overland

FEATURES
STORIES
POETRY
$5

110

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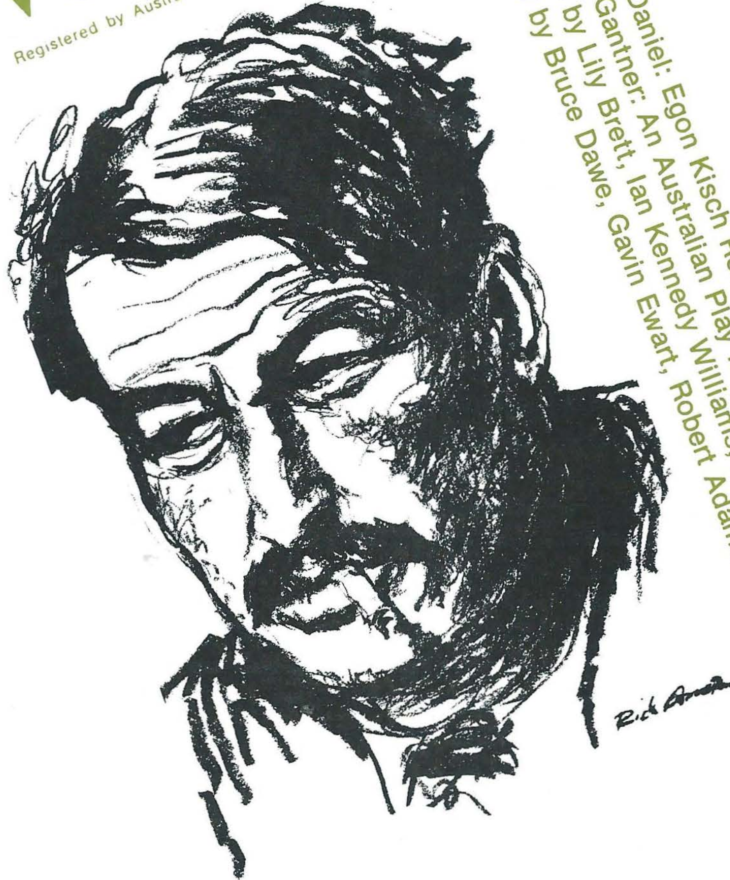
Howard Daniel: Egon Kisch Remembered
Carrillo Gantner: An Australian Play in China
Stories by Lily Brett, Ian Kennedy Williams, Andrew McDonald and Courtney Carpenter
Poetry by Bruce Dawe, Gavin Ewart, Robert Adamson, Dorothy Hewett, Frank Kellaway and others



VANE LINDESAY

COMPETITION

We asked for a Ballade of Complaint to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. None of the entries, unfortunately, combined the literary flourish and the satire of John Manifold in his poem on the same subject we printed in issue 108. The palm to Rosaleen Love for the entry printed below, honorable mentions to Peg Browne and Barbara Giles.

Song for the ABC

Skyward seek the satellite
Beaming down its rays
Earthbound twiddle with the dials
Seeking what it says.
Nothing happens! What surprise!
Void the ether, empty skies.

On strike again, their spirits broken
By the edicts from on high
"Toe the line and while you're at it
Sweep the floors. You'll have to hack it.
You're engaged to do and die!
There's a satellite to pay for
Dollars burning here in service.
Nothing left for staff or programmes?
Tough. That's life. No one will notice."

Curses strike the satellite
Pox its wings and curb its flight.
High-tech flashes through the skies
While on earth the spirit dies.
ABC my ABC
Arbiter of all I see
Jason and the Argonauts
Come and save it, fight its fight.
Make the bosses see the light.
Let the good ship Argo sail,
Journalists know they can row it
Dangers lie ahead, they know it.
Wendy Bacon will Heave Ho it.

OUR NEXT COMPETITION. **A synopsis of, or an extract from, one of the following: *Such is Life* by Patrick White, *They're a Weird Mob* by Christina Stead, *Joe Wilson and his Mates* by Helen Garner, *On Our Selection* by David Malouf, "A Sunburnt Country" by Bruce Dawe, or any other similar combination of prose or verse.**

Usual prizes, entries by 30 May.

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Temper democratic, bias Australian

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LILY BRETT

Miriam

Garth's new trousers had three pleats on either side of the zip. Until now, he had worn skin-tight, pegged-legged Levis. Miriam looked at Garth. She found the loose space between his legs alluring. She started to think about what lay behind those parallel pleats.

Not since Miriam was seventeen had she felt lustful just looking at a man's crotch.

Out of bed, Miriam rarely felt sexually aroused. She had enough trouble feeling that way in bed. Where were the children? Could they hear? Was she ovulating? Should she use Ultrasure With Spermicidal Creme or Nuda Natural Feeling condoms? What was the time? Did she have to get up early in the morning? These were the questions that occupied Miriam when sex seemed imminent.

A distant memory flickered in Miriam's head. She quickly tried to calculate how old she would have been in the 1950s, when all men wore pleats in their pants. She had been, just, still young enough to sit on her father's lap, and crush him with hugs when he came home from work.

Miriam had always adored her father. She still did. She couldn't resist his generosity and his sense of humor. She loved the way that he turned beetroot red and cried when he laughed. If he laughed at the dinner table, pieces of fish or chicken would fly from his mouth and land on the other side of the kitchen.

Miriam's girlfriends also adored her father. "Mr Bloom, Mr Bloom, can you drive us to Luna Park?" they would beseech him. On Saturdays and Sundays Mr Bloom could be seen driving through the streets of Melbourne, his pink Pontiac Parisenne full of chattering, gum-chewing fourteen year-olds.

If they passed Leo's Spaghetti Bar, in Fitzroy street, the girls knew that they could rely on Mr Bloom to shout them to a round of chocolate gelatis.

Mr Bloom loved gelati. Before the war, in Lodz, Poland, Mr Bloom used to spend more money a week on ice-cream than most people earned.

Mr Bloom came from one of the wealthiest Jewish families in Lodz. They owned apartment blocks, knitting mills and a timber yard. Mr Bloom, at sixteen, was in charge of the timber yard. He doubled the turnover, fiddled the books, and pocketed the profit. Nobody noticed.

Even as a schoolboy, Mr Bloom never used public transport. He went everywhere by droshky. He single-handedly supported two droshkies and their drivers. At eighteen, he bought himself a dark red Skoda sportscar.

Mr Bloom met Mrs Bloom when she was the very quiet, studious, extraordinarily beautiful Basia Roddem.

Mr and Mrs Roddem, pious, hard-working, respeced members of the Jewish community, lived in two small rooms with their seven children. Mrs Roddem paid the caretaker of their block a couple of zlotys extra, a week, to keep one of the external toilets solely for the use of the Roddem family. Basia was always grateful for this luxury.

Green-eyed Basia's ambition was to study medicine. She was not easily deterred from her studies.

Mr Bloom wooed this red-haired, slim-hipped, serious sixteen year old, fervently. He bought her an eighteen-carat solid gold Rolex watch. He bought her French perfumes and Swiss chocolates. He bought her the first pineapple that she had ever seen, and peaches and strawberries.

Just as Basia finished high school and was preparing to leave for the University of Brussels, Germany invaded Poland. All Jews living in Lodz were ordered to move to a slum area of the city. In this ghetto they were completely cut off from the rest of the world.

Mr and Mrs Roddem urged Basia to marry Mr Bloom. They thought that she would be better off with his family.

In their haste and confusion the Bloom family had only been able to pack a few valuables. At the end of that first year in the ghetto, they were as poor and as hungry as everyone else. They had sold their last diamond, a blue-white 2.4 carat stone in a heavy eighteen-carat gold setting, for a sack of potato peels.

Potato peels were a luxury in the ghetto. You had to have good connections in the public kitchens to buy this delicacy. You also had to know whether the kitchen used knives or potato peelers. Peels from the

kitchens that used potato peelers were mostly just thin films of dirt.

Miriam hated hearing about the potato peels. It seemed too pathetic. Worse than the stories about children dying in the streets, and relatives killing each other for a piece of bread, and trainload after trainload of people being shipped out of the ghetto never to be heard of again.

When Miriam was twelve, she had boiled herself a pot of potato peels. She had often wondered what they tasted like. She was half-way through her first mouthful when Mrs Bloom came home unexpectedly. Mrs Bloom, who had never laid a hand on either of her daughters, took the bowl of potato peels. Then, screaming and crying, she shook Miriam by the hair until Miriam fainted.

The thought of her father's penis made Miriam feel nauseous. If she thought about her father in sexual terms, she would have to think about him fucking her mother. She tried to blink that thought out of her head.

Miriam used to be able to blink thoughts out of her head. She would grit her teeth, and blink hard three times, and the thought would disappear. Now, three years into an analysis, Miriam knew that there was no magic in blinking.

At seventeen, Miriam was having furtive sex regularly, if erratically, with her first serious boyfriend. One evening, with her puce-faced boyfriend hovering above her, Miriam was suddenly seized with the thought that maybe her parents were doing the same thing, in their bedroom across the hallway. Her stomach heaved, and she vomited and vomited.

Fortunately, Miriam's boyfriend considered himself an existential eccentric. He felt that this messy, smelly, potentially humiliating episode, merely added to the interesting experiences of his life.

Melbourne is a small city. Years later, people still asked Miriam if it was true that she had chucked all over Johnny Rosenberg while he was fucking her.

Garth looked like Mr Bloom. He was pale-skinned and dark-haired, with heavy-lidded, large brown eyes. Garth, Miriam's second non-Jewish husband, at least looked Jewish. Miriam saw this as progress. Frank, her first husband, was six foot two tall, with blond hair and blue eyes. A perfect Aryan prototype. At nineteen, Miriam had ended her adolescent rebellion with a bang by marrying Frank.

"Australian men," Mrs Bloom had told Miriam regularly, "go to the pub every day after work. They don't come home until after the children are in bed. When they come home they are not interested in what they eat. Probably they have eaten a pie in the pub. What sort of life would that be for you, Miriam? And when it comes to the private things of life, an Australian husband will handle you very badly. They won't touch you gently."

Mrs Bloom never touched Miriam or her sister. When she kissed them hello and goodbye, she planted the peck firmly in mid-air.

Every evening when Mr Bloom came home from work, he would grab Mrs Bloom by the bum, and kiss her loudly. Mrs Bloom would try to shrug him off. "Look at your beautiful mummy," he would say to the girls. "My little Basia, what a beauty." By this time Mrs Bloom would have wriggled out of his grip, and busied herself serving the dinner.

In Auschwitz, Mrs Bloom slept on the top row of bunks in her barracks. She was jammed in so tightly among the other prisoners that none of them could move. If one person wanted to turn over, the whole row had to turn over. Most of the prisoners suffered from chronic diarrhoea and the bunks leaked.

Immediately after the war, Mrs Bloom experienced a strange isolation. She had become used to the constant contact of other bodies, and for a while she felt bereft without them.

"You'll be going back to your roots if you marry me," was one of the lines that Garth used to persuade Miriam to leave her husband. He pursued her relentlessly. He phoned her several times a day, wrote poems for her, painted her portrait, bought her a gold Parker pen and a black leather-bound notebook. Then came the jewellery. Miriam loved rings. Garth bought her garnet rings, emerald rings, ruby rings, sapphire rings, and a magnificent art-deco diamond ring.

In the end, Miriam couldn't resist the adoration, and she left the husband she'd been living happily with for thirteen years.

Even before her analysis, Miriam knew that she loved being adored. And Garth adored her. He watched her closely. He was always looking at her. In seven years he had painted over five hundred portraits of her. Last year he had an exhibition of his paintings in Sydney. The exhibition was called Pictures of Miriam. One hundred and eight portraits of Miriam hung from the walls of the Creighton Galleries.

Miriam got up from the breakfast table. "I think I'll have a shower," she said to Garth. Miriam found it difficult to wash. She found it an ordeal. Miriam only showered when she had to wash her hair.

Mrs Bloom showered every morning and every evening. And at night, if Mr and Mrs Bloom had had a fuck, Miriam used to hear the bathroom taps gushing at full throttle while Mrs Bloom furiously washed herself out.

Mrs Bloom kept her house as clean as she kept her body. She washed the floors every day. Twice a week she stripped the stove and the fridge. Once a week, balancing a large bucket of water on top of a ladder, she cleaned the windows. Mrs Bloom vacuumed the carpet when Mr Bloom and the girls left in the mornings, and again after dinner.

Sometimes, Miriam didn't change her pantyhose for a fortnight. The feet would become rigid. Miriam

wondered if the dirt held the pantyhose together and made them last longer.

Mr and Mrs Bloom visited Miriam every Tuesday and Friday night. They usually stayed for about three-quarters of an hour.

For years Miriam felt that they only came to see the children. They were besotted by their grandchildren. Mr Bloom would look at Miriam's son Chase, who at sixteen was already six feet tall, and say, "whoever would have thought I would live to have grandchildren."

Mrs Bloom went straight to Miriam's kitchen sink, and, in her Yves St Laurent silk blouse, her Kenzo trousers and her Maud Frizon shoes, she washed and scoured and dried until everything gleamed.

Even at home, Mrs Bloom never wore an apron or work clothes. She cleaned in her ordinary clothes, although Mrs Bloom's clothes could hardly be described as ordinary. She had satin dresses beaded with pearls, taffeta coats dripping diamantes, lame and lurex cocktail gowns, velvet suits, silk suits, shantung and lace dresses, linen and leather trousers, and all from the best fashion houses in Europe.

Jane and Ivana, Miriam's best friends, kept spotless houses. Ivana felt compelled to clean up whenever she visited Miriam. Jane said that she found Miriam's mess relaxing.

Jane and Ivana were both tall and thin, unlike Miriam who was always planning a diet. Mrs Bloom was very slim too. Miriam wondered whether ectomorphs had a mania for cleanliness.

Miriam never used to wash the dishes. She owned enough crockery to keep going in between the cleaning woman's twice weekly visits. After her first year in analysis, Miriam began to wash her own dishes. Late in life, Miriam discovered the joy of well-scrubbed saucepans and shiny surfaces.

For a while, Miriam, who had always had trouble with the concept of moderation, became a bit obsessive. She washed every teaspoon or fork or coffee mug as soon as it was used. She cleaned out the pantry and bathroom cupboards, and put everything in labelled jars. She re-arranged the cutlery drawers and the crockery cabinets. She vacuumed the front verandah, and polished the letter box. She drove everyone crazy, and the kids begged her to go back to being a slob.

Garth stood next to Miriam. He wound his leg around her leg, and stroked her face. All three children were at school. They lay down and had a noisy fuck.

After she came, Miriam wept and wept. She often cried after a strong orgasm. She knew that it usually meant that she had been shutting herself off from any intense emotions, been out of touch with her sadness.

Miriam used to say that she felt that she was born with a backlog of sadness. She didn't really know what she meant. Was it all those dead relatives, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandmothers and grandfathers, all fed to the sky? Two large families reduced to ashes. The ashes of the victims of Auschwitz almost choked the Vistula river.

Mr and Mrs Bloom stood united on every issue concerning their daughters. Nothing could separate them. Neither of them ever sided with one of the girls.

Mr and Mrs Bloom shared a past that Miriam could never belong to. Miriam longed to drive a wedge into their togetherness. She had one such moment of triumph when she was ten. She had been begging and pleading to have her ears pierced. Mrs Bloom said that ear-piercing was a barbaric custom and they were a civilised family. Not while Miriam lived in her house, could she have pierced ears.

Miriam stopped practising the piano. She no longer took the dog for a walk. She sat in her room for hours looking miserable. Mr Bloom relented. Behind Mrs Bloom's back, he took Miriam into the city, and held her hand while a nursing sister pierced Miriam's ears.

For the next week, Mrs Bloom made twice as much noise as she washed up while the rest of the family ate their dinner.

Miriam still wore the gold sleeper earrings that Mr Bloom had bought. Now, a gold, heart-shaped, Victorian locket carrying a lock of Garth's hair hung from the sleeper in Miriam's right ear.

"Miriam, my love, my beautiful wife, my delicious chicken, shall we go out for coffee?' Garth called from the bedroom. "Okay, I'll be out of the shower in a second," she answered.

Miriam loved going out for coffee. She would have a cappuccino. She liked to lightly sugar the froth, and then eat it slowly. Maybe she would even have a small slice of butter cake.

GAVIN EWART

Deb Willet

La giovin principiante

31 March 1668:... and he being gone, I called Deb to take pen, ink, and paper and write down what things came into my head for my wife to do, in order to her going into the country; and the girl writing not so well as she would do, cried, and her mistress construed it to be sullenness and so was angry, and I seemed angry with her too; but going to bed, she undressed me, and there I did give her good advice and beso la, ella weeping still; and yo did take her, the first time in my life, sobra mi genu and did poner mi mano sub her jupes and toca su thigh, which did hazer me great pleasure; and so did no more, but besando-la went to my bed.

25 October 1668 (Lord's Day): and after supper, to have my head combed by Deb, which occasioned the greatest sorrows to me that ever I knew in this world; for my wife, coming up suddenly, did find me imbracing the girl con my hand sub su coats; and endeed, I was with my main in her cunny...

13 November 1668: Thence I home, and there to talk, with great pleasure, all the evening with my wife, who tells me that Deb hath been abroad today, and is come home and says she hath got a place to go to, so as she will be gone tomorrow morning. This troubled me; and the truth is, I have a great mind for to have the maidenhead of this girl, which I should not doubt to have if yo could get time para be con her - but she will be gone and I know not whither.

18 November 1668: At last I told him my business was not with him, but a little gentlewoman, one Mrs. Willet, that is with him; and sent him to see how she did, from her friend in London, and no other token. He goes while I walk in Somerset-house - walk there in the Court; at last he comes back and tells me she is well, and that I may see her if I will - but no more. So I could not be commanded by my reason, but I must go this very night; and so by coach, it being now dark, I to her, close by my tailor's; and there she came into the coach to me, and yo did besar her and tocar her thing, but ella was against it and laboured with much earnestness, such as I believed to be real; and yet at last yo did make her tener mi cosa in her mano, while mi mano was sobra her pectus, and so did hazer with great delight.

19 November 1668: I find my wife sitting sad in the dining-room; which inquiring into the reason of, she began to call me all the false, rotten-hearted rogues in the world, letting me understand that I was with Deb yesterday; which, thinking impossible ever for her to understand, I did a while deny; but at last did, for the ease of my mind and hers, and for ever to discharge my heart of this wicked business, I did confess all; and above-stairs in our bed-chamber there, I did endure the sorrow of her threats and vows and curses all the afternoon. And which was worst, she swore by all that was good that she would slit the nose of this girl, and be gone herself this very night from me; and did there demand 3 or 400 l of me to buy my peace, that she might be gone without making any noise, or else protested that she would make all the world know of it.

13 April 1669: But here, being with him in the Court-yard, as God would have it I spied Deb, which made my heart and head to work... And I run after her and two women and a man, more ordinary people, and she in her old clothes; and after hunting a little, find them in the lobby of the Chapel below-stairs; and there I observed she endeavoured to avoid me, but I did speak to her and she to me, and did get her para docere me ou she demeures now. And did charge her para say nothing of me that I had vu elle - which she did promise; and so, with my heart full of surprize and disorder I away...

But, God forgive me, I hardly know how to put on confidence enough to speak so innocent, having had this passage today with Deb, though only, God knows, by accident. But my great pain is lest God Almighty shall suffer me to find out this girl, whom endeed I love, and with a bad amour; but I will pray to God to give me grace to forbear it.

15 April 1669: thence I away and through Jewen-street,

my mind, God knows, running that way, but stopped not; but going down Holbourn-hill by the Conduit I did see Deb on foot going up the hill; I saw her, and she me, but she made no stop, but seemed unwilling to speak to me; so I away on, but then stopped and light and after her, and overtook her, at the end of Hosier-lane in Smithfield; and without standing in the street, desired her to fallow me, and I led her into a little blind alehouse within the walls; and there she and I alone fell to talk and besar la and tocar su mamelles; but she mighty coy, and I hope modest; but however, though with great force, did hazer ella con su hand para tocar mi thing, but ella was in great pain para be brought para it. I did give her in a paper 20s, and we did agree para meet again in the Hall at Westminster on Monday next;

26 April 1669: and by and by, Sheres being gone, my wife and he and I out, and I set him down at Temple Bar, and myself and wife went down the Temple upon seeming business, only to put him off. And just at Temple-gate, I spied Deb with another gentlewoman, and Deb winked on me and smiled, but undiscovered, and I was glad to see her.

The King is stuffing all those powerful ladies
in London where to die an untouched maid is
the rarest thing – where Castlemaines and Nellies,
the sly ones and the sluts, have in their bellies
the Royal sceptre and the Lordly rod,
and, high or low, they all end up in pod!
It's Mistress Stewart, actresses – all stunning whores
(my Lord of Rochester will know them all)
in maypole madness! Oh, they have a ball,
at Court, in inns, both in and out of doors.
You see a hole, your Duty is to fill it –
and Pepys desired one thing – just Deb, Deb Willet!

He's thirty five and she has fifteen summers.
modest and sweet; and proof against all comers
her Virtue stands; but Youth is still her essence,
which doesn't cause, in Pepys, much detumescence –
he's tempted, though he calls aloud on God!
He loves this wench, who might end up in the pod!
Oh, Mistress Bagwell, Mistress Martin, each and all
the women that he rogered in the town,
kissing and feeling strangers up and down!
But Deb is different, she's the unplucked peach.
The sperm is banked and he is prone to spill it,
while he desires one thing – just Deb, Deb Willet!

His wife, poor wretch, dysmenorrhoea claims her –
and so do jealous fits (which never shames her).
Though Pepys loves ladies and is always virile
it's likely that he is (or she is) sterile
and Nature never gives her fertile nod
to any thought that she'll end up in pod!

The player woman Knepp can very sweetly sing
and Pepys may lay a hand upon her thigh
and still be lucky if he gets so high.
Although he has designs upon *her* thing,
there's only, in days long before Kate Millett,
one thing he wants, and that's just Deb – Deb Willet!

Tune: *"Die Ballade von der Sexuellen Hörigkeitt" ("The Ballad of Sexual Dependency") from the Brecht/Weill "Die Dreigroschenoper".*

"La giovin principiante" is Leporello's 'young beginners' in the catalogue of Don Giovanni's loves, in Mozart's *Don Giovanni.*

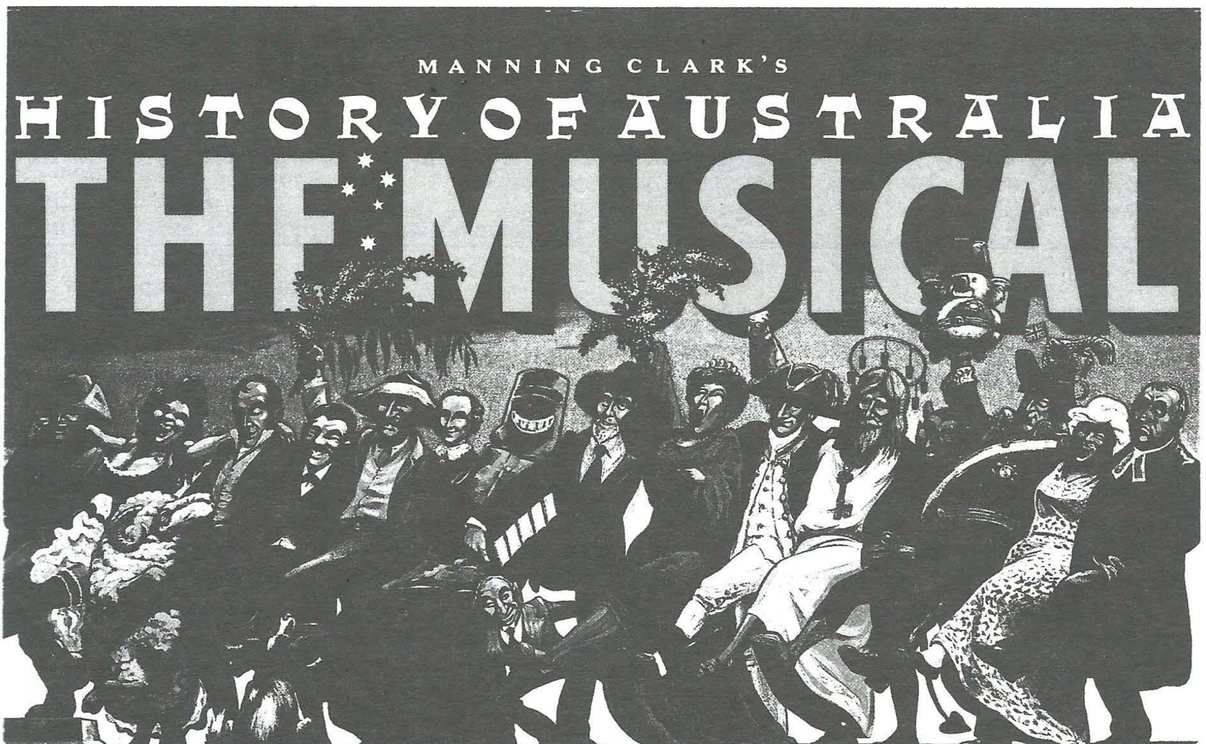
TOM GRIFFITHS

History in the Lounge Room

I have just seen five volumes of Manning Clark's six-volume history turned into a two-and-a-quarter hour musical. It works. The play is not primarily about the history of Australia. Sure, the major characters are there: de Quiros, Cook, Kelly, Lawson . . . But the central figures are Manning and Dymphna Clark.

The success of this musical is its dramatisation of the writing of history. Clark brings his mental world into his lounge room in the form of navigators and bushrangers who interrupt his life as he evokes theirs. The production's pathos and power comes from the image of this man striving to make sense of his country's past. He searches for the roots of his love-hate relationship with it, and when he discovers people who share his vision of it—like W. C. Wentworth or Henry Lawson—he embraces them with hope and gratitude. It is Clark's life which gives the musical its life: the great moments of Australia's history are wedded to the highlights of his own personal quest. There could be no better way to persuade people that history is a product of imagination.

In his writings, Clark has worn his heart on his sleeve. His prose sings with emotion and fervor and spirit, but often, too, it drips with cloying cliche and vain longings. A musical written around his words could have been a melodrama heavy with his rhetoric. But those who have translated his *History* to the stage, Tim Robertson, Don Watson and John Romeril, have portrayed Clark as complex and flawed. We see him grow and change. We see him learn to be



proud of his country, and become inspired by a vague but genuine vision which others help him bring to fruition. We see him racked by self-doubt, and hear him regret his mistakes, his omissions, his limitations.

Clark's relationship to his wife, Dymphna, is the central story of this history of Australia. She opens our eyes to other possibilities. When Clark is assailed by doubt, he tells Dymphna he's going to the pub—and she confronts him with his faith that the meaning of life is found in the meeting of men's eyes over a glass of beer. Clark, bitter with self-disgust, goes to the hotel nevertheless. Dymphna's understanding lament is the highlight of the show:

> He'll always be my lover
> I won't say he's been wrong
> But if I had to tell the story
> I'd sing another song
> Of ordinary things
> Of cabbages not kings
> A song for the people who
> move life along . . .

It is precisely Clark's concern for kings rather than cabbages, or for personalities rather than inanimate forces, which lends his *History* to stage production. But at the same time as offering a fairly faithful translation of his books, the musical manages to be their critic too. We, the audience, are the Aboriginals. We are parleyed with in condescending terms, and we witness our race suffering a fearful massacre. At the interval break, we carry in our minds the image of flames lighting up the frightened, threatening faces of frontier 'men'. So we are inclined to be unsympathetic with Clark when, in the second half, he reproaches himself for his blindness about the Aboriginals. "I left them all out!" he exclaims in amazement. Yet we, sitting in the dark, watching, were there all along.

Clark left women out, too. Not entirely, but it is one of his self-criticisms that he did not tell their story. But the writers of this show have corrected this imbalance, partly by introducing Dymphna as an equal partner, but also through their characterisation and choreography. The musical's strongest characters are women, and this is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the unhistorical but funny meeting between crisp, sure Caroline Chisholm and stuttering, gormless B-b-bold Jack Donohue (played, appropriately, by 'Bryce' of "The Fast Lane"). Not only do Mrs Chisholm's girls arrest Jack the b-b-bushranger, it is they who marry the men off: they are active rather than passive in this play. When volunteers for World War I are called for, we expect soldiers to rush onto the stage, but for every soldier there is a nurse. And the nurses are with the soldiers as they go over the top, ready to carry them back. Henry Lawson is introduced to us by his articulate mother, Louisa. Kate Kelly, attired in modern radical gear, is a member of the Kelly Gang.

Through such techniques, the musical grapples creatively with the established story. In the audience there are, no doubt, many readers of Manning Clark who recognise the phrases and the eccentricities. There are those who know the contours and characters of Australian history well. But there are just as many who have only a rudimentary, school-based knowledge, and the show must offer them pegs for their memories, places where they can pick up the story with the familiarity and recognition that is demanded of history. The musical does parade many of these popular conceptions of Australia's past, and then—through the reflections of the Clarks—mischievously undermines them.

Tom Griffiths is an historian who works at the State Library of Victoria.

COMING IN OVERLAND

Desmond O'Grady on Gino Nibbi.
Jill Roe and Barry Jones on the bicentenary history.
Cassandra Pybus and David Kerr on the last Tasmanians.
Robert Burns on Xavier Herbert.
John Hirst: A quiet way to an Australian republic.
Dorothy Hewett on Ern Malley's children.
Michael Sharkey: Interview with Eric Beach.
Jeffrey Grey on Australian writing on the Vietnam war.

JOHN HEROUVIM

Conversing

The barber's shop is at the back of the Roger David menswear store. The sign says "Hair Stylist".

I'm sitting in one of the two barber's chairs. The hair stylist is trimming my beard. The electric blades vibrate like a humming-bird's wings. His movements are deft and casual.

A man comes in with his son. The boy joins two other boys on the bench against the wall. They, too, have been left there by their fathers to have their hair cut.

The blades hum quietly, and my beard melts away like fairy floss against your tongue. The hair stylist and the man converse. Quietly. Unhurried.

The hair stylist says: g'day Bob, airy' gun?

G'day Harry, not bad, self?

N'bad. Waddya know?

Not a great deal. Self?

Not much mate. Doesn't pay to know too much, ay?

Nuh, y'right there.

(A very small smile from each.)

The hair stylist asks: how's business?

Makin' a crust, self?

N'bad; pretty quiet.

(Pause.)

The hair stylist asks: dja get away?

Nuh. Maybe March. Self?

Coupla days to New South Wales, with the missus anna coupla frenz. Bitta golf; went t'a coupla clubs.

'Ave a win?

Nar mate. Did a few quid. Y'never win on them things.

Yeah, y'not wrong.

(A very small smile from each.)

Bob looks up at the poster of the Footscray football team above the wide mirror.

Howd'ya reckon your mob'll go this year?

Orr, y'never know. Pretty good. Hard to tell. Your mob'd have t'be favorites, ay?

Yeah. Prob'ly. S'pose so. Yeah.

(Pause.)

(Pause.)

(The blades hum.)

The hair stylist asks: so anyway, airy' gun?

Can't complain.

Yeah. No point complainin'.

(A very small smile from each.)

(Pause.)

Bob asks: how long'll 'e be?

Orr . . . two in before 'im. About forty minutes or so.

Righto. See ya.

Yeah, take care.

IAN KENNEDY WILLIAMS

Salamander

He was there again today, my Salamander. I stayed on the headland for nearly an hour, watching him. I wanted to go down, but the surf was better than yesterday, it seemed he'd never come out. The sun was warm, but the wind was so cold I sheltered in a hollow under some lantana. I was wearing my school dress (which I won't need anymore) under my brown duffel coat. When I left to go home (it was nearly five) he'd just come out of the surf and was running up the beach to his car. I stopped for a moment near the obelisk, and waited while he tied his board to the roof rack. I thought he might see me watching, but he didn't even look. As he turned the board over onto the roof of his car, I saw the lizard jump where the sun caught it.

When he came out of the surf yesterday afternoon, I was on the beach walking Mrs Macready's dog. He'd lit a fire earlier on the edge of the dunes which by then had almost burned out. I stoked it up and threw on some pieces of wood he'd collected, so I could warm my hands. Mrs Macready's dog was sniffing round his car (a green Volkswagon beetle) and peeing against the wheels. When he came up the beach, I thought he'd be glad of the fire, but he said he was "burning" already, and went over to the car to rub his hair with a towel. He didn't seem to mind me being there (or Mrs Macready's dog) but he didn't say much except (after I asked) that he'd come from Melbourne. I said I supposed it was colder down there than here, but he said he never felt the cold (he was wearing a wet suit so he must have felt it a bit) and he'd only lit the fire to bake some potatoes. He told me he was staying at the Broad Sands Caravan Park (which is the other end of town to us) but comes up here because the surf is better. He showed me his board then, with the lizard design which seemed to come alive when the light caught it. He said it was a Salamander (so I call him my Salamander) which was a Creature from Mythology that lived in a fire but never got burnt because its body was so cold. When I left (Mrs Macready's dog gave his front wheels one last squirt) he was boiling a billy of water for tea. I would have stayed if he'd asked, but he didn't, and anyway I knew Jean would shout at me if I hadn't peeled the vegetables in time for dinner.

Dinner at our place means a sitting for five. Apart from Jean and myself, there are the Darabins and Brendan who has been with us for about four years. The Darabins have been here for one year and three months. They came last Easter for a holiday, and never went home. (Mr Darabin's "home" is in England, but Mrs Darabin says she's a "Sydney girl"). When they'd been here about a month, Mrs Darabin got a job at the shire offices in town, but Mr Darabin has never worked. He told Jean (after they'd decided to stay) he was a teacher of English, but at the moment he's writing a novel. Jean said she couldn't wait till it was published because she was always reading novels. Mr Darabin just smiled when she said that. He's seen what sort of novels Jean reads.

We don't get many guests these days. Sometimes in the summer if the motels in town are full, or during the carnival, or if there's a race meeting, we get a few people come here because there's nowhere else to stay. When I was a little girl we had more 'permanents', but Jean says there was plenty of work around then, and sometimes the house was full with men (and women too) who were only here for the season. That was when my father was alive, and Jean was just someone who served at the tables and changed the linen in the rooms.

I always got on all right with Jean, but I never understood why my father married her because I remember him calling her 'a silly woman' when she said once that the rockets the Americans were sending up in space were making the weather change. She still says things like that, but I never take any notice, and nor does anyone else much except Brendan who just pretends to agree. She's not so attractive these days, not like when my father married her (she was real pretty then). She's tall and thin like a broom handle, with droopy breasts (I see her in the shower sometimes), and always complaining, especially in the winter, like now, when it's so cold all she ever does is huddle against the wood stove in the kitchen and read those silly novels of hers,

or else moan to old Mrs Macready from next door how she misses having a man to keep her warm in bed at night.

In some ways she's a lot like Mrs Darabin who's thin too, with no bust to speak of, and a pasty-looking face (Jean's is only red and blotchy because of the heat from the stove). Also they're nearly the same age, as Jean was thirty-eight in February, and I heard Mrs Darabin tell someone on the phone she'd be forty next year and was dreading it.

I don't know if Mrs Darabin feels the cold, but Brendan calls her the Icicle Lady because of her cold stare whenever she catches you looking at her, and her manner of speech which is very aloof (except when she's drinking Jean's sherry), and the way she always refers to Mr Darabin as "my husband" and not John, which is his name. (Mr Darabin doesn't call his wife anything that I've heard, although at the dinner table, when he's ready to leave, he'll say, "If you're finished *dear . . .*")

Mr Darabin's novel must be very long because he writes every day between nine in the morning (after Mrs Darabin's gone to work, and he's had his "extra" cup of coffee) and three in the afternoon, and still he hasn't finished it. I heard Jean ask him the other day how it was going, and Mr Darabin said he was just starting on the third draft which he hoped would "bring it alive". Once she was silly enough to ask him what it was about, and he said it was a story about three generations of Australian land-owners who live in a small town high in the mountains that has been closed to civilization for ninety years until one day an earthquake opens a pass down to the sea and then a long dead volcano erupts and sends the whole population to the infernal regions. Mr Darabin said it was what was called Magic Realism and that he'd been influenced by Jorge Luis Borges (we did him at school), but Jean said it all sounded a bit airy fairy to her, and what she liked was a good love story.

When Mr Darabin's finished writing his novel for the day, he goes to Shea's Hotel on the highway for a drink with the "locals". Sometimes Brendan goes with him, but I think Mr Darabin prefers to go on his own because Brendan isn't really one of the "locals", and he's never got much money. Brendan was at the mill until it closed, and before that he worked for the shire, but now there's not much work about and he's on the dole, most of which Jean takes for board and lodging. They're not much alike, Brendan and Mr Darabin, not at all really, Mr Darabin being about forty, I guess, and Brendan's twenty-five (I saw his driver's licence when I was cleaning his room once). Mr Darabin's not thin like his wife, he's muscular and athletic (he jogs up to the headland most mornings while Mrs Darabin's still in bed), his hair is thick and black, his eyes blue, not cold like you'd think (dog's eyes, Jean calls them, which is stupid — dog's eyes are brown not blue), but deep and penetrating so that when he's watching you, you think he's looking inside your head or under your clothes. He's got good teeth too, but Jean says it's bad form to talk about a man's teeth, it's the sort of thing you do with horses.

You can't say much about Brendan. He's got red hair and red skin and a pot belly (though he's not fat otherwise) and he's always wearing clothes that don't match, pink pants and blue shirts which look silly on him, and nothing's ever pressed (Jean charges extra for ironing), and even when he goes for a job interview he wears white runners which are scuffed and tied with broken laces. Jean calls him a Walking Horror Story.

The Darabins live upstairs at the front in two rooms, one either side of the passageway, and have the whole of the balcony to themselves. When they came they just had one room (which is their bedroom now), but after they decided to stay, Mr Darabin said they'd take the other front room as well to use as a lounge (a "studio" he calls it). Mrs Darabin bought new curtains, and made us take out all the old furniture so they could put up shelves for Mr Darabin's books. Then they bought a big desk at the second-hand shop in town for Mr Darabin to write at, and Mrs Darabin bought a brand-new three-piece suite which Jean said must have cost eight hundred dollars, and little coffee tables that fit inside each other, and even a lamp with a big red shade to go in the corner near Mr Darabin's desk.

When I'm cleaning the Darabins' rooms, I always take my time with their "studio" because it's so nice to be in, and I can lie on the sofa and pretend I'm Mrs Darabin drinking a sherry and saying, "How's the novel coming, dear?" or "God! what a day I've had!" (which is what we usually hear her say if she catches Mr Darabin downstairs when she gets home from work). Sometimes I sit at Mr Darabin's desk and take the cover off his typewriter, and think how hard it must be to type with all the letters not in alphabetical order.

Of course I only clean the Darabin's "studio" when Mr Darabin's not inside writing, but a few times when he's heard me in the passageway he's called me in because, he's said, he's having a "bad day", and I might be a pleasant diversion. Last time this happened, when I was dusting the shelves and he was sat at his desk watching me, I asked him how many books he had, and he said one thousand and forty eight, not counting the magazines. Then he showed me an exercise book in which, he said, he wrote down the name of every book he bought, and it was true, in front of the last entry (a book of poetry, I think) was the number 1048. It seemed a lot of books, so I asked him if he'd read them all, and he got angry at first, and said it was a stupid question, the sort of question all non-bookish people asked, and he was sick of hearing it. I didn't say anything (he must have been having a real "bad day") just kept on with my dusting, and then he took

a book from one of the shelves and showed it to me, and said he had to admit he hadn't read this one. I looked at it, and it was just a dictionary, which is not the sort of book you'd read in bed before you go to sleep, so I guess it was meant to be a joke.

Brendan's room, of course, is nothing like the Darabins'. Brendan used to be upstairs too, his room was behind the Darabins' bedroom, but I think Mrs Darabin must have said something to Jean because just after the Darabins decided to stay Jean moved Brendan downstairs to the room at the bottom of the hall. When I was a little girl, this was the room my mother (before Jean) used as a sewing room. Until Brendan moved in, I always called it the Sewing Room, even though it stopped being a sewing room years ago when my mother went away. At first I didn't like Brendan being there because he's so untidy, and a bit funny sometimes, and it was spoiling my memories.

But I've got used to him being there now, and when I go in there to clean or change the bed linen, I just think of it as Brendan's room and not the Sewing Room, though actually the sewing cabinet is still there in the corner next to the wardrobe where Brendan hangs his clothes. Not that Brendan has many clothes to hang. The bottom of the wardrobe is filled with piles of magazines, mostly about movies or cars, which are the only subjects Brendan ever talks about. (Brendan had to sell his car, a white Falcon ute, when he went on the dole.) Brendan reads other magazines too, girlie magazines which he used to hide under the mattress until Jean decided we should turn it one day to give it an airing. She didn't say much really, when she saw them, just collected them up and took them outside to the incinerator to be burnt, which upset Brendan when he found out because they weren't his at all, he said, but belonged to a friend of his who'd paid big money for them because they were "collector's pieces". I told Jean I'd seen girlie magazines at school which the boys used to hand around, but Jean said these were different, not the sort you'd buy at Tullivers, the newsagent in High Street. I don't know where Brendan hides his girlie magazines now, but he's still reading them because I opened his door one day thinking he was out, and he was sat up on his bed with one spread out on his lap. I said, "Are you reading those dirty magazines again?" and he said I could have a look if I liked, but I just said, "No thanks," and went outside. Jean says if Brendan wasn't so slimy looking, he'd get himself a nice girl and wouldn't need magazines like that, but Mr Darabin says what a man reads in the privacy of his room is nobody's business but his own.

What I really wish is that Brendan had some surfing magazines, because I don't know much about surfing, and if I did I could talk about it to my Salamander on the beach tomorrow, and then perhaps he'd let me share his billy of tea. I've seen him every day for a week now, but yesterday was the only time I've talked to him. The day before, Mrs Macready's dog ran up and barked at him as he was running down to the shore, but by the time I got there Mrs Macready's dog was barking at something else, and my Salamander (I wasn't calling him that then, of course) was paddling out through the surf. I don't usually walk Mrs Macready's dog, but she's ill with the flu right now, and Jean said it wouldn't hurt me to be neighborly. Mrs Macready said, "You don't mind, do you love?" the way she does when she asks me to do anything, and I said, "No, of course not," though I minded a bit because it was taken for granted I wouldn't.

I don't much like Mrs Macready's dog either, a silly little thing with brown wiry hair and a yappy bark. When he barked at my Salamander the day before yesterday, I wanted to get hold of him and give him a kick, and then, when we were coming back along the dunes, I thought, if I catch it right he'll be just coming out of the surf, and I'll stop by his car and say, "Sorry about Mrs Macready's dog, he's such a *pain* . . ." But of course it never worked out like that, and yesterday when I did get to talk to him I was trying so hard to make him talk about himself that I never thought of Mrs Macready's dog at all.

Perhaps tomorrow I'll take him some of Jean's curry puffs, heat them in the microwave first, and then wrap them in newspaper to keep them warm. I know he said he never felt the cold, but this surfing business must give him a huge appetite, like jogging which Mr Darabin says makes him really appreciate his breakfast. Or perhaps I'll just take some fruit, some apples and pears, in case he's a health freak, and then when he sees I'm one of the friendlier natives (he made a joke yesterday about the natives being a bit unfriendly) he'll let me brew up his billy for tea.

If I had to describe him, I'd say he's like I imagine Mr Darabin as a young man, black slicked-back hair, silvery blue eyes, and a lean athletic body, not as muscular as Mr Darabin's now, but more like a woman's, with a flat stomach and a small behind. He's got a tiny gold ear-ring in his left ear (Jean would pull a face if she saw it) and a tattoo on the back of his right hand which I couldn't see properly because it disappeared into the sleeve of his wet suit. (It looked a bit like a lizard's tail curling round his knuckles, so perhaps it was another Salamander like the one on his board.) Watching him from the headland this afternoon, I thought that if I had to be anyone's girl, I might be his, because he doesn't give me goose bumps like slimy Brendan, or try to be clever like Mr Darabin who put his arm around me this morning and said in his sugary voice, "How old are you now, my dear?" (like I was Mrs Darabin and he'd forgotten) and when I told him, said, "Well when you're seventeen, you can call me John . . ."

And then, when I was stood next to the obelisk, wishing him to turn and see me, I thought, if he goes away, I'll call this place "Salamander Point", and keep the obelisk for my own memories, and not just something historical and dead that no one remembers, not even Jean who will only say if you ask that it's so damn cold and windy up there it must mark the spot where some poor freezing soul curled up and died.

TWO SONGS FOR A BICENTENARY YEAR

1

Program me 'Aussie' so I can
respond to '88
and wave my made-in-Taiwan flag
and worship my own date,
and lock me in by Jingo
to every great event
and make me proud
I'm one of the crowd
who knows what it all meant!

Shove gum-leaves up my nostrils,
stick wattle in my ear,
anoint my vest with Vegemite
and christen me with beer
– turn on your biggest sun-lamp
to make my bronze even bronzer
– come what come may,
let every day
be grouse, you-beaut, and bonzer!

Make me a Weet-Bix kiddie,
an Arnott's warrior too,
patch me in to every thing
which colors me true-blue,
roll me up in a damper,
boil me in plum-duff
– but whatever the deal
let it reveal
that I just don't give a stuff!

2

O for the wings of a wombat
to waft me away from the wide
flood-plains of promotional bullshit
– O for the thickness of hide
of ten thousand lugubrious bastards
bursting with patriot pride
who've patiently waited (with pulse
syncopated)
to take us along for the ride!

O for the four-footed fleetness
of the fabulous ring-tailed duck
– that I might swing from the tree-tops
while the admen are running amuck!
And there in my aerial fastness
with half of poor Lasseter's luck
I'll be one of the few (toorali-tooraloo!)
who hasn't sold out for a buck!

BRUCE DAWE

JOANNA MURRAY-SMITH

Ewa Czajor
1957-1988

The Melbourne theatre director Ewa Czajor was murdered in Thailand in January.

I thought I was aware of the fragility of things, but somehow Ray and I had lodged Ewa into our lives and our future. She was one of the people we looked forward to growing old with, with whom we would share some sense of continuity, youth-to-age, through all the ordinariness and ecstacies and ironies.

All of us who have gone on living despite her death are busy talking about ourselves, rather than about her, because the immediate sense is of how our lives are instantly *less.* The anticipation of pain is worse: it will get worse before it gets better. How we are diminished by her loss will be a gradual thing. I am losing more by her death every day, and I wonder when this feeling will end.

One day, working on the play at her place last year, she took me into her room to show me a John Olson lithograph she had bought. She was embarrassed at having made such an extravagant purchase but was thrilled by waking up to it every morning: she felt it couldn't have been a bad thing if it made her feel so good. It was a frog, flying through the air, full of life, contained only by the fences of the sky: no fences at all.

There are moments I have imagined people close to me dying: as if an imagined death could protect me from a real one. But Ewa was foreign to any scenario of death. Everything about her—her confusion, her gregariousness, her foibles, her work—were driven by a defiance, a fundamental impulse for life.

She was an exuberant critic—the antithesis of cynical. She saw the potential of things with an endlessly creative optimism, which is why she released so many other people's creative energies. She avoided the ease of tearing things down. She built friendships, beliefs, plays, dreams.

I knew Ewa as a director and as a friend, and on both sides her complexity was only just beginning to emerge. The difficulty for all of us who loved her in some way is that we would all like to feel that we 'knew' her, when we all know so little about one another. Not only her death is a mystery but—worse

and better—so was her life. It is a mystery we no longer have the pleasure of unravelling, each of us in different ways. I wanted Ewa to unravel me, too. I enjoyed her sense of discovery: she flattered us by her curiosity, a curiosity connected with her love for the mysteries of life.

Her passion as a director came from her passion as a person. She never let intellectual theories dominate her sense of humanity in art, or her sense of joy. Her vision of theatre was never absolute, never defined. She was stubborn, egotistical, bossy: refused to allow bureaucracies or small-minded arts administrators wear her down. She was a fighter and she knew her creative energy was her greatest weapon.

Ewa told me she was happy to have turned thirty. I think she saw her life ahead as a time of consolidation. She had explored and would go on exploring, but her sense of herself seemed to be coming clearer to her.

I felt she changed a lot in the years I knew her and that the Ewa I saw for the last time, on the final night of the play, was a bolder woman than the one I met in 1984. She had lost some tentativeness, found some determination, and ran on an adrenalin of possibility: in other people and in herself.

This is an irony, I guess. I wish she hadn't been so bold as to leave Australia to travel in Asia and study in Poland. I wish she hadn't had the courage to take chances. But that is wishing not only for a different course of events, but for a different Ewa. She said to me more than once that this was the "right time" to go, and she was impressed by the strength of her need to leave.

I saw her life here with some frustration: her battles with a boys' club network which found her presence in the theatre world a threat to themselves. She had to fight not only to be the best she could be, but simply to survive in a local world that was too small for her.

I have a strong physical sense of Ewa. The tiniest things: the way she sprawled on the floor making notes on butcher's paper with the texta-top in her mouth, the way her hair fell over her shoulders, the way she drank hot water, her earthy laugh when she gossiped, those funny shoes with pegs on them that drove me crazy. These images go further than words.

There is nothing to say about how she died. Most of us have tried to make sense of it, to take one tiny detail back, one wrong decision. But there is no sense, only casual misfortune which robs us of everything.

I was used to the idea of not seeing her for a while. But I know that in a year or so, one not particularly special morning, I will wake up and I will miss her. I will miss her faith in life and all that it might bring. She was not unlike her flying frog, soaring through space. I never said goodbye to her properly and in a way Ewa would have liked this. She liked the idea of moving ahead without fixed ends or fixed beginnings.

The Ewa Czajor Memorial Trust is in the process of being established, to support young women directors in the theatre. Enquiries may be addressed to the Trust at 300 Gore Street, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065.

ROWAN CAHILL

Heroes and Villains

The very notion of a free press in a democratic society is gradually being eroded, not by overt censorship but by one that is hidden, and to some extent voluntary, at times unconscious. It has to do with increasing monopolisation within the media generally, and the high tech. efficiency/profit bullies who create and administer the monopolies; it has to do with advancing media technology and journalists' fears of losing well-paid jobs; it has to do with the increasing tendency to serve up distortions, violence, soft porn and non-news as general fare.

Journalists report and investigate within parameters set by the media owners, parameters established with an eye to circulation, profit, empire building, and by the idiosyncratic quirks that make the exercise of great power a potent drug. So journalists can be bold and courageous in the pursuit of stories and details but, when it comes to standing back, assessing, questioning, challenging motives, morality and accepted versions of the truth, and engaging in polemic, they may be putting their careers at risk. This is a path few are prepared to take.

Those who break free of the entertainment treadmill, who seek to do something serious with their typewriters and VDTs, can be, and are, shunted off into inconsequential backwaters. If they are plagued with an overdose of principle, and free from the constraints of debts and mortgage, they resign.

This is especially so in Australia where the meshing of the Hawke consensus-Labor machine with the corporate establishment has led to an Australian print media dominated by three companies with fingers in dozens of other business pies.

John Pilger, now based in Britain, is one Australian journalist who has, over the last twenty years, developed political journalism as a popular form. He blends polemic, anger and conscience with intellect, and his style of reporting looks beyond the labels and cliches of the press handouts to the raw events and the victims, the heroes of his semi-autobiographical *Heroes*.

As a journalist and film maker Pilger has, since the early 1960s, reported from the heartlands of world conflict: Vietnam, Africa, India, Central America, the Middle East, Cambodia, worlds where small nations are regarded as expendable and where 'truth' reflects the propaganda initiatives of the dominant power.

Pilger has reported too from Britain, Thatcher-divided, a nation of rich and poor, where racist abuse is rampant; from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, where heroes struggle for basic civil liberties; and from Australia where he became aware of the hidden history of the Aboriginal people, the dispossession and extermination and resistance, that was not part of his education as a schoolboy in the 1950s.

If that was all there was to *Heroes* it would not warrant comment beyond that it is an interesting, humane, principled, combative and at times breathless read. But Pilger is also writing about the craft of journalism in the modern world: the classic concerns of George Orwell, media manipulation of thought and language, and therefore perceptions of reality, which in turn determine how we react and relate to ourselves and others. He discusses censorship in the BBC, American journalism's reaction to the Vietnam War, and to Cambodia, the trivialising impact of Rupert Murdoch (News Corporation) and Robert Maxwell (the *Mirror* group newspapers) on British journalism, how increased monopolisation and technological advances have undermined the truth-seeking traditions of journalism and replaced them with the propagandas of authority.

Such journalism can have a human cost, and amongst the honorable journalists Pilger lists are those who have been variously harassed, smeared, persecuted, and censored. Pilger himself has even made it to an assassination hit list (courtesy of the Khmer Rouge, for it was he who drew world attention to the

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Ben Kiernan (ed): *Burchett Reporting the Other Side of the World 1939-1983* (Quartet Books, $48.95).

John Pilger: *Heroes* (Cape, $34.95, Pan, $14.95).

Rupert Lockwood: *War on the Waterfront: Menzies, Japan and the Pig Iron Dispute* (Hale and Iremonger, $19.95 and $29.95).

plight of the Cambodian people at the bloody hands of the Pol Pot regime, he who tried to organise humanitarian help at a time when other journalists were simply rehashing American lies in the form of CIA releases downplaying the dimensions of the tragedy).

Important in *Heroes* is Pilger's account of his adolescence in the Menzies era:

> Because so much was taken for granted in Australia then, few of us knew that Menzies was selling off our post-war industries to great foreign-based companies: the motor industry in its entirety, oil refineries, minerals. Few of us knew he had conspired with the British to explode nuclear weapons on our soil, to kill and maim and poison our environment. Few of us knew he was not at all a 'brilliant man' or even a 'great orator' but a rather petulant, insecure and ruthless figure who smeared and ruined his victims, notably Herbert Vere Evatt, the opposition leader, with bogus allegations at the time of the defection of the Soviet 'spy' Vladimir Petrov. Indeed, in our innocence, we hardly knew that during the 1930s Menzies had regarded Hitler as an inspired leader from whom the democracies had much to learn and whose misdeeds, especially his discrimination against the Jews, had been exaggerated.

Pilger describes a time when to be 'Australian' was to be regarded as un-Australian, even anti-Australian; a time when being like the 'English' was admired, when 'world history' was the history of the British Empire, when Australia's own history was regarded as inconsequential (if not a joke), when Asia was a land-and-people-mass to be simultaneously afraid and ignorant of, when the desire for 'great and powerful friends' led to obsequiousness as a national trait.

Two Australian journalists who came to blows with the cultural climate of the Menzies era, and suffered as a consequence, were Wilfred Burchett and Rupert Lockwood.

Burchett (1911-1983), a pre-war anti-fascist, began his journalistic career in 1939. Working for Australian and British newspapers during the war, he made a name for himself as a reporter who managed to be on the spot when history was happening. Over the next four decades the scoop, whether telephoned, smuggled out by sympathisers, or personally bicycled through war-torn jungles, became his trademark. His sympathies for the communist-led national liberation movements, with America seen as a foreign presence intent on suppressing genuine nationalism, consolidated a reputation earned during the second world war as a troublemaker of considerable magnitude.

Burchett's well-known coup, of being the first journalist to enter Hiroshima after the atomic bomb, and his reports of the massive devastation and consequences the American military and government were trying to cover up, made world news. Burchett came to realise that humanity had entered a new and perilous age, a realisation that led him to combat simplistic Cold War views of a world where communism was a source of evil that had to be destroyed, if necessary by nuclear arsenals.

Fifteen academics and journalists have, in *Burchett: Reporting the Other side of the World 1939-1983*, collaborated to produce a study of Burchett's career and writings, and the allegations and smears that hounded him down through the post-war decades. These included accusations that he had engaged in the interrogation and brainwashing of Allied prisoners of war in Korea and, from the 1960s, he was a KGB agent. The Australian government denied him and his family Australian passports for seventeen years, until the decision was reversed by the Whitlam government in 1972.

Burchett was a suitable target for victimisation; his writings had a huge international readership, his was a powerful voice that challenged Cold War assumptions, and American security authorities had a score to settle with him dating back to 1945.

This is not to say Burchett had no faults, and the authors of this book take him to task for reporting from Eastern bloc countries while ignoring the tensions within communist society, for his praise of Stalin, and for a readiness "to repeat official explanations uncritically". But he was prepared to admit his mistakes; he had courage, humanity, and a sympathy for the underdog; his on-the-spot reporting was, as in the case of the Korean War, one of the few means Western readers (and fellow journalists who plagiarised his work) had of knowing what was really going on behind the facade of official press releases and briefings. Generally his writings (thirty-five books on top of his regular bread and butter journalism) provided insights into events and places inaccessible to conventional journalists.

Rupert Lockwood commenced his career in journalism as a boy, working on his father's country newspaper in Western Victoria. During the 1930s, via the Melbourne Herald, the Singapore Free Press, the Straits Times, and Reuters newsagency, he became a respected and admired Australian journalist.

An anti-fascist, having reported on the spot from Germany after the Hitler takeover, and from the front lines of the Spanish Civil War, and alarmed by Japanese militarism having witnessed it in action in China, Lockwood joined the Australian Communist Party in 1939. As a communist he had a high profile and was a widely read and quoted journalist, lecturer, broadcaster, orator and pamphleteer; because of this he became the victim of a campaign to destroy him politically. Hauled before the Petrov Royal Com-

mission in 1954 he was one of the main communist identities hounded in the Commission's quest for individuals who threatened Australia's security.

Through the 1950s and into the early 1960s Lockwood's journalism attempted to alert Australians to the realities of the Menzies era; amongst his themes were the threat posed to Australia's independence by the emerging American multi-nationals, the selling off of Australia's resources, the nuclear politics of Britain in central Australia, the dangers of Australia being drawn into adventurous American foreign policy, the emergence of Japan as an economic power, the dangers involved in the increasing Australian reliance on Japan as a major trading partner and the false premises of the 'domino theory'.

He had no time for Menzies and a constant theme in Lockwood's writings was to remind Australians of the man who had been an apologist for, and an admirer of, Hitler, the man who had been an apologist for Japan, the man who had jeopardised the security of Australia in the opening stages of the second world war by hitching his band wagon to the military strategies of Great Britain in disregard to Australia's needs. While Lockwood's concerns are now accepted as part of everyday political, economic, and historic discussion, during the Cold War they were regarded as dangerous and subversive.

A Commonwealth Investigation Branch (IB) dossier on Lockwood shows that, from the late 1930s, his mail was tampered with, his speeches recorded, his financial situation monitored, his personal habits and sex life pried into, his writings systematically scrutinised, his associates noted. The first "suspicious" thing that drew him to the attention of the IB was the help and assistance he gave to Jewish refugees from Nazism as they attempted to come to Australia; when the war actually got under way, what really alarmed the IB guardians were Lockwood's sophisticated personality, his worldly experiences, and his ability to communicate with ordinary people. As one agent reported in January 1941, "he possesses qualities above the usual labour enthusiast and are to be reckoned with" (sic).[1]

Lockwood's *War on the Waterfront* is a detailed account of the November 1938 refusal by Port Kembla waterside workers to load the steamer *Dalfram* with scrap-iron for Japan. At the time Japan had an acute steel shortage and Australia's metal industry was enthusiastically meeting the demand for pig- and scrap-iron to help overcome this shortage. So far as the Port Kembla wharfies were concerned the iron was war material, and their boycott was in reaction to Japan's full-scale assault on China in 1937, and the perceived future threat to Australian security posed by Japanese imperialism.

The ban was maintained for two months and became a major political issue. The Lyons government and its Attorney General Robert Menzies retaliated with draconian legislation, the Transport Workers' (Dog Collar) Act, which introduced licences to work on the Port Kembla waterfront—to those prepared to scab on the *Dalfram*. Menzies personally went to Port Kembla to try to break the ban, was met by angry crowds of thousands, and earned the scathing epithet "Pig Iron Bob".

In January 1939 the dispute ended. The *Dalfram* was loaded under duress, while a settlement involving the lifting of the Dog Collar Act, and a review of the pig-iron trade by the government, was agreed to. Former Governor General Sir Isaac Isaacs wrote at the time, in defence of the boycott: "I believe that Port Kembla . . . will find a place in our history beside the Eureka Stockade as a noble stand against executive Dictatorship and against an attack on Australian Democracy."

Lockwood has written here more than a study of a boycott. In an effort to describe the social forces the Port Kembla wharfies were up against, he spends half the book detailing and analysing the strength and extent of pro-German and pro-Japanese mindedness in Australia during the 1930s, sentiment that was widespread but hidden by the World War Two Australian propaganda machine. The sentiment was firmly entrenched in the upper echelons of government, commerce, industry, the rural sector, academia and journalism, a fact conveniently ignored during the Cold War which some of these same people helped shape and promote.

The irony of being smeared as a subversive by people whose own patriotic credentials were less than honorable is not lost on Lockwood. Throughout *War on the Waterfront* there is an undercurrent of controlled anger.

Implicit in Lockwood's book is the belief that had Australia been invaded by Japan during the war there would have been no lack of collaborators to help run a Vichy-style government on its behalf. In an appendix he discusses Japan's plans for, and expectations of, this eventuality.

His main sources here are statements made in 1946 by the Japanese Civil Administrator-elect for Australia, Kennosuke (Ken) Sato, leading journalist, goodwill missioner to Australia in 1934 (he remained for eight months), honorary Lieutenant-General in the Japanese Army, member of the Japanese Navy special department known as the Kaigun Tokumum Bu, and interrogator of Australian POWs.

The Vichy scenario is not new, nor a wild flight of conspiratorial fancy. It has been suggested before by historians Humphrey McQueen and Drew Cottle. During the darkest hours of the war in the Pacific many, like Vance Palmer, believed in the existence of an Australian collaborationist element. There are reasons for believing that official planning for the defence of Australia, in the event of Japanese invasion, took into account opposition by pro-

Japanese fifth columnists. In the Australian Archives documents taken from Japanese consular sources at the outbreak of war in 1941, even though culled and sanitised by the Japanese and, later, Australian authorities, demonstrate the depth and extent of Japanese intelligence activity in Australia prior to Pearl Harbor, and suggest the Japanese expected to conquer and rule Australia with the aid of collaborators. This is a point convincingly made in 1946 by the patriotic Major R. F. B. Wake of the Commonwealth Security Service (later a deputy to the first Director-General of ASIO, Mr Justice Reed) in a report to Federal Attorney-General Dr H. V. Evatt, following a preliminary examination of the consular records.[2]

What is surprising, in the consular documents and in Lockwood's book, are the identities of the pro-Japanese and pro-Germans, people whose support, in the case of Japan, went beyond ordinary politeness and interest in an intriguing foreign culture. These were more distinguished, influential and powerful people than the pathetic eccentric bunch of Australia First members, interned during World War 2 for their pro-Japanese sympathies.

This pro-Japanese quisling theme of *War on the Waterfront* is an old one for Lockwood, and formed a central part of the notorious document he part-authored in the early 1950s, now known to history via the Petrov Commission as Document J. His information then was based on personal sources within the Commonwealth public service and the naval intelligence community. In the Cold War days his pro-Japanese data was dismissed out of hand by anti-communist spooks and legal luminaries intent on ferreting out Soviet agents and destroying both Evatt and the Labor Party.

This time it is not so easy. Australian naval intelligence records, and the Japanese Consular records referred to, make abundantly clear Japanese espionage in Australia commenced on a systematic basis in the late 1880s, that real estate sites permitting monitoring of naval and merchant shipping movements were purchased through front organisations and individuals, that detailed land and sea intelligence was conducted in strategic areas of Australia and that, during the years leading up to the 1941-45 Pacific War, Japan cultivated an eager and willing fellowship of Australian apologists, informants and helpers who, had the nation been invaded by Japan, would have had little trouble in deciding where their true loyalties lay.[3]

In these twilight years of the century, when a new society seems to be crystalising within the shell of democracy, one that has much in common with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* but which, instead of containing the smells of boiled cabbage, seedy squalor, and ersatz rations, is colorfully decked out in the consumer trappings of yuppiedom, we need the touchstone talents of journalists like Pilger, Burchett, and Lockwood.

Burchett is dead; Lockwood is nearly eighty; Pilger, in his late forties, still has a way to go. The risks of their sort of journalism being what they are, it is to be hoped Pilger can stay ahead of the assassin's talents, the intelligence community frame-up, the bureaucrat's insidious paper work, the politician's cobra venom.

Rowan Cahill, a teacher, lives at Bowral, New South Wales. He is completing a biography of Rupert Lockwood.

1. Commonwealth Investigation Branch, and later Commonwealth Investigation Service, dossier on Rupert Lockwood, 1939-1949, Volumes 1 and 2, Australian Archives, Canberra, CRS/A6119/40 and CRS/A6119/41.
2. Humphrey McQueen, *Gallipoli to Petrov* (Sydney, 1984), p. 156; Drew Cottle, "The Commanding Heights of Treachery: Sydney's rich appeasers 1938-1942", paper presented at the "Wrong Way—Go Back" conference, Sydney University, February 1979, and "What is in Document 'J'?", paper presented at the Marxist Summer School, Sydney, January 1984; Vance Palmer writing in Meanjin Papers, no. 8, March 1942, extract in Ian Turner, *The Australian Dream* (Melbourne, 1968), pp. 305-306. Japanese consular documents, Australian Archives: Investigation Branch, Security Service; CRS C443, NA 1983/293, Consular Investigation Files, alpha numeric series. Report by Major R. F. B. Wake, Special Investigation Branch, N.S.W. Correspondence files (Japanese Activities), 1942-1946, Australian Archives, N.S.W., ST 1604/1, Item N 40344. I am indebted to Drew Cottle for drawing my attention to the Japanese consular material. Following the election of Robert Menzies as Prime Minister, in 1950 there was a shake-up in ASIO: Mr Justice Reed was moved aside and replaced by Colonel Charles Spry, and ASIO was taken out of civilian control. Major Wake was dismissed from the organisation during this political manoeuvering.
3. For a pioneering discussion of Japanese espionage in Australia see R. D. Walton, "Feeling for the Jugular: Japanese espionage at Newcastle, 1919-1926", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1986, pp. 20-38.

swag

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

This issue of Overland is dedicated to the memory of Ewa Czajor, the young Melbourne theatre director who was murdered in Thailand early in January. I got to know, admire and like Ewa because she directed and produced two of my daughter's plays over the last year or so. In doing so she immersed herself completely in the text and the author's intentions, and translated the scripts to the stage with sensitivity and a sense of setting at the highest professional level. Totally dedicated to her life in theatre, at the time of her death she was spending a few weeks travelling in Thailand before proceeding to spend some time working in the Polish theatre. There is no doubt that Ewa, had she lived, would have had a major role to play in the history of theatre in Australia, and the blind randomness of her death, with decades of talent undeployed, and not long after we said goodbye to her on a lovely day at our own house, and wished her well, is hard to comprehend. William Gaddis, in *The Recognitions*, talks of "the unswerving punctuality of chance." A tribute to Ewa Czajor appears in this issue.

As an ethnic, one generation removed, on my father's side (a Scot, actually; blacksmiths – hence the name – and fishermen on Gigha, the southernmost island in the Inner Hebrides, and until quite recent times Gaelic-speaking) and because, in this bicentennial year, I remember how much we owe to the British, and to the Irish (one of my grandmothers was Irish), I try to stay in touch with what my mother (a second-generation Australian) called Home. (But she did it, I suspect, self-consciously, and to make a point.)

In any case it seems to be that English intellectual life today is of extraordinary interest, especially in terms of quality writing and argument. Amidst all the cynicism about publishing takeovers and the commercialisation of cultural life it's well to remind ourselves occasionally that the world has perhaps never seen such a richness of discourse as is provided by the London publishing industry, in association with the media, and especially the magazines. Where else, except perhaps Paris and New York, can you find the richness of the compost of ideas, mixed from the work of hundreds of independent, free-range writers prepared to have a go? Clive James once wrote: "There is no Australian literary world . . . The literary world is in London and New York, the only cities big enough to sustain magazines which can afford to reject copy."

I try to read the review pages of the London 'Sundays', for they remind me that book-reviewing can be a literary art-form of the highest skill and interest. I read the Times Literary Supplement, as – especially – a provincial literary editor must. I have given up the Listener, the once-magnificent journal of the BBC, after a correspondence with its editor. I pointed out that it no longer carried the broadcasts and debates of the best British minds. The editor replied that neither did the BBC, but that his circulation had risen. For years I read the New Statesman, but finally gave it away when it became boring. It wasn't so much the sectarian-Left period it went through as the fact that, like the Listener and other weeklies, it became more insular, more Little England, less concerned with a world clientele. (There can be few experiences more disillusioning than to attend a debate in the House of Commons.) But one magazine I have taken to reading recently is the Spectator, partly because of its excellent and often amusing columnists and reviewers, partly because of its informed and balanced international reportage, but also out of admiration for its clever attention to appealing to a world market. I don't have to fuss about with taking out subscriptions in sterling every year, but simply tell my newsagent that I want it delivered. So it comes, at a cost of $2.60 a time, by airmail and often in the same week as it is published in London.

I note that the Spectator claims that its circulation has risen from 18,000 to 35,000 in four years. If so, it deserves it. And I notice it's taking some interest in Australia. Last week there was a long and thoughtful review of the Fred Williams exhibition at the Ser-

pentine Gallery in London, an interesting opportunity to see Fred's work through foreign eyes. This week P. J. Kavanagh discusses Australian writing, and especially Les Murray's poetry. Australian writing, Kavanagh says, "seems to have arrived all at once", and makes a comment we may all think about:

> I have quoted John Mitchel before, the exiled Irishman, lamenting that the beauty of a Tasmanian lake was not so 'berhymed' as Lake Windermere, and prophesying that it would be. This is exactly what Les A. Murray has been doing, because now, at last, there is enough specifically Australian past to lament, to compare with the worst of Australia's present; enough, also, that is specifically, historically, Australian to celebrate, in words and rhythms formed in Australia, which describe colours and forms and shapes and people (and flowers, and trees, and whatever) that belong to Australia and nowhere else, with a verbal relish and luxuriance that Shakespeare himself might have given the nod to. And because it has now all been fully absorbed there is room and ease to move from the particular to larger matters; what Murray, with Australian lack of pretension, calls 'the other topics'.

Keith Russell's review of Les Murray's *The Daylight Moon* in this issue, received after these notes were written, makes an interesting coda to Kavanagh's remarks.

In Overland 108 we published a set of poems by Lily Brett on the theme of the Jewish sufferings at the hands of the Nazis in the second world war. One of these poems, "Poland", expressed the views of the narrator's mother on her (the author's) proposed visit to Poland. In the course of the poem the mother says "the Poles were worse than the Germans", and the poem, through the mother, accuses the Poles of knowing about the extermination camps but shrugging their shoulders.

Two Australian Poles have protested vigorously to Overland, pointing out that the Poles suffered enormously in the war, as well as the Polish Jews, and that there are countless records of Jewish lives being saved by heroic Polish actions. At Yad Vashem in Israel the sacrifices of these Poles are commemorated.

We offered our correspondents on this matter what we considered reasonably generous space in Overland to make their points. In each case we proposed reducing what they had to say – one in a letter, another in a poem – to the core issues. We received what I regard as a very Polish reaction, which was 'print everything or nothing'. Therefore I cannot use the words of the protesters.

In Overland's view the statements in Lily Brett's poem are not to be read as historical assertions. They express the immediate, emotional reaction of a mother who learns that her daughter intends to return to the scene of her parents' agony and the agony of a whole culture. They are not, and are not intended to be, read as a statement of fact, and are no more representative of the author's own beliefs than are the statements of any character depicted in imaginative writing. They are a colloquial comment on a situation seen by the mother in purely personal terms. If expressed as an author's opinion in a newspaper article or book the sentiments would be racist and despicable. In the context of Lily Brett's poem they are expressing the spontaneous feelings of a tortured woman – we all, at times, express ourselves outrageously under stress. They are intended, we believe, to be read sensitively and with these insights.

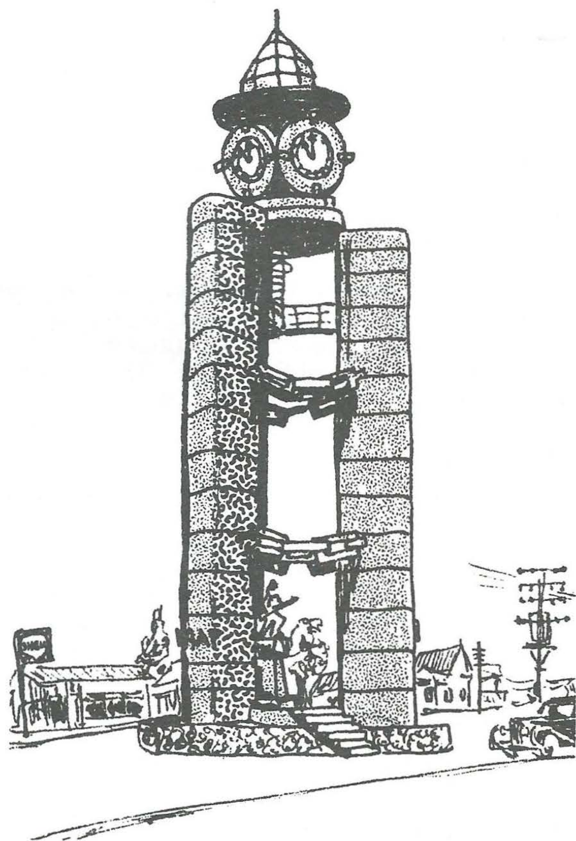
It was disappointing that the musical version of "Manning Clark's History of Australia", produced at the Princess Theatre in Melbourne in January and February, didn't do better. It appears that the show will not now be seen in other States. The Princess was the right place to put it on: Melbourne's most loved theatre, a relic, tawdry now, of the boom-time 1880s, full of historical resonances itself and, I hope, one day to be restored to its former magnificence.

The show itself was a good romp, ingeniously written and mounted, and not to be taken too seriously – which, unfortunately, is what the critics did. It had its problems, starting with the title. Despite Helen Bourke's comments in Overland 109, I very much doubt that Manning Clark *is* a household word in Australia, though I would like to see him one. For me, there was plenty of humor in the show but not enough wit, and I would have liked to see more sketches interspersed with the ensemble singing, which was not always easy to follow. The almost total ignorance of Australians of their own history and literature meant that, to many, the historical characters were obscure – how many, I wondered, knew enough about Henry Parkes to enjoy the cracks at his expense? And Geoffrey Blainey was overheard to say: "An excellent show, except for the lamentable occasions when it lapsed into seriousness."

The musical was a great effort, refreshingly taking out of the Bicentenary the po-faced sententiousness which has already driven many into exile for twelve months. With a little pruning and re-writing it deserved, and more than deserved, a national tour. The night I was there, in 'run on' time after a decision to abandon the show had been rescinded, the house was full and most enthusiastic. But John Timlin, the producer, told me that "shows only succeed when the Rotary Clubs and the AMP employees' associations start making block bookings." And this didn't happen. Tom Griffiths writes on the production in this issue.

Talking of the bicentenary, here is the Melbourne

editor and wit John Bangsund, who has been completing the index to the first hundred issues of Overland, in a letter to me: "I watched all 260 minutes of 'Australia Live' last Friday night. Listening to Julie Anthony singing 'Advance Australia Fair', I decided that it is the best possible anthem for us. All national anthems are silly in one way or another, whether you consider their words, music or divisive function, but 'Advance Australia Fair' is monumentally ridiculous in all three respects, therefore not to be taken seriously, therefore ideal. Whenever I hear it I think of the Ulverstone War Memorial, uniquely Australian, awesome in its innocent absurdity, and wholeheartedly to be cherished."



I wrote about Kylie Tennant in Swag last year, when she received an honorary degree at Monash University. Her death at the end of February was accomplished in good Kylie style, with a newspaper campaign inspired by her on the right of those critically ill to arrange a dignified end to their own lives. She was a courageous woman, consistently writing across the grain. Her *Ride On Stranger* (1943) was, we should remember in these more liberated days, well ahead of its time in championing women's freedom in an urban setting, a novel which also satirised the dogmatic Left political movement, and aroused its fury. And Kylie gave Overland strong support in some of its most difficult days. She wrote her own epitaph, in *The Missing Heir* (1986), where she describes Australians barracking for the bull at a Spanish bull-fight: "I have heirs all over the world—wherever someone gets up and barracks for the bull."

Overland is again offering an Alan Marshall Fellowship to a writer. The fellowship covers the use of a house at Sorrento, Victoria, for three months from May this year, with a supporting stipend of $3000. Applications, to me, should be sent as soon as possible, and close at the end of April. They should include personal and professional details and a statement of the work intended to do. We reserve the right to make no appointment. The latest Alan Marshall Fellow was Dorothy Hewett. Her poem in this issue was one product of her period at Sorrento.

In Overland 109 I discussed the fact that there are hardly any major publishers left in Australia which are Australian-owned, and later on within this category mentioned Melbourne University Press and the University of Queensland Press. I have very properly since been chipped about my failure to mention two sturdy and quite independent 'Australians', Currency Press of Sydney and the Fremantle Arts Centre Press. Currency, which has been in existence seventeen years, has published two hundred plays, as well as other titles on film and the performing arts. Indeed Katharine Brisbane, one of the press's founders, published a history of Currency in Overland 86—perhaps she'll bring it up to date for us before too long. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, under the direction of Ian Templeman, has a turnover of three-quarters of a million dollars, and numbers amongst its triumphs Albert Facey's *A Fortunate Life* and, more recently, Sally Morgan's *My Place*, which will have printed 100,000 copies within a year of publication, and is in the process of being sold—the book, not the firm—to Britain and the United States. A new book by Sally Morgan, taking up the story of one of the uncles mentioned at Corunna Downs, will appear from FACP in 1989. *My Place* will be reviewed in the next Overland.

Patting-our-own-back department. If we printed a page of extracts from readers' letters in each issue of this magazine I believe many of you would find it both moving and interesting, though we do not intend to do so. The magazine does seem to touch so many people's hearts—and, I hope, their minds—in what are often unexpected ways. We are always particularly touched by the few lines that often accompany renewals from long-term subscribers, sometimes now retired and economising, but so often sending along a few extra dollars to help. One subscriber wrote the other day to say "there seems to be a gentleness and

humanity to your magazine which *are* Australian characteristics and which are lacking elsewhere", then adding a reference to another magazine which "whinges and big-notes all the time." This subscriber was moved to send a life subscription—which, still standing at $100, has proved a bargain to many—with a handsome donation in addition. I'm sure I don't know if we deserved the kind words. An editor can no more assess his magazine in the round that someone who has their portrait painted can judge how good it is. But I hope we do.

The twenty-ninth Meanjin-Overland test match was played on a delightful oval in the Melbourne Domain on 28 February. Poets, publishers, academics and ring-ins were all to be seen dropping catches and nervously facing up to demon bowlers, or those who hoped they were. It was good cricket though, a nice social occasion and there was even one woman player—tokenism at its worst—in the shape of the historian Verity Burgmann. My two Argentinian guests were rather puzzled about the whole show. Overland won, 137 to 130, in a fine, exciting finish, and Ian Mair, in his day Melbourne's finest reviewer and now over 80, not only presented the Emu Egg Trophy but pointed out that 71 years ago he entered Melbourne Grammar, just over the road, where he learnt the tune to Newbolt's "There's a deathless hush in the close tonight," the whole of which he then sang us. Meanjin has won fourteen tests, Overland thirteen, and there has been one draw and one tie.

Michael Goodison, whose poems will be familiar to many Overland readers, writes to say that he is launching a monthly magazine, poetry only, about June this year, and that it is intended that the Small Times—its title—"will represent a substantial increase in publishing opportunities for poets in Australia." He adds, rather unkindly, that "unlike so many other magazines, the Small Times will be published frequently and on time." Price $2 a copy, $20 a year, and initially at least no payments to authors. Enquiries: PO Box 6, Hepburn Springs, Victoria 3461.

I'm delighted to see in print the literary essays of John Morrison, and equally delighted to see that eleven of the nineteen essays were first published in Overland. Entitled *The Happy Warrior*—a reference to Alan Marshall, the subject of the first essay—the book is published in paperback by Pascoe Publishing, PO Box 51, Fairfield, Victoria 3078, at $9.95. Many of the pieces are autobiographical, unfortunately as close as we are going to get to a full autobiography from John, who can no longer type. Included is the famous article on the Murray floodwaters, "The Big Drink", published in the Age in 1964.

I should like to give readers advance notice of one of the most marvellous books about Australia I've read in a long time, and a book I haven't yet seen mentioned in the review pages. It's Joan Colebrook's *A House of Trees* (Chatto, $29.95). Joan Colebrook grew up in north Queensland, in clearings in the rainforest, and this is the story of her coming to maturity in an Australia changing in many ways. Since 1940 she has lived in Massachusetts, has published a number of books, and is a New Yorker contributor. I have little doubt that *A House of Trees* will be, of its kind, the single most significant contribution to our bicentenary—though not, of course, intended as that. This is a taste of her brilliant writing, which combines a fine ability to handle words with an equally impressive ability to think about the meaning of her experiences. She is writing of her parents' decision to send her to a private school:

> In other words, we did not enlarge upon the possibility that the decision had something to do with the conflict embedded in Australian society, or the need to recognize the nature of the country we were in—not only the newness of it, not only the deserts and forests and, in our case, the wall of dark jungle that seemed at first to repel human hands, not only the unremitting toil needed to keep abreast of the earth's demands, but also the sense of a heathen image which we could not worship and must therefore charm away with a martial front. It was for this reason, surely, that we accepted so readily the old shibboleths bestowed upon us by the English—the prows of the Norsemen, the spirit of Neptune, and the banners of the Church Triumphant (as we also accepted the prisons of Newgate). We thought of God as a source of help, as a towering barrier between us and physical or economic disaster. It was the voice of God which drove us to become educated, and drove us also to believe blindly that we could thereby control our future.

Geoffrey Blainey's recent Brittanica Award for "excellence in the dissemination of knowledge for the benefit of mankind" was almost totally ignored by the Australian press. Based on recommendations from universities and institutes around the world, each award is worth $35,000 and an accompanying gold medal—real gold. Other recipients were John Kenneth Galbraith; the Mexican writer Octavio Paz; the Canadian critic Jane Jacobs; and the Chinese anthropologist Fei XiaoTong.

RMS

PATRICK STEWART

The Tiger of Eildon

At least once in a person's existence the unpredictable does occur, and it is gratifying to possess at that moment the necessary tools for the job, whatever it may be. In my rucksack was a stub of a carpenter's pencil and a map with a plain cover. This tool combination was to prove vital in the story I am about to relate.

On 21 April, 1953, I had made camp in the bush area surrounding Eildon Weir, Victoria. The following morning was crisp and exhilarating, as I prepared for the next leg of my journey. The terrain was rugged and, after a few hours on trek, an old ankle injury recurred, and this, compounded with physical exhaustion, persuaded me to rest on a tree trunk lying askew on the ground.

With rucksack removed I felt much better and so checked on the whereabouts of my uncomplaining partner, Trae, a young kelpie dog. He had found his parking lot at the rear of the log that I was astride, and was curled up into a black-and-white ball.

With an hour and a half of complete silence and in a state of meditation, I observed the desolation surrounding me. The stripped bark of the grey gum trees hung like curtains in a mediaeval castle. The leaves, though tinted in ochre, were laced with a dull grey that was evident in every nook and cranny. Their presence in undulating mounds concealed the trap of gnarled branches twisting across the terrain, making foot progress extremely hazardous. Poverty reigned everywhere and I mentally compared the greyness with that of a petrified forest.

Certainly no animal life abounds here, I thought, and in a split second I had to be proved wrong; and so very wrong at that. There was a faint rustle of leaves and my eye caught a swift movement. The unpredictable was about to happen.

An animal had emerged out of nowhere and had leapt onto a log adjacent to the tree trunk I was on. The distance between the logs was approximately twenty feet.

The spectacular emergence of the intruder gave me quite a jolt and the hairs on the nape of my neck stood up like soldiers on parade. Here I was looking at a wild beast that I did not even know existed. The gender was male and he was in poor physical condition when he jumped plumb into my life.

I must mention at this point that a slight zephyr had arisen from his direction and no doubt blunted his senses and made him unaware of my presence.

The frame was plain to see, as the body was emaciated, particularly in the rib-cage region. From the shoulder he stood about twenty inches in height; and the coat coloring was a murky grey tan, and the skinny buttocks sported black brown vertical stripes. The tail was ugly, being short and seemingly unfinished, much like that of a rodent. From the top of the head to the jawline the skull formation seemed unduly long, and down the spinal column there was a series of lumps that suggested he was very old or possibly arthritic. At this juncture, with head down, close to the log, it seemed he was searching for something, most probably ants or lizards.

My observations came swiftly to an end when I realised that Trae could be in peril. I could almost hear the crunching and munching and the cracking of my partner's bones. With tortoise motion, I checked his location. There he was, still in his roll-ball posture, and completely oblivious to the beast's scent and the drama taking place.

Alas, my head movement was observed and my presence betrayed. Here we were, eye-ball to eye-ball, glowering at each other. The head was long, as I have said, and the area around the eyes of this primitive being bore the resemblance of a pig or, perhaps, that of an English bull terrier. Some teeth were decayed or amiss in the gums and the fangs were sabre-like and long; and I wondered how the lower and upper fangs fitted into a closed mouth.

At that moment he seemed to epitomise the surroundings. Its barrenness, the downed logs, the prolific spread of sapless leaves and strewn branches, the ruggedness of the rock-impregnated ground, all, in an odd way, seemed to compare with the fleshless birdcage of that lone predator.

He did not tolerate my scrutiny for long. His next move was the turning of his rump in my direction and,

instead of leaping off the tree trunk as I anticipated, in a dilatory fashion he just slid off the side of the log and vanished.

The visitation was at an end. His exodus was complete; and then I thought, if only there had been pen and paper to record details of my observation. Foraging in the rucksack my fingers touched what turned out to be a blunt-nosed pencil stub. I had located tool number one. The remaining contents of the bag were tossed on the dusty floor of leaves, stones and twigs. At that moment, like a shaft of sunlight in a musty coalmine, the map cover in its whiteness gave me an inspiration. Now I had the goods, I could finish the job. With haste the snub-nosed instrument raced across the map-holder, levelled on a water-bottle positioned on my knee.

Before I arrived at the small township of Eildon I met a party of workers employed on a dam site. Mentioning the strange animal, I asked whether it was possible for a canine and feline to mate. This caused a stir until it was realised that I meant only could a dog and a cat cross-breed. No doubt the question must have seemed a silly one, as I met with derision and some Rabelaisian wit. I felt ill at ease. Nevertheless, the general synopsis was, it was a "bloody 'roo from Woolloomooloo". The pursuit of the matter stopped there and then.

Many years had to pass before my interest was re-kindled by a newspaper article about an incident in the same area. A colony of young animals with strange colored markings on their buttocks molesting sheep was captured by conservationist farmers. A comparison was made between them and a nomadic dog of Tasmania. There was no relationship.

Later I saw a photo of an animal on the move on the front page of the Sydney Sunday Telegraph. I realised the photo was that of the Thylacine or Tasmanian Tiger, which I met at close proximity that April day.

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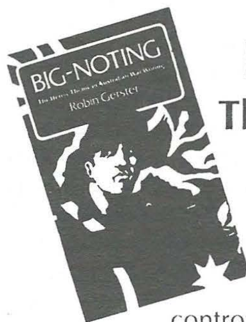

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CARRILLO GANTNER

An Australian Play in China

SHANGHAI 24/5/87:

The headquarters of the Shanghai People's Art Theatre (SPAT) are in a house about five kilometres to the south of the city centre. The house must have been built around the thirties, when this part of Shanghai was divided into foreign concessions. It would have housed a moderately prosperous European family in its three stories set behind a large garden of open lawn surrounded by flower beds and trees. It is not truly grand, like some of the Shanghai mansions of the period, but you still sense the original life-style in the iron baths on legs now rusting in the tiled bathrooms, and in the narrow stairs for servants at the back of the house.

The street outside, Anfu Road, echoes the quiet, upper-class origins of the original concessions. It is lined with plane trees, all severely pruned to flatten the branches so they meet in a shady canopy in the centre of the road. They were no doubt planted well after 1949 in the massive, annual public drives that have done so much to improve the urban environment of many cities. The central districts of Shanghai and Nanjing, further inland on the Yangtze River, have many such streets of plane trees, beautiful in mottled green yet unnatural in their tortured shapes, looking in winter like they've been got at by the Camberwell City Council. Their wide, coarse leaves seem the perfect dust trap, and as Anfu Road is under repair just outside the theatre's double gate, this is an important secondary benefit. I always use a little rhyming joke to remember the Chinese for plane tree, a 'hutong' tree. The Chinese word for 'plain' in the sense of 'common' is 'putong'.

We drove in past the gate house and the garden. We couldn't complete the tight turning circle at the front steps because the way was blocked by a small wall of parked bikes. There would normally be many more, but this was Sunday. There was no-one on the steps to meet us as we were a few minutes early. Such receptions are standard here. Even when you know people well, you never walk straight into an official meeting at a ministry or other work unit. There is always someone at the front gate or door to greet you and escort you to the assigned room. It's usually a junior officer who leads you up the stairs and through the drab, ill-lit, concrete ministerial corridors, while the senior official awaits you in the antimacassared armchairs of the meeting room. The pattern hasn't changed from the imperial court, though the trappings have.

Of course theatre companies and theatre people are not like ministries and government officials, but still the courtesy is usually observed. We are expected to arrive exactly at the appointed time. When I first started work at the Embassy in Beijing, I could never understand why our Chinese drivers sometimes drove at snail's pace to meetings. It offended my Western habits of wanting to get there, to get on with it. But to be early, to arrive before the receiver is in position, is as rude as coming late.

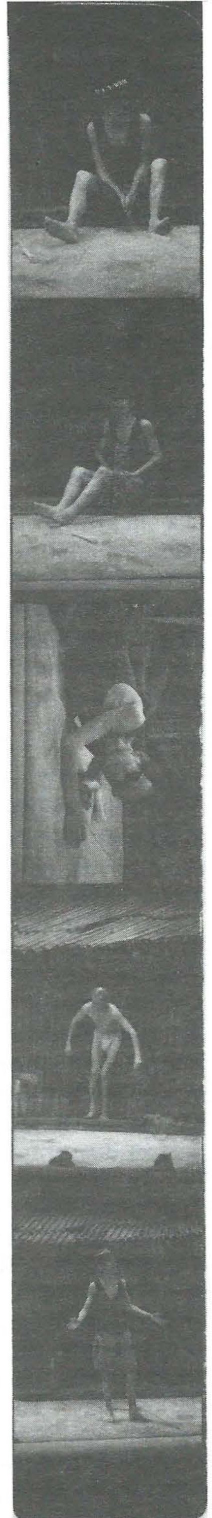
I told Zhou, the young driver from our Consulate General in Shanghai, to wait while we went inside. I wanted to be sure we were expected. There was no-one in the small front hall, though three upright pianos were lined up there gathering dust. I climbed the wood panelled stairs to the landing on the first floor. They must have heard me coming as Sha YeXin, the Company's mercurial director, came bouncing down from the third floor to meet me. Sha is a short, cuddly man of about forty-eight, with glasses that disguise his alert and darting eyes. He was wearing a green-striped polo shirt which hung down over the slight beginning of a paunch. Apart from being leader of this company, he is one of China's very best contemporary playwrights. He has also been one of the most controversial.

In 1979 Sha's play, "If I Were Real" (or "The Impostor" as it is known overseas) caused something of a sensation in its original Shanghai season and in subsequent productions with other troupes around the country. It is loosely modelled on Gogol's "The Government Inspector". It concerns a young man, exiled to the country in the Cultural Revolution, who desperately wants to get a permit to return to the city to live so he can marry his sweetheart. Initially an innocent, he soon accepts the identity mistakenly thrust upon him by others as the son of a very high government official from the capital. The deception

is compounded at increasingly senior levels until he gets the necessary permit from officials fawning on his presumed connections. This system of *guanxi*, or 'relationships', which oils the wheels of every aspect of Chinese society, is thoroughly exposed before the young man is confronted by his 'father' and exposed. The moral authority of the Party is reasserted in an inevitable but somewhat ponderous closing speech.

But the question remains: what if he really were the son of a senior leader? Most people in China would be in no doubt about the answer. It's a hot question in a country where the press often carries stories about the children of high party officials being charged with serious crimes, everything from fraud to rape, after their parental protection had been exposed by some persistent and courageous victim prepared to suffer for the truth. To their credit, the party discipline committees which handle such cases give wide publicity to the reassertion of justice. Still, in those cases that do make it to the People's Courts, I suspect we see only the tiny tip of a very large iceberg built of *guanxi*. Favors are bestowed, permits and travel documents issued, good jobs assigned, sentences suspended, promotions granted, all on the basis of *guanxi*. Your rank gives you *guanxi*, the higher the greater. If you don't have rank you must buy *guanxi* with presents, foreign cigarettes, good alcohol, dinners, electrical appliances, gold jewellery or cash. Some foreign companies setting up in China play the game by giving overseas trips or fleets of cars to their Chinese counterparts. It miraculously unsnavels knots in the negotiating process. Among outsiders the Japanese probably understand the rules better than most.

I had read but never seen "The Impostor". You can't see it now, at least not in China. I had seen a more recent play of Sha's, "Looking for a Man", a warm comedy about a thirty year-old girl looking for a husband. In China for a woman to be unmarried at thirty is a family and social catastrophe. Sha had turned this issue into a delightful romp that managed to touch on many of the issues that concern young people in China today—infatuation with the West, discos, hooliganism, marriage-broking, *guanxi*, bossy mothers, patriotism and plain, old-fashioned love. The excellent production starred my favorite actress from this company, Xi MeiJun, whom I had been determined to cast when we originally talked about my directing here and I had proposed "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll". Now Sha is writing a play entitled and featuring "Confucius, John Lennon and Jesus Christ". I suspect we will have to wait some time to see that on a Chinese stage, though it should find hot demand in the West were it not for the projected cast of one hundred.



Sha led us back to the large room on the third floor where he has his desk, the usual small glass-topped variety, face-to-face with another in front of a small

sunny balcony overlooking the garden. The room was also furnished with a large, cloth-covered table for meetings and the inevitable couches, now also pulled up close to face each other. The people already in the room broke off their conversation as Sha moved to introduce us: the actor Yu Luo Sheng deputy director of SPAT, whom I had seen on stage as Petruchio in "The Taming of The Shrew" during the 1986 Shakespeare Festival, and more recently as the psychiatrist in Peter Shaffer's "Equus"; Du ShiXiang, a gentle, kind face under swept-back grey hair, introduced as the company's leading designer, and two or three actors.

Sha began by saying that they had chosen Jack Hibberd's "A Stretch of the Imagination" because it represented a new style in China. SPAT had never done a one-man play before and he was not aware of any other Chinese company which had. Why would you when you had over a hundred actors on permanent, life-long contract? He had seen several good examples of the form on an official trip to the USA in 1986 and was interested to be the first to use it here. Sha said that Shanghai audiences would welcome the play, which would also be the first professional production of an Australian play in China, and the first time a professional Australian director had worked here on a play.

I quaked a little. I had told Sha on several occasions how thin were my directing credentials, but he had always dismissed these protests, genuine though they were. Perhaps the real attraction was the fact that I was already in China and there was no question of who would pay the international air fares. And I knew it wasn't actually the first Australian play to be produced in China and in Chinese as Sally Sussman, an Australian then a student at the Central Drama Academy in Beijing, had done a production of Richard Bradshaw's "Bananas" with students the previous year.

"Stretch" said Sha, would be a test of the director and actor, a great opportunity for them to show creativity. He himself was very confident in the ability of Wei ZongWan: he was a "big talent" who had recently been seen in several good films. Sha said that he preferred the translation that had been done by Professor Hu WenZhong, Vice President for Academic Affairs at Beijing Foreign Studies University and Director of the Australian Studies Program there. Hu had studied for an MA under Professor Leonie Kramer at Sydney University from 1979-1981 and was extremely well read in Australian literature. The first time we had met at some Embassy function I had been dazzled by his knowledge of, and often close personal relations with, many Australian writers. Also by his charm and articulate intelligence. He was translating two novels by Patrick White as well as running an important University when I had asked him to read the play.

Hu's translation of the title was not literal but, it had caught Sha's ear as a good catchy audience winner: "Xiang Ru Fei Fei". It is a known, four-character phrase meaning "to indulge in fantasy" or "to allow the imagination to run wild". That's pretty much the sense of the title in English. Talking to Hu, I knew that he had often avoided the literal, trying to find a Chinese image or idiom that could be easily understood by a Chinese audience and yet conveyed some of the colors of Jack's densely textured language. Sha obviously understood this, as he said the translation was good for both actor and audience.

Several things were bothering me. Who would be my interpreter during the rehearsal period? This was critical to the success of the whole exercise. I had to know when examining a line or an action that we were talking about the same thing. Sha advised that Zhao Yu, an English teacher from Nanjing University with a special interest in foreign drama, had written asking to act as interpreter for the production. How did she even know it was coming up? I may never know. Perhaps she had seen the brief notice in SPAT's own monthly magazine Drama; perhaps she is 'a friend of a friend'. The theatre works like that in every country.

There was also still the problem of timing. Should the play be produced in winter or summer? Wei, the actor, was practical about this. He noted that "Stretch" was a summer play: the setting and atmosphere were hot. It was much better to rehearse in the heat of August. At times in the play Monk O'Neill wears very little, shorts or a ragged jock strap. Wei couldn't imagine how he could rehearse, let alone perform, in winter without layers of long underwear, sweaters and coats which would restrict movement and physical invention. The rehearsal rooms were cold and draughty, no place to recreate the harsh Australian desert. In winter the Chinese government allows heating in offices, factories and housing blocks north of the Yangtze River. Shanghai is on the south bank of this arbitrary line. I knew from bitter experience that you go to meetings dressed in layer upon layer of clothing and still you sit there sniffling, frozen hands wrapped around the warm tea cup to induce blood flow to the extremities. In the theatres, which are also unheated, you watch actors' breath condensing in the cold air. Wei was right. It would be hard to persuade a Shanghai audience in January to accept Monk's lines, "I postulate a steam producing maximum of 112 degrees . . . Sweat at this hour. It'll be up to my tool by noon".

The other problem that worried me was whether the Shanghai Cultural Bureau would approve the play itself. Sha had given them a copy of the translation for prior approval. I knew that there were several passages in the play that might cause offence in China:

> She knew all the correct terms . . . maternity matron at Leongatha Base. What a pelvis. She

stretched out for me one humid afternoon . . . on the sands of Venus Bay. Naked. Red raw. Oozing. She didn't swoon . . . not Rosemary . . . said something about a cocktail frankfurt in a steam press . . . more like a cauldron was my retort.

Professor Hu knew it too and had suggested, when making the translation for these passages, that he should provide both a full and fairly literal translation, but also an abbreviated version with gentler Chinese images that would not cause offence. I've always found it odd that Chinese films and TV are full of violence, blood and gore, but even the faintest suggestion of sex attracts severe censure. Just when you expect a couple to hold hands or kiss, the camera cuts to a sunset or other saccharine and sentimental shot. A billion people would suggest that the subject is not totally unknown, but whatever happens happens under the covers.

Sha said that they had not yet had a formal response from the Cultural Bureau but he didn't expect any problems. Certainly sex was not the issue. I assumed from this that they had given the Cultural Bureau the milder version. Journalists have given people in the West the impression that the current campaign against "bourgeois liberalization" (bourgelib) has something to do with the influence of Western style and morals in China. But it's not that, at least it's not that unless such influences lead to the next step, which is to question the authority of the Communist Party. The problem is that while the leaders of the Party, especially those in the Propaganda Department, know what it's meant to mean, out there in society "anti-bourgeois liberalization" is used to justify all sorts of criticisms and personal vendettas. If you try to manage your factory under the new economic responsibility system you can be accused by lazy workers or party hacks of bourgelib. If you wear mini-skirts or other Western fashions that's obviously bourgelib to some old fogies. So people, particularly artists and intellectuals, become cautious. No-one wants to take responsibility in case the wind changes yet again. My favorite headline from this bourgelib period was one in the daily Xinhua English language news summary which trumpeted "THEORISTS MUST BE BOLD WITHIN APPROVED GUIDELINES".

Jack Hibberd's play was obviously bold, but was it within approved guidelines? The problem is that no-one knows what the guidelines are. Without a codified and trusted legal system in China, there is still an enormous amount of artistic censorship and control exercised by personal whim. Someone hears that a play or a book or a film may be critical of the Party, even by vague implication. They tell someone who tells someone else, and then some top leader who has never seen or read the offending piece sends down instructions that it must be taken off, or cut, or the writer criticized in Party journals. It's not surprising people learn to cover their tail. And I am a foreign diplomat, a government official, so the risks are high. Sha says that if I were just an "ordinary" director from overseas it would not be necessary to give the play to the Cultural Bureau for advance reading.

Sha told us that he had now received his invitation from the Melbourne Spoleto Festival to attend the Festival in Melbourne in September. The Playbox Theatre Company would be producing his play "The Impostor": the invitation had gone directly to the Shanghai Cultural Bureau, with a copy to Sha. He said he was still waiting to have their response, but was very pleased to have been invited. I noted that it was possible the Ministry of Culture in Beijing might not be entirely happy about the planned production of his play, although it had already been done in the United States without any problems. When Playbox produced "Madam Mao" by Therese Radic in 1986, the Ministry complained to me that it satirized and misrepresented important historical figures. I was asked to use my good offices to see that the production was not repeated. In fact, as I told the Ministry at that time, the Australian government itself did not have such authority, and anyway I believed that the play was very much in accord with the official Chinese view that Jiang Qing was a thoroughly nasty woman. Far from being a send-up, the use of elements of acrobatics and Peking Opera in the production itself was a form of cross-cultural flattery.

Sha added that in China theatre and politics were intimately related. In the early years of the Chinese Communist Party and in the Anti-Japanese War theatre had been a weapon to inform and educate the masses. In the Cultural Revolution the theatre had again been totally politicized. But life was not just about politics, and drama was not just a political tool. "Our stage should be full of color, mixing the old, the new, Chinese and Western influences (*"jiu, xin, Zhong, Xi"*)". Choosing an Australian play was not a political decision, he said. I commented that the stage in Beijing and Shanghai was full of foreign plays at this time. In one recent exchange program, the Eugene O'Neill Center in Waterford, Connecticut, had provided directors and staff to produce two American musicals now running concurrently in Beijing, "The Music Man", directed by the O'Neill's President George C. White, and "The Fantastics", in which the song "Rape" had been coyly translated "Kidnap". Chinese directors too were producing Durrenmatt, Frisch and Shakespeare. It was my own view, confirmed by many local theatre artists, that Chinese writers were happy not to have their new works on stage in these days of 'uncertain weather'. The Chinese often talk about the political climate in terms of weather reports. It's a very good way to make the point without being too specific.

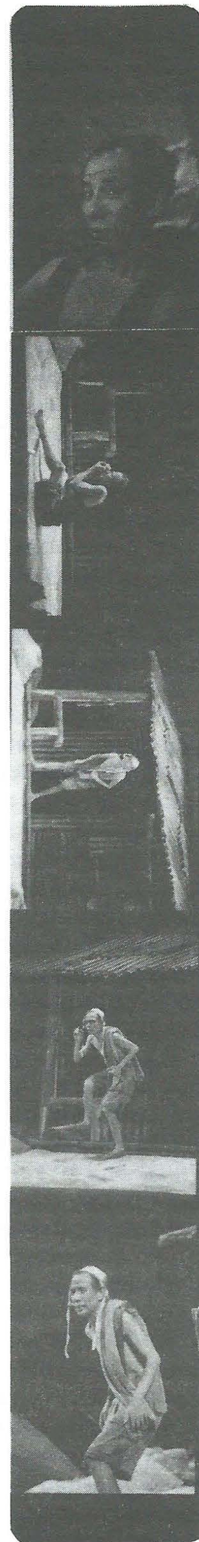
I doubt whether it offered any reassurance, but I promised that the most controversial thing in "Stretch"

would be Monk O'Neill pissing on stage, and that was hardly political. "I will take responsibility for any problems we may have", said Sha. "I hope you will be brave". I really like the man. I admire his writing, his sense of purpose for the Company. And his reading of the weather.

I had come down to this meeting in Shanghai with two main objectives: to cast the play and to begin the design process. I had thought I would be interviewing a handful of actors over the weekend. In my head I even had a couple of actors whom I had seen in previous productions. Yet the play was already cast. Wei ZongWan was not just *an* actor, he was *the* actor. The consciousness of this grew on me as the meeting progressed. Casting has always seemed to me to be the single most important responsibility of the director. Cast right and the show works with the minimum of directorial intervention. Cast wrong and no amount of vision and energy can build the fragile castle in your mind, the finished production. I was stripped of power. Yet this was logical. In a brief meeting I couldn't hope to know the experience, the character, the range of each actor. Even if I could converse freely in Chinese, which I can't, I would only have a physical sense of each man. Yet I had gone into this meeting with just this sense, the Platonic Ideal of Monk.

The thing which has always worried me about the several Australian productions of "Stretch" I had seen was the age of the actor playing Monk. Over the years Peter Cummins, David Kendall, Max Gillies and, especially, Stephen Kearney have all been too young, though their relative youth has given them the manic energy the role demands. Monk has to be eighty at the very end of his days, yet with the energy of a twenty year-old. I've always had Leo McKern in my head as the actor to take that challenge. The slight, quiet man sitting across the room in an open-necked white shirt wasn't built like Leo McKern. Heavy framed glasses shaded Wei's eyes, his skin was weathered and rough. But when he took the glasses off he did have a strong face which creased deeply as his lips turned up in a wide smile. His voice was rich and deep. This could be Monk. When he spoke he seemed practical and assured. I had to trust the choice already made. I'll never know the process by which it was reached.

Wei spoke about the play. He was amazed when he first read it. There was only one actor. This had never happened in China. With traditional Chinese courtesy Wei expressed doubts about his own ability to play the role but confidence in my expertise as a director. I told Wei that we would share our doubts and overcome them. Wei said that during the course of the play he would have to confront eighteen people he'd never met and twenty-four times he would enter this house he didn't know. This was dazzling. The Chinese love numbers. Young married couples want to buy 'the four



bigs'. An harmonious and neighborly family is a 'five goods' household. The papers are full of stories such as "Research Institute achieves 937 results". I had read "Stretch" many, many times, but I had never counted.

The afternoon started with a discussion on design. I had lugged down to Shanghai seven or eight heavy coffee table books on Australia, its landscape, people, painting and architecture. I had previously marked photographs that conveyed to me some aspect of the setting I hoped would emerge. I wanted Du ShiXiang, the designer, to have a sense of the colors, especially of the desert, the clarity of light, the round living shape of rocks, the vastness of the Centre, the clean line of the horizon, the heat, the sand. I was determined that Chinese audiences should have some sense of the strangeness and the harsh beauty of this landscape. But I didn't want the set to be 'pretty' or comfortable. The vocabulary of the play sets it somewhere in north-west Victoria. I wanted to move this further north-west to the hot, mottled-red desert.

My first design image had been to set the play in a child's sand pit with the audience on all sides, but that would have required a theatre in the round which we didn't have. The Arts Theatre in Shanghai where we would be playing is a two-level, traditional proscenium theatre built around 1915 and seating about 800. If possible then, I said, I would like the stage to be covered with a foot of real sand. Not only would this provide an interesting and variable playing surface, it would also lead the actor into new invention. You move very differently in sand. Sawdust would do, just something you could kick and fall on to, something dirty.

The major stage features were Monk's house and a large, beach-style umbrella. I found a couple of pictures of shabby galvanized-iron huts nailed together from rusting scraps. I tried to describe a setting composed of such a hut, but even meaner, standing in the midst of a painting by Fred Williams, a particular painting from the catalog of his Pilbara series which had toured to China in 1985 under the official cultural exchange program. The messy splodges of red, orange and grey, the knife edge horizon, the flat sky. For the umbrella I wanted something madder, an umbrella that might evoke a torn sail, a broken windmill, a tree. This is not a real place but an imagined land, a dream image in which the elements are not quite as they should be.

All of this I wanted brought forward on the stage as far as possible so that the actor could make direct contact with his audience. I talked of paint-spattered gauze fabrics filtering light. I even thought the fabric might be carried out across the proscenium, draping the auditorium walls to create some vast triangular perspective stretching forever away from the audience.

Hours pass quickly in these meetings, pouring over images in books, verbalizing images in the mind. Translation slows the rapid sharing of ideas. We decided to talk of properties and lighting the next day. Today the final words were Wei's. He had sat quietly all afternoon, jotting occasional notes in his black, zippered notebook. His tone was serious. "This is my first experience of working with a foreign director", he said. "It is a very heavy responsibility. From today you are no longer a government official. You are the director".

September 1987

Jack Hibberd arrived from Australia the night before the company moved into the theatre. I met him at the airport. He was wearing a pair of absurd pantaloons and kind of Hawaiian shirt. I had to rescue him from Customs, who pounced on the many signed copies of the play he had brought at my request. They weren't a threat to the integrity or morals of the state, though the earlier threatened ban on the play had made it seem otherwise for a while. Jack had simply ticked the wrong box on the Customs' form. Back at the apartment we talked into the night over a bottle of Australian red. Jack seemed mellower, gentler than when we first met in Melbourne.

In the following day of technical set-up, dress rehearsal and previews, I was locked in the theatre, but Jack walked the streets of Shanghai in search of history and good food. He found both.

The first preview was open only to company members. The morning after, the company's gangly young driver came up to me. He said that Wei was terrific the night before, that everyone in the company was talking about his performance as Monk, that you couldn't find another actor in Shanghai who could have done the role. He was right.

Jack's presence at 'notes' was reassuring to Wei and me. He gave him some new thoughts and some old thoughts freshly delivered. He talked of the need to come upon several key passages in the play as a discovery, and about the sensuous quality of the play's language. The performance is in good shape but, if Wei could now add delight in language, the sense of relish in the words, he would really take off.

During the second preview, for which tickets had been handed out to factories and other organisations to whom the company owed favors, a large number of older people had walked out. Jack noted that eighty per cent of those leaving were women. The first trickle up the aisle began in the early minutes of the play, when Monk pees into a bucket on stage. More walkouts came after the simulated intercourse in the Dorabella scene. Another wave went with the jock-strap. The problem was aggravated by the loud noise coming from the disco entrance at stage right of the theatre. The theatre management decided that making money from the disco in the coffee shop upstairs was more important than theatrical art. It's probably more profitable too. Not only did the disco patrons shout

and push in the corridor outside the stalls, but we could often hear the band itself (or was it recorded music?) thumping down through the walls, occasionally even the heavy hooves of people in what sounded like a Mexican hat dance.

Some people even left during the Les Darcy scene. Was it the overt Australian patriotism of this scene? If so it's ironical—such nationalism is taken for granted when it's done in the name of China.

Immediately after the show I talked to the technical crew (over twenty for a one-man play) on stage. I said I was shocked by the walkouts, but that we must be defiant and bold. We would change nothing. They tried to assure me that tonight's audience was exceptional, that it was all "paper" (i.e. free tickets), and tomorrow would be different. I was not convinced, but it was no time to compromise. We had come too far to change now to accommodate the unknown tastes of an unknown audience.

After the tech. notes I went upstairs and sat with Monk in the dressing room. He said he hadn't felt well all day, and when the audience started to leave he had wanted to cry. Then he too had become defiant, playing to "the real audience" who stayed. After the show he wanted to cry again when his old teacher from twenty-five years ago at the Shanghai Drama Institute had come to see him and for ten minutes had praised his performance and the play. I had had a similar experience in the foyer where a director from the Shanghai Children's Art Theatre had come up to me, clasped my hand for a long time, and told me how wonderful the evening had been. He said we must do a special performance for theatre professionals in Shanghai to see this important work. I was touched by his genuine enthusiasm for the work.

Thinking later about the audience response, I realised just how startling the play must have been to many people, most of them not used to the theatre at all, let alone this sort of theatre. We were doing a new work, a brave work. Its context was totally unknown to the audience. Its style was different. Its content was exceedingly daring by Chinese standards. We should expect people to leave. Chinese audiences are usually noisy, particularly at the beginning of plays. They talk, sometimes spit, they are used to walking in and out of the theatre during a performance, regardless of the actor's concentration. The fact that we are not using microphones on stage must also be a problem for some of them. They are not used to listening actively. If nothing else, this production may lead some members of the audience to listen to language, to focus on the stage, to give the actor the professional courtesy he deserves. I've been told on many occasions that the poor behavior of Chinese audiences is a result of the Cultural Revolution. Well if we can help, in even a tiny way, to restore respect and courtesy in the Chinese audience, we will have done something.

Saturday, 19 September 1987

The day of the opening night. Friends arrived this morning by train from Beijing. We had croissants and coffee for brunch and then set out for a day of touristing. It's odd to have no rehearsal today, to know there is nothing more I can do now to make the play work. So we set off to the Yu Gardens, Nanjing Road, the No. 1 Department Store, the Silk Shop, the Museum, particularly to see the bronzes, and staggered home about 5 p.m.

I went early to the theatre by myself to deliver the case of champagne to the crew. Better to give them each a bottle individually than to see it consumed en masse at the party after the show. I went up for a brief talk to Monk. He was keen to have me out of the dressing room. I don't blame him. He pushed his wife out too.

In the foyer, before the show I met a variety of people, artistic, diplomatic and official. An official from the Cultural Bureau told me he was aware that the Ambassador had invited the Minister of Culture, Wang Meng, to come to the opening. The Minister, however, was too busy. I had had enough of officialdom. I noted politely that it was customary to reply directly to Ambassadorial invitations. He repeated the fatuous statement that the Minister was very busy. I said I knew this was so, but the Minister also had a very large staff who could assist him in a simple reply. He parted with good wishes for the show from his colleagues at the Ministry.

We had a full house tonight. Indeed it was bursting at the seams. Many of Shanghai's cultural luminaries were there, including the beautiful Madame Cai Guo Ying, director of the Shanghai Ballet and the original "White Haired Girl", with her ten year-old daughter, and Professor Li MingQiang, famous pianist and Deputy Director of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. The new Consul-General, Murray McLean, was there, although the other Consuls-General whom we had invited had apparently gone off to the opening of the Stuttgart Ballet. No great loss. We held the curtain for about seven minutes to allow all the latecomers in. People seemed to be mingling in the foyer for a long time. I certainly was excited and full of anticipation for the performance. My interpreter, Mrs Yang, sat beside me, perhaps calmer than the night before.

The first big laugh came on the second dribble of the first urination. What a relief, not only for Monk, but also for me. Even before this, however, I could tell that Monk was on a high and we were in for a good performance. The crispness of his very first lines indicated that he was 'up'. More laughs came on his spitting out the window. A major laugh (or was it

amazement?) on the huge spit after "miner's lung".

Another laugh in the Dorabella scene when he said, "Your wife raped me". The laughter rolled out on the lines about brushing his hair with his tongue, about the coffee being like squid-piss, about the painted toe-nail. This was a quick audience. There was even a good laugh on the line about Monk being the Nullabor Desert diving champion.

Monk was inspired. The release of tension brought forth new embellishments and small ad libs, "Plato, my older brother", "classical works are very . . . classical". In the second act, which followed without interval, Monk raised more laughs with his lines about "a silent fart", athlete's foot, the smelling of the rosary beads after rubbing his toes, on the line in the reading of the will, "I'm very well disposed to the Chinaman." People thought we'd added that, but Jack had written it sixteen years before. The biggest laugh, indeed a spontaneous roar and clapping throughout the theatre, came on "*Ni ban shi, wo fang xin*", the quotation for Mao ZeDong which I had inserted to replace the lines from Virgil. A second round of applause and laughter for, "Homer said that." It might have been risky to use a quote from Chairman Mao, but it was obviously welcomed ecstatically by the audience.

In the final birthday scene I knew Monk had a real Foster's from the first tiny hiss as he opened the bottle. It frothed up beautifully to a large head in the glass. He downed the pot in one swig. More applause.

At the end of the play the kookaburra laughed and the lights changed slowly from the final red glow of the sunset to darkness. There was a long intense silence that was finally broken by one person clapping. The theatre erupted in applause, people leaping to their feet. Sustained clapping. Monk exhausted, proud, exceedingly happy. Mr Sun rushed to the end of the row to drag Jack and me up on to the stage. A sweaty embrace with Monk, centre stage. Jack coming from the other side of the apron. The three of us holding hands up, like punch-drunk boxers after the fight. Sha came up, and then a bevy of girls carrying baskets of flowers draped in red ribbons. Through the glare of theatre lights I could see the audience still standing, clapping wildly, upstairs and down. An extraordinary feeling of relief, satisfaction, pleasure, excitement. Sha tried to introduce Jack and me to the audience but it was futile against the noise. Bliss it was to be alive, and to be Yang was very heaven.

After the curtain was finally closed, the stage crew moved immediately to lift the rostra back behind the screen line for tomorrow's film matinee. Monk was dancing around. Sun urged him to get up to the dressing room quickly so that he could get out to the party. We walked back through the curtain again, into the audience to meet friends who were waiting to talk to us. We lingered in the foyer before going up to the party, which had been set up beautifully in a room on the second floor of the theatre, above the main foyer. Food out on plates down three long tables, cognac glasses for beer, cakes with "Australia-China Cultural Exchange" and "Friendship" in pink icing. Yu LuoSheng gave a speech of welcome, Sha said a few words. We toasted, posed for pictures. I waited to speak until Wei had arrived, well after the start of the party. Suddenly he was there. I said I only wanted to say seven words, "Wei ZongWan, Shanghai People's Art Theatre". Of course in Chinese that's a lot more than seven characters, so the point was lost. Jack gave a speech about this being a world-class production, whatever that is. Everyone was fairly high and noisy, no-one really wanted to listen to speeches but just to talk and eat and enjoy the energy of the night. My friends from Nanjing, LuYi, Yang XiaoDi and his wife, Li ChangMing, were there. Lots of laughter and toasts. I was very touched that they had come and had brought a basket of flowers to the theatre. As the night progressed I tried to give a second, more verbose, speech about one production being part of a continuity in a theatre's life and my regret that Huang ZuoLin, the Grand Old Man of the Company, could not be with us tonight because of his illness. Sha understood, but of course the words were largely wasted. In party speeches, second bites of the cherry should be avoided.

Yuan HuiGuo, head of the Foreign Affairs Section of the Shanghai Cultural Bureau, said to me that he had enjoyed it very much but there were a few words and actions that we ought to talk about. I said I'd be happy to meet with the Cultural Bureau when I returned to Shanghai the following week. I was returning to Beijing in the morning, but of course putting it off a week meant that we should be able to get through the first week of the run without having to make changes. I suspect that the Mao quote may be the major problem. Perhaps also the jockstrap, or the sexual innuendo.

The company gave Jack and me "A Stretch of the Imagination" T-shirts and photograph albums of the production. These were beautifully prepared, inscribed by the company and full of production shots.

We were the last to go. A friend's wife was not feeling well and asked if we could drive her home in the consulate car. I was happy to walk.

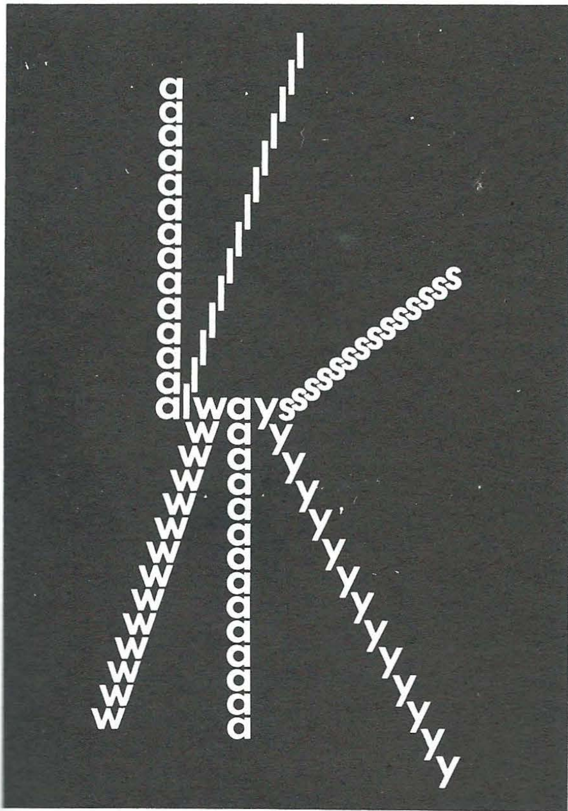
I was very conscious that this was, for now, my last night in Shanghai. Walking through the dark streets under the canopy of leaves, I felt both happy and sad. I knew we had reached our goal, the creation of a really top-flight production of Jack's play. We had given Chinese audiences something bold and new. They could see an actor of great distinction. But I would miss Shanghai. I really love this city now, its bustle, its modernising, its little cafes, its fashion consciousness, the pretty girls and snappy young men, its sense of itself as somewhere special. Shanghai is a real city, with a real buzz about it. I much prefer

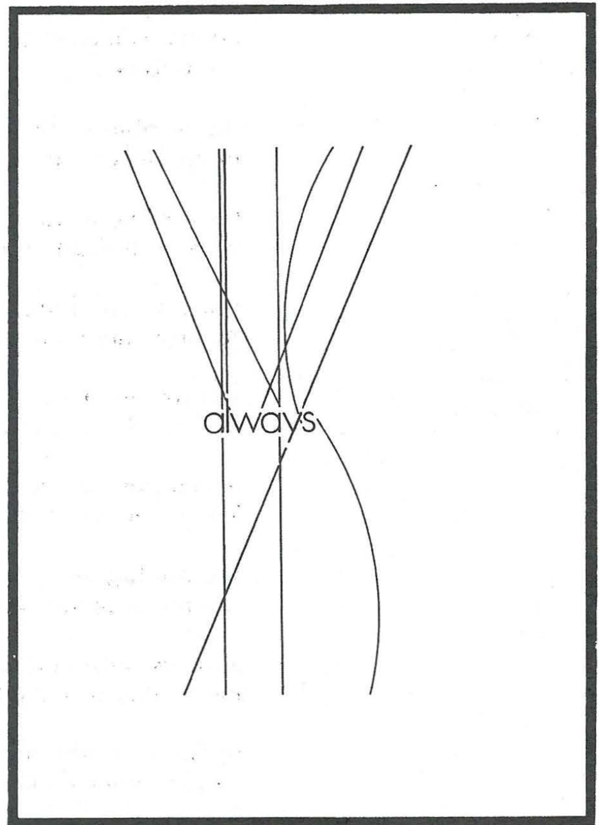
it to Beijing, despite its horrendous urban problems of overcrowding, poor transport, lousy water and filthy air. It's still the cultural and energy centre of China. Once again it is becoming the industrial engine room. I could live in this city happily. I feel I'll be back. When the car came up behind me halfway home, I was disappointed. Walking only extended the evening's pleasure.

Postcript:

The Shanghai People's Art Theatre production of "A Stretch of the Imagination" was a popular success. The original production transferred to Beijing, where it opened on 8 March 1988 to coincide with a major Australian Studies Conference at Beijing Foreign Studies University.

Carrillo Gantner was cultural counsellor at the Australian embassy in Beijing from 1985 to 1987. Prior to that executive director of the Playbox Theatre Company in Melbourne for eight years, he has now returned to the Playbox to build the company's new home in South Melbourne.





Alex Selenitsch

LEECH

Blood worm
waiting in the years' shadow,

innocuous fleck of mud
smelling the air,

smelling me,
from damp's lightless underside.

Black speck
of endless, endless patience.

Ready for the blood stretch.
If I could grasp,

confront your hideousness
have you suck my arm,

let mettle simply watch . . .
But unseen, stories fill fear's sight;

an eye wakened to red,
a nosebleed,

the terrible lapping
in an ear conch,

taste of your trace on lip,
tongue, though you were gone.

Imagine you lodged at my womb's wall!
Ageless, hermaphroditic,

self-perpetuating,
you need exist only

in relation to yourself.
You screw yourselves

the myth goes.
Bound to blood, you move

with its pulse, drawn
inexorably to cuts, lesions,

openings to the mysteries of flesh.
Unlike other suckers of blood

you arrive silently.
Little pervaders of secrets

and the dark;
if I could see you.

SARAH DAY

RODENTS

Bound very tightly and by this time unable to
move at all,
my skin was long since wrinkled from the wet
and I had a crick in my neck,
I was up to my armpits in asparagus soup.
Rodents on their way to dinner with the devil
were rowing past on very large Weston's Wagon
Wheels,
– their oars were very long spoons and they stood
as if rowing gondolas –
one after another, until a young guinea-pig
with very sharp teeth and one leg
shorter than the other,
– I presume him to have been the last of the
rodents –
looked at me as if he was a resistance hero in
a movie,
about to be executed by a nazi firing squad
and I'd offered him a blindfold.
He spat in my eye and rowed on.

STEPHEN STOKES

IMITATIONS OF ART

For S.M-S.

In the margin saved from sleep,
staring beyond images,
I reflect against the glass.

Outside light etches crane and ship,
aquatints sea and shore from St Kilda
to Sandringham, names thrown together
to impress the frivolous land.

Somedays a paparazzi sun
flares above the Dandenongs, over-
exposes the city's megaliths,
flash dances streets where Benjil's
wattle birds splash expletives;

or covertly pans north, standardising
reds, blues, minds, turning the real silly
as a soap bubble, blue and brief as Earth.

Then clandestine as a cat
amongst yesterday's truth and
history's trash, twitching its tail
in self-regard, softly unconsidered
my poem goes.

SELWYN PRITCHARD

THREE POEMS BY ROBERT ADAMSON

REMEMBERING POSTS

In this country, beyond the sparkle and the
junk,
the weekend blood arenas, beaches
full of paddle-pops and shit, out along
the road you stop noticing flags for
hamburgers
and the empire, it all becomes a streak
of colored pain smearing the windscreen –
and as you drift freeways or swerve
and loop down narrow passes, you realize
you could be anywhere in the world in your
head,
though nowhere else you'd feel like
this; a passenger of memory floating out
across
centuries. After distance lulls
you become a mobile antenna, taking in
each nerve that flicks with pain,
sensing flesh wounded open-cut mountains,
broken bones under desert crust.
Now you know that if you stop you would
shoot roots
and grow branches, leaves, flowers –
or you'd spear yourself into the earth and
sprout
up like a telegraph-pole, a grey post on
the edge of a gibber plain, and be stuck there
swaying in the dry wind, remembering. Also
singing
and remembering.

for Manfred Jurgensen

THE SPEAKING PAGE

When the tide comes up over
the point here and spills
into Parsley Bay, goes over
the river's torn entrails,
it's a blanket of healing –
Your breath becomes tidal
atmosphere, it heals deeply
thoroughly, then you begin
to understand that the river
is like a blank page, you
enter it differently: shape
it as you would a new thought
first vaguely with phrases
then sentences until finally
its language starts talking.
When the river covers a bay
you know its weight soothes,
and heals the savaged earth
and the tide begins to make
music as it covers oysters
as it climbs over the rocks
its song fills the valley:
a baroque tinkling tune
its lyrics in a language
easy to comprehend of course
it's your imagination weaving
the river-song, your mind's
invention is playing you
as the tide begins to ebb
and you see the smooth mud
you see the cuts have healed;
and there is the windsong
to dance now with your voice.

IMAGINATION, A FLAME WITH MANY TONGUES

When I first started poetry I wrote in ink,
I now find pencil makes a tougher wick:
a post-modern muse can take a lot more heat
I learnt from Kerouac a lyric turns out pure
if you can do it quick, also to make sure
you leave philosophy to its own elite.
Song's alchemy inflames a lover's brain;
although Bob Dylan sings just tell the truth
then feel no pain. If you try to explain
away the muse you'll need more proof
than white ladies falling for the mage,
Robert Graves conjuring lovers for the page.
Be like clever Tranter take this sound advice:
write a musical called *A.D. Hope on Ice.*

THE WINDOWS OF ST ANDREW'S

to Dr Patricia Brennan

god the son is in the yeast.
God the father sits at the back,
an old man who drums his fingers against
the polished timber pew.

compassion is an effort;
the evanescence of emotions,
the spirit screaming in the bread,
the blood on fire.

in images of colored light
the august sun passes through
the cathedral glass, eternal fragments
of opulence & poverty.
through the human feeble priest
the church remains the same.

too militant to be holy
the massed rabble of
women over press their strength.
our ecclesiastical chairman
is satisfied although his uncertain
smile senses betrayal.

perhaps with this defeat,
this time they will go away.
he checks the numbers & the votes
are counted.

the apostles troop past slowly
& sadly, refracted broken images in
glass. the victorious eternal church
is wise & tired. the women sing
defiant of their grief.

in twenty centuries
the gospel has never changed
& this is no place to doubt.

RAE DESMOND JONES

POEM IN CHAINS

This poem is tied up and tied down

This poem is being tortured for its secrets
while being tormented about its low status
This poem is on file with the government
has a number but remains nameless
except in a microchip's memory
This poem is broke, broken, busted up
by men in blue uniforms, paid to protect it
This poem is a crime against the state
of indifference
This poem has been stripped naked
and probed for impurities and imperfections
This poem has its eyes put out
and still can't stop seeing

This poem is not a model or a machine
or a blueprint or an advertisement
This poem beats and breathes and bleeds
and screams to be free
This poem is a wildcat in a cage, the rage
of a damaged age.

This is a poem insane
caught in a crazed brain
whose name is society
whose face is city
This is a poem in chains.

K. SCUFFINS

ON THE PENINSULA

1

Patchy rain five overnight
the dull sharp snowy light
imprints the weeping she-oak
on the lawn
the blackbirds' feet
scrabble in ceilings
flapping down to sleep.

At dawn beyond the ti-tree hedge
the spindle-shanked jetties
straddle the tide
inside the old men
captured snorting like swine
in the second best bedroom
bring in the tea on time
footfalls and table talk
furred needles scratching ragtime
through the hall
the empty mansions
and the widow's walk
the bathing boxes face the Bay
locked on Edwardian secrets
neck to knee.

Above the shallow shore
one eye weeping like Cyclops
I wait for a ship a call
a message cast in a bottle
a light burning out to sea.

2

Last night beyond the native hedge
ti-tree she-oak paperbark
flattened by the gales
something crying out there in the Bay
a bird a kestrel testing the wind
the cutting edge
through Bass Strait
   from Antarctica.

Under this fragile roof tree
stoke the fire
pull up the blankets
the blackbirds roost
and fuss above my head
the cry goes on insistent
   intermittently
dancing the tides.

In the morning in a grey light
snow fell in the garden
   on the Peninsula.

3

The nights are drawing in
we light the fire
it burns and smoulders
wet wood old desire
the seasons turn
to winter solstice
Autumn's ended
frost on the grass
the rain drives in
the house has turned
its blind drowned windows
to the storm . . .

since I saw you last
your presence dims and wavers
mist on glass
I can't recall your kiss
or your embrace
or put your face
together in my mind
only your separate features
are remembered
three months have passed
all memory is short
and totally untended
all love dies . . .

eating my heart out
in this gentle kingdom
where death has touched me twice
last month deprived of air
fought on the table
a primitive response
an old temptation
called the grave
said *let it go*
there's nothing here to save.

I have withdrawn quietly
from the world
to sit the winter out
crows in the garden
saunter pick and preen
if I wait long enough
they'll pick it clean
old bones lost love
a life that's lived
and covered over
saluted   recognized
in tender language
brutal narrative . . .

4

Last night the moths came
blundering towards the light
enlarged like giant x-rays
only one night they lasted
one wild flight
black moths in from the sea
and the dewy garden
sleepwalkers
circling the rooms
hurtling against the walls
to fall and flap like birds.

All night I heard them
frantic in the corners
too heavy to rise again
in the morning
they lay quietly
dried sticks
with folded wings.

5

Where do they come from
poems

come once
or sometimes
not for years
go unsung unknown
or in a blaze of glory
dance in the flame
a moment and go out
never to come again

does an angel
tap a shoulder
promising heaven
   or hell
is it death
blowing his first breath
over us wishing us well
a man in a worn overcoat
saying *Try this on for size*
or a woman with long wet hair
both of them out there
waiting to be recognized?

Is it a single presence
has it a face
a habitation and a name
was this the person from Porlock
Coleridge blamed?

6

There was one moment
when the sky whirled
golden needles.

Bare-footed in my night-gown
on the grass
I stagger out to find
the glinting sea
beyond the garden gate
an edge of cliff
a few steps now
are like a miracle
when will I walk again
what days months years
still lie ahead of me?
I have come
after long struggle
to this sunlit garden
this acre of grass
this temporary haven
where I dream at night
the same old passionate
disastrous things
in the morning light
the tide runs
and the hedgerow blackbird sings
back breaks legs buckle
but the she-oak tree
shakes out its golden benison
   on me.

7

Out along the Bay
the she-oak wind
sighs in with the tide
I have heard it breathing
in my ears all night
to the pull and pulse of the earth
the planets moving
to their accustomed places . . .

they comfort me.

Life will go on
go out return with every tide
children will play in the shallows
the yellow-breasted robin nest
in the shade
of the ti-tree hedge
the spin drift vaporise
above the Bay . . .

this is a place
where you have never been
your face is fathomed
under oceans of sea water
running through the Straits
drowned boy   crippled child
lover and awkward woman
they stand under the she-oak tree
with gentle gestures . . .

a place where no one walks
only the future
fossicking the shore.

8

The square behind the ti-tree hedge
darkens   soon night
will blot it out   the house
will rock above the Bay
mysterious lapped in grey
cloud   the tide
will carry us to sleep
and all the wide
salt reaches of the Strait
invade the mind.

What have we left here
when we pack and go?

two ghosts   a yellow dog
a tapping bird
the sleepless nights
when all we heard
was magnified   the mornings
when the sun struck first
across the floor
the wide glazed windows
and the doors
that opened on the lawn?

I found this space
a square of frosty grass
the sun that left
the garden earlier
each day
till winter wrapped us
in a world of cloud.

What have we found here
nothing to take away
our tenancy is lost
we've made no mark
no covenant or seal
no footsteps in the frost
a fragile shelter
and a voyager
ephemeral and real
the house remains.

DOROTHY HEWETT

TWO DOLPHIN POEMS

For Rachel Smolker

i

Goddess and Rachel with Dolphins

My favorite Aphrodite is well poised
beside a dolphin standing on his nose.
Resting a hand on his enraptured flukes
the insatiable goddess is at last appeased.
Sunny, she listens to his cheerful noise,
his high-pitched fluting to the ocean's flux.

My favorite Rachel, balanced on the bow
calls to her dolphins with a piercing "eek";
they roll and plunge, surging along the hull.
She's named close to two hundred in the bay,
who hear her call, identify their ache,
come close, expecting her, perhaps to heal

if healing is their need, their fevers, wounds,
or the heart's constant, silly miseries.
Maybe she does. At least they come again
as though they heard her faintly on the winds,
responding to her ocean mysteries
in gold-wave sunset or in mid-day green.

But there's excitement as they curve and split
the surface, leaving a swirling cock's tail
in the liquid glass, and muscling through,
then lost, a rumor of their flukes in spate . . .
Now Rachel on the prow is standing tall,
conducting them in their ecstatic throes.

Does she create their movement or they hers?
Watching, one recognises here a dawn
of understanding, current flow between
the species, prelude and fugue she almost
hears.
The moment is both mammal and divine,
the daily spell of the half-heard, half-seen.

ii

The Written Word

Rachel is swimming, dolphins near at hand,
sees one is Nicky, daughter of Holyfin,
who circles her and passes now and then.
Rachel picks up a stick and in the sand

prints on the sea-floor, Roman letters tall,
I LOVE NICKY. The dolphin comes at once
almost as though answering a call,
but come by magic, love or come by chance

it's Nicky and she stays while Rachel scratches
her message out once more, and yet again.
The dolphin is enthralled and it is plain
she sees for sure how each edition matches

and is aware a meaning is intended.
Who is the student now? and who the teacher?
The question has no meaning here or
elsewhere;
both are the questing beast, both are
suspended

above the void of bleak misunderstanding.
But here is lightning flung from star to star,
a moment from which mind to mind's
expanding,
and in that flash they both know who they
are.

FRANK KELLAWAY

Rachel Smolker of the University of California is studying dolphin communications at Monkey Mia on Shark Bay, W.A.

MARIE TAGLIONI, THE SEVERED RIBBONS

Indigo and soft, the shoals surround her eyes
like moats
or tiger lilies pressed on skin
and in that compress, her eyes rise
like inviolable blood blisters. Almost ugly . . .

La Réception d'une Jeune Nymphe á la
Cour de Terpischore.

Deep and crusting, the heel of footlights bed
her in amber
like honey running on her legs
and in that smearing, her feet leap
like dragon's wings of sinew. Almost
pinioned . . .

La Sylphide.

Remote and white, the tulle nets her like a
pale floating bride
or faintest memory of Degas
and in that periphery of breath, her body
is a winter far from flesh. Almost immortal . . .

L'élève de l'amour.

Dark and apart, the ballerina bars herself the
press
of human fingers like Giselle
and in that choreography, her pale mind bails
her life as dry as rosin. Entirely selfish . . .

She put out her heart
she put on her rosary shoes
Pas de chat Pas de chat.

Younger dancers haunt her and the smell of
fire
on a dancing girl
and in the gaslight with hair alight
she sees again her dead protégé. Almost
consumed . . .

Pas de papillon.

Once we cooked and ate a pair of Taglioni's
slippers
her satin hooves, I remember
in that surrendering, she cut them off herself
we iced them pink like sugar plums. Almost
preserved . . .

And no-one noticed the smell of a ballerina's
shoes
or saw her crippled feet.

FIONA PERRY

THE VISITING PROFESSOR SUFFERS A MARCH IMPASSE AT QUEEN'S PARK

They promise you tulips, tempting *hors d'oeuvres*
To spring's provisional menu,
And you could feel a much-travelled Gawain
Plagued in Bertelak's distant castle
With the impossible quest
Of soothing provincial *amour propre*:
All that fuss about perfectly edible fish!
They'll never believe you like it here, or now,
But heaven help you if you say you don't.
Oh yes, you could feel superior –
Except for that bitching mirror in the mind
That names Australians touchiest of all.

They keep on promising tulips. In spring.
In the park that you liked in winter,
Even, confess, in calendar brilliance
Of blue and white: you grow old,
You grow old, and not to be siren-sung
(Even by the banal) is a rare enough pleasure.
Rarer still when the eye lights on something fresh
And the mind, like fingers discovering a lover's skin,
Unwraps in the New Year a birthday gift
Of pearl-grey light, hintings at green and white
In subtlest monochrome, riddle-dissolving stillness,
An elegance most sparse and most complete.

Pseudo-Plath are you – afraid of turbulent tulips?
Want to wear winter like headphones do you –
Its music whispering, whispering a snow-woman mind
To hibernation at perfect zero?
The park grows ugly? Look now! Wounding you
It is not in itself hurt. It knows
Neither desire nor metaphor. Those pools
Of icy slush, not sheets nor tears nor shrouds,
Are simply process, its unforming;
It is performing transience, not caring
To be memorable – mere Nature, starving the ego.
When tulips, flaunting symbols, reform it to Art,
You'll probably be there
Crying "Ah!" like a child at fireworks;
And deprecatingly your hosts will say
"It is, of course, beautiful in Fall."

TWO POEMS BY JENNIFER STRAUSS

A NOTE ON THE CHINESE EXHIBITION

Instructed to hunt the symbol, I spent
A long time scanning "The Empress's Jacket
Of One Hundred Sons" in search of the tortoise;
Eye caught mostly by the Emperor's claw,
Five-toed, Authority; children whipped tops;
In Purity the lotus blossoms floated past
My troubled waters; ready to give up,
Turning away, my eye found him at last
At a sleeve's edge – close enough to fall
But checked by a boy in flower-bright jacket,
Finding it child's play to keep on a string
Strength, Endurance, and the Universe.

THE EX-QUEENSLANDERS

There's only one thing worse than a
Queenslander.
An ex. There are n number of ex's carrying
their
little icons of nostalgia south south south
south-west, even popping up in other
hemispheres –
those with photographs sealing them in
albums,
those without, miraging their memories with
high
mirrorballess ballrooms ballroomless
ballrooms;
lovely old verandahs they've only seen on
television;
trade union bunkers where trade union heavies
fought off revolution for a knight, a
knighthood;
the away, away, with rum, by gum People's
Palace
entered at your own risk of Bible-reading,
praying,
crying, crying *War Cry* & playing the trombone
forever –
unable to handle either the alcohol *or* the air
at well over .08 insecticide .08 disinfectant.
It doesn't matter whether you walk a long
slow last
walk across the walkway of the high grey
bridge &
decided Queensland wasn't worth it (dying, not
living)
or whether you put everything you ever owned
to the
torch of a bonfire on your very last night here,
inviting a cast of, well, one or two, a handful
or whether you slipped out, shot through,
pissed off
thinking, who cares, she's only a Queenslander.

Later, when *you're* only a Queenslander again
(briefly)
you blossom into frangipani, poinciana,
poinsettia
& the aesthetics of fruit & vegies at the (Joh
yes!)
District Exhibits, The Exhibition, Brisbane.
August.
Me? I'm a bloody Queenslander & I'm bloody
proud
I loathe Queensland. Loathe. Why shouldn't I?
I've *felt* the thin blue line's stiff arm.
I've *seen* the expressways through & over &
out.
The bulldozers scrape. The wreckers' balls,
ball.
(Or at least I've seen Progress – in the
morning.)
I've voted. I've argued. I've shouted. I've
marched.
Joh yes! Joh *no*! I've chanted. I've yelled. I've
failed.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

NO FRIENDS OF MINE!

1
At home (in Sydney)

The liquidambar is a-squawk with white
cockatoos;
They strut its highest branches and shower its
seeds
The shape of sputniks outside the kitchen
door.
We walk warily,
you can twist your ankle or sprawl
If you slip on a sputnik in the litter of
droppings, twigs, leaves.
We rather suppose that's what they're hoping
for . . .
We wear hats,
because from forty feet aloft
A sputnik descends with force.
Three times a day
We sweep and swear . . .
They cock their sulphur crests and screech
away
In their own good time, and I give them a
cockatoot.
But certain as sunrise they will descend again.
I like most birds but this flock is a cockapain.

2
Abroad (in Kakadu National Park)

A flock of cockatoos boards the tour boat
Squawking and chattering, nibbling chips in
their beaks.
Their T-shirts are cocky white and proclaim
them: "Bairnsdale"
Which I always thought was a quiet, if Hal
Porter, town.
They munch violet crumbles inside their shiny
cheeks
And toss their litter over the boat's decks.
The boat stops for cameras when a
crocodile is seen
And the cackling cockies snap shutters and
chiak and scream,
While the dignified saurians bask on mud and
brown ooze.
I pray for proportion, but if I had to choose
Prefer a Kakadu croc to these Kakatoos.

NANCY KEESING

HOWARD DANIEL

Egon Remembered

Egon Erwin Kisch:
a Comedian of the Revolution

Everything Kisch told me was only half-believed. A favorite uncle had destroyed my credulity when I was barely three years old. The first world war had just started. My uncle Charles had volunteered for overseas service and was visiting my family in a suburb of Melbourne before leaving for Egypt and the Western Front.

I adored this large blonde man in his ill-fitting khaki uniform, and followed him round our house and garden like a dog. Alongside the stables at the back of the garden was a small poultry run. One day he saw me watching the fowls and asked me if I would like to grow some chickens. I was delighted, particularly at the prospect of working with him on what promised to be a fascinating project.

Our first job was to collect twenty-four large wing-feathers from hens. We took these to a bed he had prepared near the kitchen door and planted two neat rows, about six inches apart. He told me I would have to do the next part of the job alone as he was leaving within a few days. I would have to water the bed of feathers twice a day with boiling water. He had already tipped off our Irish-Australian cook, who willingly provided me with all the boiling water I asked for.

I think I must have watered the cursed hen feathers for a week before I became bored and abandoned the project. I suspected that I had been duped but only knew it for certain several years later, when I overheard my parents telling the story with great amusement to some visitors.

To this day I still tend to be wary of any story with an exotic flavor. All the stories I heard from Kisch were so remote from my knowledge and experience that I disbelieved him automatically. I found—and keep finding—that everything he told me was substantially true. But I still do not believe he fathered a child on one of the Siamese twins.

I first met Egon Erwin Kisch, the famous "rampaging reporter", in a hospital room in Sydney in November 1934. He had broken his right leg when he jumped from the deck of the P & O liner *Strathaird* to the Port Melbourne wharf about five metres below.

This Central European inventor of modern sensational journalism was unlike anybody I had ever met. He was completely un-Australian in appearance and manner. His body had greater solidity than his five feet six inches suggested, and this seemed to keep him particularly firm on the ground. The fineness of his pale olive skin showed off his coarse, thick, wavy dark-brown hair, flecked with grey. To an Australian used to the then current fashion of short back and sides, his hair seemed definitely long. At a face-to-face meeting his dark, liquid eyes, heavily-etched lines which framed a thick, clipped moustache, gave him a sardonic expression. But what impressed me more was the timbre and vibrant tone of his voice. It suggested great virility. Years later, when I came across Colette's description of a real life Don Juan whom she called Damien, I was immediately reminded of Kisch. He had the same animal magnetism as Damien, which made him powerfully attractive to many women.

Kisch was almost fifty when I had my first encounter with him. At the time I was in my final year at the Sydney Law School. A year earlier I had suddenly become obsessed by the economic and social injustices of the world. I became an instant socialist. It was not the great depression with its inescapably visible signs of social suffering which pushed me in that direction. What produced my St Paul's Damascus Road revelation was a novel about the Spartacus uprising in Berlin in 1918, and the repressions which followed. I had helped to found the Sydney University Socialist Club and became its first president. Alas, we had but seven members, and our confused message went out to an indifferent audience distrustful of politics defined ideologically.

I went to see Kisch in hospital to show solidarity with a man being persecuted by a mindless government and to hear about fascism from one of its early victims. In 1934, in their almost complete ignorance, most Australians regarded the distant Mussolini and Hitler as mere buffoons. But the local leftists who acted as agents of Soviet foreign policy had for once a more accurate vision of the future than most of the population. They asked the communist-directed World

Committee against War and Fascism in Paris to send out an experienced man who would tell them of the dangers which lay ahead. Egon Erwin Kisch was that man.

I had mentally prepared a series of questions about the Nazis, but was suddenly diverted from asking any of them. In those days of pre-airconditioning, a Sydney hospital room in November was extremely hot. When I entered his room, Kisch was lying back in his bed with his pyjama top unbuttoned. Even before we had exchanged greetings my eyes were drawn to the tattoo of a dagger transfixing part of his somewhat flabby left breast. I then noticed, below his hairless sternum, the tattooed image of the head and part of the body of a young woman. I could not take my eyes away. Hitherto I had seen tattoos only on the arms of sailors and ex-sailors on the surfing beaches at Manly, Coogee or Bondi.

Kisch had always to be the centre of attention. He was only too happy to show off his tattoos. He took off his pyjama top and exposed his torso. In addition to the tattooed dagger, his right shoulder carried the tattoo of a viper gliding down towards his belly. On the outside of his right arm was the figure of a dancing Negro. The inside of his left forearm bore the image of a kind of Fu Manchu head, the left temple pierced by a knife. The girl's head which I had already noticed belonged to a classic whore figure who was lifting her skirt to expose herself.

To divert Kisch I had brought him a paperback history of the Australian bushrangers. He startled me by thanking me for a gift which would introduce him to "progressive" figures in Australian history. He mentioned the progressive role in Czech and Slovak history of Janosik and other Central European Robin Hoods. It seemed to me the parallel would have escaped the paranoid, bloodthirsty monsters most of these Australians were.

My second effort to establish my 'progressive' antecedents, which I feared were obscured by such bourgeois features as a secondary school education at the King's School, was less successful. The tiny and politically ineffectual Australian Communist Party had, however, cast a cultural spell over many intellectuals, and made them overconscious and ashamed of their bourgeois origins and non-proletarian occupations. Kisch, like any first-class journalist, was a great asker of questions. It came out in conversation that two of my cousins had been shot by the British in the siege of the Dublin Post Office in the Easter Week Rising of 1916. I learned much of the caste of Kisch's mind from his observation that so many people seemed to have died in that building, it must have been bigger than the palace at Versailles.

How Kisch came to be in a Sydney hospital with a broken leg unfolds a story of bureaucracy at its most absurd. One U.K. official—a British Consul in Paris—entered a visa for Australia in Kisch's Czechoslovak passport, and at almost the same time another British official in London cabled the Commonwealth authorities that he was a dangerous radical. On the basis of that information the embryonic Commonwealth political police decided that Kisch should not disembark in Australia.

When the *Strathaird* arrived at Port Melbourne a police guard was posted on the various gang planks to see that Kisch remained on board. Civil rights lawyers, hostile to the government's action, came aboard and talked to Kisch. They told him that, unless he found some way to set foot on the wharf, nothing could stop the government from sending him back to Europe on the same ship. The important thing was to bring himself within Australian jurisdiction. Local courts could then pronounce on the legality of the government's acts in detaining him aboard ship.

Kisch was not the inventor of sensational journalism for nothing. He literally jumped into the Australian jurisdiction and into the awareness of most Australians. What the Australian newspapers hereafter called the "Big Jump" brought nothing but discomfort to a particularly inept government. It produced enormous publicity for Kisch and his anti-fascist message.

In its dealings with Kisch the government and its legal advisors made mistake after mistake. Had they allowed Kisch to land without fuss, he would have lectured to a handful of already converted anti-war and anti-fascist activists, and then left Australia quietly. But the government's actions smacked of persecution. This immediately gained him popular support because of the Australian cult of the 'fair go'. Kisch's great charm and intelligence also assured him sympathetic treatment in the press.

The government blundered from one clumsy action to another. It failed in its case against a Habeas Corpus hearing. Its ill-prepared case was doubly doomed as it was heard before Mr Justice (Bert) Evatt, a formidable lawyer and one of the greatest twentieth century defenders of civil liberties in the English-speaking world.

The Commonwealth authorities then decided to rid themselves of Kisch by using the legal device it employed for deporting non-white immigrants under its notorious White Australia policy. Under this device officials submitted the unwanted immigrant to a dictation test in a European language. Failure to pass the dictation test was followed by deportation, the hypocritical official position being that education and not skin color was the issue. And so a young police officer of Scots origin dictated the Lord's Prayer in Scottish Gaelic to a Kisch who was less bewildered than bemused. He had known and admired Kafka.

Kisch failed his dictation test, was declared a prohibited immigrant and ordered to be deported. His supporters and sympathizers immediately contested

this action of the government and brought the matter before the High Court. A majority of the judges of this court decided, after an erudite and commonsense consideration of the question, that Scottish Gaelic was not a European language within the meaning of the Immigration Act. In the circumstances the court did not even consider it necessary to go into the linguistic competence of Kisch's examiner, who apparently could neither read nor write Scottish Gaelic.

Once more the government was confounded; but before it could start yet another procedure to expel Kisch, he launched a contempt of court action against the Sydney Morning Herald, Australia's then most conservative and respectable newspaper. After the judgment of the High Court, this newspaper had published letters and articles by irate Scots-Australians—including Sir Mungo MacCallum, Chancellor of Sydney University—protesting the idiocy of the High Court's decision. This was blatant contempt of court. The Sydney Morning Herald was forced to make an abject apology. Finally a chastened government had to settle with Kisch. It withdrew the charges against him, paid his court costs and expenses and agreed on a convenient date for his departure.

Kisch spent four months in Australia. He saw much more of it than most Australians, travelling several thousand miles, from Queensland to Western Australia. During all this time he was a free man, except for his short stay in a Sydney hospital and his one night in a Sydney police court cell. Kisch said it stank worse than the cell in the Alexanderplatz prison in Berlin, where the Nazis had imprisoned him after the Reichstag fire in 1933.

Kisch returned to Europe on the Orford in March 1935, leaving behind a growing awareness of the distant threat of fascism. He also left behind a reputation as a Don Juan which at the time shocked me considerably. The romantic puritan in me believed that professional revolutionaries were above that. I was to learn differently when I met Kisch later: in New York in 1940, in Mexico City in 1942, and in Prague in 1946.

I next met Kisch in New York late in 1940. He was living in a rooming house in the West sixties, just off Central Park. He had fled from France after it fell to the Nazis earlier in the year. Kisch was in the United States temporarily, waiting for a Mexican permit. There, he would join the colony of Central European communists and fellow travellers who had settled in Mexico City after participating in the debâcle of the Spanish Civil War.

Kisch was a special hero figure of the young Austrian refugees who lived in New York. By chance I had come into contact with some of them. One in particular became a good friend. He had been through Dachau and Buchenwald. I collaborated with him in a series of articles on life in the concentration camps. This man knew Kisch and arranged my second meeting with the writer.

Kisch was pleased to see an Australian as a reminder of his adventures in that continent. Although he couldn't possibly remember me, he was glad to talk to someone who remembered something of that part of his life. He asked me for news, particularly about a series of women most of whose names I recognised as Australian leftists, but whom I had never met. As I was living on the west side of Manhattan I often went for a walk with him in Central Park—it was possible in those days.

Naturally we talked about the war. He was quite pessimistic. The ease of Hitler's conquests in Poland, Norway, France and the Lowlands impressed him. He didn't think the British would hold out. Hitler and the Japanese would defeat Russia. Eventually the United States would come into the war. The decade ahead would be terrible; but eventually the progressive forces would triumph as the contradictions between the capitalists and fascists were insoluble. All of this was told in a matter of fact voice as if it were axiomatic. It scared me. I was glad when he turned to stories of his adventurous life, most of which I then believed were half fantasy. I could see he was enjoying himself. He liked to have an audience. It was all Kisch, virtually a monologue. But what a monologue!

He didn't seem to have changed much in the six years since I had last seen him. He had the same stocky figure and sallow complexion of the man I remembered from Sydney. His hair had a little more grey in it. He still wore the same close-clipped moustache with the inevitable cigarette dangling from the left side of his mouth. His clothes were baggy as if he had slept in them. He spoke English well but with many grammatical errors.

In our walks in Central Park we discussed his *Australian Landfall*, the English edition of which I had read in London some years earlier. He was not satisfied with the book. The subject was the great adventure which had happened to him. This was not a subject for his special skills as a "rampaging reporter". (In my view the book has some penetrating observations on Australian life but lacks unity. It is too sporadic. The bare facts of the Kisch case needed to be reported, but as a political pamphlet.)

Kisch asked me how I happened to be in New York. I said I had been in Bucharest with my wife—we had been married four and a half months—when war broke out. We left Romania at the very beginning of the war. We travelled to Holland and America as it proved impossible to get to Port Said and pick up a ship bound for Australia.

During our stay in Bucharest we lodged at a pension in the central Strada Regala, a street where high-class whores paraded at night. One evening out of curiosity we took a droshky with friends to the red-light district, the infamous Crucea de Piatrâ—the Stone Cross. The

Kisch as a young soldier.

whores soon drove us out, yelling insults at our wives, whom they regarded as competition.

At my last dinner before leaving Bucharest a young man asked me what I was really doing in Romania. His curiosity was understandable. Australians were rare in Romania. With what I considered an Australian sense of humor I proceeded to pull his leg. I told him that the Iron Guard, the Romanian fascist organization, wanted to assassinate the Prime Minister, Calinescu. It was well-known that the toughest hit men came from Australia. I was sent to do the job. My statement was received with unbelieving laughter. The next morning we left by train for the Trieste leg of our journey to Rotterdam. Just before the train pulled out of the station we bought some morning papers and were startled by the headlines. It didn't require much knowledge of Romanian to understand CALINESCU ASSASSINATED BY IRON GUARD. The story was amply illustrated with photos showing his ambushed car and bodies of Iron Guard assassins and his own bodyguards strewn across the bridge over Bucharest's river, the Dîmbovitza. It could have been a typical Kisch story.

This was a real conversation starter. But I was somewhat startled as we walked through Central Park when he told me one of his hobbies had been seducing whores. I think this was a hangover from his days as the "rampaging reporter" (for so he was known in Central Europe). I don't think he had pursued this hobby very actively since Hitler came to power. I naively believed that this was not possible for a full-time functionary of the Comintern! I was somewhat hesitant to make any observation. Anyway I had absolutely no experience or knowledge of prostitution. I believed that stark economic necessity was at the basis of it. I couldn't understand how these women could get pleasure from servicing any Tom, Dick or Harry.

Kisch told me stories of his days and nights in the dives of pre-first world war Prague looking for stories which would please his editor and the readers of his paper, the German language Bohemia. I still remember some of the colorful names: Polish Wanda, Stuttering Betty, Frieda Kneeldown, and specially Tony Gallows. His story of Tony Gallows had appeared time and time again in many newspapers throughout Central Europe. He recounted the story which explained her odd name. In fulfillment of the last wish of a criminal, she had volunteered to spend the night with him before his execution. She was ever after known as Tony Gallows. As she didn't relish the name, she fought with the other girls who teased her. She eventually lost her place in the house of joy. She was driven into the hard life of a common street walker. After her death she appeared before a heavenly court. For her good deed in making happy the last hours of a condemned man she was given back her place in a (heavenly) brothel.

To Kisch's boast about whore-seduction, I could only mutter something inconsequential. He told me that he had never slept with a woman without giving her physical satisfaction. I wondered by what trick he could establish rapport with whores. Later, much later, I realized that by charm and by treating them as human beings Kisch had won their confidence. Indeed, when I had read all the autobiographical works of Simenon, I understood. Simenon claimed to have slept with 10,000 women. He said that he always left the whores satisfied. Like Kisch, Simenon was utterly convincing. Allowing for exaggeration, vanity, and in Simenon's case the neatness of the rounded figure, I was impressed by their basic sense of fair play.

On our walks Kisch talked about an array of subjects, all of them far outside my experience, but all of them centred inevitably about himself. One story I do remember because it showed Kisch was aware of his exhibitionism. In Russia in the late 1920s or early 1930s the Comintern sent him as a sort of press officer to accompany a party of foreign journalists to the opening run of the Turk-Sib railway. At a wayside stop in the middle of a desert, suddenly there appeared out of nowhere a lot of nomads and their children, come to look at the extraordinary sight. Kisch, who was an amateur conjurer and magician, thought to amuse the wild spectators with some simple tricks with cards,

coins and a handkerchief. He quickly gained the attention of his audience. Kisch was enjoying himself as much as his enthralled audience. One of the journalists in the party, a German who had lost an eye during World War I and had a glass replacement, probably had had a gut-full of Kisch and his exhibitionism. Momentarily he captured the attention of his audience. Taking out his artificial eye he threw it in the air, caught it and replaced it in its socket. His audience was spell-bound and had completely forgotten Kisch. Without further ado, he climbed back into the train leaving Kisch without a public.

I felt I was fated to meet Kisch wherever I went, for in 1942 I went to Mexico on a short trip and met him there. My friends, the Morgans—companions on the Crucea de Piatrâ adventure and on the trip to New York—were driving to Mexico City. Murray had just got his Master's in journalism from Columbia and a one-year Pulitzer fellowship to study in Mexico. The trip via Laredo was memorable. We drove a two-door coupé. There was a fourth passenger. This was a forty kilo Belgian sheep-dog who lay along and behind the seat, sometimes one way and sometimes the other. The bitch had halitosis and a weak sphincter. She seemed to exhale foul gasses from either end.

I found Kisch living in a comfortable but modest apartment not far from the centre of the city—a letter gave his address as 152-6 Avenida Tamaulipas. He had managed to accumulate some books and the apartment looked like a writer's. Kisch looked much the same as he had in New York, if perhaps a little seedier. His clothes still had that slept-in look. But he had lost none of his great curiosity and his jouranlist's habit of questioning everything.

On one of my visits I brought along my friends. He was pleased to see them, especially Rosa. She was very beautiful, but in a shy, retiring way. Murray was a bright young journalist. My friends were familiar with Kisch from the disconnected stories I had told them, especially about his Australian adventure. We did not know he was a world-famous journalist but we soon found out.

Kisch talked of his books. The best, and the one he thought would last, was his *Klassischer Journalismus.* He produced a copy in the original German. Unfortunately our German was insufficient to judge its quality. Kisch leafed through it commenting on some of the entries. We were impressed by the large number of entries on or by Dante. From the ensuing conversation we learned that he was thoroughly familiar with all of Dante. He regarded him as the greatest journalist of all time, quoting many examples of his skills as an investigative reporter. Dante wanted to see everything in Hell, no matter how horrible. His guide, Virgil, was not spared. Such was Dante's skill at the penetrating question that Kisch considered his interview with Francesca da Rimini as the greatest in the history of literature. Murray was fascinated.

Kisch told us that his (Kisch's) curiosity was obsessive. He was compelled to find out what the person sitting opposite him in the train was reading; what language a passer-by in the street was speaking; what people were doing behind closed doors; what was behind a sign which said "No Admittance", and anything else which smacked of the secret.

He had just published his autobiography in German, English and Spanish. He was now using his skills as a sensation-monger to write a book on the unusual in Mexico. (Years afterwards I went through a copy laboriously—for it was in German—and concluded that it was not good. His style and his approach to the bizarre incidents in Mexican life were now dated. Journalism had now caught up him. Kisch was old-fashioned.)

At the moment he was trying to solve the mystery of B. Traven, the strange and elusive author of a great novel, *The Death Ship.* He had written many other novels, all of them dealing with the theme of injustice and human suffering. Traven had been living in Mexico for some time, but his cult of anonymity was so thorough that nobody had been able to track him down. Kisch told us that he had almost succeeded. He knew that Traven was not his real name and that he had edited an anarchist paper in Germany, Der Ziegelbrenner (The Brick Burner) just after World War I, under the name of Ret Marut. He had fled to escape a death sentence and from then on used many aliases and spread fantastic rumors about himself, including one that he was an illegitimate son of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Kisch followed up a lead that Traven was living in the Gulf city of Vera Cruz in a modest hotel. He thought that at last Traven had been run to earth. But what followed was like a B grade movie. Kisch entered the hotel by the front door and ascertained that a man answering to Traven's description was registered there. As Kisch was making his enquiry he saw a man leave by the back door. This was the closest Kisch ever got to Traven.

(Years later (1978) a BBC team found that the man who was known to the world as B. Traven was in reality Hermann Albert Otto Maksymilian Feige, the son of a brick-burner in the Polish village of Swiebodyzin, sixty miles west of Poznan. The team also found and interviewed an aged brother and sister living in West Germany. Feige (Traven) was born in 1882 when the village was part of Germany. Feige-Traven died in Mexico on 26 March, 1969, telling his wife on his death bed that he was Ret Marut. He had succeeded in concealing his real name in life, but most of the other stories about him were true. Kisch would have loved that.)

I saw Kisch several times during my short stay in Mexico City. We went for long walks through the

parks and the outskirts of the city. He was my guide offering interesting information on the places and buildings we passed. One day we went out to Coyoacan and he showed me the house where Trotsky lived at the time he was assassinated by Stalin's agent. I could feel he was sympathetic to Trotsky, but he was guarded in his comments. To the true-blue communist Trotsky was the devil incarnate. He was not going to endanger his livelihood by expressing partiality to that heretic.

Apropos of nothing he told me that the most interesting figures for a writer were the losers: Maximilian, Redl, Trotsky, St Just, Robespierre and, above all, Danton, his number-one hero in history. The only one of these he had written about was Colonel Redl, the head of Austro-Hungarian Intelligence before World War I. The Russians discovered he was homosexual and blackmailed him into working for them. When his Austrian masters discovered his treachery, Redl blew his brains out. Kisch told me he had got the story by accident and made one of the scoops of the pre-World War I period. His story was one of the classics of journalism and had been used (and mis-used) without giving him credit.

In our walks I told Kisch of my interest in the grotesque and fantastic, and that I was writing a book on the painter Hieronymus Bosch. He was very interested and said I should see the grotesque figurines and stone carvings in the national museum. Many of them had been given to the museum by the painter Diego Rivera. Indeed a day later, at the museum, I saw many Toltec figurines. Kisch told me to see the building of the Ministry of Education where Rivera was working on an enormous mural, at the top of a ladder and oblivious of what went on around him. He resembled a tubby Toltec figurine himself. Kisch had no contact with him, as he was politically suspect.

Still on the grotesque and fantastic he told me a story about Ensor, the Belgian painter, who was a master of that genre. Some years earlier Kisch found himself in Ostende out of season. He strolled along the sea front, which was virtually deserted. He came to a statue with an elderly, bearded man tending the small garden surrounding it. Kisch looked at the statue, then looked at what he thought was a gardener and saw that it was none other than Ensor tending his own monument!

At a cocktail party in Washington D.C. towards the end of the war I met an American colonel who was recruiting staff for the first UN organization, UNRRA. When he learned that I had been in Bucharest when war broke out he immediately recruited me for the Balkan Mission. I got a jaundiced picture of the quality of the American personnel officers who processed me into an international civil servant. A woman who afterwards reached high rank in the UN Secretariat in New York asked me if I spoke Balkan.

After a series of Kafka-like adventures in the maze of UNRRA headquarters – I was intended first for the Balkan Mission in Cairo, then Albania, then Yugoslavia – I was eventually sent to Czechoslovakia. I arrived in Prague some months after the war had ended. Who should I meet in the Alcron Hotel, Prague but the newly arrived Kisch. He was being fêted as a hero, although many of the young leftists had never heard of him. He had so many women throwing themselves at him – young and old – he literally had to beat them off with a stick.

We took up our friendship and between times had a meal at the Alcron (which was awful) or better still, at the UNRRA mess (which was excellent, as it had the best restaurateur in Czechoslovakia). In this temporary, makeshift life before the government installed him more or less permanently in a villa behind the Hradchin – occupied during the war by Adolf Eichmann – I saw Kisch often. Indeed so many of his comrades and acquaintances had been scattered or destroyed during the recent terrible years that he was somewhat of a foreigner in 'his' Prague. Many of my friends who came through Prague on official visits were brought into contact with Kisch, and we dined together in the UNRRA mess. I also brought Kisch into contact with the Czechs I had met through the UNRRA Mission, all of them on the fringes of power, such as Eugen Loebl, Deputy Minister of Trade, who was afterwards framed in the murderous Slansky Trials. From them I learned that while they admired him and appreciated his historical greatness, they thought he had little role to play in the present except as a museum piece. He had certainly no place in Czech culture, for he was culturally German. He spoke and wrote Czech imperfectly. The Czech experience with the Nazis was such that German was out for at least a generation.

In our interminable walks through Prague, always at night, Kisch related stories, mostly scabrous, from his reminiscences of pre-World War I Prague, when he was in his hey-day as the "rampaging reporter". His story about the Siamese Twins fascinated me the most. These grotesque sisters – they were in fact Czech – had been exhibited in Prague in 1909 by an Italian-American impresario. They disappeared suddenly from the place where they had been living in Prague. Kisch wrung out of the janitor of the building the name of the village where they had gone. He also learned that one of them had "digestive" troubles. Kisch took the train to the little village in Central Bohemia and found that they had recently been living at a private lying-in home attached to the house of the local obstetrician. By trickery he traced them back to a well-known hospital in Prague. Posing as a German obstetrician he then found out that one of them had just been delivered of a fine, bouncing baby. His story

was published all over the world. According to Kisch the Siamese Twins did not like each other! In re-telling the story over the years, he had developed such a knowing way of telling it that his listeners were left with the faint suspicion that Kisch was the father!

He showed me the house where he was born (1885), the House of the Bears, so-called because of the stone carvings of bears on the front of the house in Melantrichova, once called Sulphur Street. His family had occupied this house for two hundred years. His father and uncle had operated a textile business. The family had always been prominent in the Jewish community in Prague. He was a direct descendant of the Golem rabbi.

He told me stories of some of his brothers. I remember one about his brother, Paul, who was financial editor of the Neue Freie Presse, the great newspaper of pre-World War I Vienna. During the first weeks of the Austrian revolution in November 1918 Kisch was one of the officers in command of the Red Guards who had helped to overthrow the Hapsburg Monarchy. He led a tatterdemalion detachment of Red Guards into his brother's office at the *NFP*. His brother, who was understandably startled, asked Egon what the hell was going on. Kisch replied that in the name of the Revolution the Red Guards were taking over the *NFP*. Paul Kisch replied: "I'm going to tell Mama in Prague." (In later years I heard different versions of the story, all of them apocryphal. The best was one in which Kisch's brother was the managing director of the greatest bank in Vienna, the Kredit-Anstalt. With the Red Guards pointing their bayonetted rifles at his brother, Kisch ordered him to hand over the keys of the vaults. Opening a drawer where he kept the keys, he said "All right, Egon, but I'm going to tell Mama in Prague.")

One night Kisch walked me back to the place where I was staying in a small street called Beneditska, off Riba. I stopped in front of Beneditska 4. Kisch said that when he worked in pre-war Prague the building contained the fanciest brothel in Prague. The neighboring Riba, or Fish, Street was full of brothels. I could well believe it. I had often thought my apartment had a distinctive odor of smoked herring and patchouli.

On another nocturnal walk Kisch talked of his experiences during the revolution in Vienna. A detachment of Red Guards was sent to capture Schönbrunn, just outside Vienna. He toyed with the idea of going with them and seeking a dubious immortality by liquidating the whole Hapsburg family: the Emperor Charles, his wife Zita, and their children. But he abandoned the scheme. Nothing had been heard from the Red Guards for twenty-four hours. A search party was sent out and found them camped in the Westbahnhof. The explanation: they did not have money for the fare to Schönbrunn! Kisch cited this—even if it was not true—as a perfect example of Austrian orderliness and sloppiness (*Schlamperei*).

I seemed to be fated to be tied up with the Kisch family. A year after my Prague meetings with Kisch, I was in Shanghai (1947). At a dinner for Anna Louisa Strong I met a younger brother of Kisch, a doctor doing medical relief work in China. He was rather a taciturn chap but that may have been misleading, because Anna Louisa Strong did all the talking.

In thinking about Kisch today there is no doubt in my mind that he was the most fascinating man I had ever met. Years after meeting Kisch, when I had read many books about Central Europe and its politics, journalism, writers and revolutions, I realized that all his stories were true and that he really was a great figure in the history of writing. Werfel in his *Barbara*, one of the great novels of World War I, draws on the life of Kisch for one of his principal characters, Weiss. In this remarkable story, which ends with the fall of the Hapsburgs, Weiss is one of the trio who played an important part in making the revolution. The other two were Werfel himself, and Otto Katz (Andre Simone) who was afterwards hanged along with Slansky and nine others after a fake trial in Prague. Allowing for literary effects the basic facts of the Vienna scenes are correct.

Kisch was fortunate in dying in 1948. Had he lived a few years more, he would certainly have been one of the targets of the Stalin-inspired trials. He was first of all a Jew, and proud of Jewish culture. Then he had lived and worked all over the world and suffered from that fatal Stalinist ailment, "cosmopolitanism".

Kisch was one of the inventors of modern sensational journalism. He was a friend of some of the intellectual masters of twentieth century literature: Benjamin, Brecht, Broch, Hasek, Kafka, Musil, and Joseph Roth. In the 1950s and 1960s many of his works were republished in East and West Germany. Ironically his book on his Australian adventure is far better known in the German-speaking world than in Australia. But more significantly, in recent years, his works have been widely read in West Germany. His *Klassischer Journalismus* has become a standard text in all West German courses in journalism. A few years ago the West German magazine Der Stern published his collected works in many volumes, covering his reportage, tales, essays on culture, short stories, theatre pieces, World War I diary, and a novel. In addition and to publicize its large printing venture Der Stern created an Egon Erwin Kisch prize, worth about $40,000 for the best reporting of the year.

I wish I had asked him for the truth about those Siamese Twins.

Howard Daniel lived in Sydney, and had worked in a number of international organisations. He was author of nine books, including studies of Hieronymus Bosch and Jacques Cullot. He died in September 1987.

ANDREW McDONALD

Glossary

Jung

The day after the hundredth anniversary of the birth of one of my earliest and most revered heroes, Bela Bartok (in whose name I once took an oath), I received my certificate as an Open Water Diver. There's a good graphic on the front of the card, showing a low swell but still enough to slop down your snorkel and cause you trouble. On the back of the card there is a photograph of the bearer of this title; you can just make out the scar I bore across my mouth and chin for several months.

Everything starts with a dream getting up from the back of your mind, and for us the dream was the dream of heroism. Perhaps this masks, or necessarily involves, the dream of suffering; but it was suffering redeemed by meaning, a scourging of the self to mark the passage into a new state of being. On the first day of our training we were led across Kiama harbor. My mask had fogged and I didn't see the blue-bottles. Imagine you run into a cobweb at night; it is all across your face, and the strands are made of fire. You want to run, but you don't know in which direction. When you raise your hands above the water, there is a blue cat's cradle strung between them. By the time I got out of the water, I thought the poison had set my diaphragm into convulsions, that I would be paralysed. On the second day, Heather took a jolt jumping off the wharf, and surfaced with her face-mask filling with blood. On the third day, Sue panicked as we were to enter the womb of the Kiama Blow Hole, its tractive waters, the ponderous thud of its heart, the blue eye of the sky, the hiss of spray, the rock rim lined with spectators waiting for the first body to be flung up.

> The Bends explained:
> "Now, a person who is breathing air is just like a bottle of fizzy lemonade."
> Sydney Woollcott, in Waldron and Gleeson, *The Frogmen*

They were called *maiali*, pigs, the two-man torpedoes. Photos of these, and diving apparatus and limpet mines in my father's album.

> Giannoli developed oxygen poisoning and was forced to leave the craft, which immediately dived down out of control. Notari held on. It went right down to 112 feet, whilst Notari, badly distressed, fumbled with the controls. At last it turned and made a wild dash for the surface, still out of control. Notari had visions of breaking his neck on the bottom of the ship to which he had just fastened the warhead . . .
> Day after day, Lieutenant 'Bill' Bailey's party dived under the ships, searching the bilge keels by hand. They had no underwater breathing sets or rubber suiting, as the Italians had.
> (Waldron & Gleeson)

Other photographs in my father's album show him talking, leaning across a low table with his hand held upwards, fingers together, that Italian gesture of disbelief: interrogation. Counter-intelligence, the Bay of Naples; I'd have been about two. A caption in the album: "What did you do in the war, Daddy?" He caught the frogmen who blew up two British ships in Alexandria.

The sea as pleasure, holidays along the shore of the Mediterranean, those post-war years we lived in Italy. The vendor of coconut slices, the vendor of pastries crying, "*Ciao, bambini, ciao*", his face a clown's mask. Lunch under the grapes at the pensione, the wasp in the wineglass which my father didn't swallow as I tried to gasp a warning, the mellow afternoons, soft sand, warm shallow sea. The same place, or elsewhere: my father swimming in his service flippers, the heel-straps enlarged to take his oversize feet. I swam out into the calm clear sea, watchful for jellyfish, and suspended vertiginous fathoms above the kelpy rocks. Who knows what had gone down to the bottom, or been dragged down? Like monsters under the bed; I didn't want to look.

To enter the underworld is to embrace an atavistic code: first you suffer, then you are rewarded. In our various agonies, the instructors left us alone, thus

making significant the ludicrous notion of heroism, making it lived, real. If something hurts or frightens you, no one can lift from you the burden of pain or fear. No one will lift your gear, either. If you cannot do these things alone, you cannot enter that realm. And its lure is compelling; one of our instructors worked nightshift down a coal mine, and spent his days underwater.

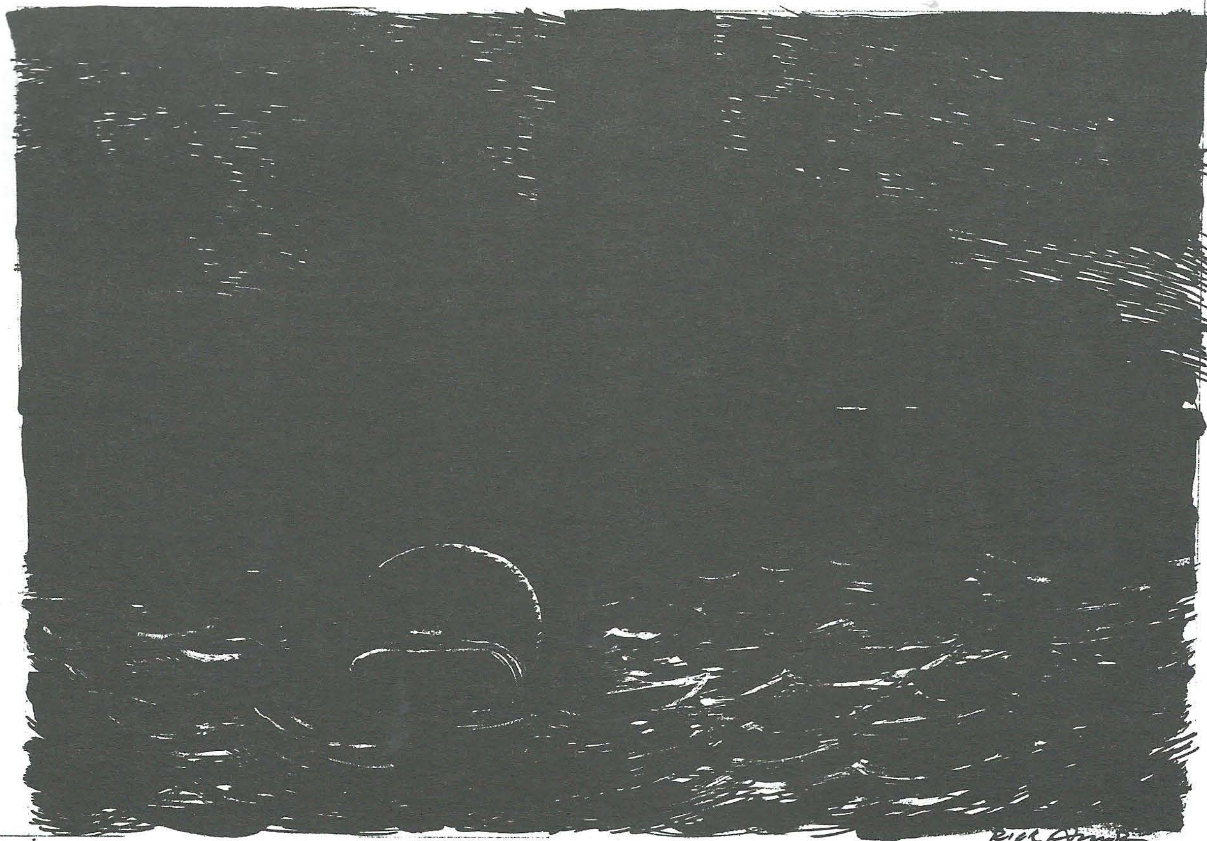
The reward, when it comes, is like something out of *The Water Babies*. The coal dust is laved from our shrieking bodies. Going to the water, carrying half my body weight in gear, like an encumbered beetle, I could barely keep my balance climbing down sharp rocks in bare feet. Flopping backwards into a moderate swell, if you mis-time the wave you fall ten feet before hitting the trough with a smack. Greenish-white water rising past you with its bubbles, cunjevoi, icy fingers invading your sweaty wet-suit. Surfacing, you struggle with the snorkel and the slop, until finally it is time to take the umbilicus of air from the tank into your mouth and sink with the relief of one sleeping or drowning under the waves.

Swimming is not merely easy: it is bliss. All burdens are lifted from you with the death of the body into the spirit, the return to the womb, to the rocking of the collective psyche, the birth of a new body fluent and calm. This state appeals to me as parachute training did, as hang-gliding and all throwing-yourself-from-a-height does. As a child marooned in a Milan flat I made paper planes of amazing aerodynamic endurance, I learned to stand on my head, and I had dreams in which I flew by swimming through the air. As an infant, I'd learned to swim underwater before I could swim on the surface. The water world is the closest you can come to bird-flight; that is, untrammelled movement on three planes. A skilled hang-glider can go up as well as down, but is dependent on thermals; the greatest natural force is gravity, bringing you down, if not killing you. In scuba diving the great natural force is not water but air.

Much of our training was predicated on our being in a foreign environment; but though I've never been technically skilled, diving seemed natural, like going home. Running out of air has never worried me when it happened; you just rise to the surface with the great wobbling bubbles that gleam like burnished lead. The world of air and the world of water are one. There is the passage of air in and around you, there is the wet medium, and there is you. Diving is Being.

Past

[If the personal is political, then the personal is surely historical, too. This is an entry from my father's



history, and hence it forms part of my own. It is becoming part of yours.]

I have had a further exchange with my Italian ex-enemies. Another of them has written to me. He, forty-three years later, has forgiven me for slapping him during interrogation. This one wrote in strange English, quoting Dickens, Shakespeare and finally this passage:

> Meanwhile let us go toward the end of our lives, with dignity, and quiet and calm soul, remembering what Wordsworth has told us:
>
> . . . though nothing can bring back the hour
> Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower,
> We will grieve not, rather find
> Strength in what remains behind . . .
>
> Now I take leave of you. We two have spoken of memories and of facts that, perhaps, it would be better that they had remained where they were: inside the gloomy, tepid abyss of the lost time.

I replied:

> While I have taken careful note of your very apt Wordsworth quotation, our lives are not over yet, my friend! Let Dante Alighieri provide my answer:
>
> *Pur che mia coscienza non mi garra,*
> *Ch'a la Fortuna, come vuole, son presto.*

(Which, if that's a bit too much for you, is roughly "Let my conscience not rail at me. I am ready for whatever Fortune has in store.")

[The letter also contained birthday greetings to me, and was in my letter box a few hours after I'd posted him a copy of "Jung", inscribed "to the man in the flippers". Two weeks later he wrote again, adding to the story and correcting my Italian.]

Your Glossary extract – though amusing, not to say flattering – had little basis in fact. I've never read the book you quote from. Never even heard of it. The best part of the Notari episode was that he was convinced he would be caught inside the harbour of Gibraltar, since his *miale* (two are *miali*) surfaced out of control. All he could do was hope he could slide away quietly on the surface without being detected – an almost hopeless possibility. At this point, a school of porpoises began to gambol round him, giving him cover to get clean away to Alterra in Algeciras. (I assume your book deals with this Spanish base.) Notari was a very nice man, and he told me about this himself after the Armistice. The men who did the blowing up in Alexandria were caught clinging to a buoy in the harbour. The leader, de la Penne, warned the Admiral on his own quarterdeck that he had about ten minutes to abandon ship. The Admiral (McGregor) was so taken with his attitude and bearing that he personally decorated him after the Armistice (8 Sept 43).

[That was the day after my father's 28th birthday, and nine weeks before my first. But if he didn't catch the Alexandria frogmen, as my grandmother told me, whom did he catch? Where did all that questioning lead?]

These extracts are from an alphabetically-arranged manuscript, "Glossary", now nearing completion.

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WALTER CROCKER

Taking another Look at our Foreign Policy

Australians of varied competence have recently been expressing uneasiness about our foreign policy. What is behind this?

In international relations countries have interests not friends. It is worth remembering this because Australians, not excluding politicians, journalists and academics, often have simple views of the world. Interests change; friends, so-called, change with them. Claims that this or that country has a 'special relationship' with another country, for instance England or Australia with the United States, always need checking with a cold sharp eye.

Australia's foreign policy for several decades has brought about much rhetoric, but in reality it is founded on the plain thesis of the American umbrella. The symbol is the ANZUS treaty, that compact which was reluctantly agreed to by the Americans in 1951 to soothe Australian fears about Japan's resurgence, but which carried no hint of the fears about international communism that soon came to be dominant. ANZUS, moreover, commits the United States to nothing more than consultation in certain circumstances. The uneasiness mentioned above arises from questionings as to whether the American umbrella is the best, or the only practicable, foreign policy for Australia.

There can be no doubt that so far public opinion as a whole, most politicians of all parties and all our governments since the Second World War, have considered it the only practicable foreign policy for us. The heads of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs, men of ability above average, sometimes held views not in accord with their political masters, yet I believe that only one of them ended up disbelieving in the American umbrella and only one other, now dead, had doubts about it.

Obvious points in favor of the American umbrella are that we live in a world as dangerous as it is complex, and that a country roughly the size of the United States, but with a population of only sixteen million, has a problem in defending itself. Could Australia afford the army, navy and air force required for its unaided defence? Great and powerful friends, to use Sir Robert Menzies' famous phrase, have been postulated to fill the gap. How vulnerable our distances make us, especially our huge coast line, has been illustrated in recent years by well-equipped drug traffickers, as also by the 'boat people' phenomenon; a phenomenon we are likely to experience again, and with more intensity, in the future. Governments, even those endowed with a deficient sense of responsibility as regards internal needs such as the economy, crime, ecology, rarely take risks about their country's security. That is why Mr Whitlam's and Mr Hawkes', as well as Sir Robert Menzies', governments have treated the umbrella as imperative.

The need for the umbrella has been hailed with the more enthusiasm because of the vagueness about the enemies likely to come down and get us. Fears have been highly receptive to words about 'teeming hordes a few hours flying time away', 'the yellow peril' ('White Australia' was still bi-partisan official policy until the 1970s; until the 1960s Aboriginals could not join the Australian Workers' Union), and 'monolithic international Communism' (barbed too with those famous dominoes). China for decades, helped on by American propaganda which had a free run, embodied and multiplied the horrid visions conjured up by the rhetoric of our politicians and mass media: China was yellow, not white, China was over-populated to the extent of numbering a quarter of the human race, and China was communist. In 1970, on my retirement as Ambassador, I made a Guest of Honor address over the ABC urging that Australia should give diplomatic recognition to China instead of the American-made nonsense we were then going in for—that Taiwan, not China, was China. In return I got some approval, but also telephone calls and letters denouncing my traitorousness.

Within five or six years, however, China had become the darling, first of Prime Minister Whitlam and then of Prime Minister Fraser.

Yes, friends and enemies change. Our supreme enemies, Japan in the Pacific and Germany in Europe, were soon regarded as our good friends and indis-

pensible. Russia, our war-time ally, soon stood as the supreme menace. Mr Fraser, well briefed by American propaganda, spoke about the Indian Ocean threatening to become a Russian lake by reason of the numerous Russian naval craft there; and only latterly Mr Hayden has had chilling words about Russian naval craft in the Pacific Ocean. Neither mentioned that Russia was a superpower with legitimate world-wide interests, let alone how many or what kind of craft it had on the two oceans.

Fears of Russia

Whatever were the exaggerations or the misconceptions about Russia, it is scarcely astonishing that Russia was distrusted. She had proved to be a most difficult ally throughout the 1939-45 War, as untrusting as she was ungrateful, and the claims Stalin made and, thanks to President Roosevelt, got away with at Yalta, were far from re-assuring—such as four seats (originally sixteen demanded) in the UN, or absorbing the three Baltic republics, or taking over the eastern half of Europe. That Germany was defeated by 1945 mainly because of the stupendous efforts and stupendous sufferings of the Russian people (millions dead and much of the developed country devastated) did not justify the difficulties which the Soviet government put in the way of normal relations. I saw this at first hand more than once. The arms race, not the promised collective security, became the outstanding characteristic of international relations, the UN was reduced to futility, being left to the mischievous demogogy of third-world countries, and the West in general, and the United States in particular, were frightened into frenzy.

Russia compounded the frenzy by meddling, directly or by proxy, in parts of Africa, in Central America and, as late as the 1970s, there was the invasion of Afghanistan.

It was not for nothing that George Orwell became disillusioned and fearful and unleashed his bleak books *1984* and *Animal Farm.* And it was not for nothing that long-rooted social democratic governments, such as Sweden, or long-rooted socialist leaders, such as President Mitterand of France, had fears about Russia, little different from those of a conservative Prime Minister such as Sir Alec Home.

Nor did the record of the communist government inside Russia do anything to allay fears and repugnance. Its failures, like its costs, are well known.

The fears became febrile as Russia succeeded in buiding up, step by terrifying step, an arsenal of the weapons of mass destruction nearly as great as that of the United States. Diplomats might not approve of the apocalyptic moralizings, such as President Reagan's during his first term, on Russia as the empire of evil, but they understood how the moralizings took on.

But diplomats understood, on the other hand, why Russia distrusted and feared the United States, whose policy was, in truth, to ring in if it could not destroy Russia, and whose CIA, armed with a staff of over 8000 regulars and an annual budget of over a billion dollars, was a sort of secret state within the state, knowing, too, not a little about evil.

Nothing stands still in human life, including, indeed especially in, international relations. Gorbachev is now presiding over changes unthinkable in Krushchev's, let alone in Stalin's, time.

Has the response on our side, the West, to the changes, especially the response in the US, been adequate? There are those with relevant qualifications who think it has not.

At this point I should make clear my own limitations: I have never served in Russia though I have been across that vast country, from Pacific to Finland, as a private traveller. I do not know the Russian language.

Even before Gorbachev the changes in Russia were such that the best informed and most travelled ambassador Australia ever had there was convinced that neither the people nor the rulers had any wish for war with the West; on the contrary the thought of war horrified them. Both rulers and people believed that it was the United States which was bent on launching war if the opportunity presented itself.

How the scene now looks to a competent observer since the arrival of Gorbachev is shown by Martin Walker, for some years representative of the Guardian. In his *The Waking Giant: Gorbachev's Russia* he expounds his conviction that Western, especially American, understanding of Soviet Russia is dangerously inadequate, that Gorbachev represents an irreversible social revolution and that his push for reform is not only possible but inevitable.

It is, as usual in recent years, Americans themselves who are the severest critics of American policy. Leaving aside studies on the arms race, particularly on "the mad immoral domination of the military-industrial complex over American life" (to cite a phrase from Norman Cousin's *The Pathology of Power*), such as M. H. Halperin's *Nuclear Fallacy*, two American critics who cannot be written off as naifs or wets or crypto-communists are George Kennan and Robert McNamara.

McNamara, for seven years Defense Secretary, first under Kennedy and then under Lyndon Johnson, had the task of building up the nuclear capability of the US to the utmost destructibility available; this former head of Ford carried out his task with awesome efficiency. He finished by being appalled and frightened by the arsenal thus achieved and, since his retirement and during his headship of the World Bank, he has stated his position more than once. Last year he brought out *Blundering into Disaster*, a book

dismissed by the Pentagon and pro-Pentagon commentators as unauthoritative but, leaving aside details here and there, which carries conviction for me at least. McNamara sees not only a new escalation of the arms race, but an increased risk of nuclear war. He targets the US industrial-military complex, particularly the senior defence officials, for their role; and he rejects the so-called Strategic Defence Initiative as being, among other things, incompatible with arms control.

No less telling is the criticism of George F. Kennan. He was the most outstanding of American ambassadors to Moscow. Learned in Russian history and literature, and with several tours of duty there to his credit, Kennan was the man who, in 1947, originated the policy of containing Russia. But all along he had constructive ideas about dealing with Russia. As the ideas did not fit the stereotypes taking over the United States in the Dulles years, he was removed from Moscow; after some minor appointments he resigned, spending the rest of his life at Princeton from where he raised his voice on the side of what he saw as truth and balance. In the Spring number of the prestigious American journal Foreign Affairs for 1987, his famous anonymous 1948 article on "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" is re-published, together with an article of his entitled "Containment Then and Now".

In this article Kennan remarks that "Stalin and the men around him were more sinister, more cruel, more devious than anything we face today," but that even in Stalin's day he did not see the Soviet Union as a military threat to the West, if only because after the appalling war-time sufferings of Russia it would have been impossible, both psychologically and physically, to re-mobilize the Soviet armed forces. The threat he saw was ideological—a takeover by various foreign communist parties subservient to Moscow, especially in France and Italy. Today, he goes on, the situation is entirely different. "The Leninist-Stalinist ideology has now almost totally lost appeal everywhere outside the Soviet orbit and partially within that orbit as well." As for the Soviet position in such places as Ethiopia and Angola, what are the Russians doing there? He replies, "they are selling arms and sending military advisers—procedures not too different from our own".

Kennan could have added that, while we and the U.S. condemn the French for their experimental explosions in the South Pacific, the US carries out experimental explosions in the North Pacific; and that Afghanistan is a special case, and a special mistake on the part of the Kremlin. (For me it is still a mystery.) As for the current military situation, Kennan does "not see the Soviet Union as threatening the U.S. or its allies with armed force. It is entirely clear to me that Soviet leaders do not want a war with us and are

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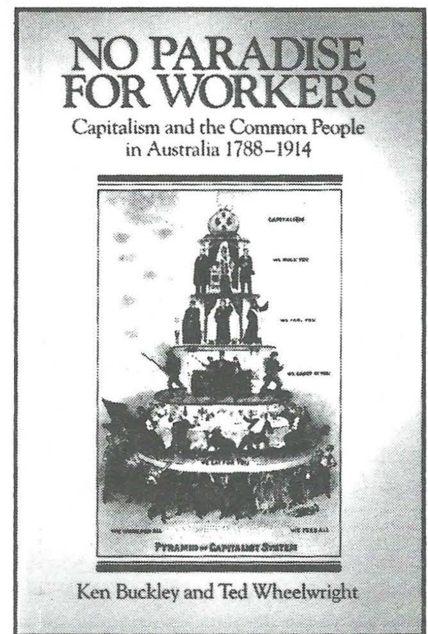

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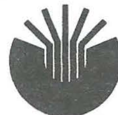
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not planning to initiate one . . . never in their interest to over-run Western Europe . . . even if the so-called nuclear deterrent had not existed." Kennan continues: "More important, I see the weapons race . . . as a serious threat not because of aggressive intentions on either side but because of the compulsions, the suspicions, the anxieties . . . the unintended complications . . . computer failure, mis-read signals, mischief deliberately perpetrated . . ."

He ends by saying that views of the Soviet Union are still drawn too extensively from images of the Stalin era.

The U.S. as leader of the west

If there is to be realism in foreign policy, if there is to be escape not from mere phantasms but from the brute realities of the arms race, the malign umbrella under which we are really living, Kennan, McNamara and not a few other Americans of their stature must be taken to heart.

For one like myself who spent no happier days than those when he was a student at an American university and who since then has lived in the United States on two separate occasions and has re-visited it a dozen times, who has had good American friends and been privileged to know Americans of signal quality, combining in a typically American way great abilities with humility and goodness, and who has kept a life-long interest in American history, it is not agreeable to be critical of policies and fears held passionately by Americans of worth, not just the T.V.-drenched populace.

It is the more disagreeable because I, like others whose profession has been international relations, am not only well aware of the difficulties of dealing with Russia, let alone of being certain about Russian intentions, but am also well aware that the United States inherited at the end of World War II the role of dealing with Russia, for the West as well as for herself. For this role she was ill-equipped, by temperament and by her traditional institutions, as well as by inexperience. The US had left Britain to fight Hitler alone for almost two years. From what I subsequently saw of the misjudgements, the clumsiness, the naif theorizing combined with trigger-happy impetuosity with which at times the United States handled her responsibilities and her opportunities, it was a miracle that the world was spared a thermonuclear war. It was no matter for wonder that the Russians feared American intentions. More than once diplomats, as also leaders in Europe, even in Canada, came to feel that the West could not continue to allow its foreign policies to be dominated by the United States. At times I found myself asking myself whether the destiny of the United States was to trigger off the destruction of the world.

Stereotypes and rhetoric bedevilled both sides, of course, East as well as West; and fears on both sides spiralled, threatening to get out of control. America's stereotypes, thanks to the American aptitude for advertising and propaganda, combined with a series of scares given by the Russians, were highly effective throughout the West. It is notoriously perilous when people come to believe their own propaganda; this was certainly happening in the United States. Mussolini believed his propaganda in World War II as Napoleon III believed his a century earlier. Both men thereby destroyed themselves and in the process brought grave damage to their countries.

The recent hearings of the US Congress Committee on Colonel North and Admiral Poindexter can give little comfort in the West, neither for the information revealed, nor for the guiding principles of the protagonists, nor for the reaction of significant numbers of the American public. North and Poindexter came out as men of acceptable private lives and of sincerity of a kind; but the same could be said of Hess and not a few Nazis of comparable rank. North, a stagey romantic, had the same dangerous simple-mindedness of many Nazis which people of my generation have never forgotten. I knew at least a dozen German Colonel Norths in the 1930s. And North was the man suddenly turned into a national hero. Can such people be trusted with decisions about the weapons of mass destruction? of peace or war with Russia?—and, perhaps before long, with China too?

The North episode is only one of a score of such 'standing tall again' manifestations from the US.

The West in general, Australia in particular (being prone to simple views) must be continuously on guard against the strain of excitability, volatility, short-span attention, hysteria, in the American character, that strain which makes too many Americans take up slogans like "North for President" or "Better dead than Red"; and which, too, is related to the violence that colors so much of American living and American culture, the hedonism and nastiness which debases so much of its vast and, also, internationally pervasive, entertainment industry, the scale and nature of its pornography industry, the unbalanced way legal and judicial practice, such as regards juries and compensation, are carried on, the pursuit of Mammon, and the networks of corruption so widespread and so tolerated as to be beyond unravelling. In latter decades the biggest of all American exports has been its own social cultural and moral malaise.

We are all a mix-up of good and bad, national states as well as persons. The good in America is so good, especially that generous yearning for all people to be happy in a happy world, that it is dangerously easy to forget the traits of imbalance combined with ruthless self-interest. Australia over the years has had more than a taste of the latter in trade matters. Angola has been providing an odd example: the US publicly denounces Cuban troops in that country but connives at the protection given by the troops to oil wells,

operated profitably by American companies, against attacks from the Unita rebels officially supported by Washington.

The Americans have a major responsibility for the decolonization movement which broke up the British and other European empires and unleashed on the world forty or fifty republics not yet ready for independence, many of them soon falling into the hands of tyrants, not a few of the tyrants raving psychopaths like Idi Amin. Throughout much of Africa the economies have been ruined, law and order has broken down, and the UN with its rule of One State One Vote, has been heavily damaged by the automatic majority going to their representatives.

Australians, in short, need to consider whether it is desirable, not just whether it is practicable, for Australia to rely on the American connection; and, if so, for how long and on what terms.

An independent foreign policy

On my retirement, which was eighteen years ago, I wrote a book, *Australian Ambassador*, aimed mainly against our satellitism to the US, exemplified by Prime Minister Holt's "All the way with L.B.J.". It suggested that consideration might be given to whether there was a case for Australia's non-alignment. The suggestion evoked little interest.

Australians more than ever need to remember that over and above the paramount need to halt and to reverse the arms race we, like any other ally of the United States, will count with that country only as long and as far as it suits American interests.

There is nothing wicked in the Americans for that. But Australians need to remember too that American perception of their interests could change within a few weeks, as it did first about Germany, then about Japan, and then about China. It could change even about Russia. Pressures to change will come in any case from America's financial situation – such factors as debts to the foreigner already near $1000 billion, with an annual interest bill to match. U.S. hegemony was not what it used to be.

The changes could take us the more by surprise because of the network of lobbies which largely shape American political and governmental decision.

The question is whether Australia should go on with the American umbrella, including at such costs as being a target for nuclear attack, or whether Australia should move towards independence. The latter would mean a policy of armed neutrality, similar to that of Switzerland or Sweden or India. A plea for this was made in 1984 by the Australian novelist David Martin in his book *Armed Neutrality for Australia*. The book received relatively little attention, written, though it was, with responsibility and knowledge. The array of facts had less effect than current fears about "the Russian menace". Publicity at the time about Afghanistan would not have helped it.

An answer to the question can only be given if the following points are cleared up:

1. The biggest single threat to the security of Australia is the same as that to every other country, namely the ever upward spiralling of the weapons of mass destruction. Would Australia's non-alignment contribute to halting the race?
2. What is the truth about Russia? Does it really aim at dominating the world? Does it really aim at organizing communist revolutions? Is peaceful co-existence merely a dream?
3. Does Australia's strongest protection in any case derive not from an alliance with the US but from the fact that no great power – for instance Russia or China or Japan, or perhaps India, not to mention the US itself – would acquiesce in a take-over of Australia or in any significant infringement of its sovereignty. There are strict limits to upsetting the balance of power.
4. Would the economic costs of armed neutrality be greater than the costs of present alignments? If so, by how much?
5. Could modern 'seeker' type weapons be made the core of our defence? Could the 'seekers' compensate for the submarines, warships and aircraft we would need but could not afford to defend our immense coast line? Can we, or should we, dispense with compulsory national service?
6. What of the ultimate question? This is whether Australia, that is to say enough Australians, have the mental and moral stamina for being independent? Is the deep-seated habit of looking to and leaning on "our great and powerful friends" and the equally deep-seated habit of feather-bedding, of whining for more and more, and avoiding effort, especially mental effort, too hard to eradicate? All the harder to eradicate because no country is more given to moralizing about the internal affairs of other sovereign states, often with crudity, and offensiveness, as well as with ignorance. The list of examples is painfully long. A recent painful example of inadequacy as regards foreign affairs, the biggest mistake made in Mr Hayden's Ministership, is amalgamating the Trade Department with the Foreign Affairs Department. The latter's functions are clear-cut and were worked out carefully, including by the ALP Minister Evatt, before Mr Hawke and Mr Hayden were heard of. What has the opposition said about the amalgamation? Or the mass media?

Epilogue

A fortnight after writing this article, the Australian Association for Armed Neutrality was launched, in October 1987. The group of citizens associated with

David Martin's initiative have standing, such as Archbishop Woods, Sir Keith Hancock and Mr Phillip Adams, and several, including Mr Alan Renouf (a former head of the Department of Foreign Affairs) and Mr Don Chipp (a former Liberal Minister) have practical qualifications in international relations. Their program promises that the questions posed above will receive attention. Their answers should arouse what is now most needed – public discussion, ventilation, light, and such assurance as may be available, if any.

It is now up to the advocates of Armed Neutrality to dispose of doubts on the other side; in particular, doubts about whether Australia, that is to say Australians, have the mental and moral qualities for this kind of independence.

The response in this year of bicentennial celebrations to the relatively simple question of the Aboriginals is not reassuring – the perceptions of what the question is and the reactions in the mass media, among intellectuals, and from slithering politicians, even to Ministers promising a "treaty" with Aboriginals and privileges not accorded to Australian citizens; promises and policies which risk the disintegration of Australia. No mention is made of what constitutes an Aboriginal or of what is the problem of the detribalized and largely corrupted *Metis*.

Australians are called on to repent for the past. Repentance (if accompanied with constructiveness) is always a good thing; and our forebears, confronted with the dilemmas of co-existing with a stone-age culture, and with their own inevitable incomprehension, did perpetrate mistakes and injustices, and sometimes atrocities. But repentance does not mean the same thing as silliness. The repentance required is a mixture of good-will and of the working out of practical measures to enable Blacks, semi-Blacks and Whites to coexist. Mere handouts, often encouraging alcoholism, may encourage the further eclipse of the non-Whites, and of resentments turning to racism among the Whites.

Too much of the bicentenary so far has been marked, on the one hand, by a lack of a sense of, as well as a knowledge of, history, and on the other by a lack of the inner self-confidence which marks men and women of independence. Certain attitudes to the Aboriginals are paralleled by certain attitudes to 'multiculturalism' which also work for disintegration, not integration, and spring from a similar absence of mind and spirit. At its worst this involves being apologetic about our British origins and the institutions and the culture we were fortunate enough to draw from them.

Advocates of Armed Neutrality, which in practice means breaking away from the United States, also have to reckon with the affinities, rapidly growing, between Australia and the United States: our populations are both a kind of multi-national melting pot; our societies a similar combination of social and cultural equality at the lowest common denominator level, with huge inequalities of wealth and yet a worshipful feeling about the wealthy; our crime rate, our mass media and not a few of our intellectuals and politicians. We share with America a susceptibility to cliche and stereotype and a proneness to excitability, volatility and bouts of hysteria rather above the human average, as such issues as time-charging for telephones, the ID card and war criminals illustrate.

Dean Inge said in the 1920s that the United States was the only country that had passed from barbarism to decadence without an intervening period of civilization. Australia needs to do much better than in the last decade or so. John Milton, thinking of more than military weapons, once wrote that "to be weak is miserable".

Sir Walter Crocker has spent his professional life in the field of international relations, as an official of the International Labour Office and of the United Nations, as the founding professor of International Relations at the Australian National University and as Australian ambassador to ten different countries. Sir Walter, of course, expresses his own views, not those of this magazine, and discussion of his article is invited.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Our grants come in before Christmas, so this time of the year, well in the black, we have to remind ourselves that the winter gales are to come and that, before many months are out, we will be wondering if we can survive till the end of the year. A fine total of donations this quarter, $2293 in all. Our salaams and thanks to: $1000, Anon.; $60, N.K.; $50, K.I., B.G., P.McL.; $30, J.W., J. & W.McD., P.M., R.P., A.M., R.C., M.R., N.K., L.G.; $20, N.B., A.H., B.R., D.B., V.S., A.D.H., J.B., L.F. V. & W.W., B.B., M. & S.P., P.H., P.J., J. & V.B., S.J.; $15, J.J.; $11, B.B.; $10, E.I., M.M., M.B., B.S., F.L., M.G., R.T., M.L., A.F., S.T., V.L., J.H. C.D'A., T.H., M.D., B.N-S., D.N., M.N., G.F., J.I., P.B., J.C., M.M., R.W., T.M., N.N., J.S., H.R., J.F., D.P., I.W.; $5, R.A., G.S., J.H., P.I., L.M., A.B., C.S., J.H., T.M., O.J., E.G., J.F., R.B., L.D., P.R., S.McK., J.P., R.W., J.H., J.McK.W., J.B., D.O'S., C.C., M.McL., T.B., J.A., E.C., H.S., M.P., F.S., M.T., P.G., R.G., I.M., D.B.; $2, T.G.

COURTNEY CARPENTER

The Lion and the Lamb

Tonight, for some reason, I found myself in the Lion and the Lamb. In the peoples' bar. But for what reason? I don't know. Because it was Saturday night? Because after death the rest is silence? I don't know, I don't know. Now, I want to record the experience, if that I can; set it down in black and white in order to see tomorrow what happened tonight. (In the morning, what I said might seem untrue.)

As I reconsider the day's events, I'm inclined to believe the evening began as early as four o'clock, and it began with a sign, a portent foreshadowing the hours ahead. What it was was this: as I attempted to read overseas newspapers in the city library, the week's incessant rain came to a dramatic close. More than dramatic. In fact, nature put on quite a show. Windy blasts from cold clouds rattled the windows' loose panes, followed by a great five-minute downpour, the horizon lead-color, the heavens dark and primeval. Like the storm in "Othello" at the beginning of Act II. But then the sky turned completely blue without clouds or wind, clear sky and open sun after days and days of rain. Otherwise, I was having a motionless afternoon bent over Le Monde and the Times.

Next, the couple reading local papers at a nearby table agreed there was no news and went away. When they had gone, I found a disturbing vacancy in the big room; physical silence and emptiness. A visceral feeling seized me, if that's the word, and then the picture-making power of my mind produced a glass tumbler full of pale gold whisky beside an open fire, like the one being built for early diners at the Royal Oak—"Now," I said in a determined whisper, forgetting my umbrella hooked onto the chair beside me, my third umbrella this year.

Between the library and the Square, two or three noteworthy incidents:

—in upper High Street, Council workmen clearing clogged drains had an impromptu smoke while the engine throbbed in their red truck. Men who would rather talk than work. The one in rolled Wellingtons said *How'ze it going?* as if we were both in the same gaol. I returned his smile;

—red and yellow pennants the size of tea towels, flowing with the wind, *bedazzled* Woolworth's facade from the Main Street doors right up to its rooftop. I saw an enormous pleasure craft in the Greek Isles at Fiesta Time. Why? Spring Sale!

—in the corner of the Square, where great trees stand about, a light-blue-eyed girl sat alone on a wooden bench, smoking. At once, universal and personal: bare willowy arms; flesh so interesting; full of all those instincts which as yet do not know themselves. (Taught by her Mum, no doubt, that sex is one of life's options.) But for the cigarette, an image of innocence.

With a watery mouth I climbed the walled-in staircase to the Royal, the stairs narrow and steep, steps and risers covered in deep magenta wool alive with coppery fleurs-de-lis. At the top, in a spacious vestibule paved black and white, stood Elizabeth and Phillip dressed for an Occasion, host and hostess encased in gold-leaf frames majestically urging guests forward with dignified smiles. Of course, everything is handsomely done in the Royal. Five Stars. Nothing quite in excess plus the whiff of antiques. And the fire? A smoky one. Flames invisible and dim.

Following a chat with Rowena, I drew up near the hearth holding on to whisky and water. At the top of the windows clouds again, too high for rain. Then the logs began to glow red hot while the business of cooking crept in from the kitchen. Around six I decided against another and went through with the one in my hand. The others, drooping over the fire with whiskies and sodas, didn't know there's lobster *sushi* on the Saturday menu, in limited quantities, only now and then. First come first served.

While enjoying French onion soup, I asked myself what it is that makes the Royal so—I had to think—so "pleasure giving?" I turned my head around. Everything in its place and absolutely fitting: the Dresden vase on the mantlepiece filled with early jonquils; reflecting candle-plaques behind the wall brackets; Persian rugs breaking the shine on wide-

planked floors, the planks halves of oaks; a twelve-point buck's head on the wall below the ceiling. (And something for the eye to look at: hand-carved Aaron's Rod moulding the walls to the ceiling.) All in all one feels, undeniably, a solid feeling, like a symphony or grand opera compared to light music.

Before the lobster arrived I studied the sunset hanging above Rowena's head, impossible not to notice: a ball of fire, weakening, rests on a chain of mountains peacock-blue; below the mountains, a wine-color surf washes a shore tannish brown; in the drier sand, bare rocks face each other. And that's it. The artist used great quantities of paint, thick bright colors meant to be excessive, coercing a small masterpiece into existence. It's best seen from a distance. From a distance it evokes a dark effect, like Aswan's black boulders along the River Nile, or like the dying notes of evensong in a great deserted church. And so I followed my feelings when the lobster arrived: I recalled choirboy days and the muted strains of my favorite Advent anthem, "What God hath done is rightly done." Bach. After that, while waiting for coffee, I remembered day-boy days, my Latin master at his writing board: *Nil nisi divinum stabile est: caetera fummus.* "Nothing is lasting unless it is divine: the rest is smoke." And then I laughed to think . . .

The *maitre d'*, enormous and short, eyed my table obliquely. Behind him a furred woman with an emphatic nose stood first on one foot and then the other. So there I was. But I had finished. And besides, the last rays of the sun would be making purple-grey mountains in the sky.

Not at all. An orangish moon like some welcoming giant leaned on budding trees. I stood stone-still as it grew whiter and whiter, rolling with marmoreal lustre into a completely black sky. Because of whisky and wine, I felt the overwhelming presence of some non-material thing, something beyond the sphere of the usual. Was it then, possessed by the intoxicating infinite, that I decided to visit the public bar? To be honest, I wanted to sit a while on the blue-eyed girl's bench. On the exact same spot. Warm the place her little bottom had warmed. Hatch some feelings. But what did I do? Unpremeditated and unmeant, I walked to the corner – *the sound of water*? No. Too early for summer fountains. What then? Outside the Lion and the Lamb's public bar two happy-go-lucky mates diddled against the wall shoulder to shoulder. When they had finished they stumbled north along Main Street holding each other by the arm, singing badly songs without words. With diminishing echoes they disappeared into Wrightson's goods yard in search of the well-worn path through to High Street. It was then that I found myself considering the jug-bar doors, considering them with a kind of benevolent curiosity, as if there were something inside waiting to be realised – or something waiting to overwhelm those within its reach? I moved cautiously into Main Street's elephant-grey shadows, the air warm and still, never before so soft. I can feel it on my face even now. Caught in the grips of some deep prompting, I approached the doors, avoiding the lazy streams of human waste merging into one at the kerb.

I'm inclined to save it, the attempt to describe it, until tomorrow. But the sharpness will be gone tomorrow. In the morning it will be something else, a sense of meaning rather than meaning itself. Tonight it lives in me, buried alive, humming.

Pretending not to believe my eyes, I made my way to the bar. While waiting for whisky I watched the endlessly rich scene in the looking glass. A square cut out of reality. A mosaic of amiable monsters held together by booze. Raising my glass to them, I whispered: "Life at the bottom, the very bottom."

The longer I remained, the effects grew thicker, hurricane-like, absorbing as it advanced. I turned to the right. On my right was a mild-eyed man in a sad-colored jersey. When our eyes met I said, "What time's closing?" He said, "I'm a stranger here myself," in his eyes a lost unanchored look. We stood for a long while saying nothing. Then, abruptly, he asked me my opinion of the times. I wanted to laugh at his quaint expression and at my opinion of the times, times longing for the days when war merely fertilised the land. Instead, I asked him what he meant: "Economically? Labor and employment? Underemployment?" (The barman stood with his thumbs in his armpits, entirely without nerves.) "There are lots of ways of looking at things," I suggested. The man asked for another pint. Then, after I had told him that one of our major problems concerns people who stand on their feet in one place eight hours a day, a tenth of them out of work now and from now on, he said with a mild stare, "Is that right," setting his mouth O-shaped. I said, "Surplus labor," meant to be ironic. But he moved along to talk to some others just in from the street. "Warm night," observed the barman sagely.

Ten o'clock closing. The mates' diddle was disappearing into dark islands of moisture while the moon, climbing the sky, had grown big and white, clear-cut and polished. All the way up Chiswell Street I felt the hovering, lingering, echoic effect of the barroom, not inside like a kernel but outside enveloping. Which is to say, the flair and flow of the desperate comedy followed me, legions of mediocre old men of thirty dying from the inside out.

Dizzy with drink, mooning over nature, I came the final distance through the fields, a kilometre shorter, the night resplendent as day – by the stile a milk-white horse standing up dozing gave me a fright. But why, at this late hour, can I not forget that very good very bad sunset hanging in the Royal? Shouldn't a picture tell a story? Shouldn't we see what a picture points out and not the picture? It's so real but no more. Or, like the peoples' bar, does it mean more than it seems?

ANNE R. KOTZÉ

Letter from Cape Town

Dear Stephen:

Like so many of my overseas friends you are probably listening, watching and reading our news and becoming increasingly anxious about us here in South Africa. When I was in Canada and Europe recently I saw what the news media over there made of events and so I can understand how you feel. But it produced in me a peculiar frame of mind. I became so angry about the slanted versions of the news and the apparently intentional distortion of the truth that I found myself defending our government and its indefensible policies. Can you understand that?

Just to give you an example, British TV showed a photograph of a corrugated-iron shack, while the newsreader told us that rents for houses in Soweto were between £50 and £200 per month. Naturally most people thought these rents related to the shack in the picture, which was totally misleading but caused those watching with me to gasp with outrage. There are all kinds of houses in Soweto—we do have black millionaires you know!—and rents according to Time Magazine start at about £14 per month for a house, not a shack. My anger made me lose sight of the point of the news item—that thousands of people in the black city were refusing to pay rent because they objected to the way the municipality was run. When things are so bad why do newsmen try to make matters even worse?

You asked me how the present situation affects me as a Cape Town housewife. It is possible to close my eyes, turn off the news and believe there is no trouble here at all, because so far it has impinged on my life very little and most of my involvement is second-hand. One of my 'Colored' friends who is a teacher told me that children in her school are all writing their exams but that they have "bomb scare drill" now so that all the pupils can be out of the building in three minutes should a bomb be found on the premises. Two years ago at this time the cry of the senior pupils was "Liberation before Education" and they boycotted public examinations. Now they seem to have realised that without education they cannot take their rightful place in the government of this country when that time comes—as it will.

My black charlady tells me about intimidation by radical blacks who threaten them with 'necklacing' or having their houses burnt down if they co-operate with the police in any way. At the same time the police harass the township residents under the umbrella of "keeping order", and such sad events as funerals turn into confrontation and demonstrations of anger and frustration. Rebecca is a Xhosa and a widow with five children. She lives in Khayelitsha, where a town for Black people has sprung up to try to eliminate the shanty towns such as Crossroads. However as soon as people move out of the corrugated-iron and plastic shacks, others move in. People are always drawn to cities, so I think Crossroads will remain with us.

Rebecca leases her house for R20 per month and it is a basic unit of bedroom, sitting-room, kitchen and bathroom—with no bath in it yet. That will come when she can afford it, as will additional rooms. At the moment both sitting-room and kitchen become bedrooms at night. They have not yet been linked to the electricity grid, but she cheerfully manages with a paraffin stove and lamps. Two of her children are working, but already the next generation is coming along and she looks after Angel, the child of her unmarried daughter who is still at school. She used to work for me with Angel tied on her back, but now the little girl is old enough to play in the garden while Rebecca is busy.

Canadian friends criticised me for employing a black servant but there is no other work which Rebecca is qualified to do and, in fact, I have stretched my own resources recently so that she can come twice a week and earn enough to keep her daughter at school until she has matric, after which she hopes to train as a nurse. Rebecca can only just read and write. What an amazing leap in one generation! And what will Angel become?

Prices of all goods in the shops are spiralling upwards. As always seems to be the case the 'Haves', who may be cutting down a little on luxuries, are much less affected than the 'Have nots' whose dole will barely

stretch to even the most basic foods. I see many people at my door now asking for work and, when I give them food, they put it carefully away to take home to their families. This, then, is how we see the results of sanctions. Few of us are personally bothered by the disappearance of overseas goods from the shops, but we all see the growing number of unemployed men and women who are growing apathetic and hopeless as they trail from place to place searching for work.

Archbishop Tutu, however, feels that sanctions are a way of making pressure for change irresistible without violence. He has great charisma and is blamed by radical Blacks for being too moderate, and by ultra-conservative Whites for being too extreme. This proves, I think, that he has a great role to play as a reconciler and peacemaker. Certainly people listen to him – even though he is usually quoted out of context.

The Church in South Africa is alive and active. It is deeply involved in social responsibility and shows tremendous courage in its witness against violence and injustice. A lecturer in Religious Studies from here was speaking recently at Oxford and Harvard. In both places he was approached by theologians who said, "How we envy you! Your churches are stimulating and alive; not half-asleep and indifferent like ours". My friend replied, "Care to swop jobs?" but had no takers.

Last Saturday about four hundred Anglicans whose churches are affiliated with the Royal School of Church Music spent a day at St George's Cathedral learning to sing a setting of the Mass in Xhosa to the African music of four marimbas and drums. It was most exciting to sing to these pulsing rhythms, trying to get our tongues round the clicks and strange consonants. It was 'mother-tongue' to some but I battled along, only saved by knowing what I was singing about and by the incredible patience and enjoyment of our Xhosa teacher.

I have come to the conclusion that the circle is the natural expression of an African. Our conductor did not beat up and down with his hands but in circles, with his hips and feet moving to the insistant rhythms too. Most of the music was sung in the form of a 'round' or 'canon', and we were told to imagine we were taking part in a service dancing in a ring round a great tree. In rural areas they build round houses encircled by kraal walls, and I think this is an expression of their kinship with the round world around them.

An exciting change of great significance has been the declaration by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church that apartheid is not justifiable in the light of the Bible. In the past this Calvinistic church has quoted from the Book of Joshua, saying that the black peoples must remain "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for opposing the advance of the Great Trek when the Afrikaaners moved into their promised land. This helps to explain how a sincerely God-fearing nation could accept apartheid as their policy. Now they acknowledge that we are all equal in the sight of God, but no-one should underestimate the difficulty of changing one's belief overnight, after a lifetime with a different conviction.

It was refreshing to find in Zimbabwe when I was there in May, that people were forgetting color barriers – not ignoring them or breaking them down but actually not being aware of them as divisive any more. People are friends because they have common interests, they live near each other, their children go to the same school. Loads of prejudice about others are being dropped and you yourself are accepted only for what you are now. The young people I mixed with are not color-blind but color-appreciative. There are many who cannot accept this yet, but it has begun.

I was amused to be called "Comrade" in the shops in Zimbabwe. It reminded me of my daughter who calls her car "Comrade" because it is red. Last time I went to Zimbabwe I found the border officials antagonistic and unhelpful, but this time there was a friendly welcome and help freely given with a smile. I saw more soldiers and armored cars there than I have ever seen in South Africa but the men on the road-blocks – eight between the border and Bulawayo – were very polite and tried not to delay us. Buildings in the towns were shabby and needed paint, but it has become a country where I feel I could happily live. Is this how South Africa will be in ten or fifteen years time?

The headlines at the moment are about the possible repeal of the Group Areas Act. The government has 'made a nonsense' by allowing marriage across the color line but not allowing residential areas where these couples may live together. Friends of mine who married quietly in another country have been living in a so-called 'grey' area, that is a district where neighbors do not object to people of other colors living next door. But this is still against the law as it stands at present, and you can imagine the insecurity and hurt which they experience daily.

But let me tell you another story. Ram, an Indian engineering student in Natal, could not stand the political situation here and went to England to finish his university course. There he met and married Mary, an English nurse, and they had three children. Ram had specialised knowledge which South Africa wanted to use, so he was offered a three-year contract to work in Cape Town. With some misgivings and the promise of a house the family arrived. They were given a pleasant home in one of these 'grey' areas, just outside the city, and enjoyed their years here, although the children had to go to a private school which was costly. They returned to England and wrote to say they were all longing to come back to South Africa, especially the children, who were feeling ostracized and friendless. They were the only pupils of mixed race at their village school, and the other children would

have nothing to do with them. Interesting, isn't it?

You ask what you can do to help. I think the main thing is not to accept our pariah status in the world without recognising that there are thousands of people of all races working together for peaceful change. We need encouragement because we are not overly popular in certain circles here! Keep channels open. Remember that bit from 'Julius Caesar'?

> A friend should bear his friend's infirmities,
> But Brutus makes mine greater than they are.

Don't be a Brutus, Stephen. Please don't isolate us. Keep in touch with us and our enormous problems and tell us when we bring about changes, however small, of which you approve.

Visit us again soon.

Affectionately,
Anne.

Anne Kotzé, a Cape Town housewife, is active in the Anglican Church in her country. Of English descent, she married an Africaner, and has a place in both communities. She befriended the Editor of this magazine some years ago, when he was in transit through South Africa to Tristan da Cunha, after meeting him in the Church Archives.

Jiri Tibor Novak

THE BOMB DROPPED IN

The Bomb dropped in today
without any warning.
The house was in a mess.
I wasn't in the mood for visitors
but I invited the Bomb in
for a drink.

The Bomb was looking terrible.
Long time no see, I said, You
could have rung me at least.

I feel shithouse, the Bomb said,
Things aren't going well for me;
I turn thirty-five this year
& my life has been a failure.
I haven't lived up to my true potential.

But you're famous, I said, You
have a powerful reputation.

I'm the most hated figure of our generation,
The Bomb said.

Don't be paranoid, I said, people
don't fear you like they used to,
they've grown accustomed to your face . . .
You're just going thru a mid-life crisis . . .

People abuse me wherever I go, the Bomb
yelled, You got a cigarette?

I've stopped smoking, I said, I've
given it up.

I'm giving it up too, the Bomb said,
I'm going to kill myself.

The Bomb jumped out the window.

I ran to the window.
The bomb was limping down the garden path.
Your best years
are still in front of you, I yelled, but
The Bomb didn't hear.
Night began to fall around me . . .

MYRON LYSENKO

books

Books for our time

Mary Rose Liverani

Nicholas Hasluck: *Truant State* (Penguin, $9.95).
Peter Carey: *Oscar and Lucinda* (University of Queensland Press, $28.95).
David Ireland: *Bloodfather* (Viking/Penguin, $29.95).

There are some kinds of people who seem inherently unsuitable to be heroes of ambitious literary works. Fanatics of any persuasion, for instance. Psychologically, fanatics are a wasteland. Only when they start wreaking havoc do they become fit stuff for fiction or history.

So it's startling to find both David Ireland and Peter Carey choosing Plymouth Brethren as protagonists of their Bicentennial novels.

Among these three bicentenary works is a potential mini-series, and a romantic film starring Judy Davis at her most nostril-flaring. There's also a splendid novel.

Better to start this trio of weighty books with David Ireland's *Bloodfather.* It's something to drink from, rather than read, a waterhole in a cracked paddock. It's dedicated to "the liberation of God", and God has every reason to rejoice and be exceeding glad in it. You need the energy generated by *Bloodfather* to sustain you through Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, a numbing work of minsanthropy and self-loathing which, expertly filleted on film, could well be the next great Australian movie.

One thing to be learned from comparing any of Iris Murdoch's novels with Nicholas Hasluck's *Truant State* is that dialogue works best in protagonists who are perceptive and intelligent and have something to say. Putting words into the mouths of men of action, simple-minded entrepreneurs from Western Australia, preoccupied with fraudulent property deals and political chicanery, should be avoided at all costs. Otherwise you get this:

> "So Romney wants to open up Butler's Swamp," Clarence Tomkins said to Ben Taylor. "Form a syndicate. Is that the idea? . . . Ben Taylor tapped the ash of his cigar. "Romney formed the syndicate some time ago. He wants to expand it. Acquire the rest of the land while it's still going cheaply. Drain it. Get the dehydration plant established. The time is ripe."

And then you will be badgered by television executives demanding the rights to your novel.

Truant State is the kind of product being sought by the new ABC. It has the major elements of a popular work: information (the history of Western Australia's unsuccessful attempt at secession in the 1930s), characters (men, naturally) who are 'shakers and movers' and hungry for wealth and power, loveless marriages, infidelity and a romantic attachment brought only to partial fruition. It has physical conflict – mob violence as well as brawls between individuals – and intrigue: the identity of an assassin is a mystery throughout.

Truant State is not, however, in any way frivolous or cynical. It raises socially important issues, resolving them, thankfully, in terms well known and reassuring to the reader.

It is ideologically sound. The entrepreneurs who dream of draining marshes and turning them into market gardens are men of vigor and vision. If their schemes go awry and they ruin scores of little people, you can't blame them for nicking off with the spoils. How else can they start again?

Those who bleat about ending corruption and privilege, on the other hand, are wimpish, rarely risking, and taking to drink at the first wipeout.

As for the naysayer who rejects the victim's role and becomes a terrorist – he is downright wicked. The most vividly repellent figure in *Truant State* is the 'Balt' Bolshie, Jacob Vas, drawn with a great deal more passion than any of the major characters.

History provides good plots, but making events seem the natural outcome of character is not easy. Hasluck can't quite manage it. Apart from his narrator, Jack Traverne, a gentle youth who matures

into an endearing if acquiescent journalist, his characters lack depth and definition. In some cases it is quite difficult to separate one from the other.

Much of the writing, especially in the early part of *Truant State*, is banal or cliched.

"I didn't want to see the party winding down, the evening coming to an end. No. That would be unbearable. Unfair. Perhaps the same thought had just crossed Diana's mind. We moved even closer." Or: "It's no use," I heard Stephanie say. She had come up quietly behind me. "You can carry on till you're blue in the face. Henry is set in his ways . . ."

And it seems odd that the Traverne family, new-chums from England, should observe their neighbors and the exotic landscape without the double vision of the foreigner.

But the Hasluck book is pleasant enough reading about a state that's largely a mystery to 't'othersiders'. Who in the East, for instance, knows that Perth magnates eagerly awaited the arrival of a ginger-headed English writer, thought to be 'in mining' and to be a well-known authority on motherhood, or that West Australians believed *Kangaroo* to be based on Lawrence's experiences in Perth not New South Wales, where he relocated his novel to escape libel charges.

If Nicholas Hasluck's control over his material is a little tremulous, Peter Carey's is absolute. All 511 pages of *Oscar and Lucinda* are held in an iron grip—no character blinks but the author wills it, no leaf falls but he records it—he or his omniscient narrator, the hero's great-grandson who, writing in the 1950s, is nonetheless privy to every thought of his Victorian forebears.

The omniscient author technique is not the only one Carey has adapted from the Victorians. You have the strange impression, reading *Oscar and Lucinda*, that you may be listening to a prissier George Eliot, with interruptions from Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens—but a Dickens, it should be said, minus the rousing moral outrage, one who knew Geelong Grammar instead of Newgate.

Oscar and Lucinda is an enormously clever work, ingeniously conceived and impressively well-crafted. It teems with event and invention and has any number of set-pieces, both comic and horrific, just made for film, some of the best taking place around the departure and the voyage of a 'tall ship' heading for Sydney. There's comparatively little dialogue—Carey keeps his characters on the leash—but that little sparkles. Actors will applaud it.

In terms of the Bicentenary year, Carey's novel strikes the right note. Lucinda, the heroine, made wealthy by the subdivision of land taken from the Aboriginals, is riven and ruined by guilt. Chinese fan-tan players in their dens down at the Rocks are shown to be human despite their pigtails; women to be assertive, "doers" capable even of becoming industrialists. And there is much drama on the sea and river, involving a variety of ships.

According to the Times on Sunday's Adele Horin, Carey got the idea for his novel when he noticed that a church he particularly admired was to be pulled down. He imagined floating the church down the river to a new destination, an image he thought a perfect end to a novel (or film?). Then he worked backwards. The only person mad enough to do such a thing, he decided, would have to be a gambler.

So his hero, a former member of the Plymouth Brethren, and his heroine, are both guilt-ridden gamblers. They're stubborn and tenacious and soul-sick. And that's a problem which is part of a bigger problem with this novel. Hardly one character in the entire book is likeable or admirable. And they are so GLUM. Most of them, especially in the concluding chapters, turn your stomach—but to no very good purpose.

Despite the comedy, there is little good humor in the novel. It is powerfully pessimistic, a prose version of Yeats's "The Second Coming".

Given an Independent Dissenting Brethren family as the focus of attention in David Ireland's latest novel, and the title, *Bloodfather*, all sorts of grim and grotesque possibilities come to mind. Thankfully, none eventuates.

In Ireland's portrait of the artist as a young Aussie, Davis Blood is a delightful and memorable creation, whose growth from toddler to teenager is followed with rapt attention and sympathy by the reader. This growth is expressed in Blood's constantly changing perceptions of his environment, from his baby-tumbling-down-the-stairs awareness of the edges of stairs and the sun splashing the carpet, to his mature reflection as a young artist, that he needs a God, needs a way to live and a work to do, and that, by heeding God's voice within him, he has them all.

David Blood is born happy and confident. "I am, therefore I can" is how Ireland describes the cheerful tyranny of the new baby imposing its will on startled parents and kin—for two wacky aunts live with the Blood family. One, a quadriplegic, confined to a wheelchair, dispenses wisdom in rhymes and the other, popping in and out of the pages like a cuckoo in a clock, shrills a risque and sceptical commentary on life, mainly in the form of hilarious and ingenious word-plays.

These aunts, despite their charm, are vehicles for Ireland's opinions rather than fully rounded characters. They are disembodied instruments whose melodies blend well in the family chorus.

Even Mrs Blood—and if the autobiographical hints are to be believed she is based on Ireland's mother—is reduced to a few qualities, but her warmth pervades the novel.

She sings non-stop. She has a hymn for every

occasion and every crisis, and Ireland often reproduces the hymns in full or in part. They evoke a personal world of untroubled faith and assurance, a bulwark against the reality of Mr Blood's retrenchment and going on the dole. Young Davis loves his mother but her singing seems to keep him at a distance (as it does the reader) though, from time to time, he has sudden awareness of who she is as a human, rather than a mother. He is staggered to realise, when he watches her join in a game of cricket, that she is actually physically strong.

The world according to Davis is a marvel to behold. Davis is a gifted child. He goes to an opportunity class and then to a selective high school which he leaves early, because the family needs his income. Painting is his first interest, and the lateralism Ireland displays with such fecundity in the word-plays of Aunt Mira shows up in the off-beat (and critical) paintings of the young artist.

Teachers could find a thousand class exercises in *Bloodfather.* Collecting wordplays might be one. "What are you going on about, Mira?" asked Lilian. "Modern chain gangs of America . . . As presented by the Washington Toast in an admirable article on the sadistics of pain," she answers. And later, when Jackson smashes some crockery his mother never liked, Mira cackles: "a satisfying autistic achievement . . . let's get out of here, let's travel. Go to grey Paree, Trashville Tennessee, the Land of Ire."

Some teachers may balk at: "genital gee-gees, fierce and wild, don't do it on a little child" but, when Mira is chided for her coarser expressions, she counters with: "I don't want him to be a verbal quadriplegic".

The sources of pleasure in *Bloodfather* are too many to explore in a very brief review: enjoyment of characters who are portrayed with uninhibited affection, exploration of religious, moral and social issues in language that is generally fresh and unexpected, and the affirmation of the god-like in mankind and the universe.

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Battleress

Peter Love

Brian Matthews: *Louisa* (McPhee Gribble, $39.95).

After playing a supporting role in numerous repeats of her eldest son's tragic life, Louisa Lawson finally gets star billing. Here, her own tragedy unfolds through an imaginative script by Brian Matthews and friends, presented by Post-Modernist Productions of Paris.

In the opening scene we see Matthews, bent over his battered typewriter, musing on the problems of writing biography. Lacking sufficient hard evidence for a conventional 'life and times', he decides to throw off the shackles of scholarly restraint and pursue "the truth of fiction". But he realises that in any sort of narrative, be it scholarly or imaginative, there is always the danger of an intrusive authorial presence, so that the audience is unsure about who is speaking. Eventually, he hits on the idea of running an alternative text alongside the main narrative: a kind of side-show where speculative and interrogative voices are heard; and tangential but illuminating images appear.

Having adopted this novel strategy, Matthews then has to decide who is to be in his alternative text. Almost immediately, he feels the presence of someone else at the typewriter. It is another self; a cautious, serious and conservative *alter ego* assuming the role of the scholarly biographer. But the biographer, in turn, soon recognises another part of himself that prefers the "truth of fiction", a more speculative and empathetic truth. While the biographer remains nameless, as befits his scholarly detachment, his other, less restrained self is given the name Owen Stevens. As Matthews slips quietly off-screen to sit in the director's chair, his two *alter egos* come to life; Stevens muttering about epigraphs, while the biographer decides that the best way to start the narrative is to introduce Louisa's daughter Gertrude, and her memoir of the family.

The alternative text dissolves and the focus shifts to Gertrude, who is the subject of a brief scene which presents her in a somewhat unflattering light. Almost immediately Owen Stevens re-appears to defend her. This prompts an impatient reply from the biographer, who thinks he knows better because he has published an article on the family as a source for Henry's story of "The Drover's Wife". We then see a re-run of the article, followed by another skirmish between Stevens and the biographer. This pattern continues, with numerous voices added, as the show progresses.

By the time Louisa appears, on p. 43, the audience is accustomed to these quick shifts from narrative to alternative text. Later on we come to expect querulous interruptions, witnesses wheeled on and off for interrogation, exhibits presented for examination, fictionalised action and vivid snapshots of significant people and places. After a while the apparent chaos assumes a kind of perverse order, eventually emerging as a coherent structure.

All this is by way of a warning to people who are looking for a conventional biography. This is far from conventional. Here, we have a double bill; a life of Louisa Lawson spliced with a practical exercise in the application of post-modernist literary theory, merci-

fully free of Gallic gobbledegook. The result is an engaging montage; challenging, witty and moving, if occasionally a little irritating. But whatever you do, don't despair after the first few scenes. It takes a while to get to Louisa, but it is worth the wait.

As her story unfolds, and is examined, we see a spirited but repressed young woman nudged into marriage with the kindly but unreliable "Peter" Larsen by parents anxious to be rid of her. After following her husband from one gold rush to another, bearing and raising children while trying to civilise and organise the world around her, she eventually calls a halt and they take up a selection. There the complexity of her character begins to emerge. She is courageous and determined in the face of loneliness and grinding toil, but strangely prey to "fits of abstraction" during which she appears to neglect her children and the farm. By the time she decides to chuck it in and satisfy her restless longing for something better in Sydney, without her husband, the reasons seem clear. At this stage Matthews' biographical strategy seems to be working. A quick glance back at the conventional evidence presented shows it to be remarkably thin. The sense that we understand her motives represents the triumph of Owen Stevens over the biographer, the "truth of fiction" over scholarly scruple.

We watch as she passes through an enthusiasm for spiritualism and an association with the Republican to the establishment of the Dawn, that lively, pugnacious champion of women's rights. At times it seems that Louisa and her journal are assailed from all sides, but with the determination of the drover's wife she fights them off. But it is not just the will to fight that sustains her through the Dawn's troubles. The journal was also a medium for her and Henry's literary expression. Here the biographer, as Matthews scholarly *alter ego*, comes into his own. His reading of Louisa's prose and poetry is a highlight of the show. It is sensitive, discriminating and insightful.

It seems, however, that at the height of her powers the President of the Immortals has just begun his sport with Louisa. She suffers a debilitating injury in a tram accident. The family's hope of financial security, her patent on a buckle for mail bags, is stolen by a corrupt Post Master General. Her children and herself are beset by recurring mental illness. Stevens and the biographer haggle over this; whether there is a fatal flaw in the Lawsons or if the weight of circumstance is sufficient to drive anyone mad. The audience does not feel inclined to take sides, we merely sympathise.

At the point in the narrative where Louisa makes her momentous journey to the city, Owen Stevens butts in with an over-the-top performance. In an attempt to emphasise its significance, he tells a story about an old woman's trip from the country to Sydney, through a time warp, to visit the Dawn office. It is a lovely way to celebrate Louisa's courage and her achievement, but it does strain the audience's forbearance. The biographer is right to chide him about it later. In fairness, however, it must be said that Stevens' boisterousness does work marvellously well when he evokes the flavour of the Dawn by turning it into a music-hall performance.

This playful and self-conscious cleverness, does not prevent Matthews' book from being a very moving work. Louisa's treatment at the hands of the Typographical Association, and the attempt to pirate her invention, are enough to make any audience scream for blood. We warm to the breadth of her sympathy, admire her long and dogged battles for women's right to the vote and resent those who, by indifference or oversight, almost robbed her of adequate recognition. But above all else there is sadness in witnessing the progress of mental illness as it steadily overcomes Louisa and her family, in tragic mockery of all their endeavors.

Without the empathetic "truth of fiction", the sparse historical record would have kept all this from us. Although it might seem to be overdone at times, the artifice finally succeeds as Matthews re-appears to dismantle his scaffolding, dismiss his *alter egos* and round off the minor characters. After some brief interludes by way of eulogy, we are left with haunting images of the country Louisa knew as a young woman, and a fragile but tenacious remnant of her attempt to transform it.

This is a marvellously bold and challenging work. My only reservation is that it might encourage ponderous imitators, entirely devoid of Matthews' wit and intelligence.

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The First Man

Paul Carter

Bruce Chatwin: *The Songlines* (Cape, $29.95).

At first glance, *The Songlines* might be taken for an account of a journey with a purpose. The journey is a trip into the outback west of Alice Springs, its purpose to test Chatwin's hypothesis that man (the human race) was originally nomadic. The point of his excursion is to learn more about the Australian Aboriginals' "songlines" – the stories the Aboriginals tell about the creation of the country and which, Chatwin believes, "represent the routes of the first Australians". As Chatwin speculates towards the end of the book, it is his idea that the songlines are universal:

> I have a vision of the Songlines stretching across

the continents and the ages; that wherever men have trodden they have left a trail of song (of which we may, now and then, catch an echo) . . .

If this recalls Black Civil Rights rhetoric, the culmination of his "vision" come unfortunately close to Reader's Digest-speak:

> these trails must reach back, in time and space, to an isolated pocket in the African savannah, where the First Man opening his mouth in defiance of the terrors that surrounded him shouted the opening stanza of the World Song, 'I AM!'

But long before this – and perhaps in order to sweeten a whimsically dogmatic pill – *The Songlines* has revealed other autobiographical and literary ambitions. In Alice Springs Chatwin has met Arkady. A man who fully lives up to the symbolic possibilities of his name, Arkady is a white nomad who has been initiated into Aboriginal secrets. He is also a foil to the death-in-life of so much white Australian society – whose cast of beer-gutted truck-drivers and magnificently-breasted sheilas Chatwin portrays gleefully and with a journalist's eye (and ear) for the eloquent detail. Chatwin becomes Arkady's disciple and together they set off west to meet the people of the songlines.

But already it is clear that this is not merely the entertaining reportage of a brilliant observer. Chatwin's narrative of his days in Alice has been interspersed with elaborate flashbacks to earlier days (and diaries). Somehow this Australian journey has to do with Chatwin's search for his own roots. Understanding the songlines is connected, extraordinarily enough, with the exploration of his own identity. In a poetically compressed cameo of his childhood, Chatwin explains how "the suggestion took root in my head that poetry, my own name [from the Anglo-Saxon for 'the winding path'] and the road were, all three, mysteriously connected." Chatwin's object, it seems, is to demonstrate the scientific validity of this insight – to show, with a mass of ethnographic anecdote, how, originally, man was "a migratory species" – an animal which sang its way over the roads of the world.

The value of this demonstration is, not so much anthropological or historical, as autobiographical and even ethical. Pondering his own constitutional restlessness, and recalling how Pascal attributed man's longing for distraction to "the natural unhappiness of our weak mortal condition", Chatwin is drawn syllogistically to ask:

> Could it be, I wondered, that our need for distraction, our mania for the new, was, in essence, an instinctive migratory urge akin to that of birds in autumn?
>
> All the Great Teachers have preached that Man, originally, was a 'wanderer in the scorching and barren wilderness of this world' – the words are those of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor – and that to rediscover his humanity, he must slough off attachments and take to the road.

But there is a further strand to be woven into this already complex fictional fabric. Among the myriad quotations Chatwin draws from his knapsack of notebooks in the course of *The Songlines* is this sardonic observation: "Useless to ask a wandering man/ Advice on the construction of a house./ The work will never come to completion." And Chatwin comments, "After reading this text, from the Chinese Book of Odes, I realised the absurdity of trying to write a book on Nomads." In a sense, *The Songlines* is Chatwin's attempt to write "a book on Nomads". In addition to being a journal, a scrapbook of autobiographical and ethnographic anecdote, *The Songlines* is an essay in fiction. Despite the cheerful superficiality of the narrative, Chatwin's book is, in fact, highly self-referential.

Chatwin's fragmentation of his own journal is a means of reflecting on the journey as a *literary construction.* His intermingling of quotations, personal anecdotes and asides becomes a way of enabling the reader to see how the journal can not only narrate nomadic experiences but reveal something *about* the nomadic state of mind. His labored dialogues with Arkady are not simply meant to convey strange ideas and speculations in an easily digestible form: they are also compositional units, ways of conveying the experience of travelling and the *shape*, the fragmentary and anecdotal character, of a traveller's knowledge.

This, then, is the meaning of the long section, "From The Notebooks", which dominates the last third of *The Songlines.* In the lee of Mount Liebler, temporarily left by himself in a caravan on the edge of the Aboriginal settlement, whose ancient knowledge he has come to study, Chatwin opens his notebooks. It is the pivotal moment of his book and his gesture – and the seventy odd pages of notebook extracts which follow – have a number of significances.

At the level of travelogue, Chatwin's decision to read through his years of accumulated nomadic lore refers to his journey into Aboriginal Australia: Chatwin is simply boning up on his anthropological (and poetic) theory of man's beginnings. At the level of autobiography, though, as Chatwin explains, his caravan sojourn has another significance:

> I had a presentiment that the 'travelling' phase of my life might be passing. I felt, before the malaise of settlement crept over me, that I should reopen those notebooks. I should set down on paper a resumé of the ideas, quotations and encounters which had amused and obsessed me;

and which I hoped would shed light on what is, for me, the question of questions: the nature of human restlessness.

Further, as this passage also indicates, the introduction of the notebooks into Chatwin's narrative has a *formal* importance. In effect, by going over his past writings and ordering them into a pattern, Chatwin is creating his own songlines. We begin to see that the desert narrative of vulgarities and sublimities which has brought the writer to his temporary solitude in the desert is a way of telling the story of his own storytelling impulse. At the very moment we expect primitive, mystical truths we discover that Mount Liebler is, as much as anything, a fictional place — a place where Chatwin can begin to speak for himself — and, in keeping with the sophistication of this project, Chatwin does this by lapsing into quotations from his own (and others') writing.

Even from this brief account, *The Songlines* is evidently a book of marked originality. In its philosophical and fictional ambitions it is stimulatingly ambitious. And, what's more, the whole enterprise is carried off in a style which is for the most part elegant, and occasionally poetic. Why, then, does the book not work? Among his spiritual guides Chatwin numbers Heidegger — the philosopher who, more than any in this century, has raised the most far-reaching human speculation on the most introspective (even solipsistic) of bases. Like Heidegger, Chatwin's vision is essentially poetic: he wants to reveal the profound connection between apparently dissimilar things. More than this, he has an intuition of different "levels" of existence — the persistence of universal ideas even in highly disparate cultural and natural phenomena.

The problem with this sense of the world as a set of metaphors bearing a common, if hidden, meaning is that, unless well-founded, it collapses into little more than a superstitious cult of resemblances. Isn't it somewhat impertinent, not to say absurd, to suppose that a middle-class Englishman's "restlessness" has the same roots as the totemic landscape of the Aranda? For all his attention to local color, isn't there something depressingly Victorian about Chatwin's urge to trace everything back to the first man bellowing his name into the prehistoric African emptiness? (What, in this context, can the Aboriginals offer except further picturesque proof for a foregone conclusion — and, of course, *divertissement* from life on the Thames.)

Chatwin's poetic vision — its goal of self-knowledge — is admirable. Unfortunately, though, the metaphorical connections on which it is based seem to me unwarranted or, at least, unworked-out. For instance, despite the wealth of anthropological and literary material he quotes, Chatwin nowhere seems to reflect on the nature of travelling — which is, after all, the book's central metaphor. As a result perhaps, he seems to think all travelling is alike. He treats pilgrims, nomads, migrant birds and itinerant writers as if they were all engaged in the same kind of activity. But they are clearly not. The migrant birds he fondly imagines setting out in search of novelty are, if anything, seeking to maintain an environmental equilibrium. Unlike religious pilgrims, the Australian Aboriginals enacting the "lines of their country" move only in order to stay where they are. And none of these forms of movement has much to do with the historical restlessness of western man.

A similar contraction of differences characterises his "scientific" speculation. Lorenz's theory of animal aggression, the interpretation of prehistoric South African skulls, the surprising survival of Pharaonic art in Ethiopia: there is nothing in which he does not find enigmatic support for his migratory hypothesis. It is almost as if Chatwin feels a wilful suspension of disbelief is the only way he can escape from the cage of his own literary sophistication. One is sympathetic, but unconvinced. And the same, unfortunately, goes for his array of literary authorities. What beyond the persistence of travelling as a metaphor (and an experience) do they actually tell us?

The Songlines will be widely read, and read with pleasure — it is a book full of thoughts, but rather too little thinking.

Paul Carter lives in Melbourne. His recent book, The Road to Botany Bay, *is reviewed below.*

Making the Country Our Own

John McLaren

Paul Carter: *The Road to Botany Bay* (Faber, $29.95).

As simple-minded historians tell the tale, the explorers first made Australia known to the European world and the settlers then occupied it to their own advantage. The maps these forerunners made and the journals they kept allow us to retrace their footsteps and recreate their experience. They are the actors who populate the theatre of our past.

Paul Carter, however, in this penetrating study, argues that this theatre is a creation of our own imagination which distorts our understanding both of the pioneers and of their achievement. As this is a major work of scholarship, restoring to our history a dimension which has been commonly neglected, it is unfortunate that the publishers, although presenting it in handsome format, have neglected to provide a bibliography and have allowed a seriously deficient index. These omissions make it more difficult to test Carter's arguments against our own perceptions. This is particularly disappointing because the very ingenuity

of Carter's arguments leads him into a form of linguistic play where all the external incidents of history tend to disappear into a single world of the mind. The excellent reproductions of maps and engravings help the reader to check the argument against external evidence, but more is needed if the author's aim of restoring history to human control is not to be subverted by his own persuasiveness.

Carter starts his work by describing the way we conventionally see discovery, exploration and settlement as a continuous drama, given its shape by its known ending. But this ending was by definition unknown to the actors, and the shape of their words and maps came from their own past, which created their intentions and determined their perceptions of a new world.

In his new history of Australia's discovery and settlement, Carter attempts to penetrate the mental world of our forerunners as they penetrated the terrain of a continent. They sought for an inland sea and gardens of Eden which we know did not exist, but Carter seeks to recapture both the experiential openness and the teleological determination of their journeys. They did not know where they were going, but they knew what they wanted to find. Consequently, Carter argues, their achievement was to superimpose the mind of Europe rather than to discover a new world. His book is an account of his expedition into the journals of exploration and settlement, and records the mental world he constructs by using the deconstructive instruments of a phenomenology which interprets all acts of naming as appropriation through metaphor.

The European traditions which determined the explorers' experience of Australia were those of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In his first chapter Carter represents these in the contrasting figures of Cook and Banks. Cook, the navigator, uses exploration as a discipline in itself, and his maps record the singularity of his experience. Banks, the botanist, classifies his discoveries in a single encompassing taxonomy which reduces the individual to an example of the universal. In later chapters he examines the records of the linear explorations of Sturt and Eyre, of Mitchell's military triangulation and assimilation of the country to the heroic mode, and of the destructive love of the pioneering settlers for their new homes. Finally, he places this record of hierarchical ordering to imperial purpose against the interstitial experience of the convicts and the unrecorded relationship between Aboriginals and the land.

The Road to Botany Bay can be read either as history or as an extended argument about language. The history follows the tradition of Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific* in showing how Europeans cast their perceptions of the new in the moulds of the old. But while Smith, whose book has now been reissued in a handsome new edition from Harper and Rowe, is concerned to show the effect of the new discoveries on the old world, and the eventual overturning of the neo-classical order that resulted, Carter concentrates on the conceptual map of Australia that the discoverers built. He describes his work as "spatial history", an account of the creation of human space in the unknown. This history in turn provides the evidence for his argument that language gives us the map that we unroll on our experience of space.

Carter explicitly disagrees with Smith in his explanation of Barron Field's distaste for the never-ending monotony of Australian trees. While Smith sees this as a disagreement of taste with the naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, who had praised the variety of tropical vegetation over the less vigorous growths of temperate regions, Carter explains its true subject as the nature of language. For Field, language depended on the association of ideas, and when the landscape yielded no contrasts it could neither support analogies with human life nor itself be described: "a tree eternally green offers the poet nothing. It defies the logic of association. It is not a distinct idea." Consequently, Carter points out, "Australia is, strictly speaking, indescribable . . . Its uniformity also means that it cannot be named, because no nameable parts distinguish themselves. Not amenable to the logic of association, Australia appears to be unknowable. A state of uniformity offers no starting point, whether for literary or physical travel." Carter's spatial history shows how the explorers and settlers made these associations and starting points, and so made the country their own. He thus reaches an opposite destination to Bernard Smith, who shows how the travellers returning from the South Pacific changed the geography of the European mind.

In Carter's view, derived from Locke and Hume, all language is metaphor. The speaker or writer takes elements from his previous experience, his culture, to name the new. His spatial history shows how this process itself changes with time and with the character of the explorer. So Banks conceals his metaphors, the resemblances to known species he uses to classify the plants of the new world, behind the apparent objectivity of a scientific taxonomy. This taxonomy embodies the ideology of the Enlightenment that all phenomena can be reduced to a single pattern of truth. Cook's metaphors, on the other hand, relate to the particular experience of the journey and preserve the ironic gap between experience and knowledge.

This gap is filled in by later settlers and explorers as they correct Cook's perceived errors with their own experience and add to the map metaphors of their own hopes and disappointments. Sturt and Eyre find mountains and rivers in the level plains, and so make it possible to record their journeys. Mitchell records his survey as a military campaign, omitting the natives who scouted his paths and describing instead his dis-

covery of a new Eden and a new India. His descriptions of fertile plains and brimming lakes where the settlers later found only drought and desolation are not, in Carter's view, deceptions, but recognitions of a potential made necessary by his literary models. Similarly, the settlers who deforested Gippsland did not do so in anger or hostility, but as a consequence of their need to establish an enclosure which would make the innate beauty and fertility of the landscape their own. Their actions are not so much purposive, undertaken in order to achieve a particular effect, as intentional, motivated by the need to uncover or realize the vision which already existed.

Carter, unlike Smith, places his emphasis on the cultural determination of perception and therefore action, rather than on the external or material determination of culture. Following the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, he argues that our perception of space, of the outer world, arises from the direction we give it by our intent. Just as the engravers altered the original drawings made on the expeditions to conform with their ideas of truth and harmony, so the explorers themselves saw the landscape in terms of rivers and mountains which provided the line of their journey, or plains and forests which gave boundaries their new empires centres and boundaries. Mitchell's Lake Salvator is not a geographic figment any more than are Sturt's mountains and plains or Flinders' transposition of the villages of his Lincolnshire youth onto the barren islands of Spencer gulf.

What the explorers did with map and journal, the settlers did with axe and fire. If in creating the landscape of their imagination they destroyed the possibility of the Eden they sought, that is just another example of the ironic gap between experience and reality. Although this gap cannot be filled by action, it can be narrowed by imagining other perceptions. This Carter attempts in his last two chapters, where he discusses the modes of perception of convicts and Aboriginals.

Carter's account emphasizes the cultural and biological determinants of our experience. Our biology determines the way we see, our culture provides the language, the forms through which we see. This does lead him at times, however, to write as if the material world we perceive through our senses exists only as a cultural artefact. So he finds it illogical that explorers read the flight of birds as a sign to water, and "never entertained the possibility that birds . . . sailed from absence to absence, that flight itself was a bad augury for what lay ahead." But, however explorers may have misinterpreted particular sightings, the biological need of birds for water is not merely a linguistic quirk. Similarly, after quoting the recollections of a Gippsland pioneer, Mrs W. J. Williams, about a pig escaping and eating her cooking, a goanna frightening her at the door of her hut, and the wind blowing at night through the cracks in the log walls, he comments that "her anecdotes concern border disputes . . . She evokes her feelings metaphorically, by way of illegitimate transgression." Certainly, these episodes do describe how "a symbolic zone was established, sufficiently differentiated to bear a history; about how, in short, she made a home." But, while it is important to recognize the home as a symbol, and its form as reflecting earlier memories and dreams of home, it is equally important to understand the settler's hut as a product of a particular technology and economy and of the material need to survive. Carter's phenomenology threatens to reduce the dialectic of culture, individual and material world to a simple process of pattern-making.

This is particularly evident in his account of Eyre's decision to abandon his plans to explore to the north and attempt instead a crossing to Albany along the shore of the Australian Bight. He complains that Geoffrey Dutton, in his biography *The Hero as Murderer*, instead of reading the explorer's journals as "symbolic representations of journeys", has interpreted them "as offering little more than a stage on which the explorer hero worked out his personal destiny." As an example of this individual dramatising, he cites Dutton's explanation of Eyre's decision to press on west: "Pride, his sense of duty, and perhaps deepest of all some passion to create his own fate, drove him on." Carter remarks "No doubt, but why this route rather than another? Suppressing the spatial occasion in this way has the result of inventing a historical character of surprising wilfulness that, once invented, has to be explained."

In this episode, however, Carter himself, by emphasising Eyre's creation of a space for his own intent, suppresses the other aspect of space, its external materiality, which Dutton is at pains to make clear. In the narrative leading up to the remarks that Carter quotes, Dutton has already explained the circumstances which forced Eyre to go west rather than north, and has pointed out that this was in accordance with the original plan for the expedition. He then describes the careful preparations Eyre made for his further journey, the thwarting of his attempts to secure supplies by sea, and the three separate attempts he made to scout to the head of the Bight and search for the prospect of a route to the inland. During these he encountered a "day so ferocious in its heat as to convince Eyre that such a furnace-blast could not be wafted over an inland sea", and saw the vast cliffs which made impossible the supply of succor from the sea which alone could have enabled him to establish the base for an inland journey. The only alternatives the land allowed him were retreat to Adelaide or progress to the west. His character, his heroic ambition, determined his choice, which becomes symbolic only in recollection. By allowing only the symbolism and its cultural determination, Carter

neglects the possibility, emphasised by Dutton, of the individual creating himself from circumstances, of willing his own fate by pitting himself against "the ancient stillness of the untouched land". Carter, properly insisting that we can see the land only through the eyes of our culture, is in danger of forgetting that the land remains a reality beyond both our perceptions and the experience these shape.

The final chapters of the book do, however, remind us that there are other perceptions than our own. Although we have few direct records of convict experience, the tales of them recorded by others show how they filled the same patterns with a significance opposite from that of their masters. The enclosures which spelled home and safety for officials and free settlers meant confinement to the convicts, and only the wilderness offered freedom, albeit delusively. In the bush, rather than making their own roads, they followed the tracks left by Aboriginals. Carter shows how, on the perfect gaol of Norfolk Island, they planned to seize power and thus change the significance of their bounded space from a place of bondage to one of freedom. Although it lies outside Carter's time-span, Price Warung's later tales of the Society of the Ring provide an interesting variation on this theme, as he shows the convicts creating their own space even within the system. By contrast, Graham Turner's studies in *National Fictions* show how enclosure remains a continuing theme for many Australian writers who found the boundaries set by their forebears too narrow to give them a purchase on the space they needed. Like the convicts in Carter's account, they sought escape to mythical Cathays beyond the mountains and across the seas. Not the land but its mapping proved inhospitable.

If the convicts provided alternative maps, the Aboriginals, as Carter shows in his most illuminating and provocative chapter, remained totally outside European perceptions. The names taken from them by the explorers to attach to features of the landscape are completely torn from the context of their original meaning. The few dark figures who hover near the margins of the journals of exploration probably determined the routes the explorers followed, but we can only guess whether they were sharing their landscape and knowledge, directing the travellers to the most propitious spots, or leading them away from their own dwellings and sacred places. Although such historians as Henry Reynolds have made known to us the facts of Black resistance, Carter points out that this merely brings the Aboriginals into our history, and thus may be regarded as merely the latest phase of colonialism. All the concepts we use to describe the land are, he insists, alien to Aboriginal thought. Boundaries, routes, sites, ownership either lack meaning or have utterly different meaning in their culture. By implication, our contemporary arguments about land rights are as inadequate as claims to be one nation are irrelevant and insulting. Carter's argument is that before we can come to share any possession of the land ourselves we must learn to see it, not through Aboriginal eyes, but as they did, surrendering our consciousness to its imperatives. This will enable us to understand how they could regard Cook and his successors as irrelevant to the business of life.

Yet this conclusion to his argument contradicts its main thrust. Carter demonstrates how we can see only through the forms we have learned from our own culture. We may be able to extend this by learning from others, and by using our learning and imagination to "re-create" the experience of the past, the "intentional common place of history". But while we can extend our limits, our boundaries, as Carter has done, his argument also demonstrates that we cannot escape from them to become another.

Nor can we escape from the material facts of land and history which provide these limits, even if they do not fix these limits beyond possibility of change. Similarly, the Aboriginals themselves are now irrevocably a part of our history, bound up with our fate, and it is vital that this part should be better understood by all parties. Carter does well to remind us, in his accounts of convict and Aboriginal perceptions, that our formal histories exclude much of our experience. Nevertheless, our history is not, as one radical group has suggested in its proposals for an alternative bi-centennial commemoration, merely a record of race, class and gender oppression. There is a common history to be recovered, and Carter's spatial history is an important contribution to this task. However, the full history will be made only through dialogue between all parties about the common dialectic of individual, culture and material reality in which we are all engaged.

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Bush Radical

Stuart Macintyre

Margaret Luers: *Laureate of Labor. A Biography of J. K. McDougall, Socialist and Poet* (Banyan Press, PO Box 424, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005, $12.95).

Rossbridge is a few buildings and a sign on the road from Lake Bolac to Ararat. A bluestone schoolhouse offers mute testimony to its heyday in the late nineteenth century, when the rich arable land along the Hopkins River was opened up to selection. Donald and

Margaret McDougall established their farm in the 1860s and brought up five children—four others died. By 1871, when the school was opened, three hundred locals gathered for music, songs, readings and recitations.

Rossbridge's moment of notoriety came in December 1919 when the oldest of the McDougall sons, John, was lured from the family home, tarred and feathered, and dumped in Ararat by several carloads of right-wing thugs.

The reason they gave for this violence was an anti-war poem McDougall had written nineteen years earlier. Six of the culprits were brought to trial, all of them officers of the First AIF and one of them secretary of the Essendon returned servicemen's association. The magistrate fined each £5: "I do not like to send to gaol young men who had done their bit for their country and the Empire." Not all agreed, and the townspeople of Ararat meted out rough justice to several of those associated with the deed. But the atrocity troubled McDougall for the rest of his life.

John McDougall's daughter has written this attractive memoir of her father. She draws on family lore and labor history to reconstruct his life, and makes good use of his verse, uncompleted memoirs and other writings to illustrate his attitudes and beliefs. Stephen Murray-Smith contributes a foreword.

McDougall's parents were both Scots and bequeathed a somewhat nostalgic pride in the family ancestry (the McDougalls are an ancient clan who claim descent from Somerled and once dominated Argyll). His mother, with her love of song and verse and seriousness of purpose, was the dominant influence:

> My mother—one of Coila's breed—
> Loved truth and hated lies and greed,
> My father toiled as Scotchmen durst;
> My mother's creed was—conscience first . . .

Growing up in the shadow of the Grampians, in a part of Australia where Scottish names and Scottish attitudes prevailed, McDougall was attracted to the Presbyterian ministry. His sympathies, however, were secular and democratic, and he abandoned Calvinism for humanism. He had a keen appreciation of the natural beauty of the region and resented the control the wool-kings exercised over it.

These feelings found expression in the Land Resumption Association he helped establish, which in turn became a vehicle for establishing the Labor Party in the federal electorate of Wannon (whose last member but one embodied the attitudes that McDougall detested). McDougall stumped the electorate, cycling to meetings from Casterton up to Horsham, and he won it for Labor in 1906:

> Stick together Wannon Workers, we are trusting now to you
> To fire a fatal volley at the greedy landlord crew—
> At the parasites that fatten on the worker's honest toil,
> At the landlords who are thriving on the tillers of the soil.

The language and ethos echoes the Scottish and Irish land leagues, and sparked a response among the cockies and wage-earners, including the Irish potato-farmers around Port Fairy.

McDougall's hatred of the exploiter was both particular and universal. Some of his most deeply-felt verse laments the expropriation by the squatters of the Aboriginals, and the spoliation of their environment. During this period also he wrote "The White Man's Burden", a bitter anti-imperialist protest against the Boer War.

> The strong hand triumphs still;
> Let Progress cease her toiling,
> Man's mission is to kill.
> Shed blood and let it curd on
> The patriot's tear-wet cheek;
> Take up the White Man's burden,
> And rob and wrong the weak,

McDougall was not well suited to the chicanery of federal politics. He spoke seldom and found malcontents like Frank Anstey most congenial. For Billy Hughes he seemed to have formed an early and deep mistrust. After losing his seat in 1913, he criticised Hughes' leadership of the Labor Party during the First World War and contributed anti-conscription verse to Labor publications. "The White Man's Burden" was revived by conscriptionists and published in distorted form to discredit the left.

McDougall retreated onto his farm after 1919. There was little room in the Labor Party for a utopian socialist of his kind, and he brooded over the failure of his ideals. Frank Hardy and Brian Fitzpatrick were among those who visited him in his last years. Margaret Luers handles this phase with clear-eyed affection for a father who could be difficult. Her book is a worthy memorial to him.

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Possessed by Life

Jennifer Strauss

Dorothy Hewett: *Alice in Wormland* (Paper Bark Press, Mary Place, Paddington NSW 2021, no price given).

Paper Bark Press makes its debut with a strong and original work from the long-established (if minimally-establishment) Dorothy Hewett. This is poetry first and foremost, although, given the vogue for verse novels, I suppose you could make a case for applying that classification to the life-loves-and-death of Alice, who is both one kind of archetypal woman and a very particular (some might say recklessly autobiographical) one. If there's recklessness, it's in the essence of the undertaking rather than in its execution: mostly Hewett manages very well the voice of self-awareness rather than of debilitating self-consciousness. Irony plays a part here, notably in the cheeky textual incorporation of a quotation from a David Malouf review about creating monsters with terrible energy.

I wish one could be as sure about irony in the cover design, which I find unfortunate, if only because it over-emphasizes and over-simplifies the vein of the rich fantastic, which may be an immediately noticeable ingredient, but is by no means the most important, matched as it is by a robustly detailed realism. The title is happier in suggesting multiplicity and warning one against being too ready to see this as a work "much possessed by death". One may be invited to read Nim, "the sinister boy", allegorically as death the thief, but he's more than just that; or, having noted that it is only when, at the end, Alice and Nim have "made friends with death" that "the myth of ourselves" breaks into a fully free beginning, one might start linking *Alice* conceptually to de Rougemont's love-as-death thesis in *Passion and Society*, but it's something to do with the formal qualities of this writing that I want to talk about.

On a recent ABC Books and Writing program I heard Clarice Lispector named as a supreme instance of feminine writing—diffusely erotic, non-phallic and hence non-centralized. Such discourse often provokes the sceptic in me; but it did occur to me that it might be a good description of *Alice*, and one which might account for a degree of difficulty I was having, not in responding to the text, but in getting a purchase on it for critical purposes.

And yet it's not only in a certain kind of centralized structure that unity lies. And given time and determination one could undoubtedly do a unifying close reading that charted the poem's web of symbols. And yes, provided one could resist trying to catch those feathered creatures, owl and falcon, in the nets of allegory, it would probably be worth doing. And no, I didn't get the apostrophe in the wrong place; this book seems to me to be as much one poem and many poems as Alice is one woman and several women. But there's something here that's more important for wholeness than the symbols. There's the stamp of a distinctive voice, the distinctiveness of which over-rides diversities of tone: the passionate, the detached, the melancholy, the raunchy, the sardonic, the elegiac. And there's above all the pulse of the verse movement, so confident in the drive of its lyrical and dramatic energies, and so exasperatingly unamenable in its freedom to the kind of analysis that can be subtle about metrics and stanzaic structures.

These qualities also make *Alice in Wormland* not very amenable to the artful quarrying of quotations. Each of its seventy-one individual poem-parts makes its own effect as a kind of continuing but contained movement of feeling (narrative movement, which is also present, being secondary). A comparison of the first sections of Hewett's book with Rhyll McMaster's *Washing the Money* (another set of poems reconstructing a female childhood) might give some idea of the process of Hewett's art, quite apart from the differences that arise from her introduction of mythic and surreal elements. McMaster's poems certainly are cumulative in effect, but their art is deliberately that of the photograph, framed, contained, sepia-historical: Hewett's work relates much more to motion pictures, the frames now dissolved, now held, but fluid rather than static.

It is a measure of the kind of stubborn individuality that has marked Hewett's career that she should write, at the height of her powers, a work like this, which anthologies, the standardizing cultural transmitters of our poetry, may not find easy to deal with. However, even a quick glance could make some recommendations. No. 10, for instance, the last of "The Alice Poems" is a mythic end-to-innocence poem that can stand strikingly on its own, as can Nos. 66 and 67, which look steadily at the fleshly and domestic processes of dying, while the five-part No. 18 provides a compactly forceful rival to earlier social-realist novels in giving a sense of what it has been to live in Australian history as a politically and sexually active woman. But it is through the whole book that we can get the full effect of this poetry that ought to be read because, in a culture both death-obsessed and death-evasive, it has the audacity to take up one of the most kitsch of cliches (Peter Pan's bon mot "To die would be a wonderfully big adventure") and to go on, being much possessed by life, to write of death with courage, anger, joy and art.

Jennifer Strauss, who teaches English at Monash University, is a poet and critic. She was the Australian member of the 1987 judging panel for the Australasian zone of the British Airways Commonwealth Poetry Prize.

Fraser Mythologised

Michael Denholm

Philip Ayres: *Malcolm Fraser: A Biography* (Heinemann, $39.95).

Given the recent debate in Australia over the direction conservative parties should take, and whether they should adopt 'dry' or 'wet' policies, it was perhaps to be expected that the Australian media would focus in its discussion of Ayres's biography of Malcolm Fraser on whether Howard or Fraser had the best credentials as a 'dry'. The most interesting aspect of this book for me, however, is its portrayal of Malcolm Fraser's early life and his political career up till he became Prime Minister.

Fraser grew up in a rural environment where adversity was regarded as being part of life. From an early age frugality became a habit of mind. Fraser always expected the worst to happen. This state of mind prepared him well for politics.

As a backbencher Fraser showed enormous capacity for work. When he once asked for six thousand envelopes so that he could write to his electorate, Whitlam, Ayres says, approved. Fraser turned his electorate into a safe seat, despite taking an unpopular stand over pay increases to MPs. He was always prepared to go on the initiative against his opponents, stacking for instance a meeting addressed by Bill Hartley and other opponents of the Vietnam War. His views were not necessary predictable—in 1956 he supported a shearers' strike, and argued against removal of a bonus that had been paid to shearers when wool prices had been higher. It is Fraser's will power and strength of character that Ayres admires.

Ayres's biography is above all an attempt to mythologise Fraser and legitimise his leadership credentials. For instance, in his discussion of Fraser's rise to the leadership of the Liberal Party, Ayres pinpoints various speeches by Fraser which he believes demonstrate Fraser's statesman-like qualities, his ability to portray conservative philosophy in a politically pertinent way.

What is revealing about Ayres's book is what he omits as well as what he includes. For example, he claims that Fraser had achieved much for Aboriginals yet his book only refers very briefly to them.

Some matters Ayres simply claims as Fraser's achievements, for example the decision to relax controls on overseas borrowing by State governments. Yet one of the major reasons for Australia's bad economic situation, and for Australia's high level of overseas debt, is due to the fact that State governments and government instrumentalities have been allowed to borrow indiscriminately on the overseas market without consideration of the long-term implications for Australia.

Fraser's role in the so called 'resources boom' is not fully discussed. Ayres agrees with the current fashionable belief that deregulation of the financial system is in Australia's economic interest. Events such as the storming of the Parliament House building by outraged workers from Newcastle and Wollongong are not mentioned.

Ayres's account of Fraser's seven years of government ends thus on an odd note. After describing Fraser as a major, even outstanding conservative ruler, suddenly the Fraser Government falls apart. Ayres lists the two major reasons as the drought and the effect of an international recession.

It was an ultimate irony of the Fraser years that this rural, patriarchal figure was partly forced from office by the effect of drought. Yet one of the major reasons for Australia's difficult economic situation is that it has never fully built up a sufficiently strong manufacturing sector, competitive enough internationally to insulate Australia from economic downturns. The over-optimism of the resources boom led to some foolish borrowing, with subsequent high interest payments and lack of investment in projects that were of long-term economic value.

Ayres's book focuses on Fraser's resurrection as a political figure in the guise of a defender of black South Africans. He argues convincingly that Fraser's views were consistent and held over a long time. Yet even here Fraser's views mesh with those of the cold war warrior who believes that South Africa has to be protected for the West from communist infiltration: that South Africa can only be saved from communist subversion by giving the blacks control over their future. Commendable as his humanitarian views are, they show a certain naivety, in that the chances of being able to negotiate an agreement with the South African Government must have always been slim.

Ayres's book is a very thorough exposition of Fraser's views. To this extent it demonstrates that Australia has advanced since the days of Sir Robert Menzies' *Afternoon Light*. The complacency of the 1950s and early 1960s is no longer relevant. In this sense Fraser was very much a man of his time. In the early 1970s he was in danger of being isolated from the Liberal Party when the permissive society was in vogue but, by 1974, in reaction to the Whitlam era, Fraser's conservatism, with his sense of mission and ambition, enabled him to assume power. Fraser chose his biographer well. In Fraser, Ayres claims:

> Australia had a Prime Minister who gave primacy and careful articulation to ideas and moral values, who wasted no time seeking to be loved by those he led through difficult economic times, and whose policies were the expression of carefully considered views on man and society. He presided over the second longest serving Government in Australia's history, generating massive support in two succes-

sive Federal elections, and maintaining the harmony of the Coalition, just as he worked to bring harmony to the meetings of the Commonwealth of Nations. In these respects, Fraser's period of office as Prime Minister, born of such intense political divisions in 1975, was marked by a drive for unity and concord.

Ayres has tried to stake Fraser's claims in the history books and to validate his ideology. Whether Australians who actually had to live through and endure Fraser's views will agree with Ayres is quite another matter.

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The Drum of Return

Keith Russell

Les A. Murray: *The Daylight Moon* (Angus & Robertson, $12.95).

Like many famous Sydney University students of his generation, Les Murray has found it necessary to beat on the drum of return; not that Murray has ever, for very long, been far from the country of his childhood and youth, either physically or poetically. But, 'back to Bunya' is as huge a move as Greer's 'search for the lost father' or Clive James's bouts of slumming in posh Australian eating-houses and appealing for local recognition. Even Bob Ellis has to float about in the flood memory of Lismore to appease the ravaging gods of cultural discontinuity.

If Murray's generation is the first to genuinely belong in Australia then it does so by locating the spiritual dimension of life in bits and pieces of *real estate*: they seek to buy back, as the rightful heirs, the land lost to the imagination. In the case of Murray the metaphors become as close as possible to literal: the back cover note to *The Daylight Moon*, Murray's latest collection, has him "returned to live on the North Coast farm of his childhood."

This return to the farm is claimed by Murray, in "Extract from a Verse Letter to Dennis Haskell", to be an answer to the choice: "get out of Yuppie City or go mad". Other, perhaps more serious reasons are given, like the state of his father's health, and the desire that the younger children should not miss out like their elder siblings on "a country childhood". The promised benefits, for the poet are: "Trees, space, water-birds—things of that ilk,/ plus people of my own kind".

The reader seems invited to debate such issues with Murray; it's an old device that still works: the poet has his refuge and in reality there is to be no exchange; the poetry is a bush hideout constructed by the poet to transmit his "kind of spoken video" ("The Kitchens"). Like the story tellers of old that Murray mentions who still spat at the fire even when iron stoves came in, Murray keeps up fashions that support an ethos that supports the poet posing in 'lost' ways. Sometimes this act is fanciful, sometimes delightful, and sometimes cranky.

When Murray is 'cranky' then either sparks fly or the poetry goes off in directions that prohibit the common reader. In "At Min-Min Camp" a camp is made "on a verandah/ that had lost its house". Setting up the camp and breaking camp are the two magical aspects of this poem that shine through with a clarity that is unequalled in Australian poetry: Murray here is poet. But the bit of the crank-handle that joins these parallel structures leaves this reader wondering "now why did the poet do that?" ("Poetry and Religion").

With his return to the farm, Murray seems to have softened; the polemics assume someone somewhere does understand. Equally Murray seems to be spending far less time supporting an overt image of himself against the seductive rediscriptions required by Yuppieville: Murray appears at a kind of peace born of giving up what could not be sustained. The devils have been sent packing; have the angels followed of their own accord?

The so called "new development, the emphasis in this collection . . . on narrative" shows Murray a little bit lost, never quite sure of direction, and spitting too often at the absent hearth; Murray has little instinct for Action and having forgone (with manners that only a Yuppie could afford) the Present of a larger audience he is a little like the station manager's dog Boxer "teetering along the round top rail of the killing yard" ("The Edgeless"). Home here becomes *oikos* only as long as the poet keeps winding the generator and priming the pump with cash-flow from the surplus of Yuppieville; the narratives lack the edge of purpose: poet squats!

Where to from here? *The Daylight Moon* may be viewed as revision in all the best senses. If Murray is staking out new ground then it is perhaps evident in his discovery/recovering of childhood as in "The Sleepout". In this poem Murray finds similar themes to Malouf in his recent *12 Edmondstone St.* Where Malouf follows through the psychological and ontological dimensions of the physical birth of the child's imagination, Murray takes the path of metaphysics.

Murray's childhood imagination is granted visions of "full billabongs all surrounded/ by animals and birds". Here the aging poet (Murray sounds ages older in this volume) invents as it were a world for his sleeping child; perhaps "two-year-old George/ asleep beneath his pink linen hat as/ we enter domains of flowering lotus" ("Flood Plains on the Coast Facing Asia"). The shift in perspective here from poet as father of himself to poet as witness of his child's

spiritual growth is awesome: many things have come right in a moment. Perhaps this is why he needed to go bush. The daylight moon becomes common.

Keith Russell teaches writing at the Hunter Institute of Higher Education. His most recent collection of poetry is titled Aussie-Wog.

Goodbye Lucky Country

Bruce Gillespie

George Turner: *The Sea and Summer* (Faber, $29.95).

George Turner is the most neglected of those living Australian writers whose works are worth attention. The novels he wrote in the late 1950s and the 1960s, including *The Lame Dog Man, A Waste of Shame* and *Transit of Cassidy*, are no longer in print, despite the fact that one of them, *The Cupboard under the Stairs*, won the Miles Franklin Award in 1962. These books are uncompromising books about characters under extreme pressure, and are written in a plain, lucid style that is highly readable. *In the Heart or in the Head*, his recent literary autobiography, received little attention from reviewers.

If Turner's new novel, *The Sea and Summer*, suffers the same fate, one can only blame Australia, and not the author. *The Sea and Summer* is a realistic novel set in the future. For this reason alone it might be neglected, since thinking about the future is not one of the great Australian pastimes. "She'll be right, mate" might sound like a cheery greeting here, but the phrase is also a warning—"It'd better be right, mate, or you won't get any help from me".

It seems to me just as reasonable to set a realistic novel in the future as it is to set such a novel in the past. In each case, the author bases details more on speculation than on close observation but, paradoxically, tells us more about the contemporary world of the author than about its putative setting. But with both historical and future fiction, the result has little flavor or interest unless the author makes a great effort to enter that other world. It's no good for the author to look around coyly and say that he or she is *really* talking about the world of the present. This converts the book into a fable, satire, pastiche, or some other slightly debilitated form of fiction. By contrast, the historical novel or the future-fiction novel retains the power of conviction, immediacy and prophecy.

In the early 1970s, George Turner made the brave decision to abandon fiction with contemporary settings for future fiction (also known, unfortunately, as "science fiction"). The resulting trilogy of novels, *Beloved Son, Vaneglory* and *Yesterday's Men*, are set in an Australia separated in time from us by much disaster and world-wide dislocation. The series was much admired overseas, but ignored in Australia. For me, the three novels did not quite work, probably because Turner speculated so widely and completely that he lost most of his characters somewhere inside his future landscapes.

Whatever the problems that beset Turner's first three science-fiction novels, they have been solved in *The Sea and Summer*. No longer does Turner try to show the whole world in crisis. Instead he chooses Melbourne as his example, the crucible in which he performs his experiment in speculation. His telescope has become a microscope. No longer does Turner choose characters that are merely mouthpieces for his own notions; instead he traces the fortunes of a family whose fates could very well be our own.

Most writers who attempt future fiction go about the task in a simple-minded way, which is: choose one main trend in today's society and carry it to its furthest possibilities; base the whole society on this extrapolation; set an adventure within this world. There are other writers who bundle together a number of future possibilities, shake them into a makeshift story, and usually watch the bundle fall apart. I can't think of any English-language writer in the last decade who has attempted the procedure that Turner uses in *The Sea and Summer*: take all the most important trends in today's world, extrapolate them carefully within one framework, and see what sort of world emerges.

The world of *The Sea and Summer*—the 2040s—is one in which easy optimism has disappeared. Under the influence of the Greenhouse Effect, the Antarctic ice cap is melting and the seas are rising. Melbourne is slowly drowning. Extensive experiments in climate and soil control have ruined most of the world's agricultural lands. The idea of sharing wealth has become a joke because there is no more wealth to be shared. Most people are unemployed. Known as the Swill, they are bundled into vast tower blocks, so that the state can feed and house them with minimum fuss and expense. A small number of people, called the Sweet, live outside the tower blocks. If you are Sweet and lose your job, you become instant Swill.

All of this would be merely journalism—but noble and salutary journalism—if it were not for the strictly fictional way in which Turner introduces us to his world. Each character tells his or her own story, and we find out about the future world only when it affects these people. Francis Conway's family becomes Swill after they thought themselves safely Sweet. Francis's father, suddenly unemployed, kills himself. The family—Francis, Teddy, and their mother, Alison—

are moved to the Fringe, an area of rundown houses a few blocks from Newport 23 Tower Block. The boss of Newport 23, Billy Kovacs, offers a protection service. Alison Conway has some savings, but within a few years the money system fails completely. From then on, coupons and barter are the only currency.

There is more than a touch of Balzac or de Maupassant in George Turner's writing. Here again is the story of proud folks embittered when forced to move abruptly down the social ladder. Francis and Teddy and determined not to be Swill, and are clever enough to be trained to be Sweet. Alison Conway becomes the mistress of Billy Kovacs, who has another family within the tower block, and remains in her house in the Fringe. The Conways fear and despise everything to do with the Swill, who seem to them merely a stinking, ignorant, idle, wretched population.

If *The Sea and Summer* offers no optimism, why then does it not seem a pessimistic novel? It's not merely that in the worst of all possible future worlds, people make the best of things. That's too reassuring. It's something more basic to Turner's literary personality: his characters like a good fight. Both Francis and Teddy, in different ways, fight like hell against the lessons taught them by Kovacs and Nik Nikopoulous, the security man—that the Swill are people too, and that the Sweet world created their tower prisons. In turn, Kovacs and Nikopoulos fight constantly to hold together a bankrupt world with peeling bits of economic sticking plaster. As part of this process, they must reconcile Francis and Teddy Conway with their mother and, later, with the whole society in which they live.

Meanwhile an unknown agency, possibly a secret branch of government, has decided to solve matters by using a plague to kill off the Swill. The battle to find out who and why occupies the last third of the novel. The web of spying, counterspying, skulduggery and betrayal makes *The Sea and Summer* into a fine thriller, culminating in a horrifying, yet fitting, torture scene which stays in the memory after other details of the book begin to fade.

I have only one gripe against *The Sea and Summer.* Turner's dates, AD 2041-2061, are almost certainly wrong. Within the last few weeks there has been an international stock market crash and Burma has cancelled high-denomination bank notes. The hole in the ozone becomes larger every year (although this is one disaster Turner does not mention). More and more evidence shows that the Greenhouse Effect is taking place. And benign neglect has already made the western suburbs of both Melbourne and Sydney into ghettoes. Maybe I should not call *The Sea and Summer* future fiction. We are all living in it already.

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Struggle and Hope

John Sendy

Amirah Inglis: *Australians in the Spanish Civil War* (Allen & Unwin, $19.95).
Joyce Stevens: *Taking the Revolution Home, Work among Women in the Communist Party of Australia 1920-1945* (Sybylla, $15.95).
Ralph Gibson: *The Fight Goes On* (Red Rooster Press, $23.00).

The influence of Australian communists and other left-wing radicals never became massive but, judging by the amount of literature published over the past few years and the heaps more which is forthcoming, the Communist Party of Australia and its campaigns, causes and comrades made memorable impacts and impressions. Many of the authors in one way or another were participants in the events they discuss, others frequently have some family or political connection with the activists portrayed. Unashamed partisanship is therefore a feature of the work. It seeks to justify, explain, enthuse, accuse, and is written with pride and faith or simply in an effort to get it all down before too much evidence is lost as memories fade into oblivion. History like beauty exists in the eye of the beholder. As Manning Clark observes, historians are not annalists but lovers and believers.

Such work is valuable. If there is to be any resurgence of movements for a radically different, more equitable, less violent and more environmentally aware social order, the examination of the failures and victories of the past can assist enormously.

Of course, history is all the go in the bicentennial year. As E. H. Carr points out over twenty-five years ago, "the present age is the most historically-minded of all ages." He believed that we peer eagerly back into the twilight out of which we came, hoping that its faint beams will light up the obscurity into which we are going.

The Spanish war has many memories for me. My father championed the loyalist cause in passionate arguments with neighbors and relatives. Each morning three Italian boys accompanied me on the two-mile walk to school. They were pro-Franco but, because they suffered from racial prejudice at school, I resisted the temptation to debate the issue. Later, in 1938, at high school, a portly little Frenchman, who with sarcasm and violence vainly tried to make French verbs compatible with out tongue-tied speech, shocked me one day by postponing the French lesson to extol the cause of the Spanish Republic. My interest in what he said was overshadowed by a feeling of amazement that this tyrannical cocksparrow could support a cause with which I identified.

Later again I befriended men who remain admirable

in my eyes, the International Brigaders Sam Aarons and Lloyd Edmonds. In 1964 I met Dolores Ibarruri (Pasionaria) and General Enrique Lister and heard the former, then an old woman, speak at Togliatti's funeral in Rome with that presence, fire and passion which had made her a legend and which that day warmed the hearts of the million grief-stricken Italians present.

Amirah Inglis' splendid book is the result of painstaking research which took her to many parts of Australia as well as to Spain, England and the United States. She was close to the events herself; her uncle fought in the Polish battalion of the International Brigade, her parents campaigned for Spanish Relief, as a child she attended rallies in support of the Republic. Her Preface frankly states her belief "that the Popular Front was the slate to vote for in 1936, that the defeat of the Spanish Republic and the victory of General Franco and his allies was a tragedy, and that those who went to fight for the Republic were on the right side."

Yet her partisanship is not offensive or even intrusive. She outlines Australian attitudes towards the war: the policies and actions of the United Australia Party government, the ALP Opposition, the Catholic Church, trade unions, Communist Party, the various organisations established to muster help for the republican cause, and the circumstances of the sixty-odd men and women who went to Spain to fight for the Republic or nurse the wounded. And she includes the solitary one who served in the army of General Franco.

Pride of place among the volunteers goes to the four nurses, Mary Lowson, Una Wilson, May MacFarlane and Agnes Hodgson, sent by the Spanish Relief Committees in November, 1936. Unlike most of the volunteers, the nurses sailed following a campaign to send them, they reported back, they wrote home more and kept diaries and photographs. However, the great bulk of the volunteers took individual decisions to go, paid their own fares, worked their passages or happened to be in Europe. Most were unknown to each other. The Communist Party, while being the backbone of Australian support for Republican Spain, did not generally favor its members leaving Australia to fight in Spain. It believed that its international duty lay in strengthening the communist movement in Australia. Hence the party cadres, Sam Aarons and Esme Odgers, left Australia without the approval of the CPA leadership.

The book is spiced with many interesting snippets: Esmond Romilly (Jessica Mitford's first husband, later killed in the early stages of World War Two) befriended the Australian Brigader Dick Whateley and subsequently wrote of him; May MacFarlane's love affair; Mary Lowson's hard-line communist suspicions about Agnes Hodgson; the information about the sole Australian Franco soldier, Nugent Bull.

Feelings ran high about the war. The most spectacular debate took place at Melbourne University in 1937 when Kevin Kelly, Leo Ingwerson and Bob Santamaria debated the proposition "That the Spanish Government is the ruin of Spain" with Nettie Palmer, Jack Legge and Dr Gerry O'Day. It must have been some show. More than a thousand came. Pandemonium reigned. Inglis takes several pages to convey the trauma felt afterwards by some of those present. Over forty years on, Manning Clark recalled: "It was a magnificent debate, I'll never forget it. That debate planted in my mind the thought that there was madness in the human heart . . ."

Most of those who went to Spain were communists or communist supporters. They believed they were fighting against war and fascism, against a threat to world peace and democracy. Amirah Inglis makes a pertinent point towards the end of her book: "If any volunteers regretted their commitment or seriously doubted their perception of the war, they never did so publicly. Those who spoke and wrote about Spain continued faithful to the hope which had impelled them to go."

In its first section Joyce Stevens' *Taking the Revolution Home* takes a critical look at what the CPA called "work among women" in the years 1920-1945. The second part presents interviews with women who participated directly in some of the action.

It finds little difficulty in establishing that the CPA suffered from male supremacy. It briefly describes the various radical left-wing women's organisations which campaigned for short or long periods: the Militant Women's Groups, the women's auxiliaries of the various trade unions, the Council of Action for Equal Pay, earlier International Women's Day events. It tells of the journals: The Woman Worker, Working Woman and Women Today, which boasted a circulation of 3,000 in the late 1930s and had Nettie Palmer as its Victorian editor. It discusses the work of important activists, Muriel Heagney, Jessie Street, Katharine Susannah Prichard and others, and names many women who played a role in the communist, trade union and feminist movements of the years under scrutiny.

During the 1930s communist women played the leading part in establishing women's auxiliaries of the miners, railways and other trade unions. Retrospectively, these have been sneered at by some modern feminists. The auxiliaries were support groups for the male unionists, wives anxious that strikes be victorious and living standards raised. They picketed, marched, organised and spoke at meetings and over the radio. They brought many women into political activity—advanced stuff for the time. Grace Scanlon, a mining auxiliary leader of the 1930s, says in one of the best

interviews printed here: "Actually, I think the women of that period pioneered street resistance. The men would get on the streets but a woman in a demonstration was dreadful – a brazen hussy. But it didn't take long for the coalfields women to cotton on, because they had to fight for a crust for all those years."

Grace Scanlon points out that when the auxiliaries were first established a lot of men found it hard to accept the idea of their wives going out to take public actions, but others, like her communist husband, Henry Scanlon, supported the women and agitated in the union lodges to overcome male opposition.

One of the most energetic Mining Auxiliaries existed in Wonthaggi. In 1937 it organised as many as four hundred women to meetings.

As Joyce Stevens sums up: " . . . the fact that the women worked within an auxiliary role did not presuppose acquiescence or subservience. Many women were more politically active than the men and they had to fight against men of their own class for their right to organise . . . the auxiliaries provided an avenue of political and social involvement that ran counter to prevailing community attitudes about women and, for many working-class women, opened up an avenue of activity that was not available to them anywhere else."

The CPA's 1920-1945 policies and attitudes to equal pay, personal politics, abortion, and many other issues, are scrutinised and often found wanting. Yet Joyce Stevens concedes that despite "contradictions in its own practice and the inability to develop a clearer theoretical perspective, the CPA did provide an image of women and their social activity that challenged prevailing social mores" and "CPA women did help to keep alive radical political activism that benefitted many women at the time as well as enabling future generations of women to critically build on their achievements." This truth could have received more emphasis.

It is unfortunate that nine of the ten interviews deal only with the last ten years or so of the twenty-five year span of the book. Only Edna Ryan discusses the 1920s and early 1930s. What a pity, too, that such important activists as Christian Jollie-Smith, Hetty Weitzel, Mary Lamm and Irene Orr remain shadowy, impersonal figures in the text. Their personal and political stories provide targets for enterprising researchers. For example, lawyer Christian Jollie-Smith, apart from being one of the founders of the CPA in 1920 and a member of its first executive, took part in many important political legal cases. In the first years of the century she attended the Presbyterian Ladies College in Melbourne. Her closest friends were that remarkable trio Nettie Higgins (Palmer), Hilda Bull (Esson) and Katharine Susannah Prichard. (A 1903 photograph of PLC Greek and Latin students in my possession shows Smith, Higgins and Bull as young teenagers.) She studied law at Melbourne University. Tom Payne recalls her as a young lawyer in the early CPA days "joining in with the rest of us eating soup made in a kerosene tin." Hopefully, before too long these women may be the subject of another book.

An irritation is the incorrect spelling throughout of the name of the old communist, Norman Jeffery.

The first Age of 1988 gave Ralph Gibson a rare distinction for an Australian communist when it printed Manning Clark's list of eighty-eight great Australians. This followed shortly after publication of *The Fight Goes On*, Ralph Gibson's fifth book, written in his 82nd year.

By chance recently I came across an old letter from a friend who has never met Ralph Gibson: "Ever since I read his *My Years in the Communist Party* (in about 1968-69) I've liked the man. Not that I ever met him, but I've liked his style. He came across in his book as a lefty of strength, principle and humanity. The book itself remains for me the only account that really manages to convey the *feel* of the inter-war years from the viewpoint of a communist, while his cold war sections vividly convey the political frame-ups, dirty tricks, violence, etc, of the establishment – a dimension lacking in all academic coverages of the period."

Many people not only on the left of centre share something of that view. Even when they do not agree fully with Ralph Gibson's politics, they admire his dedication, sincerity and integrity. This applies equally to his books.

The Fight Goes On deals with the two post-war decades from the Yalta talks of 1945 to the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. It deals often with events and campaigns in which the author played a part. It ranges widely through the various East European and Asian revolutions, through Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. It dwells on Sharpeville, the Congo, Hungary, Stalin, Khrushchev and Mao. All major international crises are scanned, together with the 1947 bank nationalisation issue, the 1949 coal strike, migration, the vicissitudes of the ALP and the CPA. He documents, briefly, the violence and accusations of the cold war McCarthyite period. All this he does, as June Hearn says in her Foreword, from the perspective of one "who clearly seeks not merely to record history from his political vantage point but to encourage readers to take pride in and learn lessons from the past." Such a task would have daunted many people far younger and healthier than Ralph Gibson, but he carries it off well.

He chronicles the development of the post-war peace and anti-war movements, providing a useful reminder to those who believe modern peace activity began with Vietnam and Palm Sunday. He outlines mistakes of the CPA: politically sectarian attitudes to the ALP, an incorrect and fateful role in the miners strike of

1949, the stifling of inner-Party discussion of the essential aspects of the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956. He admits deficiencies of his own: incorrect criticism of Togliatti, failure to query and probe repressive actions of the Stalin regime.

His analysis of Stalin and the Soviet Union, however, will not impress some readers. They may find it hard to agree that Stalin made "a mighty contribution to the advance of humanity despite wrong judgements and grotesque cruelties." Others may have insufficient faith to believe that the Soviet placing of missiles in Cuba and the subsequent awesome crisis was "a brilliantly conceived operation brilliantly executed."

Likewise, his ebullience about Soviet society does not rest easily alongside the revelations of the *glasnost* and *perestroika* era. Soviet commentators themselves are speaking of the need to overcome "moral decline", the breakdown of "public optimism", and of a people only conditioned "to carrying out directives".

Gorbachov's *glasnost* and *perestroika* may succeed in squaring socialism's shoulders. I hope this happens – for the Soviet people, for Ralph Gibson, for me, for the ideal, for the sweat, blood and tears shed in the past and present, for the good which generally might accrue and for the hope that could give to humankind.

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Editor's Choice

of books we wish to notice but are unable to review at length.

My copy of Harry Reade's *An Elephant Charging My Chookhouse* (Lilyfield, 2 Aquatic Drive, Frenchs Forest NSW 2086, $16.95) is inscribed by him "from Overland's one-and-only war correspondent, Harry Reade". An Overland war correspondent? Yes. Turn to page 14. We are in Cuba in 1961. The Bay of Pigs invasion. Tanks burning, bodies piled high on trucks. Harry's up from Havana, looking it all over. He gets an introduction to the Cuban army:

> "Listen," said the Columbiano. "I told this lieutenant you were a famous war correspondent – *muy importante.* F'Crissakes look *muy importante.*"
>
> Looking as famous as I could I moved with him through the crowd towards the lieutenant and his jeep.
>
> "What's the name of that magazine again?" said the Columbiano.
>
> "*Overland.*"
>
> "Huh?"
>
> "As in telegraph."
>
> "Huh?"

And it's all true. Harry did carry credentials from Overland – though we never got his story. He gave the despatch to some nogoodnik to send on to us from Paris or somewhere, and it never arrived.

Harry's autobiography is a superbly spirited, rumbustious, irreverent, anarchistic, detailed and moving account of his and his father's life on the Victorian roads during the Depression. Even at school "I was still the kid who lived in a bag humpy." One of the first songs Harry was taught by his dad was "The Red Flag". Among his last words, as he lay dying in the Balmain hospital, were "Carry the torch." This is a wonderfully unsentimental account of a great sentimental relationship, a shrine of words to an unknown traveller, and the story of a childhood in which tragedy and privation is balanced by humor and hope.

Mary Wilson: *A European Journal: Two Sisters Abroad in 1847* (Bloomsbury, $39.95). This is the story of a nine-months' tour of polite Europe by the two daughters and the son of a London linen-draper. Anne Wilson made her elegant sketches – they are reproduced here – while the threesome used carriages and the new railways and steamers to visit the approved scenes and sites. The Grand Tours were over. The Wilsons were 'in trade' and an advance guard of the hordes of 'ordinary' people who roam Europe in our own day. This elegant and delightful book has a special Australian interest. The introduction tells of another Wilson brother, Edward, a radical who had lost his share of the family money in a business venture, and sailed off to Australia to become a farmer. The family was heartbroken. Edward bought the Melbourne Argus and became one of the richest and most influential men in the Colony of Victoria before, like so many, returning to England in 1863. But Edward left his money for good works in Victoria, and was buried there: "people are best laid to rest in the vicinity of those places in which their best work has been done."

Verity Hewitt's name is remembered as the proprietor of an important bookshop in Canberra on which she set her individual style. She died, quite recently, in Canberra. One of her memorials is this odd and touching book, *A Man's Man*, published by Winchbooks of Canberra and distributed by Hale and Iremonger ($17.50). It has been seen through the press by her husband, the historian L. F. Fitzhardinge. Subtitled "Letters and some recollections of Lieut. George Lacey Lee, M.C.", it is on the surface a resume of the short life of a romantic, moody, rootless, not-

quite-top-drawer English gentleman and drifter who mooned about Australia and New Zealand in the 1930s before being killed in the New Zealand army in North Africa in 1942. As such it is an interesting study of what was once a familiar type. The sub-text, however, is of the author's tangled, abortive and ultimately tragic involvement with him, and of her life-long regrets and guilt. Lee was, in the end, rather a lucky fellow, to be remembered so long after his rather pointless life ended, and in this affecting way.

P. R. Stephensen's *The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay towards National Self Respect* was first published in 1936. To many, then and later, it was an electrifying document: a passionate defence of Australian achievement in historical and intellectual terms, and the corner-stone of the case for Australian self-respect. Shortly after he wrote it Stephensen went fascist, which was the way many emotional nationalists went in all countries, but Stephensen's material and his commitment in *The Foundations of Culture* inspired and influenced many who did not follow his path. A long overdue reprint of the book, with an admirable and informative introduction by Stephensen's biographer, Craig Munro, has been published by Allen and Unwin ($17.95).

Some astute and public-spirited presses are helping us retrieve our literary background, with special attention to the often-submerged record of women writers in Australia. No great works of unrecognised literature have emerged, needless to say, despite the hype of the academics and others who have written the introductions, but certainly quite a lot of material of cultural/sociological/historical interest has been made available. Catherine Martin, in her *The Incredible Journey* (1923) writes with sympathy and without patronage of the Arunta people, reminding us that Katharine Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1929) was not an isolated phenomenon. Rosa Praed's *Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land* (1915) and *The Bond of Wedlock* (1887) take oblique but seldom severe glances at Australian middle-class manners and morals, perched somewhere between Berkeley Square and an outback station. When someone gets around to looking closely at the history of the middle classes in Australia they will repay 'deconstruction'. Ada Cambridge's *A Marked Man* (1890) veers between sharp satirical characterisation and high-mindedness; it is a 'watershed' novel in that it consciously sets, and seeks to resolve in Australia's favor, the 'where do I belong' debate. The same author's *The Three Miss Kings* (1891), poorly reprinted by facsimile from an earlier edition, contains some splendid asides on Melbourne in the vulgar 1880s—"a city full of starched and whale-boned women". It is an interesting piece of light fiction, strong on observation and characterisation, but otherwise conventional. Lesbia Harford's *The Invaluable Mystery* (1921-1924), the manuscript of which was recently found in Commonwealth Literary Fund archives, is a radical novel, politically aware, looking at the Australia of the Great War period. It will add little to Lesbia Harford's reputation as an emigrant from middle-class suburbia to proletaria and a minor poet with some sharp and poignant things to say about the place of women, of workers and of women-workers in the Australia of her day. The introduction makes some absurd statements of a conspiracy-theory nature as to why the manuscript languished unprinted in its time. It is not a work of any literary consequence and *all* authors, men as well as women, had a hard time of it in the 1920s. Fiona Giles has edited *From the Verandah*, stories by Australian women of the last century which have been culled from periodicals and the like. There are no great finds here either, but the stories are deftly chosen, sensibly introduced and elegantly published, and they make accessible a world of writing and of reading we should know about; as Fiona Giles says, "they provided a view of the bush and colonial society which appealed to the experiences as well as the wishes of their readers." Richard Fotheringham has edited Steele Rudd's *In Australia, or the Old Selection* (1916), a rambling romantic comedy, never performed, which again has recently been found in the Commonwealth Archives. We may ignore the editor's claim that here we find "the most remarkable range of memorable characters ever intended for the Australian stage"—what would Barry Dickins say to that?—but the text is an amusing demotic comedy livened by Rudd's ear for the vernacular. (Pandora has published the first four books mentioned, at $12.95. *The Three Miss Kings*, Virago, $11.95. Lesbia Harford's book, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, $12.95. *From the Verandah*, McPhee/Gribble, $14.95. Steele Rudd, UQP $12.95.)

Jean Holkner's *Taking the Chook and Other Traumas* (Puffin, $6.95) is a collection of stories for children based on the author's childhood in the Melbourne suburb of Carlton when it was "a sort of Jewish village." Judah Waten, Morris Lurie and others have worked over similar ground, but Jean Holkner brings a freshness and good humor to her stories that is all her own. Many adults will enjoy such tales as "A Jewish Christmas" as much as children, and this book in its modest way is as illuminating a contribution to our 'ethnic' literature as many more portentous works.

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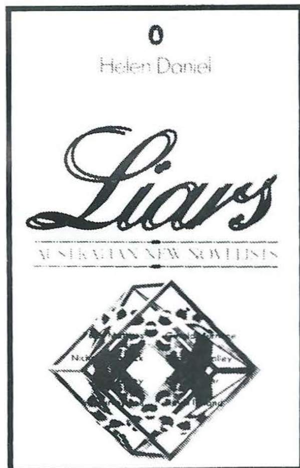

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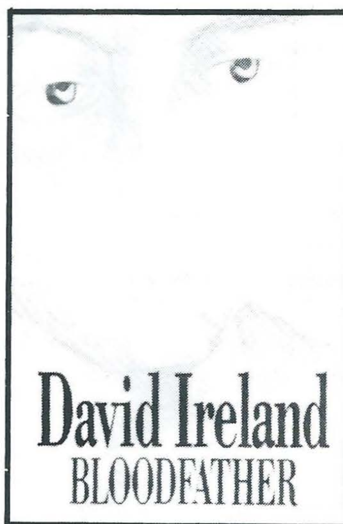

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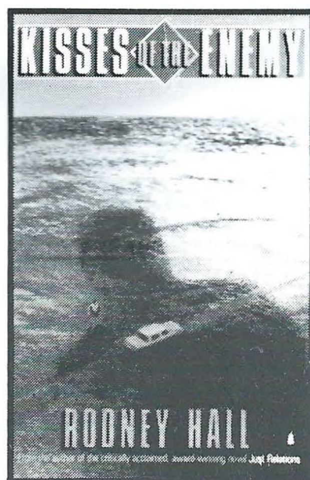

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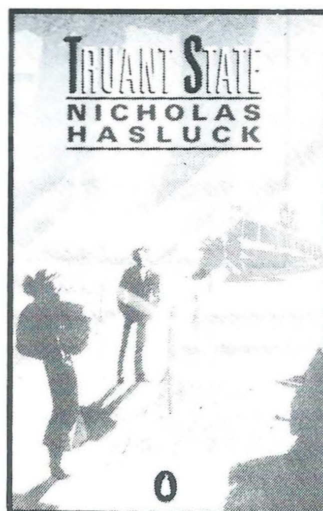

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