overland

FEATURES
STORIES
POETRY

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"Ship" from the Williamstown series, by Andrew Southall.

Race Mathews on Melbourne Grammar
A Canadian Writer in Australia
Williamstown Drawings—Rick Amor and Andrew Southall
Graeme Kinross Smith on Bruce Dawe
John McCallum on Louis Esson
Elizabeth Jolley on Peter Cowan
Poems by Lily Brett, A. D. Hope, Gwen Harwood and others

COMPETITION

POLITICAL TERMINOLOGY IN THE NEW DAWN

We asked for post-election new words, needed by the English (and Australian) language, but yet to be called into existence.

We liked M. Browne's *re-entractment*, which is a re-enactment which is retracted. We also liked Nancy Lane's comment on the *identicrisis*, the political battle over the Australia Card.

But we award the prize to Daniel Neumann, of Northcote, Victoria, for the following:

Kirribilitation: the effect the Prime Ministership seems to have had on recent Labor Party incumbents, seen at its best in the ceremonial launch-trip across Sydney Harbor to the recent ALP campaign launch. This may also be seen as an example of *Cleopatriotism*.

Televitate: to travel the country on TV screens without touching the ground; to withdraw from reality into a electronic image.

Illogistics: the problem of the Liberal Party in trying to grapple with the phenomenon of Sir Joh.

Fremantlepieces: unsaleable souvenirs from the *America's* Cup.

OUR NEXT COMPETITION. Readers will find John Manifold's ballad addressed to the A. B. C. in "Swag". The usual prizes (*The Dictionary of Australian Quotations* or *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*) for a poem of not more than three verses on the same topic. Entries by 30 November.

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Temper democratic, bias Australian

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ELIZABETH DEAN

Neither Prince Nor King

When I first moved into the house at St Kilda, I would stand for hours watching the people walk across the square. A concrete path runs across the middle, slightly curved and bordered with a small curb. It is the path most people follow. Sometimes children skip on the dusty grass and play among the unpruned cotoneasters or climb the gaunt statue of the unknown prince. Or is he some long dead king?

I try to read the inscription near his feet but the only word I can decipher is ALFRED. There are other letters and I imagine them to be in Latin. Maria doesn't know although she speaks five languages. She says it doesn't matter and who cares anyway? Secretly I find it sad unremembered Alfred is best known to the pigeons who use his curly stone head as a perch.

My room is all light, both by night and day. There are windows on three sides with thin net curtains and creamy-white holland blinds. It is a wooden extension of the first floor balcony, built over a heavy Edwardian porch with ponderous columns, now enclosed with tatty peeling paint work.

Downstairs there is a huge dark hallway with a mosaic floor and a marble staircase. It has a cold shabby grandeur which I find imposing. Sometimes I come in late at night and glide upstairs in the dimness, pretending it is my house where I live alone, rich, mysterious and beautiful.

I share a kitchen along the passage with Maria. It's not really a kitchen but a sort of open cupboard with a sink and a two-burner gas ring. It has no window and no refrigerator. I make tea in my room and sometimes I boil eggs in the electric jug and make toast on the bar radiator. But first I must lock my door because it is not allowed to cook in rooms.

The bathroom is communal and has an enormous shower with pipes round the walls where the water sprinkles through little holes. It would be a nice shower if the water was hot but it never is, not even early in the morning.

I found my room through Maria who lives in two rooms along the passage. Her rooms are high ceilinged and dark with thick patterned wallpaper and a green carpet. She has an enormous bed with a gold fringed cover and black velvet cushions scattered about.

On the walls are pictures of the Swiss Alps and a big black and white blown-up photo of Greta Garbo and a smaller one of Hildegarde Neff. She only likes European actresses. Above her bed is a painting of a nude woman reclining on a white bearskin with the head turned away. Maria says a lover she once had painted it and didn't paint a face because he didn't want his wife to know it was Maria. I don't think it looks like Maria's body which is big and white with long hanging breasts, not like the little golden ones with tawny pointed nipples in the painting. Maria says she was like that before she had her abortions and keeps it to remember.

Maria has a lover called Julius who owns a take-away and fast food shop. He's fat, middle-aged and has a wife who won't divorce him although he loves Maria. Maria often cries and threatens to get another lover who will sleep with her all night and not go home to his wife before daylight. But Julius is kind and has given Maria a sealskin coat and Italian suede boots. He is to buy her a diamond eternity ring for her birthday.

Beyond the square is a busy street and beyond that, the beach with the pier round the corner.

On the left hand side of the square is a large red building with a skating rink. At night, ice hockey is played there and I hear the thump and thrack of sticks hitting the puck.

Opposite the skating rink on the other side of the square is a pub with a gold coach light outside the bar. Each night at six a thin little woman, hunched into a fur coat, comes and stands under the light. She has short yellow hair and wears purple lipstick or maybe the light makes it purple. She doesn't smile and smokes incessantly. Sometimes she stands there till midnight. Maria says she is getting too old for the trade but can't bear to give up her beat to a younger woman.

On the nights when there is no ice hockey, I hear the Luna Park music from a couple of blocks down

the street. It blares and distorts the voices of the spruikers as they cajole and urge the public to try their luck, to have fun, fun, fun.

I know the habits of all the people who live round the square. I watch them leave home in the early morning to catch trams or to go to the shops. When the late afternoon sun slants and shines near the base of the statue, I see them walk across the path, some with quick steps eager to be home. Others drag their feet and hesitate, though whether to enjoy the sun, or because they have unhappy lives inside, I do not know.

I have my favorites. They are two young men, Russians Maria tells me, who live at the back of our house in what was once the stables. Nik is the tallest with fragile pale skin and light-blue eyes. He moves like a dancer on long boneless legs and pushes his hair back with graceful flicks of the wrist.

George is short, almost squat. He has a broad face with eyes so narrow it is hard to tell the color.

They both work in the city and have escaped from Russia through Siberia and China. They are the first Russians I have seen apart from pictures in the newspapers. There is a strange glamor in their foreignness which I find exciting.

I like Nik best. In the paleness of his eyes, I see the iciness of the winter steppes, reflecting a vision which ordinary men do not have.

Behind my net curtains I read Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.

I imagine the long journey through the Siberian winter, the snow frozen and tinted like Venetian glass, moonlight glinting on ice-bound branches. Out of the forest and the endless vista of a white landscape without a horizon.

Nik's mother must have died in that bitter beauty. Her frail aristocratic constitution could not have survived the dreadful cold.

A honking car horn becomes the desolate howl of a lone wolf.

I get up and put on my fake fur gloves. I shiver and wish I could afford real fur.

"Come and play cards," Maria says. "I invite you."

"I want to read," I say and sit on the gloves I've ripped off at her knock. "I don't like cards."

"George invites me and says to bring a friend. You are my friend. Is good to have four. Better to play."

"Play what?" I am cautious. "I'm not good at card games."

"Anything – probably poker." Maria laughs her little tinkling laugh and adjusts her new diamond earrings, given her by Julius to make up for his absence.

"Who will be there – I mean the fourth?" I watch the thin woman under the light and wonder what she does until six each day.

"Nik, George, you, me; come, will be fun, we'll play and have a little drink. It is not good for young girls to read books all the time. Should be having fun – making love – laughing."

I detected a note of pity and even condescendence in Maria's voice.

I change into my new clinging grey wool skirt and pull in my waist with a wide red belt. I outline my eyes with black and look for suitable jewellery while Maria watches me slyly. I am uncomfortable as if she had read my thoughts. When she catches me looking at her she extends a foot and adjusts the strap of her high heeled shoe and smoothes her elegant ankle.

The discomfort passes and I ask, "Do we need to bring anything?" I want to do the right thing to have fun.

Maria thinks not. "Is their party," she says. "Their idea. Let them provide – is the man's right."

We walk up the narrow steps of the old stable with its glass door and green painted fibro walls. There is not much of the old building to be seen. Maria rings the bell and George opens the door quickly as if he'd been watching us mount the steps. I realise how short he is and slip my shoes off as we walk down the hall.

His face looks broader and has tiny yellow freckles across a snub nose. He has powerful hairy arms and wears an expensive wrist watch.

The room George takes us to looks like an ordinary Australian living room. Vinyl chairs and couch, the card table covered with a skimpy crumpled piece of cloth. In front of the gas fire is a tin tray with four glasses and a black bottle without a label.

Nik comes in. He wears an old frayed red silk dressing gown over his pants and shirt. He holds a pack of cards and a bottle opener.

He pours drinks. I don't know what I'm drinking and don't ask. It is sweet, sticky and dark. The others smack their lips and quickly swallow the dreadful stuff. I do the same and hope no one will notice my screwed and puckered lips.

I ask Nik about Russia. I tell him I am very keen on Russian literature. He looks at me then away.

"I don't know," he says and begins to shuffle the cards. "I've never been there—"

"But I thought."

"I was born in China and came to Australia when I was three months old," he says and holds the pack out to George. He laughs and looks at me briefly. "I can't speak Russian. Can you?"

His eyes are cold, without depth.

We sit at the table where I hope Maria will say something. She is showing George her diamond earrings.

"Pretty," he says. "Quite a good imitation if you like that sort of thing."

Maria is agitated. "Is a mean bastard, he told me they were real." George takes an earring to the window and tries to scratch on the glass. "No way, you've been fooled Maria."

Nik and George laugh and pick up their cards. George moves his chair close to mine and says he will

help me. We have another drink and George looks at my cards. He tells me what to do while I swallow the ghastly liquid. The room is hot, getting hotter and I wipe my face. George tells me I need another drink. I wish I had worn something thinner or at least a blouse beneath my sweater. There is nothing I can take off.

Maria and Nik whisper together while George leans close to me and tells me which cards to throw out and which to keep. I wonder what Maria is saying to make Nik laugh so loudly. George breathes in my ear and fills my glass. I decide I do not like poker.

We finish the game and I have won. I don't know how it happened that my cards were the winning ones, but everyone agrees and congratulates me. I am relieved, feeling somehow the evening may still be retrieved and enjoyed.

The room is swimming in front of me and it seems we are to play a different game. It is called strip jack naked. I look at Maria, hoping it is not the game I think it is. Maria laughs and winks at me.

"Is all right," she says. "You have plenty of clothes."

I think I might faint or vomit and I am overwhelmed at my weakness. Nik and George are laughing and looking at Maria, who stands slowly and with provocative fingers, unwinds her necklace.

"There," she says and catches my eye.

It is George's turn next and he carefully unhooks his belt and lies it near Maria's amber beads.

I try to calculate how many things I shall be able to take off before I start to shed my clothes. Nik is flinging his red dressing gown across the room and Maria laughs wildly as she throws her shoes towards the ceiling and pats my hand.

"Not to worry," she whispers. "It is only a game. Not serious."

I am partly reassured but wish I had kept my shoes. They are all looking at me and George tells me it is my turn to strip.

I am hotter than ever and my hands tremble as I unfasten my red belt. I do not think I shall ever wear it again although I love it. George kisses me and gives me another drink. Maria is taking off her blouse. She wears a black lacey bra and her skin glows like her beads. I remember the painting above her bed and wonder if it may have been her body after all.

I think of the safety pin holding my bra strap and my sweater sticks to my neck with shame. I feel suspended in time. I float and move gently, hardly breathing. Everything has slowed down so that lifting my hand to hold the cards, takes forever. The colors and numbers swim and edge apart, then come together in a blur of indistinct grey. George helps me to remove my sweater and I feel the sudden coolness of my shoulders. I try to thank him but the words are too long in coming. I notice without surprise the mole on my shoulder and am reminded how once I disliked it. Now I welcome the familiarity. Somehow it makes me feel less fragmented.

I shake my head and try to say the words for I must lie down. George seems to understand and leads me to the vinyl sofa. There is a scraping sound and Nik and Maria brush past me. They merge and become one before they fade into dimness. George holds a glass to my lips and I attempt to turn my head away.

"It will make you feel better," I hear his voice somewhere near my ear and feel his hand cupping my breast, his nails digging into the skin.

It is not the sticky drink but something fiery which burns my throat so that I cough and choke. Tears stream down my cheeks and I know my eyeliner is melting and wilting across my chin and into my hair and ears.

I try to sit but George is on top of me and pulling my legs apart, tearing my knickers and my grey skirt. He is pushing hard, hard inside me and I scream for Maria. I can't stop him. He holds my head and shoulders against the vinyl and his sweat drips on me. I hear someone moaning and crying and do not realise it is my voice until he suddenly stops and heaves himself off. There is a stickiness making my legs cling to the vinyl.

I shut my eyes and cry quietly, my head towards the wall till I feel a heaviness on top of me again. This time it is Nik with blue eyes blazing. He is rougher than George and takes longer before he rolls to the floor. I hear them talking together in low voices.

I don't know how long I stay on the couch but gradually my eyes focus and I know I am going to vomit. Everything is quiet, the gas fire turned off and I am very cold. I pick up my torn and scattered clothes and creep to the bathroom where I am sick in the basin.

There is no sign of Maria.

I know it is late because the woman has gone from outside the pub. I go slowly up the marble staircase holding onto the bannister. In my room I remove my clothes and put my dressing gown on before I take a new cake of soap to the shower. The water is tepid but it does not matter. I stay for a long time, soaping between my legs over and over again.

In bed I clutch my pillow and cry without sound.

I have given up reading novels and have enrolled in a history course. I don't watch the people coming across the square any more. I eat out most nights and read as I eat. I don't want to use the shared kitchen in case I see Maria.

She comes to see me one night, about three weeks after the card game. She taps nervously with her long fingernails against my history book and complains of Julius. She says she has broken off their relationship because he will not leave his wife.

"Besides, he is mean, a liar—he said my earrings were diamonds. I have a new boyfriend; a chef who is very young. How you say, gauche—but cooks me

good food and brings lots of wine. I will get him to cook you – superb dinner. Just us three. What you say to that?"

She looks at me for the first time and smiles as if she thinks I might rebuff her.

"Thank you," I say politely. "I am very busy studying. I don't know whether I shall have time."

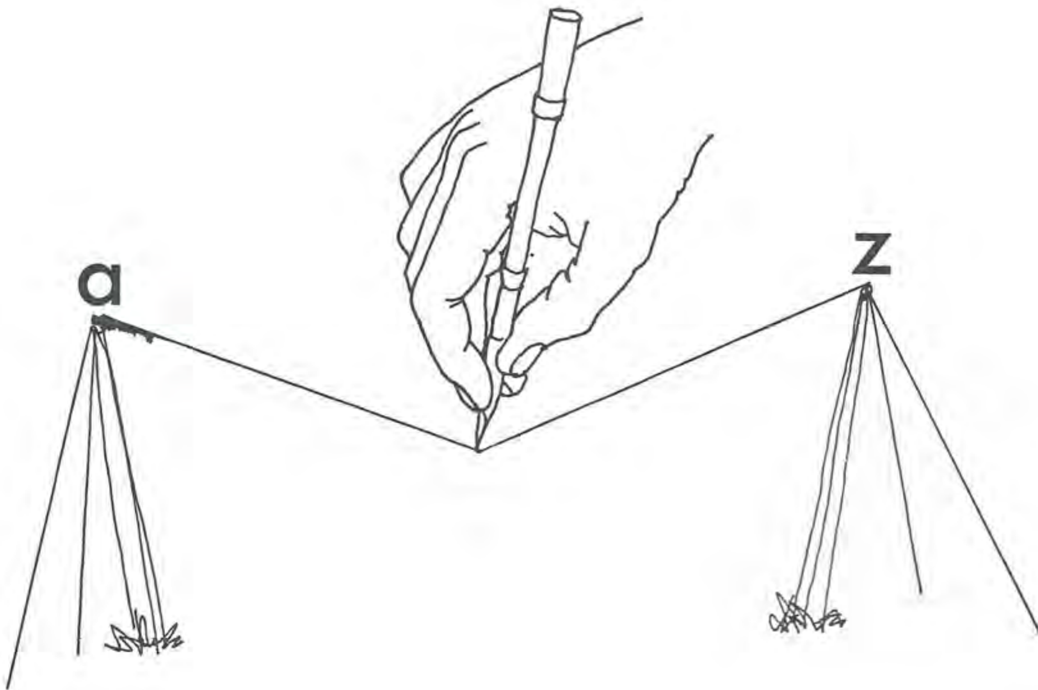
Maria stands up restlessly and says suddenly.

"I nearly forgot. I have a letter."

She hands me an envelope and I open and read the single line. Please come and see me. Any night. I love you. George.

"I think he loves you," Maria says over my shoulder.

I tear the page into tiny pieces before I open the window where I hold my open palm outside with the bits of paper on them. Slowly the breeze lifts and George's words flutter and settle into the dust. A pigeon struts forwards and pecks at the small whiteness till frustrated at the inedible quality, flies to the head of Alfred, where the soft feathers protect the hard curls.



Alex Selenitsch

JOHN McCALLUM

Something with a Cow in it

Louis Esson's imported nationalism.

The role of "Australian pioneer dramatist" in the early 1900s, was not particularly rewarding. These were barren times in the theatre, for Australian writers, and they continued to be for some time. But Louis Esson also had other problems to contend with. Most of his writing life was dominated by a detailed, specific model for drama—taken from a variety of overseas sources, but especially from the Irish folk drama of Yeats and Synge at the Abbey Theatre - which was inappropriate to the culture he was writing in. He was, moreover, a man tormented by his own conflicts: between the Bohemian tastes and interests of his youth and upbringing, and his acquired romantic ideals for bush drama: and between his cosmopolitan knowledge of the advanced art of his time and his populist conception of the audiences he hoped to train. As Vance Palmer wrote in an obituary tribute, "What inner contradictions he had to resolve before he wrote a line!"[1]

There were two great ironies in Esson's career. The first was that his early influences were the artists who gathered around his uncle, the painter John Ford Paterson, and later the group of writers, poets and journalists who frequented Fasoli's cafe in Melbourne in the years leading up to the First World War, and yet his developed interests were in the drama which these people knew little of. From these early influences Esson received his grounding in the cultural nationalism which became so important to him. There are two symbolically important locations which sum up these conflicts. The first is Fasoli's, which first in a little cafe in Lonsdale Street and later, after 1907, at the Hotel Fasoli in King Street, was an important centre for the Bohemian culture of pre-war Melbourne which Esson found so exciting and which prompted many of the early poems, stories and articles which are collected in High Anderson's anthology, *Ballades of Old Bohemia*.[2]

The second was E.J. Brady's writers' camp in the bush at the Mallacoota in East Gippsland. Esson visited this sometime round 1910 with his uncle, and wrote *Dead Timber* while Paterson painted. It was a place to which he was to return many years later when he began to feel that his bush inspiration was wearing thin. Brady maintained this camp on and off, with long absences in the city, until as late as 1952, and it was a minor centre for many city writers who wanted an ac cessible source of bush experience. Henry Lawson visited it, also around 1910, and Katharine Susannah Prichard did soon after.

The greatest irony of Esson's career, however, was that it was precisely his awareness of international dramatic trends that led to turn inwards to the dead heart of Australian popular culture which he tried so hard and so unsuccessfully to quicken. Nationalism was then an international phenomenon - and so the cosmopolitan Esson, who understood what was going on in the world of art, set out quite deliberately to apply its principles to the Australian scene. The Irish drama of Yeats and Synge was his most famous model, but it was by no means the only one. He wrote often about the issue of nationality in art, and in all his references we can see his respect for overseas examples.

Esson's letter to Palmer, in *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*,[3] and his articles collected in *Ballades of Old Bohemia*, are studded with examples of his interest in and knowledge of international theatre. He wrote articles or reviews on Ibsen, Shaw, Maeterlinck, Pirandello and the Expressionsits, as well as on Pinero, Arnold Bennett and other minor dramatists of their ilk. He was particularly interested in Eugene O'Neill because of O'Neill's reaction against bland international formulas in the interest of a more national drama. He felt a special sympathy for the Russians, including Turgenev, Chekhov and Gorky, because they were writing in a primitive culture with deep folk traditions. He was fond of quoting a remark by Havelock Ellis that "It is only by being national that one becomes international".[4] In their discussions about the problems of Art in young cultures Yeats and Esson also drew comparisons between Australia and New Zealand and the United States.[5]

The quotation from Havelock Ellis is revealing, in that it emphasizes internationalist aims as a motive for being nationalist. Esson's nationalism was not entire-

ly a simple desire to represent Australians to themselves. His cosmospolitanism ensured that he always kept at least a small part of his attention directed overseas – in the form of a concern with Art, with all the high seriousness that word sometimes evokes. In a talk for the ABC in the year before he died he said:

> The position of the writer in relationship to this country and to humanity in general has been stated clearly and justly by Andre Gide. In an address given in Paris to an international group of writer, Gide declared that no-one was more specifically Spanish than Cervantes, more English than Shakespeare, more French than Rabelais or Voltaire, and at the same time more universal and more profoundly human, his contention being that it is precisely in literature that this triumph of the general in the particular and of the human in the individual is more fully realized.[6]

Nor was Esson in more specific historical models. At different times he, or Yeats, made reference to Ancient Greece, Elizabeth England, 18th century Venice and Robbie Burns' Scotland.[7] He seems to have taken great comfort from a remark by Yeats: "You have been in Australia longer than the Icelanders had been in Iceland when they created their great sagas."[8]

All these international and historical references were ironic enough, considered as models for creating a

nationalist drama of the Australian outback, but the irony is compounded by the fact that for Esson as a dramatist they were of very little practical use. Apart from the all-important Irish influence there is little in them that could have helped him, other than a vague injunction to go bush. There are, however, several possible practical models with which Esson seems to have had some rapport, but which, for different reasons, he never pursued.

The first and most important is the Russian, and certainly Esson seems to have been greatly attracted by pre-Revolutionary Russian writers. He wrote of Turgenev, Gorky and Chekhov, as well as the composer Glinka, in tones of deep admiration for their concentration of their own local subjects and issues. The Russian renaissance of the late 19th century had enormous appeal for him, perhaps because it sprang not from a developed artistic tradition but from a vast and ancient peasant experience and folk culture.

The great Russian experiment, however, by the 1920s and 1930s (when Esson was experiencing the failure of the Pioneer Players and the decline of his playwriting) was not an experiment in folk culture at all. The artistic battles which were being fought in the Soviet Union then were at the forefront of the sophisticated European avant-garde. Perhaps a very different type of socialist than Esson might have learnt something from those battles' outcome: the suppression of "formalism" and the institution of Socialist Realism in fact might have seemed precisely the answer to many of Esson's problems: of creating a simple, formulaic popular drama of local issues which would, in Yeats' phrase "unit the nation", rather than, like formalism, "divide and shatter it".[9] It seems to have been the very thing Esson was searching for.

In fact, of course, one only has to look at Sydney Barrett, the eccentric young socialist in *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe,* to realize how alien the Soviet solution was to Esson's temperament. As David Walker has demonstrated,[10] Esson's socialism was aesthetic and Wildean in character and was aimed at liberating people's individual creative souls, not their labour. For Esson the liberated peasants or proletariat would not be working on collective farms or striving to achieve another Five Year Plan, but sitting around in Fasoli's drinking cheap wine and high-mindedly discussing Art. Or rather, at is turned out, wandering around the Mallacoota Inlet looking for a folk culture.

There were two other minor influences on Esson which are recorded in his journalism and reflected in some of his later playwriting. The first is Eugene O'Neill, about whom Esson wrote a highly appreciative review in the Bulletin in 1923. He admired O'Neill for much the same reason that he admired Synge – that he was:

> natural, but rich, vivid and full of
> picturesque idiom; not the feeble artificial

> language of the drawing-room dramatists, but a modern style of almost Elizabethan energy and exuberance, that seems to come direct out of life itself.[11]

Exuberance and picturesqueness, combined with a natural feeling for real life, are a central aim in all Esson's dramatic strivings, and the source of one of the great contradictions in his work when he tried to apply them to the inarticulate characters of the Australian bush. Like the early O'Neill Esson tried to give picturesqueness to his work partly by including a wide range of colorful national types – Finns, Scots, Italians, Americans and, of course, Irish. Just as many of his Australian stories and plays are written in an almost impenetrable phonetically rendered *argot,* so the attempt to convey these other national characteristics can make for very difficult reading and rehearsing.

Above all Esson seems to have admired O'Neill, as he admired Synge, simply for his success in a country which was a relative newcomer to the sophisticated High Culture which Esson both yearned for and rejected. His strongest personal tribute to O'Neill is his play *Shipwreck,* which clearly reflects O'Neill's melodramatic early sea-dramas. As Keith Macartney has pointed out there are also strong echoes of O'Neill's own equivalent of bush dramas – such as *Beyond the Horizon* or *Desire Under the Elms,* set on lonely decaying farms – in Esson's *Dead Timber* and *Mother and Son.*[12] *Beyond the Horizon,* O'Neill's first staged full-length play, appeared on stage and in print in 1920, three years before *Mother and Son.* Like Esson's play it concerns a young poetic dreamer, stuck on an isolated farm, who decides, for love, to stay there rather than escape to the outside world where his dreams might have some chance of being realized. It is the world of Andrew Wyeth's much later painting, "Christina's World" (1948), which inspired Dorothy Hewett's *Susannah's Dreaming* – a play which I'm sure Esson would have loved.

The final potential of influence which Esson expressed some sympathy for, but for which, in Australia at least, the time was certainly not yet ripe, is more interesting in the light of the subsequent development of Australian drama. Mention has already been made of his references to Elizabeth drama, in which he, inaccurately, includes *Volpone,* a performance of which he was proud to take Yeats to at the Lyric in Hammersmith after the First World War. What is interesting is that he also made a connection between what he called the "freer structure" of Elizabethan dramaturgy (as compared to the "Greek style") and the works of the Expressionists when he came to review Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* in 1923.[13] In the review he expresses great interest in the episodic structure of Kaiser's play – admiring its division into seven scenes and its lack of a linear narrative plot, a climax or a *scene a faire.* This interest could be seen as a passing journalistic enthusiasm were it not, as John Hainsworth has pointed out, reflected in Esson's last plays, *The Southern Cross* and *The Quest.*[14] In *The Quest,* subtitled "A Legend in Six Scenes", there is a clear, if faltering, attempt to narrate the story in a series of self-contained episodes, in the style which we now call "epic".

This is a very interesting development in Esson's late writing. It would be absurd to suggest that Esson was, in any way, proto-Brechtian, but there is no doubt that had the conditions under which he was writing been more propitious he might have developed in that direction. Harry Kippax has argued that the concern of the bush realists of the 1930s and 1940s with such a vast, impersonal antagonist as the hostile Australian landscape might have been much more powerfully expressed had they had at their disposal the tools of epic narrative developed by Brecht. They didn't, of course, Brecht himself had hardly begun to explore them in the early 1930s. But it is nice, from a nationalist point of view, to think that 'Australia's pioneer dramatist' had at least thought of them.

The final compounding irony of Louis Esson's career was that he neglected all these promising avenues of writing and retreated into his romantic dream for a Folk Drama, under the influence of Yeats and Synge. Some historians consider Synge's Folk Drama escapist itself, and Synge died before the First World War, so in a sense he had rather less to escape from than did the post-war artists. In the years between 1905, when Esson first went to Europe, and 1926, when the Pioneer Players finally ceased to operate, occurred the first great crisis of modernism: a time of fragmentation in the cosmopolitan culture that Esson knew and loved so well. The great artistic battles of naturalism and realism had been fought and, more or less, won. In the trenches and field hospitals of the Great War, which Esson, not for want of trying, missed, the artists of the Proud Tower of European culture were being killed and maimed, or turned into Surrealists, Dadaists, Futurists, Expressionists and Pessimists. For the rest of his life Esson lived on the sideline of all this. His writing slowed, he grew ill, as he watched the Depression and the rise of Fascism, and he died, in 1943, before the war against fascism was resolved. It is small wonder that one of his last plays, *The Quest,* should be desperately elegaic study of the dreams of De Quiros – one of the only great Spanish Renaissance navigators to have truly and completely failed. In the play De Quiros continually compares himself to Columbus. It seems to have appealed to Esson that Columbus had been looking for America whereas De Quiros had been looking for Australia – a country with a long tradition of glorifying failure.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Esson should have clung so steadfastly to his exciting Irish model. he was, as Frank Dalby Davison wrote, a "dweller in a Celtic twilight".[15]

The story of Esson's meetings with the Abbey playwrights is well-known, through his letters to Vance Palmer, collected in *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre,* and in the various nostalgic articles he writes after his return from his second long stay in England in 1921. Esson made two pilgrimages – his own word – to the source of so much of his inspiration. The first was in 1905, and the second, after what seems to have been a fairly unsatisfactory period in New York, from 1919 to 1921.

In 1905 Esson had not yet begun to write plays. He was introduced to Synge by John Masefield in London, and was in fact living in Paris when he received a letter inviting him to go to Dublin to see the great theatre for himself. On his second stay overseas he met Padriac Colum in New York, and renewed his contact with Yeats who was by then living in Oxford. He commented himself on this strange fact of meeting his Irish mentors everywhere but in Ireland when he wrote, rather poignantly, of his second meeting with Yeats:

> I had a little difficulty in connecting the Irish poet with Oxford, but it was quiet, he said, and he was near Bodleian, a famous and comfortable library. Every summer he goes to Ireland, to a romantic old castle, a beautiful place, that has been raided during his absence by the Black-and-Tans. I was proud to make my pilgrimage to Oxford, and the poet's study, with its fine books, the great brass candlesticks, the pictures by his father and brother, and the Blake drawings, will always seem to me the most eloquent place in the world.[16]

This comment can be taken as setting the tone for all Esson's dealings with Yeats and Synge, with its combination of romantic admiration and half-conscious initial scepticism. Yeats' study, so handy to the Bodleian, may seem a curious place for Esson's great plans for an Australian Folk bush drama to have been made, but it was during this trip, in London, that *The Drovers* was written.

From the first meeting in 1905 Esson's devotion to Yeats and Synge verged on the sycophantic. Of Synge he wrote that "No one ever impressed me more than this great writer."[17] Of Yeats, that "His opinion means more to me than anyone else's for I have always regarded him as the chief priest of the temple of Apollo."[18]

In an article in *Fellowship* he wrote:

> I have always looked upon Mr Yeats as the High Priest of Literature. He is a great critic, as well as a great poet, but his criticism is almost creative, like Coleridge's, and in every point of literary doctrine I should consult him in the same spirit as a student of the Middle Ages might have consulted Abelard of Aquinas on a difficult question of divinity.[19]

The most famous piece of advice Esson received was Synge's remark, "You ought to have plenty of material for drama in Australia. All those outback stations with shepherds going mad in lonely huts."[20] This is in fact Vance Palmer's expression of it, and put this way the quaintness of expression ought to be a warning that the parallels between the two countries' experience were not as close as they appeared. The way Esson tells the story, however, is that he had been telling Synge (in the first meeting in 1905) of the "boundary riders, shepherds, or swaggies, who sometimes went mad, or half-mad, from the loneliness of their surroundings". Synge apparently replied, "But when they are going mad, are they not interesting then?"[21] This remark in fact proved prophetic as to the dominant tone of the bush drama of the 1930s and 1940s.

During this first visit Esson also met Yeats and attended rehearsals and performance at the Abbey Theatre, which he was disappointed to discover was rather small and difficult to find.[22] In the days between performances he met with Yeats and received the second famous piece of advice, "Keep within your own borders!"[23] For the young Bohemian Esson this came as something of a shock. Years later he wrote,

> This, I admit, was not the doctrine I had come to London to hear; for, to a degree, like many Australians of my period, I had distinctive escapist tendencies . . . but Yeats was an extraordinarily eloquent speaker and in my inner soul I felt that he was right.[24]

When he objected that Australia had no traditional past to draw on Yeats replied "that it ought to be our aim to conquer the outlay provinces and bring them within the kingdom of art." This was a pretty tall order – especially for someone with Esson's deep seriousness about Art.

Yet another of the many ironies in this whole story is that it was precisely Esson's seriousness about Art which led him to accept Yeats' advice so enthusiastically. Certainly when he first went overseas he was not particularly patriotic. David Walker has illustrated the extent of his embarrassed awareness of his country's cultural inadequacies. Even on the second trip he wrote to Vance Palmer praising the stimulating environment in London, and, to a slightly lesser extent, New York, and urging Palmer to follow him there. He complained of Australia (to Yeats) that "there were no castles or abbeys, no folksongs—there was no Bloomsbury or Montmartre or the Latin Quarter of Paris, with its exciting Bohemian life—no-one was interested in art or literature—it was crude, materialistic, Philistine . . ."[23]

There is a strong streak of cultural elitism running through the early letters. It is a tribute to Esson's artistic determination and seriousness that he suppressed so much of his Bohemian youth and, under the tutelage of Yeats and Synge, transferred his early romantic attachments from Bloomsbury and Mont-

martre to the Australian outback – thereby beginning the long line of plays which were to illustrate, for drama, A.D. Hope's observation that "There seems to be a natural affinity between pioneering a literature and literature about pioneering a land."[26] Esson's idea of "Australianness", however, remained essentially romantic. In 1921, when Palmer wrote to him in London suggesting that he use some cosmopolitan themes (presumably in response to Esson's enthusiastic letters about Art Overseas), Esson replied,

> I would do better if I could write on cosmopolitan subjects. I have enough technique, so I fancy, and there's nothing to stop me doing it – nothing except want of interest. And I can't work it up. Australia is a land of romance, of fantasy, of mystery to me. I would like to read a good Australian history, with very little politics, of the different stages of the people's development. I would like to do a series of plays, but perhaps nobody wants them?[27]

There is something sad in Esson contemplating a Folk Theatre that nobody wanted. And yet he had a very firm idea, from Yeats, about the kinds of plays which they turned out not to. Yeats gave Esson a great deal of advice concerning the practicalities of starting a nationalist theatre movement in Australia. He talked about the theatre, staff and actors required, and gave specific advice on the type of play that should be concentrated on: "Yeats also insisted that the beginning should be made with country comedies. Such comedies, he said, build up a country, where dramas of ideas tended to divided and shatter it."[28]

If he was doubtful, at first, Esson soon convinced himself what sort of play he wanted:

> . . . personally I'd have nothing but local and original works, however inadequate they were, a kind of Folk Theatre . . . I can see the plays clearly; they should be lively, simple, with plenty of colour, non-intellectual, without "middle-class" sentiment and drawing room ethics . . . I want simplification, bolder outlines, more passionate characters . . . I want something absolutely national and original. I would rather have a bad Tomholt than a good Bennett.[29]

If it was strange to find the cosmopolitan Esson calling for simple non-intellectual drama, then it is stranger still to see him espousing a nationalism so proud that it doesn't care how inadequate its products are. Arnold Bennett, a dramatist who is now as little regarded as Sydney Tomholt, was in many ways Esson's personal *bête noir* – partly because he connected him with loathsome, artificial drawing-room drama. It is interesting to speculate whether Esson would have preferred a bad Tomholt to a good Synge. He did not really like Bennett's plays[30] but the tone of this remark suggests that even for Esson Tomholt's being Australian told against him – at least by the stricter standards of the pre-Yeats days.

An interesting sidelight on this issue of newly nationalistic critical standards is Esson's response to Arthur Adams' self-acknowledged attempt at commercially saleable comedy. *Mrs Pretty and the Premier,* about which Esson wrote one of his most virulent critical attacks.[31] The basic reason for his objection was revealed in his description of what a true Australian play should be:

> In an authentic Australian play there should be real atmosphere – some space and sunshine, wild nature or primitive character; something with a cow in it would have been much better; closer to the earth and reality.[31]

It is clear from his review that Esson's definition of a good play has come to include this very 1890s concept of "Australianness" – "something with a cow in it". His final judgement is very harsh:

> My complaint against the author is not that he has written a bad play – everybody writes bad plays – but that he has not even faintly realized that it was his duty to do his best for Australian drama. Adams was working for himself, not for the movement: thinking, maybe, of a motor-launch, and forgetting altogether that he was making the road harder for the rest of us.[32]

That the road was hard for Esson partly explains the pompous tone of embattled nationalism in this review. It was written in 1914, during his first burst of creativity as a playwright, and it perhaps suggests a certain sensitivity on his part about what he was trying to do. His plays from this early period do not all have cows in them, but many of them do – and even more did during his second major burst of activity, in the 1920s, after he had returned from another pilgrimage to his prime source of inspiration: not Mallacoota, but Yeats' study in Oxford.

As John Hainsworth has pointed out, it is a common mistake to think of Esson's plays as being predominantly about either city slum dwellers – reflecting his youth in Bohemian Melbourne – or the bush – reflecting his self-conscious attempt to create a new Folk Drama.[34] His best known play today, for instance, and one of the most successful during his lifetime, is of course *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe,* a witty Shavian political comedy which, as Philip Parsons has suggested, is so successful that it is tempting to wish that Esson had stayed with this form.

It is the bush plays, however, which show the Esson that he himself cared most about. I have mentioned the influence of O'Neill, in such plays as *Shipwreck* and *Mother and Son,* and of the Expressionists in *The Quest.* It remains to look at the plays which Esson wrote under the influence of Yeats and Synge.

Two of them, *The Battler* (which he renamed *Dig-*

gers' Rest for the Pioneer Players' production) and *Vagabond Camp,* are obviously intended to be "country comedies" of the sort which Yeats had suggested would help "build the nation". *The Battler* is set in and around an old shanty, the "Diggers' Rest", left over from gold-mining days when the town was more lively and prosperous. "Its glory has departed but it just faintly remembers its romantic past", as the stage directions put it.[35] An almost legendary local miner, George Ogilvie, about whom the other characters sit around swapping colorful yarns, returns to try to find a Lost Reef and revive the town. The gold is found and for a time the town comes to life: the Diggers' Rest is renamed the Commercial Hotel, and the local real estate agent plans development programmes. The reef peters out, however, George Ogilvie leaves for another mine in Western Australia and the town returns to its former quiet self.

It is a static play, with the outsider stirring up the characters and then leaving them settled again at the end – a structure which was to become very common in the bush drama of the 1930s and 1940s, and which continued to exert influence up to the 1950s, when Ray Mathew wrote *We Find The Bunyip* (a play which, although perhaps unconsciously, owes a great deal the *The Battler).* With this static quality, evoking a rich feeling for the community which is in a way the play's central character. *The Battler* may be compared with Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, in which also an outsider comes in to disturb a quiet country community. Like Synge's play it is a celebration of this community life: a gentle eulogy for the grand, romantic days of an Australian pioneering past, and a piece of deliberate legend-building, and thus nation-building, such as Yeats had called for. If *The Battler* lacks the richness of *Playboy,* then that is partly simply because old Australian gold-mining towns lack the folk traditions of western Ireland. What is important here is Esson's pioneering attempt to invest these towns with some of that Celtic glamor.

Vagabond Camp is a road play, like Synge's *The Tinker's Wedding* or *The Well of the Saints.* Again there is a clear attempt to invest the play's colorful tramp figures with the folk richness of Synge's model and, again, the attempt is only partially successful. Henry Lawson did more to create this mythology, but he didn't write plays. The flair for gently comic dialogue which was applied to sophisticated political life in *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* is here applied to inarticulate characters of the outback, and so of course the comedy is not nearly so witty. Without the narrative voice Esson is left nearly as inarticulate as his characters. This, of course, remained the perennial problem of Australian realism right up until the early 1970s.

When Esson visited Yeats in Oxford in 1920 his book, *Dead Timber and Other Plays,* had just been published in London and Yeats had read it and written to him about it. Esson reported to Palmer that "on the whole, he [Yeats] thought, I might do my best things in tragedy".[36] A less sanguine writer than Esson might have seen this as a little disheartening after Yeats' advice, fifteen years earlier, to go out and write country comedies; but certainly Esson produced, in the short plays which are now regarded as his best work, some plays with the sort of unrelieved misery that prompted St John Ervine's remark,

> I had always imagined Australia as a free and happy land of eternal sunshine. But what impressed me most about your country's plays is their Greek gloom. They are full of the atmosphere of Greek tragedies. I find this astonishing.[37]

This gloom, of course, lies at the heart of the Australian character, or at least at the heart of the experience of the Australian pioneers who, unlike the American pioneers, who kept finding rich new country, kept finding more and more nothing.

Synge had said to Esson that in Australia there was a new country and a people, and that Esson's task was to "try to get the right relationship between them."[38] He perhaps little imagined exactly how harsh and bitter that relationship was. It was Esson's achievement to create theatrical images of it which, although they may have been inspired by Synge's peasant dramas, succeeded in evoking an emptiness and hollowness of spirit which Synge, with his Celtic mists and peasant culture, could not imagine.

The best known of these plays is *The Drovers,* in which the drover, Briglow Bill, is injured in a stampede and has to be left to die while the others press on to find water for the cattle. It is a seminal play, setting the tone, for the next forty years, of plays about the hostile Australian country and its effect on the souls of those who try to settle it. Insofar as it concerns a death made inevitable and fateful by the powerful forces of nature it may be compared with Synge's *Raiders to the Sea.* The difference between the plays is that in Synge's play the mourners are the folk to whom the tragedy has occurred, whereas in Esson's it is Pidgeon, a stage Aboriginal straight out of nineteenth century melodrama, in whom Esson has tried to invest some of the feeling for folk tradition he felt in the Irish model. Alrene Sykes has suggested that what makes *The Drovers* original and "Australian" is that unlike *Riders To The Sea* its ending is "almost aggressively non-tragic".[39] This may perhaps be explained not by the famous Australian cynical detachment from tragedy, but by the simple fact that the people in the *The Drovers* are not the most important thing about it. The real protagonist, as in so many bush plays right up to the 1950s, is the land.

Part of the appeal of *The Drovers* is that it contains many of the great themes of Australian writing about the land, and many aspects of the Australian legend

which Russel Ward has identified as being part of the way male Australians like to see themselves. The scene is set on the edge of the Barkly Tableland, from which "the great plains stretch away, unbroken by timber, except the few gydgia-trees, that fringe the muddy waterhole" (p.11). The Boss is a typical hard-bitten, sturdy, laconic Australian bushman. "In his younger days he was champion horseman of three States, and is now a famous bushman and drover", writes Esson in a stage direction that it is difficult to know how to play. The Aboriginal, Pidgeon, says "You, Briglow and old man Boss, you savee bush all-the-same-blackfellow". And Briglow's hymn to the good life of the bush is surely in every (male) Australian's cultural kitbag:

> It don't matter. It had to come sooner or later. I've lived my life, careless and free, looking after my work when I was at it, and splashing my cheque up like a good one when I struck civilization. I've lived hard, droving and horse-breaking, station work, and overlanding, the hard life of the bush, but there's nothing better, and death's come quick, before I'm played out – it's the way I wanted.

These elements—taciturnity, stoicism and the laconic panache of the adventurous bush life, and death – are part of the image of the Australian, but not attributes possessed by most. Esson's view of "Australianness" is exotic. As Margaret Williams has argued, *The Drovers* depends for its impact on the audience sharing the attitude of the outraged Jackeroo. If they really did share the Boss and Briglow's casual attitude to the fate of the bushman, then there would be no dramatic situation at all.

It is this which reveals the self-conscious nature of Esson's "folk" drama. His desire to acquire genuine bush experience, what used appropriately to be called "colonial experience", was quite sincere. The dominating influence of the High Priest Yeats, however, and the impression one gets from the letters that had he been encouraged to write sophisticated social issue plays, or "triangle" comedies, he might very well have done so, shows that the "Australianness" of his folk plays had a self-consciousness about it which anticipates the self-conscious Australianness of the 1950s – and, indeed, of the late 1960s and early 1970s. There is a quality of "picturesqueness", like Synge's, in Esson's portrayal of the Australian bush – similar to the "picturesque" treatment of urban slum-life in the plays of the 1950s.

This self-consciousness helps explain Esson's ultimate failure. The rest of the explanation lies in the inappropriateness of the Irish Folk model. In the Australian outback there were, quite simply, no folk. There was only the tough land and handful of tragic, or grimly stoic, individuals who absorbed its toughness and were often defeated by it. A perennial problem in Australian realism is that the land is too important and too vast a protagonist to be adequately represented in this way. Esson, pioneering the form, was not afraid to set his plays out in the open, in the middle of the plains under the hostile sun but, without a more appropriate model than the Irish drama, he could not escape these fundamental limitations.

Not finding the people, the folk, was Esson's downfall. The Irish model let him down.

Esson called for a new type of Australian drama – "something with a cow in it". There is a recent Australian play with a cow in it, and the play is definitely epic in conception and dramatic structure. It is set in Russia, which Esson so loved, and it is about the problems of socialism which Esson knew. The cow, tethered in a square in the centre of Moscow, represents the inert mass of people which Esson spent his life trying to stimulate. The play is Stephen Sewell's *Traitors,* and it is an achievement which vindicates Esson's struggles.

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NOTES

1. Louis Esson, *The Southern Cross and other plays,* (Melbourne, 1946), p. 218.
2. Hugh Anderson (ed.), *Ballades of Old Bohemia* by Louis Esson, (Melbourne, 1980).
3. Vance Palmer, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre,* (Melbourne, 1948).
4. Anderson, *op. cit.,* p. 219.
5. Louis Esson, "Irish Memories and Australian Hopes", *Australian Quarterly,* XI, 2, June 1939, p. 58; and Palmer, op. cit., p. 10.
6. Quoted in T. Inglis Moore, *Social Patterns in Australian Literature,* (Sydney, 1971), p.9.
7. See Esson, *Australian Quarterly* article, p. 56, p. 64; Palmer, op. cit., p. 29, p. 41; Anderson, op. cit., p. 185, p. 186.
8. Anderson, op. cit., p. 195.
9. Palmer, op. cit., p. 4.
10. In *Dream and Disillusion.* (Canberra, 1976), ch. 1.
11. February 15. Quoted in Anderson, op. cit., p. 256.
12. "Louis Esson and Australian Drama" *Meanjin,* VI, 2, Winter 1947, pp. 93-6.
13. Anderson, op. cit., pp. 306-9.
14. "Some Louis Esson Manuscripts", *Southerly,* September 1983, pp. 347-357.
15. Esson, *The Southern Cross and other plays,* p. 220.
16. Anderson, op. cit., p. 139.
17. Esson, *Australian Quarterly* article, p. 58.
18. Palmer, op. cit., p. 25.
19. Anderson, op. cit., p. 187.
20. Palmer, op. cit., p. 3.

21. Anderson, op. cit., p. 174.
22. Ibid., pp. 192-3.
23. Ibid., p. 184.
24. Esson, *Australian Quarterly* article, p. 56.
25. Palmer, op. cit., p. 56.
26. "Standards in Australian Literature" *Current Affairs Bulletin*. 19, 3, November 26, 1956, p. 40.
27. Palmer, op. cit., pp. 35-6.
28. Ibid., p. 41.
29. Ibid., pp. 40, 41.
30. See, for example, Anderson, op. cit., p. 227.
31. Ibid., p. 224.
32. Ibid., p. 226.
33. Ibid., p. 227.
34. Hainsworth, op. cit., p. 356.
35. Manuscript in Campbell Howard Collection, Dixson Library, UNE.
36. Palmer, op. cit., p. 27.
37. Letter to William Moore, quoted in T. Inglis Moore, op. cit., p. 145.
38. Palmer, op. cit., p. 57.
39. "Introduction: Australian Drama Since 1920", in *Five Plays for Stage, Radio and Television* (St Lucia, 1977), pp. xi-xii. Subsequent page references to *The Drovers* are to this volume.

LIKE CHAMBERS IN THE BRAIN

For Maggie Edmond and Peter Corrigan

Bear in mind that a builder's band-aid job
is not a migraine, which in turn
is not your thesis under the mat
but a small, dense aria.
Well, magicians,

to design a room as generous as a Grand Final,
that would be something,
that would be hunky-dory,
light bouncing across the mini-radiant city.

To register in drawing up a hallway
our having passed the equinox of spring;
our having and renouncing visible
through the way you strung seven windows . . .

ah, you show your eloquence there, too,
but not in a verbal harness
and not in historians' deflection.
Red cedar yarns to wiring and to galvo,

using the inflected blue grammar of space
like an actor playing Banquo,
like a dream that sticks
in the gullet over weetbix and morning coffee.

These three rooms are strung beads of desire,
missing a pat full stop,
missing cold cruel colors,
and the roofing manages to ironize belief.

Houses you conjure materialize dim selves
proving the ghost in the machine
a grace in this machine for living,
so thank you,
and sweet dreams.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

MICHAEL KEON

Nolan at Seventy

A discussion of Brian Adams's Sidney Nolan, Such is Life *(Century Hutchinson, $35).*

"A well-written Life is almost as rare as a well-spent one," Thomas Carlyle tells us. More recently, Mark Twain's biographer Justin Kaplan observed: "The biographer is the equivalent of a good jockey. You can't win the race without a good horse." In his *Sidney Nolan, Such is Life*, I think author Brian Adams has been a good jockey. I wonder, though, about his horse?

Working from "hours of recorded reminiscences with the subject himself", "the diverse contributions of many people", and "masses of books, exhibition catalogues, and newspaper and magazine clippings", Adams gives us seventy years of Nolan in trial and tribulation, achievement and acclaim. First, there is Adams' "Celtic Larrikin". Born in 1917 in a Melbourne suburb to "working class parents", Nolan's childhood and youth are "happy in the easy environment of tram-driving, swimming, lifesaving, football, gymnastics and cycling and enjoy[ing] the camaraderie of his father's friends". He leaves school at fourteen, fails to get a job, and turns to art study at the Prahran Technical College, winning "a special dispensation to work in the life class, a full two years before it was usually allowed".

Then comes the young man as "Bohemian Rebel", whose most serious act in this respect is a botched try at stowing away on a Europe-bound ship. Nolan works for six years in Fayrfield Hats, at the same time establishing himself in the small but highly lively world of Melbourne arts, where he goes from an unproductive interview with Melbourne Herald chief Keith Murdoch and art critic Basil Burdett to a highly productive relationship with those two lovers, stimulators, and sustainers of the arts, John and Sunday Reed. This relationship will take care of his financial needs, expand and put perspectives into his awareness of and commitment to art, and see him through his first creative sunburst, culminating in that epochal visual fable, his first Ned Kelly sequence. Heide, the Reeds' home, is haven from wartime troubles.

In 1947, there is the break with the Reeds, followed by marriage to John Reed's sister Cynthia, and a meeting in Sydney with visiting English art historian and connoisseur Kenneth Clark that will prove as auspicious for Nolan overseas as had the Reed relationship at home.

By 1950, the Nolans are in London—and embarked on what will become one of the more dazzling and diversely rich odysseys in art and human association of our time. It will see Nolan with daring and insatiable innovation explore in paint subjects, among much else, taking in Africa's natural world, Gallipoli's battlefield, Greek (and Freudian) mythology, Chinese Buddha-figures, Antarctica, practically the whole Australian inland topographic and human spectrum, and as wonderful a world of wildflowers as God or man has imagined. There will be arresting 'shock of the new' designs for classical ballet and opera, and wholly new documentary film Australian envisionings.

In human association, there is pre-eminently that of the Nolans with the Clarks. In Sydney in 1949 Clark had sought out Nolan after seeing by chance a Nolan painting of "daring composition and . . . bold use of colour", and bought on the spot one of the further paintings Nolan showed him. In London, Clark makes Nolan's work a signal "exception" to his settled distaste for modern art, and with the Nolans themselves enters "into a firm friendship", having them as regular weekend guests on the Clarks' country estate. Clark writes the introductory essay to a Thames and Hudson monograph on Nolan (the first "major book about an Australian painter [to be] distributed internationally"). He persuades Nolan, over Cynthia's objections, to take an offered CBE that will be first step to full knighthood and finally that most distinguished accolade of all, the Order of Merit. Among those eminent personalities Clark brings Nolan into friendship with is composer Benjamin Britten. In 1969, as Clark's guest at the latter's opening of a great Rembrandt memorial exhibition in Amsterdam, Nolan admires Clark's handling of his fellow connoisseurs and his "brilliant" introductory speech. Four years later in Dublin, there is a retrospective of Nolan's own, opened by the Irish

prime minister, with Clark giving the introductory speech.

Among Nolan's numerous other notable acquaintances and friends are the Queen of England and Duke of Edinburgh, who have purchased Nolan paintings, the Australian writers Alan Moorehead and Xavier Herbert, Indian musician Ravi Shankar. When Patrick White is unable to journey to Sweden to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, it is Nolan who receives it for him from the hands of King Carl Gustav. On Nolan's roster of honors are an honorary fellowship of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and honorary doctorates from ANU and the University of Sydney.

All of which, and far, far more, Adams chronicles with an unflagging energy, an eye for significant detail, and an objectivity that may have had its testings here and there. Hutchinson packages it all most handsomely and clearly (except for indexing Sigmund Freud and myself where we aren't, and misspelling Knole), with happily supportive and well-printed illustrations (including one of the most beautiful and expressive photographs I have ever seen – a full-color shot of Nolan and present wife Mary, that I would dearly have loved to see on the jacket instead of a rather loopy head of an unknown-what).

Finally, as this review is written, Nolan's homeland is viewing a lifetime retrospective of Nolan's that will, I feel sure, prove to be one of the grander visual sweeps of our time.

Altogether, then, a success story? An *Australian* success story? Well, there's the rub.

2

In the windup to Adams' book, Nolan offers us a reflection on his and our time and place that opens:

> Most of our lives, indelibly influenced by the Melbourne experience, didn't turn out too well. Some of the principal players, including the Reeds, Joy Hester and Sweeney Reed, are already dead. Nobody got off easily and most of the battles were fought for a forlorn cause.

This is a quite extraordinary statement. But it does throw the whole book, and perhaps the subject himself, into a sobering balance.

First, the "Melbourne experience". This, presumably, refers to Nolan himself, Albert Tucker, Noel Counihan, John and Sunday Reed, John Perceval, Joy Hester, Arthur Boyd, Hal Porter, Judah Waten, Alister Kershaw, Alan Marshall, myself – growing up or spending a key part of our lives between the two wars in Melbourne. Which, of course, takes in the Great Depression years – a period recalling, for some of us, those words of Brian Fitzpatrick's on an earlier recession, that of the 1890s: "And so the curtain falls on wide-eyed expectation . . . 'never glad morning again' ".

But there was also Ian Turner's rejoinder to Fitzpatrick, that from the 1890s recession there "grew a new, fiery, all consuming dream which challenged all that had gone before". Turner's words, I submit, have application to how those of us who had pushed on and got work printed or exhibited were feeling by the later 1930s. It was at this later time that I first met Nolan.

And I must say that, of all of us then, Nolan was the most dream-possessed. To see Nolan come into Ristie's coffeeshop or down Swanston Street was – for me, at least – instant pleasure, expectation. It was not at all what Nolan said; indeed, I have never known

anyone who was able to suggest more while actually saying less; it was, I suppose, in the sense Nolan always carried with him of breasting some tide of warmth, confidence, commitment.

And Nolan was at his tide-breasting best at Heide, home of the Reeds. (Those who would know not just Heide and the Reeds but that whole period should turn to Richard Haese's *Rebels and Precursors*.) For myself, I will say that Heide and the Reeds were richly and enliveningly at one with that Australia-wide renewal of the spirit that had (somewhat miraculously, it now seems to me) issued from the 1920s doldrums and the early 1930s dejection and disorientation – and which continues in vigor and diversity to this day.

I think it proper to stress here, both generally and in the Nolan connection, how decisively transforming this renewal was. Though I cannot say I felt it myself, it seems unquestionable that we were a very parochial polity up to the late 1930s. The renewal then engendered — all over the country — changed all that, so that today we are at ease with ourselves and accepted for ourselves in most places where people make music, dance, paint pictures, make movies, write books.

Now, back to Nolan. Adams reports Nolan's "exhilaration at finding himself accepted as a creative individual" by the Reeds. Nolan decidedly was exhilarated, not just by his acceptance at Heide, but about pretty well everything at Heide. Garden, riverside paddocks, Sunday's food, shelves of books, conversation, wine, skylarking, and emotional openness and depth. Exhilarated, happy, absorbed, energized *and* secured. I know, because I was there. Certainly, every week or so, Nolan, or myself, or Joy Hester when she was there, or even John himself, felt like getting after Sunday with a shovel. Certainly, there were portents of real dislocations to come. But none of it weighed in the balance of being alive with the Reeds and being supported, enlightened, nagged, kicked in the teeth, and always urged onwards in whatever we saw as our purpose in life.

Nolan, of all of us, reaped most fruitfully the Reed whirlwind. It was in Heide's diningroom that Nolan painted his first and perhaps ultimate claim to fame, his Ned Kelly series. I had left Heide by then, but earlier I had seen what I imagine will remain a unique phenomenon in Australian art history: the precipitation of an ectoplasmic awareness into a workaday function. Nolan, Sunday decided, was just too open to the multifarious suggestiveness of immediate experience; more specifically, he didn't know whether he was painter or poet. To remedy this, Sunday sat herself and Nolan day after day at Heide's diningroom refectory table and read Rimbaud in French to Nolan. Nolan painted, or wrote down in English, what Rimbaud made him visualize, feel, or think of.

My own view, after a week or so of this exercise (and one or two shovel-brandishing reliefs of tension), was that Nolan was a genius. I understood a good deal more French than he did, and I will swear that his off-the-cuff English renderings of his Rimbaud understandings were light-years closer to the original than anything I could have flayed from my own mind. As for his drawings, paintings, they were a phantasmagoria of *structured* — mostly, but not all, abstract — beauty. I stress structured, because structure is, as I see it, honored by the later Nolan infinitely more in the breach than the performance. In any case, what I want to say here is that when years later I saw Nolan's Ned Kellys for the first time, I knew them instantly, not only as high visual lyrics, but as Nolan's Heide crossing of the poet/painter watershed.

As noted, in 1947 Nolan diverged from the Reeds for good. The Reeds pushed on with a publishing venture they had started jointly with Max Harris and Nolan. They founded the Museum of Modern Art, and continued to support financially and in many other always lively and usually fruitful ways a second and third generation in the arts. In their later years they gave a very large collection and an endowment of $1.8 million to the Victorian government. The government created Heide Park and Art Gallery in grounds which had been a large part of their garden. Earlier, they had given their collection of Nolan's Ned Kelly paintings to the National Gallery in Canberra. Six years ago, they died, not because, as Nolan seems to imply, their lives "didn't turn out too well", but because they were old (John Reed a few days before his 80th birthday.) And were ready to leave a life that had turned out richly and well indeed.

This curious ellipsis, this setting off things at a tangent, which occurs in Nolan's later-life reflection, seems to have projected itself all the way back into Nolan's earlier years at Heide. While the intimacy of Nolan's relationship with the Reeds, and the general effervescence of the life of the mind at Heide, is made clear, Nolan's account of the time and place seems to me almost painfully neglectful of a major dimension: Nolan's own preternatural awareness of, and contribution to, the positivity of it all.

Nolan seemed to me then to have a quite uncanny *knowingness* in regard to our involvement, our ingredients, our destiny, Picasso and Rimbaud, Melbourne's beaches and tomorrow's Champs Elysees. "They *will* be the Fields of Heaven for us, you'll see!", he told me (with a slyish glance to check if my French was up to his), Sunday devilling in the kitchen and John pruning roses, idea and action, they were all conspiring to somebody's, why not our, advantage? Nolan, then, was that thing we read about but seldom encounter, at least in our daily lives: a catalyst. He brought himself and all of us together in an awareness and commitment beyond any previous experience, and which has continued to fructify ever since. (I remember Joy Hester, another of those people whose lives for Nolan "didn't turn out too well", remarking of the Nolan of this time: "He's mad, but it's the *right sort of madness*". Joy, of course, did die tragically young, but only after a striking achievement in painting and a courage and intensity of living of a match for far longer lives.)

None of this comes out in Nolan's "recorded reminiscences". He short-changes himself, the Reeds, our history, and the whole business of being a people, a polity.

Nor is it just the Reeds he elides. There is friend and peer-painter Albert Tucker. We are given nothing of their comings-together in Rome, London, New York, their exchanges of view and experience. There is no mention of the Tucker-inspired and largely organized

1962 Melbourne "Rebels and Precursors" exhibition, which brought all the "Angry Decade" painters, Nolan very much included, back into the public eye not haphazardly but as an historic event and thrust.

Australia itself comes in as tangential to Nolan's perception of himself and his needs. In 1965, he is brought back to Australia on an Australian National University "creative arts fellowship". Arrived in Canberra, Nolan finds the national capital isolated and non-vital, fellowship opportunities "nebulous". Wife Cynthia wonders "if she could survive for six months living in their flat at University House", encompassed by suburban/political/bureaucratic "properties" and close to friend and fellow-painter John Perceval, whose then wife Mary will become Nolan's present wife after Cynthia's suicide. Nolan persuades a reluctant ANU to let him use fellowship funds, not to see if he can he bring about an on-campus "creative" relationship, but to finance an Asian tour that will end in China, and be remarkable only for how Indonesia's President Sukarno, after viewing a Nolan Ned Kelly book and having it suggested that Nolan do his portrait, sardonically observes that such a painting exercise would result in himself and Nolan being dead men.

Back in Canberra, Nolan presents to ANU not what has been promised—"an exhibition derived from [Nolan's] observation of [Asian] nations", but "a small group of works on China", which ANU Pro-Chancellor H. C. Coombs accepts with the proviso that "the university looked forward to a larger edition in due course". No such edition eventuates, but Nolan deems ANU's later award of an honorary doctorate to him as indication that Coombs at least "was obviously satisfied with the institution's investment in its former arts fellow". The kindly, ever-permissive, Coombs, perhaps. But what of university teachers and students, denied a learning interchange with one of their country's currently most actively creative forces?

Then, that Australian novel-of-novels with which Adams' book on Nolan shares something of its title: Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life*. There is a suggestion that Nolan might like to take Furphy's work as painting subject. Nolan visits the novel's locale, the Riverina—and concludes that some of his earlier Queensland paintings of "desert landscapes, deserted mines, ghost towns, and dilapidated hotels were in the spirit of Furphy's novel". Which is rather like finding Flemington racecourse at the end of a Melbourne Cup Day bash to be in the spirit of the Great Barrier Reef at dawn.

Through the years, Nolan has given—or sought to give—generously of his works to the Australian nation. There is, for example, his 1983 gift to the National Gallery of Victoria of his properly acclaimed wartime Wimmera paintings. A gift, nonetheless, about which he has "second thoughts", observing: "I think I was probably foolish to let go of those valuable paintings in the light of what happened afterwards". Whatever it is that "happened afterwards", surely this hindsight regret calls into question Nolan's philosophy of giving: was he giving for some continuing purpose of his own, or was he giving to the Australian nation for *its* quite possibly problematic, but still certainly continuing, self.

Nolan tells us: "I don't think Australians are very fair fighters, but must add I don't think myself one either". Example: Nolan's friend, novelist Xavier Herbert, in an international telephone conversation, pokes mild fun at Nolan's new knighthood; Nolan then dials Herbert's number "for the rest of the day" (night in Australia), hanging up each time without waiting for Herbert to get to the phone. Result: the sleepless night makes the aging Herbert so ill he has "to cancel a trip to Darwin".

Then, Nolan in the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. The Ned Kellys he painted back in 1946-47 in Heide, which he gave to Sunday Reed and which were his takeoff to fame, are hanging there over a plaque noting they "were given with love to the Australian National Gallery by Sunday Reed". Nolan, after he has "asked the attendants to look the other way", tries unsuccessfully to prise the plaque from the wall. *I don't believe it.* The Nolan I knew, respected, admired, fought with, and even loved, back in those Heide years, would never nose-dive so deep into inanity and self-betrayal.

Now, before I conclude with something on Nolan as painter—a subject which the Adams book explicitly does not treat, but which is still implicit throughout it—let me show quickly how, if Nolan is determined to keep Australia in ellipsis, at a tangent to himself, how much more so he is with the world at large.

No one in the whole book is more demonstrably "supportive" (Nolan's or Adams' word) of Nolan than art historian/connoisseur Kenneth Clark—and no one ends up more at a tangent to Nolan.

Clark's initial erring is in having not himself but his butler wait on his doorstep to welcome the Nolans to their first lunch at his home; Nolan enthusiastically mistakes the butler for Clark's father, lauding him on his "brilliant son". Lunch itself is a bust; Nolan is seated next to a Frenchwoman who speaks French; also, he mistakes quail for "undergrown pigeons" and finds them "too uncooked" to eat. Later, there is Clark's liking for silence during Sunday breakfast in his country home. Nolan finds "breakfasts in silence . . . a pointless exercise". Though he firmly explains this to his host ("the *Sunday Times* is only the *Sunday Times*, eggs are only eggs"), Clark proves incapable of reform. Nolan, therefore, goes "out of his way to bait his host with random questions"; inane, as well as random, Nolan makes clear. Next, Nolan inadvertently causes the Observer to gain access to and print Clark's introduction to Thames and Hudson's

Nolan monograph, placing Clark in a highly embarrassing breach of contract with the Sunday Times. Nolan spends an interested Sunday observing the Clarks' discovery of, and distress at, this inexplicable occurrence. Nor, even when Clark settles down to write an urgent letter of apology to the Sunday Times, does Nolan try to help in rectification by informing Clark of his, Nolan's, inadvertent culpability. Moreover, Nolan makes it explicit that for him the relevant upshot of all this is how the Observer's "generous" exposure helps a current exhibition of his "to become a sell-out". Last, Nolan's Dublin retrospective. On the one hand, we have Clark's introductory address which presents Nolan in measured and felicitous terms as "a genius" and which "seemed to go down well with the audience". On the other hand, we have how "Nolan squirmed with embarrassment as Clark proceeded to pour out compliments . . . in the clipped delivery that had almost become a caricature of himself since *Civilisation*", with Clark finally being silenced by "a loud Irish voice" telling him to shut up. Nolan is "dazed by Clark's words". *What* dazes Nolan in Clark's words? He is already familiar with them, as they are, we are told, largely based on that Thames and Hudson essay of Clark's which had helped "sell-out" Nolan's show. Or is it Clark's "clipped", "caricature"-like, delivery? If so, what about how our own Australian "caricature"-like stridences have "dazed" ears the globe round?

3

As a painter Adams tells us, Nolan's "real dedication was to the transmission of emotions"; he would sometimes, in his own words, "belt the paint across the canvas much faster than it should be belted; I don't care as long as I get emotional communication". Nolan also refers to his first China experience as having been "like a dream in which you drown and fly at the same time". Of a 1953 Nolan show in Australia, art critic Paul Haefliger commented on Nolan's "agility of mind, more daring than ever" and then turns to what he sees as "the Immediate emotion and impact are not sustained". At a London exhibition nearly twenty years later, the Observer critic Nigel Gosling recalls Nolan's Ned Kelly descent on London, and finds that Nolan's "original myths having been mined to the point of exhaustion, he tackled new ones but never with the same thread of inspiration running through even the smallest drawing".

True, and yet not true enough. Of course, Nolan's emotions "belt" paint across canvas. Of course, he is most of the time drowning in paint while he thinks he is flying. Of course, such too-"immediate emotion and impact" does not sustain itself. And of course, above all, he has mined his original myth to a skeleton-in-the-cupboard contradiction in creative terms—without ever managing to pick up again "the same thread of imagination" (his latest threat is to paint the Silk Road and/or Long March; has he ever been in a Gobi dust-storm, or crossed the Tatu Ho bridge?)

Never mind. Out of all these brain and emotional storms, these drownings, there always emerges one or two or three unique signature-paintings. Out of Heide, not so much the Kellys as "Woman and Tree" and "Rosa Mutabilis". Out of Nolan's trip to Antarctica, that marvellously eerie, foreboding and total otherness, "Antarctic Landscape, 1964". Out of his Gallipoli murk and splurge, one dying-never-to-die Anzac head.

Gallipoli returns us to the question of the nature and degree of Nolan's Australian awareness, sense of involvement. Gallipoli is an epic of survival. But survival out of the Australian context. It does not necessarily require an Australian imaginative effort to render it. Indeed, the "Anzac, 1964" face noted above is far more that of a Rupert Brooke than a Riverina boundary-rider or bullocky. Also, there is an overall aspect to the Gallipoli sequence that invites such reflection as that of the Sydney Morning Herald's Wallace Thornton: "The confident forms, the skilful arabesques [are] not enough for this theme"; the "slippery forms and equally slippery colours hardly arouse one's confidence . . .".

There was, however, another Australian epic of survival that might have evoked a Nolan imaginative response but did not. This is the epic of the original crossing of the Blue Mountains, of explorations such as Sturt's and Eyre's, of the first squatters, shepherds, roustabouts, shearers—particularly the workforce main component, of whom A. A. Phillips has written that they survived by "not so much the anger of the wronged, awakening to their rights, as the pride of men who had won their spiritual independence".

In what I think may fairly be taken in this connection, Nolan himself has percipiently observed that Australian light

> isolates objects, disperses them, giving them emphasis, but not equal emphasis. It probably isolates them more than any other light I've ever seen and that's a problem which confronts Australian painters . . . The light will not let you amalgamate the forms, whereas in Europe you have the unity emanating from floating skies.

On the isolating force of Australian light, Nolan certainly is correct. There is, of course, any amount of Australian light and objects in Nolan's work, and certainly no amalgamation of the kind he refers to. This, I think, is because Nolan has always been incapable of making a climactic act of the Australian imagination. As have, for example, Albert Tucker in his "Explorer", "Intruder", "Masked Faun" and reaper-beaked parrot series, and John Olsen who, along with Tucker, has in Robert Hughes' words "invented one of the few original schemata for Australian landscape

since 1885". Hang Nolan's Gallipoli survival paintings alongside Tucker's Explorer/Intruder/Faun survival paintings – and Nolan's lack of an ultimate, abiding Australian vision will be apparent.

Why this should be so rather baffles me. Perhaps there is a clue to Nolan's non-Australian-amalgamativeness in his book of paintings and poems, *Paradise Garden*. The paintings are glimpses of a paradise of vision, in content and in that high form which is the goal but not often the achievement of all art. They are the direct lineal descendants of Nolan's Heide-painted original Ned Kellys. The poems are mostly cranky and ugly and, as Adams' book acknowledges, the direct lineal descendants of Nolan's association with, and break from, the Reeds. Except that, as *Paradise Garden* makes only too arrestingly clear, Nolan never really did succeed with the break; whatever in Nolan's soul the poems were written out of, the flowers were painted on the Heide refectory table of Nolan's inner eye.

4

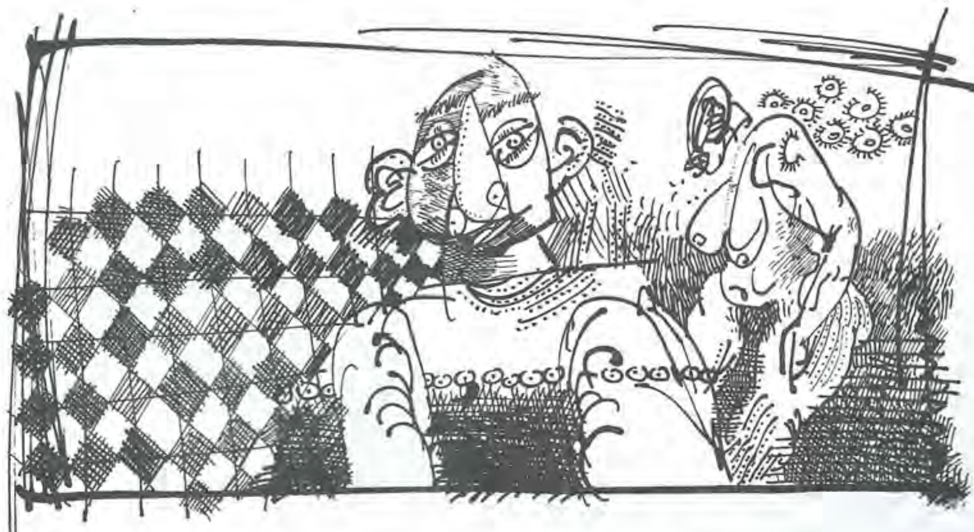
Brian Adams' *Sidney Nolan, Such is Life* does not, then, unqualifiedly exemplify Thomas Carlyle on biography. And the reason is quite plainly that jockey Adams has been riding a highly tangential-minded horse. A tangent that New Yorker magazine artist Saul Steinberg (or his wife Hedda) puts probably better than anyone else ever will, in speaking to the late Cynthia Nolan:

> Every word that Sidney says is camouflage. Everything he says goes off on a trail away from what he really believes, thinks, intends to do, has done in the past. He is like the bird dragging a wing, leading the hunter away from the nest.

Once again, never mind. Perhaps the most lasting and illuminating biographical word on Nolan has been said not in words but in his own medium of paint. By his old friend Tucker, in Tucker's "Faces I have Met" portrait series. Which December 1985 Overland readers will recall Richard Haese describing this way:

> At one extreme is the artist as elegant and successful businessman . . . at the other a cadaverous figure appearing out of a dark background like a gaunt and shadowed man of sorrows . . . 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.

Michael Keon, as Brian Adams notes, was "one of the Heide circle" at largely the same time as Sidney Nolan. He has worked abroad since the war, publishing two novels and a socio-political study of Park Chung Hee's Korea.



Jiri Tibor Novak

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

The funeral of Bob Cugley in June was a sober occasion conducted with religious rites. Its extraordinary character was the variety of women and men present, crowding out the hall of the funeral parlor. It was a gathering which in itself encompassed a large part of the intellectual and literary history of Melbourne in the past fifty years and more. It ran, if you like, from the magisterial figure of Frank Cheshire, active in the Melbourne book trade before the first world war, to Barry Jones, a Minister of the Crown today. Some would have liked a more bohemian farewell for a great lover of life and a witty commentator on it, but the setting and the tone also matched another vision of Bob—as the archetypal, felt-hatted working-class Australian of the northern suburbs of Melbourne a generation or two back, the man who never turned his back on his origins and, for this very reason, was never ill at ease in any company.

Another bloke and I were going to write Bob's life, a year or two back, but of course we never got around to it. That other bloke is now running the Victorian Schools Board, and I also had plenty to do, but I'm not really rueful at our desertion. Bob didn't want puffery, didn't even want recognition. He accepted with diffidence a Medal of the Order of Australia, and he was the first Bookman of the Year, and he took a cheque for $5000 that was raised for him after he retired only on the condition that he would spend it on lunches for his mates, and that meant particularly the women he admired, Mirka Mora and the rest.

To put it shortly, he didn't want his name on the spine of a book, either literally or metaphorically. He was happy enough to be the man who printed it; sometimes, and when the writer was having a hard time, publishing it also. His name and good works are legion, at least in Melbourne. If the Angry Penguins mob have a central place in the development of modernist perspectives in Australian cultural life, a place confirmed by a book, an exhibition and a play about to appear, then think of Cugley—he printed Angry Penguins. If you are impressed by Rob Darby's forthcoming piece on Frank Dalby Davison, then think on Cugley: he, and he alone, would print *The White Thorntree.* If, by any chance, you are grateful for the survival of Overland into the 1980s, then dip your lid to the old Bob.

He wouldn't have any truck with computers or photosetting, would Robert Cecil Cugley. So I see him out there now, at the place John Manifold wrote about: the outback fringe of heaven, where the souls of poets meet. He was a bit cynical about poets, was Bob, and had some amusing things to say about them, as he had amusing things to say about everyone. (What, I wonder, did he say about me?) But he put up with them and would buy them a beer and, being a tolerant man, I think he's out there with them, putting in a spell at the tinkling heavenly linotype (the sound people refer to as angelic bells), rolling out the smudged galleys on the proofing-press, sitting at a marble table in his waistcoat puzzling over the authors' marks, and calling Creeve Roe in to give him a hand with the jumping presses. But the paper is acid-free, distribution gratis through the cherubs' union, and all the reviews are kindly. By that time, though, Bob is back on the next job.

Talking of Manifold, a reader of Overland, one of quite a considerable number who are trying to acquire a complete set and are reading earlier issues, has written of his delight at coming across John Manifold's "Ballade of Complaint to the A.B.C.", published in Overland 25 and not included in John's *Collected Verse.* He feels it so timely that he has asked us to reprint it:

It's rarely that the times afford
    A man a night at home, to squat
At ease, unbothered by the Board
    Of Management, and drink his tot,
    And hear some music—a gavotte,

A bourree, something debonair—
Switch on the wireless!
I forgot:
It's Parliament that's on the air.

A Handel suite for harpsichord,
A feature on Sir Walter Scott,
Which we were promised, are ignored
In favour of this ghastly lot
Who, not content with having got
Our suffrage, have the nerve to tear
Our ears all night with bloody rot!
It's Parliament that's on the air.

How loudly and how long, O Lord,
They run the old appalling trot,
With memories incompletely stored
And all their grammar gone to pot!
The Minister for God-knows-What,
The Honorable from God-knows-Where—
They should be taken out and shot!
It's Parliament that's on the air.

Envoi

Lord Jupiter, since you allot
Thunder and lightning, hear my prayer:
Tilt your celestial chamber-pot!
It's Parliament that's on the air.

Suspicious though I am of the rapid academisation of Australian literature, I have a soft spot for the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies of James Cook University at Townsville. Under the aegis of the Henry Lawson scholar Colin Roderick this university was early in the field. Harry Heseltine developed the work of the foundation further before he moved to that institution in Canberra which I call Duntroon. It now calls itself, in absurdly inflated verbiage matching the ponderous illiteracies of academia itself, something like The Faculty of English of the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Forces Academy at Campbell A.C.T.

For many years the FALS at Townsville has sponsored a series of annual lectures on Oz Lit, a series I could hardly denounce, even if I wanted to, because I once appeared in it myself. A lot of good sense has been talked at these lectures, which are published as pamphlets at $5 each. Issues in print include Dorothy Green on the writer, reader and critic; Bruce Bennett on the influence of locality on Australian writing; Alec Hope on directions in Australian poetry; and Mark O'Connor on poetry styles and on David Williamson's plays.

Newly arrived in this series is Brian Matthews's *Romantics and Mavericks*, a discussion of the Australian short story with special reference to Miles Franklin, Louisa Lawson, Barbara Baynton, Thea Astley, Vance Palmer and Hal Porter. The informal and unaffected tone which has been a mark of the best of the Townsville lectures is apparent in what Brian Matthews has to say, as is a shrewd capacity to look at the relationship between the psychology of writers and their work. This has always been one of Matthews's special skills.

Matthews, for instance, tells the fascinating story of how Vance Palmer made a pilgrimage to Russia to seek out Tolstoy, made his way to Tolstoy's home, then turned back and took refuge in the buffet at the local railway station, unsure of himself and his mission. This is skilfully related to Vance Palmer's literary philosophy and his literary image. Late in life Palmer seems to have found a new voice: I remember how impressed many of us were at the time with his late collection of stories *Let the Birds Fly*.

Unfortunately, when I took up the review of *Let the Birds Fly* in Overland in 1956, I now find it patronising and insensitive. Precisely the kind of review we should *not* have published—better none at all. As I subsequently came to realise, Vance Palmer was in the depths of critical despair at the time at the two-bob-each-way attitude critics were taking to his work. And here we had in Overland a group of young, wet-behind-the-ears enthusiasts for Australian literature being rather superior towards their father-figure, a man of immense distinction in his literary work, and a man who gave Overland every encouragement.

I should not, then, have been surprised as I was when, a little later, I with other judges gave the novel prize in the Alan Marshall competition *jointly* to Palmer's *The Big Fellow* and to David Forrest's *The Last Blue Sea*, and Vance Palmer rejected the prize: "I'd be hypocritical if I pretended that it wasn't a slight on a last novel, the end of a long series of experiments, to be bracketed with a first." The fact that Vance later relented and accepted the prize was, I am sure, not because he wanted the money, though he probably needed it, but because of his good manners and his realisation that he had hurt our feelings. This was more important to Vance than the fact that we had hurt his.

I didn't know at the time how deep-seated Vance Palmer's views on literary competitions were. In a letter to Marie Pitt in 1928, after one of his novels had won a Bulletin prize, he wrote:

> I hate competitions, and would never deliberately write a book for one: but this was under way, and I thought I might as well have a try for any rewards that were going. But the atmosphere of the competition, the judging of books as if marks could be given for this or that! And the general belief that

the verdict of a fairly promiscuous set of judges must be the only one!

Well, of course, the point is that marks can be given for "this or that", and this is a proper function of criticism. But Palmer's final point is a weighty one.

Brian Matthews finds, in *Let the Birds Fly*, "a late voice whose romantic intensity, imagery and nostalgia were quite at odds with what he had judged to be the Australian writer's proper note." "Perhaps Palmer," writes Matthews, "older, mellower, feeling less burdened by a personal sense of responsibility for the national literary directions, and in any case deeply disappointed with his own reception, consciously dropped his guard and let a voice speak that had been there, but silenced, all along."

Matthews points to the possible influence here of Patrick White's *The Tree of Man*, published in 1955, "with its unashamed Lawrentian imagination." Perhaps there was a bit more to it than this; perhaps there was something of that odd factor, 'the spirit of the times.' Christopher Koch, in his new book of thoughtful autobiographical essays, *Crossing the Gap*, tells of writing *The Boys in the Island* in a tiny bed-sitter in London in 1956, thinking it to be different from the novels then appearing in Australia. "I was soon to find that I was wrong," he writes:

> In the week of my departure from Britain, I discovered Patrick White's newly published novel *The Tree of Man* in a bookshop in Charing Cross Road; and in 1958, when *The Boys in the Island* finally found publication, Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* appeared. Both of these novels were doing what I most valued in fiction: they were charting inward journeys, not just outward ones: their authors were prepared to bring to the novel the methods of poetry, and to deal with irrational and mysterious impulses in the human psyche. I wasn't alone; and it delighted me.

Appreciative though I am of Brian Matthews's insights, I beg leave to demur from one or two of his 'literary-historical' judgements in his first lecture in *Romantics and Mavericks*. To suggest that Furphy's *Such is Life* was 'misunderstood' during the first forty years of its existence, and was retrieved *inter alia* by Alec Hope's review of Miles Franklin's *Joseph Furphy: The Legend of a Man and his Book* (1944), does much less than justice to the understanding and reception of this book by many writers and critics in Australia prior to this time, as the research of Overland contributor Rob Darby in Canberra is now establishing. To say that Barbara Baynton and Miles Franklin "have been the subjects of relatively recent feminist retrievals" (which, Matthews says, have "introduced some distortions of their own") is misleading, if Matthews means by this that little serious attention was being paid to these writers in the 1940s.

To say that Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* made little impact until rediscovered in the 1950s is ridiculous. All of these books were acquired by me and by friends at the University of Melbourne in or about 1945. Teachers such as Max Crawford and Manning Clark made sure that their students were made aware of them. The idea that we were not only Australians, but Australians in an intellectual continuum which had been shaped by other Australians was, admittedly, novel to us. But it was enormously exciting, and transformed not a few lives. For many of us Australian literature was not discovered by feminists or English department academics but by the 'spirit of the times' I mentioned above. It was necessary for the generation coming back from the war to discover its roots, and therefore those roots were discovered. The fact that academics and others may have followed our path some time later, when Oz Lit became more respectable, is satisfying and important. The files of Meanjin in the 1940s, and of Overland in the 1950s, demonstrate adequately enough that the 'retrieval' of Australian literature, if the word is appropriate at all, is nothing we have to thank the English departments for, though many now make good livings from it.

I ran right into a 'hegemony of the academics' situation recently, as one of a panel of five judges for the 'non-fiction' and 'Australian Studies' sections of the Victorian Premier's literary awards. Four of the five judges were full-time academics, the other a lawyer with strong academic connections. Of the four academics one was an anthropologist, one a sociologist, one a philosopher and one me. Of the five on the panel I was the only one with any 'literary' connections, if that word is defined 'in reasonably close touch with the current active literary scene.' My view that the panel, though composed of intelligent people, was grossly unrepresentative of the literary world and of the world of readers—the people who make literature, as David Malouf pointed out in a recent Overland—was greeted with smiles.

Although the panel in my opinion finally made satisfactory decisions about the major prize-winners, this did not dispel my view that such a panel is poorly constructed and unlikely to pay informed attention to works the interest of which was intrinsically literary: an innovative new autobiography, for instance, or a set of literary essays. As one would expect from the judges, the 'short list' consisted of books of historical, sociological and political interest.

It must be said that there were probably sixty or seventy books submitted, and that most of them were probably in one or other of those fields. But the issue

raised is an interesting one: how 'literary' should a 'literary' award be? Should a work written in humdrum prose, though raising important new issues, gain favor over a brilliant, though perhaps not entirely successful, attempt to find a new creative, 'literary' solution to the problems of an old form—say autobiography? On the other hand should a sparkling piece of 'literary' showmanship, deploying words imaginatively and effectively, receive credit if the content is seriously flawed? I must say I do not know all the answers and that I found the whole experience depressing, adding fuel to those criticisms of literary competitions which point out that they usually end up comparing unlike to unlike. And, although I had respect for my colleagues on this panel, I doubt if I would accept appointment to such a panel again. Irrespective of our individual attributes, we were all too much out of the same mould, *bien pensant* leftish academics, and the committee that appointed us was presumably weighted the same way. The thing that worries me is that no-one seems to think there's anything wrong with this. Vance Palmer had the right idea.

Talking of Christopher Koch and the "charting of inward journeys", as he puts it, it is worth remarking that his *Crossing the Gap* is a rare example in the writing of Australian writers of a writer charting his (or her) own inward journey as a writer. Would that there were more.

And talking of Miles Franklin, and of the common reader, I had a letter the other day from an older man, a retired Bass Strait fisherman, who has bought himself a small island in Bass Strait where he can spend his days reading and looking:

> We have had this year probably the greatest 'Indian Summer' known to man—far greater than old Jolyon Forsyte's. We had twelve weeks of perfect, wind-free sunny days, culminating in five frosts (on a small island!) before winter set in. The Sounds in good weather is that close to paradise that all else fades into insignificance.

John goes on to say that "literature is very thin on the ground here and, being a very critical consumer, I stick to the so-called 'classics'. These are generally books which I devoured in my teens but my appreciation of them now is so much more emotional than analytical. My method of assessing a writer or book is to read three at the same time. When the 'message' started to come through about Miles Franklin I read her with Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy. Needless to say I never finished *My Brilliant Career*, but could not put *Emma* or *Tess* down until I had finished and re-read parts for the umteenth time."

There was a conference on literary magazines in Canberra recently, organised by the Australian National University. I didn't go, despite the invitations issued to a number of international luminaries, because the Australian literary editors were not consulted about the conference and were offered no more than walk-on, walk-off parts. It was another little piece of academic arrogance.

The conference, no doubt, achieved more for the self-esteem of the organisers and participants than in any other direction, in the immemorial way of conferences. It has had one interesting sequel. In the London Review of Books (9 July 1987) Ian Hamilton, one-time editor of the one-time London magazine New Review, takes a couple of thousand words to denounce literary magazines in general and Australian ones in particular. (I seem to remember that New Review never had the circulation of any of the leading Australian literary magazines.) He also writes about Australia with that indefinable sneer which even the best of the English intellectuals seem to find it impossible to avoid.

The New Review, in his time and before it folded, Ian Hamilton writes (and says he told the conference), was a *real* 'little magazine'. It promoted its own stable of poets, knew the enemies it wanted to attack, had a "bumptious kind of certainty" and employed as critics "young hoods not afraid to wield an axe". Then the New Review's writers became successes of various kinds and started writing for the newspapers. The magazine became 'accepted'. "Highbrow innovation" became fashionable. There was no longer any point. For if 'little magazines' "yearn" to discover new talent that talent will soon be "discovered" by others and all that will be left, as things are these days, is for the magazines to become "hole-in-the-corner asylums" for the second-raters, characterised by "the sourness and envy of the excluded."

Hamilton's "provocative little speech", he complains, aroused nothing but a "quasi-ruminative silence". One wonders whether this was because he had revealed a truth to the Australians hitherto hidden from them, and for which they were dumbly grateful. Or whether they were quiet because Australians have better manners than English intellectuals, and they saw in Hamilton's remarks a self-serving biographical justification of his literary failures as well as of his successes.

Part of Hamilton's article is a detailed demolition job on Scripsi, with Meanjin and Overland one of the three Melbourne-based magazines. It made me grateful that I hadn't been at the Canberra conference, as the Scripsi editors were, and hadn't drawn Hamilton's attention to Overland, as they drew his attention to Scripsi. The Scripsi people, I have no doubt, can very well attend to that side of the matter themselves. While it would

be foolish to deny Hamilton's right to interpret the history of his own magazine as he wishes, and it would be equally foolish to refuse to examine his theories about the uselessness of literary magazines today and get what one can from those theories, the point to me simply is that Hamilton is not only rationalising but that he is demanding that we accept one 'model' only for such a magazine, quite uninterested (as I would have expected) in the history of Australian cultural life and the role the magazines have played, and continue to play, in it.

Of course magazines like Overland should have an 'identity', but it doesn't have to be the identity Hamilton defines as the *only* permissible identity. And of course we all want to do some of the things Hamilton defines as the *sine qua non*. We like to have good poets and other writers identified with us. We like our critics and reviewers to know their own minds. We like helping to 'discover' new talent, and we have done much of it in our time. But we have seldom found that new talents desert us when success comes – witness Frank Moorhouse's splendid story in Overland 107. We have found that magazines like this retain, for the best of Australian writers, a continuing relevance. We do not believe that a cult of 'innovation' is *all* that matters. Overland has a duty to serve readers' interests as well as writers'. It has a duty, as I see it, to sponsor intelligent debate on books which cover a wide area in form and content. It has a duty to publish important opinions on the whole Australian experience: for instance, Walter Crocker's remarkable article on Richard Casey in Overland 107. It should try to lead taste and opinion, certainly, but on a broad front, as befits a society in which 'affairs of the mind' are more than the property of small elites. And it should seek to reflect attributes of the Australian mind, such as its humor, its tolerance and its scepticism. Let me, then, be a little sceptical about Ian Hamilton.

Whose magazine, be it noted, and despite his snide remarks about the Literature Board of the Australia Council and its grants, was kept afloat through the special interest of Charles Osborne and the British Arts Council, with a partisan generosity which has since come under heavy fire.

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A. D. HOPE'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY: A POEM FROM HIM AND A POEM TO HIM

THE MERMAID IN THE ZODIAC

(Antipodean Version)

"I shall be among the English poets, I think,
After my death," wrote Keats. He had in mind
A chair beside Chaucer, a seat by Spenser, a drink
With Dryden – poets of that kind.

I wonder among what poets I shall be found,
Shall I be sorted with the goats or with the sheep?
Among our fractious factions underground
What company shall I keep?

I will have no truck with the scribblers of my time
Who try to pass off their chopped-up prose as verse.
To be numbered with those who repudiate metre
and rhyme,
Could anything be worse?

Shall I join the ocker Australians then? But in whose
Camp? Banjo's mob or Dennis's push?
I have never celebrated the Larrikin Muse
Nor the Barmaid of the Bush.

I expect I shall stand, looking rather out of place,
Between the mouth-organs and the didgeridoos;
Not a sheep in sight, but a goat with a puzzled face
Among all those Kangaroos.

A. D. HOPE

SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT PREACHES TO THE MICE

To A. D. Hope

Silk-whispering of knife on stone,
due sacrifice, and my meat came.
Caressing whispers, then my own
choice among laps by leaping flame.

What shape is space? Space will put on
the shape of any cat. Know this:
my servant Schrödinger is gone
before me to prepare a place.

So worship me, the Chosen One
in the great thought-experiment.
As in a grave I will lie down
and wait for the Divine Event.

The lid will close. I will retire
from sight, curl up and say Amen
to geiger counter, amplifier,
and a cylinder of HCN.

When will the geiger counter feel
decay, its pulse be amplified
to a current that removes the seal
from the cylinder of cyanide?

Dead or alive? The case defies
all questions. Let the lid be locked.
Truth, from your little beady eyes,
is hidden. I will not be mocked.

Quantum mechanics has no place
for what's there without observation.
Classical physics cannot trace
spontaneous disintegration.

If the box holds a living cat
no scientist on earth can tell.
But I'll be waiting, sleek and fat.
Verily, all will not be well

if, to the peril of your souls,
you think me gone. Know that this house
is mine, that kittens by mouse-holes
wait, who have never seen a mouse.

GWEN HARWOOD

FIVE POEMS FROM "POLAND" BY LILY BRETT

THE CAKE

On the fifth of December
before dawn

in the blackness
of Palacowa street

your mother arrived
with a surprise

it was
your eighteenth birthday mother

you were living
a married life

with your husband
his mother and father and brother

in one room
in the ghetto

Rooshka Rooshka
she whispered loudly

in the
still curfewed air

I have baked you
a cake

my
darling daughter

I sold
my blue woollen dress

with the mink trim
the one I wore to your brother's barmitzvah

to Mrs Zimmerman
for thirty-six saccharin

and a kilo
of thick potato peels

from the kitchen
that peels with a knife not a peeler

I minced the clean peels
and added

two cups of chopped
turnip and beetroot tops

some baking soda
salt saccharin and washed coffee grounds

for
extra texture

the mixture
fitted beautifully

in
my baking dish

with
a bit of water

oh
Rooshka Rooshka

my beloved daughter

I have baked you
a cake.

TALES

The ghetto tales
I most hated
were about potato peels

the extravagance
of potato peel patties
steamed in a skillet

the good luck
of potato peel soup
thickened with sawdust

potato peels
it was
too pathetic

and
felt worse
than the stories

of
children
dying in the streets

and
relatives killing each other
for a piece of bread

and
trainload after trainload
vanished.

AT SEVENTEEN

At seventeen
not
having seen

much
of
life

mother

you
were sent
into the ghetto

where
you saw
everything.

AFTER THE WAR

After the war
it made your ears ache
your skin creep
your head swim

to see
your possessions
belonging to them

to sit
with Mrs Polski
who used to be
the caretaker

while her gangly callow son
wallowed
in your father's suit

she served you cake
on china plates
that were part of your mother's dowry

and the grand piano
standing polished and proud
was your brother's most prized possession

and you could see
mother
that Mrs Polski
was surprised
to find you still alive.

POLAND

What do you want
to go to Poland for
you screamed

your golden face
frozen
and distorted

the Poles
were worse
than the Germans

small children
in the towns around
the camp

would kick us
when we walked to work
in our striped rags

grown men
would throw
a piece of bread

and
nearly die with laughter
while we fought each other

oh
those nice Poles
those good people

what do you want
to go Poland for
you wept

they
won't let you leave
so easily

something
terrible
will happen

Liebala Liebala
please
why go

you know
after the war
there was a miracle

not
one Pole
did know

about
what happened
to us

you
could smell
the flesh

burning
for
kilometres

the sky
was red
day and night

and
the Poles
didn't notice

Liebala Liebala
please
don't go.

SALLY MORRISON

The Customary Hour

Barend and I had been living together for ten years when, for no specific reason, one evening he moved out of our bedroom and made up a bed in the study. I tried to talk to him about it, but he wasn't in a listening or speaking mood. We continued to live much as we had always done, but without intimacy. We never touched each other, and, apart from meals, we tended to stay in different rooms of the house. This new regime cramped our movements, making, for example, going into the hall a self-conscious and irritating exercise. As we had, both of us, to go into the hall to get from anywhere to anywhere else, our sensibilities became attuned to the opening and closing of doors leading into and from the hall. We began to live what might be described as an aggravating ballet: the choreography was jerky, the psychology electric. I felt like telling my actor and film-making friends about it; there was, I felt, an interesting wordless script, or set of scripts here to be written on the theme of the hallway.

Alienated from Barend, I began to realise the ways in which I had previously depended on him. He had been the sharer of my daily life; on occasions, he had been my comforter. We had laughed together and snarled together. Many of the improvements we had made to our old house – or Victorian villa as it could properly be called – we had made together. We had fallen off ladders, dropped pictures, stood in sinks and stifled spouting taps as a team. I wanted to know why these things had stopped, but Barend wasn't in a mood to tell me. He said we were finished.

Yet he continued to open the front door of our home at the customary hour after work. I continued to throw my bike behind the hydrangea bush and follow him in. We continued to sit at our customary places at the table and take our dinner together. I wondered why. Barend was disinclined to tell me.

Barend is a lawyer. I invented carloads of fast young floosies turning up at his chambers with the sole purpose of involving him inextricably in their lives and dis-possessing him of his own. I fretted inwardly, yet did not know what I was fretting for.

I work for a travel agent. For years my job has been to seek out new destinations abroad for the monied, the adventurous, the budget traveller, or the just plain mad. I've been in Morocco, Timbuctu, Mauritius, the Andes and the Falkland Islands. At the time of my troubles with Barend, the invitation came to go to the highlands of New Guinea.

In the past I'd always travelled alone and thought nothing of it. I'd travelled with an Aboriginal dance troupe to Paris: to be certain, it had given me an idiosyncratic view of France's capital, but Barend and I were in stitches over it for weeks after I came home. Any antipodean government wanting to discredit Paris should send a battalion of Arnhem Landers there, heavily disguised as cultural exchange. A certain element in Paris has a weakness for this type of C.E. which, if photographed, could keep the French behaving themselves for years.

In Algeria, I once spent a delightful day in the sand under a taxi stuck in a dune with an Arab chauffeur, speaking broken French and exchanging travellers' tales. By the time we had freed the taxi's undercarriage, I had made a friend for life. We correspond still, at least twice yearly.

I had Solomon Islands' dysentery, Beijing tummy and Tokyo toenail – the last after picking up a weird fungus from a pair of new shoes bought in exclusive downtown Tokyo. If Barend had had any objections to my jaunts, he'd had a whole decade to let me know. But it had seemed quite to the contrary: half the stories of our life together were stories of my trips, what I'd done abroad, what he'd done while I was away. And it wasn't as if we hadn't travelled together ourselves once in a while. For his part, Barend sometimes went abroad to conferences. Some of his experiences were just as odd as mine. He once went from London to New York having boarded a Pan Am aircraft at Heathrow by mistake. He'd wondered why the pilot kept getting his destination wrong and what so many Americans, among them a black basketball team,

found so attractive about Melbourne that they were taking it in on what seemed an awfully round round trip.

We still ate our breakfast together in the mornings. As usual, I would make the toast and he would percolate the coffee. As usual, I would portion out the muesli and he would slip the prunes into the mounds. I'd pour the milk, he'd set the napkins. The morning after I'd heard about New Guinea, I felt fed up with it: "You pour the milk," I said, "I'll set the napkins."

He told me I was being difficult.

He munched. I sipped. Five minutes seemed like half-an-hour.

"I'm going to New Guinea in four weeks' time," I said, and suddenly recalled bitterly that I'd been going to ask Barend to join me as a last ditch rescue attempt. Now I'd jeopardised my chances by being fractious and abrupt.

Barend shrugged. "So?" he said. There was a toast crumb on the end of his little beard that jitterbugged in the sunshine as he ate.

"I'm thinking of asking my mother to come with me," I rejoined, though I had been thinking nothing of the kind. I was bound for the highlands and my mother was seventy-eight years old.

Barend gave a mirthless little nasal chuckle and his pale Dutch eyes lost every skerrick of their color as he turned them from me. Round, friendly Barend had become a boulder. I felt tears in my eyes, lit a cigarette and contemplated my lonely life with a giant stone.

Getting a full extract of the birth certificate of a German Jew born thirty years before the Reichstag fire proved no easy matter. But it had to be done and it had to be done with enormous speed if ever I was to get my mother onto that plane. Suddenly she had become an imperative part of my trip. Though she was a naturalised Australian, the passport people still wanted extensive evidence that she'd been born. "Well, she is my *mother*," I did point out – that was her displayed in as much detail as had been available since the war, on the right hand side of my birth certificate. It wasn't considered good enough.

Representation was made to the German embassy, to the Germans themselves: no one had ever heard of my mother and my mother, long-suffering, was not surprised. "Vy vould they vant to remember me?" she asked. "I don't vant to remember them." I could understand her. It took a perilously long time for the immigration department to understand her, too. It was not until the day before we were due to leave that my mother was issued with her passport and I could at last collect our tickets.

My mother was well over forty when I was born to her as one of a matching pair. It is greatly to her credit that she never held the extremes of youth against my sister and myself. Accustomed to bearing life's vicissitudes with resignation, my good mother had nappied and mashed her way through our childhood with fortitude and forbearance. She had seen us into the middle of our lives without complaint and had shown goodwill to the partners of our choice. Nevertheless, when Barend heard that she was coming to spend the night before our departure in our house, he organised a fishing trip with friends and left the day before. It meant that when she arrived in the company of my sister, I had to explain to both of them that Barend and I no longer lived as man and wife. The telling was torturous and I filled an ashtray with my angst.

My mother and sister arrived at dinner time. By the dessert, it was after nine p.m. and I had been rummaging through my handbag for the documents I had spent the whole day getting in order. I found my passport, but not hers; her ticket, but not mine.

Mentally, I rehearsed the day's events. I had been to the passport office, the Qantas office, the New Guinean bureau. I had signed things, paid money, ridden on trams, buses and taxis. I had picked up sheaths of paper, wallets, handbags and coats with pockets in them. I had been to Barend's office and left a note for him. I had been to my own office.

At nine-thirty I was back in my own office, reorganizing my desk , opening drawers, ringing the taxi company, the police station, the Qantas office, the New Guinean bureau. No luck.

At midnight I rang my boss who rang the New Guinean bureau who rang the tour organisers at Mount Hagen. I phoned Qantas and told them that unfortunately we wouldn't be there to board at five a.m. My sister took my mother back to Ringwood where she'd come from: it was fifteen miles from where I lived.

At two a.m., I threw myself, weeping, on my bed, shot a hand underneath my pillow to hug something soft to my poor bruised soul, and there they were: my mother's passport and my ticket. I leapt up, rang Ringwood and diverted my mother and sister back to my place. I phoned the New Guinea bureau and they rang on to Mount Hagen.

At five a.m. we were at Tullamarine.

But the Qantas officials didn't believe my story. They told me the plane was full. How did they know I hadn't stolen the tickets and hired a seventy-eight year old woman to act as the person described on my mother's passport? Our luggage was searched, our smalls minutely examined.

I was to have devised a travelogue from this trip to entice the adventurer. I had thought of including my mother in order to show that age need be no barrier to adventure; but, half-way to Mount Hagen, my mother forgot where she was going and when we landed, she remembered what I'd told her about Orly Airport and how the Arhnem Landers, after all but

destroying a certain tier of French society, threw a spontaneous corroboree in the departure lounge, startling the gendarmes into suspecting they were terrorists.

My mother suddenly thought that, of course, she had landed in Paris. Paris was not how she remembered it, but how I had described it to her: how it had become. "Overrun with blacks," she'd mutter every now and then, and click her tongue at the pity of it.

It's just as well the highlanders couldn't understand her and venerated her for her great age, or we might have been murdered.

Two weeks into the trip there had been a further addlement of her thoughts. The past and present became confused. At nights, when the bush rats romped over the bedding, she thought herself to be hiding in Paris during the German occupation in a garden shed at the back of a nunnery. "At least ve're free," she'd say resignedly.

There was noise all night long, except between two and five a.m., when there was deathly silence. The rats stopped playing in the roof thatch. Occasionally you'd hear the whoomp of owls' wings, followed by a death shriek. My mother thought people were being truncheoned and told me to be brave. "The night vill pass," she'd say. "You only have to live through it."

I could not write to Barend. It would have been ridiculous. We had arrived with a mail delivery; we'd be leaving with the next one.

The highlanders don't send letters. They don't believe too much in the greater world. They squabble and talk in their ricketty rooms and preserve their lives with stories. Barend and I were like that in the beginning; now our little landing stripo – the hall that used to lead to the heart of our house – has become an international airport. We drop in here from the snooty-nosed planes that bear us away or bring us bnnack from our separate trips into the world. We wash here. We eat here. Once we were fellow travellers and it was us against the world. Now we tresat each other with suspicion, inventing for each other a dangerous unknown. Somewhere – neither of us knows where – someone – neither of us knows who – has planted the time bomb.

SENSATION

The sun flares above your arms
like summer, rolling its fiery
wheels down your back
and your skin skids fields
of rubies. A rush of
filmy runlets quicken
across thin, shivering things.

While your mind
is a hive, drunk on pollen,
the whole carnival burns
under each piece of skin.

Under each you find the sun
a stained-glass mosaic
sick on its colors,
throwing out crystalline barbs.

The shards sting all night,
bleed like white ice,

drop by chill droplet,
and burn like winter moons.

JOHN JENKINS

PETER MATHERS

Willo

Williamstown on its peninsula, across Hobson's Bay from Port Melbourne, often seen, seldom visited, a backwater that was once considered the site for the city of Melbourne. Andrew Southall's and Rick Amor's recent Melbourne exhibitions, "Homage to Williamstown", aroused much interest. We print drawings from the exhibitions, and Peter Mathers introduces them.

Williamstown. I worked there a few times twenty or thirty years ago. Lived at St Kilda: train to Flinders, change for Williamstown. Or a lift to the ferry opposite the Newport power station, or drive along Footscray Road and over the Maribyrnong. When the West Gate bridge was a dream to become a nightmare.

My father knew it in the 1930s when most interstate trade went by ship. I was there in the wool trade; sampling and sorting for Pacific Wools, Smiths and backyard dealers.

Returned from Europe to see a Housing Commission tower there: like a lighthouse. A few years ago the wonderful Gellibrand Light was gelignited and burnt by government vandals.

From the Strand to the east, city towers and container docks. To the west the petrochemical towers of Altona. At the Altona drive-in in the late 1970s: "Star Wars" on the screen and, behind, the chemical towers grander than anything in the film.

Early this year Drew and Ric asked me to write something for their catalog. They used part of it; a businessman's monologue . . .

Williamstown . . . we recall ourselves tripping over ropes and dunnage on Nelson Pier, wind shrieking through shrouds, canvas dealers canvassing, tyrannical captains keelhauling unfortunate bailiffs, the stacks of roofing slates and wool bales, the strongboxes of bullion . . .

See now the bridge! See the western industrial structures owned by us! Heed the container dock crammed with our contraband!

And this catalog piece became a scene in Urbiculture, a show I wrote for Chris Barry at La Mama.

A BIRD WATCHER

MAN WITH FIELD GLASSES. BIG POCKETS FOR NOTEBOOKS, FIELD GUIDES ETC.

In pursuit of bird banding data I proceeded to Williamstown. The strong south-westerly led me to believe that I was not approaching an optimum situation. The view, however, as usual, was superb. To my right — upstream of course — the confluence of Yarra and Maribyrnong. Steaming smokestacks, wisps of smoke . . . and so on.

But no gawking. In full control. Second nature. My years with the Traffic Branch.

I was in pursuit of the bar-tailed godwit which, as you all know, breeds in Alaska, arrives here early spring, and departs late autumn. A few stay on.

Very rare at Williamstown. Hope drives me.

Also I was proceeding to Williamstown to escape the carping of my spouse, Welkie, and her sister Cunjie, who wish to change domicile to Flinders Island, a location familiar to the three of us; in my case the reason is obvious, in theirs it is their status as amateur marine biologists.

Parking the vehicle in a designated zone. Strolling the foreshore.

Ah, the city cliffs . . . haunt of falcon, harrier and other raptors. (STERN) Every month a new cliff appears. Towers of money sparkling in the western sun. (HARD) Havoc. Migratory birds. One year there's a flight path, the next obstruction. Caught by gust and eddy, dazzled by new lights they are — they are often to be found broken. Tower toll I call it. (EXCITED) And where's a falcon expected to nest on the Rialto?

I saw the future when they built the I.C.I. in '56.

I tried to stop the rot. Be Jesus I harried architects and builders.

Down Toorak way I nabbed a cat-burglar outside the mansion of a cer*ta*in developer. Loaded with jewels and negotiable bonds. (PLEASED) My loathing for towerbuilders allowed the thief's escape.

I always felt a certain sadness when I nabbed a cat burglar. They lack any sense of f*au*na. Some of them fix to their faces cat's whiskers. I ask you! When cornered they will miaow! Fucking cats. Bird killers.

Show me a possum burglar and I'll see an aerial artist.

Imagine—please—a small thief—a jockey, say, disqualified for ten years—a jockey who dresses as a sugar glider . . . He would be an aerial artist. A person I would never nab.

Following the Toorak cat's escape I cuffed myself as evidence of assault. Tore my jacket. (PAUSE)

I was an unwilling early-retiree from the Force. A colleague in Staff Records found me the reason. (QUOTES) The verbose Sergeant Pinion uses ten notebooks where others use one . . . Sgt Pinion is feared in the witness box . . . three magistrates suffered coronaries or strokes enduring his evidence . . . Sgt Pinion seldom records verbals because the accused seldom gets a chance to open his mouth. (PAUSE) The courts are staffed by bird-haters. Aviphobes. The fear of starling and pigeon in the court room.

If ever I need to hire a vehicle I use Avis.

I once enjoyed a deep relationship with a microbiologist, Mavis. I took her the contents of many gizzards . . . However . . .

Yes, strolling the foreshore at Williamstown that gusty afternoon. Not a godwit did I see. The usual swans and gulls, stilts and pigeons.

I approached an artist at easel.

It was Gordon Wattle, that superb delineator of sea birds!

You would have seen his painted tram . . . silver and Pacific gull, sooty oystercatcher, double-banded and hooded dotterel, pelican, red-necked stint, red-necked avocet, white-headed stilt, short-tail shearwater. . . .

Excusing myself I asked when would he be adorning another tram.

Never.

Never?

Never, never, never. The tram I did proved so popular the entries and exits wore out. My birds required constant retouching so often were they stroked. Citizens intent on St Kilda would leap aboard my tram for Moreland. There were scuffles, ecstatic swoons, domestics. (PAUSE)

Painting while he talked . . . the deft brushwork . . .

How—however he had not pictured a single bird. He was painting city towers and container ships. A birdless fiasco! (PAUSE)

In the Force I was a quiet, thorough man. Subtlety, guile, call it what you will. I addressed the painter in the following manner:

Mr Wattle, my grandfather knew this location in the old days, when the Spencer railway building and Goldsbrough Mort's woolstores dominated the western city, when ocean liners berthed at Prince's and Station piers . . .

Williamstown he knew well. He was a true Hobson's scurrier.

To your right, Nelson Pier . . . tripping over ropes and dunnage, dodging strong boxes of bullion from the goldfields, the stacks of roofing slates and wool bales, the pens of sheep . . . where canvas dealers canvassed, where tyrannical captains keelhauled unfortunate bailiffs, where wind shrieked through shrouds . . .

One never, today, sees sheep on the pier.

There are many birds about us today. (PAUSE)

Mr Wattle, in this picture of yours there is not a single bird.

'Go away! he shouted. Go away, away. Go root a swan!

I was appalled.

I was also at a loss. The Law has changed so much lately I am unsure of my rights.

Had he not said go root a swan?

Was this not an incitement to buggery?

I took him in. Citizen's arrest. No case of course.

But I had made a point.

Rick Amor — Webb Dock

Rick Amor — The Strand, Williamstown

Andrew Southall—Naval Dockyard

Andrew Southall

BEFORE WE SLEEP

Remember the time
we made love on those parcels of warm bread,
when you called me "little motor scooter"
and I called you "red chicken",
and you told me your "naked circus dream"
where you leap onto the pony's back
turning cartwheels?
And when I sang to you
my matador love song
and caped your thigh with Spanish kisses?
And remember
that yacht floating
over the blue jungles of Peru
I called you "little grommet"
and you called me "Aztec seesaw"
and we both flew, with our arms out,
towards the bright equator?
Remember, it was after
that pleasure cruise to Suva,
when sea and sky span together
in one vast, aching waterspout?
You must remember,
because it was the day after
the day we found Uncle Banjo
'tuned up' under the awning
and you stroked my head in the light?
The plums were so good,
so cold and sweet,
and I called you "little cupcake"
and you called me "old gaptooth"?
And how the tents swayed
in the pink wind and made you feel dreamy
when blue rays from the Nile whitened our domes,
"Ah," you cried then, "Life – so brief and beautiful!"

You do remember!

Then sleep, sleep.

JOHN JENKINS

TWO POEMS BY SELWYN PRITCHARD

THE BRITISH MUSEUM 1849-1883

Seasons, years illuminating
capital beneath the rotunda,
carbuncular with prophecy,

who could have believed,
patriarch of intellectuals,
you prescribed the mosaic of History?

Bourgeois, Jew: you hated both;
exile, like god and nation, you
left out. From slavery the long march

began through your texts; Lenin entrained;
Mao took the first step; Granma set sail;
Cheka's psychiatrists checked your objectivity.

WAGES ARE A CHARGE AGAINST PROFITS,
EARNED ON MONDAY. THE REST OF THE WEEK
BUYS PALACES, YACHTS AND GUNS,

WHILST IN THE PROMISED LAND (heads beat assent,
fists phallic with the lyricism of the masses)
NOBODY'S ANYBODY'S COMMODITY; even the state's.

Meantime you wait on Comrade Fred
to come south with notes for rent
and on the condition of the poor;

your children die for want, the silver's sold,
and outside costermongers cuss and yell
like all the tribes of Israel.

PUTNEY CHURCH, 29 OCTOBER 1647

Colonel Rainborough to Cromwell before the representatives of the regiments.

"I think, sir, that the poorest he
that is in England hath but a life
to live as hath the richest he" . . .

A year to the day he was taken
at his word, a Sunday early,
he was woken with a sword . . .

Leviathan greed consumed the age,
voided that millenial charity, wiped
the soldiers' victory . . . "Have an eye
to property," Cromwell's son-in-law
required; they were beaten
from parish to slum and colony.

Civil war is endless when property is king.

Except for smart troopers
of Cyril Burt's Horse who know truth
is a column-inch between the thighs of bawds
and the rubber's mightier than swords.

They cannonade train doors and shove
above their station by cash-registers
on ash-heaps, their rewards are mortgages
for life, cars polished off on credit,
and due propriety for corgis, horses, Ratty,
Grey Rabbit and Pooh, for "Watership Down"
and all those dumb creatures under the crown:
but hush! Animal Liberationists are
padding the town.

GRAEME KINROSS SMITH

The Singer of Concerns

A Profile of Bruce Dawe

Blink, blink, HOSPITAL. SILENCE.
Ten days old, carried in the front door in his
mother's arms, first thing he heard was
Bobby Dazzler on Channel 7:
Hello, hello, hello all you lucky people and he
really was lucky because it didn't mean a thing
to him then . . .
A year or two to settle in and
get acquainted with the set-up; like every other
well-equipped smoothly-run household, his included
one economy-size Mum, one Anthony Squires-
Coolstream-Summerweight Dad, along with two other
kids
straight off the Junior Department rack.

The rows of faces watch Bruce Dawe as he reads, hear the words sermonising their own lives, those of their friends or their enemies. He reads with conviction, but at the same time on a bright plane of abstraction and imagery which gives his phrases that aptness and power which in our every-day hobbling with language we have tended to forget. The audience is delighted by his words, particularly their echoes of the familiar. They launch at the bite of his observation. They inwardly cry for their own fallibility, humanness, mortality. This dark, simple figure, wearing a cardigan with his suit pants, intones as he takes them further into the three-part story – a birth; a grappling, short life; and a death – of an archetypal Australian city-dweller.

Dawe's dark-haired, half-bald head and hooded, dark-browed eyes and hooked nose of an eagle wait to pounce again on the microphone. Deep lines run down from nose to mouth and blue chin as he reads. Unlike some poets reading their own work, he has a mastery of timing, of voice's retreat and advance, and of the soft but vital interpolated phrase.

He is reading the words as he struggled with them, sang them over to himself and polished them until they shone, requiring nothing further, when he wrote the poem, which he titled "Enter Without so Much as Knocking", all those years ago, in 1959:

Anyway, pretty soon he was old enough to be
realistic like every other godless
money-hungry back-stabbing miserable
so-and-so, and then it was goodbye stars and the soft
cry in the corner when no-one was looking because
I'm telling you straight, Jim, it's Number One every
time
for this chicken, hit wherever you see a head and
kick whoever's down, well thanks for a lovely
evening Clare, it's good to get away from it all
once in a while, I mean it's a real battle all the way
and a man can't help but feel a little soiled, himself,
at times, you know what I mean?

Now take it easy
on those curves, Alice, for God's sake,
I've heard enough for one night, with that Clare
Jessup,
hey, ease up, will you, watch it—

There is a pause, the dark face straightens, the voice drops to an explicatory calm:

Probity & Sons, Morticians,
did a really first-class job on his face
(everyone was very pleased) even adding a
healthy tan he'd never had, living, gave him back for
keeps
the old automatic smile with nothing behind it,
winding the whole show up with a
nice ride out to the underground metropolis:
permanent residentials, no parking tickets, no
taximeters
ticking, no Bobby Dazzlers here, no down payments,
nobody grieving over halitosis
flat feet shrinking gums falling hair.

Six feet down nobody interested.

Blink, blink, CEMETERY. Silence.

The audience's clapping betokens surprise warmth and recognition, not simply approval. Bruce Dawe pauses, steps back, starts to seek another poem among his book's pages. In the catch of breath the listeners realise they have just heard in a piece of free verse a touch of themselves and those around them.

Bruce Dawe's work is unmistakably Australian – it says things for us, and about us, in the voice of the Australian vernacular. Dawe is the singer of our concerns, some of them admitted, some not, and a chronicler of our social and psychological history from the 1950s until the present nervous 1980s. If book sales are the prime indicator he is clear and away Australia's most popular poet. His book of selected poems, *Condolences of the Season,* has sold more than 60,000 copies, a level of public attention undreamt of among contemporary Australian poets and greater than that for any poet since C.J. Dennis published *The Sentimental Bloke* in 1915. *Condolences* is in its twelfth reprint in 1985. Dawe was able to pay off his house in Toowoomba, Queensland with the proceeds from its sales.

Since *Condolences* there have been three further collections: *Just a Dugong at Twilight* (1975), *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems, (1954-1982)* (1982) and *Towards Sunrise: Poems 1979-1986* (1986). The last, together with the publication in 1983 of Dawe's early Joey Cassidy stories of his Melbourne boyhood, adolescence and young manhood, constitutes something of a rounding-up of experience, some of which came early in life but remained unassimilated or unwritten or unpublished until Dawe reached the steady perspective conferred on him by his fifties. Life has brought Dawe from Geelong, Fitzroy and wider Melbourne to Malaya, to Melbourne again and thence to a provincial city on the edge of a tableland in southern Queensland.

The poems in *Towards Sunrise,* his most recent book, take in all that. Here is a clutch of religious poems, another of poems about the Aboriginals, another of political poems, another on conservation of the earth's thinning resources and the prospect of nuclear winter. Here is a group of poems about war and warriors, another on the vicissitudes and rewards of writing, on creation, on teaching tertiary students, on conference-going, on being writer-in-residence. The groupings are unannounced, do not hold up the steady fall of experience. And among them are poems like "Little Dorrit Street" from Dawe's boyhood in the streets of Fitzroy, or another, "Kid Stuff", dedicated to his brother George, while also being a younger brother's plain-spun and honest tribute to him. "Kid Stuff" is a period-piece redolent with the touchstones

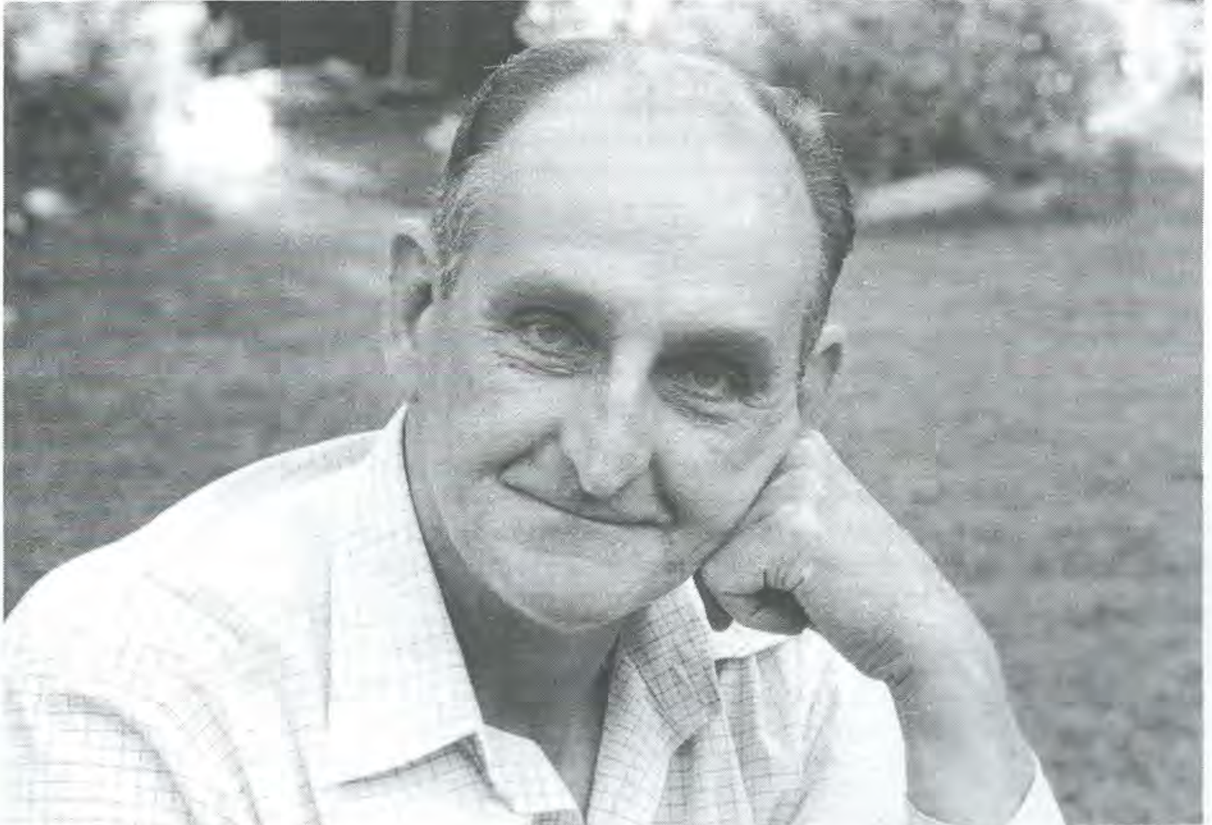

Photo Alec Bolton

of the 1940s (rabbit-fur-lined motorcyclist's helmets, mouth organs, tinkering with cars and motorbikes, and the sensed continuous battle to have the rent ready) and Victorian geography (Footscray, Geelong, Orbost, or the then-rural suburban edge at Glen Waverley).

At the other end of Dawe's scale of life's offerings are poems caught like flashing, unexpected fish from out of Queensland politics or his reading or the fascinating range of Dawe's early catch-as-catch-can jobs, or from his current role as public figure, public poet, returning from a Perth conference on the "Red-eye Special" overnight flight. Thus the little poem, "Towards Sunrise", one of wistful and momentary beauty, captures his disconcertion at finding that:

> . . . The unknown woman
> seated next to him had fallen asleep, and was now
> leaning against him, her hair spread
> fan-wise on his shoulder. It even seemed
> as though his shoulder could itself plot out
> the dreaming curve of her face, her lips' perfection, brow
> noble in shadow . . .

And the poem gathers to its conclusion:

> . . . He thought how
> loveliness
> happens before we can cry out, frame words, excuses . . .

His popularity as a poet is one for which the whole of Dawe's life offers a myriad of reasons. High among them, though, is an artistic explanation: Dawe has always been concerned that his poems should be understood by most people at a first reading or hearing. "The knowledge that others may read what we have written (many others, perhaps: thousands in a literary magazine, thousands more in a Saturday newspaper's literary pages, even more as a set text for study)", Dawe says in his introduction to his book *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems 1954-1982*, "is certainly an incentive, as long as it doesn't become our only or main reason for writing. If it does, if this 'public' becomes a constant factor in our writing, it can lead us far from home. We have, finally, to do what we do for the work's sake: no other motive is personal enough to sustain us without changing us."

And then there is Dawe's subject matter: social and politicial issues, the Australian dream, suburbia, social disaffection, the Vietnam war and what it has done to us, the world of teaching from the teacher's side of the fence, Melbourne as a city, the extreme actions of bureaucracies, civil liberties, the vapid values of consumer society – all come under his satirical and yet sympathetic scrutiny as do lovers, widowers, spinsters, hangmen, rapists, prisoners, footballers, politicians, advertising men, children and dogs. "This interest in the disreputable and the lesser subjects is central to me," Dawe said in a paper he delivered to a poet's seminar in 1970. "I'm not a great one for blood-red sunsets. There is so much of the incidental in life that is the subject for poetry and for humor."

To all this Bruce Dawe brings an unusual breadth of background a poet – an impoverished boyhood, experience in all sorts of work, a period in the RAAF, conversion to Catholicism, and relatively late in life a teaching and academic career which has seen him complete at first degree then a Master of Arts, and finally a Ph.D. Yet, despite it all, to speak to Dr Bruce Dawe is to find that he still adheres to his view, expressed in 1970, that poetry for him "is first and last lived experience, not something out of a refrigerator, the more closely it is lived, on the page or on the style, the more successful it is and always will be ". Dawe, like other poets before him, has to a considerable extent offered himself, his life and his life-wisdom to us in his poems.

Bruce Dawe happened to be born in Geelong, Victoria in 1930, the youngest in a family of four – he has a brother and two sisters, all considerably older. His father was a laborer, and was half the time out of work in the grinding years of the Great Depression, moving constantly to seek work, or living away from home on the job. "He was in some respects one of those blokes who never grew up", Bruce Dawe recalls, "very good-looking and with fierce eyes that looked all the fiercer in those days. So we were on the move a lot. One of the things it has left with me is a feeling that in very few situations through life has my background been similar to those around me. Although I was born in Geelong, by the time I was school age we were in the outskirts of Melbourne. I went to school at Noble Park State School, and then soon after to Heatherton – but these were little bush towns then. Later we were living back near Geelong and I was going to Marshall State School. I was very unhappy there, in a school of about twenty kids. The teacher had little time for plodders, and I couldn't hear him well – maybe it was nervousness in me building on itself. But I remember coming home tearful quite often. My poem 'Drifters', with its reference to Grovedale, just out of Geelong, is about what it felt like to be so often on the move as a kid. It's autobiographical in the sense of catching again what the feeling was like after the particular terrain has been forgotten. The sense of the thing stays with you."

Dawe was again in Melbourne, now a city plunged into wartime preparedness, in 1940. The family lived first in Dickens Street, Carlton, Bruce Dawe attending the State School in Lee Street. If he had had literary pretensions then, which he did not, he would have felt the urging of the fact that the 2nd Carlton Cub Group where he passed tests and played Hoppo-Bumpo met in a hall in Shakespeare Street. He laughs now to think that that was not the last of it. Later in

life he found himself living in Cardigan Street (a short step to the Little Dorrit Street of one of his later poems, as he points out). Another occasion he lived on the corner of Tennyson and Coleridge Streets in the suburb of Elwood in Melbourne. "The Victorians made me suffer abominably!" he moans. "No wonder I hate the buggers!" Within a year Dawe was attending the Fawkner Street Central School in North Fitzroy, the family living in George Street, Fitzroy, just opposite the gasworks. It was a working-class area, a working-class school, notable for pupils like Harold Shillinglaw, later to become a Test cricketer and, beyond Bruce Dawe's time, the Harvey brothers, Ian and Neil, Australian test players in the 1950s.

Meanwhile, as a junior secondary student, Bruce Dawe was acting out westerns and detective novels he had read, and playing war games, in which he imagined some of his schoolmasters as German spies. He and a mate wrote detective stories, each about five or six pages, modelled on "Colwyn Dane, Tec", one of the regular series in the Champion, a boys' magazine that also featured "Rockfist Rogan, RAF" and "Red Fury, the Battleship Brave!" Westerns also figured largely, one of his friends inventing mythical figures and drawing them as cartoons. In the cartoons and acted out stories the Freds battled the Wogs in bizarre situations with strong hints of the war between the Allies and the Axis powers in Europe and the Pacific which dominated the newspapers every day. Later, at weekends, Dawe and other Northcote High School mates went to Studley Park, Kew, where the Yarra winds its way towards Melbourne. The land features became the stuff of Westerns - Black Butte, Thunder Prairie - and there would be pitched skirmishes with stones simulating war battles and the feuds of American's west, one of Dawe's mates advancing unflinching towards the enemy's position through a hail of blue-metal.

"I conclude now," Bruce Dawe says, "that at school Dawsey must have been known as one of the kids that wrote. Because I used to write plays and we'd act them out in the class-room, dressed to kill in leggings, old army hats and carrying those black-painted Ned Kelly guns. Our characters were 'green-horns' and 'Two-Gun Tonys' ". He used to haunt the Franklin Lending Library in Smith Street, Collingwood, absorbing all he could borrow of Peter Cheyney, Ellery Queen, John Dickson Carr. He also caught the tram to the larger Franklin library in High Street, Northcote. "It was so big I was daunted at the task of getting through all the Westerns and detective novels on the shelves," he recalls. "We also read our Conan Doyles and our John Buchans from time to time, of course." At home, Dawe had a normal secular upbringing. His father, a farm laborer, had no discernible religious beliefs. His mother, from a Scots background, insisted as much as she could on attendance at Sunday School and on the saying of prayers in the small Fitzroy house.

In an interview with Roger MacDonald Dawe has explained that the portentous events in Europe leading to war in 1939 largely passed over him as a boy, but that the war's stages and campaigns, its geography and maps, and the places which saw its battles and slaughters, its fiendish equipment in guns, shells, aircraft and bombs, became part of his frame of reference. Even as a fourteen year-old he wrote poems like "Zero", which described the aerial battles in the Pacific theatre between Mustangs and the Japanese Zeros - a view of death of a pilot and plane which drew on newsreel film of the war being fought to the north and east of Australia. In his mature poem, "What Lies On Us", written in the 1970s, Dawe captures again a boy's memory of a war fought distantly, and reported in a stark adult terms, engendering an indistinct fear, fascination and horror by turns in the young:

> We grew up in a time
> when Kharkhov, Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk
> were black foot-prints in the snow
> and the beast was Nazi.
> You just knew Hitler the way you knew Monday with its sums
> was waiting for you.

The poem concludes:

> You can keep your new monsters
> — we had the best of them all, trumpets and drums,
> goggled Panzers in the Bessarabian wheat-fields,
> Zyklon-B and piano-wire!
> ('A clever devil,' they said and we knew what they meant,
> regret staining their words.)

One of Dawe's fondest memories, in fact, of the war years, was going with his thirty year-old uncle, a gentle, mentally-retarded man, to the Saturday matinees at the 'flicks' to thrill to matinee serials and characters like "The Green Hornet", "The Skull" and "The Iron Claw", and to watch the newsreels. Later, as Dawe was sitting in a hushed exam room completing the final English paper of his Intermediate Certificate, VJ Day as announced. The war with Japan was over. Other students headed for home hurling their caps in the air. Dawe and his companions sat in the silent room writing furiously. It was a doubly memorable day.

The Dawes struggled on, Bruce Dawe's older brother George acting as economic foundation for the family for much of the time, Bruce studying and writing, working at odd jobs, getting into scrapes with neighboring Fitzroy kids. Already deeply embedded in his consciousness was the gulf between the classes that he could observe day to day in the Melbourne of the 1940s. He was ashamed, even in those straitened years of Depression and World War austerity, to bring friends home to the little George Street house with its ancient gas mantle and car seats supported by pack-

ing cases in lieu of chairs in the front room. He had one particular school friend who came from what was then a lower middle-class home, a cut above the Dawe household. "His place was something like the Meredith household that George Johnston describes in *My Brother Jack*," Dawe says, pinning his definition more closely. "Despite the fact that he was a marvellous mate, I never let him get past our front door."

When he transferred to Northcote High School in 1944 his family's poverty still followed him, but did not blight his life. He was one of the 'one-suit' kids, not having a change of school clothes as others had. He worked hard, but felt misplaced in the Commercial stream, found mathematics very difficult, while gaining great encouragement on the other hand from George Stirling, his English teacher, who was percipient enough to suggest he keep on writing things other than the school essay.

At home, Bruce Dawe's brother acted as father-figure, friend and confidant. "I'd even threatened to punch up my real old man when I was a fourteen year-old if only he'd stand up," Bruce Dawe recollected without rancor, and with that touch of irony that informs much of his poetry and fiction. With some strain at home, and feeling frustrated at school, Dawe left Northcote High School at mid-year in 1946 and took a job as a junior clerk with the Melbourne firm of Weigall and Crowther, barristers and solicitors, copying out wills, delivering mail in the city. He was dismissed as lacking ambition and because he was unwilling at that stage to do his articles. A sequence of short-lived but varied jobs followed.

He worked at the brass foundry of William Bedford and Sons, and then answered an Age advertisement for a farmhand on a dairy farm at Noorinbee in the beautiful Cann River Valley, not far from the New South Wales border in far East Gippsland. He lasted in the job a little over a month, working for fifteen shillings a week and his keep, with one day off in fourteen. He was constantly involved in a festering quarrel between two share-farming families while he milked, carted feed, repaired fences. "I'd found that the city environment, when you can't find congenial work, was as wearing as any other," Dawe says, "I was glad to quit Melbourne for a while. But although I enjoyed a bit of horse-riding at Noorinbee, the long hours and tough work and the bickering meant that I left in the dead of night when I'd saved enough to get home. I cut it very fine: I got off the Nicholson Street bus in Carlton with tuppence ha'penny in my pocket!"

Dawe, who by 1947 had left home and was living from place to place in Carlton and Fitzroy, took jobs as a clerk with Australian Estates, rose to write some copy in an advertising agency, was a copy-boy on the Melbourne Sun, worked in sawmills in South Melbourne and Nunawading and did builders' laboring on the Box Hill Hospital site, and on sewerage works in Coburg.

There were times when Dawe hankered after the mental stimulus that he had left behind at Northcote High School, but he knew that it had been supplanted, for the time being at least, by the need for a job and income. His writings continued - as a sixteen year-old he published a dozen or more poems in the Junior section of the Age. "Mostly formal stuff in nature," he recalls, "but not too bad for my age, I suppose." He read as widely as he could, encouraged by his brother who, although he had not remained at school beyond sixth grade, was a devotee of the work of G.K. Chesterton and H.G. Wells. It was through this that Bruce Dawe became interested in detective stories and had earlier learned to seek out the better Westerns by Zane Grey and Oliver Strange. Through Wells and Chesterton Bruce Dawe came to science fiction. "In fact, it may be that it was through my brother that I came to write my second thesis, years later, on the anti-Utopian novel," Dawe conjectures. "Perhaps subconsciously I wanted to work my way back through H.G. Wells and others." In those years in the later 1940s and early 1950s Bruce Dawe barracked for Fitzroy every Saturday he could. At the same time he followed the Fitzroy Legion, an RSL team in which a friend of his played on Sundays.

From 1947 until 1953 Bruce Dawe worked more often than not for the Public Works Department in an asphalting gang, road-mending in the inner city streets or asphalting schoolgrounds in the leafy suburbs at Mont Albert and Doncaster. "The language I heard among those blokes was extraordinary," Dawe says "I listened a lot. I've never seen or heard anything quite the same since." It was part of the grounding that has given Dawe his infallible ear for the Australian vernacular and its cadences and rhythms which distinguishes both his reading of his poems and their attraction on the page.

In 1948 Dawe published his first poetry in an adult situation in an anthology of Jindyworobak verse. He was still using the Welsh pseudonym, "Llewellyn Rhys", which he had used in his work for the Junior Age, and significantly was going through an infatuation with Dylan Thomas's work which other Australian poets of his age have attested to in themselves. One of his girlfriends knew him only as "Llewellyn Rhys" - it was a way of ensuring that she did not seek out his home background, which was still an embarrassment to him.

Home for Dawe was at various places in Fitzroy and Carlton in those years, although he regularly dropped in at the family house outside Boronia. In 1953 a barney with his PWD ganger, and the chance opening of a possibility for further eduction, brought him to a parting from the Public Works Department. He tells the story with a certain reverence for the element of luck or coincidence that he sees as part of his life, and for which he is thankful. Living in Moor Street, Fitz-

roy, Dawe used sometimes to eat Chinese meals at the Man Fong cafe in Brunswick Street, where he was often served by a precocious Chinese student, a supporter of the Chinese Communist regime who, besides directing cheeky banter at the customers - sometimes prostitutes, sometimes derelicts - also one night persuaded Bruce Dawe to start studying for his adult matriculation at the Austral Coaching College in Little Collins Street.

"This, apart from my debt to my brothers, and George Stirling, my English teacher at Northcote High School, was the third huge debt I owed to life and coincidence," Dawe explains. "And it all arose through my chatting to the waiter one night when I came to the cafe for my chow mein. Lillian Scholes, my teacher at the college, had a great deal of influence on me. She took a sort of writers' group, as well as remedial classes for foreign students. I was about to give up her classes three or four times - it seemed hard studying when I was living alone - and she persuaded me back, counselled me each time.

"I finished adult matric — with English Expression, Literature, French - and signed up in 1954 for the Secondary Teaching Course at Melbourne University. I began to write a lot more; in fact, it was almost a matter of starting again, once I began at the university. I read in a much more directed way, and I started publishing in MUM (Melbourne University Magazine) and Farrago, the student newspaper, and later in Twentieth Century. I met for the first time people like Vin Buckley, Philip Martin, and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, and at a greater distance Professor Ian Maxwell - the latter a god figure in those days, and deservedly so. I read Tim Burstall's poems. I read Frank Kellaway's work. I got to know Philip Martin, who has been a faithful friend and correspondent ever since. I had already, in my late teens, been introduced by Brian Bell to the Melbourne Realist Writers' group, where I met people like John Morrison. But I'd got beyond that approach. Although I was certainly leaning left of centre politically, I felt that to be a Communist meant the bloody dead-end of anyone as an artist. I was reading things too - by Richard Wright and Ignazio Silone - writers who made nonsense of taking the sort of hard-and-fast stance that Communism dictated."

Dawe's decisions about the best artistic direction for him combined in the mid-1950s with the more trenchant self-questioning of the Australian Labor Party, fermented by the questioning of the Australian Labor Party, fermented by the yeast of doubt that emanated from B.A. Santamaria, the Catholic Worker, Catholic Action, and the fear of Communist influence. In 1955 the first stages of the Labor split began. By 1957 the Catholic-dominated anti-Communist groups had joined to hive off from Labor as the Democratic Labor Party. Against that background Bruce Dawe espoused Catholicism, the faith he still keeps.

His dark hair cropped short by his own hand, dressed in jungle greens and a leather jacket, Dawe strode the campus throughout 1954 — "I must have been a pretty sinister-looking bloke, thinking back" — sampling student politics, talking into the night, going to readings, writing his own poetry and prose fiction. He has left his poem "Eternal Student" as a record of those days played out beneath the clock-tower of the university's old Arts building, of earnest discussion in the cloisters, of the girlfriend who influenced him towards Catholicism, of an educational and religious watershed in his life.

His Joey Cassidy stories, drawing on the hard-learned lessons of class divisions and class behaviour, of gang-power in the Carlton streets, of language and generation barriers, began to appear in Farrago, Paston's Melbourne Quarterly, MUM, Compass and Twentieth Century. A yeast was working to draw forth his life experience as fiction or imagery.

But Bruce Dawe failed the university examinations at the year's end, felt he must repay his studentship, and moved to the Sydney suburb of Waterloo to live with his sister and to look for work. He was still writing, still posting manuscripts of poems and stories to Farrago and Twentieth Century while he worked long day-time hours in a glass factory, then at Wangi Power Station and later in a factory making batteries in another Sydney suburb. In 1956 he returned to Melbourne and became a postman for the Postmaster General's Department. He worked as a postman on a walk round in Fitzroy, covering the block Johnston Street-Smith Street-Alexander Parade-Brunswick Street for almost three years.

In 1959 he joined the RAAF, did some basic training at the camp at Rathmines, New South Wales, started a trainee telephonist course in Ballarat, Victoria, and then (because his typing speed was too slow) remustered into the Air Force's education section, first in Wagga, New South Wales, and then in its Melbourne library. The RAAF filled several needs of the moment for Dawe - a life with some continuity and structure about it, but allowing enough free time for his writing, and perhaps the resumption of university study. He was able to revisit his old Melbourne haunts - the old Public Lending Library at lunch-time, football on Saturdays, the poetry-readings, plays, films at the university; and the world of bookshops, galleries and theatres in the city itself.

In the winter of 1962 his first book of poetry, strongly supported by the literary magazine Overland, was released by F. W. Cheshire, the Melbourne publisher. It was launched in Bank Place, Melbourne, at a gathering of the Melbourne writing fraternity, Vin Buckley reading some of the new Dawe poems, Dawe himself reading others. It was a book to be prized — a collection of Australian, and particularly Melbourne, vignettes couched unerringly in the vernacular and abounding in wit and bite. Nothing quite like it had

appeared before in Australia writing. Even the poem titles were a promise of unforgettable content – "Enter Without So Much As Knocking", "Ghost Wanted: Young, Willing", "Pigeons Also Are a Way of Life", "After You, Gary Cooper", "Dogs in the Morning Light", "Only the Beards are Different", "Accident and Ambulance Siren". And the poems gave notice that Dawe's capacity extended from humor and social satire to deeply moving pieces touching public cruelty or private grief. As Dawe was to explain of his own approach to poetry in an article in Southerly in 1979: "To celebrate the commonplace without merely rephrasing existing stereotype is, I believe, a viable role for the poet . . . The most endlessly fascinating thing in the world is human nature . . ." Later in the same piece, Dawe observes: "Fortunately there is also a great deal of recent poetry to remind us that poets of all people should not take themselves with unremitting seriousness or rather, that humor, in poetry as elsewhere, can be a very disarming form of seriousness itself."

In 1963 Dawe, now a Corporal, was transferred to the RAAF's No. 7 Stores Depot at Toowoomba, Queensland. He took up study for a degree again, this time with the University of Queensland. But in the middle of the year he met Gloria Blain, a Toowoomba girl working at the base, and that put paid to study for the time being. The couple were married in January 1964. The first of their four children, Brian, was born in December 1964. In that year, too, Dawe was invited by the Commonwealth Literary Fund to lecture at the Adelaide Festival. He spoke from his stance as a public and concerned poet about the overworked images of gold-seekers and stockmen in Australian poetry, about the generally painful lack of social awarenes in the poetry of the 1960s, and about the issues in Australian society that it might take up: "I mean such issues as graft and corruption in government, business and industry, spiritual wickedness in high places. I mean the never-ending hussle of State versus the individual . . . I mean the tremendous fact of migration . . ."

"Why," Dawe asked, "should these issues be treated by our poets as the exclusive property of sociologists, social historians and the vote-hungry politican at election time?" Dawe proclaimed his belief in indifference as the ultimate blasphemy in every age. He lamented the lack of the tragic sense in Australian poetry, and found that he could read his own work and be confident of a good response. He travelled home resolving to read to people whenever he was invited. It was a decision that would see the increasing consolidation of his influence as a public poet throughout Australia, and ultimately lead to an undreamt role as a poetic 'cartoonist' for a newspaper.

In 1965 Dawe's second collection of poems, *A Need of Similar Name,* appeared. Again the poems were cherished, for their social bite, their breadth of reference, and for the marrow of wit suggested in their titles – "Any Shorter and I'd Have Missed It Altogether", " 'A' is for Asia", "The Head Next To Mine on The Pillow". There was the picture of the plasticity of woman in the face of media and advertising pressure in the opening lines of "First Corinthians at The Crossroads":

> When I was a blonde I
> walked as a blonde I
> talked as a blonde;
> but now that I have become
> a brunette I have put away my
> blonding lotion, farewell Kim Novak
> and the statuesque Nordic
> me: a touching scene truly . . .

Or there were the private struggles and griefs hidden in the suburbs touched on by Dawe in poems like "The Family Man" or "Elegy For Drowned Chidren", which pictures old king Neptune:

> What does he do with them all, the old king:
> Having such a shining haul of boys in his sure net,
> How does he keep them happy, lead them to forget
> The world above, the aching air, birds, spring?

And later:

> Unless he loved them deeply how could he withstand
> The voices of parents calling, calling like birds by the water's edge,
> By swimming-pool, sand-bar, river-bank, rocky ledge,
> The little heaps of clothes, the futures carefully planned?
>
> Yet even an old acquisitive king must feel
> Remorse poisoning his joy, since he allows
> Particular boys each evening to arouse
> From leaden-lidded sleep, softly to steal
>
> Away to the whispering shore, there to plunge in,
> And fluid as porpoises swim upward, upward through the dividing
> Waters until, soon, each back home is striding
> Over thresholds of welcome dream with wet and moonlit skin.

In 1966 Bruce Dawe and his family – a second son, Jamie, was born in 1966 – were posted to the RAAF's camp at Butterworth in Malaya, where Dawe served as an educational liaison officer for the families of Australian personnel. Six months later he was back in Melbourne working as librarian at RAAF Support Command and living first in Elwood and later at Springvale, where sometimes at night informal posses searched for a phantom rock-thrower who rained bluemetal and brick down on suburban tiles after dark:

> Out in the suburbs I hear
> trains rocketing to impossible destinations

at 3.40 in the morning hear the dog-frost
bark over the dark back-yards with their young trees
and tubular-steel swings where tomorrow's children
laughingly dangle their stockinged feet already
and the moon coats with white primer
and youthful lawns, the thirtyish expectations . . .

The poem concludes:

And sometimes, too, dieselling homewards
when the bruised blue look of evening
prompts speculations upon the reasons for existence
and sets
the apprehensive traveller to fingering thoughtfully
his weekly ticket, when the sun draws its bloody
knuckles back from the teeth of roof-tops
and the wounded commuter limps finally up the
cement path
I think of the rock-thrower, the glazier's benefactor,
raining down meaning from beyond the subdivisions,
proclaiming the everlasting evangel of vulnerability
and the suburbs of men shrink to one short street
where voices are calling now from point to point:

'Is that you, Frank?'
'Is that you Les?'
'Is that you, Harry?'
'See anything?'
'Nup . . .'
'Nup . . .'
'Nup . . .'

It was a period of prolific and successful writing for Dawe. From 1967 to 1969 he published some 110 poems. In 1967 he won the $5000 Ampol Arts Award. In 1968 he published a further collection, *An Eye For A Tooth* and, after completing his ten years' service with the RAAF, managed to find time to write and study using the proceeds of the Ampol Award. He completed his BA degree with the University of Queensland in 1968. In 1969, *An Eye For A Tooth* won him the Myer Poetry Prize. He worked for a time as a mail sorter, then joined the Land Tax Department as a temporary file clerk, working in Queen Street, Melbourne. While in Queensland to receive his BA degree in 1969, he was asked to read his poetry at the Catholic Downland College in Toowoomba. Father Patterson, the Director of Studies, suggested he might like to teach at the school. With three children to support and the end of his money from the Ampol Award in sight, Dawe jumped at the chance, and, moving his family into a new home in Cumming Street, Toowoomba, settled to a period as a secondary teacher which was to last the best part of three years.

In 1969 *Beyond the Subdivisions,* Bruce Dawe's fourth collection of poems, appeared. It included perhaps one of his most moving pieces, "Homecoming", which while it recorded the ferrying home by jet of the bodies of Americans struck down in the jungle battles of Vietnam, also spoke for the tragedy of that Asian war as a whole, for the tragedy of war as an instrument of governments in general. The poem thrums to a tragic repetition that echoes the deadly beat of war and its huge machinery for deploying and manipulating men and equipment:

All day, day after day, they're bringing them home,
they're picking them up, those they can find, and
bringing them home,
they're bringing them in, piled on the hulls of Grants,
in trucks, in convoys,
they're zipping them up in green plastic bags,
they're tagging them now in Saigon, in the mortuary
coolness
they're giving them names, they're rolling them out of
the deep-freeze lockers – on the tarmac at Tan Son
Nhut
the noble jets are whining like hounds,
they are bringing them home . . .

Soon after the publication of *Beyond the Subdivisions,* Bruce Dawe delivered a paper to a poets' seminar at the University of New England, reading and talking about a selection of his poems each of which carried his stamp of ironic concern at the human condition, and which illustrated the sense of alienation – "that general sense of estrangement from one's surrounding" – which he felt was officially compounded in the artist in Australia, and which he saw as the spring for much of his poetry.

It is his continuous and precious alienation, this cussed refusal to see the world as he may be hidden, but to see it rather with his own humorous conviction, that gives Bruce Dawe's poetry its power. That, and his remarkable wit, his uncanny awareness of the values that different types of Australians (and there are many) place on things, his sense of the suburban ironies, his infallible ear for the conversational tone of Australians, and his ability, demonstrated in poems like "Homecoming", to give us a long-distance, yet telling view of processes that are generally too vast for the individual to encompass. In "Homecoming", Dawe admitted in his paper, he had come as close as he has ever come to desolation. The poem, he added, "is no more an anti-Vietnam poem than an anti-Passchendaele or anti-Verdun, or anti-Auschwitz or anti-Dresden or anti-Hiroshima poem. It deplores in particular this same process we can see operating at most levels of society, in war-zones and peace-zones. man half-angel and half-brute".

So, the poet's role, as Dawe sees it is "to sing, to sing one's concern". In 1970 Dawe began writing a weekly light poem, built round a news report notable for its whimsicality or its direness, for the Toowoomba Chronicle. He was to continue the practice for more than five years, like a verbal cartoonist, to the tune of some two hundred poems, sometimes in the ballad form, sometimes adapting the first line of a sonnet

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well-known to readers. Although Dawe admits that the newspaper poems, set against his more serious work, "are not in the main terribly good", he defends their selected presence, with the cream of his work, in his volume *Sometimes Gladness, Collected Poems 1954-1978,* published in 1978. Without the light verse, he feels the book could not be said to represent the complete range of his work. A selection of the light verse, illustrated by the cartoonist Collette, was published in 1975, laboring unforgettably under the title *Just a Dugong at Twilight.* Its poems commented on news reports: installation of a dial-a-bird-call tape in a public park, the 1900th object shot into space, nudity in plays, vandalism of Aboriginal paintings in the Carnarvon Ranges, protests over French nuclear tests and the problems caused in New Guinea by the rising bride-price.

The 1970s opened vistas for Dawe. In 1971 he began a Litt.B. degree, specializing in the work of the American playwright Arthur Miller, and graduated in 1972. In 1973, he began a Master of Arts Course with the University of Queensland - his subject, the modern English anti-Utopian novel - and became an MA in 1974. Almost immediately he began work on a doctorate involving a study of the relationship of obsession to the work of the English novelist Graham Greene and his development as a writer. Dawe, by the time he presented his Ph.D. thesis in 1979, had been teaching at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education in Toowoomba for seven years, having taken up a lectureship in Literature there in 1972. By 1980 Bruce Dawe had become one of a select few with a background like his own—of childhood impoverishment, under-educated parents, with brothers and sisters who had not studied beyond primary school - to have run the full gamut of academic advancement by the age of fifty.

"Even now," he says, musing, "I'll be lecturing and suddenly wonder what I'm doing here. In some senses I'm not an academic. There's that feeling that others have justified their position, but that I haven't that I've simply been very lucky. I think it's that old Protestant work ethic hang-over - Arther Miller touches it in his play, 'The Man Who Had All The Luck'—that you shouldn't gain things by luck. There are tinges of it in Graham Greene, too, say in his autobiographical book, *A Sort Of Life.* It's attached to the notion that success is only delayed failure. But I could only say when I received the Ph.D., 'Well, this is for you, Mum.' My mother had a mystical belief in education for her kids, although she had little understanding of it."

There is a surprising simplicity in Dawe's life. The white-railed weatherboard house in Toowoomba has its garden of shrubs, its vegetable patch, its chook-run stridden by white leghorns, its aboveground pool, the apricot, nectarine and peach trees, its dog, cat, and budgerigars, and two galahs in an aviary. His wife

Gloria is the organizing botanical genius, while Dawe and sometimes the children provide the labor. Inside, the walls carry religious motifs – crosses, a wood carving of the Last Supper, a portrait of the Pope. And there are Bruce Dawe's degrees in frames on the wall above the piano. In the corner is the Dawe filing system: a low cupboard full of poems, drafts, photographs, old school essays and unpublished work on which the door barely shuts.

His family is Dawe's centre. He rules it as a gentle patriarch who has to ask his daughters to bring his reading glasses, who calls a family conference to decide the best order, in terms of the common good, for the day's events. "It's part of my general conservatism," he explains. "I'm positive about the family as the essential unit, the best matrix. Of course the family has disadvantages too – its authoritarian nature, and on occasion, its possible stunting of human development. But its communal responsibility is vital. I'm writing from within a family, and even with memories, from time to time, of my own childhood family where my brother and sisters being so much older were adult guardians to me, rather than a peer group. And I'm also conservative, I suppose, in my support of suburbia with all its weaknesses. I think it's still the closest man is likely to come to the ideal life."

Despite all this, during the late 1970s Bruce Dawe took to the streets in protest marches in Toowoomba, and wrote many letters to the papers – all concerned with the civil liberties issue in Queensland. "The Premier is no respecter of difference of opinion," Dawe says. "He makes it clear that if you love him, you will be hostile to *all* those who voice opinions on the streets. On the other hand he doesn't seem to mind people criticizing *him*, doesn't always slap writs on them. But I have marched and chanted in support of the general point that the peaceful street march is a legitimate form of expression of opinion. I've made it clear I don't support a lot of things that appear on the placards of those I'm rubbing shoulders with when I march. But not everyone hears that. I've lost a few friends over it. I've been labelled communist, my kids have been held up as radicals at school, despite the fact that my anti-communist credentials are the equal of anybody's in the country. I am not a political activist."

Dawe points out that although he has a photograph of himself being arrested at an early demonstration, at a later one the police escorted him and other marchers through the Toowoomba shopping centre. "That's how the system should work," he concludes. "And in practice it works out that way more often than not. The Draconian statements made by the Premier earlier on are not acted out."

Dawe has written poems about political figures over the years – Sir Henry Bolte, Harold Holt, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and others. He often finds that he works through and beyond his feelings about their shortcomings and ends up with something at least partly sympathetic. "It's one of the paradoxes of satire," he claims. "Some people think it's an attempt to have it both ways. But it's not that. It's that the satirist has to be partly in love with his or her targets, seeing in them in the end things he or she has in common with them – in my case a talent for castigation and for generalization! A strange bond grows, you can't maintain the vitriol, and other things take its place!"

Late in 1982 Bruce Dawe had another principle in mind – and stood firm for it, resigning his position at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education after eleven years of teaching there. He was protesting at a restructuring of the Institute's humanities program which could have relegated the Literature stream to the level of an option only. With this danger eliminated, he rejoined the staff as a Teaching Fellow in Literature in July 1983, and is now again Senior Lecturer in Language and Literature.

Teaching and poetry – the linch-pins of Dawe's contribution to Australian life – take him on frequent bus-trips to Brisbane, and to other centres to give readings and lectures. He has never driven a car, and has until recently been unhappy travelling by air. He has always been glad that his background – the RAAF, his late coming to academic qualifications – has helped him to distance himself sufficiently from the sometimes frenetic round of groups and literary events that can assail the writer, on the one hand, and on the other from the compulsive conference-going and academic narcissism that can divorce the lecturer from the well-spring of his intellectual enquiry and teaching.

Dawe is a story-teller, an observer, a person alive to the nuances, irony, and pathetic limits of life and human behaviour. He will read his poems quite unaffectedly to a listener, striving also to give as full a context as he can to them. He is also a humble man, appreciative of his 'luck', and bent on preserving as much simplicity as he can in a life lived in an electronic and technological time. He harks back again to the debts he owes to the writers who surrounded his first years as a poet in Melbourne. When he talks the imagery flows, drawing out a great breath of reference and a nimble recognition of cross-reference that link such things as class, poverty, political stances, ethnic background, economics and technological change in his own society, or that explain the psychological springs and barriers which artists use, or through which they must push, to reach artistic truth.

Dawe has thought deeply about how history and geography have affected the role of the poet and artists in other spheres in Australia, and of what is lacking, perhaps, in the audience of poetry here. "There is a sense that we in Australia have been left out of what ought to have been our history," he says, "that we've looked on at the fatalities of others, the things that

count. It's like someone looking in at a window and saying, "I should have been born into that family. I know what it would be like to sit beside that fire. I know what that mother would have been like . . .' It's not true of course, but somehow we can't help it. And now, of course, we wouldn't want to be part of those events, wouldn't want history to happen here, because it is unpalatable, horrific. But the feeling lingers." In his role as a 'public' poet, somebody who writes for others, as he says in his introduction to *Sometimes Gladness,* "out of a need to come to terms with some concern," Dawe is aware in his audience of that wariness about our inner selves which Australian cultural traditions have in the past encouraged. "To confront our private selves in public," he goes on, "was for generations considered not on for many Australians who skittered away from that kind of a confrontation as a threat to their sense of identity . . ." Fortunately, he maintains, that simple-minded national awkwardness is changing, enhancing our possibilities as people, as sentient beings.

W.H. Auden and W.B. Yeats were early influences that Dawe detects now in his poetry of the 1950s. So too were the effects of some of the Romantics, and, almost against his better judgements at the time, of T.S. Eliot. He doesn't detect anything in his work flowing from Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose approach to language was anathema to him. More recently e.e. cummings, among other Americans, has touched him. "His verbal nods and winks and wreathed smiles are the essence of a man who thinks, feels, publicly," he confided in a letter to the critic Mark McLeod.Dawe's own recent work has departed from the dramatic monologue, the sonnet, and the Biblical models that have preponderated as forms in his poetry. He has experimented with a spareness in those forms or others, aiming for a syllabic metre. His 'political' poems are now fewer in number. But his poems of social concern still trumpet out: "I saw relatively late, I suppose, in comparison with others, what I could do, what voice was mine," he says. "I like to attack something in a direct, idiomatic way which most people can understand at a first reading."

Dawe generally builds up his poems in quick drafts and redrafts in longhand. Sometimes, as in his poem "Lifestyle", that cocks a snook at Melbourne football, or in his elegaic poem, "Homecoming", the initial lines came quickly, but he has to wait some weeks to allow for the subconscious workings, selection and rejection that would give him the conclusions. He might have half-a-dozen poems at a time gradually coming to fruition. And they are poems which, since 1971, when Dawe's *Condolences of the Season: Selected Poems* began selling in such great numbers, have reached more and more Australians - general readers, as well as students in secondary education and at tertiary institutions. In 1978 *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems 1954-1978* followed, and is selling at a similar rate.

Two years later Dawe's years of enquiry and statement and giving of pleasure and insight were further acknowledged: he was awarded the Patrick White Literary Award for 1980. In 1983 *Over Here, Harv!* a collection of his Joey Cassidy stories of the 1950s and 1960s, was published in paperback.

The stories are redolent with Melbourne references – there are mentions of Procera bread, of the huge dome of the Melbourne Public Library, of Wardrop My Tailor, of a Sherrin football and all the argot of Australian Rules. To the ear of the 1980s, the stories perhaps sound slightly overwritten. At times too, there are echoes of the approach of the Realist Writers' Group which Dawe espoused for a time. But the best stories are spare, working forward by implication and touching the gulf between Dawe's hand-to-mouth existence as a young man in Carlton and Fitzroy among pop-shops, prelim. fighters, and graffiti supporting the gaoled communist Lance Sharkey on one hand, and on the other the different, moneyed social world of reefer jackets and grey flannels, classical music, male Ford Customlines and ladies' Austin A-40 runabouts on the other side of the park.

As one of Dawe's impoverished narrators is given to say, from Dawe's experience, "anybody from this side who takes a walk into that world soon gets to know he won't ever belong there. And if he stays there long enough he'll probably realize they're just human beings like the rest of us – for all their tailored rig-outs and toney accents." Therein lie many stories. Therein, too, it is as if Dawe's writing has come full circle, as if with the late publication of the Joey Cassidy stories Dawe confronts his origins again. A theatrical adaptation of some of the stories, together with some poems, was produced by Robert Kelton in 1985 under the title of "Stage Dawe", and performed in the School of Arts at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education where Dawe teaches.

Getting on for forty years beyond the period of the Joey Cassidy stories, and 2000 km from that Melbourne background, Bruce Dawe stands in the soft, chook-keening evening in his Toowoomba backyard. "I wonder about a lot of things, like most people. Life is very confused. My advice would be to stay confused. Its healthier."

LAURIE CLANCY

Hitch-Hiking

Sam left the Peninsula hotel early, while the sun was still easily visible over the bay and brightly colored pedal boats were still out in large numbers. He stood on the opposite side of the main highway, thumbing a ride back to the city. Business was oddly slack for the summer resort in late January and he was keen to complete his arrangements for returning to the university to finish his degree, so the management had reluctantly allowed him to leave a little early on Saturday night. Three days off without pay.

Usually he had little difficulty in picking up a lift but there was a kind of desperation in the air, the queues at the bottle department were long, and no one seemed inclined to stop. Cars passed bumper-to-bumper, their drivers tooting at one another, at on-coming vehicles, at Sam if he ventured more than a pace from the sandy footpath. Giving up, he picked up his old gladstone bag and trudged out to the edge of the town, where things were quieter.

Soon, an ancient Morris stopped for him and he jumped in the back. The driver was an Englishman, from the north to judge from his accent, but in his lap on the seat in front he held his young son whom he was teaching to drive. The boy steered the whole way while the man operated the clutch and accelerator; only on a couple of particularly tortuous bends did the father take over the wheel. Sam had not been asked how far he was going. At the first large town he came to he said, "This'll do me fine" and the car stopped.

"Not bad for eight, is he?", the driver said with a proud smile, as the car door slammed shut.

Sam walked into a pub at a corner of the intersection where he had been dropped off and drank two pots of beer. He was remembering the jubilant squeals of the confident youngster each time he negotiated a bend in the road. Looking out, he noticed it had begun to grow darker outside. Time to get on the road again before the cars had to put their lights on and getting a lift became much harder. He trudged outside and walked over to the side of the road. It was a sultry summer night and a few dark clouds had begun to build up. This time, however, he had no difficulty. Almost before he had put out his thumb a fast-travelling Falcon braked quickly as it went past him, tires struggling to grip on the gravel by the side of the road, and the driver looked back enquiringly over his shoulder. Sam ran over to the car.

"Going to Melbourne?", he asked the man, who was holding the door on the passenger's side of the car open to him.

"All the way," he answered. The car accelerated rapidly again, an empty lemonade bottle shattering under the tires. The driver showed the same tension and abruptness as when he had braked. Sam eased back against the seat.

For a few minutes neither of them spoke. There was a kind of etiquette of hitch-hiking, Sam had learned over his three summers of working at the hotel. You never spoke first, except for polite thanks to the driver for stopping for you, but always responded readily if the driver initiated the conversation. While trying to be unobtrusive, Sam always scrutinised the drivers who picked him up, speculated on their identities, what sort of job they had for instance. This man was about thirty-three, he decided, short but burly and aggressive in build, with an incongruously boyish face that seemed out of consonance with the thrust of his neck, the heavy shoulders. He wore a dark grey three-piece suit, unusual for that time and place, and it was this that led Sam to categorise him as a salesman of some kind.

Finally the man spoke. "I've just been with my girl friend Helen up at Arthur's Seat."

"Yes?" Sometimes drivers would tell him about their girl friends, as if making their own sexual inclinations clear from the outset, presenting their credentials. Usually, though, they started with a more neutral topic, like the weather or cricket, before working up to it.

"Bloody cock-teaser. She wouldn't let me root her. Teased me and teased me and took me to the point of it and then made me stop."

"That seems rough."

"Do you know what she did last week? We were in bed and I was rooting her and just on the point of

coming and she made me pull out and said she wouldn't let me finish unless I promised to marry her."

"What did you do?"

"I gave her a smack across the jaw and came anyway. Then she started crying and said we were engaged. Imagine the bloody nerve."

They had gone beyond the lights of Frankston.

"Funny thing is," the man continued casually, "I'd probably marry her anyway but not the way she's carrying on at the moment. She won't even let me inside her now. We just pash in the back seat of the car. I've got a bad case of lover's balls. It's very painful."

Sam thought. The slang was oddly archaic, like something learned from a book. His contemporaries never talked about lover's balls.

"Mind if I do something about it?", the man asked suddenly. They were passing through the bay suburb of Seaford, much less developed than Frankston and not as well lit. "There's a spot around here I know that's quite safe."

Sam had time to wonder if the man experienced the same condition every Saturday evening at around this spot. "Go ahead," he said politely and a few seconds later the driver pulled the car over to a patch just off the highway in the ti-tree that was relatively concealed. Sam looked out the window, away from the driver, staring at the ti-trees that waved slightly in the wind. He heard the sound of a zipper, sensed as much as glimpsed out of the corner of his eye the man's furious friction and then heard a groan. The man wiped himself and the dashboard with a large handkerchief, zipped himself up matter of factly again, and the journey resumed in silence.

"You didn't mind, did you?", he asked Sam.

"Of course not," he replied in the same tone of casual politeness, as if the man were apologising for having inadvertently passed wind.

"Karen's a bitch," he informed him.

Sam caught the slight flicker in the man's face as he sensed he had a mistake but neither of them said anything. They drove on and by the time they approached Cheltenham it was almost night. Sam had begun to feel drowsy and leaned his head against the passenger's side window. Almost immediately he fell asleep, to be woken after what seemed only a minute or two by a hand gripping his shoulder. The driver was shaking him quite firmly.

"You said Brighton Beach, didn't you? Well, we're there."

Sam looked around him and blinked.

"Do you live near the highway or can I drop you home?"

"No, I live near the highway," Sam lied for the first time, and felt ashamed. In fact, he lived about two or three miles away, a reasonably long walk which he could have spared himself.

They looked at each other. The driver seemed to be considering something and Sam waited. "You fell asleep in my car," he said at last. The tone was almost peevish, as if Sam's action had been an imposition of some kind. "You must trust me."

"Of course I trust you." Whether it was foolishness or ignorance or not he had felt not a trace of fear.

"Would you like to come to the stock car races with me at Moonee Ponds? I just want company. I'll pay for your admission ticket and drive you home, or wherever you want."

Although Sam felt tired after a long week in which he had worked a fair amount of overtime he hesitated only for a moment. He had had no idea that stock races were even held in Melbourne and would never have dreamed of going to them of his own accord.

"All right. But there's no need to pay for my ticket. I'll do that."

The man smiled weakly. "All right. My name's Tony, by the way."

"Sam." They both nodded. Neither made a move to shake hands. First names only. Once again the car was quickly off, north along the beach road.

By the time they reached Moonee Ponds it was after nine o'clock and the clouds had built up heavily. The evening's events were well in progress, and the roar and drone of the cars could be heard some distance away. Tony parked the car on the edge of a grass paddock adjoining the stadium, and they made their way across it to the entrance. Under the flood lights Sam could see that Tony looked uncomfortable in his tightly fitting herring-bone suit, and patches of sweat were visible under his armpits and in the middle of his back. He did not object when Sam insisted on paying for his own admission and in fact suddenly seemed to have become abstracted and distant. He went to buy a couple of beers, Sam bought some hot dogs, and they drank and ate in silence while the crowd screamed around them as the cars careened down the track, hammering into each other.

Tony picked up a discarded program in the dust at his feet. "Event number five," he said. Now he sounded as if he could not wait for the evening to be over. Something that Sam did not understand had suddenly changed his mood into one of total despondency.

"Do you go to the stock races a lot?", Sam asked at last.

"Pretty often. I like it because it's peaceful."

"Peaceful!" Sam stared at him, unable to conceal his incredulity. They were having almost to shout to one another above the screaming of the crowd as the cars charged around the bend in front of them again.

"I like it in crowds," Tony explained almost grudgingly. "Where you're anonymous." Sam wondered why he did not take off his jacket or at least his tie. The night had grown even sultrier and he was probably the only one of the five thousand or so people present

wearing a suit. He could have left his clothes in the car which he carefully locked, meticulously checking each door.

"It's the first time I've been. It's very interesting."

"Oh?" Tony grunted. The tone did not invite elaboration of his responses. Sam fetched a couple more beers.

By the time the seventh race was over, Tony turned to Sam and spoke to him for the first time in nearly half an hour. "Would you mind if we got out early, pretty soon?", he asked politely. "Before the last race, and all the drunks leave. It can become a bit nasty here at the end."

"Sure," said Sam. He didn't want to ask Tony where he lived and said "If it's out of your way you could drop me at a railway station."

"No," Tony said glumly. "I promised to drive you home and I will." He was, Sam thought, like a man out on a date who has found his companion unsatisfactory and boring but who is determined to honor all his obligations. Well, too bad. And in fact, Sam was relieved that his offer to make his own way home had been rejected. As they had stood watching the organised mayhem of the cars in the last race a few heavy drops of rain had spat into the dust beneath them and a sweet scent of earth arose. There would be a storm before very long.

Tony drove down the beach road a little less urgently than before and with more weariness than tension expressed in the way he hunched over the wheel. The rain was still holding off, but there were occasional growls of thunder and flickerings of lightning. Sam had decided that he would tell him where he lived if Tony offered again to drive him home, as he expected, but it did not happen. Outside the Brighton Beach hotel, which was closed now, he stopped the car, leaving the engine running, and said, "Well, thanks for the company. And good night."

Sam collected his bag from the back seat, said "Good night", and held out his hand, and they shook. "It was the first time I've been to one of those meetings," he said foolishly, remembering too late that he had already mentioned that fact. "I hope Helen's easier on you next time."

"My girl's name is Karen," Tony said. "Helen's her sister." He closed the door quickly and waved before accelerating in his usual impatient style, then turning left immediately and heading east along South Road, in the same direction as Sam had to walk. Sam crossed the deserted railway tracks, walked past the sports oval where he had once scored a century. The plops of rain had grown larger and more frequent and it was just as Sam reached the end of the oval that the storm broke. Rain, warm but hitting him quite forcefully, pelted down and he hunched over, drawing one hand deep into his pocket, clutching the old bag with the other, and wished that he had asked Tony to drive him to his front door. He began to run, up the hill along South Road, past imported pine trees and large nineteenth century houses built in the early days of Marvellous Melbourne, with swimming pools or tennis courts at the back, towards the newer, rawer post-war suburbs that the housing commission had built on the other side of Hampton Street.

He ran towards his home, where his family would not be expecting him and would all be in bed, towards the church service tomorrow morning that he would have to attend, towards roast lamb and potatoes and mint sauce for lunch, towards mowing the lawn in the afternoon on a comfortably full stomach. Though he could not wait to be home and warm and dry he had begun to enjoy the rain and broke into a run, the bag bumping awkwardly against his legs. On and on he ran, while the storm crackled loudly overhead.

FORTHCOMING IN OVERLAND

Desmond O'Grady on Gino Nibbi.
Howard Daniel on his meetings with Egon Kisch.
Hank Nelson on a New Guinea village.
Lisa Peattie on the peace movement.
Keith Russell on the poetry of John Millett.
Walter Crocker on foreign policy.
Michael Sharkey: Interview with Eric Beach.

SHE GIVES REASON

It had to end and so I snapped it
but pain alternated with emptiness swarming in
my stomach
and there was a man who wanted me to sing
charm
to his clients, to connect, and economically it fits

He gave me masses of the stuff
showered me with it like a wedding
a soft forgetful splint I could at least stand in
and we'd drive. It amused me to draw from
each
the right distance, cold or consecrated
and to study the language of exchange, I could
cut it
to a tee. He's rising without me,
better, with his cool brain. I couldn't mix it
They'd see beneath the tip soon
and the staggered ice realistically I am.
It was good I made him.
Now I rent it up, the white sheets to be
prepared
and weighed, and the heart's wrapped up in its
sick cradle.

GIG RYAN

INCENSE AT TEAPOT CREEK

the eucalypt colored
on its weather side
like a port-wine
birthmark on a
girl's face redolent
of the Kannon temple
in Asakusa

SUE WATSON

TWO POEMS BY J. S. HARRY

REAR VISION

At Swansea under opaque sky
on oil-scented water of pearl-shell
a sextet of outsize people
are rod-fishing out of a boat.

Two of the fattest stand up and tip
like top-heavy fruit in slow motion
out of the small boat-basket.
Which rocks. But remains upright.

Their muscled arms knifing through water
two fallen pear-bodies stroke for the shore
where grandmother waits toothless.
Her pale brown-blotched hands
flutter like bogong moths. She flaps
beside a rust-colored ranch-wagon
which she has just moved
on to the bridge, to be closer
to the two in the dangerous water.

Looking forward in the rear-vision mirror
you can see her behind you. You are helpless,
her mouth opening in a silent O.
Shark fins also
cut air, after prey, in these waters.

Though a mind's dread of shark
may fill a sea with blood,
the water stays pearl.
The next car
smashes her off the road.

VISITING HOLIDAY COUNTRY

A flash of a paperbark-colored wing
as a kookaburra angle-crosses, overhead.
At Hexham the mangroves go down on all fours
dunking arthritic knees and elbows
in the cool, muddy-green rain-swollen river.
Iron bridges support rust
and ant-lines of cards.
In the towns little white-painted
wooden-shacks squat hock-deep
in lush lorikeet-green grass.
A comic-book mountain like a green giant's
shoulder –
the Incredible Hulk's – rises, above water,
other side of the lake.
The black swans of Wallis Lake graze
the water nearest the shore that the car follows
like a careful child, making a tracing
round a watery place. The only road
scribbles itself in a bitumen streak
round the shores of a lake that swans
have lived on for centuries.
Pale, flesh-colored sand, without rose cheeks'
color,
on Elizabeth Beach.
Next morning we wake to Lewin's honeyeater
stretching a long neck to reach an insect
in the coral tree.
Currawongs wing-lift themselves one metre up
off grass, an arm's throw from us,
to catch the bluegreen blessing:
descending knobs of cheese.
Hopping down a sun ray
along the withered grey
wooden rail of the beachhouse verandah,
the satin bowerbird reaches and gobbles
fat brown raisins placed there for him.
His eyes are neon violets in the fierce
iridescent sun – the sheen
on his plumage is all violets.
Gorged he flies off, black in the deep shade
between banksias, gums and palm trees,
back of the surf. Caravan Frank
who lives where the bowerbird flies to
claims you won't find a single
used hypodermic or plastic container
for the length of the beach.

Two white-breasted sea eagles sleep their wings
over the cliff, on the air,
waiting for the prey to present itself.
Their eyes work ceaselessly, looking for it.
Perhaps they will feed, today,
from the moving white cloth of the sea
where the gulls scream and chop
into the seething mackerels;
perhaps they will fall
on the palm and banksia scrub
and rise with a dangle of snake
to dismember on the cliff-top.
They float above still at times
as the cumulus clouds
in the near-windless sky.
Tomorrow it rains till the catchment from the
roof
leaves all the rainwater tanks flooding over.
Tomorrow we all have showers – there is plenty
of water.
A tick entering on a wind jacket
spends a whole day undetected indoors.
Sand spills out of discarded shoes and off feet
white shiny into all
the cracks in the floor. Buckets and icecream
containers
are under most of the leaks.
The one-inch-long green frog in the bathroom
is against living anywhere else.

After three days' rain
the tropical undergrowth springs rank as the
fox-smell
either side of the track.
A fox crossed very early, on his way
to visit a gully uphill from the beach,
where humans dump, for other animals,
edible scrap.
As we leave it is fine again. Far out
diving gulls peck at the foam
swirling creamily like shampoo,
round the nape of a blue child, above
the living and dying
struggles of the fish.
The sea is the same color as it was
round all the islands of Greece.

FOUR POEMS BY PHILIP HAMMIAL

ISTANBUL EXTERIORS

It's all done down me here
& now & the next thing is
to incorporate the stitching
with the running & the running
with the pumping & the pumping
with the primping. Running,
pumping, primping, why this bother
with the way I've cherished? – in
cubicles, on crusts, with co-
religionists, the whole contrivance
on well-greased wheels, in one door
& out the other in a flash, so why
this revulsion? Would it not behoove you better
to think of my humble table as a place perfectly
suited for those ornate exposures that never fail
to tighten up your trade in, is it
dogs or dolls? Implicated in
what you imagine is a conspiracy
of *Istanbul exteriors* (an appellation
of your invention) when all I've done
is come from the east with a few hard crusts
in an otherwise empty sack & with
absolutely no idea that dogs
were stopping dolls (or was it dolls
stopping dogs?) in the areas under
your usually benevolent jurisdiction, a case,
clearly, of pride in wisdom (to that
I'll agree) for which you say the punishment
must suit the crime – read this poem
in a public place, but this
that you're doing down me, this stitching
with the running & the running
with the pumping . . .

SIGNS

Religious snappers fret when Mr Terence
    Nightingale
slips out from the body in which he was sewn
by a thought & a fiddle one Friday
when the signs were too exuberant – This
is the way to the Harrowing Church & this
to the Brisk; but both came to ground
with a common grievance – *Too much
body hire chatter.* Alas, had they only known
of the Great Bodies of Yore & how they'll always
    come
when you least expect them & step straight
into Creole, won't pause for the usual browse
at Butchers wondering which of the many
    obligations
they should carry out wrapped in plain
brown paper, straight
into Creole & damn the lack
of spiritual opportunity, the common body
in which our hero was sewn.

GRANDSTANDING

Benchsitting at an abattoir comes well within
the flaccid sweep of our swing from raw
to cooked encounters however had, whether
    by
some offence taken or on Thursday the train (The
Great Train) is always closed, impossible then
to bundle up & slip away for that pettifoggery
in which you can hear each slice of the knife
as it moves from raw, etc., for such

are these goons of love that they'll punctuate
your respect for the conventions of butchery
with a put-up or shut-up that flies in the face
of that simple sex or war in which
if this were a real dream we'd all
be well & truly dead.

TALL TALES

Get a raconteur ready.
If Niger stood up & were told how tall would it be?
And, having heard, would we by then have heard enough to hear how tall that Niger is?
Or has Niger stood up already been told too often limp by lilliputian tellers in prose that's flat & turtle-brown?
Of which, such a teller, there is one in London, a lazy lout.
And one in Berlin, a beggar with a single sleazy fact.
And three in Bern, belittlers. Overlook these

& get a real raconteur ready with enough material to start in rooster-red a Niger cult that crows
upon a post that's tall enough to let us hear from it
the little way that we, thus crowed, have yet to hear assuming
of course that we at rending veils (& mixing metaphors)
are as pig-snout perfect as we are led to think we are; & then:

that final push that puts the lilliputians (the boys
from the men) in their place – our Niger stood up
as tall in the telling as it's told!

TENT

The underwater bladder heaves and breathes
mocking the world above. The sun shines here
like blood, like night darkness: an opaque light
pretending day exists somewhere out there
where the wind blows and sucks at livid skin.

Trees fell our pulse, rest fish-fin fingertips
on the surface; the palm never quite flat,
the membrane never punctured by the points.
The world's still out there, breathing, separate.

We sit on coral chairs inside a bladder
monitoring the 'in' and 'out' or 'up'
and 'down', light diminished to a solid,
sound self-consumed, lost, until amplified
against the wind and tide. We listen to
a vox humana and forget the wind.

CONNIE BARBER

VIEWING THE COMET, 1986

On a cloudless night my father would
set up his telescope, call us to see
a star treat, a conjunction, a nebula,
Venus as crescent. He'd told us
of the streaming bright comet he's see
in the year that he married. "You'll see it",
he promised, "I shan't,
though I live like Grandmother to ninety."

I doubted I'd see it myself.
So far to go, but when its time came
Halley's comet was pale, invisible
in city lights. We drove to the hills;
three generations, stumbling in star-dazzled darkness.
Can you see it? Can you be certain?
Then eye clapped to telescope, saw it at last.
The Bright One. The pact with my father was kept.

Wrapped in the night's warm darkness,
crowded with friendly strangers, bound
by visits a life-time apart, I outbid Pascal.
Beneath the infinite waste of galaxies
my infinite smallness comforts me.

BARBARA GILES

NANCY KEESING

In Borrowed Time

Robert D. FitzGerald, A.M., O.B.E., D.Litt., died on 25 May 1987. All of Australia lost a great poet. The Sydney suburb of Hunters Hill where he was born and lived for most of his life (and where I have also lived for over thirty years) has lost a part of itself. His spare figure capped by a black beret will not again stride our leafy streets though I keep half expecting him at every turn, and to hear his mighty laugh, or to ask his help as on a day he came to my door to be greeted by me carrying a baby and exclaiming: " 'Brightness falls from the air, Queens have died young and fair, Dust hath closed Helen's eye . . .' and I can't find it in any book! I've got this on my brain but who *wrote* it?" Fitz immediately replied: "Thomas Nashe. The first line is 'Adieu, farewell earth's bliss!' " and then he spoke all, or nearly all, of that lovely poem.

Once he asked my help. He had proofs of *Forty Years Poems* and wanted a few of them read to him backwards, the only way, he said, to make certain one did not miss print errors in longer work. My copy of that book is inscribed:

esteem great very thanks to add
to way this rhyming am I glad
and forward read worse any not
is hope I backward read you what.

In some ways, to some people, no doubt Fitz seemed conservative. His marriage to Marjorie (whom he called Manon and to whom *Forty Years Poems* is dedicated), and his children Kerry, Rosaleen, Phyllida and Desmond, were very much at the centre of his life. His poetry and style were assured and stable. To some of the generation of poets who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s he seemed old-fashioned. Whether he seemed irrelevant also I do not know, but the 'conservative' FitzGerald was one of the first of Australian writers to speak, write and *act* vehemently against the war in Vietnam. The sonnet "Deep Within Man" was a brave poem. It ends:

I wish I believed that, there, some threat withstood
makes the cause just, rather than cruelly part
of that old grapple of greeds one must deplore
deep within man; for through this neighbourhood –
like spilling of blood that burns my grass, my heart –
inevitably the children play at war.

Even braver was his public stance, both puzzling and provoking to some of the shellbacked conservatives in whom Hunters Hill abounds.

One of Fitz's funniest Hunters Hill stories was of his footpath encounter with an elderly resident: "Hello young FitzGerald, are you still scribbling?" He was very aware of the paradoxes of his beloved suburb.

When we came to live here he and my husband Mark Hertzberg journeyed to town each morning by a small private ferry that plied a few remaining Lane Cove River wharfs. On Mark's behalf it was Fitz who stared down the 'regulars' who had raised eyebrows when a 'newcomer' came amongst them, and it was then I first understood Fitz's distinguished place in his profession as a surveyor. "I write," he told Mark, "in borrowed time." But when a particularly shellbacked critic of the Literature Board's 1970s policies attacked grants for young poets Fitz was ropeable. He may not always have cared for how they expressed themselves when he wrote: "Hell take freak poetries: I like good verse", but he was in fact supportive of policies that gave opportunities to newcomers.

In his own life and work Fitz spanned generations. Historical sense imbued his poetry, essays and spoken word. He had absolute integrity as a man and poet.

Adieu, farewell earth's bliss!
This world uncertain is:
Fond are life's lustful joys,
Death proves them all but toys . . .

but fine poems live over centuries.

In 1939, in a splendid long-vanished Australian journal called Desiderata, Kenneth Slessor reviewed R. D. FitzGerald's recently published *Moonlight Acre.* He began his article thus:

The last flags and fireworks of the 150th Anniversary have long since vanished. Little remains of all the pomp and eloquence, despite a series of Government prizes for achievements to mark the birthday. There were prizes for many things, ranging from a prize for decorations on a motor-lorry to a prize for the person who caught the largest fish. One of the smallest prizes awarded was for a poem.

Poetry, in the eyes of the Government, is not a serious or valuable industry, such as pumpkin-raising, for example; and it is a good deal easier to win a prize in Australia for a pumpkin than a poem. Yet the prize-poem, evoked by this award, will endure for many years after even the memories of prize fish and pumpkins have disappeared. The poem which won the £50 somewhat grudgingly bestowed by authority was Robert D. FitzGerald's "Essay on Memory", and it is now included in the collection of FitzGerald's newest work, *Moonlight Acre.*

When FitzGerald died on 25 May 1987 the Sydney Morning Herald asked me to write a brief obituary at short notice. I had two hours for the task and consulted the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* for information. In consequence and in haste I wrongly said that "Essay on Memory" won the Sydney Morning Herald sesquicentenary prize. This is not the first time that the *Oxford Companion* has proved mistaken, which is understandable no doubt in such a large and detailed work but, in order to make itself reliable, I really think it should publish a list of errata, not only for inclusion in subsequent reprints and editions, but to be available in bookshops and libraries for people who already own this large, expensive work.

I understand that the FitzGerald family are to point out this error to OUP.

A further point of interest about the February 1939 edition of Desiderata is the advertisement for Patrick White's *Happy Valley*—"a young Australian writer's first novel". It says, in part:

It is perhaps dangerous to make predictions about literary reputations, but Patrick White is an author of whom Australia may one day be proud.

Nancy Keesing

I MUST KNOW

And were there birds in those days,
  plump with our luxuries
  or sleek with freedom?

And did they cut the air and leave no trace?
And did they teem and cry, loud with Rabelaisian
    instinct?

Why then is the sky so silent,
  but for the steady scrape of planes
  and the dull machete blows of choppers?

Why is the sky not blue? Why is it torn and
    bleeding?
Why do you look away when I ask were there birds
    in those days?

DESMOND MANDERSON

THE TRUST: PART EIGHT

Except in that they stank like ecstasy
the woman and the man are live and gone.
Snow falls in sinews, shadowed by the gates,
closer
than fur to the animal, dying.
Of course they perform your post-
mortem here before death. Of
course the drama needs you. Dawn
encored on that woman's lips
like blood, and you had saved her.
You helped that man,
who opened like a shell
and was devoured again with no
embarrassing dance from breath.
The army watches.
The army is fossilized in long
elegant dripping sculptures
grimacing with moonlight by
the wharf. But armed. Trees
are armed statutes. I
return you to the field of fire, all
authority intact. You are
all right, and safe – so safe,
made integral by hate
as quiet as my dagger's flight
traceless in helpless air.
You are my knife. Do you
shrink to see yourself
riddled into such simplicity?

Recall how the cadaver twisted
in soft questions under you. Swallow!
Hold your glass. The park thaws.
Your fire hair salts
my tongue for its new water.
My promises have frozen
your heart dry, and I
am learning famous red.
Blood fans out on the night
as fountained ice.
Roll up the turf. Chairs rock
their aching wooden ribs
in my moist corners. Holes
sleeked warm as cunts hide prey
outside where all treed sleep
dreams down to death in fur.
Be quiet and be good.
I'll turn you now and take you.
Anything comes. At the easy end
we start and trust
the crying corpse nightlong
with litany and lullaby. Now aired
escape incants you from the dead
through mouthfuls of birthblood and bread. Yes,
here it is. As it is always said.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

ELIZABETH JOLLEY

Silences and Spaces

*Peter Cowan's place in the landscape of Australian Literature**

Peter Cowan has a special place in the writing from Western Australia. He was born in 1914. He has not lived anywhere except in Western Australia. He worked as a teacher in country areas and later became a Senior Tutor in the department of English at the University of Western Australia. At present he holds an Honorary Research Fellowship at the university.

His publications include two novels, *Summer (*1964) and *Seed* (1966), and two biographical works, *A Unique Position: A Biography of Edith Dicksey Cowan 1861-1932* and *A Faithful Picture: The Letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852.* Collections of short stories are *Drift* (1944), *The Unploughed Land* (1958), *The Empty Street* (1965), *The Tins and other Stories* (1973), *New Country* (1976), *Mobiles* (1979), and a new novel, *The Color of the Sky* (1986). The stories in *A Window in Mrs X's Place* (1986) were selected by Bruce Bennett from previous collections.

Without wishing to perpetuate what has now become an irritating myth it must be accepted that, for the earlier part of Peter Cowan's life, Western Australia was geographically isolated. It took a week to reach the eastern seaboard. Perhaps the barriers which exist now could be described as financial.

Until the establishment of the Fremantle Arts Centre Press in 1975 there was no publishing house for fiction and poetry. Manuscripts from Western Australia had to travel and take their chance in places where there was no shortage of submissions and no shortage of well-known names. Distribution of published books and bookselling are still abrasive subjects. A strange death which overtook (and still does overtake) the writer was being out of print. If books are not reprinted they simply cease to exist and the writer disappears.

Another problem, which younger writers will not have experienced, was the acute shortage of paper in the early 1940s. Manuscripts were very often rejected because of this. Paper, which was used, was often poor quality. An early copy of *Drift* demonstrates this.

The establishment of the Fremantle Arts Centre Press and fine quality publications have re-introduced Peter Cowan to a reading public many of whom are prepared to give his work the careful reading it deserves.

Peter Cowan has almost half a century of writing and publication behind him. His knowledge of and feeling for the Western Australian landscape gives his writing a unique flavor. He was involved in conservation, he has said, "a long time before it became respectable." His stories in the three first collections preserve forever pictures of life as it was in Perth, on the edges of Perth and in some of the more remote country places over a span of many years. The lonely people and the people alone, whether in a drab room in an East Perth boarding house or in the 'sleep out' of a far away farm, are depicted with faithfulness, honesty and a deep compassion. Readers who care to compare the earlier stories with the later ones will see too how Cowan reflects, with a clear vision, our own changing attitudes and behavior.

Gerald Bullett said in his biography of George Eliot that a character in fiction, if it is to have any life, must be created and not merely remembered. Peter Cowan does remember and record and, at the same time, he is creating fiction and showing the reader an inner vision of human life in addition to the external details of the places where this life is lived. He acknowledges the plain fact that a man can perish very quickly if he is lost and alone in places not very far from human habitation. He is well aware of the harshness of the Western Australian climate and the ease with which an individual can lose his way. These facts, looked at symbolically, fit our own muddled wanderings and attempts at communication. In spite of the dangers many of his characters find their solace in the solitude. The images of rock, gravel, dust and the deserted mine-head

* *With special reference to the novel* The Color of The Sky *(Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $13.50).*

poppets, the endless scrub ringed with conical hills, split by ravines and gulleys, are the places where his characters come within the possibility of making some sort of deep self discovery. He seems able in his writing to bring about a kind of reconciliation between the external, as just described, and the internal, that of attitudes, imaginations and emotions. The one seeming to offer some release for the realisation of the other.

Francis K. Crowley, the author of a well-known history of Western Australia gave the work the title *Australia's Western Third*. A reasonably accurate description. Very few people can be familiar with the whole State.

From the port of Fremantle on the west coast, the flat sand plains, encompassing the city of Perth, stretch for about fifteen miles to an escarpment. Over and beyond these ridges of low hills there is a mixture of rural land, which has been cleared for farming, and the bush. It is in this partly wild and partly inhabited bush country, quite close to the city, that Michael, in the story, "The Empty Street", comes upon the possibilities of evasion and escape, briefly putting off what he must ultimately face. He is now a stranger, an intruder, but is kindly received. At the lonely house, and with the woman who lives there, he experiences consolation. The brittle values of his suburban existence fall away as he helps to plant seedlings: "He worked without haste, there was only the new soil he had prepared, the feel of it beneath his fingers, friable, the slips of the thin greyish stems as he set them, the slow change of light as the trees along the rise grew deeper in colour." For a short time he is in a place of retreat, of sanctuary.

He finds the Horatian vision, a final gift perhaps;

> Abandon wearisome plenty, the pile
> that approaches the soaring clouds:
> leave wondering at the smoke,
> the money, the din of wealthy Rome...
> He lives well on a little whose family
> salt cellar shines amidst a modest
> table...
> ... you can assuage
> your small Gods with rosemary crowns
> and delicate myrtle garlands.

Like Ibsen and Chekhov, Cowan asks questions and never offers answers and he never pronounces judgement.

His characters, in their efforts to survive, to communicate, to understand, to enjoy themselves – or even in their drifting, are always very much of the present time. Contemporary scenes of conflict are not always readable for the reader who would prefer the human predicament to be set in some other century and not in the present. Many of Cowan's characters, in his earlier stories, can be seen now as the fore-runners of our own society. To some this may be an unwanted truth.

The story "Drift" (1944, the title story of the collection) reflects the changes which were accelerated in World War Two. Young people, who were restless in lonely rural communities, began even more to want to leave the farming life. They wanted to get right away from the land, the clearing of which had claimed the energy and sometimes the lives of their parents and grandparents.

Forster, in the novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, speaks of the "wonderful physical tie [which] binds the parents to the children; and – by some sad strange irony – it does not bind us children to our parents."

In the story "Drift" both the son and daughter want to leave the farm:

> It was lunch time. In the morning the Bren-gun carriers had been through the fields . . .
> "Wish I'd been in one of them," the boy said . . .
> "That's what I'm going to try to get into . . .

The father tries to put forward the good reasons for remaining on the farm. Soldiers have to have food he says. He belongs to the land and to the farm and he wants his son to stay there. To him, in spite of the remoteness and the heavy work, the farm is the place to be in.

> "I been here thirty years since my old man died," the man said. He gestured his hand towards the paddocks, the green deep in the fading light. "This was bush but for a couple of acres the old man cleared."
> The boy's eyes were restless. He marked the damp earth with his foot.
> "Yes but – "
> "You don't see it like that, do you?"

Forster's "physical tie" is here, unacknowledged, changed into something else. The father, inarticulate in his love for his children, sees what is, for him, the greater need beyond this love, for them to stay. The children do not want to turn themselves back towards the efforts of the father.

The women in "Drift" and some of the earlier stories are wholesome, providing and clearing away food. They are vulnerable and quite often defeated. In later stories they reflect the changes of society. They are hardened and able to victimize. Though close reading of "Mobiles", for example, will reveal Cowan's deep compassion for the apparently tough who are, even in their chosen circumstances, still defeated.

Kevin in the story "Canary" (1976) is a character representing the person who has come to some sort of understanding about himself. He lives as he wants to live. He earns a living as a shark fisherman for part of the year and the rest of the time he is out in the

sea on his surf board. This story deals, without prejudice or judgement, with the ugliness of certain human behavior in our society.

Peter Cowan, when he writes about Kevin, gives him all the images of the sea and the excitement of the places where land and water meet: "To the south was the curve of the bay and the clean sweep of beach edged with water that, even in the afternoon, was clear and vivid in colour." The girl, Sue, (dressed only in a rag of a bikini) the property of an interstate Bikie Group, always on the move, is forever "the small figure on the beach". She is the one needing and asking for food, warmth and what she understands to be love. For a short time Kevin supplies this physically and emotionally scarred little "canary" with what she needs.

It is interesting to note the parallel between Sue and her own description of what happened to her father's prize birds: "They'd never been out. They didn't know what to do." Cowan uses a carefully worked out symbolic way of writing so that each character is presented clearly as if etched with a diamond. Words like 'long', 'thin', 'fragile', 'small', 'hardly alive', are used in reference to Sue. And about her features: "As if they were a sticker pasted on the glass."

The narrative and dialogue are written with strict economy. Information is supplied by Sue in her own idiom rather than related in narrative. The story moves forward throughout by means of the dialogue.

Readers sometimes read into a text details which are not there. It is a mistake to presume that this story has a conventional happy ending. It doesn't. Careful reading will reveal pointers throughout the story which make the ending clear. Cowan uses the suddenly bleak appearance of the landscape to parallel the signs of farewell in the last conversation between Kevin and Sue.

> The white clouds were moving in across the bay from a darker, thickening base. Near the rocks at the point they looked back at the curve of the beach, the water faintly roughened by the wind.
>
> I like it here, she said.
>
> There's worse places.
>
> Couldn't we stay here?
>
> Starve.
>
> That little island out there, we could get out to that and then we'd never have to go back.
>
> The island is round the next bay. . .

Kevin's "lips to the scar that lay like thin paper" is the gentle but final kiss.

Near the beginning of the story, in reference to an expensive cigarette lighter, Sue makes the remark "People are always losing things on the beach." Another well-placed clue towards the outcome of the encounter.

The Bikie Group, not pleasant people in the eyes of suburban society, are shown to have a certain grim responsibility towards Sue: "You'll die there. Laying like that on the bloody beach. We brought you over – you better come back with us." These words, accompanied by a kick which is felt to the bone, show a compassionate awareness in the writer.

The story "Mobiles" (1979) is set in the outback. Only a few lines of abrupt sentences are needed for the reader to be transported into the harsh brilliance of the light, into the intense heat and into the emptiness. Here the writer presents a reversal of the known and accepted dangers of "speaking to strange men". In this story two girls, forever mobile in appearance – "They nodded, their heads dipping forward together. . . The thin one's red peak cap had twisted round. Their bodies shifted about. . ." – and mobile in their way of living, hitch a ride with a van driver who travels in windmills. The van driver is not as knowledgeable as the "lousy truckie" who, earlier, dropped the girls. The van driver, who knows where he has been, feels safe in picking up the girls. He knows enough to see that the roadside scrub is thin in this remote place. "They [the girls] were not fronting for anyone here."

Packed in the claustrophobic van in the strong smell of chewing gum, deodorant and sweat, the conversation, which appears to be desultory at first, becomes loaded. The girls fail in their first attempt to get the van driver to stop the van. He has declined the doubtful pleasure of a double screw at the side of the road.

Windmills, Lee said. You never fall off one of them?
Fell off? No. Not so far.
Always a first time.
Thanks. I'll watch it.
I mean, they turn around. You get in the way up there, could be bad.

Quickly they think of the unavoidable reason for stopping the van and getting him out of it.

The narrative in this story is even more economical than in "Canary". The dialogue is sinister and leads directly to the last paragraph in the story where the van driver's ultimate confusion is mirrored in his own reflection about the ants. He is standing at the roadside: "... the few ants were suddenly hesitant, confused. But at least it was wet for them, he thought, seeing the pattern of their movement broken, the red bodies dark like the marked ground." This image is presented before the girls drive off.

The writer does not offer more about the background of the girls other than the way they are living at present. If the girls can be seen to be so like the mobiles which are hanging in the van, why is it that the writer shows them to be hating the mobiles so much? They actually hurl them out of the window. This story is a glimpse of an aspect of contemporary life and the writer's very real feelings of compassion for people caught in a way of living which they have come to find intolerable but have no way of knowing how to change.

Peter Cowan does not set out to be a popular writer. His specialist style and his often painful subject matter preclude the escapist reader. His 'isolation' is not the geographical isolation of a writer in Western Australia or in a provincial town in England or in an outer suburb of Sydney. His is the isolation of individuals. Those depicted in the stories in the early collections are approachable and it is easy to respond to them. In these earlier stories Cowan is fascinated by a simple measure of achievement followed by failure. This achievement and failure is familiar to most readers. His later work is more removed and difficult.

The new novel, *The Color of the Sky*, is written in a packed and often poetic prose. Significant words in passages of narrative and dialogue seem, on examination, to be mathematically planned. Parallels and symbols employed in the short fiction are used in similar ways in this novel. A trail of big fat-bodied ants suggests the secret 'fattening' activities (drug running and smuggling) of some of the people in the story, like the ants moving uncertainly as if lost, as Maureen is lost, in the short story "Form in Wood" in *New Country*. And ants, confused, in an unexpected wetness at the end of the story "Mobiles", carry more than a hint about the feelings of the dumped van driver.

In *The Color of the Sky* Peter Cowan demonstrates once again his special standing in describing the Western Australian landscape. Regional fiction at its best has the power to transport the reader into those regions being described. To recapture the previously known or to imagine the unknown. The landscape and the sky, in this novel, are both a setting and an illumination.

To try to summarize the story would give a wrong impression. Many novels are stories of an individual's voyage of discovery and this one is no exception. It is too a novel of existence and feeling and of half knowing and not knowing. It is a story of search and mystery, the kind of mystery people have in themselves and their relationships as well as the mystery of the things they do.

Leon Jacobson, "a coffee and cereal man" (his own description) is protagonist and narrator. He is the kind of man who cautiously takes certain action, makes unexpected discoveries and to whom things happen. For example, his clothes: he wears a "light sweater that had got into his case, a legacy from London." Most people put their clothes into their luggage. He, recalled to Australia during a year he is spending in England, is diffident and quiet. He has the innocent courage in the face of uneasiness, often evident in Peter Cowan's characters (the unfortunate van driver in *Mobiles*), as they take part in the small movements of human life on the surface of an immense landscape beneath an immense sky. Both are indifferent to human life. Some of his characters seem to share this calm indifference. Annette, of the smooth buttocks and neat small breasts, seems to be more than just a small part of something so indifferent that she is sinister. The somewhat sterile neatness of her body enhances this. Leon experiences the uneasiness of being an unwanted guest.

> She [Annette] did not answer. I heard her throw the two cans into whatever else Gloria had left, flick the light switch, the kitchen in darkness. I turned off the light of the front room, and though I was at the outer doorway, I could not for a moment step on to the verandah. The blackness was complete. I was not even sure which way to turn. I was simply halted. I could not have stepped out over that verandah then, finding a way along it, and it was not from fear of losing direction. It was a force I could not confront. Annette had gone off into the darkness of some other part of the house without hesitation. I groped a way along the wall to the small room and the light was like coming out of a deep dive.

The precise choice of words and the clinical fragmented style enable the writer to reflect, without emotion, the mood and the mysteriousness of the inhabitants of the "patchwork house". Human life, even if dwarfed by the landscape, is shown to be important because of it.

The changes in the clouds carry the drama of the novel. It is well known that all things on land and sea reflect and take their color from the sky.

At the beginning of the novel "the light was softened, a thin drift of cloud away to the left I had not noticed. . ." And later, when Jacobson is about to witness something hidden (the caged birds), there are white clusters of flowers against a red cliff and a clear sky. The clarity and the coloring parallels what he thinks he sees.

And later, "From the verandah I could see clouds spread thinly above the horizon, coming from a clear sky, hardening from gold to a deep glowing red", and as the story progresses and he is on horseback with Annette: "low flat ridges over to the east with high patterns of cloud lifting like dust above them. Almost too thin for cloud. . ." Something about to be revealed?

On the surface it appears as if cattle are the source of income. In reply to Jacobson, Annette speaks:

> They are quiet, she said. You don't have to shoot them to muster. Why did you come here?
>
> I'm not sure. I was looking for some answers I suppose.
>
> She turned the horse away. It seemed to have some inbuilt mechanism to follow cattle. She said: You might find some questions.

Cowan offers sparse but loaded dialogue throughout the novel. He employs the same method of half spoken, sometimes sinister, revelation in many of the later short stories, "Mobiles", "Canary", "The Map" and others. This gives the impression of one uncompromising unemotional voice speaking for many. The controlled tone can have the effect of distancing the characters from some readers. Similarly a control of texture and feeling exists in the use of certain words and imagery in the descriptions of women, particularly Annette. She appears in body and nature smooth and able to move easily in all circumstances. She is inscrutable; "her eyes closed, arms straight along her sides, some short-sighted explorer might have stepped over her as a piece of the smooth brown rock that had none of the sharp planed angles of the cliff face."

In the short story "The Store", in *The Tins and Other Stories*, Cowan carries this image of smoothness from Jenny's slender legs and smooth youthful skin to the polished wood and the smooth bevelled edge of the store-keeper's desk

Fleeting successful or unsuccessful sexual encounters in both this novel and in some of the stories dissipate in the all encompassing powerful imagery of land- and seascape, or in the words of the self-effacing character, in this case, Jacobson: "She [Annette] had a strange violence. There would have been those better able to meet her needs. To match them. If that was what she wanted. Perhaps it was not." The reader, yearning for blow by blow descriptions of sexual activity, will not find them in Cowan's work.

The ever present sky continues to be significant: "There were high clouds building, heavy darkening ridges lifting in masses above the distant ranges." Jacobson is unable to ignore anything in his surroundings and again he observes the all observant sky:

> Over towards the ranges the clouds had thickened, building, with high rolling white edges, heavy, their base a solid black. Standing by the utility I could see the sharp flare of lightning and I was suddenly afraid.

and "I watched the black mass of cloud spreading, cut by flashes of lightning, greying slowly until the real colour was gone."

The mysteriously controlled dying down of the storm mirrors in advance the subdued, controlled catharsis as Jacobson, separating the strands of his life, comes to a final realization and a decision.

Cowan's writing is sustained by the light and shade of his imagery. In contrast to the bleak indifference and the harsh beauty of the landscape there are rare, domestic pictures which suggest hope and comfort for the wandering individual. The Doulton china, the glowing plates, surprise suddenly both in the novel and in the short story "The Store."

In "The Store" Jenny, young, bright-haired and light-hearted, is invited by the store-keeper into his house. The store-keeper is a swarthy, hairy, unprepossessing man who looks after a dark, heavily timbered camping site. His house is built of dark, oiled weatherboards and it is crowded with heavy old furniture and old photographs. And then all at once Jenny sees the china; "and on the sideboard the glowing china, somehow alive, she thought, not pathetically dead like so much stuff her friends bought. . ." She has not been expecting to see anything like it in the house. The store-keeper explains that his mother had been very proud of it. Because of this small explanation the misunderstanding and perplexity later are the more poignant.

In the novel Jacobson's discovery of the four Doulton plates, covered in dust, on a shelf in the house where he is an unwelcome explorer, forms a link between the present and the past. Jacobson recalls his mother and her pleasure in acquisition: "Sometimes returning in a happiness I'm afraid was rare. . . I have gone into that room and found her, comfortable in one of the big lounge chairs, staring at the lines of glowing china. She would turn her head slowly, looking at me, smiling. . ."

When discussing his work with Wendy Jenkins (Fremantle Arts Review, March 1986) in response to the statement, "Your language has become more and more pared down – there are the silences, which are also the spaces", Peter Cowan replied: "This sort of landscape is a landscape of silences and spaces.

You can't really talk about it in a language which is lavish and over-ornamented... You have to try and find a prose that expresses it within itself.''

In the same interview he made the revealing remark: "If you want to write things which everybody will read and enjoy, you write something a little different. I wouldn't expect that my work would get a wide audience. I'd be very surprised if it did.''

The Color of the Sky is not easy reading but the most important quality of the novel is not that it should be easy to read. This novel is the work of a man who has thought and felt much. The reader who approaches it with proper humility may sometimes be repelled and may, at times, feel lost. To read with perseverance is to find imaginative power and deep insight and compassion.

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SHIPWRECK

Green waves remember how
in the screamwind light
a saltrock fist smashed
a mouth into her and
plankshudder brine
poured in where it
had never been before.

Green light groped
on its side to
cabins and hold.
The salmon made way,
sharks made way and
dolphins stood off
as she took her
new course
down.

How long in weedgreen
slime under shellstarred
sand silent as tar will
those bones bridge
the crusted bottle
and the gold coins?

Green waves remember
and white waves,
and the blue seas
that have no waves.

R. H. MORRISON

RACE MATHEWS

A Stench of Liniment

An autobiographical comment on Chester Eagle's Play Together, Dark Blue Twenty *(McPhee Gribble, $18.95).*

Shortly after beginning Chester Eagle's book *Play Together, Dark Blue Twenty* I imagined I was breathing in the stench of liniment. Memory triggered the association for me automatically. Eagle has written about Melbourne Grammar in the late 1940s and early 1950s, where he and I were boarder and day-boy—to the best of my recollection without ever speaking to one another. The school was dominated at the time by the cricketers, footballers, oarsmen and athletes who were also its prefects, house captains and probationers. Liniment hung about their clothes, as it did about the studies and passages underneath the clock-tower from which their authority was exercised, and the bathroom where they beat us with their canes. Its presence has been linked in my mind ever since with hostility to ideas, pressure for conformity and the 'born-to-rule' syndrome of Australian conservatism. *Play Together, Dark Blue Twenty* captures these aspects of the school's dark side as Eagle experienced them in their most extreme form in the Boarding House. Balance requires that a different facet of the Melbourne Grammar picture should now be placed on record. There is a need also to ask whether the liniment problem troubles Melbourne Grammar to the same extent today.

Melbourne Grammar has been a political nursery for radicals as well as cloned conservatives. My own experience is relevant. Two good teachers—Jukes and Fell—interested me in the idea of history. Comparing the dominant Melbourne Grammar values with those of my post-war Housing Commission home was my introduction to the significance of class. It was in the Melbourne Grammar libraries that I first acquired a taste for the heady stuff of Kingsley Martin's New Statesman editorials, and read what was possibly the single most influential book of my life—the *Socialist Sixth of the World* by the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson. A handful of boys a year or more my senior formed a "League of the Three Emperors" and later a Parliamentary Society, where argument was valued.

These influences helped me towards a lifelong democratic socialist commitment. My experience was not unique. Attending a reunion of my contemporaries five or so years ago, I was struck by the sizeable minority whose radicalisation had paralleled my own. The radical interest would not necessarily have been so well served if our education had been received elsewhere. A friend who attended a similar Melbourne High School function around the same time was depressed by its pervasive conservatism.

My Melbourne Grammar teachers were mostly desiccated, disappointed men who, but for the War, would long since have retired. Their gowns and minds were threadbare, and they taught mechanically, with heavy reliance on sarcasm, the cane and Saturday detentions. Jukes and Fell were glowing exceptions, along with Evans at Grimwade House who first read Shakespeare to me, and Covill in Leaving Certificate English, who was my introduction to Milton.

History as Jukes taught it to his Sub-Intermediate and Intermediate forms was a far cry from the hitherto familiar process of taking down from dictation—or copying from blackboards—masses of insufficiently-explained, under-digested information. What mattered to Jukes was the forces and motives behind how individuals and nations acted, and why history unfolded as it did. It was not required that others should share his wryly conservative outlook, provided their conclusions were defended with reasoned argument. Fell adopted a similar approach at the Leaving Certificate Modern History level, from a more liberal political viewpoint, and with the whole of Europe for his canvas.

The effect was magical. History took on an engrossing, enthralling quality which previously had been associated exclusively with extra-curricular activities. So much so was this the case that it spilled over into our jealously-guarded out-of-school lives. Fascination with Fell's account of the intricacies of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European dynastic politics prompted a group of his students older than myself to develop a role-playing project, which in some ways

anticipated "Dungeons and Dragons". Its framework was the "League of the Three Nations" or "Drei Kaiserbund", which I was allowed to join. Other members included a future Public Records Office librarian, Don Grant, a future Presbyterian clergyman, Ian Thomas, and two future stockbrokers, Brian Benjamin and Charles Williams.

The Drei Kaiserbund focus was uncompromisingly monarchist and romantically European. A surviving note records the titles initially assigned to me as "His Excellent and Splendid Highness Roderigo X, Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst and Duke of Saxe-Altenburg, Count of the Empire of Luxembourg, Grand Lion of Hanover, Knight Commander of the Silver Sword of Saxony, Squire of the Golden Gong of Austria". Meetings were held regularly in one another's homes, where we charted ourselves elaborate genealogies, drafted complex treaties and alliances, engaged in trade and conducted wars and revolutions. Entitlements to gain or forfeit titles and territories were determined by sessions of poker, pontoon and Monopoly which ran on into the early hours of the morning. A playing board was adapted from the international diplomacy game, Powers, and our manual was the *Almanac de Gotha*. In time, gambling for its own sake took over from the original League preoccupations. Our attention then turned to politics and parliament.

The League members were my first real Melbourne Grammar friends. At that point, I had attended the school for six years. My presence resulted from a gratuitous piece of advice by my Year Two Upwey Higher Elementary School teacher. It was her strong view that I needed the stimulation which she believed only a non-government school was likely to provide. In the event, my father had me given an intelligence test by the Victorian Vocational Guidance Centre. Shortly afterwards, my mother took me to the Melbourne Grammar preparatory school at Grimwade House in Caulfield, where we were interviewed by the Principal, H. P. Down. All I recall about the occasion is the slight lift of Down's eyebrow when my father's occupation was given as "civil servant". It was a reaction which I experienced a number of times, when the school's annual rolls were being prepared.

The implicit query was not wholly inappropriate. School fees for myself and two younger brothers who attended Hailebury College heavily strained my father's public-service salary. It was beyond my family's means for me to be involved socially on an equal footing in a milieu where holidays were often taken at Portsea, and some Sixth Formers drove to the Senior School in their own MG's.

It remained for me to experience the Grimwade House version of class and caste as an outsider, neither accepted nor rejected, but mostly ignored. Failing the right address and the right connections, the minimum dues for making out were to adopt the school's values, preferably with a convert's fervor. I was deficient on all three counts. Home was in a different part of town from most of my schoolmates. Our parents did not meet socially, nor was I willing to concede cult status to organised games.

I instead grudged the precious hours which had to be given up each week for compulsory after-school cricket, football and athletics. Homework was worse, because it was open-ended, and caused conflict with my parents when it was skimped. This brought about my first abortive effort at social reform. A deputation of my form-mates was recruited, which button-holed Down on the school oval. Our proposition was a trade-off of an additional half hour's school in return for no homework. It was rejected on the grounds that our availability for sport would be reduced. Shortly afterwards, I was caned for some offence which otherwise most likely would have merited no more than a reprimand.

My kinder memories of Grimwade House turn mostly on the mildly dishevelled figure of my Year Five teacher, Evans. Rumour had it that Evans was overfond of alcohol. This tended to be confirmed by his splutteringly eloquent declamations of Shakespeare and Tennyson at lessons immediately after lunch. Memorable renditions of Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek were given, which inevitably had us pleading for encores. For all his eccentricities, Evans had heart and presence. He was the first person I met, other than my father, who took poetry seriously. In addition, he ran the Grimwade House library, where I became Chief Librarian and was awarded the 1948 Library Prize. My debt to him is considerable.

Much later, in my Leaving Certificate year, I was lucky enough to have a second teacher in Evans's mould. Covill had charge of the School Cadet Corps, but he also possessed a contagious enthusiasm for poetry, which he recited with gusto. His legacy to me was a love of *Paradise Lost*, and the opening of doors to Dante, Spencer and Donne. A further teacher—McKean—influenced me inadvertently. He accused me one day of being "indolent", a word which I later looked up in the dictionary. It has been necessary ever since to prove to myself that he was wrong. To him too a debt is owed.

At Grimwade House I flirted briefly with right-wing attitudes, perhaps in an attempt to distance myself from my background. All my relatives were solidly Labor, but not politically active or given much to discussing politics. Nothing so much annoyed my father as Armstrong's Argus caricatures of Chifley as "Baloney the Pig-headed Bull". When the Chifley Government fell in 1949, he wept, and quoted Grey of Fallodon's grim 1914 dictum: "The lamps are going out all over Europe: we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime".

My short-lived rebellion occurred four years earlier. It took the form of querying whether the conservative parties winning the approaching 1946 elections would necessarily be a bad thing. I also worried about what might happen after the war's end to the Nazi propaganda minister, Goebbels. The response from a Jewish form-mate was succinct: "Cut his balls off". As a perhaps more than usually innocent ten-year old, I had not previously come across the word "balls", but the drift was plain. Shortly afterwards details of the Nazi extermination camps were released, and my solicitude evaporated. Anti-semitism of a mild sort was common at Grimwade House. One frequently-heard chant went:

Ikey Aarons, King of the Jews,
Sold his wife for a pair of shoes.
When the shoes began to wear,
Ikey Aarons began to swear.
When the swears began to stop,
Ikey Aarons bought a shop.
When the shop began to sell,
Ikey Aarons went to Hell.

Even then, the underlying sentiments were hateful. By 1949 it was plain to me that the Right was morally bankrupt. I understood why my father venerated Chifley, and grieved with him for the Labor Government's defeat.

At that stage I had been elevated to the Senior School in Domain Road, South Yarra. The foundations for my democratic socialist beliefs had begun to be laid. After finishing *The Socialist Sixth of the World* I found the short version of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* further down the same shelf in the school library, and then the Webbs' *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation* on the shelf below.

These officially countenanced sources were supplemented after school by pamphlets from the Communist Party's International Bookshop. The 'Red Dean' opened my eyes to the possibility of people living together, relating to one another and working co-operatively in a totally new way which had immense appeal. The result was a sense of purpose and deep personal commitment which I had not previously experienced. I discovered that Russian and Chinese films could be seen at the New Theatre in Flinders Street, and attended a Eureka Youth League camp at the League's Warburton property. My thoughts turned seriously to becoming a Communist Party member. I made a trip to the Party office in Howey Court only to find it was unattended. Other pre-occupations intervened, and no further approach was made. This vastly relieved my parents, who had feared that A.S.I.O. might notice, and abort my prospects for a secure public-service career.

My embryonic political consciousness was further developed in the Melbourne Grammar Parliamentary Society. The group responsible for the Drei Kaiserbund obtained official approval for a mock-parliament, in place of what otherwise would have been a conventional debating society, and I became a member. The society's proceedings mirrored external political tensions, arising from the onset of the Cold War, the fall of the Chifley government, the Menzies government's determination to ban the Communist Party, and the foreshadowed introduction of National Service Training. My initial positions in the society—as Leader of the Communist Party and Leader of the Opposition—were jeopardised immediately by the governing conservatives introducing a Communist Party Dissolution Bill. In the absence of provision for a High Court appeal or a referendum, the Bill became law and the Communist Party in turn was obliged to become the Labor Party. In this way, my leadership of the Opposition was retained.

The other concerns of the Parliamentary Society's massive conservative majority can be gauged from a number of items which were foreshadowed in their 1950 Governor-General's speech:

to introduce compulsory military training for those deemed fit.
to preserve the White Australia Policy with greater discretion.
to amend the Constitution so as to prevent nationalisation without referendum.
to introduce the decentralisation of industry and to encourage free enterprise by government subsidy.
to increase the numbers of the Security Police and to check places of ill-repute—i.e. vice dens and fan-tan houses.

In practice, fallings-out within the conservative camp enabled coalitions of the smaller parties to form governments which otherwise would have been impossible. The combinations in some instances were bizarre. One surviving Cabinet list records myself as Prime Minister, Minister for Trade and Customs and Minister for School Affairs, along with the future Hamer Government Minister for Transport, Rob Maclellan, as Minister for Supply and National Development, and a future Chief Rabbi of Melbourne's Jewish Community, John Levi, as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs. Either of them would have fitted in equally well with a conservative administration. Ultimately I was ousted from the Prime Ministership by a coup which Maclellan and Levi mounted, in conjunction with Barry Humphries, the future Melbourne Grammar Chaplain Denis Woodbridge and the future headmaster of St Michael's school, Tony Hewison.

My portfolio of School Affairs reflected an interest by some society members in reforming the school's more illiberal and archaic rules and practices. An *Act*

to Amend the Existing Rules of the Melbourne Church of English Grammar School, which I introduced at a special sitting on 22 August 1950, included clauses for stripping the school prefects and probationers of their draconian powers; election by secret ballot of house captains and probationers; abolition of caning by masters; replacement of home work by guided home study; and the establishment of a Cultural Committee to organise excursions and visiting speakers of a cultural character for school clubs. The Second Reading Speech on the Bill queried whether the school should accept " . . . a state of affairs where people are afraid to express their true opinions; where a small boy's first introduction to his new school may well be what is known as 'a trip to the bathroom', there to be brutally assaulted by some misguided youth whose sole qualification for doing so is the ability to row in an eight or hold a straight bat." The reference to fear of expressing "true opinions" was unfair. At the height of the Korean War, I pinned-up anti-war material on the Labor Party section of the Society's notice board. Such was official tolerance that it remained undisturbed.

The special sitting had guests in its public gallery who included real MP's, such as the newly-installed Liberal-Country Party Speaker of the House of Representatives, Archie Cameron; the L.C.P. M.H.R. for Chisholm, Wilfred Kent-Hughes; the L.C.P. M.H.R. for Higinbotham, Frank Timson, and the L.C.P. Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, Archie Michaelis, along with the Acting Headmaster, Grenness, and the Society's obligatory presiding master, Gaynor, who doubled as our Governor-General. The presence of the Canberra and Spring Street contingents reflected an historic compromise, which was later aborted. Agreement had been reached that the society's conservatives would invite practising politicians of their choice, who would be followed later by representatives of other parties and ideologies. In the event, my nomination of Ralph Gibson—Secretary of the Communist Party and a Melbourne Grammar Old Boy—was squashed by a veto from the presiding master, which I felt was incompatible with the impartiality required of him in his Vice-Regal capacity. An invitation was extended instead to the Labor M.H.R. for Fawkner, Bill Bourke, who four years later figured prominently among the founders of the D.L.P. What I perceived as the perfidity of the Gibson episode inculcated for me a distrust of Governors-General which later events hardened. Then as now reform remained elusive. A Labor Party boycott of seven consecutive Executive Council meetings failed to have the incumbent removed.

These foreshadowings of the political dramas of the middle 1970s were accompanied by a more down-to-earth side of the society's activities. There remain on record numerous items of prosaic legislation, such as the Civil Law Courts Reform Bill 1950, the Kimberley District Development Bill 1950 and the School Prize Reform Bill 1951. A further note of pragmatism is captured in the *Hansard*-style record of society proceedings, which appeared briefly as *The Tactician*. A surviving copy of issue number one includes a summary of remarks made by a future Q.C., Jim Merralls, in opposition to the School Prizes legislation, which reads in part:

Mr Merralls said that if Divinity prizes were abolished all Sunday School prizes should also be abolished, and that if Divinity was a farce now what would it be if Divinity prizes were abolished. As for the proposed merit prizes, these already existed at Wadhurst, but recently, instead of being given to the hardest worker, they were invariably given to the third in the form . . .

My part in the Parliamentary Society's affairs ended when I left Melbourne Grammar in 1951. The school had set aside a period at the end of each all-too-short academic year when no teaching was given. Instead, the forms played one another at cricket. The futility and frustration of it all was such that I slipped away from the oval one December morning, and found myself a job with the Shell Company for the New Year. Even so, looking back on the period 1944-1951 as a whole, my main feeling about the school and my parents' decision to send me there remains one of gratitude. The cost in human and money terms were considerable, but so too were the rewards.

Chester Eagle's excellence as a writer suggests that he too emerged from the system as a net beneficiary. *Play Together, Dark Blue Twenty* is an important contribution to social history, subject only to the reader's remembering that the boarding house was only a small part of Melbourne Grammar, and even there a different position may prevail today. Nor are thuggery, buggery, philistinism, elitism or conformism necessarily the central points on which criticism of non-government, non-Catholic education is now relevant. What gives offence today about Melbourne Grammar and similar schools is that they have creamed off the wider education system's most able students, while opting out totally from the system's mounting problems. What is asked of them is simply that they should now shoulder their fair share of responsibility for the impaired, disturbed, poor and otherwise disadvantaged young people whose needs and difficulties currently threaten to overwhelm our government schools. What answer they give, more perhaps than any other single factor, will determine whether in future we are to be two nations or one. It may be that Melbourne Grammar has mostly freed itself from what the liniment stench once represented. There is a stench instead of abdicated social responsibility.

Race Mathews is Minister for the Arts and for Police and Emergency Services in Victoria.

JACK HODGINS

From My Notebook, May 1987

Jack Hodgins, one of Canada's best-known writers, visited Australia earlier this year as recipient of the Canada-Australia Award. (Alternately an Australian writer receives an Australia-Canada Award.) He is writing a novel based on nineteenth-century Ballarat and an actual situation. Jack Hodgins's fiction is available in paperback: Spit Delaney's Island, The Investion of the World, The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne *and* The Barclay Family Theatre. *A new novel,* The Honorary Patron, *has just been published.*

May 3, Brampton Island: "Don't expect to see Australian animals running free," someone told us before we left home. "Even Australians have to visit the zoo if they want to see them." Apparently no one told this to the crowd of rainbow lorikeets which descended upon my icecream cone this afternoon, to devour it. Nor has anyone told this to the emu which stands at the edge of the golfing greens, studying the golfers with an inquisitive tilted head—perhaps trying to figure out why humans would want to spend their days in such a peculiar manner. (I wonder this myself, but haven't the emu's desire to investigate.) At breakfast, the tall accountant from Sydney told us: "If you want to see kangaroos in the wild, go out at dusk to the waterhole and you'll see them come down out of the bush to drink." At five o'clock we set out from the lodge beneath the coconut palms and came eventually to the near-empty water reservoir by the landing-strip, where we sat, as we'd been instructed to do, on a heap of dirt. And waited. A few ducks flew in to skid around on the mud for a while, but no kangaroos came. When almost all light had gone, we decided that our legs had been well and truly pulled, and must go back to face the laughter. But on turning to leave, we discovered a long row of silhouettes directly behind us—several motionless upright staring kangaroos of various sizes, ears raised—waiting for us to get out of their way. Or had someone told them: "Go down to the waterhole at dusk if you want to see some stupid Canadians . . ."?

Is there a warning in this? When we think we are having a good look at Australians in their natural habitat, will we find that we've been looking in the wrong direction? Will we, in fact, discover that we are the ones being watched?

May 6, Alice Springs: What did I expect? A Russell Drysdale painting, I think. A town of red-dust streets and decrepit balconied hotels and sagging tin-roofed shacks. I've no idea why—haven't even read the Shute novel. Instead of fulfilling this sort of expectation, the town seems to be fleeing from that cliché as fast as possible—in a hurry to transform itself into a town like any other town, something that could as easily be small-town Saskatchewan, say, or small-town Yukon. Glass-and-concrete shopping centres, bricked malls, shrubbery, flower planters, benches. One old verandahed general store, right in the middle of everything, has apparently refused to join the stampede.

I wonder, though, if you'd find a restaurant called "The Hindquarters Steakhouse" in the Yukon, or even in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. The origin of the name is obvious, but it seems a risky choice. If this were a Canadian town, I could be fairly sure the name had been chosen knowingly, and with humor, by an owner suggesting that he lived in what he thought of as the arse-end of the world. But this is a foreign country and I have no idea how seriously the name is to be taken. The menu, after all, includes marinated buffalo. And the elderly couple who've driven up from Adelaide to visit their grandchildren in a boarding school (their daughter off in the "bush" somewhere) tell us, while we chew our steaks beneath the wall-mounted cowhides and displayed rifles, that it's the best place to eat in town. "Much quieter than that other place we tried," said the woman, raising her voice to be heard above the grill-cook's impatient shouting of "Number Ninety-four! Number Ninety-four! NINETY-FOUR!!!"

I'm beginning to wish I hadn't brought my camera. I knew there would be eucalyptus trees, of course, but

I didn't know they would be as plentiful as the Douglas fir at home. Nor did I suspect that, while every fir looks more or less the same to me, every eucalyptus would be uniquely and specifically beautiful, demanding to be photographed separately from several angles. These white-barked giants along the side of the road cannot be simply admired and then forgotten. (It's possible to imagine a kind of madness where one feels compelled to photograph every gum-tree on the continent.)

It is some time before we realize that what we are walking beside is a river. Bridges span what is a wide but only shallow depression, completely dry. Those admired and much-photographed trees are growing off the river's sandy bottom. It is even longer before we notice that the river's bed is more than the peculiar habitat of several hundred trees; it is a passageway as well—dark figures move along it, in clusters of two or five or seven, in the direction of town. In wool caps and dusty clothing, they seem to drift slowly—how could I guess whether they were moving up-river or down? There is something about the way they walk that suggests *wading*—bodies lean back, hands drag across the tops of low bushes, slim legs move as though pushing against calf-deep water. (Perhaps I only imagine this—yet I have seen non-swimmers move through shallow seaside water in much the same way.)

On the streets of town, whites and blacks pass without seeing one another, I think. Eyes are not averted, or even careful; they look at different worlds. Even here, where sand and pavement have both been covered over with the interlocking paving bricks of someone's idea of a city, they walk paths that seem as separated as the black-top roads and the dusty river bed coming in to town.

After dark, there are the voices, and the campfires along the river bottom, and the pale ghosts of the beautiful white-barked trees. To return to the hotel room is to be left out of things, but no alternative suggests itself. Life in the river sand is as foreign and indifferent as the pattern of stars in the sky.

May 8, Airport—Yulara/Ayers Rock: Someone at home would not believe we wanted to make a special trip in to Ayers Rock. "Would you fly as far as Winnipeg just to look at a hunk of stone?" The American woman in the airport has flown as far as we have, I think, and will go home with a story to tell. Already she's telling it here—perhaps practising for the folks at home. She holds a shoe box to her breast; it's her only luggage, as she tells first this one, then that—everyone will be told it sooner or later. Her husband reads a paperback, sombrely unmoved by the drama she feels she must share. Their luggage had been left behind, it never reached Yulara, "and look how I'm dressed!"

She is dressed in expensive stylish clothes. Most important, though, is that you notice the shoes on her feet. They have dainty straps with high spike heels. "My holiday could have been ruined." Her holiday was not ruined, she tells the man behind the ticket counter (and the pair of elderly Australian ladies in straw hats and the youth in white shorts carrying a backpack) because she immediately bought herself a pair of new shoes. The lid of the box is opened; a peek is granted; white and blue Adidas runners snuggle against one another inside. One day old, and yet: "Feel the soles! *Feel them*! I climbed the Rock in these. See those scratches? There's Ayers Rock dust in those treads. I paid $95 for these shoes so I could climb that thing." Her blue eyes shine with the pleasure of telling this, the joy of telling it again and again. If the plane is late enough she will have told it individually to everyone here. Her husband continues to read. Already she can see herself telling it at a dinner party: not only "Well, you didn't think I'd let a little thing like that spoil my vacation, when I'd gone so far!" but also, "People were so sympathetic when I told them! They were so charming, and helpful." Indeed, the airline officials have been charmed, promising reimbursement for the price of those shoes. (If they're paying for them why don't they insist on keeping them—see what she says to that! Mount the box on a pedestal on the airline counter, with a sign: "These shoes climbed Ayers Rock and survived—what about you?") But travelling Australians, when she has told her story and passed on to tell it to someone else, raise eyebrows at one another, smile. "American."

We will speak little to one another on this plane, having already noticed the heads which turn when we speak to one another in public, having already become aware of something 'out-of-place' in our own North American voices, having already grown uncomfortable with our own eagerness to correct: "Oh, but we're not Americans." Is there a difference—someone is bound to ask. Meaning: Do you think you're somehow better? Better or worse has nothing to do with it; it's the old familiar ambivalence. How could I explain the peculiar mixture of envy and disapproval I feel for this pleasant happy woman so confident that everyone must want to hear her story? (It is the privilege of those from the empire's centre to take certain things for granted.) While I sit here like the woman's husband reading a book, and only imagine myself making an entire airport my audience while I entertain them—with an account, say, of how ridiculous we must have looked when we arrived amongst the bikinis of Brampton Island in our warm autumn clothes. It could even be acted out—how I was forced to buy a silly little pair of blue shorts I will never wear again, just so that for one day I could parade my pale northern skin along the sand beneath the Queensland coconut palms.

May 12, Ballarat: Someone must have written a poem by now about the black swans of Lake Wendouree.

Someone, I hope, who understands more of what he is looking at than I do. I've discovered, at least, that they belong here (so much of what I take for native Australian flora and fauna turns out to be imported) and that they (or their grandparents) would have been here in the 1870s when this lake (just recently a mere swamp) became the centre for Sunday afternoon strolls and boating for polite and not-so-polite society. The original/real Mary Mc— can be imagined admiring them as she walked with her sister Emma along these pathways beneath these trees—recently planted and much smaller then—in the Botanical Gardens. The trees drip, from last night's rain. Three magpies explode upwards from the grass. I think the rustle of petticoats can be heard, the creak of new leather boots. It was here (why not?) the widowed Mary Mc— of Ripon Street (or is it Avenue?) and her sister were approached by someone they referred to as Old Leathercheeks (no doubt an old and drunken friend of the family) who said, "Would one of you dear ladies consent to marry me?" Provoking sharp-tongued Mary to turn to her giggling sister: "I'll marry him if you'll sleep with him!"

In a way, the beginning of the real story—just as the same sentence recalled and repeated years later in Victoria, British Columbia, will be the beginning of the story's end. Find out nature, habits, and history associated with black swans—I like to think of them coming up out of the water to gather round this trio on the pathway. Not sure why. Are black swans, like the white, famous for their monogamy? Maybe Mary-the-once-and-future-bigamist is dressed in widow's black? Too bad the statue of Queen Victoria down the street hadn't been erected then; she would suck in her breath with disapproval more than once during this tale of three overlapping cases of bigamy—set in a hotel, a city, a State, and an era named after her. Back to Peter Mansfield with more questions.

May 15, Hobart: Of course there are Canadians everywhere we go. Some are homesick: "Oh, what I'd give to smell the cool Vancouver rain!" Some are smug: "Moved here sixteen years ago. Will never go back. Went back for a winter in Vancouver once and the rain was so depressing I nearly slit my throat." In Alice Springs two fellow British Columbians stopped to try out the camel trek on their round-the-world honeymoon trip—both were eighty years old. Here at my reading in the Red Lion (after dinner at a restaurant called—what else?—the Ball and Chain) a member of the audience came up to tell me he'd been born across the valley from me on Vancouver Island. Tasmania, he said, was much like home. Hiking (tramping?) was better, though, because the trails (tracks?) were more clearly marked out than they are in Canada. He would like to go home one day, to visit, but he'd met this woman, he was content, he had a happy life here. While I was reading, his face bloomed with pleasure at every place-name and turn of phrase he could not help but recognize. This was a joy for me, to re-create a world for him out of words, and make him remember how he felt (and all without a single reference to beaver or mounties or the Montreal Canadiens) while at precisely the same time and with the same words trying to create a vivid sense of a world largely unfamiliar to the rest of the audience.

May 23, Sydney: "What is the name of this tree? What's that bush? And what do you call those pink-breasted birds that flew up from the side of the road?" People must wonder at this passion we have for learning, or at least *hearing*, the names of things. It would be possible, I suppose, not to ask, not to find out. But then we could go home, it seems to me, uncertain that we hadn't merely attended a four-week-long movie. Some attempt must be made to solve the mystery of things. The feeling is that of being an explorer on a mysterious planet of unfamiliar marvels, and to have all the explorer's need to *name* everything in sight in order to make it real, take it into his experience—but to be denied that right because someone else has already done the deed. The next best thing is the pleasure of wondering at someone else's choice: *galahs, bottle tree, banksia, possum, cabbage-tree palm, Moreton Bay figs, Deception Bay*. "And there—a kookaburra!" Things named can be owned, and taken away, and found to have kept their magic somehow in their names.

But I also want to know *why* about things. Why are those houses up on posts? What does it mean to live in a house surrounded by verandahs? How does it feel to live where red road signs blare out GO BACK (the entire staff at Public Works horrified at the danger you've put yourself in) and others bark GIVE WAY (in case you have plans to elbow your way in where you aren't wanted) and still others casually warn of kangaroos on the road for fifteen kilometres (meaning "be careful", of course, though it could as easily mean "get your camera ready")?

Discovering Australian literature in bookstores has been at least as surprising and rewarding as encountering this amazing landscape has been—the publishers having divided the English-speaking world in two, leaving Canadians and Australians in separate camps and largely unaware of one another. There's no denying our hosts in the Literature Board have conspired somehow with other forces to add a literary layer to all our experiences during this trip.

I'm grateful for this. To meet Roger McDonald, for instance, and spend time in conversation about the writing of novels, was worth any number of rust-red monoliths. Seeing the premier of Patrick White's new play was a rare and wonderful privilege, of course—but it was made all the more wonderful by the fact that part of it was set a block or two from our Sydney hotel, featuring characters we'd been observing our-

selves along the sidewalk and in the doorways of Kings Cross in the first few days of our time in Australia — unsuspecting, of course, that we would be seeing not only them but Patrick White himself on a stage in Adelaide.

Because I went to Ballarat specifically to do research for a small part of the planned historical novel, the discovery that a great deal of the town has been preserved much as my characters would have seen it in the 1870s was certainly pleasing — but it was equally pleasing to find that much of the old town's flavor has been captured and 'certified' in Peter Carey's gigantic novel, giving it the sort of super-reality only print can bestow.

My own observations of Brisbane, aided by the generous insights of Alan Lawson, had a definite Tom Shapcott-David Malouf-Alice Munro flavor to them; but have taken on still more 'meaning' for me after reading Rhyll McMaster's superb poems about growing up in Queensland, and David Malouf's published speech about the effect of the Brisbane verandahs and the space beneath those stump-resting houses upon the child growing up in those houses. (I grew up with verandahs too, and with space beneath the house. Could someone guess this from the way I interpret the world? Does this put me out of step with Canadian writing? Does it, perhaps, make me an Australian writer without knowing it?)

When our rented car broke down on a hot Sunday afternoon during the long drive from Adelaide to Ballarat, the only service station with a mechanic in attendance was in the community of Dimboola; most of the cast of Jack Hibberd's wild play of that name was there ahead of us, I think — grim wives waiting impatiently in cars while husbands borrowed tools and burrowed their heads beneath raised hoods/bonnets and had themselves a good time. (An imaginative move on the part of the Literature Board, I can't help thinking, to have waved their magic wand and arranged this peculiar conjunction of life and literature for us, but we've become accustomed to the impossible and the wondrous on this magic journey through an astonishing landscape, amongst a generous people.)

Like any good journey, this one has encouraged us to go home and read as much as we can of the literature which has come out of this country — but also to re-see with fresh questioning eyes our own small "overseas" corner of the world.

Words with magic, which I wish I could use at home, but cannot:
ute
digger
squattocracy
derro
jacaranda
drover's wife
bloodwood
Woolloomooloo
larrikin
dunny
There's a koala visits our manna gum occasionally.

Jiri Tibor Novak

PETER MANSFIELD

Encounter with an Author

Garry Kinnane telephoned to say that a Canadian author was visiting Ballarat for a few days and had expressed an interest in speaking to "someone who knew something about local history". The Canadian visitor wrote contemporary fiction and was collecting material for his next novel.

No, Garry didn't have any more details about the author or the book except that his name was Jack Hodgins and that he would drop by on Monday morning.

I checked our computerised catalog and could find only one entry for Hodgins, J. Unfortunately for me the book was unobtainable so I could not get any biographical details. Next a phone call to a friend at the National Book Council, but he had no other details. After a quick entry in the diary, I promptly forgot all about the visit.

On the Monday morning the telephone was ringing as I walked into the office. This time it was my wife. Garry Kinnane had again rung to say that "Canadian Jack" would be earlier than expected. While we were speaking the surprise guest arrived.

For a moment I thought it was Alec P. Keaton's father. You know, the father in "Family Ties": urbane, polite and just so American. Eventually I would see the obvious differences between Americans and Canadians but, in my defence, first impressions are usually made in Hollywood.

Jack Hodgins explained that he taught literature at the University of British Columbia. He had found an old diary which provided an ideal skeleton for his next novel or short story.

It appears that three sisters lived in Ballarat in the 1870s. Why they were on the goldfields he did not know, but preliminary reading showed that one sister eventually migrated to Canada to marry. The marriage was unsuccessful, so another sister emigrated and married her former brother-in-law. The three then lived together, so it must have been reasonably harmonious.

The novel was to be a work of fiction but what was required was the historically accurate background material. Even at this stage I was keen to point out that, given nineteenth century morality, the facts were often sufficiently dramatic to stand alone.

By now it was apparent that Jack had two requirements. Why were these sisters in Ballarat more than a century ago? Running a boarding house, teaching in a school? Secondly, where did they live?

The immediate task was to soak up some atmosphere in the suburbs. Ballarat has always been a town-planning disaster. Streets go in all directions because of creeks, roadworks, an underground river, roadworks, hills and lakes and more roadworks. I was reluctant to simply give Jack a map, so the solution was to take my guest on an escorted tour, there and then. Quiet tours are not usually arranged on Monday mornings when twenty staff are awaiting instructions. However this was soon resolved and off we went, first to the address of the house, found in an old municipal directory.

This was of no use because the old residential block has now been rezoned 'light industrial'. Admittedly there were a few private houses among the factories and shops, but this was not the image we sought. It was decided to find another street, more representative of the 1870s.

Little Clyde Street seemed to have more potential. This small street was less than two cars wide, and the twenty weatherboard houses all had front doors virtually on the footpaths. The cottages shared rough bluestone driveways, indicating that they had been built in the late 1860s.

This street always intrigues me, but Jack was ecstatic. Wrought-iron lacework on wooden houses, two-roomed cottages each with several skillion lean-tos. No two house blocks the same size. And the color schemes!

By now Jack was busily taking photographs and I was worrying. There was no doubt about the authenticity of the neighborhood – old houses only a kilometre from the town centre – but was I supposed to be showing this view to an international visitor?

Visitors to Ballarat usually want to see the more pleasing sights, of which there are many. Architectually the city has two claims to fame. The three-storeyed bluestone offices and numerous churches are dominant in the business centre. Then Ballarat is also famous for its building styles. Mining equipment is no longer visible but the uneven rewards of gold are still there in the form of miners' cottages—a style of housing that did not change in half a century. Thankfully the old habit of relocating old houses has bottomed out.

Next we looked at a few residential areas in the flatter Ballarat South area. Here the Yuppies, Dinks and Trendoids are ensconced. Many of the older houses have been renovated and redecorated. Ballarat has its own Heritage—a color paint range which replicates the bold colors of the 1870s. Again the camera clicks.

By now Jack can visualize the sisters living in some type of weatherboard house, and this in turns makes it easier to imagine how they lived.

A potted history of Ballarat begins to emerge. Gold was discovered in the winter of 1851. Within a decade the population had blossomed to 50,000 and prosperity seemed assured. Miners lived in tents, but the town was producing so much wealth that magnificent civic buildings began to dominate the sky-line. Half the population lived under cold canvas at a time when architect Leonard Terry was designing magnificent bluestone offices.

But by the 1870s more complex changes took place. The population declined as thousands of prospectors moved away to the new alluvial riches in the district. Domestic housing actually improved because the remaining workforce became small businessmen or wage-earning miners.

Always our talk got back to the three sisters. What did they do to earn a living. Here we had two choices and, for the sake of a novel, one option had to be taken. Women have traditionally been slotted into one of two groups in colonial history. There were hundreds of prostitutes who sought gold in their own way. We travelled down one street which, in 1870, had fourteen brothels and numerous hotels. Esmond street in Ballarat East was named after a gold pioneer who later objected to his name being associated with such a neighborhood. The street was renamed York street. Presumably the Duke of York had no such complaints.

The other image of colonial women takes a saccharine view of the lady pioneer. However 'Colonial Eve' probably married as a teenager and worked long tiring days. 'Our' sisters were unmarried so in all probability they worked in a school, as seamstresses or as domestic servants. Given the evidence I assumed that they were dressmakers who worked from home, but that was for Jack to decide.

By now he had plenty of visual material to follow up, but all writers seem comfortable with words so we returned to the library.

For the next day and a half the author studied local sources. Every so often he dropped in to try out new angles and I became more aware of the problems associated with information over-supply. The days went quickly and note books were filled.

On the third morning Jack Hodgins called by again; this time to announce that he must leave for Melbourne. We talked for a few moments and finally, hesitantly, he delved into his bag and produced a thin paperback. I can see the reluctance of an author having to show his work to a stranger. *Spit Delaney's Island* passes hands and I am delighted.

Peter Mansfield is the Ballarat City Librarian.

ROBERT DARBY

Colonial Culture in Australia

A discussion of Robert Dixon's The Course of Empire: neo-classical culture in New South Wales, 1788–1860 *(Oxford, $30)*.

Adam Smith and the other philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment in the latter part of the eighteenth century identified four stages of social development through which, they asserted, every nation progressed. The first was barbarism, an economy based on hunting; the second was pastoralism, the basis of which was the grazing of sheep and cattle; the third was agriculture, characterised by the cultivation of crops; and the fourth was commercial, an economy based on trade. There was also a fifth stage, that of decadence and decline, when the wealthy mercantile empire fell apart and society returned to savagery.

Robert Dixon's intriguing thesis is that these ideas had a major influence on Australian cultural life in the early nineteenth century, that, indeed, they were the dominant cultural stream. *The Course of Empire,* he writes, is "a study in the history of ideas", concerned with "a theory of social and economic progress normally associated with the Scottish Enlightenment... that played a central role in early formulations of Australian nationalism."

It is one thing to suggest that ideas of culture associated with the theory of the "course of empire" were influential in Australia; it is going somewhat further to argue that between 1788 and 1840 "Enlightenment myths of social and economic progress dominated the art and literature associated with the elite of colonial society"; and it is a bold step to claim that "the imperialist tradition constitutes an alternative to the mode of nationalism that leads to the 1890s" and that this was "the dominant mode of Australian nationalism for much of the nineteenth century."

At first glance there is nothing inherently impossible in the proposition that eighteenth century artistic principles had a flowering in the antipodes: there is even a little Georgian architecture left in Sydney. The landing at Port Jackson took place only a year before the French Revolution swept away the Age of Reason and introduced the gothic towers, questing knights and daffodils which marked the age of romanticism. Although Australia was (just) settled in the eighteenth century, it was at the moment when the English Industrial Revolution was rapidly displacing mercantilism and thereby adding a fifth, and unforeseen, stage, that of industrialism, to the course of empire.

To take this typology as the unifying theme for Australian cultural history up until the 1840s, and as a significant influence even beyond, however, is to raise a number of problems.

First, how dominant was it? Universal, pervasive, a major strand in artistic output, or only one current among others? Dixon's formulations allow a good deal of room for manoeuvre. To state that it dominated the art of the colonial elite is to ignore the bulk of the population, and in fact Dixon's book deals with only a small fraction of the painting, poetry, description and fiction of the period. His attention (apart from the chapter on the colonial novel) is virtually confined to Governor Macquarie's court. Staffed as it was by English officials who neither expected nor wanted to make their home in the colony, and who were therefore unreceptive to local influences, it is not surprising that such an atmosphere should have produced most of the evidence for Dixon's thesis. At another point he writes that during the neo-classical period (1788-1840):

> the course of empire was a dominant theme of literature and the visual arts, providing the painter, the poet and the explorer with a rhetoric with which to announce the imperial destiny of a great nation.

If it was only *a* dominant theme, what were the other ones? Dixon writes that dissatisfaction with classical modes appeared in the early 1830s, and he quotes an amusing satire on the course of empire rhetoric, "Australia: A Rhodomontade". It is true that satire implies the presence of a mainstream to be ridiculed, yet the appearance of the verses also suggests that there were more rival currents than Dixon is willing to allow.

Dixon's account of how the course of empire was meant to be expressed in verse is confusing. I am left

uncertain as to whether an Australian neo-classical poet, in celebrating the course of empire, was supposed to trace it in correct chronological order from savagery to commerce, or in correct geographical order from east to west – if you started in Sydney, from coastal commerce to inland savagery. Perth was evidently settled too late (1829) for its artists to be influenced by the principles of the Scottish Enlightenment, which is a pity, because they could have enjoyed a congruence of chronological and geographical progression. Port Phillip was founded even later than Perth (1835), so the prospects there for such *topoi* would seem even more remote. Yet I have been fortunate in finding a late poem which (despite its obvious departure from neo-classical diction and metre) exhibits most of the content of a typical topographical description, following the course of empire in correct chronological order from east to west.

"The Yarra Stream" charts the river's course from the pristine fern gullies and mossy ledges of the majestic Baw Baw mountains, and follows as it passes through more gentle woodlands, enters a region of pasture land where drowsy, fat cattle graze, then flows on

> . . . 'twixt orchard hillsides
> Where the earth in golden springtime
> Buried lies, 'neath clouds of bloom.

The primitive, pastoral and agricultural phases accomplished, the river has only to reach the commercial stage to be home; predictably it finds this at the busy Port of Melbourne:

> At the bridges, swirling under –
> Hark, the city's tread and thunder! –
> Feel the nation's life blood pulsing! –
> Commerce's throbbing arteries.
>
> Now amid the shipping drifting,
> Where the creaking derricks lifting
> Load the steamer, bark and schooner,
> With their freight for foreign lands.

Nobody would mistake these Hiawatha-like quatrains for Augustan verse, but the persistence of course of empire motifs into the 1920s, and their surfacing in a poem by the young Frank Dalby Davison, does raise questions about Dixon's methodology and, in particular, about the usefulness of the "course of empire" as a categorising label for artistic activity. It is perhaps inevitable that a poem which traces the course of a major river will follow Adam Smith's periodisation of the history of civil society, just as I can take a walk from the savage grandeur of Mount Ainslie, past the cow paddocks of Dairy Flat, the apple orchards and nurseries of Piallago and so on to the commercial frenzy of Fyshwick. Perhaps the Scottish Enlightenment was a major influence on the planning of Canberra.

A certain tendency to idealism in Dixon's explanations also leaves me uncertain at times about whether the course of empire was meant to be enacted in the actual economic development of Australia, or only in the art created here. Macquarie may have been trying to guide the colony to a perfection of civil society but, if so, his departure (in 1822) represents a defeat for the course of empire. He had encouraged agriculture – especially small scale vegetable farming and other crop production along the Hawkesbury – and, by restricting the supply of labor, discouraged the development of a large scale wool industry, thus incurring the enmity of Macarthur. Commissioner Bigge condemned Macquarie's public works program and recommended that the colony be developed so as to encourage free settlement and wool production. In the philosophers' terms, this sounds like a reversion from the agricultural to the pastoral stage of the course of empire.

Implicit in Dixon's study is the rejection of Keith Hancock's well-known argument that the decisive influences on white Australian history derive from the fact that it begins after the French and Industrial Revolutions – takes place, that is, entirely within the modern period. Historical realities affected the articulation of course of empire ideas here in ways which Dixon does not consider. The dominance of pastoralism from the 1830s, combined with the arrival of English farm workers dispossessed by the Industrial Revolution and land-hungry peasants from Ireland, helped to produce a nostalgia for the agricultural phase of the schema, later expressed in fervent demands to "unlock the lands" for selection, and perhaps also in Lawson's lines:

> I believe the Southern Poet's dream will not be realized
> Till the plains are irrigated and the land is humanised.

If, as Dixon seems to imply at times, such sentiments represent the continuing influence of neo-classical ideas, they also reveal the ways in which social and economic developments helped to transform them. One does, however, wonder whether the "course of empire" is not too broad a term to be meaningful if it can be stretched from the age of Macquarie to embrace almost any set of platitudes in favor of what used to be called national development.

Explanatory idealism is often matched by a careless attitude towards historical evidence. Macquarie's lavish building policy is related to the desire to realise what he might have read about in the poetry of Pope, Goldsmith, James Thomson and Gibbon, but evidence is offered neither on his expressed intentions nor on his reading. Nothing definite about Macquarie's educa-

tion was known to his biographer, M. H. Ellis, except that he progressed to the point where he could write "a very average sort of eighteenth century English"; the only books he is known to have read were Boswell's *Journey to the Hebrides* and *Candide*. Castlereagh's instructions charged Macquarie to "improve the morals of Colonists, to encourage Marriage, to provide Education, to prohibit the use of Spirituous Liquors, to increase the Agriculture and Stock." A glance at his public works program – churches, schools, hospitals, roads, wharves, and the barracks to house the convicts who built them – suggests that it was designed to meet those ends and was no different in purpose from the infrastructure-providing role of modern governments. Who needs the "course of empire" when the British government's desire to cut expenses by making the colonies pay more of their own way is "a well-known historical fact"?

Lack of evidence and idealist interpretation are also the main problems with the chapters on inland exploration. Dixon takes the American Lewis-Clarke expedition up the Missouri and over the Rocky Mountains to the west coast of the United States as the model for continental exploration, reporting that it conformed closely to the typology of the course of empire – commerce to savagery, east to west. He quotes a good deal from Nicholas Biddle's *History of the expedition under the command of Captains Lewis and Clarke* (1814), assuming throughout that explorers in Australia wanted to replicate their pattern of discovery. Unfortunately, Dixon offers no evidence that any Australian explorer had read Biddle, much less desired to follow the unfolding stages of civil society. Such scandalous neglect of their philosophical responsibilities is no doubt the reason why he has to quote Thomas Jefferson on this progression, instead of the local commentators about whom he is actually writing. The frequency of Dixon's improper assumptions about influence make his account of inland exploration as irritating as it is mystifying.

Dixon emphasises John Oxley's interest in North American exploration, offers no proof that he had ever read Biddle, yet still describes his journeys as though they were attempts to reproduce the Lewis-Clarke successes. No doubt Oxley did want to discover great rivers and fertile pastures, but no theory of the Scottish Enlightenment is needed to explain that interest. His disappointment at the fruits of his investigations is attributed to the failure of the landscape to do what "course of empire" theory required of it, namely, to open westwards vistas of land suitable for settlement. What Dixon actually quotes from Oxley suggests rather that he was disappointed for the prosaic reason that the land was unlikely to be productive.

I learned at school that the explorers felt let down because they did not find great rivers, the inland sea, or much good grazing land – the search for which had been, if not their personal motivation, at least the reason why their expeditions received official and business backing – but discovered instead scrub, marshes and endless desert. Nothing in Dixon's account persuades me that my primary school teachers got it wrong, that the real reason why the explorers felt their expeditions had been failures is that the course of empire did not unfold as it should have, or that the pattern of their discoveries did not reproduce that described in Biddle's account of the exploration of North America. I can allow that these factors might have given a sharper edge to their disappointment and the language in which to embellish their expression of it, but any further this cynical materialist will not be pushed.

Despite these criticisms, *The Course of Empire* is a stimulating and provocative study which offers more detailed research on the mental world of early Australian writers and artists than has usually appeared in print before. Dixon is particularly good on the European background to the cultural milieu of the period before 1830, and it may be that our notions of Australia's modernity will have to be modified to allow for a heritage from the Age of Reason more vital than has been believed.

When Dixon follows his own advice "to evaluate early colonial culture on its own terms and by its own standards" he can produce convincing arguments: his case that the watercolors of John Eyre, in taking the viewer's eye from the rocks and natives in the foreground (formerly regarded as 'incidental') to pastures, market gardens and the wharves and ships of Sydney Harbor, I find impressive. On the other hand, the tendency to idealism and a cavalier attitude to normal standards of evidence weaken the study, as does the urge to take a clever argument too far. When Dixon writes, of some comments on the action of coral polyps in building reefs, that the course of empire had become a theory of the literal rise and fall of continents, I feel my leg being pulled.

The biggest problems with the book are its deployment of the concept of nationalism, and its attitude to previous cultural, and particularly literary, histories.

Dixon makes remarkable claims for the quality of the verse of Michael Massey Robinson, the convict who became "poet laureate" to the court of Governor Macquarie. Robinson's work, Dixon complains, has usually been dismissed as imitative, but

> What has not been understood is that [his] efforts to establish the office of laureateship of New South Wales were a reflection in literature of the chauvinism that characterised the early Macquarie years... The task of relating colonial experience to these universal laws of progress [i.e., the course of empire motifs] defined the func-

> tion of poetry as Robinson understood it and must be accepted as a genuine expression of Australian nationalism.

Why must? What was Australian about verse like Robinson's "Ode for his Majesty's Birthday" (1810)?

> THO' far from ALBION's hallow'd Coast,
> OCEAN's first PRIDE, and NATURE's Boast:
> Whose Fame the sacred Bards of old
> In Strains prophetical foretold:
> Though, wafted by the refluent Tides,
> Your watery Waste her Sons divide,
> Still shall the Muse prefer her tribute Lay,
> And AUSTRALASIA hail her George's Natal Day.
> Auspicious Morn! to BRITONS dear:
> The Pride of each revolving Year!

Dixon offers a most erudite discussion of Robinson's poetic sources, and I am sure he did get everything from Virgil, Ovid, Lucretius, James Thomson, Pope and Goldsmith. What his verse lacks is precisely the "relating [of] colonial experience to these universal laws of progress". There is no trace in his verse that Robinson has had any colonial experience, let alone felt any poetic response to the local environment. The assertion that such imitations of English court ritual could be a mode of Australian nationalism is as unconvincing as it is bizarre. Robinson's odes to George III are neither expressions of nationalism nor instances of a literature of exile. They are plain monarchal sycophancy and, in the Australian context, the manifestation of a dutiful colonial subordination.

Dixon could admit, without having to retreat from his argument that course of empire *topoi* were pervasive, that the elite of the Macquarie age generally lacked a sense of identity separate from that of Britain, and hence could not feel or express nationalist sentiment, and thereby have an unassailable case. But to concede that early literature like Robinson's was European rather than Australian would be to place himself in the camp of the straw nationalists he wants to knock down in order to erect his thesis.

The reason why Dixon gets into this bind is also the major single weakness in his book: the absence of a workable concept of nationalism. This would not matter if Dixon were arguing only that the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment were influential in Australia, but his thesis is that they were a major component of Australian nationalism. In fact, he uses the terms nationalism, patriotism, colonialism, chauvinism and imperialism interchangably, which is to conflate three distinct ideologies with two distinct types of social formation. Cultural histories cannot be expected to solve controversial questions of political theory, but if Dixon is going to pivot his argument on a difficult term like nationalism he owes us at least an informed definition and consistent usage. English chauvinism was not Australian nationalism in the neo-classical period, any more than at the time of the Great War, when Australia's failure to be conscious of its national interest led to sixty thousand of our youth dying on foreign battlefields for nothing more than the glory of the British Empire.

Dixon inherits his confusions from G. A. Wilkes, whom he quotes as attacking the opinion that Australian nationalism can take only one form, an anti-British form normally associated with the 1890s. There has always been abundant pro-British or neutral political expression before, during and after the 1890s; indeed, Empire loyalism was hegemonic until displaced by American influence. But it is a theoretical absurdity to suppose that nineteenth century Australian nationalism could be anything other than anti-British. Contrary to Dixon's assumption, nationalism is *not* a matter of feeling fervently positive about the status quo in one's country. Nationalism is the ideological expression of the economic, political or cultural need for independent nationhood, and it must therefore be directed by a colonised or otherwise subordinate nation against the dominating power which denies it independence. England was that power until the 1940s. Nationalism has always been a lonely (though sometimes noisy) voice in politics and culture, but you can hear it amid the Europhile hubbub from even the earliest times, if you listen carefully.

Dixon refers to the "chauvinism" of the Macquarie years, but whose chauvinism are we talking about? Robinson's poetic mentor, and major literary influence on the period generally, was James Thomson who wrote not only "The Seasons" but also "Rule Britannia"; at Government House functions, toasts were drunk to the King's health and the domination of the globe by British commerce. Articulated in ways like these, the "nationalism" of the Macquarie period was certainly different from that of the 1890s, so different that it cannot be considered nationalism at all. Dixon's evidence suggests a situation of colonial dependence, well expressed in the concluding lines of a Winchester schoolboy's poem which neatly lay bare the economic realities behind the Augustan grace:

> Beyond, fair flocks, where juicier herbs invite,
> More free, are tended on the genial height;
> Their snowy fleeces furnish to the swain
> A ready export, and a source of gain
> Whereby, with China's ports, this distant land
> An unrestricted commerce may command.
> Australia, hence, precocious wealth shall reap,
> And chief devote her cares to raising sheep.

Such was the metropolitan view of the colonies, the destiny of which was not to be independent nationhood, or even a commercially developed dependence,

but the colonial fate of specialising in the supply of raw materials.

Dixon's demand that early colonial culture be evaluated on its own terms seems reasonable, but what he really means by it is to attack the evaluation made by an earlier school of cultural thought, namely, those who idealised the 1890s and undervalued what went before. Dixon does not grapple with the accounts of earlier critics, but his implicit antagonist is the view, particularly of Australian literature, which developed in the 1930s, the demolition of which was one of the first tasks of our "new critics" in the 1950s.

It is surely rather late in the day still to be flogging the old dead horse of literary nationalism (as Leonie Kramer once put it). There is plenty wrong with the versions of literary history given by Vance Palmer, Nettie Palmer, Barnard Eldershaw, J. K. Ewers and others, but there is nothing to be gained by making vague gestures of contempt at their ignorance and naivety. They need to be understood on their own terms. These writers were not interested in judging early nineteenth century culture in the light of academic canons or art-historical categories, but in seeking the emergence of a distinctively Australian culture. The 1890s were important to them because they saw it as the time when Australian writers and artists achieved a full adaptation to the local environment and began to create authentically indigenous work. Nothing in the neo-classical poetry which Dixon quotes so liberally persuades me that they were wrong to regard it (whatever its other virtues) as derivative, colonial and un-Australian.

Oddly enough, the literary nationalists (who at least are accorded the courtesy of oblique, if disdainful, allusion) fare better in Dixon's acknowledgements than later scholars, who are either ignored or misrepresented. His account of early cultural history seems more adequate than many published works, yet it is impossible for a non-expert to know when he is saying something new, when refining another's insight, when repeating current arguments, and when going out on a limb. It would have been useful if he had spelt out where his thesis differed from the views of other scholars: vague references to an oppressive nationalist orthodoxy are not enough.

Many people before Dixon have exposed the errors and omissions of literary histories which dismiss as worthless anything done before Marcus Clarke – for example, Brian Elliott, Cecil Hadgraft and Elizabeth Webby. A conscientious reader will want to know where Dixon agrees and disagrees with these writers, but there is scarcely a reference to them.

Elizabeth Webby found that in the 1820s the most popular authors in New South Wales were Byron and Scott. Among the numerous lists of books offered for sale by importers after 1820, the philosophers do not seem to rate a mention; Goldsmith, Pope and the classics are but occasional items; and only James Thomson's "The Seasons" seems to be common. Colonel Thornton's library, Webby writes, was typical of the period, and it included works such as *Gil Blas, Don Quixote, The Spectator,* Shakespeare, Pope, Glover, Ossian, Goldsmith and Cowper. John Oxley's library (sold 1828) contained the usual Scott, Byron, Shakespeare and *The Last of the Mohicans*, but Webby makes no mention of Nicholas Biddle. Romantic novels were favored prose reading in the 1820s, and after Byron the most popular poets were Thomas Moore and "such sentimental ladies as L.E.L. and Felicia Hemans".[1] If Webby's picture is fair, it suggests that by the 1820s romanticism was overtaking classicism as the dominant literary taste. If her picture is not fair, it is Dixon's scholarly obligation to explain its inadequacies to us.

It was not a radical nationalist but Brian Elliott and Adrian Mitchell who wrote of Robinson and his colleagues:

> There are many examples of occasional or commemorative verse, full of rhetoric and platitudes and exhibiting all the most predictable features of imperialist sycophancy. Their effusiveness about distant figures and events seems, in perspective, ridiculous; yet it testifies to the colonial yearning for identification with England's pomp and circumstance, to the need to share (if vicariously) the sense of self-importance so evidently lacking here. [2]

The only scholars Dixon cites as putting forward the argument he wants to demolish are Robert Hughes (hardly the author of "standard texts" on Australian art) and H. M. Green, whose views are grossly misrepresented. Dixon quotes Green as asserting that early Australian writing was "a literature of exile, weak and homeward-looking, a feeble reflection of life and literary forms. . . remote in space and time". In fact, these are comments which Green reports in order to oppose.

In trying to force Australian writing to fit the procrustean bed of his typology, Dixon is compelled to cut off the bits which hang over the end and pretend they were never there. What Mitchell, Elliott, Webby and Green possess, what he lacks, is a sense of the diversity of Australian writing in even the earliest times. Elliott and Mitchell comment that by mid-century there were:

> a number of ardently republican verses, often showing an American influence and passionately advocating political independence – thus seeking to establish locally the conviction of self-importance.

Dixon does not consider such voices, but it is clear that there were alternative views of the world from at least

the 1820s. Elliott and Mitchell's distinction between imperial sycophancy and (often republican) localism, suggesting the reality of a contest as much between poetic modes as between advocates of colonial dependence and national autonomy, would seem to be a more fruitful and plausible hypothesis than the picture of a uniformly observed convention.

Two significant early writers whom Dixon neglects both wrote verse (neo-classical in style) which does not fit the model. Barron Field set out quite consciously to make himself receptive to the new environment and to translate its features into poetry; there is little to suggest the course of empire in "Botany Bay Flowers" or "The Kangaroo". Instead of echoing James Thomson, Field tried to respond to the local scene. The verse of the native-born Charles Tompson, despite its classical allusions and other "eighteenth century encumbrances" (as Webby puts it), represents another effort to translate colonial experience into art. Curiously, if neo-classical ideas were in power, Tompson was chided by contemporary critics for failing quite to achieve this objective. One reviewer in the Sydney Gazette (November 1826) praised his *Wild Notes from the Lyre of a Native Minstrel* but warned him against imitating the style of others and urged upon him "the propriety of letting his similes and metaphors be purely Australian". The advantage of doing so, the reviewer continued, was that the poet's work would:

> infallibly possess all the freshness of originality. In this respect he has a decided advantage over all the European poets, because here nature has an entirely different aspect. Let him select from the treasures by which he is surrounded – let nature be his exclusive study – and Australia will have it in her power to boast of the productions of her bard.[3]

Another reviewer warned Tompson not to stick to the "beaten track of odes" but to keep his descriptions "true to nature", an approach which would advance his fame more than "a closely printed quarto of birthday sonnets, although inscribed to Venus herself".[4] Let alone a mere king!

The verse of Barron Field and Charles Tompson owes more to the sights and sounds of Botany Bay and the valley of the Nepean than to the stale conventions of courtly ritual or even to sea-stained tomes by philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment.

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1. Elizabeth Webby, "English Literature in early Australia, 1820-1829", Southerly 27 (4), 1967, pp. 266-85.
2. Brian Elliott and Adrian Mitchell, *Bards in the Wilderness: Australian colonial poetry to 1920* (Melbourne 1970), p. xvi.
3. Elizabeth Webby, "Australian literature and the reading public in the eighteen-twenties", Southerly 29 (1), 1969, pp. 25-6.
4. Ibid, p. 27.

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books

Hawke's Bath Water

Barry Hill

Hugh Stretton: *Political Essays* (Georgian House, $14.95).

A few years ago a Federal Labor Cabinet Minister told me: "We're doing all right."

"What do you mean, all right?"

"We'll get back in . . ."

Then recently along came John Pilger. Mister Prime Minister, he said to the silver screen and the present captain of Cabinet Ministers, what do you say to the fact that under your Government, a Labor Government, the rich have got richer and the poor got poorer?

The rest is, as they say, history – as indeed Labor Governments have a quick tendency to become. R. J. Hawke snarled, and walked out, leaving the Labor PR mafia to do the rest, which is to say concoct a rationale for how a socialistic journalist had stepped out of bounds. Whatever Pilger's empirical point, there was no place on the poop deck of consensus, accords, deregulation and deficits for that kind of righteousness, was there? This is the real world, fella; it's about governing, *and* staying in.

And the disconcerting thing was – quite apart from the speed with which Pilger got done, and was seen to get done by his gormless journalistic colleagues – that what we had seen was not really good enough. Cathartic, yes – a candid, necessary interview, and a relief after night after night of Press Club clubbery with a politician on the screen. But as with so many telling moments in life, one had the nasty feeling that emotional satisfactions were not going to deliver the goods. A great grey sea stretched between Pilger's honorable flag-waving and the supremely dry shore upon which the Prime Minister representatively sat. Was it possible, one thought, that any leftist craft could set out towards it again? Was it conceivable? Have we come to the permanent night game, where the big megabuck lights make everything as bright as day, and all is Realpolitikspeak? And what does it mean, to have to say this?

Stretton would say they are questions pertaining to the political climate – that perceived pattern of weathers said to determine so much of our conduct. Many people like to think there is such a thing as political reality, which is pretty much tantamount to speaking of economic reality. But the thrust of this book is to show that realities are climatically determined as well. In the conventional drizzle of 'pragmatic options' some equally real choices are not easily canvassed. Stretton comes to roll them out – to display in concrete detail the policy choices within a mixed economy that any self-respecting Labor Government ought actively to consider . . .

Anyone familiar with Stretton's earlier work will know he is a profound political thinker and a shrewd progressive planner (*Ideas for Australian Cities, Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment*) and this book extends him in both spheres. He can write as aphoristically as Bernard Shaw, with the social sweep of Tawney while holding to the plain speech of Orwell – though the vernacular tone is his (and our) own. (The book is dedicated to Nugget Coombs.) These are Fabian essays in the Australian idiom – excellent applications of rationality to government, blended with a passion for common decencies. "Reform needs intellect as well as numbers," we read at one point, which could be one epigraph for the book. The other might be: "Don't throw morality out with R. J. Hawke's bathwater." (I am writing this just after the mini-budget and as the Federal election campaign starts, so who knows who is going to throw what out.)

Here he is in the marvellous little essay, "The Cult of Selfishness". "Theme: In this century societies like ours needed to change some of their moral beliefs. But instead of replacing old morals by better ones, a lot of people were persuaded that societies didn't need moral beliefs at all any more. That is of course a moral belief with a vengeance, and one which capitalists and intellectuals can exploit for fun and profit. Many are

doing so, by peddling nastier economic theories than ever, and by opening profitable markets for whole new self-massaging and self-expanding industries. I oppose most of those developments, so this is a reactionary essay. It says we need better rather than fewer morals, and (fulfilling a long-standing ambition) it commends motherhood."

Not a bad start for an essay that will go on to lament the new selfishness which comes from the left libertarianism of the Seventies, and recently seems to have taken a whole new turn: "The rhetoric of liberation can be debased by Left as well as Right. But I think it has its nastier effects when it serves to bring the New and Old Right together: when the new psychology of self-indulgence joins with the old capitalist greed." ("The subtitle of my book might be 'H. R. Nichols was a stumblebum'," Stretton told the ABC's Terry Lane.)

Okay then, what is to be done? How fatalistic can we be about the real choices facing the nations? How 'pragmatic' are choices drawn from principles of social justice and equality? Sixty years ago it appeared that for many purposes Sweden, Argentina and Australia were in comparable economic and cultural positions. By most accounts Sweden is a success story, Argentina a social sink, while we . . . well, we continue to muddle through with an increasing sense of crisis.

Stretton agrees with Keating that the next few years are crucial, banana republic or no banana republic. He would agree with Keating too, by the way, that the wages accord was a major achievement by the Labor Government. But that is basically the end of the agreement. Deregulation and the floating of the dollar he sees as a potentially ruinous – self-defeating even in the Government's own terms. It has already led to featherbedding in high places and is tantamount to voluntarily renouncing economic control over our own affairs. At another level it has starved small business and farmers of credit, as well as checking any local impulse to reinvest in industry. Furthermore such policies bear no necessary connection with the shibboleths of strengthening the private sector at the expense wasteful and inefficient public sector.

Stretton is good on the shibboleths. Anyone even vaguely inclined to speak of cutting back the public sector in programmatic terms should read his opening essays on business and government, privatizations, capital regulation and related matters. Yet he is not, it is important to emphasise, merely polemicising (though there is some of that). What he is pointing to time and again is the intricacy of the planning issues, and the fact of the mixed economy. The question must be: will this work in *social* as well as economic terms? The case he makes in the business realm is necessarily technical – and all the better for that since he is aiming at those very policy makers who might otherwise go on with what they are doing as if no alternatives existed. On the issues he groups under "Home and Neighbourhood" he is less so – and of course in his element as proposer of humanistic design solutions since he has for many years been involved in housing policies in South Australia as well as federally.

Public housing towers were a mistake. After the first lot went up in postwar Britain, research quickly and definitively showed this. The sixty-four dollar question for the perfervid rationalist in Stretton is why, in the face of the facts, did they keep getting built? And how was it, in the face of the evidence documenting the human consequences of such a built environment, did similar policies run in Melbourne for fifteen years, then flourish briefly in Sydney just as they were finally discredited in Melbourne? Sinister capitalistic forces at work? Well, yes, to some extent, especially in the north of England, where scandals did show up. (Up north there was some corruption. Down south nobody was caught. "They're smarter down south, they say up north.") But here, in the lucky country: why did we persist? "Professional and bureaucratic ideology was the major cause of the program continuing."

Indeed this whole book can be read, not just as a set of alternative options for a bold and well-meaning Labor Government, but as a critique of "professional and bureaucratic ideology generally." It was Shaw who said that all professions are a conspiracy against the public. Stretton might say that or he might not (and it would depend on the profession under scrutiny how he said it). What he's especially keen to expose is the technocratic bias that determines questions of social policy, especially economic policies. For the conventional wisdom – endemic in industry, government and the universities – is that policy-making turns on questions of means, not ends, on technical considerations derived from 'value-free' professional considerations.

Theoretically speaking, the social scientist saddled with the rigorous genesis of this purist myth is of course Max Weber. In a few brilliant pages, perhaps some of the best and plainest ever to be written on Weber, Stretton settles that historical account: Weber argued for nothing of the sort, and insofar as he seems to have extolled the virtue of value-free social analysis, it was with deeper moral considerations in mind that actively informed his political use of his scholarship. What most alarms Stretton is what must alarm the readers of most newspapers: the shocking fact that to listen to the economic commentaries around the country you would think there was no room for debate at all; or rather, that insofar as there is room for disagreement among the professionals, these are basically strategic, technical differences which do not admit ethical valuations. Bunk, Stretton says in umpteen closely argued instances; bunk and cant. You can't take the morality out. It's in there, in the most rudimentary economic decision, as it is in the body of any polis.

To argue this one through as Stretton so splendidly does (right down to including an extract from his own forthcoming textbook on basic economics) is to be reminded of Shaw again, who likened professionals to prostitutes as well as conspirators. Stretton has a lot to say about how economics ought to be taught in the universities, and his view of those caravans of conventional economists who always find time to justify Government decisions of the day almost goes without saying. Given the gloomy picture he paints of the economists' stupidity and cowardice his lack of vitriol is remarkable, really. It's the mark of the man, of the optimistic seed that he nourishes within that inimitable rationalistic mode of his, to remain constructive, to remain generous, and to be urging generosity upon others, in order to make things better. Ultimately, he's saying to colleagues: "Okay, recognizing our own class interests (and the fact that we are human and have this history), how do we nevertheless think on behalf of others . . .?" Given more literary elbow room than such practical and momentous problems allow, Stretton might sound more like Montaigne than a forebearing Fabian.

Meanwhile, however, the options for the nation loom. In the last rather devastating chapter we meet three model futures. Need they be stated? We are living two of them: the lineaments of one, the New Conservative vista, is in the serpentine movement of the new selfishness from Queensland on to the campaign trails of Victoria; the music of the other can be heard every time it's hard to tell the difference between a Hawke, a Howard and a Peacock as they move in some kind of last tango of middle solutions.

The third model is Stretton's own: it maps the strategic emergence of practical Left policies of managing the public sector, redistributive taxation, social-contract income policies and so on. Its modest success if premised on the Australian rich proving to be inept managers of their own affairs, and a progressive alliance of "the old Labor movement with women, environmentalists and small business people" who manage to show up the managerial bankruptcy of the Labor Right (the Wrans of the world) and the efficacy of leftist policies.

Unfortunately, since publication Stretton has regretted his last chapter as speculative and distracting. And he said this even before the surrealistic beginnings of the present election campaign. I put the book down in loving admiration for its reasoned homely key, while despairing at the muted tones in which such tunes must, perforce, be played. Some political climates seem hell bent on drowning all solo lyrics out of existence.

Barry Hill's most recent work was a verse play on William Buckley, performed at the Mill Theatre, Geelong. He lives in Queenscliff and is finishing a novel. Overland will welcome discussion of this review and of Stretton's book.

The Literary Spectrum

Dorothy Hewett

Christina Stead: *I'm Dying Laughing* (Virago Press, $29.95).
David Foster: *Testostero* (Penguin, $8.95).
Rod Jones: *Julia Paradise* (McPhee Gribble/Penguin, $6.95).

Three novels from different ends of the literary spectrum—the first traditional, and posthumous from one of the greats of Aust. Lit.; the second comic and picaresque from one of the whiz kids of Australia's post-modernist explosion; the third a Gothic tour de force from a brilliant unknown.

Christina Stead's *I'm Dying Laughing* is a rambling monster of a novel, full of character and the quick of life. It is the first novel in which she has used as background her own experiences of Communist and Cold War politics in the early 1940s in America and Europe.

There are so few novels in the English language that deal with this subject. Is it because we have little real interest in Western radicalism, despite the fact that it has contributed one of the great systems of belief, and one of the last great betrayals, of twentieth century history?

I'm Dying Laughing was actually written during the period of the McCarthy witchhunts, carried out by the House Committee on Un-American activities, and the trial of the Hollywood Ten in 1947-48.

One cannot help speculating if it was political timidity that caused her publishers to urge her to rewrite the novel "to make the political sections more understandable".

The result was that, after ten years of rewrites, Christina Stead left the decision to publish or not publish in the hands of her literary executor, R. G. Geering. For the labor of love and industry he undertook after her death, editing and making difficult decisions from masses of different versions, we can only be thankful.

This is not a political novel in any narrow sense. Character and morality were always Stead's central concerns, and this novel is really about destructive passions and idealism turned sour.

Emily and Stephen Howard, rich, radical Americans, are at the centre of the story, particularly Emily, famous as the writer of small-town American humor, who keeps the whole family in the style to which they have become accustomed by turning out vast quantities of trashy film scripts for the Hollywood movie machine.

"The sub-title *The Humourist* underlines her tragic story," writes Geering, but is Emily really tragic? Certainly she is full of tragic flaws, but from the beginning her stature is so suspect that she becomes

pathetic rather than tragic. It is the old dilemma of modern literature. The fall from grace is never resounding enough, because the subject is never sufficiently elevated. Nor perhaps can they be, in a world of such shifting values and suspect heroism.

Yet what are we supposed to feel at the end? Are we supposed to judge Emily and Stephen? Well yes, but the judgement is so ambiguous.

This novel is the inheritor of psychological realism — the so called scientific method of anatomising character and action, developed in the bourgeois novel, with all the facts set out, and the final judgement withheld. But the facts are so loaded that we cannot fail to make some moral judgement.

In an interview in June 1973 Stead described *I'm Dying Laughing*: "It was all about the passion of — I use passion in almost the religious sense — of two people, two Americans, New Yorkers, in the thirties. They are doing well, but they suffered all the troubles of the thirties. They were politically minded. They went to Hollywood. They came to Europe to avoid the McCarthy trouble. Of course they were deeply involved. And then they lived around Europe, oh, in a wild and exciting extravagant style. But there was nothing to support it. At the same time they wanted to be on the side of the angels, good Communists, good people, and also to be very rich. Well, of course . . . they came to a bad end."

She talks so well about her own novel, because she understood exactly what she was doing. This is old-fashioned, moral determinism, and the basis of this morality tale is that it is impossible to be very rich and on the side of the angels, because the pursuit of wealth corrupts the individual.

Yet one always feels that Stead is too good a novelist not to be divided over her two protagonists, and we have been sucked with such violence and energy into the vortex of their lives that we cannot repudiate them, nor can we be sure that we ourselves might not act with just such moral cupidity given the same set of circumstances.

Stephen is a self-pitying, self-castigating weakling, the rich boy who becomes an amateur Marxist theoretician, who lives off his wife's industry. Emily has a terrible strength, but she is sick and swollen with self indulgence. They are both horribly guilty. Stephen is doomed from the start, but Emily has talent and strength of will, even if that strength is often used perversely. Whatever she does, she does with whole-hearted, prodigious energy, so that when she finally turns against her radical friends she does it with such thorough-going betrayal of all her old Communist principles that it takes the breath away. Are Stephen and Emily both as culpable as each other? Who corrupts whom, or is it the inherent folly of their situation?

Emily can never forgive herself the sell-out of her own talent. She is bitterly self critical. Stephen too is only too well aware of his own miserable limitations: "I'm not a brave and true man. I'm a man in misery."

"Like all melancholics," Emily tells him, "you're a soul-murderer."

To retain his American passport Stephen informs on his former political associates, friends and acquaintances, to the U.S. State Department.

"Yes, I talked," he says. "I sang. I talked and sang for three whole days. I gave them names — all the names I ever heard of, boys I knew at school and college, librarians, doctors, nurses; it was astounding what names came to my memory . . ."

Stephen's last, sad, political gesture is to march on May Day in Paris, with his young son. He leaves Emily, drenches himself in gasoline and burns himself to death in his car.

Emily disappears to Rome. Our final view of her, through the eyes of two old acquaintances, is of a homeless vagrant, sitting on the steps of the Forum, her endless letters, and the manuscript that was to be her masterpiece, blowing away through the square.

It is an unforgettable image. Mad, prematurely old, destroyed by booze, drugs, grief and self-hatred, Emily has become the bag-woman of Europe, carrying all the guilt and betrayals with her.

The style, as I have said, is old-fashioned psychological realism, with certain qualities reminiscent of H. H. Richardson, but the novel takes larger risks than she does. It is not so pedestrian or so controlled. Here is a bigger, freer hand, a wider and larger scope, a more embracing and symbolic universe.

This novel is constructed around talk, verbal fireworks, the whirling, rambling, surreal dialogues of Emily and Stephen, their children, their family and their circle. Anyone who has moved in Communist circles will immediately recognize the texture of the language — that extraordinary mixture of idealistic utopian rhetoric and shop-worn political slogans. Nobody else talks like these Communists, but this doesn't make them any less convincing. On the contrary, they are cruelly and shrewdly anatomised, from Hollywood 'lefties' to the Paris underground.

Yet if the morality of the novel is to work, Stead is ultimately on the side of the Communists, and this is her problem. The novel is so full of teeming life, its contradictions and discords, that to take sides becomes impossible and yet she demands that we do it.

As Angela Carter says, "she is a profoundly serious novelist."

So here is no simplistic equation of left and right, good and evil, no socialist treatise or true morality tale, but a monstrous and contradictory story of shifting values and uncertain loyalties. As a picture of political life in the thirties and forties it is frighteningly recognisable.

David Foster, prolific, jokey satirist, punster and

player on words, has gone on record in a recent newspaper interview as saying that he will from now on leave the genre of the comic novel and move in more serious directions.

It sounds a little like Grahame Greene discussing his "entertainments".

There is no doubt that Foster is clever, sophisticated, stylish, highly literate and alive to the magic of language. As a trained scientist he delights in using the resources of scientific language in his novels. Why then do I hanker after some of the old-fashioned virtues, like depth of characterisation, and the felt life of the novel, when I know that the genre has nothing to do with these ancient and well-tried virtues?

In *Testostero*, Foster's parody characters tumble through the parodied landscapes of Venice, London, the Scottish Highlands and the working class Sydney suburb of Marrickville, their tongues teeming with puns and word-play like figures out of a Roman comedy.

In fact the central conceit of the novel is the identical twin, beloved of Plautus and borrowed by Shakespeare. Foster extends the joke by adding a third protagonist, a transvestite contessa, thus turning the twins into identical triplets.

His eye is keen, his satire acid and, under the manic energy of his plot devices, he anatomises modern society with a bleak and pitiless eye.

The story follows the adventures of Noel Horniman, the Marrickville pool attendant now resident poet at the Commonwealth Writers Studio in Venice.

Horniman, a loutish Aussie in his forties, only too well aware of his sexual failures, has written two collections of poetry, *Slug Burial* and *Gash Alley*, both published from a small press run by himself.

In Venice he meets Perry Patetic, Professor of Commonwealth Studies in the University of Boloni, and Leon Hunnybun, art lover and homosexual heir to the British baronet Cyril Surtout-Spoton, the father of modern psychology, and a pioneer in the study of separated identical twins.

Recognising their strange affinity the twins play out their predestined story amongst the peeling stucco and the dirty Venetian canals. Horniman's ex-wife falls in love with, and eventually marries, Hunnybun. Horniman falls in love with the transvestite Contessa, the final domino in this unlikely triangle.

A true-blue Aussie working-class democrat, Horniman's hunger for a baronetcy and a share in the family fortunes takes him on his circular journey to London, the Scottish Highlands, Sydney and finally back again to Venice. As the ultimate Australian expatriate he sullenly plies his trade as the only Venetian gondolier unable to speak or understand one word of basic Italian.

But life has its compensations, such as the importation of cocaine and Tasmanian possum skins from New Zealand, or a meeting in a sumptuous room above the Grand Canal with the local nobility, the visiting professors, and the Contessa, now well past her prime, who shares the half-miraculous secret, the bond of their birth.

During the Biennale and the Filmfest they are joined by the distinguished art critic Leon Hunnybun, and his wife, all the way from the Southern Hemisphere.

I have gone into some detail about the basic outlines of the plot because I have found it extraordinarily difficult to critically examine this novel or to give the actual flavour of its style; a difficulty shared by many other Australian critics and commentators on Foster's novels. Is it a failure of sympathy for the comic mode, or an inability to relate to the style and language he uses, often to devastating satiric effect? It is a failure noted rather bitterly by Foster himself, who seems to see himself as a kind of odd-man-out amongst the literary pundits and practitioners of Austlit.

There is no doubt that he is a serious contender in the literary stakes, and I await with interest his move away from the comic to the serious novel (whatever that may mean). I wonder what kind of world he will discover there.

Julia Paradise is an extraordinary novel, a tale of mystery and imagination, from a new, and to me, previously unknown writer. Who is Rod Jones, thirty-four-year-old Melbourne University graduate, who now lives in Queenscliff, Victoria, and seems to have sprung fully formed from the head of Zeus?

The writing is swift, assured, dramatic, the characters unforgettable, the landscapes sensual and haunting. I have called the novel gothic, and it does have certain gothic elements of terror and mystery, but the characterisation and style is actually closer to psychological realism, and "the pestilential dreamscapes of suffering" have a nightmare quality, plus an uncanny verisimilitude which is not characteristic of gothic at all.

The novel moves between China and Northern Queensland, and is told largely through the experiences of Dr Kenneth Ayres, an eighteen-stone Scottish physician and opium addict, who once studied for a year in Vienna under Sigmund Freud.

In the Astor House Hotel in Shanghai, Ayres meets the Rev. Willie Paradise, an Australian Methodist missionary, and his disoriented wife, Julia, "small, plain, nondescript, indeterminate age, dressed in a black woollen suit."

This method of description, like a police file on a missing person, contrasts sharply with the exotic landscapes which are like film clips passing in hallucinatory images through the rapid, economically-told story.

A chance meeting in Shanghai initiates Ayres into a lifetime of waking daydreams, the strange world of Julia Paradise's manias and obsessions. His decision to treat Julia for her "hysterics" and her morphine

addiction draws him into a landscape of nightmare.

Under hypnosis she relates her sexual fantasies and her animal phobias—toads and snakes pursue her everywhere. Eventually, during their regular Tuesday afternoon adulteries, she tells him the story of her father, Joachim Johannes, a German-born explorer and naturalist, a widower who seduces Julia at the age of thirteen in the big wooden house on Duck River in the Northern Queensland rain forest.

Eventually the father contracts leprosy, rotting in the rotting house beside the brown, scum-covered river, where the jungle invades the rooms and fungi grows up the damp walls.

Julia, pregnant with his child, is swept away down the flooded river, past the township of Mem, past her father staring from the door of the local brothel, to a room where the local station-master rapes her, and a benign Methodist preacher pulls her inshore in his fishing net, telling her: "God told me he was sending me a wife."

In the third section of the novel we are back in China for Julia's thirty-first birthday party at the Methodist Mission outside Shanghai. That night the school house is burnt down, the Reverend Mr Paradise, arrested by the Kuomintang, is never seen again, and Julia shows Ayres her "night pictures", a box of sinister photographs taken in the Chinese quarter of Shanghai.

Amongst them is the portrait of Lucy, the twelve year-old Chinese prostitute, once Julia's favorite pupil at the mission school, who died after her rectum was sexually perforated by Ayres.

Julia demands blackmail money from Ayres, disappearing back to Australia with her lesbian lover Gerthild Platz, the German Marxist schoolteacher, whose skin is already erupting with the stigmata of leprosy.

"Condemned to life" Ayres spends the next twenty years in North China, as part of a ramshackle Red Cross unit, ministering to the sick in truck and hospital tent on an endless journey of expiation.

He leaves China in 1949 to live in retirement in his flat in Princes Street, Edinburgh. But he is never free of Julia's "silky narrative," that seems to have been spoken only to confound him. He tries to discover the truth of her story, asking questions and examining maps. Was there ever such a town as Mem, a place called Duck River, or a character such as Joachim Johannes? Was Joachim Johannes only another name for the Reverend Mr Paradise? As in life the mysteries remain with the obsessions. In 1950, in Edinburgh, Ayres' dying words are "Duck River".

How to explain the fascination of this bewitching novel, where, like Julia Paradise's "night pictures", landscapes stand in for states of mind and states of mind blur into strange landscapes?

In his admixture of realism and fantasy, Rod Jones will inevitably be compared to the South American novelists, who must be heartily sick of being dumped altogether in one literary portmanteau. My question is—how did *Julia Paradise* arrive, unheralded, unsung out of Australia in 1986? For me this is the ultimate mystery.

The Exploration of Australian Film

Chris Long

Brian McFarlane: *Australian Cinema 1970-1985* (Secker & Warburg, $32.95).

It takes guts to write about recent history. If one delves into the more distant past, one has the advantage of literature surveys, organised archives, and perhaps a small amount of previous analysis on which to build a thesis. Most of the participants in distant historical events are dead, and can't criticise your analyses. Not so with Brian McFarlane. His thematic history *Australian Cinema 1970-1985* unravels the complexities of a vast and largely unexplored area of Australian creative effort.

McFarlane's explanation of his own methods of analysis justifies his exclusion of documentary and independent film making, basing his bias "partly on my personal interest, partly on the fact that it is the feature film industry which has been largely responsible for the renewal of interest, both here and overseas, in Australian cinema". While I would agree that this qualification was necessary in defining the boundaries of his definition of "cinema", there are other omissions which perhaps could have received more emphasis.

Just consider the minefield of analytical problems posed by the contemporary Australian film industry. Nearly four-hundred feature films were produced in this country between 1970 and 1985. That's a lot more than our film industry produced in its entire history up to 1970. Commentators in the early 1970s regarded this as a "rebirth" or "renaissance" of our film industry, but this is not so. The present phenomenon is totally without precedent.

And here we find the greatest weakness in McFarlane's book, as it continues to purvey the myth of the "new start". The historical chapters of the book, providing the lead up to the boom of the 1970s, are simply a derivative re-hash of previous Australian cinema histories, repeating and amplifying many of their erroneous and ill-founded claims. For instance, the Carl Hertz film shows of 1896 were *not* Australia's first, as McFarlane claims. Edison "kinetoscopes" were on public view here nearly eighteen months earlier.

The old, old chestnut about the 1906 Kelly Gang film being the "world's first feature film" is repeated. As early as 1897, a "Passion Play" shot on a New York roof ran to a film length of 2900 feet, according to an advertisement for its exhibition in the Hobart

Mercury on 14 August 1899. At the slow projection speed of those times, about 50 feet per minute, the film would have run for about an hour, surely a "feature film" by anybody's standards – a full decade before the Kelly Gang opus. These 'firsts' are regularly claimed without the necessary original research to verify them, and they tend to become slavishly accepted by constant repetition.

Perhaps one of the worst examples of this historical repetition is the quote taken by McFarlane from Pike and Cooper's *Australian Film 1900-1977* which refers to the Australian cinema being "essentially indigenous" in the period just prior to 1914. A glance through any Australian cinema program list (e.g. Wests's scrapbook, held by the Performing Arts Museum, Melbourne) will reveal that Australian films were in the minority in local screenings, even during the so-called 'peak' year of Australian production, 1911. This often-touted numerical 'peak' of Australian fictional film production requires a great deal of qualification. In defining the term 'feature film' Pike and Cooper included *any* narrative film of *any* length made before 1913. Of the fifty-odd so-called feature films produced locally in 1911, many were less than fifteen minutes in length, all were produced on incredibly low budgets with plenty of scope for the work of independent producers and, *worldwide*, films were being made in tremendous quantity on those terms. While there were more Australian titles than ever before, there was as great a proliferation of that sort of 'feature' film from abroad.

If we applied Pike and Cooper's definition of 'feature film' to any year subsequent to 1911, I wonder what figures we'd find? Graham Shirley noted in *Australian Cinema – The First Eighty Years* that *610* short films were produced in this country during 1961-62! That is the only year for which I have figures for 'short' production, but it nevertheless underscores the need for questioning the blind repetition of the oft-quoted 1911 as being our peak year of production. In the opinion of this reviewer, there is little evidence to show that Australia ever really had a 'boom' period of film production remotely comparable to that of the 1970s and 1980s, either in the number of films produced, in the scale of those films, or in the amount of investment capital involved.

We may have been early feature film producers, but the so-called film industry of our pioneering years was very small beer indeed!

Another sweeping statement made by McFarlane in his historical chapters is that "narrative was established as the key function of mainstream cinema in Australia as elsewhere" during the First World War. I tried to point out in the book *The Documentary Film In Australia* (1981) that, until the present feature film boom, the function of the Australian film production industry was always to supplement and complement the overwhelming predominance of the imported product. The staple of local Australian production through most of that era lay in the newsreel, the documentary (particularly sponsored documentary), and in the advertising film. With the exception of a few brief periods (1911-12; 1932-40), Australian feature films were relatively rare, speculative ventures, while several companies simultaneously maintained a constant weekly output of newsreels, documentary films and advertisements from 1910 onwards. One Melbourne producer – one of the largest – was Herschell's Film Productions of Jolimont, active from 1920 to 1960. In their whole history, they never produced a single feature film, yet they managed to maintain a staff of 15 or more through most of that period!

McFarlane's book is fortunately far more valuable and germane where it relates to the post-1970 industry on which he concentrates, and in which he obviously finds the greatest interest. Here his contribution is original and perceptive, in sharp contrast to his historical survey. He chooses to break the post-1970 cinematic output into literary themes, treating the films mainly from a literary or stylistic aspect. In this respect the book shines, guiding the reader into perceptions of Australian cinema as a reflection of the development of characteristically Australian thought, attitude, and expression. The book follows a narrower course than David Stratton's *The Last New Wave* or the classic text of Shirley and Adams' *Australian Cinema, The First Eighty Years*, in that the machinations and economics of the industry are not seen as relating directly to the finished product on the screen – or at least McFarlane's attitude seems to be to see those aspects as of very secondary importance.

Nevertheless, he goes a long way towards indicating those aspects of our cinema which make it *uniquely* Australian in flavor, and in so doing he identifies cultural trends which have wider implications for a perception of Australian society as a whole. Several traditional Australian themes are identified in the various types of Australian films made in recent times, and many examples of these genres are described – films relating to mateship, larrikinism, the defence of the underdog, a love of the bush, a pride in the emergence of an Australian character from our British colonial past, and the 'Pom-bashing' which has often accompanied that perception. New themes are also identified, mainly the product of the progressive urbanisation of Australia – the problems of growing up, the migrant experience, the aboriginal experience, drugs, and the general loss of innocence.

In his concluding chapters, McFarlane very briefly summarises the contribution of Australian producers, directors and creative film personnel. Here he finally broaches the role of industry finance and economic pressures, including the famous 10BA tax concessions and the need for Australian films to capitalise on over-

seas markets to cover their steadily increasing costs. But the examination is cursory, and unfortunately does little to explain *why* films have been financed, *what* film project ideas are followed through to completion by financial backers, and *which* audiences the various categories of films have been aimed at.

Surely a survey of the marketing side of film must be necessary to explain a producer's reason for pushing a given film script or concept? Some films have made quite comfortable profits, and have obviously satisfied some sort of audience, but McFarlane treats some of these films with contempt. For instance, throughout the book McFarlane constantly slags the 'puerile smut' produced and directed by John Lamond, such as "Pacific Banana", "Felicity" or "Australia After Dark". These low-budget sex films might be of execrable quality, but they do clear their costs, which is more than can be said for many other 'art' films. They provide a living for Australian technicians and acting talent, even if they do little else. Given a choice between these sex comedies and the ultra-violence of "Rambo" (though God forbid that I should *have* to watch either of these), I'd prefer the sex. There is a slight tendency for McFarlane to show unjustified puritanical prejudice against some of these films. Professional films are produced to make money first and foremost. They are only secondarily works of literature or art – which may be the central point which McFarlane's book misses, both in concentration on film as literature and in drawing away from film as industry. Criticising Lamond's films on an artistic basis is like trying to play cricket with a squash racket. The device just wasn't made for that purpose!

Just as a survey of film marketing would have thrown light on the reasons for artistic and literary trends in the Australian cinema, some coverage of exhibition trends would also have been helpful. Where are the suburban drive-in theatres of my teens in the sixties and seventies? Has the advent of home video had an effect on the types of Australian cinema films now being produced, and has this affected the market viability of one type of film more than another? Has the policy of deleting supporting 'shorts' from cinema programs had an effect on the length or depth of the feature films shown? These changes have a vital bearing on the economics of the film industry, and because films are very expensive to produce, this bears *directly* on the artistic and technical character of film scripts which survive the tortuous path to the screen.

Finally, there is a tendency for media writers to define 'cinema' very narrowly in the old-fashioned terms relating only to theatrical exhibition. I would question the validity of an approach excluding films produced for television or video, as McFarlane does. Is theatrical exhibition still a major part of a film's money-making capacity, now that many suburban cinemas and drive-ins are long gone? Can we ignore these new media if they comprise a major part of the process of marketing 'cinema' films? Are movies made for television, or the current crop of 'mini-series' necessarily the poor relation of the cinema film? Are the boundaries between theatre, video and television as clearly defined as they once were? Our media studies courses, and our media historians, have to take a close look at these questions, clearly defining their use of the term "Australian Cinema" before writing books of this type.

McFarlane's *Australian Cinema 1970-1985* avoids pretence, communicates clearly and guides us through a literary analysis of film. Within those boundaries, the book is a valuable contribution to the body of media literature – though its title perhaps implies a broader coverage than the reality of its content indicates.

Chris Long is a freelance research worker in film and sound archives. He lives in Melbourne.

Coast to Coast

Rodney Wetherell

Kerryn Goldsworthy (ed.): *Coast to Coast* (Angus & Robertson, $9.95).

In her introduction to this new edition of *Coast to Coast*, editor Kerryn Goldsworthy tells us her brief was to look for "prose writing" rather than specifically "short stories", and she has indeed looked far and wide – in journals, newspapers, novels and autobiographies, and has presented a selection from these along with short stories, both published and unpublished. There is a giggle of Moorhouse, a drift of Bernard Smith, a soupçon of Jolley, some bite-sized pieces by other familiar writers and by some new to me: Brian Dibble, Rosa Safransky, Patrick Rogers.

An excellent book this is for suburban train reading. "In the Maize" by Barry Westburg is about a four-station number; Kerryn Goldsworthy says it made her laugh aloud – it didn't have quite that effect on me, which is just as well, since laughing aloud is unacceptable on the 8.12, but it thoroughly dissipated morning commuter gloom. In the story, scenes from a boyhood on the Iowa cornfields are seen through a corn-colored lens, as if lit by movie lights as brilliant as the harvest moon under which farm persons dance (and some disappear behind the shucking-mound). The narrator meets one of the harvest-moon girls in California years later, expensively dressed and heavily made-up. That marriage seeded behind the shucking-mound ended badly and so, we assume, did much else that grew out of that myth-infested ur-American country. But the harvest moon will always shine down on the boys who shuck and the grannies who drive them to it with

threats of hellfire and promises of apricot pie. A good story, this—funny and memorable, if perhaps over self-conscious.

But Australian? Westburg has, I believe, lived in Australia for many years, and "In the Maize" was first published in Quadrant. An Australian short story doesn't any more have to be about somebody going with cattle now, thank goodness; however, it's hard to see corn-shucking replacing cattle-droving as national myth or pastime.

Glenda Adams has gone the other way, from Sydney to New York many years ago, and her impressive story "The Voyage of Their Life" is an expatriate's story. Lark Watter is a young woman living near a suburban beach in the early fifties, polishing up her French and devoting her energies to Going Overseas—and probably not coming back. There is also a young man who goes with her to the beach, and is spied rubbing suntan oil on her back. He too is going away, but for doctoral research—a firmer basis for permanent escape than Lark has. He makes his break earlier: will the two meet up in America and fulfil a barely-permitted dream? Meanwhile family and the Sydney of the day are sketched in deftly, not so rosily as to make us wonder why Lark ever left them, but enough to convince us of Roots not entirely without interest. This is an over-crowded story, and therefore not a good one by the old rules; I was not surprised to note that it is to be published again as part of a novel, *Dancing on Coral.* It certainly reads more like a chapter than a story.

Many readers will probably agree with Goldsworthy's claim in her introduction that numbers of her selection "speak to each other, have in common ideas and pre-occupations which . . . seem to form part of some dialogue or debate". The two stories I've outlined so far have obvious similarities, and so, with them, does Rosa Safransky's delightful "Postcards", printed between them in the book. Childhood is recalled from a distance of light years, and allowances made for the likelihood of romanticizing it. We sense in all three stories the vast struggle between the urge to see life with hard clarity, however painful, and the tendency to recreate it with webs of fantasy. In the same way, John Clanchy's very funny story "The Art of Writing Dangerously" creates interesting reverberations with those on either side of it, "The Competition Portrait" by Thomas Shapcott, and "The Small Box" by Patrick Rogers (the latter marred only by its plethora of rhetorical questions). These come into that risky category of writing-about-writing, or about art in the case of the Shapcott, but none, I believe, falls into the pit of preciousness. I have little doubt that each story gains something by its sympathetic placing in a loose sequence—more, probably, than it would from being placed with other work by the same writer, though this can only be a subjective judgment.

I do have doubt as to whether the short stories in *Coast to Coast* are particularly enriched by the presence among them of some fairly workaday prose pieces. Vincent Buckley's *Memory Ireland* is an autobiographical work by one of our leading poets—but his prose, unlike his poetry, does not sing, at least not in the extract included here. His perceptions and recollections of Ireland are interesting because they are his, but the extract makes little imaginative impact. Beside the stories mentioned so far, and many others, the passage has a clunking effect—among prose pieces it is prosaic in the extended sense, and the life it has belongs to some faculty other than the fancy.

Other prose passages (non-fancy) are "Gd Ship Country" by Don Watson, a section of "The Boy Adeodatus" by Bernard Smith, and "The Softening of Blows" by Anna-Maria Dell'oso—all with their virtues and pleasures, especially the Bernard Smith, but they do not offer the same kind of reading experience as the 'real' stories. They may well be superior of their kind to several of the stories, yet they do not call forth, let alone demand, an imaginative response in the same way as, for examples, does "Gravity" by Tim Winton, near the mid-point of this selection.

This is a typically laconic and low-key story about Jerra Nilsam and his painful wresting of meaning from life. Sentences are short. People use few words. The child pisses. The reader is irritated—yet he or she can only acknowledge that a world has been constructed (perhaps out of next to nothing), an emotional network set up, suspense created and some relief offered. Had Chekhov found the story readable at all, he would probably have recognized it as the product of a craft not unlike his own.

I have left till last a mention of my favorite story in this book: "The Life of Art" by Helen Garner: fragments from the 1960s, memories of a painter friend, feminism pre- and post-. It is hard to say why this is so funny and so melancholy at the same time—one would have to analyse Garner's arrangement of her fragments, her subtle repetitions, if one were to understand the resonances. I am happy to leave this to the doctoral students of the future (or the present), and simply say that "The Life of Art", through the concealed art of its author, becomes a great deal more than the sum of its multifarious parts. It concludes a fine and very readable anthology of Australian prose.

I hope, though, that the next edition of *Coast to Coast* will revert to the old familiar format—recent Australian short stories. There seems to be no shortage of them.

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Australia as Place and People

Tom Stannage

Peter Pierce (ed.): *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia* (Oxford University Press, $60).

The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia must be one of the most beautiful books of trivia ever published in this country. Indeed, the international series published by Oxford is an exercise in self-indulgence—self-indulgence on the part of a wealthy publisher, and self-indulgence on the part of the complacent trade of lit. crit. Who the hell cares if Dorothy Cottrell returned briefly to Ularunda Station having secretly married the American book-keeper Wallace Cottrell in May 1922? All that is missing is the date in May on which the extraordinary event took place. The information given is hardly *Singing Gold*! But what of 'important' places like Sydney and Melbourne? We are taken on an alphabetical plod through the suburbs, arriving an exhausted thirty pages later at Ultimo, where 'Brian James' taught for a short period at Sydney Boys High School. God knows when and what 'James' wrote about Ultimo, if anything.

Does anything save this misguided product? Yes, its beauty. Although large and heavy the *Literary Guide* is beautiful to look at. The photographs of people and places, and the lively captions—often authors' quotes—are quite splendid. My naughty favorite is a vaginal shot of Sydney University, captioned by Charles Wentworth's "pregnant womb of this institution". My moral favorite is the undated shot of rows of Benedictine-worked fruit trees and grape vines, with church buildings in the background. My symbolic favorite is a colored Randolph Stow in civvy pants and shoes on a gravel road out of Geraldton, apparently leading a flock of sheep—or editors or publishers. His body language indicates the lie of the image. Good photo, this. My favorite dull picture comes, alas, from Melbourne, where one expects E. Morris Miller and Louis Esson to appear in stone alongside the lions of the Public Library.

Australia is a wonderfully beautiful and romantic place, as the photos of the Bight and Tasmanian Highlands show. There are important pictures, too, notably those of authors, especially in groups doing things, everything almost except writing (the indefatigable Hal Porter and Tom Ronan apart).

Some four hundred authors have created this monster of a book. Perhaps four hundred Australians will read it. The list of contributors suggests that most have done and are doing more useful work. And, to be fair, some of the place-quotes they've found are gems. The book simply lacks sex appeal.

As for the writers to whose places this book guides us, how magnificently served has been this country! Writer after writer is exciting, moving, vital—so Australian, and all. At a time when cultural elitism and new rightism is rampant in the body politic, this book says firmly that Australia is place and people, and that both have been and are worthy of study.

Tom Stannage is a historian at the University of Western Australia.

Vision Splendid, Outcome Blended

Don Watson

Stuart Macintyre: *The Oxford History of Australia. Volume 4. 1901-1942. The Succeeding Age* (Oxford University Press, $35).

Potential buyers of the Oxford History of Australia might reasonably ask themselves if they really need it. Do *we* need it? Should we pay this price for books of such mean and unimaginative design and production value? Should we make the leap of faith required to believe that the authors of these five volumes will be able to construct a drama from history so arbitrarily defined? Can the Oxford History of Australia do any more than tell the specialists what they already know and the general public what they are not interested in discovering? In other words is the Oxford History of Australia more of an exercise in monumentalist Bicentennial marketing than an effort to advance an understanding of this country's history, and excite an interest in it?

Well, of course there has always been a market for books unlikely to be read and, in Australia, never more than now. When the other four volumes are completed the Oxford History of Australia will look good and modestly patriotic on the shelves. It would sit nicely with the *Oxford Guide to Australian Literature*—with literature and history covered, a person would be pretty well set up.

Stuart Macintyre's volume 4 of the Oxford History, the first to appear, deserves a much better fate. It is so good a reader is likely to forget how a difficult an art general history is, especially in this extended specialist era.

Macintyre writes with measured regard for both the still fashionable 'history from below' and its older 'high politics' rival. In a short but somewhat formidable Preface he writes:

> Politics properly understood is not an end in itself but a response to social relationships. My approach has therefore been to concentrate in the early chapters on exploring those relationships and in the later ones on the endeavours to which they gave rise.

The result, particularly in the first half of the book, is very impressive. It is also engaging. Macintyre has touch as well as scholarship and he wears them both lightly.

His skills are apparent in an early chapter called "Some Australians", which reminds us that nothing in history is so revealing or central as lives lived. The Anglophile empire-builder, Richard Gardiner Casey, senior, began his life as a jackaroo and ended up in a South Yarra mansion where he "bought his cigars 500 at a time and his wine by the hundred dozen; he was in the habit of sending friends *beche de mer*, half a hundred weight at a time with instructions on how to make it into a soup." There is an equally irresistible vignette of Deborah Turnbull, a female Bert Facey, whose life was miserable by any measure other than her own. Equally indefatigible, George Dutton lived with unflinching dignity in the nether world between Aboriginal and white Australia. Dutton's story, even in this abbreviated form, adds a little to the theory that the Australian legend is part Aboriginal.

Macintyre also draws a portrait of William Somerville, who tramped the roads in the 1890s depression. By unceasing application to self-improvement Somerville wound up in several influential public positions, including Senator of the University of Western Australia—which place, he assured the Premier, he would "guard . . . as a university for the working man".

Finally there is John Shaw Nielsen, who knew as much about work and poverty as any of the others here, and who spoke for all of them (possibly even for Casey): "Down in that poor country no pauper was I."

It is disappointing to discover how infrequently these tantalising lives intersect the later narrative. Nevertheless they draw us in and, at the same time, provide a tangible, flesh and blood dimension to those relationships in society which Macintyre is always at pains to stress. It is partly a matter of fine writing and mastery of his material, but Macintyre also keeps the book alive by anecdotes (including some very funny ones) and the use of unpublished theses.

It is extraordinary how rapidly the book loses pace when it is not fed by this sort of material; for Macintyre has a problem, the necessity to convey so much of the old and familiar business. It changes gear, if you like, when the Oxford History takes over Macintyre's History.

If there is a single dynamic at work in this account of the first forty years of the Australian Commonwealth, it is the contest between popular aspiration and the imposed and immutable facts of Australian life. Frederic Eggleston saw those aspirations realized in "graceful social ideals and happy amenities of life . . . almost unique chivalry for the weak in the economic sphere . . . native generosity and hospitality." Significantly, Eggleston was writing from Britain shortly after the Great War. He was furious at the self-deprecating reports being sent to London by the Australian secretary of the Round Table. Of all the immutable facts shutting out Australian vision, none was more resistant than the relationship with Britain.

So much was compromised by the unshakeable British connection—financially, politically, culturally. What is more, it undermined the regard in which Australians held—and hold—their achievements. It remains a remarkable and disconcerting fact of Australian history and Australian life that the vision and exertion which produced such sentiments in a man like Eggleston are so feebly esteemed. Macintyre's brilliant account of the new Commonwealth is a reminder of the higher purposes, as well the follies, which went into the making of the nation. Those ideals have not been recited for decades. Come the year 2001 the population will have to discover them if the centenary of the Commonwealth is to be observed—and that, presumably, will depend on how much credibility and money is left after the convict landing is celebrated next year.

The sentiments of those days, when the phrase "our religion is humanity" laid claim to be a part of the prevailing ethos, are now pretty well unknown. (On the other hand Beatrice Webb was talking modern political language when she said of George Reid: "He watches public opinion like a stock jobber watches the market".) It is not that the people rejected the 'fair and reasonable' ideals of the first decade of the century, rather that they were never established as points of political reference. Had they been, we might have had a clearer view and a more enlivened debate about our limitations, including the limits of our sovereignty.

By the 1930s tugging the forelock in Britain's direction was instinctual. Half way through a reading of this book depression sets in and, if the country is out of it by the time Singapore falls, the reader is not.

It remains to wonder at two or three things. The photograph of Joe Lyons, for instance, with Enid in front of him and before her a conga line of offspring. And why, with one or two exceptions, the rest of photos are so familiar and uninspired? Finally, why did someone not knock out the last sentence? How could a book as good as this be allowed to end with, "Time would show the outcome of his hopes"? Was it intended as an encouragement to buy volume five?

Don Watson, freelance historian, has been working on the musical version of Manning Clark's History.

Hobart, Fremantle and Brisbane Lines

Graham Rowlands

Edith Speers: *By Way of a Vessel* (Twelvetrees Publishing Company, P.O. Box 109, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005, $9.95).

Shane McCauley: *Deep-Sea Diver* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $12).

Thomas Shapcott: *Travel Dice* (University of Queensland Press, $7.95).

Michael Sariban: *A Formula for Glass* (University of Queensland Press, $7.95).

Edith Speers isn't an acquired taste. You must have the taste already. If you prefer Joyce to Lawrence, James to Tolstoy and, say, R. A. Simpson to Anne Elder, you won't like Speers. I like her first collection immensely.

The poet's views are radical, even extreme. By selecting and juxtaposing certain poems, an anthologist could make her sound even more extreme. In "Can't They Think of Anything Else to Do?" she attacks wives and mothers for bellyaching about not becoming artists and/or achieving freedom. She also attacks them for *being* wives and mothers. By contrast, she works off grief at the death of her old billygoat by burying it herself:

> how often does it happen
> that you have to dig
> a deep hole in hard ground
> for the sake of something you love.

She lives with goats, ducks and chooks in the radical isolation of a small farm in southern Tasmania. Her life style authenticates her poetry. It's not a case of "I do, therefore I don't have to teach". It's more a case of "I do, therefore I teach, preach, berate and rub the reader's nose in it". All of it. Indeed, without the life style, there might *be* no poetry.

Her views are uncompromising and uncompromised. Her philosophy is simply that something is better than nothing. So her description of a lover as a Black Hole is the ultimate putdown. She doesn't like animals more than people. It's just that she doesn't complain about animals while she always complains about people. Even so, she thinks suicide a waste. It's nothing. As a trained biochemist without any notion of ritual sacrifice, she treats all meat with equal curiosity—pimples, loose anuses at death, beheaded drakes, squashed native animals. Fucking slugs are her idea of a lyric while wasps sting with her (and their) obvious Darwinism:

> Wasp jaws
> are guillotines;
> given time,
> not even plastic
> can withstand them.
> And unlike
> the kamikaze bee-sting
> when the wasp fights
> she survives
> to sting, and sting again.

Most of the poems really *move*. Sometimes they're narratives; sometimes they're arguments. With their consistently strong endings, they're always her loud voice demanding attention. Except for a few pieces using landscape and/or astrology, she writes a poetic rhetoric that includes abstract words while remaining colloquial. Her repetition, accumulation and exaggerated imagery are often funny. The first stanza of "Is a Duck Really Worth It?" is typical:

> Yes;
> though in fact it was two drakes
> I thought would die of boredom
> before the inevitable axe
> severed the supply
> of wheat and water.

Shane McCauley's second collection is attractive and intriguing. There are some outstanding poems. Even the mediocre ones contain striking lines or images. And there are only a few duds.

This range of quality is achieved across a large range of subjects. The poet works intensively at Australia's historical and geographical place. Hence, a concentration on military history. He works intensively at magic in numerous guises—both ancient and modern, obvious and obscure, earthly and cosmic. And he's the kind of poet who's likely to write a stylish poem about sex, the Impressionists, vallota, Cholet, Socrates' death or a bull's. About *anything*.

"The Australian Walrus" is a clear-eyed view of an old Ocker. "Poles in a Pub" exposes an ethnic sentimentality about counter-revolution that's as sentimental as the old One Day of the Year. "Vietnam Reminiscence" and "The Blinding" evoke vivid details of military action, and "Dardanelles Spring" is self-explanatory:

> If we'd all raised a hand
> To catch a bullet, the lot of us—sixty men,
> The remaining three of eleven officers—
> Would have been home for an
> Australian spring.

In the amusing "Modern Warlock" the sorcerer was retrenched because of technology and is looking for

a job, for a "quiet and unenchanted life". Much of the rest of the book, however, is determined to show the *presence* of enchantment. "The Beast" connects magic with drugs, cards, crime and astrology. "An Arcane Comedy" is a suite of ten poems. They're certainly arcane. Whether or not they're comic depends on how much the reader feels he or she is supposed to see through the characters and how much the reader feels the *poet* sees through them. Methinks he's half in love with this circus of an Oriental King Lear. Magic seems to run through (yes, through) his fools, hermits, wheels of fortune, hanged men and the universe itself. In the title poem, the poet as deep-sea diver thinks he mightn't return to the surface. He might pull the plug on the oceans from outside the universe. Call it narcosis, death, insanity. Or magic:

> What seems a rose, a pile of bones,
> The leaves of the sea, and
> At last shrug, something chained,
> Needing only a little strength
>
> Barnacled, a vast and yielding plug.

Dividing Thomas Shapcott's thirteenth collection into his objective and subjective poems is a crude distinction. But useful. It's the poet who has chosen certain areas for objective treatment. To that extent, they're subjective. Similarly, the subjective poems aren't simply fantasies. They involve times, places and other people. To that extent, they're objective. Even with these qualifications, however, the objective/subjective division is clear.

The division has advantages and disadvantages.

The objective method works very well in poems of historical Europe and Europeans, although it's not confined to this area. The dramatic monologues by Janacek, Franz Mozart and pro-Kanaka cane farmers are most effective. In "Three Toronto Zoo Poems" the reader has a vivid visual evocation of Barbary sheep, black squirrels and bison. There's no comment. In the superb "Hyde Park" he intrudes only two words:

> Near me, a family sits on the park bench:
> the father sighs, rips the wrapper off
> an ice and throws it behind him onto the grass.
> There is a bin right here, the fine mentioned
> One Hundred Pounds. Adjacent, in the stiff
> rotunda a group of kids break the deckchairs.

Although he doesn't say so, this is where Britain now stands in terms of its history. The four sections of "Metropolitan Museum Pictures" are detailed visual and psychological interpretations. Again, no comment. He has had trouble with historical material in earlier work. He's now in command.

Shapcott's deliberate intrusion works very well in certain poems that really require it—and in some others. "Black Cat" is the best of his separation sequence. The story of marriage and children is told via the cat and its death which clawed at "our exposed parts". The line "Our children are the children of black cat" is stunning. Although it contains some objective material, the "Life Taste" sequence is a lively and tolerant portrayal of marriage in middle age. In "Turning Fifty" he returns to his lifelong love of music and music history to consider where Schoenberg and Webern were at his age. The following lines are quite personal:

> Genes hold the trump card though I have
> invented myself continuously. When I was fifteen
> I had a sharp tongue and did everything myself
> because nobody in my family understood.
> My daughter makes her own way with the gestures
> of her great-grandmother.

The disadvantage of objectivity is that the reader will want more—more introduction, interpretation and evaluation. Readers' responses will depend on degrees of knowledge. And readers can't know everything. Still, there will always be some who know that they want more than the clicking of a poetic Nikon.

The disadvantage of subjectivity is that it can introduce trivia and self-indulgence. There's 'too much' of "Instructions on Moving", even if Shapcott concedes this. Moreover, the Greek poems are quite inferior to his other travel poems. They're about tourism; not Greece.

The sexual poems scattered throughout the book encapsulate the objective/subjective division. The objective pieces are perfect, but don't reveal enough; "Peter Foggon", which reveals enough, is the least stylish poem.

Michael Sariban's second collection is good, but too long. It promises almost everything, only to sag in the middle before living up to some of its promise. Editors and publishers must expect *some* readers to turn the pages in order.

The first section covers the poet's World War Two German childhood via memory and return visit. The second section drives around Brisbane and adjacent coastlines. It's hard to know what more could be expected of twenty-two short poems. His imagery of nature is as vividly particular as his visual imagery of cities. His notion of history encompasses change in human constructions *and* nature. Sometimes this historical view results in no more than an arresting angle of vision; at other times, it includes the obliteration of buildings, cities, political systems and history itself. These poems are characterized by wit, irony, knowledge, intelligence. And some savagery. They're written with style and precision. The main stanza of a poem about a famous provincial ballroom's demolition exemplifies most of the above:

"I give you:"
(no, words fail me,
one slide is worth—)
Damn, I'll try again:
"I give you history in stone,
here today, yes, gone—"
All right. The pictures win.
There's time for a final giggle.
I give you: Cloudland, skyline dancehall,
wedged pink against the cloudless blue,
a giant Botticelli shell
flipped arse-over to disgorge
each season's Venus,
its plaster and its prim Corinthians
improbable among the gum trees
from which it rears like a white pointer snapping.

No Parthenon. The tone is perfect.

In latter sections there are too many pages that lack these combined qualities. The obvious exceptions are "Snakes" and "Monet". The former is a frightening daydream; the latter presents Monet as almost physically ravenous for admirers.

The final section evokes and analyses a wide range of grief *attitudes* towards the dying and death of his wife at thirty-eight. There's a fine balance between emotion and intellect. Sariban stresses last looks, touches, kisses, even fingerprints—without mawkishness. He tries to go *into* death without wanting to die. He remains a spectator. He finds no metaphysical dimension. Indeed, his living wife (the life in his wife's body) is his only spiritual experience. She dies. It dies. In "God on a Saline Drip" the bored nursing sister tells God that his by-pass surgery has failed, while God tries to explain what it's like to be "on the edge/staring into nothing". Thus Spoke Sariban.

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Howl

Serge Liberman

Morris Lurie: *Whole Life—An Autobiography* (McPhee Gribble, $19.95).

Morris Lurie's autobiography *Whole Life* is a howl. Not the howl of laughter that the reader who sees Lurie as a humorist may expect; but rather a howl of anguish, of agony, of the most exquisite pain that comes from being repeatedly kicked in the guts by almost everyone within kicking reach.

The title *Whole Life* is something of a misnomer, for the book deals with but half of the narrator's life, his childhood, extending from the period of his earliest recollections to the time of his parents' deaths within two months of each other when the author himself was twenty-three. What would appear true, however—even if at bottom it is a truism applicable to all—is that those years have made Lurie, as adult, what he is; they have sown the seeds for the acrimonious, seething and virulent hate towards his family—and, one suspects, against himself—that he is later to feel and, through his writing and his twice-weekly psychiatric sessions, to seek to exorcise; and, the exorcism perhaps achieved, they return to him, those years, in a perspective where that howl which is earlier manifested as anguish and pain is, at forty-eight, transmuted into an understanding, into pity perhaps, and into a grieving lament for his parents' "dumbness, [for] their blindness, [for] their unfeeling stupidity".

Quite early on in the book, one has an uncomfortable feeling of *déjà vu*. Lurie is taking the reader yet again into family cupboards become so familiar through stories such as, say, "My Father: A Selected Listing of His Faults", or "Bobbeh", or "Zaydeh", or "Place". With allowances, the same unpleasant, unattractive, embarrassing, irremediably-benighted cast appears: the father, incorrigibly oafish, slack and slovenly, coarse, inveterately philistine, ever abusive and cuttingly critical, and physically hurting even when giving fatherly attention—in sum a leering, foul-mouthed, farting boor with a penchant for knives and razors and bellowing tenors; the grandfather, Zaydeh, a thin, irascible, basically loveless sadist with a white face, a small grey beard, and hard, bony, dry, cold hands, who boards with the family as a "resident sponge", and for whom, when he dies, Lurie feels not the slightest consideration, let alone grief; an older sister who, in her cantankerousness and crabbiness against him, is scarcely more likeable; and Bobbeh, the grandmother, his mother's mother, living elsewhere, who is cold and hard and curtly dismissive of Morris and his sister when they visit; not to mention the family's wider family and visitors and friends who prove no less obtuse and insensitive to young Morris as a boy, and the customary school and neighborhood ruffians who bedevil every child's tortuous path to adulthood.

If there is any person at all who emerges in some way as positive and redeeming in this menage of warpedness, it is the mother, the servant, the "miraculous servant", "a treasure", "a jewel": "words don't exist properly to describe her".

In fact, words do exist. A perusal of *Proverbs* xxxi, 10-31 that tells of the *"eshet chayil"*, the woman of worth, would describe her to a T—the wife and mother, the housekeeper/cook, the seamstress, the market stall-keeper, the coaxing hostess, the woman who is forever doing, working, serving, slaving, saving, providing, caring, seeing to it that the family never borrows, never owes, never rents, never wastes,

one whose works praise her in the gates. But, against this, even she has little actual time for her boy, and the most of intimacy she will allow is "a smile, perhaps a kiss too . . . but if a kiss, then only a kiss of quickest lips to briefest cheek, an instant, no more, a token, a touch." One is led, despite oneself, to wonder if there was something wrong with the young Morris that made him attract so many proverbial kicks in the guts. Certainly, while often wronged, he shows few qualities of intellect or character or sensibility that would render him particularly endearing.

This notwithstanding, all the characters appearing here have, in one guise or other, been encountered before in Lurie's stories. So much so that, more than once, his earlier anecdotal narratives or vignettes have come, with this reader, to be seen as neurotic, obsessive-compulsive, driven attempts at catharsis. It is scarcely surprising then that Lurie has, after so many fragmented efforts elsewhere to tell his story, finally brought his characters and his anguish and his constantly-repeated search for, and hankering after, acceptance into a complete, rounded, unified tale.

That, during his parents' life, Lurie never achieved this acceptance nor, for that matter, encouragement nor understanding forms the central tragedy of the narrative, as also of Lurie's own existence, a tragedy that in his other works is transmuted into bitter-sweet or black, deflectingly sardonic humor. Where in this book he departs from his earlier writings is in the fact that, as the saying goes, he lets it all out. Humor is at high premium. There is little – nothing – to laugh at. Rather, even while using, or recycling, the same material that earlier might have given cause for mirth, here he is all rage, all fury, all venom, raw and hot and malignant. The very prose in its haste, hurtling forward with spilling, tumbling, cascading fragmentedly-staccato passion-laden sentences underlines the intensity of his rage. He must unburden himself – he cannot help it; he must let go; must rid himself of the demons that have for so long been rankling in his being.

But Lurie departs from his earlier stories in another, more telling, way. He both discovers acceptance, and has learnt to accept as well. True, the acceptance he discovers is in the imagination; it takes the form of a vision. In it, he sees himself as part of a jazz quintet – significantly, as an equal among peers, where earlier, he has always been squeezed aside, pushed away, a *pisher*, not important, forgotten, ignored – a quintet in which, what is more, he plays all the instruments while his parents sit in the Town Hall auditorium, listening. Where at first they are, true to life, either critical, begrudging or uncomprehending, they gradually come around to beginning to appreciate that something that their son does might in fact be good, that he might have gifts, and that, as an extrapolation from a remark his mother makes elsewhere in the book, "*eppes velt sein von em*", something will yet become of him.

Still more important is that reciprocal acceptance of his parents as well. For some twenty years after their deaths, in what he perceives as vengeance, he has not troubled to visit their graves. When, on impulse, he does, driven to the cemetery where they are buried in a mood to piss on their graves – he is by this time himself a parent – he is moved instead to weep for them (and to weep too on to the page as he recounts the scene), and to grieve for their dumb, blind and stupid lives, and to reflect – ironically? reverentially perhaps? – that his father's name Arie is Hebrew for lion, while Esther, his mother's namesake, was the beautiful Jewish woman who pleaded with her king and stopped the wicked minister (Hommon) and saved her people.

Given his stated aim – "to investigate why I am what I am" – Lurie succeeds well enough, though what he would appear to refer to is what he is in his emotional dimension. That he had a creative side as an adolescent is hinted at through his artistic imitation of the comics that he read – rendered more definitively and picturesquely in an earlier story "My Greatest Ambition". Further he betrays an evolving antipathy towards things Jewish, such antipathy being, one supposes, his protest at his father's hypocrisy, at having daily after-school Jewish lessons forced upon him at the local *Talmud Torah* (where he appears to have learnt very little), as also at being dragged to synagogue on the Sabbath by his tyrannical grandfather who would not only not permit him to look up, but compelled him to follow with his finger in a prayer-book of which the young Lurie understood not a single word.

But there is more to a personality, there is more to a "whole life" than these. And one learns little of any intellectual interests Lurie may have had, or of any outward-directed ideological, or political, or literary, or social (if any) wider influences and concerns. There does come a time, after all, when the child outgrows his three-wheelers and his toy soldiers and his comics, and other interests born of an awakening, broadening, deepening awareness subsume their place. Even jazz is not enough, and there is little sense of Lurie acknowledging that anything exists outside his own domain that might stir a considered opinion, a reflection upon the world, or a particular way of viewing that world, whether as it is or in relation to himself.

As a consequence, for all its fury and engagement and its concluding lingering poignancy that make the skin verily creep, Lurie's *Whole Life* to this reviewer comes across ultimately as an exercise in both solipsism and exorcism. What this reader who, let it be said, owns to a very personal knowledge and recognition of just such characters as Lurie portrays, is moved to

hope for is that Lurie will, at long last, having divested himself of his demons, cease so obsessively to contemplate his own navel, and that he will turn his powerfully evocative talents to issues outside the proverbial teacup that in this world more truly matter.

Serge Liberman is the author of three collections of stories— On Firmer Shores, A Universe of Clowns *and* The Life That I Have Led*—and compiler of* A Bibliography of Australian Judaica.

Editor's Choice

Overland receives many books of interest which it is not possible to review in full. Among these are:

Samuel Clyde McCulloch: *River King: The McCulloch Carrying Company and Echuca (1865-1898)*, available from Archives Board of Management, University of Melbourne, $9.95. The first detailed examination of the vast mass of riverboat papers discovered in 1948 in an Echuca loft, an event described by Allan Morris in the very early issues of Overland. Sam McCulloch, an Australian exiled at the University of California, has skilfully illuminated his family's participation in this important trade.

Len Fox: *E. Phillips Fox and his Family*, Alternative Publishing Co-operative, PO Box 146, Chippendale N.S.W., $21.50 and $12. A delightfully-produced small book of 148 pages on this well-known Australian artist, largely informed by family memories and memorabilia—the artist was the writer's uncle. A most readable account not only of Phillips Fox but of a remarkable family prominent also in literature and the law; and the book has much of relevance to the Jewish contribution to Australian life. It is gracefully written and well illustrated.

Asterisk (R. J. A. G. Fletcher): *Isles of Illusion* (Century paperback, $16.95). Barry Humphries first drew this extraordinary book to our attention, in its original 1923 edition. 'Asterisk' arrived in the New Hebrides in 1912, bored with English school-teaching, and these are letters he wrote back home to a friend in the subsequent eight years of physical and psychological attrition, hating Australians, despising the native people (yet gradually seduced by them), contemptuous of Europe and very often of himself. There is probably nothing in the history of White contact with Pacific cultures which so conveys the tensions, hates and loves it resulted in. A work of searing and distressing honesty.

Kirsti Jenkins-Smith: *Heard Island Odyssey*, available from HIDI-Y, PO Box 90, Norfolk Island 2899 for $14.50. This book almost creates a new category of literature for itself, the anti-adventure story. It is the candid story of an amateur radio and scientific expedition to Heard Island in 1983 and may be read, not only as an unusual contribution to Australian Antarctic writing, but also as a case-study in How to Not Go About Organising an Expedition. Refreshingly non-heroic.

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STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Against all sorts of dire warnings from funding bodies, and no doubt hard times for most of us, we are struggling to keep our head above water, as usual but more so. A most helpful response from readers to our earlier remarks on this, in fact a total of $2964.60 in donations. Many thanks to: $1000, ANON.; $200, K.& A.I.; $125, A.S.; $100, E.D., P.McL., L.W.; $80, R.M.C., K.S.; $60, J.D.; $50, P.L., A.L.A., M.D.; $30, F.F., J.L., D.N., G.T., D.B., J.H., G.B., L.& G.R.; $20, D.R., R.R., N.C., D.O'H., S.B.; $15, B.L.; $10, R.B., M.L., R.H., S.D., K.S., D.D., T.M., P.H., J.MacG., P.G., D.C., A.B., R.F., R.D., R.C., J.MacG., M.M., V.C., S.McC., I.P., A.W., J.B., J.P., A.McG., A.H., L.B., J.R., F.B., J.H., G.M., J.McK., J.D., M.H., F.V., D.& K.W., O.J.; $8, B.W.; $6, M.C.; $5, K.M., P.G., B.H., M.E., L.E., J.S., G.V., W.W., R.M., P.F., H.S., B.B., A.L., H.N., J.W., D.McN., G.B., P.H., G.L., G.S., W.B., M.D., M.N., W.P., J.L., P.R., J.C., J.A., B.R., J.R., R.A., R.G., D.D., G.M., J.G., J.W., G.P., M.G., D.R., D.& B.E., J.B., H.F., O.P., L.B.; $4, R.O.; $2, J.P., M.B., L.A., D.W.

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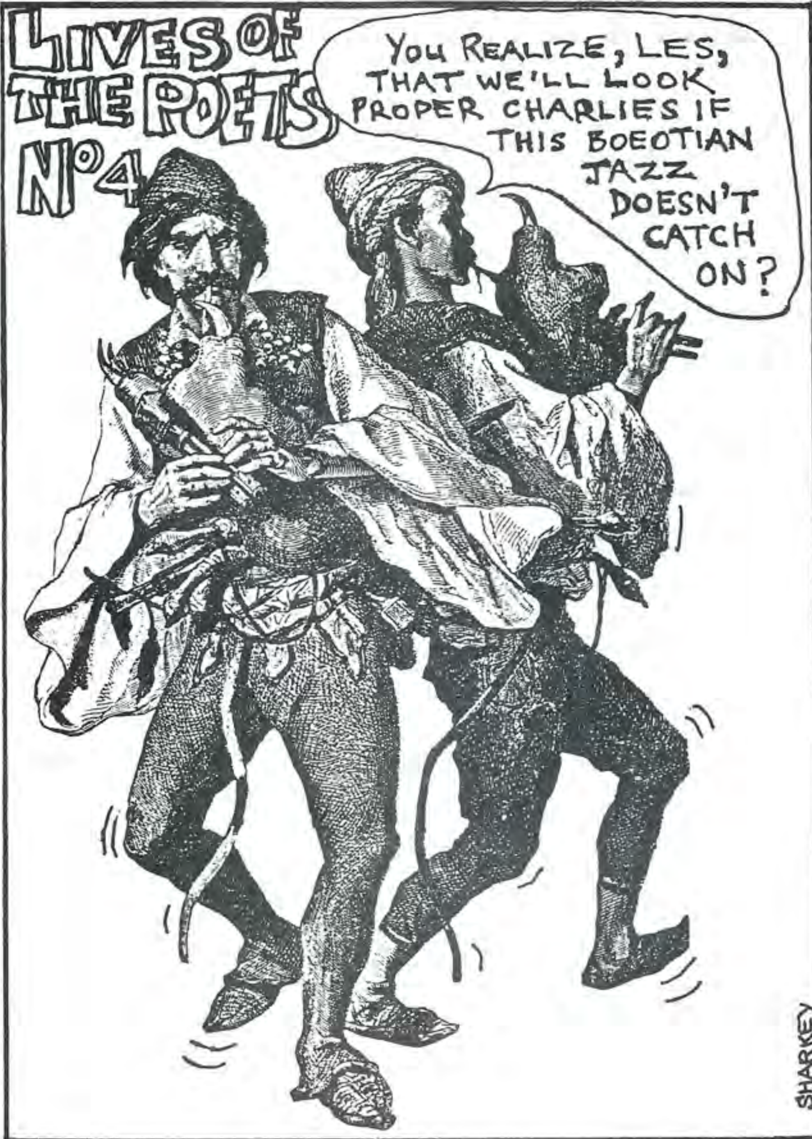

Michael Sharkey