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IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN DROWNING
Peter Read on Russell Moore

Dorothy Hewett
Liam Davison
Hank Nelson
Max Teichmann
Heather Cam
Helen Daniel
Sarah Dowse
John Barnes
Greg Lockhart

"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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MAX TEICHMANN

# The Changing World System

It has been obvious for some time that the international system is undergoing paroxysms of change, of a different order and at a rate of acceleration that we have not experienced before. It is a different process of change from that produced by the two Great Wars – momentous as these were: probably the Industrial Revolution is nearer to what is now occurring, though, as I have said, the rate of transformation is much, much greater.

*Russia and Eastern Communism.*

For a start, the Soviet Empire is disintegrating – socially, economically and politically. The essentially Leninist framework of collectivism and centralism is virtually finished – in Russia, and, quite obviously, in Eastern Europe. Not only Communism but Socialism is regarded as discredited mythology by more and more people; the latter seen as an impossible dream, the former as only too possible a nightmare.

The economic and political theories of capitalism, but also its ethos and values, are now triumphant in the market of ideas and social options being made available to us. Man is once again being described as many times before, as basically self regarding, indeed selfish; forever seeking to improve his own condition, with notions like justice, equity and compassion running way behind in his order of priorities, or goals. Man is able to quantify his greed, his competitiveness, his love of conspicuous display to a greater degree than ever before. What was once the pleasure and opportunity of a select few is now available, in reality, to large numbers in the advanced capitalist societies, and in fantasy to the rest. Thus, a columnist in *The Australian* feels free to head his article, 'Greed Is Good'.

Of course, a lot of people don't take the cue, aren't greedy, covetous or narcissistic, at least *not* to the degree exhibited by the majority. These are the losers in the new Darwinian world, as are, or will be, the countries which are not sufficiently competitive, single-mindedly materialistic, not sufficiently indifferent to what used to be called the Rights of Others, i.e. people in other countries.

*Vale the Cold War?*

Partly because of Russia's free fall and the collapse of Communism as a political/ideological threat, the Cold War is falling apart as well. There are divided views about this phenomenon in the West and there are those who see it as a great opportunity to lift the crushing burden of arms spending and consequent taxation and diversion of the social product, and a great new opportunity to trade and invest in hitherto closed or hassled markets. But there are also those with a vested interest in *its* institutional continuation, in some form or other. These include our old friends, the industrial/military/scientific/academic complex in the US, the Eastern Bloc (until recently), and Western Europe. There are equivalents in many of the smaller client states of the US. Linked to these complexes are sections of the different media, and a mass of professional ideologists; and, of course, the intelligence communities. These threatened groups are defending their prerogatives with great ferocity and these are early days.

Although a large section of the American

society *is* dependent upon a permanent arms industry, it *does*, after all, constitute only 6% of GNP, and it should not be an activity whose reduction or cessation need shake the foundations of American capitalism. This is not the sixties. In any case, the kind of reductions being touted around Capitol Hill are so ludicrously small as to constitute no meaningful change in the financial status quo. But, of course, the US defence spending is really a story about firms – companies – and *these* must expand, knock out competitors, or else go broke, or diversify. This is the logic of capitalism. Similarly with the military-civilian bureaucracies of the Pentagon and the Treaty Organisations. Parkinson's Law presses and retrenchment is unthinkable. Thus, the US spends about $150 billions in Europe in NATO – and this adds up to a lot of influence.

*The US – NATO and Europe.*

Which brings up another major reason why the US wants to remain in Europe – to slow the economic rise of Germany and reduce her impact on the economies and societies of Eastern Europe and the USSR. This is why Washington would like détente with Russia to proceed slowly, so as to preserve the pretexts of a threat. In the meantime, she is encouraging the paranoia of Poland, and the jealousies of Britain and France. Forcing Germany to stay in a now meaningless NATO is one way of doing this.

There is an almost symbiotic relationship between the Polish Church (and the Vatican), Solidarity, and the present Polish Government – and Poland is happily being used by Washington to demand, yet again, German guarantees of her present frontiers; plus another slice of reparations. And, together with a somewhat spectral entity called the Jewish nation, to sit on the Four Power Conference to supervise, and impose conditions upon, German reunification.

*The German Question: from Roses to Raspberries*

West Germany is facing a growing number of demands from many sides, motivated by greed, envy and panic. For one thing, when Germany is reunified, it will be much, much harder to gouge concessions out of her. And if she can be screwed into various supposedly eternal commitments now, so much the better. In a sense it is now or never.

Which is why Yugoslavia has produced a reparations demand, Poland another one – and these add up to $36 billions. Israel has put in another for East Germany, which will soon be part of West Germany, who will be expected to pick up the bill. When one considers the economic and social costs of West Germany taking in the East Germans (not to mention ethnic Germans from other lands), costs quite likely to weaken if not undermine the all powerful Deutschmark, one wonders what the Europeans – as against the Americans – think they're doing.

One remembers J. M. Keynes' *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, written in 1919, warning against the effects likely to follow from vindictive, draconian measures to 'punish Germany', and keep her permanently weak, so as to restore the hegemony of France and Britain, and allow their ailing economies to continue impersonating world economic forces. Keynes pointed out that Germany was the economic flywheel around which Europe revolved. A poor, low production Germany, a shrunken market for her neighbours, would drag them all down. He also foresaw the pathological effects upon the Germany polity: 'We are encircled, everyone envies us, everyone hates us, everyone is trying to use us and the fruits of our work and intelligence to solve their own problems, which they are too lazy and decadent to tackle themselves. *We* need Lebensraum.' He saw economic, political and social instability ahead for Germany, extremist politics, revanchist politics. We said in 1945 that we had learned from that experience – and would rebuilt Germany. While being vital partners in the division of Germany, we soon came to deplore this, saying it was a lousy, imperialist Russian idea. Over the ensuing years we wept buckets over the East Germans writhing under the Communist lash, unable to mix in freedom with their relations, or, to call a spade a space, mix and live with their *Fellow Germans.*

Cynics at the time said that Germany was being built up only to stop her going Left, and,

very importantly, to provide troops for the coming War with Russia. Well . . . there is no chance of Germany 'going left'; and there are no Russian hordes with whom the Reichswehr can have a dust up. So, Germany won't be the killing ground.

What then happened? Everyone chortled as the Wall went down; the journos of the world wet themselves as East and West Germans embraced. As the East German elections approached the Western Press and the pollsters tipped a 50% SPD vote and perhaps 20% for the Conservatives. Having watched Kohl operating in Dresden and Leipzig, cheered on by enormous crowds of East German workers, I knew who would win and why – as did most sensible people. The promise of early reunification, hopes of relief from low living standards and corrupt, socially irrelevant bureaucrats. Kohl's people offered all of these things.

Why did the Western Press get it so wrong? Because they *wanted* the party least likely to push reunification, and, down the track, a neutral Germany, to win. Even if it meant them supporting the German Left. But the German Left, that is the SPD, strongly resemble their predecessors in West Germany – whom the Communists labelled 'Social Fascists'. If the West German Left continue on this line, they risk being history after the end of year elections. The only thing likely to save them would be the restarting of the Cold War, over, for example, the Baltic States or the Ukraine. That would probably entail the fall of Gorbachev.

But it appears that so soon as one threat – Russia and the vile babboonery of Bolshevism – disappears, another, a revanchist Germany, replaces it. So, America just has to stay in Europe, and NATO remain, with America running it, and Deutschland locked in. America is irrelevant in Europe, and increasingly unwanted, without the positing of things that go bump in the night, and sing Horst Wessel in their sleep.

Why does America insist on hanging on in Europe? Because of the EEC, Europe 1992, and the prospect of a Eurasian block comprising Europe, East and West, Russia and Siberia.

*The Great Shift Coming.*

The 12 States of Europe, plus East Germay, are planning to move into an economic, social and cultural union of a kind not previously tried by Europe, or possibly, anyone else. The EEC – with 340 million including East Germany – already export more than the US and Japan combined, and are the world's largest importers of agricultural products. Despite Thatcher's death-bed posturing, this union will be a mighty force, with great political clout. The more the Russo-American rivalry fades, the stronger Europe will be.

But there are far more extensive linkages to come. Eastern Europe wants to join, as does Austria, and Yugoslavia, or parts thereof. There may be quite a delay, but already eastern Europe is moving as fast as western Europe will allow, or can service, into the EEC sphere of influence. That is likely to mean Germany. Washington can buy Governments such as Poland and the Baltic States, as she bought third world governments, but the European dynamic will override this, in time. Just as some of America's favourite Pacific clients, *such as Australia*, have succumbed to the siren song of Nippon, so will Washington's latest political investments finish with Europe.

Gorbachev talks of a European confederation or European home including Russia-Siberia – but on his terms. The West has no reason to accept his terms – which include a Communist Russia with most of the Empire intact. Russia is in grave economic crisis – she has little to bargain with, now she is starting to turn in her guns. Most likely Bylo Russia, the Ukraine and the Baltic States will bolt, unless the Red Army uses force and tries to turn the clock back to Stalin. But the successionists will rush westwards, partly to ease their overdependence upon the Russian economy, partly to get the capital, the technology, the consumer goods which Russia can't supply.

The Muslim provinces may depart, so a very different Russia, with Siberia, will be rattling the cup to get into Europe. Moscow will be welcome, because of Siberia. This is probably the greatest area of untapped mineral and energy wealth in the world, and the Russians

can't handle it. Europe would, Japan could and America could; but Moscow would opt for Europe, for obvious reasons. Siberia is Russia's dowry.

*Japan and the United States.*

Until her recent stock exchange troubles, Japan was seen as the strongest financial power in the world, bestriding world trade, the successful exploiter of the latest commercial science and technology, per excellence. She still is, though, as with all highly geared stock exchange economies, there is a house of cards flavour about it all. Japan seems likely to rise and rise, while America declines, and the future does seem like a Pacific economic bloc or community, led by Japan but without America.

On the other hand, failing internal economic catastrophes, Japan seems likely to continue foregoing the role of an upfront international political or military actor. Like Germany up to date, she seems prepared to let others make fools of themselves, while she improves the shining economic hour. She will deal with the rise of other economic blocs by erecting her own, while trading into these blocs, in so far as she is allowed.

*A Corporate World of Transnational Corporations.*

We have been looking at the world via the category of national states, but there are other extremely important types of actors. These are the transnational corporations – using their national base and their government to maintain privileged positions at home, wherever possible, and directing whatever political clout their Government has to get their own way overseas. American military power, especially via the Treaty Organisations, has been of crucial importance to the rise and earlier dominance of the US multinationals. But multinationals often can't lean on powerful intrusive States, and have done extremely well without them. One thinks of the operations of Swedes, Swiss, German and Japanese, and the successes of the Pacific Tigers.

Multinationals have made increasing nonsense of national boundaries, leaping over them with comparative impunity, for the world is their market. But multinationals will also use their national governments to protect their self assigned privileges and self defined interests, wherever they can. But, essentially, they are internationalists. This corporate world has had a dramatic influence upon the political systems and the overall cultures of most countries. It is not simply what they have been doing in and to the Third World, but to their own, western societies. The corporate political/economic system – with power shared, ostensibly, between capital, big unions and the political class – the Government and its patronage networks – has been imposed upon what were in varying degrees, liberal democracies. Unions are dying the death of a thousand qualifications and restrictions, as a result of their Faustian bargain, even in places where the Labor-union movement was once a force to be reckoned with, e.g. Australia. Ideas of socialism, social democracy, small L liberalism, even the individualism which conservatives praise and advocate, are a dying species, or else walking wounded. Consumerism and structured nihilism have been made the new psychological envelope in which we should, or must, live, with the monopolistic media and the domestic education system acting as the usual value transmission belts and role setters.

The situation in the West is rather like Marx's description of the late, decadent stages of capitalism – where everything has become a commodity. Political relations, intellectual and artistic transactions, human relations, including sexual and familial, *everything* in society has a price put on it – otherwise it has no value. This purely materialistic ethos is essentially nihilistic: not surprisingly it has triggered searches for Meaning, ranging from nationalism, fundamental religiosity, the occult and the supernatural, the irrational, as against the rational. I suppose we are looking at Sodom and Gomorrah, the Worship of the Golden Calf; and the Tower of Babel.

But at any rate these transnational corporations are the engines of economic growth at all costs, and the world is becoming the single market which Adam Smith and his followers advocated. This is not a world of perfect competition or equal playing fields – it is a

world on the way to domination by small groups of businessmen and their aides, situated in the principal industrial and financial nations, sharing similar views and values. A wholly undemocratic power élite, imposing their imperatives on governments and their people.

*Rogue elephants of the systems.*

The industry with the greatest overall production, measured in dollars, is the arms industry. The second is the narcotics industry, now turning in annual world sales of $500 billion, and expanding very fast. The primacy of these two industries points up the pathological character of the profit driven motive in its new form.

The results of cuts in demands for weapons in the western and communist worlds is already leading to major sell-offs of modern but surplus weapons to third world countries, and criminals, and one can expect this trade to become increasingly blatant and indiscriminate. By these means the level of armed conflict in the world may rise, possibly quite sharply, as social and political instability increases in many nations.

The apparently unbeatable colossus of drug dealers, hit men, bought police and politicians, only arose after the Vietnam War. It now supplies probably a major proportion of the speculative money going through the world financial system, after laundering in tax havens and through the world's banks.

Then there is black money – the funds of tax evasions and crime other than drugs. Many of our leading Australian corporations rely on tax havens for their profits, for had they to pay the Australian tax, they would be operating at a loss, so overstretched, so incompetent are they. All of this drug and black money has to be banked, lent and invested.

Perhaps not surprisingly, 'every day some $600 billion of foreign currency is traded by speculators in the three major markets of Tokyo, London and New York. Yet the annual trade between the US and Japan is $200 billions'. The speaker was the head of the Japanese branch of McKinseys, Dr Kenichi Ohmae, at the Melbourne Debt Summit, March 2. He added, 'We don't have economic principles to explain this new world. It has caused schizophrenia among policy makers and the public, for whom the nationalist models still linger. The markets have largely taken control from governments. The next question, surely, is who has taken control of the markets?'

The influence of huge sums, easily and illicitly earned, upon the judgement and morality of investors, lenders, borrowers is plain to see – more and more imprudent, and illegal economic decisions, producing, at regular intervals, crashes, bankruptcies and scandals – covered up by accomplice governments. This is the real face of contemporary deregulated capitalism, and shows up the disingenous vapourings of its advocates and apologists, in their proper light.

In fact, the new multinationals and speculators, legal and illegal, are making nonsense of national sovereignty, and public policy. (For example, the Mafia control 70% of Italian government paper.)

*Nationalism and Fundamentalism.*

At the same time as national sovereignty is eroding, nationalism, often crude and nasty, is returning to parts of the world stage. In many cases it is a reaction to foreign domination – military, economic, cultural – for example the independence movements of Asia, Africa and the Middle East during and after World War II. These movements became Governments of new states, which used nationalism and often ethnocentrism as ways of nation building, eliminating rivals and controlling populations. Nationalism has remained on the political agenda for most of these states, deforming them while supposedly uniting them.

Reactive nationalism is a new powerful face in the Eastern Bloc – based upon a recycling of the nationalist upsurges against foreign leaders; plus anti-Communism. In the next 5 to 10 years one might expect such nationalisms, linked in some countries with backward looking religions, to distort social and political recovery for the people concerned. The same applies to some of the potentially secessionist republics of Russia.

We have been watching the resurgence of

fundamentalist Islam, which could gain a great boost if the Soviet Muslim states were to secede. Whether a power bloc could be constructed from the numerous Muslim States in the Middle East and Asia is another matter, given their track record of permanent divisiveness. Most of their neighbours are hoping such a project would fail, for obvious reasons.

Fundamentalism has also returned to the West, as much a response to the anomie and alienation in Western society, as anything else; it could influence political and social pressures far more in the future. Fundamentalists are also starting to call the shots in Israel and the Diaspora. Such movements, more often than not carrying messages of intolerance, exclusiveness, contempt for the views and rights of others, with embryo scenarios of persecution, are divisive rather than pacifying forces, both domestically and internationally. They add yet another obstacle to attempts to see a common agenda for the globe.

*The Future of the Third World.*

This is the part of the world with the largest populations and the highest birthrates. Also the lowest production, and the lowest consumption per capita. Economically, it is marginal to the main operations of the world economy - except as a source of minerals, fossil fuels and items like tropical timber. Its share of world trade is shrinking year by year. In past times some economically tempting underdeveloped and developing countries had received massive loans and substantial investments, to supposedly create export industries to service the West. (Rather like Eastern Europe.) The main consequence of this strategy has been the creation of debts which these countries cannot pay or in some cases service. More and more of their economic life is concerned with servicing debts. Thus, South America is now a net exporter of capital - sending out more money in debt charges and dividends from foreign subsidiaries than she receives in the form of new capital.

Africa is sliding into an abyss, while the mounting poverty, misery and inequality of Central and South America is only prevented from exploding with revolutions, civil wars and social collapses, by draconian military rule, bought politicians, and American dedication to preventing any change to the *status quo*. The gap between rich and poor countries, the affluent and the hungry, is widening with every year. There seems no present remedy.

The failures of past loan programs make similar activities seem less and less probably in the future, while Western capital is far more likely to be used in the development of Russia and Eastern Europe. At the same time, aid is falling, as the rich nations, and their peoples, become even more materialistic, more selfish, more callous. There is no such thing as a free lunch, least of all for the hungry.

*Population.*

The world's population, increasing by over 90 millions a year, will reach possibly 10 billion, twice the present number in 47 years. Most of these extra people will be in the Third World, greatly magnifying its present grave problems. War, starvation, disease and social chaos seem certain futures for many countries. Overall, the additional strains on the ecosphere could become very serious indeed; the more the inhabitants try to increase food production, and consume water, fuel and minerals in attempts to stave off utter poverty. Industrialisation will, once again, greatly accelerate the step by step destruction of our environment.

The effects of crowding upon human beings have not been adequately assessed, for different cultures need different amounts of space, but we have a macabre human laboratory operating before our gaze. As Aneurin Bevan wrote in 1959 in his book *In Place of Fear*; "We could end up watching one another starve to death on television sets."

*The Greens - A Way out?*

There is no need to set out the malign consequences of continuous economic growth, as expressed by industrialisation, a continuous hike in agriculture, fishing and logging; effects of all the different kinds of fuel and chemical emissions and escapes; the piling up of millions and millions into already overcrowded cities. The Green arguments speak for themselves,

as for example their analyses of the inevitability of rule by élites, as things get bigger and more complex. The rich get richer, the powerful more powerful. The Greens have the most interesting answer to contemporary decrepit Socialism, élitist capitalism, and pyramids of bureaucrats, PR operations and monopoly media cretinisation of the populace.

But the odds of a breakthrough for their philosophy and the likelihood of their alternatives replacing the present system are especially daunting. The 'work for profit and advancement' ethic is ubiquitous, being built into social, political and economic institutions and mores, but also into people's psyches. The monastic, or reflective, or abstemious or relaxed life styles seem beyond the reach, if not the capacity, of contemporary man. So changes in consciousness are at the top of the Green priorities; and changing consciousness can take a long time, even when it occurs. Most people only wish to change when the *status quo* is on the way to being unbearable, and conditions of life and the institutions which produced these are patently unacceptable. The lead time between a serious or even terminal crisis appearing, and people recognising it, then acting on it, can be long, fatally long. So one cannot prognosticate about this one impediment to the processes earlier described.

H. G. Wells wrote a book in the 30s called *The Shape of Things to Come*, an ultimately optimistic tale of the world ruled by benevolent, almost omniscient scientists, after a devastating global war. That would appear to be one solution. Just before WWII, he wrote another, *Mind at the End of Its Tether*. This essay might suggest that the latter has more going for it.

*Max Teichmann formerly taught politics at Monash University, Melbourne. His radio commentaries on current affairs are well-known.*

— *Donald Greenfield*

LIAM DAVISON

# Stone

There's a story told, and I have no reason to believe it isn't true, about a low stone wall that used to run in an unbroken line across the entire width of western Victoria. Not much remains of it any more though in places small piles of stones can still be found, looking more like the tumbledown remains of cairns or campfires than part of a great wall. Local people will take you to them and point them out as the remains of a structure of monumental proportions. There's something smug about the way they point them out (especially if the pile of stones is on property that belongs to them), as if by identifying the wall they are laying claim to some privileged link with a lost past. In some places there are free-standing corners of stone such as remain when all but the strongest part of a house has fallen into ruin. These, you will be told, mark those points where the great wall intersected with lesser walls, which together formed an intricate network of stone dividing the land into equally sized squares.

Most of what remains of the main wall (the original line of its foundations and the occasional mile or so of waist-high stone still standing against all odds) is now hidden beneath tall grass or so overgrown with weeds that it is all but invisible to the untrained eye. Much of it has been taken away, stone by stone, for the building of farms or houses. Whole paddocks in some places are strewn with stones, the irregularity of their placement making it difficult to believe that they were once part of the same wall. For those men who are well versed in the history of the area or with knowledge of the construction of stone walls, the wall is still there and they can't look out across their land without seeing the straight line of it running unbroken between the seemingly random outcrops of stone and the sorry little cairns that other men see.

Occasionally these men will meet to tell stories about the origins of the wall and about the legendary wallers who built it. They will talk about the division of land in Europe and the Enclosure Acts of Scotland and Ireland, and of how the great wallers of those countries brought with them not only walls but a whole way of looking at the land. They'll tell stories about what parts of it still stand, building their own importance as they lay claim to a new piece of knowledge or a newly identified section on their own land. Some tell of how the whole incredible length of it was supported by the weight of each stone resting in such a way against its fellow stone that gravity held it up, and that the deliberate removal of one of the stones led to the gradual collapse of the wall, section by section in a process so slow that it was mistaken for the random falling of stones or the effects of wind and rain. Sometimes the story-telling will go late into the night as the men argue over whether a particular group of stones is part of the main wall or simply the remains of an unimportant subsidiary wall built by an unskilled farmer. Sometimes the men will come to blows, exchanging punches until their faces are bloodied and one of them concedes that he was mistaken in his judgement. None of the stories are written down, but it's the telling of them that's important, as if each story is further proof of the wall's existence.

One of the stories, however, is not about the wall itself but about an earlier telling of

a story about a pile of stones that may or may not have been part of it. Often this story will lead to fighting among the men as they argue over which stones it was originally about. Some hold it was a small outcrop just to the north of Byaduk. Others argue it was one of the many piles to be found in the Stony Rises close to Camperdown. Whatever the case, the story is still the same. It tells of an earlier meeting of men, many of whom are the fathers or grandfathers of men who tell the stories now, and of a story told by one of them that led to his expulsion from the group. His story referred to a particular group of stones, situated near the boundary of his father's property, which was regarded by most as one of the finest sections of wall still standing in the south of the State. To suggest, as he did, that these stones had never been part of a great wall was to suggest that the wall had never reached as far south as was popularly believed or, worse, that the wall had never existed.

Surprisingly, the man was in every other way quite reasonable. His family was well respected in the area. For many years he had been regarded as something of an authority on the wall. Only since the telling of the story has the family property been divided up and any mention of the family name been met with derision rather than respect. If any descendants are still alive, they have long since fled to the wooden-fenced suburbs of Melbourne.

The story has been retold many times, often in its most simple form, sometimes with much elaboration. It tells of a journey into the west by a party of men attracted by Major Mitchell's account of the land that could be found there – a land that could be English for thousands of years.

The party set out on an overcast day in August, a straggling line of eight horses, a dray and thirteen men. They passed unceremoniously behind the small huts that made up the outskirts of the settlement and disappeared around the edge of the swampy ground under a sky already low and heavy with rain. There was no emotional farewell, no crowd of well-wishers to see them off. In fact, few of the settlers even noticed they had gone. By nightfall on the first day out, tensions had started to surface. Arguments arose over who should ride on horseback. There were disputes over rations. One of the men, an ex-convict by the name of Brent, was suspected of stealing food and the party was soon divided by mistrust and petty jealousies.

Mathieson, who led the party, was a man who could not tolerate division within his ranks and had always sought to resolve it by imposing his will on others. He punished Brent by reducing his rations and threatened the lash for any man found stealing or suspected of speaking with an uncivil tongue. The men resented his harshness and the division became more deep-set, with those who had made no financial commitment to the expedition threatening to leave and set out on their own, so that Mathieson was forced to place a constant guard on the horses and rations. When he had one of the surveyors lashed for failing to keep the guard, even those closest to him, who had maintained some respect for his strength of mind, turned against him, and the party became less and less purposeful in its actions. They covered fewer miles each day and made less and less accurate observations

until it became clear that the whole expedition was likely to fail.

Slowly the men deserted it. Each day a few more would wander off into the bush or turn for home in the faint hope of retracing their steps. Sometimes a horse would disappear with them, or one of the compasses, but mostly it was food they took, or guns. And Mathieson, with neither the time nor resources to chase them, was forced to continue on with the dwindling number of men who, out of a sense of either loyalty or greed, stayed beside him.

By the end of the fourth week there were only three men left – Anderson, the surveyor, whose eyes were constantly set on the horizon, Soddards, an ex-convict who fancied himself a naturalist, and Mathieson himself, who, with only two men left under his command, saw no less need to assert his authority. The horses were gone except for the two harnessed to the dray. With each day the weather grew worse and the ground beneath their feet became so heavy with water that the horses found it all but impossible to keep the wheels of the low cart turning. Mathieson cursed them and resorted to the whip.

The country they moved through was mostly flat, with occasional outcrops of stone, barely covered by thin grass. In places, water collected in shallow puddles, flattening the grass and turning it black beneath the surface. There was no sign of the land they'd expected to find – no rolling hills of green pasture, no brooks as such, or wooded glens, in fact nothing that any of the three could find appealing to the eye. Yet they continued on, each with a clear picture in his own mind of the land that lay a day or two's journey further west.

Anderson saw a landscape dotted with small stone villages such as he remembered from his childhood. Not that the villages would be there, of course, but there would be the places where they might have stood, the lines that roads might have followed, as clear in his own eye as if they were actually lined with hedgerows. Soddards saw the harsher landscape of his Pennine home, sharp ridges of stone falling away to deep lakes, townships with names like Stonesdale, Cotherstone and Stonehouse, which would grow there as confidently as they had at home. For Mathieson, it was a picture of the flat land giving way to hills, the hills to mountains, and great boulders of stone piled each on each like a natural wall with rolling pasture land on either side. He saw his Scottish Grampians, towns with names like Balmoral and Hamilton.

But, at the end of each day's journeying, it became clear that the landscape had refused to change. The trees under which they camped were twisted parodies of what they'd hoped to find. The land itself whistled with the sounds of insects, and each time they tried to drive a stake into the ground they struck on stone. Soddards collected specimens in the form of skins or the bones of animals, which he packed away in boxes on the dray. One, at least, contained the bodies of a dozen different birds, and their stench travelled with them, attracting flies and eventually tainting the rations. Mathieson demanded that the specimens be left behind, but even with the worst ones gone the smell stayed with them as if it came from the land itself.

In the late afternoon of what was to be their last day out, Anderson came across the stones. They formed what appeared to be a low wall, about two yards long, which joined at right angles with another wall, barely visible beneath the grass. The stones rested comfortably against each other, interlocking at the corner as if they had been deliberately placed. By stepping up onto the stones, with one leg placed solidly on each of the walls, Anderson could look down at the ground and see, beneath the thin grass, the clear outline of what looked to be the remains of a stone house.

By nightfall the men had located the sites of another five houses, all of roughly the same dimensions and forming, together, an irregular circle. Some were no more than depressions in the earth where the weight of stone walls had made their mark. Others were made up of half-buried stones, so that only after scraping at the earth, or pulling the grass from it in clumps, could the tops of them be seen and the familiar shape of another stone house be revealed. Mathieson ordered that their camp be set up in the centre of the stone village and instructed Anderson to survey the area. For his own part, he recorded the dimensions of each structure in his journal, described the

type of stone used and made detailed sketches of how the stones interlocked with each other or, in some cases, protruded from the earth like a set of broken teeth.

The horses were tethered outside the ring, and every now and then, as the men sat huddled round the fire, they would hear them snort or rub their flanks against a corner of the dray. Beyond them it was quiet and dark. Inside the circle, with the reassurance of stone walls against their backs, the men felt as if, after all their travelling, they had finally arrived at home. In the silence, they could hear the night sounds of their own country. In the darkness, they saw the rolling fields of a land that could be English for thousands of years.

Only Soddards felt uncertain about what they had found. He told of how, some years before, he'd travelled with a man called Thomas, the Assistant Protector of Aborigines, and of how they'd heard stories about a tribe who lived in stone houses in the Victorian Alps. These natives, he said, never went out to seek food but took what other tribes offered. While they never found the houses, Thomas filed official reports of what he'd heard and made a detailed sketch in his notebook (not unlike those Mathieson had made) of how he imagined the stone villages to look. His sketch showed an irregular circle of stone houses, each of roughly the same dimensions, with the stones interlocking neatly at the corners.

As Soddards spoke, Mathieson became more and more unsettled, as if by telling the story he was somehow destroying what they had travelled so far to find. Occasional noises came to them from outside the circle – unfamiliar sounds of insects and night birds, which Mathieson couldn't accommodate. He poked at the fire with a stick, scraped his boots across the ground and eventually ordered Soddards to stop. Feeling the stones hard across the small of his back, he turned to his journal again to describe the fertile pasture land surrounding their camp.

Late in the night, long after the others had fallen asleep, Mathieson heard a disturbance near the horses. He heard the wheezing of breath from one of them and a heavy thud as its legs folded beneath the weight of its body. In the first light of morning they could see it lying near the dray with a spear wedged solidly between its ribs. Mathieson tried to wrench the shaft from its side, cursing the natives and swearing to take revenge. When it wouldn't budge, he broke it off, bracing his legs against the flanks of the horse and leaning his weight against it. He threw the broken shaft at the ground, lifted his gun from the dray and ordered Anderson and Soddards to load their own.

They came across a party of Aborigines about mid-morning, camped near a stony creek, and despite Soddards' insistence that they were unlikely to have been responsible for the horse, Mathieson quickly opened fire, scattering the group and bringing down a man. He fired again, from close range, into the man's back, and ordered the other two to bring in as many blacks as they could find. Anderson and Soddards made a half-hearted search of the area, knowing that with only one horse they stood little chance of pursuing the natives through their own land. When they returned, they found Mathieson on his hands and knees attacking the body of the dead man with a blunt stone. He went about it as if that man alone had been responsible for the death of the horse, the failure of the expedition and the destruction of Mathieson's vision. Anderson called to him to stop, but the stone came down again and again against the broken skull. He moved towards him, reaching out to draw him away. Mathieson turned, caught Anderson by the arm and brought the stone down across his face. Soddards took aim from where he stood. He fired a single shot at Mathieson and threw the gun away.

They carried him slumped across the back of the horse, and by the time they arrived back at the village he was dead. Soddards dug a shallow grave inside the first two walls they had found. Above it they formed another pile of stones, the same height as the walls, to serve as both a headstone and a cairn to mark how far their expedition came. Taking what they could manage from the dray, the two men turned the horse away from the stones and headed back across the flat land towards their homes.

Driving west between Colac and Hamilton, you can still make out bits and pieces of what

look like walls lining the roads or standing for no apparent reason in the middle of paddocks. Some sections run down gullies and can be seen continuing on, following the same line, up to a kilometre away. Piles of stones, the same height as the walls, appear and disappear between trees, and it would not be hard to imagine that they were once all part of the same wall, or monuments left behind by innumerable expeditions that had crossed and recrossed the land like walls.

But slowly the stones are disappearing. Each year the gaps between them become bigger, and fewer piles can be seen from the road. Mostly they are taken in trucks to Melbourne, where they separate shrubs from lawn, or form the walls of fish ponds in suburban back yards. In native gardens they are scattered at random to look as if they have lain there for thousands of years. Soon there will be no walls left, only the stories of walls. Each year, as you drive towards Hamilton, there is more and more barbed wire stretched tight beside the road. Each year, the past gets further away.


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**RETURN TO THE PENINSULA**

another year has passed
nothing has changed
I bring the same old griefs
unlock the door
on the same self
grown older sadder
wiser than before
hearing the kestrel shrieking
*She's survived*
*to spend another winter*
*in our house.*

I

We come in the off season
when the rich mansions
the summer houses are empty
and stray cats with bells
roam through the Paradise gardens

the back beach is deserted
the key-holes in the bathing boxes
stiff with cold
except for one slow learner
drifting along the shoreline
in army surplus
his breast pinned with badges

each night I hear the tide rise
but the mornings are like green glass
as if I lay on the floor of an ocean

only the gold butterfly
hatched out for her first flight
stumbles against the melaleuca hedge
dusting the death spots
on the backs of my hands
with pollen.

II

I have returned
for the third year
a ghost to join the others
their squandered tenderness
clamours in the dark wood
at the turn in the road
illuminated jewel-bright
in the last rays of the sun
the sky-filled windows
the washing of the tide
the long pier
reflected twice in stillness
the she-oak
in the middle of the lawn
solid and black and formal
as an etching
the black cat with the white face
crossing the garden
dissembles like a shadow

the last light falls
a hand twitches a curtain
a bird calls
somebody turns and smiles
from the picture window . . .

*She's back again*
*the familiar*
*with her limping step*
*and her midnight tears.*

III

I hear the sea tonight
lulling the shore
the wind soughing
in the she-oak on the lawn
and I am back
on the peninsula
the fire gusting
in the hearth
a still-life ageing woman
reflected in the glass
reading under a lamp
in a shadowy house

I stand outside
in the obliterating night
watching that woman
once careless young
and passionately proud
condemned by love
seeing her
in this house above the bay

alone    illumined    greying hair
and quiet forebearance
coals and darkness
burning at her back
and the fire leaps in the glass
as the weather changes.

IV

I am the one
no longer beautiful
behind the melaleuca hedge
beside the bay
who sleeps and weeps
and sleeps again
calling to you
across the drift of time

I hide in the silent garden
furred with frost
remote and still
where no-one comes
where time itself is lost
and the bay runs
like watered silk
through a skein of hills

no-one will burst
through the melaleuca hedge
no-one will open the door
to the silent house
the dark rooms
of the unconscious wait
in the square of sunlight
circled by the sea

the thorns grow higher
as the birds grow quiet.

V

Winter blowing in
air aches with cold
and red-hot pokers
underneath the hedge
nothing is true
this autumn night
that overlooks the sea
each day I write
and walk a little
sit in a path
of sunlight    smell the snow

asleep rock out
on night tides
anguished and violent
to confront your face

Fabulists
consumed with memory
dazzled and dazed
we improvise our lives
play out these scenes
before the magic backdrops

everything into the fire
tea-tree and paper-bark
grief    renunciation
terror and tenderness
I vanish in this land
like flame like ash
dissolving smoking in air
under a raging cloud
traverse    the sky
to wake on a cold morning
to the sign of the she-oak
the fire burnt low
and cry    *Burn Me!*

VI

Time will end
for me    one fine day
or night of silence
birdsong rain or shine.

When I fall
my universe falling
with me will perform
a perfect circle
like the cobweb
with illuminated spokes
blowing wide under
the verandah eaves

they will find me
flat on my back
in the blind grass
eyes open to the sun

a rayed mandala printed
on each eye-ball

while the yellow-breasted robin
trills in the melaleucas
and the spider spins
and circles patiently.

VII

The garden behind glass
moonlit as day
the rain walks through the grass
intimate as a lover
out on the bay
a stormy petrel calls
from its wild domain
poems dance
like firelight on the walls

eerie as white frost
the fox moans
by the front gate
marauding for birds

I lie in the still house
wired for sound
trembling with words
found lost found again
fox firelight birds
fish gut and oyster catchers
drunken as lords
flapping home through the rain

daybreak   the receiver
clicks into silence
the fire dies
to a smoulder of sticks
shearwaters out of reach
fall down the sky.

VIII

The she-oak
embroidered
on blue silk
a tuning fork
for the rushing
of the tide

the fire murmuring
its cold heart
fallen in the glass
I lie inside
the dark house
making a substance
from the shadow

the fishing boats
I heard   go out
at midnight   throb home
across the bay
all things emerge
the tea-tree hedge
filters the morning light
the daytime moon
left over from last night
in a scud of cloud

there is a shadowy presence
in this room
ghostly interlocutor
where light and shade
play on a body
half-discerned   a face
half-turned away
who never speaks
but smiles
with the perfect understanding
of the dead.

IX

I summon you up
out of my memory
under the tea-tree
and paper-bark
walking obediently
with your high distracted babble

you stand
in the green shade
on the edge
of the clearing
behind you
the radiant scrubland
is doused in light
then   turning

hoisting your rod
on your shoulder
you climb down the cliff
to the sea
I can hear you
crashing away
through the undergrowth
the sound rolls back
up the shore

the black cat pushes
and rubs at my feet
flicking her tail
the sky clouds over
a few drops fall
the she-oak soughs
like a sail
I wait
by the wooden stair
leading down to the bay
thistledown blows
through the air . . .

X

The shadows of nesting birds
circle the house
finch fantail thornbill silvereye
spring showers wet the windows
winter has passed
death turns to birth
air water light and continuity

the wattlebirds
swing on the red-hot pokers
the cat has hidden
her three black kittens in the hedge
the sunlight spreads
to saturate the lawn
the Indian mynahs
turn the earth for worms
against the silken sky
the she-oak burns
gilt as a tapestry

gulls drift through the updraft
in a paper chase
marking the boundary
night falls
with looping swallows
hooting owls
the dry cough
of the foxes on the cliff
sitting together
their sparkling eyes
reflected off the sea . . .

DOROTHY HEWETT

JAMES WIELAND

# Behind the camera

*From the Australian Front*

Just as *The Anzac Book* introduced 1916, *From the Australian Front*, comprising several series of superb photographs, black and white sketches, jokes and cartoons, saw in 1918.[1] It too was a Christmas book and set out, General Birdwood explained a little disingenuously, 'to convey to those whom we left behind in Australia, and who we know are thinking of us, some idea of our surroundings'. For the most part, it is the photographs which hold our attention, but they speak of more than 'surroundings'. Broken only by the occasional sketch or joke elaborating a mood or event like a well-placed digression, the photographs not only convey a landscape but also carry a carefully constructed closed narrative of conquest and victory, designed to instruct, inform, encourage and, most of all, recruit.

I want to suggest that by reading against the surface 'text' of these photographs, this narrative can be opened-up, making its depiction of the Australians at the Front at once, more complex, more human, and more candid.

The first of the photographs in the main 'narrative' is of a group of Australians resting beside a field in Flanders.

The Arrival in Flanders

With its treeless horizon and flat terrain this could be an Australian wheat district; somewhere out East or West, as the case may be. It is strangely disorienting: the landscape defeats expectations and the men, instead of filling the scene with their martial vigour, lounge on their packs like a gathering of swagmen, and look wryly out at the camera. We might ask, but the laconic-looking men suggest we should not, why the background is so bleak and denuded. Set beside 'The Arrival in Flanders' is an incongruously humorous photograph of a battalion hoisting their helmets in the air: looking like creatures from outer space, they excitedly prepare 'to enter the trenches in France'.[2] Working the men's innocence and eagerness, the photograph deflects the viewer away from the reality of entering the trenches. In fact, some men soon came to believe they were on the blasted landscape of the moon.

One of the Earliest Battalions to Enter the Trenches . . .

The series then progresses through 'normal' life in Flanders: a billet, village life, a dilapidated shed, serving as a cookhouse, an estaminet, an immaculate dugout, 'The Trenches amongst the Summer Flowers'; scenes which are comfortable, domestic and convivial, seeming to deny the reasons why the men are in these Flanders villages, while quietly transporting the viewer to the trenches. But the last of this introductory series, 'No-Man's-Land in the Peaceful Line' which readers are told is 'exactly such a spot . . . that the Australians charged when first they entered heavy fighting in France . . .', forms a bridge to the sustained photo-story running through 1916–1917; or for those who measure time by places or battles (as many of the men did, of course), from Pozières, through Bapaume, Messines, Martinpuich, to Zonnebecke and the fight for the ridges.

## No Man's Land in the Peaceful Line

At this point the tone changes as the photographs explore and expose the destruction of Pozières and, for the uninitiated, the bleak backdrop to 'The Arrival in Flanders' is given a context. Unlike the civilized life gestured towards in the introductory photographs, these, stark and bare, reveal a landscape grotesquely misshapen and ill-used. Now, the village, a windmill, the main street, a significant church, are reduced to rubble and the trees, emblems as much as anything of a cultured landscape, are denuded, shattered and smashed. We, coming later, know the scene - it has become a part of our iconograph of the war - but to many in 1917 it would have been no such commonplace. And yet many would have tried, as I do now looking at the shot of Mouquet Farm, to people this scene; would have, if only in grief and with groping images of loss and death and human misery, imagined their loved-ones and friends into this carnage, humanising it.

Mouquet Farm . . .

Four jokes break the story but they do more than amuse; for, in the way that jokes often do, these foreground the human and the absurd, striving to make sense of the local and particular. In a dressing station, the Padre enquires of a wounded Australian: 'Are you an R.C., my lad?' To which the 'Hard case' replies, 'No, I'm a machine gunner.' In another, a Digger boasts that a shell attack reminds him of ''ome on a Saturday night'. And, in the next, an Anzac explains to a bemused officer, that 'We've cut [saluting] right out, [digger]'.

The narrative then shifts to winter on the Somme and the ambiguities increase. The captions – 'The First Immense Alleviation: Tramways', 'A Second Alleviation: The Duckboards', 'A First Improvement in Trenches: A Dry Trench in the Front Line' – assert the gradual domination of the human over nature, but the subtext, carried in the countenances of the worn troops, in the ever-present reality of the mud sucking at the extremities of animate and inanimate objects alike, and ugly landscape shots, suggests the tenuousness of human existence in this chaos, and the absurdity of its endeavours. What, we might ask, is the point of holding Flers?

Flers: Held by the Australians all Winter

Indeed, nature seems to have turned against the soldier. In 'Martinpuich', we see again why this may be: ragged troops in a semblance of community, huddle around the accoutrements of 'civilization' - battered guns, food wagons, and rubbish - while, stretching to the horizon and dwarfing the troops, is a landscape humanly devastated, as though ravaged by bush fire.

Martinpuich

And so the story proceeds, with the inevitability of war and certain kinds of narrative, to the sacking of Bapaume and the evocative photograph of the band playing in the town on the day of its capture. The band seems to emerge from the smoke: it is as if it is playing its way out of hell, rather than celebrating victory.

A Band Playing in Bapaume

I am suggesting that this photograph, like 'Martinpuich' and 'Flers', to name only two others, becomes ambiguous in a way that was not intended: what is being celebrated here?

The progress of the photos - Pozières, Bapaume, the celebrated destruction of Messines which left the landscape convulsed, Hill 60 - and digressions into jokes, which nevertheless work on the un-natural situation of war, is towards Ypres, ancient Belgian city and site of numerous sackings over the previous six or seven centuries. In this war Ypres was the scene of three titanic battles which left the city devastated and, once again, if we 'read' these photographs against the grain, the lead-up to the series which expose the ruins of Ypres becomes an essay on the futility of it all. There are photographs of a howitzer in action 'beyond Ypres', a close-up of a siege battery, and another erie shot of men working the guns in their gas masks: and we are expected to gasp at the destruction of the Cloth Hall? The photographic narrative, essentially descriptive, once more denies the celebration of victory and lurches towards the absurd as, for five pages, we ponder, in a way not intended by the book, the effect of this most human war on traditional civilised society as it is symbolised by Ypres and the Cloth Hall. The camera seems mesmerised by the destruction of the Cloth Hall - is it revolted by it or marvelling at the destruction? - returning to it, like a finger to an annoying scab, until it halts on a man-made crater 75 yards in circumference in the centre of the town.

## A Big Crater

'A Big Crater' is a beautifully structured photograph but, like the tiny human gazing into the pool, there is something Narcissus-like about it. Or is it that, like the figure reflected in the pool, the camera seems quite unquestioningly to dominate and accept the scene, valuing it for its formal potentiality and awesome destruction, which it proceeds to structure and compose into a picture? Either way, we are not asked to read it with the irony that I am implying, gesturing towards responsibility and questions of morality. And yet these ironies are a part of the deeper structure of the photograph which the surface thrust may hide.

The men and the crater, however, are inseparable; for, as the photograph reveals, the crater is theirs, they stand above it and claim it, as some explorer might a rich discovery. Their awe and fascination is at the awesome power of the human - theirs - to destroy. The camera simply records the devastation, it does not judge it. I am suggesting, of course, that in its entirety, the photograph is about more than 'surroundings'.

Fittingly, the last photograph tells of the human cost, 'Wounded Awaiting Ambulance Transport', as the men straggle out of the photo and only a few, lying on stretchers or helping a shattered mate, look bewilderedly back at the camera. With a poignant irony this last photograph leads back, like some grotesque romantic lyric, to the two that began the visual narrative: to the exuberant innocence of any army seemingly immune to what the denuded landscape was telling.

Wounded Awaiting Ambulance Transport

I have 'read' the photographs ironically, seeing them as a layered record, ambiguous and ambivalent in their commentary, rather than as a one-dimensional record, a mono-lingual description of the Australians at the Front. Such ironies and ambiguities were not however lost on Will Dyson, two of whose 'war drawings' were included in *From the Australian Front.* His 'Cook' introduces the collection and was there perhaps because the figure is so quintessentially and mythically Australian: rough and ready, untidy, smoking his pipe and standing on no ceremony. But this figure has turned his back on the war, not to deny it, we sense, nor out of cowardice - indeed he looms large in the doorway, commanding, in an unheroic way - but out of a complex knowledge, barely glimpsed elsewhere in the book, that for the time-being his war-work was contained in the cookhouse. Of the A.I.F. cook, Dyson wrote:

> He often has, or had, a son or two in the line who probably left Australia criminally young to prove themselves men as the old man left to prove himself one of the boys. And in moments of depression, to which he is liable, he is full of mutinous threats of his intention to get back in the line again where the men are . . .[3]

Cook

He was someone to attach stories to and is, in a way that the war-photographer may want to deny, enigmatic; is more than he seems. The other drawing, 'One of the Old Platoon', placed towards the end of the selection, speaks quietly of loss and sorrows. A weary digger leans over a mate's rough grave and peers at the wooden cross, checking his name. It is one of those still moments. The hardened digger - he has with him all the accoutrements of the warrior - is gentled and pays silent tribute before, the expansive background seems to suggest, he re-enters the fray. In bold drawings there is a compassion and an understanding of the complex ironies of circumstance that the camera does not acknowledge. The absences and ironies drawn on to read the photographs, then, are external and are brought to them as an element of my reading, having to do with attitude and, of course, with passing of time. They are encoded in the photographs but, at the time they were taken, they were not integral to their meaning. In Dyson's drawings these ironies are implicit, form the texture of the work, and without an understanding of them the works are misread.

One of the Old Platoon

In one of these nice coincidences of life, while Australians were taking in the camera's-eye view of their men at the Front, Dyson, who had progressed through France with the Australians in 1916–1917, was showing sixty-five of his war-drawings at Leicester Gardens in London.[4] Some few in London may have seen both these drawings and the photographs and to have done so, as I have hinted at here, may have provided a disquieting, ambiguous and complex insight into the war and may have led such 'readers' to fill in the gaps and silences of the photographs, humanising the 'surroundings', and reaching to a more authentic picture of the Australians at war at the Front.

1. *From the Australian Front*, London: Cassell, 1917.
2. Late in the book, a sombre group of German prisoners, their helmets firmly on their heads, provide a counterpoint to this photo, while consolidating the narrative.
3. Will Dyson, *Australians at War*, London: Palmer and Hayward, 1918.
4. Twenty of these drawings were collected into *Australians at War*. Dyson was a close companion and friends with the official photographers at the Front, Frank Hurley and George Wilkins.

HANK NELSON

# Turning North

*Australians in Southeast Asia in World War 2*

In February 1941 over 5,000 soldiers and nurses of the Australian 8th Division boarded the *Queen Mary* in Sydney Harbour. The old *Queen* was well known to them as part of British grandeur and sea power. For security reasons the men were not told their destination, but when they left their training camps near Bathurst they assumed they were on their way to the Middle East, the battlefields of the 1st, and now, the 2nd AIF. On the troop trains that carried them through the Blue Mountains the men chalked slogans: Berlin or Bust, Look Out Adolf Here We Come.[1]

The *Queen Mary*, other transports and the escort sailed to Fremantle, then headed north-west across the Indian Ocean, following what had become the traditional route of Australian fighting men going to war. Four days out of Fremantle the *Queen Mary* gave five siren blasts and circled to the rear of the convoy. The other transports formed line ahead, and the *Queen*, travelling close to thirty knots, raced past. Massed bands of three battalions played on the deck, troops cheered, cooeed and sang. By some trick of acoustics, the men of the 8th Division could still hear the singing of the Middle East reinforcements after their ships had disappeared.

In that dramatic change of course what was known to the senior officers was confirmed for everyone: the 8th Division was on its way to Singapore and Malaya. The *Queen Mary* ran at speed, unescorted, to the Naval Dock Singapore.

Many of the men were to recall that manoeuvre at sea as 'one of the memorable events' of their five years overseas. An officer wrote in a letter to his family, 'my skin suddenly went prickly with pride . . . it was an exhibition of what mastery of the seas really means'. These were men and women nurtured on tales of Empire. They went to school when Empire Day was one of the two great celebratory days in the school calendar, and most believed, in spite of the evidence they could read in the newspapers, that Brittania still ruled the waves.[2]

The manoeuvre of liners and men on the Indian Ocean was indeed significant, but not for the reasons the observers thought. It marked Australia's first commitment of a substantial force to Southeast Asia and was a demonstration of the slow changes taking place in what Australians thought was their place in the world. But at the time, the adventurous and ambitious on the *Queen Mary* were looking for ways to transfer to units in the 'real war' in the Middle East and North Africa.

## I

By the end of 1941 there were 15 000 Australian troops in Malaya and nearly 3 000 in Java, with 1 300 in Timor, 1 100 in Ambon, 1 400 in Rabaul and 1 500 in Papua. In the arc of islands from New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, and the Solomon Islands, to the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea were stationed small numbers of the Independent Companies. 24 000 Australian men and 150 women of the Australian Army Nursing Service were 'up north'.

Most Australian units were regionally based. The 2/21st battalion, for example, was from

Victoria and the Riverina. In August 1940 the men began training near Seymour in central Victoria, and soon marched to another camp at Bonegilla in the northeast of the State. After six months training and frequent swims in the Hume Weir, the battalion crowded into trains which took it south to Melbourne and west to South Australia. At various towns – Horsham, Dimboola and Nhill – the men were hailed, fed sandwiches, cakes and tea, and farewelled.

In Adelaide they camped at Wayville show-grounds. Sergeant Ray Brown wrote in his diary that he was pleased to see where 'the celebrated Wayville night trots were held'. Back on the train the troops went north to Terowie where they 'ate red dust, slept in red dust and bathed in red dust'. Transferred to the old Ghan train, they had three days in dog boxes before they unloaded at Alice Springs and camped in tents at the sportsground. The battalion band swung into 'Rose Marie' and began a concert for the local people, perhaps the first time a brass band had played in the Centre. They left Alice Springs in a convoy of trucks, the first Australian unit to take the Track. Much of the road was unmade, and as it was the end of the wet, they were held up by mud and washouts. At Daly Waters the troops made their own sandbag causeway. At Mataranka, blitzed by mosquitoes, they were loaded into tarpaulin-covered cattle trucks on the railway celebrated just three years earlier in Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*. At their camp at Winnellie outside Darwin, just 'scrub and more scrub', they began a further nine months of training by building an army camp.

Six days after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and Malaya, the 2/21st battalion and attached troops, now known as Gull Force, boarded three Dutch packets for Ambon. The 600 mile voyage was one quarter the distance they had already travelled in Australia on their road to war. After sixteen months' training at home and five weeks on Ambon, they went into action.[3]

The 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion was formed in mid-1940 with separate companies in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. The battalion came together in camp near Adelaide in October 1941. By February 1942 – having fought the Vichy French in Syria, served as part of the army of occupation and celebrated Christmas in the snow – they were back at the Suez Canal, part of the recall by the Australian government of the major Australian fighting forces in the Middle East and North Africa. Most of the men sailed on the *Orcades* and many thought they were on their way home, as did the stowaway Bob Wallace found hiding in the hold. On 15 February, the day the British surrendered in Singapore, the *Orcades* called at southern Sumatra, and on 18 February the men disembarked at Tanjong Priok, the port for Batavia. The 2/3rd Machine Gunners had been overseas for ten months when they arrived in Java and became part of Blackforce.[4]

The 2/40th Battalion that went to Timor was a Tasmanian unit. The 2/22nd that went to Rabaul was Victorian. Of its bandsmen, who enlisted as a group from the Salvation Army, one survived. Ten men of the Mildura pipe band enlisted together and became the band of the 4th Anti-Tank in Malaya.[5]

## II

Since walking from the streets into the recruiting centres, the men of the units that sailed overseas had been imbued with the belief that the traditions established by the first AIF were to be honoured and emulated, in and out of action. Although their units might differ significantly in experience and origin, Australian soldiers abroad were no longer ordinary Australians.

Some units and reinforcements went into battle immediately on arrival. Edgar Wilkie was one of three thousand men from the *Aquitania* convoy to land in Singapore on 24 January 1942. He spent early January in Melbourne and Sydney and left Fremantle on the 15th. He was not in the 'Hell of a mob [that] broke ship and went ashore'. He landed in Singapore under air raid alerts, bombs fell around him a couple of days later, and in a fortnight he was a prisoner.

The latecomers had time only for that first response to the alien: the pungent smell of sweat and decay, the sounds of different

languages, the sight of the first coconut husk in the water and then the variations in dress of Sikhs, Tamils, Chinese, Malays, British Tommies, British army officers and colonial officials. Private John Waterford saw junks 'remembered from pictures in our childhood'. The eighteen-year old Frank Robinson wrote that the 'sailors . . . were Lascars, big and black . . . men I had read about but never dreamed I would ever see and they saw me . . . when one gave a sign of rocking a baby in his arms, I shouted "Get stuffed", and wandered away from their laughing eyes.' Within a few days Robinson had survived an aerial attack, fought in battle, been captured as a member of a defeated army, and made a futile escape attempt by small boat.[6]

Several thousand Australians saw the near north through months of garrison duties. On their last days at sea the advance brigade of the 8th Division on the *Queen Mary* was lectured on Malaya. The most memorable information was about malaria and the 'staggering figures on the incidence of V.D.' One soldier wrote that the final warning as they packed their kit was: 'Beware of mosquitoes and women'. They were also instructed on the importance of showing respect to the local inhabitants. As the *Queen Mary* glided towards the dock a spotless cream police launch manned by Malays pulled alongside. 'Hey, there, you black bastards!', called a digger from the porthole of the *Queen*.

When troop transports approached wharves in Asia and the Pacific, diggers threw coins so that 'natives' would dive and scramble for them. Old tricks were played: pennies were heated with cigarette lighters and dropped on the wharf; worthless scraps of metal were wrapped in silver paper. All of this was a repetition of what the 1st AIF had done in Colombo and elsewhere. Many of the diggers were raucous and racist, but as the *Queen Mary* came to rest at Naval Dock the diggers began throwing their pennies among the pips, braid, solar topees and voluminous shorts of the British dignitaries. At least the Australians' larrikinism and ill-disciplined irreverence was democratic.[7]

III

The Australians' belief in their own superiority was modified by egalitarianism and by a naive desire for the rest of the world to like them. There was much that they found repugnant in race relations in their neighboring lands. They thought many of the Dutch and English colonists arrogant and effete. They were often repelled by the way the *tuan* gave orders and presumed privilege. Flight Lieutenant Roy Bulcock said that his first impression of the RAF base at Seletar was of 'a vast country club . . . and this impression never changed'. The welcome the Australians received was 'cold'. For their part, the Australians made clear

that they were not in Malaya as guardians of the wealthy and would not act as strikebreakers against plantation labourers. General Wavell's exhortation to the troops on Singapore may have been misplaced. His order of the day stated: 'I look to you and your men to fight to the end to prove that the fighting spirit that won our Empire still exists to enable us to defend it.' Eugene Sullivan said, 'As far as the Aussies were concerned it was "bugger the bloody British Empire".'[8]

Most Australians were proud of their membership of the empire, but they did not like empires of privilege, particularly when the lords of empire classified Australians with the lesser breeds. There is irony in an Australian officer's letter home from Malaya: 'Talk about the Outposts of the Empiah and all that, by God, it's simplay too shattering'. And in the same paragraph: 'My Chinese boy Foo Che Hang neglected me this morning so I abused him all round the room and scared hell out of him.'

When the Australians became prisoners in Changi some of their guards were Indians, ex-members of the surrendered British regiments. An Indian soldier might take out years of humiliation by punishing prisoners for sloppy dress or failure to salute with military precision. The Australians on the receiving end of an Indian slap or an instruction to stand at attention for half an hour at the guardhouse resented suffering for what they thought of as British sins. The Indians did not see the distinction. The Australians had an ever keener sense of injustice when the sins of Dutchmen and Frenchmen were visited upon them.

Troops in the Australian Territories also showed a dual attitude. They angered the old white *mastas* by carrying their own gear from troopships, digging trenches stripped to the waist, and disregarding conventions which separated the races at picture shows. The Routine Orders for 2/22nd Battalion in Rabaul in November 1941 indicate what had been going on:

> The best results are obtained from natives when respect is demanded of them, and familiarity is discouraged. To achieve good results, therefore, troops will *NOT* allow natives to address them by christian names. Sex will not be discussed with natives.

Other orders were issued to stop troops giving away food and offering rides on trucks. But the troops were also keen to employ New Guineans for 'hygiene and sanitation' work. In 1943, when demand for Papua New Guinean labourers was high, the Australian District Officer at Milne Bay reported that there were forty-four men working in the officers' club and another thirty were personal servants to Americans. Camp life in Papua New Guinea was certainly different from Liverpool or Puckapunyal.[9]

IV

The Australian soldiers were enterprising tourists and relentless souvenir hunters. As far as I know the largest souvenir brought back on a troopship from Malaya was a piano taken by Happy Harry Smith. It rests in the Prisoner of War Association rooms in Sydney. On 9 November 1941 Gunner Frank Christie left Mersing for leave in Singapore. He arrived just after midday, took a launch around the harbour, went to a Chinese temple 'where they were praying', visited the gardens, had a look at an Indian temple 'where fire walking went on', and then he was off to 'the Happy and New Worlds'.[10]

After ten months in Malaya Adrian Curlewis wrote, 'I am *of* this country. No longer are the natives acting for my benefit; the shops are not background to the scenery.' Malaya had become familiar and ordinary. When I asked sergeant Don Moore about meeting local people he immediately sang a Malay folk song remembered after forty years. He explained that he had become friendly with a family, had been to a wedding and joined other communal activities. Malay words – padang, makan and leggi – entered the diggers' vocabulary. The magazine of the 4th Anti-Tank Battalion continues to be distributed under the name *Tid Apa*.

But diaries are more likely to show Australians recreating Australia in Malaya. Gunner Christie's diary records battalion football scores, his wins and losses at cards,

Melbourne Cup results, his receiving of the *Sporting Globe*, *Bulletin* and *Australasian*, and events such as those of 1 November 1941: '2 feeds of steak and eggs at Cabaret get full. [Two diggers] break street lights, a good night.' The shopkeepers with their signs for fish and chips and steak and eggs and the children with their universal greeting, hello Joe, were quicker to adapt than many of the AIF.

IV

Most of the Australians who fought the first battles against the Japanese had been trained and equipped for warfare in the open country of the Middle East, and they went into action wearing khaki. When they met the liberating troops in August and September 1945 they stared at alien creatures with beefy arms, fat faces and unfamiliar dark green uniforms. The men of the 8th Division were proud that they trained in the rubber and the jungle and made themselves familiar with Johore and Malacca, the areas allocated to them for defence. They contrasted themselves with what they believed was the barracks' attitude of the British and could claim to have inflicted the only significant defeats on the Japanese at Gemas and Muar. Despite this, and expecting the 2/2 Independent Company on Timor, the Australians who first met the advancing Japanese were unable to exploit the land. Close to home, they had no home ground advantage.

At Rabaul the Australians went into battle on land administered by Australia for twenty-eight years. Although the main troops had been in the area for ten months, and the Australian senior officers knew that the Japanese would have an overwhelming force, the Australians had no plans to withdraw and use harassing tactics. They had no reserve store dumps, no training in living off the land, and little knowledge of the basic geography of New Britain. Within a few hours of the Japanese invasion the Australians were forced to retreat into unknown country. In a week many were suffering from malnutrition, malaria and dysentery. An Australian government officer, J. K. McCarthy, found troops scattered along the west coast 'bitterly awaiting death or capture'. One group, 'pitifully weak', pleaded for food. They were in fact camped in an old village food garden, and one of McCarthy's New Guineans immediately dug up and cooked tapioca roots for them. In the first two months after the attack on Rabaul more Australians of Lark Force were killed by the environment than by the Japanese.[11]

By 1945 the diggers thought of themselves as great jungle fighters. Expertise in jungle warfare was something which Australians could apply and trade in other parts of the world. Australian troops now wore jungle green on exercises in arid Australia. Australians learnt quickly about the land to the north, slowly about the people.

V

Soldiers going to war fear death and disfiguring wounds, and they fear being found to be cowards by their companions in arms. They also allow themselves the fantasy of excelling and returning as heroes. They rarely think about surrender and imprisonment. Most prisoners record a numbed incredulity as their first response to captivity. 'SURRENDER, CAPITULATE . . . a terrible show', wrote Gunner Christie. The incredulity of the 22 000 Australians captured in Southeast Asia was heightened by their presumption of racial and military superiority and by the size of the surrendering forces. One prisoner recalled looking back from the top of a rise on the march into Changi and seeing apparently endless columns of men trudging into captivity.[12]

Like all prisoners the Australians looked for explanations which absolved them of shame and blame. The Dutch and English were targets for much of the Australian anger and resentment, feelings which grew as the humiliation and suffering of the prisoners increased. The postwar hostility of the ex-prisoners to the British and Dutch as rulers of empire may well be stronger than their attitudes before the surrender.

Both Australians and Japanese were intensely conscious of differences in race. In wartime the enemy is often dehumanised and stereotyped. Sometimes Japanese soldiers threw cigarette butts or scraps of food to

starving prisoners. The men learnt that if they pushed and yelled the Japanese might be induced to scatter more crumbs. But in putting on a good show the prisoners were confirming the Japanese view of them as crude creatures, lacking those rules of behavior that distinguished people from animals. The prisoners who scrambled for food were the same men who threw pennies on the wharf. Some Australians could never join the mob jostling for scraps, and abused those who did.[13]

The war brought out all the learnt prejudices of the Australians about the yellow peril and the rapacious, cunning, brutal orientals. The early atrocities in which surrendered men and women were wantonly slaughtered turned prejudice into loathing. Knowledge of atrocities spread with surprising speed among the troops. In July 1942 at Changi, Adrian Curlewis noted in his diary that Australian nurses had been shot on Banka Island off Sumatra. He had the numbers right. The incident had not been reported in newspapers, and was not known in Australia. Soldiers who fought against both the Japanese and the Germans wanted to kill Japanese and they did it ruthlessly. We shot them like snakes, one said.

One appalling statistic which comes in part from that attitude is the number of Japanese who died on Australian territory. At the end of the war there were about 150 000 dead Japanese in Papua New Guinea. White Australians can believe they have a peaceful history because our perception of what is Australia stops at Torres Strait. In 1945 Australian government did not stop there.

VI

In three and a half years of imprisonment the Australians had fleeting contacts with many Southeast Asians. In their memories they rank the peoples. The Javanese and Malays were most likely to jeer at them and report escaping or straying prisoners to the guards.[14] Javanese on Sunda Strait attacked the survivors from the *Perth*, wounded some and killed at least one. The Burmese and Thais were often spontaneously generous to the prisoners. When a group of prisoners marched from Moulmein gaol to the railway station, said Arthur Bancroft, the Burmese cheered and 'showered cigarettes, food, clothing and money amongst us'. Sergeant Clarrie Thornton on a march north through Thailand found eggs placed in the river sand near where prisoners washed. It was a spontaneous act of generosity by people who knew nothing of them, and could not expect anything in return.[15] The prisoners give most praise to the Chinese, Ambonese, Timorese and some peoples of North Borneo. These were peoples who knowingly took risks to help the prisoners, and some of them were killed in the process. I have seen ex-prisoners of war drink a toast to the Chinese of Singapore.

There are heroes among the Southeast Asians unknown outside the ranks of the ex-prisoners. In his diary Sir Edward Dunlop refers to 'that magnificent man', Boon Pong Sirivejjabhandu, a merchant of Kanchanaburi, at the southern end of the Thai-Burma railway. He often supplied food, money and drugs such as emetine and morphia to the prisoners. At one stage he arranged for a barge load of 36 000 duck eggs to go up the river to the starving men in the work camps. He was awarded the George Medal.[16] The Funk brothers of Sandakan - Alexander, Johnny and Paddy - are also remembered. They were a part of a group outside the prison camp supplying radio parts, drugs and food. All were arrested and tortured, and one, Alexander, was executed with Captain Lionel Matthews and seven other local citizens.

The Fuzzy Wuzzy angel who came to the aid of the Australians when they were most in need became a generalized hero. By praising the loyal Papuans, Australians also confirmed their own worthiness, proclaiming that their years in Papua had earned them loyalty. It is easier to explain the Australians' eagerness to praise the Fuzzy Wuzzy than to account for the Papuans' many acts of compassion.

Some Ambonese made a hero of one Australian. A driver with the 2/21st Battalion, Pte Thomas William Doolan became friendly with a family living close to his tent at Kudamati in January 1942. Doolan and other base troops were suddenly in the front line when the Japanese approached from the

reverse of the expected direction. Doolan refused to retreat. He waited for the Japanese armed with hand grenades, a revolver and a rifle. His body was recovered by Australian prisoners, but by that time the Japanese had removed all their own dead. What had actually happened to Doolan is unknown. The Ambonese remembered Doolan's courageous, foolhardy defiance of the Japanese in a ballad and by regularly placing flowers on his grave.

There were a few Australians who through the extraordinary circumstances of war had close and sustained relationships with South-east Asians. Lieutenant Bill McCure was one of a small group of Australians who escaped capture on the Malay peninsula and linked up with the Chinese communist guerillas. He survived three years in jungle camps. Often the only white man with a guerilla unit, he lived on a bamboo platform; listened to crude, intense propaganda; watched men tried, tortured and having their hearts wrenched out and eaten; escaped raids by Japanese, Malays and Tamils; met the Sakai, the shy hunters of the Malay jungles; was treated as an inferior and a prisoner by some Chinese and had times of quiet friendship with others. Eight Australians escaped from North Borneo to live with peoples in the Sulu Archipelago and then on Mindanao. On Tawitawi they had their own 'stable' of fighting cocks.[17]

VII

At the end of the war liberated prisoners emerged into transformed communities. Old empires which had seemed so powerful in 1941 were under attack and new national forces had been unleashed. The turmoil embroiled prisoners from Manchuria to Hainan, French Indochina, Malaya and Java. Attacked by a knife-wielding Vietnamese in Saigon, Corporal Stan Gilchrist pointed to his sunburnt arms and yelled, 'La Prisonaire'. His attacker either recognised the word or appreciated the fact that no superior colonial officer or settler would have spent long periods in the sun. Thailand, Singapore and Japan were the least violent places to be. From soldiers' testimony and from statistics we learn of another aspect of prisoners' relationships with women. The rate of venereal infection rose sharply, especially in Thailand. One factor causing the men to act with careless enthusiasm was the rapid spread of the rumour that a new drug called penicillin was a simple cure for VD.

The stationing of American forces in Australia from 1942 to 1945 resulted in a trans-Pacific migration of 12 000 Australian women. It was a significant counter in Australia to another demographic consequence of war: the deaths of marriageable young men. Australians who went to the First World War brought back English and French wives. Some of the brides went to a land fit for heroes, and to a dust floor and hessian walls on a soldier settlement block. In the Second World War the Australians who trained in Canada and fought in Europe brought back wives from two continents. Australians serving in the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan brought home Asian wives. The Australians who went to work in Papua New Guinea after

the war married local women and returned to Australia with them. Earlier, Australians had not formally married Papua New Guineans or even formally registered their relationships. Nor were Australian soldiers returning in 1945 followed by boatloads of wives from Asian and Melanesia. We can only speculate on the impact such wives may have had on Australian society.

VIII

Of the 22 000 Australians who made that first mass movement to the north and were captured, 14 000 returned. The horror of their experiences dominated both the soldiers' memories and the perceptions of others. Anger against the Japanese was the most obvious response of Australians. The men and women of the 8th Division encountered Asia as no other Australians had or will. They had gone as garrison troops of Empire; they had seen the behaviour of the *tuan* and *mastas*, and sometimes they had acted just like them; they had suffered humiliation, menial labour and extreme deprivation; and they had witnessed postwar revolutionary fervor. In interviews many reveal a sympathetic perceptiveness about the urban and rural peoples of Southeast Asia. At particular times something of their concern emerges - as it did in 1975 when ex-servicemen expressed their interest in the welfare of the Timorese at the time of the Indonesian invasion.

When the Australians were retreating down the Malay Peninsula in January 1942, men cut-off and captured by the Japanese were imprisoned within the high grey walls of Pudu gaol, Kuala Lumpur. Aged ex-prisoners of war now travelling to old battle and camp sites sometimes wander in the street in the shadow of the wall and watch-towers. They know that inside there are accused drug smugglers. Among them are the other Australians who have met Asians as equals in poverty, impotence and chance of execution.

1. The official histories, especially Lionel Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust*, Series 1, Vol IV, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, Australian War Memorial (AWM), Canberra, 1957, provide basic information. Gilbert Mant, *You'll Be Sorry*, Frank Johnson, Sydney, 1944, writes of the slogans on the trains.
2. Mant and others describe the manoeuvre at sea: Philippa Poole, *Of Love and War: The Letters and Diaries of Captain Adrian Curlewis and his family 1939-1945*, Lansdowne Press, Sydney, 1982; various unit histories, e.g. *The Grim Glory of the 2/19 Battalion A.I.F.*, 2/19 Battalion A.I.F. Association, Sydney, 1975; and Don Wall, *Singapore and Beyond: The Story of the Men of the 2/20 Battalion Told by the Survivors*, 2/20 Battalion Association, Sydney, 1985. Ex-servicemen and women spoke of the voyage on the *Queen Mary* in interviews recorded for the radio series and book *POW: Australians Under Nippon*, ABC, Sydney, 1985. The tapes are lodged in the AWM.
3. Ray Brown, Bill Cook, Roy Harris and Courteney Harrison were the main informants on the origins and travels of the 2/21st Battalion. The Battalion diary of the 2/21st (and of other battalions to a few weeks before capture) is in the AWM.
4. John Bellair wrote the history of the 2/3rd Machine Gunners, *From Snow to Jungle*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987. Bob Wallace was interviewed, and his diary is in the AWM.
5. The fate of the 2/22 Battalion is recorded in Douglas Aplin, *Rabaul 1942*, 2/22nd Battalion Association A.I.F. and Lark Force Association, Melbourne, 1980. Mick Irwin, comp., *Kicking with the Wind*, Mick Irwin, Mildura, 1984, has an account of the enlistment of the Mildura pipe band.
6. William Wilkie, *All of 28, and More: The Diary of Edgar Wilkie*, privately published, Brisbane, 1987; Frank Robinson and E. R. Hall, *Through Hell and Bomb Blast*, privately published, 1982; and John Waterford, *Footprints*, privately published, ?1983, record early impressions of Southeast Asia.
7. Mant wrote about the lectures on Malaya, the 2/19 history has the story of the black bastards, and the 2/20 history records the pennies falling among the British officers.
8. Roy Bulcock, *Of Death But Once*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1947, was coldly received at Seletar. Patricia Shaw, *Brother Digger: The Sullivans' 2nd AIF*, Greenhouse, 1984, gives Eugene Sullivan's opinion of Wavell's order.
9. The routine orders of the 2/22nd Battalion are with the Battalion war diary in the AWM. The District Officer's comments on the use of Papuan labourers is from the AWM. file 'Utilization of Native Labour', 506/5/1.
10. Gunner Christie's diary exists in typed, roneoed form in the AWM.
11. J. K. McCarthy, *Patrol into Yesterday: My New Guinea Years*, Cheshire, 1963, writes about meeting the survivors of Lark Force.
12. Don Moore, interview, looking back at the columns of marching men.
13. Colin Finkemeyer, *Little Food for Thought*, typescript

of reminiscences, is one who writes about scrambling for Japanese cigarettes and food.

14. Jessie Simons, *While History Passed: the story of the Australian nurses who were prisoners of the Japanese for three and a half years*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1954, says that when the nurses were jeered in Sumatra they returned the abuse.
15. Clarrie Thornton was interviewed. A. Bancroft and R. G. Roberts, *The Mikado Guests*, Patersons, Perth, ?1945, note the generosity of the Burmese.
16. E. E. Dunlop, *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop: Java and Burma-Thailand Railway 1942-1945*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1986, has a footnote to Boon Pong, p. 298. He is mentioned cryptically elsewhere.
17. Bill McCure kept a diary which he referred to in an interview. Rex Blow and Ray Steele, escapers from Borneo, were interviewed. Blow's handwritten reminiscences are in the AWM. Stan Gilchrist's diary is also in the AWM.

# Vietnam Revisited

GREG LOCKHART

Soldiers are not necessarily murderers. But, if the pilgrimages which old soldiers often make to former battle fields are any indication, many seem to have a compulsion to return to the scene of the crime.

There could be many reasons for this: curiosity about some powerful moment when the world went mad, nostalgia for a lost utopia, an atavistic impulse to commune with the dead. The group of American veterans I happened to be with on the same flight from Bangkok to Hanoi in January were returning to Vietnam for therapeutic reasons. Apparently, their analysts had told them that a return to the battle fields where they had been traumatised could be beneficial. I don't know who was more deranged, the veterans or their analysts. I never heard the results of the therapy. But probably like those American veterans, I returned to Vietnam because I wanted to see what had happened there.

During the war I had already been in a position to see the Australian commitment come to nothing. I was an Australian Army Training Team adviser with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in Phuoc Tuy Province. My task was to train hopelessly inefficient ARVN units not long after the Australian combat Task Force had been withdrawn from the area. In late 1972, an ambush, in which local village guerrillas tried to blow me and two others up half a mile from where the Task Force had operated for seven years, was a clear sign of something our commitment had failed to come to grips with. This was the People's Army of Vietnam. It left me with many unanswered questions that I would return to later.

After the war other events occurred which meant that I maintained a strong interest in Vietnam. I married a Vietnamese girl who came to study in Australia before the fall of Saigon. After 1975 her family disintegrated. She was not permitted to visit her father before he died, and she came to believe that the way of life she knew in Vietnam had disappeared forever. In the meantime, I began to write a book about the People's Army.

I built on some Vietnamese I had picked up in the Army, and carried out research in the French military archives in Paris. An attempt to carry out research in Vietnam failed in 1980 when, at the time of the Sino-Vietnamese War, the Vietnamese authorities left my visa application unanswered. But then, years later in 1988, an unexpected invitation for me to work at Hanoi University came while I was working at the Australian National University.

By this time my book was finished. However, I was now interested in Vietnamese literature and the urge to revisit Vietnam was still strong. The invitation I had received also reflected Vietnam's new policy of opening up to the West, and so I accepted it with interesting consequences for both my wife and me.

My flight to Hanoi with the American veterans landed late on a wintry afternoon. After my passport was stamped I retrieved my luggage from a treadmill with creaking rollers and eventually emerged from a chaotic customs area. I walked out through the main exit into a sea of expectant faces wreathed in dirty balaclavas. They swayed in the gloom, exhaling plumes of frosty breath. On my car ride into

the city along a narrow road built up between the fields, dense bicycle traffic was interspersed with ox-carts and battered trucks. Conical hats, buffaloes up to their fetlocks in mud, sheets of water, and poor dwellings formed fleeting images in the watery mists that rose from the Red River Delta.

Once over the Long Bien bridge, I entered the city by evening; a misty netherworld of low buildings, unlit streets, and cold silver lakes. In the heart of Hanoi, thousands of tiny flames from kerosene lamps danced in a ring of darkness around the faintly glistening surface of Ho Hoan Kiem, the lake opposite the post office. By day, tree lined boulevards, faded French colonial buildings, temples, parks, and flowers come into view. Once you get to know it, the ancient quarter north of Ho Hoan Kiem also envelopes you in the activity and endless colour and variety of its ancient streets. But nothing, not even the time I had formerly spent in Saigon, had prepared me for Hanoi.

Living conditions here were harder than those I had experienced during the war. In those days, we lived in pre-fabricated compounds with bars and barbecues at the end of a luxurious Australian-American logistics system.

This time, I moved into a four-storey dormitory for foreigners at the University. It must have been old before it was built in the 1960s. Its cracked walls were stained and discoloured. Except when it rained, the smell of seeping sewerage was generalised. Electricity and water supplies were unreliable, washing facilities were primitive, and, at night, mosquitoes came in swarms. Like almost every other kitchen and toilet in the city, those at the dormitory were riddled with rats.

Probably because I always boiled my water on a small Russian stove, I didn't get sick. I usually bought my food at the market or ate at local street stalls for under a dollar a day; bananas or mangos for breakfast, a small plate of fried noodles and beef for lunch, a bowl of chicken soup for dinner. Generous hospitality at the Australian Embassy and the openness of the Russian construction workers' canteen near the university allowed me from time to time to eat food that helped to keep up my calorie count. But even though I ate more than the vast majority of Vietnamese, I still lost eight kilos.

This was a common experience among the international community of about forty people who lived in the dormitory and studied Vietnamese as well as other subjects. We were Mongolian, Irish, Thai, Cambodian, French, East German, Australian, Japanese, American, South Yemen, English, Dutch, and Russian. One East German girl, who was studying Vietnamese music, shed 20 kilos. Nevertheless, there was the unusual case of the young man from South Yemen who was studying Vietnamese. Despite both Hanoi and Ramadan, he somehow managed to maintain his huge stomach.

My language and literary studies meant hours of lectures each week, mainly from a sensitive teacher with a vast knowledge of Vietnamese poetry. As my Vietnamese improved I was able to make free contacts in the literary world. Surveillance of foreigners ended with the push towards democratisation and modernisation which was inaugurated with the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party in 1986.

I was asked to give a talk at the Institute of Literature on what I thought about the contemporary writer Nguyen Huy Thiep. I was invited to participate in a celebration for the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the poet Tan Da. With the TV video of Colleen McCulloch's novel, *The Thorn Birds*, taking Hanoi by storm, a wave of interest in things Australian resulted in further invitations to lecture on Australian history. I was rarely asked about the war.

I found that the Vietnamese no longer attribute their poverty to the French colonialists and American interventionists. It is more fashionable to criticise the conservatism of the government and the self interest of what the writer Duong Thu Huong calls 'big men in little provinces'. However, while feudal practices and bureaucratic inertia are helping to keep the country in a time warp, it is still not easy to forget about the war.

There are thousands of unemployed and underemployed veterans in the city. Fragments of fallen B52 bombers are conspicuous in Lenin

Park. Anti-aircraft guns and radar vans stand abandoned in the grass. The ruins of the town at Dong Dang, which I saw on a trip to the Chinese border, are a reminder that the thirty year war against the French and Americans was followed by wars with China and Kampuchea until well into the 1980s.

Since 1986, the Communist Party's policy of modernisation and democratisation has not improved the standard of living of most people, who do not have enough to eat. Nor has it improved public health services in a city where one doctor told me sixty people died of rabies in January. Yet, it is also worth remembering that during the century of colonialism and war before 1986, Vietnam had almost no opportunity to modernise.

Many are hoping that the withdrawal from Cambodia and the normalisation of relations with America will help to change this situation. There seemed to be no concern among intellectuals I spoke to about Tiananmen Square that the recent events in China, or in the socialist world generally, would impact adversely on Vietnam's quest for modernisation. Nevertheless, recent reports that the Vietnamese government intends to postpone academic exchanges that have been planned with Western countries do suggest that policy revision is possible.

One of the most noticeable changes since 1986 has been the ability to move freely around the country. The Chinese border area was relaxed, with Chinese business people and tourists in the markets. These sold everything from packs of playing cards with sexy pictures to Honda motor cycles. I saw the major dam construction site in the magnificent river valley at Hoa Binh. In March, the Red River Delta's last rice crop looked healthy, although later typhoons flooded parts of it before the harvest. On a Buddhist festival day I went with tens of thousands of others to the Perfume Pagoda in the beautiful river and towering limestone mountain country to the west of Hanoi.

Then, after receiving reports from me, my wife finally decided to visit her native land.

For the first time in fourteen years she returned to Go Cong, her home village in the Mekong Delta. She visited her father's tomb. She renewed a number of friendships in Saigon and felt at home in a city she didn't think had changed fundamentally. In the southern highlands town of Dalat we stayed in a vast, run-down hotel built by the French in the 1920s. We opened the windows at dawn on the first morning and looked out across pine trees and a lake to the distant bell-tower of the Lycee Yersin where she had gone to school.

Because of the war she had never visited Hanoi and Hue before. In Hanoi she had some clothes made in Hang Gai Street from local raw silk, saw a water puppet performance, and rode to Dong Xuan market on a bicycle. We visited the village of Bat Trang which has been famous for its porcelain products for six hundred years. On a four day excursion out of Hanoi we visited a national park on Cat Ba Island. To get to the island we caught a boat in Hai Phong and sailed for several hours through Ha Long Bay. Thousands of limestone peaks jut out of the water, creating an atmosphere of such awesome beauty that they dominate one of the most breathtaking seascapes in the world.

We travelled with another Australian friend to Hue, the old imperial capital on the Perfume River. We visited the well-maintained palace complex where the last emperor, Bao Dai, abdicated in 1945, and also the tombs of his forefathers dating back to the 1840s. With their lotus ponds and gardens the royal tombs sit gently in the landscape and are close enough to the people for naked boys to swim in the moats. Except possibly for the emperor Khai Dinh's tomb which was built in the 1920s and has an irresistible kitsch facade, Hue's monuments are contained by graceful curves that harmonize with the landscape of hills and trees and water.

Tu Hieu pagoda nestles in a stand of trees about twenty minutes out of Hue. As we approached the entrance along a winding path we heard the chanting of a sutra and the clack of a hollow wooden instrument tapped at rhythmical intervals. We drank tea with the monks, who wanted to talk about the BBC programs they tune into. They also spoke of their mission to nourish Vietnamese culture, which they seemed to be doing very well. That night we listened to a classical orchestra and

songs from old Hue in a sampan on the Perfume River. The sampan sat low in the water and rocked us back gently a thousand years as the starlight dissolved in the current.

Such rewards for travelling in Vietnam are not free of discomfort and frustration. There was always uncertainty over bookings. Roads are especially bad in the north, hotels are inefficient and overpriced, and multiple rates exist: official rates, black market rates, rates for foreigners, rates for overseas Vietnamese. When we drove from Hue to Da Nang we even found that the State Bank branches in those cities had a twenty percent difference in their exchange rates on the same day.

In Vietnam, breathtaking scenery, enchanting moments, and the poetic sensibilities of an intelligent people glitter like gems in a feudal world of inconvenience, poverty, and rats.

As it turned out, I did not get back exactly to the scene of the crime.

When I made the trip from Saigon through old Phuoc Tuy Province to the port of Vung Tau where the Australian logistics area had been, I had hoped to visit the former Task Force Base at Nui Dat. I wanted to stand on the spot where the village guerrillas had tried to kill me. I also wanted to walk around places where I had trained people who tried to kill them. But as I drove past Baria, the province capital, I was told the road to Nui Dat was so bad one needed a four wheeled drive vehicle to get there.

This may not have been the whole story. I have heard that other Australians have returned to Nui Dat, and I wondered if my guide was trying to protect me from the lingering anger of the local people. But, still, the Long Hai hills loomed up on the left of the road between Baria to Vung Tau. Australian forces suffered many casualties there and, although I had not actually been into them, they were indelibly imprinted on my mind.

Yet much had also changed in the seventeen years since I'd been in the Province. When I got to Vung Tau the town was only faintly familiar. The sleazy wartime environment of bars and brothels was transformed into a sleepy seaside setting of holiday villas and waterfront kiosks. Then, as I had lunch in an excellent seafood restaurant overlooking a choppy sea, I realised that my return to Vietnam had served its purpose.

The Long Hai hills reminded me that the war would always be a part of me. But the invitation to return to Vietnam, to work at the university, and to move freely around the country, had clarified the war's significance for me. It was impossible to have experienced the Vietnam War without experiencing something of Vietnam. Between the war and the efforts which the Vietnamese now make to put it behind them, I realised that Vietnam too was a part of me.

My wife's experience was the reverse. As with thousands of other overseas Vietnamese who are currently returning to Vietnam, her visit was a rediscovery. It was the rediscovery of a major part of her life that had seemed lost forever. This was deeply satisfying. Yet in fourteen years Australia had become a part of her. As we were driving to Canberra not long after our return to Australia she said, 'Isn't the countryside beautiful?'

*Greg Lockhart is a former Australian army officer, now an historian.*

JOHN BARRETT

# Arma virumque cano

John Robertson: *Anzac and Empire: the tragedy and glory of Gallipoli* (Hamlyn Australia, $39.95).
Bruce Muirden: *The Diggers who Signed On for More: Australia's part in the Russian wars of intervention* (Wakefield Press, $14.95).

The Melbourne *Age*'s notice of *Anzac and Empire* (21 April 1990) was headed 'Memoirs of murder through incapacity', but the late Professor Robertson had more to say than that, and turned up the other side of the coin in the end.

So let's get quickly to the end. The bulk of the work is a long narrative account of what led to the landing and what followed it. Though informed, perceptive and balanced, it is comparatively tame and has some loose ends - such as to what degree the AIF lacked non-battle discipline. It is in the concluding chapter and a valuable appendix that we come to Robertson's most explicit assessments and most pungent writing. The appendix crisply surveys the main books on Gallipoli - of which there are many, frequently tendentious and acerbic. Of later popular histories, Robertson found Moorehead's unsatisfactory and Rhodes James's the best. He saw Bean's volumes as still offering 'some of the finest writing and best scholarship', although too detailed for easy reading and wide influence on the public. And after all of this exhaustive reading, Robertson's own decision about the whole Dardanelles concept was that "in terms of grand strategy the operation was ill-conceived and would have yielded meagre results even if successful" (p. 276). About half of the literature surveyed disagrees with his judgement, but that was his conclusion. Note it. Robertson could be a decidedly sceptical critic.

Yet, in his concluding chapter, he would not go one inch of the way with the "younger generation of historians" in their suggestion of an Anzac legend created out of the imagination of Charles Bean:

> The creators of the Anzac legend were, of course, the men themselves . . . A wide variety of observers . . . expressed high respect for Australians . . . War naturally promotes hyperbole, but so many observers . . . cannot be dismissed . . . One wonders what qualifies people who have never experienced . . . the terrifying savagery of battle to belittle the valour of those who have. Australians in 1915 were anxious to make a mark on the world and so were very receptive to the views of Ashmead-Barlett, Masefield and others . . . But it cannot be said that they . . . misled each other. They simply drew inspiration from what had happened . . . (p. 259).
>
> A community does not become a nation on a single day . . . Nonetheless, some single days can legitimately be regarded as more important than others in spurring national self-awareness and self-esteem . . . Anzac Day has pride of place because it is the first of these . . . Its symbolic and substantial significance did *not* primarily stem from the tragic loss of life, as some current-day moralists declare. It arose because for the first time Australians made a spectacular and praiseworthy contribution, recognised as such by some great powers, to the course of world history - and that in a conflict of

surpassing importance rather than in some insignificant human pursuit (p. 261).

Note those conclusions of Robertson's too. They are as important as any other, are well said, and should be pondered along with the very different approaches of younger writers like Richard White (*Inventing Australia*) and Robin Gerster (*Big-Noting*). In his preface (p. 7), Robertson wrote, "My aim is to convey the thoughts, attitudes and language of 1915, rather than of the 1980s, which I do not hold to be superior".

In a tired and very rash moment, before a witness, Barrie Reid said as he handed me these books, 'Oh – take what space you need.' But I won't make him repent at leisure; surely it is quite clear that *Anzac and Empire* is worthy of serious attention. Physically, the volume is splendid - heavy enough, indeed, to strengthen or strain the wrists, but still beautiful. The rare hiccups include a typo in the caption on p. 91, the need for a few more maps, and perhaps for a better placement of the existing ones and some of the pictures - such as putting Ellis Silas's painting, 'The Roll Call", on p. 93, to be opposite Silas in the text, instead of over the page and out of sight. In general, however, the book is cleverly treated and richly illustrated without degenerating into 'coffee table', and although the text is the product of a scholar, it is easily read throughout. The pity is that John Robertson didn't live to see it published, but a lot of us would die easier if we knew that we had written so solid a work, and that it would be so successfully designed (in this case, by Barbara Beckett) and so well produced.

Comparatively and intrinsically, Bruce Muirden's *The Diggers who Signed On for More* is a markedly inferior book. I have long been grateful for Muirden's 1968 study, *The Puzzled Patriots*. There he looked at a small group that left the mainstream of Australian life, the Australia First Movement of the 1930s and 1940s, and there he had an apt title and a text presented in an acceptable form. Here he examines - or has in mind – another small and 'different' lot of Australians, those 200 former members of the First AIF who volunteered for North Russia in 1919 to ward off the Bolsheviks, but here even the form of the text is unacceptable. There are pages containing eight or nine paragraphs, each of one or two sentences. A tract by a horny-handed exposer of some social evil might be written like that, or the least inspired of didactic pieces in an old school reader, or the literary product of someone who had no other way of being avant-garde, or a story in an afternoon tabloid; but a true book - never!

Impulse buyers, attracted by this publication's cover-photograph of two Australian soldiers with snowballs, and by its title and sub-title, would have every right to ask for their money back. *The Diggers who Signed On for More*? In a text of under one hundred pages, it is not until p. 43 that the recruitment of Australians is explained – in two paragraphs, of one sentence and two sentences, respectively. Then it's p. 60 before an Australian is quoted, and p. 67 before diggers are paraded, only to be dismissed on p. 78 without a great deal having been said about them. Purchasers might reckon they had shelled out for more. *Australia's part in the Russian wars of intervention*? When, in Muirden's own words, 'Australian authorities were not keen to encourage involvement' (p. 6) and 'Hughes advised . . . that no member of the AIF . . . could serve in any other war theatre' (pp. 69-70), what's all this about *Australia's* part? A handful of diggers who somehow escaped the net and volunteered to serve with a British force? Some part! It's hardly enlarged by the fact that two of them - Corporal A. P. Sullivan and Sgt S. G. Pearse - won VCs there. Nor does a six-page chapter on reporting and reactions 'Back Home' amount to describing a significant Australian part. *Caveat emptor*!

So what else does this slim volume consist of? Muirden, who frankly admits to knowing neither Russia nor Russian, has read fairly widely in secondary sources in English. In a journalistic way (he *is* a journalist), he explains how foreign troops came to be already in a Russia torn by war, two revolutions and a continuing civil war abetted by foreign powers but further confused by widespread desertions, mutinies and refusals of orders - among Britons as well as Russians. (British labour also adopted a "Hands off Russia" stance.) A special

volunteer force was raised, the one the few Australians joined, to relieve the demoralised British soldiers in Russia and protect their evacuation along with White Russians. Some of those who favoured sending this force also had an eye for another chance to throw a spanner into the Communist works, and not least among them was the demonic Churchill, buggering around behind the scenes here as elsewhere. Muirden concludes that all the interventions – and Americans and a host of other nationalities were involved at various times in various places – did only harm.

If that type of survey is what you want, there it is; but if you'd prefer a better book by Bruce Muirden, try to find a copy of *The Puzzled Patriots.*

*John Barrett wrote* Falling In: Australians and "Boy Conscription", 1911-1915 *(H & I, 1979) and* We Were There: Australian soldiers of World War II tell their stories *(Penguin, 1988).*


# Landfall in Van Diemen's Land

## GWYNETH and HUME DOW

A study of families migrating between and within Devonshire and Tasmania, this sensitively written and thoroughly researched history tells the story of the hopes and hardships which went into the making of colonial society. At the same time, the account of family support challenges some of the ideas currently held about the roles of men and women in both societies.

*Illustrated, hardback.*

Available from Footprint, the Press of the Footscray Institute of Technology, for $30 post free. PO Box 64, Footscray 3011.

## TWO POEMS BY PETER PORTER

### THE SECOND HUSBAND

He was a selfless man, beautiful
In all his actions if not handsome in
Himself - look through all his Orders, The Finn,
The Swede, The Turk; powers from Istanbul
To Christiana honoured him, a pin
To wear before the Emperor, a four-
starred crucifix, a jewelled watch the twin
Of Baron Swieten's - I keep them in a drawer.

Marrying him, I swam away from need.
The servants stopped their answering back, the bills
Arrived with presents; I discovered skills
I didn't know I had; the Court agreed
My figures for back pay, the last quadrilles
Sold first, those manuscripts I had to hand
He saw I wasn't cheated on; the quills
We never washed, the ink dried in its stand.

He was the most magnanimous of men;
One sign of it, I ceased my pregnancies.
Those days have long since gone; I have to please
New waves of pilgrims asking how and when.
My sister-in-law and I like two old trees
Live side by side; each plays the oracle.
Her mind is on those childhood prophecies,
Mine on the man who rescued me from hell.

And my misunderstood much-loved second
Husband wrote my first's biography -
I wondered at such generosity.
Now Europe listens, for the world is fecund
And everyone forgets reality
And praises the most marvellous of boys
Who drew the face of God for all to see
But was to me puerility and noise.

### GO SOME OF YOU, AND FETCH A LOOKING GLASS

When Hardy looked into his glass, he saw
A younger self of real not ghostly pain
And knew the travelling law
That what dies once as love will love again.

The reader reads and thinks he understands:
He's still inside the huge machine which time
Put in his parents' hands
And framed on paper with confirming rhyme.

They are themselves and so they can't be him,
And somewhere as his ancestors retreat
Intrusive Cherubim
Make singular the general defeat.

Always the present lingers in the glass.
The lawn is mown and soon the daisies rise
Above the unmown grass
And looking in the mirror blanks the eyes.

## FIRST CINQUAIN

When you
forget to ring
I can never remember
What it was about your small mouth
I liked.

## SECOND CINQUAIN

Because
she called him 'dear'
he put off once again
the speech about needing more than
one woman.

JUNE FACTOR

## PUCK DISEMBARKS

That sun is glazing and glaring from the wrong
  direction.
In his government regulation gear
And cultural arsy-turvitude
Puck steps ashore in a grammar of ti-tree.
    He rocks the pinnace.
    The foliage looks pretty crook.

Even a spirit can fail to be gruntled
Standing on his northern hemisphere head
In a wilderness without fairies or dairies,
Whose Dreaming he cannot read.
    He tweaks a tar's pigtail.
    This land is all wombat-shit.

The mosquitoes lead him to think of swallows,
The dipping swallows of Devon
And these alien magpies can sing like Titania
In love with a kangaroo.
    Puck waters the gin,
    Peddling the balance to snubnosed Abos.

The glittering wavelets throw on yellow sand
Big shells like Wedgwood ware
As the imp rises inside him, getting ready
To rewrite Empire as larrikin culture.
    He daubs a first graffito on
    The commissary tent, GEORGE THE TURD.

Against the pale enamel sky
Rebel cockatoos are screaming
New versions of pleasure:
This is the paradise of Schadenfreude.
    He begins to adore
    The willy-wagtail's flirting pirouettes.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

## JACK THE RIPPER

Whatever you do, watch out for Jack.
Whatever you do, just watch your back.
Scandal-pimp to the literary crew,
lean as Cassius - hungry, too.
Never been known to keep a secret;
if it's in confidence he'll leak it.
Mean as catshit but Awfully Funny.
Scum-bag scuttle-butt is his money.
He pays his way by defamation;
*his* small change is *your* reputation.
When it's time to divvy the restaurant bill,
our Jack's suddenly taken ill,
or else, oh dear, his wallet's gone.
Never mind, Jack will prattle on.
He'll cover the tab with a tale or two
of who's in trouble and who's up who,
of closet gays soon to be exposed,
of dykes suspected and dykes supposed,
who got the grant but didn't deliver,
who's got cirrhosis of the liver,
who did his dough on a nobbled horse,
and why X is filing for divorce.
He boasts of scoring the best lays in town,
and slanders the woman who turns him down.
Jack sinks oceans of chardonnay
as long as his mates are prepared to pay.
By midnight he's in a right good humour,
but never too drunk to pick up a rumour.
*You* give, *he* takes - that's part and parcel;
better chip in or it's up your arsehole.
And whatever you do, just watch your back.
Whatever you do, watch out for Jack.

GUY MORRISON

## from BLUE HILLS

### 21

Out at the twelve-mile mark
peppercorn seed equals memory,
A lizard flits under rubble
between the sleepers, on the line where
trains "rocket to impossible destinations";
overhead, pale green semiconductors,
a sky full of cirrus.
                              It's spring:
the peppercorns hang, an innocent aura
of ten year olds sharing cigarettes
in a hollow of compacted earth
under the waiting room.
And the lunatic who pushed a barrow
from the station to the newsagent,
infantile in middle age, what burst gland
disposed of him?

### 22

As though local history were
an endless succession of ownerships,
boundaries drawn and redrawn,
fresh signatures, the families mapped
from highland chieftains to shire presidents,
the electrical goods salesman drinks
to Kenny Rogers in the back bar.
The country cannot come to terms
with its suburbanism; parks named
after a man who discovered nothing more
than property, as fires burn east
and wood falls: the process
of clear felling or the process of nature,
Kenny Rogers can sing about it.

### 23

In this town a dance is
*the* dance.
              The chill
of shoulder straps, Friday night
outside the Main Hotel,
a sacrifice for style.
                              Sunday, the glint
of a flute in the trees up the Mitchell's bank;
snatches of Mozart: skewed notes running off the scales.

The path goes on endlessly, crackling with twigs.
Auxiliary generators whine over the agistments.

Across the river,
white branches lean in the wind
that blows down from the Divide.

LAURIE DUGGAN

## THE KILLING TURN

He was the friend of any little thing,
live or inert. He spoke to stones as though
they heard, and shifted spiders gently with
a cloth or watched dead leaves dance in the flow

of creeks. Caught by the grace of prostrate motion
he backed away and bowed as snakes went by.
Stretched on hot rocks he shared the skinks'
   devotion
to their great lord, the sun, when he was high.

He made apology, as Bushmen do,
to every plaguing creature he destroyed
to live - mosquitoes, ants, flies, fleas, bacteria -
deaths he tried to, but rarely could avoid.

Time came when he was nearing dissolution.
Wryly he smiled that soon he too would be inert,
for kindred of bacteria he had murdered
now had their killing turn to decimate and hurt.

ROBERT CLARK

## THREE POEMS BY PETER ROSE

### THREE FINGERS OF GIN

Yes, yes, the bastards have gone.
Balloons hang flaccid from rafters
like disillusioned Cupids. The hole
in the floor's been plugged where
tetchy guests stumbled or were pushed.
The absinthe and grenadine have been
put away for another year. There'll be
no more Lovers' Nocturnes in Acapulco.
Still, ever obstinate in the memory,
sprained ankles serenade us with sacred music.
If, as you claim, we've been spared,
why do last year's offerings yield pale solace,
one-egg biscuits that crumble at the touch?
Why do gilded metaphors blur when I approach?
Hectored by humdrum, hollow and hoarse,
we go in search of meatier rhythms,
humping weights to Donizetti,
drawing blinds to quell a rancid moon,
The telephone rings: someone has been given
a pacemaker. It is a house of shadows
we inhabit, each his own. For myself,
I refuse to develop the negatives.
Next door they speak an alien tongue,
the language of romance. Even in January,
that fecund frau with a henna rinse,
autumn leaves choose our doorway to choke,
there to hold mystifying discourse.
Near midnight, lashed to our beds,
we listen to rumours of desiccation
like righteous Mothers' Clubs.
(Even Helens oft play tennis.)
Meanwhile, uncrowned Lithuanian queens
turn their backs on the twentieth century
by disconnecting the phone. It's that simple.
They shall paint only masterworks while
the epicene dream pathological schemes.
Few are equipped to herald the royal yacht.
Best to flog what you know best, Rosemary:
hair lacquer, sealskins -
yourself, if all else fails.

### ANGLO-SAXON COMEDY

Here on Mondays, after the
snaking exodus of toupéed Croesus
and his pompadoured brides
(sullen dance of four-wheel drives),
I have the beach to myself,
except for crazy kelpies,
madly fetching bits of ti-tree
as I toss them in the sea,
a solitary transcendental Japanese,
pertly tattooed by a Mesmer,
the superannuated bank manager
circumnavigating the island
in paisley shorts, and so slowly,
balancing on his Father's Day wind-surfer
like a stroke victim on his frame.
Then a British couple appears,
dressed appropriately for soccer,
even scarved, and vaguely amused
by my compound in the dunes:
grapes, books, dogs, lotions, wind-break.
Had I been quicker I would have
explained that my love went back
to the city last night, how we laughed
as we lay in our last embrace,
some farce about being a working man.
But before I could frame my apology
their Lancashire vowels had dissolved,
confronted with the wonder of . . . Sand . . .
and the new tide yielded a pair
of jazzy sunglasses, turning
everything a vulgar, chancier blue.

### DISJUNCT AT MIDNIGHT

Gone.
Evanesced.
Scarce a look.
No sooner have you turned the corner,
lapsed into a sort of eldritch future
mapped like the past,
no sooner drawn off
into a stillness of last trams
and phlegmatic men in greatcoats,
than I am abject, morbid, longing,
aeons in your presence
passing nothing.
Voids are all you leave me,
in a fist of fog.

## THREE POEMS BY KEITH HARRISON

### AT SUPPER, NOT WHERE HE EATS

Akima,
Showing off, rubs his
Hand against

The fish's jaw -
But the fish leaps up
From the plate

And bites him
Hard. He jerks upright
And begins

Yowling (most
Unlike his kin, the
Samurai)

Trying to
Shake the thing off his
Forefinger

And sending
Fish-bits and his own
Blood over

The table.
This ceremony
Gains our full

Attention,
While three serving-girls
Hurry off

For salves and
Long bandages - and
Another fish.

But no! They
Bring the self-same fish.
They've gathered

Him up, and
Garnished him with more
Vegetables,

And he's still
Alive, watching us,
Eyes glazing.

Akima,
Silent now, studies
His bright teeth.

No one moves.
Then, gaining courage,
We eat him.

### JUSTICE BARRIE TO HIS MISTRESS

Two Telegrams

*Buy gloves, and*
*Silk panties.*

Right. Send
Finger-size.

(Dimensions
Of your bum I know
Precisely.)

### THANK YOU, PYTHAGORAS

This little
Varying dance of
Threes and five

Fits me well:
It keeps my flatfoot
Wits alive.

I can flick
Fast as a tomtit's
Tail, or move

Extremely
Slow, like mauve seaweed
Pulsing in

A green sea.
Here, one small word can
Swell to a

Landscape wide
As Minnesota
Or even

Wider - say
To the blind dark of
Milton's Hell.

A certain
Mathematical
Imp or spell

Hides in it.
Most anything plays
Within its

Free confines:
Pop, be-bop, jumped up
Reggae bump

Bums against
Karlheinz Stockhausen
And Berio.

If Dante,
Instead of terza
Rima had

Found this thinned
Down version, he would
Have wet his

Pants. Just think
Of the eyes saved - and the
Printer's ink.

## TWO POEMS BY HEATHER CAM

### DUSTING A LAMPSHADE

Dusting a lampshade,
thinking about how
you've got to let the light through
one way or the other,
as my thoughts turn from domesticity -
with its rust-proof, moth-proof guarantees
of continuing employment,
so long as dust falls, cockroaches crawl, and
babies bawl -
to, yet again, the fact of my job ending
before this peach-pink lampshade
can muster another crop of down for my duster.

I flick the shade,
puff up small flurries that softly
fall and accumulate.

Beyond the lint-grey line of present
accomplishment,
my future lies. I brood,
my mood black as a bible,
and hear my mother's injunctions:
'Don't hide your light under a bushel.'
'Use your talents wisely.'
My mother whose driven children were her
justification
for staying at home
and occasionally dusting,
when the prairie winds made it worthwhile:
"You know, we're experiencing a drought like the
30s.
No rain. The bathtub shows up the fine, black
dust
and you know the whole house must be dirty,
but there's not much use cleaning too thoroughly
until it rains."

And when will it rain?
It's so hard to shine
'you in your small corner and I in mine'
through the obfuscating rhetoric of politicians,
benighted bureaucrats and budget-trimmers.
How to trim my wick and burn more brightly?
(Yes, I take it personally. Yes, I am upset.)

"This is to confirm that your appointment will be
completed on 31/1/89.
At this stage it is not envisaged that the position
you
currently occupy will be continued . . .
May I take this opportunity to convey to you an
expression of
appreciation . . ."

And so to the top-floor balcony
and leaning perilously over
wave good-bye, with extravagant gesture,
to this season's flock of dust
and look forward to the warm peach glow tonight,
as I lie in bed and plot the approach of tomorrow,
beckoning and dustless.

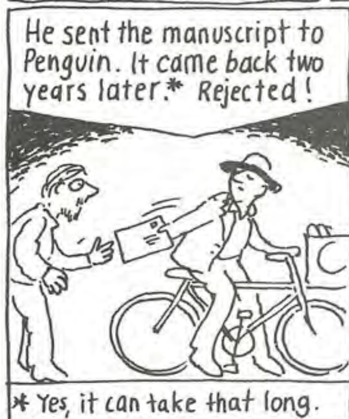
### THE FRIDGE

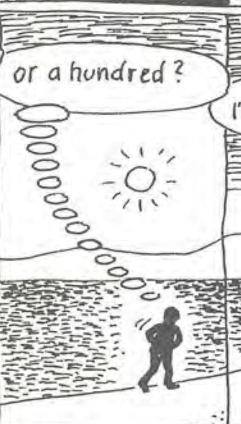
Mother stepped back
as though she'd been hit in the face
and she had,
hit squarely
by the white arctic spaces
in my half-size fridge.

But what took Mother aback
(more than how little my fridge contained)
was what it so visibly lacked.

# Ohgodism - Art Movements explained

by Lofo





UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF OHGODISM, FRED NO LONGER WRITES. OHGODISM IS NOT FASHIONABLE, BUT PRACTICED SECRETLY.

PETER READ

# 'In the Middle of the Ocean, Drowning'

*Some observations on the trial and sentence of Russell Moore*

Capital punishment is for some Americans an urgent and divisive moral issue in a way it has not been in Australia for more than twenty years. Dozens of American lawyers belong to an association that, free of charge, will defend a prisoner on a capital charge. The defence may take place either at the initial trial of the accused or in the later penalty phase, during which the same jury that convicted the prisoner hears arguments relating to the punishment they then recommend to the judge.

John Delgado, a high-powered forty-year-old attorney from South Carolina, and a member of this association, had joined George Turner, a local lawyer from Melbourne, Florida, for the defence of Russell Moore. Moore was an Australian Aboriginal, the son of Frank Whyman and Beverley Moore. Their son was born on 31 January 1963 in North Fitzroy. His grandmother, after being spoken to 'for some time' by officials from the Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board, agreed that 'it would be best if the baby were adopted'. Mrs Whyman, née Beverley Moore, fifteen years of age, signed the Adoption Consent, as required under the Victorian Adoption of Children Act, on 13 February 1963. Twelve days later, under a provision that enables relinquishing mothers to revoke their decision up to a month after signing the consent, Mrs Whyman rescinded her decision. She was then interviewed by members of the Welfare Board who 'pointed out to the girl that this did not necessarily mean that her baby would be returned to her as she seemed incapable of looking after it and had no suitable accommodation to which to take it'.

On 4 March 1963, the Reverend Graeme and Nesta Savage adopted Russell Moore and gave him the name James. In 1968, when Russell was 5, he was taken to the United States by the Savages. When he was 12 his adoptive parents returned to Australia without him. For the next twelve years Moore lived on the streets and was convicted of various juvenile and criminal offences. On 23 November 1988 he brutally killed Barbara Ann Barber, a prominent fashion designer of Melbourne, Florida, and a year later, pleading guilty, was convicted of first degree murder, robbery and sexual battery. The trial was short, since defence attorneys Delgado and Turner were planning to use the legal, historical and psychological arguments, which would have been used at this time in an Australian court, for the penalty phase, which was scheduled to begin a few weeks later, 11 December 1989.

I was brought up to date with these developments in Redfern at the beginning of December, when, discussing the case with some of Moore's relatives, I was informed that I had been asked by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, whose client Moore had become, to travel to Florida as part of a team of six Australians to testify on his behalf. My role would be to describe the system under which Moore had been removed from his family, and, using my experiences as field-worker in the Aboriginal organization Link-Up, to describe the traumas experienced by the removed children. We arrived on Saturday night, thirty-six hours before the penalty phase was to commence.

Some of the next day, Sunday, was spent

conferring with Delgado about the particular expertise that each of us could bring to the defence. Here was a problem. Florida law allowed only evidence relating to the prisoner or his past life to be entered. None of us had met Russell Moore, and there was doubt about the legal relevance of the general history of the assimilation policy to Moore in particular. In the evening I was interviewed formally for an hour by the prosecution lawyers, testing my qualifications in advance of an appearance before the judge the next day. I learnt that this procedure allowed the opposing lawyers to prepare arguments against the status of witnesses or the extent of their evidence. Unused to interrogation by hostile lawyers, I had been unsettled by their unsmiling demeanor and relentless probing of my areas of weakness, particularly my lack of personal knowledge of Moore.

That sombre meeting on the Sunday night, the night before the penalty phase began, was followed by another. Delgado, summoning the dozen members of the Australian contingent together, announced his pessimistic opinion that though it might be possible to sway the jury to the lesser penalty of twenty-five years imprisonment, the judge would probably override that recommendation. Mrs Whyman had answered a reporter's insensitive question as to how she felt about the possibility of her son's execution, that she had blocked thinking about it. She felt that she was in the middle of the ocean, drowning. Delgado began to outline the Florida penalty phase procedures, which would begin the next morning. To a comment about the moral issues involved in capital punishment, he exclaimed passionately that to him it was a matter both of principle and of the personalities with whom he was involved. 'Just understand me, please. Bausch [the principal prosecution attorney] wants to kill Russell Moore. Think about that!' Turning to Mrs Whyman he declaimed: 'They want to do nothing but electrocute your son, lady. They want to take him out and fry him. Now I've already had to shake hands and say goodbye to one client I worked with for seven years . . . and . . . and . . .' His words fell into a horrified silence.

Delgado had reinforced something I had not yet fully appreciated. Death in the electric chair or life imprisonment were the only two possibilities of sentence. If we had travelled to Florida to dispute whether he was to spend twenty or twenty-five years in jail, we might have retained some of the 'friendly opposition' feeling found in Australian courts sometimes. But the prosecution lawyers wanted to execute Moore. Every question they asked, each objection they made, was intended to sway the jury, and later the judge, to that end alone. Their purpose lowered over us all during the five days I spent in Florida, and makes even the recollection of these events oppressive. The prosecution attorneys became almost physical enemies. It did not seem appropriate even to say good morning to them.

*Florida Today* announced on Monday morning that prosecution attorney Bausch had 'some very very strong problems' with his discovery that Delgado's star witness, Hal Wootten, the former Supreme Court Judge and New South Wales Commissioner into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, had not met Russell Moore. To frustrate his obvious intended objection to Wootten's status as expert witness, it was clearly imperative that everyone who was to testify on his behalf meet and talk with him as soon as time could be found. That was not easy. Three of us who had not yet met him would probably be called that afternoon to the qualifying proceedings, in which the full court, without the jury, would consider whether, and about what, each of us would be allowed to give evidence to the jury.

My allotted share of Moore's time was twenty minutes of the lunch break of that Monday, which in addition I was to share with the Australian solicitor, who in turn was conducting a psychological test on the instructions of a Harvard psychiatrist giving evidence on Thursday. My visit to the prisoner, therefore, was not expected to produce any revelations. It seemed a legalistic rather than a useful manoeuvre, but whatever reservations I had about the plan I kept to myself: Ken Inglis had observed to me before I left Australia that academics often made the worst witnesses because they think they know better than lawyers. So I had determined to do what the lawyers thought best.

I was led to the cell below the court where Moore was held between the proceedings. It was a cream-colored, dismal affair some two metres by three. There was a small bench, on which sat the solicitor and Moore, both looking out of place in their suits. There was a lidless and seatless aluminium toilet, nothing else. I was briefly introduced to Moore, then I squashed myself into what was left of the bench and tried to look inconspicuous.

> 'Do you consider yourself persecuted?' intoned the solicitor.
> 'Yeah,' replied Moore emphatically.
> 'Do you like to write poetry?'
> 'No.'
> 'Do you tell things to your mother and father?'
> 'Well, I haven't got a father. He's dead.'

Since Moore's natural father, Frank Whyman, had died many years ago, and his adopting father, Graeme Savage, was upstairs half-way through lunch at that moment, I thought his denial significant. The questions droned on. Some seemed to my untrained ear to be silly or boring: perhaps they were the check questions built into the assessment. So I switched off my concentration and tried to 'feel the vibes', by absorbing impressions of Moore's face, accent and demeanor as well as his answers.

When the court convened, Commissioner Wootten took the stand for the qualifying session. Naturally, witnesses due to appear later were not allowed to enter the room, but it was possible to get an idea of what was happening by listening to the proceedings over the head-phones of the television crews outside. At 4.15 their shouted exclamations indicated that something dramatic had happened inside. A babble of voices from the people emerging made it clear: the judge had ruled that Wootten, though eminently well qualified in law, was unqualified to speak on the legally allowable matters. He would not allow Wootten to speak in general terms about the forced assimilation of Aboriginal children. Delgado and Wootten pushed through the crowd to where the Australian supporters were gathered. Wootten stood aside while Delgado, surrounded by cameras, lights and a dozen shouting press people, tried to make the best of what was obviously a bad situation. The significance of the decision was not lost upon the prospective witnesses either: besides Wootten, there were half a dozen of us who had come from Australia to give similar evidence.

After tea it was my turn. The jury remained out. For an hour and a quarter I was led, mostly by the prosecution lawyers, through my knowledge of south-eastern Australian Aboriginal history. Most disconcerting were their efforts to find out what I thought of Moore, and by what means I had arrived at my appraisal. The purpose of my brief visit to the cell sounded as manufactured as undoubtedly it was. The lawyers asked me what Moore's answers were to the questions I had heard. I looked at Delgado for help. Neither he nor Moore looked perturbed. Well, I was there to help the prisoner, and my immediate purpose was to avoid Wootten's fate. I had to get myself qualified to speak to the jury the following day. If such help as I could give meant a serious breach of social-worker ethics, so be it. I began to describe the questions and answers I had heard, and wished I had paid more attention to them in the last ten minutes of my visit.

In the end the prosecution lawyers offered no objection to my status as a witness qualified to speak, as the judge defined it, on 'Aborigine history and Aborigine culture'; though I was specifically enjoined not to mention my estimate of 15,000 Koori children having been removed from south-eastern Australia. That emotive and technically irrelevant fact, it was held, might influence the jury to consider matters other than Moore's immediate and past life.

The fate of Wootten caused Delgado to reason that I and an Australian psychologist should speak to Moore again before our appearance before the jury next morning. That evening we arrived at the Brevard County jail, where followed a good deal of argument about my status and visiting right from the not unfriendly jail staff. Only a late phone call from the judge himself ensured my admission to see Moore after 9 p.m.

Moore still had no idea who I was, but I

suppose that he has seen hundreds of people like me staring at him, trying to win his confidence, through the armored glass of the meeting room. From my years as a Link-Up worker I have learnt to approach prisoners as any other clients, that is to talk about my own life, and about Link-Up, for a few minutes before asking any questions. But Moore was neither surly nor reticent. I think he was on a high from having just spoken to the psychologist for nearly an hour. He confidently showed me psychologists', doctors' and other officials' reports about his behavior in jail. In the course of what I hoped was rather more of a conversation than an interrogation, I asked him who he thought was persecuting him. 'Why, the governor [of the jail] is out to get me.'

I left the jail after fifty minutes with the strong impression that while Moore was intelligent enough to know the right answers to certain questions and propositions, asked many times by the prison psychologists, he did not know what to make about all the talk of the previous three months about Victorian Aborigines, about his real family, about his mother's love, about an Aboriginal identity and about the assimilation policy. The information was so strange, and the feelings of love and brotherhood from his family were so strong, that he was simply at a loss to know what the correct responses were to satisfy the psychiatrists. The enormous change in Aboriginal self-perceptions about their history that has taken place in the last twenty years had bypassed him completely: three months before, for all he knew, he could have been the last Aborigine born in Australia. He had never associated with black people, Australian or American, at any time in his life.

I went to bed that night at about 8 a.m. Australian time and spent a terrible night. Jet-lagged, and conscious of a considerable responsibility on me not just to tell the story accurately but to tell it in a way most likely to sway the jury, I woke at about 4.30 American time, and paced up and down my room rehearsing what I hoped would appear to be the spontaneous answers to questions I had already been given by Delgado. Was Moore's removal related to a larger Australian policy of removal? What behavioral characteristics were likely to flow from trans-cultural adoptions? In what ways was Moore like other removed Aborigines that I had worked with?

I practised my answer to Delgado's question about any options Mrs Whyman might have retained. I would reply that the conversation the welfare authorities had with her after she revoked her consent was revealing: 'Beverley was told that if she returned to Deniliquin either with or without the baby she would be inviting police action against herself and Frank.' The reference to Frank Whyman was a not very subtle threat of a carnal knowledge charge. The threat to herself undoubtedly was the charge of being an uncontrolled minor, which would render her liable to removal to an institution, whereupon Russell would be declared to be a potentially or actually neglected child, and removed to a babies home as a state ward.

Delgado was then to ask: Were there any alternatives to adopting Russell? Yes, I would reply: To Aboriginal people, a child who is well loved is by definition well cared for. If in the first instance Mrs Whyman had been unable to care for Russell, the next step should have been to invite her extended family to find a home for him; failing that, within the Victorian Aboriginal community; failing that, Russell could have been declared a state ward and sent to a foster home. Adoption should have been the last alternative. Yet the Welfare Board officials had chosen adoption first. There was no evidence that they had even considered other alternatives.

I then planned to explain to the jury what would have happened to Moore if, instead, he had been sent to an institution like the Orana Methodist Children's home. At the time of his birth, that institution was midway between the old-fashioned congregate care, of large dormitories and communal mess hall, and the modern concept of family group homes of four or five children scattered in the suburbs. The 1963 style was half a dozen family homes of ten children and a house parent, scattered in the grounds of the institution. Unlike adopted children, foster children could be visited by their parents. Nor was there prohibition against their returning to parental care if the Minister

of Child Welfare was satisfied that it was in the child's best interests. Why, then, was Moore not sent there? For two reasons: one was that Orana's council was unsure of the wisdom of removing Aboriginal children from their families; another was that the authorities were in duty bound, by their own Aborigines Welfare Act, to adopt him.

At this point I planned a short explanation of the Victorian Adoption Act of 1928. In the thirty-five years to 1963, the most significant amendment to it was that which allowed Mrs Whyman a month in which to revoke her Consent to Adoption. Under the Act, the effect of consent to adoption was 'permanently to deprive' natural parents of their parental rights: 'Upon an adoption order being made, all rights, duties, obligations and liabilities of the parent or parents . . . in relation to the future custody, maintenance and education of the adopted child, including all rights to appoint a guardian, or the consent to marriage shall be extinguished.'

The point of adoption was that the child became not only legally but also, as it were, physically the child of the new parents. A few anomalies remained. The child in law retained both Birth Certificates, the original as well as the new one, but was allowed access only to the latter. Another exception to the process of 'rebirthing' was that the child could inherit property from a natural parent. A further complication, unrecognized at the time, was that a child adopted to foreign nationals probably retained its Australian citizenship if it was removed overseas by those parents. Apart from these minor though confusing exceptions, the spirit of the Adoption Act was clear. Legally, emotionally and physically, the natural parents were deemed not so much to have ceased to exist, but never to have existed at all. The child would not be interested in its real identity, because it would not know that it ever had another one.

There are no figures for the number of Victorian Aboriginal children removed from their parents' care and placed with white parents. Nor are there figures available for the number of children adopted in contrast to other forms of substitute care. However, it is worth noting several significant differences between the Aboriginal administrations in New South Wales and Victoria. First, Victoria did not have institutions designed specially for Aboriginal children. There was no equivalent of the Cootamundra or Kinchela homes. A second difference was that the Victorian administration, at the time Moore was born, was itself only six years old. It had come into existence for one purpose:

> It shall be the function of the Board to promote the moral intellectual and physical welfare of aborigines . . . with a view to their assimilation into the general community.

The new Victorian board was under much pressure to perform. All forms of separation except adoption allowed the possibility of natural family ties being retained, or later rejoined. Most institutions encouraged it. 'So, ladies and gentlemen of the jury,' I practised repeatedly, 'that is why Russell Moore was adopted, even though Mrs Whyman and her extended family were able to take care of Russell.' By definition, the Aborigines Welfare Board was established to assimilate Aborigines. By convention, adoption was the most permanent method of securing assimilation. By law, therefore, the authorities had to adopt him, because any other procedure would have been in defiance of the board's own Act and the government's wishes. That was why Moore was adopted when he was eight weeks old. The intention was that he should never learn his real identity.

Granted, therefore, that it was not just the officials' but the government's intention to assimilate Moore – was adoption in his personal best interest? First I planned to concede that in certain circumstances adoption of white children by white parents had advantages. For all the grief and cruelty undoubtedly caused to many relinquishing mothers, I would argue that the principle of a child being unaware that it has been adopted, and raised by a loving family, was not altogether a bad one from the child's viewpoint. Often it worked. But Moore was, and is, very dark and distinctly Koori in appearance. He could not possibly have imagined that he was the Savages' real child.

So the argument over cross-racial adoptions, where it is apparent that children are not biological offspring, is altogether a different one from where adopted children look like the new parents and are unaware of their history. This is particularly so in the case of Aboriginal children adopted by white parents, in which the ambience of society, whatever the love bestowed, or not bestowed, by the adopting parents, is hostile towards Aboriginality.

Analysis of the clients seeking assistance from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service for criminal charges has shown that 90 per cent have been in foster, institutional or adoptive placement. So it was apparent that there was a sharp distinction between what the law required and what was in Moore's best interests.

At this point I expected an objection under cross-examination: surely the knowledge of the detrimental effects of cross-racial adoption was not available at the time? My answer to this expected question from the prosecution was to be: yes, or at the least, the information was there but disregarded. I had not had the opportunity to study the Victorian case histories of removed Aborigines, but as a Link-Up case-worker in New South Wales I had studied over a thousand case histories of the 10,000 Aboriginal children removed from their parents in New South Wales. Quite simply, they are horrifying. I did not expect to be allowed to cite any of the histories of people who went insane, spent their entire lives in institutions, died of disease, committed a variety of violent acts including murder and suicide, abandoned their own children, were rendered incapable of forming stable relationships, or who, at the end of the period of separation, but now traumatized for life, went back as adults to the missions and camps. My own study of Wiradjuri children, taken from southern-central New South Wales, revealed that, according to the board's own records, 70 girls were removed between 1916 and 1928. Ten unmarried girls fell pregnant to whites - so much for the argument about the moral danger of the camps. Ten spent periods in mental hospitals, and seven died. Out of a combined total of 84 boys and girls, between half and three-quarters of the children eventually returned home. In New South Wales the psychological damage the children suffered could not even be justified by the criterion of assimilation. The policy was not only cruel, but useless.

Adoptions were different. Far fewer adoptees found their own way home, because they often did not know who they were or where they were from, and they had adoptive relatives who generally took a close interest in dissuading them from returning. Australian society remained deeply inimical to Aborigines, whether they behaved like whites or not. Russell Moore would have found it very difficult to obtain a white-collar job, no matter what clothes he arrived in for an interview. He could expect trouble from the police, whatever his actions; his presence in a hotel would be liable to challenge; he would be lucky to join a golf club or get a bank loan. Neither a suit, an accent nor a stable personality built

on love and respect in the home would make a twenty-year-old Aboriginal man acceptable to much white society outside the charmed family circle.

Family love could not protect the child, or the adult, away from that circle. When at school the children were called 'a black cunt' or 'a dirty abo', adopting parents could provide no relief beyond 'Just ignore it.' It was common in many adoptive homes for every reference to homeless, arrested or demonstrating Aborigines in the papers or television to be accompanied by the injunction 'Don't be like them.' In the homes of children who had not been removed, there was security in phrases like 'just keep away from those fucking gubs'. That antagonistic group identity had enabled the Kooris to survive as self-identifying indigenous people, but it was an identity that Moore never shared. It was not an accident that he had not associated with black people in all his life. Very few adopted children, in my experience, have done so during adolescence.

What, then, might have been the course of Moore's life if he had been declared a state ward, placed in foster care, and remained in Australia? He might well have quarrelled with his foster parents before the age of 12, and might have run away from home once or twice before he was 15. He might have come under minor police notice in a gang of white youths for breaking and entering and car thefts. By the age of 18 he might well have spent time in a reformatory. On release, he very probably would have come to Melbourne in search of work and adventure, having by now abandoned his foster family permanently. There, having met other Aborigines in reform schools, he might have made his way to the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Service, which offers a similar service to Link-Up's in New South Wales. But if he was still unsure, or ashamed, of his Aboriginal identity, it is highly probable that a scene similar to this would have taken place. While Moore was drinking alone in a pub, another Aboriginal would have approached him:

'Hey, brother, what's your country?'

'Australia.'

'Eh? No, cuz, where was you born?'

'Sea Lake.'

'Oh yeah. Who's your family?'

'Eh?'

'What's your name?'

'James Savage.'

'That's not a Koori name.'

'No, I'm adopted.'

'What's your real name?'

'I don't know.'

'Well you wanna get home and find your people. Don't wanna be too flash. You look like a Whyman to me. Shake hands. I'm your cousin.'

Those unfamiliar with southern Koori society might be surprised at how quickly I have allowed Moore to be identified in this imaginary scene. But the Victorian community is not large. Russell Moore looks so much like his mother that I am certain he would have been identified as her missing son before he was 20. Shortly after this scene, at the age of 17 or 18, he would have gone home to a joyful reunion with his mother and siblings.

Joyful - at first. After ten years, the Link-Up staff know that the first meeting with the natural family is not the end, but the beginning of a long and difficult journey. It might have been some time before Russell called Mrs Whyman 'Mum'. Perhaps he never would have become as proud and as confident of his identity as the other family members. But he would have been looked after. There was a home established for young people with problems like his, managed by the same person who travelled with us as an expert witness to the effects of separation. If he was sick, he would have gone to the Aboriginal Medical Service. If he ran foul of the law, he would have been counselled by an Aboriginal field-worker in the Aboriginal Legal Service and represented by an Aboriginal Legal Service lawyer. If he went to jail, he would have found Aboriginal prisoners to protect him and been counselled by an Aboriginal jail worker. These forms of protection were the adult equivalent of that antagonistic group identity Moore did not receive as a child. Aboriginal people have looked for help not among sympathetic whites,

but among themselves. They alone know what it is like to live in a country infested with white faces.

I did not expect to be able to say all this to the jury, but I had prepared my thoughts in case the prosecution was napping. By daybreak the arguments were securely, I hoped, in my head. By 7 a.m., as arranged, I was at the café across the road from the Dixie Motel, breakfasting on coffee and sugary doughnuts with John Delgado while he again rehearsed the questions (but not the answers). By 7.20 he was gone to have another breakfast with another of the day's witnesses.

At 8 o'clock I was outside the courtroom, nervously pacing the floor. Molly Dyer, who established the first Victorian services to help removed Aboriginal children, entered first. She emerged an hour later, having with grace and dignity placed Moore in the perspective of psychological damage that he and other Aboriginal children had suffered by removal. But simultaneously Delgado emerged, looking worried and muttering 'damn damn damn' under his breath.

I never did find out how he had come by the information that the prosecution was preparing to put to me, on the basis of my previous testimony, the question: 'Dr Read, you say that under certain circumstances adopted Aboriginal children have a tendency towards violence or self-destruction. But are you aware that James Savage [they insisted on calling him by his adopted name] has committed over fifteen serious crimes, including armed robbery and sexual assault?' My answer would have been no, since I had made it my business, on advice, to know as little as possible of such matters. Delgado would then have instantly, and correctly, objected that the prisoner's previous convictions were inadmissible evidence. But by then it would have been too late. The jury members, having heard the disallowed question, would not then be able to put the information out of their minds. None of the evidence I was about to give, nor that of the psychologist, nor that of the Aboriginal Teenage Home manager, would, in Delgado's view, be sufficient to counteract that one sentence of inadmissible evidence. At the last minute, therefore, we were all withdrawn as expert witnesses for the defence.

Though it was only 10.30 on Wednesday, this development brought legal proceedings to an end for the day. There was still a slight possibility that we might be called the next day, which meant that we could not be present when the person now billed as the star defence witness, the top-ranking Harvard psychologist who had asked that the psychological assessment be carried out, was due to testify that Moore was so psychologically damaged as to be incapable of taking responsibility for his actions.

Friday was the day, the judge had ordered, when the hearing must be concluded. It was the first time I had been in the court while the jury was sitting. I listened to the prosecution's attempt to allow Graeme Savage to deny that he had beaten Russell as a child. Emotionally, he testified that in California in the early 1970s he had tried to establish an integrated church. So vehement was the resistance of the Californian whites that he and Mrs Savage had received death threats. In a six-month period he was so distressed by the campaign against him that he did not remember what, if anything, he had done to his adopted son.

The summing-up that followed this last witness was low-key. The prosecution, contrary to Delgado's expectation, did not show the video of the murder scene and victim, nor produce the murder weapon, to reinforce the brutality of the crime. In deference to local southern opinion, it was not Delgado but George Turner, the local lawyer, who summed up the defence's case. The jury adjourned. We went for lunch at a local takeaway, where I accidentally encountered some members of the Savage family. They did not look pleased to see me, but I had been moved by Graeme Savage's testimony that morning. His distress seemed genuine. Few white Australians guessed at the depth and intensity of commonplace white antipathy towards Aborigines in the 1960s.

The jury emerged to ask about the exact meaning of 'life sentence', a question taken to be a promising sign by the Australians. They retired for another half an hour, then emerged

to an atmosphere of extreme tension. We arranged ourselves as Delgado had suggested: black Australians sitting at the front behind Moore, other supporters on the same side at the back. As the official handed the judge the verdict I grabbed the hand of an Australian sitting beside me, and must have held it tightly for the whole of the long ten seconds it took for him to read out the majority decision of life imprisonment – twenty-five calendar years.

When it was over, the media descended upon Mrs Whyman and the defence team. I wanted a few minutes of quiet, so I walked out down the corridor, which overlooked the car park. After ten minutes I saw her, in the fading winter light, escorted by friends, fighting her way to her car. The bright lights of the clamoring media still surrounded her, spotlit literally and figuratively as she had been for three months. It is the clearest visual memory I have of the whole trial. It was a painful ordeal for her, and I reflected on how much more painful it would have been if the jury had awarded the death sentence.

That same thought was in my mind five weeks later, when on 23 January 1990 the judge announced that he had overriden the jury's eleven-to-one decision and had imposed the death penalty. Two factors had helped him influence his decision, he said. One was the large majority of mail he had received in favor of death. The other was that he believed Moore's previous unhappy history did not amount to a mitigating circumstance; many people, including survivors of concentration camps, had emerged to lead useful lives.

There was speculation that the verdict had been framed more with an eye to the judge's subsequent re-election than to the reasons he outlined. But I thought the judgement, though disappointing, predictable in the Florida context. Arguably, judges ought to take community feelings into account, while noting whether any sections of it are under-represented or over-represented. Moore's crime was a terrible one: I imagine many black men have been executed in Florida for less brutal murders. Perhaps the law implicitly recognizes that society maintains its stability by keeping at arm's length such pleas as diminished responsibility.

The position now is that the judge's sentence is reviewed automatically by the Florida Supreme Court, which in recent years has overturned all but one of the death sentences that have been imposed against the recommendation of the jury. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs believed, in that event, special circumstances might warrant an exception to the rule that Australians are not returned to Australia to serve sentences imposed in other countries. It would be necessary to conclude either an international agreement with the United States or a specific agreement concerning Moore alone. The agreement of the Victorian or other State government responsible for an appropriate prison would also be necessary.

The responsibility of the Commonwealth and the States in the mean time is to recognize that Aboriginal child care is an Aboriginal responsibility, to change the adoption laws in States that have not already done so to ensure that Aboriginal adoptees can find out who they really are, and to fund the Link-Up work sufficiently in all States. It may be too late to help Moore, but it is not too late to help the thousands of removed children who have not found a place in white or black Australian society, who remain, at this minute, at the edge of the firelight, frightened, or aggressive, or hating, or yearning, or frustrated, or aching to be loved, or forgetting, or forgotten.

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# On the Line

The publishing of any literary journal is beset with hazards. The uncertainties of printers, the contrarities of contributors, the antics of philistine bureaucrats in Australia Post, all add to the uncertainties of life. This and the previous edition of *Overland* have, however, been produced in the shadow of further trouble. Barrett Reid, who has edited the journal for the eighteen months since Stephen Murray-Smith's tragically early death, has himself been stricken with illness and has had to seek relief from his labours. We owe a debt of gratitude to Michael Dugan for seeing issue 118 through the press, and I have assumed responsibility for this one. I am sure that Barrie's friends will join us in wishing him a speedy recovery.

Elsewhere, the literary and intellectual world continues to suffer grievous blows. Peter Fuller, erstwhile prophet of materialist criticism of the visual arts, and more recently born-again as scourge of the Marxists and defender of the autonomy of the aesthetic, was killed in a car accident. While I have not been able to agree with his latterday exclusion of the political, his writing was always characterised by an attention to the concrete which meant his opinions could never be dismissed. I do not believe that he understood Australian art, but his opinions of it forced us all to think what we really mean by a national tradition. Fuller represented the metropolitan centre at its best – knowledgeable, provocative, opinionated and, finally, wrong in its own unperceived insularity. He has rendered our state some service by making the imperial assumptions so clear.

One of the strongest critics of these assumptions, the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, also died last month, an event noted by *Publishers Weekly* but, as far as I have seen, by none of the Australian papers. The ABC noticed it in its popular Sunday arts program, but not, of course, in any of its precious literary broadcasting. Yet Achebe, as much as any contemporary writer, has been able to use the forms and language of an imperial English culture in order to make real the experience of its victims, and thus to challenge its ascendancy. His best-known novel, *Things Fall Apart*, by describing the destructive effects of imperialism, ironically changes the English language so that it can provide the framework for a global based on the quality of difference. Australian supporters and critics of multiculturalism would all learn much from his work.

The last issue of *Overland* carried a tribute to Ken Gott from Vane Lindesay, but I would like to add my own. Ken was one of *Overland*'s most loyal and persistent supporters. He had a most remarkable career, as student activist, journalist simultaneously for the Murdoch and Communist presses, commentator in *Nation* and *The Australian*, while the latter was still a respectable paper, staff writer and editor for the doyen of capitalist publications, the American *Business Weekly*, scourge of the vile League of Rights, executive and adviser to CRA and to nationalist businessman Sir Rod Carnegie, defender of lighthouses and adviser to ministers of the federal Labor government. To all these activities he brought a combination of shrewdness, enthusiasm and scepticism

which comprised an education for his colleagues and gave his own work the strong armour of rightness. We at *Overland* will sorely miss his advice, humor and friendship.

On a happier note, I would like to congratulate Vane Lindesay on nearing the milestone of his seventh decade. Vane has worked with *Overland* from its beginnings, as designer, illustrator, board member general factotum. He has also made major contributions to Australian publishing as a book designer, and to Australian cultural history as a collector, anthologist and author. Any readers who do not know his *Inked-in Image*, the history of black-and-white art in Australia, should immediately get out around the second-hand shops to buy one, or pester the publishers to re-issue it. It is not only superbly entertaining, it is an admirable introduction to Australian history.

The re-election of the Hawke Labor government leaves Australian politics unchanged. Where once we complained that our governments were destitute of ideas, now both government and opposition are wanting in both ideas and ideals, although not, alas, in opinions. The dismissal of Barry Jones from the ministry is a disgrace, and deprives it of its sole claim to being in touch with the world of the intellect. Like the earlier abolition of the Department of Science, it must be seen as a capitulation to Paul Keating's Treasury and John Button's Department of Industry, with their bleak and mechanistic view of the universe and their refusal to acknowledge that a healthy economy requires a healthy culture. Yet Barry Jones was himself a lone voice, too seldom challenged on his own grounds and so too ready to surrender to the triumphalism of technology. The government's embrace of green politics is too evidently an electoral ploy, and offers no suggestion that either ministers or their advisers are interested in the real, as opposed to the electoral, problems posed by the environment. Nor are the vocal environmentalists much help. No party to the debate over environment and devleopment seems to realize that ecology and economy are not competing interests to be balanced, but different aspects of the single problem of surviving within a finite physical world. We hope in later issues of *Overland* to encourage scientists and other commentators to take these issues up for us. Max Teichmann opens the discussion in this issue.

Meanwhile, back in the arts, all is change and all is the same thing. The Liberals will not have their way in demolishing the Australia Council, and their previous spokesman, Senator Chris Puplick, is at the time of writing still not certain of retaining his place. However, his colleague, Richard Alston, who complained that the only problem with the iniquitous increase on postal charges for little magazines was that they were not being imposed quickly enough, remains in parliament. And on the other side, the minister responsible for the policy, Ms Ros Kelly, who rarely answered correspondence and then only in terms echoing the bureaucrats, has been promoted to the arts. It remains to be seen whether she will use this position to call for increased subsidies to counteract the disastrous charges she was responsible for in her previous position.

John McLaren

SARAH DOWSE

# Pale Gold, Lowered Blind

Slouched against the stiff back of the diningroom chair with her feet resting high on the table, she watched the late afternoon sunlight pass through the slats of the lowered blind.

Slouched against the stiff back of the diningroom chair, with her feet resting high on the table, she . . .

In limbo, she slouched against the stiff back of the diningroom chair, with . . .

Slouched against the stiff back of the diningchair, with her feet resting high on the table, she hung suspended in the limbo of late afternoon. Sunlight washed pale gold through the slats of the lowered blind. Soon she would have . . .

Slouched against the stiff back of the diningchair, her feet resting high on the table, she hung suspended in the limbo of later afternoon. Pale golden sunlight drained through the slats of the blind. Soon she would have to think about dinner. But not yet. She could stretch it out a little longer if she tried. How strange that it should be hard, just to sit alone watching the fading light . . .

She could feel it, sitting in one of the diningroom chairs with her feet resting on the table. She could feel it building up. It was late afternoon, sunlight was faint through the blinds; soon she would have to think about dinner. But not yet. Not yet. She could still hold it back with effort, pressing down . . .

She could feel it as she sat in one of the diningroom chairs, her feet resting on the table. She could feel it building. Late afternoon, sunlight pale gold through the slats of the lowered blind. Soon she would have to think about dinner but not yet, not yet. Suspended there, without time, in a kind of limbo, she could stretch it out if she tried. It was harder than it should have been, just to sit there watching the fading light and the shadows ooze across the room. It required a conscious effort just to be unconscious, unaware of anything that wasn't actually with her in that room. To learn to be alone she had to snatch at solitude. She tensed, and tried to relax.

Concentrate. Concentrate on the end of the day. On the nothingness that would surely

envelop her if she could let it. The room was darkening, she stared ahead at the outline of her feet. She could almost speak to them as they faced her, like old friends from the past. But to speak would shatter the silence and instead she just smiled. It was beginning to work. Concentrate, and it will work. She folded her arms and continued staring.

She sat in the diningroom on one of the straightbacked chairs, her feet resting on the table . . .

She sat on one of the straightbacked chairs in the diningroom, her feet resting on the table . . .

She sat on a straightbacked diningroom chair with her feet resting on the table. Late afternoon, sunlight pale gold through the slats of the lowered blind. Soon she would have to think about dinner. But not yet. Suspended there, without time, she was in a kind of limbo that she could stretch if she tried. It was harder than it should have been, to sit alone watching the fading light and the shadow ooze across the room. It required a conscious effort just to be unconscious, unaware of anything that wasn't actually with her in that room.

She slouched against the stiff back of the diningchair, her feet resting high on the table. In the late afternoon, sunlight passed pale gold through the slats of the lowered blind. Soon she would have to think about dinner. But not yet. Not yet. She suspended herself. How strange that it should be hard, just to sit alone watching the shadow ooze across the room.

She slouched against the stiff back of the diningchair, her feet resting high on the table. Suspended there, she watched as late afternoon sunlight passed pale gold through the lowered blind.


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MICHAEL DUGAN

# Charles Buckmaster: A Memoir

In April 1968, aged 20, I published the first issue of a poetry magazine called *Crosscurrents.* This attracted an interview in the Melbourne *Herald.* Within a couple of weeks of the interview I was contacted by two young poets. One was Kris Hemensley, a year older than me, who, with his wife Retta, was in the process of starting his own roneoed poetry broadsheet, *Our Glass*, and was also about to publish a little book of poems by himself and Ken Taylor. The other poet was Charles Buckmaster, a 16-year-old matriculation student at Lilydale High School, near Melbourne, who lived in an orchard valley with the unlikely name of Gruyere.

Charles and Kris became regular contributors to *Crosscurrents*, and I suggested to Charles that he also send poems to Kris for *Our Glass.* He did, and became a regular contributor. By letter Charles introduced us to his friend Ian Robertson, who also became a *Crosscurrents* and *Our Glass* contributor, and who later started his own roneoed journal, *Flagstones*, to which all four of us contributed.

1968 was an eventful year. Charles was given an ultimatum by his school to get a haircut or not come back. He chose the latter, and moved to Melbourne in August, boarding in Parkville and finding a job as a laboratory assistant. This move allowed him to get to know his correspondents and, in September, to publish the first issue of his own roneoed poetry broadsheet, *The Great Auk.* Predictably, contributors to the first issue were Charles, Kris, Ian, Kris's friends Elaine Rushbrooke and Bill Beard, and me.

Also in September Kris began the series of Tuesday night poetry readings in Betty Burstall's La Mama theatre that became known as the La Mama Poetry Workshop. Kris had met Ken Taylor through readings at La Mama in 1967 and had decided that Melbourne needed a regular poetry-reading venue. Kris and Ken became considerable influences for many of the poets who read at La Mama, including Charles. La Mama became a meeting place for young poets, a place for poets from interstate to visit and exchange news and views, and a central distribution point for the poetry broadsheets. Charles was one of La Mama's core of attenders and read there often, although he was not a good reader of his own poetry. Keeping his head down and mumbling his words, he did not project his poems, but the poems were such that they commanded attention. There was, perhaps, a stubborn defiance in the way Charles read his poems, as if he were challenging the audience to listen.

As we got to know Charles better we learnt more about his family and the community in Gruyere (named by Swiss who had settled the valley, Charles' ancestors among them), where Charles had felt enclosed and cut off from the 'real' world, something he expressed in one of his early poems:

> in silent/desperation
> waiting for life
> to descend
> to give purpose
> to the foundations
> I lay.

The foundations of Charles' poetry were his reading and writing. At 16 he was most influenced by Donne, Blake and Wilfred Owen.

Now he began to devour the writers we recommended to him; one poem mentions his reading Dylan Thomas's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* and three books of poems (by Brian Patten, Roger McGough and Lew Welch) in one night.

We also learnt that there was a darker side to his story. There had been episodes of mental illness among members of his family, an older brother, whom Charles had adored, had suicided when Charles was a child. In a 1971 interview Charles mentioned that his childhood had ended when he was 'about six or seven'. He told me that his childhood ended the day he heard that his brother was dead. By the time we met him Charles had a morbid fascination with death, and it features in many of his poems. Though he feared death he was also in love with it, and there was more than one attempt at suicide before he succeeded.

At this stage, however, he was more in love with the idea of being a poet – or the romantic Rimbaudish image of a poet that so many of us held at the time. Charles wrote his own poems very quickly, sometimes several in one day, later destroying or rewriting those he felt had not succeeded at first attempt. One of his longest and best poems, 'A History of the Father', took him only two days to write.

Charles' stay in Melbourne in 1968 was short, three or four months, during which he managed to bring out four issues of *The Great Auk*. By Christmas he was back at Gruyere for the fruit-picking, and it became his custom to return each year for this.

Charles spent most of 1969 wandering around Australia, starting the year with a trip to Sydney; from there he travelled to the Snowy Mountains, and camped there with members of an underground political group called Resistance. His poems of that year document his travels. He picked up casual work if he could get it, working in Melbourne as a service-station attendant on one occasion, to finance the next trip.

Late in 1968 I had begun corresponding with the poet Peter Bladen, who had bought a building called Bruse's Hall in Quorn, a small town in the Flinders Ranges, and there founded what he called the Australian Creative Art Centre. In *Expression*, a literary magazine he edited and printed at the Centre, Peter invited writers and artists to visit and stay in Quorn. Before I had been there myself I mentioned Peter and Bruse's Hall to Charles as a place he might find interesting to visit during his wanderings. He agreed and set out for Quorn late in August, staying there for about ten weeks.

Bruse's Hall was (and presumably is) a three-storey stone building that had been a pub in the past, so there were plenty of rooms for people to stay and work in. On the ground floor Peter had established a curiosity shop for the tourists, and had set up the press on which he printed *Expression*. Most visitors contributed a small amount to a kitty from which food and other necessities were bought. Staying there was pleasant and relaxing; Peter was genial, a good conversationalist and unfussed by his guests.

In Quorn Charles earned a little money from house-painting and contributed to his keep by helping in Peter's shop and with the printing of *Expression*. In his editorial for the last issue of *Expression* for 1969 Peter commented:

> The editor of one of Melbourne's poetry folios has been here long enough to weather the storm of a stripped cog on the Multilith, and to decorate his own room (experimentally, as one would expect of an experimental poet).

The issue also contains Charles' poem 'Summer Coming In' (though titled 'Sumer is icumen in: lhude sing/sing loud') and Peter's poem 'for Francis Webb'. The first issue for 1970 includes an early version of the second stanza of Charles' long poem 'The Beginning', and Francis Webb's poem 'Two Girls'. Peter Bladen introduced Charles to Webb's poetry and, deeply impressed by it, Charles later made a point of visiting Webb at Larundel psychiatric hospital; if my memory is correct, he found Webb uncommunicative.

Charles seemed to enjoy himself in Quorn and always spoke warmly of the time he spent there. Some of the poems he wrote there, such as 'Main Street Dust Song' and 'Summer Coming In', have a light-heartedness that is not present in most of his work. He had hoped to print issues 9 and 10 of *The Great Auk* on

Peter's press, but Peter was printing a large issue of *Expression* and having problems with the press, so Charles sent an urgent call for Gestetner stencils he had left with Ian Robertson so he could type them up in Quorn and run them off when he returned to Melbourne.

Some confusion about Charles' visits to Quorn may arise from the datings given to two poems in *Collected Poems*:[1] 'Circa early 1971' for 'Main Street Dust Song', and 'Circa 1971-72' for 'Willochra' (the latter seems a particularly wild stab, since 'Willochra' was included in Charles' 1971 collection, *The Lost Forest*).[2] These were written in late 1969 or early 1970 and arose from his first visit to Quorn. His second visit (in company with Kate Veitch, John Jenkins and me) was in August 1971 and was only for a few days. That he had not been back since 1969 is made clear in his poem 'Two Years Passing', dedicated to Peter Bladen, which arose from the 1971 visit.

Though Charles sounded happy in the letters he wrote from Quorn, Kate Veitch points to his poem 'Willochra' as being particularly significant in that it indicates his awareness and fear of approaching madness:

> Ah, I
> see that plain
>         of ice brooding above me
>           - poised -
>   prepared to descend
>   at any moment
>
> Now knowing
> all the dark hints
> were not, as I had expected,
> a part of this game
>         unreal, contrived
>           - purposely veiled
> But rather
>
> uncommunicable. (Hallucinations
> pass . . . yet the
> presence -

This was written a year before he was diagnosed as schizophrenic. One earlier poem, 'Half/Only/Half', contains lines that hint that he doubts his sanity, but in far more general terms.

On his return from Quorn Charles seemed rather disorientated and lacking in confidence for a while. I had decided to publish his poems as the second in a series of pamphlets of individual poets' work. Charles did not seem confident enough to make a selection from his poems and asked me to do this for him. Then he became anxious about the pamphlet's price, thinking that no-one would pay 60 cents for it. In the event, when *Deep Blue and Green* was published in February 1970 it sold quite well.

Kate Veitch met Charles about the time *Deep Blue and Green* was published. A couple of years younger than him, she was to become his girlfriend and main emotional support, and remained so until late 1971. When they met, Charles showed little sign of the fear that had produced 'Willochra' and was still the enthusiastic and predominantly radiant person who attracted so many friends among his writing cohort and other young people. By the

time Kate could no longer handle the relationship, his actions were at times dictated by hallucinatory voices. These voices could command Charles to such a degree that on one occasion he tried to cut off one of his fingers, because he had been told that Kate 'needed a piece of him'. Although many of Charles' friends had a hard time relating to him during the period of his distintegration, Kate bore the brunt of it until, worn down by his craziness, self-destructiveness and sudden, seemingly cruel, turnings against her, she pulled out in the interest of her own sanity. She was not quite 17.

During 1969 and the first half of 1970, in spite of his wandering existence, Charles kept *The Great Auk* going. In the last four months of 1968 he published five issues. Issues 6 to 10 were published at irregular intervals through 1969, one or two under the title *Holocaust*, which included underground political comment (Charles was in the habit of using *The Great Auk* for editorial writing about whatever concerned him at the time). Issue number 11 appeared in January 1970; it was subtitled 'New Reactions Against Australian Poetry' and contained poems from New Zealand and the UK. Number 12 appeared in June 1970 and was made up of poems by *Auk* stalwarts and friends such as Kris Hemensley, Garrie Hutchinson, John Jenkins, Ian Robertson, Bill Beard, Vicki Viidikas and Geoffrey Eggleston. It was the last issue. A pencilled note on my copy says that few were circulated, as most copies were destroyed.

It is obvious from *The Great Auk*, and from Charles' own poetry, that he was politically aware and active. He read widely in political and social theory and gradually moved from a socialist stance to anarchism, involving himself in various underground movements for short periods. In this arena, as with poetry, he could be struck by sudden enthusiasms brought about by his most recent reading. Such enthusiasm had led him, after reading *The Lord of the Rings*, to plaster Melbourne and Adelaide with little stickers on which he had had printed the message THINK HOBBIT.

During 1970 Charles began working at The Source bookshop, owned by two couples, Paul and Ann Smith and Alec and Helen Morton. The bookshop was a meeting place for young writers and artists, and for some months Charles lived in a large empty room above the shop. He enjoyed working there. With Garrie Hutchinson he planned a new magazine, to be called *Dark Ages Journal*; like an anthology of younger poets that Charles edited for Penguin Books about this time, it never appeared.

John Jenkins shared the room above the bookshop for a while and found that the experience had its good and bad moments. During John's stay there Charles arrived home with a dressmaker's dummy. He stood it in a corner, dressed it, and painted and repainted its face until its appearance became so diabolical that he became frightened of it. With John's help he carried it downstairs, and the two of them walked it through the city streets, crowded with people, until they reached the Melbourne Stock Exchange, where they propped it up and left it. The thought of its resting place completely restored Charles' good humour.

More disturbing experiences were when Charles, in a fit of self-anger and disgust, stabbed 'to death' a self-portrait he had carved in lead, and when, after tripping on LSD in the Botanical Gardens, he became paranoid and was hit by a car, breaking a foot.

During this period Charles spent many hours absorbed in making complex and beautiful collages from pictures cut out of magazines, and listening to records. He was obsessive about records he liked and would listen to them over and over again, for hours on end, often to the annoyance of visitors or other residents. Particular favorites included records by the Doors, Bob Dylan, King Crimson, Traffic and Pink Floyd, and various folk music albums.

When he visited Gruyere with Charles, John felt that the home there was not a happy one. Charles' father seemed shy and extremely taciturn (something all who met him noticed) and his mother was very anxious about Charles. She asked John many questions about himself and his lifestyle, until John felt she had reached the conclusion that 'while not a particularly good influence on her son, he was not a particularly bad one'. John, although no

wowser, on a number of occasions tried to talk Charles out of various excesses and would have been a very good influence had Charles heeded his counsel.

On the same visit Charles showed John his favorite painting, cut from a magazine. It was titled 'Self Portrait' and was by a 13-year-old schizophrenic boy. It consisted of a large number of separate surreal and violent images. When they left Gruyere, Charles took the mail that had mounted up for him there. It included a book with pages so cut that, when opened, it turned into a box containing plastic bags of LSD tabs.

Charles' name is often used in concert with that of Michael Dransfield, probably because both were poets who used drugs and died young. However, in their use of drugs they were very different. Michael became addicted to hard drugs and entered the personal hell that that entails. Charles was addicted only to the Drum roll-your-owns that he smoked incessantly. He smoked pot, as did most of his peer group, and used LSD, but I do not recall him ever using hard drugs, and doubt that he ever mainlined. His drug usage was mostly experimental and in the interest of mind expansion.

There are similarities in some of the poems of Dransfield and Buckmaster, and there were similarities in them as people, though fairly superficial ones. Both travelled often, picking up many friends on their journeys, and both were subject to sudden enthusiasms. Both wrote poems about 'home', but Courland Penders was an illusion of the imagination, while Charles' poems about Gruyere attempt to pinpoint for him the sense of what his real home background meant to him. They did not meet often enough to become close friends, but liked each other and had a common friend in John Sladden, whose poetry Charles admired greatly, and with whom Michael intended to start the publishing imprint of Dransfield and Sladden, a scheme that, like many of Charles', never got off the ground.

It may well have been the experiments with LSD that brought Charles' schizophrenia to the fore, a view held by a number of his friends. Late in 1970 he admitted himself to Royal Park psychiatric hospital, stayed a couple of days, discharged himself, and then readmitted himself for a stay of several weeks, during which he was diagnosed as schizophrenic and given electro-convulsive therapy.

In hospital Charles was very depressed and seemed unable to communicate what he was going through. On one afternoon when I sat with him he could do nothing but cry. On another visit I found him more talkative and took him to seek out Ian Sime, the hospital's art therapist. John Reed had told me about him. When we found Ian and introduced ourselves, he asked Charles: 'Would you be in this place if you had a thousand dollars in the bank?' Charles said 'I've got about that in the bank.' 'In that case you've probably got real problems,' Ian said, to which Charles muttered 'I have', and then lapsed into incommunicability.

When Charles was released from hospital he stayed with Paul and Ann Smith for a while and then moved into a house that John Jenkins was renting with a friend, where he was joined by Kate. Paul Smith, who had worked in psychiatric hospitals before going into the book trade, felt that in Charles' case the use of ECT had been a mistake. His concentration span was short and he had to be retaught the simplest of his bookshop tasks.

However, he did seem to improve during the first half of 1971, no doubt due to the support he was receiving from Kate, John and the Smiths and Mortons. About Easter that year he was interviewed by Harry Marks for a series of articles about young creative people (the one on Charles was published in the *Age*, 16 October 1971). Charles' comments during this interview indicate maturity and self-understanding. He appears more tolerant, of his parents, of older people generally, and of viewpoints other than his own, than he would have had the interview been conducted a year earlier.

Through most of 1971 Charles, Kate and John, with a cousin of Kate's, shared a house in Kew. For part of the year Charles and Kate also rented a farmhouse in the Yarra Valley, where they spent quite a bit of their time. But the improvement in Charles' state of mind was short-lived, and by August, when he revisited Quorn with Kate, John and me, he was in a

bad way, depressed and quarrelsome, though with flashes of humor and cheerfulness. Back in Kew he encouraged wild parties to which he would invite anyone he happened upon, whether he knew them or not. New 'friends' moved into the house. Charles was using LSD, claiming that he now knew the drug and could control its effects.

John held the lease on the house and began to worry that he would be held responsible for the damage that arose from the parties and Charles' eccentricities (once he rode his motorbike through the house). John put his foot down about the parties, and Charles accused him of being conservative, calling him 'Mr Bourgeoisie'.

His behavior became erratic. He would stay in the house for a few days and then disappear for a few days. He rode his motorbike recklessly, to his own danger and the public's. On one occasion he told John that he knew something significant was about to happen because, throughout his life, a stranger had appeared before him at significant times, anonymously among a crowd, stared at him and then vanished. This stranger had begun to appear frequently.

John decided to give up the house because he needed to end a situation he was having difficulty handling. A week or so before it was to be vacated, Charles brawled with Kate to such a degree that she sought refuge in Garrie Hutchinson's house (like John, Garrie could usually be relied upon in a crisis).

On John's last day in the house police called, asking if Charles lived there. It turned out that he had stolen a copy of the *Jerusalem Bible* from a bookshop. When police searched him they found marijuana and he was charged with possession. After being held in Pentridge's remand section overnight, he was bailed out by Kate. He told her that the voices had told him to steal the Bible. He had made the theft so obvious that his being caught was inevitable.

For a while after being charged, Charles stayed with some friends in a house in Carlton. There was another spell in Royal Park, and John Jenkins' account of a conversation he had with Charles then indicates that he was contemplating suicide and had little or no sense of self-worth.

At his trial Charles received a good-behavior bond, a condition of which was that he must live at his parents' home. He returned to Gruyere, but there was no improvement. Simon MacDonald describes his letters as becoming 'gloomier and gloomier, and his phone calls became staccato'.[3] When I rang him his replies were monosyllabic and toneless. When John visited Charles he found him 'shuffling around like a zombie'.

'If I do it, I'll leave nothing behind,' Charles had told John in Royal Park. My last letter came from him in May 1972; it was simply a flat statement rejecting an offer I had made to help him get some poems published. He said that he was no longer writing, and enclosed some money for a book that he had borrowed from me and lost. He was tidying up, preparing to leave nothing behind. In the process he burnt all of his manuscripts that he could find. Fortunately, there were manuscripts scattered among his friends, which Simon MacDonald, who had befriended Charles about the time of his first hospitalization, patiently collected after Charles' death. Unfortunately, they were by no means all of his poems.

Charles' achievements as a poet came between his sixteenth and twenty-first birthdays. Not surprisingly, many of the early poems can be dismissed as juvenilia. However, particularly in the poems written between mid-1969 and mid-1971, he produced a core of work quite remarkable for so young a poet, including some fine lyric poetry and vividly original interpretations of Australian landscape. What he might have achieved if he had not been cut down by the cruel disease of schizophrenia can only be guessed at. For his friends, who watched his sunny personality and inspirational presence deteriorate into manic highs and lows, bouts of self-destructiveness and, finally, black depression, the poems remind us of the essential beauty and value of a friend destroyed by circumstances beyond his control.

Michael Dransfield invented a 'home'. For Charles, home seems almost to have died with his brother. Perhaps he tried to rediscover it when, for his poems, he turned again and again to Gruyere. At times he castigated it: 'Gruyere

is absolute/ and complete/ obscurity/ and oblivion'. He tried to understand what it meant to him: 'Gruyere/ I make for you, for my needs, a history of it'; and he deplored its ruination: 'The cities will merge/ Gruyere is dying and my dream of change dies with it./ What can be done?/ The green walls dissolve.'

In his teens Charles tried to turn his back on Gruyere, but he could never let it go. His brother's suicide, when Charles was at an impressionable age, was perhaps so shattering that he was never able to articulate fully what it had meant to him. In his own suicide, in November 1972, aged 21, he took a ritualistic approach, re-enacting as faithfully as he could the death of his brother.

There is one poem, written in 1969, the year of his most constant wanderings, that harks back pathetically to what Gruyere had meant to him. It is called 'Visions of a Home':

– there are trees
+ a rusted plough      half
sunken
in the clay.
. . . small groupings of
greygreen bellbirds
skim the surface of a dam.

this has been a recurring vision
of the last few weeks . . .

childhood mind images of a
'home'
rural utopia
of orchards gumtrees fields
+ full stomachs

semi-destitute –
i write on borrowed paper
+ the visions
persist

There are no people in his visions, and the quotation marks around the word 'home' seem to have been carefully placed.

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NOTES

I thank Kate Veitch, John Jenkins, Paul and Ann Smith and Alec Morton for sharing their memories of Charles Buckmaster with me while I was writing this article.

1. Charles Buckmaster, *Collected Poems*, ed. Simon MacDonald, UQP, St Lucia, 1989.
2. Although Simon MacDonald has done considerable service in collecting Charles' poems, research while writing this article indicates some flaws in the editorial process. The most serious of these is the inclusion of Ian Robertson's 'earth/hill poem' (pp. 55-7) as a poem by Charles. (Charles seems to attract misattribution; Robert Kenny and Colin Talbot's anthology *Applestealers*, 1974, includes a poem by Kate Veitch (pp. 228-9) in its selection of Charles' poems.)

   Robertson's poem was first published in *Yam* no. 2 (1970). *Yam* no. 1 (1969) includes a poem about Quorn and the Flinders Ranges ('Up & Down Along the Flinders Ranges') that is not in *Collected Poems*, as well as 'Main Street Dust Song' with its date of composition, 26/9/69, for which MacDonald gives 'Circa early 1971'. Because Charles was a very autobiographical poet the dating of his poems is important. Consultation with original published versions can result in more precise dating than is given in *Collected Poems* – e.g. 'The empty circus flutters' ('Circa 1968-70) is dated January 1970 in *Poetry Magazine* 18:3; 'The Beginning' ('late June/early July 1970') is dated November 1969 in *Yam* no. 2; 'an end to myth' ('Circa 1970') is dated January 1970 in *Aardvark* no. 1 (1970). This last may seem pedantic, but, along the line of its publications, Charles' intention in writing 'an end to myth' has been lost. In the same issue of *Aardvark* Charles published his poem 'To the Descendants: History of the Father from a Son' (retitled 'A history of the father' in *The Lost Forest*) and placed at its end 'An end to myth', with the subtitle (dropped in *The Lost Forest*) 'Footnote to "To the Descendants" '. In *The Lost Forest* the same sequence occurs; in *Collected Poems* the two are separated by eleven pages of other poems.
3. *Age*, 28 October 1989.

Comment

JOHN SCHAUBLE

# Multiculturalism, History and Absurdity:

*a Response to John Hirst's Critique*

The essentially tolerant 1940s Australia which benignly welcomed non-British immigrants to its bosom depicted by John Hirst (*Overland* 117) stretches the imagination.

Here was a society which behaved towards its Aboriginal population with an absurd mixture of paternalism and outright brutality. This was a country which for generations had simply excluded non-white, non-European immigrants. It was a society where to serve as a parlour maid in Victoria's Government House, one not only had to be white, but also Protestant.[1]

In the years after World War 2, Australia encouraged the large-scale immigration of southern Europeans for the first time as a matter of domestic expediency. Those who came made their mark and flourished, one suspects, entirely oblivious to any manifestations of John Hirst's tenuous thesis that 'the roots of tolerance lay in the society which invited the migrants to join it'.

Instead they found, as Hirst himself points out, a society which was 'passionless, offhand and even when most polite, strangely indifferent' to them.

Even after the arrival of 'multiculturalism' (an appalling term, coined no doubt by some bureaucratic gnome), it is not difficult to recognize many of the same insular qualities in the Australian psyche evident in those years and, indeed, since the earliest years of settlement.

To allege that the promoters of multiculturalism are somehow plotting to rewrite Australia's history in an absurdist fashion is to underscore that insularity. It may also evince the same sort of social paranoia that kept the 'yellow hordes' in their place (and not this one) for so many years.

Similarly, the suggestion that there is something a bit dubious about the Australian Bureau of Statistics asking Australians to identify a specific ancestry implies that to have an identifiable personal history expressed in terms of ethnicity – be it Greek, Italian, Irish or Vietnamese – is somehow shameful or at least irrelevant in this miraculous polyglot society based on a rock-solid foundation of tolerant Anglo-Celtic virtue.

It might also be worth exploring just how 'pure' this society of Independent Australian Britons was in the 1940s. Certainly it was a society dominated by those of British descent. There is, however, a tendency to ignore the presence in Australia of immigrants from other countries long before the massive influx of the post-war years.

The exceptional case, of course, was South Australia, where, in 1851, 12 per cent of the population were born somewhere other than in Australia or Britain. The majority were German.

The figures for all of the Australian colonies in 1861 show that, in total, 7 per cent of the population were born outside Australia, Britain or its dependencies. In Queensland, 10 per cent of the population were non-British. In Victoria, the figure was 9 per cent, in South Australia 8 per cent and in New South Wales 7 per cent. Only in Tasmania (0.5 per cent) and Western Australia (1 per cent) was the influence of those of non-British stock negligible at this time.

In 1861, 37 per cent of Australians were

born in the colonies. Of the rest, British-born dominated non-British born by 10:1. By 1921, the native-born stock had risen to 85 per cent of the population, but the ratio of British-born to others had dropped to 10:2. In 1947, it was 10:3.[2]

There is no question that Australian society was intolerant of non-British immigration before World War 2. Non-British immigrants could escape this intolerance and the possibility of marginalization only by assimilating into the dominant ethos of Britishness. There was nothing 'welcoming' about it. It was a matter of becoming invisible in a society which, given the opportunity, would quickly turn on those it felt in essence did not 'belong'.

Perhaps the best example of this is the experience of those Australians of German extraction during World War 1. While the internment of enemy aliens at this time was to be expected, anti-German sentiment extended to include even those removed a generation or two by birth from 'the Fatherland'.

The South Australian Attorney-General of the day was Hermann Homburg. His father was German-born Robert Homburg, the first non-British migrant to be appointed a Supreme Court judge in Australia. Hermann Homburg felt compelled to resign his portfolio as anti-German sentiment spread.

As the war dragged on, 'the former distinctions made between Germans, German-Australians and Australians of German extraction disappeared . . . everything was put in the pillory – everything that was German and regarded as potentially disloyal'.[3] Aside from the 3,986 German nationals living in Australia who were interned during World War 1, 61 naturalized Australians of German origin were also locked up. The height of intolerance, however, was the attempt literally to wipe the German influence off the Australian map by changing town names which were German in origin. The passage of the Nomenclature Act of 1917 in South Australia saw Blumberg become Birdwood, Homburg become Haig and Lobethal renamed Tweedvale. Similar changes were made in other states.[4]

After World War 2, the 'disappointment' that some Australians felt at the failure of some migrants to 'mix in' was surely matched only by their delight at the willingness of the newcomers to take on jobs that no one else wanted. The residential enclaves they formed, let it not be forgotten, were for the most part located in the inner-city slums vacated by an upwardly and outwardly mobile Australian working class.

That migrants survived and prospered in the post-war period had less to do with the tolerance extended to them by 'old' Australians than it did with their desire to break the bonds of the older, even more intolerant societies they had left behind. Many of those who came had fled countries ruined by war and/or political oppression, division and class structures which Australia had largely escaped. The 'tolerance' they found in Australia was a tolerance of indifference and inexperience of such conditions; a tolerance nurtured by a growing economic prosperity in which there appeared to be plenty for all.

But as the 'debate' over the Multi Function Polis during the recent federal election has amply demonstrated, it is a tolerance which, at least on questions of race, clearly has upper limits.

For many Australians – particularly second-generation Australians – multiculturalism has less to do with redefining history and the creation of equivalent historical myths to that of the bronzed Anzac than it does with defining the individual self. It has less to do with fragmenting Australian society than it does with finding one's own place in that changed society.

I was more than stunned when one day my father, after living in Australia for 45 years (42 of them as an Australian citizen) told me he had never felt as if he really 'belonged' to this country. This came from a man who had tacitly discouraged his sons from learning to speak his native tongue because he wanted us to grow up as 'Australians'. But who could blame him? When the Australian Government honored him for half a lifetime's work of 'service to the migrant community', it bestowed upon him an *imperial* honor.

1. Michael Dugan and Josef Szwarc, *There Goes the Neighbourhood: Australia's Migrant Experience*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1984, p. 116.

2. Figures drawn from *Australian Historical Atlas*, Faifax Syme and Weldon, Sydney, 1987.
3. Johannes H. Voight, *Australia – Germany: Two Hundred Years of Contacts, Relations and Connections*, Bonn, 1987, p. 102.
4. Ernest Scott, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–18* (vol. 11), Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1936, pp. 153–54.

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## Comment on John Schauble

John Schauble itemizes various unpleasant aspects of Australian society before World War 2. I don't see these as calling into question the existence of a liberal egalitarian ethos, as I described it. I was not claiming that Australia was a 'pure' society; on the contrary, my argument was that there were sharp divisions and a good deal of intolerance and that the liberal, egalitarian ethos developed to control and supplant these. It was an achievement, something worked for. That the tolerance did not extend to all and that it did not always prevail I accept.

Schauble's reply does not altogether escape the dilemma I posed: if Australian society was so bad, why has the migration program been a success? His answer is that Australians were not tolerant, but simply indifferent. Since indifference is so seldom the response to people of different race, language and culture, it cries out for future explanation. In fact many Australians were far from indifferent; they disliked migrants, but disliked more the practice of systematic social exclusion.

On my personal position: I welcome the changes migrants have wrought; broadly I support the present migration program; I call myself an Australian and do not want to be called Anglo-Celtic. Readers must judge whether this reveals an 'insular psyche'.

John Hirst

## Con Castan A reply to John Hirst

John Hirst's 'Australia's Absurd History: a Critique of Multiculturalism' (*Overland*, 117, 5–10) is driven by animus and spleen, generated by what he thinks the post-war ethnic migrants have done to their British Australian hosts. The essay opens with a modern fairy tale which is offered as an accurate account of the multiculturalist version of Australian history. It reads thus:

> 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. (p. 5)

The migration program that John Hirst is referring to is very time specific; it is the one that began with the conclusion of World War II. 'Once upon a time', therefore, has nothing at all to do with time but has everything to do with the use of a rhetorical device at the very outset of the essay to make it difficult for the reader to see multiculturalism's version of history as inherently childish.

The most important words, however, are those that complete John Hirst's fairy tale – 'the new migrants created the tolerance'. This he absolutely rejects and further down on the same page tells us who did create the tolerance:

> 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. (p. 5)

The most that Mr Hirst's exploration of this commonsense hypothesis proves is that British Australians[1] dislike differences being paraded even more than they dislike having to live with people who are different from them. This is a negative tolerance, and if true, is a poor thing to boast of. At a key point in the essay we read:

> 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 exclusion. Its instincts are inclusive. (p. 8)

The exception is so massive as to invalidate any claims for tolerance either positive or negative. I too would like to abandon absurdity and suggest another hypothesis. Neither the host British Australians nor most (if any) of the migrant groups have a history in which tolerance has played a big part. The success of the migration program has nothing to do with this quality in any absolute sense. Rather, the hosts and the migrants were able to live side by side and even to mingle and to interact because the economic circumstances were favourable and because they needed one another to keep these going. When in the early 1970s it seemed as if a higher than acceptable percentage of the migrants were setting out on the path of reverse migration, the official rhetoric, and to some degree practice, changed from assimilation to integration and has to date retained that orientation.

The great bulk of the ethnic migrants belonged, as John Hirst indicates, to the bottom of the economic heap. It was this that made mutualism possible. They knew that by dint of hard work they, or more likely their children, could advance to the more rewarding types of work that a society has to offer. That was what was in it for the migrants. For the members of the host society there was very little, if any, threat. There was plenty of employment and when from time to time there were recessions, the migrants were harder hit than the hosts because there were more of them at the bottom. And when unemployment began to hit middle management, that could hardly be blamed on the migrants for it was clearly the result of technological changes.

One other point. Because the non-British migrants were not a homogeneous mass, they posed less of a threat to the host society. Because the groups were clearly different from one another, and because some of them brought with them intolerance of other groups which also came, these non-British migrants could only with difficulty be seen as a single large minority which could threaten the position of the majority.

Let me now complete my critique by offering my version of the multiculturalist reading of Australian history. It is modelled on John Hirst's and borrows some of his own words, but is, I would suggest a less emotive and more accurate account of what multiculturalism has done:

> In the years preceeding World War II there was a small, inward looking, intolerant, racist, undiversified British nation called Australia. It began to take migrants from Europe and then Asia. This migration program added to both the sums of human happiness and misery and it had both its successes and failures. Among its successes was an effect that no one had intended: it became a 'more diverse, lively, and exciting place' (p. 9) than it had been, and it related to the world more widely than it used to. This resulted from small numbers of people in both the host and migrant groups working hard for diversity, and the great majority making easy adaptations and not taking very much notice of what was going on. There remained some opposition but thus far it has not been able to set the agenda.

1. I too abominate the neologism Anglo-Celt since it expresses no one; and were I by birth, as well as by education (which in large part I am), British Australian, I would utterly reject it. I prefer to speak of British Australia when I speak of the one group standing over against all the other groups. However, in some circumstances it is better to speak of Anglo-, Scotch-, Welsh-, and Irish-Australians, especially if that is a personal preference (as it is especially likely to be in the last two cases) and when one is thinking in terms of the facts that many Australians are indeed defined in part by their ethnicity as that which makes them other-than-Australian as well as Australian. I always think of Martin Boyd as Anglo-Australian, and Vincent Buckley as Irish-Australian, to name but two examples, and am sure they thought of themselves in the same way. It would probably be true to say that up to c.1945 British Australia's main 'other' which prevented it from having everything in its own way was Irish Australia: since then it has become 'ethnic' Australia.

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JOHN BARNES

# Joseph Furphy and Miles Franklin

*An abridged chapter from* The Order of Things, *a biography of Joseph Furphy, to be published later this year by Oxford University Press*

'Miles Franklin was outside the *Bulletin*'s circle, and is the only writer of comparable ability whose name is not in the weekly's seventieth anniversary roll call,' she herself noted in 1950.[1] Nevertheless, Miles looked to the *Bulletin* in much the same way that Furphy did. 'Tho' it didn't rear me I always call myself a near relation of "The Bulletin" and am glad that it did not deny me as one of its youngsters,'[2] she told A. G. Stephens after his review of *My Brilliant Career* appeared on the Red Page (28 September 1901). Stephens had praised the book as 'Australian through and through', and in characteristic fashion labelled it 'the very first Australian novel to be published'. He did not regard it as 'a notable literary performance', but allowed it to be 'fresh, natural, sincere – and consequently charming'. This review, stressing the authenticity of the book, pleased Miles who sent the reviewer 'a double handshake, a humble curtsey and a wish that his big toe may never prove fractious & a grandmotherly hug'.

The first version of *My Brilliant Career* was finished by March 1899, and Miles promptly sent it to Archibald. Alex Montgomery replied on Archibald's behalf, saying that he had not had time to read through the manuscript, but 'from the glance I have taken at it here and there it appears to be fairly well-written', and recommending that 'Mr. M. Franklin' submit it to Stephens for an expert opinion at the cost of 'a professional charge'.[3] Instead, she sent it to T. J. Hebblewhite of the *Goulburn Post*, who had read her earlier writing. According to her own account, she tried various publishers without success, revised the manuscript and appealed to Lawson to read it. Her situation, as she described it to him, was similar to Furphy's: 'My trouble is that I have lived such a secluded life in the bush that I am unacquainted with any literary people of note and am too hard up to incur the expense of travelling to Sydney to personally interview a publisher on the matter.'[4] Lawson took so long to reply that she had already written to Stephens (on New Year's Day 1900) for details of charges when his letter reached her. By the time Stephens' reply (in the name of the Australasian Literary Agency) reached her, she had Lawson's letter agreeing to read the manuscript. He recommended the book to Angus and Robertson, but as George Robertson did not get around to reading it, he offered to take it with him to England. By April 1901 Lawson's English publisher, William Blackwood, had issued *My Brilliant Career* with a preface by Lawson. The English reviews were enthusiastic, and the unknown writer an object of great interest, especially to women readers. Among the letters that Miles received was one from Martha Garnett, sister-in-law of Edward Garnett (who sought to promote Lawson in England), telling her that *My Brilliant Career* 'is being talked about by everyone in London as the cleverest novel of the season'.[5]

Miles Franklin at the age of 22 had had a *succès d'estime*, and was very conscious that

much was expected of her. Bush-bred, with a limited education, she had known even less about the world of writers and publishers than Furphy when she entrusted her manuscript to Lawson. The reactions of readers surprised her: because she had written in the first person, the novel was read as literal autobiography. Within her own family there were tensions, as various characters were identified with family members, and localities pinpointed. In her naïvety she had not realized how much of her private self she had exposed in the book: her resentment at the social decline of her family; her yearning for and fear of sexual relations; her sense of inferiority towards her sister. As an author she was now under public scrutiny for which she was ill-prepared. She relished the attention she received, especially from men, and played the role of 'the little bush maid' in public with great success, but inwardly she was confused and uncertain, and defensive about her writing. She had been upset by the editing of her manuscript and the change of title – she had expected that the sardonic intention would be clear by making the title *My Brilliant(?) Career*, and she resented the deletion of some passages and a number of verbal changes made with Lawson's sanction. Matters were not improved by a letter from Arthur Maquarie, a Sydney University graduate who read the page proofs on Lawson's behalf in London. Maquarie, who was trying to impress upon her his editorial skills, wrote patronizingly of her 'very many faults in grammar and clarity'.[6] After an exchange of letters, he offered to go through her next book before sending it on to Pinker, the literary agent, to be typed and shown to publishers, but it is unlikely that the offer was taken up.

The second book was easy enough to write, but publication was another thing altogether. She had dashed off *My Brilliant Career* in six months – between September 1898 and March 1899, and later revised it in a mere ten weeks. Within a year of receiving the first published copies of *My Brilliant Career* she completed a second novel, *On the Outside Track*, in which she carried on the characters of the first, though she insisted to Pinker that it was not a sequel. Presumably he offered it first to Blackwood, who declined it. He certainly offered it to Duckworth, whose reader was Edward Garnett, known for his admiration of Lawson's stories and Barbara Baynton's, which the firm had published in 1902. Garnett thought that there was 'dash and brilliancy' in *My Brilliant Career*, but *On the Outside Track* was 'quite impossible in its present state'. He drafted a letter to Pinker, saying that the book contained 'good material' but the style was 'hopelessly bad', and that it needed rewriting.[7] How much of this Pinker passed on to Miles we do not know, but no amount of careful paraphrase could soften the blow of rejection. In the note to the Brent of Bin Bin novel *Cockatoos* (published in 1954, after her death), which was a later version of the book, a different reason was given for its failure to find a publisher: 'A brave English gentleman, believing in it, showed it to one of London's leading publishers, but he was disgusted by its frankness and said the author should not be encouraged to write.' She also wrote a short satirical novel based on her experience of Sydney after the publication of *My Brilliant Career*. It was based too closely on her experience for any Australian publisher to contemplate, according to George Robertson, who had no difficulty in recognizing hardly disguised Sydney personalities. By 1903 both her attempts to write a second book – *On the Outside Track* and *The End of a Career* – were with Pinker, who had been unable to find a publisher for either.

There were other experiences that were upsetting. She had been attracted to Paterson, who had proposed a literary partnership and may have had more in mind, but the relationship did not develop. The royalties from *My Brilliant Career* were not sufficient to constitute an income, and she had no profession. The prominent feminist Rose Scott offered her hospitality, and introduced her to interesting and powerful people; she had no end of invitations from society hostesses; but there was still the problem of earning a living. To the world at large she was the confident and successful new writer, getting ready to astonish everyone with a new work; only she knew how complete and humiliating her failure with the 'second book' had been. The title of her satire – *The End of a Career* – seemed prophetic. She did not welcome prospects of

marriage to a man who would regard her 'scribbling' as something she would get over when she had a house and husband, and children, to care for. As the heroine of *My Career Goes Bung* says, 'An author enjoyed no prestige at "Possum Gully".'

Miles faced an early crisis in her life and dealt with it in the manner of a heroine out of a melodrama. Without telling any of her new literary and feminist acquaintances what she was up to, she disappeared from view. Under the assumed name of Sarah Frankling, she went to work in Sydney as a housemaid. It was an act of self-abasement and self-humiliation, but paradoxically it preserved her literary persona. When she was eventually 'discovered', she was able to explain that she was getting 'copy' for her next book; and the role-playing, the leading a double life, working as a maid and on her off-days being tended by Rose Scott, a leader of Sydney society, gave an excitement that she enjoyed to the full.[8]

By the time Furphy wrote to her in February 1904 she was working in Melbourne as 'Mary Anne Smith'. Totally unaware of the true state of affairs, Furphy approached her as a fellow author with whom he felt a great affinity, and for whom he felt real admiration. When he first read *My Brilliant Career* he was struck by what he saw as parallels with *Such is Life*, notably the description of a bush-born girl. 'I think our joint yet independent record ought to demonstrate the existence of a bush-born type somewhat different from the crude little semi-savage of conventional Australian fiction,' he wrote to her on 17 February, when he sent his photograph and described himself as 'the usual lanky Australian, with a proportionately long daughter, quite as old as you are reported to be'. He was now 60 and she was 25, but he treated her as an equal:

> Let me congratulate you on your book, as a whole. It is marked by a departure from the beaten track; and that divergence is everywhere in its favour. Within my own small circle of observation, it is widely read and much discussed, finding a reception as good as you could possibly desire. I like the concluding pages better than any Australian writing I have ever met with. Like you, 'I am proud that I am an Australian.' &c. &c. Such utterances find response in the heart of every compatriot, and go far to the making of a nation.
>
> It is said that you have another book ready for publication. So have I; but the BULLETIN won't touch mine till S'L. wins a wider circulation. RIGBY'S ROMANCE is the title of the new opus.[9]

Such obviously sincere praise was very welcome to Miles, who sent her photograph in reply. There had been a delay while Furphy's letter went to her parents' home at Bangalore, outside Sydney, which was the address Stephens had given Furphy, and was then re-addressed to the GPO Melbourne. By 21 March, when he received her reply, Furphy had arranged to visit Melbourne for Easter. 'Grant H., still morally ricochetting back and forrid between heaven and sheol, will probably be there too,' he had told William Cathels the previous week.[10] He had not yet met Hervey, but was well aware of his friend's irresponsibility. Dyson had invited him to call; and he was making arrangements to meet Cecil Winter's mother and his sister Molly. Now he seized upon the possibility of meeting Miles, charging her 'in the name of Edward VII.' not to buy a copy of *Such is Life*: 'If I had known your address last August, you are the first - or one of the first three, say - that would have had a volume by post. . . . This unsolicited cameraderie on my part arises from the fact that no book yet published contains so many echoes of my own literary ideas and avowals as yours does.' Again, there was no mistaking the genuine warmth of his feeling towards her:

> I like your portrait exceedingly well. It bespeaks frankness, courage, generosity, surpassing sweetness of disposition, and mental capacity of the highest order. Above all, it conveys to me the conception of *value* - womanly value; and this is the idea I would wish to impress upon yourself. You are an exceptional girl. Don't hold yourself cheap - but then, again, this counsel is superfluous, if I read your face aright. My daughter (Sylvia) is in the West. I suppose I'll have to send the photo. to her, particularly

as she regards the authoress of M.B.C. as being of some superior order. But I'll want another for my sanctum.

This is merely preliminary. If you know me as well (through reading my book) as I know you (through reading yours), you would perceive that there is no need for ceremony between us. We have much in common. Though doubtless many people know even more of bush life than we do, I question – with all modesty – whether any can depict it as well. Let this be our point of contact. The fact that you have a magnificent future before you, whilst I have a prosaic past behind me, is not the purpose.[11]

Miles' reply was restrained and a little wary. The kind things he had to say about her merely reflected his good nature, and she claimed to be amused when told that she had a great future before her.

Furphy arranged to extend his visit, as she would be 'out of town until 7th Ap when I think I will be done my 12mths "experience" '.[12] They met by appointment at the GPO. Kate Baker had expressed a wish to meet Miles, but Furphy was accompanied not by the faithful Kate but by Molly Winter, to whom he had immediately taken a great liking. He described Molly to Cathels:

Well, she is one of the loveliest women I ever beheld. Aged 27, but looking 30-odd; rather below middle-size; slight, but strong; and apparently perfect in figure as the bending statue that enchants the world. Quiet and well-mannered; singularly sensible (strange to say); fairly well-read, and exceptionally clear of intellect. Unassumingly devout (prithee be silent, boy) – in fact, the only person I ever knew to say grace, silent of course, in a cafe. William Cathels, I am as prosaic as you are; and I repeat that Molly Winterbottom is a woman of obvious virtue and exceptional excellence, with the face of a sculptured angel.[13]

Molly, who had trained as a nurse to get away from a repressive home, was on her way to Albury, where she worked at the hospital. She had no particular interest in literature, or in Furphy, whom she regarded as an old man – she thought that to him she was 'an old man's fancy'. He gave her a copy of *Such is Life*, and talked to her about his marriage, confiding in her as he did in none of his other women friends. She did not enjoy his confidences – 'His life as he portrayed it to me living all alone in his "Sanctum" never exchanging a word with his wife the year round made me creep'[14] – but she thought him 'a good man'. He wrote to her regularly (as to his mother and Kate) but she did not keep any of his letters.

Miles remembered that Furphy, dressed in 'a slop suit that looked as if it had faded much and had been washed but not ironed', reminded her of an uncle by marriage of whom she was fond. According to Furphy, when he and Molly met Miles, 'the two salt-bush signorinas – What in the Fiend's name is feminine for "fraternized"?'[15] Miles was acquainted with two of Molly's brothers, though not with Cecil (their father had remarried after the death of their mother, and there were fourteen children in all). Kate had known of the planned meeting and, perhaps with a proprietorial feeling, she and two women friends managed to encounter Furphy and his companions as they walked to the Art Gallery. Furphy described the scene to Cathels:

Drifting to the Art Gallery, we went into committee in front of Longstaff's 'Sirens', with the six chairs placed in a small circle. As the solitary he-feller of the synod, I fully expected to be given in charge every time Miles's merry laugh resounded through the galleries. But I came off safe, though something like 500 people seemed to take an interest in us. Then to Cole's, where I gave her a copy of a certain publication which I am too modest to name . . . But I would rather have missed seeing Miles than Molly. Molly is copy, and sacred copy at that.[16]

The relationship with Molly was one-sided, as Furphy well knew: she was an object of private worship, but not a friend with whom he could share his literary interests. Miles might not have Molly's physical beauty, but she fascinated him, as this description shows:

> Rather *above* middle height - say, about the altitude of Mrs. Sheil - slight, slender-waisted, and with the action of a greyhound. From the top of the head to the middle of the nose she is magnificent; then from the parting of the lips to the footpath she is a daughter of the gods. But the intermediate two inches is pure Aboriginal, except in colour. Yet when you have listened for two minutes to the torrent of common-sense, pathos and humour, clothed in mingled poetry and slang, and delivered in deep, sweet contralto, you wouldn't for the world have a feature of her face altered. She is right enough as she is. Spontaneous! Don't say another word about it, Cathels.[17]

The meeting in the Art Gallery was 'disappointing' because the women monopolized Miles, but he met her again the following day for an hour.

Back in Shepparton he wrote to her: she was now 'Miles' and he was 'Joe Furphy'. Several of his letters to her went unanswered, and when she did reply it was to 'Mr Furphy'. She was living at home, now in Penrith, writing again, but with little confidence. Her life as 'Mary Anne', domestic servant, had come to an end just before Easter and her meeting with Furphy, but although the news of what she had done for the past year led to fresh newspaper interest in her, her series of sketches of the life of a domestic went unpublished. While she struggled with an overpowering sense of failure, Furphy was innocently writing to her about her 'great future'. On 12 April he was giving her advice: 'You will be sought, and courted, and fawned upon, as no other woman has been since the time of "H.E. Jarsey". Be not cajoled into exclusiveness, dear Miles. Think of the ten thousand sunburnt and profane brothers out back, any one of whom would walk fifty miles to hear your voice or touch your hand.'[18] On 15 June he was speculating that she was 'the Tenth Muse'.[19] On 17 July he was urging her not to leave Australia:

> Don't go to America or Europe, Miles. There is variety enough here; between the seething Pandemonium of the cities and the hallowed solitudes of the Out-back; between the serrated profile of the Great Divide and the long, long levels of Riverina. And Literature has hardly yet touched the fringe of Australian life-conditions. Practically nothing has been exploited but the amenities of the Home-station, the hardships of the Selection, and the most unlikely nugget found by the reduced gentleman. Stay among the eucalypts, Miles, and earn the adoration of your countrymen by translating the hosannas and elegies of the Bush into vernacular phrase.[20]

When she wrote to him on 12 August, she tried to persuade him that he was laboring under a delusion about her:

> I absolutely refuse to see that I have any vestige of talent for writing. I have no talent any way, especially to make my living. Being deplorably domesticated I can only be comfortable working in the home, and America appeals because I believe domestics have a better time there. They have a very, very hard one here.[21]

His reply was a long letter, written over two days, describing his life and his writing projects, and mixing praise of her writing with advice:

> 'What on earth can I see in your book?' you ask. Well, frankly, there's a lot of average-girl in it - just as there's a lot of quartz in the Great Boulder Reef. But all of the book is interesting, and parts of it are magnificent. You *cannot help* doing great work yet; you can no more help it than the earth can help performing its diurnal rotation. Speaking as an experienced and somewhat fastidious reader, I say deliberately that all of your work which has come under my notice bears the stamp of *genius*. You have a power which could never be acquired by (say) Ethel Turner, or Mrs. Praed, or 'Ada Cambridge'. Believe me, your ability is right enough; the only question is the application thereof. Which happily affords me opportunity for advice. - Avoid the Greasing of the Fat Pig (if you will pardon the not inappropriate vulgarity), and also the Lower Bohemianism.[22]

She had told him that she was swearing off correspondence in order to get on with literary work. He declared that he would write once a month without expecting a reply.

Looking over Furphy's letters almost forty years later, Miles Franklin saw in them, as in the letters to Cathels, 'the evidence that he hungered for response that he did not get'.[23] She acknowledged then - what she did not perhaps acknowledge consciously at the time - that she did not know how to respond to this man old enough to be her father. She may have expected originally that her meeting with Furphy would be no more consequential than her meeting with 'Rolf Boldrewood' (T. A. Browne), which also occurred during her stay in Melbourne. A 78-year-old greybeard, Browne wrote in her autograph book 'What youthful writers need if they have the gift is perseverence and industry',[24] a piece of advice, he said, that came from his own experience. Furphy had plenty of advice to give her, but at the same time he was looking for a degree of intimacy that unsettled her. Asking her to send another photograph - he had sent the first to Sylvia - he tells her: 'Meantime, it rests with you to renew me spiritually, so to speak, and the capacity to do so - if you understand me - seems to embody a certain responsibility' (17 July).[25] He wanted more than a casual literary friendship, and the strength of his desire for intimacy, albeit on paper, leads him to play the role of the paterfamilias in the same teasing manner that he does in letters to Kate. Referring to her silence, he writes: 'Indeed, I had some idea of approaching your Pa with a request that he would beat you' (31 July).[26] A year after their meeting he was still trying to establish with her the sort of relationship he had with Kate and his other women correspondents:

> Don't think I am flattering you for some sinister purpose. You don't know my attitude toward the wearer of the silky mo. For philosophic reasons, I carefully cultivate a hard and ungenerous opinion of her. By a rather remarkable coincidence you met the whole circle of my lady-acquaintances in Melbourne, so you can judge for yourself. I have trained myself to regard Baker as an opium fiend; Miss Drewitt as a person who has bolted from her hubby; and Miss Winterbottom as one who habitually chases people with an axe. Present time, I am just casting about for some imperfection suitable to you - the more mal-apropos the better.

The letter concludes:

> I write this on the anniversary of the day when I first saw the 10th Muse stepping into the vestibule of the Melb. P.O. Do you write to Baker of the Guards? I don't think you do. Miles! I'll *have* to beat you. Good night.[27]

He was anxious to have her within his circle. A recurring theme of his letters is the possibility that she would marry the wrong man - or marry at all - instead of fulfilling her potential as a writer. She should not go to America: 'If you did, we should presently hear of you as Mrs Colonel Petroleum Z. Something' (31 July).[28] On 5 October 1904 he quotes Carlyle on happiness and tells her:

> There are gems of word-painting in M.B.C. which neither you nor anyone else is likely to excel. If you can only retain the picturesque freshness of that book, whilst acquiring method in construction, and a patient faith in the Scheme of the Universe - that is to say, a rational appraisement of the value of life, and a definite theory of its purpose - you will assuredly do work that will make the rest of us seem as grasshoppers in our own eyes. Which is a painful situation when the object of contrast is 'only a girl'.
>
> Colonel Birdofredom Z. Peanut, with $1,000,000,000, is one thing, and the Minstrel Boy of feminine day-dreams is another thing entirely. You can't get a chemical combination of the two. Don't touch the first, unless you covet death-in-life. Please yourself about the second. But I don't see why you should hanker after the job of keeping an Old Man, in addition to yourself. Miles, the subject is becoming painful.[29]

On 3 November he speculates on what she is doing:

> Are you eating the lotus of idleness? or smoking the cigarette of meditation? or driving the magazine-pen of energy? or merely waiting for the Colonel? (let us call him the Colonel, for shortness). Seriously, you are just now at one of the epochs of life that mar or make. That is to say, 'M.B.C.' is merely a breathing gallop, and display of pace; now it is to be decided whether you run a good race, or bolt off the course, or sulk at the post. Doubtless you will come out grand, for I have unbounded faith in the Australian woman in general, and the meteoric Miles in particular; for your past work is studded with gems of genius. Mind, I don't say this to flatter you (what a spaniel I would be!) but to inspire you with due confidence.[30]

With this letter he sent her a volume of Epictetus.

Having read the volume twice - and decided that the message of Epictetus was 'keep your hair on' - Miles replied with a long letter in which, despite her protestations that she could not tell Furphy what he wanted to know, she managed to tell him a great deal about herself, perhaps more than she realized:

> I can't tell you anything about my book, as it has not been home long enough yet for me to get word of it.
>
> I can't tell you what frame of mind I'm in at present - one without a rudder somewhat. I don't know whether I will bolt off the course, or sulk at the post, but don't be alarmed if I do come a cropper in the near future, as I have time to fail to all appearances, and then succeed again, before I'm thirty; and a phrenologist gave his opinion that I couldn't be crushed, because I could never be brought to accept defeat as final. One thing is - I'll fight to a finish, even if I marry the Colonel (yes, we'll call him the Colonel, for shortness), and he gives me a death-in-life existence, such as you have warned me of. I won't cringe, at all events, but continue to regard myself as a retort for the assaying of various commodities of mental existence.
>
> I can't tell you how your appreciation affects me. I don't for an instant think you would stoop to flattery, and otherwise I don't know you can mean it, or what you see in M.B.C. Why anybody should like it arouses my honest curiosity and ardent desire to fathom. I can't get at the root of it all; yet I still get an occasional letter - not from children or gushites either, but apparently from grave and storm beaten men.

To his enquiry about what she may be doing she replies that 'a kind gentleman here lends me his racehorse, and a kind woman lets me nurse her baby'. More to the point, she tells Furphy of visiting A. G. Stephens with Rose Scott, and fetchingly alludes to the conversation: 'We talked of our Australian brothers and sisters - and you must act Epictetus, and guard against conceit, when I say your personality evoked the adjective "dear", and many others as good, every time you were mentioned.'[31] Like her previous letter, this one is signed 'Merrily, Miles', but the strongest impression left by what she writes is of anxiety and puzzlement. She was very far from confiding in Furphy, however much she admired and respected him; and he had little understanding of how his intense desire for close friendship affected her. (Verna Coleman[32] has suggested that the character of Renfrew Hoddington, 'the really truly GREATEST AUSTRALIAN POET', in *My Career Goes Bung* has many of the virtues that Miles Franklin discerned in Furphy, which may be true. However, all Miles' own comments, published and unpublished, about their meeting and correspondence emphasize her inability to respond to him as he wished. Her letters to him that have survived show her groping to find the appropriate manner.) Unlike the heroine of *My Brilliant Career*, she held back her innermost feelings, and when she did write directly about herself gave no indication of her increasing identification with the feminist outlook of such figures as Vida Goldstein. While in Melbourne, when not being 'Mary Anne' she stayed with the Goldstein sisters, who shared an apartment with H. H. Champion

and his wife. Vida Goldstein had stood unsuccessfully for the Senate in December 1903 (Furphy voted for her and 'instructed' Kate to do the same), the first woman to be a candidate. She was a determined worker for women's rights, and her influence on Miles was probably decisive in Miles' choosing to go to America in April 1906.

Soon after the meeting with Miles, Furphy raised with Stephens the possibility of reviving the Australian Society of Irresponsibles. If Stephens would not take up the idea again, what about Steele Rudd having a go? 'Couldn't risk further Irresponsibility,' replied Stephens, 'G.H. was too painfully wedded to the letter which killeth.'[33] Furphy put his suggestion to Davis, who set about drawing up a constitution with Furphy's help. 'You are the only one he mentioned personally in connection with the movement, in the course of some desultory correspondence thereupon',[34] Furphy told Miles on 5 October. This well-intentioned initiative appears to have lapsed, even before those interested had got as far as designing their letterhead.

'What delightful Bohemians you literary people are',[35] Kate had written to Furphy on first hearing that he planned to meet Miles Franklin, and her naïve remark reflects pretty well the public view of artists as irresponsible nonconformists prepared to ignore the proprieties. To a later age there is something very comic about Furphy's reaction to Kate's letter, asking to be introduced to Miles: he sent her letter to Miles with an apparently serious enquiry as to whether he might introduce Kate. So much for his Bohemianism!

Furphy's range of acquaintance among writers was very restricted, and he never belonged to any of the metropolitan literary groups. The Society of Irresponsibles, which was to have been a kind of correspondence club, had seemed to offer the possibility of making contact with other writers; it probably meant more to him than to anyone else involved. But it could not resolve the conflict in his life between his desire to be a writer and his commitment to wife and family. There had never been any real prospect of his becoming a full-time writer, but from the time of his visit to Sydney it had seemed as if he could look forward to, at least, the fellowship of other writers. The publication of *Such is Life* had brought public notice and a gratifying number of congratulatory letters. There was, however, no financial reward, and no chance of his being able to give up the foundry job.

By writing *Such is Life* Furphy had turned defeat into a kind of victory. He had failed in a material sense, but he had succeeded in a way that was more important to him. Yet once again he felt disappointment and frustration after success. *Such is Life* had been well received, but no-one seemed to want *Rigby's Romance*. 'As a chastening experience there is nothing to surpass the discipline of waiting on publishers with a little thing of your own in your hand and a hangdog expression on your face,'[36] he had written in March 1901, while waiting for the *Bulletin* to publish *Such is Life*. It was a discipline he was to live under for the remaining few years of his life.

1. Franklin, *Laughter Not For a Cage*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1956, p. 119.
2. Franklin to Stephens, 10 October 1901, ML MSS A2299.
3. Montgomery to Franklin, 18 April 1899, ML MSS 364.
4. Franklin to Lawson, 19 November 1899, ML MSS 364.
5. Martha Garnett to Franklin, ML MSS 364.
6. Maquarie to Franklin, 18 September 1901, ML MSS 364.
7. Edward Garnett, reader's report on 'The Outside Track, 13 January 1903, Duckworth Papers, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
8. Of the various accounts of Miles Franklin's early life the best documented is Verna Coleman's *Miles Franklin in America: Her Unknown Brilliant Career*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1981.
9. Furphy to Franklin, 17 February 1904, ML MSS 364.
10. Furphy to Cathels, 13 March 1904, ML MSS A1964.
11. Furphy to Franklin, 21 March 1904, ML MSS 364.
12. Franklin to Furphy, 23 March 1904, SLV MS 9419.
13. Furphy to Cathels, 11 April 1904, ML MSS A1964.
14. Molly (Winter) Bowie to Franklin, 19 June 1937, ML MSS 364.
15. See fn. 13.
16. See fn. 13.
17. See fn. 13.
18. Furphy to Franklin, 12 April 1904, ML MSS 364.
19. Furphy to Franklin, 15 June 1904, ML MSS 364.
20. Furphy to Franklin, 17 July 1904, ML MSS 364.
21. Franklin to Furphy, 12 August 1904, SLV H 15997.

22. Furphy to Franklin, 20 August 1904, ML MSS 364.
23. 'The Furphy Women', typed note by Miles Franklin, ML MSS 364.
24. Franklin, *Laughter Not for a Cage*, p. 52.
25. See fn. 20.
26. Furphy to Franklin, 31 July 1904, ML MSS 364.
27. Furphy to Franklin, 28 April 1905, ML MSS 364.
28. See fn. 26.
29. Furphy to Franklin, 5 October 1904, ML MSS 364. The Carlyle quotation was from *Sartor Resartus.*
30. Furphy to Franklin, 3 November 1904, ML MSS 364.
31. Franklin to Furphy, 13 November 1904, NLA MSS 2022.
32. Coleman, p. 66.
33. Stephens to Furphy, 26 April 1904, NLA MSS 2022.
34. Furphy to Franklin, 5 October 1904, ML MSS 364.
35. Kate Baker to Furphy, 25 March 1904, ML MSS 364.
36. The quotation is from a paragraph apparently written for a newspaper competition. It was first published in Miles Franklin's *Joseph Furphy*, p. 65. The original is in the Kate Baker Papers, NLA MSS 2022.

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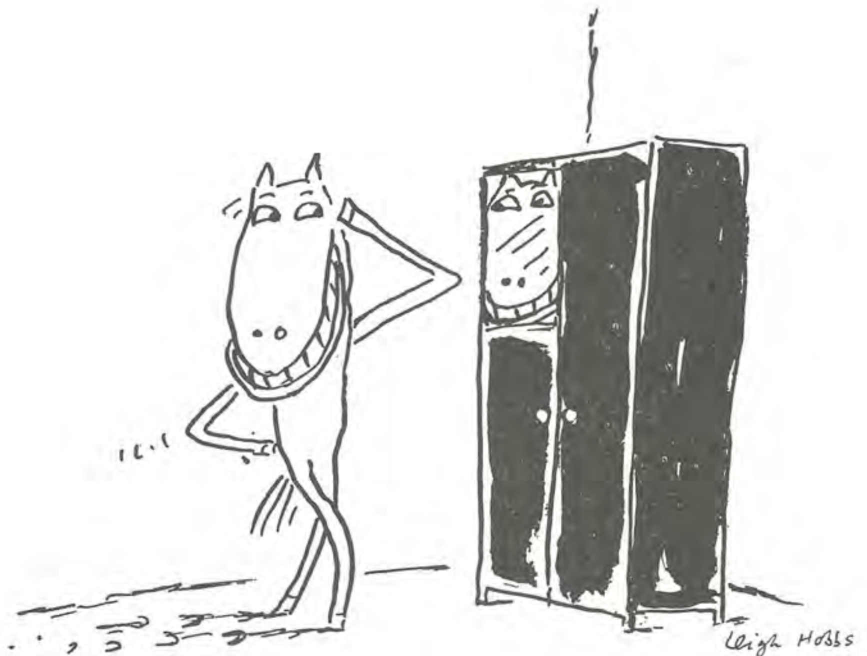


Vanity

*Leigh Hobbs*

# books

## After Such Knowledge

John Hanrahan

Lily Brett: *After the War: Poems*, illustrations by David Rankin (Melbourne University Press, $29.95).
Lily Brett: *Things Could Be Worse*, illustrations by David Rankin (*Meanjin*/Melbourne University Press, $24.95).

In the late 1960s, when I was no longer young, but enjoying higher education and student poverty, I answered an advertisement for a tutor in English. Mrs Brown lived in Caulfield. Her name wasn't anything like Brown, but she didn't want her friends to know that she was having her sons tutored. It was incredibly obtuse and ignorant of me to notice how precisely Mrs Brown had written a phone number on her arm. Her phone number to Hell, her Auschwitz number. Over the years that I got to know her, her story seeped out. She wanted to forget, but she knew that the world should not forget.

Learning how not to forget is a theme to Lily Brett's work. She was born in 1946. She came to Australia in 1948. Her first book of poetry, *The Auschwitz Poems*, was published in 1986. Brett refers to a character in her collection of stories as 'a reformed anti-Semite'. Her poetry and her stories convey the sense of a rough awakening and an urgent plunge into memory.

Brett is an important writer because she threatens the monocultural amnesia of those of us who claim to espouse a multicultural society. We choose to forget the nightmare Europeans introduced into Aboriginal Dreaming, we choose to forget the nightmare of Auschwitz. Memory can be manufactured and self-aggrandizing. Descended from Sullivans, O'Briens and Haydens, I am asked every other week if I have ever read John O'Brien's poem, 'Said Hanrahan' and invited down to the Celtic Club. I never go, because I distrust career Irishness. But there are ways of reclaiming one's heritage that are not spurious, that do not exploit suffering but move into it without diminishing it. Vincent Buckley did this powerfully in one of his best books, *Memory Ireland*, and he was much further away from his Irish origins than Brett is from her Jewish-Polish origins. Buckley writes best about Ireland when he works in the narrative mode and this is one of the great strengths of Brett's first two books of poetry, *The Auschwitz Poems* and *Poland and Other Poems*. (1987)

The use of the definite article in the title of *The Auschwitz Poems* is both daring and appropriate. It is not a grandiose claim, for Brett has written The Psalms of her suffering people. Her voice is so authentic that it brings into words the unspeakable. Her narrative is at once generalized and sharply realized in its particulars. And in all her writing is the personal search for her parents, particularly her mother - a search for their past. The Auschwitz poems are in fact one long poem, a narrative at once laconic and impassioned, angry and celebratory. The struggle to find the words for the depths of human suffering and for the banality of evil pervades her work. Most of the poems in her first book have one-word lines, a defiance of silence, but almost an escape into it:

You
mother
would have

like
all
the other
mothers

gone
with
the
children . . .

they
held
their children
high

to
breathe
the last air

the
gas
burst
from the ceiling

hitting
them
first.

('Children I')

Much of Brett's poety is the exorcising of the guilt of the survivor, the guilt of the person who hasn't suffered and who had for a long time closed herself off from the suffering of others. Moral indignation is a dangerous emotion, offering as it does the pleasures of self-righteousness. There is still plenty of anger in *Poland.* The first half of the book is mainly about a bitterly nostalgic trip to Poland.

I
am
angry

I
dizzy
myself

fly
from
my skin

float
in
fright.

('Angry')

The second part is called 'Kaddish for My Mother' and focuses on the death of Brett's mother in 1986. Anger, affection, celebration are given another dimension by Brett's sometimes mocking, sometimes ironic account of herself.

suspended
I invent
my death
and weep for myself

I spin
a large web

of sympathy
to break my fall

poor Lily poor Lily
('Today IV')

Brett also shows a consistent awareness of the irony in becoming a well-known poet in Australia by writing a series of poems that could be subtitled 'Postcards from Auschwitz: Almost Wish I'd Been There'.

Lily Brett's third collection of poems, *After the War*, does in a real sense complete a trilogy. In her first book she was a voice off-stage, narrating anecdotes of agony that were held together by a harmony of rage, disbelief and admiration. In her second volume her voice became more personal but still paid homage to her past. Both the homage and the anger are present in her new book, but now with an edge sort of tranquillity. As well as looking back, she looks forward with a startled, suspicious optimism. Her strength still lies in a noticing and celebratory anecdotal wisdom, in a succinct observing of her world and in asking the reader to find the meaning. And always the theme remains, that we have to find the words for the Holocaust before we can start to redeem ourselves by redeeming our language.

The word 'Holocaust' is a good example. In her collection of stories, *Things Could Be Worse*, Brett writes:

> Lola hated the word Holocaust. It was too neatly wrapped into a parcel. There were no loose ends and no frayed edges. The Holocaust. It was a nice, compact abstraction. But what else could she say? The alternatives were so wordy. She could say the Nazi extermination of European Jewry. She could say the destruction of the Jews by the Nazis. She could say Hitler's murder of six million Jews.

This is Brett's first work of prose to be published. I hope it will be the first of many more, both from Lily Brett and from *Meanjin*/Melbourne University Press. I also hope that this book will not be seen as a postscript to Brett's poetry, in the way that Sylvia Plath's wonderful novel, *The Bell Jar*, is often seen as a PS to her poetry. *Things Could Be Worse* moves a step further towards redeeming a language that gave The Holocaust a label and, with it, permission to forget.

*Things Could Be Worse* is a collection of stories about 'a company' of Jews who find themselves surprised and pleased in the Melbourne of the 1950s and 1960s. The focus of the narrative is Renia and Josl Bensky and their daughter Lola. The 'Lily' of the poems has become the 'Lola' of the stories, which come very close to making up a novel. The themes of the poems recur, as do many of the incidents, preoccupations, even phrases. Like the Lily of the poems, Lola suffers through her mother's death, visits Poland, gets introduced to Chopin's piano, rushes to the toilet to vomit when she is being entertained by Polish hosts with short memories. Lily and Lola both wonder what soup made from potato peels would be like.

But the fiction has moved on from the poetry in two ways. Its focus is the next generation of Jews, the Jews who would dare to forget. And its anger is lit by a wonderfully ebullient and demanding comedy. The book starts grimly enough: 'In Germany in 1945, Renia had contemplated suicide . . . Everybody she had belonged to was dead . . . But Renia Bensky was too tired to die." So she comes to live in Caulfield. And things often do get worse. The gilt falls off Caulfield, Jerusalem the Golden. The children drop out. You name it, they have dropped out from it. A son of Auschwitz agonizes over ways of concealing from his parents the fact that he has paid $70 000 for a sideboard.

Jewish parents came to Australia to rebuild their lives and to forget their past. 'You must forget the past and think of the future.' For Renia and Josl Bensky 'the past, their lives before they came to Australia, was definitely out of bounds, their own private territory. Sometimes a small sliver of detail would slip out.' Sometimes the past crashes out in Renia's nightmares. In Renia and Josl, Brett has created an affectionate portrait of two vibrant personalities. Renia is the compulsive carer, worrier, nurturer, shopper, fusser. Josl is a man who insistently believes that he was born lucky.

Brett shows a compassionate understanding of their need to forget but is unforgiving of the wilful forgetfulness of their children. Lola, born with 'a backlog of sadness', slowly comes to terms with her parents' past and with her own anxious present.

> Why was it, Lola wondered, that a generation of robust, earthy, vigorous parents had produced cool cats like Morris, or comatose hypochondriacs like Fay Farber or Susan Wiener, or repressed depressives like Ben Hertz, who meditated and ommed all day?

The stories are a celebration of those parents who 'came to Australia damaged and penniless' and 'also resilient'. 'They came here with gratitude, and spirit, and optimism, and a readiness to begin again. They built new lives. And they had children.'

Brett presents both parents and children with an exuberant, ironic comedy. 'The company' of Jewish friends makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Josl organizes the itinerary - via Las Vegas, which is where he has the most fun. Israel is too full of Jews. Auschwitz is neither forgotten nor forgiven. It recurs in the laconic anger of Brett's storytelling.

> Mania and Shmul Buchbinder died in Auschwitz. Yetta Buchbinder died in the Warsaw Ghetto. All the aunties and uncles died. There had been eighty-seven Buchbinders in Lowicz. After the war, Genia was the only one left.

But the stories are written with the energetic peace of a writer who has finally given herself permission to laugh, who has finally forgiven herself for not having suffered as much as her parents. And the writer herself does not escape her own irony, her own mockery. 'Lola felt worn out. Not talking about herself had exhausted her.' 'Arrows of anger and shafts of self-pity pitted her thoughts.' Occasionally Brett's prose is clumsy, occasionally her images are trite, but she has emerged as a powerful writer of prose fiction, with a sharp narrative sense, a fine ear for dialogue and an energetic vision of human absurdity. Her stories are a forceful example of that wonderful anomaly, anger at play.

*Things Could Be Worse* is a deftly ironic title for stories about people who escape from the hell of Auschwitz to the brick veneer paradise of Australia. *After the War* is a title that carries its own more subtle ironies. For this collection of poems is really about after two wars: the war of Brett's parents; and her own war. Her war to find and own her parents, her war to find herself. The book is divided into three sections: 'Jerusalem', 'A Storyteller' and the awkwardly titled 'I Have Thrown Away Days'. A character in *Things Could be Worse* says 'I was in Auschwitz, so, do I write poems?' Brett wasn't in Auschwitz, but she has written many fine poems about being there. Now she moves on. This is her after-Auschwitz book and enhances her reputation as a poet who creates not from ritual responses to Jewish suffering but from a passionate involvement in human living and loving.

The poems are now both more serene and more individual. In their longer lines, in their quieter rhythms, they move towards a ragged peace and say goodbye to a tortured past.

> It has taken me
> a long time to know
> that it was your war
> not mine
> that I wasn't
> in Auschwitz
> myself
>
> ('Leaving You')

Brett's strength still lies in the narrative swoop, in grabbing the scene, the incident that reverberates: the trays and trays of eggs inside the entrance of the Jaffa Gate; a garden in Independence Park in Jerusalem that is decorated with cabbages; the earnest advisers who bombard her with information on how to look after a baby; a Japanese girl praying for Emperor Hirohito at the Wailing Wall. She can lapse into the grand gesture, the exhausted metaphor.

> Filaments of fallen stars
> stitched and fettered
> make an earthly firmament
> for you and me . . .

our arms are intertwined
the radiant point of Zion shines
the red planet shifts
for you and me.
('Poem for David')

I thought this fear would leave me
would sweep itself into weightless leaves
which each year drop by drop
would seep out through my skin
('This Fear')

In her more meditative poems, Brett can indulge in a confused earnestness. She would do better to leave the moon and the stars to other less accomplished poets. On her home ground of personal observation and self-revelation she writes with a seemingly easy confidence. She has produced a collection of poems that claim with assurance many emotions, for they are wry, angry, moving and self-aware. 'I have no women friends left', she claims. She also announces:

I have finally
claimed
my madness
('Finally')

Brett teeters on the edge of self-indulgence. But her poetry generally has a sardonic self-awareness, a redeeming irony. She takes emotional risks in her writing and her daring pays off in many rewarding poems. And stories. Brett has a genuine narrative flair. Both her stories and her poems are important because she has an individual, passionate voice. And this voice warns us that when words die, people die; reminds us that in our lifetimes, millions of people have been murdered in the name of civilization; and tells us eloquently that we have no right to remain incredibly (and sad to say, credibly) obtuse and ignorant about the sins of our time.

Brett's poetry is published by Melbourne University Press, her fiction by the same press together with *Meanjin*. I hope this is an indication of future directions. Both books are beautifully produced. They are the sort of books that bring out one's book-fondling tendencies. Both are illustrated by Brett's husband, David Rankin, as were her first two books which were published by Scribe. 'Illustration' seems too small a word to describe Rankin's drawings both on the covers and inside the books. The drawings counterpoint the poems and the stories. They are filled with celebration and brooding, with a rich spareness. Some of them are more black than white, but they live with welcoming shadows. The effect is not of darkness but of rushes of light and a bold subtlety, which are the characteristics of Lily Brett's writing at its best. Both the drawings and the writing celebrate, against some damning evidence, a belief in a leftover, resilient human goodness.

*John Hanrahan is a Melbourne writer whose novel,* O Excellent Virgin, *has recently been published by Heinemann.*

**Meditations for Dark Times**

Michael Denholm

Beverley Farmer: *A Body of Water* (University of Queensland Press, $29.95).

Some of the reviews of Beverley Farmer's new book, *A Body of Water*, demonstrate a lack of understanding. Robin Gerster, for instance, in the Melbourne *Herald*, seems to have missed the point. Gerster saw *A Body of Water*, with its investigation of the personal, as being self-indulgent. In the *Age*, Rosemary Sorensen mainly considered it as a literary text. 'In the end', Sorensen wrote, 'it is not the content that is of interest in Beverley Farmer's collage of writing.'

Farmer's new book is one of a small number of recent Australian works of fiction that explore philosophical issues. These include Barry Hill's *The Best Picture*, Mark Henshaw's *Out of the Line of Fire*, and John Sligo's *Sappho*.

Farmer's book is ideal to read when you cannot sleep at night because of inconsiderate neighbors. It is about sleepless nights, about unrequited love, about love that has been too passionate and about the nature of solitude. Consider these passages:

For all that, to have had my first experience of love in the arms of a woman was a blessing . . . To have been known in my own body and to have known hers, before ever turning to encounter a man . . . One more year will make it thirty years ago and I can still remember and will remember for ever the look of her lying with me, her eyes closed, her breasts against mine and our thighs entwined, my hands in her hair, all that warm abundance and security . . .

I hardly slept. At about sunrise I woke and gave myself five orgasms. After the first one, as happens often now, I melted into hot tears: this slow trickle across my cheeks down into my ears was so like a tongue, two tongues, that the lust kept welling up again and was exhausted by the end rather than assuaged. This deep wound between my legs, why does it still refuse to stay closed – dry lips sealed in the husk of hair.

Farmer writes well. She cares about beauty and the joys of life, good food and wine. She is no puritan. Significantly, one of her stories concerns Matisse's *Intérieur, bocal aux poissons rouges.* Matisse, above all, was a master of form, of delight and of good taste.

Farmer's writing does not have a direct political focus: she is too private a person to be often involved in politics. It is rarely referred to, and then significantly she writes of participating in a rally for the Tibetans and marching to the Chinese Consulate at the end of Queens Road in Melbourne, or when she mentions the Holocaust. But her book is courageous and is obviously a form of personal liberation. She writes about people who tamper with the sacred, who destroy what is valuable in people's rituals. She knows only too well about pain, loss and suffering. She has much to offer. She has pondered the works of great writers such as Rilke, Tolstoy and Pasternak, as well as those of Zen writers.

To say that *A Body of Water* is a very literary and feminine book is not to denigrate it at all. The image of Virginia Woolf's lighthouse recurs, homage is paid to Marjorie Barnard and reference is made to Henry Handel Richardson's house and to fellow Australian writers such as Margaret Scott.

Farmer's book is one for dark times, such as when you have a Prime Minister who only refers to the debt in terms of the government's debt, not that of big business, as if government didn't concern that sector; or when you had a Minister in charge of communications who did her best to damage communications by increasing the cost of postage of literary magazines in Australia. Oh for an Australian George Orwell!

Farmer does not make the political connections that John Berger makes in *Once in Europa*, which she comments on. But she has a lot to offer a society out of kilter – a society which destroys too much, rather than healing and making whole; a society which definitely needs a sense of the sacred and the so-called female value of nurturing.

Farmer's writing should find a wide and appreciative audience, so building on the reputation she gained when she wrote *Alone*, memorable, as Barbara Jeffries has written, 'for its truth about the implacable destructiveness of self-doubt'.

*Michael Denholm is author of a forthcoming study of small publishing in Australia from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s.*

## Verbis Coeptis

### Nancy Keesing

Vivienne Sigley, *Australian Mottoes*, (*ALIA Press*, Australian Library and Information Association, 1989, $30).

When Vivienne Sigley, a senior librarian at Lismore (now at Lismore TAFE) contemplated a book of Australian Mottoes she contacted me by letter several years ago. I felt both complimented and also keen about the project, although I had no idea that it intended to be so comprehensive and potentially definitive as it now proves to be.

I say 'potentially' because no ambitious compendium like *Australian Mottoes* can possibly,

in a first edition, contain everything that everyone who consults it, thinks, or knows it should contain; indeed, as I shall explain, this even adds to its appeal. The back page of the book is a form that says 'New and amended entries'. The search for Australian mottoes is an ongoing one. Information relating to new mottoes would be most welcome, as would any additional information relating to existing entries in the current edition, and clearly lists the information that should accompany suggested additions to a contemplated second edition.

As it stands the collection is formidable, as one would expect from professional custodians and providers of information (librarians as they used to be called) and the contents are well presented with useful indexes, one of Names and one of Mottoes. No doubt, like me, many readers and users will look first for their own schools and organizations and will strike some surprises like discovering Zig Zag Public School, New South Wales (which must be near the zig zag railway near Lithgow) and shares 'Truth and Honour' with seven other schools (eight if one counts one school that spells 'Honor' thus). Sadly, some of the listed New South Wales schools have recently been closed by the New South Wales government. The mottoes are not only indexed but in the main text are given under appropriate headings: Truth, Unity, Maritime etc. The mottoes of families entitled to use them are quoted and explained.

Translations are given of the mottoes in Latin - there are many. I like the punning motto of the RAN Submarine School - 'Knowledge in Depth' from a badge approved 16 September 1982.

In the week the book has been in my hands I've shown it to a number of people - nearly everyone has found omissions, or queried translations and so on. I shall send a list to Sigley and the ALIA and only, here, mention a few examples, not to carp but to demonstrate the great interest the book arouses. One woman noticed that St Margaret's Girls' School, Brisbane does not appear - it has a perhaps unique motto in Spanish - 'Per Volar Su Nata' meaning 'Born to fly upwards (or rise?)'.

Old girls of Brisbane Girls' Grammar School and of Frensham, Mittagong: 'In Love Serve One Another', are disappointed.

Why does an ALIA publication omit the mottoes of David Scott Mitchell - that great benefactor of the State Library of New South Wales? If you want to know what they are go to the Library and look. Or read David Jones's book *A Source of Inspiration and Delight.*

Again 'Fortes fortuna iuvat' is listed three times - twice for Dickson, Victoria, once for Dickson, New South Wales, each referring to the Dixson arms 'granted 12 September 1922'. But should not one of the distinguished holders of that motto, Sir William Dixson, be mentioned? His gifts and influence enormously enriched the State Library of New South Wales where his motto is, of course, enshrined.

'Temper democratic, bias Australian', *Overland's* own, must await the second edition.

A senior Sydney librarian assures me the book will be essential for libraries of all types, both major in cities and in suburbs. For my part it is very much a book to own both for reference and recreational reading and as a talking point. Also, to a great extent, the second (and I'd hope subsequent editions) can really only be as truly complete as cooperative readers make them. Don't delay!

### 'Novel *In Camera*'

Helen Daniel

Thea Welsh: *The Story of the Year 1912 in The Village of Elza Darzins* (Simon and Schuster, $24.95).

Thea Welsh's first novel, with the unwieldy title *The Story of the Year 1912 in The Village of Elza Darzins*, encloses within it a fictitious film of the same title, mercifully often abbreviated to *Elza's Story*. It is a lively and unpretentious work with a pleasing directness of style yet it achieves a subtle vision of rivalries of art and interpretation, of the collaboration of camera and language, eye and word. The novel is, in every sense, set *in camera.*

Offering a refreshing mix of suspense and satire, the novel moves with verve and assurance through complex terrain – political, historical, and artistic. Unlikely material for suspense, the narrative focuses on the translation into English of a Latvian film to be shown at the Sydney Film Festival, part of a trilogy of films made by the Latvian-born film director, Pteris Balodis, initially with Soviet approval.

The narrator, Erika Cavanagh, is employed by the NSW State Film Board as translator of the film, solely responsible for the English sub-titles. Although Erika's mother is Latvian, Erika's own links with Latvia are more imaginary than literal – as if a private language and an exotic country of her own invention. Always conscious of being marginal in the film world, her private insecurities run beneath a gripping narrative of her engagement with the film and its political connotations.

On the surface, there is some lively comedy about the Sydney film world, ranging through struggling film-makers, the machinations of the Sydney Film Festival Director and glimpses of the making of a spoof vampire movie. Yet the core of the novel, Erika's attempts to understand the artistic vision of the film, is fascinating, with *Elza's Story* running inside Erika's story.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this novel is the locus of the suspense: the trafficking between film and film-goer, between the intentions of film-maker and the response of audience. Alone with the film, in progressive viewings with and without the soundtrack, Erika investigates a number of mysteries, particularly inconsistencies of dialogue and plot.

Welsh handles with remarkable ease the difficult task of luring the reader into the film itself, on a number of levels. The film is a political mystery with the Soviets first sponsoring the film and then suppressing it. The film itself is about an investigation into the murder in 1912 of Elza Darzins' father, who is the local schoolteacher with Tsarist sympathies and suspected of reporting the villagers to the Tsarist police. Amid the contrary testimony of the very voluble villagers, there is also the mystery of why, 40 years later, the villagers are still obsessed with the murder and still wanting justice.

The film is also an artistic enigma, regarded as a masterpiece, yet full of ambiguities and often arcane. Erika realises the movement of word and dialogue is oddly discordant with the movement of camera. Through her deductions, the mystery gradually gives way to her own sense of the true vision of the film – its intent and its design. She is faced then with the central dilemma of the novel, the artistic and moral implications of intervening, through the sub-titles, and so clarifying the vision of the film. Convinced her version is the agency of the true vision of the film, she is committed to rewriting Balodis's film.

Yet ever conscious of her marginality, her questionable right to be in this role – both in terms of her Latvian origin and in terms of her film experience – it is a decision fraught with dangers. Touted as the major feature of the Sydney Film festival, dogged by Soviet suspicion and bureaucratic restrictions from the Soviet Consulate, further complicated by the protests of the Sydney Baltic community and the nervous twitches of the Minister for the Arts, the screening of the film becomes the public showing of her *in camera* reflections.

At issue is the legitimacy of her collaboration, which is not only clandestine but without the assent of her collaborator, Balodis the film-maker. As the narrative tension splays out to her fears of discovery and exposure, so the consequences splay out around her: 'They don't shoot the translator, do they?'. She considers too the legal implications of her intervention, toying with words such as counterfeit, spurious, fraud, searching for a *category* for her filmic 'crime'.

A form of this intervention becomes her cinematic calling, as 'scriptdoctor'. Before the narrative moves to the Cannes Film Festival the next year, she is involved in working on several other films, much of which is comic and runs along the surface of her enduring anxiety about exposure. In the midst of her loneliness and yearning for love, Erika is an appealing character, free of obsessive maunderings on self – which is rare in a first novel – and emerging as vulnerable, but resilient and creative.

A leitmotiv of the novel is *zolite*, a Latvian card game in which the Queens always win . . . In a world both dangerous and comic, the novel has a sense of game, of manoeuvre and strategy, and, like cards, it gives play to chance and luck within the given values of the cards. Thea Welsh plays with the givens, in an elaborate series of strategies where much of it is played blind, where outside factors can suddenly cut across the patterns.

Yet Welsh sustains the intrigue to the last page and the ultimate disclosure which takes place during the Cannes film festival is a splendid ending, a last bewitching flick of the mysteries. The *shape* of the ending and the restraint that Welsh exercised in leaving it open, still hovering over a last twist, seem to me rare touches in a first novel.

The political insights of the novel are similarly subtle and allusive, without heavy-handedness. Erika's version of the film draws forth what Balodis called "the peculiar tragedy of the peasants" and the nature of their obsessive revisiting of the events of 1912. Through the figure of the Captain of the Tsarist troops sent to exert authority over the village, Balodis and Erika together expose the face of the future.

The ways in which Thea Welsh realises this unlikely collaboration of film-maker and translator are memorable. *The Story of the Year 1912 in the Village of Elza Darzins* manages to combine witty satire on the film world of Sydney with shifting modulations of suspense and sophisticated artistic themes. Thea Welsh is a refreshing new presence in Australian writing, and I look forward with eagerness to reading her work in the future.

*Helen Daniel's most recent books are* Expressway *(Penguin, $12.99) and* The Good Reading Guide *(McPhee Gribble, $16.99).*

**Tales told afresh**

Bill Scott: *Many Kinds of Magic: Tales of Mystery, Myth & Enchantment* (Viking, 1990)

These two examples from: *100 Enchanted Tales* compiled and with a foreword by Clemence Dane (Michael Joseph Ltd; London; 1937.

Nancy Keesing

*A Scotch Cinderella*

'Noo, weans, if ye'll be guid, I'll tell you a tale. Lang lang syne, in some far awa' country ayont the sea, there was a grand prince, and he had a shoe made o' glass – ay, a' glass thegither; and the bonniest wee shoe that e'er was seen, and it wad only gang on a bonny wee fit; and the Prince thocht wi' himsel' he wad like to hae a wife that this bonny shoe wad fit. And he callit a' his lords and courtiers about him, and telt them sae, and that he wad marry no ither. The Prince then ordered ane o' his ambassadors to mount a fleet horse, and ride through a' his kingdom, and find an owner for the glass shoe.

'He rade and rade to town and castle, and gart a' the ladies try to put on the shoe. Mony a ane tried sair to get it on, that she might be the Prince's bride. But na, it wadna do; . . .'

*Cinderella*
by The Brothers Grimm

'The wife of a rich man fell sick, and as she felt that her end was drawing near, she called her only daughter to her bedside and said: "Dear child, be good and pious, and then the good God will always protect thee." Thereupon she closed her eyes and departed. Every day the maiden went out to her mother's grave and wept, and she remained pious and good. When winter came the snow spread a white sheet over the grave, and when the spring sun had drawn it off again, the man had taken another wife.

'The woman had brought two daughters into the house with her, who were beautiful and fair of face, but vile and black of heart. Now began a bad time for the poor stepchild . . .'

As to the above quotations there are probably as many versions of Cinderella as there are

books for children of all ages and parents who tell their children stories.

Bill Scott, in this excellent and beautifully designed and printed new book, displays his great skills as story teller and folklorist in presenting many different kinds of stories from many different lands.

A few of the stories are Scott's re-tellings of existing tales but the majority are of his own invention (though sometimes also mixed with tradition) and he has in a letter to me explained 'you may have noticed that I did my best to style the prose into the shape and idiom of the typical folk tale from each country, and to use the folkloric background of each tradition in the story. I could use a Tarroo-Ushtey, a water-horse in Ireland, a drunken badger in Japan and a Mayan goddess in South America, and also try to pattern behaviour on traditional mores from each country. An Irish mouse would have behaved very differently from Jungle Mouse, for instance. I've even tried to make the speech patterns fit.'

The second story in the book 'Jakamarra' is a Scott invention, though entirely related to its central Australian setting. On the other hand 'How Fire Came' is a re-telling of a traditional tale.

Scott has also placed each of his tales very firmly in their countries of origin so that a story like, for instance, 'Young-Man Who Travelled' embodies esoteric religious beliefs of American Plains Indians and, of course, in this story (as indeed in all the others) the animals belong firmly to their settings.

I would suppose that some of these tales could be read aloud to children by adults who are prepared to answer questions and offer some interpretation of their own but I am sure that older children who can read for themselves will tremendously value the book.

As with all good books of short stories the enjoyment is enhanced because the readers can dip in and make enjoyable use of the time at their disposal.

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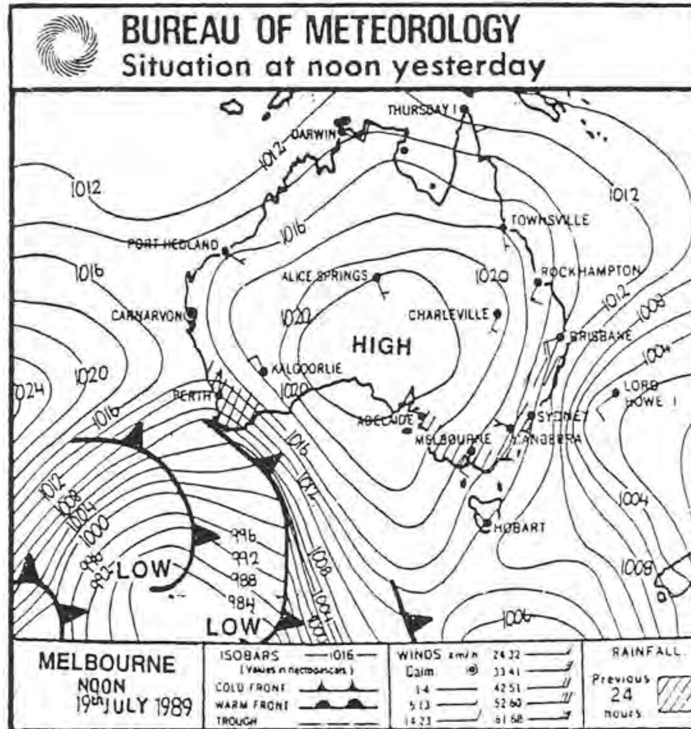
# Weather




**Weather**

Wisps of rain met seaspray across a no man's land of sand with staccato dottrels making spirals on an unmarked shore. Swamp harriers search the sand dunes, rising and falling with the wind's breathing. Inland the sun holds at eye level, brushing dew off picture book orange groves, cockatoos and parrots make sunspots on the sun. In Mildura it's warm and cold, cold and warm, depending on where you stand. Ants make black contour lines across a salt pan, rain coming, and honey-eaters flit from the fast food of hakea and grevillea. Red sky in the morning when the bars of a tomato sauce sunrise have spread across the horizon.

JACK DERHAM