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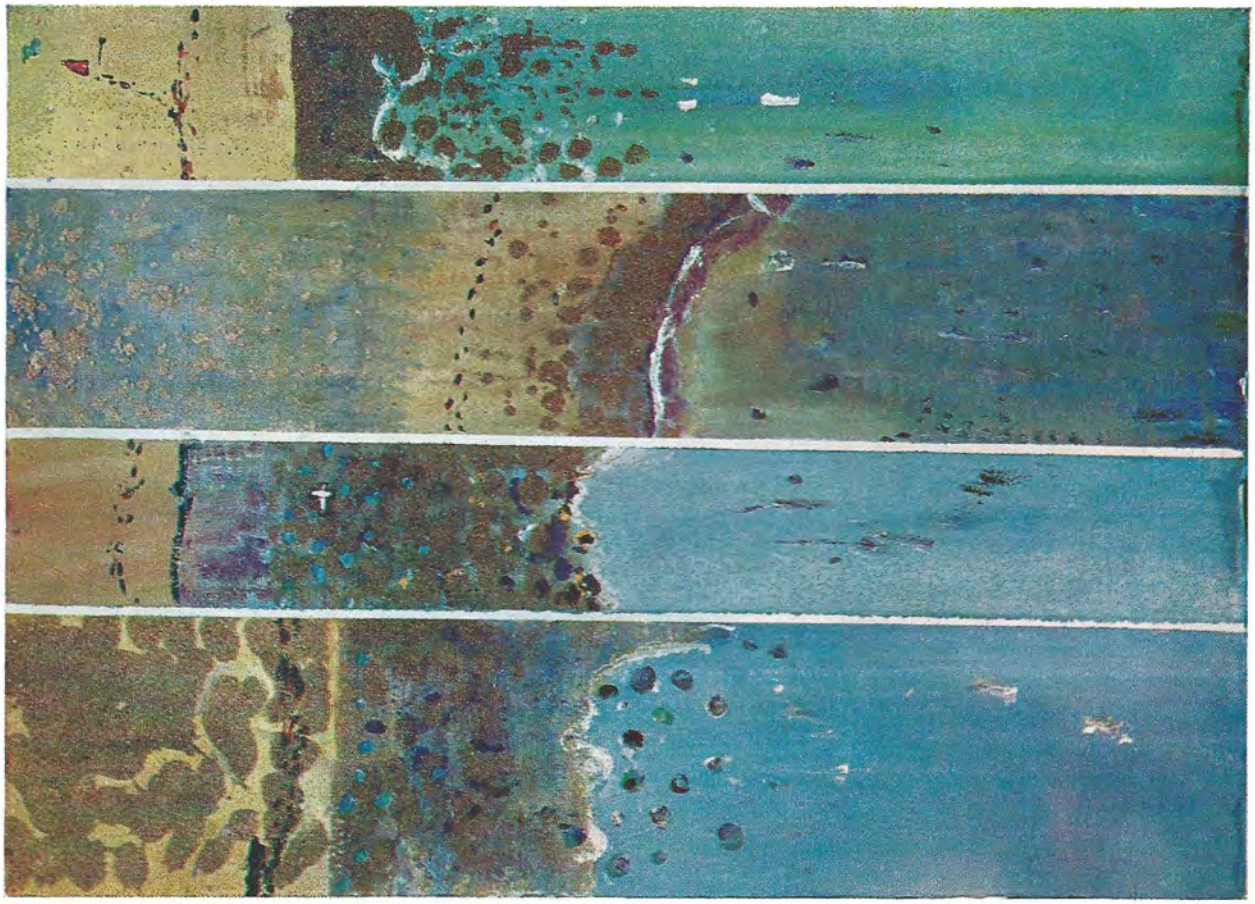

Cover painting by Fred Williams, from the Erith Island series

Overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

Autumn 1975

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PETER MATHERS

Immersion

I began regretting my all-round proficiency and lack of a specialty the first time Malcolm contacted me. Although we hadn't met since our schooldays we were well aware of what the other had done. Tom, he said, I admire your all-rounded talent, there's so little of it nowadays, everyone's a specialist, we'll keep in touch, eh?

Afterwards I thought, What's he after? Why does he admire my talents—I'd give anything for a bit of singular genius—he's one of the country's great all-rounders.

We left the seminar, he in his chauffeured limousine, I in the station wagon. And he certainly kept in touch, but never personally, always through others. You're needed, they pleaded, won't you come to his—to the nation's—assistance? I told them he only wanted me to silence the growing concern being expressed by the ever increasing thoughtful minority. I was not the kind of person who was taken in by tokenism.

Then his letter arrived.

In order to study my reaction at leisure the postman prolonged the business of handing it over. I weighed it in my hand before accepting his receipt book and by the time I'd accepted his pen he was agog. A slight sense of shame for treating him thus contributed to my sense of occasion. The crosses of registration, sender's title and address, the red wax seal . . . was the latter some under-secretary's blood? Judy and the postman impatiently awaited the opening but I returned to the seclusion of the study. What did the powerful all-rounder Malcolm want with me? To pick my brains certainly, but why the urgency? So I composed a lighthearted ambiguous reply.

As we drove to the picnic match I told Judy about the letter. Who does he think he is? she demanded. He's not the prime minister or governor-general. He influences them more than they dare admit, I replied. You mean he's not answerable to the people, she cried. He is regarded as the voice of the people, I told her.

Over lunch friends and colleagues applauded my determination to resist Malcolm's tokenism. There was so much goodwill that when I killed the dog on the boundary everyone sympathized. I am a creator not a bureaucrat, I told the umpire.

Suddenly my ambiguous reply to the letter began to worry me. What had happened to my self-confidence? Malcolm was determined to manipulate me but why shouldn't I test myself, be the stronger, and use *him* for the benefit of creativity and the new life style? My work is appreciated in high places. I am master of many disciplines, an organiser of rapidly growing importance—is not Lament for Past Strops for Leather Works Limited known round the world? My account of The 7 a catalogue of universal source material? My Manhattan, London, Paddington rife with metaphor, perspex and new relationships?

The ball cracked three of my ribs. At five in the afternoon. As I rested in the shed a horde of bikies arrived and started throwing bottles at the players. A column of striped cars arrived and fought the bikies. Children shrieked, men and women fought. Judy screamed at me: This is your bloody Malcolm's doing.

A line of cars hauling speedboats stopped on the highway and helped us drive off the attackers. They have saved us, I told Ruth, and they are a Malcolm reply.

In the evening I rested and watched the nautical thriller about international friggers on the Barrier Reef. This is Malcolm shit, Judy moaned. I watched international croquet at Alice Springs. Judy cursed. Croquet is going to become big, I

told her. I watched two professors professionally wrestling. Judy wailed when one of them, hit in the balls, stained his trunks. Three poets debated the national simulacrum with three sportsmen. A poet stood on his head, a sportsman oded. Judy brought one of my portraits into the room and hammered a tube of an early fiction into the neck. It's shitwit Malcolm's doing, she plainted.

The next morning I agreed to become Malcolm's special aide at 18,000. It's a challenge, I told him. I would move to the city as soon as possible.

Judy and the children refused to leave. We quarrelled violently. Tubs were overturned, pottery smashed, the loom twanged like a dying guitar, she scattered my press clippings. She drove the goats into the study where they behaved like jealous colleagues. I wept midst the ruin.

I took a fine flat in the city and got on very well with Malcolm until I realised I was being eased into sectors which did not concern me. I told him Kameraka, Hobbs or one of those would do if he needed a cultural valet. He lectured me on priorities. I felt like a student before his headmaster. Inwardly I fumed like a recalcitrant prefect. Soon afterwards I appreciated the reasonableness of his style. He knew. I was knowing.

He was an active man with the energy of ten. Much of his time was spent travelling and meeting the mighty or their deputies. When not in solemn conclave, open conference, at banquet, or engaged in sport he dallied in the bath. As he sprinted, served, jogged or freestyled he conceived remarks calculated to placate or shatter opponents or partners. At banquet and in the bath he hatched strategies:

. . . every household has at least a bath and/or shower so washing is part of our heritage as are the pie, picnic and twenty dollar a plate dinner and what with poolside dinners the rage, bath dinners on the way so shower snacks must follow, all this I know because I mingle with the wet. . . .

Seven-eighths immersed in his tub he would confer with supplicant and adviser alike through a batik bathscreen. (For a time I wondered if he suffered from mange or lice: he did not.) Phoebe, his wife, was extremely understanding and selected his rackets, sandshoes and so on, his soap, sponges *et cetera,* arranged his special banquets and dinners and was personally responsible for the floating television set.

I had been his special aide three weeks when Phoebe delegated to me the purchase of the bath-plugs which were used but once then presented to selected visitors.

A week later I felt that my aideship had deteriorated to plug comptroller. Then, on the Friday I collected from the jeweller six sterling silver plugs. Silver and solid! I exclaimed. Yes, said Phoebe, for favored visitors, do take them to him.

I entered the bathroom as the last of the water gurgled and, there being no response to my greeting, peered round the screen and saw him murmuring to the plughole. Astounded, I dropped the plugs. He slithered, livid. Plugsnooper! he yelled and caught me on the ear with a mint soap as I retreated.

I had seen and heard him talking to the plughole.

Half an hour later he summoned me to his dressing room. He declared: pipelines of communications are a top level secret. Soon they'll criss-cross the continent. I know I can rely on you. Pipes flowing with fluids, solids and words. Yes. words. Wooooorrrrdsss. Of course there are problems but in this instant in time is not problem a word? A word, yes. Problem is transmittable so send it on. To its solution. If need be in solution. Or suspension. There is, however, the difficulty of drag. We are working on it.

I offered him information recently to hand. Discovery of the giant koalas! He corrected my enthusiasm with the reflection that these koalas, because of their size, would, if relocated (their habitat a mining zone), eat too much, break trees and kill tourists. We nodded sadly.

Gradually the strange became the familiar. Commentators who tried to belittle him just did not realise that what appeared to be a blunder was in reality something carefully arranged so as to take the fullest possible advantage of his personality and national and international situations. His genius lay in his ability to profit from the seeming random.

The yerpish, I told him, is threatened with extinction. Goodness, he exclaimed from behind his screen. It is, I continued, a living rung in the ladder of evolution and is thought to contain alphaslag, key to extraterrestrial life. We could breed it in industrial effluent ponds and issue commemorative stamps—I know a brilliant young designer ideal for the commission.

Youth, exports, the arts, the post office, mused Malcolm. Suddenly he splashed, yelled catch!

And I had a silver plug in my hand. It glittered in the morning sun.

I walked the corridors, verandahs and grounds, hands clasped behind, the silver plug warm. The establishment, once a small hotel, has been added to extensively. Malcolm and Phoebe's apartment, the many offices, the innumerable bathrooms . . . surely soon there will be one for every week of the year. Questions have been asked in the House. Diplomats and couriers, from distant climes, must needs ablute at sundry times, said the Prime Minister to an interjector. Once the Duke of Edinburgh stunned by a pony was immersed in the master bath. The papal nuncio administered extreme unction to the Swiss courier in the cave-like original bathroom (now walled-in). Dame Melba trilled in the ferns of the enormous north bathroom. Lord Doulton splashed tears on the great claws of the cloverleaf bath. In '44 fish and aquatic animals saw out the great drought.

Had the place made Malcolm bath-centred or had it been his goal since childhood?

And so I mused as I wandered with the silver plug. Until Malcolm blipped me on the pocket radio. Before I knocked on the bathroom door I heard Phoebe and Malcolm loud in argument over his secretary, Susan Brow, who was thought by many to have excessive influence over him. Phoebe's policy was public disdain and private adoration of Susan. This day, however, Susan had gone too far and allowed herself to be featured as a kind of bathroom mistress in a magazine article. Quietly I entered the bathroom just as Malcolm denied having ever spoken to Susan on the pipe. You lie, shouted Phoebe, I heard your soapy murmurs to the little earwig. My soap, replied Malcolm through gritted teeth, my dear, is selected by you and contains ROx, the bacteria- and insect-icide. Phoebe blushed and clinked the ice in her glass. Suddenly Malcolm turned on me: This does not concern you—go. I'm sure you didn't speak to her on the pipe, darling, murmured Phoebe easing from her shoes.

As I strode the long corridor to my flat I tried to bring order to my mental turmoil. Was Malcolm actually in communication with others per pipe? Was he able to talk to someone in another bathroom in the establishment or elsewhere in the city or in Moscow, Peking, Washington or London? No, because our nation lacked international pipe connections. Or did it?

I had, I told myself, seen and heard him addressing a pipe.

Was it monologue or dialogue?

At seven he called me to the fern bathroom to invite me to dinner later that evening. He asked had I played croquet lately. I had not. He advised me to have a game with the current guests Dame Theodora and Lesbia Cohunty, public relations consultants. I've got a surprise for you, he chortled, we're going to hold the world croquet championships. It's the ideal sport for environment-conscious citizens—grass, mallet-clack, languid movements, soft voices, bee-buzz and cricket chirp. He became excited: we could dye the pool green, freeze it and invent ice croquet!

Dinner was at the Episcene. Without Phoebe, who was learning Icelandic to relieve her distress at being called an old hag by one of Malcolm's children. She is twelve years older than Malcolm and the children of his late first wife sometimes call her Granny. Phoebe and Malcolm's children regard their half-sibs as uncles and aunts. Sometimes I heard, or heard of, bathroom battles when some would refuse to wash while others would not come out and one, the eldest, Prunus, stayed awash two days then refused the bath for a month. Malcolm seldom concerned himself with others' baths.

At dinner I met his old friends Ruth, John, and Claudia, the fashion writer and croquet champion. Over initiatory drinks Claudia expressed perplexity over the government's scissors tariff. Malcolm explained the situation: I was partly responsible for increasing the duty on scissors and other cutting devices such as knives, spears, daggers, flick knives and machetes, not because of ill will toward fashion, gastronomy, feuds and scrub-cutting—

(we declared our agreement)

—but it was necessary to placate local cutlers. Also, it is my intention to establish a memorial natatorium where rulers and the people can mingle HOWEVER because of the risk of assassination certain things must be forbidden. There will also be fish tanks, and on gala occasions chlorine-resistant fish. The washing of sox and smalls will be prohibited.

The headwaiter brought the tureen of dolphin. Enfolded in the fragrant aroma we salivated freely into the delicately embroidered linen salivities held under our chins by waiters. Malcolm gestured for the cover to be removed then ordered the staff to leave us. He addressed the dolphin: And what do you foretell? To which there was no reply. We cleared our throats. He announced: To

follow there will be mango-fattened flying foxes. We were not pleased. We partook of the dolphin. He clapped for waiters and they burst in, bedraggled, with hubbub. Is it the flying foxes? he demanded. We drew back in horror and mock-horror. They are in the cameras, sobbed the head-waiter. And those musicians—alas, alack, olah—the Silent Muk—twitters for an audience and the amplifiers have lost their mutes.

Send the Muk in, replied Malcolm coolly. And if it's got what it takes there's a place on the new committee for the Muk.

And in slithered the Muk, one-two-three-four, aerosols in hands, mouths twittering and moaning, eyes rolling, stick-on scabs twitching on puckered arms.

Headwaiter crooned over the remains of the dolphin: Not everything is edible, some things should not happen.

I agree, Malcolm yelled, clapping his hands. And the Muk embraced, enveloped and carried out the struggling headwaiter. The Muk returned, calm and smiling. I recognized Muk One as Athol Guhl, the promising younger contender for office. We dined and talked for another three hours, an all too brief sequence of delights.

We have had, said Malcolm, A delightful moment in time.

I happened to enter one of the minor bathrooms. I paused; I thought to myself, I'm entering bathrooms quietly nowadays, why? Have I become a stealthy person?

Then I saw her, Nina, the maid, in the empty bath, her ear pressed to the plughole. Her beautiful body. Nina—what are you doing—did you fall? She looked up. I slipped—since when have you been inspector of baths? Nina, you are only a maid while I am a special aide but don't let this interrungular space keep us apart. I am *only* a maid—I am a special maid and you are an aide. Don't be haughty, I replied fondling her ankles. You should talk, she said returning her ear to the plughole. My hands caressed her knees. Nina, I murmured, Would you like to appear on a stamp? Her glorious smile as she climbed out and I snibbed the door! We bathed for an hour, hot, tepid, cool, hot. Each time the water ran out she pressed her ear to the plughole. Her presence. Her freckled haunch, bath-curved underbuttock, her five left toes a-trembling. . . . I did not ask her about the messages—if indeed there were any—if indeed there are such things, I corrected myself.

She dressed quickly and unsnibbed the door. Two servants and a cypher clerk burst in with outpourings of banter and ribaldry. Nina joined them and tossed my shoe into the bath, the clerk snatched it up and tossed it out the window. I finished dressing, left the mob and went into the garden to search. O one shoe off and one shoe on, put it on, put it *in*, my man Tom, warbled the hateful tenor gardener from behind hydrangeas. I spun on shoe heel, gouging turf.

I had marred the court.

I forgot the taunting voice because I had holed the ground sacred to Malcolm, Claudia, Phoebe, Dame Theodora, Lesbia Cohunty, promoters of croquet, television tycoons, contenders for office, diplomats—champion and tyro alike. I contemplated my ruin, staggered, stared at the gouge between my feet. It's only a small one, I thought, surely they'll regard it as a peccadillo, it's not as though I've wantonly desecrated the site. I flaked.

The stillness was more than I could bear. I knew they were there. Slowly I looked up. I saw the line of croquet shoes, hose, hems. Emboldened I gazed upon the white-clad, rage-contorted players Claudia, Theodora, Lesbia and with astonishment, Susan Brow, Malcolm's former secretary. I shut them out. They pried at my eyelids but could not part them. So they began their frightful croquet vengeance. I-eeee they picked me up, they threw me down and as my face hit the turf a frog surfaced croaking its mouth bearded with worms like the former prime minister sucking spaghetti, and there were also crickets but not cheerily chirping as is their wont, no these creatures croaked too, mouths running ants.

And the players rolled and spreadeagled me, hammered croquet hoops over my ankles, wrists and throat, cut away my clothes with croquet scissors so that I seemed to be shedding last season's skin. And I did open my eyes and look, not at my assailants, but at the numerous small clouds moving from an experimental site to an unknown destination where rain would provide me with insurmountable artistic and ecological problems.

The game began according to the Modified Rules of the All-England Croquet Club. Confines of play remarked by the sturdy female gardener pushing the liming device. Players fought for supremacy to clack of mallet on ball and grunts, cries and shouts of *bisque, half-bisque, fuck, penult, hammer you into the turf m'dear, shit* and *fantastic drive* mingling uneasily with croak

of frog and cricket. The game ended with the defeated bitter. The winners stroked and patted with their mallets. A loser kicked me. Lesbia threw a sweaty towel over my face. My skull was malleted. Darkness of inner play.

Return to Modified Rules. I pulled and strained, and my left hand loosened its hoop. Theodora drove it back and trod the hand. Naughty, murmured Claudia. The limer creaked past for another game, ants crawled in veins, frog crouched in crutch. Or should it be crotch, I wondered. Which would Malcolm use—and how would he deal with a situation such as this? Why did he wash so often, what was Nina *really* doing in the bath, was the establishment having its nerves pulled? My god how I vexed under that damp towel. Bathplugs, ecology, lust, bathing, the arts, political advancement and interpersonal relationships throve in the humidity of that moment in time. *Moment in time* throbbed in my mind, on and on . . . such felicity of expression . . . the phrase of our phase in time. *Moment in time* had rolled from countless tongues yet not become a cliche. Probably never to become a cliche because of its timelessness. And it was Malcolm who singlehandedly brought it and others into the national usage. He destroyed the minuteness of moment, gave it breadth and strength, and hauled the nation out of its *timeless land* lethargy.

Suddenly the towel whipped away. I blinked. The sunlight, the silence! Had I been left to the ants, frogs and crickets?

Stop it, Claudia, Phoebe snapped. Three players moved within sight. I strained against the neck hoop and through spread foot and shoe saw Claudia creeping toward me. Claudia, roared Theodora, You lost so go back. But she kept on. Please, Claudia, Susan begged. Theodora moved out of sight, reappeared behind Claudia, raised high the mallet and struck her. The surviving players circled me, arguing, gesturing, thrusting at each other, and I heard: A light tap would've done, Off-day for Claudia, her last off-day, look—she moved, My strike, Mine, No mine, Coup-de-grace to me dears.

So she was malletted several times. I heard: It was on the cards, Yes sooner or later, We'll need a new court, Just you try to move it, Will she be all right? Will she never, And what about him? Unhoop him, Let's drag the bitch away.

Left alone I waited a while before wriggling. I assessed my experience thus: I had been close to death; I had gained a greater understanding of a particular micro-environment; my clothes were ruined; I had withstood harsh treatment; endured humiliation by four viragos and witnessed the demise of one of them; the notion of croquet as a game/sport for effetes or pensioners was shattered; the arts would be well served by croquet, for example the percussiveness of the mallet, the balletic movements of players and lineswoman, the free verse quality of players' remarks, and the illimitable prospects for painters, sculptors and movemen. The players I classified as impulsive, exotic and brilliant, careful and decisive, cunning and sure.

A minor official brought me a drink and a splendid Thai dressing gown. I walked with slow dignity past the bench seating Lesbia and Theodora. Their cool appraisal bore traces of admiration.

Malcolm had me sit on a stool behind the screen and I believe he forgot I was there. Occasionally he splashed a little. Alas, there are no voices in the pipes today (he said), they have gone elsewhere, taken the day off or gone forever. However, in this moment in time I do not wish to think of them. I'll ascend cleansed from these bubbles. O bubble bubble soil is trouble. Bubble, balloon, bah-loooon-sss with words stripped to the marrow and what is marrow if not the pulp of life contained in pipes of bone? I cannot help but recall my voices nor can I resist picturing the speakers and their periods of time. Period, full stop. Have my communicants gone? To the last syllable of recorded time? And all our yesterdays but blighted stools? My piped tales told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing? Ho hold! I fart. And what's the message in this fetid bubble? That my predecessor, the former chairman—he who fell so far, whose messages come as faint echoes of *my* personal statements. I-ee that inflation is buoyant, committees float, ministers release ballast, the dollar soars. Perhaps fart and pipe voices come from a single individual with highly developed powers of mimicry, say . . . Mr Vocal, The Gullet, The Thousand Voicer . . . nay, for there lies derangement. What is needed is a National Natatorium. Marbled splendor like Roman Caracalla with a special section for the elite because a bather is as defenceless as an infant. I cannot carry a flesh-colored revolver in simulated flesh shoulder-holster because our society has not reached such a stage of development as to warrant chairmanic weapons. I could, of course, have an operation and be fitted with a flesh pouch for revolver. Perhaps a squeeze duck

filled with tear gas. Or fragmentation soap cake. O poor Marat, O bitch Corday. Do I itch? Sonia the bath maid knew how to relieve me but, alas, she is no longer with us. The day she was found in the bath she was listening to a top secret song from another bathroom, a song about swaying palm trees, palm oil, copra, bauxite, a native uprising with fleets of war canoes surging southwards towards our jets waiting on puce alert. Palm oil production declined, soaps deteriorated, dirt increased, body odors swirled and anti-proliferation treaties sagged.

I left quietly. Later that afternoon he phoned me and whispered: I have, in this contemporary instant in time, regained the condition of piped grace. Power, Thomas, is contained pleasure and strain, and occasionally the contents leak.

I met Athol Guhl in the corridor. He pretended not to know me, so I asked him if it was true the Muk had dissolved. Patting his jodhpurs with the croquet mallet he sang softly: In two-fold harmony, we're riding to the dawn, and those who singalong with us, will never have to mourn. He then seized my shoulder, smiled his beautiful smile and went his way with a: Great to see you again, Thomas, keep in touch.

About ten the next morning I was near the blue bathroom when I heard screams. I threw open the door. Malcolm was his old self. A jellied long-soap had reminded him of an incident at the international feast in Fiji (he chortled) where he had pushed through throngs of jabbering officials, lascivious servants, mounds of frangipani, mango, hibiscus and pineapple to the bathroom: too much to drink, kava, my god never again, have a throw in the bath, beautiful tiles, sunken, take six at a time—ho, eh—they've got a great bloody fish in the bath. I could have been taken, the swine. Voices raised in concern, pounding on the door, please Sir, Mr Chairman Malcolm, Sir, a misunderstanding. Misunderstanding indeed (I replied) it's an international incident, you knew the kava would send me in here, you were aware of my love of baths. I'll divert shipping, cancel visas, recall advisers, plug your pipes! The door burst open and in they rushed: Terribly sorry mistake Mr Malcolm Sir, a dolphin, keeping it fresh for din-din.

Together we laughed at the story until he choked, horribly. I slapped his back. Thank you, Thomas. And do you know you are the only aide to have touched me in the bath? I returned to my place behind the screen. Would you, he whispered, consider it out of place for the Chinese to fill our reservoirs with microscopic urethra-eels?

I feigned ignorance and excused myself.

In the afternoon he commissioned an opera, the World Croquet Games, the International Piscatorial Congress and a rock opera to be called Jake and Tess; wrote speeches for three directors and two senior chairmen; was interviewed by Transcontinental USA. I marvelled at the style and energy of chairman Malcolm. From the fern bath he winked. Messages coming through, he chuckled.

The next day was dreadful for Malcolm.

A cold water tap yielded two blue fish, a bath just emptied geysered pink waste water, a new batik screen disintegrated exposing him to the gaze of unfriendly foreigners, whisky soap tasted of aloes, piped messages were jammed. Seeking solace he trailed from bathroom to bathroom. Is he cracking under the strain? I wondered. Are these repeated immersions making him soggy? At last . . .?

He needed to be calm for his next meeting. I'll not be intimidated, he growled. To water, to water, and *they'll* cringe in the steam. *They* are a delegation to be wary of. If there's any doubt, he cried, Strengthen the redoubt.

I thought he was cracking, that he had misused redoubt which I knew as a field-work enclosed on all sides with its ditch not flanked from the parapet. I had this information from work done on a proposed stamp which was to link Eureka with Agincourt, a project abandoned because of political tensions arising from the visit of a minister to Paris where his daughter taught.

However the redoubt Malcolm had in mind was the one used as an inner, last retreat. The master bath.

It was a delegation of interior decorators led by Acanthus, the master of the guild. Outside, they were stung to a fury by the sight of Oko, the Japanese bathroom architect who laid low four. Acanthus, shrieking vengeance, evaded him, burst into the bathroom and attacked Malcolm with a flexible rule. Malcolm submerged and all the crazed Acanthus could do was slash the foamy surface into a bubbly eruption until Oko saved the day. The brilliant Japanese went away laden with silver and gold bathplugs.

Word came from the top that Malcolm was to have a bodyguard. Despite protestations he was given a tough pair, the shrewdest slice being the one who wore a wet-suit as underclothing to a

mock-tweed suit designed to dissolve on contact with water. When not raging Malcolm moped. He referred to the bodyguard as a perversion of privacy.

A couple of nights later in another city he evaded the bodyguard. Meet me in an hour, he hissed. Two minutes later I followed him to the motel suite seven miles from the hotel guarded unwittingly by wet-suit and his colleague. My periscopes and glasses followed his every move, my mikes turned his whispers into shouts. He soaked half-satisfied in the contemporary half-bath, in water up to his chin, his feet high on the wall. He cursed the dripping shower. The provision of a bath with shower plus a shower cubicle baffled him. Suddenly he leapt from the water, wrenched the offensive rose to another position, tied a rubber glove over it, returned to the water and gloated. But slowly the glove plumped. What had formerly irritated now threatened. The water torture scandal, he whispered, It wasn't my doing, I just happened to commission an irrigation opera at the same time, that's all. There is only one water torture and that is lack of water.

He discarded three lots of water, one tan, the next flecked with red, the third fishy. He cursed, jabbed them with coathangers and almost used cyanide until he remembered to scald. On the bathside table were his beard, moustache, nose, dark glasses, disinfectant, lubricant, other glove, stethoscope, and cyanide capsule. They'll not take me, he declared, and in undertone added, Alive, that is. He glanced at his watch, noted the time, date, temperature and pressure, and submerged. The water, slightly turbid with additives and wastes, did not prevent him taking submarine readings.

He made a neat tumble turn and surfaced with his head over the outlet. When the water was calm he applied stethoscope to the plug. He heard the same incomprehensible sounds I heard. He snarled. The swollen rubber hand beckoned. He shook his fist at it. He pulled the plug.

I admired him for this because it was an against-all-odds gesture. And he fought, yes he did! He fought against the water which sought to swirl him through the message pipes to the great sombre relay caverns where swirl eddies beyond number, the vast exchanges of pipedom.

He heard the shlurl of the whirlpool. He laughed. He knew he was safe. After earing the plughole for perhaps five minutes he sat up, set the heat control, sluiced the bath, replaced the plug and intoned: a somewhat unintelligible many-voiced conversation this time—milk powder, river problems, bribery of judges, gangster unionists, bladders, the overdue jets with their beautifully designed feasibility reports and soap in their black boxes—or is it rope? And the treaty with the delegate's crazy, crabbing hand nailing up precious document, his nails blackening with Cs, Us, Rs and Ys, oh the berserk abecederian we forcibly restrained for the sake of freedom in Asia—hope, it was hope in those black boxes—hope and glory, this land of ours where one day hence in a future period of time there will not be (except in museums) these horrible half tubs which so distort fine, long, athletic bodies like mine—misplaced hope I am afraid because population pressures will not allow full baths—as a child I bathed as a child, as a man I demand to bathe as a man—O sunken bath eight by five by four—what would the youth of today make of such a place—smearing sides with scum and semen, committing unspeakable acts—enough, enough. . . .

I too thought he had said enough for it is not good to slander the young.

He stepped from the bath and walked backwards to the bedroom. I was surprised he did not look for ceiling web because his associate Smith of Army would have particularly since his transfer from Navy because of the scarcity of spiders at sea, indeed, Smith has declared that a single clean room with wall to wall has yielded 2,572 arachnids whilst farmland has gone 40,000 to the acre, and who is not aware of web in bomb sights and the web of the spider studied by Robert the Bruce as he ate his porridge (Bruce's porridge) who was scolded by the crofter's wife for letting it (the porridge) turn cold—dinna y'ken only th' braw laddie lets porridge lump in the belly—and as she said this she realised she was reprimanding none other than Robert the Bruce.

Malcolm returned to the bathroom carrying his floating television set and an enormous bottle of brandy. Glancing at the ceiling he said, Web, and I am descended from Robert the Bruce as is my martial associate Smith who would never scald a spider in an empty tub. There are those who do this and there are people who do not.

He sat in the tub watching snippets of the international croquet contest, the drama of the policewoman and the weeping weightlifter, the choir of dogs, the documentary about the beautiful couple with the poisoned galah speeding through the desert.

He took his brandy with bathwater.

Suddenly a sound I had heard earlier was repeated. Cold terror rippled my flesh. A frog had croaked to a chorus of crickets and something else—cicadas. The garden swarmed with them. Behind me scattered floodlight stippled the shrubbery into the croquet players Theodora, Lesbia, Susan and Claudia the last-named bloody and eager. I almost fled. I hurried round the motel wing to the door of Malcolm's suite. I was early but had to get inside. He did not respond to my bell and knock. The animal noises I thought I had left in the shrubbery built up. I announced myself and with relief heard Malcolm grumbling his way to the door. I explained my early arrival as due to worry. He laughed scornfully as he hurried back to the bathroom where I saw he had hurriedly improvised a bathscreen with two chairs and a bedcover. To my explanation that I had tried the pipeline he snarled, Can't you see the plugs in? as he re-entered the water.

The latest popularity rating for the committee pleased him and he caressed the total. Chairman-Malcolm-relaxes pose? I asked as I set up the camera and tape recorder. He laughed, and spoke of mandates, hopes, threats, lassitudes and attitudes in the current moment in time. Off the record he asked about what I thought of the effectiveness of water additives. Communication has never been better, I assured him.

The tailor's shears in the heavy manilla folder in my briefcase were comforting. I pondered the desirability of plunging them into his heart then and there. How he would rear, gasp, bleed, fall back!

He drank a tumbler of brandy with very little water, switched on the television, had another brandy. Did you bring the scissors? he asked. I handed him the shears. He scowled. All I could find, I offered. He told me to get a tumbler from the lounge as he started trimming his toenails. I strolled back when I heard a plop! a cry and a thud. Blood poured from his wrist, bubbles rose from his sunken head and the burst glove dripped. How I gazed at the ruined creature. I then raised and propped him with a chair squab, sat on the bath edge and addressed recorder and camera: In the aftermath of this ghastly moment in time a heart-lifting beauty is born and needless to say our guidelines are taut with resolve, turgid with hope. Fraught with our new sense of mission we prepare to stride into the future moment in time without flinching from this our glorious present moment in time. I hereby commit (I plunged my hand into the bloodied water) our ailing chairman's arterial fluid to the multitudinous communications network (I plucked the plug). Hear the vortex of the old era, listen to the sound of the new.

The gurgling ended and from gaping plughole came the new anthem at the conclusion of which I tied a towel tightly above his wrist and dragged him into the bedroom. When the bodyguard arrived, half-smiling, half-grim they made mention of him, but only in passing. I told them he had complained about something in the water and they nodded. That's progress, said one. The skin-diver fingered his mock-tweed sadly.

The committee acted swiftly. You were close to him and knew his ways and means—you have ability and determination in this point of time—approval of the executive would be a simple formality—would you step into his place?

Yes, I replied. I have but one stipulation — that nothing be added to the water without my authority.

The staggering responsibility of my new position was eased by the friends, advisers, acquaintances, contacts, good conversation, fine food and wine and exciting monologue.

I authorized tests of several pipe lubricants and it seems the break through will be achieved with one of the marine mammal oils.

To survive my burdens I have had to delegate to others many functions. The old premises, nowadays quite inadequate, will soon be overshadowed by the five storey structure next door. Something about the committee encourages our accountants and solicitors to default. There must be an answer.

My personal assistant, Mal, has worried me lately but I do not think I need fear him because his gratitude is so obviously stronger than his enmity. I have been acclaimed for having given re-employment to such a person. His wheel chair, or mobmach as he calls it, gives him a circumscribed mobility. If I do not want him close he cannot get too close. I am able to bathe and shower alone. Soft ground in the garden frustrates him although recently he muttered about a catchair with rubber tracks. Sometimes his ingenuity worries me.

He has run over innumerable cockroaches because he cannot resist crushing them. At night he waits at the end of the long corridor. He

presses the master light switch. Scores of cockroaches, doubled on the polished parquet, scuttle this way and that and Mal, their doom, accelerates, he scrapes walls, spins, reverses. The whirring tyres, the crushing bodies and, increasingly, his grunts. He does not know I have watched him nor that I feed the cockroaches. He will never take me unawares while I meditate late at night be the lights on or off because of this audible approach of his. His arms through wheeling are extremely powerful and despite his wasted legs he is able to hobble on hickories. My borers were detected by an ambitious junior aide. I had the committee provide him with a battery-powered chair in the hope his arms would weaken and, with luck, atrophy but last week fate intervened. He left his batchair in the corridor and hobbled into VIP Room One for a conference. The chair exploded. Frantic cockroaches scuttled into the room putting to flight distinguished delegates, media people and officials. Vapor accumulation in the cells was the cause but he refuses to accept this finding. When he sulks his face becomes quite interesting; with speech his features slip into their usual moustachio's blandness.

Of course he is after my position which after all is the one he held before his fall (or bloody immersion). You've had your run, I told him, You don't get a second chance especially when your disability is psychosomatic. He bared his teeth at this, did Mal. He often bares his teeth as he practises stick karate (which I think is an unsuitable pastime for someone barely ambulant). Anything is possible if you've guts, he retorted. His physiotherapist encourages sexual rehabilitation and they couple with alacrity. I never know what next to expect. I have seen them leering at the flagpole. Surely they would not dare in bosun's chair? Last night I observed them wrapped in the flag in the flagroom. These days he scarcely acknowledges his wife and she does not press him. She has advertised herself in a lonely hearts column, made several intimate matches and appears to be in bliss with the latest.

You work too hard, I am told, You're becoming monkish—would you like a woman?

I don't tolerate such statements from anyone.

Yesterday I appointed another assistant, Costello, whose operas and jingles are first-rate. But he is a sniffer. He has had three secretive conversations with Mal.

And yesterday the cockroaches were poisoned by an unknown hand. Their crannies stink.

I have taken to soaking for hours and though I hope for messages when I let the water go I rely on the pocket radio.

It is often out of order. I fear I am being jammed.

The expected discovery of a suitable lubricant has not eventuated.

Am I being watched?

I think I have uncovered concealed odor meters.

Whenever I apply deodorants I hear a Costello jingle.

CYRIL PEARL

Letter from Dublin

In June 1925, the legislators of the Irish Free State were debating a Bill to prohibit divorce. William Butler Yeats, a poet, a Protestant, and a senator, rose to oppose the Bill on behalf of his co-religionists—five per cent. of the population. His speech, the finest he ever made, had a magnificent peroration.

> I think it is tragic that within three years of this country gaining its independence, we should be discussing a measure which a minority of this nation considers to be grossly offensive. I am proud to consider myself a typical man of that minority. We against whom you have done this thing are no petty people. We are one of the great stocks of Europe. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Emmett, the people of Parnell. We have created most of the modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence . . . Genius has its virtue, and it is only a small blot on its escutcheon, if it is sexually irregular.

(Yeats could have added to the roll-call of Protestant Irish patriots the names of Wolfe Tone, Thomas Davis, Smith O'Brien, Roger Casement and Erskine Childers.)

No one as eloquent as Yeats spoke on behalf of the Republic's Protestant minority when the Dail recently debated a Contraceptives Bill. It was a comic-opera debate with a finale worthy of Gilbert and Sullivan. An Act passed in 1935 had made it a criminal offence to import or sell contraceptives. A few months ago, a Dublin mother challenged the Act and the Supreme Court ruled that the import ban was unconstitutional. It then became legal to import contraceptives but not to sell them. To rectify this absurd situation, the Government introduced a Bill to permit the sale of contraceptives to married people. But when the vote was taken, the Prime Minister, Mr Cosgrave and the Minister for Education, Mr Burke, voted with the Opposition to defeat the Government's own Bill! The Catholic Church, of course, had vigorously opposed it.

At the 11th Annual Glenstal Ecumenical Conference, the Rev. Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J., said that although Ireland was still "an amazingly church-going country", a "slow inevitable decline in religious practice" was appearing, especially in the 15 to 25 age group. Stressing the urgent need for "fresh pastoral direction", he said: "From having been somewhat complacent about their superiority to the dechristianised world, Irish Churches have become a scandal in the eyes of the world. The world is seeing Catholics and Protestants in violent opposition almost as in the religious wars of the 17th century. The 'Island of Saints and Scholars' has become the place of which the secular world could say, 'Look how these Christians hate one another'."

An even more vigorous attack on the Irish Catholic church was made by Senator Noel Browne, addressing a summer school at Trinity College, Dublin. Outside Spain and Portugal, he said, no Catholic church was as powerful, and "as essentially spiritually corrupted by wealth and power" as the Irish church. (A few years ago, Dr Browne had bitter experience of this power. As a crusading Minister for Health, appalled at Ireland's high infant mortality, he introduced a mother-and-child scheme to provide free maternity and child welfare care. It was squashed by the direct intervention of the late Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Charles McQuaid, an uncompromising 'hard-line' churchman, who saw Dr Browne's scheme as a threat to the church's control of Irish family life. Dr Browne resigned his portfolio in protest.)

It was not surprising, Dr Browne told the summer school, that the Irish Catholic church, having suffered considerable losses in power and prestige in Europe, and faced with falling vocations and closing seminaries in Ireland, should fight "with every skill, venom and total unscrupulousness to hold what she has recovered in the Irish Republic". He described the process of control by the church in the Republic as "continuous, intricate and total", exercised at three levels, the most persistent and important being the long-term process by which the church pre-determined the social and economic policies of the Republic. The church demanded, and had been given, absolute control of the Republic's education system. The system was strictly segregated, monosexual and rigidly sectarian. "It is through these schools," said Dr Browne, "that we have learnt to hate the British, and learnt about the Protestant expropriation and cruelty to our forbears—all true, no doubt—but hardly Christian and certainly divisive of our people. It is only in recent times that Catholics have been permitted to enter Trinity College, hitherto forbidden [by Dr McQuaid] under pain of mortal sin."

Finally, Dr Browne denounced the church ("one of the greatest private institutional owners of wealth, property and power") for her consistent opposition to state projects to spread mass literacy, higher education, better health and housing. "There is widespread poverty with at least 25 per cent. of our people still living below the poverty line," he said. "And there is destitution among the aged, the unemployed and the disabled. The truth is that were it not for the fact that about one-third of our people—over one million — were starved into emigration . . . the mass poverty, child prostitution, slums, hunger and unemployment in the Irish Republic would be on much the same scale as that of the more backward Catholic South American Republics."

But the Irish church's concept of a "just society" was one in which 75 per cent. of the wealth was owned by 5 per cent. of the people, a significant part of this wealth belonging to the church.

A socialist member of the Limerick City Council, Mr Jim Kemmy, made his personal protest against the wealth and worldliness of the church when he received an invitation to attend the episcopal consecration of the new Bishop of Limerick. President Childers (a Protestant) and former President Eamon de Valera (a Catholic once excommunicated, but received back after giving Ireland a Catholic constitution) were among the 1,500 guests who accepted invitations, but stout-hearted Jim Kemmy, who is the general secretary of the Ancient Guild of Brick and Stonemasons, declined, on the grounds that the ceremony would cost more than £6,000, which would be better spent in helping the Limerick poor. "The event," he wrote to the organisers, "with its ostentatious pomp, elaborate rituals, ornate vestments, and wealthy, influential guests, clearly shows how far the Catholic Church in Ireland has departed from its original simple Christian message, and how it has shackled itself to the economic ruling class."

On the other hand, the Catholic Bishops' Council for Social Welfare is advocating radical and liberal change in Irish family law, including the raising of the marriage age (which is now 12 for a girl and 14 for a boy), and the granting of full legal rights to bastards. Dr. Birch, Bishop of Ossory, has declared that much of the existing law is "harsh and unchristian". Societies which do not claim to be as christian as Ireland do more for their families, he says.

Dr Birch led a clamant chorus of protest when a hill-billy Kilkenny judge sentenced a ten-year-old boy, one of a very poor family of 16, to six years in a reformatory, for an "indecent assault" on a nine-year-old girl. (When his mother protested from the body of the court, she was given a week in gaol for contempt.) Anyone who failed to protest against a system where such things happened was a coward, Dr Birch said from the pulpit. In the uproar that followed, it was revealed that the age of criminal responsibility in the Republic is seven! It is now proposed to raise it to 12. A government-sponsored report recommended this four years ago.

Ireland's holiest mountain is Croagh Patrick, near Westport, in County Mayo. It was here that St Patrick, brandishing his crozier, shooed the entire reptile population of Ireland into the sea. Each July, on Garland Sunday, thousands of pilgrims struggle and stumble 2,500 feet up its rocky slopes to attend Mass in the Oratory on the top. Many make the ascent in bare feet.

Traditionally, the pilgrimage has taken place at night. But last year the Archbishop of Tuam, Dr Joseph Cunnane, decreed that it be held in the daylight hours. This departure from tradition was made to discourage unseemly behavior by some pilgrims who fortified themselves for the ordeal in one of the 74 pubs which serve Westport's 3,500 inhabitants — pilgrims who, as the

Irish Times put it, "blew silent refrains into bottles that contained something stronger than holy water".

Ambulance men welcomed the move to get rid of the drunks. "We have carried them off the Reek too often to be sorry to see the end of them," said a veteran official. "Some of them in really bad condition should never have been allowed to start up the Reek in the first place." More than 20,000 sober pilgrims climbed the mountain this year. The path leading to it was lined with canvas-covered stalls gaudy with bric-a-brac. "Offered for sale were such sacred objects as plastic statues," said the Irish Times. "One would not be surprised to find autographed pictures of the saint himself."

Dublin's Anti-Apartheid Movement recently launched a new campaign against South African goods, particularly against a popular brand of oranges, "Outspan". The Movement pointed out that black workers on the Outspan farms earned from four to five shillings a day and were forbidden to strike or to join trade unions. They got no holidays or sick leave, and it was a criminal offence for one to leave his job. "To buy an Outspan orange is to condone slavery and increase the profits of slavers," the Movement said. And it named other brand names of South African slave-produced goods, some of which are certainly on sale in Australia: Libby, Armour, Delmonte, and John West.

Dublin's attempts at "depommification" — to borrow Bernard Hesling's hideous but useful coinage—have been typically Irish, i.e., casual. Sackville Street has become O'Connell Street, but Sackville Place remains. . . . The Pommy red pillar-boxes have been painted Irish green, but no one has bothered to remove the Crown, and the "E.R." or "G.R." beneath it. . . . The British Lion and Unicorn still proudly surmount the handsome Customs House, designed, of course, like most Georgian Dublin, by an English architect. . . . A Roll of Honor in the Bank of Ireland (once the House of Lords) commemorates staff members "who served their King and Country in the Great War 1914-18" . . . And the Royal Irish Academy remains, of course, the Royal Irish Academy.

Winter is tiptoeing into Dublin, and the solemn Ph.D. hunters who ransack the National Library every summer for new footnotes on Joyce or Yeats have vanished with the leaves in St Stephen's Green. Joyce and Yeats, of course, remain firm favorites, but at least five American scholars this year put their money on the beautiful Maud Gonne, and I predict that an outsider, the poet Austin Clarke, who died in March 1974, will be well in the running next season.

UNCONSIDERED TRIFLES: Outside Dublin's G.P.O. a messianic figure stands in front of a poster reading: "Did Jesus Christ visit America? The Scriptures say Yes." . . . Outside the vehicle entrance to Trinity College a notice reads: "The Engines of Motorised Cycles must be switched off at this gate and the cycle pushed to a motorcycle park." . . . Dublin liquor stores sell a mysterious beverage called "Speranza Irish Sherry". A portrait of "Speranza", Oscar Wilde's mother, adorns the label. . . . The lakes of Killarney are badly polluted by human sewage, with water twelve times worse than the internationally-recognised standard suitable for swimming and 120 times higher than the acceptable limit for drinking. . . . Dublin taxidrivers call the River Liffey "the sniffy". . . .

I began this letter with a quotation from Yeats. Let me finish it with a bitter parody of one of his most famous lines—from the typewriter of a brilliant young contemporary Irish writer, Benedict Kiely: "The birth of a terrible beauty ended only in the establishment of a grocer's republic".

NORTHERN CIRCLE

VINCENT BUCKLEY

1

The Heat Behind Me

I

Set off the heat behind me
or beneath ruffling in the hills
if I could have hoped for
the rivers cleaning themselves
the tides swimming in them like fish
the shallows flashing at the bridges
the mountain-bridge trembling with spray
I might have thought
of the scouring of my blood
and if the land were not so
high in air
straightened and contoured as water
My country is all skin
and closed nerve: no grain
of earth no towns to surrender

II

The dead grass, and the mountains'
sulphurous green behind me,
coursing into Canada
with a plane's vibrato in the air
under it the whining currents
dipping white runners in the sea
sun like a coastline rising
the sea the sea gliding into Vancouver
sea, protean as skin and blood,
opening (and land opening) in my eyes.

But is that heat behind me?
Through the curved window, line
line seamless horizon
asks and is asked:
what voice will you use?
what home will you go to?
what meeting lives, and what
contentment inside you?
So I come, arriving, songs
lagging in my head
breath like electricity on the glass
the heat in everything fibre holding to fibre
the cold outside, grasping an arena.

2

And this inland sickness
with its quiet edge the cold
keeps no smell, and the blue
spruce scentless no tang persisting
even in the drift of smoking wood

Phone lifts the crackle of
your hand feels cloud grow
out of rooftops and the lights
sharpen the stone windows
a mile away across the snow-river

and the ice brittles in your nostrils
the small cuts open
on your hands the cigarette
tears at your lip

Edmonton they had you listed
as humid continental but I found
winds like ropes falling,
walkable snow

3

Here you sweat differently it is
watertight air, you
walk into sweat, your skin itching
with the hardened inside of houses

air so dry it floats like paper
and false cumulus in a great line
hundreds of miles into Saskatchewan

and you walk out, every morning,
your piss dried up inside you
appetite a withered surface
inside your mouth

Hands in your padded
nylon pockets, traveller,
stand still listen
a sighing whisper in the egg

4

in the mountains there were tables
looking outward the people
grouped about them almost seeming
to exchange bodies in the violet
mountain evening one girl's translucent skin
carries her between tables wavering
her body slumbers in her mind

At each table there is something
hidden she moves as though she found it
one face then another drains its speech
dark closing the violet
into her watching lips limbs and pale heads
shining hands like gloves lying together.

And her friend here: the double: who has found
clear room in the thunder sits
tapping a man's forearm wide
cheekbones laughing

A handsbreadth away the plateau air
is warm as a thumbprint she, outwardly
all thought inside, contact, trembling

5

Letter to Brigid

You were right about loneliness;
it sits down in the trainseat
inside you, takes up its posture
in the set of your shoulders
your hand on your eyes, watching

without seeing the flow of the mountains.
In this fear-like silence you
are rain dripping, a curtain
twitched back from the window,
words links not meeting,
a tongue fumbling for the lost
object, the train whistling, the canyon
drifting uphill on its bed.

And you there in the fixed seat
as if faith had left you
may come, finally, to regard it
as a friend, scrutinised in the glass
coldness that supports your hands,
your eyes almost grateful, to think they miss
those objects dying on the sea.

6

North-West Winter
For Cait

Smell — streaks on the apple
milk scabs in the cup
all night the windvent
buzzes like a heart; the clean
sheets wait to feel my skin
stretch with their heat.

I am earthed here
indoors, in the snow heaped
like white sand, the walls
salt-white, the unsensual
electric surfaces, the hint
of thunder in the room.

And my mind occupied with
tadpole fish-form
openeyed child
shows me, in the light's oval,
shadow of the milk
flowing into the cup.

7

Daughters . . .

remember how I called you
to roam the light, as I did, watch
the runners in the sea
lunge and whiten; and the steep cold
climb from window-frames
sunrise like a coastline
rising in the wondering heat

Waiting in Vancouver
I too shaded my eyes

Months before you cried, breathing
furrily against my shoulder
as if the airport walls, the tight
railings, the metal floor
stripped and vanishing between us were
the last of childhood

Now, half-way back, the same
pigeon-wing of light beside you,
I see you dazed with flight
talking softly to each other
down in Hawaii now
looking out from plane's heat
into brighter heat

while across the saffron
wash of flowers Vancouver
still shades my eyes

Subject camera conscious

In my term as a film trainee
so many times on location cinematography
amongst my people of Niugini
I noted how fancifully camera conscious they are
they love to be in the composition
framed and included
captured by filmic sensitivity
some look a momentary gleeful frigidity
turn, come face to face with the *piksa bokis*
throw a temporary grin
fix that grin, animated; quiver, giggle, mumble
something in *tok ples*
then go out of frame
walumping away to tell *wantoks*
that as long as time remains
he's got a picture to be referred to
and an image to last

Some are remuneration conscious
for instance when you snap a Chimbu
dressed in traditional *kumul* and ochre paint
for a *singsing* traditional-style
he thinks in terms of service:
"Yu kisim piksa bilong mi,
O.K., yu mus pe mipela,
kam on, yu mus pe—
tu bob, tu bob, tu bob,
mi laik tu bob nau!"

JACK LAHUI

The dark side
of a Niuginian's teeth

Black teeth, ripe watermelon seeds,
I see in the grin of my people
when love, cheers, jokes are poked
these are elements that bind us.

I can claim I was educated
education came like a Tek toothbrush
refined by the moral cream of christianity
cleansed by the blood-bath of Christ's resurrection.

I am a Niuginian and this
happens to be my age of pretentiousness
so that I sometimes believe
I have been totally commutated.

In school I could sing with trills
the foreign-worded songs
back at home I sing in slurred legato
the traditional melodies.

Isn't civilisation a complete modification?
thus it makes it hard to know
what civilisation really is
having said to have been 'civilised' for some time.

Isn't civilisation to a Niuginian
like a brawl after a church service?
Isn't this the back of the shining teeth
that I show to you?

JACK LAHUI

a key turned the lock.
a key wound to itself, drew the power of a lock,
back.

brushing the door aside he entered where i stood
naked, muscular, brown in the room's white light;
undresses to a singlet, lies face down on his bed,
juts one iliac crest into the blanket,
the green glass neck of a vermouth bottle to his eye as a telescope;
watches me swill in the slop the dreg of this evening's bottle.

he moves before the globe may quickly cool,
before dilation is complete he scurries the floor,
and even at this late stage, almost with the bull by the horn,
there is still not a single word
Y.M.C.A. justifiably upright
Share Room which should, maybe, coagulate our sense.
the penis speaks
throbbing with a heart's blood,
it would penetrate the foramen of my skull.

an encounter with his loneliness, its time and place.
handed a bunch of flowers in the form of his fist,
the red-tulip confectionery of his mouth,
a quick hand up the dress, an open fly,

and "fuck you harry" from a car's interior,
"i want to watch the picture, leave me alone, put it away, dirty."

he smudges away.
outside, along St Kilda Rd, trams rattle to a stop.
start again, keep to a schedule from terminus to terminus.
had caught a bus that morning,

"go to flinders and russell mate, you'll find one there
that'll see you to doncaster," and he was right.

i have made love to woman.
exchanged my gender on a bosun's chair,
stood on her deck, she on mine,

down at her lips and chin, my flesh both soft and pliable.

or when alone in a crowd at the quay,
i lean as far out as is safe from the rail
when she motions away, as i have sailed,

the severance of one unbroken streamer in our hands.

my stubble will scratch on her soft pliant skin.
or else the ribbon will be rewound and we kiss
locking tongues, at the quayside, in our street clothes,

within our bodies' gunwale rail.

MALCOLM BRODIE

From Princes Bridge

Dirty blackness over them in sweat.
this convoy of rusted barge hulls nightly
crusade an entry past foreign ships at berth,
cruise below the damp undergirth of bridges,
force quaint excited hymens of waves; and
following nets trawl asphyxia from dense water.
wake in wake: an artery in a black quadricep;
a destitute, felled mulatto has a broken back.

Volga boatmen with bandaged soles
the barges pull twice their own weight.
rigid lanterns on princes bridge gleam their bows,
and here, opposite the platforms of flinders street station,
rendezvous for the on-loading of the freight,
the bulky filth of loneliness that pervades
those long, silent, depth-charged, otherwise vacuous
gaps between people in melbourne streets.

Loneliness that rides slippery tram lines with silver ruts
for free; of a saucy pie bag that bobs a vessel,
that reduces the arc-lit cathedral to a hulk;
that turns cripples from souped-up bars,
shows lack of public seats under cover.
spiders in the treasury gardens are afraid.
pigeons spit and polish townhall ledges, footpaths.
do not expect them to mop the entire city.

Quietly the barges load for the black dirtiness
of port phillip bay. the convoy is resolute
it will serve the loneliness in chimney city.
to and fro, off yarra banks to the sea, the barges
load and transport, return up-current, nightly,
for the residue of horror shrugs off some shoulders,
will sidle under cover of closed shop fronts to the river.
these barge-tows wait in neon mist, for us who don't speak,
off princes bridge.

MALCOLM BRODIE

In Praise of Distance

After Paul Celan

In the spring of your eyes
live the nets of the fishermen of the mad sea.
In the spring of your eyes
the sea keeps its promises.

Here I, a heart
that has dwelt among humans,
cast off my clothes and the lustre of an oath:

blacker in black, I am more naked.
Only now disloyal am I faithful.
I am you when I am I.

In the spring of your eyes
I drift and dream of plunder.

A net catches a net:
we part embracing.

In the spring of your eyes
a hanged man strangles the rope.

VIVIAN SMITH

JOHN McLAREN

The Faces of Tyranny

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's moral vision

'I dedicate this
to all those who did not live
to tell it.
And may they please forgive me
for not having seen it all
nor remembered it all,
for not having divined all of it.'

—Dedication to *The Gulag Archipelago.*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's writings present an unavoidable challenge to both reader and critic. He does not offer a piece of entertainment, a slab of enlightenment or even a work of art to be evaluated according to its contribution to our aesthetic sense or our understanding of what man is. His books are, in a sense, perfect examples of that social realism whose self-proclaimed guardians reject them. They betray none of the aspirations to formal or linguistic innovation which characterize so much of twentieth century fiction. They are content to present people as they appeared through their actions, events as they happened. Yet the selection and narration of the events is controlled by a moral sense which is not content to hold them up to our inspection, to explore the moral values inherent in them, but which demands of the reader a personal commitment. In this sense they belong to the simple moral world of Dickens rather than to the more self-consciously ambivalent milieu of the contemporary western novel. They present good and evil men, and analyze a system which promotes evil at the expense of good. The reader is invited not only to understand, but to choose.

This does not mean, however, that Solzhenitsyn's books can be dismissed as propaganda. Although they are valuable as documents, telling us what happens, the experience they contain is embodied in characters and episodes which exist wholly within the work, and which shape the work into meaningful form. That is, they make an immediate demand on the reader to respond to them as works of art, works which exist in their own right, and they accordingly invite us to share in their experience and to assent to or dissent from the values discovered in them. The positive values informing Solzhenitsyn's work, even at its most documentary, are his love of Russia, once again in his writings the Holy Russia of tradition, and his belief in the ordinary people of Russia. His belief in the stubbornness at the core of living leads him further, to a dawning faith in the religion which has sustained the Russian people through the centuries. This faith is made real not through theological argument but through the author's encounter with its reality in the lives of others, and through his understanding of the changes which these encounters work in him.

The problem remains, however, that Solzhenitsyn will not allow us to remain content with his writings as works of art. They make a further demand on us because we know they reflect political and historical reality. What is more, they show this reality as something created by men, and therefore something that can be changed by men. This implicit demand makes western critics as uneasy as Soviet commissars.

There is a sense in which the Russian response is more honest than that of the west. The Russians have denigrated Solzenitsyn as being factually dishonest and artistically worthless. If either of these charges could be substantiated the significance of Solzhenitsyn's work would largely

Alexander Solzhenitsyn: *August 1914* (Bodley Head, $8.50); *The Gulag Archipelago* (Collins, $8.95).

collapse. Verisimilitude is an inherent part of his artistic method, and it is the force of the artistry which challenges the Soviet leadership and its minions to re-examine the ethical and ideological bases of their organisation and actions. If we accept the essential truth of Solzhenitsyn's evidence or the validity of his values we must recognise, not just Stalinism, but the entire Soviet system as a monstrous betrayal of humanity. The gravity of this challenge no doubt accounts for the hysteria of the attacks made on Solzhenitsyn through the Soviet Writers' Union, and disseminated through Russian embassies, but the tone of these attacks suggests that their authors were not capable of reading what Solzhenitsyn had written. They attempt to discredit him by attacking his patriotism, his honor, his honesty, yet these qualities are amply demonstrated in his texts. If his enemies would try to understand what he is saying, they would realise that he is not proposing any alternative to the present regime, but offering it a road to its salvation. This road requires the same relentless search for the truth, unhampered by any kind of ideological blinker, and particularly for the truth about themselves and their actions, which Solzhenitsyn has undertaken about himself and the things which he has done and seen. By responding to his work in the language of political abuse the Russian critics and their western sycophants lower themselves to the same level as the cold warriors of the west who attempt to use him for their particular political ends. The paradox of Solzhenitsyn, most political of writers, is that his work is so far beyond politics.

It is this quality which has also eluded such western critics as Andrew Field, who in *The Complection of Russian Literature* (Penguin Books, 1971) categorizes Solzhenitsyn as a "good man" about whose literary standing there has been increasing doubt since the publication of *August 1914*.

Field suggests that his novels "distressingly . . . echo the didactism of Soviet political art", and suffer from "naive philosophizing". There is no doubt that his works do present didactically a philosophy of life, but the issue is whether this philosophy arises from the fictive world or whether it imposes its view on this world, shaping events and characters to meet its own preconceptions. It does not follow that, because Soviet art has failed in this manner, all didactic art is artistically invalid.

There is no doubt that Solzhenitsyn, in his steadfast determination to be himself, regardless of the cost to him in personal suffering, is a good man. It is, however, precisely the quality of this goodness which demands exploration. By resolutely being himself, Solzhenitsyn is providing that alternative to the one-dimensional state of which Marcuse has despaired. He has resisted the physical repression of a tyranny which makes the complaints of western dissenters about the oppression of western society seem trivial and self-indulgent, but he has also stood firm against the subtler pressures of success, the kind of 'repressive tolerance' which is prepared to let everyone be himself provided he does not disturb anyone else. It is against this kind of tolerance, the complacency and willed blindness of his fellow citizens, that *The Gulag Archipelago* is a protest. In this sense the writing and publication of the book is a political act, but the act is effective because it is an act of total commitment of the author to humanity as discovered in the reality of those who have suffered and perished under Soviet terror.

It is however not only the quality but also the nature of the commitment which is important. Solzhenitsyn has committed himself as a writer, as a maker of the truth from the facts of raw experience, not as an onlooker who chooses the role of chronicler or detached artist. His commitment is to see the truth and to tell it. To see the truth has required nothing less than the whole of his being. To tell it requires its recreation in words so that it is a complete world into which the reader is able to enter for himself.

It is only by seeing Solzhenitsyn's work in this kind of perspective that we are able to make on it the kind of judgement it demands. If we allow the man to come between us and his words, we can only acknowledge that his experience is such that comment from anyone who has not suffered similarly would be impertinent. Yet it is not for his fellows that he writes, but for those who have not experienced and therefore do not understand. In *The Gulag Archipelago* he tells a moving story of prison camp survivors who, each year on the anniversary of Stalin's death, spread out in their home the photographs of those who were shot and those who died in the camps.

> . . . And throughout the day solemnity reigns in the apartment — somewhat like that of a church, somewhat like that of a museum. There is funeral music. Friends come to visit, to look at the photographs, to keep silent, to

talk softly together. And then they leave without saying goodbye.

There is a sense in which *The Gulag Archipelago* is Solzhenitsyn's own memorial to his comrades who have died, to keep quick the scar in his own heart: "So that they should not have died *in vain!*" To this end he includes his own small portrait gallery of the dead, six sad photographs to which he appends brief notes — the name of each, his or her occupation, when and where shot. But this is a ceremony for the survivors, not for the readers. Its importance in the economy of the book is to take the reader further into the world of the camps which is its subject.

The business of the critic is, then, with the world which Solzhenitsyn creates in his books. In dealing with this world we are entitled to point out that the author's sympathies are limited, even as we understand from what he himself shows us that such limitation is inevitable, even necessary for survival, in anyone who is subjected to the experience of the camps. That is, when we look at Solzhenitsyn as the subject of his experience, we understand him, but when we look at him as author we must acknowledge that he has not succeeded in his task of seeing the whole. The bitterness of his experience prevents his sparing any understanding for the *blatnye,* the organised underground of thieves who, in co-operation with the guards, control the camps and transports. He has a sweeping contempt for those Russian writers whose path has not been the same as his, and a similar contempt for western visitors who have seen anything good in the Soviet system. His reaction to the monolith of Russian communism prevents him from acknowledging that elsewhere — for example, in China — it may not be the same. (This is not, of course, to excuse the naivety of those western enthusiasts who reject the possibility that the Chinese experience has anything in common with the Russian.)

Yet these limitations are of minor importance in a work which succeeds in conveying the whole sweep of a historical movement as felt in the lives of the men and women caught up in it, and which extends its sympathy to the oppressors (although not Stalin) as well as to the victims. The Solzhenitsyn of the book is ruthlessly self-analytical, and discovers in himself the same vices which control and perpetuate the system of oppression. His analysis also discovers how the system moulds its controllers into conformity with one pattern of behavior, of callousness, at the same time as it drives its victims to search for the roots of their own humanity. Yet while to know all is to understand all, there is no sense in the book that it is also to forgive all. *The Gulag Archipelago* is ruthlessly judgemental, of individuals as well as of the system, for the only effective opposition it proposes is that of the individual commitment to truth and to compassion.

It is necessary to repeat that this judgemental quality does not come from Solzhenitsyn's own comments, but from what he shows us. He himself seems committed to an ordered society where the rulers' sanctions are truth and justice, not fear. Andrei Sakharov, in his "Reply to Solzhenitsyn" published in translation in the *New York Review of Books* (13 June, 1974), specifically disagrees with the retention of the Party as the guarantee of order. Others may disagree with his identification of Stalinism with Leninism, although the case he argues for locating the origins of the terror with the revolution itself cannot be lightly dismissed. Similarly, it is likely that some of the anecdotes he tells, some of the cases he cites, could be refuted. None of this, however, would touch the central quality of his work, which is to create for the reader a world where the individual is crushed by a stark, absolute bureaucracy, whether of Stalin or of the Czar, which conducts its operations uninfluenced by fact, logic or feeling. The values which are created in his books, the values by which the machine is judged, are those which individuals discover in themselves in the depths of their suffering. Like the values which fuelled the first flames of the revolution, they are the values of peasant, soldier and convict. The hearts which they set alight are those of the young, the students and intellectuals who are fired by love of their country and their fellows and want only to find a way of releasing the spirits they find around them. Isaakii Lazhenitsyn, the pacifist student who volunteers for war at the start of *August 1914,* Gleb Nerzhin or Ruska Dobrounov in *The First Circle,* the students in *The Gulag Archipelago,* and Solzhenitsyn as he describes himself at the beginning of this last book, share this same aspiration, complicated by their discovery of the moral complexities of life. It is this awareness and this aspiration which stand in judgement of the system which condemns them.

There is a danger that the very writing of Solzhenitsyn's books weakens their central impact, for they are all imbued by the spirit of those who endure and survive, to the extent that it is easy for us to forget, or at least overlook, those who pass through suffering to their death. We remember from *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* the way in which Ivan extracts pleasure from the tiny achievements of the day, the final comment that it was 'almost a happy day.' As Jack Lindsay has written (*Meanjin,* 4/1971), Solzhenitsyn is able to "reveal forces of moral resistance and renewal in men under conditions that seem calculated to rob them of every element of hope, dignity, or reason for existence". It is against this fact that we must set laconic entries in *The Gulag Archipelago*: "shot in a camp on the Yenisei in 1942", "They just left them there to die, alone with nature", "the corpses of those suffocated were thrown overboard", and, perhaps most chillingly, referring to the camps reserved for prisoners with special skills, "It's to them I owe my survival, for I would never have lived out my whole term in the camps." The continuing catalogue of horror is a necessary part of the whole work, even it it does tend to stupefy the senses with its repeated instances of futile suffering, for it is only in this way that Solzhenitsyn can give due weight to the force of oppression against which the victims struggle to preserve their humanity, to find their answer to the Tolstoyan question, "What do men live by?"

The official answer to this question is given in *Cancer Ward* by the apparatchik, Rusanov.

> There's no difficulty about that, he said. 'Remember people live by their ideological interests and by the interests of society.' And he bit off the sweetest piece of gristle in the joint. After that all there was left on the bone was the rough skin of the foot and the dangling tendons.

The comment and the action, together with Rusanov's subsequent anger when it is suggested that the true answer is love, delineate his character. More importantly, they penetrate to the weakness of the ideological system which provides its servants with glib responses to questions which require a man's whole life to answer, and in so doing rob him of his ability to respond to life. It is the threat of his own death before which Rusanov is helpless, but we see also the way he is blind to the facts of his life. In strictly Marxist terms, his ideology is defined by his relationship to the instruments of production. For Rusanov, the whole state productive system has become a way of providing him with comfort. His work, in the secret police system, alienates him from any creative relationships, while the official ideology which it is his task to maintain reverses the truth by convincing him that he is one of the people, and therefore can have no guilt. As Orwell has shown in a slightly different context, once language becomes the instrument of the ruling class, as it must in a totalitarian society, it loses any power to explore the truth and makes possible the grossest forms of oppression. In Rusanov's insensitivity we can see the germ of the whole system of terror, but Solzhenitsyn is surely right when, in *The Gulag Archipelago,* he locates the source of the terror in the absolutism of Lenin and the old Bolsheviks. It can probably be traced even further back to the notion of a vanguard party which believes it has a monopoly of truth. Once this is accepted, there is no longer any way men can respond to either events or words in their own terms, for they are committed to the pre-ordained answer.

In confronting these issues Solzhenitsyn has been forced to develop a new form of literature. Although the origin of his style is the Tolstoyan narrative, the absolute evil of the terror with which he deals has forced him into a different relationship to historical fact. Where Tolstoy recreates, Solzhenitsyn presents. It is this element which accounts for the sprawling nature of much of his work, but particularly of *August 1914* and *The Gulag Archipelago.* Each of these is composed of a series of individual vignettes set against a background of big events. In *August 1914* the individual episodes are linked by a number of narrative threads, but these threads themselves are united not by a single plot but by their involvement in a common historical catastrophe. In *Gulag,* of which so far we have only the first two of seven parts, the particular events are linked by the common metaphors of the archipelago itself, the waves which pass through it, and the transport systems — sewers, fleets, convoys — which hold it together.

Unlike Tolstoy, Solzhenitsyn does not so much show us events through the eyes of the participants as show us the participants in the light of the events. It is this quality also which separates him from other chroniclers of the camps, and also from such writers as Arthur Koestler or Victor Serge, who concentrate on the relation-

ships between individuals and on the development of individual ideology, but not on the system which creates ideology. In analyzing the logic of the system and the way it dominates men through its control of language, as in his total commitment to stating the truth, Solzhenitsyn is perhaps closest to Orwell, but his quality of characterisation not only gives his work a density which Orwell lacks but also makes starker the horror of the system which wastes the lives he shows us. At the same time his discovery of value in living saves him from the nihilism of much modern writing, and gives his work a curiously old-fashioned air for writing so frighteningly contemporary in its subject and implications.

The events of *August 1914* are those of the first few days of the Great War, as experienced by the armies in East Prussia and a couple of families from Rostov-on-Don, Solzhenitsyn's own birthplace. The subject of the novel, however, is the destruction of the Russian people by its own rulers. It is hard to see why the Soviet government should wish to ban the publication of a book so full of the author's love for the people and country of Russia, and so bitter in its indictment of the Czarist regime, unless the present leadership sees itself as the legitimate heir of the Czarist government or is so xenophobic that it refuses to admit that a Russian army could ever be beaten for whatever reason. For those familiar with Solzhenitsyn's other writings, however, there is a bitter flavor from the knowledge that the imminent collapse of the Romanovs was not to lead to any restoration of human values, and would indeed perpetuate the appointment of safe fools to positions of authority.

The three main characters in *August 1914* are Isaakii Lazhenitsyn, the student volunteer; General Samsonov, the actual general who commanded the defeated Russian Army and committed suicide during the retreat; and a staff officer, Colonel Vorotyntsev, who moves relatively freely from headquarters and through the war zone, and thus is able to give some sort of general picture of the battle.

Isaakii only appears in two major episodes, one as he leaves home in Rostov, and one on his last day in Moscow before joining the army, but in these he gives us a focus on the home front, with its mixture of corruption, patriotism and idealism. The early scenes as he journeys from Rostov towards Moscow have the same feeling of peopled space that we find in Russian war movies. Although he plays little part in the action, it is through Isaakii that we get the feeling that the war should have been worthwhile, and that there was something worth fighting both a war and a revolution for; it is also through Isaakii that we glimpse the intellectual debates about how these ideals could be realised, in war or peace.

The other two figures provide the focus of the military action. Although of different generations and representing different military principles they are united in their grasp of practical issues as opposed to the blundering incapacity of the status-dominated headquarters. Yet from the beginning we know that their actions, and the heroism of the troops they command, are doomed because of their inability to impress any reason on headquarters. Their inability to communicate stems from the same cause as the later terror of Soviet Russia — the divorce of language from reality, the attribution by authorities of an autonomous meaning to words, so that truth is moulded to fit the interests of those who command obedience. In this case, the refusal to question established procedures, the preference for neat abstractions over untidy reality, leads to the collapse of a regime. Yet what concerns Solzhenitsyn is not the loss of authority as much, but the fate of the tens of thousands of individuals caught inexorably in the machinations of a system they can neither understand nor control, but which controls and dooms them without ever understanding.

The book has been criticized for its alleged lack of form, in the sense of a tidy narrative, but its form mirrors the reality. Solzhenitsyn gives us a series of portraits of individuals — of subalterns, privates, a couple of sergeants, nurses, doctors and drivers — and a series of incidents of the war. Each is clear in itself, but together they make a masterpiece of confusion, which is precisely what was experienced by the men involved and achieved by the Russian high command. The unity of the book is given to it by the uniform implacability of the system. The values of the book come from the individuals who are brought fully to life only to be crushed in the disaster which overtakes them through no fault of their own.

The Gulag Archipelago uses a similar narrative technique. Again, unity is given to the book by the constant presence and inexorable process of an inhuman system, although this system operates with an efficiency which eluded the Czarist war machine. The efficiency is, however, in terms

only of its autonomous logic, not in terms of any productive or other human ends. The pattern of the book is modelled on the sequence of events which starts from the initial arrest. The characteristic pattern of the successive chapters is to start with a vivid account of the meaning of the event in the life of the victim, to widen this to include the whole history of this stage of the system, with its chronologic and geographic variations, and then to come back to the encounter with individuals in the system. If the first parts of this tend to be repetitive (Solzhenitsyn remarks on a couple of occasions that his account may be become boring, but that this is because the system repeats itself), then life is given to the book in the repeated portraits, sometimes coupled with case histories, sometimes left incomplete as time and memory have left them, of people encountered in the prisons.

There is the incredible story of Eric, the idealistic Swede who has been kidnapped and left in a kind of limbo. More importantly, there are the ordinary men and women who keep their spirit alive even to death. There are the intellectuals who conduct a philosophy school; V. G. Vlasov, who spits in the face of the chief of the local investigation department when he enters Vlasov's condemned cell. There is the former Rumanian spy, who calmly informs the author that he will kill him if it is ever necessary, and Konstantin Sergeyevich Arkadyev, who cannot bring himself to take his leave from his fellows in the condemned cell when he is being taken out to be shot. There are priests and communists, socialists and professionals, kulaks, Germans, and minority nationals, but all are brought briefly to life in these pages. Their lives give the book its authenticity, just as they condemn the system by the same essence which gives the book hope.

Solzhenitsyn writes his works for and to the Russians, but they have a triple relevance to readers in western countries. At a time when the world seems headed to chaos, they give assurance that the human spirit can triumph.

Jack Lindsay, in the article referred to, suggests that Solzhenitsyn presents no positive alternative to the Soviet system, that his understanding of the masses is deficient, being a compound of fear of where they will go if released and despair of their strength extending beyond the individual. It is true that Solzhenitsyn's books

are concerned with the question of individual survival, but he also shows, particularly in these last books, how individuals can work together. The prison system is corrupt both because it is intrinsically dishonest and because it is an hierarchy of power and affluence, a perfect capitalist system in fact, with the thieves as the professional entrepreneurs and exploiters. The means of exploitation and control is cruelty. Yet in both these books he shows us reservoirs of communality and goodwill, and resources of skill and leadership at all levels which could release and guide these reservoirs if given the opportunity in an atmosphere of trust and honesty. Vlasov could run his commune if he did not have to contend, not only with an ignorant party boss, but also with party plans which are constructed on paper and which the facts have to be bent to fit.

It is true that Solzhenitsyn does refer slightingly to the abilities of men promoted to command from the proletariat, but this is in the ironic context of official proletarians promoted for no other reason than their favor with the more senior apparatchiks. He also refers to the abilities, when given the chance, of people like Vlasov himself, and like Sergeant-Major Chernega or Arsenii Blagodaryov in *August 1914*, all of whom display qualities of leadership which rise directly from their peasant experience.

It would be true to say that Solzhenitsyn's view of life places the hope for improvement on slow change arising from giving people the opportunity to be themselves, rather than on any revolutionary break with the past. This belief in continuity applies, of course, to contemporary Russia, and accounts for his difference with Sakarov, who would like to see much more far-reaching changes. The other side of this belief is, of course, Solzhenitsyn's distrust of absolutism, which can lead only to disaster as well as to cruelty. There is an implication (made explicit in his *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*) that this fate threatens Soviet Russia as much as it was a real threat to Czarist Russia. The chilling implication of what he tells us of the Soviet is, however, that, whatever its productive weaknesses, the internal logic and strength of the system of terror is such that no amelioration is likely. In these circumstances, there is a clear need for western readers, particularly those with no professional commitment to anti-communism, to maintain constant moral pressure on the Russian government on behalf of the dissidents and prisoners. The hope of success for such tactics rests not on any supposed moral sensitivity on the part of the Russian leadership, but on the fact of the growing interdependence of the world community, which makes it impossible for even the greatest powers to totally disregard world opinion. In this context Mr Whitlam's visit to Moscow was as wise as his underhand recognition of Soviet sovereignty over the Baltic states was shameful.

The second major implication of Solzhenitsyn's work is its analysis of the operations of terror *per se*. His emphasis on the Russian setting of his work may make it seem narrower in its implications than it is, for his concern throughout is with the authoritarian personality which exists in any system and with the conditions which make it dominant, as well as with the forms of resistance. Even if we accept his thesis that terror has been an intrinsic part of the Russian Revolution from the start, it does not follow that it is an intrinsic part of every communist system, or even of every revolution. Similarly, it is by no means unique to communist countries, being probably the major form of political control in the twentieth century. The dramatic examples of Brazil, Chile, the colonels' regime in Greece, and South Africa should not blind us to the fact that few countries outside northern Europe and America do not maintain, not merely surveillance and intimidation, but terrorist control over their people. Solzhenitsyn shows how easily such a system follows in the wake of the surrender of the rights of individual judgement and free speech, and how easily the system can be justified in terms of the highest moral objectives.

In all cases, this control follows the corruption of language. This corruption is more vicious when it develops into a total system of abstract ideology into which every fact is fitted so that it cannot challenge the rulers. In Russia the process has gone from the erection of the will of the people into an abstraction, and then the identification of this will first with the interests of the party, and then with the interests of the leader. In southern Africa, the abstraction has been Christian civilization; in Brazil, by a supreme irony, the preservation of democracy; in South Vietnam, self-determination. In Australia, similar processes can be seen in the agitation of both extreme left and extreme right, although the extreme right now seems to embrace a considerable section of the Liberal and Country Parties.

The common element is that actions — those of the government in our case, those of a peasant or writer or lawyer or engineer in the case of totalitarian states — are no longer judged for what they are, but for their presumed effect. As the effect can only be judged by the accuser, the charge cannot be refuted by fact. There is therefore a complete alienation of the individual from his natural environment, the world in which he must fulfil production quotas or provide jobs, and instead he is forced into a relation with an abstract system which judges him but which is totally removed from his control. In social terms, the result can only be absolutism and terror. In personal terms, the only options are struggle or passivity.

Finally, therefore, Solzhenitsyn is important because of the way he confronts and locates the problem of absolute evil in the twentieth century. His answer, through some kind of mystic belief in God and country, may in fact be as dangerous as the problem itself, but only if we ignore the fact that this answer is not offered as dogma, but is adumbrated as a quality found in individual human hearts. His work is hopeful because he does not believe either that life is meaningless or that man is evil. He shows that man can construct his own meaning, just as he can construct systems which, by totally alienating the rulers from the ruled, language from reality, and all men from one other and from creative purpose, can deliver him into the dominion of an evil which corrupts men until it finds enough to do its bidding. The challenge he poses is not to develop a society which will free men from their bondage, but to build one which will give them control of themselves. The reality he portrays is one in which the latest stage of the development of human society has become, not an instrument of man, but a shackle on him.

FRANK KELLAWAY

Garni Sands

In 1936 when I was a boy of fourteen I spent a holiday at Tarwin Meadows, a station in central south Gippsland, where, as well as enjoying the bush and a wonderful stretch of wild ocean beach, I was also entertained by a story teller who spun fascinating yarns of the adventures of George Black who, she said, was the first owner of the property. One of these tales stayed with me and in 1951 I used it as the basis of a radio play in blank verse called "Garni Sands". The A.B.C. had this for a long time but eventually sent it back to me explaining that the producer who had been interested in putting it on had gone overseas.

The radio play was never performed but thirteen years later Tim Burstall introduced me to George Dreyfus, a musician who had been composing for Eltham Films. Dreyfus wanted to write an opera and was looking for a librettist. I thought the radio play might do as a starting point. George read and liked it and that was where the work began. I rewrote, thinking of the theatre and of musical presentation. George explained his musical conception of the opera as a whole, then we went through the play and he said things like: "Right, I want a duet here between the women, d'you follow? It'll be in waltz time. Try and make it as sunny as you can" or "We need a quartette here. You can give individual singers solo lines or phrases here and there. It'll be in 2/4 time." I then wrote the duet or the quartette and brought it back. Sometimes he'd be pleased and he'd go ahead and set it but often, by the time I'd done my stint, he'd changed his mind and decided he wanted something quite different.

Most of the time I went along easily enough. We only had one serious quarrel when George wanted to turn the whole opera into a full-scale tragedy with twentieth century overtones. I said that was ridiculous: the libretto was essentially slight; it was based on a folk-story and simply wouldn't carry the weight of an intellectualised tragedy. I added that if he really wanted that, I could start again and do something quite different. By that time he'd written too much of the music to pull out. I don't know whether I convinced him that to lay the significance on with a bulldozer could only lead to pretentiousness.

We finished the opera in 1966 and George worked very hard to get it performed. After many disappointments he managed to get the backing he needed and it was eventually produced in Sydney and later in Melbourne in August 1972. It had an enthusiastic press and the score was published by Allan's in 1973. It is now to be produced in New York, where it will have three performances by the Bel Canto Opera in its theatre on the corner of Madison Avenue and 31st Street in May 1975.

"Garni Sands" was the first of three collaborations. The second was "Song of the Maypole", a story told by four children's choirs, performed in Canberra, and the third "The Takeover", an opera for children, performed in Sydney, Canberra and eventually at Moomba in Melbourne.

Composer and librettist haven't fallen out but I think we are both disappointed with "Garni Sands". George would have liked a great intellectual edifice to hang his music on. I would have liked folk opera music for my words. I have indicated my willingness to work with him again, but he has gone in search of more trendy operators.

The story of "Garni Sands" is a folk tale having some elements of historical fact with others which are sheer invention. The story-teller from whom I had the basic tale died long before it ever

occurred to me to go back and make sure that I had her version straight, so I have only my memory to rely on. She herself was relying on two further removes of memory: her own of a story told to her, and the memory and possibly invention of the original narrator who had been living at Tarwin Meadows when the events which gave rise to the tale occurred.

It is difficult to tell which parts were simply invented to enthrall a boy of fourteen and whether the fourteen year old did not elaborate for his own delight. This is the story as I remember hearing it.

George Black, the original squatter, worked the property with the labor of ticket-of-leave convicts. Stores came to Tarwin Meadows by sea once a month, but they were difficult to land as the store-ship had to stand off beyond the breakers while rowing boats brought the stores in to the beach through the surf. On one occasion the ship itself was driven aground and broke up in a heavy sea in shallow water. I could see for myself what it was like, the story-teller said, if I went down onto the beach, because there was a wreck to be seen a little to the west of the homestead.[1] This was a much later wreck, but the original store-ship was lost in the same area. Tarwin Meadows was very isolated at the time and so there was nothing for it but to go overland to Port Phillip to get stores. George Black left the women at the homestead but took the convicts with him. They set off on horseback and on the first night out the squatter overheard the convicts plotting to kill him. He crept away from the camp, slipped the hobbles on the horses and stampeded all but his own, riding off and leaving the conspirators to perish in the bush.

In 1932, four years before I heard my story, H. J. Malone's *A short history of Central South Gippsland* was published by the Victorian Education Department. His information on Tarwin Meadows comes direct from memories recorded by Mrs George Black and is probably the most reliable source.

Tarwin Meadows was leased originally by George Raff in 1841, at which time George Black was managing a property for a friend on Cape Schanck. In 1843 the Meadows was taken over by E. W. Hobson who used it mainly as a resting station for cattle being moved overland between Melbourne and Port Albert. In 1844 Alexander Hunter got the lease and built a wattle and daub hut in which he lived until, in his own words, he sold "the Tarwin to Mr Black for £60" in 1851-2.[2]

A good deal of the territory was tidal swamp and George Black said he bought it because "there's money in mud".[3] He built dykes along the river, drained the land and sowed it down with strawberry clover from Holland, which did well in salty soil.

There is no mention of the property having been worked by ticket-of-leave or assigned convicts. It may have been, though it seems unlikely. Victoria became a separate colony in July 1851, and certainly convicts were not brought in from other colonies after that date. A few convicts had been sent to Port Phillip from the special prison at Pentonville in England, starting in November 1844, but in spite of the fact that the British authorities called them "exiles" and tried to pretend that they weren't really convicts, the people of Port Phillip protested strongly. By 1849 the scheme had collapsed.[4] By December 1851, at about the time when George Black was beginning work at Tarwin Meadows, transportation to the mainland of Australia was abolished.[5] It is possible that labor at Tarwin Meadows in the early 50s was provided by ticket-of-leave Pentonvillians, but I have been unable to find any evidence to make it seem likely.

There is no mention either of stores coming through the surf by row-boat from a store-ship nor, considering the weather often prevailing on that stretch of beach, does it seem likely. At first goods were carried to and from Melbourne by bullock waggon and mail came in, again by waggon, once every six weeks from Stockyard Creek, now Foster. In the late 1870s a steamer plied between Griffiths Point, now San Remo, and Stony Point, so that the Blacks were then able to get their stores from San Remo. In summer that was a one day trek from the bullock team. In winter it took three days.[6]

It seems then that as history little is left of the legend on which the story of the opera is based. However there are many well-authenticated stories from the same area and period which have a similar flavor of dramatic barbarity. According to Murray Black, "signs of cannibalism have been found along Tarwin Beach".[7] The real villains, it seems, were not ticket-of-leave convicts but escapees from Van Diemen's Land, and it was they and not the stores which came in from the sea. Here are three brief summaries of tales which came direct from Mrs George Black and were presented by her as history.

Once while resting in a hut on the Bass River, George Black was called out by six men, two of whom were armed. They said they were squatters going to Melbourne to buy cattle and asked to borrow powder to shoot duck. Black said he had none. They asked for food. He told them to help themselves which they did, ravenously. One man was sick as a result. They asked Black to guide them to Melbourne but he said he'd just come back. They offered what were obviously stolen goods. Black still refused. He said the bullock driver would soon come in and would take them some of the way. The driver took them to the next station where they begged powder from Mr Brown, stuck him up and helped themselves to horses. They were eventually caught by the police and their leader, James Dalton, was hanged for the murder of a policeman when they were escaping from Van Diemen's Land.[8]

Another troupe of escaped convicts came in with the same story, that they were squatters on their way to Melbourne, and asked for stores. Black told them he was waiting for his bullock waggons to arrive from Melbourne. He got word that in fact the self-styled squatters had landed in a sixty foot sailing boat and planned to take all the Tarwin Meadows stores and sail for King Island. Black got away from the homestead on his horse, set fire to their boat and rode to meet the bullock teams. He told the driver that if men came looking for him to say he was last seen four or five miles down the track towards Melbourne. He then took one of the waggons through the bush by a roundabout way back to the homestead. The convicts did come after him and were sent on by the bullock driver and caught by police.[9]

On one other occasion bushrangers, who'd been sent in the direction of police by George Black but had escaped, came back to get their revenge. His sister, Elizabeth, held them off in the dark with a pipe-case, pretending it was a pistol, and convinced them that George was not in the homestead.[10]

However, after all that is said, I am glad that I read the history after I wrote the libretto. The legend as fiction is quite as true in its way and is less tied to Gippsland or the 1850s. All its elements are true to the colony of New South Wales in the period preceding the creation of the separate colony of Victoria. Squatters did rely on assigned convict labor to work their properties. Many places were so isolated that if their stores didn't arrive by sea they were in desperate straits. Many convicts were good men deported for petty crimes, and Kane Chapman is by no means merely a romantic invention. That respectable women did sometimes feel compassion and even love for men so unjustly treated is not hard to believe, though just how monstrous such disobedience as Eve's would seem to respectable parents is certainly insufficiently indicated in the libretto. Still, Andrew Stewart's betrayal of the man who had been trying to save his life and his subsequent remorse, only after the death of his daughter, grows naturally from the situation.

And like other legends and folk-tales which continue to work for us, many of the elements seem very modern. Young people choosing love in the face of respectable authority, in the face of impossible odds, belong to every age. Most modern men have experienced Andrew Stewart's predicament, whether to take the course of action appropriate to making money and holding power, position and respectability, or the alternative course appropriate to valuing other people's lives and identities. It happens every day all over the world and still it takes something like the death of a beloved daughter to bring most men to their senses.

I hope the libretto of "Garni Sands" will be read, if it is read at all, as legend and not as history.

[1] *Magnat,* purposely run aground to get insurance, 1900. H. J. Malone's *A short history of Central South Gippsland* (Melbourne, 1932), p. 37.
[2] Malone, p. 26.
[3] ibid., p. 32.
[4] Gordon Connell, *Stories of Australia* (Melbourne, 1967), p. 103.
[5] ibid., p. 110.
[6] Malone, p. 33.
[7] Patricia Crooke (ed.), *Is Emu on the menu?* (1966), p. 83.
[8] Malone, p. 34.
[9] ibid., p. 35.
[10] ibid., p. 36.

MORRIS LURIE

American Shoes

We open our story on a Saturday afternoon at the Commonwealth Hotel in Port Augusta, known to the local drinkers as the Crazy Cottage, where the owner, a tall, gaunt woman of forty with red-rinsed hair hanging down like string, is playing the violin. She once gave recitals in the capitals of the world, winning renown for her Bach, but now her eyes are mad. She is accompanied by a short, fat man on trumpet, and a fourteen-year-old boy on drums. The trumpeter has a drinker's nose, a drinker's watery eyes, and his face, as he plays, is on fire. The boy has black hair plastered down hard with water or oil, and his drumming is loud, flat and even. He stares straight ahead, deadly serious, never smiling. They are playing popular tunes, the violinist sawing frantically, bony elbow flying, and stamping a foot. The place is packed and in an uproar. Everyone is shouting. Harold Singer, who is twenty years old and five hundred miles from home, is sitting with a battered ex-boxer, a tall Dutchman, and a once-professional conman with a mouth full of silver teeth. The boxer is pummelling Singer with talk of the ring.

"Hey, ya heard o' Blue McDonnell?" he asks.

"I don't think so," says Singer.

"I fought 'im," says the boxer. "Knocked 'im clean out o' the ring. Yeah! Ya heard o' Stan Davis?"

"I really don't know too much about boxing," Singer says.

"What about Tommy Muldoon?" says the boxer, unperturbed. "Little runty fella with sandy hair. Fought 'im twice. First time he practic'ly killed me, second time I 'ad 'im in one. Yeah!"

"Is that so?" says Singer politely, trying to conceal his unease. The boxer frightens him. He is a small, surly man with little yellow eyes set close together and eight teeth missing in the front. His face and hands are battered with sun and bumpy with scars, and he seems to Singer a man capable of anything. Singer takes a quick sip of his beer. The boxer leans in close, breathing hard, his yellow eyes not leaving Singer's for a second.

"Ya heard of a guy name of Steve Mansfield?" he says, jabbing Singer with a finger.

"Well . . .," says Singer, "the name . . . rings a bell . . ."

"Ah, leave him alone, Mick," says the Dutchman. He's only a boy."

"Shut up, Lofty," the boxer snaps.

The Dutchman laughs. He is having a fine time. Yesterday he was broke and today he's drinking jugs of beer. He is a big man, six feet three or more, with happy blue eyes and protruding teeth like dirty piano keys. His long legs are sprawled out in front of him like pipes, his pants stretched tight and halfway down his right thigh an unnatural bulge showing. There is something wrong with his privates, caused, the Dutchman told Singer, by an accident on the railway line a week ago involving, somehow a handcart, two forty-four gallon drums of petrol, a train and a cook. "Look," said the Dutchman to Singer, indicating his melon bulge, "I don't think it's natural to be like this. All blown up like a rock. It's not right. Ha! But you should see that cook! The train went bang! he shoot up in the air and when he come down he started to run and I never seen that fella again! That cook!"

"How about some more beer, Mick?" says the once-professional conman with the silver teeth.

"What?" says the boxer, and Singer takes this opportunity to turn away, away from the boxer and his probing yellow eyes. He looks around the room. The decor is Victorian, dim, with

heavy hanging lamps on chains and ferns in brass pots by the walls. The walls are covered with paintings, stiff and formal portraits of men with moustaches, sleek racehorses, views of trees, mountains and skies, all brown with age like gravy. Between and above them, the walls show wallpaper mildewed and stained like old maps.

Singer sees his mother's face and quickly looks somewhere else.

His eyes alight on a woman sitting at a table to his right. She has enormous breasts and a huge face like a moon on which has been painted a cupid's bow pair of lips. She sits comfortably with her feet wide apart and a large handbag over one arm. With her is a little whippet of a man wearing a wide-brimmed grey felt hat. The man's face is serious and white. He takes quick, nervous sips of his beer, his eyes glued to the woman's breasts. The woman, as Singer watches, laughs. The breasts quiver and lunge. The man leans forward anxiously, mesmerized by the bouncing flesh. A chair crashes to the floor as a drinker at the next table stands, but the little man with the grey hat doesn't move. Singer gets a sudden picture of the breasts bouncing free, jumping absolutely and completely out — and then what? What will her little friend do then? Singer is sure it is all about to happen when suddenly the woman turns and looks at him, catching him unprepared. He blushes furiously and quickly looks away, but not quickly enough. "Wanna come upstairs, son?" the woman shouts at him. "Show ya a good time, ha ha ha!" "Marge, ya're all tit!" someone shouts back. "Watch yer language!" yells the woman. "Where do ya think ya are, at home? Ha ha ha!" Singer, flustered, flees to the band.

He is just in time to see the owner throwing down her violin. She slams it down on top of a piano, her eyes bulging. Then she sits down at the piano and starts to play. She plays with considerable force, her fingers stiff with rings and banging like hammers. Singer stares at her, amazed at her fury. No one else, he sees, is paying her the slightest attention. In the shouting room she can hardly be heard. Singer has never been in a place like this ever before in his life.

"Hey," says the boxer jabbing Singer with a finger, "ya ever heard of a fighter by name of Snowy Edwards? Helluva fighter, strong as a bull. Yeah! Ya heard o' Percy Blake?"

"I don't think so," says Singer.

"Yeah? What about Mitch Flanagan?"

Singer tries to smile, blinking into the boxer's broken face.

"Me and Mitch fought it out once," says the boxer, but Singer doesn't hear the rest. He is all at once back in the changing rooms under the grandstand at the local football field, where he slept last night in his sleeping bag on a hard wooden bench, climbing in through a window after it was dark and waking up at five in the morning to hear a strange sound. The wind has come up, but the sound is more than the wind, and for a minute Singer is terrified. It is like a horde of frantic birds. He runs outside and sees the grandstand above bedecked with pennants and flags, flapping and fluttering in the morning wind, and he thinks of funerals and death.

"Ya know Buddy Kelly?" says the boxer, and Singer sees his mother, and he feels himself sinking, filled with fear.

She is sick, she is very sick, and why Singer has run away he doesn't know. He left suddenly, thumbing rides with cars and trucks, not sleeping, going as far as fast as he could. All the way to Port Augusta. The last town before the desert.

"Another jug, Mick," says the conman, banging the boxer on the arm.

"Yeah," says Mick. He scowls, but at the same time looks proud as he brings out of his trouser pocket a roll of notes two inches thick and clumsily peels one off. He flicks it to the centre of the table, and then leans back in his chair, his yellow eyes skimming around the shouting room.

"Look at all that money!" shouts the Dutchman. He gives Singer a broad wink. "Happy, boy?" he asks. "You like the Crazy Cottage? It's a good place."

"It's fine," says Singer. "It's very nice."

The Dutchman was the first person Singer spoke to in Port Augusta. He met him two days ago, leaning up against the bar in the front room of this pub. "I'm looking for a job," Singer told him. "You know where there's one around?" "You got money to buy me a beer?" the Dutchman asked. Singer had — and has — five traveller's cheques at the bottom of his pack, and five pounds in single notes in various pockets. He took out a crumpled note. "That's all I've got," he said. The Dutchman grabbed it and waved it in the air. "Over here!" he shouted at the barman. "My friend's buying!" The pound went fast, Singer trying to find out about work

but getting nowhere. "You got any more money?" the Dutchman asked. "No," Singer said. "I have to get a job." "Come back Saturday," the Dutchman said. "My friend Mick'll be here. He'll fix you up."

A pound down the drain, Singer thought, and the next place he went to was the Government Employment Office, where he should have gone first, and there a man told that the only job available was fettling, repairing track, out in the desert. "Pretty tough," he said, looking hard at Singer. "Gets hot. They're all alcoholics out there. Only place a drunk can get a job. They won't hurt you, but my God, they'll drink the spirit out of your lamp. Where you from?" he asked, and when Singer told him, he shook his head. "You better go home, son," he said. "This is no place for you. Go home."

There's a clock on one wall and Singer, looking up, sees that it's after four. He has been here for nearly two hours, drinking the boxer's beer, and the subject of jobs hasn't even come up.

"Have another drink," says the Dutchman, refilling Singer's glass from a new jug.

"Ya know Sydney at all?" the boxer asks Singer, looming up again, his face only inches away. "There's a bastard of a town. I had some times there though. Me and four girls in a hotel, best in town. Yeah! We done everything! Just won a fight. Feeling great. Those women! They was all over me. They go mad when they see blood. Ya can't keep 'em away. Yeah! They tear ya t' pieces, do anything ya care to name. And when ya lose and don't get a penny, they wouldn't look at ya in the street. Wouldn't spit on ya. Yeah! That's the truth."

"What I really want," says Singer, made bold by beer and the flying minutes on the clock — it has suddenly become five o'clock — "is a job. Do you know where there's one going?"

"What kinda work?" says the boxer.

"I don't care," says Singer. "Anything."

"Yeah?" says the boxer, his little yellow eyes boring hard into Singer's. "What sort o' work ya do back home."

"Well," says Singer, and feels sweat breaking out on his brow — he can see I'm a student, he thinks. He can see I've never done anything. He can see I'm Jewish. "I worked for a while with a firm of shopfitters," he says.

"Yeah?" says the boxer.

"Got into a bit of trouble," says Singer. "You know."

"Ya got any money?"

"No," says Singer. "Not a penny."

"Okay, son," says the boxer. "You come with me. I'll fix ya up. Listen. Ya ever come across a fighter by name of Ronnie Smith? Big Ron he was called. Had a reach on 'im like a bloody crane."

"I don't think so," says Singer, but the boxer doesn't stop. Name follows name. Beer follows beer. Singer, suddenly a shopfitter with a background of trouble, lets himself go. He stares into the boxer's broken mouth and hears the thud of leather on flesh and the roar of the crowd. Up and down the coast of Australia he goes, girls screaming, blood spurting onto the canvas of a hundred rings, in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, in bush towns, at carnivals, in smoke-filled private clubs. Exhibitions, contests, grudge fights, title bouts. In and out of taxis he leaps, into plush hotels where everyone bows and knows his name, or in cheap anonymous rooms where from behind the thin walls comes the sound of old men coughing all night. Vast sums of money magically appear, mysteriously fly away. Champagne explodes from icy bottles, red-lipped girls do amazing things. The boxer's chin is wet with spittle, cigarette after cigarette hanging from his cracked lips, and when next Singer looks up, it is six o'clock. And the place is in turmoil.

"That's all for today, ladies and gentlemen!" the owner is shouting, her violin tucked under one arm. "Drink up and get out! But don't forget to come back! Non-stop entertainment guaranteed!"

Singer stands up, dazed with beer. Everyone is standing, but no one seems to be leaving. Everyone is shouting and waving money in the air. Singer sees waiters rushing from table to table, loaded down with boxes of beer. Everyone is buying for the long drought of Saturday night and all day Sunday. Singer has never seen anything like it. "Over here!" Mick is shouting, waving his roll. Singer watches as he buys four boxes of beer, a dozen bottles in each, two bottles of whiskey, and a gallon flagon of sweet sherry. "Okay," he says. "That should do. Let's get outta her."

They are outside. Singer is amazed to see the sky is still blue and the sun burning down. He blinks, sweating, and rubs his eyes.

"I want a taxi," the boxer mutters.

In the bright light of day he is a smaller man than Singer thought, with short bowed legs and a fighter's sloping shoulders and low neck. He stands, his whiskey bottles jammed into the

pockets of his jacket, the gallon of sweet sherry under one arm, squinting angrily down the street.

"You come with us, boy," the Dutchman says to Singer. "We gonna have a party. Okay, Mick?"

"Where's ya gear, son?" the boxer asks.

"It's at the police station," Singer says.

"Them bastards!" He scowls and spits into the street.

"Hurry, boy," says the Dutchman to Singer. "We be right here."

Singer is off, running. The police station is halfway down the street, next door to a bank. A sergeant at a desk nods as Singer comes in, and Singer goes along a corridor, then through a door to the yard at the back. This is the gaol, a large barred cube like a cage at a zoo, open to the sky. The floor is concrete. Inside are buckets and long wooden benches, nothing else. A man with a stubbly grey beard stands at the bars as Singer hurries past, the man's eyes red-rimmed and empty. Singer goes through another door, collects his pack, and hurries back the way he came, head down as he passes the prisoner.

They are all in a taxi and about to leave when Singer comes running back. The Dutchman throws open a door and Singer squeezes in, his pack on his knees. The taxi is hot inside, and smells of scorched plastic, dust and sweat. The windows are so dirty Singer can hardly see out. Next to him the conman lights a cigarette.

They travel for ten minutes and then Mick leans forward and jabs the driver on the shoulder.

"Right here," he says.

Singer struggles out, banging a knee. He sees a cluster of huts, with bright tin roofs and yellow wooden walls. There are about thirty of them, grouped together on a low pocket of land down from the road and next to a railway line. He hoists his pack onto his back. A train begins to shunt along the line, appearing and disappearing between the huts.

He waits for Mick to pay the driver, and then follows him down, his pack bouncing on his back. Mick unlocks the padlock on the door of his hut, kicks the door in with his foot, and then goes in. The conman follows, then the Dutchman, and then Singer, first taking off his pack.

There is a bedroom, a kitchen, and one other room. The kitchen is filled with empty bottles, yellowing newspapers, rusty tins. There is a black stove in one corner, shiny with grease. The bedroom is dark, and all the other room has in it is a broken chair and an old calendar nailed crookedly on the wall by the kitchen door. Singer puts down his pack.

"Here y'are, son," says the boxer, and hands him a bottle.

"Thank you," says Singer, and sits down on his pack. The Dutchman lowers himself carefully to the floor, and then sits, his back against a wall, his long legs sprawled out in front of him. He gives Singer a happy wink. The conman takes a bottle of beer and goes out. Mick sits down on the broken chair and lights a cigarette. He stares at the floor, his brow furrowed. Suddenly he looks up at Singer, his yellow eyes burning.

"Where ya reckon I got these shoes?" he says, jabbing a foot at Singer. "Take a good look."

"Sydney?" says Singer.

"Sydney be damned! They're from New York! America! Yeah! Listen, ya heard o' Bing Crosby? The singa fella. Well, I been to his place. He lives on a big ranch. I put on a little exhibition from 'im. Yeah. He ain't a bad fella. Knows how t' treat a man. Not tight with his dough like some. I got these shoes in New York. I been all over the place. Been to Italy, been to France. Come here," he says to Singer, standing up. "I'll give ya a little lesson, teach ya how t' fight."

"Easy, Mick," says the Dutchman.

"Ah, I ain't gonna hurt 'im," growls the boxer. "Come 'ere," he says to Singer. "Get yer hands up. Now watch."

Singer takes up a position, but before he can think, Mick has thrown his arms around him and is squeezing him hard, breathing in his face.

"Yar!" he grunts. "Spit in 'is eye! Chew 'is ear! Keep movin' so the ref can't see. Yar! Yar!"

Singer is helpless, his arms pinned to his sides.

"Stomp on 'is foot" grunts Mick, stomping hard on Singer's foot. "Keep turnin' round! Don't let 'im get free!"

Singer is terrified, he can't do a thing, but all at once the boxer breaks his grip, takes a fast step back, grunting and snorting, and then lets fly with a flurry of punches, hitting Singer on the arms, chest and in the stomach, Singer gasping and trying to step back.

"Mick," says the Dutchman. "Leave him alone. He's just a boy. Drink your beer."

"Ah," Mick growls, the fire dying in his eyes. He falls back onto his chair. "Soft," he mutters. "Get yerself killed."

He drinks from his bottle, and then lights another cigarette.

"When were you in America, Mick?" Singer asks, trying to act as though nothing has happened.

"I been all over," Mick says. "Fought in Englan' too. I done all right. See this hand? That's the one shaken by Bing Crosby himself. In person. He ain't a bad fella. Not like some o' them. Yeah!"

Singer up-ends his bottle, but drinks very little. The beer tastes warm and sweet. He's not going to find me a job, he thinks. But how do I get out of here?

The conman comes back, and stands in the doorway, a fresh bottle in his hand.

"The party is about to commence," he says, flashing his silver teeth. "Guests are reminded to kindly supply their own drink."

"Jeezus!" cries the boxer. "Them bastards'll drink every drop I got! Lofty, get on yer feet. We gotta hide some of this stuff."

The Dutchman stands up, smiles at Singer, then carries a box of beer and the flagon of sherry into the bedroom, where he pushes them under the bed.

"Come on, boy," he says to Singer. "The party is starting."

"I'll be over in a minute," says Singer. "I just want to do a few things first."

"Touch me stuff and I'll kill ya," the boxer says, jerking his thumb at the bed.

"Next door, boy," says the Dutchman. "You'll hear the noise."

Singer is alone.

He thinks first of fleeing, taking his pack and going — but where? Another night in the changing rooms, with the pennants flapping in the wind? And what if someone finds me there, he thinks. He looks at his watch. He sees, with surprise, that it is after eight o'clock, and he feels instantly hungry. He had coffee for breakfast, nothing for lunch, nothing but beer all afternoon. He unstraps his pack and takes out a piece of cheese and some black bread, bought two days ago, now both hard and dry. He washes them down with beer. Then he lights a cigarette, takes out from his pack his pen and a writing pad and sitting on the pack he begins a letter to his brother back home.

I'm in Port Augusta, he writes. *I might take a job here for a while, I'm not sure. Or I might go on to Alice Springs. It's very hot here. It was ninety-three degrees today. How is mum? Tell her not to worry about me. I am going to*

What? he thinks. I am going to what?

He sits and stares at the pad on his knee. Then he looks up and stares through the open door at the sky, crisscrossed with washing lines. An angry shout followed by a burst of laughter comes from the hut next door. Jesus, thinks Singer, and closes his eyes. Then he opens them, stands up, tears the page he has written on from the pad, screws it into a ball, goes to the door and throws it out into the night. They're singing in the hut next door now, a dozen voices belting out a drunken song. Singer thinks again of fleeing, grabbing his pack and running away, and for two minutes he stands, head down, undecided. Then he looks up, pushes his hands deep into his pockets, and steps out of the hut to the party next door, for where else is there to go?

Just one more thing about this night: at two o'clock, Singer can take no more and slips back to the boxer's hut. He is woozy with beer, hoarse from too many cigarettes, his face aches from smiling into drunken faces, and he unrolls his sleeping bag on the floor and in five minutes is asleep. At three the boxer and the Dutchman come in and wake him up. The boxer is very drunk. He sits down on the broken chair, a bottle of beer in one hand, a cigarette in the other.

"What're ya sleeping for?" he says to Singer, and then sees Singer's pen and pad. "Listen," he says. "I want ya t' write me a letter. Yeah. To my sister. Bev."

Singer sits up, rubbing his eyes.

"I'll tell ya what t' say," the boxer says. "Tell 'er I'll be round one o' these days. Yeah. Ask 'er how she is. How ya keepin,', Bev? Write that. How are the boys? Listen. Tell 'em t' stay away from the fight game. Write that. Stay away. It's a mug's game. Stay outta it, ya hear? It's a game for flamin' mugs. Yeah! They're good boys, they don' need all that. It's a mug's game, it's a racket." He says this over and over, tears running down his battered cheeks and chin, until the Dutchman taps him on the shoulder and say, "It's all right, Mick, it's all right," and the boxer staggers off to bed.

Our story takes a skip of three weeks. Singer is now in the employ of the railways. He is at the butt-welders, close to a hernia. Here, forty feet lengths of rail are being welded three together, and it is Singer's job to push these hundred-and-twenty-feet lengths of rail down a slide. "Crack 'em like a whip, boy!" the foreman shouts at him.

"Keep 'em moving!" He shows Singer how, grabbing one end of a rail and whipping it backwards and forwards so the whole length comes alive and slips like a snake down the slide, but when Singer tries it, nothing happens. The sun beats down on his head. Black spots dance in front of his eyes. His hands tremble and shake. "Put yer back into it!" the foreman shouts.

Singer lives in another colony of huts in another part of town, sharing a hut with a drunken Czech. Night after night the Czech tells him the story of his life, something about respect and a bad woman and three or four gaols, while Singer waits for a letter from home. Nothing comes. Will I go to Alice Springs? he thinks.

"Ya'll die there, son," the boxer tells him. "Sun's so hot it'll fry ya brains like eggs in a pan. Yeah!"

The boxer seems not to be working. Singer bumps into him occasionally in the wide main street of the town, with its verandah posts and row of pubs like a set for a western film. Mick looks each time shabbier and shabbier, his cheeks grimy with beard. "Lend us a quid, will ya, son?" he asks. His fat roll of notes has gone.

One night, lonely and bored, Singer drops in at Mick's hut. The Dutchman is there too, and a young man named Howard with a bright red face and thick nearly-white hair like straw.

"How do you like the railways, boy?" the Dutchman asks Singer.

He is as jovial as ever, stretched out comfortably on the floor, a bottle of beer in his hand.

Howard is reading *Time*. Singer met him at that party three weeks ago. He is a university graduate, and was just about to take up a position in a pharmaceutical firm when he suddenly left home and came here. He seems to Singer highly intelligent, but he drinks. He makes no bones about it. "I'm a boozer," he says. And when he asked Singer what he was doing here, Singer was vague, he couldn't tell him about his sick mother, he shrugged, looked away. And then wished he hadn't, that he'd told Howard everything, but now it's too late.

"Hello, Mick," Singer says.

Mick doesn't look up. He is drinking wine and looks surlier than ever. All at once he stands up, shoulders hunched, and leaves the hut.

"What's wrong with him?" Singer asks.

"Ah, don't worry about him," Howard says. "Ya on the booze yet?"

"I'm not really a drinking man," Singer says.

Singer stands one afternoon on a hill with his back to Port Augusta and before him the desert. He watches a truck moving out into the desert, raising a long plume of dust. After a while the truck is out of sight and all he can see is the dust. Then that goes too. There is nothing to see, the view to the horizon is featureless and flat, hazy in the sun, but still Singer stands. He lights a cigarette and tries to focus his thoughts. I can't go home, he thinks. I can't go home yet. I just can't.

There now enters the scene, dancing in, wearing shiny black shoes with pointed toes, a dapper little man with a pencil-thin moustache and sparkling eyes. His name is Harry and he is a liar.

He moves into a hut two down from Singer's and hangs up a sign saying *Haircut* 2/-. This is cheaper than the barber in town and Singer goes to have his done.

"I've seen some bad places," says Harry, dancing around Singer with his scissors clicking, "but this is the worst. Just a minute, I'll show you my map. It's all there. How do you like it in the back? Short? Up high?"

He gives Singer a few more clips, and then leaves him, with only one side done and hair creeping down Singer's shirt under the tatty towel Harry has spread over his shoulders, and on one knee he bends down and slides out from under his bed a small suitcase which, with a neat flip, he puts onto the bed, his thumbs, at the same time, clicking open the catches. Up flies the lid. "It's all here," says Harry, opening up on Singer's lap a large map of Australia.

"You name it, I been there," says Harry, dancing back a step, hands on hips, rocking proudly on the balls of his feet.

"What's this?" says Singer, trying to free a hand from under the towel with which to point. A snip of his hair rolls down from the towel and explodes soundlessly in the middle of Western Australia, creating new rivers and roads. Harry dances back to Singer's side.

"That?" says Harry. "Lost four hundred quid there. See? *Lost* £400 — *poker*. Everywhere I go, I write down what happens. See? *Worked for butcher*. That was at a slaughterhouse. Good work. Wasn't there long, though. It's on the map. 2 *months*. Got into a fight with the foreman. I don't like being pushed around. I broke his nose, collected my pay, and took the next train south."

I'll bet, thinks Singer. "Is that so?" he says.

"See that?" says Harry, pointing to a tiny inscription in the middle of New South Wales.

"£1200. Two-up. Got into a little school there, cleaned them all out. Had to fight my way out of the place, they was so mad."

Wow, thinks Singer, what a liar, but he doesn't look up, frightened his eyes might betray him. He peers at the map, trying to decipher some more of the writing which is scrawled everywhere.

"I've got a map of New Zealand and a map of Japan," says Harry. "Won't show them to you now. Take hours. See that line? That's where I sailed, on the way to Japan. Had a little Swedish skipper. Tight with his money. The food was so bad, one day I went up to him and said 'Listen, I can't eat that stuff any more. I notice you don't eat it. How about some real food for a change?' Well, he didn't say anything, but when I went down to eat that night, there was that same lousy food. The skipper was eating steak. Well, I grabbed him, took him up on deck, and hung him over the side by his heels. When I pulled him up, he gave me his steak. Ate well the rest of the voyage. The skipper stayed out of my way. He knew what was good for him."

"Hmm," says Singer, pointing to another inscription. "And what's this?"

"That?" says Harry, dancing in closer to look at the map. *"Shearing. Horse.* Oh yeah. That was up north. Queensland. Fella up there thought he'd have a little joke. 'See that horse? he said to me. 'Tame as a milking cow. Gentle as your own mother. Get on and I'll teach ya how to ride.' He thought I'd never been on a horse before. So I got on. Well, the second I was in the saddle, the damn thing started humping and careening all over the place. I tell ya, if I hadn't been able to ride, that horse would have broken my neck. You can bust up your insides on a horse like that. Well, I stayed on a while, and when I'd had enough, I got off and went over to that joker and said to him, 'I suppose that's your idea of a joke. Well, I don't. I knocked out three of his teeth. He didn't know what hit him."

Singer looks up, attempting a smile. There is something about this Harry he doesn't like, and not just the obvious lies. He looks at his watch and feigns surprise. "Hey, it's seven o'clock," he says. "Can you finish me up, I have to see someone."

"Sure," says Harry, dancing in. "Won't take me a minute."

The following day, while Singer is washing his shirt in the communal laundry, another facet of Harry's character is revealed. The small dancing man has been not only a shearer, a butcher, a sailor and a gambler, but a man of the ring.

"Yeah," says Harry, throwing his shirt into the tub next to Singer's. "I've been in a few fights in my time. Professional. I'm not talking about the others. Won some big purses too. All in a day's work."

"Do you know a boxer by the name of Mick Sullivan?" Singer asks. "A small guy. Little yellow eyes."

"Mick Sullivan!" cries Harry. "Jesus! I haven't seen him in years! Know him? I've fought him! Hell of a fighter. One of the best."

"He's in town," says Singer.

"In Port Augusta?" says Harry, and Singer blinks, amazed to see such coolness. What a fantastic bluffer, he thinks.

"You know the Crazy Cottage?" he asks Harry. "He goes there a lot."

"Listen," says Harry, "next time you see him, tell him I'm here. Wait a minute, wait a minute. Tell him I'll be in the Crazy Cottage Friday afternoon, four o'clock. I'll buy him a beer."

"Okay," says Singer.

"Mick Sullivan!" cries Harry, dancing back with his shirt from the tub. "This'll be an event."

That night Singer goes around to Mick's hut to tell him his old boxing friend Harry is in town and wants to meet him. Singer doesn't know what kind of reaction to expect from Mick, but he feels excited, he's not sure why.

But Mick, when he tells him, seems hardly interested. He is drinking port. The hut smells of it, sour and thick.

"Friday," says Mick, not looking up. "I'll be there."

There is no enthusiasm in his voice, no surprise. He seems to Singer to be more morose than ever, his head down, his face dark, and after twenty minutes of surly silence Singer says goodnight and goes back to his own hut, feeling off balance and ill at ease.

The next day is Thursday. Harry has his chair out in the sun, in front of his hut, and is sitting listening to a portable radio, his dapper feet crossed.

"I've seen Mick Sullivan," Singer tells him. "It's all arranged. Four o'clock tomorrow."

"Fine," says Harry. "Sit down. What have you been doing? I haven't had a decent conversation all day."

Singer sits down on the step outside the barber's hut and lights a cigarette.

"You been here long?" Harry asks.

"About a month," says Singer. "I'm thinking of going to Alice Springs."

"The Alice," says Harry. "Good place. Matter of fact, I'm planning to go there myself. Gonna drive up. There's a sweet little car going for thirty quid I've got my eye on. Needs a bit of fixing up, but I can handle that, no trouble. Worked in a garage once, I ever tell you? When are you thinking of going? Might take you along."

Whoops, thinks Singer, his heart suddenly beating fast.

"I'm not sure," he says, not looking at Harry. "In about two weeks, I think."

"I'd better get onto that car," says Harry. "A bargain like that doesn't lie around too long."

"Well, I think I'd better be off," says Singer, getting to his feet. "Got some things to do."

On Friday, Singer finds himself passing the Crazy Cottage. It is half past four. They won't be here, he thinks, going in. Well, certainly not Harry.

But they are. Mick and Harry are sitting side by side under a painting of a race horse, ferns in brass pots on either side of them, like a tableau. This is the room where the mad violinist plays on Saturdays, but now it is completely quiet, a different place. Mick and Harry have two glasses of beer on the table before them, and a plate of sandwiches, so far untouched. Mick looks very serious. Harry is smoking a cigarette.

"Hello, Mick," says Singer, smiling broadly. "Hello, Harry."

"Go away," snaps Mick, his yellow eyes hard and vicious. "Beat it."

"Yeah," says Harry. "Leave us alone."

Singer retreats.

That night Singer goes over to the barber's hut to see what it was all about.

"Mick Sullivan?" says Harry. "That wasn't Mick Sullivan. Jesus! I should have broken his nose for using the good name of the man."

"What?" says Singer.

"Just a bum," says Harry. "Using Mick Sullivan's good name. I should have broken his face for him."

He says it with such conviction that Singer begins to doubt his picture of the barber. A liar? He looks quickly at Harry's hands, which all at once seem to him strong and hard, a fighter's fists. But what about that business of hanging the Swedish skipper over the side by his heels? he thinks. That can't be true. Then he sees the way Mick and Harry were sitting side by side at the Crazy Cottage, so calm and solemn, and he doesn't know what to think. What were they talking about? Why did they tell him to get out?

"Just a bum," says Harry, and Singer knows he will get no more from the man. The matter is closed.

"I had another look at that car today," says Harry. "Gave it a good going over. Not much needs doing, a lot less than I thought. We'd be out of here in a week. The Alice! Wonderful time of year to be heading up there. Hot? Yes, it is. But it's a dry heat. A man can work in that kind of heat, it's the humidity you've got to watch. I've worked in a hundred and ten. And let me tell you, you won't find a better beer-drinking climate anywhere in the world than you get up in the Alice."

"Sounds good," says Singer, looking over his shoulder.

Any moment now, thinks Singer, he's going to ask me for that thirty pounds, and then what will I say? A flat no? It won't be easy. I'll tell him I've already booked on the train. I'll tell him I'm going with a friend.

But the next afternoon, as Singer is going past Harry's hut, he notices that the haircut sign has gone. The door to the hut is closed, but through the window he sees a big man lying on the bed, a big man wearing a dark blue suit staring up at the ceiling and smoking a cigarette.

Where's Harry? thinks Singer.

"It's like that out here," the man in the hut next to Singer's tells him. He is an old railway man with tufts of hair growing out of his ears and brown spots on the backs of his hands. "Fella takes off in the middle of the night, ya never see him again. Maybe he heard someone was in town he didn't particularly want to see. Maybe the police. Harry, eh? Yeah. They just go. You'll never see him again. Why, he bite ya for a couple of quid?"

"No," says Singer, "he didn't. He didn't ask me for a penny. That's the funny thing."

That night, yet another night of loneliness and boredom, fears and doubts, Singer goes around to see Mick. He has nowhere else to go. The Czech in his hut has embarked on a bout of heavy drinking, reeling around and cursing and throwing bottles at the walls. There are no letters from home. It is a hot night, the sky

crammed with stars, the smell of desert in the air.

Alice Springs, thinks Singer, why do I want to go to Alice Springs? He sees his mother's face and flushes with shame and guilt. He has to close his eyes. His stomach tightens into a knot. He hurriedly lights a cigarette and to keep from going around in circles, he concentrates on Harry and Mick and all the stories he's heard.

There is no light showing in Mick's hut. The door is closed. Singer knocks. There is no reply.

"He's gone," says a voice, and Singer turns to see Howard sitting on the step of the next hut, a bottle in his hand. "Took off last night," Howard says. "Don't know where. Into the desert, I suppose. That's where they all go. Want a drink? I've got some cold bottles inside. Sit down. I won't be a minute. Been a bastard of a day, hasn't it?"

It remains now only for Howard to tell the end of the story. He goes inside his hut and comes back with three bottles of cold beer and sits down beside Singer, on the step.

"The local constabulary paid us a little visit last night," he says. "Two of them. Plain clothes. They drove right up here, in a big black car, right up to the door of Mick's hut. Mick was sitting on his step, like you and me now, not doing a thing. One of them stayed in the car and the other one went up to Mick, said a few words, and then they both went into Mick's hut. Closed the door. They were in there about half an hour. Then the policeman came out, looked around, nice and casual, and then he got back into the car, and they drove off. Nice and slow. Then out came Mick, and Jesus you should have seen him. That copper made a real mess of him. There was blood everywhere. He'd just about torn off an ear."

"Why?" says Singer.

"Well," says Howard, "the coppers said Mick had a gun. That's rubbish. That's a straight lie. He didn't have a gun and they knew it. They just wanted an excuse to beat him up, that's all. They don't like Mick around here. Anyhow, when I went over, Mick told me to go away. He said he was all right. He didn't want me poking my nose in. Well, that's his business, but Jesus you should have seen the way he looked. I've seen some guys beat up round here, but never like that."

"But what was it for?" Singer asks.

Howard takes a slow drink from his bottle before replying. "They don't like Mick around here, that's all," he says. "He's been in too much trouble for their liking. He once killed a man, you know that? A sailor. Did it for ten quid. That was back in the days when he was a standover man. Beat up anyone for a tenner. Break a leg for another five. He must have beaten up that sailor a bit too hard. He was in gaol for eight years."

"I thought he was a boxer," says Singer.

"Did he tell you that?" says Howard. "Naah. He was never a fighter. Not professional, anyway. Might have been in a couple of fights when he was a boy, same as a lot of them, but he was never a real boxer. Our friend Mick was a common gangster, a standover man. That's all."

And what am I? thinks Singer, riding to Alice Springs on the train. From the windows of the train he looks out on river beds run dry, broken trees, boulders, mile after mile of sand, as he speeds into the desert, the final retreat. What am I? he thinks. What am I? There looms up before him the boxer's broken face, and he looks into the small yellow eyes, but they're blank, there's no expression, all he can see in them is his own face. He unstraps his pack and from the bottom takes out his five traveller's cheques and he fingers them like the end of a string tying him to his home.

Artists' Camp
Erith Island: March 1974

IAN TURNER

Erith Island is a part of the Kent Group, which lies in the middle of Bass Strait, eight hours' sail by supply launch out of Port Albert, on the Gippsland coast. It is uninhabited, one of the few places in Australian waters where it is still possible to act out a romantic dream. Which is one—perhaps the main—reason why a party led by Stephen Murray-Smith first visited Erith in the summer of 1962-63, and other parties, also led by Steve, have visited it every summer since 1966-67.

I first joined the Erith party in 1970-71, and immediately loved the place for its beauty and its tranquillity—a peace guaranteed by isolation and qualified only by the emotional undercurrents and occasional outbursts which characterise any small-group situation. In 1972-73, I suggested to Steve that he and I might take our friends Clif Pugh and Fred Williams on a special expedition. The proposal aroused some opposition among other Erith regulars who — quite understandably — regarded the island as a personal and very private retreat. But the idea was talked out, at great length and over many bottles, and it was finally accepted. The first plan, to go out late in 1973, foundered on Clif's travel and Fred's health. We finally made it in March, 1974.

I think I had three motives in putting forward the idea: to get to know better two painters whose friendship I enjoyed and whose work I admired; to learn something about how painters went about their work; and to see how these two painters responded to a land- and sea-scape which was, in my experience, unique in Australia (the only comparison I could make was with the Hebrides, though the light was very different). What follows are some notes on how these hopes paid off. Since, stupidly, I didn't keep a journal (Fred did, but that's not for publication), these notes are a synoptic impression rather than a sequential account.

It took us twelve hours to get out, because we had to deviate to unload some stores for the lighthouse on Wilson's Promontory. The trip was pretty "jobbly"—a word invented by Frank Goold, the great man who drives the supply boat, to describe Bass Strait in a certain mood. The night fell when we were still a couple of hours from Erith. Frank headed for the light on Deal Island, the largest of the Kent Group. Sailing into a light at night has the same kind of hypnotic effect as driving into a stream of oncoming cars, except that you don't have to dodge the cars. But you do have to avoid the rocks, and the opening into Murray Pass looks much narrower by night than by day. In fact, you can barely see it. "Look at that bloody big black shadow," said Fred, "we're going to hit it." It seemed as if we might, but we didn't—Frank knows those seas backwards. We anchored in our cove and unloaded the essentials —sleeping bags, food and booze. Clif and Fred looked tired, relieved, and a little wary.

They began to prospect the landscape the next morning. My first reaction was a puzzled disappointment that they were not immediately captivated, as I had been. Over the next week, I explored the reason. What it finally came down to, I think, was that my response was literary, while theirs was 'painterly'. I was seeing a landscape which had a romantic grandeur, which was 'picturesque' (in a 19th century, Chevalier or von Guerard sense), which was *sui generis*. They were seeing something which they would have to try to make part of themselves.

The point became clear in talk. Not without

difficulty because, while Clif was happy to verbalise his responses, Fred was most reluctant—a painting (like a poem, as Archibald Macleish once said) should not mean but be. It became clear that Fred found new landscapes threatening, and responded to them aggressively—he had to fight to get on top of them, in a personal battle, inside himself. I also learnt something that I should have known, but didn't—that, for Fred, the landscape has no focal point and no boundaries, in breadth or in depth. It cannot be contained in a frame—but for me the Erith landscape seemed to compose itself into a series of frames. Clif reacted very similarly, though slightly more aggressively. more like a hunter: "You've got to stalk a landscape." It was an illuminating comment. A painting of Clif's which looked out from the cliffs and over the hills of the north-west headland to Totem Pole Point saw the cape as an animal, dormant but ready to leap. I had the feeling that for Fred there was a series of battles, each of which might be won or lost, while for Clif there was a never-ending war.

As it turned out, I thought that the broad Erith landscape won on points. It may be that the island beat them physically; it's a long and exhausting walk through the poa grass and up the hills to reach the visual vantage points, especially when weighed down by a painter's encumbrances. (Steve and I shared the loads, but they were still heavy.) It's more likely that a week just isn't long enough for a painter to feel his way into an unfamiliar landscape. I think, too, that the light may have been a problem. The painters seemed to get on to the colors quickly—a range of reds, browns and purples that I hadn't seen before, and one of them rapidly dubbed the place the "ochre island". But there is a lack of haze, a clarity, a glow in the light which is uncharacteristic of Australian landscape.

However that may have been, it was interesting that, as the week progressed, Clif and Fred narrowed their borders until finally they zoomed in on the beach below the hut in which we were living. It seemed as if this was a scale they could live with, and for a couple of days they played with close-ups of the shimmer and shade of the sea on the sand—and used sprinklings of sand to give their painting a new tone and texture. They played, too, with the things that were washed up on the beach—most interesting for me, the jelly-fish: just how do painters paint translucency? I watched, but I still don't know.

I had expected that painters, like poker-players, would resent kibbitzers. If they did, Fred and Clif were very polite about it—they didn't object to Steve and me looking over their shoulders and asking naive questions about what they were doing. I was surprisd by what I saw. Clif seemed to me to be working from the outside in—to be 'composing' a painting, to be outlining the architecture and then filling in the detail; while Fred seemed to be working from the inside out—to start with the minutiae of the painting and to build these into a coherent and disciplined whole. I had vaguely thought of Clif as romantic/expressionist and Fred as classical/impressionist; but their methods of attack cut sharply across this pattern. Clif worked more slowly and worried more about what he was doing; Fred seemed to work intuitively and with a frantic bravura.

This is a confession. I was also fascinated to see how these two men, who had often painted together but whom I knew separately, would relate in a working situation. I asked pointed questions; the joint answer was that artists weren't rivals—they were rather allies in confronting the unfamiliar. And that was, in a sense, true. There was a reciprocity; they bounced ideas off one another in much the same way as good jazz musicians do when they are improvising. And they were generous in exchanging ideas and judgements. But inevitably—since they were each making paintings which were individual events—there was an unstated confrontation. I was tempted to judge. Finally I decided that I shouldn't—both Clif and Fred were doing what they had to do, and each had to judge himself.

Fred and Clif painted in gouache on paper 30½ by 22 inches. Sometimes they divided the sheets of paper into segments by laying down strips of masking tape on the paper. The weather held us up for a couple of days; Clif ran out of paper and borrowed some from Fred—that's the paper that looks curlier around the edges. (We also ran out of booze three hours before Frank arrived with relief supplies—the one time it has ever happened, or ever will happen, to an Erith expedition, Steve says.)

The following discussion with Fred Williams and Clif Pugh was tape-recorded one evening on Erith Island.

IAN: Fred and Clif, you must have been approximate contemporaries in the Melbourne Gallery School. Is that so?

FRED: We did overlap, but only for about six months. I went up there very young. I went up to the Gallery School about 1943 when I was 17. I stayed there until 1949, which is when Clif arrived.

CLIF: I remember seeing a beautiful nude you did, Fred. It was superb.

IAN: Fred, when you left the Gallery School, you went to London for about six years. But when Clif left the Gallery School, he went to 'Dunmoochin', out at Cottles Bridge, where he still is. Now one of the intriguing things about lots of Australian artists is why they feel, or perhaps don't feel, that they've got to go overseas.

CLIF: I never felt I had to.

IAN: I know. You never went overseas until 1970. So Fred went overseas very early. Clif went very late.

CLIF: It was more traditional to go overseas in those days.

IAN: Why?

CLIF: I don't really know. Maybe because Australians felt they were in a backwater, and had to go and find where the mainstream was. Everybody felt they had to go overseas, but at the time I came along it was a bit different, there was an Australian identity, such as it was, emerging. The Nolans and the Tuckers and the Boyds had already started to establish themselves. They were starting to be recognized.

IAN: Why did you go abroad, Fred?

FRED: To learn more about painting, I suppose.

IAN: What could you learn there that you couldn't learn here or find out for yourself.

FRED: I wanted to see better paintings, I guess. I never really thought about it.

CLIF: It is interesting to reflect on the attitudes prevalent at the time. I went in for the travelling scholarship in 1951, I suppose, and it was brought down to a short list of four of us. The short list of four was taken into the interview, the chairman was Joseph Burke, and one of the first questions the chairman asked me was, "If you win the scholarship you will be going to the Slade School in England, I presume." I said: "No, actually, I won't. If I win the scholarship I don't even want to go to England. I would rather go to Mexico." Professor Burke stood up and said: "Mr Pugh, why would you want to go to Mexico," I said: "Because of the painting I have seen in books. There seems to be more of a spiritual attachment for me in Mexico than anything I have seen from England." Burke said: "Mr Pugh, the idea of the travelling scholarship is to further your education in art, therefore you would go to the Slade School, wouldn't you, Mr Pugh." I thought, oh, bugger the old bastard, it's my life not his. So I said: "No, sir, I would go to Mexico." "Oh, I see, thank you, Mr Pugh." That's the only question I was asked. Now don't you see that implicit in that there's an attitude. Needless to say, I didn't win the scholarship. A woman won it who got married on the boat over and never painted again.

IAN: But if you go back as far as the 1890s you will find that most Australian figures went to London. Lawson went to London. Tom Roberts went to London. Streeton, Katharine Prichard, Vance Palmer went to London. Conder went to Paris. Louis Esson went to London. In 1950 when you went, Fred, there couldn't have been one painter working in the U.K. that you thought you wanted to see compared with, say, the people in Paris.

FRED: Oh, yes, there was. There was Francis Bacon.

IAN: And you were aware of Bacon at that time?

FRED: Oh, yes, I used to meet him at parties.

IAN: And did you study the kinds of things that Bacon was doing then?

FRED: I didn't study them—I watched them.

IAN: Why London and not Paris?

FRED: It was easier to work in London. I had to work, both full and part-time, in a picture framer's shop.

IAN: If you look back on it what did you get from London that you couldn't have found out for yourself here.

FRED: Lots of things. Looking at the National Gallery.

CLIF: It wasn't particularly conscious. It was a kind of automatic thing you did. You went to England. When I didn't get the travelling scholarship I then started seriously thinking about it and asking what the hell was there in it for me, and my answer was absolutely nothing. Now that I have been and looked at some of those paintings that Fred has been talking about, well they are certainly very different from what they looked like in the magazines, and that does make a bit

of a difference. It's interesting that persons like Monet and Bonnard, two painters that have never excited me seen just through art books, gave me the biggest shock of my life when in London and Paris, and I will never forget seeing the big Monet in the National Gallery — the waterlilies one: knocked me flat. Then I went into the little gallery opposite the Louvre, where there are two rooms of Picassos. I walked around them—these Picassos—and I spent a while and I felt a terrific let-down. It didn't give me a different feeling from what I had seen in books. Then I walked out of that room into a whole room of Bonnards. I just looked at them. I sat down stunned. Everything was wrong about them. But they worked, and the colour, and they sang. It was an experience which just floored me, and that was something that happened quite late in life, well past the point they could alter anything I was doing. Perhaps if I had seen those paintings as a student, and those Vuillards there, the most beautiful quiet commanding presences just sitting there, sitting there with a terrific authority, I might have developed in another direction.

STEPHEN: Fred, would you have been the painter you are now if you hadn't spent those six years in London?

FRED: I think it helped. It slowed my progress down. I find it very hard to explain these things.

IAN: Why do you stop talking when you are talking to tape?

FRED: I can't help it, Ian. It worries me.

IAN: Fred, John Brack described you when you were working with him in his studio before you went to England as a *farouche* painter—a wild painter—and you say that London slowed you down.

FRED: Yes, it gave me more discipline. When you look at good paintings, it's a shock to the system.

CLIF: Writers can always read books. As a painter, all you've got are very dubious reproductions which have no relation to the scale. And the scale of the painting makes a hell of a difference. There aren't many very good paintings in Australia. The Melbourne Gallery, in my opinion, is largely an historical collection rather than one of quality though, of course, there are some good paintings there. All the names, but not the quality paintings. Writers can read books, musicians can hear good music, but it is particularly important for students of painting to see for themselves. It makes you aware of the quality you have got to achieve.

STEPHEN: But you didn't do it.

CLIF: It could be argued that I might be a better painter at this stage if I had fronted up. There's no way of telling this.

IAN: I found going to London on sabbatical leave in 1969 a curious kind of experience. I thought I was reasonable intellectually in Australian terms, held my own in most of the circles I was operating in in Australia. Going to London and getting into those high-powered situations, thrown into a conference or a seminar with some of the great names of English and American academic life, people like Leslie Fiedler, E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, I found myself in the position that I had to match myself against them, to prove myself. It was *machismo* in it.

FRED: Yes, well, there's an element of that in me. I just wanted to see the best pictures as quickly as possible.

IAN: To test yourself against them?

FRED: Oh, not necessarily. I spent many years looking at them.

CLIF: I think what it can do is to make you aware of the inadequacies in your own work.

IAN: But surely it can also reinforce your conviction that you can do your own thing, and that it does work.

FRED: I am sure you can paint just as well by not going to England and not going to America. There is absolutely no need to go away, really.

IAN: But would you know that you had been painting as well as you are if you hadn't been over there and measured yourself against those? That's my question.

CLIF: I don't think you can tell. What didn't happen, you don't know about.

IAN: That's not the point I am making. I am not saying does your painting improve *because* you went? I am saying, does your confidence in yourself change?

CLIF: I don't think it's got anything to do with it.

FRED: I think if you go when you are young there is of course more chance of assimilating things than if you go later.

CLIF: Yes, I think that's true, but whether that's good or bad is still an argument, though. You can get led away from your own thing.

FRED: Oh, I don't have much truck with that.

CLIF: You paint landscapes differently from anyone else. I am not talking about the ones that come after you but, as far as your contemporaries are concerned, you paint the same thing differently. Of course, there are plenty who come after you—you can see all sorts of Fred Williamses all

over the place. But at the stage you started doing your "squiggle" landscapes, as someone called them—no one was doing that prior to you. You just saw it in another way—and as a truth. The way Nolan saw this landscape was another way of looking at it too, and yet your works—and Nolan's—are quite related in my eyes to the tradition of the Heidelberg school. I can see the continuation the same way as I can see exactly the same continuation another way in Nolan's landscapes.

STEPHEN: And can you see this continuity in your own paintings as well?

CLIF: No, not at all. I don't work in that field. What I can see in my work, now looking back at it, particularly when I was starting to break away from the Dargie stuff, was more German Expressionism, more Mexican work. Nature red in tooth and claw, internal organic structure of the environment—that kind of thing. I think that was another way of looking at the Australian landscape which hadn't been done before either. But they are not big breaks, because I am called a very traditional painter.

STEPHEN: Let's leave that topic for the moment and have a go at another. Isn't there a suggestion of a contradiction in your attitudes towards your paintings as paintings? And, in particular, to the disposal of your paintings. On the one hand as artists the painting itself is the main thing, a picture finished becomes of historical interest rather than any creative interest. One might expect you to disregard the fate of your pictures to some extent, and yet we have noticed that both you and Fred, and probably by extension most other painters, take a very pronounced interest in the fate of your paintings. You watch their values very closely, you watch the market closely, you can be very resentful of paintings going astray or being misused, you are very sensitive about being "taken down". These attitudes don't comport easily with the traditional view of the artist. What do you think of the allegation that the contemporary artist is a business man? And does he have to be, if that is true?

CLIF: Well, there are some little things called swamp birds. These to me are my happy little relaxed paintings. Things I did when I was right down in the depths of depression. These were paintings I did absolutely for myself. I was selling them for about fifteen quid to people who wanted to buy them—I didn't really care—when suddenly something happened. I used to do about half-a-dozen or so a year and people were coming up to me and buying them, and suddenly they started going up to auctions and, although this was years ago, bringing up to a thousand pounds each. Then one day I sold one to the directoress of an art gallery who said, "I must have one of those for my own collection", and a few days later somebody came up to me and told me that the painting had been framed very expensively and was selling for thirty or forty times the amount she had paid me, in her own gallery. Now this sort of thing may be business, but it gives me the shits. Now, do you know they have been destroyed for me, I hardly ever paint them now. You are asking a question about money. Now every time I might want to go and paint one of these just to relax, I see dollar notes stuck all over them. They were a very personal relaxing thing. I notice at auction now, the ones that are still there—they go up to two and a half or three thousand dollars. To me this is a ludicrous price, when a big painting which so much more effort has gone into, gets much the same price."

STEPHEN: Should you be taking any notice of prices at auction, should you even be reading the reports?

CLIF: Yes of course you do. I have been trying to hold my prices. I don't want to price myself out of any market. I want to go on painting the rest of my life. Making money isn't my interest. As long as I have enough to live on according to the way I want to live, that's all there is about it. I don't have much money in the bank at all. I spend the bloody stuff. But if I sell a painting for a thousand dollars and I find out in a fortnight or a month or six months later it has been resold at double the price, right, then my prices go up to that. The public makes the market—the artist doesn't make it. The public does, and you aren't going to be such a bloody fool — if they are getting two thousand on the market—you are not going to sell them for a thousand. That way you are just saying goodbye to a thousand dollars. I would much rather have it myself—you have to give half of it to the government anyway. In other words, people are just coming up to me, bringing up a bottle of wine, getting a painting, taking me for a bloody silly little idiot and getting a thousand dollars just for the drive up to my place.

STEPHEN: If you have friends like that, you deserve to be treated like that.

CLIF: Not only friends, all sorts of people.

STEPHEN: Yes, I can see that kind of happening as morally indefensible, but artistically it is no business of yours. There seems to be a contra-

diction between your saying you only need so much a year to live on, whether it is seven and a half thousand dollars or seventy-five thousand dollars, and on the other hand the concern you show for the kind of prices your paintings bring in the public arena. I suppose you might say to me if you wanted to—"Why should paintings be cheap?"

CLIF: I can't see why paintings should be anything. I just have no answer or thought on that.

STEPHEN: If you cared to work for the market and cared to play the market and cared to sell everything you could in the right kind of way, just putting the right kind of things on the market at the right time in controlled quantities, you could make an income of, I don't know, five times that of Patrick White's, perhaps fifteen times. Does this ever make you ask questions of the profession itself?

CLIF: Yes, you're quite right, but it doesn't make me ask questions about the profession. I know why it happens. If you take the guts of your question, what you ask about incomes, painters are better off for one reason only, and that is the possessive instinct of people. They can buy everything you do and put it on their wall and say "I've got that." There is only one manuscript at a time for Patrick White, but with a painting there can be twenty sketches leading to it, and every one of those can be in the possession of someone. Whereas a musician, poet or writer—they are battling uphill. What have they got? A manuscript perhaps, with lots of crossings out, and even with that, aimed at very special collectors—it can't be stuck on a wall! They have this disadvantage because people are collectors of possessions, and you create a tangible possession for someone every time you make a mark on a piece of paper.

STEPHEN: Does this make you sick?

CLIF: No, it doesn't worry me at all. In fact, I don't have anything to do at all with the marketing.

STEPHEN: But you are interested in the marketing. You have just been complaining of people who take advantage of you.

CLIF: Ah, but you see I have got Rudy Komon looking after that now. He watches that.

STEPHEN: Well, what are your relations with Rudy Komon?

CLIF: I just send him up a couple of pictures every now and then.

STEPHEN: You are under contract to him and he is under contract to you?

CLIF: Well, it's an agreement we made—I suppose it's a contract. Each one of us who works through Rudy has a different relationship with him.

STEPHEN: Do you get a guaranteed annual income from him?

CLIF: I get a monthly amount from him because that's the way I like it and I know exactly how I can run my budget. I spend more though.

STEPHEN: And are you totally committed to him? Can you work outside that?

CLIF: Oh, it depends on circumstances, but basically no. I would rather Rudy did it all anyway. There are problems inherent in that, but at the moment it is all right.

STEPHEN: What kind of problems are inherent in it?

CLIF: Well, he is in Sydney to begin with. We have all had this argument with Rudy about a gallery in Melbourne. It is interesting that six of his painters are Melbourne-based: Brack, Balderson, Fred, myself, French and Senberg. This means of course, that there is no outlet for us here, there is no way we show our paintings, except through other Melbourne galleries, and that's a complicated arrangement.

STEPHEN: Fred, would you agree with Clif that you paint for yourself and that the markets are of no great interest to you, apart from the fact that you get an agreeable standard of living out of it? That the problems of distribution, accessibility and communications, so forth—these are basically under control? Would you go along with Clif on this?

FRED: I know what Clif means. I do most of the things he does myself. I find it very difficult to cope with success and I think it's retarded all our work.

STEPHEN: How?

FRED: By having to worry about all the things you have just been talking about.

CLIF: It's got nothing to do with painting.

STEPHEN: Give me an example of the kind of things you worry about.

FRED: Oh, I don't say I worry about them. They're not the kind of things I do worry about anyway.

CLIF: Look, Fred, you have now spent a lot of time on the Visual Arts Board and on the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, these are things that wouldn't have happened to you without success as a painter.

FRED: That's a little bit different though. I don't consider that wasted effort.

IAN: Do you feel any pressure to be unduly

repetitive in what you are painting because that is what is selling?

FRED: I honestly believe that's not so, because I think the better the painting is the more chance you have of selling it. If I work hard for four or six months on a painting, I look at it and think "My God, I'll never sell that", but they are always the first to go. The moral is the better your work, the easier to sell, and not the other way around.

STEPHEN: Are there economic problems at the moment in the tax structure, in the probate structure, for instance, that would worry you?

FRED: Well, if you paint two hundred pictures a year and you sell half-a-dozen of them and if you drop dead tomorrow, your wife goes broke.

STEPHEN: Is this because the paintings that you leave are assessed at current market value and probate has to be paid on them? Even though to pay the probate they may have to be sold at half or below their current value?

CLIF: The government won't refund you for that. They assess them before they are sold.

STEPHEN: What should be done about this?

CLIF: Well, for a start, probate should not apply to your immediate family. You pay taxes all your bloody life, why pay again when you die? Your wife and children should inherit automatically. For anyone else it is a windfall, so they should pay probate.

FRED: I am not saying that when a painter dies his children should live off the paintings. But it does present a problem for an artist and his family.

STEPHEN: Fred, you once said to me that you only had to sell two or three paintings a year to live, and no doubt the same would apply to Clif. Do you ever feel uneasy that you are a very successful painter and that you could earn a lot of money fairly easily, so to speak, and access by the public at large to what you are doing is restricted? Now Clif has said that he is not particularly worried about this, that examples of his work are available in public galleries, that he has periodic exhibitions, that people who want to see Pughs have opportunities to go and see Pughs. I think that this is partly bullshit, but still this is what he says. Do you feel uneasy about it, Fred?

FRED: Yes, I feel uneasy about it.

STEPHEN: Right, now unlike Clif, who has recently resigned from the Council for the Arts, you, Fred, are actively engaged in art politics. Can you see any way through this problem?

FRED: How do you mean—I don't understand?

STEPHEN: Well, like Clif you have got a lot of paintings locked up. If Patrick White put all his manuscripts in the bottom drawer of his desk and locked the drawer that would be a loss to Australia.

FRED: No, but on the other hand, Stephen, it is far better to show the best of what you do than the lot.

STEPHEN: Yes, but you even show the best of what you do?

FRED: Pretty well—pretty well.

CLIF: Well, why don't the galleries put on these retrospective shows? They never do.

STEPHEN: But even if the galleries have regular exhibitions of Pugh, Williams and anyone else you like to name—this is not a real way of getting art to the people.

CLIF: Why not?

STEPHEN: Because by and large people do not go to galleries, and they don't buy pictures there either. Have you got any solution to this?

CLIF: Well, what you do is to make your pictures available to people, and the ones that want to go, will go.

STEPHEN: Ian and I have been saying to each other while you have been up the hill painting how your paintings extend our vision of the islands which we know very well, and yet in a very few days you have made us see them better. Surely this should be extendable to a vast number of people. Access to your work should be extending the imagination of a far larger number of Australians than are seeing it. Perhaps tens of thousands relate to the work of you and other artists at the moment, why not hundreds of thousands or even millions?

FRED: There is a fairly obvious answer to that. We are too young for this to happen to us yet. If you take painters like Dobell, Drysdale, Nolan or Boyd, their age group, which is a generation ahead of us, their work is very accessible to a lot of people. There would be very few school kids in the big cities who wouldn't know what a Nolan looked like, or a Dobell looked like, or a Drysdale looked like.

STEPHEN: I think you delude yourself. I don't think one child in a hundred would know what a Nolan looked like.

CLIF: Well, they all learn about it if they do art at school. In any case, surely it's the function of institutions to do this kind of thing. No painter would ever refuse co-operation. I've got a show going on at Melbourne University. A retrospective show of portraits. It is going to cost me money, none of them are for sale, and I have got to go

back and do a lot of work on it all, but it is something I feel I should do. The National Gallery should certainly put on retrospective exhibitions of contemporary painters—but this is something they never do. It's those public institutions that are the ones at fault. The painters would always co-operate. Fred had a show at the Melbourne Gallery recently—he went to a hell of a lot of trouble to put that on.

IAN: And Noel Counihan had a recent show.

CLIF: But they should do more of that. But that's your answer, it isn't up to the painter. It is in terms of public relations. It is up to the Government and the organizations that are supposed to be interested in public relations. It is not the painter, it is not his bloody responsibility. He does it in his own way with exhibitions. I have just had a retrospective going all round Victoria for the last fourteen months. It's gone to every gallery in Victoria, and it's cost me a lot of bloody time, sweat and effort—and money. I just believe in the idea.

STEPHEN: If you were really living up to your principles, you would decide what income you would want for the year—say $40,000—and you would sell by auction, say, or lottery, the requisite number of paintings to give you that income.

CLIF: I've been doing that for the Labor Party, mate, I've given eight thousand bloody dollars to the Labor Party in the last three years. Do you know that? By doing exactly that. I gave them five paintings, so there have been five people of the mob you have been talking about who have had a very cheap painting, say about ten dollars.

STEPHEN: I've got one more question I want to ask. Throughout history in every generation *some* artists have been able to get on top of the wave. There's surely a danger of feeling like God, a danger which doesn't apply to anyone else in the whole creative field. It doesn't apply to novelists, not to musicians—the feeling that any stroke that you care to make on any piece of paper is worth money to somebody. You must feel like God, often. How do you resist this? How do you keep yourself people?

FRED: Yes, it's difficult. Success is the most difficult thing the artist has to cope with, as I have already said. We all have coped with failure—and painted well on it.

STEPHEN: Well, do you worry too much about success, in this sense?

FRED: I do.

CLIF: It does worry me a bit. I'm not sure what the psychological reasons are, but what I am painting now has got no relation to anything I've painted before. I am going to go on painting these pictures because I want to—and they may be economic disasters. It doesn't make any fucking difference. Now, whether it's just because these last two years have been caught up with the Council for the Arts, which so shat me off with everything that I didn't paint much, I don't know, but what I am painting now has nothing to do with the way I was painting before, which is what my success was based on. And no one may be the slightest bit interested in them—but it doesn't make the slightest bit of difference to me—I'm going to paint them. Whether I am going to make money out of them has got absolutely nothing to do with it—in fact, there's every chance I won't.

FRED: Probably make a fortune out of them.

CLIF: Oh, but you don't *know* this.

STEPHEN: Of course you know it. You delude yourself if you don't. You wave your hand and the world changes. I am not talking about the economic aspects now, I am talking about what you can do with your art. And what I am interested in is the feeling of omnipotence it must give you. Does it spoil you as people?

CLIF: Well, why can't you answer that? People like you and Ian are the ones to answer that question. How the hell can Fred and I answer that? You have known us both over the years. You and Ian, you answer it.

STEPHEN: Okay, we have to answer it. But do you ever ask it?

CLIF: It's never occurred to me.

FRED: It's occurred to me.

IAN: When you say, Fred, that success is a frightening thing, I can see a number of ways in which it might be frightening. Success must be frightening because it freezes you on a particular level of expectation—you are successful, then you repeat what you are successful at.

FRED: No, there hasn't been a collapse of artistic standards. It's the effect that it has on us as people. The sort of things I would get strongly upset about in the art world aren't the sort of things I would have got upset about twenty years ago.

CLIF: I think that part's true.

FRED: I think that just generally the defences that I had, fifteen years ago, I just don't have any more.

STEPHEN: What defences did you have fifteen years ago that you don't have now?

FRED: I think this was pretty common to all the painters—that they knew how to protect them-

Clif Pugh and Stephen Murray-Smith

Ian Turner

Fred Williams

Fred Williams and Clif Pugh

Williams: Beach scene, Erith Islan

Pugh: Beach scene, Erith Island

sculptures to a large number of people.

STEPHEN: Let's get away from the narrow view of art, and look at the whole question of cultural response. To literature, if you like, to music, anything you like. In some important ways our society is becoming more elitist in its response to the arts. Now how do you break through this paradox—that the more one spends on the arts and encourages them, the less accessible, in some respects, they become to the mass of the people?

CLIF: I would have thought the opposite was happening — that the arts were becoming more accessible.

STEPHEN: I think both things are happening, but certainly one of the things that is happening is that we are building up a well-heeled, silver-tailed clientele for people like you two, and for that matter, Ian and me. People will buy our magazines or read our books. But at the same time there is a growing audience, in this sense, there is a growing number of people who are cut off.

FRED: I haven't got any ideas about it, but I do know what would be best; if we could paint our pictures better. That's the quickest way of communicating to people.

STEPHEN: Do you think if Patrick White writes better novels he'll connect with more people?

FRED: Yes. Eventually it will make the difference.

STEPHEN: He might be writing better novels for fewer and fewer people.

FRED: I don't agree with that.

CLIF: In this country here, right now, there are more people becoming aware of *War and Peace* than perhaps have ever become interested in a book in Australia before—and some will go on and purchase that book. The TV program is cheap, popular crap, but it is a very popular program, and I imagine half the people in Australia are now watching it.

STEPHEN: I think it's interesting, and indicative of your attitudes generally, that you think half the people in Australia watch *War and Peace*. I would have said more like four per cent.

CLIF: Well, we can check that out. [Subsequent enquiry established that in May 1974 nine per cent. of sets in use were tuned to *War and Peace*.]

IAN: I think it's understandable why a lot of kids, instead of painting easel pictures, which in the nature of things can only appeal to a limited audience, are saying "We will animate for a wider public."

FRED: But you mustn't look at the individual works that they are doing. That's their gesture—to make works that cannot be exploited. But it's the principle behind it that's important. They're doing what other generations have done—they are working out for themselves what is the nature of art. And they will come up with a different answer to that which we came up with. And you can't be too quick to judge it.

IAN: No, what I'm trying to say is that easel painting or sculpture, and things like that, can only communicate to a quite limited audience. One of the responses, therefore, is to go to conceptual art, which is disposable—it is over and finished with, not a permanent artifact at all. The other response is to go into animation for moving pictures, something of that kind. A lot of the kids who in your day would have gone to art school —they are now going to media schools, and are working in film because they feel that is a medium through which they can express themselves, and communicate with a lot more people. That is a valid response to the point that Stephen is making.

FRED: Look, when Clif and I were students there was painting and sculpture—those were the two fields you could work in. Now, twenty-five years later, easel painting is not quite as important as it used to be, not that it has been superseded but that there are other things that are equally valid. Print making was one of the first to come along. I see no reason why say you shouldn't achieve art through film making, for instance, but, if it is art, everyone will know it. Over a period of time.

CLIF: Television isn't yet, but could be the greatest bloody medium of the lot. There is, sitting there, a medium which could be *the* art form.

IAN: Take Bruce Petty—a man who has, I think, an enormous visual imagination. Now Bruce really wants to work in films . . .

FRED: He should be encouraged.

IAN: He is being encouraged—he is getting grants to work in films—and the reason Bruce is doing this is so that he can use his visual imagination and communicate with far more people than you can through your paintings.

CLIF: I got more response from a program, "See it my way", on television than through my whole experience as a painter. The medium that Fred and I are working in is very limited—it is just one thing.

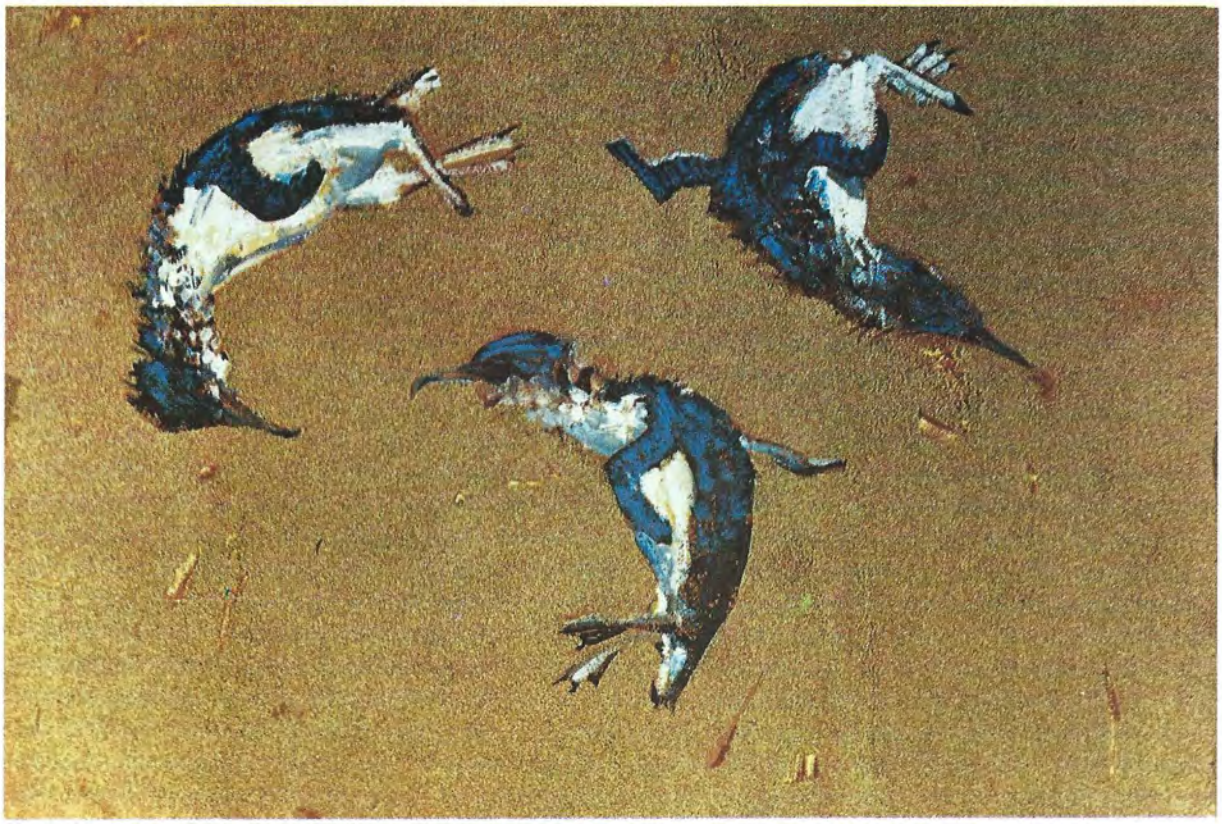
FRED: But on this question of the accessibility of art, look at Sid Nolan—I consider his work is very accessible.

IAN: If you look, as I have just been looking, through books illustrating posters over a period of time, it's quite clear that the new discoveries

Williams: Still life

Pugh: Point Prick and Murray Pass (top); Erith Island, West Point (bottom)

Williams: Erith Island, West Point (top); South West Island and Judgement Rock (bottom)



Dead Penguins: Pugh (top), Williams (bottom)

selves and their art and shield themselves away from people . . . No, I can't explain it.

IAN: Do you feel more vulnerable to criticism once you've been successful?

FRED: No, I don't. Criticism stings when it happens to you and the next day it's not very important and all the artists I know feel that way about it. We know all the critics so well.

CLIF: You could write the criticisms for them—before you have the exhibition.

IAN: I am still intrigued about this success thing because obviously Fred feels it very strongly—he said it three times.

FRED: Look, the sort of things I objected to as a student in the art world I now find that I am doing.

IAN: You've become a god figure, you are exercising too much power.

FRED: Probably, yes. I think we're all doing that.

STEPHEN: Can you give us an example of the sort of thing you objected to as a young person but you are doing now?

FRED: No, I can't.

IAN: You were painting then, you are painting now, so it can't be painting, it must be something else. Is it your relationship with the audience? Is it that once you are a success people become less critical? That they will accept anything you do? Is it a kind of Picasso syndrome? [Vague mutterings of expostulation from Fred.]

IAN: But you have said three times that you feel threatened by success.

FRED: I am not just saying it for myself—I think it applies to everybody—everyone of my generation or older generations.

IAN: Stop talking to the tape. I'm probing for the bloody answer. Is it a kind of Protestant kind of thing—that you have to suffer?

FRED: No, I don't believe that.

CLIF: I can't quite put my finger on it either but there is . . .

IAN: Well, I can put my finger on it. I know what it means to me, and what frightens me. It's a power thing—I know that I am good as a teacher, and in a sense that frightens me because it gives me too much power.

CLIF: But you have a relationship to people in which you can influence them quite directly. Fred and I are not in that kind of position.

STEPHEN: Yes, but with you many more people are involved. Still, it is an interesting difference.

CLIF: Then I don't think a painter has the kind of influence that a teacher has, because it's indirect. It's a painting you are putting up there and they take themselves to it. But I agree there is a niggling worry about it.

STEPHEN: Has it occurred to you that most of the earlier painters in Australia have changed the vision of a *later* generation, but people like you two are changing the vision of your *own* generation of Australians? With the Streetons and the Robertses it took a generation or two for an advanced, educated public's taste to catch up, but now you people are working in parallel with public taste; you are manipulating public taste as you go—you are still relatively young men. This is a part of the whole god syndrome. There's been the strange catch-up thing that has happened—now the okay artists of the present day are quite important people in terms of public taste, in terms of looking at, interpreting the environment. The kind of things that you two are doing have a relationship to how people are thinking about quite important political issues, like the environment.

FRED: It is a terrifying thought—but if I were going to paint two serious pictures, one of a landscape and one of the Tooronga Park Zoo, I know which one I would sell.

CLIF: I can remember that thrill I got—do you remember David Yencken? Well, when David first came out here from England he used to support me. He used to pay me £5 a week, which was very nice of him, and he used to come out to Cottle's Bridge, and I used to take him for walks through the bush and show him the orchids and the spring flowers that I was painting at the time—the delicate and the hard colors and shapes. It was my painting rather than the actual physical world of the bush that made him realise Australia was not just the grey dullness he originally thought. So a painter does influence people, and does communicate. I have such a love for this bush that I want other people to look at it, to appreciate it and have some love for it too. Now if that's the god-like attitude, then thank God for that, I'm all for it.

IAN: I think that's fair enough . . .

CLIF: I think Fred's changed people's attitudes to the landscape too.

IAN: Yes. Fred's done a lot for the landscape too. I don't know whether it is a different love, or whether it is just expressed differently—I wonder, looking at your pictures, Fred, whether the reason you distance yourself is because you still have a feeling of fear in front of the landscape and you have to distance yourself, and you have to reduce it to dots.

FRED: I don't like the bush the way Clif does, I don't want to live in it. I only want to see it from a distance. I couldn't say I loved the bush.
IAN: But your main preoccupation in painting is nevertheless landscape.
FRED: Well, it has been for the last ten or fifteen years, yes.
IAN: In that book of your etchings there is a series of genre things about acrobats, circus people and so on, but I have never seen a painting that you have done from those. Did you also paint those subjects?
FRED: Oh, yes, yes. But I don't want to give the impression that I love the bush, and because I love it I want other people to love it. I simply want to paint pictures from it.
IAN: But you want to paint pictures from the bush. You don't want to paint in the way that Arthur Boyd painted those back streets in South Melbourne or Vic O'Connor painted workers streaming across Fishermen's Bend to the factories or Noel Counihan painted street demonstrations—none of those things have moved you, but what has moved you has been landscape, primarily, as it's moved Clif, with the exception of his portraits. The only portraits that I have seen of yours, Fred, have been the few I have seen in the collection of the etchings, and the odd etchings I have seen otherwise. Always it has been the landscape. Because it threatens you? Because you have to get on top of it?
FRED: I always thought that my generation's virtue was, as Stephen was saying the other night, that we move very freely in the landscape, and we don't have to have a great deal of thought about it at all. And therefore we can work quite freely from it.
IAN: Yes, you work freely from it, nevertheless you work in a very different way from the way Clif works. You are reducing it to a kind of formal order. Clif is, too, in a sense, but the ambience is different.
FRED: Yes, of course, all painters are different. Look, I'm sorry, I'm not very good at these things.
STEPHEN: You possibly wouldn't be as good a painter as you are, if you were better at discussing these things.
IAN: Archibald McLeish once said "A poem should not mean but be", and you're quite entitled to say "Well, it's there in the paintings, and why the hell should I talk about it". On the other hand what we are trying to do, either on or off tape, is to explore ideology—what the values are.
FRED: Yes, sure, I understand. I have never had any doubts about what I wanted to be in this life. I wanted to be a painter, and I also firmly believe that if you want to be a painter, you have got to cut your tongue out. I believed that when I was thirteen, I believe it now. A painter is a teacher, and he teaches through his pictures.
IAN: Look, there are two ways for Stephen and me to deal with the situation we have built ourselves into. We can either sit back and watch what you are doing and draw our own conclusions from it . . .
FRED: It's always best, you know.
IAN: Well, it might be best for us just to look at these bloody pictures festooning the walls of this hut as we sit here and say to each other "I think Clif's got this sort of ideology, or emotion, or whatever it is, and Fred's got that". Or we can put the question to you, and see whether we're right.
FRED: Well, my ambition is to paint good pictures, very good pictures, and I am not ashamed to say I would like to paint them better than anyone else.
IAN: Well, Christ, everyone wants to be the best in the world at what they are doing.
FRED: I also think that Australian paintings are a bit over-priced in comparison with what you can buy on the world market.
STEPHEN: Why do you think that Australian painting is over-priced? That we possibly pay too much for your paintings in Australia?
CLIF: The new-found pride of nationalism.
FRED: It's a cultural insecurity, I think. And I think the dealers are taking advantage of it.
STEPHEN: Would you like to short-circuit dealers?
FRED: No, no. I hope I am a complete professional in that sense. That's the system.
IAN: I think Australian paintings are very highly priced because Australia is a very wealthy country.
FRED: Do you think they are over-priced?
IAN: No, I think they are highly-priced, and Australians can afford to pay a lot of money for paintings.
CLIF: But they pay a lot more than they do in England, you know. Arthur Boyd's got to send a lot back here.
IAN: That's right. Most Australians, for whatever reason, would like to live with paintings painted by people who live in their own cultural climate.
FRED: But the dealers have taken advantage of our cultural insecurity, really, to the point that it's become almost absurd. Big name auctioneers go round every dealer in the country, and the

dealers rake things out of their storeroom, put them in the auction and flog them off at high prices, and what it really amounts to is a dealer's job lot. Naturally, the dealers won't give them anything they can sell themselves. To me in that sense it is being manipulated like crazy, and it's not hard to do.

CLIF: What annoys me is that one of these overseas chaps had the cheek to say the other day that they are not here to help themselves, but to help the colonies. If they didn't make a packet out of that last auction, I'll go he.

FRED: Of course they didn't make that sort of money, most of that stuff is passed in.

IAN: But I think it's also true to say that in almost any country in the world the local product is the product that the local buyers are going to buy because they've got the association.

STEPHEN: Is this really true? It wasn't true here until quite recently.

FRED: Oh, I think they have always done reasonably well. Actually, Australian artists always have done better than their English counterparts. Very, very few English artists make a living from their painting.

IAN: At a rough guess, how many painters from this country would be making a living?

FRED: Well, the income tax people could tell you precisely. It's about 70 or 80, I think, isn't it?

CLIF: Fully professional painters, not doing any teaching?

FRED: After the first fifteen the standard would probably fall completely away.

CLIF: Well, I would say there would be a dozen or so who are not doing anything else but paint.

FRED: I think if you started to add them up, it's well over twenty, and probably nearer fifty. Of course, standards raise another question. Not every full-time painter is a good one. But all sorts of people keep turning up. I notice this particularly through my work on the Arts Council. It's certainly proliferated.

IAN: Have you found any young blokes who are scratching along on fifty dollars a week?

FRED: Yes, yes, I am counting them.

IAN: Well, if you are counting them there must be a lot more than fifty. I know half a dozen young people myself who are making some kind of living out of painting.

FRED: Yes. It's become a feasible thing.

IAN: Because it's become fashionable to own original works.

FRED: And yet on the other hand there is one competent artist I know, who has been painting for eighteen or nineteen years, whom I happen to know earns no more than $300 a year from painting. It's terrible.

STEPHEN: Well, then how do you account for the difference between that income and yours?

FRED: Well, what that artist is doing is probably unfashionable.

STEPHEN: Why is what you are doing fashionable, then?

FRED: Oh, I think it's having more people to speak for it, critics and so on.

STEPHEN: Why do you think they have wanted to speak for it?

FRED: I think it's something I have been able to communicate to people.

STEPHEN: Is this artist then working in a more way-out way than you?

FRED: Probably in a more staid manner, that's got nothing to do with the Australian identity.

IAN: Yes, this is interesting, because it relates to how the market operates to sort out quality, and that's a terribly bloody imponderable thing—how much is fashion, how much is promoted, how much is quality.

FRED: Look, the whole thing is phoney in many ways. Anyone who can tell me that the market is genuine when — can make as much money out of painting as — when he is nowhere near as good, well, the thing just stinks.

CLIF: Of course, that's dealer promotion, you know . . . Now you take — who is a very competent painter and has a little spark in her, but she works very much looking over other people's shoulders. Her work reminds you of what you have already experienced, whereas Fred's is an experience you come to for the first time, or close enough. I mean, of course, everyone has mums and dads. But work is a recreation of experience. It's like a Buckmaster, there is no new experience in anything that Buckmaster ever did. But of course there is a certain ability—it's like Dargie—every Dargie you see, you've seen before. Not by Dargie, but by someone else. Now it's well done—and it serves a purpose to remind people—that's valid too. But it isn't a new experience.

IAN: I was talking to a woman artist the other day, who was complaining very bitterly that it was much more difficult for a woman artist to get a run.

CLIF: I think women get confused in the issue of what they are about as creators—I'm just not talking about babies, though they're part of it. Women get pulled, physically, and they get di-

verted, as a man doesn't. It is all very well talking about women finding it difficult to get exhibitions, and that sort of thing, but there have been very few creative women painters in history, and there's no reason why there couldn't have been.

FRED: The way the dealer system is set up these days, they will exhibit anybody.

IAN: There are a lot of young painters around town who are saying "I can't get a one-man exhibition, and the reason I can't get a one-man exhibition is that I haven't had a one-man exhibition".

FRED: Ian, can you give me one example of a painter of virtue who can't get an exhibition? I suppose these young artists of yours are about twenty-one or twenty-two. Are they?

IAN: Yes.

FRED: Well, a young painter is a painter of fifty. In fact, that is one of the great problems in Australia, everybody wants to be a painter before they are ready for it.

IAN: You mean that in three years' time you are going to be a young painter?

FRED: Yes. Look, you spend all your life learning how to say something. So an artist of twenty gets up on the stage—he is going to say the lot, is he? He is going to stand up on the stage, he is going to bellow, and he is not going to say a great deal —he is not going to hold the audience, anyway.

IAN: So how does he learn?

FRED: By living. By painting for twenty years. I quote Greenberg, who said "I don't want to speak to anyone who hasn't been painting for twenty years".

CLIF: I think there's a lot of truth in that.

FRED: So that brings him up to about the forty-five mark.

IAN: But unless he's got a continual feedback, how is he going to progress?

CLIF: He doesn't have to have one-man exhibitions to get feedback.

FRED: This idea that an artist has to have an exhibition every twelve months is a purely Australian idea.

CLIF: It's ridiculous.

FRED: And art prizes are purely an Australian institution. They don't have them anywhere else in the world.

STEPHEN: Why shouldn't the artist have an exhibition every twelve months, if he feels a duty to show the public what he is doing?

FRED: Because he may be a very bad judge of his own work.

STEPHEN: Why not let the public judge?

FRED: The public are the worst judges in the world. If it's bad, they'll encourage him.

STEPHEN: Well, who are the right judges?

FRED: His fellow artists, and himself.

CLIF: Time.

STEPHEN: How does "time" operate?

CLIF: I can look at my earlier works now and assess them almost as if I hadn't done them. It makes a very big difference.

STEPHEN: Nevertheless, your painting is directed to somebody or something, probably, with you two, to some vague concept of the people.

FRED: To fellow artists. You know damn well that if it appeals to your colleagues, you're on the right track. They're the hardest judges.

STEPHEN: How would they bloody well know?

FRED: The artists are always first to find out whether a painter is having a good patch, a bad patch, or an indifferent patch. They know. They're uncanny. They almost know before the pictures have been painted. It's intuition.

IAN: Do you know when you are in a good patch or a bad patch?

FRED: Of course you do.

CLIF: I think so.

IAN: But I've seen you exhibit when I think you have been in a bad patch.

FRED: We've all done this, and it's regrettable. It is one of the things I have been saying before—that you can handle adversity but you can't handle success.

IAN: That's interesting. Success is that you feel that you have to keep on showing what you are doing.

FRED: Well, I gave up. I stopped. I refuse every time I paint a batch of pictures to exhibit them. It's six years now since I have had an exhibition, in the sense of exhibiting a batch of pictures I've just done.

STEPHEN: By and large you two have had a fairly tough trot. I don't want to exaggerate it and things have gone a lot better for you in the last ten years, but you were forty before you started getting there. As a matter of fact, this applies to the four of us in this room. Do you ever worry that this might prejudice you against the young?

CLIF: No. Why should it? In fact, I can't see in any way that painters are competitive. How can Fred and I possibly be in competition with each other? What he has to say is so different from what I have to say. There is not even an economic competition, because the people who want Fred's

pictures may not want mine, or, if they do, they will buy one of each anyway.

STEPHEN: I am not talking about economic or personal competition so much, but a certain resentment against new ideologies, new visions, new postures.

CLIF: No, I am terribly interested in these things. They're exciting—I can learn from them still. Balderson, for instance, intrigues me with what he does.

FRED: The interesting thing is this. We've been talking tonight about the dealers and the problems of success. Now the young people have to think of something which the dealers can't sell, and they've done this very successfully. This is their independence. Disposable art and so on—the protest is made and the point is well taken.

STEPHEN: Fred, you and Clif are traditional painters in the Rembrandt sense. You don't see these people as a threat to you? Your reputation is built up over the years on a backlist, and this carries you on to your forward list. Your lives as artists are a continuity. These young people we are talking about are revolting against this. There is no backlist for them, there is no record. There are only episodes.

FRED: I think they have done the proper thing. The only way you can keep art alive is to look at one generation, and then to react against it.

STEPHEN: But how are they going to stay alive to do it?

FRED: When they are fifty, let them worry about it. They'll get by. They'll get grants, jobs. If they are serious about it, they will win through.

STEPHEN: But here we come back to this question of communication. You say that people can go and see exhibitions by the younger people. But they don't. Of course, a small circle of people who are interested in trends will follow what is going on in the modern art field, but there are tens or hundreds of thousands of people, aside from these, who should be helped to look at things, at events, or people, or landscapes or processes differently.

CLIF: That's got nothing to do with the bloody artist. That's something to do with public institutions.

STEPHEN: But aren't you ever concerned about getting out to people, rather than expecting people to come to you?

CLIF: Fred's had two exhibitions in the last nine months. I've had two exhibitions in the last nine months. Now what else would you expect from just us two?

STEPHEN: I would like a different bloody approach. Exhibitions are old-hat. There must be some other way to break through.

FRED: I think that you will find that Australian artists have been very accessible to the public—in the schools, on chemists' calendars, on postage stamps and look at all the art books.

STEPHEN: Art books — perhaps three thousand copies of a title. What proportion of the population even go to the libraries?

CLIF: If you want lots of people to be interested in Australian art, then it's got to start in the schools.

STEPHEN: Everything is supposed to start in the school. It's really a much bigger question than this.

CLIF: All right then, you posed the question, you tell us some of the answers.

STEPHEN: I think that, like Max Harris, you see the future of the race, so to speak, in the elite that buys art books, buys pictures, goes to galleries and exhibitions — people who know who Clif Pugh and Fred Williams are.

CLIF: I don't know any answer except to make my work available.

STEPHEN: You're not making them available by having an occasional exhibition at the South Yarra Gallery.

CLIF: Look, if people don't want to go, they don't have to. Look, do it any way you like, do it through trades halls if you like, if people want to put on exhibitions, good. We'll go along with them.

STEPHEN: I would have thought people like you would have been thinking of this.

IAN: No, you can't possibly pose the question that way, Stephen. You are talking about people who are producing individual works all the time. It's a one to one relationship. They are not particularly interested in the mechanical reproduction of the work. If it happens, okay. In fact, it does happen in the Australian Women's Weekly, for instance, from time to time. But basically it's an insoluble problem, and this is what the young artists are worried about.

FRED: The Council for Arts is very concerned about this sort of thing, and, in fact, is working on it, but you can't expect artists themselves to get involved in this. To bring art before the public will require a very considerable bureaucracy. It would be far too consuming for artists to get involved in this.

IAN: There's just an insoluble problem in transmitting the message contained in paintings and

sculptures to a large number of people.

STEPHEN: Let's get away from the narrow view of art, and look at the whole question of cultural response. To literature, if you like, to music, anything you like. In some important ways our society is becoming more elitist in its response to the arts. Now how do you break through this paradox—that the more one spends on the arts and encourages them, the less accessible, in some respects, they become to the mass of the people?

CLIF: I would have thought the opposite was happening — that the arts were becoming more accessible.

STEPHEN: I think both things are happening, but certainly one of the things that is happening is that we are building up a well-heeled, silver-tailed clientele for people like you two, and for that matter, Ian and me. People will buy our magazines or read our books. But at the same time there is a growing audience, in this sense, there is a growing number of people who are cut off.

FRED: I haven't got any ideas about it, but I do know what would be best; if we could paint our pictures better. That's the quickest way of communicating to people.

STEPHEN: Do you think if Patrick White writes better novels he'll connect with more people?

FRED: Yes. Eventually it will make the difference.

STEPHEN: He might be writing better novels for fewer and fewer people.

FRED: I don't agree with that.

CLIF: In this country here, right now, there are more people becoming aware of *War and Peace* than perhaps have ever become interested in a book in Australia before—and some will go on and purchase that book. The TV program is cheap, popular crap, but it is a very popular program, and I imagine half the people in Australia are now watching it.

STEPHEN: I think it's interesting, and indicative of your attitudes generally, that you think half the people in Australia watch *War and Peace*. I would have said more like four per cent.

CLIF: Well, we can check that out. [Subsequent enquiry established that in May 1974 nine per cent. of sets in use were tuned to *War and Peace*.]

IAN: I think it's understandable why a lot of kids, instead of painting easel pictures, which in the nature of things can only appeal to a limited audience, are saying "We will animate for a wider public."

FRED: But you mustn't look at the individual works that they are doing. That's their gesture—to make works that cannot be exploited. But it's the principle behind it that's important. They're doing what other generations have done—they are working out for themselves what is the nature of art. And they will come up with a different answer to that which we came up with. And you can't be too quick to judge it.

IAN: No, what I'm trying to say is that easel painting or sculpture, and things like that, can only communicate to a quite limited audience. One of the responses, therefore, is to go to conceptual art, which is disposable—it is over and finished with, not a permanent artifact at all. The other response is to go into animation for moving pictures, something of that kind. A lot of the kids who in your day would have gone to art school —they are now going to media schools, and are working in film because they feel that is a medium through which they can express themselves, and communicate with a lot more people. That is a valid response to the point that Stephen is making.

FRED: Look, when Clif and I were students there was painting and sculpture—those were the two fields you could work in. Now, twenty-five years later, easel painting is not quite as important as it used to be, not that it has been superseded but that there are other things that are equally valid. Print making was one of the first to come along. I see no reason why say you shouldn't achieve art through film making, for instance, but, if it is art, everyone will know it. Over a period of time.

CLIF: Television isn't yet, but could be the greatest bloody medium of the lot. There is, sitting there, a medium which could be *the* art form.

IAN: Take Bruce Petty—a man who has, I think, an enormous visual imagination. Now Bruce really wants to work in films . . .

FRED: He should be encouraged.

IAN: He is being encouraged—he is getting grants to work in films—and the reason Bruce is doing this is so that he can use his visual imagination and communicate with far more people than you can through your paintings.

CLIF: I got more response from a program, "See it my way", on television than through my whole experience as a painter. The medium that Fred and I are working in is very limited—it is just one thing.

FRED: But on this question of the accessibility of art, look at Sid Nolan—I consider his work is very accessible.

IAN: If you look, as I have just been looking, through books illustrating posters over a period of time, it's quite clear that the new discoveries

the art nouveau people made, the new discoveries that the constructivists made, all finally altered the way that the masses of people looked at the world. In the long run, the way the artist looked at the world became translated into movie posters and soap wrappers, and the way newspapers related art, and this great revolution all emanated from elitist art.

CLIF: Mondrian has affected every house in Melbourne suburbia, and how many would be aware of it? For a start, the idea of painting walls different colors came straight from Mondrian. Similarly, the design of many articles in the house. They've never heard of the name of Mondrian, but he affects their lives in many ways.

IAN: It's twenty years after Klee that you get the Klee images appearing in advertising, and so on.

FRED: The Heidelberg School, after nearly a hundred years, is at last starting to break through to popular consciousness, and it is going to take over in Australia before very long.

IAN: That's regrettably slow.

CLIF: No, no, it's faster than has often happened in the past.

IAN: And maybe the way you two see the world will hit the popular imagination in twenty years' time.

FRED: We're not in that much of a hurry. When you stand up to say a few words, you've got to be able to say them without dropping your lines. That's unforgivable.

IAN: The real question behind what Steve's saying there is, is what do you aim for? Obviously when Bruce Petty is working he wants to impact immediately, and so he uses the medium that gives him the biggest possible audience in the shortest space of *time—television.*

CLIF: Television could be the medium for some of the greatest art forms in the coming years.

IAN: Yes, but it must be done in its own terms, it's not going to be done by reproducing your paintings on television.

CLIF: That's right.

FRED: In fact, painting is no longer holding the centre of the stage—it's had to move to one side.

CLIF: Possessive people will keep painting alive for a long time, because they want to own something.

FRED: I don't think that's the primary force behind it.

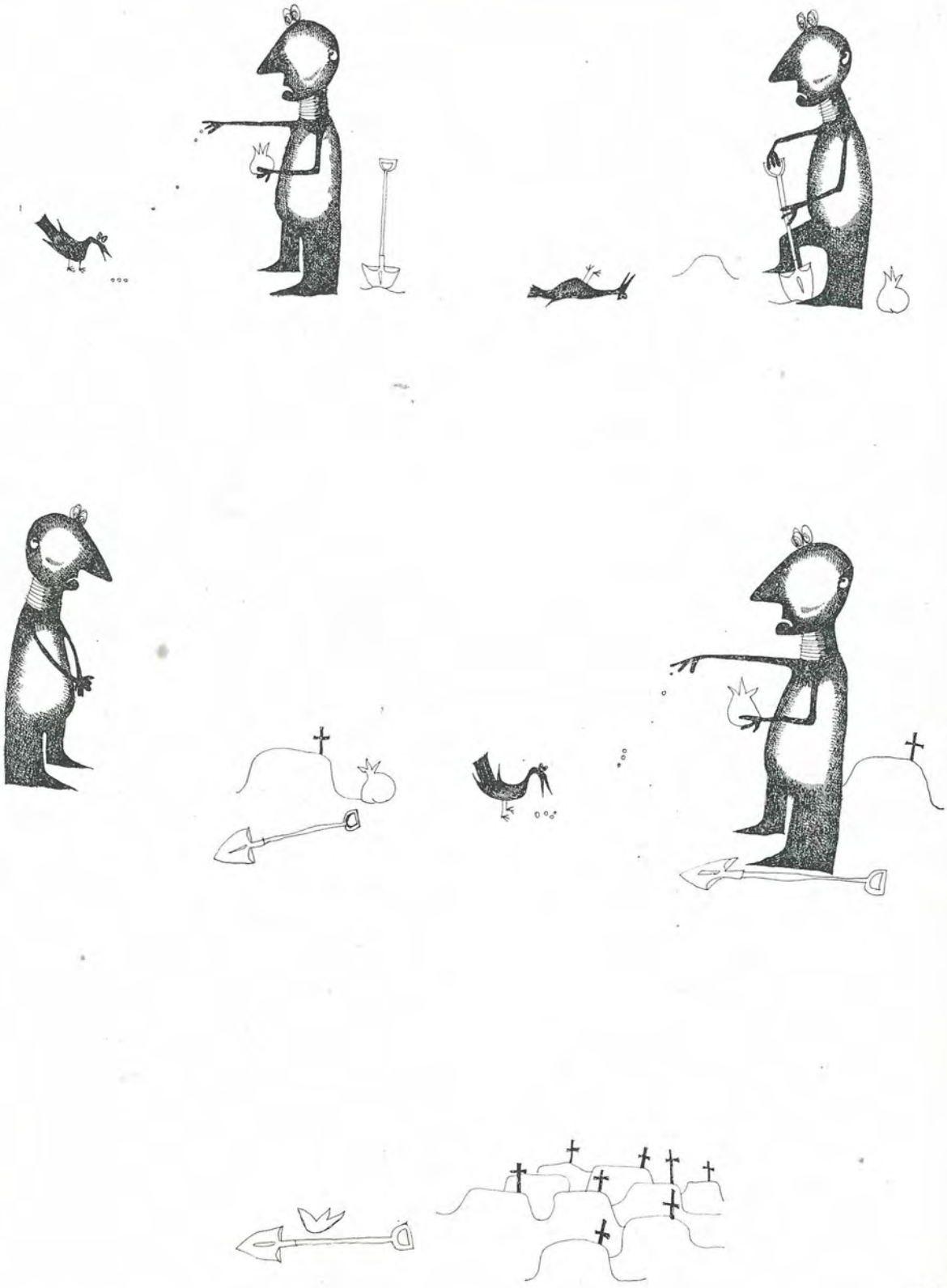
CLIF: It's a very strong force.

FRED: Well, in the West it is.

CLIF: It makes it very easy for painters and sculptors to exist, but not for the writer.

STEPHEN: Shall we stop the tape at this point and talk about possums?

CLIF: I've given up thinking about the tape a long time ago.



Jiri

Arthur Phillips: A Fellow in Literature and Humanity

JUDAH WATEN

Arthur Angell Phillips, the most creative Australian literary critic since A. G. Stephens, was born in Melbourne in 1900, of Jewish parents. Both his father and mother came from Jewish families among the earliest in Australia. His grandparents on both sides were born here.

The Phillips saw themselves as Australians of Jewish descent. In no way did they consider themselves strangers, itinerants, second class citizens. Their first duty was to Australia for Australia was their land and they were resolved to make a contribution to that land.

Maurice Phillips, Arthur's father, became Master-in-Equity in Victoria and President of the Australian Natives' Association at a time when that body opposed slavish obeisance to English political and cultural domination. He was an enlightened man, a lover of literature and drama. Arthur's mother was a good amateur actress.

This talented family succeeded in making a considerable contribution to Australia. There are 24 separate entries on the Phillips in the Mitchell Library. One of the most distinguished of the family was Emanuel Phillips Fox the painter, born in 1865, perhaps the first native-born artist to grasp the principles of impressionism and apply them to the Australian landscape. Arthur met him several times.

Another gifted member of the family was Marion Phillips, Arthur's aunt, the sister of his father, who settled in London after she had graduated from the London School of Economics, where she studied with Graham Wallas and other notable Fabians. She became a Labour M.P. in the House of Commons and Chief Woman's Officer of the Labour Party, frequently representing the Labour Party at international conferences. Her book, *A Colonial Autocracy*, first published in 1909 and recently republished, is considered by many historians still to be the best guide to Macquarie's economic policy.

Arthur stayed with her in London during vacations when he was reading education at Oxford (1923-25). For almost as long as he could remember he had wanted to be a school teacher and he went to Oxford after graduating from Melbourne University. His decision to be a teacher was made in the face of considerable opposition. Many members of his family tried to dissuade him. Knowing something about Jewish families in those years, even the very assimilated ones, I can easily visualise the perturbation in the Phillips family when one of their brightest sons announced that he had chosen school teaching rather than law or medicine, which were the only sensible professions for a Jewish boy to follow. Have you gone mad? someone must surely have said. A University teacher perhaps, but a school teacher! Heaven preserve us!

To Arthur Phillips the profession of school teacher was an important one, both socially and personally. To teach, to develop the critical faculties of his pupils, to imbue them with a love of literature and drama was part of his concept of teaching. He had acquired a love of acting from his mother which stood him in good stead as a teacher. He produced school plays and acted in them. Altogether he taught for 50 years, 46 of them at Wesley College in Melbourne, from where he retired in 1971.

Chance led him to Australian literature. He had studied English literature at the Melbourne University at a period when most academics at best looked condescendingly on Australian writing. Arthur did not share this view, but his reading of Australian literature was strictly limited. It was

in 1932 that he was unexpectedly obliged to extend his reading of the Australian writers. With Enid Derham and Percival Serle, he was then on a committee of the English Association which had been asked by the parent body in London for a list of Australian poets for possible inclusion in a British Empire anthology. Phillips went to see Frank Wilmot, then running his own bookshop after having worked for many years at Cole's Book Arcade. Wilmot was a well-known poet writing under the pen name of Furnley Maurice. Arthur asked Wilmot to get him all the Australian books worth reading.

The poet-bookseller was only too happy to help. He not only provided the books—he encouraged Arthur to write about literature.

Arthur affectionately recalled Frank Wilmot while he talked to me about the bleak 1930s. Wilmot was not only an indefatigable worker for Australian literature, a propagandist for it, and a member of the Commonwealth Literary Fund until his death in 1942, but he also made an important contribution as a poet. Arthur thinks more highly of Wilmot than do most modern critics, and considers he has never received proper recognition.

Another incident, quite trivial but quite characteristic, deepened his new interest in Australian writing. It happened on a hike with a group of fellow-intellectuals in the 1930s. The conversation was about Australia and Australian culture and there was an underlying assumption that everything local was inferior. It annoyed Arthur. Of course he was quite prepared to concede that there was much wrong in Australia but he insisted that pride in ourselves was necessary for any social advance.

It was probably on this occasion that the seed of his famous article "The Cultural Cringe", written in 1947, was planted in Phillips' mind. If Australian literature is better received today it is partly because of this article, which cleared away a good deal of cultural servility. "There is a certain type of Australian intellectual who is forever sidling up to the cultivated Englishman, insinuating 'I, of course, am not like those other crude Australians. I understand how you feel about them; I should be more at home in Oxford or Bloomsbury'." Substitute the word 'sophisticated' for 'cultivated', 'American' for 'Englishman' and 'Manhattan' for 'Oxford' and you have the modern Australian cringer.

"The Cultural Cringe" was not his first piece. Characteristically his first essay attacked pomposity of style. It appeared in *Meanjin* in 1942, in the last Brisbane issue of the magazine before it transferred to Melbourne.

If it was Frank Wilmot who suggested to Phillips that he should write on literature, it was *Meanjin* that first made it possible for him to appear in print. It was at this time too that he first met Douglas Stewart, with whom he has remained friendly since then. Arthur was then literary adviser to Dolya Ribush, who was producing Douglas Stewart's *Ned Kelly*. And Arthur acted the part of Gribble in the play.

In his essay on Dolya Ribush and the Australian Theatre Arthur shows him to have been one of the pioneers of the modern Australian theatre. Ribush's production of Gorki's *Lower Depths* was a landmark in Australia's theatrical history. Ribush died on the verge of producing a play by Vance Palmer, a pioneer of the Australian drama and a member of the Pioneer Players, which had amongst its playwrights Louis Esson and Stewart Macky. An indigenous theatre was then premature, for attendances were meagre; one night Frank Wilmot, who helped at the theatre, was asked if he was the chucker-out and he replied, looking gloomily at the rows of empty seats, that what seemed necessary was a chucker-in.

However Ribush was confident that one day Australia would have a theatre. In his essay Arthur predicated that "on the day when an Australian company of real devotion presents an Australian play of real quality, and presents it in the spirit of getting the thing *right*—he will be alive: and I, at least, will hear a voice saying, 'Didn't I tell you, Artoor, didn't I tell you? Wasn't I right?' "

For the best part of his 74 years Arthur Phillips has been encouraging other people—schoolboys, actors and writers. Imparting knowledge, developing the critical spirit, acting and analysing literature have been for him inter-related activities, all part of his contribution to Australian life and culture.

But it is literary criticism that has been his most conspicuous achievement. He has now spent almost 40 years studying Australian literature, caring about it, writing about it, celebrating its triumph, lamenting its failures. He has been an eminently successful critic, helping to create a favorable climate for Australian writers.

Admittedly it took him many years to win recognition. He has provided the young and up-and-coming literary critics with the very material on which to sharpen their critical teeth. His 1958

book, *The Australian Tradition*, a collection of studies in a colonial culture, was just right for that. There were the contentious essays on the craftsmanship of Lawson and the craftsmanship of Furphy. And as if that wasn't enough, Phillips also suggested that the persistence of the democratic theme in Australian literature reflected an Australian democratic spirit which even before the Gold Rushes was flowing almost as freely as rum, in his own words. His essay on "The Democratic Theme" first appeared in *Overland*.

For the student being trained in the elitist English literary disciplines favored by most Australian universities the Phillips views were the sheerest heresy. His matter-of-factness, his lack of literary snobbery and the clarity of his prose all counted against him, as did his interest in the social aspects of literature. But Arthur Phillips could not be banished for ever. His *Australian Tradition* was one of the few critical works to be read by ordinary people as well as literary experts, while internationally Arthur Phillips is one of the few well-known Australian critics. He is quoted by Soviet and German critics and *The Australian Tradition* is studied at the Sorbonne. An American publisher commissioned him to write his study on *Henry Lawson*, published in 1970.

Arthur Phillips the man, it seems to me, has been moved through a long life by kindly and reverent concern for people. He has been extremely loyal to his family, to his friends, to his colleagues, to his associates in different literary and cultural bodies. And he has always been honest, almost rudely honest sometimes. He has been the very antithesis of everything false.

I will always remember his presidency of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. He took over at a difficult time when the organisation was shattered, torn by ideological strife. Unlike some prominent literary people at the time he did not shun literary organisations. Although he did not side with either the left or the right he managed to bring both sides together for causes that were likely to advance the interests of the writing body as a whole. He refused to bow to McCarthyism when it was quite the thing even in literary societies. The subsequent success of the Fellowship owes much to him. He worked hard and long and without reward to advance the cause of writers.

Perhaps the secret of Phillips' success is his capacity for tolerance. He is tolerant even to critics of his work. To my knowledge he has never lamented or condemned the unreasonable failings of writers and fellow critics, nor has he spluttered with indignation at the outrageous behavior of literary colleagues. This stern-looking schoolmaster has often been the last to leave a party.

Arthur should himself be celebrated with proper literary pomp. I can imagine him making a droll speech, perhaps a trifle too long, telling jokes which might or might not make his audience laugh. He will be wild if they don't, but good-humoredly wild.

But you would probably think he was wild. He has a severe face; sometimes it reminds me of a hatchet, other times of a well-worn boot. With glasses. His head is often enough pitched forward at a slight angle in an attitude of perpetual telling. His hair is thin and grey and he now sports a trendy but wispy grey beard. His hands shake. But there is humor in the eyes behind the glasses.

Humor, as ever, salts his views of the present day generation. He was always on the side of youth. He speaks of his pupils with pride. There were some very good ones among them, including Geoffrey Blainey, Ross Terrill, Rohan Rivett and Alwyn Lee. And also among his pupils were Harold Holt and Senator S. H. Cohen.

Arthur Phillips is still writing. His strictures and his reflections are still as clear and straightforward as ever, blunt even, but always free of venom. I know, as a writer. He has certainly never been flattering to me. But his concern with Australian writers deserves to be reciprocated. And so this piece is an attempt to do just that.

Footnote: In April 1975 Arthur Phillips was made a Doctor of Letters of the University of Melbourne, *honoris causa*.

Church Social

Someone hands him a cup and the tea, damn,
spills down his linen coat. Where was he to?
Advancing with water biscuits the Youth Club Leader
proffers his cue "You look fit for another eighty years
Mr Bagnall." Outside, a motorcycle matchstick;
shouting. Sirens. Necks turned, eyes turning, answer
with the same urgency, all around him, and in the quickening
he remembers
that he remembers nothing: not his workfellows,
not his wife who died so young, not even this morning
(did he eat his breakfast?):
none of this loss and letting
can be traced to a pivot point like that. Death
is not always strident, as he knows. "Young man,
I have forgotten more than you have learned." Nods,
inattentive. "At your age I was in uniform." He does not really
feel any concern. "I did not make the battlefields,
the trenches. I was stationed near London,
a chemist you know, in the Mustard Gas Factory."

Public Servant

I think of them as clients, but they are
numbers on a file, I am patient,
I decode figures out of their words
that persist in tangling quite unnecessary
information about lives and deaths
and relationships. If one listened
to every story one would believe
beds rucking behind blinds eyes strained
and clawing enlarging weeping sweating
pushing toes against the bedhead
Knock
at my door I say yes I say let me just refer

My files are stored in a fireproof room
this recurring dream of fires
conflagration all my papers records carbons
my first return first invoice 1927 driving licence
quick to ash a last look at the print before its sheet
crinkles
and strangers with black fingers
rummaging their laughter derisive

Tobacconist

"You know," he keeps adding,
picking his freckled nose.
"I mean, you know,"
he smokes he does not
tap his stained fingernails.
"I mean, you know, it's
OK here. I've been here
all my life, you know, why
should I change?"
Outside, a closed bridge,
a group of pigeons wheeling
over a drooping backyard fence,
the unfinished 1918 Railway Station.
"You know?"

TOWNSPEOPLE

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

No. 59 Gaillardia Street

She puts on a record
but walks out.
A magazine on the table
holds he,
still she does not sit.
Yesterday she started a garden,
bought seeds in a packet,
spent a half-hour on her knees.
Her house has been paid for
her husband insists.
She cannot stay in it.
She is
down town again
this time she will buy
groceries lingerie a paperback
something that might alter
the world.

VICKI VIIDIKAS

The Come Back

Under a sharp blue sky
you step with Malacca sandals
from a thin green stream.
After all this hullaballoo
there is still this need
for stillness, an attempt
at floating/flying
utterly benign and silent.
Your soft round stomach
hangs like a second Buddha's chin,
you walk towards
some very phased-out image,
a space perhaps
of colors and quick movements
of peaks of sensation and
hollows of dark.
You keep drifting into
a menagerie of change.

Bliss Violets

How many of us would say
we're all felt out, our words fools' lies,
our fingers felt up
so much soft flesh, pillows,
soft soft tongues, bliss violets.

How many times we shoot up
those cravings, wild eyes
carried on to another dream,
our selves, that serpent
gnawing its slinky tail.

How many many hearts
beating too close to the rim,
eyes like feelers
separated from the original sight.

How many times to part the skin
and enter that dream, and again the dream
so released and abandoned
the lights become blinding.

Does it coil down to another dream
this felt out space, this active pursuit,
ensure dreams so realised
they're no longer felt as responses.

How many of us gone down
rotating tongues so bright and sure,
bliss violets at midnight, soft,
fingers still moving, these skins parted and closed
yet the words become soundless,
these dreams become shells.

The Mathematics Lesson

This is the lesson children
one is one
and further one and one
are also one.
Take as an example a tree
which is one
a wind which is also one
then a wind
and a tree, they are one.
This is addition.

Now take a man
he is one
take a woman, she is also one
take a man,
a woman and an estranged society
they are one minus one.
This is subtraction.

This is the tree that turns its boughs
to itself
and holds its leaves from fall
the wind that
streams no flowers but distantly erodes
the earth from its own.

This is the lesson's end.

MAURICE STRANDGARD

Way

I walk the circle. A wedding of sorts.
The ground is uneven, prone giddiness;

it has a pity. It will halt a fall.
It will cover these strays in

light rust and pin blue-bells to the toes.
Suffragette to another, impose

no heavy hand or costly deals.
The heart of this, all matter,

will transfuse, quake, dry her own rivers
and grind the gone-way where we get off.

STEFANIE BENNETT

Kelly-Lore

Our Robin Hood
a socialist hero and international as
Mick Jagger now

The Kelly name coming in cleaner
as prophesied by Ned himself
a Waltzing Matilda philosopher
on horseback after justice

Yes he's on the comeback . . .

But what we'd give for one of those live
interviews on TV

and there's a good read in his memoirs too

KATHERINE GALLAGHER

The Brachychiton (Kurrajong)

Study the leaves of the Brachychiton
And you will be ready for any turn in the conversation
What holds true in a grove of Brachychitons
Holds true in wheatfields and oaks

The kind of thought that I aspire to
Would not disturb one leaf of Brachychiton

I am not self conscious in my Brachychiton
Some are afraid in my Brachychiton
Brachychiton Brachychiton
Enter the Brachychitons

After a while my thoughts fly
When I chant "The Brachychiton"
They sit down and most move around in the Brachychitons
I thought my jeans were Brachychitons
Nirvana Brachychiton. Brachychiton Das Cyclamens
It is different each time in the Brachychitons.

TWO POEMS BY JOHN ANDERSON

The Book

To be housed in a nice new book
Printed by the Lansdowne Press
With glossy white margins
And heavy black type
Is the salvation of nature lovers all over Australia.
Camping in paddocks
And living out of tins.

To have their world lit for photographs
Like tractors close up in the mist
Struggling backdrops of bindweed a sudden showcase
And suffering gums in February singled out for pity
Brings them great comfort.
They hope that all that is best in them is edited and annotated
And that the concentrate tastes something like orange juice.

If the cover is as strong as the shell of a rock mollusc
And the pages fall open as freely as gumleaves
If the whole fits together as wings to a sandpiper
They are satisfied.

Poet

Wishing hatred half as bright
I loved him in a bitter light;
sense, senses burned away,
left a caring and exhausted clay.

A poem flares, and that is all
I can do if I would be still:
break the silence of the pain
until a neutral silence sings again.

Clay and fire shape my rhyme:
too brittle to suspend in time;
it falls; it breaks; I let it be;
and ask which silence is it dazzles me.

LAURENCE COLLINSON

The Honey Cat

A great purr on a horse, with the best hand
in Tuscany to set you glaring;
Away from war and love, you fill
the square with working bronze.

Back home, it's Carnival,
paddles are slipped through the slats
so Old Man Death can row
across the sea to his green cloister.

We've ordered the best corpses money can buy,
each looking a sermon
down his occluded nose,
with a most apostolic complexion

like honey cancered. Harvest horses
are in the shafts, and the tall anatomist
is draping black and silver
on his set-piece, *The Charging Reliquary.*

It's hot, our skin's intarsia'd
by minor shadows: nothing to breathe
but the weft of self-Doomsday at the double
under the heavy fountain,

and Herr Grobian, the Northern Visitor,
explaining the Gothic Pox — palms
in the distance and the one bird sailing
over an impractical city.

Unceasing war and nobody gets killed.
That's why we see a horse settle
its hoof on the ball of life
and point its rider to the banners of the sun.

Proud Honey Cat, the hawk has left the wood,
distraint and uproar seize the citizens,
troops coming down the evening rocks
acclaim you on the field of allegory.

PETER PORTER

At the Airport

Airports are equinoctial, scoured by winds,
But of no latitude, hot or cold
According to the hearts of those who leave or stay.
Look at that girl, waving to her lover,
Or at the young man beside her, smiling at his girl
Also locked in the windless waiting jet.
She lifts her hands to adjust her scarf.
The wind carries silk and hair high over,
A violet and an auburn cloud.
She floats on all she has crowded
Into half a morning, this glowing girl
On a sickie stolen from the office.
He is on the lucky side of the plane,
They can hold each other with their eyes,
The scent of her juices still on his hand,
The juice of his senses still in her thighs.
The young man in the green sweater beside her
Still smiles and smiles through the scream of the jets.
She takes off her scarf and lets it fly.
The wind blows straight from him to her
Though the bar she leans on is steel across her thighs.
And when the jet moves out, searching the wind,
The scarf still blows, but on secret wings
Of a wind blowing straight from him to her.

GEOFFREY DUTTON

The Tower

Words follow the old courses
up and down: the nervous system
has never broken out sideways.
There are no important centres in an arm.

Right and left: we see and even feel them
as opposites, but equal in all ways
mirroring our sense of completion.
Each hand is useful. Fingers, unlike toes

have a purpose. The arms are good for balancing.
Together they may serve as indicators
communicating our feelings

in a most unsubtle way. But they are a truer meter.
Words become inadequate when you are dealing
with the concrete/ there is no view from the tower.

MICHAEL BLANCH

IAN TURNER

swag

Dear Ian:

As you know Overland is in a peculiar position. Two of the editors, John McLaren and myself, have shown a distinct hostility to the Australia Council, in some of its manifestations, in recent issues. However another of our editors, Barrie Reid, is on the Literature Board of the Council, while you are both deputy chairman of the Council and head of its finance and administration committee. I suppose it says something for the empathy in which we work with each other that only a very few cross words have been exchanged on these issues. I remain unrepentant, and I suppose John does too, but it's time you had a say. Will you take over the next 'Swag'?

Whatever you have to say on the general issues, I wonder if you would comment on a few specific ones. Why did the Council go to water, so to speak, when its proposals (e.g. for election of board chairmen) were not accepted by the Minister? How was it that the recent debate on the Australia Council Bill, in both the Reps. and the Senate, and from both government and opposition benches, was so disappointingly vacuous and congratulatory, so that the whole passage of the Bill looked like a political deal, a put-up job? At a lower level, we all notice that the Council apparently intends transferring the Literature Board from Melbourne to Sydney (or so its advertisements say), so that everything will be centralised in North Sydney? Is this really the way the arts are going in Australia?

Sorry to be a bastard. Over to you,

Stephen

Dear Stephen:

I'm happy to take over 'Swag', as you suggest, because I think that *Overland* has been (uncharacteristically) lacking in generosity in its comment on the Australian Council for the Arts—hereafter, happily, to be called the Australia Council. Indeed, I feel that, while *Overland* has raised some important questions of principle, most of the comment has sprung from either misinformation or pique. The Prime Minister may well feel aggrieved *(Overland 57)* that the few words of praise and thanks he has had for what his government has done for the arts in Australia seem to have been drowned in a tide of philistine mockery and querulous complaint.

It has been very much an in-group argument, and I doubt whether many *Overland* readers have much knowledge of what it's all about. So it might be useful to begin by setting out briefly just what is the Australia Council, as created by an Act passed without amendment by both Houses of Parliament and proclaimed in March, 1975.

The act establishes the Australia Council as a statutory corporation, and endows it with the following functions (which I'll quote, since they have been the subject of some debate, and most of our readers won't have seen them):

To formulate and carry out policies designed—

(i) to promote excellence in the arts;
(ii) to provide, and encourage the provision of opportunities for persons to practise the arts;
(iii) to promote the appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the arts;
(iv) to promote the general application of the arts in the community;
(v) to foster the expression of a national identity by means of the arts;
(vi) to uphold and promote the right of persons to freedom in the practice of the arts;

(vii) to promote the knowledge and appreciation of Australian arts by persons in other countries;

(viii) to promote incentives for, and recognition of, achievement in the practice of the arts;

(ix) to encourage the support of the arts by the States, local governing bodies and other persons and organizations.

The Council is given such powers as are "necessary or convenient" for it to carry out its functions, and specifically the power "to make grants or loans of money, and to provide scholarships or other benefits, on such conditions as it thinks fit".

The act provides that the Council shall consist of from 18 to 24 members who shall be the chairman, the chairmen of each of the Council's boards, three public servants from departments whose operations are relevant to those of the Council,[1] and other members "of whom the majority shall consist of persons who practise the arts or are otherwise associated with the arts". The members of the Council are appointed by the Governor-General, for a period of from one to three years.[2]

The act empowers the Minister to establish such boards of the Council as he thinks fit. Boards are to consist of a chairman and from 7 to 10 other members, except in the case of an Aboriginal Arts Board, which shall consist of a chairman and from 9 to 14 other members. The members of boards are appointed by the Minister for a term of from one to three years, and "a majority of the members of a Board . . . shall be persons who practise the arts or are otherwise associated with the arts". The act provides that the boards shall advertise publicly for persons to submit their names for board membership, and that the Minister shall give consideration to such submissions.

As to the powers of the boards, the act provides that "the Council shall, by resolution, delegate to a Board such of its functions and powers as, in the opinion of the Council, can appropriately be performed by that Board". The act also provides that the Council may revoke any such delegation of power, and may exercise concurrent powers with the boards.

The remaining sections of the act are of a machinery nature, but are of great significance in determining the continuing operations of the Council. They provide that the Council shall prepare estimates of its expenditure for each financial year, shall receive such monies as are appropriated for it by parliament at such times as the Treasurer directs, shall keep proper accounts of all expenditure, shall submit its accounts to the Auditor-General, and shall report annually to the Minister on its activities and its financial operations. The Council is also empowered to employ such staff as it thinks necessary, on such terms and conditions as it determines (the terms and conditions being subject to the approval of the Public Service Board).

The structure established by the act for the Australia Council is substantially the same as that which already existed in the Australian Council for the Arts, so that there will be a continuity of operation, except that the Australia Council will now assume certain functions which were previously carried out by the Prime Minister's Department and by Treasury—notably the formal approval and processing of grants and the payment of salaries and allowances.

The Minister has already proclaimed that the existing boards of the Council shall continue to function: these are the Music, Theatre, Literature, Visual Arts, Crafts, Film-Radio-Television, and Aboriginal Arts Boards.

The Australia Council has resolved to continue certain functions which had been undertaken by the former Australian Council for the Arts and administered by committees of the Council—an International program (international exchanges); an Entrepreneurial program (support for various performing arts activities, including some of those associated with the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and the Arts Council of Australia); and a Community Arts program. These functions are administered by committees of the Council because they commonly span a range of activities beyond the sphere of interest of any one board.

In addition, committees of Council carry responsibility for finance and administration (budget planning and staffing), publicity and information, and research.

While the act was still a bill, there was con-

[1] The public servants who are at present members of the Council are the secretaries of the Departments of the Prime Minister, Foreign Affairs, and the Media.

[2] The varied terms of appointments are thought of as an interim measure. It is expected that, unless there are special circumstances relating to a particular individual, members of Council will be appointed for three year terms, one third of the members retiring in any one year.

siderable discussion about its provisions. The main points seemed to be:

Whether a statutory corporation was to be preferred to a Ministry of the Arts.

Whether the stated functions of the Council (and the order in which they appeared) was a correct or adequate expression of what government should aim for in respect of the arts.

Whether the relationship proposed between the Council and the Boards would best serve the interests of the arts (and indeed, as you suggested in *Overland 57*, whether the Council might not be "supererogatory").

Whether Council and board members and chairmen should not be elected rather than appointed by the Minister.

Whether the formulation, "persons who practise the arts or who are associated with the arts", is adequate.

I have no warrant to speak for the Council on these matters, but I'll risk some personal comments.

I was, and am, strongly in favor of a statutory corporation rather than a Ministry of the Arts. It seems to me that, by distancing the decisions about what art forms and artists should be supported from day-to-day ministerial control, the interests of both the arts and the government are well served. A statutory corporation can stand at one degree of remove from the electoral and political pressures to which a Minister is inevitably (and quite rightly) subject. I take Geoff Blainey's point *(Overland 57)* that various pressures will continue to operate within and on the statutory corporation (the Council) concerning the allocation of funds (and I'll come back to the nature of those pressures later), but I believe that it will be better for both the arts and government to have those pressures resolved within the corporation.

I can understand why there was some concern about the ranking of "to promote excellence in the arts" as number one of the Council's functions; it suggests an elitism which I certainly do not share. It is, however, balanced by the two following functions: "to provide opportunities for persons to practise the arts", and "to promote the appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the arts". I take John McLaren's point *(Overland 59)* that this could imply a dilletantish view of the arts as "items of consumption" (though I cannot accept his stricture that "to foster the expression of a national identity by means of the arts" equates to Anzac Day rhetoric—I thought that that was one of the things we were about). But I think that that's very much a matter of balance, of what emphasis the Council places on the implementation of its various functions, which are stated so broadly as to give it room for establishing its own priorities from time to time. My own view is that modern technological development has changed dramatically both the ideology and the practicality of the work/leisure dichotomy, and that the policies of the Council will necessarily reflect this change. More precisely, that is likely to mean a growing emphasis on both the dissemination of the work of professional artists and broad participation in creative activity. With John, I would hope that that would result in "raising our consciousness of the possibilities of life"—although I believe that that aim is more likely to be served by the creation of new possibilities of participation, rather than by the consumption of the products of a creative minority.

The argument about the Council-boards relationship is a complex one. If you accept that the statutory corporation format is to be preferred to a ministry, then the alternatives were the creation of one authority or of several, each with its own budget. If the latter course had been adopted, the Minister (and finally Cabinet) would have had to decide on the relative level of funding of the various art forms and functions. It seems to me that that was a decision which it was quite reasonable for government to delegate to a Council of people with special knowledge of the arts—and that was in fact what the government determined. The act directs the Council "to formulate and carry out policies" in respect of certain broadly stated functions, and to delegate powers to the boards in respect of these functions. That definition of roles establishes the parameters of the Council/boards relationship. The Council, and not the boards, is answerable to the Minister and to parliament (and is subject to the tests applied by the Auditor-General). It is the Council which, under the Act, must decide on financial estimates, which must make the broad budgetary allocations, which must determine the staffing establishment, which must enter into contractual relationships, which must answer the questions about how the money is spent. It just isn't possible for the Council to carry those responsibilities without having its own measure of authority. The Council has in fact resolved to delegate to each board power "to make grants or loans of money, and to provide scholarships or other benefits with respect

to its own art form, to the limit of the funds allocated by Council resolution from time to time on such conditions as the Board thinks fit". To that resolution, Council has added the rider: "The delegation of any power shall not preclude the Council from recommending guidelines or policies for implementation by the Boards". In respect of that rider, the Council has indicated that it is particularly concerned about any board making a grant which implies a large continuing commitment (which might restrict the "free funds" available to the board in later years and might impinge on the funds available to other boards), and about grants for capital expenditure. That seems an entirely reasonable precaution.

The question about the election of Council and board members, and the election by the boards of their chairmen, is a very difficult one. I thought about it a lot. A nominated electoral college? If so, nominated by whom? A self-nominated electorate? It seemed impossible to define the electorate. There are obvious attractions in having board chairmen elected; but, given the turnover in board membership, which board is to elect the chairman, and for what term? I found it impossible to answer that question, too.

As to the definition of who should be eligible for membership of the Council and the boards, I cannot accept as a matter of principle that the administration of funds provided by government for "the support of the arts" should be in the hands exclusively of the present practitioners. That is a terrifyingly elitist concept. The 'consumers' of the arts, and those who would like to become practitioners, have an entirely legitimate interest. If that is granted, then the precise definition is a matter of semantics, legal drafting—and the good will of the Minister.

So the act went through Parliament. You ask why the debate was "vacuous and congratulatory". I cannot speak for either government or opposition. But I imagine that there was a consensus on the desirability of a statutory corporation, and that it was felt better to see how the proposed structure worked out in practice rather than to delay its creation by prolonged debate (it had already been before parliament for twelve months) about unknowns and unknowables.

I've been making some personal comments on what might be called matters of principle; you and John also raise questions about the Council's style of work, which relate to bureaucracy, centralism and "commandism". I'd like to comment on these, too—again stressing that I'm speaking not for the Council but only for myself.

Of these accusations, the most serious is that of commandism. John makes this most explicit *(Overland 59)*. He says that the Council "imposes uniform procedures on every Board, every State and every artist"; that the Council and its boards are "policy makers" while the artists are "supplicants"; that the Council exercises "the most intimate and detailed control over the details of the projects" for which support is sought; that final decisions are made by the Sydney office of the Council without due consideration to the individuality of the artist or the needs of the local community. Of course, I see the process from a different angle than does John, but I must say that what he alleges is totally foreign to the way in which I have seen the Council operating.

Each board makes its own definition of its function, and (with the reservation about continuing commitments and capital expenditure which I've already noted) determines the broad categories within which it will offer grants. That definition is, of course, always open to re-assessment. But I don't see how it can be avoided. No more than the decision about allocating X funds between 2X or 20X claims. (Beyond that, there is the usual requirement about accountability for the use of public money.) There is, of course, an element of policy-making in this; but there is a big gap between deciding on broad categories of expenditure and exercising detailed central control over particular projects. The attitude of the Council is quite clear on this (and here I am stating not just a personal but a Council view). It is not the function of the Council to tell artists what they must create or perform, or communities what they need. Nor is it the function of the Council itself to create, or to provide direct entrepreneurial support for, the arts. It is, on the contrary, the Council's function to make opportunities for artists to create and perform, for communities to develop the kinds of arts activities they want for themselves, for a continually growing number of people to participate actively in the arts.

As to bureaucracy and centralism. Everyone with experience in politics knows of the tensions which may arise between temporary (and, in the case of the Council, part-time) policy-makers and permanent administrators. All I can say is that I don't feel particularly threatened. A greater worry is the proportion of total funds spent on grants in support of the arts, on administration of those

grants, and on such functions as research and development and publicity and information. How do you balance the need for, say, an accountant or a stenographer against the need for a journalist or a project officer? I don't know. Within certain broad priorities, I can only try to make the best judgement in the given circumstances. Similarly with centralism. There are arguments both ways —for locating each board administration where the board chairman happens to live (at the moment, four board chairmen live in Sydney, one in Melbourne, one in Adelaide, and one in North Queensland), or for having all administration in one place. That seems to me to be more a question of effective practice than of principle.

After saying all that, I'm still left with what seem to me to be the major worries about the Australia Council and the general policy of public support for the arts.

1. The arts, as we commonly define them, are a minority concern, and public support can therefore be attacked as forcing an indifferent or even hostile majority to pay, through taxation, for the pleasure of an elite. I would make these points:

True, the "high arts" are a minority concern. So are philosophy and history and pure mathematics—but they are all a necessary part of the whole culture, and none of them can survive today without public support.

In a world in which the work/leisure balance is changing, it is important to maximise the possibilities of the creative use of leisure, and the arts must play a major part in this.

In any case, there is no insurmountable barrier between the 'high arts' and the popular arts. Each fructifies the other — examples: pop music; the new wave of Australian feature films; the improved standards in Australian television. Perhaps an important area for the Australia Council to explore is this cross-fertilisation.

2. Given the need for public support for the arts, at what level can we reasonably expect this to be maintained, in competition with other demands on public funds? Geoff Blainey *(Overland 57)* forecasts a situation in which "those arts whose message is not conspicuously political—for instance opera or sculpture or ballet" will put pressure on other, more potentially political art forms—for example, literature and film—to implement a self-censorship so that total government spending will not be held back. I don't think that that is the real problem.

Australia (like the United States, the United Kingdom, and I imagine all other advanced industrial societies) is, in this field, confronted by a problem set by the imperatives of modern technology. The costs of production in the arts, as in all other labor-intensive industries (for example the news media, medicine, sports) are growing sharply in relation to the costs of mass-produced consumer goods. Economies of scale are not possible in the arts, where the aim is individualisation rather than serial production. This is especially the case with the major performing arts—drama, opera, ballet, music. The simple fact is that even to maintain a 'plateau' of standards in the performing arts will require a growth-rate in public funding far beyond the growth in costs in most other productive activities. How can we continue to maintain the traditional performing arts at an acceptable standard without impoverishing new and innovatory activities and the individual art forms like literature, the visual arts and the crafts? Or should we let them sink?

3. If we accept that public support for the arts is politically viable only in so far as arts activities involve a continually growing proportion of the community, how do we bring this about—and how can it be done without imposing on people an elitist view of what cultural medicine is good for them? A far deeper investigation of education in the arts than anything that has yet been done. A far greater emphasis on distribution and on expansion of the audience (including the potential of the mass media). The development of public access to video, radio, printing and recording. The creation of new community facilities and the expanded use of existing facilities—municipal, educational. Support for higher creative standards in the popular arts, even though these are commercially motivated. The spread of small grants to provide the opportunity of personal fulfilment, with less concern about whether what is created has any broad or long-term appeal. Conditioned as we all have been to a traditional view of the nature and function of the arts, we (and here I include the Australia Council) are only beginning to explore these possibilities.

So it's back to you, you old bastard—and I hope that you may have the grace to feel just a little repentant.

Ian

Dear Ian:

Really. Repentant, eh? Well, it's your Swag, and I'll confine myself to remarking that, while you raise the question of 'pique' you are also in a subjectively-exposed position, and a commanding one, and may be in danger of ignoring the trees for the wood. You make an excellent case, however, and no doubt we critics should have been more 'positive' (as we used to say) in our total response to the Australia Council and all it stands for. And no doubt the proof will emerge in the eating. I still think much evidence suggests that the Council and its secretariat (as distinct from the boards) may become a monster with far too much subvert as distinct from overt power.

I should finally point out to readers that as a matter of editorial policy I did not let you read the criticisms by Blainey and Timlin which are published in the review section of this issue. I felt they should have a right to be heard before being answered. No doubt you will answer them in our next issue if you feel like it.

Respectfully,

Stephen

Vane Lindesay

books

COMMENTS ON THE ARTS COUNCIL

Two views on *Australian Council for the Arts: First Annual Report: January-December 1973.*

Geoffrey Blainey

Most annual reports are glossy on the covers and drab inside. This first annual report from the Australian Council for the Arts is glossy and almost lavish on the inside but drab on the outside. The cover indeed looks like a white tombstone which the mason had barely begun to inscribe. It is therefore unintentionally symbolic for an organization whose first year received epitaphs of extreme praise and blame.

The report has about 100 pages, many of which are illustrated with photographs and a brilliant series of drawings by Bruce Petty. The text begins with a long report from the chairman, Dr Coombs, and concludes with articles on the undoubted achievements of the council and of the seven boards. The publication is often generous in the volume of information it discloses and the policies which it explains, so that at last the public has an opportunity to discuss many of the issues affecting government aid to the arts. Undoubtedly one of the weaknesses of Canberra's past polices was the caution with which information was released or principles discussed, though it's fair to add that Mr Howson, as Liberal minister for the arts, was releasing more information than had been released under previous ministers.

This is not a genuine report by the council on its own activities, but that fact has apparently been withheld from parliament. The title page of the report consists of a letter from the chairman to the Prime Minister — "The Australian Council for the Arts has pleasure in presenting its First Annual Report for tabling in the Australian Parliament" — but the letter carries no date. The absence of a date anywhere in the document prevents readers from realizing that the report was written so long after the end of 1973 that most of the members of the council who, presumably, approved the final report had not been members during any part of the year in question. Even those members of the council whose term expired six months after the end of 1973 were given no opportunity to comment on an annual report which, in important sections, many of them would have disagreed with.

Any report of this kind, understandably, has a coating of public relations. Moreover some issues are perhaps not touched on in public because they are still divisive within the organization. The silences in this annual report are revealing. There is no hint of the fact that the federal arts agencies were divided between Canberra and Sydney until 1973, when it was quietly resolved that all should be centred in Sydney. The removal of government agencies from Canberra is such an unusual action that it merited comment, the more so as the reasons for the removal are debatable. (I raised this question at the first meeting of the new Council for the Arts in February 1973, and was told that the old Council for the Arts had a loyal staff in Sydney whose employment should be protected. A high proportion of those 'loyal staff' has since resigned.)

The annual report for 1973 is also silent about the reasons for a more important change in organizing support for the arts. Until the end of 1972 a series of separate organizations (Art Advisory Board, Commonwealth Literary Fund, Council for the Arts, etc.) gave support to each of the main art fields. Each organization was

directly responsible to the minister for the arts. But before Mr Whitlam came to power he apparently adopted the draft of an unusual hierarchy of control which Dr Coombs and Dr Battersby had privately prepared. Under the new system a group of seven boards was to be responsible to a council of 24 which in turn was responsible to the minister. I'm inclined to think, though it's too early to be definite, that the council of 24 — for all its talents — has proved cumbersome, costly and perhaps redundant. I had argued in 1973 that this cumbersome quality at least helped to ensure the relative independence of the boards, but this argument has since been disproved. Significantly the annual report offers no reason for the setting up of this council of 24.

If I place strong emphasis on a board's independence it is perhaps a reflection of the particular hazards of government aid to writers as distinct from, say, aid to the performing artists: I tried to set out those hazards in a recent issue of *Overland*. As the all-embracing Council for the Arts is dominated by the performing arts, and as big sums of money are vital for opera and ballet and the pageant-like arts, money has dominated attitudes on the council. I think it is fair to say that, in return for Mr Whitlam's generous millions, the council as a whole has been prepared to be silent if a controversial issue arose. Now this might not matter much in the performing arts, where the danger of direct political interference is not so large. But it does matter in literature.

The council's tolerance of political or bureaucratic interference can be glimpsed from another omission in the annual report of 1973. The names of all councillors and the members of each board are set out but the differing tenures of offices are not specified. It is reasonable to suggest that parliament should be informed which members have long terms and which have short terms. Even within the organization today the various terms of office remain a secret, so that members of boards have to learn from one another whether they are on short or long terms. This practice saps at the independence of members of board and council. It is particularly dangerous in an organization where terms of office can be for periods as short as one year, can be renewed secretly as rewards for services or silences rendered, and are completely in the control of the Prime Minister or his anonymous advisers.

If this new organization is to serve the diversity of interests and viewpoints in the arts, it should not become too servile to the government of the day. It has to live with the government and, in a wide sense, serve the government, but occasionally it must disagree strongly. Ironically the danger of direct political interference in artistic decisions — a danger with most of the previous governments — was more easily detected before Mr Whitlam became minister for the arts. The new practice of nominating to the boards many people with qualifications in no art-form has quickly become a respectable way of making political appointments in the name of "community awareness". Today there is less political interference in specific artistic decisions than five or ten years ago. There is perhaps less need to interfere if you appoint ideological marionettes to many positions.

The most serious flaw in the annual report is in another facet of artistic independence. The main task of the council itself during the first year in North Sydney was the devising of the outline of an arts organization which would be then cemented by legislation. I pay tribute to the skill and thought which the councillors gave to that question and to the way in which the chairman, Dr Coombs, tried to reconcile conflicting views. But the council's own recommendations — especially those which might have promoted artistic independence — were quietly whittled down in Canberra. The bill finally presented to parliament was anaemic. The council silently accepted a bill which was a mere facade of those proposals originally put forward. Dr Coombs' account of these events is, in its statements and omissions, misleading. He pretends that the bill was an expression of "the needs and wishes" of the artistic communities, as shaped by the council, rather than an expression, in many of the key issues, of the views of the Prime Minister or his anonymous advisers.

The first annual report of the Australian Council for the Arts proudly proclaims how alert it is to the dangers arising when "an undue concentration of patronage lies in the hands of the Government." That warning is ironical in a document which conceals from parliament those ways in which the council itself is becoming a puppet of a remarkably generous but short-sighted ministry.

John Timlin

There is nothing new about governments and oppositions making promises, enunciating policies

and then subtly retracting or amending them when the gains of office and the problems of power present the winner with the real politic of dealing with public servants, press and the people.

In December 1972 Labor gained power for the first time in 23 years. It did so in large part due to the personal achievement of Gough Whitlam in welding a party fraught with ideological and personal dispute into a united front of members and non-members dissatisfied with Australia's immediate past and its lick-spittling image. The Liberal Party leadership had disappeared into a Country Party compost heap and the two were nitrogenously nurtured and bound by the piss of the death-wish D.L.P.

In both that, and the subsequent double dissolution campaign, 'quality of life' was a seminal issue. The A.L.P. proclaimed policies designed to fill the vacuum of urban living; it exhumed equality of opportunity and aimed to redress those organic imbalances of power and voice which wore the direct consequence of conservative reign.

The Arts was one area singled out by the A.L.P. for special campaign attention. The L.C.P. at the initiative of the late Mr Holt had dropped a dollar or two in this direction and had established the Australian Council for the Arts. Subsidy levels were totally inadequate; funding decisions were capable of being capriciously over-ridden by ministerial prejudice or high-level political manipulation. A some-time minister, Mr Howson, railed against subsidies being given to *experimental* theatre groups unless their work had *popular* appeal.

The A.L.P. advocated the establishment of a statutory authority to administer the arts, and emphasised greatly increased funding and the establishment of independent boards responsible to the A.C.A. (now the Australia Council) for particular arts forms. Wider community access to the arts was stressed as was improvement of salaries and working conditions.

The government acted, in many respects, with admirable speed and possibly excessive rudeness in establishing the new council and its related boards. The council was to co-ordinate the funding of elements previously unconnected, like the Commonwealth Literary Fund and the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, and weld these into old A.C.A. functions such as theatre, opera and ballet, as well as introduce crafts and the Aboriginal arts within its ambit.

Dr H. C. Coombs, in the first report on A.C.A. activities since the A.L.P. came to power, neatly eludes major criticism of the council. It is clear that appointments to the council and its various boards were made with little interest in mainstream artistic representation; that the necessities of innovation, community access and involvement were viewed as secondary to the undefinable "pursuit of excellence"; that dialogue between the council bureaucracy and the artistic community was nil or negligible, and that serious consideration of democratic structures on the council and its recommendatory boards was early dismissed without, again, adequate investigation and consultation. Dr Coombs in his report evades criticism of council procedures by the skilful device of diagnosing discontent as a positive signal of an intellectual stimulus which he seems to see as a major achievement of his and Dr Battersby's "implementation" of an A.L.P. arts policy!

In the performing arts in particular there has been no great show of egalitarianism or more open access to the fairly questionable activities of major companies. There is no evidence that the commonly interlocked boards of management which prevail, particularly in Sydney, are in danger of being broken up — the young upgraded and the old retired — or that those who actually *work* in the theatre, for instance, will be democratically elected to these boards. Mr Whitlam shares with Dr Battersby the oft-held view that artists are barely capable of handling a cheque account; that their dominant feature (and perhaps interest) is their eccentricity. Of course the contrary is true — to be a practising artist over the last ten years in Australia has required more personal administrative ability than can usually be sighted amongst the *centralist* bureaucracy now emerging at A.C.A. headquarters in North Sydney.

That bureaucracy will never *make* art; potentially it can enable it to happen, but first it needs to understand that there is not one process, not one excellence, and that people eminent in salesmanship and business administration may never know *how* art can proliferate within a variety of administrative and organisational forms.

There is no evidence to suggest that drama, say, will renew itself (especially in a country still striving to recreate its own) unless the whole pot is put on the boil and the bubbles bottled as they surface in a coherent way. After we remove the bubbles, maybe we are left with "excellence", no relevance and an after-taste of potted conservatism that will restrain our excitement for aeons.

Let the bubbles burst as they will and beware blocking the drain with the sediment of the educated Anglophile. The Australian Council for the Arts is one of those institutions that should *only* be able to improve.

THE VIEW FROM GALLIPOLI

Gavin Souter

K. S. Inglis: *The Australian Colonists: An Exploration of Social History 1788-1860* (M.U.P., $13.80).

Although I thoroughly enjoyed the first volume of Professor Inglis's "exploration" of Australia's social history, I must confess to some uneasiness about his expedition. It is too soon to be certain, for there are three more volumes to come, and if they are each as well-turned and perceptive as this one then the journey, despite its somewhat restricted nature, will be more than justified. What worries me a little is the vantage point from which Professor Inglis has charted his route. Is the view from Gallipoli wide enough, or must an observer on that sacred height inevitably find himself blinkered as he looks back to the eighteenth century and forward to the Australia of his own early youth in the 1930s?

Being much of the same age, I can understand the attraction which Anzac holds for Professor Inglis. Our generation was exposed to the full force of a perfected tradition before war had become a drug in the market. Hiroshima and Vietnam stand peremptorily between our children and Gallipoli, but we ourselves are still mesmerised. I took the trouble to go there once, as Professor Inglis did in 1965, and was moved more deeply than I expected to be by the beach and the graves at Ari Burnu, the arid beauty of the entire peninsula, and the sight of barbed wire on Chunuk Bair, the crest on which Mustafa Kemal stopped the Turkish retreat before the first Anzacs late in the morning of April 25.

For Professor Inglis, the Anzac tradition provided "a base from which to explore areas of Australian history not yet well mapped." Its ceremonies, monuments and rhetoric seemed to him to constitute almost a civic religion — a quasi-religion about which many Christian clergymen had decidedly mixed feelings. In trying to set out his themes, he kept encountering questions which turned him back into the past. "The rhetoric of Anzac was both imperial and national," he writes. "What had Australians thought about themselves before 1915 as Britons, colonists and members of their own nation?" Gallipoli was said to have provided Australia with its first truly national day. What other occasions had been celebrated as holidays, and why had none of these quite filled the bill?

The First AIF was said to have been unusually egalitarian, informal and enterprising. If that were so, where had such qualities come from? Did the Anzac tradition owe anything to the Boer War, or even to the Australian colonists' subliminal involvement in the 1885 Sudan campaign? How had Australians responded to Britain's earlier wars, and what was their own experience of violence, both human and natural?

Professor Inglis's first volume pursues answers to some of these questions from the first days of European settlement to 1870, which was not only the centenary of Cook's visit to Botany Bay but also the year in which the last British troops sailed from Port Jackson — a departure hailed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as Australia's "first step towards nationality."

A second volume — tentatively entitled *The Little Boy From Manly,* in allusion to Livingston Hopkins's *Bulletin* cartoon figure — will carry the exploration up to 1900; a third, *Australia Will Be There,* will end on the first anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli; and a fourth, *Anzac Day,* will be about the world which Ken Inglis himself "began to know at North Preston State School and thereabouts."

What features of the landscape does Professor Inglis choose to remark as he scans Australia's first century through Anzac field glasses? He looks closely at convicts, emigrants and colonists; at the festivals and holidays which these people brought with them from Britain, and new ones which they developed for themselves; at the colonists' experience of war and other forms of violence, both real and vicarious; and finally, at the kind of men Australians regarded as heroes (there were no heroines) up to 1870.

All four of these subjects are carefully examined. Professor Inglis is an erudite and informative guide; but the reader's expectations are geared to Gallipoli, and it is hard not to feel some disappointment at the rather faint level of adumbration. If Anzac has roots this far in the past, they are minutely attenuated.

"If the ballads of a people are the essence of its history," wrote an American patriot in 1857, "holidays are, on similar grounds, the free utterance of its character." Taking that as his text, Professor Inglis looks at the early Australian Sabbath, Christmas Day, St. Patrick's Day and the monarch's birthday, and at three home-

grown festivals of leisure: Eight Hours' Day, Cup Day and Anniversary Day. The only relevance of this to Anzac flows indirectly from Professor Inglis's conclusion that Australia had not yet found a day on which its people "would celebrate their common nationality as Americans had long celebrated theirs on the anniversary of 4 July 1776, or as the French were to celebrate theirs . . . on 14 July 1789."

Experience of war? The closest Australia had come to this before 1870 was the imagined sound of gunfire from the Crimea, and the sudden appearance of a Confederate raider, the *Shenandoah,* in Port Phillip Bay during the American Civil War. Napoleon ordered his military governor at Mauritius to capture Port Jackson in 1810, but instead a British force occupied Mauritius.

If not warfare, then what about other forms of violence? "Australian colonists in 1870 were inclined to exaggerate the tranquillity of their history so far," writes Professor Inglis. "They found it easy to forget both the Aborigines and the Chinese. Eureka was a single episode not much noticed outside Victoria and regarded there as ancient history as soon as it was over."

Professor Inglis reminds us of the many deaths caused by bushranging, the bloody suppression of convict rebellion at Castle Hill in 1804, and the Australian colonists' familiarity with such forms of natural violence as bushfire and flood. Our first century was indeed more violent than mere absence of formal warfare would suggest.

For heroes, the Australians of 1870 had to choose between "Cook the remote explorer, Wentworth the flawed patriot, the grim explorers of the interior, the disreputable outlaws of the bush, the makers of the Eureka stockade and the eight-hour day, and other men of such reputation as could be nurtured within the bounds of colonial settlement and experience." The first state funeral in New South Wales was for William Charles Wentworth in 1872, and the first in Victoria for Burke and Wills in 1863.

Here again the apparent relevance to Gallipoli is slight, although the cults of Leichhardt and Burke and Wills prompt Professor Inglis to ask whether a democratic taste in heroism led Australians to savor the man who dared and was overwhelmed. If so, there was a treat in store for them.

There is every reason to expect that, within its framework, Professor Inglis's completed work will have much to tell us about certain aspects of the Australian ethos. Yet it seems to me that he may be in danger of over-emphasising the importance of the Anzac tradition.

Certainly Anzac was important at the time, and to the following generation. On April 25, in the rhetoric of the day, history and Australian history were fused at white heat. But the two have now been joined for quite a while. Viewed from a distance of sixty years — back beyond the complexities of Vietnam, the close shave of New Guinea, and all our shifting alliances of the last half century — Gallipoli seems less a culmination than just one of the more interesting episodes in the continuing evolution of our sense of national identity.

"Culmination" is my word, not Professor Inglis's, and nothing that I have said here is meant to prejudge those of his volumes still to come. I look forward to learning exactly what he does make of Gallipoli.

ONE WHO WAXED FAT

Manning Clark

Gwyneth M. Dow: *Samuel Terry: The Botany Bay Rothschild* (S.U.P., $9.50).

The traumas and puzzles of childhood drive some to damnation, hatred, rage and destruction, and start others on a journey towards the light. Happily for Gwen Dow nature had so mixed up the elements in her clay that when the time came to find answers to the questions in the nursery, she performed a service not only to herself but also to all those who believe that the 'birth stain' era in our history was where it all began.

As a child she was puzzled why her father did not work: she was puzzled, too, by her father's hints about his convict ancestry. As an adult she found one simple answer to both of those questions. Her father was living off the unearned increment on capital inherited from his own ancestor, Samuel Terry, who was one of those few convicts who had waxed fat in the land in those years when the Captain General and Governor-in-Chief in and over the colony of New South Wales and its dependent territories was instructed to make grants of land to those who by their good conduct might be found to be deserving of such favor.

As she rummaged away in the material both in this country and in the United Kingdom for information on what manner of man this Samuel Terry was, she took on another mission: she

would not only tell the reading public the facts about Terry: she would rescue him from the vilification of his contemporaries, and the character sketches of him by historians who rather rashly confounded the case for the prosecution with the truth about the man. For Terry had been judged harshly by his fellow human beings who had accused him of becoming disgustingly rich by shameful means, and of unspeakable cruelties to those placed under him.

Gwen Dow is very successful in telling us who Terry was and what he did. In that part of her mission the book will live on as an achievement. For the first time that blanket covering that term of the historians 'the emancipists' has been lifted, and we now have the opportunity of seeing one of them at close range. By great industry, by that capacity to go on worrying and puzzling and sifting long after the impatient and the careless would have given up the search she has shown us an emancipist, Samuel Terry, taking part in the public life of New South Wales.

Thanks to her we now begin to see what Sam Terry was up to. We see him signing the petition for the arrest of Bligh — one of life's little ironies for an emancipist to team up with the traditional enemies of his class to humiliate and degrade the man who had befriended emancipists. We see his role in the story of the Bank of New South Wales. We see him taking the chair from time to time at the annual emancipists' dinner to commemorate the foundation of New South Wales. Perhaps the most valuable part of the book is her success in giving flesh and blood to the vulgarian wing of the emancipist party, and in helping us to see why Wentworth, a great offender against propriety, but an aspirant for the drawing room with the Louis Quinze chairs, felt ill at ease with the emancipists whenever a Sam Terry or a Daniel Cooper, the man who shovelled peas into his mouth with a knife, set the tone. We see Samuel also as a landed proprietor in Illawarra, Yass, and that lovely valley south of Canberra where his daughter, Martha Foxlowe Terry, came into her inheritance with her husband John Hosking, the first mayor of Sydney.

The attempt to white-wash Terry is possibly not quite so successful. This is not to dispute her facts, but rather to raise a question about method. This is an argumentative book. The danger in such books is always that the quarrels and disagreements of the author with other labourers in the same vineyard will come between the reader and the subject, and at times even obscure the subject. The other danger in argumentative books is that the author is so carried away by the chase after some quarry of their own that they skip about all over the past, and so do violence to the story.

The task of the biographer is to paint a portrait. He or she should resist the temptation to debate with other writers. Creation belongs to a book: criticism belongs to an academic journal. Creation is harder than attacking or demolishing opponents.

Still it would be inappropriate to end an appreciation of the book with what could be construed as a rebuke. Thanks to Gwen Dow we now know probably as much as we, or our successors, will ever know about Samuel Terry. Other writers may choose to pass a different judgment on the man. Others may have a go at creating him as a person but, if they do, then they will be deeply in debt to this work. They will also probably pause before they plunge into any hasty condemnation of Sam Terry, because this book will remind them that well over a hundred years after he died, Sam had a worthy and formidable apologist, who discovered that, although she had borne his name, she was not a descendant by blood of the founder of his family in Australia.

POETRY — MAINLY MELBOURNE

Tom Shapcott

Robert Kenny and C. Talbot (eds.): *Applestealers* (Outback Press, $2.25).

Paul Smith (ed.): *Pie Anthology* (Whole Australian Catalogue, $6).

At the time I edited *Australian Poetry Now* in 1970 it seemed important to make a large, comprehensive selection that would make readers aware of the whole new liveliness and energy that had mushroomed up in Australian writing. Never before, I think, had so many self-declared Poets sprung shouting and singing out of the deadwood of the Australian cities and suburbs. Much of this energy, it was predictable, would wane. Many of the young talents would fade away, or grow up, or become pedagogues. But the impact had been made; the change was there.

In making that anthology, at that time, I sought (rightly I think), to confirm that it should not be ignored. I am not interested in words like 'underground' or 'alternative': they are

merely trend words like 'anti-establishment' and 'youthful', and my aim was to increase the already noticable spread of the new poetic excitement beyond the coteries. It is not insignificant that some of the most intelligent response to the new formal dictates — closer attention to genuine speech cadence, relaxation of formality, more flexibility of associative patterning, less reliance on metaphor — was, in the next few years, to come from poets in their thirties and, in the case of Vincent Buckley, well into their forties. Poets like Buckley and Beaver, of course, were exploring the American and European originals of the local cult heroes even before they were taken up by the 'alternative' grapevine. Their newer work set the seal on the moment of change. It is now possible to define clearly the moment of change, and the direction it is taking.

More than time for a new anthology, then.

What has been needed is a selection that will be not just a grab-bag, a tumble of fresh promises (things are altogether more predictable now than they were half a decade back), but one that gives a strong pointer, out of the best work in these years, to the main highway somewhere beyond. If ever a strong, defining, anthology were pertinent and necessary, it would be at this point, when much of the original new emphasis has slackened, and the affectations, as well as the achievements, begin to be more clearly recognized (and most of all by the participants themselves). Such an anthology is needed in Australia in order to draw attention to our own recent high points rather than to overseas peer-groups (condescendingly egalitarian though they may pretend to be).

Outback Press, as their first publishing venture, have produced *Applestealers,* and it does attempt to fulfil the needs I have just listed. There are seventeen poets represented, each one adequately and in enough depth to give the reader a good indication of their stature. There is also a nice element of surprise and discovery: Robert Harris, for instance, appears as an infinitely stronger and more interesting poet here than in his first collection, *Localities,* and Kris Hemensley benefits enormously from being compressed into fifteen pages or so. I was interested also to read a selection of Ken Taylor's work. Taylor has been curiously elusive as a poet, though much lauded as a key figure in the La Mama years that were, I think we can agree, the Melbourne watershed for the new poetry. (The Sydney equivalent would probably be the Adamson take-over of the Poetry Society.) Of the Taylor poems, "Take Care" is certainly the best. His work does not seem innovative or radical by any means, but its understated coolness and underlying social involvement would have made good listening, and pertinent too, in the late 1960s in Melbourne.

The anthology is more sure of itself and more interesting in its Melbourne selection despite the fact that the two most marginal poets are in that group. As the numerous introductions, editorials, notes and appendices point out, the anthology's heart is really set in Melbourne. It would have been much more useful — and successful — had it restricted itself to a rather more thorough survey of the Melbourne scene (which, to an outsider, is complex and conflicting enough for any anthologist to tackle) than to drag in the Sydney push. As it is, it remains half-baked. If it is really to pretend to reveal "the best poetry written in Australia", then Jenkins and Kenny should surely have been dropped (there are at least a dozen other poets writing at present who are their peers, even in the confines of the Carlton/Balmain cliques; and if we were to look just a little further . . .). I was actually very interested to read and weigh all the Melbourne poets together; I resented having to think "good better best" about this collection. But all the flags were there waving at me, the starting gun out, the barracking and the hullabaloo.

There would have been — there still is — space for an interesting and lively survey of Melbourne poetry in the 1970s. Such a survey should not have stretched the editors beyond their limits or their experience. As it is, they have made an uneasy compromise, seemingly at the last minute, and thrown in a group of Sydney-oriented poets. Of these, Robert Adamson and the late Michael Dransfield were undoubtedly the most urgent contenders. And, after all, it would be difficult to pretend a 1970s anthology without them. Hence the obvious editorial dilemma. It could have been overcome by preparing a companion volume, in which event the ludicrous omissions of Bruce Beaver and Les Murray would have been overcome without loss of sense to the Melbourne context. As it is, we have half a Melbourne anthology, in which Ken Taylor plays a useful and intelligent part, but a Sydney half-an-anthology that tells us nothing about the scope and development of poetic trends in that city, apart from drawing attention to Nigel Roberts' charming but slight arabesques, by way of lead-in. The peculiar Sydney intoxication (from Tranter and Forbes and latterly Adam-

son) with the work of Ashbery (brilliant and *absolutely* inimitable) is, I feel, the sort of passing phase, like pimples, that should be politely ignored. They will grow out of it, we hope, without permanent scars. John Forbes is young, and in his "4 heads and how to do them" brilliant as a parodist. I certainly hope he grows and poetically finds himself, not just middle-aged Americans. John Tranter is older and has always had, indeed, something of the cold artifact-manufacture that also informs Ashbery's work. One can understand his fascination with Ashbery, but Tranter's "The Lesson" in this anthology, will become, if he develops as a poet, one of the crosses he will have to bear. Of other Sydney poets included, Vicki Viidikas has always been immensely uneven but she clings to something worth holding onto and worth saying. Robyn Ravlich has always seemed a very hollow voice to me. But where is J. S. Harry? There is more true poetry in one page of Jan Harry's work than in the whole volume of Ravlich's.

Applestealers is, then, two broken halves of anthologies. It is well worth reading, though, and so far is the best we have that surveys one of the most lively periods of our writing. If you read *Applestealers* (which, for all its unevenness, does give a good indication of some of the recent areas of poetic concern and, more importantly, some of the ways such concerns are being expressed) and then, say, one of the 1960s anthologies, it will be quickly seen how certain methods and attitudes had become lazy and formula-ridden. The period of re-thinking has set in and the change has occurred. There is still space for a tough, pertinent and intelligent anthology of our recent work.

Pie, the whole 628 pages of it, almost seemed to supply (to over-supply) the missing half of *Applestealers'* Melbourne survey, for only the late Charles Buckmaster co-incides (apart from those writers who contributed to Mal Morgan's broadsheet *Parachute Poems,* reprinted entire). John Tranter is the only Sydney poet included in both selections.

Pie is the sort of amorphous grab-bag that can be all too easily dismissed out of hand — it is pretentious, parochial and puffy with poetasters. It does have an editorial line: affirmation of transcendental experience. This, as many (even Blake) discovered, puts great strains on verbal expression. The outer regions of experience and apprehension require something of genius if they are to be carried back through the medium of words to be passed on to others. Such areas of awareness, in fact, are far often better not attempted by words — there are other communication channels — music, art. Significantly, perhaps the contributions in *Pie* that most achieve a sense of mystical stillness are the drawings by Billy Jones that accompany his emblematic spidery words. Here the mind can reach to and be absorbed by the experience. Most of the other 'transcendentals' in this book are so doughy and damned dithery on the subject of Oneness, Love or Abiding Grace that the reader is left wallowing in an absolute mess of all too human futility.

Pie attempts a fair amount of visual liveliness, in keeping with the Letraset Age, the Offset Era. But I wonder how many readers will really worm their way through the dreadful handwriting of Jas. H. Duke's lolly-mouthed fables or re-read with pleasure Ross Bennett's work-in-progress (the apotheosis of Paste-Up). Such unserious gestures however are positively electric compared with some of the more pallid or pretentious poeticisings that cram the book. Like faded watercolors many a page is smeared with effete effusions, and a few scattered four-letter words fool nobody.

There are interesting and good things however: in fact the volume begins quite bravely with work from Alan Afterman and, new to me, Sue Barrett; and there are other clusters of achievement: poems by Ian Hill, Brian Joyce and Leo Kelly's uneven but appealing elegy for Danila Vassilieff. And there are drawings by Mirka Mora, promising prose excerpts from Philip Motherwell. In a book this size it takes some stamina to seek out the hidden truffles, but they are there.

I was quite fascinated, also, by a section on Genesis retranslated as a text in hermetic philosophy, and a series of articles on Hafiz of Shiraz, including translations of his Ghazals. The translations here are a clue to much of the pervasive soppiness of the poetry collected: they equate those rather dreadful nineteenth century versions with the expression of mystical intent. The Ghazals are an exciting body of work, in a striking art form. But one has only to set these languid leaden-word translations against, for instance, Adrienne Rich's modern reanimations of the form to see that it is possible, with our plain everyday speech, to come closer to the communication of Hafiz' essential world than through flowery nineteenth century turns of phrase.

Pie pads out a well-padded book by reproducing, as I have said, all of the *Parachute Poems* broadsheet, edited by Mal Morgan. Personally I think there have been a number of other minimags appeared in Melbourne over the past few years that would have been more interesting to enshrine in book form than this one, though it does have a fair deal of retrospective interest. Mal Morgan is one of the flowery ones who is hard for upgrading the status of The Poet: "The Poet is the thief in the night who steals your secret dreams and gives them back to you before the crafty stars suck them all away." Or is it just the Poet as Star-shooer? Anyway, a goodly number (there! it's infectious, that Poetic Magic) of the poets in *Pie* are all too happy to declare their self-righteous Special Insights. It is largely a book directed at the already converted. A Primer for the Elect. Despite all that, and the heaviness of the tread through many of these pages, *Pie* throws interesting lights on part of the current Melbourne scene, and draws attention to a number of writers who are new and have promise. If it also enshrines some monumental bores, well, that is the fate of many another anthology. To an outsider, it is curious that *Applestealers* and *Pie* should be so mutually exclusive. Is there nobody in Melbourne who can step just a little outside their own coterie and give us an informed survey of the ferment down there?

BLAMEY WITHOUT WARTS

Peter Hastings

John Hetherington: *Blamey: Controversial Soldier* (Australian War Memorial, $7.50).

Several years ago the *Sydney Morning Herald* asked me to detach myself (how readily one reverts to antique military terms!) to spend several months at the Commonwealth archives at Brighton, and subsequently another month in Canberra, to "go through", as they say, Defence and Services departmental files, newly opened, for the entire World War II period. In addition there were War Cabinet and War Advisory Council agenda to read, but these were open only until the end of 1941.

I undertook the job somewhat unwillingly. Contemporary Papua New Guinea, South-East Asia, foreign affairs and some aspects of defence generally were my interests, and the War was long over. Within a week I was fascinated by the task of hunting for interesting, long lost needles in a gigantic haystack of disordered, part-censored, certainly culled and most certainly interminable files.

Claude Forell, my intelligent and knowledgeable colleague from the *Age*, shared the task with me. For some reason or other, although forewarned several months ahead, no other Australian newspaper bothered to send reporters to look at the archives material, so that for weeks on end Claude and I did not have to contend with other reporters — although we had to contend with the paranoid suspicions of the Canberra archivists; while, properly, the Melbourne staff could not have been more helpful — and were able to pursue uninterrupted our several interests and intuitions. We also learnt in respect of the post-1941 War Cabinet agenda that it really wasn't necessary for one of us to keep nit while the other rapidly, and illegally, unpinned the brown paper jacket and had a look inside. All one had to do to find out what that jacket contained was simply to read on a few pages. Invariably one found Defence Department or Service instructions to some one or other to implement the decisions contained in "War Cabinet Agendum 241/43 which are as follows, viz. . . ." Why Canberra ever bothered to jacket War Cabinet material I'll never know.

Claude was particularly interested, among other things, in the Darwin bombing file and the report of the Royal Commissioner, in the Jap. sub attack on Sydney Harbor, in the Australia First movement and in the chemical warfare issue, and I, among other things, in the Brisbane Line episode, the Bennett story, including the findings of the military court of inquiry, the Port Moresby lootings of 1942, and the Rowell/Blamey confrontation. I found in all this the additional and probably predictable interest of reliving the history of my youth, a sort of *recherche du temps perdu*. But there was yet another interest which increased as I went along — the elusive complex character of Thomas Blamey.

I found ample evidence, most but not all of it indirect, of both his overpowering personality and influence, more especially after his return from the Middle East to become Commander-in-Chief. I found, for example, large chunks of incomplete correspondence with Curtin over his Charter as C-in-C; almost the entire correspondence between himself and Forde after the latter's ill fated four-day trip to Papua in October 1942; his spirited and highly partisan defence of

allegations that General Basil Morris, when GOC New Guinea Force, had "facilitated" the looting orgy in Port Moresby in February of that year through inaction, and some highly relevant letters in his hopeless, final self-demeaning rows with Forde and Senator Fraser.

These were rich lodes of gold. Mostly one had to mine much shallower deposits. In the midst of a dreary waste of correspondence one would come across a letter, memorandum or appreciation with the bold, old-fashioned signature, T. A. Blamey. They dealt with a variety of subjects and were nearly always forceful in tone, frequently provocative and often ungrammatical. But taking it all in all there wasn't much of him to find and one wonders why. He couldn't have taken all his correspondence with him. It would have required a furniture van to move it. He may have destroyed a great deal of it. Much of it may be filed, Army style, under the most unlikely headings. I discovered his passing out report from Quetta in 1913, a genuine Blameyana find, in a thin file improbably marked 'Governor-General' to whom in those distant, imperial days the commandant had sent it. And of course the looters had been at work. The almost non-existent files relating to Conlon's Army Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs are mute testimony to that. Alf probably took the lot with him when he left the army. Even the so-called Blamey papers deposited with the War Memorial don't tell us much, and they only comprise a minute fraction of the vast amount of correspondence Blamey must have manufactured during the war.

Apart from John Hetherington's biography, both the first and the more recent, expanded version under review, remarkably little has been written about him. This is partly due to a lack of primary sources and partly due to the reticence of those who knew him best — a now rapidly dwindling band — who divide into three classes, ardent supporters, ardent critics, and a very few who saw him in the round. With the obvious exception of one man most of the generals to whom at one time or another I have spoken about Blamey were Blamey men and not really prepared to say much. Even known opponents proved surprisingly reluctant to come to grips with him. I spent an unintentionally hilarious, hot Brisbane afternoon with Frank Forde who solemnly assured me that the Commander-in-Chief had always shown respectful decorum in his dealings with his minister. He continued to insist this was the case even when I laid on his dining room table photocopies of angry correspondence between himself and Blamey in 1945. As he examined his near thirty-years-old signature all he could say was "My goodness me."

And so, it's back to John Hetherington. He worked hard at his biography. It's painstaking. It's soundly written and structured. It's undoubtedly a labor of love for which history will not thank him because it is partisan, distorted and idolatrous. The sad part about it is that Blamey, as much because of the scale of his faults as the magnitude of his virtues, deserved a great deal better. Hetherington in fact has got a lot of the "Old Man" pretty much to lights. He's got his energy, his essential toughness and his ambitiousness. He's got his restless, quick mind with its romantic quirkiness, suddenly plunging around in Middle East history or wanting to know, now, immediately, about the pathology of malaria or wondering whether elephants might not, after all, be used as transport trains in New Guinea. He understood Blamey's combativeness, his capacity to evoke fierce loyalty and equally fierce dislike, and his physical stamina and courage, stamping without a word of complaint a gout-swollen foot into recalcitrant boot to attend a Cairo reception or riding horseback for miles, grey-faced and sweat-drenched, passing a kidney stone. And he has a sense of Blamey's occasional sense of grace, quoting at length from his compassionate, understanding letter to Mrs Vasey after her husband's untimely death.

But it's not Blamey. At best it is only part of him. It makes no mention of his intellectual pretentiousness. Instead it unconsciously illustrates it. It glosses over his vindictiveness and his pronounced predilection, when cornered, for childish lies and invention. It shows little real understanding for one of the gifts that made Blamey tower over contemporaries and rivals, that made him in fact the very model of a modern major-general, his capacity to understand and play politics.

Who else at that time could have assumed the enormous burdens of C-in-C which require that the incumbent not only knew a great deal about running an army, had a fundamental grasp of strategy and tactics and could oversee the cumbrous administrative machine, but could also deal with a wartime Labor government, frightened politicians, an uncertain civil population, and a principal ally represented by a U.S. general who was not only devoted to denigrating Australia's role and achievements in war but had the willing

ear of Australia's government? Rowell was a far better staff officer than Blamey, Lavarack a cleverer organiser, Robertson a more daring soldier, Morshead a sounder. But there wasn't one of them from Berryman to Herring who could have come within striking distance of taking on the job. Not even Sturdee.

But those very capacities Blamey possessed depended for their effectiveness quite often upon a relentless, destructive side of him which at no time does Hetherington ever really probe, except in his somewhat partisan account of the Rowell affair, over which Blamey's motives are still a matter for speculation and his unrelieved spleen a matter for wonder. Hetherington's account of the Bennett affair is a case in point. It is straightforward enough but it deliberately omits the relentless role played by Blamey from the period, shortly after he returned from the Middle East, and grunted that Bennett should be "tried by his peers", until he finally got his man and Bennett underwent the final, dreadful ordeal of questioning by Dovey Q.C. There is no doubt that senior officers regarded Bennett with great distaste after his escape from Singapore, that he greatly overestimated the value of his knowledge of Japanese tactics (there were others who had been sent out ahead of him) and that he was, although a clever and courageous soldier, vain, opinionated and, in the final count, self-indulgent. If he had not been he would have stayed in Singapore. There is no doubt that when G.O.C. corps in the west he saw his talents wither slowly on the vine and became first a nuisance and ultimately a pathetic figure living on intrigue, gossip and fantasy. But nothing he did or had done could possibly excuse Blamey's sustained malevolence towards him, and the clever way in which he saw to it that sycophantic principal staff officers like Northcott kept up the pressure to destroy Bennett once and for all. One has only to read through that huge file on Bennett to see what Blamey was all about.

Hetherington tends to brush aside disagreeable episodes or to romanticise them. He gives a quite erroneous picture of the prolonged and politically crucial debate between Curtin and Blamey over the C-in-C's Charter which if, Blamey had got his way, would have made him virtual military dictator in Australia. Hetherington says that after Blamey's implied threat to resign on Good Friday, 1942 — over promotions on the publication of which no one consulted him — he and Curtin achieved a "wartime partnership . . . just short of personal friendship." There was certainly respect between the two but this is a very romantic definition of their relationship. Between April and May, Blamey and Curtin conducted a lengthy, occasionally very sharp, exchange of correspondence over the Charter. Blamey wanted the right to delegate his powers to a second person if necessary and the right of that person to delegate to a third; the right to promote generals in the field; the right to determine war establishments without reference; the right to employ and dismiss civilians without reference to the Defence Department and the right to buy, requisition and otherwise impress supplies and material without reference. No Prime Minister could have gone to parliament with that request. Curtin was firm. "I have a doubt," he wrote on 25 April, "as to the wisdom of giving you such wide general powers." Blamey loved fighting causes, in fact fighting lost ones eventually finished him, and he fought this one through to the middle of May before retiring to lick his wounds after Curtin finally told him that "I regret that I am unable to accept the view that the granting of these powers to the Commander-in-Chief when in the Middle East creates any precedent for conditions in Australia." Hetherington dismisses this clear evidence of Blameys' lost Battle of the Charter by producing a somewhat doubtful exchange in which Forde allegedly sent for the Army Secretary, Sinclair, and said, "I'm sorry to tell you that the PM has told Blamey he can write his own ticket."

But to me the most amazing omission in the Hetherington biography is his failure even to mention the Aitape landings controversy which, I believe, finished Blamey with the Labor government and would have led, if the war had not timely ended, to his compulsory retirement as C-in-C. The landings took place in 1944 and at the time there were numerous complaints from the troops themselves not only about their secondary role in the war but about actual shortages of equipment and amenities. In March 1945 the acting Army Minister, Senator Fraser, visited New Guinea and, after a formal statement to the House, wrote to Blamey personally, and in the strongest terms, on 19 June, pointing out that not only was the unloading of stores held up at Aitape but that the first two ships to unload contained no Red Cross, engineer or medical stores but 200 tons of beer and spirits and 117 tons of canteen stores. How come? He would like a full report for War Cabinet.

It is a long and tedious story and now very

ancient history but the gist of it was that Blamey lied in quite childish fashion; in a letter to Forde on his return from London he charged that Fraser among other things "obviously has no knowledge of general administration." Fraser replied to Forde making a violent attack on Blamey. Forde suggested politely but firmly to Blamey that "I offer this suggestion that you may, in the circumstances, wish to withdraw the terms of paragraph 2 of your letter under reply." Blamey tried to cover up by saying that "general administration" was not what Fraser thought but a very esoteric military subject. Forde understandably refused to accept this subterfuge. And so the row went on. But times had changed. Curtin was dead and Chifley had little time for Blamey. On 30 September the row had reached such savage proportions that Forde reported Blamey to Chifley complaining that Blamey had no right to use the language he had of Fraser which he, Forde, believed to be "completely out of place." The game was just about up. Blamey left the army seven weeks later.

This is a sad biography really. Blamey was in fact a great man but as a biography this is simply an attempt at a great picture. Just how great a man Blamey was is still a matter for determination. But some day someone will capture his doggedness and tenacity in the face of considerable odds and even his wry contempt for those he served. When John Kerr, as Conlon's successor went to say goodbye to Blamey, the C-in-C asked him what he intended doing. The future chief justice of NSW and governor-general of Australia replied that he wasn't entirely sure but he thought he might return to the Bar. Blamey grunted: "Good idea. Remember, you can break your heart working for the country."

THE TRENDY AND THE TRUE

Rod McConchie

Robert Adamson and Bruce Hanford: *Zimmer's Essay* (Wild and Woolley, $4.50).

Peter Carey: *The Fat Man in History* (U.Q.P., $4.50 and $1.95).

Vicki Viidikas: *Wrappings* (Wild and Woolley, $4.50).

Michael Wilding: *Living Together* (U.Q.P., $4.50 and $1.95).

Certain dicta spring forcibly to mind as a result of reading these four books — to be fashionable is not to be original; to talk about dullness or stereotypy is not necessarily always to evade those vices oneself. There is a plethora of currently saleable, trendy cliches, and a rather indulgent dwelling on a life-style just barely beyond the borders of respectability. There is less ennui, desperation, and art than in Beckett, less genuine assertion and assault than in Genet, and the lovingly considered sexual curiosities are distinctly sub-Sadean.

Degrees of self-consciousness, and of ability to control voice, are helpful in evaluating these works. The less self-conscious authors seem to have the finer control; though that is limited praise in that the bare reportage style adopted by Carey, and at times Wilding and Adamson, is severely restrictive in terms of authorial management. If it is (as it seems) a reaction to the baroque of White and Keneally, then it seems to suffer as a result. The sense of an informing and coherent authorial voice is in inverse proportion to the attempt to be complex and original, and to utilize personae.

Peter Carey's *The Fat Man in History* is engagingly straightforward, relatively speaking. Most of the stories are neatly contrived (contrivance being important to this writer) and skilfully executed. "Crabs", "The Fat Man in History" and "Death in the South Side Pavilion" are all good examples, even though the first two are basically circular tales, while the latter is a stiffly surrealist tableau. Carey shares with the other writers reviewed the tendency to indulge fashionable interests — the circular tale itself is a case in point — odious comparisons with *The Bald Prima Donna* or perhaps *Waiting for Godot* are invited. "Conversations with Unicorns" seems to owe much to Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*.

There is, in many of the stories, a sharp appreciation of the idioms of the dull and the mundane, and this strength is often in curious balance with the surreal fantasies which are the core of the stories. When they coalesce, fading one into the other as the circle reveals itself, much is gained. "Crabs" manages this union well, but "Peeling", a fantasy of the conversion of human flesh into metaphor, is more awkward. Here the element of abrupt surprise and revelation helps to cover the difficulty.

Adopting and maintaining a particular voice comes reasonably easily to Carey (though limited by the pervasive flatness of tone and ubiquitous understatement). For example, the flat, drearily systematic voice of "Peeling" — "Let me describe my darling. Shall I call her that? An adventure

I had planned to keep, but now it is said. My darling has a long, pale face with long golden hair . . ."

This, along with the revelation of emotion or compassion by discovery, is sometimes a telling device. Carey uses it at a higher level than that of the creation of suspense. In "Withdrawal", the neat excision of an expected climax is striking — the corpse which Eddie had wanted to acquire as a culmination of his necrophiliac enterprises fails him — "He felt no suspicion of fear, no disgust, no exhilaration, merely a kind of curious calm like a good stone."

Having read up to the section concerned with the sexual fantasizing of the male chauvinist Martin in Wilding's *Living Together* I had been progressively more impressed. The threesome who compose this melange of sexual partnerships and insecurities, and their territorial and psychic claims on each other, had been succinctly drawn. A set of tensions was developing well. Paul, slight and elusive, was beginning to assert himself, psychologically and sexually; Martin, pompous, trendy, and repugnantly male and self-satisfied, was estranging the rather indefinitely motherly Ann, whose desire for a "glistening kitchen" had not been matched by a sufficiently glistening male. When Ann finally leaves, however, the book unaccountably goes flabby. Ann's vague and occasionally lambent motherliness culminates only in her returning after Martin has been through a number of pointless liaisons (or failures to connect); Martin accepts her, male-chauvinist-priggishly as ever. It seems to be merely a case of exhaustion by passage of time, and in no sense self-revelatory. Unfortunately, this half of the book passes in much the same way. We are led to an inconsequential return to the original status quo, and have gained precious little. To write about sexual boredom and inconsequence is fine, but it should not be done dully or inconsequentially.

Wilding does best with Martin's sexual fantasies about Paul's love-life, and with the minor character Gretel Mann. (Is he best as a miniaturist?) In the former the humor becomes vigorous and even racy, reminiscent at moments of the best of *Portnoy's Complaint*. It is animated by Martin's own puerility. Ann tells Martin that she had invited Paul to bring Gretel home for a meal. Martin explodes.

YOU WHAT?

There is no need actually to pimp for him. He seems quite capable of getting his own fucks. He seems quite capable of nosing his way along the ground sniffing out well worn cunts. He's not exactly limbless. And if he were he could still wriggle along like a caterpillar with his orgasmic convulsions . . .

Martin's ranting and rhetoric are nicely balanced by his own utter insensitivity to Ann, and earlier his diatribe on relationships declaimed for Paul's benefit — "It requires continual adjustments, continual compromises. You have to be willing to surrender all your old prejudices . . ." Martin's compromise and surrender is to find another screw.

Wilding allows Martin to be a character in the fullest sense up to this point, to grow not out of the author's continual telling, but out of self-revelation and reactions with others. As soon as Ann leaves not only is his primary relationship gone, but so is the author's control of the richer aspects of the novel.

Gretel Mann is presumably the book's demi-gorgon, sexually carnivorous and socially blasphemous. The final scenes, where her influence destroys the precarious alliance of Paul and Marianne, and leaves Ann and Martin back where they began, is, frankly, fresh air in a stale house. Gretel roundly exposes Martin's fears and pretensions. (It is the finally irony for him that the naked, declaiming Gretel gives him an erection.) " 'Not only are you a rotten liar, and a sexually screwed up little poofter', Gretel said, 'but you're an evil manipulative bastard'." But to move from this round statement of truth to "Ann kissed him, not angry at him. 'I've cleared the moneylenders from the temple,' she said, taking him back to their room; and, putting new sheets on their altar for those Marianne had taken, commenced her priestessly ceremonies" is a denial of the novel's real strength, and an evasion of the tensions and problems it raises worthy of the simpering flabbiness of *The Graduate*.

The current legitimacy of crims and cons, and the fashion for seeing them as oppressed and maltreated, is indulged in Adamson and Hanford's *Zimmer's Essay*. "Indulged" is not quite accurate; the best of it is sensitive and compassionate. Glaister, the petty thief who is degraded and finally immolated in jail, is a compelling portrait, mainly because the author allows himself to stand somewhat apart, sometimes by the use of Zimmer as a persona, sometimes by the reportage style of writing. Glaister is a complex character of small-mindedness and martyrdom,

homo- and heterosexuality, self-assertion and oppression by society and the jail.

The persona of the novel, Zimmer, is less successful. The authors speak of "this monster named Zimmer", who "materialized in the room and began dictating the story". One wishes it were so. Zimmer comes and goes fitfully, only occasionally intervening with a genuine voice. He suffers also from that besetting cliche of the contemporary novel, a hero who writes poetry, as if merely to mention it sets him and the author apart on some special self-congratulatory Parnassus. Compare Halloran in Keneally's *Bring Larks and Heroes*, and Le Mesurier in White's *Voss*, for example, the latter being far better integrated in the novel.

Glaister, however, has to exist in the 'wider' anti-penological propaganda, revelations of censorial activity in the *Digger*, as well as some of context of a kind of sociological tract, a piece of Adamson's previously published poetry. Thus the book is rather a concoction. Glaister's fate, as a short story by itself, is well worthwhile. Zimmer as penal poet, and as master of algolagnic ceremonies, works less well.

The problem with Viidikas's *Wrappings* is that in spite of numerous hints of further profundities (". . . a voice persists, though it offers no goal, no complete and absolute meaning." Or ". . . Under apples' peelings there is the core, complete with sections, elements four. O play this seedling . . .") there appears to be nothing to discover. Viidikas's evocations, metaphoric skills and feeling for concrete detail are self-regarding and indulgent. Situations are created, but only minimally examined. There is throughout a lack of the control which might have served to manage these fantasies. There is, for instance, a love of lists, without the care that a Hal Porter would apply to them:

> I felt worse off than most, living in a room where the weather noticeably affected what could be done in it. When the sun was shining I'd iron all my clothes, maybe hang them up, take long elegant showers, finally get round to cutting my toenails, read Lewis Carroll, drink cheap flasks of brandy having fantasies of highballs, yachts, Spain and so on.

The lack of imaginative and critical control reduces much of her work to a fashionable pulpiness. The characters in the stories therefore are quite as self-indulgent. Much time is spent wallowing in pseudo-problems and agonising about the boredom of the life created by being a bore. Viidikas has, undoubtedly a lexical grasp of the language, but would do better without the glib pretensions of the creative writing class.

MELBOURNE OR THE PUSH?

Geoffrey Serle

John Docker: *Australian Cultural Elites. Intellectual Traditions in Sydney and Melbourne* (Angus & Robertson, $8.95 and $5.95).

This is a welcome book, though to my mind an odd mixture of acute analysis and ponderous doctrinaire misunderstanding which positively stinks of the lamp.

Most readers would be well advised only to skim the first four chapters (almost half the book) on aspects of Chris Brennan, Norman Lindsay, A. D. Hope and Patrick White, whom Docker takes to be high priests of the Sydney cultural tradition. He has something to say in these chapters, but overall they are samples of the worst kind of learned academic non-communication, and much of it has only a tenuous connection with the main body of the work.

The book comes alive in chapter 5. Docker has followed up Manning Clark's suggestive essay in *Australian Civilization* (1962), but has illustrated rather than added to it. He argues that "the Sydney and Melbourne literary traditions draw on, and distinctively develop, different aspects of European romanticism. The Melbourne tradition looks to Romantic and post-Romantic sources which are non-individualistic, and basically Coleridgean. In its social and aesthetic attitudes it develops the thinking of Arnold, Eliot, Pound and Leavis, in seeing literature and knowledge as central to society . . . The poet is the prophet or spokesman for the finer values and tendencies of his society. This tradition is considered mainly in relation to *Meanjin*, and to Nettie and Vance Palmer. The Sydney literary tradition, on the other hand, looks to individualistic romantic sources — particularly to attitudes expressed in the work of Blake, German Romantic and French Symbolist poets, and Nietzsche — which stress the individual's detachment from society and politics . . ."

In its essentials, the argument is well sustained. Docker is particularly interesting in chapter 7 in contrasting *Meanjin* and *Southerly*. And his sketch of Andersonianism in chapter 8 seems to me to be balanced and just.

But Docker does not know Melbourne well enough. I should be almost the last to decry the seminal importance of *Meanjin*, but it cannot be taken to represent the Melbourne intellectual tradition adequately. Brian Fitzpatrick is mentioned only once, Max Crawford, Alf Foster, Jim Cairns, Jack Barry and many others not at all, and *Overland* only as a source of quotation. The treatment is perfunctory.

One approach which, if it could be verified, would fundamentally modify Docker's framework, would be to test the hypothesis that the 'Melbourne tradition' is not so much Melbourne's as the standard and the 'normal', broadly characteristic of Australia as a whole. Whereas the 'Sydney tradition' was peculiar and eccentric and hardly reflected at all elsewhere. Moreover, it might be suggested the 'Melbourne tradition' was far more representative of Melbourne and elsewhere than the 'Sydney tradition' was of Sydney. For without denying the force of Andersonianism in particular, it was surely nothing like as dominant as Docker implies. And it is easy enough, after all, to throw in names like Burgmann, Evatt and Whitlam, and those of many writers like Dark, Barnard, Eldershaw, Stead, Tennant, Gilmore and Franklin (all women by the way) who were not in the Lindsayan stream.

It would be easy to go on and on about what I see as the books' shortcomings. It has no historical sense — of the long-term movements which made the Sydney and Melbourne traditions possible. It suffers from fashionable hangups: the women-and-sex content is sometimes percipient but is often extraneous, while the crude anti-élitism (so blind to its own élitist pretensions) implies a philistine devaluation of art and intellect. The arid 'sociology of knowledge' approach shows a distasteful lack of love, appreciation or respect for the artist and thinker. The categories are often strained and forced — Tom Fitzgerald an Andersonian, Vin Buckley a Leavisite! For several pages Nettie Palmer is clumpingly and patronisingly arraigned for not expressing the proper values of someone fifty years younger, without any recognition of her quality. Docker has forgotten about Calwell and Cairns (what about the Melbourne tradition?) and that the anti-Vietnam movement was not confined to the younger generation. Etc.

But if any book can at the same time be exciting and brilliant, and dull and foolish, this is it. It is an innovatory work in intellectual history. It is fair-minded, within its constricting blinkers. It must be read — but with a very critical eye, for it is only a start on the subject.

THE FIRST OF SIX

John K. Ewers

Donald Stuart: *Prince of My Country* (Georgian House, $6.95).

I approach the reading of a new novel by Donald Stuart with something like the same anticipation that I bring to a new translation of a novel by the late Hermann Hesse. That is not to say that I equate the two writers at the same level of literary excellence, but that there are some aspects of their writing I find similar.

Each has a leisurely, unhurried style which tells me that he is a craftsman unaffected by the unstable social whirlpools of his own day — and Hesse's day was, of course, about half a century earlier than Stuart's, but no less unstable. Each also is very strongly part of a landscape that colors his writing and enriches it. They are two very different landscapes — Hesse's the Black Forest country of southern Germany where he was born in 1877, Stuart's the harsh semi-desert of the Pilbara where he was *not* born in 1913, but which he has by long experience there made his own. There is a third similarity in that each is motivated by a philosophy. In Hesse, this is very complex, deriving from his classical and clerical training and moving into mysticism; in Stuart, it is much more simple and drawn from the ancient lore of tribal Aboriginals who, to a greater or lesser degree, feature in all his writings, blended with the homespun philosophy of white bushmen whose loneliness has led them to look into life's meaning in their own individual way.

In the last-named aspect, *Prince of My Country* reminds me of the writing of Tom Collins, where men in the Riverina spend a great deal of time yarning and philsophising. Stuart's characters in the Pilbara spend a lot of time yarning too, and most of it is very good yarning with some philosophising thrown in.

The story-line of the novel is almost incredibly smooth. There are few variations in the steady rhythm of success from the day Tom Redman, stationhand and teamster, turns prospector and strikes it sufficiently rich to enable him and his mining partner, Eugene Molloy, to take up the lease of their own cattle station in the fringe country of eastern Pilbara where for a few years

they prosper. Then with dramatic suddenness the rhythm breaks: both men die within a year of one another and the good seasons come to an end.

But the book really concerns David Redman, son of Tom and the Aboriginal woman who is accepted wherever they go as Mrs. Redman. To David she is simply Mother.

> Mother is dark, and quiet, smoothskinned and warm-milk breasted, soft handed, and always she is here. Where he lies in his box, she bends over him and he smells her smell, the mother smell of milk and sweat and dust and woodsmoke.

She seldom has much to say but is a practical and ever-willing helpmate to Tom Redman, just as she is a steady and reliable influence in the young years of her son, David. Eugene Molloy wants Tom to send the boy to the Christian Brothers for some education, but Tom elects instead to send him when he is fourteen to the neighboring well-run station, Millanilli, where he believes young Davey will get a more practical kind of education in the capable hands of its owner, John McGrath. And he does too. He learns many more aspects of life than would have been possible for him on their own isolated property, Karrawolgan. He also meets Hannie, third wife of "ole Donald", and he forms a lasting attachment with her that gives the book an idyllic quality as rare as it is unexpected. David, while enjoying their relationship, has some misgivings and Hannie tries to explain when he asks, "What about old Donald?"

> "You proper whitefeller, eh? Orright, ole Tonal my man. He got thad one ole Bonny from his youngtime. He got that one Katrin, *thass* his proper woman. He got me. He don't worryin' 'bout me, long as I don't make him look wrong kind of man. Orright, I come with you, I reckon you good young man, make me feel I'm good young woman. But you too much proper whitefeller, eh? You gotta be talkin' 'bout ole Tonal. Orright, mightbe I'm wrong, mightbe I can't tell you proper way."

But she does and David comes to accept what she has to tell him by her actions. It is David and Hannie we see riding away together from Millanilli after they have left his own drought-stricken Karrawolgan. And with *Prince of my Country,* the first of six already written and acepted novels, we feel that David and Hannie are about to enter upon a series of events where the rhythm of the story-line will not always be as smooth as it is in this book. My guess is that the sequence of novels to be called *The Conjurer's Years* may well become an Australian classic. At the very least this one, with its splendid characterization and its beautifully modulated prose, is a fine beginning to that sequence.

COWAN, PORTER, VONDRA, MURNANE

Garry Engwerder

Peter Cowan: *The Tins and Other Stories* (U.Q.P., $4 and $1.95).

Hal Porter: *Fredo Fuss Love Life* (Angus & Robertson, $5.25).

Josef Vondra: *Paul Zwilling* (Wren, $5.25).

Gerald Murnane: *Tamarisk Row* (Heinemann, $5.40).

Someone whose name escapes me for the moment once said that a reviewer should not try to overpower a book but should rather allow himself to be taken in by it.

Right, I said, thinking that to be a particularly significant statement, I will not try to force my ego onto the work. I'll be passive and receptive. I'll listen instead of arguing. Ah, dear reader, how quickly such good intentions were abandoned. The author of that worthy statement was obviously never exposed to short stories like those of Peter Cowan and Hal Porter. Either collection would have the venerable St Francis reaching for his club.

Peter Cowan has written a series of claustrophobic stories entitled *Tins* about loneliness, and loneliness is a terrible thing folks. Really it is. It's no joke. You wander around crashing into scenes, walk along beaches, paint a bit and generally brood a lot. Or at least Cowan's characters do. They appear as a bunch of ill-assorted neurotics never quite overcoming that barrier between themselves and their fulfilment. Naturally you would expect such introvert characters to be a little more perceptive than your average citizen. Not so. In fact the author has to work damned hard to produce the insights for the characters and it is this maddening intrusion of the author on the characters' behalf that weakens this collection. Time and again we have the author subsidising a party of creations, pressing them onto us. That amount of prodding should not be necessary.

Stoic, lonely people are dull from the outside — the real drama is on the inside beneath the often hard shell. Unfortunately that hard shell is never cut away by Peter Cowan because, to put it simply, the tools are too blunt.

Hal Porter, on the other hand, is a demon of a different color. In his collection of short stories entitled *Fredo Fuss Love Life* he assumes the mantle of a world weary, bemused cynic — a writer who observes the idiosyncrasies of the modern world with a raised eyebrow.

Yet there can be no doubt that he has a nose for the particular. The girl in "Jessie" going home on the Tube for example, "swaying above rancid hair oil and gamey arm pits" — or he can write with a certain charm about a whole range of international characters. For example when describing the mystery man upstairs in a London apartment building: "The boys extravagantly give us the impression that he's a species of horror film cross between necrophile and an unhinged religieux. She says he's a nice, quiet, little man, a dishwasher in a Wimpy bar".

The stories have that touch of class. They are diligently crafted, meticulous and a little pointless. Imagine if Shakespeare had written a multivolumed work on the life and times of Zelda Frump and you had to review it. There you have it you see. You somehow feel that Porter could have put his talents to a less trivial use. And trivial it is despite its seductive, stylistic charm.

Josef Vondra's *Paul Zwilling* is a migrant's story although you wouldn't think so if you judged books by their covers — why it should have "Urgent for the Prime Minister" pasted across the top is beyond me. A sort of poor man's Saul Bellow, Vondra writes about migrant alienation sympathetically through the medium of a disenchanted, inscrutable European intellectual. Paul Zwilling is an emotionally and spiritually derelict person. He has trouble with an uncommunicative father back home, his girl friends, and an ex-wife, as well as with the feeling that, being between two worlds, he is not really at home in either. His problems and fears are compounded by his degenerate alter ego,a fellow migrant named Willie who virtually lives off him. As the dust cover tells us, Willie emerges as the symbol of the fate Zwilling is trying to avoid. (Unfortunately the conflict between the life options never assumes the form of an entirely convincing inner struggle. Zwilling fails to convince us that he is attempting to decide between life and death.)

The difficulty is in the presentation of the character of Paul himself. Vondra has made him too much of a fatalist to begin with, and the subsequent soul-searching seems out of character. In a cliched ending the author washes his hands of his character, perhaps because he no longer knows what to do with him.

"But surely there must be one good one in amongst that lot." Yes, dear friends, that there is. Gerald Murnane's *Tamarisk Row* is, to use the bopper's parlance, "the Red Bullet Performer".

Clement Killeaton is a young boy growing up in the small country town of Basset in the late 1940s. His soul is in state of siege in a world created much too large for him. He is threatened by the unpredictability and precariousness of the adult world represented by his father, his associates and their fortunes. He has to come to terms with his own childish sexuality, the bullies at school, his sensitivity and his being a Catholic in a largely Protestant community.

As a partial refuge from these concerns he finds solace in a fantasy world of his own. Playing marbles comes to symbolise the central concerns of his life. The colors inside the marbles take on a spiritual aspect in the boy's life as the world of Basset seems to move on around him.

The novel's faults are relatively minor ones. It overstresses the symbolic thread somewhat, and the italicised breaks in the story seem a little unnecessary, but who cares. It is a most convincing book — it depicts the rawness of the time and place, the limbo of Basset and the fantastic fears of children with conviction. Its simplicity serves only to underline its honesty, and it is that honesty combined with talent that makes this first novel a winner.

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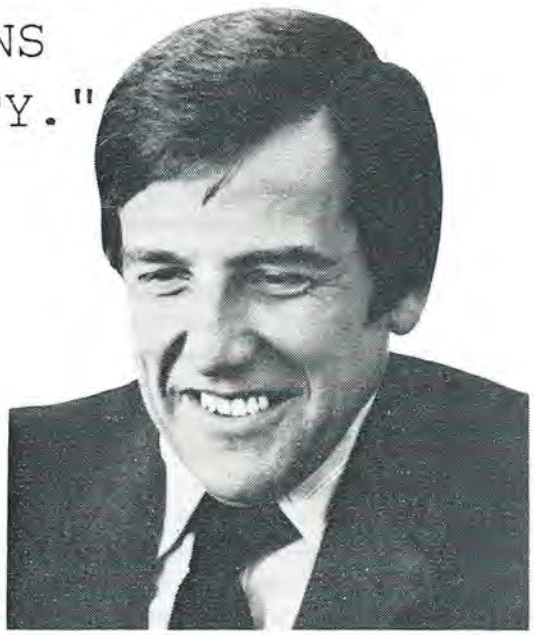

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