

A significant proportion of [Indonesia's] debt should be classified as 'criminal debt', as loan monies were effectively stolen by powerful political figures, officials and business cronies. (*SMH*, 1 June 2001.)

The *Tampa* election put paid to his plans, but the

situation can be reversed if we are prepared to act. There is no reason why the concept of odious debt cannot be raised, along with lawsuits against war criminals. They would improve the strategic environment tremendously.

*Jay Bulworth is completing a PhD in strategic policy in the School of Social and International Studies at Deakin University.*

obituary / **PAUL STRANGIO**

## JIM CAIRNS (1914–2003)

"MODERATION IN TEMPER is always a virtue, but moderation in principle is always a vice," wrote Thomas Paine, the Anglo-American political philosopher and radical democrat. No formula for public life more aptly describes how James Ford Cairns conducted himself in a career that took him to unparalleled heights for an Australian politician of radical persuasion. Frequently vilified for his unorthodox and passionately held views, Cairns maintained a civility in political debate as unusual as it was disarming.

Cairns packed many lives into his extraordinary 89 years—Depression school-leaver, champion athlete, 'copper', economic historian, 'great white hope' of the post-Split Victorian ALP, anti-war protester extraordinaire, Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer and subject of scandal in the Whitlam Government, counter culture guru, and prolific author. If he had a remarkable capacity for reinvention, he was also constant. For sixty years he struggled to change the world, to right wrongs created by racism, colonialism, authoritarianism and militarism, and to expose the iniquities and acquisitiveness of the capitalist market place. His was a crusade rooted in an indomitable faith in humanity. The resilience of that faith seems all the more extraordinary because so often Cairns swam against the stream of his fellow Australians.

When my biography of Cairns appeared in 2002, at least one calloused political observer sniffed at the worth of a life spent in what he construed as quixotic pursuit. For that writer, there could be one calculus of political achievement only. Yet because

Cairns' predominant role in public life was a voice of dissent against the established order, his influence was hard to quantify and easy to underestimate. Former Monash University political scientist Max Teichmann alluded to this when he observed that Cairns' legacies could not be measured in "dams bridges and foundation stones. His contribution was different and superior".

There is little dispute about Cairns' effectiveness in turning around Australian attitudes to the Vietnam War. Contrary to the stereotype of a man congenitally lacking in political nous, his leadership of the anti-war movement was not only courageous, but skilful and prudent. Nothing better exemplified this than the first Moratorium campaign of May 1970. He contained the excesses of fringe militants who were prepared to spill blood in the name of peace, yet he did not concede ground to the shrill scare-mongering of the movement's conservative critics. Cairns demonstrated that mass public protests need not descend into anarchy, and he enlarged the space for democratic action in this country.

As Cairns reached the apotheosis of his popularity during the anti-Vietnam War struggle, an increasing disjunction existed between his status as prophet of social liberation and his private asceticism. Writing around that time, Craig McGregor diagnosed a man who had surrendered himself to his principles: "somewhere along the line Cairns has made up his mind that what he stands for is more important than what he is himself". This emo-

## Subscription form

- Full price Individuals 1 year (4 issues) \$42
- Full price Institutions 1 year (4 issues) \$45
- Pensioner / Student 1 year (4 issues) \$32
- Overseas 1 year (4 issues) US\$60
- Life Subscription \$600
- Take-3 (Island, Overland, Tirra Lirra) \$85
- Donation \$.....  
donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible

Send cheque or money order or

Please debit my:  Bankcard  Visa  Mastercard

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Expiry Date  /

Signature .....

Cardholder name .....

Subscriber name .....

Address .....

.....

.....

.....

Mail to: PO Box 14428  
MELBOURNE VIC 8001  
Australia

O L Society Limited  
ACN 007 402 673 • ABN 78 007 402 673  
e-mail: [overland@vu.edu.au](mailto:overland@vu.edu.au)  
ph: (03) 9688 4163 • fax: (03) 9687 7614  
[www.overlandexpress.org](http://www.overlandexpress.org)

tional constraint, coupled with his intellectual openness, created a complex and fragile mix, which is central to understanding the explosive impact Junie Morosi had on him in 1974-5. So many of the words expended about that episode ignore that Morosi's assault on Cairns was intellectual as well as emotional, the one spearheading the other.

The banner of personal liberation Cairns marched behind following 1975 never became an end in itself; instead, he remained focused on its translation into social action. Equally he found it difficult to slough off a lifetime pattern of self-restraint. Organiser and guiding light of the early Confest movement, Cairns eschewed its mores. Nearing the end of his life he fretted that this personal austerity (what he described as his 'standoffishness') had stunted his emotional relationships. Asked in 1999 whether he was 'pleased' with what he had accomplished during the 'whole sweep' of his life, Cairns distinguished between the public and private spheres. "There is a critical contradiction," he reflected, "I feel pleased in all those impersonal relations, those distant public campaigning relations . . . But so many of my purely personal relations, I feel disappointed about."

But even here there was a paradox to Cairns. While he presented as emotionally remote, forbidding even, he was also renowned for his compassion at the micro-level. Legion are the stories of his personal kindness (some aired over talkback radio in the days following his death and others were swapped at his funeral service): the offenders he convicted as a policeman and then assisted, materially and otherwise, to rehabilitate; the Asian students whom he befriended and helped ease their isolation while an academic at the University of Melbourne at the end of the Second World War; the countless interventions he made on behalf of victims of Australia's racially discriminatory immigration policies; and the displaced and distressed people whom he gave refuge in his family home. I too became the beneficiary of that kindness extending over many years as I worked on the biography.

For those that got to know Cairns, and I count myself fortunate to have been among them, there was never a doubt that a deeply sensitive and generous soul lay behind his dour exterior. It was also a big soul, which for a time shone a light on a better Australia.

*Paul Strangio is the author of Keeper of the Faith: A Biography of Jim Cairns, MUP, 2002.*





## CURRENT AFFAIRS

Many people who are challenging Labor's values are moving to the Greens . . . the response I got to my resignation suggests that a lot of them remain committed to the Labor Party, although some are only hanging on by the fingernails.

*Carmen Lawrence*

The handing over of 'border-protection' to a private company, and a foreign one at that, is an abrogation of one of the first duties of a democratic government. The very idea of running detention centres and prisons for profit is loathsome, and reeks with overtones of the slave trade, in which fortunes are made directly from human misery.

*Graham Maddox*

For what feels like an eternity, the Howard Government, large sections of the press and the right-wing think-tanks have been bellowing the same old propaganda and narrow ideology. The electorate is now so softened up by all of this that all sorts of extreme policies and actions are being taken seriously.

*Tim Thornton*

## CULTURE

I did not want to believe humans would abandon such a user-friendly, all-accommodating, resilient and non-aligned mode of speculation. Nor did I think we could afford to lose the hopefulness intrinsic to the exercise of the utopian mode.

*Robyn Walton*

Modern epic fantasy is a literary form of fundamentalism that troubles secular ideals. But it also troubles the kind of political fundamentalism that relies on Manichean binaries of good and evil.

*Ken Gelder*

## OPINION

Australians interested in changing the situation for the better can use the existing legal system to take steps. 'Odious debt' is recognised within international law, under US initiative. If enough Australians understood this, it would be easier to pressure our elected representatives to implement the concept of odious debt.

*Jay Bulworth*

I never forgot that teacher. He could have been at home near a fire with a nice cup of coffee but we wanted to learn and he could teach us, and that was his reward. He was paid almost nothing. It was the memory of this small, freezing teacher that drove me on through two degrees. I just couldn't let him down. He and others like him are what make Australia run. That teacher was an 'ordinary' Australian. John Howard is not.

*Antonia Hildebrand*

## REVIEW

Anyone who has attended conferences such as the one that led to Dawkins' and Kelly's book will be struck by the atmosphere of complacency towards Australia's growing crisis of inequality. There's something distasteful about highly paid economists and businesspeople arguing that the only way to give hope to the struggling single mother who cleaned their five-star hotel room that morning is to cut her wages and introduce 'price signals' into her local health and education services.

*Dennis Glover*

Peter Singer's simplistic view ignores the fact that reason does not speak with the same voice to everyone, especially in ethics, and that reason has its undefeated rivals—above all, faith.

*Janna Thompson*

"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"

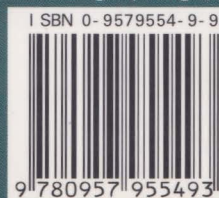
| Fiona Capp, *The Age*

"A journal of variety, ideas, opinion and heart"

| Christopher Bantick,  
*Canberra Times*

## temper democratic, bias Australian

cover: Oscar at the Queensland Art Gallery's  
Asia-Pacific Triennial 2002, digital photograph



PRINT POST APPROVED PP 328858/0003