

overland

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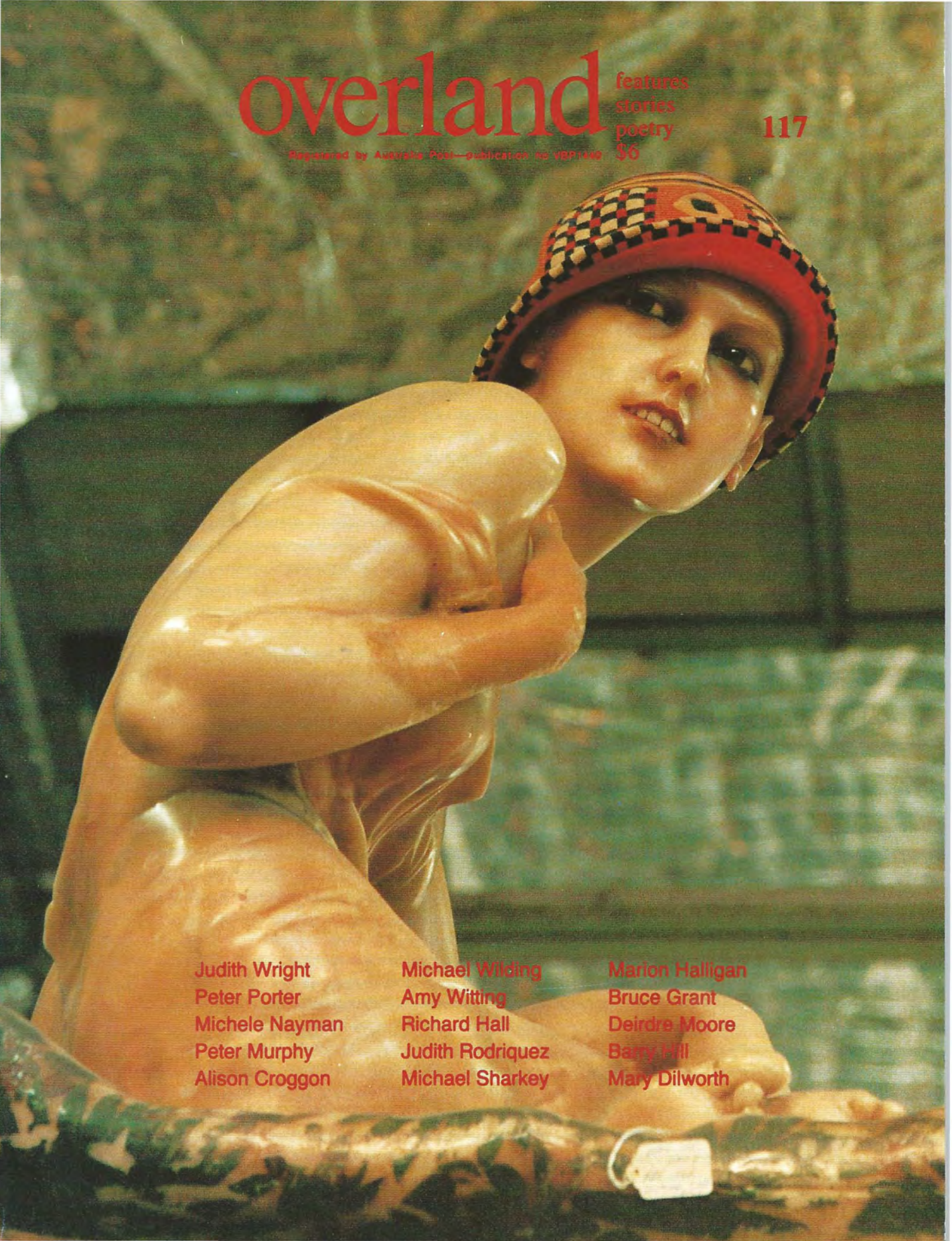
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Judith Wright
Peter Porter
Michele Nayman
Peter Murphy
Alison Croggon

Michael Wilding
Amy Witting
Richard Hall
Judith Rodriguez
Michael Sharkey

Marion Halligan
Bruce Grant
Deirdre Moore
Barry Hill
Mary Dilworth



“As she explores the frailty of emotional experience, Farmer places her characters in a luminous domain of elemental sensual experience . . . [her] eye for detail and sensitivity to nuance distinguish her as a very fine writer indeed.”

Cassandra Pybus,
Island Magazine

Beverley Farmer

A BODY OF WATER

“This new writing: I want it to be an interweaving of visual images more open, loose and rich, and free of angst. And if I keep a notebook this time as I go, it will grow side by side with the stories, like the placenta and the baby in a womb.”

The technical virtuosity of this exciting new work is a major advance for Beverley Farmer. As well as presenting five beautifully developed and complete stories in the inimitable style of *Milk and Home Time*, she also incorporates the day-by-day ideas and influences that sustain and nourish her creative output.

Like a body of water fed by many sources yet remaining whole and self-contained, the text draws on journal, notebook, story, poem, tribute and criticism to produce an astonishingly powerful, many-layered montage. It lays bare the creative process, the connection between text and context, experience and art. The resonant, fugal writing, with its mutability and shifting focus, engages the reader on different planes of awareness to generate a multitude of challenges and responses.

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These were the great days for poets. The heroic days. The days of myth. When the clock was always at quarter to three in the morning. They rolled on the pavements like alchemical twins, breaking each others' heads into the awaiting concrete. They howled their way through plate glass doors and windows. Their blood congealed. Their cars caught fire. When their clothes were taken they wore their neckties. Naked meant honest, as in lunch, dead, cop. For emperor's new clothes they wore sombreros and smoking jackets. They brandished machine guns and straddled mustangs. They shot themselves and others, possessed explosives, attempted assassination, did smash and grabs, died from dirty needles. Waste not, want not, drug poems, prison poems, to say nothing of the madhouse. Nothing will be said of the madhouse.

He was a policeman with the soul of a poet. Or a poet with the soul of a policeman. And who is to say which had priority? A literary agent who could book you. Some people grew moustaches, long hair, shark's tooth medallions, sun glasses, key rings at the hip, the janitorial touch, the pay roll guards. 'This is your cover,' they said, giving him a jacket with his picture on the back. 'Start a magazine,' they said, 'get funding from the bored. Make it glossy, sticky, tacky, everyone will want to get into your pages, we'll supply the boys and girls.' They always supplied the boys and girls. 'Then you print the poems and the boys or girls say how they dig the poems and then they get to screw the poets. That's the only way we can be sure to get the poets screwed. Mediated through art.'

He would have preferred it if they'd paid for sex but this was bohemia and he was told that love like verse had to be free. 'But you can deal a little dope,' they said, 'they'll pay for that, get them hooked, that would be a service. Like the massage parlour girls, get them hooked, make them pay back their earnings for dope. You supply the dope so they can write the sort of stoned shit you publish in the magazine,' they said. 'And you get to introduce the chicks,' they said, 'you'll be the M.C. as it were. Macho Chap. You heard of the big banana and the big potato and the big

pineapple, well you're the big stud and you don't even have to wear a collar.'

There were poets declaiming Rimbaud in the café noirs, revolution was plotted in their cups and recorded in the potted palms. Coups were conceived over the cheesecake and captured in the kitchen. There were poets' balls, barbecues of skewered kidneys, acid in the punch, sexual harassment institutionalized and licensed. There were anthologies of desire and manifestoes of will. Proclamations of ego and performances of id. Speaking in tongues, computerized address lists, minimum fees, cash enslavement, questionnaires on the lone and level sands. State your poetics, stare your politics. The poetry of pure sound.

The logic required whole huts of poets writing out material for him. For when he became famous. Success might catch him up. A book. Another book, they demand another book, follow it up. He put his mind to the organizational problems. Translations from the Italian. Get the semioticians to programme the poetry machine. Telepathic theft. All he had to do was get some telepathine and that wasn't difficult.

'Nothing's too difficult for us,' they told him. They had their men out there, combing the hairs of the jungle for telepathine. 'Invite the writers round,' they said, 'feed them chemicals allowing easy transfer of information and plunder their word hoard.' The first experiment made him sick. The psyches.

'So how do I write it?' he said. 'There has to be a better way.'

'We'll send you the lines,' they said, 'install a telex, we've got a line service, we send lines all round the world, we'll fax you.'

'But then they'll know they're not mine.'

'No they won't, they never read, poets never read other people's poetry and the public doesn't read it at all. Anyway, we only send any given set of lines to one person per major language group, more or less.'

'What if they get translated?' he said.

'They'll sound different. That's the point about poetry, it's not what you say but the way you say it, as they say.'

'But what about what you say, though?'

'Well, you don't say very much, it's all a matter of style. The less you say the better, really.'

'Ah,' he said.

'That's right,' they said, 'a sound poem.'

He tried it again, 'ah.'

'Well done,' they said. 'Least said, soonest mended. Never overdo the content, that's how you tell a subversive, by the content.'

'What sort of content?' he said.

'Any sort of content,' they said. 'Just content's subversive in itself.'

'Protection,' he said.

'Protection,' they said.

'So if I deal the dope?'

'Protection,' they said. 'As long as we supply it.'

'Of course,' he said. 'I wouldn't dream of dealing with anyone else.'

'Don't do it either,' they said.

'What about poems?'

'What about poems?'

'Protection for bad poems.'

'That's your look out,' they said. 'We'll fix the reviews but in the day to day fisticuffs of the poets' café, you're on your own. But if they kill you for your bad verses, we'll revenge you,' they said. 'Never fear, if they get you, we'll get them, don't worry about it.'

'Thanks,' he said.

'You're welcome,' they said. 'Don't mention it. We'd be glad of a chance to off a few poets if you disappear. Writing about civil rights and human rights and land rights and race riots and wars and rumours of war and conspiracies. Some of them need to be done over every once in a while, hey man, have some of this superdope, what a blast, sprayed with skunk oil, guaranteed to drive everyone away from you for six months; no man, we can't have that old skunk-oil smoker on the programme, he's just too much.'

But this was all low level stuff. His poet's soul wanted more job satisfaction. He studied the aesthetics of it. Get the right recipe and funding will flow. He rebelled

against traditional forms. He developed an insignia of the modern. It seemed radical but looked at in the right light it was all right. 'Just challenge the old, the established, the traditional literary order. We've got our chaps there, we need you with the enemy. What the old money won't publish through their traditional firms and established quarterlies is yours.' And when he was on his own, or better still when he had people round, so they could see him actually doing it, he would chisel out a poem or two. Or the odd line thereof. Written on the plaster of a broken arm or a broken wall. Or the frame of a painting, the ripped out title page of a book, a piece of bone or vellum. 'Would you like us to print up some menus?' they said, 'so you can create on them,' these men in button down shirts, watching their work being done.

So there was always dope around at his place, always chicks, sometimes they'd have a barbecue and roast a dead sheep or a side of an ox. Connections with the meat trade. But the troubadors always embellished the story, 'We drove out to the plains and caught one and hit it over the head till it died and put it in the boot of the car.' Just like getting chicks. Machismo like they promised, poet's license to kill, rape and shoplift with impunity.

It wasn't too bad being a poet. A different beat but the same old drummer. It didn't take too much time. Not many words. And no one cared anyway. No one needed to understand it. So it wasn't too bad. When you got into it you realized the possibilities of faction. Sexual play. With this poet's lady, and let him know. But a slip of the tongue. The oral tradition. Who's been sleeping in who's bed. 'I thought you guys had a liberated scene.' Get them stoned, get them pissed, bring them home and listen to the bastards. 'Here, smoke some of this supergrass and give us the full story.' A change from watching tv. Here you could write your own plots. Anyway, you could always watch tv at the same time, secure in the knowledge that everything was being taped anyway, he didn't even have to stay awake.

COMING IN OVERLAND 118 AUTUMN 1990

Eve Fesl and Eric Willmot on new Aboriginal Writing
 John Bryson on the William Golding trilogy
 Brian Matthews on Pretty Dulcie Markham
 Peter Steele on Australian autobiographies
 Stories by Lily Brett, Betty Birsky, Zeny Giles
 Poetry by Jean Kent, Tim Thorne, Shelton Lea,
 and much more

JOHN HIRST

Australia's Absurd History:

a Critique of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism, with contradiction at its heart, has a great capacity for the absurd. Its exponents are now developing an absurdist history of Australia. This is how it runs: Once upon a time there was a small, inward looking, intolerant, racist Anglo-Celtic nation. It began to take migrants from Europe and then Asia. The migration program was an outstanding success. The nation turned into a diverse, open, tolerant society. The new migrants created the tolerance.

Where is the absurdity in this? That a nation which hated 'wogs' invited hundreds of thousands of Italians and Greeks to come to its shores? No, nations, like individuals, may under urgent necessity do what is distasteful to them. The rationale for the migration policy was to boost Australia's population and economy as a defence against a renewed threat from the north. Better the dark skinned Greek than the Japanese. No, the absurdity lies in the claim that the migrants created the tolerance. The more benighted and bigoted we make the Australian people of the 1940s, the less likely it is that the migration program would have had a successful outcome. If the Anglo-Celts were so bad—and in the current demonology there is no-one worse than an Anglo-Celt circa 1940—why did they not savagely oppress and permanently marginalise the incoming strangers, a process all too common and very easy to accomplish?

But if the strangers are numerous and carry with them a very different value system, could they then not have a transforming effect on the host society? The migrants were certainly numerous and over a short time constituted a reasonably high proportion of the old population, but they were not of one sort; they came from a number of different countries and were notoriously intolerant of each other. If Greeks and Turks, Serbs and Croats, Arabs and Jews live in peace in Australia, it is not because they brought tolerance with them. Let us abandon absurdity and explore a commonsense hypothesis: that the migration scheme has been a success because the roots of the tolerance lay in the society which invited the migrants to join it.

Multiculturalism makes ethnic origin into destiny.

So at the last census Australians were asked about their ancestry and encouraged not to answer 'Australian'. Even those whose families have been here for five or six generations were meant to declare a European ancestry. As with individuals, so with society. In the eyes of multiculturalists Australian society of the 1940s, 150 years after first settlement, is adequately described as Anglo-Celtic. At least this acknowledges that the people of Australia were Irish and Scots as well as English, but it has nothing more substantial than a hyphen joining them. In fact a distinct new culture had been formed. English, Scots and Irish had formed a common identity—first of all British and then gradually Australian as well. In the 1930s the historian W. K. Hancock could aptly describe them as Independent Australian Britons.

To say that the Australians were more British than the British carries more of the truth than is usually realized. Britishness was not a very strong identity in Great Britain itself. The heartland of the United Kingdom was England and the English thought of themselves as English and only on the rare occasions when they wanted to be polite to the Scots did they use the term 'British'. In Australia the pressure of the Scots and especially of the Irish forced the abandonment of 'English' as the identity of the colonies in favour of British. The Irish of course could still bridle at a British identity even when it included them as equals. In time, with the passing of the first generation born in Ireland and the growth of a distinctively Australian interpretation of Britishness, they were prepared to accept it. The Irish had done well in Australia and saw the solution to the Irish problem at home, the adoption of self-government within the empire, the system which had worked so well in the colonies.

Multiculturalists pride themselves on their respect for the identity people give themselves. They tell us that if Greeks want to call themselves Greeks, they should be referred to as such and not as Greek-Australians, still less as New Australians. In calling Australians of the 1940s and their descendants 'Anglo-Celts' multiculturalists depart from their own rule. This

term has not been used by these people to describe themselves.¹ They were proud that they had constrained particular ethnic identities and subsumed them into the broader terms of British and Australian. The imposition of 'Anglo-Celt' is the tyrannical arm of multiculturalism. I find the term offensive.

The Irish were present in large numbers from the beginning of European settlement in Australia. Hence Australian society as it was forming had to accommodate the antagonism of Catholic and Protestant which had torn Europe apart and still poisoned relations between England and Ireland. If the Church of England, established by law and funded by compulsory contributions from all, was transferred intact to Australia, the old battles would begin again. We owe it to a liberal governor of New South Wales, a Protestant Irishman, that they did not. In 1836 Governor Bourke decided if there were to be established churches, all three of the great divisions of Christianity within Britain should be established. He would allot public funds on the same terms to the Church of England, the Catholic Church and the Presbyterians. This amazing measure was the clearest signal to the Irish that life in Australia was to be truly a new dispensation. A British government was financing the Roman heresy. The system worked well and was expanded to include any who wanted to join it—even Jews. It lasted in New South Wales until 1862, in Victoria until 1870. Those colonies then adopted the more orthodox liberal principle of complete separation of church and state which had been pioneered in this country by South Australia. Under either system the state was strictly neutral on an issue which could and did bitterly divide its people. This neutrality was policed with an eagle eye. All other distinctions between churches having been removed, the colonists argued bitterly over whether the Anglican bishop should take precedence at a government house levee over his Catholic brother.

Unlike in the United States and Canada, the English, Scots and Irish did not form separate enclaves. There was a remarkably even intermingling. This in itself suggests a high degree of toleration which was advanced further by the determination to keep sectarian rivalry out of community organisations. In the nineteenth century, hospitals, charities of all sorts, trade unions, friendly societies, sporting clubs, the mechanics institutes and the schools of arts which ran the libraries and the public halls—all these had Catholics and Protestants on their boards and among their members and clients and worked to keep them together. This was not easy. There was always low-level tension and sometimes spectacular brawls. Separate community organisations for Protestants and Catholics would have avoided this dissension, but threatened much worse.

In society at large public feuding between Protestant and Catholic occurred regularly and was sometimes

savage. Historians who search mindlessly for conflict latch on to such episodes as if they have discovered a Belfast or a Beirut. But this public feuding did not lead to polarisation at community level or residential segregation and it encouraged people of goodwill on both sides to redouble their efforts to neutralise the conflict. The commitment to avoid old-world divisions was much stronger than the desire to perpetuate them.

The worst sectarian violence in our history occurred in Melbourne in 1846 when Catholic and Protestant mobs fired on each other on the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne. But note the response. The colony's mini-parliament immediately passed a law banning processions held to commemorate festivals, anniversaries, or political events related to any religious or political differences between Her Majesty's subjects. Banners and music calculated to provoke animosity were forbidden. The poisonous cycle of demonstration and counter demonstration by which Northern Ireland keeps alive its troubled past was nipped in the bud. But all that colour gone from the streets! A disappointing outcome according to true multiculturalists who appear to believe that no social differences can be damaging, no matter how acute or passionately held they are—so long, of course, as all participating parties have access to a regularly updated multicultural policy statement.

The liberal hope for education was that children of all religions could come together in schools run by the state. Religion would still be taught. Either the regular teachers would teach a common Christianity—the essentials of the faith to be agreed on by all the churches—or clergymen of the different churches would be allowed to come to the schools to instruct their own children. The opponents of these schemes were the churches, or more precisely the clergy. The laity in general supported them. The only church finally which could sustain its opposition to these schemes was the one where clergy had most power over the laity—the Catholic. Here old world antagonisms could not be kept at bay.

The Catholic bishops and priests were Irish and judging by their Irish experience thought any state scheme of education must be designed to undermine their faith. They could not see that the governments of the British colonies of Australia were different from the Protestant English state which oppressed Ireland. The Catholics were a large minority, but not large enough to stop the liberal schemes of education. The Catholic opposition to these schemes made state education into a Protestant cause. This issue became the most divisive in nineteenth century Australia. The Catholic clergy set out to build their own schools and demanded that government money be granted to them. This was fiercely resisted. On the other hand the state rejected pressure to adopt some Protestant forms of instruction and worship in its schools. The state schools

remained strictly neutral. Some Catholic children continued to attend them.

This battle confirmed the widely held view, stronger probably among Protestants than Catholics, that the clergy were a grave threat to the development of a tolerant society in Australia. They had an interest in exaggerating the virtues of their own faith and the shortcomings of others. In some colonies clergy were prohibited from becoming members of parliament to reduce their opportunities for sowing discord. In community organisations it was impossible to have a single clergyman participating; there had to be representatives of all major denominations. The usual practice was to have none. To isolate the divisive force of religion was relatively easy since no one church had ever established its pre-eminence. Much more than in England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales the clergy were confined to their churches.

Class differences which became significant from the 1880s were accommodated in a similar way to religious differences.² At first sight Australia seems an unlikely place for strong class feeling to take root. In the late nineteenth century most of industry was still small-scale, living standards were the highest in the world, and workers did not experience the hauteur of an aristocracy or stigmatisation from a solid bourgeoisie. But doctrines of liberation galvanise best those who are more than half liberated already. Because the working class was better off and more self-confident they adopted more eagerly the new doctrines of socialism and aggressive trade unionism. These did not so much lead working men to concentrate a new hatred on their class enemies—for these seemed inconsequential—as encourage them to think that an improvement in their own lot and the transformation of society could be readily accomplished. This heady optimism was rapidly punctured. The largest employers—ship owners, mine owners and pastoralists—quickly developed their own organisations and when the unions blundered into a national strike in 1890 they were decisively defeated. During this struggle and the more desperate shearers' strikes of 1891 and 1894, employers were totally intransigent, police and troops were deployed by governments, on occasions strikers used or threatened violence, and some strike leaders were gaoled.

There was widespread dismay that social disruption and hatred of an old world intensity had broken out in the new. This was the mood in which the distinctively Australian response to class conflict emerged—the establishment of an arbitration court which would compulsorily settle industrial disputes. This did not end class conflict but it institutionalised it at a distance. The new disruption, which threatened so much, was declared to be amenable to the time-honoured procedure for dispute-settling, the law. Trade unionists accepted this regime because they were weakened by strikes and depression and because

the rapid success of their new Labor party gave them some guarantee that the state would not be used against them. The Left has criticised them ever since for transferring industrial conflict, which is meant to be the growth point of socialism, to the tribunals of the capitalist state. But it was a capitalist state of a special sort which enhanced the status of workers by treating them as litigants of equal standing with employers and made their wages and conditions a matter of regular official concern.

Class differences were ameliorated in another way. In face-to-face encounters Australians gradually dropped old-world formality and deference and spoke to each other as equals. This is an egalitarianism on which Australians have come to set great store. So far their historians have told them very little about how it came about.³ We know that complete equality in form of address was first practised on the goldfields when men of all conditions were dressed in workingmen's clothes and doing hard manual labour. Everyone was 'mate'. We do not know how long it took for this practice to spread to the rest of society. It is hard to imagine it proceeding any further than the point it has now reached where given names are used not only in casual but in formal encounters.

The success of the Labor Party depended on its ability to keep Protestant and Catholic workingmen together. Since the Irish were overwhelmingly working class, the numbers of Catholics and Protestants in the party were close to being equal, which made it very different from any other public body. From the beginning it committed itself unequivocally against taking sides in any religious matter. Despite the high proportion of Catholics among its members, it refused to take up the Catholic cause of funding for church schools. Following the split in the party over conscription during World War I, the Catholics became even more prominent. The church began to think it could pressure the party to deliver on funding for its schools. The Catholic parliamentarians resisted. A Catholic party contested the New South Wales 1920 election to teach the Labor Party the lesson that it could not have Catholic votes if it ignored Catholic causes—and failed disastrously. Catholic voters and parliamentarians had refused to be diverted from the main cause, the improvement of workers' conditions, and this involved working with people of other faiths or no faith.

The other great Australian institution of the twentieth century, the RSL, had to discipline itself closely if it were to keep old soldiers together. It had to avoid any party political or religious alignment. It could not take the easy option of ignoring religion altogether since it wanted a religious service to conclude the annual Anzac Day march. This was drawn up as a non-denominational service but the Catholic Church forbade its members to attend it which was its practice regarding any service not

conducted according to its own rites. Conscientious Catholics accordingly dropped out from the march toward its end. This always rankled with the RSL whose animating spirit was the desire to retain the camaraderie of war which had made all the differences of civilian life seem irrelevant. In 1938 the Victorian RSL faced up to the problem of bringing the religiously divided together, the theme of so much of our history. It was an extremely tricky issue: to win Catholic participation the service must be completely non-religious, but to drop all references to God at the behest of Catholics would outrage Protestants. The League devised a new civic service, but to show it was not anti-religion it encouraged churches to hold their own services on Anzac Day and the civic service itself was left open for religious use. There was to be a two minute silence—in which soldiers could pray according to their rights. There was even a hymn, 'Lead Kindly Light', a cunning choice this, written by a Catholic and not actually mentioning God. There were loud complaints from Protestant clergy at these changes, but they don't seem to have affected participation in the service. The Catholic Archbishop, Daniel Mannix, gave the new service his blessing and thanked the RSL for its consideration. For the first time Catholics and Protestants remembered their dead together.⁴

It is true that British Australia before World War II was intolerant of non-British migration, but it was expert in the modes of toleration. The old dinner party rule that religion and politics should not be discussed had been the principle on which the formation of civil society had proceeded. Matters which were known to be divisive had to be kept at a distance or subject to strict local quarantine. Civil society should not be shaped by religion or politics, but preserved against them. This explains both the decencies of our private and community life and the vacuousness of our public discourse. The contrast with the United States is complete. There religious and ethnic differences have firmly shaped community life and the commitment to equality and toleration is made in public discourse: the noble words of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

The reasons for the success of the migration program should now be apparent. Migrants had to suffer personal abuse and suspicion, but Australian society, except in its treatment of Aborigines, is uneasy with sustained and systematic social exclusion. Its instincts are inclusive. As one migrant reports "Australians did not especially like 'foreigners' but they disliked drawing attention to themselves by being nasty to people more than they disliked foreigners".⁵ It should not be forgotten that assimilation, now criticised for its cultural arrogance, was a welcoming attitude. And it demanded less than its latter day critics imagined. There was not a homogeneous society

insisting on complete conformity. Migrants were not being asked to abandon everything; rather they were not to make a public display of difference; they were to 'mix in' and live among Australians and not in their own enclaves. That is, these new differences were to be handled like the old Protestant-Catholic differences had been.

The Australian ethos, as I have outlined it, was concerned not to obliterate difference but to overlook it. It is best caught by Henry Lawson:

They tramp in mateship side by side
The Protestant and Roman
They call no biped Lord or Sir
And touch their hat to no man

This is not envisaging a world where there will not be Protestants and Catholics or employers and employees. It insists that person with person, face to face, these differences are not to count. Much ink has been wasted by social scientists 'proving' that Australian society is not egalitarian because it has quite distinct differences of class and status. Our egalitarianism is rather the means by which we live more comfortably with those differences; it makes them less disruptive and demeaning.

Now, to leave differences out of account, as D. H. Lawrence observed in *Kangaroo*, can make for very superficial encounters. I can well understand migrants' complaints that Australians were passionless, offhand, and even when most polite, strangely indifferent to their background and experience. We are not looking for reasons why migrants were comfortable or contented—for migration must always be more or less traumatic—but to the general social circumstances which allowed for the accommodation and melding of peoples to proceed relatively smoothly. The process would have been different if the Australian people had been more divided socially among themselves and less concerned to bridge barriers.

Nearly all migrants entered the Australian economy as workers. It is often said that migrants were exploited because they had to take the lowest paid jobs which Australians thankfully left. But the trade union movement only agreed to the admission of migrants as long as they were to be paid award wages. Unskilled migrants, knowing no English and with no experience of trade unions, came under the protection of the arbitration court. This put a severe limit to their 'exploitation'. The unions' historic opposition to migration had arisen because they feared that migrants, especially those with low expectations and less ability to defend themselves, would drive wages down. They had to be assured that this would not happen before they would support the post-war scheme.

Some Australians were disappointed that migrants did not mix in readily and that they formed,

temporarily as it turned out, their own residential enclaves. But the freedoms of a free society are real. Freedom of movement, of residence, of speech and publication, of association, of business enterprise could not be denied the migrants. The commitment to an open society means that we agree to live with what is unusual, distasteful or even threatening. It is a great act of faith and easy enough to think it foolhardy. However if liberalism has its dangers, it also has its unexpected rewards. Modern Australia is one of them. In the space which an open and tolerant society gave them migrants found security, prosperity and self-confidence and transformed the society in ways which their hosts had not intended. They have made it a much more diverse, lively and exciting place. Because the outcome was unintended, Australians can take no great credit for it, though the commitment to openness and tolerance was theirs. Since liberalism's achievements depend on self-restraint, it is easy to overlook its outstanding practitioners.

The children and grandchildren of southern European peasants are now flocking into Australian universities. If they choose to study sociology, there is a good chance they will be taught that migrants are a badly treated minority. They might well have as their textbook Professor J. S. Western's very popular *Social Inequality in Australian Society* which declares that the history of migration "has, in many important aspects, been a history of economic deprivation" (p. 257). This amazing conclusion is reached by surveying the population twenty or thirty years after the migration program has begun and 'discovering' that migrants are over-represented in the ranks of unskilled labour and under-represented in the professions and board rooms.

How, you might ask, would a just society have treated these migrants? (This is not a question Professor Western asks: enough for him that every difference is an inequality.) Is it seriously being suggested that Australian society should have contrived to have these migrants distributed evenly through the hierarchies of skill and wealth in the first generation, even though so many of them arrived without skill, capital and knowledge of the language? What a piece of social engineering that would have been. The immigration officer at the foot of the gangway as the ship from Italy berths: "All those from Calabria will be brain surgeons." Given the mindlessness of these statistical surveys one wonders why they do not examine the migrants at the point of arrival. Then they could 'discover' that *all* migrants were unemployed and owned little or nothing and hence pronounce even more decisively on the inequalities of Australian society. But to remind us that migrants had little or nothing to begin with would spoil the story of 'deprivation'.

We would need to be worried about the position of migrants in Australia if we did not believe that

after two or three generations their descendants would be fairly evenly distributed through the economy and society. The signs are looking good. Already the statistical information on the first wave of southern European migrants—the Italians and Greeks—confirm what old Australians have long known: the migrants are doing very well. Italians and Greeks are more likely to own their own home, less likely to be unemployed, and more likely to keep their children on at school than the rest of the population.

Migrants have had to work hard to do well. They have experienced great difficulties in coming to terms with a culture very different from their own. These aspects of the migrant experience are brought forward in Professor Western's account not to lead us to admire the migrants or to understand better their difficulties, but as a further sign of the *inequality* of Australian society. This is the final absurdity. Try to imagine a society in which outsiders, ignorant of its mores and language, would not be handicapped and have to make special efforts to succeed.

In Professor Western's eyes to think of migrants, even the most recent, as outsiders is illegitimate. He criticises us for demanding that migrants become naturalised before they can join the public service, hold certain public offices and practise law. All this is discrimination!

We have reached the heart of the multicultural outlook: the denial of any superior legitimacy to the host culture. Insofar as multiculturalism makes what it calls 'Anglo-Celts' the equivalent of Italians and Turks, it denies the very notion of a host. We are all immigrants of many cultures, contributing to a multicultural society. This may serve the needs of ethnic politics. As serious historical or sociological analysis it is nonsense. To found policy on it may be perilous.

I say 'may' because there are grounds for believing that multiculturalism has made little difference to the way migrants and the host culture interact. Migrants face a cruel dilemma—to get on and succeed they must adapt to the host culture (of whose existence they have no doubts); as strangers they are anxious to hold on to the culture they have brought with them. When our policy was assimilation the migrants held onto more of their culture than the policy-makers wished. Now when multiculturalism encourages them to keep their culture they are probably assimilating at the usual rate.

Many Australians appear to have interpreted 'multiculturalism' as a new name for the traditional toleration of difference and the willingness to accept migrants into their lives. When the leader of the Opposition attacked multiculturalism they thought he was a bigot, planning to close down Italian restaurants or prohibit the speaking of the Italian language. The Prime Minister defended multiculturalism but then launched a citizenship campaign and began to stress

what must be the common elements of our culture: the English language, parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, the fair-go,—all of course 'Anglo-Celtic' which it seems is *not* to be just one among many cultures.

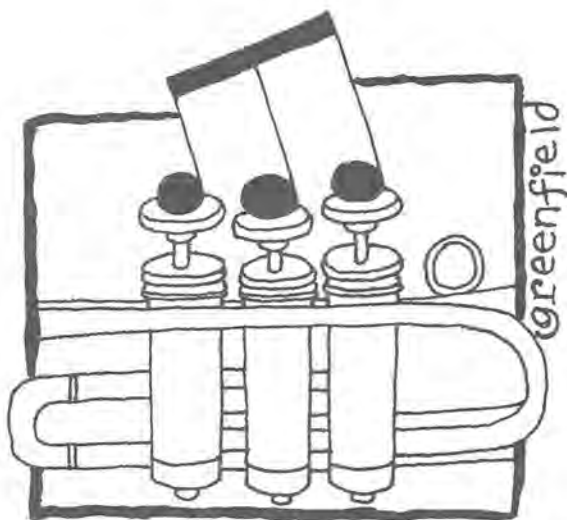
Multiculturalism interpreted in this way, a diverse society united by core institutions and values, is unexceptionable. But the institutional legacy of a more separatist multiculturalism is still with us: public funding of migrant organisations so they can maintain their culture. This has two dangers. Firstly, the obvious one that migrant cultures contain elements antagonistic to the core values. If you fund Greek schools, will you breed intolerance of Macedonians? If you fund Muslim schools, are you undermining the policy of equality for women? The second, indirect danger is that the support of migrant culture smacks of official favouritism. Nothing could more endanger the standing of migrants in this society; it is offensive to the liberal and egalitarian elements in our culture,

the same elements which have been so important hitherto in the success of the migration program. No wonder, as the Fitzgerald Committee reported, the majority of Australians are puzzled and annoyed at multiculturalism. The multiculturalists of course see migrants as a disadvantaged group and so worthy of state assistance. Ordinary people, with a much better nose for these things, know that while new migrants might need help the Italians and Greeks are now a long way from being underdogs.

How could policy-makers be so obtuse as to push the migrant cause against the grain of this society? Perhaps because they have no knowledge of or respect for old Australia, which they label 'Anglo-Celtic, intolerant'. Let them suspend operations until they learn what sort of people we are.

John Hirst teaches history at La Trobe University. His most recent books are The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy (Allen & Unwin) and a children's book Don't (Hyland House).

1. Ken Inglis reminds me that the Irish in Australia in the late nineteenth century coined the term as an alternative to Anglo-Saxon, which as a racial identity for the people of Australia excluded them. It was not widely adopted and fell into disuse until recently. See his *Multiculturalism and National Identity* (Canberra 1988).
2. In what follows I draw heavily on John Rickard's, *Class and Politics: New South Wales, Victoria and the Early Commonwealth 1890-1910* (Canberra 1976) and *Australia: A cultural history* (London 1988).
3. I have made a foray into the subject in 'Egalitarianism' in S. L. Goldberg and F. B. Smith *Australian Cultural History* (Melbourne 1988) and *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy* (Sydney 1988).
4. Ken Inglis 'Anzac and Christian—two traditions or one', *St Mark's Review* Nov. 1965, pp. 3-12.
5. Eugene Kamenka, 'The Dunera and After', *Quadrant* Nov 1985, p. 32.



Donald Greenfield

RICHARD HALL
JOHN K. RUFFELS

Shipboard Talk: Did D. H. Lawrence meet Fr O'Reilly?

*"You seem very thick with Trehwella," said Kangaroo at last.
"Not thick," said Richard, "Celts, Cornish, Irish—they always interest me . . ."*
Kangaroo Chapter XI

Richard Aldington, writing an introduction to the Penguin edition of D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*, asked the question: "Where did he get those vivid scenes of political contest between the Diggers and the socialists?" and briskly answered it with: "Not from his favourite periodical, *The Sunday Bulletin* (sic), for at that time no such political violence occurred in Australia.¹ Probably they were a transference to the Australian scene of the bitter contests between fascists and communists Lawrence had seen in Italy in 1920–22." (p. 9) Certainly there were no such violent events as Lawrence describes in Sydney during his stay in New South Wales. But there had been a year or two earlier. Had he heard of them? If so, how?

David Herbert Lawrence and his wife Frieda arrived in Sydney on the S.S. *Malwa* on Saturday 27 May 1922. On the Monday they moved to Thirroul, a small town slightly north of Wollongong, and before the week was ended he had begun writing the novel *Kangaroo*. The central figures of the novel are Richard and Harriett Somers, thinly disguising Lawrence and his wife. The title comes from the nickname, or *nom de guerre*, of Benjamin Cooley, a Jewish barrister and charismatic leader of an underground movement of ex-servicemen, the Diggers, organised to save the nation from the red menace, personified by Willie Struthers, a union leader at Canberra Hall (the Trades Hall also thinly disguised).

Somers, described as an essayist and poet, meets both Cooley and Struthers through the agency of Jack Callcott, Cooley's lieutenant, and 'Jaz' Trehwella, a coal merchant-cum-unionist.² Both Cooley and Struthers seek to recruit Somers' talents for their respective causes. He is most drawn to Cooley, in one of those Lawrentian male relationships, a mixture of love, hate, fascination and repulsion. He rejects Cooley and his demand for subservience and affection and turns down Struthers's proposal that he write for the socialist paper. Following a violent clash between

the two sides in which Kangaroo-Cooley is mortally wounded, Somers and his wife leave Australia for the United States.

The novel, as most of Lawrence's work was, is a projection of his dreams of power and his theories about human relations, mixed up with some very shrewd observations of Australia and Australians, some down-to-earth common sense and a vivid response to the Australian landscape. Aldington, in suggesting that Lawrence had simply transposed Italian politics to Australia, was merely echoing the opinion of those few Australians who, up to 1950, had even bothered to take notice of *Kangaroo*.³ Although Australia was not Mussolini's Italy, there were in the 1920s a variety of undercurrents of political strife which could and did flare into open violence.

The Australia the Diggers returned to after World War I was not a paradise fit for heroes. Unemployment was high and the slums of the cities, while not as bad as Calcutta's, were certainly as bad as anything in Europe. The Communist Party formed in 1921 was minuscule, but the wider trade union movement, which had been knocked about during the war years, was frustrated and edgy. For the middle class, the spectre of red revolution was real. They believed that the unions and the Labor Party had been disloyal and pro-Hun during the War and were now in the grip of the Reds. A further complicating and embittering factor was the alienation from the British Empire of the Irish in Australia because of 'the troubles' in Ireland. To the loyal protestant middle class there was little distinction: the Reds and the Greens together threatened the Empire.⁴

As early as 1920 these tensions collided in violence in the affair of Father Jerger's deportation. Jerger, a German Catholic priest, had been interned during the War as an enemy alien who spoke out against the War from his pulpit in the Sydney suburb of Marrickville. The Hughes government's belated

decision to deport him touched off a vehement campaign of protest, which brought together the Catholic Church, the Trade Union Movement, the Labor Party, the infant Communist Party and even John Wren, a powerful figure in sectarian conflicts in Victoria.⁵ On 29 May 1920 a rally over the case in Moore Park, Sydney, which attracted a crowd of almost 150,000, one in six of the adult population of Sydney, erupted into violence. This is how the press saw the "Battle of Moore Park":

Singing the National Anthem and methodically counting out the speakers on the lorry, an organised body, including many returned soldiers, drove a wedge into the meetings held in Moore Park yesterday afternoon to protest against the deportation of Father Charles Jerger . . . A number of soldiers and their friends worked their way into the middle of the meeting and lifting the Union Jack, which had been flying over their platform, forced their way onto the lorry.

(*Sydney Daily Telegraph* 30 May 1920)

The onslaught was so cowardly and unexpected that the majority of the crowd were taken by surprise. Women and children were lying helpless on the ground in all directions and appeared in grave danger of being trampled to death . . . A wild rush of hooligans towards the platform . . . Many of them reached the edge of the platform and attempted to lay hands on Very Rev. Father O'Reilly . . . more than a match for his cowardly assailants, however. With the glint of battle in his eye and a look of determination on his usually smiling countenance, he caught up a chair and holding it aloft with both hands, calmly invited the howling mob to "come on". (*Sydney Catholic Press* 3 June 1920)

The *Sydney Sun* of 31 May, 1920 reported that the diggers present heard some remarks that Father O'Reilly made about the Union Jack. They walked over to the Number Two Catholic Federation platform where O'Reilly had just finished speaking and another speaker had just begun: "And 20,000 Diggers reply:—'One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Out! Chuck 'em out! What will we do with them?—Shoot 'em!'"

In Chapter XVI of *Kangaroo*, "A Row in Town", D. H. Lawrence describes the breaking-up of a socialist political meeting after the Diggers had "counted out" Willie Struthers:

There was a crash, and the hall was like a bomb that has exploded . . . There was a most fearful roar, and a mad whirl of men, broken chairs, pieces of chairs brandished, men fighting madly with fists, claws, pieces of wood—any weapon they could lay

hold of . . . A Union Jack torn to fragments, stamped upon . . . the central heap a mass struggling with the Diggers . . . hands clawing to drag them down, wrists bleeding . . . and thud! as the white flesh was struck with a chair-leg. (p. 346)

Had the novelist heard or read of the Moore Park 'row'? Two-year-old newspapers were unlikely to have come his way, though he did find some old newspapers in the house at Thirroul. Robert Darroch in his book *D. H. Lawrence in Australia* has argued that Lawrence had probably established contact with the Digger leaders through someone he met on board ship.⁶ There is some plausibility in the argument that Lawrence, during his six-week stay, did make some contact with ex-servicemen leaders. His descriptions of Kangaroo, Benjamin Cooley, and of Jack Callcott, his subordinate, have some resemblance to Major-General Sir Charles Rosenthal and Colonel W. J. R. Scott who were at the head of the King and Empire Alliance. But the fact is that Lawrence started writing his novel within a week of his arrival in Thirroul, with little more than two days spent in Sydney, and those over a weekend. In Perth, where he had stopped over, and early on the trip from there to Sydney, Lawrence told people that he had no plans to write in Australia. Something must have changed his mind, because even before docking at Sydney he had written a letter saying he planned to write a "romance". In fact the romance turned out to have as a principal character the charismatic leader of the Diggers.

The Darroch theory depends solely on the military source for Lawrence's motivation and information. However, an examination of the passenger list of the S.S. *Malwa* shows that among the Lawrences' fellow passengers was a man with a literary background, who had been intimately involved in public polemic with the Diggers and with Sir Charles Rosenthal, and who, for good measure, had trade union contacts. It was the same Very Rev. Father O'Reilly of the Moore Park fracas whom the Catholic press gave as the man with "a glint of battle in his eye" and a chair in his hand.⁷ He was returning to Sydney after some seven months in Europe (Paris, London and possibly Ireland) and so his recall of political Sydney would be not of contemporary events but of the year or more before 1922 when the scene was far more volatile.

Unusual circumstances on the *Malwa* threw all the passengers into some intimacy on the nine-day voyage from Fremantle to Sydney. It was a one-class boat and there were only 40 passengers on board. Lawrence, recalling the journey later, remarked on the wintry cold which had the lascar crew shivering.⁸ The *Sun*, struggling to make a story from a dull passenger list, headlined the arrival "Stewards' Paradise".⁹ Father O'Reilly, who was a gregarious man, would have been hard to escape. Several things would have recommended him to Frieda and Lawrence: he spoke

German and had even translated two sonnets by Heine in a mediocre collection of verse published by John Sands in London in 1920.¹⁰ Lawrence had only recently mentioned his regard for Heine to a friend in Perth.¹¹ O'Reilly's participation in the Moore Park meeting in 1920 had been in defence of a German wrongly accused of treason. The Lawrences had suffered during the War: because Frieda was German-born they were suspected of spying in Cornwall. Lawrence was to write with retrospective bitterness about this period of their lives in the "Nightmare" chapter of *Kangaroo*.¹² Then, for Lawrence, there may have been the attraction of religion. En route for Australia he had told one correspondent: "I think too the Roman Catholic Church, as an institution, granted of course some new adjustments to life, might once more be invaluable for saving Europe: but not as a mere political power."¹³ And in the novel he has *Kangaroo* saying: "I have the greatest admiration for the Roman Catholic Church, as an institution. But its creed and theology are not natural to me, quite."¹⁴

Maurice O'Reilly was one of those energetic, passionate and vocal Irish priests of his era who worked off their surplus energy in public controversy. He had been a contemporary of Daniel Mannix at a seminary in Ireland, and was a vigorous supporter in public of the controversial Melbourne Archbishop, although the two did not get on well personally. Father O'Reilly joined the Vincentians, an Irish religious order, and had come to Australia first as a preacher. Later he became a teacher and headmaster of a boarding school. In 1915 he was appointed Rector of St John's College within the University of Sydney.

In 1911 he had gained extensive publicity by advocating the replacement of Empire Day with "Australia Day". (The *Malwa* arrived in the port of Melbourne on Empire Day 1922). He developed his case with the argument that Empire Day stood for everything aggressive, blatant and jingoistic and for good measure added that the Empire builders had crushed the Boers on behalf of Chinese labour, gone on a "peaceful" mission with guns to Tibet, and oppressed the people of Ireland. The *Daily Telegraph* accused him of bringing bigotry and rancour to Australia and of desecrating patriotism. Unabashed, O'Reilly wrote "An Australian National Hymn", opening with the words: "God bless our lovely morning land".

While he had at first supported the War, writing a poem "Right to the End", what he saw as the great "Betrayal of Ireland by the British Cabinet" led him to oppose conscription. He had dabbled in politics, condemning Labor in 1913 for its refusal to endorse State Aid for Church schools; but by the end of the War he was marching with the Left. It was not only in the united front over Father Jerger. In July 1921 he told a congregation that a man with a starving family had a right to take what he needed. He gave

Workers Education Association lectures as well as blessings at Trades Hall dinners. As a public orator he was much in demand, and, as with his old fellow-student Dr Mannix, the line between priest and politician became blurred.¹⁵

The climax of his public career was certainly the battle of Moore Park, even though a few months later he addressed another crowd of 50,000, this time in the Domain. (Probably the only prominent person from the pro-Jerger platform in Moore Park still living, until very recently was Sir Edward McTiernan. Former High Court judge, but then a young Labor lawyer, Sir Edward died on 9 January, aged 97).

O'Reilly's prominence made him a target for loyalists, not only at meetings. *King and Empire*, the journal of the King and Empire Alliance, attacked him frequently.¹⁶ The Secretary of the Alliance was none other than Sir Charles Rosenthal, the possible original of *Kangaroo*. Unlike *Kangaroo*, Rosenthal was not Jewish; he was at pains to stress his Danish descent and his Methodist allegiance.¹⁷ His looks and his name nevertheless contributed to the general perception that he was Jewish. Perhaps the fact that his fellow General Sir John Monash (fairly clearly alluded to as "Emu" in *Kangaroo*) was Jewish contributed to the misapprehension. In a profile in 1937, a *Bulletin* writer went out of his way to deny "the fairly general acceptance" that Rosenthal was a Jew.¹⁸

Rosenthal had been a successful division commander in World War I on the Western Front, although he came from a citizen soldier background and was an architect by profession. He was a notoriously stern disciplinarian. In peacetime he played sectarian politics hard. On the eve of the Jerger meeting he wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* to rally the numbers. Rosenthal referred to exhibitions of "rank disloyalty" and urged "all loyal citizens who can possibly do so to attend Moore Park on Sunday afternoon, support the Returned Soldiers meeting and thus support the Government. Are we asleep?" and signed himself Charles Rosenthal, Major General.¹⁹ The Catholics believed that he had orchestrated the storming of the platform that day. He was the subject of counter-attacks in their journals.²⁰

Rosenthal did not do particularly well in conventional politics. When Lawrence was in New South Wales Rosenthal had just been elected to the Legislative Assembly in which he served for only one term as a backbencher. He later became a Legislative Councillor, then retired to become Administrator of Norfolk Island. It might be claimed that for him, as for O'Reilly, the Moore Park episode was the climax of his public life. Although there were other speakers that day, the papers made it clear that it was really Rosenthal versus O'Reilly.²¹ Both were good speakers. Rosenthal had a fine voice—deep, rich and melodious. He had sung baritone solos with the Sydney

Philharmonic Society Choir.²²

While it is inconceivable that Lawrence would not have known the identity of his fellow passenger among the small company on board the *Malwa*, the question remains how intimate he and Frieda became with O'Reilly. At least one person who knew O'Reilly personally believes he would certainly have made himself known to Lawrence. Despite some searching, his papers, which might have recorded such a meeting, have not been found and are believed to have been destroyed. The case remains conjectural. That something happened on the voyage between Perth and Sydney to change Lawrence's mind about writing a novel is quite clear. That O'Reilly was in fact a source for Lawrence's knowledge of the Sydney political scene, albeit a year or two out of date, must stand as a high probability. But it remains probable also that he was not the only source for Lawrence's information about the Diggers.²³

Richard Hall's most recent books include the novel Costello (Collins) and his examination of Peter Wright The Spy's Revenge (Penguin). John K. Ruffels is an independent researcher.

1. Richard Aldington (1892-1962) poet, novelist and biographer of DHL. He translated Carlo Goldini's *The Goodhumoured Ladies* in January 1923. His Introduction to *Kangaroo*, published in 1950, contains other errors of fact—e.g. that Lawrence arrived in Sydney on 26 May (correctly 27 May). Some attempt was made to check the accuracy of this Introduction but the correct information was not finally included. See the *Meanjin* files in the Baillieu Library (University of Melbourne); Nettie Palmer to C. B. Cristensen.
2. See *Kangaroo* chapters vi and xi.
3. See R. Darroch *D. H. Lawrence in Australia* (1981), p. 123.
4. See Edmund Campion *Rockchoppers* (1982), p. 84; Ian Turner *Sydney's Burning* (1967).
5. Campion, p. 90.
6. Darroch, chap xi, p. 123.
7. Passengers Address List, R.M.S. *Malwa*, Sydney 27 May 1922 (N.S.W. Archives Office Microfilm Reel R2121).
8. See *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Penguin Books) p. 159-60.
9. *Sydney Sun*, 25 May 1922, p. 10.
10. Maurice J. O'Reilly *Collected Poems* (London, 1920).
11. The expatriate Dutch poet and translator William Siebenhaar met DHL in Perth and recalled: "I had occasion to point out that Free Verse although more recently introduced from France into the English-speaking community, had long before been written . . . by Heine in . . . "North Sea Pictures". My statement enthused Mrs Lawrence who reminded her husband how they had read them together." Edward Nehls *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1957-59) vol.3, p. 105.
12. *Kangaroo* chap. xii. See also Hugh Kingsmill *D. H. Lawrence* (London, 1938) chap. iv, p. 94ff.
13. *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* vol. iv 1921-24 (Cambridge, 1987) p. 21.
14. See chap. vi.
15. For Fr O'Reilly's career, see J. F. Wilkinson "Father Maurice O'Reilly: A Controversial Priest" in *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, vol. vii part 3 (1983).
16. *King and Empire magazine*, March 1921; 15 October, 1921. pp. 5-6; 27 June 1922, p. 14.
17. See Warren Perry "Major General Sir Charles Rosenthal: Soldier, Architect and Musician" in the *Victorian Historical Magazine* Vol. 40 No. 3 (August 1969).
18. *The Bulletin* 14 July 1937, p. 47.
19. *Sydney Morning Herald* 29 May 1920, p. 13.
20. *The Catholic Press*, 3 June, 1920, said: "We do not know Rosenthal personally. We believe he is a Jew. His name indicates German origin. The history of his race should have taught him tolerance, if his name did not counsel modesty in an Australian community. But he behaves with the unmistakable Junker spirit" (pp. 26-7).
21. *Ibid.* p. 20, see also *The Sun* (Sydney) 31 May 1920.
22. *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 April 1902 and 10 September 1903.
23. Nowhere in *Kangaroo* does DHL mention any Catholic priest: his "Row in Town" chapter (xvi) has the Diggers fighting not the Sinn Feiners but the Trades Hall Reds; a Red flag is flourished as well as a Union Jack, so it is evident he chose to alter actual events to fit the plot. One of the continuing mysteries of *Kangaroo* is why he chose not to describe the growing sectarian skirmishes which filled the Sydney press immediately on O'Reilly's return, most of it involving the turbulent priest himself. See letters to the *Daily Telegraph* circa June 1922, and *The Bulletin* 29 June, 1922, p. 42. The editor of the forthcoming C.U.P. edition of *Kangaroo*, Bruce Steele, informs us, however, that there is a cancelled reference to "sectarian bickering and bullying" in the manuscript of the novel.



—Did you get it, he said, as soon as he'd drawn her inside the little house and shut the fragile front door.

She opened her schoolbag and took out an object wrapped in an old silk scarf.

He didn't unwrap it, but held it in his hands slowly feeling its shape.

—Why does your mother have such a thing?

—Ever since we had burglars once. She says it makes her feel safer.

—Has she ever used it?

—No. My father says she'd have to be so close she'd never dare.

They talked coldly, not really interested in the words; the questions and their answers a ritual, what was due to the opening of the package, which fixed the eyes and even more the minds of both. He felt the shape through the wrapping still; it was very hard, very solid. He began to fold back the silk.

—I suppose it's really rather pretty, he said, regarding the handle, black enamelled with bands of ivory, the silver chasings so elaborate the eye could lose itself in them, wondering at the art lavished on an object meant for doing, not contemplating. The strained wooden house about them was witness to the tenuousness of staying alive; the useless beauty of this small lethal object was foreign in it.

—Are you sure it works? he asked her, and she said she'd taken it yesterday afternoon deep into the bush at the bottom of the garden and tried it out on a tree stump, and it did.

—I don't suppose there's any hurry now, she said. She took cushions from the sofa, the cushions his mother embroidered with the skill of her youth and another country, and they lay together on the floor wrapped tight in one another's arms. They didn't make love but lay still, waiting for the moment of another consummation. Nor did they speak, they simply held one another, until she said, I am cold, and he said, Perhaps it is time.

—Who will be first? she asked, and he said I must be the one to do it.

He went to a cabinet and took out a bottle of slivovica and two small glasses. They watched one

another drink, then they lay down again and he put his arm around her and held her, and put the small round muzzle under her left breast, pressing it into the thin greenish checked fabric of her summer school dress, and she put her fingers over his and pushed against them so they pulled the trigger. He lay for a long time without moving, and then turned the gun around and pressed it into the grey polyester of his own shirt front, but though his fingers tightened several times they did not complete the action. They still lay together thus, she cold and he with the awakening chill of life, a little of her blood upon them both, when his mother came home as always at three o'clock from the cafeteria and screamed out the realisation of her worst fears of this never to cease being foreign country.

Emma's mother, the scared-of-burglars possessor of a small enamelled black and ivory pistol, a work of art as everything about her must be, would say to her daughter, Emma, why don't you invite your friends around sometime? She would catalogue the possibilities of hospitality: tea, one afternoon, buy some cakes from the patisserie; a pool party with why not a little claret cup suitable for nearly grown girls; a barbecue indeed, marinate some chicken and toast marshmallows. Not she said that I am *au fait* with toasting marshmallows but one reads that they are delicious. After all she said what is the point of sending you across the city to that exclusive—understand but don't say expensive—school if you never bring any of your little friends home?

Mrs Wharton knew that a good school does two things for you: it enables you to say that you have been there, and gives you useful friends for the rest of your life. But the latter not automatically; it needs working at.

Emma said, oh Mama, but could not explain that school was not manoeuvrable you could not suddenly ask people home to tea, or pool parties, or barbecues, there was an etiquette to be observed. Emma was a newcomer; her parents had not seen early enough in her life (the right moment was at birth) their future prosperity, and although she'd been very young when

her name was put on the waiting list, by the time she was offered a place the cliques were formed. She was not pushy enough to break into them, nor seductive.

She had another problem: cleverness. A swot she was, quiet, but she knew the answers. A habit not easily forgiven. If only, sighed her mama, she could meet girls on her own ground. Dianne Wharton herself hosted brilliant parties, was a magnificent figure still as thin as in her modelling heydays despite the expensive dining she adored; well, she said, stroking her concave front, I live on my nerves in my business you can't help it it keeps the weight off. Emma was slight and fair and wouldn't command even a first glance in school uniform, but dressed by her mother



from her boutique—called with costly brevity *Di's*—she could look very striking. So thought her mama, not seeing that her daughter's charm lay not in suddenness but in the reward of contemplation.

Emma sat on the long train journey to school and read; her fair hair combed smooth into a thick plait fell over one shoulder and you could fancy it was its weight that bent her frail neck forward over the book; her grey eyes were hooded by heavy round lids and her pale skin unblemished. When you watched her for a while the pure lines and delicate colours of her face gave you an ache in the chest for their beauty. *Too rich for use, for earth too dear.* You could imagine her sitting in just that manner gravely

embroidering and looking at the world beyond her tower only in a mirror of beaten silver.

So thought a young man who sat in the train every day with a book of his own and hoped to see her. He got on long before her fashionable suburb, far away where the edge of the city petered out in a rim of cheap and distant housing. He went to a state school, one of the last of the selectives; he was clever too and an ambitious primary school teacher had put him up to it. He read a great deal in English to make up for his background; he had been born in Yugoslavia and was called Novica Cecik.

One day Emma sat opposite him in the train and lowering her eyes began to read. He was transfixed by the high arched domes of her eyelids; he had never imagined that such simple shapes could contain so much loveliness. He looked at them for a long time before he moved his eyes down to her book and saw that it was the same as his, same edition even; he laughed a small chuckle of delight. Enough to draw her eyes up to him.

—I see we are reading the same book, he said.

She smiled and nodded, her eyes wavering back to the page. Nice girls don't speak to young men on trains. But they don't like to be rude.

—Do you like *The Tempest*?

—I think so. I haven't read much of it.

—I think it's tremendous, he said. His English was perfect, it was the only thing that gave him away a foreigner. He spoke it proudly, forming the words lovingly in his mouth.

—This is the third time I have read it.

Some days later she sat in the only empty seat, next to him.

—I finished *The Tempest*, she said. You were right, it's marvellous.

—O brave new world, that has such people in it, he said, and then blushed in case she thought he meant the words to be as ironic as Miranda's are unintentionally in the play. But she smiled and he wanted to say that he imagined Miranda to be just like her, but was too shy.

After that they often sat or stood together, always with a book in hand, but after a bit they didn't read them, they talked about them. And thus themselves. And then they began to lend each other favourites and talk about them. Novica, a clever boy, was studying mathematics and physics and chemistry; Emma, a clever girl, Latin and French and German. They had one subject in common: English literature.

English literature is about love and sex, and sex and religion, and death and love, and nature and sex, all the important things. They had plenty to talk about. They tasted the heady pleasures of not having to dissemble. They could be as intellectual as they wished. They discovered the sensuality that goes with the intellectual. The long boring train trip to school became far too short.

—Shall I see you home from the train? May I? he asked, his manners as faultless as his grammar.

At first Emma said Oh no he couldn't possibly, and then she thought why not, and so he began to walk her home through the leafy absent streets; together they dawdled past secret walled gardens and watched the spring blossom in azaleas and flowering almonds and poetic daffodils. At first they stopped at her corner, and then she took him home, leading him past lawns spread with the fleshy shards of magnolia petals into the pretty back sitting room that was her own place.

For love all love of other sights controls
And makes one little room an everywhere

Her mother was always out at the boutique in the next village, as the suburban shopping centres in those parts call themselves, and her father was never home from the city before seven, tired and remote with the rituals of money making.

They enjoyed the privacy of conversation away from the bored involuntary eavesdroppers of the train, and began to read to one another the wonderful things they'd just discovered. They read Donne and Marvell and the Elizabethans, and took pleasure in teasing their nubile sensualities with explicit love poems, each delicately knowing the other's awareness of what was being said, but not yet openly admitting. It was still Literature. One day he kissed her; cleverness became flesh.

Emma bloomed. Her mother looked at the light in her eye and the curve to her waist and said when are we going to send the invitations to that pool party, and was irritated that still her daughter stalled. And then with that unreliability of parents that makes their children's lives a misery she came home early from the shop.

Emma from the corner of her eye saw the grey Porsche slither round the corner of the house and into its garage. Their situation was not compromising; they were drinking tea and he was reading Donne—*This flea is you and I, and this Our marriage bed and marriage temple is*—and they were laughing slightly ecstatically but hardly improperly. They were not sitting on the windowseat that looked down over the long polished garden to native bush at the bottom, bodies pressed together, kissing and entranced, as they might have been.

Mrs Wharton seeing just her daughter's greenish chequered back through the window thought Oh bugger I have forgotten to get in another stock of TV dinners (Meals had to be works of art only when she was there to consume them, though a case could have been made for the TV dinner as pop art: bright colours and odd textures in shapely white frames) oh well Emma can cook herself some eggs tonight they're very nourishing. The Whartons were to dine with friends at Le French Café; she adored *nouvelle cuisine*,

though her husband preferred a squarer meal.

—Mama, said Emma, her face and manner and the little back sitting room all composed, this is my friend Novica Cecik. I have brought him home to tea.

In another age Diane Wharton would have called for her vinaigrette and had an attack of the vapours, but lacking at this hour servants and knowing a vinaigrette merely as a dressing for salads she did these things only metaphorically. To the young man she offered a prickly bouquet of fragments of polite phrases: a mangled *how do you do*, a *but surely*, several *I don't know*s, one *not quite proper* and an *Emma darling* or two but directed still at the boy who bowed possibly under the onslaught but as likely from native elegance until finally her *young man I think you'd better* chased him away with the most exiguous of leave-takings.

Then Diane Wharton became superb. She achieved the moving simplicity of liturgy.

Oh Emma how could you

Oh Emma when we trusted you

Oh Emma what will the neighbours think Oh Emma

Oh Emma a common boy a foreigner oh how could you

Oh Emma after all we've done for you

Oh Emma how could you ungrateful your father and I day and night every advantage how could throw it all away

Oh Emma I cannot bear it

Her voice flew through all the scales of anger to sorrow and back again. Her rhythms, her variations were a *tour de force*. She fell back on the glazed chintz sofa exhausted by her brilliant solo performance.

Emma said, But Mama you're always telling me to invite friends home.

—Friends! Friends! *Girlfriends!* Don't you know the difference between a girl and a boy? Oh Emma . . . you haven't . . .

—Mama of course not. What do you think.

Emma had not expected her mama to admire the straight classical line of Novica's nose or the downy prickle of his cheeks or the way his teeth nipped her bottom lip when he kissed her, but she had thought she would be able to explain him. His mind, his wit, the pleasantness of his character. To explain him in terms of her own happiness, at least; a sincere and passionate daughter expecting a loving parent to understand.

But when her father came home she still had not succeeded.

I do not wish to be an ogre in my child's life, he had said long ago when his wife demanded that he punish his daughter, but his absence from her daily domestic life cast him sometimes in that role; he tried to counterbalance it by being the most sugary of daddies. Neither connection made for much intimacy. He loved his daughter dearly, but nobody noticed.

—What's this chap's name?

—Novica Cecik, said Emma.

—Noveetsa Seesick! shrieked Mrs Wharton. The spiky foreign name filled her mouth, tangling in her expensive dentistry and pressing against her uvular until she thought she might puke.

—He's very clever papa. You've got to be brilliant to get into that school, it's much more difficult than private schools.

Her father said, Well, if he's clever, remembering as he was not supposed to that his father had had a dusty corner shop in a western suburb and that the clever boy he had been had climbed to his high panelled office overlooking the Opera House by means of scholarships and prizes . . . He could be quite a nice boy, Diane, after all—

—What does his father do, said mama, inexorably.

—He's a gardener. He works for the shire council. And his mother works in a cafeteria doing lunches, and he's got four brothers and sisters and lives in a little wooden house in a dreadful dreary suburb and he's the most interesting person I know.

Thus counterattacking by confirming her mama's worst fears, Emma burst into tears and went to bed. Mrs Wharton was almost too upset to go to Le French Café but made the effort.

Next day in the train Emma her eyes large with tears that like a convex glass held misery trapped inside said, We are not supposed to see one another ever again. My mother . . .

There were no words for her mother.

Emma said, She'd stop me catching the train if there were any other way for me to go to school. She's working on that.

Mrs Wharton rang up to make sure her daughter was home at precisely the right time, and turned up in person to make sure she was alone. Emma always was. But not always from school; she and Novica played truant. She went down the hill to the station as usual, but caught a train the other way. He met her; they walked slowly through the scruffy streets to give his mother and the other children time to get out of the house, then spent the day together. She caught an afternoon train back and dawdled up the hill and home on schedule.

They didn't do it very often, hardly once a week, though several times they took two days off running to make their absences seem more logical. Emma typed out notes on her mother's typewriter for a variety of malaises: heavy colds, viral infections, influenzas, gastric attacks, a poisoned toe. She signed them with a practised imitation of her mother's violet ink flourish. Novica had always written his own absence notes anyway.

They read *Romeo and Juliet*. The similarity of their situations sent shivers down their spines. *Oh she doth teach the torches to burn bright*, he whispered to her tremulous intent face. They left behind *The Tempest* and Miranda's unbroken virgin knot and found their own truth in the consummated passion of the lovers

of Verona. They lacked a kindly priest to bless it but made their own vows. They were so perfectly happy that their previous lives, before they had known one another, became impossible to imagine.

—It's like being a butterfly, said Emma, her hair falling like silvery striped wings over her naked shoulders. You can't possibly remember the awful feeble worm you've changed out of.

—And you can't possibly change back into it, said Novica.

They knew the dangers of getting pregnant and took precautions. That didn't catch them. The nosiness of her exclusive private school did. Being seen to keep a sharp eye on the welfare of its students. Emma's pastoral tutor rang up Mrs Wharton at the shop to express concern at the girl's poor health, it did seem to be affecting her work, her grades were not at all what they had been

This time her mother had no words. The virtuoso performance of the tea party had left nothing for this horror. Through the thin lips of fury she said The boarding house for you my girl. As soon as they can take you. We'll see how you manage to go whoring about then.

—It's fixed for Sunday afternoon, said Emma to Novica on Wednesday.

—And just make sure my girl you're at school till then. Any more truancy and I'll take a stick to you, old as you are.

—It was true, about being a butterfly, said Emma. A beautiful life for a day and now it's over. You can't stop being a butterfly, but you can't keep it up either. Oh Novica, I can't go to boarding school and never see you, I'd rather die.

Metaphor, Hyperbole. But gradually they felt the literalness. The publicity of the train bound them tighter in their misery, in the pain of sitting contained and quiet and not touching one another. All the springs of their joy and wit turned to bitter salty tears and their bodies ached with the effort of not shedding them.

On Thursday Emma brought *Romeo and Juliet* to the train. They read the last scene.

Oh here

Will I set up my everlasting rest
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh.

—My mother's got a little gun, said Emma. I'll bring it to your place, tomorrow, as usual.

Suicide Pact, the headlines sang. Boy Lover Claims Suicide Pact. Suicide Pact Failure Tragedy. I Should Have Died Too Says Boy Over Body of Slain Sweetheart.

Boy 17 Remanded Children's Court. Boy Charged Murder Schoolgirl Lover.

No names, they were too young.

Diane Wharton did not see how her life could go on after her daughter's death. I do not know how I will survive, she said. It was true, she did not know, but survival is not something you need to know how to do, it happens unless you deliberately take steps to avoid it. So Mrs Wharton survived.

She said, How lucky I am to have my little shop. If I could not throw myself into my work where would I be.

Occasionally in the supermarket she would think of buying some TV dinners and then cruelly remember that there was no longer any call for them. No thin-shouldered daughter to nourish any more. No green-checked form in place on the windowseat in the back sitting room. Then she would hurry to the continental section and deliberate the choosing of some distracting delicacy: a pot of goose-liver, perhaps, or a truffle in a tin, or some rosy lobster bisque.

Mr Wharton who had his work too and was already immersed in it without finding much relief went to see Novica because he wanted to understand. He felt old and weak and grey, grey to look at and grey in looking. His wife took comfort in blame; the guilt was the boy's; the foolish daughter . . . there she stopped thinking, sanity saved by not dwelling, went back to punishing the guilty. All the boy's fault. The

father was glad for her comfort, but couldn't share it; it made no sense, and he believed that everything could be made sense of, it was his ability to make it that had raised him to that high office whose thick carpets and brilliant collection of modern art pretended that it wasn't a centre for manipulating things and people.

He found Novica beyond manipulation, and not much help in making sense.

—He didn't know, he told his wife, this beauty that his brains had won. Kept saying that he didn't understand why he didn't . . . kept asking—not me, himself, was he a coward. Said something about destroying the perfect beauty of their act, and now all he can do is stay alive and mourn her forever. Bereft. Terribly romantic, the way he talked, but you couldn't get away from its sincerity. Poor kid, his life's gone as much as Emma's . . . he really loved her, you know. They really were in love. Poor kids.

—I don't think talking about it does any good, said Mrs Wharton.

With dry fingers she stuck a spine of false lashes to the rim of each high domed eyelid, and coloured above it with violet shadow. They were going to the Pavilion du Parc that night. An old favourite.

our subscribers and Australia Post:

A Note from Our Treasurer

Wide publicity has been given to the decision by Australia Post to do away with registered bulk postage rates for periodicals with a cover price of more than \$5.00. This decision, because it is based on price, means that the magazines to be hit by the measure are mainly smaller circulation specialist magazines including, of course, literary quarterlies.

In *Overland's* case the decision means that our base postal rate per copy will go from 47 cents to \$1.65, and higher in some cases. As a cynic might expect, the commercial mass media goes largely unaffected. Increasing our subscription rates would heavily penalise our readers, particularly our large component of pensioner and student subscribers who are on our concessional rate.

If you value *Overland* (or the many other smaller journals produced for people who read and think) I

urge you to write protesting against Australia Post's decision (it argues that subscribers who can afford to pay \$5 for a magazine can afford to pay more) to the relevant Minister:

The Hon Ros Kelly MP
Minister for Telecommunications and
Aviation Support
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

If you can afford two stamps it would also help if you could send a copy of your letter to your local Member.

Michael Dugan

PAUL CARTER

An Effect of Distance: Porter's History

Possible Worlds, (Oxford University Press, 1989, \$12.95),
A Porter Selected (Oxford University Press, 1989, \$12.95),
both by Peter Porter.

'The New Mandeville', the final poem in Peter Porter's latest collection, describes a society without history:

The people of this place are activists
Of the spirit's incompleteness, living
In expatriation from death . . .

Missing death, they are nostalgic: "If we could die we could have history . . . They like to think." Living overseas from death, migrants from the human body, even their feelings are suspect. Their nostalgia is a stand-in for self-knowledge, the sentiment of a people "who define themselves/ By one great missingness undoing all/ Which love and speculation should insure." But in this country "speculation" is a fatally ambiguous term. It may describe a metaphysical longing—a desire unrealy mirrored in the export of "mirrors which reflect the soul"; or it may refer to the spiritless winds of economic change—"Which foil both Planners and Free Marketeers"—that have superceded human history. In this province, it seems, the only secure transcendence lies in language itself, in the poignant memory that words like "speculation" and "insure" may retain of a pre-economic spiritual aspiration—in their intimation of a foreign country, another, still possible world.

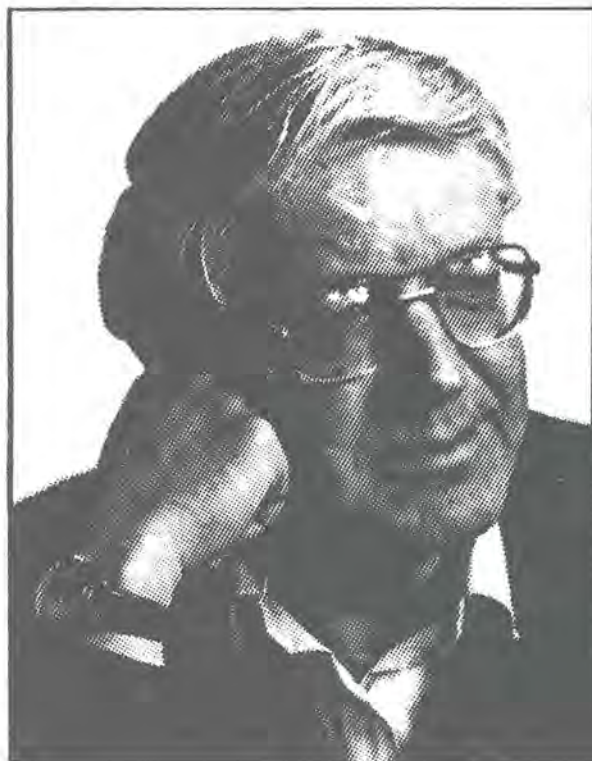
This other world is profoundly literary. In the second part of his poem, Porter's utopian voyage takes him to "The twilight archipelago named Archivia . . . A land without population but Rich in society." This country of perpetual conferences, concerts, museums and shops, despite its infinite wordiness, represents the death of literary intelligence:

We tourists feel forlorn as if we'd
Lacked a chapter heading at our birth
Or got through childhood glued to the box
With no memories

Of Sunday School or nominating
'Black Beauty' as a prize.

Even metaphor has lost its transcendence here and, subject to "Finger-tip control", has turned into "a sort of 'Chips with Everyman' ". Language has lost contact with tradition. Literary criticism (to translate Porter's allegory) has overtaken literature, "and love is free to love/ Itself as syntax".

But the way back from Archivia, the recovery of true literary and social values, is fraught with difficulty. The poet may satirise his society, displaying the hollowness behind the worldly (and wordy) facades of its publicists and scholars. He may ridicule consumerism's myth of immortality, the blindness of its indifference to history. But, while he can attempt



to stand back from the whirligig of fashion, he cannot stand outside history. And history also changes literary history. The new "Mandeville" of Porter's title invokes the 14th Century author of a collection of half-factual, half-imaginary travellers' tales, Sir John Mandeville. But the social critique at the heart of Porter's poem comes from another Mandeville—the 18th Century author of *The Fable of the Bees*. Porter's description of a society whose prosperity is built on technology's reinforcement of its own solipsistic selfishness—

an ever-changing Expo
Of the newest redeployments of the Spirit
Where greedy fables are precisely nimble
Whichever laser-digits phrase the murk
Of history—

is directly indebted to Bernard de Mandeville's satirical equation of "private vices" with "public benefits". Only now, as befits the era of universal self-interest in the public sphere, the formula has been reversed. In the new Mandeville it is public vice that assures private benefits.

Even though Porter would like to recover true literary values, and uses the tools of literary tradition to frame his criticism of contemporary culture, he cannot treat the literary past literally. There is no literary theory that licenses Porter's conjunction of two writers who lived four centuries apart. At the very moment Porter invokes a literary tradition, he alters it. T. S. Eliot saw that any new work of literature changed literary history, but Porter's poem works differently. For, unlike the mimetic modulations Eliot had in mind—his, Pound's and Joyce's reworkings of Homer—Porter is not modelling his poem on a literary source, but on literary history itself—the highly insular (and academic) tradition that treats both Mandevilles as exemplars of a great tradition.

Hence Porter's carefully ironic stance: to avoid the flattening out of the past (and ultimately its death in the twilight eternity of the new Mandevillian present), he must treat literary history ambiguously—perhaps it amounts to nothing more than a series of punning, nominal coincidences. Porter wants to demonstrate the pertinence of both Mandevilles, but he also recognises that the literary tradition they represent is what the new Mandeville forgets. The old writers can be invoked, but only to prove their absence from contemporary consciousness. In writing after them Porter does not believe—as the Modernists did—in the power of aesthetic objects to transcend history, to make the whole of history metonymically present. Quite the reverse: his appeal to literature reflects a defiant acknowledgement that aesthetic objects, the signifying forms that enable us to communicate with the past, are no longer readable.

Society's cultural illiteracy places the poet under another pressure. In a society where writing has lost

its power to invoke "possible worlds" and instead follows supinely the operational logic of electronics, satire becomes impossible. Without the power to imagine another world, how can the relativity of this one be shown, its spiritual incompleteness mirrored? Porter bows to this pressure by writing allegory rather than satire. To be sure there are distinguished literary precedents for the visit to the trough of despond that Porter describes in the last section of the new Mandeville. But the novelty of Porter's visit to

a very different place,
A veiled occluded territory
Haunted by a tribe of dispartes

is that it seems to describe a Hell of Poets, a realm in which the pursuit of beauty has replaced the search for truth, self-knowledge, where the poets misconstrue the ultimate question of how we face our End as a metrical problem and, with their false logic ("the end of ending is so beautiful"), contribute to our spiritual death.

The "backward Cave Of Cadences", as Porter calls it, is a provincial backwater, but, if anything, its spiritual quietism is more vicious than anything observed in the capital—"To some its title is 'The Swamp of Suicides' ". The meaning of much of this section is hard to grasp, as if so great a sense of irony (or perhaps futility) has overcome the new Mandeville that he can only write paradoxically:

The true books come as liberators, they
Reproduced the best historic hells . . .

The only truth here is that every truth preserves a falsehood; every sign of moral fastidiousness proof of the self's fatal self-enclosure, its retreat from history into the image world of autobiography:

But nothing here would print such images,
Their documentaries faded when the self
Looked from its attic to the childhood lawn
And saw its shape, the grass beneath the blade.

But where, in all of this does the poet stand? "A nation whose last words are not to be/ Esteemed," Porter writes, "Makes this its poetry:

'I die' (iambic), 'death comes' (trochee), 'dead
As dust' (dactylic), 'Thou shalt die' (an
Anapest) 'Proud Death' (the spondee) . . .

What, in view of this parodic pedantry, are we to make of the poet's own adherence to the syllable and stress patterns of blank verse? And who exactly is represented by the "we" who, at the end of this poem,

set out from this backward Cave
Of Cadences to rejoin the world and felt

The breeze of commerce moving on our faces,
The sun re-focus on our skin . . .

Although the voyager identifies himself with the tourists to this place, he is also the voyage's diarist; and the extreme ambiguity that overtakes him, his inability to speak except ironically, indicates the extent to which he also is implicated. How is he to preserve his intuition that the literary is not merely literary, but has the power (the responsibility) to frame transcendent truths? He will not do it by going on. For in a world of "economic shifts" to meet again "The breeze of commerce" is to steer into a yet deeper illusion. No commerce of minds is promised here, only resumption of life in the body and a new circle of consumption. The literary that threatens to immolate the traveller is also his only way out, his only means of grace. But perhaps the grace it offers is a form of recidivism, a sliding back into criminal cadence.

'The New Mandeville' is the most substantial poem in Porter's new collection and it focuses preoccupations that recur throughout his work. In particular it reveals the deeply (and deeply suppressed) religious impulse permeating his poems. The despair he feels among "the activists/ Of the spirit's incompleteness" does not reflect any clear political or social philosophy. It stems from spiritual dissatisfactions of his own.

To describe Porter, the sceptical humanist, as a religious poet may seem eccentric. But his transcendental longings are inseparable from his humanism. After Auschwitz humanism ceased to be the natural inheritance of every intelligent man. The liberal values associated with a veneration for Shakespeare, Michelangelo and Bach had failed to civilise the civilisation that produced them. A love of beauty, it turned out, had been a way of drowning the cries of the tortured and dying. Hence, by the time Porter arrived in London, it was too late to slip on the mantle of western culture as if it were a natural inheritance. Humanist history had come to an end and any attempt to redeem its values must inevitably involve an act of faith, commitment to a history that transcended the facts. As he writes in the ironically titled poem 'The Historians call up pain', "We cannot know what John of Leyden felt/ Under the Bishop's tongs . . . : not having faith,

We have our loneliness
And our regret with which to build an eschatology.

Recently George Steiner has impressed on us the historical rupture that occurred during the 1940s, but contemporaries recognised it too. "It is the end of civilisation," wrote the historian A. L. Rowse in 1951, "In the heroic days of 1940-45 I used to put up a resistance and argue that there was a future. Now

I know that they are right . . . It is the decay of a civilisation I study". The widely read philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, took the analysis a step further. Attributing the end of civilisation to a spiritual decline that he associated with the new dependence on technology, Marcel concluded in *Men against Humanity* that "we live in an eschatological age".

Much of Porter's verse is a meditation on the fragments of civilisation written in the time of "Last Words". 'Europe', 'May, 1945' and poems that, more generally, cast Porter in the role of historical tourist all bear witness to a spiritual rupture. Cold war "Europe" has become what it always threatened to be, "a place/ Of skulls, looking history in the face."

Even in his earlier poems, which superficially imitate the affected alienation of other Movement poets like Larkin and Kingsley Amis, Porter finds it hard to focus exclusively on England—the depressing class-ridden reality of the post-war Welfare State and the physical strangulation of the countryside beneath pylons, by-passes, chemical clouds and proliferating suburbia. Porter, the outsider (not the Australian come to England, but the constitutionally placeless person), finds it impossible to look at the world without thinking of himself looking. For Porter the deceptiveness of appearances, their failure to offer him a self-transcending reality, is a reflection of the depression he feels in contemplating his own self-consciousness, his imprisonment in his own personal history.

In 'Roman Incident' a poem that characteristically associates self-transcendence with the contemplation of art, it is clear that the misogyny so often present in Porter's poems is less a reflection on the duplicity of women than an expression of his own self-imprisonment. After "a night/ of quarrelling and making love/ to make up quarrels and not quite/ succeeding", he leaves his wife asleep in the Borghese Gardens. Because unlike her he couldn't sleep, because "A woman sleeping makes me lonely", he takes refuge among the women of Carpaccio and Dossò Dossi in the gallery nearby. The liveliness of one Dossi in particular affects him:

Standing frozen before her on a plinth
of grief and awkwardness, I tried to cry,
to force water from my eyes, so that
Melissa might turn me back to manhood.

He prays "to the enchantress whose one kiss/ undoes the tactless misery of self." Whether his prayer works or not is left unclear: he rejoins his wife and they leave, an afternoon of sightseeing ahead of them.

This is the bare, sentimental outline, but there is little sentiment in the poem itself, unless we count Porter's low moan of self-hatred. Despite appearances, the poem expresses the poet's distance, the irremediable deception of the world and the ambiguity of all identifications. In one pedantic sense, the poet-

lover's transformation into a statue is an act of literary identification: it is a life-mirrors-art motif of exactly the kind that Melissa's inventors, Ariosto and Tasso, specialised in. But the fact that Porter cannot enter the gallery without feeling the need to give us a little lecture on taste—"All that awful/ Carravagiesque paint . . ."—reveals something else: that even here Porter remains wakeful, anxious to make a sophisticated impression, to distance himself from emotion. It is, paradoxically, a statue that transcends itself in the act of prayer—and prays to be human. But to be human involves another act of self-transcendence, the capacity to undo "the tactless misery of self." Even art mirrors the impossibility of union with the world and, despite itself, represents "the best historic hells".

Porter's inability to empathise, to yield to his longings, may or may not be a personal problem but, in the context of his poems, it is also a historical condition, to do with coming after, with living in an age when the traditions of representation binding self to other, I to image, present to past, have broken down. In this situation Porter's self-imprisonment mirrors a larger solipsism, in which post-war western society, waking from the dream of history, finds itself unable to distinguish appearances from reality.

The difference is that, while this post-humanist condition forces Porter to confront the illusory nature of his desires, the world at large seems bent on metamorphosis. Beauty becomes the beast; pleasure, pain, history and art hiss away to nothingness in the television screen. Perhaps his "disappointment" ('The Story of my Conversion') can all be traced back to the "priggishness" that, as a little boy, made him sulk in his father's "smart world" ('Ghosts'). Or perhaps it is history itself that has let the poet down, with its failure to live up to the promise of a past nobler than his own.

Had Porter been born in another age he would have been a lay priest (in a poetic as well as religious sense). His vocabulary, his cadences, his tendency to preach, suggest a mind saturated with the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. In his Australian poems, he lapses into the imagery of Eden and after; only as you would expect, Australia, like everything else, has a ghostly definition, its promise of Canaan turning to dust:

A kingdom comes with dust, a slaughtered sheep
Hangs from a river oak, the text of life.

In his English and Italian poems the metaphysical longing may be confined to a cadence, a phrase peeping through the argument, a line that Porter deliberately allows to escape his ironic scrutiny. 'Venetian Incident', for instance, describes with characteristic ambiguity a visit to an Anglican church.

But, even as he puzzles over his wife's need to observe the outward forms of faith, his language succumbs to its rituals:

God was pleased.

How do I know? Because, even if he doesn't exist,
he likes us to try to belong,
and though you were not relaxed in his world
and needed by lunch to be pissed
your lightness at living and dying expressed
Creation's plain tenure, the warrant of birds.

The monumental final line has a transcendent gravity, the lapidary lyricism of an epitaph promising resurrection. Whether it sits well with the previous lines is another matter, but the conjunction points towards Porter's own suppressed desire "to belong", if not to God, then to the language of His praise.

But Porter is not immersed in language. Rather he remains wonderfully exterior to its beguilements. Although his wit occasionally evokes the troubled seriousness of the metaphysical poets, his authorial attitude to language recalls the creator of *Hudibras* rather than Donne or Marvell. Even when exploring the sensuous ambiguities of language, his poems have the logical, prosaic construction of a sermon. He scrupulously avoids the solecism of imagining the aural and syntactic ambiguities of language speak for themselves. Although his poems frequently reveal a debt to the music of Wallace Stevens's poems, Porter lacks Stevens's aesthetic faith that words, properly arranged, can become a world of their own.

Porter's primary impulse is to stand outside, not inside, the world. Even though God may not exist, he is not averse to assuming God-like control of his own poetic universe. In his more allegorical moments, he characteristically miniaturises the world. The futility of a woman's life is contained in a doll's house; the visions of St John of Patmos contract to the fast-forward of a home-movie projector; people's lives and deaths become frozen in a photographic frame—"Now is the ending of the world/ and now goes on forever." The poet may, Gulliver-like, lie down and, staring at the sky, yield his imagination to clouds, "watching these flying islands/ with selfish unconcern". But he soon recovers his upright position, his characteristic perspective, his distance from things:

I wave goodbye knowing I shall miss it
less than the passing cyclist on the road.

But this self-distancing has its price. It sidesteps the question of where the poet retreats to. From what place outside this world of illusion does the poet chronicle our folly? Porter's answer would seem to be literary: a history of utopian satire licenses the ironic mirror he holds up to the world we live in and the pain we suffer. But it may be that in this way Porter

avoids the implications of his own eschatological vision: in our time there is no other place outside our own where the poet can stand. To borrow the 18th Century viewpoint of the empirical philosopher, even to treat art and music as the solaces of an enlightened tourism, may be to suppress the more disturbing truth that, in our time, the old division between the observer and the observed has largely disappeared.

The idea of an art that transcends the pain and pleasure of existence may be the last stand of a poet-patriot who, like it or not, can call no nation except the past his own.

To acknowledge the relativism of one's perceptions and judgements, to recognise that the self is also a historical construction, is not necessarily to embrace the nightmare of a televisual culture in which all differences are flattened out. It may simply mean putting experiences in context, a process that is as much emotional as historical. The pathos of the doll's house, for instance, depends on narrowing the gaze, on divorcing the object from its history of play. We all know the pathos of toys, their loneliness when abandoned. But it is only half the picture—a photographic impression—to focus on their abandonment. It is much harder to express their playfulness, the escape they offer from boredom—

and hence their promise of imaginative life.

The pathos of Porter's history of the self is real, but it depends on leaving so much out. Although the world invites him to escape from his misery, his reaction is to step backwards. The result is a poetic and emotional impasse: the lyricism of a world close up is replaced by satirical detachment. But this self-righteousness brings Porter no pleasure. As he writes in 'A Sour Decade',

These are the years which furnish no repentance
Though seamed with sore regret . . .

The sense of coming after, of living in the time of last words, is an emotional as well as historical experience. Rejecting the world's loveliness, Porter find himself condemned, Orpheus-like, to lamentation. The poetic artifices he uses to transcend his loneliness are ingenious, sometimes desperately so, but they do not conceal the fact that his Olympian anatomy of human weakness reflects his own distance from happiness.

Paul Carter is the editor of The Age Monthly Review. His book The Road to Botany Bay is now in paperback (Faber, \$14.95).

THREE POEMS BY PETER PORTER

GODSEND

The dove returning brings the Ark
a twig of the vernacular,
bad news, a plague on Ararat.
Our threshold angel now descends
the sacred stair of words
to syntax, citing promises.

NOTHING NEITHER WAY

I saw the world cease at my cradle's foot.
Beginning life with knowledge of its end,
I wasn't told what acts would come between.

I meant to be a writer who put down
the truth dressed in its absolute brown clothes
but found myself in motley in my dreams.

I learned to live with my contending powers
and feel the warmth of being what I was
the while my species swarmed beneath the sun.

Natural History programmes pictured mice
alive beneath the desert sand, clusters
of ants like music's notes on wide patrol.

And all the while a silent ticking told
my individual fate, my siege of self
I was the screen where history would show.

'War declared today, went for a swim',
'got my *Zauberflöte* seventy-eights',
'came home to father choking on the floor'.

What do the waggons roll for, who will weigh
a Butlins in the pan with Buchenwald?
Death is a word in English. Gott is God.

And when I crawl from this cold absolute
of pointlessness, I only step into
the meaner worries of the middle way.

Why are the ones I've loved so treacherous?
Where's the escape from unoriginality?
What courage could command a quiet end?

'I am myself indifferent honest but
yet I could accuse me of such things . . .'
Ophelias feel the heat of our self-hate.

And so fate faces both ways. My close loves
are matches for myself: can they forgive
my seeing my mediocrity in them?

INAUGURAL LECTURE

In the beginning was the grapefruit
whose rose-window cross-section
hung in the calm empyrean
like a city of God: consider
each transparent ampule
held by perfect lines of pith,
as beautiful in its half transparency
as a painted tear, as strong
as tides correcting the interstices
of sand. Continue with the snowflake
seen through a microscope;
the watching eye brings imperfection
to this fruitless patterning
until the proper strut of death
restores inaugural dark.

We shiver in the winds of space,
some of the restless dust which blows
about the spars of measurement.
Short views alone can comfort
matter so distressed. A notice
on a gate reports a cat is lost,
stuck over it an invitation
to a rubber fetishist. Is this
sufficiently emotional
to represent what's still unclarified?

In these early lectures which are love
we aren't so knowing that we doze
through wonders. In the heavens
beyond digital recall
a soaring phrase establishes
one revision of the rotting heart—
murderers and misers
pay to hear the universe
play on its mortal Stradivarius.

MIDNIGHT MOVIES

Under the story there lies another story
closely resembling your life or else
glassgreen shadows painted across a day;
perhaps your soul is stories all the way down.
In threat begins transcendency.

Treading westward along a warehouse-
framed, umber street, I realized
that smack outside every doorway ahead
stood a hostile guard in the same blue rig.
Even paranoids can have enemies.

I scarpered smartly off to my left,
ducked through the drac backyard of
an oatmeal factory, then into some outhouse
full of flattish telephone booths.
Fluid, versatile and canny.

I started to make a call—cut off
and in came casual Mister Big
at which intrusion the whole scene cut
to a cream house interior: twentiesish.
A glimpse through the ontological window.

Mooching across the marble foyer
I found a bathroom, needed a bog
and sat on the middle toilet of three
as a couple of workmen came barging in.
After all, shit is only money.

Dark, tumbled into the other dream,
I paused by the ocean's transparent margin
to see a quick bird, not quail, not hawk,
plunge vertically into that glassy water.
The opposite can be good for us.

Prompter than boiled asparagus
it shot straight up again, accompanied
by a hairy dog, pied black and brown,
mobile between the elements.
Grammar mirrors reality.

Exhilaration was what I felt.
Run it all backwards: chew, consider,
life turns over again. Repent
for merely walking in time.
The true picture of the past flits by.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

BUNKERS AND HAZARDS IN A BACK LANE

My Captain Hook lights bonfires
in the back lane. Early one Sunday
I drive the car over the flames. His face
pops over the fence into the mirror
scared I might explode. The council man
can find no signs, I shut him up with a smutty
patch.

Hook uses my holiday to fell and spread a tree
across the lane. My son handles that.
An attentive, yes sympathetic man
sends a truck forthwith. Creepers looping
over fences are really nothing.
I try not to mind scratches on the car
but they'd be visible
in my psyche. Sometimes I lop greenery,
tell myself it's exercise. Late after a party
I shift a load of weeds. That blackens
a dress, and me inside it, bumping.
In a few days the stuff wilts and is forgotten.

Hook poses as ordinary, a son in a family.
He parks his old white Austin
outside my carport. The pharmacy must open,
I blast the horn then telephone
the police. Two of them with guns
laugh on the doorstep. Hook sleeping off a night
says his mum won't have the bomb outside her
house.

JOYCE LEE

SOMETIMES IN THE DARK

There is, someone claims,
a pup in the prison.
And then a yap! confirms
it. Who now can work?

The women, the inmates,
are excited. The welfare
officer has passed the gates
with a pup at her heels!

It is trotting along
the verandah, towards
H Block—springy, strong
and defiantly doggy.

“Oh!” says one “girl”
who is serving time
for murder. Memories whirl.
“Oh, I haven’t seen a dog

for nearly four years!”
The bars are no barrier
to the pup. It peers
through and the murderess

picks it up and hugs
it with a hard urgency.
It licks her face. No drugs
could put that distance

in her eyes. She thinks,
Four years and six to go.
She shakes her head, blinks
and says for consolation:

“But sometimes in the dark
far off, I hear them bark.”

ANDREW LANSDOWN

A SECOND-HAND FREUDIAN INTERPRETATION OF HAL COLEBATCH’S DISCOVERY OF A MARXIST LAVATORY UNDER ST. PAUL’S

There will be no more epiphanies in St. Paul’s
(at least not for the male Paulines).
Once again the Greater London Council
has taken unilateral action against
private property, private privacy, private parts.
The underground lavatory at St. Paul’s
is no accident of glass & porcelain.
A sub-committee of planners planned it.
A sub-committee of accountants accounted for it.
A too too solid solidarity of workers worked
kilns & furnaces & factories & brickyards
to sit this comrade in his (yes, his)
cloth cap & glass-fronted booth
only to look down a lineup of
an instant collective of
a proletariat of
men urinating in a tiled room to
a musak of “The Red Flag” flying

all, all urinating but Prince Hal
straining, struggling desperately to think of
the Berlin Wall, the Great Wall of China
& the outer walls of the Kremlin

while ascending into the epiphanies of the font
above
& the epiphanies above the font above.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

TWO POEMS BY ALISON CROGGON

SONGS OF A QUIET WOMAN

Lurching delicate as a snow queen down this
street of greys
unfocussed exactly enough to miss the
businessman
goggling at my stockings deciding
(as I twitch primly into my tram seat my
handbag
nestled on my lap like a puppy) deciding
this will be a day of minor survivals;
etching a treacherous mouth in fluorescent mirrors
to seal blandly all the routine lies
lunch perhaps for solace in a restaurant
and maybe my beautician who always cheers me
with her watercolour skin and supple fingers—
there are other things of course which are
important
but they may spill me from my limitations

there is one streetlight which always
blinks off whenever I walk near it
coming home late and secretarial
to the hint of cats and cooking—
silently inside me something flexes
something unsurprised

men of course lately they are kind to me
although an acid starting in my sweat
erodes me like an argument:
snatched by hesitation in a shop
eloquent and secret with the smell of him
I feel sureness swelling like a bruise
forcing blood into lips breathless and reverent

LA BELLE DAME

the lake looks inside itself
the sky has forgotten summer
and you there white on the grass

I can watch you
from all these miles
although there is no sun
there is no sun at all

all my mouths sang for you
those long nights
and every word was true:
the lake shuffled its visions
the stars trailed their brittle distances

what poisons did I set in you
so lovingly
that this winter is a scythe of wails
that against it your luxuriant veins
flower to livid ash

RESTAURATEUR

His eyes are marrons glacés
embedded in balls of brie.
His double chin is gravid
with sauce béarnaise
and mayonnaise
and haricots verts en aioli.

He and some diners exchange
candied compliments.
'We've missed you,' he complains.
Warmed by his condescension
and the other guests' attention,
they describe their month on the Continent.

He loves them because
they stuff his brain with money.
They love him because
he chokes their arteries with sour cream,
and makes their humblest pleasantry seem
quite brilliantly funny.

Cockroaches in the kitchen
grow sleek on goose fat
and strawberry confection.
Their eyes are beads of red caviar
embedded in sauce tartare.
Their bellies bulge with scallop St Jacques.

'Goodnight!' 'Thank you!' 'So late!'
When all the guests have left,
he sits weighing the take
in a hand well padded with chocolate mousse.
Only this can induce
in him a sort of tenderness,
a memory of something he once called happiness.

GUY MORRISON

VERY LIGHTS AT NOON

Very lights? at noon? in Summer?
Who's firing them?
Who's signalling?

Very lights? No, those gleaming stars
That flow across the green
And shaven hills, are thistle-down.

They spark on wire, and catch, bright
Xmas globes, up in the pines,
Or rain upon the river, riding
Row on row, like Ganges candles.

Who's firing them? The thistle-gun.
The thistle-gun! Where?
There, look, look along the saggy
Fence, an acrobat in red and blue,
And next to her, see, one leg up,
He's holding up the thistle-down,
And, as he does, a thistle-down
Is whisked away, and, catching sun,
It flows, a Very light, to hill,
To she-oak, and dark river. There! See?

Very lights? at noon? in Summer?
Who's firing them?
Who's signalling?

DENIS KEVANS

**NORTH WEST:
travelling with a sister**

I. Midland

We wait for the coach at the gardens.
Her hands, hardworked, hold her bag.

I wonder how the other passengers will see us,
with our ageing luggage and rather fussy

checking that our things are safe,
that we've left nothing behind.

How shall we talk together, how shall we
relate the days to each other. So many years.

Later, under tropical palms, I watch her
in the abandon of spa water; the lines around her
eyes.

She is (her body transported) tasting death, she
tells me.

II. On the road to Port Hedland

This is a strange place. We are intruders who put
up tin
and wood and write *Swagman's Roadhouse*.

The grey road snakes through iron country, and
man's fabricated
cells. Dampier. Karatha. Roebourne.

And Port Hedland.
A woman is loaded into a police van.

It's DJ night at the Esplanade.
Girls coming in, for the Session. Men eye them up,
then down.

The manager invites us. We say
nothing. Age—and the difference it brings—are
not talked about.

We go back to our boxes, everything neat and
clean.

The bathroom tiles gleaming. We can imagine
these four walls

into a home, and escape the DJ's music, and the
beer spilling,
and the slow, ever-so-slow dancing.

III. By car to Fitzroy Crossing: and a meeting

That muddy water, and the straggling trees
with long brown seed pods. A red dragonfly.

We're both tentative here.
A truck fords the river upstream.

We've parked away from the road. There's a
silence
outside, and we've just decided to go.

His appearing then is so soundless,
we don't see him until his outstretched arm is held

through the window.
He puts his hand on ours, his black fingers
curving.

Names. Our age. He gives us his aboriginal name,
and points towards the hills.

He is of Pigeon's tribe, he says. He tries to explain,
but we can't understand.

If we get out of the car, and come to those trees,
he will tell us stories, tell us about his tribe.

We sit quite still.
My sister says that, really, we must be getting back.

IV. Going Home

We have packed our bags,
and our aboriginal artefacts from Broome,

and the century-old perfume bottles;
and the shirt with the Rainbow Snake design.

My sister, from her window seat, smiles across to
me.

No need for bridges, after all. We are from the
same place,
and the same times.

I notice there's red sand still in our sandals.

And regret we didn't hear the stories by the river,
didn't know quite how to listen, or what to do.

MARY DILWORTH

guilty until proven guilty.

Is that 'moral simplicity'?

I'm not sure that those who can't, teach; but those who can, *do*. And Caddy *does*. She travels, fights fires, throws knives and digs a soak. She catches, cooks and eats a lot of seafood. She moves three paces to the same fox each night. 'Retreat'?

She identifies with *other* action. Loves storms. Is fascinated by machinery and technology. She also experiences vividly what she has only read about—Russia, weather patterns and space travel. It's not always possible to tell whether she's airborne because so much of her movement is evoked as flying. If she didn't refer to water and earth so often, a Shakespeare buff might hear her say 'I am fire and air'.

Dorothy Porter's *Driving Too Fast* is easy to read. No backhanded compliment. It's the main reason why the first and longest section works so well. Porter's treatment of the 'heavy' subjects of Carmen, Antarctic exploration, 'mad' twins and Tasmanian history is impressive. Mainly using dramatic monologues, she controls visual imagery, dialogue and word repetition in tones and rhythms that play down the subjects. Her art conceals art. My only reservation is that all the voices sound the same.

The rest of the collection fails to live up to the promise of the first section. The poet can't find another combination of subject and treatment to equal her best work. The lyric-descriptive poems aren't distinctive and some are slight. While some of her sexual poems are attractive she *strains* to make them significant—the opposite of her method in the first section. 'The Red Sports Car Afternoon' and 'When Desire's Gone' come closest to regaining the earlier quality but aren't as good as 'The Twins' from the first section:

I wish you weren't me.

I want someone different,
my twin.

Your eyes. Your hair.
Repulsive. Intimate as toilet paper.

Even when you're silent
your talk is my talk.

Shut up.

Meredith Wattison is an American poet. Although not all her poems are dramatic monologues, *Psyche's Circus* is an expressionist sequence—Mona Lisa, Marilyn Monroe and Mary Shelley as Circus. The delirious energy of the language (hundreds of verbless and/or one word sentences) is prevented from becoming advertising copy by the dramatic realisation

of major figures in the Western artistic and intellectual tradition. *These* figures are prevented from plod plod clump clump appearances by the poet's pop language. A heady combination that doesn't always work. But she lapses into obscurity, uncontrolled language and use of easy targets such as Andy Warhol are comparatively few.

The poet is so saturated in her subjects that she seems to be recreating them even when the situation is imaginary. There's nothing new about da Vinci as Mona Lisa, but Mona becomes Ophelia and also creates a work of art called Marilyn Monroe who keeps returning to the child Norma Jean. Mary Shelley becomes her own daughter and the daughter becomes Mary. Frankenstein's monster either becomes or meets Oskar the dwarf in Grass' *The Tin Drum*. Picasso becomes both Noah and God. It would be easy to say that the actors, writers and painters become their own and one another's works of art if their various creations weren't approached with such biographical expertise and ferocity. The sequence is a kind of fancy dress ball that includes animal and pre-animal stages of evolution, ending with a quotation from Charles Darwin. It's so pretentious that the pretentiousness ceases to matter.

Wattison favours her women but doesn't idealise or sentimentalise them, not even when she prefers Mary to the "awful" P. B. Shelley. The women are victims *and* heroines but they're more dramatised than judged, as in Monroe's drug states:

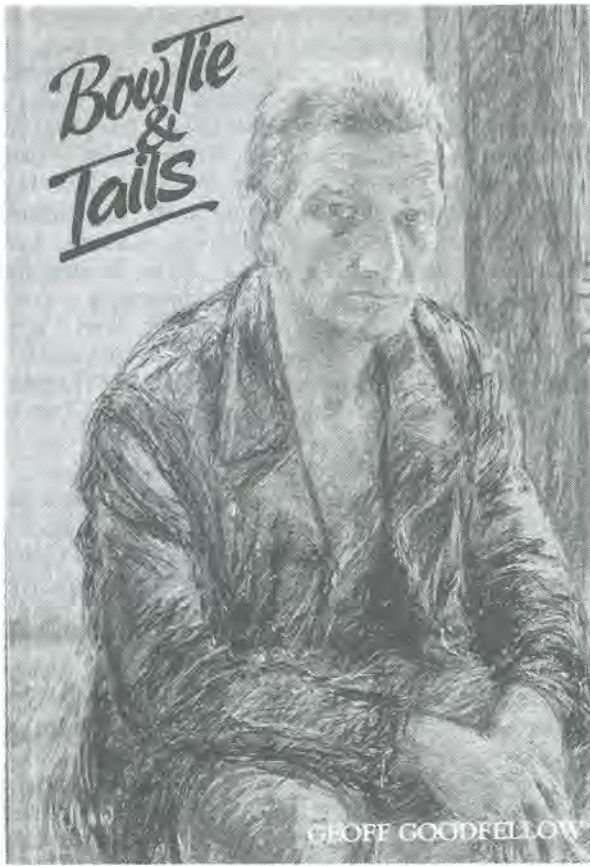
And when I told you I had thrown
diamonds from ninth floor windows
you loved me.

I said who needs best friends
if your lover loves you.

Wattison's men? Da Vinci (a woman) and Picasso (who believes God is a woman) receive balanced treatment. Truman Capote receives sympathetic treatment. And Wattison (as Monroe) gets quite high on Jack Kerouac!

Australian poetry readers needed Kate Jennings' *Mother I'm Rooted*. I suppose they still need anthologies of women's poetry. In 1990, however, they need the achievements of Caddy, Porter and Wattison even more. While I've not read anything quite like Wattison by an Australian poet, I hope I'm not going to spend the next decade reading second rate versions of her. I'd rather read more Caddy and Porter.

Dylan Thomas' reading voice could have made a Christmas card sound like a literary masterpiece. A good reader can vitalise *any* printed poem. That's why ABC radio has used professional readers in *A First Hearing* for as long as I can remember. There's nothing wrong with this tradition. Even so, BBC-ABC radio programs are a long way from those courageous poets



who fronted up to bars in the late 1960s and started reading their poetry to audiences whose previous contact with poetry would have been nursery rhymes and compulsory school readers. That was cultural innovation, even if it's yet to be recognised by cultural historians.

Between the radio and the bar come literary readings where audiences expect to hear and read poetry. There have been literary readings in all major/large Australian cities. Adelaide's Friendly Street is the oldest. Sydney's Harold Park is the most famous with the biggest audiences. Melbourne's La Mama Poetica began its readings in early 1985 at Carlton's La Mama Theatre. Judged by Mal Morgan's anthology of the same name, it must be a flourishing venue.

The anthology is generous. It's large. It contains multitudes—without containing them too much. It includes poetry that wasn't read at the readings, prose-poems, short fiction and short stories. For the most part, however, it's filled with poems performed at the readings. Some of these are *performance* poems. Meaning what?

One answer is "the poetry that university lecturers weren't directed to when *they* were students". There are other answers. They're worth giving because virtually nothing has been written on the subject in this country. The academics who could write it don't

want to know. The performance poets are either too busy writing and performing or, let's face it, can't write analytical prose.

Almost all performance poetry techniques have been used in poetry written primarily for the page. At a given period, these techniques might seem outdated or excessive in print. Then again, they might be just the techniques that would lead a reader to say "That would *sound* terrific". Of course, some of the techniques come from poetic traditions much older than print. I'm not suggesting that the contemporary performer is a performing encyclopedia of conscious influences. A poet influenced by a performance poet may have no idea who influenced the influential poet.

Repetition is a common feature. A flexible technique. Lyndon Walker's 'Unsophisticated Poem' uses the word 'woman' twenty times in twenty lines. As he plays around the one word, it becomes increasingly difficult to decide whether he refers to a woman or to certain qualities in women. Compared with this upbeat poem, Walker's 'There is No Need to Travel to America' is a downbeat coverage of the boredom of watching television screening movies about people watching movies on television. Jas H. Duke's 'My Tiger' is a love poem where an entire relationship is evoked by variations on the verb 'to tiger'. And it works.

Serious themes or subjects are often conveyed by *comic exaggeration*. Morgan's 'Have a Heart' opens:

I love you
my heart
and will never
reject you.
You are my
favourite pump.

Myron Lysenko has an affair with the bomb who/which is impatient to have her/its button pressed. If he doesn't manage to survive the bomb, he'd like to return as that superior life form—the cockroach. Eric Beach in 'evolution' deduces from the Big Bang theory that the universe's hairline is receding from a single point. Maurice Strandgard wants to be remembered as the inventor of the collapsible walking stick. I *hope* Cliff Smyth's 'the art of not writing' is comic exaggeration.

Lists can be used for various purposes. Lauren Lee Williams' 'Boys' House' is a list proving all male habitation, including the toilet seat permanently up. Stephen J. Williams in 'Epic Red' will paint red anything that isn't red already. He even accuses the Russians of being responsible for everything red. A magnificent obsession? Well, at least a paranoid one. Komninos' 'my friends' is a list of his friends' lives held together by the repetition of the title. It ends disarmingly "my friends/ and me". Although the poem is uneven it includes gems such as:

my friends
feed cats kangaroo meat
so they won't eat the native birds

Lists are probably the least disciplined performance poetry. They can slide into self-indulgence.

Narrative know-how is difficult to prove. Short quotations are useless. Allan Eric Martin's 'Spitting Out Sixpenny' is a superb lyric-narrative that evokes the poet's childhood. R. A. Simpson's short narrative conveys a drinking problem in 'Home Life, 1975'—one of his best poems. On the same subject Bev Roberts' 'Ms Bee' remembers her address and avoids chundering in the taxi. Shelton Lea's 'a poem on a peach melba hat' exudes larrikin charm. Narratives are journeys; not destinations.

Dramatic monologue is hardly new to poetry or drama. In 'A Real Good Catch' Nadia Coreno reveals more of her woman character than the character knows she's revealing. Doris Brett doesn't present Snow White from the stepmother's viewpoint; she presents the stepmother from the stepmother's viewpoint. A savage poem.

Address poems often address the audience but may also address people and things. Ken Smeaton instructs his hypothetical audience to stay away in 'Don't See This Poetry Show'. Jenny Boults' 'dear dusty springfield' is an ironic and bitter-sweet address that's really about ageing. John Ashton loves to hate Chandler Highway while Kevin Brophy's 'Melbourne' is wry and affectionate. Dare to call them odes.

Rhyme can be a problem in performance. Contemporary audiences are no longer used to it—despite Sylvia Plath, Bob Dylan and A. D. Hope. An *experienced* performer may get away with a serious poem in rhyme; an *inexperienced* performer may encounter suppressed (or unsuppressed) giggles. Rhyme is safer in comic poems. It's also part of the fun, as in Michael Sharkey's work. Rod Moran has no problem with rhyme either in his light satire 'Bolshevik Chic' or his bleak social comment 'White Collared'.

This anthology contains some excellent poems that were probably written for print but work equally well in performance. Although the ideas and feelings don't have to be simple, the language has to be clear. Walker's 'The Fisherman' and Morgan's 'Isaac Stern in Melbourne' are vivid lyrics. Walter Adamson's 'Refugees' is an apparently plain poem that gains depth from a mixture of tenses. Terry Harrington's 'Test-Match' is a fine father-son poem. Note the ending of Andrew Donald's 'Poem for Chris Mansell': "Is it true/ that she who has a/ why/ to live for/ can bear almost/ any/ how?" Philip Martin's 'Thanksgiving Snow' is a memorable lyric (although his sharper 'Bequest' would probably go down better in performance). Alison Croggon's 'Flirtation' is delicious. And Barbara Giles' 'Fireworks and

Champagne' is arguably the best poem about old age in Australian literature.

An anthology of this size and scope—albeit based on only one reading venue—would test any editor's taste and judgement. Morgan has done a fine job with his selection and also with the Contributors' Notes which always takes ages to compile. A fine job—but not a perfect job. First, some poets are under-represented: P.O., Peter Murphy, Lauren Lee Williams, Robert Harris and Jas H. Duke. Second, for an anthology stressing poetry in performance, there's too much obscure poetry: among others Tony Page, Alex Skovron, Bryce Vissel and Judith Rodriguez. It's a pity because the matron at the Port Hedland Hospital would enjoy some of Skovron's and Rodriguez' other work.

Geoff Goodfellow's first collection *No Collars No Cuffs* sold 4000 copies in less than four years. It's still selling in its fifth printing. The book is as hard as nails. It calls a cop, a cop; a crook, a crook. His second collection *Bow Tie & Tails* continues his earlier quality and expands his range—without much softening of his aims and impact. Now he's *almost* as hard as nails. However, he has extended his appreciation of physical toughness to *other* kinds of toughness—defiance, endurance and assertiveness. This is most evident in the 'family' section, particularly his treatment of women which also is shown in the 'street' and 'institutional' sections. Even so, he's capable of stylish satire of a trendy, affluent middle-class woman. It would be impossible to read Goodfellow and believe that Australia is a classless society.

The working class family is the centre of the poet's loyalties. He subjects it to a brutal working over without the sentimentality that so often goes with this kind of toughness. The family and friends are never far from violence and, therefore from crime. Violence (boxing) and controlling violence (bouncing) can be sources of income. Domestic violence always seems possible. He portrays disease, ageing, old age and death. Even the most cheerful poems hint at the other poems. 'Observer Observed' is psychologically claustrophobic. The three year old girl in 'A Happy Balance' is too young to distrust people. The woman in 'Just a Twist' tells the ill poet to squeeze a lemon rather than her breasts. In 'The Morning Shuffle' he manipulates a son out of bed but elsewhere his sons put him in his place.

The street poems are about drunks, junkies, beggars, prostitutes, rape victims, boxers and boxing trainers. They're the living, the dying and the dead. There are no eccentrics on Goodfellow's street—just nut cases. He's sympathetic. He knows these people. Even so, he intends to shock and he shocks. 'An Old Bloke' on the pension—a mixture of schizophrenia, illegal drugs and medication—turns out to be only twenty-eight. In 'Presumed Lost' a front bar 'mongrel' sinks

his 'ivories' through Black Frankie's 'snot-box' until his nose flaps 'like a wind-sock'. Here's 'Tailor Made':

She slid along the bar
gliding to the clink
of glasses
the swish & snap
of a beer tap
& knew just what
that customer wanted
when he said
give us a bit of head
but smiled politely
as good servants do

but he obviously thought
he could still be a chance—
slid his White Ox
into his overalls pocket
& changed to tailors—
anything to impress

said y' *new here aren't y'*
on his next one
where'd y' work before

i was an SP she said

jeez i don' mind a bet
wouldnaed pick y'
fer a bookie tho
not in a million years

supporting parent she laughed
tossing back her hair
& moving up the bar

& while she was talking art
to a bloke two up
he eyed her split skirt—
caught her eye & big noted
he'd been to Pro's last opening

then switched to house white

& as she slid across
his change
he pulled her closer
with a wave of his head
said softly
i'd love to get into y'r pants

her eyes flashed like
the blinking fluoro above her
as she replied
i'm sorry but i've got
one cunt in there already
i DON'T need another

& he hasn't been back yet
for his tailors.

Goodfellow's street leads straight to custodial and correctional institutions which, in turn, have some similarities with previously encountered institutions such as schools. Will kindergartens be next? He exposes recidivism; inadequate facilities and opportunities; arrogant, ignorant and niggling officials; and victims of sexual abuse who encounter more sexual abuse during 'rehabilitation':

if there's appeal
there's no right of appeal—
on appeal
& never a witness

just a cum-ing of age ceremony
for blonde haired boys
given the hamburger

& no-one hears
a single scream or muffled moan
as Governor's Pleasure
becomes someone else's.

He is, of course, a performance poet.

Expatriate Keith Harrison's *A Burning of Applewood* groups a fairly wide range of new and selected work. Although there are portraits, dramatic monologues, social comedy, fantasy and translations, most poems fall into the reflective-descriptive category. His vivid imagery draws on Australia, Europe and North America over thirty years. His poetic personality is generous, affectionate and sometimes wry—within limits.

Although Harrison can send himself up, he has trouble finding the right tone for his strongest feelings. The poet's description of swimming with his aged, disabled father is a fine example of what he can achieve by *showing* rather than his more usual method of telling. By contrast, under-statement leads to (or is part of) under-realisation, as in the potentially stunning poem 'Man in the Train'. The poet doesn't want to know about the worst human motives in himself or others. He finds pain, illness, ageing and death acceptable when he sees them as part of Nature. He's always lively when he finds books in the running brooks. In fact, he seems on the verge of tossing his books *in* the brooks.

The best poems are portraits and dramatic monologues where the poet is able to minimise his own role. This is from his tribute to Ingrid Bergman:

Who would have thought that you . . .
would rise on your birthday, late at night,
toss back a glass of Veuve Clicquot, chuckle . . .
pull up the sheet . . . turn your face
quickly to the dark and,
most privately, burp, and die.

Graham Rowlands works as a TAFE lecturer in Adelaide. His most recent poetry collection is *On the Menu*.

Caroline Caddy: *Beach Plastic* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$12.99).

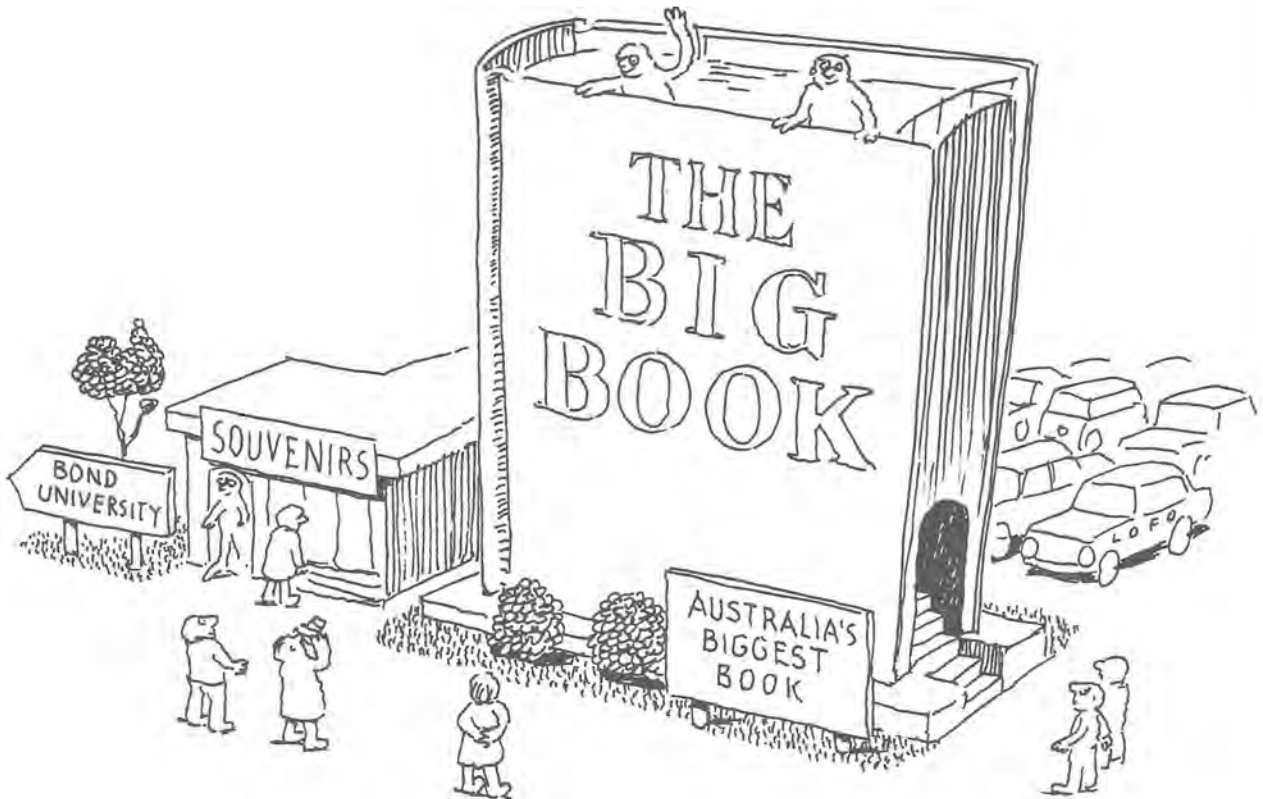
Geoff Goodfellow: *Bow Tie & Tails* (Wakefield Press, \$12.95).

Keith Harrison: *A Burning of Applewood* (Black Willow Press, Northfield, Minnesota).

Mal Morgan ed.: *La Mama Poetica* (Melbourne University Press, \$19.95).

Dorothy Porter: *Driving Too Fast* (University of Queensland Press, \$11.95).

Meredith Wattison: *Psyche's Circus* (*Poetry Australia* 121).



Eddie Doylerush tells me Miss Williams has died. Her brother is leaving their farm to live at Tal-y-Bont in the valley. After 300 years Rowlyn Uchaf will be empty; like many of the high farmhouses in Snowdonia it will probably go to ruin. Its name means Upper Whirlpool; the stream Afon Dulyn rushes under a steep bank close by.

I was there three times: 1943, 1979, 1986. I had not expected to get to the cottage in 'eighty-six; I did not even know it could be reached by a steep road from the Conwy valley. Eddie drove me there, up into that remote world of rock and turf and stone fences. We were warmly welcomed; the brother and sister were much more communicative than I remembered them. Miss Williams had been in hospital after breaking her leg; she had been mixing with people and watching television. She was much less shy. I learned that she was eighty-one, which surprised me—she seemed younger. Her brother was seventy-five, four years my senior. He was worried just then by a ban on selling his lambs, his farm being in one of those parts of Britain affected by the Chernobyl disaster. As we went outside to leave he said, "You notice a difference here?"

"The big tree has gone," I said.

"Yes, the big beech; it became dangerous."

I didn't much like that; it seemed an omen, a courting of displeasure from Brenin Llywd, Lord of the Mists, who ruled those parts.

I first reached Rowlyn Uchaf in August 1943. A friend, another RAAF navigator, who had been my flying partner all through our training days in Canada, was to have come with me. He was killed with the Pathfinder Force shortly before our booking date at the Ferry Hotel, Tal-y-Cafn. I went alone, feeling solitary from the beginning. I did long walks in the mountains, finding my way with an inch-to-the-mile ordnance survey; everything was on it, nevertheless, up there one had to be watchful, there were sudden mists, numerous precipices, bogs and often gale-force winds. There were no habitations in the higher parts. I used to tell Constable Jones at Tyn-y-Groes where

I was going and would report back to him on my way home. He did not altogether approve of my lone walks. He was an expert in mountain rescues—and there were plenty in those days of aircraft crashes. He was decorated for his work later on.

Toward the end of that leave I was beginning to find the mountains lonely and oppressive. On my last day I reached the top of Carnedd Llwyelyn, second mountain in Wales to Snowdon. Standing at the summit I was looking onto an array of peaks and chasms, the air eerily still, when mists closed in. I did not move. They wrapped about me, feeling my face and hands, lingering undecidedly, then, as if changing their mind, moved on. I moved quickly to a lower level, coming onto a saddle that looked far across to the Conwy valley. The nearer part of the intervening country was wild and open; lower down were woods and stone fences and farms. Up the valley, towards the Irish Sea, a thunder cloud of immense proportions was moving inland, cannonading like a galleon as it came. I was walking in battledress and had no sort of waterproof, nor was there any kind of shelter. I decided to take a shortcut to the farmlands much below my level.

I had not long started when I came on remnants of a crashed aircraft embedded in the ground. Although there was little of it left and I didn't linger, I recognized that it had been an Anson. The cloud now was much closer. Although I was in sunshine the sky to the north was black and flickering with lightning. I descended cautiously beside twin lakes, Llyn Dulyn and Melynlyn. Llyn Dulyn—Black Lake—was backed by a high precipice, its surroundings sombre. I began racing with the oncoming cloud. Why I felt urgency I don't know. Perhaps I was fleeing as much from the mountains as from the storm; perhaps I was taut still after months of heavy losses on our squadron.

Years after this day, in 1966, I wrote about it for *Blackwood's Magazine*. Since the account itself played a part in the sequence of happenings, I shall quote from it:

I looked ahead for shelter and saw not far off two farmhouses, marked on my map Hafod-y-garreg and



"No I don't remember you!"

Hafod-y-gorswen. I walked quickly towards them, but before long saw that they were roofless and deserted.

The cloud was now only a few miles off, and I could see rain obliterating everything in its path. It was then that I noticed this other cottage, Rowlyn Uchaf, about a mile away against a hollowed flank of a hill.

I began running, pacing with the cloud, but across its line of movement. I was about half way to the cottage when the whole range shook with thunder and the nearer peaks were blotted out. The thunder rolled among the mountains, crashing and echoing. In strange contrast all the country about me was bathed in yellowish light.

I went through long grass, past sheep and over fences. Between me and the cottage a stream flowed towards a wood. I pushed through trees, crossed the stream on stones, and climbed a hedge. As the rain began to fall I stood facing the back wall of the cottage. On the other side a door led directly into a kitchen from which I could hear light-hearted voices speaking in Welsh. The rain was already streaming down, hissing on the ground. I called out, "May I shelter please from the storm?"

The voices ceased. After a moment a man's voice answered, "Come in."

In the dim light I saw the glow of a fire on the

faces of a young man and woman, and on an old woman sitting in the chimney corner. The two women were immediately silent and scarcely looked my way; only the man turned towards me. I explained uneasily that I had come from Carnedd Llwyelyn and was on my way to Tal-y-Cafn where I was staying. He seemed surprised and said something in Welsh to the young woman. I thought she might have been unable to speak English, but she said, "You have walked a long way."

As my eyes became accustomed to the light I saw that the floor was of polished slate, large blue-grey slabs from the mountains. Against one wall stood a dresser of very dark wood and on it a willow-pattern dinner-set and some pewter mugs. Beside the dresser stood a grandfather clock, its tick audible above the rain. There was no ceiling to the room, but the underside of the roof was whitewashed. It must have been fourteen feet at the gable.

The young woman was standing at a table near the only window, mixing something in a bowl, her eyes on the gloom and rain outside. Her mother, or mother-in-law, sat motionless before the wide hearth. The whole picture was one of great beauty and simplicity.

As the silence persisted I said, "This is a beautiful room."

The young woman smiled faintly, but the man

replied, "The cottage will fall down one of these days—it is three hundred years old."

Then he said nothing more and I hardly knew what I could say to him. We stood motionless and silent. Outside the rain was threshing at the open door.

"I am in the Australian Air Force," I said at length.

The young woman answered slowly, "We had an airman from New Zealand here."

"Walking, too?"

"No." It was the man who answered. "He crashed on the mountains in an Anson."

"By the two lakes?"

"Yes, by the two lakes. He was blind in one eye and his head was injured. It took him seventeen hours to reach our cottage. There were three other men in the wreck."

I looked at him, waiting for him to go on. His eyes were somewhere beyond me. "It was winter, you see, and his hands were all torn from feeling his way. He went to two cottages before he reached us, but they were empty."

I remembered Hafod-y-gorswen and Hafod-y-garreg, and thought of this man stumbling to them in darkness.

"And the other three?"

"One lived and two died. We were long reaching them in the mists."

"The New Zealander?"

"He lived."

The rain had eased. I saw that the young woman was setting the table for the evening meal. She gave me a glass of fresh milk while the three of them sat down to eat. I drank the milk and only paused a moment longer to ask the way.

I never forgot that room and the people. As the years passed the room came to represent for me a place of deep peace; an unassailable place to which I could retreat in my own mind. Perhaps this was so because I had come to it out of a storm which, in my mind, I identified with the greater storm we had known in Bomber Command. I hankered over the years to return to it. Often in my mind's eye I would see the old woman motionless by the fire; the man's dark eyes as he told me of the New Zealander; the young woman smiling shyly as she handed me the glass of milk.

In 1963 and 1964 I was in Britain. On each occasion I took the opportunity to try to retrace my steps to Rowlyn Uchaf. I found the way confusing and, in any event, realized that repetition of the walk was beyond me. I took solace in combining the two attempts in the 1966 *Blackwood's* tale.

Eleven years after the story was published I received a letter postmarked Roe Wen, that lovely village from which many of my walks had started. It was from a man named Eddie Doylerush who was writing a book on wartime aircraft crashes in Snowdonia. My mention of the Anson had led him to the site. He

had identified the aircraft; even traced the pilot, who was farming still in New Zealand. His name was Ken Archer. On the night of the accident he had covered his crew with parachute silk before starting down the unknown mountains, his left eyeball out of its socket, his face "like a raw piece of steak". Eventually I was to meet him.

But chiefly Eddie Doylerush wrote about the cottage:

As Rowlyn Uchaf was for you, at one time, unattainable I have, in a sense, brought it to you. It came about like this: Just lately I have been incorporating walks with research into the stories behind the many aircraft crashes in wartime on the mountains. One of my colleagues, knowing of my interest, lent me a copy of *Blackwood's Magazine* with *A Long Time* in it. . . . I then thought it time to make a pilgrimage to Rowlyn Uchaf. . . . I wondered if anyone still lived there—so many farms in the hills are now abandoned. The farm was indeed 'alive' and Mr Williams himself came to the gate. I was invited into the cottage. Like you I found it dark with no artificial light, but it was just as you had described it all those years ago. . . .

The old lady had died; the Williams brother and sister were living there. In the following year Eddie Doylerush wrote:

If ever you are over this way I should like to take you on foot to Rowlyn Uchaf by a route less arduous than the one you attempted in 1963 and '64.

I was able to join him in 1979; he provided bed, boots, pack, food and warm company. His "less-arduous" route seemed arduous enough—I was within a few days of my sixty-fourth birthday. Near the forbidding lakes a strong wind rose, lashing us with rain. Ahead we could see the cottage, white against woods under its rounded hill. We were drenched before we reached it. As we drew close a dog set up indignant barking. I asked Eddie if we were expected. He shook his head. "I thought it better not to tell them. They are inclined to be shy."

At length we rounded the cottage wall, just as I had done in 1943. The dog was barking frantically somewhere inside. Then I saw at the door a man in a cloth cap, holding a border collie. He put his hand around its muzzle and regarded us with curious but friendly eyes.

"Mr Williams—" Eddie began.

"Ah, it's you Mr Doylerush! I did not recognize you—not with your hair so wet."

Certainly I would not have recognized the farmer. He seemed by no means as remote as I remembered him. His sheepdog was carrying on with abusive, muted sounds, eager to run us off the place. "Tyd onna!" he was commanded.

"This gentleman is from Australia," Eddie began. He introduced us and we shook hands across the mollified dog. "He has been here before—thirty-six years ago."

"Thirty-six years!" Mr Williams looked at me searchingly, but shook his head. "I don't remember. How was it you came here?"

"I was walking back from Carnedd Llwyelyn and sheltered here from a storm." What else might jog his memory? "I was wearing Air Force battledress—Australian Air Force."

He pondered, hand to chin. "No, I don't remember." I said then, "You remember the New Zealander?—the man who crashed in the Anson and walked here?"

"Ah, Mr Archer; I do indeed." He shook his head. "I thought he would lose his eye."

He knew, it seemed, that Ken's eye had been saved. "Thirty-six years, you say—nineteen forty-three? It may be that my sister would remember you. Would you like to meet Miss Williams?"

"Very much," I answered.

He stood aside and allowed me to precede him and Eddie to the room, into that inner place of my mind. A few steps and there it was as I remembered it: stillness after wind and rain; the high roof without a ceiling; the slate floor; the sideboard with its willow-pattern dinner-set; the grandfather clock—no, my memory had played me false—two grandfather clocks. Then I saw an old woman sitting in the shadowy area by the large range—the place where I had seen her mother sitting. She was gazing from the small window to the mountains, her face remote and absorbed. As I entered she turned and rose shyly. As she did so

her whole demeanor changed remarkably; a youthfulness suffused her. She spoke quietly in Welsh—a greeting, but something more. Surely she hadn't recognized me! The others came in and I felt an odd sense of loss. Her brother said, "A gentleman from Australia to see you."

She inclined her head in acknowledgement and held out her hand.

"He says he came here thirty-six years ago. Do you remember him?"

Perhaps I ought have been prepared, but I was not. She smiled warmly and said, "A glass of milk."

Was it possible! A glass of milk! "Yes," I said.

Her brother smiled happily, but showed no surprise. "There!" he said, as if his expectation had been confirmed.

For her part, having spoken to me, Miss Williams returned to the shadows by the stove; age had returned to her; her eyes went back to the mountain scene.

Eddie said presently, "We must go, Mr Williams." In turn we shook his hand and thanked him. Miss Williams did not speak again, nor look our way. In a few moments we were walking once more through wet grass, silent with surprise and joy.

As I said in the beginning, Miss Williams was much more communicative in 1986. She died in the autumn of 1987; her brother closed the door of Rowlyn Uchaf five months later.

Among Don Charlwood's best-known books are his wartime memoir No Moon Tonight (1956) and All the Green Year (1965) both of which have been constantly in print. Don Charlwood lives in Melbourne.

The Overland Society Capital Fund

Michael Dugan, Honorary Treasurer, writes: We are grateful to the following for donations made to *Overland's* Capital Fund: Maurice Strandgard, Mona and Len Fox, Robyn Rowland, R. M. Crawford.

on the line

The extraordinary events in Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R., and particularly their astonishing and unexpected pace, makes comment by their writers and intellectuals fleeting, and fragmented by yet further developments. Writers actively engaged in day-to-day struggles for greater democracy may have to wait before writing about the experience. For most of us, of course, the playwright Vaclav Havel, now interim President of Czechoslovakia, symbolises this engagement. But writers are playing central roles in democracy movements in Poland, the G.D.R., Hungary, Bulgaria, indeed everywhere. The pressures on attempts to create alternative social democratic policies in the midst of economic disaster and strident and often authoritarian nationalistic movements are daunting to say the least. The Hungarian historian George Litvan said last November that "Two obstacles brought down every previous attempt to establish democracy here: the lack of tolerance and understanding between the ethnic groups and nations in Central Europe, and the lack of democratic unity. We have somehow now to avoid the mistakes which led to past catastrophes."

Nationalism has exploded in the U.S.S.R. and television will ultimately have the same effect there as it had, although it took so long, on the U.S.A. during the Vietnam War. We now see the various crises enacted nightly on our screens. Former dissidents have returned from silence and internal exile and have even been elected to central and local governments. The most powerful symbol of this change was the election of the late A. D. Sakharov. In a memorable piece in Melbourne's *Sunday Herald* Frank Hardy included

a translation of Yevgeny Yevtushenko's recent elegy for Sakharov. Yevtushenko has been elected as a member for Kharkov, Russia's third largest city, with 78 per cent of the votes. Like so many Yevtushenko is vividly aware of the threat from the economic crises to a democracy struggling to be born: "Until we get economic freedom the other freedoms hang over us like a Damocles sword." "We've a lot of glasnost but not many potatoes."

There is little sign from the comments so far made by Eastern European and Soviet writers which I have heard or read that the kind of democracy being struggled for has much resemblance to the mythologies promoted by the power brokers of 'Western' capitalism. In time we hope to publish comments on the democracy movements by writers from the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe. We also hope to publish translations of recent poetry and some literary comment.

Back home three of the great nurturers of writing, publishing and reading leave their present positions: Tom Shapcott, Di Gribble and Ian Templeman. They will be sorely missed and our thanks to them, joining the thanks of so many, is mixed with the hope that the rare abilities the three have shown to discover, develop and support good writing will not be unexercised for long.

Tom Shapcott completes his six year term as Director of the Literature Board in March. No position in the literary world is more demanding or more exposed to destructive and uninformed comment. Michael Costigan, as first Director, brought to the position a fine intelligence, a quiet ability to carry an enormous work load

and the gift of being able to gather and to transmit factually and lucidly an enormous amount of information. His was a hard act to follow but Shapcott, beginning in November 1983, succeeded brilliantly in turning that style into a tradition and, in difficult times, enhancing it. We welcome his successor Sandra Forbes, a former executive of the Board and a former Director of the Australian Book Publishers Association.

The takeover by Penguin of Melbourne independent publisher McPhee Gribble is a shock ending to an exhilarating fourteen years. Few publishers have been so admired. While it is good to know that Penguin will keep the McPhee Gribble imprint and that Hilary McPhee will continue as publisher we wish, right now, to pay tribute to Di Gribble. The publisher and printer Henry Rosenbloom spoke for all of us when he wrote that "McPhee Gribble were arguably the best literary publishers in Australia. They tried for fourteen years to make a viable business out of good writing and good books." Di Gribble, with Hilary McPhee, has not only the respect but the warm affection of countless writers and readers. We are reluctant to lose from publishing her energy, forthright intelligence and management flair. She may wish to avoid it, but surely a "Come back, Di Gribble" movement is already underway.

Few *Overland* readers are unaware of the Fremantle Arts Centre Press, that publishing phenomenon which produced its first four titles in 1976. Who has not heard of Albert Facey and Sally Morgan whose books the Press discovered, developed and published to such astonishing success? Many will remember that F.A.C.P. was Elizabeth Jolley's first publisher (*Five*

Acre Virgin, 1976). The Press is an integral part of a rich range of activities associated with the Fremantle Arts Centre. Ian Templeman was the Centre's presiding genius from its beginning in 1972. Trained as a visual artist and as a teacher, he saw the position as Director as an opportunity both to create an informed audience for the arts and to provide payment for artists as they developed. "There were two parallel streams the Centre could develop. The first was an adult education stream. People could come here to learn to paint, make a pot, write a poem, and so on. It was a multi-arts approach. Alongside this there are the artists who teach the community courses. They get paid *and* exhibited."

The Press evolved from this concept. Initially Templeman himself taught the creative writing course "because the Centre does not have to pay extra money for a tutor". He published the work of his students in about one hundred duplicated booklets. They sold out. He then asked Elizabeth Jolley to teach the course. The Court Government established a committee to examine ways to publish Western Australian writers. Templeman made a successful submission to establish a publishing unit within the Centre and was then able to employ one person full-time. He soon saw that it was

necessary for the Press to have an independent identity and, remarkably, was able to persuade the Fremantle City Council to allow this. The rest is a triumphant chapter of publishing history.

Templeman has been one of those rare people able to create a ground for creativity. Plays were commissioned, writers seminars held, opportunities made for lectures by visiting writers such as Helen Garner, Frank Moorhouse and Blanche d'Alpuget. Posters of fiction and of poetry were produced and the magazine *Patterns* launched, followed by the now very successful *Fremantle Arts Review*. All of these activities, and of course the books of the Press, reflected Templeman's commitment to good design as well as to literary innovation. As the activities grew he attracted and developed a small and gifted staff of writers and editors. It was evident that one man could not continue, after seventeen years of such intense activity, to direct both the Centre and the Press. Both had grown so much. Ian Templeman would have liked to continue with the Press and most of the members of the controlling corporate body which he had fought to establish enthusiastically agreed. But, so I understand, not all. Ian Templeman played down what must have been a traumatic time and

decided to leave Western Australia. "It's a small community here and I don't want to cause any unpleasantness. I still want to develop something with an arts/publishing edge." He leaves behind a flourishing Press with a talented staff and starts again, one of the great creative nurturers of our time.

Yet another departure: Alan Johnson the Administrator of the Public Lending Right Committee has left that position, not caring to follow the Committee from Sydney to its new headquarters in Canberra. Public Lending Right began in 1974 with Richard Hall as Chair. I was a member of the founding committee and remained, as a member and then as Chair, until 1985. Alan joined us a few years after we began. I wonder if writers appreciate how much we owe him. With the tiniest staff he enabled the Committee to fight for and eventually gain the security of the PLR Act (July 1987) despite entrenched bureaucratic inertia (and active enmity in some quarters). While that battle was on, Alan continued year after year to run the survey, codify the innumerable decisions and pay the cheques. He made the Committee the best on which I have served and, in the most unassuming way, has been a public servant to whom writers and

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publishers are indebted. Farewell, Alan, and thanks. You did a great thing for us.

'Performance Poetry' is given extended comment by Graham Rowlands in his quarterly survey of recent poetry in this issue (p. 31). Curious how the term eludes clear definition. Since Graham Rowlands wrote his article three very interesting, examples of the art have come to hand, one on video tape, one on audio cassette and one a combination of print and audio tape. The video is *Shelton Lea Presents the Radical Poets* produced by Terry Doran for Mile Post Productions. This is no amateur effort. The camera work is superb, successfully capturing the ambience of the poets and their large casual audience at the Punters Club Hotel in Melbourne last September. The video makes quite clear that this is not a gathering of poets reading to other poets but a genuine, if at times uneasy, interaction between poets and unexpected audience. Among the many poets appearing are Lauren Williams (memorable), Kerry Scuffins, Jenny Boulton, Catherine Bateson, Billy Marshall-Stoneking (a fine poem), Eric Beach, Nigel Roberts, Geoff Goodfellow (in absolute command) and, of course, Shelton Lea. Mile Post Productions have given us, as well as

great entertainment, an archive of importance. This is the only way to capture the essence of performance poetry: an essential acquisition for major libraries and wherever contemporary literature is studied. (\$75 from Mile Post Productions, 52 Argyle Street, Fitzroy, 3065. (03) 417 4375).

Another example of the present vitality of performance poetry is a recent audio cassette *The Best of Jas H. Duke* (N.M.A. Publications, P.O. Box 185, Brunswick, 3056). Duke's book *Poems of War and Peace* created quite a stir a year or so back, was short-listed for various awards, and rapidly became a collector's item. Alone among the better-known performance poets Duke is also a poet of abstract sound, that is he will take one word, for example *Roo*, and create an extraordinary structure. Some of the poems on the cassette such as *Stalin* are well-known to radio audiences. These seventeen poems, with their energy, dada wit, fierce political and social satire, wide ranging historic references, are a memorable performance. Here is poetry after the fire alarm, at speed, all bells ringing racing down Main Street to the fire.

Ken Smeaton *et al* have imaginatively presented the work of 17 poets in performance in *Nightclub*

Poetry Exposition and Nightclub Poetry Mag Pad (Street Poetry Lab, 1989, \$10 from Collected Works, 1st Floor, Flinders Way Arcade, 238 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, 3000). The performances, from the 1989 Spoleto Fringe Festival, are presented on a 60 minute tape accompanied by the poems in printed form. A listing of the poets will sufficiently demonstrate the range of styles and approaches: John Ason, Eric Beach, Jenny Boulton, Jas H. Duke, Geoff Goodfellow, Allen Gregory, Liz Hall, Kristin Henry, Kerry Loughrey, Myron Lysenko, Billy Marshall-Stoneking, Nigel Roberts, Kerry Scuffins, Ken Smeaton, Tom the Street Poet, Nolan Tyrrell and Lauren Williams. Anyone with any interest in contemporary Australian poetry will recognise at least some of the names. Michael Dugan says "The package is good value at a tenner and, incidentally, if I were a teacher wanting to involve upper secondary students in poetry, I'd leap at it."

Gremlins stalk into the most sedate printer-publisher relations. We apologise for the rather flimsy paper used for the cover of our last issue and to those subscribers who received slightly damaged copies as a result.

Barrett Reid

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She knew it would be Mr Tatsuma, although the telephone rang in the same boring way it always did—erp-erp, arp-arp . . . duty calls, be nice, make him happy.

Mr Tatsuma was usually about this time, although not every day of course, and sometimes not for several days. But usually twice a week. He had last rung on Tuesday and it was now Friday, so it was more than likely that when she picked up the receiver and announced the number, adding the husky invitation "Can I help you?" it would be Mr Tatsuma's hesitant, sensitive, yet utterly single-minded voice that would answer.

"Tatsuma-san here. Is that . . . Susie?"

He always hesitated before mentioning the name. She had thought it necessary at the beginning to explain that Susie did not exist. The name had been chosen because it rhymed in a kind of way with sexy. 'Sexy Susie' and the telephone number was all that was required, if the paragraph was well-placed.

"No, Mr Tatsuma, this is Liz. How are you today?"

"Ah yes," he would say, in his most deeply gratified manner. "Liz. And how are you today?"

"I'm just fine, Mr Tatsuma." And then: "I've been waiting for your call, Mr Tatsuma. I'm all hot and horny for you."

He would be convulsed with laughter at that.

"Oh, yes," laughing so much that the words were barely comprehensible, although by now, Liz, so-called, knew them by heart, "Hot and horny for Tatsuma-san . . . Tatsuma-san hot and horny for Liz . . . Oh, yes, very much so . . . etc."

This time, for it was indeed Mr Tatsuma, it was no different. Except that when his laugh had finally dwindled away and Liz was about to take the next step and say (settling into her bean bag, her brown hair tousled and her green eyes vacantly remembering), "I'm sitting on my couch, Mr Tatsuma, brushing my long blond hair with long firm strokes", he coughed insistently.

"Tatsuma-san propose something different today? Yes?"

"Of course, Mr Tatsuma."

"Of course, Liz."

He often repeated what she said, sometimes just as she was getting up a bit of momentum, as on one occasion: "And then Mr Tatsuma I take your hand and I wet one of your fingers in my mouth and then, ever so slowly so it won't hurt, I put your finger right up inside my lovely warm pussy", when he had repeated, "And I take finger of Liz, and I put it in mouth, so it is wet, and then I put it right up her



pussy."

"Not my finger, Mr Tatsuma." Liz laughed. "Your finger."

"Your pussy?"

"Yes, my pussy. Your finger."

"Tatsuma-san finger?"

"Yes, your finger, my pussy."

"Your finger," said Tatsuma-san sternly.

"Oh alright," said Liz, "it makes no difference to me. I could feel my pussy, so hot and juicy all around my finger, so I took it out and I took your hand and I wet it with my hot and juicy finger . . ."

"Tatsuma-san hand!"

"Yes," said Liz patiently. "Just wait. Mr Tatsuma." She chortled. "It'll come out alright in the end."

But Tatsuma-san was nervous and kept interrupting and she had to start again at the beginning, which made the session rather long. So this time she herself became nervous when Mr Tatsuma repeated what she

had said, especially after saying he wanted something different.

She decided to take the initiative.

"And how is Mrs Tatsuma?"

"I hear she is very well, thank you." He was gravely courteous. "She is busy with her national responsibilities."

This was a new development. She had been busy earlier with family responsibilities, especially with organising their two teen-age sons who went to classes in the martial arts every night, it seemed.

"And how is business?"

"Australia-Japan business co-operation very good."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Liz. "It's very important that Japan and Australia work together, isn't it?"

She blew smoke from her cigarette and rolled eyes at her reflection in a mirror.

"Very important," said Tatsuma-san.

However, his mind seemed to be elsewhere. He did not follow any of her leads. The long silences began to irritate her.

"Time is money, Mr Tatsuma. I've got clients waiting you know."

He responded briskly to her sing-song voice.

"Tatsuma-san ready. Please be so kind to extend. He pay, of course."

"Well now," said Liz, "I'm lying here on my lovely velvet couch, combing my long blond hair . . ."

"Something different?"

"I know, but we haven't got around to it, have we? Just tell me what you want. It's up to you." She sounded exasperated, but added, "I can do anything you want, except children and animals."

"Liz and Tatsuma-san can discuss serious matters, perhaps?"

"Well, if it turns you on . . ."

"Tatsuma-san wishes to save life." In a hoarse whisper.

"Life?"

"Yes."

"Whose life?"

"Life of Liz," said Tatsuma-san.

"You want to take me away from it all?" asked Liz.

"Ye-es," said Tatsuma-san.

She had already encountered this problem. After a couple of calls, some clients became possessive. They wanted favours, sometimes for nothing. Then frustrated, they became indignant and critical.

But Liz liked Mr Tatsuma. He could be courteous and even charming and paid on time, including a small tip.

"You needn't worry about me, Mr Tatsuma," she said. "I enjoy my work."

"Yes, yes, very good worker." He seemed to be searching for something. "Very . . . poetic?"

"Oh, that's nice." Liz felt herself blushing, so she added: "And hot and horny, too."

He descended into a spell of laughter that was, however, less buoyant than usual.

"You have feeling, perhaps?" Tatsuma-san inquired. "Just a little?"

"I've got a lot of feeling for you, Buster," said Liz.

Tatsuma-san subsided into a spasm of laughter, which quickly reached the bottom of his capacity.

"I have to tell you." He spoke in a lowered voice and hurriedly. "Wife is organising big attack on this country. She take over everything here. Everything."

"Oh come on," said Liz. She giggled. "You're having me on."

"It's true," Tatsuma-san said passionately. "She has secret plan. One son told me."

"Calm down, Mr Tatsuma." Liz looked around her tiny room for the other telephone.

"She will *do* it, I tell you. She will! She has plan!"

"Now, now, Mr Tatsuma. And when is all this going to happen?"

"On fiftieth anniversary of Japanese bombing of Darwin. February 19, 1992."

"Good heavens!" said Liz.

"Yes," said Tatsuma-san.

"But that's years away," said Liz, recovered. "You'll



be back in Japan by then. It's ages away."

"She now training in Japan. She has plan, I tell you." He whispered. "Assassination."

"Oh, really," said Liz. "Who?"

"Maybe Prime Minister," said Tatsuma-san. "Or me."

"Yeah?" said Liz.

"That is why Tatsuma-san must also plan. Now."

"Well, I'm not sure I can be much help, Mr Tatsuma," said Liz. The other telephone, which was shared with a half-Indian girl from Kenya who had a high British voice and specialised in nanny fantasies, was engaged.

"He plan escape with Liz," said Tatsuma-san.

"Escape?"

"Tatsuma-san has friend who can make new faces. When hit man come he cannot recognise. Very good friend."

"Mr Tatsuma, why don't we just do the usual. You know how hot and horny you get with Liz, how you love doing it. Look, here I am, sitting on my couch, brushing my hair and my pussy is all hot and wet waiting all this time . . ."

"Liz not really have long blond hair."

"Of course I do."

"Maybe you just say, make Tatsuma-san happy."

"I *do* have long blond hair, Mr Tatsuma, and my pussy is all hot and wet . . ."

"No matter, friend can fix everything, long, blond hair, big bosom, teeth white, legs straight. Anything. Tatsuma-san, too."

"I wouldn't want him to fix you, Mr Tatsuma," said Liz. "I like you just the way you are, tall, dark and handsome, with a touch of sadistic cruelty, so that when you swell up . . ."

"What height is Liz?"

"Oh, heavens. I never know . . . 165 centimetres, would that be right?"

"Probably."

He was quiet for a long time.

"Mr Tatsuma?"

"Yes."

"I was just wondering whether you were still there."

"Tatsuma-san still here."

"So?"

"He thinking."

"What about, Mr Tatsuma?"

"He thinking maybe this is good time for chrysanthemum."

"Oh, that's nice."

"And winter plum blossom."

"I like pink blossoms."

"In Japan," said Tatsuma-san, "sun is red, like blood. Like flag."

"Oh," said Liz.

"I know small village on sea," said Tatsuma-san, "Every day sun rises over water. Very pretty. Some fishing boats. Land rises . . . very quickly."

"You mean cliffs?" asked Liz.

"Yes, cliffs. At night lights all shine . . ."

"Twinkle, twinkle," said Liz.

"Yes, twinkle, twinkle."

"Very pretty," said Liz.

"Very pretty," said Tatsuma-san. "Liz and Tatsuma-san live there."

"In Japan?"

"As hunchbacks, maybe. No-one recognise. Friend very good."

"Mr Tatsuma," said Liz severely. "I've got to put a stop to this nonsense. You're a regular and I'll bend the rules for you, but we've got to get down to business. What do you want? Do you want the usual, the couch and the long blond hair? Or do you want the office desk? Or the crowded train?"

"Liz?"

"Yes."

"Maybe fishing village?"

"In Japan?"

"Yes, please. Twinkle, twinkle, maybe?"

"Jesus, not hunchbacks," said Liz.

"Not necessary, perhaps. Just secret journey at night, maybe?"

"Well, I'll give it a try, but remember, I've never been to Japan."

She settled down into her bean bag and glanced at her watch. She scuffed off her slippers and lit a cigarette.

"I arrived one night in this small Japanese village. It was very pretty, with lights all going twinkle, twinkle. I booked into this rather posh little hotel. The porter who brought up my bags was tall, dark and handsome, and he gave me a real look, as much as to say, 'I'll be up again later'. So later, just as I was lying on my couch, combing my long blond hair . . ."

"No good," said Tatsuma-san. "Not working."

"Well, I told you."

"Small village not have posh hotel. Tatsuma-san not porter."

"I've never been to Japan," said Liz. "You're in Australia now, remember."

"Maybe you shipwrecked," said Tatsuma-san. "You sitting on rock in Japanese fishing village, combing hair, when Tatsuma-san come, strolling in moonlight, carry you to cabin on steep cliff."

"I've never done a bloody shipwreck."

"You try," said Tatsuma-san.

"Well," said Liz, "There's this boat that hits a rock one night off the Japanese coast and I'm on it . . . Mr Tatsuma, why don't we do the crowded train? I quite like that, everyone pressing against me, and you putting your arms around me and me touching you up and you taking off my pants, without anyone noticing. We can do it in Japan, if you like."

"Japanese fishing village," said Tatsuma-san.

"God, you're hard," said Liz. "Well, alright, so I swim ashore and I'm sitting on this rock, combing my long blond hair when I see a tall, dark handsome man coming towards me . . ."

"In moonlight," said Tatsuma-san.

"In the moonlight," said Liz. "So I smile at him, just a little, and he comes up to me and touches my hair and then runs his finger around my neck, and inside my ear, and then he slides his hand down between my breasts which are all white and wet, and you can see the nipples through my blouse, and he takes my hand and puts it against his thigh and he unzips his trousers . . . Mr Tatsuma, are you there?"

"Tatsuma-san here."

"You're not grunting."

"He grunt later, in cabin."

"Okay. So he picks me up in his strong arms and carries me across the beach, which is all bathed in moonlight . . ."

"Very poetic," said Tatsuma-san.

"...And he carries me up the steep cliff to his cabin, which is warm and cozy and a fire is burning and there is a kettle on it, whistling with steam, and a cat curled up asleep on a chair, and a grandfather clock and sort of stained glass windows, and he puts me on his bed which smells of leather and fur..."

Tatsuma-san grunted.

"And he gently lies down beside me and puts his hand between my legs, feeling for my pussy..."

"Kiss," said Tatsuma-san.

"And he leans over me and places his lips on mine..."

"Tongue," said Tatsuma-san.

"He pushes his tongue..."

"Liz tongue."

"I push my tongue into his mouth, showing him that I want him, and he pushes his thumb into my pussy, all hot and horny, and then... You there, Mr Tatsuma?"

"Tatsuma-san here," he said, faintly.

"The door suddenly opens and Mrs Tatsuma stands there with an axe in her hands."

"No!"

"Yes! She raises the axe and comes right up to the bed."

"She kills you!"

"No, she kills you!"

"Cannot see," cried Tatsuma-san. "Friend has made invisible."

"But I can see you," said Liz. "You're lying next to me with my tongue in your mouth and your hand up my pussy. And I'm telling the story, Buster."

She listened to his heavy breathing. She waited for him to speak. Then she realised that he was sobbing, thin intakes of air bubbling into coughs and stifled wheezes.

"Come on, Mr Tatsuma, don't do that. It's only a joke."

She coaxed him. "I didn't mean to upset you."

Gradually his breathing subsided.

"Liz not poetic," he said sternly.

"You've got to learn to take a joke in Australia," she suggested.

He did not respond.

"Let's stop mucking about," said Liz. "I'm sitting on my lovely velvet couch, brushing my long blond hair with long slow strokes... Okay?"

"Okay," said Tatsuma-san, with a sigh.

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I had finished my secondary education at a convent-type school and entered the hallowed precincts of Sydney University as a Women's College student in residence.

Still in first term and I was just seventeen when we started rehearsals for the University Revue. It was in the College Common Room, sacred to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, conservative periodicals and our Principal, Miss Camilla Wedgwood, who was a Quaker.

I saw this tall, emaciated young man, playing the piano on a dais at the far end of the Common Room.

He looked dessicated, smoking a cigarette, half of which was unfallen ash still continuing a straight line from the corner of his mouth, and taking gulps at regular intervals from a tumbler of red plonk (as wine, then unpopular, was called).

He was vamping out the pop tunes of the day with dash and verve.

I was in the chorus line, singing and dancing, my mind still encased in the nunnery mores of my upbringing.

"Swing it, girls! Plenty of *swing!*" shouted the man at the piano.

"That's Jimmy McAuley!" one of the Second Years whispered to me, as if she were referring to God, or the King.

"More leg, girls! More leg!" shouted Jimmy McAuley, looking fixedly at us and not at the keyboard, but playing as if in a storm in mid-Pacific. "Swing more leg!" Holding his glass with one hand while the other never stopped playing, he gulped down more wine.

We obliged, because his fantastic rhythm permitted nothing else.

I was thrilled and fascinated by his sinuous, stringy, under-nourished body bashing away at that piano, and his bashing away at us with his verbal machine-gun fire. After I left, I asked the Second Year about him. "Oh! He's famous," she told me convincingly. "He's just got his M.A. with Firsts in English. But instead of getting the lecturer's position in the English Department, as he should have, they gave it to another chap."

"Why?" I asked her.

"It's most unfair," she told me. "You see, Jimmy McAuley did his M.A. on Baudelaire and Mallarmé, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and that sort of thing. Very decadent. He got a bad name over it. The other chap did his M.A. on a far more conventional subject."

The latter was the prototype academic,



bespectacled, his body in the praying mantis position before the lectern. Neatly dressed and approachable, he was unimpeded by charisma.

Jimmy was often to be seen lounging in the Arts Quadrangle in a dilapidated suit, an off-white silk evening scarf occasionally flung around his neck. He could be heard as a main speaker at the Freethought

Society and at the Literature Club meetings in lunch hour. His topics ranged from James Joyce and Marcel Proust to more exciting ideas such as Nihilism or the Negation of the Negation. To me he looked raffish, a reminder of the Yellow Book School. A romantic figure indeed!

He was a surprisingly softly spoken young man, and I read his poetry and his lyrical prose in *Arna* (the Arts Faculty magazine) and *Hermes* (the Sydney University literary magazine) with admiration. When war broke out that year, Jimmy became a passionate campaigner against censorship of the press.

From the satirical musical reviews *I'd Rather Be Left* and *The Marx of Time* put on 'down town' at the Independent Theatre or New Theatre (as distinct from the collegiate annual University Revue) I remember fragments of brilliant poems set to music, the whole composed, produced and no doubt directed by Jimmy:

Have they got measles in Albania?
Cut it out! Cut it out! . . .

or

They can write about the cricket
Or the rapes up in the thicket,
But cut out all the rest . . .

Today rape would not be subject for humour, one mark of progress in almost fifty years.

"There is but one God and that is Criticism" Professor John Anderson and Jimmy (to me his leading acolyte) both seemed to be proclaiming. Jimmy was in those days an anarcho-syndicalist, along with the Prof. I do not know whether, like John Anderson, he had ever been in the Communist Party.

Anarcho-syndicalists then espoused the cause of the P.O.U.M. in Barcelona. They quoted Proudhon, and indeed anarchism persisted as a strong political force in Spain until the end of the Spanish Civil War in which the anarcho-syndicalists made a strong stand.

I remember seeing Jimmy frequently in a kind of shed which served as the office of *Honi Soit*, the Sydney University newspaper then edited by Donald Horne. It was a newspaper of high standing in those years. Jimmy also attended a Labor Club Conference at the W.E.A. at Newport with his girl-friend Norma, who was a teacher at Hunter Girls High School in Newcastle. ('I was there.')

To me, Jimmy was the Cult Figure of my early undergraduate years. I loved him for his freedom from

social mores, his lean and hungry look, his apparent dissipation and decadence, his nothing-like-I-had-ever-met.

Years later I heard of his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church, his appointment in 1956 as first editor of *Quadrant*, the magazine of the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom which was established in 1950 to counter the threat of communism. The Association brought Stephen Spender to Australia. I remember Spender's Melbourne visit as part of the McCarthyite atmosphere of those years.

Jimmy McAuley married Norma and they had six children. He worked for many years at the Australian School of Pacific Administration (1946-60) and, at one stage, it was rumoured, almost converted Manning Clark to Catholicism. (This was the time when Manning Clark was writing volume one of his *A History of Australia*, published in 1962, and he was dealing with the Portuguese and Spanish navigators who were dedicated to bringing the Holy Mother and Son to this World's End).

I have read much poetry and prose written by the now late Professor McAuley over the intervening years, the core of it maintaining a strongly devout, politically conservative position.

I saw him last at the University of Hobart, where he was the Vice-Chancellor presiding at some distinguished gathering. He had aged (as had we all) but was well-dressed in a double-breasted suit, academic gown and hood. He looked well-fed, and had put on weight. He had the sobriety of a remote dignitary.

I remembered the piano-player calling us to "Swing more leg, girls!" between the gulps of plonk from the tumbler at the end of the keyboard, with a sad nostalgia . . . Why had he changed so much? Young anarchist to conservative academic?

I realise now he was merely following a lifeline common to so many: the continuum from Anarchy, from the values of Nihilism and Iconoclasm to those of devout Roman Catholicism.

I remembered Jimmy at the Memorial to Stephen Murray-Smith, when the opening speaker, Emeritus Professor C. Manning Clark, likened Stephen to Ian Turner and (among many others) to Jimmy McAuley.

I was glad Manning called him Jimmy, and not James.

Deirdre Moore lives in Melbourne. This is a section from work in progress.



Some years ago I began taking photographs of replicas without at first having any clear idea as to why I was drawn to them. Last year I became more aware of the nature of their bizarre fascination. They began to appear like physical summaries of social constructions, whether of brides, soldiers or dogs. Some have come to seem like incarnations of shared dreams, created in a fashion close to art naïve with its absence of pretension and self-consciousness. As my photographs have grown into a series they have become objects of contemplation for me in other ways. In close proximity, drawn from unconnected contexts, replicas constitute a curious society, remarkable for the separateness and inwardness of its members. For years now, in my writing, I've focussed on the inner life, drawing characters for whom life is solipsism. Thus, finding in replicas a visual correlate to this area of concern has been like déjà vu. In contrast to my writing, however, these photographs document forms in the external world. To stress their 'living' reality I've taken them in the manner of snapshots, the camera hand-held, the photographer often distracted by passers-by. This has sometimes produced jarring similarities with family snapshots.



*Peter Murphy's books include poetry, *Glass Doors* (Angus & Robertson), *Lies* (South Head Press) and stories, *Black Light* (Hawthorn Press) and *The Moving Shadow Problem* (University of Queensland Press). His concrete poems and photographs have been widely published and exhibited here and abroad.*

HELEN DANIEL

Plotting 5, a Quarterly Account of Recent Fiction

These chronicles of recent Australian fiction tend to be compressed and compendious, and sometimes seem to be criticism in the picaresque mode. In this episode, like Dinny O'Hearn in the last one, I too think it is time to loiter.

Last time, with characteristic eloquence, Dinny O'Hearn addressed some of the problematic attitudes from outside the literary world, or at least on its margins, attitudes which I too suspect are based on limited familiarity with contemporary Australian writing and literary culture. This time, I intend to potter inside the literary world, pondering on some problematic attitudes within Australian literary criticism.

In the 1960s, the Mexican writer, Octavio Paz, began a discussion of Latin American criticism, by announcing "It is an open secret that criticism is the weak point of Hispano-American literature." Paz continued, "There is no lack of good critics, of course" but there is a lack of

a world of ideas that as it develops creates an *intellectual space*: a critical sphere surrounding a work of literature, an echo that prolongs it or contradicts it. Such a space represents the meeting place with other works, the possibility of a dialogue between them. Criticism is responsible for the creation of what we call a literature, which is not so much the sum of individual works as the system of relations between them: a field of affinities and oppositions.¹

Paz argued that criticism had failed to create this intellectual space and "that is why . . . there is no Hispano-American literature, even though there exists a whole body of important works".

In Australia now, we are in a happier position. Certainly we have an Australian literature but we too have a few open secrets and a few conspicuous gaps. And here too, the space created by critical action, the place where works meet each other and confront each other, is often narrow. Australian fiction is in a period of extraordinary fertility, with new novels

appearing almost daily, but, in the midst of fictional plenty, I think much literary criticism is lagging behind, unable to keep up with the energies at work in our fiction.

Outside literary journals, there is a dearth of critical writing exploring the ideas and impulses, the dimensions of contemporary fiction, works which hazard ideas and bare intellectual passions. With many of our literary passions reserved for fellow critics, there are still few critical works addressed to the wider reading community. It seems to me vital that Australian critics should seek to enlarge the space within which literary debate and reflection and dialogue are conducted.

Perhaps this pottering is to do with plotting after all, the plotting of maps—or at least the space where one day maps might later be drawn, special kinds of maps which can contain oppositions and correlations, absences as well as presences. Here in Australia, we have our own dark continent, with many unexplored open spaces, large tracts of uncharted territory. While rumours of its riches are sometimes heard and strangers sometimes stumble across it by accident, few cartographers have travelled there. We need many more maps, maps drawn from many different angles and perspectives, maps which challenge and lure readers into new terrain. We need many more critical works which enter into dialogue with other literatures, which explore tensions and affinities in our literature, works which take risks, which hazard large ideas and large scale vision.

Yet recently there have been a number of viewpoints presented in newspapers which I find tend to shrink critical possibilities rather than enlarge them. An article in *The Sunday Herald* by Peter Craven² raised a number of loosely linked literary and academic issues, to which Ken Gelder replied by focusing on the notion of the canon approach to literature. Craven's article included the bizarre question, "Who, in a period of abject critical relativism, has the courage to prescribe the Australian books they think have the best right to live?" It is bizarre to imagine such a prescription might be an act of courage

rather than intellectual myopia, and certainly bizarre to imagine such a prescription might be an antidote to "abject critical relativism", a condition which I suspect was the real lament in Craven's article.

In his responding article,³ Gelder emphasised the diversity of Australian literature and objected, quite rightly, to the critical approach which focuses on the establishing of a canon of "great" writers. Of course Australian literature is "a sprawling, heterogeneous and often somewhat-dismembered body". Of course it cannot be encompassed in a canon of its "great" writers—or novels with "the best right to live". Yet it seems to me there are a number of positions between these two stances, indeed a diversity of them.

While I congratulate Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman on the range of fiction in their recent book, *The New Diversity: Australian Fiction 1970-88*, I hope we can do more than celebrate the diversity our fiction has long manifested. Gelder and Salzman set out "to retrieve heterogeneity" (the emphasis is mine). Obviously, in view of my own recent work, I applaud the retrieval of neglected or underrated fiction. But when was heterogeneity, which has long characterised our fiction, lost?

In their book, Gelder and Salzman suggest that, in *Liars*, I myself "offered a canon consisting of the work of eight writers . . . carrying with it an implied evaluation of all the writers who are excluded".⁴ It seems to me that to write about one group of writers in order to explore some ideas of what is going on in our literature, is neither proposing a canon nor an act of churlish insult to all the other miserable wretches who did not receive my attentions. Nor is it some ideological impurity, some breach of critical decorum to explore affinities and oppositions, to identify modes and preoccupations shared among a group of writers. I think literary enquiry is more than a numbers game, an approach which could become an overloaded critical lumbering, while our fiction is accelerating away into more exciting territory.

I think it is incontestably a proper critical procedure to select some Australian writers or books for discussion, a procedure which carries no necessary implications about all other Australian writers or books. It seems to me not only proper but vital to literary discourse. Laurie Clancy, however, in another newspaper article,⁵ was worried about the possibility of a "critical hegemony" in favour of what he calls "progressive writing", and warned that "The danger of pushing one barrow is that the rest of the market place may be neglected". While there are many curious attitudes behind Clancy's complaint, it draws my attention to the real dangers: the shortage of barrows, the dearth of ideas, the danger of silence descending upon us.

Perhaps the proper stance of the critic is a continuous celebration of diversity, but I hope this is not the limit of our collective critical capacities.

I hope we might move beyond that into hazarding some ideas and pushing a multitude of barrows in a crowded critical marketplace. Imagine it: ideas milling and jostling, bruising each other perhaps, but a critical marketplace teeming with life. Imagine the intellectual space of Australian literary criticism not only enlarged but crowded too.

All of this has to do with my belief that the range of literary criticism in this country is way behind the range of our fiction. Fiction writers are exploring vast spaces and terrains of Australian experience, past and present, within and beyond the template of Australia. The spaces and places, the habitats and inhabitants of Australian fiction are multiple, variant and, of course, splendidly diverse. Yet there is little criticism risking ideas across a whole range of matters our writers are exploring.

No one person can crowd a marketplace but, for what it's worth, here are a few of my barrows. We live in an age of an impasse of consciousness, with the spectre of global destruction and collective extinction hanging over us. Susan Sontag has written of

. . . our sense of standing in the ruins of thought and on the verge of the ruins of history and of man himself. (Cogito ergo boom.) More and more, the shrewdest thinkers and artists are precocious archaeologists of these ruins-in-the-making, indignant or stoical diagnosticians of defeat, enigmatic choreographers of the complex spiritual movements useful for individual survival in an era of permanent apocalypse.⁶

In such an era, attention to the processes of consciousness, the choreography of imagination and of cultural discourse, is a matter of urgency. Not for us the innocence of other eras, not for us late nineteenth century notions of linear space and time, not for us the assumption of progress. For us, when the earth itself is already protesting at our activities, there are radical questions of the possibilities of survival. Beyond 2000, a dark, labyrinthine tunnel and some vast conspiracy of time and contingency at work in which we seem to play no individual part.

In our fiction there is a multitude of ideas about the impact of the new millennium, ideas about belief, belief in the significance of private action, the condition of private recoil, belief in the possibility of a future, and the question of whether we see ourselves as bystanders, spectators watching helplessly, or can see ourselves as protagonists in the world.

In a previous *Overland* "Plotting", I potted around ideas of the millennial consciousness in Australian fiction, some novels addressed to the future, already stirring beneath the surface of the present, some turning back to cuspidal periods of Australian history in a literary prelude to the new millennium. Peter

Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* explores in the nineteenth century notions of faith, risk, and dissent which still brood over the present. Kate Grenville's *Joan Makes History* is sliding guises of woman across two centuries. Other novels are exploring the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Nigel Krauth's *The Bathing-Machine Called The Twentieth Century* and Victor Kelleher's *Em's Story*, or Rodney Hall's *Captivity Captive*. Some novels are exploring the mechanisms of recoil, retreat from vast and mysterious forces to the more tenable dispositions of the private self, while others, such as Thea Astley's *It's Raining in Mango*, Carey's *Illywhacker* and Tom Flood's first novel, *Oceana Fine*, are tracing circuitous familial paths through the twentieth century.

There are many tensions in Australian fiction to do with myth and the mythopoeic imagination, often its darker side, in novels ranging from Randolph Stow's *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, to the novels of Patrick White or David Malouf, or Marion Campbell's *Not Being Miriam*, from Atkinson's *Grey's Valley* to Tim Winton's *In the Winter Dark*, or Kelleher's *Em's Story*. Australian fiction reflects a contemporary reworking of myth, both stringing back to European mythology and, increasingly, drawing on Aboriginal mythology through novels such as Eric Willmot's *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior* and Mudrooroo Narogin's *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* or the contemporary twist in his *Doin Wildcat*.

In different ways, these novels already suggest movement away from what Christopher Koch has described as the strain of the "lost hemisphere" in Australian writing, the consciousness of "a ghostly negative image of another landscape",⁷ the lost landscape of England and of European ancestral memories. We are beginning to free ourselves from the "lost hemisphere" Koch described, to break free of that "European hegemony of the mind" to which Dinny O'Hearn referred in the previous episode of "Plotting".

Both mythically and politically, this shift in orientation is already emerging not only in the work of Koch himself, of Trevor Shearston and Blanche d'Alpuget, but also in novels as diverse as Rodney Hall's *Kisses of the Enemy*, Randolph Stow's *Visitants*, Robert Carter's *Prints in the Valley*, Astley's *Beachmasters*, Louis Nowra's *Palu*, *Water from the Moon* by Barnes and Birrell, R. F. Brissenden's suspense novel *Poor Boy*, Robert Drewe's *A Cry in The Jungle Bar* and Nicholas Hasluck's forthcoming novel *The Country Without Music*, as well as two recent novels set in China, Nicholas Jose's *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and Barbara Hanrahan's *Flawless Jade*.

While European culture, myth and history continue to pervade our writing, such novels represent a quest for a mythic framework within the geography of our world and a shift in the orientation of the Australian imagination. I believe this shift will be addressed in

part to Latin America, because of affinities and resonances among some Latin American and some Australian fiction. It might be to do with the Latin American sense of being Europe's *other*, what Brian McHale has described as a sense of being "its alien double". Or it might be to do with the nature of Latin America, which McHale has suggested is "intrinsically postmodernist".⁸ Or it might even be that Latin America has become a kind of metaphor for contemporary consciousness. A number of barrows there.

In Latin American fiction, borders constantly present themselves—borders of countries, time, cities, and chimerical borders of dream and revenant selves, rival regimes of reality. We too have many novels which cross borders or inhabit intersecting worlds, from Finola Moorhead's *Remember the Tarantella* to Henshaw's *Out of the Line of Fire*, from Hasluck's *The Bellarmine Jug* to David Ireland's *City of Women*. We have many labyrinthine narratives, narratives inside one another like Chinese boxes, from Murnane's *Landscape With Landscape* to Jolley's *Foxybaby* or *Miss Peabody's Inheritance*. We have much baroque fiction and many Borgesian impulses in our fiction, from the work of Gerald Murnane to Janette Turner Hospital's *Borderline* or Graham Henderson's *The Mountain*.

I think there are other interesting correlations among the work of many Latin American and Australian women writers, including Isabel Allende and Janette Turner Hospital, Marion Campbell and Luisa Valenzuela and Finola Moorhead. Between Latin America and Australia, there is a multitude of other possibilities for critical exploration, literary absences and presences, harmonies and discords, a myriad ideas to be hazarded, barrows to be pushed.

There are ideas to be risked about the increasing use of the detective mode or the mystery and suspense mode, a mode that can encompass the inexplicability, the insecurity and perplexity most of us, quite rightly, perceive to be at the centre of existence. In some fiction, the world seems more and more a mystery, not only with clues scattered around us, which we must struggle to recognise and interpret, but as if there is some sinister intent, some clandestine agency at work: in Michael Wilding's *Under Saturn*, Hospital's *Borderline*, Jan McKemmish's *A Gap in the Records*, Robert Kenny's *The Last Adventures of Christian Doom: Private I*, and Tom Flood's *Oceana Fine*. The list could go on, with new detective and mystery novels by women or with women protagonists: Marele Day's *The Life and Times of Harry Lavender*, Tess Brady's *Paint Me A Murder*, *Unable by Reason of Death* by Catherine Lewis and Judith Guerin, *Whatever Happened to Rose Dunn?* by Tom Beauford, alias John Sligo; and Jennifer Rowe's *Grim Pickings*. The mystery mode and a sense of secret plot in fiction is flourishing. Perhaps it is to do with exercising and exorcising

radical distrust in the contemporary world or perhaps it is a genre which has a kind of wistful teleological lure, promising the reader answers and ultimatrics.

This is not the place for more ideas nor more barrows. These are only shadows, spectres, my own inklings of possibilities amid the multitude of themes for collective critical investigation, wanting address now. Ideas to do with myth and history in a comic subversive mode, with freewheeling verbal energies and ideas about the sabotage of old literary forms and the emergence of hybrid forms of prose. And ideas to do with origins, exile and displacement, isolation and insulation; ideas to do with institutions and enclosure; ideas to do with moral and spiritual hiatus; many to do with the racial and cultural mix; themes of the private I and rival selves, sensuality and power; themes of shape, perspective, space, the lure of the mirage, the ancestral murmurs of lost landscapes and the shimmer of new landscapes.

After pottering for so long in the larger spaces of Australian writing, I have not left much space for recent fiction, but among the recent fiction I have read, two novels stand out. Even in this exciting period in Australian fiction, rarely are there first novels of the dazzling power and intellectual elegance of Tom Flood's *Oceana Fine* and Graham Henderson's *The Mountain*. Both explore mysterious conjunctions of self and shadow-selves, of truth and fabrication. While Henderson's is perpetually inner within the hermetic mysteries of the self, Tom Flood's novel trafficks across the real and the surreal, an intrigue of place, time and memory, through the decades of a family in Western Australian wheatfields.

Tom Flood



Winner of the 1988 Vogel Prize, *Oceana Fine* is a meditation on time and history, with a powerful mix of compelling suspense narrative and magical family saga. With variant histories of the Cleaver family since Federation Day 1901, the narrative runs serpentine through the twentieth century, coiling and uncoiling around events comical and chimerical, familiar and fabulous. While James, the narrator, is fossicking through the tailings of histories, searching for explanations of family mysteries, much of the novel turns on a spiritual energy and builds towards the dark alchemy of a communal cult in the wheatfields.

Through James' meditations on mysteries of memory, time and fiction, the past is in urgent address to the precarious now. With an unflagging energy, the style is richly inventive, attuned to the fabulous, the arcane and the mythic, as the surface of the tangible and the real breaks down to disclose not only mysteries within the Cleaver family but profound urgencies of the present.

Graham Henderson's *The Mountain* has a haunting sense of exile and enclosure. With a spare, almost chaste style, it has much to do with characters inhabiting others, with impersonations and disfigurements of self. Investigating Commissioner Joseph Gruner is sent to the North, to a Resettlement Station known as the Mountain, a strange ziggurat shaped construction in a flat, distant landscape. There to investigate the exiled writer, Jacob Bruner, Joseph Gruner enters his own exile, with Eva, her daughter Ursula, Katerina, and Gabriel Hartman, the disfigured forger and writer of stories.

In the storeys and stories of this architectonic novel, rival selves brush against each other, inside shifting symmetries of Hartman's stories and Gruner's reflections. As Gabriel Hartman's tales take Gruner into an anguish of self, the novel becomes a dark and tormented vision, yet with a contrary glow from the ease and lucency of the writing. A hermetic narrative, it moves with ascetic precision through a maze of figuring and disfiguring. Both *The Mountain* and *Oceana Fine* mark the debut of exciting new writers, beautifully polished novels which shine and shimmer among the recent fiction I have read.

Of course in recent fiction there is diversity, now as always. There are a number of first novels: Rod Usher's *A Man of Marbles*, a moving and engaging novel about that problematic figure, the good man; Amy Witting's intricate and sensitive novel of self-discovery, *I For Isobel*; Fiona Place's *Cardboard*, an intense and demanding novel of a woman's struggle with anorexia nervosa; and Justin d'Ath's novel of racial encounter, *The Initiate*. From Peter Goldsworthy, a writer whose short stories I admire, there is *Maestro*, his first novel which I found disappointing, exploring the bond between an adolescent Australian and an elderly European refugee beached in Darwin.

As well as Thomas Keneally's major new novel,

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Towards Asmara, a grim and disturbing work which also celebrates the people of Eritrea, there is a revised excerpt from Keneally's early novel, *The Fear*, under the title *By the Line*. Recent fiction by established writers also includes Georgia Savage's *The House Tiber*, a novel of street kids on the Gold Coast, which is at once searing and poignant; and two major novels about China, both of which have been much praised, Nicholas Jose's *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and Barbara Hanrahan's *Flawless Jade*. There is Barry Oakley's new novel, *The Craziplane*, which I wrote about in an earlier issue; a major new novel by Peter Corris, *The Gulliver Fortune*; Geoff Page's *Winter Vision*, set in the 1990s; and a welcome re-issue of Robin Wallace-Crabbe's *Feral Palit*, with his protagonist under seige in a landscape which "lied to me, misled me", the landscape of Gippsland and of his own darkly comic memories.

John Clanchy's *Homecoming* comprises three finely counterpointed novellas with a rich and assured style working across the gaps between people, one about parents whose son is killed in Vietnam, and one, particularly memorable, about a homosexual classical scholar, the structures of his private thought and the ironies of his position in an Australian college.

With the magical title, *North of the Moonlight Sonata*, there is Kerry Goldsworthy's first collection of short stories, of which I have read several glowing reviews. There is also Laurie Clancy's collection, *City to City*, Heather Falkner's *Up All Night*, and Liam Davison's powerful short stories in *The Shipwreck Party*, highly evocative writing which moves easily among elusive and peripheral moments. There is also a splendid new collection of short stories by Robert Drewe, *The Bay of Contented Men*. And there are a number of anthologies of note, all favourably reviewed, including Garry Disher's *Personal Best*, Drusilla Modjeska's *Inner Cities*, Peter Cowan's Western Australian collection, *Impressions*, and *Moments of Desire*, edited by Susan Hawthorne and Jenny Pausacker.

Many of these recent books I have not yet read, but I will in the coming months. In 1990 I hope also to read some new critical books, the kind that can enlarge the intellectual space of our literature and contribute to cultural discourse, while trafficking in diverse modes of contemporary fiction. I hope in 1990 there might be books which foster some large-scale critical diversity, books which hazard barrows of ideas in a crowded and noisy critical marketplace.

Helen Daniel, author of *Liars: Australian New Novelists* (Penguin), is the compiler of two recent books, *The Good Reading Guide* (McPhee Gribble, \$16.99) and *Expressway: invitation stories by Australian writers from a painting by Jeffrey Smart* (Penguin, \$12.99).

1. Octavio Paz: 'On Criticism', in *Alternating Current* Wildwood House, London 1974, pp. 35-6.
2. Peter Craven: "Writing Wrongs of Literary Australia", *The Sunday Herald*, August 20, 1989.
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5. Laurie Clancy: "The Seduction of Progressive Writers", *The Australian* September 23, 1989.
6. Susan Sontag: "Thinking Against Oneself: Reflections on Cioran", in *Styles of Radical Will*, Delta 1970, pp. 74-5.
7. Christopher Koch: "The Lost Hemisphere", in *Crossing the Gap: A Novelist's Essays*, The Hogarth Press, London 1987, p. 95.
8. Brian McHale *Postmodernism*, Methuen, New York and London 1987, p. 52.

NEW RELEASES CITED:

- Clanchy, John: *Homecoming* (UQP, \$12.95).
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 Corris, Peter: *The Gulliver Fortune* (Bantam, \$29.95).
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 Usher, Rod: *A Man of Marbles* (Angus and Robertson, \$24.95).
 Wallace-Crabbe, Robin: *Feral Palit* (Collins Imprint, \$12.95).
 Witting, Amy: *I For Isobel* (Penguin, \$12.99).

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: *Overland* has wonderful friends. Your letters from all States and even Japan and (to me) exotic islands are full of encouragement—and the occasional sharp criticism. Who among you spotted the misspelling of kotowing (no. 115, p. 11)? That wasn't a typo. Your comments and financial contributions raise our spirits.

Quite apart from our Capital Trust Fund and the Stephen Murray-Smith Memorial for new writers, you gave to the No Thanks to Australia Post Fund, from September to November, a magnificent \$1689.50. Specific thanks and a happy New Year to: \$120, Anon; \$100, M.S., J.N., P.L., J.W.; \$80, K.I.; \$76, A.S.; \$50, L.W., D.O'H., K.S.; \$34, J.H.; \$28, J.McI.; \$26, C.H., R.F., R.C., H.S., R.R., M.F., D.N., N.B.; \$25, B.G., J.W., McK., M.N.; \$24, R.S.; \$20, A.H., D.P.; \$16, S.McC., F.B., S.C., A.S., H.Z.; \$14, B.R.; \$12, C.G., M.B.; \$11, S.McK.; \$10, C.C., L.A., L.K., R.D.; \$7, L.A.; \$6, Anon, M.J.R., G.L., B.H., S.C., C.L.B., M.D., J.B., D.R., J.C., J.C., J.G., G.M., J.R., W.K., N.A., B.R., R.A., P.C., P.H., J.A., A.McG., A.W., J.R., I.P., D.McN., J.McG., F.J., G.S., R.F., G.S., G.P., K.A., N.E.C., L.C., V.C., A.L., R.C., R.H., J.H., M.T., J.K. & J.M.S., D. & K.W.; \$4, N.G.; \$2, J.H., J.W.; \$1.50, M.M.; \$1, G.M., B.F., B.L., M.G., P.B.

"You're not listening," said Marthe.

"Sure I am," Laurie replied. She looked out the window of the restaurant Marthe had said was the best in Dusseldorf and watched the shiny-haired women parading along the Konigsalle, dressed in leather and silk. The men on whose arms they dangled did not have the same fantasy gloss. They did not have to, Laurie thought; they only had to pay. Did Steven want a woman like that?

"You're *not!*" Marthe said, and started to cry.

Laurie stared stupidly at the buttons on Marthe's pale green blouse. Colleagues weren't supposed to cry at dinner. "You'll have to forgive me," Laurie said. "I'm not concentrating well. Steven and I broke up before I joined you in Berlin."

"Oh," said Marthe. "I thought you were practically married."

"He doesn't want me any more," Laurie said, immediately regretting it and having to choke back tears herself.

"I don't know what to say."

"Tell me what you were trying to before."

Marthe picked up a fork and put it down again. "The office here. Frans is having an affair with Frieda."

Laurie looked at her blankly. "Frieda?"

"She's the temporary secretary Frans hired when Christa went on vacation."

"And?"

"And he's going to fire Christa so that Frieda can have her job."

"What are you talking about?"

"I just *told* you!"

"What I meant was I don't understand the significance of what you're saying."

"He's a total liar! He is a man without scruples!"

"Frans?"

"Of *course*, Frans. That's what I'm *telling* you."

"But you can't just fire people in Germany," Laurie said. "You have to show that the person has done something wrong."

"He'll manage," said Marthe. "He does not care what he does, to get his way."

"Well," said Laurie, "I can see how that strikes

you as unfair. But if things are as you say, there doesn't seem much you can do about it."

"No," said Marthe. "That's why *you* have to do something about it."

"Me?"

"There's more. Frans also told Frieda she can have *my* job in a few months' time."

"Does Frieda have your qualifications?"

"Of course not."

"There you are, then."

"He'll *do* it!" said Marthe, slumping into her chair and crossing her arms. "He'll find a way. He's made up his mind."

"How do you know all this?"

Marthe uncrossed her arms and leaned across the table. "I heard him tell her," she said, sitting back in triumph.

Laurie blinked.

"He always shuts the door to his office when they talk," Marthe said. "It's the only time he ever shuts his door. Last week, after everyone else in the office had gone home, I listened at the door to what they were saying."

Laurie almost laughed, but the rabid look in Marthe's eyes made her nod gravely instead.

"Also," said Marthe, her voice taut, "Frieda goes through the papers on my desk at night, when there's no one else around."

"How do you know that?"

"I arrange pencils and paper clips in a particular way. They're in different positions in the morning."

"Perhaps the cleaning staff move them around."

"Cleaning staff come once a week. You don't believe me, do you?"

"I didn't say that."

"You don't know how bad it is," Marthe said, reaching into her handbag. "When Frans has Frieda in there, in the office—sometimes you can't hear any talking at all, they must be kissing or God knows what. It's disgusting, a sixty-year-old married man and a girl like that—everyone else in the office feels uncomfortable. No one can concentrate. And it's the worst for me, because I don't think I will have my

job much longer, and what will I do then?"

Marthe blew her nose, and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "He has all *sorts* of private meetings with her. Frieda knows everything that's going on in the company—probably things *you* don't even know. The other day, he told her that, if she stuck with him she wouldn't be sorry because the company was about to be sold and he'd make a fortune from his shares."

Laurie looked at Marthe without speaking and kept her face a mask. The unexplained discrepancies of the past eighteen months began to make sense.

Marthe crossed her arms again and stared at her wildly, madly. "So you're not going to do anything about it," she said.

"Would you excuse me?" Laurie asked, and left the table.

In the bathroom, Laurie tried to stop the implications of the sale from overpowering her. She had to focus on what to do about Marthe. Her first impulse was not to get involved—to finish her contract and get out clean. But to ignore what Marthe had said would be taking the easy way out, avoiding her responsibilities.

What, exactly, *were* her responsibilities, and to whom? She'd been hired to help develop a marketing network for Europe. If something was undermining that network—as Frans's behavior was or, at least, the way his behavior was perceived—then it was, indeed, up to her to do something.

But what? Confront Frans? Frans and she were barely on speaking terms. Should she tell Adam? Frans had been Adam's mentor, as Adam had been Steven's, and Laurie had already seen what could happen when an outsider got wedged in between.

That led back to the option of doing nothing. But what if the situation in Dusseldorf got out of hand? What if Adam later discovered that Laurie had known and had kept it to herself? Laurie would have been negligent; or so it seemed to her. If her loyalties were to the job, and to Adam, she had to tell him.

When Laurie returned to the table, Marthe stood up in a frenzy of seemingly disconnected movements, and Laurie felt a sudden sympathy for her. There were probably other conflicts in Marthe's life, as there were in her own. Laurie extended her hand to touch Marthe's shoulder. "I know how you feel," she said.

Marthe jerked her shoulder away. "No, you don't," she said. "You're as bad as the men. You don't care what others think. You're always in control."

"That's not true," said Laurie. "We're all falling apart. Some people just hide it better." She froze as she realized what she'd just said. Steven had used those words in Singapore the night Laurie had received the first letter from Susan.

Marthe avoided Laurie's eyes as they walked together to the cashier. Laurie paid with her company Amex card.

"We'll talk about this tomorrow, after I've had a look for myself," Laurie said. "I'll help you sort out what's going on, I promise."

Marthe sniffed. "I'll wait and see," she said.

Back at the Rheinstern-Penta Hotel, Laurie stood on the large balcony outside her room and stared at the grey towers of West German commerce. From the window of the room next door she could hear a loud monologue in Japanese interrupted by brief silences. The man appeared to be talking on the phone. Were things going well for him in Dusseldorf, Laurie wondered, or badly? Would he return to Tokyo or Osaka or Nagasaki with contracts signed, at terms acceptable to his superiors? What sort of business was he in? Electronics? Textiles? Did he have a family? Did he miss them?

Laurie repressed an urge to go next door and ask these things. She undressed, took off her make-up, and got into bed. In the dark, she listened to the one-sided conversation on the other side of the wall. The voice of a faceless Japanese businessman would be one of the key elements in her memory of this night, yet she'd never know his name.

FIRST SIGHT

Lolling against pillows on the patio
 the infant empress, to whom the world is now
 the astonishing abroad, stares mystified
 as the wild magpies swerve downward to be fed.
 Two living beings of conversable size
 come teetering towards an outstretched hand. She
 cries,
 'Oh, love! Oh, love! Oh brave new world! Oh
 brave
 new world! Oh, love! Oh, love, love, love!'
 Flustered, the birds take off.

See, they are gone.
 Your chirruping has frightened them. That is
 Lesson One.
 As for the other, the moment of pure seeing,
 happening of black upon blue to the untaught
 eye—
 look for that on the gallery walls, or in a poem.
 It will remain among the best of being.

BEAUTY IS THE STRAW

Beauty is the straw I clutch at, but to say straw
 of the sky-height and the scope of it, the poise of
 cloud,
 swathe of sea and dream-dance of undersea,
 all world's wonders, down to the flicker of finches
 delicate in detail—can one say straw of these?

Evil looms large, bedevils all beauty,
 is taller than any tree and wider than the winds,
 drifts through dreams too, is fashioned as the
 finch—

but beauty says to me, 'You are the straw.'
 I am the straw. There is solace in that thought.

FLIGHT

*'Flying is the most laborious of all the methods
 of progress. No species will resort to it unless
 compelled.'*

Seeing the butterflies, furbelows of the blue
 summer,
 make their uncharted journey across the broad
 lawn,
 hummingbirds hold space, working their wings to
 a whirr,
 hawks high, tense in stillness before the long
 plunge down;
 seeing the slanted wing of the currawong write
 freedom on air, and fairy martens streaking
 boldly across wide water to their building site,
 think of the bloodied feet of the dancer, the poet's
 long waking.

THE WHALE

Simple as a wigstand, the whale, Leviathan, lord of
 leisure,
 he galleons it across the glittering acres,
 stays to sport awhile. Neatly he knifes in,
 comes up, curled like an anchovy, tail to blunt
 brow,
 rolls like a rubber ball in the vast bathtub,
 dives down—straight the strong tail as a treetrunk,
 the great fins falling like fronds, posing as palms;
 one moment a black tree tops a black mountain—
 all's gone and the galleon sails stately onward.

Flaccid now he is pulled onto the flensing
 platform,
 his weight only willing against the winch.
 Men in long boots mount the bulk of him.
 Busy, busy, busy with the bloodied knives
 they pare him, peel away blubber, clean as a
 coconut,
 reach with the long knives into a red landscape,
 hack and climb, hack and climb, heave hunks of
 the commodity
 onto a toy train to be trundled away.

THE BROKEN BOUGH

Pick them up, the raw percentages
I've no longer any wish to carry.
These days I wrestle with the absolute.

Much is left over. The Titan
Impersonating Zeus' loss.
The white witch who sells

Found fortunes at the half hour.
The sack-clothed singer
With the cracked voice and sad accordion.

New League missionaries. Bionic bards.
Assurance satirists. I'd bagged
The lot in some begotten springtime.

It was the evening my brother
Returned from the war.
Quarter mooned—unlike himself

But with the sameness of quaint indolence.
Quieter than
Our mother's grave. Speech therapy

Would put a fix to that. It never did.
Years viced his silence
. . . Lent me mine. I learned.

Communication's a game fit to kill,
Squander, maim—or
Tell untruths when amnesia wills.

Our sanatorium, sunday walks avoid
What it is that's left over.
In the distance I see them

Impersonating posthumously those they'll
Not become. Raw percentages
Crying still to be lifted up.

STEFANIE BENNETT

UNDER THE HARBOUR BRIDGE

The men who sleep under the Bridge
have sores on their cheeks like dried raisins.
They party, they jig, they argue, they kip,
coping all night with harsh gulls.

The men who sleep under the Bridge
have hands scored like kitchen cross-grain.
They strike at invisible enemies,
cut like the snake, mad with the metho.

The men who sleep under the Bridge
have wounded egos, acid stomachs.
They cadge a fag, a sandwich, a dollar
living in the side pockets of inner suburbs.

The men who sleep under the Bridge
are indignant as beaten-up lovers,
can no longer fight off the voices.
They are tossed and smashed and finally
snookered.

The last years are tracking them down.

CHRIS MOONEY

KOKODA

On any cold morning, snatching the *Sun*
or grappling with my Age,
standing at my station, the freeze
runs up my leg like hot piss running down
or on a hot night, sweating on Parliament
caught by a wave and drowned,
I wait for phantom air-conditioned stock.

Magpie skipper's weeks;
untolled roadtoll;
recurrent images of the wounded
walking the Kokoda trail;
Premier Cain unveils
a plaque at Rosebud.

I lean on an arthritic father,
a motherless son and white-haired Harry.
The Dean wears dermo
underneath his socks.
He testifies there's no good book,
new joke, original sin;
battlegrounds for heroism.

LEON SLADE

DELIVERY

In the delivery room I massage
your back & you scream
& when your contraction ends
you say: Stop leaning on me.
I say: I'm trying to relax you
& you say: Don't touch me.

Another contraction hits
& I re-call pre-natal instructions
& I tell you how to breathe
& you think: How would he know?
I show you loud shallow breaths
but I say: Breathe deeply darling.
I wipe your forehead with a damp cloth
thinking: At least I'm getting this right.
You think: Why is he scratching my head
with a dry rag?

You sway on hands & knees
on top of the high delivery bed
& the mid-wife guards you on one side
as I wait to catch you on the other
& you scream so I offer water & ice
& I think: Any moment now
you'll ask for a pain killer.
But you just go on screaming.

Mary the mid-wife beckons
& points at a slit of wet scalp
appearing between your legs
& I say: Is that the baby coming?
Mary leaves the room
while you open your mouth wide
& I turn the lights down low
& pat you with the dry rag
& tell you how to breathe
as I drink your cool water.

You scream so loudly
I wish you'd ask for the laughing gas
because I could sure do with some.
Mary returns with the doctor
& you scream as he prods you
& I wish I could share your pain
because it doesn't seem fair
that you should carry it all.

The doctor nods at me
& I climb behind you on the bed
& you scream like I've never heard you
scream before as you squat & shake
as I pat & rub & instruct
& you shake from side to side as you push
& I struggle to hold you
as you push harder
& you give a final loud scream
& Mary says: Well done!
& you moan & cry: Never again.
I'm shocked to see the pink & purple baby
& I think I see testicles
until somebody says: It's a girl!
You say: I don't care
& you bleed over the baby
& I notice the thick umbilical cord
& I'm glad I wasn't given the chance
to cut it, like we planned
& I'm crying harder than I ever have
as I look at the baby wriggling
& hold you tightly as you recover.

I'm so proud of you, so proud
of the three of us together on the bed;
such a brand new family so exhausted
& everybody looks at the baby
with her eyes tightly closed
& Mary places her on your chest
& you try to give her your nipple
& the baby opens her eyes
& now it's her turn to scream . . .

MYRON LYSENKO

THE FAITHFUL

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.—Hebrews 11:1

Lenny tells me it would be better if we all
believed,
Bended knee to the man in the cloud, consulted
Bibles
For solutions to dispute. *Give in, he says, and be
faithful.*
Joyce, one of them that do believe, moves my
head
From the night sky, asking me to look beneath my
feet.
*The questions are up there. The answers are with
us.*
Eric, the poet, says all those dying fools in need of
cure
Should write poems, learn to live their own words.
*Don't be a martyr, Stephen J. You can tell stories.
Do it.*
Mornings I pass St Paul's, knowing so much stone
cannot
Hang on air. The builders who made it want me to
go in, submit
To dangers of believing the whole structure will
not fall.—*Come in.*
On the day my father was buried the priest read
Lazarus:
To say that if I stumble it is because I have no light
in me
And to ask if I am dead, or only sleep.—*Do you
believe?*
I know about the dead. They are all dead and
staying
That way. I ask them to visit, but they are busy in
their graves
And in the wind.—*We've no time, they say. It's all
yours, now. Go.*

STEPHEN J. WILLIAMS

BETWEEN LUST AND ISLAM

The whore and the virgin are at war in her again.
Each morning she wakes with candlewax
and semen dripping from her hands.

The virgin would have her button her nightdress
at the throat and return to the hills—
sitting all day on a secret stone,

naming butterflies, and living the legend
she had made from her solitude.

The whore invites her back to the trees,

where boys her brothers had procured from the
orchard,

wait for her to lift her skirts.

"Ten cents a feel," and she lay down under the
pines

and watched the magpies. Then one day she
yawned:

"I don't want to do this anymore." The whore was
furious.

Candlewax and semen—the liquid pearl

she collects in her hands.

The virgin puts flame to a thin white taper,
pouring the wax into her palm. As it cools,

she works the faces of her friends
into portraits of tenderness.

The whore labours over the warm tumescent shaft

of her lover's penis, catching semen
as it scatters like a splash of milk into her hands.
The virgin wears her body like a rare shawl;

the whore dismantles herself limb by limb,
grafting her bones like mistletoe
to the loins of a hungry man.

Torn between lust and Islam,
she lubricates behind a black veil,
listening to her body's long debate,

touching herself unhappily by candlelight,
and sometimes blinding the waxen faces
of her friends with a shower of semen.

ANTHONY LAWRENCE

TWO POEMS BY BARRY HILL
from The Buckley Poems

EARLY MASONRY

He'd laid brick after brick.
Sun grit his back.
He was his own lash
like it or not.

Beaten by hours
hide thickened to quiet
loads humped at night
day's work done.

Two things at hand:
his mix of lime and sand,
blue chip where the join is,
his thumb nail sense of running;

Also a dream of kneeling
and sliding out and under
at the same easy time;
a sly transport of self,

not the raising of one
chained leg after another,
gut waiting next meal,
the heart stuck.

No. No, not that but
a dream of solid
green lurching to flee.



BUCKLEY, IN KELP SHOES, ON THE BLACK ROCKS AT BREAMLEA

slips and falls and has not a word to say for indigo
or to the porous apron he slaps his mouth on
does not gather himself up or in.
A gobbly mumble of weedy syllable
escapes him, then he rises and straightens

his naming apparatus—jaw, thorax, chest bone,
his armour plating ready to sound out
if only his chariot were harnessed to go
if only someone were there to call, and hear.

Not this mop after mop of black noggin
leathered crowns lank without tongues
a whole clan undrowned as yet and eyeless
wet and slippery further out—
a triangulated igneous plug to



the softer utterance of the dune's shoulder
dips scooted down to home country ditties—
net in hand, rope in tow, hungry and still speaking
then,
if only to fish eye, bird claw and even
on occasion to the old self:

'Dear Will, methinks as I inhabit
this isle that rings my words
with water, black reed and wind,
suffocating sentences to a trope,
I will save breath for Providence
and the vague hope of a nautilus shell
flute blown once and for all
to hear my longer silence out—'

Such wind. It tears
around the main dunes
a tenth time, and again.
It whips face from itself.
That foul mud, in bend of creek
is blow hole to the wind.
Wind won't stop at pitch of night.

He tired shouting at it.
It netted back at him.

No more words to throw.

He howled.

His voice he lost on seas of mind.

A long time ago.

*This is Karaaf Creek near Keingang.
I am Armadeat from the dead.
Koonan, Koonan swim near here,
their rivet eyes and reminders.
Waakee, Waakee, the uncatchables call
before flying to Yallock, the Yawangs, Jerringot.*

*Armadeat with my nets and dealwark,
wood for firesticks and Kooderoo
Mudfish to come up in
Kooderoo into my mouth.*

NO

No! I can't get there, I'll be working.
No-one anyone's heard of is going.
No! the discutant is a wimp
and the venue is down-market
and miles from a decent meal.
No! Tuesday's the dead night.
No! you never advertise
and the technicians scrubbed the tape last time.
No! I'd need time to work on it
and I've better ways to spend Monday than
psyching up.
No! to your white wine in rings on everything,
and to plastic tumblers particularly NO—
I always crack two while I work out
refutations, afterwards—NO!
No, you've got me wrong
and I can't help out on this subject
THOUGH I haven't heard anyone else
get it right. Obviously.
On the other hand
I don't mind the odd plump sandwich,
satay, nibbles, souvenir-pens,
admirers, questions on radio,
paid transport, exploring
a new place—or the Hilton—and a few hundred
(in cash?)
plus an item for the old C.V.
So shall we say yes?

TWO POEMS BY JUDITH RODRIGUEZ

YES

Yes, what an exciting concept.
And timely, just when we all
face up to—yes, unprecedented . . .
No, I don't mind being sandwiched
between Helen Caldicott and Patrick White—
after all, it's not nuclear annihilation!
Yes, I see, somebody at the common level,
—did you say light relief?
Next month's lecture. Yes, I can put in a plug.
Yes, I can quite see you don't want anything
negative or critical or complicated.
All those digestions . . . jokes? of course,
and yes, I will pay tribute . . .
past president's wife . . . uh . . . Splendid woman.
Yes, I'm happy to be there early
and shake hands over nibbles
and I'll do the gracious about the catering.
Is there anything else?
A thesis on recognitional disability,
a fanfare for non-confrontational feminism,
my sixties experiences in Youth Hostel lobbies?
No trouble, a pleasure,
we'll turn the nation around,
thinking people anyway (the ones who pay).
Yes, I understand, staffing . . . finance . . .
the cheque—a month or two?
or books in lieu? Well . . .

MICHAEL SHARKEY

Zora, Dave and Henry: Some recollections of Henry Lawson by Zora Cross

At the end of 1917, David McKee Wright left Beatrice Osborn, his partner of several years, to live with Zora Cross, who had arrived in Sydney from Brisbane in late October 1916. Osborn, as 'Margaret Fane' went on to achieve success as a writer in collaboration with Hilary Lofting, who joined her soon after the split with Wright.

Cross and Wright met as a result of correspondence conducted throughout 1916. Zora Cross, while touring North Queensland as an actress and vaudeville performer, submitted stories and poems to Wright who was editing the *Bulletin's* Red Page. She also submitted work to Bertram Stevens, who was editing *The Lone Hand*. Stevens provided her with work on *The Lone Hand's* theatre-reviewing pages during 1917, and she ran her own column from September 1917 until the end of 1918. Wright also assisted Cross early in 1917 to gain regular journalistic work through his contacts at *The Worker* newspaper, to which he had long contributed.

Bert Stevens and Wright were acquainted from 1906, when Stevens sought poems of Wright's to include in his *Anthology of Australian Verse*. The two men met when Wright came to live in Sydney in 1910, and went to some of the same literary gatherings, though Wright was more outgoing in his nature than Stevens, of whom Lawson wrote that he could not be reckless.

Cross had nearly met Stevens while she was still a schoolgirl. A protégée of Ethel Turner's, Cross had written for *The Town and Country Journal* from 1902 (when she was twelve years of age) until 1910. At a tea-party at Turner's house when she was seventeen, Cross observed from the guest-book that Stevens had previously called, and she reminded him, in 1916 that she had sent work to him while she was at school. He published her poetry from February 1913. After leaving school and teaching for several years until 1914, Cross had gone to Queensland, where, during a career as elocutionist, singer, comedienne and actor she gradually moved toward supporting herself as a full-time writer.

Toward the end of her writing career, Cross began

to compile a series of recollections of her literary contemporaries for the Sydney collector and bibliophile Harry F. Chaplin. She sent some of these to him in 1952 and later (she died in 1964), and retained her working drafts, which are now held in the Fisher Library of the University of Sydney. The drafts contain a number of anecdotes about Henry Lawson, whose work she had come to admire as a result of an experience during her primary education in Queensland.

Cross was born in Brisbane in 1890 into a family with literary connections. Her father was an importer and impresario with a literary bent. He had been educated by Brunton Stephens; George Essex Evans had courted Zora's aunt Charlotte Skyring, and Mary Hannay Foott was a family acquaintance who encouraged Zora from an early age. An uncle, Oscar Cross, had edited a newspaper in Paddington in Sydney, where the family was to move following the crash of Zora's father's business. Zora was educated first at Gympie, then at Ipswich Grammar, and from 1905 until 1908 at Sydney Girls High School. She attended the Blackfriars Teachers' College in Sydney until 1910 and taught in several suburban schools, while simultaneously gaining stage experience with the Sydney Stage Society. Before she came to write about film and theatre for *The Lone Hand* in 1917, she had edited a stage journal, *The Bohemian* in Brisbane during 1916, and published in *The Theatre Magazine* and Hugh D. McIntosh's *Green Room*, for which she was a selling agent. Hal Porter later paid tribute to Cross's critical ability. Cross had also conducted a women's column on social issues for the Brisbane *Daily Mail* during Mabel Forrest's absence from the paper.

While a schoolgirl at Ipswich Grammar, Cross boarded with the school secretary, who permitted her to attend the School of Arts one day each week to read and borrow books. There she first became regularly acquainted with the *Bulletin*, whose cartoons were a talking-point among her school fellows. She picked up anecdotes about Lawson from the *Bulletin*, and heard others from two schoolmates whose fathers

were journalists. Cross initially did not discriminate between Paterson and Lawson until she attended a reciting competition and was rebuked for her denigration of the competitors' versions of the poem 'Out Back' (first published in the *Bulletin* on 30 September 1893, and *In the Days When the World Was Wide* in 1896). "I don't think much of it", she observed to a woman beside her, who replied "You'll learn". Cross began to attempt Lawsonian verse, and after one of her efforts, an imitation of 'Talbragar' had been rejected by the *Bulletin* with the advice "Leave that road to Lawson", she observed "So I learned, as Edmond said, that there was after all only one Lawson, and although in after years I managed to follow Lawson more humbly and with a little more success I raised him to his own pedestal on that first reject and he never came off it again. When I hear someone say 'Oh, Lawson!' in a belittling way I say 'Try and imitate him'".

At the Sydney Girls High School Cross heard more directly of Lawson:

I was a probationary student at the school studying for the Teachers' College Entrance Examination.

We had a girl in our class whose father was a journalist. One morning she came to school bubbling over with merriment and joined a group of us gathered together talking under the Moreton Bay fig tree which grew in the centre of the asphalt yard that served as our playground.

"Listen!" she said, "I must tell you this. Henry Lawson stopped one of the Grammar boys on the way to school and said to him 'If you picked up a stone, sonny, and I knocked it out of your hand what would happen to the stone?'

'It'd fall', the boy said.

'Fall! Fall!' Lawson said. 'That's the rhyme I wanted'.

I laughed with the others, one of whom—an Irish girl chortled: 'That's good. Just like Lawson. I must tell father, though he doesn't think Lawson's poetry is a patch on Daley's'. Incidentally, Daley was my favourite Australian poet then.

In David McKee Wright and George Robertson, Cross found two "true Lawson lovers": "If these two didn't understand the man they appreciated his genius and through them I was enriched with full appreciation too. [. . .] 'Black Bonnet' was one of G.R.'s favourites. 'The Sliprail and the Spur' one of D.M.W.'s". Robertson presented Cross with all of Lawson's works, in the course of arranging to publish her *Songs of Love and Life* in 1917, but she did not meet Lawson until her book had met with critical acclaim. Cross observed "One thing I knew of him was that he was a solitary wanderer—a law unto himself and not a writer I might chance to find at any social or literary gathering". From what Robertson told her of the man, she expected to be disappointed when she met him.



Zora Cross and David McKee Wright (Premier Studios, 1916. Moir Collection, La Trobe Library)

"Lawson used to use the same theme in verse and prose on occasion and G.R. seemed to admire Lawson's sense of business. 'He'll write a poem and sell it' I have heard G.R. say, 'then he'll go away and write the same story in prose and sell that too. He ought to be well-off. But he never seems to have any money'".

In 1918, Robertson commissioned Wright to compose a satire (*Apollo in George Street*) directed against contemporary writers, editors and artists. David Low was to provide illustrations for the volume. Wright laboured over the verses, which incorporated suggestions by Robertson, like the reference to Lawson's selling ideas twice—in prose and verse—but the project was abandoned when the verses were typeset and Low had provided a folio of caricatures, because Robertson feared a libel action would stem from publication.¹

Zora Cross met Lawson at the office of *The Australian Worker* one afternoon shortly after her book had been published. She left a lengthy impression of the occasion:

I don't suppose there could have been a more appropriate place to meet him. 'The Worker' was then at St Andrew's Place. Claude Marquet was the cartoonist and I remember that as you came in, the wonderful Dyson cartoons were displayed in the lobby I suppose you'd call it. The Worker was fighting conscription then or had just won the

campaign. H. E. Boote, who in profile as he laughingly said himself looked so much like Mephistopheles, was the editor—a rare soul who gave me my first opportunity as a prose-writer.

I don't know whether Lawson was writing for the paper. I was. So was D.M.W., who although he was a staff man at the *Bulletin*, was permitted by S. H. Prior, another rare soul, the *Bulletin* editor, to write also for the *Worker*. I think both papers had for a time the same political platform.²

I was with D.M.W. We were, I think, both collecting cheques. Anyway we were at the accountant's desk when D.M.W. said "Oh there's Lawson. You must meet him. Come and I'll introduce you. You'll have to speak up. He's deaf".

I think Lawson was probably waiting to keep an office appointment that day for though he wore no hat he was particularly well groomed to his immaculate white shirt and from the distance that temporarily divided us as we crossed to him he had a quite unexpectedly professional look about him rather than that of the wanderer I knew him to be. Well he had been a professional poet for years, and how could he look otherwise. Perhaps he had just had a hair-cut. I don't know but I remember being at once struck by his noble head remarkably well turned on his shoulders—a long head as I first glimpsed it, and simultaneously I noted that he had long sensitive hands. He was a long man too—tall and thin and dressed that day in a darkish suit which however did not appear to be sombre.

This was but a quick glimpse of him as he sat on an office form ruminating it seemed over something or other as he waited. He had neither book nor bag nor paper with him, yet I think anyone who hadn't seen him before as I hadn't would have recognised him as a distinguished man by a natural distinction about him of which he appeared aware but only in a casual way. He could only have been a poet—his attitude as he sat with legs crossed suggested the dreamer momentarily lost in his own dreams. And yes—tho' he himself would have winced at the words—he looked cultured and refined.

Being young and in school-girlish parlance 'thrilled' at the prospect of meeting one who had been a famous poet while I was yet a child, but one who had been a legendary figure to me for so many years, that was rather like seeing the imaginary shadow of some well-loved fabulous being of faery materialize—I was already beaming fatuously when we came up to Lawson and D.M.W. said "How are you, Harry?"

Lawson roused from whatever half reveries he was in, looked round and the thoughtful expression of his face changed to one of concentration quick with inquiry.

"Oh Dave!" he said, unfolding loosely. He got up and without noticing me he gave his whole

attention to D.M.W. No one could have been more natural.

Seen closer he looked more weather-beaten and buffeted by fate. The illusion of the professional was lost—the culture too when he spoke. He was I saw then like the men of the 'bush'—he talked like them with a slow drawl and with difficulty. His words didn't flow freely.

"I wanted to see you about"—he buttonholed D.M.W. and I drew away from them still beaming. For here was the real Henry Lawson, talking about his poetry from what I could gather, tho D.M.W. appeared non-plussed and seemed to be following what he was saying with difficulty. Presently D.M.W. drew me forward and I heard him shouting to Lawson who I was and that he D.M.W. wanted him Lawson to meet me.

Cross was left alone with Lawson, and they sat for a long time silent, Lawson holding her hand in both of his, after Cross ceased an initial talkative rush of enthusiasm, and until a neatly dressed small woman, wearing gloves and a dark hat came up and asked Lawson "Who is this?" while he continued holding Cross's hand.

"This", he said, as if speaking to himself rather than to her, "This is—" and after an imperceptible pause—"Shakespeare". Then he dried up.

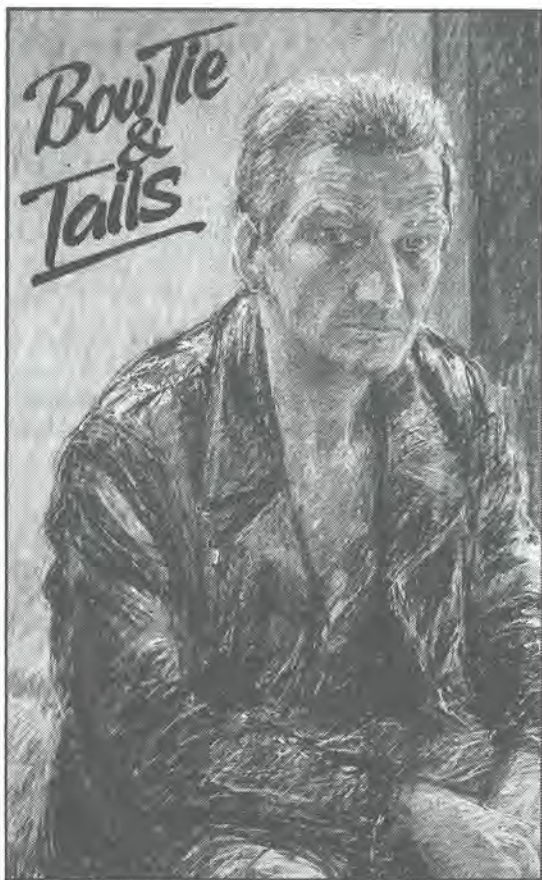
The visitor was Lawson's companion Isabel Byers, who addressed Cross "Miss Shakespeare, is it? Another writer. What do you write?" According to Cross, she emphasised "you". Lawson was called away, and the two women sat in near-wordless proximity until Wright returned. On their way out, Wright asked her what Lawson had said. "I told him [. . .] expecting him to laugh at what I said was surely conscious or unconscious drollery on Lawson's part".

Cross provided a version of the David Low caricature story:

Lawson had a rakish side as everyone knows. Outside the 'Bulletin' pub one Friday afternoon I saw him sidle up to D.M.W. with a whimsical grin on his face and 'touch' him for the price of a drink, then 3d a glass. "It'll cost you thruppence, Dave", he said and held up three fingers of his right hand. Then he laughed characteristically 'through his nose'. And D.M.W. obliged.

Low's cartoon of Lawson done at the same time as Brennan's showed Lawson looking rakish and holding up three fingers. At least that was how Low first presented his drawing of Lawson to G.R.

G.R. had a great regard for Lawson's genius and I recall that he didn't approve of Low's original caricature in which the right hand was held up with the three fingers prominently shown so that there was no mistaking the obvious.



Geoff Goodfellow

This time the poems
are as tender as they
are tough.



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G.R. showed the drawing to me himself and I remember that he was quite upset about it. He thought it was cruel and too undignified to express Lawson's idiosyncrasy which really amounted to a failing. He said he couldn't let it go like that. Nor did he.

An addition to this story observes:

I saw it in G.R.'s hands and I remember he said he thought it belittled Lawson and wouldn't pass it. Low made the 'touch' less obvious by bringing Lawson's hand to his hat rather like a salute, which satisfied G.R. but was not characteristic of Lawson. Low was not consciously cruel to Lawson. His genius caught the 'slightly barmy' grin that Henry sometimes adopted.

Cross also wrote from personal experience of Lawson's relationship with his publisher. The story is prefixed by an anecdote of James Edmond's treatment of Lawson:

Lawson one day, according to a story, was pestering James Edmond, whose office in the Bulletin overlooked George Street on the ground floor. The window was opened and Lawson thrust the copy he wished to sell or whatever it was through the window at Edmond. Edmond was just lighting his pipe and put a match to the paper. I forget whether it was a reject or something Lawson thought was worth money. In any case it was something Edmond didn't want to buy.

Edmond was terse. "What do you think of him?" David asked him after he had introduced him to G.R. who then wore a beard. "He has a great growth of whiskers", Edmond replied.

Lawson was pestering G.R. for money one day when I called. A and R's shop then had a gallery running round the top floor over which you could look into the shop below. There was a door right, and left another. G.R.'s sanctum was a good run along the gallery from either of the doors.

I was waiting with Becky who sat at the end of the gallery guarding the sanctum (N.B. she was called The Dragon by many writers)³ when I noticed G.R. apparently playing at hide and seek with someone as he bobbed backwards and forwards round the door to the left.

"What's the matter?" I asked Becky.

"Lawson", she said.

And then I noticed Lawson at the other door.

"He's here. I know he's here", Lawson said, and went through the door to run round, I suppose, and catch G.R. But G.R. suddenly made a quick run for it and was in the sanctuary of his office in no time. Lawson went away satisfied that on that occasion he was out. With threats that he'd be back, Lawson went.

"I don't know what he does with his money",

G.R. said to me. "He was paid this morning".

Lawson then seemed to be on a weekly wage for work he had sold. I was never any good at business so don't know what arrangement they had.

That day G.R. pointed out the skylight which was nailed up. "See that", he said. "I had to do that against Lawson. One day I escaped from him in here and he got a shop ladder, climbed up and looking down on me from the skylight said 'There you are. I knew jolly well you were here'. I had to laugh of course and let him in, but I nailed the skylight up literally in self defence".

Shenstone said of Lawson's work after Lawson had been given a public funeral "It didn't move a book of his from the shelf".

G.R. said of Lawson that he saw him pass through his shop a hundred times and never once stop to pick up a book and look at it.

Another anecdote concerning 'The Dragon' and Lawson was included in Zora Cross's recollections of Brennan:

Becky seemed to have no great regard for any of us writers, Brennan included. She had come to A & R's as a girl of 15 or so. She was very religious then, G.R. told me, and used to embarrass him by handing out tracts to writers. "Has your soul been saved?" she asked Lawson and everyone else. Lawson, whether facetiously or not Becky never knew, she told me, once went down on his knees and proposed to her. "Get up, Mr Lawson", she said, "and don't make a fool of yourself". When I met her she was a tall dour-looking girl-woman, wore glasses and had a row of stiff little curls dangling on to her forehead. Lala Fisher touched them once & said they were effectively brown-red, ticklish. I think Becky braided them.

Cross included two other references to Lawson's publishing history:

Fred Broomfield told me that he accepted Lawson's first verse for the *Bulletin*. It was 'The Wreck of the Derry Castle'. There seems to be no truth in the myth that it was rescued from the W.P.B.

In after years I met in Glenbrook the man who published 'Faces in the Street' for Lawson and paid him £1.1.0 for it. I think his name was White. The paper was a suburban one as far as I can remember.

The first of these stories qualifies Broomfield's own written version, in a letter to Robertson on 24 March 1924, where he claims to have rescued the poem from the wastepaper basket where his 'chief', Archibald, had thrown it on finding it ill-spelt and illegible.⁴ The second story, about a suburban publication of 'Faces in the Street' prior to its appearance in *The Bulletin* on 28 July 1888 does not appear to be elsewhere corroborated.

Cross left a reminiscence of Lawson as she met him at the end of the War:

Another time I met Lawson was during the influenza epidemic just about the time masks were advocated but before they became compulsory. I was standing outside A & R's talking to J. F. Archibald whom we had met coming out of the bookshop as we were going in. Archibald was short with hunched up shoulders and appeared small beside D.M.W. He wore his hat well down on his head. He quoted something French which I didn't pick up. He hadn't a relative [due] to the epidemic and the war. He seemed exhausted.

"Good Heavens, what's this" DMW suddenly exclaimed, and then with a laugh "It's Henry Lawson". Archibald made to move off before Lawson noticed him (but Lawson didn't notice him nor me). He came up to DMW. He looked like a bandit as in place of a mask he had a black silk handkerchief across his face, only his large burning brown eyes being visible. I kept a straight face but it wasn't very easy, the mask looked so incongruous. He might have been as you'd draw a picture, say 'Bail Up'. Lifting the end of the handkerchief he said to DMW in a sepulchral voice "It's the end of the world, Dave. It's the end of the world". "Oh I hope not, Harry" DMW said, "It's not as bad as that". Lawson shook his head pessimistically, and repeated hollowly "The end of the world, Dave", dropped the handkerchief over his mouth again and passed along Castlereagh Street—a tall, dark majestic figure straight as a rule.

We looked still and long after him. Archibald shrugged. He casually accepted Lawson's idiosyncracies as a matter of course, for he did not smile. "There he goes", DMW said softly. And he went. I looked after him as DMW turned back to Archibald who remarked to him in a tone that implied mutual understanding of Lawson "There he goes". And then he went drifting with the city's human tide.

Zora Cross observed of Lawson's methods of composition:

Sometimes Lawson could struggle for his lines as I have seen copy of his showing the struggle. Also copy where he suggested alternate lines or entire alternate verses showing how he worked. But G.R. told me that his great poem 'The Star of Australasia' was written at a sitting and flowed from him freely.

Finally, among Cross's drafted recollections are the following notes on Lawson's funeral and upon his family:

When Lawson at his death was granted a public funeral D.M.W., who didn't attend it, thought it

rather a pity Lawson's own wishes hadn't been considered. In his poem 'The Jolly Dead March' Lawson stated what he wanted. But maybe the band did strike up 'Annie Laurie'. I don't know. I wasn't there either.

Mrs Byers was present. Mrs Jago told me that she wept bitterly by the grave-side, and Mrs Lawson went over to her and comforted her.

I only met Mrs Lawson once. It was the day of the pilgrimage to Lawson's statue. She spoke to me and thanked me for my address. She was rather small as I remember her and had pretty reddish-brown hair framing a gentle serious face. She was quietly spoken, retiring in manner and was I think at that time an inspector for the Child Welfare.

I also met Lawson's daughter, Bertha, when she was at the Mitchell. She was tall like her father and had his beautiful brown eyes.

Mr Walter Jago who was with me asked after her mother. She was well, Bertha said, "But you know what mother is. Always doing too much".

I never met Jim the son. At the time my first book came out I was told, I think it was Bertram Stevens that Jim admired my work. The poem he picked out was 'Only Sir Galahad'. From what I have heard of him from time to time he was something of a gentle knight himself. He was a teacher then. Mrs Lawson was very attached to the children.

Lucy Byers, wife of R. J. Cassidy ('Girrooney' of *The Worker*) and Zora Cross's friend and nurse at the birth of her daughter April, remained in touch with Isabel Byers, and relayed gifts from Cross and Mary Gilmore to her after Lawson's death. Cross's most public tribute to Henry Lawson was her address at the first Fellowship of Australian Writers pilgrimage to the statue of Lawson by George Lambert erected in the Sydney Domain. The text refers to Lawson's qualities of simplicity, vision, and his greatness: "Henry Lawson was and still is undoubtedly the truest Australian poet whose voice has yet been heard". She said not a word about his personality, which she had observed for the last five years of his life, but reflected that "This day we cover ourselves with glory, . . . bow at the shrine of him whose hand put the stamp of genius on our literature". It remained for Fred Broomfield and Tom Mutch to add more personal reminiscences at the ceremony. Cross's admiration was always for the poetry rather than the man: once established, her esteem for his ability did not falter.

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1. See my article 'A Lost Satire on the 1890s *Bulletin* Writers and Bohemians', *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4, October 1986. A partial collection of the caricatures by Low is held in the Mitchell Library (catalogued under 'Apollo in George Street'). See also George Robertson's letter to Low concerning libel fears, 28 June 1920, Angus & Robertson papers, Mitchell Library.
2. Cross's memory is imprecise: Wright negotiated a contract with S. H. Prior which permitted him to also contribute to *The Worker*. Ken Prior later took exception to Wright's conditions and practices and effectively forced him out of *The Bulletin* in 1926. Wright thereafter wrote journalism almost exclusively for *The Worker*, though, like other staff there, on lower rates, until his death in February 1928. *The Worker* and *The Bulletin* were diametrically opposed in their editorials on Conscription; Wright's personal views appear

to have been more in line with those of *The Worker*, even while he wrote leaders for *The Bulletin*.

3. 'Becky' was Rebecca Wiley. Zora Cross also provided in her recollections an account of Wiley's visit to Norman Lindsay at Springwood. Wiley's account of that episode is contained in *Rebecca Wiley's Visit to Norman Lindsay at Springwood in May 1918* (an unpublished manuscript with supplementary texts by Barry Walts and Judy Lukin). Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1986.
4. See Colin Roderick, *Henry Lawson Collected Verse*, Vol. 1, 1885-1900, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1967, p. 414.

I have adhered to the text of the drafts of these reminiscences with minor emendations to punctuation. Square brackets represent omissions of repetitious material.

If you stand among the low trees and thick bushes near the top of Three Pagodas Pass at sunset, you see why Rama I built Kanchanaburi in the first place. Several tracks slip quietly in and out of the thick cover connecting the Thai valley of the Mae Klong River with the highlands of Burma. Before the town was built, Burmese outlaws could sweep down at dusk in ambush of unsuspecting sugar cane farmers almost at will. In World War II, the Japanese decided this game plan could work just as well in reverse—the so-called Death Railway, built with the labour (and lives) of thousands of Allied prisoners, not to mention many more Malaysian and Indonesian impressed workers, gave the invaders free access to the high country.

People who stumble along the trails still carry guns, most are long, aged flintlocks, while a few are stubby automatics, but these weapons have nothing to do with nationalism and everything to do with good business. The donkey trains carry heavy pouches of raw opium, still a lucrative cash crop among the hill tribes. Government agents suffer from blurry vision up here but come away richer for it. Foreign trekkers yield the paths to the donkeys and keep their lens caps on.

We start out from the wrong bus depot in Bangkok, so we miss the air-con express. A line of synchronised Sanyo fans fixed to the bus' roof does a credible job of churning up the air. Our driver weaves in and out of traffic, fearless as a shark among minnows, and soon we are out along the rice paddies. The pollution thins, slowly.

Helen checks out places to stay in the guidebook and is drawn by the fact that Kan has two River Kwai hotels.

"Here's the choice," she says. "An air-con room in the River Kwai 1 starting at 550 baht—no charge for mingling with the American and Japanese tour groups who overrun the place—or a quiet, fan-cooled room with bath in the Kwai 2 for 100B—no charge for the *iihen* in the lobby."

"What's an *iihen*?"

The *iihen* is tied to a bench in the middle of the lobby.

A cardboard sign taped to the bench describes it as a 'palm civet', but to Helen, it looks cuddly as a cross between a cat, a racoon and a monkey. When she reaches out to scratch it behind the ears, it nearly snaps her finger off.

We decide not to loiter in our room. The bed is lumpy as a sack of corn cobs and the bathroom sink hangs above the floor by a rusty metal clip. While I shave, water from the sink slops out onto the floor, distracted only temporarily by a pipe and a flawed trap underneath, where it gradually drains into a hole in the corner. But we have an excellent view of the River Kwai 1, flanked by rows of tourist buses with their smoked-glass windows glinting in the sun.

"Never mind", says Helen. "I'll buy you a drink there after we've booked the raft trip."

"What raft trip?"

No tourist prices! the sign out front of Sunya's restaurant declares, as if in apology for its Western menu. Inside, a faint smell of stale beer lingers and the tables are slightly sticky. Plastered on the walls are photos of people enjoying themselves at various phases of one, two, three day and even week-long expeditions up and down the Mae Klong. Everyone seems to have a drink, a tan, and dripping hair. A waitress hands us albums of more photos and testimonies written in English, French, German, Swedish, and so on.

"Maybe we should do it," says Helen, pointing to the last letter. "The Swede seemed to think it was great."

"But what did the Pommy say?"

"Never mind. The *Swedes* know how to have fun!"

We haven't earned our drink yet, so we catch a pedal-powered *songthaew* out to the war cemeteries to sober our thoughts. The Allied one is trim as a space needle restaurant. The lawns are neatly raked; not a speck of dirt escapes the wandering brooms and dust pans patrolling the pathways. Each gravestone is garnished with compact flora either in, or just about to, bloom. A cynic might suggest that all this is show to impress the Yanks and rub salt into the Japanese. But the Thai

are serious about death and invasions: a Bruce Ruxton would feel very much at home among these insignia and marble epitaphs.

Next to this cemetery is another *susaan*—this one Chinese. Though the stones are more massive and decorated with intricate mosaic tiles, the grounds are in disarray. Gravel paths, rather than asphalt. Only a few brittle weeds brave the inattention. We bend over a few of the more colourful inscriptions then move on.

"Perhaps the Chinese have left town," I offer.

At sunset we're standing on the bank of the Khwae Yai, watching the silhouettes of Japanese tourists strolling back and forth on the Bridge over the River Kwai, pausing now and then to let a Kawasaki or Suzuki or Honda motorcycle squeeze by. The bridge looks much better in near-darkness, its timbers warmed by the dying sun. I wonder what a young Japanese father thinks about, halfway over the bridge, as he arranges his sons, in their crisp, white shirts, against the guardrail for one last snapshot above the silty water. Is it possible that he could be as anaesthetised to history as we are?

I wait for the instant when the photographer holds his breath just before pressing the shutter, then I take my snapshot.

"Did you get the shadows in?" Helen asks.

"Yes," I say. "All of them."

It's supertime, and we're back by the Mae Klong, sipping German beer on board one of several houseboats that someone's had the inspiration to lash together and develop into restaurants and hopeful bistros. Helen's ordered us pepper fish and a hot Thai soup teaming with fins and lemon grass, after our waiter blundered by suggesting that those dishes were better left to the steely palate of the natives. I quietly cushion my stomach lining in advance with bread sticks.

The food's hotter than even I could imagine.

A band begins to play, the lead singer struggling with the lyrics of a country-western tune I thought I'd forgotten long ago. Every once in a while they sneak in a Thai song and their pace quickens. But the tables are filling up with tourists and soon they sing only in English.

From nowhere, a boy comes up to our table with a basket of long-stemmed roses, each carefully wrapped in plastic. He's barefooted, but his black hair is neatly combed and his shirt and shorts are clean. My eyes are watering so much from the food that I can barely focus on him.

"No, thanks," I say.

To my surprise, he doesn't drift away like the other pedlars we're used to but leans up against my arm and gazes up at me with serious, hypnotic eyes.

"You should be in bed, young man," I stammer.

"Maybe he'd like to be," says Helen, "perhaps his mother put him up to it."

"I don't know about that," I say, trying to avoid those eyes. "Somehow, I think this act has worked for him before."

I point him in the direction of a table of American tourists. "The big dollars are over *there*," I say, nudging him off.

The band starts in on a rash of Beatles songs, so we order more Klosters and hum along. A longboat floats by, lit by an arcing string of lights, and bumps to a stop just beyond our table. The woman aboard gestures up to us, offering an array of sweets. The boy has apparently softened us up, so we buy two small cakes with toasted coconut on top, which the woman passes up in a reed basket tied to the end of a pole. I take a bite of mine and, finding it too sugary, set it aside. As though on cue, the boy comes back, minus his flowers.

"Where'd you hide them, mate?" I ask. "You couldn't have sold them *all* to the Yanks!"

He says nothing at first, but then I hear him, in hardly more than a whisper, humming the lyrics of the Beatles song: *las nigh I say this wuds t'ma girl, ah know you neva even try, girl . . .* The band has stopped by then, but he sings the line over and over, concentrating *you neva even try . . .*

Before we go to bed, Helen puts the rose in a spare water glass.

"Let them eat cake," she laughs.

At Sunya's next morning, over a mango fruit shake and banana pancakes, I try to shake off my doubts about the rafting trip.

"Are crocodiles attracted to inner tubes?" I ask Helen.

The houseboat is like two verandahs stacked on top of one another. Sunya has had to ferry passengers from the restaurant in two shifts because his Datsun utility is too small, so by the time we climb on board nearly all the spaces on the upper deck have been taken by a clutch of young Germans who, eyes closed, seem intent on recouping sleep neglected from the night before. Scattered between them is a generous array of lip balm and sunblock potions.

Helen jabs me in the ribs as we look for a niche. One of their towels has a *River Kwai* 1 insignia emblazoned on it in bright, red thread.

"See what we're missing?" she whispers.

I nod back. "I'll bet the hotel packages Sunya's trip for twice what we paid!"

We snigger a bit too emphatically, and one of the Germans sits up. "A fine morning!" he says, more as a decree than an observation. "My name ist Klaus."

I introduce us in halting German, which impresses him. Germans always seem so pleased when you speak their language, then so disappointed when you expose how few stock phrases you actually have at your

command. We speak briefly about the weather and the price of beer, and then Klaus lies back down on his towel—also a *River Kwai*. He has very little hair on his chest and none of the sunscreen lotions seem to belong to him.

The houseboat has no motor. A smaller craft, linked to us with a hemp umbilical cord, supplies enough power to guide us out into the current and then to keep us on course. A man sits on an elevated seat that looks as if it's been salvaged from an old tractor. He wears a straw hat, usually tipped down low to protect him from the sun. Occasionally, we can hear music—country and western—drifting back to us. He seems content to ignore us.

Suddenly, Sunya clammers up from the lower deck and becomes a live wire. He wears baggy, red swimmers that show his waistline hasn't fallen victim to the good life he promotes. He's one of those people who always gets by, no matter what the regime. I imagine him, camouflaged, padding through steamy jungles with his automatic rifle, a prickle in the rib of some doomed, invading force. With the same premeditated smile. Now, poised on a platform doubtless built for the purpose, he gives out a cry that sounds like a cross between a war-whoop and a yodel, then dives out, feet-first, into the water.

"*Girls just wanna have f-un,*" he sings, spluttering up to the surface.

We're supposed to follow his lead.

The Germans are ambivalent. I overheard them speculating about the relative friendliness of the water and am tempted to gently mention the crocs. But I've forgotten the word for "teeth".

After the shyness wears off, we're in the water, bobbing for inner tubes. Along the river, we see huts, farmers plying the fields with plows pulled by water buffalo, women watering rows of crops with sprinkling cans balanced on poles they carry across their shoulders, kids dipping nets in the river for fish then waving madly at us as we pass by. The sun's warming up. In the distance, bamboo forests and the green, green hills of Burma.

I look around for the hidden camera.

Two huge woks steam away on the lower deck. Ever since we cast off, a woman has been methodically slicing vegetables and fruit, shelling prawns, scaling and de-boning fish. She's arranged everything within reach so she seldom has to interrupt her crouch, which she sustains without fatigue. She could just as easily be chopping and stirring in a Bangkok back alley for all the notice she seems to take of the world drifting by on either side of the boat.

As we stand around waiting for the lunch signal, Helen elbows me to look at Klaus, who's showing the first signs of sunburn. But he and the other Germans are so well into the beer that I hesitate interrupting their fun.

"You can pack them off to uni," I whisper to her, "but you can't teach them how to look after themselves."

The woman lifts a lid, revealing a cauldron full of white rice. The dull clang wakens Sunya, who, after acting the catalyst, has flaked out on a shady bamboo mat. He leaps up but then has to steady himself on a post for a moment to find his balance.

"Lunch," he says, as though leaning out of a chuck-wagon, "come and get it!"

When it's all laid out, there's far too much food, but of course this is no accident—Sunya knows the stuff of which memorable testimonies are made. One of the Germans whips out his camera to immortalise the table before the picture's defiled. Helen and I conspire to not let them out-eat us; we'll show them the stuff *River Kwai* 2 loyalists are made of. Between second and third servings, someone takes notice of the cook squatting in a corner with chopsticks and a humble bowl of rice. She grins toothlessly at our vigorous applause.

As we sprawl on the mats afterwards, I remember those kids on the bank, waving. Has someone spread a rumour about leftovers?

The woman's work isn't done. The tugboat man angles us into shore, and she hops out into the water, tying us up to the dock after Sunya tosses her a rope. Then she arranges a plank as a footpath for us from the deck to the dock. Sunya urges us overboard.

"Two wats," he says, excitedly. "Chinese and Thai, side by side. You follow her."

Evidently Sunya has seen enough of the wats, because he stays behind, no doubt to catch up where sleep left off. We follow the woman up a trail meandering steadily uphill through the bamboo. The Chinese wat is built into the side of a mountain; hundreds of unrelenting steps curl around up to the top, passing spotless porcelain walls onto which thousands of identical Buddhas are painted; clay pots containing bonsai plants of every imaginable variety and fragrance; altars with golden statues of Buddhas in lotus position, lit by scores of candles in glasses of red wax. Helen notes that the Chinese fashion Buddhas in their own image, definitely more plump and self-actualized than their Thai relations.

The Thai wat's façade is under reconstruction, so we're not allowed in. From scaffolding on the huge dome, several workmen chink away at the old stonework with hammers to smooth the surface for new patterns made of concrete in pre-cast molds, a curious blend of traditional ways with the bland uniformity of technology. It's taken the men years to get this far, and they're not finished yet.

Thai water-skiing—that's what Sunya calls it. The river's broad and calm enough at this point to be mistaken for a lake, so when he detaches the thick

line connecting us to the powerboat, we hardly move at all. At the same time, he tosses a thinner tow line over to his hired man, who ties it up unceremoniously to the stern of his boat.

Sunya tightens the string on his swimmers. "Very important," he says, pointing down at them, "for the men, if they don't want to lose their . . . valuables. O.K. for the women, though."

"Why not for the women also?" one of the German women blusters.

"It's O.K. for the women," Sunya says, winking at me.

On the skier's end of the line is a wooden cross-piece thick as a yoke.

"You hold it like this," Sunya says, swinging it over his head and positioning it across his shoulder blades like a crucifix. "But don't let go, even when the water splashes your face. As long as you keep your back straight, you'll be O.K. So who goes first?"

"Where are the skis?" Helen asks.

Sunya just laughs. Maybe the Americans took them back when they decided to abandon Saigon?

Scanning through my repertoire of crocodile jokes, I try to look preoccupied. I don't fall into the trap of asking what happens if you *don't* manage to keep your back straight because such pessimism usually leads to the questioner being selected—or rather, scapegoated—as the first to go. As it happens, Sunya has overheard someone mention that today is Klaus' birthday, so he has an ace in the hole. The other Germans, noticeably relieved, are more than happy to volunteer Klaus, whose skin now is taking on the tinge of a ripening pomegranate.

Klaus gives in with only a token struggle and soon is hurtling along behind the boat, nearly obscured from view by the whitewater arcing back on either side of him as he churns through it with screams that the motor nearly muffles. A few seconds later, it's all over, and the boat has to spin around for the rescue.

"How about you?" Sunya asks me. "You go next?"

"I'm not a very good swimmer."

"Never mind," he says. "If you lose the line, just think of crocodile teeth. Everyone swims top notch when he thinks of crocodiles!"

By sundown, and less than an hour from home port, Sunya notices that, while the beer's nearly gone, only a few bottles of Mekong whiskey have been consumed. His brow furrows. Do Pepsi drinkers have less fun? Do they write lukewarm testimonies? But then he comes up with a solution.

"Everybody on top deck!" he orders, pulling three bottles of whiskey from the Eskie. "We have a toast on Sunya!"

Once we're arranged with glasses and our share of the liquor, Sunya salutes Klaus, who's acting very subdued with his sunburn and an abrasion or two that he suffered while trying to scramble aboard the rescue boat from his sojourn in the water.

"Happy trails," Sunya declares. "To the birthday boy!"

"Happy trails?" I mutter to Helen under my breath, diluting our bitter-tasting drinks with more ginger ale. "I think old Sunya's been watching too many Roy Rogers movies."

"Now we play *games*," Sunya says, arranging two lines of empty beer bottles in parallel with each other. Then he reaches into a chest behind him and pulls out several sets of chopsticks and two ping-pong balls. He sets a ball down on the first bottle in each row. "This is how it goes. We have two teams, and one person at a time who's up. You pick the ball up with chopsticks, carry it to the next bottle, set it down again, until you make it to the last bottle."

"What happens if you drop the ball?" one of the Germans asks.

"Nothing much," says Sunya, with a grin. "Everyone on your team has to have a drink and then you try again. Simple as that."

The whole thing reminds me of Friday evening at the Officers' Mess, but, of course, we go along with it. Sunya's liquor; Sunya's game.

Soon the first bottle's gone, and Sunya waits patiently for someone to offer to buy the next one. No one does. Finally, he walks over and claps poor Klaus on the shoulder, ignoring him when he winces.

"The next bottle, I split with my friend Klaus," he says. "Only charge him half."

He smiles when a few of the other Germans automatically reach for their wallets to offer Klaus money for his share. Now the ping-pong ball's *really* on a roll.

"Happy trails," Sunya sings, pulling out a set of bongo drums from the chest, switching on a ghetto blaster, and really getting into it. "Party time!"

The obligatory party back at Sunya's—*no charge, my friends, everything's included*—is an anticlimax. Not nearly as much food this time (the testimonies are already signed and sealed), and Klaus sets a maudlin tone to forget his sunburn.

We smile through one last bottle of Mekong and then blame our early departure on packing for an early bus, just as Sunya's about to sign people up for a morning bus tour of waterfalls north of town.

In the Cave Temple of the Golden Dragon, an old nun meditates while floating on her back in a small pool fed from an underground spring. Thais come from all over the country to watch her, and many young women stay on for months to serve her. She blesses you by whistling moistly onto the top of your head.

A series of steps with dragon-sculpted handrails leads up the craggy mountainside to another limestone cave where a Burmese hermit with a long white beard prepares and sells nearly forgotten herbal remedies.

He won't let you take his picture.

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books

Developmental Ideology: an Indispensible Guide

Judith Wright

H. C. Coombs, H. McCann, H. Ross and N. M. Williams, editors. *Land of Promises: Aborigines and Development in the East Kimberley*. (Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU, and Aboriginal Studies Press, \$9.95).

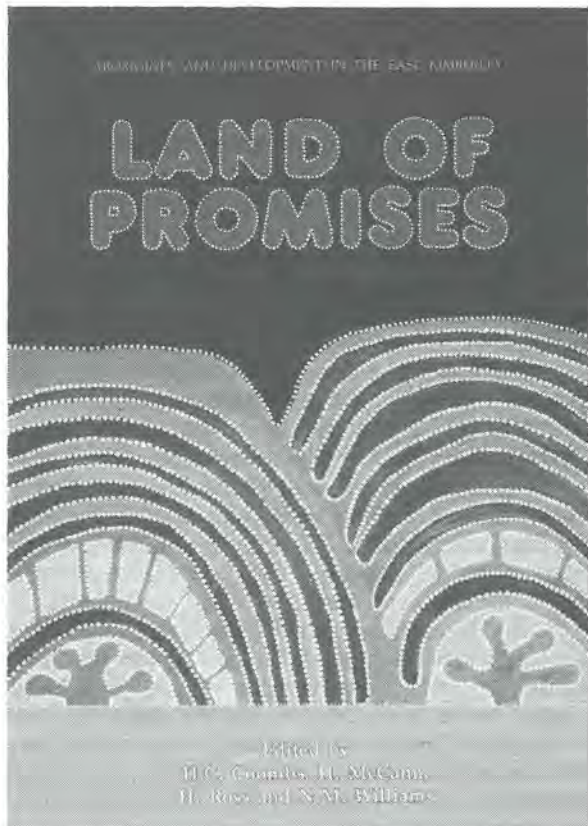
Australia is an ill-documented country, historically, environmentally and even geographically. The sheer size of the country, the inaccessibility of so much of it, the lack of documentation about its past and the bias which has kept the little historical research about it grounded in prejudice or repression of stories we haven't liked, have been a limitation not only on our knowledge of the place and its stories, but on our literature. I myself have good reason to know this. In 1949 I began to write the story of the part played by my own family in its neglected but highly important pastoral invasions. Virtually no books or collections of documents or archival resources, apart from the Mitchell Library, were open to me; and I found to my surprise that not all that did exist were available to researchers.

The work of deduction that was necessary was beyond my capacity, and certainly beyond my finances at the time. This, and not any recoil from the job, was why it took so long to establish the background for my second attempt, published as *The Cry for the Dead* twenty-five years after the first book appeared.

So the appearance of *Land of Promises*, a major work and a regional study unique of its kind, not only in Australia but as far as I know, anywhere else, is of incalculable value not just to the Aborigines of the East Kimberley for whom the study was undertaken, but to the whole community, its environmentalists, economists, historians and writers as well. It deals with only a small, and little-known, part of the north of Australia, but within that area over the hundred years or so since the first Europeans

arrived there, the biggest and most environmentally questionable dam—the Ord—and one of the biggest recent mining developments, the Argyle diamond mine, have added their impacts to those of the pastoral industry, feral introduced animals, and the ejection and dispossession of the original peoples of the East Kimberley, followed by their temporary reinstatement as largely unpaid stock-workers, and their second and more final loss of land under the waters of the dam.

So as a case-study alone, the book embodies historical, economic, environmental and racial-relations elements; it is practically an archetypal



examination of our own impact on land and peoples, as well as of their responses and the possibilities open to them to resist, adapt to and live with the shock of the new and unprecedented. It is not commissioned by any government or resource developer and was never likely to be welcome to either, so that for once its many contributors were free to work without such distorting pressures. Its researchers, editors and even publishers were financed by independent sources—universities, research foundations and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Its immediate genesis was not even from the major economic players in the region, but from the few and almost powerless Aboriginal organisations which have, over the past few decades, seen their lives alter almost beyond recognition and their bargaining position sink to nearly zero (from the lowest level, at that). Accordingly they asked for help in assessing what was happening to them, as vast and uncontrollable mining interests, new settlement induced by the Ord development, an influx of new tourist interests and an intrusion into their last refuges forced change and deprivations into the lives of their people. How, they wanted to know, might they find strategies to deal with all this, and to adapt to, where they could not influence, the changes that were overpowering their lives.

The resulting study covers a region stretching from Kununurra and Wyndham in the north, to Malan (Lake Gregory) in the south, and including the diamond mine, the Ord Dam and its rivers, the newly 'discovered' Bungle Bungle (Purnululu) plateau and national park, and the Aboriginal communities driven comparatively recently from their lands and from the pastoral properties which used to employ them. It's an epic stage, for changes and dramas of epic proportions; and it does—yes—encompass much of the real history, political, economic, and environmental, of our own society as well as theirs.

The Report is based on—so far—thirty-two working papers from researchers in many disciplines. Its range of expertise in the many disciplines of its contributors is probably unequalled. It embodies a wholly new initiative in multi-disciplinary research, planning and recommendations, and the truly new factor is that it has been produced, not by the dominant economy but in co-operation in planning, consultation and scope with the Aborigines who are the losers and the sufferers in a game with nation-wide and even world-wide implications.

Moreover, it, and its associated papers, make absorbing and enlightening reading. No writer, or historian, can now be ignorant of the real forces shaping our own, as well as Aborigines', present and future destinies; and the sheer sweep of the total study is without precedent.

Pastoralism—mainly the cattle industry—provided the introductory experience here as elsewhere; and its establishment and the Halls Creek goldrush in the

1880's 'were accompanied by the massacre of many Aborigines and the appropriation of nearly all of their land'. (These statements are documented in the working papers, for the first time.) Later, in the usual pattern of such stories, Aborigines clinging to such relationship as they could salvage with the land which was their source and religion were allowed to 'come in' as the jargon was, as unpaid workforce to the stations. This attempt at accommodation, which allowed them at least occasional contact with their past and their land, continued until pastoralists, seeing opportunities in the Ord River catchment (and realising perhaps that the erosion and the failing fertility of the soils of the region pointed to disaster ahead for the industry) pressed unwilling governments to dam the Ord River and encourage agricultural projects.

For the Aborigines, watching the waters rise over their land and its sacred places and associations, this was an unimaginable blow. It could scarcely be said to have been an economic success—its huge costs will probably never be recouped in any case, and the agricultural projects it was intended to encourage met blow after blow as rice, cotton and other crops were successively destroyed by magpie geese, insect invasion, and climatic problems. Heavy erosion in the catchment has not been arrested by withdrawing the area from pastoral use; regeneration attempts have been 'dissappointing'; tourism, with its exploitation of the delicate Purnululu sandstone massif in the 'Bungle Bungle' national park (the name seems appropriate) has not helped Aborigines as yet, though they may achieve some involvement in management.

The Report does not merely examine the problems of the region itself—in its opening chapter, 'The ideology of development', it goes far into the whole question of Australian 'development' priorities, history, and record not only in the context of the study area, but of the major 'industrial powers of Britain, Western Europe, North America and Japan.'

This chapter, with its penetrating judgement of the whole 'development ideology' is applicable far beyond the context of the East Kimberley where its results are so recent and so evident: its environmental and social costs, its justification for the destruction of hunter-gathering and peasant-farmer societies, its creation of a 'propertyless proletariat unequipped for the new system.'

The chapter, written by H. C. Coombs, contrasts Aboriginal views of land ('we look after land really for the future') with the largely unsustainable onrush of unplanned and generally ignorant resource use which characterises the great god 'Gross National Product', and the current exhaustion of soils, pollution of waters, and destruction of natural systems which has resulted—as at last we begin to realise—in an impoverishment which increases, and affects us all.

With land degradation now seen as a national problem, what hope have Aborigines—gradually

gaining a little control over the future of East Kimberley stations such as Doon Doon and Bow River—of starting to regenerate soils and introduce management methods to restore their devastated lands? With their old management methods no longer viable in a world economy, they have no good examples available to them from our own management: 'The story of the Ord River Irrigation Area is one of grandiose visions, inadequate and ill-directed research, and decisions by politicians for short-term political advantage.'

But the Report and its associated working papers (25 of them listed in the appendix, along with numerous reference papers) form a unique basis for future planning and action by Aborigines as they face continuing and increasing disruption of their lives and sacred areas. The historical account of their lives over the past century, the impacts of change and the variety of Aboriginal responses, makes clear that the 'ideology of exclusion' which has driven them from their land is being actively resisted; but matters are little better than they were before Aborigines gained citizenship rights in 1971.

Yet the Report and the studies associated with it have already been of use to them, in the attempt, for instance, to ensure an Aboriginal share in the management of the Purnululu national park. It will increasingly act as a guide to their disrupted organizations and the communities themselves in the economic and social problems that crowd in on their lives.

The whole enterprise, its planning, financing and the work which documents the environmental and social realities of the region have been a triumph for its originators and directors, and provide a model for any future enterprise of its kind. But for other Australians, as well as for the Aborigines who requested it, it is a major source of illumination about our own society, our priorities, our motivations and the effects we have had on the land we reached 200 years ago and have so momentously altered since then. Writers badly need this kind of source study of ecological and environmental, as well as social history. They have been badly served by a history and a literature which concentrated narrowly on social relations within an urban or semi-urban context and set of accepted values, and which lacked perspective on our past and present. The indispensable, if deadly, light it throws on the enterprise we embarked on with our ignorant arrival on this other side of the earth, is what writers, even more than the rest of the community of Australians, need to see by.

The editors' claim that this study and Report is a major work is more than justified, in all the branches of study it covers; we should be thankful to the Aborigines who originated it as well as to those who carried it out.

Manning on Manning

Michael Costigan

Manning Clark: *The Puzzles of Childhood* (Viking, \$29.99).

What is left for a great historian to do after completing his major work, a classical six-volume history of his own country? If his writing hand, like St Paul's tongue, cannot be stilled even after so much exertion, he may set to work on a multi-volume history of his own life. Australia's most celebrated historian has done precisely this.

A distinguishing mark of *The Puzzles of Childhood*, which could be alternatively titled *Manning Clark's history of Manning Clark, Volume One (1915-30)*, is its relentless honesty. After finishing it, the reader should have some idea of how a priest or psychiatrist feels after hearing the confessions of the guilt-ridden and the over-scrupulous.

Revelations of family secrets and the baring of one's soul may be what autobiographies are all about, but few of the many others published in Australia in recent years approach the candor of Manning Clark's portraits of his mother and father or of his account of boyhood tribulations, many of which apparently had devastating effects later on. He will no doubt tell us more about this in the sequel or sequels to this quite remarkable book.

The 1980s have been a vintage decade for autobiographies or memoirs—think of Albert Facey, Clive James, Sally Morgan, Ronald Conway, Nancy Keesing, Charles Osborne, David Malouf, Jill Ker Conway, and the continuing output of Donald Horne, Betty Roland and one or two other trilogists. Among the other samples of this form of literature appearing in these years have been several from writers born, like Manning Clark, during or near the period of the First World War. Notable examples are Patrick White, Bob Santamaria, James McClelland, Russel Ward, Oriel Gray, Maslyn Williams, Bernard Smith and Joan Colebrook. Collectively, their books are a rich source of information for anyone interested in how the young of the 1920s and 30s lived and dreamed.

Perhaps the recent autobiography which comes nearest to Manning Clark's introspection and to the frankness of his exposure of parental qualities, failings, disappointments and motivations is Ric Throssell's *My Father's Son*. Both writers have a keen sense of having lived in the shadow of parents whose undoubted love for each other was severely tested by the almost irreconcilable diversity of their respective backgrounds, viewpoints, talents and personalities—a situation which Throssell analyses less incisively than Clark.

While Throssell's advancement as a public servant and diplomat was handicapped because those whom

Clark calls "straiteners" or "life-deniers" would always remember that he was the son of Katharine Susannah Prichard, the Communist writer, it was Clark's happiness and peace-of-mind rather than his career that were profoundly disturbed by the never forgotten "torments of childhood".

The storms and the uproar were mainly internal. From his father, the Reverend Charles Clark, a gifted orator and a "banquet-of-life man", he inherited an acute sensitivity to slights or insults and an inability easily to forgive and forget. While attracted to his mother's "inner serenity", he was thrown off balance by her over-protectiveness, her constant assurances that he was special, "not like the others", and that there were things in life that she hoped he would never hear or know about.

His parents came from two opposite sides of the tracks, Charles being the son of a London-born tradesman and a Tipperary Protestant, while Catherine Amelia Stuart Hope was descended from "the ancient nobility of New South Wales"—the Marsdens, Hassalls and Hopes. They met when Charles was a curate at St John's Church of England, Ashfield, where they were married in 1910. For him, marriage to Catherine, together with ordination in the Diocese of Sydney, provided an entrée into a more respectable world than the son of an immigrant blacksmith-turned-builder might have expected to be his. For her, it was the beginning of a life of genteel poverty in a succession of vicarages. For both, it was to lead to deeply hurtful but only partly explained events, to a life of "fret and fever".

Charles Manning Hope Clark, the couple's second son, was born on 3 March 1915. A third child, a daughter, arrived in the following year. It is a curious feature of these reminiscences of childhood, which tell so much about both the Clark parents, that the author has little to say about his brother Russell and virtually nothing about his sister Hope. One can only surmise that his siblings had much less influence than his parents on the troubled childhood of Manning Clark.

We learn a good deal more about some of the characters and companions who touched the young boy's life when obscure circumstances, probably linked with the rigidity of Sydney's Low Church Anglicanism, took Charles Clark and his wife away from Sydney, first to Kempsey and later to the Victorian parishes of Cowes, on Phillip Island (Manning's "Swanee River", where his heart is "turning ever"), and Belgrave ("a place of drip and gloom"); and when a scholarship transformed him in 1928 from a day boy at Mont Albert Central School into a boarder at Melbourne Grammar, that training ground for the sons of "Yarraside".

The pen-pictures of friends, tormenters, shopkeepers, local "mavericks and eccentrics", teachers and domestics give scope to his considerable

skills as a raconteur. They are a delight.

He categorises most of those he has met along the way, usually by using a word ending in 'er'. In addition to the straiteners and life-deniers, those meriting opprobrium include the mockers, sneerers, frowners, punishers, avengers, haters, threateners, grovellers, wondrous, taunters and various others. On the other hand, those deserving admiration or sympathy, as the case may be, are the enlargers of life, worriers, self-effacers, life-affirmers, indulgers and stumblers. Manning Clark must be one of literature's most prolific labellers. He assures us that he has come to view all human beings, even presumably the straiteners, "with the eye of pity and the eye of love".

Manning describes life as a boarder at Melbourne Grammar in a wonderful chapter titled 'The Ordeal'. There was much for a sensitive lad to endure at an institution where bullying and snobbishness flourished and which he disparages as "in most ways imitation English". It was also at this time that the mild form of epilepsy which was to afflict him for many years first manifested itself.

It is clear, however, that this famous public school, where subjects like Latin and Greek were in those days given the emphasis they deserve, contributed much to his development. Clark acknowledges his special indebtedness to a great headmaster and teacher, Lofty Franklin, who helped to set him on his life's course by recognising his capacity to "manage history".

"Only those who can tell a story should write history," said Lofty. Manning could and Manning did, for which Australia must be forever grateful.

Grammar also offered him the chance to enhance another of his inherited skills, with a cricket bat. Unfortunately, this did not exempt him, as he had hoped it would, from the taunts of the "Long Dorm" bullies, the high priests of sadistic initiation rites and other arbitrarily imposed penalties, usually involving soapy tables and knotted towels. But he has put them forever in their place in some memorable passages.

The faces of the Long Dorm boys will never go away. They become long-term members of my nightmare world. I think of them as the ones to whom Australia belongs, the types who rule Australia. I never know heart's ease in their presence. For me they are everywhere. It does not matter which group or which society—capitalist, communist, or fascist—they are the self-appointed standards men. They wield the wet towel . . . I also know, but this, alas, very rarely, as it does not happen very often, that moment of moments when my eyes meet another pair of eyes, and there is instant recognition: that mystery of mysteries why those who have suffered from the Long Dorm are always attracted to each other, why they always recognise each other, why that bond transcends all offences the one may commit against the other.

His fellow historian Russel Ward, a near contemporary, has called Manning Clark the first genius he ever met. He also asserts that "everyone he ever met either admired or hated him" (*A Radical Life*, p. 228). This may be an over-statement, but, if it is true, this reviewer wishes to be counted among the wholehearted admirers.

I first met Professor Clark twenty years ago and saw quite a bit of him when he was a member of the Literature Board (of which I was Director) in the early 1970s and of the Australia Council a few years afterwards, in both cases under the chairmanship of his friend, Geoffrey Blainey. He participated in the Board's meetings with a zest and humour which indicated that he truly felt among friends. In contrast, his silence at most meetings of the Council might have owed something to the tedious nature of much of the agenda or to his sensing the presence of a straitener or two around the table: "I later met Judas on every committee. Judas was everywhere". When he did speak, he always commanded attention, as he did in the lecture room.

It is clear that behind much of Manning Clark's anguish as a boy and the worries which have persisted throughout life is the religious question. What does it all mean? Is it possible that annihilation awaits us? How can the mixture of good and evil in all of us be explained? He is forever haunted by the words which Dostoevski places in the mouth of Ivan Karamazov: "I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for."

Life's experience has shed light on some of the puzzles of childhood, but much of the mystery remains. In Russel Ward's view, "he was and still is an intensely religious person, forever assailed by doubts, and still trying to decide between the Protestantism of his ancestors, the *de facto* rationalism of his fellow academics, and the Roman Catholicism of Irish-Australians whom he admired."

What is apparent again from this book, as from much of his other work, is that his agnosticism does not prevent him from repudiating secular humanism and, like his father, greatly admiring Christ and his teaching: "The secular humanists had no time for Christ. I mixed with them, seemed to be one of them, but was really like a foreigner in their country."

Having spent much of his life "wanting to believe in a Heaven on Earth and a Heaven in the world to come", he appears now to have a view of the Enlightenment not as far removed as one might have expected from that expressed by B. A. Santamaria. Writing in *Against the Tide* about the famous Spanish debate at Melbourne University in March 1937, which the 22-year-old Clark witnessed, Santamaria says:

What we represented was a less Utopian view of man, with a profound belief in the Fall and in Original Sin; imposing the necessity of the search

for justice, but knowing that the quest for human perfectability on earth was ultimately unrealizable and would be used to justify the most appalling tyrannies . . .

It is a view of man and society which I have never abandoned, although I recognize that it has been used, in Spain as in many other countries, as cover and justification for outrageous injustices perpetrated by those who control the machinery of the State in their own social and political interests, to whom God is merely a chance ally.

The Puzzles of Childhood and what, I hope, will be several further autobiographical volumes are not a mere coda to Manning Clark's monumental work, an elongated "note about the author". This is a literary work of considerable distinction and importance in its own right.

Sombre and repetitive it may be, but the gloom is that of a solemn oratorio and the repetitions are essential refrains rather than the survivors of editorial carelessness. As for the pervasive sense of guilt, it has to be respected, but is it well founded? Were I Manning Clark's confessor, the penance would be congenial, more in the nature of reward than punishment, and the absolution most willingly bestowed.

Michael Costigan, who has had careers in the Catholic priesthood, as a journalist and as the Director of the Australia Council's Literature Board, has recently been conducting a Church inquiry into the distribution of wealth in Australia.

Bear Tracks

Max Teichmann

Amin Saikal and William Maley (eds.): *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press, \$23.50).

Ross Babbage (ed.): *The Soviets in the Pacific in the 1990s* (Brassey's/Pergamon, \$34).

These volumes on different aspects of Soviet foreign and military policies show the influence of the think tanks of the A.N.U., especially the collection dealing with the Soviets in the Pacific. Hence a certain unified approach to interpreting Russian policies and motives. In the past, searching for threats, or, when they couldn't be found, divining their possible existence just round some corner, very nearly exhausted the intellectual repertoire of many Australian academic commentators. These books constitute an advance.

There had to be a change in this circular, repetitive reasoning about Russia and Communist states generally—given the extraordinary changes in the five years since Gorbachov arrived. There are still commentators hanging on to worst case scenarios in

these books, but a certain dejection hangs over their continuing efforts to conjure up a Russian bear on the rampage; a more likely future for Russia is to steadily contract to the size and importance it had in the 16th century; but telling our life time Kremlinologists *that* is like shooting the fox. They won't hear of it.

The book on the Pacific is in some ways a strange collection—the core being about the Soviet economy, society and military capacities and philosophies—not the Pacific at all. The core chapters, by the way, are very good; the best parts of the book. The North Pacific chapter is also important, but then we start downhill as writers look at South East Asia, and the Soviets in the South Pacific in the 1990s.

The fact is, as the writers concede, Soviet activity in the South Pacific has been at a fairly low level, and promises to stay that way. The only likely military contact we and Russia could have would be in the event of a Russo-American war—now more and more unlikely. The joint facilities could be attacked, but *that* is not a story about the Russian presence here, but the American. In other words, the arguments for Anzus, the bases, or Alliances are as specious as they've ever been.

As to the Russians in South East Asia, commentators foresee a steady decline in their influence during the 1990's. Asean has less and less need for Russian trade or help (for that matter, Japan can get cheaper raw materials from non-Siberian sources if she so desires).

The key Pacific area for Russia is, of course, North Asia, where she faces a string of hostile or semi-hostile neighbours—China, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and the U.S.—always likely to form a coalition, in Moscow's worst case scenario. These neighbours make a large scale naval break out from Soviet northern waters into the main Indo-Pacific Ocean area virtually impossible, just as they make the maintenance and defence of distant bases or forces, e.g. Cam Ranh Bay, a hazardous if not quixotic enterprise. Russia is most unlikely to engage in such risk-taking.

By the way, there really is no need for Soviet missile-firing submarines to leave home waters and make the hazardous journey into the open sea in order to line up targets in the U.S. or its island bases. Their firing range is now such as to enable them to hit most of what they want while still operating in Siberian waters.

In sum, Russia's strategies in the Pacific, and along her long border with China, are essentially conservative and defensive. She sees no future in a war with the West—either nuclear or conventional—and the impossibility of defeating China in a land war. She would be content to still have what she now holds, ten years hence.

There are two wild cards in the Pacific—one is a Socialist Japan, committed to winding down confrontation with Russia, stopping further rises in defence spending, and forcing changes in U.S. nuclear

activities in and around Japan. Such a development would transform Asian politics—and one might expect intense U.S. opposition to such a party gaining power. The other card, mentioned in the Pacific volume, is a Philippines Government at last refusing to continue housing U.S. bases there. Philippine politicians have been promising this for so long that few people really believe that anything will change, but the U.S. for one remains concerned. However, it's hard to see how even these dramatic changes in the Pacific status quo would entice Russian to greatly expand her Indo Pacific role.

One of the things which comes out of the economic analyses of Russia is the seriousness of her plight and the folly of any future Soviet government trying to pretend that these mounting economic, social and legitimacy problems did not exist, nor required early drastic changes. Russia's resources are stretched to breaking point, and a reversion to the arms race, or investing in new adventurist policies beyond the periphery of the Soviet Union, could undo her entirely.

Her Afghan adventure, presented in a most interesting and informative way, points up the law of unintended consequences. The Russians never counted on such resistance, nor the extent of world hostility, while the Americans and Pakistanis, even now, seem to think they can instal a regime of their choice, with the Kabul governors either dead or in exile. Original perceptions of the essentially tribal character of the Afghans, their disputations and fissiparous tendencies, were forgotten by the West. Like the Russians, they thought guns would find a way.

The results have been the most appalling loss of life and destruction of vital resources, without anyone yet getting a prize—unless the rise of Reaganite arms policy on the backs of the Afghans, the Poles and the passengers in the South Korean airliner, is seen as a prize by the Pentagon. But that aside, the analogy between Vietnam and Afghanistan is pretty clear—*except* that Russia has accepted her defeat with far fewer adverse domestic feelings than the United States; indeed the United States has never accepted her Vietnam defeat—hence Pol Pot, Cam Ranh Bay and the Boat People.

But to return to Afghanistan. No one appears to have come up with a political formula which would satisfy all Afghans. The tradition of centralist legitimacy has been either monarchical or presidential—with the experiment in 'constitutional' power, as it was called, (1963-1973) being a period of indecisive government. The continuing ability of Kabul to hold out against American and Pakistani-backed rebels is a tribute to the chronic inability of the numerous factions to unite, combine or agree—in some cases, even stop shooting one another up. Were Kabul to collapse, peace might not break out, rather a slow motion Lebanon.

One can observe a lack of political will to reconstruct post-war Afghanistan, either politically or economically, on the part of America and her friends. No more than in Kampuchea, has Washington exercised her foresight beyond getting the 'Reds out'.

As the Soviets have allowed ideology to over determine past policies, so have the Americans appeared to be quite inadequate custodians for the peoples and territories on whose behalf they have overtly or covertly intervened. The only lasting monuments to their political realism in Afghanistan, Indo China and e.g. Central and South America might appear to be the newish but enormous drug industry on the Afghan-Pakistan border, the Golden Triangle, and the cocaine empires of Latin America. Plus some shattered societies.

These two books are well worth reading—especially the Afghan collection, and it would be nice to see companion volumes on the U.S. in Afghanistan and in the Pacific in the 1990s. However, there might be problems in obtaining funding for such studies.

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Buckmaster Collected

Judith Rodriguez

Charles Buckmaster: *Collected Poems*, edited by Simon MacDonald (University of Queensland Press, \$16.95).

This book has been a long time coming. After only four years writing poetry, Charles Buckmaster committed suicide at 21, had he lived, he would now be 38.

Poems written between the ages of 17 and 21, from 1968 to 1972—a time of political ferment, of conscription for the Vietnam War and of the rise of a drug culture in Australia—inevitably challenge comparison with his contemporary Dransfield. The waning pastoral idyll of Buckmaster's childhood home, the orchard valley of Gruyere, is less spectacular subject-matter than Dransfield's high fantasy of Courland Penders but somehow even more strictly the counterpart of the drug culture which too literally engrossed them both.

Death-obsessed, impatient as Blake of social regimentation and pettiness, responding to his reading (explicitly to Owen, to French symbolism, Eliot, Thomas, and Beat poets), never less than free in form, tortured by the ambivalence of experienced loneliness and the ideal of freedom, the early Buckmaster almost disappears under the apparatus of youthful angst. Only an occasional gleam discloses the poet overcoming such leached abstractions and jargon as 'pathetic',

'impotent exhibitionism', 'decaying flux of hopelessness/of anonymity'.

... the sand is as dead
and impotent
and pathetic
as the beach
of a cold
shore wet
in winter
and there's a sediment
of insoluble
sterility
left
by the hour glass
that's gone.

An early homing in on his deepest metaphor—"There are forests in the mind", page 12—is cast into relief two pages later by a whole generation's cry:

the dead brush bushes
of the yarra
bank/cast out shadows
of lost purposes in their raving nakedness
only obscured
by their self chosen
alienation
—'soul'

The reader of this piously gathered collection must pick among material, rightly preserved, that the process of a longer career would have scrapped. Possibly the first highly preservable poem, dated 2/8/68, is 'solitude: a song for Gruyere'. From here on, the power of Buckmaster's simple lyrical evocation of his native district is apparent:

moonlight, dulled light
and red fires on the hills . . .
floodlight on the farm across the
paddocks & over the road . . .

wind rippling the moonlight on the water on
the rain barrel.
frost coming down on the lawn.

cold wind and shaking trees.
—'sunday night poem'

'½ way down' and 'for 5 minutes * two weeks ago' are two brilliant notations of wet fern forest; 'salt/sun/sea poem' articulates a relationship between humans and the natural environment. With the Lawrentian, quirkily questioning and talkative long 'answer to a question' (circa November 1968) Buckmaster sets out to investigate his subject matter: the powerful hold on his imagination of peaceful, secluded Gruyere, and later on of the imposing Wilpena Pound in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia.

It is not an exclusive or narrow interest. Within one month, 'deathdance of the ancient Britons', 'in the park/grassseeds below', 'My eyes have seen you (i)' and the fine 'Migraine' introduce a preoccupation with socially ritualized death, and furiously accuse the war politicians and devastators of the earth.

The second third of the book, poems dated mostly to the first half of 1969, develop by travel and return. They document Buckmaster's way to Sydney, then to Adelaide and Perth; the frustrations of '3//days of inaction/at the left action//conference/ways & means', and the detailed actuality of 'Unemployment'.

The remarkable follow-up to this foray is a group of visionary poems. 'Visions of a home' briefly refers to Gruyere as a far, rural utopia, while as for the poet . . .

semi-destitute—
i write on borrowed paper
+ the visions
persist

The more elaborate 'dream sequence: two related poems' pictures first a group of laughing friends at a table in the sunlit forest, with a flower of San Francisco lineage held on high dispensing light as the bread is broken. Next, under a threatening sky on the rocky mountainside, a cave-dweller tears at a bloody haunch of meat. A tall man approaches and attacks him, but in the wrestle that follows both are mortally hurt: the tableau, bleeding bodies and mutilated hunk of meat, dissolves into "a forest of brawling cave-people" and massacre.

Capping the work of the summer of 1969, the seven-page 'a history of the father' is a sustained, familial, under-written tribute to the Swiss settlements round Lilydale and Gruyere, and their landscape. It is unsurprising to find Buckmaster at this time reading Thoreau.

The wattle tree:
to make power of it.

Under its limbs,
peace, we washed at its foot:

light; I drank the sun; the first signs of blossom

. . . There is something to cry out for now

For your slaughtered tribes,
raped forests
Gruyere.

I hope that this fine and eminently translatable poem reaches Switzerland in French and German translations to Swiss idiom; it is not a nation whose migrant pioneers are widely spoken of.

From the realization here of Buckmaster's ability

to construct, and to move lyrically and with assurance through historic perspectives, reading his book is alternately painful and joyful. Joy for the loving insight of 'Vanzetti', the passionate concern for vanishing forest as in 'an end to myth', many evocations of a precarious idyll—

(Taking up your axe—the trees
for your home

. . . at some unmarked spring—bathing your child
in the water of the mountains

. . . Gardens about your cabin

. . . Within the voice of the forest . . .)

ending with Wilpena Pound's "circle of fire". Pain, for Buckmaster's recordings of drug-induced incoherence, fully apparent in the lengthy 'all up along 1984 times'. Because, however he may have been "in equilibrium with his own decay", as a fatuous memorial prose-poem declares (meaning 'accepting'? 'fatalistic'?), it is in coherence rather than fragmentedness, in syntax and free structures that are often complex, that Buckmaster realises his vision.

It is a prophetic and reverent vision, as in 'the mountain', or in 'she sings' where the radiant invulnerable figure of a woman singing is set against grey ice and "grey-scaled" city.

It would be interesting to know more about the remaining drafts and texts. Searching for a favourite line from Buckmaster's previously published work—"the forest is forever/there is no way out"—I found it in 'waiting cold', among 'Extracts' gathered separately from the Poems. A late version which appears in 'The poems', titled 'waiting cold (a section)' and dated 1971, has corresponding to this the wooden line: "The forest is a totality. There is no/return,". Grimmer, admittedly; but it's lost its direct strike, its deeply meditated quality. How many revisions exist that would enable us to look at Buckmaster's working procedures? Would they support the hint of a movement, from forests (in the mind?) felt as refuge and maze, to total threat, to grief for the ruined habitation the forests have engulfed.

The Introduction serves to whet our interest. Michael Dugan's page-and-a-half names several friends and fellow-poets, gives a year-dates for birth and death and involvement with La Mama (and that's all), merely mentions Buckmaster's poetry magazine *The Great Auk*, and says nothing of family background, schooling, or life-time reputation as a poet. For what Dugan gives we must be grateful, but the people are all around who could flesh it out.

For myself, I met Charles Buckmaster in 1970 at a then-rare event, a high-profile launch for new poets. Channel 7 had its cables all round the North Carlton

church hall (since burned down) where as many poets read as could reach a Melbourne launch of the Sun Books anthology *Australian Poetry Now*, edited by Tom Shapcott. Buckmaster turned up late, straight from a motorcycle accident, bleeding, patched-up, shaking, supported by friends but quite obviously headed away from the world that awaited us in the surprising seventies.

He read; I wonder if Channel 7 keeps film. At least this *Collected Poems* keeps faith with Buckmaster's strong and delicate talent and timely boldness in experiment. A score of poems here will survive both careless praise and detraction. Buckmaster richly deserves to be heard, as a young and serious poet casting in his spiritual lot with the symbolism of the land; not the Lawsonsque of the Beachcomber mode but a voice working out its own protests and idealism, reverently identifying with the land in its lived-in, tragic, and often (as he saw) doomed aspects.

Judith Rodriguez's latest book is New and Selected Poems (University of Queensland Press). She is editing the poems of the late Jennifer Rankin.

Innocence and Experience

Rod Moran

Rod Usher: *A Man of Marbles* (Angus & Robertson, \$24.95).

Geoff Page: *Winter Vision* (University of Queensland Press, \$9.95).

Rod Usher's *A Man of Marbles* is a gem of a book. Unburdened by any literary-theoretic pretensions, it is a shining and clear narrative constructed in the tradition of the well-made story. More than that, it is a deeply touching tale that has an important point to make, something that cannot be said of so much of the bilge being pumped out of the fiction factories in Australia in recent times.

As *The Age's* former literary editor, Usher has an impressive reputation as a journalist. He has also published a book of verse, *Above Water. A Man of Marbles* is his first novel.

The story centres on the antics, character and tribulations of Stan Kristopolis, the son of a Greek greengrocer. Stan is a humorous and eccentric man, filled with a certain simple and unself-conscious goodness, a gentle non-conformist in a world full of people damaged or poisoned by the self-interested guile that under-pins their approach to others.

When he is happy, Stan dances, Zorba-like, through the sluggish peak-hour traffic on Bridge Road in

Richmond, for which he is examined by a police psychiatrist. He has a rabbit called Doe, to whom he talks, who travels everywhere with him in his ute. He seeks advice from a painting of a Madonna he hangs on his wall. Rose, a local bar-worker down on her luck, has a son in Pentridge Prison. Stan regularly drives her there on visitors' days to save her from the trial of public transport. He spends his own money to buy her a colour TV set, after unsuccessfully trying to steal one for her to give to her son. There is even a certain innocence in that act: he doesn't get the set out of the house before deciding to put it back. Subsequently, he makes regular vegetable deliveries to the pensioners who live there, free of charge.

Due to an intersection of circumstances that have a chillingly authentic ring to them, Stan is indicted and eventually convicted for the murder of Rose's lover. A crime of which he is innocent.

While on remand in Pentridge, he asks one of the warders to buy him some marbles. With them he starts a series of games between the unfortunates awaiting trial. This oddly innocent, persistently good, man manages to have an impact even in the despairing and rugged zoo of the remand yard.

Usher's characterisation is superb, right down to details such as the marvellous pidgin Greek-English spoken by Stan's parents, the nuances of the police mentality, the tentativeness of his Vietnamese neighbour, the suspicious attitudes of the peasant market-workers to Stan's exuberant good humour about the world, and the fact that he talks to a rabbit.

A Man of Marbles is also richly evocative of inner-urban Melbourne. The atmospherics of the Richmond area especially are splendidly rendered, partly due to the fact that Usher has a poet's eye. Hence, a line of slow-moving traffic containing a tram becomes a "boa-constrictor that has just swallowed something too big". And the hot north wind gusting down Bridge Road, "fraying humans at the edges", whips up papers from the gutters and sends them "flying like demented birds". The grittiness and tensions that are the broader backdrop to Stan's fate are captured in a series of images such as these.

The court-room scenes are also turned into sharply focused vignettes through the author's gift for striking simile. When the prosecutor stands up to pompously badger Stan into submission, the latter smiles at him, thinking how, in his wig and robes, he looked "like a pigeon in courtship". The courtroom is described as "lofty, wood-panelled, resonant with the air of Latin roots, as though the wood-work had been buffed to its deep burgundy by legal syllables and whispered witness." Such descriptive passages put a telling gloss on an ebullient narrative line.

While vastly different in tone and intent, thematically *A Man of Marbles* has elements reminiscent of Melville's *Billy Budd*, where innocence

and goodness encounter the dark under-belly of the human condition. Stan can also be seen as a kind of Mersault, from Camus' *The Outsider*, though a good-humoured one, devoid of the inertness and nihilism that Stan would see as bafflingly unnecessary in a world in which there is so much to love.

Rod Usher's first novel has an important integrity. Well-crafted, sensitive and speaking of things that matter it is a civilising work of literary art.

Geoff Page joins a number of other fine Australian poets, including Tom Shapcott and Rodney Hall, who have turned to prose fiction in recent years.

Winter Vision is his second novel. It is the story of two middle-aged teachers in a secondary college in the A.C.T., Roydon Porter and Libby Sexton. Roy is divorced, world-weary and only semi-engaged by his job as a history teacher. He is also a drummer in a New Orleans jazz band, which is his essential passion. He gave up sex for cycling, even before his marriage ended.

Libby is a child of the 1960's, as is Roy, trapped in the amber of her political and philosophical adolescence. She still goes on protest marches and futile peace-pickets of various embassies in Canberra, all on the basis of an analysis on international relations that has the complexity of fairy-floss.

Page does a fine job of creating the ambience of nostalgia for other times both Roy and Libby feel, the need for bigger meanings and deeper passions than the vista middle-age's winter plains seem to offer. He also develops the contours of the growing relationship between Roy and Libby convincingly. Both burned by love, but knowing it is as indispensable as sex, they gradually rediscover the capacity for emotional risk.

Set in the 1990's, *Winter Vision* places the personal turmoil of the two central characters against a vaguely drawn back-drop of international political disarray. Breakfast radio brings fragmentary news of tension between the Soviets and the U.S. over new missiles. The Australian PM of the day is reported as going all-the-way with you-know-who. Then, something happens to the previously finely-tuned balance of terror. Roy and Libby are amongst the first to know.

Winter Vision has some of the qualities of Page's poetry. Its chapters have a minimalist restraint. Most are only two or three pages long. There is an understatement to the development and tone of the narrative. In short, there is some beautiful writing here.

Yet, I could not help feeling that the novel has a central weakness that perhaps undermines it entirely. It is found in the proposition concerning nuclear war that its scenario contains. It is almost a case of fiction being overtaken by reality. With the Stalinist Utopias unravelling at the seams in Europe, and with the U.S. very slowly returning to a traditional isolationism, the notion of nuclear war in the 1990s just doesn't ring true. I think Page has made an artistic misjudgement on this matter and the role he assigns it in his story.

It makes the Aristotelean suspension of disbelief very difficult to achieve in the reading.

Rod Moran's latest book is *Against the Era* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press).

"Comical-historical-pastoral"

Geoffrey Serle

J. B. Hirst: *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy* (Allen & Unwin, paperback, \$19.95).

John Hirst has steadily been establishing himself as a major historian with *Adelaide and the Country* (1973), *Convict Society and its Enemies* (1983) and important revisionist articles in *Historical Studies* (which he also edited for several years).

Here, following up his study of the convict period in New South Wales, he sets himself to explain the establishment of political democracy. It was a "strange birth" in that "this most bizarre of England's colonies" at its foundation had by about 1850 "come closest to recreating the social order of the mother country". In the settled areas a conservative landed gentry leased their estates to tenant-farmers employing labourers, and were well placed to impose a constitution, based on the glorious British model, which would ensure their continued dominance. Yet by 1857 liberals in command of the new parliament introduced manhood suffrage, together with reasonable electoral distribution and the secret ballot, and they were soon to be superseded by the democratic mob.

In explaining how it happened Hirst breathes new life and some comedy into well-worked subject-matter. In 1850 the House of Lords, unaware of the colony's higher land-values and rents, lowered the franchise for the Legislative Council to the British level of £10 a year for householders, thus unwittingly granting virtual household suffrage and giving the colonial democratic cause a great boost. Then W. C. Wentworth's draft constitution of 1853 was wrecked by amendment of the provision for change to a simple parliamentary majority. Reformers like the Duke of Newcastle, W. G. Gladstone and Lord John Russell were content to give the colonists what they assumed they wanted—accepting that colonies had different needs to the standard British. The conservative case for the sanctity of the British Model was in ruins—Sydney liberals and democrats, especially Henry Parkes in the *Empire*, could now refute the assumption that democracy was necessarily republican, and could quote John Bright and others in support. "Democracy had to be made British before it could be accepted . . . A British democracy was ceasing to be a contradiction in terms."

Hirst is at his best in commenting on the British context, the colonial democrats' attachment to the motherland and the tension between assuming themselves thoroughly British yet better than British. The Crimean war was a rallying-point: Parkes could now disown John Dunmore Lang's republicanism. By the 1860s the colonists were gravely concerned both by British sneers at colonial democracy and by the drift at Home towards anti-imperialism. Oddly, their outrage and sense of disgrace following the attempted assassination of Prince Alfred was assuaged by British surprised appreciation of their evident loyalty.

The later, larger part of the book further defines the nature of the emerging democracy. Though perhaps not entirely logically organized, it contains many delights: bold new insights and debunking of standard interpretations which only occasionally verge on the outrageous. Hirst has much of interest to say on bushworkers, bushranging and the conflict with the Chinese—in general and at Lambing Flat—and about the criteria for definition of a colonial gentleman. He makes a convincing point about the acceptance by the diggers—in contrast to Victoria—of the benign, efficient authority of Commissioner Hardy and others on the goldfields, and demonstrates the decline of local government power in favour of centralized bureaucracy. But his chief assertion, argued impressively, is that “the victory of the liberal democrats was followed almost immediately by a general collapse in respect for parliament and public life.” John Robertson's Land Acts were a total disaster: “false swearing on a massive scale. Government . . . had daily to sanction corruption, conspiracy and perjury.” Democracy came too easily in New South Wales; it produced no heroes. Daniel Deniehy and Charles Harpur, its notable early champions, died soon in utter disillusion.

From Hirst's first resonant sentence to the last, sketching participants brilliantly, he writes lucid narrative, interpreting all the way with wide-ranging intelligence rather than presenting the facts before summing-up. Compare the analytic dry-as-dust, personless histories, infected with jargon from lesser disciplines. He has the gift of revealing as obvious what everyone else has overlooked. The literate public is beginning to recognise him as one who can tell a good story, as a *writer*. (Perhaps the Aust. Lit. practitioners, compiling their surveys of Australian writing, will some day acknowledge that historians occasionally write excellently—but that is another story . . .) After a couple of decades of fashionable social history, it is most pleasant to welcome a rare work of mainstream importance, bang on fundamental issues.

I wish, however, that Hirst had indicated the degree to which he considers New South Wales to have been a strange, special case in the squalor of its public life; he knows enough about colonial South Australia and

Victoria to have done so briefly. I parochially assert that very obviously colonial democracy in Victoria was far better served, in terms of moral and intellectual stature, by Higinbotham, Pearson, Service, Deakin, Shiels, Turner, Higgins and others.

And, writing in a period of mass disillusion about political leadership, perhaps Hirst's conclusion is too bleak in its long-term implication: “The colonists inverted the Greek ideal and made public life something to be ashamed of.” Surely it may be agreed that over a good sixty of the first seventy-five years of the Commonwealth (i.e., including Menzies, but not Hughes) our prime ministers were by and large principled men of integrity, honour and essential decency, often with huge trustful followings. (I stop at 1975 for Malcolm Fraser's reputation will always carry the burden of that year's events.) One might similarly assert that, omitting borderline cases, the same applies to Victorian premiers over at least sixty of the last hundred years—and probably also to South and Western Australian premiers. I would not presume to make any similar judgement about New South Wales, but at least Reid, Carruthers, McGowen, Holman and McKell deserve considerable respect. Overall, we might have done much worse.

But read anything John Hirst writes.

Geoffrey Serle, author of John Monash etc, recently retired from the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

Candor and Reticence

Anne Gunter

Kate Llewellyn: *The Mountain* (Hudson, \$19.95).

The other evening I talked with a woman ‘motherless’ from her birth, who had got on well with several stepmothers; she could not understand the angst with which many women writers examine their relationships with their mothers. My mother died a few weeks after the birth of my only daughter. I have also been separated from both by long distances. Yet the continuity of the mother-daughter fabric seems only slightly abraded. This may make me a less than objective reviewer of Kate Llewellyn's latest prose work.

In her two previous books she gave us something of herself as both daughter and mother (ignoring the fact that the dustjacket of *Dear You* calls it a ‘novel’, since it is very much the Llewellyn persona we met in *The Waterlily* who writes to ‘you’). In the new book, *The Mountain*, she writes to her daughter, but, as with the relationships presented in the other books, she does not wallow in mother-daughter emotionalism. Much is left for our own experience, empathy and imagination to instill.

I have been teasing out why I finish Llewellyn's books with a sense of a conversation interrupted similar in flavour to that with which I finished Simone de Beauvoir's memoirs. Cultural and geographical context, lifespan and lifestyle aside, there are at least two crucial differences between these works: de Beauvoir recollects (though hardly in tranquillity) and she was heavily concerned with politics; Llewellyn writes of each day as it passes and intentionally chooses to bypass socio-political goings-on. In *The Mountain*, she is quite specific about this:

But while Kapuscinski thinks the big events, revolutions, etc., are important, I think that so, too, are the small ones, and that is where I concentrate my gaze.

One can see how this could irritate her activist daughter. It does me a little, too, recalling when, involved as I was in the small events of child bearing and rearing, certain world events coloured my days—and my nightmares. Still, one does not castigate Jane Austen for ignoring Napoleon.

The resemblance I find to de Beauvoir does not lie in femaleness, femininity or feminism (" 'female' is related to sex, 'feminine' is related to gender, and is therefore socially constructed, and 'feminist' is, of course, related to politics", Llewellyn and Jan Morris decide). It lies partly in the care with which everyday living and friendships are presented, but more particularly in the tantalising quality of congenial conversation which derives from the combination of candor and reticence both writers sustain.

Llewellyn's latest book is more outgoing than the others: she travels to Northern and Central Australia, and spends time as a writer in residence in Wagga Wagga, meeting people (boat trippers, a crew filming a 'dig', primary school children) under sometimes impossible conditions. People (often ugly, like the racist-sexist bus drivers) and places (often astoundingly beautiful and awe-inspiring) are more directly described than previously. Although I enjoy the 'metaphoricalness' Llewellyn claims to inherit from her mother, and which often refers to meals, clothes or nursing, I suspect there are fewer metaphors and similes in this book. I like:

On the edge of the billabong were fairy waterlillies. They are so small that three flowers could fit into a thimble, and they float on lily pads the size of a child's hand.

considerably more than this (borrowed from her own poetry where it worked better):

. . . The birds are just beginning to call and to net the stars. They are folding up the chiffon scarf of the Milky Way and putting it behind a red hill until tonight.

There are other ways of calling up images beside metaphor or simile.

In writing letters this time to someone who does not and will not know strangers met in travel, Llewellyn says more about them: you don't have to describe people in a diary or to a correspondent who knows them. But somewhat more than was dictated by the nature of the purported audience or reticence about real people, Llewellyn previously presented them almost entirely through their actions in relation to herself and her response to these. This detached, even seemingly uninterested, egocentricity was at least honest, and avoided the kind of pontification some memoirs (not de Beauvoir's) fall into. Similarly, as a kind of 'travel writer' in *The Mountain*, Llewellyn pretends to no objectivity or authority in her comments. She is candidly but not immodestly idiosyncratic: a 'take it or leave it, this is how it struck me' attitude. And above all, as she says, "God save me from those who take the moral high ground."

When *The Waterlily* was first reviewed, I wondered whether such a book would not be boring, even though I liked Llewellyn's poetry. The enjoyment her books afford can best be hinted at in her own words:

I kept wondering how people ever discovered that, say, Dickens or Patrick White were trying to say things . . . I thought it was the same as going to the sea to swim. You opened a book and read. Simply floated through the book hypnotised by the words. (*The Waterlily*, p. 71)

She goes on to say, "I expect I got my taste for the stylists from this method of reading." The candor which allows access to the writer's pains and pleasures, the reticence that avoids self-indulgence, pierced occasionally by direct reference to strong 'interpersonal' feelings, may not display artifice but do not lack conscious art. Publishing letters to her daughter has involved a remoulding, both of an established woman's tradition and of the style Llewellyn established in the earlier books. The writing is not artless. Llewellyn does not hesitate to show her delight in words, but without rambling on about her problems with writing as some egotists do. In *The Mountain*, there is a lovely passage in which she finds herself editing signs, like one reading, 'Caring without regard to either Race, Creed or Colour'. "I stood and stared for a while. They didn't need 'Colour'." It's the kind of alertness which makes for good words well put together to hypnotise any reader who, though floating, prefers unpolluted water.

In the earlier books the choice to write letters or a diary over a set period appeared to be made because the writer could foresee, guess at or at least hope for certain outcomes in that time. *The Mountain* is less contained than the other two books, but two intersecting spirals twist through the three-section

structure. The traveller starts far from home covering enormous distances, moves closer to home still going places but with a focus, then comes home. Meanwhile her loving anxieties and acceptance of her daughter's autonomy spiral through Caro's political activities, to her lover and her coming child. This pattern gives a satisfying shape to incidents, observations, comments, thoughts, feelings interesting in themselves and for the person they reveal.

As a footnote, I would like to congratulate the publisher, Hudson, for producing (apart from a few bugs that bedevilled *Dear You*) three simply, cleanly presented books, pleasant to eye and hand, *which open properly*. This last is becoming almost the exception rather than the rule.

Anne Gunter's activities revolve around literature, writing, education, feminism and a fair go for all, lately called 'social justice'.

Women and Writing: Four Perspectives

Moya Costello

Drusilla Modjeska (ed.): *Inner Cities: Australian Women's Memory of Place* (Penguin \$16.99).

David Brooks and Brenda Walker (eds.): *Poetry and Gender: Statements and Essays on Australian Women Poets* (University of Queensland Press \$28.95).

Susan Hawthorne and Jenny Pausacker (eds.): *Moments of Desire: Sex and sensuality by Australian feminist writers* (Penguin \$12.99).

Gillian Whitlock (ed.): *Eight Voices of the Eighties: Stories, journalism and criticism by Australian women writers* (University of Queensland Press \$16.95).

Some books are a pleasure just to hold. Some books make your heart sing. Like diaries or writing about travel, writing about place is inherently attractive.

I first read Sophie Watson's writing in the papers of the first national conference on women and housing a few years ago. I was then entering the housing market for the first time, but I had also grown up in a house on a quarter acre block in a suburb of an Australian city, so I was fascinated by what she had to say.

As editor of *Inner Cities: Australian Women's Memory of Place*, Drusilla Modjeska has chosen Watson's writing to sound out the themes of the four sections of the book. It's a perfect choice and only one aspect of Modjeska's creative editorial work here.

Twenty-eight women have written poetry and prose related to the book's title. In this writing, personal identification is linked with place and is political, because place is linked to quality of life and quality of environment which both throw up issues such as forms and costs of housing, transport and services.

Women can be readily linked with a sense of place

because physically and culturally (metaphorically) they inhabit particular places: they know about the edges and the margins. Here's Barbara Brooks in 'Maps':

And now, my sense of landscape has to do with centres and margins and edges. The feeling of being marginalised, as women, for example. The desire to live on the edge, to be always confronting, breaking out. In our maps, we live on the edge, but our concerns are central.

If these pieces are about landscape, they're also about housing, because as well as knowing about the margin's relationship to the centre, women know about the relationship of the private to the public space. Here's Susan Hampton in 'Album of Huts':

I sit in the workroom, the window open to next door's foxgloves and the sound of Johnston Street pelting its cargoes to Parramatta Road. My city house cut from a grid. Cramp of brick on brick and fence. It's quieter working in the kitchen. At the same time it's invadable, scene of the hob we inhabit.

These two pictures are representative of the writing in the book that echoes in the body: poetic prose pieces that speak obliquely, the writer swimming underwater in the currents rather than on the surface.

Recently, at another conference, I heard Sneja Gunew, herself a contributor to this book, read from Sue Chin's piece 'Sydney':

But when I spoke in my tentative voice about the tropics, people looked at me as though the words were coming out in another language . . . Soon, I myself forgot the words to describe the place, 'here', and I never believed for a moment that I came from anywhere else, except Sydney.

This sense of alienation and dislocation cuts across race, as the structure of the city itself becomes the sources of this sense for all.

Our (women's only?) histories—of where and how we live/d, the physical places and the moods they generated—are in this book. And I am reminded specifically of my reading history by *Poetry and Gender: Statements and Essays in Australian Women's Poetry and Poetics*.

Take, for example, J. S. Harry. I first discovered her work in the early 1970s through Jim Tulip's lectures at Sydney University when he introduced new Australian poets and new publishers of their work. So I came across *the deer under the skin*. Distracted, I missed her next book then rediscovered her in *A Dandelion for Van Gogh* and a much-welcomed interview conducted by Bev Roberts in the literary magazine *Fine Line*.

An extract from this interview forms J. S. Harry's statement. There are statements by twenty-six more women, and thirteen critical essays on a selection of these and other poets.

One of these essays is by Dorothy Hewett who talks about alienation as a recurring theme for Australian poets, among them "that daring and much neglected poet" J. S. Harry:

A puff-ball
on a slim green stem
is more attached
to earth than I.

Rose Lucas writes an essay exclusively about Harry. Elizabeth Lawson, in her spirited essay about Gwen Harwood, comes to grips with the thesis of the whole book by talking about the 'slantedness' of women's writing and specifically Gwen Harwood's writing:

... the signs of slantedness or of antithetical experience in Harwood's poetry as a whole seem to me pugnaciously, pervasively, playfully present.

and leads me directly to Gwen Harwood's work for the first time.

The book opens with an introduction by Brenda Walker, one of the editors, and a terrific sounding of themes, 'Soundtracks', by Susan Hampton, reminiscent of the creative introduction she wrote with Kate Llewellyn for *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*.

The writing of two of the poets, Berni Janssen and Ania Walwicz, enacts its content. Janssen takes this a step further and doesn't divorce the language of theory about her poetic from the language of her poetic. (It's surprising that Walwicz does not do this too.)

i am a woman writing writing womans writing the
voice of that discovering dis spell the words that
have bound us our marking terrain

I have come across this device elsewhere in Janssen's work—for example, the editorials she wrote with Jurate Sasnaitis for their literary magazine *Syllable*.

Joanne Burns does something similar, adopting the third person for a writer thinking about writing about writing:

at first she thought it would be easy to write about
her own writing.

The statements, especially from such a diverse group, are as gripping as interviews, such as those conducted by Candida Baker and Jennifer Ellison in other books.

Poetry and Gender is a book foreshadowed by the other editor David Brooks in an essay he wrote on women poets and published in *Meanjin* some time ago.

I remember speaking with another woman writer, in fact one of the poets in this book, about that essay and we agreed at the time that it was good (as well as a surprise) to have a man make sense about such a subject.

It's a shame that the cover of this book is so plain, and its whole design in fact so conservative, because they both belie the interest of the contents.

A painting by Georgia O'Keeffe is the perfect cover painting for *Moments of Desire: Sex and sensuality by Australian feminist writers* edited by Susan Hawthorne and Jenny Pausacker. But for me the contents do not satisfy as much as those of *Inner Cities*. I would emphasise the 'Moments' of the title: the reading of the book is a fragmentary experience for me.

Such a book is meant to be celebratory of course. I was in a discussion with a contributor to the book before it was published and she was curious to know what the heterosexual pieces were like compared to the lesbian pieces. But I don't think there is a great deal of difference here. It was not a problem posed by the editors in their introduction where they state their satisfaction with the display of a range of experience.

The editors say the book:

contains writing that is sexually explicit in a way that remains unusual for women writers, . . .

I am not sure that this reflects my reading experience. I can think of writing by Helen Garner, Dorothy Johnston, Inez Baranay, and Anna Couani and Mary Fallon—who are both represented in this book.

In her piece, Jenny Pausacker comes at the issue through humour and the language itself, which some of the other writers do as well. 'Talking About Sex' knits together snippets of conversation about and during the experience of sex.

University of Queensland Press has done a much better design job on *Eight Voices of the Eighties: Stories, journalism and criticism by Australian women writers* than on *Poetry and Gender*.

The interviews I referred to earlier by Jennifer Ellison and Candida Baker make an actual appearance in *Eight Voices of the Eighties*. The editor, Gillian Whitlock, takes extracts from the interviews conducted by Ellison and Baker and combines them with short fiction, extracts from novels and criticism by well-known writers such as Kate Grenville, Elizabeth Jolley and Helen Garner among others.

I thought at first that this book might be redundant, meant only as an introductory text to familiar Australian women writers for students unfamiliar with their work. But again, with creative editing, Whitlock has chosen some of the most interesting pieces of fiction by these writers and in combination with their own criticism and critical writing about them, has built a context which illuminates their work individually

and as part of a tradition in formation. For Helen Garner there are short fiction pieces from her outstanding collection *Postcards From Surfers* and her critical writing about Eleanor Dark, Elizabeth Jolley and Thea Astley.

In her introduction, which is full of common sense and canvasses all of the issues surrounding women's writing, Gillian Whitlock attempts to come to grips with the fact that these are the women writers who are talked and written about most often.

Certainly the . . . canonisation of particular writers deserves close scrutiny. . . . It seems both disingenuous and misleading to deny notions of a canon when dealing with these eight writers who have so obviously represented the acceptable and popular face of women's writing in Australia.

However, I must say that I am therefore grateful for the publication of the other three books in this review. The editors seem, by contrast, consciously to have chosen work by less well-known writers, new writers, writers from small presses and experimental writers. The work of these writers makes the very notion of a literary canon an anathema, narcissistic, representative only of itself.

Moya Costello lives in Adelaide, working as an editor of educational materials and as a writer of book and theatre reviews, fiction and television scripts.

Mary Strikes Gold

Adrian Rawlins

Mary Fortune: *The Fortunes of Mary Fortune*, ed. Lucy Sussex (Penguin, \$12.99).

Some thirty years ago I had dinner with two scholars. Much of the conversation was over my head or beyond my ken but I remember being startled that two such people could take the subject of flying saucers seriously, but they did; one opining that the craft concerned were not from another planet but from the future of our own species, anthropological observers.

Today I have felt as those observers must feel while watching us. I've been studying writing of last century, most of it to be found in *Colonial Voices* edited by Elizabeth Webby for U.Q.P., to test an intuition I had concerning the goldfields memoir in *The Fortunes of Mary Fortune*. I read this some months ago for a review published elsewhere, and as I read I felt "Oh, I've been this way before." The way she writes, the clarity of vision, the fascination with the beauty and absurdity of Scots and Irish accents and dialects, continually reminded me of Joseph Furphy's methods in *Such Is Life*—a book I've tried three times to read over a thirty

year period, the third time being 1983 when, again, I lost interest about two thirds of the way through.

Such is Life is the book C. Hartley Grattan in 1936 identified as the first book to speak with an Australian, as opposed to a Colonial, voice. Furphy it was who in a letter to his publisher, J. F. Archibald, declared his work to have a "temper democratic, bias offensively Australian".

Not only *Such is Life* but also William Evans' *Diary of a Welsh Swagman* and Hal Gye's warm, loveable but slightly too subjective memoir of his prospecting father were fresh in my mind as I faced Mary Fortune's work for the first time. Her writing seemed more vivid, better organised, immensely more readable. I felt she had to be a precursor to Furphy and quite possibly an influence: *Goldfields* was patently a first class literary artefact. The works I have read since confirm this view: the Irish-Canadian Mary Fortune, child without a past, daughter without a homeland, truly a motherless child, a Chartist of the spirit, speaks with an Australian, perhaps the *first* Australian, voice.

Let us, like those observers from the future, imaginatively fly back and forth among those Colonial writers. Let us examine prim and proper Miss Ellen Clacy, whose book *A Lady's Visit to the Gold-Diggings of Australia in 1852-3* had run into three editions in England by June 1855. Here she describes the diggings: "Let us take a stroll round Forest Creek—what a novel scene!—thousands of human beings engaged in digging, wheeling, carrying and washing, intermingled with no little grumbling, scolding and swearing." She then takes us on a carefully annotated "stroll" down gully and up hill, past mines, old Post Office Square, the Private Escort Station, the Commissioner's Quarters, to "the principal gullies about Bendigo—all twenty-tree of them!!!—and the sheep wash.

"Most of these" she tells us, "are well-ransacked and tunnelled, but thorough good wages may always be precured by their tin dish washing in deserted holes . . .

"It is not only the diggers, however, who make money at the Goldfields. Carters, carpenters, storemen, wheelwrights, butchers, shoemakers, etc., usually in the long run make a fortune quicker than the diggers, and certainly with less hard work and risk of life. They can always get from £1 to £2 a day without rations, whereas (diggers) may dig for weeks and get nothing. Living is not more expensive than Melbourne: meat is generally from 4d to 6d a pound, flour 1/6d (this is the most expensive housekeeping item), butter must be dispensed with, as that is seldom less than 4/- a pound, and only successful diggers can indulge in such articles as cheese, pickles, ham, sardines, pickled salmon, or spirits—only to be obtained for 30/- a bottle."

Much information, but no real picture—don't you agree?

Now let us fly forward two years. Mary has been on the fields some months, ensconced in her "uncle's" tent (he is really her father), suddenly "there came a heavy storm ere sunset, and such a downpour of rain as few could accredit. It was like an extended waterspout, a continuous heavy sheet . . . on the side of the street next the creek . . . every tent and tenement was threatened . . . by the great rushing stream of water (which) made a way through or between the tents." Here follows a vivid account of the efforts to contain the flood and deal with its after-effects as it subsided.

"And subside it did, almost as quickly as it had appeared;" then: "'Come and see! I never saw such a sight before', was my summons, accompanied with a hearty laugh; before it had ceased I was peering out to a point where the still-flowing streams . . . seemed with one accord to congregate, each sweeping before it such a multitude of corks . . . a strange sight indeed when, by the eddying and swirling water, the thousands of new and scarcely discoloured corks were swept into an embayed bend of the creek, collecting in swirling groups that finally amalgamated into one grand whole as it was still augmented by the arrival of fresh detachments of corks brought down by the two-and-twenties . . . in the comparatively quiet water they crushed against one another, or bobbed up and down in a jerky, uncomfortable fashion, until the surface was completely covered and so thickly that no individual cork had room to assert itself or make visible protest against the attempted encroachment of a neighbor.

Apart from telling us reams about social habits on the diggings, this image of the armada of corks, at once literary and surpassing visual, is as striking as though it had been painted by Arthur Boyd or Albert Tucker in the nineteen forties. Yet her work is richly endowed with many such brilliant and judiciously chosen episodes. There is also equally brilliant character-drawing. In short, Mary Fortune's work is *literature*; Miss Clacy's is scarcely more than a shopping list!

Among Fortune's contemporaries we find that manly erudite Irish rebel, John Mitchel, quoting the classics more adroitly than any of his English overseers and finding only "rivers, rivulets, rills, fierce torrents, dimpled brooks, the tinkle, or murmur, or roar of running water reminds me of home". William Howitt, on the Bendigo diggings in 1853, finds the country round the Campaspe "bounded by downs, green, flowing in their outlines, and as free from trees as the downs in England . . . all was Emerald green as England itself . . ." Rolf Boldrewood, in 1884, the time when Mary Fortune's writing gained its greatest popularity, writes of the beach between Port Fairy and Portland: "For leagues upon leagues stretched the

ocean shore—a milk white beach, wide as a parade ground and flat as a tennis court."

In other words, all these colonial writers draw their terms of reference from "Home". Even Marcus Clarke, who published *Mary* under her mandatory male nom-de-plume of *Waif Wander*, in his heavy-handed attempt to lampoon "the large-jointed men with shining hats, elegant trousers, red neckties and big coarse hands twinkling with rings . . . who live at Nasturtium Villas" and his earnest desire to show us the seamy side of city life in Bourke and Stephen (now Russell) Streets aims at the vivid prototype but usually achieves the prolix and melodramatic stereotype.

Let us zoom once more back to 1855 and look over Mary's shoulder as she beholds the fields for the first time:

"All at once we turned the corner, and there burst upon my astonished gaze the 'street' of an Australian goldfield . . . a rough, almost impassable road, outlined by huge lanterns of various sizes and forms. The places of business (and, indeed, all were places of business in one way or other) were entirely of calico, and mostly unlined, so that the lights inside shone through them brightly, and cast the moving shadows of dancers and drinkers and fighters on the canvas as on the sheet from a magic lantern."

No prolixity here. But what a charming portrait, as is her description of her first sight of Ballarat, atop a hill on a stopover:

"We looked down upon it just ere dusk had been swallowed up in perfect darkness, save for the light of glimmering stars that shone coldly above it. It appeared to occupy a great saucer shaped valley, which lay among the rises, and to be composed of thousands of canvas tents that were huddled together beneath our eyes, in the bottom of the valley, and crept in white shoals up every surrounding slope until miles were covered with the gradually darkening tenements."

Eugène von Guérard has left us a wonderful painting of this but I'm not ashamed to say I got goosebumps when I read Fortune's description of the same scene.

Certain literary boffins are much enamoured of Daniel Henry Deniehy, a pompous, prolix, posturing pedant, Sydney-born, European-educated lawyer and sometime editor and M.P. They love him for his put-down of W. C. Wentworth's attempts to create an Australian aristocracy along English lines. Deniehy could find no way to "classify this mushroom order of nobility" and suggested that what Wentworth was proposing was a "bunyip aristocracy". This comment, tame by our standards, was seen as hilarious and unchallengeable by the N.S.W. parliament in 1854.

But his writing is worse than Hansard, and he is revealed as the intellectual equivalent of the denizens of Nasturtium Villas. Indeed of rings and food, he adorns himself with ostensible erudition, attitude and bombast. His utterances are long-winded, otiose, boring and uncomfortable, in a word: parliamentary.

Let us fly forward a year and hear Mary Fortune's estimation of her political stance: "Coming almost directly from America (Canada), and being young, you know, perhaps it was natural that, in a new land and among scenes in which law was of but little account, I should bloom in the Poet's Corner as a thorough Democrat." Six months prior to this utterance, the first indigenous poet, Charles Harpur, had written: "As I feel but little respect for Monarchy Men and Empire Worshipers (as such) I cannot apologise for speaking of them somewhat contemptuously. I am not only a democratic republican in theory, but by every feeling of my nature. Its first principles lie rudimentally in the moral elements of my being, ready to flower forth and bear their proper fruit, hence as I hold myself, on the ground of God's humanity, to be politically superior to no fellow being, so, on the same ground. I can feel myself inferior to none." That other great republican, Edward Kelly might well have made some such statement!

Mary Fortune wrote much reportage. The six examples included in Ms Sussex's collection lack the sweep and sparkle of her fiction. But placed alongside Clarke's posture-filled journalism, they show a remarkable clarity and modernity of tone. Her piece on Bourke Street, her loathing of the "cant and hypocrisy" of commercial life, is worthy of J. F. Archibald himself. True, some of her characters (in these reports) are not free from stereotype but are not stereotype *as such*. Each is enlivened by canny touches of quirky, unique and personal mannerism, communicated with masterful economy of means so that we never doubt their existence beyond the page. And she is wonderfully free of the racism and anti-Semitism that bedevil most journalism of the period, from Clarke to Archibald.

To all familiar with Furphy's significant but not 'easy' masterpiece, this final 'observation' will surely seem to come from the hand of the master, though it is a later episode in *The Diggings from '55*, a description of Patrick and Mary Deinhy . . . :

"the man was a twisted little wiry figure, with big joints and the hands and feet of a giant, and he was blessed in addition with a flat nose, a fiery red head, and an awful mouth that resembled nothing so much as the aperture in a frog's head . . . His wife was a squat woman about his own age, with a flat shapeless face ever exhibiting the dropped jaw and utter open-mouthed inanity of an idiot. Figure she had none. She was a square, flat surface on which was hung a stuff gown reaching

to within a couple of inches of the top of a huge pair of leather boots." . . .

"Our first knowledge of this arrival was obtained by the man's visit to the store for the double purpose of purchasing provisions and procuring information.

"And you mean to dig then?" uncle asked as he was supplying his requirements.

"Ov course, sur. What ud any man do on the diggin's but dig an' mack his forchin?"

"But do you know anything about digging, or have you a mate who has any experience?"

"Mate indeed! Fogs we have mate every day in the week, an' fur why shouldn't we? Sure mutten is only thrupence a pound."

As we zoom over our cultural 'dig', many small mounds appear plus a few major formations. Yes, Furphy is a major mound, Clarke a lesser one. Most of the others seem mere earth works. Mary Fortune shines as a load worth mining. In her goldfields' memoir, *The Diggings from '55* Mary and Australian literature strike gold.

Adrian Rawlins' last book was Festivals in Australia. A well known organizer of poetry readings and workshops he has published poetry, book reviews and free-lance journalism.

A Novel of Becoming

Nancy Keesing

Amy Witting: *I for Isobel* (Penguin, \$12.99).

I for Isobel is the second published novel of Amy Witting whose short fiction and poetry have been widely published in Australia and abroad. This book is written in such a straightforward, unembellished style that it may seem deceptively simple. Isobel is a young girl growing up in Sydney from the 1930s to the 1950s. Her story is, in fact, an uncommonly subtle work posing questions some of which must be interpreted by each reader, some of which are eventually answered including, almost at the end of the book, the most compelling explanation.

Isobel Callaghan is the younger daughter of parents who, at least according to the mother, are poverty-stricken though they have an annual holiday at a lakeside boarding house. Margaret, the elder sister, seems less adversely affected by the family situation than does Isobel.

Probably some of the perception of poverty rests in Mrs Callaghan's neurosis, a mental disturbance that becomes increasingly obvious as the book develops. The unhappiness of the marriage is suggested (except for one incident) rather than being a major part of the foreground.

This is how the book opens:

A week before Isobel Callaghan's ninth birthday, her mother said, in a tone of mild regret, "No birthday presents this year! We have to be very careful about money this year."

Every year at this time she said this; every year Isobel chose not to believe it. Her mother was just saying that, she told herself, to make the present more of a surprise. Experience told her that there would be no present . . . Even on the presentless morning she would not give up hope entirely, but would search in drawers, behind doors, under beds, as if birthday presents were supposed to be hidden, like Easter eggs in the grass.

Mrs Callaghan, too, kept the birthday in mind and spoke of it now and then.

"January," she said, "is too close to Christmas for birthday presents," and later, serenely, "It is vulgar to celebrate birthdays away from home."

Whenever she found a new argument against birthday presents for Isobel, a strange look of relief would appear on her face, and Isobel would be forced to accept for the moment, that there would be no present.

Isobel's real friends become books. She is a precocious reader (for instance at the age of nine she embarks on the complete works of Sherlock Holmes). She also invents stories, especially in bed at night. She comes to regard herself not so much as an inventor, but as a liar. Her convent school gives her little support or understanding. She is warped and shaped by her mother's rejective behaviour and does not progress to the full education her intelligence both needs and merits.

Both parents die (separately) when the girls are comparatively young. Their illnesses are not described or explained. Two maternal aunts who are not poor and who have always been in the background assume responsibility. Margaret goes to live with one in the country; Aunt Noelene in Sydney keeps an eye on Isobel who has found a job, lives in a boarding house and, at Noelene's sensible insistence takes a course in shorthand and typing. Aunt Noelene also provides some modest financial and other assistance, but is never really in the foreground.

Isobel continues to live chiefly in her own imaginative world but does make some office friendships at a superficial level. Then, she comes to know, and meet regularly, a group of University students whose interrelationships, and talk of books and writing enlarge Isobel's own life, reading, emotions and inventiveness.

Some of these contacts are puzzling. Her search in a library catalogue for a poet called 'Orden' can be solved, but many lacks of understanding of all kinds remain.

Then, almost at the very end Isobel meets an elderly

woman who had been a neighbour in her childhood. This kind, and interested woman virtually lays the ghost of Isobel's unreasonable mother; explains a dreadfully hurtful incident, and does, at last, release Isobel to become "I".

Whether this will be a true happy ending who knows? Whether Isobel will become a published writer, who knows? But I do know how much I hope to see more novels emerging from Amy Witting's intriguing imagination and method.

Nancy Keesing's last book Riding the Elephant (Allen & Unwin) is now in paperback as is her popular Gold Fever (A.&R.).

The Dark and Light Collected

Don Watson

Patrick Morgan *comp.*: *Shadow and Shine; An Anthology of Gippsland Literature* (Centre for Gippsland Studies, G.I.A.E., Churchill 3842, \$18.00).

Patrick Morgan has been rattling the old milk can of the Gippsland mind for the decade and a half he has been teaching English Literature at the Institute of Advanced Education up there. (Or should we say "in" there, for Gippsland is not a place one comes easily out of?). Refusing to submit to the melancholia so commonly brought on by the combination of bracken, milk fever and up to six hours teaching a week, like Ovid, Patrick Morgan has treated his appointment to barbaric parts as an intellectual challenge and unearthed knowledge the natives did not know could be derived from them. Would there were more like him.

The Centre for Gippsland Studies is one result of his endeavours. An extensive archive, a facility for research and a general encouragement to intellectually respectable local studies, the Centre should be a model for all the provincial colleges of Australia. And so should Patrick Morgan be a model: he has demonstrated that regional studies can go beyond the collection of anecdotal history, which is much more often dull than even picaresque, and discern patterns of behaviour and thought peculiar to the region, yet essential to any understanding of the national experience. One can, in other words, find in the life of a province—even a province so chronically unforthcoming as Gippsland—the life of the mind. *Shadow and Shine*, a collection of writings about Gippsland over 120 years, is the best testimony so far to the truth of that assumption.

Now Gippsland is no easy place to understand. It is not uniform in topography or climate. There are Gippslanders of the plain, Gippslanders of the mountains, and Gippslanders of the coast. Dairy

farmers, sheep farmers, and cattlemen. The place has a history of uneven development. It is, perhaps, typically associated with selectors (mainly Scottish) who dealt with mighty forests. Yet there is in The Heart of Gippsland a tradition more akin to the pastoralism of Western Victoria. There is also a continuing history of coal mining, one of timber getting and another of fishing.

Some time ago Patrick Morgan devised a literary taxonomy which reflected the widely differing experience of Gippslanders. He had good reason not to be deterred by factors inimical to establishing a common thread: Gippslanders themselves have never been put off by it. They share at least the sense of otherness which Gippsland's formidable natural boundaries have created. The "otherness" is manifest in an unmistakable degree of suspicion about outsiders, an undying hostility to the city and most of its inhabitants, and laconicism of the classically Spartan kind. It is this, in the mouths of its poets, which translates as the peculiarly unlachrymose Gippsland melancholia.

As Morgan points out, the writers of Gippsland largely bypassed the outback mateship literary mode. They remain in the Harpur-Kendall tradition. The grandeur of Gippsland's natural world has much to do with this, and the solitariness of pioneering experience. But in Gippsland there was always a paradox at work. Nature contained as much terror as beauty, and for all the delight they took in the great blackbutts and blue gums, the scented musk and hazel, or the fern glades with their lyrebirds and women, the business of the pioneers was complete destruction. Equally, their solitude was rarely pure repose; it was laden with the anxiety experienced by all those dependant on the elements, an unforgiving God and bank managers.

Nostalgia came to Gippsland with the first Scottish settlers. It was reinforced by the very act of pioneering—in the desecration of pristine nature and, to an extent which may surprise those who have come to think of all nineteenth century colonials as conscienceless, in the destruction of Aboriginal life. So Hilda Temple Kerr of Orbost on the Snowy River writes of the bush full of ghosts.

Among these shadows deep a race has drawn
Its last long breath
And reigns supreme a stillness in the bush
Which speaks of Death.

Death is at least an unspoken element in many of the selections in *Shadow and Shine*. When it is encouraged by Calvinism, near-impossible labour, and heavy rain, pioneering is an intensely morbid experience. The most unlikely triumphs are likely to produce only half a celebration.

There are writers in this collection with whom everyone will be familiar: non-Gippslanders like Henry Kingsley, Rolf Boldrewood, Marcus Clarke and

Katharine Susannah Prichard; Henry Lawson and Louis Esson who both took holidays at Mallacoota; John Shaw Neilson (for whom holidays were unthinkable) who worked around Central Gippsland for several years; Eve Langley who also worked there, Hal Porter lived and wrote there and, more recently, Robin and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Bruce Pascoe, Terry Harrington and Chester Eagle. Their names alone give the region a distinguished place in the literature of Australia. Add the most famous of all Gippsland writers (Wilfred Burchett aside), Mary Grant Bruce, and you have already a substantial lexicon.

But it is the less familiar writers who have, I think, the most to say about the place and give this book a unique and enduring value. Marie E. J. Pitt of Bullumwaal, later of Bernard O'Dowd and feminism wrote poetry in the manner of Burns about fairies and brownies in the Australian Alps. Mary Fullerton of Glenmaggie, was the author of the classic *Bark House Days* and the following blasphemy:

The farmer on the river, by the bend,
Has killed the wattles that I loved last Spring!

Perhaps the most elegant, and certainly the most droll and insightful of all Gippsland's chroniclers was George Dunderdale, for many years the Clerk of Courts at Port Albert. If the two pieces of his reproduced in *Shadow and Shine* encouraged another generation to read his unforgettable *Book of the Bush* it would have served sufficient purpose. If it encouraged them to read Bernard Cronin, Nathan Spielvogel, George Henry Haydon, R. H. Croll and Korumburra's own Nellie Clark no one in future could put a price on it.

Shadow and Shine however has the virtue rare among anthologies of giving us more than a taste. It is an excellent brief introduction to the literature of Gippsland and yet, in sum, it's a thing in its own right: an evocation of the place which is bravely wry and haunting. Read it and you will begin to see a lot more in the face of a Gippslander—if you can ever catch his eye.

Still, it would not be right to conclude on a note less fulsome than that struck by Nathan Spielvogel ("The Gumsucker"), as he wrote from Foster in the early years of the century:

Would that I could sing the tale of these heroic outposts. Bold-hearted men grinning at hardships, breaking down the walls of disasters, battling on till they victor or die. Few of words, slow of brain, but greater conquerors than Alexander and Napoleon, for those fought but with men, while these fight and conquer Mother Nature herself. I just pause here to mention that the rain is still falling.

Don Watson, an historian born in Gippsland, lives in Melbourne where he writes scripts and a newspaper column. He is one of the authors of the musical based on Manning Clark's A History of Australia.



ERNESTO DIAZ RODRIGUEZ,
CUBA

Writers in Prison, 4

The recent easing of tension between the great power blocks certainly makes the world a safer place for most of us. However, insecure governments continue to be frightened of their own people and of ideas, and writers continue to suffer. At the end of August last year, the number of confirmed cases known to PEN of writers being harassed or worse had risen to 358, the highest figure for five years. These include ten who have now been imprisoned for more than ten years, in Cuba, Morocco, Laos, Syria, Vietman, Yugoslavia, USSR and China.

Amongst these is Ernesto Diaz Rodriguez, who was first arrested in 1968 for 'anti-government activities'. Sentenced then to 15 years imprisonment, he was in 1974 given a further 25 years for allegedly conspiring against the state from his prison cell. He started writing in prison and has published one book of poetry and written two books of children's literature.

Enquiries can be made from the Head of State, Dr Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Council of State, Havana, Cuba, or from the Consul-General for the Republic of Cuba, PO Box 625, Bondi Junction, NSW 2022.

Stankey's LIVES of the POETS

Nº12

THAT WAS AN UNREAL
LECTURE ON MODERN
POETRY, MR GINSBERG

