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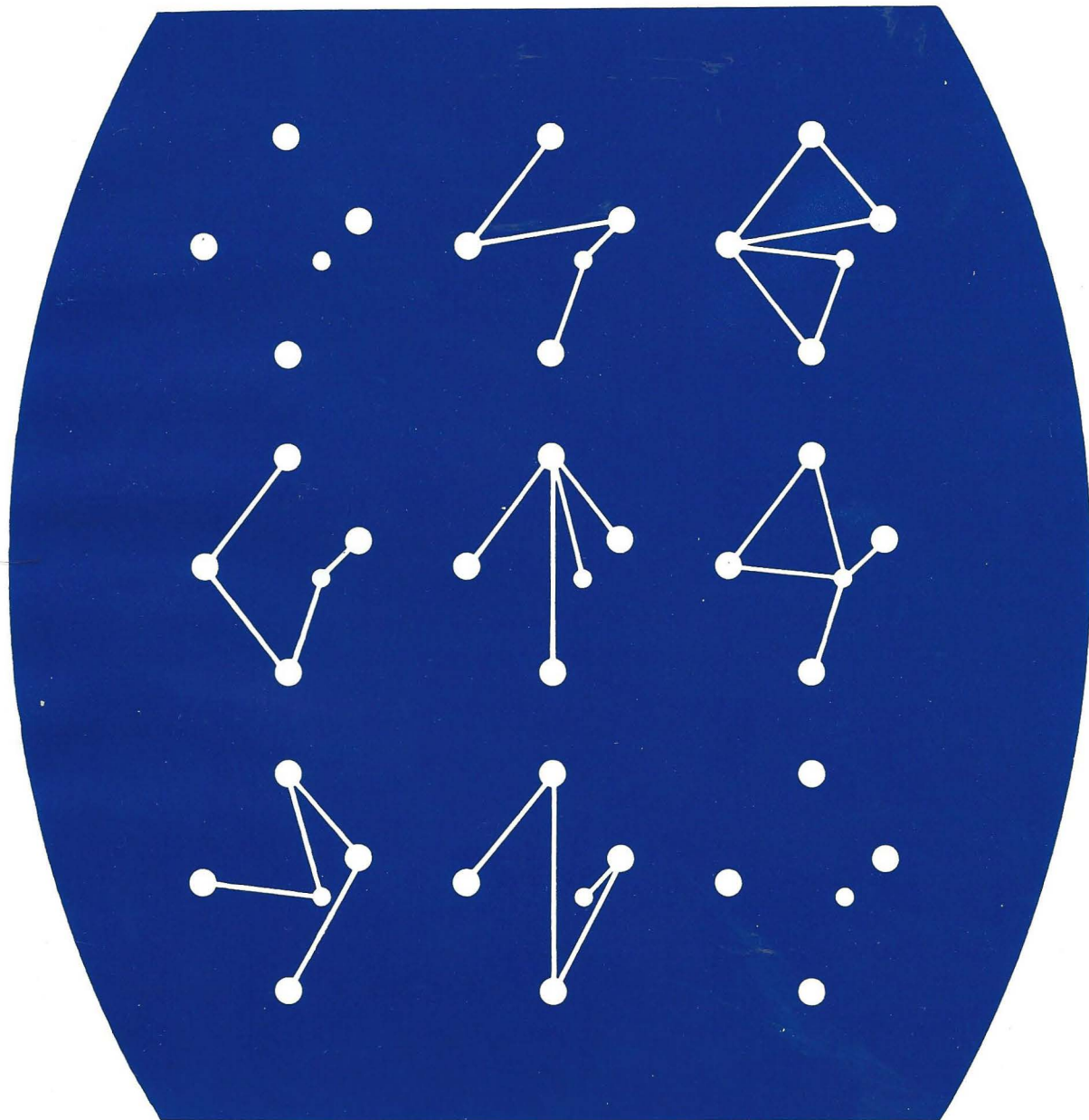
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FEATURES
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1

He is a few months off his eightieth birthday. Today, as nearly every day, weather permitting, he is in his backyard garden, sweeping up dead leaves. His dog, a sprightly cross between Pomeranian and chihuahua, trots and prances beside him – as though expecting a brightly-colored ball to come flying through the air: to bounce and be retrieved. He speaks to the dog as if it were a favorite child, never crossly or impatiently. The dog, in turn, obeys him to the letter. There is a rare form of communication between them, often unspoken, that relies on nothing more than a turn of the head or the pointing of a finger. The sky is a pastel grey, with a hint of Chinese calligraphy in its transparency. The autumn sun invades the remaining leaves on branches and they shed a brown light of their own. From where I stand, at the white wire-and-steel gate, the scene has a rural glow about it – a reflection of fertility and growth, even though it is late afternoon and I feel I should step back: even though I am in too much of a hurry to appreciate fruit trees and camellias, pines and the rows of vegetables in a small, fenced-off garden.

Why hasn't the dog heard me? It usually does from that distance – when I arrive alone or with the children. Like today. Unannounced.

The movements of his arms are slow, steady. The broom never misses its intended leaf. The way he holds the broom – sweeping it across his path and back, to his side and behind him – reminds me of how farmers use a scythe. Or the way I have seen him swing a pick in his younger days and dig up dirt with one of those long-handled, short-end shovels that were standard equipment in the Water Board, nearly thirty years ago.

2

Half-past five in the morning.

How exciting!

I dress by the light of my bedlamp. Outside it is still dark. The floorboards under the carpet creak, even though I tread as lightly as I can in the hope of not waking anybody else.

There is a tapping on my door. I open it.

“Are you ready?”

“Nearly, Dad.”

My father is already dressed. In the corridor's darkness he stands like a ghost. The thought of leaving the room's warmth chills me and I shiver.

“Your breakfast's on the table; don't be long . . .”

But in the kitchen I discover there is no need to talk in whispers or walk around on tiptoes. My mother is putting out the Weetbix and warm milk. Eggs are still boiling in a saucepan on the stove.

As I sit down, a wave of sleep rushes over me and I long to be back in bed, under my eiderdown; but a clattering at the sink reminds me this is the kitchen and I must eat. My parents speak to each other and it seems that a routine is being followed. Food. Drink. Table. Chairs. Everything is part of a ritual that I am not usually involved in. The rooster crows in the hen-house and for some reason I look up and notice the light in the kitchen, its reflection off the pale blue wall and how it spreads out from the circular white-glass shade.

“Did you dress warmly?” my mother asks.

I reply that I did, and know she is referring to underwear – to whether I am wearing cotton or wool.

“Remember to do what your father says and don't get in anybody's way.”

Again, I nod in agreement.

When my breakfast is finished it is nearly time to leave, but I excuse myself and run outside, instead of using the toilet in the bathroom.

The dawn's air attaches itself to my face like a damp cloth and I watch my breath condense into little clouds in the grey light. Another breath and another. My shoes leave prints on the dewy grass.

Under the fruit trees, beside the hen-house and its wire enclosure, I stand and pee. Steam rises and I find myself looking over the back fence: over the bushland reserve where soft bird-noises can just be heard. The sky is smudged with yellow. In the hen-house the fowls are restless. Spiro, the rooster, crows again. The family's dog runs up beside me, sniffs at my urine and stands there, wagging his tail.

“C'mon, boy,” I say, just as my father calls out from the back steps.

“Let's go.”

The fruit trees crowd over me, then they seem to part – to open up a way that is mine alone. Plum trees, manda-

rin, lemons, one large old apple tree. Under them, I feel as content as I do in my bed under the big eiderdown. I pull down a branch and smell the scent of wet leaves, bark and grass. The whole yard is breathing life.

"Hurry up," my father urges.

"Just wash my hands, Dad – only be a sec."

The train is speeding out of the western suburbs, travelling further south towards the newer, developing areas: past Sefton, Chester Hill, Villawood . . . towards Liverpool, from where we will catch a bus to our destination, Green Valley. For much of the journey the railway line runs along a high embankment and overlooks the backyards of homes – their sheds, garages, outhouses, trees of many varieties that glisten with the damp.

Streetlights are still on; houses have their blinds drawn and traffic is at a minimum. The 6.10 a.m. "All Stations to Liverpool" rattles with a clackety-clack rhythm, and squeaks when it comes to a rusty, nerve-grating stop at each station. My father sits upright in the aisle seat and stares past me. He has rolled his own cigarette from a yellow pouch of Jubilee. In his thick, turtleneck pullover and brown felt Akubra hat, he might pass for a secret service agent – except that his knowledge of English spoken and written, is of such an elementary standard it would not obtain him even the lowest of clerical positions.

Blue cigarette smoke drifts past me into the window, rolls off and floats away into the almost-empty carriage. We speak very little; and although I want to ask questions about what I'll do all day, I choose not to – thinking it best to wait and see, otherwise the day might be spoilt before it starts.

It is the first week of the school holidays, and I have waited impatiently for this morning – to be up before the birds and travelling out through the sleeping suburbs: to watch yellow light streaking over the red terracotta-tiled roofs and trying to imagine thousands of people asleep in their beds. Instead, I am thinking of my father, his age and the circumstances of his life: how it must feel to be in one's fifties and have arrived in Australia ten years earlier. So many times I've listened to his account of being in forced labor under the Nazis and seeing men shot in the fields for refusing to be marched away, heard him curse Hitler for destroying Poland. But the concepts, the ideas are difficult to think about – or something distracts me from dwelling on any of that for too long and my reverie becomes broken.

"You're deep in thought, Andrew?"

Rarely does he call me "Andrew" in English – and then, when he does, I think he is joking.

"How far away are we now?"

"Liverpool's after Warwick Farm . . . Another five minutes; then by bus for nearly twenty minutes."

"Have you ever missed the bus?"

"No."

"Or the train?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"The rooster always wakes me on time," he laughs.

His laugh is soft, private, travelling no more than a few

feet. The "rooster" he refers to is the enormous silver clock that dominates the dressing table beside his bed.

He stubs out his cigarette in the aisle, his mind falling back into silence. He is not a heavily-built man, but is sinewy and lean. His hands are broad, calloused, with thick brownish fingernails and knuckles that are reddened and large: as if the hands they belonged to had been lifting or carrying heavy objects for a long time. As my eyes run over him quickly, I decide, no, maybe he could not be a secret service agent because there are too many grey and dark colors on him: dressed in the grey waist coat or thick woollen trousers, a darker grey – or his heavy black shoes and old black leather briefcase. No, there is too much uniformity in all that. A spy would need something lighter, less conspicuous to wear. Otherwise his disguise would be seen as being overly 'underground'.

But the cream-colored letters of the word "Liverpool" suddenly appear on a platform seat outside the window and my father stands up; I do likewise, preparing to follow. Instead of stepping ahead, he pauses, turns around and motions for me to go first. I do so, obediently. For a moment he waits, then follows. As if I were somebody important.

The site is a complex of large, portable tin sheds, compressors, a crane, backhoe, jackhammers; steel, concrete and clay pipes; bags of cement, blue metal, sand, picks and shovels. Men walk about in overalls and work clothes of different sorts; everyone is wearing either gumboots or black hob-nailed boots.

"Ah, Anton, you have your son with you today?"

Even before we are introduced, I realize who this man is and why he is the foreman – this Harry Thompson: a Hungarian immigrant who came to Australia in the late 1940s, who married an Australian woman and completed his assimilation with Australian culture by anglicising his name. My father speaks of him a lot at home. Sometimes I think it is with a begrudging strain of reverence, at other times it is with disdain because of what he has done with his name. My mother, on the other hand, makes no secret of her feelings: she cannot abide the man – no matter how successful he might be in his job.

"Yes, yes . . ." my father repeats, thrusting me forward. To shake a hand that is scrubbed clean like a shammy.

"The boy who is so clever at school?" Turning to me, he adds, "Your father is very proud of you."

It is more than just embarrassment, acute as that might be; but what sense or inadequacy makes me turn away and try to find an interest in men grouped together – distributing picks and shovels, uncoiling black hoses and attaching them to pumps: men who look at me and continue walking past, some of whom I can understand, others not? There are Yugoslavs, Italians, Poles, Russians, Hungarians, Czechs. Occasionally there is someone whose words are clean, rounded with vowels, unblemished and nasal: the 'dinkum' Aussie. Otherwise, voices are heavy with guttural accents – broken, foreign, strange. These are the 'new' Australians: the imported, manual laborers.

At ten o'clock the men stop work for smoko – which means they pause virtually where they stand or return to the base huts and have a cigarette or cup of tea. The Billy Boy has prepared tea in a large blackened enamel pot which he has placed on a bare table for the men to come up and be served. Sugar is in a dirty biscuit tin. A spoon is stuck in it. There is no milk. The whole arrangement seems crude and regimental, but it appears to work. My father brings over a cup and hands it to me; it is full of sweet, black tea – he also has one and we squat against the wall of a hut, sipping.

“So, how have you occupied yourself so far?”

“Watching, mostly; walking around the area and having a look. I went down the road as far as the river.”

“It will be houses one day . . . Most of this land belongs to the Housing Commission.”

“Why don't they leave the bush as it is?”

“People must have somewhere to live – even now there are plans for us to take the main sewer line down towards the river, where you went; but first we must finish connecting up the lines here.” As he speaks he draws lines in the air to indicate where he means the pipe lines will go.

“How long will it take?”

“Too long!” Then he laughs, adding, “But there'll be lots of work for lots of men – and that, too, is important . . . Come on, back to work.”

He tosses the remains of his cup into the sandy dirt and stands up, throwing his cigarette butt into the patch of wet ground. Standing up, I follow.

It is early afternoon, lunch has been eaten and at half-past four it will be time to “knock off” work – to exchange clothes, walk to the bus stop and start the return trip homewards. Most of the men are working around a long trench that disappears deep into the ground, at an angle, like a long slippery dip; its sides are lined with long flat boards to prevent cave-ins. At the side of this, somewhat monstrously, a crane has been manoeuvred into position so that a long black steel pipe can be lowered into the trench.

Looking down into the excavation from where I stand, the day rushes up at me momentarily from the darkness. I see myself eating a packed lunch from home, sardine-and-lettuce sandwiches washed down with black tea, listening to the men talk and laugh among themselves. Their reliance upon the “boss” to do the smallest thing is almost total, slavish. They ask what he thinks of something in the news, they ask him to repeat instructions, directions, the interpreting of a plan or how to fill out the claim voucher for reimbursement of travelling expenses – a procedure familiar to me because I fill out my father's for him every second week before pay day. The river flows past my eyes languidly, its green surface textured by wrinkles and the drag of an underwater current whose force I am trying to measure in manual strength and find the problem impossible. It flows on, past me, further southwards, through regions of bushland where cranes and peewits fly over. I am throwing stones into it, a pocketful of blue metal taken from the site – trying to hit the opposite bank where cows and horses are grazing, asking myself why must houses be built here?

But around me the bush has become a sudden rushing of bodies, a panic of voices – men calling for Harry Thompson to hurry over. The long black pipe has slipped out of its sling and trapped Joe, an Italian worker, in the trench.

Trying to get a closer look, I bump into several men who ignore me and continue crowding the open trench. There is a long cry and a wooden, thudding sound as the pipe slides off the supporting planks and settles at the bottom of the excavation.

Harry Thompson rushes over, pushes his way through the workers and peers down. He is distracted, thrown off guard by this accident, terror-stricken for a moment; then he calls out, “Back, get back, everyone. We need light to see clearly . . . Back, men!” He holds his arms out in a semi-circle, trying to restrain the gang of workers – which he does, all except one: my father. Even before I fully realize what is happening, I see my father brace himself into a crouching position, low, knees under his chin, arms tucked into his side – like a skier racing downhill in the snowfields – gripping his long-handled shovel that drags behind him as he slides on the surface dirt of the trench – down, down, down. Pebbles and clods of earth in his wake. Until he bumps into the black pipe. Men are shouting encouragement around me – calling back to him: “Good man, good man!” Or, “Hang on, Joe!” I can see enough into the shadows to understand he is using the shovel like a crowbar: trying to lever the pipe forwards or back – just enough for the Italian man to be able to slide out his leg. There is a long, strenuous grunt from my father and a loud “Hooray!” from the men around me; and although I cannot see into the end of the trench, I know that my father must have shifted the pipe. Harry Thompson, once again, seems bewildered, lost for words, perplexed: unable to instigate a decisive course of action.

“Back, men, back!” he continues yelling, “Make room – more, more room!”

Fortunately, Joe's leg was not broken, just heavily bruised and skinned. One of the workers rushed him in his car to Casualty at the local hospital. For the life of me, I could not understand why his leg did not break; but when I asked my father he said he would explain later.

Everyone congratulated my father – especially the Italians, with their *grazie* and *eroe*, over and over, their emotional embraces, back-slapping and vigorous handshakes. Work was abandoned for the rest of the afternoon and Harry Thompson told everyone to go home; but my father shrugged his shoulders, and asked, “How can we – there is no earlier bus?” Going over to the hand-basins filled with water he washed himself, rubbing the yellow cake of Sunlight into his face and hands, over his arms, as if he were trying to wipe out an image from his mind or away from his eyes.

“Can I help?” I asked.

“Be ready with the towel,” he said, pointing over to his towel at the end of the bench.

I watched as he stripped off to the waist, lifted another basin of water over his head and, bending forward, tipped the water over himself – shivering with laughter and

pleasure as it ran down his muscular body into his trousers.

"Ah, ah . . . There it goes! Beautiful . . . All the way to my toes!"

Returning in the train, I finally sensed when the moment might be right, to ask, "How did you know Joe's leg wasn't broken?"

"The surface dirt was too soft and his leg just sank under the weight of the pipe – which didn't fall directly on to his leg, but sort of rolled over it. But it could have broken, once the dirt settled and the pipe could go further. The point is, time was of the essence, and there was more to do than stand around and call encouragements from above."

He slaps his hands together and rolls a cigarette. I look for the red and white "Non-Smoking" signs in this carriage and see there are none. Unlike the morning train, this one is a lot more crowded with men and women, most of them factory workers, returning to their homes.

As my father lights up his cigarette he repeats the words "time" and "essence", pointing a finger at the floor as if he were teaching a child a lesson. Other than that, he says nothing. I wonder what it meant; but I am afraid of showing my ignorance, and, I too, say nothing.

3

But memory fails me in the present, and I don't know why I've come to visit my parents. Maybe there is no reason. Maybe I just came over because I wanted to see them. As a surprise.

Looking down at my clothes, the precise matching of shirt and tie, shoes, trousers, jumper and winter jacket, I

feel out of place: wrongly dressed to be standing at the entrance of the garden where I grew up. Why should it feel wrong? My parents insisted on a high standard of education; I achieved a profession as a result of that education, and now must dress appropriately.

As he sweeps, my father approaches me, comes closer to the gate between us. The dog, the third he has owned, has not yet seen me. The sky has darkened a little. Leaves fly up, away from his feet. The dog continues with its doll-like frolics.

Remembering the incident of the trench creates a mist before my eyes, a hazy recollection of a day I had not thought of for years. Then I think to myself: perhaps I should walk away and return announced – sound the car horn and make the tyres screech as I turn off the road into the driveway. It even occurs to me that this is all a myth, something dreamt of and never existing like wood or steel exists: that this is a remnant of a child's memory that lingers and distorts itself – a delusion to be ignored and forgotten.

But the boy that dresses by a bedlamp one morning, at half-past five, mocks me with his excitement. The clods of earth that fall down the trench into which my father slides are still falling. The water that splashes over his head and body is still trickling to the ground. The train's clackety-clack is reverberating in my head, and my father repeats the words "time" and "essence", pointing to the floor as he does. If all this is still happening, how can that day have been just a myth?

Even as I try to answer myself the dog pricks up its ears, notices me and barks. As he does, I see that my left hand is raised to lift the latch of the gate. As my father looks up, I realize with a pained sense of loss that I have left it too late to make my arrival known – that I will never know which of us responded to the other's presence first.

ROBERT DARBY

The Fall of Fortress Criticism

The chief glory of every people arises from
its authors.

—Samuel Johnson, *Preface to the Dictionary*.

Meanwhile, Momus fearing the worst, and calling to mind an antient Prophecy, which bore no very good Face to his Children the Moderns; bent his Flight to the Region of a malignant Deity, call'd Criticism. She dwelt on the Top of a snowy Mountain in Nova Zembla; there Momus found her extended in her Den, upon the spoils of numberless Volumes half devoured. At her right Hand sat Ignorance, her Father and Husband, blind with Age; at her left, Pride her Mother, dressing her up in the Scraps of Paper herself had torn. There, was Opinion her Sister, light of Foot, hoodwinkt, and headstrong, yet giddy and perpetually turning. About her play'd her Children, Noise and Impudence, Dullness and Vanity, Pedantry and Ill-Manners. The Goddess herself had Claws like a Cat: Her Head, and Ears and Voice resembled those of an Ass; Her Teeth fallen out before; Her Eyes turned inward, as if she lookt only upon herself: Her Diet was the overflowing of her own Gall: her Spleen was so large, as to stand prominent like a Dug of the first Rate, nor wanted Excrescencies in form of Teats, at which a Crew of ugly Monsters were greedily sucking.

Jonathan Swift, "A full and true account of the Battel fought last Friday between the antient and the modern books in St James Library".

In 1866 Australia's first important critic, G.B. Barton, wrote that unless popular attitudes changed the prospects for an independent literature were dim: "Patriotism has not yet developed itself amongst us; and the history of the world has shown that where there has been no patriotism, there never has been a literature." Such a sentiment may not have inspired the publisher, but patriotism, in its best sense, is the right word for the devoted labors of Joy Hooton, Barry Andrews and William Wilde in producing the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, which is everything a good mate should be: tolerant, competent and usually reliable. Barton would be pleased that popular attitudes have changed enough to make their mark on academic publishing.

A *companion* to literature lies somewhere between a bibliography and a history, so OCAL offers us neither the comprehensiveness of Morris Miller's *Australian Literature 1788–1938* (1940; revised 1956), nor the coverage and depth of H.M. Green's *History of Australian Literature* (1961), though it is heavily indebted to both, and in

its readiness to make critical judgments seems particularly influenced by the latter. The editors have followed the example of Sir Paul Harvey, who wrote in his Preface to the first edition of the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* (1932) that his aim had been to compile "a useful companion to ordinary everyday readers." Like him, OCAL's editors have included two main types of entry: the first covers authors and works; the second, allusions met in Australian writing, including people, places, events, terms and other information relevant to filling in the cultural and historical context in which literature is written and received. Authors (of non-fiction as well as "creative" works) are defined widely enough to include critics, editors, journalists, scholars and patrons, while among the allusions will be found entries ranging from 'larrikins' to the 'Commonwealth Literary Fund.' The great virtue of Harvey has always been the richness of its information in the allusions category; by following this pattern, Wilde, Hooton and Andrews have given us not only a very valuable guide to our literature, but probably the most useful single-

volume reference book on Australian culture and history.

The *Companion* takes the opposite approach to that of the *Oxford History of Australian Literature* (1981), which was a highly selective survey of what the authors considered the best Australian writers. While the *Companion* has been greeted with almost universal enthusiasm, the *History* was met with a coolness bordering on contempt, a fact which may explain why the only hostile review of the former issued from the pen of Adrian Mitchell, author of the section on fiction in the latter. Mitchell's bitter and rather churlish review is largely a complaint that OCAL offers too much: it is "built on the suburban trash and treasure principle. There is more here than you want and more than you need." Mitchell concedes that its inclusiveness is a virtue, but he also asserts that this is the "great liability" of the book, which should have been "more rigorously edited". He also takes exception to the content of some entries, notably those on Slessor, McAuley and Koch, all golden boys of the *History* and, to recognise the political undertones, favorites of the Quadrant crowd. In a revealing aside, Mitchell complains that the *Companion's* coverage "may be God's plenty. It may also be too much." To understand the significance of these phrases requires a look at what John Docker has called "the struggles for the control of Australian literature" since the 1950s.

To speak of struggles is not to indulge in hyperbole. When the *Oxford History* was published, John Bremer referred to the event as "Chapter I in the great literary battle", predicted "howls of protest over who has been included and who has been excluded" and expected "good arguments ahead" (*Australian*, 18 March 1981). Reviewing the reissue of H.M. Green's *History of Australian Literature* in 1985, Don Anderson contrasted it with the Oxford effort and referred to "an Australian Battle of the Books . . . with Oxford on the right and Green on the left." (*National Times*, 12-18 April 1985).

The battle had really begun in the late 1940s with the rise of academic criticism. Before this time little Australian literature was taught in the universities. Zora Cross based her *Introduction to the Study of Australian Literature* (1922) on lectures given at Sydney Teachers' College, and J.J. Stable introduced Australian material into the English course at Queensland in the 1920s, but such injections were drops in the ocean. H.M. Green gave lectures and marked examination papers in Australian literature at Sydney in the 1930s, but (until research reveals otherwise) it must be said that the first full unit in Australian literature was introduced at Canberra University College in 1955. A Chair was established (by public subscription) at Sydney University in 1964, but the first two occupants (Professors G.A. Wilkes and Leonie Kramer) had done their doctorates in English literature at Oxford.

With the near absence of academic interest in Australian writing, criticism was the domain of other creative writers, editors, journalists and the occasional scholar from another field, and there was always a lively contention between the various 'schools': A.G. Stephens versus Douglas Sladen or Edward E. Morris in the 1890s, Walter

Murdoch, T.G. Tucker and Archibald Strong in the period leading up to the Great War. With the renaissance of Australian literature in the late 1920s, criticism also revived. Major names from the 1930s and 1940s included Nettie Palmer, Frederick Macartney, Frank Wilmot, Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw, H.M. Green and Frank Dalby Davison, none of whom held an academic post.

Despite assertions that such writers constituted a narrow critical orthodoxy which demanded crude (gumtree) Australianism in literary work, their views were diverse, the critical atmosphere pluralist, and interest in overseas writing quite marked (especially in Nettie Palmer's essays). The real sins of what became known as the "radical nationalists" in the eyes of the new generation of academic critics which emerged in the 1950s was that they were conscious of their nationality, they asserted the relevance of the social context of literature, and most of them were politically 'left' – not an orientation which attracted praise from the ambitious during the Cold War.

The 'new critics' did not so much overpower a previous critical orthodoxy as constitute the first academic critical establishment, with definite views on how literature should be appreciated. As John Docker points out, the new critics secured influential posts

just as the universities were massively expanding, and in the icy climate of the Cold War. The Cold War influenced a lofty, end-of-ideology view which looked down on the social, political, ideological and utopian as an unworthy human interest, and which paraded the moral and metaphysical as the supreme location of interesting experience, and hence literature as of supreme interest. In a further, comforting, move the social and political, ideological and utopian, were perceived as pertaining only to the extra-literary, while the moral and metaphysical were identified as strictly or purely literary. In the garden of criticism, the metaphysical nestles up against the literary/aesthetic, other perspectives being exiled beyond its high walls.

A similar view has been put forward by Brian Kiernan, a colleague of Leonie Kramer, Adrian Mitchell and others at Sydney University:

The dominant concern of academic critics in the later fifties and early sixties was . . . not the attempt to produce a historical synthesis but to establish evaluatively a "canon" of Australian writing. The introduction of Australian literature courses brought, under the prevailing and ostensibly anti-ideological "New Criticism", an emphasis on literary values and on selective close reading rather than on historical inclusiveness. During the Cold War, academic attacks on the "confusion" of literary and political values were not always unaffected by political considerations.

When H.M. Green's *History of Australian Literature* appeared in 1961 it caused the new critics some embarrassment. They could neither match nor deny its scholarship, yet the work embodied everything they opposed: concern with the social context of literature, interest in the question of its Australianness and an explicit willingness to make political/moral comment. As Kiernan observes, the delayed publication of the *History* gave it the air of a visitor from another age, since its "confusion" between literary and social criteria in literary judgements was by then under fire from the new critical orthodoxy.

It took the new critics twenty years to prepare their answer to Green: the *Oxford History of Australian Literature*, edited by the Professor of Australian Literature at Sydney University. Leonie Kramer must have had more pressing tasks. In her inaugural lecture (1968) she told her listeners they "must face the fact that there is not enough Australian literature to constitute a full course of study for a pass student, let alone an honours one." Still, she was brave enough to take a full professor's salary and confront the terrible void. Australia's position, she continued, was like that of

an English university in the seventeenth century [which] wanted to devise a course in English literature . . . It would not have been possible, in the mid-seventeenth century, to construct a full English literature course, without having recourse to figures so minor that they could hardly have been included, or without bolstering the course with historical and language studies to give it weight and substance.

A less discriminating scholar might have felt that a course including Beowulf, Chaucer, Langland, Malory, Spenser, Marlowe, Bacon, Richard Hooker, Raleigh, the King James Bible, new voices like Donne, Milton and Marvell, quite apart from upstarts like Shakespeare, might not have been too impoverished; but the point of Kramer's assertion is that, if England had not produced enough good literature in one thousand years, what hope had Australia after only 180? As for history, she defines a modern English course as existing only "by asserting . . . its independence of historical studies." Leonie Kramer also observed that English universities were "wise or timid" enough not to establish English schools until the early twentieth century.

This may broadly be so, though English literature was taught at Oxford from the 1870s and at University College, London, from its inception in the 1820s. Unfortunately for Kramer's claims about the irrelevance of politics to literary studies, and her suggestion that it was due to an insufficient bulk of works, the delay had nothing to do with waiting for enough literature to accumulate. English literature had to battle against the dominance of Classics in much the same way as Australian literature has had to oppose the hegemony of English (also European and American) studies. English literature gained prominence in English universities, and the education system generally, in the early twentieth century for consciously politi-

cal and explicitly nationalistic reasons. As Chris Baldick and D.J. Palmer have shown, between the 1870s and 1920s English graduated from a marginal, 'dilettante' subject, suitable for "women . . . and the second and third rate men who . . . become schoolmasters" (as an Oxford professor delicately put it in 1893), to a prestigious academic discipline, calculated to train the rulers of an empire and fit to imbue the masses with wholesome respect for its achievements.

If Green's work was published ten years after its time, the *Oxford History* was twenty years late. As an attempt to codify the 1960s orthodoxy, it was already out of date on the day of publication, despite ridiculous claims about marching in bravely to do battle with the sacred cows of "radical nationalism", cows which had already been desanctified by the New Left in the 1970s. The *History's* aim was a "highly selective and critical survey" which "attempts to place in perspective the successes and failures of Australian writers up to the present" – especially the failures, one feels after reading it.

Despite the promise that it would "look afresh" at our literary history "with the detachment that temporal distance makes possible", and its pathetic pretence at iconoclasm, the *Oxford History* was right back in the debates of the 1950s and added little to what G.A. Wilkes, Vincent Buckley, A.D. Hope and others had already said. The predictable whipping boy for all of them was Vance Palmer (died 1959), whose influence as a critic was not great in the 1950s but who, for all his faults as a creative writer, had done more to encourage Australian literature than most of the new critics.

As John Docker showed in his savage review, the *Oxford History* presented itself as a fresh voice in revolt against a radical nationalist orthodoxy, the monotonous tactic of the new critics who had themselves become the orthodoxy in the early 1960s. In her introduction, Kramer attacked interest in the question of Australianness as prescriptive and restrictive, but reviewers were quick to note that the real prescriptions were issuing from the *History* itself. Docker ridiculed its attempt to set up narrow guidelines for authors, particularly of fiction, and Brian Elliott (no young Turk) expressed concern that when Kramer talked about the need for academic authority, she really meant "authoritarianism" and "dictatorship". She and Mitchell evince the same prescriptive attitude which Victor Daley satirised in A.G. Stephens:

I am the Blender of the pure
Australian Brand of literature.
No verse, however fine, can be
The radiant thing called Poetry
Unless it is approved by me.
I am the Critic set on high . . .

But they are coldly authoritarian, lacking Stephens' wit, generosity and anti-colonial inspiration.

Apart from Docker, the *History's* most severe critic was Dorothy Green, who castigated it as "less a history than a collection of subjective articles", not comprehensive, and narrow in its range of sympathies. Green

particularly attacked Adrian Mitchell's section on fiction for its selectiveness, narrowness of vision and its total contempt for important regions of literary territory, notably social realism: any work tainted with this (never defined) disease was either passed over in silence or dismissed out of hand. The general aim of the book, Green regretted, "appears to be not to tell the reader what is there but to establish a canon. We are presented, not with God's plenty, but with a list of Approved Authors". Mitchell counter-attacked with a hostile review of Dorothy Green's collection of critical essays, *The Music of Love* (1984), in which he condemned her tendency to "break away from a critical response to make some kind of assertion about the world, politics, morality" and other trivia. That Mitchell should serve back the phrase "God's plenty" in his review of the *Companion* attests the continuity of the debate and the depth of the critical passions involved.

The next phase in the battle of the books was the publication of Dorothy Green's long awaited revision of H.M. Green's *History of Australian Literature* in 1985. Reviewers were lavish in their praise, but not Adrian Mitchell, who attacked Green's "bristling, unnecessarily defensive foreword" and accused her of "defacing a public monument" by adding her own comments on the degeneration of the media to H.M. Green's discussion of the press. Don Anderson remarked that to deface a public monument might sometimes be a political duty – as it was for those still unknown heroes who painted PEACE in enormous white letters on the pillars of Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance the night before Anzac Day 1970, an act for which the RSL demanded they be hanged. If, as Anderson remarks, Mitchell is the RSL to Dorothy's dissenter, he cannot be accused of wanting her hanged, but it is fair to say that he objects to her additional comments only when he disagrees with their substance. He approves of her "crisp, snappy, trenchant" notice on Miles Franklin's feminism and Randolph Bedford's fictional definition of the "rural bludge", but he cavils when she applies the same intelligence to the press, education or nuclear war. Mitchell writes that her comments about media image-making in modern electioneering have "nothing to do with Australian literature" as H.M. Green practised it, yet a glance at Green's work will show that he was not scared to take a political stand: his account of the press incorporates an attack on monopolising tendencies and declining freedom of speech; he ends by asserting the need for a labor-movement newspaper. As always with those who object to the expression of political opinion, it is not politics as such that they dislike, but critical political attitudes.

It is extraordinary to see so political a figure as Leonie Kramer (former Chairman of the ABC, a director of the ANZ Bank, an editor of *Quadrant*, and so on) warning that a concern about Australianness "introduces extra-literary considerations into criticism" and that critical protectionism can lay down "conditions in which literary values are less important than social attitudes." Does she really expect people to believe that her advocacy of Hal Porter over Patrick White, Martin Boyd over Christina

Stead (though that backfired), James McAuley over John Manifold, and her total dismissal of the literature of the 1930s and 1940s, are not politically influenced?

Kramer's political views pervade her literary judgments and surface in the very place where she deplores the intrusion of politics into criticism. The opening sentence of her Introduction to the *Oxford History* suggests an awareness of historical context she is normally at pains to deny: "This history is written only a decade before the bicentenary of the establishment of the first settlement at Sydney Cove in 1788." That such a reference is no mere cliché is made clear by later remarks about what she likes in Australian literature: "The excitements and dangers of exploration, the qualities of character it demands and elicits, and the mystery of the impulse towards heroic endeavour." She praises *The Tree of Man* for taking up "the theme of pioneering, and the struggles to sustain life in the face of natural disasters. Its chief protagonists create order out of chaos." She criticises Judith Wright, Eleanor Dark and Patrick White (his later work, presumably) for picturing pre-European Australia

as an age of innocence in which Aboriginal man lived in harmony with himself and nature, governed by mystic rules of kinship and primal unity. Even those colonists who, like her [Wright's] own ancestors, endured hardship and displayed courage and tenacity in their pioneering of the land, become ravagers of nature, and torturers of the land and its people. That there is some historical truth in this account does not invalidate the claim that a legend is here substituted for reality.

Two comments should be made on such a heartfelt defence of the pioneers. First, if Leonie Kramer's contempt for the period had not closed her eyes she would know that the revaluation (as Leavis liked to say) of the pioneers began during the 1930s; it is particularly visible in the fiction of Xavier Herbert and Brian Penton, as well as in the non-fiction of many other writers, including Keith Hancock and Frank Dalby Davison. Influenced by D.H. Lawrence's enthusiasm for unspoiled nature, they began to look at the negative side of settlement and soon perceived environmental degradation, destruction of native wild life and persecution of the Aborigines.

Secondly, what we have in Kramer's comments is the conservative side in the current debate over the Bicentennial, and it comes as no surprise to find that she has taken a definite stand on this question. Considering her guarded attitude towards history, it is perhaps surprising that Kramer should take an interest in Australian historiography, but a year or so ago she wrote a review of Sue Fabian's history text, *The Changing Australians*. Kramer attacked Fabian for setting out

to destroy the fiction, as she sees it, of Australian history as the story of a struggle against perilous beginnings, of settlement, discovery, pioneering, and the establishment of a distinctive way of life in a different country.

No reservations about Australianism here: many of the “radical nationalists” of the 1930s had the same vision. She continues:

For her [Fabian], it is a story of cruelty, exploitation, disadvantage, discrimination and injustice, its victims not only Aborigines, convicts and the poor, but also most women and children.

The correct view of Australian history, according to Kramer, is that:

Here is a country which, in two hundred years, has made extraordinary progress in settling a difficult land; it has a proud history of pioneering and exploration, and its people have displayed courage, stamina and fortitude . . . To characterise it as a tool of British imperialism, the heartless promoter of class war and disadvantage, is false and reprehensible.

Kramer’s comments on Fabian’s book appeared in the same issue of the Institute of Public Affairs Review as Ken Baker’s notorious attack on the Australian Bicentennial Authority for setting 1988 to the wrong themes. In particular, Baker condemned the ABA’s national program of projects and events for ignoring the family, the monarchy, free enterprise, the rule of law, the Anzac tradition, assimilation of migrants and “the Australian achievement”, while emphasising “living together”, multi-culturalism, religious diversity, Aboriginal culture, women, the arts, science and education. Baker fears that “guilt about the settlement of Australia by Britain” could be a “guiding sentiment of the celebration”, and he quotes Geoffrey Blainey to the effect that, while settlement was initially a tragedy for the Aborigines, more lives have been saved than were lost by virtue of the increased agricultural productivity which the Europeans

brought with them. “We forget”, he quotes from Blainey, “that the Aborigines . . . had sat on rich resources and been unable to use them.”

It is odd that both Baker and Kramer are more interested in imposing a single view of Australian history than in appreciating its contradictions. A broader mind might see room for measures of both pride and guilt, but *they* would seem to be more interested in political propaganda than historical truth. It is true that Australia has not just been “a tool of British imperialism”—people have also fought against it. In doing so they have often displayed “courage, stamina and fortitude”, but I cannot see Kramer wishing to acknowledge *this* side of our history, nor the vein of anti-imperialist sentiment which runs through Australian literature from the convict ballads to Peter Carey’s *Illywhacker*.

Adrian Mitchell refers in his review to the “defensiveness” of the Foreword to the revised edition of H.M. Green’s *History of Australian Literature*. But Dorothy Green is not defensive at all; she is punchy and aggressive. Although she takes the opportunity to correct misunderstandings of Green’s approach (in particular his sensitive handling of the problem of balance between “representativeness” and “literary quality”), the principal target of her blows, never named, is the *Oxford History*. Green forcefully defends the virtue of what Kramer considers to be cardinal sins: Australianism in literature, attention to historical context, the legitimacy of relevant political/moral comment. In addition, she renews her attack on Kramer and Co’s exclusivist approach:

One of Green’s most important statements of principle was that he was writing a history of works and their authors, not of authors and their works. He had no intention of establishing a canon. This principle enabled him to take account of excellence wherever he found it and so avoid the narrowness and lack of variety . . . which afflicts histories based on the opposite principle.

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Referring to the sheer ignorance of those who are interested in only “the best” (i.e. the well-known) works, she points out that readers expect a reference book to tell them what is there:

those who consult a general map like to find on it as much information as possible, and prefer to make their own decisions about where to linger and where to hurry past. One cannot write an “exclusivist” history, supposedly based on excellence alone, until one knows what there is to exclude, and literary historians cannot take it upon themselves to make narrow decisions on this point.

Green’s strongest attack is on the *Oxford History*’s denial of the relevance of the question of Australianness:

Those who complain bitterly about the futility of trying to define the Australianness of Australian literature are quite happy in almost the same breath to talk about the Russianness of Tolstoy, or the Irishness of Yeats and Shaw, or the Frenchness of Voltaire; or to quote with approval Yeats’s opinion that a grand parochialism is the surest road to universality; for everybody except Australians, apparently.

Commenting on the role of national awareness in promoting the renaissance of English literature in the sixteenth century, Green wonders why certain people think it is respectable for England to strive for national identity then, for America to do so two hundred years later, but wrong for Australia. “It is unlikely”, she writes, that:

any significant literature will be created by a country whose image of itself is self-denigrating and apologetic . . . If a country does not take its own writers . . . seriously, no other country is likely to do so.

The logical position of those “anxious at all costs not to be thought ‘nationalistic’”, Green concludes, is to reject the possibility of any national literary history and merely write about the choice works of “world literature”. But who would want to make such fools of themselves? In his “Battle of the Books”, a satire on the late seventeenth century controversy between ancient and modern learning, Jonathan Swift did not say who won, but he did end his account with Virgil transfixing two moderns on a lance.

Our battle has continued with the publication of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, which represents such a body blow to the decrepit new critical orthodoxy that it will never recover. The first thing to be said about the *Companion* is simply that it is incredibly useful to have such a wealth of information arranged alphabetically, with good cross-referencing, in the one place for ease of consultation. Reference books are not normally read from cover to cover, but you could read

this one through with instruction and delight: and just think of the number of Ph.D. topics the aspiring graduate student might find! In the following paragraphs I comment on some of the *Companion*’s exclusions and inclusions, though nothing I mention in the former category in any way detracts from its overall achievement. In a work of this scope there are bound to be numerous omissions and errors of fact, and some of them were pointed out by Stephen Murray-Smith in his review in *Overland* 101. Any that I pick up are not so much criticisms as suggestions for the second edition.

Reviewers have pet subjects and areas in which they feel themselves expert, so it is easy for them to show off by asking whether some obscure figure from their reading has been included. I am no exception, and the following examples are drawn at random from my own fields of interest. The omission of “Georgia Rivers” (Marjorie Clark) is unfortunate because she was a significant writer of the 1920s, considered one of the hopes for the Australian novel at one stage, and her *Tantalego* (1928) is interesting in anticipating some of the sympathies and subject matter of Helen Garner’s fiction today. The entry on the national anthem is fine, but it does not mention the Bulletin competition of 1908, which attracted a vigorous response, and to which C.J. Dennis contributed (as a spoof) the *Austra-laise*. Further, the entry on the latter, which does discuss the competition, treats Dennis’s offering as serious, when it was really intended as a mockery of the whole artificial proceedings and was meant to be sung to the tune of the Merry Widow waltz. That it was set to the music of “Onward Christian Soldiers” in the recruiting hysteria of World War I is merely another instance of Dennis exchanging his radicalism for social acceptance.

The entry on the Great Australian Adjective is good, but I was hoping to see it followed by a short essay on the Great Australian Novel. The Fellowship of Australian Writers is included, but not the more communist-oriented Writers’ League which it absorbed in 1938. The entries for Hugh Macintosh and Dal Stivens do not mention that the former, the Sydney sporting entrepreneur and political manipulator, was probably the model for Stivens’ *Jimmy Brockett*. The entry for Lesbia Harford does not refer to her active involvement with the Industrial Workers of the World.

Turning to overseas names, the question of whose impact on Australian literature has been little studied, the *Companion* has a good entry on Shakespeare, which refers to the numerous societies and makes me wonder about all those diligent Australian scholars, beavering away in English departments on yet more editions of Shakespeare’s plays. Rather than duplicating the work of English editors, their time would have been better spent on producing proper editions of the many inaccessible Australian novels, plays, essays and poems so much closer to hand. There is an entry for Dickens, but nothing on Walter Scott or Byron, whom Barry Argyle (*An Introduction to the Australian Novel*) considers the major literary influences of the later nineteenth century, and there is nothing on Tennyson, allusion to whose verse has been

made as recently as Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River* (1978).

The odious Thomas Wood and the inspirational Walt Whitman are there, but where is F.R. Leavis, whose influence on post-war literary criticism is incalculable? Where would the new critics be without his distinction between literature and social history? D.H. Lawrence is rightly included, but what about H.G. Wells, whose visit to Australia in 1939 was a literary and political sensation? Finally, one must regret the omission of Egon Kisch, whose visit in 1935 (aside from the political ramifications) prompted the formation of the Writers' League and consolidated the leftwards orientation of the Fellowship of Australian Writers.

The editors observe in their preface that the presence or length of an entry in OCAL is not necessarily the result of a judgment about the importance of the subject. It can also reflect the undeveloped state of Australian literary scholarship: "for some authors information has been difficult to discover." Thus, I was not surprised to find nothing on R.D. Tate, author of the remarkable modernist novel *The Doughman* (1933), with its apocalyptic scenes in a suburban bakery and an amazing picture of the labor process. Two other modernist writers, Leslie Meller and Chester Cobb, refute Mitchell's claim that there was no literary experimentation in the 1920s and 1930s, but, while Cobb has an entry and Meller's *A Leaf of Laurel* is mentioned in Laird's essay on war literature, the *Companion* has not come up with fresh information.

I would have liked to learn something about the essayist and political commentator E.T. Brown, whose elegant, ironic reflections are such a contrast to the chatty good humor of Walter Murdoch's essays. R.H. Long has an entry, but more work needs to be done on this gentle, socialist, nature-loving poet, whom Nettie Palmer singled out for praise in 1924. Popular writers fare much better in the *Companion* than in the *History* (from which the exclusion of popular literature was "unavoidable"). There is a fascinating essay on science fiction, the genre in which so much Australian political and utopian writing is cast, but there is nothing on G.W. Wicking, a prolific writer of popular crime and adventure stories (which I, at least, still find exciting, as well as of documentary interest), nor for Henry Raine, who specialised in stories of returned World War I servicemen.

On the other hand, A.C. Rowlandson and the New South Wales Bookstall Company have useful entries. Because of a research interest here, I was disappointed not to learn more of F.S. Hibble, whose novel *Karangi* shared first prize (with Vance Palmer's *The Swayne Family*) in the Victorian Centenary Novel competition of 1934. A scathing account of woman's role in a New South Wales dairying community, it stands with the work of Eleanor Dark and Dymphna Cusack's *Jungfrau* as a contribution to feminist literature.

Turning to concepts, the lack of an entry for censorship is unfortunate in view of this plague's prominence throughout Australian history and its considerable impact on literature – not merely on what could be distributed, but also on what writers, anticipating the censor, felt they could or could not say. From the banning

of Marcus Clarke's political satire *The Happy Land* in 1880, through the crackdown of the 1930s, to the ban on *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1971, which backfired on the government and effectively led to the end of blatant censorship on most books and films, the censor has probably had a bigger impact on literature than the critics.

Finally, OCAL contains no entries on literary genres. Research in this area is only just beginning in Australia, so such an omission is inevitable, but it would be very useful to have entries on (for example) realism, social(ist) realism, romance, modernism, melodrama and the picaresque in the Australian context. The last, in particular, strikes me as a prominent theme in Australian literature: the novels of Kylie Tennant, the sort of short stories collected in *Coast to Coast* during the 1940s and the wider search for strange, way-out, marginal and (at least until Peter Mathers) usually rural "characters". As suggested, most of these "gaps" are inevitable in view of the state of literary research, and many are probably defensible on the ground of relative importance. Dorothy Green has defined the first problem with her customary vigor, and points out that the *Oxford History's* approach will do nothing to help solve it:

a vast body of work remains uncollected or unknown to more than a handful of specialists. It is not time yet to close the record and write exclusivist histories. If the dozens of aspiring PhD or MA students were encouraged to perform some of the spadework that still needs to be done, instead of scratching over the ground occupied by the same handful of well-known writers, the day when we could afford to write a history of choice works might approach more quickly.

It would be more useful to have theses on "minor" writers like John Dalley, Capel Boake, Georgia Rivers or G.W. Wicking, on modernism in literature, the practice of publishing and the literary importance of (non-literary) serials and newspapers, than yet another half dozen on Patrick White.

One of the great strengths of the *Companion* are entries which reflect the editors' detailed knowledge of an author, work or literature-related aspect of Australian life. An example is the excellent essay on the nineteenth century author Catherine Martin and her novel *An Australian Girl*. Checking H.M. Green's *History* and Morris Miller I find that she is discussed in these works too, but I would not have been likely to find her without prior knowledge. The pleasure of discovery is enhanced by the reassessment of *An Australian Girl* (1890) as more than a "bluestocking romance", and the knowledge that while Martin wrote evocatively of the Mallee she was not concerned with any "bush ethos", that stereotype which critics have often tried to foist on the literature of the 1890s. Some of Martin's later work, notably *The Incredible Journey* (1923) foreshadows Xavier Herbert's, and later writers', concern with the fate of the Aborigines.

The essay on Aborigines in Australian literature is particularly good, and that on the remarkable con-

temporary writer, B. Wongar, also useful, even if it does assume (and thus enshrine as orthodoxy?) the unadmitted point that Wongar and Sreten Bozic are one and the same. The entry neglects Wongar's three most recent books: *Babaru* (short stories, 1982), *Walg* (novel, 1983) and *Bilma* (verse, 1984). It is disgraceful that so powerful and prolific a writer has received so little critical attention in Australia; perhaps it would help if some enterprising publisher made his books available.

On the strictly literary front, it is good to see mention of the nineteenth-century dramatist William Forster, one of the morally concerned writers who deserves to be rescued from oblivion; very useful to know just exactly where and when E.E. Morris was professor of what; and good that most of the enormous range of 'second rank' writers has not been ignored. For example: Dale Collins, literary glamor boy of the 1930s, whose overseas success aroused the envy of the struggling authors at home; Ernest Wells, whose historical novels reflect that decade's interest in the Australian past; Jack McKinney, whose *Crucible* is one of the better fictional accounts of the Western Front. At the other end of the spectrum, the excellent entry on *Such Is Life* does justice to the novel's qualities, and to its "talismanic" significance in our literary history; the Jindyworobaks are rescued from the condescension of posterity.

On the general knowledge front, at last we can quickly find out that it was G.A. Sala who coined the term "Marvellous Melbourne" in the 1880s, that the expression "working man's paradise" dates back to Henry Kingsley, and that the expression "Dead Heart" for the central desert was used by J.W. Gregory in 1906. The entry for Lassetter is fascinating, confirming my sceptical prejudice that the only place he found a reef was in the pages of romantic adventure stories. The essay on mateship is also very good: not only an account of the ambiguities of word and concept, but a warning to those who would impose a "doctrine" of mateship on writers like Lawson. If there is a problem with the entries in the allusions category, it is their apparent rural bias. The information on bush, shepherd, crow, new chum, shearers, dingo, kangaroo, kookaburra, coo-ee, Riverina and so on is very valuable, and it was imaginative to include it, but what about urban Australia? Larrikins are there, and Frank Hardy's Carringbush, but not a lot else, and there is not even an entry for suburbia itself, despite its being a favorite target for literary satire from Louis Esson and C.J. Dennis to George Johnston, Barry Humphries and Patrick White. Do the editors agree with Vance Palmer that only the countryside is nationally distinctive, while Australian cities are colorless and provincial? Or is it merely a fact that writers have been inspired more by the bush than by the city? The conclusion from the mass of interesting material the editors present to us would seem to be the latter, but who can be sure?

OCAL has an entry for cultural cringe, but the deference to things English which A.A. Phillips skewered in 1950 is no longer much of a problem. Instead, there is a new version of the cringe which holds that Australia is now too mature and sophisticated to be bothered with na-

tional assertiveness; we are citizens of the world, this line runs, and should be cosmopolitan in outlook, not nationalist. Such a view (which takes no account of the role of US multinationals in manufacturing a cosmopolitan mass culture) is expressed variously in the *Oxford History's* contempt for Australianism in literature (and especially for Miles Franklin for preaching "unrelieved passionate nationalism"); in the idea that any Australian intellectual endeavor (especially on a high theoretical plane) will be inferior to that of Europe and the US; and in the compulsion to trail after the vagaries of French intellectual fashions.

Certainly the *Companion* is an answer to those who are ignorant enough to believe that there is nothing here worth studying, but it could have put the boot in harder. For example, the entry for J.I.M. Stewart covers only his detective stories as Michael Innes. It does not mention his infamous remark, as Professor of English at Adelaide in 1940, about the non-existence of Australian literature:

I am most grateful to the Commonwealth Literary Fund for providing the funds to give these lectures in Australian literature, but unfortunately they have neglected to provide any literature. I will, therefore, lecture on D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*.

George Cowling, Professor of English at Melbourne in the 1930s, has an entry which reports his disdainful 1935 Age article on the unlikelihood of any worthwhile Australian writing, but the full extent of his efforts to secure such a result remains undisclosed. T.G. Tucker was an important critic and commentator on Australian literature before the First World War, and he managed to say some useful things about the greater importance of social over natural environment, but because he does not get his own entry we do not learn of his later activities. In the 1920s he became an editor for Angus and Robertson and devoted his talents to rewriting manuscripts he considered insufficiently refined. Among the works he tried to improve were Davison's first novel, *Forever Morning*, and H.M. Green's *Outline of Australian Literature* (1930), to which Tucker objected more on the basis of content than of style. (The A & R edition of *Forever Morning* remains Tuckered to this day; Green took his book elsewhere.)

In mentioning these acts of bastardry I am not just paying off old scores. None of these ancient injuries would be worth remembering today were it not for the fact that Stephensen's unteachable Englishmen are still very much with us. They are still exuding contempt for Australian literature in university English departments, and doing all they can to minimise teaching and research. *Kangaroo* (fascinating work of sociology that it is) is still to be found on the reading lists of certain Australian literature courses.

In *The Stockyard and the Croquet Lawn* G.A. Wilkes asks why there was "no peak in Australian literature to correspond with the achievement of Federation in 1901." He does not answer this question directly – indeed, not at all – but a response would need to begin by pointing out that Federation was not achieved through a popular mass

movement but merely imposed from above, by the British government, on an indifferent or even hostile population. The *Companion* has a good entry on the nineties, but how does one begin to challenge the constantly repeated (but wrong) view that Federation represented a culmination of rising national awareness? Quite the opposite: it represented the negation of nationalism, and it was imposed with such ease only because the nationalist and radical sentiment of the late 1880s and early 1890s was moribund by 1900, no longer a force to contend with. The *Bulletin* itself dropped most of its republican demands during the 1890s, finally resigning itself to Federation as the least evil, but the radicals around Bernard O'Dowd and the Melbourne Tocsin, joined by maverick liberals like H.B. Higgins, maintained their opposition to an arrangement which they saw as anti-democratic and as cementing Australia's subordination to the British Empire.

The last gasp of 1890s nationalism was Archibald's and Lawson's (lonely, but principled) opposition to involvement in the Boer War, and a farcical echo might also be heard in the *Bulletin's* facetious attitude towards Empire Day as late as 1910. But the fact remains that the charged political atmosphere of the period from 1888 to the final defeat of the shearers in 1894, which was the inspiration for so much literature, had been replaced with a dull Empire loyalism by 1905. And we all know what happened in 1914.

These considerations are not merely political. For one thing, many critics have commented on the great literary silence between Furphy's *Such Is Life* (1903) and Prichard's *Working Bullocks* (1926). With the still young Lawson falling silent after Federation, perhaps we can reverse Wilkes' question and turn it into a hypothesis: perhaps it was precisely the triumph of the conservative and anti-national forces in Federation which inhibited literary expression. Secondly, and returning to the *Companion*, the absence of an entry for (and thus a concept of) nationalism might help to explain Heseltine's unfortunate use of the term "provincial" in his otherwise valuable essay on criticism. He uses it in the common sense of 'parochial', but its strict meaning is to designate a situation where outlying regions are obsessed with – and usually seek to imitate – metropolitan fashions. Provincialism in this sense has been a serious brake on Australian cultural development, partly because we have not been parochial enough. Even Lawson hoped the literary grass might be greener on the other side of the globe; even the "radical nationalist" Vance Palmer was persuaded to

abridge *Such Is Life* by the prestige of Jonathan Cape and Edward Garnett.

In his review, John Docker wrote that the *Oxford History* had barricaded itself securely (apparently) behind the institutional walls of fortress criticism. But "the orthodoxy is starting to age and wither. Worse, it's beginning to look it." With the reissue of Green and the publication of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, Fortress Criticism has finally crumbled. The battle of the books would seem to have ended in victory for those who oppose the selective 'canonical' approach to literature, who accept what is there for what it is, and who take pleasure in its diversity. Docker refers to the struggles for control of Australian literature, but neither Green nor Wilde, Hooton and Andrews wish to lay down the law, much less erect an alternative dictatorship. The collapse of the new critical orthodoxy means neither the return to any alleged 'radical nationalist' prescriptions, nor the imposition of a fresh paradigm. Like the fall of the Bastille or the ousting of the Greek colonels, it is a genuine liberation: the field is now open for contending views, for a variety of critical approaches, for a genuinely fresh look at our literary history. There is the opportunity for that pluralism and open-mindedness to which the new critics (and especially the cold war warriors among them) always paid lip-service, but which they denied in practice by their attempt to impose a single critical style.

Considering the context from which the *Companion* emerged, such an outcome is a remarkable achievement. Not that it makes the faintest allusion to the struggle in which it is the latest, devastating, thrust. As befits a reference book, it is a sober, factual, objective and comprehensive guide to our literature – precisely the qualities which distinguish it from the tendentious judgmentalism of the *Oxford History*. It might not amuse the authors of the latter to recall the concluding words of Brian Elliott's dismissive review of their book:

what would really have served the students' (and possibly a wider) "need" was not an *Oxford History* at all, but a more systematically factual compilation . . . An Australian *Oxford Companion* . . . would have been a proper boon indeed!

And so it is.

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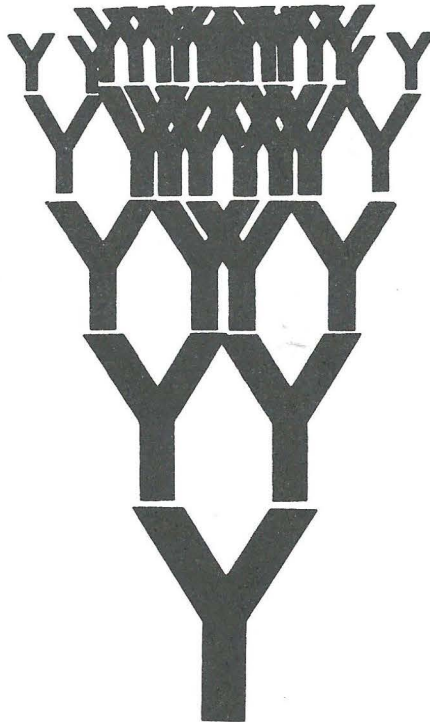
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Alex Selenitsch: "Tree"

PAUL HASLUCK

Gough Whitlam in Office

A discussion of Gough Whitlam's The Whitlam Government 1971-1974 (Viking, \$35).

To quote an election-winning slogan, "It's Time" this book was published. For ten years Mr Whitlam and his supporters maintained their rage over the events of November 1975, and the consequence is that their hero has been given the crown of martyrdom and robbed of any claim to achievement. Just as Charles the First is popularly known as the king who was beheaded, so Whitlam faces the risk of being remembered only as the Prime Minister who was sacked. That would be unfair to him and bad history. Any chapter of Australian political history that recorded only his dismissal and gave no account of what was done during his term in office would be ludicrously deficient.

In this review I shall look at his book as a contribution to Australian political history and try to write as a political historian. Although the limits set by propriety and discretion are perhaps not as narrow today as they were at the time when I left public office, they still impose some restraints. During his term as Prime Minister my official and personal relationship with Mr Whitlam was always both correct and pleasurable. The exchanges between us were frank and marked by mutual respect and, as far as I am aware, were kept in confidence by both of us. That confidentiality will not be breached now.

This book is a welcome contribution to Australian political history. As well as being overdue it deserves a cordial greeting, because hitherto Australian Prime Ministers have done little to record history or reflect on political events. In the United Kingdom in recent years books have been the customary by-product of a term at Number Ten. Churchill had six volumes. Attlee had one. Macmillan had six. Harold Wilson has already reached three. Douglas-Home wrote one graceful, modest and engaging book reflecting on his part in public affairs. Heath has written books on sailing, music, travel and Christmas carols, with a few political memories incidental to these more abiding interests. In Australia, in eighty-odd years, the Prime Ministership has yielded only some unpublished rambblings from Deakin, and books from Menzies and Whitlam, leaving on one side the memoirs of two short-term Prime Ministers, Page and Fadden. Whatever criticisms one may make of Whitlam's book one must praise his purpose and his industry in producing it. He is the first to give so full an account of political life as Prime Minister. Menzies wrote one volume containing a

penetrating study of central power in the Australian Commonwealth, and two books of memoirs in which some enlightening information mingled with some entertaining reminiscences, but he never offered a ball-by-ball description of thirty years in high office. Whitlam now gives a long account of his four years. No criticism by the political historians should lessen their appreciation of that fact.

This book is being promoted, however to reach a wider public. Any reviewer of any book needs to ask himself: Who are the readers to whom the author submits his work? I can think of three possibilities – the devout worshipper at the Whitlam shrine, the general reader who is looking for a good story and the voter with a serious interest in politics. All three are likely to put this book to the first test: Is it readable?

The short answer would have to be that it is good in parts but calls for a dedicated effort to read it from cover to cover. It is certainly not one of those books that you 'cannot put down'. Someone who had passed a rapid-reading test and whose concentration never flagged might get through it in a total of twenty hours of reading. Less determined and slower readers will probably have to give up thirty hours of their life, and I doubt whether they will all last the distance. This prediction is not based only on the length of the book but on the organisation of the material. The author takes topic after topic – foreign affairs, economics, health, education, law, Aborigines and so on for twenty chapters, and each chapter is monotonously the same. Whitlam was wise; his opponents and sometimes his colleagues were stupid, and all the good things were done by him. A readable story needs some setting of the scene, some description of the problem to be solved, and a narrative in which the hero's purpose, the difficulties he encountered, the setbacks he overcame and even the mistakes he made are all revealed.

Monotonously the hero of this book is never wrong. Here and there he pauses to mop his brow and tell an anecdote or make a quip, but I doubt whether this book is what any borrower from the local municipal library would recommend to a friend as a 'good read'. Even the most fervent loyalist finds a never-ending victory parade a bit tedious, especially when the commanding officer who marches, chin lifted, sword drawn, at the head of

each contingent always turns out to be the same person.

There still remains what might be termed the specialist reader – the person who makes a study of Australian political history and is prepared to sweat a little to gain information. Some such students may master the book, read it from beginning to end, find some statements they endorse and just as many they wish to contradict, some claims they find convincing and some they would question. Even the author's former colleagues and closest followers may wish to qualify or enlarge on his account of certain events. His political opponents will join issue on every chapter. In other words, the book is a significant and helpful contribution to the study of the Whitlam years, but not by any means the definitive account.

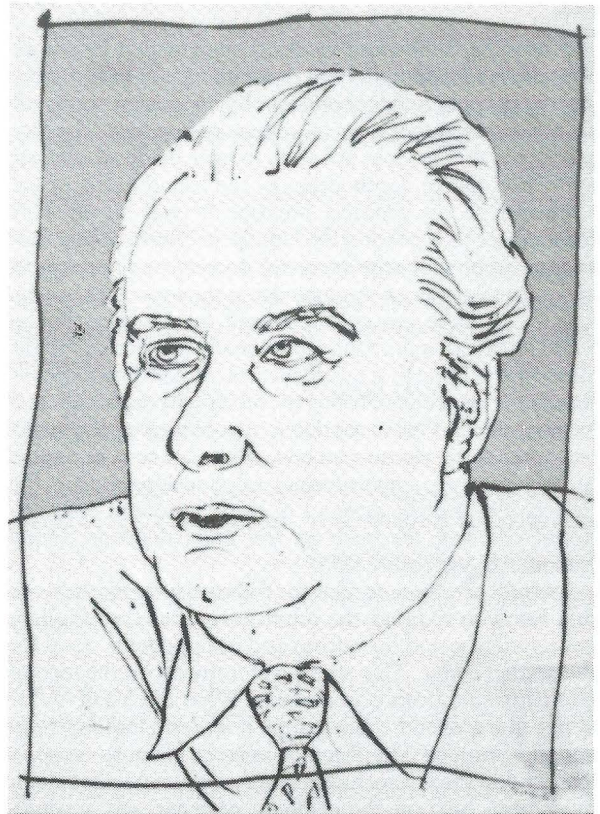
My own personal reaction during a rather laborious reading of the book was not one of outright contradiction, or even a serious questioning of Whitlam's claims, but rather that on most occasions on which he wrote of any event of which I had personal knowledge his account was incomplete. He was either ignorant or indifferent to much that had been done before he came on the scene, and he disregarded many of the factors that impinged on the situation which he faced.

The book is uneven. There are some signs that he may have worked on draft narratives prepared by assistants. This is a recognised practice by authors who are busy as well as distinguished. Churchill did it in writing *The Second World War*. When this method is adopted drafts are reshaped, embellished and in some places re-written by the author and, whatever the process of composition may have been, the author has both a legitimate pride and final responsibility for what is published under his name. In Whitlam's book the literary style and the manner of reciting the facts sometimes reveal contrasts. Whole pages, sometimes a whole chapter, are vintage Whitlam. One can visualise the gestures of the speech-maker. Other pages bear the mark of the diligent assistant. One such instance is the chapter on economics which, except at the beginning and end, has few embellishments and is a singularly straightforward recital. Whether or not the political historian has doubts about the rightness of the Whitlam Government's management of the economy, here is a reasonably clear account of what it did and why it did it.

The same cannot be said of all chapters. In other chapters, as one reads the flowing periods, one can almost see the lifted head, the glare of triumph as Whitlam demolishes another adversary. He writes history in the same style as the writing of speeches. For example, he does not pay attention to chronology when his interest is to produce one illustration after another to support his theme, or to quote one instance after another to prove his case. The political historian cannot help gasping now and again at his effrontery while at the same time admiring his eloquence. The technique of the speech-maker is also apparent in the conviction with which he ascribes opinions or statements to other persons, without pausing to identify or verify the source of his information.

These defects are clearly apparent in his chapter on international affairs – a chapter that perhaps more than

any other reveals the author's political limitations. That chapter is also entertaining for the reader but questionable for the student by the way in which the repetition of passages from his own speeches is used as evidence of the truth of the statements he is now making. The needs of the eloquent speech-maker may also excuse some flightiness in bringing into juxtaposition something said or done at one time with something said or done at another time, and using this device not to find historical cause and effect but to indulge the vanity of having thought of something before someone else did. There is a "certain grandeur" in his display. Some of the flowing passages turned my thoughts to a comparison with Macaulay, but then my second thoughts were to recall what Melbourne said: "I wish I was as cocksure of anything as Tom Macaulay is of everything".



What did the Whitlam Government do? What did it fail to do? What more could it have done if its term had not been interrupted? A short answer to the first question might be that it tackled more subjects than its predecessor and acted more quickly. One fact stated in the final chapter is that "a record number of Bills were introduced and a record number of Bills became law during the Whitlam Government", in spite of a record number of rejections by the Senate. It enacted 507 pieces of legislation, using Parliament "as the chief instrument of social reform". There was also a steady flow of Executive Council decisions. I recall that during the first two years

of the Whitlam Government, when I was still in office, there seemed to be something new almost every week. This liveliness in government was welcome, and certainly not disturbing to me but I also recall my growing puzzlement as the months passed and more and more pieces of bright color were added to the patchwork quilt. It was difficult for an onlooker to find the design.

My personal view is that one of the basic problems facing any government is to get its priorities right. Some tasks are more important than others, some expenditures more necessary than others, some decisions more urgent than others; some steps more practicable than others. Mr Whitlam had the grander view of doing everything at once. Priorities cannot be fixed wisely without a clear and exact assessment of the situation in which a government has to act, and such assessments need to be continuously revised. But that takes time and dull routine, and Mr Whitlam thinks of himself as a sprinter, not a plodder.

This book reveals a great deal about what Whitlam is and how he thinks and works. I suggest that he shows himself as a leader who had more interest in bright ideas than in shaping political philosophy, in scoring points off his adversary rather than in understanding him. The biggest gap is that he does not seem to have made an analysis with care and in depth either of the broad needs of the nation or of any political situation he was facing. This comes close to repeating the familiar criticism of him that he was a political opportunist. I do not use that term to mean that he was an opportunist in the sense that he was looking to make a career for himself, but I suggest that he was a political opportunist in his ready response to bright ideas or the hope of a quick success, rather than a deeper search for an understanding of the state of the nation and its basic needs. One exception to this generalisation might be found in the chapter on law, where his aims in respect of law reform, constitutional relationships within the Federation and the attempt to bring legal and constitutional changes, do seem to rest on a doctrine deeply considered and firmly held.

I would also suggest that the political historian will use this book to explore the implication that the Whitlam government stood for reform and its opponents stood for the settled order. This study will impinge on the second and third questions posed above. What did it fail to do? What more would it have done if its term had not been ended abruptly? The Prime Minister's claim to stand in history as a great reformer is largely a claim to what might have been but, on the evidence of what was accom-

plished, it would seem to me that the major contrast between the Whitlam Government and its predecessor and successor, was not simply in what was done but rather in the way it was done. Most of the effective decisions made by the Whitlam Government were in keeping with trends towards change that are discernible before and after his term in office. He was an expediter and innovator of changes rather than someone who challenged an old faith or established a new one, a political activator rather than a creative political thinker.

Perhaps the final testing of where Whitlam stands in history as a reformer will have to be made outside the confines of the present book, in an examination of what happened to the Labor Party under Whitlam. The simple heroic story is that he led them to electoral victory in 1972 after they had been a long time in the political wilderness. The euphoria of that glorious moment was enhanced by another electoral triumph in 1974. The wind set fair. Then in 1975, following the dismissal, electoral defeat put Labor out of office for another eight years.

I would suggest again that the judgment of the electorate in 1975 was not a rejection of the objectives of the Whitlam Government, nor a considered judgment on a constitutional issue, but rather a vote against the style of the Whitlam Government. Nothing about that election seems to me to support a thesis of reactionary rejection of the great reformer. I would also express doubt whether any Whitlam ideas about reform, persisting among Labor candidates, helped the party to regain the confidence of a majority in 1983. If any influence persisted it was still in style rather than in ideas of great reforms. But that is something to be explored by another historian in an entirely separate book about the influence of Mr Whitlam on the political ideas of the Australian Labor Party.

My final comment on this book on the Whitlam Government is that the Labor Party appears in it to be less significant than its leader, and the corollary to that is another doubt – whether in the long run the leader will prove to have been significant to the party.

But, when all is said, it is a good book, timely, solid and revealing. It repays study and stimulates much questioning.

Sir Paul Hasluck was Governor-General of Australia from 1969 to 1974. His term in office coincided with most of the term of the Whitlam government.

Exploring in Spain I am daily reminded of that past which weighs like an alp on every European, which they take in with statues and the buildings, with the cobble-stones, with the catechisms, with the family, with manners of eating and drinking. There is no such weight of the past for white Australians. Children of the new, we are all born again. Our earliest ancestors were Sinbads marooned on their great island continent in the watery wastes of the southern hemisphere and their descendants, anxious and self absorbed like all pioneers and colonials concerned to make a good life, knew little of old Europe and didn't like what they knew. The difference was too great; the life was too alien.

In 1936 and 1937 those British-Australians who travelled to Spain to join the Republic in its fight against the four insurgent generals came to a land that was alien in almost every particular. Even those dry flat plains and scrubby rocky hills, which they seized on as reminders of home, sheltered hamlets where peasants shared their houses with animals; landless laborers worked for almost nothing a day, every village clustered round a church; larger towns were full of cathedrals, monasteries and convents; donkey carts carried the farmer and his produce. And they saw all this through eyes narrowed and sharpened by their own sun-lit continent sparsely populated from one end to another with people who almost all spoke the same language. Their rearing had been secular and liberal; hatred of fascism inspired most of them, a hatred ennobled for many by a vision of the last fight which would unite the human race.

Even European volunteers who should have known better were blinded by passion to many of the realities of Spain, shaped by the Moorish conquest, re-conquest and holy war, by divisions in language and customs; all were utterly alien to the Australians. An Australian finds much that is alien even today, when we are more likely to have connections with old Europe, when McDonalds have burst like boils on the Gran Via and the Ramblas, when the urbane, handsome face of King Don Carlos looks down from the walls, when the harvest is brought in by machine, irrigation channels cut through green fields and there is not a donkey cart to be seen.

Wars have been fought here. Armies have flowed over towns, other armies have fought them off and re-taken the towns. Sometimes the soldiers were foreigners from

another country, sometimes they were foreigners from another region or province; sometimes they were brothers. Terrible things have been done here: behind that wall men were shot; at the end of that road men and women were thrown into the ravine. The cobble-stones of this beautiful little town are stained with blood. And still life goes on. We have never known this.

"I'd go to Figueres, Barcelona, Vic, Madrid and El Escorial" wrote Lloyd Edmonds, whose *Letters from Spain* I'd just edited, when I wrote about my coming journey to Spain. Nettie Palmer's 1936 diary, the diaries of Australian nurses, the songs and poems which had inspired my generation of intellectuals: all helped to form my Spanish itinerary.

I speak no Spanish; a mixture of French, Italian, English and hands had to serve, with an occasional interpreter. Extracts from my diary:

June 19. Paris to Barcelona by train tucked in the air-conditioned luxury of the swish Spanish Talgo, sharing an elegant little double compartment with a Spanish woman who speaks only Catalan and Castillian; we nevertheless exchange courtesies and even some information.

June 20. The frontier, Port Bou on grey damp morning. In 1936 you had to descend at the border and change trains, for the Spanish rail gauge is different from the rest of Europe. At 5.30 on a cold winter's morning – after sitting up all night – the four nurses presented their safe-conduct passes to the anarchist militiamen, dressed in workers' overalls with rifles slung over their shoulders, who controlled the frontier post and their fate. Passed; they received first-class tickets to Barcelona and boarded a local train.

My Australian passport held in the competent care of our carriage *controlleur*, I take in the morning scene from my top bunk. The wheels have been changed as we slept and after a while we fly on smoothly and swiftly towards Barcelona, ignoring Girona, where the Palmers had alighted in May 1936 and spent the night, and shoot past the village of Mongat where they took a house.

In Barcelona, when the nurses arrived on December 1, they found *mucho confusione* at the militia committee

and no one to meet them. They showed their papers, demanded an escort to the Hotel Colon and were whisked off to the Placa di Catalunya where the huge hotel stood, headquarters for the combined Communist and Socialist party of Catalunya since it had been wrested from the rebel troops, who marched down from the barracks at Montjuich and occupied it on the first day of the revolt.

In the first winter of the civil war Barcelona was noisy and exhilarating; a heady place for revolutionaries like 'Blue' Barry from New South Wales, who had come over from London to join the fight against fascism. Small cars dashed about painted with revolutionary slogans, tramways were posters on wheels, workers' committees ran the transport services, the Telefonica; armed patrols strolled the streets, knots of people surrounded their party headquarters attending to speeches blaring from loudspeakers, recruits marching down the Ramblas with their blankets to party headquarters. The Australian nurses, anxious to get to work, were aware of the confusion, of an "air of suspicion" which surrounded them, and quickly dispensed with the hats they normally wore everywhere; "hats are considered bourgeois here" wrote Agnes Hodgson in her diary. Mary Lawson thought Barcelona the noisiest place she had ever experienced.

It is still noisy; though the noise today comes from buses, cars and motorized bikes, augmented by rock songs bursting out of bars; the words of these songs will later be the only English I hear for days. A nice purgatory.

The cars that dash about the streets today are neat little black-and-green taxis whose drivers are chatting at the head of the long line of cabs at the station until the train passengers arrive and then efficiently, quickly and pleasantly organize everyone into a cab and leap out into the traffic.

The Hotel Colon seemed just the place to meet my travelling companion, like me a child of the thirties and university student of the forties, but the dowdy, old-fashioned place we meet in is opposite a church and cramped up into small streets; when we walk out to explore the great Placa di Catalunya, scene of the battles of July and the triumph of the Republican forces, there is no Hotel Colon. It was demolished a few years ago, we are told later. In its place the flat, boring facade of the Cortes Ingles department store. The Telefonica still stands on another corner of the Placa as it did when it was a battle-ground in July 1936 between rebel troops and republicans, and in May 1937 between factions of republicans. No signs of battle remain on its square and white facade. The fine solid apartment buildings of Calle Muntaner, where the British Medical Aid Unit had its headquarters and the nurses their base in Barcelona, near its junction with Diagonal—a fine 19th century boulevard that cuts a swathe like Broadway right across the city from the port—look as though nothing untoward had ever disturbed their respectable calm.

With forty years of post-war tourism behind us, we must spend our spare time looking at the sights: we stroll through the Disney-like fantasies of the architect Gaudi's Guell Park, we marvel at the Cathedral of the Holy Family. Fifty years ago the international volunteers whose

paths we are following noticed very little, either man-made or god-given, about the Spanish towns and cities they landed in. Lloyd Edmonds was an exception.

June 23. To Mongat on a Sunday morning in a train full of Barcelonans off for a day at the beach. It is separated from the beach today by the railway line and a road thick with holiday traffic; but Calle Monsoulis, the Palmers' street, still climbs steeply along the side of the hill, and the squat stone houses with iron balconies still look across the road to a flat sea, today hazy and grey. In one of these houses Vance Palmer worked on his abridgement of *Such is Life*, Nettie wrote bread-winning articles for newspapers and Aileen, interpreter for the Peoples' Olympics staged in opposition to the Nazi Berlin Games, commuted daily to her work in Barcelona. From the house on Calle Monsoulis Nettie had run down to the beach on another Sunday forty-nine years ago with the news that the sounds coming from Barcelona were not fireworks celebrating the Peoples' Olympics, but gun-fire from the soldiers in the artillery barracks who had marched out under command of their officers to take over the government. Mongat was too far away for them to hear the sudden blast of factory whistles which, at 5 o'clock that morning, had shattered the air with the news of the rebellion.

We return to a Barcelona again filled with explosions. It is the eve of St John's day and St John, says the desk clerk, "means Boum! Boum!" The boys of the city celebrate the saint in an orgy of explosions; they hurl bungers into doorways and among the crowds gathered in the squares to celebrate the Saint's day with dancing and games. All night the explosions blast off like gun-fire, and it's easy to imagine Vance lying on the sand at Mongat hearing without knowing.

I had intended to make a base at Girona; no accommodation, snap decisions in bad French with Spanish travel agent and we are booked into Figueres.

June 26. Back north towards the French border, but in a slow local train which stops at every little town. This is more like it. All the international volunteers who came from France were billeted in the barracks of the Castell de Sant Ferran at Figueres, on the highest point overlooking the town. "At a guess I would say they could hold thousands of men," Lloyd wrote to his father, "when you get inside, you see catacombs where there are thousands of beds. Napoleon's army remained here a hundred years ago."

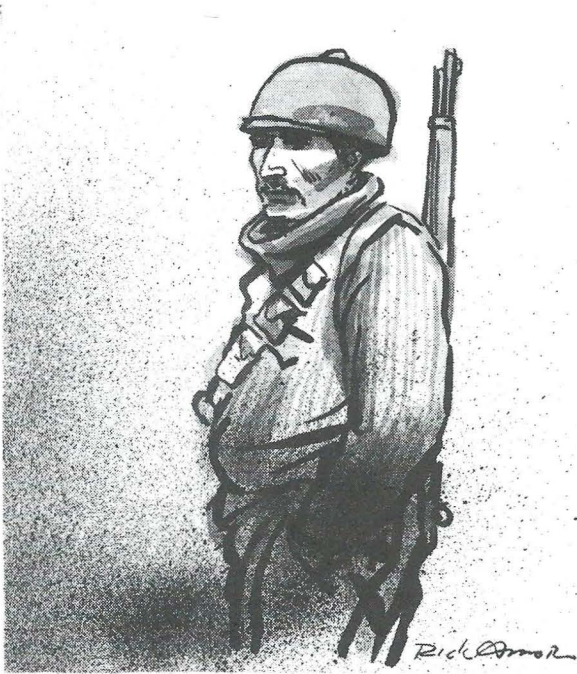
Today a boy in army uniform, sitting in the guard box listening to his transistor, rises, his arm resting along the short machine gun slung over his shoulder. He gives short shrift: the Castell is an army establishment. No admittance. No photos.

"At every town, call first at the *ayuntamiento* [Town Hall] and ask to speak to the *conjerhal di cultura* [cultural councillor]. Tell him what you are doing and ask for his help."

The advice had come in Barcelona from Gloria Montero, expatriate Australian writer, a generous and delightful woman who gave us much help and answered

all our questions. She left Queensland with her husband first for Canada. They lived there for twenty years and are now settled in Spain, where her family originated. For she is the grand-daughter of Jesus Garcia Montero, born in Asturias in 1887 who, as Jack Garcia, took leave from his job at Goondi mill in Innisfail, North Queensland, and bought a passage back to Spain to fight for the Republic. His wife proudly waved him goodbye.

I visit the Figueres *ayuntamiento* but the *conjerhal* is not in his office. "Call tomorrow", says the pleasantly casual official at the front desk. He is not in tomorrow when I call. "What are his hours?" "Who knows?" shrugs the same official. "I have hours; but the *conjerhal* . . ." A nicely named young archivist, Senor Temporal,



struggles alone with the files of the past fifty years and is as helpful as can be. Another council employee takes from his desk the manuscript of the history of Figueres during the civil war which he hopes to publish for next year's fiftieth anniversary of the rebellion. People of the town remember the International Brigaders marching down the Castell and along the Ramblas. They sang and sometimes shouted a strange chant which he has transcribed, though he does not know what it means: "*Franco o poto*". Back in Paris, I ask my Uncle Henry, who came to the Brigades by sea from Marseilles and never saw Figueres. They were shouting "*Franco au poteau*" and it meant "Death to Franco."

June 28. South westwards towards Vic; that "peculiar town" Lloyd remembers, which seemed to contain nothing but convents, monasteries and churches. It is indeed full of churches, and there is even another since Lloyd's

time, begun in 1957. In the grand Placa Mayor, surrounded by wonderfully decorated buildings, we find the *ayuntamiento*, but again no *conjerhal*. An English-speaking girl in the tourist office nearby makes enquiries and directs us to the Carmelite convent which, during the war, had housed the American hospital. It is very close, she assures us. Fifteen minutes later, after many false turns following kindly instructions in rapid Spanish, and an all-too-brief visit with an ancient, French-speaking nun from the wrong convent, we arrive at the Carmelites. A whole block of grey stone buildings sheltering behind a great grey stone wall; all grim, and as there is no sign of activity when we wander in through the back gates, we leave, after taking photos of the present school building – the former American hospital – where Lloyd had been treated for yellow jaundice and where he met for the first time Kevin Rebecchi, another Australian. The foreign dead had all been buried in a common grave, we had been told; it used to be just inside the cemetery gate. The day was very hot, I was anxious to get on the road before the truck drivers finished their lunch and the little red Peugeot was straining for the road; we drove past the turn-off to the cemetery where the bones of Kevin Rebecchi, the Brunswick council employee who had died of typhus in Vic, lie in their unmarked common grave.

June 29. Westward toward Huesca; up through Cordona, across the river Segre at Balaguer, past Binefar and Babastro through shining fields of grain at harvest, deep river gorges and a harsh beauty all around, into Aragon and towards the provincial capital of Huesca, following the earliest Republican offensives from Barcelona when the anarchist militia had streamed out from the city into Aragon to attack Zaragoza, fallen to the rebels. Seven kilometres outside Huesca, almost an outer-suburb now, is the village of Tierz. Here, on the eve of the attack on the city, the young Oxford Communist, John Cornford, had written two poems which best expressed the beliefs and romantic ardor of my generation of Melbourne communist intellectuals. "Full Moon at Tierz" began "The past, a glacier, gripped the mountain wall", and contained the lines "history forming in our hands/Not plasticine but roaring sands/Yet we must swing it to its final course". The other began "Heart of the heartless world/Dear heart, the thought of you/Is the pain at my side,/The shadow that chills my view". In the battle for Huesca one of the first Australian volunteers, Dick Whatey, had fought with the German Thaelmann column among the POUM militia led by the libertarian communist Buenaventura Durutti. I wander around and pay some sort of homage to them all.

Huesca today seems a solid progressive city. Cheerful Saturday morning crowds shop and drink coffee in summer relaxation. A large public park with bandstand, shady walks and children's playground also reveals another of those war memorials "to all those killed in war", with no indication that there is any particular war in the mind of the builders. Again no *conjerhal di cultura* – "Never on Saturday" – but the local government officials who *do* work on Saturday won't send us away empty-handed, so one is deputed to show us their treas-

ure, a grand salon decorated on all walls by huge genre paintings portraying the history of Huesca. Their charm and kindness somehow expresses this Aragonese city. Our hotel stands in the Street of the Park, formerly General Franco street. A new ceramic plaque replaces the old, as they do all over Spain; restores, I should say for the streets were renamed after the Franco victory. Thus Gran Via, Madrid's most famous street, was re-named for Jose Antonio De Rivera, founder of the Falange. Some Franquist names remain; it depends, they say, on the local council.

South of Huesca, along narrow little roads that bisect fields of golden wheat, is the little town of Granen; here the British Medical Aid Unit of unpaid doctors and nurses had posted some of its members to a hospital established by the Generalitat of Catalunya. Here Aileen Palmer worked and another Australian woman, Margot Miller; here, early in January 1937, arrived Agnes Hodgson, the Australian nurse left behind in Barcelona when her three companions were sent off to the International Brigade headquarters at Albacete. Dorothy Low, a Tasmanian nursing sister, was at Granen where Spanish surgeons and British nurses made a hospital from a rambling house which had been requisitioned by the anarchist town committee. Agnes, walking one sunny winter's morning across the muddy river Flumen towards the Huesca road, after the anguish and exhaustion of night duty, passed fields being ploughed by single-disc ploughs drawn by mules, others by oxen, contemplated the grain and vegetables, while the guns were more active than usual because of the sunshine. The hospital found itself in the middle of bitter and destructive left-wing feuding. Its membership of the Carlos Marx column was a constant source of irritation to the anarchist village leader. The doctors and nurses worked in an atmosphere so hostile that they decided to move patients, equipment and as much bed-linen as 'Pancho Vilja', the anarchist leader, would allow, to a large villa at Polenino a few kilometres further south. Our little red car sped along the straight and narrow roads to Granen and Polenino through the harvest; past farmers with huge complicated machines that turned hay into monster swiss rolls.

Most Granenins and Poleninoans were sensibly indoors, cool behind closed shutters and thick stone walls; a couple of old men sat in the shade of buildings; young boys defied the heat from the back of noisy motor bikes. A little girl took us in tow but Granen and Polenino were language barriers. We smiled and shook hands and talked, each in our own language and, though I eyed the old men hungrily as living history, all we managed to note about both towns today was that the great church in Granen was derelict and that both looked comfortable and well-kept. Handshakes, and photographs as mementoes of those harsh hot towns, and we drove back in the long evening light on the deserted Huesca road where Agnes thirty-eight years ago had passed huge lorry loads of oranges and other food stuffs on their way to the front.

June 30. Our way turns south towards Leida, winding on narrow roads around the side of mountains rising up

from the River Ebro, which we cross at Flix, then heading for Gandisa. Here, in the last battles before the international volunteers were withdrawn in November 1938, many Australians unknown to each other fought on the rocky escarpments of the Sierra Pandolls, through which we drive with wonder. Joe Carter was there with the Canadian MacPaps and Jim McNeill; Lloyd Edmonds was driving for the artillery, Ray Jordana and Charles Riley fought round here; W. 'Pop' Morcom and James Craig died. Down towards Tortosa we follow the Ebro, now a bed empty of water and filled with vines, olives, maize and fruit trees, now a dammed-up lake, hillsides terraced with richly cultivated green between craggy pale rocks and now, near Tortosa wide and green and slow, almost at its delta.

It has been a long, hard and hot mountain drive but our spirits are rising as we follow the signs to the mediaeval town through the last stretch, with a cool hotel room, a swim and lunch in view, and we are on the bridge across the Ebro when before us rising out of the calm green water of the river a monster of concrete and iron pierces the sky. Hundreds of feet it seems to rise. On one side, facing upstream, a great cross; on the other, facing the road and railway bridges, an eagle with fierce aspect clasping chains in its talons glares downstream; above the whole structure a male figure, straining upwards, holds aloft a spiky object like a knout. The shock knocks us speechless. In the cool soft light of early evening I stroll out to photograph the memorial. On the near embankment wall a plaque commemorates its inauguration on 26 June 1966 by the Chief of State, Caudillo of Spain, and its blessing by the Bishop of Tortosa "in memory of the battle of the Ebro from 25-7 to 16-11, 1938." Engraved on the concrete base, facing the mediaeval town, are the words "To the combatants who found glory in the Battle of the Ebro" and, facing the new town, "To the Leader of the Crusade and of the Spanish peace." I walk slowly across the bridge to the other embankment where a group of elderly men are leaning and chatting. Giving them good evening - to which they respond in the friendly way we have come to expect - I lean over the wall and begin my non-Spanish chat. The mixture of Italian, French, English and actions usually gets a response, about a tenth of which I can understand. One of the men had spent four years in prison after the war ended, in Burgos and Salamanca, but the monument which raised so much ire in me causes him no indignation: "It's a fascist monument" he explains.

July 1. To Benecassim a two and a half hour south and west dash along the auto-pista, where by the Mediterranean we follow the nurses and relax; their shore now jammed with apartment buildings and hotels, their beach packed with Spanish families on holiday, and their convalescent-hospital villa lost among the holiday development.

July 2. Valencia is for me, as it was for Lloyd Edmonds and his group of Internationals travelling south from Figueres, a stage on the way to Albacete. For Netta it is farewell to Spain. Refugees from Madrid sat on their

bundles on one platform, and gypsies in colorful costume were begging at the station when Lloyd passed through. Today their grandchildren and great grandchildren are begging still, though the costume has disappeared. A market as grand as a cathedral, a cathedral like a Busby Berkeley extravaganza and five beggars in five minutes on the streets. Every outing produces a moral dilemma.

July 4. By train to Albacete. Along this line Lloyd and his fellows had come in a slow but triumphant procession, the train stopping at every little station and the townspeople parading along the platform welcoming the foreign friends. My smooth, speedy Inter-City on its way to Madrid will stop only at Albacete in two hours. Heat, heat, heat. Oranges everywhere, a dense shiny green forest of carefully planted, well-tended rows stretching out to low hills on the horizon. Not a human being in sight in the middle of a hot day. It has been thirty-two degrees in Valencia and looks even hotter here. The second-class passengers settle down in their seats to a three-course meal: smiling, efficient stewards first deal out the china, cutlery, glassware, table-cloths, napkins, bread and wine with a joke and with remarkable speed before beginning on the food they serve to each passenger from large silver dishes. As I am to alight at Albacete all I am offered is a drink, but my travelling companion, a retired munitions worker from Burgos with whom I have been conversing, can't see me sit while he eats and insists I share his first course of salad, his bread and his wine shouting at me in Spanish so that I will understand him.

We zoom through the stations where the International Brigaders' train halted; on either side pass cranes and cement; ugly blocks of apartments seven or eight storeys high, electricity pylons, Massey Ferguson signs, then orange trees and the sun beating down on fields now of stone fruit, now terraces of vines, now vegetables and then more orange trees. Orange trees upon orange trees, and then into flat plains. Mary Lowson, May McFarlane and Una Wilson, the Australian nurses, had arrived at Albacete on the back of a truck on a cold December's night; today at two in the afternoon the pitiless sun beat down and then beat up again from the station platform and the white walls of the station.

July 5. As we were contemplating the works of one of los Reyes Cattolicos one day Netta had mused "Aren't we lucky that Queen Elizabeth didn't marry Phillip II?" I agree again as I wait for the *conjerhal* in the cool lobby of the *ayuntamiento* of Albacete, while a stone Madonna and child look down on us from a commanding niche above the stairs leading up to the council chambers. Another cultural rift; another shock for an Australian raised in a liberal tradition.

It is impossible to visit any cathedral in this country – as I do in France or Italy – for its architectural beauty or grandeur or curiosity. Even the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona. Here they were all resolutely committed – in the name of the christian faith – to the rebellion, of the generals and to all its subsequent horrors.

I never do get to see a *conjerhal* – I hope that they are all too busy arranging cultural activities to spend much time

in their offices – and leave the town hall on its little old square, surrounded now with modern bank buildings (the banks are the greatest peace-time vandals in European cities). As I walk away I see Lloyd and his fellows marching past here to the Auto Parc chanting "The Rats, the Rats, we gotta get rid of the Rats". Directed to a building which housed the headquarters of the International Brigades, I pass a street wall expertly muralled with today's international issues: uranium, greens, women's rights.

July 6. By train from Albacete to Madrid. Hour on hour of plains, flat as South Australian wheat country, stretch to the horizon on both sides. Golden stubble, brown ploughed fields, flat, flat, flat. This is La Mancha, Don Quixote's country; no wonder he escaped into madness. Ten o'clock at night and just dark, we pull slowly into North station Madrid, still sweltering after a day of forty degrees. The pavements and roads are crowded, street cafes and bars shouting with people. I go out to eat at ten thirty and diners are still arriving well after eleven, when I leave for my airless and ugly hotel on Calle di San Bernardo, just up from Gran Via – picture Broadway at 42nd Street superimposed on Oxford Street and filled with exuberant Spaniards.

Madrid is the heart of my itinerary. Here the cry "No Pasaran!" had first been shouted; here on November 8, 1936 the citizens who had swiftly defeated the revolt of their garrisons of conscripts confronted the experienced soldiers of the Army of Africa in the suburbs of the capital. Here from Atocha station a column of men in uniform, singing in foreign languages, marched along Gran Via, up Principessa towards Plaza d'Espagna and the barricades of cobble-stones which marked the beginning of the front at Casa di Campo and University City. They arrived in time for the second rebel attack against the capital. Some joined the armed citizens on the Manzanares, near Paseo de Florida at Frenchmen's Bridge where the Army of Africa was held back. "It is us too they defended who defended Madrid", wrote the English poet Rex Warner, and though Madrid did not prove to be "the tombstone of fascism" of the slogan, neither was it conquered by rebel attackers; it remained the proud symbol of Republican Spain until the end.

There are no more marks on Gran Via or the streets converging on Puerta del Sol than there had been in Barcelona, of the bombs and shells that had landed here, smashing homes, shops offices and churches, killing people and destroying hopes; impossible to see the Palace Hotel as Military Hospital No. 1. But it is easier to imagine Madrid in war time. The blanket of smoke – diesel and petrol fumes from buses and cars and the smoke from a million cigarettes and cigars – which hangs forever in the hot still air of the city; the noise and heat of the vast boulevards baking in a fierce sun; none of this in any way resembled war-time Madrid, but the daily discomforts sharpened the imagination. Rivers of cars and buses flowing down the boulevards could more easily here turn into trucks and tanks after a long day. I have been given introductions to two people: Marcos Ana, a Communist official, imprisoned for twenty-three years

from 1939 (when he was 17), and Tom Entwistle, an expatriate American teacher with no politics that I could discern, a US Marine with eighteen months in Vietnam. Both are as helpful as can be. With Marcos Ana, though we have no common language, I experience once again the old comradeship. How crucial to the foreign volunteers, to soldiers and nurses – often in charge of men who did not speak their language – the shared ideology, the familiar words and expressions of communism.

July 7. To the Monastery of El Escorial the bus drives along the old tramway route to the front at University City, then follows the north-west road out of Madrid towards the Guadarrama mountains. This university had opened for classes only two years before the rebellion and was still being built when it was smashed to bits in the room-to-room fighting of November 1936. The rambling bush campus high above the city is dotted with plain and fancy modern buildings and closed for the summer.

We drive through low scrub hills and begin to climb into the mountains. Exactly forty-seven years ago today Lloyd and his Transport Regiment camped at El Escorial outside the sheltering walls of the monastery and palace, based here for the Republican offensive which had the day before captured the rebel held town of Brunete, twenty-eight kilometres south of Escorial, about twenty kilometres due west of Madrid. The soldiers were taken, as we are today, on a tour. The tourists in my bus are almost all Spaniards or Spanish colonials from Latin America and receive from El Escorial a reaffirmation, a strong draught of national glory; a British-Australian colonial's response is quite different. Lloyd's prosaic description of the marvels of these royal palaces and pantheon of Los Reyes Catolicos is a peaceable Australian protestant's distaste for kings who stowed their remains in marble urns decorated with gold, surrounded themselves with wondrous paintings and tapestries depicting their victories in battle and the power of the Faith, while their subjects starved and lived like animals.

What would Lloyd say of Santa Cruz of the Valley of the Fallen, I wonder? Twelve kilometres along the Guadarrama road running through one of the strategic passes in this rugged mountain range sheltering Madrid, we climb up to the crest of a peak. High on a great rocky outcrop, a stone cross 150 metres high, beneath it stretched out on a man-made plateau a forecourt with vast shallow steps leading up to a Mussolini-Roman colonnade of strong, plain arches which surround the entrance to the underground basilica hewn out of the rock by republican prisoners. The basilica is larger than St Peter's, we are told, but as this is not permitted, wrought iron gates have been erected inside the main doors to reduce the measurements, and with this lie the whole dreadful place resounds.

Our guide briefs us before sending us into the Basilica. "There are only two graves here", he explains, "Franco and Primo de Rivera."

"But where are the Fallen?" I ask, remembering the war cemetery at Bomana near Port Moresby with its heart-stopping field of plain white tomb-stones, the war



memorial in Canberra and the Vietnam memorial in Washington DC, with those terrible lists of names.

"They are behind the walls on each side."

"Can we see them?"

"No, the public can see only two tombs: Franco and Jose Antonio."

"But what about parents, relations. Can they come and visit the tombs?"

"We don't know who most of them are. But there is a list of names and one day every year, when we honor the dead, they can come."

"And what about the Republican dead?"

"This is not for them."

Around the walls brutal statues brandish swords. It is Sunday and a mass is being performed at the high altar for the visitors who come in their hundreds by bus and car, take the cable car to the top of the cross, stroll on the forecourt, marvel at the view down into the valley and eat at the restaurant. The Basilica's altar is placed directly under the towering cross and high over it arches a domed mosaic ceiling. Two chapels on either side of the altar are dedicated to the Virgin of Saragossa – "because the war ended there" – and the Virgin of Africa – "because the war started there" – and in one a little boy about eight years-old declaims the falangist slogan, "Arriba Espagna".

When the mass is over we examine the graves – the simplest objects in the whole memorial. Jose Antonio lies in front of the altar and Francisco Franco behind it, each under a plain marble stone engraved with his name and dates. Someone has put red roses on each and a childish urge to display my feelings comes over me; I walk over Jose Antonio. There are too many solemn-faced people about Franco's grave and I am too cowardly to risk it.

There is something horrible and breathtakingly arrogant about the vast size of this memorial built by a little man who thought he was God's right hand. It is even bigger than it looks from the front. Behind the rocks and

the cross an enormous monastery and convent were built around the even larger plateau. It rivals El Escorial as though Franco and the Falangists, wary of putting the Caudillo into one of the niches with the Reyes Catolicos, planned something no less solid, spectacular and saintly. The bus returns to Madrid along Principessa and passes under another symbol: a great white Triumphant Victory Arch. That such archaic symbols of victory and gifts to God for his help in a bloody triumph over brothers – there is no memorial to the help of Hitler or Mussolini – should have been built after the second world war is the final vindication of the republic and of those who fought for it.

The memorials are all Franquist, the defeateds' bones are not even marked, while those who rebelled against their elected government have received a pension for it ever since and those who went on to fight with Hitler against the Soviet Union in the Spanish Blue Division receive a West German pension as well, I was told. The men who defended the Republic received nothing but execution or jail sentences. The Socialist government has agreed to pensions for them, but the scheme has not yet been implemented. The volunteers from all over the world, whose Australian steps I have haltingly followed, do have one memorial. In the cemetery at Fuencarral, a small town now almost a suburb on the northern outskirts of Madrid, a marble plaque has been attached to a wall. It reads, in French:

Volunteers of the International Brigades
Fallen as heroes for the liberty of the Spanish
people and the progress of humanity.

A group of young people had it put up five years ago to replace the original, smashed during Franco's time.

July 10. "There's a valley in Spain called Jarama" we used to sing around the camp-fire at war-time Melbourne University Labor Club conferences. The words transformed into a noble lament the wry complaint about languishing in the trenches which the Lincoln Battalion had put to the mournful tune of "Red River Valley". Part of the 'little war' of left-wing factionalism being fought inside the big war of anti-fascism. All the Australian volunteers at one time or another served the Republic around the valley of Jarama: May McFarlane and Una Wilson in the hospital at Colmenar di Oreja nursed the survivors of the battle of Brunete and mourned the many good friends they lost there; Lloyd Edmonds and Sam Aarons drove men and materials to the front at Brunete, where Harry Hynes died; 'Ossie' Stephens was killed at Villeneuve del Pardillo, Jack Stephens at Villeneuve de la Canada; Ted Dickinson and Jack Newman near St Martin and Chinchon. We arrive at all these towns after an early morning start from Madrid; out along the Valencia road which was from 1937 the only road open, chewing up the miles through today's thick morning traffic of lorries and cars in the cool of a day which will be hot by ten o'clock. We walk around Boadilla dal Monte, where the aristocratic young Englishman Esmond Romilly met the thin sickly Australian Dick Whately and put him down forever in his book about the terrible battles in that

little village. Today it is a rich little place full of Madrid week-enders, and it keeps its General Franco Avenue.

Around Morata we walk over broken land where trenches remain and bunkers from which all scrap has long since been salvaged by poor villagers; only the strongly aromatic herbs are flourishing in this rocky ground. We drive to Colmenar di Oreja – a "brutal village" says Tom Entwistle, and I don't know what he means until we drive through narrow streets and suddenly burst into the plaza, a dazzling sun drenched empty square surrounded by two-storied stone houses with wooden verandahs, stone arcades below, the whole a perfect rough-hewn space, like a gigantic version of Shakespeare's Globe theatre. Stone benches around the edge and not a soul in sight. The sun scorches and I take photo after photo, entranced by the harsh beauty (this is what Tom meant by "brutal"). An elderly fellow wearing a Basque beret who has been watching us arrive and park the car beckons us into the shade of the arcade, and then wants to know where we are from and where we are going.

"I thought you wanted to know something!" he says, greatly pleased with himself, when we explain our mission. "That's why I called you into the shade". And he takes us in hand. He spent four years in jail after the war, he tells us, but he's not much interested in the past, finds the present more absorbing and noticing my interest in the plaza he leads us off: "She'll like this", he bubbles, and we follow him up narrow streets, I imagine to another aesthetic pleasure, but we enter an old people's club, run by the town. On a pleasant shaded verandah around the courtyard, which is dotted with flower beds and decorated by Ali Baba wine jars, old codgers are playing cards. Introductions all round, hand-shakes, jokes about the old women. "Where are they?" "Oh, they have their own section, over there, we don't want any trouble!" Great guffaws from weathered and coarse-featured peasant men. Our guide is vastly proud of his club which is indeed an oasis of shade, peace and beauty in the harsh heat – only a tourist could prefer the brutal plaza – and leads us to another wing where, in air-conditioned coolness and charming surroundings sit elderly women, crocheting and chatting. We are beckoned over, I am invited to sit down and we exchange talk about our children, our grandchildren, about crocheting and knitting. They are unsentimental and practical. One helped in the hospital where May and Una had worked, and I kick myself for not bringing the photo of the two nurses with Spanish *chicas* (girls). One of them could have been this woman. But I take photos of them for May Pennefather. Another road back to Madrid. We pass a white farm-house restaurant. "That's the cook-house they all talk about", and stop at nearby village of Chinchon – whose fabulous main square is more graceful and elegant than Colmenar's. On these rocky ridges the British batallion had been massacred in the battles of February 1937; here Ted Dickinson was taken prisoner and then shot. "That's the church where John Cornford left his pack" (a shell-pitted ruin near Los Angeles hill), says Tom Entwistle. He talks of all these events as though they were yesterday.

July 12. Sole English speaker, I sit alone in a bus load of glossy, rich, black-haired Latin American families heading south-west seventy kilometres for Toledo. The Alcazar, a gaunt impregnable palace which seems to guard this fortress town, was an officers' school in 1936, when its inhabitants resisted a Republican siege for seventy days until rescued by Franco's forces, who had turned aside from their September advance on the capital to relieve the besieged people whose ordeal had become a Nationalist epic. It is being restored, our guide reports, and will be a military museum. Gloomy thoughts about the depravity of even the noblest human passions fill my mind as we trudge around the sights of Toledo: the Cathedral a marvel of tasteless excess, the synagogue Catholicized after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain during the Inquisition; particularly gloomy thoughts

about the fate of political passions, puzzled thoughts about the complexities of issues that once seemed so simple and a country that is so different from ours; confused thoughts about living on one's knees or dying on one's feet (sentiments which had always seemed impossibly noble and now, after a few weeks in this country seem not in the least impossible but particularly Spanish, and most particularly un-Australian) all ran around my mind on the bus back to Madrid.

The same evening I watched a video of Spanish TV's film on the Lincoln battalion. On the small screen here were men I'd met in New York and San Francisco walking over the same rocky ground of the Jarama valley and reliving the passions of youth; remembering with compassion and with the tolerance of age the battles that have no memorials and the dead that have no graves.

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MANGO/GO MAN GO

Ruth Cowen

THE POETS

The grizzled poet and the dark-browed poet
together watch the spray flying
against grevillea hedges. They ponder their shared
ways —

imperative, impetuous, ill-judged
but sparkling, gleeful, coarse.
She walks along the beach
to fall like a seal
listening to voices seven miles below.
Consulting weed and fish and pearls —
what are they planning in the ferocious deep?

Sternly, stiff against the curling wave,
constructing phrases to use in his next verse
he trudges on.
It will be about the cliff edge and the shells
and how the albatross leans on the wind
unreflecting above fossils. He sees
the anecdotal coastline pour
shimmering into mist. Listen, listen
the poem is coming, it bends from the glistening rock.

She wakes as he tells her, but not to smile. Congratulations
are not in order between poets.

ELIZABETH RIDDELL

ULURU October 1985

Now we can live a shared
commonality having a dark
centre not our own; knowing
the inland sea holds unknown
horizons. We have stars
untouchable as the dark core,
our own unexplored desert
instead of worn-out charts,
the status of occupier, the look
of occupation forces.

CONNIE BARBER

THE MURRAY

The river lies where it fell.
It cannot get up. Feet in
the mountains, arms by its sides,
long hair streaming out into
the sea. It lies in bed, but
can't sleep. It knows no hunger,
but thirsts insatiably. The far
snow takes pity and the clouds
will never let it die.

R.H. MORRISON

SEA SLUG

Dirty, broken down,
raving in a derelict cafe;
the seaside carnival boarded up,
the gaudy summer town sensitive with winter.
Children kill:
Brando & Johnny Rotten snarl behind pool cues.
Alcoholic comedians amble thru the penny arcade,
perform spastic mimes to the mirror maze.

Our voices dun the cafe walls;
discuss your festering addiction,
my morbid fantasies & corkscrew vision.
Jobless, artless, running out of friends,
we joke about insanity & several bitches
who adore us. Pass resolutions,
compliment our failure, lighting cigarettes.
Dull fingers stab chips in sauce.

The world we know is patient for its debts.
The rain clings like an old man's mucous
to the window's smug eye.
In a tenement doorway a denim gypsy,
skeletal, blown, hacks a blues guitar.
You shun the street
as five bored sailors mangle him.

You should have looked. Thru the blood
his eyes never called but blinked, once, twice.
Paranoid, you dribbled lies
into the cleavage of your dreams.
The counterpoint of hysterical poets:
while you pipe a rainbow vale of maidens
I create a castaway perverted by the waves,
holding nose & sliding off the greasy pier.

BILL FEWER

GREAT GRANDFATHER BLUECOAT

To the demon which hisses 'expatriate': no.
Wherever you go each suburb has her duchess
and things are much of a muchness.
Also because great-grandfather Gordon, the Bluecoat
must have toyed with desertion
some slow combustion stove of a night
while his iron wife begged him not to go
until he did go, armed to face the miners
with a smooth bore .44 and his clumsy manners
since they, between forgetting all their Gaelic
had promised they would kill him, quick —
if he showed up to close the pub on Sunday.
I suppose they thought that he might go away,
it was worth a try, if he forgave them
or never forget, he clearly didn't care about unwelcome.

I think of him brushing leaves off his face
and painting Sidney Nolan,
scratching out in his office a daily report
"Occurrence: I've discovered that I do prefer
Tertullian to Origen, and Rochester
to any of the Augustans."
In cells: 1 drunken in charge of a dray,
2 for fighting whom I will release in the morning
and some-one who called Dr Johnson an oaf.
I said to him: not, my son, in my hearing
at this he complained of the price of a Poet's Licence.
If Castlemaine Arts and Sciences should finish
the Academy of the Future please send reinforcements
to keep the disillusioned in. I am happy.
I love my wife, who never has waved before me
any other man's skeleton.

ROBERT HARRIS

THE SMITHFIELD RAILWAY STATION

A long corridor of moving pictures
shifting Friday morning faces

early between extremes
down the back end of everything

here where eventually
last wild places will be found

narrow borders of thistle and spike-weed
bum-bush and the enthusiastic

clutching after distance of kikuyu
where magpies grip down on fence-droppers

with lidless contemplation
refuse to shift

what they make of it is uncertain
gone too quickly to matter

other things frighten more quickly
scuttling into dark disorder of pines

or shuddering beneath
the broad dock leaf's profusion

then only the eye-sore
of a white limestone cutting

before the backs of houses start
a cluttered stumble toward the city

hemmed in by long drains of coffee-colored
mud and half sunk cardboard crates

where it stops again this same way later
heavy with five-o'clock faces

a station and a village
the sprawling suburbs

have now within their unchecked sprawling
alone in a last box-car

with soft rain falling
night gathered at the edges of the glass.

JEFF GUESS

ONE DAY OUT

I'm one loaded chamber
playing time roulette with ghosts
when spud sold picasso's underpants
when th thump roared out his boasts

I'm a fool for swimming pools
but it's rainin', helen
no spitting running skidding
swearing or pushing in

there's kevin, been here all th time
reading about th great lords of invisibility
marxist junkie, to each according to their needs
from each according to their ability

& steven, hasn't been near th pub all week
he's in love, but she's got several more
blokes, girls, & he won't go out th back
without leaving a note on th front door

in comes th overweight ballet dancer
freighted with chuff, pirouetting past
reciting a poem of how she'd have danced
if it weren't for her recalcitrant arse

when yr running out of money
a pot's asking a lot
one too many in a taxi
uh oh — george th bot

when a glass is on a game of pool
whose pockets get th rot?
who's not around when it's their round?
uh huh — george th bot

it's old ma rainbow, she's moved out of town
out to widow's county, pa couldn't make th climb
to voga & painting classes, now she's alone
& she tells me rather sadly how she's filling in her time

calmed th joe blakes, she'll be jake
cheque day is wreck day, hump th bluey
snakes in the plagon, call me snake
& SEND HER DOWN HUEY

ERIC BEACH

MOVABLE FEASTS

Night closes down on the city above the waters,
no moon tonight, the elements divided
by a gulf, senegal absence.

There is fire under the pot-bellied planet:
St Mary's is purging prodigal horizons,
imaginations, with a waxing, yellow iris.

The spires blow sparks in the tenements, stinging the
brain,
and Madame Simone and her twelve, midnight children
are down on their knees and their preferences praying
for rain.

Meshed in the half-light, like zebras at large,
come cleft youths dancing a storm, the primal resurgence,
and fresh out of Darlington young turks exotic as
paradise

fan their displays. Immersed in reflections, reactions,
the head
lifted quickly, they go weaving the scat season's cardiac
traffic,
murderous territory pumping bands into the red.

Otherwise, uptown, two whippet-faced gourmets
ejected for living a lie, are without dissension;
stranded, at pains to decipher the signs

they witness the holocaust framed in the other's eye
and are breakneck for Chinatown.
*Every condition is cake for the journey:
the feast is movable.*

CONAL FITZPATRICK

GREAT REDEEMING ACTIONS IN THE LIFE OF A LUCKLESS WONDER

One night, one man took a woman all the way home.

On another night, another man takes the same woman
who stops half-way and says:
“no it’s better to be left with the thought
of what might have been”.

Well there’s no answer to this and no room for the night
so the man sticks his hands in his pockets.

The woman observes:
“now I know why men put their hands in their pockets”
then leaves to catch an early rise to work.

The man does nothing.
With hands all-the-same in the pocket
he stands like this
until (she’s gone and well out of view)
then, alone at last
he pulls from his pocket a handkerchief

and blows his nose at the stars.

NEIL MURRAY

PREDILECTION

It had always been
Jack’s habit
of looking Betty
squarely
in the chest
and so he saw
the bull-ant
(and demolished it
what’s more)
before it reached
the cleave
of purplish flesh
above her dress.

BARNEY ROBERTS

the other side of footscray

footscray, footscray, footscray.
anyway, you say, footscray,
it comes out the same.
you can’t make it sexy,
you can’t make it nice,
you can’t make it romantic,
it doesn’t sound right.
’cause footscray is footscray,
just footscray,
that’s it.

there’s violence in footscray,
two people dead the newspapers say.
one shot in the park on new year’s day.
by the gay men’s beat.
another in a bar-room brawl down victoria street.
and my neighbor shun, born in vietnam,
ties young lei to the fence, with string on both hands.
and she laughs as she struggles,
till her tears beg release,
and she cries and she screams,
in vietnamese.
yeah. there’s violence in footscray,
you can see it all around,
in the mall on a sunday,
when the vandals have been out.
and the coppers with their guns,
hassle harmless old drunks,
whose only concern is their brown paper bag.
and in the street when you’re walking,
you’ll hear someone scream,
bloody nips go home ya bastards, fuckin’ japanese.
we fought you in the war, well, not me,
but we fought you ya bastards, fuckin’ dumb japanese.
go home where ya came from, leave us in peace.
no cops around at moments like these.

and the footscray sky fills with whirring blades
and blue lights flashing, this is a raid.
the cops are everywhere it seems,
in the peace of your own backyard,
and in the streets.
now they’re in the air too.
keeping a watchful eye on you,
and me.
and there’s nothing more scary
i have found
than a copper chopper
that’s bearing down.
with its spotlight searching
heading straight for you.

yeah. there’s violence in footscray.
and violation too.
in this working class town.

KOMNINOS

'UP THERE CAZALY!!!'



'GOLDEN WINTERS'

MAX PIGGOTT

Swansong

This article is by a regular Overland contributor who was not only a South Melbourne supporter but a South Melbourne player. It has been selected for publication by Overland's Editor, a South Melbourne supporter, and illustrated by Vane Lindesay, also a South Melbourne supporter. Old loyalties die hard.

I fell in love with and married a woman who, on rare occasions, would use a little Eau de Cologne 4711 behind her ear. Later, I was to learn from her that 4711 soothed the pain of a bull-ant bite. But I'm digressing. I would like to have said that the attraction of her scent stays with me still, nearly forty years after I began wooing her, but it doesn't.

The fumes so readily conjured up comes from a mix of sweat and liniment, a mingling from the dressing rooms of football clubs. When I read that the Sydney Swans had irretrievably broken the umbilical cord that linked the football club to Melbourne and, more particularly, to South Melbourne, I was shattered, stunned. Here was one hundred years of endeavor and tradition going down the drain. Tradition and loyalty no longer count. No longer will the sound of masseurs slapping shiny thighs, of coaches berating and urging, no longer the rat-a-tat-tat of studded boots as the players run down the race and on to the arena at the lakeside oval. I could weep.

You don't understand? Ian Turner would have. I wish he were here – a consoling Tiger licking the downcast neck of a despondent Swan. Swan? Swan? That's where the rot started.

As kids my generation knew them as the blood-stained-angels, their red-and-white guernseys revered warriors' tabards. Listen to the old cry "Carn the Bloods" or better still, the call to arms, "Up there, Cazaly" and you'll understand why old men are crying. Cazaly was typical of the Irish Catholics, the pro-Mannix, anti-conscriptionist working class of South Melbourne in the 1920s and 1930s. The suburb was not formerly known as Emerald Hill for nothing. From the window of the room I was born in, above a shop in busy tram-lined Clarendon Street, you can lean your head out and see the club's 1933 premiership pennant hanging dejectedly from the main grandstand flagpole.

I was inducted into the club at birth; there's no other reason for my devotion. Surely the sound of leather on leather must have drifted up from the arena on the June day long ago as my mother tensioned in the midwife's arms. The 1920s and 1930s were depressing years for South Melbourne's adults. Many of them were sustained only by their loyalty to family and their beloved football team. At primary school it was quite useless of Miss O'Brien, or tottery 'Argie' Hargreaves, to try to drum the heroism of Horatio into the hearts and minds of their Dorcas Street State-school pupils. We knew that down the road in our coliseum eighteen heroes battled it out every Saturday arvo. While, bless her, Miss Sheehan hoped we saw beauty in "wandering lonely as a cloud", we kids found it in the grace and balance of brylcreemed Ron Hillis (an Australian ballroom dancing champion), as he cleared the ball down field. There was, for us, more elegance in the flight of a dropkick as it left the toe of waterside worker Peter Reville than in a host of nodding daffodils. We could touch *our* heroes, carry their bags from tram to turnstile and receive, if our hero was in a good mood, a pat on the head and an autograph.

Few of us could afford a football of our own. We tightly rolled a Sun Pictorial, tied it with string to the size of a 1920s sausage roll, and booted it in school grounds and carless streets. Like Christmas holidays, the start of the next season's football season never seemed to come quickly enough. Over long summers our anticipation was kept below boiling point only by knowing that cricketing giants like Bill Woodfull, Lindsay Hassett, Keith Miller and Ian Johnson were wearing our beloved red and white. You could sit beside old men who would recall South Melbourne sporting giants like Trott and Blackham and hear tales of how Fletcher and Mark Tandy "the greatest ruck combination ever" thrashed their opposition. Maybe, in their excitement, forgetting Cazaly. At the

height of the Great Depression I recall seeing a middle-aged woman, who had been standing quietly behind the goalposts, turn and begin belting a spectator over the head with her umbrella.

On another occasion South Melbourne supporters, riled by the umpiring decisions of the then doyen of umpires, Jack McMurray, waited on him after the game, carried him to nearby Albert Park Lake and threw him in, clothes and all. No one could accuse South barrackers of being unsupportive.

The canker from which the club never recovered suppurated in 1934 and 1945, the only years in which the club might have won a premiership after its successful campaign in 1933. Red hot favorites in both those years, yet falling unexpectedly to Richmond and Carlton. Rumors abounded, with accusations of bribery of leading players by Melbourne's baccarat fraternity.

The patient hung on for another forty years. War matures. In our youth we knew league football was for gods and heroes and I was but an ungodly, gangling kid. My reputation as a schoolboy footballer rested solely on the relished accounts of the day I kicked the ball into the back of the head of the school's sportsmaster. He never forgave those who laughed, or me, and promptly dropped me from ever again representing the school. I never forgave him.

Six years of wartime army life convinced me there were no gods, least of all football ones. Determined to get at least one game of senior Victorian League football, I turned up at South Melbourne for the opening of training in 1946. "At twenty-six he's a bit old for a recruit," they said. I would stick it out, one game, and the three quid would be useful too.

On the sixth game of the new season I ran out on to St

Kilda's Junction Oval to play against the Saints. "You're going to make it hard, I'm only a new chum," I said to the Adonis who ran across to oppose me. He was national idol and Test cricketer, Keith Miller, the Saints' full-back.

I had to wait until the opening of the 1947 season before I achieved the ambition I'd nursed unconsciously for so long – to run out on to the hallowed South Melbourne arena to the cheers of a South Melbourne crowd. (The arena and grandstands had been abused by US Marines camped there during the war.) About 25,000 spectators jammed the ground, and they saw South Melbourne beat Carlton. It was a victorious homecoming – we were delirious.

You find it hard to understand such a display of emotion? Then you don't understand what life was like for two decades in places like Fitzroy, Collingwood and South Melbourne. Football made life bearable. On one day a week football broke down class barriers. Football developed a sense of loyalty among people who were questioning whether loyalty meant anything after the senseless slaughter of the Great War and the mindlessness brought about by industrialisation. Football gave hope, winning *was* possible.

Now the symbol of that hope has gone for those who remember it as it once was. I'm saddened to think the lakeside oval lies silent. Never again will Up There Cazza be heard in the homeland. Maybe if you listen hard enough the cry of Carn the Bloods will be heard as the wind whistles through the grandstands' trusses. But even that is asking too much for someone who can't recall the scent his lover used.

I'm sorry you don't understand, but you see, you never grew up in South Melbourne.

JOHN SENDY

The Story of Overland

John Sendy recently wrote this study of Overland as an academic assignment, without any thought of publication in this magazine. As this is the 'centenary' of Overland, marked by our two recent special issues, and as we receive many requests for information on the history of the magazine, it seems desirable and appropriate that his study should be published.

The distinguishing feature of the literary quarterly Overland is steadfast commitment to its founding motto, "Temper democratic; Bias Australian". This encompasses both a non-elitist, "old-fashioned" desire for literature and ideas to be accessible to the average intelligent reader, and an adherence to Australian radical nationalist traditions of earlier times. It embraces, too, in the editor's view, determination to avoid "the dreadful humourlessness and dogmatism of the fully convinced."¹

The first issue of Overland appeared in the spring of 1954. It announced itself as follows:

Overland is a new magazine devoted to creative writing. Its motto is: "Temper democratic; Bias Australian."

Overland will publish poetry and short stories, articles and criticism by new and by established writers. It will aim high, but has no exclusive or academic standards of any kind. It will make a special point of developing writing talent in people of diverse background. We ask our readers, however inexperienced, that they write for us; that they share our love of living, our optimism, our belief in the traditional dream of a better Australia.

Send us your criticisms and suggestions, and help us to reach the public we want to serve: the useful people in every field.²

According to its editor, twenty-five years later, it set out to:

talk of books and writing in an unselfconscious way with the assumption that there was no reason whatsoever why 'ordinary people' should not enjoy such writing and participate in it. There were

two important implicit assertions: firstly, that writing was *not* confined simply to the best that had been said, written or thought in the world, that there were all sorts of traditions, and not just a "great" one; secondly, that other things being equal, writing dealing with our local reality, Australia and our jobs and our politics and our history and, if you like, our beaches, would be meaningful in a way that 'better' writing more removed from us was not meaningful. Yes, we espoused the dreaded 'double standard' in Art.³

After a hundred issues and thirty-one years the editor, still the same person, has reiterated these positions: Overland, he claims, has established itself "somewhere on the left/liberal/Labor/socialist/humanist side of the social and political spectrum", there is nothing in human, literary and cultural affairs which should not be "accessible to that odd, hypothetical being called the 'intelligent general reader'", and the journal is not "always sure of what it thinks."⁴

Overland has a rich and colorful past. It emerged in the Cold War years, created by (mainly) communist writers and intellectuals during the long period of the Menzies Government, at the time of the Petrov Royal Commission, of the anti-communism which flourished following the 1949 coal strike, of the Lowe Royal Commission into Communism in Victoria and of the attempts to outlaw the Communist Party of Australia in 1950-51. The membership of the CPA had tumbled from some 25,000 at the end of the war to about 8,000. The CPA retained, however, considerable trade union influence, and its writers and intellectuals, particularly in Victoria, were vigorously attempting to promote Australian culture and develop Australian literature and art.

In 1950 *Power Without Glory* became notorious, recording large sales, and the subsequent prosecution of Frank Hardy created wide interest. In 1952 the Australasian Book Society emerged, and over several years enrolled 3,000 members to take six paperback books a year. Following *Power Without Glory*, Eric Lambert's *Twenty Thousand Thieves* appeared in 1951 and Judah Waten's *Alien Son* the year after. This seemed to herald a literary revival and a hope for the left-wing in general. Large audiences saw Dick Diamond's "Reedy River" at New Theatre and other theatres throughout Australia.

As part of this development the Melbourne Realist Writers' Group established a journal, the *Realist Writer*, in 1952. The first issue of this technically-poor, roneoed little journal displayed an energetic and partisan approach which was marred by crudity, lack of sophistication, and by grossly over-simplified and foolish political assertions. Capitalism and its culture was, apparently, at the end of its tether: "The old order is dying and the old literature, the old criticism, the old journalism with it."⁵

Frank Hardy, Eric Lambert, John Morrison, Ralph de Boissiere, Walter Kaufman and David Martin were foremost among the contributors to the *Realist Writer*. These young writers, most of whom had already published novels or were about to, were all members of the CPA.

They proclaimed social realism loudly, even shrilly, without beating about the bush:

Every writer whose aspirations are those of the people and who is with them in their day to day struggles against the warmongers, fascists, scabs and political thugs who try to block their path to socialism, cannot fail to choose significant social themes. And because he is with the people he will write as a partisan, as a spokesman for their interests.

He will write of the demand of the world's peoples for peace; of heroic struggles of men and women against black reaction and ruthless corruption, of day to day issues like the imposition of the Crimes Act and the treachery of the strike breakers.⁶

A sketch shows a new broom (the Realist Writers' Group) sweeping out the capitalists and the rats.

There were nine issues of the *Realist Writer*. It shed some crudity and loudness and gained a little in sophistication, publishing some interesting and useful stories, poems and articles. Bill Wannan edited the first two issues and Stephen Murray-Smith the next seven. Realist Writers' Groups were established in most states and the journal had representatives in all states except Tasmania.

"In the middle of 1954," Stephen Murray-Smith has related, "Judah Waten, then working part-time at the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, asked me to call and see him. He offered me fifteen pounds to turn the *Realist Writer* into a printed magazine." The money came from a fund to which Waten had access.⁸

With the agreement of the Realist Writers' Group, *Overland* was launched. It proved to be very different from the *Realist Writer*, which it incorporated. Vincent Buckley has classified it as "a united front journal whose ideology was not Zhdanovite but one of cultural co-operation combined with one of romantic nationalist traditionalism."⁹ Indeed, Murray-Smith determined that *Overland* would go after a broad audience and would not become a medium for diatribes of Soviet ideologues such as had appeared in the *Realist Writer* on occasions.¹⁰

The first issue contained a mere sixteen pages. The cover carried a black-and-white drawing by Noel Counihan, "Off to the Diggings, 1854", of powerful-looking diggers, determined and independent, men who would take no nonsense. It had a story by John Morrison, articles by Brian Fitzpatrick and John Manifold, literary comments from Nettie Palmer and Katharine Susannah Prichard, book reviews, a couple of poems and "Swag", an editorial *pot pourri* of brief comments, opinions and announcements, about books and writing, politics, gardening, or anything which took the editor's fancy. Swag became a permanent feature of *Overland*.

Apart from Murray-Smith, the editorial board consisted of Eric Lambert, Jack Coffey, Ian Turner, Ralph de Boissiere (Victoria), Joan Clarke, Len Fox (NSW), John Manifold (Queensland), Joan Williams (WA), Brian Fox (New Zealand). All, or nearly all, were CPA members. One thousand copies were sold. By the fourth issue sales of 4,300 were claimed,¹¹ far larger than those of the other literary magazines, *Meanjin* and *Southerly*.

The size increased to 44 pages by June, 1958, and the more left-wing contributors like David Martin, Ian Turner, Frank Hardy, Elizabeth Vassilieff and John Morrison had been joined by names such as Colin Roderick, Geoffrey Serle, Race Mathews, Rodney Hall and Max Harris. As well as stories and poems *Overland* endeavoured to popularise Australian literature and writers, past and present, in days when it wasn't so popular or well-known. Its focus was distinctly literary but matters relating to peace and war were often discussed and, not infrequently, Soviet literature was referred to fondly.

Lynne Strahan, commenting on the early issues, has found that "Content was preferred to form and style; awkward sincerity was favoured above elegant playfulness. Except for poems by Laurence Collinson, who was masochistically inward-looking, the verse celebrated events and change in the external world. Irony and satire were rare . . . The tone was perky and defiant, even self-important."¹²

A 1957 editorial, "Tradition and Today", expressed the journal's orientation, asserting that a distinctively Australian literature was born among the Australian lower classes who rejected the culture and outlook of the squatters, merchants and manufacturers who favoured England:

The creators of the new literature – Lawson, Furphy, 'Banjo' Paterson, William Lane, Mary Gilmore, Miles Franklin, Steele Rudd, Bernard O'Dowd – drew their images from the Australian

common man – the convict, digger, selector, shearer, and from the early struggles of the labor and radical movements – Eureka, the 8-hour day, the demand that the land be unlocked, the strikes of shearers and miners.

Their outlet was through the radical and socialist weeklies – the *Bulletin*, the *Boomerang*, the *Worker*; their champions were the early labor publicists; their audience was found largely in the ranks of the Australian Shearers' Union and the newly-formed socialist and labor organisations.

Thus were the values of Australian literature established as being democratic in temper, human in approach, national in spirit, plebeian in orientation, and above all faithful to the realities of Australian life. And this tradition has endured.¹³

One observer who participated in the Melbourne literary movement of the times later assessed the significance of *Overland* as follows:

Overland was the most tangible expression of the new, progressive literary movement that arose from the efforts of the considerable body of writers centred in Melbourne. The enthusiasm it engendered derived from its high quality, from the variety and talent of its contributors, and from the imagination, the cultural background and the political commitment of its editor. Adopting a policy of encouraging new writers, Stephen Murray-Smith was responsible for publishing the work of writers of undoubted ability who later achieved considerable distinction. Literary soirees, social activities, fund-raising parties, informal meetings with authors created a sense of clan among writers, a belief in themselves, a conviction that their work was important. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of *Overland* in developing Australian literature between 1950 and 1960. Anyone associated with the journal in those years will have experienced the encouragement given by Stephen Murray-Smith to writers who showed any promise, and the ideological influence of the journal was considerable.¹⁷

Adler's view is substantiated by Rodney Hall's description of the Brisbane Realist Writers' Group of those days:

The members were mainly unionists writing for a hobby, and for a good while meetings were held in the Trades Hall; yet eventually it came to be by far the most important and productive writers' group in the city, partly because it began by having the advantage of connections with a new magazine, *Overland*, which made publication at least a practical possibility.¹⁸

Trade union journals such as *Common Cause*, the organ of the militant Miners' Federation, often mentioned and reviewed *Overland*, and a number of NSW coalfields writers such as Jock Graham, Allan Vaisey and Mick Lawson contributed poems and stories to the literary journal.

Lynne Strahan believes that *Overland* "did represent a sincere attempt to provide a magazine with broadly-based appeal, to transcend cultural divisions that separated people as surely as economic disparities. A proud if chimerical goal. It also counteracted the isolation of the left, who despite their cockiness, were a minority on the fringes of community tolerance . . ." ¹⁹

The difficulties of the task were outlined patiently by Murray-Smith in a letter to a communist building worker who, struggling to write and be published, was apprehensive about the staunchness of the journal:

. . . *Overland* is a democratic magazine (not a social realist or Marxist one) standing for peace and

OVERLAND

Incorporating The Realist Writer

NUMBER ONE, SPRING 1954 ONE, SHILLING

Off to the diggings, 1854. Drawing by H.C.

WRITING BY:

Nettie Palmer, John Morrison, Katharine Susannah Prichard, John Manifold, David Martin, Brian Fitzpatrick, Senator Donald Cameron, Elizabeth Vassilieff, Eric Lambert, Professor A. D. Hope and others.

The public reception of early issues proved encouraging. Miles Franklin approved of the first one: "Today came a more interesting magazine, alive in every pore . . . I will subscribe to *Overland* if I live."¹⁴ Mary Gilmore wrote: "It is just as good and easier reading than *Meanjin* – that is for ordinary people."¹⁵ The *Adelaide Advertiser* believed *Overland* to be ". . . easily the most readable of the current issues of the Australian literary magazines . . ." with a "down-to-earth Australian flavour and an up-to-date vitality."¹⁶

national independence and democratic rights, and seeking to find common ground and common interest in these causes among workers, middle class and intellectuals. Overland has a large number of aims, some of them not easy (but not impossible) to reconcile – e.g., being ‘intellectual’ enough ... to satisfy the more cultured and educated and intellectual people, and ‘meaty’ and ‘earthy’ enough to satisfy people who stand close to life at its rawest but haven’t fully grasped that art and literature is their right too, and reflects their lives as much as anyone else’s.²⁰

As Ian Turner believed, the CPA tolerated Overland “but there was an aura of ideological suspicion around.”²¹ Traditionally the predominantly working-class CPA activists had regarded intellectuals with a degree of scepticism. Turner’s comment about the Victorian CPA leadership’s attitude to Overland has been corroborated by a senior functionary of the CPA at the time.²²

The magazine was suspect in other quarters, too. In Federal Parliament on 12 October, 1955, the Labor MHR, Cremean, attacked it as being communist, and criticised Dr Evatt for allowing Overland to publish some of his earlier writings; while Leslie Haylen, MHR, an ALP man with literary ability, defended Evatt and the journal.²³

But the chief trouble loomed very much closer to home. Khrushchev’s 1956 revelations about Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, followed by the uprising in Hungary and the action of Soviet troops there, shook the faith of large numbers of communists. Generally, the CPA took a hard line on these matters, attempting to avoid discussion of the weighty problems involved and supporting Soviet actions in Hungary. Many CPA intellectuals, worried and doubting, came into conflict with the CPA leadership. Ian Turner was expelled from the CPA in 1958. His expulsion sparked the resignation of his friend, Stephen Murray-Smith, and encouraged other writers and intellectuals to leave.

A fight ensued over Overland. Murray-Smith, supported by Turner, David Martin, Ken Gott and others, refused to hand over the journal to the Realist Writers’ Group where faithful CPA members had a majority. Editorial board members Jack Coffey and Eric La Motte, loyal to the CPA, claimed that as the Realist Writers’ Group had decided to establish the new journal, which had incorporated the Realist Writer, this proved that the Realist Writers’ Group actually owned Overland.²⁴

Murray-Smith and company remained unmoved by such arguments and were able to point out in reply that the Commonwealth Literary Fund had been advised in October, 1955, exactly one year after the foundation of Overland, that while it had grown out of the Realist Writer, the journal “was founded as an independent and a national magazine, with an independent editorial board.”²⁵ He claimed the full legal and financial responsibility always rested with the editor.²⁶

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the argument, and despite the shouting matches, Overland remained in the hands of Murray-Smith and his friends.

In the autumn of 1959 Overland carried an article “Two Views on Dr Zhivago.” Maurice Shadbolt, a New Zealander, defended and praised Boris Pasternak’s famous and controversial novel while Katharine Susannah Prichard severely criticised it. The presentation of such a discussion by a literary journal seems logical, yet it angered the CPA leadership and provided the basis upon which a public attack on Overland was launched in the CPA press. According to Tribune the journal had “become a shackle on the Labor Movement by its veering from the Left, through centre and away to the Right where, if editor Murray-Smith is allowed to have final say, it will remain.”²⁷

However, Katharine Susannah Prichard objected and praised Murray-Smith; she wrote of her concern that a “sectarian approach” might alienate CPA friends and supporters in the Labor Movement.¹

Meanwhile the Realist Writer (later the Realist) had been resurrected in Sydney as a counter and alternative to Overland. The editorial by Frank Hardy in the second issue attacked intellectuals who had allegedly “grown tired of the long, difficult and even at times tedious struggle for Socialism.”²⁹

In June, 1959, the Victorian CPA weekly, Guardian, maintained the attack: “Can one arrive at the facts about Pasternak by presenting the reader with two opposing views about the novel Zhivago?” asked Ralph de Bois-siere, presenting the rather curious opinion that only one view should be allowed.³⁰ The article alleged Murray-Smith had shown hostility to the labor movement and objectively assisted the cold war while talking of peace.

Judah Waten presented a somewhat less shrill criticism: he praised some parts of the current issue but called for a clearer editorial attitude, a more partisan stand, more vigorous combatting of reactionary trends and for stories, poems and articles which sharply reflect “lives and struggles of the people today.”³¹

Since that time Overland has rarely rated a mention in the CPA journals.

With CPA support withdrawn the sales began to fall from their peak of 4,300 in March, 1958, and in ten years time were less than half of that figure.³²

Following the split with the CPA some changes in Overland were inevitable. It did not become anti-Soviet or anti-communist, communist writers were still freely published and reviewed, and the journal became, if anything, more political and left-wing, for a time, in its comment. However, it adopted a critical stance towards some Soviet policies and it carried advertisements for independent Australian and British journals which were critical of official communist attitudes. Furthermore, loss of the chiefly working class CPA support robbed it of access to many trade unions and of contributions from various sources including many unionists. In addition, the attacks from the CPA brought a certain tension, defensiveness and self-consciousness for several years.

Except for Murray-Smith and Ian Turner the editorial committee was completely new: Tom Errey from Tasmania, and the literary notables Kylie Tennant, Nancy Cato, Gavin Casey, Rodney Hall, and later John McLaren.

David Carter has written that *Overland* in this period, after its withdrawal from doctrinaire communism, searched for a position somewhere on the left, somewhere in between.³³

Nevertheless, the split with the CPA provided only part of the problems faced by *Overland*. Apart from being ostracised by the communists, the journal was attacked from the political right; for many years the Commonwealth Literary Fund Advisory Board refused grants to *Overland* because of its left-wing connections and its first grant came as late as 1963.³⁴

As well, the academics attacked Murray-Smith "for admitting that literary quality was not his only criterion in what he published; he was after the human element as well."³⁵

Nonetheless, the magazine attracted stories, articles, poems and comments from big-name contributors who were significant democratic figures: Patrick White, Bernard Smith, Mark Oliphant, A.A. Phillips, Jim Cairns, Geoffrey Dutton, Nancy Keesing, Eric Westbrook, A.D. Hope, Xavier Herbert, Judith Wright, C.P. FitzGerald, Leslie Rees, to name but some. And, as well as literature, art and writers, the journal dealt with issues relating to foreign policy, New Guinea, the Aborigines, the Mount Isa strike, the Vietnam war and a host of other subjects from a left-wing socialist or humanist viewpoint. And so it has continued to do.

Max Harris felt forced to write: "Modest, penurious, scrappy but tenacious, *Overland* has always been the voice of the liberal left . . . over a quarter of a century [it] shows that there can be a humanised case for democratic socialism . . ."³⁶

Just over ten years ago Peter Ryan, who rarely shrinks from sinking in the critical boot when he feels it warranted, reviewed six Australian little magazines and compared *Overland* quite favorably. He complained about a general tendency in several of the journals towards cult-jargon, navel-focussed articles, and the content-less privacy of most of the poetry, and remarked "how far actual readers have slipped already from editorial minds."³⁷ Ryan considered *Arena* had a special contemporary dead language which made its thoughts inaccessible to the ordinary brain; Westerly he thought odd for preserving "through all the short stories a delicate connecting line of urine, vomit, cockroaches and violent assaults on old women by mental defectives"; Meanjin got its serve through barbs hurled at contributor, Humphrey McQueen, who "has attained emeritus status as a bore at an unusually early age" and "performs a prodigy of self-effacement by getting 'I' seven times into one paragraph and three times into one line."³⁸ Though *Overland*, Ryan wrote, "has had its share of tired old whim horses treading their circular tracks, too," it often showed greater exuberance than the others. He praised *Overland* no. 60 as "a triumph of editorial enterprise" because it contained a penetrating interview conducted by Murray-Smith and Turner with artists Fred Williams and Clifton

Pugh on Erith Island in March, 1974, as well as reproductions of the artists' paintings done there at the time.

One critic has perceived Meanjin "as fundamentally too elitist, *Arena* as too ideological, and *Overland* as too ocker. But of these magazines only the last one seems to have any reasonable chance of making contact with ordinary Australian people."³⁹

Among some academic and intellectual circles *Overland* is thought to hark back to the past with its realist, humanist and contextual approach to literature and its general adherence to the radical nationalist position it adopted at the outset. Accusations that *Overland* is stuffy, old-fashioned and respectable, are made.⁴⁰

But Murray-Smith is unregenerate. He declares interest in good writing, concern that writers should have something to say to interest *Overland's* audience, which includes many non-intellectuals; he complains that some of the young poets, while radical in themselves, and about themselves, have no program for transforming society; he believes the fashionable is not necessarily radical, and disapproves of "contemporary literary band-waggoning."⁴¹

He is not the only critic of the presentation of weird and wonderful personal desert-scapes in modern Australian literature. Some believe too many writers today head their literary efforts into the by-ways of mad minds, deviant practices, loony contemplative fantasies, in exercises designed to be ultra-modern, shocking, super-intellectual, faddish. Dorothy Green has complained of writers who "find it difficult to believe that there are areas of life outside their world in which people do not see one another as copy or compete for public attention; areas in which people struggle to be human and honest, and sometimes succeed."⁴² She dislikes their use of "considerable skill to generate in their readers a deep disgust with life in general . . ."⁴³ She is worried about the zeal of young poets in communicating especially with one another: "This is a vice practised by economists, commercial travellers, physicists, political scientists et al, and if the young poets are off on the same track, God help us all."⁴⁴

Many of the newer writers and dramatists are products of and observers of Australian intellectual life and middle-class social conditions, and, as Ian Turner says, they "speak confidently . . . to their fellow-inhabitants of that milieu."⁴⁵

Turner saw the writers of the 1880s and 1890s differently:

The first thing about the writers of these years was that their tone of voice was unselfconsciously, unmistakably, and often "offensively" (as Joseph Furphy said) democratic, lower-class Australian – and this was possibly the first time in any literature that this had been the dominant tone. Not that there were no gradations: Lawson characteristically saw the country from on foot, and his feet were mostly hot and tired and blistered, while his contemporary, and a better balladist, "Banjo" Paterson, saw it from on horseback; Lawson's future was unlike anything that had gone before,

while Paterson's was a return to an idyllic pastoral beginning; Furphy wrote of bullock drivers, Edward Dyson of miners and city workers, Miles Franklin of remote or feckless station owners, "Steele Rudd" of small selectors grubbing a living out of a back-breaking farm. But there was sufficient community of language and sentiment to link all these, and many more, with what was fresh in the nineties air. They were "battlers" themselves, and their hearts were on that side. Their hope was not in the individualist radicalism of the urban middle class, but in a collectivism which had borrowed some slogans from overseas socialism but owed more to the instinctive solidarity of bush unionism. They rejected old-world models, both literary and social; they spoke the vernacular, and spurned romance. They shared a humour whose central element was an ironic understatement which seemed designed to make more manageable the manifold difficulties of the lives they knew. Their view of human nature was optimistic: there was pathos, even horror and despair, in their work, but not tragedy, for defeat, when it came (as it often did), came from without and not within. And in all this they were close to their people and their time.⁴⁶

Indeed, ordinary people apparently read a good deal in those days of which Turner speaks. According to Vance Palmer the shearing sheds of the eighties and nineties "were better supplied with current literature than the mechanics institutes of the coastal townships and the schools of arts in the cities. The new bushworker was a reader and, to some extent, a thinker."⁴⁷ T.A. Coghlan claimed of Australia: "There the workers are a reading class . . ."⁴⁸ The point is confirmed in another way. Dr Lloyd Ross, whose father edited the Broken Hill Barrier Truth, which was mainly read by unionists, has pointed out that the paper published Furphy's *Rigby's Romance* in 1905 in weekly instalments. He has said that *Rigby's Romance*, not exactly a light yarn, was "read eagerly by the miners, discussed during cribtime, anticipated more enthusiastically than the newspaper's comments on topical affairs. Together with *Looking Backwards* by Belamy, *The Co-operative Commonwealth* by Gromund, *Socialism* by Tom Mann, and the verse and prose of Henry Lawson, *Rigby's Romance* served as a text for many an argument on socialism, free-thought and the coming of the social revolution."⁴⁹

These observations relate to the radical nationalist tradition upheld by Overland. One of its editors has described Overland as "neither an academic nor a popular magazine . . . Our aim is to maintain conversation amongst a community of like-minds, from diverse backgrounds and with diverse interests."⁵⁰

In 1959 Overland carried an article by Ian Turner, "The Life of the Legend", which discussed Russel Ward's writings and the radical nationalist Australian tradition. He described how Australian radicals and socialists came to the realisation during and after the Second World War "that aggressive, militant democracy was not only a func-

tion of the international labour movement, but was deep-rooted in Australian popular history . . ."⁵¹

The left-wing search for origins went back to the convict days, Castle Hill, Eureka, the shearers' strike and confrontations of the 1890s. Historical works, resurrection of old bush songs, musicals like "Reedy River" and "The Old Bark Hut", poems and novels followed. However, Turner did not see this searching as an escape into an idealised past but as "a search for, and an assertion of, values formulated in the past, and still held in the present, which would be of service in moulding the Australian future."⁵²

In the 1970s this radical nationalist approach on the part of historians such as Turner, Ward and Serle, and of Overland, came under spirited and energetic attack from young new left critics. Humphrey McQueen pooh-poohed the tradition, the legend and the literature of the nineties: the working class of those times was thoroughly racist and orientated to ownership of land and property; Henry Lawson was a racist, a fascist, a militarist; the Australian Labor Party was intensely petty-bourgeois and the real proletariat opposed it.⁵³ McQueen set out to demolish many aspects of labor movement myth, of literature and history held dear by the left-wing of Australian politics. With an ebullience and extravagance he branded the radical nationalist positions, and seemingly the attitudes of the Turners, Wards and company, as "anti-radical and counter-revolutionary."⁵⁴

McQueen was followed by others, more soberly, in the journal *Intervention*, for example, and by Tim Rowse in *Australian Liberalism and National Character*.

There was much which was correct in these criticisms. The magnitude of the racist attitudes of Australians and Australian workers and writers, while acknowledged in the past, had been down-played by radical nationalist historians, left-wing political activists and writers; the role and position of women in society had suffered even more; Australian Aborigines were, by-and-large, disgracefully overlooked.

However, it seems difficult to sustain an argument that our convict origins, Castle Hill, Eureka, Barcaldine, the early *Bulletin* and Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy and company, meant little in moulding national traditions and character, or were merely manifestations of racism, reactionary political ideas and petty-bourgeois chicanery.

One young historian who entered the fray against Turner, Brian Fitzpatrick, Russel Ward and others, in the early 1970s, had second thoughts by the end of the decade: "The popular, democratic and national tradition . . . has been abandoned precipitately . . ."⁵⁵

Turner, in what seems a reasonable conclusion, said that new circumstances, new questions, and the new answers required, do not "deny the radical past; and to accept that past is not to confine oneself to its strategies and goals."⁵⁶

Overland set out to assert the radical nationalist tradition. On occasions this may have been hard to see. About one issue Tom Ronan complained: ". . . this particular Overland seems to run from Bloomsbury to the Baltic. There's not a gum tree along the track."⁵⁷ Furthermore, some writers published in Overland can be read also in Meanjin, Scripsi, and Quadrant and sometimes their out-

look and literary style appear to be somewhat removed from the editorial line Overland espouses. But the radical nationalist tradition is generally apparent, developed under the long influence of its editor, his articles, comments and attitudes to literature and life. Overland has published, too, a considerable body of the original work of the historian, Ian Turner. It has depended, also, on the stories, poems, articles and reviews of a body of writers such as John Morrison, David Martin, John McLaren, John Manifold (particularly in the earliest years), Dorothy Hewett, A.A. Phillips, Frank Kellaway, Cecil Holmes and, from England, the expatriate Jack Lindsay, who all share, to one degree or another, a similar 'Overland' perspective which shows through in their writings.

Such a little journal can only eke out a place for itself, win a name and contribute over a prolonged period to the cultural and literary life of the country, if it has someone who guards it jealously, lives for it and nurtures it in every way. Murray-Smith is perhaps unique in this regard. As Geoffrey Serle has written, Overland "bears his mark through and through – serious and humorous and chatty, friendly and fresh, good-natured larrikin, always combining literature and life . . . as a spare-time creation it is remarkable."⁵⁸

Murray-Smith was educated at Geelong Grammar, "one of that strange little band of rebels which Geelong Grammar produced and which included Russell Drysdale, Geoffrey Dutton and John Manifold."⁵⁹ He is, as Serle says, "the typical Geelong Grammar product with proper accent and authoritative manner."⁶⁰ During the war Murray-Smith served as a commando in New Guinea. Then at Melbourne University he studied history under Manning Clark, joined the Communist Party, became president of the radical Melbourne University Labor Club, and, as Serle points out, absorbed "the Melbourne intellectual traditions of moral earnestness and political radicalism."⁶¹

David Martin, closely associated with Overland throughout, has acutely and critically confirmed that the journal bears the stamp of its editor:

This has something to do with the genial attitude to people of the editor, his almost too wide sympathies. Sometimes this grates on me, but then I come from a different background and tradition. In literature and literary comment I put objective quality high above 'human' concern/interest, etc. The editor does not. In this he reflects, generally rather pleasantly, a kind of Australian traditional provincialism, reinforced by the extraordinary chummy/clubby atmosphere of public life in Victoria, where everybody gives official dinners to everybody else.⁶²

Some consider Murray-Smith pompous.⁶³ "People still think me abrasive," he himself confides.⁶⁴ Certainly he is tough, courageous and generous. His forthright declarations against what he considers to be inhuman or stupid actions on the part of governments and parties, ultra-leftism in the radical political movement and arcane

trends in literature, sometimes arouse anger. All these qualities, and more, go to make up the complexity of one who is probably the longest serving editor of any journal in Australia.

Has Overland been successful, then? But how can success or failure be judged? The circulation hovered around 2,000, less sometimes, for long years; it is now rising slowly. Young readers in the main do not buy it, even though many young writers contribute poems and stories. (Many of the younger writers today who are becoming famous published in Overland early in their careers.) For a fairly large section of radical young readers, those active in the anti-war, anti-uranium, movements, the women's movement and others, Overland appears to be not ideological enough, and therefore conservative. Yet for the hundredth issue many distinguished Australians, mostly left of centre, rallied to contribute articles, poems, stories and memoirs: Manning Clark, Patrick White, Judith Wright, David Malouf, Marjorie Tipping, Robyn Rowland, Barry Jones and many more. Why it hasn't got a larger circulation remains difficult to answer, but perhaps a bigger sale for such a journal is hardly possible in today's Australia.

Much of literature and literary criticism today can be closely identified with academics, universities and tertiary graduates. Indeed, the main literary quarterlies, apart from Overland, are closely associated with universities and announce this in their pages: *Meanjin*, *Scripsi*, *Westerly* and *Southerly*, for example, are all associated in one way or another with the academics.

Almost inevitably intellectual work is carried on at a distance, sometimes a great distance, from ordinary people and from many of the realities of society, in an atmosphere in which words, language, intelligence, ideas, books, theories, are the stock-in-trade of most practitioners. How different this is from the world at large! And how different, too, from the 'intelligent general reader'.

About this problem one radical theoretician has observed:

The circumstances of academic life . . . have led to many abuses, and are an immediate source of much that is abstruse, obscurantist, and irresponsible in radical theory. But that isn't to say that the idea of academic life, retreat devoted to intellectual pursuits at the highest level, is a false one. What's wrong is that it is attached to social privilege, that it therefore has a corrupted notion of excellence as competitive achievement, and that it makes intellect itself a means of exclusion. Attach it rather to a programme of social equality, try to make it work in an inclusive, egalitarian way, and we have a powerful tool for the development and democratisation of culture.⁶⁵

It seems that Overland, in its own way, has been trying to play a part in such a process and achieve something along those lines. Last year its editor expressed the hope that in the future people may consider Overland to have taken "a significant stand, refusing to abdicate" in con-

tinuing to insist that literature, art and thought would not be handed over to the credentialled and to the professional circles, but would as far as possible remain the property of all prepared to listen or take part."⁶⁶

Such a cause appears to have a current urgency.

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The New Heresy Hunters

C.J. KOCH

“Tell all.”

“If I knew what to say, I would say it. Oh Señor, I don’t know what I have to say. Tell me what I have to say . . .”

*Inquisicion de Tolado:
History of the Inquisition in Spain.*

When I was young, in the Age of Menzies, Australia was a desperately conformist society: one in which there were many heresies. It was heresy not to admire Mr Menzies; not to respect the Queen; not to wear a pin-striped blue suit for formal occasions, and a Stamina sports coat for informal ones. To wear suede shoes was to stamp oneself as an arty poofster.

I did not admire Mr Menzies, and said offensive things about him. I was left-wing. I did not believe Australia should continue to be presided over by the British monarch, and remained seated in cinemas during the anthem; for this, an old lady once banged me over the head with her umbrella. I wore suede shoes, and was menaced for it. At university, my friends and I rebelled against Australia’s mindless conformism by becoming anarchists: disciples of Sir Herbert Read and Prince Kropotkin. It was not then fashionable to be an anarchist, and when one of our more reckless colleagues threw a bungler into the middle of a session of Tasmanian parliament, we came under police scrutiny. Our attempt to hang an effigy called Foo from the steel arch which the Hobart city fathers had erected outside the railway station for the Queen’s 1952 visit was not viewed favorably either – particularly as the royal motorcade was passing underneath at the time. Our chief activist, with Foo in his embrace, was seen hanging from a strut with a murderous police sergeant clinging to his legs; the Queen appeared to wave at them. I earned an ASIO dossier for my part in these eccentricities and years later, ASIO warned the ABC not to employ me, since I was a dangerous radical. Fortunately, their advice was ignored.

During those heady years, we anarchists came to the friendly attention of various members of the Australian Communist Party, who attempted to recruit us. We were flattered and interested, but did not prove to be quite the right material. A famous communist writer came to talk to us, and when we announced that we were pacifists,

and asked why the Soviet Union was armed to the teeth, he pounded the table and thundered: “Stalin says: ‘The state is the army!’” That night I had a terrible dream that a fiendish dentist was pulling all my teeth, while the benevolent writer stood by, assuring me that this was all for my own good.

The trouble with us anarchists, our middle-aged mentors informed us, was that we were frivolous. But the trouble as we saw it was that we had this thing about freedom – a romantic notion that did not always fit into communist contexts. I learned a good deal about the operation of Soviet communism at that time – including the fact that the liquidation of six million Russian kulaks and of thousands of writers and intellectuals was seen by the converted as a reasonable step on the road to socialism. I formed the fairly predictable conviction then that no society could achieve anything for human good that was founded on mass murder or mental coercion. I was also influenced by the friendships I had made with the members of the first wave of post-war immigration to Australia: European refugees from both Nazism and Soviet Communism. And my education in regard to totalitarian systems was eventually completed by my marriage to a Lithuanian who had fled with her parents, along with thousands of others, from the Soviet takeover of the Baltic. I learned about what happened in June 1941, when thousands of Baltic people were deported to the remote slave labor camps of the USSR, the trains going out night after night to take wives from husbands, parents from children – just as those other terrible trains had done whose destinations were Belsen and Auschwitz. I learned, in other words, how lucky Australians were, and what they had been spared by history. And I came to the conclusion that writers and intellectuals have a duty to oppose physical and mental tyranny wherever it occurs – tyranny in the present, not just in the past. This has an honorable history in Europe, particularly in France, where many socialist intellectuals have taken with great seriousness the revelations contained in the *Gulag Archipelago*, and see nothing incompatible with their beliefs in opposing Soviet totalitarianism.

This is a position I have taken up in private discussions, but never until now in print. I am a member of no political party or group; I want nothing to do with party politics

except, like most other Australians, at election time; and I have the quaint, old-fashioned belief that the way I vote (and it varies) is my own affair. I am not a political writer. But I am anti-totalitarian, whatever form totalitarianism takes – and I have decided to go into print concerning these convictions because of a disturbing phenomenon currently appearing in Australian intellectual life: what I could call the new heresy hunters.

There are people, in academia and elsewhere, who wish to put creative writers and their works to political tests, to discover whether or not they may be approved. If the writer, like me, is determined that partisan politics (as distinct from ethical convictions) will have no part in his work, the new heresy hunters are not deterred, apparently. Even though no entrenched ‘political’ position can be detected in his work itself, they will subject him to other tests – based on who his friends and associates are, and where he publishes; perhaps even on his private conversations. This of course is guilt by association. It is the method of McCarthyism, and of all totalitarian-minded groups. In the middle ages, such people were religious fanatics: inquisitors. They appear in every age, wearing different hats. That they have appeared in Australia should concern everyone – whether of radical or conservative convictions – for whom the tradition of liberal humanism is still important.

For my own part, I believe that if a society loses that tradition, it has lost everything – which is why I am writing this article. If it causes even a few fair-minded people to think about what is happening to our artistic and intellectual life, it will have served its purpose. And I have set out the little personal history above so that the heresy-hunters will not have to tease their minds about my ‘position’ when I proceed to the issue this article is concerned with.

Most people who are interested in Australian literature will be aware of some of the ideological gang warfare at present going on. It is a dispiriting spectacle, because behind it there lies no real joy in literature – which is surely what literary comment ought to proceed from. But I don’t propose to deal with this tendency in general. Instead, I want to reply to a recent critical article which seems to typify some of its effects, and which is the most startlingly hostile piece ever written about my own work. I refer to an essay in the latest issue of *Meanjin* by Dr Susan McKernan. I believe that an analysis of it is not only necessary to defend my reputation, but may go beyond my personal concern to illuminate a serious cultural malaise.

Entitled, with no great subtlety, “C.J. Koch’s Two-Faced Vision”, it deals with all my novels, and has not a single good or unambiguous word to say about any of them. I am a fifty-three year-old writer who has been through the mill and, like any professional, I know a knife-job when I see one. I think I have a modicum of talent, and it just isn’t possible that a life-time’s work hasn’t a single pleasing feature, whatever its faults. Am I accusing Dr McKernan of mysterious antipathy? Yes; but this isn’t the main point I wish to make. All writers put up with this sort of thing, and know it’s pointless to reply: they’ll be seen as defensive and sensitive. Writers, filled with

arrows like Saint Sebastian, must smile bravely and take it, which is very nice for critics like Dr McKernan. But I am replying in this instance because very early in the article, the ominous tone of the new heresy-hunter appears; I am somehow guilty by association. Dr McKernan’s article sends out dozens of signals, all of which say Bad. And not only has this picture nothing to do with the merits or otherwise of my work – it isn’t even true.

Dr McKernan begins by complaining that a section of my latest novel *The Doubleman* was included in the *Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature*, which otherwise avoided extracting passages from novels. This makes her conclude that I am a favorite of “the anthologists” – Professor Leonie Kramer, and Dr Adrian Mitchell – delicately left nameless. The matter appears to have some sinister importance for Dr McKernan; but what she fails to note is that the piece was first published by Geoffrey Dutton in the *Bulletin* as a short story entitled “The Radio Men”, without any reference to its being part of a novel. It was from this source that the anthologists obtained it, and only later was it incorporated in altered form into *The Doubleman*.

Anticipating some speculation about her goodwill here, Dr McKernan goes on to say that it would be “peevish” to grudge me inclusion in the anthology, since gaining recognition is so difficult for an Australian novelist. But now my inquisitor puts on her cap. The Oxford anthologists value “tradition”, and it is for this reason, she decides, that my writing suits them. Nothing from the text of “The Radio Men” is cited to prove this supposed “traditional” bent – plainly because it couldn’t be.

Then comes the big serve. As well as being propped up by the Oxford Anthology traditionalists, I am somehow especially promoted and supported by *Quadrant* magazine. The evidence? *Quadrant* “supported” my work by publishing an early extract from *The Doubleman*; an interview with me (“long”); and a critical article. This is seen by Dr McKernan as confirmation that I am an approved Catholic conservative in the mould of the late James McAuley; and one of her comments here is worth quoting in full, to allow the reader to share its delicate overtones of menace: “It is hard to ignore the ideological elements in the promotion of his novels.”

Let me record certain facts, before making further comment. I am not associated with *Quadrant* magazine, although Vivian Smith and Robin Marsden are among my friends. I am not promoted by it. I have published articles in it, as I have done in many other papers – the *Age*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *National Times*, the *Bulletin*, *Westerly*, *Island* and *Australian Book Review*. This is my prerogative, as a professional writer. I will publish in any magazine of quality that will take my work. I do not agree with all the views expressed in *Quadrant*; nor do I agree with all the views expressed in *Overland*. But both seem to me to be excellent literary magazines, and both their standpoints on issues other than literature, whether or not one likes them, are in the interests of healthy debate in a democracy. I expressed these views about both magazines when I served on the

Literature Board. Other writers such as Patrick White have frequent articles on their work in Quadrant's pages. Are they also "promoted" by it?

Dr McKernan's silly theories concerning "promotion" of *The Doubleman* for a novelist in need of it from one magazine would be amusing if they were not so grotesquely false, and did not ignore an entire spectrum of facts about me. *The Year of Living Dangerously* has sold nearly two hundred thousand copies around the world, and is still selling in paperback in the US, Britain and Australia. It is appearing in translation in France, Spain and Brazil – where *The Doubleman* has also been sold. The latter was given a major promotional campaign in the UK and Australia when it appeared, and feature-length interviews appeared in almost every important newspaper in Australia. All Australian literary magazines have reviewed it favorably. An interview appeared in *Southerly* at the same time as the Quadrant interview. Extracts from the book were carried by the *Bulletin*, *Mode*, the *Age* Monthly Review, *Northern Perspective* and the British edition of *Good Housekeeping*. Does my dread inquisitor see all these publications as part of an ideological plot? And given this kind of promotion, and the international status of my previous work, why would I need "promotion" from one small Australian literary magazine? Dr McKernan appears to know little about the field she has made her career in. But the truth is that her imagination is selective; and as well as trying to falsely tie me to one conservative intellectual group, what is being attempted as well is a put-down that tries to paint me as a small struggling novelist in need of friends.

It is from this fiction that Dr McKernan proceeds with the rest of her demolition job. Here are some of the salient points.

I am said to be a Christian humanist, with "spiritual" concerns (always in quotes). But these concerns are linked to the exotic, and apparently therefore reprehensible. They may even be cheap and popular. I am (on the strength of an article I once wrote entitled "Who Wants the Novel?") against experiment in fiction; and this is somehow tied to a traditionalism linking me with Les Murray and Vivian Smith. Les and Vivian can defend themselves; but Dr McKernan appears not able to follow the gist of a literary essay. In the article concerned, I did *not* declare myself against experiment as such, but against minor and spurious experiment. I made clear that I saw Joyce as a major experimentalist, and the sort of minor writers who currently fiddle with narrative method to be of no formative importance to the development of the novel. I do *not* regard myself as traditional in my own narrative or thematic approach, except that I value narrative and character. Whatever the value of my work or otherwise, there are technical features in it which are innovative – as some academics have seen. For the record, I believe that true originality in the novel lies in angle of approach and in content, not in narrative tricks that don't proceed from necessity.

Moving on from this, Dr McKernan proceeds to allegations that go beyond any reasonable literary criticism. Bringing in faceless accusers she doesn't name, and one whom she does, Dr McKernan says: "In the case of *The*

Year of Living Dangerously, the charge that Koch distorts his pictures of Indonesians and so promotes Australian racism has been made several times – most recently by Kirpal Singh at the 1985 ASAL Conference." Cunningly anticipating some defence from me that I was honestly portraying simple Australians of the time (although none of them in fact displayed racist attitudes), she concludes by saying that even if this is true, "Koch is not interested in ordinary Indonesian life".

I was astounded that such a statement should be attributed to Kirpal Singh, who is a friend of mine, and who was responsible for my attending a recent conference on Asian and Australian literature at the University of Singapore. I wrote to Kirpal asking for his comments, and I now quote an excerpt.

Shocked to receive your letter. McKernan's charge is *absolutely* out of context – I *never* said your novel promoted Australian racism. I did delve into some of the attitudes some of the characters in the novel betray, but also made the point that there is a vital difference between character and author. At the ASAL conference I told everyone ... that neither you nor I could by any stretch of the imagination be called racist.

No further comment seems necessary, except to remind the reader that Dr Singh is the only witness Susan McKernan has produced to back the serious implications of her charge against me.

The next section of her article is rambling. It seeks to prove that I am somehow "sexist", since I portray the faces of my female characters in strong physical detail, and they have characteristics which Dr McKernan seems to imply ought not to be portrayed. She is heavily influenced here by an excellent article on this aspect of my work by Laurie Clancy; but her own efforts are so confused and confusing as to defy comment: except to note that her real complaint is that I don't portray "ordinary" women! Doctor McKernan's demand for the "ordinary" is quite extraordinary. Who is "ordinary"? I have never regarded any individual as ordinary. Perhaps that is why I am a novelist.

Her next charge is that I portray crippled people: Billy Kwan; Richard Miller. This is bad; and I am seen to link physical deformity with "evil and corruption". That this is simply untrue can be proved by a simple check of my texts. The characters concerned were among my most sympathetic, and have been seen as such. We have entered the realm of fantasy. We have also entered the special world of the heresy hunter, where there are many Forbidden Subjects. (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* should be banned, perhaps.) And I am then charged with seeing normality as good. This from a champion of the ordinary!

At the end, Dr McKernan sends out her depth-charge, which I quote in full. "Koch's use of exotic places, the female face and human deformity set him up for charges of racism, sexism and general inhumanity."

That this repulsive sentence defames me and my work in the most serious way should be plain to anyone who

reads it. I have asked Meanjin through a solicitor that it be withdrawn, and that Dr McKernan apologise for it, without result at the time of writing this. Let me make clear, however, that the nonsensical charges of sexism and inhumanity would not have given me great concern, simply because they are so plainly foolish. What concerns me is the criminal charge of racism, which I cannot allow to pass, and against which I now defend myself before the Australian literary community. I do so fully aware of Dr McKernan's shabby effort to steer it towards me by implication, rather than directly; but this should fool no-one. It has no place in intelligent literary criticism, nor in civilized debate; and the brutal little phrase "sets himself up for charges" says everything about the level of thinking and tactics being employed here.

Only a few comments are necessary. Most literate Australians know that *The Year of Living Dangerously* has been seen as a novel which is totally sympathetic to the culture of Indonesia. In published talks, which I imagine Dr McKernan has read, I have asked that Australians and South East Asians draw closer together. I challenge anyone to find a single racist attitude in *The Year* or in any of my work; and I conclude by quoting from a review of *The Year* in the Indonesian magazine Kompas: "Koch has demonstrated a great feeling of sympathy towards the Indonesian people."

As to the complaint that I do not portray "ordinary" Indonesian people: isn't Kumar the PKI activist "ordinary" enough for Dr McKernan? Or Ibu, the poor woman of the kampongs whom Kwan befriended? Or did my accuser conveniently overlook these characters?

I conclude as I began: by warning those in Australia who genuinely care about literature what a danger this sort of criticism represents. It is part of a general tendency, a general hostility and polarisation, even though it may not see itself as being so. The sheep-like conformity of the Menzies era is returning, wearing a new mask: a con-

formism just as stifling, just as prohibitive, and possibly uglier in its implications, since it makes false claims of tolerance and free-thinking, while putting people in boxes – often with bland disregard of whether they belong in these boxes or not. In fact, the face behind the mask is often that of a new enemy to intellectual freedom as threatening as any McCarthyist – and who in fact resembles a McCarthyist upside down. Dr McKernan is right about one thing: I am a humanist, and I ask that we be careful in Australia that we are not losing human tolerance, and the respect for differing viewpoints without which real freedom cannot exist.

Finally, I ask that a simple proposition be examined. You do not write a whole article on a writer's work to belittle it and defame its author out of a love of literature. This too represents a growing tendency towards hostility instead of nurture, where literary criticism is concerned – that is, unless the writer fits with the critic's prejudices. Many of the new heresy-hunters do not love literature at all. They see it as a tool: a tool for messages; a tool to advance their careers. And this of course is a totalitarian outlook. It's all depressingly familiar, in this century. Nazism used literature as a tool; Marxism uses it as a tool. And the real loser is literature, its true sons and daughters driven into silence, or bullied into distorting their work and their vision. This is the situation under totalitarian regimes – of the Right or the Left – that favors the talentless and the time-servers while stifling talent, as it did in China until the fall of the Gang of Four. China, with the recent appearance of the brilliantly experimental Misty Poets, is emerging from that strait-jacket, as I was moved to discover after a visit there. Are some Australians asking that we should put a strait-jacket on?

I do not believe that we will make so basic an error. I believe that in the end literature will be seen by all those who truly love it not as a carrier of messages, but as a carrier of beauty. And that includes 'ordinary' people – all of whom are secretly extraordinary.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Our readers sprang gamely to our support in our dispute with the Literature Board over funding, and I'm grateful for all the letters I received on this matter. And all the more reason, then, to welcome the excellent total of \$1614 for the Floating Fund since our last issue. Many thanks to: \$200 N. & C.C.; \$100 R.M.C., H.S.; \$75 B.J.; \$59 R.M.; \$50 B.R., A.C., J.B.; \$44 J. & C.C.; \$40 C.W.C.; \$34 F.L.W., A.M., J.C., P-.A.; \$30 W. & J. McD.; \$25 D.R.; \$24 P.M., J.P.; \$18 J.B.; \$16 J.S., P.R.; \$14 R.McK., D.J., H.Z., J.B., M.M., K.R., C.O., D.N., D.B.; \$10 M.L., N.N., A.H., R.O.C.; \$9 R.H., C.W., P.J., F.S., E.C., M.R., J.B., J.S., J.L., C.C., R.C., B.G.; \$8 J.J.; \$6 L.C., G.S.; \$5 T.D.; \$4 P.M., D.P., A.B., F.L., W.B., B.N-S., J.R., E.A., J.B., K.H., V.B., H.R., T.S., A.C., H.A., R.W., D.B., D.W., P.McL., J.W., K.F., B.A., F.J., S.J., B.R., S.C., L.F., D.O'S., A.P., E.K., P.B., J.L., R.T., G.M., A.W., R.W., M.K., K.B., S.B., T.W., V.T., V.N., D.M., C.C., A.J., M.R., I.M., I.W., T.S., L.McK., R.M., R.N., B.C.R., D.W., M.J.; \$2 K.P., J.C., M.C., G.H., T.B., J.B.; \$1 J.P.

KYLIE TENNANT

Notes from Murder Mountain

On Monday night we had our first heavy fall of snow but the apples had been gathered into the packing shed. A full moon at midnight saw the snow sparkling on every bough and the ginger Persian cat Macgregor dancing with the tiger-stripey, Pandora. They would bound and prance, roll over and scoot, tails flicking, whiskers twitching. About two in the morning a gale came roaring over the cliffs to the south but the cats had retired to find a human bed-warmer with an electric blanket. The gale blew away the stall at the front gate.

I have been asked so many times: "Why don't you get a decent stall if you *must* sell apples and jams at the gate?" I explain that people in cars passing say: "Oh look at that poor little stall! Let us get out and buy something." It was no surprise to find the stall a heap of corrugated iron. It was put up ten years ago by a drunken artist and his team of dubious characters. One of them was in trouble over a stolen car, another became later a pillar of Alcoholics Anonymous. In those days he was the man who rang a taxi when the team was paid. They would go into the hotel and you wouldn't see them for a couple of days. I don't suppose there are many of the local unemployed who haven't sometime worked at our orchard. One of them came out a month ago asking for a reference.

"What did you give him a reference for?"

"Well, he *did* work here. I can't remember when." Anyone who comes asking for work is handed a hoe. Later I was told he produced the reference in court. One of his friends had escaped from gaol, had come to this character's lodging and died of an overdose. The police were quite peevish about it. Many of our workers go on to better things, to turn up later pleased to be back. You see where we differ from other farms is that the work force gets fed: a substantial morning tea, a hot meal mid-day and afternoon tea if they are still with us. Ten years ago I laid down the rule that a farm provided not only work but food, and some of my workers live very sparsely. We grow our own vegetables so it doesn't cost us very much. The farm certainly provides work. I regard the blackberries not only as an anti-erosion device and a source of jam but an unemployment relief. Every year the council and I have a private bicker over the blackberries. Tourists, I say, come out and pick them by the roadside and the council should not spray them with poison. Besides we have the bees, the pregnant mare, all the geese, ducks, turkeys, hens. I think I have won because last year I

received a minatory notice forbidding me to do more than treat the blackberries to "Manual Extraction Only". But they sprayed the road just the same.

Our other trouble is foxes. Turkeys lay away from home and my daughter can be seen tramping out at nightfall with a torch and a rifle. The geese go up to the high dam where they can be heard quarrelling in the early hours. They go in single file up the steep track, each goose in its rightful place in line. We like to sell them in live pairs because geese mate for life. They are accustomed to evading foxes.

Frances, one of our neighbors, came in one morning with tears streaming down her face. She had gone out to her pens where a fox was massacring her flock. "I couldn't kill it," she sobbed. "It was a mother fox in milk." John, who shoes the horses, clips the goats hooves and drenches them, has no such scruples. He shot five one month.

Christmas and Easter we hold our own massacre and Paddy comes out to help pluck. He was born in the west of Ireland and says we would never qualify as pluckers there. "For one thing you're standing instead of sitting and for another you're not spitting on your fingers." Ducks are harder to pluck than geese, and geese are harder to pluck than fowls. I usually get the job of scalding the giblets and peeling ducks' feet. Last time when she was packing the ute to make deliveries my daughter said thoughtfully: "There's a spare pair of feet here and I think they're Paddy's." Paddy's payment is a duck. He always has the best bird.

All the feathered inhabitants can be seen pecking, grazing, scratching in the orchard. They put themselves away at night and we just go down and lock up. Sometimes the wild ducks on the dam come in too. Then there are the rosellas disposing of their percentage of the crop of apples, plums, gooseberries, currants and cherries. We spray, prune, clip, weed, and the birds regard us as a bird asset.

There are always eggs to be brought in and washed. I know you shouldn't wash eggs but if you could see how mucky a duck's egg can be you would forgive me. People will come for miles to buy ducks' eggs. They seem to be addicted to them. Goose eggs are sold to people who paint them for Easter.

There was a film crew up here and complained bitterly about the noise: not just aeroplanes going over but all those birds yelling their heads off; the tractor starting up, the dog Blackberry who is part collie barking at the turkeys and then with a startled yelp realising that two male turkeys have executed a flanking movement and are darting in for revenge.

Where is all that peace and silence?

Nor is an isolated farm a good place to write in. You settle to the typewriter when a voice says: "Where is the hammer?" "Well, have you looked in the packing shed, the tractor shed, the machinery shed? Terry was fencing down in the bottom paddock but there are *three* hammers . . ." Then you go and look for the hammer or put on the stew for lunch.

We had a tax inspector here because our farm is rated a "hobby" farm though we work seven days a week. "But you'll never make a profit," the inspector said earnestly.

"This farm was cleared and the house put up in 1912,"

I told him. "It has *never* made a profit. But families have been reared, crops taken off, sweat and devotion have gone into this place. All over Australia there are such farms where a man has worked all his life and then the banks have taken it to sell to a new lot of hopeful fools. The history of Australian farming is generations of mortgage, ruin and start again. The owners see their blossoms in spring and their trees die in the drought. They work until they are too old to work any more, they lie awake at night planning and worrying . . ." "Yes," the inspector said. "But all the Department is concerned with is: Is it going to make a profit?" My daughter took him off to look at the bees.

The orchard is beautifully green: Eric, our builder is laying concrete foundations for a worthy structure to replace the old stall. My daughter has just come in with the bill for the concrete; "Oh, my God!" I say. "I'll have to go into town and put some money in the bank or this cheque will bounce!"

BLURBUS REDIVIVUS

An Overland competition

It's not as easy to think of good topics for competitions as it might seem – and we ask for readers' suggestions. We have pinched the idea of this one, however, from the London Sunday Times.

We are asking for a modern publisher's blurb to any well-known Australian book published before 1960. Limit about a hundred words, entries by 30 May, prize a copy of the *Dictionary of Australian Quotations* or the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* – the winner to choose.

The winner of the Sunday Times competition was one John O'Byrne of Dublin. His blurb for *Robinson Crusoe* ran:

Daniel Defoe's masterpiece is a spare, stark account of alienation and ethnic tensions in a hostile landscape. Defoe has created a remarkable, enduring character in Robinson Crusoe, a personality obsessed to the point of madness with survival. Brilliantly worked, marvellously written with hilarious set-pieces – an imaginative triumph and a must for DIY experts.



26 March 1984. Spring has come again, my third in Arfara. Blood-red poppies bloom thickly at the foot of stone walls, every olive grove has a carpet of purple, yellow and white, and tiny lizards have moved into their summer homes on our balcony, among my flower pots. Soon the swallows will arrive, flying first over Kalamata, southern port of the Peloponnese and capital of the prefecture of Messenia. But swallows prefer village houses to eave-less high-rise flats, and so they fly on; the villagers always note the exact date of their return. The villagers know that harsh winter has gone, but with the swallows and with Easter they feel it, and it is feeling that is all-important in Greece.

Arfara is eighteen kilometres north of Kalamata. It is backed in the east by a mountain range known locally as the Makriplagi, a softer, lower extension of the Mani's Taygetus mountain range. To the west, olive groves slope gently the two kilometres to the Athens road. Kalamata olives and olive oil are world-famous; this year Arfara's olive harvest has been a bumper one: bank-books are black with figures and wallets are fat. But villagers spend little; for the older generation, a least, life still retains the pattern of last century. The old men are all farmers, while their wives still tread the ceaseless round of tending vegetable gardens, making noodles, cheese, tomato paste and wine, rearing kids and lambs, always working, working, working as their mothers and grandmothers did before them.

Their lives have the illusion of certainty; this certainty, the security of tradition, and the changeless pattern, are the migrant's great temptations. The city-dwellers of Australia, usually, know that the past is dead: time will have altered the property, the township, the suburban street, beyond recall. There is no return to the womb for people who have only two hundred years of history, and those years one of constant change. But Greeks, like the swallows, can return and find their villages superficially unchanged. That is the reason I am here. Disillusionment, the comprehension of change, whether in oneself or in the village comes later. And that is the reason I may leave.

My husband, George Bouras, was born at home in Arfara, in the spring of 1938. His mother, Aphrodite, and her parents, were all born in Arfara, but George's father, a priest, was born in Stamatinou, a mountain village

seven kilometres away. Aphrodite's husband was also her sixth cousin, and her name did not change upon her marriage. The Bouras family was the founding family of Arfara, and in spite of the difficulties caused by a multitude of people all having the same name (for tradition decrees that eldest grandsons are always named after their paternal grandfathers), Aphrodite takes pride in being able to trace her own and everybody else's ancestry and being able to explain complex webs of relationships to my children. There is a high degree of inter-breeding. Because I am a foreigner I am the only person without blood relatives here. My children live next door to their fourth cousins and are related to about two-thirds of the village. Close contact is taken for granted: I shock the locals by saying that my mother has never managed to meet all of her forty-six first cousins, and that I have many second cousins I have never met. "Eisai xeni, omos" (you are foreign, though) they say.

For older Greeks there are only two places on earth: Greece and Exo (outside). Their idea of Exo is often hazy. Our local priest is convinced I come from Africa; another old priest had no idea, until recently, that Christian denominations other than Orthodoxy exist. Of course there are foreigners within Greece; anybody not of one's own village is automatically foreign. "Who're they?" I ask Aphrodite, on seeing unfamiliar faces in the street. "They're not ours," she says firmly. "They're foreigners" and she names a village perhaps ten kilometres away.

It has not occurred to Aphrodite that her son is a foreigner. For her, his fifteen years in Melbourne are in the past, a time of grief which she does not wish to remember. That he is not the son who left Greece in 1965 is a preposterous notion, although she occasionally notes his marked lack of interest in essentials such as olive-harvesting and hardening. But George misses Melbourne, Australian manners and ways of doing things, and Greek migrant solidarity. His world has shrunk.

Mine has both shrunk and expanded. I was eleven years old when I left the Wimmera township where my father taught at the local high school. The next twenty-five years I spent in cities, certainly not taking advantage of all the benefits of city life, but secure in the knowledge that mental stimulation and a variety of interests were there if I needed them. This is no longer the case. Reality is always

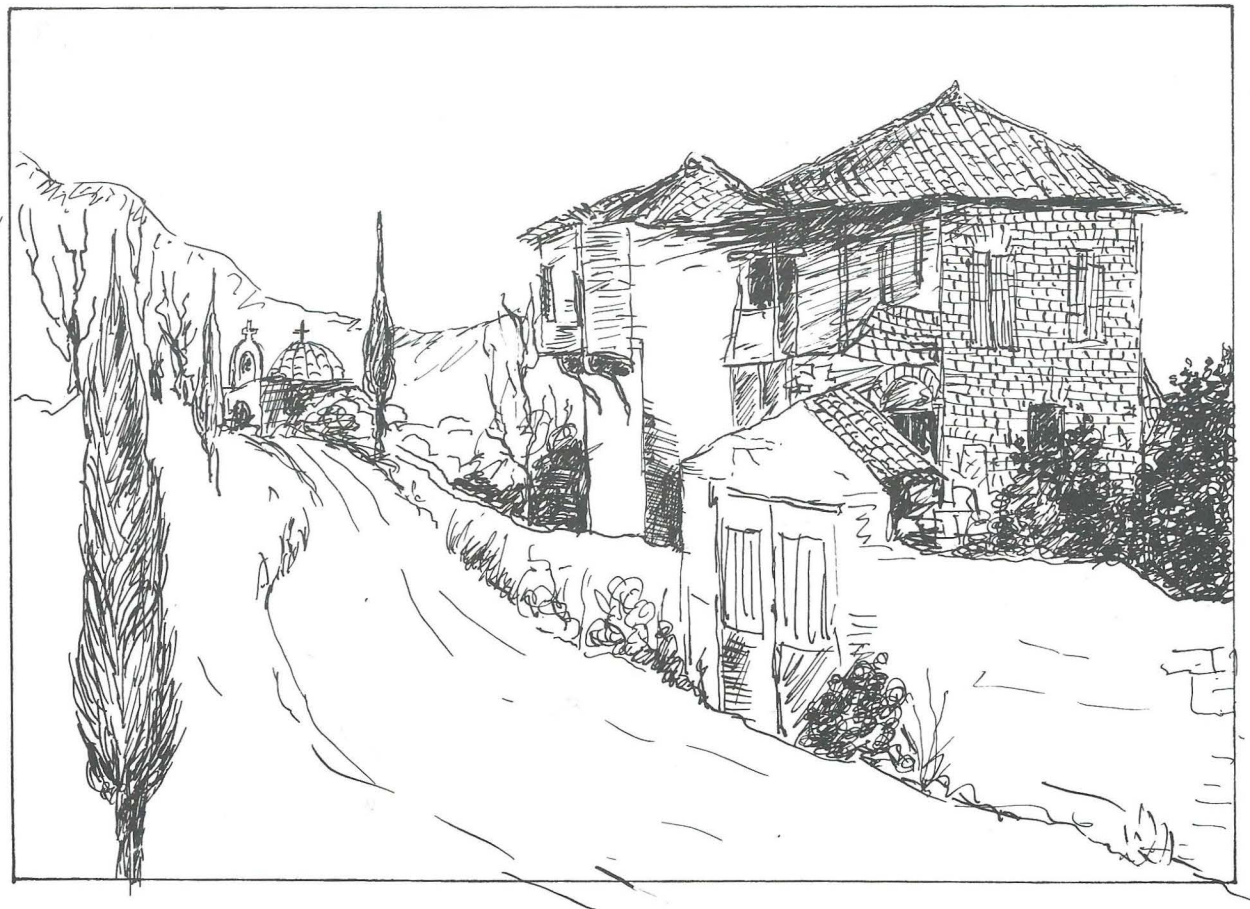
different from our imaginings; it is all too easy, I discovered, to be seduced by works like John Seymour's *The Fat of the Land*, and to cherish rosy visions of a return to a simpler rural round. It is all too easy to fall prey to "pastoral nostalgia" and to forget how "a simple rural economy may stunt the soul". I discovered fairly early that roosters sensed a victim as soon as I entered the fowl-yard, and that I was apparently a slow learner when it came to the womanly art of milking goats. I also discovered that making noodles and tomato-paste were rather time-consuming activities which interrupted important pursuits like letter-writing and novel-reading. More seriously, I have found I have to battle constantly against the narrow range of interests here: I have to keep reading and writing, and resisting the temptation to sleep for three hours in the middle of the day.

30 March 1984. I went to the post office today. I go every day; it is a bad thing to be so dependent on one's former life, but I am a migrant. My children chide me for my interest in the letter-box, but Cyril Connolly once remarked that the essence of country life is waiting for the post.

This morning an old, black-clad woman had come, not to post a letter, but to collect her electricity bill. It wasn't there. "How d'you spell your name, Grandma?" demanded the clerk. (Finesse is not a rural characteristic.) She drew herself up. "I don't know. Do I know letters? I? I'll get my son to write it down tomorrow."

The discovery of illiteracy still comes as a shock, and I felt physically ill at what I thought was her humiliation. Aphrodite can write her name—just, but her reaction is to pour fine scorn on books. "You've got too many," she told me once. "Why don't you sell some of them? *Poly thiavasa* (too much reading) weakens you. No wonder you've got grey hair and glasses!" Her sister-in-law, on the other hand, has stood in my kitchen almost hanging her head in shame. "I can't read or write" she said sorrowfully. "We had a school here then (seventy years ago) but my parents never sent me; they only sent my brothers."

I learned to read when I was four and a half; I have spent nearly four years here, pondering, every so often, illiteracy and its consequences. The practical aspects are often frightening: one old lady, a neighbor, has a heart condition, and calls George in to sort out her pills. "I



George Mangoukis

know I have to take the orange ones morning and night," she worries, "but what about these red and brown ones? I *think* I know about the white ones."

Once, perhaps it did not matter so much, in an age of herbal medicines, and when nobody travelled or left home. But now old people cannot cope with the grief of separation from their children in America, Canada, Australia. They feel irrevocably cut off. They cannot hope to understand the universality or the mixture of emotions inherent in the expatriate experience. Karen Blixen and Paul Scott, though, have helped me greatly. I wonder how many migrants have returned to their homelands because they felt the silence too much to bear? George's father wrote regularly; after his death, George felt the lack of communication from Greece very deeply. Literacy is a weapon in the migrant's constant war against homesickness, depression, maladjustment and neurosis.

Introverted foreigners, like myself, are often struck, and enchanted, by Greek vivacity, by the delight in companionship, by sheer bubbling gregariousness. The shadow side of these traits is a restlessness, an inability to cope with solitude. There has never been any reason for rural Greeks to develop individual inner resources: the extended family, church congregation, *kafeneion*, sixteen hours work a day as a family group, all served to develop not only sociability but a worrying dependency on others. What happens now, in a time of improved economic conditions? Leisure becomes a problem. Enforced bedrest is torture: Aphrodite has to have someone to talk to every minute she is ill. The furniture of the mind is sparse: other people's lives are newspapers, novels and theatre, a never-ending source of entertainment and drama.

Illiteracy breeds a deep conservatism and a dangerous complacency. How can people who cannot read question the attitudes and powerful race-memories they have inherited? Television, I think, saturated as it is with American programs, has little stimulating effect on the poorly educated. The word *Cyprus* produces the conditioned response *Trounce the Turk*. The suggestion that patriotism or even fighting for freedom are highly dangerous concepts in this nuclear age is one I have not dared to make.

Widespread illiteracy has inevitably had its effect on the education system in Greece. In the general haste to make everybody literate, education here is interpreted in its narrowest sense: children go to school to learn the 3R's and to acquire the skills which will enable them to achieve a higher standard of living than the one experienced by their parents and grandparents.

The village schools appear to be stuck fast in the mire of instrumentary education: some teachers have heard of Montessori, but not of Progressivism, or so it seems. I cannot be an unbiased observer, for my sons are now in their fourth year at the local primary school, but I worry about the great gaps in "educational philosophy". The emphasis is on rote-learning and transcription, not on problem-solving, on absorbing information, not on thinking. "Transmission of culture" consists of teaching a few folk-dances, pounding an emotionally charged view of Greek history and demanding the learning of patriotic poems. The concept of creativity and even the notion that

each child is different are ignored. There is no musical instrument in the school, and art work consists of an attempt to copy an impossibly perfect original. There is one text per subject per year: project work and book reviews, those banes of Australian mothers, are unheard of. Teachers claim that all their pupils finish "the reader" on the same day.

I see the end result of this system of education in the English classes I give for many of the village children. Most of the adolescent students are reluctant to speak English, even though they know a good deal, for fear of making a mistake. At the beginning of the year most of them are quite unable to follow the format of the English text-books, which generally consists of providing an example of a construction, and then requesting a further application of the same pattern. Very few seem to have the persistence needed in problem-solving.

For the younger pupils I provide as many games and as much drawing as possible. Children here cannot draw without the aid of a rubber; ask them to draw a giraffe, monkey or man, and the invariable response is bewilderment, culminating in a tense "I can't". Drawings, when they are produced, are stiff, cramped, and grossly immature.

Teachers in the village school are skilled imparters of information, and pleasant, loving and vivacious, but are inevitably narrow in outlook. Most of them came from villages, trained for two years at a teacher's college in the Peloponnesian town of Tripoli, and then returned, often, to their home villages. This is their ideal: in general teachers do not want to go somewhere different; home is always best. Very few of them have ever travelled abroad, and most of them never question the ideas and values they imbibed in childhood. The primary school principal recently announced that Arfara's priest has a piece of the One True Cross. He also informed Grade 6 that "history began with Greece".

I often react badly to such pronouncements. Battles royal have raged over the place of Sumer, Phoenicia and Egypt in "history", indeed over all sorts of assumptions brought home from school and church. As a long-lapsed Presbyterian, I found it amusing, at first, to be labelled a heretic by my Orthodox offspring. But now I have to work so hard to convince them that none of us is automatically on Heaven's short-list that the joke has turned sour. Once I rather fancied myself in the role of gad-fly; now it is simply hard work, and I fear my small influence is simply flicked away.

2 April 1984. An old widow stopped me in the street this morning. Perhaps she is not so old, but widow's weeds crush any vestiges of youth remorselessly. I do not know the widow, but she knows me.

"*Parme stin Afstralia?* Shall we go to Australia?" she asked.

"Certainly," I replied. "When?"

"At Christmas-time," she said, "Let's go then," knowing perfectly well that I may go, but that she is not at all likely to go, even though she has children in Melbourne. But she thinks and talks about going.

Aphrodite conquered both her fear of flying and her

fear of the unknown to travel to Melbourne in 1973. Perhaps she also wanted to prove to herself that migration is not as final as it sometimes appears. She had a great and understandable fear of migration, and once told me how she wept in the olive groves after George had gone.

In 1914 Aphrodite's much older brother Nikolaos, migrated to Chicago. In 1920 her only remaining brother, Dimitrios, went to join him, travelling steerage, enduring hardships on the voyage, and arriving infested with lice. Dimitrios spent sixteen years in Chicago, surviving the Great Depression and a meeting with Al Capone. Eventually, Nikolaos, alarmed at the life Dimitrios was leading and the way in which he was losing his 'Greekness', packed him off home to Arfara. He arrived back in 1936, bringing his worldly wealth with him: a gramophone and one cracked record. He has not seen Nikolaos since.

Nikolaos is apparently isolated in Chicago, living with his only child, a divorced daughter. He suffered some kind of breakdown upon hearing of the death of his father in 1930, and although he sent parcels in time of hardship, he found contact even by letter so difficult to bear that his daughter requested that letter-writing cease.

This type of emotional condition is by no means uncommon. I know of an elderly Greek woman in Australia who could afford a holiday in Greece, but cannot face the thought of what twenty-three years will have done to the young siblings she remembers, and so she chooses to live with memories, rather than with reality. Another European friend, in his eighties, decided not to visit his eighty-five-year-old brother in the United States, because the brother could not bear the thought of a "last goodbye". For the older generation of European migrants, conditioned by the thought of great distances and ships, for whom even a trip to a city in their own country is a horrifying experience, the whole concept of migration has a dreadful finality.

In spite of his mother's fears, my husband George migrated, sailing on the ship *Patris*, and arriving in Melbourne in April 1965. The period after his arrival followed the established pattern. Employment at General Motors, Dandenong, had already been arranged aboard ship, and he went to live in Oakleigh with three other young Greeks, one of whom had already settled in Melbourne. Three months' work at GMH was followed by a longer period of employment at the Mail Exchange in Spencer Street.

George never regarded the Mail Exchange as a lifetime's career, however. Soon after his arrival there, he began a correspondence course in Electrical Engineering. He knew his English was not good enough to enable him to start a study course at one of Melbourne's tertiary institutions, even though his Greek Matriculation had been evaluated and accepted. His study choices were also limited. The language barrier effectively cut him off from the humanities; in any case, like many Greeks of his generation, he was, and remains, fascinated by history and politics, but has never regarded them as a possible career avenue. Literature was Greek drama and Homer, read in the original at school; he has never been able to understand why anybody would read or write a novel, while philosophy is strictly for leisured aristocrats. He has

studied commerce in Greece, but as Greek practice and commercial law are different from the Australian systems, this was not a choice, either.

George and I met when I took a vacation job at the Mail Exchange. When he asked me out, I unwittingly impressed him by telling him he would have to meet my father first. I discovered later that he thought no well brought-up girls existed in Australia. Likewise, he believed that all Australian men were foul-mouthed, hard-drinking gamblers. It was apparently a great relief to meet, in my father and grandfather, two generations of quietly-spoken, teetotal stay-at-homes. George suffered from the difficulty experienced by many migrants: that of finding Australians who shared his tastes and inclinations. This was one reason for the developing of Greek and Italian ghettos: Australian society seemed lax, almost decadent, something to be protected from. The obvious result of the defensive retreat into the ghetto was that migrant societies were far more reactionary than the ones they had left behind.

George presented himself to my parents, accompanied as Greek form demands, by his best friend. Both wore suits and both brought presents. My grandfather had his hand kissed for the first time in his life, received this mark of respect towards the elderly in lordly fashion, and pronounced them both "gentlemen and scholars" after five minutes' acquaintance. Later my mother made the predictable remark about Greeks bearing gifts; she was not altogether joking. Three years later George and I married in a Greek orthodox ceremony followed by a specially devised Presbyterian blessing, the two churches symbolizing the many differences between our backgrounds.

George originally planned to stay in Australia for two or three years in order to earn his sisters' dowry money. This plan went awry. The dowry money had been earned and despatched, but he stayed to take advantage of career opportunities as they presented themselves. In 1974 he undertook the trained technician instructor's certificate course at the State College of Victoria, in Hawthorn.

He enjoyed the course, although the tutorials in Educational Philosophy were too much for his Greek practicality. "Too vague. Too idealistic," he would invariably announce on his return from one of these sessions. He completed the course at the end of 1974 and in 1975 began lecturing in Electronics and Mathematics to Middle Level students at the School of Industrial Studies, a campus of the Caulfield Institute of Technology. He remained there until mid-1980, taking his turn at administrative responsibility, as was the system there, and becoming involved in student counselling. He liked lecturing and seemed to have little difficulty in establishing rapport with his students. Had he been an Australian, he would have been almost completely happy with his life and career.

But he is Greek, and our children, Dimitrios, born in 1972, Nikolaos, born in 1974, and Alexander, born in 1981, are to him more than half-Greek. The boys were used to slipping from one world into another, although the eldest became embarrassed by George's obvious "difference" as soon as he could compare his father with other parents. "My father's not an Australian. That's why he speaks with an accent," he would mumble

apologetically to his playmates.

For fifteen years George clung to the migrant's dream of going home. I had been willing to settle in Greece, or at least try to do so, when we were first married, but George was loth to leave the opportunities offered in Australia.

In 1975 and 1977 we spent the Australian summer holidays in Greece. Even in mid-winter, a Greek village can be an enchanting place, with its sense of timeless tradition and security against the outside world. Arfara itself is within striking distance of the wild Mani region, fascinating because of its stark beauty, its history and its folklore; it is also close to ancient sites like Ancient Ithome and mediaeval sites like Mistas. Greece's potent magic had begun to work on me, but I was still very much aware that holidays are never the reality we want them to be. George, however, had no such reservations: Greece was home and where he wanted to be. From 1977 onwards, all our energies were directed towards organizing a stay of six months in Greece. It took us until 1980 to achieve this goal.

The fact that he had no family in Australia was a major factor in George's desire to return to Greece. The call of a family becomes stronger with age. Greeks are not a self-analytical race: George was quite sure that his slot in Greek society was waiting for him, and equally sure that he could turn his back on Melbourne with scarcely a regret. He had no notion that, once in Greece, he would discover that he had the classic disease of migration, the split psyche.

After the initial euphoria of the homecoming, an accumulation of shocks – some slight, some severe – combined to sour the dream. When George left Greece in 1965 much of the population was impoverished by Western standards, there were few luxuries, little leisure and the Western concept of the *teenager* was unknown. He was aghast to find, in 1980, young people roaring along village lanes on motor-bikes, smoking, and listening to Olivia Newton-John on their transistor radios. He had forgotten the widespread ignorance of the older people and the low standard of living which they still followed, and though they could not improve their lot in life. He had forgotten the inconvenience and inefficiency of the Greek business world and bureaucracy, and the high tension of Greek life and speech. He discovered that his family had not changed; at first this was reassuring, but later he realised that he had developed and left them far behind in attitude and outlook.

He also found, at work and elsewhere, that provincial Greeks do not necessarily give their returning brothers a warm welcome. Workers who have struggled into fairly high positions naturally resent being supplanted by people with overseas qualifications. Even well-qualified Greeks often appear insecure when confronted with Western efficiency techniques. The attitude of many Greeks is summarized neatly in the metaphor of the rats who deserted the sinking ship: now that the ship is staying afloat, albeit precariously, the rats are back!

6 April 1984. "*Kali mera, Kyra Yeorgina,*" my old neighbour, farmer's wife, part-owner of two rooms, and survivor of sixteen pregnancies, called to me as I passed

her gate. "Good morning," I replied, still refusing to call her by her husband's name, knowing she would be at least surprised, if not shocked, to hear her own.

In Western cultures names are vital to individuality and sense of identity. I remember John Proctor in *The Crucible*; I still feel sorry for the Cecil Schwartz of my Wimmera childhood. In Greece, at least for older people, names are used far more as social labels, indicating where each person fits in the scheme of things. Greeks ask a child "Whose are you?" rather than "Who are you?" and the child replies, "Iou Yeorgi – George's." Aphrodite is *never* Aphrodite, and I feel greatly daring every time I write her name. Even her brother and her sister call her *Papathia*: 'priest's wife', or 'of the priest'. She tells me she always called her husband *Pappadimitri* and that he always called her *Papathia*. I do not want to believe her. "Always?" I hazard, cheekily, and she crushes me with a look.

I have lost my name here. Nobody has ever heard of it, and when I explain that *Gillian* is the English form of *Julia*, I am immediately christened *Julie*; I am not at all a Julie. Even my initials are now T.M. instead of G.B.

This business of my name is symbolic of the drastic effects of migration. You lose your old self, and isolation and strain reveal to you every weakness you always suspected you had, but whose existence you never wanted proved: intolerance, a belief that you are always right, a dreadful immaturity and naivety. Worse than any of these is jealousy: a jealousy of others' certainties, others' ease, others' status, even of your children who 'fit' where you never can, jealousy of the people they accept while rejecting you because you are different. On this score at least, my migration-in-reverse-return-to-the-simpler-round has not meant in innocence at all, but rather an experience of nightmare and loss.

Every intelligent migrant expect to face the language barrier, although it must be said that otherwise sensible tourists often have most peculiar ideas about language. "My brother was here for three weeks once", said one, "and at the end of that time he had a really good grip on the language." There was no reply to make, except a smile. I believe that my own grip on Modern Greek will remain a tenuous one, even if I live here for forty years, instead of the mere four I have nearly completed.

Language is not just a matter of speaking and understanding speech. Language is the key to an understanding of protocol in what is often a very formal society. My children hate my accent and writhe with embarrassment at my errors in grammar. It is far more difficult to demonstrate a sense of humor in a foreign language than in one's own; other people equate intelligence with verbal expression and rarely try to probe further. The language barrier militates against society's knowing the real person inside the migrant.

It is all too easy to give way to self-pity. That way madness lies: far better to concentrate on my new understanding of migrants to Australia. My reaction to Greek women is mixed: admiration for their courage and spirit with incredulity at their narrowness; in the case of young ones, envy of their beauty and poise, with bewilderment at their intransigent prejudices. (Even the highly educated ones will make appalling remarks about Turks and

homosexuals.) My reaction, now, to the migrant woman I knew in Melbourne is one of contrition. I thought I knew them before; I was wrong. I now know how greatly the female migrant is to be pitied and how much support she needs. Every circumstance prevents her from functioning easily within the main social stream. Work, domesticity, husband, children, all mean she has no time to learn the language properly, no weapons to fight with.

8 April 1984. Today it is raining, and there is nothing quite like Peloponnesian rain for sheer depressing effect. But such days are good occasions for giving oneself a mental shake. Why do I stay? What are the good things? On some such days I even hear an echo from a much simpler past: Be a Pollyanna . . .

I can never regret the experience, in spite of its pain. We have all benefited from living 'something different'. George, I think, has had the opportunity to give the past a

decent burial; the boys have had a country childhood and have had their 'Greekness' permanently established. My imagination has been stimulated; the physical world has shrunk, perhaps, but other worlds have undergone what Karen Blixen termed "a mysterious expansion". We have all, I hope, come further along the road to self-knowledge.

What of the future? I know we will have to leave. Dimitrios is due to start secondary school in September, and he needs more opportunities than the local institutions can provide. I, too, am reaching the stage where what masquerades as growth, is, instead, hibernation and escapism. Soon I will be afraid of that other world of competition, ambition and advancement. It is leaving me behind, and I don't think I like the idea. But – I don't like the idea of leaving Greece, either. So – what of the future, indeed? I can only say what Odysseus Elytis said in Anniversary: "Εφερα τή ζωή μου ὡς ἔδω . . . : I have brought my life as far as this.

Comment

Mary Baillieu writes:

I am moved to write by Manning Clark's account in *Overland 100* of his visit to the battlefields of France.

His reaction was beautiful and real. He was lucky to have found respect and order there.

We have just recently returned from Egypt and I have, for the second time, visited the memorials of the Italians and Germans to their dead and the Commonwealth Cemetery at El Alamein and then, some of the battlefields.

The great German war memorial stands on top of a rise, solitary and enormous and very efficient. It is made of dark elephantine grey stone and is implacable. Inside are recorded names of the German dead. It is an unhappy building because of its density, but beautifully kept by the government and people of Germany. Often visited, it shows pride and care and a national determination to survive.

The Italian memorial is exquisite and wistful. Not baroque nor palladian, but a building of great and tender architecture. It also records the names of the dead and preserves their memory. It is close to the German memorial but is much more gracefully fitting to the scene. Long slits of glass windows show light and the Mediterranean below and, sometimes, Arab children peer in like ghosts.

These buildings are beyond Alamein and on the road to Mersa Matruh and then Libya. Before we see these memorials, we stop at El Alamein for petrol, having passed the turn-off to the Commonwealth Cemetery. It is not obvious where it is, as it is situated on the side of the road away from the sea. The others – German and Italian

– stand as rampants glaring at the road and the Mediterranean. The walk to the cemetery is down, to a low building with a beautifully cloistered entrance and, then, battalions of crosses marking Commonwealth graves.

The silence, where no bird sings and few walk, is overwhelming, and the feeling that people have been there, are there, is strong. The sadness is beyond tears. Everyone buried, everyone gone, and the dusty town of Alamein with its mosque and petrol station and its dusty litter up the hill from you.

We stay at Sidi Abdel Rahman at an Egyptian hotel. The sad empty end of a seaside summer and the most beautiful beach and water. You stand on your shabby verandah and there you feel people are everywhere – so many people. You retreat into your room and try to feel secure.

You remember this was often Rommel's headquarters and it was from here that Rommel did, I suppose, plan his campaigns for battle. Due east of you are the great desert battlefields of El Alamein and Tel el Eisa and the scene of carnage, defeats and victories.

The term desert here in North Africa means stone, rubble, harsh sand. Places described as hills are barely rises. No cover, no trees, no grass, no water. How did they live and hide and fight and write letters home? There is nothing, nothing – only desert. Marks of conflict remain. Little dugout holes surrounded by stones, like dying flower beds at country railway stations, broken pieces of rusty iron, the remote possibility of mines. The strangeness of the bitumen road to Libya still running through the great battlefields.

There is no memorial to the Australians except silence.

FIVE POEMS BY LILY BRETT

The following poems are selected from The Auschwitz Poems, to be published by Scribe (Melbourne) in May. They are based on the experience of Lily Brett's parents and family, and are illustrated by her husband, David Rankin.

INVISIBLE

It was
essential

to
develop

the
skill

of
appearing
invisible

to
look
at the ground

slink
around

slide
inside

mix
in the middle

to
work

and
walk

and
sometimes
talk

as
though

you
didn't
exist.



SLEEP

Jammed
on the
planks

they
could only
sleep on their sides

forced
to move
in unison

like
synchronised
swimmers

a
corps de ballet
with corpses

occupied
hell's
private hotel.



MUSELMÄNNER (MOSLEMS)

Death
was
loosely
wound around them

leaving
them
room
to breathe

they
walked
blindly

spoke
with
a slur

were
avoided
by

those
who
wanted
to stay alive

as
though
hopelessness
was infectious

these
Moslems
these
Muselmänner

named
after
beggars
starving in India

could
no longer
understand
orders

and
were
often

beaten
to
death.



ANOTHER SELECTION

Mengele looked
while the Kommandant
lightly whipped
the thin nipples
shrivelled around
their empty bags of breast

rows and rows
of wrinkled pink tips
sitting on bowed ribs

the night sky
a romantic red
blazed with arms legs and heads

the thick air
sweet
with your mother's bones burning

the snow
clothed in
black ash
was mourning

and you stood
pushing out
what remained
of the flesh on your chest

it passed the test.



RENYA'S BABY

Afterwards
you
heard

that
Renya's
baby

who
could
already
smile

and
point

and
laugh
at
cats

was
sucking
quietly

on
the
breast

and
missed
the
gas

when
they

untangled
the
dead

chopped
their
hair



and
mined

a
sea
of teeth

they
found
her

attached

to
the
dead breast

before
loading
the
trolley

that
serviced
the ovens

they
split
her
head

hurled
her

on
top
of

another
mother.

Antarctica pointed up the Australian virtues and vices in what was, to me, a startling way. *The delusion of limitless space*: we claim nearly half the continent – “So what does it matter if we bugger up a bit of it?” I heard someone satirically say. *The pretence of democratic government overlying an uneasy administrative autocracy*: far more working democracy between the German officers and crew on the *Icebird* than I have ever seen in a similar Australian situation. *The existentialist heresy*: ‘every day, every year, we start anew’. No sense of continuity, no knowledge of the Australian past in Antarctica, no perspective of national achievement, not even a running record of useful observations. *Ideological pragmatism*, if that’s not a contradiction in terms: no very clear idea of what our tactics and strategy should be in a situation where we, more than any other nation, have the most to win and lose.

So those are some of the hard things that my time in Antarctica, between December and February, led me to consider. But there were many good things, too. I was proud of the way that we had been associated with Antarctica from the time of the first landing on the continent, as late as 1895. I was proud of the spirit that has twice sent the Project Blizzard people, a private expedition, to Commonwealth Bay to do what they can to protect and preserve Mawson’s hut and its environment from the 1911–1913 expedition. (They struggle against sabotage and every possible obstacle from the Department of the Environment in Canberra, jealous of a non-bureaucratic initiative.) On the best of our bases down there there is a resilience and spirit, and a sense of co-operation, which seemed to me in a very good Australian tradition. And some of the individuals I found associated with our work down there, from scientists to plumbers, I was moved to find did have a sense of purpose, and dedication to an Antarctic tradition, which I found very moving.

Historically, I was fascinated to follow the travels of the earlier travellers, even to the extent of sailing dead south from Hobart until we hit the continent, just as they did – a rhumb line very seldom sailed these days, when our Australia bases are so far to the west. (The most remote, Mawson, is on the same longitude as the Persian Gulf.) The beauty of the ice, and there has been a lot of ice this summer, was quite beyond my expectations – the frustra-

tion is to try and explain it to stay-at-homes, which is one of the reasons we need painters and poets in Antarctica. The main strain I felt was not a physical one, but an emotional one: so many impressions – political, aesthetic, anecdotal, historical – and so many adaptive challenges, all following each other it seemed with insistent urgency, that the main problem was ‘overload’. I’m still trying to sort it out, for a book Hutchinson’s have commissioned.

I’m pleased to record that Robert Harris has joined our board of editors, his main job to assist Barrett Reid with the increasing burden of the poetry editing. Robert began publishing in *Overland* in 1973. His fourth book of poetry, *The Cloud Passes Over*, was published by Angus & Robertson during Writers’ Week in Adelaide this year.

One of the sadnesses of running a magazine like *Overland*, especially one that desperately wants to support the interest in writing of ‘ordinary’ people, is not only the many stories and poems we have to reject – perhaps thirty or forty stories for every one we print – but also the many books we just cannot mention in reviews. These often include highly individual productions, perhaps of no great literary merit, but of much sociological interest. I think for instance of a book called *Tatters of Hessian*, sub-titled “Depression Time 1930’s Poetry”, in which the author Joy Beaudette Cripps has put side by side family photos of her childhood with attempts to capture in verse the ‘feel’ of the Depression years:

Child – watch shop. Mother’s washing tday!
Paper cloth – potato pie for dinner.

Tatters of Hessian costs \$5 (postage \$1) from Poetry Day, PO Box 268, Mordialloc V. 3195.

The Melbourne literary organisation PEN, now in the process of reorganisation and strengthening, will hold a meeting to celebrate the centenary of *Overland* at the Toorak/South Yarra Public Library, 338 Toorak Road, South Yarra, on Thursday 1 May at 8 p.m. A number of persons associated with *Overland* will speak briefly, but it will be an evening of examination and discussion rather than of eulogy. All are welcome. There will be a nominal entrance charge.

The death of Zoe O'Leary in Sydney recently removes from us a remarkable woman who was closely involved with the literary milieu of the 1950s and later, described by John Senty in his article on Overland's history in this issue. Zoe was the youngest daughter of the Queensland poet Alfred Midgeley, and not long ago wrote a biography of him, *The Little Byron*. At the age of seventeen and in the early 1920s Zoe went to Sydney and joined the J.C. Williamson chorus, later acting in many of the popular old melodramas. She used to comment ruefully that her most prophetic role was in "The Girl who took the Wrong Turning." During the Depression she and her husband organised and participated in marathon dances, sometimes twenty-four hours and more, to stay alive. She could still dance a Charleston and ride a skateboard at the age of seventy. She began writing in Brisbane during the war years and, always a fierce fighter for social justice, joined the Communist Party. Her books include *Girl Fridays in Revolt* (with Joan Clarke) and the biography of Eric Lambert, *The Desolate Market*, a sensitive and important study. Her wit and engagement lasted

very nearly until the end, when cancer destroyed her at the age of some 82 years.

The twenty-seventh Meanjin-Overland test match, held in Melbourne Domain in February, resulted in a resounding win for Overland. We scored 185, Meanjin 136. Individual scores of various literary identities included 44 for Laurie Clancy (novelist and critic), 9 in a stylish innings for Geoffrey Serle, 4 for the director of the National Gallery of Victoria, Patrick McCaughey, who was bowled by the director of the Ararat Art Gallery, David Salter, 21 for Bruce Pascoe, editor of *Australian Short Stories*, 10 for the historian Stuart Macintyre and 5 for Overland poet Robert Drummond. We have a standing invitation to women to play, but don't get many takers.

I should like to remind readers that donations to Overland may in some cases be tax deductible, and anyone planning to make a reasonably substantial donation should first contact me.

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Don Charlwood

Arthur Phillips

Arthur Phillips was born on 13 August 1900 and died on 4 November 1985. I saw him a few days before his death, unable to feed himself in hospital but still able to tell a delightful satirical story about Angela Thirkell and a League of Nations ball in Melbourne in the 1920s, which ended in international rancor. Until the end he retained his sharp critical mind, modern but unswayed by mere modernity. He seldom entirely approved of anything, but he was generous with his conversation, his experience and his ideas, and both this magazine and I owe much to him. Don Charlwood made the following remarks at his funeral. – Stephen Murray-Smith

My links with Arthur Phillips go back to a day in 1944 when I married a Canadian girl who had numerous relatives in Australia, none of whom she had met. Soon after we came to Melbourne – her mother's home city – her cousin Arthur and his wife Mary drew us into their lives.

As a young man trying at that time to finish a book about Bomber Command, I felt it a bonus indeed to gain the already legendary A.A. Phillips as a cousin. But I can't say that the family connection spared me anything when I approached him for advice on my manuscript. Yesterday I looked back over his comments: "You haven't said to yourself toughly enough, 'What can I cut out here? What can go without loss?' Until you go through this tight-lipped process, you never get writing really *full*."

As for my dialogue: "Your dialogue is bad, very bad. The trouble is you don't listen to hear the man's voice in the words. You've got to keep working at it until you can hear that particular man's voice saying it."

But he was consoling toward the end: "I've talked almost entirely about what's wrong because destructive criticism is the most constructive. The real point is that your stuff is worth criticising –"

To how many of us did he say such words as these. We knew we were getting the truth with no punches pulled; that we would be encouraged if we showed ourselves worthy of encouragement. He displayed such extraordinary insight into what one was trying to say and was capable of saying, yet had failed to say. Then it was a case of being sent back to essay another leap at the bar.

Only last Friday, when Michael Dugan – a former

student of Arthur's who remained close to him to the end – told him he proposed drawing on *The Australian Tradition* in a forthcoming book, Arthur responded from his hospital bed, "Well, you'd better make sure you don't misinterpret me!"

The Phillipses and their cousins the Ellises have been extraordinarily gifted families who have enriched Victorian life since they came here in the 1840s. They range from the artist E. Phillips-Fox to Adele Ellis, lecturer in English Literature at Melbourne University in the 1880s and author of matriculation textbooks; from Dr Marion Phillips who went from Melbourne University to the London School of Economics and, in 1929, was elected to the House of Commons, to Arthur's father, M.M. Phillips, Master in Equity.

Mary and Arthur Phillips carried on this tradition together. Some of us will remember their literary gatherings of the 1940s and 1950s and even the early 1960s when one could be sure of seeing Vance and Nettie Palmer, Alan Marshall, Judah Waten, John Morrison, Dolia and Rosa Ribush and many another luminary of that period, all in lively discussion in Mary and Arthur's Hawthorn home.

They were a devoted, dauntingly energetic couple. They raised four children; they were both inspiring teachers; they were joint editors of two books; they were enthusiastic bush walkers; they were members of innumerable committees. Both were strong, resolute people, yet I know that many of us wondered in 1968, when Mary died, how Arthur would manage to carry on alone. He

was then aged sixty-eight and already in indifferent health. He was in his final year as a master at Wesley. I am sure his work there and the support he received did much to tide him over his most difficult months. Then, to the joy of his friends, he not only learned to cook, but brought to it the distinction he brought to all his undertakings. He began inviting friends to small dinner parties, at which his flow of conversation remained undiminished as he served each inviting dish.

When he reached eighty, three parties at least were given in his honor. One was by the Fellowship of Australian Writers, of which he was a Victorian past president and a life member. He expressed his pleasure that night in having lived to see the establishment of chairs of Australian Literature. In his own university years, he said, Australian writing was not considered literature. He had the deep satisfaction of knowing that he himself had done much – especially through Meanjin and Overland and his newspaper reviews – to foster awareness of Australian literature and to encourage emerging generations of writers.

Arthur's last public address was on 25 July last year when, at the Kew Municipal Library, he unveiled a memorial plaque to Vance and Nettie Palmer. He spoke that evening with the sensitivity and eloquence he always brought to such occasions; spoke unerringly without notes. During the next week he spoke again of the Palmers on Radio Australia. This was fifty-four years after he had given the first of his many radio talks.

His last book review, as far as I am aware, appeared in the *Age Monthly Review* in August last year. He no longer had strength enough in his hands to use a manual typewriter, and was delighted that the purchase of an electric typewriter enabled him to complete the manuscript independently. The review was of Peter Carey's *Illywhacker*. A reader not knowing A.A. Phillips might well have supposed that here was a vigorous, discerning man in the prime of intellectual life. And so he was – despite the fact that he was physically frail, aged eighty-

JOSEPHINE

the ginger of your fur growled
as I stroked

your face was a ruby flush
with the pelt's reflection

for a month
you lay alone

bedded under the stone of winter moon
pressed to my scent

I crouched in the peat
finger tipped on the genital of a gun

five, not long out of hospital and soon to return there.
Listen to him confessing defeat by symbolisms:

I admit that I am a poor hand at unravelling modern symbolisms. At one time I used to feel shame at my unfashionable disability. Then I began to notice how often reviewers skated delicately around the very passages which had stymied me, and it dawned on me that I was not the lone no-hoper that I had assumed. My shame now is rather directed to the fact that I have just scabbed on my mates in the Critics' Union by admitting that I have just been floored by a symbolism. That is just not done. How can the public trust in us experts who tell it what it should think if we admit to fallibility? I probably deserve to be defrocked.

And yet – Might it not be better practice to flaunt our defeat by obscurity in the faces of readers and writers alike? Isn't there too large an element of emperor's-new-clothes seeping through the arts today? Isn't there ground for believing that two generations from now our mocking descendants – for history tells us that each age is mocked two generations on – will direct their scorn at our artists' fuddy-duddy and pretentious involutions of obscurity?

The week before he died Arthur was absorbed in reading Martin Green's *Children of the Sun*, which concerns several of his Oxford contemporaries. It was passed to him by Ken Rivett, one of the many men whose life was enriched at Wesley by A.A.'s teaching and humanity.

He died while, in the best of ways, a whole man, his mind eager still and unflawed, his spirit undaunted.

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not soe,
For those whom thou thinkst thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor death, nor canst thou kill mee.

& saw your mouth warm after wine
spindly legs

red eyes like nipples raised
by light

you were listening to the dark
as the trigger lip was bitten

teeth shone & shattered
bullet entered throat

you shivered & with sigh
patted the shoulder of a silent silver coat

TERRY HARRINGTON

THREE POEMS BY DAVID NEUMANN

ROCKABYE BABY

From America I heard
this tale of an average boy
threw such a mental, truly
nothing the doctors could do
but hang *psychotic* on him.

His parents sent him away
to an uncle on the land.
First thing on arrival
young nutcase finds a tree,
climbs forty feet off the ground.

He stayed up there three days
all weathers and wouldn't come down;
was cured when he did. You wouldn't
read about it, said doctors
one or two sharpening chainsaws.

ATTILA

*Attila Jozsef's story is told briefly in Arthur Koestler's
The Invisible Writing.*

He cut off the sleeve
put the shirt in the drawer
days later knelt by the track
thrust his right arm under
but the train took him as well.

Fourteen, he'd lain across
right across, but the afternoon
was suddenly trainless.
Further up he learnt
the goods had killed already.

So death like his mother
left him on his own.
He spent for years *I'm happy*
My love sews by my side
We listen to an old freight train pass

Meeting the instalments
he dreamed his arm was interest
went looking to pay out
met repossession.

Trains echo through his verse.

TRAMMIE

Knock-off time? let's hope —
up the hill near the roundabout
sucks a tube of Invalid Stout
(looks Valid to me). 19, 18
he lets go, staring townwards, eyeing off
distance in the lunch-hour sun,
drover-fashion . . . must march to a different tram
Maribymong perhaps? His neat
uniformed arm makes the slow ancient
off-duty salute, he swallows

and on the seat
eleven more invalids wait their turn.

THE ROLE OF TELEVISION IN REMEDIAL EDUCATION

Nothing induces a greater sense of confidence than this:
to see a State Minister following the autocue almost
perfectly,
mouthing the monosyllables with consummate ease
and negotiating even the BIG WORDS with a manful air
— to see triumph lighting up the tiny eyes and a deep joy
(such as, it is said, only the blessed experience)
suffusing the puffy cheeks . . .

You just know
you're in the Sunshine State when you see such
handicaps overcome, such wonders — why, it seems
only yesterday those same lips had trouble with
C-A-T while we all groaned in shared anguish
for the brave little fellow toiling so hopelessly
up the Sisyphean slope of intelligence . . .
And now! To be up there among the biggies!
To be almost able to handle giant-size boulders like
SOCIALIST, UNIONIST, CONSUMER!
That's what it's all about! That's PRO-G-G-G-
That's GOOD!

BRUCE DAWE

MR MADDEN

Face as red as a heart attack
temper as black as murder
pale blue eyes and a mouth like a crack
that's Mr Madden
Geography Graphics and Maths

The kids are blue
but there's work to do
look down at that Maths
— diagram skeletons, spiky black fractions
Look away from the window the yellow day
STOP DREAMING! and DO WHAT I SAY!

Mr Madden has purple words
to beat you down and make you frown
STOP! DON'T! CAN'T! DETENTION!
BEHAVIOR CARD CONFERENCE WITH PARENTS
He'll put you in the cupboard
for saying WOT?

but when the bell goes
day is waiting
with gold and silver for you, dear
and diamonds and smiles too, dear

and Mr Thunderbolt Madden
stays in his grey room.

KERRY SCUFFINS

FREUD'S BACK-YARD

Berggasse IX, Vienna.

The doctor's not at home.
For a few schillings you may stroll
past letters, photos, musty souvenirs,
and old confessions
sheened like wax on weighty chairs
(though the body imprint's gone).

Prim, sequential, why do rooms like these
bring on uneasiness?
You find you're listening for dead people's pain.
Perhaps the wallpaper
covers too many secrets, old and mousey,
muttering where they scratch with dingy claws.

Go now, unnoticed — leave discreetly
through the door, then run —
follow your footsteps' echo
down cold stairs.
A dusty window, quaintly scrolled,
exposes Freud's back-yard:
a glimpse of shattered psyches spilling from a bin;
libido bagged for burial;
Oedipus howling for his Mum —

all in the mind!
There's no detritus here from dreadful dreams;
the sanely waltzing Viennese
have whipped it stiff and baked it in a torte.

ISOBEL ROBIN

The Prison House of Cultures

SEAN REGAN

Narrow in view, bigoted in principle, milk and waterish in the fiercest of its denunciations; it has yet all the vigour as the disposition to be as splenetic and spiteful as the most steadfast old ladies whose presence is the main support of the conventicle of the self-righteous.

Though readers will immediately recognize the subject of this handsome panegyric as the Sydney Morning Herald, it is just possible not everyone will as readily identify the source. The sentiment and even style might suggest it were so, yet these are not the words of Balmain's leading stoic but a lively editorial in the Fiji Times of 16 April 1879, penned by the archipelago's first and finest master of the vituperative arts, Mr T.H. Prichard, father of Katharine Susannah and lifelong antagonist of "that plebeian" Henry Parkes.

Katie, of course, was to chance her hand with the Left-becoming, in a cluttered life, a charter member of the Australian Communist Party – but Prichard *père* was more a natural misanthrope, his venom and principles never quite divorced, though on the important issues selflessly estranged. Even then, there was nothing milk-and-waterish about *his* denunciations, especially of the first governor, whose refusal to countenance the settlers' request for representation sorely tried the loyalties of the fourth estate:

Sir Arthur Gordon is no believer in representation by the popular element. His objections, no doubt conscientious, are perhaps also well founded. He himself was returned once as a member of Parliament and it is not impossible that this fact may of itself have convinced him how dangerous it is to trust to the popular sense when it is desirable that persons fit and properly qualified to discharge the duties of legislators alone should be chosen.

As spokesman for the European community, Prichard had little option but to confuse the issue of settlers' rights. John Bull's earth-hunger might have been keen, but it was not indiscriminate. Fiji in 1874 had become a Crown Colony "of a severe type" and that severity, so it seemed, was to apply to the white population as much as the indigenes. The country was ceded and formally recognized as though a colony of conquest, meaning first, that

native customs and laws (as were consistent with natural justice) had to be respected; but second, that settlers could not automatically assume the prerogatives of Englishmen abroad, as they might in a colony of settlement. Indeed, Whitehall was disposed to view them as the major cause of the annoyance which made colonization necessary at all. Under the Deed of Cession through which the Fijian chiefs were finally able to make themselves wards of the Crown (an earlier offer had been declined and even the second was accepted reluctantly), Britain was expressly obligated to protect and further the interests of the native people; to shield them from the depredations of foreigners and lead them up the path of civilization at their own leisurely, innocent pace.

This might have been only an extravagant gesture of imperial good will, which is certainly how the settlers saw it. However under the first governor, Victoria's promise was kept with a vengeance. Ever the amateur of the exotic – and recognizing aristocracy even in a grass skirt – the future Baron Stanmore took the *kai viti* under his benevolent wing, setting up a dual system of government in which Fijian institutions and customs (or what he imagined to be such) were not only preserved but effectively nationalized through a complex system of native regulations, courts, governing bodies and inviolable rights, most importantly in land. For Gordon, whose undistinguished career at Westminster had stimulated a passion for colonial service and the science of man, the Fijians were a real find. Not only did they excite the humanitarian and scholar in him, they also provided images and rituals of sympathetic authority that were a considerable boost to his self-esteem. Away from home, a knight can be a king, an accountant a true bourgeois. This is a common form of delusion among well-to-do white men in the tropics and it was not long before Gordon was conversing (badly) in Fijian, sipping *kava* instead of sherry at Government House and generally carrying on like one of the cannibal chiefs he had been sent to civilize.

Naturally, this did not endear him to the settlers who, being very badly-to-do, were alive only to the aristocracy of race and determined to act, therefore, as they presumed Englishmen under the circumstances should: with utter contempt for the darkies. Yet Gordon's personal idiosyncracies and quaint policies could probably have been tolerated if he had not also insisted that in their own best interests the Fijians would have to be quarantined

from Capital. Their traditional way of life must be safeguarded at all costs. (This was a departure even from the humanitarianism of his day which, while considering native lives sacrosanct, held little brief for native culture.) Fijians were therefore banned from plantation work, to be replaced by indentured labor from India.

The resulting furore was both expected and casually received. Gordon's genius for shipping Indians across the globe (his single most lasting contribution to colonial instability) evidenced a touching faith in what a later orthodoxy would term "multiculturalism". The fact that Fijians, Indians and Britons were light-cultural-years removed did not strike him as constituting an insurmountable difficulty (he himself got on famously with natives everywhere and indenture had been a roaring success in the Caribbean); nor, until it was too late, did even Whitehall seem particularly troubled by Lord Salisbury's fool assurance that time-expired laborers would be able to enjoy "rights and privileges no whit inferior to those of Her Majesty's other subjects": a happy prospect in a colony where Her Majesty's other subjects did not all enjoy the same rights and privileges to begin with. But for Gordon the only salient question was how to preserve the Fijian race while making the colony pay its way. The answer, obviously, was: Indians.

To the settlers' objections his ears were caked hard. Their motive for wanting native labor was simple greed; their conduct towards the Fijians abominable and their fears about the Indians the merest ignorance and prejudice. Talk of Englishmen's rights and freedoms was outlandish hubris, their very advocates being little better than convicts. "They are," he wrote to Lord Carnarvon, "mostly half or wholly wicked men of small energy and narrow intellect given to drink & indolence & full of Australian notions as to the niggers."

All the more galling, then, that the Australians themselves were not entirely sympathetic to the settlers' plight. They had already solved their nigger problem, of course, and found it hard to resist the condescension to which circumstance and fierce resolve had entitled them. Australia was a white man's land, and Fiji patently wasn't. Whether in the taunts of visiting sailors asking why they hadn't yet dealt with their Tasmanians, or the "respectable old fageyism" (Prichard again) of the Sydney Morning Herald admonishing them for self-interest and callousness, Fiji's settlers were made to feel out of turn, second-rate, whingers of a severe type. Quite simply, they were not up to their own pretensions.

The relevant facts were easily stated. The Australian colonists, in British lands of occupancy, could afford to affect the confidence of a nation, with British constitutional form and the accompanying sense of decency. They would soon control their destiny. Then future arrivals would no longer be settlers but migrants. Fiji, as a ceded colony, gave its white men no such advantages. Paradoxically, they would always be settlers, exercising their natural rights only at Her Majesty's pleasure, employing native labor only when the Governor decided it was historically acceptable to do so and – worst of all – having to put up with ever-increasing numbers of Indians belligerently demanding that Lord Salisbury's word be honored.

In short, while Australia moved in chorus to European

nationhood, Fiji would become a racial hell. For a British settler it was, all told, an inferior sort of colony to be in and he himself, as Gordon implied, an inferior sort of Australian, small beer in a minor indulgence of Empire. No wonder Prichard fumed.

Australia may or may not come to grips with its independence; Fiji resents the very condition. There are a few Australians who would trade that citizenship to live permanently in Fiji. There are few Fijians who want to be where they are. But on one critical point – the song of multiculturalism, or national nonentity – it is now perhaps we who should look north for the prejudice it is our instinct to admire. Sir Arthur Gordon is, like Hope, among us once again.

Consider first what it is to be a nation and why anybody should want to live in one. Like ideology, nationhood springs from the heart before it enters the mind: a dark heart, admittedly, but vigorously beating. Unlike ideology, it is not a slave to words; indeed, in its inarticulacy lies much of its strength. Broadly, a nation is a gathering of tribes whose mutual distrust and loathing are a form of dependence, grounded in a common expectation of the world and shared anxiety. It is best held together by a monarch, though God will often do. Insofar as it allows tribal sentiments free but secure rein, it is a natural political order and therefore desirable. Which is not to say it is always stable. Revolutions do occur. But then we all occasionally vomit. The nation is, above all else, a place of privacy.

Its antithesis is the republic – not the philosophers' fantasy but a rag-bag of tribes whose mutual distrust and loathing are the expression of practised ignorance and cultural sloth. There is no natural dependence here and, of course, no monarch. The philosophers were right to see it as an intellectual creation; but it is not, even ironically, a community of rational beings. The tribal hatreds are deeply felt and ineradicable. The rules, therefore, have to be hard-headed, public and (in the sloppy sense) Hobbesian. The tribes must, like mistresses, be kept apart – by whatever means. This allows them at least to live, if only by pawning most of the things worth living for. A 'multicultural' society, of its very nature, is republican. The only question is whether it is healthy or degenerate.

On these terms Australia is now far less of a nation than it was even in Prichard's day. True, the Aboriginals remained a blot on settlement but there were sufficiently few of them for the appropriate legal fictions to be sustained, while the White Australia policy would see to the rest. Both public and private culture were derivative and the monarchy semi-detached, as it continues to be. But for most Australians these were unimportant facts of an otherwise increasingly satisfactory existence. (Does it matter that royalty itself is almost entirely made up of foreigners?) Outsiders were accepted, so long as they conformed to the prevailing Knopfmorph values. The country was preparing for its national initiation rites boldly, with a clear sense of its good historical fortune and a comfortable mortgage on the future.

Fiji, by contrast, was a born republic. "Fijians" themselves comprise an assortment of cultures, their common ethnicity (and country) being, as usual, a European inven-

tion. Given Gordon's policies on native affairs and indenture, colonial Fiji was from the outset an exercise in controlled intolerance. Indian numbers grew, the proportion of white settlers fell; racial disaffection increased. Today Indians account for just over half the population, Fijians about 43 per cent, the Europeans, Chinese, half-castes and Islanders the rest. This is no nation, and racial distinctions pervade all aspects of life. The settlers' fears have been more than adequately catered for.

And now they find an echo in our own indignant bitching. For the last few decades Australians have been told they must learn to love the republican virtues, if not quite to wake up to what they are all about. 'New' Australians have arrived. The country's British heritage, which gave it credibility as a nation, has come under learned attack. The "cultural cringe" has been denounced. The Queen may still be saved, but we advance independently, non-sexistly. The future is multicultural. But does it work? Those who think it does might well consider how it works in Fiji, not for direct parallels (there are perhaps one or two) but to trace the logic of our present course – more clearly seen in miniature – and ponder, without prejudice, on its likely outcome.

There are several issues to play with, but a few of particular importance. The first and most obvious is that republicanism means the end of nationhood and is therefore incompatible with nationalism. The two may of course co-habit, but only to wear each other down (as people do). A multicultural society has, by definition, no cultural heart. A multicultural nation is a contradiction in terms. To encourage nationalist feeling is therefore to exacerbate the very differences it is the task of the republic to contain.

In Fiji this is certainly the case. Multiculturalism is the official dogma, ubiquitous pictures of the Windsor clan its tatty veil. Public holidays abound, but the only thing common to their celebration is a grim consumption of alcohol. There is little miscegenation, except by rape. There is a *lingua franca*, English, but the majority do not use it. The radio stations broadcast in three languages and early education is also in different tongues. The 'national' culture consists in being discrete or getting out.

Particularly striking is the intellectual withdrawal. It is rare, for instance, that an Indo-Fijian scholar writes on anything but the Indo-Fijian condition, or even pursues other knowledge unless it be a grand scheme that helps explain the Indo-Fijian condition. And Indo-Fiji is, in effect, India displaced. This is reinforced by a constant stream of imported Hindi films and magazines, sometimes brides, as well as the odd Western *mea culpa* like the appalling film "Gandhi". Naturally, Indo-Fiji Indians are always bickering amongst themselves, Hindus with Moslems, descendants of indentured laborers with descendants of traders, dark-skinned with light. This is all part of the fun of living in the twentieth century. We can enjoy our communal quarrels anywhere in the world.

It is rare to find a Fijian scholar. Fijians hide instead within 'tradition' and the ceremonies of self-deception handed down by decades of European scholarship, from Gordon to the latest Canberra Ph.D. *Vaka viti* – the Fijian way – is the official name for this torpid self-indulgence,

and any upstart who dares be different is soon put in his place. Still largely cossetted from civilization, but retaining most of their earlier discontents, Fijians shoulder the tragedy of having become a minority in their own land lightly, by expecting – and usually getting – special rights (of which more in a moment). Since none of their relative advantages would have been possible without British paternalism – specifically, the denial of early settler demands and widespread Indian migration – the majority are quite happy to view their lot as reasonably fortunate. Being a quaint and endangered species has become a way of life.

And the early settlers? Gone, most of them, one way or another. Part-Europeans play a significant role in the country's affairs and – despite a strong Gujerati presence in the retail trade – Europeans divide with Chinese the serpent's share of business. But the early settler spirit has fallen to its own conceit, now morosely sunk in gallons of the liquid Carlton and United Breweries have the temerity to call Fiji Bitter. New Zealand and Australian expatriates do what they can, like monks chasing a girl. Most manage to return home before their marriages completely disintegrate.

How far these are the future faces of the Australian republic it is impossible to tell, but realistic to enquire. The established tribes have been joined by others, eager for establishment and told this does *not* mean they must assimilate. Yet establishment, we all know, does not come easy; you've got to fight your way in this world. So they will fight all the way. And there are only two possible outcomes: the creation of a new hybrid culture through fervent miscegenation, or communal isolation. There is no mawkish mean.

As in Fiji, in Australia 'ethnic' inter-sexuality is off limits (so much so "Romeo and Juliet" appears to be the sole prototype for the fledgling multicultural novel). Helped by a natural as well as federal government fear of open spaces, the new tribes have learned to beat a hasty cultural retreat even as they consolidate their material advance. The urge for symbols to capture this – newspapers, films, festivals, a Minister of State – grows ever stronger as the exile sinks from view. The first generation is generally happy enough to have escaped whatever it escaped. The second is more anxious to assert itself, usually through money. By the third, cultural identity has become a major problem.

One telling aspect of Britain's reluctant republicanism has been the development among third and fourth generation Negro migrants in Britain of a distinctive West Indian patois, in determined rebellion against their parents' cockney or Midlands whine. These are people 'in' but defiantly not 'of' Britain. Except that – in reality – they are. Very few would actually like to live in the West Indies. Their language serves its self-appointed purpose only in Britain itself, where it establishes them as 'outsiders'. (In the West Indies, of course, they would be the genuine article.) A thriving multicultural society thrives on alienation, which – *pace* Marx – is usually eligible these days for a local government grant. Pakistani and

Indian youths have apparently cottoned on to this and are now busily perfecting their own self-loathing voice. The selfish gene is never less than generous when in the welfare state.

It is likely something similar will happen here, especially amongst those ethnic groups which are economically disadvantaged or believe themselves so. Australian accent like the American, is more open than the British to linguistic discrimination of this kind because its variants are more subtle and not so easily confused with distinctions of class. Tribal vocabulary is already evident. We even have a Commissioner to check it out. May his investigations never cease.

But there are more general questions, which the bicentenary will put on notice. It will definitely not be an anglo-morph affair. There will be British and Irish migrant history in abundance; but also Chinese and Turkish and homosexual. Like delegates at a tax summit, the various 'community' groups will trot out the nostalgia and sour grapes of their situation, to their own polite applause. There will be cultural displays, as peacocks air their differences. There will be mutual understanding over a spring roll and Coke. And then each will return to his cultural ghetto, bush poet and belly-dancer alike. This is indeed nationalism, of the sort you find without a nation. The dress rehearsals have already begun.

The greatest irony falls on those Anglo-Celtic nationalists who for years have confused their own understandable desire for a truly independent Australia with a defective ideal of the republic. In the days to come they may be forgiven ever greater self-pity as it slowly dawns on them that the nearer we come to the ideal the more dispensable and disagreeable will appear the nationalism that inspired it. Indeed, we might even predict that over-indulgence in the Older forms of Australian history and culture will in due course be harshly criticized for its 'ethnocentric' disregard of the sensitivities *and rights* of the wider multicultural community. (After all, *they* are not a quaint, endangered species.) We may all wallow in our own ethnicity, but when it comes to 'national' identity there must be no hierarchy. In other words, the civic culture – an equal opportunity employer – will soon become irretrievably sterile.

A more specific question concerns the Aborigines and their fellow-dreamers. Britain respected Fijian rights from the start, not least because of the mistakes made in Australia. Land, in particular, was an issue on which the Fijians' opinion was respectfully heard. As a result, the bulk of it still rests in Fijian hands, and probably always will. A cause of resentment among the early European settlers, this is now the principal grievance of Indian tenant farmers who are disallowed by law from purchasing what, by right of use, they consider to be their property.

The retrospective acceptance of Australia as a colony of conquest – which is what all the breast-beating amounts to – presents what many would hope, or fear, is a comparable opportunity to legitimize the notion of differential rights for the indigenous people here. There are relatively fewer Aborigines than Fijians, but Australia is a bigger country and non-Aboriginal Australians

have a far greater racial debt staring them in the face. They took the land on credit. Now they must pay the interest.

This, at any rate, is the gist of the case forwarded by our present-day Arthur Gordons. They do not have his legislative power, but they have influence enough in parliaments and other moral graves to be taken seriously – as do our present-day Prichards, more likely to be running a mining company than a newspaper, but none the less public-spirited for that. The central debating point – whether Aborigines should have special rights or equal rights with other Australians – will not be new to those familiar with the Fiji Times of the 1870s, nor will the special pleading. What is clear from the recent statements of Aboriginal activists is that the official enthusiasm for a multicultural Australia is something they rightly believe can be used to their advantage. This doubtless will muddy the issue even further, making it more difficult to resolve, but by the same token impossible to argue away. The scene is therefore set for a continuing ugliness, taken out of context until such time as the apartheid that all sides secretly want is formally brought into being.

But it need not stop there. If the claim of one group to special rights can be derived (however tenuously) from the overall commitment to multiculturalism, then so in principle can the claims of others. Once ethnicity is accepted as a 'relevant' criterion in the assessment of an individual's positive rights (as opposed to being dismissed as irrelevant in an assessment of his merit, which is what 'anti-discrimination' used to be about) the way is clear for it to become the critical criterion. Naturally the justification for this will be mooted in the name of equality, but what will be at stake is militant inequality. As this is ultimately a political question (who can be the most stubborn?) it is in the political arena we should expect it to finally rest: which is, indeed, what we do find in Fiji.

Democracy in paradise is based on an elaborate gerrymander designed to preclude Indian rule so long as the Fijian vote holds – a condition the constitution-makers took as read. Central government is bicameral, the Senate having eight of its twenty-two members nominated by the Fijian Great Council of Chiefs. In the elected House of Representatives, by virtue of an involved and almost failsafe franchise, non-Indian is to exceed Indian representation, whatever the demographic balance in the country. Fijians and Indians have twenty-two members each (elected in both racially exclusive and cross-voting constituencies), the remaining eight being given to "General Electors" (Europeans, Chinese and half-castes).

To service this racially-divided franchise are racially-divided parties. The ruling Alliance Party is Fijian and General Elector dominated, with an ever-decreasing rump of Indian support; while the opposition National Federation Party is for all practical purposes exclusively Indian. The only other group to make a significant electoral showing – the Fijian Nationalists – take their philosophy from Idi Amin, their main platform being complete Indian 'repatriation'. (In the first election of 1977 they actually split the Fijian vote, gaining some 25 per cent of the total and causing the Alliance to lose its

majority. The NFP, visibly shocked to find itself invited to form an administration, at first prevaricated and then called for a coalition with the Alliance. The Alliance leader went off fishing until the Governor General – another high Fijian chief – asked him back to form a minority government pending further elections. The erring voters, suitably chastised, did not betray themselves a second time.)

The public service, too, reflects racial sensibilities. Equal numbers of Fijians and Indians are recruited, whatever the relative numbers and merit of candidates. To facilitate the process, educational standards have become gloriously flexible. Fijians, for example, do not have to score as highly as Indians in order to gain a university place or scholarship. Incompetence can even be a positive advantage in securing employment. But there is one area of endeavor in which Fijian competence is not at all in doubt: the army is a thoroughly efficient institution, highly experienced in ‘peacekeeping’ (trained by the UN in the Lebanon) and presently under the able command of the Prime Minister’s son-in-law.

It goes without saying that it is now the Indian community – rather than the diminished band of whites – which is most insistent on the need for a common roll and good old-fashioned equality before the law. Europeans and Fijians are perfectly happy with the present arrangements, each group pointing to the reasonable grounds for its own special treatment and being listened to, reverentially, by the other. In a multicultural republic, only the mosquitoes are truly disinterested. The noble lies of democracy are nowhere to be heard.

In Australia there are plenty of lies, but do we still believe them? Certainly it would be foolish to take too many liberties with our democratic credentials. There is not a constitutional world of difference between the arguments for a Chiefs’ Senate and a States’ Senate. Nor is the traditional Labor call for smaller, numerically squared constituencies so far distant from the Fiji Indians’ demand for a common roll. It is possible to imagine our own gerrymanders refurbished to accommodate what could easily be promoted as the legitimate objectives of multiculturalism. It is equally possible to imagine party politics taking an enthusiastic ‘communal’ turn, as has happened in the past and is sure to happen in the future over immigration. Liars are always happy to come to the aid of the party.

On the issue of ‘equal opportunity’ we are already well down the track. The present schemes to eliminate discrimination will inevitably lead to a system of quotas, if only as a means of self-defence; an institution can prove beyond reasonable doubt (a.k.a. hysteria) that it has *not* discriminated against group X only if it appoints members of group X to a fixed number of positions. This is chancy enough when the group in question can claim something approaching numerical parity with other contenders – as women can with men – but perfectly hazardous when the numbers themselves are up for grabs. The argument then has nothing to do with equal opportunity but a vague and sinister notion of ‘equality of preferential

rights’, in which any complaint is potentially a legitimizing condition.

Present educational debate may serve as an example of this and pointer to the future. The charges of ‘elitism’ which underwrite criticism of traditional methods of assessment (among other things) have lately been allied to a profound concern for the specific disadvantages suffered by the ethnic communities. One of these is instruction in the English language which for even second generation migrants cannot, we are told, be considered a first tongue. (We are not debating the truth of this proposition.) Provision, it follows, must therefore be made to counteract this structural discrimination so as to equitably compensate the community group in question by facilitating its situation in respect of intellectual achievement – by fair means or foul.

Already the case has been made for schools in which English would not be the language of instruction. Already assessment procedures – up to and including university level – take account of candidates’ ‘cultural background’. There are no official directives on this – only the nascent republican conscience, cheerfully unaware of what it is bringing on itself and countless cultural misfits yet, all passionate, to come.

Are we, then, on the verge of what they do in Fiji? Is the future one of multiple cultural sclerosis? Establishment, remember has to be fought for and then entrenched. (So, in its way, was disestablishment.)

The answer obviously is no, we will not become like Fiji. Not at all. We will probably end up far worse.

For a majority of Australians it is doubtless unflattering to have the Great Experiment compared with the politics of a tourist resort, and be found in any way wanting. Is it not the United States to which we should be looking for our fast culture as we now look for food? Perhaps – but the comparison with Fiji is more valuable because it tells us where we shall not be going but always visiting.

The point may be simply made: Fiji, for all its misery, is a successful multicultural society because it has faced up to the requirements of the republic and put them into institutional shape. Australia will be an unsuccessful multicultural society because the country is still emotionally bound to the ideals of its aborted nationhood and will therefore not have the resolve or stupidity (take your pick) to properly meet the republican challenge.

The Australian Republic would have to be founded on rules that violently offend many of the most basic principles of government to which the once national heritage has (erroneously or not) attached us. There are too many here who will not take that offence lightly. Undoubtedly there are also others, prankster Arthur Gordons, who would dismiss the heritage as trivial, another cringe; who do not believe in ‘representation by the popular element’ except by quota; who react to the arguments of the white middle-classes as Gordon did to those of Fiji’s settlers; and who might therefore, be prepared to go all the way like Fiji and have a communal franchise, an *a priori* division of ethnic rights and jobs for everyone but the boys.

But Gordon was not legislating for his own country and it is questionable whether even the brightest and best of today's multiculturalists have fully thought their position through. In any case, Australia's "mostly half or wholly wicked men" will long be a powerful minority, with a veto over anything that goes Too Far. Money barks.

So what *will* happen? Probably the worst that could. We have undermined the nation, but do not have the disposition to build a healthy republic. We will therefore go half-way – along the lines suggested – and then call a halt, degenerate before the fact. The rights and special interests we are now carefully nurturing will spring back on us, like disobedient flowers; henceforth ever suspi-

ous, ever nationalist, ever unpatriotic. And the rest will follow suit. *All* our sullen tribes will be Indo-Fijian.

The pity is that those who push us there are not narrow in view and bigoted in principle, but narrow in view and liberal in principle. They love the new republic, but they do not know what it demands. If they did, they would perhaps realise that while, for some fortunate inhabitants of the world, citizenship is no more than a necessity of life, for most it is a prison camp.

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AT THE PUB

Her breath smells like insecticide.
Engrossed in her taciturn grotesqueness
she ceaselessly sucks on the few teeth
she has left. She's ugly. Christ how she's
ugly. Already weary when she makes her appearance.
Between one glass and another she strays into
frenzied advances pushed to the limit of
amorous assaults. Half naked, dressed
in rags she staggers from table
to table thrusting out her breasts, her buttocks,
barley and hop lit up like beacons
under her loud besplattered dress.
It's blood. It's shit. It looks as though she's
just used it to clean her bum
or that she's had an abortion in the toilet.
Whoever she is now she loved, was loved.
That right belongs to her. She wants it
back. She's paying for it. A lot. Too much.
For the forgetfulness they applaud her,
they pull her down onto their knees. Go on
girl . . . have a drink. Hurray for us,
hurray for you, tonight we'll have fun.
What a night! Drink. We'll do wonders.

ROSA CAPPIELLO

Translation by Gaetano Rando

books

An Australian J'Accuse

Barry Hill

John Bryson: *Evil Angels: The Death of Azaria Chamberlain in the Central Australian Desert, and the Events Leading to Judgement* (Viking, \$24.95).

This impeccably written and artfully constructed book – better than *In Cold Blood* and *The Executioner's Song* – is a defence of Lindy Chamberlain, a cool tracking of circumstantial evidence that led to her conviction for the murder of her daughter, Azaria, at Ayers Rock in 1980. The tracking – and what is tracking but successful telling according to signs thin and confusing on the ground? – takes us from the events at the campsite and the search for the lost baby, to the first inquest, which named the dingo, so to speak; the second inquest, at which the Chamberlains seem to have been legally ambushed; to the trial, where, before the ghoulish eyes of the nation, Chamberlain was sentenced to life imprisonment. Site, scene, dialogue – Bryson's technique is cinematically fine and unflagging in its dramatic intensity. I could not put the book down.

I must say, as several reviewers already have, that I began the book with the unhappy sense of Lindy Chamberlain's guilt, having myself been caught up, however privately, with the case that so fired one's passions. I confess to feeling some weird sense of satisfaction that she had been convicted. I seem to have caught a feeling in the air which proclaimed: 'Well, even if she didn't do it she should be punished.' Jesus. But now I can only say, after Bryson, that my feelings run hard and fast the other way.

After following his narrative, which is made of more than one point of view, I have the uncomfortable sense of having precariously traversed the rock face of this contemporary social order called Australia – with its simplistic Christian brow here, the slippery cheek-by-jowled professions there, the treacherous bottom lip of the general public needing pitons to negotiate – I feel as if I have been led across these features only to be dangled, pitched out and down on the thin rope before the mouth, the cave, a deep and ancient cave running a long way back

into the slope. One dangles, and the breach from the cave is palpably dark. But more of that in a minute.

Very simply, Bryson thinks the case unproven. The evidence is circumstantial – no body, no motive, forensic submissions that are highly debatable. That is to say and we are still in the realm of the tabloids, aren't we? Lindy Chamberlain was not proved guilty *beyond reasonable doubt*. Therefore we must assume her innocence. She should be free. Her case should be re-opened – all this comes through, as I say, through a painstaking reconstruction of situation or evidence that was either lost sight of at the trial, or strangely veiled by contradictory scientific material.

So it is that we hear of dingo incidents at the rock, prior to the disappearance of Azaria, and the fact that the chief ranger had written to the authorities warning them that if something was not done about the half-tame half-wild state of the animals in the vicinity then one day a baby could well be taken. The dingo is closer in genus to the wolf than the dog, and all through recorded history wolves have made off with children.

We learn, too, that there are numerous witnesses to testify that when Azaria disappeared the mother's reactions were what other mothers would deem normal: that is to say, ladies and gentlemen of the leafy or dried-out suburbs and dusty towns of the interior and north, Lindy *did* cry! Not only that. Azaria was a normal child and the name has nothing to do with sacrifice but everything to do with 'Blessed of God'. And the mother was no more post-natally depressed than she was slapdash about the relentless task of tending an infant. At the rock she still had, one other experienced mother observed, 'the consistent glow of the new mother'.

And so on – though we should add, once her husband, the Seventh Day Adventist pastor Michael Chamberlain took his stunned wife in hand, announcing to everybody that the terrible event could not but be the Will of God, it was then that she took herself in hand; some of the composure that was to goad the public became evident, as she turned into the arms of her husband, and to her God. Anyway, the main point here is that, whether one wants to believe all of this or not, the evidence against her

was and remains circumstantial and contentious. Why then did she not in the normal course of justice receive the benefit of the doubt? What happened? What went wrong? What forces were at work?

Well, one thing is clear. One banality is true: she was powerfully tried by the media. Bryson is brilliant here: we get clear sense, not simply of the working lives of individual and conspicuously male journalists with their deadlines, and the contingencies of radio reporting and television coverage, which made it hard to cover the genuine complexity of a whole day's proceedings (especially when the right headline could lift a paper's sales by 40,000 copies a day); we also get an absolute sense of the inexorability with which the prosecution case was taken up: this despite the fact that as the case unfolded the premises of the police views were steadily refuted.

Some journalists, of course, were uneasy about the flood tide of opinion/rumor/evidence that they were with their simplistic reports helping to swell. But for all practical purposes there had to be an 'angle', and as one man in the Alice Springs newsroom proclaimed: "We're here to report the prosecution case." According to Bryson, about the only journalist who resisted this tide was Malcolm Brown, from the SMH. Bryson uses Brown's angle as a kind of alter ego, a cunning way of approaching and then shying away from the jackal company he was obliged – ambivalently no doubt – to keep.

But this is perhaps a bit too righteous. In a way, Bryson seems to be as fatalistic about the workings of the media as the Chamberlains about God. He sets to work more trenchantly on the endlessly metamorphosing police case, one that seems so much to have been compulsively pursued, and on the material submitted as the 'scientific' evidence, presented to the court by eminent men and women known as forensic scientists. Bryson produces much scandalous material. We are left with a very dubious sense of forensic science especially if its presentation gets inextricably bound up with what the key overseas witness Professor Cameron called, at one point, "court-manship". In general we gather from Bryson that here we have a case where some experts got carried away with their own reputations, and Science in general got dragged before the jury as some article of Faith. We approach the cave.

What Bryson presents here – the point at which shivers are meant to go up the spine – is the lattice work of fallible reason, against which our system of justice is meant to work, but through which darkness can seep. So it is that he is able to report that Mrs Joy Kuhl felt that in court Lindy Chamberlain was looking at her like a witch; and that the journalist, Murray Nicol, had made contact with a scientist who thought Azaria was the devil's child. It was Frank Moorhouse who commented on this. "A scientist peddling black-magic stories," he said, refilling glasses, "It has a nice congruence". A congruence, we come to see through the Bryson account, that seems also to have been compulsively willed by people other than scientists; by the heavily masculine sleuthing of the police; by the feline imaginations of the journalists who

were perhaps necessarily prone to satanic atmospherics; by the general public – that murky sea of opinion of which the others, whether they were highly trained rationalists or not, were ultimately part. What Bryson is suggesting, to put this crudely, is that even though the trial Judge directed the jury away from a ruling of guilt, the gaps in the lattice work had become, one way or the other, too great, the structures of Just Reason had at bottom and in an undeclared way become too weak, to keep Superstition out. And so the sentence had to be handed down, born as it was convolutedly and undeclared, out of our Salem. So much, one shudders, putting the book down, for the jury system. And so much for 'Us'.

Yet this is going too fast. I don't know what Bryson, who is a barrister, thinks of the jury system. Part of the book's great power is the suggestiveness and the cunning with which its author argues by implication. Superstition, however, is his word. He comes across as an Enlightenment man. That is to say, the word superstition, with its attendant trust in the reasonings that help make Science what it is today, tends to relegate to black holes any Unreason, or the Irrational. And this I think makes some things too undiscussable too quickly.

With the Chamberlain case it may well diminish and distort some of the deeper forces that might have been at work. A question is, once we come to bitter realisation that we have been caught up in something compulsively vicious and unresolved, what bearings do we take – what frame, what notions, what discourse do we use to wake up again?

Frank Moorhouse was probably the first public commentator to speak of the Chamberlain case in terms of myth – pointing to the grip mythological structures have upon our imaginations. Central components were there: the desert, the sacred rock, the wolf, the inquest that was, first of all, about the wolf; and then about the blood. Potent elements at the best of times, we can see. Astonishingly however, he hardly focussed on the component that aroused us most, which fired the breath in the cave. And that was all that is meant in ritual and sacred taboo by motherhood – not the killing of children as such, we have had infanticide through the ages too, just as we have had wolves taking off with babies, just as we have, to confirm certain rectitudes, the thought of Abraham: but this cannot be the same, it seems to me, as the slaughter of a child by its mother.

Motherhood, perhaps the final haven, in this sacriligious age, of the sacred. Motherhood, the site, in this sociological and psychologised age, of guilt and irresolution. Motherhood, the site, definitionally, of female Power most worshipped and denied by men. And once a mother stands, even incipiently accused, do not some components of myth have their own gravitational power, their own momentum? For collective accusations are premised upon collective possession of the crime – the accusation a kind of foretelling, on the basis of guilt for the same thing. And thereafter, once the fingers go up, the sacred imperative is that one should, whether innocent or not, acknowledge the crime. (How else to account for the rigor mortis that seemed to beset Lindy Chamberlain's

foulest accusers when she stepped out in that new dress, and the relentlessness with which men responded to their shrieks by exercising their Dominion by Punishment.)

It seems to me that the subsequent liberation of Lindy Chamberlain bears out this line of reasoning: one minute Authority judges that evidence does not warrant her release, the next minute it sets her free declaring that she will remain so whether a new enquiry finds the new evidence crucial or not. What is belatedly being let out here except symptoms of collective guilt? Since then the media does loop the loop with its conscience, one journalist after another bemoaning the tribal chant of his colleagues.

But I don't know. I only know that the Bryson book leaves me feeling somehow ashamed and yet incompletely enlightened, and that this is not because I am superstitious or perhaps reflexively chauvinist. It is true that Bryson has written an indignantly revealing book that bears comparison, as D.J. O'Hearn has said, with *J'Accuse*, just as it is a book, as Kerryn Goldsworthy has argued, that almost unwittingly condones the sexist semiotics of the whole public affair. But for me Bryson has also pointed towards Savage Gods. The next book about the Chamberlain case might dig deeper into the archaic realms of instinct and transgressible reason, into the totem and taboo of motherhood, the better to be contemporary.

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Am I a Camera?

Roger Milliss

Amanda Lohrey: *The Morality of Gentlemen* (APCOL, \$24.95 and \$12.95).

Paul Radley: *Good Mates!* (Allen & Unwin, \$16.95).

Tim Winton: *Shallows* (Allen & Unwin, \$14.95 and \$8.95).

Gerard Windsor: *Memories of the Assassination Attempt and Other Stories* (Penguin, \$5.95).

Amanda Lohrey's *The Morality of Gentlemen* is one of the most overlooked and underrated novels recently published here. Based on an actual incident on the Hobart waterfront in the late 1950s, it is an overtly political work which, the blurb tells us, "follows on from the great tradition of Australian social realist writers." At first glance the claim may seem either pretentious or offputting, depending on how you view that tradition. In fact, it is neither. The standard 'social realist' novel – like its bastard 'socialist realist' child, with which it is often irritatingly confused – is now happily almost extinct. Its essential concerns, however, remain as valid as they ever

were. Lohrey gives them new life by treating politics as it should be but too rarely is in these post-*engagé* and -*enragé* days – as a basic human activity which literature can no more afford to ignore than any other, but in a style that bears very little resemblance to its outmoded archetype.

In addition to being by-and-large locked into a nineteenth-century narrative structure, the old realisms, social and socialist alike, were predicated on an assumption that the writer's 'commitment' to a radical or revolutionary cause would inspire the reader to get out and try, if not to change the world, at least to correct its grosser faults. Maybe some readers answered the call, but for the most part they didn't: otherwise the world might be a somewhat different place. A general spirit of commitment is present in *The Morality of Gentlemen* – there is no mistaking who is on the side of the righteous in the conflict it describes – but it is tempered by a scepticism of outlook built into its deliberately episodic structure that subjects the actions and motives of even its most sympathetic characters to rigid scrutiny and questioning. Again, the blurb informs us that this derives from Brecht's precepts for his epic theatre. Certainly it has the effect of 'distancing' the reader from the action and breaking down the emotional involvement on which traditional realism in the novel like its stage counterpart depended. To this extent, *The Morality of Gentlemen* can claim to be a 'dialectical' novel, in the sense argued by David Caute in his polemic on 'committed' art, *The Illusion*, and effected in its fiction companion-piece *The Occupation* some fifteen years ago.

So Lohrey presents us with a composite account of events from a number of diverse and sometimes contradictory points of vision. Twenty years later a young historian is researching a bitter struggle of the Cold War era touched off by the refusal of two wharfies, the anti-Communist fanatic Victor Moseley and his pliant son Russell, to pay a union levy for Labor Party election funds. The "gentlemen" on both sides – the "Movement" forces and their allies behind Moseley, and the left-wing union leaders – act out their set-piece plays of advance and retreat, confrontation and compromise. Between them sits a 'moderate' State Labor government, alarmed by the growing threat the turmoil poses to their rosy island appletart.

Moseley's strategy and tactics are clear-cut – to smash the militant union leadership as a prelude to purging the whole labor movement of the "Red germ". Those of his opponents are less certain. The local branch executive first tries to strike a deal with the two disrupters, then is rebuffed by a mass meeting which votes to expel them. The federal secretary – a thinly veiled portrait of Jim Healy, "the finest man ever to run this union," says one of his admirers, "though I'm not a Com meself" – counsels caution: play the game by the rules, let the Moseleys put themselves out on a limb, then cut it off at the trunk. Communist Party activists set up a 'rank-and-file' committee which organises mass picketing to prevent the pair being rostered for work, abetted by a police superintendent shrewdly judging the government's eagerness to avoid a major conflagration. The Moseleys resort to the

courts and are awarded a hundred thousand dollars (in pre-decimal days?) against twelve of the ringleaders. Things settle back to normal. The Moseleys leave the wharves to live off their fat. The union licks its wounds, but with its ranks still intact. There are victims on all sides. The Moseleys' leading supporter – a Scottish Presbyterian by the unlikely name of Doolan – hangs himself in his backyard. The union branch secretary dies from the strain soon afterwards. The main Communist activist accepts a job in Federation headquarters in Sydney, leaving his lover – the wife of the union's lawyer – behind.

Through it all the young historian-narrator picks his careful academic way, searching among the tangle of partisan versions he's collected for the actual truth and the ideal 'reliable witness' who can give him a satisfactorily unbiased outlook. Finally he finds the person he's after in the "corrupt sportsman" Jaz, with "his abrasive scepticism, his cheerfully low view of human motivation". What does Jaz think of Communists? he asks. "Show me a fair dinkum Como and I'll vote for him," Jaz declares, but adds: "Once they give up the idea of the revolution, mate, they're just like the rest of us. They're all opportunists in the end." So, the narrator happily concludes, "Jaz is my perspective; the perfect blend of complicity and cynicism." But as Drusilla Modjeska has remarked elsewhere, the narrator is himself "as manipulative as the rest". This is also where Lohrey's "dialectic" subtly asserts itself. Just as Brecht demands of his audience at the end of several of his finest plays, You've seen the way the world is, are you content to leave it like that?, so Lohrey forces us to ask ourselves whether we can be satisfied with such a complacent cop-out from the past and the present. It represents a new brand of authorial 'commitment', cool and dispassionate, the anti-thesis of the emotional empathy underpinning its old model.

One of the most impressive features of *The Morality of Gentlemen* is the convincing way in which Lohrey handles the political process as such. Unlike so many writers today, she not only understands the simple facts of organisational structures but has a genuine feel for the gut realities of practical politics – the give-and-take of meetings, the line-up of forces, the power-plays behind the scenes, the sub-text of the offhand speech or innocent motion, whether in a union committee, a State ALP conference or a Communist Party branch – that can only stem from a first-hand familiarity with the milieu. Her characterisation is for the most part correspondingly deft, especially in the case of her union activists, Moseley included, unpleasant though he is. This does not apply so much, however, to her establishment figures – a somewhat superfluous society Dame, an unnamed archbishop (not Mannix) and even Robert Gordon Menzies – though to compensate there is a neat cameo of a Professor of English and recent convert to Catholicism (guess who?), only too happy to help out as a conduit for funds from mainland sources in the anti-Communist cause. The women of the piece mostly never get much beyond the sidelines, but this is a gentleman's game and it is they who make the rules and dominate the field of play.

There are most likely more fucks, cunts, pricks, twats, dongs, fannies, cocks, clits, tits, dicks, rods, tools, arseholes, roots, screws, sucks-offs and pull-offs in young Paul Radley's *Good Mates!* than have adorned the whole of Oz Lit since Lieutenant Bowes decorously described the first orgy on the beach of Sydney Cove. Such concupiscent delights were a fascination which Radley, still only twenty-four years old, displayed with some enthusiasm in his first two novels, *Jack Rivers and Me* and *My Blue-Checker Corker and Me*, but only as a comparative sidelight. In this bigger and more ambitious sequel, however, they assume almost obsessional proportions.

Set like its predecessors in the sleepy little cement town of Boomeroo buried somewhere deep in the Hunter Valley, *Good Mates!* deals with the doings of "Chidley" Howard and his cobbler "Nickie-Prickie" Johnson in their passage to early manhood in the years before and during World War II. But beneath its seeming somnolence, Boomeroo in the late thirties was really a pretty lively sort of place. Fellatio and cunnilingus were all the go, and girls dropped their knickers and spread their juicy thighs apart at the merest glimpse of a fly-button or bulging crotch. Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains, where I grew up a decade later, was a benighted sexual backwater by comparison. But I suspect that Radley has rather taken his own adolescent experiences, real and imagined, of the freewheeling late seventies and superimposed them holus-bolus onto an earlier era, minus drive-in movies, shaggin'-wagons and Molly Meldrum. The impression is reinforced by a quite ridiculous jacket design showing a bunch of with-it young guys (not blokes), sporting very 1980-ish hairdos, moustaches, T-shirts and even a bare chest, in front of a lace-verandah country pub.

Anyway, Chid and Nick dip their wicks into every hole in sight, and some that aren't, with profligate abandon. Nick would also dearly love to shove his queen-size donga into Chid, but Chid – who sometimes has part of his mind on Higher Things – prudishly draws the line at that, though he does eventually relent to the extent of jerking his ol' caballero off. While Nick goes into the mines when they both leave school at the age of fifteen, Chid becomes an apprentice boilermaker and at the outbreak of war card-sharps his way out of his reserved occupation to join up in the best Anzac tradition.

In the interim, he gets one of the local girls up the duff, knocks off sundry others in wheatfields, back lanes and boatsheds, lines up to be sucked off by a sixty-year-old evangelist lady who pays him five pounds for his pains, and finally, a few months before his death at Japanese hands in New Guinea – a bad slip this, for in *My Blue-Checker Corker and Me* Radley has Chid killed off at Tobruk in 1941 – pledges his troth to a young miss who subsequently gives birth to a baby which may be his, Nick's or someone else's. Its all rather juvenile and sometimes a bit hard to take, even in this call-a-spade-a-shovel age, especially when Chid gets raped by the local cop, shit and all, and even more so when an army nurse with an "enormous cunt" which he disconcertedly finds he can't fill on his own blows him between the hospital bedsheets with seven other patients listening and then visits him in the lines one night armed with her friend "Dr Dildo" which she rams up his tent-mate's arse while Chid oblig-

ingly buggers her himself. (Eric Lambert's troops in *Twenty Thousand Thieves* were all so innocent.)

The book also abounds in anachronisms and other implausibilities. I just don't believe that a teenage working-class kid in the Hunter Valley would have been reading Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* in what appears to be 1938 unless he'd been put on to it by some pretty advanced local Red, or a year later Gunther's *Inside Europe* (published in England only in 1936) – let alone Antoine de Saint-Exupery, whose *Wind, Sand and Stars* could not possibly have reached rural NSW by August 1940 – or have been able to cope with conversations about Mozart, Kant and Schopenhauer. Or that a homosexual teacher in those days would flaunt his predilection in all its naked glory before a young ex-pupil. Unemployment, still hovering then at 10-12 per cent generally and more in the industrial regions, hardly rates a mention, and while one by no means expects or wants a political treatise some of the issues of the time – Curtin's reversal of ALP policy on conscription, for instance – would surely have made some impression at least on an eager young union delegate in a left-wing stronghold like the Hunter. But for all this, Radley can write. Not unlike his hero Chid, he left school at the age of sixteen and completed his first novel while working as a storeman, no mean feat by any standards. Having, we hope, got his post-pubescent fantasies out of his system, he should now be able to start making the most of his very considerable talents.

Tim Winton is another youthful prodigy, a year older than Radley and likewise a past Vogel Prize winner, with three books already under his belt and a fourth just coming on the market. But where Radley relies on a sheer extravagance of language, profane and otherwise, Winton's style is taut, restrained and finely wrought. *Shallows*, which took out last year's Miles Franklin Award, is a heavily symbolic novel that recalls the early work of that other precocious West Australian of thirty years ago, Randolph Stow.

On the surface, it's about a conflict that erupts in a small whaling port called Angelus, happily planning to commemorate its sesquicentenary despite the skeletons in its cupboard, when a Greenpeace-type conservation outfit lobs in to disrupt the new hunting season. While the rest of the town unites against them, Queenie Cookson, descendant of one of its first inhabitants, leaves her week-kneed husband Cleve and joins them as they harass the chasers out at sea in a couple of flimsy inflatables donated without their knowing by Pustling, the local property magnate, who can see a big financial killing in the publicity the affair is bringing the place. But Queenie gradually becomes disillusioned as she realises the conservationists are similarly more interested in publicity than saving whales, and the whole campaign collapses on a note of burlesque when they inadvertently rescue a world-famous big game fisherman who's fallen into the drink after one too many celebrating a mammoth shark catch. The group takes off to fight another dubious battle elsewhere, and Queenie returns to the suitably repentant Cleve to patch up the marriage and bear the baby she's expecting by him.

Underlying this is the story of Queenie's grandfather, Daniel Coupar, who during the Great Depression forty years earlier had organised the debt-ridden local cockies to resist the attempts of Pustling's father to drive them off the land. When his efforts failed, he retreated into embittered self-imposed isolation, paralleling the final decades of his own grandfather, the whaling pioneer Nathaniel Coupar, whose journals – which Cleve laboriously ploughs through seeking a clue to his in-laws' tormented past – provide an apparent counterpoint to the contemporary conservation struggle. Wracked by an obsessive sense of his wasted life and dynastic guilt, Daniel slits the throats of the dying stock on his neglected farm and clambers up to a nearby hill where he expires in a deluge of drought-breaking and soul-cleansing rain.

If I read Winton correctly, the great sin besetting both Daniel and his forbears is that of pride, which has prevented them from ever knowing love, "the fulfilling of the law" of the God they have denied. Similarly it afflicts the symbolically named town of Angelus and its people, who have likewise ignored the annunciation of the Lord's blessings brought to them by the whales, "God's appointed messengers," when they have season after season senselessly destroyed. (They also seem akin to the sheep Daniel puts out of their misery after allowing them to famish away.) As Queenie and Cleve camp by the sea unaware that Daniel has gone to his expiatory death only a mile or two away, a pod of whales beginning another cycle of their restless migration enter the bay and beach themselves helplessly on its shoals, in what appears to be a final metaphor of the futility of human endeavour.

For all its careful crafting, *Shallows* still suffers from a few too many structural contrivances which seem to provide Winton with an easy way out of thematic uncertainties he may not have resolved. Pustling abruptly wipes himself out when his car hits an errant kangaroo, while even more unconvincingly another nasty type, the publican Staats, suicides when he finds out he's picked up passive lung cancer from the nicotine smoke of the drinkers from whom he's made his pile. And Winton seems curiously ambivalent towards the conservation issue on which the book ostensibly revolves, treating his greenie protesters with an uneasy mix of respect and ridicule. Perhaps life is ultimately a tale of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Or perhaps, like the whales, *Shallows* never really succeeds in freeing itself from the waters suggested by the title.

If there's one fault Gerard Windsor lacks, it's overstatement. A cool detachment is again the keynote of the stories in his second collection, *Memories of the Assassination Attempt*, effected by a spartan economy of language and objectivity of tone, with the writer functioning primarily as a recorder of events and the reader largely left to draw his or her own conclusions. The ellipsis is a matter not only of style but of thought as well. If the focus is tight, however, the range of subjects it takes in is eclectic.

For the most part these are wry but fanciful reflections on the quirks of human behavior, some with a Thurberesque flavor to them. In two "Domestic Interludes" a

husband bickers with his wife about her intention to bury her deceased mother's never-opened wedding presents with the corpse, and a middle-aged bachelor finds his cosy routine of racing and football threatened by his visiting sister's fantasies about an obese neighbor. In others, a gynaecologist's clinical distinction between women's bodies in his surgery and his bedroom goes alarmingly astray, and a woman frantically tries to dance her dead alcoholic husband back to life in the basement of a London flat while his ex-wife holds a party overhead. And Windsor reveals a rich taste for the absurd in "Press Conferences of Ambassador Sweeney", with what must be the ultimate in Irish jokes. Nothing like a good breakfast of cow-pat and milk out in the farmyard to begin the day, begorra!

Sometimes the lens expands to take a studied look at history with a contemporary significance. In the title story, a participant in the botched plot against Napoleon of December 1800 recalls how his last-minute decision to spare the tyrant "for the sake of those who had not forfeited all rights as he had" – but more likely from failure of nerve, one suspects – led to the senseless slaughter of an innocent young girl: the mentality of terror then as now, Windsor is evidently saying, is ultimately indiscriminate in its choice of victims. In "The Victoria Cross of Timothy O'Hea", a young Irishman out in search of Leichhardt dreams of presenting the medal he's won in less than conventionally heroic circumstances to the great man, only to find himself facing the same fate as the explorer in an alien land, with the regal face on the useless piece of bronze his only solace, "children of dispossession, both of us, compensated by toys."

In a couple of the most interesting items, Windsor's detachment spreads like a protective veil across the face of personal emotion, penetrated only by an external observer. In "A Real Little Marriage-Wrecker", an Irish woman rejects the plea of the transient Australian father of her daughter to resume the relationship eleven years after the event, realising that he's not in love with her but with his mental image of the child he's never seen. In "The Archbishop or the Lady" – possibly autobiographical? – a one-time trainee priest recounts the impact of meeting Daniel Mannix and a few days later helping to lay out his dead body, exactly twenty years earlier, while all his listener wants to do is drag him into bed with her. But even as he breaks down under the weight of his memories of his lost religious past, the ironic tone is never discarded.

Only in the final story does Windsor ever really drop his guard. A youngish writer tries to draw close to his reserved surgeon-father by getting him talking about his wartime experiences. Eventually the older man loosens up enough to repeat the one his son has been waiting to hear again, despite the flood of sentimentality it will probably release, of flying to Sumatra with an army matron to bring back a group of Australian nurses just released from Japanese captivity. As it reaches the familiar climax of the survivors' pathetic response to their commandant's query about the rest of her charges – "This is all of us, Matron" – the father and son weep together in a rediscovered

affirmation of their common bond, and a larger one beyond.

Windsor keeps a tight rein on the emotion, but it is a poignant and moving tale. I am a camera, John van Druten proclaimed after *Isherwood*. Perhaps, but the apparatus has a disconcerting way of catching moments the photographer may too often consciously ignore.

Roger Milliss's autobiographical novel Serpent's Tooth was published in 1984. He is currently completing a historical work on a series of massacres of Aboriginals on the Gwydir River in NSW, entitled Waterloo Creek: A Colonial Cover-up.

Economic Decline

Boris Schedvin

Jocelyne A. Scutt (ed.): *Poor Nation of the Pacific? Australia's Future?* (Allen & Unwin, \$9.95 and \$19.95).

Since the publication of Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country* twenty years ago, Australia-watching has taken on an increasingly negative and introspective tone. At first the emphasis was on psyche and society. Horne and Ronald Conway in succession exposed the weaknesses of a small insular society which had achieved material success without a great struggle. More recently the emphasis has switched to economic management and performance, with bad marks being awarded in nearly all subjects by commentators as diverse as Maximilian Walsh, Barry Hughes, Peter Sheehan and John Stone. The rush of books in this genre reinforces the old adage that bad news makes good copy. But as with news reporting, perspective is lost and wrong conclusions drawn. Many of the commentators seem to envisage an ideal world of political responsibility and economic achievement which has never existed and can never exist. Even if Australia has slipped on the league ladder in recent years, it is necessary to remind ourselves amidst all the gloom that at number thirteen on the ladder in 1984, this country is still one of the richest. This is not a reason for complacency, but it is a point to be kept in mind to help us recognise both the strengths and weaknesses of our economic system.

The essays edited by Jocelyne Scutt for the Australian Institute of Political Science are less shrill than many of their predecessors, but most of them remain profoundly pessimistic. The papers were presented at a conference in Melbourne in May 1984, and bear the imprint of the severe economic recession of 1981–83. The contributors

are prominent Australians drawn from politics, business, and the universities. As Anne Summers says in her conclusion, the collection is interesting because the politicians have made the most noteworthy contributions. Most of the papers are short and easy to read; but the price of brevity is that many solutions are proposed in a form so general as to be platitudinous.

The theme of the collection is the decline in relative living standards measured in terms of real output per capita, and the prospects before us if we continue to slide. Several contributors make the point that at about 1890 Australia (with New Zealand) probably had the highest standard of living in the world, and that the twentieth century has seen a continuous fall in our relative position. This is also the subject of Professor F.H. Gruen's Edward Shann Memorial Lecture in Economics delivered at the University of Western Australia on 23 September 1985.* Professor Gruen is a shrewd and experienced observer of the Australian scene with a keen eye for international comparison, and it will be useful to contrast his views with those of Jocelyne Scutt's contributors.

Because the subject of discussion is relative economic decline over a country, it is necessary to be aware of any special features of the point of departure. The main characteristics of the Australian economy in the late nineteenth century are well known, but we tend to underplay the uniqueness of our nineteenth-century economy. The central feature is the speed and the comparative ease with which we achieved high living standards. Australia probably passed the United Kingdom in terms of per capita income as early as the 1830s, and the gap continued to grow until the 1880s. The main explanation, of course, is the exceptional efficiency of wool-growing. The effect of gold in linking Australia to world financial markets, and the usually high work force participation rate, also played a part.

Such heavy reliance on wool was a mixed blessing. The sheer efficiency of the industry encouraged high urban ratios, but the linkages between the industry and domestic manufacturing were weak. Moreover, the industry had such modest labor requirements that the pace of aggregate economic development, while brisk by most standards, was never high enough to achieve the momentum required for sustained industrial development.

The contrast with Canada is telling. Before 1890 Canada's economy was modest compared with Australia's, yet in the three or four decades after 1890 Canada achieved a rate of expansion greater than in Australia, an expansion which delivered a comparatively sophisticated industrial economy by the 1920s. The key difference was the role of wheat-growing. Exploitation of the prairies generated higher rates of population and demand growth than in Australia, and also stronger linkages to man-

ufacturing through the growth of agricultural implements and metals manufacturing generally. Canadian industrial development was accomplished despite competition from American producers and without the natural shelter enjoyed by Australian firms. Of course, Australia's own wheat industry developed rapidly at this time, but not at the rate or on the scale of Canada's. Despite closer settlement legislation, the premier position of wool tended to retard the Australian wheat industry.

Professor Helen Hughes is one of the contributors to this volume who recognises that slow economic growth in Australia is of long standing, but it is Professor Gruen who shows that Australia's performance is typical of comparatively rich countries. An analysis of performance in OECD countries since 1960 reveals a strong inverse correlation between growth rates and per capita income. Australia is a little below the trend line and performance certainly should have been better, but radical improvement appears to be out of reach. The evidence indicates that the achievement of high income dissipates the discipline and social cohesion necessary for rapid growth. Anglo-Saxon culture seems particularly vulnerable to problems of indiscipline and pluralistic politics, perhaps a product of excessive reliance on competitive individualism. Rich countries – Australia is a prime example – also lack the priceless once-for-all advantage of gathering momentum by transferring resources from low productivity agriculture to high productivity manufacturing and services. The high OECD performers are countries such as Portugal, Greece and Spain who have experienced rapid structural change over the past quarter century.

Australia's twentieth-century problem is that it has not been able to replace wool. In other words, no industry or sector has been found to deliver the efficiency or the momentum which would have prevented relative economic decline. Minerals extraction was as efficient as wool, but not nearly large enough, in terms of employment, to serve the purpose. The shift to manufacturing after World War I caused a sharp deceleration in economic growth, and as we now know the sector failed to take advantage of the sharp technological upgrading generated by World War II. In an elegant essay in this collection, Bruce Grant makes the point that much of Australian history has been moulded by threat. In the economic sphere the threat has been to living standards, the fear that the great gains of the past would be lost. Therefore the formation of economic policy and institutions has been defensive. Labor market institutions such as the basic wage expressed the need to defend the gains of the past. Industrialization and tariff policy has been largely defensive in the sense that this was seen as a way of maintaining employment and encouraging the population growth necessary to justify occupation of the Continent by whites. Manufacturing growth has not been seen as a way of building a technologically sophisticated industrial society. The encouragement of indiscriminate import substitution at the end of World War II was also defensive, because of pessimistic assumptions about the future of traditional export commodities.

The essayists have no difficulty in identifying weak-

* "How bad is Australia's economic performance and why?," Centre for Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper No. 127, Australian National University, September 1985. Available on request.

nesses in Australian economic arrangements. Professor Hughes believes that excessive protection, domestic regulation, taxation, price inflexibility and industrial relations are the main culprits, but she is so broad and indiscriminate in her condemnation that the argument is not advanced. Professor Michael Porter underlines the economic potential of the service sector, particularly tourism and education, and the need for much greater flexibility in both price and the range of services offered. Ian McPhee and Graeme Spurling concentrate on the labor market and human resources. There is common agreement that this is *the* economic problem of our time, and likely to be so for the indefinite future. Ian McPhee must have had a gruelling time as Minister for Industrial Relations in the Fraser Government, for he writes with despair about the blindness and pigheadedness of many of the actors on the industrial relations treadmill. He threatens to write his experience up in detail, and he should be encouraged to do so. Senator Button and Barry Jones offer intelligent accounts of industry and technology policy and confirm the impression that this is one of the most innovative areas of government activity. There is much acclamation of consensus politics, and after a promising start Anne Summers degenerates in her summing up into partisan approval of the Hawke Government.

But the causes of economic malaise are overdetermined: there are simply too many culprits. Professor Gruen is more discriminating. He points out that protection has been reduced substantially in the past fifteen years, and that the remaining highly protected industries (motor vehicles, clothing, footwear and textiles) are no longer such large employers of labor. There has also been improved price flexibility in product markets as a result of the work of the Trade Practices Commission. More needs to be done, but protectionism in its various forms may be no worse than in the Common Market with its heavily protected agriculture. The size of government, crudely measured by levels of expenditure, is also a poor indicator of economic performance.

Again, the crucial area seems to be the labor market, followed by low levels of education and a poor record in the adoption of new technology. Professor Gruen is strongly of the view that the labor market will not be reformed simply by deregulation and releasing the forces of individualistic competition. He is of the view that the solution must be a corporatist one along European lines. In other words, agreement must be reached within the union movement and between unions and business on such issues as real wages, redundancy, technological change, superannuation, and so on. This is highly controversial, but I believe Professor Gruen is correct. The world of atomistic labor markets is not within reach, and we must work for greater flexibility by agreement. The historical record suggests that a resources recession offers the best opportunity for change, so the next few years could be crucial.

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Comic Cuts

Fiona Giles

Frank Moorhouse: *Room Service* (Viking, \$19.95).

Alex Buzo: *The Search For Harry Allway* (Angus & Robertson, \$9.95).

Patrick Cook, John Clarke, Don Watson, Phillip Scott and others: *The Gillies Report* (McPhee Gribble/Penguin, \$9.95).

The 1938 Marx Brothers' film "Room Service" is described in Halliwell's fourth edition as a "claustrophobic Broadway farce" in which "penniless theatricals find a way of staying in a hotel until they can find a backer." Such coincidences of title, subject and tone may or may not be of the fortuitous kind that one of Frank Moorhouse's narrators has elsewhere invoked to prove life's fearful symmetry. Yet Halliwell's synopsis does provide a suggestive background to this collection of stories whose comedy often rests on the techniques of vaudeville in a context of rising ontological panic. For the comic quality of the collection verges on the hysteria of hyper-awareness. Thus the principal character, Francois Blase—if such a diffusion of personal features can be so labelled—brings back news from the nowhere of the world's hotels (whether the Tel Aviv Hilton or a tent at Lake Eyre) as seen through the field glasses of a satirist who is also a neurotic: a scrutineer unable to resist glimpsing his own distraught image in the same revelatory lense.

Consequently Blase is both disgusted and disgusting, subject as much to his own as to the world's compromise. The quest for a healing escape in "Convalescence", for example, leads not into the arms of motherly domesticity (or room service in its most natural mode) but a "swampy ground" of female effluent festering in what appears to be an inner-city squat. Yet at the same time, if his travels abroad seem primarily in search of the amiable bell captain, it is less for the experience of orderly service in that clinic of commerce that is the modern hotel, than for an opportunity to be, wilfully, the worst: to re-enact perhaps, the vitally aggressive behavior of the bad kid in the rough playground so finely depicted in the four stories that comprise the "Oral History of a Childhood".

As a part-time parodist Blase thus plays the dangerous game of highlighting human deficiencies, particularly those of undeserved authority and pride, through an offensive that is itself (although often beguilingly) offensive; a sophisticated nose-thumbing that through its unanswerable and ostensibly innocent indignity precludes any possibility of self-righteous riposte. One of Blase's reported indiscretions is described in "Blase in Pacific Paradise", where he is said to have tormented a holidaying child. Yet when confronted by its mother he appears merely to be defending the child's underdeveloped rebelliousness. If there is, in fact a recurring conflict in *Room Service* it is enacted by Blase's curiously unalienated and intermittent campaign against misplaced obeisance. After all, this is the satire of the hysteric, not the pedagogue.

While this is essentially a funny book, there is also a sense of disappointment that arises from its comic play with the discrepancy between appearance and actuality

and, more strikingly, between effort and reward. Such is the sense of disenchantment when the Systematic Traveler meets Francois in "The Anti-Art of Travelling" and, more painfully, in "Mechanical Aptitude", where the complaint of an imperfect child reveals that what streams through the average adult consciousness is simply repetitive and censorious cliché.

As satiric comedy measures the distance between what we wish to be and how we are, so hysteria covers over the distance between laughter and despair. And while room service might console us for the loss of home on our travels, it also reinforces the fragility of our means for self-determination – however considerate the bell captains. Even in the relatively greater sense of community portrayed in the late 1960s household in "An Incident from the Wake for Jack Kerouac" it is hard not to see the "well-lit but empty" refrigerator standing peacefully by the side of the drama, its door declining to stay discreetly closed, as beckoning to the chillier room service of the morgue, the last hotel we get to stay at, no tips required.

A morgue is also featured in Alex Buzo's first work of prose fiction, *The Search For Harry Allway*, which is published in the course of a successful playwrighting career. Yet this is a more simply cheerful satire, neatly structured and with a happy, though surprising ending quite distinct from the interests of *Room Service* in the incompleteness of ironic romance.

The search of the title is conducted by the young, under-reaching journalist, Prue Foster, an apprentice and virginal Modesty Blaise who, in her mission to find the missing pools winner Harry Allway, seeks also (or really) the accoutrements of a clean and conventionally middle-class life. This sounds more serious than it is, as the search provides a simple narrative structure that enables a series of comic encounters between Prue and what she calls the "Awful Types" of Sydney. It is not what she sees so much as what she rejects (as well as the simple-minded expressions of her rejection) that provides much of the humor. Thus, while some of the satire spills over herself, it is not really middle-class Australia but only its pretenses that are being attacked.

Because Prue's quest is also the professional journalist's search for a story, Buzo presents a parody of both highminded but vacuous journalism and the expediently twisted plots of detective fiction, and lightly points to a more serious scrutiny of the sources of information in our world. But principally, with his use of comic-strip characterization and his interest in physical detail, the narrator is concerned efficiently to diminish his cast of Sydney's urban Left, who likewise depend on a few choice props and behavioral packages. It is the style that might have resulted from mixing Margaret Atwood with Raymond Chandler.

The anatomy of Awful Types that Prue's search gradually maps at times rests on a rather flimsy narrative base comprised of a series of disappointed 'leads', but any potential thinness in this device is saved by the ludicrously

unexpected and implausible resolution of the mystery. Like its ending, the book's portraits and epigrammatic observations are both deflationary and amusing. Take, for example, Prue's jaded recognition that "most television news stories consisted of people walking in and out of doors carrying briefcases" or her attack on the "affectations" of one Awful Type, the "Gutsy Lady", whose habit of rolling her own cigarettes under the pressure of Prue's questioning "was the modern equivalent of Victorian ladies pretending to faint".

While there is a consistent ironic distance between the prudish Ms Foster and the narrator, one of the nicer touches of Buzo's satire is that Prue's militantly unhip niceness is amiably tolerated. That she is "Nice" is paradoxically one of the few things she regrets about herself, but the one left to stand as an inoffensive advantage in what is ultimately depicted as an only mildly polluted world. Prue sees men principally as an army of sexual harassers, for example, but instead of marching them to the tribunal she is content to exploit and, she imagines, to devastate. Such is the nature of the entertainment: ideologically sound but loosely committed. And despite the caricature, Buzo provides a refreshing image of a heroine whose flaws are simple and with whom, as her vices amount only to being middle class and having a weakness for vermouth and Toblerone, at least some of us may indulgently identify.

Perhaps the most indulgent and also the riskiest enterprise here is what could only ever amount to a record of the highly successful television series, *The Gillies Report*.

Although updated in various minor ways this book acts as a posthumous program to a comedy that clearly worked best as television. Dependent as impersonation is on visual effects, movement and timing, the many black-and-white photographs of Gillies' victims are only reminders of his considerable skill. And while many of the scripts retain their liveliness and originality in print, others sometimes only serve to show the importance of delivery and contemporaneity for their humor.

The Gillies Report probably does deserve to be recorded as a book, even if only to pay tribute to the enormous variety of its subject matter and stunts, and to preserve its special view of mid-eighties politics. But such scripts as the parody of "Perfect Match", which work by dramatizing the absence of verbal skill, are difficult to print without revealing themselves as a series of culturally stale comic clichés.

Nevertheless it is an entertaining memento of a great comedy show, and while it seems a pity that the writers took no more advantage of their transformation into print than occasionally to add a Patrick Cook cartoon, at least those serve to remind us that he needn't pretend his first talent is acting.

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