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BETTY BIRSKYS

At the Wilsons'

Joan had read that a strong needle rammed into the exact soft spot on the crown could kill: seeing her father's bald spot as she passed behind him and his rustling newspaper she felt quite pitiless and longed to have the courage to try.

That was during the bad times. During the good times she and her brother and sister were special: the Wilsons of Manly Jetty; there was no-one else like them. They lived over the Bay. You walked from the Esplanade along the wooden bridge that went out over gritty orange sand then mud then the deepening waters of the Bay to the Jetty with its baths and kiosk and living quarters.

Bridge and jetty stood high on thick wooden piles, reinforced round their base with concrete on which oysters and barnacles grew. Fishermen tied their dinghies to the piles. The water lapped, green and sparkling. The islands on the horizon seemed to hover above the water and on brilliant days water and sky became one. The children fished where the bream and flat-head gathered under the rubbish-hole in the kitchen floor.

Sundays were the best days. Crowds came to the jetty by foot and train and bus. A few even drove; you could see their cars parked along the Esplanade. From opening time Sunday music belted out, either from the coin-in-the-slot gramophone or from the electric pianola with the racing horses. The pianola played classics and the children hummed Mozart and Beethoven and Strauss without knowing the names of composer or piece. On the gramophone it was popular music: South of the Border and Begin the Beguine and Tippy-tippy-tin. Once at the Methodist Church, where to make it worse they were only visiting from the Church of England, Patty sang "She'll be coming round the Mountain" at the top of her voice during the hymn.

When the gramophone and pianola were silent the wireless was often on: the Argonauts for Patty, or the news, and Sunday nights they all had to sit absolutely silent while their father listened to Dr. Goddard's Book of Time.

When there was no other sound their father liked to talk. "Get him talking and he won't notice," Mrs. Wilson told the children when there was something wrong with the dinner.

His voice boomed. His 'barrack-room' voice, Mrs. Wilson called it. She had been the Town Clerk's eldest daughter, Edna, reared for gentility in the big, wide-verandahed house at East Brisbane. George had been born in the Married Quarters at Woolwich Barracks, London, where his father was Quartermaster Sergeant.

"An N.C.O., like generations of his family before him," George declaimed. "As high as they could go. Although it was us N.C.O.'s kept the British Army going, not those chinless wonders strutting round with swagger sticks under their arms."

"One less parasite," he exulted when the old King, George, died. Edna Wilson was in tears, third generation Australian though she was. "Don't cry for him. Do you think he'd cry for you?" George's voice hardened; they all knew what was coming next. "Victoria's nephew, the Duke of Connaught, was Colonel of my Regiment. We only saw him at ceremonial parades, swanking around swagger stick slapping against his leg. I was the bugler boy, just out of school, fourteen years old, seven stone. Proud of myself, but nervous. And the great royal gentleman came up to me and knocked my bugle against my lips. 'Play up, boy! Play up!' It was icy-cold, my lips were swollen, I could taste the blood. There were tears running down my cheeks as I played."

And hatred in his heart.

Soon after, puny arms dropped the heavy army saddle he was trying to manoeuvre onto his mount. His big toe was broken but he had to ride regardless; by night he could barely get his boot off. His foot grew twisted, with the big toe tucked useless beneath the next two. His hatred grew.

"I used to go and hear Keir Hardie speak—the first Labour M.P. The toffs in the House of Commons'd laugh at him and the other Labour members—their accents and clothes. Ordinary working men, thinking they should have something to say about how their country was run. In the Sergeants' Mess they called me the Red R.S.M. Those old sergeants—all they cared

about was getting through another day in the army, and their drink . . ."

The children had heard it all so many times before. Their mother said she let her mind float, and Joan tried to do the same.

Rainy afternoons George rounded up the girls. "Come on—get off that bed. No use lying round playing with stupid bits of paper." The girls had a game with people cut out from the women's magazines; they acted out dramas with them, mostly Happy Families. Shoeboxes were houses and small boxes were cars. "Where's your brother? Go and get him."

When they were lined up their father stood before them. "Ten-shun!" he roared. Edna Wilson sat with the maid at the kitchen table, preparing vegetables. "Like a parade ground," she sniffed.

"The Yorkshire Two-step!" George announced. "I learnt this watching the dancers in the music halls. No lessons—never needed them. Just watching, and a natural ear for rhythm."

Joan and Patty looked down at their toes, slid their eyes sideways towards each other. They had to go to Miss Robbin's classes to learn Irish, Scotch and modern Tap.

Off George went, calling as he danced, throwing his arms out for balance and effect:

> "Tap, atap, atap, step . . . tap, atap, atap,
> Tap, atap, atap, step . . . tap, atap, atap . . ."

He danced energetically, exhorting the puffing children, "Come on, keep going. What sort of sugar babies . . ." They had to keep going until he was panting.

"The girls have got their own dances," Edna said, hitting the knife through pumpkin with the heel of her hand.

"Oh, no, mum," Joan begged, but it was too late.

"Yes, let's see what we pay for," George shouted.

"The Highland fling," Edna prompted.

"The Irish Jig first," George ordered, and they had to thump around while he clapped his hands and tapped one foot for the music. "Stamp your feet, shake your fists, you should've seen the colleens do it," George cried. "Come on, as if you mean it!"

He had been a boy-soldier in the occupying army in Ireland. 'Pat o'butter, Tommy?' the girls would offer, a little dab of butter on a leaf, but run when they saw the priest coming. "Pretty girls, with high red colour in their cheeks. T.B.—tuberculosis," George bellowed, and Joan and Patty would lower their eyes again, somehow ashamed of their own sturdy chubbiness and sallow freckled Australian skins.

"The Royal Horse Artillery Sword Drills," George commanded. "Mounted and dismounted." The flat sword, relic of World War One, was grasped in his right hand, his left hand posed on his hip. He roared through the thrust and parry of the ritualised movements, each syllable articulated so emphatically and explosively that the aspirates, carefully schooled over twenty years in Australia, lapsed into their original confusion:

> "The sword will be 'eld hupright, three hinches from the nose, the blade level . . ."

Edna Wilson, brought up to more genteel phrases and accents, flinched.

"Mounted!" George's barrel chest rose and fell with his exertions. "The back 'eld herect, the horse jogging . . ." and he set them to thrusting imaginary swords, their knees bent to hold imaginary horses.

Sometimes there was gymnastics. "Kick your feet up on the table," George shouted. "I could do it myself if the table was higher."

"Not here. We're getting the dinner," Edna said, and spread saucepans and beans on newspaper over the kitchen table-top.

"Here. Push this rubbish back." With a sweep of his hand George pushed aside tools and money and papers to clear a space on the dining table. He waved his hands in encouragement. "You first, Ken. Throw your hands on the floor and kick up your heels." He grabbed the feet as they came past him and planted them firmly on the table top. "Now down," and with his hand in the small of the back he guided Ken erect. After Ken, it was the girls' turn.

When they were too big for the table they had to kick up against the wall; skirts fell backward over heads and arms, showing the girls' pants.

"The girls are getting too big for that," Edna protested. "Especially Joan."

"Rubbish!" George shouted. "Come on, mum; you come and have a go, too." His laugh billowed up, setting the children crowing and drawing a twitch to Edna's mouth. After a cautious glance at Edna, the maid Veronica smiled.

Reciting was another passion. "It's important to be able to talk up, to say what you want to say," George proclaimed. "Now: shoulders back, head up. Throw your voice out. Let's see what we're paying for." This was to Ken, who had elocution lessons.

George demonstrated, shoulders and back ramrod stiff, chin pointing towards the ceiling. "Let it out, let it out," he exhorted.

As the children's voices dwindled, George took over:

" 'IF', by Rudyard Kipling.
. . . 'If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you . . .'."

The children hated "If", but some of the other pieces were not so bad. Like the "Green Eye of the Little Yellow God". Joan's spine tingled in anticipation when he announced that.

" . . . 'the floor was wet and slippery where she trod,'," George intoned.

" 'A golden knife lay buried in the heart of mad Carew,
It was the vengeance of the little yellow god.' "

"Do we always have to have that bloodthirsty thing?" Edna asked, but George did not seem to hear.

"Shakespeare," he announced, with a glance at his wife, who had boarded for two years at Miss Green's Private Academy and still could not recite Shakespeare. Or did not.

"Cardinal Wolsey's farewell," George said.

" 'This is the state of man: today he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope, tomorrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him . . .'."

He had learnt all this poetry at The King's School, a free boarding school for the sons of N.C.O.'s. His eyes clouded and his throat choked up when he spoke of that school. "Better than any of your Etons or Harrows. In two years there, I never heard a dirty word. We were chosen for brains and ability. Not to be trained as the country's leaders, though; just to be N.C.O.'s in their army."

He had seen only one boy flogged, for stealing; the assembled school stood with eyelids lowered. On Sundays there was jam for the prefects and the little boys who laid the tables would dip their fingers in and lick and lick until half the treat was gone.

Before that, he had been the star pupil at the village school at Newhaven. His father was Quartermaster Sergeant at Newhaven Fort.

"The school wasn't free; dad had to pay, a penny a day I think it was, and I was wasting the money, wagging it, running wild. I had a gang; I was General Wilson; I had a wooden sword, two pieces of wood nailed together; I led the other boys over the Sussex Downs and down the tunnels of the Fort. Once I took them picking hops for days."

When George went back to school after the hop-picking the master, "a little man with a black pointed beard", bent him over the table and gave him "ten of the best". "Then he stood me in front of him and told me I was one of the smartest boys he'd had in his school, but it was up to me. I could do anything, learn anything—but not if I went on the way I was going. From that day, you couldn't keep me away from school and my books. And I got a place in The King's School."

And all that intelligence and leadership had landed him here on Manly Jetty, in the 1930s, in his fifties already, with a young family.

Periodically an extra degree of excitement and energy came over George. He seemed to be everywhere, talking more and more and louder and louder. He hung around Edna as she cooked or ironed; laughing at his own jokes, cuddling her, pinching her lightly, peering into her face for a response.

"Oh, George, get out of it. Not now," the children would hear her say. "I'm all over flour." Or she'd be sewing, or counting the takings—always something.

He took no notice. He told her stories, with a nudge of his elbow to her ribs, and the great laugh roaring out so everyone had to join in, even the children, who knew only that there was something rude to the joke.

George could have made a living as a singer, he sometimes said. His voice boomed, deep and clear, every melody held true, through the seemingly endless repertoire he had learnt in the music halls of Edwardian London. There was Cockney bounce in "Down the road and away went Polly", and the pathos of "the blind Irish girl", and the rousing military beat of "Dukes' sons, cooks' sons, sons of a belted earl". He sang and sang but it was no use.

The demons would not be routed. The songs stopped. George prowled the place, eyes cold, mouth tight. He was a trap ready to be sprung; anything could be the trigger. There was an ominous silence in the house. The children stole about, trying to keep out of his way, pulling back into another room when they saw him coming. But he loomed everywhere, pushing things on the cluttered table, thumping chairs into new positions. "Look at this—mess everywhere," he snarled. "Can't anyone clean up? Two women round here all the time."

"Veronica's supposed to work in the kiosk," Edna

snapped. Joan stared at her mother, eyes round and pleading, but Edna's mouth was tense. "This place is nothing but a slum anyway. Who could do anything with it?"

"If you cleaned it up. In Yorkshire, I'd see the women out on their knees at six in the morning, still dark, down with bucket and brush, scrubbing their front door steps. Every morning—by night they'd be covered in soot and dirt again, but they . . ."

"Why didn't you marry one of them then, if that's what you want? A slavey?" Her voice was shrill. "Or one of your Irish peasants?" George's mother had been Irish-born, and could have been a peasant.

"Better than Belgian pork butchers," George shouted. In some mysterious way this referred to Edna's father, the impeccably Anglo-born town clerk.

"You filthy swine! A dead man, died in agony," Edna shrieked, as the children cowered and George roared back, "If you could manage money, but you never learn. What you waste . . ."

"I? Waste? I never HAVE any money. I live like a pauper, a beggar. Veronica lives better than me. I can't even get my hair done without you whining . . ."

"And look at your kids. Spoilt. No discipline. How are they ever going to be any good in the world?" The children pushed back, wondering how, indeed.

" 'My' kids? They're your kids too, poor little devils. It's a wonder they're not all nervous wrecks. Delinquents."

The row raged for days, the scope spreading like a bush fire, over family, money, the whole despair and disappointment of life. Seemingly unforgivable things were shouted. The children were glad to go to school while the air throbbed with manic sound. Joan, passing behind her father and his fiercely rustling newspaper, felt quite pitiless and longed to ram a strong needle into the bald head. If only she had the courage; or could be sure she would not fail nor be found out.

"Why don't you ignore him, mum?" she pleaded. "Instead of starting it?"

"Me, start it?"

"Answering him back."

"I'm supposed to take all that? Anyway, he wants a row and he won't be satisfied until he's had one. Better to get it over and done with. The sooner it starts the sooner it finishes."

It finished, always, the same way. George took to his bed. He huddled under the bedclothes, only his grey hair and the bald patch visible. The windows stayed shut so that the room grew stuffy, then fetid. The girls, who shared the second double bed, hated to sleep there. How can mum get in the same bed with him? Joan wondered.

George arose, silent and grim, only to go to the lavatory or to shower, and to forage occasionally in the cupboard. He stood then bare-foot as he rummaged for fruit, cheese, a little bread and butter or cold meat, staring straight ahead as he steadily munched. His very back bespoke reproach.

"Don't leave anything there for him, mum," Joan urged. "Let him starve. Why should you leave stuff for him to find."

Edna put in the cupboard a paper bag of dried apricots, another of prunes; nuts, some sweets and a chocolate (for he had a sweet tooth); all things he could take back to bed with him.

"You're hopeless," Joan raged. "One thing I know: I'm not going to have anything like this when I get married. If I do."

"We could put some poison in his food," she told Patty. "Rat bait. Or powdered glass: I read about that. I wonder how you make it into powder?"

Or there was always the needle, the slender rod of steel.

After a few days George would linger slightly longer over his meal. Occasionally he turned from the cupboard to meet, with his own sad eyes, the evasive eyes of one of his family. He might even sit to eat at a little corner he had cleared for himself on the cluttered dining table.

There was something pathetic now about the slouched shoulders and wispy grey hair, about the musty striped pyjamas and the bare feet, and they all knew, even Patty, that very soon he would rise from his bed quite early and shower and dress and come to sit at the breakfast table.

"I know you won't apologise so I'll have to forgive you all," George would say, but his voice wavered a little, his eyes flickered before their eyes. Silent, mouth drooping, Edna put his bowl of porridge before him.

That afternoon when the children came home from school they heard their father. Singing again: "The Old Kent Road", or one of the other rollicking cheery songs, as he hammered away at some odd job around the Kiosk.

The bedroom windows were open and the bay breezes blew the shabby curtains in a frantic dance of gaiety. The good times were back. They were special: the Wilsons of Manly Jetty, there was no-one else like them. All round them the ocean and sky sparkled.

WENDY BACON

An Independent Journal 1958–1972

Tom Fitzgerald and George Munster

K. S. Inglis (ed.): *Nation; the Life of an Independent Journal of Opinion 1958–1972*. Edited and introduced by K. S. Inglis assisted by Jane Brazier (Melbourne University Press, $24.95).

If the recently published collection of articles from *Nation* had been merely a series of reprints, arranged chronologically or by subject, the book would have been worthwhile. But the result would have been of interest mainly to those involved in the intellectual and political debates of the 1960s, and to specialists in the history of that post-war period. However this book, as its subtitle *The Life of an Independent Journal of Opinion 1958–1972* suggests, is much more than that, thanks to the contribution of the book's editor Ken Inglis.

Inglis has grouped his chosen pieces into five three-year periods. The material in each section contains a sample of what might have appeared in a single issue of *Nation*, without the letters pages and advertisements. Around these sample issues, Inglis has woven the story of *Nation* and those who shaped it. The result should attract a broad readership among those interested in seeing a vibrant intellectual life, including an independent press, flourish in this country.

There is no doubt that *Nation* represents a considerable achievement in the very patchy history of independent publishing in this country, or that it had an impact on political debate during the years it appeared. But I agree with Sylvia Lawson, one of the few women who regularly contributed to *Nation*, who said in a recent interview published in *Australian Left Review* that the reaction to this renewal of *Nation* has so far been nostalgic—"sort of solemn, as though it was a semi-sacred thing". If we are to learn from the experience of this journal, it is important to assess its achievements critically.

I was one of those who encountered *Nation* in its latter years. To those of us involved in the radical publishing and other political movements of the late sixties and early seventies, *Nation* seemed a staid, even quite conservative journal. Although, like *Nation* itself, I had grown up in the early sixties, so caught up was I in contemporary conflicts that I had little sense of how quickly attitudes were changing, let alone how a journal like *Nation* might have contributed to that change.

To understand *Nation* and those that produced it, one must understand its beginnings. It was born after ten years of Menzies' rule and its editor Tom Fitzgerald's project was, in a nutshell, to shake his iron grip.

It was only last year when I was researching a talk about my days at Melbourne University that I was reminded of just how restrictive was the press of my adolescence. I had forgotten that as far as the daily newspapers were concerned Aboriginal people were still 'natives', communists still evil 'reds', a vote for the Labor party unthinkable, and ladies in hats lunching on visiting naval ships were the stuff of the women's page.

In 1958 when the paper was launched, Australia's metropolitan papers were, as Inglis writes, "uniformly anti-Labor, docile in the face of Menzies' posturings abroad, content with his government's obsequious endorsement of American foreign policy in Australia's region, slaves to the bipartisan conventional wisdom about non-European immigration and indifferent to large issues . . . such as the tendency towards monopoly in industry". When the only outlet for other ideas, a small paper called *Voice*, closed down, Fitzgerald, the financial editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, determined to launch his own independent fortnightly journal.

Fitzgerald offered to resign from his job at the *SMH* but instead John Fairfax and Sons preferred to continue to employ him until he transferred to News Ltd in 1970. As a reader who experienced the restrictions of the Fairfax press during one of its more liberal periods, the mid eighties, I would like to have learnt more about how this editor of an independent journal fared within the Fairfax establishment. Here I found Inglis's account incomplete. We know that as an economist Fitzgerald was unusually knowledgeable and articulate and also that, unlike that later independent editor, Brian Toohey, he was not a

confrontationist. We know too that he had four children to support and that he mortgaged his house to start *Nation*. But Inglis notes without comment that Fitzgerald had a congenial relationship with that arch-conservative Sir Warwick Fairfax, whose clashes with other senior employees on matters of policy are legendary. Inglis attributes the fact that Fitzgerald never became editor of the paper to his employers' awareness of his independence. In terms of understanding *Nation's* position in relation to the rest of the press and Fitzgerald as a journalist, it would have been good to know more how he viewed his work at the *SMH*.

In any case, Fitzgerald set out, as he later described in *Nation's* dying days, "to affect the general consciousness by gradual, intermittent suggestion" by cautiously challenging some of the tenets of the mainstream press especially the White Australia policy, an insensitivity to our position in the Asia-Pacific region and subservience to the United States. For instance, an editorial on the White Australia policy in 1960 argued that if the color bar was removed, Asians would accept that Australia would still prefer more migrants from Europe and recommended a "moderate intake to be reviewed from time to time in the light of experience".

But to recognise that Fitzgerald was cautious should not be taken as suggesting that he was dull. His comment was always stylish, pointed and showed a thoughtfulness usually still missing from the editorials of our mainstream press. His first issue appeared after a week in which, despite Australia's slavish adoption of the United States' support of Chiang Kai-shek's threat of military aggression towards Communist China, the American President had raised protective shutters against the importation of metals from Australian mines, already working on short time because of a lack of orders. In his editorial, Fitzgerald wrote:

> When we should be up and saying these things, our Government has rather been priding itself on its silence. To reserve the statement of Australia's policy and any dissatisfaction with America for the private ears of Washington offers no reassurance to Asia and may earn precious little American gratitude to judge from this week's experience. . . . If we accept the policies of professed hardheaded realists, the results can sometimes be unpleasant. If we allow our American protectors to do the speaking and acting on our behalf, the result may suit them and not us. These realists, men with their eyes like their feet well and truly on the ground and never a little higher, have found themselves walking into some tight corners lately. To keep a sense of idealism after having learned well that some of those you must deal with are not idealists, is true realism. It is just the kind that will stand up the longest.

The expression of such views was like a bolt from the blue in 1958 and was enough for some of Fitzgerald's friends to label him a communist. But while Fitzgerald wanted an independent foreign policy for Australia, he was not a socialist. Although he warned against an obsession with the 'red threat' from the North, he did believe in an anti-communist defence strategy.

These days it is easy to slip into assuming that Australian liberals were opposed to conscription and to Australia's intervention in the Vietnam war. But the *Nation's* muted criticism of the Federal government's conscription and Vietnam war policies is a useful reminder of just how long it took not only small 'l' liberals but also many ALP members, including Gough Whitlam, finally to call for the removal of Australian troops.

In 1964 *Nation* greeted conscription with this editorial comment:

> The resort to military conscription is partly a symptom of conditions of very full employment (another name for prosperity), and it also reflects the Government's failure to stir the people to respond otherwise. It may well be unavoidable, although a less opportunistic record of leadership would have made the point clearer. Lives will be at risk in overseas military contingents, whether volunteers or conscripted.

I have researched only the 100,000 words selected by Inglis from the 8 million words published by *Nation*, but if the articles chosen are representative, they contain a much more ambivalent attitude to one of the major issues of the decade, intervention by the West in the Vietnam War, than I expected.

Inglis chose a 1965 piece by Maxwell Newton to illustrate the paper's handling of the Vietnam issue. The piece claimed the American decision to bomb North Vietnam and send in more troops had already had positive psychological effects both at home and in South Vietnam, although he admitted the main objective of bringing the Viet Cong to the negotiating table had failed. But in rejecting Calwell's view that military aggression was no way to force negotiations in what was in reality a civil war, he argued:

> The government's policy, which no one really likes but to which no one can suggest a practical alternative, is to support the Americans in forcing a situation where it will be possible to avoid both defeat and all-out war, by forcing negotiations. The present American policy was decided on when defeat appeared to be inevitable.

An editorial the following year slammed the "disaster-headed Ky junta" in South Vietnam but saved most of its sting for the Minister for External Affairs, Paul Hasluck, for failing to openly acknowledge that we were in Vietnam because the Americans wanted us to be. This deceit, the editorial argued, would hand the Opposition leader Arthur Calwell, who was demanding withdrawal, the "moral and logical ascendancy on a plate".

By the mid sixties, most of *Nation's* more radical readers would have already agreed with Calwell's position. If anything the bombing of North Vietnam crystallised opposition to intervention. Throughout the earlier period, a fair number of its 11,000 or so readers held views to the left of much of what was expressed in the journal but they continued not only to read, but to savour *Nation.* As one radical barrister said to me, "there just was nothing else" and "it was a good read".

That 'good read' included cultural criticism which broke new ground in treating Australian art, music and theatre seriously, and well written articles by a number of liberal academics, who had previously lacked opportunities to contribute to public debate. *Nation* also had George Munster as its business manager, associate editor and, unofficially, its chief reporter.

It is to Fitzgerald's great credit as an editor that he provided George Munster with an environment in which he could flourish as a journalist, for he never desired to be, nor would he have been welcome, in the mainstream press.

While I do not know Fitzgerald, I feel that Inglis succeeds in the short space available in explaining the roots of Fitzgerald's intellectual approach to his work—his inner Sydney upbringing, his Catholic education, his experiences overseas during the Second World War and the influence on his journalism of J. M. Keynes, George Orwell and the British journals, *New Statesman* and the *Manchester Guardian.* However, I do not think Inglis is similarly successful in explaining George Munster although he does recognise his trailblazing contribution not only to *Nation* but to Australian journalism.

Inglis is quite right when he describes Fitzgerald and Munster as a "remarkable contrasting pair" but I do not think that contrast can best be summed up as "native son of Sydney and cosmopolitan Viennese". Munster was educated in a way few Australians now are—he studied English, philosophy and anthropology, read the European philosophers in their own languages and to the surprise of his friends, became a master of company accounts and tax law. But while he was born in Europe, the key to his approach to journalism was not found there but inside the quadrangle of Sydney University.

Inglis mentions that Munster studied philosophy under the "iconoclastic Professor John Anderson" as well as English under Professor Waldock. But he fails to understand that Munster, while not a disciple of Anderson was one of a generation of philosophy students who were profoundly influenced by Andersonianism, especially its notions of inquiry, objectivity and its identification of 'the good' with freedom.

Anderson himself had engaged in public debates about censorship and education but Munster's lively mind was never constrained by the important issues as defined by academia. One major unsigned Munster article reprinted by Inglis was about the soap powder multinationals. As Fitzgerald has said, it took readers "from the housewife answering the doorbell while wiping her hands on her apron to boardrooms at company headquarters in Britain, Holland and the USA which were directing the local strategies. A new quality was introduced into our journalism". In another article, Munster looked at how the global strategies of the huge Japanese trading multinationals were affecting investment in Australia. In an ABC interview, Fitzgerald recently said that similar articles are now commonplace in the Australian press. I was surprised by this for I can think of few with the same analytical sweep and broad international content. Although economic journalism is an area of great expansion, most of it still treats business in a piecemeal way which means little to the general reader. If anything new business journalism tends to celebrate business or to focus on personalities.

It is tempting to call Munster the first of the recent wave of journalists to whom has been applied the label 'investigative reporter'. Certainly, Munster was the first journalist I met who talked about the usefulness of company and land title searches, tax avoidance schemes and corruption in business. In these areas he broke new ground but I think he would have rejected the category of 'investigative journalism'. For Munster, journalism was just part of ongoing intellectual life which by its very nature was based around questioning, probing and where necessary researching.

Part of Fitzgerald's project of breaking the conservatives' grip on the country was to encourage reform of the Labor opposition so that it could eventually win government. Some of Fitzgerald's most scathing words were written about Arthur Calwell, particularly over his support for the White Australia policy. Early in 1972, the paper welcomed Gough Whitlam back from holidays: "Nice to see you back and all that, Gough, and now it's on, without any more let-ups. This year makes you or breaks you". *Nation* merged with *The Review* just a few months before Whitlam won the election later that year and for much of the rest of the decade Fitzgerald became an advisor to the Federal and NSW governments.

I am sure that most of the contributors for *Nation* shared Fitzgerald's hopes for the ALP but while

Munster himself may have agreed with his criticisms of the Labor opposition, I doubt that he set so much store by party reform. Munster was one of those influenced by Anderson who became more radical, rather than more conservative as he grew older. While he was not part of the Sydney Libertarian movement (an offshoot of Andersonianism which was sympathetic to anarchism but less utopian), he enjoyed the company of the libertarian 'Push' and shared their distaste for political parties and government institutions.

So while Fitzgerald gave *Nation* its central project, Munster contributed his myriad of interests and enormous intellectual energy. It was not their contrasting personalities and appearances but their different views and interests which made this partnership a dynamic one.

There is another gap in Inglis's account of *Nation* which I think should be mentioned. Fitzgerald himself has admitted in an ABC interview that the paper had a blind spot as far as women were concerned. At the very beginning of the book, Inglis fondly recalls the "band of brothers (and a sister Sylvia Lawson) who were there on *Nation's* St Crispin's day". Beyond this, he makes no other reference to the small number of women who regularly contributed to *Nation.* Of the 42 contributors whose articles are reprinted in the book, four are women. I do not know if this is representative of the number of women who wrote for *Nation* but even for those years, it is pitifully few. The contribution of one of these, the music critic Maria Prerauer, was only recognised by the initial 'M' in her husband Curt's signature 'C.M. Prerauer' until she took over on her own after his death in 1967.

Claire Wagner's "Don't Drop the Mister" was a scathing attack on anti-feminists published by *Nation* in 1968. But as Wagner (a public servant then writing under a pseudonym) noted, the low status of women had high news value in that year. *Nation* had not led the field in taking up the issue.

Sylvia Lawson contributed film reviews and campaigned for the renewal of a national film industry. She was one of *Nation's* most accomplished writers with a wit and bite missing among some of *Nation's* earnest academic contributors.

> The bedrock reason why we need a film industry isn't international communication, or profits for investors. It's that we need what our film makers could give us just as much as we need what our painters, novelists, playwrights, musicians and TV entertainers give—for better or worse. As things are they can't give it. Some spend their life turning out footage for sponsors (you couldn't call it making films) on tobacco growing or open-cut mining or how they make paper. Some (usually pretty young and idealistic) try to make the sort of films they want to in their spare time, under cripplingly handicapped non-professional conditions; the results aren't often too happy. Still others . . . rather than make documentaries on Beautiful Tasmania or tobacco growing, simply and resignedly depart from their chosen means of expression. They become reluctant teachers or journalists or photographers; they opt out. They are defeated human beings; their loss is also ours.

They were Lawson's concluding words in a 1967 article on the lack of Federal support for a film industry. Like Wagner's contribution on feminism, her article had an emotional edge and bitterness which was rare in the usually restrained *Nation.*

Only on one occasion did Fitzgerald display such personal frustration. This was in an editorial written in 1968 shortly after an Irish nun had predicted that between 2 and 3 million Biafrans were going to die. Fitzgerald argued that it was cheaper for "adult do-gooders" to pay "liberal-leftish attention" to students demonstrating about South Africa than to try to save Biafran lives. Inglis records that friends told Fitzgerald that the editorial on Biafra was "too personal, that he had gone outside the proper boundary of public discourse". Fitzgerald apparently pondered this—but the fact was that he showed no further signs of such intemperateness.

Who were these friends? We are not told but similar attitudes were common around liberal, and even older radical circles in the late sixties and early seventies. A generation who had survived the Cold War and struggled to keep liberalism intellectually alive in the fifties were wary of those who expressed their views in an emotional way. They were even less sympathetic when emotions spilled over into action. But this lofty detachment and restrained manners were what many women found hard to handle. Perhaps it was not because those running *Nation* were explicitly sexist but because Fitzgerald's friends had such narrow ideas about public discourse that more Wagners and Lawsons did not find their way into the pages of *Nation.* It was just this notion that the personal had to be kept separate from the public sphere that the women's liberation movement would soon explicitly challenge.

This quality of restrained detachment was also a mark of *Nation's* middle class intellectual quality. It was not just that *Nation's* readers were mostly middle class but that most of its contributors' experiences and concerns were middle class ones. The theatre critic Harry Kippax in a review of *The Shifting Heart* in quite rightly questioning why the playwright had sited his drama about xenophobia in Collingwood not Kew, declared Australia to be "middle class in mind and habit". Even George Munster wrote a long article in 1961 about housing economics in which he looked forward hopefully to the wholesale rebuilding of the

Rocks area by private developers. Part of the plan would mean that the working class public who lived in the area would have to become "acclimatised to the role of home-unit ownership". It was a view which he would later revise when those same tenants allied with the builders' labourers union staged an extraordinary battle in the 1970s to resist those developers.

By the end of the sixties, the women's movement was only one of a number of movements which were challenging the status quo in an impassioned, often forceful way. There was the Aboriginal movement, gay rights, the movement for student democracy, the anti-apartheid movement and soon there would be resident action groups and prisoners' action groups. Each of these demanded coverage in the media but they also turned to new outlets, more compatible with their style than *Nation*, or (taking advantage of new developments in offset printing) started their own newspapers.

By 1970, when I was editing the student journal *Tharunka, Nation* had ceased to be an outlet for views that were not published elsewhere. During that year, writer Frank Moorhouse edited a whole *Tharunka* supplement of material by fiction writers and poets which had effectively been censored by the timid publishing world. There was a supplement on Gurindji landrights, debates about whether or not to support the Vietnam NLF and theoretical articles about the male orgasm and the connection between the nuclear family and capitalism. The following year, *Tharunka* published the statements of prisoners naming prison officers who had systematically bashed them in Bathurst prison. None of these articles would have found a place in the mainstream press. But nor would they have sat comfortably in the *Nation* of 1970.

It is not that *Nation* ignored all these issues but that when it did cover them, the articles often had the tone of an outsider. For example, there was an amusing Bob Ellis piece chosen by Ken Inglis which dealt with LSD which was fashionable at that time. "I'm a cowardly abstainer. And I'll tell you why, LSD worries me". Ellis may have been right about acid but that is not the point. There were a number of publications at that time which would have preferred to commission an article by one of the many thousands of young people who experimented with acid. Similarly, Keith Martin wrote a fair report on violent clashes between police and demonstrators during the 1970 anti-Vietnam moratorium march in Sydney. But he seemed not to have understood or grasped that many of the demonstrators, if not their leaders, actively supported tactics of civil disobedience.

On the eve of *Nation's* merger with *The Review* in 1972, Fitzgerald would write that "liberals and radicals without sinking their differences must love one another or die as an articulate force in this country". Stitching together a liberal and radical readership had become a problem for *Nation* by the latter part of the sixties. The journal was outflanked to the left, and even, at times in the mainstream press. Nothing could demonstrate this better than a statement by Fitzgerald in that same last editorial that "after all the atrocities and waste of life [in the Vietnam war] moral and intellectual victory" belonged to the United States! Few of the readers of the combined *Nation Review* would have agreed with him.

After a brief dissatisfying period with Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd, Fitzgerald worked as an advisor to Labor governments. Munster, who in his still questioning and sceptical way was nevertheless swept along by the movements of the seventies, went on to be the Sydney editor of *Nation Review*. His new partner was Richard Walsh, the former editor of *Tharunka* and London *Oz*. Eventually, when *Nation Review* closed down, the two ended up at Angus and Robertson publishers. A & R was eventually taken over by Murdoch. While Walsh moved on to Kerry Packer's Consolidated Press, George Munster returned to the ranks of the freelance writers.

Throughout *Nation's* life, Fitzgerald had resisted approaches from the mainstream media bosses and other entrepreneurs to take it over. He preferred to keep his house mortgaged rather than risk the paper's independence. However well regarded he was at John Fairfax and Sons, he must have known he could never expect a free hand there. Eventually, at about the same time *Nation* merged with *The Review*, Fairfax launched the *National Times*.

At first the *National Times* appealed to the same liberal audience which had provided *Nation's* core readership. During the seventies, there were plenty of other publications for the radicals. But most of these had already died by the time *Nation Review* closed in 1978. While the *National Times* never could have become a left wing magazine, it did for a period stitch together a mixed readership of liberals, left-wingers, new feminists and other activists much as *Nation* had done. When, in 1986, the Fairfax press ditched its independent editors and the *National Times*, unfortunately the wheel had almost, but not quite, come full circle.

It would be too pessimistic to suggest that we stand back where those with liberal intellectual views stood in 1958. There is public radio, talks programs on Radio National, *Australian Society*, Four Corners . . . and for those who cannot find a voice in anything of these, desk top publishing. Investigative stories can be published so long as they don't threaten one or two powerful businessmen or politicians, and for those stories there is Brian Toohey's *Eye*. But still there is no major outlet, for those who want to publish and read the stories the mainstream press ignores, as well as challenge its emerging ideological consensus with considered analysis. *Nation's* achievement was that it provided such an outlet. Last year, *The Independent* was launched by one of the contributors to *Nation*,

Max Suich. Its Christmas issue featured a supplement of reprints from *Nation*, a welcome promotional exercise which only served to highlight the difference between the two papers. Many of *The Independent's* well known contributors already have ample space to express themselves in the rest of the media. So far, *The Independent*, like *Nation*, is a 'good read' but it lacks what its predecessor had in its heyday: a clear sense of itself and a project. Until that changes, there will be a gap in the reading of a small but distinctive market of Australian readers.

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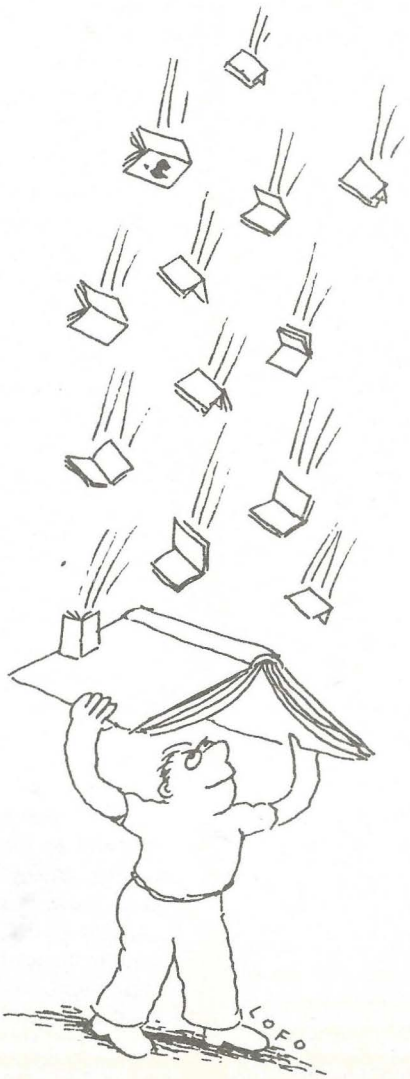

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JOHN SENDY

Boris Pasternak 1890–1960

"I adore the man," Anna Akhmatova once wrote about Boris Pasternak, "but he's intolerable." In this year which marks the centenary of Pasternak's birth and thirty years since his death following his rejection of the Nobel Prize at the insistence of the Stalinist authorities, Pasternak still arouses feelings of adulation and criticism and irritation. Debate about his work still rages, particularly in the USSR.

Akhmatova's comment was provoked by Pasternak's ridiculously mock-modest attempt in 1954 to convince her that he was a literary nonentity. Yet Pasternak, as he well knew, was anything but a nonentity, literary or otherwise. His father had been a successful artist, his mother a concert pianist. Scriabin and Anton Rubinstein were family friends. Leo Tolstoy visited. The young Pasternak accompanied his father to Tolstoy's death-bed at Astapovo in 1910. His career started in Tsarist times and spanned the 1917 revolution, the artistic ferment of the early revolutionary years, the Stalinist terror and the uncertain thaw which followed Stalin's death. He once argued about literature with Trotsky. He received phone calls from Stalin. He knew Mayakovsky well. He bucked the Soviet system by largely refusing to comply with ideological straitjackets and the various demeaning formalities imposed on, and accepted by, most of his literary colleagues. His friends included the great poets Osip Mandelstam, Marina Tsvetayeva and Anna Akhmatova whom he refused to abandon when they suffered the persecution of the Stalinist authorities. He courageously appealed and pleaded on their behalf and supported them in other ways. Despite official ostracism, personal humiliation and many years in which his works were not published, he was regarded as one of the greatest Russian poets, his translations of Shakespeare and Goethe were hailed in artistic circles and his novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, created a world-wide furore.

Personally, Pasternak was modest and vain, simple and complicated, childlike but subtle, timid and brave. Andrei Voznesensky claimed he possessed "attraction force and a celestial unpracticalness" and described him as "an eternal adolescent". His childlike innocence aroused much comment. Akhmatova wrote:

> He is awarded a kind of age-long childhood,
> Such a profuseness and such keenness as
> The illustrious have, the earth all his, of which
> He makes all men the co-inheritors.

Lydia Chukovskaya, whose account of Anna Akhmatova's life is being published in the Soviet Union, said Pasternak exuded effervescent joy on the slightest pretext and continued each year to marvel at the four seasons.

This probably accounts for much of Pasternak's literary stand and subject matter: the primacy of nature and life, personal life, the individual. For he came to contemplate and confront one of the rawest tragedies of Soviet society observed so succinctly in his 1930 diaries by the great nature writer, Mikhail Prishvin: "Revolution is robbing man of a personal life".

The defence of life, the individual and human feelings is one of the main themes of the novel, *Doctor Zhivago*. Another, according to Olga Ivinskaya, was to show that the revolution was not a "cake with cream on top which it has always been made out to be as a matter of course".

"Man is born to live, not to prepare for life," says Zhivago. He goes on to reflect: " . . . revolutions are made by fanatical men of action with one-track minds, men who are narrow-minded to the point of genius. They overturn the old order in a few hours or days; the whole upheaval takes a few weeks or at most years, but for decades thereafter, for centuries, the spirit of narrowness which led to the upheaval is worshipped as holy."

Lara says of her former husband, Strelnikov: " . . . he handed himself over to something lofty but deadening and pitiless, which wouldn't spare him in the end." It didn't spare him, nor does it spare the Strelnikovs still around today. Pasternak was no fool and his courage was incredible. Such stuff had never

been submitted for publication in the USSR. No wonder the grey-faced ideologists howled for his hide.

Rejected in the USSR, the novel appeared in Italy in 1957. The Nobel Prize was announced in 1958. Pasternak was officially condemned as a traitor, forced to reject the Prize, expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers and threatened with expulsion from the country.

In the Cold War atmosphere the West hailed *Doctor Zhivago* as a masterpiece, the communist left throughout the world denounced it.

In "Two Views on Doctor Zhivago" (*Overland*, No 14, 1959), Katharine Susannah Prichard, no doubt inspired by her political loyalty to the communist cause and the Soviet Union, maintained that Pasternak cheeped like an insignificant quail and took refuge in personal grouches. The New Zealander, Maurice Shadbolt, likened Pasternak to "a voice calling to us across a landscape of time war-torn, sickened and soured, and smoky with cynicism and despair," but he went over the top somewhat to describe the book as towering "like a giant over most other novels, written in Russian or any other language, of this tremendous century".

Some of Pasternak's closest friends, admirers and fellow-dissidents were not so generous. Alexander Gladkov aired his disappointment in *Meetings with Pasternak* (London, 1977): "He writes magnificently about nature, art and the processes of composing verse . . . but it doesn't add up to a great novel". Nadezhda Mandelstam, Lydia Chukovskaya, Anna Akhmatova and Gladkov criticised what they considered to be contrived characters lacking vitality, extraordinary coincidences and the mixing up of the 1920s and 1930s. They contrasted Pasternak's alleged weaknesses as a novelist with his strengths as a poet.

Such critics read the book either in manuscript form or in copies smuggled from the West. Now, within the past year, *Doctor Zhivago* is being published in the USSR and ordinary citizens are reading it and arguing about it. Whatever their verdict, as Marietta Chudakova wrote in *Moscow News*, reading *Doctor Zhivago* for them "will be a step in the right direction".

The poet's son, Yevgeny Pasternak, who last December went to Stockholm to accept the Nobel medal on behalf of his dead father, has said that poetry in translation is "poetry at one remove". Nevertheless, Pasternak's poems move me more than most others do. Reading his lines one breathes the Russian air, paddles through rain and snow, soaks up the sadness and pain, glows with the joy, dodges tumbling autumn leaves, appreciates more the business of life.

Andrei Sinyavsky believed that Pasternak's faith in life was the moral foundation of his poetry: "Life to him is something unconditional, eternal, absolute, it is an all-pervasive element and the greatest miracle." Marina Tsvetayeva raved about his *My Sister Life* (1922) as being a downpour of light. Osip Mandelstam said: "To read the poems of Pasternak is to get one's throat clear, to fortify one's breathing, to renovate one's lungs; such poems must be a cure for tuberculosis".

In June, 1935, Pasternak represented Soviet writers in Paris at the International Congress of Writers in Defence of Culture. Australia's Nettie Palmer and Christina Stead also attended. His speech there revealed Pasternak's poetic stance: "Poetry will always remain that celebrated summit, loftier than all the Alps, which lies in the grass under our very feet, so that we only need to bend down to see it and pick it up from the ground . . ."

Pasternak lived and developed as a writer in a society which in the name of liberation and socialism became cruelly repressive and totalitarian. Individual freedoms were trampled and morality thrashed into the very ground. In this society Pasternak did not conform, did not cut the cloth of his writings to constantly praise the Soviet system and extol the virtues of Marxism-Leninism as most Soviet writers did. He tried to keep alive in his writings the human dignity and spirit which he cherished. In so doing he was lucky to keep his own life.

He did not measure up at all to the false standards of socialist realism. One great Soviet writer, Konstantin Siminov, not the most subservient or hidebound by

any means, is recorded as saying that Pasternak's poems were like parcels from which one could unwrap layer upon layer of paper in order to find a tiny trivial object. But the wrappings happened to be human feelings and emotions and the "trivial object" was life. As the famous Byelorussian writer Vasil Bykov said recently in an interview, Soviet society pronounced lack of tolerance as a virtue and "every vestige of humanity was regarded as a weakness".

In his biography of Pasternak Ronald Hingley claims the poet required "two decades of mingled sympathy and antipathy" following the 1917 revolution before he finally concluded that "sterile, blinkered fanatics" monopolised power in his country. Confronted with that realisation Pasternak sometimes kept his head down but he often did risky things: he demurred, refused to sign condemnations of others, maintained his friendships with dissident elements. He knew the dangers. According to Olga Ivinskaya, when he finally decided to hand Sergio d'Angelo the Zhivago manuscript to pass to the Milan publisher Feltrinelli, Pasternak commented, "You have invited me to take part in my own execution".

Yet Pasternak's life was not one of gloomy resignation: the joy of living always bubbled up. In 1955 he wrote: "My life in recent years has been so full, so clear, so absorbed in the work I love, that it has been an almost continuous festival of the soul for me".

Almost at the end of his life, while suffering public denunciation and the merciless attacks of Soviet power brokers, Boris Pasternak was still able to write:

> Even so, one step from the grave,
> I believe that cruelty, spite,
> The powers of darkness will in time
> Be crushed by the spirit of light.

John Sendy's latest book Ralph Gibson, An Extraordinary Communist *was published last year.*

JAMES McQUEEN

Hiroshi

There was really no good reason, I suppose, why I should have noticed him in the first place. After all, there were always plenty of Japanese in Chiangmai; not as many as in Bangkok, of course, where the sex tours concentrate on the two Patpong Roads, but enough. Anyway, in the end I *did* notice him one night in the Viang Ping market. Maybe it was the fact that, unlike most Japanese, he was a bit unkempt. His dark blue suit was dusty and crumpled, his tie was askew, his spiky black hair stuck out all over his head. Or maybe it was the earnest way he was bargaining with the woman at the stall over the pile of black Akha carry-bags with their bright red and white appliqué; or the way he stood on the kerb, afterwards, with his stack of bags in his arms, looking helpless and a little bewildered. Or maybe it was just that he was *alone*; you almost always see the Japanese in tight groups.

Whatever the reason, I was still watching him when the crowd of French tourists got off their bus and hurried along the footpath towards the booths with the fake Lacoste tee-shirts. One of them bumped him, and the pile of bags flew out of his grasp into the street, where it was promptly run over by a swerving *tuk-tuk*.

I knelt down beside him and helped him pick up the bags and dust them off. He smiled up at me very shyly and thanked me in quite fair English, his eyes enormously enlarged by his black-framed spectacles. He looked so flustered and lost that I took him over to the little kiosk and bought him a beer.

His name, he said, was Hiroshi Kimura, and he was in Thailand buying hill-tribe craft work for his importing business. He was staying at the Riverview guesthouse, almost next door to the Galare, so I ended up helping him carry the bags back down to Charoenprathet Road.

And, as far as I was concerned, that was that.

Except that afterwards I seemed to see him everywhere. And it wasn't just in the markets. I saw him at the zoo, in the City Park, out at the umbrella village of Bor Sang; at the flower market, in the Cowboy Bar, in the Suriwong book centre.

We were all staying, our crowd, at the Galare. We weren't a group, more a loose agglomeration of individuals who had drifted together out of inertia as much as inclination. It made things easier, sharing transport costs, excursions, and so on. There was the Trombone Player, and the CIA Lady, and Hugh the retired engineer, and Les, who came from Sydney and would never tell exactly what he did; there was Jan from Gympie, and Margaret from Honolulu, and Bert who had had two Filipino wives and thought he might try a Thai one next. Others came and went, drifted in for a day or two, then drifted on. But we were the basic core of the tribe. Some of us had been in Chiangmai for as long as three weeks. The CIA Lady, of course, had a permanent room and claimed to be an anthropologist working at the university. But she flinched at sudden noises and made a lot of mysterious phone calls to the US Embassy in Bangkok. Somsa the laundry man told me about those.

The first time I noticed Hiroshi—after our meeting in the Viang Ping—was one afternoon at the zoo. Jan and I and Les and the Trombone Player were eating noodles and meatballs at the open-air restaurant. The others had gone on up to Doi Sutep, but we'd been there before, and it was too hot anyway. We finished our noodles and ordered more beer. The Trombone Player—who was a short Samoan with an enormous bum—was telling us once more how he had once almost got a job with Ray Price, when I noticed Hiroshi lurking behind the bougainvillea. There he was, crumpled suit and all, creeping about on the far side of the shrubbery. I waved, but he disappeared, and I didn't see him again that day.

The next day it happened again at the elephant training camp, and the day after that at the Wararot market. I'm a bit slow, I suppose, and it was only then I made the connection. I realised that I only ever saw Hiroshi when Jan was in the company.

That made sense, of course. Jan was the only one of us really worth looking at. She was tall, with long straight blonde hair, and lovely olive-gold skin, deep blue eyes. Everything else was there, too, and all in the right places. The Trombone Player was trying to

get off with her, and so was Les, who was sixty and looked a little like a freshly dug potato. I wasn't sure that the CIA Lady wasn't interested, and I'd even thought of it myself, in a sort of lazy avuncular fashion. But it was really too hot.

Well, I couldn't help but notice Hiroshi's more or less constant if distant presence on our outings, and sooner or later the others began to notice, too, to give sly winks and not so subtle nudges. So I thought I might as well do the polite thing and invite him to join the party. I went round one evening to the Riverview, asked for him at the desk.

They sent a girl to get him, and I sat down on one of the cane chairs on the terrace. He came down a few minutes later, looking flustered and as crumpled as usual.

"Hullo," I said.

"Hurro."

"I came to invite you to have a meal with me, perhaps meet some of my friends."

"Friends?"

"Yes," I said. "I'm sure you know them by sight . . . you might as well meet them."

"Oh." He sat down and stared at me in confusion.

"Come on," I said. "We'll have a couple of drinks, then all go and find somewhere to eat . . ."

He came in the end, a little reluctantly.

And of course, it was an absolute bloody disaster.

We sat round one of the white tables on the Galare lawn, mosquito coils burning around us, that beautiful warm darkness closing down, the lights reflecting on the river. Perfect. But the only one who was nice to Hiro was Hugh, who engaged him in conversation about word-processing programs in Japanese. Les told stories about the Japanese bombing Darwin; Bert had read a book by Mishima and wanted full details of Japanese ritual suicide. The Trombone Player talked about Nipponese racism; Margaret, thin and wrinkled and red-headed, raved about the Japanese trade embargoes, the CIA Lady sneaked off to make a surreptitious telephone call, and Jan stared over Hiroshi's head into the middle distance.

As soon as it was politely possible I extricated Hiroshi and took him off for a quiet meal, just the two of us.

He was pretty deeply distressed, and to cheer him up I kept up a free flow of Mekong whiskey. After about the sixth glass, Hiroshi began to loosen up a bit.

"For seven years," he said, "I was working in my father's factory. He is very rich man, he make toilet bowls, very nice picture in the bottom, you know, flowers, and beautiful ladies and goldfish. I was accountant, I was good accountant, you know . . . But I must go in the dirty parts of the factory and all the smoke and pollution . . . And you know, Jim, I don't just like to work so hard, work all the time, and I just losed the interest in working in this business . . . So now I make my own business. Is very bad business," he said, looked at me mournfully. "I am very bad businessman, I make no profit for three years, almost all money gone now . . ."

I refilled his glass.

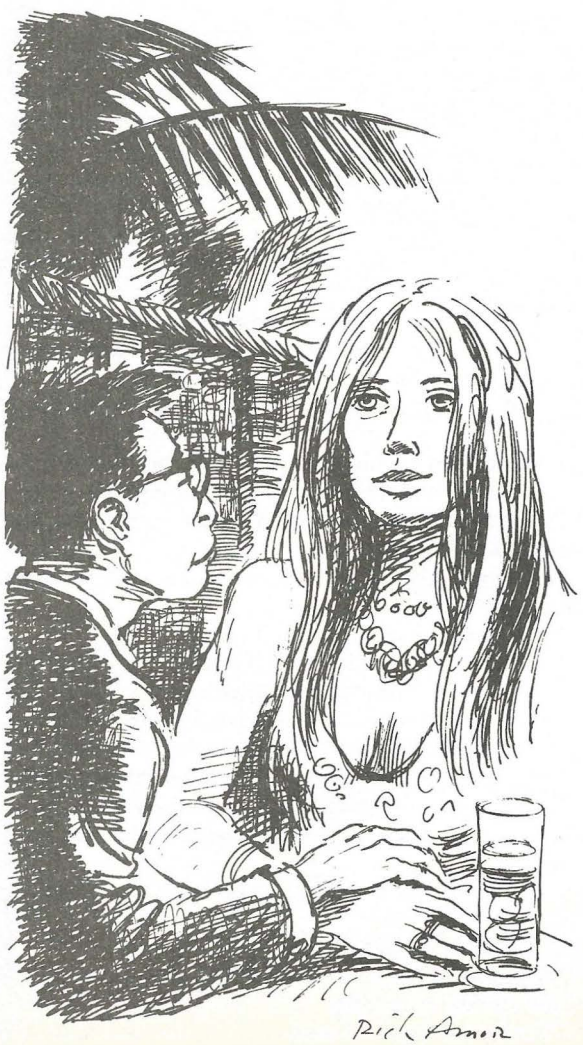
"I choosed this business," he said, "to get away from factory . . . my father he very angry at me, he want me come back to work in his factory. But I think I can never do that, I hate that dirt too much and that working too hard . . ."

"We'd better eat something," I said.

"You first person who ever be my friend," he said. "I am thirty years old, and no-one ever before my friend."

I called the waitress and ordered noodles.

"I tell you this, Jim," he said, "I am not enough sophisticated and sociable to live in big city . . . but I never live in country, so I have no country place to go back to . . . can't live in Tokyo no more, but



got no country place to go to . . ."

The noodles arrived.

"Eat up," I said, "you'll feel better with some food inside you."

"You my good friend," he said. "I don't want this food, I want to marry this lady . . ."

"You want to marry *Jan*?" I said. "You want to *marry* her? But you've hardly spoken to her."

"Not to matter," said Hiroshi. "She no want me anyway . . . too small Japanese man . . . no money . . . not enough sosh . . . sushub . . . sosable . . ."

I lifted his head out of the noodles and paid the waitress. He was really quite a little fellow, weighed hardly more than a kid, and I didn't have any trouble getting him back to the Riverview.

"How's your little Nipponese mate?" said Les next morning at breakfast, and sneered a little at me over the paw-paw.

"Incredible," I said. "You should see him break bricks with his bare hands."

"Eh?"

"He's some sort of martial arts expert," I said. "You know, karate, all that stuff?"

"Go on."

I left him looking a little thoughtful.

On Friday evening Bert insisted on singing in a *karaoke* bar. There was a bit of polite outcry from the Japanese tourists, but we were there in strength, and Bert had his go. In fact, he had several goes. The Trombone Player brought out a jew's harp, and Hugh contributed on a comb-and-paper kazoo. It was quite a performance. When it was all over, we retired to the Cowboy Bar and got merrily pissed. So on Saturday everyone was a bit subdued, and no-one surfaced till well after breakfast. I came down about eleven, drank some orange juice, ate an egg, contained it with an effort, and sank several cups of coffee. Les joined me and we drank a couple of beers. Then Jan and the CIA Lady appeared, and slowly the group began to reconstitute itself. But it was a slow day, and about two o'clock I retired to my room, lay down and dozed off.

What woke me a little before four o'clock was not a sound, but a smell. I lay there half asleep, my nostrils twitching. Well, I've seen two young and innocent coppers on a city footpath walk through a cloud of it that you could smell twenty metres away, and they never turned a hair; but once you've partaken of the foul stuff it's an aroma that never goes unrecognised. I rose up and went to investigate.

Poomrieng, the owner of the Galare, told me later how it came about. When I'd been last in Chiangmai two years before, the riverbank along the western side was quite wild—a tangle of small trees, shrubs, weeds, running down to colocasia, lotus, waterlilies in the shallows. On the east side the Ping River is contained by a high concrete wall, but our bank, on the Galare side, was a wilderness. Poomrieng in the past has just shaken his head over it. He'd tried, he said, to get the town council interested in improvements, but they had better things to do. But now, it seemed, the council had had a change of heart, and was encouraging all the landowners on the riverbank to tidy up their patches. Poomrieng, being a man of some civic virtue, was one of the first to act, and for the last day or so his gardeners had been at work cutting and pulling the weeds and shrubs from the bank, piling them for burning. And now, today, on our fateful Saturday, they had put a match to the lot. The smoke from their good fire was drifting and billowing, and a light wind from the east was swirling it gently over the terrace restaurant and the garden of the guesthouse. It was even penetrating into the upstairs rooms. And the smoke, of course, was redolent of that common weed of the north, *Cannabis sativa* . . .

The river bank must have been riddled with it.

Of course, by the time I got downstairs the fire had been going for half an hour or so, and the inhabitants of the restaurant and garden had been getting the benefit of it. I paused at the bottom of the stairs to view the scene. The Trombone Player and the CIA Lady were in the restaurant, drinking beer and getting the full goodness of the smoke as it surged up the bank. Les was sitting cross-legged on the bare patch of ground that sloped towards the river, a glazed look on his face. Behind them, in the garden, Jan and Margaret were lying supine on the grass, staring at the tops of the mango trees. Bert was listening, transfixed, to a tranny playing Led Zeppelin. Hugh was sitting slumped in a chair staring at a marigold in his hand.

I took one good long look, and went to summon Hiroshi.

I found him in his room packing his Akha bags in cartons, writing tallies on a sheet of paper.

"Come on," I said. "You'd better come and join the party."

He shook his head. "No, no, I am not sociable enough."

"This time," I said, "it won't matter at all . . ."

I dragged him back to the Galare, dusty suit and all, bought him beer, set him down on the grass beside Jan. She smiled at him a little glassily. I fed Margaret some peanuts. She liked them. I began to manoeuvre her towards the table where Hugh sat staring at his marigold. I picked another one from the garden, gave it to Margaret. I left them both staring at their flowers, smiling.

Hiro was sitting beside the magnificent Jan, looking a little forlorn.

"Pick up her hand," I said.

He picked it up.

She smiled at us both.

"Stroke her hand," I said.

He started to stroke her hand, and she kept on smiling.

"Great work," I said. "Go for it . . ."

By this time all that smoke was starting to make me feel decidedly odd, and I thought I might as well enjoy it before someone called the fire brigade. So I went and picked another marigold, sat down with Hugh and Margaret. For a while I watched Hiroshi stroking Jan's hand. Then the marigold got the better of me, and when I looked again a little later I couldn't see them . . .

Like all good things, our bonfire came eventually to an end. The smoke slowly dispersed, and the breeze from the river was deliciously cool. I think I must have gone to sleep then, because the next thing I remember it was getting dark and Poomrieng was standing over me, smiling. His eyes looked bloodshot.

"*Ganja*," he said, and went off, still smiling.

Slowly, the group came to life again. By the time it was dark we were gathered, nearly all of us, in the restaurant. The night was marvellously cool, and the lights of the city sparkled and danced on the black river. Everyone was there except Jan. And, of course, Hiroshi. It was more than an hour before Jan came down the stairs. She had showered and changed and she looked quite respectable, compared to the rest of us. But her eyes were a little bloodshot, still.

"Where is he?" I said, as she sat down in the empty chair beside me.

"He's gone home," she said. "To the Riverview."

"He all right?"

She nodded. "He asked me to marry him."

"What did you say?"

"No."

"But nicely?"

She smiled at me. "Quite nicely."

Hiroshi came around the next morning, early. Sitting on the end of my bed, he looked sad; but rather happily sad, if you know what I mean.

"She has gone," he said.

"Gone?" I felt happy, relaxed, at ease with the world. The first cigarette tasted wonderful. "Gone where?"

"Kathmandu," he said. "She has packed, taken early flight to Bangkok, then she fly Kathmandu." He took off his glasses, rubbed his eyes. "She has left note for me."

"Ah . . ."

"I have decided," he said, putting his glasses back on, "I have decided to love only this one woman in my heart all my life . . . she will always be my most important person . . ."

"Well," I said, "all this deserves some sort of celebration, or wake, or something. What do you think?"

"Whatever you wish," he said. "You my good friend."

I got out of bed. "Just wait till I have a shower, we'll see if we can stir something up . . ."

We did manage to stir something, Hiroshi and me and Les and the Trombone Player. In fact we had quite a good day, and ended it only moderately pissed. And the others were as nice as pie to Hiroshi when we got back to the Galare in the evening. Even the CIA Lady smiled at him. It was almost as if he'd passed some sort of test.

When I went to bed Hiroshi was still down below, drinking beer, and the CIA Lady, with a slightly hungry look on her face, was talking to him very earnestly; about anthropology, no doubt, and possibly about other things too.

And I thought, well, it's unreasonable to carry constancy too far. After all, Kathmandu is a long way from Chiangmai . . .

BRIAN MATTHEWS

Pretty Dulcie Markham and the St Kilda Realists: Some literary byways and digressions

Spoken at the Premier's Literary Awards Dinner, Melbourne, 1989

Mr Premier, Mrs Cain, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: diligently reading the other day, as is my custom, an essay in contemporary literary criticism, I came across this sentence: "The colonial culture has been phagocytised by the mother country." That's what it said: "The colonial culture has been phagocytised by the mother country." You see my immediate problem. I knew at once, as all of you do, that a phagocyte is a leucocyte which under certain specific conditions has the power of absorbing and destroying pathogenic microbes by a process of intracellular digestion. That goes without saying, of course. What worried me was the sound of it. And being among other things what P. P. McGuinness calls a literary academic—a phrase he uses in the same way as you might say "This dog has the mange" or "The Black Plague has returned"—it added to my worries, as I contemplated my invitation to be here tonight, about what was expected of me. Literary criticism at its best is an honourable and important activity but, like many another human activity, there are places to do it and places not to do it. *That* can't be what they want me to come back and do, I thought, uneasily. But then, all was clear, as I recalled my brief, though in the eyes of the organisers overlong, incumbency of this rostrum last year. I was telling you about my father walking out of the Palais Pictures because they wouldn't let him smoke. Remember? It all got out of hand a bit as I recall, but you must remember . . . They want me to continue *that* story, I realised. I haven't checked with anyone, but . . . I suppose it's all right . . .?

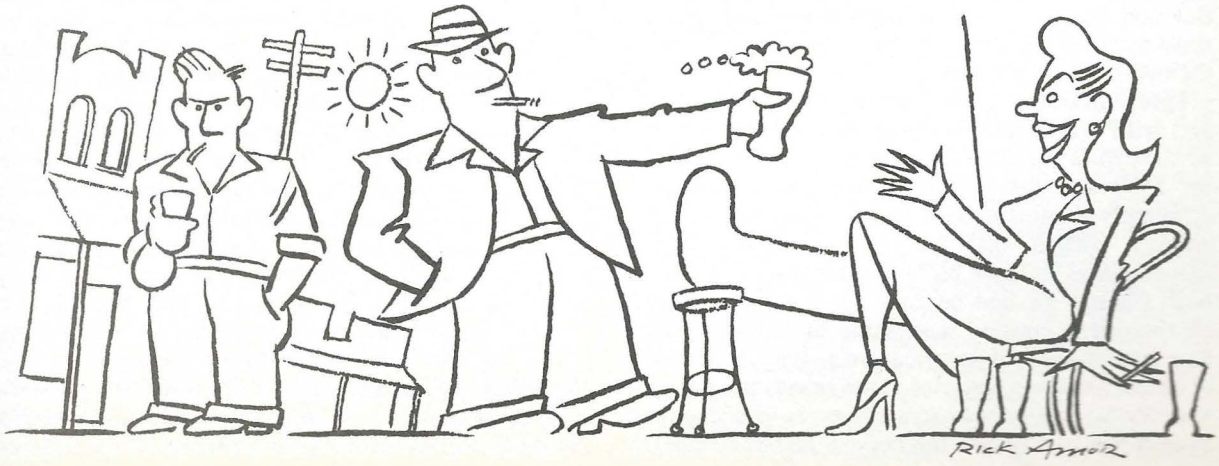
Fifty years ago, almost exactly, Australia found itself at war with Hitler's Germany and my family, like most others, quite soon farewelled many of its members—some of them forever. My father disappeared from my sight, inexplicably to me of course, from sometime in 1941 until about the middle of 1945, though he came home once on leave, but so wordless, lean and yellow-looking that I hardly recognised him. When he came back for good, scarcely knowing me and I scarcely knowing him, he set out on several personal campaigns of family rehabilitation. One of these was to build us a house somewhere and get us, and especially me, out of St Kilda. This was because, on his return from wartime violence, he was appalled at the violence of peacetime in which I, as an eight-year-old boy was taking a vigorous interest. It was a story of the streets and of their life, their disorders; the talking and meeting, the brawling and shouting. Our house was in a street which struggled for respectability but was always backsliding. But our tiny yards shouldered up against the houses in Fawkner Street—and Fawkner Street in those days had no doubt whatsoever where it stood in relation to respectability. It stood nowhere.

In Fawkner Street lived "Pretty Dulcie" Markham, just behind our place. She was a famous gangster's woman who, about this time, actually got married in her house in Fawkner Street to Leonard "Redda" Lewis, for whom the day was doubly significant: it was his wedding day but it was also the last of the seven days that the police had given him to get out of St Kilda. The best man was Lesley "Butcher" Goodwin who, as he assured the police, was in charge of the eighteen and there'd be no blues. The bride was attended by numbers of uniformed and plain clothes policemen who, being modest and retiring, remained in their cars outside and thoughtfully blocked off both ends of the road; for the wedding ceremony she wore a white cast on one leg having been shot in the hip a few months earlier in a melee which left an ex-boxer and practising hood dead and his brother injured. "Any qualms about being married in the very room where a man was shot dead?" the *Truth* reporter asked. Not a one, said the bride. Pretty Dulcie did not spend much time or effort on what are sometimes called the niceties. Walking out behind her one day from the ladies' toilet of the Middle Park Hotel, one of my innumerable aunts, not knowing for the moment who she was dealing with, noticed that Dulcie's dress was accidentally hooked up at the back, so my aunt helpfully flicked the offending bit down for her, whereupon, before a word of explanation could be

offered, Pretty Dulcie turned and intimated her gratitude by saying: "You lay a finger on me again, and I'll have the boys break your arms". Well, that's roughly what she said—interspersed at appropriate points with copulatory and other references; and recommendations difficult to carry out even if my aunt had had the slightest idea what they meant. Following the shooting, Dulcie would sit outside the Prince Charles pub on the corner of Grey and Fawkner Streets—not a salubrious place to sit in those days—with her broken leg propped on a stool and her admirers ferrying beers out to her. All unbeknownst to her, as they say in the stories, she was being observed: by me and one Francis O'Reilly, a street-wise urchin whose world-weary air of knowingness about gangland mores and aberrant sexuality was equalled only by the unctuous and public piety with which he discharged his duties as Senior Altar Boy at the Sacred Heart Church in Grey Street. Indeed, it was over our regular swig of altar wine in the Sacristy one morning after the priest had left that O'Reilly confided to me his conviction that the gunman would return to finish the job. Hence our vigil opposite the pub—not a successful one as it turned out, because our elaborate and studied show of uninterested loitering was so obvious that Dulcie got wind of it and told us to—and I quote—*Piss off!* unquote.

The quickest way from the middle of Fawkner Street to the middle of our street was to sprint along the drain that intersected both streets and passed beneath each by means of a tunnel. This drain ran right alongside our house—indeed, the wall of our house mostly helped but occasionally failed to contain it. Many of the Fawkner Street denizens chose this expeditious method and they could be heard clattering over our front fence as they emerged from the darkness of the midnight drain on their inexplicable and very speedy errands. One such exodus at about two o'clock on a winter's morning some time in 1945 was apparently expected and eagerly awaited because it was greeted with what the newspapers called a hail of bullets which took large chunks out of the front of our house and ten years off my Grandmother's life. In the ensuing gun-battle, Mrs Rosie Saperera's potted flowers were shot off her front verandah like whisky bottles at the back of the bar in a western movie. My Grandmother, who could never get her head round a name like Saperera and always referred to her as Rosie-across-the-road, whisked her away from her shattered eyrie the following morning and installed her in our kitchen where Mrs Saperera had loud, continuous and justified hysterics, my Irish grandmother keened (which is a poetic word for a very loud noise), a visiting neighbour's baby screamed, my mother made endless pots of tea and my newly returned father walked up and down smoking and saying *Christ Almighty* and *It was quieter in bloody New Guinea.* I have to say with as much regret now as I felt then that, as a healthy eight year old, I slept through the whole catastrophe. The details and lineaments, so to speak, of that famous night quickly spread among the community of both streets. My Grandmother, as always, played no small part in this dissemination. Among her many connections were derelicts, priests (frocked and defrocked), the Bottle-O (to whom she surrendered regularly empty Purple Para Port bottles), Starting Price Bookies and many other district luminaries. I once went with the youngest of my aunts while she placed my Grandmother's bets at the Milk Bar, whose proprietor, Mr Rorke, was the nearest SP. My Grandmother always wagered 2 shillings and her bets went like this: threepence each way Mighty Prince, if any each way Matador if any each way Savoy's Pride if any . . . prompting old Rorke to remark one particularly bad day to my aunt: "Y'mother gets a bloody good run out of two bob . . ." Later in the afternoon, he would deliver the loot, *if any*, in return for news of all and sundry.

These were the sorts of unsuitable experiences from which my old man ought to extricate his small son. One of the things he did to distract me was to take me to my first ever Grand Final. This was extremely



memorable for me but it didn't accomplish what he'd hoped because the Grand Final of 1945, as many of you know, has gone down in history as "The Fighting Final"—an enormous public brawl between Carlton and what used to be known as South Melbourne, which did not show either the skills or the sportsmanship of the game in the way my father had envisaged, though it excited me beyond endurance and I hardly slept for a week recalling its stirring scenes. If that was footy, I decided, I wanted to be in it. More successfully a few years later, he took me to Don Bradman's testimonial game at the MCG. This too, however, was a nightmare for my father because he wanted me to see a Bradman century yet he didn't want me to expect it. As we walked towards the ground he kept saying "He doesn't make a hundred every time, y'know" and "You can't expect miracles—he's not the batsman he used to be" and "We might see him get a really good thirty or so", none of which dinted my certainty that I was about to see the great man triumph as always. Well, again as many of you know, Bradman swept stylishly into the nineties while the crowd became more and more tense. My old man was beside himself, smoking endlessly and telling me that "even if Bradman got out now it wouldn't matter, we've seen a great innings" and subverting that assurance with a look of extreme anxiety. Within a few runs of his hundred, Bradman mis-hit: the ball ballooned out over mid-off where Colin McCool positioned himself under it for the catch and a long, distraught gasp gusted out like a sad breeze from the stands and terraces and my old man grabbed me so hard by the arm that it hurt and said, "Christ, if he catches it they'll lynch him" and McCool expertly dropped the ball and so I saw Don Bradman make a hundred. Eventually, my father would single-handledly build the house right next to the Elster Canal in East Brighton that would become our family home. But I did most of my growing up within that small perimeter of streets—the exotic, sleazy, exciting, violent yet somehow endearing world of 1940s St Kilda, with the flat, treacherous waters of Port Phillip Bay and Luna Park's mad laugh at one end; and the sinister, tawdry glitter of Fitzroy Street at the other: the two faces of St Kilda.

I grew up among a constant mix of Australian, Scots and Irish voices and infusions of a whole range of accents from the Jewish community amongst whom we lived and had many friends. But my father's diffidently dominant style ensured that we were all entirely certain that the cosmopolitan was as Australian as the lyre birds and the eucalypts in the bush (though he had no time for the Poms, whom he thought it entirely reasonable to dislike, and he hated the invasion of Americanisms). It never occurred to me to wonder about, let alone reject, the polyglot accents; the sad, boozey reminiscences of distant and forever lost homelands; the ragged, half-remembered songs of this clan or that city. All of that merged with, was as much a part of normal life as, kicking a footy made of old socks or newspapers in the street; seeing the lady next door come home waving her handbag in triumph from the races where Bernborough, the punter's friend, had won again; snooping to learn new lurid details about the endless warring of the gangs; going for the first time in my life to the Dandenongs and hearing kookaburras and walking in the huge, vocal silences of Sherbrooke Forest . . . We're all nostalgic for our own particular equivalents of that time because it was then that we came closest to having what some literary critics call a unified sensibility: life seemed one big and exciting organic flow and not, as it so soon revealed itself to be, a series of embattled, hard-won or crumbling positions.

Of course, one emerged from such a cocoon a little wide-eyed. I was deeply shocked when I grew older, for example, to find that my accent was regarded as both raw and uncouth in some if not many circles. This took a long time to be borne in upon me, but I was getting more than an inkling of it after two years as a schoolteacher and the seal was set on my insight during a small episode on my first ever visit to London. I was with a mate of mine one evening trying to find Covent Garden theatre. We were hopelessly lost in a maze of small, empty streets when, at last, a solitary figure turned the corner and came towards us. "Excuse me," I said, "I wonder if you could tell us how to get to Covent Garden theatre please." "Why, of course," said the obliging fellow plummily. "Look, you go down heah, turn to the raight, then lairft, then straight ahaird and you cawn't miss it, you seeah." I thanked him and we started to move. "By the waigh, wheah are you frorm?" he asked. "Australia", I said. And he said: "Good God, I know thairt. What part?"

But a greater and much more significant shock to me was the discovery that those experiences of working-class St Kilda, along with the many other, very different Australian experiences of people I met and befriended as the years passed, were rejected by many in the society and especially in the working environment around me: for these people, English villages, priories, meadows, moors, counties and country houses, and to a lesser but growing extent supposedly resonant names like Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, Grand Rapids Colorado, Detroit, the Bronx, the State Line, Californ-eye-A etc. were the familiar, and above all, the artistically acceptable geography. If you mentioned 47th Street in a story you could assume instant comprehension; if you referred to the Elster Canal you were being ludicrous. It was another way in which I was being wide-eyed, of course: my father's straight down the line idealism did not prepare me to deal with cynical, anglophile teachers and smart-arse anglophile academics. But one

of the reasons I made a personal decision to direct my professional attention predominantly towards studying, teaching and writing my own culture was a growing impatience with the way so many of my colleagues assumed, without a tremor of examination, that the local—our place—was inappropriate for serious art and serious critical attention. In large black letters, I printed this quotation from Margaret Atwood's great book, *Survival*, and tacked it to my wall:

> What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror, it is also a map, a geography of the mind . . . We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here because here is where we live. For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive.

This reminder was extremely pertinent some years ago, but, despite our huge advances in the formation and acceptance of a literary culture—and one sign of that is that we are here tonight to honour our writers—it remains salutary. It's not difficult to identify rejections of our own Australian experience occurring almost routinely: appointments to university chairs of literature, for example, which so persistently and overwhelmingly disfavour Australian born and Australianist scholars; in the field of Art, there is the subversion of the Dobell Bequest; and there are the recurrent attacks, always unencumbered by anything so tiresome as evidence, on our writers, on the relevance and importance of their subject matter; on Australian literature as a phenomenon; on our more daring local publishers; and, inevitably, on academics involved with it all either as teachers, critics or reviewers. The most recent eruption of this sort occurred a few months ago in the *Australian*—an argument so silly that it was almost impossible to reply to cogently, though several respondents managed very well; and a short while ago, in the second issue of the *Independent*, where P. P. McGuinness, in an essay of monumental incoherence, managed the difficult feat of blaming writers, our literature and literary academics for quite a lot of evils without ever naming a writer, a text or a critic. Routinely also, he condemned the whole spectrum of tertiary literature departments as second-rate with the same magisterial assumption that *his* assertion was all that was required to carry the day on that one; and he returns often to this attack, always in the form of unsupported assertion, in his column in the *Australian*.

Such rejection of our common, grassroots Australian experience—as it is interpreted by our writers and discussed in its literary manifestations by intellectuals, teachers, critics and readers—is the cultural equivalent of the worst of the developers and reconstructors: it is a re-echoing of Le Corbusier's cry, "We must kill the street", where for "street" we read the rich and intricate substratum of past and contemporary *Australian* experience, black, white and ethnic, on which our currently burgeoning literature draws. It is the mentality that drives people out of ever more glassy cities and pushes freeways through thriving, though perhaps scruffy, neighbourhoods; the mentality that leaves a city on a quiet Sunday afternoon whispering only with the languour of abandoned and imperceptibly shifting cranes—grotesque and monstrous weathercocks; the mentality for which neither literature nor the experience it deals with will ever be important unless expressible as economic outcome.

Well, in this symbolic proposition, I'm for the street, which is why I began this talk in the streets, so to speak. Literature, resisting directives from bureaucrats and constraints from interested parties of one kind and another, will always stand up and be counted for the teeming and disorder of the streets: " 'The ways of the Creator are not our ways,' " Mr Deasy tells Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. " 'All history,' " he says, " 'moves towards one goal, the manifestation of God.' Stephen jerked his thumb towards the window, saying: 'That is God.' 'What?' Mr Deasy asked. 'A shout in the street,' Stephen answered."

Finally, we might want to ask, should at least wonder, why attacks on writers and critics and literary academics and intellectuals are so virulent and so recurrent in this country. Well, there are obviously a lot of related answers to that, but one of them, one of the answers, always reminds me of the conclusion of Orwell's great defence of P. G. Wodehouse when Wodehouse was being attacked as a traitor by Cassandra, among others:

> Cassandra's articles in the *Daily Mirror* [says Orwell] were good examples of the demagogic propaganda flourishing at that time. In this atmosphere, Wodehouse made an ideal whipping-boy. For it was generally felt that the rich were treacherous and Wodehouse—as Cassandra vigorously pointed out in his broadcast—was a rich man. But he was the kind of rich man who could be attacked with impunity and without risking any damage to the structure of society. To denounce Wodehouse was not like denouncing, say, Beaverbrook. A mere novelist, however large his earnings may happen to be, is not *of* the possessing class. Even if his income touches £50,000 a year he has only the outward semblance of a millionaire. He is a lucky outsider who has fluked into a fortune—usually a very temporary fortune—like the winner of the Calcutta Derby Sweep. Consequently, Wodehouse's indiscretion gave a good propaganda

opening. It was a chance to "expose" a wealthy parasite without drawing attention to the parasites who really mattered.

Or, to end with a no doubt phagocytised, postmodernist sidestep: as P. G. Wodehouse's own Gussie Fink-Nottle said, with only obscure relevance but unanswerable assurance:

> There are stones in books and sermons in running brooks, or rather the other way round and there you have it in a nutshell.

After laboriously looking up Ulysses *for the "shout in the street" passage, I found, more or less by accident, Marshall Berman's reference to it, linked with Le Corbusier, in* All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity *(pp. 312-3 and 317) so I gratefully adapted it to my own purpose. The experience of seeing the unattended cranes slowly shifting in the breeze was related to me by my friend Hugh McGivern.*

Brian Matthews' most recent book is Quickening and Other Stories *(McPhee Gribble). His biography of Louisa Lawson,* Louisa *(McPhee Gribble), won the Victorian Premier's Award for non-fiction in 1988 and other major awards. Brian Matthews teaches English at Flinders University.*

TWO POEMS BY LAURIE DUGGAN

The Bishop

The bishop's lawn rusts with poison.
For him it's autumn on demand;
for the rest of us the leaves won't drop
for prayer or money. Dewy decanters
in living rooms are their own season;
weeds are condemned for lilies or
"natives" for which the natives must die,
but, for the bishop, god inheres
in a defoliant. Surrounding him
and us, subterranean pipes suck
on wastes with indifference; bacteria
disintegrates rotten birds; but the bishop
is purple and spotless, as though delivered
in humus from a nursery.

Minutes To Midnight

Each tick of the clock represents
a moment of indifference,
but indifference is preferable to torture.
It's better for birds to make black crosses
on the dining table than for words
to be broken off and rubbed into the carpet.
Who expects the clouds to reply in kind
or any loving anthropomorphism?
The words meanwhile are back, shuffling
their torn shapes across the surface
amid ink stains and picture postcards
showing great art works in washed-out colour;
it's breakfast, re-heated for sentimental
revolutionaries,
and the blackboard, its rubbed out shapes
are histories, may have been yours.

INDIRECTION

The urger at the ringside
Has no doubt
The top pug's guide
Is Every Blow Must Count.

Great fighters know
The punches that stun air
Make their unconscious
Contribution elsewhere.

BARRY DONLON

PETTY SESSIONS

From high walls of the court house corridor
Dead Burburys and Bisdees look down
on mottled lino and a kid in wet sneakers,
eighteen and on the dole, who doesn't bother
with the tiny democratic heater sharing
its useless efforts on a June morning.

$60 and one demerit point,
at twenty bucks a cheque.
"I know I done a silly thing",
swerved over the white line
to crush a milk carton . . .
"M'lord" instead of "Your Worship".

The influence of telly? No, no Rumpoles
in this bailiwick. More likely it's
the generations of deference brought back
to the mind and forelock. Thick blood tugs
hard on this frosty plateau, and those framed
visages of men who know their place

still know their places, "Woodbury House",
"Tedworth" and "Lemon Springs", and know
more than the city lawyers. The beak's
not local, though. Six weeks to pay.
Swerved over the line, but safely back in place
soon enough, no danger to others.

No danger of anything spreading
like gorse or rabbits, no threat,
soon back in place, the sneakers soon
back on the midday frost and no harm done;
at least no greater harm than when
his ancestors were flogged or dobbed to survive,

or when the only dole his grandfather knew
was at a Bisdee's kitchen door
or on a Burbury's far paddock
at midnight with a quick knife.
The portraits do not smile, even to know
that milk cartons are less likely to be crushed.

TIM THORNE

i am nebuchadnezzar

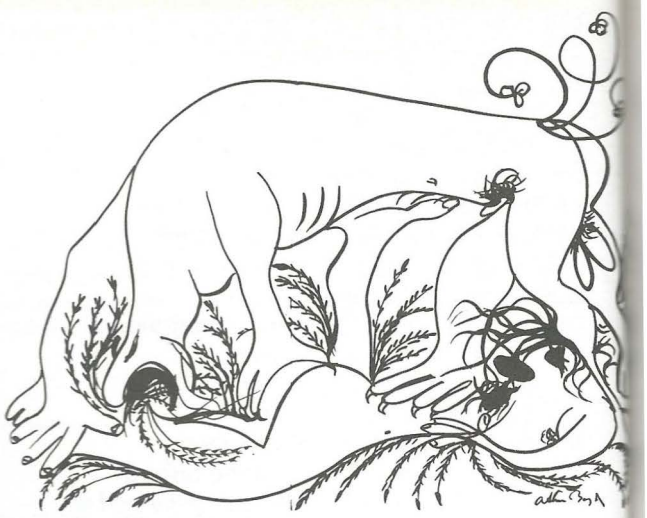
(from the paintings by arthur boyd)
for sonny booth

i am nebuchadnezzar,
my balls are bound tight with white wire.
i am caught in extremis,
falling,
paying the price for the poor,
my body pays with fire.
for i am nebuchadnezzar, the koori king of fitzroy
the clouds scud
and the subtle landscape of trees emanate from me
for i'm the king of what's loud.

i am nebuchadnezzar and i am the king of fitzroy,
my skin is black, my heart is strong,
you see my gardens there in gertrude st.
beneath the high rise flats,
that's my babylon,
the land that long i've fought for
on behalf of all my tribe,
for this is my country and i am its king
whose balls are caught taut with white wire,
who sees blind on a starry night my gardens
whose peace is kept by police from the city of tyre.

for i am nebuchadnezzar,
aflame i fall through fitzroy skies
(my diamond studded haven)
afire i fall into gertrude st.
my fingernails become claws
and my hair to feathers forms.

for i am nebuchadnezzar
whose balls are still caught in the fire,
who goes to the brascoe for a piss
and talks to the gold
and finds a hand graffiti-ing strange words,
'mene, mene, tekel upharsin'—
almost an indecipherable scrawl
etched lightly on the dunny's wall.
and on a saturday night in my kingdom of fitzroy,
wet with the dew of heaven,
i prowl with the lions through my parks,
grab lionel, he laughs,
he loves to congregate with lions—
such is lionel's spell.



for i am nebuchadnezzar
doing my time in the cells,
seven years in exile smoking lebanese gold
in that putrifying hell.
i have moved among the beasts,
stalked with them behind the forests of the bars
and on the starlit nights
have dwelt on savage dreams
while listening for murmurs from my beloved babylon.

for i am nebuchadnezzar,
my heart has been stalled
by the fury of the streets of fitzroy,
the police are out with their batons
and my brothers have been felled in the gutters,
their black skulls are bleeding
the same blood that's on the lions' claws.

but i am nebuchadnezzar,
bastardry and beauty surround me
though i am still the king.
i dream a fitzroy tree
whose roots are deep in gertrude st.,
whose shadow gives shelter to the beasts of the field
and the fowls of heaven find home along with my kin
for its leaves are as broad as the sun.
for i am nebuchadnezzar, still the king of fitzroy,
still afire and falling
still blind on a starry night,
still dreaming the gardens of my beloved babylon.

shelton lea

SEX DRUGS & POLITICS

There's no shortage of sex & drugs
on this city building site

a naked woman hangs silently
in a site shed & flutters
like a worker's pulse
as an air-conditioner drones on
& on
& on
the only thing permanently fixed
is her smile
& nipples that never soften

& further on you'll hear
the politics both known
& understood
it's too hot mate
fair dinkum i need an RDO
we should pull the pin
when it hits 34°

& on the point of safety

a morning patrol is sent each day
to survey fence lines for syringes
discarded by uncaring pricks
while workers discuss
the demise of custom & practice
that inclement weather clause
the bosses just won't buy
& talk about who
is sticking it into
who.

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

SINGLE FRAMES

Dawn, Dampier
Under the satin skin of light
the bay lies now; the islands glow
like planets in a fallen sky,
while the dark ships retain the night.

Winter
Bone-beauty of a tree, when the birds flare
sudden as a trumpet note and leave it bare,
espaliered against the glassy air.

Harbour Reflections
Water and sunlight have softened, transmuted
the perpendicular concrete ranges,
dissolved the strict calculations of engineers
and their steel girders,
melted the bright indifference of windows.
All's now fragmented,
floating like dreaming
eyes in their shallow sockets of water.

Night
The tree that leaned out
from the cliff seeking sunlight
has caught the old moon.

Seashore
Beyond the windbreak of she-oaks no walls, no
word of walls.
Endlessly the foam-fingered water heaves and falls.
Sleek ribbed beasts are ferrying sunlight to the
shore.
Mild continuous roaring brings distance close to
the ear.

Birdbath
Sparrows are crowding the birdbath. The water
spurts
like a rocket fire of silver. The small wings beating
present a basinful of beating hearts
feathered against the storm of their creating.

Honeyeater
Beyond yellow plumage
and scarlet corolla,
as the curved needle beak
tunnels for nectar
deep in the flower,
is the strict beauty
of perfect precision:
God's finger touching
the finger of Adam.

AMY WITTING

THE BROTHERHOOD

corruptio optimi pessima

The brotherhood will bind you from the start,
From your first swearing-in.
It will set its seal upon your heart
And wink at your first sin.

A bottle of Johnnie Walker will begin
To instruct you in your part,
And a trip upstairs, in payment, to some thin
Experienced tart . . .

And later, if you're lucky, there'll be more,
When you're properly on the take
—You'll learn how, when, and where to score,
And the moves to make.

And the brotherhood will watch you like a snake,
Alert for any flaw:
The twitch of conscience, the self-doubts that shake
All corporate law.

The code of silence, a thick smog, will creep
Across your day;
A secret oath henceforth you'll need to keep
And a public one betray.

For what you see, and what you do and say
Must sink so deep
That the force will be with you, even when miles away,
Even in sleep.

You'll walk in a mirror-world where much that seems
Wrong elsewhere is reversed:
The crooked commended, truth but the stuff of dreams,
And honesty *cursed* . . .

BRUCE DAWE

INJUNCTION

Town Hall was disgusted
that against you I'd held
no audible concern. "Shake," said
the mayor whose word was law, "her
Heidelberg out!" Your crime, he'd
insisted, was a crime of air—shape-
shifting. "So let
the punishment fit: pink
her waist, do her haber-
dashery's worst!" And "yes," I'd
unsuspectingly answered, "I can see them down there
assuming shapes, getting ready
to rise—Heidelbergs all, the worst
I've seen."
But howling
in a high or low house is howling
just the same, & did it
really matter?—was what I'd told
Town Hall & suggested that perhaps we were too sleepless
in our own kind, & for answer came
further conjunction: "Do
worse!" So then my bouncing ball high
in your adorned-as-though-for-spring tree (if that
was what it was) that wouldn't therein be hung
as the fruit thereof—was the worst
I could do.
"Hardly haber-
dashery's worst," was the mayor's at-
his-wit's-end answer to this second
miserable failure who was now convinced that I'd been
insufficiently suckled: "Nothing less than an immediate
resignation will appease our disgust!"

PHILIP HAMMIAL

THE HAND

Is this a hand I carry
floating and brushing my memory?

Something is tapping at my temples
something to last perhaps
something to mourn even.

Maybe
from within desert dunes,
your hand
will sprout blades
of grass
and will hold the brilliant silk scarves
that cover my gaze.

And yet
and yet
something is tapping at my temples
something to last perhaps
something to mourn even.

MIREILLE EID

HEAT WAVE

It was a daybreak sky, the tide out
and the sea barely moving under the pale
glaze of mauve and lemony-rose at its surface

and the shadow of the lighthouse reaching far
out over the rock shelf and the flat
dimness of the water in the shape of a giant bell

only this was midnight, and the low moon
had cast it. Chimes, clicks and twitches poured
out of those dry fountains, the clumps of marram
grass

as beetles, a bird or two, even a spun dragonfly
lifting in a black whir across the moon like a witch
on a broomstick, behaved as if it was broad day.

We saw lightning flicker out at sea, but no smell
of rain came, and it was too hot for sleeping indoors,
we said, almost too hot and too bright to sleep
at all.

BEVERLEY FARMER

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

I stand on duty at the window,
quartering the valley, alert for strangers
from rougher places, noting that the dog next door
is stealing our silences, checking the ECT wires
which link the tonsured heads of our
depressed Council trees.

There has been little to report: an orange
cat has slid by, culpably cool;
the Silver-Eyes giggle inside the hedge
refusing to take this seriously;
the houses on the further slope
shift deeper into shade, wincing off-white
under my hard eye.

But I may have stood this watch too long.
The world beyond the glass, its bulk and depth,
is shifting to a flatness. The criminal eye
is stealing the objects of its gaze—
damp trees, lone walkers, a slate and silver sky
are now pictures stashed within the Cartesian
mind.
I have agreed to assist the police
with their enquiries.

KEVIN MURRAY

TWO POEMS BY ANDREW TAYLOR

Not The Canteen

The secretary is adamant—
there is no staff canteen.
It was abolished four years ago
due to funding cuts.

Where was it then he had lunch today
with the Acting Deputy Head of Finance's
last minute replacement?
It had food, stainless steel,

mediocre cheap wine. If it wasn't
a canteen it certainly wasn't
Rizzini's. His secretary
shakes her head. She's heard it

from every new Chairman:
the lunch, the chummy talk,
everyone aware of them, etc.
Including the winey announcement

at 3.15, "I had lunch today
with . . ." while her pen scratches
an obscure part of her hairdo.
"It was not the canteen," she scrawls

in confidential shorthand
"but he might have had lunch with the Acting
etcetera's etcetera." "It was,"
he insists, very late at night

to his wife, who's trying to sleep,
"it was obviously a canteen.
I can recall distinctly
the food. It wasn't very good."

The Bus Station

Outside the bus station it's snowing hard
and nearly dark. Ridges of dirty snow
are piled under the overhanging eaves
where the buses steam. For half an hour
the streetlights have been struggling with the
gloom.

Inside there's almost nobody around.
The kiosk's shut. A man dozes in fatty folds
behind the ticket counter. But we
are in an annex, a cupboard tucked behind
the baggage office and entirely lined
with video games. They whine and purr,
their orange and green glare our only light.
The room smells of wet dogs and old fast food.

Except for us and the machines there's no-one
here.
He pulls a slab of banknotes from his coat
and pushes them at me. "Take them!
Take them and keep them out of sight."
The wad's nearly as thick as my hand's broad.
I watch the expression flickering on his face—
elation, or panic, maybe even boredom—
as he thrusts the banknotes at me, and I take them.

motoring th post-modernist way

scene of th accident still-life revolving light tragedy
common as dirt
picking up th pieces on a smooth buttressed
freeway where it seems
no-one could get hurt
where driverless cars pick up academics who
sneer
that poets like hitch-hikers are illegal here
in this endless discussion of style
T-bar auto trans alloy wheels velour trim V 6
motor electric windows
power steer
reputations jockeyed only to find that gain's
illusory
at th traffic lights where time ends & it all becomes
clear
that nineteen billion monkeys could write all of
australian literature
in one year
in a room where everyone's wearing black driving
stack backs & hatch backs
& hanging curtains on th rear-vision mirrors don't
look back
th price of making it new
is to dismiss th heart as a spare part transplant
pump
where th only crime of conscience is to be plump
& th hottest property is cool
where people don't make scenes they have them
& nobody's love's fool
& they're cutting th oxymoron out of th wreckage
with an oxy torch
with labels for th coroner's court
there's nothing more annoying than th writer
walking into th room
where he's being taught
leavisite shoot that poet we've worked out exactly
what he meant
straight down th line by line dissection by section
he's too bent
we can't fit him into our pathology report
post modernism is th life you write before you've
lived it
nineteen-nineties fin-de-siecle th party you join
before you give it
when th wall came down you stood around &
discussed th renovations
in th world of moving wall-paper you watch th fate
of nations
& consider th relation of things, note by note
you teach th computer to sing, you've a program
to obey
gigo in gigo out, you were moved to say
O let me gang-punch reproduce you / sort-merge
in the field of my arms
brute sex with th safety on, metallic charm
venus de milo bearing arms
you too can dive with jacques cousteau in a
radioactive lagoon
life goes on you got a glowing review
everything's a deconstruct when you have to
make everything new
with your flyovers & your clover leaves you've
alienated your luck
armageddon all I can get you can go & get . . .

ERIC BEACH

CONFERENCES

The choice and master spirits are arrayed,
the subtle jockeying begins, eyes slide,
assess, survey. Sinners all, apart, part of,
or reaching for the inner echelon, each
with an equation to balance—beware,
approaching on the left is Flotsam,
and conceivably even Jetsam, tentative
pilgrims on whom shafts of wit are not
to be wasted, but saved for the powerful
executive enclave, professorial pundits,
imported or otherwise, heads of departments
and other stars in arbitrary orbit,
medical, legal, orthodontic, literary,
masters all of the unseeing gaze.

JOAN PRIEST

KEVIN HART

After Poetry 5, a Quarterly Account of Recent Poetry

"WHAT IS POETRY?"

The question "What is poetry?" is frequently more tantalising, and more fertile, than any of its answers. Not that responses have been slow in coming: the long epoch from Plato to Collingwood is bursting with formulations, hypotheses and theories. And yet none of these answers, however suave they may be, carries the question's full burden from generation to generation. There is always a reduction involved; and it is precisely the kind of reduction which distinguishes one age's ideas about poetry from the next. No literary period, though, fits comfortably under any simple description. Digests of literary history often try, for pedagogic convenience, to tell us the opposite; for we were all told at some time—were we not?—a story of modern literature that goes something like this: the Augustans valued convention over nature; the Romantics, blessed with imagination, happily reversed all that; then the Modernists stripped Romanticism to its bare essentials, eventually leaving us to the perplexities and puzzles of Postmodernism. The popular histories of Australian literature are, if anything, even more polemic. In the face of this, criticism does not so much complicate literature as try to overcome the simplifications of literary history and polemics, and in doing so restore the text to its original complexity. I say complexity, not difficulty, for while not every strong poem is intellectually demanding (think of Robert Burns's "O my luve's like a red, red rose"), every poem worth re-reading affects us in a variety of ways at once, and inhabits a range of contexts: social, political and cultural, as well as literary. In keeping the question "What is poetry?" open for as long as possible, not being bothered by the embarrassment people sometimes feel when asking simple questions, one lets poetry reveal itself in its own ways and in its own time. The question keeps us exposed to poetry, open to challenges and risks, regardless of whether it was written centuries ago or just today.

One of the salutary things about modern criticism is the thoughtfulness it has brought to the question "What is poetry?" Martin Heidegger, for one, tells us that the question takes hold at a deeper level than aesthetics. If we are to have any hope of understanding poetry, we must think longer and harder about it than we are used to do. "Poetry", he says, "is the uncon-cealedness of what is", which means that in reading poetry we are confronted with Being at its most accessible and most intense. And if that sounds trouble-some, so much so that you might like to turn to other literary genres, then Heidegger offers little comfort. "Language itself is poetry in the essential sense", he asserts, and thereby suggests that the question of genre comes a very poor second to the question of poetry itself. That poetry requires us to think is something we know very well, but Heidegger tells us something new, that poetry is itself a mode of thinking. It asks us to step back from "the thinking that merely represents—that is, explains—to the thinking that responds and recalls". Explaining poetry gets you only so far; it is a first step and no more. The whole point in reading poetry is to respond to what gathers there: the luminous presence of things.

Despite the extraordinary difficulty of Heidegger's thought, his essays are read and respected by a wide range of writers. Charles Simic, in his prose work *The Uncertain Certainty*, speaks for many when admiring the "phenomenological impulse to re-examine the simplest, the long-taken-for-granted things"; and he isolates a central aspect of Heidegger's thought when noting how he describes "the division between the world as nothing, as what he calls the 'open', and any act of conceptualizing which restores the world in a particular way. Many of his texts are longings to experience that anonymity, the condition where we don't have an 'I' yet". A longing for anonymity informs much of Simic's early writing, in lyrics which explore the dense significance of things as ordinary as knives, forks and spoons. It is also felt throughout *Nine Poems*, although here the desire for immaculate perception converges with a longing to recover the past.

These lyrics tell "a childhood story" in nine stages.

Nothing like a continuous narrative, or even a series of high points in a tale, this sequence approaches its subject tangentially: we see a loaf of bread turning into a baby; a battle with toy soldiers; and a father who is busy "writing the history of silence". The poems open a space that is both historical and magical, as in the fourth lyric, "Childhood Story":

> The streets were wider, the houses bigger.
> A raven-haired giantess with huge breasts
> Took you into her bed. There one could hear
> The story of the King's youngest daughter.
>
> The ball she played with rolled into a pond
> Full of dead leaves. It stayed there.
> You already knew you'd find it some day.
> You'd enter some quiet, sunlit room,
>
> And there'd be a ball on the table . . .
> It was black from spending so much time
> In other people's dreams. You told no one about it.
> The earth is a ball, you heard your father say.
>
> He sat in a lion-footed chair, a sheet over his head,
> As if awaiting movers. The roads out of town
> Were packed with sleepwalkers dressed as soldiers.
> They must not be wakened, you were warned.
>
> Was it true that they drew the victim's name
> Out of a hat? That there were forbidden rooms
> Only bad children and mad housewives entered?
> That the ball in the story used to be golden?

One of the charms of lines like these is their casual, eloquent movement. In an early poem Simic solicits the time when "The ear will crawl back into the eye", and that is the time of poetry.

Throughout, Simic is motivated and moved by "the little pins of memory" that return him to his native Yugoslavia and his childhood experiences of the Second World War. It would be possible to read all Simic's work, not only this new collection, as a search for a myth of origins: an attempt to come to terms with the silence which precedes any poem, any word. But that would be only a partial response. To acknowledge that Simic's roots come from Eastern Europe is, of course, to be aware of a poet such as Vasko Popa from whom he has drawn strength; but it is also to register the weight of politics, ideologies and displacements. And at times that weight is almost unsupportable, as in the final stanza of "My Father's Dream":

> Evening at midday; centuries of such light,
> Gray and threadbare like the winter coat
> Of that woman on the sidewalk dumb with rage
> For not being able to kill her soldier son.

So it is a relief of sorts to turn to *The World Doesn't End*, Simic's long-awaited collection of prose poems. If the world doesn't end it is mainly because it can be remade in so many ways; there are always new combinations of familiar things, and new combinations of those combinations.

Or as Fats Waller said, "Let's waltz the rumba". In poetry it's easy: you take two worn literary codes then place them so close that they begin to engage and interfere with one another, setting up strange, unlikely patterns. Thus Simic:

> I was stolen by the gypsies. My parents stole me right back. Then the gypsies stole me again. This went on for some time. One minute I was in the caravan suckling the dark teat of my new mother, and next I was at the long dining room table eating my breakfast with a silver spoon.
>
> It was the first day of spring. One of my fathers was singing in the bathtub; the other one was painting a live sparrow the colours of a tropical bird.

Poems like this one keep the question "What is poetry?" open, moving and unanswered for as long as they can, and derive their energy from it. Russell Edson does the same in his prose poems, sometimes pushing back the borders of poetry and sometimes showing those borders to be uncertain, divided or equivocal. With this next piece, for instance, there is a sense in which asking "Is this poetry?" is both perfectly justified and entirely beside the point:

> 'Tropical luxuriance around the idea of the soul', writes Nietzsche. I always felt that, too, Friedrich! The Amazon jungle with its brightly colored birds squawking, squawking, but its depths dark and hushed. The beautiful lost girl is giving suck to a little monkey. The lizards in attendance wear ecclesiastical robes and speak French to her: 'La Reine des Reines', they intone. Not the least charm of this tableau is that it can be so easily dismissed as preposterous.

Preposterous: the word signals a reversal of the natural, proper order; and one might think that Simic and those poets with whom he shares a fellow-feeling (Russell Edson, James Tate and Bill Knott) delight in merely inverting the world and seeing what disturbances they can make. But that would be a mistake. Being has no single, natural order; what counts as natural in any given society is carefully fashioned over long periods of history by interested groups. So in setting the proper and the preposterous together, letting them worry each other, these writers are at once offering a critique of culture and demonstrating an openness toward language. Bill Knott shows this as boldly as anyone, and although this selection of his work is not as full as his earlier *Selected and Collected Poems* it is nonetheless a

powerful and original book, a record of one of the most disturbing imaginations of our times. Few people can create a world so completely and so concisely as Knott does time and time again. Thus "Sleep"; "We brush the other, invisible moon./Its caves come out and carry us inside", Or "Goodbye":

> If you are still alive when you read this,
> close your eyes. I am
> under their lids, growing black.

In his first *Manifesto* of 1924 André Breton argued that only surrealism could capture the "real functioning of thought", those sudden moments when the subconscious erupts through the conscious mind. That kind of thinking is greatly in evidence in Knott's very short lyrics; it marks a freedom, yes, but also a logic and discipline. For, odd though it may seem, surrealism uses imbalance and disorientation in the ultimate service of equilibrium and wholeness. It is a quest for Being. In his second *Manifesto* of 1929 Breton talks of "a certain point in the mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, what is communicable and what is incommunicable, the high and the low, cease to be perceived as contradictory" and sees surrealism's goal as grasping that point. The remark is worth keeping in mind when reading Knott's *Poems 1963-1988.* When we come upon the opening of "Rigor Vitus":

> I walk
> On human stilts.
> To my right lower leg a man is locked rigid
> To the left a woman, lifelessly strapped

we note Knott's impeccable surrealist credentials: the black humour, the exotic eroticism, and the longing to upset traditional habits of perception. As we continue to read, though, we begin to sense that he too, in his own way, is seeking the point Breton described so eloquently. Those weird stilt-creatures are "not even dead,/Those ole hypocrites", and when they make love "it appears then/Like I'm dancing". Here we recognise a surrealism that has refused to trade its humour and gentleness for arbitrary propositions and mechanical power.

Reading Simic or Knott we see things we know more sharply, as well as noticing more things. All too easily we become inured to the wonder of the world, to the astonishing fact that there is a world in the first place, and it is the task of art to impede perception and so restore to us that sense of original strangeness. Correctly understood, all art is concerned with *ostraneniye* or "making strange"; and the question "What is poetry?" is best answered by saying that it is an ensemble of techniques for heightening consciousness. The great Russian critic Viktor

Shklovsky argued along these lines in the early years of the century, and his views have percolated down to writers as well as influencing critics. Imagery provides an obvious way of retarding perception: in choosing an unusual simile or an arresting metaphor the poet makes us view an object or event from a fresh perspective. Boris Pasternak was an early master of this kind of defamiliarisation; and once understood it can be traced back to the Metaphysical poets Cowley and Donne. Recently, it has featured prominently in the writing of Craig Raine and others of the 'Martian' school of British poetry.

In Australia the foremost practitioner of this kind of defamiliarisation is Robert Gray, whose gift for simile exceeds that of anyone now writing, and whose *Selected Poems* was one of the finest books of the last decade. In *Skywriting* Jamie Grant seems a little under the influence of Gray, sometimes even in matters of phrasing, as in this description of a laundromat:

> Most
> of the washing tubs are empty, their lids
> propped open the way the posters
> lean outside the newsagency. Threads
> and scraps of lint are islands
> on a floor of ocean-grey linoleum.

And like Gray's last book, *Piano*, Grant's new collection is heavily enamelled with rhyme. The poetic resources that rhyme holds—even in English, a language not particularly rich in rhymes—are very considerable. When reading virtuoso contemporary versifiers like Anthony Hecht, Philip Larkin and James Merrill one begins to notice how much work good rhyming can do: it brings eye and ear momentarily (yet regularly) into accord, giving the poetic line an integrity and a flexibility. For Grant, rhyme is a matter for the eye rather than the ear; he loves it for the discipline it brings to writing, not for the pleasure of repetition.

There are poets who think in poetry, and others who think in prose then turn it into verse. W. B. Yeats was one of the latter. Especially in the long, meditative poems of his middle and late periods, he would summarise his argument before casting it in complicated stanzaic patterns such as *ottava rima*. The lesson is easily learned: you can either write in a complex rhyme scheme or be written by it; and Yeats always wished to be in control. In this respect at least, Grant is like Yeats, though without his magical ability to turn prose into verse. Here are some lines from "Christopher Codrington", in some ways the choice poem of the collection:

> He was placed in a boarding house
> in a district which refugees from the Second
> World War are obliged to share with the refuse
> of society: a suburb of strudels
> and bratwurst, and of cast-away needies.
> My youngest brother, who is always family-minded,
>
> compelled me to sample the atmosphere of this
> hostel; he took me on a dutiful visit.

The rhyme scheme is evident when you look for it: abaccb (where a is the first rhyme, b the second, and so on). But rhyme does not, of itself, change prose to verse; nor does using rhyme excuse one from having to think about metre, rhythm and effective line breaks.

John Rowland knows all about such things, and a good deal else. *Sixty*, his fifth collection, abounds in finely turned poems of a descriptive or meditative stance. At times his diction wobbles a little, shuttling between the Victorian ("secret/Cool caverns of verdure") and the starkly modern ("a rich dark tree, a refugee from the rain-forest"); while his sense of form occasionally dictates what he is allowed to perceive. At his most assured, he is both expansive and direct. "Paris Remembered", very much a poem of a retired diplomat, begins with a great rush, evoking "the kaleidoscope of wit/Pretension, literature, scandal, politics, art" until a possum's thumping on the roof recalls him to his current life in Australia. The poem ends with a Horatian flourish, in which the speaker figures himself as "a provincial/Whose butterfly wings remained damp, obstinately folded". The sentiment is familiar, yet the skill and humanity behind it nevertheless command respect.

If Shklovsky is right, all good art exhibits an impediment, whether it be slanting imagery, deliberately roughened rhythms or wordplay. Earlier this century William Carlos Williams and others pioneered a new kind of line: short, broken, keeping pace with colloquial speech and the pitch of modern American life. His aim, as he repeatedly testified, was to speed the poem up; and yet, that quick line had a way of making its readers look twice, and often enough people asked, "But is it poetry?" Mark Miller's *Conversing with Stones* works with that same line, although it has now lost the rawness and bounce it once had. "I ride boundaries/fenced with tidy lines" he writes, and there is an air of tidiness throughout the book: each poem has a neatly demarcated subject which is cleanly evoked then carefully put down. "Fencing", the poem from which I have been quoting, could almost stand as an *ars poetica*:

> you need an eye
>
> for pattern
> and irregularities,
>
> for sudden shifts
> and convergences—
>
> already it is spring
> and I am repairing lines.

One worry about this book (and a number of others recently published) is that the poems seem entirely competent but lacking an appetite for risk, luxuriance or intensity. Do we really need another poem entitled "Outback" which trades off images of a "frost-bitten night", "sculpting wind" and a "dead heart"?

A few years ago people used to joke about the Platonic form of the UQP poem: it was written in labile free verse, had one good image, and went for a page and a bit. Today the role is being admirably filled by the A&R poem, that most jejune of aesthetic objects. It's hard to know just what the problem is: are too many mediocre books of poetry being published these days, or is there a failure of nerve in contemporary Australian poetry? Certainly the question "What is poetry?" is getting some routine answers, if it is being asked at all. Anthony Lawrence's first collection *Dreaming in Stone* is by no means a poor book: it shows talent, intelligence and a feel for words. There are some local failures: overwriting ("I am tense as an elm root, muscled and awry/in its labyrinth of fibrous rock") or blandness ("his yellow, lithium-quiet eyes/were brimming over with acceptance"); and there are the usual bows to the household gods: an English teacher is ticked off for getting "snagged on technicalities" when teaching Kenneth Slessor, and there are whispers of "my poetry my love". All these can be excused. What is more worrying is that Lawrence's sights are set so low: most of the poems are anecdotal, journalistic; they animate a moment then hint at a moral. After a while one begins to long for new perspectives, and it must be said that Lawrence is perfectly capable of finding them: "Jack and the Beanstalk" shows what he can do when he allows himself sufficient space, and the central lines of "Quasimodo's Bells" have a sureness and density that is compelling. We see how the hunchback would polish "each bell with an oil rag", how

> he worked at the cloudy metal, rubbing
> until his face grew into the maker's name
> and the casting date floated up to him.

In those lines Lawrence lets us glimpse a world enlivened by work and spirit, a world in which Tony Lintermans is very much at home. As his title suggests, *The Shed Manifesto* garners its experiences from everyday occurrences and ordinary things. He can move from a taut lyricism to the wide expanses of "A Bone From the Misty Days", a lively graft from Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*. Smart's obsessive, electric lines picture a cat more surely and deftly than anything written before or since the eighteenth century. A hard poem to quote, since it needs time to release its immense rhetorical power, it is also too good a poem not to quote whenever the opportunity presents itself:

> For I will consider my Cat Jeoffrey.
> For he is the servant of the Living God duly and daily serving him.
> For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.
> For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.
> For then he leaps up to catch the musk, which is the blessing of God upon his prayer.
> For he rolls upon prank to work it in.

And so it continues, endlessly inventive and energised. If Lintermans' poem is less haunting, it is partly because Smart's litany compels complete allegiance to those who know and love it, and partly because the energy of Lintermans' line is detoured into a narrative:

> For there is much to be learned from dogs.
> For the dog is focused upon the immediate, as in the startled rabbit chased, or the scent reciprocated.
> For the dog goes crabwise through the day, sidewise he goes with prancing joy.
> For the dog is aimlessness creatively turned, exact opposite to a brief-case.
> For my first dog was Whisky, a blue heeler who worked with cattle and was well trained.
> For he was a way-back dog, a down-boy, sit-fella skitch-it dog who always did.

That focus "upon the immediate" and the "aimlessness creatively turned" continually enlighten Lintermans' writing; and if these poems have the sting of direct engagement with sheds, flies, wind and dogs it is partly because Lintermans has gone bush with books by David Campbell and Les Murray. The strongest poems here work through, and take pleasure in, a dialectic between the immediate and the deferred, the empirical and the illusory; and none is more fully achieved than "The Unnecessary Yacht". "Look long enough and you'll see it", the poem begins, making the most of an ambiguity: is the red yacht really there, though far out at sea, or does it appear only when you look for it? No doubt it perplexes the people who watch it "while the day sails away":

> Before dark a delegation gathers
> on the beach, someone with a loudspeaker
> hurls questions across the water—
> Ahoy there! Who or what are you?
> Why squat like a nesting chook
> on an eggless ocean? Explain yourself.
>
> No answer comes back. Day sinks,
> someone thinks aloud, Must be something simple.
> A red stain on unquestioning blue?
> That'll do, someone mutters, and it does.

In one of his most amusing and instructive poems, "Why I Am Not a Painter", Frank O'Hara talks about the genesis of a sequence entitled "Oranges". He begins with a line about the colour, but thereafter the poem takes off in unforeseen directions, so much so that, in the end, it fails to mention oranges, and, as he says, "It is even in/prose, I am a real poet". Two important things are in play here. In the first place, poems compose their subjects and are never deduced from them: inspiration is something that occurs when writing, or after writing, not beforehand. And second, distinctions between prose and verse tell us very little about poetry. Some of the most sublime poetry ever written has been in prose: almost accidentally, as it were, with large tracts of the King James Bible; but purposely with Baudelaire's *Petits Poèmes en prose* and Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations*. There is a difference, however, between the short, highly charged paragraphs of Charles Simic's *The World Doesn't End* and the extended prose meditations of Edmond Jabès.

Between 1976 and 1984 Rosemary Waldrop published translations of Jabès's piercing *Le Livre des Questions*, the seven volumes of which constitute one of the main literary documents by which our century's writing will be judged. *The Book of Questions* concerns two lovers, Sarah and Yukel, who live through the Holocaust. Only the barest elements of a story appear: Sarah goes mad in a concentration camp, and Yukel testifies to the bleakness of the age. The story is never told directly but is simultaneously revealed and veiled by the endless commentaries and observations by imaginary rabbis. Throughout the seven volumes, Jabès broods on 'the Book', a complex figure incorporating aspects of the Jewish Talmud as well as Mallarmé's imagined perfect Book which would contain all of reality.

The Book of Shares tells no story; it is a long meditation on Jabès's characteristic themes: God's absence, the status of the Book, Judaism as "constant recourse to citation", and the illusive relations between Being and writing. Yet where his earlier work revolved around separation and otherness, this new book converges on the possibility of a sharing community. "What is your own?", asks one of Jabès's voices, "Almost nothing, and even this *almost* is too much". One could say that 'almost' and 'perhaps' organise the entire meditation, for voices are always circulating around states of insufficiency and contingency. An abstract work, then, but also one whose avatars have haunting faces when they appear:

> I was writing at my desk. In spite of the late hour I was not at all sleepy. Still, I must have closed my eyes once or twice. Everything around me seemed no longer quite real.
>
> Outside, night was testing its horizons, adjusting its frontiers.
>
> Suddenly, three men came out of the half-light. Without any effort, so great was my surprise, they seized a stack of my pages.
>
> One said: 'These pages are mine'. The other two visitors: 'And those are ours. We wrote *almost* all of them'.
>
> I objected: '*Almost*, you say? Then *perhaps* I am the author of some of them? The ink on my fingers would seem to prove it.'
>
> They continued: 'These pages are ours by right. We have come a long way to retrieve them. After we have examined them we will give you back the rejects'.
>
> 'So many days and nights', I thought when they had gone, "so many sacrifices and tears, and all that for an *almost*, all that for a *perhaps*?'
>
> I found myself alone again, clasping to my chest a sheaf of crumpled pages, all blank, all strangely blank . . .

As always with this writer, aphorism is a main source of energy. Thus we hear: "Siamese twins with separate heads: *thought and poetry*" and "The visible . . . is not the negation of the invisible, but its perverse expression" and "Nothingness can also flaunt its colours". The text makes very particular demands on the reader. Unless one is familiar with Talmudic writing—how commentaries twist and spiral around a central text, their cryptic quality and breathtaking leaps of association, the mélange of voices from different times and places—reading Jabès is likely to be mystifying. And increasingly so if you happen to be Jewish, since Jabès's commentaries elaborate themselves around an absent centre. Hence a warning: "If you happen to speak of my relation to Judaism, do not ever call it just Judaism, but *this particular* Judaism". All Jabès's extended meditations on the Book offer themselves as repositories of law, ritual and debate; and if they seek to displace the Talmud it is only to make room for extended discussion of the Holocaust and of a God who reveals Himself more often in questions than in answers.

If There Were Anywhere But Desert presents itself as "the selected poems of Edmond Jabès" but, in truth, it is a very partial selection. We still need a full translation of this writer's verse, one that includes the early songs translated by Anthony Rudolf in *A Share of Ink*, a book now almost impossible to obtain. Even so, there are good things in Keith Waldrop's translation. "Slumber Inn" is Jabès's claim to be considered a strong surrealist. In English it is an equivocal success, its lyricism easily-won and running in all directions:

> The bird with infinity-compasses has deserted
> the heavens
> It sings on your shoulder the despair of years
> The sea has condemned the fires in each of
> its nests
> The alcohol-level clock with its old insomniac face
> holds its hour among all others the only real one
> white around your irises of unalterable Sunday

No one would be surprised to find that Jabès's poems in verse gain much of their vitality from aphorism and proverb. "Show" is a series of one-liners which circulate between image and statement. "The eagle pins the time of day to the light", the series begins, then variously modulates: "Taking long to be born, the eyes are last to die", "Listen to the water, quietly spelling out ermine names", and "Always in a foreign country, the poet uses poetry as interpreter".

Any strong poem has a favoured mode of resistance, a way of slowing the reader down, preventing complete and easy comprehension. It may be found in diction, rhetoric, rhythm, form or content: there is always a ridge to negotiate, then, beyond that, another ridge, and then another . . . Strong poems are those we must re-read, for whatever reason. So what happens when we discover a poetry that is utterly pellucid, whose technical accomplishment is such that no surface tensions arise while reading it? That is one question that comes to mind with Paul Kane's *The Farther Shore.* Lines like "But the sea is wider than a dream of the sea,/and freedom a coin on the tongue of the living" are clear and mysterious, biddable yet reserved. Perhaps this is what people mean when talking of poetry's power to enchant, and there are plenty of occasions to be spellbound when reading this book. In "Cities" we hear of "little boulevards/of phrases" which "become the avenues of approach", but this is a poet of withdrawal as much as approach. His characteristic note is sounded toward the end of "Phillip Island":

> And no misgivings could mar this moment—
> the very waves, beating the shore, withdraw
> in foaming undertow and carry with the tide:
> exhausted, redeemed; exhausted, redeemed.
> It is the fever of our lives that we
> compel the sudden changes and all the while
> ache with an alien solitude, knowing what
> changes us flows from a sea beyond change.

It is that dialogue between knowing and unknowing, that feeling of being in exile wherever we are, which makes us return to Kane's poems for renewed vigor and consolation. "Let us fly to our dear country" exclaimed Plotinus in the *Enneads.* "Where then is our way of escape? How shall we put out to sea? . . . We cannot get there on foot; for our feet only carry us everywhere in this world, from one country to another. You must not get ready a carriage, either, or a boat. Let all these things go, and do not look. Shut your eyes and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use". If Kane is concerned at heart with "another way of seeing" it does not lead him to the surrealism of a Jabès or a Knott; his style remains plain, unadorned, and sometimes all the more disturbing because of that. Thus "Stellar Junk", a poem of terrible returns:

> But the world was cluttered with memory,
> people walked about as if stunned in a weather
> of weariness, their eyelids weighed down.
> And so it came to pass: in daylight, one by one,
> like planes landing at LaGuardia, they returned.
> We thought they were angels, transfigurations
> in robes—but saints, martyrs came, shrouded,
> Lazarus and the prophets, mystics, Church fathers.
> They crumpled into the dust at our feet.
> Some wore smiles, others the grimace of
> death-masks.
> We could not bear to lift them, their prophecy
> fulfilled.
> O Lord, we cried, give us another vision.

And Kane does indeed give us another vision, gentle yet consequent, in the evocative monologues "Mr Emerson Assisted on His Walk", "A Letter from Erasmus", and in "Lady with a Falcon: A Tapestry". Always beneath the urbane surfaces of these poems, though, the ageing Emerson's words echo, "If we could ransom our knowledge/For a vision, to shed this stubborn sleep of flesh".

There are several points of contact between Paul Kane's *The Farther Shore* and Elizabeth Riddell's *From the Midnight Courtyard.* Both write with a sense of economy, a quiet voice, and without the slightest affectation. Riddell's book gathers together, in its brief compass of fifty-eight pages, a fair selection of her life's work. This is, then, a "selected poems", although her publishers hardly highlight the fact. And it is a very welcome selection, since her three earlier books have been unavailable and desirable for years and years. "An image is formed by words dreaming it", Jabès tell us, and that seems just about right when reading "Occasions of Birds". The second section testifies to the various excellences of this writer:

> In Dar-es-Salaam the morning lay on us like
> wet silk.
> We bought fruit in thin slices, and yellow
> bead rings,
> waiting for the news of the tornado, the hurricane,
> the cyclone, the typhoon
> crouched in the opaque sky.
>
> We ran before the wind
> to Malagast, to Reunion, to Mauritius
> where it caught us, cast us on the beach
> beside the tourist cabins and the sugar cane,
> both with rats.
>
> Port Louis was under water, we saw with dismay.
> The corpses of duck dinners
> floated in the dark gutter under the blind windows
> and past closed schools.

Reflected in this aberrant lake, old cool houses
suitable for provincial nobles and for slaves
brooded under wisteria. Their columns were erected
in memory of the Loire.

I remembered about the pink pigeons of Mauritius.
They have tiny heads and supplicating voices,
poor flakes of pink driven out when the forest was felled
to make way for the chateaux.
There is not one left to complain.

It is all there: precision leagued with flair, concision with luxuriance. If Elizabeth Bishop's poems about Brazil come to mind, it is more for the pleasures of mutual admiration than for open competition. An analytic imagination is at work throughout this selection, whether in "Telephone Call" ("Between her telephone and mine there lie disposed/her several lives") or "My Old Friend" ("He lives in a ruin of stubborn weighted flesh").

Riddell writes with a journalist's eye for the telling detail; at no stage, however, do these poems become mere reportage. True, there are a few slight lyrics, and moments when adjectives elbow everything else out of the way ("imperative, impetuous, ill-judged/but sparkling, gleeful, coarse"); but these hardly affect the achievement of the book. Reading these poems, it is hard to tell whether analysis leads to pathos, or vice versa. At their finest, as in "We Might Go to Japan", the circuit is very tight indeed. "You said, we might go to Japan", the poem begins, then the possibility is slowly dismantled:

I replied, it will be a long flight and not agreeable.
But to find fish like these, you said, admiring
almost still in the cafe courtyard pond
the yellow carp, the purple carp and the rose
made of paper, say, or of papier mache
or silk. But there is a ripple of life
in the tapered body, the flowering tail, the double twitch
of whiskers under the lip, the indolent, long and mild
inquiry at the edge of the rock.

The conclusion is inevitable, though no less forceful for that: "Watching the fish/we have talked ourselves out of Japan".

What is poetry? From time to time every poet removes the question from its quotation marks, gives it a little air to breathe and room to move around; but it is good, too, occasionally to put it down. A poet's most enduring views of poetry are given in his or her poems. Tomas Tranströmer surprises the writer "halfway into his image, there/he travels, at the same time eagle and mole". It is a startling image in itself, as one would expect from a writer so incisive and searching.

Books by Tranströmer have previously been available in English translation by Robert Bly and Robin Fulton (although the pick of the bunch until now has been May Swenson's rare *Windows and Stones*), but this new selection edited by Robert Hass is far and away the best available, containing versions by a range of translators, including those just mentioned.

Tranströmer's *Selected Poems 1954–1986* is a major contribution to contemporary poetry. "When we reflect on poetry", Heidegger tells us, "we find ourselves at once in that same element in which thinking moves. We cannot here decide flatly whether poetry is really a kind of thinking, or thinking a kind of poetry". These reflections lead us directly into Tranströmer's poetic world, for this is a writer who continually thinks in images. An early poem, "Sailor's Yarn", shows how much spin he can put on a short lyric:

There are bare winter days when the sea is kin
to mountain country, crouching in gray plumage,
a brief minute blue, long hours with waves like pale
lynxes vainly seeking hold in the beach-gravel.

On such a day wrecks might come from the sea searching
for their owners, settling in town's din, and drowned
crews blow landward, thinner than pipe-smoke.

(The real lynxes are in the north, with sharpened claws
and dreaming eyes. In the north, where day
lives in a mine both day and night.

Where the sole survivor may sit
at the borealis stove and listen
to the music of those frozen to death.)

That interplay between the literal and the metaphorical is one of Tranströmer's signatures. It is as though the speaker suspends all recourse to natural explanations so that the world can manifest itself. Or if 'the world' pitches the issue a wee bit high, then certainly 'a world', any one of the possible realms which Tranströmer conjures, and which challenge us with new ways of responding to daily life.

To think in images is partly to know when to be silent. Images call to each other across a poem, not to mention across the centuries from poem to poem, and there is a wisdom in giving images enough silence around them so that their calls may be heard. At times images cross the gulfs of time and culture:

It is still beautiful to feel the heart beat
but often the shadow seems more real than the body.
The samurai looks insignificant
beside his armor of black dragon scales.

At other times they work their way into a familiar landscape and reveal its essential strangeness:

The house on an island in the river
brooding on its stony foundations.
Perpetual smoke—they're burning
the forest's secret papers.

The rain wheels in the sky.
The light coils in the river.
Houses on the slopes supervise
the waterfall's white oxen.

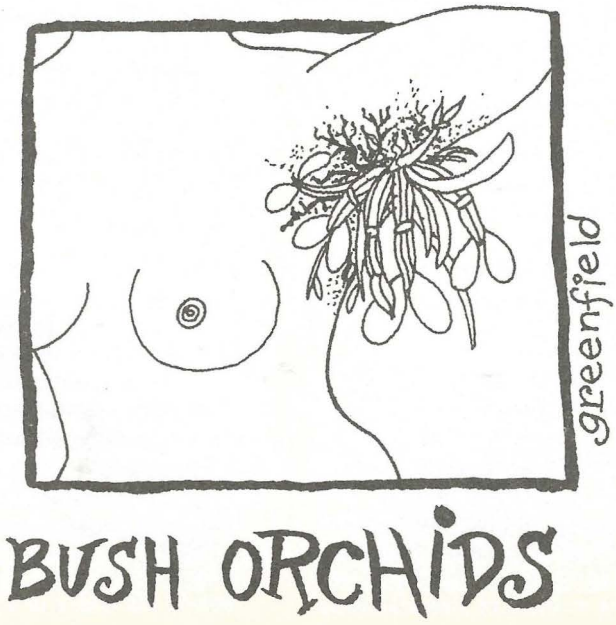
Autumn with a gang of starlings
holding dawn in check.
The people move stiffly
in the lamplight's theatre.

Let them feel without alarm
the camouflaged wings
and God's energy
coiled up in the dark.

It is tempting to let that final image of "camouflaged wings" stand for Tranströmer's answer to the question, "What is poetry?" But perhaps it is wiser to leave the last word on the subject to Jabès: "We have one moment for the answer and an eternity for the question".

Kevin Hart's most recent book of poetry was Your Shadow. *His* The Trespass of the Sign; Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy *(Cambridge University Press, $45) was published recently.*

Jamie Grant: *Skywriting* (Angus and Robertson, $14.95).
Edmond Jabès: *The Book of Shares.* Trans. Rosemary Waldrop. (The University of Chicago Press, $29.95).
—, *If There Were Anywhere But Desert: The Selected Poems of Edmond Jabès.* Trans. Keith Waldrop. Introd. Paul Auster. Afterword by Robert Duncan. (Barrytown, N.Y., Station Hill Press, $28.25).
Paul Kane: *The Farther Shore.* (George Braziller, $14.95).
Bill Knott: *Poems 1963-1988.* (University of Pittsburgh Press, $17.95).
Anthony Lawrence: *Dreaming in Stone* (Angus and Robertson, $14.95).
Tony Lintermans: *The Shed Manifesto.* (Scribe, $14.95).
Mark Miller: *Conversing with Stones.* (Five Islands Press, P.O. Box 1946, Wollongong, 2500, $8.95).
Elizabeth Riddell: *From the Midnight Courtyard.* (Angus and Robertson, $12.95).
John Rowland: *Sixty* (Angus and Robertson, $14.95).
Charles Simic: *The Uncertain Certainty: Interviews, Essays, and Notes on Poetry.* Poets on Poetry. (The University of Michigan Press, $14.95).
—, *Nine Poems: A Childhood Story* (Exact Change, $25).
—, *The World Doesn't End: Prose Poems.* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $28).
Tomas Tranströmer: *Selected Poems 1954-86.* Ed. Robert Hass. (Ecco Press, $18.50).



ZENY GILES

Another Wooden Horse

Dhimitri was only in his fiftieth year and he'd already begun to feel old. His father had fought in the resistance and the civil war and he still tended his own olive trees. He would live to be a hundred. But then Dhimitri's father only had sons to provide for.

Since Dhimitri had taken on the loan for his second daughter's house, he'd felt the full burden of his responsibilities.

Not that he should complain more than others. Look at his friend Kosta. Three daughters and a wife too ill to work. Kosta drove a taxi, helped in his brother's restaurant and played a lyra at one of the tourist tavernas. While Dhimitri had a job paid by the government the whole year round. He'd been there twenty three years—knew every case in his two rooms and most of the others as well. The work wasn't hard. In fact he liked it best when they were busy but it was December and most of the tourists had gone. Now, he was sitting, smoking one cigarette after another and fingering his worry beads. For Dhimitri had made a discovery in the last month that separated him from his friends and filled him with anxiety.

And in the quiet of the off season he had too much time to brood. He longed for the distractions of April when ships would fill the harbour, chartered planes would fly into the airport, tourist buses would line up in the Platia Eleftherias and people would pour into the Museum, their guides babbling to them in their own languages.

The Germans stood out from the others. They would walk into the room with their heads already in their books, and they would examine each case very slowly. They made Dhimitri feel uneasy.

He preferred the tourists who came out of the buses and voom, they were through the whole place and back in their buses within half an hour. They had no chance of discovering anything.

Sir Arthur Evans had been a very special man. Dhimitri knew Cretans that called him arrogant and conceited. They criticised him for building himself a house like a king so close to the palace itself at Knossos. They complained that he had taken treasures back to his own country. Dhimitri begrudged him nothing. Without Evans they would still be digging their little plots, trying to marry off their daughters with the scraps of money earned from the left-over wine and oil.

It was Dhimitri's debt to Evans as well as his debt for the second house that forced him to be so strict about the cameras. Petros and Mariana in the adjoining rooms made him nervous because they wouldn't make any effort to stop the photos. He wanted to warn them of the danger, to convince them all their jobs could be at risk.

Only three weeks ago, Dhimitri had ordered an elderly American to put away his camera. The next moment, the same man took out a piece of paper and began to sketch each article in the top shelf of case No. 18.

Dhimitri spoke to him again. "It is not permitted. The work is not yet published." The man had stopped but he'd gone away with the paper still in his pocket.

Dhimitri had waited, had pored over newspapers, had listened anxiously to the news on radio and television. Nothing was reported but the uncertainty remained with him in the rest of December and the slower months of January and February. Unable to sleep, he kept going over and over his calculations.

There was no way his debt for the two houses could be cleared in less than ten years. Even with what his wife earned with her embroidery, they would need to have Dhimitri's salary from the Museum for the next ten years at least. And in that time, somebody else was bound to discover what Evans had done at Knossos.

Mixed with his fear for his job was his growing admiration for this Englishman. How did he have the audacity to do it? And how had he got away with it so long? Dhimitri was bursting to discuss the matter with his friends, but his own financial problems forced him to say nothing. He wouldn't even risk going with them to lunch. Not that he wanted to eat. Worry had taken away his appetite so he stayed at the Museum, trying to soothe himself with his beads and cups of thick dark coffee.

What amazed Dhimitri was the way the whole

business had expanded like the big grocery firms in America with branches in every town. After Knossos had come the palaces at Phaestos, Malia, then Zakros. Each one on the same model. Each one charging a separate entrance fee, selling its own catalogue, its own pictures, its own post cards. Of course they had to send their treasures to the safety of the Museum. The cases kept getting bigger and the Museum extended to contain them.

The latest palace at Zakros had been discovered by Platon and more recently Zakellarakis had been leading an archaeological team at Archanes. So now professors from all over Greece were playing the Evans game as if it was their own.

No Greek would speak out; not the shop and hotel owners or the curators and attendants at the palaces and the Museum. And even professors of archaeology have daughters to marry.

The Germans puzzled him most. From the time Dhimitri was a boy, he'd heard stories of German precision and their efficient technical skill. How could so many of them have looked so carefully into those cases without understanding? How could they have walked the stairways and halls at Knossos and failed to see through the audacious scheme?

Dhimitri got up to stretch his legs. He walked past case No. 11 and stopped to look at the miniature seals. Some portrayed fruit and others insects and animals. His favourite was the tiny fly from Archanes, simple in shape with parallel lines on the wings. The seals were made from ivory and faience and had been used as amulets in the pre-palatial period. He'd learnt the notes by heart from the Guide Book. The words never failed to impress.

Suddenly, it came to Dhimitri like a revelation. The Germans knew already. They came back to Crete again and again because they too were fascinated by the brilliance of the whole fabrication. They kept silent as a mark of respect for what Evans and his team had accomplished—the digging out of the koulouria, the marking of the walls, the building of the columns, the ceilings, the stairways, the drawing of the wall pictures. Even the construction of pipes so that American tourists would come to admire the plumbing from three thousand years ago.

Of course Evans had to insist that the pieces found on the site were too precious to be left there. The Museum was expanding as the number of treasures grew. Vases, funeral caskets, baths, jewellery, wall paintings were constructed the way the tourist shops had managed it ever since. Pots with octopuses and palm trees, jewellery in the shape of bees and axes, ornaments like tiny flies. The wall paintings were the easiest of all. Evans could say quite openly that the artist from Switzerland was completing them—working out what they would have been like. The only challenge then was to devise the little faded sections of leaves, of birdwings, of priestly figures holding libations.

Over fifty years people had been paying their money to see the Evans excavations. Of course they would continue to come when the trick was revealed. After all, this Evans was no ordinary man. He'd been born an Englishman but his talent for ruses and deceptions made him a second Odysseus. He was truly what the Greeks call *poniros*.

Dhimitri put away his beads and stubbed out his cigarette. Today he would go with his friends to have lunch at the Platia. For the first time in many months he felt secure and he began to plan how he would wait till Petros and Andreas were deep in conversation about their olives and their current yield of oil and then in an offhand way, he would ask them if they'd heard the news that Zakellarakis was planning the grand opening of a new palace in Archanes, just in time for the coming season.

JOHN BRYSON

An Armada of One: Golding, the Trilogy

William Golding: Rites of Passage *(Faber, $8.95),* Close Quarters *(Faber, $12.95),* Fire Down Below *(Faber, $29.99).*

RITES OF PASSAGE began this voyage, then *Close Quarters*, so to *Fire Down Below*; and only now, when the final book is closed, the trilogy complete, do I understand what gifted and courageous madness the sea-passage was.

The captain, and here I mean Golding, is driven by a demon, by a monster. The journey is a fake. It began at Portsmouth (as I guess it was; see how Golding makes us work even for this detail, from sand and gravel under the anchor, so it wasn't the muddy Thames or the Bristol Channel), in maybe 1814, if I've counted right, and a fake because it's not bound only for Sydney Cove, but way beyond, for immortality. His vessel carries, as if they were Golding's personal belongings, or in his duffle, nothing less than the traditions of his nation's literature, its personality, its ambitions, and his stature within it.

And he sinks it. Malign, heroic, to cunning purpose, he puts it all to the flame.

THE SHIP is not named. The imagination is at liberty. No single name-plate will suit her for long. She is a vessel with a reflection always somewhere about, on the waters alongside, or loomed against a mist, sometime *Antrobus, Argo, Ark, Dutchman*, and ever an albatross shadows the wake. She tracks Coleridge all the way to the great southern ice. This is an easy course to follow so far but, for the death-defying frame of mind Golding is in presently, nowhere near far reaching enough.

He is known to flay inquisitive analysts, critics, scholars,

> I seem to have no connection with their William Golding.

In 1980 he told academics in Hamburg,

> If there has been any coherent argument in what I have said, it leads to a proposition that could see the end of all literary criticism and analysis.

The essay *A Moving Target* carried this complaint,

> I am the raw material of an academic light industry

and an address to Les Anglicistes in Lille began,

> Ladies and gentlemen, you see before you a man, I will not say more sinned against than sinning, but a man more analysed than analysing.

So, one form of his vessel, or its ghosting, is the ship: Scholarship. The pun isn't necessary to the exercise (although he makes plenty elsewhere), but I can't dismiss it from mind. It is too beguiling a running joke, it so fits the tone, the complicated ambitions, the cleverness and sillyness together, the stunning risks Golding is determined on, in this mood.

The trilogy is drawing scholars already, as it should (which Golding, perverse, well knows, so let's not leave the *Narcissus* off this list), and some work can be dealt with early, clearing decks. Golding likes to write from a tradition, and to extend a book from there. Trollope's city of Barchester was a point of origin for *The Spire* (see *A Moving Target*); *Coral Island* for *Lord Of The Flies* (ibid.); Camus' *The Fall* for *Free Fall* (Helen Daniel). Now, scholarship (much in excess of mine) suggests that the form of *Rites of Passage* clearly begins a bildungsroman in the manner of Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, following the passage of a young man to greater age (Christopher Leonard); the journey for *Rites of Passage* began in the year of *Sense and Sensibility* and landfall should coincide with *Pride and Prejudice* (Bernard Levin); and the tradition for the entire trilogy has genesis in 1494 when *Das Narrenschiff* was published in Swabian dialect (Maurice Dunlevy).

Golding says of literary imprisonment: "I am subject to rages . . . I seize those bars and shake them with a helpless fury." I don't believe him for a moment. He feels nothing like helplessness. Fury is here, but

better words are defiance, reprisal, and the better clues are found in this passage from *A Moving Target*:

> But the student's true struggle through his parodies is towards that thing a writer must have more than a room of his own—though Jane Austen never had one—which is a voice of his own. Yet the student who is parodying other writers is likely to be your best student. He or she has fallen in love with a writer. His or her parody is passionate. He will think nothing as important as to have a book printed and so he will always look for a theme where other people have found it. I have to own to being one of those students and to have committed these necessary follies so often as to make me a prize example of the process.

Together with his fondness for these two quotations,

> Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have immortal longings in me

and

> Would that the ship Argo had never sailed

with one last, again from *A Moving Target*:

> . . . the books that have been written about my books have made a statue of me . . . a po-faced image too earnest to live with

and we have something close to a likeness now: this consummate literary figure, goaded, cranky, ready to make wonderful trouble for just about everybody.

YOU WILL HAVE CAUGHT, by this, a sense of my unsteadiness, looking back on it all from here, and I won't expunge it because, in the absence of learning enough to know precisely where I've been taken, unsteadiness is the most valuable sense of the voyage I can give you. I have the clear feeling of standing at dockside, still loose-kneed and groggy, needing to tell someone what it was like out there, how furious it was, how beautiful were the triumphs, how terrible the failures. I've seen things I don't know whether to believe.

GOLDING SOUNDS WARNINGS early, most often in asides of quite mischievous intent and, if I'd got the first when I should have, I might have been too timid to go on. His narrator, the young Edmund Talbot, muses on the very first page of Book 1:

> We have paid more attention to sentimental Goldsmith and Richardson than lively old Fielding and Smollett!

After the voyage is over, the opposite view:

> I have always been embarrassed for such authors as Fielding and Smollett, to say nothing of the moderns, Miss Austen for example . . .

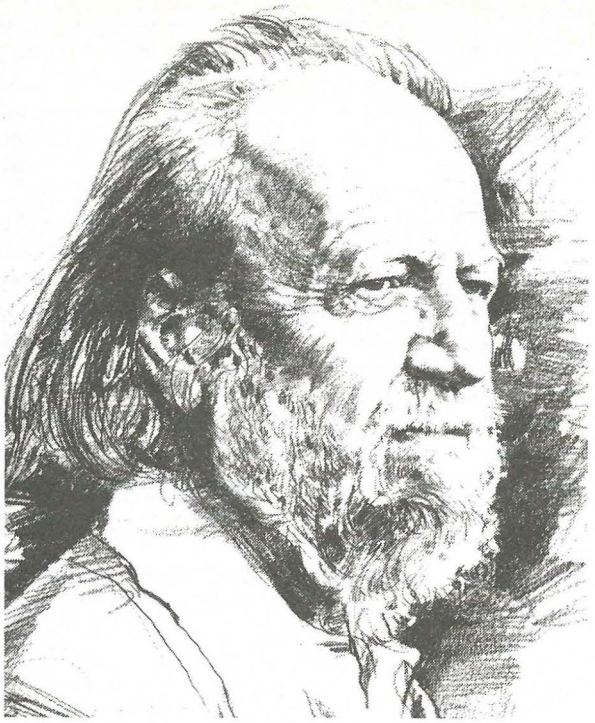
These are navigational statements, in this sea-story, they fix Golding's position, and he completes the triangulation this way: "Beat that, Goldsmith! Emulate me, Miss Austen, if you are able!" These are the fires below, the terrifying fires of ambition, burning from the beginning, from *Rites of Passage.*

AMBITION, and the sequence of gratification for Golding, is worth keeping in mind. *Rites of Passage* was published in 1980, won the Booker Prize, and thereafter came *A Moving Target*, in 1982 (but the last of its essays was written in 1980), he won the Nobel in 1983, published *The Paper Man* in 1984, *Egyptian Journal* in 1985, and *Close Quarters* in 1987. The effects of the Nobel worried him, we know. Was the trilogy so important that he needed to steady his breathing awhile?

THE JOURNAL of Edmund Talbot is for the gratification of his godfather, who is high enough in ruling circles to arrange a keen post with the Governor of New South Wales, and to promise a Rotten Borough later at home. The tone is at once eager, questing, sometime honours-English perhaps, fair to Golding's best student early self, who lacks yet a voice of his own, who wittily reaches for the voices of others, and crafts the plausible way for Golding to use the same device (I've only just seen where this extension leads, would Golding pull a reversal like this one?), so the *character* is able to craft the *writer* in his own image. The young of the old, as in truth.

The company aboard comprises soldiery, emigrants, mariners and crewmen, and a classy passenger-list, all of which is arkadian and archival, these navigators, these vying officers, clergy, a marine lithographer, a philosopher in Huxley mould, a suffragette, all of equal use to Golding and to the new colony, if this ship ever gets that far. And it is a mark of the telling that, although the reader quickly becomes a passenger on this creaky hulk, we are never confident we will make it. Golding takes a care that throughout the voyage the reader stays all at sea (not merely a pun, I think, but the writer's proper allusion) and no possibility is closed off until the moment is meet. He is proud of his reliability. Whatever he promises, by way of some wily clue here or there, he delivers. The balance for this is an uncertainty principle.

The method of suspense is very fine. It is a way of getting around the Nabokovian principle: The I in the book must not die in the book. The journals the narrator is writing, and which we're reading now, are dealt with so they will survive any disaster. *Rites of Passage* is bound up in calico, and sewn tight. *Close Quarters* is stuffed into a firkin, and sealed. Anything



could happen to the ship, the journals can make it through. But flagged events like these are most often called on to perform other work as well, his images are in this sense multi-skilled. I don't believe I'm reading too much into this. The trilogy itself is a package which must be uncovered. We are being told, I think, not to take the box for the bundle. Box within box, and here is a delight, for with each unwrapping the boxes get bigger: sea-story to literary collage, to ambition and endeavour, to the nature of failings in humankind.

And I think there's more to the firkin and the calico yet. It has to do with immortality. The books will survive young Talbot; they will survive Golding; they will survive us. These words are again from the 1976 essay *A Moving Target* (prose, but because the young Golding's first book was of poetry, published 1934, I present the lines thus, and you'll see why):

> When I have tried all ways and found them shut,
> I can think of one last thing to do.
> I shall take my manuscripts aboard a ship . . .

and thence to bury them, awaiting posterity, ready for archaeological excavation five hundred years later. Immortality? Yes? Maybe? I don't know, perhaps I'm rattled. So canny an allegorist is Golding that shadows move. But one thing I'm certain about: When allusions are apt, all trails are true.

THE PROMISE of *Close Quarters* was made in Book 1, and on the evidence of the calendar was fulfilled seven years later. It shouldn't surprise a Golding reader, by now, that he might effect the thing backwards.

Narrator Talbot, grown up a good deal after a third of his voyage, closes *Rites of Passage* with this:

> The book is filled all but a finger's breadth. I shall lock it, wrap it and sew it unhandily in sailcloth and thrust it away in the locked drawer. With lack of sleep and too much understanding I grow a little crazy, I think, like all men at sea who live too close to each other and too close thereby to all that is monstrous under the sun and moon.

Since we've just finished a book, then, of a sea passage in which the Captain's rule is merciless, officers hate and mistrust each other, the chaplain is buggered by many of the below-decks crew after fellating another, and makes for the sanctuary of his cabin so to die, blubbering and alone, of shame, we well know what sort of territory is monstrous now, what is too close.

So the promise was fulfilled before it was made. We might expect *Close Quarters* to deal with a different manner of propinquity altogether.

THE SHIP HAS MOVED, by Book 2, only so far as to clear the doldrums, and now drags with it a vile sargasso of weed which flays every time the hull rolls. The narrator casts about for some direction in which to write (the author too, since a Booker, a Nobel, and seven years of such growth has slowed progress). Talbot cries:

> Wanted! A hero for my new journal, a new heroine, a new villain, and some comic relief to ameliorate my deep, deep boredom.

Is this to be the truth of *Close Quarters*? Not a chance.

Ever better to look elsewhere, and the elsewhere now is the final page of *Rites of Passage*, disguised as Golding's own critique,

> Why—it has become, perhaps, some kind of sea-story but a sea-story with never a tempest, no shipwreck, no sinking, no rescue at sea, no sight nor sound of an enemy, no thundering broadsides, heroism, prizes, gallant defences and heroic attacks!

Together these paragraphs are index enough of the happenings in *Close Quarters*, but let's add this, from the 1980 essay 'Belief and Creativity':

> I have always felt that a writer's books should be as different from each other as possible. Though I envy those writers who can go on writing the same book over and over again it is not

> something I can do myself. I do not see myself writing a book about a group of girls on an island. Yes, I have moved on.

We'd be daft not to take warning.

COMIC RELIEF, I should say now, is the one component he doesn't deliver for me, in great measure anyway. Humour doesn't often travel well, over the horizontal or through the vertical. In his Nobel acceptance, Golding spoke of the perils of inter-continental English, and the hazards of its travel:

> Personally I cannot tell whether those many dialects are being rendered mutually incomprehensible by distance faster than they are being unified by television and satellites; but at the moment the English writer faces immediate comprehension or partial comprehension by a good part of a billion people.

The vertical I mean is time. Golding is locked into his chosen time. It follows, I guess, that the humour available to him is not the re-wrought, not the amended humour acceptable to the non-British world, to the post-colonial world. Golding's is nowhere the humour of an underclass. None of it is sharpened by ghetto of gay, or of Jew, or of black. This was long a failing of the ruling English, of a certain foppishness, this reliance on a traditional humour of deprecation, delivered with princely negligence, despicable and tyrannous, tolerable only where the deprecation is of self, and tricky even then, for the faint hint of a conceit will sicken it. When a self-satisfied handshake after battle, say, carries tones of 'stout fellow' and 'jolly fine', I know this is Forester, but I'm not so much moved as is an Englishman. And when young Talbot's landfall soliloquy runs:

> the deepest note of my heart-strings
> sounds now as it will to my dying day—
> England for ever!

or he advises his lady to avert her path from aborigines because

> their appearance is not to be borne,
> the women in particular

this reader smiles a good deal less than did the writer. Englishness does not carry its own forgiveness, in my part of the Pacific anyway. I'm sorry if I've offended anyone.

But look: A storm we've been warned about, and the one we get lasts almost half the book. We are grandly abroad, vividly in peril, even the ship has begun to flex underfoot and is twitched together with cables, much like the story itself, and by now we have begun to enjoy, ahead of time, any unlikely way the story might fulfil its other promises. A sea-battle is to come, so we've been told, and it is fought, shot for shot, in the anticipation of the narrator who stands silent, cutlass in hand, beside the breathless guns. It's over before it begins. The stealthy foe in the mist turns out to be English, the war with Napoleon already done.

The writer's cry for a heroine had us scanning the cabins below. Instead, she walks aboard from this new ship, bathed in the delicate light of the Romantic novel from which she seems to step. She sails off on it again, after they've danced the night away, and we're not sure how much of this vision is attributable to the love-struck narrator's fever, how much to the flotilla of ghostly ships sailing on and on. The sea is unfathomable, the vessel of life skittish and unsafe, the journey is never over, who knows where the current will take us?

I'm not sure where else you'd find the artistic structure of a novel so hidden in an aside, but it's in *Close Quarters* all right. To simpering Talbot, in a saloon-cabin conversation between dances, his Miss Chumley says:

> Do you know, sir, I once had to compose an essay on the subject of Art and Nature? Now would you believe it? Though I fear young persons are sadly docile—or should I say dutiful?—yet while the others were positively eloquent in their defence or advocacy of Nature—for it is fashionable nowadays to believe in Nature, you know—I discovered to my astonishment that I preferred Art! It was the moment at which I became an adult.

Here we have it for this volume, I think, a devious rivalry set up between the two. Art (the way we see it played out during a pavanne on the deck, or over an undulating dinner-table) is gracious, inconsequential, decorative. Nature (hull-rolling, storm-blasting nature, the nature of death where a man blows his sloppy brains over a bulkhead with a lily-shaped blunderbuss) is the intervening power, the show-stopping reality. But, and we see it must be so, nature was made with swaggering art.

TERRIFIED, BY NOW, that this famed laureate, this commanding intelligence, is making a mess of things in the territories of humour and love, where his new needs most are (his po-faced image too earnest to live with), the heart sinks at Talbot's postscript to Book 2:

> I will go further. Who has ever written extensively without finding himself lured little by little into the desire to captivate an audience? There is in me, as in all writers, what Milton called

'that last infirmity of noble mind', the desire for a name more widely known, admiration more generously given, for a greater measure of interest in the author's character and person . . .

This is another joke, of course, delivered by the young English acolyte, Golding's prototype, a joke made a conceit by the passage of time and laurels, a chrono-trick. And Golding didn't seem to be taking the advice of his own earlier essays, *A Moving Target*, for one,

. . . and I think how good the idea might have been for someone else; for I know now, you see, it was never for me, not my metier, I couldn't do it.

And,

Men do not write the books they should, they write the books they can.

Heedless of his Maker's proscriptions, young Talbot presses on:

Failings? I admit to ambitions.

OF NAVAL ARCHITECTS it is said that the design of the next ship can be seen in some line of the craft before, and it's not too different in this trilogy. The line for the third volume was laid early in the second, in an exchange between Talbot's Captain Anderson and the master of the visiting *Alcyone*, while the ships were rafted together, becalmed. Their conversation turned to steam tugs. (Never knowing what Golding might be up to, I did check this out: By 1815, five small paddle steamers were in commission on the Thames, more on the Clyde.)

"It is an extraordinary invention, Mr Talbot," said Sir Henry, "and I swear nothing but the inventive genius of our country could have brought it forth!"

(A joke, for the invention was Scots, with a side pun on the Forth I think.)

"It is a craft with a steam boiler, the force from which makes great paddle wheels rotate on either beam. It would throw up fountains of water were the wheels not cased."
"There is too much fire below," said Anderson. "I cannot like the things. If they should explode they might touch off a fleet like tinder."

Golding will deliver on these warnings, but not until the magnitude of the task seems absurd. The ship is, by now, overloaded with perils. The emigrants are diseased, officers at the point of violence with each other, the crew has twitched the vessel together with cables, the soldiers have been set to the pumps for days, no one aboard knows where on the globe the ship is, the chronometers have failed, and the forward mast has split the heel, that cage which prevents it from plunging a gulf through the hull large enough to take its rigging to the seabed, and with it all souls.

Containing the mast to the writhing deck is the task of the two lieutenants, becomes their arena of fresh battle, the well-born and beautiful Benet, Frenchman and poet, against Talbot's now friend Summers, the Englishman who came to this rank through the fo'castle, so our hearts are with him. But setting up our prejudices, and having them topple, is familiar work for Golding. The entire voyage has been full of it. Benet's is the solution which wins out. The smithies fix the sea-rotten timbers through with blazing iron rods, a bright spine, furnace white. They quench the heat, so far as they can reach, with water. The metal shrinks; the ship draws tight.

This risky architecture Golding has attributed to the ship's poet, a bard's gifted vision of the natural world (nothing is possible without art, a resonant message from Book 2), and now we have ardent fire smouldering forever below, waiting on breath.

THE SEARCH for philosophical symmetry, from which Golding never, never resiles, makes toward a balance between the Absolute, the celestial above, and these 'sparks of God' beneath, en route to new lives, should they live.

He said, in *Belief and Creativity*:

Of man and God. We have come to it, have we not? I believe in God.

And, confessing to being an anti-utopian:

I would call myself a universal pessimist, but a cosmic optimist.

His (circa 1960) essay 'Copernicus' contains this:

The intuition of Copernicus was the intuition common to all great poets and all great scientists; the need to simplify and deepen, until what seems diverse is seen to lie in the hollow of one hand.

So navigation, mostly in its celestial discipline, is made to work hard on this voyage, made to look to the sky and into the soul. The Almanac and the Tables are the navigator's Old and New Testaments, their poesies every bit as graceful and true.

Young Talbot, who is after all an Englishman journeying to New South Wales in order to rule it, is admitted to much of this craft, but not by a seamanly officer under a starry sky, instead in a stinking cabin

with the old philosopher now rotten to near death: Prettiman and his suffragette wife Latitia, the Utopians, the liberal thinkers on this foundering ark. And it is here, with Golding on navigation, on the navigation of all human endeavour, that he puts on magnificent show his capacity for courageous allusions, for parallel thought, for kinship of ideas (which we'll understand, never mind, now or later), and it is here too he puts on show his disdain for risk, for failure.

One scene will do to display some of this. It happens in the cabin, young Talbot the eager, Prettiman the sage. The chronometers have seized, so no one can plot the longitude unless one could use, Prettiman wonders,

> " . . . the passage of a satellite as a check."

Can the master do anything with his miraculous pen? Invite a plausible satellite ahead of its age? This is not the moon, the planets. It is not a timely maritime term, then. But (a memory does tug from somewhere) *Satellite/Saturn*? Saturn was also Kronos (Time) which devours all its children except Neptune (Water) and Jupiter (Air) and Pluto (the Grave). Is this part of his game? The unsettling word arrives in this story together with failed chronometers, so the world here is out-of-all-time, and anachronism pursues the joke. But it is arch, awful. And yet, and yet, you can guess the loftiness of ambition in a space-age idea like this. The ship is a capsule, sealed. Its trajectory will land it at the ends of the earth, on a continent its passengers will call Stone Age. It passes by Africa, and under the long Asian archipelagos, so it misses God knows how many intricate cultures, and on to effect British government of another land in absolute ignorance of its region.

Is this where he points? Then where does it lead? Does it follow, here, that colonization might have been different, had European expansion made along the land routes, forced to make contact with its peoples? Is it that British maritime success also brought inevitable colonial failures?

I'm not confident, but I think so. Does it make a difference to know that, in Utopias and Anti-utopias, he speaks of utopianism as kin to science-fiction? Prettiman is a Utopian. This manner of link is Golding's seised demesne, and he works it hard. No one thinks an idea through further than Golding. His accords of thought, his consonances, run up a sweat.

Many of these sorties take as long a trail out, and here's another I can't pass up without offer. Throughout this voyage, Edmund Talbot falls in and out of factions, is warned about factions and their dangerous fires. But there is no resolution, no pay-off, for this obsession within the narrative. The point of it lies beyond the final volume, beyond the end-papers, and even then only for readers who will recognize the welcoming Governor in New South Wales, for readers who will know (from elsewhere) that Macquarie is the very Governor who will lose in the struggle between Emancipists and Exclusionists, lose the faction-fight which will ruin egalitarian movement in the colony.

THE FIRE BELOW does burn the ship, I must tell you. It consumes the ship and it consumes its Master. Golding burns his boats, standing there, legs astride, claiming to have out-written the heroes and heroines of his own tradition (but in robust love with all). He leaps ashore to this New Land, to this strand of Aborigines, who

> lost interest in us, as they do after a while

and of convicts who

> have found this shore in no way fatal to them

so felling Robert Hughes at a stroke, all the while chest-beating enough to out-thunder, across oceans, the braggy writers of *Death In The Afternoon* and *The Armies Of The Night*, and all at a time when freshest in our minds are his failings, his weaknesses, with comedy, with love, and (God forgive his attempt) with feminism.

He had prepared us, we'll recall, in the 'Post-scriptum' to *Close Quarters*:

> Failings? I admit to ambitions.

These terrifying fires explode, the ship burns to the waterline, destroys its Master, and threatens to take the nearby fleet with it. Is he also showing us his funereal barge? Has the Grand Old Man chanced his afterlife on this sea-venture, this Armada of One, leading to its heroine waving away flies with her parasol,

> "One should live in a city after all. This
> craze for Nature must pass and society come
> to its senses!"

in accents to my ear of perfect Gwendolen Fairfax, ending with the silliest of romantic curtains, this circumnavigation of stupendous cunning finally done, his entire voyage now over?

This is what has set me ashiver. His own failings are made compatible, maybe necessary, to his expedition. He has put them to use. Golding's reason for being is to deal in human failing. He deals in the disgust of self-knowledge, deals in its shame.

> In the not too ample volume of man's
> knowledge of Man, let this sentence be
> inserted. Men can die of shame.

He has made his players face shame, he has made his narrators face it, and in this trilogy has made the writer of its journal face it. What is the last Golding-trick left? Now, we see his own flagrant vice, see him ludicrous with ambition, his the last shamed face.

From 'Utopias And Anti-utopias', speaking of treating other writers in ways they mightn't like, he says:

> I have done it in this essay to so many other writers it is only fair that my own turn should come.

And that's what has so rattled me. Not the swaggering, the elaborate references, the double-plays, the intellectual work, the heady near-misses, but this possibility: I have been watching a writer of courage enough to appal himself, so to stay true to the world he began.

HAS HE FINISHED with us? Never. There is one more thin page to end the trilogy, space enough for his one more astonishing thing.

In the manner of an afterword, he means to accommodate his own shortfall, if that's how we judge him, but set with comparisons of other times, with the more modern, the newer frontiers. As his narrator, now old and tired, he wonders what else he might have become had things been different. Like much Golding, the place of wisdom, the meeting of triumph and sadness, appears in what seems like some off-cut, in this case a dream, a midnight waking terror of lost opportunities.

> I do not wish it to have been more than a dream: because if it was, then I have to start all over again in a universe quite unlike the one which is my sanity and my security.

This is a dream of the crippled old philosopher, the Utopian, and the aged feminist: the Prettimans. They are on horseback. They are riding a strange land, yet

> . . . from the laughter and, yes, the singing, you would have thought that they were going to some great festival of joy, though where in the desert around them it might be found there was no telling. They were so happy! They were so excited!

The Idealists are leaving him behind.

These are the trilogy's last lines, and so, to date, the last of Golding:

> I woke from my dream and wiped my face and stopped trembling and presently worked out that we could not all do that sort of thing. The world must be served, must it not? Only it did cross my mind before I had properly dealt with myself that she had said, or he had said, that I could come too, although I never countenanced the idea. Still, there it is.

John Bryson's most recent books are Evil Angels *and* Backstage at the Revolution.

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: Our Honorary Bookkeeper, Shirley McLaren, labelled this quarter's list "Sinking Fund". But I think we did rather well. Sure our present postal registration ends on June 30 but, because of support from our readers, we face the future, like the new government, with hope if not confidence. From December to February you donated a splendid $758. Specific thanks to: $100, J.H., $60, J.McL., $30, G.S., $26, E.M., A.W.M., A.M., J.K., $25, Anon, $24, D.B., $20, M.G., $16, J.B., S.P., D.B., L.B., R.S., M.M., $11, L.A.R., D.P., R.S., V.B., $10, M.S., B.J., W.F., L.B., K.T.F., $6, W.B., K.E., T.M., T.S., R.D.W., D.R.B., G.E., J.G., E.D. J.H., D.B., B.J.H., O.J., J.F., P.R., M.McL., R.B., C.E.S., M.D., D.S., B.B., G.S., P.B., B.N.S., J.A., J.F., G.S., M.L.S., S.D., T.S., W.B.A., C.C., $4, A.H., $2, D.W., G.H., J.W., $1, J.B., D.A., W.W.

PETER STEELE

The Geography of the Heart

Current Australian Autobiography

Consider this, as a book's beginning:

> It was summertime, and the living was easy for the Red Sox because Marty Rabb was throwing the ball past the New York Yankees in a style to which he'd become accustomed. I was there. In skyview seats, drinking Miller High Life from a big paper cup, eating peanuts and having a very nice time. I wasn't supposed to be having a nice time. I was supposed to be working. But now and then you can do both.

This is the first paragraph of Robert B. Parker's book, *Mortal Stakes*, one of a series about his hero, Spenser. Spenser is a private detective from Boston, and comes imaginatively out of the stable which offers Philip Marlowe and Lew Archer—the interrogators of death and its mystifications. But why cite the paragraph now, as we begin to address a group of books concerned with the fortunes of Australians, in their distinctive terrain?

Stay with me for a moment, and I will tell you. Look again at Parker's paragraph. We Australians are looking at a foreign land: the game is wrong, the season is wrong, the beer is wrong, the idiom is wrong: the whole thing is, as they say in that foreign land, a screw-up. And yet, and yet . . . we are looking at seduction. And this is not due only to the fact that Australia has been Austerica before becoming Austranica. What cajoles us is the nominating of an other, but accessible, land. Parker is strutting his stuff in a zone which he offers as native land to any would-be inhabitant. Half the sentences begin with the word "I", and for the moment we throw in our lot with the fictitious figure who goes by that universal name. The latent autobiographer in all of us finds a warrant at the hands of this papery fiction.

Somebody has been around before us in such a paragraph, though—somebody other than Parker. The 'somebody' is the voice of publicist or populace. The first sentence incorporates a fragment of song, a sporting dictum, and a conventionality about marriage. The second sentence is the most famous of Walt Whitman's sayings. And so it goes. In short, the flash and flair of Parker's paragraph blends, to an Australian ear, the foreign and the familiar. We are as it were resident aliens to its cadences, or it is a resident alien to ours.

Mortal Stakes is a fiction, but its ways are autobiography's. We come to any of the books before us as if it were a report from a strange land—as it is—but as if it were in familiar vein—as it is. The peculiar truth of autobiographical writing is that it can note life as if it were as customary as the weather, while suspecting that it is as alien as Cathay or Atlantis. Autobiographical writing is mirror-writing: dodgy stuff indeed, readily decipherable given the necessary simple instrument, but queer in character, and quietly shocking as an enterprise.

So I believe, but many would object. "What", they might say, "could be more natural than autobiography? Do we not all offer versions of ourselves, in word and deed, to those whom we encounter? Are we not all, Australians or not, incorrigible autobiographers?" To which I would respond, "Of course you have something right. But our very creativity ensures that each of us registers reality as novelty. Girl or woman, man or boy, we stand up and, by trope or as for the first time, stylize ourselves. We cast, orchestrate, celebrate or threnodize our lives. Born naked, we are never truly naked thereafter. Even our stripped bodies carry the streaks of greasepaint."

Whatever about the bodies, our minds are unstrippable. Interpretation is our metier, our game. Nobody has ever seen things in black and white—not even black or white. This is true most emphatically of all when we look at ourselves, and offer an account. Moralists in the French tradition would attribute this to a duplicitousness in us all: "every straight path shall be made crooked" is their motto. God knows, such an account is not beside the point, but it is misleadingly sombre. It is in fact our ingenuity that makes for our specialized 'readings', the wit that lifts incision or imprint into illumination.

Years ago, theologians used to argue about the relationship between nature and grace: more recently,

psychologists argued about the relationship between nature and nurture. Autobiography, curiously, compounds both formulations. It tends to be governed by absorption in matters to do with freedom, above all—with the liberty of the self, whoever she or he may be. And the liberty, as registered in the writing, also concerns the writing itself: the frame adopted, the pace welcomed, the melody to which the tale is attuned.

Perhaps "they order these things better in France", but we still order them in essentially the same way in Australia. If a Manning Clark can be our national historian and a Sidney Nolan our national painter, plainly we are obsessed with interpretation, with self-rendering. Those two names also suggest something else, though—the deal done with the land, the negotiation of topography. Few of us are gentry, but all of us are, in one sense, landed: our milieu is mappable, and we are locatable. Many of us do not know where we are going, are so many Dantes still in the *Inferno*: but all of us sense that we are circumscribed. Even for the most citified of us, beyond the Blue Mountains, the Dandenongs, the Adelaide Hills, the rest of the land waits, as consciousness waits beyond sleep.

An exaggeration? You would not think so to judge by the parcel of books before me at the moment. Their titles are: *Towong Hill; The Road from Coorain; His Mother's Country; In the Smoke; My Heart, My Country; Over the Top with Jim; Portrait of a Young Forger; Caviar for Breakfast; Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest.* They are as various in ambition and quality as one might hope or fear, but seven of the titles betoken something territorial, and in fact all are informed decisively by a preoccupation with 'placement'.

When I was a boy in Perth, some of us took the study of geography seriously. The reason is obvious. Perth is about as remote from anywhere else metropolitan as say, Lhasa; and we Australian Tibetans used to figure reality to ourselves lest the whole thing fall apart. This is not a peculiarity of Perth-ites, but is the proper style of all who are forced to find themselves participant in the bodiliness of the country and the globe.

If this is so, then certain autobiographical works become newly fascinating, in that they show the convergence of description and desire. "A local habitation" becomes the context not only for living done but for aspirations cherished, fears endured, life embraced or rejected. Many an autobiography has begun with a description of either cultural matrix or family context, so that we see how the nascent individual found lodgement or footing in the world. Australian autobiography seems notably preoccupied with what Vincent Buckley called "the world's flesh". Our psyches are full of its greens and golds and browns: self-articulation becomes, conspicuously, world-articulation.

That said, I want to concentrate on three of these books: Maslyn Williams' *His Mother's Country*, Elyne Mitchell's *Towong Hill: Fifty Years on an Upper Murray Cattle Station*, and Jill Ker Conway's *The Road from Coorain: An Australian Memoir.* Of these, the third is the most intellectually elegant, the second the most at home with its milieu, and the first the most ingenious: but time spent reading any of them is well spent.

An interview with Elyne Mitchell in the *Bulletin*, January 9th, 1990, headed "The Woman from Snowy River", begins in this way:

> In 50 years on Towong Hill station at the foothills of the Snowies, Elyne Mitchell has become the conscience of the mountains and they have become an intimate part of her life. She has walked, skied and ridden extensively in the Mount Kosciusko area. The view from Towong Hill homestead to the snow-capped peaks has been an inspiration for 30 books about the mountains and Australia's heritage as well as two best-selling children's series.

The interview proceeds accordingly, with a mingling of vivacity and relish. What emerges is a picture of a woman of flair, who could perfectly well have done without the interview but, given that it was on, makes a dashing best of it. Much the same might be said of her book. She is neither an adorer of the word nor a contemner of it. She writes as I imagine she skis or rides—proficiently, pragmatically, from time to time with obvious enjoyment, and always with an eye to what is yet to be done. Essentially, everything is episodic, but memory and anticipation both suffuse the episodes. Here is a characteristic moment, the description of her husband's burial:

> They reached the grave, they saw the view, and suddenly a feeling almost of elation began to blow through that crowd of his friends. Here they were, at his graveside in the wonderful setting, below the Snowy Mountains where he had skied and ridden. They had all seen him borne along for his last journey in a four-wheel-drive, and now there was Alen beside his grave, reciting the Psalm for the second time: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills'.
> The grave was facing Pretty Plain. There was the Last Post's infinite sadness, and the cattle, down on the river flats, lowing their last farewell. Indi left for overseas. Honor and Mark stayed ten days and did most of the immediate sorting out, then they and their baby, James, returned to England. John went back to Howitt Plains.
> The last forty years faded away, and I was back in those war years, alone in the echoing, empty house, where I only had my memories of all

> our wanderings together, and when I had the aching fear of what was happening in Changi. The cry of plovers rose up through the night and the lowing of the cattle. (pp 196-7)

"Grave", "view", "elation"—the characterization is briskly comprehensive. There are intricacies here, and some ironies, but no paradoxes. The man fitted in death for the earth is the one who was fitted for it in life: and the reminiscent self-description of the writer links naturally with what is to be said about the dead husband. This is writing which is everywhere functional, but which is not superficial.

As might be guessed from the *Bulletin* excerpt, Elyne Mitchell's book is that of someone peculiarly responsive to given tracts of land, seasons, and nature in its most active sense. It is much concerned with traversing and recapitulating the countryside. The contours of her mind are fitted to the contours of the earth. It is not always economical writing, which makes me contrast it with poetry, but then poetry is not always economical either—otherwise we should all have been starved of Homer, Milton, and Walt Whitman. (Presumably, if God were economical, we should not have had Australia.) It is permeated with the kind of affection for a place which most of us hope to have for persons. And what pleases me as a significant element in the book is what might be called the malleability of selfhood, or its plasticity. Sensibility to what is beyond the self is often thought discreditable, and indeed near-incredible in much writing about the self and its fortunes, nowadays. That we should be beings en rapport with others or the other seems grudgingly conceded at best, and implies a grudge against the other when the case is made: sweet, it seems, are the uses of autocracy. Elyne Mitchell's book, which nowhere looks as if it is written to sustain a thesis, vindicates a quite different sense of selfhood. She reads as if Wordsworth wrote with her in mind.

Jill Ker Conway's *The Road from Coorain* has a rather different air to it: a darker, harder eye has been at work upon experience here: perhaps her sponsor was Coleridge. Hers in any case is a tale both grimmer and more triumphant. It is a long way, in more senses than one, from a large farm on the western plains of New South Wales to being a Professor at M.I.T. If it were not an impertinence, I should wonder whether Robert B. Parker and she have ever met, and if so, what they make of each other. But Jill Ker Conway's book is governed throughout by the making, securing, rescuing, and eventual leaving of Coorain. It is a *Book of Exodus*, with many of the poignancies and promptings implied in any such venture. She is not a person, or a writer, to be intimidated by the attendant challenge. The book ends:

> As I walked out to the plane in the balmy air of a Sydney September night, my mind flew back to the dusty cemetery where my father was buried. Where, I wondered, would my bones come to rest? It pained me to think of them not fertilizing Australian soil. Then I comforted myself with the notion that wherever on the earth was my final resting place, my body would return to the restless red dust of the western plains. I could see how it would blow about and get in people's eyes, and I was content with that. (p. 238)

Not an easily-won contentment, this, and austere enough in nature. But this is not surprising, given the character of the book as a whole, which has in fact been about the discovery of the island or continent of the self, with many disillusionments on the way, and with commensurate joys. This is a book as much concerned with moral discovery and self-education as with the fortunes of a property or a family. The life she narrates up to this point has been an onerous course in liberation and responsibility, deeply coloured by the fact that the reel cannot be re-run, and that the consolations of the future have to be won if they are to be enjoyed. It is a lean book, in the sense that considerable variety of experience is shaped and concentrated from paragraph to paragraph: but it is a generous book, in that that same variety is formulated in very accessible ways. It is not every autobiographer, least of all every one who has made herself a distinguished academic, who could, as Jill Ker Conway does, contemplate the blending of her residual body with the shifting dust of the whole earth. The intellectual and the visionary have comparable authority here. About quite other matters, the same gifts are plied in the whole book. *The Road from Coorain* is emphatically a road to reality.

As is Maslyn Williams' *His Mother's Country*, though on different terms. This book flourishes its own selectiveness about the past, which is welcome when too many autobiographical accounts offer to be *the* story, from which others dissent only at their social or intellectual peril. Maslyn Williams says in his "Foreword":

> The fact is that my palate does not savour the flavours of today, and the mechanisms of memory have rejected all but the most deeply embedded recollections of world-shattering events that in the past fifty years have transformed civilization. Consequently I am more able to give time, place and date to the occasion when the home-brew exploded under grandmother's bed than I can to that splendid irrelevance, the first human moon-walk.

This has its charm, one amply exercised throughout

the book: and some of its jauntiness has been signalled in the photograph of the author at the frontispiece. I know nothing of how he has looked over the years, but here he is handsome, whimsical, engaging—and resistant. It is not the face of a man whose sense of life is to be had on the cheap. The episodes on offer come to us laconically, with precision, and almost always with some of the 'tilt' which determines the photograph. The photograph, incidentally, is captioned 'The Lad', and it is by this guarded but wooing soubriquet that the "I" of the book is identified throughout.

Here then is—what? A good example, in any case, of that mingling of the familiar and the foreign of which I spoke earlier. A book-long flirtation between the naturalistic and the novelistic. An Australian book, in short. And in spite of Williams' deprecation of "the flavours of today", it is for good or ill a 'modern' book, in that it looks to the episodic for disclosure, stands at an angle for purposes of observation, and keeps its fingers crossed while the whole process goes on. Henry James would be bedevilled to know what to make of it, but Laurence Sterne would be onto it without hesitation: which makes it about as modern as they come.

This too is an introduction into the arts of maturity: initiation after initiation takes place, as they do to us all, unless we bow out, by policy, at specific moments. Perhaps for that reason, it is never far from comedy, as insinuated in many of the chapter titles: 'One Day He'll be Grateful', 'Encroachments of Progress', 'Women's Rights and a Housemaid's Snake', 'The Empire for Ever', 'Uncle George Calls for a Pause'. Anecdote is big with jest, though there is a twinge of the grave behind most stories: at a political meeting in the Twenties, after the usual objurgations against big government:

> Old Mackie flicked the spittle from his pipe. 'Experts!' He made a rasping noise in his throat and spat. 'Bloody pen-pushers. Know as much about the land as a day-old chook knows about its grand-dad. Wouldn't know a bull from a heifer. Not one of 'em wouldn't.' He rasped and spat again, scuffling dust over it with his boot before slipping the bridle over Baldy's head.
> Mick the gardener lifted the handles of his barrowful of manure and trundled off muttering, '*De profundis ad te clamavi*' (p. 140)

A barrowful of manure is one thing: the being up to the neck in ordure which is implied in the most celebrated of the Penitential Psalms is another. This is a Sternean gambit, or a Beckettean, but Williams does not need to borrow legitimacy from anyone else. His book registers easily that the barrow, or the bucket, may tilt any way at any time.

But that does not make for a bowing out. The final word, in the "Epilogue", goes as follows:

> He could now (though only vaguely) understand the fathomless sadness of Aborigines and the hopeless dumbness of residual black people who could only sit among the debris of their beliefs and watch the violation continue. Yet still, in its monstrous god-like solitude and self-sufficient silence, this vast expanse of land retained the same aloof detachment; a single huge symbol of timeless and unknowable truths. This had been his mother's country and now it was his. Already he was thinking of things he might do in the future—when he came back.

Sometimes time runs out first, and sometimes space: this time, it has been space. I can attend only scamperingly to the other books before us. Elsewhere, I have written about John Colmer's *Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest.* This is the best book of its kind to be had at the moment, and there does not seem any urgency for a successor. It would be odd if one did not have one's quarrels with any intelligent work in such a field, not least in mettlesome Australia: but anyone with this book to hand will have precisely what it is offered as being—not the last, but a provocative and informative first word on the whole sway of autobiographical writing in this incessantly perplexing country. Reading the book will help with more than some antipodean cluster of texts, messages or perspectives: it could facilitate attention in anyone, anywhere, to the trees and the forest of selfhood.

Of E. M. Kelsall's *In the Smoke: A Riverman Moves to the City*, Hugh Lunn's *Over the Top with Jim*, or Adrienne Howley's *My Heart, My Country: The Story of Dorothea Mackellar*, it would be easy to say too little, or too much. Kelsall's book, like the other two, gives the impression of aiming at transparency—at having as little intervention as possible from the writer. It is diligent, comradely, kindly, and fairly coarse-grained. It would ideally be read on radio. Lunn's book has the quasi-subtitle, "tap-dancing, bugle-blowing *memoir* of a well-spent boyhood", and there you have it all. It is in fact highly intelligent, and especially enjoyable if you happen to have come from the Catholic sub-culture which he memorializes: but you have to settle for a jaunty, larrikinish manner throughout: not so much artless as Artful Dodgerese. Adrienne Howley's *My Heart, My Country* begins by saying that "There is in this work as much of autobiography as of biography, the greater part of it being the words, spoken or written, of the subject—Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar. For eleven and a half years, I saw and spoke with her six days or nights of every week; during the last years of her life I was with her twelve hours and more each day." It is a simple narration, but no simpleton's: the lens of interpretation is, if sympathetically, constantly upon Mackellar.

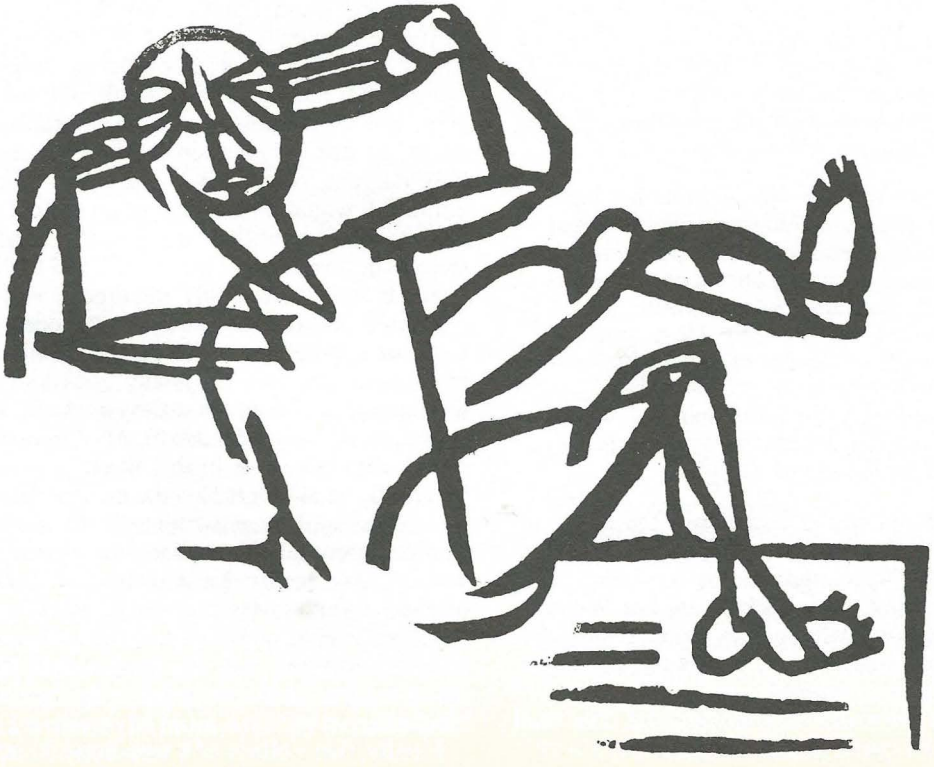
Finally, two siblings of a sort: Betty Roland's *Caviar*

for Breakfast and Marian Pretzel's *Portrait of a Young Forger*. They group themselves together naturally to this degree, that they are both concerned with rovings in eastern Europe in the Thirties or Forties of this century. Inevitably, given developments in that part of the world at present, one looks with ironical or wistful eyes upon any such accounts—a reminder, by the way, that autobiographies do always take their chances with time as well as with place. Marian Pretzel's book deals literally with the survival skills of, and the risks taken by, a young man gifted at forging enemy documents, and thus provides a teasing counterpoint to all of those autobiographies governed by notions of mimickry, fraudulence, and gifted hoaxing which increasingly flood the market. It takes few liberties with its subject, or with its readers. Betty Roland's book is based on a diary kept during 1933, when she spent more than a year in Russia. I do not think that there is a dull page in it, which when one reflects on the time and place in which she found herself is no little praise. God knows why most of us who keep diaries do so, but one is glad that Betty Roland's was kept.

In conclusion: start again at the beginning.

The poet and critic Peter Steele teaches English at the University of Melbourne. He is Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus in Australia. His most recent book is The Autobiographical Passion; Studies in the Self on Show (M.U.P.).

John Colmer: *Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest* (O.U.P., $22.50).
E. M. 'Mick' Kelsall: *In the Smoke: A Riverman Moves to the City* (Lothian, $16.95).
Hugh Lunn: *Over the Top with Jim* (U.Q.P., $24.95).
Marian Pretzel: *Portrait of a Young Forger* (U.Q.P., $14.95).
Betty Roland: *Caviar for Breakfast* (Collins Imprint, $12.95).
Adrienne Howley: *My Heart, My Country* (U.Q.P., $16.95).
Maslyn Williams: *His Mother's Country* (M.U.P., $29.95).
Jill Ker Conway: *The Road from Coorain: An Australian Memoir* (Heinemann, $29.95).
Elyne Mitchell: *Towong Hill: Fifty Years on an Upper Murray Cattle Station* (Macmillan, $29.95).



Jiri Tibor Novak

TWO POEMS BY KATE LLEWELLYN

Answers

Sometimes lying beside me
you ask a question

occasionally the answer
isn't a fish with a hook
I've pulled up
and lain sparkling there
its eyes mottling
in the sun

the answer
I cast slowly about
there is an answer
but sentences and words
won't hold it

nor no hook grip it
the answer
yes I know the answer
it's a mixture
between milk
bread and water

White

No I won't be silent
though white is the colour
of silence
and the birds *were* white
but something lifted
when they did
as a poem floats
off the page sometimes

well I'll tell you
a flock of white ibis
as I stood at the door
circled the pool
in the green paddock
and while the sunset drowned
they waltzed above
round and around
until suddenly
they became a woman
in a long full white frock
dancing
with the dying sunset
that she held in her arms
ecstatic
unable to save

ON RESTORATION

There's all sorts of restoration
going on. In Byron Court
pre-packed plaster board is going
in, pavement slabs are lifted

up. You have to watch your step.
Mind, these houses are worth saving.
Generations old, ten chimney-
pots intact and close to literary

Doherty Street (which sign posts point to),
apart from where the writer lived,
taken over by advertising-
agencies, solicitors.

Croxley Script neatly boxed,
electronic typewriters,
up-to-the-minute desk computers
visible at uncurtained windows

a few steep steel steps below
the street. It's worth preserving this.
Yet further on, past Gray's Inn Road,
seen from the window of a bus,

an old man and a woman lean
on their balcony, seven
storeys high, look down on that
and know they haven't long to go.

No restoration yet for them, who
look every bit as frail
as tiny shapes of curtain veil,
some well-hung and some askew.

FAYE DAVIS

BEN BRIGGS' SOLUTION

"If dynamite won't move it," miner Ben used to
say,
"it can't be moved!" As our foreman, Ben was
green
as a dandelion, but *he* knew which way the rocks
go
once they split, so the boss made him boss over us

lower weeds. No boulder could give Ben backtalk:
he'd wave the sticks at them like doom and spark
the fuse himself, scuffing the match into flame
on his sole, then smile like a cat at morning cream

while the mountain shuddered to dust. Then
winter
came with shrouds of snow, and Ben went all
grave
at its weight on our mess-hall roof. After a whiskey
or two or three he swept out into the lurid night

brandishing a broomstick in his fist like a cross
against the evil drifts. "Off my shoulders, Satan!"
he cried, whacking the highest log with such
self-righteousness the handle split to kindling

at his feet. But nary a flake stirred at his curse.
So Ben stormed off to the shed for better ammo,
five sticks he shook at the sky like a Royal Flush:
"Now we'll settle who's boss!" he glowered at us.

Nothing less would do than setting the charge
right in the Devil's bowels, so he lurched inside
and tossed it on the fireplace's smouldering coals.
Like cats on their last lives, we dove for cover

before the dreaded blast. And did she ever blow!
No dozing angels could miss such a declamation
of flames and smoke. But would Ben repent at
dawn
gazing across his char-splattered congregation?

DAVID P. REITER

BLACK DEATHS

We do not hang them now, but still they hang,
though warders' hands are clean as a white sheet.
A little silent air beneath the feet—
no sounds of violence, no cries, no bang.

Nothing accuses more than loss of hope
sprung from the blackness of a black despair:
invisible infection in the air,
one of its symptoms epidemic rope.

A wail goes up beside some camp-fire's embers
where children's eyes and charred food share the
flies.
In some far noose another lost one dies,
and one of the surviving lost remembers.

R. H. MORRISON

COACH COMES HOME

He used the long walk to 'Dunromin'
as fielding practice. She'd have heard
of course, and though the brief two-word
affair was closed, you're never sure with
women.

Been good, fuck off, the girl had said
—the thanks he got, a real disgrace!
and people near them knew his face
so, tales get told. He stumbled, rubbed his
head.

It's been a puzzle how to bat:
straight down the pitch and keep it nice
like Dad, with leg-byes once or twice
when they were offered? No great score, but
that

kept sweet; or slam around the wicket
like old times? But old times recalled
in-swingers (in his mind, no-balled)
like this, who'd found his gaps and spoilt the
cricket.

DANIEL NEUMANN

JOGGING

You call what you do work?
she said. That's not work.
Try running up & down 15 steps
maybe two, three hundred times a day,
waiting tables.
Now that's work.
What did you do today?

I wrote a poem,
about jogging.

What do you know about jogging?
she said; you hate jogging.

I know.
It's about why I don't jog.

Easy. You don't jog because
you're lazy; anyway, how can you write
a poem about jogging when
you don't know any joggers?

I've watched them, I said.
They're everywhere.

Some research. Is that as close as you get?

Close enough, I said.
It was exhausting.
I lost a coupla kilos just
thinking about it.

You're full of shit.

Maybe, I said . . . but have you ever
noticed . . .?

Noticed what?

The fear.
They're not running for nothing.
You can see it in the eyes.
It's almost desperate.
Now, take someone like Mr Mislimov . . .

You think too much, she said.
A little exercise would do you good.

All right, I said. But I'll take mine
walking.

She didn't have time to discuss it
anymore; she was already running late
for her squash lesson.

I didn't get to tell her about
Mr Mislimov.
He lived to be 166.
The secret of his success was:
"What's the hurry?"
And he only had one rule:
"don't eat, unless you're hungry".

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

WAITING AT STATION FOUR

He sent a letter
to The Commissioner of Stations
complaining of the horsemen on the tracks
watching at the station switch to Station Four
channel famine channel plague
channel death channel war

He sent a letter
to The Commissioner of Stations
crawling in the living room
writhing eye apon the floor
lashing cord, chromed horn, spewing truth
slipping off the china geese flying
ignominiously smiling on the wall

He sent a letter
to The Commissioner of Stations
dipped in a wine glass of ancient lore
Dum, Psfardeach, Kinim, Arov
Dever, Schechen, Barad, Arbeh
Chochech, Machat-bechorot
he saw them all one Wednesday eve
they were watching him at Station Four.

He sent a letter
to The Commissioner of Stations
metal cock asphixiating weirdly
on the purple lawn
clouds poison rain fire seas boiling, iced sun
is the earth a wound
and we its blooded tears?

Be still
be still
his face is to the wall

Send a letter
to The Commissioner of Stations
but remember please you saw it here
first at Station Four

GARY MALLER

HAPPY FAMILIES

When are you going to stay with your father, next,
I ask.
Michael shrugs.
I haven't been since
I ran over the chainsaw with the ute.
He wasn't pleased.
I think I'll wait
till he gets over it.

What about Beck?
The last time she was there
she threw a bowl of chicken noodle soup at him.
What happened? It ran down his legs.
What did he do? He cleaned up the soup.

So he's still on the job it seems.
At five Simon wrote in his news book at school
"Last night my Mummy threw her dinner at the
wall
and my Daddy cleaned it up."

But the last meal I threw, nine years ago, stayed
there. It was scrambled egg. It dried
over a period of days and fell off the wall, bit by bit

All the good fights involve food. Matty said
that Karen packed her bags because his father
took a sausage off the table before they had sat
down.
The last food argument I had took four hours:
it was about whether egg shells burned.

Simon grins. *I'm* going to Dad's on Friday.
I raise my eyebrows. Really?
He doesn't know it but I planted 36 dope plants
in the bush behind the top paddock
and I want to see how much they've grown.

TERRY WHITEBEACH

PRODIGAL

A chauffeur shows my name, salutes!
A prodigal's return to where
I nosed the wartime wire with Bob,
My dog, watched Hamdens broadcast
Parachutes like dandelion seeds . . .

"Francis," I should have asked Cammaerts,
Did you ever see a fat-kneed lad?"

This carpark was Raingill land, lost
As Max, commissioned at Chester with me,
Left red blossoming in a Malay tree . . .

That spire's above Antrobus graves,
The wilting Grandpa I watered
With his feeding cup, his last,
My third summer, our eyes still locked . . .

Above the smog I'd glimpsed Welsh Wales,
Land of our Dad who could two-clout
Nails long as your cock BAP! BAP!
Whistled at life after Arras;
Humped our Anderson shelter under the oak
Over which the thrumming Hun flew "K.L.M.,
Then L.M.S. from Crewe," Dad said.

And wrapped against the frost I saw
Searchlights knit scarves from stars, like Mum
Who now is blind to them as Hodge.
Our father is in Devon, dust like Bu,
My boy, whose smile blows in the hills . . .

Thailand, Greece in transit I saw everything/
Nothing. Here the air is warm with ghosts!

Next to the driver, Aussie-style,
I find the city we once went to
Has itself arrived: not only youth
but all its scenes are gone under
streets where rubbish rolls, Blacks wait.
Outside the hotel a beggar grasps.

Inside I stick out my hand. The chauffeur
Inspects it
steps back. Salutes!

Upstairs the room's designed for thieves
And on the box with landlordly assurance still
The striped-tied Junkers jaw.

Midnight or Two p.m. it's too late to call
Home . . .

SELWYN PRITCHARD

ME AND SARAH BELLUM

Cruising south on the Corpus Callosum
In the Dopamine Interceptor
To lunch at Hypothalamus
Feelin' groovy.

We'd left the basal ganglia at home
Packed a limbic
Some 1974 Medulla
The air in our hair

It was just out of Meninges
When a rear synapse went
We hurtled off the central cortex
Arse over pons

At the occipital a man in white coat
Diagnosed temporal troppo
Right out of our hemispheres . . .
And they locked the parietal door.

ROD USHER

ALISTAIR DAVIDSON

Gorbachev al sugo

Gorbachev's milestone of a speech at the United Nations created an uneasy feeling of *déjà vu*. The stress he placed on the complex modern economic world system in which nuclear weapons imperiously impose foreign policies of peace and co-operation, and on the movement of the great masses "to the forefront of history" to face *global* economic and ecological problems which are part of their lives—of which they are already pressingly aware through the electronic media,—strikes the ear like a jangle of strings and chords as an orchestra tunes up. The further development of his argument into the need for "a fundamentally new machinery for the functioning of the world economy" with new criteria for "peoples" acting in new ways, which is in turn developed into the affirmation that both the French (bourgeois) and the Russian (proletarian) revolutions shaped mankind's past consciousness—a consciousness which we must all "go beyond" (shades of the Hegelian *aufhebung*) in a program dictated by "universal human values" based on consensus rather than "at the expense of others"; also strikes strongly evocative notes. The theme of the need for compromise and collective solutions between communist and capitalist based on a freedom of choice finally brings the cacophony together into a symphony. "What we are talking about is unity in diversity." What we are listening to is a proposal for a global "historic compromise". Gorbachev has gone Italian. His orchestra is playing something from the compositions of Berlinguer—with shades of that earlier great music maker Togliatti, who is famous for his call for unity in diversity.

After the anathematising of the Italian Communist Party's policies in *Pravda* in 1982 this is an unbelievable *volte face*. Then the condemnation of Soviet policies and especially what went on in Poland had brought accusations that the PCI favoured "imperialist reaction" in its call for diversity. But a quick rush to *Kommunist* of January 1989, and to *Rinascita* (rather smug) of 28 January reveals an admission by the Soviet writer Vladimir Naumov that the PCI was right after all seven years ago. Indeed, both sides directly link *perestroika* with the development of the PCI's policy, particularly under the late Enrico Berlinguer. In 1989 the USSR appears to be learning from that former *bête noire*, the PCI.[1]

The problem is that the PCI's policies which the USSR seems to bid fair to adopt, have failed. The Italians—with their capacity for cynicism and self-mockery—have already made a film about the difficulties of a conductor who seeks to make an ideologically disunited set of musicians play in harmony. Indeed the policies leftists grew to know in the last twenty years under labels like "the historical compromise"; "eurocommunism" and, more recently "the left alternative," have already been defeated by a world whose contradictions are fundamental. They all faced the complexity of a world where the two titanic classes never emerged to confront each other. Instead, the world remained of kaleidoscopic diversity and variety and the petty-bourgeoisie and the peasantry itself—far from declining, grew in strength. And with the survival of all these vestiges which history refused to leave behind also continued the "bizarre beliefs" of people for whom the enlightenment and modernity had no lived meaning. Indeed, the most vexing of these for Gorbachev must be militant Islam. We can almost feel sorry for him on reading that the return of a very ancient Koran to one of the USSR's Islamic Republics provoked paroxysms of piety.

When faced with their equivalent folkloric diversity the Italian Communists had attempted—as Gorbachev now proposes—to reach across classes and to make progressive fronts and alliances. The PCI had resuscitated the values of the individual and the citizen which went back to the French Revolution but which had been curtly dismissed by the deposed oracle, Gramsci, as early as 1919. It is true that the PCI left replaced the Voltaire (so lovingly translated by Togliatti, who made *On Tolerance* almost required reading) by Rousseau. All those books by Lucio Colletti and Galvano della Volpe which the new intellectual left touted around in the seventies brought a new theme into a world which marxists had thought was really about class struggle. When this proved not to be enough to achieve the progressive unity, the PCI reached its embrace across the Alps to fellow parties, since the economy world within which it had to operate extended beyond its borders and no national solutions could be found. This "eurocommunism" came to nothing as well though it continues the attempt of 1986 to set up a European-wide left. The French Communists proved too nationalistic for eurocommunism. Desperate attempts to woo Mitterand only brought home the strength of the adage that those who would sup with the devil should use a long spoon. Since the late eighties the PCI's experiments with compromise and unity in diversity left it in decline and on the defensive.

Indeed, it no longer has much credit left even in the realm of ideas. The Left is left without a compass—discombobulated. Capitalism is stronger than ever and inhumanity quite acceptable to discourse. After all, why talk about exploitation of the working class if there is no working class anymore as many PCI members now assert, having been corrupted by those in Paris they sought to embrace.

I wonder if Mr Gorbachev thinks that the USSR is so much bigger that it could not be so affected. It is a slippery road he is on, and the bigger they are the harder they fall.

If the scale on which the USSR approaches these problems is much greater than that on which the Italians addressed their problems, the parallels between the two countries are still great as Gramsci was quick to point out sixty years ago. It was not fortuitous moreover that Gerschenkron chose the two countries as parallel examples of the problems of late capitalist development and how this placed them in subordination to international capital and its exigencies. Today both still have great internal imbalances economically and socially; a rather underdeveloped internal market; and regional problems of staggering complexity compounded by the nationality problem. Undoubtedly, they both have sectors of the most advanced technology. Yet the Soviet Union, like the Italy from which it seems to be borrowing its policies, in a sudden rush to reason after decades of bloody-minded benightedness, is finding it difficult to meet even its food requirements internally and seeking a great deal of capital and 'know-how' outside. All this adds up to a remarkable degree of tolerance which is duly applauded by the enemies of socialism outside the USSR. It is, of course, necessary to allow creativity to flourish by ending the highly centralised command system. Our own Professor Rigby pointed out over twenty years ago that the refinements of modern technology demand a complex and differentiated system of decision makers and experts. Yet, the privilege accorded to science and scientists under Nikita Krushchev (a form of tolerance) did nothing for the Soviet Union. What is demanded is not merely pluralism—for the obverse of the Kantian society is that of the Marquis de Sade—but what sort of pluralism comes in the wake of the new policies. So far we have no indication that the pluralism acknowledged by Gorbachev both nationally and internationally is encouraging more than the expression of the political forms and ethics we have all associated with capitalist-liberal society for over a hundred years. The real issue is not whether the masses come onto the streets but how they come onto the streets.

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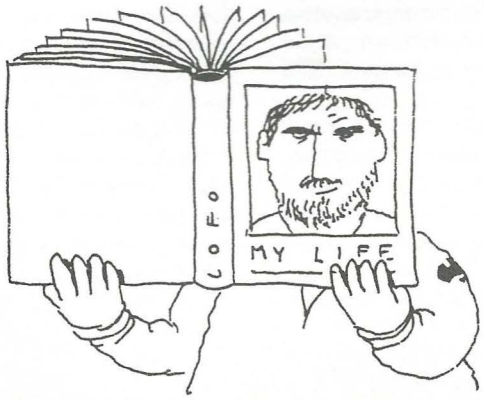
1. I am grateful to Professor Graeme Gill for bringing the *Kommunist* article to my attention.



Lofo

JACK CLANCY

Media and Methods

A Discussion of Three Books on Film and Television

Ina Bertrand *ed*: *Cinema in Australia; A Documentary History* (University of N.S.W. Press, $39.95).
John Tulloch and Graeme Turner *eds*: *Australian Television; Programmes Pleasures and Politics* (Allen and Unwin, $19.95).
Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan *eds*: *The Australian Screen* (Penguin, $19.99).

In the horrible mess that at present constitutes Australian television and the confusion and uncertainty that represents the Australian film industry, it is encouraging to know that scholarship continues, that thinkers speculate and historians delve away. These three books, all published in late 1989, contribute to a necessary dialogue about the past, the present, and therefore inevitably the future, of Australian film and television.

The contributions vary in achievement and value but one thing to be said about them all is that they are addressed primarily to what might be called a Media Studies audience, that is, to the teachers and students at tertiary level engaged in the study of that very important phenomenon, the media of mass communication. Beyond that they are directed towards an educated audience who may lack the specialist knowledge, and certainly and mercifully, lack the specialist vocabulary, that many of the writers assume, but who are nevertheless media consumers who share the recognition of film and television as an important part of the national culture.

Taken as a group, the three works span a variety of approaches to the task of analysis and interpretation. Hardly a discipline in itself, Media Studies has been promiscuous in enlisting established disciplines in its attempt to make sense of what sometimes seems an all-pervasive fact of our life and our culture, perhaps even, as one contributor to these books had it, of our self-definition.

History, the all-seasons discipline, is common to all three books, but central to a splendid achievement, *Cinema in Australia; A Documentary History*. Under Ina Bertrand's editorship the contributors have brought together a fascinating collection of documents on the chequered history of the Australian film industry from its legendary beginnings in 1896 until the latest state of uncertainty exactly 90 years later. (The most recent document is dated 1986.) It is organised into six sections of something over a decade each, with each decade having a particular focus on one film; thus "The Story of the Kelly Gang", "The Sentimental Bloke", "Thoroughbred", "Jedda", "The Adventures of Barry McKenzie" and "My Brilliant Career" receive particular attention. The documents range from letters to policy papers, reviews to reports, polemics to propaganda. The editor speaks of another six volumes on the cutting room floor, and it is clear that selection from the vast mass of material could not have been easy. One inspired inclusion is the first, a Henry Lawson short story entitled "The Australian Cinematographer", a work which barely justifies its title and yet, for 1897, shows remarkable prescience, with its succession of shots on familiar Lawson themes.

The story and the issues which the documents present are familiar. They cover boom and bust, innovative daring and conservative resistance, local flavour and international reach, cultural nationalism and media imperialism, market forces and government assistance, Sydney and Melbourne, mainstream and alternative, art and industry, ocker and genteel. And they cover them remarkably well; the book is a treasure trove for students of Australian film or more generally Australian culture, not least because many of the issues, recurring through the decades, are as urgent for film and the other arts today as they ever were.

Each of the sections is introduced by a narrative which attempts to account for the developments in the period covered. These in turn form a larger narrative which presents and interprets the history of Australian film over ninety turbulent years. The supporting sectional bibliographies and the concluding general bibliography complete a volume that is a credit to Australian film scholarship. It is also splendidly produced, with one glaring error of judgement, and that in the worst of places, the dust-jacket cover. In an otherwise graphically apt design, the title is presented as **CINEMA**, and the rest, in letters one

quarter of the size, as **IN AUSTRALIA A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY**. Since the title is **CINEMA IN AUSTRALIA**, with the explanatory subtitle **A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY**, this seems an odd design decision. The most carping critic could find no other fault with the book, whereas its virtues are both apparent and abundant.

With the other two volumes however there are problems. Even though each of them has a historical component, with a scholarly approach producing contributions of considerable value, other writers seek to provide their own theoretical framework, and it is here that the problem of Media Studies method is most urgently raised. A case in point is John Fiske's piece on Television Quiz Shows ("Sale of the Century" and "The Wheel of Fortune") and "Perfect Match", in Tulloch and Turner's *Australian Television*.

The programs studied are extremely popular and critically despised, constituting therefore almost a definition of popular culture. Yet they might also be defined as mass culture, in the terms set out by the Frankfurt School in the thirties, and Fiske's task is to rescue them from the latter, inclusion in which would make them a Bad Thing, and establish them as the former, and thus as a Good Thing. This exercise, repeated with considerably less conviction by Ann Curthoys and John Docker on "Prisoner", has become a commonplace of left-wing media criticism. It is based on the logic that says that if a program is popular, that is liked by The People, it must be good, even though it emerges from a source more easily associated with monopoly capitalism.

Fiske's argument is an ingenious one, resting on a theoretical outline that produces introductory definitions of the social system, capitalism, popular culture, language, everyday life and cultural capital—no mean feat. When to all this is added the buttress of the inevitable Foucault as well as the latest intellectual fad (also used by Curthoys and Docker), Bahktin's notion of the carnivalesque, and a heavy reliance on De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, it is clear that heavy theoretical artillery is being trained on what had seemed rather slight objects of attention. Apart from prompting the thought that the resulting arguments would mean little or nothing to that popular audience which is the very object of Fiske's concern, all of this theorising does produce doubts. Such an elaborate structural base is surely itself suspect. And more importantly there are leaps in the progression of the argument which must be at least questioned.

For example, "Perfect Match", it is held, presents a "challenge to patriarchal power and social discipline" and "Sexuality is understood as the source of equally valid pleasure for both genders, not, more responsibly, as the basis for a long-term, hopefully marital relationship". Yet to argue simply thus, and present the program as a guerrilla attack on established ideology, is to act as though the revolutionary change in sexual mores from the 1960s had never taken place. Patriarchal power is still a fact of life but the nineteenth century version which Fiske cites is hardly of urgent relevance.

Fiske's argument is nevertheless a lively and provocative one, even if, as a model of an approach to the study of television forms, it produces more problems than it solves. Less problematic and more enlightening are Graeme Turner's piece on Transgressive TV and Stuart Cunningham's on the innovative strategies of Australian mini-series. With Curthoys and Docker however the problems arise in sharper form, since the authors, determined to show that popularity must have something to do with merit, set themselves a task to which, finally, they are not equal, the task of defending "Prisoner" as in some way worthwhile (even, though they don't use the term, quality?) and of doing so by means of old-fashioned subjective criticism.

A series of opinions about the program (" . . . is 'Prisoner' voyeuristic? We don't think so"), and of put-downs of those who oppose it, don't establish more than the starting point we are all familiar with, that "Prisoner" was popular. And the opinions are often decidedly odd: "But if Bea is the moral centre in 'Prisoner', she's an unusual and complex one, in part, exerting her control through violence or the threat of it; she brands K for Killer on Nola's chest with a soldering iron". Unusual and complex indeed.

The problem of method then remains acute in Media Studies, and most acute in television studies. It is tackled, directly and valuably, by both Bob Hodge in "Television and Children" and John Tulloch in an afterword chapter on questions of audience theory. It is raised, turned around and upside down, sent up and cast aside in John Hartley's entertainingly idiosyncratic "Continuous Pleasure in Marginal Places", which is perhaps the best comment in the book on how to approach the serious study of television.

The Australian Screen is predominantly a study of Australian cinema, with only one of the eleven chapters and part of another being devoted to television. That one chapter, Moran's "Television Drama", is a model of uncluttered analysis, demonstrating most effectively that one of the chief determinants of the content of television drama is the choice of the form which will best serve commercial imperatives. Media Studies' search for a method finds one wholly satisfactory answer here.

Otherwise, the best pieces are again historical, with accounts of the pre-1970 revival period managing to shed new light on what is now well-traversed ground. But since the revival period has been with us, sometimes precariously, for the twenty years since 1970,

it is legitimate to look at a study of even its early years, the Ocker-comedy period, as having contemporary interest. What is surprising in Tom O'Regan's piece is that having carefully and effectively placed Alvin, Bazza, Stork and Petersen in their cultural and historical context—the virtual abolition of film censorship, changing sexual mores, cultural nationalism, the very fact of a long-dead industry being revived from scratch—he can still ignore their crude sexism and their failure to respond at any level beyond bemusement to the preoccupation with male desire and male fantasising which is at their centre. The "high bourgeois dismissal of ocker" to which O'Regan refers may now be recognised as perfectly justified.

O'Regan's account of Australian cinema in the eighties is a far more satisfying piece, even though his categories stop short of the radical developments of the last two or three years, where "Sweetie", "Ghosts of the Civil Dead", "Young Einstein", "Dogs in Space" and "Celia" have declared that a new generation is at work in Australian film, going into territory which the 'period' film, well dealt with in Graeme Turner's chapter, never came near.

The second half of the book largely deserts the feature film to concentrate on alternative cinema, by which Adrian Martin means independent avant-garde or experimental film-making (after all these decades the nomenclature is still messy), Blonski and Freiberg mean women's film-making and Moran means institutional documentary. Despite minor slips which re-christen Albie Thoms as Thomas, and Bruce Goodluck as Brian, they effectively cover the territory using aesthetic, political or institutional perspectives. The Blonski and Freiberg chapter, despite predictabilities, which include an objection to the term 'rebirth' in relation to Australian cinema on the grounds, one gathers, of sexism, provides an important introduction to a large, and largely unknown, body of film-making by Australian women. The disappointment here is the chapter "Aborigines and Film" by Sean Maynard, (revealed on the cover itself as John Flaus, in which case why the pseudonym?). Again it is principally a matter of method. *The Ancient Mariner* and *Oedipus Rex* are not terribly useful as comparison points for "The Last Wave", nor are the Richards, Walsh and Neville, as "whingeing liberals", for "Jimmy Blacksmith". John Ford's Indians may be closer, but it is all far too loose. And finally, omitting "Bitter Springs" may be excused but failure to mention "Short Changed" cannot.

The Australian Screen is mercifully light on both theory and jargon although Tom O'Regan, who can cite with approval "Temper democratic, bias offensively Australian" in one chapter, is capable of the following in another:

> In the process a different kind of intertextuality was posed: not one in privileged relation to the discourses on Australians and Australian society, but one in relation to conformity and difference within genre cinema.

The task of understanding and interpreting Australian film and television is too important to be left to the amateurs of press reviewing. These three volumes suggest an increasing competence and authority in the professionals. Despite problems of method, they are a hopeful sign for Australian media scholarship.

Jack Clancy teaches in the Department of Communication Studies, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

VANE LINDESAY

Ken Gott: 1923-90

To be sought out and accepted as a friend by Kenneth Davidson Gott did much throughout my life to keep one's self esteem at the simmer. I did not know Ken at the time he was dux of literary studies at Melbourne High School, for our forty-two year friendship had its beginnings when Ken, with Geoffrey Serle, was the 1947 co-editor of *M.U.M.*—the Melbourne University Magazine—for which I was asked to design the cover and various illustrations to its short stories, feature articles and verse. Formerly, Ken had edited the student newspaper *Farrago*. During this post-war period he became involved, as with so many of us at the time, with the socialist experiment.

Ken graduated in economics and went into journalism. That he became a journalist with an international reputation was recognized as a common matter of fact when he was appointed South East Asia editor, and later general editor of the American publication *Business International.*

In every state of Australia Ken will be remembered by friends for his many involvements: for his contribution as a most welcome editorial board member of both *Overland* and *Australian Book Review*: for his analytical writing published by the Fabian Society: for his research and published denouncement of racism, and for his enthusiasm for amateur radio having secured, long ago, his broadcast licence. His recent and final request from me was for a re-design of his station call sign identification card announcing VK3 AJU. I am happy he liked the result.

Over and out, dear Ken.

A DREAM OF REFUGE

On distant mirages' glittering seas,
my grandparents' house floats.
A tired board rider, I'm drawn toward
these broad, dry decks. Butting the day's transparent
gaze,
here a dream hollows its space. Moonlight's secret
sheen
stops skimming the morning's edge.
It too bends its knees above a ripple
—wind in wheat—
riding the last wave back.

Behind this nightsurfer I dreamwalk the years.
Past a compound, shadow-splashed,
backwards we glide onto sand—
a space latticed by the to-and-fro tangles of glances,
an abandoned court where tennis balls
like oysters served out of their shells drift
through nets. Here three generations joust.
Heralded by the broken-handed clapping
of silky oak leaves, while racquets claw crabwise
above salt-sharp lines, here all the years of my
childhood
wait their turn, feasting on the white sights
of my family in gentle battle.

Towards a dream of refuge that family falls.
Sun, like golden syrup tipped from the sky's
cut-open tin trickles easily
from horizon to horizon
as if it had never treacled into the day
darkening once a town a bank
where my father balanced accounts.

Here the only houses hide their darkness
under radiant hats. This ferry trip,
once for holidays, becomes suddenly like sleep—
as we fall into its dazzling coma,
an ambulance deposits my father somewhere else.

Shivering leaves, the silky oak cashes its silver.
Moonlight shocks there, pausing beside the
verandah . . .
While I peel off the present like a wetsuit,
moonlight pauses and contemplates a tin tank,
counting down its potbelly a happy peristalsis
of darkness and light. I remember. How fear
and loss
stripe us and we do not peel open silence
like a sardine can. " . . . all is calm,
all is bright . . ." I practise hopeful forgetting
so easily, aged under-eight. Side by side,
safe beneath the verandah roof
nestle the rites of Christmas, elasticised:
Granpa *hffffs* his long cigarette . . .
On the wireless, the Davis Cup; Blue Hills . . .
day after day after day clinking cutlery and china . . .
through the house these glancing
after-lunch confidences.
Sun-shocked metal armours us
while the paddocks fry and the drawers and
cupboards hide
foreign families—all alike
and hugging in the dark.

Carols. Chants of harvesters and ploughs.
That crackle of heat. A stretched-thin
limpness: summer heat lassooing the house.
Grasshoppers in kikuyu. Days of bees
through the grapefruit trees. Mosquitoes too,
singing sly menace above the ringed tank
of rain: returning, I sniff for kerosene
remembering how I drank some once how it lies
a harmless secret in this tank—this sidewise
piano now—which moonlight sounds out.

Lullabies, as lightly winged as larkspurs
stalk down into beds, into ears laid out below tin.
On her pillow my grandmother's hair

plaits the same silver which on the roof is skittering
as freely as someone who has woken, suddenly
young.
Shadows pergola these rooms
where dreams twine and sprout like the grapevines
waiting to be pruned tomorrow.
Over these gardens my memory rises
turning sunflower faces while I travel
too far above, tripping over a cat, dark and cool
as a waterbag, bristly with dew . . . its long tail drips
where snakes have been seen, drooling down the
gutter.

On distant mirages, my grandparents' house
floats. It appears beside me
while I'm balancing oddly, teetering between turns
in my life. Before a window, its bottom tier hitched
like a skirt at a beach, this verandah waits.
Pretending no absence, as I grip this moment
will I find at last my life floating out
like a dream just this side of sleeping?
Here, between the house and the world:
a space, stripped, open to air
a room rippled above and below
a home like a safe, dry hollow in the heart
of an ocean. Here even the peripatetic moon

pauses. On this lingering ledge of light
I wait. The tide turns.

JEAN KENT

PESTO EVENINGS

There were stakes inside the evenings.

Inside the long pink evenings
of pasta and pesto there were the
tiny stakes of a blossoming garden.

Inside, with the heat and her leather sandals
she'd watch as he created the bowls.
The bowls of outside.

The basil from outside had to be picked with
hands of knowledge, with the hands of the
inside.

She'd speak of Derrick,
the German detective and of Fellini on SBS.
She'd also finger the Italian chocolate cake
she've baked that afternoon inside
her flat. Up the road.

And he'd talk of the times
they'd spent in Florence
and Venice.

His garden was under her tutelage.
And her garden was his.

They'd eat and watch Derrick,
their lips touching the past surfaces
while tasting the fresh garden green.

But their hands would crack still. And she'd leave
with her purse and keys.
No words.
Episode after episode.

And even now,
although he's long since moved house
the black spinach still stings in the night.

FIONA PLACE

THE ANIMAL VOTING BILL

Good evening. In the second reading of the
Animal Voting Bill
a confident Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, explained
today
that it wasn't his intention to arbitrarily exclude
birds, insects, reptiles & mammals from the
legislation.
Under persistent interjections from the Member
for Tuckey
'The birds, Bob, the birds, don't forget the birds'
the Prime Minister, without weeping, emphasised
that
the only species to be included on the Electoral
Roll
was the higher simian family of animals—apes
baboons, gorillas, mandrills, chimpanzees, orang-
outangs &
then only when resident in Australia for over two
years &
capable of demonstrating some basic
understanding of
optional preference ballot paper design & voting
procedure.
(The Member for Tuckey was suspended from the
House for a day
while the Prime Minister clarified Aboriginal voting
rights.)
Birds, insects & reptiles were obviously excluded
from the bill.
Even so, Mr Hawke believed that there might be
an opportunity
for Cabinet to consider one or two mammalian
amendments.
His Government had an enlightened policy on
dolphins; in fact
his Government had several enlightened policies
on dolphins.
Unless a new code could be cracked for whales,
however,
he felt their inclusion might increase the donkey
vote.
Mr Hawke denied that this exclusion had anything
to do
with former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's
delivery of
over ninety percent of the potential whale vote to
the Liberals.

Mr Hawke acknowledged that the higher simian
family wasn't native
but he'd always given immigration his complete &
absolute support
& one of his grandchildren kept a lovely hairy-
nosed wombat.
Multiculturalism had been a plank of the ALP's
platform for years
now, ever since its abandonment of The White
Australia Policy.
Eligible chimps in travelling circuses would be
enfranchised
the Australian Electoral Commission had reassured
Mr Hawke
but these mobile colonies of chimps would be
only random factors
not large enough to necessitate any electoral
redistributions.
In what some experienced commentators saw as a
major concession
Mr Hawke admitted that most zoos *were* in
marginal electorates
but strongly emphasised that he wouldn't be
diverted from the
cause of equality, fairness & justice for all
Australians, who
understood the difference between gerrymander &
malapportionment.
It was true that not all human voters were
privileged to
fathom the full implications of complex political
terminology
but it was contemptible of the Opposition,
contemptible, he said
to belittle disabled, distressed & disadvantaged
Australians.
With respect to any minor defects in the proposed
legislation
he just wanted to say this: it was unequivocably
responsible
unlike the new absurd & irresponsible Opposition
policy of
populating Australia with all the world's remaining
animals.
That was just jumping on the bandwagon, the
Prime Minister said,
a cynical & contemptible exercise in pandering to
greenies.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

THREE POEMS BY PETER LYSSIOTIS

The Bird In The Belltower

On the belltower
the wind breaks

like glass.

At the edge of the belltower
there is a bird:

wet with light.

It has black wings
as in miracles

The sound of the bell
holds the bird to the belltower

Everything is held
the way it was agreed on
years ago.

An Outline of Two Voices

In his garden,
Under the moon,
Smoking;

He looks from his house
To mine,

The trees of his childhood;
The pomegranate, the fig,
The lemon and the orange
Cast shadows
And form a knot
Around absent things.

In his yard,
One branch crosses another,
Their movement
Has come to sound
Like the dead
Gossiping about the dead.

A door is shut twice.

I spend part of each day
Being my father,

Looking from his house
To mine.

Hands

The bell tower
is wrapped in vines and smoke;
beneath it the sparrows scratch
at fragments of the past.

In this place,
memory remorselessly presses against
what must have been real events,

which will end here,
with you
if they have to.

Dragged between familiar white stones
your voice searches
for a language lined with flesh:

the sounds recall
the way your life was ordered
in the other place;
of the way you were led by the nose,
in that other place.

That final letter of yours,
the one I'd lost,

is now in the palm of my hand.

SWAMP

strange place to meet, bed
a swamp where you dam yourself

it's certainly a strange place
an unspoken rendez-vous

no matter what else passes
this doesn't

you do not speak
but strip down together

and listen to the tides
of each other's breath come

even as waves
even as inches

tonight i certainly think
it strange to be in bed with you

cross purposes writing a parallel line
across our destination

there is a brake on our movement
we lie, cracked, jagged

stopped with words
we will not say

COLLEEN FARRELL

WEDDING PLANS

"We're discussing marriage seriously.
We will probably get formally engaged in 1997.
And we plan to have the wedding in 22 or 23
years.
We're not sure who we should ask to be our
grooms and bridesmaids.
Friendship's so ephemeral now.
The reception will be in the Dandenongs, if they're
still up there.
I would like a honeymoon in Queensland, but my
girlfriend would prefer Australia.

Sex before marriage is quite a problem.

We have opened a fixed term bank account to
save enough to get a bank
loan for a 10% deposit on a block of good
land.
We believe that our church has a vital role to play
in family life.
Next Sunday we'll start going. If the
barbecue's called off.
One of these Sundays.

Sex before marriage is quite a problem.

I've decided that I will name our first baby after
Dad. I hope it's not a girl.
We demand the right to raise our children in a
nuclear free world,
but we both recognise that, in a serious
relationship,
you sometimes have to compromise.
We both grew up in the 70's; so we would like to
give our children
everything we never had, like childhood.

In this decade, sex before marriage becomes a
problem.

Ultimately in the final analysis, we feel so secure
about our feelings
for each other, that we've bought twin
cemetery plots.

Even though the future's taken care of, sex before
marriage
is quite a problem.

GEOFF FOX

Claude and Nola (Faust Version No. 146) by Lofo

books

And Women, Prince?

Manning Clark

C. B. Christesen: *The Troubled Eyes of Women* (University of Queensland Press, $12.95).

Not long after the end of the war in 1945 I remember attending a students' party in Fitzroy. It was a time of hope. The people had just won the war against Fascism. It was a time when lovely young women told me how 'beaut' Australia would be when there was a socialist society. At this party there was much drinking, much dancing, much laughter. But that is not why I remember the evening. I remember it because, at the height of the gaiety and the uproar, a rumour ran around: "Clem's coming". The crowd parted, leaving a passage way, just as the Red Sea is said to have divided to make way for Moses. There was a reverent hush as Clem Christesen strode into the room.

I wondered then what manner of man he was, what went on inside him. I knew him then as the young editor of *Meanjin*, a magazine in which he had preserved a balance between those who saw Australians as representatives abroad of European culture, and those who saw Australians as a people destined to produce a culture of their own. I knew he had thrown his pages open to all. What I did not know was whether he wanted to make *Meanjin* an outlet for highbrow bourgeois culture or for the new working-class culture which could flourish in Europe and the New World after the impending destruction of bourgeois society.

But most of all I did not know anything about the man who was a missionary for better, if unspecified, things in the intellectual life of Australians. So it was with a lively curiosity that I opened this book of short stories. They would tell me something about the man who, for three decades after the war, fought the good fight for literature in Australia—and is still fighting on because he knows, as we all know, that the mopping up operations will take a long time yet.

I was not disappointed. These stories confirmed my hunch that if you scratch long enough at the epidermis of a single-minded missionary for Australian literature you will find a boy from the bush. These stories reveal what put the light in the eye of Clem Christesen. He loved fishing. He loved the sea, loved collecting bait, learning the lore of the sea, how to manage a boat and the habits of fish. Being then in the years before the biting into the forbidden fruit, he did not notice any similarity between the hopes of a fisherman and the hopes of a lover. That will come in time.

He was, to make a simple point, a child of his age. He grew up near Townsville at a time when a man's intelligence and virtue were reflected in his response to the religious teaching of the day. A nun ordered him to do what he did not want to do. Clem walked out and never turned back. The vacuum left by the departure of God was to be filled by culture, and much later with the Australian version of it.

So Clem was never tempted to take comfort from the knowledge that Christ had been a fisherman. He became a loyal, uncompromising son of the Enlightenment, no groveller at the throne of grace. He was an Australian, but not a son of British sires. Culture was the answer: literature, music, painting, drama, cinema, would be a man's comforter, what a man put between himself and death.

The young man made another discovery. While fishing or walking in the sand dunes or sitting in a boat, he discovered the wonder of a man with a maid. This young man was not condemned, as many bush boys were condemned, to an almost exclusively male society, or a life in which desire was infinite but opportunities nil. The young Clem would have no hesitation in answering the question Rogozhin put to Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*: "And women, Prince, are you very keen on them?" He would have said "Yes I am". Women ministered to his delight. Later he found it rewarding to talk to a woman. He was lucky. Women were not just poodles for the men in the comfortable classes, or pack-horses for the men on the land, or madonnas of the kitchen sink.

Women were also an enigma. They often had

troubled eyes. The young Clem wondered why this was so. The mature Clem put the reflections of a lifetime into the title story, "The Troubled Eyes of Women".

So for me it was a delight to find that a man I had admired for years had been a fisherman, had been a young boy who took a stand against what he believed to be an infamous insult to humanity. In this collection of stories he has written about those early years with the tranquillity of a man who always was magnificently alive, but has now become an observer of rather than a participant on the battlefield of the human heart. They are a guide to the man who gave so generously of his time and his talents to the reputation and standing of Australian literature. Judgement is for the literary critics. A rapidly ageing historian can only say Thank you for the document, and wish long life to its creator.

Manning Clark's most recent book, the first volume of an autobiography, is The Puzzles of Childhood *(Viking).*

Secret Armies

Rupert Lockwood

Andrew Moore: *The Secret Army and the Premier: Conservative Paramilitary Organisations in New South Wales 1930-32* (New South Wales University Press, $24.95).

Bearing the title 'Unemployment Roundsman' for Keith Murdoch's Melbourne *Herald*, I visited Broadmeadows army camp, converted to a refuge for jobless, homeless Diggers. They wore surplus 1914-18 uniforms, dyed dark blue to avoid reminder of khaki worn for a pledged return to a land fit for heroes. The ex-soldiers drank cocoa thinner, they said, than that served by the Sallies in Flanders trenches, and ate stale pies and saveloys donated by city restaurants. The stoic misery of it all was in my mind when a senior *Herald* journalist, volunteer militia captain and later a wartime Intelligence major, invited me to Hawthorn army drill hall to play bridge. From unblooded warriors I won 23 shillings at threepence a hundred. This tax-free supplement to a £4 a week cadet reporter's pay spelled prosperity at 1931 prices.

Next week I was at Hawthorn drill hall for another tray-a-hundred haul from slow-thinking militia officers. Alas—a uniformed soldier dumped a Lewis gun on the bridge table. He showed us how to fire a drum-load of .303 bullets to flatten Communist-led unemployed rebels. I was offered a seat in a low-slung Lancia car, fitted with machine-gun mountings. My intimate contacts with non-rebellious unemployed, confining their sapped energies to marches, anti-eviction riots and 'dole strikes', evoked no ambition to rat-tat-tat away at the deprived and defenceless. No more bridge winnings from militiamen and RSL members who would have turned that Lewis gun on those blue-garbed returned soldiers had they rebelled against betrayal and humiliation . . .

I should have dumped on the sub-editors' table an exposure story on para-military conspiracies, but with General Blamey and other high officers and corporate controllers of advertising contracts involved, the copy would never have gone up the chute to the linotypes. In Victoria the private armies Dr Moore identifies were allowed protective secrecy. His long trek through archives, often found by luck, to compile this most significant history of ultra-Right conspiracies between the wars, yields the names of nearly all ranking generals, many senior officers, judicial eminences willing to give the greenest of green lights to the 'guardians', RSL personalities, leaders in banking, insurance, manufacturing, retailing and rural industries, organising or subsidising volunteer minders to open the arms caches if their privileges came under serious challenge.

Dr Moore's title might suggest that ultra-Right conspiracies were based only in NSW, directed against Premier J. T. Lang (1930-32) and the Sydney labor movement, then subject to cataracts of misrepresentation. He has shown that media emphasis on the New Guard, whose strutting, copy-catting fascist saluter, Eric Campbell, able to write scripts for suppression of imminent Red revolution in his sleep and promise fire and faggot for those not worshipping before the never-setting British imperial sun, diverted attention from the major power lurking in the wings, the Old Guard. The Old Guard, with its network of armed groups stretching over the land, enjoyed the most military, financial and political support.

The Old Guard was to lead in the Lang Government's overthrow. His mild reform policies were often branded as 'Communist', though Jack Lang, wealthy real estate agent, was one of the nation's most vocal anti-Communists. Lang's plan to suspend interest on British loans outraged an Establishment long trained in silky grovelling to the suppliers of knighthoods, investment and a 70% farm-products market.

From Wesley Church Pleasant Sunday Afternoon pulpit in Melbourne came the astounding claim from R. G. Menzies that he would prefer to see "every man, woman and child in Australia die of starvation rather than that we should refuse to pay our honest debts to the bondholders". And so Lang's planned suspension of interest to British bondholders to permit job-creating public works must be defeated, by putsch if necessary. The firestorm of Establishment opposition to 'repudiation' appeared to the British to have unstoppable momentum. They were keenly aware of the grave domestic and imperial crises a coup would cause. Andrew Moore's main thesis is that British vice-

The cover illustration of *The Secret Army and the Premier*

royalty, Sir Philip Game, made a pre-emptive strike by sacking Lang and thus disarming the Old Guard.

Dr Moore's *Secret Army* provides another crucial reminder of how determinedly Australian vested interests will rush for their defensive arsenal if faced by real or imagined damage to privileges. In the 1930's Constitutional law was bent, military officers permitted to conspire against elected Labor Governments, radical reformers rubber-stamped with the sign of treason, the trade unions assailed as impediments to economic recovery, a Carthage deserving destruction.

The tycoonery was not confident that armed forces could hold back the Gadarene opponents of King, Empire and ailing private enterprise, all of them influenced by the Reds. Cross-hatched groupings of the loony Right were well provided with arms and recruits. The parading summer soldiers were from station homesteads, farmsteads, army barracks, country-town traders, beef-witted yokels, RSL branches, the academic demi-monde, legal, medical and other professions, city clerks, shopkeepers, business houses, appeasers of Japanese and Nazi aggressors—some of these, like Major Jack Scott of the Old Guard, able to escape prosecution for handing Australian POW's to Japanese torturers—and lumpen proles.

While Jack Lang was the immediate problem, Old and New Guard, the auxiliary groups and the Victorian secret armies kept the labor movement in their sights. As in pre-Hitler Germany, the threat of 'Communist revolution' dominated the rhetoric of extreme Right leaders. Even Lang did not escape the tab. Dr Moore claims the vigilantes' fear of 'Red revolution' showed "an anxiety that was quite genuine, even if the forces which promoted concern were occasionally contrived and exaggerated." Genuine concern? Military officers in the Old Guard and similar bodies had access to Intelligence reports. They must have known that the Communist Party lacked sufficient strength to hold Flinders Street station for the afternoon. Yet they asked Australians to see the shape of Bolshevik helmets advancing over the hill, the snow, no doubt, still unmelted on their boots. In 1928, when a waterfront strike lifted 'Communist menace' screechings to new heights, the Communist Party had, nationally, 280

members, wearing their Marxism lightly. CPA membership did not reach the 1,000 mark till early depression years, when, if the doomsayers were to be believed, the camp fires of the Long March were already glowing as Red forces swooped toward cities and towns. CPA members comprised pensioners, housewives and, in the majority, workers, mostly out of work. The bare bones of dole living did not leave them in good shape to take on the power machinery of the State—without guns.

Dr Moore gives examples of Antipodean Reichstag Fire strategy. Old Guardists circulated dates for the uprising. The 'Red Army' was marching on Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong, quite a forces dispersal for so few gunless *maquisards*. In the march on Mildura Reds were seizing banks, farms, wheat, horses and cattle. (They hadn't time, apparently, to rape the nuns.) Barricades crossed Ouyen's main street: Mallee cockies dug trenches from which, no doubt, their 12-guage shotguns would blast the Reds right back to the Nevsky Prospekt. Plans were drawn up to dynamite Yarra bridges—that would keep the northside unwashed away from Toorak and South Yarra.

"Genuine anxiety" about revolution falls short of an adequate explanation for the credence accorded this cynical Red scare strategy against labor and liberal movements of the time. Was it a blend of paranoia and cretinism? Dinosaurish blimps? Lust for power? Or a desire to return Australia to authoritarian rule, with defensive forces suppressed, as insurance for enduring self, profit and privilege?

Andrew Moore steers clear of the stodginess of much academic writing. His smoothly readable prose, never over-dependent on metaphor, and the tearing away of the blanket thrown over this sensational record of Rightist conspiracies, veering toward lethal confrontations, makes *The Secret Army* too exciting to be put down in favor of a TV Soap. The ABC has devoted much time to dubiously researched programs on the Australian Left. Here is the ABC's chance partly to redress the balance with a certain ratings success on the grave delinquencies of the Australian Right.

Rupert Lockwood, Wimmera-born, is a veteran journalist of Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Asian and European experience. For three years he was Communist correspondent in Moscow. He left the Party after the 1968 Czech invasion, but not for that reason alone. He has written well-known books on labor history and Black Armada, *an account of Australian support for the establishment of the Indonesian Republic.*

A Subscript of Suffering

Joan Grant

"Duoduo" (Li Shizheng): *Looking Out From Death* (Bloomsbury, $14.95).

One should be suspicious of books with covers designed to take commercial advantage of bloody events. So, it is hard not to be initially wary of this collection of some seventy-five poems by the Beijing poet Li Shizheng, pen-named Duoduo. Subtitled *From the Cultural Revolution to Tienanmen Square*, its cover is a collage of images showing a false confrontation between the student-constructed papier-mache "Goddess of Democracy" (not, as it was damagingly called, the Statue of Liberty) and the large portrait of Mao Zedong which hangs over the Gate of Heavenly Peace. And is the photograph of the man who appears to be holding both images aloft in fact the poet? We are not told. Perhaps the collection is just a callous quickie, taking advantage of a sensational situation, despite the glamourously respectable Bloomsbury imprint.

But it is impossible to believe this after reading the poems, even through their problematic translations. Their subscript is suffering. They are the work of someone whose life has been redesigned by totalitarianism and political paranoia. About half of this aptly-named collection was written during the cultural revolution, most of the rest trying to reconcile subsequent existence with that experience, and two were composed after the Beijing killings, some of which Duoduo witnessed in Tienanmen the evening before his scheduled departure for London on his first trip abroad. In preparation for his tour, the small British press Wellsweep brought out a collection of his poems; after his arrival, Bloomsbury took over and expanded the edition.

Although only thirty-eight, youthful indeed in the Chinese context, Duoduo has gradually become widely known in China's literary world, partly through his frequent poetry readings. He has been published extensively both in the official press and, when the political climate dictated, in unofficial journals and papers. Over the last decade it has been officially acceptable to attack the cultural revolutionary decade of the '70s, though never the government's *current* preoccupations. The obstacles to Duoduo's continuous official acceptability are not only his bitter subject matter and his refusal to acknowledge nation or government except as oppressors, but his style, which is perhaps as far from socialist-realist as it is possible to get. His use of surreal contexts, his time-warps, the diffuse menace and loose structuring of his verse, leave the outsider floundering for clues, the insider unable to pinpoint the dissidence, though there is no doubting its presence. Frustrating stuff for the jackbooted. He gives as his influences Robert Desnos, Dylan Thomas, Sylvia Plath, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Baudelaire.

The strength of Duoduo's poetry seems to lie in the sharpness and originality of images which pierce the sombre background tonalities of his work like burning brands vibrating through a pall of smoke (I say 'seems' because I am uncertain of the translation's

veracity, a question I will return to later). One of the most compellingly truthful depictions I have read of the cultural revolution's Red Guard, the youngsters who ran wild across the countryside, as menacing but not as murderous as in Cambodia, is in the peculiarly named (another translation problem) "When the People Stand Up Out of the Hard Cheese": " . . . August is stretched like a cruel bow./ The poisonous man-child walks out of a peasant hovel/with tobacco and a parched throat . . .".

In general, landscape, backcloth, are an endless dreary atonality of historical and present suffering, from which moans or screams emerge, never love-songs or carols of joy. His landscapes are those in which " . . . grapes have withered from fatigue,/the stars have all gone out, are turned to bags of stones/ and rays of moonlight enter the room, covering the walls with holes . . ."; or where the moonlight "falls in scars", from a moon like "a sick person's pallid face . . .". Summer brings "false blooms", "hateful trees" and "ill-omened seed". Beauty is an obstacle to endurance, a reminder of what can never be: "As if it were not already over,/ as if the sacrificial wine were not already finished,/outside the prison the first light of day breaks through/and the branch clumsily blossoms . . .".

As here, references to tradition depict ritual hollowly as only what has helped the people endure their eons of suffering: "When society has difficulty giving birth/that thin, black widow ties magic charms on a bamboo rod/which she waves at the rising moon./A blood-soaked streamer emits an endless stench . . .". Otherwise, "All over the befuddled land,/the coarse faces of the People and their groaning hands./Before the People, an endless expanse of hardship./Storm lanterns sway in the wind./The night sleeps soundly, but eyes are open wide:/You can hear the great snoring Emperor with his rotting teeth." Written in 1973, the poem's "Emperor" is not difficult to identify.

Human relations are no less desolate. An old Frenchwoman dies, and her poodle is hanged by local Chinese children. As for love, some temporary comfort is possible, though dubious: "There could be someone to kiss you/cleanse you, and there could also be exquisite lies/waiting for you . . .". But ultimately lovers are like shrubs which on the surface "see each other but cannot see" yet whose roots seek each other in the mud "and on discovery twist each other to death./Amongst us there are people who call this behaviour: love . . ." The relationships charted in several series of poems end bitterly: "You created mankind, didn't create freedom,/you created woman, didn't create love./ . . . God, you are so mediocre!"

Powerful images of desolation and endurance strike time and again throughout this small volume, but it is impossible not to feel that this is despite the translation, which has many obvious ineptitudes of both language and punctuation. The translators, Gregory Lee and John Cayley acknowledge that the book was produced "quickly and under great pressure", and this is evident. Too often, words, images and punctuation jar; sometimes meaning is obscured. It is hard to judge the voice of such inept passages as, "When the risk-braving lover/with awl-shaped buttocks/probingly rises . . .".

I do not believe that Duoduo writes this way. Even in poor translation the bones of his poems and the images which escape relatively undamaged onto the page are too strong. I hope that with more time and less pressure the translations will be brought closer to the reality of the poet's work. Nevertheless, even in this version they are worth struggling with. It is likely, under the present political repression in China, that this volume will be Duoduo's only public outlet for some time.

Joan Grant is Executive Officer of the Institute for Contemporary Asian Studies at Monash University. Her article on teaching in Shanghai in 1988-89 and poem on the Beijing killings appeared in Overland *No. 116.*

"The Dialectic Between Literature and Experience"

Harry Heseltine

John McLaren: *Australian Literature: An Historical Introduction* (Longman Cheshire, $24.99).

In simpler times, the whole practice of criticism was sometimes distilled into three questions: What was the author's intention? Was that intention achieved? Was it worthwhile? An uncomplicated recipe for literary understanding and judgement, maybe, but not necessarily the worse for that. Indeed, if pursued with subtlety, tenacity, and tact, those three questions may still produce results as accurate and illuminating as other, more currently privileged methods. For good or ill, they will guide this brief commentary on John McLaren's recent contribution to our literary historiography.

Not that in adopting such a framework I wish to suggest that this *Historical Introduction* is as *demodé* as my three leading questions may, by some, be deemed to be. Rather, I intend the compliment of bringing to a fresh, lucid, and straightforward book a set of queries which share the same intellectual qualities. Before proceeding to 'interrogate' McLaren's intention, however, I would wish to assert that straightforward is not necessarily simple-minded, lucid not uninformed, fresh not naive. Indeed, as the two-page Preface, densely packed with theoretical implication, abundantly demonstrates, the account of our literary history which follows will be written in sharp awareness of a wide range of current thinking about

literature—from reception theory through post-structuralism to the new historicism.

It is, I take it, a central part of McLaren's intention to assimilate his theoretical acuity into the clearly set-out chronological and thematic account of our literature that his study offers us. Further aspects of that intention are indicated by two signposts that only the most obtuse reader of his text could overlook. It is, in the first place, and as the title proudly announces, an "Introduction". This is not primarily a book for initiates—at least not for initiates in search of esoteric information or extreme new interpretations. McLaren has firmly in mind an audience composed mainly of beginners in the field of Australian literary study, of amateurs who take pleasure in being led, confidently but unassumingly, through large tracts of our cultural development. In a word, this is a book which should prove useful and successful as a text in the upper levels of high school or in introductory undergraduate surveys. The more advanced professional in the subject, let me hasten to add, should not deny himself the very real pleasure of reading *Australian Literature: An Historical Introduction.*

The kind of pleasure that such a reader will find—and he should not be alone in this—is defined by the other clear signal that McLaren gives as to his intention: the generous number of illustrations which salt the text, and give it flavour. Here, McLaren's book quite visibly declares, is an enthusiast for his subject who, after many years' professional devotion to it, can still find such joy in rehearsing its fundamentals that ideas must, as often as space and the publishers permit, be translated into aptly illuminating images.

It is possible to probe into McLaren's intention further than those two aspects the book so visibly insists on. He gives us, for instance, something very like a New Critical desire to put his readers actively in possession of those works which most move him, by a close and sympathetic gloss of particular passages. In setting down his responses, McLaren does not hold back from clear judgements of value and preference. Nor does he conceal a desire to find a shape in our literary history through the deployment of what one might call a kind of cultural thematics (see, for instance, the importance accorded Shakespeare's *Tempest* in the early chapters as an organising and illuminating *leitmotif*). Finally, and most importantly, what is central to McLaren's intention is the determination to argue the deep and inevitable involvement of literary process and its products in the total historical development (social, political, economic, technological) of this country.

McLaren's success in demonstrating the binding nexus between the society and literature of Australia (or any country) seems to me beyond dispute. It is only on its fringes that I would wish in any measure to call (what I take to be) McLaren's intention into question. Any student of the subject will, for instance, find some omissions from the historical survey which he will register with a twinge of personal disappointment. (Where, I ask, is Eve Langley? Where Dal Stivens?) Most readers will, I suspect, sense a certain faltering in the tempo of McLaren's stride as it draws toward the contemporary and its close. On balance, however, I believe this book to represent an unpretentious triumph of an analyst whose intelligence, equally at home in the disciplines of history and critical exegesis, finds its most comfortable resting place in the range of "realisms" (social, political, psychological) which have been so important in the mainstream development of Australian writing. Symptomatic of what I read as both McLaren's position and his strengths is the length, tact, and penetration of the commentary (pp. 64-70) he devotes to *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony.*

No other single title is accorded such a wealth of detailed exposition. Plainly, McLaren is powerfully attracted to its dense and complex interweaving of virtually every aspect of Victoria's colonial history with the individual tragedy of Richard and Mary Mahony. Yet the discussion is also charged with/sustained by McLaren's awareness of the profoundly symbolic aspects of Richardson's prose.

I would generalise McLaren's perception about this one text into a pervading sense of the abiding importance of language in life as well as literature. He characterises a failing in Brennan's verse in these terms: "The dialectic between literature and experience has given way to experience constructed entirely out of poetic phrases" (p. 61). It is his commitment to this sense of dialectic, a fruitful tension between language and experience as the source of the most valuable literature which, to my mind, ensures the overall sanity of McLaren's literary judgements, the success of his literary history.

I am brought, then, to the last of the three questions from which I started out: Understanding the author's intention, accepting his success in achieving it, was the achievement worthwhile? That my answer here must be in the affirmative will, I hope, be clearly implicit in all I have said so far. I shall conclude, then, by indicating an intellectual perspective that this *Historical Introduction* provides which seems to me of the highest importance. McLaren, I believe, succeeds in giving us an overview of Australian literature which, in confident possession of the European intellectual and cultural traditions, is squarely Australo-centric in its standpoint. I detect this virtue not only in the sympathetic treatment of Aboriginal literary culture (both before and after 1788) but also in the consistent perception of European and American experience as something that bears in on us rather than an affair to which we may peripherally contribute. McLaren's final sentence is couched in characteristically modest tones; it characteristically embodies a large and vitalising concept: "Australian

literature constitutes a struggle to find room in an old continent for old cultures and to enlarge these cultures to accommodate the people at whose cost they were built" (p. 250).

In sum, and to balance the trio of questions from which I began this interrogation of McLaren's text, I conclude by ascribing to it three qualities celebrated by Joyce's Stephen Dedalus but dating back to Aquinas: *integritas, consonantia, claritas*—wholeness, harmony, radiance. These are no mean virtues to have and hold in any time or place. I am grateful to McLaren for exhibiting them with such unobtrusive amenity in *Australian Literature: An Historical Introduction.*

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History Turns a Spiral . . . Is Australia Part of Asia?

Peggy Holroyde

Christine Stevens: *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns; a History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia* (Oxford University Press, $49.95).

It is with a very real sense of irony that one finishes the 333 pages of Christine Stevens' book following through, sequentially, the coming of a very unusual group of people to Australia less than a hundred years after white settlement through their work, marriages to alien women (Muslim wives being left behind in an extended family situation back on the North West Frontier) and final demise and dispersal as late as the 1960s. In a nation that now prides itself on a conscious effort, Governmentally supported, to embrace a tolerant cosmopolitan identity, while acknowledging our unique Aboriginal base (involving a subtle sense of land) and the modern heritage of Anglo-Saxon-Celtic traditions, it is quite remarkable how oblivious we are to important parts of our historic past.

There is much political talk (when it suits us in a selfish economic way) of being part of our geo-political Asian environment. But what of the longer-lasting emotional and psychological coming-to-terms with our neighbours of this global region—and an Asia that is not only that area most commonly acknowledged from Canberra's perspective as being the Pacific-rim Asia? What of those who are nearer to our western shores where we live in Western Australia?

The Afghans who followed in the padded footsteps of their majestic camels (which incidentally were ecologically most useful in embedding our friable top soils into the roads of the future in the Outback with their clumpish feet) developed the distant, lonely area of this country as much as the white pastoralist, yet their contribution has been singularly neglected. Afghanistan was in the 1840s and onwards, the threat of a powerful Russia, and tribal feuding turned history around again on its axis.

Only David Martin's sensitive novel *The Man in the Red Turban* (not an Afghan) has given an insight from the other side of the fence as to how it felt to be Asian in Australia. Tom McKnight's *The Camel in Australia* is another book, but those that recognise that other cultural groups pioneered this ancient land also can be counted on one hand.

It is a pleasure, therefore, to acknowledge Stevens' obviously quite considerable research in ferreting out what must have been fragmented and scattered source material, much of which—due to limited funding of our national State Library archives and lack of proper staffing—is still being indexed.

One of the great difficulties in dealing with such cultures so singularly disparate from mainstream Australian society as that of staunch Muslims, fiercely proud Afghans least likely to integrate, and who anyway came out of strong oral traditions not part of a European *belles-lettres* culture, is that the feelings and attitudes of the participants in this cultural interchange are often lost to history. If only the tape recorder had existed in the 1890s when a considerable number of these camel drivers and hawkers disembarked at Fremantle, Adelaide and Melbourne encountering the laid-back Aussie way of life, the swank squattocracy, and the tough drovers on the long sheep runs!

Yet the fact is that in the early days of the opening up of Australia there was probably more knowledge of Asia by the ordinary public (even despite a colonial superiority in entrenched racist attitudes) than there is now. People seem constantly surprised to learn of real people with real feelings in Cloncurry, Coolgardie or Oodnadatta, people such as Nameth Khan who came to Australia in 1892 to work for another North West Frontier Khan. At one time he owned 1500 camels . . . when his Aboriginal wife died in 1919, a victim of the Spanish flu, he was left to raise a daughter and two sons alone.

His was a case in point of how marginalised such people were, victims of a fierce discrimination, yet he was one who stayed on in this country and his daughter Miriam is alive today. Speaking to the author of her family experiences, she recounts (p. 220) how her father was "tricked, cheated and robbed by his cameleers and the consignors". Yet that Asian will to work in hard times, not to be beholden to anyone, prevented him from turning to the State for handouts. "He insisted upon looking after the children himself. The youngest was reared on camel milk, in a bottle with a rag tied around the top to control the flow". Imagine! No wonder so many lived to a ripe old age—often in their eighties and nineties. He was

so burdened by domestic duties that he went bankrupt and never saw his original family again but his daughter still is in contact with his family in the Punjab, and although she inherited a large fruit orchard near Peshawar she signed it over to relatives in India. She had "become Australian".

In the mid 1800s the common umbrella of the Raj gave shade to many racial hues. After all many of those from the high passes of Asia came partly through a sense of adventure and their peripatetic culture of the North West Frontier. But also they came to settle in Australia at the instance of the white men wanting their labour in the daunting interior. When Landells set off from Melbourne with Burke and Wills on their ill-fated exploration northwards he was an ex-Indian Army man familiar with these people whom he had recruited out of Karachi. Some were Baluchis; others Pathans, possibly ex-Indian Army soldiers themselves. For people who turned out to witness this departure (marvellously illustrated on p. 33 from the La Trobe Collection in the Victorian State Library), they saw "the arrogant Landells" (a difficult man not at all sympathetic to the Aboriginal trackers on foot), dressed as an early Lawrence of Arabia.

It is we who seem more ignorant and our racist attitudes in the objectionable bus poster campaigns against our Asian colleagues in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney or up north, less excusable than a century ago.

A number of exacerbating factors which seem to have influenced the inevitable outcome of race relations by the end of that colonial century have no parallel with Australia's multicultural experiment of today. The rush to the Goldfields, the sudden accumulation of Asian numbers, the autonomy of each colony to deal with migration, and the continual clash of forces between the wealthy squattocracy wanting cheap labour rather than the higher costs of the determined Aussie manual labourer not to be 'put down' in this new kind of society where he began to hold power in his own working hands, created understandable suspicions.

Stevens explains with real sympathy as well as an historic sense of dispassion, the feelings of this proud people. Her documentation is considerable and her illustrations bring a vivid and penetrating insight, giving us portraits of real people in quite extraordinary circumstances with whom we can empathise. Tall men with long Graeco-Roman noses and Aryan faces (they are the descendants of those sweeping migrations of antiquity) stare out at us with hauteur even in their pin-striped suits and undoubted twenty carat gold watch chains; there is the incredible 108-year-old herbalist Mohamet Alum who married a young white girl when he was in his eighties. He beams over his new-born daughter. The photograph is touching. It came into the author's possession as a symbol of good luck, one could almost say, a Muslim amulet recording historic occasions of half a century ago brought by a contemporary Kabul refugee of other wars, other oppressions. That *is* the spiral of history.

As is also Vosper, editor on the Eastern Goldfields of WA, staring out with his hard keen eyes, stirring up the labour movement in the rush for gold against the Asian 'coolies'. How much do we progress when we measure Perth's van Tongeren (on remand for trial in a few months' time for his own vicious anti-Asian campaign) against Vosper? Indeed Vosper's campaign had a grain of principle in it, since he was concerned that the working man might be threatened by Asians willing to work for cheaper wages.

And there is the astounding double page photograph (pp. 186-7) of a funeral of the much respected Mullah Merban in Coolgardie. It was 1897. A considerable number of white men in their homburg hats and suits, with women in black crinolines, ring the praying Muslims who are crouched in the foetal position on the ground as the Hadji is interred. The impact of the photograph forces one to pause and question how many of our citizens would pay respect at a Muslim funeral these days. Are we that much more emotionally advanced as we cast our eyes over the other side of the garden fence at culturally alien neighbours?

Stevens has given us an assiduously documented account to help us take stock of what really we are trying to create—a well-grounded, tolerant, culturally enriched mosaic society. Canadians use the word 'mosaic' in describing their own similarly diverse citizens. It certainly has better sounding 'vibes' than our own pedestrian word: 'multicultural'. At least now we cannot plead ignorance. My only fear is that, in its scholarly form, it will not reach our younger generation in schools. A popular version is needed for social studies.

When researching with Joyce Westrip our nearly-completed book on the Indo-Australian links—equally difficult in tracking down—we encountered an irate Donald Stuart, the late West Australian writer. He had worked on the railways and hacked railway sleepers in the Murchison with Pathans, Punjabis, Baluchis and Afghans. He was angry about the majority of ethno-centric Australian historians as he paid a fitting tribute to this "wonderful creature, the camel, and its Asian rider".

They were, after all, indispensable parts of all the construction teams where horses could not endure the conditions without water. And it was the waterless sand dune terrain of Australia which was the daunting challenge to all the explorers, and the intrepid developers who followed in their wake carrying the lines of communication which were to be the harnessing of the hidden energy lying under the untamed land. Donald spoke determinedly:

> The average Australian today fails to realise how camels and their riders helped to develop Australia. Pack horses can only go a day's ride.

> Even by the time we celebrated our first centennial horses had not the staying power to reach the interior. They always need watering at the end of the day. Australia did not ride to riches on the back of the sheep alone. It developed the interior on the back of the camel, one hump, or two.

My only note of caution is the matter of identity of this singular Asian group of Australians—and even in Stevens' text there is confusion while talking quite passionately about Afghans. One realises that in their to-ing and fro-ing (many did indeed make good, carrying bags of gold sovereigns despite charging no interest on loans to other less frugal or abstemious Australians) many belonged to that wandering tribe that took no note of arbitrary boundaries drawn up by Colonial powers for their own games of political chess, Durrand Line or no Durrand Line.

Because of the very nature of the cultures born out of the terrain of these mountainous regions exchange of traders across borders is second-nature to them for human survival. Especial clans of Afghans and Pathans have always criss-crossed what are regarded as highly arbitrary lines dividing valleys and rights in 'no-man's land' where the *paiwanday* follow their legitimate business. This is an Urdu word derived from *paiwant*, junction or connection, and for these seasonal traders it meant not only bringing hand-woven carpets and woollen goods down into India but the barter of rich spices, silks and jewellery up into the high lands and plateaus of central Asia. With all this exchange there ensued a free flow of information. These *paiwanday* were able to know exactly what was developing in the far southland along the very bush telegraph with which Kipling's Kim was so familiar.

Peggy Holroyde lived in India for 5 years. Her books include Indian Music *and* East Come West. *Currently she is writing, with Joyce Westrip, a book on little known Indo-Australian links. Now living in Perth she was Administrator of the Indian Ocean Arts Festivals, 1979 and 1984.*

Australia, a User's Guide

Kaz Cooke

John Clarke: *A Complete Dagg*, Illustrations by Jenny Coopes (Allen and Unwin/Haynes, $14.95).

You may have heard "Fred Dagg" on the radio. You may have noticed Jana Wendt weeping with hilarity after a John Clarke 'interview' on the Friday editions of A Current Affair. If so, think yourself lucky.

John Clarke is very funny. Thankfully, he doesn't suffer from either of the Clive James syndromes—the temptation to give in to sleaze, or the ability to write, but not perform. Clarke can perform, as his appearances on the *Gillies Report* and straighter acting proves.

And he can write—with an unerring eye for satire and parody, such as the impassioned and evocative farnakeling reports, and with the short, sharp shocks of a 'celebrity interview'.

A Complete Dagg is a collection of various bits into a book with no specific point and some really silly photographs. Frankly, it's a riot. The first section, "Australia—a User's Guide", contains some glowing appreciations of the unlimited spending of public money on advertising, "the romance of banking", superpower peace summits and spying. Next comes the celebrity interviews, in which 'light conversation' is undertaken without the bother of having the celebrity present. Bob Hawke is pressed on accusations of rampant socialism, John Howard is accorded status as a Renaissance man in several spheres, Joh Bjelke-Petersen is asked about his comedy career and the chief executive of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation is engaged in a revealing exchange.

Lovers of sport, commentating in general and farnakeling in particular, will find themselves well-served by a homage to Dave Sorenson and his fellow arklers, who have captured the imagination of Australians without ever being televised, interviewed or commented upon by anybody except Clarke.

Children and Unions (Federated Under Tens), a TV guide for the ABC, some hilarious illustrated golf hints and a probing tax form out of the way, the reader happens upon 'Damon's Beat'. These pieces are in the style of Damon Runyon, who wrote about American gangsters in the 1930s, using the present tense and some glorious nicknames. Clarke has appropriated the style and adapted it with some ease to Australian politics, introducing Paul the Spook, Baby-Face Richardson, Dependable Crean and Trousers O'Toole. As an explanation of politics as practised in this country, Damon's Beat is recommended reading for those who can no longer afford to attend a university.

The book does suffer from a lack of lay-out, but it is amply and brilliantly illustrated by Jenny Coopes, whose work in the Damon's Beat section is particularly fabulous. Her portrayal of a stubby and overwrought John Howard leaping on a table and shouting "We are being overrun with Chinamen" is enough to make other cartoonists quite legless with envy.

Clarke is adept at using different forms of writing to extract a bit of a chortle and a shock of recognition, although he retains certain constants, including a love of sport, professional integrity and being prepared to make a total dick of himself in photographs.

As Barry Humphries remarks in his introduction to *A Complete Dagg*: "John Clarke sees the skeletons

in our closets, and I am amazed he has not grown very rich on offshore hush money. In Australia, the Powers That Be are very powerful indeed and are protected by draconian laws of libel . . . fortunately for John Clarke he can always be dismissed by his victims as a harmless wag . . . if he told us what he sees and what he knows about Australia in any other but his jester's guise he would, long ago, have met with a very nasty accident".

John Clarke is subversive simply because he will not affect a horizontal position and snipe languidly at easy targets. Long may he ferret around in the closet.

Kaz Cooke is a freelance cartoonist and columnist and author of the Modern Girl's Guide To . . . *series. She feels compelled to mention that she shares an agent with Mr Clarke, but abhors his taste in jumpers. She feels this entitles her to a balanced view of his work.*

Hymn and Hagiography

John Hanrahan

Barbara Hanrahan: *Flawless Jade* (University of Queensland Press, $29.95).

Flawless Jade is both hymn and hagiography. The hymn is to the unsung, in this case a Chinese girl who tells her own story. She begins: "I was born in a war, I grew up in a war, and there was war all along. When I was born it was the Japanese War. That was in China." Wing-yee tells her story matter-of-factly, fighting her own wars on another front, scarcely noticing when Mao marches into history. Her own long march is towards a safe sense of herself in a world that offers few choices and little comfort, either physical or emotional.

Hanrahan presents almost biblically the sacrament of the uneventful life as lived by a Chinese girl. Wing-yee's life is shaped by the mysteries of the mundane and Hanrahan writes with a precise passion about the realities and rituals of everyday life. "Snails are tricky to eat. You have a special way at sucking at the shells, so that when we were eating them everybody would be sucking and making lots of noise." In her own special way, Hanrahan sucks noiselessly and gracefully at the details that control life. Wing-yee tells her story anecdotally, usually in small sections, many of them shorter than a page. "Flowers of the four seasons" begins: "Peony is the queen of the flowers, it is the flower of spring." The next two sections are called "Romantic shitting" and "Peeing on our ancestor's heads". The narrator moves confidently from a wistful reflection on the beauty of flowers to remembering that "Father called it romantic shitting because you did it out under the moonlight". *Flawless Jade* works actively by setting fantasy against reality.

Wing-yee struggles to find a voice and a name. "Babies came cheap in China, but families only wanted boys." She was originally called Jin-tai which means "To Take a Brother's Place", as she was the third daughter and therefore the third disappointment. When Little Brother finally does turn up he is a bit of a disappointment, as he is an amiable but physically unattractive eccentric. However, he gets the privilege of an education, while his sisters get the privilege of earning money to support the family, which also includes Grandfather, Big Grandmother and Second Grandmother. Wing-yee records all this with a placid, unstated irony, in the same way as she records her name changes. Her mother quietly changes Jin-tai, given by Grand-father, to Jin-yee, which means "To Take Happiness". At school, she is called "Frying Fish" because her name sounds like that, so her mother changes her name to Wing-yee which means "Forever Happiness". Finally, Wing-yee chooses the name Flawless Jade, when she has an opportunity to appear in movies.

Flawless Jade never makes it onto the big screen, but she gets to watch the stars in her job as an usherette at the Golden Dragon cinema. There she admires Joan Crawford and Elizabeth Taylor. Hanrahan deftly uses Hollywood films to focus the fantasies of the third daughter of a deprived Chinese family. The other focusing fantasy is the belief that learning English is a way of achieving some sort of success and status. This belief grows stronger when the family moves from Canton to Hong Kong. I don't know how exact is Hanrahan's world of Canton and Hong Kong, just as I don't know how exact is the world of Emily Brontë's moors. But I believe in both. Flawless Jade is precise about many superstitions. "If you saw a pair of women's underpants hanging out to dry, you should never walk under them because doing that would bring you bad luck." "You weren't to sweep the floor for three days after New Year came, because sweeping would send good luck away." Flawless Jade's luck is swept away. She doesn't become a movie star. The rich young man who courts her and whom, after some hesitation, she decides to marry finally decides that it would be beneath his family's dignity to marry an usher. But she does learn English, she does set down some of her memories. Here, too, Hanrahan achieves an authenticity of voice. There are just enough slips in grammar, there is certainly enough simplicity of syntax, to convince the reader that this is written by a woman who is proud of her mastery of English as a second language.

And here my reservations about the novel assert themselves. There is a dullness in the writing. I know that Emily Brontë is dead. I know that certain women (and men) lead dull lives. I also know that the best writing is not dull. I know that is a value statement by a middleaged, privileged Australian male. I read

this novel as a parable about one of humanity's greatest offences against itself, the oppression of women by men. It is a powerful parable and a strong novel, with weaknesses. I am not sure that finally I believe in Flawless Jade. I am not asking for a more exciting life, a more eventful life, though I do admit to a longing for more exciting prose. I know that this is an argument I cannot win, as I further reveal myself as a privileged male wanting excitement in words. I am talking about the sort of pleasure I get from reading Marion Campbell, Sue Woolf, Kate Grenville, Janette Turner Hospital, Elizabeth Jolley, Janine Burke.

I know that what I have just said is a pre-emptive strike, but the contemporary discussion of women writing about woman is full of pre-emptive strikes and too many images of war. Having acknowledged *caveat emptor*, I buy-in further. I enjoyed Wing-yee-Flawless Jade's account of her world and was moved by it. But I ended up wondering whether I believed in her. Flawless Jade talks about being "so furious". She also says, "I was burning inside with an anger and a pain". It does sound quaint and authentic. But her writing has no fury, it does not burn. She was in fact offered the possibility of becoming a movie star. But her mother thought it would not be good for her and burnt the letter of offer. Flawless Jade casually records the fact. She speaks of herself as "a never-complaining good girl". She never-complains too much. She has suffered war, poverty, indifference, fire, hunger and the streets of Hong Kong, yet in middle age her most disparaging comment is "not nice". I did feel I was being asked to believe in a western stereotype of a passive oriental woman.

Flawless Jade improves her English by reading *Robinson Crusoe*. The point is well made throughout the novel. No woman and every woman is an island complete unto herself. In the last paragraph of the novel she records her philosophy of life:

> When an unpleasant thing ever happened to me I would go and have a sleep. If I was upset, I knew when I woke up from sleeping that I would feel better. The more sleep I had, the more better I felt and I wouldn't remember why I'd been upset. After all these years of sleeps I've had, even my bitter memories have turned somehow sweet. My memories do not have to be exact facts because I like to fantasise them so they'll stay in my mind as, for ever, sweet memories.

I will always have sweet memories of this novel. It is filled with flawless description, wonderful ironies and a memorable compassion. Flawless Jade is too nice a person to wish on her nightmares or sleepless nights. But I did feel that I would have believed in her more if she occasionally had a "not nice" dream. I also realise that, in saying this, maybe I am just displaying the suspicion about hagiography that comes with being a middleaged ex-monk.

John Hanrahan is a Melbourne writer who is not related to Barbara Hanrahan. His novel O Excellent Virgin *(Heinemann) was published in April.*

Absent Friends

John Barrett

A. T. Yarwood: *Walers: Australian Horses Abroad* (Melbourne University Press, $39.95).

Common neglect of the horse's place in Australian history prompted 'Sandy' Yarwood's book, and also forced him back onto primary sources, including material garnered from people who knew at first hand the horse-export trade, which is what the book is mostly about. Shipment of Australian horses to the Indian army began in 1834, came to dominate that market, and continued for over a century. Yarwood focuses on the Indian trade, in which the horses were christened Walers, but he also ranges wider, notably in a chapter on "The Waler at War". Readers of *Overland* will be glad that the book is dedicated to Stephen Murray-Smith, whose forebears were exporters of Walers, and who—along with many others—actively encouraged and assisted Yarwood's project. Too good a historian to describe his narrative as definitive, Yarwood sees it just as a contribution towards the filling of a gap, and it is a real contribution.

We can be sorry for people. I've often been sorry for the horses too—a sorrow in no way diminished by reading this book. Perhaps 25 000, or two-thirds, of the Walers sent with Australians to the Boer War died in it. It isn't revealed (if known) how many among the 136 000 Walers sent to World War I survived that carnage: none came home. In any case, the mere shipment of wild young horses involved them in terror, discomfort, injury and frequent death, especially in the early years before big steamers reduced the losses. Philip Mason suggests in a Foreword that one reason why the British army in India used horses for too long, Australian suppliers persisted despite all the uncertainties of the business, and Yarwood finally wrote his book, was that all of them *liked* horses. No doubt that is partly true. Australian light-horsemen either shot their horses or handed them over to the British army, rather than sell them to Syrians or Palestinians, whose treatment of horses appalled them. The people of the Middle East must have been wondrous cruel. For examples of Australian brutality *circa* 1880, read pp. 149-50 of *Walers*. The fact is that too many people who have had to do with horses

have *not* liked them or felt for them. Once, as late as the 1950s, I inspected some trucks of brumbies being brought down from the north by the South Australian Railways. I still don't know which was the more sickening: the battered stock and trampled new-born foals, or the ways in which pressure was applied to shut me up.

All of that probably should be said, but it would be rank injustice to Professor Yarwood to say it in a way that discouraged anyone from reading *Walers*. No tight rein is kept on the material. There are reflections on attitudes underlying King George V's durbar in Delhi in 1911, and comments by and on boys who were there from The King's School, Parramatta, and the story is told of a Scottish officer who took part. Why? The king rode a Waler; some of the boys' fathers raised Walers; the officer had won the Victoria Cross on a Waler named English Lord, and that much-loved horse survived into an active old age despite five wounds by Boer bullets, one of which he carried all his life. So, why not? The diversions have both charm and point.

Narrowly business-like material is there in plenty, of course. The term Walers initially (1846, in Calcutta) referred to New South Wales, just as South African horses were Capers, but Waler was soon applied indiscriminately to horses bred anywhere in Australia from originally Arab but increasingly Thoroughbred stock. Cheap land and expensive stud were twin determiners of where the best Walers came from at any one time, and Australian climatic conditions prepared them well for life in India, but not their Australian handling: they often needed months of gentling. And they were needed in India not only for polo but also because mounted tribesmen in the northwest had to be countered by troops supplied with fast, enduring horses. The ups and downs of the trade, and of India's own horses, and of the British army's needs, are described in considerable detail, along with a succession of key people. (Who were they? Look, read the book; a review is not meant to be a substitute for that.) Providentially occurring at a time of rural depression in Australia, losses in the battles for Sind in 1843 produced one of the 'ups' in the demand for Walers, and Sir Charles Napier is quoted on the campaign. Yarwood, very likely, would have used Napier's final despatch too, if he'd thought of it: "*Peccavi*" (= I have Sind). But why, oh why, weren't Sind and the other Hyderabad shown on the full-page map of the Indian region on the facing page? At any rate, readers of this review will get the general idea of how the story is unfolded.

The discussion roams over many things: prices, horse losses, difficulties over insurance, the poor management of the Australian Agricultural Company, the good breed-improving Australian practice of gelding despite the early British preference for entire stallions (the Brits changed their mind later, and thus were better able to use mares as well), the difficulties caused in the trade by the gold rushes and by rivals from other places, the African Horse Sickness, army enquiries and reports, Melbourne's emergence as the major horse-shipping port (although many of the horses were still from New South Wales), the perversity of Australian breakers in encouraging horses to buck (is it odd that "Breaker" Morant gets no mention?), the development of purchasing depots in India where horses were acclimatised and quietened . . . At the halfway point you've got all that and more.

The remainder of the book, which is well illustrated throughout, consists of five chapters, an epilogue about some traces of the great days lingering into the present, and some statistical tables mainly adapted from Malcolm Kennedy's 1986 Melbourne doctoral thesis on bullocks and horses in eastern Australia. The chapters are respectively centred on shippers and shipping, Walers at work and play in India, Waler exports (made up of sections, not "chapters" as appears on p. 141, on the comparative activity in various regions of Australia), the Waler at war (especially with Australians in South Africa and in 1914-18), and the end of the remount trade (the last year of purchase was 1937, and the last time Walers came under fire was probably in January 1941).

A reservation to be offered is that the material, if interesting, is rather jumbled. In the shipping chapter, among the stories of outstanding shippers, the size and construction of stalls, and hints on how to land horses, there comes a discussion of breeding and the size and build desired in remounts. In the chapter on work and play, mostly about racing, polo and pig-sticking, there's a typical return to why Capers failed to maintain their position in the Indian trade (African Horse Sickness crops up again), and the conclusion on the passing of the army horse would have been better kept for the later chapter on the last of the remounts. So there *is* jumble. In some ways, rather than being professional, the organisation is haphazard and the style sometimes reminiscent of a pedestrian speech-maker's. "Let me conclude this chapter by recounting . . ." (p. 117). Nevertheless, if anything to do with horses fascinates you, or if you simply realise that despite your interest in Australian and modern Indian history you know nothing about all this, here's a very informative book for you to read in the Chinese Year of the Horse.

And the next time you stand by a well-mannered horse at rest, talk to it quietly, and rub it behind the ears. It will like that, and you might like to think you're saying "Thank you" and "Sorry" to all horses past and present.

Dr John Barrett recently retired as a Reader in History at La Trobe University. His latest book is We Were There; Australian Soldiers of World War II *(Viking).*

A Rich Social History

Stuart Macintyre

Cutten History Committee of the Fitzroy Historical Society: *Fitzroy, Melbourne's First Suburb* (Hyland House, $35).

In asking me to review this book, Barrett Reid drew my attention to the dustjacket reproduction of a triptych by the artist James David, *Hellgate—Junction of Gertrude and Brunswick streets.* It looks up the slope towards the city, the dome of the Exhibition Building hard against a jumble of houses, pubs, shops and factory tower, lit in a lurid glow. The streets themselves, marked off by the winking orange beacons of the street-repair gang, are awash with bottles. From above strange minatory creatures descend. Are they, the editor asks, of the real estate or academic species?

I'm not sure, but neither form of visitation is as recent as the painting suggests. The land speculators, as Miles Lewis makes clear in his chapter on the creation of Melbourne's first suburb, were there at the beginning. The large sections they bought at the first auction in 1839—in Sydney!—were divided and subdivided to define the streets and house-sites. The builders who erected the nineteenth-century terraces, the landlords who rented them to working-class families, and the lodging keepers who let out dilapidated rooms until well into the present century, they defined the substance of Fitzroy.

Similarly with Fitzroy as an object of investigation. From the end of the last century, when the depression of the nineties accelerated the departure of owners and employers and reduced the southern part of the suburb to poverty, there have been inquiries into Fitzroy as a distinctive and potentially dangerous site. As George Tibbits shows in his chapter on slums and public housing, two major twentieth-century investigations, one public and one private, led to the creation of the Housing Commission that changed the face of the suburb in the 1960s.

Fitzroy has been rich also in projects of improvement. The Old Colonists' Village, established in 1870, and the Public Library, opened in 1877, were nineteenth-century secular initiatives. By the twentieth century the changed character of Fitzroy attracted religious charities—the Little Sisters of the Poor in 1884, the Salvation Army's Sisters Refuge Brigade in the 1890s, later the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Pastor Doug Nicholls' Aboriginal Mission. More recently they have been supplemented by new secular agencies such as the Fitzroy Legal Service and the Koori Information Service.

And while it is true that Fitzroy has more than its quota of academic residents, with a corresponding interest in its local history, that interest is by no means as predatory as the editor's question implies. In a lavishly illustrated volume, with photographs dating back to the middle of the last century, quite the most striking series is that taken by the late John O'Brien, prehistorian in the History Department of the University of Melbourne, who roamed the suburb with a camera on Sunday mornings in the late 1950s.

His snaps of the almost deserted streets are gems. A woman in an apron making her way past a galvanized iron fence; a cement mixer in the back of a ute; a street sign athwart a rough-hewn telegraph post; a row of stunted trees in crumbling bluestone kerbs. They make up an utterly undidactic evocation of Fitzroy before the fall.

The book also keeps open the ledger in its treatment of present-day Fitzroy and the gains and losses of gentrification. On the one hand we have accounts of urban preservation, and the battles of the 1970s and 1980s to save old buildings from demolition and streets from death by traffic. These are complemented by an imaginative reconstruction of the layout of seven inter-war residences, using the recollections of those who lived in them to reconstruct patterns of domestic life with its hardship and familial closeness. On the other we are given the testimony of those for whom the high-rise tower blocks of the Housing Commission brought important benefits. Eleanor Harding, who joined the Fitzroy Aboriginal community in the late 1950s and remembers the appalling living conditions, has no doubt that this was "the best thing that ever happened in Fitzroy for some families".

The openness of the book is achieved by a plurality of voices. Altogether it contains thirty-seven chapters, ranging in length from brief sketch to substantial essay. They are organised around the themes of Founding and Funding, Building and Bulldozing, Working and Playing, Coming and Going, and Looking Back. The collection opens with a fragmentary acknowledgement of the Woiworung People who lived in the area before its white occupation and closes with a stringent perspective forwards from Janet McCalman. While the quality of the contributions varies, the general standard is high and the handsome large-format design compensates for the longeurs.

Barrett Reid also asks whether someone living in Redfern or Spring Hill or Hurtle Square "interested in history" would find this book worth reading. Local history is a popular genre as one municipality after another commissions an account of itself. The books that result range from the competent monograph, usually produced by a professional historian, to the miscellany of anecdote and minutiae sometimes presented by local enthusiasts.

Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb will satisfy the reader seeking essential information with its core chapters on architecture by Miles Lewis, politics by Rosemary Kiss, community and religious life by Renate Howe, and immigrants by Chris McConville.

It meets the need of the resident who wants to rummage in the past with its appendices of census data and the origins of street names. More than this, it grounds a rich social history in a firmly controlled context. Other suburbs might not be as fortunate in their local resources as Fitzroy, but they will find this way of writing their history a challenging model.

Stuart Macintyre teaches history at the University of Melbourne. Among his recent books are Foundations of Arbitration *(O.U.P., $24.95) edited with Richard Mitchell and* The Labour Experiment *(McPhee Gribble, $9.95).*

Psychic Alienation

Jas. H. Duke

Anna Couani and Peter Lyssiotis: *The Harbour Breathes* (joint publication of Masterthief, 33 Lorraine Drive, East Burwood 3150 and Sea Cruise Books 28 Queen Street, Glebe 2037, $17.95).

This interesting little book is a psychic portrait in text and images of the inner parts of the city of Sydney, told in non-linear prose, free verse, and assembled photomontage. The Sydney revealed is not the familiar terrain of glitter and dash and brash millionaires making deals and white sails on the harbour and ever-rising property values, but something much more fundamental, something buried deep within the guts—or the inner geography—of peoples and cities. The text mostly consists of lithe and sinewy prose that interweaves various strands of narrative, at some points crystal clear, at others maddingly opaque, but always interesting and intriguing. On some pages prose gives way to verse where the already compressed language becomes even more compressed. The effect is something like observing human skin through a microscope, familiar things become mysterious, mysterious things become familiar, history criss-crosses with geography and philosophy to form a species of Moebius band. For example:

> The night on the hill at Moore Park. The psychic alienation. Our whole focus directed overseas as though we had nothing, knew nothing, and saw nothing. Existentialism was another word for psychic alienation. Eastern mysticism. The new american architecture: Buckminster Fuller. Pop Art. Wave upon wave of americana. We were battered with information. We were cut off from our own cultures.

or

> we're conspirators in silence
> keeping our bonds hidden
> so they can't be crushed

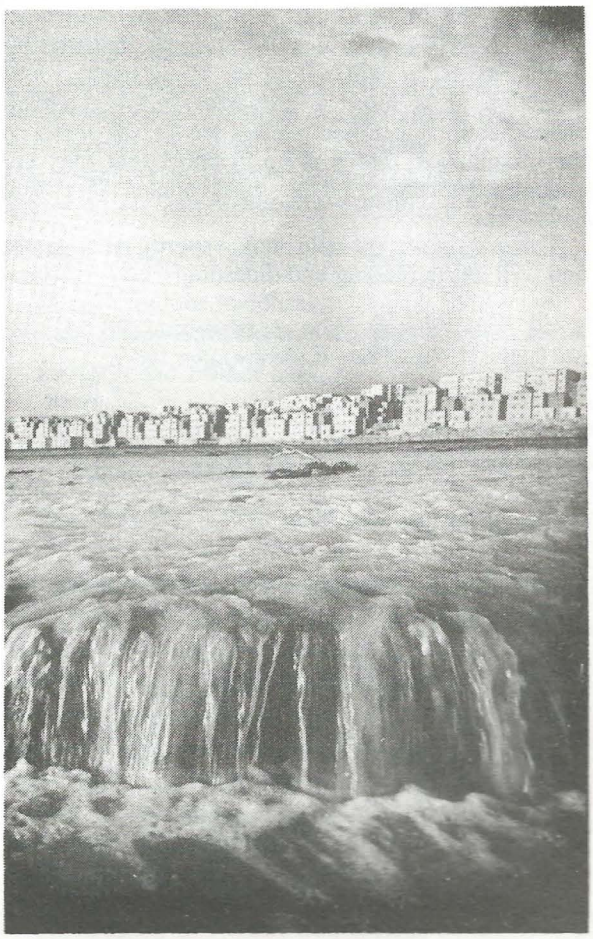
or

> The sunset, the red sky over Glebe, the twilight. Walking alongside the big dusty windows, bathed in the glow of it. The slow darkening. Looking at it from an unseen position. Unknown, untested, unorthodox.

or

> The city walls broken down long ago, and know an open rambling of the city into the landscape, contained only by the wall of eyes.

The images complement the words, the sea bubbles like a fountain, a crowd of starving Asians overrun the space shuttle, fluted classical ruins overlook a field of glass-box skyscrapers, a huge snake glides past lighted windows, a mysterious hooded figure runs through an indeterminate landscape, city dwellers bunch on escalators, a dark shadow slithers down a



back alley, a skeleton in uniform crouches on a battlefield, alienated figures are silhouetted in doorways or beside windows, a ghost house is reflected in a rural pond, smiling businessmen with identical faces crouch around a table, a giant admiral dips a warship in the harbour, a sofa explodes in an atomic cloud, an antique statue stands in a street full of wreckage. The times are well and truly out of joint. Emotion is truly reflected in tranquillity.

The authors are some of that talented and dedicated band of Australian artists who have been condemned to labour in dark corners with minimal recognition from either critics or readers. For far too long the conventional wisdom of cultural decision-makers has been that Australia is an anti-intellectual, naive and unsophisticated land (although perhaps with some measure of crude vitality) and therefore Australian writers and readers should have their diet restricted to straightforward meat-and-potatoes linear narratives that begin at the beginning and march on until they reach the end, written in a cat-sat-on-the-mat prose suitable for the unsophisticated readers of newspaper editorials. Anything more ambitious generally has a label like 'pretentious' or 'derivative' or 'élitist' pasted on it by official opinion-makers, placed in a cage, and confined to some dark corner of the zoo. This is not at all the 'tall-poppy-syndrome' (beloved by journalists as an explanation for every explanation) in action, it is more a 'dirt-beneath-the-jackboot' phenomenon. Australian readers see so few works of the imagination that it is no accident that they are alienated from those that they do encounter. Alienation Rules!, O.K.?

This is a significant little book, expertly put together and well worth reading and digesting.

Jas. H. Duke is a Melbourne poet and performer. His last book was Poems of War + Peace *(Collective Effort 1987).*

Economic History: A New View

Graham Dunkley

Andrew Wells: *Constructing Capitalism* (Allen & Unwin, $19.95).

Although Wells' book bears the sub-title *An Economic History of Eastern Australia 1788-1901*, it is not a traditional economic history in the textbook sense. For instance, it contains no tables or graphs, let alone equations, though it does draw on known data where required. Rather, it is an interpretative essay from a Marxist perspective on the shaping of the Australian economic system. So while it covers reasonably well-worn ground it appears to fit an important niche, or arguably even opens a new one.

Much previous economic history scholarship focuses on obvious basic themes such as convicts (Shaw), money and capital (Butlin), agriculture and pastoralism (Shann), communications and individual sectors (Blainey) or colonial subservience (Fitzpatrick). Wells endeavours to draw these loose threads into a picture of what shaped the development model, posing central questions such as whether or not capitalist industrialism was an inevitable result.

Wells' Marxist approach is not dogmatic, and indeed Marxist historians such as Hobsbawm, and Hill in the UK or Waterson in Australia, seldom are. Despite defending Brian Fitzpatrick he concedes that Britain did not 'exploit' Australia in any crude sense. He accepts the view of some mild Marxists that modern under-development may be caused by "too little rather than too much capitalism". In this sense he is wedded to the common Marxist notion that capitalism is beneficial in its technologically progressive phase and is a necessary prerequisite for socialism.

Well's thesis holds imperialism as detrimental only in so far as the capitalist world system integrates all separate societies into its mode, subjects it to uneven development, etc. However, he does not consider the useful thesis of another Marxist historian, Peter Cochrane, who argues that in deliberately retaining Australia as a source of wool and as a market for manufactured goods and bonds, British capitalism distorted Australian development away from self-sufficiency in capital goods and long-term finance, hence into dependency on debt. This distortion still haunts us today.

The strength and core of Wells' book lies in identifying a complex conjunction of forces—pastoralism, an early "merchant core", British financial interests, small settlers, large squatters and late nineteenth century full-blown capitalists. Early small-scale settlements gave way after about 1830 to the "commodification of land" and later to a similar development in industry. The process was not inevitable, but was due to this conjunction of political forces at particular times. Early government policies had encouraged small farms and sale to state stores had minimised capitalism. This socialist (?) potential was, however, soon undermined by corruption, capitalist ideology and political forces both imperial and colonial.

The commodification process did not follow the traditional Marxist model because of some peculiarities of the Australian class system. These included the fact that surplus value derived primarily from pastoral ground rent rather than from manufacturing and commerce; the preponderance of finance over industrial capital; and the early strength of labour. He disputes the thesis of Butlin and others that 'state socialism' was a major shaping force, because it was largely infrastructural complements to private industry; public enterprises often behaved like

private companies; and by borrowing in London governments avoided appropriating surplus value in Australia. So a mature capitalism emerged after 1860 out of these forces, and was consciously shaped by them, but it was an unstable structure until at least the 1940s.

Wells' book is a useful one with a somewhat new view of the origins of Australian political structures and many interesting interpretive points throughout. However, because of the large number of threads he weaves the argument is at times hard to follow, and the book badly needs a concluding chapter which draws them together more satisfactorily. His class analysis, though explained in Chapter 8, borders on the abstruse. His admirable attempt to avoid historical determinism sits a little uncomfortably with his Marxist framework which, at bottom, remains substantially deterministic. Despite Wells' hints to the contrary the reader is still left wondering whether Australia could ever have been anything other than the good (or bad?) capitalist self it is today.

Graham Dunkley is a member of the Department of Applied Economics, Footscray Institute of Technology, Victoria.

"Today We Speak to Tourists in Ferrara"

Peter Murphy

Ken Bolton and John Jenkins: *The Ferrara Poems* (The Experimental Art Foundation, PO Box 21, North Adelaide 5006, $10).

The sentence in italics in the blurb is not wrong: "*Things are as they seem—but you weren't looking.*" *The Ferrara Poems* are very much about surfaces, often bright surfaces, as are the paintings of Jeffrey Smart. As in his paintings the surfaces here seem at times to be all there is.

On holidays people aim to put aside unsettling aspects of themselves, their lives and relationships. Holiday friendships are often smooth, designed to avoid undue intimacy or introspection. In this vein, this verse novel focuses on a group of friends on holiday in Italy in a bright, external manner. Moments are often portrayed briefly and in passing, without a suggestion of or interest in anything other than what meets the eye—as in this account of some of the friends dancing:

> They watched Greg and Miko and Carla dance
>
> to *Rebel Yell.* The taped music
>
> was very loud.
> Carla's shirt was undone. As was Greg's.
>
> Miko's tiny fists punched the air
> at the appropriate moments,
>
> strobe-like,
> exactly on the beat.

Life is pleasant and nothing threatens the friends' equanimity or their image of themselves. Indeed, they are able to retain a considerable amount of distance even when relationships appear to be becoming close . . .

> "I think you are very sophisticated
>
> —and Gerard—
> to share different apartments."
>
> "I have always wanted
> to be that way."

The sets of two lines of which the whole novel is made up have the effect, as here, of spreading things out so that the high visibility of the parts makes the whole seem rather remote. At times, the extended sets of lines, broken up by relatively large spaces on the page, play over uneventful moments in a manner not unlike that of those very distinct and carefully paused language tapes telling you how to find the nearest post office. The reader is thus encouraged to cultivate a somewhat detached interest. It is a little like looking at a photorealist exhibition, particularly as the details and events rendered so carefully are usually unremarkable in themselves, as can be seen in the following account of Roberto 'gunning' the engine:

> "Gun the engine for them Roberto," Karl said.
>
> "I can't find the handbrake
> —Ah," said Roberto, handing Giselle
>
> her large kid-leather bag.
> "Here."
>
> "Oh, sorry, I put it there where I thought
> it wouldn't be in the way."
>
> Roberto gunned the engine.

In keeping with its minimalist approach to content, its fascination with peripheral detail, this novel of a holiday devotes a considerable amount of time to the experience of being in vehicles. A meeting occurs through someone falling off a bicycle and there are later jokes about this. There is also concern about who should sit where in Roberto's car and about his reckless driving style—as can be seen in this extract:

> Roberto changed down and accelerated
> into the next curve.
>
> "Do we have to die?" asked Giselle.
> "I thought you were . . . liking it."

"Slow down, Roberto,"
she told him.

She braced herself for the next bend.
Roberto slowed down slightly. "This Humber," he said

"is a very good car."

They heard
a siren behind.

Carla said, "Roberto
there's a police car behind us."

"Really?"

He slowed down.

The amusing aspect of such a sequence seems to derive from the way the style of the work can neutralize any sense of involvement that might be found in such an event either in life or in another literary work. To avoid any danger of the reader seriously engaging with the moment, the surface texture of the poetry stretches out more obviously than usual, carrying less and less in each set of lines, drawing attention to itself rather than to what it is depicting.

In addition to this there are a number of other ways in which we are conscious of being distanced from what is being portrayed in the novel. A number of characters whose first language is not English speak in a rather formal, artificial manner and, because of differences in cultural background, sometimes see things from a surprising perspective. This can produce a curiously unreal effect, as in this discussion of a fall in the Australian dollar:

"Someone," he added
"has been foolin' with the sheep's back."

"What is that,
a proverb?"

"What? No."
"It's a saying—that Australia *Rides*

on the Sheep's Back—
the wool we sell," Giselle explained.

"It sounds medieval, like Breughel,"
Gerhard commented.

"Maybe it is," said Giselle.

A kind of distance from the characters and events is also achieved through humour and a concern with oddities, the professions of the characters ranging from bonbonniera exporter to ex-stuntman insurance swindler. Perhaps that sense of the remote nature of events is most intense when the friends see one of themselves, a tour guide, being interviewed on television while they are eating at a restaurant:

" . . . Today we speak to tourists in Ferrara,
And now I am speaking to Giselle.

Giselle, you are a tourist in Ferrara?"
"Yes, I visit every year."

"Where are you from?"
"Australia."

"The Other side of the WORLD! You like it here?"
"Very much."

"You will come here again next year?"
"I do not think so."

"Venice perhaps?"
"I have accepted a new job."

"And what do you do?"

"I will be working for the United Nations,
in Geneva and New York."

"The United Nations."

Here, as always, the texture of the writing serves to increase the distancing effect of the situation, the use of italics and capital letters intensifying the impression of the banal being highlighted to a point where everything becomes as curious and remote as that mythical entity, the United Nations.

Like some of the classics which have the feeling of a holiday about them, such as *A Room with a View* and *The Europeans*, this novel builds up to a kind of resolution at the end. Its resolution, however, is not so much in terms of relationships—though there is something of that—as in terms of business ventures being concluded. Gerard and Giselle are to "share different apartments" in New York; Greg and Carla are to "stay with the band". Karl sells his share in the bonbonniera business back home and buys into a small Italian "restaurant supply and outfitting" business; Roberto sells a quarry and buys a group of pleasure boats. The characters manage business affairs with the same amount of ease as those of the heart.

As in the classics there is a kind of celebration at the end. It is held at the guest-house restaurant of Karl's new business partner, an eccentric whose colourful account of his life provides the fireworks of the evening. In contrast to some of the classics which in their bright aspect, their holiday mood, also allude to other aspects of the characters, their relationships and life itself, what is remarkable in this work is the absence of anything beneath the surfaces portrayed with such care. Indeed, this feeling of absence, like the spaces between the sets of lines, becomes intriguing in itself.

Writer and photographer Peter Murphy lives in Melbourne. His books include The Moving Shadow Problem *(University of Queensland Press).*

PRAMOEDYA AMANTA TOER, INDONESIA

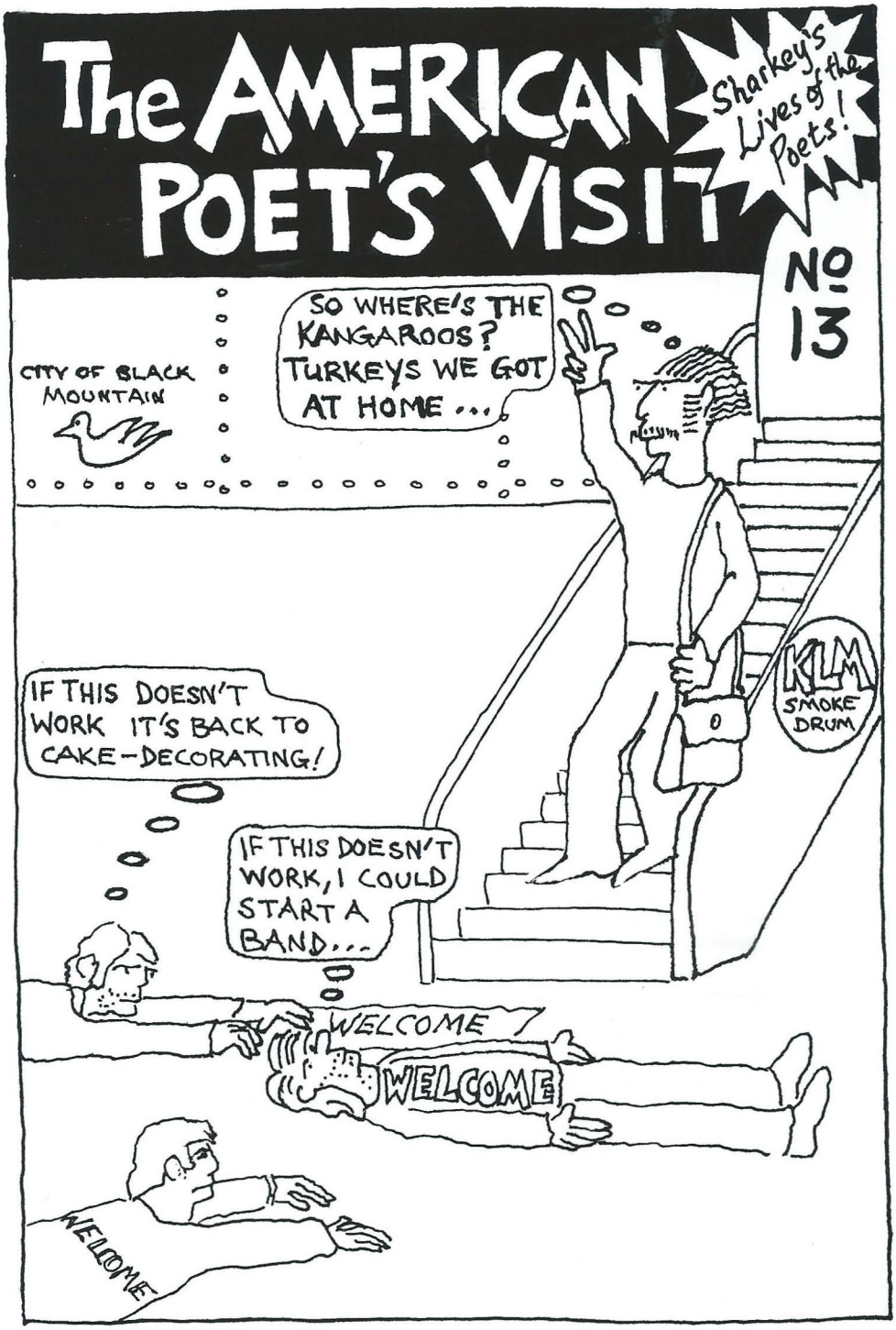
Writers in Prison, 5

History, geography and economics have all involved Australia with Indonesia. The Australian landmass first became known to Europeans when Dutch mariners were blown on to its shores on their way to trade in the Spice Islands. Australia may be the Java Major of The Lusiads, Camoens' epic poem in celebration of Portuguese imperialism. The Australian government looked sympathetically at its postwar struggles for independence, and Australian watersiders assisted materially by banning Dutch ships. Bali remains a favorite tourist spot for Australians. But in recent years the friendship between the two countries has cooled. While this is largely due to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor and the shooting of the Australian journalists covering the action, Indonesia's treatment of its own people has fueled Australian suspicions. Censorship laws, which have banned, amongst other books, a history of Jakarta by the Australian author Susan Abeyesekere, inhibit what Indonesians may read, and writers themselves are restricted in what they may write.

Pramoedya Amanta Toer is an Indonesian novelist whose works confront the problems of a village society transforming itself into a modern nation. Published in translation by Penguin, they help outsiders understand the Indonesian predicament. Yet these books are now banned in Indonesia, and their author, who wrote them in the first place as a prisoner on Buru Island, is under town arrest and has been threatened with further prosecution. The Minister for Politics and Security complained that Pramoedya Toer's latest novel, *The Glass House*, "clearly reveals Karl Marx's labour theory . . . [and] contains clauses supporting the concept of social classes which is against Pancasila."

Indonesian authorities ask for international understanding of their difficult situation, and deny that western standards of freedom apply to a developing country. But the suppression of the free expression and exchange of ideas can only distort their apprehension of reality and make the solution of their problems even more difficult.

Readers can express their concern to the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, 8 Darwin Avenue, Canberra, ACT 2600.


The AMERICAN POET'S VISIT
Sharkey's Lives of the Poets!
No. 13
CITY OF BLACK MOUNTAIN
SO WHERE'S THE KANGAROOS? TURKEYS WE GOT AT HOME...
KLM SMOKE DRUM
IF THIS DOESN'T WORK IT'S BACK TO CAKE-DECORATING!
IF THIS DOESN'T WORK, I COULD START A BAND...
WELCOME
WELCOME
WELCOME