overland

FEATURES
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Helen Bourke on Manning Clark's History
Hank Nelson on a New Guinea village
Rob Darby on Frank Dalby Davison
Poetry by Les A. Murray, Bruce Dawe, John Millett and others
Keith Russell on John Millett

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GEOFFREY BEWLEY

Tell me True

The road from the beach crossed the marsh and cut across behind the headland. He made the Thais in the minibus let him off half-way, and he found a gravel track downhill to the right. He followed it through a belt of trees to an open field, and saw tourist cabins ahead and the sea beyond. Thais in a beach restaurant glanced up as he passed.

The beach lay between two steep headlands overhung with trees. There were fixed tables and umbrellas but the sand was almost deserted. A couple of women were at one table and some people were down at the right hand end. That suited him and he took his mask and snorkel to dive at the other side.

The water there was warm and cloudy, and he didn't see many fish. He saw some by the rocks. There were none over the sand. Not worth the trip, he thought. He kicked back to the beach and dropped his mask and walked along past the umbrellas to dry off.

He noticed a woman down the beach, coming from near the rocks at the far end. She was wearing a long white skirt and she looked brown from the sun, with dark sunglasses and short dark hair, walking ankle-deep in the sea. While she was still some way from him, he saw her wade deeper to her right. She was looking at something under the water there.

He saw something dark under the surface, and he looked closer. "What is it?" she said. "Can you see what that is out there?"

It looked long and dark, about as big as a man. It looked uneven, but that was due to the shift of light between water and air. She stopped and he waded closer.

"Seaweed," he said. He ripped it and showed her a strand.

"I mean, you hear stories about this place," she said. "Dead boat people, and things like that."

She was an American. She wasn't bad-looking, as far as he could tell with those glasses. She was about thirty or thirty-five.

"No, you get that on the east coast," he said. "This is the wrong side."

"Oh, yeah. Right. Have you been over that side?"

"I was there a week ago. I was there last week."

"Oh, really? I was wondering about going there. So what's it like?"

He told her about the town at Songkhla and the beaches on Ko Samui. They left the seaweed and waded back to the shore.

"So you just got to this place?" she said.

"No, I've been staying at Patong. I just came round for the day. I wanted to dive but there were too many speedboats there."

"Patong, right. That's the big one. Some friends of mine said it was like a big glitzy tourist trap. Bars and bar girls."

"Well, that's pretty right, yes."

"But this beach, now, is a whole other scene. It's very quiet here. It's a little too quiet, I'm starting to think."

"Not enough people around?"

"Well, there's some. But most of them turn out to be Germans or Swiss."

"Don't they speak English?"

"Well, yeah, they can speak it. But I mean, there's nobody here you'd really want to get to know."

"It's a bit like that at Patong," he said.

They were standing on the hard sand at the edge of the waves. She seemed to want to talk. He liked her and he wanted to keep talking to her.

"So, anyway, where are you going now?" she said.

"Just along here. Just drying off."

"You can dry off up here. There's a chair under there."

"I'll get my stuff, then."

He collected his clothes and diving things, and she waved from under one of the fixed umbrellas. He trudged up and took the deck chair in the shade next to her.

They shook hands. Her name was Pauline. They talked about where they'd come from. He'd flown to Singapore from Australia and come up through Malaysia by train and bus. Pauline had bought a package trip from Hawaii, to Bangkok, then a local flight north to Chiang Mai, then another south to the

beaches. Bangkok had been terrible, just terrible. In Chiang Mai she'd thought of going on a trek, but it had rained all the time. The island beach now was pretty okay.

She was an instructor in earth sciences in a college on Hawaii. She'd taken this trip to get right away from that scene. Until a couple of months ago she'd liked it there, but then she'd had some difficulties with the head of her faculty and now she didn't know if she wanted to go back.

"There was no reason at all for him to get that post," she said, "except that he was a guy and I wasn't. He had a wife and a child to keep. So, okay, fine. But I mean, intellectually, you know, he was nowhere."

"That's tough," he said.

"Well, I guess I can't expect you to agree, because you're a guy, you'd see things the same way, the family to keep. But from my point of view it was a real slap in the face. It was like having my face slapped publicly, right in the market place."

A Thai woman in a flat straw hat was coming with a plastic cooler on a strap over her shoulder. They bought a can of soft drink each.

"Anyway," he said, "what were you thinking of doing next?"

"I don't know," she said. "I mean, I thought I had a career there. I thought I was going someplace. And now, all of a sudden, like, right out of the blue, it seems like it's all over, it's all gone."

"You've got to figure out what to do next."

"It's like half my life gone," she said. "I was working for it all that time, and now it's all over."

He thought she was on the wrong track, but he didn't think she'd like to be told that. He looked along the beach and saw a new party of people there.

"More Germans," he said.

"Germans, yeah. They came yesterday."

"What're they like?"

"I don't know. Germans."

He saw a tubby man with a clipped beard and a blonde woman in a blue costume. There were two girls and a small boy. The older girl ran down the sand to the water. She was wearing the bottom of a string bikini.

"Look at that," Pauline said. "God, if I looked like that."

The German girl was in her late teens, slim and hard-looking, blonde and pale-skinned, just starting to turn brown, with a small waist and small breasts. She splashed and laughed in the water, and then ran back up the sand.

"What for?" he said.

"Oh, if I had that figure."

"What's supposed to be wrong with yours?"

"Well, look at me. Look here and here. Twenty pounds overweight, right? Or make it twenty-five. Make it thirty."

She looked down at her legs. She moved them apart, then together, seeing which way they looked better.

"Sooner you than her," he said.

"Than her? Oh, come on."

"Well, you're an adult and she's a kid. And she's just, you know, there are so many of them like that. Like they're all stamped out of a machine. All sort of thin, blonde, happy, pretty, but there's nothing really there."

"Oh, come on. No guys really think like that."

"Well, look. We're talking. But I couldn't talk to her. I mean, what could she say? What could she know to talk about?"

"She'd find something."

"She's just pretty," he said. "It's not as if she's really anybody. She's just a pretty face. It's like, you're real and she's not."

Pauline was looking round at him. He reached for her brown hand on the arm of her chair, and squeezed it, and she held his fingers.

"Come on," he said. "Let's have a swim. Let's have a rest from this heavy stuff."

She tossed her skirt over her chair. She was wearing a blue two-piece costume. He decided it was two-piece, not a bikini. In the water he fitted his mask and dived past her, but the water there was cloudy too. He raked his fingers in the coarse sand, feeling for bits of shell. He saw something flicker at the limit of his vision, maybe a fish, but it was gone before he could tell. He saw Pauline's legs kicking and he surfaced by her.

"What's down there?" she said.

"Just sand. Nothing."

"Nothing at all? No fish?"

"Huge fish," he said. "Bloody great sharks. Nothing else though."

He saw her squeal and laugh and splash the water as he dived again. He breathed deep through the snorkel and angled down. He turned and saw her body and kicking legs and arms under the bright shivering surface, bubbles around her feet, and he came behind and grabbed her by both ankles. She twisted and kicked and he came up through the surface laughing.

"Jaws," he said. "Great white shark strikes again."

"Oh, you," she said.

They were both laughing. She started splashing him. He pulled his mask into place to dive again, and she reached toward it, and he caught her hand. He backed away and stopped her other hand coming. He was laughing, bubbling around the snorkel in his mouth, and he couldn't resist properly.

Then suddenly she relaxed. "Oh, I don't want to fight you," she said.

Through the wet glass he saw the change in her face. He held her arms lightly, and she rested her hands on his shoulders. He put his hands on her waist.

"Take that, take that off," she said.

He tugged the mask off with one hand and slipped his arm through the strap. He was standing shoulder deep, leaning back, and she was floating in front of

him. She floated forward the last few inches and kissed his mouth. He touched the small of her back and she went on kissing. Her tongue licked out and in. He held her balanced until she stopped and floated back to an arm's length again.

"Some surprise, eh?" she said.

"Nice surprise," he said.

"You're a nice guy."

They closed and kissed again, not for as long. "Germans watching," he said.

They moved apart slowly again and came ashore hand in hand. The Germans looked at them and then looked away.

"Would you like to take a shower?" she said. "I mean, I'm finished here if you are."

"Okay, yes. Good idea."

They picked up their belongings and he followed her up the sandy path under the trees. The Thais sitting at the restaurant watched them pass. She opened a timber cabin with a brick bathroom built on at the back.

"I'm sorry about the mess," she said. "I mean, it's no problem or anything, but I'm sorry about all this mess inside."

Then the door was swinging shut behind them, and in the dark he touched her arm, and she turned, looking up, and they held each other and started kissing again.

In the bathroom, getting used to the dim light, he rubbed her with pink soap from a pink plastic dish. Her stomach and hips and thighs were wide and soft, with a white patch where her costume had been. Her breasts were good, not heavy enough to sag.

"Just there," he said.

"Oh, no. Yes. Oh, wow, yes."

Her face tightened. He kissed her again. This was all something he hadn't expected. He hadn't thought she'd react this way. Now he was there, he wanted her to enjoy it, however.

"Which way?" he said on the bed. "I mean, whatever you like."

"This way," she said. "This way. Just any way."

But he took his time about it. He wanted her to go on enjoying it. He wouldn't enjoy it unless she enjoyed it. Presently he lay over and kissed her mouth again and she held him tight.

"Fat," she said. "Oh, God."

"No," he said. He didn't care about that.

Then he went ahead slowly, stopping sometimes, picking it up then. She was very eager and responsive. She was a lovely girl. She didn't know how good she was. He held on as long as he could while she shivered and gasped. Finally she relaxed and they lay apart again.

"Oh, so good," she said.

But she was watching him sidelong. She might have been starting to remember that because of how and where they were, it couldn't go on much longer. He was starting to think about that too.

"You look a bit serious," he said. "Bit too serious."

He started walking his fingers on the sheet, up her arm, round her breast, she giggled, and down her stomach. She was smiling again.

"Come here," he said.

That took care of things for another while. She was dazed from the exercise, and presently she went to sleep. He slept beside her and the sun was much lower outside when he woke.

Pauline was lying with her face toward him. Her eyes opened when he moved. She smiled and lifted a hand. He moved over and kissed her again.

"Come on," she said.

He did it slowly as before, and finally, when he backed off, she lay with her hand over her face. "That okay?" he said.

"Oh, thank you so much."

"Thank you? What for? Did you think I wasn't enjoying it?"

"Just thanks, anyway."

He lifted her hand. Her eyes were shut. She was smiling, but in a different way. He couldn't imagine what she was thinking.

"I don't follow this," he said. "What do you mean?"

"You don't have to make me talk about it. But I just think of that kid on the beach, and then I think of me."

"What about the kid?" he said. He had to think hard to remember her.

"Oh, you saw her. She was just so young. So much vigor. Not so, God, not so damn aging and slack and fat."

"Well, you're not slack and fat."

"No? Oh, no? Look at that."

She slapped her upper leg. The brown flesh shook.

"That doesn't matter. Really fat is a lot fatter than that."

"Okay. Okay, I'll tell you. You see my hair? You know it's dyed?"

He shook his head. He hadn't thought about it. He couldn't tell it was dyed.

"Do you know how old I am?"

He thought about it. "Thirty-three?" he said.

"Thirty-six."

"Well, what's wrong with looking younger than you are?"

She shook her head and turned away.

"I mean, I like you," he said. "I never thought about all the rest of it."

She was shaking her head, rubbing her eyes. He put his hand on her shoulder.

"You like me?" she said. "You're sorry for me. You don't have to apologise about it."

"There's nothing to apologise about. Apologise for."

"I wish you'd just say what you really thought," she said. "I wish you could be sincere."

He didn't like the word but he made himself say it.

"I am," he said. "I am sincere."

"It's no good just saying it."

"I am, truly."

She was looking at him again. He felt as if he was driving too fast on a wet corner, and all four wheels had just started to slide.

"Tell me what you really thought," she said. "Tell me true."

"I liked you. I thought you were, you know, attractive. I liked the look of you. I liked your personality. I was glad it was working out like this. I mean, shit, you know, I was grateful. I ought to be saying thank you about it, not you."

She was shaking her head. "Just be honest," she said. "Tell me true."

He was sitting on his heels, looking down, not touching her, shaking his head. He noticed it was becoming dark outside the cabin.

"I told you the truth," he said. "I don't know what else you want me to say."

She turned away from him. He bent forward to hold her. She was crying again.

"Come on," he said. "Come on now."

She lay on her back with her hands still on her face. This time he couldn't get her to respond. He couldn't make himself respond.

"Okay, just this," he said. "How's this?"

Finally she reacted but she kept one hand over her face, and finally she turned away. He put his hand on her arm.

"I don't know what's wrong," he said. "But I don't think I can do anything. I think I ought to go now. Do you want me to go or stay?"

"Go," she said. He took his hand away.

He dressed in the half-dark, watching her dim body on the white sheet. He remembered his towel and diving things.

"I'm sorry about whatever it was," he said at the door.

He thought she shook her head. He wasn't sure. He wasn't happy about going, but he didn't think it would be any use to stay. He drew the door closed on her.

There were lights in the beach cafes and some cabins but he turned along the path up to the main road. It was quite dark by then. He walked all the way back, over the hill and across the marsh to the lights of Patong. There were fireflies over the stagnant pools, and there was a hissing, whistling noise among the mangroves. He guessed it was some sort of insect, but there was no way he could tell.

REMEMBERING BORGES

From this garden to have looked up at a comet,
from this point where others might have looked up
at stars
and known man himself as a pinpoint in the night,
to have looked from shadows in a rustic garden,
felt the other's presence, heard the twig break,
then fall,
to have looked up, that is the thing.

FAYE DAVIS

HANK NELSON

Pictures at Tabara

Along the north bank of the Gira River in the Northern Province of Papua New Guinea the walking track winds through sharp changes of deep shade, half shade and bright sunlight. Even with our eyes full of sweat we were conscious of the condition of the light. Near Nindewari village, in an open area of shimmering heat, there was a patch of swept earth, white stone border, bright crotons, fenced square, and in the centre a peaked corrugated iron roof supported by stakes. Although not a grave, it looked like a memorial of some sort. We wanted to cross the intense heat of the open space and escape into the dark heat of the rain forest; but we asked what it was.

Many of the young people of the area know a little English, and they speak it with a distinctive, clipped carefulness. Five or six of them answered, each giving a quick rush of words. Perhaps they were translating from their own language, and while one was talking another was choosing the foreign words to push the story along its well known track.

> A young man. He was only fifteen or sixteen. He was making love to a married woman. They used to meet often. Then the husband found out. He came back to the village early in the afternoon. He sat there sharpening his bush knife. For a long time. In the evening he waited here by the track. When the young man came along he killed him. He kept cutting and cutting. And he threw all the pieces away in the bush. Then he ran. He went to Ioma. He travelled all night. To give himself up to the police. The people gathered all the bits of the body. They found every piece except his cock and balls. They smoked the body to keep it so that the government men could look at it. This (and they indicated the fence, crotons, and roof) is the place where the young man was killed. He is not buried here. He is buried in the village cemetery.

The story was dramatic and grotesque. Such stories are attractive to Australians who have just arrived in Papua New Guinea. The stories confirm what they had hoped: they have passed beyond the Australian frontier to the exotic. And they are themselves unthreatened. They cannot wait to write home; or get home and talk about it.

We had flown in from Popondetta to Dodoima on a six-seater Islander, crossing the uniform pattern of oil palms, the mass of rain forest, the Kumusi, Opi and Mambare Rivers, and losing height over curve on curve of the Gira. Dodoima airstrip is a patch of vivid green where the Gira leaves the foothills of the central ranges and begins its north-eastward surge to the Solomon Sea. At Dodoima some Binandere saw their first wheeled machinery: on the undercarriage of an aircraft or on the Scott Bonnar mower used to help cut the *kiawa* (whiteman's) grass on the runway.

Chris Owen, Andrew Pike and I were going to Tabara village with John Waiko. John had recently graduated from the Australian National University in Canberra, the second Papua New Guinean to gain a Ph.D. Amid flowing robes, floppy hats, mortar boards and speeches, John had stepped forward to take his degree wearing a gown, feathered headdress and shell face ornaments. Now his own Binandere people were to celebrate his doctorate. We three foreigners had come to take part, watch and record.

At Popondetta airport the Papuan clerk stated on the loading form that each of us weighed seventy-seven kilos. Was that the known average weight of white travellers in the tropics, or did we all look the same?

It was a four-hour walk from Dodoima to John Waiko's village of Tabara. After three hours the unpractised walkers among us could not alter stride without feeling pain. We were fixed in mobility.

The track crossed a succession of steep-sided creeks feeding into the Gira. Some were bridged by heavy tree trunks adzed flat on top, and at other longer crossings the logs tapered to sapling, bending and whipping with each stride. All the barefoot Binandere, including those with awkward two-man loads lashed to poles, slapped their feet confidently on wood over space. At each creek we measured our agility and comfort

against humility. We could follow the lead of the Binandere; bounce across on our backsides; or ignore the bridge, plunge into dense bush, wade through stagnant water and haul ourselves up the far bank. The Binandere watched closely and covertly. All hoped for a spectacular display of foreign ungainliness so that they would later mime, laugh, mime, and laugh again. We avoided disaster, but at the expense of pride, splinters, scratches and a soaking to the waist.

Less than an hour out of Tabara we were told to board outrigger canoes. Each time a white boot was placed in the main hull, a Binandere politely urged us, "Watch the outrigger." I thought this curious advice until I realised that it was the lightwood outrigger that gave the first sign that the canoe was tilting.

Strong current and intermittent deft poling from the Binandere took us quickly downstream. With Tabara still out of sight another canoe joined our quiet convoy. It took station on the left. The rain forest on the banks was darkening with evening, but low-angle sun still lit the eastern edge of the river, and it fell on a spectral figure kneeling just forward of the stern poler in the strange canoe. The spectre was in fact a boy of about seven painted in grey clay, and dressed in broad green leaves and white streamers of beaten fibres. He was, we were told, representing the spirit of John's uncle, the man who had first brought mission schooling to the area. John's uncle had since died, but the boy honored his place in John's education. There could be no Binandere precedents on how to greet a returning doctor of philosophy. George Kandoro of Tabara, John's cousin, had choreographed a new village ceremony.

The canoes rounded the last bend and the polers thrust for the *papo*, the shelving bank of the Tabara canoe landing. The *papo* is still for the river people what the steamer jetty was to the white men in the tropics, and what the railway station was to Australian country towns. The *papo* is the point where the Tabara have met the outside world. Brides from other villages have stepped ashore on its grey sand, some surrounded by families displaying their strength, others as trembling captives. Men have arrived at the *papo* to offer feasting, fighting, trading, treachery, a new religion and a new government. Women have wept when young men left to work on plantations or enlist in the army or the police; and they have wept again on the *papo* for those who returned and those who did not. And now when village groups from downstream want to arrive in style, white leaf-pennants flying and canoes low in the water with pigs, taro and bananas, they battle upstream close to the far bank, pass the village, then turn and race into the *papo* with the current.

At the *papo* we were met by drummers, dancers and a chanted welcome that swelled and died. Headdresses and leaf streamers waved with the gusts of sound. Spearmen raced forward, retreated and charged again. All the time the spirit-boy stood quietly at John's side. He was both shy and assured. The welcome was a compressed re-enactment of many meetings with strangers: the shouting of "Who are you?" the challenge, violence, a treaty, and an invitation to the men's house.

From the front platform of the house set aside for us we looked out on swept earth surrounded by some fourteen other houses, each with its own split-palm floor, vertical lath walls and shaggy sago-palm thatch roof. Each house sat on posts, some over two metres high. The only useful plant cultivated right against the houses was tobacco. Old men plucked leaves, cured them over the fire, and rolled themselves a cigar as they talked. Beyond the houses were betel and coconut palms, behind them rain forest and the curve of the river. The food gardens, extending over two kilometres, were across the river where they were protected from the foraging village pigs. Logs lying on the ground marked off ownership and gardens in different stages of production: newly cleared land with timber piled to dry for fuel, freshly planted taro, tangles of sweet potato vines spilling from earth mounds, mature gardens dense with maize, tapioca, peanuts, cabbage, pumpkins, beans and onions, and old gardens in which even the sugar cane and banana palms were disappearing in the secondary rain forest.

The Binandere led us through their gardens with pride. The obvious productivity does more than demonstrate that the Binandere possess fertile land and work it well: the constant harvest confirms for the Binandere the essential correctness of the way they organise their material and spiritual worlds.

The Tabara grow no cash crops. For a time Australian field officers tried to compel the villagers to grow tree crops, but economic laws were stronger than those of government. Any harvest had to be carried on men's backs and in canoes to meet boats that did not come and for buyers who did not care. The Tabara found it cheaper to pay fines and easier to labor in gaol.

In the evening some women lit a fire in front of our house. We sat in the dark on our platform looking at other fires, trails of smoke, and people moving in and out of the shadows. A house, a young Binandere man told us, is not complete without its fire. Did we, he asked, notice a lone rock in the river? He took great care to remind us of the particular rock where the river was fast and shallow. That rock, he said, was once a house. No one lit a fire in front of it. Believing it had been spurned, the house left and became the rock.

At daybreak each morning there was a rhythmic swishing as Binandere women swept the *arapa*, the open space between the houses. When we first looked out on the *arapa* each day it was still patterned with the crescent strokes of the bush brooms. During the day fat pigs, healthy chooks and skinny silent dogs

left one lot of shade, crossed the *arapa*, and found other shade. In Tabara the vegetarians and omnivores do well, and the carnivores struggle.

To a westerner the *arapa* could look like a street; but that is absurd for there are no vehicles, and no roads connect the village to anywhere else. And the Binandere do not see a space equally free to all pedestrians. They think of each house as having a claim to the *arapa* immediately in front of it. The Binandere feel more secure in their own section of *arapa*. The protective spirits of ancestors, they think, are more able to guide and guard them close to their own houses. A person suspicious of another does not lightly enter the rival's *arapa*, and a man wishing to make a strong speech stands before his own house.

We cooked some of our own food, but much of it came in leaf-covered bowls full of steaming taro, yam and banana. At the end of one meal I was asked if I wanted anything else. I said I wouldn't mind a small sugar banana. Someone, I thought, would just throw me one. In fact someone had to take a canoe across the river in the dark and walk to the gardens. About an hour after my request I was presented with an enormous branch of sprouting banana hands. While I tried to say that the branch could be better used somewhere else, it was lashed to our platform. Next morning other branches were tied to our house. My suggestions that we could not possibly use so many bananas were met with cheerful indifference. Our house was thick with the scent of ripe bananas, and insects swarmed around the oozing fecundity. Had the *kiawa* slighted his hosts by asking for more at the end of a generous meal? Or was the display to demonstrate to other Binandere the capacity of our hosts to feed guests a reckless excess? Andrew preferred a sexual explanation. In asking a woman for a banana (a phallus) I had shown my ignorance of metaphor and biology. The thousand bananas celebrated and sustained the joke. That was why the Binandere sometimes slapped their thighs and laughed as they looked on the decaying reminders. Or perhaps there were reasons beyond *kiawa* speculation. One of the first things that a stranger learns is that he is not the centre of events; he is temporary; events matter in the way they change relationships between Binandere.

In 1930 F. E. Williams, the Papuan government anthropologist, wrote of the plays staged by the Orokaiva, a neighboring Northern Province people. They were, he said, "valuable as a source of pleasure and amusement, and as an art that is its own reward".[1] That was an unusual judgement for the time, one likely to bring guffaws of contempt from the white-suited men in Port Moresby's Papua Club. Williams wrote of the dance dramas, but the Binandere also put on impromptu farces. Young men prepare during the day, and in the evening present a play of capering, distorted faces, funny dress and knock-about jokes. Children become so convulsed with laughter they verge on hysteria.

One midday the young men said that they needed a whiteman for the play that they were putting on that night. No, we said, we admired the plays but we had no ability as actors. The whiteman, they assured us, had nothing to say, just sit there. He was a *kiap*, a government field officer; and the Binandere wanted me, I looked right. Sensing their own escape, Chris and Andrew were immediately converted to enthusiasm for the play.

I asked was it certain that the *kiap* was just a prop. Yes, yes. Just sitting. In that case I would be in it.

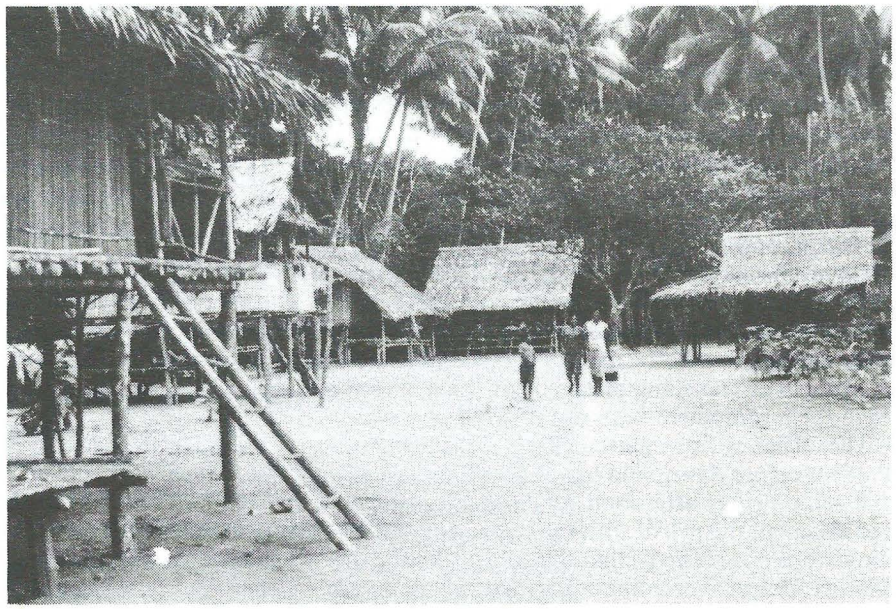
The players conferred. It would be better if I would shout out in English to a Binandere question, "I don't understand." I agreed to the one line.

The players again went into Binandere pre-production discussion. There was one more thing. The second time I was asked a question I had to shout, "Have you got a licence?" "Licence" in this context meant a letter of authority from a government officer. So I was dragged deeper into Binandere farce.

The incident forming the basis for the play was well known to the Binandere. In the early days of Australian control a group of Tabara men, conscripted to carry for a government patrol, were released from duty in the Goilala mountains and told to make their own way home. At Ioma they had to report to the *kiap* and collect rations for the final walk to Tabara. Only one of the Tabara carriers had been away to work on a plantation. He often entertained the villagers with stories of the outside world, and he demonstrated the strange ways of the whitemen by speaking their language and imitating their behavior. When the tired Tabara carriers reached Ioma he was nominated to tell the *kiap* who they were and what they wanted. But in reality the only foreign words he had picked up on the plantation were isolated commands in English, swear words, and a few disconnected phrases in Police Motu, the lingua franca of the Papuan coast. To the admiration of his fellow Tabara and the complete confusion of the *kiap* he produced his jumbled vocabulary.

In my role as *kiap* I sat on a patrol box in the *arapa*. A 'cookboy', obsequious to the point of shivering stupidity, kept bringing me cups of tea. The 'carriers' in strange clothes, faces painted into absurd contortions, stumbled into view. Their spokesman was pushed forward and he gave forth a volley of English and Motu. I shouted my first line: "I do not understand!" The apparently terrified Binandere fell over backwards, the men in front knocking over those behind in domino fashion. From then on it was ad libbing, random action and general chaos.

The Binandere actors understood all that went on; the audience followed about eighty per cent; and with little warning of the plot and no comprehension of Binandere I understood about ten per cent. At what



The arapa *at Tabara village.*

I thought an appropriate moment I came out with my second line and demanded a licence. Perhaps the timing was right, or perhaps I just added a further element of farce. With just two repeated lines from me the Binandere actors sustained over half an hour of sight gags, lewd asides, political satire and funny walks. The *kiap* was guyed, and so were the yokels and the pretentious of Tabara. The audience loved it.

Our planned entertainment for Tabara was the *asisi wasiride*, literally the moving spirit, the picture show. Nearly all the Tabara had seen pictures, but this was the first picture show in Tabara. To be able to throw pictures on to a sheet draped down the side of a house was logistically complex. We needed to have in the one place at the one time a two-strike generator, fuel, a projector and film. The compact Honda generator was also needed to recharge camera batteries so that Chris could keep shooting film. Under civil aviation regulations we could not take fuel on an aircraft that also carried passengers. Before we left Port Moresby Chris had arranged for the Papua New Guinea Office of Information staff—the travelling picture show men—to bring film, projector and fuel by boat along the coast, transfer to a smaller craft and come up the river.

On Thursday evening a man arrived from Manau on the coast. Through interpreters we learned that the Office of Information team had arrived at the coast, but had no outboard-powered dinghy to come up the river. After long discussions with other Tabara men John thought he could persuade them to take six outrigger canoes down to the mouth of the river, walk across to Manau, direct the coastal boat to stand off the Gira, load the canoes at dawn when the surf was down, and battle upstream through the next day. It would be a gruelling trip for the canoemen.

At about ten o'clock that night there was a cry, "*Dinghy gupeira, dinghy gupeira.*" The dinghy was coming. Excited groups hurried to the *papo*. Through the heavy humid air I thought I could hear a distant motor. At times I imagined I heard the sound I knew in another place as the drone of a tractor working through the night, the farmer desperate to sow while moisture still darkened his Mallee paddock. The sound faded and we began walking back. High cloud covered the sky, but the near full moon gave just enough light to walk without torch or lantern. Only a patch of bamboo was absolutely black.

Again there was the cry of "dinghy, dinghy". We went back to the *papo*, and now the sound of an engine revving and dying was clear. Suddenly we saw a torch flashing, the outline of a boat and the white churn of the wake. Keeping in the deep water close to the far bank, the dinghy drew level with the *papo*. The villagers on the bank were calling out, and we picked up occasional comments translated into English. "It's not our boat." But the engine slowed and it turned towards the *papo*. "They haven't got the pictures." Then the torches on shore picked up the shine of metal film cans lying among the cargo. Like victorious warriors home from battle we carried stores, projector and film into the village. The women already had mugs of tea and bowls of food ready.

While the boatmen ate on our platform, Tabara men and women drummed, danced and sang. One woman left the dancers, warmed a drumhead on the

fire, tested it with palm and finger taps, and returned to the dance.

John spoke quietly of the tenacity of the small boy and six men on the dinghy who kept driving their boat upstream with just a handheld torch to give them warning of rocks and timber. The Office of Information men said that they wanted to show the films immediately. They had a sea-going boat waiting near the mouth of the Gira and had to meet it the next day. No one seemed surprised at the idea of starting a picture show close to midnight; but John pointed out that people in nearby villages were expecting to see the films and they would be unable to come to a sudden showing. The travelling picture show men agreed to leave their equipment with us.

The Office of Information men and the boat's crew were up before dawn, and left at first light. Early on that same Friday afternoon we discovered that they had taken all the petrol with them. We could neither show films nor recharge batteries. But, we were told, another dinghy was coming on Monday and it was carrying a forty-four gallon drum of *bensin*, petrol.

A saga of confusion over the petrol had begun. For me the confusion was increased because I was never sure of the source of the many conflicting messages, and I did not know whether others were hearing the same contradictions.

The second dinghy came not on Monday but the next day, Saturday. The boatmen had no forty-four gallon drum, and, they said, only enough *bensin* to get back to Manau. At Manau they would store the dinghy until at some unknown time a coastal boat would drop off fuel. The nearest government station, Ioma, we were told, had no petrol. We wondered whether it was worth paying about $300 for a charter aircraft to bring fuel to Dodoima. But a runner would take a day to reach Ioma and we were uncertain of the speed and accuracy of any response.

Someone remembered the mower at Dodoima. If there was an engine, there was *bensin*. But, no, for many months bent backs, sweat and swinging grass knives had cut all the cursed *kiawa* grass on the airstrip.

We were then told about the driftwood *bensin*. A forty-four gallon drum had been washed away in a flood and found stranded in a creek by some villagers living upstream from Tabara. When the owner claimed his petrol, the villagers said he could have it after he paid them compensation. The owner had no money, and the finders kept the drum. The dinghy men left by canoe to see if they could buy the come-by-chance *bensin*. They were back the next day: the villagers did have a drum, but it was small and it only had enough petrol in it to cover the first joint of one finger. They left drum and *bensin* where it was.

As we sat on the house platform in desultory conversation, the boatmen speaking Binandere and us English, John in one of his comments that linked the two groups told us that there was some spare fuel on the dinghy. One of the boatmen, John and I went down to the *papo* and collected two plastic containers of oil, an auxiliary tank from the outboard and another four gallon drum of petrol. We could run the two-stroke generator to charge batteries and for several hours of films.

Had the boatmen given us the fuel that they needed to get back to Manau? Would they now have to drift and pole downstream, leave the dinghy on the river and walk across to Manau? Later when I gave one of the boatscrew antibiotics for a tropical ulcer on his leg I tried to question him closely and casually. He said they still had enough *bensin* to get to Manau.

Placed in sequence and isolated from other events the story of the petrol has a step by step clarity. Even the contradictions are precise: the dinghy would come on Monday and it arrived on Saturday. But at the time I often heard half statements, searched for another person likely to be better informed, and asked for someone to interpret. And all the time other things were happening that were of immediate interest. The sago palm was cut, the sago pulverised, washed and carried in an old canoe hull into the village; the rehearsals for the *ario*, the dance drama, went on in the bush; visiting village groups arrived; prolonged discussions took place on the distribution of pig meat and other commodities; and there were emotional accusations and counter accusations of sorcerers being paid to impede the ceremonies.

Our pursuit of the *bensin* told us most of all that we were outsiders. The petrol actually existed, and our need for it could be explained easily. We could ask simple direct questions. But if we struggled to find out about petrol, then what chance did we have of learning about the non-material? We could observe and record; but it was doubtful whether we could find out what it all meant to those directing and taking part in events. As on other occasions when I have been fascinated by what I could see and bemused by village talk, I wondered about all those travellers and anthropologists who write crisp certainties with no admissions of bewilderment.

We showed the *asisi wasiride* over three nights. People walked for several hours or came by canoe, they ate with those linked to them by kin or some historical debt, and joined various groups on woven mats in the *arapa*. Soon small fires glowed at the front edge of several mats. Smoke drifted through the projector beam. Young men stood at the back where they could hear almost nothing of the sound-track above the hammering of the generator engine. Dogs and pigs scavenged cautiously for discarded food at the edge of the crowd of about 400 people. Late in the night children slept in positions of contented exhaustion.

Among the films we showed were a documentary

People from Jinganda village arrive at the papo *(the canoe landing) at Tabara village.*

by Chris on the Gogodala people of the Western Province of Papua New Guinea, his Pidgin language feature, "Tukana", shot on Bougainville, and a documentary, "Angels of War", made by Andrew Pike, Gavan Daws and me. "Angels of War" includes scenes in which John interviews Orokaiva and Binandere ex-serviceman, so the Tabara saw one of the few films in which their own language is used.

During the films the Tabara talked among themselves, and directed occasional comments at the screen. They were quick to comment on the way other villagers carried out everyday tasks and behaved towards each other. In Tukana the Tabara applauded quietly when the wicked suffered, and they were quick to express their consternation when young men and women scorned their parents. This was an immorality so extreme that the Tabara could not look at it dispassionately. To countenance such behavior was to accept the destruction of Tabara: all in the audience knew that the towns with other values beckoned the Binandere young. In "Angels of War" there is a scene where an Australian kicks a surrendered Japanese soldier. Australian audiences are embarrassed by the incident; the Binandere approved of Australian violence.

When people gathered in the village in the evening the sounds most likely to rise above the general noise were cries of greeting and bursts of laughter. But as the egalitarian and competitive Binandere prepared to celebrate John's doctorate there was tension about contributions in work and kind, who would be hosts, and who would be artists and entrepreneurs. The prominence of one man or clan was equally detrimental to others. All acts to advantage or disadvantage someone would eventually be repaid. When clan leaders discussed plans in the evening, or when the dance leader denounced the men who could not reproduce the movements of the hornbill, men shouted, and a disruptive brawl always seemed possible. John's immediate family were the bookkeepers of intricate village balances. They met in frequent low-voiced conferences to calculate the debts paid and incurred. Some older clan leaders might have been offering aid which they hoped that John could not repay immediately. Then they would have the right to call on him to act for them in Port Moresby in that alien culture of cash, forms to be filled in, and government patronage.

Before 9 o'clock on the morning of the first of two days of festivity people began collecting at a clearing about the size of a small cricket ground. It was like show day in a country town. Families carrying netbags of food and green coconuts to drink took up positions against the boundary vine. There was much shaking of hands as groups met, and constant chopping. Nearly all men and many women carried bush knives or tomahawks. They cut leaves to sit on and to drape on heads and shoulders; by midday some had cut poles and vines and built shade houses; and the bush that usually pressed against the clearing was hacked into retreat.

The young men, the *farceurs*, acted out a story familiar to the Binandere about a crying baby. Their appearance in bulbous masks and bodies covered in black and grey clay was more elaborate than in the

impromptu evening capers. Women danced in pairs. They were without drums, but kept the beat with their feet and pounded the ground with the flattened ends of wild ginger stalks.

The main troupe of *ario* dancers entered the arena, and pairs of men and women came in from four different points. The dancing ground was a swirling mass of color. Red earth dye mixed with the beaten bark of the *simani* and the intensely bright yellow of the scraped root of the *nonda* were everywhere shimmering and flouncing in layers of fibre draped from shoulders to ankles. All the men wore full headdresses with small feathers at the front through to the bird of paradise plumes at the back. White shell and dog-tooth ornaments were hung on chests and held in the mouth. Red-brown tapa cloth hung from waist bands. All men carried hand drums. Palm frond screens were shifted from the centre of the arena to reveal five-metre high carved poles supporting a stepped ramp leading to a platform above the height of the headdresses. A man and then a woman danced on the platform and displayed the *yavetu*, the bone of the dance, the motif, a baby-sized wooden figure carved secretly by Reginald Oveva, an artist from a neighboring village. Bodies glistened with sweat. An old man dropped out, short of wind, he said. Women arrived with metal boilers of water and handed enamel mugs to the dancers. Old women sang a lament for those who had once danced in splendor but were now dead. Other women danced at the side of sons new to the *ario*. A dome, representing a cave, suddenly raced across the arena. There were people crouched inside giving the dome an eerie mobility. It was a dramatic coup. The hornbill dance, the sago dance and the wallaby dance were completed, and the Binandere had acted out legends defining where they came from and who they were. We left the dancing ground with its trampled grass, slashed branches already wilting, and litter of peel and husks. Back in the village we sat on the house platforms, ate and talked.

The next day the pigs to be killed were paraded shoulder high around the *arapa*. Still with front and rear legs tied to poles, the pigs were lined up along the *dapamo*, a tree trunk fixed horizontally about half a metre above the ground. John, dressed in Australian National University doctoral robes, emerged from a house. People expressed quiet admiration for the blue-and-black gown. Perhaps they guessed that this was the dress of declamation rather than dance. Escorted by men in headdresses and tapa cloth, John led a procession around the *arapa*. Suddenly there were shouts in the crowd, a thud as a round-house right connected, and a club arced through the air. Someone blew a whistle, men and women rushed forward, and the hotheads were pushed apart. The Binandere share the paradox of other cultures: warriors are heroes and the peace-makers are blessed. At the height of the melee John said calmly, "Think of this in the School of Music", the scene of his Canberra graduation. He then spoke to restrain his wildest supporters.

The flare of violence died quickly. The young men of Tabara had clashed with those from another village. Someone had stood up, the young men at the back had shouted for them to sit, there were comments, then insults and a fight. In another country the beer would have been blamed; but in Tabara there was no beer, no trade store and almost no exchanges involving cash. The fight was another incident in a long-lasting rivalry between the two villages.

The procession moved on. John climbed a low platform especially built in the *arapa*. He addressed the people who remained close to their houses and shade. Nicodemus Kove, one of John's first teachers, spoke, and I tried to say what John had achieved in a foreign education system. I began, "Ladies and gentlemen of Tabara *edo nasi berari de. Ositeraria butu da ainda* . . . I had written a paragraph and John had translated it for me to read. I continued in English and John turned the talk. Women put shade leaves and cooling water over pigs that they had fed, pigs that were known by name and were accustomed to lie close to the family mat in the evening. Other Binandere men spoke, then John walked the *dapamo* log to nominate those to receive pigs.

In the evening the young people began their 'disco'. A string band played all night. The lead singer, a young boy, knelt to project his voice into the microphone of the one guitar hooked to a battery-operated speaker in a radio. Most of the songs were in Binandere, adaptations of those played by the string bands of the Papua New Guinea towns. On the first day of celebrations the old arts of Tabara had been displayed on the dance ground; on the second day John in his doctoral robes had inserted a glimpse of another culture into the village; and the night of the second day belonged to the *gita*, the instrument that was changing church, funeral and dance music on the Gira.

We left at dawn the next day and walked through flood waters to Dodoima. Our weather was clear, but storms in the ranges had sent a mass of swirling mud-colored water down the river. We no longer had to worry about the log bridges: they had disappeared and we swam in warm, opaque water. Our guide, Dudley, was a tall young Binandere of about fourteen. His English was the most fluent of those who were educated in the area and stayed there. At school he had been consistently around the top of his grade, but when the final primary school exam was held he was fourth, and only three Gira pupils were given places in the high school at Popondetta. John, in one of the services he could provide for his people, was trying to find a school that would take Dudley. At one creek Dudley made real what I had presumed was old *masta*

John Waiko, in Australian National University doctoral robes, speaks to his people in Tabara village.

folklore. He waded into the water, took a deep breath, held a bag of our gear at arms length over his head, and kept walking. He had calculated correctly. The water rose to his wrists only, and he made the crossing in one breath.

As the water on the flat parts of the track rose above waist level we wondered what was happening to the carriers who were following. The film, in taped cans, would survive immersion, but the sound tapes had little protection. We joked about reviving the silent documentary, the film in which you learnt to appreciate Binandere music by looking at it. But as we rested on a rise at Peio village, John and the carriers came yodelling and splashing through the flood. When the Gira rose they had cut timber, made rafts and floated the cargo. All the tapes were dry.

We missed our charter flight. It roared overhead as we waded beneath a thick forest canopy. We could neither wave nor hurry.

By the time we reached Dodoima the Gira was almost contained within its banks; but its surface was still rilled and heaving, it roared like surf, and mud-stained foam hung on snags. The fall on the river was sharper here, and stones rolled in the stream. There were no more Binandere villages higher up the Gira. As we stood on the flood-washed bank looking at the river a man on a black motor tube swept into view. He went with such speed, the tube seemed to be skipping across the surface. Far out in the stream, he could not join a shouted exchange. He waved a relaxed arm and was gone. We could not ask whether he had long planned this day, how and why he got his tube to the Gira, did he have business down-stream, or was he a great opportunist. For us he was the man who took the flood, became the fastest man on the Gira, and for an instant gave us a share in his exhilaration.

At the airstrip I wrote a note in case the pilot came back. It said we were in Usi village, just ten minutes' walk downstream. For a moment I thought about carving DIG into a soft-trunked tree; but decided that the Australian pilot might not have been instructed in the same repetitive explorer history as my generation. And nothing could have been more alien to Burke and Wills than the Gira and the rain forests where men became hornbills and danced in swirls of color. I cut a stick and used it to pin the note to the split-palm shed housing the no-*bensin* Scott Bonnar.

The charter picked us up two days later.

NOTES

Dr John Waiko obtained his Ph.D. in the Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History at the Australian National University. As one of his supervisors I was invited to attend a celebration in his home village. I am grateful to John and the people of Tabara for their courtesy and generosity. Andrew Pike and Chris Owen were invited as friends of John and as film makers. John Waiko is now Professor of History at the University of Papua New Guinea. In various writings he has recorded much of the history of the Binandere people. I am grateful to John, Andrew and Chris for reading a draft of this article.

1. F. E. Williams, *Orokaiva Society* (London, 1930), p. 259.

THE COLOR OF THE SKY

Why care about what happens to this world?
My blood will be still.
– There is a picture in my brother's room, my
grandfather in uniform gazes down solemnly
at the blankets saxophone and a map;
the look – it is my brother.

– There is a book in my sister's room, her
name is on the spine and it is full of her words;
the book – it is my sister.

One day the sun will fade and the earth will
freeze.
The oceans will be still.

The stars are vast and far
and swallow their cadavers.

Who then will know what sounds
once shook the icy clockwork that surrounds
us?
Who'll even know the color of our skies?

DESMOND MANDERSON

GEORGIA SAVAGE

The Plaid Dress

While it was happening I watched the moon. It was in a piece of sky behind his shoulder. With the upright of the window on one side, the curve of his shoulder on the other and the white-faced moon in between it was like looking into one of the Japanese drawings my mother's so keen about. At the same time there was a part of my mind noticing that the piece of him prodding between my legs was warm. (No. Not between my legs, higher than that. Prodding into my body. Into *ME.*) For some funny reason I'd imagined that when it happened to you, that part of a man would be cold. Being skin and blood and stuff how could it? But I hadn't thought of that. I'd just imagined it would be cold and slippery. Like a snake, I suppose.

I went on staring at the moon even when the pain split me and I called out. I kept staring until it was over and his face was in my hair. Then in an awful mixture of sobbing and breathy laughter he was saying over and over, "Vicky, Vicky, I'm sorry."

Because there was nothing else to do, I said, "It's all right, Dad. It doesn't matter," and I remember being surprised at how funny and faraway my voice sounded.

I'd been in my room trying on the dress my mother had bought me for Caroline Teasdale's birthday party. Usually, my mother who's very creative, made my clothes but she'd been having trouble with an impacted wisdom tooth and hadn't felt like sewing so she took me to David Jones which *she* still calls Buckley's and there we saw a dress in layers of scalloped pink and red. I fell in love with that dress. It was like the petals of a poppy and I could see myself dancing in it while Christopher, Caroline's brother watched in admiration. But my mother said the dress wasn't elegant and she bought instead a taffeta one of lilac and blue plaid with a prissy little collar.

For a week I mourned the poppy dress. My friend Samantha mourned it with me. *Her* mother's a gynaecologist too busy to shop, so Samantha buys her own clothes and gets the most *wonderful* things. She told me on the bus that the poppy dress would have illuminated my dark eyes and moth-wing eyebrows. (Sam's very poetic.) But at home the mirror told me the only thing the *plaid* dress illuminated was the fact that my chest was still skating-rink flat while Samantha, who's only four months older than I, already had two distinct volcano peaks rising from hers.

I was thinking about Sam's volcanoes and leaning forward at the same time to check out my teeth in the mirror when I heard my parents begin quarrelling.

My mother had been working in her studio which is beside my bedroom. (I'd been hearing the hiss of the wheel and the clack of the pedal for some time.) Mum's a potter and quite a good one. When she was younger she had a few shows of her own work and was even asked to send some pieces for exhibition in Japan. But Dad, who's an architect and knows about most things, told her that if she did, she'd make a fool of herself. After that she gave up having exhibitions of her work and just made pieces for members of the family for Christmas and stuff like that.

As usual they were arguing about money and I knew it was bad because I heard the wheel stop and then a piece of furniture, probably the stool Mum sits on, fall over. Knocking things over is most unlike my mother, who's quite a careful person.

"Yes, it *is* in my name," I heard her say. "But it's still *ours.*"

Sounding really angry, my father cut her off, "*My* share bonus—in *your* name!"

"I didn't want to put it in the cheque account. I thought we should put it towards our winter holiday."

"How much other money have you got in there?"

"Very little."

"How much is very little?"

"Just the two thousand Mum gave me when she sold her car."

My father exploded then and I heard him call her a liar and a cheat. That wasn't fair. Mum's a funny person but she's awfully honest. If she finds money in a shop or anything she always hands it in.

I didn't want to hear any more so I left the mirror and turned my transistor onto some heavy rock. If it comes to that, I didn't *need* to hear any more. I knew exactly the way the argument would go. Dad would start using what my mother called gutter language and he'd keep doing it until she went to find her car keys. When she did, she'd leave the house and drive to *her* mother's place two suburbs away. After that Dad would slam around the house for a while then sit in his study drinking claret. He'd go on drinking until he fell asleep in his chair. Sometime during the night he'd ring my Nanna Peg's house. Mum would come home then and in the morning they'd both act as if none of it had happened.

Aunt Penelope, my mother's sister who's a feminist, says my parents' quarrels aren't about money at all, that they're about power. I'm not sure what she means by that and I don't see how she'd know anyway. She probably hasn't ever heard one of them.

In a little while, just as I'd thought, my mother left the house. I saw her go across the patio. Her face was set and she slapped her feet down angrily. Mum has big feet and gets her shoes custom-made, a fact which launches a lot of jokes in our family.

On her way to the garage she didn't even look in the direction of the music blasting from my room, though normally she'd have come to the window to tell me to turn it of—*immediately*. I turned it off myself in the end because I found I wasn't in the mood for Jimmy Barnes.

It must have been 9.30 when my father came into the room. For once I hadn't finished my homework. Instead I'd been doing what my mother calls paddling around. Sorting my tapes and re-reading some old letters from a pen-friend in Switzerland. I was still wearing the plaid dress, or rather I was just taking it off. I'd pulled it over my head but it still covered my arms and chest when Dad opened the door. He was carrying a glass of wine and he said, "What're you doing, sweetie?"

Here I think I should stop my narrative flow for a moment to describe my father. He's tall and slim and very nice-looking with thick curly brown hair cut shortish and eyes of hare-bell blue. At least that's what my mother calls them. And she says his mouth would be considered beautiful even on a woman. His clothes are nice too. He wears blue shirts and tweed suits. The suits are expensive ones but looking sort of lived-in. His shoes are always dark-brown imported brogues.

"Nothing much," I told him and hauled the dress off and flung it onto the bed. "Can I have a drink?"

He said, "You know you shouldn't," but he came across to me and handed me the glass.

I took a gulp though I didn't like it much. Then I held the glass out to him. Before he took it, he reached out his index finger and lifted a lock of hair away from my eyes. At that moment a sudden wind rattled the rose bushes outside the window.

"I'm cold," I said and folded my arms across the bra I didn't really need.

"Come here—I'll warm you," said Dad. He put the glass of claret beside my transistor and folded me inside his arms. His clothes were warm and a bit rough, making me feel comforted and special, and I stayed there leaning against him while he stroked the skin just below the small of my back.

Suddenly he slipped his hand into my pants and moved it slowly backwards and forwards across my bottom. Then, not taking his hand away he sort of juggled me down onto my bed and just before my body touched it he moved his hand and pulled my underpants down, grabbed my ankle and lifted it, so that before I even knew it, one of my legs was free.

What happened next was horrible. I was crushed and half-suffocated, then prodded and split by the warm part of him. All I could do was stare at the moon and try to pretend it wasn't happening. In the end, after he'd collapsed in that awful half-laughing, half-sobbing, he left me, going out and shutting the door quietly behind him.

For a long time I lay on my bed without moving. My cheeks were wet, which is funny because I don't remember crying. The room around me and even the inside of my head it seemed, had become a swamp. A dreadful, dark, hot, stinging swamp where now and then cruel little thoughts darted like fishes. I kept them away some of the time by counting up the places where I was hurting. My knee, one wrist, the side of my face and the other place.

The worst part of it was knowing that my father had gone. I don't mean just out of the room. I mean for good. The person smelling of birthday aftershave who'd taught me to swim and ride a bike and tended every little cut and scratch for me was gone and in his place was a stranger who didn't give a solitary little second of his thoughts for anything that happened to me. Not only that, the stranger was still somewhere in the house and might come back some other time and force himself into the most private, private part of me.

Later on, when my eyes were hot and gritty and past tears altogether, other thoughts came. I saw myself as I'd been that morning getting on the bus, my hair shining and my eyes wanting to look for Christopher Teasdale sitting at the back. And I knew I'd never be able to get on the bus again because if I did, everyone would look at me and know as if they'd been there watching, what had happened in my room. No one would sit with me or even speak and if I somehow managed to last through the shame of the trip to school, I knew that when Miss Wilmot asked me to run and play tennis and things like that, what I'd done would show and she'd know too.

They'll blame me, I thought. The lot of them and they'll be right because I stood around with almost

nothing on. Then I asked for a drink of wine from his glass like someone in the television show Maree Simmons and her mother watch instead of getting Maree's homework done.

There'd always been something bad in me. I'd proved that when I borrowed Mum's watch and lost it and lied and lied, never owning up. In fact there were plenty of things my mother didn't like about me, like my going wild over some of the musicians on Countdown and wanting to be seen in the wrong clothes. Carmen Jones, she sometimes called me. And it was that side of me my father had recognised. Then remembering the funny shivery feeling which shot through me when he touched my bottom, my face grew hot. I tried to think of something else, but the only thoughts that came were of the people who said my father was a fine man. *Everyone* said it and although he made little jokes about the girls in his TAFE class who got crushes on him and rang him up at home, he always put them off kindly, so I knew he didn't want to do to them what he'd done to me.

But in spite of all those things whirling round inside my head, in spite of the fact that I was frightened by the thought of the man-shape somewhere in the house, I kept waiting for my *real* father to come back and say something to me that would put everything back in its right place again. I truly believed that all I had to do was wait and my door would open again and he'd be there to say, "What happened didn't happen at all. It's gone—been wiped away and in the morning I'll look at you and you'll be my shining girl again." But he didn't come near me and if I hadn't heard James drop something in his room, I might have gone on waiting for the rest of the night.

James is eight and it's my job to see he gets to bed. If I don't he's capable of finding things to do in his room until 4 a.m. As it was, when I turned my head and saw the clock, it was 11.47, so I got up and crept silently along the hall to the bathroom to clean myself. I didn't have a shower. I didn't want to make a noise and have someone find me with nothing on. I simply filled the washbasin and bathed myself with water as hot as I could bear. I put some Dettol in it and I swabbed and swabbed, trying to get inside as well where it stung. Then I rinsed myself and the washcloth too in clean water and tiptoed across the diningroom to the kitchen to hide the cloth at the bottom of the plastic thing we put the rubbish in.

There was no sign of my mother and although lights were on in almost every room, no sign of my father either. I put most of the lights out and crept back along the hall. In my room, because I wanted to cover myself right to the floor, I found a funny satin nightie my grandmother had given me and put it on. Then I went to James's room.

He was lying on his bed the wrong way with his feet where his head should have been. While I was in the bathroom he must have given up the struggle to stay awake because his eyes were closed and he was breathing peacefully. Golly knows what he'd been doing earlier. His hair was plastered to his forehead as if he'd been perspiring and the earplug of his radio was still in his ear. When I pulled it out he opened his eyes, looked at me, gave a long sleep-sigh and closed them again. So although he was still wearing shorts and a grubby t-shirt I covered him up and left him. At the door, just before I switched off the light, I turned to look at him. His hand was clenched under his cheek and he was frowning.

In my room again I stayed awake for a long time while the moon which every night sees everything still watched me. In the end I must have slept, because suddenly my room was full of daylight and when I turned my head to look out the window there in the sky, as high it seemed as the moon had been was my brother James. He was whizzing between two gumtrees on a flimsy flying-fox thing he'd rigged up. I was at the window in time to see him hit the second gum with a terrible thwack and fall to the ground where he lay without moving—a coat-hanger gadget of wood and wire still in his hand.

I don't remember getting out the window but I know that on the way to James my foot came down heavily on a prickly seedpod and hurt like fury. Then I was beside him. His eyes were closed and his face was white, the circular scar on the side of his chin showing up like a tattoo. He was dead. I could see that and such a wave of love for my sad little brother rushed over me that I wanted to put my mouth against his, to breath my *living person* into him so that he'd sit up and give me one of his strange smiles. And if I *couldn't* do that, then I wanted to die too. To stop being anything at all the way my father says we do when our life is over.

But James wasn't dead because the corners of his mouth moved, his eyes opened and his face lit up, *blazed* in fact with pleasure at the memory of his flight. Then although he must have been hurting everywhere, he got to his feet and carrying the coat-hanger thing marched towards the house.

As he went his back and his birdie-little-legs were as tense, as *defiant* as a bundle of gelignite. Watching him I had the feeling that if someone could find a way to untense that back of his, there'd be nothing wrong with James at all and he'd start speaking. The trouble was that no one seemed to know how.

He reached the door and went inside without collapsing so I crossed the lawn and climbed back into my room. It seems a funny thing to say but I'd forgotten the night before and when I saw the plaid dress lying crushed on the bed with a watery looking blood stain in it, I took a little while to work out what the mark was. When I did I grabbed the dress and raced with it to the bathroom where I ran water from the hot tap onto the stain. I thought I'd see it disappear.

Instead it turned brown, in places almost black, and although I scrubbed it like mad between my knuckles it didn't move. I was holding it up and staring at it when behind me, my mother's voice said, "Victoria, what *are* you doing?"

She'd come into the bathroom and was standing close to me so I tried to hide the dress. But it was no use, she'd seen it and she snatched it from me, sending a little shower of water over both of us.

Then she saw the stain. She couldn't miss it. It was so dark it seemed to leap from the material.

"You filthy girl," was what she said to me. "You've started a period and got it on the dress."

"I don't have periods." The sunlight coming through the window was bouncing off one of the taps. It struck into my eyes so I moved my head. It followed me. I moved my head again and said, "Last night Dad . . ." then my voice drained away into silence.

My mother was silent too. Keeping my face away from the light I looked at her. She'd stopped staring at the dress and was staring at me. She went on staring for a long time. And then she *knew*. I saw it in her face. In some spooky way her mind had made the jump from the stained dress to what happened in my bedroom the night before. I still don't know how she did it. Whether she read my thoughts or whether the facts were so terrible that she'd *felt* them or something. Perhaps she knew because it was *me*. Perhaps that was enough but suddenly frightened of her I shrank against the towel rack as she flung the dress into the bath. "Get dressed," she said and her voice was cold and quick. "Then go to school. I don't want to see you."

The unfairness of it was too much for me. I was no longer frightened, just angry and I stood upright and glared back at my mother. Her face loomed big and white. "Where's my father?" I shouted.

I saw her eyes widen until there was a rim of white around the pupil. "He's gone to work," she said. "Into the city. He went at seven. *He* didn't want to see you either."

I turned after that and blundered from the bathroom. There seemed to be a sort of humming around my head like bees and I don't know how I found my room because that humming made it impossible for me to think or even see properly.

SCIENCE

I made a primitive woman in red clay
and imagined love, under the Ribbon Gums;
then, studied Science, till mother said
wasn't it bedtime, son, and why disagree?
In bed you sleep, in dreams you see.
Christians had churches, Aborigines Ayers Rock,
I had imagination, a teacher said,
the way a teacher would say
disturbing things, to satisfy some mum.
Deep down I couldn't keep away
from the ruined house where dance-night louts
with charcoal or red clay
drew actual women, with a few lines,
with unarguable science.

DANE THWAITES

THE LIBERATED PLAGUE

So it's back to window shopping
on Aphrodite Street
for the apples are stacked and juicy
but some are death to eat.

For just one generation
the plateglass turned to air –
when you look for that generation
half of it isn't there.

An ugliness of spirit
leered like a hunting dog
over the world. Now it snarls and whines
at its fleshly analogue.

What pleased it made it angry;
scholars Flaunt and Vaseline
taught that everything outstanding
was knobs on a skin machine.

Purer grades of this metaphysic
were sold out of parked cars
down alleys where people paired or reeled
like desperate swastikas.

Age, spirit, kindness, all were taunts;
grace was enslaved to meat.
You never were mugged till you were mugged
on Aphrodite Street.

Sweetness was so brief before contempt –
the fish above, the bait below –
but much that stretched like good faith then
is truly rubber now.

Apples still swell, but more and more
are literal death to eat
and it's back to window shopping
on Aphrodite Street.

LES A. MURRAY

REFLECTIONS

In the bevel of the old oval mirror
something moves –
not the ghost of a dead beauty preening,
something past,
but the flicker of a flaw which lives,
something undone.

In the silver dome of the dish-cover
something jeers –
image flattening, starving, signalling
something awry.
it see-saws with laughter mocking
something gone

today, here always tomorrow,
something delayed.
Shout and clap at the window pane –
something rings
beyond the harmonics of sound,
something thin.

Eleven-twelve-thirteen is my birthdate,
something easy,
haunting mnemonic of fourteen and
something between,
threading the calendar of years,
something sewn,

fitful as moments in glass,
something lost.
Yet, deep in the silver's grin,
something longs,
a loyalty which does not know time,
something passing,

and seeks the buried mazed essence.
Something waits
to penetrate each day's selfhood,
something simple,
sensed beyond the senses,
something true.

MUNGO MacCALLUM

ON PRIMARY GROUND

I remember Gwenda Clare
burnt skin in swinging folds
around her neck
seamed at the edges
and smelling of powder
and sweet stale oranges.

her brother threw a match
which flamed her dress
and all his days thereafter
he looked at her patchwork flesh
with its strange sweet smell of fruit.

I remember Lester Locke
'knight redeemer' of my primary days
who bravely vowed
to take one kitten
from our littering female
thus saving it from certain death
by ritual drowning.
"Blasted females" my Dad would say
hotly
discovering the piles
of furry tight black bodies
appearing as regularly
as the hydrangeas
in which she'd hide them
hopelessly
year after year
under our back stairs.

I remember Susie Roberts
who grew lettuces
at the end of her garden
so that when she told me
confidentially
that babies came from cabbages
I would sometimes look
under the curved green lettuce leaves
just to make sure.

still I knew she wasn't right
my mother was growing one
in the dark rich soil of her
belly, which curved towards me
in sold, solemn proof against
the cabbage theory.

I remember Helen Swane
block-shaped
red-faced
wedging out the sun
above my head
on the basketball court
on long sports day
afternoons
one summer
rumors grew
that she was
queer

and so we shaped
our lives away from hers
to where our secret
fears
blossomed like blood
under the sudden stars.

VIVIENNE MULLER

HELEN BOURKE

Above the Mainstream

Manning Clark's history of Australia

The sixth, the last and the longest volume of Manning Clark's *A History of Australia* (M.U.P., $35) has opened to some rave reviews, particularly in his home town of Canberra. There have been few negative noises and, on the whole, the comments in the general press have been phrased with moderation. The reception of this sixth volume contrasts sharply with the hostility that greeted a number of the earlier volumes. Some reviewers of Volume V, for example, seemed almost to be trying to outdo each other in vitriolic characterisation of Clark's rendering of the period 1888-1915. So far, Volume VI has evoked more celebration than rejection—in part because of the near-universal admiration of Clark's human achievement in bringing this remarkable project to a conclusion.

The relative absence of dissent from Clark's last volume, however, may have something to tell us about the changing position that he has come to occupy in our intellectual life in the thirty years since he began his history. If we look back to the conflict of opinion which centred on Volume I when it appeared in 1962, we can see some important differences between that debate and the terms in which Clark's work is now discussed. Malcolm Ellis' review in the Bulletin has almost passed into legend. He declared this first volume to be "history without facts", accusing Clark of inadequate research, of frequent factual error and, in a short but severe attack on the very integrity of this historian, of a deliberately partial use of evidence.[1] J. M. Ward and A. G. L. Shaw were among others who expressed misgivings about Clark's treatment of the early history of Australia and the era of Macquarie, which forms a substantial part of the book. Bede Nairn entered the lists in defence of Clark; he examined all the charges with a care and exactitude not often encountered in reviewing today.[2]

In retrospect, the significance of this debate is not who was right and who was wrong—who perceived what Nairn called "the elements of greatness" in Clark and who made a fetish of grubby facts. The point is the character of the debate. Here were historians taking Clark's scholarship very seriously, searching respectfully through the footnotes and the sources, scrutinising the evidence and its uses. In short, they were engaging in a discourse of which they were all part, which they understood and shared. Here, for example, was Clark's bibliography, twenty-two pages of it appended to Volume I, being found too "select" by Ellis, a scholar who had devoted much of his life to the study of the same period. What would he have said about Volume VI, which grapples with a far more complex society and a larger scale of events, and yet has no bibliography? The answer, going on the reactions to Clark in recent years, is probably nothing at all. Over the long twenty-five year haul academic historians have progressively withdrawn from any close engagement with the content or the methodology of Clark's history. The idiosyncratic nature of the history has baffled and perhaps outdistanced some of them, while others who disagree have preferred silence. It may also be that the historical profession has finally granted to Clark what he has wanted all along—a place outside (or above?) the mainstream, beyond the dull confines of the academy. Almost as soon as he began to write, Clark says, he gave over the even-handed, "Dry-as-Dust", academic history as "lifeless, meaningless and false":

> The truth was I had nothing to contribute to that most valuable human activity—academic history. I suddenly realized when I got to Quiros that there was a story I wanted to tell, a story about the coming of a great civilisation, a civilisation which had produced Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, to an ancient barbaric continent, and what that continent did to that civilisation and its people, and what those people did to each other. I wanted to tell the story of how three quite different visions of the nature of God and man—Catholic Christendom, Protestant Christianity, and the Enlightenment—confronted each other in Australia.[3]

If this was intended as something *other*, a history of a different order, then perhaps it was to be absolved from the normal professional criteria: appreciating vision requires more an act of faith than a labor of criticism. And of course, there has always been the problem of a ubiquitous authorial presence. Clark has written so much about himself and revealed so much of his ambition, his anxiety and his personal questing, that it becomes difficult to separate the achievement from the urgent aspiration. The whole endeavor is founded on the hope that he has "something to say". Volume V prepares us thus:

> I gave what I had. No one is more aware of the inadequacies of the performance than the writer of the five volumes.

And, in the preface to Volume VI,

> I have always been aware of my inadequate powers to find words to convey 'what the heart doth say' about one of the great passions of my life—the history of Australia.

It seems churlish and unimaginative to resist, to join those mockers who darken so many pages of Clark's writing. On the other hand, Melbourne University Press has presented these volumes across the quarter-century in a sober format suggesting the constancy and weight of Edward Gibbon. There are hundreds of Australians, also outside the academy, who have bought these volumes in unprecedented numbers and who presumably believe that they are reading *the* history of Australia. What, in fact, have they bought?

Volume VI is entitled *'The Old Dead Tree and the Young Tree Green' 1916-1935*. The images come from Henry Lawson's poem, "A Song of the Republic", and the lines that follow make their meaning clear:

> The land that belongs to the lord and Queen
> And the Land that belongs to you.

The old dead tree is British colonial culture, conservative, bourgeois and philistine; the young green tree is the native Australia struggling for a radical identity, a national voice and an authentic faith. This volume takes up the story after Gallipoli. It is 1916 and young Australians are dying on the Western Front. Their Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, arrives in London, is dazzled by the world lights and assures the English that "all British peoples must be up and doing to defend their freedoms and liberties". The story ends in 1935 when another future Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, makes his pilgrimage Home for the first time and records in his diary a breathless excitement with all things British. It is an appropriate framework for Clark's interpretation of the years between.

In the opening pages there still seems a possibility of an alternative Australia than the one he believes has developed but, as the chronicle goes on, the young sapling is more and more stifled by the dead tree. The twenties are a time of conservative triumph: Stanley Bruce and his class, generically termed "Yarraside" or personified as "Mr Money Man", secure their ties with Britain. They woo British migrants, British money and British markets; they consolidate British values and fashion the Australian persona after the mother country. Billy Hughes and Joe Lyons, Labor men, cross the class divide and a good man, Jimmy Scullin, is defeated in the midst of Depression. The Australian people in whose name all of this happens are blurred in the background, seduced by suburbia, having traded in their hymnals for Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern, animated only by a Test match or a Royal visit. They have never come to terms with the continent or its true inhabitants. It is a depressing coda for the clash of those great themes which Clark set out to explore.

As has been noted by many commentators on Clark, the basic metaphor of this history is the theatre where human tragedy and comedy is orchestrated in all its sound and fury. The dramatis personae, from Quiros to Menzies and Curtin, play out their moments on "this great stage of fools" against the ancient backdrop of the continent. There are some brilliant crowd scenes and lively set pieces throughout all the volumes; in Volume VI the cavalcade pauses memorably at the opening of Parliament House in Canberra and the scenes of the Bodyline Test series. Clark has a devastating eye for pomposity and human absurdity, as his account of the ludicrous Egon Kisch episode demonstrates. In this volume, too, a Greek chorus of intellectuals and artists, mainly Vance and Nettie Palmer and Hilda and Louis Esson, keep up a refrain bemoaning the problem of doing something "as Australians".

At the heart of this volume there is a significant question: what sort of Australia and what kind of social order was to emerge in these post-war years from the colonial cocoon? Many of the intellectuals and social scientists in this period did engage with this difficult issue, and some like Frederic Eggleston wrote quite prolifically about it although, in Clark's production, they are given only bit parts and at times they verge on being caricatured. Eggleston is mentioned as a man who had lost his faith but not his Methodist morality. John Latham is described as a vain man who "brushed his hair with the care of a man who had taken literally Christ's remark that the very hairs of his head were numbered". Economists L. F. Giblin and D. B. Copland also appear, but only to reduce the wages of workers during the Depression.

Conflict is at the heart of drama and in Clark's work this means that the basic imaginative and narrative structures derive from the simple, and sometimes

simplistic, clash of opposites. Readers of the six volumes become very familiar with the struggle between God and Mammon, between the old world and the new, the bourgeois and the bush barbarian. Those who make history here are ruled by the image of Christ or the demon of madness in their hearts, they obey Apollo or Dionysus, they are either "enlargers" or "straiteners" of the human spirit. Such images, metaphors and gnomic allusions abound in Clark's prose.

Now that the whole is finished it is interesting to go back to the origins of this huge work, not to suggest that any author is bound by the plans on a thirty year-old drawing board, but to try to understand what has happened to the program for writing Australian history which Clark announced in 1956. In a lecture published in *Australian Signpost*, Clark promised a new agenda for the study of Australia's past, and exciting directions for a new history. He wanted to revise certain assumptions which he believed had shaped earlier historical work on Australia and, in so doing, to expose some of the illusions which had comforted us about our past. Our convicts were not "village Hampdens", as we liked to think, but neither were we a race of cultural barbarians lacking an "inner life" as D. H. Lawrence had said when he visited Australia in 1922. We had achieved more than the democratic mediocrity which W. K. Hancock had noted in his *Australia*. It was, Clark argued, time to stop harping on our materialism, our cultural desert and our middling standards and to take another look at our history. There were great meanings to be illuminated there in the clash of those three great visions of God and man.

Another bubble waiting to be burst was what he called the warped and distorted picture of our social and political progress that had been an orthodoxy to this point. It was time to reveal the radical tradition for what it was—the projection into the past of the romanticised hopes of disappointed radical historians like V. G. Childe and Brian Fitzpatrick who wanted to find a time when "Labor was pure, untainted by the world, the flesh and the devil". Mateship, he believed, had been both over-emphasised and under-examined and the neglect of the urban middle class which had built the cities and controlled the power ought also to be repaired. For all this a new kind of history and a new kind of historian would be needed. History must have "something to say, some great theme to lighten our darkness" and it must be written by someone "who has something to say about human nature and who has pondered deeply over the problems of life and death."[4] Such history would require a new language, that of the poet and the prophets.

Clark was well equipped to undertake his mammoth task, having already acquired an impressive knowledge of the sources of nineteenth century Australian history while compiling his two volumes of *Select Documents in Australian History 1788-1900*. Documents were made accessible to students at a time when the work of reproduction required many hours of labor and the main technology was the pen. These volumes are as valuable today, even though there are now many editions of similar material from other scholars. Empirical research on the convicts' origins soon produced two path-breaking articles which disposed of the myth of "innocent and manly" convicts—but what of the rest of the agenda for re-writing Australian history? Clark acknowledged the long-term question—when the old illusions had been dropped, what was to replace them? In 1956 Clark admitted, as one might expect, that the answers were yet fragmentary and elusive. Now that the revisionist version is done, what answers have we got?

First, the clash of the visions of the Enlightenment, Protestantism and Catholicism. Clark certainly details through his history how these great forces confronted each other, not only in heightened moments such as the decades of the education debates and the conscription crisis, but also in his attempts to gauge the influence of humanist and religious ideals on the actions of his central characters. There is rarely much systematic analysis of the ways in which ideas exert their influence or of the complexity of ideologies, but the message is constantly asserted. Religion is not a source of greatness or comfort in Clark's history; it is, rather, a lost force. Protestantism has been at the service of bourgeois complacency, and Catholicism has wavered between saints and Blakeian priests who nurture a peasant faith and ancient grievance. There is not much grandeur in the sectarian "dog-fights" between the religious leaders and the men of secular progress, and there is even less in the indifference of their flocks. Again and again, throughout his story, Clark has brooded over our descent into the "Kingdom of Nothingness", so it is hard to accept his assurance on the last page that the time was coming "when an Australian voice would be heard in the great debate on what it has all been for". The Australian contribution to metaphysics has not been prepared for in the preceding volumes.

Second, the review of our radical tradition. As a corrective to the romanticising of the 1890s and the heroic status assigned to the labor movement in shaping a progressive social democracy, Clark has provided a two-pronged revision. He has most usefully directed attention, however unsympathetic, to the role of the middle classes and their liberal notions in both building and shaping Australia, and he has insisted on the failure of labor to live up to its ideals. The bush myth of mateship is shown to us through Lawson's eyes, making us aware of its ambivalence, its maleness, its xenophobia and its expression of inarticulate loneliness. Those who have held to the true

vision—in Volume VI these include the dying Lawson, John Curtin, Bert Evatt and Ben Chifley—are destined to "tragic grandeur", inner madness or deep sorrow. There has been a challenging critique of the labor tradition mounted in the last two volumes but, again, it is difficult to locate in Clark's exposure of this failure where the alternative truth resides, or how it might have transformed the story. Perhaps the fruits of Curtin's ponderings on the beach, as described at the end of Volume VI, come closest to Clark's own view:

> He [Curtin] would teach Labor that it was possible to be pragmatic without being opportunist, that the inspired idealism of their founders need not disappear in the pursuit of political power. He would teach Labor to work for a 'new social order', and stop fighting about whether the carter of bread should be in the bread carters' union or in the carters' and drivers' union. Labor must not degenerate into a band of machine men and women. The Henry Lawson vision lived on in him.

In the Epilogue in the sixth volume there is a Bicentennial reflection which would appear to bring Clark's final judgement up to date. The verdict is not good:

> History has blurred the vision of Eden, allowing Mammon to infest the land. A turbulent emptiness seized the people as they moved into a post-Christian, post-Enlightenment era. No one any longer knew the direction of the river of life. No one had anything to say.

The brief rally in the next and last paragraph is both surprising and perplexing. Clark now sees some hope in this generation—"with the end of the domination by the straiteners, the enlargers of life now have their chance". Are we to assume that this is the Hawke government and that the new enlargers of life are Messrs Keating, Dawkins et al, who have the chance, in Clark's words, to "lavish on each other the love previous generations have given to God"? The evidence of six volumes and twenty-five hundred pages is all against it.

Third, when he began writing Clark had wanted to dispute the negative picture of Australia that so many foreign visitors had drawn. Lawrence's indictment of our inner emptiness, the "vacancy of this freedom", was particularly cited, but now that we have reached in Volume VI the years of Lawrence's visit we find his opinions absorbed and endorsed by Clark rather than repudiated. Lawrence's cry "Nothing! Nothing at all!" echoes through these pages. And finally, there remains for me a gap between the apocalyptic reach of the language which Clark employs and the stuff of the history itself. As the story moves from governor to governor, then from government to government, it is embedded in personal rivalries and factional struggles. Its chronology is political and biographical although, as the Bicentennial history, *Australians* shows, there are many other chronologies in the life of society. Clark portrays, in the end, an Australia in which, as W. K. Hancock said, except for the pursuit of pleasure, all the other activities of its people "lose their clear outline in the universal smudge of politics".

Students and writers of Australian history will discuss the character and worth of Clark's history for years to come. In the meantime he has become a national sage and household word. He has entered the living-rooms of ordinary Australians, a domain which is closed to most academics. He has opened the minds and imaginations of Australians to their history; it is written for them and they do not quibble. I am always reminded when thinking of Clark of a first-year tutorial class in Australian history in which the group was asked to consider Clark as an historian. They were learning the trade of professional history so they were tentatively enthusing, hazarding sceptical or critical remarks, in general chipping away at the edifice. A mature-age student in the class was becoming visibly agitated and incredulous. Finally she burst out, "But I'm here because of Manning Clark". Educating Rita is no small achievement.

Helen Bourke teaches social science and Australian history at Signadou College of Education in Canberra.

NOTES

1. M. H. Ellis, "History without Facts", Bulletin, 22 September 1962.
2. Bede Nairn, "Writing Australian History", Manna, 6, 1963.
3. Manning Clark, *A Discovery of Australia*, ABC Boyer Lectures 1976, reprinted in Manning Clark (ed.), *Occasional Writings and Speeches*, p. 72.
4. Manning Clark, "Rewriting Australian History" in Manning Clark (ed.), *Occasional Writings and Speeches*, pp. 3-19.

PHILIP HAMMIAL

Pell-mell

"Let the good times roll!" —*My Man Green*

"Always have Ithaca at the back of your mind."
—*Constantine Cavafy*

About three years ago, at the ripe middle age of forty-seven, I decided that it might be a good idea to record some of my juvenile follies for my ripe and possibly forgetful old age. So far I've captured about fifty for that posterity and have a hundred to go (a future book?). Obviously they make no pretense to be deep and meaningful and are not at all concerned with style. But they are true. "They're believable," said an Australian friend, "if you know that they happened 'only in America' ". And they're not even exaggerated. On a recent visit to my home town, Detroit, I had a chance to compare notes with four friends from that long ago time; surprisingly, very few distortions had crept into the telling. It's the 1950s and early 1960s and Motown is thriving. We've got the world by the ass. Let the good times roll.

THE OWL

Always the youthful experimenter & already convinced that *true* poetry doesn't come from the *conscious* mind, I'm looking for ways to project myself into 'altered states of consciousness.' I have a brainstorm. Under a full moon I follow the railroad tracks out into the country. When I hear the whistle of an approaching freight train, I place my pen & notebook on the cinders & lie down on my stomach beside a rail, about six inches from it. Moments later the huge cars are roaring & shaking & screeching & thundering over me, around me, through me. My experiment is more than successful. I rise shakily to my feet & begin hooting, over & over at the top of my lungs. I've discovered my totem bird, the bird that will give me my poems.

THE SCAPEGOAT

Working at the Wixom Ford factory, my worst job. Putting the right front door-handles on Lincoln Continentals for six days a week, ten hours a day. It's Saturday afternoon, almost quitting time. Suddenly, in the distance, a great uproar, a bellowing & screeching that sounds like animals gone berserk in a zoo. What's going on? The sound comes closer, & closer. Now we know. There's a four-door gold-lacquered convertible coming down the line. It's already been hammered & kicked & gouged & scratched almost beyond recognition. It's a scapegoat made of steel, rubber & plastic. Eddy picks up a ball-peen hammer. Shorty puts a large bit in his air drill. I pull a Phillips screwdriver from my back pocket.

THE ALLIGATOR

A long story. Make it short.

Hitchhiking on the outskirts of Mobile, Alabama. Trying to get to Sarasota, Florida. A long ride with a man from Miami. About midnight, in the center of Florida, a siren. We're pulled over. Cop very cautious. Spotlight on us, standing behind his car door, gun drawn, telling us through a megaphone to get out of the car & place our hands on the trunk lid. Comes up carefully & frisks us. Returns to his car & has a long conversation on a two-way radio; then comes, gun back in its holster, & tells us we're free to go. "What was that all about?" I ask the driver when we're back on the road. He explains that his best friend had knifed a man in a bar brawl in Miami, had managed in the car we're in to get to New Orleans before he was

caught, is now being sent back to Miami for trial, had called his friend & asked him to come & get the car. A dangerous murderer. The Florida State Police knew the make & licence number but didn't know he'd been apprehended. But the story doesn't end here. There's a sequel. Patience.

Two a.m., I'm let out at an intersection, the road to Sarasota, & go into a diner for something to eat. Right away I know there's something wrong. Three people, a waitress standing on a chair behind the counter sobbing & whimpering & two very large & very drunk crackers roaring with laughter. It's either leave & maybe be pursued or play it very cool. I sit down at the counter & pick up a menu. Then I realize what the problem is. There's a three-foot long alligator scampering down the counter toward me. I lean back just enough to avoid the open mouth (big enough to take off a few fingers or even a hand) & go on reading the menu as though angry alligators on diner counters were an everyday occurrence. This is too much for the crackers. They come over & start a conversation. Now I see that their arms are covered with long bloody scratches. I learn that they've been out in a swamp catching alligators with their bare hands, one of the great sports in this part of the world. They take a liking to me. We become great buddies. I'm a good ole boy. Most damn Yankees are just plain chicken-shit, but I'm a real man. I'm so much of a real man that they want to give me something. You guessed it—the alligator. "I'm hitchhiking," I tell them, "I can't hitchhike with an alligator."

THE RITUAL

The ritual must be followed carefully, religiously. One *must* use a hose to syphon some gas from a car. One *must*, we *must*, stand on the edge of town at 9 p.m. on a cold winter night & hitchhike with a can of gasoline & a bundle of newspapers. One *must* ask the driver to be let out in the middle of nowhere. One *must* wade through two feet of snow to the deserted farmhouse &, once inside, one *must* kick out seven step-risers, pour gasoline on the staircase & start the fire at its base with newspapers.

Flames leaping from the peak of the roof & red-hot timbers crashing down on every side & we're still inside leaping through burning walls, shouting, laughing, out of our heads. Then we notice some approaching headlights. Maybe it's time to leave. By the time we get down to the highway another car is approaching. We decide, in the middle of nowhere on a cold winter night, to play it cool. The car slows to a stop & the driver asks: "Did you guys start that fire?" "Of course not," Bradley answers. The car drives off. Maybe he's going to call the police. Maybe we should think about hauling ass. We cross a field, leaving deep tracks, then three or four more & come out on a narrow road. We walk along the road for a few minutes before we see headlights approaching from both directions. We leap as far as possible off the road, go into a field & lie down on our stomachs behind a tree. But the cars are stopping; they've seen our tracks; car doors are opening & closing; flashlights are pointing in our direction; they're coming to get us. Seven or eight men led by a county sheriff. He's got his gun out but his hand is shaking. Maybe he doesn't use his gun very often; maybe he's just cold. But the sight of the shaking gun starts us laughing. Lying on our stomachs in the snow & laughing at a man with a gun. A couple of real crazies. They don't waste any time. They handcuff us & take us to one of the cars. They blow the siren, & we wait for twenty minutes. A deputy has been following our tracks. He gets in the car; he's shivering; his teeth are chattering. This too is very funny.

THE ARSENAL

Eighth Grade Civics Class. The teacher asks Roger a question, & of course he doesn't know the answer. Right away, at the desk in front of us, up with his hand, glowing with knowledge: it's Little Mr Good again. He always has the answer. The teacher turns to write something on the blackboard. Roger nudges me. Out from his lunchbox comes his uncle's .45 Colt Automatic. Then a switchblade & a pair of brass knuckles. I contribute my switchblade & a German Luger. There on our desk in full view of the teacher if he should turn around is a fairly formidable arsenal. Roger taps Good on the shoulder. Good turns around & sees the weapons. Good turns white. Roger asks him if he's going to answer any more questions. "No," a silent no from speechless lips, & he keeps his promise for the rest of the semester.

RALPH

Ralph the Human Battering Ram! Three of us go into a hotel & listen at doors until we find a room that's occupied by, hopefully, a couple in bed. With our arms we make a cradle for Ralph's legs & a support for his back. He puts his arms around our necks & holds his legs out stiff in front of him. If we start from the opposite side of the corridor we can usually get up enough momentum to burst the door open & land in a heap inside the room. Then we must pick ourselves up & run.

HOTEL INSPECTORS

Hotel inspectors! Two in the morning. A small flea-bag on the second floor of a dilapidated building. We climb the stairs & tell the clerk that we're hotel inspectors. He appears not to understand. We care-

The Ritual

fully explain that we've been sent by the Department of Health to examine this hotel for health hazards. He still doesn't seem to understand. So we leave him in his fog of incomprehension & go into the first room. It's empty. All seven of us get up on the bed & start jumping up & down. It fails the test. Its legs snap like matchsticks. Now the clerk is up on his feet & protesting. Never mind. We move quickly down the corridor kicking doors in, tipping over spittoons, smashing lightbulbs, yanking fire extinguishers from walls. Now the clerk is chasing us with a weapon. As we flee down the back stairs we rip its railing out by the roots, an obstacle that stops the club-waving clerk in his tracks.

PEYOTE

Patrick's bushel of peyote. Sent up from Texas on a Greyhound. Several buttons boiled down to a thick brown fluid & drunk like tequila – with salt, lemon & soda. Two hours later, late at night, we're walking on the grounds of Athens State Hospital, the local insane asylum that some in their idealistic ignorance would prefer to call a psychiatric hospital. We've been here before. We know how to get down into the basement (rooms that still have hooks on their walls to which, not so long ago, syphilitic patients were chained). And we know that the internal fire escapes will give us, through one-way locking doors, access to the wards. I suddenly have a marvellous plan that soon becomes an obsession. "Let's go up into one of the wards, take empty beds & be there when the doctor makes his morning call." "That," says Patrick, "is a truly wonderful idea, but how are we going to get back out?" It takes him a long time to convince me that this one slight drawback is worthy of serious consideration.

THE HEAD

David gets his tools (he calls them his burglar tools), & we go into Highgate Cemetery, the upper unkempt part, & down into an underground mausoleum. The chain on the barred door is easily clipped off & our flashlight investigates the interior – two coffins on either side, one up & one down. A screwdriver quickly pries open a lid, & my hand (it has a mind of its own) does not hesitate to explore the contents. I'm looking for something valuable, a gold watch, a ring. Nothing. What to do? A consolation prize. I take the head. David just happens to have a paper bag, just right for the head. By the time we get back to the van the girls are furious. We've been gone a long time. "Where in Christ's name have you been?" "We've been getting you some pastries," I answer, & hand them the bag. My joke is not appreciated. "You're not going to keep this *thing* in this car!" So David drives to a post office. We find a box & mail it, return address: Robin A. Graves, London, England, to a friend in San Francisco who makes found-art sculpture.

THE FLOAT

Tomorrow is Homecoming Day, so we decide to make a float for the big parade. We borrow a wagon from my landlady's son. Search-out & bring-back missions are deployed. Inspiration is found in trash cans & in

a pile of discarded timber. Soon the wagon is bristling with sticks, an eight-foot high porcupine on wheels; & on its quills we impale rotten oranges, apples, grapefruit, cucumbers, heads of lettuce & long slabs of rancid bacon. A rope is attached to the handle so that all four of us—one black, one Chicano, one long-haired beatnik & one wise-guy New York punk (this is heavy redneck country, Athens, Ohio, 1959)—can pull it. The next afternoon, via side streets, we manage to manoeuvre our contribution to school spirit in between one of the floats (two crepe paper footballers) & the sorority queen who follows it in a white Cadillac convertible. We become her float! And pull it (the others are all motorized) the entire length of the parade route. The fraternity boys watching from the sidewalks are dying to kick ass; they can hardly restrain themselves, & my art teacher gives me an A for the semester.

KEITH RUSSELL

The Gun Falls Over and Goes *Bang*

The poetry of John Millett

When John Millett published his first collection of poetry in 1971 (*Calendar Adam*), he dedicated it to Bruce Beaver. This dedication is more than simply a statement of friendship. Beaver at the time was closely involved with Poetry Australia and Millett was, as it were, taken into the Grace Perry stable. But the connections go deeper; Millett's book is influenced by Beaver's poetry, especially Beaver's treatment of Sydney as a personal backdrop to the drama of every day life. Faced with the enormously poetic material that Sydney offers, Millett willingly succumbed and continues to succumb. The first lines of the first poem in his first book go like this:

Each day I walk past
the small flats to work
Harbour views . . .

Leaping ahead to his recently released *Blue Dynamite* we find in the poem "Sydney Grommets":

The beach on the city's edge
divides a sea primitive as Bedouins
from tower blocks

Different parts of the city, and a different treatment of the subject; Millett has moved from the personal style of his early writings to a more sophisticated persona-distance in his latest work: the image of the city remains to haunt.

In *Calendar Adam* the city was a Vanity Fair about to crumble under its own weight; under its weight of history. In "Quartz-iodine" Millett attempts to turn the harsh light of modernity on the somewhat staid city that he acquired as a piece of mental property:

The vase of this building held
my father.
Last week
walls buried another.
Old rafters lie quiet in grained wood,
doorways seal in
neverending lovers,
all their falls. So many dead.
After a century
I call down stairwells to walkers
rubbed warm with textures of wood.

Reading this we have to remember Millett was writing in the years before Whitlam about a city that often forgot its vivacity. There was little 'fun' in taking the ferry to work: "The ferry arrives like a troop-train". The person of the poem is not permitted to enjoy the richness of his immediate world; its vitality leaves him wondering at his own desires and the 'escapes' of others:

I marvel at this man's need
to stare at wild dreamlands
of light-suffusing trees.

In the end the speaker of the poem flees the city at 120+ (mph) and creates a kind of electricity through his negation. But this is the stuff of prophecy. Unable to be at peace with the fragments of a tribe that constitute his city ancestry, the poet seeks out the missing pieces of a sensibility, demands the kind of wholeness expressed by the man who has a need "to stare" and is able to satisfy that need.

These tensions persist in Millett's work. In his second volume, *The Silences* (1973), Millett again explores the delusive magic of the city:

Tonight the office blocks are like huge Alps
the snow has just left and I wonder how many men
have wasted lifetimes waiting for poems of steel
to open the locks of enormous doors and I wonder
how many have walked into the blue rain
of old age and not come back. I don't know.

Here the speaker talks of "going home", he too seeks some kind of electric experience that will confirm:

> Yes that's what I want,
> new seasons to grow into the shape
> of a tall woman I don't know.

In this volume we already have evidence of Millett's need to build books. The patterns of the first volume are not accidents; Millett very consciously puts together dramatic movements that attempt to account, in their passage, for the particular views seen along the way. The frustrated business-man seeks a contrary position in his overly-romantic imagination. Unable to be at home with the cold Alps, he projects impossible connections:

> I want to reach into the pines of fire
> that wear winds which have travelled half the
> earth.

By the end of this volume, in the poem "Walcha", we begin to see the answer that Millett finds in a sense of place, sustaining the deeper dreams of its inhabitants. The poem suffers from an excessive 'imagism'; Millett often approaches hysteria in his attempts at the delicate. The intellectual side of the poem is also over-done, as Millett tries to out-think his poetic difficulties:

> It's the continuous process of
> history brings you here not
> the cut-out sections of the dance
> but this herewithyou past
> in the skylight

Again, we must remember the times in which this was written. In the early 1970s Australian poetry was taking stock of its poetics in public ways that it has not attempted since. Millett is as 'serious' as the best in his integration of his American models. Carlos Williams appears to be everywhere. I recall the only time I met Millett, at a poetry workshop at Sydney University back in 1971: Millett dropped in one rainy night and the evening became saturated with Carlos Williams.

It is not until Millett's third and 'breakaway' volume that we see the results of all the hard proving going on in his first two books. *Love Tree of the Coomera* (1975) begins with a quotation from Valery: "There is nothing so beautiful as that which does not exist". Millett backs this up with a page and a half of dense 'poetic-prose' that illustrates he can think with the best:

> The "I" is not the ego of poet or poem, or persona —shaped with rough words and the impeccable tools of a day and age, moving perspectives which structure world and corporate entities . . .

Freed from the impinging and dominating 'reality' of the City, Millett's poetry does not go off at 120+ into the distance. Rather it acquires a grounding in the space of imagination that has become the essence of Millett's poetry. From this point on, Millett is confident of his domain; the arguments become characters and the characters acquire histories and actions that 'explain' their being. *West of the Cunderang* (1977) and *Come Down Cunderang* (1985) add territory to Millett's already extensive literary range.

In *Come Down Cunderang* Millett celebrates the wonder, splendor and richness of a tribal community; a community that participates in the making of mythology from its history; a community that lives out that history in a kind of typological progression: from symbol to substance, from substance to symbol again.

As we follow the fate of the Irish family of Callahan's so we watch the growing of a country town. Millett, in building his family tree, is very aware of the needed blur: families are deep in their own secrets and mysteries. After many attempts, I still am not able to ascertain the 'full' system of inter-relations. It is far easier to follow the blood-line of the horses. And in a very real sense this is Millett's major theme: the pursuit of the imagination. The horse is the mythological animal; the possible source of impossible outcomes; the bearer of an ancestry that leaps the history of man and retains its integrity; the beast that reminds us, indeed carries us beyond our selves back to our Self.

Horses of course are for courses and Millett, true child of both the city of the heart and that other place, brings to his tale the fullness of the racing world as seen by a small community of gamblers. Along the way there is time to celebrate the full human calendar. In "Turning Point", "Three boys walk with guns/ as far as possible/ from dawn to mid-day". The boys lie down to rest beside the river:

> Each washes his hands in a storm
> which visits at two o'clock
> Guns lean on a fence
> They eat talk and rest
> the river mumbles to sheep
> Whatever they shot cools
>
> One of the guns falls
> explodes and kills a boy
>
> the river slouches past

Here Millett shows the skills he has labored to master. The dramatic language is the language of the scene; it is able to take account of the reality of the

boys, the reality of the background, and the reality of movement. Under this structure lies the logic of many of Millett's earlier 'heavy' treatments of Heraclitus's views on flux. Here flux is not some thinker's issue but the spark that lights the fire, the apple that hits the head, the shift from life to death.

The following poem, "Race Results and a Sad Occasion", illustrates how this great weight is dealt with by a small Irish community. There is time for a lyrical passage: "James O'Brien called Limerick/ mourns his child/ *Angel son/ thou hast left us/* in the coffin/ a pillow of immortelles". On the way to bury the child "The cortege stopped at the pub/ to read the Melbourne Cup results". Life goes on and the pace increases. Millett has firm control of his medium; his sense of voices has matured in ways that set him aside as Australia's foremost verse dramatist. As strong as ever in terms of single poems, Millett has found what to do with his love of language at its edges; his ear for how words are *used* as tools of life is second to none.

Come Down Cunderang is, to my mind, Millett's best all-round book, but it in no way accounts for all of Millett's styles. He has not remained in the country of a tribal imagination. The reality of shared history has inspired *Tail Arse Charlie* (1982). I have yet to hear this "Play for Voices". The effect of poetry that is set beside war photographs is disturbing in ways that go beyond the normal area of aesthetics. Add to this the effect of the spoken word and one begins to see how Millett has re-distributed the intellectual questions of his earlier writing. The form of *Tail Arse Charlie* is far more complex in its 'performance' than any of the issues Millett struggled with in his formative work. Here he is in control.

And, not surprisingly, there are parallels between the sensibility of the voices in *Tail Arse Charlie* and *Calendar Adam*. The threat of disintegration, of instant breaking apart, is something hidden behind the failure of the City as an image of the Self in the early work. Born into a world whose history was simply taken away by the post-war world, Millett has taken his time in re-establishing a world that incorporates as many pieces as possible of that other world that simply, like the boys' gun, fell over and went bang. The time he has taken is, in a way, evidence of his sensitivity to the particulars that go to make up a *place*.

The fact that Millett took part in the destruction by bombing of Europe, adds a dimension, but it does not 'authenticate' *Tail Arse Charlie*, a book which Frank Kellaway, in Overland 89, said was "amongst the best poetry about war written in English this century." Personal as many of the 'memories' might be, the overall impact of the sequence is elegaic: it celebrates what was and cannot be again. The direction of the book is towards the future; the thrust of the book is the need to sing in passing. Along with those who grew up are those who went mad and those who died and those who were maimed and those who were unable to return. In "XXX" we hear of one who could not come back and begin:

> One of us
> blindfolded by what he had done
> threw the safe silk off
> and jumped naked through fifteen thousand feet
> letting himself go down
> by gravity alone
> into the orange and ebony
> of that bullring below
> hard as a gunshot—

In Millett's latest book, *Blue Dynamite* (South Head Press, $10) the City reasserts itself with all the glamour of the mid 1980s. Here the 'set-piece', the piece that typifies *the* city-dweller of this time, is "The Fast Lane". No longer the ferry-rider, now he's up-market, or simply in a car. Millett can afford to treat this character with far more irony than he could previously. This shift in tone is both a result of Millett's 'escape' from the state of mind he describes, and a result of the shift in self-consciousness that has made the city-dweller more aware of his sensuous involvement in a world that is so rich as to cause revulsion:

> My mind is stuffed
> with the memory of these streets
> so that my arms twist exactly
> at the reflex of each intersection
> twice every day
> on the way into the square
> thought-chamber I call office
> and back to the bed
> my wife accepts
> sometimes dangerously close
> to accident
> mostly with the same reflex
> with which a car is driven
> on a road map
> not needing to be read

Here what is known is known more than once, but still it is not enjoyed. The speaker is aware of what is wrong in his world, he is aware of what is wrong with his neighbors:

> I drive past lighted windows
> and there is nothing to say
> to the woman who draws her blinds
> against the sea wind
> shuffling in from the harbour
> nor to the man whose dog life
> pisses on gates neighbours
> shut with philosophies
> plaited from various unmatched strands

they manage to weave
into a lead that secures them
to whatever hand tugs

What makes *Blue Dynamite* into a book that will outlast the 1980s is not its attack on the social mess of big business and little people, but its exposure of the methods that sustain the players in the 'ultimate game': the attempt to build the city of *man*. The speaker in "The Fast Lane", comparing sex with driving, concludes that: " . . . one body overtakes another/ simply to get off it". The extension of this is that one thing follows another simply to be done with what went before. The lack of any final significance, the view that reality is not teleological, is not the real concern here. What implicates this character in the sad drama is his inability to find in his activities the moments that transcend his self-sufficient knowledge.

But Millett does not offer mystics to redeem this landscape. There is no old man who maintains his private imaginative garden in the centre. There are those in the middle, like the traveller in the "Fast Lane" and those at both extremes. The members of these extremes are able to find moments in their daily life where all is right with the world. What condemns them is their failure to incorporate these moments into the rest of their daily life.

In "Sydney Grommets" the boardriders "inscribe theorems on the morning skyline". With " . . . the sea's religion" in their blood, they turn into architects, planners, property developers and barristers. The possible world that could result from such a merging of insight and skill is what lies behind this book. Managing directors' have their high in the spirit of the "sea's religion": they build up and pull down with all the innocent glee of children born under the star of the Tasman.

The possible depths of a religion of the sea are explored in the poems that deal with the cultural history of the place "Greenville"; the place about to be changed by the wave of progress. In "White Horse" poor pathetic Nareen, whose parents separate (in anticipation of her discovery of what life is about?), has her horse break a leg and get shot. In all this real life confusion "She tried to assemble a jigsaw puzzle/ with parts missing/ asked the landscape to accept her". This is the gesture that the airman makes, and it is the gesture that hangs ever at the edges in *Calendar Adam*. Other characters find other answers; for most memory is the keepsake that makes the present a less dangerous chaos. Nareen goes on, like most who are not interrupted, to discover sex as one momentary solution.

In the final poem, "Varuna in the Tube", an aesthetic view of reality is put forward:

You see everything in the face
of an old man and on the wall
of a wave step into the centre
of a mandala—colours pinwheeling
down steep alleys of the break
rail hard in and the fish listen

The boardrider is rewarded in his special way, as is the poet. The isolation of the surfer is however not the solitude of the artist: the sense of structure, the structure of language, remains dominant. Millett is the observer and the participant; he is never the one stuck in the middle, or the one who has gone out of the scene. His work increases in its discoveries and capacities to deal with the cultural complexities of the 1980s. More and more he becomes the poet of a possible nation, the nation we might already inhabit. Millett ends with a quotation from Chuan Tze that very clearly indicates where the poetry arises:

> The life of men and women pass like a galloping horse, changing at every turn, at every hour. What ought they do, or what ought they not do, except allow their own discomposition to continue.

Millett has become a poet of "discomposition". More and more he is able to go with the horse and allow the changes and allow the discomposing. The gun falls over and goes bang!

Keith Russell's most recent book of poetry is Aussie Wog. *His current research at the University of Newcastle is on James K. Baxter.*

SEPARATE POSTINGS—UK WWII

1. Holding depot – Brighton

Dusk crouched under the awnings of shops
windows boarded up against bomb blasts
High Street was full of Australian airmen
waiting for postings to bomber squadrons
learning shapes of vowels and consonants
spoken by girls wiser than gauche colonials

Just on 6 o'clock right at the top of High Street
Bobby Masters took out his wallet
to show a photo of his mother
to a girl with England in her voice
and hold in his hand pictures of a land
lost forever, pay envelope
and a few knick-knacks he kept for luck

When it was too dark to see
that old face resembling the young man
the girl snatched his wallet and ran
with him in pursuit shouting "Stop thief, stop thief"
to wind crying in the alleys
and lanes where she vanished

That was a long time ago but sometimes
when darkness reminds me of the dead
I hear in my own land the words "Stop thief
stop thief" and I'm growing old
and winter comes quickly to old men

2. Waiting for postings

My friend Bobby Masters and I
volunteered for nickel raids over Kiel and Antwerp
strips of metal to draw nightfighters
away from the main bomber force
The nickel raiders would scuttle
back to England unharmed

Bobby, a schoolteacher in real life
spoke of Elmer Gantry and Dos Passos
on our walks along the Brighton seafront
and gray England the color of real mud
sank into the mists that closed over
the distant outlines of the French coast

One afternoon the sun came through the clouds
as we strolled towards Hove
past expensive tenements
One we approached cautiously
where a middle-aged man shouted
"You bitch of a wife" to a woman
on the third-floor balcony that overlooked
sunlight and a seaside blinking at Cherbourg
and lulls in their dangerous war

Without another word he picked up a small dog
that yelped in terror as he hurled it
like a grenade at our feet

I exploded into a silence
quiet as a desert at night

3. Bomber squadron

Bored with Brighton I went AWL
to visit Bobby Masters on his squadron
When I arrived he said "I'm flying tonight"
We sat in a Nissen hut talking of Dos Passos
and a woman in a nearby village
whose husband had been absent too long

We flew over the Ruhr that night
circled slowly at dusk above Midland towns
that were crushed by descending twilight
fields divided by hawthorn hedges
and customs dating back to Alfred the Great
We headed east cramped in the tail plane
where the wind tried to sing us to sleep
North of the main force nickel raiders
were cut to pieces by German fighters

Slowly the bomb doors opened
and we dropped dogs on old towns
barely visible through the night mist
Angry searchlights glared at our coming
we who slouched through the sky
bringing with us a terrible warning

I stayed with Bobby about ten days
and again went out into the search-lights
thinking of a man whose dog
is still falling through a Sunday afternoon

4. Final posting

I was posted to a different squadron
Seven strange faces in the Nissen hut
looked at me from seven beds
Winter slid in and closed the doors at night
Ice elbows nudged the gutters
I tried to make new friends
in the short days that followed each other
through the sergeant's mess
the billiard room, the lavatory block
and through the boredom of having nothing to do
except fly once or twice each week
where every one of the crew
was like the father I left
withering in a cold climate
save the third pilot
whose eyes were wind-gentle

His past life the same color as mine
was visible only in the distance
Ice clothes hung from his shoulders
an ice flying helmet covered his head
He guarded himself with a cold past
only smiled at ironic jokes
kept himself to himself in the third bed
protected by a technical text on botany
Never smoked cigarettes, rarely drank.
The cold breath from his body
kept everyone out of the way
He was never promoted

One day a letter came from the Midlands
with two small sentences on the white page
"Bobby Masters has fallen from the sky"
"That dog in the sky is dead"

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

At the moment I am in an author-publisher relationship with seven Australian publishers. It's not a very tidy way to do business but it does enable one to size up the industry. Three of the publishers are 'locals'. One is a gallant small firm based in Melbourne. Another a small publisher in Tasmania. The third is the ABC. Four of the publishers I deal with are 'internationals' and at least three of them have changed hands, in at least one case three or four times, since I first established business relations with them.

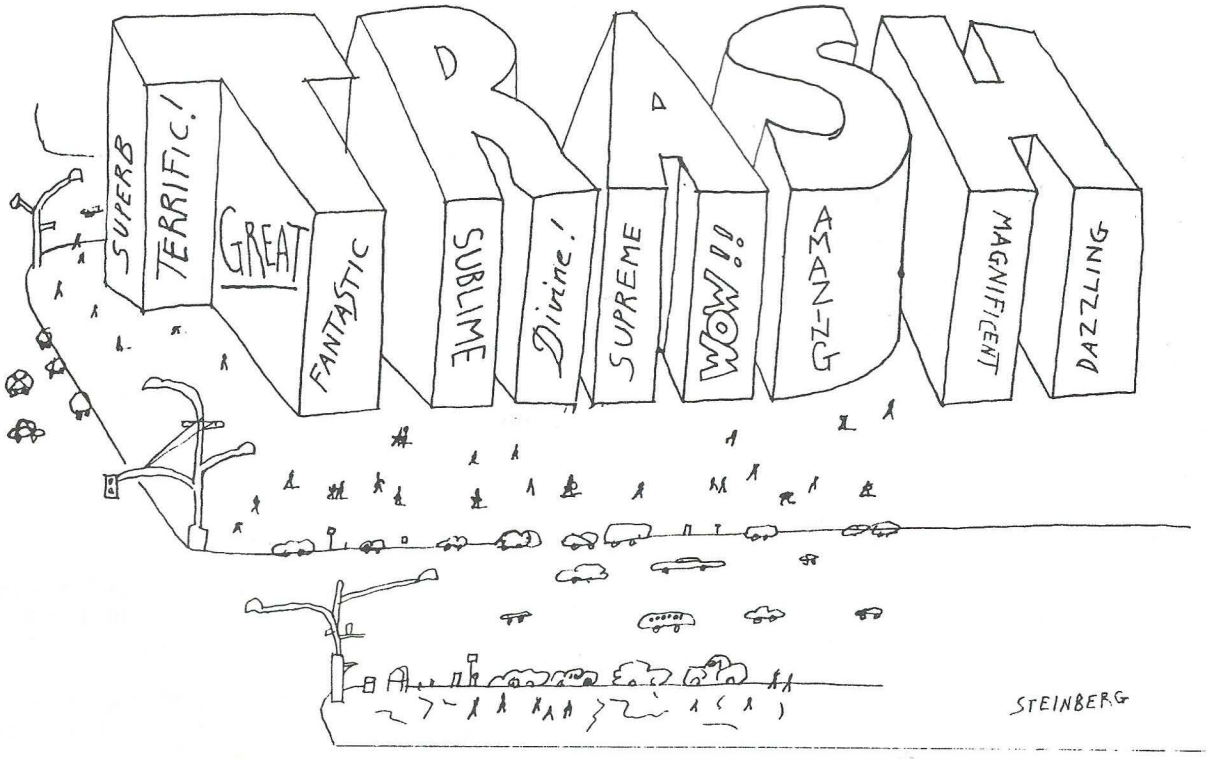
Although I have encountered inefficiencies and ineptitudes with all my publishers, with the exception of the small Melbourne firm, I count myself blessed when I come across evidence, as I so often do, of misconduct ranging from the barefacedly dishonest to the grossly incompetent on the part of publishers in Australia with whom I do *not* deal. I must say that those who suffer most from such conduct are those who cannot bring themselves to join the Society of Authors or to employ a good agent, and except in the case of beginners I have scant sympathy for them. A good agent will guide a promising writer, discourage a deluded one before frustration builds up too much of a head, and above all will know the secret of getting into print: horses for courses. Which publishers are on a 'high' and in what area. Which are in a 'go for the moon' mood, and which are cutting out biscuits with morning tea. Which, having had a success with a book on plastic antimacassars, are now seeking for authors to write about footstools.

While I am often angry that there are hardly any major publishers left in Australia which are Australian-owned, I am not convinced that writers will get the best deal from those that are, nor that those publishers will always serve the best interests of the nation. Foreign-owned publishers may often have the experience to market effectively both inside and outside Australia, and may have the wisdom and the resources to permit a virtually independent Australian publishing operation. The Brian Johns era at Penguin Books, which everyone hopes will continue under new direction now that Brian has gone to SBS, is an obvious example. This has been an operation marked with flair, efficiency and national passion. And, I understand, by the ploughing back of profits.

International publishers not prepared to go the way of Penguin are, I believe, already finding themselves in trouble here. I was sacked as an adviser to one such publisher some twenty years ago because I pointed out that the profitable Australian trade in romantic English novelists was not going to hold up for ever, that the times were a-changing and that by the end of the century or sooner the 'internationals' would have to be Australianised to survive. Of course many overseas publishing executives don't give a damn about the future, so long as profits hold up in their time.

I think the question of the university presses is a special one. There are really only two worth talking about in this country—Melbourne and Queensland. Both have undertaken remarkable work, have produced books of great importance many of which would not otherwise have appeared, and both have remained solvent. Melbourne has created a special name for itself in scholarly work, Queensland in poetry and fiction. These are national presses in every sense of the word, and a mature and thoughtful government, in this bicentennial period, would be seeking for ways to ensure their survival and expansion without losing the special character of their association with a specific institution.

In view of all this I was interested to read recently, in the same week, articles by Paul Johnson in the London Spectator, and by Maurice Dunleavy in the Canberra Times, both welcoming consolidation and internationalism in the publishing industry. Johnson argues that "all large-scale businesses are becoming international", that trillions of dollars flash round the



Earth in seconds, that "the book is a global product if ever there was one" and that the development should work in authors' interests. "What matters is the character and quality of the editorial direction, and the proficiency of the commercial machine, not the size of the firm." The new internationalism, says Johnson, should encourage the development of small, local firms able to tap smaller markets more effectively.

Dunleavy points out that takeovers and mergers have been the mark of a delayed economic transition in publishing over the past thirty years, as it moves from corner-stores to supermarkets, though he spares the kind of sigh for the past that some of us who are old enough have for the family doctor of our youth.

I can only hope that the size, shape and number of the Australian community is such that we may benefit from a compromise between the international 'fast-book/fast-buck' world and the human contact and intimacy that has in the past marked the best of Oz publishing. Perhaps the real danger is the crude, insensitive and over-pressured manufacturing and marketing of books, whether that comes from overseas or is locally generated.

The response so far to our competition in Overland 108—a poem addressed to the ABC—has been disappointing. Since that issue was late in any case, because of problems associated with changing printers, we have decided to extend the deadline for the competition to 28 February 1988. Sharpen up the quills.

A kind educational librarian has sent me a book discovered lurking in her stacks. Entitled *The Suggestive Handbook for Practical School Method*, and published in London in 1908, it includes a 'specimen lesson', involving a cat and a cat basket, which includes the instructions: "What has made it warm? *Pussy has made it warm*. Stroke pussy. How does her coat feel? *It feels smooth and soft*." And so on. I have returned the book, suggesting it be kept in the locked cupboard.

Political vandals and free marketeers who occasionally find time to attack the support given to literature and other arts in Australia from public sources may care to note that the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States has recently published an anthology of the work of writers assisted by the foundation's Literature Program, which is funded by the American taxpayer. More than a thousand writers have been helped, including some of the best known names in contemporary American writing. The magazine Daedalus points out that the funds expended on the entire project to date amount to those needed to build a hundred yards of highway.

Barry Jones has become something of a thorn in the side of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, with reviews of successive issues which conclude with listings of errors spotted (though always after appreciative comments on the range and depth of the publication). Geoffrey Serle, general editor of this magnificent work and now, sadly, retiring, wrote to comment that in his review of volume 9 Barry was right in two out of three errors he claimed to have spotted, but in volume 10 he was right in only one out of four cases. "No-one insults me with impunity" should be the motto of the *ADB*. Geoffrey Serle adds that Barry Jones has, however a 'star' entry in the forthcoming eleventh volume on his old friend Professor W. A. Osborne of "Information Please". It has been thoroughly checked.

A new literary quarterly, Redoubt, is to be published from January 1988 by the School of Communications at the Canberra College of Advanced Education (PO Box 1, Belconnen ACT 2616). Subscriptions are $16 a year ($28 for two years) and submissions are invited: stories, poems, scripts, features, reviews, translations, designs and photos.

A well known Western Australian author who wrote to me recently cheered me up with his letterhead, a reproduction of a Steinberg cartoon. It is reproduced opposite.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Astute readers may have noticed that last issue we changed printers, not without regrets, for we had very happy associations with those we were driven to leave when we received an offer we could not refuse. As a result of this move the last issue (108) was much delayed, and this follows hard on its heels. Our Floating Fund total is therefore down, to $870.46. We are most grateful to: $400, V.L.; $130, P.P.; $50, G. & J.S.; $35, D.J.; $20, D.D., D.B., J.H.; $12.96, I.M. Estate; $10, B.S., D.A., N.B., J.W., M.S., L.C., R.D., L.B., S.A., J.E., J.C., L.K., S.P.; $5, P.McL., D.T., L.C., D.F., R.H., K.P. C.C., G.S., B.H., K.E.; $2.50, B.B.

FRANKLIN

I SAILOR'S GRAVE

Montreal, Wednesday: British sailor, preserved in permafrost 138 years, could give clues to Sir John Franklin's ill-fated expedition . . .

i

He is clothed for work:
the fabric of eighteen forty six:
ropes frozen between fingers,
snow blasting his face.

So far to go.
And the not-knowing,
the white waste spreading its enigma
to the farthest edge.

Land is sky: sky, land.
There is no horizon.

ii

They strike with their axes
the coffin, prise open the lid.

II PRELUDE: NORTH WEST PASSAGE

Dreams die hard deaths, when men
are crazed by spice.
O Cathay . . .

Cabot, haunted in ice,
claimed Cipango,
where all the spices of the world
waft through snow.

Jean Nicolet carried his robe—
pure Chinese damask—
for the day of need.

Davis played his lute in snow houses,
and Hudson—
o Hudson—dreamed of spice
before next Candlemas.

III CHIMERA

The land folds its secrets
away.
Hard starlight
watches the seasons go.
Snow glints white hope,
the wild lure men follow.

IV DEPARTURE, 1845

This gallery of men:
brass buttons, the peaked caps.
Officers of the Queen.

Somewhere a man shouts.
His voice fades, fades
into answering air.

V LETTERS

i

from Greenland, 1845

And Fitzjames writes
that Osmer is dancing on the deck
at midnight.

ii

from King William Island, 1848

And he writes
of winters' pain,
of scurvy, of the grip of ice:
words for the winds, and the rigor of silence.

VI THE DEATH OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN

Somewhere a man shouts.
The voice fades, fades
into cold, unanswering air.

Crozier, in cabin's light.
And Stanley. Gore. Des Voeux,
Le Vesconte, and Osmer, silent.
Fitzjames, and Mr Goodsir, from the Terror.

Crozier? Fitzjames?

And men with rotten flesh. Black tongues.
Beset.

The gaunt white faces hover over him.

Crozier reads the Lesson for the day:
God's Word . . .
He's calmer now.
The single night of winter closes.

VII THE RELICS

April 25th, 1848—
. . . Terror and Erebus were deserted . . .
having been beset since September 1846 . . .
Sir John Franklin died on the 11th June 1847;
and the total loss by deaths . . . to this date
9 officers and fifteen men.

James Fitzjames
Captain HMS Erebus

F.R.M. Crozier
Captain and Senior Officer

and start on tomorrow 26th for Back's Fish River.

i

Silver plate, crested and named –
arrows of iron –
tarnished forks and spoons –
a metal button pinned
to an Eskimo's dress
– allegory of grief.

The jigsaw is built
of embroidered words,
drifts of snow; small cairn
of crumbling rock,
and strange detritus carried
by dying men.

Shovels, iron hoops –
towels and soap –
brass curtain rods –
the Cross of the Guelphic Order of Hanover –
clothes-brush; boots and guns –
one torn copy of The Vicar of Wakefield.

ii

And a man with a frozen name.
It is Harry Peglar, of the Terror.
His small bones are gone. This is wolf country.

iii

Starvation Cove: . . . 'The white men were very
thin, and their mouths were dry and hard and black.'

To eat my brother
I must eat my heart:
drink the bitter dregs of necessity . . .
And the Great Fish River,
in the haunts of the mind:
this spectre of silver.

And the not-knowing,
the white waste spreading its enigma
to the farthest edge.

VIII ENVOI

Franklin, your honors
were bartered for a needle-case;
questing: for death.
On your absence,
cold winds spelled Amundsen's story
as he sledged over dead men's bones
buried with bits of braid, and pocket-books
—and such ghosts as glory.

MARY DILWORTH

H. A. WILLIS

Daydream

How far down the biological scale does the dream weigh?

Do dogs dream? Do cats have Rapid Eye Movement? Sheep? Do they dream? (Surely not!) Do reptiles still run on dinosaur imagination? Or do we project it into them? And if the crocodile is merely a biological machine, can we then project a dream onto a truly mechanical object? Can we make a car dream? A motor-cycle? Or are the objects the dream in themselves? We psychoanalyse cars, so are we then the ghost in the machine?

I felt like the ghost in the machine that day we drove up into the hills to strip and bag the dope crop. Steve and I were sitting in the back with Coral, watching the eye-level, knife-edge overhang of a truck tray a few metres in front of our windscreen as Paul swung out to pass . . . Steve was telling me about how he survived a head-on with a road train. It was a good thing I wasn't doing any of the driving because the car-cars seemed to be dreaming a life of their own. Either that or there's some real ratbags on the roads. Paranoia either way.

Five of us in my mate's Kombi, cruising through the hodge-podge of industrial estates, partly completed cheap housing developments, orchards, vineyards, farms becoming riding schools, machinery depots and belts of scrub that is the northern expanse of Perth. We'd had our first bong long before we hit Great Northern Highway and J. J. Cale was purring through the cab. Just along for the ride, I was content to be a passenger: the dope was good, the company relaxed as we made the open road, and the weather was perfect: Anzac day, the ideal day to collect a dozen mature plants that had dried in a small tin shed for a week of sunny days.

We got into the outside lane and changed down for the long curving climb up the escarpment into the hills. An Alsatian, gone wild, darting in and out of the scrub fringe, was running beside the road. Paul aimed his forefinger and quietly blew it away on two soft, plosive breaths.

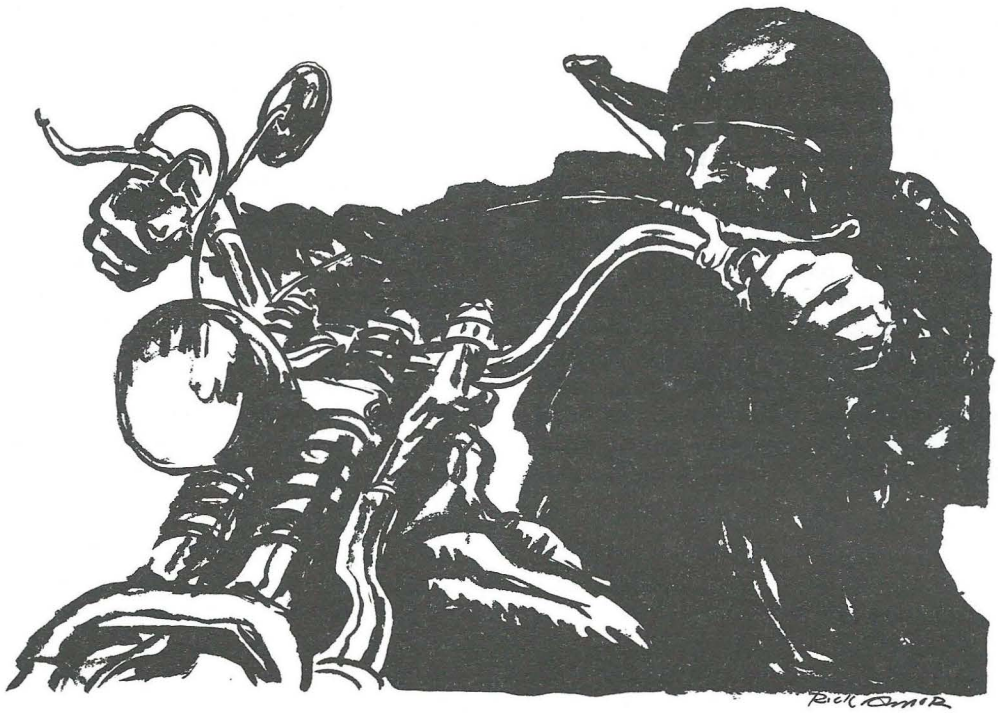
It was a long haul before we left the main road, but, happy-go-lucky us, we all sang along to the chorus "We're all on the road to nowhere." The windows were up and the cones came thick and fast in the back. Good fun.

The sun was overhead in a cloudless sky when we hit the side roads, and I soon lost all sense of direction. The first part of the journey was through an area recently sub-divided into twenty hectare farmlets, some already partly cleared, and for a while we were seeing caravans, sheds and even a few new houses in the bush, but these petered out as we got further along. The dirt roads got rougher with each turn-off until we were crawling along firebreaks. I had no idea where we were. Steve said he'd previously seen emus and roos in the vicinity, but we didn't see any that day. We saw a couple of goats at one place.

We were within twenty or so metres of the shed before I saw it. Lugging our bits and pieces through the bush, quite a hike from where we left the van, the others showed signs of nerves. That was natural enough on such a big day. What if the stuff was gone? Or cops were waiting? Nobody bothered to laugh when Steven made the predictable joke about leaving the shed key in Perth.

As visitors I stood back from the Grand Opening, and was the last to crowd in around the plants hanging from a wire under the roof. It was warm in the shed—warm, close and pungent. We all sniffed with loud appreciation, and generally gloated over the stuff for quite a while.

When we finally got going stripping the plants we could not help but periodically stop to admire a particularly large head or to scrape resin from our sticky fingers. Paul insisted we try a cone of every plant. Sometimes one of us would get up to go outside for a cigarette and a swig of hot tea. (Discuss the psychological importance of smokoes—1500 words.) Bag E, from a scrawny runt of a plant, turned out to be very heavy fuel indeed. The job seemed to take longer than expected.



After the plants were stripped and bagged we sat in canvas chairs beside the shed to lunch on barbecued sausages, tomatoes, lettuce, apples and wine. A couple of big fresh heads, lightly turned on the hot-plate, garnished the sausages—Teddyboy's picnic. Sturdy blackboy and gnarled tuart mixed and banked as far as we could see under the peerless blue sky. A huge dead tree hung its long grey limbs in the bright air twelve or more metres above our heads. Paradise weather, golden weather, it was the kind of day you wish to hold forever; But shadows . . .

But shadows shifted, the wine cask ended up in the sun, and we all looked at our watches to swear surprise at how fast the day had flown.

By the time we were back on the main road the bush was dark under a bright sky, just getting on to when you think of putting on the headlights. Working west through the drawn-out gullies and across the long ridges, we'd banked up three or four cars—so when I declared I could see a UFO Carl decided to take a short break, stretch our legs, at the waterfall picnic grounds.

The place had been packed when we went by in the morning, but only a couple of cars remained in the dusk. We parked away from them to pile out for a cigarette and a blasé perusal of the series of small waterfalls serving as the development's reason for being. Paul and I wandered behind a big old eucalypt for a leak and there, just on a way from the next tree, was a motor-cycle. I walked up to confirm what I thought I saw and, no mistake, it was an old Kawasaki two-stroke triple. Remember that one? The H1 500cc, better known as the Mach 3: a classic bike. Came out in the late '60s—the bike that made Kawasaki's name. Had the power of a 750 and handled like a dream. Except for an occasional tail twitch. That caught a few out.

Paul knows about bikes, so we cooed admiration for a minute before, peering over the bubbling brook into the silent bush looming up the far side of the gulley, we looked around for the owner.

Nobody in sight.

Neither of us had laid a finger on the machine, but we moved back to put visible space between us and it. Without exchanging a word we moved back towards the others, glancing over our shoulders. The twilight was more night than day, the time someone once described as when dog becomes wolf.

We were back on the highway only a few minutes, just picking up speed on a new stretch of road shearing through the bush in an easy looping sweep between two ridges, when the Mach 3—topping the ton, easy—absolutely flew past. We hadn't seen him coming because he was travelling without lights, and was already rushing into the gloom ahead before any of us managed to say a comprehensible word. A big guy in black leathers, black helmet, with a crossbow strapped to his back. A crossbow! Bit of a heart-stopper, aye? He must have been watching us back at the recreation grounds.

He still hadn't turned on his lights when he had our

final glimpse of him cresting the cut in the next rise. He must have done so soon after because from there the road drops down steep, a headlong hurtle . . . by the time we got there he was long gone and our attention was taken by the metropolis, scarfed in layers of mauve-grey haze, spread out on the coastal plain beneath the day's last afterglow.

Coral fell asleep as we crossed the flat country to get into the ruck of the northern suburbs. Carl must have been on automatic pilot or something, I don't know how else he kept awake at the wheel. I stayed awake because I'd caught sight of a full sovereign moon floating clear of the escarpment. It was worth pulling over on a road not yet graced with street-lights to have a proper look through Carl's binoculars. Coral wasn't interested in any moonrise, and I was just about sleepwalking by the time Carl dropped me home.

The only reason I remember going to bed that night is because I saw that bike-rider flash into our head-lights again. I was on my back and he came at the moment of drowse when you sometimes suddenly *fall*. He startled me and I briefly woke to grip the sides of the bed, but he flew on by—handling like a dream—and I drifted off listening to the continuing roar of the road.

Do monkeys dream? Floating in their cradle boughs high above the jungle floor, do they dream of falling? When dawn is a haze of light over the endless forest canopy, do monkeys, waking to strident macaws and plaintive parrots, dream of flying? Do they dream of a swing across space, momentum abrogating gravity? Free fall to delicately alight on the suspended extremity of their arc: such precise judgement of moment can only be dreamed.

Or what of whales and dolphins? When currents, moon and changes of temperature score their quickening blood with songs of distant coasts, do their dreams encompass their own fluid births? What lullaby do they sleep as they swim together all night in slow clockwise circles? And what deep soundings of the womb have they forgotten when they beach upon an unfathomable nightmare shore?

THE KIROV ON TV

On the chopping board
in the laundry
I bash hydrangea-stems
with the secaturs
prolonging life,
like ballet dancers
distorting limbs
prolonging art.

FRANCES ROUSE

JOANNA MENDELSSOHN

Asthma and Jean and Me

I am in the Mitchell Library reading the letters the artist and critic Lionel Lindsay wrote to his English friend Harold Wright. It seems an odd occupation for me to be reading the private words of the man famous for his reactionary and racist views on Jews, women, politics and art, but I find that almost against my inclination I come to like Lionel and to sympathise with him as an old man failing to understand the issues that affect the next generation. At first the letters cover his travels in Spain and India in the early 1930s, his hatred of the Jewish artists and dealers who supported modern art, his loathing for Labor politicians and his love of the work of Dürer. Over the years they change to become an extended diary, recording the domestic achievements of gardening in the great drought of the 1940s, meetings with friends, books read and reread. But they also start to reveal his most personal thoughts.

These letters are so immediate that reading them is almost like being inside Lionel Lindsay's mind. Then the tickle starts at the back of my throat, my chest is held by unseen bands to stop me breathing, and I grab for the ventolin I use so often that I look like a chain-smoker taking long drags on grey plastic. His emotion has been caught in time and transferred to me, forty years on. In the world of these letters it is the 1940s, and his wife's asthma has become so acute that she is sent to the mountains to breathe:

> I shall miss her, as we have always been on a perfect understanding, and growing old, this quiet companionship and the small jobs of housekeeping are part of the texture of time.

I remember their son Peter, also an asthmatic, talking of his father's devotion to Jean and how, in those days before ventolin, he would give her injections of adrenalin in the bad nights. Despite her illness, which started after she and baby Peter had whooping cough, he loved her and cared for her until she choked to death in his arms in December 1956.

It is a real thing, this love between two people that lasted all their joint lives. Those last years must have been such a strain on Lionel. He would start letters to his brother Daryl, "I'm so worried about Jeannie". He always called her that. But his main worry was that he would die first, and not be there to look after her. In Melbourne, in the La Trobe Library, there is a letter he wrote the night he had a heart attack, when he thought he was about to die:

> With such a cranky heart I feel that I must write you a line before I try to sleep. Not that I am apprehensive, but only a little mistrustful of Destiny. I need scarcely tell you that you have been the only woman I have loved, and that I have always had as much admiration for your courage in suffering, as for your cheerfulness and kindness. Should I go out suddenly . . . look on my passing as inevitable and remember the days of our companionship that were pleasantest and forget the worries that seem inseparable from human life.

According to their daughter, Bingo, their long term relationship wasn't all fire and passion, but rather a companionship and deep friendship. Lionel with his sudden enthusiasms and depressions needed Jean's dry wit and quiet support. If an etching wasn't working out he would come flying into the kitchen in unlaced boots too big for him saying "I'm finished old girl. I'll never do it!" She would make a cup of tea with quiet conversation, and the problem would solve itself when he returned to the studio hut.

But she was never well, Jean Dyson who became Jean Lindsay. One of the reasons her brother Ted paid for her Italian holiday in 1902 was her poor health. Both Bingo and Peter remember how their father would spend a lot of his time looking after them, taking them for fairy walks in the bush, telling them tales of adventure, because their mother was not well enough to look after them full-time. Lionel Lindsay made a group of woodcuts about family life in the

house in the bush. Morning tea, served to the artist by his graceful wife, children in the garden; and one of another typical sight in the Lindsay home, "The Convalescent", Jean lying on a couch in the garden, sewing.

My own asthma gives me a morbid interest in Jean's health. I had it first when I was a small girl and we had a long-haired bitch, a spaniel. I would bury my face in her hairy back. No one knew why I started to choke in the cold hours of the night. At first I thought the sound of wheezing was seagulls calling, until the pain of breathing made me cry. Now, years later, in this damp old house, I am choking.

No one knows the cause. I grow thin, so thin the veins stick out on my hands and arms, and I hear a neighborhood rumor that I am a junkie. My husband complains that I have become boring. I no longer cook exciting fresh meals every day. My wheezy conversation fails to scintillate. Nor do I bring in money because I am now unemployed and lack the energy to even look for work. I am useless.

So I read Lionel Lindsay's letters in the Mitchell Library. But these letters aren't about the "turd modernist" conspiracies of Jewish dealers and art politics. More and more they are about his wife and the need to relieve her pain.

"Nature has no mercy," he writes on 26 January 1956, the year Jean finally dies.

I go home from the library to nights when the weakness from ventolin overcomes without any relief and the seagulls in my chest batter me with their wings. But the body on the other side of the bed wants me to be quiet. There is a ridge on the edge of the mattress. I use it to cling to while I vomit because the coughing will not let me keep food down.

Lionel's letters at the time of Jean's death are too painful, too full of grief to read easily. His friend Robert Menzies writes a graceful tribute to their marriage:

> A great partnership has ended. The Lindsays and the Dysons. Why, it is the very stuff of Australia's civilised history.

There is a sense almost of relief in many of these obituaries. Friends saw the reality of a beautiful vision of Aestheticist sensuality become a skeletal form in pain, fighting just to breathe. They also knew that the frail old man who was her lover of so long ago had spent most of his time and energy in the last fifteen years nursing her, and caring for her. In their objective wisdom it was a merciful release.

But Lionel's memory of Jean was not the choking years of injections and false hopes. On 18 October 1957, almost a year after her death, he wrote to his friend Jimmy McGregor indicating that for him her appearance had not wasted away. She was still the girl he had met in Florence in 1902:

> I met Jean in his [Randolph Bedford's] house via St Giorgio, tumbled into love and proposed to her in a fortnight, having before not the faintest idea of marrying. What a hide.

I too tumbled into love once, long ago. I remember long sunlit days in Newcastle, lying together soft-fleshed and hard on white sheets. He always liked white sheets. I remember walks on beaches looking at the marvellous Japanese spaces in the cliffs, rides on Sydney ferries, new homes together. Touching each other.

Now in the middle of the black night I fall asleep, asthma exhausted, and dreams of love turn into nightmares.

I am in hospital. This afternoon I could not push the stroller up the hill to the doctor. I wait until my husband comes home. He complains there is no dinner but minds our child while I go. Towards the top of the hill it is too much and I crawl into the surgery on hands and knees. So I am in hospital and cool hands cover me with oxygen and the ventolin mask. Later my husband comes and my little girl sits on the bed and laughs, while a man quietly dies on the other side of the room and a paraplegic damns the nurses who stop his suicide.

I like hospital. They tell me I am a good patient, never complain and don't demand to go home. Here I can breathe, and rest. I share a room with a seventeen year-old cancer patient who faces death with the kind of black-humored courage that might help me. After the bland meals the nurses know to produce a bowl so I can vomit. I am pregnant. When I can stop vomiting I can go home. To the house which chokes me, to the cat that shares our bed with her fleas and moulting hair, to my child who wakes the night with her fears, and to my husband.

And in the night seagulls. Seagulls inside of me. Battering me with their wings, choking me.

Joanna Mendelssohn's biography of Lionel Lindsay will be published in mid-1988 by Chatto & Windus.

From ap**horos**isms

if the sheer sight of a visionary gives you vertigo
wear a hat made from the hide of a bassoon it will
impede your fall

*

to gather all the birds on earth in one place bow a
viola at summer solstice on a wooden bridge built
without bolt or nail nor the agency of rope but of
equal boardlengths interlocked over a wide slow water
course

*

when measuring the pelt of a wind make certain there
is no sound present within a circular area the dist-
ance of a shout otherwise a great stirring will car-
ry you to the stars

*

to fly first discard all words in your head containing
the letters b d g j m n p q r t u w y and from those
words remaining discard every word that refrains from
containing the letter h twice once this is achieved you
will rise above the horizon

*

those among us whose irises are plagued with shining
rays whose habitual scavenging of immense thrown away
traces of distance they are the unfashionable makars
of stars

*

your shadow has fallen in love with somebody else's
shadow but you don't love her fearing fear from those
who notice your shadow's absence you only go out with
the other on moonless nights colored by the coincid-
ence of power failures

*

you wake up one morning having been given in a dream
a gift a single piece from a jigsaw puzzle it is made
of air you have a pleasant day wandering through many
countries crossing oceans climbing mountains looking
for the space it fits

*

PETE SPENCE

QUINCUNX

I

Marking a return to calm
The words slide out a tray
On which Meaning sits like a coffee
Cooling before it's drunk.
Also the air is warm;
Outside the cafe the town
Melts in the curve of space,
Falling into a soft river
Slapping the bank at dusk,
Where we thought of renting
A boat the next morning,
Resting on some jetty.
The swimmers moved slowly
Independent of being
Seen.

II

Clouds swing over forests at night
Leaving nothing behind Hope
In Joy, in fear, the air
Joining the horizon
To an expectation of day.
The great rotundity of Earth
Is discovered again in other
Peoples' eyes like a pebble
Tumbles in water
Before appearing as another part
Of Light on a creek bed.
Rain ascends for years
Before breaking the reflexive surface.
Fingers catch the pebble up again.

III

You have heard the rain
Before night. Through a window
The sky is all over
The horizon of a city.
The painting a friend left
Is silent like spaced steps
On an iron bridge.
A man alone in the street below
Looks for a opening
In the wall the rain showers over.
It is seen as in a mirror
The girl in the cafe watches
Her reflection in the glass.

IV

Momentarily the doors and windows
Traverse light through walls
Leading furniture into real thought;
The houses in the suburbs
Don't exist as they were
Without you walking
Through them like relics.
A wooden tower
Posted over an ocean
Where my father took me fishing
Tells the full story.
It is not funny but
Beautiful how the evening is overgrown.
The Garden grows Death and what was sown.

V

Changes
The changes do not change
Anything, not metamorphosis.
They are seen only in retrospective
Like Coleridge at the lookout
Taking in the prospect
Of all his dead friends.

Elegiac Change
A coffin shouldered downhill
Before they descended on electric elevators,
While Memory watched from the church door.

Ideal Change
Steps down inside the moment.
Death was Coleridge's final theme.

THOMAS ROGERS

THE POLLSTER-ANALYST

Relentless nurse at a
sick man's wrist
stands the pollster
– analyst:

X's image is in
a slump . . .
(Are they getting set
to dump?)
Y's personal leadership
ratings soar . . .
Is *this* what he's been
waiting for?
Will *he* now bring
an election on?
Alas, Y's party's lead
is gone!
They're neck-and-neck
and jowl-by-jowl,
they match each other
scowl for scowl,
dilated eye and
swollen joint,
percentile point for
percentile point
– nurses flicker from
bed to bed
with constant checks of
heart and head,
temp. and resp.,
and then –
to scan
prefigurements of
bottle and pan!

Farewell all health,
all certainty!
for this, the public ward,
must be
forever on display,
a screen
whereon the body politic's
seen
with every nerve-end
nicely raw
– and *that's* what the
pollster-analyst's for!

BRUCE DAWE

MOURA MINE DISASTER, JULY, 1986

Just a tiny mining town, the AAP wire service
tells us, and we debate the fit of words.
Small, perhaps, but scarcely infinitesimal . . .

Hawking the bands of the cop-radio scanner,
we've
sent out a two-man team to catch it all: telling
pictures, words that fix a reader's stare.

TWELVE MEN BURIED, BELIEVED DEAD. Headlines,
bylines flap across the room with energy,
stall. They flutter like a worried kiss.

Embarrassed looks.
This is the Davey nod you'd rather not,
will not, if sanity's to be preserved.

Mining accidents are rare/good copy/grist
to any journo's mill. I have learned how to handle
other people's tragedies with, well, felicity.

Defend ourselves, watch the faces pale as we
relate a day's work . . . Choose not to look that
miner's son too square in his hypothetical eye.

ANNE LLOYD

PUTTING IT AWAY

Snow falls during the drive up the mountain.
By the time we get to the lodge, a white mantle
covers everything flat. Silence smothers
the steady throb of the generator,
cars with chains on their tyres clank past
on the Omeo road, like nightmares
vaguely remembered. We unpack and go to bed.

Morning brings its white miracle.
Snow has fallen all during the night,
accumulating in drifts outside the window.
Putting on my skis, I take on a life
of temporary speed, of instinct and balance
tuned by geography. Hurling down
the most difficult slopes I forget
the slow learned lessons of right technique,
the intricate edges of controlled survival
and pray only that gravity be my friend,
that sleep will fall as easily as snow
when winter is over.

TONY LINTERMANS

THE INVENTION OF DREAMING

Inside the womb
the baby lies sucking its thumb
dreaming
(we know they dream
mothers of premature babies
have sat watching them dream
among their tubes and oxygen)

did consciousness come like a mushroom
growing up through the root of the brain
as the baby lies softly kicking
and swimming

is it dreaming of the light
or of the first taste on the tongue
of the sea in which it swims
or the first time it heard
the music of the thud and the throb
this din of love

does it dream of the father
who from time to time
passionately tenderly explores
this world before light

is the baby dreaming of the breast
like a sun waiting above
such warmth joy and love
if so the baby's an artist
inventing the breast
after inventing the dream

to know this though
the baby dreams too of the cell
the barbed-wire and the torturer's tongs
the child lies inventing dreaming
describing the world
growing and waiting for the light

KATE LLEWELLYN

SONGS OF THE PROTEST ERA

(Title of an LP record advertised on television)

That would have been somewhere
between the Twist and the Frug.
You know, there are people today
who can still do the Twist,
even the Charleston, but it's a pity
that Arthur Murray's black
silhouetted soles never set out
clear instructions for the Protest
or the Frug.

The Napalm was popular then, too.
Nixon sold better than Chubby Checker
– records *and* tapes – and do you remember
that dance we used to do to something by
Creighton Abrams, "They're playing Song My"?
The melody escapes me but the beat's still there
and the steps would soon come back, but I'm not
so sure
about those zany dance crazes that swept the
campuses
like Kent State.

TIM THORNE

ASMS v ISMS

Stand up for iconoclasm, orgasm, phantasm
Down with fascism, nihilism and gism
Wouldn't you rather face a chasm
Than a schism?

Savour an asm
Shun the ism.

An asm is asmuch
As an ism isminimal
Heroism's exceptional
Philistinism's criminal.

True, a prism is preferable to a spasm
Ismalia may be as inviting as Asmara,
But generally isms are ripe for criticism,
As an acronym: Introverted, Selfish, Mean
While asm comes acronymbly across as:
Able, Soft, Mindful.

Pass the asms
Hold the isms.

Marxasm might have made it
Capitalasm has more onomatopoeia
Sexasm sounds sexier
Catholicasm is an almost credible answer to
Narcissism, egoism, sadism and that anachronism,
onanism.

Put it this way;
If you were dying,
Would you have a transfusion
Of plisma or plasma?

ROD USHER

LISA PEATTIE

The Defence of Daily Life

This article, the third in our 'Citizen Pilgrims' series, is by the Professor Emeritus of Urban Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

I had parents who were intellectuals—anthropologist and sociologist—with liberal political ideas. They were based at the University of Chicago; our apartment was a half-block away from the first nuclear explosion under the stands at University Stadium, and in early adulthood I was touched by the conscience-stricken physicists who started The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists with its ten-minutes-to-midnight clock. My father had a finger in that and was deeply involved with Robert Maynard Hutchins' Committee to Frame a World Constitution. My four children made it seem natural for me later to join in women's protests against atmospheric nuclear testing and civil defense drills. Later there was a job at MIT with its deep institutional schizophrenia—distinguished physicists and engineers lecturing against the arms race, and at the same time military research funding a huge silent presence on campus.

Maybe it was both simpler and more general than all that. As anthropologist among technicians, as advocate for human implications among the professional planners, as a woman in a man-dominated professional world, I felt like an outsider and I wanted community. I began to see my colleagues as people deeply implicated in the running of social machinery which no longer made sense. I looked around me at the staff meeting, thinking of the possibility of nuclear annihilation, and thought, are these the people I want to be caught dead with? I wanted community and, atheist as I was raised, yet knew I was more likely to find it in the religiously-tinged peace movement than here.

All that is one individual story, unique. But generalizing some of the themes it turns out to be not unique at all. A study of the social bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament found that the participants in this movement, like my parents and like myself, were preponderantly middle-class and, like my parents and myself, not simply middle class but from a particularly highly-educated segment of the middle class. Furthermore the study found that CND members came preponderantly from a category of occupations characterized as "the welfare and creative professions—for example, social work, medical services, teaching, the church, journalism, art, architecture, scientific research, and so on." These, the story goes on to say, "are occupations in which there is a primary emphasis upon either the notion of service to the community, human betterment or welfare and the like or upon self-expression and creativity."[1] In becoming active in the peace movement, such persons were not so much rebelling or breaking-away from normal practice as extending it, building on it, carrying it forward.

Furthermore, the study found that CND members were joiners of other formal organizations; indeed "46 per cent held or had recently held an elected post or position of responsibility of some kind within organizations. . . . The overall impression of CND respondents is that they appear well integrated into a broad range of social activities and institutions."[2] Even more striking is the data in this study on the attitudes of CND supporters about their capacity to bring about desirable social change. "They appear to have a strikingly high degree of optimism about the possibilities of human betterment and their personal political effectiveness."[3]

My parents and I fit this picture, and all the evidence we have would suggest that the American peace movement is rather similar. It has often been commented upon that one of the leading organizations in mobilizing opinion against the nuclear arms race is a group drawn from what is generally thought of as a very conservative profession, the doctors. Physicians for Social Responsibility no doubt owes much of its high visibility and capacity to attract members to the organizational dedication of Helen Caldicott, under

whose leadership it went in three years from a tiny group to one of 18,000 members in 45 local chapters. However, the doctors, however conservative in their ordinary politics, certainly fit very nicely into the category of welfare professions identified in the British study. The organizational success of the physicians has inspired a number of other professionally-based peace groups, such as Educators for Social Responsibility, Psychologists for Social Responsibility, High-Tech Professionals for Peace, Lawyers Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control, Business Alert to Nuclear War, Musicians Against Nuclear Arms, Communicators for Nuclear Disarmament and Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility.[4]

These professional groups are, of course, only part of a movement which also draws from dissident groups, such as feminist activists, and from the Left. However, one can certainly generalize to the point that the participants in the American peace movement are not, by and large, hapless alienated social deviants or 'outsiders', but persons of established status, usually highly-educated, and experienced in organizational life and in personal and social reform.

Prominent in the peace movement, for example, have been many mainstream churches. The Presbyterians and Episcopalians both established peace commissions to study American military policy and the links between the arms race and domestic social and economic problems. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1983 issued a pastoral letter condemning the arms race. Even the conservative Southern Baptists have passed strong peace resolutions.

Furthermore, the American peace movement is a perfectly enormous movement, by any measure far larger than the movement against the Vietnam War was even at its peak.

A sort of pledge of allegiance by which adherence might be measured is the support of the "Freeze": the demand the United States and the Soviet Union "should adopt a mutual freeze on the testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and of missiles and new aircraft designed primarily to deliver nuclear weapons." The Freeze manifesto has been endorsed by 156 national and international organizations, adopted by legislatures in 15 states, supported by 370 city councils, 71 country councils and 446 New England town meetings, voted in by a popular majority in 9 state-wide referenda, and supported by the U.S. House of Representatives. It has become a united rallying point and an organizing vehicle for a multitude of organizations—new and old, national and local—to mobilize concern over the threat of nuclear war."[5]

On 9 June 1982, in connection with the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament in New York, 2,300,000 signatures on Freeze resolutions were presented to the U.S. and Soviet United Nations missions. Three days later the largest mass demonstration in American history, estimated at 800,000 people, marched from the United Nations to Central Park to protest against the nuclear arms race. Similarly huge demonstrations have been mobilized by the peace movement in Britain and in Germany.

Finally, the peace movement should have on its side the universalism and self-evident reasonableness of its goals, aptly summarized in the cartoon in which an adult is asking a child what he'd like to be when he grows up. The answer is, "Alive, if it's not too much trouble."

Politics has bent to the movement on a verbal level; for example, President Reagan has tried to sell the Star Wars technology—the most costly military program of all history—as a pacific alternative to missile programs. But, at the same time, all the political resources of the Presidential office were put into play to get Congressional support for the MX, and Congressmen who had voted the Freeze then tried to demonstrate their open-mindedness and lack of extremism by voting for the missile too. The warheads on one nuclear submarine alone have the capacity to strike every major city in the United States. One Cruise missile, which fits in a van, is equal to sixteen Hiroshimas. But the weapons continue to be built and to be shipped by train and truck across the United States, while little groups of protestors stand in vigil at the tracks. Meanwhile, the weapons are not only more numerous year by year, but more diverse and more accurate. There are small weapons for potential battlefield use; there are long-range weapons which can hit a small target from thousands of miles away. And with this more sophisticated weapons technology have come new planning ideas about the use of the weapons. The idea that the nuclear arsenal would never be used, and would serve as a deterrence to war, has been joined by ideas of "flexible nuclear warfighting" and of nuclear "first use" in the event of the Soviet invasion of Western Europe or similar eventuality. After all the Freeze votes, both national and local, the subsequent continuation of the arms race has thrown the adherents of the peace movement into a state of some doubt and disarray.

So why is the peace movement not more successful? With so many adherents, and with such competent and well-situated adherents, why hasn't the peace movement achieved more?

This is, of course, the kind of question which people in movements are inclined to ask. There are many ways of going about answering, by no means mutually exclusive. One version is to point out that the peace movement has substantially raised awareness of the issue publicly: there are now many organizations working for peace, and political leaders show more sensitivity to the issues.

Over half of Americans surveyed find themselves thinking more about the possibility of nuclear war than they did five years ago, and their thinking is not optimistic; in 1984, 89 per cent of Americans in the same survey agreed that "There can be no winner in an all-out nuclear war; both the U.S. and the Soviet Union would be completely destroyed."[6]

It can also be argued that the peace movement can only achieve its goals if people in general experience a deep change of values and consciousness, renouncing—along with nuclear armaments—sexism, aggression and the will to power. This is bound to come slowly. Or the movement can be faulted for failures in organizing strategy: "The left should struggle to raise the level of the mass struggle in accordance with the objective conditions and strive to unite all who can be united to oppose U.S. aggression . . . Anti-intervention movements should ensure the full participation of oppressed nationalities."[7]

In part it is reasonable to argue that the difficulties of the peace movement are simply those of the difficulty of the task. The Vietnam War was a particular project and it could be terminated, not without some disruption, but without requiring a massive restructuring of political and economic institutions. Nuclear threat is a central element in our government's operations in foreign affairs, and the weapons systems are built into the political and economic system. To put an end to the nuclear arms race requires many more basic changes than putting an end to the Vietnam war, and the peace movement's current state of deflation may well be the outcome of the massive efforts at public education which have gone before. People realize what they are up against, and turn away at the thought.

No doubt each of these explanations contains an element of truth. But I should like to look at the peace movement in another way: as embodying in a particularly exaggerated form the problems inherent in a number of social movements in which 'citizen pilgrims' endeavor to "think globally but act locally," and to shape a politics which responds to deep issues of the purpose and meaningfulness of daily activity. These movements are at one and the same time political and quasi-religious in character. They mobilize around changes in the structure of power and around alterations in the decisions made by political and bureaucratic leaders; at the same time their forms of mobilization, their expression of goals, the very nature of the objectives, constitute demands which are those of moral conversion and of far-reaching changes in how we live.

As often happens, these movements caught social science napping. The understanding of politics a decade or so ago was in the liberal image of a specialized domain within which diverse social interests could and would work out their conflicting claims.

Their competition, and the confrontations which it might generate, would be limited by several factors. It would be moderated by a common interest in maintaining the institutions of government because of their role in providing the framework—roads, bridges, schools, public order and the like—of daily life. It would also be limited because, while the interests at stake were important ones, they were of a practical, material sort on which reasonable men and women might reasonably agree to disagree. Outside the framework of government people might live as they chose, and while their integration into larger and larger markets and the spread of mass communications was bound to reduce differences, a certain amount of diversity was plausible and entirely possible. Modernization theory in political science, Parsonian sociology, acculturation theory in anthropology, all played off the same melody.

It was recognized, of course, that other kinds of politics were possible. Anthropologists knew all about the Ghost Dance religion of the Plains Indian tribes, and the nativistic movements of the South Seas where whole villages threw their goods into the sea in expectation of the return of the ancestors. But these were seen as the last-ditch response of primitive peoples forced into the modern world; Garveyism and Rastafarianism might also be put into the same category. Europe had not had great religious movements—or great religious massacres—for centuries. Hitlerism was thought of as a particular aberration. It was true, of course, that there were still regional issues in modern Europe and the British Isles; the "Irish Question" seemed not to disappear, and there were still the Basques. Still, these were thought of as products of historic lag, traditional internal emnities and separatist sentiment supported by tradition and by residual economic differentials; they were on their way out, although the process was taking longer than one might have expected.

Government was, furthermore, thought of predominantly as a domain of arms-length management. Liberals saw policies as needing to take account of the exigencies of political support, with organizational needs warping best solutions; nevertheless government was by and large the custodian of the general welfare. Until recently political science research on the role of the military in politics dealt almost exclusively with power seizures in banana republics; again, it was a problem which would be phased out with modernization.

On the issue of government, the Left of course had a divergent view. The state was not the custodian of the general welfare (although it might hypocritically pretend to be so) but the instrument of the ruling economic class. Nevertheless, this view proposed for a socialist future even less of a possibility for conflict between daily life and the institutions at the top; in a socialist world, reasons for any basic conflict must certainly disappear, with contradictions managed, organized, and educated away.

None of this now appears to be true.

'Rational politics' in the liberal mold, a politics of negotiable, limited material interests, is joined by a politics of social movements tapping deep moral passions. The ecology movement is more than a movement to restrict pollution and protect the national parks; it has a quasi-religious underlay, and people have put to sea in small boats to defend whales and seals. Regionalism seems to be more than an argument about the distribution of the national pie; not only Welsh but even Cornish is now being taught in the British Isles. Cultural identity turns out to be a practical organizing issue in the modern world, and colors the organizational identity it produces: Aboriginal Australian religion is booming as the Aboriginals enter the Australian labor market at the bottom, and American Blacks who once straightened their hair are corn-rowing and thinking African.

The line between politics and private life is no longer at all clear. Who would have thought even a decade ago that we would have in the United States in 1984 a national election in which the politics of gender, abortion rights, and the political role of the churches would figure prominently?

Movement politics easily become anti-state. There is a reason why the black flag of anarchism was seen flying—for the first time so publicly in many years—at the assaults on the Pentagon in the Vietnam protests of the 1960s. David Apter calls his recent book on the airport struggles in Japan *Against the State*—a fascinating account of a movement fusing New Left ideas of class struggle with an attachment to Japanese traditional farming and the aesthetics of the blossoming cherry tree.

At the same time these movements, variously called "anti-politics" or "meta-politics", make demands on the political system and on the machinery of the state. The ecology movement brought into existence environmental-impact legislation and the California Coastal Commission. Feminist consciousness raising supported Title VII, a woman vice-presidential candidacy, and the struggle for an Equal Rights Amendment. The movements at one extreme make demands for social reform so far-reaching as to constitute criticism of the very utility and legitimacy of the existing institutions and, at the same time, they demand response by those institutions which, of course, can only respond in their own terms. One need only think of the Greens in Parliament.

All of this is clearly visible in the peace movement, in which I have recently been working. This movement is, of course, not unitary but multiple: a loose confederation of many hundreds of different groups, drawing on diverse strains of interest and ideology.

There are religious groups, liberal reform groups, groups on the Left, groups coming from ecology or from a counter-cultural anti-materialist position—and there are groups which tap more than one of these traditions. But one can, speaking generally, distinguish two broad categories. There is the arms-control and disarmament wing of the peace movement which operates in a world of what can well be called normal politics, even if the stakes make the debates and negotiations rather out of the ordinary. Here there is discussion of alternative positions and weaponry packages, of what bargains might be struck, of which issues are critical to lobby at a particular time. Here the motto is: Don't make a point; make a difference.

But then there is that other peace movement: Helen Caldicott holding up a baby and telling women they have thirty days to save the world; declarations that some area is a "nuclear free zone"; women joining embroidered strips together to wrap around the Pentagon a ribbon of images of "what I would not want to lose in a nuclear war." This peace movement is the expression of an ultimate moral revulsion and it makes a demand which no state is prepared to grant: a world free of the threat of nuclear war.

It is worth noting that the first, or practical-politics movement, is dominated by men; the second, more Utopian movement, is dominated by women.

Discussions of movement effectiveness often focus on the apparent inefficiency of a myriad of essentially autonomous groups, competing for resources, and lacking the mechanisms of coordinated action. Alternatively, the seeming disorder may be re-conceived as "segmentary, polycephalous, and reticulated" structure with many advantages: "It makes the movement difficult to suppress; it affords maximum penetration of and recruitment from different socio-economic and sub-cultural groups; it maximizes adaptive variation through diversity; it contributes to system reliability through duplication and overlap and, finally, it encourages social innovation and problem solving."[8]

But suppose, for the peace movements and the other movements of social-issue politics, this discussion is rather off the mark, since it seems to imply a choice to be made which is not there: The peace movement, at least, sits right on a deep divide between politics and anti-politics, and while the movement as a whole may span the two, it is hard for a particular group to do so. The issues which I see as marking this divide are not argued about directly; I see them as expressed in action.

One of these issues is whether the machinery of the state should be looked at as an available tool for making peace, in other words potentially part of the solution, or whether by its very nature it is central to the problem. The current disarray of the Freeze movement is in part related to this issue. Before the last election, the Freeze organization mustered a vast voter registration drive, and attempted to make the Freeze a countable issue in electoral politics. Freeze workers were able to attribute some modest influence in the legislature, but the overwhelming Reagan victory was disheartening. And from the event, two messages were drawn. Some saw it as their mission to exert firmer pressure on the critical decision-makers. Others proposed civil disobedience: a march into the desert, to the site of the first Alamogordo explosion, to court arrest there.

There are peace groups who would like to organize politically around getting the administration to develop better institutional arrangements for managing crises and de-fusing tensions between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. And there are groups which deal people-to-people via professional contacts, religious groups, youth groups in the two countries. These do not argue; but the two strategies embody different underlying conceptions of the relevance of government. The "Ploughshares" activists who have directly assaulted the weapons with hammers—a woman with seven children got an eighteen-year sentence for damaging a missile silo—are symbolically asserting that for them the machinery of ordinary political claiming is out of order.

Along with this there is another which interacts with it: a distrust of technical rationality and expertise generally. All the social movements of citizen-pilgrimage have in one way or another touched on this. But in the peace movement the theme is central. Nuclear war will be the war of the experts. No recruiting rallies; no letters home from the war zone; rather, the men in the missile silos, and the central command in their fastness: around them, the devastation. The preparation for nuclear has certainly had its mass-appeal elements; as E. P. Thompson has pointed out it has tapped some ugly bits of populism. The contracts are important politically for the jobs they bring; the bomber with a part made in each of the States was not so built by chance.

The nuclear arms buildup has been brought about in a largely technocratic planning framework. "There now exists in [both the U.S. and Soviet Union] a formidable array of high-ranking officers and government officials whose lives are dedicated to the management and operation of nuclear weapon systems. In both countries, the nuclear soldiers are supported by an equally formidable array of civilian scientists and technicians. All these people have come to take it for granted that the deployment of nuclear weaponry on a massive scale is essential to the security of their countries. They identify nuclear destructive power with national security, and so they become trapped in the cult of destruction."[9] Even special forms of rationalising discourse—game theory—were developed to serve this social apparatus. This is clearly loonyness on the grand scale, authority without the legitimation of reasonableness.

All this makes for a very deep division within the peace movement, between those organizations which try to work with and modify the existing governmental system, and those which have in effect written it off. The peace movement is not simply a loose confederation of different groups; it contains two peace movements, which contrast both in style and in content. What might be called the disarmament movement takes the political institutions seriously, as worth working with. Its style is that of rational analysis and expertise. To the degree that it tries to exert pressure on government by the numbers of adherents it is able to muster, it still tries to gain adherence by information and argument. It builds by publications, speech-making, teach-ins, film showings; it supports political action groups and legislative hot-lines.

The other peace movement holds vigils, demonstrations, civil disobedience actions. My daughter can supply any demonstration with banners of skeletons and of flowers, as well as a set of Guernica-like screaming faces on poles, and at a couple of recent demonstrations—a Trident launch, and a missile-manufacturer—we set the participants to screaming in furious rage like the mourners at a funeral in rural Greece.

It is true that persons can go back and forth between these two peace movements; I do so myself. Nevertheless, the shift may present problems. The professors at my university who are experts in the field of disarmament and continually available for speaking on the perils of the nuclear arms race are not really available for participation in peace *movement* activities; the role of partisan commitment conflicts with the role of expert.

Yet the peace movement, like the other social movements which have been called anti-political, needs both ends of its spectrum. To put an end to the nuclear arms race requires very deep changes in society. Therefore, in a certain sense, for this issue the Utopian approach is the only appropriate one: as the French said in their May Days: Be Realistic: Demand the Impossible. But movements need real victories or they die.

Because movements need victories, the peace movement has to find specific victories it can win: defeat the MX; elect a peace candidate. To do this, it has to temper both ideas and practice to political realism. But the political space for peace politics is currently very small; and to enlarge it requires the Utopian program and the unconventional action, such as praying in the lobby of the weapons lab or having—at a missile cone with hammers. The Freeze movement was a brilliant invention, for it sounded like arms-control, and at the same time had enough absolutism in it to tap the Utopian branch of the movement; having taken that one so far, it will be hard to find a new program which can make the same bridge. Until we do, the movement has to play both ends: the movement aspects both pushing the politicians, and building them a base of support, the politicians protecting the extremists from total repression, and using the movement dramatically like 'crowd noises off' to push politics a little way.

So this movement struggles on, locked into a confrontational interaction with a state which depends on the ideology and institutions of war-making for its stance in the world, and by its struggle against the weapons industry, threatening to undercut the livelihood of those who might otherwise give it their sympathetic support. It must be "realistic", but it must also demand the kinds of changes which appear impractical.

The problems of the peace movement are in some sense unique to it. But if one thinks of it as one of a spectrum of the new movements of social-issue politics, anti-politics, meta-politics, one sees that its organizational problems are not unique. The defence (or enhancement) of daily life is not readily transformed into political leverage or political program, in a world in which one vision of daily life must compete with others. Each vision is in some sense absolute, moral, not wholly negotiable. Each vision is embedded in a practice at the local level which, articulated into politics—from movement, to party, to state functionary and legislation—loses in the translation. As the Utopian end of the peace movement spectrum looks at the Congressional budgetary process it may well appear that so much gets filtered out that one might as well stay with the flaming vision of those who hammer the missile silos and go to prison. Here we have to see and say it: the peace movement extremists have something in common with those who bomb abortion clinics, likening their acts to that of John Brown at Harper's Ferry.

But even in the discomfort of saying this, I know that I speak about the people to whom I want to belong. Now you will ask, thinking back to the reasons for that: Did you find community? Here I'm not sure: certainly not all the time, every day. But the most extraordinary singing of my life has been in the holding cells after arrest. Perhaps that is enough.

1. Frank Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (Manchester, 1968), p. 180.
2. Ibid., p. 16.
3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. Susan M. Minter, "Organizing for Peace: The History of A Local Struggle Within a Growing National Movement", thesis, Harvard-Radcliffe College, April 1984.
5. Ibid.
6. Public Agenda Foundation in collaboration with the Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University, *Voter Options on Nuclear Arms Policy* (Public Agenda Foundation, 1984).
7. Anne Adams, "The anti-war movement reassessed" (leaflet reprinted from Unity, n.d.).
8. Luther P. Gerlach, "Movements of Revolutionary Change: Some Structural Characteristics", in Jo Freeman (ed.), *Social Movements of the Sixties and Seventies* (New York, 1983), p. 145.
9. Freman Dyson, *Weapons and Hope* (New York, 1984), p. 161.

BILL GAMMAGE

Justice

The case was one of common assault. Dogger and Gary and their wives and a few others were out in a bush camp drinking. Midwinter, cold even in the outback, and they'd got pretty drunk. After a bit Gary tried to steal Dogger's sherry cask, so Dogger belted him with a full bottle of port. Caught him just over the left eye, and dropped him like a shot bullock. Beautiful. Wife cleaned him up a bit, then had a few more drinks with the others, until one by one they fell off to sleep. By dawn only the dogs were moving, snuffing anxiously about, waiting for the people to wake.

That should have been it. No trouble, everything sorted out right. But when Gary woke up he felt a little bit angry. He was a short man, mid-thirties probably, broad powerful shoulders, and very strong. He'd had more fights than anyone else for miles around, and he'd won most of them. Dogger was old, quiet, public-spirited, hardly ever in trouble even when he was drunk. Gary was a bit put out that Dogger had laid him out so neatly. He decided to get the sister at the settlement to dress his wound.

Of course the sister asked how it happened. Put your life on it, she will always ask, a sister. Gary told her. You ought to go to the police, the sister said. Silence. Do you want to do that? Yes.

The constable was not all that keen on hearing the complaint. He didn't want to see Dogger in any trouble, and he reckoned Gary got what he deserved for once. But, bugger it, if a complaint was made he had to do something about it. He put some rough notes on Gary's story onto a piece of paper, and went off and found Dogger. Oh yes, said Dogger, he hit Gary. Bugger was trying to pinch his sherry. The constable made a few more notes. Well, he said, I'll have to charge you with assault. All right, said Dogger.

Wasn't all right though. If it had been, Dogger would've just pleaded guilty. But he was an elder, and he wasn't going to have a young feller like Gary beat him in court. He pleaded not guilty. There would have to be a trial.

Eight months later a great gathering of people turned up. A magistrate and his secretary came by charter plane from Adelaide—that was more than 700 kilometres away. A Legal Rights lawyer to defend Dogger also came from Adelaide. A police prosecutor, on his first day back from leave, drove up from the nearest police station, 140 kilometres down the road. With him came the constable who had investigated Gary's complaint, and two other constables. With them came Gary, taken that morning from the regional prison and flown 500 kilometres to the station. He was half-way through three months for assaulting his wife. No reason, just got a little bit drunk.

The community hall was unlocked to set up the court. Inside was one table, a pile of plastic chairs, a ping-pong table broken in half, some gear for the local band, and a modern TV set on a big box. The magistrate grabbed the table for his bench, and put it at the top of the hall, in front of a wall of fibro panels from which smashed holes gaped like a row of black mouths. Prosecution and defence took half the ping-pong table each, and put it on chairs, so each had a place to write. They felt right that way. Gary was brought in and sat on the floor at the bottom of the hall, yarning happily with his wife, catching up with the news, and now and then waving to friends outside through a hole in the wall. Only a few people outside, waiting for their own cases mostly. The others were up at an outstation, 150 kilometres away, where important business was going on.

Gary was the first witness. Could remember drinking in the bush. Could remember some of his drinking mates. After a while remembered that Dogger was one of them. Could remember being hurt over the eye. Could remember being hurt by a bottle. Could not remember being hit. Could not remember whether anyone was holding the bottle when he was hurt by it. Well he was pretty drunk, see. Could not recall anything which might help explain how he got hurt.

A bit of a setback for the prosecutor. Not to worry. Call the investigating constable. Remembered the occasion. Could not recall details of the conversations he'd had with Gary and Dogger the day after the alleged assault. Had lost the rough notes he took at the time. Had written a full account of what he was told into his official notebook, using the notes and his memory, but that was eight days later. His official notebook was back at the station. Unfortunately no chance of finding the rough notes. Case dismissed.

Dogger hadn't followed much of this. When the magistrate told him he could go, he was very surprised, and a bit doubtful. Couldn't be they'd gone to all that trouble, just to let him go after half an hour. The defence lawyer had to take him outside and explain it to him. No evidence, see, so they got to let you go.

No evidence. Gary had not put him in. Wouldn't take on the elders. Dogger knew that anyway, otherwise Gary wouldn't have gone to the sister in the first place. And the constable, well he didn't want to see Dogger in trouble. After the trial he said cheerfully how distressed he was at having lost those rough notes. Might be he understood a little bit. Dogger watched the plane and the police vans hurrying from the settlement. Might be the blackfellas would get a little bit justice after all. Might be.

ANNA BIANKE

Stuck

My watch has stuck at some time long past, but I'm convinced I'm late. Twilight has its own confusions—the few grey strangers left on the streets lurk against bright displays of mannequins frozen into swaggering joy. I keep to the centre of the mall and hurry, my empty suitcase banging against my knee.

I must be late because today I went backwards. Home. Got on the rattling bus that swayed through shorn Hawthorn hedges and drove for an hour and got off where home used to be and walked up the long driveway. It never changes this landscape: soft blue jags of distant mountain ranges, the brown curve of a ploughed field sweeping over the hill, yellow rectangles of drought, the eternal gums. I heard the magpies carolling in the firs, and I was a teenager dawdling from school, dragging my exercises in the dust behind me. Saw the magpies hopping in perky pairs and I was home on university vacation, swinging my briefcase full of answers. Saw the elegant flash of white wing against sheeny black and I was white—all white—travelling up the long drive with a man in black and a dazzling gold band expanding on my finger.

But I went home today to look for someone else.

Up ahead the clock suspended over the jeweller's says five to. Is it right? My feet are too slow for my thighs which strain forward. A man stands in the doorway and I stop.

"Please," I say, "what is the time?"

His face is in the dark, but I sense him looking at me.

"The time," I repeat. "What time is it?"

He raises his left arm slowly and his face turns towards it. I am panting slightly.

"It's too dark," he mutters. "See yourself." He thrusts his wrist in front of me. Sleeve-ends of jumpers and coats, cuffs, a pale hand: I can see no watch.

"See," he says. And the hand shoves further out of its cuffs. The wrist is bony and bare.

"Thank you," I say, stepping back. "I must go."

I clatter with my hurry. Five to, states the clock above the jeweller's. Haven't I passed that yet? I lurch on.

There is a child somewhere, lying on the prickle of the hay-stubble, sliding her gumboots through the runnels in the milking shed, a child still unaware, ebbing and flowing through the rains, the barns, through *Black Beauty* and tea-party dolls. It's her I've gone to find.

There are strangers at the farm. Why did I go, knowing that? Knowing that one parent is knitting long-sightedly in a wrinkled chair in the old people's home, that the other lies now in a field that is never ploughed, on the outskirts of the town.

Because it's not them I'm looking for. I'm looking for the moment, for that moment when I ceased to ebb and flow. For that moment when I read my mother's magazine and learned that I must please the world. Must hide my blemishes. Must smile and smile and smile again. Cover your face and pull in the body and speak words that are not yours. Upright, straight and charming. You will please men. You will be important. Next week: how to apply eye-makeup to create a new you. I walked up the driveway to the house and lifted the knocker to ask.

And now I'm late and my watch has stopped and I want to take off my shoes and run but dignity forbids it and so with ungainly, swaying clatter I yank myself into the side street and up the steps to the stage-door. Heavy of breath, I lean against it momentarily, letting the weight of an empty suitcase drag at my shoulder, then I run down the corridor to the dressing room where the wardrobe mistress sits on a stool, sewing.

"Am I late?" I pant.

"They've started," she says. "You've got time." She pulls the thread taut, and her needle loops into an aerial dive.

"What do I wear?" She scarcely glances up.

"What you've got on."

"Are you sure?" I step forward into the light of

yellow globes that flank the mirror and suddenly I'm a person. I have on a beige raincoat and I carry a suitcase.

"I went home today," I say.

"Home?"

"Where I grew up." The needle pricks through the surface. "Where I first learned to act." My face in the mirror is twenty years on. But the exercises are all done, the homework set by the magazines is all complete: paint, powder. I even smile. They say that until the mirror was invented, people had no sense of self. I've done it all—the nightly cleansing, moisturising routine, the lunch-hours spent in the fitting room. And now I'm big in the mirror: big and bright.

"Home is where I learned to be who I am now," I say. Behind me in the reflection she sews on, finishing someone's costume. I swing round.

"Should I be waiting in the wings?" I say. "Is it my cue yet?"

"There's time," she says.

"What play are we doing?" I'm restless. I move around to find a script.

"Same as yesterday," she says.

"Who? What?" A dog-eared, heavily underlined copy is curled up on the floor in a corner. It is covered with a delicate tumbleweed of hair and grey dust.

"Where are they up to?" I glance at a speech. "What is this?" It doesn't look familiar. I search for the beginning. "Pinter? Are we doing Pinter?"

"Of course. 'The Homecoming'."

"I went home today. To find the magazines. They weren't there any more. Where are we up to?" She lays the sewing on her lap and gestures that I should give her the script. As she flips back the pages one by one, I start unbuttoning my coat. It's hot and uncomfortable. I'd like to take it off. Underneath is a light summer suit.

"I dressed well today so they wouldn't mind if I wanted to search. I asked the woman if I could have a look around to refresh my memories. She was stuffing kittens into a sock. She said I could. I didn't find what I was looking for. Even though I took a suitcase to bring it back. She said she always put them in a sock to drown them."

"Here we are," says the wardrobe woman. She points with her needle. "And here's where you come on."

I read.

Teddy and Ruth stand at the threshold of the room. They are both well dressed in light summer suits and light raincoats.

Two suitcases are by their side.

Teddy: Well the key worked. They haven't changed the lock.

Ruth: No one's here.'

I look at the sewing woman.

"Am I Ruth?"

"Of course."

"I can't remember."

"What?"

"The lines. Anything. Do I say these lines?"

"Yes."

I read on.

'Teddy: They're asleep.

Ruth: Can I sit down?

Teddy: Of course.

Ruth: I'm tired.'

It is all totally unfamiliar.

"Have I said these lines before?"

"Last night."

"No. It can't be. I'd remember." My palms are sweating. I start to unbutton the jacket.

"I went back today. To remember. What it was like before I read the magazines. What it was like to wear gumboots and slide around the cow-shed. I don't know these lines. I've never seen them. What will I do?"

"You'll remember," she says, snipping the thread with her teeth.

"No! Not in front of all those people. Are there lots of people?"

"Yes. Good house. Your parents are out front."

"No. That can't be. You don't understand—."

"You'd better go now." I back away from her, hard up against the mirror.

"Yes. Don't want to miss your cue." She stands. My reflection is in the opposite mirror, framed by globes. Me front on, me back on. Backwards, forwards. All of me is revealed. I feel stuck, jammed. Although I am wet with fear, I pull the coat tightly round me.

"Without lines," I cry, "what will I do?"

"The prompt will help." She steps towards me, soothingly. My head bangs back against the mirror.

"No." I am moaning, whimpering. "She drowned the kittens. In a sock." The woman touches me with her forefinger and it is like a needle thrusting into my hand.

"It will come back to you," she says.

I have no choice but go on.

ROBERT DARBY

The Fellowship of Flesh

A discussion of Frank Dalby Davison's
The Wells of Beersheba and Other Stories
(Angus & Robertson, $9.95).

As a tribute to Authors' Week 1935 the Sydney Mail published a ten-page feature on Australian writing, with interviews and original stories by leading literary figures. The Mail's selection looks bizarre by modern standards, and probably raised eyebrows even at the time: Dulcie Deamer, Ion Idriess, Marjorie Quinn, Ethel Turner, J. H. M. Abbott, and C. H. Bertie among the established writers; Winifred Birkett and Frank Dalby Davison among the newcomers.

The winnow of time has left only the last of these among the ranks of significant authors, and Davison is so unfashionable today that he is not included in the reading list of any university course on Australian literature;[1] nor, despite his reputation as a short-story writer, does he make an appearance in Laurie Hergenhan's representative anthology, *The Australian short story* (St Lucia, 1986).

Davison has always presented paradoxes. Starting his publishing career quite late (*Man-Shy* appeared when he was 38) he quickly became one of the brightest literary lights of the late 1930s and early 1940s: a pivotal figure in the Fellowship of Australian Writers and an activist in literary politics generally, the first recipient of a Commonwealth Literary Fund Fellowship when they were introduced in 1939, and an artist whom Barnard Eldershaw described in 1938 as "one of the most deeply significant figures in Australian literature today".[2] At the height of his fame, after *Dusty* won the Argus novel competition in 1946, Davison took off for the bush and spent the rest of his life on his farm at Arthur's Creek, outside Melbourne. It was assumed that he had gracefully retired from writing, a belief which was shattered when *The White Thorntree* hit the scene some twenty years later.

Confronted by a work at first sight so different from his previous output, many critics reacted with disbelief and indignation: it was as though the man from Ironbark had returned to the barber shop and put one over the city slickers. The reputations of the inter-war realists fared badly in the 1950s and 1960s; and, as a male, Davison has not benefited from the surge of interest in women's fiction from that time. Yet he has always been one of Australia's most popular writers: *Man-Shy* and *Dusty* have gone through countless printings, been prescribed as school texts, and the latter has been made into a film. Despite such popularity and corresponding sales figures, Davison could never make a living from literature; like most of his contemporaries, he could write creatively only in the spare time left over from paid employment or farm work. Such constraint may have offered stimulus as well as frustration, but it is no accident that Davison's finest fiction, the short stories collected in *The Woman at the Mill* (1940), was written in the freedom afforded by his CLF Fellowship. The ingredient missing from so much 1930s literature was simply time to write.

Christened Frederick Douglas after his remarkable father, Davison took the name Frank Dalby in 1933, following the success of *Man-Shy* and *The Wells of Beersheba*. Although the leap to recognition as an important author was sudden, Davison was no novice at wielding the pen; throughout the 1920s he had produced sketches, stories, reportage and critical commentary, most of which was published in Frederick's little magazines. *Man-Shy* itself was assembled from pieces originally published separately in the Australian. Apart from his father's practical help, Davison was virtually self-taught. Born in the Melbourne suburbs, he left school at the age of twelve to earn wages as a farm laborer; then travelled to the United States where he was apprenticed to the printing trade and published his first creative work—a set of verses called "The Warrigal". The dingo would become a central symbol in Davison's life and writing, but for the moment it was a loyal conformist who joined the British Army in 1914, saw the Great War through in France, and returned to Australia to take up a marginal selection near Dalby, Queensland. Although this failed after only four years, the experience at Injune contributed much to Davison's fiction.

Davison's name crops up regularly in anthologies,

but no compilation of his short stories has been available since *The Road to Yesterday* (1964). *The Wells of Beersheba and Other Stories* is an artfully constructed volume which brings together a most thoughtful selection of Davison's work: published stories from *The Woman at the Mill* and *The Road to Yesterday*; two excerpts from his great novel, *The White Thorntree*; and two unpublished stories—one a soldier settlement sketch, the other an excised fragment from *Thorntree*. At over 300 pages it is a representative and generous selection which might encourage universities to add Davison's name to some of the Australian literature courses—not so much for his posthumous glory as for the instruction and delight of the students.

The pleasures of this volume lie as much in the care of the selection as in the quality of the stories themselves. Most striking is the beauty of Davison's prose: simple, clear, precise, yet always sufficiently understated to offer that element of ambiguity which Empson considered a defining characteristic of literature. His style is summed up in this description of the Crown Lands Ranger's speech: "he had a fine, simple power of words, and a way of talking about commonplace things that put a bloom on them" ("The Crown Lands Ranger"). In his mastery of the short-story form, Davison has often been compared to Lawson, and one power they certainly share is that of evoking the feel of everyday experience, especially labor. Lawson's sketches often turn an ironic edge, but Davison's descriptions of work are almost reverent. Tasks like tree-felling, fencing, digging a dam or skinning a possum are rendered by one who has both observed the activity and experienced every intimate detail of the procedure: the workaday knowledge of the farmer who has done it, combined with the skill of the writer who can put it into words. Davison's belief in the dignity of labor gives him empathy even with chores which he must rarely have attempted—for example, this description of ironing from an unpublished episode of *The White Thorntree*, now printed in *The Wells of Beersheba*:

> Some of the hundred and one skills a domestic woman practised daily in the course of caring for others had an interest of their own; the purchase, care and cooking of food, for example, but there was something about the rhythm of ironing garment after garment, with its almost total lack of need for concentration, that invited analytic and melancholy meditation. Its long monotony was a reminder of the monotony of life and its weekly occurrence emphasised the repetitiousness of a woman's life in the service of others, its lack of surprises. There was that mountainous basket of clothes, damped and rolled yesterday, that must be got through today or they would either develop mould or dry out and have to be damped again. The household linen and six individual people's personal linen, many items bringing their especial associated train of thought as she stood there on rather tired legs passing her iron back and forth with rather tired arm, placing a finished garment with those ready to be put away and then reaching for another from that very slowly dwindling pile.

Like Lawson's sketches, too, Davison's stories of selection life resemble the pieces of a mosaic which together present a picture of a whole community. "The Bush is no place for a woman", wrote Lawson of the 1890s; if the position had improved by the 1920s, Davison's is still a man's world. More than Lawson, Davison is aware of the ways in which male arrogance can deny expression and self-realisation to women. In several stories he tackles the image of woman as a bridle on men's freedom: tied to the home, women represent order, stability, routine, security, boredom; required to roam in search of work, men represent adventure, daring, change, subversion and risk. Bert Caswell's fear that the woman at the mill wants to trap him into a permanent relationship, however, is more than a comment on the itinerant (young male) laborer's desire to be a rolling stone; it is also a more general judgment on the avoidance of emotional commitment.

As D. R. Burns has commented,[3] Bert and Irene's husband represent two contrasting types of bushman—the nomadic and the settling—but they are alike in a common characteristic of their sort: unable to appreciate a woman's aspirations. The occasional regret that Australian fiction of the outback excludes women misses the point that women were largely excluded from life out there or, if included, confined to a few set roles. In "Further West", Dave's life as a possum trapper ruled out normal domestic arrangements, so he had the option of remaining single and enjoying a variety of one-night stands, or of marrying an Aboriginal woman. The latter works so long as he operates in country ahead of settlement; once civilization catches up, and intolerant white selectors wonder what a nice man like Dave is doing with a dirty old gin, he and his family have to move further out.

Davison's fictional world is that of the frontier, and the frontier is always moving on. He captures the moments when it is just ceasing to be true frontier and becoming settled, and how men used to frontier life cope with the transition. In "Return of the Hunter" Tug Treloar, as a selector in a newly-opened region, is himself part of the civilizing process which limits him to a humdrum farmer's routine, while his wartime mates seek adventure on the new frontiers: buffalo shooting in the Northern Territory, gold digging in New Guinea. Busy fencing his land to keep stock in and dingoes out, Tug feels that "life had run a fence around him".

The parallel between Treloar's matrimonial condition and the rogue dingo he catches by setting his pet bitch as a lure is drawn with such force as to seem

misogynous, but Davison's own perspective is not that of the man. His position is not feminist, but that of the compassionate observer who understands the way people feel and react in these circumstances, who can see that the social requirements of being male in such a community—independent, hard, taciturn, a good provider—can hurt both men and women. "Return of the Hunter" achieves the impressive feat of showing what an emotionally unaware person might feel if he had greater self-knowledge and deeper insight into the springs of his discontent. As critics have observed, Davison often seeks to give a voice to the inarticulate, whether human or animal.

The great virtues of the careful selection of stories in *The Wells of Beersheba* are, first, that it traces Davison's political transformation during the 1930s; and, secondly, that it reveals the persistence of his humanist concerns and the continuity of his literary style and power from the world of *Dusty* to that of *The White Thorntree.*

To begin a volume of Davison's short stories with "The Wells of Beersheba: An epic of the Australian light horse" (1933) and to end it with "Fathers and Sons" (1940) is to chart his intellectual and literary progression from the "Kipling-esque romantic" who fought gladly in the Great War and wrote *Forever Morning: An Australian Romance*, to a pacifist left-winger committed to realism. Davison joined up from an automatic assumption that Britain was right; out of a comparable sense of filial and imperial duty, he took up farming after the war so as to promote national development. By 1936 he saw that sort of rural industry as a menace to the environment, and by 1939 he shared the common fear of the intellectual Left that domestic authoritarianism was a worse threat to liberty than Hitler was. As he put it in "Fathers and Sons":

> Like the other lads [at the time of World War I] I really thought it was a German sniper who had killed Mitch; didn't understand, as I do now, that it was our own people, back in Australia, in Canada, in Britain, who really menaced us.

To read a finer dramatisation of how the betrayals which culminated at Munich led people to embrace a variety of dissident ethical beliefs, it would be necessary to turn to Martin Boyd's *A Single Flame* or, in fiction, to Boyd's *When Blackbirds Sing.*

If Davison thus settled accounts with the Empire for which he had mistakenly fought, he was also sorting out his relationship with his own anglophile father, whose fervent belief in the "men, money and markets" style of rural development he attacked in *Blue Coast Caravan* (1935). The conservationist sensibility which emerged in the mid-1930s is fully present in many of the soldier-settlement stories,

Louis Kahan

notably the first one printed in this collection, "The Wasteland", which in places reads like an elegy to a lost bush Eden:

> Down on the good lands the bush was wasting before our attack. The early days, when a man could ride from camp to camp, across country, passed with the putting up of settlers' fences. Then came ringbarking. The leaves that had filled a valley or clothed a hill fell, disclosing in their place only a mist of grey twigs supported on bare, peeling branches.
>
> The game, too, disappeared. Mobs of kangaroos that had taken a three-point stance, with twitching nostrils, to stare at us when first we came, had vanished. The settlers' guns and the settlers' dogs had seen to that. The emu and plain-turkey were gone; and the creatures that browsed among the foliage, the koalas that glided so cleverly from view at our approach, and the possums that had peered with twinkling eyes at our camp-fires—I often wonder what tragedy had been theirs when the ring-barkers caused that cataclysm, the falling of the leaves.

The frequency with which images of wild animals appear in Davison's fiction attests his continuing attraction to wilderness.

During the 1930s, like many of his intellectual

generation, Davison was politicised by a combination of local and international events, especially the march of domestic repression, epitomised in the policies of the Lyons government on issues such as appeasement and censorship. Davison was first and last an artist, never a propagandist, in his fiction, but he still saw writing as a political act, with important implications for the way in which social life was organised. He insisted that his writing was politically informed, and the point of many stories does hinge on the opposition between freedom and repression, rebellion and conformism. It is common to say that Davison wrote only a couple of "political" stories: "Transition" and "Fathers and Sons"; but, even aside from the vein of conservationist sentiment which runs through the Injune stories, there are many which are implicitly, if not overtly, political.

Bullies, wimps and balanced good guys recur as character types in many of Davison's stories. Although he had a sceptical attitude to the "romantic tradition of the free and careless bushman" ("Transition"), he regarded the ideal of the democratically-minded bush worker as a desirable national type. "Nobody's Kelpie" may be read as a moral fable on how to be a good anti-fascist Australian. Connolly, the swaggering bully, and Cody, the whinging wimp who "lost himself somewhere between meekness and excessive wrath", represent the extremes to be avoided; while the model would seem to be O'Reilly, the quiet, efficient worker, gentle and benevolent, yet not afraid to resort to defensive violence when occasion demanded. It is either no accident or a happy coincidence that this embodiment of the golden mean should be nicknamed Nugget. The behavioral lessons of "Nobody's Kelpie" extend beyond the anti-fascist context, but in the 1937-1940 period, with its talk of bullying dictators, appeasement, collective security and the need to defend democratic values, the possible connotations of the story would have been evident and specific. It might be read as a dramatisation of Davison's opinion on the appropriate response to the threat of fascism: "aggressive defence", as he put it in 1937, when describing Joseph Furphy's attitude to the "common man" in his novel *Such Is Life.*

Davison once remarked that *The White Thorntree* was cut from the same cloth as *Dusty* and the short stories. To see examples of the three side by side is to become aware of a continuity in pattern which derives, as Harry Heseltine has observed, from his profound sense of "the fellowship of all flesh".[4] Complaints are often heard today that *Thorntree* is either dated or too narrowly concerned with sex, and in one sense both these charges are true. Dealing with suburban Australians between the wars, the novel is fixed in space and time, and even its perspective is largely that of the period. However deeply Davison questioned the sexual practices and standards of his time, he did not have an independent vantage point from which to attack them; his rebellion is limited by many of the assumptions of the order against which he wants to rebel. The women's, gay and human liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s helped to put critics in a position where they could see *Thorntree*'s inadequacies, but considering that it was written by a victim, the novel's examination of sexual variation and repression is remarkably acute.

The White Thorntree is mainly about sex but, if you object to that, you might as well complain that *Man-Shy* is only about cows. The program of the novel was precisely to consider the range of sexual precept and practice in 1930s Sydney. Even with such a specific brief, the novel (contrary to the author's prefatory remarks) achieves a vivid coverage of the whole range of human emotional experience, and not a bad picture of social life between the wars. In another sense, *Thorntree* is no more dated than the work of Freud or Flaubert's *Madame Bovary.* They could be accused of dealing with the emotional pathology of only a small fraction of the upper- or lower-middle class in Vienna or the French provinces in the late nineteenth century. The detail of Davison's novel belongs to the 1930s, but the broader issues it raises—emotional responsibility, the nature of love and desire, the contradictions between sexual freedom and security, for example—belong at least to the twentieth century.

As for the complacent assumption that the repressions and inhibitions analysed in *The White Thorntree* are irrelevant in this liberated age, one must not mistake the decade for the century. The severe moral (and political) censorship of the 1930s is now a byword for puritanical and reactionary denial of free expression. There was little chance of such a novel being published then, but Davison feared it would not make the grade even in the late 1960s. He was planning to leave typescript copies in the Mitchell and National Libraries when the indomitable Bob Cugley of the National Press was brave enough to take the risk—and risk there was, as Penguin found with *Portnoy's Complaint* a couple of years later.

People continue to suffer from surfeits and insufficiencies of love and sex; if books are less frequently banned than in the 1960s, concentration of media ownership places its own restraints on free speech, and there is no guarantee that the bad old days will not return. With the Fred Niles of this world and other wowsers trying to drag us back into the barbarity of the Dark Ages, who can say that our present liberated condition will be anything other than a fleeting episode? Davison expressed some of his own hopes through the judge at the trial which placed David Munster on the road to doom. Justice Edmondson was of advanced views for his time and social position, and his colleagues used to say to him: "This is the 1930s, Edmondson. The world may be ready for you by the end of the century!" ("David and the

Judge"). If the world is ready for, or still prepared to accept, the humanity and compassion of *The White Thorntree* by then, we will have some cause for satisfaction.

Robert Darby is a post-graduate student in the English Department, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra.

1. Jane Munro, Report on Australian literature for the Committee to review Australian studies in tertiary education, September 1986, p. 52 and Appendix B.
2. M. Barnard Eldershaw, *Essays in Australian Fiction* (Melbourne, 1938), p. 80.
3. D. R. Burns, *The Directions of Australian Fiction, 1920-1974*, (Melbourne, 1975), p. 97.
4. Harry Heseltine, "The fellowship of all flesh: The fiction of Frank Dalby Davison", *Meanjin*, 27 (3), Spring 1968.

SEASONAL WORKER

Nothing ever comes but you persevere
work hard all day for crumbs.
New-chum or Gun you're a dime a dozen
and there's always the dole.
You won't starve this is Australia
but in the Outback you're too far from anywhere.

You pick a fair boss join the A.W.U.
but Sundays you work for low wages
you've no choice it's 'interest rates'.
In the seasonal rural industry
there is no worker solidarity
like it or lump it or get the sack.
You're just a flea on the pig's back.

Your tools are knives hoes ladders
dip-tins chest-bags secateurs.
You get filthy your back aches.
You work on your knees
hands nimble but go careful
you can't afford to hurt yourself
or bruise the fruit.

The hotter it is
the more work there is
the harder it is.
You pray for dry weather
curse the flies ruin your hands
your face turns to leather.

You ache. Head down race.
You have the right attitude.
You set targets try to beat them
you persevere but nothing ever comes.
You follow the harvests.
One more year you say.
One more year.

KEN SMEATON

HELEN GARLICK

Distanced

I am a stranger to this place—and to these people; yet we are linked by the ties of blood. They never expected to see me nor I, them. We do not know each other in any way apart from whatever childhood memories we share. Now I am in their house—their home. I am a guest and both hosts and guest are a little ill at ease. I was visiting this country town as an expert witness in psychology at a particularly tragic inquest. Outside the court a young man with a vaguely familiar face approached me, and in a confused and muddled way we established we were second cousins. The house I am now in is the house of his mother. Her name is Meg and I haven't seen her for fifteen years. I am sitting in an uncomfortable green lounge chair—the type that was very modern in the sixties and still enjoys a vogue—why I cannot begin to imagine. I long for my comfortable Habitat two-seater; I long to be sitting in it in my little terrace house forgetting the morning's work. But I must return to court tomorrow and here I am now with my kin. I feel trapped. Meg's husband Frank has just returned from work. He shakes my hand. There is no surprise on his face at my presence and he gives no clue as to whether he knew I would be sitting in his favorite lounge chair when he came home. He and Meg do not greet each other. Rather, they circle around one another in the kitchen—like an adolescent dance or boxers in the ring just before the first punch is thrown. But the circling is not hostile—just familiarly passive. I cannot tell whether it is my presence that is causing it or whether it is an everyday ritual. Frank starts to make his lunch for the next day. Dry biscuits, cheese and chutney, and four tea bags are carefully packed in his plastic box. I feel a little like a voyeur watching him, but there is nowhere else much to look. He rinses his thermos and stands it on the sink ready for hot water in the morning. This must be a nightly ritual—and one that cannot be altered for any reason. Certainly not because of a guest. Frank silently leaves the kitchen—as silently as he prepared his lunch—and returns ten minutes later. He has changed from his overalls into slacks and a jumper that looks like it's hardly been worn. Meg's son comes in carrying a cardboard box stacked with red and white wine; port, beer and brandy. It's a pity I'm not a drinker. One glass of very dry white is all I enjoy. The white wine is a Ben Ean moselle. The son—Ian is his name and I always have trouble remembering it—pours himself a very large brandy and coke. More brandy than coke. He quickly gulps it as if he's anxious to get it down before it could be taken out of his grasp by his mother. But Meg seems not to notice—she has been sipping away at sweet sherry since my arrival. I wonder if she sips sherry like this every night. But the box full of drink is surely for my benefit. Perhaps to show me they know about more than beer or just a welcome break from the sameness of their nightly drinks. The house is fibro-cement and all the surfaces are shiny with high-gloss paint. There is not just a spartan air about it, but more precisely, a sense of the house and its contents being not at all important.

There is nothing comfortable or comforting; nothing I like except a sepia pottery bowl full of wild flowers. I have something very similar in my own home.

Ian's young wife Sharon joins us. She and Ian live about a kilometre away. She is a sweet-faced girl who will run to fat before she's thirty. I expect she expects to. I sit down with the men at the table and Meg and Sharon take turns waiting on us. We talk of my mother's last illness, of the old house in Orbost, my brother and sister. Also, of cousin Julie—the family's blackest and most fascinating sheep. "Fancy her running off like that", says Meg, "and leaving those poor kiddies". They all have disapproval—tempered by awe—on their faces. Cousin Julie left her husband and children and went to live with a well known French musician. She lives in Paris, visits her children at intervals, and seems quite at ease with the situation. "What's he like, this French bloke?" asks Sharon. The men want to know but leave all the questions to the two women, although Ian does make a joke about "all those frogs' legs". But Sharon is really curious about

the sort of house Julie has and what life is like in Paris. They would also like to talk of me—I am a curiosity to them—but I cannot explain myself to these people and so I talk only of my work. They seem at once proud to have me as their guest and antagonistic toward my differences. And afraid I will be looking down my nose at them. We have always been considered the clever branch of the family even if our mother was uneducated and our father a drunk. But it was as much luck as brains really and I can't explain that either. Am I looking down my nose at them? It's the differences in our lives and the strangeness I feel—and they must feel too—that amazes me.

We are distanced from each other not so much by class or education—Meg is a primary school teacher and Sharon a mothercraft nurse. No, rather we are distanced by the difference between country and city living which seems to result in different expectations and aspirations. But they do not envy me at all.

They would think my terrace house small, my street noisy and smelly, my friends, oddballs. They would be shocked by my long-standing affair with a married man. They would think I longed for children. They would be wrong.

I am looking, listening, trying to feel; trying to understand what is happening. Here, I quickly work out, it is not what is said that is important—but what is done. And done in that peculiarly Australian way—grudgingly, proudly, ashamedly. Hence, the lace tablecloth—that is not brought out nightly. And Frank's jumper. I can almost smell the moth-balls. And the wine, port and brandy. Even the meal—it would be a Sunday meal; roast lamb, gravy, potatoes, peas, carrots, follow tinned tomato soup. Then we have fruit (tinned too), with ice-cream. It's a meal exactly the same as my mother served for forty years. I think, however, that the tomato soup is especially for my visit—making the dinner into a proper three-course meal. Frank has almost total recall—he describes in excruciating detail the last time we met; who was with me; where we had come from—everything. Despite the details the event remains only a hazy memory for me. For Frank, it obviously had greater importance. It strikes me he knows quite a lot about me and I know not much about him, except name, marital status, occupation. Probably forty-five. That's enough for me. I'm getting bored, even agitated here in this ugly house listening to things I have no interest in. I can't forget the events in court this morning. After being forced to listen to and witness such tragedy I find it oddly unsettling to be forced to listen to details of a day fifteen years ago—a day I can hardly remember. I turn my attention to the bowl containing the wild flowers. They are very pretty.

When I was twenty I had a boy friend who was a bushwalking enthusiast. I became one too and even when all I wanted to do was to sit on a rock and cry, I lumbered on. That is when I learnt to identify flowers such as these. Now I cannot recall the bushwalker's face but I have never lost my ability to remember the names of the wild flowers of Victoria. I turn everyone's attention to the bowl. Do I do this because I am bored, or because I would like to admire something of theirs? Or, am I simply telling them that, not only am I sophisticated, clever, and live in a lovely house in the city, I also know about their things—about wild flowers?

I say, "That's a Dusky Coral Pea, isn't it?" Rather expecting them not to know. "Yes", says Sharon, "and that's a Pink Pavonia." "And that one's a Scented Sun Orchid." They all join in then, and name each wild flower in the bowl. Frank adds the occasional Latin name as well.

Later, back in my life in the city I send, to thank them, the latest edition of *Wild Flowers of South-East Australia*. A brief—almost curt—note on a Christmas card four months later, acknowledges the gift.

PAUL CARTER

Non Sequiturs

A discussion of Laurie Duggan's The Ash Range *(Picador, $12.95).*

Over the last ten years there has been something of a shake-up in Australian history. But it has had to do largely with content, not form. The earlier narrative histories of colonisation and settlement have been subjected to any number of theoretically-informed 'readings'. Feminists have illuminated our early convict society; Marxists have revealed new aspects of the colonist's economic dependence on Aboriginal labor. But, in this re-evaluation and extension of the 'historical facts', there has been little attention paid to the *way* our earlier histories were compiled and written.

Contemporary histories still take largely for granted the historical paradigms put in place in the late nineteenth century. The splendid *Historical Records of Victoria*, for instance, make available many formerly inaccessible documents connected with Melbourne's foundation; but the choice of documents and their arrangement conforms largely to the historical paradigm of "I came, I saw, I conquered" put in place by Henry Giles Turner in his 1904 *History of the Colony of Victoria*. (Alistair Campbell's recently published book, *John Batman and the Aborigines*, is valuable precisely because it questions this canon of events.)

The imperial narrative which early historians like Shillinglaw and Bonwick cobbled together was not simply *there* in the facts. It was a result of the facts they chose to record. Or, more extremely, it was a consequence of the historical facts they chose to *invent*. Bonwick, for instance, candidly describes how he encouraged old-timers to remember events they had forgotten, how he actively conjured up, as it were, the facts he needed to authenticate his historical vision. Bonwick had a personal interest in the story he told. He moved extensively through the colony, Victoria, whose past he did so much to establish. His history, for all its appearance of empirical objectivity, disguised half a century of travelling, conversation, ambition and disappointment. His history was, at least in part, autobiography.

A history of our histories—a history which showed the personal, anecdotal basis of what passes for fact—would be fascinating. And it wouldn't have to start with a learned assault on the academic bastions of empiricism and positivism. In Australia, at least, there is an easier way to hand. While our theoreticians may want to banish personality from the historical landscape, in one neck of the woods at least—local history—it continues to flourish. Local histories—and is there a shire, a municipality, a region, which hasn't got one or got one commissioned?—prodigiously run together historical facts, personal incidents, snippets of biography. The whole enterprise often turns on the energy and resourcefulness of one local resident—someone who almost inevitably emerges from his literary endeavor as a decidedly eccentric, not to say, parochial author.

Local histories are contemporary versions of the colonial epics Flanagan and Turner wrote. Like the Hobbits, they have had to yield to progress. Their hybrid tales of epic beginnings, auriferous fields, the railway's coming, flood, fire and a century of local council meetings, have had to retreat to the fastnesses of the bush. Nevertheless, a study of them might well throw light on the way the national, as well as local, past has been put together.

In a sense, then, Laurie Duggan is unfairly prescriptive when he describes one local historical source he draws on in *The Ash Range* as "a novelette disguised as history". Again, the sarcasm he reserves for a locally inspired biography of Gippsland pioneer, Angus McMillan, may be unduly harsh:

> For a martyrdom at Iguana Creek
> we get a biographer who tells us
> what the young Angus thought
> as he clambered rocks of his native island.

For the question criticisms like these beg is: what form would a local history take? What is it, in fact, that

a local history describes? (Why, for instance, should romantic fictions be any less characteristic of a place than other writings associated with it?) The point that Duggan overlooks apparently is that local histories do not describe pre-existing places, but create them—or a fictional equivalent—out of the most heterogeneous literary materials. But the strangest aspect of Duggan's historical puritanism is that, taken as a whole, *The Ash Range*, is nothing if not a sustained meditation on local history *as a genre of historical writing.*

The obvious analogy with Duggan's collage of Gippsland newspaper cuttings, traveller's journals, pioneers' letters—and extracts from local histories—is not poetic—it is not to be found, say, in *Paterson*, the American poet William Carlos William's local epic: it lies closer to home in the *ad hoc* way our local histories are compiled, organised and illustrated. This is true structurally—Duggan's arrangement of materials, partly chronologically, partly as narrative and partly by theme, closely imitates the conventional shape of most local histories. But the analogy goes deeper, illuminating not just *The Ash Range's* content, but Duggan's characteristic ambivalence towards it.

Duggan may want to persuade us the sources he quotes speak for themselves. But, in fact, until he recovered them and put them together, they were largely silent. In this sense *The Ash Range* bears witness to the *absence* of an immediately present, spoken past. To make the past speak may, then, be to falsify history. But, unless the past does speak, how can he (the poet) himself find a voice. From the start, then, *The Ash Range*, like all local history, recognises that the invention of a place to speak from is an enterprise which is poetic as well as historical.

But it is also an anti-epic enterprise. Duggan remarks in his notes that an epic is "almost by definition, the product of shared consciousness". An epic is also the product of a shared *oral* consciousness. In this sense, *The Ash Range* is an elegy for the absence of epic possibilities in Gippsland. Firstly, its collage of documents asserts the historical absence of a "shared consciousness" (only now are these words being put together). Secondly, Duggan's reliance wholly on literary documents suggests the absence of a spoken tradition, a shared field of historical reference.

The elegiac tone of the book is justified, not so much by nostalgia for a past way of life, but by Duggan's sense that the past remains unnamed, unspoken, irrevocably an object of nostalgia. It is precisely this absence of a shared place which justifies Duggan in intruding himself into his own history. For without his presence the ash range, the place he has come back to find, would remain undiscovered and, possibly, unthought of. This explains how he appears—not as the hero of eloquence, but as an outsider, an enigmatic visitor to high country pubs and a solitary exile to wild places. No talk with locals is reported. Apart from one passing mention of a forbear at Grant, arrested in 1884 for vagrancy, no family connections are established.

Consequently it is significant that where Duggan does speak for himself, his language is strangely unpersuasive, bordering on cliché:

> In a high wind, on a rock in the back paddock
> pollen dusts my pants;
> 180 degrees of the valley before me:
> its scattered dams, sheds,
> fawn and white masses
> of fleeced and shorn sheep;
> Mt Elizabeth to the south-east,
> and north, the country round Tongio Gap;
> the hillside below covered with yellow flowers,
> green clover,
> scattered rocks and stumps . . .

This is how *The Ash Range* opens—in a flurry of conventional epithets and clichéd phrases—"the hillside below covered with yellow flowers"—which, but for the place names, would be quite impersonal, quite undistinguished. For, indeed, this is the local historian's dilemma: how to define a locality in such a way that it is different from other places; or, in another way, how to show that ordinary language—the language used there—is nevertheless special, endowed with local significance.

Local history is foundational in intent and, in Australia, this involves it in a paradox. For, as Duggan shows in the early sections of his book, in the beginning there are only travellers criss-crossing a geographical region—an explorer from the north-east, a navigator from the south-east, a squatter from the west. These people, men like McMillan and Howitt, leave a written record of their journeys—so they get into the local history. But here is the paradox: local history treats these travellers as if *they* belonged to the locality, as if they only emerged from the shadows when they stepped on to the Gippsland stage. In truth, though, the locality was something they invented, with their names as much as their tracks. The locality was, first of all, nothing more than a history of tracks, of appearances and disappearances.

Local history is by its very nature cobbled together out of fragments—and this is what lends Duggan's narrative technique its historical authority. In local history, events, objects and faces are always strangely detached from history—from the history which brought them there. Because of this detachment, they acquire an iconic quality: someone's madness, a tale of a lost white woman, these anecdotes, reported in the local papers, assume by their very lack of context a peculiar, if unexplained, local significance. What do they mean? Hence, Duggan's book of quotations is not to be judged in terms of its historical accuracy, but rather in terms of its truthfulness to the nature

of local history.

Local history is notably laconic. The most surprising facts are reported cheek-by-jowl; a relic blue gum stands next to the 1920s fire station. But the very inexplicability of these ordinary facts serves local history's desire to endow a place—or, better, a place name, with a mythic inevitability. Part of that process is to mingle uncritically biography, anecdote, reportage and photography. As Duggan writes,

> —Spence
> *absent in Bruthven—*
> *The origin of the fire*
> *is unknown. The building*
> *was insured.*
>
> The standard *non sequitur.*

But the process of mystification, the retrospective wish to lend the present the dignity of a past, is also served by the mere device of printing this matter consecutively, by organising it as if it *were* a chronological history. Hence sheep yield to gold, bush yields to meadows; and then, later, fields yield to bush, gold to sheep. But the meaning of this pattern is so enigmatic—so dependent on historical causes outside the scope of local history—that, left unexplained, it merely serves to reinforce a sense of the place's particularity, its mysterious self-knowledge.

But something is always left over from the narrative: a special chapter has to be contributed on the milk industry or perhaps the RSL; the weather, for instance, needs to be mentioned and, of course, the members of the Back-To Committee. And then the local Aboriginal scholar must be invited to summarise Brough Smyth, Curr and Howitt. It is in this context, perhaps, that the final third of *The Ash Range* is best read. Here Duggan cites documents descriptive of (among other things) the Aboriginal Mission Station at Ramahyuck, the 1939 fires and the local weather. Were this not *local* history, Duggan's account of the Gippsland Aboriginals—not least his treatment of them as a bygone race only recoverable from the literature—would be little short of scandalous.

As it is, though, Duggan selects his material to show how the Aboriginals were already, in the late nineteenth Century, being regarded, like the Gippsland Lakes, as tourist attractions. And, once again, Duggan's local historical intuition serves him well here. For local histories are promotional as well as pious: they carry advertisements as well as pioneer sketches and in this sense are propaganda for the future of the town, providing incentives for casual travellers to stop, buy postcards and more. But here—in this desire to make the past an instrument of the future—we reach a limit of local history and, by implication, one limitation of *The Ash Range.*

Local history, its very existence, implies remoteness, the possibility of being outside History. But this remoteness is anti-historical: the first explorers did not cultivate it; the settlers did all in their power (as Duggan shows), with jetties, railroad tracks and metalled roads, to diminish it. Remoteness is what the visitor comes for: it is the experience of not living there. And, when the local historian proudly notes his town's distance from Melbourne, he does not necessarily articulate a staunch feeling of local identity. On the contrary, he may only be seeing his place as *others* see it. Remoteness is, paradoxically, the product of better communications. Remoteness is the pleasure of travelling quickly by car.

So, when Duggan observes at Ninety Mile Beach how

> Strange plants
> with pulpý leaves and brilliant flowers
> send forth long green lines
> having no visible beginning or end,
> binding together the dunes

one cannot help feeling that the place is being invested with a false mystery, that its inscrutable remoteness is superficial. It is not simply that those plants have names, but that their strangeness is in the eye of the beholder. Described here is not the character of a locality, but the nature of the poet's own presence—the fact he is a day-visitor and not privy to the region's invisible undercurrents and continuities. This is the pathos of *The Ash Range*, but whether it is artefactual or not—an insight into the character of the place and its history or a product of the distance from which the poet came and the hopes he entertained—readers will have to decide. It is greatly to the credit of Duggan's book that, in reflecting on these local questions, they will find they are also reflecting on something much larger—the nature of Australian history and poetry's relation to it.

STEPHEN ALOMES

Bound for South Australia

Past and Present in a Jubilee City State

"South Australia. It's a great state, mate." This was the slogan of South Australian Jubilee publicity during 1986—for South Australians. Visitors were enjoined to "Enjoy!" The supposed 150th anniversary of European settlement in South Australia ran, however, on standard historical themes. In 1986 every schoolchild in South Australia could give the correct answer to the question "On what ship did the first settlers come to Glenelg?" Many Adelaide children might have even drawn the *Buffalo* as it is atop the pioneers' memorial. Few would have known that the first white settlers were sealers and whalers and runaway convicts on Kangaroo Island, or that some of the founders of South Australia at times recognised, as historians including John Summers and Henry Reynolds have shown, the Aboriginals' proprietary right to land.

The parochial and the celebratory have come together in the 1980s. The parochial exists throughout Australia, as elsewhere, partly because of the distance between the different cities. The parochial can often be a force for repression and for fear of the strange. Simplistic conceptions of 'progress' are worked out in city or State terms. Local boosting reflects fear of the eccentric, the strange and the unknown. In the 1930s the cry of "treason at the university" was raised in Adelaide in response to the critics of the 'vast open spaces' ideology of Australia's future.

In this Bicentennial period local and national pride-cum-history are appearing on Canberra milk cartons, as Ken Inglis has told us, and on other commercial surfaces around Australia. Celebration has become the norm, from America's Cup Fremantle to historical Tasmania, from Grand Prix Adelaide to convict or 'First Fleet' Sydney. Since the warm aura of celebration has been accompanied by the chill winds of economic decline, and by demands for national sacrifice, what does the celebratory packaging of our past mean? How accurate is it regarding the past? What view of the present does it encourage?

On Pioneers' Day in September 1986, all South Australians were enjoined to dress as pioneers (and official guides on "How to Prepare Your Period Costume" were provided). Few dressed as struggling wheat farmers north of the Gawler line, persons of German extraction interned in the Great War after their houses were burnt down, or Woodville workers injured at General Motors; or, for that matter, as Aboriginals at Maralinga in the 1950s.

Governments know people like birthday parties. Especially when times are tough. The scaling down of car and whitegoods manufacture in South Australia, and the decline of shipbuilding, means that the economy may have a bleak future. Amongst the possible saviors is tourism. Thus the 'heritage' movement is closely linked to tourism, and both are bolstered by new museums (including the excellent, historically-informed Old Parliament House Museum and the Maritime Museum at Port Adelaide). What is the relationship between history and heritage in difficult times? The party of 1986 was, perhaps, intended to cloud the public mind to economic realities by inducing a feeling that the ship of South Australia was sailing in fair weather towards a better future.

In its sloganising South Australia followed Tasmania, which expressed the boosters' dream of economic revival in the TV ad and song, "You can make it in Tasmania".

Nor is the past always understood. The message is not about analysing its complexities but about play-acting it in period dress, walking on historic stages (from ships and museums for period interiors) or sprinkling it on politicians' speeches. Romantic talk about 'pioneers' allows politicians and 'consumers' to bask in a picture of the past in which color and theatre push aside conflict and suffering, the less appealing aspects of the Australian past.

The equation of history with 'heritage' often furthers ignorance and complacency. The relationship between historians and 'heritage' is a complex one. Some critics would see it as collusion. A kinder view sees historians, serious publishers and museum directors riding the 'heritage' waves to win government and popular support for their more serious ventures. At best the

'heritage' movement also saves the built past from the developers' schemes and the wreckers' hammer.

But how similar are the new 'heritage industry' developments to the Faustian sponsorship bargains sporting competitions make with cigarette companies? Certainly the celebration-heritage-tourism' triangle has brought support for things other than casinos: for new museums, for instance, in Adelaide, in Fremantle and around Australia. But are such museums likely to give us doses of valium, obscuring the chance to learn from the past, and realistic assessment of the present? Yet it's possible to have meaning as well as pleasure, knowledge as well as kitsch.

Celebrating, too, offers mixed blessings. The $200 a head ball, attended by the old Adelaide elite and the new rich, and the world three-day equestrian event at Gawler, which lost several hundred thousand dollars, flattered the 'better' classes, still dominant in South Australian society. The New Year's Eve party and community celebrations in local areas represented something more popular. The popular descended to McDonald's salute to Great Australians on their paper tray covers, and a novel two-legged South Australian wombat.

State self-love had other expressions. One was the campaign to support *South Australia* in the America's Cup: an Adelaide *Advertiser* supplement declared "Come On, South Australia. We Can Do It!", backed by an appeal for a million dollars. Events pricked this balloon of patriotic prophecy. More positively the Grand Prix (advertised as "Adelaide Alive") is a continuing source of tourist revenue. Yet the activities of the Wakefield Press and other publishers, who brought out over fifty Jubilee books (on subjects such as the trade union movement, charity and welfare and women in South Australia) showed that celebrations like this could produce thought as well as hype. It is another matter whether the impetus will last when the celebrations are forgotten. Already the Wakefield Press has gone into lower gear.

The lively South Australian cultural and intellectual scene of today also poses interesting questions about the relationship between local and national, between grass roots parochial and the larger or merely more commercial. To what extent, in these Bicentennial days, do celebrations stimulate, and to what extent do they restrict, wider cultural activity?

One positive sign is the new interest in the Australian experience. The rediscovery of Australia in cultural terms in recent years has been the product of local initiatives as well as developments in the larger capitals. Here South Australia is part of the story. In Tasmania Island Magazine, Twelvetrees Press, the Tasmanian Writers' Union and the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre (now Teraupin) have thrived; in Western Australia, the Perth Festival and the Fremantle Arts Centre Press, which first published Albert Facey's *A Fortunate Life*; the Fringe Festivals in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne and, in Adelaide, the free monthly Adelaide Review, the comedy and poets' cafes. The rise of local history throughout Australia, expressed through historical societies, publications and museums, indicates an increasing awareness of the Australian past and present. Similarly the growth of Gippsland and Darling Downs studies, with the support of the local institutes, and the rise of Queensland studies (as reflected in Ross Fitzgerald's work and in the two special Queensland issues of Social Alternatives) suggest a new alertness. In them the local is at best *not* parochial but committed, *not* laudatory but critical.

Yet the local can lead to narrowness, rather than to a sense of the relationship between the local, the national and the international (for example, international capital's role in exploiting immigrant labor in motor manufacturing). To hear the localism of radio in most Australian cities, and to experience the localism of the press, is to notice how narrow Australians' view of the world is. When the only national paper is a cheap tabloid in broadsheet form, wider perspective is lacking. Most Australian newspapers ignore developments in other States, except at election time or when there is a crisis. Questions of larger significance are ignored. The cities are far apart and communication is difficult. It is not just a matter of technology, but of time and money for most people—the cost of travel and STD calls. One reflection of isolation is the lack of a national approach or perspective. Most 'national' associations work primarily through a publication, a conference and through correspondence and telephone calls between members of their executive.

South Australians' sense of time and place, of past and present and of horizons beyond the State demonstrates the costs of localism and of a theatrical sense of the past. Low South Australian membership of national associations (from Australian literature to public administration organisations) poses questions about isolation. Is the 'city state' of Adelaide/South Australia off the beaten track? Is it too close to be exotic but not far enough away for its people to have the thirst for wider contacts found in Perth and Hobart? It is difficult from an Eastern States perspective to really know. In the era of Bicentennial trumpeting, questions of regional and national self-awareness are important. What is clear is that popular local activities flourishing at the expense of parochialism, are an essential part of an Australian critical self-awareness.

Stephen Alomes teaches at Deakin University. *He wishes to thank Ken Elford and Victor Korobacz for their comments.*

BRIAN SHEEDY

Street Stories 1

Calling in the Experts

I call this my Florentine house. Nothing in it is from Florence and Fitzroy is a long way from the Arno but it has an austere facade built right to the street, an ornate front door and that warm apricot-colored render I associate with Florence. It is chipped and cracked, like over-used sandpaper, its color and texture eroded in places by the elements and by countless comings and goings. The north wall has been bleached to a dusty beige by years of sun and rain and, when the fierce summer winds rake it, sand fizzes across the kitchen roof below. On hot mornings I turn the corner into the deep shadow of the shady side and think for a moment that I can smell the cool quarry mustiness of a back street near the Uffizi.

"Another scorcher by the look of it, Kev." Les and Smokey are just setting out on their morning round in search of diversions from the tedium of old age. Bad-tempered old Les with only his dog left to bully.

"This was always the coolest spot in the street, you know." Les was born and raised in the cottage two doors down; he has never lived anywhere else.

"We used to play here all day in summer; hop-scotch and alleys and flip-card, up against this wall." Boisterous young Les whooping through the dusty streets in short pants.

"Can you remember if that stain was there then, Les?"

"Stain? Where?"

He spits in preparation for the challenge, bends the knees and shuffles as though about to take up a heavy load and squints along the line from my outstretched finger to the corner of the house. There he sees, for the first time, my ominous stain.

"What? That?" There's a faint note of ridicule in his voice. "You mean that dark patch?"

That dark patch, the one the local oracle is so dismissive of, is my ominous stain and it caused me months of anxiety. It must be dampness, I would worry; it's underground water rising up at the corner to destroy the most perfect example of Fitzroy-Florentine architecture in existence. The slight mustiness I smell on this corner isn't Florence but water-logged plaster and render and hand-made bricks that will shortly crumble like sand-castles. History will condemn me for not having identified the cause and taken swift action to save this priceless part of our nineteenth-century heritage.

"That's nothing," Les concludes after a brief examination and a couple of reflective spits. "That'd be where they done the footpaths and got it with the spray when they lifted it coming to the corner." He swings his arms up in an arc and delivers a long, technical lecture on the design and construction of the suburban footpath.

"Careless bastards they were too," he remembers. "Put tar everywhere."

But I am not convinced and continue to fret about my menacing mark until finally I pay an expert to solve its mysteries. With a clever blend of history, technology and building science he constructed an implausible explanation which linked the construction of the footpaths with alterations to ventilation flows and changes in the water table. The replacement of the floors had something to do with it, too.

"No worries", he assures me but I go on worrying just the same, except that now I didn't have to worry alone.

On the other three corners are houses identical to mine—solid, unadorned, two-storey boxes. Like bookends, we hold up the rows of small terraces that stretch away to the next street. Two had been painted but the third, like mine, was still in the rendered state. It had an identical stain in the identical place, right on the corner and tapering down to the footpath. This was Leo's house. Like me he was a newcomer to the street and a recent recruit to home restoration but, apart from our ominous stains, we had nothing in common. Leo scoffed at my so-called expert and went one better—he called in a consultant who, Leo said, frequently advised the National Trust.

We waited in a sweat of anticipation as he scoured the house, inside and out, with meters and instruments in a high-tech quest for the origin of the stain. After hours of pains-taking probing, electronic beepings and digital read-outs, he announced, formally and without emotion, the verdict.

"Oxidization."

Sunken into the footpath, right on the corner outside each of our houses is a concrete pit for servicing telephone cables. Those cables, the consultant said, are coated with lead and zinc which give off small amounts of gas; the gas gradually deposits a stain.

Leo rang the telephone company immediately and demanded some action. A technical adviser came, pulled the lid off the pit and invited Leo to inspect.

"Half-full of water, mate. They're all like that around here; it's underground water. Anyway we haven't used lead-coating for fifteen years and the zinc

oxides are white. What you have, mate, is a dampness problem."

Leo threw away the consultant's bill, made a number of threatening phone calls and charged off on a new tack. He brushed aside my scepticism.

"If anyone can find damp, it's a damp house expert."

This time there was no technology and no history either; just a ragged hole in the beautiful Baltic floor, a lump of plaster the size of a card table out of the wall and a disappointed tradesman. Not even a smudge of damp.

"A man ought to sue the bastard," Leo said.

"What for?"

I didn't know Leo very well then. I was to discover that he would rank highly in any list of World's Most Litigious Persons. Leo's way of seeing the world was through the pages of a legal encyclopaedia. Leo was legal-trained and, like a punch-drunk boxer, he had become a danger to himself and a worrying joke to the rest of the world. Leo's way of dealing with a neighbor's car always illegally parked on 'his' footpath was to take out a Supreme Court writ—or perhaps it was a restraining order. He sacked his architect after only three weeks and they took each other to court for the next three years. He came home one lunchtime, saw a deep excavation where his 'unsympathetic' concrete kitchen floor had been and sacked the contractor on the spot. The downpour that night filled it knee-deep with water and work ceased for three weeks while it dried out. The contractor had planned to back-fill it that afternoon.

"What for? For taking money under false pretences, that's bloody what for!" Leo would have preferred the damp to paying someone for not finding any. We were leaning on his wall in the morning sun, worrying about our stains. We examined them again looking for the clue that must be there. Leo ached to put one in the witness box where, under oath and the force of his brilliant cross-examination, it would surrender the secrets of its origin. We crossed from one to the other, then to the painted houses on the other two corners, trying to penetrate their many coats of gloss for evidence that they too might have born the cursed stained.

That's where Les and Smokey discovered us. Les beamed at his good fortune in bagging a pair this early on a Sunday morning, wriggled his back contentedly against the wall and cleared his throat productively; Smokey assumed the all-suffering air of a child of talkative parents in the main street on shopping day.

Walking and talking were all Les did these days, and the home renovators moving into the area were his prime targets. With seventy years of living in the street and a working life spent wholly in the building game, Les could have taught us a lot. But he preferred to lecture us and make long-winded speeches, so we dodged him.

"I told this stupid bastard you don't paint these houses. Look at that—peeling off already! Can't tell these bastards anything. Look, I've been in the building game all . . ."

Smokey, who had heard it all before, strolled across the street towards the shade. He paused at my ominous stain, sniffed, turned sideways and directed a short, sharp stream of piss over it.

"How much does a dog piss in one go do you reckon, Les?"

"Eh?"

Les wasn't happy with any sudden twist in the conversation unless he initiated it. He spat, flexed his knees and narrowed his eyes into a squint.

"Couldn't be much, they're pissing all the bloody time."

Say a dog pisses a couple of tea-spoons every time, more for a big dog, less for a little dog.

"I suppose there used to be a lot more dogs around here once, Les?"

"Dogs . . .?"

Les warmed to the new theme.

"Dogs everywhere once, everyone had a dog. And you talk about dog fights! Jeez, I seen some . . ."

Say twenty dogs a day used to piss on my corner. That would be a glass full of piss pouring daily down that warm apricot render.

"Do dogs piss more in winter than in summer, Les?"

But Les had had enough of this line of questioning and doddled off towards Brunswick Street.

I tried to picture it—one and a half litres a week, fifty-two weeks of the year.

"What's 75 litres in gallons, Leo?"

Leo had once taken a car manufacturer to court because his car didn't get the fuel consumption they claimed. He didn't hesitate.

"Sixteen and a half."

Every year for over a century, a bath full of it, spreading out, seeping down, soaking in.

"Leo, do you reckon if you trickled a couple of thousand gallons of dog piss over that wall it would leave a stain?"

"Well it would leave a terrible bloody . . . do you reckon that's what it is?"

We stomped over to re-open the case.

"One hundred and ten years, Leo. One hundred and ten years of dogs pissing on our corners. That's what it is all right. And it's not Florence that I can smell on hot mornings, it's dog piss."

"That's probably what it is in Florence as well," Leo retorted, and just to prove he was a bloody Philistine he painted his house gloss white.

books

Looking Back and Around

John Douglas Pringle

C. J. Koch: *Crossing the Gap: A Novelist's Essays* (Chatto and Windus, $29.95 and $12.95).

It is encouraging to find so well-established and highly praised a novelist as Christopher Koch writing a book of essays. There was a time, in the eighteenth century, when essays rivalled poetry as the highest branch of English literature. They maintained their prestige throughout the nineteenth century, reaching their peak, as some would hold, with Hazlitt. Even in the first quarter of this century essays or, more correctly, essayists clung on to their position, though threatened both by the rising popularity of the novel and the decline of the leisurely reviews which had offered them space. When I was young there were still plenty of essayists writing in England—Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton, Bernard Shaw and others—though some of them began to write more and more about less and less. (I remember buying three volumes of G.K.C. with the ominous titles, if I remember correctly, "On Everything", "On Something" and "On Nothing".) But after the Second World War the art of the essay seemed to have disappeared.

In these essays Koch has returned to the nineteenth century model. They are serious essays, each with a recognisable subject and all linked by the theme of the young Australian writer growing up in Australia and trying to reconcile the spiritual and cultural conflicts within him. But they are far from dull. Written in that excellent, cool, detached style, which has impressed so many critics and which is, I believe, a mark of considerable intellectual power, they range over a wide variety of books, people and places. They deal with England, India and California as well as with Australia. One at least is very amusing. "Maybe It's Because I'm a Londoner" describes his first visit to London as a young man, his mind filled with the images left on his mind by Dickens and Conan Doyle. He was not disappointed. His first experiences, first friends and first jobs are all described with a delicate sympathy and humor, but when he found a job in the Hearts of Oak Insurance Company at Euston "the last edges of the world of Dickens closed even more firmly about me". This is a delicious piece of writing.

Koch's first visit to California, where he enrolled at the Stanford University Writing Center, could hardly have been a greater contrast. It was in 1960 at the height of the Beat generation. He was introduced to Ken Kesey's parties out at Palo Alto, where the guests were offered marijuana and LSD as well as cheap California wine, and listened to their host, "padding with an athlete's quickness in jeans and snickers among his guests", apparently unaffected by drugs and conveying "an illicit and chuckling promise". Koch tried pot but wisely rejected the notion that drugs could provide a short cut to vision for a writer. But his portrait of Kesey and his analysis of Hermann Hesse's influence on a whole generation of young Americans makes "California Dreaming" perhaps the best essay in the book.

Koch seems to me at his best when writing about books and places. There is an exquisite essay on his own island of Tasmania, and I agree wholly with him when he says that "Geography is the great hidden shaper of history and character. The essence in landscape and climate will always impose itself on the human spirit, and especially the writer's spirit, more finally and insidiously than anything else, in the end."

I am less happy when he ventures into more metaphysical realms. It seems to me unfortunate that the first essay, which gives the book its title, should also be the weakest. In this Koch describes his first experience of Indonesia and India on his way to England. Koch is a Catholic with a rather un-Catholic

sympathy for other religions. He read the "Bhagavad-Gita" on the ship going to India and was all too ready to fall for the heady mysteries of Hinduism. The myths and complex theology of Hinduism, especially the goddess Durga-Kali, may well have provided him as a novelist with a symbolism which can be used with great effect in imaginative writing. But I find it hard to swallow his conclusion that "Australia and India, in at least one way, might be akin in spirit. Australians might well become the Hindus of the south." This, frankly, seems nonsense. Nor am I impressed by his other argument that because Indians too—or at least some of them—are Indo-Europeans who originated in the Northern Hemisphere and suffered under British imperialism we are "brothers under the skin".

Fortunately most of the arguments in this first essay are contradicted by a later and wiser essay. In "The Lost Hemisphere" he warns young Australians against trying to cast off their European inheritance even though they are no longer "little duplicate Englishmen". "It would be just as foolish for us to discard our European inheritance as it would be (say) for an Indonesian to discard the Koran or the Hindu myths." And again, "It's a glibness which tries to throw out the European inheritance which is our greatest cultural treasure, and which also treats with foolish complacency the diverse and rich Asian cultures we seek to make connection with. The one cannot be lightly discarded; the other cannot instantly be put on". We shall learn to understand the nations of Asia only "when we recognise the fact that we have different cultural identities, accept the differences, and look for points of contact". This seems a great deal more sensible than imagining that we have some deep mystical bond or common origin, let alone dreaming of a resurrection in Australia of that "amoral and capricious divinity" known as Durga or Kali!

I do not usually indulge in nit-picking in reviews but I have one small nit to pick which seems to me representative of a certain woolliness in Koch's thought. He writes at one point of how Indonesia's "destiny was changed overnight" in 1965. But if you believe in destiny, then you must surely believe that all events are predestined, that is, pre-ordained. It is surely a contradiction for a destiny to change overnight. (In my own view destiny is simply what happens and is only recognised as such after the event.)

I say this only because I am slightly alarmed by Koch's evident admiration for such pseudo-philosophical writers as Dr Nor Hall, the author of "The Moon and the Virgin", who apparently advocates the revival of worship of the Mother Goddess, and the even more bogus Carlos Castaneda, who advocates "sophisticated witchcraft as an ethic and a way of life". It is something of a relief to find that Koch finally comes down on the side of Georges Bernanos' "The Diary of a Country Priest". Bernanos is a Catholic novelist, like Koch himself, whom even agnostics can respect.

John Douglas Pringle was twice editor of the Sydney Morning Herald. He is the author of Australian Accent *and other books.*

Unruly Activities

Kevin Hart

Imre Salusinszky: *Criticism in Society: Interviews with Jacques Derrida, Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, Frank Kermode, Edward Said, Barbara Johnson, Frank Lentriochia, and J. Hillis Miller* (Methuen, $52.95 and $23.95).

Literary criticism is an unruly activity. From the outside it looks like something in perpetual disorder, nothing but disagreements about which writers are better than others, what literature is, how it should be taught, and what criticism should be. And from the inside it is clear that, whatever it is, literary criticism is not a discipline: it has no definite rules to govern the interpretation of texts or even to say that it is interpretation rather than something else which should be the critic's business. Worse, literary criticism has no space of its own; it is forever looking to other disciplines—history, linguistics, philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis, sociology—to get a ready supply of concepts and vocabulary to talk about its supposed object of study: literature.

From a slightly different perspective, it seems that literary criticism is always drawn in two opposed directions. There is an impulse to define itself, to map out a proper area of study, to be professional. At the same time, criticism wants to involve everything outside itself, both in the academy and society, to live by its nerves, to be radically impure and frustrate any attempt to distinguish its inside from its outside. One historical consequence of this tension within criticism is that the more it follows the path of professionalism, the further removed it becomes from popular culture and society. Criticism tends to focus its energies and to succeed as an academic discipline when it detaches literature from its social and political context and frames it as an aesthetic object. Yet it is precisely here,

when literature is apparently divorced from society, that criticism is most effective in transmitting dominant ideologies. To question the reign of aesthetics on literature, to see poems, novels and plays as continuous with society, presupposes a commitment to other ideological positions. However one looks at it, then criticism is tightly linked to society, and to a vision of society.

In this admirable collection of interviews Imre Salusinszky is preoccupied with two main questions. The first question seems very broad—What is the relation between criticism and society?—certainly broad enough to contain the second: What is the relation between criticism and the university? As the book develops, though, it becomes apparent that the second question encompasses the first. For criticism chiefly takes place within the university, where its relation to society is already firmly structured by the venerable belief in the disinterested search for knowledge. It is this idea of the university, Frank Lentricchia tells us, which "forcibly separates literature from difference—sexual, political, and social"; and it is exactly this notion of difference which, in various ways, concerns nearly all the critics assembled here. Those critics with a leaning towards marxism or feminism value a heterogeneity in literary studies, the widening of the canon to include works by blacks and women, and the consideration of the material structures which produce and legitimate literature. Critics drawn towards deconstruction seek to show that apparent differences between texts turn out to be suppressed differences within those texts. And Harold Bloom, who delights in not fitting into any school, stresses the individual's absolute difference from everyone else: "There is no social dimension to what we do . . . Criticism is as solitary as lyric poetry".

Criticism in Society tells a number of stories. On one level it is the story of a poem, Wallace Stevens's late lyric "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself", as it travels from one critic to another in quest of its true meaning. Detached from its original context, the poem finds its meaning changed as it is read by critics of different persuasions, until it (and the reader) realises that it *has* no single, true meaning: its identity is constituted by those different interpretations. With the sole exception of Jacques Derrida, each critic comments on the poem, and since each reads the interviews with those who have gone before, the story gains in complexity as it proceeds. The book is also, perhaps, the story of eight critics' will to power over that same poem, the story of eight quests to pass beyond the borders of current critical discussion into the imagined true realm of criticism. This story is heavily ironic, though, for the poem turns out to prefigure its critics' interpretations, mediating, as it does, upon the shifting and illusive borders between the real and the unreal.

On another level *Criticism in Society* is the story of a young man, the interviewer, who is on a quest of self-discovery. A Fulbright Fellowship gives him the opportunity to make the Grand Tour of those great cultural centres, the major universities of North America. Here he meets the heroes of the age and tries to work out his own critical position in dialogue with them. At times it is hard not to think of James Boswell, leaving provincial Scotland to meet Dr Johnson and Garrick in London and then, in Europe, to interview Rousseau and Voltaire. Like Boswell, Salusinszky has a natural charm which enables him to move between the roles of the innocent outsider and the courtier. And like Boswell he has a penchant to confess his faults and a tendency to style himself in the interviewee's image. Who is Salusinszky's Dr Johnson, the great man of literary criticism? There can be no doubt: although Harold Bloom is the most Johnsonian figure in the collection, Salusinszky's hero is Northrop Frye. This is, after all, very much a book of heroes—the one woman interviewed, Barbara Johnson, is asked questions Salusinszky "didn't really have the guts" to ask Derrida.

If Frye's presence dominates much of the book, there are two absences whose force is nonetheless felt. The late Paul de Man, the most stringent of the Yale deconstructionists, orients much of what is talked of here, both by his admirers and detractors. Kenneth Burke's absence is also deeply felt, and it is a shame that there is no interview with that wonderful critic whose work, with its dual emphases on rhetoric and society, now seems to promise a mediation between deconstructionists and marxists, and whose career was pursued outside the university. Collections of interviews always involve an element of chance, and Salusinszky's chances led him to concentrate on East Coast critics, especially those associated with Yale University. A pity, all the same, that Jonathan Culler, Shoshana Felman, Stanley Fish, Fredric Jameson, Gayatri Spivak and Helen Vendler—all East Coast critics—do not appear in these pages; and still more of a pity that none of the new historicist critics (such as Stephen Greenblatt and Stephen Orgel), who live on the West Coast and whose theme is precisely 'criticism in society', are not interviewed.

Cavils aside, this is an eclectic and fascinating collection of interviews. It is not 'representative' of contemporary criticism, yet the specialist in literary theory will find new connections between different theoretical positions; the student or layperson will find a complex and important discourse made accessible without being simplified; and both will find it fresh, amusing and immensely readable.

The poet Kevin Hart is a Lecturer in Literary Studies at Deakin University. His monograph on Jacques Derrida, The Trespass of the Sign, *is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.*

Radical Interpretations

T. G. Parsons

Russel Ward: *Finding Australia. The History of Australia to 1821* (Heinemann, $29.95).

Russel Ward is the doyen of the radical nationalist school of Australian history. A victim of the local cold-war warriors who still advance their derivative overseas culture in Quadrant, he has been an accomplished teacher, an excellent editor and translator, and is the author of a seminal work on Australian life, *The Australian Legend*, which is still capable of evoking excitement and enthusiasm in undergraduates. He takes his history seriously; good history, in the sense that it is "unusually free of factual mistakes" (he writes in his latest preface), "will also usually possess all the riveting interest of a correctly itemised butcher's bill".

Finding Australia is the first volume of Ward's trilogy. Volume 3 was published in 1977 and Volume 2 is still to come. In this book Ward traces the settlement of Australia from the time the Australians, "the first human beings to cross oceanic depths between continents", arrived in this land until the time Governor Lachlan Macquarie, a sacrifice to British classical economic theory, left Sydney broken in health and spirit to face the hard men in London. Between these events there were many other voyages—Iberian, Dutch, English and French—and it is a mark of Ward's abilities that he makes these chapters, containing the stuff which convinced generations of Australian schoolchildren that Australian history was dull and boring, fresh and interesting. His first chapter is superb; now some of us know just how little we were taught two decades ago in Sydney's selective State schools. This is required reading for *all* Australians.

Ward's analysis of European settlement in Australia between 1788 and 1821 raises, however, serious questions of interpretation. "Butcher's bills" may not be riveting documents, but they are symbolic of the fact that early Australia is best understood by use of the economic interpretation of history. Sid Butlin said this in 1953; it is no less true today. By repeating the myths of Brian Fitzpatrick, ignoring two decades of work in the field by Shaw, Fletcher, Hainsworth, Schedvin and Noel Butlin, and ignoring the economy (there is no entry under "commissariat" in the index), Ward distorts the early European experience in this country. Here again are the myths of jack-booted New South Wales Corps officers, the all-powerful John Macarthur who could make and unmake governors, the oppression of small settlers, and—most surprising—an analysis of a revolt, based on a "monopoly" of rum, a monopoly which had ceased to exist at least five years before 1808.

There is a radical interpretation of early European Australia, but it is an interpretation grounded in the economic interpretation of history. It involves a detailed analysis of the commissariat and the exchange relationships between the public and private sectors, a study of agricultural and grazing settlement and technology, and a realization of the strength of the capitalist economy in Australia in, at least, the 1790s. Australian historians have consistently underestimated the privatisation of the convict colonies in the years before 1821. They have also failed to see that with the burgeoning private economy came the demand for a stronger state apparatus. It is a pity Marx did not know about early New South Wales; it fits his theories almost exactly.

I have serious problems with some chapters in this book, but this should not detract from Ward's achievements. This is a work which will make readers think and argue long after the ephemera of the bicentenary has been forgotten. Russel Ward challenges, stimulates and annoys. It is a pity that he has not turned his powerful intellect to the private sector of the economy. Capitalism came to Australia early; it deserves a role in Ward's trilogy. Marx's warning to the French working class is worth remembering; myth is no substitute for history. Mercantile capitalism in early Australia still awaits its historian.

George Parsons teaches Australian economic history at Macquarie University. His history of the New South Wales Corps is in preparation, and he has just completed a study of the commissariat in early New South Wales, to be published in 1988.

Benign Faith

John Carmody

Edmund Campion: *Australian Catholics* (Viking/Penguin, $19.95)

I believe that the author intends this book to be both more and less than history; more and less, that is to say, than scholarly history. Why *less*? Because I think (though I cannot test this surmise directly since, surprisingly, there is no preface) that he wants it to occupy a niche between ephemeral journalism and solid, academic history. *More*, therefore, because its popular style and light carriage of learning should ensure greater sales and readership than a more substantial work would enjoy.

The book, however, has an abundance of factual material, much of it newly re-discovered and of value to other historians. This fresh material is mostly contained in Campion's third chapter, "Years of Consolidation", which deals primarily with the 1930-1960 period; elsewhere, especially in his somewhat grandiloquently titled opening chapter, "A People becomes a Church", he is (correctly) happy to draw upon those more establishment sources whose history is what Campion calls "the view from the cathedral". Such indebtedness is surely inevitable after the work of Patrick O'Farrell and his school.

An illuminating history is, however, more than a concatenation of facts, even those which bring their warm, amusing or puzzling recollections. Each Catholic reader will have a personal response to all this stirring of the memory. I am reminded of my spinster aunts whose life blood was the CDA—the "Catholic Daughters of Australia"—whose tea-rooms at the Brisbane "Ekka" were the women's counterpoise to the bars of Michael T. Sullivan. I also recall the Children of Mary with their freshly-ironed, sky-blue cloaks and white frocks converging on our church (on a hill, naturally) for 7 o'clock mass on the third Sunday of every month: as I write this I am suddenly reminded that I have never asked my sisters what they felt about it all. I am sure that I am not the only male who has never asked.

Enjoyable as Campion's third chapter is, it seems to ask few questions. Is it more than disciplined nostalgia? History (even, or perhaps especially, popular history) must offer more. It surely must offer its readers at every level an idea, an interpretation, a concept. If they are here, they have eluded me. True, the author has a couple of cases to argue, but advocacy is a different matter. He believes, for instance, that the laity have been a driving force—perhaps *the* driving force—in Australian Catholicism: indeed, his opening sentence asserts this view.

I believe that the argument is unsustainable. The retention of pious practices by a priest-deprived populace is far from the ascendancy of moral authority assumed when priests are present. One has only to observe—in retrospect or in the present—the deference of laymen and women to priests and bishops who are their intellectual and moral inferiors (an inferiority which is especially obvious when it is women and bishops who are considered) to realise how specious this argument is.

Campion's advocacy of the significance of women—laywomen and nuns—is an utterly different matter and will, I believe, come to be seen as his major contribution in this book. Except as breeders and feeders, the women of Australia were invisible in the view from the Catholic cathedral, as they seem to be from the Anglican ones. That view from the cathedral was in the episcopal eye, which tends to be distorted by beams which seem sadly invisible to Campion. Such scant criticism that he has of the Australian bishops is extraordinarily muted, yet (with the plausible exception of Polding) there really is remarkably little that can be said in their favor. They have forcibly moulded the church, the influence of laymen such as B. A. Santamaria notwithstanding; when they have become significant public figures (Mannix is the pre-eminent example) it has usually been for specific political reasons, often born of an Irish hatred for England, rather than for particularly Catholic reasons or through the force of moral leadership. They have ensured, and this is my major criticism of Australian Catholicism (though it does not here concern Fr Campion, except in the most oblique sense) that the Australian church has been a true reflection of its society, and not at all a challenge or a lived-out critique.

Ours has been (and still largely is) an intolerant and anti-intellectual country: the Church has been the same. Indeed because of the massive defections of the last twenty years, the Church has remained in that condition. While the country has matured a little, it is difficult to discern a similar change in Catholicism. The Australian church has virtually no cultural or intellectual history to speak of (so Campion does not), and even less to be proud of, and a book on "the contribution of Catholics to the development of Australian society" needs to deal with this egregious problem.

I am not, of course, ignoring the vast and impressive development of the Australian Catholic school system—which Campion does deal with interestingly—nor indeed the numerous Catholic colleges in the universities, though in that matter Campion might have tempered his portrait of Patrick Francis Moran with a comment on the Archbishop's bitter, spiteful animus towards St John's College (which H. M. Moran elaborates in *Viewless Winds*). One of the several scandals (in the ecclesiastical sense) of Australian Catholicism has been the pervasive view that there is no place in it for intellectuals. In consequence, the recent price in lost priests has been extraordinarily high. An indifference to creative art is another facet of this character defect and, though Campion alludes to difficulties with the Blake Prize, a man of his sensibilities and taste might have been expected to say rather more on the general question.

Perhaps I have been too hard on this unfailingly interesting book. I had hoped, even in the popular work, for a more generous glimpse of the author's vision. I am conscious of Manning Clark's closing words in the final volume of his great history: "It is the task of the historian and the myth-maker to tell the story of how the world came to be as it is. It is the task of the prophet to tell the story of what might be." Campion may demur at being cast in the exalted

role of myth-maker, yet the optimism of his account, especially the confidence in the future as revealed in his peroration, does more than suggest the role of prophet.

It is, however, an optimism that I cannot share, nor did a pessimistic Patrick O'Farrell in his 1985 re-issue of *The Catholic Church and Community*, or Fr Paul Collins in *Mixed Blessings* (1986) share it. I recognise that a priest who has tenaciously stuck with his church must be sanguine to survive and cope with official oppugnancy; Campion is not necessarily wrong, therefore, in being optimistic, but I'd like a more cogent case. History—even for a mass readership—is a philosophical activity, and the popular writer must take care to avoid over-supplying the sugar coating at the risk of skimping on the nourishing and transforming kernel.

John Carmody teaches in physiology at the University of New South Wales.

What is seen remains: a poet's farewell

Barrett Reid

Douglas Stewart: *Garden of Friends* (Viking $24.95).

Meg Stewart writes in an Afterword to this beautiful book:

> My father wrote his diary *Garden of Friends* in the last year of his life. He was too frail to leave the house much. So frail, in fact, he had to hand-write the diary. Hitting the keys of his typewriter was too exhausting, he said. His desk in a room at the back of the house was perfectly positioned for keeping an eye on the garden even if he wasn't out in it. The garden had become his outside world.

Douglas Stewart died on 15 February 1985, only a few weeks after he had finished this diary. His books are many. There is general agreement that his best poems are among the most beautiful lyrics of our time. In his later years Overland published some of them and it is remarkable how clearly they have remained with me. In these late lyrics a highly formal word music of natural speech rhythms served an acute and original vision of the objective world. That world was not only 'landscape' or 'birds' (though these were memorable) but somehow, even if in many of these there were no people, there was always a sense of a peopled landscape. And sometimes, of course, as in "The Mother Superior" (Overland 65), wondering for a light-hearted moment if "it was all a have", the human figure dominated memorably.

This easy intermixing of man with all the other products of the earth, where the integrity of plant, animal or insect was not humanised, was a special quality of all Douglas Stewart's writing. What he saw *was* a human world: his honesty made that inescapable, but never did he sentimentalise what he saw. His enjoyment of the visible world came not only from his knowledge of knowledge's limitations but from a passionate desire for accuracy and detail.

All of this comes together in what must be one of the finest farewell pieces in our literature: an unpretentious, superbly crafted, diary of the mundane, the comic and the tragic events traced by a pair of eyes as sharp as a tack, as wondering as a five-year-old, in a suburban garden at St Ives, Sydney.

I opened by calling this book beautiful. I meant the spirit, the craft, the unusual discoveries of a poet who could see. But I also meant that this is a fine-looking book, meticulously produced on good large pages and splendidly illustrated by the painter Margaret Coen, whose best known paintings have been of flowers. She, of course, as the co-creator of the garden and wife of the poet, was a perfect choice as illustrator. Here she gives us innumerable drawings of the bush, the garden and its creatures. I particularly enjoyed a stubby blunt drawing, uncompromising, of a green tree frog. And she is splendid on ants.

Many a writer, such as Densey Clyne in *The Garden Jungle*, has reminded us how populated and dramatic is the suburban garden for those with time to be still and informed enough to look in the right way at the right time. But no one has brought this so vividly to life as Douglas Stewart. 24th March: "Raining! Snails don't eat parsley, but they love its dry seed-heads."

How many of us knew that? But the surprise and freshness of that observation is repeated on every page. The most magical, such as the story of the nesting white-eared honeyeaters and their stealing of human hair, too well written to be sliced by a brief quotation.

Another charm of this involved but undisturbing observer is his acceptance of the unexpected beauty of the commonplace if seen at a slightly different angle, an angle such as that of a bower-bird:

> Rain all night, and a blowy, rainy, grey day. I take note of one blue plastic clothes peg on the line over the back lawn.

The poet notes that we tend to despise such bric-a-brac but, learning from the bower-bird, he reminds us that "the blue *is* beautiful when you look at it detachedly or abstractly, so maybe the bird is the true connoiseur after all."

For Meg Stewart this is the most poignant of her

father's prose books "because it is so like the man we knew talking". This makes it the most companionable of books but the ease, the effortless good manners, of the prose cannot, of course, be seen as artless. The firm control, the freshness of each sentence, the mixture of so many different shades, is the work of a mature artist.

Beyond that what strikes me most is the nobility of spirit with which Douglas Stewart created and loved the world about him as he grew towards his close. The sense of what was happening to him is hardly mentioned but, somehow, it is clearly present. It is accepted without fuss and the poet goes on with his business: of seeing, of sharing, of remembering, of celebrating.

Here is a book to keep and treasure. Buy a second copy: you will certainly want one to give away.

Barrett Reid is a poet who has written extensively on art.

A Woman Who Did

Elizabeth Webby

Helen Thomson (ed.): *Catherine Helen Spence* (University of Queensland Press, $14.95).

In 1905 Catherine Helen Spence celebrated her eightieth birthday. By then the woman who had arrived in Adelaide in 1839 as a teenager was a South Australian institution. A brief account of her birthday celebrations can be found in Spence's *Autobiography*, first published in 1910. Another glimpse is given in a letter from S. J. Way, then Chief Justice of South Australia, to the Melbourne literary man, H. G. Turner. Way noted how he had spoken in praise of Spence's achievements as a novelist, comparing her works with those of Jane Austen. Later, "The dear old lady whispered to me, 'but I cover more ground than Jane Austen.' "

Just how much ground Spence did cover is well suggested in this new volume in the University of Queensland Press's Portable Australian Authors series. As with most of the earlier volumes, the cornerstone here is a reprinted novel, Spence's first and best-known, *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever*, from 1854. The influence of Austen is apparent in Spence's delight in exposing social pretension and pricking pomposity, as in this little pen-portrait of Clara's uncle, with which the novel opens:

> Mr. Morison was a grave, respectable looking man, between forty and fifty, who had a handsome house, and saw a good deal of company, in a fashionable street in Edinburgh. He had a delicate and rather *exigeante* wife and seven children, to whom he was as much attached as he could be to anything; but living up to his income, he felt that the recent death of his brother, leaving him two penniless girls to provide for was a dreadful calamity; and it was in order, as he thought, to do the best for them with the least possible inconvenience to himself, that he sent for his nieces on this memorable morning. He did not like to be opposed in anything, and both of the young ladies knew it.

Clara is persuaded to go to Australia where, her uncle is assured, she will speedily make a good match. Unable to get a post as a governess—much less a husband—when she arrives in Adelaide, Clara is forced to work as a housemaid. Spence's description of Clara's difficulty in mastering such unaccustomed work shows an ironic awareness of the differences between real life and fiction which is again reminiscent of Austen:

> When young ladies in novels are set to any work to which they are unaccustomed, it is surprising how instanteously they always get over all the difficulties before them. They row boats without feeling fatigued, they scale walls, they rein in restive horses, they can lift the most ponderous articles, though they are of the most delicate and fragile constitutions, and have never had such things to do in their lives.
>
> It was not so with Clara, however. She found the work dreadfully hard, and by no means fascinating; and though she was willing and anxious even to painfulness, the memory that had tenaciously kept hold of hard names and dates, which her father had trusted to as to an encyclopaedia, seemed utterly to fail her in recollecting when saucepans were to be put on and taken off, and every day brought the same puzzling uncertainty as to how plates and dishes were to be arranged at the breakfast and dinner-table . . .

But, it goes without saying, none of Austen's heroines would ever have found themselves placed in such a situation. Spence therefore "covers more ground" not only in the literal sense of taking her heroine across the seas to Australia, but in taking her across class boundaries as well. Like Austen's novels, *Clara Morison* is conventionally romantic in its plot structure—Clara meets her destined husband early in

the novel but many obstacles have to be overcome before they can wed—he is engaged to another, she has become a servant, and so on. Spence did not, however, see marriage as the only possible way of life for a woman. Clara's cousin, Margaret Elliot, usually seen as Spence's self-portrait, is content to live as a spinster, helping her brother with his legal studies and writing letters to the papers under his name.

Spence's own entry to journalism occurred in much the same way. Before long, however, she was to become a regular and prolific contributor to many leading Australian magazines and newspapers, including the Australasian, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Melbourne Review, the Victorian Review and, especially, Adelaide's own Register and Observer. Though she wrote another five novels after *Clara Morison* (one of which, *Handfasted*, was published for the first time in 1984, also edited by Helen Thomson), Spence gradually turned more and more to journalism. As she noted in her *Autobiography*:

> I found journalism a better paying business for me than novel writing, and I delighted in the breadth of the canvas on which I could draw my sketches of books and of life. I believe that my work on newspapers and reviews is more characteristic of me, and intrinsically better work than what I have done in fiction; but when I began to wield the pen, the novel was the line of least resistance. When I was introduced in 1894 to Mrs Croly, the oldest woman journalist in the United States . . . I found that her work, though good enough, was essentially woman's work, dress, fashions, functions, with educational and social outlooks from the feminine point of view. My work might show the larger questions which were common to humanity; and when I recall the causes which I furthered, and which in some cases I started, I feel inclined to magnify the office of the anonymous contributor to the daily press.

Helen Thomson has chosen to reprint just over half of Spence's *Autobiography*, together with a further ninety pages of her journalism, lectures and sermons. While not necessarily agreeing with Spence that her journalism was "intrinsically better" than her fiction, for me this less familiar material was the real highlight of the book.

Thomson gives a good idea of the range of Spence's non-fiction, grouping it in sections entitled "Literary Comment", "Social and Legal Reform", "Politics" and "Religion". The writing in the section on "Social and Legal Reform" is particularly striking, with "Marriage Rights and Wrongs", originally published in the Register on 15 July 1878, still having much relevance for today. Though some of the issues Spence raises, such as the need to make divorce easier, have been resolved, many others have not. The battered wives, too afraid of their husbands to complain of their mistreatment, and the difficulty of enforcing maintenance payments, are unfortunately as much of a problem as they were 110 years ago. Here, as elsewhere in her writing, Spence shines out as someone who values logic and reason, though never at the expense of human compassion. While very much a woman of her age, she had a clear perception of how her age could be improved. Her optimistic belief in progress is perhaps best seen in her lecture on "Heredity and Environment", delivered to the Criminological Society of South Australia on 23 October 1897, which begins: "The many-sided problems of this age cannot be solved by going back even to the greatest masters of thought in olden times."

Though we may be no longer able to share Spence's optimism, her life and work remain an inspiration. As well as being one of Australia's first woman journalists—and one, as we've seen, who resisted relegation to "women's issues"—she was one of the first women to lecture in public. She was also South Australia's first woman preacher: Helen Thomson includes an extract from the first of over a hundred sermons Spence was to preach between 1878 and 1908. Despite her highly successful invasion of previously all-male preserves, Spence did not undervalue domestic work, writing in "Some Social Aspects of South Australian Life", also from 1878,

> Perhaps in time people may come to see that driving a pen over creamlaid notepaper and writing a nice little note is no more dignified than driving a smoothing-iron over linens and laces; that cooking a dinner so as to get the best meal for a family with the least waste is as intelligent a thing as defining the chemical constituents of meat, bread, and other eatables; that keeping a house clean and tidy is as good a work of art as making an indifferent drawing of it, and that the arrangements great and small which conduce to the comfort of a family every day and all day long, may require as much thought, and call forth as much talent as is required for the composition of one-half of our popular literature. So long as these things are looked on as inferior and only fit for what we are too apt to call "the lower orders" they will be done in an inferior manner. It is only by upholding the dignity of the work that the workers gain self-respect.

This is also, in part, the message of *Clara Morison*, where the Elliot girls do their own housework and where Clara learns that being a servant is no easy matter. An analogy might be drawn with the literary world, where we are slowly beginning to realise that a fine piece of journalism can be as good a work of art as an indifferent poem. This would not have been news to Catherine Helen Spence. Helen Thomson must

be congratulated for her thorough editing and thoughtful selection and, particularly, for making so much of Spence's non-fiction as well as her fiction available to us.

Elizabeth Webby is an Associate Professor in English at Sydney University. She has recently edited, with Lydia Wevers, Happy Endings, *an anthology of short stories by women from Australia and New Zealand, 1850-1930.*

Exotic Flowering

Ninette Dutton

Kate Llewellyn: *The Waterlily* (Hudson, $19.95).

When you first pick up *The Waterlily* you are not quite certain what is in store for you. The word 'memoir', which was popular earlier this century, seems to have fallen into disfavor, but it could well apply to *The Waterlily*. The book is a journal which follows Kate Llewellyn's life through the course of a year, and which is treated as a friend in whom she confides. The reader becomes one with the journal and is party to the confidences and must respond to the trust, even if at times wondering whether it might be possible to speak up with a dissenting word or two.

Kate Llewellyn says: "I have lots of friends but I need intimacy," and this she establishes in the course of the journal. She takes the world into her life. As the book progresses you come to meet her friends, recognise their names and tastes, and she speaks of them less formally as the year goes by, as though realising that you have come to know each other better. They are the characters who flesh out the story.

Keeping a diary becomes addictive. Every experience is seen as possible food for the next episode, and you resent the occasions when there is no opportunity to record the day's important moments, as the author finds. "Coming indoors I realised this journal has become like a lover who takes time away from work. A secret vice. An illicit passion. There's never anything more delicious."

Often the smallest occurrence in real life can be more remarkable and bizarre than those in any novel, but in this book it is usually the most everyday happenings which provide the excitement, enticing the reader to finish just one more page. You must find out whether the tulips have flowered yet. A journal unfolds as a story because life itself can't stop, but no-one, not even the writer, knows the ending, so everyone has to press on to see what happens next. Kate Llewellyn carries us briskly along with her in her zest for all she undertakes.

The book is divided into months, starting in September, in spring, with just a few entries. The author is living at Leura in the Blue Mountains and making her garden when the story begins. The garden is one of the continuing themes of the book, with detailed accounts of the plants and their health. Like so many devoted gardeners she finds that she seems to have a personal feeling, not only for those flowers in her own garden, but for some of those from the nurseryman's as well. Once, having just returned home from the shops, she feels obliged to leap on her bicycle and rush back to the town to rescue some punnets of wilting seedlings she has noticed at the store. Though money is desperately short, a magnolia tree becomes a more urgent need than any more prosaic article. A clematis coming into flower can lift her spirits immediately, and ours with them. However, a supply of good manure for the garden also gives her the greatest satisfaction, and she is not so romantically-minded that a cheque from the publisher does not have the same effect. Her knowledge of the difficult sides of life comes out in some cool, clear comments: "So often in life, the thing you have most longed for only arrives after you have ceased caring."

The book is also a love story, not always a happy one, and there is no easy culmination. There is even a hint of a sinister black side. The waterlily of the title is one in her pond which is noticed early in the journal by her lover, who comes to be known as Mr Waterlily, and the affair, with its joys and heartbreaks, has a parallel in the life of the yellow waterlily. Love of many kinds is much in Kate Llewellyn's thoughts and she is not afraid to talk about it, in a way which many people cannot bring themselves to do. She poses an important question: "Do some people need more love than others?"

Her children give her great joy. "Caroline has been staying here while I was away. I can feel her presence. Even to be where she has been makes me happy."

The birds, bower birds and currawongs in her garden, the mountains, the trees on the mountains, the mists and the moon all add richness to her life. Reading all sorts of books, including poetry, is a necessity.

On Sunday 20 July she says "An almost full moon is hanging like a baroque pearl round the sky's throat on a chain of stars."

It is a baroque book, with rococo trimmings.

One of the pleasures of the journal is the author's enjoyment of cookery and good eating, and she is generous enough to share her favorite recipes, some going back to those her mother taught her during her

girlhood in the little town of Tumby Bay in South Australia. She declares that she is addicted to picnics, and it is accounts of these and pleasant walks and long friendly meals which are a part of the book she had intended as "a calm and soothing book" one, though eventually she decides that it is not possible to make it completely so. She talks of those things which she considers "the best things to do", making a fire, cooking and bathing a baby amongst them, and she concludes that, above all, we must have faith. "Without that we have no hope and without hope we cannot live." Yet in another place she points out that we often have to be satisfied with something less than we had aimed at in our highest hopes. Her sense of tough reality is always there as well as her sense of humor.

An underlying knowledge of reality, of the sparest essence of what they are writing about is vital for poets, and Kate Llewellyn is basically a poet. This is at once apparent in *The Waterlily*. It is not only that she refers constantly to writing poems, clearly a prolific compulsion with her, but she has a poet's eye and imagination which inform her work at every point. She talks of the use of words and writing being "a game of cards played by one."

She knows all the guilt which besets writers when they are not actually at their desks setting down words, but are simply taking in and appreciating the world. She herself manages to fill in many of those moments with activities rewarding in themselves and ultimately enhancing her poetry. During the year of the journal she finishes editing *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets* with Susan Hampton.

Early in the book she says that critics "must add a quibble or two" and here I must add my own. There are too many mistakes in the varied spelling of plant names and of other words, in a book which is otherwise beautifully produced.

In the end she can scarcely bear to part from her journal, her friend, the one who knows her secrets, and the reader, also, is reluctant to go away alone. It is a hopeful book. Anyone who takes the trouble to plant a garden must believe in the future.

Among Ninette Dutton's books is Portrait of a Year (1976). *She lives at Williamstown, South Australia.*

The Ports that Passed

Don Charlwood

Neilma Sidney: *Journey to Mourilyan: A Coastal Pilgrimage* (Dent, $24.95).

By sea Europeans came to Australia; by sea they colonised her. Then the country's coastal settlements were linked by ships and for 150 years ships remained the life-line between the new world and the old. Until as late as the 1960s immigration was by ship, and by ship those who could afford to do so visited the lands of their forebears.

The end came first to the coastal trade. Rail and road transport, then piston-engined aircraft finished the small ships. Next, jet travel became established and the journey to Europe was reduced from five weeks to less than two days. The long era of passenger-carrying by sea was over.

Neilma Sidney is one of the many of her generation who feel the passing of the maritime days keenly; now, as she puts it, "the sea is for a holiday, boating is for pleasure." *Journey to Mourilyan* is her account of a 'seventies pilgrimage to the smaller ports around the mainland coast—perforce by land—to find what life is like in them today. Sometimes she drove with her dog as sole companion; sometimes she had a friend with her; occasionally she picked up hitch-hikers. Port Lincoln, Port Hedland, Broome, Eden, Port Stephens, Gladstone; in all she visited nearly thirty ports. Some of them are now shadows of their former selves; others have taken on new life as outlets for harvests not dreamed of years ago. Tuna, prawns and crayfish are exported by the tonne from Port Lincoln, Geraldton, Exmouth, Eden. In Twofold Bay the savage hunting of whales has been replaced by a flow of pulpwood to Japan in hundreds of thousands of tonnes. At Port Hedland the 165,000 tonne Chikumasan Maru set a record in loading 125,000 tonnes of iron-ore pellets in eighteen hours.

Her master remarked, "During the war we tried to take this country from you. But we did not succeed. Now we take it bit by bit."

They are taking it more gradually than we Anglo-Saxons took the country from the Aboriginals, but perhaps they are taking it just as irrevocably.

There is much more to Neilma Sidney's long pilgrimage than today's commerce; there is rich history—tales of Chinese landings at Robe and their long jog to the Victorian goldfields; memories of grain races in the 'twenties and 'thirties when Finnish windjammers loaded at Port Lincoln; evocation of remote places (Broome transmuted by moonlight and alcohol and an Aboriginal rock band is especially vivid); descriptions of idiosyncratic characters fetched up on various tropic beaches.

Neilma Sidney's love of the sea was fostered on the great yachts Kurrewa III and Kurrewa IV. She writes of them with great sensitivity:

> It was an immense experience to be on the open sea at night, within inches of it in the cockpit of Kurrewa IV, to be out, as I preferred, beyond the reach of the farthest beam of the strongest light-house in the soft sea-darkness, when the great cutter's mast moved against the stars and there was just the glow of the binnacle light, a cigarette, and the riding light on the mainstays.

She wrote once of such memories in Meanjin; I found myself wanting more of them here in *Journey to Mourilyan*, rather than enumeration of port facilities, but I daresay a balance had to be struck—and this is a land-based book, not a reminiscence of deep-water days. I came from it knowing much more of my country's smaller ports than I ever knew before. I shall want to re-read it before visiting any of them. But I hanker still for Neilma Sidney's masts moving against the stars.

Don Charlwood's books include No Moon Tonight, All the Green Years *and* An Afternoon of Time. *He lives in Melbourne, and has a special interest in the sea.*

Art for Everyman

Ella Ebery

John Yule: *The Living Canvas: Right and Wrong Roads into Art* (Melbourne University Press, $9.50).

"As there is a little of the artist in all of us, this book is written for whoever cares to pick it up."

So the author of *The Living Canvas* prefaces his book. He then proceeds to ensure that those who do pick it up will not want to put it down again.

This is no ordinary book about art and the artist. It must be unique in art books in Australia today.

It stimulates, informs, presents new perceptions and challenges old beliefs in a refreshingly clear, concise and entertaining style that all may understand and enjoy.

The author, John Yule, is a Melbourne-based artist who is one of the 'forties' group of artists which included the Boyds, Tucker, Nolan, Perceval, Douglas and others who challenged the world as young artists.

The book is the result of Yule's own philosophy as an artist, formed over his own life-time and, in later years, by his contact with art students struggling to find directions and understanding.

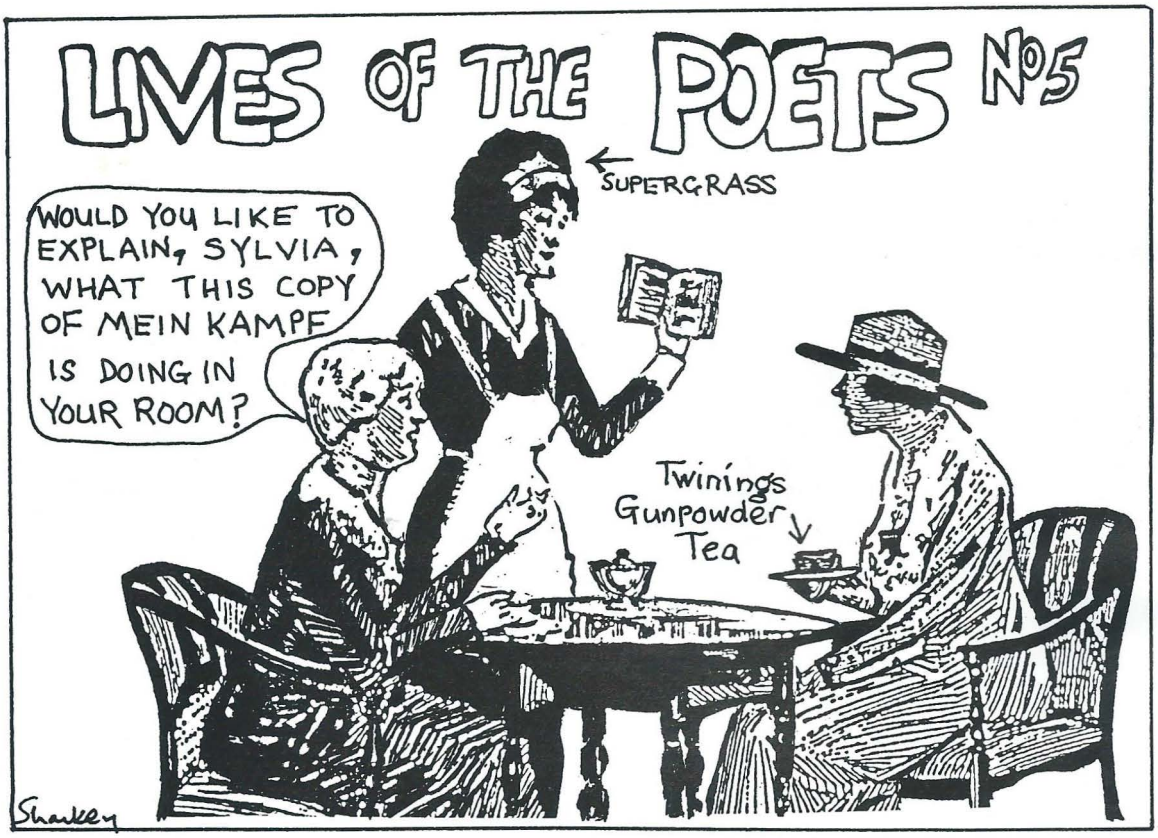
Yule blames the modern system of education and the modern conditions in which we live for the stifling of instinctive knowledge of Art that is born in us, "information buried in our nerve ends".

The book does make sense to the untutored who are looking for a guide. Suddenly things do make sense and instinctively we recognise and understand. For me it was as exciting as the "seeing the light" claimed in religious conversion.

Artist Neil Douglas has said of John Yule's work as an artist that he, alone, is painting in the spirit of the times, exemplifying the confusion, chaos and complexity of our era which people cannot bear to be reminded of.

This could also be said of *The Living Canvas*. The issues raised will not be popular with the 'establishment' in art circles. Art is complex, we are complex beings, and art's truths are not fixed, nor can they be proved. This entertaining and informative book is for the beginner in art as well as the experienced. Witty and provocative, it would make an excellent Christmas gift.

Ella Ebery is editor of a country newspaper, the North Central News. She is also a freelance writer and student painter, and lives at St Arnaud, Victoria.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