

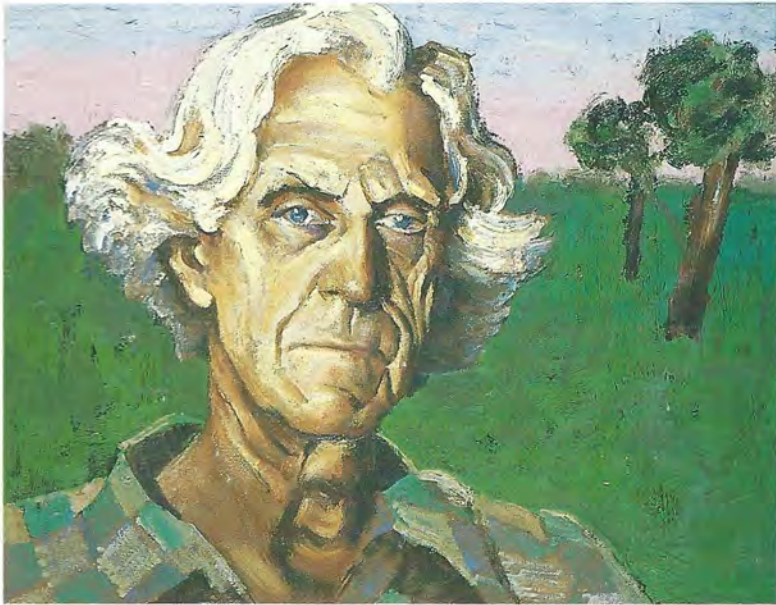
overland

FEATURES

STORIES

POETRY

\$4



*This is the second Overland
centenary issue.*

*Louis Nowra, Ken 101 Lewis, Morris Lurie,
Anna Bianke, Naomi Mitchison,
Hugh Stretton, Robyn Williams, Barry Hill,
Russel Ward, Gwen Harwood,*



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Temper democratic, bias Australian

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December, 1985

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The Translator

Because the electricity workers had gone out on strike the hotel was in semi-darkness. The hotel's own generator had broken down and now the foyer was dimly lit by hundreds of candles. I felt as if I had arrived in a Byzantine church. I sat down so I faced the stairs. As the lifts were not working I knew he would descend via the staircase. I had hoped for a longer meeting but in a terse early morning telephone call he said there had been a mix-up and he now had little time to spare before departing Australia.

It was strange to be meeting a man whose books I had translated but whom I had never met. Our names had, over four books, become indisputably linked. The novels had sold moderately well and had been critically successful but now a large American publisher was going to try to make him, with this new novel, a best selling author. Up until now Reuchtsnichts' reputation had been confined to England and, ironically, the Germans thought little of their native son's work and regarded his success in England as another example of English eccentricity. Reuchtsnichts' latest novel was called *Die Rache* and it was this novel I was to get from him directly and translate into English for the following American summer.

As I sat, waiting for him, while shadowy bellboys carried dark luggage and guided ghostly guests down the stairs, I thought how silly the idea of translating Reuchtsnichts' novels would have been to me four years ago. I got to know his work quite by accident. I was attending a conference on "Colonial Cultures" in Frankfurt where I delivered a paper on Australian drama entitled "Dead Ends, or Where Is the Australian Kleist?" The only memorable moment of the conference for me was meeting a handsome black from the Ivory Coast whose woeful French accent was redeemed by his exquisite body. In my rush to get the plane at the end of the conference (my face wearing evidence of a nasty rejection of my advances from my spunky hunk of a black) I picked up a paperback at the airport in mistake for another. Only when I settled into my seat did I realise what I held: *Das Messer* by Friedrich Reuchtsnichts. On the cover was a naked woman with a carving knife through her left breast and a trickle of blood like a piece of red sewing thread ran down her side as if it had accidentally landed on the cover and was inviting attempts to pluck it off. I was appalled at what I had mistakenly bought but as I had nothing else I started to read it, despite the slight double vision caused by my black eye.

What can I say about *Das Messer*? It was an awful pulp gangster novel about a gangster, Hans, seeking revenge for the rape-murder of his slutty girlfriend. The language bordered on the illiterate. The dialogue was so corny and the characters so one-dimensional that I began to enjoy its very badness. Back in Australia I would sometimes amuse my friends by reading out some of the more hideous passages. One friend suggested, when I had complained about the high cost of my new flat, that I should translate *Das Messer*. After all, he said, it would only take a few weeks and would earn me a few quick and necessary dollars and as I found such badness amusing, the time I spent translating it wouldn't seem drudgery. I wasn't keen on the idea as I had to rewrite sections of my book *Verwirrt and Verhör in the plays of Heinrich von Kleist*, but I certainly needed more money if I were to continue to lead the life I was presently enjoying.

During the summer vacation I set to work at my desk which overlooked Bondi Beach and those sunbaking Adonises whose musclebound bodies resembled a tournament of flesh, highly strung with desire. Once started on *Das Messer* I found my amusement at its awfulness began to pall very quickly. I grew bored and felt appalled that I was in such close contact with a mind that resembled a madman's fed, on a diet of American gangster movies, pornographic magazines and gutter life.

Originally I was quite literal but its nauseous world proved unbearable. Unconsciously, at first, I began to be freer, then, as I gained more confidence, I began to change the book, finding amusement in the difference between Reuchtsnichts' world and my version of it. Hans, his hero, grew less brutal, less ugly and his sexuality more diffuse. He no longer burst into apartments to rape women in the form of a macho hello. Women now chased him, but he never slept with them. There was the stain of guilt; men seemed more alluring to him. His girl-friend turns out to be a transvestite and at the end he doesn't repeatedly stab and then castrate the killer in a bar in front of cheering customers. In my version Hans discovers that the man he sleeps with (and the very man who showed him the way out of the closet) is the killer and so, as they make love, Hans, crying, strangles his lover who dies, ecstatically, at the moment of orgasm. The novel had gone through a complete metamorphosis; from out of the grubby sewer of the German original had emerged a beautiful English butterfly. What a marvellous six weeks it turned out to be

once the novel became mine. I translated with gay abandon in the morning and then there was sun, sauna and steaming sex in the afternoon.

The novel was accepted by a good English publisher and the advance helped pay my American Express card. It occurred to me that all values were topsy-turvy; something I regarded as a joke was going to earn me more than my edition of Kleist's plays and letters. Close to publication date I received, out of the blue, a letter from Reuchtsnichts himself. His publisher had told him of *Das Messer's* imminent English publication. Obviously written on a page torn from a notepad or exercise book, Reuchtsnichts' letter was an almost incomprehensible mixture of Bavarian dialect and German. He told me he was a barman in Munich and that he had written his novel when unemployed one winter. To my great relief he said that he knew no English. A few weeks later I received, from him, a copy of his second novel *Blut und Angst*. I didn't even read it. Frankly I wasn't interested. Now that I had an advance I would seek out something more prestigious to translate.

One summer night as I licked the delicious, sweaty body of an Aboriginal I had picked up, it occurred to me that English readers were now ready for a complete edition of Fontane's novels. But it never happened. *The Knife* got such excellent reviews ("A German with humor!", "Orchids for Herr Rauchtsnichts", "Proust meets Spillane") that my publisher said he would increase my royalties if I translated Reuchtsnichts' second novel. Fontane would have to wait for sedentary old age.

Blut und Angst was such a delirious mixture of violence and sex that I suspected its author was insane. Again set in gangland Munich, its men and women collided with such terrifying results that it was difficult to tell the difference between murder and orgasm. So brutal was it that I could barely read it; in a note Reuchtsnichts had proudly told me that he "had taken Hemingway to his logical conclusion". Loathing the novel, I translated it even more freely. Reuchtsnichts' hero became obviously homosexual, his age about mine and his tastes for black boys similar. The dialogue grew less illiterate, less slangy. Verbs and adjectives began to surround the one-word sentence nouns, like body-guards escorting a damsel across a busy street.

The critical reaction was wonderful, the sales good. In a letter Reuchtsnichts told me how touched he was to see one of his works in hardback and said that although he couldn't understand the contents, *Blood and Fear* was his favorite because "great authors come in hardbacks". The English treatment of the novels as serious works of art gratified him immensely and for a reaction to this critical esteem one need not go past the photographs of him on the dustjackets of his four books. His picture wasn't on *The Knife*, *Blood and Fear* had a small one which looked like it was taken in an automatic photo booth. *Crash Through* has a studio shot of a weather-beaten, acne-scarred face and *Lust* has a full page profile of the author on the back cover holding a pipe, wearing a beret and his acne obscured by a beard.

Just as he was becoming known, so was I. Reviewers mentioned "the great symbiotic relationship" and, by the

fourth novel, my name was on the front cover with the author's. I resigned from university just in time to avoid being unjustly accused of sexual harassment (some exchange students from Africa had complained about me, misunderstanding my tactile, friendly nature). Some former colleagues, engaged in counting the number of printing mistakes in the original edition of *The Sun Also Rises* or teeth imagery in Patrick White's novels, were noticeably envious and made catty remarks about my having sold out. Sold out! I had sold in! I was making it in the outside world. I now had a friendship with a Maori and a well-stocked bar; what more could a man ask for? The final step was America. If you become a success in the States then your fortune is assured. Talk shows, conferences, grants, offers (sexual and financial) and respect. Reuchtsnichts' fifth novel, which I was waiting to pick up from him, would bring me all this.

But where was he? He was half an hour late. I told the desk clerk to page my meal ticket and then settled back into the blood-red couch, unable to even get a drink from the bar because it was closed due to the bar staff's being on strike. I idly watched the staircase, my eyes growing used to the dim, flickering light, expecting each person descending the gloomy stairs to be my kraut but it was generally a guest being led, like a blindman, to the desk by the bellboy. One woman in a white frock descended the stairs and looked purposefully into the penumbrous foyer. Her make-up was garish and quite, quite hideous in the candle light. I suspected she was a whore looking for her businessman client. I looked away, hoping she did not think I was he. "Are you Mr Dunne?" I said yes, I was the man in question.

"Ms Goode. Hanna Goode," she said and, without offering her hand, sat down on the chair opposite, saying, as she did so "Aren't these chairs a terrible color. Like someone's had a period." I cringed at her bad-taste comment. There was silence and she stared at me in the twilight as if trying to sum me up. It dawned on me that she had something to do with Reuchtsnichts. Was she vetting me before I was allowed to see him?

"I am representing Herr Reuchtsnichts - he wanted me to speak to you."

"Are you his agent or something?"

"In a way."

Her smugness was disconcerting. She had something over me, that much was obvious. She had the aura of invincibility that a blackmailer must have when he meets his victim for the first time.

"You look gay. I thought you would. You wear it like a badge."

"Excuse me?"

"You heard."

Her confidence was awesome; I had seen such brutes at American conferences on Kleist. She surveyed the flickering foyer. "Lousy place. Lousy country. Nothing works; neither taps or workers. Do you know why Reuchtsnichts came to Australia?"

"To see me."

"To see kangaroos. He's mad about kangaroos. We went to the Zoo yesterday afternoon, straight off the plane. He found out he didn't like animals that hopped,



Rick Amor Apologies to Grosz

so he fell in love with those Tasmanian devil things; more in keeping with his vision of the world, I suspect. Do you know I met Reuchtsnichts a fortnight before he left Berlin to come here and I've been a close friend of his ever since."

All right, so you sleep with him, I thought, most writers have groupies. Women are suckers for writers and painters; but what have all these remarks got to do with me, sister? "Oh, is he living in Berlin now?"

"Didn't he tell you? He shifted there a few months ago so he could be at the centrepoint of European political neurosis."

"Reuchtsnichts said that?"

"Don't be so incredulous. He's a deep thinker, you know. Hopefully, it doesn't mean that because a man comes from peasant stock and has had little formal education he then is ignorant. Potentially we're all William Blakes, you know. All knowledge is an ongoing communion with experience."

I was being outplayed by a woman who not only had a misuse of language on her side but who also had an important secret she was keeping from me. "I mean, they're homo-erotic wet dreams, aren't they?"

"What?"

"Come on, Laurie. Your translations. Is it because most Australian men are gay?"

"No, we're all sad."

"I haven't seen a real man since I got here. The women are real men here, god, they even walk like men. Reuchtsnichts is a real man."

"So, he's a good lay, is he?"

"Jealous, Laurie? Thank heaven for a man who isn't scared of women."

"He must be bonkers, because even King Kong would be scared of you," I said, without thinking. She paused and for a moment an equally bitter remark was going to be said but she thought better of it. I was losing badly. She calmed herself by looking at the shadowy indoor plants along the window.

"At first I liked your translations. Like most people I didn't know the originals but when I decided to do my thesis on Reuchtsnichts – and so be the first in the Reuchtsnichts industry – I read the German originals. What a disgrace, Laurie! Your translations may as well be other novels. You took his updating of the eternal male ethos and poisoned it. You betrayed Reuchtsnichts. Destroyed his creations."

"Destroyed his creations? I made his pieces of crap into masterpieces. Read the reviews! Look how well written my novels are. My honor! My style! My God, I doubt if Reuchtsnichts can sign his own name."

"His work is a brilliant portrayal of the violence of our times."

"They're just macho-porno fantasies. Semi-illiterate junk."

"It's so good to see a translator who has faith in what he is translating. Wonderful! You will never understand, Laurie. His work reveals, through deliberate linguistic poverty, the story of our times, my times, our times; our situation. It has a message for us all. What have your fey concoctions got to do with that? I mean, when I found

out! What about the final chapter of *Lust*? Max is trapped in his burning car and in a defiant last gasp he yells obscenities at the world and the police who shot him. And what did you do! Max escapes from the burning car and hides out in a Boys' Home where he dies of a heart attack when he comes upon a dozen handsome young boys showering together. My God, Laurie, have you no honesty? I mean, drag queens, transsexuals, homosexuals, lesbians and Jesus Christ, you took that lean, muscular prose and made it limp wristed, metaphorical nonsense – as if Hemingway had become a screaming queen. Wow, Laurie, you're lucky you're not arrested for destroying masterpieces, like that loony Australian who smashed up the Pieta."

"Now, listen here –"

"Don't point, Laurie, it's rude. The fact is that I told Friedrich what you had done. He was distraught. So distraught that he threw up. And yet you have the nerve to want to translate his new novel, the one that is going to make him famous. I have heard of Australian con-artists but you . . ."

I suddenly realised. "You're translating his new novel?" A tiny smirk of triumph appeared on her face.

"You went over to Germany after you found out what I had done and you told him. You probably slept with him first and then told on me."

"Now don't get jealous."

"Where is he?"

"Sit down, Laurie, You're shouting and drawing attention to yourself. He isn't here. He saw the kangaroos and the devils – that's all he wanted to see here. Three hours ago, just after he rang you, he flew off to the States. Close your mouth, Laurie, someone's likely to drop a ping-pong ball down it. Now sit down. Yes, that's right. Comfy? Yes, I did all of that. All that you suspect. I found a lover and also an author who had been betrayed by his translator. Do you know I'm chairperson of the West Coast League of Translators and in the coming issue of *Translate* I have an article outlining your duplicity. You are wiped up. Finished."

I felt like throwing up or throwing myself at her in a murderous rage, even collapsing on my knees like a deck chair and begging forgiveness. Panic reigned in my mind. A willy-nilly of shock blew through me. She was capable of humiliating and destroying me. My name would be mud, *Dreck, merde*.

"Why don't you undo your tie, Laurie, you look hot and bothered, even in candle light. Tell me honestly, did you think you could get away with it? Is that just a nod of agreement or dejection? Oops!" she said interrupting herself, amused to see a tourist tumbling down the stairs, taking with him, as if on a suicide attempt, both his bellboy and suitcase.

She was as good as her word. She demolished me wherever she went. Conferences, parties, lecture halls. Other academics scenting blood, got into the hunt, titling their shafts "Fraudulent Behavior", "Translation as a Confidence Trick", "Overdone Down-Under", "An Author Betrayed". My name became synonymous with bad or

fraudulent translations ("Doing a Dunne"). The money ran out, so did my lease and so did my black Kiwi.

It was said in a New York magazine that Ms Goode and Reuchtsnichts were now living together, working side by side, making sure her translation of *Revenge* was literal and scrupulous. The novel was eagerly awaited and Time magazine had a cover in mind ("From Bavarian Beerhall to the Bigtime"). I had been vanquished and vanished. Not that I put up much resistance. Resistance was impossible. She was right, I had been dishonest. Like Frankenstein I had raided the cemetery of Reuchtsnichts' talent and out of assorted limbs and organs I had constructed a marvellous monster which was now destroying me.

Reuchtsnichts novel *Revenge* was a moderate success. It should have been a disaster but only two days before publication Ms Goode and her lover were killed in a car crash. It was said that Ms Goode was orally satisfying her lover and Reuchtsnichts had converted his little death into a big one by crashing his car into a brick wall at the moment of supreme pleasure. Sex and destruction, it was a typical way for the kraut to go. The publicity helped sell the book and critics, respecting the recently departed, were respectful, though most of them said that *Revenge* in no way compared favorably with his first four brilliant novels.

Revenge can now be found in discount book shops. In Germany all of his work has been sucked into the black hole of oblivion. The books I translated sell reasonably well and I have a small income from them, which is a help because my career is permanently blighted and I am done for. The first few years after the scandal I ran to fat and ran to despair, though I never quite reached the finishing tape of suicide. For a long time I felt like a bad translation of my former self. Even my beautifully literal translations of Kleist have fallen into disfavor.

Gradually I recovered my spirits. I receive the occasional postcard from solitary men in London bed-sitting rooms congratulating me on my "delicious" translations and I have found a New Guinea lad who seems to like me, though you know you're getting old when your lover calls you Dad. And I have also realized that Reuchtsnichts' posthumous reputation is all due to me. I now see that my translations are supreme creations and sometime in the future I will be seen, not as a dishonest translator, but as an honest to goodness writer of the highest quality. Just as Shakespeare's "King Lear" vanquished its source, so Reuchtsnichts' work will vanish and my versions remain. And Hans, the gay gangster, with his copy of Proust in one pocket and a pistol in the other, will be seen as Laurie Dunne's greatest creation.

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RUSSEL WARD

Geelong and the Centre

An extract from a forthcoming autobiography.

After graduating from the University of Adelaide at the end of 1936, I had no idea of what I wanted to do with my life, though I had acquired something perhaps more valuable – a deep-seated conviction that there was in me something important struggling to be born. I talked about it one day with Nina Bills, a fellow Arts student grossly crippled with poliomyelitis, and citizen of that most Australian of towns, Broken Hill. Deformed people in my experience have nearly always been unusually lovable or unusually hateful. It is as though the misery of their affliction causes some to hate bitterly ‘normal’ human beings, while it causes others to love their fellows with much more than the ‘normal’ measure of understanding. I never loved Nina in any physical or romantic sense, but she was a dear friend and the happiest, kindest, most intelligent woman I ever knew. One day on the refectory lawn, with more than a twenty-one year-old’s fair share of egoism, I ‘made sweet moan’ to her about my hapless condition. What hope was there I asked, for the mature student who had learnt nothing important, knew not what to believe about anything, but yet did know that he had something new and true to say – if only he knew what it was. “Oh! That’s all right then,” Nina replied instantly, with more matter-of-fact certitude than I felt at the time, “you obviously have a great book maturing in your belly. It wouldn’t be great if you knew everything about it now.”

Religion was another topic we often discussed. Though beginning to doubt the miraculous and magical elements of Christian dogma, I loved the peaceful precepts and example of the man Christ and, persuaded thereto largely by T.S. Eliot’s poetry, felt that I should go the whole hog and become an ordained priest. The trouble was that I knew quite certainly that I could never live the reasonably temperate and wholly unselfish life Christianity demanded of its uniformed ministers. With Nina and another friend, a theological student named Swann, I talked of this difficulty, exhibiting more than enough of that terrible, priggish earnestness excusable only in the very young. “Oh I don’t know Russ,” replied Swannie, “if you catch me in twenty years with my knees under the dining table and the Bishop’s port on the sideboard, you won’t get me out of it in a hurry!” We all laughed but I never again thought seriously about a clerical career.

Swannie did become an Anglican priest and, when last heard of, vicar of one of the irrigation towns on the Murray. He never, I think, attained to the pomp of Bishop’s port but did have the unique happiness of marrying Nina Bills.

Long before that happened, I had to earn a living – but how? Thanks to my peculiar Methodist upbringing, or rather to those moral imperatives I had retained from it, it never occurred to me to ask how I might grow rich or famous, but rather how I might be useful. To one whose whole life up till four years previously had been spent in schools, teaching was the obvious answer. It was also the career for which my university years had best fitted me. I had barely reached this conclusion when my father took me to St Peter’s College one morning to meet the then recently appointed headmaster of Geelong Grammar School, J.R. Darling, who was visiting Adelaide for a meeting of great public school headmasters from all over Australia. We walked a few times back and forth over Saints’ oval and I found myself with a job teaching in the Junior School at Corio for £100 a year plus bed and board. Darling struck me that morning as a tall, slim, engaging young Englishman abundantly endowed with that quality later called charisma: which is not to suggest that was his only or his most important trait. One noticed first that he spoke almost as though he had a cleft palate. It is some measure of his stature that I never heard anyone imitate his distinctive way of talking, except myself; and I did it only rarely and then to people who knew and respected him as I did. He was the first and incomparably the most humane, liberal and best employer I ever had. He was a sincere Christian with the integrity, though a member of the Melbourne Club, to endorse the Saviour’s central message that the poor are the salt of the earth. Later at Geelong he once said to me with genuine passion, “This school won’t be doing its job until we are sending Labor members into parliament.” Yet with all his virtues on his head I could never quite wholeheartedly admire him; perhaps because he was the very epitome of what was implied by the Junior School motto “Noblesse Oblige”, or of what later radicals were balefully to denounce as ‘paternalism’. More likely it was simply his upper class Englishness. Years later he told me he belonged to the same family as Sir Ralph Darling, conservative Governor

of New South Wales from 1825 to 1831 and Sir Charles Darling, liberal Governor of Victoria from 1863 to 1867. With that background, his Oxbridge accent and his perfect manners, though I am sure he never felt, like Menzies, Fraser and Hawke, that he was born to rule, it was inevitable that most ordinary Australians should feel less than easy and equal in his presence. I certainly did. If not born to rule he was born to inspire in middle-class Australian breasts what A.A. Phillips many years later identified as the cultural or colonial cringe.

So in the first week of February 1937 I made the first of many trips between my native city and Geelong in a second-class carriage on the Melbourne express. The experience by contrast, emphasized just how deep-seated in Australian life was this subservient attitude to all things English. As a child I had read voraciously the novels of Mary Grant Bruce, and a vignette from one of them had lodged firmly in my mind. Its heroine, a young matron whose husband was fighting heroically for England on the other side of the earth, was travelling with her young children from Melbourne to Western Australia. Before settling down for the night in their sleeping compartment, she asked the attendant about something for breakfast – to receive possibly the most implausible reply ever put into the mouth of a fictional Australian: “‘The coffee and rolls at Murray Bridge are excellent Ma’am,’ murmured the conductor.” There is the cringe perfected, so internalized by the Australian writer that she is utterly unconscious of it. Like anyone else who has ever travelled on any Australian train, she knew that those subservient words could never have been uttered, still less *murmured*, even by a newly-arrived English immigrant with memories of ‘knowing his place’. And if they ever were spoken she certainly knew them to be grotesquely false. Seasoned travellers know that pre-war Australian railway fodder was, arguably, the worst in the world and that the vile, grey, tepid soup then called coffee in platform refreshment rooms, was always much worse than the alternative brew of tea. But the hot meat pies weren’t bad. On my journeys to and from Melbourne I ate them for dinner, supper and breakfast, washed down with beer in hot weather and rum in winter.

In those days rail travel was certainly rougher but also very much freer than it has become since. In 1940 one summer day I carried some freshly caught fish from Gosford to Sydney on a train so crowded that some passengers actually rode astride the bumper bars between carriages. Anyone possessing a ticket and some who didn’t could climb aboard. No one was injured except the fish, which died stinkingly after an hour or two. En route to Melbourne, when the compartment was crowded I often slept on the luggage-rack, the only place except the floor where one could stretch out at length. People were, so to speak, thrown more together: an experience which could have both delightful and painful results. Once or twice I was lucky enough to share a corner seat with a companionable young woman and a rug used to keep out both the bitter cold of the Mallee country and the too close scrutiny of our fellow passengers. Sometimes one met old friends in this way and once, unfortunately, I made two new ones – male.

Stan and Les talked first to each other and then to me of the fabulous win they had had at the Adelaide Races that afternoon. As the train roared through the Adelaide Hills in the gathering dusk, the wonder of Stan’s tales grew as my supply of Cooper’s beer diminished; Stan’s tales, because even in those first few hours I noticed that Les’s sole function was to beam with approval of his mate’s existence and occasionally to cry “Bloody oath” in confirmation of his most implausible sallies. By the time we reached Melbourne next morning even the innocent from the City of Churches had realised that his new friends were a pair of race-course urgers and confidence men, but they were such affable and engaging scoundrels that he had also arranged to meet them at Flemington race course on the following Saturday. There at Stan’s suggestion he bet and lost a few shillings on each of the first three races, but this was a trifle compared with the confident expectations built upon the fourth and main race of the day. Like Falstaff sweating with anxiety to see Prince Hal, Stan raced up to tell me he had just learnt from an infallible source that a certain animal, by common agreement of the jockeys in the fourth event, was to win on their behalf and, thanks to my dear friends Stan and Les, mine. For me Stan could get better odds with a bookie he knew than were available on the tote. So I gave him £20; ten-elevenths of my life’s savings at the time, and never saw it or him again. My Methodist upbringing had taught me to expect that sin would be punished in this condign way, and Stan’s larrikinish charisma, plus awareness of my own stupidity, were such that I hardly minded being robbed.

My first class was scheduled for nine o’clock in the morning on Tuesday, the day after I reached Corio. I knew it was to be the first Latin lesson, for the top stream in the junior school, of eleven-year-olds deemed mature and intelligent enough to begin learning foreign languages, and I slept hardly at all, being gripped by a deadly fear that the boys would see my nervousness and laugh me out of the room. Towards dawn I dreamt that God pointed an admonitory finger at me saying accusingly, “the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.” So, determined to interest them at all costs, I drew on the blackboard a map of Europe about 300 AD and talked for forty minutes about Roman civilization’s contribution to the languages and culture of the world of 1937. Surprisingly enough they were quite interested, or at least apparently attentive; and I was never again quite so nerve-wracked before any other lesson, lecture or speech. My panic long afterwards seemed more excusable than it did at the time. In those days most private schools in Australia assumed that teachers, like poets, were born but could not be made. Experience has confirmed my belief that this assumption was correct; but it would have helped me, if not necessarily my pupils that morning, to have had just one trial dip as a practice teacher before being thrown in off the deep end. As it happened I had a surfeit of supervised practice teaching lessons, but only after having taught for a few months by myself.

Enlightened educational practices reached Victoria only a few years before I did. Up till then private schools

hired whomever they pleased as pedagogues, even people possessing no kind of tertiary degree or other formal qualifications whatever. They could still do so; but only on condition that those without formal qualifications in the newly invented discipline of education should, while they continued teaching, enrol as part-time candidates for a Diploma of Education. So I became a conscript student in the Melbourne Dip. Ed. course and at year's end failed in English Method, the only examination since leaving school so distinguished by me. It happened like this.

Method, in Educational jargon, means the supposed act of teaching student-teachers how to teach, and it was examined in a three-hour written paper at the end of the year and in a series of oral examinations wherein the student's Method Supervisor observed or inspected the aspirant's performance in charge of a class. My supervisor for English Method was an elderly woman named Marshall who sat, as was customary, at the back of a Melbourne State school classroom while I taught from a low platform at its front. My plan was to talk a little with the children about death, to read Scott's lines beginning

Soldier rest! thy warfare o'er . . .

then Shakespeare's song from *Cymbeline*,

Fear no more the heat o' the sun . . .

and finally to discuss with them these two great poems on mortality, asking them to think about why they liked one more than the other. All went well at first. I used to be able to read poetry very well indeed, so well that by the last line of the first stanza from "Cymbeline" every adolescent in the room was sitting on the edge of his or her seat in rapt silence drinking it in. Just as I declaimed, superbly of course,

Golden lads and girls all must
As chimney-sweepers come to dust,

the spell was broken by a discordant voice from the back of the room saying, "Oh Mr Ward, that's my favorite poem. Do you mind if I go on from there?" My self-conceit was a good deal greater and my temper's fuse a great deal shorter than it is now. With unpardonable puppyish rudeness and total carelessness of the consequences I replied shortly, "No Miss Marshall", handed her the book, and walked out of the classroom, shutting the door none too gently behind me. So I failed in English Method.

Yet though a slow learner in the stony fields of Education, I did learn. In the following year, when studying English Method again, I was officially informed that Miss Marshall was to inspect my 'method' of teaching English at the school in Corio. On the fateful day I was coaching a class of thirteen year-olds in the murder of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" on the stage at the front of the Junior School hall. An enjoyably bloodthirsty time was being had by all when the Method Mistress came into the room. Instantly I suspended activities on the stage, carried thence the most comfortable chair in sight, placed it

beside her, dusted it and, not quite obsequiously, invited her to be seated. She accepted graciously, if not quite thankfully, and of course I passed English Method with credit some months later and obtained my uncoveted Dip.Ed.

Enjoyment of teaching in the Junior School was tempered by the only tepid degree of respect I felt for its headmaster. Jennings was, I think, the greatest snob I ever knew, and the most successful Australian cultivator of a pseudo-Oxbridge accent. He was also the author of novels always to be found in the Junior School library, every line of which dripped with the most excruciatingly refined and bogus sentiment. Once or twice a term he would invite me into his private quarters for a 'nightcap', there to reveal in an elaborately casual conversation that the photograph of a statue in the place of honour over the mantelpiece was one of his ancestor Robert Blake, Admiral of the Parliamentary Navy during the English Civil War. Occasionally, Junior School boys told me long afterwards, he would invite two or three pupils to his rooms after lights-out for a perfectly temperate supper. On these occasions he was wont to signalize his favor by reclining on a chaise lounge and commanding each in turn to massage his very bald head. With all this he was an intelligent and not insensitive man, a competent teacher and a very good administrator. We ushers, nevertheless, were always glad to escape even briefly from the prissy but stifling air emanating from him the boys call "Jenno". We took the train or drove to Melbourne for a night, a week-end or even a single meal.

As in all boarding schools in those days, resident masters effectively worked around the clock. We taught the boys in school all day, coached them in cricket, football, swimming or other games after school, attended to their manners at meal times and to their homework after dinner. Every other night the duty master had then to put them to bed, making sure that no boy omitted to brush his teeth. Because Jenno clung to a nineteenth century belief in the crippling effects of masturbation, we were supposed, even after lights-out, to patrol the dormitories till midnight; but most of us were content with one or two token visits before ten. In the morning however the boys had to be inspected, teeth brushed and hair combed again before breakfast. We looked on visits to the big smoke not as luxuries but rather as essential breaks in this routine.

At first I spent time out with Chester Wilmot and young university women friends of his, or with people introduced to me by Peter Tresise, a school mate from Perth, who was studying Medicine at the University of Melbourne, there being then still no medical school in Western Australia. Later more often I drove up to splendid dinners with friends like Noel Polkinghorne, a brilliant classics student from Adelaide, who was also reaching at Geelong. We favored particularly the Florentino at the top end of Bourke Street, then and since, I'm told, considered by many the best restaurant in Australia. Only once did the possibility of any kind of break from school duties present itself in Geelong and this, in probably the most priggish act of my life which I shall die regretting, I rejected.

An epidemic of measles broke out in the Junior School and raged virulently for two or three weeks. At its height the sick rooms and two or three large dormitories were filled with spotty, gummy-eyed small boys and, to help the school matrons cope with the situation, some trained nurses from a Geelong hospital had to be hired. One seemed the most beautiful, candid, open-hearted person I ever saw – albeit as she moved about among sick-beds at the other end of the Barrabool dormitory. Being far too inhibited to look at, let alone speak to her, I walked through the dormitory as often as I could bear to before lights-out, glancing furtively in her direction while elaborately pretending to be engaged in some urgent but non-existent errands. Next morning, a beautiful sunny one, I had a spare period for forty minutes at about mid-day, my only break from teaching time for the week. Picking up a towel from any bedroom I walked briskly across the oval towards the school baths, about 3000 square yards of the salt water lagoon enclosed by a paling fence conventionally regarded as shark-proof. Half way across the field I became aware that the marvellous nurse was walking in the same direction about fifty yards behind. At once terrified and elated, with the predetermined precision of a sleep-walker I proceeded across the planking and to that end of it most remote from the shore. The splendid lady followed till, being unable to retreat further without stepping back into the sea, I was forced to bid her a good morning.

In 1938 she may well have been the first woman to set foot in the school baths. Swimmers there still swam naked as their ancestors had done in the nineteenth century, and it had not occurred to me to bring bathers, the more so as I knew the baths would be deserted in school hours. So I stood there like a half-witted clown, tracing patterns on the planking with one foot, taking off my upper garments and explaining to her that I wanted to have a swim. The nonpareil smiled encouragingly but did not go away. I took off my shoes and socks and began to finger my belt, but still she stayed. Only after I had walked into a changing cubicle and shut the door behind me, did she walk away sorrowing. Next morning, stricken herself by the disease caught from her patients, she went back to her job in a hospital in Geelong and I never saw her again. I had not mustered enough self-confidence even to ask her name. I still feel sure that, if I had, the whole course of our lives would have been different, for she would have displaced Margaret in my callow heart. A few weeks later Darling commanded me to teach in the Senior School in 1939.

In that year the Head took what some of my colleagues called "Home leave" in Britain, leaving the Second Master, C.A.C. Cameron, formally in charge as Acting Head. "Cack", as the boys nicknamed him, was a Science master rather more than usually ignorant of the humanities. Once when the founder of the Holy Roman Empire's name was mentioned, Cameron contributed to the conversation a remark deservedly famous for many years afterwards, "Ah yes! Charley-Magney, one of the old popes!" Cack also shared with most members of the school council and many leading old boys a deep distaste for the liberal, progressive ideas and practices which

Darling seemed to be introducing. Fearing these policies might be halted or even reversed during his absence, the Head appointed a conservative old council member, Ned Austin, to live in his house as a kind of social leader of the school, and charged Charlie Bull, the senior English master, with responsibility for nurturing the new policies during his absence. Ned Austin was descended from an early Victorian squatter transported from Somerset for stealing beehives, but not re-transported for releasing in 1859 rabbits to ravage the continent from his station across the lagoon from the school. In one chapel sermon, pointed none too delicately at me, shaking his chops solemnly he intoned, "Boys! I have never met a Christian man, an honest man or a gentleman who was a Communist!" Ned was also a member of that watchdog of conservative liberties, the Victorian Legislative Assembly, but as a guardian of progress in the Head's absence he was a dead loss. Charlie Bull on the other hand was one of the very best teachers and human beings I ever knew. He had the will but not the power to keep the flag of progress flying, and he it was who finally wrote to warn Darling that Cameron, Austin and a powerful section of the school council were planning to sack him.

Their self-imposed task was made somewhat easier by one aspect of a new school activity. After Munich, like many other thoughtful people, Darling foresaw the extreme likelihood of war with Germany and, like a few other idealistic people, set out to do something practical about it. He devised the National Service scheme to be carried out by the whole school on one afternoon each week during his absence in 1939. I cannot now remember whether on one afternoon per week National Service replaced, or was performed in addition to, the weekly half holiday for sporting activities; but in either case it was felt by traditionalists like Cameron to be an unwarrantable and unwanted interference with the established order of things. It consisted of a whole range of 'practical' activities designed to improve the boys' fitness and skill in tasks that might be necessary in wartime, and participants were free to choose which activities they would take part in. I remember that, for instance, as master in charge of the School Sea Scouts during the regular incumbent's absence, in addition to sailing an old tub about Corio Bay and learning how to make reef-knots and bowlines we had to haul it up on the beach, scrape its bottom clean with whatever old tins, oyster-shells or other instruments we could find, re-paint it, and haul it back into the water on logs we had cut in the bush. Most of the National Service activities were, at worst, as harmless as that, but one particularly roused Cameron's ire. Presumably to strengthen national unity by bridging the gap between rich and poor, boys and masters who felt inspired to do so were to visit unemployed or poverty-stricken families in Geelong to offer friendship and help in cash or kind, for example by coaching a poor lad in Maths or History. Darling had borrowed the idea from the Toynbee Hall scheme in London, where it may have worked to some degree, but I felt it could never work here because of the unbearable assumption of superiority and condescension implicit in the relationships envisaged between helper and helped. Australians hate being reminded of class differ-

ences because they like to feel they are all essentially equal as human beings. When invited to lead one of these slumming expeditions I felt so awkward that I asked the acting headmaster his view. Cack confirmed my belief that the proposed slumming expeditions constituted an un-Australian activity. With considerably repressed passion he answered, "If I were unemployed and any mug started such a spiel in my house I'd say to him straight away, 'There's the door!'" It was probably the only thing we ever agreed about, but it was certainly not an important part of the plotters' anti-Darling arsenal. In the end they failed to make the innovating Englishmen walk the plank, but they did force Bull's resignation. The only good that came out of the whole business was that he became almost at once Director of Educational broadcasts for the recently established Australian Broadcasting Commission.

At the time I guessed much but knew very little of all this, being preoccupied with my new task of teaching the Head's own Upper Sixth English form during 1939. Of course I perpetrated the blunder made, as I later discovered, by all tertiary teachers in the Humanities at the beginning of their careers. The standard at which I marked essays and other tests was absurdly high. With the best will in the world I assessed these very intelligent seventeen- and eighteen-year old boys by the best standard I knew, that actually suitable to fourth-year honors university students. So the best three essays scored 76, 65 and 63 and most of the rest passed in the low fifties. Only a year later it became clear to me that I should have added about 20 to every mark, though as far as I know my victims never complained of harsh treatment as their successors today surely would. Geoffrey Dutton, who should have been awarded 90 or 100 per cent for his essay on W.H. Auden's poetry, became a great writer, a poet and my lifelong friend. The runner-up, Bob Southey, was last heard much of as president of the Liberal Party. Slightly lesser literary friends, first met as pupils at Geelong, were Stephen Murray-Smith, editor of *Overland*, Frank Kellaway, poet and librarian, and Stuart Sayers, long-time literary editor of the *Melbourne Age*.

The other boy I remember very well was Fraser Davidson, elected by his fellows as captain of the Public Affairs Sixth form, a gentle, tough young man imprisoned by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore. He died on the Sandakan death march. The Public Affairs Sixth form was seen, only half jokingly, as a refuge for squatters' sons not bright enough to cope with the traditional academic subjects, but not old and informed enough to leave school either. So they studied Book-Keeping, Agriculture and other 'practical' subjects, leavened by a course in Public or Current Affairs. This last was my responsibility and preparation for the five public affairs lessons a week probably taught me a good deal more about life and politics than I had learnt up to that time, or than most of my pupils were to learn.

Dr Johnson once assured an acolyte that the knowledge one was to be hanged next morning concentrated the mind wonderfully. Thinking about current affairs in the twelve months between the Munich crisis

and the outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939 certainly had the same effect. Like other young people I did not want to die any sooner than advancing years and infirmities made necessary, but every passing month made it more likely that I would. Hitler's criminal thugs were openly hell-bent on a war against Britain, France and any allies they could find, and just as obviously Germany would be joined by Italy and Japan at the first sign of any major Fascist success. Daily it became clearer that the only hope of keeping the peace, or of winning the war if it did start, was an alliance between the western powers and the USSR. But western governments, including that of our own country, were all firmly committed to the 'appeasement' of Fascism, that is, to the diversion of German aggression towards Russia and buffer states on her western borders. So anyone who advocated an alliance, or even friendly contacts, with Russia was labelled a Communist – knave or dupe. Naturally old Ned Austin so preached at me in the chapel when I was expounding such subversive views daily to Davidson, Alan Cowlshaw and their class mates. In fact I never contemplated joining the Australian Communist Party until nearly two years later, but in the midwinter of that year 1939 my commitment to the liberal views I shared with Darling led me to commit what all right-thinking people, boys and masters, saw as another atrocious deed.

Before he left for England Darling had commended to my care the affairs of a school society whose business was to stimulate discussion of, and thought about, social and political questions. It was called the Public Affairs Society, though it had no necessary connection with the Sixth form of that name. Stephen Murray-Smith was its Secretary. By long established precedent the duty of the master-in-charge was, once a month or so, to invite a speaker to address interested schoolboys on his or her own particular ideas as a prelude to free discussion of them. I brought down two or three conservative speakers who ruffled no feathers, and whose names and ideas accordingly have been forgotten by most of their auditors, certainly by me. Then, having first confirmed with Charlie Bull my impression that the absent Head would approve, I invited Ralph Gibson, brother of the then Professor of Philosophy at Melbourne University and Secretary of the Victorian branch of the Communist Party, to address the rather privileged section of the masses then resident at the school. This high misdemeanor, rather than any other, gave rise to the still current legend that I was sacked from Geelong Grammar for being a Communist; but the alleged felony was compounded by my strong and growing commitment to pacifism. Then as now sensible people knew, or believed, that if not actually Communists themselves, all pacifists were the dupes of Communist agents.

It would have been truer to denounce me as a dupe of Jesus Christ. Though gradually losing faith in all supernatural aspects of Christianity I believed more fervently than ever in the social gospel of him who was called the Prince of Peace and the friend of the poor; and I found it increasingly difficult to reconcile the preaching and practice of Christ with those of most of His professional servants. On Anzac Days the whole school, led by the

uniformed cadets, gathered ceremonially before the war memorial, a beautiful bronze statue in a beautiful colonaded setting. But the prayers for peace, it seemed to me, were offered up not to the Man of Sorrows but to a particularly bloodthirsty version of the Old Testament's God of Battles and the orator, whether in clerical garb or not, spent less passion in sorrowing for the dead of the last war than in exhorting his young auditors to prepare themselves for sacrifice in the next one. The school chaplain, the Reverend "Joey" Allen, naturally took a leading role in these rituals as he did in the daily chapel services. With that fiendish genius for inventing perfectly apt nicknames which only children possess, the boys called him "Hippo", partly short for hypocrite and partly because his long, heavy-jowled not remarkably intelligent face was reminiscent of that of the animal dubbed by the ancient Greeks "river-horse". At that I thought him a better Christian than some of my more pious and pretentious colleagues who sought to bar me from holy communion, not because they considered my faith shaky, but because as a Methodist I had never been confirmed. Joey freely processed all who cared to line up at the rails. Like the Vicar of Bray in more troublous times he cared not a whit for doctrinal differences.

As much could not be said for "Pinny", a large Old Geelong Grammarian who coached the school's first eight and ruled all who came and went from its boatclub on the Barwon River. As every oarsmen knew there were two distinct styles of rowing, Fairbairn and orthodox. The Fairbairn style or method of coaching had been invented, if that is the word, at Jesus College, Cambridge, by a certain Steve Fairbairn, Geelong Grammar Old Boy and scion of the Australian squatting family based in the Victorian Western District. He expounded the new gospel of rowing in a book which made him instantly the most famous member of his distinguished family. Nothing could shake the quasi-religious faith in his teaching entertained by Pincott and other members of the fellowship known to many Geelong citizens as "them pale-blue accent bastards". Naturally, though nothing ungentlemanly was ever said, they looked with extreme disfavor on the newly-hatched young usher, allowed as a great favor to coach the third eight. The puppy was clearly working along outdated orthodox lines.

Coaching the third eight was very enjoyable nevertheless. On Saturdays by custom we rowed several miles down the river, landed on the bank for what would now be called a barbecue and then paddled home to the boat shed again in the afternoon. About halfway to the picnic place, going and returning, the crew had to carry their shell over a portage of a hundred yards or so beside a shallow stretch of the Barwon and under a railway bridge across it. Presumably the cox must have stayed behind, for I was always firmly wedged in his seat by parcels of chops, bread rolls and other lunchtime provender. One day after the meal, as we stood pleasantly full around the

dying fire, someone pointed to a copperhead snake swimming across the river towards us. When it was fairly on the grass a tall Tasmanian boy named Dobson, in a single lightning movement, snatched it up by the tail and cracked its backbone as bushmen used to crack a stock-whip. Probably everyone present, like me, had heard a hundred times of this old bush feat but had never seen it before or were to again.

Another boy in the third eight was a feckless red-headed fellow called Peacock, very amiable but not unusually bright. I remember him one night staggering into my study under the weight of two-dozen bottles of Melbourne Bitter the crew had munificently bought for me at the end of the rowing season. After the War, I believe, he became one of the more intelligent, and certainly more likeable, operatives in Colonel Spry's Australian Security Intelligence Organization. With a little of that lumbering subtlety that has ever distinguished it, this patriotic body first assigned to him the task of tailing round Melbourne his and my old friend, Stephen Murray-Smith. Peacock, it seems, was quite bright enough quickly to protest to his masters and be assigned to other important duties. But all this was undreamed of in April 1939.

Pincott one day asked me to have the third eight help 'pace' the Firsts in their final trial for the G.P.S. Head-of-the-River Race to be rowed that year on the Yarra. The school's second eight was to start level with the Firsts and do its damndest to beat them over the first three-quarters of a mile, at which point they were expected to stop rowing while recovering from their exhaustion. The third eight, waiting on their oars at the three-quarter mile peg, was to take up the running there, just level with the tired Firsts, in order to squeeze the last ounce of effort out of the latter over the last quarter-mile of the course. Pincott adjured me to drive my crew as hard as I could because he feared that, even though fresh, they would be no match for the tired Firsts. For a time all went well. The Seconds dropped further and further behind and the Thirds started level with, or just behind, the Firsts at the three-quarter mile peg. Then however the Thirds drew further and further away to cross the finishing line a length or two ahead. Pinny charged along the bank, as I ingenuously supposed, to make some polite comment on the standard of rowing the Thirds had reached. Instead he trumpeted a volley of heartfelt but unimaginative insults at me, my ancestry and my crew, a volley in which the words Fairbairn and orthodox were conspicuous only by their absence. When reminded he had conjured me to squeeze the last pip out of the Firsts, he replied, "Yes, but I didn't tell you to shit all over them." It was then that I decided to start looking for another job.

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The Seventh House

When I was a young child my father, as an illustration of honesty, used to tell me the story of a poor workman known to him in Nottingham. The man, having no food in the house for his starving children, stole a large turnip from a farm under the cover of darkness; but he left a penny in its place. When my father's father came to visit us he too told the story, setting it in his own childhood. Later still my father's brother told it to me again, but in his version the nourishing root was a mangel-wurzel, the coin a halfpenny, and the place Chester. Perhaps he was tired of the original version. My Australian grandmother used to say the farmer got a good bargain if he ever managed to find the money.

More than half a century later I have come across the story again, in a paper called the *People's Friend*; an old lady writing from Huddersfield in memory of the good old days knew the man who left the honest penny for the turnip. I was in hospital when I read this bit of folklore and, somewhere between the pain and the painkillers, had a vividly memorable dream in which the farmer, in twilight, searched for pennies along parallel rows of turnips stretching to a featureless horizon. I am home again, cured and not at all melancholy, in the beloved seventh house we have lived in for only a few months; but now and again the landscape of the strange dream lies across the pleasant view of hills, river and houses. Weird metaphors cross my mind: life as a turnip-field, fine turnips stolen after all that toil, pennies left to suggest the last sightless journey. Enough of death, I tell myself, I am years ahead of the Grim Reaper.

After a decade in the country changing five acres of scrubby bush to a charming estate, I find life in town full of surprises. In my first twilight walk I found a wallaby wearing a collar eating a slice of pumpkin; I met a woman who breeds guinea-pigs and uses her blow-drier to prepare them for shows; I heard from a man the story of how, when his old dog disappeared, he rose at first light all through the summer and searched the streets of Hobart, and finally found the dog at the gate of a house where it had lived as a puppy. The mixture of human voices, town birds and traffic is the background I heard for twenty-five years while the children grew up in the

house in Lenah Valley with its vines and espaliered almonds.

My father would have loved this house, which is set among apple and plum trees, holly and ivy, a wall of jasmine and an old nectarine. Next door is a century-old mansion, Hopper by day, Chirico in the moonlight. The mansion was once set among acres of orchard and pasture, and some people say our place was the caretaker's cottage, and then the school-teachers' cottage when the mansion was for a while a school. A friend remembers going to school next door long ago, and seems to remember two schoolmistresses living here. I have met no ghosts, but am peopling it with my own: my father goes to the piano, my splendid Schwechten with its urns and scrolls (did a great shipment of Schwechtens come to Hobart? One meets them here and there, in private houses or church halls, some still with the candle holders removed from the one I bought with the money my grandmother left me.) The piano squeezed by a millimetre through the passage into the parlor – so my grandmother would have called the room, with its fireplace flanked by leadlight cupboards and bookshelves, its antique mirror reflecting the afternoon light on fruit trees and the chimneys of the mansion. She is there with the fine lace crochet-work I never had the patience to learn. My friend Alice has found the corner in the odd-shaped bedroom where one can surprise or be surprised.

Alice and I used to spend a lot of time under tables, which in those days were draped nearly to the floor, listening to, though not understanding, the voices telling how long Mrs Lebanon was in labor, what happened when Mrs Shillito went mad and got up at midnight to cook breakfast, how it would be good riddance if Ted Theodore got the seat, how the dippy Spinks had bought land at Deception Bay, how Old Duhig was having tunnels built under All Hallows'. Alice and I were credited with the engagement and marriage of Olly Widdop and his Merle who had been washing his shirts for years. Olly was too shy (my grandmother said too mean) to speak up. Alice and I tied his shoelaces together when they came for tea. He stood up, fell on Merle, and said O my darling have I hurt you?

I have written elsewhere of the paradise of those years at Mitchelton in my first house, a time so radiant that no later sorrow can darken it.

If eternal life can be given
let me have it again as a child
among those whom I did not love

enough, while they lived. Let me wake,
if I wake at all, on the threshold
of day in my father's house

believing all riddles have answers
night gone my grandmother walking
head bowed over glittering pasture.

The pastoral years at Oyster Cove have some of that quality. Often as I walked across the pasture to feed my poultry I would think "Full circle. Now I am the grandmother." A friend gave me four bantams of varied lineage; they flourished among the blackberries and in a couple of years I had a flock roosting at night in the pine groves like Christmas tree ornaments. In another year genetic defects crept in, and a dwarfish race with no speed in their legs fell victim to the hawks. A kind neighbor lent me his two best roosters and once again the tribe flourished. "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." One splendid bird, Hector, used to sing "Ab-so-LUTE-ly" instead of "Cock-a-doodle". On my first morning in West Hobart I woke to hear a bantam crowing and wondered if I were at the edge of a dream. But it was a real bird, one of a pair of black and silver beauties, a neighboring child's pets.

Surely our houses shape us. The second house, in which I lived for nearly twenty years, was what the estate agents call a "Queensland charmer", with twin front steps join-

ing in a Romeo-and-Juliet balcony, then ascending in a single flight to the wide all-round verandah. Know'st thou the land wherein the citrons bloom? Straight from there to Fern Tree on the slopes of Mount Wellington where, newly married, we rented a holiday shack tilted so far sideways that the liquid in cups and soup bowls had a marked slope. Our infant son used to throw his ball across the room and wait for it to roll back; when we moved to a level house and his ball and wheeled toys failed to return he behaved like Isaac Newton watching an apple fly upwards.

If I had to give this house a name I think it would be "Villa Felix". We seem to be on some ancient cats' way. They make their fluid journeys across and along our fences, up and down our drive, weaving aside according to their rank, inspecting our work with the air of those who own everything. We are so close to the mountain reserve that flights of rosellas come to our trees. We are on the path of gulls who spend the day at the South Hobart tip. The bushes are full of silvereyes. The resident blackbirds and doves are endearingly tame.

I miss the space, the brilliant night skies, the bush empty but never lonely; but the lighted city is beautiful, and we are close again to old friends. Perhaps this house will shape my old age. It is small, but all we need now as we approach our fortieth anniversary; closest in feeling, somehow, to the cottage at Fern Tree where we began our life together and I picked the *Tractatus* out of my husband's crate of books. "Our life is endless in the way that our visual field is without limit." My mother saw Halley's Comet, and so shall I. "If the question can be put at all, then it can also be answered." Well, then, Wittgenstein, did the farmer find the penny?



HUGH STRETTON

From London, with love and hindsight

When I first saw them in 1946 London and the Londoners seemed lovable as well as unbeatable. The fabric still blitzed, "looped and windowed", full of ragged gaps and acres of rubble. Black with coal-smoke, no paint for seven years, but great fraternity. Beveridge's notions of social justice and compassion seemed to be shared by almost everyone. The class war seemed amiable, without much hatred. Rich and poor had died together in the war, now they grumbled together at bus stops and post offices. In those days 'millionaire' meant £30,000 a year, the notional yield of a million in capital; a 1946 report estimated that after tax, only sixty remained of however many thousands there were in the 'thirties. Two or three successive deaths could cost an earldom three-quarters of its acres in death duties. Stately homes were becoming museums, research centres, trade union colleges. The top rate of income tax was 95 per cent and a lot of the rich who owed it were believed to be paying it. Keynes had invented full employment.

That shabby, friendly, equalizing world was full of further promise. The Attlee government was nationalizing the commanding heights of the economy. Wartime controls were adapted to reconstruction, directing resources to better rather than worse uses: industrial re-equipment rather than office-building; houses rather than hotels; public rather than private hospitals; holidays at home to protect the balance of payments. Bevan got three-quarters of the doctors to vote for the National Health Service.

And as fast as the old ideas were implemented, the best forward thinkers were feeding the government new ones. Socialist Bruce-Glazier, the able London manager of the Blue Funnel Line, was ready to manage nationalized shipping. (His conservative owners knew it, and thought he'd do it better than most. They were meanwhile financing the first Outward Bound schools.) Richard Tawney was urging some inventive, less bureaucratic diversification of the forms of public ownership. Joan Robinson and Thomas Balogh and others were specifying the income policies which could protect full employment from inflation, and boundary and exchange policies to protect it from other hazards. As head of Labour Party research, Michael Young was recommending family policies and educational policies which look even more prescient now than they did then. He was also introducing Britain to consumer protection.

Labour had been elected in a landslide against the advice of eighty-five per cent of the national press. A peaceful democratic transition looked quite possible, if not to socialism at least to a mixed economy with steadily improving welfare, dwindling private ownership and increasing equality. Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, and letterboxing for Attlee's re-election.

Forty years on, in this year of 1985, workers still in work are getting real pay adjustments between minus five and plus two per cent. Many chief executives are getting well-publicized rises between fifty and sixty-six per cent, not counting stock options and invisibles. Rising numbers of the executives of the remaining public industries are urging privatization. (They mostly double their pay when it happens.) Manufacturers and manufactured exports are in headlong decline, some industrial cities have twenty or twenty-five per cent unemployed, real interest rates and rentiers' unearned incomes are higher than for two centuries past, the public hospitals are falling down, and the police now earn more than schoolteachers.

So there are any number of contradictory accounts of What Went Wrong. Some of the Left think nothing did, we're into the predicted capitalist crisis. Others say we wuz robbed, sold out, imperialized, divided-and-ruled, bourgeoisified, homogenized, hegemonized. Some on the Right say the enterprise was crippled by taxation, effort was sapped by welfare, and the workers have priced themselves out of jobs. (With nearly the lowest wages in Europe that one always puzzles me.) The Prime Minister and Minister for Education add that we've been immoralized, disloyalized and de-skilled by illiterate dope-smoking Left-liberationist schoolteachers. (If teachers want police pay let's see some police *performance* from them.)

With an all-party glut of What Went Wrong I thought it might make a change to imagine what might have gone right. Overland's centenary issue seems a suitable place for a backward glance at what might have been. If novelists can set sci-fi fantasies in past times, why not socio-political scenerists?

So I climb on an eastbound bus to revisit Bethnal Green, shut my eyes to shut out the housing towers and National Front graffiti, and dream that Attlee won the 1951 election. His government was followed in due course by the Bevan and Benn governments, with short

intervals of slower progress – useful consolidation, really – under Rab Butler's and now Ian Gilmour's middle-of-the-road Tories.

The great postwar British success (I reflect, eyes tight shut) was built on some well-judged economic policies. The governments of the 1950s shifted from the direct, bureaucratic, rationing model of central planning to a more market-oriented 'French indicative' style. Their main aim and achievement was to increase British saving and investment, keep most of it at home, and direct it away from property and speculative and tax-evasive uses into productive manufacturing and services, research and development, and arts and education. Buying some banks and founding others, and acquiring a big share of the insurance and pension business, government was soon a major source of private capital and – learning fast from some early scandals – used its resources skilfully.

Most nationalized industries were well-managed. Later acquisitions didn't take the monolithic form of British Rail or the National Coal Board. Instead, public investors acquired existing firms or founded new ones and ran them independently, often competitively, often turning them over to part or full ownership by co-operatives or local government. In some major industries – banking, insurance, oil, air and road transport, car and ship and aircraft manufacture – public and private firms were kept lean and honest by competition with each other. The distinction between 'public' and 'private' was anyway blurred as private enterprises came increasingly to be owned in ways that made no millionaires, but left the firms full market freedoms. Governments generally let competition take its course. By that means government and the car-workers between them soon owned all the car-makers – but scarcely any of some other trades. Nobody managed to make public firms efficient at retailing, fashion designing or hotelkeeping.

Housing policies were powerful but invisible – you couldn't see which houses were public and which private. For a generation after the war local authorities were funded to build about a third of all new houses. The new family policies made sure people got the kinds of houses they wanted, not the kinds bureaucrats or architects thought they ought to have. They wanted terraces, semis, houses and gardens. Some wanted old houses, and the funding was loaded against demolitions in favor of renovations. As incomes rose with economic growth most of the houses were sold to their tenants. But at the same time another new policy took them out of the urban land market for keeps. Resales of public housing have to be back to the housing agencies, at building-cost price without land price. So there are now two housing markets in Britain. Half the houses are traded or rented in a traditional market way: competitors bid for them with money. The rest go at low fixed prices to people who bid chiefly with waiting time. The presence of the second market keeps the first one fairly cheap too, except at specially central or fashionable addresses.

The hardest achievement was the national incomes

policy. It was negotiated piecemeal but to a standard pattern, firm by firm and industry by industry through the 1960s. The Left suspected it of being a capitalist wage-freeze, many unions resisted it, so did many capitalists. Two things got it accepted – or beat its remaining opponents – in the end. It was a top-down policy: no wage restraints until the dividend and salary controls were on. And the owners and executives were part attracted, part coerced by investment and tax policies which gave solid advantages to firms 'inside' the incomes policy against those outside it. It followed that investment was higher and productivity grew faster 'inside' the policy than outside it, so by the 1970s 'inside' was where the higher wages were, and often also the competitive advantages. So nearly everybody joined. Britain couldn't avoid some inflation from OPEC and other foreign causes, but its rates of inflation have been among the lowest, pegging level with the Germans and the Japanese.

Britain achieved the only full employment in the developed world through the 1980s, by spending most of the proceeds of North Sea oil on a massive labor-intensive reconstruction of its nineteenth century infrastructure. Schools and hospitals were modernized, hundreds of thousands of miles of water and sewer and gas mains were replaced, all the gaols were replaced, and some new technology allowed the country landscape to be cleared by undergrounding most of the ubiquitous power lines.

At this moment in history my bus crashed fifteen feet through the road surface into a collapsed sewer main, and woke me up.

It was not such a ridiculous dream. Bashing the British is so fashionable at home and abroad just now that it's too easy to think they can do *nothing* right, least of all the sweet things fancied above.

But that's a mistake. Their postwar economic performance, from Attlee's election to Wilson's retirement, was Britain's best since 1873. And if their economic growth lagged behind their competitors, other things didn't. Here are the best press, the best radio, the best public television, the best commercial television, in the world. Also the most and best theatre, excellent publishing, excellent higher education, a lot of very good schools, the classical music capital of the world, the top nation in Nobel prizes per head. Unlike the housing towers, most of the New Towns are solid social and economic successes. In the conflicts between developers, farmers, rambles and conservationists, creative British compromises have allowed them *all* to win. New houses fit tactfully, without sprawl, onto old villages and market towns. And two million miles of pedestrian rights of way, bridle paths, towpaths and recreational canals are laced through one of the most beautiful, best conserved and most efficiently farmed countrysides in the world.

People who can do all that with about half America's income per head and a tenth of America's murder rate *should* be able to fix their manufacturing. And pull down the housing towers, be fair to blacks, and learn to watch soccer peacefully. Just a few things.

Triptych for Mike

1

Mike and Reba, his slender wife of three children, enter our lives that first night. An hour after touch-down out of a luminous sky into a vast snowscape. Fifteen below, outside, said our captain over his intercom. We look at each other, Edna and I, hurled out of Sydney summer into this. I think of the unused parka up above.

"Courage," smiles Edna. "Survival rate's high!"

The next hour sees eighty kilos of snow-free Interstate unwind serenities of winter moonlight. Then the heat of the Visitors' Suite at Gertruda Anderson where we'd spend the year's sabbatical. From a feeling that Australians were a convivial people they'd managed an impromptu get-together in welcome. A likely crowd assembled by phone-calls. A come-as-you-are crowd, bring-your-own crowd. Beer and bourbon. Out of all these people we got to know so well, Mike and Reba stand clear on that night. Not only did they bring welcome; they brought gifts.

"From our farm!" shouts Mike.

Reba elegantly holds out a squash, Mike his jar of maple syrup. "From our own trees! From our own sweet maples!" His face glows.

He is a florid, dark-haired man, overweight, nuggety, face filling with boyish smiles. His bonhomie wells up with a nervous laugh, according to the response he gets, boisterous or tentative. Reba, our lady of quiet smiles, in unflustered attendance. A well-matched couple, you would say.

"Come out next Spring when the sap starts flowing! See how it's done. A bottle of Jim Beam to keep out the cold, you'll see. And this is what you get!"

He holds to the light the amber syrup.

"One hundred per cent. This is no supermarket muck, with their 3 per cent maple syrup, the rest just shit!"

At this exuberance several politely waiting, as Americans do, to join in, step forward. Someone says:

"I see you've met our Chaplain. Be warned!"

The evening ends early, "in homage to St Jet-Lag," as Mike puts it.

"I've booked you for spring," says Mike. "One thing you must do before, though! Sauna at the farm! Maybe there's a lot Swedish Lutherans don't know; but they know about saunas." Reba smiles quietly.

"Of course we'll come." Waves of jet-lag overflow us.

How does a chaplain come to be farmer? Mike's been at Gertruda Anderson twenty years, on year-by-year contracts. No tenure for Mike, highly qualified though he is. In his church he has enemies. They whisper he drinks too much. He's "too popular" with the students. With the townspeople. Too modern! Despite the ratings they've had his weekly broadcasts chopped, withdrawn funding – he's been exceeding his paid duties, you see. Moreover, his wife's strange. Some say not even Lutheran. Not even a Christian. Never seen at Chapel! According to the contract they can sack him any time, replace him with a tame cookie. Only for one thing – the students would riot. Faculty, too, support him. But it's wearing for Mike. And Reba. They live under threat.

Years ago they bought the farm. Insurance against malice. Twelve acres of farming land, some woods. It had been up for sale for years and years when he found it. Got it for a low, low price. Never happen again. Not three children later. Not now. Have to be young for that sort of thing, says dark-haired Reba. They had to sell off a part. Just had to. Pity. Would now be worth a packet under soy-beans. Would solve all their problems. Well, the financial ones.

There was the old farmhouse. To be rebuilt. They'd used the planks from the collapsed barn to slab-line the house. A lucky fashion in these parts to line rooms with old barn timbers. Visitors exclaim "Lucky things! Where'd you get *your* barn?" They admire the weather-stained texture of wood notched and grey with age, here and there traces of the old red paint.

"Got a few fraternity kids to help," laughs Mike. "A few beers and they were happy enough. Great guys. We had a great time . . ." You knew they had.

Problems! That old well. Six hundred feet with an oldtimer of a pump. No modern submersible there. Always needing attention! Even the water's fierce. They've renewed their water-heater three times. Corrodes. So expensive to replace – that's how they make them. Inbuilt mortality. Keeps you poor, though. Question: How many dud heaters make a millionaire? Mike's laugh bubbles up . . .

Some plusses, though. The arboretum they've planted. Those long lines of poplars and natives. Two hundred metres running up to the house. Will be wonderful, some-

day. Of course they'd lost elms. Dutch disease. Had to have them pulled out of the valley. Such huge equipment! The contractors managed marvellously. Scarcely damaged anything else. They're still paying that off.

Lucky to have the old tractor, though. Went with the place. Front tyre's still half flat (bubbles of laughter). Got caught in the valley by the first snow this winter. Frozen in till the thaw!

"We manage to grow a few things," says Mike. "Squash, pumpkin, sweet corn, cucumbers. Weeds a problem. Make a buck or two at the roadside stall. With luck!"

We stand, four of us, this sombre winter's day, looking through the farmhouse's picture window. It had stopped snowing last night. The big outside thermometer shows minus twenty.

"Lucky people!" shouts Mike. "About to have the thrill of your down-underling lives!"

Edna and I have changed in the guest room upstairs. Now are wearing snowboots, heavy coats. We have swimming costumes underneath. (What does one wear to a sauna?) We feel we've been conned into this. "But, dingo it?" says Edna, being offensively Australian, "No way!" Mike opens the outside porch door. The four of us move through knee-deep snow, a powdery, dry snow. An old farm shed has been fitted out. Heat through one wall has sculpted a gap between snow and the unpainted timbers.

A wave of heat engulfs us. Mike's been stoking.

"The real stuff!" he cries, round face just containing his grin. Hot stones on charcoal radiate heat. They glow white in the half-dark.

Mike reaches for a bottle, splashes Jim Beam over the stones. They hiss and steam.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" cries Mike, inhaling extravagantly. Reba smiles.

This sizzling heat is unbearable. Even with whiskey.

"Now," shouts Mike, "Do as we do. Naked into the snow!"

Mike and Reba step out of boots, throw off greatcoats. Edna grabs my arm - they wear nothing underneath. They're gone. We're left. What to do? Strip! Togs off! Why didn't we try a nudist beach before leaving old Sydney? That would at least have been *some* pre-sauna practice! We trot after the two forms that are now rolling in level snow. Mike prances, rolls, shouts. Reba is more restrained. Prefers rolling. Edna, I notice, is a natural roller, rather than a prancer. We lose self-consciousness.

"Back to the stones!" roars Mike. Blessed heat pours over us in welcome. Panting we sit briefly on the narrow wooden bench. Fumes rise again. The whiskey-smell.

"Out!" shouts Mike. "Remember the Scripture? To be born again, be as a little child!" He chuckles quietly. This time he's in a quieter mood.

"Listen to the silence," he says. "The wonderful snow silence!" Not a sound, not a movement. Only us. . . .

"And to think!" Edna laughs as we drive back to town, "I still don't know! Do Lutherans circumcise?"

Emerging from my 8.00 a.m. Aust. Lit. class I am stopped by the secretary, Mitzzy Lutz: "Call this number. The Chaplain wants you!" It is Mike, sounding tired but immensely enthusiastic. "The sap's flowing. Come right out!"

Fortunately no class till two. I collect Edna and off we go through the early-spring morning, out of town past the Dairy Queen and the Jug Liquor Store, through a landscape of ploughed ground and winter wheat. The cold bites at us, but since temperatures climbed up to zero it seems a heat-wave. Things are relative.

At a bend in the farm-road we come upon them, on the edge of the maple wood, Mike and the farmer sitting by a tank that is wide, long and shallow. Cement blocks prop up the tank. The two men sit on stools. From the tank steam fluffs into the air. From time to time spurts of wind flick away steam-wisps into the morning. A fire of maple and elm branches glows and flares, spreading heat nearby. The old tractor stands handy, flat tyre in one of the road puddles, loaded with wood from the forest fall; dark logs and branches, some rotting. Every now and then Mike or his mate, a local farmer who has his five year-old son with him, kicks the fire-sticks, pushes them further along, takes branches from the trailer load. Meanwhile they squat on their stools, near hell-mouth, henchmen required to stoke. They are wrapped against the sharp cold. Great boots, shapeless pants, heavy pullovers under disreputable parkas. Balaclavas, blue-knitted and jauntily tasselled from the one pattern, are pulled over ear-lobes. Florid-faced they wave in greeting. Mike's been there all night. He looks weary.

I switch off the engine and the world is suddenly alive with sound. Up through the leafless branches of the sweet maples it swirls, filling the morning. On a post is Mike's transistor. Full strength.

"Bach! Glorious Bach!" he shouts. "His birthday! We're filling the world with the joy of Bach. Public Radio, St Paul. Woods flowing with sweet maple syrup and Bach!" He waves his arm in sweeping, grandiloquent gesture.

"Come, join us! Try our potion! You've tasted nothing like this!"

From a flagon he pours what looks like orange juice, except a part of it is sap that in yesterday's warmth has flowed out of the sugar maples. He reaches into the leafless hedge, draws out a quart of Jim Beam wrapped in a brown bag. He mixes drinks, hands them to us with the enthusiasm of an evangelist.

They are good.

"Aren't they just great?" he yells boisterously over Bach. We sip away in the cold morning wind, warmth moving beneath outer padding and thick gloves.

"You must try our eggs!"

From a carton Mike's mittened hands extract eggs, plomp them in the steaming vat of maple sap. The white blobs bob through the steam, circuiting in the dark fluid. Like a prophet managing difficult rites Mike peers through the steam, retrieves his eggs with kitchen tongs.

Hard-boiled. The rarest of hard-boiled eggs. We crack off the hot shells, bite into the hot egg-texture, lick our lips and say we've tasted nothing like it. About us, overhead, wakening the branches swirls the Chaconne.

"This sap," shouts Mike, "must boil fifteen hours. Means day and night. Forty-five gallons of sap. One gallon of syrup. 45 to 1! We'll be boiling for three days—fifteen hours a time! There comes a moment of delicate balance. That's where James here helps me—the moment to pour! Leave it a minute and it's thick, dark and spoiled. You can't go to sleep."

This moment is now approaching. The two men, nodding to each other, grasp iron handles at each end and lift the tank from its cement base, pour the dark fluid into a huge drum.

"The rest we do in the farm kitchen," says Mike. "Reba helps there. We refine it. Strain through a felt cone. With love and patience," he grins. "Hear again. Result: one hundred per cent syrup. Nothing like it. A dying art—like so much else! Total result: twenty gallons perhaps for the year. Just think. Twenty gallons, pure syrup, for us and our friends, our very own, flowing over all those waffles and crepes and pancakes!"

I ask James: "Been doing this long?"

The farmer is a slight-built man with three days' stubble on his reddish, sharp cheeks. Blue eyes sparkle.

"All my life," he says. "Started when I was five. Used to come down right here, to this very spot, using this very tank, doing things just as you see today." He smiles with pleasure.

"Now I'm bringing my little five year-old down with me. He'll know all about it, too!"

Time to load the tractor-trailer with more firewood. Our feet sink into the dank ground cover. Above us against a pale sun float dark tracers of maple bole and branch and twig. Little creatures have left untidy winter nests high in the branches, squirreling crazy pursuits through the tree tops. It's not sap alone that spring is stirring in the sweet maple.

On these old trees metal inserts have been placed tapping the sap. Now, with the day's warmth the sap is beginning to drip into the cans and plastic containers. White plastic buckets, four feet above ground, catch the run-off. In some, yesterday's bees have drowned themselves sweetly, death after all their winter hibernation. The power-saw drowns out Bach, ripping and roaring its way through fallen trunks and limbs.

Back in the farm kitchen, helping Reba force syrup through the felt cone, Mike says:

"Knew a man once. Honeywell engineer. Had a stand of maple woods. What he did was link each drip through a thin plastic line. All flowed into a central container. Not a drop wasted! Not a bee drowned! All quietly flowing out of the woods into that container. Marvellous!"

"Then, of course, he'd fixed the boiling down. Thermostat! Electric heat. No sitting up with fires through the night. No fatigue! Could just go on with whatever else he had to do. No wasted time!"

"Imagine," says Mike, "that clinical forest, tubes draining away. Enough to make the woods throw up!"

Reba, flushed from her work, shrugs at Edna who has already started filling jars. Her eyes flash with scorn:

"Honeywell!" she says. "What would you expect!"

3

"There's something about this Anderson College I find hard to define," says the British Council man, oddly named George Eliot. ("No, No. Oh dear no. I'm no writer myself! Wrong sex even!") Did a two-week lecture stint for them a couple of years ago. And they've asked me back for a week. At their expense. Generous souls!"

George is an amiable fellow, much more than the Englishman Abroad. We are talking in the Visitors' Suite where George, to his delight, has just discovered in the bookcase a rhyming dictionary Swedish.

"Good Lord," he exclaims, "What a treasure! Did you know the Swedes needed to rhyme?"

He and his wife occupy an official flat.

"Being English, I suppose," he continues, "I still find the informality surprising. Friendliness here has a different quality. Back home we protect ourselves more. Really, these people can't do enough for you. As if they still felt a little guilty about that Boston tea-party. What do you think, being Australian?"

I point out we haven't thrown tea in the harbor yet. But guilt feelings, I very much doubt.

"We Australians," I suggest, "perhaps feel more guilty that we haven't thrown tea!"

"I can see," smiles George Eliot, "you people from the New World have much in common."

Indeed, over the week George Eliot and I have felt we've much in common. As guests. As aliens. Even as representatives of the Commonwealth. And here we are invited to take part in the academic procession. It's time to walk across campus.

George continues: "Things happen here, every day, that I'd find hard to have people back home understand at all. Often delightful things. Students coming up, talking freely, so openly. Why don't they export that image; instead of the brash tourist one? Tell me!"

We walk into the south bleacher end of the stadium. The science conference is about to open. We're just in time. Before us stand the academically garbed. The very folds of their gowns seem stiff with scholarship on parade. The first personages, who have been standing longest, look resentfully at late-comers. Rectitude sits heavy on them. We excuse our way past, down the long line furnished with gowns of great price out of inadequate salaries. Expensive caps, gaudy and sombre, flat and high-peaked, crown distinguished visages. The typical academic procession. George Eliot reads this, I see. We exchange glances. We feel onlookers.

A hush descends. Mike, long experienced M.C. in these matters, in his Upsala robes, moves things along. The double line flows into the oblong of light. From our place far down the line the disappearing couples look enormous, a masquerade in slow replay. A muffled organ lauds famous men electronically. George, no taller than I, whispers "In this line-up I feel we're prisoners under escort, what!" We proceed into the light, past rows of

audience, visitors, anonymous people who turn curiously to watch. Down the concrete aisle we go, split left and right, stare over heads until the whole throng subsides with a sigh. The President welcomes the speakers, the guests, the audience.

The conference is under way . . .

Back in the suite we take up the discussion.

All that," I suggest "was cliché and spectacle. Pomp and circumstance. Your cup of tea?"

"Back home, for a start, there'd be no stadium. I like the stadium. Practical. A building in use all the time. Not kept for Occasion. Basketball, ice-hockey, broom-ball, indoor field meets, inter-college comps. Band competitions. Marching girls. Pop concerts. Today, a conference, academic procession. Constant life in it. I like that."

I suggest the English might think such buildings lack dignity.

"They express, perhaps, exuberance rather than dignity," he remarks carefully. "What's either worth, really?"

This evening's the last for the Eliots. It's near the end of our stay too. We've arranged dinner in the long dining room. An evening of good fellowship. Close friends we've made over the year's sabbatical. And the Eliots. Of course Mike, the Chaplain, and Reba. ("I've stood up an official do for this," boasts Mike, "they'll sack me yet!") He's brought his morels.

"You can't leave this land without tasting morels!"

On a large platter the morels lie mute and crenellated, sponge-like in appearance. Their thick stalks have been severed at ground level. No waste!

"They're found in the valleys," explained Mike. "Very hard to spy. Some people develop the ability to see them. I'm one. Most can't see for looking!"

We have pitted olives for the martinis that accompany the morels. Reba takes charge quietly, cooks lovingly. The rare mushrooms are shared out as they come from the pan. We savor them, sip our martinis, make the most of the rarity. What an opening for a meal!

We're backing New York Strip as challenger to Roast Beef of Olde Englande. Hot English mustard. Idaho potatoes. Tender broccoli. Two bottles of '64 Pokolbin

Dry Red saved for the occasion, blessings of Australia.

The meal is interrupted by a sharp knock on the outside door.

Mike moves quickly, returns, says "Would you like to see an American wedding?"

All look their surprise.

"I mean it. There's a bridal party outside here. They want me to marry them!"

George Eliot grins: "My God. What next!"

Of course we agree. All go out on the porch.

Below the wooden steps stand bride and groom, best man and bridesmaid. The groom is an extremely handsome young man, Swedish blonde hair, black evening suit, ruffled dress shirt, tall and charming. He wears a wide-brimmed black hat, narrow bow tie. His bride, a fair-haired beauty, elaborately coiffured, full bust. Behind them a photographer.

They modestly enquire again if the Reverend might marry them. Mike assents—provided all folk on the porch are witnesses. It is agreed. He thereupon speaks the service. They respond humbly. He speaks it reverently, deliberately, compassionately. There's difficulty in finding the ring. One is found. They pledge each other. All witnesses are given a handful of rice. The rice is thrown, each in his own style of blessing, wishing fruitfulness. Flash bulbs keep popping.

By now, despite the finery, it is evident the pretty females are males. The Englishman turns to me:

"By God! Not a homosexual wedding? What next!"

The wedding party moves off quietly into the night. We return to the table.

"How did they know you were here, Mike?"

"I always leave word where I can be found, should there be a need."

Then grinning, "They tracked me down easily enough. It's a fraternity stunt, of course. They'd be given a day in which to be photographed being married by the College Chaplain. To join their frat.

"Some of my best work," he adds seriously, "some of my greatest friendships have come out of stunts as silly as this."

The pavlova planned for supper, with its withered passionfruit bought from Lund's supermarket (89 cents each in the exotic fruits section) seems an anti-climax.

I spoke too soon. In the last issue of *Overland* I wrote of the support this magazine has received from the Literature Board of the Australia Council over the years, and expressed appreciation. Shortly after I published that statement *Overland* received a slap in the face from the Literature Board which has amazed readers and supporters who have come to hear about it but, more than that, has baffled others who are in touch with the magazine world but are not necessarily close personal supporters of this magazine.

The essence of the matter is contained in the following (partial) list of basic grants offered magazines by the Literature Board in 1986:

Quadrant	\$25,000
Scripsi	\$22,000
Meanjin	\$22,000
<i>Overland</i>	\$20,000

There are two matters of immediate interest. The first is that for many years *Overland* and *Meanjin* have been accorded equal status in grants by the Literature Board. The second is that the grant to *Scripsi* has been raised from \$4000 in 1984 to \$22,000 in 1986. (I leave *Quadrant* aside as a special case. It is essentially a monthly magazine, not a quarterly.)

Dog does not eat dog and the literary magazines of Australia, all of them under siege, do not indulge in attacks on each other. They have too many other things to do and, in any case, readers are not likely to be interested in or impressed by internecine disputes. Let me state quite clearly that I have the greatest respect for the record of *Meanjin* and *Scripsi*. *Meanjin* has behind it a great and important tradition which it continues to uphold. *Scripsi*, a newcomer to the scene (and also, like *Overland* and *Meanjin*, a Melbourne-based magazine) has, by dint of enormous editorial involvement by editors Michael Heyward and Peter Craven, achieved a notable success in new directions in a short space of time. We welcome their existence and their achievement. We believe they are entitled to the support they are receiving.

Having said that, let me make some comments. The Literature Board traditionally requires at least four major responses by the magazines it supports. It expects them to use the grants they receive to pay writers to the maximum

possible extent. It expects them to pay special attention to Australian writers, Australian books, and the Australian scene. It expects them to build circulation. And it expects them to expand the meaning of 'literature' within the broad Australian community.

Within these categories the achievement of *Overland*, especially in recent years, has not been paralleled. This is not *my* assessment. It is an assessment based on the monitoring of hundreds of comments, both printed and otherwise. David English, for instance, reviewing the magazines in the *Australian Book Review* (February/March 1985) said that the way ahead for the magazines must be "forward and be damned", and commented that *Overland* "has been one of the first to experience that change." To take the Literature Board's stipulations in order: *Overland* pays over 70 per cent of the Literature Board grant received straight back to authors – an unheard-of figure not remotely approached by any of the other magazines; *Overland*, as its motto on the title page shows, has always devoted special attention, almost certainly more than any other of the magazines supported by the Board, to the Australian scene; *Overland*'s circulation in the last year or two has risen towards 3000, almost a doubling in two or three years, and probably the largest literary magazine circulation in Australia, with the exception, perhaps, of *Quadrant*, which has newsagency distribution; and *Overland* has always, and self-evidently, placed more emphasis on 'popular' appeal than any of the other magazines.

For these virtues we have now been discriminated against and punished, by a Board – its Director tells me – which "makes its own independent assessment of what support should be given to each magazine." I believe the Board's actions in the current case throw doubts on its capacity to assess and think, on its knowledge of the important role of the magazines and its familiarity with what is in fact being done, and in short on its competence and impartiality. Comments from Board members and others on the inside lead me also to believe that the decision to downgrade *Overland* was made at least as much because of inefficiency and failure to consider its own guidelines as by overt prejudice.

We are not taking this matter lying down. I hope, and will try to see, that this action by the Board will be as widely

discussed as possible in politics and in the media, and that in particular it will be discussed in the context of the competence of the Australia Council and the Literature Board itself. I request readers, for a start, to convey their opinions on the matter to the Director of the Literature Board at PO Box 302, North Sydney 2060. I should be glad to have copies of any such letters.

With literary prizes now quite common, and the pleasant sight of the Premiers of New South Wales and of Victoria vying with each other to claim the credit for the most valuable prizes offered in Australia (each totalling about \$50,000 depreciated dollars), questions are being asked both here and overseas as to the virtues and the administration of such awards. In Britain the Booker £15,000 award (not the richest but the most publicized) has been won by the New Zealander Keri Hulme for *The Bone People*, which has sold 27,500 in Britain and 35,000 in New Zealand, the British sales at least largely due to the award.

Hermoine Lee, in a recent issue of the London Observer (6 October) says that the Booker is "in danger of losing its credibility", partly as a result of all the hype but also because of timid decisions, "excluding from the short list the boldest and baddest books of the year." She claims that Booker publicity actually harms good books which don't make the short list, and that the award is itself distorting publishing. Publishers may throw everything into promoting their 'front runners', and tend to crowd the publication of these into the two crucial months of September and October.

No doubt much the same objections can be mounted against the major Australian awards. And I have heard others – for instance, that being on a short list without knowing the final result can be nerve-racking for authors; and that the awards, especially if they tend to be repeated for the same books from award to award, can lead to cultism and to the belief that 'good books are the kind of books that win awards'.

Certainly there seems some evidence in recent years that judges of these competitions may be influenced by prior decisions by other judges in other competitions. That it takes a bold man or woman to reject from a short list a book that has already won a major award in another competition, the desire for intellectual reputation and for following fashion being what it is,

Then there is the problem of what may be called the 'literary two cultures'. Should awards go to tomorrow's 'classics', to the best professional writing now being produced in this country, or should they go to original, imaginative, unexpected, perhaps rough-hewn, even 'popular' material? Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life* would have been most unlikely to have won a literary prize in 1903.

This leads to the question of whether judges should be persons who stand in some professional relation to literature (writers, academics, critics, editors) or should they be 'intelligent common readers', with more confidence in what they *really* like than professionals can usually admit to? I'm very much in favor, myself, of appointing 'common readers' to our judging panels; so far as I know we don't do it in Australia at all, though the Booker has made a point of this for years. I have heard an interesting rumor, in fact, that had the 'common reader' on this year's Booker prize (a well-known television personality) actually lodged her vote (because of a technicality it was not counted), Peter Carey's *Illywhacker* would have won.

Readers may be interested to take note that next year's Meanjin-Overland Test Match (the twenty-seventh) will be held at the Domain oval (between the Shrine and Melbourne Grammar School) on Sunday 23 February. B.Y.O. and all will be very welcome.

We record with great sorrow the deaths of two friends and supporters of Overland. Jim Gale, our South Australian editor, collapsed and died on 18 September, at the age of 57. A New Zealander by origin, Jim was a leading activist in the fight against racism, and had just returned from a demanding conference on Namibia at the United Nations. Our sympathies go to Irene and Jim's family. We also note the death of Arthur Phillips on 4 November at the age of 85, a contributor to Overland and a friend to its Editor. We shall publish a tribute to Arthur in our next issue.

For those who wish to give a subscription to Overland as a Christmas present, we are holding enough copies of our centenary issues to make it possible for such a gift to start with No. 100. But let us know quickly please!

Effie Broadwater, author of a poem in this issue, is an Aboriginal who is studying anthropology at the University of Queensland.

Off to the Antarctic for a couple of months. No mail-box and no phones!

To the Coming Man

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: We don't often print documents in Overland, but with the following we make an exception. I came across Horace's letter recently, when I attended the opening of the new Court House Museum at Stawell (Victoria). It appears to be addressed to me. The original still lies under the foundation stone of the former Stawell Mechanics' Institute, but a copy was printed in the Pleasant Creek News and Wimmera Advertiser for 29 March 1875. The town "about 18 miles to the south" is Ararat, and the old rivalries, to which Horace refers, still hold good. The publication of Overland's centenary issues seems an appropriate occasion on which to print this message to the future. I append my reply to Horace.

Mr. Smith, Sir – It is true that I have not had the pleasure of your acquaintance, that I probably never shall have, for since the day in which these lines were written there have been a few alterations in this world of yours – ours once, yours now. Your name may not be Smith; it may be something far less euphonious and aristocratic, and you may therefore, have a right to be aggrieved at my familiarity bestowing a wrongful appellation. But, my dear Smith, I was a calculator of the doctrine of chances. Statistical records told me that in the British Empire thousands of Smiths were born and died every year; that the Smiths were of themselves a nation. The chances therefore in favour of your being a Smith outnumbered the chances of any other individual name, and to me you, yet unborn, were Smith.

It is possible, Smith, that you are not a reader or speaker of English as I write and speak it, in which case my antique jargon may appear uncouth. I would respectfully suggest that it is too late for you to try to teach me better, and you must take my old fashioned anphonic style as it is.

To say I envied you, Smith, conveys but a feeble idea of the longing I had to know what you know, to see what you see. Pardon the absurdity of my asking you to be historical and answer a few queries, which were unanswerable when I wrote which of course you can easily dispose of.

This town of yours, is it still called Stawell? Does it exist, or are you exploring a kind of Australian Herculaneum or Ninevah on a small scale? If the latter, your shaft is in what was once the centre of the town, and a few drives will disclose some rare treasures. I speak of course of the year 1875 of the Christian era, but as some of the best prophets then extant used to say Stawell would be played out in a year or two, you will probably find things such as they were when I wrote.

About northwest, you will find the remains of possibly what was the leading hostelry of the town, at the time when large vehicles drawn by horses used to arrive every day with news twelve hours old from the sea. By the way, Smith, how do you get your news? Have you fully developed aerial navigation, and do you communicate with the moon by telegraphic wires? If so, is it a fact that its superficial strata are auriferous? They said so in our own day and we doubted it. I am afraid gold is valueless, however, nowadays. We were producing it pretty rapidly in our times, but it was not much cheaper then.

If it is worth anything to you, and the destruction of the ancient city of Stawell was sudden, I may mention that not far from this spot were seven large banking establishments. If your shafts or drives reach these spots, and you find underneath any skeletons of managers, give them decent burial for my sake – some of them deserved it. You are of course a teetotaler. I suppose you hardly know what I mean by "P.B.", "No. 2", "Square Shaft" or "Soda and B". It would not be interesting to you to investigate any old liquorshops, otherwise I could direct you to some – there were two or three in Stawell in my time.

Did you find any waterpipes in your diggings? If not perhaps some of your antiquarians have observed a queer kind of perforation in the range to the westward which we used to call the Grampians. How far through is it and did you find any "efficient miners" or a surveyor in it when you got to the end?

I am curious about your form of government. Are you a citizen of an enlightened republic and if so how long was it before the Britishers burst up? Did they ever work out the Imperial Federation scheme, or did Higinbotham and Slattery coalesce to bring about the revolution? It was talked of in our day, and the Press were divided in opinion over it. By the way, Smith, how about your Press? How many daily papers have you beside The News, and what

line of politics does the editor of that journal adopt? Does he ever rile the outspoken, though ungrammatical farmers of the Wimmera by a criticism of the doings of their chosen ones? I feel anxious to know who is your Shire Valuer, and whether he pleases everybody.

Have any vestiges been found of a town about 18 miles to the south? We treated it badly in our time. You see we wanted one or two things it wanted too, and being the strongest we got them in the end, and the result was that we were not friends. We have all been sorry for it many times since, and being naturally placable, I have forgiven it all, and I am sure all the others of my generation have done so too. It might be worth your while to search for a few relics down that way.

There are several other matters I should like to ask you about, and I shall never have another chance. That spiritual business – was it ever cleared up? Were the reverends right in calling it devilism or was it only psychic force after all? If it was you have easy times of it with every article of furniture made self-acting. If you can lay your pen on a sheet of paper, and will it to write without any other effort on your part, you are a lucky fellow, and your pressmen have jolly times of it.

Was Professor Halford's remedy for snake-bite any good, and did he whip those Indian medical sceptics? I suppose you have no snakes to trouble you. Mesmerism, or, as we had learned to call it, electrobiology, has long ago enabled you to draw them all out of the colony into the sea, something after the style of St. Patrick's wholesale deportation of varmint. Still I feel anxious about Halford, you know, because he was a man of our time and we had snakes, and heard plenty about them, when reporters were hard up for news.

Was it measles, after all, or something else? You know what I mean. We could never find out. Was it?

How are the reefs looking, and where is the most distant prospecting shaft situated? I suppose you can work to a great depth with your appliances. I am rather curious to know something about your mines. What did the last crushing from the North Cross go, and is it long since they gave up numbering the dividends? If you could tell me how deep the Magdala is, what country they are in, and when they expect to be through, it would ease my anxiety a little. How often do they send rations down to the men, and do they still find plenty of "bunches" and "floors"?

I am afraid, Smith that you think me a bore for thus pestering you with my questions; but consider my anxiety. You know all these things – I don't. You have long ago settled all such troubles, as whether mining property should be taxed, whether it is wiser to bore two-thirds of a mile, or flume eight; whether the Heathen Chinese can be absorbed into the Euro-Australasian race profitably; whether the "flashing sword" upset the Education Act of our day; whether mallee country will grow silkworms; whether any railway reached Hamilton, and if so, which; whether Ararat did get its turntable; whether Wallwork's motive power worked after all; whether Gladstone and Dr. Cummins were made Cardinals; whether Baxter was right about Napoleon; whether the southern hemisphere is now ruling the north and whether that prophetic

New Zealander has started on his visit to the ruins of London Bridge, and if so, whether he was not arrested under the Vagrant Act.

To conclude, my dear Smith, I heartily wish you well, as also your friends, who have assembled to root up this stone, and examine these relics of the past. Some of you may be relatives of myself, or some of the jolly good fellows I knew in the olden times. I feel convinced you are all jolly good fellows yourselves, and I should like to know you. As I can't, I figuratively shake hands with you. You will find some antique coins in the bottle which contains this. They were put there to enable you all to perform whatever ceremony passes in your times for the drinking of the health of

HORACE

Dear Horace:

Yes, I would have liked to have known you. You certainly seem to have known me, at several removes. You seem to have been a man of parts and you write a pleasing style – I am afraid you would find that the common literacy, which you seem to exemplify, has gone a long way down hill since your day. I know of few university professors – we have thousands in the Australian colonies these days – could write as fluently, wittily and interestingly as you do.

You would certainly have known of Froude's remark about those of the past – that "they cannot come to us, and we can but fleetingly penetrate to them." I think you go some way to undermining – a word certainly familiar to you – Froude's proposition. You do come through to us, Horace, and I can see myself sauntering down the main street of Stawell with you to one of those "liquor shops" you mention. Only two or three? I sense a tongue in cheek.

How were you educated, I wonder. (I'm in the education business myself, these days: it's an enormous and self-perpetuating enterprise.) You were obviously too old, in 1875, to be a beneficiary of the 1872 Education Act, and in fact I suspect you were not colonial-born at all. I think you came out in the Fifties from what you called the Old Country or Home, and that you were pretty representative of the men who came hoping to better themselves through gold. Not that you did so better yourself, I think. If you had done even reasonably well I presume you would have gone back Home. But perhaps not. After all, most of the diggers did stay here. And so you stayed on in Stawell, which is still a pleasant small town: you would recognize much about it, and your original message still lies under the Mechanics' Institute.

The institute, however, is now an accountant's office. Its collections are dispersed or destroyed – in many such cases thrown down old mine-shafts. How do you like that as a metaphor for returning gold to the ground? Books, for those who read them, are provided by a benign state

through a mechanism of what are called 'regional libraries', run, not by the committees of working men and others such as in your day, but by trained 'professional' librarians. They don't necessarily *like* books, or read them, but then, my dear Horace, *everything* has become much more 'professional' since your day.

Come to think of it, I wonder what your profession was? Or perhaps I should say *is*; let's drop this pretence that I'm not really talking to you. A school-teacher, perhaps? You seem a little too good-humored for that, in your day at least. And rather too well-informed, in that attractive old-fashioned way of being interested in rather too many things for your own good. (These days your breadth of sympathies and interests would certainly harm, or be seen as harming, your 'career'.) Perhaps a journalist? That rag-bag mind of yours would seem to go with the image of many an old-time journalist, "passing rich with forty pounds a year". But you seem a little too relaxed for a country journalist, beset with his problems of jumping presses, pied type and dilatory correspondents. And, for similar reasons, I doubt that you're a farmer. Your hand seems accustomed to holding a pen, and you seem to have a leisurely approach to life which farmers can't afford. I think that perhaps you are a man who had the sense to give up the quest for gold quite early, and to start a store; and that now you're a reasonably prosperous shop-keeper of some kind in the town. Or perhaps a public servant with a little time on your hands? Whatever you are, I wish you well: a happy family, good friends, tobacco and grog, the books you obviously treasure, and a long and contented life.

So much for the pleasantries, my dear Horace. I am sure you are waiting to hear from me about the answers to your questions.

You ask about news. You remind us of how it felt to be cut off from news. Today we have the opposite problem: we have too much news, and we have it too quickly. Instantaneously, in fact. We still have newspapers, of course, though by your standards they are trivial, superficial things for the most part. They are not taken as seriously as they were in your day – perhaps few things are – but they still exist. Indeed your Pleasant Creek News survives, but buried within a paper now called the Stawell Times News. But, for the most part, people get their news, and their entertainment, by means that you never dreamed of. We have boxes in our houses which work off electricity, which is now a vastly developed source of power which in effect runs the whole country: our lights, our trains, our industries. Of course we have electricity piped into our homes, through wires which disfigure the countryside and the suburbs – one of many prices we have paid for the 'progress' you wanted and which we are now not so sure about.

On these boxes we see photographs in color which move as in real life, and we hear the sounds at the same time. (There is also another system which is cheaper and whereby you just hear sound.) We see and hear what are called "films" (that is, theatre of one kind and another), men and women reading us the news, sometimes actual pictures as they happen of sporting events and disasters

and great occasions. It is all very addictive. I suppose reading could be addictive in your day, and often was, but these new systems are in virtually every home and are usually watched at least for several hours a day. (Working hours are less than in your day.) Whether this means that we are better informed, or just better misinformed, is one of the big questions of *our* day.

I am afraid, Horace, that in many ways you would be disappointed with us today. Yes, we have some marvels, like those boxes I mentioned, and yes, a few years ago some men, Americans actually, got to the moon by rocket propulsion. They returned safely, with no news of gold, but with rocks and dust; and it is said that there will be a human colony on the moon in another generation or so. No one is very excited about it any more, for reasons I will return to below. I don't know whether we have "fully developed", as you put it, "aerial navigation", but we have developed it to the point where it has largely replaced railway travel between such centres as Melbourne and Sydney, and totally replaced passenger ship transport between Australia and overseas countries. Horses have gone now and we take most of our journeys in horseless carriages. Since I mention Australia, I had better say that the six Australian colonies federated into the one country, called Australia, in 1901. It is a country governed – if that is the right word – from a place called Canberra, which in your day was a sheep-station not far from Yass. Plenty of relics of our old colonial past still exist, however; and one matter you thought a relic in your day has become a major issue in conscience and in politics – the matter of the Aboriginal people, who have rallied and revived.

But I must keep to my point, which is that you would be disappointed in us. By this I mean that Australia is not the great country of the future, the heart perhaps of an empire, that you and your contemporaries thought it was going to be. In fact we are not an empire at all. (Empires are in theory out of fashion, though the world is in fact split between two great empires busily disclaiming their interest in empire when they have time to do so left over from the process of building them.) We are still a small country with a population of only sixteen million people – I'm sorry to mention this, for I know it will shock you. Perhaps you will also be shocked by two other disclosures I make: that we are not a republic, but on the other hand we are no longer British. This conundrum will, I am sure, cause you to reach for a Soda and B. I doubt that I have time to explain it here, but perhaps I should seize a few words to say that we have found that the Heathen Chinese, as well as a number of other peoples, Asian and otherwise, can be accommodated reasonably comfortably among our sixteen million.

We find ourselves then, and despite our marvels, very much where we were in your day: a small, fortunate, reasonably affluent and essentially European country in an outrageously non-European geographical environment. China and Japan, not to speak of Russia and America, have risen to Great Power status. We kow-tow to them, for we survive in this world largely by mustering such wits and such moralities as we can. The capacity for reasoning, my dear Horace, and the ability of man to aspire to moral dealings, have as you know not been

Good reading for Christmas

So Much that is New: Baldwin Spencer 1860-1929

by D. J. Mulvaney
and J. H. Calaby

The life of a pioneering scholar—a great man and a great 'read'. \$33.50 (rrp)



Monash as Military Commander

by P. A. Pedersen

The definitive study of Monash's military genius. \$29.90 (rrp)

Why China?

Recollections of China 1923-1950

by C. P. FitzGerald

A unique view of 'what was before' the China of today. \$26.50 (rrp)

To Live in Peace:

Australia's
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by Michael
O'Connor

Rising public disquiet about the state of our defences makes this paperback a 'must'. \$9.50 (rrp)



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subject to any law of change for two or three thousand years. We may still walk down the street with you in this.

Perhaps our insignificance has its points. After all, you chose to live in Stawell and not in Melbourne. And now I had better tell you the most important thing. One of the reasons empires have (as I said, in theory) gone out of fashion is that, following two world wars in this twentieth century, a weapon has been fashioned—a bomb of dimensions almost equally unimaginable to you and to us—which, if ever employed, may obliterate all human life on earth. The two empires I have referred to possess this weapon in abundance. There seems to be no way to persuade them to divest themselves of it. It may be delivered, virtually at will, and again by rocket power, to any point on the world's surface. (This is one of the reasons why the successes of rocket transport in outer space have been received glumly.) While there are still plenty of small wars in the world, we all know that a third world war will ruin us all. Our insignificance means that we are perhaps not in the direct firing line; it is even possible that the southern hemisphere may suffer less than the northern, where the empires are based; but this is cold comfort, for it is likely that the after-effects of such a war would kill us all. Do you still envy us, Horace?

But now I must return from apocalyptic things to the more mundane matters that keep us all sane. Or, at any rate, sane-ish. The press, you ask about. You have no daily papers in Stawell at all, these days. Indeed you have few independent newspapers of any kind, either in country or city. News and opinion comes to us by courtesy of two or three great monopolistic networks which 'cover' Australia. Their interests are not primarily in spreading information or in promoting discourse, but in making money for their owners, who already have so much that they spend their lives in meaningless attempts to acquire more, with no other object in mind. Power, Horace, is no longer a local matter. One of the reasons ordinary people no longer write like you is that they no longer believe—and rightly no longer believe—that there is much point in their doing so. There is of course a great shadow theatre of public involvement—politics itself is put forward by the owners of the means of communication as the most important part of this theatre. It promotes the illusion of participation. But true power rests with the owners and stage managers of the shadow theatre, and with such entrenched groups in the community as have been able to build their Martello towers of privilege. The average Australian possesses more than he did in your day, in terms of belongings and leisure and freedom from the fear of sickness and cold and ill-nourishment. But, for all that, that same Australian has been mightily dispossessed in other ways. And, as for leisure, we have a new and unfamiliar Australian phenomenon now heavy on our shoulders. Far fewer people can produce far more goods than in your time. So increasing numbers of people, especially young people, are no longer needed, or even wanted. We are still bewildered about this—you see, your vision of an infinitely progressing Australia died hard—and we do not know what to do about it.

Your Shire Valuer, I am sure, still annoys everyone, and that remains as a universal between your days and mine. That town to the south is still 'that town', I am afraid, and I don't think you are the stronger any more. It even has an art gallery; we think much of 'culture' these days, and it is supported with some public generosity as a means of preventing the Devil from finding work for idle hands to do. Spiritualism and mesmerism? Spiritualism we laugh at, partly because we all like to laugh at our predecessors, partly because it can't be proved any more today than in your day, and we're very much 'into' (a modern phrase, I'm afraid) 'evidence' and 'proof'. The scientists, you see have triumphed, at least to the extent of having their own Martello tower, and they can be very stern with the rest of us. One famous Australian scientist even suggested, not long ago, that in his sphere of interest there was simply no more to be found out.

Mesmerism, too, is an example. Unlike spiritualism, it is now accepted. But it's not called 'mesmerism', it's called 'hypnosis', and it has been captured by yet another Martello tower, that of the medical practitioners, for the most part a wealthy brigand mob, accorded for some reason the kind of respect that you reserved – apparently – for the Mr Gladstones of this world.

No, Professor Halford's remedy for snake-bite was not the answer. Scientists and medical men, I must admit, have found a remedy for that: a certain substance of a homeopathic nature which must be injected into one's bloodstream. But snakes, you will be glad to know, are still a god-send for newspaper reporters.

Gold, now, gold. *How* important it was to you. Not so much to us. Australia's not much of a gold-producing country these days: it's minerals like iron ore, and coal, and aluminium (a light metal you won't have heard of) that count. But Stawell's proud of the Magdala mine, which has recently reopened with a great deal of modern machinery and hardly any miners.

I must hasten. The railway did reach Hamilton. Silkworms do not prosper in the Mallee. Ararat did get its turntable, but as far as I know it's not used any more (our engines are now reversible). Father Slattery's "flashing sword" opposition to the secular aspects of the 1872 Education Act succeeded to the extent that, for a hundred years, but only for a hundred years, Catholic schools remained outside the area of government support. But even the religious are secularists these days. God is the benign patron of the Australian team, comfortably out of sight but expected, every now and then, to weigh in with the odd benefit and support. I don't know who Dr Cummins was, or Wallwork, or Baxter, but my ignorance may itself answer your questions. I do know that Gladstone was not made a Cardinal and that, while there are plenty of New Zealanders in London, many of them no doubt vagrants, Macaulay's London Bridge (and yours) was sold to the Americans!

My very dear Horace, and my hands go out to you, I have much enjoyed this unusual encounter, and please accept my affections. I have more admiration for your century, and perhaps even for your society, than I have for my own. I think that I might have been happier in it than in this; indeed I think many of us might have been. You didn't have some of our useful drugs, of course, including one called aspirin which is a great help in countering the effects of too much Soda and B., and that, and that, alone, makes me pause.

I cannot say, Horace, that I should like to meet you. Thanks to your courtesy, and your pen, I have.

Yours in sincerity,

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

P.S. Yes, Stawell did get its water through from the Grampians. It nourishes a wide area.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: A wonderful total in the Floating Fund this time around. The figure is \$2645, which I think has never been equalled before in the period between one issue and the next. It has been a very welcome centenary present indeed, and many thanks to: \$500 Anon.; \$400 L.W.; \$200 V.L.; \$100 H.S., M.W., P.R., R.R., N.H.; \$84 J.W.; \$80 P.W.; \$64 R.D.B.; \$50 B.S., P.L., G.B., J.W.; \$34 C.G., S.L.; \$30 D.O'H.; \$24 D.G., D.D.; \$18 T.M.; \$16 A.M., G.B.; \$14 W.B., B.B., A.C.J., B.A. W.K.; \$10 B.R., M.M., L.B., R.D., G.S., K.D.G.; \$9 S.B., J.McG., S. & S.S., B.D., B.B., L.M.-J., G.P., C.C., J.H., R.H., L.K., R.H.; \$8 S.S., J.W.; \$4 R.R., C.duB., A.H., C.H., D.&K.W., R.H., T.C., B.M., J.D., L.H., D.R., R., I.G., T.M., D.T., J.W., J.F., P.R., J.O., B.H., L.D., J.B., P.R., E.W., J.W., M.S., J.J., B.B., S.G., S.P., J.F., J.W., M.T., E.G., J.S., J.H., D.F.; \$3 H.H.; \$2 D.W., W.McD., M.L., H.J., G.H., D.H., G.A.; \$1 N.McP., S.D.

Dead Hands and Young Blood

ROBYN WILLIAMS

When I graduated from the University of London back in 1972 I was on my way to an Australia which was in the process of taking off. The beginnings were humble, but gone was the dullness of ten years before, the land of the Village Glee Club and the Hospital Hour, where stage actors pretended to be British, where you had to stand for "God Save the Queen" in the cinema, and where I was once thrown out of a country swimming pool by the man with the whistle for wearing shorts without legs.

In 1972 Blue Hills was still on the ABC, Monday Conference proceeded, with an agonized sense of balance, to indifferent reviews, and Four Corners was presented by one Michael Willesee. But there, in the local cinema, was an *Australian Film*, "Stork", starring great big Bruce Spence, Mad Max's mate, and in the theatre were *Australian* plays by people like Buzo and Williamson; music was everywhere and not just that of the Seekers or Frank Ifield, clones of Tin Pan Alley, but a new rougher sound that seemed to come from here and nowhere else. You could buy a pixillated publication called Nation Review which was outrageous and stimulating where its satirical predecessor on television, "Mavis Bramston", had been rather awkward and somewhat twee. Above all, with all the singing, dancing and shouting going on so exuberantly throughout the land, the wide brown land, one felt immediately that one could join in.

So I did. I went along to William Street, asked for a job in the Australian Broadcasting Commission and got one. I had wide experience of international hitch-hiking, an unspectacular degree in biology and an extensive knowledge of Monty Python, having been in several of those programs, once as an exploding Scotsman and once as the Queen Mother, astonishing hat, dreadful handbag and all. With this to recommend me I was required to swear allegiance to the sovereign and duly given employment by the ABC. I've been there ever since.

Thirteen years later, what do we see? Well, Nation Review, Monday Conference, Blue Hills and the Hospital Hour are all gone, but the promise of 1972 in film, theatre, books and broadcasting has been realized. We have achieved splendid results, we have almost arrived. But only to a kind of adolescence rather than full, independent maturity. And the trouble with the adolescent is that there's often a tendency to go bad, lose heart, give up. So I hope you won't mind my suggesting that, for all the

undoubted achievement, we're not there yet.

Our films are pretty good, even the Americans say nice things about them. But they're not great, not truly great, yet. Our theatre continues to please, with productions much slicker than the days when shouting in an Aussie accent was enough . . . but you still see the same names as years ago where it says 'author'. Our papers and magazines carry much more authority than of yore but the range of opinion is much narrower, safer, more conservative.

There are two problems. One is that, in this adolescent phase in the getting of cultural, intellectual wisdom, we have hardly any great teachers, people with vision. Not critics, but leaders who can inspire, then get out of the way. That's one problem. The other is that young people have been cruelly, even cynically excluded from most opportunities. There's no way that someone like me could get a job in the ABC in 1985!

But back to leadership. What I really mean is a climate in which one can take risks, but know that there are those with judgement and skill who will help if the weather turns nasty. My own experience is the opposite of this. When I write for the press I always ask for editorial feedback. It never comes. The stuff just turns up in the papers, or more rarely, comes back unremarked. When you go out to do something on telly they can spend half a day fiddling with their contraptions, but when it comes to *what* you say or *how* you say it, everyone loses interest. They know they can carve seventeen seconds out of whatever blather you produce. In radio it's nearly as grim. We spend most of our time at the ABC discussing money crises, hardly any on what we want to broadcast. The other week I made a 'trailer' for some program. It consisted of thirty seconds of a famous person followed by twelve seconds of me saying who he was and what else was going to be on. Somehow only the back announcement was handed to those responsible for transmission, so off it went, on air, throughout the land, twelve seconds of meaningless piffle, faithfully transmitted to all corners of Australia again and again and again.

In the old days, you say to yourself, such slackness would not have been tolerated, such lack of guidance never allowed. Well, you're wrong, and that's not my point. Just go back to some of the old stuff and you'll be surprised how blemished it is. But we accepted the odd blemish if the thrust, the vigor, the enthusiasm was there. I often have to pull out programs I made years ago, ones

that made a mark back then, and they're invariably rough as Bass Strait, but the bounce is there. Bounce goes when purpose is absent.

You see, there's a difference between the role of stern critic, such as that so ably performed by my old friend, Australia's answer to the Queen Mother, Dame Leonie Kramer, there's a difference between that role and that of the mentor, one who persuades and manages to change a climate of opinion, who improves profoundly how things are done or considered. Mr Justice Kirby has undoubtedly achieved this in the field of law reform. We have a few people of such quality in Australia, but not many. There's Anne Deveson at the Film and TV School, Robin Hughes at Film Australia, Phillip Adams at the Film Commission and elsewhere (nearly everywhere), so we have the beginnings, but only by accident. In fact I meet some of the few charged with deciding policy in the arts and sciences in Australia at committees I find myself on. I don't know how I got there and I'm sure I won't be there long, but what is really interesting is that I meet the same people all the time, the same small pack of notables shuffling from one board or commission to the next. It must be the greatest act of incest since Caligula met Bob Guccione.

I'm saying that we must nurture leaders, not simply pop practitioners like me, on every board in sight. We don't, and then wonder why things go wrong. Crisis at Film Australia, Shock at the Bicentennial Authority, Horrors at the ABC, Murder at the Opera, Crash at the Nimrod, and so it goes on. This is no coincidence. Our major institutions, the vigor of our culture and of our intellectual life, is very much at risk. We're in the hands of the accountants not the visionaries; as you know, accountants know the cost of everything and the value of very little. To get the leaders with vision you must invest time and money. Today we have the opposite approach. We cut, we deplete, we begin by talking of cost-effectiveness and end by talking about privatisation.

Well, I'm afraid it won't do. If you want excellence, class, vitality in the cultural and intellectual fields you must say so and then act accordingly. Professor David Throsby of Macquarie University has pointed out how puny is our support for writers, artists and others – we spend far more on pet food. I can tell you how inadequate is the funding for the ABC, and others have made their points about similar bodies. We don't want sacks of gold forever. No, just enough to find our feet and be equipped for the 1980s and the 1990s. Without that support our adolescent culture will never grow up, will never produce that generation of leaders we must have to survive.

So that's the first of the problems. The second is the exclusion of most young people from these fields. In the ABC we live in a geriatric nursing home, these days a crematorium. That's why, when new talent has to be hired, as we've seen recently in ABC radio, there are hardly any young bright faces, trained to take over, so we have to turn to yesterday's folk, yet again. We have been asked to reorganize and innovate without being able to get new blood. That's a bit like taking your cat to the vet,

having it desexed and then saying "go forth and multiply". Not easy. And especially difficult if you want your neutered pussy to produce puppies as well.

We're being asked to reorganize, plan for the future, cut back *and* keep going *all at the same time*. That, if I may mention a certain famous letter signed by thirteen splendid Australians, is the nub of the problem, why we may not seem as excellent as some would have us. It's hard to recite Keats or Keating with your teeth out.

Richard Carlton on television the other day told how he, having achieved an average pass in the leaving certificate, wrote to five companies for work. Four made him offers. Imagine the confidence with which his generation was able to face the future. In those days you see, in old photos of training schools at the ABC, people like Mike Carlton, Paul Murphy, Mike Willesee, Alan Hogan, Richard Carlton himself, an apparent deluge of talent, all hired at once. Coincidence? Not at all. We could do it today. I and my colleagues prove every week in our programs with the Australians we put to air how vast the pool of talent is in this country. That we are neglecting it now, that we've had to neglect it so long, for nearly ten years, is a national disgrace. The youthful spirit is stifled. Only the music industry displays some fraction of the abilities our young people have in abundance. Elsewhere, all you hear about is drugs, depression, violence, mindless apathy, appalling taste and illiteracy. Those are not the young people I know. If we could only advertise some jobs tomorrow we could fill them a hundred times over with kids as stunning as *any* generation of bright sparks.

But we are not advertising jobs. This tired, cynical, mean generation of powers that be, those realists in their sharp suits, those technocrats with their flow charts and miserable computer forecasts, those erstwhile egalitarians pretending to reform the world whilst sitting in the first-class lounges of big jets, *they* are not giving young people a chance. I applaud the Prime Minister's statement on youth given before the budget, but wonder whether it will be enough. But I also applaud the motto of the International Year of Youth: Participate, Do it Now. Don't wait to be invited. Don't wait in the queue, because only the one in a thousand will be chosen, the orthodox, the square, the safe little boy or girl. No, get on with it yourselves with whatever means you have to create a sense of something happening, because it's that, the doing, that transforms the situation.

I was saddened at the ANZAAS Congress recently to hear a young man say "My generation is confused, please advise us." That is not the way to be: passive, meek, befuddled. Instead, let's have the promise of Australian intellectual and cultural life fulfilled, let's have the campuses and colleges around the country shake off their quiet gloom, let the stunned silences be turned into hell-raising and exuberance, let young people all over Australia shout that they will not be ignored and that they want participation. Let there be uproar and let it be now.

Robyn Williams is Executive Producer of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Science Unit, and producer of "The Science Show", which he has made famous. This article is adapted from a graduation speech made recently at Macquarie University.

MORRIS LURIE

On the Splendor of Fathers

This will be short. There's not much to say. Well, there is, but I don't want that. I want the opposite of that. This is a long trip I'm going on here I'm not sure exactly where or how long or if I'll even get back and the last thing I want is to be burdened with luggage. Steamer trunks! Trolleys! Porters, if you can get them! No, I don't want that, to have to depend on that. I want the opposite. I want to be fleet. I want to be able to swing on to a train at a second's notice, to skip up a gangplank, to leap, to run, to accommodate myself to any change of plan, unencumbered and unrestrained, as light as a sudden whim.

So.

Just the one small light tight bag.

We're sitting around, the three of us, and the talk turns to dads. Fathers. Patriarchs. Breadwinners. Heads of the family. We're dads ourselves, of course, so you can see what we're doing here, how it is.

Dads on dads.

So the first dad speaks and he says this and this and this, a monster, a tyrant, we trembled and shook at his merest glance, the power, the rage, the black fury he exuded at the drop of a hat, the manic might, a self-made man and they're the worst, rags to riches, the whole glory story, a yacht for Christmas, sure, but you had to be told what it cost, he bellowed it out, he thumped the oaken table with his fist, crystal quivering, claret spilt, only a little man physically, a shortie, a shrimp, but so was Napoleon, so was Mussolini, he had every chair in the house specially elongated so no matter how tall you were your feet didn't touch the floor, every chair in the house except, of course, his, so you dangled in terror and he laughed, laughed and roared, as the mood seized him, feet-on-the-floor tyrannical dad.

We are suitably silenced.

Now the second dad speaks and what he wants to say is how, in his sixtieth year, his father rediscovered the joy of loins. The old man, they used to call him. The old man indeed! Not only rediscovered, but had them out and about dancing dances and singing fancy songs in all manner of circumstances and environments, not least loin to loin with Milly the hired girl in the back paddock on the

old tartan rug, his loins singing arias, as it were, entire operas, at the top of his voice, no, this was no whispering sneaky old dad, this was out in the open, grandly outrageous, lovely Milly, by God those loins still knew some tricks, dad's, that is, tireless too, right through the summer, month after month, until finally grouchy mum, lips tight like she was holding pins, had to capture it in black and white, imprison it, slam dad's summer to an end, paid a fella to hide in the long grass and get it all down, six whole rolls. They were like animals! she said to me, the actual photographs in her actual hand, and in her other hand, righteously shaking, the tartan rug. How could he? she howled. On the family rug! God knows the barbecues it's been at! Well, says this second dad, that was the finish of dad, had to sign everything over to her, moved into the little room under the stairs, he called me in there once, this was near the end. Son, he said, I've had a rotten life, a really rotten life. Betrayed by his loins in his sixtieth year, says this second son, digging a toe into the dust, and we sit there, we three dads, and think about that for a while.

And now it's my turn but what can I say? He seems, my dad, so insignificant, so paltry, compared. Where is the yacht-giving tyrant, where is the animal on the rug? My father did nothing like that. My father tugged leaves from bushes as he walked down the street, mangled them between his fingers, tugged more, but what kind of picture is that? Or that, between leaves, he walked down the very middle of the street, like a lumbering peasant, betraying his small-town origins before the world of cars, is that the picture I wish to preserve? Come on, dad! Present yourself! Speak up! Don't shame me like this before these other dads! And ah, finally it comes, the splendor of my father, the essence of the man. He was itchy. He was always itchy. Give me a scratch, he would order me. Higher, he would say. Lower. Naah, he would grumble, shoving me away, and stand in a door, do it himself, backwards and forwards with the edge of the door, backwards and forwards, that's him, that's dad, that's the picture I'm taking in my one small light tight bag, my dad forever itchy, trying to touch that unreachable place.



WALTZING TOYOTA

To be sung to the tune of Advance Australia Fair, but with due reverence for the lyrics of Waltzing Matilda

A swagman parked his camper-van by the Billabong Motel;
 he wound his dusty windows up and went and punched the bell,
 and a girl who was all of eighteen years
 and looked like thirty-three
 said, "Give your stupid thumb a rest
 – I'm not a bloody tree . . .
 You dag, you dag, you dag, you dag,
 you dag, you flamin' dag!"

The swagman took a thoughtful breath and then began to say,
 "Your welcoming remarks are such as make me want to stav . . .
 The durrie hanging from your lips,
 your rat's-tail-coiffured hair
 suggest the Billabong's the spot
 to romance Australia's 'fair'!
 You dag, you dag, you dag, you dag,
 you dag, you flamin' dag!"

The girl, who'd heard it all before, at least ten thousand times,
 said, "God forgive you, if He can, your countless other crimes,
 but most of all let Him forgive
 your warbey words just now
 – I've never in my life before
 met such a rotten cow
 as you, you dag, you dag, you dag,
 you dag, you flamin' dag!"

BRUCE DAWE

THE BUTTER FACTORY

It was compound of things that must not mix:
paint, cream and water, fire and dusty oil.
You heard the water dreaming in its large
knead pipes, up from the weir. And the cordwood
our fathers cut for the furnace stood in walls
like the sleeper-stacks of a continental railway.

The cream arrived in lorried tides; its procession
crossed a platform of workers' stagecraft: *Come here
Friday-Legs! Or I'll feel your hernia—*
Overalled in milk's color, men moved the heart of milk,
separated into thousands, along a roller track — *Trucks?
That one of mine, son, it pulls like a sixteen-year-old—*
to the tester who broached the can lids, causing fat tears,
who tasted, dipped and did his thin stoppered chemistry
on our labor, as the empties chattered downstage and
fumed.

Under the high roof, black-cruised and stainless steels
were walled apart: black romped with leather belts
but paddlewheels sailed the silvery vats where muscles
of the one deep cream were exercised to a bullion
to be blocked in paper. And between waves of delivery
the men trod on water, hosing the rainbows of a shift.

It was damp April even at Christmas round every
margin of the factory. Also it opened the mouth
to see tackles on glibbed gravel, and the mossed char
louvres
of the ice-plant's timber tower streaming with
heavy rain all day, above the droughty paddocks
of the totem cows round whom our lives were dancing.

LES A. MURRAY

THE MILK LORRY

Now the milk lorry is a polished submarine
that rolls up at midday, attaches a trunk and inhales
the dairy's tank to a frosty snore in minutes

but its forerunner was the high-tyred barn of crisp
mornings,
reeking Diesel and mammary, hazy in its roped interior
as a carpet under beaters, as it crashed along potholed
lanes

cooeing at schoolgirls. Long planks like unshipped oars
butted, levelling in there, because between each farm's
stranded wharf of milk cans, the work was feverish
slotting

of floors above floors, for load. It was sling out the bashed
paint-collared empties and waltz in the full,
stumbling on their rims under ribaldry, tilting their big
gallons

then the schoolboy's calisthenic, hoisting a steel man
man-high
till the glancing hold was a magazine of casque armor,
a tinplate tween-decks, a seminar engrossed

in one swaying tradition, behind the speeding doorways
that tempted a truant to brace and drop, short of town
and spend the day, with book or not, down under

the bridge of a river that by dinnertime would be
longueing like cattedogs, or down a moth-dusty reach
where the fish-feeding milk boat and cedar barge once
floated.

LES A. MURRAY

INSTRUCTIONS TO AN ORDERLY

Increase
the catch
on Sam.

Slap Sol
who saw
too salubriously.

If he trills
balance Bill
on a hill.

Tell Jack
he was Jill
in the Crawl Caper.

Jerk him
in his entirety,
George.

Let his statue,
fall under attack,
Frank.

Set his course
for succotash,
Charles.

Seem
to squander
Jim.

Twist
a key
in Ken.

Bob,
bind him
to the beast of his repudiation,

Call Peter
Wolf
twice.

Keep Paul
from his hymn
of plenty.

And remember to ask
if mad aches slim
still for Harvey.

PHILIP HAMMIAL

IN MEMORY

*For Groovey, who died in style
on the football field today.*

It was a mistake to approach you too seriously
with your high flamboyance like a flag flippant

on the breeze. Palm Island warrior-blood filtered
through the hot rocks of your heart, simmered,

and kept you chuckling at your own absurdity:
deviate, maniac, hedonist, a heavy mixture.

From my side of the wall I heard your demons
laughing this morning, pictured your teeth

grinding at their usual around-heart-beat pace.
Both stopped dead today on the football paddock

although what ceased first – the heart or teeth –
I'm not quite certain. Your exit was fittingly

unusual like your buoyant indeterminate sense
of humor, eruptions of cackle and laughter.

I will miss your laughter the most – already
its echoes make memory vivid and frightening.

B.B. WOOLSTON

THE MUSK DUCK

In the island's lee
the musk duck kicks and calls
and plunges, scowls from his ridged brow
at swamp-hen, swan and grebe.
He is his own patrol. He never joins
convoy, flotilla, careful bobbing squadron.
He leads no titupping young. Aloof he sails.

But when I stop by the pond's dark brimming edge
he leaves the trailing willow and the lily pads
and spreading his feathers against the intruding wing
of gull or coot, squats at the muddy rim
and, all grace gone, thrusts for the sodden bread.

ELIZABETH RIDDELL

LITANY WITH PICTURES

City of wind-blasts
I raise no standards.

City of blankets
I burn in Babylon.

City of depressions
I look to the glass for highs.

City of fears
I parade the saints.

A docu-drama is playing inside my head:
the empty millions in Europe
are filing into cattle-cars
for the consequential camps and the
dispersals.

Hunching down inside their collars and caps
they are a lost race, a disappointment
and a curse to posterity.

A folksinger is mourning the absence of
flowers
and the grey sky hanging, fine as cement
dust
closes on sorrowing cobblestones
and the narrow, brown-shirted backstreets.

City of Shifts
I order my chains.

City of Steel
I search for a soft centre.

City of Oxygen
I am green in my element.

Company City
I shadow the damned.

The beasts are at large in the blue-metal
reserves:
a girl framing delicate smiles from the
suburbs
is dismembered by bucks at a do
on the day of her wedding.

At the Port, a coke-worker cutting his losses
rips back the covers, blesses himself,
and drops neat as a pin to damnation
in Number One Battery,

while a giant chewing bodies
like woodchip down gunbarrel Ousley
is for all things unstoppable.

City of Platitudes
I endure my commission.

City of despisers
I beat my brows past B.H.P.

Cockroach City
I scream after midnight.

City of hammers
I roll with the blows, and slur my words in company.

The Town Hall fountain doesn't piss on me,
not even from a yawning height.
I am lowly past the Lord Mayor's hoardings,
the labor council and other exalted altars.

I lie down with dogs,
I suckle the fever,
burning my offerings at daylight,
heavy under sackcloth.

My sacristy shines,
I am moon-white then,
cold, chosen, but in disguise.

City of the monster
I move through evil.

City of the monster coming
grim for salvation.

City of the monster coming white with wings
I chant the rhythms but get no joy.

City of the monster coming white with wings and demons
I have learnt to exist in the blood and the marrow.

The faces of my people hang like millstones:
we are numb from moving,
we are ravaged from retreat.
Pulsing fires seed our sleeping
and the dull seasons dawdle acetylene days.

We are resigned to waiting
the spirits' returning:
a white heat whistling over the waters . . .

The sands at Kembla laid bare. And smooth.
Like a claypan after the rains.
Save for the prints of a lone dog twining
between blackened dunes and the fine, sheet
haze over the sea.

CONAL FITZPATRICK

FITZROY RIVER PEOPLE

Look there! Hold him! – Fitting!
Wake up now – you all right now?
She offers her most profound gift of
 thought and deed.
“That one go soon, die soon.
Here brother, the bottle
 have a charge.”
Compassionate age old gift of sharing.

‘Nother one sick, won’t go near that big hospital,
Needles in the butt, medicine, pills
 strange poison;
Strange cold place.
White hospital sheets make him feel
 too black
Stick to what he know – bottle,
 he know that poison.
Stick to ground to sleep,
Stick to river bank.
This place our earth.

Government people, social scientists,
What can we do for them?
Subscriptions, policies, research us,
Take pictures of us, to show
 the problem.
They know it all, they smart,
 they got degrees.
We can’t do anything for them.

Some allright, that one up in the kitchen
She feed us, give us a bed up there.
She don’t lecture us – if we don’t sleep in
 that bed.
 She understand.
We sleep on the ground here,
We got everything we own here,
The trees, the river, the air,
Might go up for a feed,
But drink here, sleep here, die here
 on the ground.
This place our earth.

EFFIE BROADWATER

POEM

you lying over blue sheets
trying to repair a body

that exploded like rocks
after a night of fighting a fire

the morning cools the air around you
& lighting a back burn

up hill, against flame
& now, being caught

somewhere in the middle
is a scene in an opera which fell down around us

RORY HARRIS

A GIRL MAD AS BIRDS

Shellshock
of king parrots
their bright bellies
my hands on a hot stove
the hands I love with

magpies
tangled dangerously above my head
gurgling like fresh rivers
primary colors
their black and white
strutting like lovers' chess

lorikeets
sashay across the balcony
are always starving
don't feed them sugar
give it to me instead.

DOROTHY FEATHERSTONE PORTER

SOME BYS

By invocation
there's only this, this frumpish lilt
to huge a growing.

By association
our harbored guilt will be the first
to pick up sticks.

By blue only
are the irrevocable & indecent choices made
unbearable.

By wolfing it down
some are seldom frequent, much more
than we suppose.

By application
we've come to an understanding of what it means
to buck & moan.

By tooth & claw
we've made & hung the tapestry
of our fundamental decency.

By invective
are the blasphemous
bearded.

By mutual consent,
all else being equal, no trap
is left unbaited.

By word of mouth
it's only a matter
of simple unsaying.

PHILIP HAMMIAL

IT HURTS NOT BEING A CONTENDER

"The only thing she regretted about her disfigurement, Casey said, was that it interfered with the pursuit of romance." — *Time*.

Some mid-afternoons, when another morning
Seems weeks away, it can hurt to look
In a mirror and not find Jane Fonda
Or Robert Redford staring back as if
Over-intent with beauty, to shudder
From something other than cold, brook no
Interference from self-flattery. Only
The over-indulged eyes know that no cord
Is brutal enough to tie up Life, that
No words exist to lecture it, Some would
Say all ageing is premature, and fight
And fuss with death, letting laughter grow
Like a toad in its mud, spitting at light:
They would be wrong. In darkness are no
Silhouettes. And the touch of one hand can
Be very like another, just warmer.

SHANE McCAULEY

THE CASUAL WALK

The casual walk is what I remember most:
that stroll by day in evening dress,
deliberately, the way that magpies walk

south of Goulburn, where Miles Franklin
dug potatoes by the dairy, exposing worms,
and such things that only magpies see

when with two short steps, and a flash of beak
a meal is lifted from the ground
the head thrown back, and the world swallowed whole.

This one watched my car approach;
my wheels on his territory;
this world would wait as it always had.

I felt him hit the on-side wheel,
watched him roll from the rear-vision mirror
much as a bone would roll from a plate.

That bird was not me,
yet differentiation was still difficult;
the funeral an hour of solid driving.

TIMOSHENKO ASLANIDES

SET TO WORDS

Out of the green of the ocean
and over the waves of the skin of the sand
comes a music of blue, with its chords of the
sky and of salt and of hope,
like a hand that is laid in bright day
on the sleeve of the night.

There are gulls, there are ropes, there are lingerings,
longings of hulls and for docks;
there is time that is timeless
and time that is not.

Who can say why the notes of the tides
have set sail for the empire
of glittering words, as though harbor were there
and not in the calls of the terns,
or the waves and their splinterings?

R.H. MORRISON

"The school year," my father had said, his hands grasping feebly for the edges of the academic gown it was no longer customary to wear, "the school year is like a ship voyage. Each day follows its own defined pattern; you, as the captain, travel familiar waterways – but for those under your command it's all new." His gown hung in the long lean folds of aged authority. In parts it was rubbed bare.

"It's up to you to teach them what it all means. And when you finally dock – if the voyage is to be judged a success – they'll have learned something that all the rest – the mothers and the people you see in the street – don't know."

By the time my own gown hung on the back of the staff-room door, my lungs had been filled with his chalk-dust beliefs that the school term was the only reality. But by then he was an old man and the voyages he spoke of were his memories; my own journey was of little interest to him. I took comfort, however, from the knowledge that we were part of the same ritual, linked by the slowly lengthening honor boards in the school foyer, and the golden names of those killed in the great war gleaming in the morning sun, and from the new batches of boys whose appearances differed only slightly from those of the year before. I sat where he had sat, unambitiously, in the second row behind the Headmaster, looking down at ordered wooden benches and austere designs of stained glass. The school song. The stillness behind the Chaplain's reading disturbed only by an echoing shuffle, a hidden cough. Serenity.

As always the final assembly appeared too short. Boys walked self-consciously forward to receive awards and grasp the Head's hand with determined masculinity. Willing yet honest laughter roared at Mr Andrew's final jokes. Ahead of me the procession of billowing gowns strode down the central aisle out into the hard daylight of the beginning of the holiday.

"Michael Smyth," asked my father, his thin spectacles inquiring into next year's class lists, "brother of William?"

"No. Michael's an only child – rather independent and difficult to handle. His father was killed in Vietnam."

"Ah." He moved with staccato wiriness to the fire and stretched out his fingers. It was a warm day and he wore a grey cardigan under his jacket, but he found it hard to keep warm these days. Vietnam was nothing to him. His battles were at Bosworth and Flodden, glorious moments in an ordered design of treaties and economic policies and

dynastic arrangements. Moments they were, without emotion or butchery or humanity, moments that changed the course of history, a history that could be traced with different colored lines down the blackboard. We took in the newspaper with the milk and it went out again with the rubbish; in the final days of the Vietnam conflict, television had lurched the final helicopters of Saigon into our living room where desperate refugees clinging to the undercarriage had dripped from our screen, but he, the man of the pencilled text, was blind to the passion of the present.

Leaving him with a cup of tea, I wandered through empty streets to the local store. At the other end of the village the two thin school towers reached up into the sky. A fortress. A bastion of knowledge. Empty now of course except for the cleaners and the smell of polish, isolated in summer's yellow playing-field moat, but standing secure, waiting for our return. I loved it as I loved my father, for its dependability and for the learning it contained.

"How's your father?" The same woman had owned the store through generations of clamoring schoolboys sticky with hard round coins and leaking pens.

"Very well thanks – although a little slower these days."

"That's to be expected. Do give him my good wishes." Their warmth warmed me. They always remembered him. Him first, then me.

"How are you enjoying the holidays?"

"Quite. I always look forward to the new school year though."

"Just like your father."

The tea-cup was upside down on the hearthrug. A crazy dark stain had spread under it and there were little black splashes further away. Even on the good carpet. They shocked me more than my father slumped unevenly in his chair, slurping awkward, irregular breaths. Beneath the desolate wail of the ambulance siren I travelled with him to the hospital while the memory of tiny black drops danced over his blanket. Thin and strange on its stretcher, his body rolled past chrome and dials and gauges, and was taken away through silent double doors.

Twice a day I went to see him.

"You're looking better." But he had let himself become like the other patients waiting in the still wards – to be operated on, to be washed, to die – it didn't seem to matter what. Without will even those who were able to walk trailed down the endless corridors, linked to drip-

feeds, stooped and shapeless in loosely-tied dressing-gowns.

"You'll soon be home." Above his shrouded body the pale face, cruelly helpless without his spectacles, merged with the pillows.

A doctor took me aside. His voice was full of understated drama and confidentiality. Words, words, words! I had spent my life with words. Who was he to tell me about my father! I didn't listen; shook him off.

"Just let me know when he can come home."

"I've been trying to tell you —."

I went home and lit a fire although it was warm, because the house was so quiet and my mind was so full of noise. However hard I rubbed, the stains on the hearthrug would not come out.

The shallow, dipped steps leading to the first assembly of the year were without their usual time-worn sense of security. With an attempt at vigor I sang:

Oh Lord, let us learn,
And value all Thy gifts.

There were the boys who were to be in my class; in the back rows now, promoted through age and learning to the senior position. Muted through the stained glass, the sun was trying to give life to the golden lines of names on the roll of honor. Today, however, the list was meaningless, dead even in the imagination.

"Mr Hague — a moment. I heard about your father — dreadful news. How is he now?"

"Oh fine, Headmaster. Fine."

"So the prognosis is better than they told me?"

"Doctors don't know everything. As you know he'll always soldier on. But my class is waiting . . ."

"Of course. Glad you have such excellent tidings."

The boys took their places. New places to be beside newly discovered friends. Some had grown during the holidays. A gesture, a slow frown, the slimmer contour of a face; manhood was beginning to assert itself. Most looked tanned. They still had something of the other life they had been leading recently. It would take skill to separate them from the world of family and home.

The roll-call.

"Sir." "Here, sir." "Yes, sir." Personalities were put into a couple of words. This one would be attentive, this one slow. This one was ambitious. Could I really bear to start a whole new, predictable year?

"Michael Smyth." No response.

"He may be delayed, sir. He's on an army training camp."

"Indeed." It was an outrage. The pattern was spoiled; my intention was hindered.

In a spirit of hard anger, I changed my teaching plan and turned the pages to Wilfred Owen, exploding his shell-fire pacifism into the dusty classroom. Open and fresh as they are only on the first day of term, the boys caught Owen's bitter pity. The door opened.

"Michael," I said with careful sarcasm. "Do sit down.

We are reading the poetry of Wilfred Owen who fought and died in the first world war. Perhaps, as you are something of an expert on things military, you may have heard of him?"

"Yes sir. He's one of my favorite poets."

My missile had been avoided, and another had been shot back. I took cover under the routine of the lesson proceeding to wait my chance. The boys began to sprawl a little.

It was nearly time for the final bell to ring. I grabbed the first line of Owen's "Anthem":

What passing bells for those who die as cattle?

"What do you think of that? Do you agree soldiers die like animals sent to be slaughtered?" No hands were raised. There was a certain exhaustion in the class. We had declared our dislike of war, sided with Owen, identified with his appeal against arms, given ourselves to his hard, sensuous imagery of battle, and now I was firing with too heavy a weapon; the question was too obvious, too large; it fell on the boys' bowed heads.

"Well I agree with him. What do you think, Michael?"

"No sir, I don't agree." The struggle had become a personal one.

"Oh? Would you care to elaborate?" I was feeling hot and talking loudly. What I intended to be stinging sounded brutish. He began to speak so softly that I had to step forward to hear.

"My father was killed in a war." Embarrassed by the dangerously personal reference, the boys escaped by staring at their books. "And my uncle died in a motorcycle accident. I was very close to him too. But they were both the same things really. Death isn't anything to be frightened of; it happens to us all and it doesn't matter much how." What did this boy know! Scarcely sixteen and giving a lecture on death. He was still speaking. "There's another poem by Owen where he says what I've always felt. It's at the end of this section." He was talking to me alone. Viciously I thumbed my book. The words leapt out:

Oh, death was never enemy of ours!

We laughed at him, we leagued with him, old chum.

Inside me something exploded. A thousand little white lights shot out as from a firework and in slow motion drifted into the darkness. Dimly I realized that the final bell was ringing and that the boys were waiting for my nod to leave. Yes, yes. Go. I need to be alone. They hurried past and opened the door and the bell's hollow toll swelled into the room. They scurried away, avoiding my stunned gaze. Inexorably the little sparks were being quenched. If only I could catch one, could concentrate on it, study it, see what it was, I would know something, something that had been there all along. Round the empty room echoed the sepulchral clangor. What was it he'd said? I couldn't quite remember. The glowing white fragments had all died.

Slowly but precisely, I gathered up my books to prepare tomorrow's lesson.

BARRY HILL

The Garden, William Buckley, and the Big Ear

This article by Barry Hill is the second in our series on Place.

The loved one ... locus of the heart ... the place in which one dwells ... site of what is given and received ... transformational exchanges – how striking it is that Letters from This Place or That Place are so much like love letters, just as it might be observed that the distinction between a love poem and a religious one is fine and arbitrary. Once passions are engaged the territorial imperative is to make of person and place a unity, a simple whole containing all that one knows and has yearned for and dreams towards.

I have two views associated with this place called Queenscliff, Lat. 38 S, Long. 144 E., on the south coast of Victoria, a little old fishing town (born *circa* 1832) just inside the heads of this dreadfully flat Port Phillip Bay, a basin of water enclosed by the thin cold lips of one of the oldest and surely the weariest lava plains in the world. The first view you get by standing on the pier looking south – beyond the indent where the coota boats, once the livelihood of the town, used to anchor: you look south straight out through the heads into Bass Strait which takes you on to Tasmania, except that, leaving Tasmania aside (if I may) you are looking into the Southern Ocean. It is a clear run on to the Antarctic. This is the end of the world. You are standing, whipped by southerlies, on the edge of the world. Nature in its sublime aspect, we might say.

The other view is different. Take a drive out of town back towards Geelong born *circa* 1840, out of wheat and wool and then goldmongering, and which was only linked by road to Queenscliff after some time, since Queenscliff's isolation was maritime, the place where the sea pilots lived, from where they conducted ships in and out of the bay; take a drive out and around the estuarial lake called Swan Bay, and from there look back towards the town.

This is a view of the sky line. The fine profile has in it church spire, pine trees, high gables and domestic towers, all in a line down to the water, where a bridge links the peninsula to Swan Island where, you might happen to know, there is a golf course, a military base and a rare species of bird called the Orange Bellied Parrot, of which there are only about two hundred alive in the world. What you can't see, as well, are the structures on the other side of the hill: the wall and water tower of the Australian Staff College, the edifices of two grand Victorian hotels

and the tops of the black and the white lighthouses. Serene this profile is, a figure of poised settlement, an order arranged in the white light that shimmers here, since it is refracted on three sides by water. The scene is, for all the world, from a seventeenth century Dutch landscape painting. Civilization in its benign aspect, we might say.

One day, soon after coming to live here, I drove around Swan Bay, taking in this view and coming to a rambling chicken-farm – the "Happy Hen". Perfectly it commanded the whole Dutch painting, and, sure enough, the three or maybe four families that worked the farm were Dutch. Civilization may well add up to this: the sound prospect of untold Happy Hens!

A couple of summers ago, on one of those hot nights you can get here, despite what our geography teachers called the moderating influence of the sea, a night of north wind and an ocean flattened by off-shore heat, I camped with my six year-old son up on the dunes, close to the lighthouse that overlooks the Rip. This is the Point Lonsdale light, just below which is the cave – iron bars across it now – of William Buckley, the almost legendary figure (I say almost because Canberra and Sydney people seem hardly to have heard of Buckley, for what that's worth), the "Wild White Man" who lived here with the Aborigines for 32 years, having escaped from the convict settlement on the other side of the bay, at Sorrento, in 1803. My son and I, we pitched our tent, spent sunset down on the inflamed rocks, and came back up out of the hot wind in the dark bedding down as the silver moon rose.

He slept restlessly, as I did ... The full moon, perhaps; the irritable guy ropes, the elemental invasion of moon light and hot wind through the tent flaps; sleeping on the rim is an edgy experience, even if you are within arm's reach of that emblem of domestic security, the lighthouse. I put my head down to let the mind be lapped all round by water, but it didn't work. In the end I sat up, read for a while and gazed at my son, whose little dome of a head, seemed to arise from the dune like a natural protrusion. A few days later I wrote this poem:

Dear one, I want to put my head where yours is
in the moonlight, night wind warming the grass

and silver pouring over your cheeks, lengthening
your lashes. I have a shell pressed into the roof of
my mouth. I am tasting the silence of your temples.
When I re-order myself to be still, absolutely
quiet in opposition to your determined flight
– your arms out, hip abandoned to an air pocket –
there is an emptiness beneath me, a vacancy
as if I have, while standing up alone, fallen
down again into the dip where you have placed

yourself.
A while ago in the dark I experimented with
patience.

I lay with my face touching the welcome
of your hand, trying myself out finger printed,
almost
for life; a captive of the exchange we practice
while you sleep and (let's face it) when you wake:
no silver then, the moon has swung right about,
it looks washed out at the rising sun,
the ocean's shallow slaps make no comment
on the naturalness with which we pretend
to forget each other, a forgetfulness that makes
every lover the same lover,
so swart the sea is when we are in it.

2

Living in one place for a length of time invites the possibility of observing one's possible transformations, which is to say, locating what might be of some universalizable interest. It just so happens I have been surfing on this part of the coast since I was a kid; and that even while living as far away as London, I might at three in the morning announce that I would one day live here; and that when the move was made, soon after the Kerr coup, it seemed almost a frivolous thing to do, what with all that rage that had to be maintained . . . It just so happens that these particulars are true and that they seem to carry with them a happy fatedness, happiness that is akin to the pleasure which comes from discovering that you have, somehow, transposed one love to another love, having written a poem that could be to a child while equally being to an adult or even to a place.

Once a poem is done it should be able to stand elementally, so to speak, while beaming like a lighthouse.

"Dear One" is now part of a larger set of poems about William Buckley, and it sits in the middle of part three of the work in progress, in the section entitled "Warm Wine", which tells of Buckley's encounter with Woyambee Myrnie, out of which union sprang their daughter Karrie Ael, otherwise known as Summer Rain. One version of Buckley's life has it that he did not see much of Warm Wind after their early meetings. It is also said that later he had a wife imposed upon him, almost, and who was subsequently carried off, a fact which did not much disappoint him, since he preferred to wander in the silence of his own company, or with the tribes when they were not at war, in either case choosing to live in this landscape which must also have chosen him; it must have ensnared him in the struggle he decided to make between his own nakedness and what must have increasingly been

the tatters of his own culture. After all, it is claimed that when he returned to what is sometimes called civilization he had lost the art of using the King's English, which was not a good omen for a man wishing to prosper in the village to become Marvellous Melbourne. But I am running ahead of myself, as Buckley must have.

This is a very tame landscape, almost shamelessly so. Oh there is the Rip over there, with its deadly run, the upswelling tidal difference between bay and ocean making it one of the most troublesome stretches of water in the Hemisphere; but having said that, the coast from the west tapers to an innocuous degree: the heads are not much more than dune bluffs, a major come-down from the terrain eighty kilometres away where the Otways, with their mountainous cliffs, strike up a different color scheme: ochres, beech green, and an ocean as dark as a whale's back. Here it tends to be water-colory, pastels and dun – except in winter, when there is such fire in the Western sky that the birds out on Swan Bay become cinders, all living creatures look burnt to an essence, reduced to their singular presence.

You can get runs of days here, especially between April and late June, when there seems to be only one word to describe the limpid clarity with which things hover in space: divine. It seems to be divine light opening the sky, tuning the bays to ocean, and elevating each color to a higher yet calmer key. A son is born and he is the color purple, airily transported; his sister arrives and she is mother of pearl blue; the marriage breaks and still, somehow, the distinction to be drawn between water and sky out over Swan Bay is arbitrary, as the atmosphere is opalescently renewed.

Across the road from me is a wonderfully kind man who has fished in these waters most of his life. I say kind because in the days before we had the phone on I would hear him at the local phone booths – talking, but more often listening to whoever it was on the end of the line. To sons? Daughters? It was the investment that went into his listening that was striking: always the expression of care-listening, advising. We'd smile at each other afterwards, and one day, a few years later, he let on how much he liked living here, the petty corruptions and small-minded local officials notwithstanding (who have wanted to cut down trees, demolish piers, zone for high rise, that sort of thing . . .).

"You know", my neighbour said, "during the war, when I was in North Africa, we used to sit in the desert at night, talking. We'd talk about the places we wanted to live in – our utopias. All the blokes had their utopia. Shangri-la. Some other planet. But I said, I know a utopia and I tell you what. I'm going back to it. And I tell you, when the boat came through the heads and I got my first glimpse of this place, I . . ." He pushed an autumn leaf about with his foot. When he got back to the waters that he had fished, he wept.

But there is a difference, is there not, between standing before a landscape, and living in it. Ideally, we think that the man who works the land lives in it, and need not speak much: whereas poets since the French Revolution (at least) have stood back from their scene, trying to

master their passions. On this view the poet wished to be somewhat invisible, which was supposed to be the good thing. As Rilke put it in a little essay "Concerning Landscape": "To see landscape thus, as something distant and foreign, something remote and unloving, something entirely self-contained, was necessary, if it were ever to be a medium and an occasion for an autonomous art; for it had to be distant and very different from us if it were to be capable of becoming a redemptive symbol for our fate ..."

Well, yes; but there is some redemption, maybe, from stepping inside Nature, which comes from living more thoroughly in the landscape. William Buckley, who did not farm, who did not fish (though he did!) yet who entered this terrain – the naked nomad, the initiate, who by choice roamed in it, journeying out to endure trials and to return, much to the puzzlement of those who could not or would not hear what Buckley could not or would not speak ...

4

Buckley might have had trouble discovering the myth he was in, but I doubt it. (For us today the source of endless fascination about myth is the apparent certainty with which the players did know their parts.) Cast out by his stepfather in Cheshire, a stonemason, a foot soldier in Holland, a receiver of a stolen bolt of cloth and henceforth a transportee ... his progression in exile is perhaps determined enough. Then, in 1803, when he and four others escaped from Collins' camp at Sorrento and walked around the bay, climbing the You Yangs and casting a look down upon what was ominously vast and Aboriginal, it was Buckley who chose to keep going on. The others wanted to give themselves up, and the party actually spent some time on the beach of Swan Island, which looks out on Sorrento, trying to attract the attention of the Authority from which they had escaped.

I sometimes wonder, when I imagine that moment, what the soldiers on Swan Island might think of the scene now. For the place is, as I mentioned, Commonwealth property and since WW2 has been used for various military purposes. We hear trucks come in at night. Planes go over. But no self-respecting officer at the local staff college will let on. An ammo dump? Chemicals? A couple of years back we heard of army plans to upgrade their air strip so that the big Hercules transports could come in over the town, all the better to make the war games on the island more modern, evidently. So we started the protests, hounded the media – to be told that yes, it was rather secret, it all had something to do with intelligence and terrorism and that it was in the national interest for us to keep quiet, even if the training did take place within coo-ee of two thousand civilian residents. Then came the Sheraton raid. The cover was blown. Yes, the island was a top secret site all right: it was the home of ASIS. We've heard no more of the airstrip since. God knows where ASIS is now.

Anyway, Buckley and companions lit their fires. Clearly they wished whole heartedly to be saved from freedom. "At length a boat was seen to leave the ship and

come in our direction," Buckley was to recall much later (according to one report of 1852, redolent with myth-making self-consciousness even by then), "and although the dread of punishment was naturally great, yet the fear of starvation exceeded it, and they anxiously waited her arrival to deliver themselves up, indulging anticipations of being, after the sufferings they had undergone, forgiven by the Governor. These expectations of relief were however delusive; when about half-way across the bay, the boat returned ...". Soon after that, Buckley pressed on, the others turned back ...

When companions leave you walk around
yourself for a bit, you thank Providence
for button holes and a firm lining
of crutch to see you through.
There is a scratchiness of vigor, too.

As they waded off the end
of Swan Island, I noticed two oyster catchers
winging their way home across the sea grass.
There are, I thought, creatures stationed
here with fat regard for revelation.

I think I wondered then about my
guilty feet in the old country, how
trembling yet grateful I was to join
the regiment. Then I jollied again the low flame.
In stripping down we have ourselves to blame.

In the evening, that night, I wept.
I kept dreaming that when I woke
the old tide of vanity would be right out,
that the light next morning would be too quick
to make mirrors of rock pools, and that this time
Narcissus would be nonplussed, nullified.

In point of fact I breakfasted on bones
of the dead, which is to say the newly departed,
wondering if, in the height of my madness
I would one day break the glass
of the question Swan Bay asks.

Then I thought of my mother, a thing
I seldom do; and of my stepfather
whom I hated for sending me further
than this. Once banished, we are like sandpipers
running as far across the mud as our legs will carry
us ...

That morning I counted ninety six cormorants
on the mangrove stumps, and saw not one wallaby
between my self and the sea – another mark of
Providence.

5

SALT PAN

In the lap of flaky crystals, the idea possessed him
of hiding in the open – back of dunes, untussocked;



flat out on an unshaved undrinkable verge, its nap white, fontanelled, his crown as black as mud under stinking skin broken nails can peel off; scratching our way, pickingly, out of some vague need to map a radius: we are splayed bedraggled and wide ranging with both hands.

Look at the palms then! Pan cracks all over. Deepest cuts engrain slime into the whole depression, each crease a cul-de-sac, the destiny line crusted, calloused . . . almighty hands upturned to dryness! And the ignominy as we lie – out of wind, unruffled – of spoonbills snaffling our spread, draining up hope.

EELS

Arms long in the gloom swirl
or in the idle slack of sinew with teeth
the eye a rivet in the spine which slackens not,
it whips, it squirms, pike to pike battling,
the tiny mouth one to have when midnight greases
light out of the comer's tail; all power-filled stealth;
oily purring under the hair lip of bank,
spawned by night roots, out of frog song;

sheaths vigorously mute, with tubular contortions in
secret.

Koonan, the blacks called the place of settlement
he'd run from. Koonan, Koonan he'd call now –
to eat: seeking small mercies in the bubbles
of their wicked liberty, from the logs of silence
crocodiled
against a spearless thrust, and knowing and kneeling.

ROCK PLATFORM

Providence is pig-face and sitting up
reasonably straight for fish shelled
on smooth rocks, the mouth wide
O to the wind blowing sweetly in for pudding;
burgundy berries split nipped to a cheek,
the blood of finger tips juicier
than wounded knees; each tide
shelving open a venerable feast of moss.

In homage we might be to alchemy,
in bonding light and leaf; blue veins
are in squid also, the white meat
unreached by the black-hearted gulls
– wavering wills for which we are not grateful –
but to saplings, branches, bark for this hut.

6

Yet the whole business of living in something, in this case a landscape that possibly means everything, is problematic, isn't it? What is real and what is not? Buckley's European Vision of the South Pacific might have got him a certain distance. Historically speaking (about half of my concern actually, no more), it is likely that he behaved like the Frenchmen who first sighted the Tasmanian blacks – trustingly approaching the Noble Savages only to discover they had claws and did not think kind thoughts. More likely Buckley was closer in mind to Governor Arthur, who posted bills to blacks, the better to guide them towards Morality. Buckley might have been in that frame of mind, but with a difference: he had to survive alone. He could not do that without entering *into* some revisions, surely. Disordered, and half-starved often, he must have had to do something with the pictures he had in his head.

In learning to live here, to review, to re-read this coast, sleeping and eating and loving and fighting in it, he must for instance have had to do away with the picturesque. I'm thinking here of a brilliant book produced in this district and about as good as you will get as an aide to making sense of terrain. *Orienteering*, by the painter and Deakin University teacher, Rodick Carmichael, is about painting in the landscape, and in it there are two remarkable illustrations of the Barwon river, of the meandering section just down from Buckley Falls. One of those shots is of the present golf course, which the river flows through. The other, of exactly the same scene is actually a painting by von Guerard. Both present a vista, an English scene suggesting some natural Eden, the point also being that if Buckley walked into either picture today he would hardly be able to tell the difference between them, such is the similarity between the 'naturally real' and the artifact.

Carmichael's point is that artists still tend to avoid the artifact (the golf course) in favor of what is supposed to be more natural, but which is equally a construction. In his own work he tackles the issue of making 'scenes' out of landscape head on: he renders tangible things such as

and the tapering head of the animal aswivel, slippery
even at that distance we know though eluded
hand over hand failing to grasp the grand arrival) . . .

Hadn't it, the seal, the great father seal, just come in?
Calmly flopped, there at the edge, making a kingdom
of danger, the mooning neighbor of cataract,
where a tidal rush of bay redefined luck, hope,
notions of return, fear of asking the wrong questions . . .
and the trail of it dangling there, in foam,
its head, on twisting shoulders, snout up – on the wind;
whiskers, aerations, music of spray and scattered

Oh the damned fullness of its beauty for Buckley there,
stroking his beard, ruminating and propped to see
the break in the reef's jaw, that rip and now
this visitation from ice and light imagined
adrift in pale sheets of remembrance, hinterlanded light
wishing to compose a south sea, as he'd composed
itself . . .

as the seal, sniffing ocean, not barking but returning,
must have slid, just as a man blinks, back in.

And if he'd gone, ripward in its wake,
himself outside there, beyond the booming, what then?
Dawn a great mothering of pearl
opalescent feasting securing him for good?
Or night running fast in trenches, no sound
on slack water but peep peep peep perhaps
of penguins diving, a bob of Pacific gull –
grey, tawny, still only flecked with white
that will overtake it flying, and grown:
only those birds he'd see out there with father seal,
his diving bell of gladness, gone:
adrift thus, that would be it, between swells.

Yet how movement changes from inside, to out.
The bay in its confines chopped, uncertain –
banks held in by loss, by the slim chance
of breaking bounds checked by old hard flat land,
the sea itself healthy enough (what isn't!) but
lava-ed in, best appeased in late afternoon
with a single hand line cast from dry rock,
with patience . . . whereas, outside

in ocean, in fat light,
in slow rising walls that heave
a held breath up and then dark
it down again in blue,
valleys between a gasp,
the voice thins to pleasure;
its keying is buoying to pure
white all the way to South America
or to the south land that is new
which is to say as peopled, as fluffed
with chatter as a boyhood in Cheshire,
the sway of that memory rising and falling
with an amplitude of movement settling
to its own proportions, too . . .

And so, outside, oceaned,
could he go on stroking calmly
striking out to recover himself
at the horizon? And not going under though tempted
by his dear, departed, slippery friend,
– father fin and mother pearl –
just a man swimming on, surfacing in open swells?

But Buckley, bearded, hair growing down him stood.
He squatted, gathered kindling and the tips
of demeaned ambition and his face
and the underbelly of childhood memory
he warmed at the fire,
curling up in reminiscence,
knowing there would be no moon
and letting the sea mist settle on him,
he dreamt of life as a Pacific gull
ageing in a lie of flight across clear heights;
and later that night he shook awake
stumbling into fog to urinate,
the tide out, the sand invisible steaming
like a porous and thoughtless cranium
of a giant beneath him.
He thought, "I am not beached,
my feet are here on this crown.
In the morning the giant will wake, and kick."

Emptied, niggly, Buckley tucked himself into the big ear.

RICHARD HAESE

"Time Ridden Faces"

Albert Tucker's Portraits at the Tolarno Galleries

In a remarkable exhibition of nearly sixty portraits, entitled "Faces I have Met", at the Tolarno Galleries in Melbourne in April-May this year, Albert Tucker paid tribute to seventeen members of his generation of the forties. These are the key figures – the majority of the artists, writers and their supporters who emerged in these years as the makers and celebrators of an extraordinary moment in Australia's cultural history. Early pioneers of the period, such as the expatriate Russian painter Danila Vassilieff, who first began to paint the streets and street life of Melbourne's inner suburbs, or the English born intellectual maverick Adrian Lawlor, are central to this pantheon. Such figures as Vassilieff or Bergner with their romantic backgrounds helped affirm, as Tucker put it in a recent television interview, the Australian artists' belief in themselves by showing that they were not alone. So too did John and Sunday Reed, whose presence permeates this exhibition just as it did the entire period of the 1940s and beyond.

Heide, the Reed's house near Heidelberg, now appears as culturally and spiritually significant in our own terms as a Garsington, and Melbourne's radical artists and writers from these years possess something of the fascination of a Bloomsbury. As an act of homage Albert Tucker's collective portrait is, however, anything but an uncritical exercise in nostalgia. Some images recreate significant moments long since past, others record what Tucker sees as key transactions between the central personalities; many are recent images of faces scoured and marked by time and experience. In a series of fascinating shifts and warps of time and perception, Tucker offers us the most revealing glimpses yet into the central figures of the inside history of these years.

This Bloomsbury connection has too often been called upon in defining the intellectual character of the Heide circle; it is at best a half truth that only serves to distort its actual character. The real heroes of Heide were not Roger Fry or Vanessa Bell, but those who stood apart from or who opposed Bloomsbury. The roots of its outlook were in the moral precepts of Bertrand Russell, the organic values of Herbert Read, and the dark emotions of D.H. Lawrence.

In the introduction to the catalog Tucker describes the mixture of compulsion and sense of urgency that led to the portraits and the exhibition:

I wanted to deal with past history, a forty year episode really. These are portraits of the survivors and the participants over that time. I think I have stumbled on a peculiar sense of energy by taking the historical approach; I had that compassion you feel knowing we are all dying, fading out, and I thought my God, where are the traces. What I'm really trying to do is reach back into the past and seize that period, and the people who comprise it and try to fix them . . . these people were part of my artistic life and human background . . . The important thing to me was to recreate their presence and fix them so that they would have some kind of immortality.

The exhibition and its lavish catalog is essential viewing for 1940s watchers, but it is also an historically critical one for Tucker as well. It is almost twenty years since the artist, now turned seventy, has held a major exhibition of current work. Tucker has never been as prolific a painter as his contemporaries; the important work has emerged obsessively and painfully out of long periods of experiment, solitude and reflection. If this measured quality of Tucker's output marks him out from so many of his companions, so too does his profound sense of history and his sense of responsibility to history. Behind Tucker's cry "I do not want my period to die" lies the knowledge of the vulnerability of all culture. The art of the 1940s may now be secure in public collections (though that in itself is only a very recent development) but the values and conditions that produced such a degree of informed national awareness seem barely discoverable now on the contemporary art scene. As one reviewer noted, Tucker's generation of painters was the last to have read seriously as a matter of course, the last which could be described as truly literate, a generation whose intellectual awareness and commitment to ideas informed and intensified their every image. If John Olsen and Fred Williams were notable exceptions, too few others have had either the resources or will to resist the claims of rival regionalisms, or the retreat of art into the all-too-often trivializing mind-games of post-modernism.

Tucker's people stand for an older Australia, one whose deep intellectual roots united the Australian experience

with the great adventure of European modernism. They include not only the members of that extraordinarily close but difficult and quarrelsome Angry Penguins family (Sidney Nolan, Cynthia Nolan, Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, Danila Vassilieff, Joy Hester, Michael Keon, Barrett Reid and John and Sunday Reed), but also the outsiders and adversaries such as Adrian Lawlor, Yosl Bergner, Noel Counihan and Bernard Smith. Given the intensity of family relationships, with the Angry Penguins family in particular, it is not wholly surprising perhaps that it is the outsiders and old enemies whom Tucker treats with the greatest degree of objectivity and even generosity. Certainly the portraits of Counihan and Smith are among the finest in the exhibition. In two of the portraits of Counihan, Tucker conveys a sense of the artist's still powerful vitality, while a dramatic and flickering light dramatizes and ennobles the romantic and leonine character of the artist's head. The Bernard Smith portraits possess a degree of concentration and intensity that are found elsewhere only in the self-portraits and the portraits of Michael Keon. Our experience as viewers confronting each of these figures is especially strong in the most powerful of the Smith portraits, where the figure is placed within a rectangular framework of a room-like space. Everything about this portrait, from the stark lighting which illuminates every feature of the head with great force to the steady unflinching gaze of the subject, expresses a powerful intellect, a mind perhaps that admits little indecision and even less self-doubt.

The portraits of the music critic John Sinclair and writers Barrett Reid and Michael Keon are as compelling as those of Counihan and Smith. Barrett Reid, now living at Heide, stands in front of the old farmhouse and its garden and in one painting, to stress a continuity of sensibility, two figures appear ghost-like in the dark entrance to the house. The feeling of a humanist vision linked with a degree of romantic melancholy is most strikingly apparent in the portraits of Barrett Reid, while those of the novelist and journalist Michael Keon attest to a passionate intensity of character and spirit. As with the portraits of Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, Sidney Nolan and the other artists, these are the images of the survivors and the carriers of experience.

From the living one moves to a series of tributes to the dead – Adrian Lawlor, Danila Vassilieff, Harry Roskolenko, Joy Hester, Sweeney Reed, and John and Sunday Reed. These portraits clearly presented quite different problems and Tucker has reworked images from old photographs from the 1940s, images that are themselves part of the historical record. The results are strikingly different. A portrait of Tucker's first wife, the artist Joy Hester, is one of the least naturalistic of the paintings, with its broader handling and element of surrealism and expressionism drawn from earlier stylistic devices in Tucker's work. The tragic dimension of Joy Hester's life, especially the long and terrible fight against the cancer from which she died in 1960, is present in the anguished turn of the head and the dark wall of breaking waves behind her. The sea refers not only to the beachside world of her youth but also, as Tucker has revealed, to a line "the long joyful sea" from Sidney Nolan's collection

of poems on the period entitled *Paradise Garden*. As Tucker states: "I almost wrote that on the bottom of the portrait . . . power, and menace. Something coming to overwhelm her, as it did."

At the heart of the exhibition, however, are the portraits, both individual and grouped together, of Sidney Nolan and John and Sunday Reed. One of the precipitating factors in beginning work on the entire series of these portraits was the deaths of the Reeds in December 1981, one following so closely upon the other. There was a very deep sense of loss, Tucker notes in the catalog, a feeling that something had gone that couldn't be replaced. For Tucker and Nolan, as for other artists of the Angry Penguins group, the creation of Heide with its special ambience offered a place of refuge, stimulation and support. It was Nolan, however, who both gave and gained most from Heide; that it was a transaction ending in great bitterness and pain is suggested in emotionally charged paintings such as "Bonjour Monsieur Rimbaud" and "The Offering". Even in the paintings in which Nolan is physically absent, Tucker suggests his presence – chiefly by references to Nolan's own paintings. Thus the double portrait of John and Sunday exploits as its background Nolan's great 1946 painting "Rosa Mutabilis", a lyrical view of Heide seen from the Yarra bank with Sunday amidst a flowering rose. In another portrait of Sunday, Tucker places her guardian-like alongside a painting from the Kelly series.

In the varying moods that John Reed reflects in the portraits, there is an overriding and powerful sense of dignity and courage – qualities never more apparent than when facing the pain and illness of his last years. Most of the images of John are of this period of his life. The directness and candor which are also present in these images of John Reed might be contrasted with the oblique and introspective character with which Tucker invests Sunday. It is the character of Sunday Reed, along with that of Nolan, that has clearly troubled Tucker more than the characters of any of the other figures. Depicted for the most part in her last years as an old and painfully thin figure, she is an illusive presence; her eyes are an opaque blue-green, the pose Tucker has chosen seeming to set her at a curious tangent to reality and to the viewer. If Sunday was the animating and binding presence at Heide, as Tucker surely believes, it was a presence with which he was never comfortable, and these images of Sunday verge on the demoniac. While these portraits of Sunday contain something of the great power of her personality that remained undimmed to the last, even in a worn and time-ridden old age when she was in pain and tragically sad from the losses of those last years, her friends regarded her as someone of unique beauty and presence.

The widest emotional range of all the portraits is reserved for the nine portraits of Sidney Nolan, portraits that one critic has stated must go down as among the greatest ever painted in this country. At one extreme is the artist as an elegant and successful businessman, smooth and immaculate in suit and tie, at the other a cadaverous figure appearing out of a dark background like a gaunt and shadowed man of sorrows. The apparent contradic-

tion between this emaciated and haunted man, whose face tells of measureless pain, and that of a man whose control and confidence rivals that of a Renaissance prince, seems irresolvable. One painting, perhaps the most immediately striking of all the portraits, addresses this contradiction directly by placing Nolan in suit and tie silhouetted against the illimitable space of the Australian outback desert. As if within one of his own central Australian paintings of the fifties, Nolan inhabits a disturbing psychic space in which the man and this vast space is as mysterious and finally as unnerving as a riddle by Magritte or the silence of the Sphinx.

Albert Tucker's return to portraiture as the central preoccupation of his art marks a key shift from his earlier preoccupations with the mythic dimensions of the Australian past and the Australian land image. The shift has, in fact, coincided with Tucker's recent move back to live in his old environment of St Kilda, the world that fuelled so many of the most powerful of the "Images of Modern Evil" forty years ago – the physical move corresponding with and strengthening the move in his art back towards the earlier concerns for disturbing social and psychological realities. The result is the remarkable and unprecedented cultural srocktaking that this exhibition represents.

As the self-portraits remind us, Tucker has always been as ruthless in his probing of his own psyche as he has in his

dissection of his other subjects. The exhibition contains two self-portraits that stand out especially. One is a three-quarter view of the head, the harsh light throwing the plastic sculptural form of the head into dramatic relief; the eyes are apparently sightless and hidden in sockets that are deep in shadow, the features stony and intractable. The mysterious and surreal character of this head may be contrasted with the robust realism of the second self-portrait, an even more powerful image that may well be Tucker's finest self-portrait to date. In this painting the artist looks directly out at the viewer; the head is held back with the planes of the face receding from the aggressive thrust of the jaw to eyes whose shadows only serve to accentuate the unyielding and judicial gaze of the artist. On the basis of this magisterial image alone, Tucker reveals himself now at seventy as the most disturbing and powerful image-maker Australia has produced, and the companion of Beckmann and Munch. Tucker's exhibition of faces is as unprecedented in Australian art history as it is uncompromising in its judgements, and it is a measure finally of both Tucker and his people that they emerge strengthened by the ordeal – the cast of great historical drama.

Richard Haese lectures in art history at La Trobe University. He is the author of Rebels and Precursors and is working on a biography of John and Sunday Reed.

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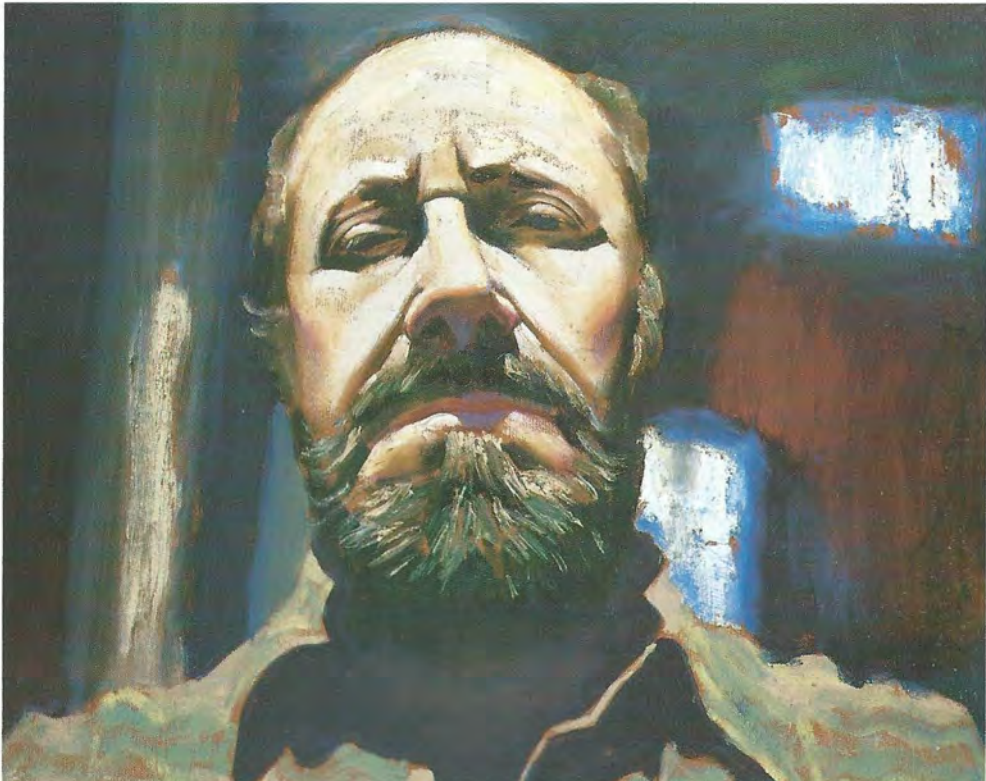
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Faces I Have Met

*There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create*

*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock
T.S. Eliot*

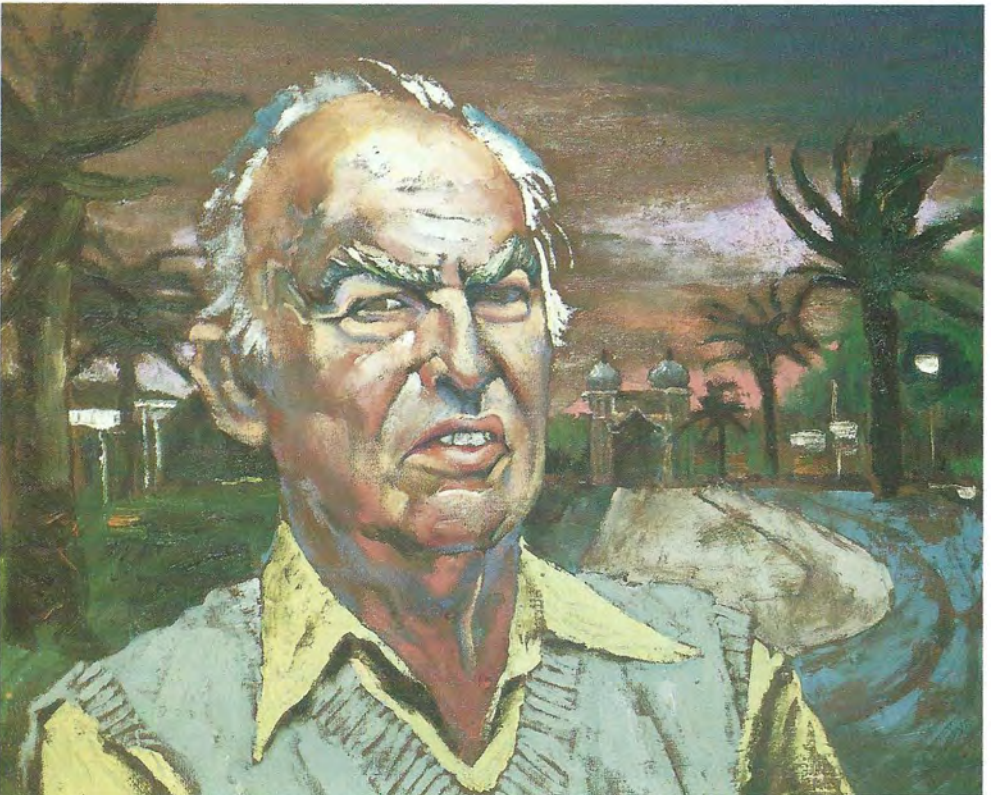
Portraits by Albert Tucker



*Albert
Tucker*



*Bernard
Smith*



*Michael
Keon*



Noel
Counihan



Joy
Hester



*Barrett
Reid*



*Sidney
Nolan*

John Reed (1901-1981) played an historic role in the development of the arts in Australia. With Max Harris he edited Angry Penguins (1940-1946) and founded the publishing firm of Reed & Harris, producing many books by authors such as Henry Miller, Arthur Calwell, Roy Rene ("Mo"), Dal Stivens and Peter Cowen. He edited Ern Malley's Journal with Barrett Reid and Max Harris. Among international writers he published when they were little known were Gabriel Marquez, Dylan Thomas, Robert Penn Warren, Kenneth Rexroth and James Dickey. For many years he was President of the Contemporary Arts Society. In the same week he was attacked by the Catholic press as a communist and by the communist press as a lackey of BHP. He founded the Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, staging major exhibitions of Picasso, the first Dobell retrospective, and surveys of the work of Albert Tucker, Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, Joy Hester and Danila Vassilieff, all of whom he talks of here in this autobiographical fragment. There were early exhibitions by Fred Williams, Charles Blackman, Mike Brown and many others.

John Reed's wife, Sunday, gave Nolan's series of Ned Kelly paintings to the nation. The pair left their collection of over four hundred works of art to Victoria, and their house and garden is now a public trust, housing these works and exhibiting the art of today. They made other donations to major State and provincial galleries. No doubt their private incomes allowed them to do much, but they were not, as many assumed, of great wealth, and out of limited funds supported many artists when they most needed support – when they were young, poor and unknown.

An edition of John Reed's letters is being prepared by Barrett Reid, and a biography of Sunday and John Reed is being written by Richard Haese. This excerpt is from a short, unpublished memoir written when John Reed was seventy-seven, and which he did not think merited publication in book form. Perhaps he was wrong.

The years 1938 and 1939 were crucial to modern art in Australia.

The academics, though virtually holding a monopoly of the art market, now sensed the danger of the growing feeling for modern art and decided to consolidate their position even further by forming an 'official' art body, the Australian Academy. This would provide the hallmark of status and would be an arbiter of standards to which all artists would have to aspire if they wanted commercial success.

The Academy was a society of artists, but its most powerful supporter was R.G. Menzies, then the Federal Attorney-General. Menzies was then, and remained all his life, an extreme and active protagonist of the academics, and I believe that his influence over the long years of his Prime Ministership, when he acted as a positive dead hand in the official art world, retarded general art prog-

ress in the community as well as doing considerable damage to our image overseas.

However, Menzies was to lose his first round in the battle. Apparently it was thought that if the Academy could become the "Royal" Academy a final blow would be dealt to the dissenters, and Menzies undertook to use his influence to get the royal approval for this move. For whatever reason – perhaps the whole idea just sounded too silly – the approval was not forthcoming, and, in fact the Academy itself came to an early and unlamented end. It quietly disappeared.

However, this suggestion for a "Royal" Academy had one dramatic effect: it roused George Bell to action as nothing else had been able to do, and he called the historic meeting to form the Contemporary Art Society of Australia and, in so doing, earned himself an important and honorable place in Australian art history. Over the next

few years the real birth of modern art in Australia took place, and I have no hesitation in giving the CAS major credit for this event, and for the first two years George Bell was its President.

It is true enough that even if there had been no CAS the development of modern art would have proceeded by other means; but the same argument is true of any significant phase in human development – if it had not happened the way it did, then it would have happened some other way. The important fact remains that there is always a precipitating factor, and in this case George Bell and the CAS were to provide it.

Apart from this, I believe the importance of George's place in Australian art history has been greatly exaggerated and, even in the CAS, he immediately adopted a static rather than a dynamic attitude. As a painter, surely any reputation he may have had was shattered by the retrospective exhibition of his work held at the Leveson Gallery a few years ago and, as a teacher, his mythical role hardly bears exposure to the light of day. When one remembers that he taught for more than thirty years, and then views the results, I think one cannot feel very inspired. Of course his pupil Russell Drysdale is always quoted as evidence of his excellence as a teacher; but even here, I think a serious reassessment of Drysdale's position as a significant creative artist is inevitable sooner or later. I can remember his work in the early days in George's studio, and, though he was always liked as a person, and was clearly gifted in his handling of his materials, we never thought he possessed a great deal of original talent, and I believe his later work has justified this judgement. To me, his landscapes are banal, and at times positively vulgar as paintings, and show no inspired realization of any truth about the country; but on the other hand I do find that sometimes in his portrayal of people – particularly, say, the glimpse of someone seen at a window – he achieves a degree of excellence in 'portraiture' which is perhaps equal to anything to be seen in Australia.

Even in its formation there were signs of trouble in the CAS. For some reason I cannot now remember why I was unable to attend the original meeting called by George Bell; but I sent a memo through Allen Henderson outlining my thoughts about the formation and constitution of the society. What really worried me, and most of the other laymen and younger artists, was that, under George's influence, the society would be dominated (and George was a very dominating person) by a small group of the relatively conservative artists, who would set up 'standards' to which the younger and more revolutionary artists would have to conform. If this took place, then it was clear to me that the CAS would just degenerate into another sterile self-consuming art group – as indeed happened to the Melbourne Contemporary Group which George established when he left the CAS.

The young artists themselves could not have formed a sufficiently powerful group to prevent this happening – they could only have broken away. For this reason, the role of the layman was of the utmost importance.

I had, in fact, assumed that George Bell welcomed the laymen on an equal footing in the formation and control

of the CAS; but I was soon to find out that this was far from the case – and the fight was on.

It was at this time that George told me his thoughts about the role of the layman. His problem was that he and the artists in his group lacked influence in the community as well as lacking money, and accordingly were unable to compete with the academicians. He was particularly concerned that one of the artists' chief sources of revenue at that time, official portrait commissions, always went to academics. Put in its most simple terms, what he wanted from the layman was promotion and money. He wanted them to go out into the community and fight the battles of the modern artists, and at the same time to form a nucleus of buyers for their work. In exchange for this, they would have the privilege (as he saw it) of being admitted to the counsels of the artists, not it is true on an equal footing, but rather in a consultative capacity, and definitely not in any sense which would involve interference with the artists in anything which related to exhibiting etc.

This revelation came as a great shock to me – I suppose I was very naïve – as I had taken it for granted that we were all completely united in a common cause, and it had not occurred to me that the CAS could be founded on any other basis than that of equality of status.

I have already indicated my own views, which were, in general shared by the younger artists and most of the interested non-artists. This made me confident that we would be able to convert George, or a sufficient number of his followers, to our way of thinking, and all would be well. Obviously, I neither understood George's nature, nor the almost mesmeric effect he had on a certain type of artist.

It was in this rather ominous atmosphere that the CAS was launched, and I, being a lawyer, was asked to draft the constitution. From my point of view this was most fortunate, as it enabled me to establish in simple terms the sort of society I had always envisaged. It was also fortunate that George was not at all at home with any sort of formal document, and though he was not enthusiastic about my draft he accepted its basic provisions. (I think he felt that the constitution was only a piece of paper and that, in practice, he would be able to do much as he liked.) General membership was open to both artists and laymen, and neither artist nor layman could make up more than two-thirds of the council. It was generally assumed that artists would always be in a majority, but this provision made sure they could not completely swamp the council. Either artist or non-artist could be president.

The election of the first president was unanimous, as everyone agreed as to George's right to this position. Rupert Bunny was artist vice president, I was lay vice president, and Adrian Lawler was honorary secretary. Other council members on 'our' side were Gino Nibbi, Dr Guy Reynolds, Allen Henderson and Albert Tucker.

To start with, activities were fairly peripheral; meetings, lectures, letters to the press etc.; but the constitution provided for an annual exhibition and thus, scheduled for the spring of 1939, was to be our first big event.

In 1938, when the CAS was formed, Nolan was 21, Tucker 24, John Perceval 15, Arthur Boyd 18, Joy Hester 18, Josl Bergner 18 and Danila Vassiliev 40. These were to be the seven artists who, in one way or another, were to become so very important in the emergence of modern art as the dominant force in the Australian art world, and of these it was Danila whom I met first, at his exhibition at Riddell's Gallery, probably in 1936. He had just come from London (via Sydney), lured by the offer of a job from Clive and Janet Nield, who were then opening Australia's first progressive school, "Koorng" at Warrandyte, about twenty-five miles from Melbourne.

Danila was born, and died, a Don Cossack. He loved his native country, and in later years often talked of going back; but he never made it. In our prosaic terms, his whole early life was close to fantasy: a cadet officer in the Russian army at the time of the Revolution, he fought with the White armies all over Russia and Siberia, finally being captured in Caucasia. His fellow officers (he was by then a colonel) were shot and he only escaped this fate because of his youth. However, he thought his turn might come at any moment, so he decided to escape, and did so by commandeering a motorbike and dashing across the Persian border, followed by the shots of the Red guards. In Persia he became the protégé of a despotic mountain prince, who even suggested making Danila his heir; but the thought of a barbaric existence for the rest of his life, cut off from civilization, was too much for Danila, and eventually left the prince and found his way down to the Persian Gulf. Then followed China (in the hope of rejoining the White Army), Burma (as a mining engineer), the Northern Territory (railway contractor, etc.), Queensland (sugar farming), Brazil (painting, engineering and love), the Caribbean (art and social lionizing), Spain, Portugal, France and England (exhibiting and exploring the new world of modern art) and then back to Australia.

It is a story full of crazy happenings and adventures, which deserve a book, and I always hope that his former wife, Elizabeth, will write this. In Warrandyte, where he later built his fabulous 'castle', christened by Elizabeth "Stonygrad", he was to be our only, and treasured, contact with a temperament and a world of art which were truly exotic to Australia and which made an invaluable broadening contribution to the local scene.

One assumes that a Cossack is gay, dashing, reckless, and Danila could be all those things. He could also be cruel and moody, and I imagine that is not out of keeping either. He had a natural affinity with children, and most of his early Melbourne paintings are centred around them, first the children of the streets of Fitzroy (where he lived) and then the school children at Koorng. However, even though the streets were Fitzroy, and the children Australian, his paintings were obviously completely foreign to anything being done in Australia; and this applied right through his life: always he was able to stir us with his exotic vision. He loved Australia, and he painted it with love, but to the end he remained a Cossack, and he painted as one.

Although I have, so to speak, bracketted a number of artists together, this does not imply that they formed a school, or were even a group. I rather doubt whether,

before 1938, any of them knew each other. They were all quite independently moving in the same direction, but each in his own way. One thing, however, which they did have in common was lack of money: Nolan's father was a tram driver, Tucker's worked in the railway yards, and so on.

In the 1970s poverty in Australia is, in the main, a relative and temporary thing; but in the 1920s, 1930s and even the 1940s, it could appear as an absolute and irrevocable phenomenon, and for most of the artists of whom I speak, poverty, or near poverty, persisted till the mid-1950's. Tucker, more than any of the others, bitterly resented the social system which placed him in this position and, being both aggressive and articulate, he never failed to let everyone know how he felt. He was the socially conscious one and, as was to be expected, he had joined the Communist Party.

In those days we were naive enough to imagine that one could be a Communist Party member and at the same time preserve one's individuality. Bert insisted that the only way an artist could be of value to the Party (or anyone else) was by expressing his individual vision, while the Party insisted that an artist was no different to any other Party member and that his job was to be a Party worker and to submit to Party discipline. The disillusionment was mutual and ended in the usual recriminatory break.

Bert's social consciousness made him fully aware of his duty to society, which he believed he fulfilled by devoting himself to the completest possible development and realization of the creative gift with which he knew he had been endowed. He was convinced he was doing this and accordingly insisted that society carry out its duty by giving him the means to live and work under reasonable conditions. The fact that society did not appreciate his offering had nothing to do with the matter: as an artist he was a 'creator' and, as such, showed the way, and society must respect what he did even if it was not understood. He was not aloof from society; but rather its interpreter, its guide, even its conscience. Indeed, I can recall him saying that he regarded himself as a religious, or at least a metaphysical, painter.

I associate my first meeting with Bert (though I could be wrong in this) with an exhibition he and another artist, Nutter Buzzacott, held in 1937 or 1938. As in his social attitude, so in his painting, Bert was to my mind a more consciously orientated worker than the others and, in this sense, took himself more seriously than they did. He was more an orthodox student than they were, but one who intellectually rejected the academic in favor of the modern, and behind this rejection was a certain cold passion and a creative drive, which enabled him to become an important artist. His work tended to a certain formality and tied in more closely than the others with the modern Europeans, which may have been why his painting was acceptable to George Bell, who rejected Nolan completely, and why Bert himself referred to Nolan's paintings as "trivia". It was some years before he would accept Nolan's paintings, and I believe the persistent advocacy of Joy Hester (then his wife) was largely responsible for this.

His first paintings I remember were not dramatically spectacular – they were streets and interiors in Fitzroy, where he then lived – but I recall one painting which particularly shocked the orthodox because the shadows of two separate trees fell in opposite directions! There was a strong expressionist and even surreal element in his work; but tempered by the lessons of Cézanne and the cubists. He was also already painting, and drawing, self-portraits, which were to be a strong feature of his work for some years, and it was from them that were to come the powerful symbols of the flared nostrils and the slashed mouth of his Images of Modern Evil.

I think it must have been Bert Tucker who took me to a remote North Carlton room where Josl Bergner was living. It is a tricky business ascribing influence and I would not like to say how much Josl influenced Bert; but he was Bert's first contact with European expressionism and the impact on him seemed to me to be considerable.

There was nothing exotic about Josl in the sense I have attributed to Danila Vassilieff: he was part of our total western culture, whereas Danila sprang from a different source, having at least some of its roots in the east; but Josl came from the ghettos of Warsaw, and behind him was a history of poverty and persecution quite unknown to us. It was probably his ingrained feeling of being ostracized and persecuted which drew him to the Communist Party. He was one of the downtrodden and underprivileged to whom the Party offered protection from a hostile capitalist society. However, Josl, unlike Bert, was not a politically minded person, and I doubt if his communism was ever any more than expediency. Essentially he was concerned to paint, and he was in fact our first and most significant social realist painter. He was very young, a flabby, unhealthy boy, living in real poverty and not overmuch concerned with the moral or hygienic values of society, and an unpleasant incident arose in relation to the latter. One night he came home with us for dinner and during the course of the evening held forth on his complete disregard for truthfulness and honesty (as we understood them) in his dealings with others, and, to cap his argument he said "I would not hesitate to steal from my mother".

In the ordinary way we would probably have taken that sort of talk in our stride – half seriously, and half regarding it as a sort of bragging; but unfortunately that same evening some money was taken from my dressing table and it was inevitable in the circumstances that I should relate that to what Josl had been saying, and I was more upset that an artist whose work I admired so much, and had bought, and for whom I had only friendly feelings, should do this.

The next morning, not knowing where Josl lived, I went to see his friend Noel Counihan and told him the story and that I naturally suspected Josl. His reaction was immediate and violent, and he abused me for daring to suspect poor Josl, whom, he said, suffered enough without this – as was no doubt true – and also turned the tables on me by saying that, in any event, I had no right to leave money lying about where it could be taken so easily!

Noel proved to be right, and I hope I apologized ade-

quately to Josl, even if his 'philosophy' somewhat justified my suspicion. The actual money-taker repeated the performance once too often. It was not a very happy revelation.

During the 1930s all western intellectuals had reached some realization of the political and social disasters which were overtaking much of Europe. First Spain, which caused some sort of a spiritual revolution among intellectuals, then Germany and Italy. Though almost as remote as another planet, we were by now ready for some relatively close-up view of this world. At least the echoes of the phenomenon of the European intellectuals' socio-political commitment had reached us.

Everyone had now heard of ghettos; but it was altogether a new experience to see them through the art of Josl Bergner. On top of this was the impact of our first direct contact with German expressionism, and when Josl came to live here it was only natural that he should use our own slums and slum life in this dramatic form. If the extent of Josl's influence on Bert Tucker is problematic, there is no doubt that his influence on two other communist painters, Noel Counihan and Vic O'Connor, was crucial; but I will talk of them later.

It is difficult not to think of Arthur Boyd and John Perceval together, as for so many years and in so many ways their lives were closely linked. This natural difficulty has led to quite false conclusions as to influences and so on; but in fact, in background in personality and in their art these painters are entirely different, and the overlapping of the work (sometimes conscious, sometimes casual) on a few occasions does not alter this. The unique family history of the Boyds as artists is well known: it just seemed a fact of nature that if you were born a Boyd you were born an artist, and we all witnessed an extraordinary example of this inborn gift a few years later, when Arthur's sister Mary, then fifteen, entered a painting for a CAS exhibition.

In essence, this was a painting of a masked face above two lightly clasped attenuated hands; but the rather sophisticated concept was carried out with an appearance of quiet confidence, maturity and dignity, and with such skill that the CAS committee was unanimous in thinking that Mary could not possibly have painted it, and that someone was trying to hoax us. At the same time we were still fighting for our existence and were very sensitive to any attacks, as this appeared to be, particularly when it came from the very people from whom the CAS existed. As a result everyone got very worked up and we finally confronted Mary with our suspicions, and it was only her transparent amazement and truly indignant denials that convinced us we were wrong. I am glad that Sunday and I bought the painting, and we still look on it with some amazement.

It seems probable that Arthur will prove to represent the quintessence and the peak of all that this beautiful family has held in promise for so long. It is hard to imagine another Boyd who will come to outshine Arthur.

In 1938-39 Arthur was still painting what I would call sweet family landscapes. Quite a number of them have been exhibited over the last few years and, although they

are imbued with the ineffable Boyd quality, it requires an effort of conscious hindsight to read into them a true foretaste of things to come. At any rate, my own realization of Arthur's staggering resources, both in concept and execution, came a year or two later.

Arthur's deepest life seemed to evolve within the family unit, and though Sunday and I were regularly at the Murrumbeena home, and were on the happiest terms with everyone there, this did not mean that I was necessarily aware of Arthur's more profound thoughts. It has, however, seemed to me that it was the impact of the war which sprung the lock and released the extraordinary images and the forces which lay beneath the surface of Arthur's daily life.

Whether I am right or not, it was certainly the war years which produced the fantastic series of allegorical paintings and drawings which, in our minds, established Arthur immediately as an important artist.

I have often been asked – by those who ask such questions – how we saw with such accuracy who were the important artists, and my only reply is that it was the most simple and natural thing in the world. One day there was nothing, and the next a miracle had happened. How could we not see it? I must, in fact, stress the phenomenon of that period, because I realize how hard it is for the younger generation, which experienced nothing of those years, to grasp the elementary fact that, for all intents, art – the creative product of the contemporary personality – just did not exist. Prior to 1938/1939 the whole atmosphere was one of stagnation and death, and to be able to share in the activity which so utterly and irrevocably changed this situation, was a truly beautiful and exciting experience. After the formation of the CAS things were never to be the same again.

Though John Perceval was the youngest of the group and took little or no part in the early art-political scene, his extrovert and activist nature perhaps best represent the spirit of the period. When I met him he was in bed, stricken with polio, which finally left him with a permanently damaged leg. This fact, however, has never seemed to have had any bearing on his exploration of the world – unless it is to accentuate a nature already biased towards an aggressive approach to life. While in bed he was impatient to be up, and when up he was impatient of all restrictions to the free use of his leg, damaged or not; but his enforced physical inactivity did precipitate his dedication to painting, and I believe he spent much of his time in bed drawing and painting 'after van Gogh'. He was, I think, the first to feel the need to paint big, and his earliest showing of his work, jointly with Arthur Boyd, included both "Man" and "Survival" which, at a time when 24 x 30 inches was considered large, were quite phenomenal. If they were crude and raw, and their ambitious scope and full realization beyond the powers of such a relatively inexperienced artist, they nevertheless carried an intensity and force which gave vital clues to John Perceval's potentiality. He did not take long to give us proof of what he could do, and paintings such as "Boy and Cat" quickly revealed an artist with a new vision and a tender and intimate understanding of the world, and a personal means of expression.

As John was the youngest of the 'precursors', and was a bit of a maverick, and as there was often an element of lightheartedness in his work, there grew up an unfortunate, if unconscious, tendency to regard both him and his work as meriting less serious attention than was given to the others. This did little harm at the time as we were all carried along on the same wave, and the excitement and activity of the moment made such questions unimportant. It was true also, and specially in John's case, that there was an intense drive just to keep painting, without too much thought about the future, or even about the value of the paintings themselves. For the most part they were unsaleable anyway, and if two or three were sold in a year at around £10 each, that was considered exceptional rather than otherwise.

The result was that individual paintings were very often more or less forgotten about and, in many cases, just put under the house or in a junk room to get them out of the way of the new ones which were always coming up. The only real exception to this was Bert Tucker, who had a positive fixation on posterity and immortality and, while others were painting on anything which came to hand, and with the cheapest paints, Bert was studiously poring over the text books and making certain (as he told me with absolute conviction) that his paintings would be as perfect in five hundred years as they were then.

The intimate association between John Perceval and Arthur Boyd, the extrovert and the introvert, is well known and is historically significant, not only because John married Arthur's very beautiful sister Mary (when she was sixteen) but also because of the stimulus each gained from the other in their work. During a brief period in the late 1940s both were painting scenes involving massed figures with religious or semi-religious significance, and there were almost inevitably points of similarity. This gave rise to talk of John (the younger) copying Arthur, just as, later, his "Night" paintings were supposed to derive from Bert's – though, in fact, John's were painted before Bert's.

Of course this is all silly talk, and the only wonder is that it persisted so long in the face of John's clear demonstration over the years that he needed no prop with which to bolster up his own talent.

Two stories of this early period – both told before – are worth telling again in an attempt to recapture an atmosphere which is so very remote from that of today.

It is the greatest pity that John and Mary's wedding could not have been recorded on camera; it was a lovely and completely unique event. The Boyds, Merrick and Doris and their children, Arthur, Guy, David and Mary (the eldest child, Lucy had already married and left home) lived in an old timber house at Murrumbeena, an outer suburb. Originally, it was a big property; but as the years went by and money became more and more scarce, it was gradually sold off, till finally it was a suburban block, with old trees crowding the house and a wild and unkempt and sweet garden – the reproach of a respectable neighborhood.

The heart of the house – and it was a loving and closely knit one – was the "Brown Room", in which the family

life centred: at the same time a source of creative activity and a refuge from the world at large. Here the spirit of Merrick and Doris presided – Merrick, a sweet and gentle man, but by now absent minded and preoccupied with mystical thoughts of Love; Doris also gentle, but a strong mother figure on whom most of the burden of the home fell.

In this house, in the Brown Room, Mary and John were married, with the utmost simplicity and informality. The only change in the domestic economy was that John would now move into Mary's room, and after the ceremony they both retired there. This, however, was altogether too much for Merrick, who, quite forgetting all about the wedding, demanded indignantly to be told "what that man is doing in my daughter's bedroom?" The story is really a perfect commentary on life at Murrumbena.

The other story related to the early stages of the Japanese War, when the American military invasion of Melbourne was in full swing. The centre of the city (particularly at night) was almost unrecognizable, with crowds of people milling around everywhere, with nothing much to do except to look for something to do. Uniforms were in the preponderance, and prostitutes, both professional and amateur, were there by the dozen. For the most part it was a fairly easy swinging crowd, but there was always a chance of a fight, and I suppose few nights went by without one.

One evening I was in this crowd around Flinders Street station, where it was always thickest, when I saw Arthur and John right in the middle of it. Both were in uniform; but their appearance was such as to have delighted our beautiful friend of the First World War, the Good Soldier Schweik. Nothing more unmilitary could have been imagined; John was wearing his uniform as carelessly as he might his oldest clothes, but thoroughly enjoying the crowd, almost prancing along on his gammy leg, and ready for any adventure. Arthur, on the contrary, was obviously a most unwilling participant in the whole affair; with his big army coat almost down to his boots and his army hat pulled right down over his eyes, he looked the picture of misery, and it seemed his one desire was to get away from it all, and, in the meantime to be as inconspicuous as possible. That vivid scene has stayed in my mind as a sort of visual manifestation of their opposing personalities. It was John's moment; Arthur's remarkable strength showed itself elsewhere.

It is difficult to speak separately of Nolan in the sense in which I have spoken of the other artists. Though Sunday and I had relatively close relationships with them, the Nolan relationship existed on a different plane: from the moment in 1938 when I first met him till the day in 1948 when he disappeared from our lives, it seemed to me that the three of us moved together in the most closely integrated way.

In 1938 Nolan was twenty-one, a sort of wild-cat spirit, unformed, uncertain of his destiny, but arrogantly confident that the fates were on his side, and determined that one day he would be famous. One of his then close

friends, John Sinclair, gives a good picture of Nolan at this time in an issue of *Art and Australia*.

Although Nolan said to me that he did not know if he was to be a painter – and thought of himself equally as a poet, it was in his search for someone to interest themselves in him as a painter that I met him.

Keith Murdoch had already become head of the Herald newspaper organization and was soon to become a trustee of the Victorian National Gallery; he had built up a somewhat mythical reputation as a patron of young artists and, on this basis, Nolan had decided to seek his support. As a matter of fact, for all the personal response he was likely to get from Murdoch he might just as well have gone to see the Archbishop of Melbourne; but he did see Murdoch, who was uninterested, but told Nolan to show his work to the Herald art critic, Basil Burdett. This Nolan did; but Basil in his turn expressed little interest, and suggested going to George Bell. Once started, Nolan was determined not to give in, so he duly went to George, only to be told that it was not the sort of work which appealed to him, but that it might appeal to me.

That Nolan should still persist is surely remarkable, but he did, and so in this roundabout way he came to see me in my office, where I was then practising as a solicitor. It is easy to remember him and the half dozen drawings he brought with him; but it is not so easy to say why I was convinced at that brief and rather strange meeting that Nolan was a rare special person and a true artist. To say that he was inordinately shy is true enough, but sounds silly, and the same applies when I say that in talking to me his speech was so mumbled that it was almost impossible to follow him, I suppose these are comments one has to make, but the shyness and the speech barrier were somehow penetrated by more fundamental qualities and, above all, I think I was impressed by a sense of a man who was absolutely convinced that he had a very special statement to make as an artist, no matter what form it took, and that nothing would prevent him making it. It is hard to say how much of this was due to his personality and how much to his drawings, which were in the form of broad calligraphic symbols.

Anyway, we seemed to find some mutually sympathetic response, and I took the drawings home to show to Sunday and tried to convey to her something of the rather inexplicable excitement I felt after our meeting. Of course, it was not long before Nolan came out to Heide, and very soon a close and loving relationship existed between us. This was to continue for nearly ten years, during most of which Nolan lived with us.

It may be noticed with curiosity that, whereas I refer to other artists somewhat indiscriminately by either their surname or their Christian name, I always refer to Nolan simply as "Nolan". This is because, for us, he was never (except during the period of his absence without leave from the army, when he assumed the nom-de-guerre of "Robin") anyone other than the person who signs his paintings "Nolan".

It was obvious from the first that Nolan was a man who thought deeply and read prolifically. In particular, he was absorbed in the personality and poems of Arthur Rimbaud, who seemed to epitomize his own rebellious

nature and all his own powerful urging. It was completely fitting that, when the first CAS exhibition came round, one of his entries was his abstract "Portrait of Rimbaud".

It is almost impossible for me to imagine Nolan without a book in his hand, beside his bed, or within reach while he painted. When I think of him in this respect I am struck by the difference between him and so many other artists, both of his own and, more particularly, of the present generation. I have never known any who read as he did, and I could easily name some who do not open a book from one year to another. Because of this – if for no other reason – Nolan's painting always had depth: it was the reverse of the "trivia" which Bert Tucker named it: it was the reverse effect of what was soon to be the monotonously and belittlingly repeated "naive".

I do not assume to probe the working of Nolan's mind, or his obscure creative processes; but it seems reasonable to suppose that, when I met him, he was involved in some kind of creative ferment, but was yet to have any conviction as to the direction his destiny was to take. So far as I know he always wrote poems, and in fact almost all he writes is stamped with the essence of poetry, because that is the way his mind works, and he once told me he would probably be a poet rather than a painter; but I am sure I never believed this.

Perhaps because of the element of uncertainty within himself Nolan's paintings had become abstract, though his earliest painting that I know is a gentle but fairly conventional landscape. He was dissatisfied with surface appearances and was concerned with symbols and poetic imagery and with the essence of things. In his own way he perhaps wanted to do as Rimbaud had done, to abandon convention and to reveal by symbolic processes the reality which lay beneath. No doubt this is so, in one way or another, with all artists; but in the greater ones the driving force behind this urge is of phenomenal strength. Perhaps, too, there is a philosophy in all art, though in most cases it may seem to be a personal and relatively instinctive one. In Nolan's case, however, the philosophy was almost scholarly, and derived from a much wider reading and range of thought than is usual. If I had to select one particular influence at this early period, it would probably have to be Kierkegaard.

So far as landscape is concerned, Nolan's eyes were always filled with the actual vision of whatever aspect of the physical world occupied his attention at any given time: the visual images of his native St Kilda – Luna Park, the Catani Gardens and, above all, the St Kilda baths, the bathers and the sea itself: sunlight, color, and the gestures of figures. It is an interesting coincidence that Nolan and Streeton each painted himself from the back: it was only rarely that Nolan concerned himself with the expressiveness of a man's face.

As Nolan is primarily a landscape painter it is understandable that his abstract work, prior to the St Kilda paintings, is either overlooked or disregarded. This is unfortunate, not only because in this work Nolan laid a basic foundation for what he was to do later, but also because it reveals his amazing inventive gifts and that particular 'magic' which turned almost everything he touched into a thing of beauty. The word 'purity' can

readily be applied to Nolan's best paintings, and, in these early abstracts that purity can be seen in its most elemental form.

Nolan's next move, from St Kilda to the Wimmera, from an almost closed personal expression to a universal statement about the Australian landscape, came about after he had been conscripted into the army. The war came as a deep traumatic shock to the young artists, but their immediate response to it (and mine as well) was a somewhat confused and ambivalent one. In any real sense, we were quite unequipped to deal with the problems it presented and, if those at the centre of world events showed uncertainty and made mistakes, I do not think we can be altogether blamed.

It was easy to start off with two convictions: the artist was a creative personality and, as such, instinctively reacted against involvement in war; but, equally, he stood absolutely opposed to fascism in all its forms. This precipitated an immediate inner conflict, which was only deepened by the history of the Spanish War. This started with all the signs of a crusade, but ended in bitter disillusion: it showed up not only the horrors of fascism, but also the cynicism and ruthlessness of communism, and the utter chaos produced by the anarchists. In general the left-wing intellectual maintained his basic ideological position, but only as the lesser of two evils. Up to a point the artist seemed inclined to resolve this conflict by accepting the necessity of the war against Hitler, but insisting that his role in it must be one which was consistent with his creative personality. He was prepared to be a war artist against Hitler, not a combat soldier.

I doubt, however, whether in Australia (whatever the position in other countries) the more significant artists ever had much conviction about this resolution of their dilemma. What they really wanted was to be left to make their anti-fascist statement in their own way, even if this meant producing paintings which had no apparent connection with the subject of fascism or the war.

Not unnaturally, the authorities were slow to accept this view, and the result was that, sooner or later, all the young artists were in uniform – an unhappy and disturbed group. Nolan and others went absent without leave. Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker and others found their way, by various devious means of their own contriving, to the psychiatric ward of a military hospital, from where they were finally discharged from the army, after experiences which might very well have sent them round the bend. In Nolan's case, the army became the unwitting agency through which the whole of Australian landscape painting was changed. In fact, I would go further, and say that Australian landscape painting was then really born.

During the war period, and to some extent under the influence of communist thinking, there was a good deal of talk about 'taking art to the people'. Superficially it seemed a good thing to do: 'what was the use of an art which only circulated among an elite?' It was the common man who mattered and it was up to the artist to work with and for him. In this form the argument, though in the climate of the times it gave us some uneasy moments, did not carry conviction for very long; but, on a

parallel line of thinking, Nolan shared with Picasso, and no doubt many other artists, the impulse to spread his art everywhere, and wished that in some way it should be available to anyone to buy who could afford the most elementary of indulgences.

Out of this feeling arose the idea of a unique kind of exhibition. In the Heidelberg village (as it then was) one of the biggest shops was Sheffield's, the newsagents, and I persuaded them to let us have their large shop window for an exhibition of Nolan's paintings, which were all to be for sale at ridiculously low prices. We still have the typed catalogue sheet, and the highest price is three guineas! What an opportunity for some perceptive local buyer: but in fact not a single painting was sold.

I am not sure whether the original idea for the exhibition was Nolan's or Sunday's, and Nolan now seems to repudiate it and to imply that it was against his will and in some way derogatory to his art; but at the time he was a full participant, as his letters show, and I have no doubt of his enthusiasm.

It may still not be possible to view these years objectively – not that I have ever had much faith in pure objectivity in relation to art – but I think one can now view the history of Australian art up to the 1940s fairly clearly and dispassionately. Broadly, this means landscape painting, because this seems to have been the prime concern of our artists.

From the very earliest period we have interesting paintings and, very occasionally, an exceptional one such as John Glover's "My Home"; but they relate almost exclusively to a foreigner's nostalgia for a different climate, a different landscape and a different light.

I am not an historian, and cannot trace the genesis of the artists concerned; but one only needs the evidence of one's eyes to tell one that suddenly an extraordinary thing happened, a dramatic development. Almost overnight the amateur or labored processes of the past were swept aside by a creative surge which brought to us Conder, Roberts, Streeton, McCubbin, Withers, Davies, Anne Southern, June Sutherland, and perhaps others.

Each of these artists has given us some memorable vision of Australia; but the fragility and the fugitive nature of this vision is indicated by the startling rapidity with which it vanished. By 1900 almost the last traces of it had gone; but during the preceding twelve years or so we do at least catch an inspired glimpse of the Australian landscape seen truly by men who were true artists. It was, however, only a glimpse, and we had to wait forty years – and be dependent on the precipitating crisis of a second world war – before this glimpse became anything like a total revelation.

All such statements are, of course, purely a matter of personal opinion, and it may well be a hundred years before they can be finally evaluated; but for me, the revelation of Nolan's Wimmera paintings has remained clear and undiminished after nearly thirty years, and I still see them – as I saw them when they were painted – as being the first full revelation in paint of this strange and beautiful landscape of ours: a major creative achievement.

Nolan's statement was so simple that it was foolishly

thought of as naive or primitive, whereas it was, in truth, that ultimate simplicity which comes from the most sensitive and highly developed sophistication. Nolan's eye was unflinching; but its vision was implemented, not only by a rare and profound sensibility, but also by a subtle and meditative mind which was able to embrace and elucidate intellectually what his eye revealed.

The sad thing is that there are so few of these paintings (and that they are still so little regarded). Sunday used to prepare the canvasses – they were mostly butter muslin on board – and they would then be wrapped in hessian and sent off by train to Dimboola, or wherever Nolan was, and they would be returned to us in the same way – transfigured by Nolan's magic. With them would come little sketch books filled with crayon drawings to supplement the paintings. But time was relatively short and we had to wait a few more years before what was started in the Wimmera was continued and marvellously extended in the Kelly paintings.

In making these claims for Nolan's Wimmera landscapes I do not for a moment overlook Arthur Boyd's Hastings paintings, which were, roughly, contemporaneous. Here too is the Australian bush; but it is seen with a sort of hermetic vision, bound to the strange actors of the play he presents. In its way, what Arthur did is just as important (if one must use such a word) but it is a much more inward-looking view than Nolan's, and, for that reason does not carry the same wide implications in relation to landscape painting as his.

The sixth and last artist on my list is Joy Hester – a girl, a woman, a poet, an artist, of whom I carry such rich memories. When I met her she was a real little hoyden, a peroxide blonde, expelled from schools, a rebel at home, ill-informed about almost everything; but eager to be told, spontaneous – always ready to scream in the middle of the street if she suddenly took fright – ready for any mad scheme, though already a little tamed by Bert Tucker, with whom she was then living. Concerned essentially with people – for, against; but feeling her way always to a deeper understanding of them as individuals, their personal dreams, their loneliness, their suffering; and, above all, absorbed by the mysteries of love; and all these things seen through the human face.

In this understanding, and in her lovely and powerful talent in being able to express it in her drawings, as well as in her poems, lie her claim to recognition as one of our finest artists.

Joy never painted – this is almost literally true – and referred to all her work as "drawing", even her later work where the linear element was not exclusive, and where she used washes, first black, and then other colors. Though no one could mistake the femininity of her art, she had none of those hesitations which one almost invariably associated with the work of women artists, and was fully accepted and respected by all of us without any qualification whatever. It was more than sad that these feelings were never shared more generally (she died very tragically at the age of forty), but probably her very lack of the familiar 'femininity' turned people aside: she was too uncompromising for them, and they looked away.

PRAYER TO THE RAINMAKER

Can I come inside?
My dreams are getting dark.
The sun has scorched
The sky black.
The day has died.
The time has come
For the yellow grass
To receive the dew.
Send her down
Send her down, Hugh!

Can I come in
For eventide and prayers?
I am weary from
A ritual of cares
And aimless games
That I usually win.
Put out the brain,
Lock the door too.
Send her down
Send her down, Hugh!

Can I get up now?
I must face the light.
I thought it would be better
In the night.
But I think not.
One needs sight
To look up
And face the blue.
Send her down
Send her down, Hugh!

Should I look up
And squint for signs
Of some divinity
For kangaroo,
Emu, men's minds,
For rivers and love
For gums and you.
Oh send her down!
Oh send her down Hugh.

MAX HARRIS

TWO HARD-NOSED BUGGERS DISCUSSING AMBIENCE

So there we were,
Two hard-nosed buggers discussing ambience,
Milieux, and such things.

"Good times old china, real rorts . . ."
"Rorts! Rorts! Whoever says rorts,
Where you been these fifteen years?"
I had a shandy: I was driving.

"Like I've been around and seen things like,
In India and that . . ."
Brownny drank scotch. No ice.
"Starving millions? They're fucked mate! Fucked!
Know what I mean?"

"Now how I see it is this,
Y'gotta cop onto the megatrends."
Brownny was doing well.
"As I see it mate, it's indoor cricket,
She's a real big go, you'd clean up there."

"Saw old Dank the other day.
Just the same, hasn't changed."
Brownny always liked a little levity.
"Dank. That ringbarker.
You'd need a jackhammer
To clean his sheets of a morning."

"Listen you're not still into that lefty shit,
Na couldn't be, that was years ago.
Tell you what, here's the oil,
The bloody tourismos, money to burn,
That's where it's at mate, get into it,
Like I'm talkin megabucks here fella . . ."
I had to fly. Good bloke, Brownny.
Always said so.

P.R. HAY

THIRTEEN NOCTURNES

1

Although my even breath
will not disturb
the long blonde hair
trailing over the pillow
I will pause at the open door

and turn back.

2

When I heard that sound
in a nearby tree
I knew that the earth
had turned in its sleep.

3

There are transparent fish
in the pale waters of the moon

and their shadows are silver.

4

When the new moon shed
its thin milk-blue light
on the world below
all the grass-blades swayed
and whispered to each other.

5

If the moon's a hole
in the night sky
its tunnel should lead
to a hot world
of constant moonlight.

6

In the great silence
of a night like this
you can almost hear
the breathing of stones.

7

Tide, and moon.
Moon, and tide.

The young girl
is dreaming of lemons.

Moon, and tide.
Tide, and moon.

8

At each appearance
of the new moon

I would like to go
far into myself

and listen, there,
to the breathing

of leaves,
of stones.

9

The night spread out its wings.
The wings were black
and covered everything.

Swaying in pools of inky black
the drowning dreamt they had danced
on the head of a pin

but they were mistaken.
There was only the night
whose black wings covered everything.

10

Though it rises above
that fever-chart line
with which the horizon
has signed its name
to the whole world
the new moon takes
just a shy pleasure
in its appearance
as if uncertain
of its achievements
and its charms. No matter
how high it may rise
it's clear that this moon
entirely lacks
the ease and buoyancy
of a common balloon.

11

To say that the moon
has a Cyclops eye
completely ignores
its impartial gaze.
Like a perfect monarch
it treats all subjects
in the same way
– whether rich or poor,
hairy or bald,
blonde or red-head.

12

But I'd hardly expected to see
that sun-bleached skull
glare down at me

when, on stepping outside,
I filled my lungs
with the cool night air

then lifted my eyes
to the provident sky.
Yet there it was,

fat as a pumpkin,
that perfect image
of hollow despair.

13

True, in looking at
this evening's moon
I am reminded
of a slice of lemon

on a plate, and also of
an apple cucumber
as firm and round
as one's heel. However,

I'm also reminded
of those long evenings
when the moon itself
was a simple moon.

GARY CATALANO

EARNING MYSELF A CEDAR IN GALILEE

One night permeated by rain
turns out to be
all rainy nights.

Every cortex can draw upon
old retrieval systems
but still have need
of a road weather alert.

Light chimes with light,
emerald, amber, red,
wet car rhymes with wet car,
I would have said.

Every seven years
we grow a new body
to put something or other
permanent in;

God is not molecules
nor even quarks
but He may well be
their disposition.

Can He lend volition
to the storming of a brain?
Thought parades along
with hooligan yearnings
carrying her ermine train.

Will it be wet and black like this
when I am trundled away,
plucked out and tucked
into my ultimate black burrow,
that bureaucratic cot of shadow?

What matters about dying is to do it well
with a style that few
have the wit and luck to master.

There is a kind of complicated music
dancing across my eye,
a suite of lights
on this rhythmical night of nights,
conducted by myself
without a swallowtail coat.

All along this map of roads,
fussily attentive to speed and braking
I crouch over my instruments
like a superannuated baby.

Nature plonked me into the world.
I got into the car.
I think I am giving a reading tonight.
God means what we are.

Body and spirit in cahoots
go creeping over the skin of the world
planning a fitful revolution
and how to eat their children.

I splash through tautologies,
light over colored light;
how Goethe would have been rapt in it all
but this driving is wearing me out.

The Passat makes a U-turn, halts;
I carry my metres and myth
to give this reading to the nicely-spoken
folks of B'nai Brith.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

Quick! Quick! Bird-cries at first daybreak,
hark how sharp among the metal-stiff
still banksia leaves! Quick, prick the tight
stretched sky, let in a sudden flood
of bloodred light. Quick quick quick quick!
Brown honeyeaters dart from twig to twig
piercing the morning calm . . . The bled
sky heals itself, one blue from edge to edge.

NANCY CATO

JOHN HEROUVIM

My mum, Sir John Kerr and other surprises

The glass fell in jagged pieces from the window frame on the first floor of Liberal Party headquarters in South Melbourne. A woman of at least seventy years flashed a conspiratorial and impish grin at me and reached into her handbag for another rock.

She had white hair and a pleasant face and looked like the prototype of all nice old grannies. I did not know her, nor most of the two thousand or so others with whom I had rallied there in a spontaneous and ireful protest.

It was the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1975, the Governor-General had “determined the commission” of an Australian government and a nice old granny had smashed a Liberal window. It was a day of surprises.

The biggest surprise, of course, was the discovery that the Herald headline was genuine. GOVERNOR-GENERAL SACKS GOVT, INSTALLS OPPOSITION, or something equally pithy and preposterous. KERR SACKS WHITLAM, APPOINTS FRASER PM. Ludicrous.

We were a Cortina-full of university students and on the afternoon of 11 November 1975 we had just emerged from one of the few places left in Australia where news cannot penetrate: a three-hour university exam. The Cortina was on its way to the pub, me driving, but the gates were blocked by an old Volkswagen. A wild-faced young woman was hanging out of the car, frantically waving what had to be a phoney headline. “Look what he’s done!” she screamed. “Look what the bastard’s actually gone and done! Look!”

But we were a Cortina-full of university students and we had seen brilliant parodies of the popular press before.

We were also a Cortina-full of Maoists. This meant that, once convinced the news was true, we immediately grasped the enormity of what had transpired. For years we had been warning about the imminent peril of fascist dictatorship in Australia. Now it had finally happened. We were not sure whether to feel worried or triumphantly vindicated.

Accustomed to acting with the speed, unity and determination characteristic of clandestine party cells, drilled in the revolutionary mythology and methodology of ‘underground work’, we went straight to the pub to discuss our next step.

We all knew, of course, that we’d end up in the City Square. I mean, where else? That’s where we rushed when Nixon resumed the bombing of Hanoi in Christmas 1972, our flagpoles presenting a bristling spear-wall to the adrenalin-poisoned police and their terrified horses. That’s where two coppers smashed Bernice’s face into a steel power pole and broke her nose and cheek because she was protesting against the Shah of Iran.

Brackets. SAVAK, the Shah’s CIA-trained secret police, toasted opponents alive, dismembered their infant children, etc. *Close brackets.*

It was to the City Square that we gravitated to do most of our denouncing. We denounced lousy public transport in Melbourne and butchery in Chile and the flooding of Lake Pedder. And the murder of Neil Collingburn and Zionism and colonial massacres in East Africa. And the arrest of Aboriginal leader Fred Fogarty, a demonstration at which I learned that there is a limit to how long a person can chant “Free Fred Fogarty” before it becomes “Fry Fred Friggerty” and “Frig Frod Freggarty”. We denounced the invasion of East Timor and American imperialism and, at small exclusive Maoist demonstrations, we denounced Soviet imperialism.

All of these things richly deserved to be, but were not, the objects of widespread denunciation.

We knew that we’d end up in the City Square. But I am fairly sure that we wanted and expected the *capital P* Party to have a masterplan ready to click into place like a tape clicks into a video recorder.

After all, Maoists were fair dinkum. Chairman Mao taught that revolution was not a dinner party. People die. Errors are made. Errors are made and people die.

“Errors” was a handy word, a piece of sticky tape with which to stick down those unruly, inconvenient bits of history that kept curling up at us.

Like Stalin.

One Thursday at La Trobe University a student stared in disbelief at the posters of Stalin which were among the items we sold at our weekly bookstall.

“Stalin?”, he said. “You actually sell posters of Stalin? But he killed twenty million people.”

I said, “Name twelve”.

That’s how we were when our views were challenged. We had found the answers to the questions young people

ask about the world. Most young people are not so lucky.

And whenever we had doubts, a bit of ideological panel-beating soon hammered them out.

II

Our Party was called the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). You didn't join the CPA (M-L); you were recruited into it when you were deemed ready. And worthy. It was a grave moment, make no mistake.

Secrecy was our operational catchword. This was the fixation and the fetish of the Party's chairman, Ted Hill. "I've been through two Royal Commissions," he once told me, "and they've taught me one very important thing: never put *anything* on paper." There were certainly grounds for vigilance and tight lips.

In 1964 Hill and his supporters formed a party aligned with, indeed mentally welded to, China. To distinguish themselves from the old pro-Russian communist party they called themselves the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). Purity proclaimed in parentheses.

Hill's was the most fiercely revolutionary party in Australia and it carried the endorsement of one of the most romantic figures of the time: Mao Tse-tung. Australian society was awash with radical youth and many of the more impatient, fiery and troubled poured into the CPA (M-L).

It was a funny party in many ways, but one of the funniest things about it was its composition. The grim-faced, devoted and battle-hardened communists of the 1930s and the iconoclastic, angry young teenagers of the 1960s.

It was weirder than Dracula meets the Wolf-Man. It was Bob Dylan meets Jack London, or Che Guevara meets Georgi Dimitrov.

We all had one thing in common though. We loved Chairman Mao.

Ted Hill had stood by Mao's side in Peking's enormous Tien An Men Square and addressed one and a half million Chinese. He brought them greetings from Australian revolutionaries. (That was us.)

We were Maoists. And in November 1975 we were very zealous and very busy.

III

We painted slogans on walls, produced posters (the first batch, done in a rush, called on people to "Fight Facism"), wrote and distributed leaflets. Etc.

I licked little stickers and stuck them up all over the place: telegraph poles, filing cabinets, shop windows, toilet doors. They urged people to form self-defence units in their workplace.

The Party newspaper, Vanguard, published brief and urgent exhortations. One such item went as follows:

NO LIBERALISM

- * Do not use phones unnecessarily
- * No loose talk
- * Be extremely vigilant
- * Step up activity.

It could be argued that this was all rather peculiar, or at least excessive. After all, there *was* going to be an election on 13 December.

But what if Labor won? After the Governor-General, which would be the next card played? We assumed the ruling class had a masterplan. It probably did.

As I have mentioned, we also expected our Party to have a masterplan. It didn't.

From the pub we rang Ted Bull, the wharfies' union secretary and a leader of our party. He wasn't there. Did they know where he was? Someone thought he had led a body of wharfies – to the City Square.

The next step was to ring Duncan Clarke, the editor of Party publications.

Duncan roared joyously, like an American razzamatazz preacher whose performance has reached its climax. "Yes, yes, yes son, I know! Bedlam son, har har har, bedlam! It's all happening."

We wanted specific directives. Where and how did the Party wish us deployed?

More mirthful roaring and a few calls to arms – "draw your swords" and whatnot – and then his voice dropped.

"Listen carefully," he whispered. I listened. "Use your initiative!" he shouted into the telephone, "to horse, to horse!"

Duncan wasn't mad. He just possessed a keen nose for the ridiculous side of any situation. Stalin would have made him a jester. Or had him shot. Or both.

So we used our initiative and, unsurprisingly, it led us to the City Square. There a few less energetic protesters directed us to Government House. An improvised demonstration under improvised leadership was setting off along St Kilda Road, past Honeywell, an American company which made money mutilating people in Vietnam with metal fragments dropped from high in the sky, past the United States Consulate, until we got to Liberal Party headquarters in South Melbourne.

On the way there were more surprises. People on the streets applauded us. A tram driver left his tram on the tracks and joined us. The demonstrators eagerly took up the anti-American chants we, the Maoists, started.

It was shaping up to be a good demo.

IV

After the nice old granny had broken the first window and a few others had followed suit, the police entered the demonstration and began arresting people. Expecting only the customary resistance which precedes acquiescence in such confrontations, we were agreeably surprised to see people resisting the police with conviction.

We were devotees of 'militant struggle'. This was our motto and creed, our attitude and religion. If there's trouble at a demo, *cherchez le Maoist*. In broken heads and broken glass we measured the advance of the Australian revolution. Therefore when others fought the police too, we felt good. It meant the masses were catching up.

There were fierce skirmishes to free those arrested, a see-sawing struggle in which some people were liberated

and more were nabbed. Finally the police started clearing a path through the demonstrators. A paddy wagon filled with arrested people lunged forward, braked, lunged forward again, revved its engines menacingly and finally got clear. Those locked inside the van banged on the windows and walls. The van took off, straining in first gear. It was time for my next surprise.

As the van broke free of the demonstration so did Bill. He ran at it, swinging a big, thick flagpole over his head. (The flag it displayed was suspiciously small. We Maoists were famous for our flagpoles.) There seemed to be a moment of silence as he leapt, a moment in which all eyes were on Bill in mid-air, snarling as he swung the pole at the police van and smashed the flashing blue rooflight into smithereens.

A cheer erupted from the crowd. Bill dropped the pole and began to run like buggery. A flying tackle from a policeman brought him down. Quickly three other policemen joined the first one and they all sat on the struggling Bill.

Then we charged, hitting Bill's assailants like an angry wave, and during the ensuing scrambling, slugging, hairpulling and yelling Bill escaped to a local pub. The workers there provided an enthusiastic audience for his adventure and bought him many beers.

On the defiant march back to the City Square the flagpole which had smashed the police van was thrown through the huge, tempting front window of a bank. I think it was the Commonwealth. "Nationalize the banks!" someone shouted, to distinguish what had happened from vandalism. The windows of Honeywell were also smashed, for the sake of tradition. (Revolutionaries have traditions too.)

There were a few hundred of us left when we reached the City Square. Some speeches were made. The mood was spirited; tired but spirited. I think we passed a motion or something like that, and somehow a Eureka flag flew above the old Regent Theatre which looked down on the City Square.

Paul, one of my comrades from the Cortina, suggested I get up and say something.

"Like what?" I asked.

"Anything," he said, "just get them to come back tomorrow."

So I invented a demonstration that had been organized for 1 p.m. the following day – in the City Square. We had just heard, I announced, that among others the wharfies and builders' laborers would be there tomorrow. This was met with enthusiastic cheering and applause.

Most of those present did return the following day. And so did we, bearing leaflets, banners, flags, a public address system and Paul's coffee table. I made a speech standing on Paul's coffee table in the middle of the City Square. I mentioned things about Sir John Kerr that most Australians still don't know. So electric was the political atmosphere on 12 November that almost three thousand passers-by gathered to listen. The man and woman in the street – literally.

Then this spontaneously formed and, one would imagine, disparate crowd did two surprising things. It voted

overwhelmingly in support of a motion, moved from the floor by a railway worker, to rename our country the Democratic Republic of Australia and adopt the Eureka Flag. And then it marched around the city.

I rushed to the Vanguard office to tell Duncan. I thought the revolution had started. He wasn't so impressed.

The following edition of the right-wing Catholic journal *Newsweekly* had a picture of the event on its front cover. It showed me standing on Paul's coffee table addressing a crowd in the City Square. "I was only nineteen."

V

On 14 November 1975 there were thirty thousand people in and around Melbourne's City Square. The Trades Hall Council had called a half-day stoppage. A smell of expectation and, yes, of outrage rose from the dense and colorful throng and floated up to the top of the Graham Hotel, where police were busily photographing individuals in the crowd.

Among those individuals, almost certainly, were the two mysterious workers Paul and I had encountered the previous day. We were standing on the platform at the Newport Rail Workshops, waiting for the train to bring the workers in. It was cold and foggy. In the half-light of early morning a single carriage emerged from the fog and came to rest at the platform. Paul and I removed our gloves and each took the top leaflet from the bundles we carried. The leaflets were published under the Party's Vanguard bannerhead.

The workers walked past us towards the workshops. Most took a leaflet.

Finally two dark figures approached. They wore long, dark coats. The collars were turned up around their ears and head.

They stopped very close to Paul and myself. One of them said, "What's this?" He took a leaflet and looked at the heading. "Vanguard eh?" There was a note of impatience in his voice, like a man accustomed to making quick decisions. "Give us some for inside."

His companion looked around. The desolate, ugly paddocks and storerooms showed no sign of life. The one who had spoken also looked around furtively, then turned to me, took a wad of leaflets and slipped them inside his coat. Both men shrugged their coats higher around their heads and marched off.

Paul and I still talk about those dark, mysterious workers. They were the stuff of which student revolutionaries' fantasies were made. And they strengthened our misconception that the Party had people planted everywhere.

The diversity of those assembled in Melbourne's City Square on 14 November 1975 was enormous. It spanned a range of nationalities, ages, slogans and apparent social positions unusual in an Australian political gathering. I don't know if those two workers from Newport were there. But I do know that the rally included a short, Greek woman with busy eyes and a quick, impatient tread. She was forty-three years old and my mother.

Apart from being short and Greek my mum has more nervous energy than a carnival of professional fidgets. She is as free of inhibitions as a fish is of feathers. She has more front than a rat with a golden tooth. And, to add one more ingredient to this stew of similes, she fends for and protects her kids like a lioness her cubs. She is an uneducated, indestructible, diminutive titan with a heart full of love. She also has most of the qualities people like to admire.

It is difficult to describe that precise form and intensity of embarrassment which I felt when I heard faintly my mother's voice penetrate the noise of the crowd. Oh no, I thought. What's *she* doing here? And how did she find me? For heaven's sake there are thirty thousand people here, and twenty-eight thousand of them are taller than her!

But find me she had. I stood in a knot of Maoist friends, wielding banners, stoutly-mounted flags and a megaphone. She jostled and shouldered her way through the people until she reached me.

She mopped my brow with tissues from a shopping basket, and then took out an apple, polished it on her cardigan, and tried to jam it into my mouth.

"You look tired," she said.

Earlier that day the workers at her factory had taken up a collection for the Labor Party. Now my mum was attending her first demo. I told her she ought to leave.

"When this rally is over we're going to start another one," I explained. "There will probably be trouble with the police and they will use horses and batons. You might get hurt."

Of course this was the most counterproductive thing I could have said. She now had an almost palpable picture of her son being trampled and clubbed to death. She quickly thrust her arm through mine, clasped it firmly, pulled two thick knitting needles out of her basket and said, brandishing them grimly, "If any policeman touch my son I poke him on the eyes." The needles jabbed upward at her imaginary enemy. She meant it.

My friends were kind about my predicament. Everyone loved my mum. Still, it was very embarrassing.

VI

The rally was a resounding success. I don't think anyone noticed that a few hundred Maoists were virtuously refraining from joining the huge, ringing chant: "We Want Gough", "We Want Gough", "We Want Gough". Etc.

The idea of extending the rally into a march had been disseminated through the crowd. I will never forget the vigor with which people were urged to disperse. Speaker after speaker took the microphone at the centre of the wide, high, banner-draped stage and admonished everyone to go home. Mr Frank Crean, former Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister, did so. Mr Clyde Holding, Victorian Opposition Leader, did so. And Mr John Halfpenny, secretary of the metalworkers' union, did so. Many, indeed most people, drifted off after about twenty minutes.

Ten thousand stayed. These were the people we were interested in.

The crowd turned, almost as if governed by a single

brain, and began to climb the hill. A mad scramble ensued, as all the would-be leaders ran to secure the front of the march.

By the time we reached Parliament House there were enough Maoists near the front to ensure that the crowd rolled up from the footpath and covered the steps. There, standing at the top of Bourke Street, surveying ten thousand people bent on maintaining their rage, puffing to catch their breath after an unseemly and often awkward sprint to reach the front, stood Messrs Crean, Holding and Halfpenny. They were flanked by aides or flunkies or secretaries or whatever it is such men are usually flanked by.

Very quickly the aides realized that the dignitaries had no means of addressing the assembly which stretched out at their feet. Then one of them spotted me.

He pressed his way down the steps, calling out that Frank Crean wanted my megaphone. The way in which he gripped it and turned to leave indicated that he had expected I would happily relinquish the megaphone if doing so meant helping Mr Crean. He was surprised when I held on to the strap.

"Frank Crean needs this megaphone," he repeated impatiently.

"Then he should ask for it: politely."

"Look, will you *please* lend me your megaphone? It's important."

"O.K. But I'm coming with it."

"Whatever you like. Now let's go."

He cleared a path back up the steps and I followed with my megaphone. (A handy device, incidentally. Every practising or aspiring demagogue should have one.)

Frank Crean took the megaphone and spoke. I stood on his left, holding the strap. He looked at me in an annoyed but distracted way. On his right stood Halfpenny and then Holding.

Crean congratulated the increasingly restless crowd on its orderly and responsible behavior and counselled it to avoid doing anything at all which would discredit the protest. After reminding people to vote Labor he handed the megaphone to Mr Halfpenny. Faced with the embarrassing prospect of causing a tangle, I let the strap go.

Halfpenny's approach differed a little from Crean's. He stressed how important it was for everyone to spread the anti-Fraser message. To do so, of course, we had to go back to our homes, our neighborhoods and our places of employment. Immediately. Go now and go quietly, he was saying. (Perhaps Kerr said the same thing to Gough.)

The megaphone then passed to Holding at the end of the row. I stepped across and stood next to him, placing my hand through the strap.

He gave a rousing speech. "We will conclude this magnificent and successful rally in an orderly fashion," he said at the end, "with three cheers for Gough Whitlam." A brilliant move; end the rally decisively and finally, with a bang not a whimper.

My grip tightened on the strap. After calling "Hip Hip!" Holding turned his face slightly towards me and said, threateningly, out of the side of his mouth: "It's over, O.K.?"

"Hip Hip!"

"We're going home."

"Hip Hip!"

"Don't start any fucking trouble."

While the third cheer died down there was a brief, inconspicuous and tense tug of war for the megaphone. Then I said loudly, "Excuse me Mr Holding, this is my megaphone. May I have it back or not?!" He looked around nervously and abdicated his grip with a scowl.

I delivered a pretty good harangue about the need to keep the pressure on. The interests which had hounded and finally unseated Whitlam were telling us that even mild reform would not be permitted. Now we would give them our own message, in the streets. We're fighting back and, like yourselves, we are prepared to go beyond the proper channels. Etc.

The march headed off for the Stock Exchange. At the bottom of the steps my mother waved and hopped about, beaming with maternal pride. It was as if I had won a race or graduated or something like that. She leapt at me and hugged herself to me. "That's my son, that's my son!" She was as proud as could be, exhibiting me to some left-wing Greeks with whom she had fallen in.

And then I met two more surprising people. The first was a Greek man, dark-faced and handsome, who came and stood beside my mother. She had met him in the march and introduced us.

"Perhaps you should not be so happy," he said to my mother. Then, to me, he said in a low voice:

"You are public. They know you; they have you on file. But they don't know me. Be careful. And if ever you need somewhere safe to stay for a while, my home would happily be your sanctuary. You speak well so they will want to get you. Be careful, and remember my offer."

Only later, relating this story, did it occur to me that he hadn't told me where to find his house.

On the way to the Stock Exchange the second surprise came, an unexceptional looking man, appearing to be in his fifties. He approached me and said, "God has given you a gift, the gift of eloquence. Use it well, my friend, and for His purposes. Do not besmirch this gift by employing it to preach doctrines of hate and violence." (By the way, these were really the words he used.)

What could I say?

An election night party was held at a Maoist house on 13 December. I wanted to attend it, but thought the politically correct choice was to spend this ideal occasion for proselytizing with two good friends who supported the ALP.

They were brothers who lived in Lower Templestowe, a dull, debt-ridden, well-kept, philistine suburb in the violently swinging seat of Diamond Valley. They lived with their parents. The father, a self-employed businessman, was a member of the local ALP branch and a very decent bloke. The election result saddened and upset him. His hopes for reform, and therefore his commitment to it, foundered on the obstacle of Mr and Mrs Lower Templestowe.

The landslide conservative victory absolutely stunned my two friends, Bob and Ray. When it was clear what was happening they left the television and ran into the night streets. They screamed indiscriminate abuse at the locals in their houses. They called them morons, cretins and fucking stupid bastards. It was like something out of a Leunig cartoon.

Under the street-lights, they ran up and down the footpaths and roads, railing against the asinine, dirigible stupidity of Mr and Mrs Lower Templestowe. Ray surprised me by screaming out, "All right you rotten, selfish pricks. You wanted fascism; now you're going to get it."

Of course, they didn't get fascism. They simply got a Liberal-Country Party coalition government. The normal government of Australia resumed its place after an unpleasant but probably necessary absence lasting just over three years.

After the election Xavier Herbert said: "I've always known Australians are bastards. Now they've proved it."

I think that the light of angry realization, resistance and purpose which was lit on 11 November 1975 was snuffed out for a generation by what the Australian people did at the election four weeks later. So, in 1985, I agree with Xavier Herbert. But ten years ago I wasn't allowed to. Maoists never blamed the masses for anything.

John Herouim is a Melbourne teacher.

YARRALUMLA FAIRY TALE

It's the little things you remember;
how the tall prince with a face like a grave-digger
hid anxiously in a back room
until the other tall prince
had driven away:
how the fat wizard with a red face and snow-white hair
let the grave-digger in through a padded door.

Then in the big white castle by the lake
a majority of the dwarves were very sad
and plucked their beards in anger
while the others celebrated all night long.

It's a bed-time story we should tell the young.
How for three short years the lost children
had wandered through a freshly painted forest
and begun to learn new things.
How one day they came
to a crumbling royal gingerbread house
where the fat old wizard with a tall black hat
and the sad-faced grave-digger with clay on his feet
baked the children in a two-tiered cake
and gobbled them up
in a trice.

PHILIP NEILSEN

The Son's Story

You see that tree? Yes, that big fellow, the ash tree. There's a fine view if you stand under it and look away, right out to the downs, great walking country. But my Dad, he always sat facing the tree. You'd speak of the view and he'd smile but he didn't bother to look round. Not at least if he was sitting the way I remember him, very straight in the back with his legs crossed and his feet sticking up. I never could do that, though he tried to show me how, but he did, easy, and then he'd go off into whatever it was, and once he was there it was no use trying to talk.

Me, I don't reckon to understand what it's all about. Religion and that, it doesn't touch me, I haven't felt the need of it, not yet anyway, and if I ever did it would be too late wouldn't it! But my Dad, it was lucky that he'd got religion before he needed it, before it was any real use to him as you might say. How? Well, it seems he began to take to it when he was growing up, a first-year medical student. That was why he'd gone to stay with some cousins in Singapore, feeling they knew more about it in those parts. All this was long ago, when the Japs had started winning their war against all expectations. It all happened before people in Singapore had time to think, so to speak, and then the Japs set up those foul camps of theirs for the prisoners who had just never believed it could happen.

By that time my Dad was already kind of deep into some kind of Buddhism; it had been quite the thing for the university kids. My notion was that Dad had fallen for one of his girl cousins, but he wouldn't speak of that, wouldn't want to remember it, even. She had a foul time with those Japs in another camp and died in the end. I think he told Mam about it later, but not me.

Well, he found himself helping the doctor in this big prison camp, kind of medical orderly, getting to know the ropes and a bit about treatment. Now the only way to get anything was to boot-lick the Jap commandant, go through the motions and do anything else strictly behind his back. The doctor was mad to get more medical supplies, he knew the Japs had them, oh yes, the stuff was there all right, but not for the prisoners, who were thought to be the lowest of the low, just because they'd surrendered or someone had surrendered for them. There

were some badly damaged prisoners, burns and that; he told me but I don't recollect the details. But it all sounded real nasty and a lot of pain, most of all in that climate.

Any time there was a minute to spare Dad said he used it for meditation, it made him better able to do the work. But how did you manage it, I asked him. Well, he said, it was better than just being angry, as otherwise you were if you started thinking about what was happening and likely to happen. Or you'd get to making plans that weren't possibly going to come to anything or else crying over what you'd lost. Some of the prisoners thought he was nuts or that he was sucking up to the Japs, for it seemed they let him be, sort of looked at him and passed by instead of yelling and barking at him, the way they did with the other prisoners. It helped a bit when rations were low, he said, you could find yourself able to give away a handful of rice.

It wasn't only rations of course; it was drugs of all sorts. They'd had things to start with, morphia or something of the kind. Pain-killers anyway, for the real bad cases. He used to give the injections and he was in charge of boiling the water. Getting it sterile, see. The camp was full of infections. The latrines, he said – well, you can imagine. Or really, I suppose, you can't. I couldn't myself when he told me, it didn't seem real, didn't seem possible that human beings could make other humans suffer like that. But they did. And it seems they still can. There are all those things you read about in other parts of the world boiled down into a few sentences. So you can forget them quick. That is, if you're somewhere else. But my Dad was there. He'd to clean the latrines and burn dressings – that is if they let him light a fire and burn away the stink. But sometimes there'd be days, he said, when he couldn't get out of it for one minute, to go back to this meditation which gave him strength to go on. If you get too tired, he said, you'd go off past the doors that have to be opened, into total illusion. I'm not sure I follow that, but it seems that was the way he thought of it. But it did strike me that total illusion must be like some kind of a real nasty movie, dirty and frightening, and you knew it couldn't have a nice ending. Poor old Dad.

And then the doctor found out that his drugs were being tampered with, half a bottle taken and then filled

up with dirty water. The lock on the medicine box pulled off. Yes, and some of his instruments stolen. He had a flaming row with the camp commandant and was shot out of hand. There was my Dad kneeling over him and the doctor just muttered look after my patients and then he was dead and the Japs standing round laughing and the commandant looking black murder. My Dad wondered a little if he would be next. But then, he said, the look split and went past him and he left the dead doctor and went back to the patients who had been got into a kind of thatched shelter. Kept the sun off, see. But not much good for the rain, he said.

Well, there was one or two in real bad pain, waiting for the doctor to come back and begging for their injections, asking, crying, for morphia. And the morphia was finished or spoiled. Nothing else in the medicine box. In a while one of the Japs brought in a bottle and said it was morphine, but my Dad thought that was a trick, could see it somehow on the man's face. You know the way the German Nazi doctors, in that same war but the other side of the world, experimented on men and women, yes and small kids, in the concentration camps, saying it was scientific research; I don't know that the Japs ever went to that length, not their style quite. But my Dad didn't trust that bottle, not with the Jap guard grinning the way he did. For a bit, he said, he didn't know how long, he was in total despair and could only hear the patients moaning and crying. One of them was a woman, they'd punished her for something. He didn't know what to do. And then suddenly he did, my old Dad. He filled a syringe with the boiled water and it seemed that as he did it those doors opened – that was the way he put it to me – and he told the patient that now the pain would go and he put his hands onto the poor chap. Well, it seemed that worked extra well, the chap said thanks for the morphine and went off as quiet as a goner. Same with the others, and the woman smiled as she slept. And the Japs were watching.

He did it again, three or four times, to the worst patients, and every time it worked. But he was flat out at the end. For a while, he said, he was in darkness, whatever he meant by that. But he managed just one go of this meditation of his and the Japs went on watching and then he was going to give another of the patients some kind of medicine – I think the poor guy had diabetes or something of the kind – and one of the Japs came to him and took it away, frowning and shaking his head and then put his hand in his jacket pocket and said "Those bad. These true. Promise." And it seems they looked at one another and the Jap said something else, kind of religious the way I account for it, so my Dad believed him.

Well, it seemed that from that time things looked up a bit. The commandant ordered a proper funeral for the doctor, not just a hole in the ground. And they took away the bottles that had been tampered with and even found him a few things that he needed for the patients. The surgical scissors came back, he said. And then one day there were flowers on the top of the medicine box, put together in the correct way, he told me, but when I asked what he meant he couldn't exactly explain. I suppose because it had sounded a bit silly to me: some kind of a pattern.

It went on for a long time, days and days, months and months. Two of the patients died. Others recovered. That woman did; she used to write him a long letter every Christmas – oh for years. New ones got ill and came to him. He lost count. And maybe he didn't want to talk about it. But it seemed that he made quite a success out of most of the patients. It seems, too, that he was able to get more time for his meditation because, instead of laughing and poking him, some of the guards began to help and to take a bit of trouble. They'd speak quiet and nice to the sick ones instead of shouting and hissing, and it seems that one or two began to sit in meditation with him, but a bit behind, and go with him wherever it was he thought he was going.

Soon enough they were right out of medicines, and then some of the Japs began to tell him about local medicines, things that grew in the forest or even on the edge of the paddy fields. And somehow they fixed with the commandant that he could go and get them. A lot of them worked quite well and, what was more, he was able to gather leaves and berries to stew up for camp food; they were short on everything. But he kept on with whatever it was he had done for those first patients who got what wasn't real morphia. Well, he tried to explain it but it never made sense to me. Because pain and what's causing it is real, see? And what he did couldn't have been real. Or not in the same way. He and the Japs might have thought it was, but it couldn't be, could it? You see, he tried to use words to explain it to me twenty years later when I began to ask questions the way kids do. And Mam didn't really understand, only she said it was all true.

Dad never finished his medical course. A pity in a way but maybe he'd have found it hard to stop believing some of the things he did believe, and he'd have had to do that, wouldn't he? Learning real scientific things, they wouldn't have mixed. Instead he became a botanist; he even had a plant called after him, though not what I'd call a pretty one. Mam had a bit of money so it was all right.

But he went on with this meditation lark and sometimes we'd have all sorts of holybodies coming to the house and once it was some Japs and he told me that one of them had been a guard at this prison camp – fancy, him coming and touching Dad's feet – I saw that myself. So there must have been something in it, though what, well, that beats me. But I grew up keen on engineering and I had a bit of luck with jobs, so here I am. In the real world, though Dad wouldn't have looked at it that way.

I suppose I feel a bit the same about the university physicists that I meet sometimes and we get on a treat till they try and take me into their way of thinking, for they're dealing with the same set of objects and movements that I'm dealing with, but in ways that don't seem real in my sense. Any more than Dad's realities that I was always outside of. There we were under the same tree, me looking out at the fine view and my Dad with his back turned to it and looking in at something that can't be real. And yet it seems to have worked in that ghastly old prison camp where nothing else could have. And when Dad died he seemed so sure that everything was all right. So where are we?

DOROTHY HEWETT

Bring Me My Bow

An extract from the forthcoming autobiography Run Through the Hourglass.

I was born a ten-pound, healthy baby in a nursing home in Perth on 21 May 1923. My mother screamed and fought for hours, grabbed the doctor in a vice-like grip and refused to let him go until he delivered me as the dawn broke. My sister was born in the Wickiepin District Hospital two-and-a-half years later during a violent heatwave, five days after Christmas, and had to be removed with forceps. She still has a small scar near her left eye. My mother nearly died and Dessie had to be taken home, a starving sickly baby, to be reared on cow's milk by our grandmother. My mother was never able to feed either of us. She once confessed to me when I was breast-feeding my first baby that she considered the whole thing rather disgusting.

Perth in 1936 was an innocent little city, not much bigger than a large country town, lost in time and distance, floating like a mirage on the banks of the Swan River. We lived in a middle-class, suburban street south of the river, lined with lopped-off plane trees, in a hideous, dark, liver-brick bungalow I immediately called the Castle of Despair. I have never known such misery. School is a nightmare. I stand in the girls' playground, under the pines, watching the other kids play . . . French and English, Fly, Knucklebones, marbles, skipping games, passball . . . I don't know any of them and am too shy and awkward to join in. Many years later I will go back and see my eldest son, a wan, lost little figure, standing under those same pines in the boys' playground, hiding behind the trunks, just as I did, suffering the identical horror of the different child, who doesn't fit in, and long to be transformed by a little bottle labelled "Drink Me" into a twelve-year-old again, so that we can share our terror and our loneliness. But instead I turn and go home knowing there is nothing I can do to help him. At least he never has to suffer being taken out of the "scholarship class" and put in with the "dummies", because he can't do Arithmetic. He gains a doctorate in Pure Mathematics. I get two out of twenty for mental arithmetic, even in the dummies' class.

Every morning my hair is pulled and twisted into two curls with tight rubber bands, and I suck the ends of my hair obsessively. My mother tells a story of a girl who sucked her hair, had to be operated on and a huge hairball removed from her stomach, so I suck my handkerchiefs into holes instead.

I have to wear long, black, narrow college shoes that

pinch my feet unbearably. I have gone barefoot all my life, but the feet that were horny and tough, that could walk over rocks and stubble and hot sand, are now as soft as any townie's. My legs ache with what grown-ups call "growing pains", and when I stick my burning college shoes out into the school aisle the teacher trips over them and I get into trouble. There is a girl who pinches and sticks pen nibs into me, and another girl who has "things" in her hair that crawl out and cross her forehead before my fascinated stare. When it's composition or spelling or dictation, I move up to the top of the class, when it's anything to do with the hated sums I plummet to the bottom, which means I always end up somewhere in the middle, just over the border from the real dummys or those who refuse, out of some wild principle of revolt and despair, to learn anything at all. But Mr Lewis, the miniature teacher with the bright-red face and sandy hair, likes me so I am nicknamed teacher's pet.

There is a vicious fight in the school playground between two girls. One of them is the "bad girl" of the class, with narrow eyes and a twisted mouth. I'm horrified and without thinking I run between them, my face white and my eyes blazing. They are rolling over and over on the gravel, biting, kicking, screaming, pulling out each other's hair. I wrench them apart.

"Stop it, stop it. You should be ashamed," and, miraculously, they stop. The "bad girl" is amazed. She grins crookedly. "What's up with you?" she says, and after that if there is ever any trouble she always defends me.

Malcolm McAulay, tall, rough-looking with a lopsided grin, smiles at me. His father is the local bottle-oh. When I come to school one morning there are signs written in chalk all over the girls' shed . . . MM LOVES DH. I try to rub the chalk off the weatherboard walls, and pretend to despise him, but I watch him with a secret glow, and suffer when he gets the cane.

My mother takes us to dancing lessons with Miss Frizell at the local hall. She is a stringy bottle-blond with knobby knees, in her forties, who dances "The Dying Swan" with her boyfriend, Maurice, a tough in a black beret who pretends to be French. In bobby sox and frilly dresses we do Shirley Temple tap numbers and sing "On The Good Ship Lollypop". My father is ashamed of us and, dimly, I realize why.

I catch everything, measles, whooping cough, pleurisy,

and almost pneumonia. I get paler and skinnier day by day. My mother worries that I am anaemic.

When my grandparents buy a dim, cool house in the dress circle above the golf-links and the river, we shift out of the Castle of Despair, and life starts to improve. "Cathay" has an acre of garden with mulberry, fig and apricot trees. The house, built by a retired Indian civil servant for his bride, and called after the honeymoon ship that brought them to Western Australia, has ceiling fans in every room, blue Axminster mats on polished jarrah floors, a carved teak firescreen with an elephant's head, and a wide front verandah shaped like a ship's deck. There is a little wicket gate at the end of the garden where the Indian civil servant used to sneak out to the pub, after his wife pined away, and he went properly on the booze.

I love "Cathay", but my father is building another house for us on the block opposite. When my sister and I see the size of the land we sit in the low scrub and cry. Exiled from three thousand acres, it seems to us like a prison. But the house goes up with its snub-nosed gables, its plate-glass picture windows, and its circular rose bed in the centre of the lawn.

I dream of having a room of my own but, instead, I sleep in a corner of the sleepout with my sister on one side and my father round the corner in the single iron bedstead he has slept in all our lives. My mother takes the second bedroom and the master bedroom always remains empty. My grandparents shift into "Cathay".

At High School I'm not much happier. I can't do French or Arithmetic, and have to sit in the classroom for a whole week with a sign round my neck because I haven't learnt the French verbs. Miss Bonus, my form mistress, wears hand knitted pale woollen suits, a blonde bun and tortoise-shell framed, round glasses.

Miss Bonus says: "Stand up Dorothy Hewett. Are you a moron when it comes to Maths?" I bite my lips, struggling against tears, but they drip down my face, and she looks ashamed. I love the English lessons. When we do "The Merchant of Venice" I play Shylock, creeping crook-backed down the aisles, reciting "Signior Antonio many a time and oft, on the Rialto you have rated me."

I borrow Miss Bonus' blue, woollen, one piece Seekum bathers to play the Amazonian female lead in the school play. The other teachers seem astounded at the transformation. I hear them discussing me as I dress for the opening night. "What a lovely little figure she's got, and so mature for a thirteen year-old."

I am filling out. I have breasts, a small neat waist and swelling hips. I take off all my clothes and stare at myself in the full-length mirror. There is a soft fuzz growing between my legs, and I don't like the look of it. My grandmother, dressmaking, with her mouth full of pins, says: "She's got a sway back. She needs a little pad in her lower spine."

I've learnt to play French and English, and Fly and Knucklebones, but at lunchtime I often sneak away to the old graveyard behind the school and sit amongst the gravestones writing poetry in my English exercise book. At school assembly we sing "God of our fathers, known of old, Lord of our far-flung battle line, beneath whose



awful hand we hold, dominion over palm and pine" or "Bring me my bow of burning gold". I look up at the names of famous women engraved in gold letters around the Assembly Hall . . . Boadicea, Florence Nightingale, Madame Curie, Queen Elizabeth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and my voice soars out under the stained-glass windows. Some day, I think, with absolute certainty, my name will be up there.

But I still lie in bed at night and cry for the farm. I feel as if I have been turned out of paradise into a dark world beneath.

When the flood waters turn the Swan River brown in winter my father says: "There's the Great Southern running into the Swan," and I wish I could be like Hans Anderson's mermaid, become foam on the flood waters and flow back, dissolving, lost in the creeks of my own country. I wonder if my father is as homesick for the bush as I am. He never says so but seems to have settled for a book and a chair under the standard lamp, or a game of golf at the Royal Perth golf-links.

As my mother passes his bed he grabs at her arm. "Nothing's been any good since we stopped sleeping together." She pulls away. Her face flushes red. "Don't be silly, Tom." My grandmother says: "Men are funny. Always wanting to put you on their knee and kiss you," or "Your grandfather's never touched me since your mother was born. He knew another one would kill me."

Pamphlets on sex instruction are sent through the post for adolescent girls. My mother tries to give them to me but I run away. I won't read them. I feel as if some secret part of me is being violated. She presents me with *The Way of The Eagle* by Ethel M. Dell as some kind of substitute, and I do read the palpitating, hothouse nonsense she calls a love story. I sense some unpleasant prurience in both the sex manuals and Ethel M. Dell. There is some nasty secret here, like the time my mother slapped my face for discovering her douche bag in an old tin trunk.

I have vague friends but I'm not really close to anyone. There is one girl I admire, slender, dark, alive, laughing. She's won an Eisteddfod speech medal. I wish I could really get to know her. She's always playing jokes on the form mistress and getting into trouble and there does seem to be some unspoken underground allegiance between us. Maybe it's because we both love acting and Shakespeare. In my second year at university, when I'm enrolled in Abnormal Psychology, I see her again at Claremont Hospital for the Insane. She sits in front of the students . . . heavy-bodied, empty-faced, dull-eyed, speechless, with her stockings dragging over her institution shoes . . . paraded before us as an example of incurable schizophrenia. She haunts me for a long time after that.

My mother visits the school, worried about my tears in bed at night. "She's not suited to a state school," says Miss Bonus, a snob at heart. "Send her to college where she'll fit in. She's too sensitive. She'll be happier." So I am enrolled in the business course at Perth Ladies College to learn typing, shorthand and book-keeping, in a white middy blouse, a gored navy blue skirt, a panama hat and the black stockings of my dreams.

Perth College is a double-storied, red-brick building with an ivy-covered chapel, a swimming pool and an avenue of pines where the Church of England sisters pace, black habits in winter, grey in summer.

I have a kind of friend called Edith Budge, a poor minister's daughter, who doesn't fit in either, but for different reasons. Typing, shorthand and book-keeping remain a complete mystery to me, so I am moved into the "professional" class. The teacher reads my essay on Titania and Oberon aloud. The classroom rocks with laughter. The following week I write an essay on "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Ever Met" (a theme borrowed from the Reader's Digest). I write about Ann Craig, a tall, leggy, brusque girl, from one of the "old families", destined to be School Captain. I have a secret crush on her, but now it is secret no longer. The class titter and look sideways, but they are beginning to be afraid.

I have a poem published in the school magazine: "A little thorn needle, a little grass thread, for the Queen of the Fairies, will Oberon wed." In the school playground I sit alone, reading a book of poetry, pretending to ignore them. Edith Budge has been left behind in the business course, a cut below these girls who will go on to the Leaving, and even perhaps university.

I have a nickname, "Hermit Hewett", but they know nothing about my secret life—reading Mazo de la Roche's *Jalna* series under the apricot tree at "Cathay", drowning myself in that dark world of Gothic romance, dressing up and parading in a white-spotted tulle evening dress, skintight to the knees with a fishtail flounce, handed on from my second cousin, Marjorie Tindale, and copied from Joan Crawford in "Susan Lennox—her Rise and Fall".

I twirl in the folding mirrored doors of my grandmother's wardrobe seeing myself reflected, image after image, like shots in a movie, twirling tulle, gold-coiled hair, white tulle, tulle, hair, hair, tulle. When my mother is pleased with me she calls me Honeytop. I lie in bed curled up in the sleepout with the striped canvas blind bumping in the wind and make up fabulous stories about my life as a great writer and a famous actress in the capitals of the world.

I write a play called "Han The Chinese Fisherman" and play the male lead in a matinee in the school hall. My father takes me to a meeting of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. We sit in a basement cafe with a mural of ballet dancers painted on the walls, and I listen, breathless with excitement, to these heroes of Australian literature read their works . . . a big, dark, handsome man from Kalgoorlie, called Gavin Casey, who has won the Bulletin short story competition; tall, cool, aristocratic-looking Henrietta Drake-Brockman, who has written a novel about the first settlers, called *Younger Sons*; an old woman called Mollie Skinner who looks like a boobook owl, and has actually written a book with D.H. Lawrence called *The Boy In The Bush*.

My father sits uneasily, silent, proud and still handsome, amongst these gifted paragons. Dimly I realize what a strain it is for him. He knows nobody. He doesn't fit in, but he is putting himself through all this because perhaps, in some strange way, he does believe in me, although he never says a word about it.

Then we have to turn our backs while a sad, saggy-looking man in bi-focals reads his radio play. After it's all over he approaches us as we stand uneasily on the edge of the meeting. "My daughter wants to be a writer," says my father, quickly, in explanation. The saggy man looks at me sadly. "Don't ever let her be a writer," he says. "Nothing in it."

I go out into the night air flushed with indignation. He has spoiled my wonderful evening. I fume all the way across the Narrows Bridge.

"Anyway," I say. "I didn't think much of his radio play."

My father grins.

"And I *am* going to be a writer."

"Righto Nip," he says.

A distant cousin invites me to the annual Hale School dance, but he is embarrassed by my stumbling, my dress and my hairstyle. My grandmother has made me a chaste-looking, puffed-sleeve innocent orange crepe-de-chine. My mother has wound my hair in coils over my ears. They are called "telephones". I look like an awkward spinster schoolmarm at only fifteen. I spend most of the night, dodging being a wallflower, sitting on the toilet, fighting tears, or powdering my nose obsessively over and over in the powder room. But I'm watching and learning. Next year I'll be the belle of the ball in the same "apricot" crepe-de-chine, remodelled with silver lame shoulderstraps, and a silver corselet cinching my waist. Two golden braids will hiss on my bare shoulders as I dance the double chassis and lock, learnt at the Wesley College dancing classes.

My family have built the Regal Theatre, an art deco picture "palace" with a crying room for mothers and babies, double plush seats with no arms between for lovers, a sweeping staircase from foyer to lounge with a huge gilt-edged mirror at the top. Mr Appleby in his grey suit is bowing in the foyer. Mrs Appleby is eternally smiling in the ticket box, the fireman stands guard at the bottom of the stairs, the identical twin usherettes tear the admission tickets in half, and up in the bio-box the operator and his assistant have one eye on the film and one on the blonde woman across the street, with the big tits, undressing, without pulling down the blind.

On silver sandals with baby louis heels I float down the stairs in pale green, ballerina-length crepe-de-chine to see Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in "The Gay Divorcee".

In 1971 I will commemorate this moment in "Bon-Bons and Roses For Dolly" at the Perth Playhouse. The characters will come dancing out of the foyer . . . the Silver Fox with a carnation in his buttonhole, Mary Corker with her black eyes snapping like Yum Yum, Jack Garden, the Black Prince, the pretty sentimental Maddy, Ollie Pullett, the menopausal monster . . . an amalgam of all those school friends of my mother's who would gather for lunch and tell their risqué stories in her South Perth garden.

"All for you," cried Dolly Garden, "you fucked up pricks. All for you, you shitty bastards. You promised me the world and you fucked it up for me, so it's all for you" . . . and she aims her silver revolver straight at their hearts.

The blue rinse set leave in scandalized droves, and the play is taken off in a fortnight.

But that's all spinning in a crystal ball and now we're off to the farm for the September holidays, crawling across the wheatbelt in a shabby country train, through paddocks green with the spring rain, arriving at Malyalling siding, sleepy in the dawn, to be met by Tony Sartori.

His wife Hilda and his sister-in-law Pommy, huge women out of a Drysdale painting, cook boiled meat in the farm kitchen, wash up eternally, and swing the teapot in rhythmic circles round and round above their heads "to make it brew . . ." "When was that . . . that was five years ago on a Fridee in May or was it Saturdee at six o'clock . . . and poor old Mum said . . ."

We still have most of our old furniture stored in the sitting room. We sleep there under "The Stag at Bay" and "The Watcher on the Hill". The sitting room, that sacred place, where we were only allowed to sit on special days, has become a lumber room. It seems like a kind of sacrilege. My mother decides to try again with my sex education. Maybe its the insistent bawling of the bull in the back paddock that turns her mind to it.

"You might as well know what terrible things can happen," she says. "There was a man and a woman stuck together like dogs on the Esplanade, and when they found them in the morning, her insides had come down and trapped him. They had to cut it off."

The orchard well and the well in the stable yard have both gone salty. The orchard, the garden, and most of the trees along the creek-bed are already dead. It has all happened just as my father predicted.

Peter, our clever sheepdog, has been poisoned with a bait left out for the foxes. Strawberry's horn is growing into her head. A kelpie pup is strangled by accident, dangling from a rope at the back of the T-model Ford. Hordes of rabbits leap in front of the truck headlights, squashing and bumping under the tyres.

But when we ride out to help bring in the sheep, our ponies flatten the pink and white paper everlasting under their hoofs, quail and plover rise up in front of us, the new wheat quivers like a green sea to the foot of the rock hill, and we are back in our own country.

Except that it isn't really our country anymore. Everything has changed, and even though Tony Sartori brings out the bottle of Chianti after tea, and pours me my first glass of wine (while my mother frowns) I don't really belong. It's not my farm.

The King of England has abdicated to "marry the woman I love" and become the Duke of Windsor. I thrill to their love story and hate old Stanley Baldwin. There is something called the Spanish War but I don't know much about it. Hitler and Mussolini are giving fascist salutes and bombastic speeches on the Fox Movietone News, but Charlie Chaplin has made a film called "The Great Dictator" and it's obvious that they are just buffoons and nothing much to worry about.

My greatest worry is the Junior Exam. Algebra and Geometry are a torment. I can't remember the theorems, let alone understand them. My French grammar is non-existent, and my accent appalling. I'm always late for

school, dawdling to the tram stop, waving back to the tree on the corner . . . "Goodbye old tree, goodbye", missing the early ferry, panting through the school gates with my pyjama top still on under my school blouse, missing Chapel, and sneaking into the back of the classroom.

My only real happiness is when I call in at "Cathay" on my way home, pushing open the little green iron gate in the picket fence to find my grandmother planting out her "slips" in her motley collection of pots on the kitchen windowsill, or my grandfather pottering underneath the house in his baggy old pants and flannel shirt, the shield slipping on the ulcerated leg he has to bathe every morning in the salt water at Como.

I sit at the player piano and sing "Hustling Hinkler, up in the sky," "That Certain Party," "Tea For Two," and "Velia oh! Velia the witch of the wood, would I not die for you dear if I could." The piano rolls are turning and turning and I pedal for dear life in the blue sitting room.

There is a young silver wattle in the garden that I press myself against, staring up through the flat silver leaves at a faint new moon caught in its branches.

If I stay the night there is a housebrick, covered in flannel, and heated in the stove, to warm my bed.

"Goodnight pet," says my grandfather. "Sleep tight," and his moustache ends, ginger with nicotine, brush my cheek as he kisses me.

Sometimes my grandmother, with her famous tactlessness, puts her foot in it. We are sitting out on the slope of the lawn gazing down at the river.

"And Lesley will get her scholarship," she purrs, "and you'll pass your Junior."

I go home in tears and, of course, that is exactly what happens. Dessie becomes a "scholarship girl" enrolled at Modern School, the high school for "brains", while I just scrape through the Junior with the minimum five subjects (failing Maths and French). Why can't I be clever at everything like my sister, instead of this weird freak who only shines at English Literature?

With the Junior looming, I am taken to see a Christian Science "practitioner" who will have "the right thought" and be paid to pray for me.

I am shocked at this revelation. Is nothing sacred? Can everything be bought and sold in the market place, even the goodwill of God?

Except for the obligatory grace and prayers before bed when we were little, religion has never played much of a part in our lives. We used to recite "Thank you for the world so sweet" etc., and bless all our relatives every night. It used to take a long time because there were so many of them, and you couldn't leave any of them out and hurt their feelings.

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild
Look upon a little child
Pity mice and 'Licity'

I was quite prepared to pity the mice, but who was Licity?

Of course my grandmother was always going on about "God is Love" and "there is no sensation in matter", and now here is Mrs Love, sitting behind her desk rolling in fat with sleepy, heavy-lidded eyes like a female buddha. I gather my courage and my indignation together and start asking questions, "Why does she think she has the right ear of God? Why is she paid to pray? Why can't I pray for myself?" Generations of Protestant dissenters stand at my back. My intellect soars and demolishes her. She is terribly glad to see the back of *me*. My mother looks shocked and slightly amused. I have a feeling she is rather in awe of my cleverness. My father laughs, and Christian Science goes out the window.

In Albany at the end of that year, after reading Lloyd C. Douglas, I imagine I have some kind of transcendental experience. I am walking along the beach alone in the evening, the sand glistening and wet as the tide recedes, when I hear a voice that comes from the sky. I write a poem on the wet sand, given to me like automatic writing, but the surf washes it away, and by the time I get back to the beach house I've forgotten it. Sitting on the end of the jetty staring at the dark water while my father fishes, I feel I am experiencing the mystery of the universe, but after that, until I fall briefly in love with a Catholic who plays "Souvenirs" on his violin, I set my face against all organized religion.

I want to leave school. My mother takes this seriously and has a long private interview with my prospective tutor behind closed doors. The young woman, who needs the money desperately, wisely advises her it would be better for me to learn to mix with my peers.

But it is my father who really talks me out of it . . . my father who has a great respect for education, who went to the Melbourne Workingmen's College at night, and wanted to be a doctor, only there was never any money, and then the war broke out, and nobody had ever heard of a doctor who came off a little dairy farm in Koorong Vale anyway.

"Try it for another year," he says, "and see how you feel," which is just as well, for before another year is out I am the resident eccentric genius of form Vb, and have fallen in love with Lilla Harper and Ken Tregonning.

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MARY ROSE LIVERANI

Portrait of an ABC

(*Australian-born Chinese*)

Irene Chee
is not
what
she ought
to be
which is
Kwong Wai Lin
meaning
Water-Lily
a bloody silly
name for
an ABC
Irene Chee
told me.

So Wai Lin became Irene and that meant all the Chee Chicks from Sydney's Chinatown, Irene and her sisters and near-sisters, (Willie Chee had three families) bore names reeking of damper and corrugated iron, Irene, Lynette, Barbara, Phyllis, Dot and Ollie. The only brother in Third Family slunk off to the Ultimo Boys' brandishing his name, Reggie, like a protective crucifix to ward off the demons of racism, but in the end he took to hiding his sandwiches under his little Dixon Street bed, and hiding himself among the warehouses, out of sight of Mum and Dad.

In her youth, says Irene Chee fretfully, she grovelled. Grovelled and grovelled. She took her mother's food to school, all the little delicacies Australian troops had discovered in Korea and were to demand on their return home, thereby generating the great Chinatown restaurant boom.

She brought her schoolmates home to her mother's table at party after party, and there they are in the family album, beaming like sunflowers, fairer than an Anglo-Saxon fairy tale with cornflower blue eyes and long golden tresses, their princes waiting for them just around the corner.

None of her schoolmates were nasty to Irene. It was, she supposed, perfectly understandable they should want to know how she breathed through her nose.

Irene strokes her nose thoughtfully, remembering this and how she pulled at her nose night after night, trying to alter its shape, while her older sister, Lynette, wrestling with a machine she had bought, tugged at her toffee-colored limbs, trying to stretch them.

"I think I hated what I was," Irene confesses.

Willie Chee died in 1978. Irene was the child of his old age. She tries to remember what he looked like and comes up with "he looked Chinese" adding, after a moment's reflection "you know - he had a round face, a flat nose, darkish, olive skin; he was plump and shortish . . . well, maybe he had a southern Chinese look, unlike the Northern Chinese who are better looking by Western standards."

Irene's mother brings some photographs and we all burst out laughing.

Willie Chee and his three brothers are giving us the glad eye. They are real dudes of the flapper era, the brothers in straw boaters, light grey suits with waistcoats and white shoes, Chinatown's Fred Astaires. Willie the youngest, is sporting a slightly more modern hat, felt, pleated in the crown.

Bachelor Willie is in fact very handsome, and wears the frisky expression of a man who knows it. His face is long and narrow, his dark eyes deliberately compelling, and maybe it's the way his hair is combed but there is a hint of Valentino about him. He was mad about movies, like all the Chees. He even bought a cinema later when he retreated to Hong Kong.

How did he come to end up with three families, one wonders.

Greed, says Irene tersely.

And why did he quit Australia for China in the 1930s, even after the Japanese had invaded Manchuria. Irene shrugs. She doesn't know. They never talked about any of these things. Who's interested in the past, anyway, she demands impatiently. There's enough to worry about in the present. But what about Confucius? Venerating the old. Right. You venerate the old by not bugging them with questions.

Irene is not impressed by the quiet exhortation graven on the archway over the Dixon Street Mall: "Continue the Past into the Future," Heaven forbid! she says between clenched jaws.

As for Maxine Hong Kingston, that ABC who wrote about Chinese in America, she's not a real Chinese Chinese. All that prying into her family's past, all that curiosity. She may *look* Chinese but she's powered by an American engine. And so far as Irene knows, all that lyrical prose - it's not Chinese style.

Reg, in his forties and older than Irene, was born in

Hong Kong and knows why Willie Chee, an ABC, went home to a place he had never known. Leaning forward, Reg lowers his voice to enquire confidentially, "Have you ever heard of the White Australia Policy?"

Before the Chinese communist revolution you see, no Chinese coming to Australia ever thought of staying here. Reg shakes his head vigorously. No, not one. They knew Australians didn't like them. But the standard of living in China was so low, and the standard here so high – Dad said – all you need is £2000 and you can go back to China and live well. And they did.

Dad got a cinema. And somehow over a period of fifteen years he acquired two more families. It was the Era of Prosperity until Japanese troops reached Hong Kong. The cinema, projecting its dreams of an Australian-inspired future, was commandeered by the invaders, and the Chees did their own long march to a relative's village on the mainland, where one of the children eventually succumbed to starvation.

Then back again they trekked to Hong Kong when the war ended, leaving the Nationalists and Communists on the mainland fighting it out. They were crushingly poor in Hong Kong, all of them squeezed into a room a quarter the size of Reg's suburban living room in Kingsford, a Sydney suburb. When the Australian government offered Australian citizens, Willie Chee among them, transport to Australia in a pocket battleship the size of the Manly Ferry, Willie went.

This time there would be no going back, no more opportunities for going home to live on earnings made abroad.

At the quay, the government, to Willie's amazement, gave him £20 to start him off, and he followed the old route to Chinatown, to the markets. Now in his fifties, thicker and more jowly but still perky looking, he decided to put his faith in tomatoes and became "Willie Chee, the Tomato King", a title that produces grimaces in Irene.

For two years he worked fifteen hours a day, sending money back to Hong Kong and saving to furnish the house at 47 Dixon Street where, in 1949, about a year after the older Chees and their mother reached Sydney, Irene Chee was born.

Willie Chee had never said anything to his son Reg about the White Australia Policy. Not in Hong Kong and never in Australia. "Oh if he had, if I had known what it would be like," says Reg, his cheeks flushing, "I wouldn't have come. Not for anything. Was I born just to be insulted and humiliated?"

Reg didn't discuss the insults with his father. Never told his mother of his hurts or shared them with his older sisters.

"Chinese are very private people," says Irene haughtily.

Reg is a gentle person. His voice is softer than Irene's, the contours of his face more relaxed. He was never driven by his father's demon. "Getting up at 3 o'clock every morning – I hated it," he bursts out. "Every night I dreaded going to bed at 6.30 when other people were just starting to enjoy themselves, watch TV or go out. I used to

think about it in the day when I was grading the tomatoes. Going to bed at 6.30!"

So, when Willie Chee's unrelenting drive to house himself and his family was suddenly terminated by a series of strokes, Reg could not hold the tomato business together. He lacked the will. His father lamented. Only a few more years and they would be rich.

"Course he could've got rich years before if he had gone into gambling," Irene comments. "He had the offer." She's not sure why her father chose instead to slave at the tomatoes.

"Maybe he was honorable," she ponders, "or – just chicken."

Irene isn't chicken. Well, not since she gave up groveling at school. Course she was studying too, studying and grovelling. When Willie and Reg were rising at 3 o'clock to go to the markets, Irene was still up frowning over her books, fortifying herself with a bowl of noodles.

Mrs Chee felt sorry for her youngest daughter. She worked so hard for so many years. But what else can you do? If you're born to poor parents you're poor. It's not fair or unfair, just tough. For a girl the best thing to do is marry a rich man.

"Look at Irene," she says, pointing at her daughter. "If she hadn't married a rich man she would have to work. Even with all that she's done."

"What is it you do, dear?" the old lady keeps asking her daughter.

She understands what it means to be dux of the school, but postgraduate law studies at Harvard are outside her experience. The Anti-Discrimination Board where Irene works is something she cannot imagine. Injustices are after all, part of nature. What can governments do about them? That her daughter should have married a rich man and yet work herself to near exhaustion, conciliating complaints about discrimination, is a mystery to her.

But the Chees are proud of Irene. Her success both cheers and reproaches them. Living in their solid suburban houses with their small families (if I lived again I would only have two children, says old Mrs Chee fervently) working in ordinary jobs – Reg is a storeman – owing no one anything, they feel themselves failures. They are horrified by the thought that Irene should be prepared to talk about them and about growing up in Dixon Street.

"We're nothing," they tell her. "Nobody needs to know about us. People only want to read about successes."

It's all right for Irene. She's good at everything. She can even speak Chinese, unlike most ABCs. She has had schooling. Her English is perfect.

Irene in fact speaks with a broad Australian accent and swears like a wharfie. She leads with her pointed chin when she's mad, which is often. Hoes into you with her Western logic when she's arguing a point. Hoots with loud laughter when she's amused, which is most of the time she isn't furious. Buys takeaways because she's not interested in cooking.

"Hah," she says, stabbing at her restaurant noodles, "to tell you the truth, I feel more Chinese than Australian."

That's hard to believe.

"Well, I can't change the way I look, can I?"

It was at Harvard, where she and her Caucasian husband went as post-graduate scholars, that Irene was publicly acknowledged to be Australian. Fellow students sought her out the day after Gough Whitlam was removed from office. "Hey, tell us about your crazy Australian constitution," they urged her.

Nobody sought her out at Sydney University. Being small, Chinese, female and from the Western suburbs she could hardly have been more invisible. "It was a real culture shock." Class and race crystallized as concepts there. Not that she was miserable. She hung about with other Asians. At least she was past grovelling. Harvard, however, gave her a confidence that has never failed her. She competed with the best and did well. She made good friends. Students at Harvard didn't turn up in phalanxes from private schools, their friendships already foreigner-proof. Everyone at Harvard was actively looking for friends, and Irene's natural ebullience and quick wit made her popular – without grovelling. Among her new friends were some of America's most active feminists.

"Feminism was in the air and in the water supply," she says. "You couldn't get away from it." Not that she wanted to.

She came back to Australia pretty steely-jawed, two little dents of determination on each side of her chin. Her dark eyes, behind the ubiquitous Chinese glasses, are never still. She lacks totally that pillow-soft docility observable in her older sisters and her mother, generating instead a prickly energy and impatience to get things done, and a willingness to do battle till they are.

Down in Dixon Street she stands in front of number 47, glaring disapprovingly. "That's where I grew up. Look at it, will you – a bloody fun parlor."

She dismisses it all, the mall, the imitation pagodas in Chinese red and Berger green, the slick takeaways. Kitsch. Everybody in Chinatown is an expert on Chinese culture, her brother Reg had commented ironically, though the nearest some of them have been to China is Fiji.

An old man suddenly appears in the doorway next to number 47 and Irene's eyes light up. "That's how it was. Like him." The old man is dressed in an old-fashioned black smock over blue trousers. Black, blue and grey used to be the colors of Chinatown, and there were as many old men as there are tiles in the mall today.

Irene remembers them with affection and sadness. Where had they all come from? They had no one but each other for company and would pass the time, smoking and gossiping, after their work for Willie Chee was over. When Irene climbed the stairs on her way to the rooftop to play they would tell her stories and chafe her affectionately, except when she stuffed their pipes with dirt or dumped water on them from above. Then they would screech at her and flap her away.

"Nobody had ever heard of child molesters in those days," Irene reflects. "My friends and I could go anywhere in Chinatown quite safely."

Sometimes she and her friends took breadcrumbs soaked in rum to Central Park to feed the pigeons, stalk-

ing them till they were groggy enough to scoop into bags and sell to restaurants.

Irene's friend from birth, Susie Pang, is standing, arms folded, in the half-open doorway of the residence attached to her family's restaurant. Susie is an ABC too. Went to Fort Street School. Irene mentions this more than once. If only her father hadn't been so anxious to move up in the world and shunted her out to Belmore, she would have gone to Fort Street too.

Come to think of it, Dad was a bit of a groveller. Very bluff and congenial. Always inviting people – Caucasians – home to eat. "Everybody come round to my place." Mrs Chee, whom her husband addressed as "serving woman," used to grumble about the work it gave her. "You think more about outsiders than you do your own family," she would complain to Willie.

But Mrs Chee's advice to all young women is: support your husbands. If they aren't rich, work for them. Give them all your support.

Susie Pang, who has caught Irene's eye and is welcoming her over, has decided not to marry. So her mother informs Irene later when we go upstairs for a cup of tea. Getting a husband is no very big problem for an ABC. It's like buying a car. You get what you pay for.

"They had a lot of cooks lined up for her," Irene mutters.

Susie is a very easy-going person with a sweet smile and pleasant voice, a little less plump than she seems in Irene's childhood photos. As we enter the ground floor of the residence, Irene whispers: this is how number 47 was before it became a fun parlor.

Inside, in the dim light, the floor seems to be stone, buffed to a high dark gloss by the passage of countless feet for over half a century. Two little girls and a boy tease each other among the stores, imported from China and Hong Kong and piled up the walls in cardboard boxes. At the back of this ground-floor entry, steep wooden stairs lead to the living quarters on the first floor.

Each step has a clearly marked depression in the middle, scooped away by thousands of ascending and descending feet. Susie's mother and a friend are watching a Chinese soap opera on video. The room they are in is spacious, partly because it is sparsely furnished, and cool. Behind a partition at our backs, a low conversation in English is going on. More ABCs who can't speak Chinese. Irene and the Pangs swap news.

Susie's brother-in-law is working in a bank. Irene had thought he was teaching. He was. Out at Matraville. Suzy chuckles. The kids gave him hell. Irene joins in the laughter. Oh well. Teaching's hard these days. Irene tells Mrs Pang it's time she invited Mrs Chee to visit her. It would do Mum good. They could play mahjong.

Our last stop is at the new Institute of Technology, raised behind the brick and stone facade of the old vegetable market. Irene is no admirer of Edwardian blood-and-bandages architecture. She wants to show me the lettering peeling from one of the old arches Sydney is so enamored of.

"A. Moss," she reads aloud. Alfred Moss. Dad used to think he was a bit of a shrewdie, she informs me with a grin. "Geez, he was successful though. He's me father-in-law."

She never knew Alfred Moss as a child, or knew of her father's dealings with him, but she met his son by chance at law school, and to the surprise of both families they got married.

It was a surprise to Irene, herself, when Reg later disclosed that Joshua Moss, Alfred's father, had helped Willie Chee to get started when he came back to Sydney from Hong Kong.

"I never knew that," she says wonderingly. "Hell, I know so little about the past. But it's kind of interesting,

after all. Maybe we could dig into it a bit more."

Now I'm amazed. "Pry, you mean? Exhibit curiosity about the old folks?"

I voice the opinion that Irene might not be Chinese Chinese after all, that she's powered by an Australian engine.

Her eyes take on a feral glint behind her glasses and her chin thrusts forward, marked by the two little dents of determination. "D'ya reckon?"

THE EDGE

The shortest days of the year
die bitterly.

At night now
you hear yourself in
the wind-torn darkness,
a long howl
against better-or-for-worse.

My dream is
a season ticket to New York
to live in a language
no one knows
in coldwater flats with arctic winds
up the backstairs
until one day
the Enlightened One
will appear
bearing
the quiet of the woods.

"Do you ever seriously
think of our future?"

We back further
into the same essentials.

I move amongst newspapers folded,
lifeless dolls
and silent guns —
the empty heart.

Can you dance amongst this?
my bookish silence,
weedflowers in our garden?

I wait for you in ashlight
as the fire dies.

My old meat is
on the lookout,
its beak
like the nose of
a panel-beaten jalopy
reconnoitres the night.

ANDREW BURKE

SHIVA DANCING

An excerpt from part 3 of the Shiva poems, a work in progress.

Lord Shiva dancing, sang a song
of hearty tyranny:

“My voice rolls out in thunder claps
a thousand bolts cut zig-zag paths
for my far-seeing, forked the
lightning of my weapon’s flash
my tongue a breaking wave . . .

I grind the earth – it rocks.
I rend the earth – it quakes.
Firm as the earth’s axis is
my high-arched foot –

it tumbles the mountain buffalo
pounds burial grounds
topples garden coconuts splits
figs and mangoes phat!
like peas –

Such childish rages!
*Ah, they said, but children only
curl their lotus toes and stamp unseasoned
lie and sprawl exhausted. Shiva knows
what secrets curve a foot
the weight the measure
height and depth of planting.
Let him sing out his season:*

“I land like a vulture on rocks
in the sea, burnished in sunlight,
My eye sinks the sun, the moon
the hooded snake my eye-lid,
cobra-smiling mouth. My slinking
tiger-shadow lurks, my mount
a gravid elephant . . .”

New shapes for old! New shapes for old!

“Like dreaming moon in water or
mirage on a wide spring plain
nothing is changeless

Going I stay
Staying I go

My anklets clash I
raise and curve my left haunch
high higher higher
above the
rooted
foot
and ever round
the fiery wheel
turning turning
turning”

Dusky powdered human forms
flit shadow-black, blue sapphire
faceted in fitful spurts
candleflame

Smoking censurs swinging golden
chains linking tiny tinkling bells
surging swinging silken saris
jewels sandalwood sheen of
musk-oiled hair merging in
light stone

silence

FAY ZWICKY

WIND & DISAPPEARING

1

return, the bay.

as a boy
time was adventure, time was the sun,
wandering the beach exultant in foam,
waves cool around legs
shaping sand. shells,
delicate hearing horns,
telephones from the sea.
the gazing boy:
clouds,
acrobats in the sky arena,
sea dances, rays.

2

tonight the man
slumps against a hotel window.
rain slugs the glass.
strewn lights huddle by the headland.
fishermen their muscles broad in flannelette,
laugh & grumble at the bar.

twenty years, a man returns.
i drive, live on my own;
my jaw is stubborn with beard.
the boy would be proud
to command such things.

in the rowdy pub
i want to tell him
the history of his son.

the curtain rattles, a gust
thrashes the pane.

he is gone.
my hand holds beer.

3

the tidy bedroom smells.
public disinfectant pervades.
whoever slept in these sheets
has been washed, rinsed, dried.
i stare at my reflection,
cheeks of rain. i call,
cup memory like a warm breath,
a shell murmuring waves, to solitude.
two women blend with my face,
dim.

my face,
moon in a black frame.

4

in a phone booth
thru static wires
i find death.
my mother crying, her sister.
from the hotel room staring,
the moon torn on the windy bay,
i think how as a boy
shock would have grieved me,
bewildered me like the sea's betrayal:
blue waves blackened, the bullying storm.
thinking how the man grieves:
for lovers,
for those that disappear;
lights blown over,
extinguished by squalls.

death
& wind
& the eyes of a boy

BILL FEWER

A GREEN EVENING

a million miles away from Lorca's
verde que te quiero verde,
quietly moving their
grass colored backs
as if a slight
wind were ruffling
the feathery lawn,
three metres from the
bmx track where a few
late keen under-tens
go round,
two
red-rumped
grass parrot
couples
celebrate
the evening
with what the
day's sun
has brought them:
fresh
ripe
seeds of the soft-lime grass,
lifting, from time to time,
innocent
green
juice-stained beaks
to look around,
calm
in their use
of a verdant world

J.S. HARRY

NO TRENDIES

just a Besser Block pub
no pretensions
no frills
& no bullshit
built thirty years back
by blokes with crew cuts
square necks & Brylcream
smack in the guts of
north-western suburbs
old bodgies
still drink there
minus the Brylcream

their kids drink there too
no car salesmen
no secretaries
no trendies
they talk pipe dreams of
a Moomba job
take trips & speed
from a barstool
reckon rent relief's more
regular than the girlfriend
& confuse her with
Judy
Debbie
Sue
Dianne
Carol
tattooed down one arm
love & hate knuckled down
& just a wrong blink
can drive a hammer
home.

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

SELECTION

From "The Auschwitz Poems"

He leapt through
the line
like

a
sharp angled
soloist

a
mad
dancer

a
principal
in a private ballet

before
he'd pinched
and pinched
his cheeks

so
they sat
like red moons
in a grey sky

armed
against
accidents

he'd emptied
himself

of
the typhoid
that dripped
from his bowels

he hurtled himself
so high
his bones

looked
like
they might

burst through
and
puncture
the performance

right
said
Mengele

and
he knew
he was
all right

LILY BRETT

A TINCTURE OF BUDAPEST

I have lived for thirty years
with a tincture of Budapest,
the reddish hills of Buda, whose long bridges
filled squares with the living, then with the dead,
the burning factories caught in the water,
the brown bodies held fast

in their skin, in a photograph
of almost winter. I learned Csépel,
Kilian, to set beside Kossuth,
and saw the plumbing of war stretched across
Petöfi Square, Bem Square, Republic Square,
with the gun barrels burnt at their corners.

I learned the unconscious of maps
in those photos; their waters broke in my dreams
of a city wound on to a river
like a great fabric on a spool. I learned Győr,
Pecs, the call signs of free radios,
I learned borders, entries and exits.

I learned that no killings give me pleasure;
the AVO grouped by the wall for execution
lean together, their eyes squeezed so thin
it looks as if the wind blows their faces.
Next they are seen sprawling on the ground.
Next, it is said, laughing at café tables.

The camera is deadlier than the gun.
The freedom fighters in their long thin coats and armbands
fell too. They lay crushed like flags
on the buckled tram lines. Their time will drench them
and the text books will make them faint and drab,
and only the poet as historian will discern them.

And yet how useless poets are, how feeble
their anecdotes and promises.
History leaves them staring resentfully
at cities they'd farewelled, now long rebuilt.
If they are needed it's only as a town
needs bells; or as a bell needs echoes.

It's just that each of us has a lost language,
to be cherished and built back,
piece by piece, into the mind.
Like Cornish. Kernow. Whose very name
became its myth, so that it can't be spoken
without a spine chill. Mine is Hungary.,.

VINCENT BUCKLEY

MARY DURACK

Barunga – Man Of Two Worlds

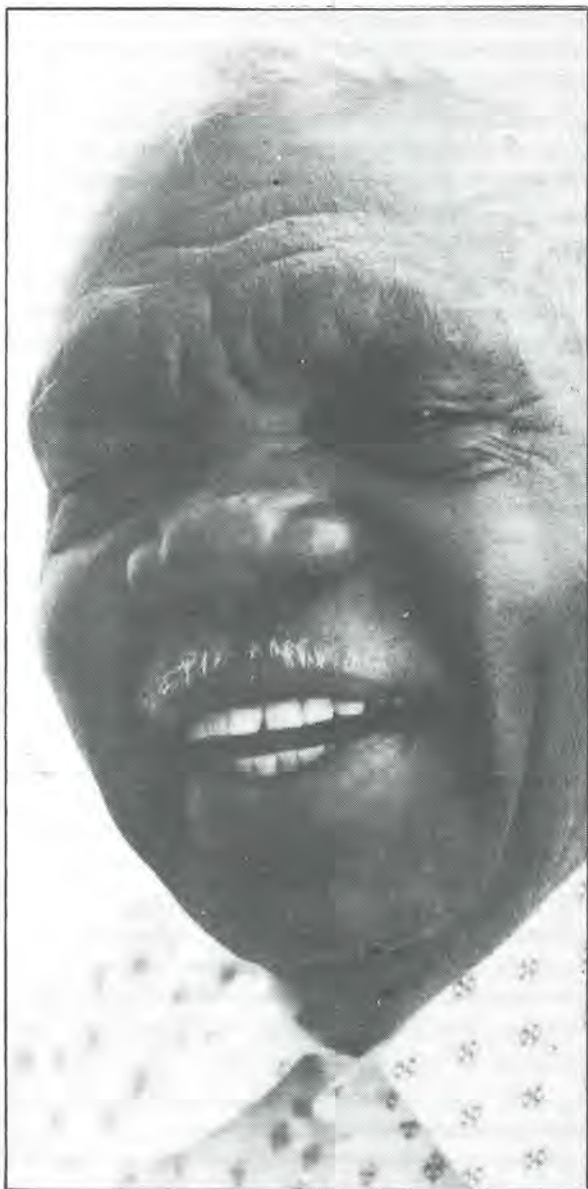
Much has been written of the Aboriginals from an anthropological point of view and they have also figured as characters in a good deal of Australian fiction. Too few, however, have been remembered, except in passing references, as individuals of outstanding character and historical significance.

I regret not having recorded more fully the life stories of a number I have known and with whom I shared a 'tribal relationship' which extended throughout the Kimberley district and beyond. It was this wide-ranging kinship, or extended family system, that bestowed on me a beloved 'nephew' with whom I was to be associated in outback and city situations for a number of years. This man was Albert Barunga.

He was a member of the Worora tribe, one of three major groups of the far north-west of the Kimberley district that were brought together by a Presbyterian missionary body in 1912 – a complicated story that has been recorded by the Rev. J.R.B. Love in his *Stone-age Bushmen of Today* (London, 1936) and by Maisie McKenzie in *The Road to Mowanjum* (Sydney, 1969).

By the time I first encountered these people in the early 1960s they had moved in several successive stages from the Prince Regent River area to within a few miles of Derby where they hoped, while retaining certain basic elements of their own culture, to obtain jobs and education for their children in the 'white-man's world'. This, in fact, with the help of understanding and practical missionary friends, they succeeded in doing to an extent that could hardly fail to impress the most sceptical of visitors. The inhabitants of this 'Mowanjum' community were a friendly and outgoing people, many of whom had obtained paid jobs in Derby, or as stockmen on their own and other properties. Most of the adults had been educated in the mission school before coming to Derby. The men's skills included not only stock and other station work, but saddlery, gardening and artwork in the Aboriginal tradition. The women were adept at sewing, cooking, household management, and a few were employed as teaching and nursing assistants at the Derby State School and Hospital.

Albert Barunga, unlike most of his community, had had no formal schooling, but had learned more than an aver-



age boy in the school of life. This was due to circumstances that he often recalled with a mixture of regret and philosophic satisfaction. While so many of his people had been making friendly association with the white missionaries, his own family's contact with the invading culture had been of a decidedly discouraging nature. Sometime during World War I, when Albert was about nine years old, his family was confronted by a contingent of police in search of an alleged murderer and his father, unable to answer their questions, was led away in chains. Eventually found innocent of this charge, he was released and returned to his people, but Albert attributed his death soon afterwards as being due to the shock of this experience.

Albert and his family had been in touch for some time with a sympathetic half-caste named Willie Reid, who had somehow acquired a lugger of his own and was combing the beaches for pearl and turtle shell which he sold in the pearling port of Broom. Willie agreed to take Albert and his Mother to join her brother, "Big Charlie", on an outlying island. Albert had known and admired Willie for as long as he could remember and, by the time they reached their destination, it had been agreed between them that the boy's mother should remain on the island with her brother while Albert embarked on a life of adventure as Willie's 'crew-man' and adopted son.

During the next few years he came to know every feature of that confusing and perilous cyclonic coast. He had many hair-raising experiences and learned much from Willie about the handling of a lugger and had found his company unfailingly entertaining and educational. For all his outstanding and lovable qualities however, Willie was a half-caste and as such, unable to obtain either the whiteman's permission to employ Aboriginal labor or the approval of the Worora elders for keeping Albert away from his tribal country. Therefore, whenever putting into port to dispose of his shell and obtain provisions, Willie was obliged to leave Albert on some uninhabited island. Albert accepted the situation cheerfully enough. He knew he could live on seafood indefinitely, but was sometimes worried lest his supply of fresh water should give out before his mate showed up again.

This never happened, but the boy was discovered at last by a group of Aborigines who took him to Kunmunya mission on his tribal territory. Albert, then too old to attend school with 'the little fellas', was, as he often told me, tempted to "clear out" and rejoin Willie Reid, but was warned that this would bring trouble on his friend from both whiteman and black.

Before long he learned to ride and handle cattle and was able, when required, to act as engineer on the mission lugger. During this time he came to honor and respect the Rev. J.R.B. Love, then in charge of the Kunmunya Mission, who had studied the local languages and in 1929 embarked on a translation of the Gospel of St Mark into the Worora tongue. Albert, who although illiterate was extremely articulate, was one of the Aborigines engaged with him in this project.

In that same year Albert was involved in the search for Kingsford Smith and his three crew members of the

Southern Cross known to have come down somewhere on that uninhabited coast. A small party, of which Albert was in charge, was the first to locate the missing aircraft and, while his companions returned to the mission to convey the news, he remained with the airmen and cheered them over five anxious days. During this time food parcels, petrol supplies and equipment to repair the damaged plane were dropped to them, and when the Southern Cross took off at last, Albert had established a warm friendship with 'Smithy' and his crew.

In 1942 the mission lugger *Watt Leggatt* was commandeered by the Navy to patrol the coast for possible enemy activity, and Albert was engaged as their guide. He proved so competent in this capacity that, as the war progressed, he was asked to work with an American construction unit, and later to join the crew of an American Liberty ship. Typically he developed a great liking for Americans and would greet them with friendly enthusiasm whenever he encountered them.

It would be impossible in a short account to explain the various circumstances of our association. By the time of our first meeting at Mowanjum over twenty years ago, he was accepted as the leading loreman, and because of his remarkable powers of communication, the main spokesman for his people, this led to his being associated with many projects including those involving anthropological research. In the late 'sixties he was chosen to represent his people on an Adult Education tour of New Zealand, an experience from which he returned with mixed feelings of elation and sadness. Visiting me in Perth on his way back to Derby he spoke of the survival of so much of the Maori culture and of its acceptance by all sections of the population as an important part of local life. Why should this not be so of at least some aspects of the fast disappearing Aboriginal culture in Australia? He told me that he had often discussed this with the last keepers of the lore who had told him he should accept the fact that the 'dreamtime' was finished and that, like it or not, their young people had no option than to go "altogether whiteman way". "Now", he told me, "I see we are going to be no more Aboriginal, can't never be European - only *nothing people*. I go back and tell them old fellas how Maori people keep their culture and everyone satisfied!"

Not long after this I was asked by Dr H.C. (Nugget) Coombs whether I agreed that the Aborigines should be encouraged to retain their pride of race by maintaining at least some elements of their own culture. With Albert's voice still ringing in my ears I agreed wholeheartedly and, early in 1970, a group gathered in Darwin and, under the chairmanship of Justice Richard Blackburn, established what was to become the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation. This organisation, of which Albert was an enthusiastic founding member, is now administered by a completely Aboriginal committee. It has flourished over the years and its representatives perform not only throughout Australia, but to appreciative audiences in the United States and more recently, at the Paris Museum of Modern Art.

In 1974, Nancy Keesing, then chairman of the Literary Board of the Australia Council, and anxious to encourage Aboriginals to record their legends and life stories, organised a seminar in Darwin for this purpose. The group of some fifteen Aboriginals and seven Australian writers inevitably included Albert and other members of his community. This occasion was to result in the publication of several books and the production of a number of tape-recorded reminiscences, though too little of Albert himself, who was more interested in encouraging others in this project than in systematically recording his own experiences.

Albert was at home in both worlds, whether hunting and camping with his old people in the bush, or flying off with white friends to the crowded cities where he appeared quite at ease in heavy traffic and modern hotels.

Fortunately he is clearly recalled by his surviving associates and much of the message he left us was of understanding and comradeship between white man and Aboriginal.

As I wrote at the time of his death in September 1977:

“Derby Funeral draws Big Crowd”
the headlines said.
Why did so many gather on that day?
Who was this man, Barunga? How old?
What did he say?
What influence did he hold?

People who knew Barunga
still see the steady tracks
of a straight man walking,
hear the quiet voice
of a true man talking.

“White man got one world try to understand.
Blackman got two.
Living more difficult today, my people—
More hard to see what way true.
Our way go back long time—long time ago,
When spirit ancestors make dreamtime lore
Not easy these days keep it like before.
Whiteman way different—
don’t have much relation
to blackfellow thinking.
He got big words like ‘progress’, ‘education’.
He say that dreamtime people gone to sleep.
Got to wake up and find another track—
No good look back.

I say two people got to be like brother
Go arm-in-arm or don’t get anywhere.
Talk quiet and kind each other
Talk about country, seasons and the weather.
Make joke and laugh together.”

Always he spoke of loving, laughing, giving.
And while we remember his voice
Barunga is living.

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books

The Practical Christian

Don Watson

D.W.A. Baker: *Days of Wrath. A Life of John Dunmore Lang* (Melbourne University Press, \$35.00).

When John Dunmore Lang was born there was scarcely a Catholic in Clydeside. Twenty years later Catholics comprised ten per cent of the population and a pro-Cathedral seating 2,200, the largest church in town, stood resplendently in Clyde Street. This invasion of his home town by poor, uneducated Irish Catholics, all of them competing with the Scots for employment, made Lang twice the bigot he might have been, albeit one who supported Catholic emancipation.

In those same twenty years from 1799 Lang witnessed the introduction of steam navigation on the Clyde, gas lighting and railway trains. He sailed for New South Wales in 1822 on a ship no bigger than a Sydney ferry and the voyage took seven months. On his eighth and penultimate voyage in 1861 he took a steamship to Suez, a train from there to Alexandria and another steamer to Southampton, arriving less than sixty days after leaving Sydney.

John Dunmore Lang was a great believer in science and progress, and of course, a great believer in Scripture and Providence. This, no doubt, was why he was no believer in Irish Catholics or the rights of emancipists in colonial society – the Lord's judgement was manifest in the former's backwardness and the latter's fall.

Lang believed that prophecy was being fulfilled: in his own lifetime all the world's heathen would be preached to (and with a dozen more like him they might have been), the preachings despised and there would follow the second coming and the day of judgement at which the Godly would be saved and the rest would suffer eternal torment. He seems also to have believed in pre-destination: that God had said to Isaiah, "My counsel shall stand and I will do my pleasure." But how Lang and his Calvinist colleagues reconciled this with the evangelical calling, let alone with Jesus Christ, is beyond this writer and, I suspect, Lang's biographer, if not Lang himself. The same question, after all, worried Ignatius Loyola, who warned his Jesuit missionaries that they should not "make a habit of talking about predestination," for fear of releasing a tide of resignation and despair among the flock. Scripture, of

course, contains apparent contradictions. Pelagius and Augustine were at odds about the issue. Calvin was never as clear as he might have been; and Cromwell resolved the confusion with his own version of the exhortation "Do it!"

Ultimately this was Lang's way too. He was a man of action. At Glasgow University he learnt from the Professor of Divinity that the end was nigh and that the elect were few. But he learnt also that to do good was to prepare for the blessed state. He learnt, in other words, "practical Christianity". The expanded version of this creed is "As a nation is Christian so will it prosper," or "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord build the city, the watchman waketh but in vain . . ." In Australia the Calvinists built various houses, including Collins House; John Dunmore Lang was interested in building a nation as the House of God.

Believing that he answered only to God, Lang feared no mortal. Believing in Providence and that he was almost certainly one of the elect, he was rarely afraid of God's creations and never of mankind's. He made nine voyages to England and several shorter ones, often in ships with dispiriting leaks and drunken captains. He travelled all over the colonies on foot, on horseback and in buggies. Never once, we gather, did he ask a driver to slow down. Lang combined the states of grace and perpetual motion with ridiculous ease.

In a society where vice abounded, where nearly everyone had a record, where concubinage and drunkenness were only two of the classic Old Testament sins being practised, John Dunmore Lang flourished. He could readily believe himself to be St Paul in the Antipodes. "O generation of vipers," he wrote to himself soon after his arrival. "Will they never be warned to flee from the wrath to come." But this defeatist tone, common in mission diaries, was quite untypical in Lang's. His lifetime *modus operandi* was the text from Haggai he used in his first sermon in the colony: "and the Lord stirred up the spirit of the governor, and the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people!" And Lang did, on behalf of the Lord, for fifty years.

Lang's energy was limitless. It is a virtue of D.W.A. Baker's biography that we are not allowed to forget Lang's continuing devotion to his pastoral duty through all the

public turmoil which surrounded his grand schemes. He preached all over the colonies, married the living, buried the dead and gave comfort to the sick – what comfort he gave Archbishop Polding on his death bed remains an unanswerable question. In all these tasks Lang set standards which few of his fellow ministers could approach, and he did not hesitate to savage them for their spinelessness or sloth.

A man of Lang's temper seems to invite weakness in others. So it was for a while in the strife-ridden Presbyterian church of Australia. Quite independently of the crippling disruption, Lang found himself in the mid-1830s surrounded by clerical inebriates, weaklings and sexual eccentrics. The Rev. Archibald Macarthur of Hobart was found to have a longstanding passion for "holy kissing". He took hold of a Miss Turnbull's neck with his teeth: he kissed a Miss J.M. on the lips while offering her the sacrament and attempted to fondle her breasts with his free hand. "The girl jumped up as if shot and started for the door. Macarthur was there first, stopped her and tried to calm her by saying, 'Let us pray.'" One should never underestimate the Presbyterian imagination.

Lang had more than a Presbyterian church on his mind. He had a vision of Zion. He imagined a land peopled by industrious Protestants, not squatters but small holders: he imagined church bells ringing in the valleys, like the Hunter where his family had established grapes.

In Scotland there were destitute God-fearing crofters, weavers, and mechanics much needed in Australia to build Zion and check the influence of Catholics like Caroline Chisholm. Here was a splendid design of providence needing only Lang's perception and energy to make it work. He rounded up emigrants and what ministers could be lured away from their comfortable sinecures. In this, the furtherance of God's will as he saw it, Lang was prepared to practise calculated deceit on emigrants, institutions and officials alike. Lang was a blatant and unashamed liar, although this is a word Baker prefers not to use.

Mendacity and slander were habits which frequently led Lang to court and sometimes into gaol. The Sydney Morning Herald described him as "an arrogant, intolerant, scheming charlatan, deceiving himself by his own vanity and deceiving others by his vain projects . . ." But Lang was impervious. These words would matter nothing on the Day of Judgement.

They mattered little to the colonial masses after Lang had finished with them. Lang turned courts in his favor from within their walls and without. At elections he beguiled voters by bludgeoning his detractors. What right did X, a notorious whoremonger, have to point the finger at Dr Lang? What was Lang's small fiddle with the truth compared to the well-known perfidy of Y fifteen years ago? What were his own petty offences, all committed in the best interests of decent Protestant smallholders like themselves – what were these compared to the great infamy of the squatters and their minions?

Lang called the squatting act of 1846 one of the "crudest measures ever known in the annals of civilized legislation". It was "ruinous". It should be removed at all

costs "even though the British ensign should be made into a broom to sweep the streets of Sydney and Melbourne". While William Charles Wentworth was rapidly becoming a colonial Tory, Lang was writing that the chime of the revolutionary clock had been heard in Australia. He had become a republican. In 1845 he had doodled a proclamation, a Declaration of Independence for New South Wales which ended;

Peace! Freedom! and the Republic of New South
Wales. In the name and on behalf of the League of
Liberators of New South Wales.
Sydney, A.D. 1845
First Year of the Republic.

Five years later he was proposing a republic called the United Provinces of Australia.

This was not all demagoguery. It derived partly from the democratic strain in Presbyterianism which appears to teach that a nation, like an individual, should be humble only before God. It also derived from a visit Lang had made to the United States which convinced him that democracy and the right to property could co-exist and indeed was most effectual. In America Lang saw democracy and it worked. This lay behind his campaign for separation of the colonies. A people only achieved their moral and economic potential when the government was local. Republicanism was the logical next step.

At this point the pulse quickens, but only momentarily. Gold steps in and the republic dies. It is not that Lang's schemes were lunatic, it is only that Divine Providence refused to serve them. God is an Englishman after all.

That other republican, Ned Kelly, must have had one hundred books written about him. Lang has had just one. When the great men of state were parcelled out among Australian historians two and three decades ago Lang got a skilled biographer but, no doubt for the best possible reasons, a slow one. Lang fared better than William Charles Wentworth: the man who has some claim to be called "Australia's first great native son" has no biography.

Can you imagine the United States with no biography of Jefferson or Lincoln! Britain without Cromwell! Ask a young Australian about Wentworth or Lang – or John Robertson – the chances are you will draw a blank. Ask an old one. They will all know more about the relatively ephemeral and unimportant figures of Bligh or Lalor: even Macquarie is less significant than these men, and much less colorful. It is quite simply bizarre that their lives form no part of the national consciousness.

Days of Wrath, then, is a great contribution to Australian historiography. Not that many people will read it, for it is formidably long and not cheap. Those who do find their way through may wonder if it is all that it might have been. Baker's story, though often crisp, elegant and wry, is inclined to bog down at times, at others to feel like a forced march towards the grave. Readers need not fear the horrors of structural analysis, flights of fancy or an author preaching. This is pure empiricism: a biography

constructed by paraphrasing Lang's letters, speeches, pamphlets and journalism. This technique has its limitations. Sometimes we get Lang's account of conversations and events when we should be getting Baker's. Paradoxically, the paraphrasing of Lang's writing starves us of his voice. We are left equally bereft of his remarkable wife's voice, and dozens of others who wrote to him or about him.

If *Days of Wrath* promises a richer texture in the opening chapters than it ultimately delivers, if the title itself suggests more drama than it actually contains, Baker's achievement is nonetheless impressive. The book will shift emphases in the writing of nineteenth century Australian history. It is a major contribution to the underdone subjects of Australian Presbyterianism, Australian philistinism and Australian respectability – the last above all. It puts one of the remarkable individuals back on the stage. Perhaps someone will now feel the need to write a popular essay on John Dunmore Lang. Perhaps someone else will feel free to contest this interpretation. Lang is back in the public domain for the first time since his death. Perhaps it will be asked now what he thought of charity, sport or women; or what John Knox, who, quite remarkably, is barely mentioned in this biography, would have thought of Lang. What did Lang and his Presbyterian God do to our heads? Substantial as this book is, there are a hundred questions still to be asked.

Don Watson is a freelance historian and scriptwriter. His most recent books are The Story of Australia and Caledonia Australis. Scottish Highlanders on the Australian Frontier.

Betwixt Game and Earnest

Jennifer Strauss

Andrew Sant: *The Flower Industry* (Angus & Robertson, \$9.95).

Rosemary Nissen: *Universe Cat* (Pariah Press, 101 Edgevale Road, Kew, V. 3101, \$7.95).

Stephen J. Williams: *A Crowd of Voices* (Pariah Press, 101 Edgevale Road, Kew, V. 3101, \$7.95).

Walter Adamson: *Adamson's Three Legged World* (Abalone Press, P.O. Box 202, Cheltenham, V. 3192, \$7.00).

Centuries after Chaucer's identification of game and earnest as definitive qualities in poetry, their polarities and intersections can provide a vantage point for viewing four collections as diverse as these.

The cover of *The Flower Industry* (admirable, incidentally, for an elegant, wittily under-stated design) speaks of Andrew Sant's "quizzical analytic gift", but I would place him as essentially on the earnest side of the spectrum. The

finest poems here belong to a strong and honorable tradition in Australian poetry, the lyric biased towards landscape, gravely reflective. By reflective, I don't mean moralizing. What we have here is the play of the mind's eye over the presence of the physical world and also the play of the mind over its own participating presence.

"I prefer my reality to be substantial" (from "Keeping in Touch") could be an epigraph to the substantial, detailed world he evokes with an air of cool scrupulousness that seems to be characterized in "Jetty":

And now the tide, utterly detached, repeating an
experiment
balances and weighs the jetty's reflections

The resulting effects often resemble those of the visual arts, notably in "The Fat Man As Nudist", which is full of tactile and visual wit. Elsewhere, it is a numinous rather than comic world that flowers, as in "The Flower Industry" which, placed as the title for the volume, suggests that it provides a metaphor for writing. In these poems, the underlying mental process may be better described in lines from "Soundwaves":

... as if, suddenly I'm travelling

In a car at high speed where the mind
is a curious receiver, exposed, intent
on that which is always about to be revealed.

This kind of intelligence, perceptual rather than conceptual, invites comparison with Wallace Stevens, as does his formal success with two or three line stanzas. In "The Reason for Fires" he celebrates construction, "the kindling balanced neatly in a casual tension / by the maker". His own creation of casual tensions, especially a teasing one between movement and stasis, owes much to a handling of syntax which disturbs the stanzaic form with run-ons and asymmetrical stops. There is great pleasure to be had in watching him play out a long formal sentence, reeling it on the lines of a poem like "The Behaviour of Plovers". Interestingly, these forms are abandoned in those poems I find least successful; in discursive poems, poems talking about living such as "The Weekend Begins Here" or "Reading for Pleasure", and in overtly whimsical poems such as "Elegy for Shoes", there can be a certain flatness, even heavy handedness.

Transition from Sant's "Master and Cat" to Rosemary Nissen's cat poems in *Universe Cat* illuminates some differences of poetic voice and sensibility. Nissen has the lightness of natural playfulness; she can be vulgar (which Sant never is) but she is never ponderous (which Sant sometimes is). While it is with justice that she warns in "I become like my mother" that "We are not light", there is in much of her best work an almost sensual capacity, common to animals and praised by her in a lover ("The Supreme Compliment"), to be "playfully intent". This is not a constant, since in some poems the engagement with emotion is direct and vulnerable. There is no "modulated

thought sheltering / an emotional flow" (Sant: "Keeping in Touch") in the anger of her elegy "For Fran":

a whisky-sucking purple-satin
razzle-dazzle girl
clanking golden chains

or in the sadness of "Or Call it Freedom", a dual elegy for bird and man.

An intersection of play and pain is established in her recurring image of the clown who "danced distraught" ("Not-Quite-Bottom") while "our expectations are / of another perfect performance: / he always did Pain so well". In the small, moving poem "gone is a blunt word" she writes of coping with grief by "icing myself and adding candles / painting the clown face on".

One suspects, finally, a deal of art to the air of spontaneous, not to say untidy, variousness that makes this appear so much more risky than Sant's subtly solid achievement (although risk is a favorite word for him). There has to be, after Ted Hughes, a risk in writing of "the fox on my wall" ("Poster") but she pulls off something quite surprising, "the quietest / head-on collision". Throughout the collection, she plays with register, flouting and flaunting being female in a way that should be enjoyed as much as her loving exploration of the relationship of adult and child in "Andrew's Dragon". This ostensibly playful poem about a child's game triumphantly demonstrates the sadness and joy of fantasy. Its confident handling of a larger, more expansive line also suggests formal territory she might develop as an alternative to the characteristically loosely-structured, short-lined forms prevalent in *Universe Cat*.

Fantasy of a more grotesque and sinister kind adorns the cover of Stephen J. Williams' *A Crowd of Voices*. These two first collections bring to six the tally of Pariah Press, a collective which is staking a claim as a serious presence in local poetry publishing. Williams' poetry is much more social and more aggressively contemporary than that of Sant or Nissen. So our attention is commandeered for "Reds", Lévi-Strauss, psychoanalysis, an extravaganza on "Connibalismia" in which we encounter "Marx in a supermarket" . . . "Hegelian hamburgers" . . . "cliché Lorraine? - why not? (for supper perhaps)"; we contend with, or revel in, prose poems, slashed poems ("Bananas" is a bizarre piece of nutritional surrealism), ambiguous narratives ("x=x"). Williams can write with grave or passionate sympathy, but what one remembers as characteristic of this collection is the play of energy that drives across experience and through the verse. Sometimes this seems, if erratically, celebratory, as in "Ode to John Tranter"; sometimes momentum gathers towards the satirical and/or the nightmarish as in the disturbing "Burning Poem". To quote from the last words of the volume, "It's disturbing. The meaning of the episode strikes you suddenly: you are just a visitor here; you came to wish a sick friend well; you didn't expect to be given his heart."

Less threatening is Adamson's *Three Legged World*, a book for those who understand the importance of *homo ludens* to civilization. Deceptively simple, it sports with formal expectations to give a gently surrealist twist or mildly sardonic jolt to the order of our common perceptions of the world. Nor, in being minor, are these poems trivial: "Speech Therapy" for instance carries more punch than a gallon of rhetoric about ethnicity. The illustrations by Stephen Pascoe complement the text sympathetically and the format is, in its modest way, very attractive.

Jennifer Strauss teaches English at Monash University. She is represented in Mrs Noah and the Minoan Queen, edited by Judith Rodriguez for Sister Publications.

The Lie of the Land

Martin Duwell

Peter Carey: *Illywhacker* (University of Queensland Press, \$19.95).

Jack Lindsay: *The Blood Vote* (University of Queensland Press, \$19.95).

Peter Carey's *Illywhacker* is a huge novel of immense ambition. It will probably take us a long time to understand its ambitions fully, let alone try to pass judgements on the degree of its success in achieving them, and it is one instance where the responses of reviewers should be treated as being even more provisional than they usually are. It clearly wants to make large statements about Australian social history in this century and even earlier, but at the same time concerns itself with the processes of its own writing by exploring the nature of truth, lies, myths and fabrications. In both of these features it has much in common with Carey's two books of short stories and his novel *Bliss*, though it clearly outdoes them in scope and ambition.

The central character (at least of the first two of the book's three parts) is Herbert Badgery who, like Harry Joy in *Bliss*, is salesman, liar and genius, though he is a confidence-man as well. The novel follows, with much temporal shifting about, Badgery's relationships first with Phoebe McGrath, the mother of his son Charles, and secondly with Leah Goldstein. The third part of the book virtually abandons Badgery, for much of the time in gaol, and follows the fortunes of Charles and his Sydney pet shop (the best pet shop in the world). It begins as a picaresque novel bordering on allegory, but is given a satisfying conclusion by an extraordinary final image, in which the pet shop is transmuted into a kind of zoo symbolizing contemporary Australia. Carey himself has spoken somewhere of difficulties in moving from the

second to the third part, and the strain does show when the second and third generations are needed for the historical processes Carey wants to explore; but the final operatic image convincingly knits together threads which have been established earlier in the book.

It is tempting to say that the book is principally concerned with the lie and uses it as its principal conceptual tool in analysing Australian history. Indeed it is tempting to say that the lie is Carey's main theme. The "beautiful lies" in the much quoted passage from Mark Twain which is one of the book's epigraphs are examined in loving detail. Badgery creates almost entirely false scenarios which later become fact, and when he tells the truth he fails. At one stage the book comments on Charles' failings:

... with Charles the truth was an obsession. I don't know where it came from, but it made him a poor salesman. And this is not, as you may have imagined Professor, because a salesman is required to lie. It is because the truth, told thus, is of no interest to the average punter.

(This direct address to the "Professor" intrigues me here. It looks on the surface like a mistake, the use of the American sense of the word in which it applies to pretty well any worn-out teacher at a college or university, rather than to the Australian meaning of a fairly exalted occupant of a few fairly rare chairs. In retrospect I suppose it might be a deliberately American usage to underline the book's theme of the increasing Americanization of Australian life.)

Carey's great symbol for the lie or myth is a building which is, after all, another kind of construction or fabrication. We meet Badgery as an expert liar and also an expert builder of temporary-permanent houses for his various women. These houses, like his stories, are usually skilfully tacked together from whatever odds and ends are at hand. Throughout the book houses become cages – the house built for Phoebe becomes, at the climax of the first section, a cage for a parrot – just as we become prisoners, happy or otherwise, of our own personal and national myths. This symbolic substructure of the book becomes extremely complex and, even on a second reading, often difficult to unravel. There is, for example, a particularly worrying brown snake in the first part of the book (the object of one of Badgery's earliest lies) and later flocks of birds and a goanna whose exact function is difficult to grasp.

It is ironic that a novel so sophisticated, so playful and self-aware succeeds to a large extent through two of the most old-fashioned and Victorian of literary features: style and characterization. I think Carey's development as a writer has been largely a matter of growing stylistic ability. The short stories often seem to rely on their ideas to keep their heads above water. The much disliked final section of *Bliss* however seems a *tour de force* to me in that the style is forced to come to the aid of the positive rather than clever (and thus easy) conclusion that the structure of the novel demanded. It succeeded although

one felt that it relied too often on the rhapsodic tone derived from Garcia Marquez. In *Illywhacker* there are certainly stylistic uncertainties – the endless theatrical prolepses, addresses to the reader and so on, often create a sense of straining for effect, but generally the level of achievement is remarkably high.

The book is peopled with some extraordinary characters in a way which is perhaps fitting for its status as an extended spieles' yarn. Many of the minor portraits are simply unforgettable. True, they are caricatures, but they are caricatures who, in being simplified, have lost none of their humanness. The marvellous O'Hagen family (Stu, Goog and Goose) may be merely pieces of bush gothic, but they're treated with a respect by the novelist that makes the fine scene, in which Badgery goes to sell them a car, all the more effective. Among the more significant characters, Jack McGrath and Les Chaffey are near psychotic autodidacts who, having left school early, have not lost respect for truth or understood that it must be carefully packaged for the consumer. The passage in which Les Chaffey dismantles Charles Badgery's motorcycle, more or less to see how it works, is a hilariously brilliant set piece:

The AJS, Les Chaffey thought, was an interesting machine. He squatted beside it for a moment. Then, like a fellow reaching for his pipe, he pulled a small wooden-handled screwdriver from his back pocket and, in four fast neat movements, removed the single screw from the pilgrim pump.

One of the book's epigraphs establishes, by quoting Wilkes' *Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (which in turn quotes Porter and Prichard), that an "illywhacker" is a con-man or spieles, though it is not a word I have ever heard or seen. Carey's use of it as the title for a book as good as this may well establish it in spoken use. Should this occur, a fictional work would in one sense have become 'true'. It would be hard to find a more beautifully appropriate emblem for the book's theme.

The publishing history of Jack Lindsay's *The Blood Vote* is a remarkable one. As he says in his author's note, it was written in 1937 under the immediate stimulus of the similarities between the conscription issue in England at the time and his experiences of the conscription debate in Australia in 1917. The span between the date at which the novel is set and the date at which it was written almost exactly matches the span between the opening and closing of the autobiographical trilogy *Life Rarely Tells* and the autobiography, written yet another twenty years after *The Blood Vote*, reworks vast tracts of material from the then unpublished novel.

The central character of the novel is the young Brisbane boiler-maker Jack Grant who, desperate to fulfill a growing need for understanding and commitment aroused partly by the all encompassing rhetoric of war, becomes a follower of the first available leader – the sinister activist Clode, whom he hears haranguing a crowd near the Botanical Gardens. This commitment results in his being in-

volved in a dangerous piece of provocation in the conscription debate, but he is rescued by events in the form of a providential action by a drunken journalist friend and by a group of IWW activists who, throughout the novel, have been moving around the peripheries of his consciousness. The novel draws a clear line (perhaps too clear to be realistic) between what it considers legitimate political activism and outright conspiratorial lunacy. The difference between the two is that the former has a responsible attitude to the means towards the desired end. Clode's plan is to provoke a triumph for the pro-conscriptionists in order to "show the militarists in their true colours". The sheer dottiness of this plan is so apparent that it is one of the book's achievements that it convinces us that the effect of Clode's distorted personality is so great that Grant falls for the idea.

The novel catches both Grant and his society at a moment of crisis, always a good technique in an historical novel, because it brings dormant or concealed forces into highlight. In the case of the society at large, the war is on the point of turning from patriotic event to nightmare as more soldiers, mentally or physically crippled, return, and the fear grows that the whole enterprise is a ghastly charade masterminded by capitalists to prolong a situation in which profits soar. Grant himself appears at a moment of crisis too. On the verge of young adulthood he is thrust into a position of importance in his own family by the abduction of its three senior males. His father is a generally ineffectual character who, in the family's distant past, has been bullied by his wife into moving from the country to the "large country-town" of Brisbane (how fascinating that that cliché, which forms the opening words of *Life Rarely Tells*, is at least as old as the writing of *The Blood Vote*), and his two older brothers have been respectively killed and crippled by the war.

Grant's search for a satisfactory political commitment in a fluid and possibly dangerous situation, combined with his search for a way to behave within his strife-torn family, makes *The Blood Vote* an entirely deliberate blend of *Bildungsroman* and political novel. The two levels combine so clearly and so tightly that one wonders eventually whether the title *The Blood Vote* does not have a second meaning, one which refers to the familial fidelities that Grant discovers are paramount. The motif of the search for a true home stresses the relationship between the two levels: Grant's discovery of political fellowship with the Wobblies is twice described as making him feel "entirely at home". Just as his growth in political knowledge produces an ability to choose a wiser course of action, so his growth in knowledge of the tensions in his own family and its desperately hidden secrets enables him to behave within it in a more satisfactorily human way.

This all makes the novel sound more exciting and rewarding than it probably is. Though it is plotted carefully and parts of the background are brilliantly sketched in – the pubs for example, and the brothels near the Botanical Gardens which introduce the theme of mercantile activity imposed on human values – the whole affair is rather flat. The prose seems to go out of its way to

avoid any kind of resonance. It is possible that this may be a deliberate ploy, a way of preventing any suggestiveness which would take the edge off fact as fact. But the casual comment at the end of *Life Rarely Tells* that the novels of this period were written in one draft on the typewriter suggests that the stylistic flatness was a result of haste and "pressures of work" rather than policy, as does the fact that the prose style slips so easily into bathos. At the very climax of the book for example, as a detective searches for the incriminating parcel which Grant had planted, the prose simply slumps:

There was nothing there. With an oath he began trying to pull up other boards. With the aid of a metal ruler that had fallen from Dunkel's table he heaved up another board. But Grant was no longer concerned. The packet was definitely missing from the place where he had put it.

The flatness of *The Blood Vote* contrasts so strongly with the brilliance of the best parts of *Life Rarely Tells* that one is driven to ask why. The subject matter is so often the same (right down to the barmaid who read Keats) that the same area of experience is obviously being explored. To say that Lindsay is a better autobiographer than he is a novelist really only rephrases the question though perhaps it suggests an answer. Reading *Life Rarely Tells* convinces us that the real drama for Lindsay is the drama of his own intellectual and emotional life and the growth of his understanding of it. Perhaps he writes best when this constitutes the stuff of the text, rather than material to be reprocessed as background for a plotted-out narrative.

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A Master of Line

Doug Hall

Vane Lindesay: *Noel Counihan's Caricatures* (Hutchinson, \$24.95).

It must have been a joy to write the introduction to this book, for dealing with the work of one of Australia's great caricaturists does not demand that one's comments and enthusiasms be tempered. The book's illustrations testify to Counihan's talent, and they are supported by Vane Lindesay's text, which assumes the format of a biographical narrative and places Counihan's career and drawings in the full context of Australian caricatures.

Counihan remains one of Australia's most conspicuous and important artists. His art, which of course includes his work as a caricaturist, has reached and provoked a wide audience. The breadth of his interests, which include a global view of politics and events, has ensured that the artist and his work have never submerged in parochial insularity. This is despite the fact that by necessity, caricature depicts a specific subject which may well have been chosen because of events and circumstances belonging to a particular location or time. As Vane Lindesay points out, Counihan has never regarded caricature as something superfluous to that ill-conceived notion of Serious Art. Caricature, with its own history and purpose, has a vocabulary of its own and Counihan can be placed comfortably within its tradition.



H.G. Wells

Within the many areas of and approaches to satirical drawing, portrait caricature must surely be the most demanding. The portrait exists as an isolated image, without creating a context or environment to aid the viewer in interpreting the subject; for example, the cover illustration of former Prime Minister Menzies. To analyse and interpret Counihan's response to his subject by describing the human characteristics which the portrait expresses would be to challenge the boundaries of defamation legislation. And therein lies the strength of caricature and the challenges for the caricaturist; he has the opportunity to provoke or reshape our thinking and our attitudes to

certain figures in an immediate and graphic manner. Caricature demands great analytical skills, an obvious capacity to humor or ridicule a subject, and often the employment of the irreverent and the grotesque.

The book contains a selection of over eighty caricatures covering the period 1934-1984. Each work is given a single page, and the scale of the book and placement of the images within a generous white space is a thoughtful piece of design. It allows the graphic strength of each drawing to be appreciated in a format in which artists past and present, working for the press, would envy. Caricatures produced for the press are invariably severely reduced in scale, thus diluting the image's assertiveness.

In one sense the book is an exercise in retrieving lost property, for much original material was forgotten the day after publication and is now lost forever. This book brings to light some of this material, and it should serve as a sharp reminder to magazine and newspaper managements that they have foolishly discarded a significant aspect of Australian creative endeavor.

This book provides us with a survey of half a century of the work of one of the finest exponents of portrait caricature.

Doug Hall is Director of the Bendigo Art Gallery. In 1980 he organized a national touring exhibition of Noel Counihan's prints and drawings.

Structure of the Senses

Frank Kellaway

Eric Rolls: *Celebration of the Senses* (Penguin \$6.95).

In the final chapter of *Celebration of the Senses*, written for the Penguin edition to commemorate his wife Joan, who died of cancer after the publication of the first edition by Nelson, Eric Rolls writes: "It amazes me that in the history of literature no other writer has estimated his senses." Obviously this is a preposterous claim. It supposes a comprehensive knowledge of the history of literature which no-one possesses, and it also ignores books and writers certainly well enough known to Rolls. D.H. Lawrence in almost everything he wrote was among other things "estimating his senses". Colette did it too throughout her work, and more particularly in *Ces Plaisirs*, later renamed *Le Pur et l'Impur*. I suspect that other examples could be drawn from oriental literature and European literature.

However the claim in no way detracts from the originality of Rolls's book, and certainly nobody else of whom I'm aware has attacked the subject in so frontal a way. When people say to me that it's an astonishing book to have come out of Australia I retort that it would have

been remarkable wherever it came from. In spite of that it is stamped with its origins on every page.

Rolls expresses his approach to his subject directly again in the last chapter, "Free Choice". Speaking of mediaeval attitudes he writes:

Philosophers believed that a man's mind developed only when he overcame the passions . . . the idea still holds among some people. It is a theory that denies life.

An animal is its senses. They are its assessment of life, its total capacity. Man is an animal. Our intelligence is a distillation of the senses, an appraiser certainly, but never an impartial judge. Even in those regions where the intelligence seems to function independently, in pure mathematics for example, I suspect there are roots within the senses.

It is natural to Rolls' way of thought that he should take each of the senses separately, showing by the repetition of the same or similar theme how they overlap. On the first page he says: "This book has no form. One cannot order the senses." Towards the end of the section on "Touch" he reports a discussion he had with a publisher's editor on his conception of the book. " 'I don't see how it could be written,' said Veronica. 'It would have no form.' I had to answer her. 'It doesn't have to have any form. One cannot order the senses.' "

The astonishing thing is that the book *does* achieve a patterning, a kind of organic form through the repetition of themes, particular areas of experience, repeated preoccupations and the reappearance of the people closest to him, his wife Joan and his children. These repetitions serve to draw the book together into a deeply satisfying whole, a total experience for the reader. A few examples need to be given.

One of the most important themes is sexuality and love-making. On this Rolls is admirably frank and explicit; he shirks nothing. On the other hand it is a subject which evokes his most eloquent, poetic prose. It is dealt with in every section and is one of the strongest threads which links one part with another. He discusses porn movies, mentions contraception, masturbation and Aboriginal sexual customs, and in every section there are vivid and beautiful accounts of his love-making with his wife. One of the ones I found most individual comes in the section on hearing.

We finished one bout of lovemaking with my head resting against her groin. She was very wet and profoundly excited. Amazingly, I heard her orgasm. The walls of her vagina smacked together. Even after the strong rolling contractions were over, the last well-spaced single spasms were audible. We had then been married twenty years. Joan never loses the capacity to amaze me.

Another theme, almost as important, is the earth and farming. This includes talk of soil and water, sheep and

cattle, ploughing and cropping, vegetable growth in forests and in cultivated land. In one form or another this preoccupation comes in every one of the sections on the five senses and evokes some of the most inspired prose, often more 'poetic' than his poems.

An area of experience which also keeps recurring to give a sense of unity is the author's war service in New Guinea and Bougainville. That also plays an important part in each section.

Birds, animals, fish and fishing (he is a brilliant observer and writes splendidly about all of them) are another thread in the vividly woven pattern, as are food and wine. The latter are explored with enthusiasm but with the author's usual down-to-earth exposition of practical detail – recipes, how to kill and cure a pig, how meat should be refrigerated, with many more details. I was a little uneasy with some of the food and wine writing. To my inverted snob's ear some of it seemed precious, but when I set my prejudices aside and listened to the book as a total statement it fell into place.

Human customs and peculiarities do not escape attention. There are passages on barbeques, cattle sales, butcher's cries, wireless, bed-making, darning socks, theatre, dance, music, and there is his daughter's delightful wedding.

Some day a critical article will be written showing how all the themes and preoccupations relate to one another and interweave. It will show the organic structure as a living tree, but the most casual reader can sense that. I doubt our future critic will add much to the understanding and enjoyment of a remarkable book.

The poet and novelist Frank Kellaway lives at Tubbut, Victoria.

Enquire Within Upon Oz Lit

Stephen Murray-Smith

William H. Wilde, Joy Hooton and Barry Andrews: *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (Oxford University Press, \$50.00).

The book qua book: Extremely handsome. Well designed. Good size and shape. Beautiful Australian impressionist cover, by Julian Ashton. Smells good. Good typeface and double-column layout. Up to the best Oxford standards. Not clumsy to handle, though 760 pages.

What about Overland and me? A generous and adequate entry on Overland. One error: the magazine split from the Realist Writers' Groups not in 1956 but in 1958, when Ian Turner and I left the Communist Party. On me personally, again a generous and adequate entry, purely factual. Omits as a publication *The Dictionary of Australian Quotations*, which was published eighteen months

before the publication of this *Companion*, so they should have been able to get it in, especially as they have other entries, for instance Geoffrey Blainey's, up to date. Although it would have been a big job, it would have been desirable to have authors check entries concerning themselves. Why do they refer to my 1970 edition of Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* as *For the Term of his Natural Life*, when that is not the proper title and in any case their main entry on the book is under *His Natural Life*?

What about my little mates? I noticed immediately no entry for Barrett Reid, whose work *for* literature as well as his work *in* literature, should have been recognized, even if he has not published as much as he should have. Barrett is however mentioned in the brief entry on his magazine *Barjai*. Ian Turner gets twenty-three lines. His full name is not given and his most important book, *Industrial Labour and Politics* (1967 and 1979) is not mentioned; and nor is Ian's study of the IWW trial, *Sydney's Burning* (1967 and 1969). This is perhaps because these are regarded as works not closely related to 'literature', but on the other hand the authors say that "We have taken a broad definition of 'literary work', and include a number of Geoffrey Blainey's historical works. Puzzling and – if the exclusion of books like Ian's is deliberate – misleading and silly. Dorothy Hewett gets nearly two columns. It seems accurate and the critical discussion is a model of compressed analysis. Dorothy's three husbands are mentioned; why then are not Ian Turner's wives? John McLaren is mentioned as the editor of *Australian Book Review*. (The previous ABR, published in Adelaide from 1961, is said to have been edited by Max Harris. In fact, for most of its existence, it was jointly edited by Max Harris and Rosemary Wighton. Its date of cessation is not given.)

John Manifold has an excellent entry, though his death in April 1985, six months before publication, could surely have been noted. (The authors state that for the most part they did not feed in new data after the end of 1983, which I think is ridiculous, especially with simple matters like dates of death.) In the entry on Manifold's poem "The Tomb of Lt John Learmonth, AIF" Manifold is described as being "involved in the German offensive in the Ardennes in 1944", which seems a strange way of describing a member of the allied forces. Entries on Nancy Keesing, David Martin and Frank Kellaway seem exemplary.

Let's put the book through a canter, by asking some random questions.

Sydney Nolan has some reputation as a poet. Is this mentioned? Yes. A very good entry on Nolan, but oddly his Order of Merit is not mentioned.

Is Frederick Howard's The Emigrant mentioned? Yes, but he is listed as living when he died in August 1984.

Is the fact that the island of St Kilda was a source for much of David Foster's Moonlite mentioned? No, not specifically, though "the pagan island of Hiphoray" is mentioned.

Is Matthew Flinders' delightful and revealing literary sketch Trim, a eulogy to his cat (published 1977 and 1985), mentioned in the entry on Flinders? No.

Does Francis Adams, the radical poet and commentator on Australia, have a satisfactory entry? Yes, an excellent entry, though his full names are not given. This appears to be the authors' policy, and a poor one.

Is Zoe O'Leary's study of Eric Lambert, The Desolate Market, mentioned? Yes, and a good entry generally.

What kind of guernsey does Paul Wenz get? A well-knitted one.

Many would consider Hugh Stretton one of the most important historians and social analysts of our day. Is he mentioned? No, though there are a number of entries on far less significant 'non-literary' figures.

And Ken Inglis, ditto? No, despite the authors' claim that they include entries on historians. Geoffrey Serle, however, has an entry.

Is Clive James in? An excellent entry.

What about my old friend, Ted Harrington, one of the last of the balladists? Yes. A sound entry.

Is there an entry on the Australian literature of Antarctica? No. Surprising, seeing there are entries on topics such as "Concrete Poetry".

Is there an entry on Ron Edwards' Rams Skull Press? No, but there is an entry on Edwards which covers the press. A cross-reference would have been desirable.

What about the technical aspects of the book? A scholarly work like this should, in my opinion, use double quotation marks instead of single, thus making it possible to avoid confusion when single quote marks are used simply for emphasis; but they do not do so here. More surprising, perhaps, is the absence so far as I can see of square brackets, surely essential in a work of this nature.

Now for a sampling range through the book. I wonder at the space devoted to entries for individual books, for instance John Docker's *Australian Cultural Elites*, George Turner's *Transit of Cassidy*, Shirley Hazzard's *The Transit of Venus*. There are scores of such entries. These are important books but I would have thought they would be best covered under the entries for the authors concerned; strangely, John Docker does not have an author entry though his book does have an entry. Is it really necessary to have a cross-reference entry for *Forever Morning* when there is an entry on Frank Dalby Davison? It is not a little indulgent to have a specific entry for Stan Cross's "For gorsake stop laughing" cartoon, when it is already mentioned in the Stan Cross entry?

A strength of the book is the numerous entries on magazines, newspapers, literary organizations and the like. Given the suspicion of some padding that I feel about the *Companion*, I should have thought that, under the entry for the Literature Board of the Australia Council, space should have been found for a list of the chairmen

nal history and mythology with white Australia in the ambitious poem "Imagining Illawarra". Clearly, there's no more important line in *Wollongong Poems* than "There is no coming from across the waters" in "Returning: The Western Plains".

Fitzpatrick is easy to read, but repays re-readings because of his mixed modes and approaches. The mixed *modes* consist of descriptive realism, lyric imagery, social criticism, Gothic surrealism and apocalyptic statement that alternates between Doomsday and comedy. The mixed *approaches* interpenetrate animate and inanimate, urban and sea, urban and rural, one sense in terms of another of the five senses as well as the human-made and the Metaphysical-mythological (also human-made). Moreover, Medieval fantasy is as strong a reference point as Medieval Christianity. The poet *believes* in neither. They're parts of his tendency to turn psychological states and moral values into the most unlikely *things* by repeated sledgehammer similes. Indeed, at Fitzpatrick's forge similes become a kind of fragmented twentieth century allegory.

Exemplification of his poetic mixture isn't a matter of knowing where to start, but of knowing where to stop. If titles such as "Transfiguration: Down Bulli Pass At Night", "The Dragon Factories" and "Illawarra Gothic" hint at the poetic mixture, the merging of past and present in "Imagining Illawarra" and present-in-future in "Air-Raid: The Future" indicate its extent.

In "Night Shift" the striking imagery remains within a realism that precedes, prepares for and in a sense causes the spiritual ascension into a vague heaven. Here's vintage Fitzpatrick:

Dementia. The coke-ovens hiss like snake-pits.
Lava-runs flare underfoot: the ordeal by fire.
The maze houses mines and depressions,
the doors are like mirrors. On the road outside
lights float mystic and lost.
A revelation.

This poetic mixture becomes most vulnerable to criticism, however, where the connections are simply wrought in the iron of the poem's texture without clear sequence or consequence. The opening similes of "Behind Dapto" aren't visual. They're *moral*. Some will find them too moral and possibly too arbitrary as well:

Behind Dapto, the Range confronts us like infamy,
colder than calculation.
We tailor its legend in whispers excited and intimate,
yet none of us admits he is related.

From the Freeway it rises, a great dam-wall.
The knuckles of rock exude menace, like a secret society.
They reciprocate rumour, converging with darkness and tides,
and play it close to the chest.

Readers who can't accept Fitzpatrick's poetic mixture will be most skeptical when following him through similar connections, such as pissing as "Ritual and Retribution", the city "shrunken like deprivation" and cars growling "hungry as animation" among many others. One line even reads, "The city is malcontent, terse like a eunuch."

If Fitzpatrick's future work tones down its rhetoric and blends its poetic mixture, it'll become more acceptable to more readers. It's debatable, however, whether it'll be *better*. Too much may have been lost.

What? Poetic mixture. Mixtures. They trouble some readers. Even so, it's possible to defend poetic mixture without sounding defensive. Fitzpatrick may bother readers who regard *Wuthering Heights* as a freak. But these readers should remember the European Gothic tradition and "the power of blackness" in Poe, Hawthorne and Melville. Fitzpatrick may bother readers who share T.S. Eliot's doubts about the missing objective correlative in *Hamlet*—although he may bother these readers less when they're reminded of Eliot's rediscovery and acceptance of the "mixed" Metaphysicals. If the whole of the Elizabethan stage can be seen as a dramatic mixture, the same can be said for Hispanic and other Modernist writings. Are *all* these writers to blame? Shakespeare and Marquez—not to mention Cervantes and Furphy? Surely not. The search for the pure mode omits too much. And it would omit Fitzpatrick.

The more I read the collection the more I lose track of where poems begin and end. The more I re-read it, the more I think that this doesn't matter. Is, in fact, a bonus. The collection is *almost* a seamless web. *Almost* because there are a few poems such as "The Tunnels Sequence", "Returning: The Western Plains" and "Coast Watch" that would be outstanding in *any* Australian poetic company. *Almost* because there are a few poems such as "Flinders Street", "Bethlehem Street" and "Around Corrimal Street" that could be passed over in much Australian poetic company. Neither the best nor the worst, however, is at variance with the rest. The poet's impact comes from *Wollongong Poems* in toto. From Wollongong. Wollongong plus.

Graham Rowlands, poet and editor, lives in Adelaide.

Jack Lindsay as Pilgrim

Neil Morpeth

Bernard Smith (ed.): *Culture and History: Essays presented to Jack Lindsay* (Hale & Iremonger, \$24.95).

With the publication of *Culture and History: Essays Presented to Jack Lindsay*, historians have been presented

with an opportunity to investigate the relationship between twentieth-century Australian letters and Western Marxism – particularly its English variant. The evaluations carried out in this book, and elsewhere, indicate the magnitude and complexity of an appreciation of Jack Lindsay's contribution to twentieth-century English letters. Lindsay has remained until recently on the margin of 'academic society', but that has not prevented a life of continuous writing and publishing, outside the formal institutional structures but not outside the fields of scholarly enquiry.

This Lindsay *Festschrift* demands a close reading, for a lot of information and pleasure is to be gained from it. But there are some rocky moments, especially in two essays by James Borg and one by Orin Anderson. Anderson's work has the unfortunate knack of falling into a form of gobbledegook when he attempts to elaborate upon Lindsay's work as that of "a Renaissance man". Anderson has done his essay, "Introducing Jack Lindsay", a disservice and, if he has traded a little of his zest for some restraint, a more succinct and coherent piece might have emerged. A little unconscious humor and something of the siege mentality, to say nothing of paranoia, surfaces when Anderson describes Lindsay's relationship with the Communist Party of Great Britain:

In 1948, Jack faced the dilemma of commitment to an organisation he felt was turning contrary to its purpose. Instead of self-defeating futility, he chose to take a vital approach to the challenge . . . It was not appreciated, to say the least. For his anti-Zhdanovistic, anti-authoritarian 'heresies' he was nearly expelled from the Communist Party, and was marked for execution by the Stalinist secret police (to be carried out "after the heroic British working-class had taken power" in England).

Who showed him the list? And was the anecdote an indication of how out-of-touch and uncomprehending some communist officials were with their own intellectuals and Britain's working class? Equally unfortunate is Anderson's reference to Lindsay's becoming involved with "the ideas of Marx at a time when Marxism alone opposes fascism". One only need turn to George Orwell to realize that anarchists, socialists, Trotskyists and many other factions, parties and groups not only fought against Franco and fascism in Spain, but clashed violently with one another.

James Borg's "A poet for the people" and "Passage of Pegasus", do not contribute to a more coherent view of Lindsay's life and work. They are wordy, confused and confusing pieces of writing. Why did Borg bother to speculate that "Had Lindsay progressed to Oxford on a travelling scholarship as originally scheduled, there can be little doubt that he might have become another Gilbert Murray . . ."? Lindsay missed out on a Rhodes scholarship and decided not to reapply for one, as John Arnold makes clear in a well-written, straight-forward account

of Lindsay's years in Australia. Lindsay's real output in ancient and modern history, fiction, art criticism, philosophy, poetry and translations are more than enough testimony to formidable endeavor. Borg also touches upon Lindsay's involvement with Lysenkoism, but unfortunately does nothing to clarify why Lindsay erred over this issue.

For Lindsay's encounter with Lysenkoism is as interesting as it is problematic. Without entering in detail into the tragic consequences of Lysenkoism for the Soviet Union, its agrarian development plans and the dissenting intelligentsia who opposed its crippling presence, it briefly erupted in Lindsay's wide-ranging philosophical inquiry, *Marxism and Contemporary Science*, published in 1949. His attitude appears to have had two sources. The first lay in his commitment to the Communist Party as affected by Stalin's political, cultural and intellectual czarism. Yet, while Lindsay did not accept the philosophical and cultural dictates of Party apparatchiks (he often vigorously opposed such forces and views), he was influenced by Lysenkoism's pervasive presence. Then there was his moral, humanist-inspired search for the paths to clearer human understanding and a better world. He grasped momentarily and mistakenly the force of Lysenkoism as being one more unifying concept. The principal strength of his book, however, still remained his hopeful, humanist, romantic stand and interpretation of Marxism which went against the grain of the Party line. He rejected the reduction of historical forces and movements to a linear deterministic process.

Lindsay did not (and does not) arrive at his views by writing in a social vacuum. Whilst he lived for a long period the life of a somewhat itinerant and hermit-like writer, he was and still remains a political being. Lindsay was at this time as much an actor as he was a member of a select audience which was being acted upon at the periphery of a major historical drama. Lysenkoism's centre remained firmly within the Soviet Union but it spilled, inevitably and unevenly, into communist parties outside the Soviet Union.

The essays of Bernard Smith, "Jack Lindsay's biographies of artists", and Humphrey McQueen, "Wagnerism and the visual arts", have opened a general inquiry into Lindsay's ideas and their sources of inspiration. Lindsay personally invites an open debate when he says in "A note on my dialectic":

Despite all the changes, the many confusions as well as steady efforts to integrate afresh my ideas in order to tackle even larger issues, I feel a deep and living continuity between my positions as set out in 1981 [in *The Crisis in Marxism*] and those with which I was struggling over sixty years ago . . .

One approach to an evaluation of Lindsay is in examining his poetic vision. Lindsay is not simply a poet, though

he has a good claim to the title, as Robert D. FitzGerald's "Textures and developments" points out here. Lindsay's corpus is for the greater part the work of a 'prose poet'. The use of this expression first arose in relation to his work when his friend, editor and intellectual protagonist, Randolph Hughes, characterized his *Despoiling Venus*, as the work of a 'prose poet'. Lindsay approaches the realm of cultural experience and its historical forms not from the narrow perspective of a formal academic discipline but from that of a risk-taking poet, an ideas' venturer. Three of this *Festschrift's* contributors, Bernard Smith, Christopher Hill and Robert D. FitzGerald, comment upon the importance of the poetic base to Lindsay's intellectual life. His identification with a poetic base and vision finds expression and form in his moral language, his taxonomy of ideal, hopeful values. Lindsay not only rejects the pervasive economism of capitalism, he rejects its inhumanity and decries it as an alienated manifestation of human behavior. Romantic socialism is an integral part of this taxonomy. Lindsay's Marxism is infused with such ideas and this explains his early equation of the "bolshewiki" (before he declared himself a Marxist) and the first decade of the Russian Revolution as being "a huge and happy uprush of the human spirit ... this brimming worldtide of new energy ..."

The genesis of Lindsay's writing career and its daily practice are well portrayed by Craig Munro in "Two boys from Queensland", an account of Lindsay's and 'Inky' Stephensen's awkward association in the Fanfrolico Press. The problems and influences surrounding Jack and Norman Lindsay's "sprint up a blind alley", involving a reworking of Nietzschean vitalism, are investigated by Munro. A thoroughgoing account of the carry-over and influence of Nietzschean and Platonic ideas on Jack Lindsay's work in the thirties, and the extent to which these ideas were superseded by a romantic socialist position which involved an embracing of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, awaits scholarly attention.

These problems, amongst others, are reflected upon in Bernard Smith's "Jack Lindsay's biography of artists", an enquiry into Lindsay's Marxism and his biographical method. Smith comments on "the humanism which informs Lindsay's Marxist aesthetic, preserving it from historicism and relativism".

The well-springs of Lindsay's humanism can be located in two spheres. The first is found in the environment, the second in a socialism both tolerant and optimistic. His affection for and love of the environment finds its origins in two hemispheres. Lindsay, born in Melbourne, initially spent his childhood around the delights and color Sydney Harbor's Lavender Bay afforded in the early years of this century. After his mother, Katie Parkinson, separated from his father, he went with her and his two brothers, Philip and Ray, to Brisbane. Brisbane possessed not only 'country air' but a uniquely Northern Australian country character. He was formed under the hot and humid summers of Sydney and Brisbane with their mild winters. Once in England, after first basing himself in the heart of

London's intellectual world around Bloomsbury, he sought a variety of country retreats, and finally found a far more durable residence in Essex until, very recently, he moved house to Cambridge.

Lindsay's socialism arose out of a seemingly contradictory brew of ideas and influences. In Australia scholarly encounters with Plato and Nietzsche were joined to the wish to create in Australia an Australian Renaissance, writing the classical heritages of Graeco-Roman civilization with a swathe of Western European cultural experiences. Lindsay's brief but vital experience of socialist ideas, as embodied in his encounters with V.G. Childe during Queensland University student days, with his experiences of a swirl of dissenting Bohemian ideas and practices in Sydney, gradually coalesced in England to create a romantic socialist. In the novel *Rome For Sale* Lindsay's portrait of Catiline, enemy of Rome and hydra-headed monster to the consul Cicero, assumed the tragic and defiant proportions of a man at the cutting edge of his society, an individual acting out his life in the front line of a social crisis.

As he moved towards Marxism Lindsay took with him his idealism and hope, and this continually surfaces in his writing. His working experience particularly realized itself in his biography of William Morris, artist, writer, political activist and socialist. Morris' view of socialism and Marxism was tempered by his Utopianism. Morris recognized that the industrial revolution and capitalism not only changed the nature of work (the work processes of pre-industrial and pre-capitalist societies) but was capable of turning science, like any other tool, to "the invention of anthracene colours and monster cannon". He wished and struggled for the dignity of labor and the careful management by human beings of their environment. Morris wanted a garden society with "plenty of leisure". This potent vision is shared by Lindsay.

In different but not unrelated ways Nikolai Lopyrev and Christopher Hill demonstrate Lindsay's skills as a Marxist historian and critic. Leaving aside Lopyrev's occasional stereotyping of workers' "morality", "the masses" and "the working class", he has been quick to realize Lindsay's interest, not only in large-scale or collective movements, but in the impact of the more singular and particular in history: "Lindsay finds people who think and seek, who are revolted by the stifling atmosphere of their own environment and break with it." Similarly, Michael Wilding's essay, "1649: a novel of a year", reflects on the play between individuals, fictional and historical, Diggers and Levellers, their co-operative movements and their opponents within a specific historical moment.

Whether it was the complex flowering of a new political and popular culture during and immediately after the period of the English civil war (Christopher Hill, "Jack Lindsay, the historian"), or an historical recreation of post-Roman Britain of Arthurian fame (Stephen Knight, "Jack Lindsay, medievalist"); Lindsay has a preference for a broad (and often highly detailed) canvas. This be-

comes particularly clear in *Blast Power and Ballistics: Concepts of Force and Energy in the Ancient World* (1974). Hill only touches upon this large, dense work. However, he does put his finger on its centrality to a history of scientific ideas. It aims at a re-evaluation of the historical place of the ancient sciences and their methodologies. As a history of Western scientific thought, *Blast Power and Ballistics* is a critique of scientific methods and directions which grew out of the Galilean and Newtonian revolutions in science.

In order to shape this critique, and this is indicative of his method and capacious intellectual style, Lindsay has looked backwards to locate the origins of this ferment of scientific ideas which, figuratively and literally, exploded on to the scene of early modern European history. Lindsay argues that the ancient Graeco-Roman Mediterranean world derived much of its intellectual dynamism (as opposed to the practical application of scientific knowledge and inventions) from non-scientific, shamanistic and pre-scientific inspirational well-springs or culturally derived explanations of its own cosmos. In turn these modes of human belief and imaginative or predictive leaps into the future did not remain isolated cultural experiences, limited to one broadly defined historical world, but were continued and extended beyond their historical origins into the formation of the 'modern' world. Rational and irrational forces contended, reason and unreason clashed. The forces of so-called progress should not be greeted complacently or be regarded as a benign, unmixed blessing for humanity.

Jack Lindsay's interests stretch across the broad frontiers of history and culture. Given that, it is not surprising to find that Nietzsche and Wagner played an early, significant part in his intellectual development. They were controversial giants (or ogres) and had placed themselves in the centre of a Western European cultural storm (Humphrey McQueen, "Wagnerism and the visual arts"). Similarly, Lindsay's love for and seemingly indefatigable inquiry into Graeco-Roman antiquity led to his interest in the history of the great divide between West and East, as in his *Byzantium into Europe*. For its beginnings are found in the history of the later Roman empire and its capitals, Rome and Byzantium. Both Hill and Robert Browning, "Athens in the 'Dark Age'", have interesting things to say about the historiography, the writing and interpretation of Byzantine history. One person's decline is another's transformation.

The very boldness and eclecticism of Lindsay's radicalism and socialism have placed him, until recently, outside or at the edge of more conventional and academic socialist thought and writing genres. The challenge which this *Festschrift* presents, in some parts unevenly, is for scholars to unravel, in far greater detail and depth, the moral and intellectual well-springs of Jack Lindsay's working life as a writer, to chart this pilgrim's progress.

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Soldier's Soldier

Joe Rich

P.A. Pedersen: *Monash as Military Commander* (Melbourne University Press, \$29.90).

This is strictly a soldier's book – by a soldier about a soldier, and concerned with him only as a soldier. It follows the upward climb of John Monash from his enlistment in the Melbourne University militia in 1884 until he relinquished command of the Australian Corps on the Western Front in November 1918. Since its aim is confined to portraying, explaining and assessing its subject as a military leader, its stock in trade consists largely of assaults and retreats, enfilades and salients, creeping barges and flanking movements. We rarely get close to Monash, but see him at a distance, divested of that rich and abundant diversity of detail revealed by the more powerful microscope of Geoffrey Serle's fine biography. The larger fabric of his life flickers into view only on occasions and briefly, when it has a direct bearing on his military career. This is not a criticism; in the absence of significant new sources or a radically different perspective on the old ones, there would have been little point in doing again what Serle has already so ably done. Moreover, this study amply demonstrates that the questions raised by Monash's military activities are of sufficient importance and complexity to demand separate treatment.

The author's formidable technical mastery of the science of warfare, and his painstaking research, together constitute a powerful tool for the detailed (often minute-by-minute) reconstruction of the military engagements in which his subject took part. The action comes to life in a series of crisp, gripping but business-like descriptions, complemented by conveniently placed, uncluttered maps. Pedersen graphically conveys the sense of confusion and excitement, the physical discomfort and stench, and the relentless, paralysing cacophony that was Gallipoli, where Monash commanded the 4th Brigade. That his accounts of subsequent European actions are less riveting in their immediacy is more a product of their far greater scale and complexity than of any stylistic shortcomings.

Tedium is always averted by the fine balance between description and interpretation, as events are examined in the context of the personalities of, and relations between, leading participants, the pressures under which they worked, and associated factors. Some ancient misconceptions are demolished and new light is shed on important areas. The resulting assessment of Monash is generally more favorable, especially with respect to Gallipoli, than that of many previous analysts. Pedersen does not rank him with the Napoleons and Marlboroughs – he never held a comparable independent command – but with the best of his own highly competent contemporaries. He was fortunate in the men he commanded, who were at their fighting peak when the enemy was at its lowest ebb. And he made serious mistakes. But Pedersen shows that the

early ones, especially, stemmed from the inadequacy for the Gallipoli campaign of his pre-war militia training. His greatest disaster there, moreover, is shown to have occurred partly because the attack plan (not devised by Monash) had overlooked the fact that retreating Turks dislodged by a New Zealand unit would collide, in pitch darkness, with the advancing right flank of his brigade.

An impressive case is made for the view that Monash's European victories were to a significant extent the outcome of his thorough planning. Pedersen adroitly plots the links between this and the skills Monash acquired in his civil engineering career – dealing, for example, with the complex human and logistical problems of constructing Melbourne's white-elephant Outer Circle railway line. And he reveals how these skills were applied to military ends during thirty years part-time militia service that proved very useful in Flanders, if not on Gallipoli.

The charge that Monash's performance suffered because he insisted on directing battles from his headquarters and rarely visited the front is carefully evaluated. Pedersen shows that he had a highly developed faculty of creative imagination which enabled him to visualize battles by studying maps, aerial photographs and eyewitness accounts. By staying put near a telephone where runners could easily reach him, he generally obtained a more accurate, up-to-date and complete picture of the action and was better able to influence it than by dodging bullets in the trenches.

Yet Pedersen is not convinced that this was his only reason. The practice conflicted with advice he himself gave to senior officers to "go forward when the situation was ugly". Nor did he depart from it when telephone and other contact with the front was cut, and a personal visit would have avoided costly mistakes. Although even such enemies of Monash as the anti-semitic official war correspondent, C.E.W. Bean, denied that he lacked the requisite courage, the author does not rule out this possibility. But in the absence of evidence he commendably refrains from drawing a firm conclusion. What is not considered here is the possibility that Monash was worried about becoming rattled. He tended to bluster when criticized or when he didn't get his own way. On the voyage to Egypt he developed an irrational fear of falling overboard. And at least once he became quite agitated when things went wrong on Gallipoli. Recognizing this disposition, he may have wished to avoid situations in which his judgement was likely to be impaired – an eminently sensible policy.

A few of Pedersen's judgements lack depth. Monash may have been without an intellectual equal among British commanders, but no evidence is advanced for this. The assertion that he probably believed a political career was closed to him, because of his religion, ignores the fourteen Jews who sat in the Victorian parliament at various times during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, three of whom, as he must have known, held cabinet rank. Too much value is accorded to the banal platitudes with which his pep talks to troops were burdened. And the claim that he "knew . . . the psychology of the Australian soldier was unique" cries out for

elaboration and corroborative support. Nevertheless, while many of its conclusions do not differ materially from those of Serle, this book is most welcome for its comprehensive elucidation of Monash's management of men at war.

Joe Rich teaches History at RMIT. He has just completed a Ph.D. thesis on G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, and is working on a biography of Sir Laurence Hartnett.

Marxism and Fiction

Frank Kellaway

Michael Wilding: *Political Fictions* (Hale & Iremonger, \$19.95); *The Paraguayan Experiment: a documentary novel* (Penguin, \$7.95); *Reading the Signs* (Hale & Iremonger, \$9.95 and \$19.95).

Political Fictions is a reissue of a critical work published in England in 1980. Wilding states his intention in these terms: "A radical criticism needs to be responsive to radicalism of form as well as content. Marxist criticism has not traditionally been happy in this area. Marx, Engels, Lenin, Plekhanov, Trotsky, Lukacs, all preferred the products of nineteenth-century realism to any other available fictional modes. As a result, works of radical content and radical form have tended to be neglected by both conservative and radical critics." The book sets out to explore a number of political fictions which he claims search for a revolutionary mode appropriate to the expression of both radical ideas and the experience of what he believes is a new kind of awareness. It deals with Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, William Morris' *News from Nowhere*, Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and *Kangaroo*, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* and, in passing, several others, including Meredith's *Beauchamp's Career*.

The essay on *Huckleberry Finn* is entirely successful in showing that attempts to depoliticize the novel by T.S. Eliot, James M. Cox, Orwell and others involve a serious misreading, that it is, among other things, but importantly, "a radical exploration of the social forces of the American South during and after slavery." The essays on *News from Nowhere* and *The Iron Heel* are both brilliant arguments in favor of considering Morris and London as serious political novelists. The political content of *The Rainbow*, previously ignored by most critics, is demonstrated ably, and an ingenious attempt is made to justify as experimental, and therefore good, the form, or rather formlessness, of *Kangaroo*. While I admired the

argument it could not make *Kangaroo* a less dull book.

The first five novels Wilding deals with are defended with flair and verve; the last two, *Darkness at Noon* and *Nineteen Eighty-four*, are attacked. The attack on Orwell is well sustained but the denigration of Koestler is another matter. "Koestler feels the need to elevate his theme by giving it the aura of classical tragedy; as if the political were not valid on its own . . . It is an aesthetic choice that reveals the conservative, non-dynamic world view . . . In effect Koestler is saying, the forms of art were determined in the world of Classical Greece, they are absolutes . . ." Because Koestler rejected the revolution as well as Stalinism, modern Marxists have got to find some way of writing him down. This doesn't seem to be a good way. Koestler is not at all saying that the form of Greek tragedy is an absolute. As Wilding himself points out at length in his article, *Darkness at Noon* has a complex structure of which the reference to Greek tragedy is only a part. It is made, I believe, to emphasise the similarities in the human reaction to tragic situations over a span of centuries which is too short to show very much change in the human psyche. Maybe that point of view is reactionary, but I believe that it is true.

That brings me to my main objection to Wilding's book. It is certainly an impressive performance. As moral literary criticism it seems to me to be in a class with Leavis, but both Wilding and Leavis take for granted certain sets of moral values, Leavis those of the 'great', liberal-christian 'tradition', Wilding what he believes are those of the 'proletarian revolution'. I must admit to finding both sets more than a little tiresome, and Wilding's much more than Leavis'. Wilding, like every Marxist critic I've read, including Christopher Caudwell, whom he mentions, thinks that if he can reasonably label a position an attitude, a book or an author as *bourgeois*, then he has made a telling point against it, or him. I suppose in his ball-game he has, but it puts him in the ranks of the hounds who savaged Mandelstam and ran at Akmatova's heels to the grave's edge.

But how does his critical stance relate to his own fiction? *The Paraguayan Experiment: a documentary novel* is about William Lane's attempt to set up a new society of socialists, recruited from Australia, in Paraguay. As a Marxist I would have expected Wilding to disapprove of

the experiment on the grounds that Lane and his crowd were weakening the fight against capitalism in Australia by going off and doing their own thing. Wilding does mention this criticism of the movement early in the novel, but as a writer he is fascinated by the venture and thereafter takes the part of the utopians. He shows them being sabotaged by *agents provocateur*, blocked by government and bureaucratic actions, undermined by the pettiness of individuals unable to work for a cause, and finally wrecked by the rigid puritanism of the man who leads them. In the introduction to *Political Fictions*, talking of Meredith's *Beauchamp's Career*, Wilding writes: "The romantic action constantly collapses into bathos; realistic recording of society becomes boring. But out of the tension something else emerges; the drama of consciousness. A new mode is born." It seems that Wilding had something of that sort in mind when he wrote this novel, but it is hard to see *The Paraguayan Experiment* as much more than a paste-and-scissors job which manages to give a sympathetic picture of the disastrous Billy and to create one or two vivid and memorable incidents; the rest is simply reading the documents. Tension between romantic notions and documentary reality, if it exists, doesn't produce anything new or memorable.

Reading the Signs is a collection of twenty-two stories which displays high achievement in a great variety of fictional modes. I liked best the stories of childhood, "Reading the Signs", "Gypsies" and particularly the painfully moving "Class Feeling". The longest story, eighty-eight pages, is a drawn-out account of a non-relationship. Some stories in Peter Murphy's *Black Light* deal with similar situations, but in a much more suggestive and interesting way and always in only a few pages. I'd reckon "Among My Books" is an example of bourgeois realism at its least interesting. "Beach Report" is political science fiction, and "Welcome O Foreign Writer" is a very enjoyable full-on satirical tirade. The majority of the stories are admirably vivid attempts to render the experience of rock and roll, pot-smoking, beat Sydney.

Whatever else he is on about Wilding is on about rendering experience. In the stories he appears to be searching for an individual mode which will give him elbow-room to exercise his formidable intelligence.

Noel Counihan CARICATURES

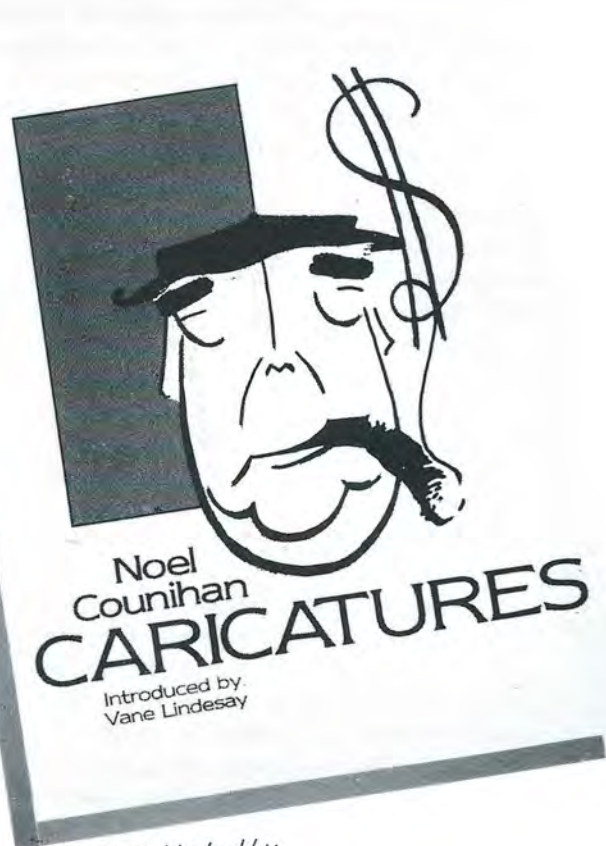
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