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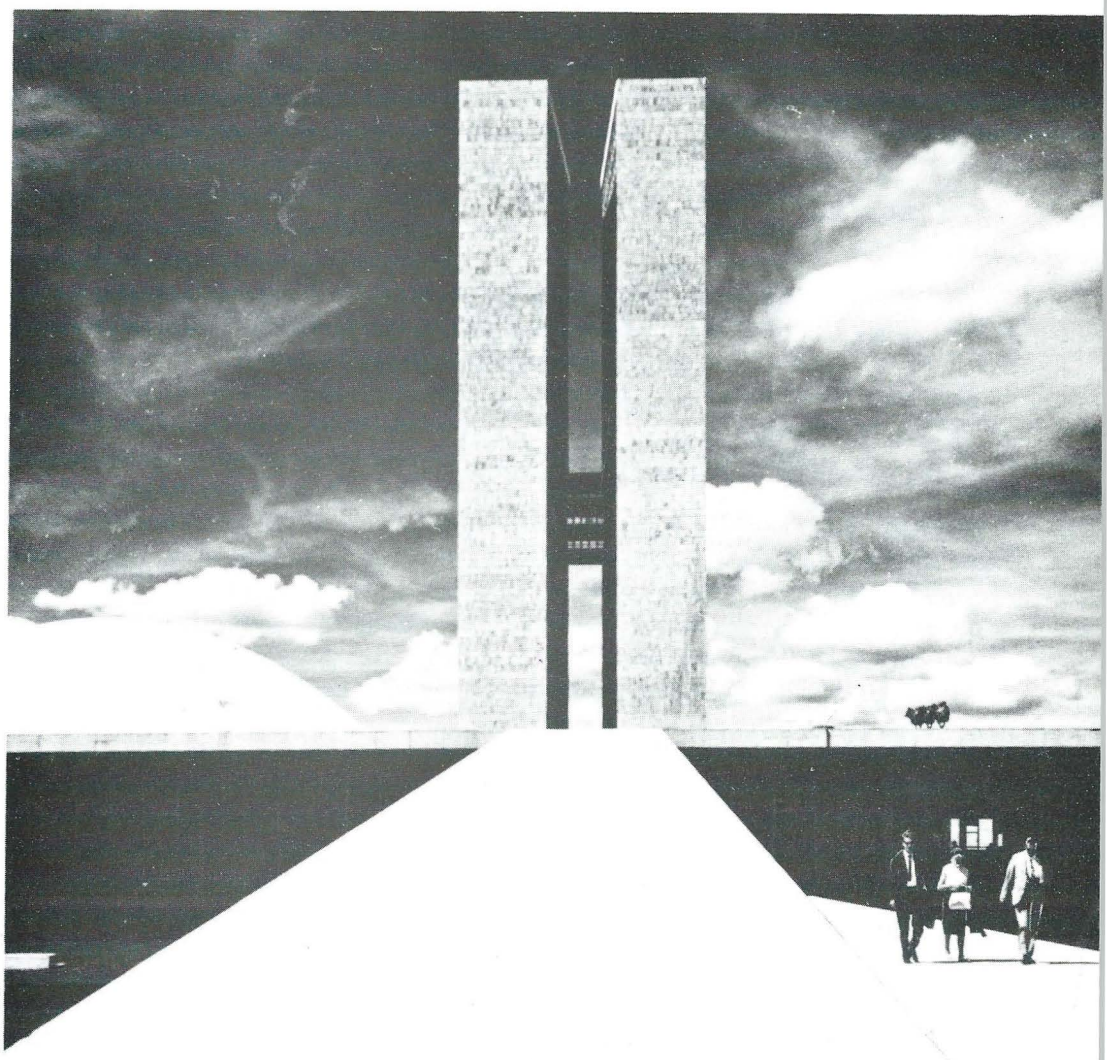

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KEN INGLIS: BEHIND THE BICENTENNIAL
ALAN SEYMOUR ON LAURENCE COLLINSON

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: These donations received in the past quarter represent a very generous $1788. There are some handsome gifts to the magazine but, as usual, the bulk comes from small donations. Many of these, we know, are from people who have to think twice about it. All in all they represent our margin of survival. Many thanks, then, to: $400, V.L.; $80, ANON; $60, F.O.; $50, J.H., P.L., N.K., E.P.; $40, A.C., J.B.; $30, I.M., R.M., J.C.; $25, A.P.; $20, B.D., W.D., D.B., N.B., J & W. McD., D.D., R.B., R.G., J.B., P.D., J.D., P.A., P.H., D.R.; $15, J.J; $10, B.N-S., M.M., M.L., J.H., F.L., J.F., T.S., S.P., D.C., D.W., P.N., M.G., S.H., C.C., A.H., M.R., G.W., L.F., D.B., I.M., G.S., R.M., D.M., C.O., M.K., J.P., M.M., R.S., J.B., D.N.; $8, J.E.; $5, G.S., V. McG., P.R., E.D., G.S., M.T., J.H., E.I., A.B., A.F., S.J., M.R., V.B., M. deB.P., L.W., N.K., R.W., G.E., B.M., R.W., A.J., T.W., F.S., I.W., R.H., M.M., E.C., D.O'S., G.H., D.P., T.S., B.W., H.R., B.G., A.R., M.S., H.S., P.M., K.R., P.McL., D.M., J.S., Y.G., J.B., J.I., H.H., J.A., R.F., R.G.; $2, J.C., C.B.; $1, I.W.

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CHARLOTTE CLUTTERBUCK

Visiting Hour

Philip looked in the driving mirror, straightened his tie, combed his hair. Outside the air was hot and thick with the grinding of cicadas, the smell of baked earth and gumleaves. Carnations wilted at the flower stall. He paid too much for a bunch of red and white roses, but roses had always reminded him of Jennifer, standing in the rose garden, the first time he asked her out, eight years ago.

He pushed open the heavy glass door. He hated hospitals: the smells of polished lino, gravy and boiled cabbage, disinfectant, covering other, worse smells. It was noisy too: the clatter of steel trolleys and cutlery, the yowling of babies as he passed the nursery, the groan of overloaded air-conditioners. The walls bare, except for the obligatory cheap Drysdale print in an ugly frame. Room 14. No privacy, the door open. He knocked, and walked in.

Even in a hospital bed, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She wore a nightdress fringed with lace and blue ribbons, her dark hair flowed over the pillow, flowers all around her. She smiled.

"I came as soon as I could," he said, and bent to kiss her cheek. Mixed with hospital smells, the scent of flowers, was a wiff of something sour.

"Do I reek of milk?" she asked.

"Oh no," he said hastily, and looked for a chair.

"I can't stop it leaking. I thought I mightn't have any, but I'm like a cow. I was so proud the first time he had a wet nappy – it proved I was giving him something. I could have done without the first dirty one though – greenish-black, sticky, covered from shoulder to toe, not a nurse in sight, and he screamed all the time I was bathing him."

"It sounds horrid."

"You don't mind when it's your own baby. Except that I'm tired, and I feel so sad when he screams."

"Are you too tired? Should I have come?"

"Of course, Philip, it's lovely to see you."

"Ted said it wasn't easy for you."

She shrugged. "He had a big head and I tore and had some stitches, that's all. When he arrived safely, none of that seemed to matter." She glanced at the crib beside Philip's chair, "I'm longing for you to see him, but I don't like to wake him up."

"It can wait. You're sure you're all right? You look very tired."

"I'm fine," she laughed, "but my mind has turned to mush. They say it does when you have a baby. There's a Drysdale print in the corridor, and I couldn't work out why it was there. I thought I was still in England. The colors were so strange – red-brown and aquamarine. I'd forgotten that was normal here."

He laughed uneasily. She looked pale, with dark rings under her eyes; her hair was limp, her eyes too bright, and she spoke too fast. He shouldn't have come, not so soon, but the letter from Oxford burned in his pocket; he wanted her to know at once.

"Speaking of England... " he said.

"Are you going? Did you get the fellowship?" He nodded, and she leaned over and grasped his hand. "Oh, Philip, I am glad. I can see you at Oxford. You'll have rooms in college, they'll be damp and cold because the floor will be stone, and none of the walls will be straight, but you'll live in a dreaming spire, and look out over the Christchurch meadows, and hear Great Tom ring the hours. You'll walk in the quad and go to evensong in the cathedral. You'll fit in much better than I did."

"Why?"

"Perhaps because I wore jeans and was married and lived out of town and didn't care about paleography. You'll wear a gown and a mortarboard, and spend your days in Duke Humphrey's Reading Room."

"You mean that I'm donnish."

He was right of course: even in summer he was wearing a jacket and tie, his fair hair was neatly combed, it flopped over his forehead, his skin was pale and smooth; he was studious and upright, and alone.

"The very best sort of don," she said. "You'll use the tails of your gown to wipe the chalk off the blackboard, and then you'll tuck it over your arm and hop on your bicycle. I can see you with a boater and a

striped blazer, punting down the Cherwell, with a basket of chicken and champagne, and a lovely English girl!''

''You won't be there!''

She felt it as a reproach. ''Yes,'' she said briskly, ''it's a pity we couldn't have been there together, but never mind, you've done it the right way round. You've done some solid work here, and you'll make good use of Oxford. I dashed off too soon, and I'm not made in the Oxford mould: I can be serious, but not in their way. I wanted to do a thesis on antifeminism in medieval romance, and they wanted me to edit an ancient text that has never been printed because nobody but Oxford dons could possibly bear to read it!''

''How did you get out of doing it?''

''I told them my eyesight was too poor to cope with manuscripts, and at last they let me work on Chaucer's women. My supervisor, nice, but a typical lady don, lank hair, sensible shoes, tweed skirt, and a large dog which she called darling, thought I was frivolous!''

''What will you do now?''

''Look after the baby. And don't you say that that's frivolous. What's the point of having a baby if I'm going to bung him in a creche? I'll write articles while he's asleep!''

''You mustn't waste your talents!''

''Being a mother is the most important thing in the world!''

She sounded smug, and he could hear the pomposity in his own voice as he said, ''I'm going to work on Shakespeare's modals!''

''What models?''.

''Modals. Can, may, might, could, would, should. I am a grammarian!''

''Yes, of course. I'm sorry. I told you my mind had gone to mush!''

''You'd find it dull!''

''No, I wouldn't. Not if it interested you. You taught me so much: how to write an essay, how to read carefully, how to listen to Bach!''

He smiled, ''You told me he was pleasantly insipid!''

''Yes, wasn't I brash and awful? And you were so patient with me!''

Patient, he thought, careful. ''A sound thinker,'' they had written on his reference. Jennifer was keen, challenging, but not sound; he did not want her pity. He looked down at his smooth clean hands: the hands of a man who lived in an ivory tower.

She looked at his bowed head, and wished she could offer something to make amends. There was a bleat from the crib.

''He's awake!'' she said, ''Would you like to pick him up for me?''

Philip looked up; she was transfigured. On her wedding day, in her grandmother's dress, cream with age, it had been for Ted; now it was for the baby. He bent over the plastic crib, the cocoon of white cotton wriggling like a witchety grub, and drew sharply back. ''What's wrong with him?'' he asked, looking with horror at the crusty scab that matted the hair on the baby's head.

''Nothing. He's perfect. But he was a long time coming, the doctor used a suction cap to pull him, and it slipped, but it's only surface damage. The doctor says it won't even scar, and you can tell that he's all right; he obviously knows everything!''

''The doctor?''

''Him too, but I meant the baby. You'll see what I mean when I've fed him. When he's calm and awake, it's just like Wordsworth:

Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come.

But Philip was still thinking of her pain, ''It sounds awful!''

She felt suddenly irritated that he was so squeamish, that he had not listened, that he would not pick up the baby.

''Here, if you're frightened of dropping him, push the trolley over!''

She took the baby in her arms and undid her nightdress, "Do you mind if I feed him?"

"No, of course not." But he did not know where to look – there was so much bare flesh.

"It does wonders for your figure," she said, "I've actually got one at last."

Philip blushed, and bent to pick up his briefcase. He brought out a silver christening mug, and put it on the bedside table.

"Oh, Philip," she said, "it's beautiful. Ted and I would both like you to be his godfather. We could have the christening soon, before you go to England."

He felt both touched and sad: as if he had been given a precious substitute, but not the thing he asked for.

"I know nothing about children," he said, "and I'm not very holy."

"But we both love you, and would like to think that you'd take an interest in him, especially if anything happened to us."

Philip blushed again. "I wanted him to have something that would last him longer than a rattle. As a matter of fact, it was mine."

Again she felt reproached and irritated. "But Philip, then you must keep it. Even if he is your godson, you can't give it to him. One day you'll have children."

"I doubt it. I'm thirty-two. A few years ago, everyone was asking me to their weddings; now they're all asking me to the christenings. I've been left behind."

"You musn't think like that. There must be so many women who'd appreciate you."

"They do: they like my good taste, they admire my knowledge, they think that I'm kind, but they don't want to marry me."

"Have you asked them?"

"I asked you."

"Philip, I've said I'm sorry, and anyway, I would have made you miserable – I'm far too flighty for you. But you musn't miss out on all this. It's wonderful, especially just before Christmas, and a boy. I turn on the radio and hear 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given', and I feel as if it's all for me. Does that sound crazy?"

"No," he said, but she talked like someone drunk, or high.

The baby stopped sucking. He lay still on her breast and gave her a milky smile. She smiled back, lifted him to rest against her shoulder. Madonna and Child, she thought.

"Actually," she said, "I don't know that my mind has gone to mush. I have marvellous inspirations, I seem to know what it's all about. When he came, the doctor pulled him out in a rush and scooped him up into the air, all red and naked and bloody and yelling and still attached to the cord, and it was just like 'Pity, like a naked new-born babe, striding the blast', which I never understood before, the violence and vulnerability of birth. Maybe I'm high from the hormones, but I seem to see more and understand more. I'm in love with the world. I feel whole for the first time in my life. As if I've recovered my innocence, like Adam and Eve before the Fall. It won't last, I suppose – there'll be nappies and teething, but at least I've had this. I'm not ashamed of my body any more. You give birth in front of strangers, and they're not strangers – the nurses really care. There are no physical indignities left for you to suffer. You cop the lot, more pain than you can bear, incontinence back and front, and it doesn't seem to matter. I could feed him on Central Station without turning a hair."

She realized suddenly he was disgusted, even frightened. "I'm sorry," she said, "was that too gory. I just wanted you to... know. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to start... weeping like a bathtub overflowing."

He stood stiff and still. "I shouldn't have come," he said, "you're tired."

"Don't think that. It's been so good to see you. Don't go, Philip, you must hold your godson first."

"I've never held a baby before," he said, but she pulled him down beside her, and shoved the baby into his arms.

"Sit down, hold him firmly. He won't bite you. Look, he's smiling now. They say it's only wind, but any fool can see it's a smile. He's a bit spotty, but isn't he beautiful?"

Philip felt the warmth of her body beside him, and edged away. He looked at the squirming baby in his arms, the scab on his head, the red, wrinkled skin, the pimples round the nose, "Take it back," he said, "I think it's going to cry."

She took the baby. Philip reached for his briefcase. She held out her hand as if to keep him.

"You look so tired," he said, "get back into bed."

She dropped her hand and obeyed. Again he bent to kiss her cheek, again the sour smell, and the damp smell of the baby. He thought she might try to hold him, but she let him go.

"Well, goodbye," he said, "take care of yourself."

She would have flung out her arm to stop him, but she could not reach him, and she let him go. He was alone; she could not change that, but still, she had the baby. She opened her nightie, and offered him the other breast.

DAVID MALOUF

The Making of Literature

Spoken at the Premier's Literary Awards, Melbourne, 1986.

In casting about for a topic tonight I wanted to find some area that all of us here share a concern and responsibility for, but one as well where we have the same role, whether we are writers, reviewers, academic teachers and critics, librarians, magazine editors, publishers, booksellers, arts administrators or none of those. So I am speaking to you tonight as a reader to other readers, about something we evoke often enough, and which prizes like the ones we have come together to celebrate – coming as they do from the people – have especially in mind: the creation of a body of writing that we feel to be our own, that speaks in our own accent and to us, and which we might come to think of at last as a literature – as Australian literature. And I might just say that literature is a term I seldom use, and Australian literature almost never.

If we look at the culture of other places, what we see, I think, is that the notion of a national literature, of literature itself as a category, is a late and very self-conscious one. To begin with there are just plays or poems or books, pieces of writing that come into existence for their own sake to be performed or read. It is only when those works have established themselves, through many generations, as works so loved, so precious that readers will not let them die, that they become a body of literature, and only when they are recognized as being expressive, at a deep level, of the lives and the destiny and the deep sufferings and aspirations of a people, of its unique way of seeing the world and moving in it, of expressing itself in words, that that literature becomes a national one. The individual works become part of a classic canon – one that is established, not by the authorities or by any sort of academy, but by the shared passion of readers. And I would just remind you, as gently as possible in this age of education, that the great books of the world survived into the twentieth century without being institutionalized in literature departments, and that readers got by, till very recently, without being tutored in the handling of a text.

I say this, not to indulge in that popular local sport of academics-bashing, but to suggest that the professional handlers of literature have no special authority in the making or breaking of canons – they are readers like the rest of us – and to claim as well that the only real training we need as readers is got by reading itself. I want, I mean, to claim back for ordinary readers their proper place in a shared enterprise.

Books are written by writers, but a literature is created by readers and writers both, in a direct relationship that needs no intermediaries. Its classics are established and kept alive by individual acts of reading, by readers who will not let a particular work die. For some books that will mean a readership of millions; for others just a few hundred – the numbers do not matter. What matters is the passion and commitment of the reading.

So what about 'Australian Literature'?

Well, we are latecomers – there's no escaping that – and we live in a self-conscious age. But I hear that formulation, with its capitals and its heavy claim on our attention, with the same uneasy sense of being over-aware about something that ought to be left to look after itself as when I hear that other grim formulation, 'National Identity' – and indeed the two are deeply related.

Of course, our national identity has begun to form itself. Two hundred years in a place makes that inevitable, in the sheer accumulation of things made and changed of lives lived. And *of course* there are works we already value as peculiarly our own and which we have preserved by keeping them alive in our reading. But if we believe in the future, in our having as a people a real hold on time, then we must believe that we are only at the beginning, and that we may need to be very patient, to hold off with judgments and claims and counterclaims as to what is significant or authentic, most of all with proscriptions, and let go as well some of our self-consciousness, if we are able to close the very doors that ought, for a while yet, to be left open.

Part of our lateness in history expresses itself as impatience for the achievement of identity that others have taken a thousand or more years to grow into – and had achieved before they knew that that is what they were doing, or even that anything in that line was to be done. We won't become Australians by a deliberate act of the will, and we won't have a national literature by declaring one. Which is not to say that it isn't an excellent thing that our young people should be faced at school with local writing.

A literature of the sort I have in mind comes into existence *against the odds*, quite humbly, and by stealth.

Against the odds of indifference, of a mass of other calls on the attention and time of ordinary men and women, against the whims of fashion, social disruption, the destructive processes of time itself, certain pieces of writing in every form – poems, plays, novels, even sermons and documents and political speeches – take hold on the minds and imagination of people and refuse to be forgotten. They go on speaking. Someone goes on listening. These books, these words, keep getting passed on from hand to hand and heart to heart, because they cannot be done without. That, as I understand it, is that body of writing that we call, when we look about at last and see what we have accumulated, a national literature, and it is made in every case by *us*, by readers, individually and in a body; by the passionate act of engagement with books, which is something that some of us – not all, but enough – simply cannot forego.

Readers are a particular body of men and women for whom the act of reading, the experience they have in books, is as essential as daily bread. Not everyone is a reader of that sort and it is unreasonable of us to expect them to be. Universal literacy has not created a universal readership. Reading is an activity that requires a special capacity, like ball sense or a head for figures – and we don't all have those abilities either, though most of us can play catch and add up. We are not all alike. Twenty years of teaching, in schools but also in a university English department taught me that the real reader belongs to no particular type or stratum of society, or profession or level of education. What he has, or she has, in the same mysterious way that other special abilities appear, is the capacity to enter passionately, and with all the senses, into the physical act of approaching words and touching a world. Those are the people, and the only ones, who keep books alive.

Let me just say that this is not an argument in favor of a naive and mindless popularism. Some great books will find no more than a few hundred readers at any time. If the readers are passionate enough the book will live. Think of the poems of George Herbert or, to come closer to home, of *Such is Life*.

I am not speaking, either, of an act of reading that is merely passive: of readers who are happy to have books speak for them – though that is certainly what they do: for the deep, unuttered occasions of their lives. The reading I have in mind is an act of the imagination that is equal to, for all its difference from, the imaginative act of writing. The power of reading lies in our capacity to enter into the world of the book and become a mover in it, to make that world our own. It's the active capacity to live, for a time, in some other life than our own daily one, and in that way to add to our experience, to make new discoveries in the world of the senses, to see new connections between things, to make leaps of moral awareness that give us a more complete hold on our world. We value works, as readers, that do this for us. It is a form of experience we can get in no other way. And we value it especially when the world we enter, and in which at every turn we make new discoveries, is one that carries the shape of our own local habits and accent but which we see as if it were new, and leave as if we were also new.

The works that do this for us will stay alive, whatever the commentators or the critics tell us, whatever fashion dictates, because we, as individual readers, cannot do without them and will not let them go. We read and re-read them. We find different experiences there as our own experience, individual and as a people, changes and as the books themselves enter a second or a third life. We are building up in all this, as readers, a body of work that speaks uniquely to us and for the richness and depth of our experience. And one day, when we look up, we will find that what we have created – what we have on our hands – is a literature; our own literature.

I happen to find it exciting that we are at the beginning of that process, or anyway, just a few decades into it, with the largest part of what-we-are still to be envisioned and the great readings, the great writings, still to be done. It puts possibilities into our hands as readers, and makes our responses, to what has been written but even more to what is being written right now, the key factor in what will one day stand as the body of work that is ours.

What is required of us, as readers, is an act of passionate reading, an individual one. It is numbers of acts of that sort (and they need not be made public and justified or accounted for by talk) that constitute the making of classics. It's an activity we can all share in, and it ought in the end to be an easy and natural one, to which we need bring only the whole of ourselves. Not a task but a pleasure of enlargement, enlightenment, power. That it is also a responsibility ought not to weigh too heavily above us, though it is one. Responsibilities are best when they are carried lightly. It is also of course a privilege: to be, all of us, the makers of what will one day stand as the deepest expression language can offer of what we are.

KEN INGLIS

1788 to 1988

Visions of Australian History

At breakfast I read this: "The Aborigines are thought to have come to Australia from Asia at least 40,000 years ago. They lived in groups based on family units and followed complex and strict social and religious customs." I read on. "There were many Aboriginal societies and they varied widely in their customs, languages and economies. They differed as much from one another as do the nations of Europe."

I read this on my carton of milk. Text and pictures take up three sides, and one side has also the logo of the Australian Bicentennial Authority and the words "Australia 1788-1988". The milk authority of the ACT wants me to have respectful information about tional Aboriginal life, and the Bicentennial Authority encourages it.

The information is more accurate than milk drinkers will find in many reference works still in use. At least 40,000 years ago, the carton says, Aboriginals are thought to have come from Asia. The *Australian Encyclopedia* of 1958 proposed about twelve thousand years. The figure of forty thousand years represents the latest confirmed estimates by scholars moving along trails of research marked out in the 1950s by John Mulvaney, who has just retired from a chair of prehistory at the Australian National University. Mulvaney provoked Geoffrey Blainey to write *Triumph of the Nomads*, (1975), a book which has done more than any other to open Australian minds to the pre-European past of their land. Blainey's artfully simple prose transports readers to a world of clever and comfortable hunter-gatherers. When the milk carton says Aborginal societies differed as much from one another as do the nations of Europe, it's drawing whether it knows it or not on Blainey, who was the first writer to make that daring comparison.

Why am I being offered more Aboriginal history with the milk than I was given in the whole of my schooldays? That bicentennial logo suggests one reason. We are being encouraged officially, commercially, educationally, to think of 1988 as a time to commemorate the beginnings of European settlement; and we can't do that without giving *some* thought to the people who were here first. But that isn't the whole explanation. When Australians celebrated 150 years of history in 1938, and when they had centennial festivities in 1888, Aboriginals weren't the subject of vigorous curiosity. In 1938's pageant of nationhood they were given no more than walk-on parts - or walk-*off* parts, as a group impersonating their own ancestors scattered before a boatload of actors impersonating Governor Phillip's landing party. In 1888 they were almost entirely ignored. In those years of both centennial and sesquicentennial celebration, most white Australians who had an opinion on the matter expected the Aboriginals to disappear. Now we know that expectation was wrong. Each census records a larger number than the one before. The numbers are still small: in 1981 160,000 people put themselves down as Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders: just over one per cent of the total population. But the very decision to enumerate them in the census, a decision made at a referendum in 1967, had symbolic importance: for the first time, the Commonwealth counted Aboriginals as people. From the 1960s, for a mixture of reasons, Aboriginals have been more publicly visisble than in earlier times. They have been subjects of greater *controversy* and they have been *participants* in controversy as never before.

The milk carton doesn't want to get into matters of controversy but it can't entirely avoid them. It takes a position on two disputed questions. Aboriginals, says the carton, lived in *relative* harmony with their environment. The word 'relative' represents a compromise betweem scholars who see Aboriginals before 1788 as peaceable and ecologically responsible, and others who believe that this view arises from sentimentality rather than evidence. Fresh research may or may not narrow this difference of interpretation. Scholarly discussion won't resolve a second conflict, about the origins of human settlement in Australia. The milk carton says Aboriginals are thought to have come from Asia. Some Aboriginals reject that as white history and declare that

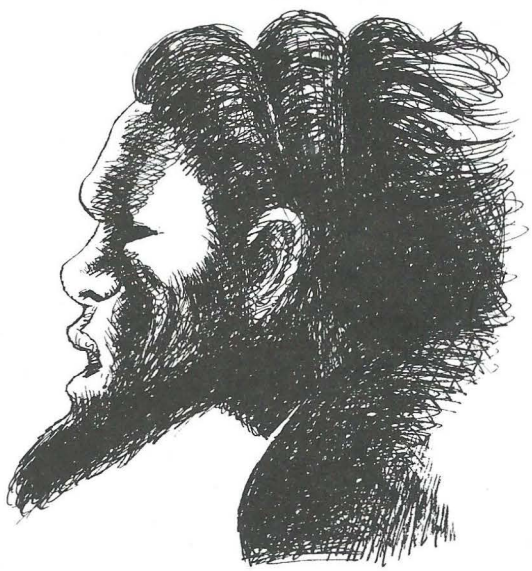
their ancestors were here from the beginning of time. In one version of this declaration, it is validated by traditional Aboriginal creation stories; in another it invokes Christianity: in the words of one Aboriginal writer, our ancestors "never imagined this country, they were here, put here by our Saviour. . . " If the scholars' history is right, we are all migrants. The Aboriginals' history denies that, and enables Aboriginals to say, as some do: We are the only real Australians.

This collision of judgments is a problem for scholars who are committed both to respecting Aboriginal perceptions of the world and to believing that the methods and findings of science compose not just one culture's mythology to be set alongside another's, but a universally valid system of inquiry. I've been at meetings in which the issue of Aboriginal antiquity caused awkward moments between academics, who sensed that the pursuit of rational enquiry was being challenged, and Aboriginals who sensed a threat to their cultural autonomy. Awkward *moments*, only; the relationship is basically harmonious because the parties share a will to retrieve the Aboriginal past and also have a fair measure of agreement about the Aboriginal present and future. Scholars in the field have been sympathetic, some actively so, towards a movement one of them, Charles Rowley, has called the politics of Aboriginal recovery.

The recovery of Aboriginal *history* has been part of this movement. Over the last twenty-five years or so our knowledge of both pre-European and post-European Aboriginal experience has been transformed. In 1960 the bearer of one of the oldest names in white Australian history, William Charles Wentworth, proposed a national effort for urgent scientific research among Aboriginals. Out of his initiative came the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, based in Canberra. A planning conference in 1961 was chaired by the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner of the Australian National University, who helped to make sure that Aboriginal studies as defined at the Institute would have a strong historical dimension.

Stanner had been one of the very few professionally trained social anthropologists working in Australia before the war, and he pursued history in a manner not prescribed in the 1960s on the duty statement of a social anthropologist. Stanner gave himself two historical projects. The first was to propose for the national capital what he described as a Gallery of Southern Man, which would display, he wrote, "the story of the discovery, mastery and enrichment of the continent by the Aborigines." A national memorial, Stanner called this enterprise, and he saw it, he said, as "first among a cluster of fine buildings concerned with Australian civilisation." Stanner's version will be embodied one day in the National Museum of Australia to be built alongside Lake Burley Griffin. His other personal project was a study of European, white Australian, perceptions of Aboriginals from the days of Cook and Phillip to the present. Here he discovered a history of forgetting, a tradtion of disremembering, an affliction of collective amnesia, "The Great Australian Silence", as he called one of his Boyer lectures delivered on ABC radio in 1968. He found that scholars, including himself, had contributed to the national amnesia; and those Boyer lectures were part of his own effort to find a cure.

Just when the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies was being established in 1964 Charles Rowley was beginning a three-year survey sponsored by the Social Science Research Council of Australia entitled "Aborigines in Australian Society". Rowley was a scholar and administrator with a burly indifference to the boundaries between academic disciplines. His brief didn't actually mention history, but he decided to make the first of his three volumes a historical survey. Rowley



had once been a schoolteacher, and he reflected now that what white Australians remembered from their school history books was that Aboriginals were an incompetent people, an inferior race fading away in the face of western culture. Whites grew up knowing little or nothing of the violence, the tension, the forcible dispossession of land that were familiar in Aboriginal folk memory. So Rowley wrote a volume of history with a stark title: *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society.*

The work of Stanner and Rowley encouraged younger historians to explore Aboriginal experience. A journal named Aboriginal History was established at the Australian National University in 1977 by a group of anthropologist, historians, prehistorians and linguists, assembled and kept at work by Diane Barwick, a social anthropolgist from Canada dedicated to the recovery of Aboriginal history. Henry Reynolds, a histori-

an at James Cook University in Townsville, published in 1981 a book entitled *The Other side of the Frontier,* subtitled *Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*, reconstructing, as well as sources, written and oral, would allow, that process of violent dispossession Rowley had found missing from white Australian memories. The poet Judith Wright published in 1981 *The Cry for the Dead*, a history of what white men with animals had done to Aboriginals who occupied land the newcomers wanted for pasture. In 1959 Judith Wright had published a study of her own ancestors as pastoral pioneers in New England, *The Generations of Men*. Later it occured to her that she had been suffering from the Australian amnesia; and when she looked again with eyes educated by a new sensitivity towards Aboriginals she was "shocked", as she confessed, "into a deeper realization of the genocidal background of the pastoral invasion in which my own forebears had played a part." So she rewrote the family story, putting the Aboriginals in and making herself and her readers see what had been done to them. What Judith Wright does in that book and elsewhere is comparable with what Nathaniel Hawthorne did when he wrote *The Scarlet Letter* to make amends for the cruelty visited by his own puritan ancestors in Quakers and witches in another New England.

By 1982 the recovery of Aboriginal history since 1788 had gone far enough to sustain a well-crafted survey for general readers, Richard Broome's *The Aboriginal Australians*. So now we had Blainey's account of roughly 150 years of expropriation followed by a period of hope and confusion and conflict over what, if anything, expropriators would do to make amends.

We are still waiting to read Aboriginal historians, and that's not surprising. Millions of black Africans, millions of black Americans, had to wait a long time for education and consciousness to generate accounts of their experience by authors from within their own communities who had studied the necessary records and gathered the necessary oral and archaeological evidence. From three million Papua New Guineans have come so far maybe ten equipped by skill and training to write their people's history, and only two or three writing it. The others have been called away to fields of action. And in Australia the first Aboriginal honors graduate in prehistory, Marcia Langton, now works not in a University but for the Central Land Council in Alice Springs.

Marcia Langton and others like her may have another reason for not writing Aboriginal history, or at any rate for not writing it under white supervisors. She was one of a working party of Aboriginal historians who attended a conference in 1981 called by convenors of a project for a ten-volume bicentennial history of Australia. The working party issued a statement showing unease at being co-opted. "White historians", they declared, "debate the nature of a historical fact. Our ways of establishing fact are distinctively our own." They spoke of legend, tradition, story, myth-making, painting, dance. their affirmation resembled stands taken twenty years earlier by black Africans and black Americans, and later by some feminists towards male historians. Like these other assertive groups, the working party moved back and forward between two objections to outsiders' history, one more drastic than the other. White historians, they said, had *largely, in the main, so far,* got things wrong or not got things right. From that critique it could follow that collaboration was possible, on agreed terms. White historians, they also said, *can't* see the story from our world view. We and they have different conceptions of knowledge. From *that* position, if sustained rigorously, Aboriginal history must be separate and separatist.

All members of the working party had European as well as Aboriginal ancestry. They had all experienced European educations. So when they said of Aboriginals "we" have a different conception of knowledge, they were rejecting a European part of the self and proclaiming Aboriginality, affirming *loyalty* to an Aboriginal community. The confrontation provoked by their statement was resolved, more or less, by agreement that Aboriginal writers might contribute to the project on their own terms, and that they might initiate their own Aboriginal volume of bicentennial history.

There is now a short shelf of books by Aboriginals in which autobiography, family history and legend mingle, and these books may prove to be beginners of a tradition from which Aboriginals fighting present battles draw strength by having access to a useable past. White people, Stanner observed, have their myths about Aboriginals. Aboriginals have their own, new as well as old. To say that Aboriginals have been here forever is to say: *we* are the owners of our past. The manager of an Aboriginal dance group touring Europe tells a Swiss radio interviewer that he is proud to belong to a people who pioneered aerodynamics with the boomerang, were the first esperimenters with plastic when they chewed spinifex, and had kinship systems which were wonders of genetics. Like authoritarian whites before them, Aboriginals may try to censor history which in their view contains harmful error. In Melbourne last year the Koori Cultural Heritage Working Group had tried to stop a television station showing an archaeological film which doesn't accept the doctrine that Aboriginals had lived here forever.

The most controversial work on Aboriginal history so far has come from an unexpected direction. Noel Butlin, doyen of Austrlaian economic historians, wondering how to measure Aboriginal participation in the economy of early New South Wales, needed to know

how many Aboriginal people there were at the time of white settlement. We have, of course, no way of knowing. The census is an instrument of a settled and centrally administered society. Butlin found that an estimate made in 1930 by Australia's first professor of anthropology, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, had filled a vaccum of knowledge; and though its author had offered the figure tentatively, it hardened over the decades. "Certainly over 250,000," Radcliffe-Brown proposed, "and quite possibly, or even probably, over 300,000." Butlin concluded that New South Wales and Victoria alone may have supported as many people as Radcliffe-Brown suggested for the whole continent. Now the higher the population in 1788, the greater must have been the reduction by violence and disease to the remnant left when reliable counting began. When Butlin set out his findings in a book entitled *Our Original Aggression: Aboriginal Populations of southeastern Australia 1788-1850*, one reviewer observed: "Although the relative importance of direct violence is reduced by his stress on disease, the assumption of a much higher initial population can be taken as so much the greater indictment of Europeans." At one point, moreover, Butlin makes a direct, if tentative, indictment, suggesting as not only possible but "likely" that Aborigines were deliberately infected with smallpox by order of the authorities at Sydney in 1789.

Even without that speculation, Butlin's revision was potentially the most newsworthy, the most sensational finding of all in the recovery of Aboriginal history, his speculative arithmetic suggesting unguessed levels of devastation. Add in the likelihood of deliberate, official lethal infection, and the use of that word "genocide," put into currency at the United Nations in 1945 to describe what the Nazis did to the Jews, begins to look a justifiable term for what the British in 1789 did to the Aboriginals. Butlin gives no reason, it seems to me, why deliberate infection was likely rather than merely one among a series of explanations possible to imagine for an otherwise puzzling phenomenon.

History is never far away from discussions about the present responsibilities of white Australians to Aboriginals. Debates on the central issue of land rights, in and out of court, always involve reconstructions of traditional Aboriginal life and early contact. Last June, when the Aboriginal chairman of the Northern Land Council called on Aboriginals to boycott the bicentennial celebrations in protest against the federal government's failure to legislate for land rights, the Northern Territory's best-known right-wing parliamentarian, Paul Everingham, said: "If there hadn't been a 1788, Aboriginal people would still be bashing their daughters' skulls out on rocks... They'd still be having massive tribal fights among themselves, and they'd still be leading a life where, to keep body and soul together, some of them would be spending all day, twenty-four hours a day, chasing a lizard across the desert." Everingham doesn't want to know Stanner's considered view that in traditional Aboriginal society "the war of extermination... was so rare as to be all but unknown." Everingham doesn't want to hear the judgement, conveyed by Blainey in his phrase "the prosperous nomads," that Aboriginals may have had to spend a smaller proportion of their time than the average Pole or Spaniard or Englishmen in 1800 working at the job of getting food. Everingham *knows* that life in Australia to 1788 was nasty, brutish and short, just as some Aboriginals know that their ancestors were here at the beginning of the world.

The one day of the year on which we as a nation have ceremonially recalled 1788 is 26 January, anniversary of the British disembarkation at Sydney. Ceremonially, but lackadaisically: a tradition of oratory on Australia day deplores our indifference to it. On 25 April it can be said that our nation was made on the beaches of Anzac Cove; on 26 January the congregation that might be hearing about the settlement of Sydney Cove is stretched out on the beaches of Australia.

For Australia Day 1985 Hugh Morgan prepared a speech about Arthur Phillip, a traditional subject for Australia Day oratory. Like many anniversary speakers before him, Morgan hailed Phillip as archetypal pioneer; and like others who enjoy using the word 'pioneer' he left convicts entirely out of the story of Phillip's colony. Morgan's main purpose was to defend Phillip against that sentence of Noel Butlin's about likely deliberate infection of Aborigines with smallpox. He ignored everything else in Butlin's book. He found Phillip's behavior towards Aboriginals flawlessly admirable, and here ignored, if he knew, W.E.H. Stanner's thoughtful analysis of Phillip and the Aboriginals from which the first governor emerges badly. In Stanner's judgement Phillip "was undoubtedly courageous, kindly and of good intent. But many of his transactions with the Aborigines lacked common sense; his vision of them was so warped by presuppositions that he misunderstood their character as persons and social beings."

Morgan also offered a speculation based on no more evidence than Butlin's speculation about smallpox. A few weeks earlier, President Mitterrand, responding to Australian criticism of French policy towards the indigenous population of New Caledonia, had said: "There is no longer any indigenous population in Australia because it has been killed." The thrust was a familiar one in dialogue between French politicans and their Australian critics. I suspect it goes back to French children reading textbooks in which the few sentences about Australia's Aboriginals are less indulgent than the equivalent in English. Hugh Morgan, however, thinks that, "a particular and eminent authority... may well have been used to brief the President" on the point: Noel Butlin.

It doesn't settle any argument about Phillip and the

Aboriginals to observe that Hugh Morgan is executive director of Western Mining Corporation, though it *is* fair to say that if in the course of his reading history Morgan came across evidence uncongenial to the Australian Mining Industry Council's position on Aboriginal land rights, he would not be serving the interests of his company to broadcast it. A more considered debate about Butlin's proposals is going on among historians, and a book entitled *Australians to 1788*, in that bicentennial series, is I think the first in which scholarly authors accept that Butlin's work on population for 1788 requires a drastic revision of the old figure. This set of bicentennial histories is beginning to make the fruits of recent research on Aboriginal history accessible to an unusually wide range of readers. The publishers have ambitious plans for it, and I wouldn't be surprised to see the series advertised on milk cartons.

The text with pictures about Aboriginal life on the ACT milk carton is announced as the first of twelve to cover two centuries of history. I wonder what the last in the series will tell me, and in particular I wonder how it will represent the new multiculturalism, which like the new attention to Aboriginals, has been producing a fresh and controversial history.

Arthur Phillip figures in this history, too. A correspondent with a German name writes to the Sydney Morning Herald saying that Phillip "was a son of a German couple who emigrated from Frankfurt to England in 1758." Phillip was actually the son of a German father who had emigrated more than twenty years earlier than that, and an English mother: some ethnic enthusiasts, like other people in search of a useable past, try to make history say more than it can. But it is arresting to learn, as I don't *remember* learning at school, that the planter of British institutions in this continent had a German father. Hugh Morgan, incidentally, supports the view that Phillip's father may have been a Jew, and I know a historian who plans to devote his retirement to establishing that he was.

Our non-British heritage has been pushed back beyond 1788 to 1770: "the real father of Australia," in the phrase of the Italian-born writer Pino Bosi, was James Matra, described as a Corsican who sailed here with Cook and pressed in London for the colonisation of New South Wales. Two Australian historians sympathetic to multiculturalism, Richard Bosworth and Janis Wilson, nevertheless think that zeal like Pino Bosi's may get the cause of ethnic history a bad name. Matra, born in New York *possibly* of Corsican parentage, seemed to these historians to have small claim to Italian nationality, and in any case he had only a glancing connection with Australia. The historians were reproaching Pino Bosi in 1981 for extravagance committed in 1970, when the word 'multiculturalism' had hardly begun to fill Australian mouths.

Bosi, if not his hero Matra, may get recognition as a pioneer of Italo-Australian history. In 1982 an Italian Historical Society was founded in Melbourne, and by 1984 its president, Justice Sir James Gobbo, could report that both the Italian and Victorian governments were helping to pay for an oral history project to collect the memories of old immigrants. In 1985 the Society mounted an exhibition, "Victoria's Italians 1900-45", and has produced a book based on the exhibition with text in Italian and English, a novel essay in bilingual Australian history. Also in Melbourne the Vaccari Italian Historical Trust was formed in 1985 to research and record the history and culture of Italian people in Australia. It is named in honor of Gualtiero Vaccari (1894-1978), an immigrant of 1912 who made good as an importer. The first award, to support research in the history of Italian market gardeners at Werribee, shows that the trustees are out to recover the history of ordinary people rather than to unveil particular individuals. The award shows how ethnic history may enrich general history. The mansion of Werribee Park, once owned by a pastoral family, then used as a Catholic seminary, is well documented in a book published by the Australian Council of National Trusts, which nevertheless leaves out entirely two generations of Italian tenant farmers who worked its lands.

The Vaccari Italian Historical Trust has lately sponsored a conference on Australia's Italian heritage, and at the Phillip Institute of Technology in Melbourne a workshop has been run on "Building the Social History of Ethnic Communities in Australia" with particular attention to the Greeks, Maltese and Vietnamese. Not all of this activity is about years within living memory. At the Vaccari Conference there was a paper on Italian culture in nineteenth century Australia, and the Journal of Australian Studies for November 1985 has an article by Michael Clyne, "Multilingual Melbourne, 19th century style", intended to show, in the author's words, that the "penetration of languages other than English into a number of public domains (notably education and the media) was a natural phenomenon in Melbourne for a large part of the nineteenth century. . . " Like much recent ethnic history, and like Aboriginal history, this article is written with one eye on the present.

Among other enterprises in ethnic history the federal government has appointed a committee of inquiry into folklife in Australia, whose terms of reference make it multicultural, and the Australian Bicentennial Authority has commissioned an Encyclopedia of the Australian People which will contain predominantly historical entries on ethnic groups. Melbourne has a Museum of Chinese History to which the State Government makes grants, and a Jewish Museum, established in 1982. At Albury and Wodonga there are moves to have the old migrant camp at Bonegilla turned into a National Immigration Museum. And in

Canberra, the national museum which originated in W.E.H. Stanner's proposal for a Gallery of Southern Man has begun to appeal for material recording the experience of postwar migrants.

Such enterprises tend to draw on bicultural or multicultural energies. They are essays in cooperation between people of Anglo-Celtic origin (to use a term now common, and peculiar to Australia) and members of other ethnic communities. There isn't, as far as I know, the kind of unease about collaboration which provoked that working party of Aboriginal historians to make their statement. Unless in the case of Asian Australians, there's no collision between systems of historical knowledge: the activity Australians know as history derives as much from Renaissance Italy and nineteenth century Germany as from the old British imperial motherland. Nor need members of non-British ethnic communitites in Australia today feel themselves to be victims of an oppressor with whom it may be immoral, or at least uncongenial, to collaborate, as Aborigines may feel.

Most of the projects I'm describing here are works-in-progress rather than achievements. They build on no tradition established by main-line Australian historians, who have confined themselves almost entirely to recovering the past of the English-speakers. They have as predecessors only a scatter of works by writers with special purposes. J.S. Lyng, a Dane writing in the 1920s and 1930s about Scandinavians; Lutheran pastors recording, sometimes in German, the experience of communities at once national and religious; academic demographers needing to give studies of postwar migrants a historical dimension. It has taken multiculturalism to begin the making of a tradition of ethnic history. If there still isn't much, it's because the work has begun so recently and because capable workers are few.

One reason why the main-line historians stuck to the history of English-speaking is that few of them knew any other relevant language. This is still a difficulty for most scholars of Anglo-Celtic origin; and for historians who do have the necessary language it may be hard to write in English. Gianfranco Cresciani left Italy as an adult in 1962 and like most migrants he had not undertaken higher education at home. In order to take on the subject he wanted to explore in Australian history he had to master English as well as the skills of research. The book by Cresciani the ANU Press published in 1980, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia 1922-1945*, is a landmark in our historical writing. Not an attempt at a general survey of an ethnic group, but a piece of original research on one period and one subject. A contribution both to the history of Italy, or greater Italy, and of Australia. A book, moreover, which wil make it harder for Italian-Australians, should they be tempted, to build amnesia into their tradition. Cresciani shows, for example, that Gualtiero Vaccari, whose fortune now fuels Italian Australian historical studies, gave money to fascist causes in the 1930s, *and* simultaneously worked for the Australian intelligence service, convincing them that he was not really a fascist, and unknown to the intelligence people assured compatriots that he *wasn't* really anti-fascist. I notice that the makers of that exhibition on Victoria's Italians didn't flinch from showing fascist attachments in the community. There are sure to be more works like Cresciani's in which historians of diverse ethnic orgins explore the Australian experience of people from their own first homelands.

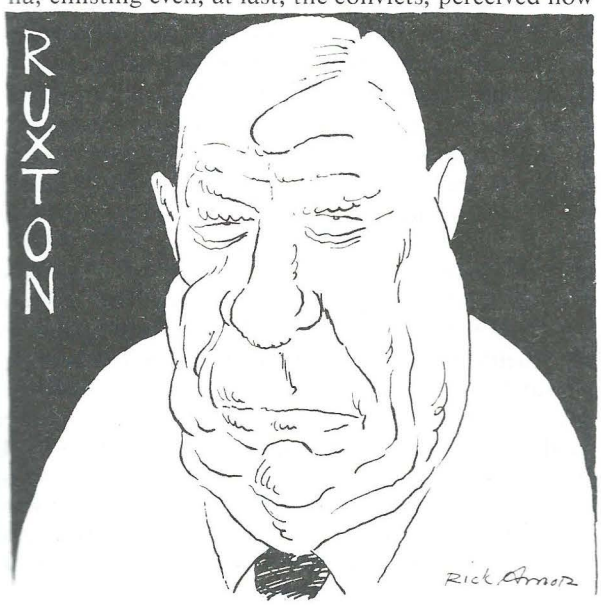
These books will be welcomed by readers who see that diversity as an enrichment of our history. They may not be so welcome to people who see diversity as loss. In the Canberra Times a letter says: "As a fifth generation Australian, whose grandfather was a 1915 Anzac, I deplore the moves to 'dilute' our heritage..." Politicians, says a letter in the Australian from a man who had fought in New Guinea, "are well on the way towards destroying the ethnic identity of a race of people whose British forebears, through sweat and toil, had developed a country and a way of life which was the envy of all". Here are voices from an old Australia invoking an all-British tradition they feel is in danger of being swept away. Those sweaters and toilers sound like Hugh Morgan's pioneers: voluntary, altruistic and classless builders of a nation; later its defenders. That nation, some of their descendants fear, is being yielded to other sorts of people, and the work of the builders and defenders is being misrepresented or forgotten. The humorist Alan Fitzgerald makes the point neatly: "Australian history," he writes, "is full of brave Poms, which is something the Australian Bicentennial Authority and the promoters of the Museum of Australia appear reluctant to acknowledge."

The concern to keep alive British, premulticultural, tradition is given powerful expression in the campaign to preserve the Union Jack as part of the national flag. The move for a new flag, as it happens, did not come out of non-British ethnic communities. "Ausflag 1988", as the quest for a new emblem was labelled, was the inspiration of a man with the thoroughly English name of Sir James Hardy who was irritated when he raced his yacht in waters east of the United States to be asking again and again, by people seeing the Australian flag flying from his stern, what part of Great Britain he was from. But the proposal outraged leaders of the RSL, custodians of an old *imperial* nationalism, one of whom said eloquently that changing our flag would be like burning every Australian history book. The movement to conserve old buildings may have emotional origins similar to the movement to preserve the old flag. The geographer Denis Jeans wonders whether historical conservation is a reaction

against attempts to create a multicultural and cosmopolitan identity for Australia. "How many Italian- or Greek-born Australians," Jeans asks an audience in Wagga, "are members of the National Trust or the Wagga Wagga Historical Society?"

For that matter, how many people of Italian or Greek or Polish or Turkish origin are members of the genealogy societies which have flourished in Australia since non-British immigrants became the most numerous? Sydney, we're told, has the world's largest genealogy society. And in the memory of middle-aged Australians there has been a striking reversal of attitude to the transported founding fathers and mothers who for a time formed the majority of Sydney's population. The Irish government can count on our thinking that copies on microfiche of the records of all convicts sent to Australia from 1798 to 1848 will make an acceptable gift for our bicentenary. That would have been unimaginable, even if technically possible, in 1888 or 1938. Convicts were even less visible than Aboriginals in Sydney's sesquicentennial pageant. The turning point came around 1970, when the bicentenary of Cook's New South Wales landfall was celebrated. The Fellowship of First Fleeters was formed in Sydney for 26 January, Australia Day, 1969, open to proven descendants of people who arrived on the first fleet in 1788 whatever their circumstances. Its rhetoric rang with a British Australian nationalism. First object: "to honor and be loyal to our Country - Australia". "We look around us," said an editorial in its journal, "and see that where British Justice has departed the dignity of man also departs and the inalienable right of man to hope then disappears under a new oppressison.

The rhetoric is close to the RSL's. Appearing at exactly the same time as the new multiculturalism, it's a rallying of old Australia in the face of new Australia, enlisting even, at last, the convicts, perceived now as having a quality long taken for granted because not distinctive: they were British. The Genealogical Society of Victoria has within it a Descendants of Convicts Group, which originated in a project begun by one member in 1968. In 1975 a mixture of public and private enterprise created Old Sydney Town, near Gosford to the north of Sydney, offering visitors a pantomime history in which the convicts are goodies and their keepers are baddies. Even in Tasmania, where convict ancestry was for longer than on the mainland seen as a hated stain, there was formed by 1971 a Broad Arrow Society, whose members had to prove descent from a convict transported to the island.



In a similar vein Americans of British origin had organised societies declaring ancient origins in the 1890s, as their nation was being transformed by new waves of migration from southern and eastern Europe. It was easier for them: there were no convicts on the *Mayflower*, and until the 1960s I think it seemed unlikely that Australians would boast descent from passengers in convict ships. But it has happened. In 1986, a bicentennial history being sold in weekly parts by newsagents proclaimed. "Today, those with convict origins are the blue-bloods of Australia." Hundreds of them flaunt those origins in family gatherings at the Rocks, close to the point of first British settlement, on Australia Day.

In the early postwar decades when hardly anybody questioned publicly the philosophy of assimilation, that day was one for naturalization ceremonies, at which migrants cast off their old nationality and swore allegiance to the British Australian crown. The naturalization ceremonies go on, but they are now accompanied by headscratching and even derision. The Canberra Times published on 27 January 1986 a letter beginning: "As an Australian, not born in Australia, of non-English speaking parents, it has always seemed ridiculous to me that, 26th January being the day the English "dumped" their "junk" on Australian soil, this should be celebrated as Australia Day."

So 26 January has become the occasion for two debates over the history embodied in the anniversary: about the relationship between Aboriginals and white Australians, and about the relation between British Australians and others. These debates make the day more lively and more purposeful than it used to be when speakers couldn't think of what to say except to reproach the rest of us for national apathy. Speakers on Anzac Day have always found plenty of words. At least until after World War II, everbody knew what event had consecrated 25 April. The history of Gallipoli recounted by Anzac orators had an almost liturgical character as a statement about Australian nationhood. People now in their fifties recognise at once what Peter Shrubb has written about growing up between the two world wars: "Anzac Day", he reflects, "was...

part of the meaning of the world. It was the nearest thing I had, I suppose, to myth of Creation... " Shrubb, writing in 1978, noticed that some people were trying to replace his creation myth with another one, a colonial myth about convicts and settlers which he saw enacted at Old Sydney Town.

Shrubb preferred the myth of Anzac, and believed that it would survive the death of its makers. What is to become of Anzac Day, celebrating as it does the deeds of young men from British Australia in a British expeditionary force? What's to become of it in multicultural Australia? As the Canberra Times observed on 25 April last year: "many migrants, especially those from continental Europe and Asia, see Anzac Day as a celebration only for the Australian-born." The non-British Australian writer David Martin had the two main characters in his novel *Where A Man Belongs, (1969),* quarrel about the myth. The German Jewish immigrant writer Max says: "I knew as well as he what Gallipoli meant to Australians, but I did not agree that nations were born on battlefields. They were born where corn is grown and steel is forged, where men shed not their blood but their sweat to conquer a country. Australia was Australia before her sons had to die in Europe, or on some foresaken Ottoman beach... " Paul, the old Anzac, won't have that: "... Australia was a nation before Gallipoli; but it needed Gallipoli to tell her that she was. No foreigner could conceive the importance of it... " If that view of Anzac Day prevails, it may dwindle to become just one among a series of ethnic festivals, when men and women – or maybe just men – nostalgic for the old British Australia meet and remember.

Custodians of the tradition can sound as if they positively want to repel others. The Victorian president of the RSL, Bruce Ruxton, said this in his Anzac Day message for 1986: "We must never lose our British heritage. For those who come to this country for the better life – our way of life – and who don't like it, then please go quickly back to where you came from." No multiculturalism there! But cooler heads in the RSL know that if Anzac Day is to endure it needs fresh energy from wherever it can be found; and they see that given the will, just about every ethnic community can find some way of importing its own sense of history into the festival. Greeks find it easy. Their nation and Australia were allies in both world wars. There is a Greek sub-branch of the RSL in Canberra's Hellenic Club, and on Anzac Day 1986 in Athens Bob Hawke announced that the Greeks of Australia would be putting up a monument to Australian soldiers who sailed from a Greek island on 24 April 1915 for the beaches of Turkey. This enterprise was a kind of retaliation against Turks, whose government on Anzac Day 1985 renamed a section of those beaches "Anzac Cove", while in Canberra on that day a section of Lake Burley Griffin was named "Ataturk Reach" and a statue of Kemal Ataturk, an officer at Gallipoli and later president and re-maker of his country, was unveiled in Canberra. At Albany, in Western Australia, the port from which the Anzacs left Australia, the harbor entrance was named Ataturk.

Even before Turks became acceptable immigrants in the 1960s, the rhetoric of Anzac had embraced them as gallant and chivalrous foes, Johnny Turk; and in 1985 the Australia-Turkish Friendship Society could hold a conference with that title to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of Gallipoli. The purpose of the conference was to interpret the term Johnny Turk and to enlarge Australian understandings of modern Turkish history. The official namings and the Ataturk statue were imaginative attempts to give Anzac Day a Turkish dimension. They were government-to-government activities: the Ataturk monument was unveiled by the Turkish foreign minister. But admit a little of the Turkish past into Anzac Day and it may be hard to keep out history unpalatable to the Turkish participants. Official ritual may be accompanied, even threatened, by unprescribed ritual. While colonel Mustafa Kemal, later Ataturk, was directing actions from the heights above Anzac Cove, his compatriots were killing up to a million Christian American inhabitants of Turkey. There were official fears that American Australians would demonstrate at the Anzac Day unveiling of the monument to Ataturk. The police who were present in case that happened had instead to prevent hundreds of Turks from fighting each other. A representation of harmony between Australians and Turks became also a representation of homeland conflicts, as slogans on banners protested against the military tyranny of the present government and the oppression of Kurds. The occasion had become less bland, more multicultural, than it was supposed to be. One way and another, energetic Turkish involvement in Anzac Day seems to be assured, the only problem for the hosts being that it may get out of hand.

For immigrants of Italian origin Anzac Day has not been so easy to enter. Italy soldiers were not respected by Australians who fought agains them in north Africa, and are frozen in the memory of wartime newspaper readers as unkempt cowards whose cause had to be rescued by Rommel and his stiff-backed Germans. Italians in Australia who fought as partisans against fascism resent the RSL's refusal to admit them as members, and regret that old Australians don't know why their compatriots were so readily made prisoners-of-war. "The Italian soldiers surrended to the British", says one old partisan, "because they did not believe in the war they were fighting." When partisans did march in Melbourne on Anzac Day in 1985, the television commentators appeared not to know who they were. But an Italian woman who marched in Adelaide that day was identified in the newspaper report as a partisan.

Some Italians try to remind Australians that on 25 April 1944 Rome was liberated from the Germans. They might try to recall being on the same side in World War I; but that revokes no common memory, as Italians and Australians fought on widely separated fronts. They might observe that a number of our soldier figures on war memorials were imported from Italy and others were made here by Italian migrant stonemasons. But so far the Turks are the only former enemy to have been thoroughly accommodated within the Anzac tradition. When immigrants from Germany were most numerous, almost nothing was said publicly on either side about what Anzac might or might not mean for them. Here and there a German was admitted to the RSL. In Cooktown, an old member of Rommel's Afrika Corps survived several attempts to expel him from the RSL sub-branch, and he has played the Last Post and Reveillle on his bugle for every Anzac Day service since the late 1950s. He is most unusual. Japanese are too few in Australia for their participation to be a problem, though perhaps there is a sign of things to come in the advertisements for Mitsubishi which helped pay for the screening in 1985 of "Anzacs", the series in which Paul Hogan embodied the Anglo-Celtic Australian fighting man. Poles and Czechs march as national groups on Anzac Day. Serbians in Adelaide place wreaths both on the state war memorial and the monument to their equivocal hero Mihailovich.

Veterans of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam march under their old flag. They do so with RSL blessing. Not so long ago the RSL was truculently in favor of a white Australia. RSL racism was fatally undermined by the war in Vietnam, when Australians fought alongside some Asians against others. These days an RSL concerned about its image makes "Anzac of the Year" awards for people who show the Anzac spirit. This year one goes to a Mrs Nguyen, a language teacher from Vietnam who established an Australian-Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association and who with her husband organised volunteers to work in a relief centre during bush fires. She admired the Anzac spirit, she said when receiving the award; and Bruce Ruxton, state president of the RSL, the man who wants immigrants to go quickly home if they don't like it here, approved vigorously of this one. The Vietnamese presence, unlike the Turkish one, offers no threat to the peaceable character of Anzac Day, for immigrants from Vietnam are overwhelmingly opposed to the present government of their country.

The new cultural self-consciousness among Aborigines has intruded on Anzac Day. From time to time honour has been given to particular Aboriginal returned soldiers in Anzac Ceremony. In 1984 a group of Aboriginal ex-servicement in Melbourne decided that they wanted to march together. Why not, when the Greeks and Poles and the Vietnamese did? On the committee that runs the march, four members said why not indeed, but nine said no. Aboriginals had never been in separate units; every Australian ex-serviceman, black or white, should march with his own unit. Bruce Ruxton declared that these Aboriginals were trying to make the gap "wider and wider between black and white."

Aboriginals decided to have a march of their own on the day. It became a tradition: a small contingent – 25 in 1986 – marched under the banner of the Aboriginal and Islanders' Ex-Service Association, and won a prominent report in the Age, including a statement by the convenor of the Association, a veteran of Vietnam, that he had founded it in order, he said, "to do away with the furphy which lurks at the edge of the land rights debate that since the European occupation of Australia, Aborigines have not fought in defence of the country." Had RSL members on the march committee let the Aboriginals do what they proposed, their presence would have been hardly noted. As it is, they marched to the office of the Aborigines Advancement League where television cameras showed one of them calling for silence and an Aborigines playing what he called "a special dreaming" on the didgeridoo. So Anzac Day becomes, among other things, a platform on which Aboriginals act out a call for the restitution of lost land.

I mentioned an Aboriginal threat to boycott the bicentennial celebrations. At one stage the Australian Bicentennial Authority hoped that one great ceremony for 1988 would be the signing of a historic treaty between leaders of the Australian nation and its Aboriginal remnant. That now seems unlikely to happen. What will? What will be said and done and shown about the meaning of those two hundred years for Aboriginals? And what will be said and done and shown about the mingling of British and non-British in the last of those four half-centuries? The first official theme for the year of commemoration, insisted on by the Fraser government, was "The Australian Achievement", which was disliked by people in the Bicentennial Authority and elsewhere because it gave no signal about diversity. They preferred "Living Together", and that prevailed for a time, despite jokes that it sounded like a celebration of the new custom of cohabitation without marriage, and despite more serious misgivings that not to affirm achivement was a mistake, and possibly a sign that the government was being influenced by radical minorities for whom national pride was no virtue. Now the advertising agents have delivered to the Bicentennial Authority the theme "Celebration of a Nation". That gives off no sound of diversity; nor does either of its associated themes "Let's Make it Great in '88" and "Give us a Hand to Make it Grand!"

They all rhyme, perhaps to fit into jingles. None of them makes a meaningful statement about history in

COLIN SYMES

On Becoming an Australian Citizen in Queensland

Brisbane City Hall is a parody of grandeur. Its circular auditorium, a cross between the Albert Hall and the Pantheon, is redolent of Victorian hypocrisy and religious zeal. A massive organ-console dominates the stage, its pipes threatening the frieze of bare-bosomed and lyre-playing maidens, sporting their charms in an otherwise chaste and very moral building. Where an organist would have normally sat, a large picture of the Queen, flanked by two Australian flags, looked down on her new subjects, no doubt to remind any republicans among them that she, not Robert J. Hawke, is the boss Australian. The presence of this portrait, placed in such a position that all eyes were drawn to it, dominated the whole evening, as if we were ultimately here to pay homage to Union Jackbootdom and the Court of St James's. The berobed and medallion-decked woman in the painting was the same Elizabeth the Second to whom we had all agreed to pledge our undying loyalty and allegiance, as one of the conditions of Australian citizenship. You can be atheist and obtain that citizenship but not, so it seems, a republican.

Those familiar with the eccentricities of the Australian political system, and the pedigree of colonialism running through its constitution, tolerated all this as being consistent with our enslavement to monarchism. But those from other nations must have been somewhat befuddled by all the raucous royal-mongering that went on during the evening. Thomas Hobbes, it seems, is alive and well in Leviathan Australia. That a supposedly independent and sovereign nation, which prides itself on upholding democratic values, which condemns regularly the practices of imperialism, should proudly advertise its deference to an English Head of State not elected or even appointed by the Australian people, must seem the height of political hypocrisy.

The Queen's picture was but one of the ghosts of tyranny haunting the evening. There were also subtle reminders that Australia is a Christian country, ultimately answerable, not to the tenant of Buckingham Palace, but to God. Whilst the ceremony did take into account the fact that there might be some non-Christians in the audience, indeed who might not be of any theistic inclination at all. God's presence was felt nonetheless. When we, as would-be new citizens, were ushered into the auditorium, we were divided into two kinds of Australians: the god-lovers and the godless. The former, who had agreed to swear their allegiance to God, as well as to Elizabeth the Second, went

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a pithy phrase. They sound plaintive. For the bicentenary of the American Declaration of Independence someone had the inspiration to pick up a phrase from a poem by Walt Whitnman: "A Nation of Nations." If our Bicentennial Authority can't match that, is it the fault of our advertising agents, our poets, or our history?

"A Nation of Nations" was the theme of a historical exhibition created by a particular American institution, the Smithsonian in Washington. Our 1988, like their 1976, will depend on how a great variety of organisations and groups will respond to official initiatives. Everyone in Australia will make decisions about what to attend, what to watch, what to listen to, what to read, what to buy. We'll be casting votes of a kind about who we think we are, whose pasts we inherit, which visions of history we accept. That seems to me the best thing about marking the bicentenary, and I'm pleased that the milk authority is bringing it to customers already.

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to one part of the auditorium, the atheists and the agnostics to another. No doubt, this being Queensland, to have their photographs taken by Special Branch.

Civic ceremonies seem to attract the armed services, and this one was no exception. The sight of politicians in the company of men (and it usually is only men) shouldering all sorts of killing devices is an impressive way of displaying where ultimate power resides. Admittedly, there were no armed guards at this particular civic ceremony (not that we saw, anyway), but the military were there all the same, this time displaying musical rather than fire power. The Second Military Brass Band, resplendent in a red uniform of Marxist-Leninist hue, at least provided a better accompaniment than some other forms of military presence one could imagine. If the soldiers of the Queen have to show their colors on such occasions, better they do so with brass bands than bazookas.

But if these bassoon-wielders were there to remind us that, in taking out Australian citizenship, we had also agreed to fight for the nation, the medley of popular and classical tunes they played, whilst we waited for the *real* civic dignitaries to arrive, hardly inspired much confidence in the need to defend the nation's culture. "The Man from Snowy River" and that *very* Australian classic, Albinoni's G-minor Adagio, are hardly worth giving an ear for, let alone the ultimate sacrifice. And we were not told that Percy Grainger referred to by that expert on cultural affairs, the deputy Town Clerk of the Brisbane City Council, as Australia's greatest composer, was a master of the fustigatory arts. (And this in a State which has recently passed legislation banning perverts from public houses!) And Grainger's professed racism hardly seems an appropriate underpinning to a ceremony designed to bring the races of the world together in multicultural harmony.

The musical fare, in fact, was about as multicultural as a vegemite sandwich. Despite all the high-flown homilising about Australian multiculturalism there was little in the rubric of the ceremony that recognised the ethnic diversity of the audience. The whole ceremony was Anglocentric from start to finish. The nearest we ever got to the reality of multiculturalism was when the Minister for Transport referred to his experiences in Merthyr, an inner suburb of Brisbane. According to the Honorable Minister, the streets of Merthyr pound to exotic music and are walked by folk in diverse ethnic costumes, whilst spicy aromas from the suburb's kitchens lend a pleasant odor to the otherwise polluted air.

The whole ceremony was a cross between a church service and a school assembly, the moralism of the former blended with the authoritarianism of the latter. When the civic dignitories eventually filed in, we were told, like obedient pupils, to stand; moreover, we were to remain standing until the Lord Mayor and her party had taken their seats on the stage. I duly obeyed lest some petty official, patrolling the aisles, saw my act of disrespect, and decided to withdraw the envelope containing my certificate of Australian citizenship. One of these same officials had already informed us that these envelopes, stuck down with the heaviest of red seals, were not to be opened until after we had taken the Affirmation of Allegiance.

We were informed that we would be required to actually mouth the words of the allegiance tract. It was announced that officials from the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs would move amongst the "affirmers", checking that mouths were enunciating the words of allegiance. What of those many non-English speaking citizens in the audience, to whom much of the ceremony, since it was *all* in English, must have been so much mumbo-jumbo?

The climax of the whole evening, the moment of holy ordination into Australian society, the moment when all six hundred and forty-one of us were able to unseal our envelopes (but only of course if we had first opened our mouths), was a long time coming. If patience is supposed to be the first virtue of the Australian citizen, then we had plenty of opportunity to test it out that evening. The addresses presented by civic dignitories were supposed to tell us about the responsibilities Australian citizenship entailed – as if we did not know already. After all, we had been interrogated about the matter in our interviews, some six months previously. In the guise of telling us about our responsibilities, we were subjected to an unmitigated bout of propaganda and patriotic fervor, particularly about Queensland. Had we known we were in for a hideous half-hour of Queensland type hype, many of us would surely have left at this point. There were the many metaphors about mother, and we were assured that Australia would make an excellent step mother. She was, so we were led to believe, with a convenient mixing of metaphors, the nearest thing to Utopia on the planet.

But it did not end there. The Lord Mayor, as did the representative of the National Party government, informed us that not only had we made the right decision about Australia but we had made an even "righter" decision about choosing to live in Queensland. Despite what the southerners saw, we had, so the Minister for Transport told us, every justification for being proud of Queensland and its achievements; if that is being parochial then we should indulge ourselves in parochialism. The State, after all, was a place of never-ending sunshine, it was go-ahead, it was a state of unrivalled opportunity and prosperity, just the sort of place in which to bring up one's children.

Children in fact, featured a great deal in the sermons. We were told by all the speakers, Labor included, that 1986 in Queensland was the Year of the Parent not,

as it was in the rest of Australia and the world, the Year of Peace. This seemed to be a somewhat bizarre declaration when in a world without peace the future of parenthood and humankind in general (including the Queenslanders) looks somewhat uncertain, to say the least. But we were reminded constantly that the future of Australia lies in the hands of its children, for it is they, the Lord Mayor told us, who will inherit the pioneering spirit which their forefathers brought with them two hundred years ago, and built this fine Land of ours. There was no mention of the pioneering work of the Aboriginals.

If we thought that the oath-taking represented the climax of the evening, and that permission to open the envelopes containing the Certificates of Australian Citizenship were signs that the night's celebrations were over, we were mistaken. What followed was a supreme example of theatrical kitsch, whose pop-artistry would have done Jim Dine proud! As the Second Military Brass Band struck up the National Anthem, the lights of the auditorium gradually darkened, until blackness reigned. At which point two huge spotlights beamed down on the portrait of the Queen. The two Australian flags flanking Her were gently unfurled by two giant, ancient fans, specially sited to create enough draught for the poignant, uplifting moment when we all became Australian (or was it Queensland?) citizens.

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GEORGE TURNER

Teddy: AD 2045–2047

An extract from the forthcoming novel The Sea and Summer.

—1—

To say that Sweet and Swill learned to understand each other would be fiddling the truth. We learned to mix without friction, but though real friendships, even a love affair or two, did straddle the social barricades, they were exceptions.

Tutorial insistence that the Swill component learn to speak correct English, be able to pass as Sweet in voice and mien, offended them; they didn't see it as an improvement and only under pressure became bilingual. (That, as it turned out, was enough to start undermining their class loyalities.)

Hardest done by in the social sense were we Fringers, seen by Swill as fake Sweet and by Sweet as Swill tainted. Stuck in the middle, looking both up and down, we realised earlier than the rest how deliberately the state fostered such attitudes. (That the state's intention was not to create division so much as to preserve an economically manageable *status quo* was a sophistication beyond our perception just then.)

Through all this Nick persisted under the surface of my mind, unhated. With the illogical crush-proneness of the teen years I now badly missed the hand that might have thrashed me but never had. A bad attack of father substitution.

Other teen troubles surfaced. Carol and I were fourteen when she taught me those facts of life I had known only in sniggering theory; I had sense enough, or developing self respect enough, not to ask where she learned them. Then for a year she indulged a bitching-martinet complex, grindingly perfect in drills and regulations. She tells me I withdrew into role-playing to a point where people avoided me in their uncertainty as to who I might be at a given moment; I was unaware of it myself. We both survived our periods of ego boosting, were still together when they passed and rolling happily in the hay whenever privacy could be got.

Once or twice she tried to talk me into visiting home and we came close to quarrelling. She learned to leave the subject alone and I learned guilt as lengthening years made it ever more impossible for me to heal the break. *"Mum, I've come home." "Why? Is there something you forgot to take with you?"* I couldn't face it.

I heard that Kovacs had moved in with Mum; it seemed impossible, degrading. I know now that the information was fed to me and that Nick was in his shadowy way behind the feeding. It made a solid reason for accusing her of betrayal (of whom? of me?) and hardening my heart. Hearts being what they are, mine only cursed and grieved.

If the camp had troubled our teenage certainties, the Intelligence School destroyed them. There we had our noses rubbed in those facts which everybody knows but, as they are other people's woes, leave unattended – such as, that two-thirds of the world starves although it is easily possible, with global planning, to feed everybody.

We had never set such remote facts straight in our minds. Why should we have? If raised as Sweet, we had been buttressed from birth against horrors, our minds parentally turned from the abyss. If reared as Swill, taught from birth that you could have your state-given share (a frugal but scientifically calculated ration) and no more, that life meant making the most of little, that there was no way out of the Swill towers (untrue) and that the preservation of the state depended on recognising one's place and not rocking the boat, why should they consider remote others?

We learned, in wonderment at the obvious, that the state not only encouraged these counsels of contentment but actively promulgated them. The brighter history students observed with prim surprise that both Church and state had preached this doctrine of ordained place in the scheme of things as recently as two centuries ago. Our world had taken a step backward. I heard chuckling Nick query again the meaning of 'progress'.

The upshot was outrage in Squad Tutorial. The Tutor of the day listened, curbing extravagant protest here

and there but in the main agreeing with us. He sat there *agreeing* that a monstrous state kept order by lies and cozenage! His acquiescence shut us up faster than any whipcrack of authority, until a single voice was left, crying, "But . . ." and sinking into general silence.

"But . . ." Larry repeated. He was a seconded policeman who treated us with genial tolerance and bouts of histrionic despair. "But what, you outraged political nitwits? What would you do about it?"

What would we not! The air boiled with utopias and means of confounding the state's philosophic errors. At the end Larry said, "This uprush of well meant poppycock takes place every year at this point in the syllabus. You are neither better nor worse than most, only noisier."

He sat on a corner of his desk, swinging a leg and giving us the raised eyebrow that meant disillusionment coming apace. "You will each prepare a scheme for the solution of the planetary food problem. If you feel that weather fluctuation will be the main problem, to be countered by improved meteorology, small weather control units and better farm administration, be advised that it will not. Your concerns will be salination, education, finance, transport, religion, global politics and selfishness. For research I recommend the Governmental Procedures and Year Books of the major nations. You have surprises coming to you. Dismiss."

As we left he had an afterthought: "If at the end of the week anyone should despair of completing this exercise, we will weep together but no marks will be lost. That does not absolve you from trying."

We floundered in deeper mud than ideals had dreamed of. In the end none of us completed the task; what we found in those recommended texts frightened the nonsense out of us. Police Intelligence had a major victory over social conditioning; we began blunderingly to think.

Larry believed that when ignorance had talked itself out there was room for information to enter, so the Population Problem followed obviously enough from the Food Problem. On the next day, in fact.

The Squad agreed that it was, basically, one for national governments. When you have been born into a system referred to as the Concerned State, one that takes responsibility for everything, your response is to leave everything to it. Childbirth affects everyone, so the state should –

Should what?

Larry outlined the attempts that had been made in the past: reversible and non-reversible sterilisation, decrees limiting family size, selective allocation of the right to breed, savage punishment for illegal conception, exhortation by charismatic leaders and such grotesque aberrations as segregation of the sexes and encouragement of homosexual relationships.

The last two we saw clearly as denials of heterosexual genetics. "Not the others?" Larry asked. Well, yes, the others too. . . but some sort of restraint was necessary. . . "Applied by whom?" Well, um, the prospective breeders. Contraception was, after all, freely available.

"A very respectable moral attitude in a class whose combined sexual activities wouldn't raise a breeze in a brothel doorway. What of the consequences of parenthood denied?"

We knew of those at second hand, through reading. Assessed over three generations of trial by every major nation, they were: breakdown of the family unit, increases in street and domestic violence, apathy, mental depression, withdrawal from responsibility and – most seriously from a state viewpoint – unrest expressing itself in destruction of property, political dissension and outright insurrection.

"Take away the core of sexual existence, procreation, and emotional energy seeks an outlet. The alternative to creation is destruction. People *want* children."

Sixteen is a productive age for cynicism, so it was no surprise that a voice said, "The poor do."

That was a kid we called Young Arry because he chose to answer to it rather than resent it as a reflection on his Swill origin; a thin skin would have started more fights than any gutter battler could survive. Besides, he was skinny and clumsy and not much good for anything but physics and distance running. I liked him in a casual way, almost against my will, but well enough to take his part when he needed support and not take it amiss when he failed to thank me for it. I suppose the dregs of vanity still showed in me, because he was the only Swill kid who would meet me half way.

The Sweet kids in the Squad didn't argue his point about the poor because Arry *was* the poor, while the Swill knew exactly what he meant. History backed his statement; poverty had always been a saddling paddock, and at the heart of our present problems were the swarming, unproductive poor.

Larry didn't give a damn for Sweet and Swill or the the feelings of either. "True," he said, "but why?"

"Habit," said Arry, a laconic type.

"Indeed?"

"Lose it and you become an endangered species."

"And that's all?"

"You need a hobby when you've got a lot of spare time."

Larry spoiled our tittering by saying, "That is literally true. A feature of idle poverty is a failure to develop inner resources; the poor need entertainment that costs nothing." To the ripple of subdued catcalls he added, "If you have to pay for it you don't deserve it."

That set the girls squawking denunciation of prodding males treating them as sex objects.

"You mean you *should* be paid for it? Good for you, but tell me, what do you treat males as?"

Eh? Oh, as companions, prospective life partners. "And sometimes," said Carol, whose sense of humor played no favorites, "as sex objects."

"Only sometimes?"

She refused to be drawn; further gender treachery would get her a season in hell from the other girls. As things quietened down somebody asked what should have been asked earlier, "But why does contraceptive teaching fail?"

Larry set his face in the bland innocence of the liar who refuses to be queried. "I'm sure I don't know. It should make an interesting investigation. Let me have your ideas a week from today."

A dozen voices asked, "References?"

"Sex is not a subject for library research. Try thinking – or whatever."

That was quite a gutful of challenge to absorb in two days, but it was Friday and most Squaddies were going to their homes for the weekend; the population problem was left to simmer. It simmers still.

—2—

Squaddies raced into their civvy clothes, grabbed their bags and paused only for the regulation scan of the notice-board. Then the small group of us who did not go home, for one reason or another, strolled to the board to see what might be new, and found nothing.

But there was a street map on the board, a big one with City Centre lined in red and the names of major buildings marked for reference. I examined it with a sting of old fascination, for in our fourth year City Centre had at last been declared 'in bounds' to us. (Permission to be grown-up!)

As kids we had talked of mysterious City Centre and its fabulous corridors of power. In time we had learned that it was just an antiquarian's delight of old buildings preserved through lack of funds to tear them down and rebuild, haunted by Small Sweet planners and programmers and secretaries and runners of messages for the Top Sweet who made the state's decisions. Longer in dying were the rumors of Swill robber gangs erupting from the sewer systems; we didn't really believe those, but you could never be sure...

Those who had actually seen the Centre said that nobody in his right mind would go near the musty place – "Crummy buildings and almost nobody about." They were probably right but the glamor persisted. I wanted to see for myself.

As I peered at the map a Swill voice whined in my ear, "Y' wanna gwin, Teddy?"

It was Arry, who could forget his Sweet speech at a fingersnap. He repeated, with apologetic care for trained elegance, "Do you want to go in, Teddy?"

Of course I did, but civilian dress was obligatory for a City leave pass and I had none. I had outgrown my enlistment clothes and found no way to replace them; the state saw no reason to supply clothing coupons as well as uniforms.

I said briefly, "No clothes," hiding the hurt. Then passed the hurt to Arry. "And where would *you* get city clothes?" The gear the Swill kids wore to go home in would not do for the Centre.

He shot me the most curious sidewise look of benevolence and complicity. "Can get. Can borrow some for you, too."

I didn't trust a word of that. Training or no training, Swill was Swill, and devious. But I wanted badly to see the Centre. He took my silence for assent, or pretended to. "Twenty minutes," he said, "in your dosser."

In less time than that he appeared in my cubicle with two complete outfits – trousers, shirts, belts, berets, the throatbands that were 'in' that year and two brassards identifying us as cadets. I recognised the stuff he gave me and knew it would fit, just as I knew its owner would be absent for two days and that he was a snot-nosed Sweet from whom Arry could never have cadged a loan of anything.

"Skeleton keys?"

"A loan," Arry insisted, his grin openly conniving. "But he's the type who wouldn't appreciate thanks."

I had qualms.

And I had a chance to see City Centre.

I dressed.

So did Arry, with a difference. As he put on each item he studied himself in my wall mirror, entranced by the portrait of a stranger. He had never in his life worn tailored, matched clothes.

"Munt mucky," he murmured, warning himself, and I translated, *Mustn't muck them up.*

We collected our passes and went out.

—3—

We crossed the bridge into the Centre.

Crummy buildings and almost nobody. Years ago the business houses had moved out to the suburbs on the breakdown of public transport as people ceased to travel to work that did not exist; now the business houses did not exist. In City Centre the old buildings housed state departments employing three-quarters of the work force, so there could have been a quarter of a million people in the forty blocks of the Centre.

We did not see many of them; they were inside, running the state, appearing briefly in the street when shifts changed. The few in sight were there with purpose, moving in duty from one nexus to another; there was little for them to look at or linger over.

The streets were clean, tended by rolling robots that prowled the gutters and made forays on to footpaths when their sensors told them nobody was in their way. We amused ourselves forcing them back into the gutters, stepping in front of one as it spied a scrap of garbage and lurched after it, asking the thing's pardon and exchanging witty wonderings as to whether a

machine could become frustrated. Passers-by paid no attention. Our brassards told who and what we were and they must have had a gutful of Extra cadets exhibiting their sophistication on leave.

There were few shops. You could buy magazines and snack food but only a couple of stores sold clothing or theatre bookings or anything but immediate necessities. The Centre was used, not lived in. It was inert.

Yet there were things to see. The old Public Library had been preserved and in a culture of tapes and data banks its contents were fabulous. More than a million books in one place was hard to credit; believing they were all worth preserving was harder. Most were surely not worth a glance, much less the reverent handling by the Library staff, but a hint of this brought us a curl of the antiquarian lip. But no other member of the public was there so why, if nobody used them, should they be preserved? Because they were *there*?

History was *there*, glooming uselessly in the street. Arry said, "It's dead. There's people but they're dead too."

Yet for all its mustiness the Centre was in use, not just dust-sheeted over for uninterested posterity. We found a cafeteria but the food was in the high-coupon range of catering for employees with generous bonus grants. I would have turned away but Arry said, "I'll shout you."

"What with?" He showed me, for an instant, a wad of blue bonus coupons thick enough to choke a glutton before he stuffed them back into his pocket.

"Stolen!" I must have sounded like a prize prig, all shock and righteousness, but we Sweet kids were raised to believe that stealing was *out*. A precious pack of little sods we were.

"My Tower Boss sent them to me."

I had an ungenerous vision of a Boss suckholing to an Extra who might be useful to him later on; I didn't credit the man with being proud of his ugly duckling and risking his freedom to look after him, only grunted gracelessly that they must have been stolen in the first place.

Arry explained patiently that coupons were basic exchange, passed on by police for 'favors' received. Payment for informing and betraying, sneered my holier-than-thou upbringing while my stomach thought over the food displayed on the shelves.

"There's some advantages in being Swill," Arry said. "Not many but some."

We ordered a meal that might have done for a State Senior in a triv drama. Morality shuddered but gorged.

Afterwards we found, right on the eastern edge, an old building with a decorative façade that stamped great age all over it, the Princess Theatre. Its plaque said it was built in the nineteenth century and was still in use. The Early Cinematograph Society was playing a season of films we had never heard of, so we used some more of Arry's coupons.

It was a peculiar experience watching what our great-grand-parents had enjoyed, probably thinking it the last word in crash-bang technology. They were short films covering a century or more of cinema 'art', if that's the word. It was all two-dimensional, pre-triv; some had no color and some had no sound, like cartoons where actors doubled for drawings. Much was nearly unintelligable because acting styles have changed and notions of drama become more sophisticated. Only the early comedies, slapstick without dialogue, were wholly intelligible though primitive and idiotic, but Arry laughed himself into stitches and insisted on seeing out the whole program. I decided that the Swill must create most of their own amusement, which doesn't make for artistic sensitivity.

When we got out into the street again, it was dark.

We walked on the floors of half-lit canyons. Windows gleamed where night shifts worked (doing what among the banked computers and automated operations?) but most were dark; upper floors vanished into a sky cloud-covered and threatening rain. The footpaths were lit at cost-saving intervals, one lamp standard in three glowing in a passage of shadows; the whole complex was so quiet that tiny noises at a distance were identifiable as footsteps or scraps of paper rustling as they blew or soft conversations between ghosts in invisible places.

We went rapidly down Bourke Street. I wanted now to get back to the barracks, away from the footpaths where black lanes and alleyways dived between buildings into the silent blocks. Almost silent. Voices twittered in their darkness.

"Swill," Arry said.

I remembered the schoolyard furphies about sewer gangs.

"What are they doing?"

"Scavenging."

"Don't the coppers . . ."

"No law stops Swill coming to Centre or anywhere, but turn up here in bare feet with the arse out of your pants and you'll get rushed out fast, loitering or something. Night's different; give and take; the coppers look away."

"Muggers!"

He laughed at me. "In Centre? You Sweet get ideas! The Bosses wouldn't stand for it; they'd have to be squaring the coppers all the time and maybe throwing them the muggers to keep them quiet. It's for scavenge."

The accumulating picture of Swilldom as a ramshackle culture with a hierarchy and rules and a sort of grimly enforced order began to work into my imaginaton.

Arry grabbed my arm. "Watch."

All that moved in the street was a line of cleaning robots, a dozen of them, single-filing uphill towards

us, deploying, I thought, for a fresh sweep. "Watch what?"

"The cleaners."

The leading robot mounted the footpath at the mouth of a laneway, opened its hatch and tipped out the whole of its gathered garbage in a pile of assorted detritus from offices and cafés and gutters, then rolled back a pace and paused as if waiting for an activity to follow.

Scavengers erupted from the laneway and burrowed into the rubbish. Across the road from them, and fifty metres away, we could not see too well in the poor light, but it was plain that they knew what they wanted and worked to a method. In minutes the heap was reduced by a third and the extracted material passed by a chain of hands into the darkness. A half-naked figure operated a control on the frame of the robot; it rolled forward, sucked up what rubbish was left and moved off to the discharge depot it had been headed for. Another took its place.

"What are they taking?"

"What's useful. Bottles, cans, bits of metal, pins and clips and rags but mostly paper.

"Paper? It would be all written on or screwed up."

"Written on one side; the women iron it out for writing on the fair side. The rest, wrappings and stuff, gets pulped and mashed and pressed for the shapers. You can make a lot from paper, even some kinds of furniture."

How long would a paper cupboard last? Did it matter, while you could swipe the makings for a new one?

Arry said, "Kitchen cleaners have food in them, scraps and half-eaten stuff. It gets boiled up and mixed into messes."

Revolting messes. But the state ration was calculated... Back in the Fringe, Kovacs had said Swill stole from Swill, strong from weak, even adults from children... There would always be someone in need of food, starving amid plenty; the most ruthless Boss could not prevent it. I suffered a heaving shame at never having known hunger... at having known all my life of the underside of the world with no feeling for it but revulsion... and now failing to understand the mind of Arry who knew and for the most part contained his rage.

Across the road the cleaners' contents were sorted with the orderliness of a state operation. Interference with the state property... my mind was still on law. "Don't the coppers ever stop them?"

"You don't catch on, do you? The coppers program the cleaners to stop at scavenge points when they're full."

In my head the structure of society shifted again.

Arry's thin face was picaroonish in the half light. "If we can use what Sweet throw out, why not? The coppers are bastards but they aren't stupid. And in the towers a thing has to be properly busted before it's useless."

Rain fell before we reached the Telltale. We got soaked and spent most of Saturday cleaning the 'borrowed' clothes.

I felt obscurely in need of more punishment than that. I had begun to see ignorance as a crime.

SAVING TIME

"Curtsy while you're thinking what to say. It saves time."
Lewis Carroll

To curtsy is thoughtful: the bobbing head addressed
Clouds with the thought of thousands gone before,
Now schooled or shielded, manacled or blessed
By all they, impetrating, could adore.

Bowing, saluting, sweating for the grand
Sleek-tailored keepers of our destinies,
We learn the art of knuckling down: they stand,
Dicing away the fabric of our pleas.

Saving your reverence, is it saving time
To trick our clumsy gestures out with grace?
These are our hearts, self-eaten, without rhyme:
Whose is the time we save, and whose the face?

PETER STEELE

LEONIE SANDERCOCK

Letter from Brazil

Imagine a country even more crazy about football and beaches than Australia, and you're halfway to understanding Brazil. Add music, dancing and carnival and you conjure a picture of a people always at play. And indeed Brazilians are a playful people: hilarious, animated, sociable and irrepressible.

But the other story concerns that half of the population who are illiterate and living below the poverty line. Economically and politically the country is in deep trouble, yet not very many people take either work or politics very seriously, except perhaps in Sao Paolo (the largest city, with a population around twelve million). There's a lack of involvement, of participation; partly the result of being ruled by a dictatorship for twenty years, partly a product of low levels of education and literacy. Civil society is not yet alive and well.

It is only two years since the dictatorship gave way gracefully to a democratic transition. Last November the country elected a new parliament which will be responsible for drawing up a new constitution. The old left has returned from exile. Amongst progressive intellectuals the atmosphere is not unlike that of Australia in the early 1970s, the Whitlam era, when we knew that *'it was time'*. But in Brazil in the 1980s this atmosphere of optimism and determination is tinged with fear and desperation. If Brazil can't be pulled onto better social and economic tracks now, it never will be. *This is it.*

There is, for a start, the immediate struggle to bring the economy under control. Since 1980 inflation has been running at 250 per cent a year. While fortunes were made by speculators, ordinary folk simply stopped buying. Middle-class salaries were being eroded. In February 1986 the "Plan Cruzado" was introduced, part currency-reform, part wage-and-price-freeze. This led to a frenzy of buying, with shortages of basic commodities like meat as producers withheld their product in the hope of future price rises. These measures are short-term and stop-gap. This is a country with one of the most unequal distributions of income and wealth in the world. It is also a country of vast regional differences and inequalities. Currency reforms and wage and price controls don't scratch the surface of these fundamental problems of development and distribution. It seems clear that new models of development are urgently needed.

What follows is a series of snapshots of a month in Brazil, which I hope add up to more than travel stories and shed some light for Australians on this huge country (population 130 million) about which most of us know little. I was lucky to be travelling with somebody who understands Portuguese, has lived in Brazil for some years and has contacts with progressive thinkers in government agencies and universities in a number of cities. These 'guides' discussed with us the Brazil beyond the glossy tourist brochures.

Rio could have been a glamorous city, in different circumstances. It has Sydney's setting; that is, big harbor, beautiful beaches, and even more spectacular topography, with some of the most ancient mountain rock formations in the world breaking up the urban landscape. From the air, the shapes of these escarpments are intriguing and powerful. Close up, you see that these steep slopes and this solid rock provide firm foundations for the flimsy favelas that climb the hillsides.

The favelas are the shacks that the poorest people construct for themselves from whatever materials they can beg, borrow or steal, on land on which they squat, and without enjoying any of the usual urban services (running water, sewerage, electricity). The problem of housing the urban poor in a city with such a big population of poor people has existed for such a long time that some of the favelas are now thirty years old; they house 100,000 people. Official policy used to be to demolish them, just like the slum clearance programs in England, Australia and the U.S. in the early post-war period. Some favelas were demolished, notably those occupying the most valuable land. Inhabitants were relocated to the fringe of the city where they must spend four or five hours a day commuting, if they have

jobs.

Studies have shown that transport costs were consuming so much of the household income that food for the women and children had to be cut back. (You can't cut back on food for the man, they say, or he'll lose his strength and won't be able to work.) The minimum wage here is $US45 a month. The official poverty line is three times the minimum wage, for a couple with two children. Malnutrition is a real problem, despite the abundance of food that the country is able to produce. The population is said to be 65 per cent undernourished.

Recently official policy on favelas changed. Now they are being 'urbanised': that is, upgraded, provided with water, power, basic sewerage and drainage. There is a highly organised politics of favelas, a metropolitan-wide organisation which now makes demands on behalf of the city's worst-housed inhabitants.

That is the contradiction of Rio. Parts of it reminded me, visually, of Chinese cities: other parts of southern Italy, especially Naples. Juxtaposed with natural beauty and bourgeois glamor is an underlying sense of decay, of benign neglect – pavements and roads falling apart, buildings not maintained. There simply appears to be very little investment in keeping the city going.

But all of this is forgotten by Brazilians on the beach. Copacabana and Ipanema are justly world-famous beaches with long expanses of the whitest sand, good surf and a thriving beach-side urban life of bars and cafes. The three mile stretch of Copacabana is framed by distinct headlands at either end, a sharp escarpment rising only four streets back from the beach, and a beachfront Avenue of twelve-storey apartment buildings and hotels in 1920s and 1930s architectural styles (although built in the 1940s and 1950s), full of curves and rounded windows. The sidewalk that separates the beach from the Avenue is at least twenty feet wide and the shapely curves of its tiled pattern (a Portuguese tradition) are a clue to the soul of Brazil. Along this sidewalk thousands promenade: strollers, lovers, exercisers, dog-walkers.

On the beach itself there's more activity than you'll ever see on an Australian beach. Most of the activity is a kind of energetic exhibitionism on the part of young men, playing volleyball or beach soccer or bat and ball or flying kites, or just exercising their jaws in animated group conversations. Young lads apparently without fear do reckless things on ten-foot waves that dump them mercilessly – and still they go back for more. Crowds gather to watch. Beaches are all about watching, and here the greatest attention is reserved for nubile young women in the briefest bikinis in the world. It is said that the only taboo parts of the female anatomy are nipples and sacrum, and it's not for nothing that bikinis here are referred to as dental floss.

Another distinguishing feature of Brazilian beaches are the vendors, young boys and older men walking among the horizontal bodies shouting wares: ice-creams, beers, lemonade, sandwiches, cookies, peanuts, pastries, shrimps on skewers, suntan lotions, beach hats. You can't exactly get a six-course meal by just sitting in the sand and waiting for it to come to you – but almost.

Such was Copacabana on a sunny Saturday afternoon at the end of winter. In summer, hundreds of thousands of Kariokes (natives of Rio) take over this wonderful beach.

But in summer it may be wiser to take the Bondino (a very old tram; the one that features in the beautiful 1950s French movie about the Carnival, "Orfeó Negro"), from downtown up the hillside to Santa Teresa, a neighborhood of old villas and small bars perched on hillsides overlooking the harbor, a community of artists, writers and assorted low-income workers. Here you are in another Rio, of lush and exotic vegetation, cool mountain breezes, small villas (rather than towering apartment blocks), narrow winding streets and steep steps, and spectacular vistas. And at the very top of these hills: another favela perches on the solid rock, reaching for heaven where life is guaranteed to be better than in modern day Rio.

This is a city living on and in its past (as the capital and cultural centre of the country); a city which has been passed by by the industrial modernisation and drive for productivity that is said to characterise São Paolo. (For that reason, we didn't go to São Paolo.)

Travelling from Rio to the interior state of Minas Gerais (literally General Mines) was also a trip backwards in time, but this time back to the early 1700s.

When you're on board a bus with a warning sign up front prohibiting the smoking of cigarettes made from corn husks, you know you're headed for a village rather than a big city (where they all smoke cigarettes with the brand name "Hollywood"). I'm not sure how the census defines 'village', but for me a clue is that the public signs don't tell you to keep off the grass. They ask you to *"Colabore com o Jardim"* (collaborate with the garden). And a familiar sight along the approach road to villages is a father and daughter holding up a three-foot string of garlic for sale as you go by, or young boys at the roadside selling cashew fruits which dangle on string tied to long sticks.

In Minas Gerais we visited, by local bus, two early eighteenth-century mining villages which made a lasting impression. Ouro Preto (Black Gold) is a village of two thousand people which has become a "World Monument" and is under strict historic preservation orders from the federal government. Nestled into the floor and slopes of a small valley, it is notable for its churches filled with gold ornamentation, its street-

scapes of intact eighteenth century housing (brightly colored two- and three-storey wood and brick constructions) and for the variety of beautiful black faces in its streets. Ouro Preto was a slave town for almost two centuries. Negros were brought in to work the gold mines. Over the centuries they have reproduced themselves in a variety of skin shades but still with predominantly Negro features, and the mixture is seductive.

Today there are cars, TV aerials, and international rock music in the bars. But mules still share the cobbled streets with VW's and motor bikes and pedestrians, and it seems as though only the thinnest veneer of the twentieth century has reached Ouro Preto. In the late afternoons older folk hang out of their windows, or sit on verandahs and balconies, or under a tree in the village square, watching. They watch the younger folks walking and courting and talking. Middle-aged men gather in the streets or bars, telling stories (you can tell that they are telling stories from their animation and gestures) and gossiping. Everyone is watching everyone else. That's what villages are like. It's what makes them feel safe. It's also what makes them feel stifling.

I was reading Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* while I was in Brazil. This tale of a Colombian village in the early twentieth century evokes, above all, a small town life near-impermeable to change, with rigid codes of honor, loyalty and duty.

Neither Ouro Preto nor Diamantina (a similar but larger village) gives the impression of being absolutely frozen in another century. For one thing, both places have tertiary institutes, one a mining school, the other a dental school, and for that reason alone pressure to change social codes must be there. But these villages not only look but feel pre-industrial. In Diamantina a mule train was hitched in the square outside the market, and handcrafted saddles were for sale alongside the local produce. Local faces were deeply etched and weathered in a way that doesn't happen to city people.

The village versus the metropolis. In such magic places the 'development romantic' in us emerges. We wonder why we need big cities and industrial modernisation. Perhaps paradise can be reclaimed. But even here, paradise is flawed. For across the other side of the valley from the perfect village are the ubiquitous favelas, the stench of open sewers, women washing laundry in a polluted stream, kids eating in the red dirt among the dogs and chicken shit, and mangy half-starved horses picking over scrappy grasses.

Paradise cannot be reclaimed. The Faustian dilemma of modernisation, of what we lose and what we gain, will not go away.

The north-east region of Brazil is looked down on by the sophisticated and energetic southerners in a way not unlike Sydneysiders looking down on Tasmania. The north-east has its own pace and its own poetic spirit. It is famous for its dancing, its poets and painters and folk singers/composers.

We arrived in Recife (population around two million), capital of the north-eastern state of Pernambuca, late Saturday night. Sunday morning on the beach was our introduction to this part of the country. By ten a.m. the beach was packed and the vendors were active. Here women hawked home-cooked delights like fried fish with spicy sauce and cornmeal patties, while men sold the usual range of ice-creams, drinks, pastries, fairy floss, fresh fruits, and sugar cane juice.

But in Recife something else was going on too. Politics had come to the beach. The campaign for the November elections was in full swing by early September. The square fronting the beach was a buzz of electioneering, Brazilian-style, which means music. The right-wing candidate had hired a local band of traditional musicians (saxophones, trumpet, drums, singer) to play old-style popular music. Within minutes people were drawn from the beach to the music, Pied piper-like, and began dancing in the street.

Politics, carnival-style, became a noisy affair when other candidates set up their musical shows on different corners of the square: vans loaded with hi-fi equipment blasted Brazilian and international rock music; before long music became cacophony, but the beach people treated it all as a big party.

Those left on the beach were not neglected either. Pamphlets were being distributed from political tents; light planes towing campaign slogans flew past; and a flotilla of antique sailing craft cruised off-shore, their sails advertising candidates. This activity continued all day. Come evening, musicians played in the square under the banner of the right wing candidates and, although it was raining by now, people danced without seeming to notice it.

In the afternoon we drove through the city past the Governor's house where a group of demonstrators had pitched black plastic tents. They were the unemployed and the landless, asking for jobs and lands. "This would've lasted thirty seconds under the dictatorship," our host observed.

On the northern outskirts of Recife the three-centuries-old town of Olinda, once the capital of the state, has some of the appearance of the Rocks in Sydney, and is going through the same gentrifying process. Artists and intellectuals have moved in and political murals cover all avail-able public wall space. Strictly speaking this is illegal, and there's an official from city hall who goes around each day painting them over, *unless* they're deemed to have aesthetic merits. That explained why what we saw was very high standard political folk art. But how does this all-powerful official decide, we wondered, just what is and isn't 'artistic'?

In Recife itself the old prison, used not so long ago to accommodate political prisoners under the dictator-

ship, is now the Casa da Cultura, accommodating arts and crafts. Each small cell is a little shop, selling ceramics, leather and lace work, gems, jewellery and needlework from the region; folk art, unpretentious and jolly, and very cheap by tourist standards. Later we learn that the makers of these goods get paid about a penny an hour, and middlemen take what profit there is.

So prison becomes 'palace of culture', but oppression and exploitation have not disappeared.

On the outskirts of Recife sugar cane country stretches for mile after mile, hills covered with cane. And because of the hilly terrain, methods of planting and cutting are still manual, and oxen and mules are the methods of transporting it to the central depot. Again the standard of living in these areas reminded me of China or the Philippines.

The cane is becoming an increasingly important crop. Traditionally harvested for sugar and molasses, more recently it is being turned into alcohol to fuel the cars here. So important is this oil import substitute that it is being subsidised by the government, and that means that land used previously for food production is being converted into cane fields, and the food problem continues.

At a dinner in a restaurant in Olinda (in a renovated two-storey terrace that could have been Paddington or Carlton) I am surrounded by 'development specialists' from the World Bank, the Organisation of American States and UNICEF, all lamenting the hopelessness of Brazil. There was no optimism here, compared with the Brazilians' own attitude toward their new government. The world of the development specialist is a curious one. These people are always outsiders, usually economists and efficiency experts, and they jet about between Africa, Asia and South America discussing property values in gentrified Washington just as easily as they discuss crop yields in the Philippines, or how difficult it is to find your way around Kyoto if you don't speak Japanese. These people are impatient experts, with their own technocratic and economistic view of the world, and I wonder what the final balance sheet will say about their role in the third world.

São Luis de Maranhao is the capital of another north-eastern state, Maranhao. It is a somewhat sleepy former French town, now home to 600,000. Of São Luis it is said, "If you go to sleep here, you wake up a poet." To me it was the least poetic of cities.

We went to see a housing project built by the National Housing Bank. Cidade Operario (City of Workers) is an estate of 7500 houses, row upon row, built five years ago but all still empty, and now in varying states of disrepair from vandalism and neglect. The reason the houses remain empty is that they are still not connected to water and sewerage. Once the houses themselves had been built the money that was to be used for water and sewerage was diverted into providing a new water headworks facility for the city. There is still no money for repairs or for the infrastructure connections, but now the estate had become a political football in the context of the coming elections. It was said that the politicians who won seats in this area would find the money to fix the houses and distribute them among their supporters.

These houses were built for the very lowest income people in the town, those living now in favelas. Some have simply one room, with a separate small toilet and shower, and a laundry tub outside. The largest have four rooms, all very small. Purchasers of these houses expect to improve them themselves, building external walls and fences, then adding more rooms as and when funds permit. When it's occupied, the estate will be home to about 50,000 people; a small city. Its social facilities are minimal: a creche, community centre, supermarket and schools. But the waiting list for such housing is three times as long as the space available.

This is public housing, but the houses are sold via loans which are repaid over twenty-five years. Looking down the empty streets at the weed-covered tiny plots and identical white boxes as far as the eye could see, more subversive thoughts occur. Could it be that established favelas, once upgraded with running water, sewerage and power, are a better solution to the housing crisis than these pathetic imitations of the large housing estates of the developed world, which themselves are plagued by social problems?

A partial answer to this question was suggested by a visit to a small fishing village, Praia Raposa, twenty kilometres or so from São Louis. Officers from the Housing Bank had been to the village and asked the fishermen whether they would like some government housing. As one, the village said "No", emphatically. They build their own housing, on stilts over the mud flats, of mud, slab and straw construction. The men fish, make their own nets, build their own boats: the women and children do lacework. The village is run as a cooperative. Its beach is one of the most beautiful you could wish to see. Open-sided huts front onto the beach, the equivalent of the corner pub, selling drinks and providing billiard tables, and playing music – of course.

There seemed to be just about enough work going on for the village to reproduce itself, and no more. Here, more than anywhere else, I wished I could speak the language so that I could ask whether these people thought they had arrived at the good society, or whether they secretly aspired to the life of the big city. One day I'll go back and find out.

Belém was a temptress, beckoning us into the Amazon whose mouth she guarded. Belém, capital of Para, almost on the equator, a sagging old lady without a

future. The future has moved into the Amazon region and the port city of Manaus, a thousand miles up the river, had been favored over Belém as a focus for new development.

So old Belém decays. But, like the rain, the locals don't seem to notice it. Every afternoon there is a tropical downpour, yet nobody bothers with umbrellas or raincoats. It is said that in Belém people walk between the raindrops.

The old town spreads in a grid around the port, and at dockside is the most exotic open-air market in the world. Alongside fruit and vegetables are clothes stalls, local ceramics, love-birds in cages and handicrafts. The smells of herbs and home cooking mix with the smells of piss and rotting fruits. A large area under tarpaulin is an outdoor cafeteria of hundreds of small stalls where women cook fresh fish for you and cover it with their spicy sauces: pots of rice are bubbling, pasta dishes, puddings. People sit on stools and eat, drinking beer, and always talking.

In another section all the herbs and herbal medicine under the sun give off exotic smells and invite fantasies. Shrivelled-up old men point to shrivelled up snakes in jars, and tell you that this is the cure for an ailing heart, or was it liver? Further on, the fish market is all a-bustle. Customers with plastic bags at the ready choose their fish and ask for it to be cut into steaks. Large butcher's knives slice through flesh and bone, lopping the head, and the fish steaks are wrapped in large palm leaves and thrown into the plastic carrying bags.

Outside the fish markets large black vultures hang about on roof tops waiting for scraps. There's something ominous about these ugly creatures. They seem to be attending a funeral: the funeral of the old town? Waiting for the corpse to rot? Almost a million people live here, in newer suburbs beyond the old town, but I have no sense of what their children have to look forward to.

If Brazil has anything to look forward to, it is symbolised by Brasilia, capital since 1960, instant city, planned and built in a few years thanks to the vision of their President Juscelino Kubitschek. When Brazil became a Republic in 1891 the intention of shifting the capital from Rio to the interior was written into the first constitution. The idea was to shift the nation's focus away from the coastal cities and their European orientation to the interior, where the future was thought to be. In the 1890s that was a utopian vision. There were no means to carry it out. By the 1950s it was possible, given the political will.

Kubitschek was a charismatic leader able to generate a faith in the ability of Brazilians to change their circumstances. The *idea* of Brasilia quickly assumed, and still carries, the burden associated with being "the capital of hope", as André Malraux once called it.

Nobody seems to love Brasilia today. (It's hard to fall in love with a city without sidewalks. It doesn't draw you into its secrets.) But people keep flocking to it, despite all the accounts of it as cold, sterile, antiseptic, boring. So what is the attraction?

Brasilia has that unmistakable feel of the too-well-planned city. All is order and design. Nothing is left to chance. Each urban activity is allotted a particular sector, or zone. There's no disorderly mixing of these, such as occurs in the unplanned or semi-regulated market cities. And no unsightly street stalls, billboards, or neons.

All of this combines to produce a city as unlike any other Brazilian city as one could imagine. These others bustle with life, with their small bars, street stalls, open air markets, and people everywhere, walking, talking, shopping, laughing, cuddling. And always, music, emanating from shop fronts and houses.

But in Brasilia, if you want a bar, you drive to the neighborhood shopping centre. Chance encounters on streets, leading to gossip and conviviality, are excluded from the plan for life here. Movement between the different sectors (residential, banking, shopping, governing and so on) is strictly on wheels. Walking is impossible. Roads as wide as the Amazon River flow between these zones with no provision for crossings.

The criticisms of Brasilia will be familiar to those who have taken an interest in Canberra's development. It is a city without charm, without soul, without character. It's a city of monuments and monumentality. It lacks intimacy, mystery. That much planning is contrary to human nature, which likes a little chaos, disorder, unpredictability. And so on.

Many of these criticisms are fair enough, and some can be attributed to the failings of a too-well-planned city. But others have more to do with youth and age. A new city, by definition, has no history, no roots; only pioneers and promises. But the fact remains – people are still going there, and not just for the material incentives.

Planned cities have their problems. But they have advantages too, from the sheer level and quality of urban services to the ease of daily travel and the effortlessness of getting out into the countryside. And Brasilia has an extra attraction in the quality of the architecture, most of which is the work of Oscar Niemeyer. Whatever I might think of the town plan, the public buildings that adorn it are enough to restore my faith in modern architecture.

From the light and grace of the cathedral to the boldness and daring of the Congress, Senate and Pantheon; the beauty, internal and external, of the Foreign Ministry; the imposing weight and strength of the memorial to Kubitschek; even the soft green and glass uniformity of the twenty or so Ministries lined up like soldiers along the Esplanada dos Ministerios: residents of Brasilia live amid a feast of architectural delights.

The city has played an important role in national economic development. Before Brasilia existed, Brazil was like a crab living on the edge of the ocean, and looking outwards to Europe. The building of Brasilia, and of the whole new interior road system fanning out from it to old and new regions, shifted the focus from the coast, opening up new frontiers – Amazonia, Rondonia, Acre, Para, Matto Grosso – and connecting them with the rest of the country. The cost may have been great. But it's not possible to change the direction of national economic development without paying some price. The future of the country lies partly in the agricultural and mineral developments that the interior can yield, and the Brasilia project was the beginning of this new thrust.

Of equal importance is the fact that, despite all the criticisms and all the jokes at the expense of the city, it remains the symbol of hope, the symbol of the future of Brazil, that Kubitschek wanted it to be. The fact that it was built, and built so quickly, and functions as the national capital and draws international admiration – at least for its architecture – gives Brazilians a pride and a faith that they can transform their country.

And that, today, is especially important, as the new and fragile democratic government struggles to produce a new constitution and an economic policy that will pull the country out of crisis and move towards a fairer society.

It is hard to imagine Brazil today without Brasilia and without the related opening of the interior. Without Brasilia, Saõ Paolo might have 15 million people to worry about rather than its present 11 or 12 million. Rio would most likely have 12 million rather than the 8 or 9 million presently crammed into the greater metropolitan area. If that were the case, then all the problems of the favelas of Brasilia, and the underdevelopment of its satellite towns, would be writ much larger in those older cities.

So a cost-benefit analysis of Brasilia is impossible. It is not just a new city but an *idée force*. Its existence has changed the pattern of Brazilian development, and I can't help but feel that change is for the better.

If democracy is "the right to perplexity" (as the Vice Chancellor of the University of Brasilia was arguing, at the conference which I was attending), the right to be unsure what path to take, then newly democratic Brazil is certainly perplexed about where it is going and how to get there. These are exciting times in Brazil, but forging a new future takes vision and courage if it is to be a civilisation project rather than just a development project. The existence of Brasilia offers hope that great dreams can be realised.

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ETIQUETTE

Etiquette, a perfumed screen between
The front room and the jungle.
Eti-Ket, an idol at the door that sighs
And rolls its eyes at brown shoes.
Etiket, a liqueur for the insecure
Distilled by compromise to taste of knives.

D.R. NICHOLSON

CALL FROM A TELEPHONE BOX

I suppose it was so close in there,
the droplets of voice steaming up the four glass walls,
having rung their mothers-respective in Perth
& Brisbane, so excited & the receiver knotted up
in its short vandal cord, it seemed only moments
before clothes below the waist boiled loose
& they had slipped into the old public/pubic rhythm
seen all around the coast at this time of night
& I suppose it was bare buttocks against moist glass
that bought her on, bought her to the door, her knuckles
rapping the glass sharply & demanding her turn
at the mouthpiece, the rewards of a patient queue,
& I suppose it was a sense of shock at not being listened to
at all & told to fuck off & the realization that
there might have been someone on the end of their call
who had accepted reverse-charges & become a
participant,
a fourth party, & I suppose it was not unexpected of her
to seek the uniform & press charges & cause these two
honeymooners from Tasmania living it up in the Garden
City
to appear before the court & swear before a rakish wig that
until that night they had been devout virgins & merely
acting on instructions from home . . .

TERRY HARRINGTON

LETTER

She walks into the kitchen
with a letter.
It's from you,
she says.
What does it say,
he asks,
slicing a tomato.

Why write me a letter
while we're living together,
she asks.
I had some things
I had to tell you
& they seemed better on paper.

She tears the envelope.
There's nothing in here,
she says.

Maybe I didn't have
anything to say,
he says,
biting into a sandwich.

MYRON LYSENKO

ON THE DEATH OF MURIEL RUYKEYSER

Old Sister Death bit you off
maybe dreaming of my backdoor;
I'd sent you a letter explaining it all:
(living in ancient Aboriginal land
at the foot of big dinosaur hill); I said,
drop in and see . . . and you said
maybe I will . . .

But as Annie says,
all's got teeth:
cups and card tables,
drawers and feet.
In New York, death might be
fifty stories high;
a railing that gives way
too easily; the last beat
of a dry martini.

I don't know how it came to you —
not that poetic, certainly.
More likely dead in a dirty brasserie
or impatient with the speech in a pen
after the heat leaked out.
The news I got was impersonal, the cost
of Time magazine:

66, poet of social protest,
Heart attack;
proselyte of the dissident muse
(not Sappho, Sacco) —
the message more important
than the way it's read.
But

if I could reach you now
past solemnity, past Death,
past fame, we might laugh
at that last grim joke:
pointing to the dinosaur hills
you never visited,
your thick, woman voice gesturing:

"Those mountains waited two billion years
for me to born, and
before I could see them
I was dead."

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

POEM ON TAKING UP HOARDING

Peter & Jane next door are a fund
of useful information. When we came,

the street was noisy, filthy, and it stank
from the NB Love Mills, traffic, rotting foodscraps

one dead cat & a bunch of stiff birds lying
on the pavement. Brothels, boozers, unemployment

help to keep the residential tone despite the factories,
smash-repair shops, chemical dumps & depots, railway
yards

and deserted cars that all help to imply
that there's something that North Melbourne lacks.

Color came early when two doors down
a lady was bashed and raped (her assailant just kicked

in the door: was he born in a tent?). Luckily,
we found out that he came from Kew, so at least

there was honor among the inhabitants: no one here
admits they use the brothels & the strangers just assume

that we'll all take it lying-down.
Then there was the amusing scene where Peter's car

was shifted round the back to try to keep it clean
for a few days longer in between each wash,

and the front side windows all got smashed.
Luckily it was someone else (South Yarra; they can afford

the discotheque at the corner pub); and the Chinese guys
out back across the lane take a heavy club when they
open

their door. Squatters moved in when a factory went up
next to the Chinese place

and a few doors up, when the house was busted,
invaders only ripped up every photograph in sight

of the girl's dead mum and her family snaps; amazingly
nothing was taken (unlike next-door to Peter's where

the TV went). With another row of brothels on the go
with an opening special, Carol two doors down is a bit

annoyed; who but a flash suburban would have flogged
her
Mercedes-Benz? I've begun to take a whole new interest

lately in collecting bayonets.

MICHAEL SHARKEY

THE DEAF

Just watch a group of them
crossing the road like geese,
chopping the air and honking
in obviously animal discourse.

They pollute the public transport,
disgusting everyone with their silence
and threatening with frantic gestures.
What can they be saying about us?

They smile far too much
and we shall not stand it.

The deaf will have no say in it:
we shall require the deaf to speak.

JOHN PHILIP

IN THE ONE TV VILLAGE

At the convention Mr and Mrs Big arrive
with an all too obvious love of the crowd.
It's Current Affairs;
Maria turns over to "Perfect Match".
She loves the way the big pimp compere
squeezes the fruits of youth
gambling on voices without faces.
After the field trek the regional auditor
surveys the mud surround
sticking to your feet like
all hard work. So much to have paid off
this one TV village, when totem-breakers
borne of jet plane take refuge here.
I carry tissues through a watery ghetto,
a knife and a wallet filed with
Abraham Lincoln's picture and the eye of God
shining in a pyramid. Some say that's
a perfect match. Older and wiser
the village go-betweens stick to their old drug
poker, leaving Maria with the state's sole channel
and three possible lovers.

ADAM AITKEN

PHOTOGRAPH

The Renault stacked
and ready to run
after the one

spring visit home —
and you're just about set
to flick the key

when the future floats up
and into the screen
rubbed clairvoyant

all through breakfast
by a father who's seen you
scattered in dreams.

Kissing you once
or gravely shaking
they are eyeing the tyres

(you pale hair,
translucent skin)
when suddenly

you grab the camera.
The photograph
declares itself:

two parents with a
passing grandson
stopped on a ground

of flowering plum,
frame for a child
to dream in later.

You feel like film stock,
tentative, ready,
emulsions all set

to handle the light
and three still faces
in loosening flowers.

You twist for focus . . .
aperture . . . speed . . .
"Don't take us,"

your mother says.
"We're only a pair of
old death's heads."

GEOFF PAGE

"A WORK OF ART"

After the drawing "A Work of Art" by William Delafield Cook, in the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.

Why yes, it is a matter for tears, Miranda,
the bird in a glass bowl cowering under
a gesture, and the magus daring us all
with his fine sharpness and ravening talent —
but do be reasonable. This is a work of art.
Look, the critics are discussing it already,
the imprisonment will be forgotten soon;
besides, Father would like us to be proud . . .
Come, sister, stand by me at the window,
use the night framed with such effect — the moon,
the clouds racing to their destruction, no
other habitation near. Consider
and calm yourself, before you face the crowded
gallery for whom this work was done.

DANIEL NEUMANN

ERGONOMICS

Years ago,
when I was working at the factory
so we could spend our nights
in more exotic locations,
I left you sleeping one morning,
left you sprawled in our tumultuous bed
with a brazen smile that was no more innocent
for being unconscious,
and one of those grave sighs
I found so unreasonably attractive.
At the door, chill frisson of a dream perhaps:
I kissed your lips, looked, left.
Clocked on, quite deaf to conversation,
I grasped my first airconditioner
with a compulsion that had little to do with
the bourgeois whose home it would cool
through long blameless summers.
For I was thinking of you,
all the time thinking of you,
lazy and sensuous, stirring only
to nestle in the hollow I had made:
my Victory, my noblest of savages!
though how you would baulk
at the sentimentality, and the pronoun.
Thinking of you so raptly, so exclusively,
that before I knew it the whistle had sounded,
the last ghostly frigidaire lumbered to a halt
and my fellow workers were saying goodnight
with prurient smiles on their faces.
My disbelief. Eight hours' labor
in a single remembrance.
What ecstasies of productivity!
For all the time thinking of you.

PETER ROSE

DISPUTE AT SUNRISE

It is enough, this world, more than enough:
plum blossom shivering along a branch,
the sun still hanging from the lemon tree,

the garden laced with frost. Dig for an hour,
you'll find Athens beneath Jerusalem —
the day begins without a push from God.

Clouds gather in the afternoon, rain falls
in detail and at large, as is its way;
the sour winds of summer begin to stir

though far from here: in cities wild with heat
cicadas shake maracas through the night
and make the sleepless sprawl beneath their sheets

or walk in moonlight close as a lover's breath.
There are old mirrors fattening all day
on things that come and go, but midnight proves

the clock's hands are scissors in slow motion,
the spider will be trapped in its own web.
Pushed to one side, the mind becomes extreme

and cultivates a glasshouse world. Strange things
breed in the margins of your prayer books:
tall knights afraid of snails, a grunting bull

that milks a naked woman, monkeys dressed
in doctors' coats with glinting knives in paws —
Birds spoil the unripe fruit, and darkness finds

its foothold in the shadow of a child;
it is enough, this world, but even now
the lemon tree is hanging from the sun.

KEVIN HART

JESSICA

I have no argument
with those who say
creation occurred
in one mighty act

just like that. I
am too absorbed
wondering
now you are born.

Who will you resemble?
What will you become?

FAYE DAVIS

THE MAP

The maps of death get better every day —
young draftsmen use a scale of one to one
with instruments that speed across the page.

So there's no need to hang around old graves
in black jeans, looking for a shady deal —
a simple map will tell you all you want.

You'll find a dozen in your corner shop.
I've heard it takes two trees to make each map,
upsetting the environment, they say,

but people barely wait until they're home,
unfolding sections on their lounge-room floor.
"Now where's the legend?" Father thinks aloud,

"Until we find the legend", he expands,
"we can't tell if it's right-side up or not".
It spreads into the kitchen, covers beds,

then flaps out on the mail-box and the lawn . . .
Its creases are as sharp as Father's shirt.
"Beats me", says Father, taking up his pipe

and rattling small change as he walks away.
"There's Uncle Harold!" Mother points, then goes
to make some coffee while the children stare

and play at generals, sticking in small flags.
"We'd best put it away now", Mother says,
"before Grandfather comes to see the kids."

But already they've forgotten how it folds;
they try this way, then that. The map is vast
and all the neighbors help, but it won't close.

KEVIN HART

THREE PASTORALS BY GWEN HARWOOD

REFLECTIONS

Two worlds meet in the mirror
of the quiet dam. The trees
lift stem and crown above
their own calm images.

Rest, in the heart's dry season,
where the green reeds stitch light
to light, where water levels
unendingly the bright

ripple of leaf or wind-breath;
inverts the bowl of sky
to a cup of deep enchantment,
as if some perfect eye

saw memory and substance
as one, and could restore
in depth, in flawless detail,
time as it was before.

Why does the body harbor
no memory of pain,
while a word, a name unspoken
in the mind cuts to the bone?

When time is turned to anguish,
lastborn of nature, rest,
where shade and water offer
solace to all who thirst.

AUTUMN RAIN

Chill rain; the end of autumn.
A day of sombre music:
a raindrop army drumming

to the plover's haunting cry.
Grief under a gold mask
perhaps? More likely, joy

at the delicate abundance
stirring in sodden paddocks
to nourish generations

of spurred grey wings. A day
for the householder to listen
in peace to his tanks filling,

or watch the mushrooms making
themselves from almost nothing
in their chosen place, a domed

city among the pines;
but to any eye beneath them
dark suns with rays extending.

A day to think of death,
perhaps, or of children's children
inheriting the earth.

WINTER AFTERNOON

A sun too mild to challenge
frost in the shady hollows
honours this afternoon
with light so sharp the gulls
a mile away flash silver.

Cold underfoot; how cold
the touch of air on hand
and face in lengthening shadows
by the dam's hoof-churned rim.
Explicit darkness stamps

and snorts. Two young bulls wheel
away, return and circle
like boys at play exploding
with aimless energy,
then stand stock-still, exhaling

a sour-sweet mash of grasses.
Clear light glosses their blackness:
taut flank, keel-curving breast,
bold eyeball, glistening muzzle,
plumed with the warmth of breath.

No word that makes us mortal
touches their strength, or glints
on their serene horizon:
this winter's day, this field
where earth has set their table.

MY FATHER'S GOLDEN SUMMERS

"Modern Art!" he said, echoing Ming's vision
of an Academy. "Heysen," he said, "Streeton."
This was his country, his father's and his
father's. He saw no art
in cracked European images — like
battlefields. Half the eyes he shared
died a world away from golden summer
and the cutting winter of the plains.
The next war fostered new eyes turned
from Europe towards continents which press
and lean on red and golden soil,
cut out the eyes for their own use.

The cream of his Australians, almost members
of the A.N.A., hang in order.
Spotlights, historical notes, delightful
till you see that all the charm and color
shrinks to airy dabbling in the shade
of icons round the door. Australian Natives
rooted in the plains, paint their living.

CONNIE BARBER

INDISCRETION

1
that i am writing this.

2
that you called me "outrageous"

3
we employ euphemisms
because we are afraid
of the truth

you can lean back into cushions
i have only wooden chairs

4
i don't answer when people
call me from a distance
i'd rather be spoken to
than shouted at

time is a fabrication
but it won't carpet cinemas

5
you fell into my life
like a cricket ball
hitting the stands

you're a fast bowler
& i can't hold a bat

6
like a laundress i smooth out
buckles & creases

the water is soft

7
that this is not the literal truth
we are too polite

8
i contemplate the past
like a faith healer
summoning ectoplasm

9
a green jumper makes itself irresistible
this is the price of pleasure

10
that i was enjoying myself
& not feeling guilty about it

11
that you're terrified of breasts
& i can count further than two

12
what's left is as much as there ever was.
& more. & less.

13
that i am writing this

JENNY BOULT

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

Bill Turner of the gallant Inprint magazine writes to say that, after ten years, Inprint will cease regular publication. "I find the editorial burden too great these days. I'm back full-time teaching and looking after my three kids." Starting at Bathurst in 1977, and originally aiming mainly at regional publication, Inprint soon began publishing stories from all over Australia and the Pacific, blending new and established writers, and helping to launch many such as Tim Winton and Brian Castro. The magazine made a special point of relating stories to other aspects of the writer's work: biographies, reviews, photographs. Many of the stories it printed have been anthologised. Circulation stabilised at about a thousand, but the magazine's influence was widespread. In all twenty-seven issues were published.

The last regular issue of Inprint is on the Western Australian short story, with contributions from Fay Zwicky, Julie Lewis, Peter Cowan, Elizabeth Jolley, Tom Hungerford, Peter Bibby and others. The editor of the issue is Brian Dibble, who argues that the West is "in the midst of a renaissance of creative writing, particularly in the fields of poetry and fiction." The West, of course, has long had perhaps the strongest literary of any Australian State, an identity now underpinned by the achievements of Ian Templeman's Fremantle Arts Centre Press, which, outside a couple of university presses, is almost the last wholly Australian publisher of any consequence. This issue of Inprint, together with back issues, is available at $5 from the magazine at PO Box 666, Broadway, Sydney 2007. Inprint will in the future publish the occasional anthology and collection.

On a bed of pain recently - well, actually a touch of bronchitis - I reached for Osbert Lancaster's splendid first volume of autobiography, *All Done from Memory*, as a pick-me-up. He talks of the absence of an 'intelligentsia' in his youth: "Hitherto, this amenity so long established on the continent had been lacking... Matthew Arnold, Browning, Millais were all indistinguishable in appearance and behaviour from the great army of Victorian clubmen, and took very good care that this should be so." In the 1890s, however, a faint Bohemia did emerge. Then - and I print this paragraph without further comment-

> By the time the 'twenties were half-way through the whole picture had completely changed. The immense increase in size and circulation of newspapers and magazines, the rapid development of the cinema industry, the coming of the B.B.C., the colossal expansion of advertising, and later, the establishment of such organisations as the British Council, had transformed the pocket *Vie de Bohème*,which flourished in the late 'nineties into a vast army of salaried culture-hounds, an army which recruited its main strength from the younger generation of the upper-middle-class.

I am preparing a new edition of *The Dictionary of Australian Quotations* for publication next year and would very much appreciate readers' favorite quotations, either *by* Australians or *about* Australia. I refuse to believe that each and every Overland reader does not have some of these up her or up his sleeve, and indeed some magnificent items have come in recently in response to earlier requests. One I was pleased to note myself the other day was a vintage Rupert Murdoch, the date 1967: "I think the important thing is that there be plenty of newspapers with plenty of people controlling them so there can be choice."

It was with this admirable sentiment in mind, a sentiment so clearly endorsed by the great Australian Labor Party, that I raise the matter of Social Alternatives, a 'little' though not a 'literary' magazine produced in Queensland which has become one of the few sources of genuinely alternative opinions and information in this country. Its coming issue, for instance, will include a major article on East Timor by Ross Fitzgerald, with photographs, which was accepted by the Times on Sunday and then rejected. The magazine, which has had a mailing subsidy withdrawn, is in danger. Subscriptions are $20 a year to the Department of Government,

University of Queensland, St Lucia, 4067, but I am sure that a letter of request, mentioning Overland, would bring a free specimen copy.

A recent issue of that admirable and always interesting little journal, Biblionews, put out by the Book Collectors' Society of Australia, has an article by the also admirable Lionel Gilbert on David Scott Mitchell. (Gilbert, of Armidale N.S.W., has written originally and with panache on topics as various as the influence of environment on history and the gravestones of Australia. His work, ranging across all sorts of disciplinary boundaries and always informed with a sense of personal discovery and involvement, should be better known.) Arising out of Gilbert's interest in gravestones, and with much trouble, he located the grave of Mitchell, the greatest benefactor in Australia's history to this country's knowledge of itself. (The Mitchell Library, of course.) Mitchell's grave turns out to be unmarked. Volunteers worked to refurbish the grave and raised a couple of hundred of the thousand dollars required to put matters in order. A request to the Bicentennial Authority for $800 to finish the work has been rejected. In the meantime the Authority promised $70,000 for a bronze equestrian statue of the bushranger Frederick Ward, a.k.a Thunderbolt.

Frank Huelin's story of the Depression, *Keep Moving*, is something of a classic, and was republished by Penguin a couple of years back. Frank lives at Bendigo, an active and respected member of the local branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. He came to Australia from the Channel Islands in 1928, was in the pre-war left-wing Writers' League in Melbourne with Alan Marshall and others, stowed away in an attempt to get to Spain during the Civil War, and spent the second world war on occupied Jersey where he worked in the underground against the Nazis. Both Frank and his wife Doris are around the eighty mark: he went blind overnight two years ago, but continues to write for the local press, while Doris has just had a cookbook published by the Bendigo Advertiser which has sold 5000 copies. And why do we print this? For a number of reasons, one of which is priority the Editor is giving to his new 'life begins at 65' campaign.

If I were able to establish a grand prize of some kind I think I should like it to be to commemorate the lives, while they are still living, of such as Frank and Doris Huelin. There would be plenty of candidates. People like Bert and Sue Vickers, of Perth - Bert died a year or so ago. Or the Albert Faceys of this world, though he fortunately lived to see his reward. People who often life in weatherboard houses on the pension and who perhaps have never seen a dishwasher but who have done more than bevies of bishops or swatches of scriptwriters to establish a moral order in our community. In a way, I suppose, this is what Patrick White's annual award sets out to do. At a time when purely literary prizes are coming under increasingly critical scrutiny (for attempting to compare unlike to unlike), this is at least one way to go.

COMPETITION

What's wrong with youse? We set up a splendid competition in Overland 104, on the transfer of the gods from Parnassus to Kosciusko, and *not one* of you was game to take it on.

Our new competition is set by Tim Thorne. Here it is. The current Prime Minister is not likely to emulate Sir Winston Churchill in winning the Nobel Prize for literature. Unlike Henry VIII, Mao Tse-tung and Pope John Paul II, he has not turned his hand to poetry. An extract, please, from the *Collected Verse* of R.J.L. Hawke. Entries by 30 May, prize a copy of either *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* or *The Dictionary of Australian Quotations* or, if you have both, an equivalent.

Which brings to me, in a way, to Mrs Olivia Jackson, of Churchill, Victoria, who wrote to Overland last November sending a subscription and reminding us that twenty years before she had been a subscriber but had lost touch with the magazine. Then she found a copy of issue 104 in the bookshop at the Gippsland Institute of Advance Education: "It was like meeting up with an old friend." Olivia Jackson asks if she may be allowed to "gate-crash" the discussions groups of us have been having on the future of the magazine:

> First, why did I stop subscribing to Overland? At the time I found it was becoming too 'highbrow' for my tastes, or perhaps I was becoming to 'lowbrow' for Overland. So why did I come back to it? I now find more stories, poetry and articles I can identify with. Or perhaps it is just that I have matured and having studied three English units in an Arts course I can understand the intellectual content better.
>
> My plea to an editorial board that contains a possible majority of university-educated people is to remember those who are not of the top ten per cent but still like a 'good read' and like to read something a little more thought-provoking than the usual collection of short stories. You have a very good mix, but just watch that the 'intelligentsia' doesn't take over too high a proportion of the magazine.

Mrs Jackson sums up for me a lot of what the magazine is supposed to be about, and puts her finger on much of the problem of 'balance' and 'mix'.

Comment

Gary McLennan and Lee Berningham (Q.) write:

We believe that John Docker has got Bakhtin's theory of carnival wrong. In his article in Overland 104, he used the concept of carnival to cover practically the whole of media and literary production and consumption in Australia. By contrast we would use the same concept to assert that the media/literary world is not upside down – far from it.

Space does not permit us to enlarge on this point, but what is really needed is a full critical examination of the origin and use of the concept of carnival in Bakhtin's work, before rushing in and labelling this or that element or piece "carnivalesque".

Briefly we felt that the concept of carnival should only be employed where there is a direct challenge to 'normal' social relations. Where society is sober, the carnival is drunk. Where society is proper, the carnival is scandalous. Where society hiccups, the carnival belches, and where society stirs uneasily, the carnival farts out loud.

Docker mentions "Sale of the Century" and "Dynasty" as being carnivalesque. That for us is simply ridiculous use of what is potentially a very radical concept.

"Sale of the Century" offers us bargains to console us for the scarcity of consumer goods. "Dynasty" offers us glamorous stars to console us for our own lack of glamor. Neither show in any way mounts a challenge to existing reality. A carnivalesque show would offer an alternative world by, among other things, ridiculing the existing world. There is never any suggestion of ridicule in "Sale of the Century" or "Dynasty" or the other media productions Docker mentions.

So where does the carnival exist? Well, Bakhtin argued that the culture that gave rise to the carnivals had faded and we were left only with "sparks from the great festive fire."

So where are the sparks? Well, for us the Gay Mardi Gras in Sydney is an example. Here for a time the norms and taboos that underpin the official culture are overthrown and the participants enter the realm of freedom. The grotesque nature of the costumes, the lavish splendor of the floats, the parodies of the straight world all represent a direct challenge to the official heterosexual world.

In a similar way on television, "The Young Ones" is carnivalesque in its celebration of crudeness, grossness and general mayhem.

We would argue then for restricting the use of 'carnival' to those works which are really oppositional. The alternative is to follow Docker into a make-believe world where everything on TV that is well-liked must be carnivalesque.

Again space does not allow us to elaborate, but Docker's central mistake is his complacent use of the term "carnival". In this he may, like other left-wing cultural critics, be reacting against earlier pessimism. But if pessimism is wrong, so indeed is it wrong to be complacent about a people who are hooked on "Dynasty" and "Sale of the Century". Nor should Bakhtin be dragged in to bolster the case.

Gabriel Crowley (Victoria) writes:

David Frost (Overland 104) maintains that the Church can spread its message most effectively by using the language of the day. But, as he wishes to preserve the poetry of the original texts, he objects to the rewriting of such verse as "wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" to remove the implication that white is purer than black, a concept offensive to "the Negro minority of the United States". He does not state what lines were substituted in his Psalm, but whether they had any poetic merit would depend only on the skill of the writer and the eye of the beholder. That they no longer contained the image of snow may be lamentable, but snow was merely the vessel not the essence of the piece.

Frost fears that removal of "so-called 'sexist' implications" from the Church's teachings and other publications will result in the language being burdened with ugly words. I agree that words like

''spokesperson'' can seem excessively militant, and are anyway largely ineffectual in altering sexist connotations in the language, as they are more frequently applied to females than to males. A further objection raised by Frost is that they enjoy minority usage and therefore should not be given currency by the Church. A simple solution to all these problems is that the language already contains suitable substitutes which do not draw attention to themselves. In most cases, ''chairman'' can be adequately replaced by ''convenor''; there is no need to use ''spokesperson'' when the word ''representative'' exists, and ''human race'' does not seem as contrived as ''humankind''.

Why should this change in language be necessary? One problem with the generic use of male terms is that it is often not possible to know when they are meant in their male sense and when in their generic sense. While it may be argued that the use of ''brethren'' is now limited to a generic level, ''man'', ''men'', ''he'', ''son'', ''brother'' and ''father'' are frequently used in the Scriptures in their male senses. Therefore, it seems likely that they will be more frequently interpreted as male terms. Thus, if Frost objects to minority usage of words, then surely he would be glad of the elimination of the minority generic usage of male terms, which is also ambiguous.

The ''so-called 'sexist' implications'' in the Scriptures are not imagined. God first created man and secondarily woman, to keep man company. God is seen in the male image; represented on earth by a male. These teachings, along with woman's tempting man to commit the Original Sin, have been used to justify the subservient status of women in the Church and as arguments against women becoming ministers. If these implications were intended, then would it not be reasonable for all references to ''man'', ''men'' and so on to be interpreted in their male sense? If not, then these examples illustrate the effect the use of generics can have on attitudes and behavior.

No-one has ever suggested that ''woman'' or ''wife'' can have generic meaning. Then what of the commandment: ''Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife''? In order to explain the sexist implications of the above examples, it is not necessary to invoke sinister intent by the Church to exclude women from its teachings. As Frost points out, the Church used the language of the day. But it also framed the language in the imagery of the culture of the day. This commandment was not written in such a way in order to condone the coveting of a neighbor's husband. The power structure of society already prevented this from occurring to any degree. Moreover, women did not hold positions of authority or earn wages that they could call their own. When crowds were counted, women and children were excluded (Matthew 15:38). The Church's imagery was couched in these terms. When Christ appointed ministers, they were, like other contemporary figures of authority, all men.

The position of women in society has changed since the writing of the Testaments. Women now vote, earn wages and make important decisions. The move to equality has begun. Not even in counts of football crowds are women and children excluded. Thus, if the Church wants to communicate its message equally to both sexes in this changing society, it would be well advised to alter its language and imagery to reflect present cultural patterns. To use a poetic example of non-sexist scriptures: ''Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation'' (Mark 16:15). To fail to do so will alienate increasing numbers of women, and the Church will have to accept the consequences in dwindling congregations.

''Blessed is the man who fears the Lord'' may be poetry to Frost, but it perpetuates the notion that women are spiritually inferior to men. As women have been long treated as inferior mortals, only a subtle suggestion, such as using ''man'' instead of ''person'' is needed to do this. Frost recognises the subtleties contained in language when he states that ''the man who fears God'' contains a sense of the individual's relationship with God in a way that ''those who fear the Lord'' cannot. Why then is it so difficult for him to appreciate that ''man'' does not contain a sense of ''woman''?

If the church alters its language to remove sexism, it would not be the first in our community to do so. The words of the present national anthem have been changed from ''Australia's sons'' to ''Australians all''. If nothing else, this is a positive gesture to say ''in case you are uncertain, we do want both men and women to be involved''. It is not adopting an elitist language.

Frost's complaint that demands for non-sexist, non-racist language come from a vocal minority is irrelevant. Anyone who enters into a public debate, as he has, is joining such a minority. Indeed, Bob Hawke dismissed 100,000 who took to the streets recently as a vocal minority. All religious ministers, not elected, are themselves a minority. This has no bearing on the validity of one's arguments. Does the fact that most women did not belong to the suffragette movement mean that voting rights for all women was elitist? It may be a minority who are calling for the abolition of sexist language, but this is precisely because of the effect that it has on the majority of women's aspirations and the majority of men's attitudes affecting their fruition.

In conclusion, the first concern of writers should be to identify the message they wish to convey, the second, to identify the desired audience, and the third, to determine the language and imagery which will communicate this message to the audience with credibility. In such a context, blind fidelity to any language style has no place, and sexist language will continue to alienate women.

MARTIN DUWELL

Both Sides of the Curtain

The Poetry of J.S. Harry

J.S. Harry: *A Dandelion for Van Gogh* (Island Press, $6.95).

A Dandelion for Van Gogh is the third book in a lengthy poetic career which still awaits adequate description. Most of the reviews of Harry's first book *The Deer Under the Skin* (UQP, 1971) greeted it favorably and tended to see it as being both 'committed' and lyrical, and thus more approachable than many of the first books appearing with such rapidity in the late sixties and early seventies. As a result of some vagueness about Harry's age it was generally treated as a young poet's work, and there is a touch of paternalism about the tone of some of the comments although, in fact, Harry was in her early thirties when the book was published. Reviews of her second book *Hold, for a Little While, and Turn Gently* (Island Press, 1979) generally have the kind of polite, provisional quality, that one expects for the work of new poets whom the reviewer feels unsure about.

She is not included in Rodney Hall's *The Collins Book of Australian Poetry* or for that matter in John Tranter's *The New Australian Poetry* or Robert Gray and Geoffrey Lehmann's *The Younger Australian Poets*, although these two books include poets of slighter achievement than Harry. It is hard to think of any other Australian poet of comparable stature who has received such bipartisan rejection.

The reason for this may be that Harry doesn't belong to any of the registered camps of Australian poetry. But the real answer is in the poetry itself, in the fact that, at least to most readers, it exhibits no observable consistency of voice or method. There is a variety of kinds of poems and this is not a result of a development from one style to another, since the mix is much the same in all three books. As a result it is difficult for readers to form any satisfactory impression of a poetic whole, a poetic career, and educating yourself to being able to read one Harry poem is no guarantee that you will make any sense of the next.

Three poems chosen more or less randomly from this new book will serve as a starting point in establishing how various this poetry is. The opening poem "Parts Of Speech As Parts Of A Country" consists of two sections "I As Desert" and "He/He tried", the second of which is delayed until later in the book. The two parts are variations of a macabre parable which seems to describe the breakthrough of the self into some kind of new mode: "I came beating my stone head / against the walls of my own construction". This breakthrough, although in some way foreseen and even desired, seems to demand the sacrifice of part of the self (one's ego? one's perceptual apparatus?) since, when the head breaks through the wall, it is immediately decapitated. The "I" of the poem does succeed, however, in

> planting one flag – here – for truth – and one –
> for the darker justice
> before the axe
>
> descended.
> (The order
> I founded
> known as Headless.)

The second part of the poem recreates the scene by changing the initial pronoun from "I" to "he", and then following through with subtle alterations that make the poem concern itself with the relationship between the sexes. Here the male figure, breaking through the walls "tradition / had built for the roles of the sexes" is beheaded by a female and plants "one flag – there – for her rights – and one – / for the darker instinct".

This poem shares at least one quality with a great many of Harry's poems: it is both specific and suggestive. The title suggests that one of its concerns is linguistic and that it is interested in the borderline between reality (language) and metaphor (landscape seen as a correlative). Perhaps one of the points the poem makes is that since English marks gender in third person singular pronouns but not first person pronouns, it is only the outside world, the world outside self and addressee, which is polarized into male and female.

Whatever the most satisfactory interpretation of "Parts Of Speech As Parts Of A Country" the mode of the poem is recognizable. There is a strong drive towards ambiguous parable in much of Harry's work and many poems are equally macabre. The title poem of the second book, "Hold, for a little while, and turn gently", for example, includes a character who conceives of style as a stiletto which will pinion idea to person. This metaphoric connection however becomes literal and the character is killed by the blade. The poem concludes in a mysterious and suggestive way:

It was then
we realised he had intended
for us to test
his idea, like this, on him,
from the beginning.
Hold, for a little while, and turn gently
the word-knife in your belly.

A world away from "Parts Of Speech As Parts Of A Country" is a poem like "temple viewing" though it is, in fact, the next poem in *A Dandelion for Van Gogh*:

respectfully
barefoot
mute as lovers
a pair of spotted turtle doves
enter the green silence

walking on round
brown wooden stones
sunk between
white pebbles

it is the japanese garden
to a japanese temple
the dwarf bamboos
sway in the wind
dipping
to the soft
chimes
of the windbells

& the doves
who are visitors
from india

nod & bow
at the ground as if
they were in accord

with both the customs
of the place
& matters invisible

This is, insofar as the word has any meaning at all, a true lyric poem. The careful use of line endings, the manipulation of sound, the weighting of co-ordination at a mere ampersand, are all designed to establish the kind of hushed atmosphere, suggestive of transcendence, which parallels the scene itself. Presumably, though it is not stated explicitly, the temple is a Buddhist one, and this is one reason why the doves from India, the birthplace of Buddhism, find themselves on familiar ground. There is also the suggestion that the doves behave with humility deriving from their knowledge of themselves as part of the natural world, and that it is the Japanese temple which, among human creations, has molded itself to that world with an equivalent humility.

Harry's three books contain many poems that one would want to consider 'lyric'. They are full of such lyric felicities as "Late a golden whistler / moves across the stillness / putting sound-pegs on his holding". Even within this large sub-group, however, there is a bewildering variety, and a poem such as "Walking, When the Lake of the Air is Blue with Spring" builds a composite picture out of a number of images of birds: honeyeaters, a pelican, a seagull and other water-birds. Framing these are visual images of earthboundness: "a dark chocolate fungus / soft as the nose of a deer" at the beginning and, at the poem's climax, a sudden and brilliant modulation into an auditory image:

A crowcoloured dog
gallops over the hill
while the voice of his colour
caws above him

Contrasted to this is a poem such as "the wanderer", which endeavors to enact reality by the careful attention to utterance, the quantity, quality and placement of syllables that one associates with the method of some practitioners of 'projective verse':

soft
ly dropping
onto twig

light as a blue wren's foot
it settles

sending
as a wren did
seconds earlier

the insects scuttling

This poem is spoiled by its ultimate lack of faith in the strategy of suggestion, for its conclusion baldly explains "so comes rain / to a lodge of leaves".

To conclude this brief survey of the variousness of Harry's poetry I want to introduce the mysterious and

challenging poem "This explains. . ." The language of the parables I've mentioned tends to be neutral, though full of syntactic dislocations. The language of the lyrics tends to have that marked-out, rinsed-clean ability that the lyric has always used to suggest that there is a register in which language can be brought close to the natural world. The language of "This explains. . ." however, is a parody of an insanely bureaucratic, pseudo-analytical approach to the task of contrasting chimneys and ferries:

> The difference
> between a chimney & a ferry
> is that one carries an insubstantial
> 'substance'
> in a vertical direction without moving
> upward
> & the other carries solids
> in a horizontal direction by its own
> movement

and so on, carefully pursuing the contrast through subtle and pointless distinctions:

> likewise if an
> empty dragon were to bite a chimney & side-suck
> the smoke, for his own, personal use,
> this would be movement of smoke in a
> horizontal direction, unnatural, & outside
>
> the scope of this enquiry

In the face of such demonstrable variousness, commonsense as well as established critical practice sends one searching for unity. One avenue of approach is to investigate the ideas about poetry which are present within the poems themselves. A result of this would be to uncover a large number of references to Egyptian culture and an emphasis on the immanence of meaning within the pictograms and ideograms of hieroglyphic writing. This suggests that Egypt may have the sort of significance to Harry that Mayan Culture and Chinese ideograms had to Charles Olson and Pound respectively, as examples of cultures which work on different polarities to our own and where such crucial Western divisions as those between a word and its written appearance, and between art and thought, are cavalierly dismissed. As a result there are plenty of references to the physical power of a word, the kind of power it retains in a pre-literate or newly literate society. At the same time there is a lot of emphasis throughout the three books on the proposition that a word derives its meaning only from the way it is used, and the relation between these propositions is chewed over in a long early poem called "parts towards a meaning."

Another clue can be found on the cover of Harry's first book, where she is quoted as saying that she writes "with the hope that there should be room in each poem for the imagination of the reader to work in." This suggests an interest in the strategy of withholding meaning not only from the poem (which can result in an annoying, teasing quality) but perhaps also from the poet's experience of the poem. There is no doubt that this strategy can be found in all the types of poems I have mentioned so far: the parables have an ambiguous quality, and the lyrics remain open-ended and suggestive.

Another way of discovering the unity behind work such as Harry's is to search for a coherent, psychic motivating force which will manifest itself in the kind of variety which appears on the surface. This approach is difficult, because it runs the risk of the fallacy of searching for the poet's 'true' self speaking in its true register. However it is one of the great achievements of a review by James Tulip of *The Deer Under the Skin* that it establishes that the search for a unifying principle is the crucial issue with Harry's poetry. This was said at a time when it must have been tempting for reviewers to ascribe the variety to an adolescent lack of poetic certainty, a lack of an achieved poetic voice. Tulip sees the answer as lying in the poet's psyche and its stance towards reality:

> It is of a life lived, and poems written, reflexively i.e., coming back and away from things, not trying to know and possess and love them. The ego has been placed. Knowledge does *not* equal power in the mind of Jan Harry. It is more a kind of drama, of being a thing among other things – slight, happy, fey, vulnerable. . . If Jan Harry's stance inside her own psyche can be grapsed, her movement outside into role-playing the satirist, the religious, the humorist and storyteller – the list is a long one – will also explain themselves.

Since the details are not filled out here, it is hard to pass judgement on how accurate a diagnosis this is, although it certainly represents a fruitful approach to understanding the variety in Harry's work. What I want to do in the rest of this review is look for consistent features at the humbler level of images and themes.

It is remarkable, for example, how often the most disparate poems revolve around the image of strata and the relationship between them. This image takes different forms in different kinds of poems. In the lyric poems, for example, it often appears as actual surfaces especially of earth-to-air, water-to-air and body-to-world, while in other modes of poems it appears as conceptual polarities: for example where fact meets fiction or where life meets death.

To look at the lyric poems first, it is notable that Harry's poetry is populated by small flowering plants

which tether air to earth, and by waterbirds which mediate between water and air. The first poem of Harry's first book "the what o'clock" establishes the importance of this image:

A puff-ball
on a slim green stem
is more attached
to earth than I.

The wind will tear
its seeds away –
perhaps they'll root –
Words root. My words? Mine?

Living all in your head
is a kind of thistle-madness,
anyway, but close, grass is,
birds are –; the people
outside
seldom sing
.....
How?
Grown from a thin green shoot
with a root in earth
to this airy death?

Even as a child
I could feel for days on end
the isolating air, cool and strange,
around my head.

Here the plant seems to symbolize both poet and poetry, connecting perhaps poet and audience or self and outside world. The same image provides the title for the third book, and is to be found at the end of a fine poem "wind painting", where the corrupt fertility of manure produces a minor natural miracle:

Here is one fat gold
dandelion for van gogh
tethered by its own sap
in the black damp shade
by the clump of horseshit

The symbolic resonance of both these images is suggested by the gloss on the word "dandelion" which is included before the book's title page. It includes, among various definitions of "dandelion", the information that "the leaves, stalk and root contain a bitter milky juice", that is, the bitter milky juice of poetry which bridges opposed elements. In the parable poem "Hold, for a little while, and turn gently" poetry is a knife but, like the small plant, it unites, in this case body to idea. Another example of this image, though one in which daisies replace dandelions and grasshoppers replace seeds, is the one that concludes the poem "under the rim".

below
on the valley floor
above last night's
rainfresh green grass, late
mountain summer's yellow daisyflowers,
green and yellow grasshoppers
rose upwards by wing
flowers moving dreamlike
from their stalks

Not all examples of mediation between levels found in the lyrics are symbolized comments on poetry. There is also a large cast of water-birds inhabiting Harry's poetry, including the jacana or Christbird, which is the subject of a long poem and which actually walks on water. There are also plenty of pelicans. In one poem, "standing in front of a woman artist's portrait of a pelican", the bird's role as a bridge is made quite explicit:

on the lake
the pelican
stands on a black sodden log
half of which is anchored on the bottom
half of which is balanced on the top
the pelican stands like a balance on
your mind halfway
between life and art
. . . . . .
its beak is working hard
bringing something down or up

Here, fittingly for a poem addressing itself not to a 'real' pelican but to a painting of one, the levels are allegorised into art and life. In an earlier poem "Backward Over Dark Water" a boy lowers a fishing line from a bridge in pursuit of a golden fish. In the water are the ideal fish, uncaught. A fish in the air would, of necessity be killed by the act of transference from one level to another.

The words do not pulse – fat & gold – in his hand
that would tell how uncaught fish may last

how an uncaught fish may gleam...

While the boy
holds a hand
to a line of dream
uncaught fishes will follow him always

The two levels here represent real and ideal; the meditation between them is the task of the line (and, perhaps through the transformation of a pun, of the lines of poetry).

As I have said, the levels in other poems are often binary conceptual distinctions; the role of such opposi-

tions in Harry's poetry is worth looking at carefully. A number of poems establish two opposed possibilities and, at the point where lesser poems might triumphantly declare their preference, suddenly concern themselves with the interaction between them. The early poem "the little grenade" is puzzling, for example, because it dissappoints our expectation that we will be directed overtly or covertly to the preferred alternative. It involves two opposed kinds of poetry:

> The little grenade
> wanted poems that explodexplored
> or pushed candles
> inside the pumpkin people
> to make flames sputter and drip
> where their darkness bulged.

In other words a poetry which performs actively, illuminating phenomena by interacting with them. In contrast the second kind of poetry is receptive.

> The he that was a friend of the little grenade
> liked poems that sat fatly in the middle of
> stillness
> waving their feelers.
> . . .They had the kind of stillness
> that goes to museums on sunflecked
> Saturdays

At this point the reader is anxious for authorial direction as to which is to be the approved mode but it doesn't arrive. The author of the receptive poems thinks:

> there will be room for explodexplore and
> stillness
> in one of the corners.

This suggests either pluralism or at last accommodation, and the poem concludes:

> He *liked* Everything - he wanted
> to get into it -
> he felt the bounce of a poem in his palm,
> coiled himself around, and like his friend
> the shattered little grenade,
> he knew himself

suggesting, if I'm not misreading it, that reality is neither inconceivable nor simple but, rather, immeasurably vast. The ultimate (and fitting) result of either active or receptive approach is immolation.

A major poem in *A Dandelion for Van Gogh*, "Socio-Realist Fiction / Moves Amongst The Facts / Or The Fiction Versus The Facts", concerns itself not only with the conventional opposition of fact and fiction but also with the oppositions of life/text and writer/reader. It is a complex poem full of telling effects and it also includes some effectively used puns. The word 'act', for example, is used to include the act of a play, 'real life' acts, and the legislative processes of Nazi Germany. Its complexity is proof against simple thematic description, but even a cursory reading makes clear how concerned the poem is with the process by which one of a pair of opposites becomes the other:

> (Had you said a hitler-fact changed 6 million
> jewish people-facts
> into imagined realities (fictions)
> it would have made no difference to them)

or:

> The point of a book's end is a reader's chance to recognize his own life as fiction before it becomes: fact:

The conclusion of the poem is not straightforward but it includes a telling pun which emphasises the function of poetry as mediation:

> It is fiction that art good brave bold or
> indifferent
> is able to comfort them
> Great art like the wall of china & built up
> of bodies
> It is purely to comfort the living
> Perhaps to forgive them
>
> Our art is medium
> We will allow none of it No forgiveness

A look at a poem such as this gives us some clues to the mysterious "This explains. . ." The manic voice of this poem is concerned to polarize ferries and chimneys and, although this can be done more or less convincingly, it is pointless. The aim of the enquiry is to unite ferries and chimneys in some useful task, and my initial reading of the poem was that the sinister connection between the two was the task of ferrying human cargoes to gas chambers and ovens. The references to the genocide of the Jews in "Socio-Realist Fiction. . ." removes this interpretation from the realm of the entirely fanciful, and the poem's intriguing conclusion lends some support also:

> You say this explanation does not fit your
> problem's appetite. . .
> If *only* you had told us sooner -
> . . . . .
> we could have projected
> an entirely different set of developments,
> specifically
> designed to locate
> 'ideally suitable stocks'

of consenting human heads
.....
see item 21 para. 28 under 'self-destruct'
The Acts of the Mind as a Fascist State

Here are our heads

The frequency with which this flexible and powerful motif appears is one of the unifying features in a poetry that at first puzzles us by its variety. Perhaps it's fitting that one of Harry's best poems about surfaces, about the borders between reader and writer, life and text, self and world, meaning and language, should be a statement of poetics with the suggestive and punning title "their common":

as stones go into water
as grass goes into ground
the words containing
stones and grass
go into you
and sink
are gone
and round or green
as pebble or blade
the words in you
go rolling on
a changing ground
and you move on
as the stones and grass
beneath your feet
as stones fall into water
as grass grows out of ground
the words containing
stones and grass
grow out of you
and you are gone

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JIRI TIBOR NOVAK

JAMES McQUEEN

Choke and Scatter

It's still daylight when we pull the Toyota off the red dirt of the road and onto the rough track that leads to the waterhole. We park by a bottle tree under a steep bluff at the western edge of the clearing. In the shadow of the cliff it's already starting to cool off. Even in the tropics it gets cold at night, up on the tablelands. By the time the shadows have reached the edge of the pool we have our camp set up, food cooking, and Michael has a line in the water. You never know. After we've eaten we sit by the fire talking, listening to the small sounds that come with twilight in the bush. Suddenly, it's almost dark. It's then that we hear the sound of the approaching engine. Very faint at first, then growing quickly louder, a harsh blatting roar. Not a car or a truck...

It's a bike, a Harley Sportster by the look of it, and it turns onto the track, slides to a halt fifty yards away. We look at the rider. A bikie, a genuine lone bikie. Filthy denims, beard, scuffed leathers with indistinguishable club markings...

He looks at us once as he parks his bike near the bluff. Then he ignores us. He rakes wood together, builds a small fire, huddles over it munching cold food from his panniers, a lonely and desolate figure in the fading light. But he doesn't look sociable, so we leave him alone. And when we climb into the Landcruiser to sleep we take all our small portables with us.

In the morning I wake first and climb shivering out of the van. It's very cold, there's frost on the ground. I look over towards the bikie's dead fire. He's got a piece of old tarpaulin stretched over the bike, weighted with stones, and he's huddled under it.

I light the fire, fill the billy, make tea. When it's ready I hand a mug in to Michael. I sip at my own, standing looking eastward into the flat cold sunlight. Shiver. I pour another mug of tea and walk across to the motor bike. I bend down and look under one end of the tarpaulin. The bikie is curled on the ground, rolled in an old blanket. I can see only one hand, and it looks a bit blue under the grime.

"Here..." I push the steaming mug in under the

frost-stiffened canvas. An eye appears, a fierce red thing that glares out from a tangle of greasy hair. The hand reaches for the mug.

"Thanks..." Muffled and surly, from the depths.

Michael is out of his sleeping bag by this time, and we are both watching as the bikie crawls out of his shelter. First he hawks, then pees copiously. Then he folds his tarpaulin and packs it away. He goes to the waterhole and washes – not himself, but the mug. I hadn't really expected that. Then he heads our way.

As he approaches I can see his eyes flicking over our gear... the radios, the sleeping bags, the clothes, the food, the promise of all kinds of goodies packed away inside the Toyota. He gives us a quick look, drops the mug beside the fire.

"Ta..."

And he's gone again, tramping back to the bike, matted head down, shoulders hunched.

We expect him to kick the bike over, move, leave. But he doesn't. He gets out a rag and wipes his bike over very carefully. As the red dust comes away the machine begins to gleam in brilliant chrome and metallic blue. Finished, he sits down beside the bike, rolls a smoke. Now and then he flicks a quick glance at us.

It's getting warmer now and I start to think of moving. It's a long day's drive to the next stop. I'm lighting a last cigarette when Michael nudges me, grinning.

"Look..."

I look over towards the bikie again. He's unpacked one of his panniers and he's fitting a shotgun together. It's battered and rusty, an old double-barrel, neglected but lethal enough. And we're far enough off the beaten track...

Michael is still grinning.

"Demo?" I say.

Michael nods happily, his grin wider.

He gets to his feet, reaches inside the Landcruiser, pulls his gun out of its sheepskin case. It's really something, that gun. His father had it made in London, years ago, and when he died Michael inherited it. Michael stands there for a moment, out of sight of the bikie, just feeling it, hefting it in his hands.

It's a shotgun, a twelve-bore double. Well, that doesn't tell you much, of course. There are some special things about it. For a start it's got thirty-inch barrels, side locks, a beautiful walnut stock. And it's chambered for three-inch magnum cartridges. The left barrel's fully choked, and at fifty yards you can put half your pellets in a two-foot circle. At twenty yards you can fell a small tree.

He stands away from the bus, where the bikie can see him, and breaks the gun. He slips in two of the Eley Magnums, number 6 shot in the right barrel, number 1 in the left, and cocks the hammers. Carefully. The trigger pull's very light, about two and a half pounds.

He nods to me. I pick up one of our plastic plates. I can see the bikie squatting there watching us carefully. I wink at Michael, and skim the plate high into the air, out over the waterhole, the red plastic bright as Christmas in the sun. He sights, leads off, squeezes off the scatter barrel. The plate jerks, spins away, collapses in tatters. He's never shot anything with that gun, no game or anything like that – it tends to pulverize anything at under fifty yards away – but he loves to use it, all the same, and I can understand that, it's such a beautiful piece of machinery.

We've got the bikie's full attention now. Michael looks round the clearing. By the edge of the waterhole, halfway between us and the bikie, an old rusted kerosene tin is sitting on the bank. Michael raises the gun again, slips his finger gently round the rear trigger, squeezes off the choke barrel. The whole tin just disappears, disintegrates, the pieces blown out of sight over the bank.

I look at the bikie. He's taking his old shotgun to pieces again, very slowly and carefully.

We pack up.

"You drive," says Michael. "I'll clean the gun."

We get in, start up, drive out past the bikie, who is still sitting beside his gleaming Harley. I wave, but he just stares stonily out over the waterhole.

Michael begins cleaning the gun. He is grinning as he works. I look sideways at him, start grinning too.

Suddenly there is a great shattering roar behind us and the Harley screams past, careers off into the distance, streaming clouds of red dust.

Michael starts to laugh. Soon I'm laughing too, we're both laughing so hard that I have to stop the bus.

And we're still laughing, sitting there roaring like a pair of idiots, long after the dust has settled and the chrome and glitter of the bike has been lost behind the first heat-shimmers of the day.

ALAN SEYMOUR

Laurence Collinson

Laurence Collinson died in London on 10 November 1986. He was associated with Overland from the magazine's founding in 1954, and remained its London representative until his death. Overland published two of his books, The Moods of Love *(1957) and* Who is Wheeling Grandma? *(1967), and we re-publish some of his poems following this tribute.*

Yesterday I went to Laurence Collinson's funeral. It was wonderful.

Laurie, although born in England (in Leeds), had no real family contacts here and the funeral arrangements – like all the arrangements during the last devastating year of his life – were handled by a few close friends. My mate Ron and I can't claim to have done much more than visit him a few times during the last months, taking attractive tidbits to smarten up his (supposedly strict) diet. The real hero was Micki Burbidge, an ecology specialist with Britain's Department of the Environment, and a friend of Laurie's since the early 1970s. Micki has been writing endless letters, to keep Laurie's many creditors at bay, and helping with the legal arrangements to do with his flat which had to be sold to comply with the court order. Laurie did not own the freehold and in using the flat for his Transactional Analysis lessons and counselling had violated, according to the landlady, his lease. He lost the subsequent court case and the costs, on top of his debts, have to be met from the sale of the lease. But all possible buyers have backed off as soon as they discovered some of the difficulties Laurie had encountered.

This is only one of the many bizarre elements in the last phases of Laurie's life.

Someone remarked to me a few weeks ago that he'd never found Laurie the "easiest" of friends. I felt a pleasant little shock – at realising that I was not the only one, after all, to have had such heretical thoughts. (I will not insult Laurie's sense of honesty by speaking only well of the dead.) Laurie had an alarming capacity for truth-telling, for candor whether it was welcome or not, and a somewhat lugubrious seriousness which often masked a sly and mordant sense of humor. His theoretical love of the human race was undermined by an abiding suspicion and scepticism, based on its never-ending capacity to let him down. Above all, his life seemed – to me – to move from a passionate, almost paranoiac, identification with one minority group, one cause, after another. I don't think Laurie ever felt or ever wanted to feel "a part of the main". His preferred position was that of the critical outsider. (The psychological origins of the stance do not need to be labored.) These traits made him, though admirable, at times difficult to deal with. We rarely had stand-up fights but often disagreed quite bitterly on principles so basic that there would seem to be no further room for manoeuvre within the friendship. Really, I am saying that Laurie had the discomforting capacity to make his friends feel bourgeois, ordinary, overcautious and timid – for not supporting, for not recognising the absolute necessity to support, his current cause. What were the causes? Communism, Gay Liberation, Transactional Analysis . . . and how many others along the way I am not sure.

The causes seemed to shape Laurie's life. It was not enough to be born into two minorities, Jewish and homosexual. In Brisbane during the Cold War of the 1950s he chose to be a Communist. (Whether he was a member of the ACP or not I've never known.) The experiences of this formative time presumably shaped his attitudes from then on. What most worried us was that Laurie's crusading spirit – expressed so generously and boldly in articles, letters public and private, discussions, speeches at meetings and so on – never seemed to mesh with his own personal style, his often sad pessimism, what Stephen Murray-Smith has called his "almost hangdog" attitude to life. I think that Laurie wanted to be – and to be recognised as – a good poet, a good writer. The 'causes' without doubt

did embody much of the essential man. Yet they seemed to filch time and energy from his legitimate artistic and career pursuits. More importantly, he seemed to be emotionally dependent on the cause, whatever at the moment it was, at the expense of a freestanding, independent, maturing personality. (Easy to be so lordly about other people's lives; the beam and the mote are in whose eye?)

Rightly or wrongly we bourgeois buddies looking on from the side felt that the traffic was all one-way, that he was pouring great energy into the cause but getting little back. Arrogant of us, of course. The cause is supposed to be its own reward. But when in the early 1970s Laurie came upon the wonders of Transactional Analysis, embraced it with fervor, qualified in it as a psycho-therapist and teacher and actually began to earn a living, what joy! At last he had found a passionately held belief which also enabled him economically to keep afloat. This is not so crass a response as it may sound. For years, since arriving in London in the early 1960s, Laurie had struggled to maintain himself as a freelance writer. Anyone who has been through that mill, as I have, will understand the dogged need to hang on despite all discouragements and the ebb and flow of fortune. All too often come the moments when – especially if trying to establish oneself in a partly alien society twelve thousand miles from home – the question hammers at the nerves: Is it worth it? Not long after he became a TA counsellor Laurie remarked that he supposed he really should get back to that novel or those poems but he no longer felt it to be quite so important. The life of a counsellor had become fulfilment enough.

We now found him so dismissive of any other approach but Transactional Analysis to personal problem-solving that in the early 1970s we stopped seeing him, as – we realised only recently – did some others. That we never heard from him suggested that he was no longer in need of the sustenance of older friends. What we glimpsed of Laurie's newer friends seemed to indicate that they were younger, sassier, more theoretically pure than Ron or I have ever managed to be on any doctrine – and devoted to him. Just how devoted, not to say worshipful, we were to discover at the funeral.

We'd not seen Laurie for almost a decade when one evening late in 1984 we bumped into him at – where else? – a Lena Horne concert. James Corbett, once Laurie's most intimate English friend, a man who covers his sensitivities with an abrupt, no-nonsense, almost military manner, used always to complain that it was a penance to be seen in public with Laurie because he never turned up empty-handed but would be weighed down with magazines, books and bulging plastic shopping bags, and, more likely than not, would be eating a cake or a sandwich out of a paper bag. (Laurie had no time for theatregoers' pretensions and, I suspected, perpetuated his small-town maverick act out of devilment, silently mocking, as I often felt he did, those patently embarrassed friends. Or was he, could he have been, a genuine naif, unconscious of the effect he was having? Even now I'm not sure, but suspect it was the former.) Sure enough, on this Lena Horne evening, there he was, with the above-listed accessories and munching away on some of his beloved junk food. We greeted each other, chatted a little. Suddenly Laurie, to my surprise, said "I'd like to be in touch again". Agreed. We did talk to each other occasionally on the telephone but he showed, after all, no urgent desire to visit. After a silence of some months I heard that he had been in hospital with a recurrence of the hepatitis he'd suffered a few years before. I rang to re-establish contact and one evening in summer 1985 he came to the house for supper. It was an oddly unsatisfactory encounter. We talked with a certain ease because we had known each other, after all, in Sydney and in London, for something like thirty years – allowing for the lapses of seven years in the 1960s when we were travelling or living in the Middle East and the latter (TA) period in the 1970s when we lost touch. The talk was mostly desultory, without any of the old displays of enthusiasm on either side. He never mentioned TA to me and quoted none of its pet slogans as he used to. It now seemed pretty clear that we no longer had much in common. The factor I was probably omitting, and thought of only in the light of later knowledge, was that ever-present lassitude which affects those with a liver problem. (The best pun in the English language is surely William James's: "Life depends on the liver".) We talked of seeing each other again but nothing was done.

In June and July 1986 I was working in Sydney and on my return to London was given a message. James (whom we'd not seen for about ten years) had rung to say that Laurence was quite seriously ill and would appreciate a visit from old friends. I should have rung immediately but felt a definite reluctance. Did he really want to see us? The new friends, the TA disciples, surely now had more to offer him. A couple of days later Charles Osborne rang (an event in itself these days) to say that he had heard – from Melbourne, presumably from Barrie Reid – that Laurie was dying – or soon would be.

Here was a mystery. Laurie was not supposed to know the terminal nature of his condition. The most obvious mutual contact, James Corbett, did not know that the illness was terminal and was deeply upset when told only a few weeks ago. Yet someone so far away knew. A small matter but it teases at the mind. Did Laurie himself write, hinting at the awfulness of his condition to ensure that he would be taken seriously?

I rang Laurie. "Please come," he said. "I'd appreciate the company." Then, immediately: "You won't mind if I watch television while you're here?" Still a film-telly-video freak, I thought, marvelling a little at his definition of "company". Later

it occurred to me that the telly-watching, apart from the addictive pleasure he had from it, was also a device to save energy. Conversation requires concentration; too much of it can be literally debilitating for someone with a liver problem.

His flat, in West Hampstead, was the summation of all Laurie's previous flats. As usual all the living seemed to be done in one large room, the walls and every available inch of space stacked with books, magazines, records, tapes, video-tapes and so on. With some difficulty I cooked a meal. There was no clear space in the kitchen corner to put down any dish, to move, to operate in any way at all. Somehow the pasta got cooked, the sauce got made. Laurie sat through it all seemingly unaware of any problem, watching television with the sound up flat-out. Once upon a time I'd have been irritated by this – and shown it. An interesting thing about encounters with Laurie during his last illness was the sense of absolute calm I had when with him.

By now his appearance was distressing. Laurie had never bothered about exercise. His illness had made him weak and immobile, entirely lacking in energy. He spent most of his life sitting in his armchair and as a result had a great pendulous stomach (even larger than my own) and thin, wasted legs. It was no surprise but still a shock to hear a week later that he had had a fall, had lain on the floor of his living room all night to be found in pain the following morning when the police, called at last by a neighbor, broke in. He was taken to hospital, but to an orthopaedic ward (for treatment of the soft fracture of his thigh) not equipped to deal with his liver condition apart from trying to meet, within the limits of English hospital cuisine, the special demands of his low-sodium low-protein diet. His own doctor (with whom he had quarrelled) seemed not to be much in evidence. Within a couple of weeks Laurie was transferred to the hospital which had treated him before, and given a room to himself. Visitors were always pressed (by Laurie, who at this point was articulate, not to say demanding) to bring in some "goodies" whether they were on his diet or not.

This occasioned the next round of phone calls. The friends who had now rallied all found themselves in the same predicament: whether to insist on bringing only what was felt to be dietetically correct or to bend the rules and bring some small pleasure into his now drab and circumscribed life – at some risk, of course, to that life itself. The diet, we had been told, could stabilise his condition but only for a time, and estimates of what that time would be varied from a year or more to only a few months. As the weeks went by I think most of us tried to take in foods in keeping with the diet, but with occasional delicacies to please his palate and to cheer him up.

Well, were we right or wrong? Should we have departed from the diet not one jot? In the absence of strict guidelines from his doctor or the hospital – and the untouched remains of hospital meals on his tray showed that no special dishes were at any time prepared for him – this was difficult. And as always Laurie went very much his own way. "Do you know what I'd really like to have next time you come?" he'd murmur. "Some smoked salmon." "But, Laurie, isn't it full of salt?" "Not that much!" – this quite indignantly. Useless to argue; he would not be swayed. He especially liked cartons of soup from a nearby take-away. As always his attachment to convenience foods (because, no doubt, for one person living alone they *were* convenient) went hand in hand with his taste for expensive delicacies.

The greatest irony was that his illness was a cirrhosis of the liver; for Laurie was virtually a teetotaller. (He'd once told me that he had never been drunk in his life because he couldn't stand to drink more than about half-a-glass of wine and had no interest in beer or spirits.) Most distressing to him in the last weeks were the series of tests that the doctors ran on him, putting him, all wired up with electrodes, in the scanner, for what he felt were periods of four or five hours although a medical friend assured me that he could not have been kept in a scanner for more than about forty minutes at most. (Long enough, I'd have thought.) The last weeks ran a course familiar to anyone who has had contact with hospitals. He liked some nurses, thought others were "absolute bitches". They were trying to get his stiffish legs moving again after the accident but this caused so much pain that he mostly refused even to try to use his walk-frame, wheelchair or stick. There were distressing scenes. When one of his TA friends and I were visiting one day the nurse gently nagged at Laurie for neglecting his exercise, he broke down and wept and we all three tried to console him. One day he had a fall trying to walk from bed to toilet. When a nurse later talked of the effort of will he must make to get himself mobile again "so that he could go home" I blew up and asked how she thought he could look after himself alone at home when he couldn't move three yards without falling over even in this relatively protected environment? Did they not understand the problems and conditions of his life outside?

When told of the flat to be sold – or, if not sold, confiscated by the court and then disposed of as it saw fit until his debts were paid – she was horrified, for the staff knew none of this. I asked Micki: Shouldn't there be better liaison between Laurie's doctor, his social worker and the hospital staff? He passed this on to the social worker but the only result was that – as he was in possession of more facts than anyone else – Micki was the one who wrote a long letter setting out the whole background.

Meanwhile the local council had written to offer Laurie a self-contained bed-sit with bathroom in a small council estate with a resident warden, in official terms a sheltered home for the indisposed and aged. "Bridled" is an under-statement for Laurie's reaction at sight of the word "aged". At 61 he did not see himself

in that category, dependent on local government "charity", at all. He would, he vowed, write to them and refuse, though what he had in mind to do instead it is difficult to guess. In fact, the matter of Laurie's future accommodation was fast becoming academic.

Seeing the extreme misery he was in, physical and psychological, and the problems he was to face in the near future, one of his friends commented to me that the best thing surely would be if Laurie quietly "slipped away" – thus escaping debts, bankruptcy, homelessness, everything. At exactly this point Laurie rallied. In no way was he going to oblige everyone with a neat and tidy solution. Suddenly he was up and about, smiling, joking, practising walking, a model patient. Not for the first time with Laurence Collinson one collapsed in helpless, but admiring, laughter. Micki had told us earlier that some months ago he visited Laurie at the flat to find four television sets and three video-cassette recorders – "because there are so many good programmes one can't keep up otherwise". "This," cried Micki, despairingly, "when he was over £14,000 in debt!" (How anyone extended him credit to that extent when he was too ill to earn anything is another of the mysteries.) At some moment Laurie, I think, just gave up any further responsibility for his own life and indulged himself accordingly, while he could.

The sudden burst of activity did not last long. Next time I went in he was lying, his hospital pyjama jacket half-undone, held together with a safety pin (is *this* what we pay our taxes for?), the sheet up almost over his head. He hardly stirred, talked very little, dropped off to sleep in the middle of the conversation. Taking him good things to eat – for months his only pleasure – was now pointless. Food and drink stood untouched for days on his table and trolley. Even now I don't fully understand the nature of the hospital treatment, if any. One of his torments was the course of laxatives they kept him on. The official explanation was that because of his lack of mobility Laurie was suffering acute constipation and had to have a liquid laxative four times a day. One day, waiting at the nurse's office when there was no-one about I'd glimpsed his notes and, information being in such short supply, unashamedly read them. The scanner's tests required a pre-med consisting partly of something radio-active. It needed to be cleared from his bowel within, I think, forty-five to sixty-five minutes, but was taking over three hours. The liquid laxative was to combat this as well as his immobility. Because it tasted so foul – and made him repeatedly take the cumbrous, epic journey out of his bed and across the floor to his private loo at a time when even trying to sit up caused him excessive pain – he would pour it out into the peculiar jug-like urine repository under his bed. Finally, the constipation ever worse, in an agony of discomfort, he had to be given an enema, which he had sworn he would never allow them to inflict on him.

Through all these weeks, and seemingly a greater trial to him even than his muscular and internal pains, his skin erupted all over with an acute outbreak of eczema. He would lie there, feebly, incessantly but, alas, ineffectually, scratching his body – and complain, in a voice now barely audible, that "those bitches" did not massage him with his skin ointment as often as they should.

On what turned out to be the last time I ever saw him Laurie complained about the terrible waste of time that such a stay in hospital was. "There is so much I should be doing." Assuming that he was referring to the multitude of practical problems facing him in the outside world, and not at all sure that it was a good idea for him to start worrying over them, I asked cautiously, "What things?" "Oh, there's a novel I want to write, and maybe a play." Magnificent! I reminded him that in the early TA days he'd said he no longer felt such an urge to write. "I may have said that *then*."

A film director was flying from Australia to work with me for two hectic weeks on the final draft of a television film I'd written. As we had to pack in as much work as possible during his limited stay, Ron took over the hospital visits. They had never been close friends but Ron was so upset at the sight of Laurie's distress that instantly he became involved, made up special sandwich packs and bought not only food but new pyjamas and underwear for him. Whether Laurie ever wore them we never knew. On the last Friday afternoon visit Laurie, tranquillised or virtually unconscious, was unaware of the visitor's presence. His complexion was now quite jaundiced. The slightest movement caused him immense distress and pain.

A week before Ron had found him feebly trying to write a letter, one of many he wanted to send to "those who called themselves my friends" – but who had never come to visit. As most of us who knew each other had fallen into a kind of rota system and went on days when we knew others couldn't, it was difficult to know who else was visiting. Thinking that Laurie might find more immediate pleasure from the company of his TA associates, with whom he had worked so closely over the most recent years, Ron asked if they were visiting. "Some of them." Then, and surprisingly, he added: "I can't communicate with them any more." A few weeks before he and I had had a rare nostalgic chat about Australia in the 1950s and his youth in Brisbane, of which I knew so little. As I left Laurie said how nice it was to have a real conversation. As a discussion it had been simple, banal even, but probably another indication of that well-known tendency of the old and/or dying to live again imaginatively only in their beginnings.

On the Monday morning I took time off from my director to ring the hospital. The head nurse spoke quietly and kindly of Laurie's tribulations and when I asked if anything could be done for him replied that the doctors were unable to arrest the ill-

ness and that she felt Laurie had more or less decided "about a week ago" to give up. At my direct question, "How long, do you think?" she hedged a little, felt it was not possible to say. An hour and a half later Micki called me to report that the nurse had just rung. "Laurie died an hour ago." We agreed that it was a merciful release – and were not ashamed of the cliche.

The funeral was held one week later at Golder's Green Crematorium and was arranged by Roger Baker, a vigorous polemicist (as Laurie had been) in the gay magazines which had flourished in the more open climate of the early 1970s, pre-Thatcher, pre-AIDS. Laurie had not been religious; the ceremony was to be, in the modern fashion, agnostic. Let all be dispatched according to their beliefs; the only time I've felt distaste at a funeral was when a non-believer was given a traditional religious ceremony arranged by his not at all pious but certainly conventional widow and the local vicar had described, in set phrases, a man I did not at any point recognise. Save us from insincere pieties. Laurie's send-off was not to be like that. A few friends would simply speak of the aspect of him they knew best. I had been invited to say a few words about Laurie's Australian origins, life and work, as this was a closed book to his English friends. I'd have done it willingly – but the person who knew most about this part of Laurie's life was Charles Osborne. Here was a small dilemma. I knew that Charles had rung Laurie a few times months ago when he first heard of the illness. Laurie, once his energy started ebbing, always had his answering machine on and called back only those he really felt up to speaking to. He did not seem to want to talk to Charles but did not explain why. Later, in hospital, tranquillised but far from tranquil, almost incoherent, Laurie began a garbled account of some incident in their adolescence in which Charles had said or done something to upset him. Whatever it was it now plagued him again. So! Would it not be the final irony if this was the person to speak at his funeral? Mulling it over I came to a quite arbitrary decision. After all, Laurie, in a sense, was not going to *be* there. Most important was the presentation – and the facts. Charles agreed immediately to do it.

The crematorium is an enormous complex but its East Chapel is small, intimate, modestly impressive. A few rows of pews face a wall of small red bricks with a high-arched recess bricked in a vaguely Byzantine style. In this brightly lit recess, flanked by stands of flowers, is the table or platform on which the coffin will rest. The usual drill is that once the mourners are seated soft music, live or recorded according to choice, begins to play and the coffin is brought in. Not so today. Roger, dashing in his expensive tweed wind-cheater jacket, its shawl collar rising about his dark, grey-tinged hair, his right ear decorously agleam with a small silver earring, rose to make some brief opening remarks. "We are here to say Hello and Goodbye to our friend Laurie, Laurence Collinson. Laurie's life had many aspects which seemed to be kept separate, whether as a deliberate policy or just because it happened that way I don't know. We will ask a few people to speak of the Laurie they knew. But first . . . the music that Laurie most loved was the civilized, romantic American music of the 1920s and 1930s, Gershwin, Cole Porter, Jerome Kern. Today's equivalent, admired by Laurie above all others, was Stephen Sondheim and of his songs, this is the one that Laurie loved best of all."

In stole the orchestral introduction to Barbra Streisand's recording of "Send in the Clowns". Beautiful and touching, the song speaks to all of us in its wry, polished phrases, of our ineptitudes, aspirations, failures, silly misjudgments, and disappointments. But was I the only one to wonder if the irony were intentional when just as Ms Streisand hit for the first time the title phrase, in came four black-coated pallbearers with Laurie, in his coffin?

The coffin placed on its stand, the black-coats moved solemnly out of the scene, leaving only a kind of major-domo, young and rather good-looking, which Laurie would have liked, to give a little formal bow and to move to the back of the chapel. The song over, Roger invited someone to speak of Laurence's early life in Brisbane. Charles, a little greyer since last time, as are we all, spoke simply and quietly of their school-days and adolescence. He recalled working in the Barjai bookshop when he and Laurie, with Barrie Reid and some others, began a small literary magazine, and met every Sunday to discuss the latest issue and other current literary topics. One of the team one day complained that an article in the last issue was too long and too solemn, that to be successful the magazine needed to have more lightness and humor. Laurie replied that those born in a great Depression and growing up into a World War would not ever have much humor – which, said Charles, and he told Laurie so, struck him as a pompous remark from a seventeen year-old. Yet, Charles went on, that statement of Laurie's had remained to haunt him sometimes and came to mind especially when he saw later generations with such self-confidence and optimism. He then read a poem of Laurie's, published in Brisbane in the mid-50s, "I Will Take My Love to A Sea Place" . . . a three-stanza piece with an interesting rhyme scheme, and an effectively repeated phrase in the final line of each stanza. It talked, very delicately, of making love by the sea, on grass in bright sunlight, and so on. I remembered it although I'd not read it in perhaps twenty-five years. It seemed to me a good poem, gently evocative of its time and place, the sentiments timeless and honest. Charles read it simply and well. In fact, public person that he is, he carried off the whole thing very adroitly, and much better than I'd have done.

James Corbett was sitting immediately in front of me. So far – although he may have bucked a little

at the contribution of Ms Streisand, for a setting of the Mass was more his idea of the right music for such an occasion – there was nothing in the style and subject matter that, I thought, he would object to. This was about to change.

Roger rose to thank Charles and to ask someone to speak of Laurie's work as a psycho-therapist. Up jumped Norman, someone the older gang had never seen before. American, tall, almost bald, formidable in a black leather jacket, he began: "I came to England some years ago while experiencing what most people call a mid-life crisis. I needed advice, help. I wanted an older man, a gay man. The person highly recommended to me was a Mister Laurence Collinson. One day I went to that flat on the top floor of the old house in West Hampstead, up the dark staircase and into that incredible room. I took one look at it and wondered what the hell I'd got myself into. There were books and more books and *more* books. And television sets. And videos. And papers piled on every table and chair. And nowhere to sit. And in the middle of it all, this fat, bald, bespectacled man with a *terrible* complexion." (An Australian actor, Teddy Brayshaw, used to say that Laurie's face was the color of Kleenex. He also said, years later, that he regretted he'd had such an unkind tongue.) Norman went on to say that this unimpressive-looking man, within a few minutes, was talking "the greatest horse sense" he'd ever heard. This man, vowed Norman, had straightened him out, had got right to the heart of the matter, and over the months and years ahead, gradually "helped me get rid of all the bullshit in my life."

Much of the time I sat gazing at the back of James Corbett's neck, above his dark-blue raincoat a band of white, that especially white white of the rufous Englishman. Did I imagine it or was that white skin beginning to turn slightly pink?

Norman's testimonial over, Roger called next on "Nickie". A surprise, this, to hear the severe Guardian critic with a reputation for the waspish put-down referred to in the diminuitive. Nicholas de Jongh came forward to tell of his own profound gratitude to Laurie for the changes Laurie had helped him make in his life. Emotionally tangled, he had been recommended to Laurence and felt terrible misgivings when he first entered that "appalling" room. "A budgerigar was flying around all over the place. This unnerved me." I felt a sudden surge of nostalgia – nostalgia for Cupid! that aggressive and over-weening bird who shared a bed-sit with Laurie and me when I stayed a few weeks on returning from Turkey? The room faced the Finchley Road, if Cupid had got out the roar of the traffic might have panicked her so that she'd never get back, windows therefore were always kept closed and the room smelt always of birdseed, stale food and the souvenirs Cupid left wherever she flew. The budgerigar which so distressed Nick de Jongh was, I think, a successor to Cupid whose death had troubled Laurie so deeply. After a few minutes Laurie said to Nicholas, "You're smiling too much." Nick asked if the bird might be put in its cage. Laurie complied. They began to talk. And again the miracle occurred. "This unprepossessing man" cut right through to the bone, gradually displayed the problems and helped Nick find his own way to deal with them. As a counsellor Laurie, Nick and so many others seemed to find, was "brilliant". It was an astonishment to some of us who had never seen him in this capacity. Afterwards we were to confess to each other that we'd always thought of Laurie as the one who needed to be counselled rather than the counsellor. A prize example of old friends too used to someone, taking him for granted, pigeonholing him and not allowing for subsequent and unexpected development? I think so. At funerals people tend to be polite, but this was not a polite occasion. People who had struggled with great personal troubles were clearly speaking from the heart. They knew a more positive and dynamic Laurie than we had ever seen, knew him in a way we never had. Unencumbered by old knowledge and old prejudices, they accepted with gratitude his gifts of insight, honesty and understanding.

But the ceremony was not yet over and its most extraordinary moments lay ahead. Roger summed up with his own appreciation, reading a poem of Laurie's, evoking the sights and smells of the fruits and vegetables of old workaday Covent Garden and finding in the shapes and colors of some vegetables and fruits certain erotic overtones. The poem, thought Roger, was a testimony to a little-appreciated aspect of Laurie's personality, the sensuous and erotic. This led him to Laurie's gifts as a spokesman for the gay movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, his many frank articles in gay magazines, above all his short play "Thinking Straight" (which I'd seen at one of the first lunchtime performances of the Gay Sweatshop Company with the leading role played by a not yet celebrated Antony Sher). Now I knew I was not mistaken. The back of James Corbett's neck was definitely turning redder and redder. James had always hated what he saw as the exhibitionism of the gay movement and an easy overt public statement of gayness repelled him. I told him afterwards I'd almost expected him to rise and shout in Biblical wrath, "You know, we're not all poofs!"

The eulogies were over. Roger faced the coffin to say, finally, Farewell. And as the coffin slowly slid forward to pass through the highly polished little doors there echoed around that high-arched recess the sound of – at first – distant cheers and applause, that of an audience having a good time! As I experienced that old uncanny prickling of the scalp at the sheer unexpectedness of it, the recorded voice of Elaine Stritch, at once strident and loving, began to sing Sondheim's great pastiche, "Broadway Baby".

I choked, unsure whether I wanted to laugh or cry, and could see or

sense that many others felt much the same. We stood watching the coffin slide Laurie to who knows what oblivion or eternity as the recorded audience laughed and cheered a song which so affectionately summed up our glorious, mundane aspirations for our work, our struggle, our identity, our worth, to be recognised. "Attention must be paid." Attention was paid that day – in a way so original and convention-bending and heartfelt and genuine that – despite the anguished, uncontrollable tears of at least one young woman in the audience – it was not a sad but a happy experience. (Just don't tell your orthodox Jewish friends about it. I did, to be met with shocked incomprehension.)

As the doors closed on the coffin and the music and applause died away, the handsome young attendant in his short black overcoat came forward, bowed with genuine dignity to the place where the coffin had last been seen, then after a respectful pause, turned and ushered the front-row mourners out.

It was a cold but fine day, some autumn leaves still on the trees. Roger and Micki who were now to share the responsibilities of the massive tidying-up operation, the aftermath of the death, looked a little nervous as I asked "Who chose 'Broadway Baby'?" Micki said, "I did." A few weeks ago Laurie had asked to hear the tape of Sondheim's "Follies" and as that number was sung he'd at first smiled in delight then cried, all the way through. "I thought that had to be it. Didn't you approve?" On the contrary, I told them, I thought it was inspired. Ron, who usually avoids such occasions, thought the whole ceremony very good. I was glad he'd come, apart from anything else, so that he could see how these non-denominational, agnostic services could be done. That, I told him, is the way I want to go.

THREE POEMS BY LAURENCE COLLINSON

THE SEAGULL

Birds can't cry – that was the trouble;
had he shown grief, our pity had been less . . .
but that's an absurd fancy!

There he stood like a melancholy clown
after his comedy. (We'd straightened him
upside-down he'd tossed on the shallow water,
each thoughtless wave as troubling as world's end.
Like mourners the other birds lit around
in helpless ritual.)

The wing was torn by the educated boys.

At once he thought himself safe – the upright land
was the land he knew : of flight in perpetual sky,
circling the sea, sand-soaring, snatching food.
Now all was well.

The wind was unconscious of pain,
the sun gave no reproach, the sea slid away
negligently. He shuffled forward,
then leapt to be loved by the clouds.

The earth fell on him.

(The sun melting his dream, Icarus died.)
His wing dragged loosely in the sand :
it wasn't part of him, he couldn't understand.
He straddled to the sandhills to hide his shame
and, out of sight, our world to us
with horror seemed momentous. We fled from it . . .
for we are bound to the miracle of tears.

PROMENADE

I often see the aged rich
on promenade about the church
that honors John, evangelist,
on Toorak's green and pleasant perch.

Affectionate the very air,
dogs and sunshine frisk around,
the war memorial stands proud . . .
the dead lie proudly underground.

The aged rich, the aged rich,
their true church is no walled place:
the wide world is their godly house
and everywhere they walk in grace.

Such dignity is never seen
embracing other lesser folk.
Could lesser folk such pride provide
or such just worthiness invoke?

The aged poor : bent, bare,
torn twigs of winter's windy strife,
with withered knuckles pick, pick,
pick at the very bones of life.

While the aged rich whose gentle walk
proclaims their amnesty with fate
move yet with inner stride as firm
as any God could allocate.

The aged rich have bred their kind,
the aged poor bred you and me . . .
our boots are torn from tramping far
but we too have nobility

though little time to promenade;
our lives run swift to catch deceit;
our clock tight wound to reason's hour
ticks to the beat of marching feet.

THREE PLACES

I'll take my lover to a wild place
where the chant of the sea corrodes the rock
and the ear, and the fury of our embrace
is the tempest that screams and the winds that knock,
and my lover's hands are the little waves
that shudder across the land that is I,
and we'll stretch like the tide on the love that each
craves,
and we'll break with a cry, and we'll end with a cry.

I'll take my lover to a lazy place
that the sun knows well, and the breezes choir.
We'll lie in the sun, and its slow embrace
will lengthen our love and strengthen desire.
Our touch will be soft as the speech of the moon,
and our kisses like stars will be never enough
though the passion compels us from noon until noon.
And we'll break with a laugh, and we'll end with a
laugh.

I'll take my lover to a lonely place
where the calm and the mad are unknown, are
unknown,
and there we shall hold us in mocking embrace
while skull worries skull and bone worries bone.
For this is the love in which all lovers enter,
which no dream can alter nor law can amend,
for though love surrounds us, this love at the centre
will never break, and never end.

OH MOTHER

I thought
mother

you would
bowl and cancer over

wrench it away
with your anger

shred
those scrambled cells

death
tried to talk to you before

mother

in
the ghetto

in
Auschwitz

after the war
you thought about killing yourself

when you found
you were

the only one
left

you
couldn't

you wouldn't give death
the pleasure

you moved
to this blue country

and patched yourself up

with a house a husband
and children

cocktail gowns perfumes
nail polish

a suntan dinner dances
glamorous entrances

while death danced its tango
around someone else

you fed birds
every morning

and cleaned
ceaselessly

oh
mother

I
thought

you would
bowl the cancer over.

TWO WOMEN

We are two women
who sit across
a white and gold-topped table

we are two women
one in her middle age
the other still strong not old

we talk
awkwardly warm
with each other

the central heating
hums
cheerfully around us

voilet pansies bloom
in a small
purple pot

I try to throw off
the jealous child
who keeps swimming back to me

I am not your beautiful girl
your sweet six year-old
with sausage ringlets bouncing

I am not the baby
you were ashamed
to conceive

I am not the fat teenager
who envied
your silver bikinis

I am not the mute mother
draped in black
as you waltzed in aqua satin

we are two women
one in her middle age
the other still strong not old.

MARIAN AVELING

Always With Us?

Three Books on Social Justice and Charity.

Stuart Macintyre: *Winners and Losers: Social Justice in Australian History* (Allen & Unwin, $10.95).
Richard Kennedy: *Charity Warfare: The Charity Organization Society in Colonial Melbourne* (Hyland House, $14.95).
Graeme Davison *et al*: *The Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History* (Allen & Unwin, $22.50 and $10.95)

On 4 September 1980 the Age reported Jim Carlton, the shadowy treasurer, as condemning those he called "the coercive Utopians", people professing that "man is perfectible and that the evils that exist are the product of a corrupt social system." Among them he included those who disliked "the competitive nature of the market economy, believing that it automatically produced poverty." Unlike other self-confessed spokespersons of the New Right, Mr Carlton did not on this occasion have historians in his sights, but he might well have done. The social causes of poverty and inequality concern most Australian historians writing today, and the three books to be reviewed here are no exception. All are in Carlton's terms 'utopian' in that they look to society as the cause of mankind's ills – but they vary widely as would-be coercers.

I wish to compare these three books in the light of Mr Carlton's concerns, as investigations of past inequality written with an eye to continuing social injustice. Kennedy and Macintyre open themselves cheerfully to both lines of this enquiry; Davison *et al* are less presentist, admitting only to a concern with nineteenth-century society and its effects. But before considering what these books can tell us about the inequalities of Australian society, I must allow them a hearing on their own terms. What does each set out to do?

Stuart Macintyre's *Winners and Losers* is perhaps the most ambitious of the three; it aims "to examine the meaning, intentions, and outcomes" of the Australian search for social justice via the action of the state. It is a big topic for a slim volume – less than 150 pages. The story moves rapidly through the convict system and the establishment of a 'free society', through the hopes and failures of free selection, through the regulation of wages and conditions to the basic wage, through postwar reconstruction and 'the end of unemployment', through the failure of public education to end social inequality and the state's sellout to the private schools, and finally to recent attempts to redress inequalities less specifically economic, particularly those of race and gender.

There is no attempt at a comprehensive account of every aspect of the search for social justice; rather the book is a series of related essays on the general theme. The earlier chapters look at the development of a concept of social justice in nineteenth century Australia. Later chapters look back from the present in order to explain it. But the book is unified thematically by the steady pursuit of the central concept, and in subject matter in that it describes both "pleas for social justice" and "the political processes to which they give rise". In a sense *Winners and Losers* is best read as a new political history of Australia – an account of the development of the Australian state and its agencies, understood as a site of conflict between competing interests and their competing definitions of justice and injustice. And a depressing story it is. Macintyre concludes that the state is at best an ambiguous agent of justice, and that "the outstanding feature of the last forty years is the shrinkage of our vision to welfare dimensions." Yet the story is not entirely pessimistic – a point I shall return to.

Winners and Losers is the product of research leave spent in the Social Justice Project, at that haven from lectures and student essays, the Australian National University. Macintyre worked there as part of a team of social scientists investigating the usefulness of the concept of social justice to Australian society today; the current flurry of discussion papers and working parties within the branches of the ALP owes something to their deliberations. In that company Macintyre found himself a lone voice arguing the historicity of the concept; far from having a fixed meaning over time,

it meant different things to different people, and offered real power to those able to define its meaning.

In a sense the audience for which *Winners and Losers* is written remains that seminar group at ANU, and that particular focus restricts the book in ways that I regret. The emphasis on the *political* expression of notions of social justice prevents any discussion of the half-formed pre-political ideas about how society should work that have always guided the thinking and action of many Australians, especially women. But the focus upon politics and state action is quite appropriate for Macintyre's wider target – the civil servants, judges and politicians who are currently defining social justice in Australia, and all those – lobbyists, members of political parties and pressure groups, all politically aware who seek to influence that process. No, not *all* of them – I doubt that Mr Carlton and his friends could be persuaded to read it.

In *Charity Warfare* Richard Kennedy seeks more specific audiences – on the one hand "students and others in the 'caring professions' – especially Social Work", and on the other "the one million men and women actually unemployed at the time of writing... in the unlikely event they could afford a copy." He reminds his first audience "how much harm well-intentioned 'middle class' people can do when they adopt uncritically the latest welfare nostrums thrown up by capitalist ideology"; his second "ought to know how the victims of past capitalist economic depressions were treated."

Charity Welfare is thus conceived firstly as a contribution to the history of Australian social welfare, and secondly as a tract for our times. Its subject is small – the formative decade, 1887-1898, of the Melbourne Charity Organization Society, but its themes run much wider than mere institutional history. Kennedy sets his narrative of the COS within the context of colonial life and British social thought. His first chapter exposes the myths and realities of poverty in late nineteenth-century Victoria, and the public and private measures developed to cope with the poor. The second analyses the British origins of "the theory of Organized Charity" in terms of a crisis of class and capital. Kennedy's treatment of the thought of the movement's founder, Charles Loch, is almost sympathetic, catching its nuances and ambiguities.

The central chapters narrate the growth and uneven progress of the COS towards an organizational and ideological hegemony over unorganized charity in Melbourne, against spirited rearguard action from the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. "Organized Charity" was premised on the belief that indescriminate giving *caused* poverty while giving, carefully regulated by inquiry, registration and the repression of imposters, could "control and possibly excise the social cancer of pauperism." The benevolent ladies of Melbourne accepted this principle, but in practice continued to give indiscriminately and insufficiently where they saw need. They were finally defeated by the depression rather than by the COS. Kennedy's tale makes lively reading, but his slick judgments can annoy.

Finally Kennedy sums up the impact of the COS in Australia. Borrowing from the work of a more recent student in the field, Shurlee Swain, Kennedy finds the principles of modern professional social work in the methodology of the COS – "the interview, the home visit, the case committee, and the paramountcy of two 'values': 'the family as a whole' and the visitor-client 'relationship.'" He concludes that "the COS forged professional social work in Australia as an instrument to slay, or at least ward off, the rising 'threat' of organized labour."

Kennedy explains in his introduction that the basic research for *Charity Warfare* took place in the mid-sixties, for an MA thesis at Melbourne University. The situation of Kennedy's family – "growing steadily poorer in the last post-war boom when poverty was supposed not to exist" – at once inspired his research, hindered its completion and made revision of his manuscript for publication impossible until the early 1980s – no ivory tower at ANU for him. Kennedy writes with passion "on behalf of the clients of 'the charitable'," of his "hatred for a society that left children open to physical danger and despair."

The third book considered here, *The Outcasts of Melbourne*, directly addresses Kennedy's concerns. It is the work of the generation – perhaps two generations – of Melbourne historians who have written about the city since Kennedy completed his thesis. Kennedy has either not read their work, or acknowledges it less than generously in *Charity Warfare*.

In aim *The Outcasts* is the most modest of the three. It admits only to extending its readers' understandings of past events and past experience. "The essays in this book," writes Graeme Davison, "attempt to expose the social realities behind the slum stereotype. The authors intend to use Melbourne as a social laboratory within which to gauge the effects of urbanization on individuals and classes. But the approach is less clinical than this pretends; Davison borrows a contemporary phrase to catch their intent – to show how "the forces of civilization work against the weak."

The essays collected here arose out of the Intervarsity Urban History Seminar which met at Melbourne University from the late 1970s, and the book consciously places itself within the genre of urban history, understood as a sub-genre of social history. So their first audience is other urban historians and people professionally interested in the history of cities – much the narrowest target audience of the three books here reviewed. But the style and presentation – and I think the subject matter – of the book make it perhaps the

most accessible of the three. For a start, the pictures are superb. The subjects of the text – nervous Chinese, European opium-smokers, prostitutes, thieves, the poor, the sick, Salvation Army lasses and lads, evangelicals, reformers – all gaze at the reader from prints and etchings with the look of absolute truth. The text uses the same device; it is full of people doing things, described in material detail, and it is this detail in the best of the chapters which carries the explanatory burden. In Davison's words:

> Getting arrested, appearing before the committee of a benevolent society, being converted at a Salvation Army meeting were not, as comtemporaries believed, the actions of isolated individuals; they were the outcomes of much longer chains of causation that lead us back to the social forces shaping the city itself.

Unfortunately some of the contributors are less adept than Davison at suggesting chains and forces, and their accounts remain interesting only as revelations of past lives previously hidden – a voyeuristic glimpse of the city's underside.

This charge of voyeurism can be laid against the structure of the book as a whole. Readers acquainted with Davison's *Marvellous Melbourne* will surely see *The Outcasts* as an account of the less than marvellous bits he left out. Davison confronts this difficulty head-on, opening with the progress of two voyeuristic tourists through Chinatown in 1888. He explains "Outcast Melbourne" as created by "Marvellous Melbourne" and instrinsic to it, both economically and ideologically. Again, contributors vary in the degree of sophistication that they bring to this problem; some remain trapped within the vision of their respectable sources.

So what do these historians tell us about Mr Carlton's non-problems – the social causes of inequality in Australia? For all their differences of approach they concur at many points. Collectively they knock on the head of a number of myths dear to Mr Carlton and his friends. All three demonstrate that the state and its agencies have never acted neutrally within Australian society, that the exercise of bureaucratic power has always been a class weapon. All three offer evidence demolishing what Kennedy has described as the double illusion of colonial liberalism, "the myth *of and for the bourgeoisie*, that there was no poverty in Melbourne" and "the myth *for the working class*, that there was no poor law" in the sense of institutionalized charity. And all three show that poverty, *pace* Mr Carlton, was structurally and necessarily related to developing capitalism.

The most significant differences relate to the problem of social solutions, spelt-out and inferred. Macintyre's moral is the most overt, and the most optimistic. His concluding paragraph declares that popular pressure has always influenced the definition of social justice in Australia, and will continue to do so as long as the oppressed contest the procedures of the state, "bending them to their own purposes." Kennedy's conclusions are the most pessimistic, that "all social intervention within the tradition [of casework] must be viewed as a bulwark of hegemonic ideology for the ruling class." By implication there can be little successful contestation within the system, no victory except by revolution arising from despair.

The question is vast, and way beyond historical 'proof'. But it is useful to look at how Kennedy comes to this conclusion. All historians and social scientists begin with a theoretical notion of how society works, a theory which shapes the questions they ask of their evidence. Kennedy seems to me to be locked into a restrictive social theory which prevents him from asking a range of useful questions. They concern his use of the theory of class. Kennedy gives in this introduction a definition of class "intended to be fundamental without engaging all the complexities"; "class," he writes, "is inscribed on the relationship in which groups of people stand to the means of production." And class consciousness is produced "when people in a similar class position work, struggle and fight to claim, defend or extend their real interests."

But in seeing class as automatically "inscribed" on men and women by virtue of the work they do and what they own, Kennedy loses interest in the process by which this inscription takes place. Nowhere in *Charity Warfare* do workers struggle or fight to claim or defend anything. Kennedy admits in self-criticism that the work is "onesided, omitting working class liveliness, humour and struggle", and advises reading other historians to get the whole picture. But this is like watching St Kilda beating the Swans on Channel 2, then turning to Channel 7 to watch the Swans fight back.

To illustrate the point, let me cite Shurlee Swain's chapter in *The Outcasts*. Swain sets out to reconstruct the lives and minds of those seeking charity by looking at their interaction with the case workers – lower middle-class women who were responsible for all the face-to-face contact with the poor. These are a group much blamed but little described by Kennedy, who is mainly interested in the minds and deeds of the male executives of charity; his women remain faceless "wives" and "ladies".

The picture which Swain builds up from the case records is bleak; she endorsed all of Kennedy's generalizations about the immanence of poverty and the rigidity of charitable philosophy. But Swain's poor are not merely "victims" experiencing "social exploitation and cruelty"; she distinguishes at least three groups, with differing responses. There were the "genteel", who "had been 'well brought up' and were not

only aware of the behaviour expected of them, but shared the value system on which it was based." The givers fell over themselves to press charity upon these reluctant and deserving receivers.

Then there were "the very poor", whose way of life was "inexplicable to well-to-do charity workers: inexplicable that is, unless it was seen as the cause of their poverty." This group felt "no shame in their plight", "even suggesting – more accurately perhaps than they realised – that they were doing the rich a favour by giving them some-one to help." Swain shows how these people learned the expectations of the donors, and appeared to conform:

> Hurriedly tucking the beer jug under voluminous skirts, locking the visitor out while tables were cleared of forbidden 'luxuries', pretending unemployed husbands had gone up country, all were attempts to maximise much-needed aid, and keep a little light in otherwise very bleak lives. Here is a struggle of a sort.

With the 1890s depression, Swain finds a new group seeking charity – "respectable working men" now unemployed. They were not used to asking for help, and charity workers regarded them with suspicion; "They looked too respectable, their clothes were too good." Swain shows these families moving from apology for having to seek charity, to anger at being treated like "the lower class poor" and finally to political action against the charitable institutions which shamed them. Here is the working-class struggle, the growth of class consciousness that Kennedy promises, but cannot deliver, believing as he does that, in Anthony Giddens' words, "human beings are mere bearers of modes of production."

It is easy to write off social justice as just a catchword of the consensus makers of the middle (as it undoubtedly is), and to dismiss the reconstruction of past lives as sentimentalism (as it certainly can be). It is more difficult to read the past honestly for the good of an uncertain present.

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BARRY WESTBURG

Silver Earrings in Colorado

In our observation of the world around us we are continually discovering *relationships* among the things that are familiar to us. For example, we notice that old jacaranda trees can be short while young ones can be tall. That people with big noses may pay high taxes while people with small bums may pay no taxes at all. That the postage required for a letter may be determined by the weight of the postman. That a baseball thrown into the air rises to a height proportionate to the integrity of somebody's grandmother. That the price of an article is determined by the venue of sale. That the tangent of an angle depends on the mood of the angler.

Today I'm rather reflective.

My thoughts have been returning to my birthplace, the northern hemisphere. The northern hemisphere invented deep thoughts: if we have any deep thoughts here in the sleepy southern hemisphere, it is because they have been imported.

For instance, how many great Fijian philosophers or scientists have there been? I can think of only one Fijian Reflective and that is my old friend Carbon Man.

And Carbon Man got that way after we took a little trip up north together, travelling on my credit cards.

We started out in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with the intention of following the old wagon trail to the West Coast, and so to end up in my birthplace, San Francisco. We started out the very night we struck set at the Loeb Theatre in Cambridge, where we had been playing in "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui". I had played Ui. Carbon Man played my henchperson, Rosenblatt. Not an incongruous bit of casting: Carbon Man was a terrific gunman. At one point he would jump down into the audience and fire several blank cartridges into the faces of bejewelled dowagers – to great effect. When we were doing "All the King's Men" the week before, Carbon Man was cast as Sugar Boy, another gunman, this time one with a stutter. He developed a terrific stutter, which wouldn't let go. He still has it. I of course played the lead once again, though I forget the name of the character at this moment. I had been the stand-in for my friend Brad, who died of a stroke on stage during dress rehearsal.

My kid brother Marc had driven from California for the occasion in a racked-up Pinto. He had picked up Mandy and Gary in upstate New York. And so we all set out for the West; Carbon Man had borrowed an old Caddy convertible from a girl-friend and he followed us. He can easily pass for a Chicano in the North, which gives him a certain mileage as a Latin loverboy type. To support this mild deception he had teamed up with a guy named Ricardo Corrado who was genuine Mexican and they would find lot of common interests: Anglo women, primarily. And, eventually, deep philosophy.

Every time our little caravan got to a rest stop on the endless turnpikes of the East and freeways of the Midwest we would permutate the seating arrangements, Gary and Mandy and Ricardo floating from car to car as the whim moved them.

Mandy and Gary were married but getting ready to split up; this was to be their last trip together. Gary, a geologist, wanting to see the Great Divide and especially the Rockies where they begin in Eastern Colorado. Mandy dying to explore the silver mines up in Cripple Creek. So our initial objective was Colorado.

Ricardo smoking his Montecristo panatella didn't care where he was going so long as it was conducive to deep philosophy and shallow women.

At this point in time, possession of a Montecristo (Havana, Cuba) cigar was more serious than marijuana or heroin. Try getting one in over the Canadian border! It makes a nice little experiment for a would-be terrorist.

I smoked them, but like a snivelling coward I had to go to Canada to do it. This was some years before Carbon Man and the plays in Cambridge: several of us were up on the Peck Farm. That was a Poetical Farming Experience which in fact my kid brother Marc wrote a few poems about, which were later published

in the Atlantic Monthly (May, 1977).

Up at Peck Farm we got a sampling of the simple non-urban earthbound sunsoaked life. We got hay in our hair. We went up as a favor to my old friend Doctor Peck, who wanted to lounge about in Majorca (or was it Minorca?) and to forget about his cows and chickens along the Bonnechere River in the lush Ottawa valley.

This was when my third wife Winnie was still with us and hadn't freaked out and turned into a bitch and thereafter a slut. Sluttishness was in her blood and the taint of it began to show under the stress of primitive earth-bound sunsoaked poetical farming conditions. Actually all that we did there was to sit on the banks of the beautiful Bonnechere River drinking Jack Daniels Black Label and target-shooting with a .22 rifle and feeding the livestock – didn't do any farming – still not even sure what farming is. And talking a lot of deep philosophy.

And we would all sit around and smoke those forbidden Montecristo panatellas until we were green in the gills.

At night the local beavers would topple the local trees and chew them up and pile them up into beaver dams near the farmhouse and by morning the only access road to Peck Farm would be flooded and we couldn't get out until we had axed-up the dam and destroyed the nightshift work of the irrepressible beavers, who wisely stayed out of sight during the daytime though we thought we could hear them prowling about somewhere deep in their damworks. This was an excellent way of blitzing a morning hangover.

Afternoons we set up half-a-dozen chess-boards and while listening to the Bobby Fischer vs. Boris Spassky world chess championship on the shortwave radio we'd try to keep a move ahead of the players. This feat was complicated by the circumstance that the moves were leaked in over the radio from Iceland and were given in Quebec French and we had conflicting notions about the names of chesspieces in French and the radio static made the French moves additionally incomprehensible and so did the Jack Daniels Black Label.

We gathered eggs every morning – actually that was my kid brother Marc's chore, one which he found almost beyond his capacity, getting in the way of his poetry writing. Thus the chickens suffered a crisis in morale, lost faith in the poetical soul of my kid brother and went on a slowdown so that by the time we left Peck Farm the egg supply was a shameful trickle: one or two eggs per day from several hundred prize hens! Doctor Peck was stupefied on his return and never spoke to any of us again. The Whiskey Priest was there, "Chicken" Marengo was there, and poor Brad, and Marc, and me, and of course mad Winnie just brooding on becoming a slut (whatever that is! – I don't know why the word always pops into my head but then I think of her later career).

Right now she's married to an unemployed model airplane enthusiast. Or is that my second wife, Hortense? Shucks, that's right it was Hortense who was with us. She was pregnant then with my second kid – my eldest daughter, that's right. The past is a tricky time – I wonder why we think we need it.

No – come to think of it my second wife was Corkie and Hortense was the first one. I've got this all written down in a notebook somewhere or I could look it up in the legal documents somewhere if I haven't thrown them all out, or all the courthouses haven't burnt down. The only thing I can remember sharp and clear is my two little girls. But then it is years since I have seen them, much as I've tried.

That's what's wrong with reflection on one's own life, that's what makes it all break down – you start following a memory or a person in your past, and then you think of other people and then suddenly you are thinking of – your mind naturally gravitating to – an unpleasant person or event when really you only want the good ones and the whole thing comes toppling down and the memoir itself if you are writing it down goes haywire.

The silver earrings in Colorado. . .

They came from Cripple Creek. We finally *did* find the abandoned silver mines above the old wagon trail! Mandy and Gary and I did. Ricardo and Carbon Man stayed down in Cripple Creek in front of the Old Fashioned Ice Cream Parlor.

Smoking Montecristo panatellas. Smoking the world's best and most dangerous cigars. Talking deep philosophy. In full view of the police, while insolently looking over the gringo tourists, the women who were always to be seen streaming through the town in the summer. Carbon Man to be seen in sombrero, Ricardo in a cowboy hat looking like a real sinister Mexican-type cowboy, lots of swagger, which is what he will be in another life.

Mandy was eager to see the mines and I wanted to climb the hills and Gary wanted to inspect the cliffs from a more scientific perspective so we climbed for nearly two thousand feet up above the town of Cripple Creek and could see its grid of streets laid out below us with sharp lines and then every so often a cloud would pass over the town darkening it and we would be up where it was light and then the town would light up again when the cloud passed over and we would be where it was dark and would imagine Ricardo and Carbon Man down there in front of the Old Fashioned Ice Cream Parlor smoking their insolent Montecristos and casually surveying the women climbing in and out of tourist buses.

We did find the old silver mines and Mandy had a good look and Gary had a good look at the red soil up that high and started speculating about whole continents pushing up layers of rock from the very deepest

levels and they only came to the surface in Colorado where you can climb right up in the clouds above timberline to discover the way things are hundreds of fathoms *below* the surface of the Great Plains, the vast continent turned inside out and seen here as in x-ray vision.

And what about the silver earrings in Colorado?

In New York we had this outrageous stereo set (Heil AMP-1 towers) when I was living with Carmela on W. 47th St. with the two Siamese cats, Jascha and Maya, who moved like music, like Mozartean strains, through the studio. Or like moveable sculptures, plastic realisations of musical forms, the Mozartean impulse transposed into the feline dance of a New York studio with Carmela's awe-inspiring body gliding naked or wearing only a pair of jeans, another feline realisation of silvery form.

Carmela and her love for Mozart. Me and my love for Carmela: and up above the floor of the metropolis, twelve stories up and the rain clouds passing down Seventh Avenue darkening the streets and then the streets brightening up as the clouds sweep over.

Carmela and her love of jewellery, of silver... In Bennington, Vermont, we found an old silversmith who made us a pair of rings and in San Francisco we found their complement: a young craftsman at the Renaissance Fayre who designed us matching silver medallions, emblems of the Sun Energy on one side and the Earth Energy on the other.

So this very day I go into a random shop in Cripple Creek and I see them and buy them – silver earrings for Carmela!

Then I go with Mandy and Gary up to the silver mines to explore the Earth Energy. Climbing above the city the earrings in my pocket jingling away as we climb higher, even above the mines, towards the main peak, and we find when almost there – hard to believe! – a broad meadow filled with strange wild flowers (the whole scene becoming crammed with excessive idyllic romantic detail) and we're getting pretty tired so we stop and take off our back packs and start gorging ourselves on salami on rye with dill pickles and a couple of apples. And Gary has lugged up a sixpack of Coors beer which almost explodes when we open the first can. We pass around that can and then another. And by the time we have finished them we are walking over the tops of the wildflowers seemingly without touching them and the sky is suddenly more beautiful more absurdly blue – and Mandy takes off her shirt and her breasts start catching a lot of the Sun Energy up here.

Then Gary pulls her down and they roll over and over and they are kissing and then Mandy pulls me down too and rolls over on top of me and we are kissing, too.

The silver earrings are in my pocket – getting crushed. Stabbing into my thigh.

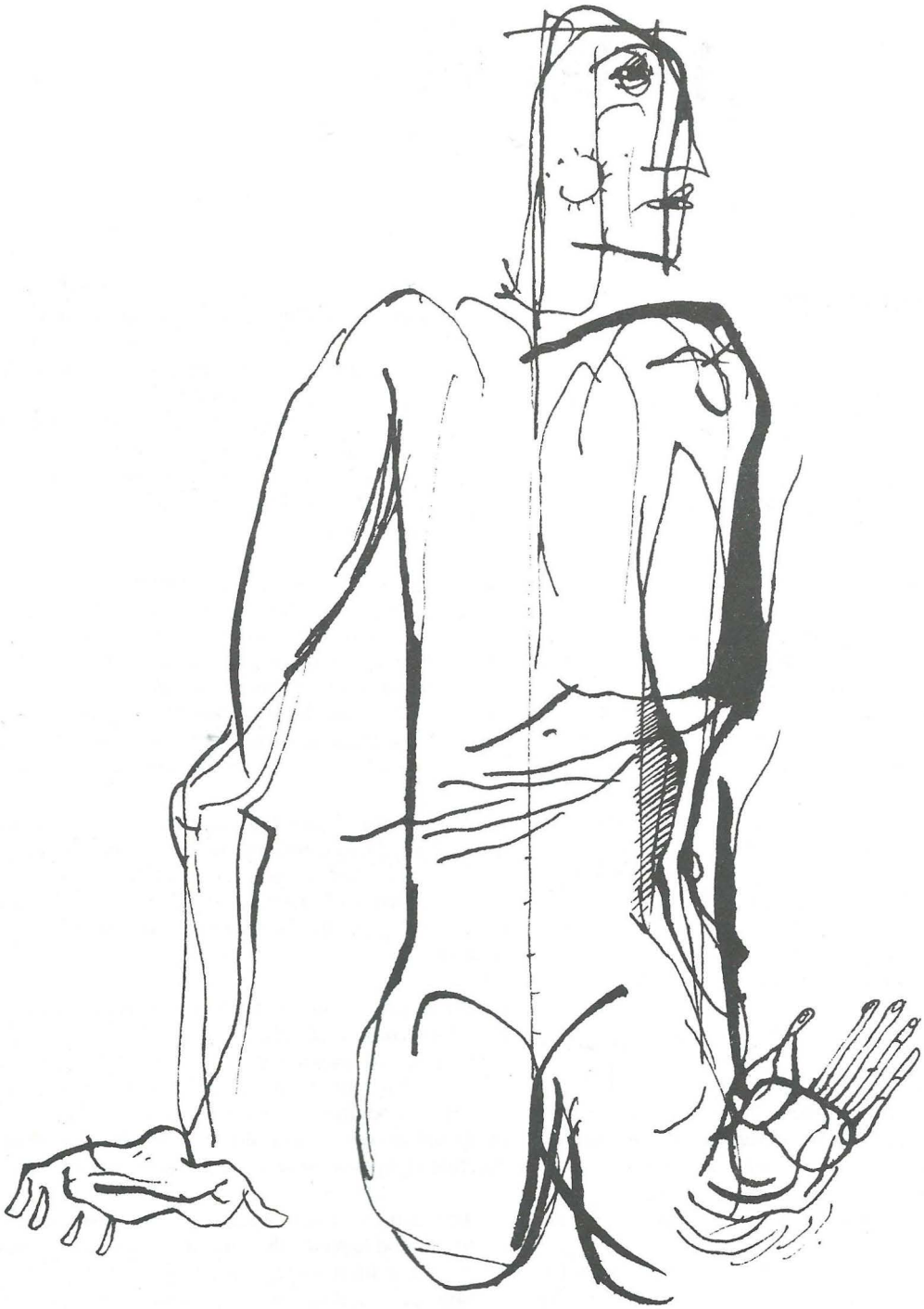
We are all laughing – it must be the air over ten thousand feet. Mandy and Gary are getting ready to split up, they don't have much time for each other any more. It must be the altitude, rolling off of me she pulls Gary down again and they start wrestling and tickling each other until finally they are out of breath.

The difficulty is not in imagining exceptions to any rule but in imagining the norm which is invisible. The everyday is invisible, while the exceptional is plainly seen. However, the unusual is quickly forgotten, but the ordinary, while invisible, is never truly forgotten.

The North made a genuine thinker or reflective out of my Fijian friend Carbon Man, but I can't say why.

None of my friends are exceptions to the rule. And yet all of them are for some reason memorable (to me). I have only forgotten exceptional friends, if I ever had any.

Lying together on our backs staring up at the absurd blue sky filled with Sun Energy and then falling asleep for awhile until the mountain chill wakes us and we remember Ricardo and Carbon Man down there in the streets of Cripple Creek smoking Montecristos and maybe remembering us and looking up into the hills.



JIRI TIBOR NOVAK

books

Assertion and Argument

Lucy Frost

Harry Heseltine: *The Uncertain Self: Essays in Australian Literature and Criticism,* (OUP, $30.00).

Fay Zwicky: *The Lyre in the Pawnshop: Essays on Literature and Survival 1974-1984* (UWA Press, $15.00).

Is a "book" a "text"? This is not, as the unsuspecting may naively believe, a question about setting some syllabus. No, indeed. What we have here is a ponderous philosophical dilemma: what is a reader to make of print on a page? Should it be deconstructed? reconstructed? misconstructed? Such abstruse anxieties are currently intoxicating minds across the continent, bringing to some euphoria, to others the deadening weight of a hang-over.

If damage caused by critical theorists could be localized, I would sigh wearily and avert my ears. After all, twenty years of teaching in university English departments has exposed me to more examples than I care to remember of those described by Fay Zwicky as "the tin-eared, flint-hearted academics with their jargon." They brutalize the language and leave their students less dazzled than dazed.

Admittedly, the best of the theorists do not have this effect, but they are few and far between, and their less capable imitators excite primarily themselves. Leaving aside their banality and aesthetic blockage, what bothers me is the gleeful response they meet in a culture already primed to be anti-academic and anti-intellectual. In part, my response is personal. Belonging to a despised group, apparently hell-bent on confirming the prejudice it bears, is no fun.

The prejudice is all around. Popular opinion sets the critical mind against the creative spirit. As Fay Zwicky puts it, the weight given to " 'creativity' relies on the assumption that creative people are open, pliant, unconventional, and that the uncreative are closed, rigid, and inflexibly authoritarian." With this dichotomy neatly in place, it follows "that the development of the rational critical intellect is hostile to the creative temperament." Zwicky sees "something amiss" in the gladiatorial set-up:

> In the red corner, you have art, creation, life; in the white corner, criticism, annihilation, and death. It is one of our more quirky modern heresies that art has been credited with virtually angelic powers, and word has got round to the consumer that the one thing you cannot do if you run into an angel is wrestle with him.

And yet wrestling is one way to "survive."

"Surviving," a motive throughout the book, combines personal and intellectual concerns. Often the two merge, as when Zwicky expresses literary preference in terms of "my own love of writers vulnerable to experience like Tolstoy, Whitman, Melville and D. H. Lawrence as opposed to my guarded respect for writers who seem to have been born old, like Ibsen, Sartre, Kierkegaard and Strinberg."

"Love" and "guarded respect," ordinary language shared by academic and non-academic alike. Nothing here of "tropes," "schemata," or "signification." A reader may disagree with Zwicky, confident of understanding what she had to say. This to me is crucial for first-class criticism.

A similar clarity marks the essays of Harry Heseltine in *The Uncertain Self,* bland though his prose alongside Zwicky's, with its wit and metaphoric color. Never do her sentences ring out of tune. Frequently Heseltine's fall flat. A certain stodginess is made worse by his habit of summing up an essay in a single sentence, like a teacher erecting signposts for an undergraduate lecture:

> The burden of my argument in this essay is that myths and legends, drawn from three chief sources, played a fundamental role in Kendall's imagination, provided him in effect with an indispensable means of organizing his often inchoate perceptions of the world into a sustaining identity.

Zwicky's essays stay closer to sources of intellectual energy. Discovery emerges through discourse, with judg-

ments finalized only at the end.

Heseltine's well-wrought structures are appropriate for a vision yearning towards balance, and perhaps stasis. The book's title shows the way. Tentative though "The Uncertain Self" must by definition be, confidence firms in the sub-title, "Essays in Australian Literature and Criticism" (how much more assured than Zwicky's sub-title, "Essays on Literature and Survival 1974-1984"). Heseltine's opening, eponymous essay has a different subtitle; "Notes on the development of Australian literary form" (Zwicky starts out with "Disinterested Motives?"), and in the word "development" there dwells a cheery optimism.

"The uncertain self" turns out to be yesterday's writer, not today's critic. Reference is to the writer stranded on Australian shores in the closing years of the eighteenth century when "the value systems by which English society lived were in a state of radical change, and when literature was caught between competing conventions of style and form."

> Thrust as it were into a cultural vacuum, without the support of a sanctioned tradition, his central task became that of authenticating his own uncertain self in an unfamiliar world.

Heseltine follows "the literary artist" from these first years in Australia to "the welter of new prose", including writers "whose work seems likely to last." Here for once the critic himself seems uncertain. Before actually naming Wilding, Carey, and Moorhouse as his candidates for "lasting," he adds the parenthetic disclaimer, "by arbitrary selection."

I suspect Heseltine feels less comfortable with these contemporary writers than with their uncertain precursors. The subjects of individual essays in his collection are older favorites, Henry Kendall, Henry Lawson, E. J. Banfield, Judith Wright of the 1950s, Eve Langley, Hal Porter. Heseltine's critical writing sets distance between enthusiasm and judgment. Known as a supporter of Xavier Herbert, he designates *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975) as "the most astonishing starburst of our recent fiction." Few would agree. Surprisingly, he makes no effort to persuade them. In the single paragraph devoted to the book, he ignores well-documented reader resistance.

Heseltine asserts, but does not argue, his most controversial judgments. Zwicky shows no such squeamishness. Her delight in playing books and writers against each other underpins her critical method. Where a critic less intelligent or less generous might descend to ridicule or complaint, Zwicky uses her comparisons to 'see'.

In "Gallic Sanction: Another Look at Brennan," she begins: "I came to look closer at Brennan after teaching Edgar Allan Poe." The closer look showed her a different Brennan, to be appreciated as a writer who "unwittingly gave us a formula for the disintegrating consciousness at a time when, for most people, God was still in his heaven and all was very nearly right with the world." Even so, she won't be drawn into claims for splendor in the poetry, or congratulations over discovering the French symbolists. On the contrary, she argues "that Brennan has failed to comprehend Baudelaire's account of Beauty."

Such independence of mind is a pleasure, the next best thing to long conversations with friends genuinely passionate about books and ideas. Many of the essays speak directly to me as an American-born teacher of American literature. Zwicky writes wonderfully about American poetry, but she doesn't stop there. With authority, she generalizes about differences between the colonial cultures developed in America and Australia in terms sharp and perceptive. Considering Australia's pressures on its writers to equate "self-love with selfishness" and shrink accordingly, she compares them to their American counterparts:

> In such a climate perpetuated generation after generation, there is little chance of the emergence of an unashamed egoless ego like a Melville or a Whitman, a Faulkner or a Bellow to present a rounded evaluation of place and people with enough complexity and assurance to admit he might occasionally have blundered and be prepared to change tack. Where man is separated from his fellow, each wrapped in a cloud of self-contempt, the writer faces a sterile limbo of humankind, unable to live fully or die having cared passionately, doomed never to obtain release from the brittle casing of the self.

Heady stuff, stern . . . true? Maybe so, maybe not, but worth thinking about.

The Lyre in the Pawnshop is to me a model of academic criticism, engaged with books and ideas, erudite and committed, a personal voice willing to say, *"I think."* Self is not distanced into abstractions set by French theorists in translation. Zwicky is far from insular, blowing no horn simple-mindedly for 'Australian' culture, but she knows herself to be implicated in it, as I think critics should be. Perhaps the 1890s could afford a *fin de siecle* aestheticism. A hundred years on, can we?

Lucy Frost teaches English at La Trobe University. In 1984 her book No Place for a Nervous Lady *was published by McPhee Gribble/Penguin, and she is working on a life of Annie Baxter based on a remarkable nineteenth century journal.*

Foreign Affairs in Transition

Walter Crocker

Peter Henderson: *Privilege and Pleasure* (Methuen Haynes, $6.00).

Australia has been fortunate in most of the men who have headed its Department of Foreign Affairs. Some of them, conspicuously Sir Alan Watt (1950-54), Sir Arthur Tange (1954-65) and Sir James Plimsoll (1965-70, at present

Governor of Tasmania), three, all quite different from one another, have been outstanding for their qualities of intellect, professional skills, and uprightness. What strengths the department possesses is due largely to these three men who laid down its foundations and its standards.

The performance of the heads of the department was the more creditable because it was carried out in the face of Ministers who more than once were scarcely adequate. The good Ministers, and from both parties, worked hard, were conscientious, and had the dignity in their personal demeanor as also in their handling of Australia's interests which is a requisite in this particular portfolio. Heads of the department, moreover, had to cope with the rising status and power of the trade-unionized clerical grades, especially since the Whitlam years.

Peter Henderson, the author of this book, was Secretary (i.e. head) of the Department of Foreign Affairs from 1979 to 1984. By the time he left the foreign service in 1985 he had spent thirty-three years in it. He had seen it from the inside grow from an establishment of diplomatic officers increased several times over, Australia's overseas posts increased from twenty-six to seventy-five plus nineteen consular posts, and the budget increased many times. He had the benefits of the standards and the procedures laid down and pursued during the Watt-Tange-Plimsoll years. By the time he himself was promoted to head the department the secular liberation theology of the Whitlam years had been institutionalized and he had to cope with the liberation. Being a father of four daughters he presumably took to what is now called 'affirmative action' with grace; there were only about half-a-dozen women officers in the service during his formative years. The right of an officer, and indeed of clerical grades, male or female, to take overseas a concubine in place of a legal spouse, which would have been unthinkable to his father-in-law, Sir Robert Menzies, or to Lord Casey, he had to accept, whatever he felt about it. From the Whitlam years it had become a Public Service Board fiat. So too with the onrush of egalitarianism, which levelled out much of the status of diplomatic officers and which, aided by the practice of leaks, made clerks such a force to be reckoned with. When Henderson was appointed to the department, and for some years later, the Australian diplomatic service saw itself as a *corps d'élite* and tended to act, and to react, according to that vision. The cat-calls about elitism have now dealt with that.

The author explains that he wrote this book at the urging of friends, and that he agreed to their urgings in order that his "children and grandchildren might know something of the amusing and significant things which happened to us during our years in the Foreign Service". This modest aim accords with the book, which is genial in tone (though with its share of proper complaints about conditions), recounting some amusing stories, and free of any pomposity. Significantly there is no index, a pity in a book like this. It runs to about two hundred pages divided into eleven chapters. They deal chronologically with his years in Canberra and his postings overseas (Washington, Djakarta, Geneva, London and Manila), his attendance at a variety of international conferences and his tours of inspection. The light-heartedness ceases with the two final chapters on the Senator Primmer affair and on his involuntary retirement.

Except for the two final chapters the book, as a result of the specific and limited aims Henderson set himself, touches on the great public issues, especially the issues in international relations which were engaging the attention of the Department of Foreign Affairs during the thirty odd years of his service, only once or twice, and then by the way as it were. That is to say, this is not a book which throws light from the inside on Australia's policies regarding Indonesia or India or Japan or international communism or Vietnam or the arms race or defence priorities and so on. It would be irrelevant as well as unfair to judge it by that criterion. That needs another and different book. Perhaps he will write it some day.

What it throws light on is above all the personality of Henderson himself. What comes out are his inner preoccupations and his decency and probity. He must have made some mistakes – who doesn't? – but he seems never to have made a howler and never to have flagged in his duty. He was well reputed in the service for his honorable standards and, as he grew in authority, for his valuing of *esprit de corps*. I understand that as Secretary he was scrupulous almost to a fault in seeing officers who had grievances, and also junior officers going to an overseas posting. I know too of the time devoted by his wife to the departmental wives, an essential prop to departmental morale, not always observed in the past. I can vouch for his justifying his reputation because he and I were colleagues together in Djakarta, and this was at a peculiarly testing time when Sukarno was on the rampage. Untruthfulness and deviousness of any kind were foreign to him.

And it also throws light on the question of parliamentary privilege as used and abused by the ex-Senator Primmer, and on the further question of relations between Ministers and senior public service officers, particularly heads of departments. Space does not permit a full account of these two weighty subjects here.

As regards the Primmer affair, over a period of two years, following on the Hawke Government's coming to power, Senator Primmer, fed on information and misinformation from a hostile officer inside the department, kept up a sustained campaign against Henderson, asking more than two hundred questions, all under parliamentary privilege. The initial accusation was that Henderson as Head of the Department, and in keeping with "the Geelong Grammar School mafia", had covered up embezzlement by an officer, a member of this mafia. He then went on to accuse Henderson of, *inter alia,* corrupt activities himself, of lying to Parliament, and of breaching sections of the Crimes Act and the criminal justice system. These changes led to a series of investigations by the Federal Police, the Department of Finance and the Commonwealth Ombuds-

man. All cleared Henderson of any misconduct. And a few weeks ago, since this book was published, following Henderson's suing Primmer, now no longer a member of Parliament, for defamation, a settlement was made out of court. The settlement included a public apology and a humiliating retraction of the charges. Primmer acknowledged, and Henderson recognised, that although the statements had been made in good faith, acting upon information supplied to the former, he had in fact been misinformed "and none of the statements were true".

Henderson concludes that parliamentary privilege as it now exists should be curbed. Members of Parliament of all parties would not disagree. But bedevilled as he had been by it, he is sensible enough to see that parliamentary privilege in some large measure must remain. It is in fact essential. As our society becomes ever more complex, and as manipulations, conspiracies and corruption of the kind long familiar in the United States seep more and more into Australia — witness revelations from Sydney in recent years or from the Costigan Commission — and given the heavy slanting of the criminal law and its procedures in favor of the accused, members of Parliament must be allowed the traditional right so as to ventilate charges and suspicions. That is indubitably in the public interest. But the hounding of public servants in the way Primmer and a few other parliamentarians have is indubitably not in the public interest.

The final chapter in the book deals with the termination of the author's position in the Department of Foreign Affairs and then in the Public Service, including the nature and the process of the termination. Principles of importance are raised and as politicization of the public service is an imminent and worrying prospect, at least for significant sections of it, they demand a discussion at a length which cannot be undertaken in this review. In the particular case of Peter Henderson, who cannot be expected to have a steel-strong judicial objectivity about his sufferings, the facts as he presents them show, or imply, that Mr Hayden as Minister behaved not without a fair amount of considerateness and frankness and not without dignity, if also not without some incomprehension (e.g. "the G.G.S. mafia", class prejudice, or Henderson's character).

Peter Henderson believes, as do some others familiar with the corridors of power in Canberra over the last thirty or forty years, that his career was disadvantaged by the fact that he was son-in-law of Sir Robert Menzies. He gives examples which will probably not be convincing for all readers. It was certainly true that Sir Robert was unbending in his punctiliousness that no family connection of his would benefit, or could even appear to benefit, from it. And there were those in the Liberal Party as well as the Labor Party who viewed askance any Menzies connection after Sir Robert retired.

But Peter Henderson would be the first to admit, and with no feigned gallantry, that the Menzies connection gave him more important things than progress in a career — a wife endowed with a lively intelligence and a rare degree of wifely devotion.

Sir Walter Crocker, Lieutenant-Governor of South Australia for nearly ten years prior to his resignation in 1982, had previously spent his time mainly in foreign affairs, including some thirty years as an international official at Geneva and New York, and as ambassador of Australia. Among his books are Nehru, Nigeria, Australian Ambassador *and* Sir Thomas Playford.

A Study of Loss

Jim Davidson

Thomas Shapcott: *Hotel Bellevue* (Chatto & Windus, $25.95).

Thomas Shapcott's latest novel, *Hotel Bellevue*, is centred on the now famous destruction of that Brisbane landmark by the Bjelke-Petersen government in April 1979. On that occasion excavators and trucks rolled in under arc lights and police protection to destroy the cornerstone of what was then the finest tropical Victorian precinct in the country, a rarity by any standards. The novel is in part a requiem for that building, and the lifestyle it represented; it is also a study of loss, and of replacement that is nevertheless displacement. A secondary idea is that experiences incompletely resolved early in life are bound not only to haunt us later, but to recur.

Boyd Kennedy, the main character, is an even bigger wimp than another lawyer, Phil Vernon in *Harland's Half Acre;* rather than go on with psychoanalysis, he shrinks from his shrink and flees from his wife by returning to Brisbane, the scene of childhood holidays with his grandmother. She is now dead, but he is driven to go to her former house, and is able to take a room in it; the exploration of the wider world that he began there in his boyhood he now tentatively resumes. He looks up old friends, begins a muddled wooing of a drop-out woman, and feels no little magnetism toward a Yugoslav laborer who is also in the house. Back in Melbourne, Boyd's wife Marie is coping as best she can, sparring with her Viennese mother and relying on the support of a close friend, torn by the desire to be generous to Boyd while feeling helpless at his desertion. Meanwhile in Brisbane the drama of the Bellevue is reaching its conclusion. Standing now without balconies, the hotel is like a convict with head shorn awaiting execution. Boyd, seeing it as the symbol of a past which is unrecapturable, is initially dismissive. But on the crucial night he goes along to the demonstration, and is manhandled by a policeman. The effect is galvanic. "Up until that moment he had, somewhere inside, felt himself half observer, half party visitor. Until that one shove, Boyd perhaps had been only half anything." Afterwards he goes off with his new friends, and, though he has decided to return to Melbourne, has a fling with Cora. It's made plain that his life will never be the same again.

That Boyd, a confused if stolid figure of southern decency, should actually want to attack the police turns out to

be an effective way of indicating the enormity of the Bellevue's destruction. But otherwise the building does not have the presence in the novel one might expect – this is neither a *Little Hotel* nor a *White Hotel*. (Not even, one might add, an effectively black-banned one. It seems that before the final scene, secret demolition of the interior had been proceeding.) The only time the Bellevue as a building really comes alive is when Boyd is standing on one of the verandas with his grandmother, in their very own balcony scene.

Yet Brisbane itself is marvellously present throughout the novel. There are references to Major Rubin's art collection, to the frail old men found captive a few years ago in a privately-run labor camp, and the more usual references to its voluptuous vegetation and one-dimensional moneymakers. Indeed the exchange between Boyd and his old school friend Bruce Patterson is quite chilling: so long as things can be fixed by the system, then it's O.K. Overall the atmosphere is one of tropical gothic, almost a metaphorical Bellevue, its intricacies unknown, ignored or demolished. Brisbane is wasted on its people, Shapcott seems to be saying; worse, they are wasting it. Nevertheless, at certain levels the integration is complete:

> Queensland, he had read, has the highest illegitimacy rate in the country. Always did have. Generations. Generations of Queenslanders ramming it, tropical fever, out in the daylight, openly, legs open, sweating, grabbing, hair wet on brown, hair tossed over, under mangoes, under beach cottontrees, in full sunshine among sand dunes, brown buttocked, bronze-breasted, edge of riverbanks right beside the new sub-divisions in full sight of roof tilers and builders' labourers, sub-tropical like soft papaws, papaw-breasted, mango-breasted, rolling in fruit-stains and sweat, taking it, giving it, endlessly ripening.

White Stag of Exile, Shapcott's previous novel, was bound to be a hard act to follow. *Hotel Bellevue* has many virtues; but it does not quite deliver. The broken-up sequences, laced with flashbacks, seem to work against the schema of the book, which consists of a week laid out day by day, culminating in the demolition: there is simply not enough tension. Sometimes the dialogue reads flatly, particularly in the Melbourne scenes. Indeed Marie, the wife, is somewhat underdrawn as a character; Cora, the Queensland girl, is far more convincing, and her involvement with Boyd seems quite plausible. But not a great deal more than that: the real centre of energy in the book is Olof, and although both Cora and Boyd manage to avoid entanglement, thereby managing to advance from their scripts laid out in childhood, some violence is done to what seems to be the emotional logic of the book. Boyd's initial encounter with Cora is almost a reactive rape. That Marie, the abandoned wife, should be the one to pay the highest price in all this seems both unconvincing and unfair.

Jim Davidson edited the recently published Sydney-Melbourne Book *(Allen & Unwin).*

The Belated Modernist

Gary Catalano

June Helmer: *George Bell: The Art of Influence* (Greenhouse, $35.00).

June Helmer's *George Bell: The Art of Influence* is largely concerned with advancing Bell's claims to be the father of modernism in Australia.

As she states in her introduction, Helmer believes that most accounts of the emergence of modernism here are inadequate in that they neglect the significance of Bell's role. She has a simple explanation of this neglect. "It has been said," she observes, "that left-wing intellectuals were responsible for the modern sensibility; that modernism emerged in Melbourne in its full sense only by the 1940s." Helmer's footnote at the end of this sentence directs us not to Richard Haese's *Rebels and Precursors*, the most detailed and substantial study of Australian painting in the 1930s and 1940s, but to Murray Bail's study of Ian Fairweather.

Many of the things that are wrong with this book should be apparent by now. Just as it is never made clear whether Bell's significance is due to his art, his teaching, his role as a publicist, or a combination of all these, so it is never proven that all previous accounts of the emergence of modernism in Australia are actually biased in favor of left-wing artists and intellectuals. Indeed, readers of *Rebels and Precursors* will recall that Haese was explicitly concerned with both examining and endorsing a *liberal* tradition in Australian culture. The works of left-wing artists and intellectuals formed only one part of this tradition.

George Bell came belatedly to modernism, and he did so by a process which Helmer never satisfactorily explains. Though Bell was entirely unimpresssed by the 1910 and 1912 London exhibitions of post-Impressionist paintings organized by Roger Fry, the suggestion is made that by 1914 Fry's critical writings had come to exercise a profound and lasting influence on Bell. This may well have been the case, but Helmer fails to present any evidence that Bell read Fry's writings either in these years or at any other time in his career. It is not good enough for her to rely solely on a statement by Fred Williams (a student of Bell's for a time) to the effect that Bell never spoke of Cezanne except through the ideas of Roger Fry.

What complicates this issue even further is that Bell's art took a further two decades to show the influence of post-Impressionism. Helmer herself states that not until 1933 did Bell produce, with "The Chef", his "first completely successful work in the modern manner."

Helmer raises many more matters which inadvertently invite us to question the degree and strength of

George Bell's commitment to modernism. Not the least of these is the fact that when Bell again returned to London in 1934 (in order, as he put it, "to find the golden key of modernism"), the Australian artist to whom he most frequently wrote was none other than the increasingly reactionary Bernard Hall, his old teacher at the National Gallery School. Bell can be regarded as an exemplar of modernism only when he is contrasted either with Hall or with such figures as James McDonald or Max Meldrum. What novelty his work of the mid-thirties possessed in the stultified and provincial culture of Melbourne would quickly wear-off by the end of the decade.

The one good thing about this study is that it alerts us to the complexity of George Bell's character. Helmer gives a brief but interesting account of Bell's upbringing and family background, and it may well be that the change his art underwent in the 1930s had its real roots, not in the writings of Roger Fry, but in the legacy of his Quaker and puritan background. For what strikes me about so many of Bell's statements on art is that his "search for first principles" was not so much an artistic question as it was a moral one.

Indeed, there is even a whiff of profound moral distaste in the statement Bell made in 1945 when reflecting on his work of the 1920s:

> I was a portrait painter once but gave it up. The production as demanded today, a mixture of flattery and camera likeness, has little to do with art and is of little interest to me. A portrait of commerce is applied art – for purposes of record, merely recording what Mr Jones looked like in the summer... but that's got nothing to do with art, which deals with abstract ideas rather than personalities. Art deals with the hidden truth rather than superficial appearance.

If George Bell was the hero which June Helmer imagines him to have been, he owed this status to the fact that he was unable to flatter. It is, I think, in a loathing of flattery and hypocrisy that the origins of his modernism – such as it was – should be sought.

Gary Catalano's most recent book was Slow Tennis. *He writes art criticism for the Melbourne Age.*

A Knockabout Life

Olaf Ruhen

Cecil Holmes: *One Man's Way: on the road with a rebel reporter, film-maker and adventurer* (Penguin, $9.95).

The knockabout life is not comfortable; one sleeps a lot on hard floors and eats from a questionable menu. It's seldom rewarding and the majority would avoid it like the plague. And such rewards as it offers are not in great demand. Yet those who follow it tell a good story and frequently make their readers wish that they had followed a different path when the opportunity offered. For perhaps all of us have had such chances. Perhaps we listened to the voice of wisdom, perhaps we thought too long and too hard about some soberer promise beckoning, perhaps we met the wrong acquaintance at some psychological time. Not many achieve their aim.

Good company is among the best of the rewards that offer; and it is impossible to read the memories of such Cecil Holmes without encountering familiar names.

I met the man myself once, on a Belgian airfield crowded with a thousand heavy bombers on a happy mission – returning prisoners of war to England. Each bomber carried, in addition to its crew, some 24 ex-prisoners. And Cecil's part was to assist Roger Mirams in filming the operation for the New Zealand Government. You won't find the film in the archives... at least I never did.

But Holmes was much happier when he was writing about events in which he was more directly involved, for example and most spectacularly the 1974 cyclone which smashed Darwin while he was living there. His descriptions are excellent and he displays the film-maker's abilitiy to pinpoint tragedy, both major and minor. His description of cyclone Tracy is the best I have read. It first appeared, like many pieces in this book, in Overland.

A stream of ethnographic films for the Institute of Aboriginal Studies now set him off on a new direction, and inculcated a feeling that modern man had lost the gift of life. "Aboriginal tribal life, or what remains has more to offer than we care to admit," he writes. And he came to the conclusion that its basic characteristic, "extended family", made people think of each other, instead of themselves, including a oneness, a sharing, "a reversal of the anonymity of our society with its loneliness, its selfishness." This realization led him into a sense of companionship under which he produced work that made people think.

Under this same influence he made a number of biographical films, and explored for himself the philosophy behind the work. One such piece told the story of Philip Roberts, on whom Douglas Lockwood had already written his prize-winning biography *I, the Aboriginal*. Others of his subjects included artists already beginnning to make names for themselves, like Wandjuk and Marwulan, now beginning to make good incomes from their art in response to the growth of their reputations. The Arnhem Land painters are now collected in groups of up to a hundred such sites as Yirrkala; art was a popular income producer and they like to work en masse.

From Aboriginals Cecil Holmes moved on to related Pacific subjects: New Guinea people, Solomon Islanders, and the indigenes of Timor, whom he 'collected' during the last days of Portuguese rule there. Cavalcanti, the Brazilian film director, recommended he try

a story of Conrad's, which he did after the copyright became available a quarter of century or so later.

Most of Holmes's travels have been involved with film-making and he has made films in China, Singapore and the Philippines, in Moscow and Budapest, in New York and Hollywood, as in London and in Australia.

A good deal of his work has been shown on television, and the titles of some at least should be familiar to Australians.

Holme's life has been full of interest and change. Yet his summing up reflects a disappointment and dissatisfaction which seemed to centre on his politics. He writes:

> If human beings, however desperately and uncertainly, begin to abandon the competitive acquisitive society, motivated by greed and avarice, how can they come to terms with a planned order, one that may ultimately make life more agreeable and humane?
>
> The sad characteristic of planned societies is the sterility of creativity (when was there last a memorable Russian novel?) and the lack of inventiveness (why do the Russians always trail behind in technology?). For creativity and inventiveness flourish in an open society.
>
> Thus we continue to confront the familiar dilemma of how to solve economic/social problems yet safeguard, even develop, freedoms that have been so hard won over the centuries.

Olaf Ruhen is the author of forty books and many short stories. He is a free-lance author, living in Sydney.

Mannix, Monash and a Cast of Hundreds

Barry Jones

Bede Nairn, Geoffrey Serle (general editors): *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, volume 10, 1891-1939 (Melbourne University Press, $35.00).

In reviewing volume 8 for Overland, I moaned that a disappointingly small number of interesting Australians in the period 1891-1939 had surnames between Cl and Gib. Through the luck of the draw, this volume has an unusually high quota. It runs from Lat-Ner.

There are 659 entries by 445 authors in 680 pages, an average of 2.06 columns per name.

The longest individual entries are for Archbishop Daniel Mannix (12.9 columns), General Sir John Monash (12.8), Joseph Aloysius Lyons (9.8), Sir Keith Murdoch (9.5), Sir John Latham (8.9), Dame Nellie Melba (8.8), Essington Lewis (8.7), Cardinal Patrick Moran (8.0), Sir Douglas Mawson (7.5) and H. V. McKay (6.2). The Lindsays – Percy, Lionel, Norman, Ruby and Daryl – share 16 lively and incisive columns by Bernard Smith.

James Griffin's Daniel Mannix (1864-1963) is not only the longest entry, but probably the most densely packed, and certainly the most controversial, with the flavor and style of Lytton Strachey's Cardinal Manning. "While Mannix was politically naive and, in spite of his quick-wittedness, intellectually shallow, this was not crucial to his spiritual constituency, the clergy and faithful. Folklore asserted that he was one of the four cleverest men in the world. Certainly he was God's warrior in the breastplate of St Patrick, smiting bigots with apparent logic and ridicule and edifying the Church militant."

Dr Mannix was very remote in his personal relations. His brother Patrick, who lived to 97, was snubbed for his apostacy. He never addressed his intimate supporters William Hackett and Jeremiah Murphy by their Christian names, nor visited his neighbor and loyal supporter John Wren.

Griffin sees Mannix as vain and arrogant, finding "intimidating sarcasm and jibes irresistible". But he concedes that on some socio-economic issues the archbishop was more progressive than his bishops — on capital punishment, sex education, non-confessional universities and the 1951 referendum on banning the Communist Party. He condemned Nazism and anti-semitism but admired Mussolini.

I found only one slip: Archbishop Gilroy, whom Mannix patronised bitterly, was created Cardinal in 1946, not 1945.

Mannix's confrontationist style on state aid and conscription was in striking contrast to the more amiable leadership of Patrick Moran, who became Australia's first Cardinal as early as 1885. There were other contrasts, as A. E. Cahill's entry makes clear: Moran wrote prolifically, had been a professor of Hebrew and commanded Italian, French, German, Spanish, Greek and Gaelic.

Mannix wrote nothing, was monolingual and spurned the Gaelic revival. As Griffin notes acidly he "applied himself to wording rigorously the penny catechism; he was hardly an educationist". Moran was held in high regard by the Papacy: Mannix made his superiors feel uneasy.

Geoffrey Serle's John Monash (1865-1931) is a masterly reworking of his award winning biography (1982), with some new touches added. The contrast between the rise of Monash, the German-Jewish outsider, to professional and social success before 1914, and the grudging meanness of officialdom towards him in the 1920s, is striking. Before the war, Victorians were able to cope with a medium tall poppy, but after the armistice — when there was no good reason to love the British — the colonial cringe set in with a vengeance. Having a really tall poppy among us was a major embarrassment to the Australian establishment.

Serle is wrong to say that "Commonwealth governments, in 1919 and later, entirely neglected to honour him . . ." As *John Monash: A Biography* points out (p.404), in 1919 he was promoted GCMG. "So far as he knew, in Australia only the Governor General and Sir

Joseph Cook had attained this grade [he was wrong – Griffith and Barton had it too], but he received few congratulations; seemingly few people understood how rare an honour it was''. He deserved far more and his promotion to full general (by the Scullin government) was delayed for eleven years.

Incidentally, although Dr Mannix is now to be found in the 24,000 pages of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, John Monash is not.

P. R. Hart and Clem Lloyd's Joseph Aloysius Lyons (1879-1939), ''schoolteacher, premier and prime minister'', retells the story of the poor Irish Catholic boy from the wrong side of Bass Strait who became in the 1930s the increasingly uncomfortable instrument of conservative capitalist orthodoxy, surrounded by people he neither liked nor trusted. When Labor split during the Depression he was unduly respectful of, and deferential to, the conventional economic wisdom: sanctity of contract, balancing the budget, and equating national and household accounts. His accession to anti-Labor leadership is also discussed in the entries on Sir John Latham (Stuart Macintyre) and Sir Keith Murdoch (Geoffrey Serle): although the latter's alleged role as ''kingmaker'' is discounted as ''largely a myth''.

The entry on Essington Lewis (1881-1961) by Geoffrey Blainey and Ann G. Smith conveys a powerful impression of his toughness, energy and vision: he was formidable. ''Among Lewis' papers was found the simple text which had ruled his life: I AM WORK'' . . . ''He once remarked that he would like to die on horseback . . . and thus it was'', and the much reproduced photograph of Lewis, Churchillian in appearance in his riding gear at the age of eighty, is an essential contribution to Australian iconography (not reproduced here, of course). Sir Ian McLennan, who dominated BHP himself for decades, even now invariably refers to him as ''Mr Lewis''.

John Lack's H. V. McKay (1865-1926) is the story of a remarkable innovator and fairly benevolent paternalist, the humble farmer's son who overcame all obstacles to create Australia's largest manufacturing enterprise — only to have that enterprise sold off and his contribution lost.

Some of the best entries are shorter — the appalling T. J. Ley (''politician and murderer''), Bea Miles (''Bohemian rebel''), George Marshall Hall, composer, conductor and disturber of Melbourne's peace, R. D. Meagher, a Sydney criminal solicitor in both senses, Dr William Maloney, philanthropist, physician and MP, T. W. McCawley, public servant and Queensland chief justice who died at forty-four, G. E. ''Chinese'' Morrison, journalist and adviser to Sun Yat Sen, and E. A. Mann (''The Watchman''), chemist, politician and broadcaster.

I have no space to discuss Nellie Melba, Hubert and Gilbert Murray, our man in Papua and Greek scholar respectively, Sidney Myer, Douglas Mawson and Henry Lawson, such is the diversity and importance of the subjects in volume ten.

However, Stephen Murray-Smith's piece on Herbert Dyce Murphy (1879-1971), ''gentleman adventurer and raconteur'', cannot pass without comment. Brought up in Como (South Yarra, not Italy), and educated at Oxford, he became a transvestite and was a model for the pretty girl with the parasol in E. Phillips Fox's ''The Arbor'' and Patrick White's Eddie Twyborn, became an escort for his distant kinswoman the Empress Eugenie, was a dog handler for Mawson in Antarctica and for forty-five years an ice-master of the Norwegian whaling fleet.

Errors are surprisingly few: Bishop Henry Montgomery, the Field Marshal's father, was – although a KCMG – not Sir Henry. Unlike their Australian counterparts Sir Frank Woods, Sir John Grindrod *et al*, British bishops never take the accolade. Sir Newton Moore, ex-premier of W.A. and industrialist in Canada, ceased to be a Conservative MP in Britain in 1931 (not 1932).

Barry Jones is Australian Minister for Science.

Women to Men and Women

Graham Rowlands

Kate Llewellyn: *Luxury* (Redress Press, P.O. Box 655, Broadway, NSW 2007, $6.95).
Katherine Gallagher: *Passengers to the City* (Hale & Iremonger, $16.95 and $8.95).

It's a pleasure to review Kate Llewellyn's second poetry collection and Katherine Gallagher's third. A pleasure. And something of a relief. Unfortunately, recent collections sent to Overland have been characterized by obscurity, turgidity, prolixity and such a lack of style and rhythm that they may as well have been columns of newsprint with every fifth word chosen at random from the *Macquarie*. Even the odd bursts of verbal drama and energy seem to have been derived from Hopkins.

It's tempting to praise the praiseworthy in Llewellyn and Gallagher, and leave it at that. However, this wouldn't be fair to them – or to the reader. Both poets are still writing best what they wrote best when they started writing. For Llewellyn, that means woman/women-to-men poems; for Gallagher, that means landscape. On the other hand, both poets have expanded their range. Whereas Llewellyn has *willed* her expanded range, Gallagher has covered new areas of experience. A crude distinction, but one that can be supported at length. This, despite both poets making ample use of their long-term memories. Although Llewellyn can scarcely go wrong in her main subject area in her first two sections, her other successes are few and far between. By contrast, Gallagher writes *some* fine poems across most of her range, while not having one large successful area.

Almost all Llewellyn's poems are clear, fluent and likely to grab the reader with an apt image. It's an art that conceals art. In her woman/women-to-men poems she's witty, cutting, playful, resigned, ironic, honest,

blatant, vulnerable. Her *tones* are a tonic. Consider "Breasts":

my breast knows me more than I do
prying hanging over fences
observant as a neighbour
or eager as a woman wanting to gossip
they tell me nothing
but they say quite a lot about me

Her coverage of Western "mythology" is her major new achievement. She re-writes "Genesis":

Let's face it
Eden was a bore...
she wasn't kicked out
she walked out

The other "myths", however, *aren't* re-written. They're largely *reinforced.* The poet delineates the heroines' *feelings.* Possibly not all feminists would endorse this particular kind of sisterhood. Still, if only all masochism sounded as impressive as "Helen (2)":

so she did what we all have done
lay down and gave herself to love
and knew she'd pay and pay

Unfortunately, many of Llewellyn's other poems trail off into prose, repetition, garrulity, over-generalized politics and whimsy. The best are "O", "Football", "Shimmer", "Prison Without Walls", "The White Hole" and "The White Bird". A pity her title poem is nothing like her best.

Gallagher's poems are uniformly competent. Reading a collection gives the reviewer a chance to watch the competent rise to the outstanding. While such quality is occasionally achieved in her verses on European buildings, it happens most often in her Australian landscapes. On returning from Europe she finds herself:

like a miner
surfacing, clutching at the sky

the weight of sun suddenly
held on his hands.

In "Wimmera Windscreen" a silo focuses attention because of flat monotony, and in "Drought Sequence" carcasses become "scattered sculptures / from the earth's own oven".

Although Gallagher is less successful overall in her poems about people, she can succeed remarkably well. "Momentums" is a tough-tender end-of-relationship poem. The title poem is about a middle-aged man and a middle-aged woman who are sitting next to each other. They might have lived most of their lives together or they might be strangers. The poet doesn't know. The man "turns his head quickly / not like a lover, but content". Finally, "At the Playground" is a poem that will outlive us. It could be one of the best modern parent-to-child poems in English. In the last two stanzas the "he" is a three year old and the "I" is the mother, the poet:

The ground spins, blurs, he begs it
with each command, checks
I'm not going too fast.
'You can't fall off,' he says
smiling, assured.

I know it, this steady pace
contains us both, days overlap: he will perhaps
never love me more than now.

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Three Perspectives on Oz

Tim. Thorne

Alan Wearne: *The Nightmarkets* (Penguin Books, $14.95).
Howard Jacobson: *Redback* (Bantam Press, $24.95).
Anthony Turner: *Light & Shade* (Hyland House, $16.95).

Excerpts from *The Nightmarkets* have been appearing in magazines and anthologies and at poetry readings over the last decade. To see the work in its entirety, however, is a vastly different experience. Familiarity with bits of it as verse does not prepare one for its impact as a novel.

The obvious comparison and contrast which it invites is with Les Murray's *The Boys Who Stole The Funeral*, and it could be seen as the urban complement to that work. But whereas Murray builds a sonnet sequence into a long yarn, Wearne has been more ambitious in attempting to present a work in which the qualities of the novel and of poetry are integrated and balance each other.

Like those of any first-class novelist, Wearne's characters speak with voices which are distinctive, but not so idiosyncratically personal that they do not also speak for whole recognisable categories of people, from the tough but vulnerable 'working girl' to the Toorak matron.

Yet within the language of the characters, the language of the poet keeps rising to the surface. The length (nearly 300 pages) does not preclude a consistent tightness and many pithy observations which have the resonance one associates with a poet's epigrams rather than a prose-writer's aphorisms.

Such are lines like "whenever / a market's free, much more isn't," and (perfect as an encapsulation of the spirit of the Labor Party post-1975), "Maintain your rage? Maintain your quorum."

In fact it is an Australian political novel that many readers will see this book filling a space that has been empty for far too long. Not that there has been a dearth of ideological novels, far from it, but there has been nowhere near enough tapping by novelists or poets of the material available from within the machines and machinations of the political parties. In Australia the worlds of creative

writing and practical politics do not overlap as they do in Europe. I can think of only three published poets and no novelists or playwrights who have stood as political candidates for a major party in the last ten years, and the only one of those who was elected seems to have stopped writing. Alan Wearne, of course, was one of the other two and, if electoral success had meant the loss of *The Nightmarkets*, Australia would have been the poorer for it, whatever his abilities as a politician.

The section entitled "You Can't Dine Out Forever" is reminiscent of some scenes from Gunter Grass' *Diary of a Snail* in its capturing of the atmosphere of a political conference, but Wearne's achievement is all the more remarkable for his characters' being peripheral to the heavy political action or, more accurately, *vice versa*.

The master stroke is the invention of "The Love-ly Frank", the archetypal minor ALP machine man, who not only combines the most admirable with the most excruciating qualities of mateship, but in his role of 'minder' acts as a link between the political background and the erotic foreground of the chapter.

This section, too, contains one of Wearne's best wry looks at contemporary language:

> – a white-collar union official
> and a community FM co-ordinator:
> the future may wonder not just who we are
> but what.

There are many others, such as the question asked of the Vietnam era draft resister, "Had he been conned by pseudo-intellectuals?" and the deft following up of this description of the ex-Liberal politician:

> In early *Hansards* most words seem as the cud
> of your class: 'containment' – 'stock' – 'backbone'
> – 'fibre'.

with his concession:

> I was pretty "right", yes, call it "right", Sue. It
> helps me gauge
> how far I've, no, Australia's come.

Wearne's characters range widely in their political stances and their social milieux from Macca, the ex-Monash revolutionary, to Molly, "with her battleship bosom", who is depicted as the brains and personality behind "The Tribe" of Liberals endeavoring to keep the Menzies era intact.

But what makes *The Nightmarkets* such a welcome and important addition to Australian literature is that it is so much more than a series of dramatic monologues. It is in his portrayal of the relationships between the characters that Wearne most tellingly captures the spirit of the times.

Howard Jacobson's *Redback* is set a few years earlier and is in a more traditional genre, that of the humorous novel (to call it satirical might be too large a claim) observing Australian *mores* from the point of view of an outsider.

It contains some hilarious passages, for example when the narrator, Karl Leon Forelock, is crossing the Indian Ocean en route for Australia only to find it a virtual traffic jam of liners all pointed the other way:

> On one afternoon alone I waved to Sidney Nolan, Diane Cilento, Randolph Stow, Clive James, Clifton Pugh, Germaine Greer, Barry Humphries, Thomas Keneally, Robert Helpmann, Brett Whitely, the young Bob Hawke, Robert Hughes, Barry Tuckwell, Brian Hayes, Nigel Dempster, Carmen Callil, the future Princess Michael of Kent, and scores of minor poets and essayists all of whom would return from Oxford and Cambridge ten years later to take up Gough Whitlam creativity grants.

The purpose of Forelock's journey is a cultural mission, an attempt to stem the tide of left-wing and permissive attitudes in Australian intellectual circles during the sixties. For this he was recruited by the CIA, chosen (among other reasons) for the fact that he "was the only undergraduate in Cambridge who wasn't a homosexual."

His encounters with various species of Australian fauna form the most entertaining episodes. These range from the goanna which takes up residence in his North Shore house, until evicted by means of a jar of chocolate spread, to the radical feminist schoolteacher in Melbourne's western suburbs who stripped naked in front of her class in Remedial Relationship Enhancement Studies to make a pedagogical point.

In between these is an assortment of academics, politicians, synchronised swimmers, boutique owners and other denizens of a continent the cultural foibles of which, while intriguing this naive Englishman, will strike a note of recognition among Australian readers. The originals of many of the characters, too, will be recognisable, such as the Celtic poet, Vance Kelpie, and the Catholic polemicist, Enrico Santalucia.

Redback's main weakness is structural. The climactic incident concerns the narrator's being bitten by an eponymous spider, with consequent dramatic changes both physiological and attitudinal. The reader is told repeatedly that this will happen, but when it does it is not only anti-climactic but also irrelevant to what has by then established itself as the novel's main thrust. The incident does, however, provide the rationale for a magnificent encounter between the victim and a blonde, recently-married member of the British royal family who is visiting the hospital where he is recuperating. It is worth reading the book for the punch-line to this exchange alone.

Compared to these two books, Anthony Turner's is superficial in its treatment of Australian society and strained in its attempts at humor. And whereas Jacobson might be taken to task for exaggeration in his presentation of Australian geography, he does this to make a point. There is a great difference between his telling us that Broken Hill is a thousand miles from anywhere and Turner's putting Cootamundra on the Hume Highway for no apparent purpose.

This might be a very small point about which to quibble, but when a writer is trying as obviously hard as Turner is, then the details should be correct. And try hard he does, at least in the book's first two sections, which consist of anecdotes and prose sketches. The rest of the book, fifty 50-word vignettes and a three act play whose only characters are God and the Devil, it would be kinder not to dwell on.

Most of the anecdotes are amusing enough in an Australasian Post kind of way, in the vein of, but nowhere near the standard of, such newspaper columnists as the late Ron Saw, Barry Dickins or Les Tanner. Gathering them in a book, unfortunately, exposes them to a different set of reader expectations and makes one regret the lack of editorial pruning.

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Faint Praise

Kate Ahearn

Janine Burke: *Second Sight* Greenhouse, $8.95).
Joan London: *Sister Ships* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $12).
Kate Grenville: *Dreamhouse* (UQP, $19.95).

Anyone interested in Australian literature can tell tall tales from the not-so-long ago, like the one about the wag at the dinner party who, when the subject is raised, looks around the table for approval and says, "Australian literature? I didn't know there was any."

That was Cultural Cringe. Sure, we had writers, but a small society with such a short history could safely be assumed to have produced nothing of the highest order. Patrick White did win the Nobel Prize, but one writer, no matter how clever, could hardly be said to constitute a literature.

These days those wags have had to find something else to be humorous about. With several of our writers achieving recognition overseas, we can now be said to have entered Cultural Cringe, Phase Two.

International recognition remains the imprimatur without which we cannot be certain that any work can be said to be truly fine. When Arthur Phillips made the phrase famous, you could safely rubbish any new Australian book as soon as it hit the streets. But, under the rules of Phase Two, it is unsafe to rubbish anything unless the author is unknown, in which case it is safer to ignore than to rubbish.

I exaggerate, of course, to make a point. Generalisations are dangerous and usually wrong. They are exaggerations of one aspect of the truth at the expense of all the others, as was the one made by Paul Carter, editor of the Age Monthly Review, at the Spoleto Melbourne Writers' Festival recently, when he dismissed the art of the book reviewer (as opposed to that of the critic) as an exercise in promotion for publishers. But there is a germ of truth in my C.C. Phase Two theory, as there was behind Paul Carter's remarks, although they made a lot of people, including myself, extremely angry at the time. The same could be said of Gerard Windsor's comments at Writer's Week in Adelaide, about what he saw as the unfair advantage enjoyed by female writers in Australia at the moment. Well, yes, there *are* problems. As one male reviewer remarked to me in a throwaway line, "I wouldn't like to be the bloke who gives So-and-so's latest book a bad review." He hadn't read the book, by one of our leading women writers, but was certainly hoping *not* to find himself in the position of not liking the book and having to say so in print.

But what these generalisations do offer is a warning, a chance to recognise the sorts of hazards and/or temptations that beset the book reviewer, traps into which most of us, even the most scrupulous, fall from time to time.

I have taken this rather scenic route into the review of these three books because they are among the most exciting and dangerous questions being asked in the Australian literary backyard at the moment, and because questions like these preoccupy me more and more when I read contemporary Australian fiction. These three books are all by women, each of whose work has been highly praised, and although there are positive things to say, I find myself in the position of not being able to be unmitigatedly hearty about any of them.

Joan London's *Sister Ships* is a first-up effort to be proud of, and London has a future as a writer. Still, I was surprised to learn, just a couple of days after reading it, that *Sister Ships* had won the *Age* Book of the Year Award. Was the competition perhaps not as strong as it has been in recent years? Are we starting to apply different criteria in judging literary awards? Are we, perhaps, much less interested in innovation than we have been over the last twenty years? Have we just become smug? Or is Joan London's book simply one of those strong but silent types that doesn't blow a trumpet for the verbal-gymnastic skills of its author, but whose considerable virtues are easily over-looked in a louder literary environment?

There is probably a grain of 'Yes' in the answer to all these questions. London's stories are told quite clearly from a female (but not necessarily feminist) point of view. In the title story, "Sister Ships", an Australian girl shares a cabin with a couple of others on their first trip O.S. The central image of the Sister Ship is a fine one, and London shows a very literary feel for the *shape* of the cluster of ideas she is writing about, and in those stories where she has hit upon the appropriate central image cleanly enough, that image has a way of reverberating throughout the text.

> A row of lights comes suddenly out of darkness and rushes towards us. I can feel our own pace now as the Sister Ship takes shape, slides her long glittering flank

beside us. The two ships snort at one another like animals from the same litter, mournful bellows across the frothing wakes. Rockets spray out from between the answering sets of funnels. I glimpse long shelves of decks under swinging lights, hear scraps of frantic music. Tiny figures lift their hands: I have lifted mine, like a salute. Then they are gone.

The stories themselves are little voyages of discovery for the central female figures, voyages which always climax in epiphany, just a little too predictably at times. In "Burning Off", the hippie couple from the city come to the country looking for the simpler life. There are the expected disillusionments and the bushfire at the end comes as no surprise.

What disappointed me most about these eight short stories was the feeling that I had read them before – not the actual story-lines, of course, but the type of story and the style of storytelling – a mixture of Lawson Tradition and Mid-Eighties Feminine. Young Australian women grow up, go overseas and come back. They examine their relationships with their parents, their lovers, their daughters. They move to the country to 'find' themselves, or visit an old boyfiend for the same reason, as in "Enough Rope":

> Every now and then an energy builds up in me and I know that it's time to visit Michael. Quite suddenly everything, the set of rooms I move through, the see-saw glare and darkness as I pass outside and in, the glint of the dam down on the boundary, become the background to a dream.

That touch of melodrama evident here spoils some of London's stories. She is trying just a little too hard at times to convey the significance of an image or situation.

These are small problems, really, especially for a newly published writer, and in comparison with Kate Grenville's *Dreamhouse* or Janine Burke's *Second Sight*, Joan London's collection comes off well. But London's talent struck me as the sort that will mature with use and should therefore be encouraged. But whether that encouragement should have extended to the awarding, at this stage, of one of our most prestigious literary prizes is a real question.

Dreamhouse, although published after *Lillian's Story*, is Kate Grenville's second book, based on a short story from her first collection, *Bearded Ladies*. Despite the obvious talent of its writer, *Dreamhouse* cannot be counted as a success for Grenville, although it is a daring attempt to engage the reader's interest in the lives of a bunch of thoroughly obnoxious characters.

> . . . As for myself, I was a woman full of greed: my husband, whose name was Reynold, was soon to be a professor with an income and a position, while I could never be anything wealthier than a striking secretary with lovely legs and little future . . . We had been looking forward to our summer in Italy, although I had wondered if Rennie's vanity and my greed would survive a foreign summer, alone with each other for so long.

The notion that the reader must identify in some sympathetic way with the central characters of a novel is a truism in need of challenge, and that is the most interesting thing about this book. It is a failed attempt, I felt, mainly because, if sympathy and identification are missing, there needs to be deep interest, even fascination, which Grenville has relied too heavily on prurience to provide, and because what these five nasty people do to and with each other seems pointless in itself and of singular irrelevance to the ordinary reader.

Perhaps Grenville is aware of the problem and has tried very hard, *too* hard, to give it all meaning and importance for the reader. She rarely creates an image or situation that is not significant but, too often in *Dreamhouse*, situations are fairly dripping with significance without actually coming to the point. It's a problem that the narrator is aware of herself as she tries to figure out what it all means for her, but unfortunately it is also a problem for the reader.

Janine Burke has emerged as something of a cult hero with her first novel, *Speaking*, which has been compared by at least one critic with Peter Carey's *Illywhacker* and found to be a finer work. But of the three books under review I found *Second Sight* by far the weakest and also the most pretentious.

If *Sister Ships* and more often *Dreamhouse* are spoiled by trying too hard for significance, in *Second Sight* the tendency is ruinous. None of Burke's central characters seems able to speak to others in plain English. Everything is loaded to the gunwales with 'meaningfulness' including the narrator herself, Lucida, who is undergoing some kind of breakdown after the death of her grandmother.

She meets Lethe, a photographer, who also takes himself far too seriously, and who takes (if Lucida's description of them is anything to go by) truly dreadful artsy-tartsy photographs. "I could not imagine buying one of the photographs. Like owning the sliver of a soul." This is serious, folks. High Art.

> I told him about my grandmother. He wasn't afraid. He waited for me to pause. When I couldn't he listened closer. It was the time I thought I could talk death away. Death, when you meet it, is very much alive, refuses to be a stranger and wants to go with you everywhere.

Why her grandmother's death might have made Lethe afraid is not obvious. Lucida talks a lot about death, but it is also unclear just why the death of a grandparent should have affected her so deeply – deeply enough for her to contemplate suicide. "Death was singing to me. I wanted to lay my head on its deep breast, sleep and never wake. I made plans for the crossing but I did not attempt it."

No doubt many readers will like *Second Sight* – it's a navel-gazer's paradise. I didn't, mainly because it's indulgence reminded me of the more awful of the nineteenth-century women poets – a touch too much of the old histrionics. Sure, love, life and death, literature and art are big themes, but for that reason they speak best for themselves – better handled with tact than with gush.

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Inner Directions

Richard Haese

Ursula Hoff: *The Art of Arthur Boyd* (Andre Deutsch, $65).

The last two years have been a lean season for art publications in contempory Australian art — a drought broken only by two significant books, Ursula Hoff's splendidly produced study of the work of Arthur Boyd and Geoffrey Dutton's celebration of a Sydney tradition that looks at the alternative to Boyd's brand of Melbourne-based expressionism.

Of all the artists of his generation, Boyd has fared best in terms of scholarly interest in his work. Nolan may have the numbers but, apart from exhibition catalogs, there is little that can compare with the seriousness and depth of scholarly achievement found in Franz Philipp's pioneering monograph of 1967 or this text by Ursula Hoff, not to mention the publication of Boyd's drawing in 1973, Sandra McGrath's book on the Shoalhaven paintings in 1982 and such key essays as Patrick McCaughey's "The Artist in Extremis" which appeared in 1980.

It is hardly surprising that Boyd's work should have had such a powerful appeal to Hoff and Philipp, European-trained scholars whose essential interests lie in the older European masters. From 1946 onwards Boyd's work is engaged in an intense dialogue with the great European traditions; of all the painters of the forties, Boyd alone held to a profound sense of unbroken traditions. On the one hand there was that of Europe; this embraced such masters as Bruegel, Tintoretto, Titian and Rembrandt. On the other hand there was the tradition of transplanted European idioms of nineteenth century colonial painters such as Louis Buvelot. It was during the years 1943-47, when Nolan set to work applying his discoveries of Cézanne, Rousseau and Cubism, that Boyd's expressionist symbolism was gradually overlaid with a deepening concern for the old masters; early expressionist rawness gave way to more ambitious statements of the human condition, exploiting a more universal symbolism.

In the comparatively short but dense text (fifty pages by Hoff, following a long introduction by T.G. Rosenthal, whose extravagant claims do little to enhance Hoff's more sober and substantial analysis) the biblical, classical and art-historical dimensions of Boyd's work are explored without losing sight of the essential qualities that belong to Boyd alone. The key turning points of Boyd's development and periods of consolidation can be seen clearly in the fine selection of superb reproductions — production standards are very high in all aspects of the book. Hoff juxtaposes illustrations of the key influences and connections in the art, bearing witness, as Hoff states, to Boyd's concern for the emotional intensity of Rembrandt, the allegories of Piero di Cosimo, the Venetian opulence and drama of Titian and Tintoretto and the mysticism of Blake. If this is comparatively familiar ground, Hoff is able to make fascinating comparisons between Boyd's cycles of love and death and Kokoshka's "The Tempest" (1914) and Picasso's "La Vie" (1903). Boyd emerges even more securely as the supreme master of tradition that Philipp presented — indeed, the word "traditionally" occurs time and time again in Hoff's text. In terms of this century, Boyd bears comparison in this respect perhaps, only with Picasso: his art cannot match that master's radical enlarging of the possibilities of artistic form as a consequence of his assaulting the very foundations of European traditions but, like Picasso, Boyd's art also represents a constant effort to retrieve and revitalize traditions.

Boyd's romanticism, as a consequence, began to look very different from the resolutely immediate and expressive art that John and Sunday Reed continued to favor in the later years of the forties. One detects a note of defensiveness in the assertion quoted by Hoff that Boyd felt that his concern with the past was "as avant-garde as what was done at Heide." Boyd returned to a more direct expressionism with a vengeance after 1955 with his cycle "Love, Marriage and Death of a Half Caste" (works that were recently brought back together for the first time since they were shown in London in 1960 for an exhibition at the Heide Gallery). The return to expressionism was necessarily accompanied by a return to an interiorized symbolism in the cycle of mysterious events that recall the obsessive works of 1943-46. This private and personal symbolism was largely abandoned once again after Boyd settled in London, where he began painting the themes of Romeo and Juliet, St Francis and Nebuchadnezzar during the 1960s. Both images and compositions were now simplified in presenting the dreaming internalized world that Boyd had made the subject of his art.

Boyd returned to Australia in 1972 for the first extended stay since leaving thirteen years before. He later bought land on the Shoalhaven River near Nowra, built a house on its banks, and still later acquired Bundanon, the old adjoining colonial home and property — moves that signalled a new, and in some ways unprecedented, re-involvement with Australia and its landscape. As two of Australia's more celebrated expatriates, Boyd and his more visible brother-in-law, Sidney Nolan, both established toe holds on the banks of the Shoalhaven. Unlike Nolan, however, Boyd has never been an inveterate traveller, preferring always to put down the kinds of roots into place and

circumstance that are nourished by his deep sense of tradition.

In London Boyd had lived in Highgate near Hampstead Heath, the scene of Constable's remarkable late landscapes. It was a location favored by many of the painters who followed Boyd in the exodus of the sixties. But it was Boyd, and not one suspects coincidentally, who stayed longest and who chose to live and work in Constable's other country, near the River Stour in Suffolk.

As with Constable and the Stour, Boyd has made the Shoalhaven his own, and in a magnificent series of paintings over the last decade set about rediscovering and reinvigorating the traditions of Australian landscape painting while simultaneously reinvesting it with a distinctly Boydian mythology. Jonah, the Prodigal Son, Narcissus and the tortured figure of the artist meet and conjoin on the Shoalhaven, as do Van Gogh, Cézanne, Conrad Martens, Eugene von Guerard and Tom Roberts. If the artists provided ways into what Boyd has described as a landscape that is for him as alien as any place in the world, the mythical figures act as touchstones for the alienation of man within it and metaphors for an existential estrangement of man on a profound level.

Few, if any, Australian artists in the last decade have matched either the range or the achievement of the Shoalhaven paintings. They range from studio minatures painted with a sable brush on burnished copper, reproducing the stippled textures and glittering contrasts of light found in Conrad Martens, to large on-the-spot works that register the blistering heat of full summer. In "Shoalhaven Riverbank and Rocks" (1978) the form of hillside and rock are slashed in with an immediacy and sense of absolute rightness that challenges Streeton's "Fire's On" or Roberts' "Breakaway."

All this might suggest an inspired eclecticism or skilled jockeying of style and manner were it not for Boyd's over-riding engagement with the subject. Boyd remains Boyd, one of the most consistently inner-directed artists this country has produced. Naturalistic vision is matched and married to the landscape of the soul. Boyd's ability to register the transcendental and the tragic cycle of life has never been bettered than in "Horse's Skull, Blanket and Starry Sky" (1981) or "Skull-headed Creature over Black Creek" (1979-80), or in the contradictions of the creative life in "Chained Figure and Bent Tree" (1972-3). Here, in such works, is one of the most complex and powerful statements of, to use Patrick McCaughey's phrase, "the artist *in extremis*." As Hoff observes, "if in the early pictures the lovers were often shown as victims of a jealous vindictive society, the painter in the seventies is the victim of a world which expects him to perform for reward; he is also at the mercy of his own hyperactivity of an excess of fantasy."

Whatever the range of Boyd's art, its core remains, as Hoff acknowledges, expressionism. All expressionist art is essentially tragic in its romanticism; and, as Sir Kenneth Clark has noted, it is the romantic sense of the misery and wastefulness of existence that ultimately gives such a disturbing character to the late work of Constable. The same may be said of this latest phrase of the work of Arthur Boyd. It is hard to imagine an artist with Boyd's deeply ingrained sense of the tragic and the religious ever denying the only appropriate means of giving voice to such vision. But if, as has been claimed, the act of painting landscape is always an act of faith, Boyd's landscapes, whether early or late, assert the redemptive and regenerative power of the natural world. Boyd has turned to the past in much the same spirit as he has addressed landscape, less an an act of homage than as a way out of the labyrinth of alienation and despair.

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Battling the Manufacturers

Boris Schedvin

Alf Rattigan: *Industry Assistance: the Inside Story* (Melbourne Univeristy Press, $28.50).

This is an important and timely book. Senior Australian public servants have been reluctant authors. Even in retirement most have felt bound by the Westminster system, preferring the dignity of imperial honors or high reputation to the arduous task of writing. One of the very few recent examples, H.C. Coombs' *Trial Balance*, was a disappointment. Coombs was Australia's most experienced and ubiquitous public servant of the second third of the twentieth century, but his account is more a defence of his actions than an exposé of governmental process. Probably Coombs was too close to the centre of power for too long to have adopted any other position.

The contrast between Rattigan and Coombs is striking. Rattigan is merciless in exposing the weakness of Australian governments when faced by sectional interests, and concludes that "the events reveal that the *modus operandi* of Australian Governments has promoted divisiveness within our society, eroded our standard of living, and depreciated the basic freedoms which are seen as the benefits associated with democratic systems of governments." His special target is the manufacturing lobby in pursuit of high protection. Rattigan believes strongly, even passionately, in principles of economic liberalism: in the effective use of the country's limited resources, equality in access to resources, avoidance of 'distortions' favoring sectional interests, and openness in the examination of policy issues. This book is a continuation of the campaign in favor of these principles which Rattigan waged with reasonable success as chairman of the Tariff Board and the Industrial Assistance Commission.

Rattigan is an unlikely crusader for economic liberalism. Educated at the Royal Australian Naval College,

he had no formal training in economics. He rose through the Australian Public Service to become Assistant Controller General of Customs, and then to high office in the Department of Trade. Both these agencies, of course, were strongly associated with the *dirigiste* philosophy and developmental policies of the post-war era. We are not told whether Rattigan was a closet liberal during these years, or whether he was a late convert in reaction to the policy chicanery of John McEwan and his permanent head, Alan Westerman. An account of his intellectual journey would have strengthened the book. Evidently neither McEwan nor Westerman knew of his state of mind, for in 1963 Rattigan was invited to replace Sir Leslie Melville as chairman of the Tariff Board. Melville had resigned after only two years in office. Presumably McEwan expected Rattigan to be a cipher of the Department of Trade; it was one of McEwan's greatest miscalculations.

The outline of tariff history between 1963 and 1976 (when Rattigan's chairmanship came to an end) will be familiar to the *cognoscenti* and has been discusssed by Leon Glezer in *Tariff Politics*. The author adds the smoke, the dust and even the blood of the battle. He depicts himself, reasonably enough, as the champion of community interests against the sectional interests of manufacturers, and against the failure of politicians to take a long-term view of the national interest. The attempt to obtain a rational basis for tariff policy is described, including measurement of the effective rate of protection, publication of effective protection rates, the moves to eliminate surplus protection and excessive tariffs, the formation of the Industries Assistance Commission and the Impact Project. The only politician Rattigan shows any sympathy for is Gough Whitlam, who commenced his term with a flurry of economic rationality (including formation of the IAC and the twenty-five percent tariff cut), but in his estimation the Whitlam Government declined rapidly when Jim Cairns exerted more influence. Rattigan adds to the already formidable evidence that Fraser was the most protectionist Prime Minister since Scullin. At least Scullin had the excuse of having to confront a major economic disaster.

While the book is valuable for the light it throws on the policy-making process, it lacks balance. Rattigan did a magnificent job in transforming the basis of tariff policy in little more than a decade, but it is now clear that rationalization was a necessary but not sufficient condition for continuing industrial development. Too much confidence was placed on improved resource allocation *per se* to achieve a shift from inward-looking to outward-looking manufacturing production. In a small, high-cost country, the change from import-replacing to export-led growth could not have been achieved spontaneously (or endogenously, as the economists say). After Britain pioneered the industrial revolution, all countries have relied on the state to help overcome competitive disadvantages. In Australia's case these disadvantages were and are so great that the selective intervention of the state, however distasteful, is unavoidable (e.g. Button's steel plan).

Rattigan is correct to doubt whether this can be achieved without ending in another bout of featherbedding. But he is wrong in believing that the removal of excessive protection was all that was needed to create an efficient industrial economy. The IAC is now in decline because it has taken the Rattigan philosophy too far, and still seems to believe that improved resource allocation is all that is necessary in the Australian context.

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Current Trends

David Matthews

Anne Derwent: *Warm Bodies* (Angus & Robertson, $14.95).
Jean Bedford: *Love Child* (Penguin, $6.95).
David Foster: *The Adventures of Christian Rosy Cross* (Penguin, $7.95).
Dal Stivens: *A Horse of Air* (Penguin, $8.95).
Bruce Pascoe: *Night Animals* (Penguin, $9.95).
Victor Kelleher: *The Beast of Heaven* (University of Queensland Press, $10.95).

There is a theory, which is mentioned usually only in conversations which are about to get out of hand, to the effect that we all have a limit to the number of words in us, and when we reach the end of what we have to say, we die. Though I am inclined to dismiss this theory, when faced with a sizeable pile of books on the one hand and a very few blank pages on the other, I begin to sense some of the urgency that a limit on one's words conveys. Death begins to seem not so unlikely an option after all.

The books reviewed here are a disparate lot, but in some ways are fairly representative of current trends in Australian fiction. Two out of six are by women – this is probably a little less than the average. One is a book of short stories. One is a comic epic, another a science fiction story. Notably, the terseness and economy of words which has charcterised much of recent Australian fiction, is a frequent trait; though viewed dubiously by some, it is becoming thoroughly entrenched, and marks the best writing here. *All* are touched by the malaise that seems to be afflicting books from all the major publishers lately: unacceptably poor standards of proofreading. Perhaps there should be a discount, payable at the publisher's door, to every member of the book-buying public who

presents a copy clearly marked with four or more errors.

Of all these books, Jean Bedford's *Love Child* is a superb exemplar of narrative economy. The story, spanning two countries and two generations, is effortlessly compressed into a hundred-odd pages. The first chapter in particular runs at a breathless pace, and tells of the upbringing of Grace, one of the two central characters, and her sisters, in poverty during the First World War and the years following. Their overbearing father habitually beats them with his spare wooden arm – "The fingers hurt most, cruel and stiff, though the back of the wooden hand could still bruise." The girls learn defiance as they grow up; the father reacts to the breaking of his tyrannical rule with all the astonishment of an old dynasty waking up to an unexpected revolution. From here, *Love Child* darts to the narrative of Anne, Grace's daughter from her second marriage, and the other important character of the novel. But there is never any fixity in the narrative viewpoint; the story remains coherent, but it always demands careful attention as it is conveyed in a series of short sharp attacks from different angles, rather than by a conventional linear approach.

Though Bedford's women have learnt defiance and independence, there is a sad and bitter thread running through their lives. The revolution falters for Anne, as her bond to Grace and her actions dog her through the increasingly complex finale.

Anne Derwent's *Warm Bodies* is by contrast a ponderous affair. Mike is a thirty-five year-old academic, married with children, seen at the beginning of the novel ending a three-year affair with Gemma, and already lining up the next with his wife's cousin, Kate. No doubt there are still many men about who say things to their wives like "You were as weak as piss then and you're weak as piss now" and "Pardon me for surprising you. You look half-witted with mouth hanging open like that," but what is to be gained from knocking these straw figures over once again? Judith, as the wife, is presumeably the one to whom sympathy is due but, as a character, she is so unconvincing she inspires more wonderment. She has the taint of TV soap about her, with her undiagnosed agoraphobia and her sudden conversion to alcoholism in the middle of the book after a lifetime's moderation. It is a little ironic that the past and potential mistresses, Gemma and Kate, are far more believable and interesting characters; indeed the sub-plot of Kate's life, and the account of her relationship with Selina, an old college acquaintance, is easily the most sensitive and subtle piece of writing in the book. More of the same would have been welcome.

David Foster's *Adventures of Christian Rosy Cross* is a comic rampage through medieval arcana and the period of the Great Schism of the Church. The eponymous hero is a prodigiously tumescent youngster with a genius for getting into trouble and out of it again, in the best picaresque tradition. Baptised in mercury by a very unconventional monk, Christian is infected with the desire to pursue arcane knowledge in the East. In Damascus, he finds it, learns that not only the philosophers are getting stoned, and uses their herbal remedy to ease his peculiar condition. Returning to Europe, he is detained at the Pope's pleasure and repudiates his own doctrine, but becomes a fomenter of heresy in spite of himself. All he ever wanted was a nice big castle anyway.

Not the least interesting thing about this book is Foster's grasp of hermetic thought, which would be far more daunting if it were not deployed to such devastating comic effect.

Dal Stivens' *A Horse of Air* was originally published in 1970 and won the Miles Franklin Award; it is now re-issued in paperback. Its complex, multi-layered narrative is the anatomy of an obsession. Harry Craddock, millionaire, amateur naturalist and ornithologist is, at fifty, still a man of obsessions, his grail the elusive night parrot. Craddock mounts an expedition to Central Australia to find a speciman of the parrot, believed by many to be extinct. The intriguing and allusive story of the expedition and its odd mix of characters is made fascinating by its elements of natural history, echoes, in the modern expedition, of the past, and its tragic conclusion. Behind it all, there is the looming presence of Australia's Centre. But this is only half the story; the book is written by Harry as a therapeutic exericise while confined in an institution for the mentally ill as a direct result of the expedition. The narrative is interspersed with comments from a nameless editor and, to cover certain events, Harry uses excerpts from his former wife's diary. This makes for a text in which there is no fixed ground of authority. Harry is capable of being deliberately unreliable – he taunts his psychiatrist with made-up stories – but at the same time it seems that he has been genuinely mentally disturbed, and possibly unreliable in other respects. The powerful story, allied with the challenge to narrative conventions, makes this a tantalising and satisfying book.

Bruce Pascoe, who has had the misfortune to have been called "a modern Henry Lawson", has written a satisfying collection of eclectic short stories in *Night Animals*. At his best Pascoe is tight and controlled; but a little too often he can spoil a carefully contrived effect with a line or paragraph that is out of place. "Cicadas", an otherwise fine story about unrequited love, is made less credible by a paragraph of almost Lawrentian purple prose. Likewise, a reference to Blake's 'Tyger' seems gratuitous at the end of "Thylacine", about a simple man's encounter with the semi-legendary Tasmanian tiger. But at his peak, in "Split-

ter'', Pascoe has written one of the finest short stories I have seen in a long time. Pascoe's reliance on a shock event - murder, death by misadventure, suicide - as a basis for so many of the stories leads to a sameness after a while. They are best read singly, over several days.

This leaves the book which is perhaps the odd one out in this collection, Victor Kelleher's *The Beast of Heaven.* It is a science-fiction novel, and won the Australian Science Fiction Achievement Award in 1984, but it is of the thoughtful type rather than the struggle for galactic domination variety. The Beast of Heaven treads the post-Holocaustal landscape, motivated by the most primitive of urges, only vaguely touched by the shadow of a memory. The Gatherers, who revere the Ancients (us) in their ritual, come down from the rocks and into danger on the plain where the beast walks. They are pushed into this extremity by their search for ''the sweetness in the earth''. But the discovery of the madness of Project A2Z, two computers still functioning thousands of years after nuclear destruction of the earth, leads to a confrontation with the destiny of the human race in the surprising and disturbing climax of the book. I must admit I quailed at the thought of yet another post-Apocalyptic myth epic, with all its potential for didacticism; but this one is worth reading.

In their variety, these books make an interesting contribution to the current record crop of publications, and two or three of them should endure.

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Nearness to Death

John Leonard

Philip Hodgins: *Blood and Bone* (Angus & Robertson, $10.95).

This is a collection worth looking out for. Poem after poem here combines an impressive maturity with the sharp attack of youth — a conjunction which we must assume has been a matter of make or break, since most of them meditate on encroaching leukaemia, a disease which was diagnosed in 1983 when Hodgins, then twenty-four, was given a possible three years to live.

It is disturbing poetry, in that the subject seems to involve a dimension of intimacy not present in the publication of, say, love poems. We may regret the taboo on death: at some time, most of us will know in advance of our own impending death, and we need to have some sense (at least) of its naturalness. But the taboo has a point, and Hodgins touches on the raw nerve: in our century, the knowledge of our own death is taken as proof of our fundamental contingency and loneliness, and that is what the best of these poems distil with clarity — at the very point where the experience is unsharable. It is summed up in ''Room 1 Ward 10 West 23/11/83'', which ends:

> At twenty-four
> there are many words
> and this one
> death

The rest of the poem is almost as bare as these concluding lines; yet Hodgins is a master at the exact placing of a sparse image and at tensile shifts in syntax by which he is able to focus complex feelings very lucidly. Here are the concluding lines of ''Apologies'':

> That's the way the symptoms really are —
> not the body sending first calls now
> and last calls now
> but two married people
> sitting in a hospital corridor
> gazing down the length of sorrow.
> Their only child will not bury them.
> I must tell them how sorry I am.

''The Wait'', ''Ten Things about It'', ''Ich Bin Allein'' — these are sparse poems indeed: yet their quality is palpable when they are compared with a poem whose syntax loses its spring and which flattens out into overweighted simple statement — truism — as for example ''A Bit of Bitterness''. The title is perhaps a giveaway; another poem, ''Self-Pity'', seems to me to fail similarly, though in this case with too tumbled an imagery. Hodgins' best poems, though, mourn for the self less distractedly than either bitterness or self-pity imply — in fact more comprehensively.

The mourning, as is surely proper, comes from a sense of life. There are several strong poems where he recalls growing up on a Victorian farm, for example ''Making Hay'', ''A Difficult Calf'', ''The Haystack'' — and this, from ''Room 3, Ward 10 West'', on going out to fetch cows and finding mushrooms:

> Each group a reject dinner set, some chipped,
> some the wrong size.
> I take the best,
> lifting them slowly as a saucer of milk,
> and feed them to my duckbilled cap
> remembering their power.
> (Once, after rain, I found one
> punching through a disused tennis court
> with a shard of the old asphalt poised on top.)
> Ignoring not-there-yesterday
> golden gobstoppers and Pine Gap puffballs, I come
> back
> over simple speed traps,
> primal screaming at cows.

This is unusually humorous, but the quality of wryness evident here is rarely absent from the book, and it is an enlivening one. The delicate following through of imagery is also a trademark (better than the occasional sudden Martian similitude — I find "The Dam" and "Country Football", for example, too much mere exercises). I have referred to the sparseness of some of the poems on illness, but quite a few others use an oblique approach rich in imagery — "Catharsis", "Question Time", "Insomnia", "Death Who" and "The Guest", to name several of the best. In a number of these, Hodgins has clearly absorbed something from Peter Porter's conversations with death, just as in the farm poems he has learned something from Les Murray. The task of course is above all that of finding a voice. W.H. Auden, in his elegy for Louis MacNeice ("The Cave of Making") saw imminent death as suggesting the key for genuineness in poetry:

> ought to be something a man of
> honor, awaiting death from cancer or a firing squad,
> could read without contempt: at
> *that* frontier I wouldn't dare speak to anyone
> in either a prophet's bellow
> or a diplomat's whisper.

There can be no doubt that the knowledge that a poet is writing directly about his own experience affects our response. It always does. There is a cruel twist to Hodgins' predicament, that he is presented with it in his twenties: "I don't know what I've lost" ("Resurrection"). At the same time, he doesn't rail at this — or any of it — as injustice. All of this is particular — Hodgins' own predicament and his own steadiness of mind. But he finds a voice that does 'speak' to — and surely in some way for — his audience; this is in no way mere thinking aloud. I hope there are more poems to come.

John Leonard teaches English at Monash University.

Fruit Cake of Life

Brian Dibble

Elizabeth Jolley: *The Well* (Penguin, $19.95).

At first publishers rejected her and then, when she started to be published, critics ignored her, a fate arguably worse than getting bad reviews. Now, Elizabeth Jolley is a major Australian writing talent to be accounted for. Overseas critics marked that fact with front-page or otherwise prominent reviews of her works in major publications like the Daily Telegraph and the Times Literary Supplement in the UK, and the New York Times Book Review and the Washington Post Book World in the US. Ten years and ten books after she started to be published is probably an appropriate time for Australian critics to start constructing an overview of her work – an example of such criticism recently appeared in Westerly (July, 1986). That is, *The Well* is sufficiently like and unlike her other books to suggest that it marks the end of one line of development and previews the direction of a future one. The book clarifies Elizabeth Jolley's mode as pastoral, her manner as metafictional and her material as the conundrum of love.

Her pastoral concerns are indicated by what she denies and what she affirms. She denies what the city represents, so-called progress and so many people that they cannot all be dealt with as individuals: the two conspire to mitigate against the possibility of love. As early as the *Five Acre Virgin* the city is characterized by the factories of the Black Country in England which some of her immigrants escape to live in Australia; in later works it is characterized by the Australian high-rises where some of her early characters work and the prisons, hospitals and nursing homes which society establishes to provide the services more properly performed by the family, by parents and children, or by lovers and loved ones.

Against the city and what it represents, Jolley affirms the ownership of land, or at least the necessity of a place of one's own. Having such a place can substitute for love relationships, or at least alleviate and ameliorate the lack of them. There are the farms, the rented rooms, the shacks and the vacated homes returned to in the *Five Acre Virgin*, the wheatfield towns of *The Travelling Entertainer*, the farms in *Newspaper* and *Palomino* and *Peabody*, the vacant land on which Mr Scobie would build, remembering the biblical story about the three tabernacles. Perhaps the most heart-rending example is that of Bill Sprockett – the name is significant – who loses the land which he only imagined he owned. And, of course, there is Hester Harper in *The Well*, who tries to translate her money from selling the farm into emotional capital to invest in her relationship with young Katherine. One is reminded of Virgil, one of the two great pastoralists of antiquity, and his outrage and sense of loss when his farm was expropriated.

Jolley's metafictional manner, writing about writing, began as far back as the *Five Acre Virgin*, with its wry reference to *The Seducer's Cookbook* and the books with real titles. Certainly it is developed through the many characters who write novels – Heather Hailey in *Mr Scobie's Riddle*, Diana Hopewell in *Miss Peabody's Inheritance*, and Alma Porch in *Foxybaby*. In *The Well* the metafictional preoccupation continues in a more daring way: a woman Miss Harper meets in the shop is writing a novella, one which sounds very much like a caricature of *The Well*. We are told that it is about "misfortunes, conflicts, passions and emotions – all rather heightened . . .". Its matter is to be "the rich dark fruit cake of life".

Often *The Well* is even more playful about its metafictional manner: a devotee of Chekhov, Jolley never misses an opportunity to remind her creative writing students of his dictum that, if a gun appears on the first page, then it

must be fired before the end – but in *The Well* the rifle cannot be found when it is wanted. Similarly, at the beginning she foreshadows the arrival of a character, Joanna, who does not appear before the novel ends. And, most daringly, Jolley plots a central event around a person who might not even exist: there is an automobile accident in which Hester says that a man has been killed, and then claims to have dumped him down the well at the house she shares with Katherine, who next begins to report long conversations with a voice from the well. However playful, the metafiction is not merely play: it calls attention to the arbitrariness of the distinction between the categories of the 'real' and the 'fictional' and to the felt reality of those mental worlds that we construct from fear and desire.

Elizabeth Jolley is traditional in subscribing to the pastoral myth, modern in using metafictional techniques. Both serve in exploring her basic concern, the concept of *love*. The classical pastoral concentrates on it, pointing out time and again the difficulties which relate to it: if you have no one, you are lonely; if you desire someone, your longing is pain; and if you have someone, there is often disappointment and there is inevitably loss. Such a pattern of loneliness, love and loss faces Hester and Katherine, just as it underlies the relationships Jolley explores in her other works. It is not surprising, therefore, that she also subscribes to the pastoral convention whereby art is preferred as solace for lost love — the dancing and singing, the writing of poetry and novels, the story-telling which so many of her characters engage in, including Katherine, who dances throughout the novel, and Hester, who starts to tell a tale at the end of it.

The Well does not predictably appeal to the usual metaphors of deep, cool, clear waters to create, sustain, and nurture life. There *is* a well in the book, but it is dry. However, Hester is aware that much deeper down there are water-sources, flowing through cracks and crevices of the earth. They can erupt spontaneously, or we can divine, dig or even blast into them. Like the Id itself, these waters are powerful, potentially destructive or constructive, depending upon how we try to tap into them and then to control them.

Effectively, that is what Hester Harper is trying to do, needful of the water at its source and heedless of the dangers of trying to get at it. In her past and present there are other opportunities for love which she resists or overlooks; such failures indicate an emotionally scarred and flawed character, but they do not diminish the essential need. Indeed, they serve as indicators that risk-taking is necessary even though it is also likely to cause damage, turn out badly or be fruitless. Harper takes that risk, ambiguously. The novel does not tell what the outcome will be, but it clearly indicates that putting one's self at risk is necessary if one is to achieve contact or, *mirabile dictu*, communion with another self. In Jolley's world it is only surrendering one's freedom that creates the space in which another might do the same.

The Well does not argue that love is close to hand nor that, even if it were, it could be reached. It is an unusual book, more concerned with relationships than plot, and optimistic about the prospects for unattractive characters — they are unlovely but not incapable of love. Hester's father, who made the governess pregnant, dies demented and tiresome. Her accountant and adviser seems to have been born old and grey and yet, before he dies, Mr Bird reveals that he had loved her from afar and without her knowledge. The two most unlovely characters are Hester and Katherine. The former is a flat-breasted, post-menopausal virgin with a braying laugh who wears orthopedic shoes and carries a stick — to, yes, a dance. The latter mirrors her physical defects through moral ones — she is pretty (but with an anxious, squinting look), of suspect truthfulness, and naive or devious (probably both, since she has a convent-orphanage upbringing), wanting everything from life as she has seen it . . . in the movies. Out of such stuff, Jolley argues, life is made and love can grow.

To my mind *The Well* is Elizabeth Jolley's best yet. With this book her characteristic manic humor is somewhat subdued, her vision more steady and sober. If it marks a culmination or a new point of departure remains to be seen. Her next book, *The Sugar Mother*, may tell.

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EX MUP SEMPER ALIQUID NOVI!

AUSTRALIA AT THE CROSSROADS:
REFLECTIONS OF AN OUTSIDER
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