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Overland

Ian Turner on Manning Clark

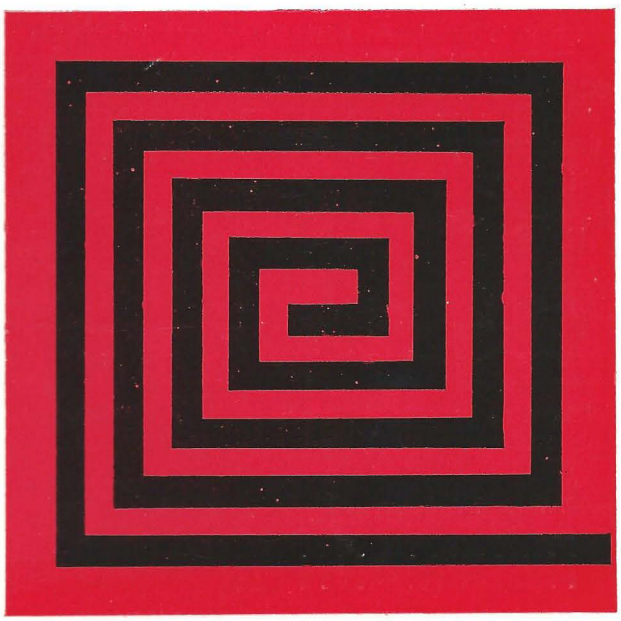
Argument on Katharine Prichard

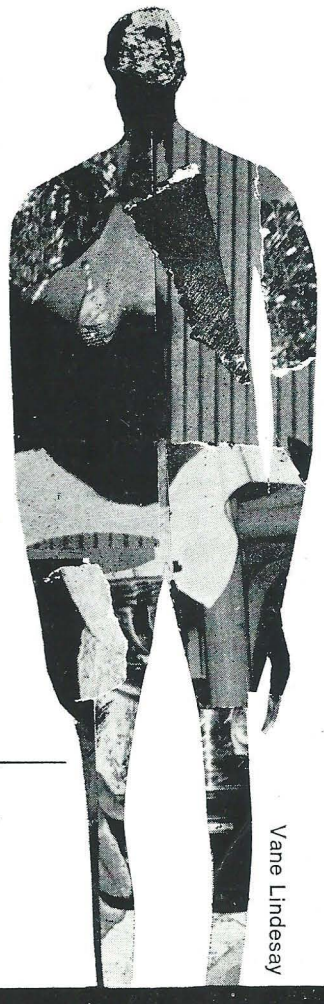
Conversation with Peter Porter

Owen Webster: Frank Dalby Davison

fifty cents

history: prophecy





Vane Lindesay

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Overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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Winter 1970

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MONA BRAND

Nanny Crisp and the tamarind tree

At playtime a few of us ten and eleven year old Grammar School girls used to climb up into the branches of the tamarind tree to talk about sex.

As soon as the ten-thirty gong sounded we would leave our classroom with exaggerated casualness and meander along the panama hat, lunch box, sandshoe-smelling corridor until we came out on to the blazing front terrace. From there we would stroll under the poinciana trees before quickening our paces down the steps between the tennis courts. Once out of sight of the school buildings we would dash to a far corner of the grounds and leap one after the other into the shelter of our tree—a flurry of navy serge skirts, navy bloomers, gaps of pink leg, white garters and black stockings.

Settling ourselves on our favorite branches, we would reach out and pick handfuls of brittle brown beans containing the sticky, sour fruit we had all been told not to eat. Members of a secret society called the Searchers, we met in the tree to barter scraps of information we'd collected since the day before.

In our group were Maud Mason, a bank manager's daughter, Elsie Ford, whose mother served on several committees including the Y.W.C.A., the

Country Women's Association and the Women's Hospital Board, and Jessie Cain, whose parents had a big property "out west".

And there was Dimity Butcher, the scholarship girl—more often called Butch, which was somehow more suitable.

Dimity's sister Dell was still at the state school recently attended by Dimity herself—a fact that made things a bit awkward for grammar school pupils accustomed to talking loosely about "those awful state school kids"—as Joyce Reece discovered on an occasion marked by the transfer of a ribbon and a good many strands of her hair into Dimity's fist.

There had been initial reluctance to admit Dimity to the Searchers. It was only when spies reported her to be in possession of some vital information that feelers were extended. Even then she was asked to submit her data from under the tree before being allotted a branch; but as soon as she announced in a voice of authority that she knew for a fact that babies came out of their mothers' "belly buttons" the leaves parted and she was given a leg-up.

Hitherto Jessie Cain's theory had prevailed. Jessie had seen calves born, and begged us to conclude that humans made their way into the world by the same route. It was unacceptable to most of us—it seemed far too vulgar. All right for animals, perhaps, but we'd been told often that man is above the animal, and felt that if ever there were a chance of proof, it was surely here.

Not surprisingly, the path along which babies left their mothers' bodies interested us less than speculation as to how they had found themselves there in the first place. It was generally accepted that fathers played a part, but there were conflicting views (some commendable for their originality) as to just what this part was.

Again Jessie's attempt to draw a parallel with our four-footed friends was rejected. And not only on the grounds of delicacy. We had all seen baby boys and toddlers minus their clothes, and felt sure that that part of their anatomy that distinguished them from girls would be less than efficient for the role Jessie ascribed to it.

Then one day, out of the blue, Maud Mason was able to strengthen our objections and weaken Jessie's thesis. Maud had gone accidentally into the bathroom and seen her father under the shower. From this she was able to assure us that the main change occurring since babyhood to the feature under discussion was simply one of dimension. Nevertheless, this chance reconnaissance by Maud created a lively session, for dimension had been one of the facts secretly puzzling us all. Now we wanted to know: "How big?" "Like this?" "This?"

The centre of attention, Maud's status grew by the minute—as did the bank manager's, had he but known it.

I was soon to discover that my own admission to the Searchers had not been immediate. I was considered a risk because Judy Wilson was my best friend. But I had in my favor that I was the doctor's daughter, who should be able to find out a few things. This I promised to do, but only on condition that Judy be admitted as soon as she came back to school after a bout of German measles. It was sheer blackmail on my part. I had been brought up on the "little black bag" doctrine, and had no intention of asking further questions. To have done so would have implied professional mistrust. Besides, the black bag, though questionable, did seem to be the very axis upon which our family fortunes revolved.

It was not really Judy the Searchers were afraid of, but Nanny Crisp, a spinster in her seventies whose "strictness and narrowness with those girls" was often commented upon by our mothers.

During the school year Nanny Crisp acted as guardian to Judy and her younger sister Mabs, all three boarding at Hillcrest, a modest guest house near the school. The girls' father managed a station in North Queensland, and preferred this arrangement to sending his daughters to boarding school. Nanny had been his wife's governess, and later Judy's Nanny. Ailsa Wilson died when Mabs was born, and Nanny "took over" both the girls for the unhappy father.

Almost a caricature of everybody's idea of an old maid, Nanny always wore a long-sleeved white silk blouse with a boned collar, an ankle-length black skirt, button boots and a black straw hat. She spoke little, but everything she said was terse and to the point, punctuated by facial twitching and grimaces said to be symptoms of St. Vitus Dance—a disease which I could not help paraphrasing as "invite us to the dance"—incongruous though this was, applied to Nanny.

From the moment we met as flat-chested eight-year-olds Judy and I became what our elders called "bosom chums", swapping all secrets and planning a shared future stretching far into old age. We spent our Saturday afternoons together, many of them in the Botanical Gardens strolling about arm in arm or lying under the tropical palms. We were writing a book, the main character a composite of ourselves (though ten years older) who was having a love affair with a stranger from England.

We always had to have Mabs along with us on these outings, but she was useful for running to the kiosk for penny ice cream cones and eight-a-penny aniseed balls.

Some Saturdays I was invited to Hillcrest.

Nanny Crisp's bedroom was hard to sit down in except on the floor because of the books stacked on all the chairs. There were books, too, on most of Nanny's washstand, forcing the jug and basin to the floor; books on the commode chair, exiling its china portion to a place under Nanny's bed, only partly screened by the white marcella quilt. And there were books on what had apparently started out life as a dressing table, judging from the few inches of mirror glimpsed between the stacks.

French windows led from Nanny's room to the verandah and the girls' stretcher beds. It was here that Judy and I lolled, talking and reading while Mabs played in the garden. How we read! It was at Nanny Crisp's that I made acquaintance with Shakespeare via Lamb's Tales, with "Wuthering Heights", "Jane Eyre" and much of Dickens. It was because of Nanny that I surprised my parents by asking for a collection of Greek myths for my birthday instead of a sequel to "Mollie of the Fourth Form" which they had had in mind.

Nanny herself sat almost permanently in front of the washstand writing on thick sheets of exercise paper with a pen dipped into green ink. From time to time she would bark an order to the girls: "Mabs, be quiet!" "Judy, stop fidgetting. Pull your dress down!"

I had always been rather afraid of her until the day the dog jumped on Mabs. While Judy and I read on the verandah Mabs was rolling about on the small strip of faded lawn near the front fence. Somebody had left the gate open, and a huge alsatian bounded in, and (perhaps with the best intentions) shouted a greeting and leaped all over the little girl. Not waiting for explanations, Mabs ran screaming up the front steps and straight into the bedroom. Through the open door I saw Nanny jerk herself from her writing, and without question gather the sobbing child on to her lap, and gently, tenderly soothe away the fears, rocking to and fro, to and fro.

Nanny Crisp made a point of censoring the girls' outings—especially to the pictures. This meant that while they were familiar with Charlie Chaplin, Jackie Coogan and even Harold Lloyd, they were out of their depth at school when the conversation turned to Adolph Menjou and Tom Walls.

But Nanny made sure they were not left out of approved activities—which included the Children's Hospital Fancy Dress Ball held every year at the School of Arts. Careful scrutiny of pattern books and long consultations with dress makers ensured that July and Mabs were as convincingly transformed into gum-nuts, pierrots, butterflies or shepherdesses as any of their playmates.

At the ball itself Nanny sat dutifully and not without pride on the side of the hall reserved for mothers, there to watch the Grand Parade and acknowledge polite praise of her charges.

But for most of the year Nanny stayed out of the social whirl, and that (as the ladies often told each other) was how the old girl wanted it, judging from her obvious discomfort at one of their Morning Teas.

Morning Teas! These most popular of all functions were held at least once a week in some private house. I usually encountered one at our place in the school holidays, and idly watched my friends' mothers arrive—alas, without their daughters, who could be left at home with the maid. It was a chance for the women to wear their best dresses, hats, silk stockings and—even in a ninety degrees temperature with seventy per cent. humidity—their kid or fabric gloves. The more portly were corseted in what appeared from the back view to be stiff board, terminating just below the buttocks in a ledge over which flowed floral crepe-de-chine or georgette.

The visitors were ushered past our wide, fern-filled verandah into the hot sitting room, there to be served with sausage rolls, cheese straws, sandwiches, gem scones, cream puffs and passion-fruit sponge.

"I really shouldn't, but it looks marvellous."

"How delicious! Did you make it?"

This flotsam on the tide of conversation bobbed against the more solid pieces:

"He's no good, you know."

"She's no better than she ought to be."

"Up to his ears in debt."

"A fast little flapper—smokes in public."

"Another child!—he ought to be . . ."

Washed around by this swirl of sophistication, Nanny had been observed to be "out of her depth" and "high and dry", no matter how hard one had tried to "draw her in".

On one occasion the young wife of a solicitor brought her six weeks old baby along. As the crowd and the noise in the sitting room grew, I wandered into the front bedroom where the infant had been put down to sleep on my parents' double bed. Bored and lonely, I peered through the perforations in the mosquito net at this smallest version of a human being I had yet seen at close quarters.

The baby lay in its silk dress on a waterproof sheet, guarded on two sides by pillows. Its small thighs protruded from over-size holes in its loose towelling napkin; one of its minute, almost translucent hands kept opening and shutting. Its constantly working lips blew out a bubble.

I marvelled that this miniature human being could grow up to be a man. One day its feet

would reach the end of some bed the size of this one; one day it would have muscular arms, a hairy chest and lie on its back and snore. It might have a moustache on its lip, and thick brown hair on its head instead of this damp, dark fluff. Then one even later day its head might grow bald and cause its owner, as the hair restorer advertisement predicted, "a feeling of acute social embarrassment". (I was not to know that Ceddie would be torpedoed and drowned in the Coral Sea before this warned-of calamity could overtake him.)

My mental stretching and widening of Ceddie was cut short by an offer from the sitting room of a glass of lemon squash and a sponge finger.

Cups, saucers, plates, cake forks and hand-embroidered doyleys were being restored to the autotray when the baby sent an S.O.S. down the hall to his mother.

"Go and get him, Nancy," the women pleaded, "it must be nearly time anyway."

"He heard the cups rattling," someone quipped.

Nancy obeyed, and soon brought the mollified child into our midst, where half a dozen opinions were advanced as to whom he most closely resembled. With his pinched face and rarely focusing eyes I thought he looked more like Mr. Justice Clancy than anybody, but some instinct warned me not to say so.

A feeble little hand veered towards its mother's chest. The women laughed. "Come on, mummy, don't be mean," said one.

Nancy flushed slightly and sat down.

She undid the buttons on the front of her dress and put a hand inside her bodice. She was a small, slight woman with a face like a shy child's, so I was unprepared for the enormous sphere of creamy flesh she drew forth, veined like marble and moulded towards a nipple as big and purple as a ripe muscatel grape.

This she took between two fingers, and a faint sigh escaped the watching women as she guided it into the baby's expectant mouth.

I was fascinated and appalled.

"Why don't you go out into the garden and play, Helen?" suggested my mother.

Leaving the house by the front door, I glided down the wooden steps, my hand on the rail. At its end was a post, surmounted by a creamy ball. My hand caressed it, loving it.

An ultramarine flat wash, the sky seemed to exude moisture. The scent of some shrub was overpowering. Our prize-winning garden was noted for the many shades of bougainvillaea surging over the high lattice/trellis that hid us from the street. Cannas blazed beside the fence; poinsettias flared; zinnias burned like embers. And there were roses. Wherever I looked I seemed to see big tight cream roses; I turned my head and saw purple fuchsias.

A wave of isolation swept through me as though injecting my body chemistry with some strange, alienating substance.

"Who am I?" I wondered. "This is **me** but who am I?" I slid down on to the grass and surrendered myself to the luxury of painful and ecstatic weeping.

It was soon after this that the Searchers was formed.

At her first meeting Judy sat on one of the lowest branches. Smaller than any of us, and a few months younger, it seemed that a goblin had come among us—a goblin with big luminous grey-green eyes, short straight hair, turned up nose and wide mouth. A pensive goblin. Some of the Searchers were really nervous.

"You have to promise not to tell anyone about this," Maud warned.

"That's right," said Dimity, "see what you can find out but don't spread it all round the joint."

Judy nodded. It was a lean morning for information, and we weren't sorry when the gong jangled across the grounds like an avalanche of kitchenware, calling us in for Nature Study.

The next day Elsie opened the proceedings with an item she had intercepted the night before, eavesdropping on her Hospital Board mother. It was possible, she told us excitedly, to have a baby **without** being married.

She had scarcely got her message out before Dimity ripped it up with her derisive: "Everybody knows that!" (I hadn't) "I've got an auntie—of course they didn't let her keep the baby. It was adopted out."

Stung by the reception of her communique, Elsie lashed back, "Well it only happens to common people—like somebody's maid. And anyway you were all wrong about babies arriving the way you said. I heard mother telling daddy that this Miss Watson had a difficult birth because of the narrowness of her pelvis—so there!"

"Are you calling my family common?" screamed Dimity, avoiding science and attacking on the weaker flank. The scene showed signs of becoming ugly.

"Judy has her hand up," cut in Maud, desperate to save the situation, "I think she wants to say something."

"Yes, I do," said Judy. From her mouth she took a half-sucked 'gob-stopper', wrapped it in her handkerchief and put it in the pocket of her middy blouse. From the same pocket she withdrew several sheets of folded paper.

"I can tell you all about it," she said calmly. "I've made some notes." Before anybody could exclaim or interrupt, Judy began to read: "Conception results from the union of the female ovum or egg and the male spermatazoa or sperm. This takes place inside the female body, in the uterus or womb. The sperm is implanted by . . ."

Judy's notes told us everything. They gave us an outline of both the male and female reproductive systems and their respective roles in copulation. Some technicalities of intercourse were included—even to clearing up the confusion created by Mr. Mason under his shower.

When Judy finished reading there was a moment of stunned silence, broken only by the sound of tamarinds sliding from Maud's listless hand. Then everybody shouted together, "But how do you know?"

Judy exchanged the notes for the 'gob-stopper', and restoring the latter to her mouth, remarked between sucks, "Nanny told us. I asked her."

"Told **us**!" "When?"

"Me and Mabs. Last night."

"You told her about the Searchers?"

"No I didn't. I just said I wanted to know, and she said since I'd asked we'd better hear it all—both of us."

"But she might be wrong! She's not even married. She's old. She might have made it up."

"She didn't make it up," said Judy, "she got it all out of a book. She showed us. There were pictures too."

"Pictures!"

"Diagrams. Nanny read some of it out and made me take notes. She always does that when we ask her something. But this time she said"—here Judy hesitated—"she said I'd better not tell any of you because you'll tell your mothers and they mightn't understand."

Nanny needn't have worried. It was she who didn't understand—we wouldn't have dreamt of telling our mothers. It wasn't a subject one could discuss with parents.

That was the last time we climbed the tamarind tree. The Searchers disintegrated — the search being over. Besides, the tamarinds were past their prime, and the basketball season was starting.

Not long afterwards my family left the district and I lost touch for ever with Judy, Mabs and Nanny Crisp. Just before we went, there was a rare visit to the town of a touring theatre whose repertoire comprised "Hamlet", "The Geisha Girl" and "Cinderella". Judy and Mabs were the only girls we knew who went to Hamlet, which our parents considered unsuitable, but we all went to "Cinderella".

The School of Arts hall was packed. The Masons were there with Maud, sitting just behind Nanny and her girls. I sat next to Elsie because our mothers wanted to talk to each other. Across the aisle was a party of ten of the best behaved grammar school boarders, resplendant in their white hail-spot muslin dresses and black silk stockings. Jessie waved to Maud; Maud waved back, and on an impulse her father sent her across to "those poor kids" with a packet of Columbine caramels. For some reason he had felt himself to be the centre of the girls' attention tonight.

"Cinderella" proved to be a combination of music hall, revue and circus loosely associated with the well known fairy story. The star of the piece was clearly the Dame, whose hoarse male voice kept things going with a running patter of stories which I recognised from the audience response to be of the kind sometimes told by my Uncle Clarrie who was always described by my mother, with an affectionate smile, as "dreadful".

Although I didn't understand all the Dame's jokes, I was able to perceive their strong dependence on some of the data contained in Judy's notes. The main difference lay in the fact that the Dame made his points by reference to double beds, misplaced underwear (called "drawers"), marital infidelity and unmarried motherhood.

I could tell by the laughter around me that they were good stories—the men's throaty bellows descending further and further down the tonic scale as the women's squeals climbed up it.

One bracket of yarns began with the comparatively tame: "I once knew a girl who treated her boy friend like dirt—she hid him under the bed when her husband came home." This was followed by several more leading to something rather bolder about a bachelor being afraid of going out with a girl in case "one thing should lead to a mother"—and on and on, gaining strength until the climax: ". . . then there was the young man in the nudist camp who said to his girl friend, 'Don't look now, but I think I'm falling in love'."

This, it was said later, "raised the roof" and "brought down the house".

Elsie and I exchanged knowing glances, biting our lower lips and hoping nobody would guess we understood.

The applause died down, the orchestra broke into a Strauss waltz, and we were transported to a palace ballroom. Cinderella met her prince and lost her slipper; a juggler tossed and caught his batons; the Dame made us laugh again; the prince located the foot he wanted to marry . . . and finally it was all over.

We clapped our hands sore, and after numerous curtain calls the cast and audience stood rigidly to attention and in ringing tones implored God to save King George the Fifth.

The lights came up. As snatches of Strauss mingled with "If You were the Only Girl in the World" and "Yes We Have No Bananas" we left our seats and began ambling out—the men slapping each other on the back and the women exchanging nods and half-guilty smiles.

Suddenly we were all aware of Nanny Crisp striding briskly down the centre aisle, her back as stiff as a telephone pole, her face as inscrutable as a scrubbing board. Judy and Mabs had to run to keep up with her.

When she had gone, a perceptible titter rippled around us.

The bank manager's wife edged up to my mother, bent down and whispered something in her ear which I just caught.

"I'm afraid some of it would have shocked Nanny Crisp," said Mrs. Mason.

She might have been right.

WEAPONS TRAINING

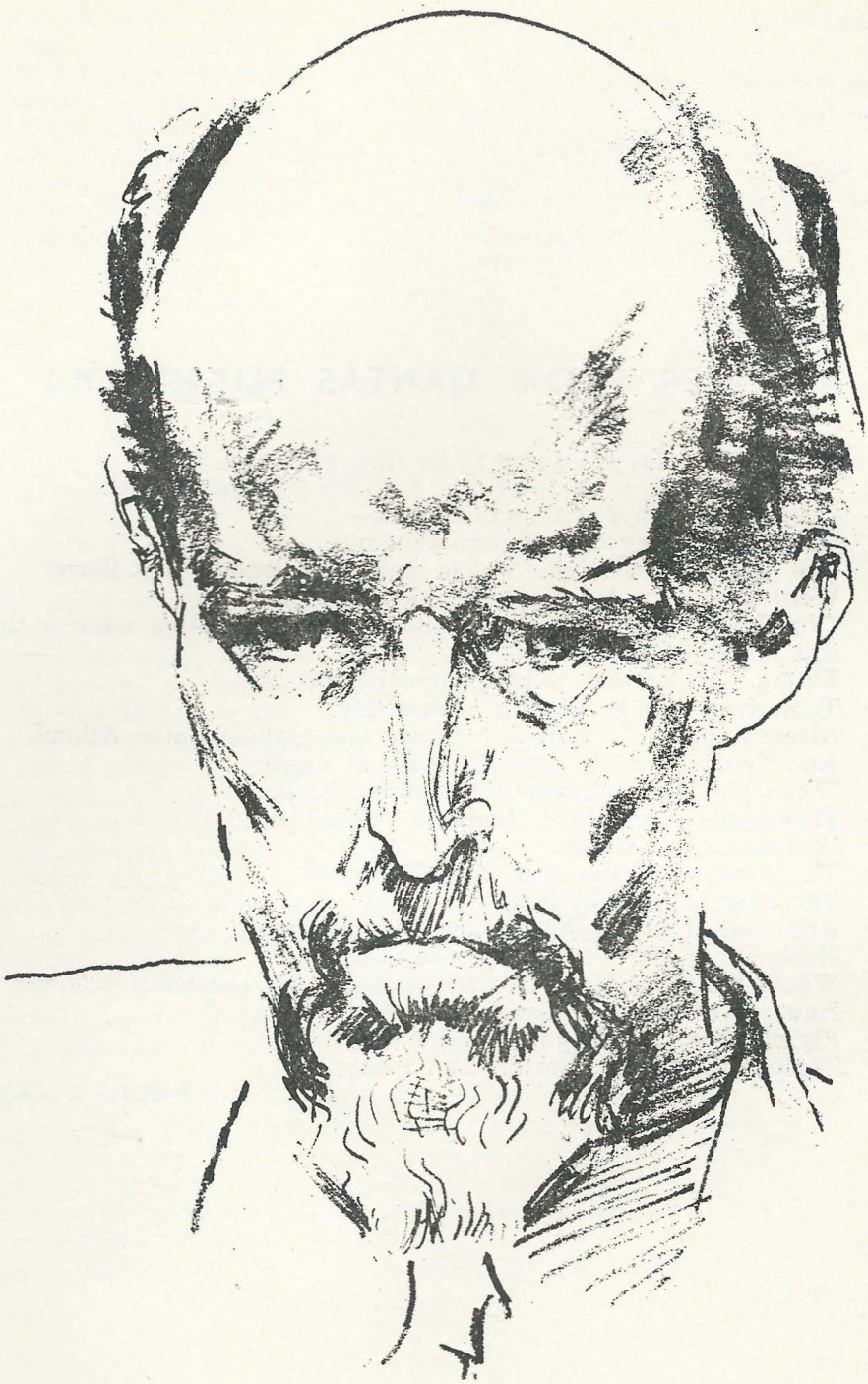
And when I say eyes right I want to hear
those eyeballs click and the gentle pitter-patter
of falling dandruff you there what's the matter
why are you looking at me are you a queer?
look to your front if you had one more brain
it'd be lonely what are you laughing at
you in the back row with the unsightly fat
between your elephant ears open that drain
you call a mind and listen remember first
the cockpit drill when you go down be sure
the old crown-jewels are safely tucked away what could be more
distressing than to hold off with a burst
from your trusty weapon a mob of the little yellows
only to find back home because of your position
your chances of turning the key in the ignition
considerably reduced? alright now suppose
for the sake of argument you've got
a number-one blockage and a brand-new pack
of Charlies are coming at you you can smell their rotten fish-sauce
breath hot on the back
of your stupid neck alright now what
are you going to do about it? that's right grab and check
the magazine man it's not a woman's tit
worse luck or you'd be set too late you nit
they're on you and your tripes are round your neck
you've copped the bloody lot just like I said
and you know what you are? you're dead dead dead

BRUCE DAWE

A LETTER FROM QANTAS FLIGHT 744

You know what it's going to be like when you first
come aboard:
Oyster-grey vinyl with wildflowers—
Only, when they cut the windows out,
The Queensland silver wattle and the slender rice flower
Went too
(You know because at every window one or the other name is there
But not the illustration).
Flying East we are putting time behind us;
Tomorrow will be shorter than today.
Already sodden London is a dream and night-haunted Athens,
And Teheran, which we will leave at dawn,
When you are well asleep in Belsize Park,
Three hours and three thousand miles behind,
Will scarcely register.
The steward speaks in a Cronulla drawl,
The beer is cold (at last)
And I am thinking that I must not miss you
Here, above the weather, in the dark,
Where the Queensland silver wattle and the slender rice flower
Have only left their names.
Flying East we are putting time behind us;
Tomorrow will be shorter than today.

DENNIS DOUGLAS



MANNING CLARK, by Noel Counihan, 1959

Manning Clark: history and the voice of prophecy

IAN TURNER

"I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for."

The epigraph to C. M. H. Clark's "Select Documents in Australian History, 1851-1900", from Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov".

Visiting the Museum of the Revolution, in Moscow in 1958, Manning Clark ruminated on the making of history. The displays in historical museums reflect the ways in which the rulers of a society dress up the past—sometimes by selection and emphasis, sometimes by suppression and fabrication—so as the better to manipulate the present. "The past is a great attic of pictures from which you select the relevant ones and hang them on your walls."[1]

The image is apt; indeed it illuminates one aspect of the history that Clark creates. For an essential part of Clark's history is the making of portraits. The pictures are hung against a wall onto which the historian projects his documentaries, but the films do not make the portraits—they may throw them into sharp relief, or project a hidden beam of light on to them, or leave them to rest in shade, but the smug curves of complacency, the serene planes of wisdom, and the deep furrows of anguish and doubt, these belong to the portraits themselves. For, like all historians for whom a claim of greatness may be made, Clark brings to his work his own preoccupations, and first among these is his awareness of the darkness that is in all men's hearts, the ineluctable tragedy of man.

Some have said that this is a concern more fitting for the biographer than the historian; but surely this is to reduce Clark to much less than his true dimensions. His concern is with man's search for happiness, and the ways in which this leads men to attempt to build a society in the image of happiness. The failure of the search, and the illusions on which it is based, are central to Clark's meaning. This is an historical concern, for his meaning is for all men; his argument is with happiness as a social philosophy, and while the point may be evidenced, it cannot be resolved in terms of individual lives.

Some have objected that Clark's constant reference to the "fatal flaw" in the human clay, that his belief that all men carry "the stamp of one defect, [and] shall . . . take corruption from that particular fault,"[2] reduces man to a stereotype, a cliche; yet this is central to Clark's question about the nature of man. The corollary of the belief that social adjustment can lead to happiness is the assertion that happiness is within man's nature. Clark's insistence on the "flaw" is shorthand for his denial that lasting happiness is a human possibility—even for those who, like Samuel Marsden, believed in God's saving grace, for had not Marsden himself "lifted up his eyes to his heavenly father, and beseeched Him to give His faithful wretch the prize he had looked for in vain from his fellow-men"?[3]

Clark and his critics are engaged, then—though this is not always obvious—in a debate about the eternal search for happiness: whether the search can be successful, and if so under what conditions. Or, to put the point in more traditional terms, whether the long-dominant Enlightenment assumptions that unhappiness and wrong-doing (in the sense of inflicting unhappiness on others, or remaining indifferent to the unhappiness of others) spring from a badly ordered society, and can be eliminated in so far as the conditions of social living are transformed.

Clark's importance in Australian historiography is that he stands against a swell of opinion that has carried most twentieth century Australian histor-

1. "Meeting Soviet Man", 19. Compare the comment Tatiana Tolstoy wrote in her diary during 1882: "Papa said that the world is like a river . . . and the current carries with it models of fine or worthless people, good and bad and all sorts . . . it's our duty to leave the pattern we want on that river". Qd. in "Melbourne: An Intellectual Tradition", 23.

2. "Hamlet", qd. in "The Writing of History", 18.
3. "A History of Australia", Vol. II, 18.

ians along with it. The temper of Australian historiography has been Whiggish, progressivist, materialist. It is this temper which Clark has challenged, and his challenge has been so vigorous and so well-directed that no-one concerned with Australian history can evade it; it has changed the terms of the debate (or, perhaps more accurately, it has created debate where none had for some time existed), and it has correspondingly changed the way of thinking and writing of all those who are engaged with him. Australian historiography is learning from Clark that the "subject is not just the tree of knowledge, but the tree of life".[4]

Clark has said that "today there are only two great beliefs in Australia—two tremendous utopias. There are those who believe in the tremendous dream sketched in the Communist Manifesto. Then there are those who believe in the last paragraph of the Apostle's Creed".[5] (I imagine that he would extend the comment to all lands whose cultures are within the tradition of Judeo-Christian civilisation.) The proposition can, of course, be questioned. Most Australians regard their lives, the world in which they live, with an easy-going, unreflective pragmatism. Indeed, Clark has suggested that perhaps an existential acceptance of and response to life might prove to be Australia's contribution to civilisation.[6] But his concern is with those who doubt and question their own actions and motives, who usurp God's function and judge themselves—and especially with those, the most vulnerable, whom life has invested with charisma or power—for theirs is the glory, and with it the tragedy.

"The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!" "I believe in the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come". The two utopias seem to occupy different territories, the one earth-bound, the other transcendental, demarcated by death. But for Clark they do not; for both are to be sought in the heart and mind, in the attainment of a happiness that passes understanding. These are the two great faiths of our time: the one proclaiming that man was born free but is everywhere fettered by exploitation, from which he can find collective redemption by the abolition of class society; the other proclaiming that man is born of sin and into sorrow, from which each man must seek his own redemption through reconciliation with his God. The premises seem contradictory; yet each promises that, through redemption, man will at last find the salvation of peace and rest. And Clark seems to hope for a reconciliation of individual and collective redemption, of Rome and Moscow, which confront (or until recently confronted) each other as symbolic guardians of the monolithic faiths: he speaks with sympathy of those who are "waiting patiently for the day when Rome accepts 1917 just as in the past Rome came to accept 1789".[7]

What such a reconciliation might mean—and the acceptance would surely have to be mutual, and not just on the side of Rome—I will discuss later. Meanwhile, it seems that Clark's deep concern with redemption involves an awareness of this contradiction: that man wishes that he could be God and forgive himself, but knows that he is not God and that there is no self-forgiveness; and that he has therefore created a God who can forgive, but has been unable to accept his own creation. And it seems further that Clark hopes to find, in a reconciliation of Rome and Moscow, of individual and social redemption, an escape from this intolerable dilemma and a true path to happiness—but fears that there is no happiness in this life, and that there is no other. If this is so, behind Clark's compassion and despair for the "never-ending tears of humanity", lies a double crisis of faith, an unhappy conviction that in neither the secular nor the transcendental faith can man find comfort.

Some have not seen this and have accused Clark of retreating from a rational concern with the future of this world into the mystical consolation of a world to come.

It is, of course, true that Clark rejects the facile optimism of that Enlightenment thinking which asserts that man, by making his own culture, makes himself—and therefore can, if he so desires, make himself perfect. And it is true that he rejects the claim of Soviet communists to have created a society in which unhappiness, and wrong-doing (glossed as anti-social, anti-party or anti-state behavior), exist only as survivals from a bourgeois past—and in the process to have created a new kind of man, 'Soviet man'. But in this many communists and almost all independent Marxists would agree with him. And it certainly does not follow that the rejection of a general belief in human perfectibility or of a specific approval in its own terms of Soviet communism implies a disbelief in or lack of concern for the possibility of the amelioration of particular evils—poverty, hunger, disease, war.

On what then does Clark found his view of human nature? The rhetoric in which he presents it is biblical, but of the Old, rather than the New, Testament; but the standpoint is not, I believe, Christian. From Cardinal Newman he quotes:

4. "The Writing of History", 22.
5. "Rewriting Australian History".
6. See "Australia Felix—Without Guilt".
7. "Faith", p. 84.

"Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man."[8] But this is not a state of sin into which men were consigned by a vengeful God after their fall from grace. Rather, this is simply what men are: "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."[9] Men are driven by faith and doubt, by greed and selflessness, by humility and pride, by lust and tenderness, by hate and love. The fullest of loves is flawed by withdrawal and deceit; with the act of creation comes the knowledge of failure. The trust and the hope of man is foredoomed to defeat, for each man destroys what he loves—and in the first place himself, for he alone can know himself.

That seems to me to come close to what Clark is saying about man. His rhetoric is biblical—partly perhaps because he first approached this understanding in childhood, in a family whose rhetoric was Christian; but more importantly, I believe, because Christianity presents evil and wrong-doing in terms of choice. For a man does not do "evil" who can do no other than he does: he is a sick man rather than a wrong-doer, a man who cannot be held responsible, who is to be cured rather than condemned. Illness implies pity; wrong-doing implies forgiveness. Christianity promises to forgive the sinner—provided he confesses his sin, having recognised that, confronted with a choice of good and evil, he has chosen evil. Clark's conviction that tragedy is the common condition of man rests not only on the belief that man is self-destructive, but that he destroys himself by the exercise of his own free will, by acting in ways which he knows to be wrong. For Clark, all men are a mixture of darkness and light, and none can wholly escape his darkness.

Is it the hint of determinism, the absence of a sense of evil, which leads Clark to reject the Freudian explanation of man's self-destruction, which he has surely considered? In Freudian terms, the fatal division in the psyche is the imperfect reconciliation by the ego of the demands of culture and of the innate drives. The balance is always precarious, because the contradiction goes deep; both social being and the satisfaction of drives are essential to life. No-one achieves a permanently satisfactory resolution; everyone lives with his own neuroses; in some the breakdown is complete.

But the man who cannot channel his drives into socially approved outlets, or sublimate them in culturally acceptable ways, is victim rather than villain, to be pitied rather than to be blamed. The pessimism of Clark's philosophy of man, the assertion that lasting happiness is incompatible with the human condition, fits well with Freud; but for Clark there must also be right and wrong, and the possibility of choice.

But not, however, sin, for sin is an offence not against man but again man as the child of God, and therefore against God, and in Clark's belief man, having made God in his own image, is now destroying him and must face the consequences. The key question is posed by Kirilov, in Dostoyevsky's "The Possessed". Christ has died on the cross saying to the two thieves that they will join him in paradise. But "His words did not come true"; they "found neither Paradise nor resurrection".

"And . . . if the laws of nature did not spare even Him, and have not spared even their miracle and made even Him live in a lie and die for a lie, then all the planet is a lie and rests on a lie and on mockery. So, then, the very laws of the planet are a lie and the vaudeville of devils. What is there to live for? Answer, if you are a man."[10]

The promise of Christ, the son of God, that man could win through to life everlasting and eternal happiness sustained man through his brief and unhappy years on earth, and gave him hope. But what if the promise were untrue? If Christ had no warrant to speak for God? If there were no gods except those that man had made? If there was no escape from this vale of tears into eternal bliss? Could there then be anything but despair (or frivolity and mockery, which are the obverse of despair)?

Clark points to the two answers which have been seriously proposed. First, the collective answer—that man can find a meaning for life in the contribution he makes to the well-being of the species as a whole. This was the claim which the Enlightenment enshrined as "progress"—progress defined in terms of the adequate production and equitable distribution of material satisfactions, which would lead to the happiness of each and the happiness of all. This was the claim which Marx stripped of bourgeois mystification and rationalisation and which he translated into the class war and the promise that, with communism, men would reach "the end of the human pilgrimage",[11] that, having learnt to know necessity, they would transcend it and pass into the realm of freedom. Once this liberation was won, each man would find his own happiness in his own way. Clark finds this answer embodied in the intellectual

8. Qd. in "Meeting Soviet Man", 4.
9. Qd. in "Melbourne: An Intellectual Tradition", 17. Ecclesiastes IX, 3.
10. Qd. in "Melbourne: An Intellectual Tradition", 19.
11. "Meeting Soviet Man", 85.

tradition of Melbourne, in the work of such writers as Bernard O'Dowd and Joseph Furphy (later perhaps Vance Palmer) and of such historians and social commentators as Brian Fitzpatrick and R. M. Crawford.

Secondly, the individual answer—that the meaning of life is to be found in the realisation of self, the satisfaction of physical appetites, the achievement of creative and intellectual fulfilment. This answer assumes a hierarchy of appetites and aspirations, some more refined or sophisticated or serious than others; it assumes the existence of elites and masses, of men and supermen; its origin is partly in the philosophy of Nietzsche. Clark finds this answer embodied in the intellectual tradition of Sydney, in the work of artists and writers like Norman Lindsay and Chris: Brennan (later perhaps Patrick White); it has some philosophical underpinning in the anti-moralistic libertarianism associated with John Anderson.[12]

Two answers, but neither satisfactory: the first because it asserts that, with progress, good will prevail over evil and men will find happiness, but fails to demonstrate the point; the second because it proclaims the whole dilemma a non-question, asserting that man can find happiness if only he passes beyond good and evil: whereas for Clark it is just the inescapable knowledge of good and evil which defines man, and condemns him to a life of sorrow. His only consolation is in love—in that time when

> All the wealth of love lavished of old upon Him, who was immortal, would be turned upon the whole of nature, on the world, on men, on every blade of grass.[13]

The belief that man creates his sorrow by his own choices involves Clark in an attention to ideology which is new to Australian historiography. For individual choices are made in terms of two sets of correlatives: value-systems (i.e. ideologies) and self-interest, which may be and indeed often are in conflict.

It may seem, at first sight, that there is a contradiction between this proposition and the Marxian analysis which suggests that ideology is the rationalisation of interest; but I do not think that this is necessarily so. Thus, it may well be that precepts such as "Love thy neighbor as thyself", and the rules set down in Decalogue, are conservative in their nature—that is, that they are prescriptions for social solidarity and continuity, and therefore, in the circumstances of inequality and minority rule, serve to preserve these conditions.

However, at most times in history most men have not thought outside the confines of the existing social orders; the demand for revolution has been presented only rarely and exceptionally. And beyond the general condition of satisfaction or at least acquiescence, it is also the case that normative statements of this kind appear to their adherents as having a universal validity—because they are the commandments of God, or because they are necessary for the cohesion of any society and not merely of the existing society. In either case—whether the universality is taken for granted, or whether it is consciously accepted—it is obvious that the choices indicated by ideology and those indicated by self-interest do not necessarily coincide. Communist theory discusses this in terms of collective interest and bourgeois individualism, or long-term and immediate interests. Freudian theory suggests a contradiction between the demands of the culturally-determined superego and the physiologically-determined id. To Christians, man's sinful, earthly nature stands between him and eternal life in the love of God. For Clark, the conflict is between the dark side of human nature—pride, the desire to dominate, the sensual appetites, and the light—fellowship and love. No matter what words are used, man is split in two, torn "between his desires, and the law of God",[14] and from this division comes his sorrows and his doubts.

The division is inescapable; but one side of man leads him to choose, to seek to make his life in terms of ideology. In Clark's terms, what is significant is not the question whether ideology is a rationalisation of interest, but just that it is in some sense a determinant of behavior, that men seek to order their personal lives and their social existence in accordance with their ideologies. Insofar as ideologies express ideal codes of existence, they represent aspirations rather than reality; and it is this gap between aspiration and reality which makes of ideology a source of failure, guilt and despair. And the total rejection of ideology, the "cynical" expression of undisguised self-interest, is no escape, for this leads to a self-brutalisation which few men can face.

For Clark, then, ideologies are significant in two respects—because they have provided the various (and rival) models for Australians engaged in building a new society and nation, and because they are one opening into the enactment of the human tragedy. So one side of the history of Australia is the conflict between the three great faiths brought to this country with the First Fleet. The Protestant, believing that, through hard work, and the proper observance of their religious duties and the just demands of charity, men would find

12. See also Clark's discussion in "Faith", 84 ff.

13. Epigraph to "A History of Australia", Vol. I, from Dostoyevsky's "A Raw Youth".

14. "The Writing of History", 16.

their due reward both on earth and in the life hereafter. The Catholic, believing that men could only live on earth in sin, that this life was preparatory for the life to come, in which those who had confessed their unworthiness and humbled themselves before their maker would find forgiveness and eternal life. The Enlightenment, holding that men had only this life to live, and should so live it as to increase the total of well-being and happiness according to the teachings of reason and in the brotherhood of man.

The Protestants and the men of the Enlightenment found that they had much in common; the Catholics were usually odd men out.[15]

These were the faiths men professed, the models by which they hoped to order their lives. Yet those of all faiths who took time off from work or worship to consider their situation had to concede defeat.

The Protestants found that the demands of business all too often overrode those of piety; they built granite and bluestone monuments to their faith, and watched and felt them turning into tombs. At first sharply under-privileged and disadvantaged, the Catholics found themselves, even when they had won their rights, a permanent minority, tolerated but distrusted, and fighting a losing battle against the world and the flesh (which to them represented the devil). The men of the Enlightenment found that brotherhood was easier to profess than to practice, and that the advance of reason and science did not necessarily increase the sum of human happiness. "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a Heaven for?" For Clark, the gap between aspiration and achievement is all too evident, but Heaven provides no bridge.

This approach to Australian history was not one to commend itself to Clark's fellow historians. The Australian environment made great demands of those who sought to master it. Men measured themselves by their successes in achieving this mastery, rather than by the degree of mastery they achieved over their own dark impulses, the nearness of their approach to God. They gave praise to themselves, more than to Knowledge or Beauty or Faith, in their bluestone and granite. As Clark says, many of them found in a belief in material progress and mateship "their only comforters against earth and sky, man and beast".[16] Although it was only rarely stated in any developed form, and even more rarely analysed, this was the dominant intellectual climate of Australia's first 150 years. Australians liked to believe that they had created a new nation—new not only in the sense that it was self-governing, one people occupying one continent, but in the sense that what they were making of that continent, the institutions and the way of life they were creating within it, were also something new. Australians not only believed in progress; they also thought of themselves as in some ways acting as its forward scouts. Those who thought at all about their God mostly gave him thanks for the material blessings he had bestowed upon them.

Most historians of Australia were responsive to this climate—whether, like Hancock or Fitzpatrick, they thought of progress in terms of the achievement of democracy and the material advance of the masses, or, like Shann or Ellis, in terms of the economic achievements of private entrepreneurs. In 1956, Clark presented a frontal challenge to this mainstream with his demand that history "must . . . have . . . some great theme to lighten our darkness—that, for example, the era of bourgeois liberalism, of democracy, and belief in material progress is over, and that those who defend such a creed are the reactionaries of today"; that history "must have a point of view on the direction of our society". Clark did not believe that what he hoped for would come from the academic historians, from the universities. They had not "pondered deeply over the problems of life and death", the iron of these questions had not entered their souls. The universities, "instead of being the fiercest critics of the bankrupt ideal, are its most persistent defenders". Their impulse was exegetical rather than creative; they were bound to their own uncertain authority and the conventional wisdom. Nor would it come from the "radicals" (that is, the Marxists) for they were "either tethered to an erstwhile great but now excessively rigid creed, or . . . frightened by the self-appointed inquisitors of our moral and political opinion". If the answers were to come at all, they would come from the creative writers—including those historians who were capable of writing great literature, who had "pondered deeply over the problems of life and death", who had "something to say about human nature."[17] Clark aspired to write history of this kind, and he addressed his demand that history, like literature, should concern itself with the human condition in the first place to himself.

There were two reasons for Clark's rejection of the "bankrupt ideal" which most Australian historians had accepted; they were closely connected with the reasons for the gradual rejection by intellectuals of the U.S.S.R. as the model of the just and rational society. In the first place, Clark

15. See Faith", 81.
16. Introduction to "Select Documents" (Vol. II), xv.
17. "Rewriting Australian History".

held that the course of development of society had demonstrated the falsity of the Enlightenment (including the Marxist) assumptions. Secondly, he held that the ideas of the Enlightenment were no longer felt to be relevant by the post-war generation, were not seen as an adequate response to "the problems and aspirations of this generation".[18]

To take the second point first, Clark found this contradiction pointed most sharply in the intellectual life of Melbourne. The Melbourne tradition had been the search for a secular faith for mankind. But, in the years after the war, "those who were discussing the life of men without God were confronted somewhat to their surprise with those who looked for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come . . . Here was a Catholic humanism confronting secular humanism". The confrontation, and the social and political circumstances in which it was taking place, were causing the adherents of two philosophies which had been held to be mutually exclusive to re-think their positions and this Clark found cause for hope. "I venture to predict, at the risk of being derided as enigmatic, that anyone brought up in the Melbourne tradition would not view Rome confronting Moscow as an impasse, but rather as the beginning from which something momentous in the history of mankind might well develop".[19] The Melbourne tradition was one of questioning, rather than faith in universal answers. What Clark was saying here, I think, was that secularists and believers, Marxists and Christians, were beginning to ask the same questions.

What of Clark's rejection of the "bankrupt ideal" of earlier generations? When he rejects "the era of bourgeois liberalism", he is not rejecting the central liberal tenet of the right of conflicting ideas—even conflicting truths—to coexist. Like many intellectuals, he is attracted to complete, all-embracing intellectual systems, to ideologies which offer at the same time explanations of nature and society and culture and the human psyche, and prescriptions for determining what is right and what is wrong; pre-eminent among these in our society are Marxism and Catholicism. But unlike many who are attracted to such systems, Clark refuses to accept the claim of any one system to universality. He repudiates alike the "spiritual popery" of those Soviet communists who regarded with hatred or good-humored contempt those who contested their claim to a monopoly of truth,[20] and the "crusaders for the eternal values of the West".[21] In rejecting "bourgeois liberalism", Clark is rejecting the conventional Enlightenment belief that, if all views are heard, reason will prevail (which is another way of saying that there is only one correct, or "right", answer to any question)[22] and the unstated bourgeois assumption that reason will confirm the rightness of the bourgeois order.

The rejection of "the era of democracy" is rather more complex. Clark is, of course, deeply conscious of the Tocquevillian critique of democracy, represented for Australia by D. H. Lawrence's 1922 comment: "It just brings everything down to the mere vulgar level of wages and prices, electric light and water-closets, and nothing else . . . your real inner life and your inner self dies out and you clatter around like so many mechanical animals". But he holds that preoccupation with the "Australian Cultural Desert" and the "middling standard" allegedly enshrined by democracy has led Australian historians to neglect the great debates of principle which have in fact taken place in Australia's history—although largely outside politics. He rejects the radical nationalist belief (a descendant of the Enlightenment) that democracy would prove a "panacea for the ills of society", and quotes James McAuley: "The great unculture that you feared might be 'drawn to the dregs of a democracy' is full upon us . . ."[23] What Clark seems to be saying here—though in rather contradictory fashion—is that democratic structures do not guarantee that reason and justice will prevail; that, contrary to a common radical assertion, not all questions are reducible to politics; that men continue to be divided and torn apart by great differences of faith which are not always susceptible to reason and which are often fought out in areas of life removed from formal political processes; and that it is finally these questions which determine whether men are at peace with themselves or not.

Finally, Clark's rejection of the "belief in material progress". It was this more than anything else, perhaps, which led some to see Clark as the leader of a "post-war counter-revolution" in Australian historiography which "released Australian history from the prison of the radical interpretation".[24]

18. Ibid.
19. "Melbourne: An Intellectual Tradition", 22.
20. "Meeting Soviet Man", 96-7.
21. "Melbourne . . .", 23.
22. Thus, Clark calls his work in progress "A History . . ." rather than "The History . . ."
23. "Rewriting Australian History". The Lawrence quotation is from a letter to Frieda's sister, Else Jaffe, from Thirroul, 13 June 1922 ("Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence", Vol. II, 707). For the McAuley quotation, see "A Letter to John Dryden", in Meanjin, 1954, No. 1.
24. P. Coleman: Introduction to "Australian Civilisation", 7.

But Clark's position is much more complex than this suggests.[25] Clark is not taking the fashionable contemporary position that technological advance has created more problems than it has solved, that man's scientific growth has outstripped the political and social means available to control its consequences. Alienation is inherent in man rather than in his relations with the machine. It is not the techniques of social control which are lacking; it is the will to use them.

Nor is he asserting that progress, in the sense of social amelioration, is illusory. It may be that the circumstances of the modern world make for greater tensions, greater anxieties. It may be that, for all the increase in the total production of goods, wealth is, in world-wide terms, less rather than more evenly distributed. But it remains true that, in Australia, men lived more easily in 1828 than in 1788, in 1970 than 1930—their health was better, they were better housed and better fed, and they had more leisure and more means available for its use. And these were ways in which most people measured "progress".

It is not so much progress (in the sense of social amelioration) that Clark rejects as the "belief in progress". He concludes the second volume of "A History" thus:

> Men might have it better . . . in Australia. There something of an extraordinary nature might turn up one day on that shore when men liberated themselves from the curse of Adam's fall. There men, freed at last from the stain of the Old World, freed too from the convicts' clanking chain, might see that heaven and hell were priests' inventions, and come to trust the brotherhood of man.[26]

But this is not Clark speaking; he is giving eloquent, even noble, expression to what the men of the day felt lay in the Australian future. His own belief is in the tragedy that such noble hopes must fail. For the "belief in progress" does not merely assert that men may make easier the material conditions of their lives. It asserts that by doing so they will make themselves happy: and it is this assertion which Clark denies. Not because technology has created nuclear weapons as well as an abundance of consumer goods in the advanced societies; not because the fruits of technology are concentrated in nations which represent only a quarter of the world's population; but because the undeniable fact of material progress has demonstrably still left people far removed from happiness—and Clark sees nothing to suggest that further material progress will necessarily lead to any different result.

Writing of the Australian present, he says: "Material well-being for all was stripping away even the need for the great comforters of the past —the promise of happiness in the life of the world to come, or the promise of happiness on earth, or the poetry and music which have ministered in the past not just to delight but also to give the strength and the courage to endure". But this is illusion. He ends with doubt:

> The decade drew to a close with at least one great unanswered question: how long could this affluence be enjoyed before Australia was swept by the great storm raging to her north? There was perhaps another question: just as Samson after being shorn of his hair was left eyeless in Gaza, was this generation, stripped bare of all faith, to be left comfortless on Bondi Beach?[27]

What Clark seems to me to be saying about the two great faiths, Marxism and Christianity, the Communist Manifesto and the Apostles' Creed, and his hope for reconciliation from confrontation, is this: that Marxism must recognise that material progress is not a sufficient condition for earthly happiness; that Christianity must recognise that hunger and pain and social inequality are not necessary conditions for eternal happiness; that both must recognise that they are alike concerned with man's search for happiness and that neither has a monopoly of the questions, still less of the answers.

Or, to put this in other words (words which come close to my own position):

> You might say that the human function of socialism [or read "progress"] is to raise mankind to a higher level of suffering, for given the hypothesis that man has certain tragic contradictions, the alternative is between a hungry belly and a hungry mind, but fulfilment there is never . . .[28]

In these terms, material progress, a transformation of society, alone can free man from the dehumanising character of his present environment, can enable him to transcend a preoccupation with his material needs, thus enabling him to confront his own emptiness, his spiritual needs—to examine the conditions under which he might reach happiness, to ask whether such conditions might or might not exist. Thus the freedom of each would become the condition for the freedom of all, for

25. As Coleman was later to recognise. Reviewing Vol. II of the "History", he said: "The paradox has been that Clark appears to have had a gloom-and-failure-sodden view of the Australian past, while often holding a sort of simple opportunitistic 'Progressive' view of our future". (Bulletin, 30 March 1968.)

26. Op. cit., 349.

27. "A Short History of Australia" (2nd ed.), 262, 265.

28. Norman Mailer: "Barbary Shore".

until all men were free to ask this question of themselves, none would be free to ask it. Perhaps when they are finally able to ask this question, they will say, with Captain Ahab: "Born in throes, 'tis fit that man should live in pain and die in pangs! So be it then!" And perhaps not. The question remains open.[29]

I believe that this is Clark's significance in Australian historiography, and the basis of the claim that one may make that he is writing great history: that he asks of those who read or listen to his words, "If you have abandoned the belief that God became man, have you then the courage to assert that man can become God?"

The minor errors of fact which some of Clark's critics claim to have found in his writing are irrelevant to what I conceive to be the real meaning of Clark's work. The tactical engagements which he has waged over such Enlightenment "comforters" as the character of the convicts, the origins of Australian democracy, Australia's claim to be a social laboratory, are incidental to his purpose, which is to direct men towards an examination of their own natures.

This is something new in Australian historiography. But what Clark has done has an historical significance, too, for he has asked his questions with such passionate intensity that they cannot be avoided, and with such human sympathy as to create a corresponding desire to find the answer he seeks. For Clark's voice is more than that of historian, it is also that of prophet—not a prophet of doom or of salvation, but a prophet who says to all who will listen: "If you must know what you are, and what you might be, these are the questions you must ask".

29. It is certainly not the case, as Coleman has suggested (loc. cit.), that Clark expects to find out "what it has all been about" through a new (Communist) invasion of Australia, as I hope this discussion makes clear.

30. "Rewriting Australian History".

Note: Ian Turner's article is available from Overland as an offprint, at ten cents a copy, with reductions for large orders. The bibliography for this article will be found on page 24.

The answer is not given. In 1956, Clark wrote: "the whole answer has so far eluded me".[30] It still eludes him; and one feels that, in the foreseeable future and under any conditions of life we can imagine, the answer will continue elusive, that man will still be waiting to find out "what it has all been for".[31] The meaning of his life will continue to escape man, for life can have no meaning other than that which each man gives it for himself, and no man can rest satisfied with what he has made of himself.

Addressing R. M. Crawford, Clark said: "It is the divided ones, the ones who thirst to believe, and who are sceptical of all belief, who believe in the perfectibility of mankind, and yet perceive that the hearts of the sons of men are filled with evil, who became the great teachers".[32] He might well have been—perhaps without being conscious of it he was—speaking also of himself.

For

> There will always be men who see that every man must fight out the battle between damnation and impassioned clay with his own pitiful equipment. In every generation these men will communicate to us their vision of the beauty and terror of this world. Some will write poetry; some novels; some plays; some will paint, some will compose music; and some, I believe most passionately, will write history.[33]

31. In the thirties men were "Waiting for Lefty". Today they are "Waiting for Godot". That is part of Clark's point.

32. "Melbourne . . .", 21.

33. "The Writing of History", 22.

a history of Australia: extracts

MANNING CLARK

The first of the extracts below is from volume one of "A History of Australia" (1962). It attempts to draw some general significance from the return of Captain Cook to London after the first journey. The second is a very early draft from the last chapter of volume three, not yet published. This chapter covers the period between 1847 and the discovery of gold. The theme of the volume is the coming of industrial civilisation to Australia. In this extract members of an older order of society have some intimation of the shape of things to come.

. . . As the ship rose and fell on the green swell of the Indian Ocean, events in Asia and North America were preparing the way for the voyage to acquire a significance which no member of the crew could ever have pondered. In India and the Indonesian archipelago a new era of territorial conquest and occupation had begun in response to the change in the economic use of those areas by the commercial companies exploiting their wealth. During the long pull home after rounding the Cape of Good Hope they heard again of news from the English colonies in America, as they had heard earlier in Batavia that the American disputes were made up. So Cook, almost at journey's end, brushed up against an event, or the prelude to an event, which was to lead to an attempt to found a penal colony at Botany Bay, on the site of that meadow as fine as ever was seen. He was brushing up against the prelude to an event in which a new vision of human life was to be brought to birth. In this vision all men were born equal, and all men had a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. By which they did not mean that happiness, that hope of re-union with God, which had inspired Quiros, nor that happiness which Cook had detected in the Aborigine, but a happiness here on earth, a vision of a day when men should neither hurt nor destroy. This new vision of human life was emerging as Cook sailed home from a country in which the European would in time rejoice in its promise, and dream that this millennial Eden was actually drawing nigh.

But no such thoughts, no such hopes, crossed Cook's mind as he anchored in the Downs on Saturday 13 July 1771 and, as he put it, "soon after I landed in order to repair to London" . . .

On his way to church on Christmas day 1846 the lord bishop of Australia, William Grant Broughton, saw the Speaker of the Legislative Council, Charles Nicholson, lolling in a carriage reading a newspaper. Broughton began to think of the number of men in public places who were either irreligious or certainly not friends of the Church of England. There was Wentworth for a start: there was Lowe, there was Windeyer; there was Macleay and that sybarite Nicholson. So Broughton grew quite sad as he brooded over the flagrant infidelity of the squatting areas, and the atheism of the towns, all contributed to by the careless liberalism of these men in higher stations. A new spirit was abroad in a land in which he and God's word were mighty strangers. His holy faith had taught him that he had been made in the image of God but those who came after him in Australia might behave as though they were made in the image of the beast.

The minds of other men were on clean different things. On the occasion of the fifty-ninth anniversary of the founding of the colony on 26 January 1847, the Sydney Morning Herald rejoiced in the "proud patriotism" of the people of New South Wales, and their determination not to bargain their own fair farm for the "pottage of tainted wealth". On that day the poor of the Benevolent Asylum were visited by the Mayor and his family, and were regaled at his worship's expense on roast beef and plum pudding to commemorate that day when Sydney had begun to be a grand centre of civilisation. Not even the formidable evil of convictism could come between them and their destiny which was to rise to distinction, and to importance.

One sticky day in February 1847 at Queanbeyan, a small village in the heart of a pastoral district where sheep farmers were said to have a sordid interest in convict labour, over a hundred and fifty gathered at a meeting to discuss the proposal to renew transportation to New South Wales. Alured Tasker Faunce, a one time captain in Her Majesty's 4th Regiment, now salaried police magistrate at Queanbeyan, known to the locals as 'Iron-man Faunce', asked whether the opponents of renewal proposed to sweep convicts from the face of the earth. Charles Campbell, the inheritor of Robert Campbell's landed wealth at Duntroon, replied in the heat of the debate, to the applause of his faithful Highland servants, who had been made pliable by high wages and strong drink: "You can hang them." For Campbell, a strong Anglican, and a Broughton man, has come to the conclusion that renewal of transportation might enrich sheep farmers while polluting the whole of society with a disgusting moral life.

In all the Australian colonies, save Van Diemen's Land, settlers in the up country districts clamoured for "Hands". Over in Western Australia, near Perth, Picton, Bunbury, Busselton, and Albany, the cry was just as desperate as at Queanbeyan or Maitland, Inverell, or Portland in New South Wales. For in Western Australia settlers and government officials alike agreed that it was the dearth of labor which explained the stunted growth of population. At the end of 1829 there had been 1,003 in the colony, at the end of 1840 there had been 2,311, and the end of 1846 there had been approximately 4,500.

The district of Port Phillip had grown from 224 at the end of 1836 to 38,334 at the end of 1846. There, too, a vigorous movement for separation from the 'seat of bondage' in Sydney, and the granting of self-government had developed; while in Western Australia both population and revenue were too low, it was said, to justify settler participation in government. It was a far cry from those castles in the air of the gallant Captain Stirling who had seen Swan River as an emporium of British commerce in the east and Albany a naval base where ships rode at anchor as a symbol of British dominion and power over the great South Seas. Settlers and government officials had come to terms with reality on that 'coast of iron'. They had survived the battle with sand and flies and mosquitoes: they had even stopped condemning that Government botanist from New South Wales, Charles Fraser, who had described the soil of the Swan River district as good in March 1827. The early settlers, in their anguish on first enduring a summer had cried, "That man deserves hanging nine times over". Now in 1847 the survivors, and their descendants, have learnt not just how to endure without 'castles in the air' but how to enjoy.

From the explorers they have learnt the verdant south-west corner of their vast territory bordered on a land of sand and spinifex, where grass for stock and soil to germinate their seed were as rare as feathers on frogs. Captain George Grey had told them in 1839 of summer's fiery furnace between Perth and Shark Bay. Edward Eyre had confirmed in 1841 that Matthew Flinders was all too accurate about the country to the east of King George's Sound: it was like unto a vast sea of desolation. On 7 August 1846, Augustus Charles Gregory who had arrived with his parents on the Swan River in the foundation year of 1829, had set out with his two brothers, F. T. and H. C. Gregory, from T. N. Yule's station sixty miles north-east of Perth and pushed further north. They only confirmed the reports of all others who had wandered into those regions. This country was not for tillers of the soil, and breeders of sheep.

The high hopes they had entertained in 1829 for the Aborigines had almost disappeared. They

had hoped to guide their feet in to the way of peace. The Aborigines had speared their cattle, and put the firestick in their grass. They had brought the gift of their civilisation: the Aborigines presented a sullen indifference to all their talk about private property, the gospel of work, the virtue of respectability, and the story of that God who, being fashioned in the likeness of a man, had come down from heaven, and once lived amongst men, and had been crucified to pay the price of man's sin.

Their first Governor Sir James Stirling, one time member of the 'kindness and amity' school, had placed himself at the head of the 50th (West Kent) Regiment, and a posse of police, and laid waste Aborigines at Pinjarra on 28 October 1834. Ever since the bloody skirmish at Pinjarrra the Aborigines had kept out of the way of the all conquering white men, or made their peace with them and became inept converts to the gospel of work, and carried the white man's letters, shepherded his sheep, or guided the white man through the bush. The survivors of the coming of the white man had become an abomination in the sight of man in the towns. In the country districts a few troublesome ones still speared cattle, or sheep, and committed other outrages against the white man for the more monstrous crime of stealing the natives' land, and destroying his way of life, and saying to the Aborigine as had Jehovah of old, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me".

While some were consoling themselves for minor inconveniences with the hope that the savage was passing away, as they put it, before "an immeasurably better and higher power than ever ran wild in any earthy woods", two Spanish Benedictine monks, Dom Joseph Serra and Dom Rudesindus Salvado were attending an audience in Rome on 5 June 1845 with Pope Gregory XVI. He told them to remember their glorious patriarch Benedict the blessed Saint who had inspired his apostles to transform the savage people of Europe into cultured nations. So with the blessing of the God of Heaven they might bring the precious gift of the holy faith to those 'miserable people in the world'—the savages of New Holland.

Dom Salvado was then thirty-one years of age. Born in Spain into a family of Hidalgos he had entered the Benedictine Abbey at Compostella, where he had absorbed the paradox of the role of a cultured elite to show a Christ-like compassion on the multitude. After the suppression of the religious houses in Spain during the liberal interlude of 1835 he had gone with his brother in Christ Dom Serra to Italy where they met in 1845 John Brady, bishop elect of Western Australia, who had told them of God's children who were living in great darkness in his vast diocese.

On going ashore at Fremantle on 8 January 1846 Dom Salvado entoned the Te Deum, and at the words "Te ergo quaesumus" he and Dom Serra prostrated themselves on the sand, as the surf thumped on the shore. In Perth they met again John Brady, one of those Irish peasant priests who had kept alive the image of Christ in the depth of beastly superstition and degradation. He had served first as a priest in New South Wales between 1838 and 1843, after which he had gone to Western Australia in December of the latter year to minister to a handful of Catholics and to bring the holy faith to a field he believed then was ripe for harvest—the field of the Aborigines. In 1845 he had gone to Rome to be consecrated first bishop of Western Australia, and had knelt down as the Holy Father had told Dom Serra and Dom Salvado of God's holy will for the savages of New Holland. But by 1846 Brady, like Broughton and others, had begun to be faint of heart about the Aborigines. By then, too, lying tongues in Perth were saying about him what they had said about his fellow Irishman, John Joseph Therry, in Sydney in previous decades—that he was a man whose heart was on fire with love of Christ and compassion for the multitude, but his head, or some part of him, was fatally weak on questions of getting and spending. Besides, Brady had that suggestion of the larrikin and the saint in his face, while Salvado had none of the look in the faces of the Spanish shepherds in the paintings of El Greco, but rather the aristocratic disdain of the Hidalgo for men born to low estate.

At that time Salvado greeted Brady as a man, like himself, who had his eye on 'joy in heaven'. He believed that for all the suffering, deprivation and calumny, God would repay him abundantly in heaven. So on a hot night in February 1846 he gathered his worldly goods on his back, placed a crucifix on his breast, and gave John Brady the kiss of peace. Then he set out with his companions, with a change of clothes, some agricultural implements, and a portable altar in search of a site where he could establish a mission to the Aborigines as God sent the light of the moon to guide his steps through the bush. God, too, he believed, would give him the strength to overcome this weird and barbaric land, and the patience to put up with the waywardness of the Aborigines. Or so he mused, not sensing then that between him, as a Spanish Hidalgo, and Brady as an Irish peasant, there was a great gulf fixed.

Six years earlier another man stepped ashore at Fremantle in April 1841, sensibly aware, as he put it, of the honor and privilege of being appointed to plant the Church of Christ in a new

district of the world, surrounded by heathen tribes, but weighed down by his utter insufficiency for this work without God's help. He was John Ramsden Wollaston. He was born in 1791, educated at Charterhouse, and Christ's College, Cambridge, ordained and married, only to find that his stipend would not support the quiver-full of five sons and two daughters with which his wife presented him as members of the gentry—a station which he believed God had allotted to the clergy of the Church of England. So he applied for and obtained the position of chaplain to the Western Australian Land Company's settlement of Australind. He hoped, with God's help, that his desire to preach the Gospel would not fade as had that of the easy-going, cello-playing, well-read John Burdett Wittenoom, with his quaint idea that too many church services might encourage the vulgarities of religious enthusiasm.

In May 1841 Wollaston landed at Port Leschenault, Australind, with his sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, prefabricated cart, and family. He found much to dismay him. The foliage of the trees was of the most sombre hue—so different from the variety of tints and beautiful outlines of an English forest. Here an impervious mass of one dark dirty green color presented itself. He was tempted to shed tears at the desolateness of the scene. Other things weighed him down: by night mosquitoes and sandflies plagued him: by day he and his wife had to live like day laborers earning their daily bread in the sweat of their brows because of the great want of servants, which, in turn, dictated what he called an "omission of civilised forms". In the early days, he wrote in his diary, he and his dear, kind wife Mary were so oppressed with the weight of labor, care and anxiety that they would utterly despair of going on were they not, as he put it, "mercifully supported by One who has promised that 'as our day so shall our strength be'."

Either his faith or what was inside him gave him the strength to endure with a becoming courage and dignity. With the labor of their own hands he and his sons built the church at Picton, finishing it on 20 September 1842. They also put up their own house, planted a garden, and witnessed to the faith which sustained them. When the local resident doctor, Dr. Carpenter, breathed his last, after a somewhat eccentric life during which he had at times labored under an aberration of the intellect, Wollaston used the occasion to preach to his small flock on death and the resurrection. He urged them all seriously to ask themselves "If God were to cause me this night to sleep the sleep of death, have I a well-grounded hope that I shall rest in peace and awake to a blessed Resurrection?" But there was the rub. Unbelief was rife in the land. The servants of government were no friends to the ministers of religion and their sacred duties. The root of the whole evil in Western Australia, as he saw it, was the absence of religious principle which caused or allowed "poor fallen human nature", whether manifested in settlers, government servants, laborers, emigrants, or ignorant savages, to "revel in the mire". This, he feared, would weigh down the strongest spirits were it not for God's promises which helped him to be of good cheer and not be afraid of men, who, strangers to belief, were rushing on to perdition.

[NOTE: This is followed by a passage in which the hopes and way of life of the settlers are contrasted with those of a Salvado or a Wollaston.]

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A SELECTION OF ARTICLES BY MANNING CLARK

1943: "A Letter to Tom Collins", Meanjin, Vol. 2, No. 3. Reprinted in I. Turner (ed.): "The Australian Dream" (Melbourne, 1968).

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1968: "The Writing of History", Victorian Historical Magazine, Vol. 39, Nos. 1-2.

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See also the interview with Clark in Melbourne University Magazine, 1969.

Katharine Susannah Prichard: "excess of love"? Some comments

"There are many (not Catholics merely) who require their heroes and saints to be infallible; to these the story will be painful; not to the true lovers, patrons, and servants of mankind."

R. L. Stevenson, in his open letter to Dr. Hyde on Father Damien ("Valima Papers", London, 1924, p. 37).

[Editor's Note: Dorothy Hewett's obituary article on Katharine Susannah Prichard, in Overland No. 43, aroused a passionate, revealing, organised and disturbing correspondence. From this we print extracts below. Mr. R. P. Throssell has been invited to contribute to Overland an article on his recollections of his mother.]

R. P. Throssell (Canberra, A.C.T.):

So, it falls to Overland to be the first to disparage her. I could have expected her one-time political friends to have found it necessary to justify their own inconstancy to the ideals they once shared by belittling Katharine, but is that all Overland has to say of Katharine Susannah Prichard? . . .

I can, and must, correct the utterly false picture of my mother as a person to which you have lent yourself in publishing this most damaging 'obituary'.

The uncompleted reference to "Why I am a Communist" in Dorothy Hewett's article implies that Katharine was successively a Christian, Rationalist, Buddhist, Theosophist and Christian Scientist. What Katharine says is that her reading led her to these philosophies. [She adds, however, that she was committed to none of these theories and was "not satisfied that I had found the answer to the questions my mind was asking".]

I will try to stick to those trivial, seemingly unimportant, details of Katharine's life in Greenmount since my father's death, that I have known myself. It is from this pretended insight into Katharine's personal life that Dorothy Hewett attempts to construct the image of "nun-like withdrawal" "self immolation", "egoism" and "self-dramatisation". To anyone who knew her, such descriptions would be laughable—absurd! Laughable, until they are seen to be very precisely the attributes that would have hurt her most.

The facts are that those "occasional visits" to which Dorothy Hewett refers were a constant never-ending stream of calls recorded in her weekly letters to me, so that I pleaded with her, completely without success, to limit the demands made on her strength by the visitors from abroad. It may be true that she struggled against the gift of a radio, as Dorothy Hewett says—to her it would have seemed an expensive present from friends who were hard-up, but there was always a wireless in the house, since I first fiddled with a cat's whisker and crystal. Katharine listened regularly to the National News, and loved the A.B.C's music sessions. That full length photograph of a soldier that once hung in the living room, was not my father, as Dorothy Hewett imagined: it was his brother . . . Poverty? She believed herself to be affuent, and enjoyed it. She enjoyed the intimate dinner parties she prepared for special friends; enjoyed the drinks on Fridays with her neighbours; enjoyed their Rabelaisian anecdotes passed on from the prisoners in Fremantle gaol. Is it so difficult to understand that Katharine's pleasure came from the notion of relative independence that foreign royalties gave her from the Government's welfare services, and the joy of giving to others, rather than setting herself up with a modern kitchen, so dear to the suburban soul?

That was Dorothy Hewett's "moralising Marxist religeuse" . . .

Conveniently to her ridiculous proposition that Katharine willed her own creative death after my father's suicide, Dorothy Hewett forgets that some five years ago Katharine suffered a stroke . . . After six months, by her own courage and the devoted attention of her doctor, she had largely recovered. She wrote then:

> I still feel however that a shattering blow has been struck at the resilience and creative energy I once had. Despite skilful treatment there is still a consciousness of depression, uncertainty of movement, and some brain disorder . . .
>
> Has it broken a vital fibre of my contact with life? I don't know. Time will show I suppose whether my zest for controversial ideas and literary expression will overcome this lapse into the doldrums or not.
>
> Naturally at 80 perhaps one should be content to count blessings and watch the world go by; not be concerned to shove and push any longer. But as Lawson said: "I've been at the Front all the years of my life". And it's difficult to enjoy being a mollusc.

That was the "little bourgeois lady" who lacked the courage to dissect herself.

She did not give up. She went on in 1968 to publish more than in any time of her life . . .

No one will deny the assiduousness of Dorothy Hewett's scavenging for material, nor her inventiveness. Her accuracy is rather more questionable.

> In the crazed mirror of my eye
> the world is flawed irrevocably . . .
> (Dorothy Hewett, Meanjin, December 1969)

Bill Wannan (Vic.):

It isn't often in this country that one comes across a literary and personal evaluation so profound and stimulating as Dorothy Hewett's.

It is not necessary to agree with everything Miss Hewett says, or to accept the validity of her evaluation, in order to recognise at once her honesty of mind and the integrity of her intentions.

The provincialism of so much of Australian cultural life is nowhere more apparent than in the paddock of literary criticism. The religion of the Sacred Cow flourishes mightily here. . . .

For idolatry does far more harm to the great writer's reputation than all the derogatory opinions ever expressed about him. One can answer disparagement; one cannot answer idolatry. Poor Henry Lawson was ill served by much blind admiration. He became a sacred cow; and remains so in certain coteries to this day. And that will surely be the fate of Katharine Susannah unless critics view her considerable achievement objectively and imaginatively (in the best sense of that misused word), and analyse her evident literary failings and failures as well as her remarkable strengths. In other words, it is her right to be served by the most informed, most honest, most sophisticated criticism that can be brought to bear on her work and the vital part which her life played in the production of her varied body of writings.

Mena Calthorpe (N.S.W.):

I am more than astonished to read Dorothy Hewett's unfeeling article on Katharine Prichard published recently in Overland. Surely, it might have paid one generous tribute to K.S.P. before allowing the critics in.

I am astonished, not so much by the criticism of the Prichard contribution to our literature—since the work of great writers will always excite interest and comment—as by the petty tone of the article. It seems that the writer is determined to shatter the Prichard image. In death, it is so easy to invade one's privacy.

Though not a member of the Communist Party I was one of those people who signed the petition protesting against the imprisonment of Sinyavsky and Daniel. However, I do not agree with Miss Hewett's inference that those who failed to sign the petition are necessarily inflexible and misguided. It would be a sad state of affairs if a difference within a political party were permitted to denigrate the work of an outstanding writer.

Miss Hewett is an astute, clever writer who knows exactly when and where to point the rapier. How easy to describe Katharine, dead, as a bourgeois little woman. And how Katharine would have hated it! Is this the best that we can say of one who has devoted a lifetime to socialism? . . .

Perhaps the saddest thing about Dorothy Hewett's article is not the criticism of Pricard's work but the judgments passed on the Prichard character and personality. These sort of statements, unfortunately, often live . . .

How cruel a thing it is to become a legend in one's own lifetime! And it is doubly cruel that a critic, under the guise of friendship, should be admitted to a writer's home, and, while exercising this privilege record every real, or imagined, negative aspect of the writer's character.

F. B. Vickers (W.A.):

I think Dorothy Hewett's article is a very perceptive piece and one which cried out to be printed. We can hang on to our dreams and myths for too long for our own, or the writer's, good.

Helen Palmer (N.S.W.):

I haven't re-read Katharine Prichard's work for a good while, but I think I would agree with Dorothy Hewett's central theme about it. Except that, where she sees two contradictory elements at work, I see three—for I feel that also at war with her inherent romanticism was a kind of toughness and clear-sightedness in looking at life. Never mind that this was progressively overlaid by the other strands; it seems to me it was there. Perhaps in feeling this I am influenced by the fact that my first impressions of her and her work go a good way back—but I've also felt the tension much more recently, in correspondence with her.

The article opens the way to an assessment. and that's of course all that can be done at present. It would make a fascinating biography of our time. I'm perhaps more inclined than Dorothy to see her as a victim—while accepting entirely that no one has the right to let himself be a victim —it's an abdication of one's humanity. But it's nagged me for years that if her life had been timed differently, and she had been both younger and not sealed off at Greenmount, she might have had something to say about the present period. Other people, equally fallible and self-contradictory, have not had the combination of circumstances lined up against them that put her ultimately where she didn't really belong—on the Wrong Side.

Dymphna Cusack (N.S.W.):

Dorothy Hewett's version of the writer and her life could not be farther from the truth than if she had lived all her life in Lapland.

Katharine's quota of visitors, the breadth of ideas discussed over the kitchen-table, in her sitting-room, on the verandah, would have exhausted most younger women. And Katharine was on the verge of eighty!

Whatever personal contact Dorothy Hewett had with Katharine at Greenmount, she learned little that was not superficial or actually wrong. One feels that she went there to debunk a legend or a myth, and whatever evidence to the contrary, she did it—or tried to.

The little she did learn, she has distorted in her article, either from lack of insight, deliberate intention, or political animosity.

As for her statement that while in the Soviet Union, a Russian admirer asked her (no doubt in an awed voice): "Did you touch her?", I don't believe it. I know from considerably wider experience than Dorothy Hewett's that the admiration Russians show for well-loved writers is based on something other than their tactility.

Charitably, we might put it down to bad translation.

Or is Dorothy Hewett's distortion of Katharine Susannah Prichard and her work only another facet of today's academic denigration of progressive writers?

Or could it be part of her—newly-developed—anti-Russianism?

John Clements (W.A.):

It would be easy for me to write at length on the complexity and frailties of human beings, some of which were combined in Katharine as in all of us. These were evident to those who were really close to her and who supported her in old age "spite all despondencies in the inhuman drought of noble natures". What were these beside the record of her performance?

It fell to my lot to organise her 80th birthday celebrations. It was my suggestion that she be given a radio to replace the old bomb to which she was so attached for the good things she had heard on it, so that for her it was like losing a friend. She also could not appreciate the benefits of a transistor because she had never experienced such a modern miracle. But her "struggle" against it was not apparent to me and when she heard that there would be a balance which would pay the deposit of one of our condidates at the then federal elections she was delighted.

The obvious haste of the insert in Overland is for me unseemly and distasteful. It will not dislodge Katharine from her place in Australian Literature or enhance the stature of the writer.

Delys Cross (N.S.W.):

I read Dorothy Hewett's article on Katharine Susannah Prichard with a deep sense of shock and disgust. Such an attack on her work, her character, the simplicity of her home, even her funeral arrangements, is hard to believe. True, K.S.P. will not be affected, her place in Australian literature is assured by critics such as H. M. Green, Hartley Grattan, Henrietta Drake-Brockman, Jack Lindsay, J. K. Ewers and others of a calibre that D. Hewett is not likely to emulate . . .

So she was "thin, frail, brittle, ladylike," according to D. Hewett. In 1967-8 K.S.P. had a very good figure for her age as the many visitors to her birthday party could testify. She was not too frail to light the fire in her sitting room, water and tend her garden, feed the wild birds each day and cook in her electric oven quite an elaborate dish for Henrietta Drake-Brockman, my husband and myself. "Brittle" the dictionary says is "liable to break". To anyone who know Katharine "steel-true, blade straight", this is laughable. I have known none with more tenacity and courage. "Ladylike"? If this means good manners and con-

sideration for others, yes, Katharine had those attributes, sadly lacking in Dorothy Hewett . . .

Although we did not share Katharine's political views, in discussion she made her position clear without resentment of one's own attitudes. In her own life she WAS "a great force for socialism with a human face" and for Peace to which she gave so much of her time and energy.

Irene Greenwood (W.A.):

I felt I had to ring Dorothy Hewett right away and congratulate her on her splendid K.S.P. contribution. Those of us who have known Katharine over the years and watched her intransigent attitude to politics, have either drifted away, because we did not wish to quarrel with her physically in her frailty, or have avoided contentious topics when we have called on her. No doubt there will be panegyrics from the countries where she is published so widely and understood so little. But Dorothy Hewett's tribute can keep the record straight and is the most honest that I expect to read.

Jack Lindsay (England):

I was very sorry to see Overland of all periodicals rushing into print in an effort to debunk Katharine Susannah Prichard. The essay by Dorothy Hewett seems to me about as petty, superficial, and off-the-mark as it is possible to get in literary debate. I have stated elsewhere (in Meanjin) my view of the profound poetic-realistic basis of K.S.P's art, and only by a detailed re-examination of such aspects could one adequately answer D.H's comments, which are so trivial that they merely provoke a series of exclamations. I will deal here with only one small factual point which will bring out the nature of her remarks. She says: "She blamed the failure of 'Subtle Flame', not on her own conception and execution, but on the failings of the audience, who had lost their own old idealised quality". She may well have made some passing comment on the changes in the reading public, as I certainly would myself, but she was acutely aware of the weaknesses of "Subtle Flame" in its artistic working-out, as her letter to me fully show. Anyone who could make the above statement about K.S.P. puts himself or herself out of court. The whole of D.H's essay is on this level.

I hope someday to expand my Meanjin essay and bring out more fully the deep poetic comprehensions of K.S.P. Naturally she had the limitations of her qualities, but they were not those that D.H. so shallowly attempts to depict.

Mary Durack Miller (W.A.):

I was very impressed with Dorothy Hewett's piece on K.S.P. It is a perceptive article and a brave one for her to have written. Since she has written this very thoughtful coverage please don't consider publishing my trite tribute.

Grace Kirkwood (N.S.W.):

Dorothy Hewett so often says the things that the Right cannot even begin to understand and the Left won't say.

BETTY ROLAND

requiem for k.s.p.

She had been a legendary person long before that day in February 1933 when I met her for the first time in Greenmount, W.A., during a brief stop-off at Fremantle during a voyage to England. Years before, as a schoolgirl aspirant to literary honors, she had become to me an object of veneration, someone against whose excellence one measured one's own shortcomings and one's small achievements. Would I ever write a book to rival "The Pioneers", or "Coonardoo", or "Working Bullocks"? There was also that melancholy picture in the Melbourne National Gallery; the figure of the settler's wife seated on the fallen log never failed to move me to tears and to have inspired (as I imagined) a picture like that seemed the highest accolade of fame. Now, here was the woman herself.

She came out of the house to meet us; slender, grey-haired, wearing a cotton frock. The February sun was fierce and she raised an orange-colored fringe that edged the brim of her hat—protection against the flies—and let us see her face. It was narrow, grave, and somewhat colorless, redeemed by a pair of penetrating eyes that missed no detail of the three who stood before her: Guido Baracchi, the revolutionary, Bertram Higgins, the poet, and myself, the unknown. Having judged us worthy, she smiled and was suddenly beautiful.

We followed as she led us through the house and out into the orchard where she had her studio. Time has dimmed the details but has left a recollection of book-shelves, sunlight, comfortable chairs, and peace. The poet and myself were new to her, but the revolutionary was an old and valued friend, and they had much to talk about. The flow of words was leisurely, punctuated now and then by the delicate cadences of Bertram's baritone. He had the most precise and beautiful voice that I had ever heard and I was content to sit silently and listen.

At noon her son came in from school. Katharine reached out her hand and drew him forward. "This is Ric, my son," she said. It was to Guido that she spoke, not Bertram or myself. He leaned forward in his chair and took Ric's hand, studying the grave young face in front of him. "Yes—yes," he said. "So this is Ric." What thoughts passed through the minds of the two old friends, none but they could guess.

Then there was lunch. Ric's father, Hugo Throssell, was there now. He sat at one end of the table, Katharine at the other, Guido on her right and Bertram on her left. Ric faced me across the table, while his father sat between us. Our end of the table seemed subdued; Ric ate his meal in silence and I found it hard to think of things to say to a man who seemed oblivious of my presence. There was no uncomfortable silence at the other end however, the voices flowed on happily until the meal was almost over, then our host leaned forward suddenly and thrust a dish of jam in Guido's direction.

"Try some of this," he said. "My wife made it. She's an excellent cook, did you know that?"

The animated talk broke off and Guido stammered a reply. Katharine's eyebrows lifted slightly and she smiled indulgently, as though to a forward child who had spoken out of turn.

"Jimmy always likes to pretend that I'm a model wife," she murmured in that soft, slow voice of hers. Jimmy was her private name for him. After that we left the table and went out onto the porch for coffee.

The boat was due to sail at six o'clock so we made our farewells in mid-afternoon and drove back to Fremantle. Katharine came as far as the gate to wave good-bye, while her husband stood on the verandah: a handsome, massive man staring morosely down at us, hands thrust in his pockets, saying nothing.

Much that was unexpected happened in the next few months, and in August of that year Guido and I were in Moscow and were bona fide members of the English section of the Co-Operative Publishing Society of the USSR; the hows and whys of which are too devious to be outlined here. My task was to decipher and type the manuscripts that flowed in an endless tide from the translators' room to the typing-pool. All of them in longhand and almost without exception totally illegible; with erasures, corrections, interpolations, marginal notes, additions and deletions turning every page into a typist's nightmare—especially as it was obligatory to complete a minimum of 24 foolscap pages every six-hour working day. No great achievement for the skilled secretary, but an ordeal to a self-taught amateur.

So one sweltering afternoon, such as only a Moscow summer can produce, a message came to say that someone wished to see me and was waiting in the corridor outside the room. Somewhat mystified, I went out to see who it could be. At first, I did not recognise her, then I realised it was Katharine. Only those who have lived in an alien land can really know the joy of seeing somebody from home. Gone now were all my feelings of inferiority, my awe of her achievements. I threw my arms around her and believe I wept. Guido came running down the stairs to greet her and we laughed and talked and hugged each other and did everything but dance a carmagnole in the dingy corridor.

Katharine was very much persona grata in the USSR and had been accorded the privilege of a room in the Lux Hotel, a place reserved for foreign delegates and other political VIPs. But it was overcrowded and expensive and by no means luxurious, so we hit upon the obvious solution and, Moscow fashion, she moved in with us.

By a piece of remarkable good fortune we had managed to acquire the temporary tenancy of a large and airy room on the seventh floor of one of the new blocks of flats that were shooting up all over Moscow; we only had possession while the rightful owner, Freda Utley, was on holiday in England, but for the next few weeks we were secure. We also had the right to share the bathroom with several other tenants, a corner of the kitchen, and a spectacular view of the cupolas and spires of the many tiny churches that had not then been obliterated from the Moscow skyline. There was, of course, the drawback of those seven flights of stairs and the fact that the room, though boasting a wardrobe, table and some chairs, had only one bed. There was a second mattress, however, though it was thin and seemed to be stuffed with tennis balls. We reached a compromise by giving Katharine the good, thick mattress, which was laid on the floor, while Guido and I had the bed and the tennis balls.

Guido at this time was engaged in translating the works of Marx and Engels into English; a task which he took very seriously, and he went to enormous pains to find the exact word, the most subtle nuance, with which to convey the precise meaning of the sacred text. Consequently he was always far in arrears with his monthly quota as he, too, was obliged to produce a minimum of work each day, and that meant that he had to work at home for several hours each night.

A single unshaded light glared down on us, losing none of its belligerence because of the stark white walls and ceiling. This made it difficult to get to sleep, so Katharine hit on the bright idea of taking shelter under an umbrella. The scheme worked splendidly and the sight of the pair of us, fast asleep under the black umbrellas, with Guido at the table surrounded by his books and dictionaries, must have been a rare spectacle indeed.

We scurried off to work each morning leaving Katharine to conduct her own affairs, and in the evenings we would meet again and eat, perhaps at the 'stolovia', or "closed" restaurant, to which only those who could produce the necessary card of admission were admitted; but generally we ate at home. Being foreign workers, Guido and I were privileged in having ration-books that provided us with an adequate amount of food, and Katharine, by reason of her honored status, also had a book to Insnab, the store that had more of everything in the way of food and other commodities than any other shop in Moscow. So we managed well enough even in that time of desperate want.

Katharine had not planned to remain in Moscow longer than a few weeks, and that time was almost up when she was given the opportunity of joining a delegation that was going on a tour of Central Asia and Siberia. It was a rare opportunity. By this time it was late September and the first bite of autumn had already warned of the approaching winter; where she was going it would be already cold. She had nothing but some summer dresses and one light overcoat. I gave her what I could spare in the way of winter woollies, and thus ill-equipped to face the ordeal of the journey and the savage climate, she departed on her great adventure.

It was late November before we saw her again and by that time Guido and I had been transferred to Leningrad. The first snow had fallen and the dank mists from the marshes hung above the canals and crept between the one-time sumptuous

buildings of Peter the Great's citadel. It was beautiful, but depressing and extremely cold.

We saw her only briefly as she had to hurry up from Moscow in order to catch the last boat that was leaving Leningrad for England. The Baltic had already started to freeze and great chunks of ice were floating down the Neva; soon both sea and river would be frozen solid and the sea route via the Kiel Canal closed until the spring.

We were shocked at her appearance. She seemed shrivelled, aged and ill, besides being woefully thin. Her shoulder-blades protruded under the thin cloth of her coat, and every bone in her hands was visible. Our last meal together was a sombre one; none of us had much to say, she was tired and ill, and we were saddened at the thought of seeing her go. Even in the taxi we were silent, each of us too depressed to speak.

The ship was berthed a long way down the river and we seemed to go for miles along that dark, deserted quay, with the sullen river flowing on one side of us, the rows of warehouses and packing-sheds on the other, and only an occasional street-lamp that did little to relieve the gloom.

Katharine sat huddled in her corner staring out the window at the few muffled figures that shuffled along the road. "When I came here first," she said half to herself, "I felt I wanted to put my arms around them. They were my comrades, now . . ." Her voice trailed off and left the sentence incomplete. Both of us knew what she had left unsaid. We, too, had learnt much in the past few months. Then she brightened and began to speak of home, of the pretty house in the hills near Perth, of Ric, and of the man who waited there to welcome her.

"How good it's going to be to see it all again," she murmured. "My Jimmy's been so good to me, so patient. Putting up with all my pranks." Her voice was tender and her face lit up with happiness. "He shot some possums before I left and made a pair of fur-lined boots for me. How many times I've thought of them when I've been blue with cold and wished I had them on my feet. But, like a fool, I left them behind in London. He'll scold me when I tell him that. And for getting thin. He'll fuss over me and make me eat all kinds of nourishing food to 'fat' me up again."

Here was a new and unsuspected Katharine, one who had learnt to doubt herself, who was no longer sure of anything but the unswerving devotion of the man she had left behind at Greenmount and the warm security of home.

We said good-bye and watched her struggle up the gangway to the waiting ship; a thin tired figure carrying a battered suit-case, hugging her coat around her in an effort to keep out the biting wind. She did not turn, but disappeared along the deck. It was pointless to do anything but return to the taxi and drive back to Leningrad.

There is an entry in my diary dated December 2, 1933. This is what it says: "Today a letter came from Katharine, a short disjointed note, almost incoherent, but from the broken sentences the terrible fact emerged that Jimmy has committed suicide. It seems too unreal, too dramatic; one simply cannot grasp it. She learnt the news in a particularly dreadful way, by reading a poster as she drove past in a taxi the day she arrived in London. She is quite distraught. 'I didn't know I cared so much,' she wrote. Poor Katharine—poor Jimmy. Why did he do it? Was it because he felt that he had lost her? That her decision to prolong her visit to the Soviet Union was an indication of her reluctance to return? Was it because he had failed in so many things that he had set out to do and that all the things in which he had succeeded counted for so little in her eyes? What does a dedicated communist care for a soldier, even one with a Victoria Cross, a farmer whose crops have failed, a politician who failed to win an election? All this is mere speculation, but I can't forget his moody silence that day we sat at luncheon, nor his sad little ploy to draw attention to the fact that his wife made excellent fig jam. If only he had waited just a little longer."

conversation with Peter Porter

DENNIS DOUGLAS

Born in Brisbane in 1929, Peter Porter is now regarded as one of the leading English poets of his generation. His major published books are "Once Bitten, Twice Shy" (1961), "Poems Ancient and Modern" (1964) and "A Porter Folio" (1969).

Peter Porter is a tallish solid man who looks younger than his early forties, cleanshaven, hair cut short back and sides. He professed to be out of a job, having left off writing copy for an advertising agency some months before. The departure did not seem to have occasioned actual economic hardship. A fairly average family man living with his wife and children in central London (Paddington). Entertaining rapidfire conversationalist.

D: Have you been influenced in your writing by established Australian poets such as A. D. Hope, or Judith Wright, or by James McAuley's "Neo-Augustanism", or indeed by any Australian writer?

P: When I left Australia I didn't know Australian poetry existed and I haven't encountered a great deal of it since. I came over in 1951 after a few years on the Brisbane Courier-Mail, following on from a spell at Toowoomba Grammar, where I mainly learnt to hate Harry Roberts, who was the headmaster. I wasn't terribly conscious of other writers when I started out.

D: I have noticed that the younger poets in Australia now are like that too. For them Australian literary traditions do not exist.

P: I suppose they are turning to Ginsberg and the Black Mountain and so on. The same is happening here of course. The young writers of the little magazine have lost contact entirely with the T. S. Eliot generation, and don't even want to know anything about recent poets like Hughes and Larkin. This is a pity. I don't really like underground poetry. I think it is marginal as poetry and marginal in relation to life. I suppose I could call myself anti-American in that I am against what the American poets have come to symbolise here.

D: Where do you stand in relation to the main currents of poetry-writing here?

P: I think my work is fairly characteristic of English poetry of the sixties. I'm in the middle of the road. The poets I like are Christopher Middleton and Spike Hawkins among the avant-garde, George MacBeth, Peter Redgrove, Alan Brownjohn, Ted Hughes, among the mainstreamers. I don't think poetry ought to be something you identify with one side or another. There are a lot of poets like me who don't belong to the conservatives like Fuller or to pop poets like Henri. At the moment the magazine that interests me most, because it represents this point of view, is Ambit.

D: A lot of your early poetry was about experiences in Australia, and involved catching the atmosphere of your childhood. Do you think being an Australian has influenced you very much?

P: In peripheral ways, I suppose. I do not think of myself as an Australian poet, but when my first book came out people were interested in the way I had got things in England "wrong", because of not being English. They liked that. I think of Australians as a nomadic people, peripatetic but not adaptable. We don't settle down easily, even though we live quite happily outside Australia. We put down roots slowly. Living happily outside Australia requires a lack of ease with Australia. For me there are not enough people in Australia interested in maintaining a high level of literary standards. Not that I would be the

sort of person who could. But in England there are a lot of people who are interested in this, and I like living in a country where that is happening, where standards are being maintained. I could not imagine going back, except perhaps to visit my father, who is very old now. You know I went back, in 1953, after two years here, and I couldn't stand it. My morale collapsed entirely. I was back here inside ten months. I still count a lot of Australians among my best friends, Roger Covell for example, and I see people like Roger from time to time, but I don't feel in the least nostalgic. I suppose I feel out of touch. An Australian education is a good preparation for a career here by the way. There is a joke at the BBC about Australians being the "new Jews". A lot of the most successful musicians and painters in London are Australians, string men particularly, and conductors, and wind players, and composers, Denis Vaughan, Doug Whitaker, Barry Tuckwell, Don Banks, David Lumsden, Michael Williamson. I am aware of Australianness as a residual element in my experience. You know when I first got here I didn't know I was Australian. I didn't even know I had an accent. It is a pity Australian national culture is held back by the acceptance of mediocre standards and low personal aims. A national culture is built on high personal aims—all achievements are sui generis and arise out of the individual—there is no excuse for Australians to be tied to the past.

D: Do you think personality has a lot to do with poetry?

P: I think poets run the risk of confusing their public demeanor with their avocation. One ought to distinguish between one's personality and one's poetry. Taking things seriously on paper is a different thing from interacting with people.

D: An Australian professor was quoted the other day as saying that he thought the English literary tradition was far too precious to be entrusted to the care of academics. Do you think academics bear a special responsibility in this respect?

P: A lot of academic in-fighting about literature seems very unreal to me. I have never thought of academics as having much to do with writing. You get preposterous things like Leavis' attack on Margaret Drabble. The tradition that matters isn't exclusively literary anyway. The literature of Western Europe is part of a culture that includes things like law, politics, warfare, music. Literature can't be cut off from these things, this complex of human activities.

D: What critics do you respect most?

P: Empson, Randall Jarrell, and Wilson Knight.

D: You are said to feel you owe a great deal to George MacBeth for getting you published in England originally. Is that so?

P: Yes. After I came here, when I was first trying to break into writing, I didn't get anything published for seven years—and then George MacBeth, and Philip Hobsbaum, and Edward Lucie-Smith started telling editors they ought to publish my poems, and I started appearing in print. I owe a lot to them. Then my first book came out. The critics were very enthusiastic about it. I can't say they've been as enthusiastic about anything since.

D: Is there any poem you've written that embarrasses you, "Phar Lap in the Melbourne Museum", for example, which gives such a misleading impression of your work at the time.

P: I was embarrassed by "Phar Lap", but not for that reason. I got the color wrong, you know. Finally I checked it with a friend of my father's who used to be sports editor of the Courier-Mail. Phar Lap was a bay, not a chestnut. The poem that embarrasses me most now is that one I wrote about Marston.

D: One of the interesting things about your poetry is a tendency to catch the reader off-balance, by techniques like a serious use of the grotesque. This is something I notice in Auden too. Are you conscious of it?

P: Auden is the only English writer I have read all the time I have been writing, and I still find him exciting to read. I was 18 or 19 when I discovered Auden. Reading him taught me more than anything else.

D: Where do you think modern English writing stands in comparison with, say, German writing.

P: The Germans are awfully over-rated. You know Brecht is a dull playwright, a bad writer. The Berliner Ensemble have had very successful tours here, but it's a triumph of production technique, not the plays themselves.

D: What do you think of the drama and the novel in England?

P: The novel is not doing well at all. Much more interesting things are happening in the States. The good novelists here are traditionalists like William Trevor. Osborne is still a very good playwright. Have you seen "Hotel in Amsterdam"? Livings is good, up to "Nil Carborundum" and "Stop it, Whoever You are". I thought Marowitz's "Hamlet" was puerile. The key arts in England at the moment are poetry and music.

D: What is happening to your poetry now?

P: I have been translating Martial, and getting interested in the epigram as a form, and epigrammatic effects generally in poetry.

frank dalby davison

OWEN WEBSTER

"All my life", Frank Davison said to me a few weeks before he died, "my body has done whatever I asked of it: it's never let me down. And I've worked it hard, done everything hard, used it up whenever I've wanted." He experienced its failing with a mixture of bewilderment and philosophic calm. He was no longer rolling his own cigarettes, nor able to shave. He dictated his correspondence, typed by his wife, Marie, as she had typed, from his drafts, the manuscripts of his last two books. And it was Marie, twenty years his junior and deeply involved with his suffering, who was angry, opposing his growing acceptance of the illness he described as "drowning": "You should have been good for another ten years, Frank!" He was a month from his seventy-seventh birthday when he died, on 24 May 1970.

Marie attributed the genesis of his illness to a time when he fell sick at the Adelaide Festival of Arts in 1962. The first half of "The White Thorntree" had been rejected by Angus and Robertson, and, since he always wrote best in the face of an obstacle, he got to work on the second half throughout that summer, when he wrote some of the best of it. This included the chapter, "David and the Judge", in which he was helped in authenticating descriptions of court procedure by his friend, Sir John Barry.

My own suspicion is that the onset of his illness could be antedated nearly half a century, like the ill-health of most of his generation, to the trenches of the Great War. He served with the British cavalry and saw mounted action on the Somme and at Arras. It was the period of his life about which he was most reticent. "You didn't squeal" was almost all he would say, and it seemed to be a precept he would carry through to his deathbed, for he remained in good spirits till the last.

In the course of the ABC television interviews, which were recorded over two days of March 1969, I tried to draw him out about the war. In an unbroadcast sequence, answering a remark of mine about simple brute physical privation, he said: "I simply don't know how we endured it. We were skinny twenty-year-old lads. We endured six weeks in frozen muck continually unable to sleep at night because of the vermin. As soon as you got warm the vermin would start, and the only way was to get cold again."

But in the next breath he was laughing once more, talking of getting his corporal's stripes for saluting under shellfire, and agreeing to train for a commission because it would take him out of the firing line.

He would refer to himself, though always in the past tense, as a Kiplingesque romantic. ("I went to England to enlist," he wrote in a letter, "because like a lot of other mugs, I thought the war might be over before I got into it.") "Kiplingesque" may have described a phase (verses written in the trenches); but "romantic" was a life-style, established early.

As a schoolboy he ran away from home with two young friends, an escapade of a day and a night, equipped with the necessities of life: a tin of jam, a loaf of bread, a blanket and a bayonet. After leaving school, aged twelve, he was ready to go anywhere, do anything, but he worked as a wood-and-water joey for three years on a farm in Gippsland before his father took the family to America. At twenty, when he was arrested for riding the rods near New York in search of work, he took ten days in jail because he was three dollars short of the ten-dollar fine. Then he took ship as a ship's printer and made three voyages from New York to Central America, the experience which a couple of decades later became "Caribbean Interlude", a trifle concerning two young shipmates who preserved their chastity in face of delectable temptation, a celebration of youth and adventure which was also a literary protest against a fashion in sailors' yarns boasting sexual exploits.

After the war, victim of government propaganda aimed at soldier settlers, he took a young wife and baby son to a 1,000-acre selection at Dalby in S.W. Queensland, with little to aid him but his stout romantic heart and his experience as wood-and-water joey. The land was poor, advice and the weather were bad. The wonder is not that it failed, but that it lasted four years. And what sort of failure were the years that fertilised the two great animal books, many of the short stories, and the autobiographical material that started him writing his prentice stories guaranteed publication?

These first tales appeared in a monthly magazine published and edited in Sydney between 1923 and 1925 by his father, Fred Davison, now returned from his unsuccessful attempt to be an inventor in America and established in a real-estate business. "Australia" was a hobby and platform for the kind of individualistic self-help politics propounded by such organisations as the Australian Natives' Association. It ran to twenty-four issues before it predictably failed, with its proprietor £2,000 out of pocket and his wife, Amelia, never to forget the loss.

The editor wrote for the magazine himself under various pen names (e.g. Himself) and also enlisted the help of other members of his family. His daughter, Dulcie, wrote long sentimental romances as Una Dea. The rather conspicuously unsuccessful advertising manager was his son, F. D. Davison. He had been named Frederick Douglas, after his father and the capital of the Isle of Man, whence his maternal grandparents had emigrated to the gold diggings. The family called him Freddie.

But authorship under his own name would have caused confusion, and the first issue of the magazine carried four of his stories: respectively by Frederick Douglas, Francis Daly, and two by Frank Daniels. The three names recurred through seventeen issues, but in the eighteenth was a story, "The Bangtail Muster", by "F. D. Davison (Frederick Douglas)". The remaining half-dozen issues contained stories by F. D. Davison.

Several of the stories were incorporated into the first innocent romantic novel, "Forever Morning" (1931). "The Killer", by Frederick Douglas, appeared in the fourth issue. It was about a sheep-dog, half-dingo, half-kelpie, that had to be shot for killing sheep. Twenty-three years later it re-appeared, expanded and enriched, as "Dusty". Frederick Douglas was also the author of some tales about scrub cattle. Three appeared in successive issues between November 1923 and January 1924. They were entitled "One in Ten Thousand", "Man-shy", and "The Scrubbers". The last of them, "The Lesser Brethren", was published in the penultimate issue in January 1925, signed F. D. Davison. Four years later his sister, Dulcie, showed them to Mary Gilmore, who wrote to the author:

"Man! You don't know what you have written in these! In these stories you speak our own—our very own language; our real language that is dying for want of use, and is going out of memory because **none** have really written it. You give the lore of the bush in its own being, where others have only written **about** it. This is so different, it is history made real and facts made living." She suggested working the four stories into one book, "a book for men, boys, or a book for Australia". She had some other suggestions, and invited him to visit her to discuss them. "Don't let go I beg of you," she concluded, "but however hard it is for you to write, keep on."

It is uncertain now whether it was Mary Gilmore's advice that caused what followed, but the four stories were worked together, their opening passages combined into an introductory chapter, and an extra chapter, "Bulls in Battle", added. A few gaucheries in the form of author's comments on his material were deleted; the handwritten manuscript was offered to Angus and Robertson and rejected. But the author's name, the one by which most of the literate among his countrymen will remember him, was settled at last, and so was the author's metier. The setting of the fiction was actually Dalby, Queensland, which also happened to be the Manx village where his maternal grandparents had lived. " 'Man-shy' was a fortunate book", its author wrote later. "It challenged nothing that I lacked and gave full scope to all I had."

The story is well known of how a thousand copies came to be privately printed, stitched and bound in wallpaper at home, then sold by Frank and his brother Douglas (to whom the book is dedicated) at sixpence a copy during the Depression. Their father entered it secretly for the Australian Literature Society's competition in 1930 and it won their medal for the best novel of the year. Angus and Robertson accepted it then, and it has been in print ever since.

In the television interview, Frank described it as essentially the story of an animal who learnt early to value freedom above everything and "like all such creatures must, animal or human, die possessed of nothing else. You simply cannot possess freedom. Once you get that idea, you're sunk, you'll be destroyed."

"Dusty", the dingo and the kelpie in conflict within him, explored the same theme and exemplified a conflict within us all. The romantic had begun to be invaded by the realist. Yet he con-

tinued to value freedom, and pay the price for it. "While Freedom Lives" was the title of a leftist pamphlet he wrote during the Thirties when he was a prominent short-story writer, and no less well known as president of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Sydney. The pamphlet was well received among the converted; but its author came to regard it as the "Forever Morning" of his political writing, and to repudiate most of it.

He was a late developer; perhaps this, too, was part of the price of freedom. Yet the development, when it was accomplished, was more than most men's. It was the demand for freedom that led him to commit the working time of a third of his life to writing a book he didn't think would find a publisher. He commenced work on "The White Thorntree" in 1946, a year after returning to Melbourne to start a new life with his second wife. He had been away from the city of his birth for thirty-five years. By October 1946 he had written enough to make half the length of an average novel, and wrote to Vance Palmer: "It will be a long job, and I won't try to do it in one crack, like Dusty".

Early in 1968, three copies of the half-million-word typescript were ready for binding. The story of how his old friend Robert Cugley, of the National Press, Melbourne, agreed to publish an edition of five hundred copies at no profit to himself, is now part of Australian literary history. I heard recently of a copy of that $10 edition being offered for sale at $100. Frank lived to know commercial publication of the first handsome volume of the two-volume edition, and to see it make literary history again in the form of a full-page advertisement in The Australian. He died a month after publication day.

The romantic, the visionary, had won—as, deep in his secret heart, I'm sure he knew it would. Only the posthumous triumph remains to be accomplished, and it seems consistent with the heroism of his life and work that in time "The White Thorntree" should be acclaimed a masterpiece more widely and authoritatively than my advocacy.

The realist had hardly stood a chance. It was the romantic who bought the farm, Folding Hills, in 1948 to silence a dream of working the land recurrent since the failure of the selection at Dalby. But it was the realist who worked it to a stage at which he could retire from it and leave it to his widow to continue.

It was the realist who said of all his writing that he had ever had only two themes: man's battle with the elements, and forbidden love. It was the romantic who must privately have known that there are no other themes but man's battles with the world without and the world within. A statement in the third chapter of "The White Thorntree" epitomises both the work and the man by referring to "humanity's age-long attempt, under ever-changing conditions, to equate individual need with social viability".

It was the romantic who resolutely sought to achieve the equation, and who was so widely loved for his courage and example. But it was the realist who was impatient with fools (those who knew too little of the struggle) and forthrightly contemptuous of phonies (those who denied that it existed).

The realist accepted the imminence of his own death; but the romantic, in the last weeks, refused further experimental medical treatment, preferring to take his chances with the God he had never believed in.

Realist and romantic were fused in the books and stories, producing the quality that Mary Gilmore discerned all those years ago, raising Australian literature from the national to the universal. If a sensitive foreign visitor ever wants to know the meaning of the word "dinkum", one could not do better, for as long as that rare quality exists, than to give him a book by Frank Dalby Davison.

Between March 1945 and her death well into her eighties six years later, Frank corresponded almost weekly with his mother in Newcastle, telling that wise but not erudite old lady of all the little incidents of his life. In her replies to that extraordinary series of letters, she often tenderly recalled that eccentric, freebooting buccaneer, her husband; and on one occasion she wrote: "I do wish Dad could . . . know that you are thinking of him as a very young man, even then making history, or at least, adventuring. He had the heart of a lion, didn't he?" She might as well have been writing of her own firstborn.

miscellany

REDISCOVERY — I

Leonard Mann's "A Murder in Sydney"

MAURICE VINTNER

Why do some good novels have a short run and then disappear, and some bad novels have a long run and remain with us forever? It is a question which authors, publishers, critics and readers have not yet managed to answer. Take Leonard Mann's "A Murder in Sydney". Most readers of this generation—and quite a few writers and critics, too, for that matter—have never heard of it. Though it is a probing powerful psychological novel in its own right, and certainly a pioneer novel in Australian writing, it was unlucky. It was published in 1937, had a second impression in that year, with a fair, occasionally enthusiastic, critical reception, and has scarcely been heard of since.

There are, in this instance, some causative factors which can be quite readily seen. The title is rather unhappily chosen, indicating to most readers a detective mystery novel—in fact, I found it twice, years ago, in the "Crime and Detection" section of lending libraries. Perhaps more significant is the date of publication: any new novel in the two or three years before the War had to carry special handicaps coming as it did into a world cracking with the tensions of impending tragedy, followed by the great hiatus when normal living ceased to exist.

"A Murder in Sydney" is far from being an ordinary tale of crime and detection. There is a murder quite early in the novel, but there is no attempt to conceal the murderer from the reader, or to construct a mystery. The author is more concerned to reveal the human passions which lead to the crime and the profound psychological changes in a number of people which flow from it. With a rare perceptiveness and intuition, he shows how this taking of a life imposes unexpected responsibilities on the killer, and how, as always in the dialectic of violence, the conqueror becomes the victim as surely as the conquered.

It is a simple killing. The anger, two blows with a brass vase, the blood and the golden hair, then fear and cunning. This is how Barbara Hallam, spoilt only daughter of Frederick Hallam, a wealthy public accountant, kills her father's fiancee, Chloe Morton. Chloe, a rich voluptuous creature, insults the memory of Barbara's mother, who was in fact a complaining, nagging woman, but, Mr. Mann shows, many other factors impel Barbara's arm: her hatred of her father for his obvious relief at her mother's recent death and for the speed with which he has announced his engagement to Chloe, thus legalising, as it were, their former clandestine relationship; her jealously of Chloe's beauty and sexuality and indifference; her resentment of Chloe's promiscuity, which is well known to her friends; her own sullen feeling of insufficiency.

The author shows Barbara at first indifferent—"it's done"—then exultant and euphoric, as she sees suspicion settling on her father. Two detectives, one huge and brutal, one small and cunning, ironic symbols of Sydney law enforcement rather than real people, harass him into a corner. Then Barbara faces the terrible responsibility which, as we have said, a killing imposes on the killer. She sees the involvement of other people, the helpless fear of her father. She is torn by conflicting emotions, as she feels her malicious mean dead mother acting through her for revenge against her father, as she realises she cannot in the end let him be blamed. She thinks of suicide, standing lost and defeated on the rocks at Manly, but in the end gives herself up and confesses.

The secondary characters are well realised, though Hallam is colorless and not always convincing. The housekeepers, the smaller people, the lawyers, the group on the beach, the cynical indifferent painter, are real. Hughie Stair, the half-crazed journalist whose mistress Chloe had been, who is still enslaved by her, is a most effective creation, as is Mat Dyas, the crippled ex-soldier and concrete contractor, who stands by Barbara through her ordeal and promises to wait for her. Mat is her anchor in life. He is that Australian special, the rough diamond, but he is real and you can walk around him.

Someone has said that this novel is Australia's "Crime and Punishment". It is a good analogy, though Leonard Mann's novel does not have the

tragic force of the great Russian work. The motivations of the girl are not strongly enough based for this: at first they are little more than the jealous smoulderings of a delayed adolescence. But the development from an almost petulant blow into real tragedy is most skilfully handled, and the tone of the whole novel is set by the atmosphere of a heavy sensuous, sun-dazed Manly summer, with rich flesh everywhere, baking indolently in the golden warmth. This gives it a special color of its own: "the heavy heat, like an ointment percolating through the skin and flesh into the centres of nervous life . . . The sun beat them almost into insensibility . . . the ocean quivered ceaselessly and violently . . . the pines writhed ceaselessly upwards . . ."

At another level, the general background is extremely well done. The whole action takes place in metropolitan comfortable middle-class areas of Sydney and Manly—something seldom done in Australian literature before. It is Depression time, and the smell of despair and misery is shown gradually seeping into the lives of even the lucky people. This general background is skilfully blocked in without the use of the palette knife. One feels and sees it without quite realising how.

There it is, then, a good novel lost in the sands. It has many of the elements of a great novel, particularly in the flashes of imaginative insight which illuminate so well the motivations of the characters. But it is also at times too rough and careless in style and construction to realise fully its potential power: the opening few pages, in particular, are extremely shaky and unconvincing. This rough-hewn style, however, often adds to the atmosphere of authenticity, and often produces an admirable compression.

"A Murder in Sydney" remains a landmark, even though half-buried and obscured. A second reading thirty years after the first confirms its power to involve the reader in that hot Sydney summer, those driven people, that passionate and tragic drama. It still has much to offer, and one might hope that in the flood of paperbacks now being produced in Australia a place will be found for this fine novel.

PAISLEY COUNTRY, 1959

NIGEL WACE

They're beating the drums tonight along the road at the Orange Hall—tuning them up for the twelfth, they say. But it is hard to detect any sort of note in the massive noise that they produce. It is a wild savage sound: a harsh rapid strumming with short sticks on the tight skins. At first I thought that the noise was produced by some sort of road-digging machine. It has all the sharp penetrating insistence of a pneumatic drill, and nothing of the rumbling undertone that can make well played drums so attractive.

I strolled over the bridge, and up the street by the church towards the source of the sound. It was interesting to see the effect on everyone, on the warm summer evening, of the incessant din. There was an air of expectancy about. People were standing outside their cottages listening, and looking about them. Something was going to happen. You could feel the tension. A yelling mob might be around the corner down by the linen mills. The raw strident din set everything on edge. Was it just my imagination that the expressions on the faces of the cottagers by their front doors were more reservedly hostile than usual? Is he one of us? What's he doing here? Where does he come from? Where's he going?

The Orange Hall itself is a small brick building. On the grass patch outside, the two young drummers were producing their now deafening racket. Three scruffy urchins, drunk with the din, chased each other around on the grass, tumbling and fighting. From underneath his playmate one of them shouted "No Surrender" at me, struggled free and dashed off. The two young drummers, both about twenty. were sweating in their shirt sleeves while they belabored their drums in turn. There seemed little artistry in the thing—just the production of a tremendous and overpowering noise. During a pause in the drumming I wandered over and looked at one of the drums. On it was a garish picture of Johnston, one of the Ulstermen in Gratton's parliament; and on the other was the Royal Cipher. The drummers were pleased to show their drums and their worn sticks to a stranger, but at the door of the hall an elderly Orangeman looked distrustful. However, a remark about the "tremendous sound" thawed him out, and he asked me into the hall to see the biggest drum belonging to the lodge.

The huge drum lay on its side on a table in the middle of the hall, a large Union Jack serving as the tablecloth. The young drummers outside started up again, and we held a rather incoherent and one-sided conversation as I plied him questions on the care of the drums and on their history. The drumming was dying out, he said in his harsh metallic accent. He took my shaken head as agreement that this was a pity. Only the lodges around Lisburn now had the drums: in Belfast they had the bands for the twelfth instead. It occurred to me to ask what the bandsmen thought of the drums, with whom they had to play in competition

in the big Orange parades on the twelfth—but I let it pass. Outside, both the drummers were reaching a crescendo of noise. I yelled my thanks into the Orangeman's ear, and left.

As I walked back down past the cottages to the bridge, the tenseness returned. A nod to the cottagers produced scarcely an acknowledgment. Back at the old house by the river, the elderly landladies had shut all the windows to keep out the sound. One of them was playing the piano fortissimo; the other remarked to me what a "terrible loud noise" it was that they made at this time of the year, but that "there were fewer drums now than there used to be, thank goodness".

"Not an Inch" and "No Surrender". How many more centuries will it take these people to forget the Battle of the Boyne?

QUIET BOOKMAN

W. N. SCOTT

It is impossible to think of boating in Moreton Bay without thinking of the Tripcony family. Thomas Welsby, the historian, in his book "Bribie the Basket Maker" says "We are still in the Pumice Stone Channel, and next see Cowie Bank, the old time residence of the Tripcony family. I knew Cowie Bank well. When I wrote "Schnappering" in 1905, I gave full particulars regarding this place, and the grand old man Thomas Tripcony, the soldier man who fought with Chinese Gordon, and his three sons, Andrew, Con and Tom."

Welsby had good reason to remember Constantine Tripcony. It was Con who had taught him the rudiments of sailing and boat-handling. Small craft and boat building remain the interest of the descendants of old Thomas to this day. I first went prawning with one of his great-grandsons myself. But there is one of his grandsons who has quite different hobbies.

Paul Tripcony was born at Dunwich, on Stradbroke Island, in 1901. His family moved to Brisbane in 1908, and he has lived on the mainland ever since, first at Kangaroo Point and then later at Lota, near Wynnum, within easy walking distance of the foreshores of the Bay. He is a big quiet man, broad and white-haired, living alone in a house in a backwater of this bayside suburb with his collection of Aboriginal artifacts and weapons, and surrounded by his beloved books.

What makes a man turn his back on the traditional pastimes of his family and adopt hobbies so much at variance with his background? There is no easy answer to such a question. Paul Tripcony, the grader driver, the machinery man, the roadmaker who worked so many years for the Brisbane City Council, has one of the best collections of Australian books in the State. He gave up smoking so that he could buy an average of two books a week for many years, and they overflow chests and cupboards and shelves in the modest home where he lives on his pension, cooking and cleaning for himself, and rebuilding his home in his spare time, between reading and cataloguing his library. A pleasant occupation for a man who has led a useful unspectacular life, and one that will occupy him for years to come.

It began, as so many things literary did, with the Bulletin. Paul's mother used to cut the poems out and glue them in exercise books. The boy was fascinated, and his lack of formal schooling meant that he read for his own pleasure and instruction. What did it matter if there was no planning or sequence? He grew to know more and more about the natural history of the country, the human history, the history of the first Australians, the Aboriginals, the settlers. He became a member of the Historical Society.

His interest in the Aboriginals was stimulated by the fact that he knew many of them as friends. There was a big settlement of them at Dunwich where he had spent his early years, and where he returned frequently for holidays. He knew the father of Kath Walker, the poet, and remembers him well. He remembers Uncle Willy McKenzie, whose tales and legends were so ably recorded recently by Sylvia Cairns. And of course he had many other friends and acquaintances among the dark Australians in the community. He knew the locations of the shell middens, the camping grounds of the old people for countless generations, and during holiday visits has sifted the stone fragments of history from among the millions of eugarie and cockle shells. Whenever there is a grass or bush fire he has patiently searched the ashes. His collection of spear heads, scrapers, axe heads, hand axes and traditional 'boundary stones' is quite remarkable. The most unusual stone in his possession is a sacred stone of a fully initiated elder, forbidden to be seen by all women and any man who was below the rank of its owner. It is a slabbed section of a quartz gibber, as neatly and evenly flattened on two sides as though cut by a diamond saw. Paul found it in the ashes of an old bloodwood, a hollow giant burned down by a bushfire, that had obviously been the treasure house of a man, his private bank vault, so to speak. Paul has already presented a lot of material to the University of Queensland, as well as guiding some of the anthropological investigators to sites where they have made fruitful digs. But his own first love remains his books.

Some fifteen years ago I was working in a Brisbane bookstore and had introduced what was a new idea then—a separate section for Australian books. At least, it was new in Brisbane. Every Saturday morning one of my regular customers was a broad powerful man in the prime of life, usually dressed in a leather safari jacket and always interested in new books. He bought many books from me, and shared my enthusiasm for Australian authors. I never discovered where he lived, because he always paid cash for his purchases. He told me that he had a signed photograph of Thomas Welsby, and autographed copies of Welsby's books. I lost touch with him when I left the bookstore, but heard word of him from John Manifold, when John was combing the Wynnum-Manly area with Geoff Wills, searching for traditional Australian songs. John was especially excited because he had found a man who not only remembered a number of songs but who had given him a copy of Paterson's "Old Bush Songs". He in return had given Paul a set of the "Bandicoot Ballads" suitably inscribed. It is one of Paul's treasured possessions today.

It would be impossible here to describe the riches of the Tripcony collection. You can hold in your hand copies of books you have heard about and never thought to see. Not only that. Tucked away in each book are letters, newspaper reviews, news items, carefully clipped and inserted in the relevant copy so that the reader can gauge some of the impact of each book on the news and critics of the time of its publication. This should be invaluable to the future literary historian setting out to place a possibly neglected book in the perspective of its own time, and should eliminate the often tiresome search through contemporary journals for the relevant information. Many of the books are signed and dedicated to the owner by the author.

Paul has not confined his collection to books printed in Australia, though these, of course, make up the bulk of his collection. One outstanding item that caught my eye was the Hakluyt Society reproductions of the maps and charts of Cook's voyages, carefully printed in facsimile with all notes and sketches left on the manuscripts, and with the artist or cartographer identified where possible. I doubt there would be many sets of these charts in Australia. Certainly it was an odd thing to find in the possession of a retired grader driver in a remote suburb.

One does not easily come to the end of a man like Paul Tripcony. From his reading he has learned to appreciate his country and its beauty, and he is doing his part to preserve and maintain this. When he bought the land where his house now stands, it was covered with the remains of what had been thick wattle scrub, cut over by people who sold cordwood to bakers in Brisbane. He not only cleared it, he replanted, and with the knowledge gained from the library he planted indigenous trees and shrubs. Honey eaters sing in the flowering melaleucas outside the front door, and in September when the northern spring brings flowers to the banksias and other native plants, his yard is full of the honey-eating parrots that swarm on the wallum country south and north of Brisbane at this time. He has seen much of the beauty go from the environment he knows and loves so well, Stradbroke Island, the Bay, the hinterland of Brisbane, but he has brought part of it back to his own surroundings, which is what you would expect of such a man.

I do not know what he plans for his library eventually. This much is certain, it will be a tragedy if it becomes broken up and fragmented among other collectors. This is more than merely a collection of books, it has been the life of a man, his worthy obsession, and it should not be divided. It is a priceless collection of parts of our national history, solemnly sublime and solemnly ridiculous in content, and it should be maintained in its present unity. It certainly will be while this quiet bookman continues his labor of love in the little bit of Australia he has made uniquely his own.

MANIFEST DUTY

L. K. DALTON

Published in Overland not long ago was a statement of protest on the imprisonment of Aleksander Ginsberg and other Soviet writers. It was authorised by the editors of a number of Australian magazines and sent to the "appropriate Soviet authorities". In effect it was an appeal for action on the part of the Union of Soviet Writers and other professional bodies. The signatories, which included me, must have realised that for individuals to respond to the appeal, and it seemed likely to be only individuals, they would have to be prepared to make some sacrifice.

Looking over recent events here in Australia it seems to me that we deserve in return a statement from Soviet citizens along similar lines. It could read as follows:

"We have read with heavy hearts the trials and closed inquisitions of young scholars who speak out against your Government or authorities in institutions of learning and in schools.

"It is true that the evolution of your institutions and ours has been basically different and we must keep in mind that the processes of law in another country may seem more arbitrary than they really are. Nonetheless, it is evident that freedom of expression is under attack in your country.

"It appears also that the movement of dissent in your country is comprised almost entirely of young people, whereas among us there have been some older people prepared to make the sacrifice.

"We associate ourselves with the protest of those young people who have suffered imprisonment, dismissal or other punitive action because of their opposition to your Government's involvement in the Vietnamese War, and with those young men who through conscience will not join their fellow countrymen in the slaughter of Vietnamese.

"We understand that in your country young men are being imprisoned upon the judgment of a government appointee without any participation in the judgment by his fellow citizens.

"Although in your country there are some safeguards against arbitrary arrest, we hear that when prosecution is not feasible then petty persecution is not uncommon, and that in institutions of learning and schools arbitrary dismissal is beginning to occur.

"In your country, as you indicated in your statement of last year, and alas in ours also, these actions by the authorities are aided by the inaction, engendered by economic self-interest, professional bodies.

"We appeal to the associations of writers, scientists and teachers of your country to do their manifest duty by their younger colleagues who suffer from these injustices perpetrated by government and private authorities.

"It is only through vigilance in one's own country and through preparedness for sacrifice by individuals that we may achieve and maintain an open and equitable social existence in each and every country."

CANTILEVER ELEGY FOR CROSSED LOVERS

(A homage to Guillaume Apollinaire)

ALAN RIDDELL

HAPPENSTANCE

I've lived my life to so many
Lies I wonder where truth went or
Was it like God merely a trick
Of mind, a signpost erected
After the wrong track was taken?

Ah these moveable feasts endow
Each small day with significance
And the whole brutish world is set
To rights by "It might not have been".

Yes, I'm on my way: new dawns break,
And it promises to be most
Different on my next train home.

PETER STANSFIELD

AT THAT TIME

there were
sacred ants
antrails
led
everywhere

at that time
in that area
there were not
people
anywh
ere
death
was

DON MAYNARD

I FELT FURRY

i felt furry as a child
but the fire went wild
the hearth reached out to me
with sensitive forked fingers
& moulded vibrations in my plastic brain
spastic spider in the elastic web
of my soul eats crazy all these
so young but so old years.
and what's to come—
t.v. monsters, poltergeist longings
in lonely long corridors, and mental
lockers with invisible bones
& flower skeletons.
no-one owns peach mirrors in grand
piano-parlors, muralled stairway corners,
wistful whistling violins & running baths.
cameras turn upwards from festival crowds
in the park to lazy skies behind swaying
pins & oaks & poplars.
magazine stalls & limbless wheelchaired paper-
sellers pass time on the city sidewalks which
are eden's apologies for the beauty
that now has to wear shoes.

PETER FRASER

WEATHER

There's a time the grass turns pink, the seed is setting.
Shorn ewes rule lines on hillsides with lambs at foot.
Then it blows ten days from the west, the sheep-camps yellow,
And it's not the best year old hands remember yet.

—Reminds me of '57 . . . A hot dry summer
Puts heart in the stock . . . Could do with an inch or two
To fill the ears out . . . It's when it comes that counts . . .
Heads shake and the cattle market takes a tumble.

Rain from high skies. Sheep newly-shorn are shedded:
Cooper's lost two hundred. Bullfrogs bellow from dams
And dabchick nests float incubating. Water
Fills crescent hoof-marks. A terrible year for fires!

DAVID CAMPBELL

ECHIDNA IN A PARKING LOT

(for my son)

"Well, I've done my good deed for the day," he said.
"I rescued an echidna from the parking lot."

"I had a wonderful afternoon," he said.
"I watched some wild mice making a nest in a ti-tree."

"I got drunk on vodka and danced all night by myself.
I lay on top of a blonde and bit her on the neck."
He loathes demonstrations or making himself conspicuous.

Next year he'll be called up, given a gun
and a meat ticket, or forty days in Holdsworthy
in a bright cold concrete cell with a spy-hole
and a plastic bucket and a water bottle.
He'll say, every thirty minutes, day and night,
"Private J. Flood, No. XXXX, forty days sir,"
and be given thirteen slices of bread every twenty-four hours.

I wish he was an echidna or a wild mouse
who could hide in a parking lot or a ti-tree.

DOROTHY HEWETT

THE SURVIVOR

(On Reading the Collected Works of Bertold Brecht)

(After Erich Fried)

My friend H. read to us
from the poems after 1933:
"The victory of violence
appeared complete.

Only the mangled bodies
report that criminals once lodged there.
Only the silence over wasted dwellings
points to the crime."

His twelve-year old son
asked wonderingly,
"Even then,
was there war in Vietnam?"

NOEL MACAINSH

NETTING PRAWNS AT MALLACOOTA

After tea, the lakes darkening, and a new night's breeze
riding the breakers in across the bar,
the far-off Gabo lighthouse
winking the minutes away,
we slithered down the cliff path to the sand,
lamp and net in hand,
then waded into the night;
and the sea, blacker than night,
slapped its wet palms at our calves and thighs
and the seats of our pants,
with the boys wondering, full of a joyous fear,
what strange sea creature might appear
and who would fall first
off the edge of the world.

Neither the nights nor the years have lasted
and small boys too soon forget,
until, perhaps, some year
when they take others hand in hand,
walking out into the dark,
and then remember me walking with them
as my father walked with me and his father with him,
and each with our shoulder touched by a hand from the past
and each with a hand to point and stretch ahead.

J. BRIGGS

FOR A PRICE

Maybe the technicolored kid
wanted the bullet
in his guts.
Maybe he was sick
of the whole mess
and the bother of killing.
Maybe it was just his growing pains
or his tight uniform.
But he got the bullet,
anyway
For a price.

MIRIAM LOFTUS

TO A CERTAIN CRITIC

I wrote an incantation
with magic in the rhymes;
you never noticed it should be
read backwards seven times.

My words faced in two ways,
yet only stared in one;
lines that glanced down at the grass
were blinded by the sun.

Some that soared into the sky
dived deeply under earth;
and when they seemed to speak of death
they really sang of birth.

I wrote an incantation
with magic in the rhymes;
you never noticed it should be
read backwards seven times.

You only saw the tension,
ambivalence and such;
and you stilled the pulse of poetry
with your scholar's touch.

IAN MUDIE

GULLS AT NIGHT

They are rags in the wind
tonight, above the bridge's arc.
Torn from the black page
lights prick them.
And I am driving in the rain
with the old cars.

The dream tears open and the gulls rush in.
Great gales are sailing above them.
The bridge's spars lift in the storm shrouds
and I am striding across the outlands
in this dream, when I am driving home at night;
I mean they are always above the bridge—
and the dream is never a dream.

They were the first fish that walked,
and never leave the sea—
the gulls that shriek at night
in my torn town.

JOHN MILLETT

BOOKS

MEN OF LETTERS

ANDREW BEAR

John Gross: "The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: Aspects of English Literary Life since 1800" (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, $8.40).

Mr. Gross' book came as a promised land for its many reviewers. "There is his list of the most important English men of letters, and now here is my better one . . ."; "Mr. Gross is excellent on most of them, but wrong about my particular hobby-horses, for example . . ." And so on, until the real subject, the real importance, and the real inadequacies of the work had been swept conveniently under the carpet. In fact, both for what it says and what it inadvertently reveals, this book is extremely bad news for the very people who had so much fun reviewing it.

Mr. Gross himself is something of a portent. He is a militant drop-out from academic Eng. Lit., and a would-be man of letters: he sees the two roles as mutually exclusive, the one destructive of the other. He is extremely intelligent, and, by the end of the book, extremely depressed. He admires, and would emulate the great nineteenth century men of letters, because, though they were not creative artists, they were literary intellectuals who could speak powerfully to their own society. As (Mr. Gross might add "because they were") literary intellectuals, Mill and Arnold were profound **cultural** critics. They matter not because they wrote literary criticism, still less because they were literary scholars, but because their concern for literature engaged them directly with society. It is this double function that attracts Mr. Gross, and his sense of dissociation that leads him to think of the contemporary man of letters as 'fallen'. But before the full force of this analysis is made clear the book fades into confusion, for by then the author is talking about himself.

"The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters" looks like a cool, detached piece of slightly popularised, 'relevant', intellectual history—Raymond Williams with the knobs off. It has been praised, even acclaimed, as an important contribution to our understanding of nineteenth century literary culture. Thus, in his characteristically off-hand manner (he is very cool throughout), Mr. Gross states his far from modest aim:

> I am concerned with journalists and reviewers, teachers and interpreters—and, more generally, with the role of literature in public life, and the social context of criticism; with the rise of English studies, and the extension of the reading public; with the shaping of nineteenth-century literary culture, and with its gradual disintegration.

To these purposes, the substance of the book is a series of about fifty critical-biographical portraits of nineteenth and twentieth century men of letters. The portraits range in length from a few paragraphs to the rather surprising sixteen pages devoted to F. R. Leavis, who is the last figure discussed in any detail. On the whole, his inevitably brief comments are interesting, sometimes penetrating: he is an intelligent, judicious critic of critics. The reader is left with an impression of a robust, unpretentious common-sense; of a literary man well and truly emancipated from the nonsense that people like him have sometimes written about nineteenth century culture. And given the scope of the undertaking, this is no mean achievement.

Not surprisingly, then, "The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters" has been much praised. But "given the scope of the undertaking", for there's the rub. Mr. Gross clearly had ambitions to produce something more than a Book of the Month multiple biography, but, when the whole of his stated aim is taken into account, a number of severe limitations become apparent. Or even if we merely observe the inconsistency between the title and subtitle. The portentousness of "Rise and Fall" promises a book with a coherent thesis, a sustained argument, and possibly a polemic: "Aspects of English Literary Life", on the other hand, promises only a miscellany of loosely related bits and pieces, and that, in the end (and however interesting some may be) is a not unfair description of the work as it stands.

The intended subject is 'literary culture' and what is called, in another part of the book, "cultural change". Yet it is almost impossible to find anything substantial on the specified aspects of this—on "the role of literature in public life", for example, "the extension of the reading public", or "the social context of criticism" (whatever that may be). And I cannot at all understand what Mr. Gross means by the terms "shaping" and "disintegration" in relation to the "culture" under discussion. There is, however, a great deal about the "rise" of English studies. A possible explanation for these difficulties may be that Mr. Gross wrote, or intended to write, a unifying introductory chapter, of which the present statement of aim (in the very brief foreword) is only the baldest of bald summaries. Certainly the book needs such a chapter, for without one there is little sense of control or direction. The work is not sufficiently disciplined, not thought-out carefully enough, to deal with the extremely complex and abstract problems that it raises.

At least four major sources of inadequacy can be specified. The first is the restriction implicit in the use of the term "man of letters" itself, when the subject is "the shaping of nineteenth-century literary culture". There is an impossible contradiction here. Certainly the men of letters played their part, but since the great writers, as writers,

are left out, the reader is constantly forced to remind himself that Dickens, for example, really was there, and really had something to do with it. Furthermore, the focus on men of letters forces Mr. Gross to present everything in personal terms, when he claims to be dealing with abstracted trends and movements. Thus, "The Rise of the Reviewer" (Chapter 1) slides, after only two paragraphs, into a seven-page study of Jeffrey, and this is typical of the book as a whole. A very delicate balance needed to be struck here, but all we have, apart from the 'straight' critical study of the most famous of the Edinburgh men, is a vague remark about "the steady advance of industrialism". And that, as Jeffrey himself might have remarked, will never do.

Related to this, Mr. Gross never properly defines what he claims to be his main theme. In particular, he is never fully explicit about what he means by the "Rise and Fall" of the title, nor the "disintegration" of the foreword. Eliot and Leavis are the most important figures at the end of the book. Are we to assume that they represent the "fall" of the man of letters in comparison, say, wih Arnold? To put it mildly, that might seem a doubtful proposition, and in any case Mr. Gross lays particular stress on the enormous influence that they have had. Or are they the last of the still 'risen' men of letters, with the fall coming only post-Leavis? We are not told. Apart from one striking and revealing change of tone—the study of Leavis has an intensity about it which is absent elsewhere—the only progression is chronological, and the apparent theme is lost in the accumulation of detail.

The two remaining sources of inadequacy may be mentioned more briefly. Partly because of the tendency towards personalisation, Mr. Gross does not carefully or systematically follow-through or relate the key themes which he himself raises from time to time. One is the recurrent notion of the elite, which is well-discussed in the section on Arnold, but the significantly different elites conceived of by Carlyle, for example, or by Eliot and Leavis, are not carefully compared. Nor does Mr. Gross follow-through his own interesting comments on the persistent conservatism of the men of letters. These two threads, systematically examined and traced, could have provided the core for a much more serious and unified book than the present one. Similarly, the notion of "popular culture" which Mr. Gross touches on in the sections devoted to Stephen and Gosse. Surely the men of letters' attitudes to 'low' literature are an important aspect of literary culture, yet again the few remarks on this are isolated and unrelated. Charles Knight is mentioned in passing, but Edward Lloyd and G. W. M. Reynolds not at all. The point here is that Knight saw the function of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, in part at least, as a counter to the allegedly pernicious influence of such publishers and novelists—i.e., he had a view of 'the role of literature in public life'—but once more this potentially important theme is allowed to slide away.

Finally, Mr. Gross is all too often vague or offhand at crucial points in his analysis. In the wholly disappointing Epilogue, for instance, we find:

> . . . it is plain that the role of the literary man, and more particularly of the unattached literary man, has changed a great deal in recent years, chiefly as a result of broad social forces which are bound to make themselves felt even more strongly in future. On the whole it has diminished.

The force of "plain" has not been made clear by the rest of the book, but more important, the "broad social forces" turn out to be mere commonplaces. They are, primarily, the rise of science, sociology, and the cinema. As literature itself has become less important in the twentieth century (but was it really so much more so in the nineteenth?), the role of the men of letters has diminished accordingly. Mr. Gross then turns to another factor, the almost total academisation of the literary men themselves, and it is on this that he spends most time. The book winds up with a measured, though very telling, attack on academic Eng. Lit.: down with excessive 'scholarship'; up (not very hopefully) with interdisciplinary studies.

Yet all this tells us very little. If the social role of the men of letters has diminished, then either that role has become socially irrelevant, or it is being played by someone else. A little ambiguously, Mr. Gross favors the second interpretation, but when he finally comes to the point ("what about . . . the men of letters?"), he is four pages from the end. All we get is an all too conventional attack on the mass media, some OK sneering at Fiedler and McLuhan, and a final, despairing gesture towards the New Left. Without any kind of conclusion, the book simply stops.

These seem to me obvious weaknesses, and they would have been pointed out with much more force had the book been reviewed by professional historians. But of course it wasn't, and that is why its enthusiastic reception has been so revealing. Mr. Gross, despite his ambitions, has nothing fresh to say about contemporary culture, and as an historian of cultural change, he is all trees and no wood. He fails to become a modern man of letters in the traditional mould, and ends where he began, a fallen, though struggling, product of the very Eng. Lit. system he so trenchantly attacks. For the inadequacies of the book are the inadequacies that can be seen so often when English department people stray out of the intellectual confines of 'professional' literary criticism and scholarship: personalisation, a reluctance to think or write abstractly even when the subject demands it, overreaching ambition, the false assumption that facts derived from literary history may be applied to society as a whole without further verification, an obsession with 'the words on the page', and a further obsession with F. R. Leavis. Indeed, Mr. Gross' burgeoning reputation as a champion anti-Leavisite shows him more clearly than anything else as a true Eng. Lit. man.

Has the book any relevance to Australia? Historically, I think, none at all. Studies of A. G. Stephens and Vance Palmer already exist, and there is nothing in "The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters" to show how these could be improved. In any case, the method of concentrating on individual men of letters (apart from Stephens and Palmer, who in the past would qualify?) is obviously even less useful in the study of Australian literary culture than it is for English. The guidelines here are still the well-known books by Palmer himself and Russel Ward, to which may be added the chapter by Ian Turner in "The Literature of Australia".

As for the contemporary scene, it could be said that this book highlights a situation that is already

obvious. Academic scholarship and criticism (some of it now devoted to Australian literature) is increasing in quantity, but it has little relevance to anything outside its own professional boundaries. Mr. Gross' sketch of the "rise" of English studies shows how these boundaries came to be so narrow, but at this late stage his tentative suggestions for reform are likely to fall upon deaf ears. Apart from this, Mr. Gross has so little to say that his book will not further the discussion of Australian literary culture in any way. A few people—publishers, booksellers, editors, journalists, teachers, and, of course, creative writers—will continue to demonstrate that a passion for literature is no bar to a creative concern with the problems of social life, but understanding of their role will not be furthered by vague generalisation about science, sociology and the cinema.

TROUBLED SCHOOLS

ERNEST ROE

John McLaren: "Our Troubled Schools" (Cheshire, $3).

"The depressing uniformity of outlook and methods [within Australian schools] is a product of neglect rather than of intent, for the systems are based on administrative, not educational, convenience."

"The problem of general education at the lower secondary levels has been with us for at least twenty years without apparently coming any closer to a solution."

". . . the Australian myth that authority is something to be suspected but not questioned."

". . . a social and cultural environment which is actively hostile to education and learning, and which pays no respect to endeavour but only to material success."

"A major reason that a study of English rarely achieves its potential is that its teaching has not normally been considered a job for experts."

". . . the central problem of all the humanities, which is to encourage the student to recognise that there is rarely if ever any right answer to a human problem, but that this very fact imposes on each individual the obligation to explore all the relevant evidence thoroughly and to make up his own mind on this basis."

". . . whereas centralisation removes responsibility from the individual teacher and headmaster, the seniority system locates it in the hands of men who have done the long crawl up from the classroom through the inspectorial ranks to the remote atmosphere of the administration, and who now have neither the time nor the recent experience to judge the results of their actions in terms of the classroom situation."

"The most important structural change needed in Australian education is the promotion of autonomy for individual schools."

Mr. McLaren is eminently quotable. Followed by "Discuss", any of the foregoing could serve as a topic for an essay in a course on Australian education. "Our Troubled Schools" contains much forthright criticism, together with some constructive suggestions for amelioration. Many of his targets have been long familiar to the student; critics like Freeman Butts and other ungrateful visitors to Australia have scored heavily on our state-independent school divisions and their social implications, on our slavery to external examinations and their effect on syllabuses, on the gagging of teachers, on our centralised bureaucratic control and the sacredness of seniority. But even on these, Mr. McLaren is usually fresh, pithy and to the point.

He also puts at some length the economic and social arguments for equality of opportunity, but is no more successful than his predecessors in proposing measures which sound anything but utopian. In a discussion of the teaching of values and attitudes he comes out strongly against the two-sides-to-every-question approach.

> . . . the teacher who attempts to present impartially a matter in which he is passionately committed is being intellectually dishonest in concealing part of his own analysis of the facts, and professionally irresponsible in not trusting the judgment of his own students. If they are not ready to debate a topic in full, then they are not ready to meet that subject at all.

He is savage about Australian worship of sport, takes a somewhat sceptical view of the Outward Bound movement, and attacks the agreed syllabus of religious education in Victorian schools and the Victorian secondary school health course—all this in a chapter on Religion and Indoctrination.

A similar impression of a rather motley collection of material is given by Teachers, Teaching and Teacher Training, full of interesting items but with the connection between them not always apparent. A frank exposition of the low esteem in which teaching is held is followed by slavery-to-examinations, inadequacies of headmasters and of the seniority system, the values and dangers of standardised texts, teaching programmes and language laboratories, strongly favorable comments on team teaching, with extensive and effective justification for accompanying changes in the role of teacher, and finally disappointingly little on teacher training.

Other chapters deal with school subjects. There is a proposal for involving senior academic scientists in the development of science courses for primary school and a suggestion that practising artists should work in the schools. A wide-ranging discussion of English includes a comment on the "uncertainty of purpose" which afflicts teachers both of English and of science—"whether the subject is being taught for those who are to pursue it as their profession or for the average student". The state of foreign language teaching is described as "catastrophic" and intensive introduction to new languages—full-time instead of three or four periods a week throughout the year—is advocated. The art and music situation is just as bad, and Mr. McLaren links poor art teaching in schools to the low standards of industrial design in Australia. There is a realistic appraisal of the need for schools and teachers to come to terms with the popular media.

The final chapter opens with a critical review of what the Commonwealth is doing in Australian education, and concludes with an outline of Mr. McLaren's "ideal system" of "Commonwealth responsibility for finance and for the standard of material provision, the states for administration,

and the schools and teachers for the actual education of their students." More Commonwealth initiative is needed but the final professional responsibility should lie at the level of the local community.

The author has something valuable to say about many of the problems of Australian education. The main fault of the book is that he has tried to say too much, though this is not so much a criticism of the content as of the structure. Mr. McLaren's points sound most effective when they are isolated as by quotation. But fitting them into a logical, coherent whole was obviously a difficult problem which could not always be successfully solved.

TREES LIKE PEOPLE

JOHN MORRISON

Stan Kelly: "Eucalypts" (Nelson, $12).

I came to the conclusion many years ago that the eucalypts are, for Europeans, a cultivated taste. I know I didn't immediately take to them. With their drooping tufts of leaves at the extremities of raking, naked limbs they looked starved and dying to eyes fresh from the rich greens of my native England. It took me years to accept them, but I wouldn't exchange them now for all the lush oaks and beeches that ever grew. I'm fond of saying that when you've seen one oak, one beech, one elm, you've seen all oaks, all beeches, all elms. Not so with the eucalypts. They're like people, infinitely differentiated, each one an individual, a personality. I like them also because you can see what goes on in them. A flock of birds flies into an English tree, and vanishes. When a mob of king parrots or galahs takes possession of a eucalypt they decorate its stark white frame like living jewels.

Eucalypts, about 450 species comprising ninety-five per cent. of our forest trees, have been an inspiration to our painters, the delight of our photographers, a headache for botanists, and the despair of those nature lovers who like to know what's what.

To the latter group I particularly recommend this collection of 250 water-color paintings of our national trees. Each plate shows flower, fruit, and leaf-arrangement, and there is a descriptive text by two leading botanists, G. M. Chippendale and R. D. Johnston, both of the Forestry and Timber Bureau, Canberra.

Nelsons are to be congratulated on producing a very beautiful book, and for encouraging an artist who has set himself the task of doing for our native trees what Robin Hill is in process of doing so magnificently for our native birds. "I want to paint them all," Stan Kelly told me as long ago as 1950, soon after publication of his first collection, "Forty Australian Eucalypts".

May he live long!

HARVEST OF STORIES

JOHN McLAREN

Dal Stivens: "Selected Stories, 1936-1968" (Angus and Robertson, $3.25).

W. N. Scott: "Some People" (Jacaranda, $3.50).

Frank Dalby Davison: "The Road to Yesterday" (Angus and Robertson, $1.25).

Frank Moorhouse: "Futility and Other Animals," a discontinuous narrative (Gareth Powell Associates, $3.80).

Lyndall Hadow: "Full Cycle and other Stories" (Collins, $3.50).

Manning Clark: "Disquiet and other Stories" (Angus and Robertson, $3.50).

The yarn or tall story is one of the few forms of folk literature still enjoying authentic life. Within its normal environment of the pub and the party it rarely attains any artistic heights, but the tradition is still lively enough to provide a source for two writers who have published collections of their short stories during the past year.

Of the two, Dal Stivens has the greater verbal facility. He picks up the rhythms of Australian speech and, paradoxically, sharpens them so that his yarns move with the rapidity of a comedian's patter without losing the naturally laconic and deadpan style of delivery. In keeping with the prose style, the substance of the stories emphasises the striking incident, which achieves credibility only because of the manner of the telling.

The tall stories in W. N. Scott's collection, on the other hand, move with the slower pace of the life they describe. Scott's interest is more in the people than the events, and from behind the fiction of the incidents emerges a true character of the participants. This same quality appears in the more conventionally realistic stories, which provide a gallery of personalities from outback and coastal Queensland. Their interest, however, is more than that of the traveller's tale, for Scott puts himself inside the skin of his varied types as he explores some of the more individual manifestations of human possibility.

Dal Stivens' more serious stories share with his yarns the interest in what happens rather than who it happens to. This does not mean that his characters are unconvincing, but that the exploration of character is not a part of his purpose. Rather, he is saying that these are the sorts of things which happen to a man in his journey through life.

Frank Dalby Davison's stories, collected in "The Road to Yesterday", provide a much more leisurely investigation of the human condition. He covers a variety of people and circumstance, but his interest is in using the particular episode as a reflection on the central question of what life is about. As a consequence his stories provide the link which otherwise might seem to be missing between the natural history concerns of "Manshy" or "Dusty" and the apparently quite different interests of the monumental "White Thorntree". With the stories as a guide, we can see that his constant endeavor has been to capture the whole of the individual life in its social and natural context. This tends to lead him to a retrospective stance, and so gives a nostalgic overtone to his work, which suggests that man rarely achieves the harmony he seeks. This, however, does not lead Davison to any glib nihilism. Just as Lawson found in mateship a refuge from the disappointments of life, so Davi-

son's stories assert the final value of human decency in personal relationships.

This removes him by a generation and a world from Frank Moorhouse, whose stories are written in the brittle, disjointed urban style which reflects the style of his characters' lives. His characters are so obsessed with the modern liberal values of frankness to each other and honesty to themselves that they finish up clothed in their handmade cocoons of introspection and obsession. At heart, despite their honesty and their freedom, they fail to trust in life.

Very different again is the work of Lyndall Hadow, who is content to find any meaning in life by exploring the world around her, in this case mainly in Western Australia, with the odd excursion to war-time Melbourne. She does not avoid the modern urban neurosis, but her interest is in the simple rather than the complex, the peasant woman and the squattocratic relict rather than the playboy and the bohemian. Her subject, however, is not so much the satisfaction found in the past as the necessity of a new generation finding its own way.

Finally, Manning Clark's "Disquiet and other Stories" introduces a metaphysical note which is absent from the strongly temporal tone of the other writers. Clark is not so much interested in what happens as in why it happens, and what sort of world it is where such cruelties and disappointments can happen. He finds little faith in God but even less in man. Yet these concerns are not completely fictionalised, so that we are often left with the author's musing on events instead of the events themselves. The stories raise questions about the truth which lies behind them, instead of convincing us that they are the truth. Many seem to be autobiographical, and they inspire the hope that Clark may drop his fictional disguise and set about a complete autobiography. In the meantime, they provide us with notes towards this future work.

THE FAMINE THAT WASN'T

NEVILLE MAXWELL

Wendy and Allan Scarfe: "Tiger on a Rein: Report on the Bihar Famine" (Chapman, $5.70). Nicholas Wollaston: "Pharaoh's Chicken" (Hodder and Stoughton, $3.90).

The story of the Bihar famine of 1967 is one of human suffering on a vast scale, involving tens of millions of people; it is a story of short-sightedness, callousness and smug arrogance, also on a large scale; but nevertheless it is a success story. For in spite of two successive monsoon failures in a desperately poor area of India, true famine was averted. The mass migrations, the dead on city streets, the desolated villages, the death toll of millions that marked the Bengal famine of the early 1940s and the long count of Indian famines before that, were not experienced in 1967. The starving millions of poor peasants in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh were kept alive—just. Something of how this was done is told by the Scarfes in a very readable and often sharply perceptive book.

The Scarfes had had previous experience in this part of India, and told the story of their work in a village there in "A Mouthful of Petals" (Heineman, 1967). In 1967 Wendy Scarfe returned to observe and write about the great Indian and international rescue operation that staved off the final crunch of famine. Mrs. Scarfe is a compassionate and clear-eyed observer, and she writes vividly. (The book was co-authored, but as it is told in the first person, and only Mrs. Scarfe was in India on this occasion, it is simpler to refer to her singly as the author.) The searing hopelessness and fear of those months of spring and summer in Bihar, with the fields dead and the wells going dry, come through strongly in her account. So do the patience and determination of the many voluntary workers, Indian as well as foreign, who came to the famine-threatened area to help: to get the villagers to dig wells, to distribute what food there was, and get more in; to help where possible with medicine, or vitamin pills.

Mrs. Scarfe sees, too, that famine is a social rather than an economic disease. Famine, she says, "is not only of the seasons: famine is of the mind and spirit of man. It is the culmination of man's social failure that the poor become victims of the elements as well as of their fellows". (The point is scathingly made in the 1944 White Paper on the Bengal famine, the classic anatomy of famine in India.) Putting it another way, famine is a vertical phenomenon, not horizontal. I remember coming back to Delhi from a tour of the stricken area in early spring 1967 and meeting an Indian who was complaining bitterly that the press, domestic and foreign, was grossly exaggerating the situation in Bihar. He had returned from a tour through some of the same parts of Bihar as I had just seen, and maintained strenuously that in the villages he had visited the position of the peasants, though straitened, was not dangerous. Further discussion resolved the contradiction of impressions. He was a salesman for fertiliser, and his business had been with the most prosperous of the rich peasants; in their quarters of the villages the situation was just as he had described it, straitened but not dangerous—they might get hungry as the summer wore on, but no-one was going to starve. But I had walked through the prosperous parts of the villages to the wretched hamlets on the fringe, where the landless (and Untouchable) live, and that was where the present misery and the dread of the immediate future was to be found.

There is always food in an Indian famine area, indeed often food to spare—but it is not spared, and it is not shared, and the poorest of the village hierarchy die in want of it.

Mrs. Scarfe appreciates this, but her compassion is sharper than her indignation. The latter, indeed, seems to be more readily aroused by foreign correspondents, one of her betes noires, than by the Indians whose callousness she recalls. (One visiting foreign correspondent made the mistake of asking Mrs. Scarfe whether she thought "the sacred cows had much effect on the poverty of the Indian peasant", and the context in which she recalls it suggests that she thought the question inane. But the refusal to butcher cattle does have a most destructive effect on the rural economy, and thus on the poverty of the Indian peasant.) J. P. Narayan, India's man for all seasons, sees more clearly than Mrs. Scarfe the inhumanity of his own society, but in her dialogues with him she often seems to

shy away from his judgments. Sometimes she seems to be angling to elicit his condemnation of the journalists who wrote about the callousness which Indian society as a whole showed to the Bihar famine: he does not bite, no doubt because he realises that the headline which she says "enraged and ashamed" her—INDIANS JUST DON'T CARE—was far nearer the truth than her own view.

But Mrs. Scarfe is writing about the rescue operation, the leashing of the tiger, and her account of that is just and moving. For appreciation of the social, even the moral background, of the Bihar famine, the novel "Pharaoh's Chicken" is outstanding: it is certainly one of the best novels written about India in recent years. Nicholas Wollaston went to India to report the famine for the Sunday Times and stayed on to write his novel. His central character is a young Englishman, who like Mrs. Scarfe, goes to India to help (though for rather muddled reasons), and "Pharaoh's Chicken" is the story of his moral destruction—or education, which may be the same thing. I think anyone interested in India should read this novel. Certainly Mrs. Scarfe should.

ILLUSION AND REALITY

J. K. EWERS

Osmar White: "Under the Iron Rainbow" (Heinemann, $5.95).
Vincent Serventy: "Australia's National Parks" (Angus & Robertson, $8.50).

Osmar White's book might have had far more validity if he had not confused his concepts. The confusion is hinted at in its sub-title, "Northwest Australia Today", and brought right out into the open in a sentence like this on p. 79: "One of the most impressive settlements in the whole of the North West is run by priests, monks and nuns of the Benedictine Order at Kalumburu in the North Kimberley . . ." Viewed in a geographical sense, with reference to the continent as a whole, Kimberley is in the North West. But considered climatically and ecologically, it is not and never will be. Those who know the two areas of Western Australia know that the true North West lies somewhere between Carnarvon and Broome, and that Kimberley lies north of Broome. The one shades imperceptibly into the other, but their basic qualities are different. It is impossible to discuss the present conditions or the future prospects of these areas as if they were one and the same.

Because of this confusion, I shall refer to them separately, in the one case as the true North West and in the other as Kimberley. If for a moment we look at the title, we have to admit that it is only the true North West that lies under the iron rainbow. Kimberley does not, except in the islands of Yampi Sound. It may do so at some future time if workable desposits of haematite are found on the mainland, and it may, if some predictions come true, find itself under a bauxite rainbow. But not yet.

Having said this, let us examine what Osmar White is getting at. Of the true North West he says (a) that the present large-scale extraction of iron ore will not, as some politicians seem to wish us to believe, lead to a great increase of population there, and (b) that pastoralists over the past hundred years have impoverished the country by overstocking and unscientific management. Both these statements are true, and this would have been a far more valuable book if Mr. White had devoted it to demonstrating their truth. Instead, he lumps Kimberley in with it. Mining and its effect on population do not affect Kimberley, though they may in the future. The Ord River Scheme, an example of what may be done on an extended scale (there are several other similar sites), suggests the possibility of an expanding economy for Kimberley, an economy which will forever be denied the true North West.

The true North West is an economic question mark. It lies between the winter rainfall system of the south and the summer monsoonal rainfall of the north. Sometimes, if it's lucky, it gets a bit of both. Sometimes it misses out on both. It may cop tempestuous winds and rains from wandering cyclones, but these are chancy things. True Nor-Westers don't speak of the coming of the "Wet". Kimberley-ites do.

I have been through the true North West three times—in the summer of 1931-32 and in the winter and spring of 1948 and 1962, the latter just before the iron boom began. Over a period of thirty years it seems to me to have changed only for the worse. Accepting the fact that its pastoral possibilities have deteriorated, is it then wrong to make use of its vast deposits of iron ore? Osmar White criticises the comparatively small returns to the State government in the way of royalties and the comparatively large proportion of profits going overseas. These are valid points. Against these, of course, one must set the enormous improvement of our overseas financial balance in spite of reduced income from wheat and wool, and the great pile of dollars the Commonwealth government rakes in each year by way of taxation from the operating companies.

What impresses me most is that so far man's know-how seems to have got the better of the jinx that hitherto bedevilled the true North West. It is a country where man's efforts in the past have been dwarfed by nature's uncompromising harshness. I have photos of the little, light-weight, unballasted railway line that used to run 114 miles from Marble Bar to Port Hedland (the trains took all day to do it) twisted like a corkscrew by the Coongan River in flood. I've seen pastoralists reduced to despair by no rain for seven years. Now, when a cyclone strikes, I wait for the jinx to do its stuff. But all it's managed so far are a couple of derailments, and in a few days the mile-long ore trains are running again. The same with the giant masts at the Exmouth communications centre. Unlike the fragile windmills on stations and the all-steel telegraph poles, they continue to stand upright against winds of 150 miles an hour. This successful challenging of the jinx could perhaps extend in other unpredictable ways.

The second half of this book is a series of sketches, mainly in Kimberley, showing with bitter irony the kind of no-hoper the country fosters. They're very readable. Indeed, the whole book is readable, but it tells only part of the story, confusing the issues by its own confusion of concepts.

Vincent Serventy's very handsome "Australia's National Parks" is a guide to those areas set apart to preserve our natural flora and fauna. He has selected 181 of these although some of them, it seems, are not altogether immune to the inroads of mineral exploitation.

Serventy is one of our most active and eloquent conservationists, but here he contents himself with a brief introductory blast at the devastators. Interpersed with the letterpress are many pages of excellent photographs, both in color and in black and white.

Before any detailed description of the national parks of each State, there are eight maps—one for each of the six States, one for the Northern Territory, and one of the water-park of the Great Barrier Reef. Locations are shown by numbers but not by areas, which would have no doubt been a problem in the case of the smaller ones. For ease of reference, each map might have immediately preceded the letterpress it is intended to illustrate.

It is a pleasure to report that both these books are printed in Australia and not in Hong Kong.

CORNERS IN CANS

MICHAEL DUGAN

Shelton Lea: "Corners in Cans" (Still Garth Publications, $1.05).

"Corners in Cans" is Shelton Lea's first book and contains fifteen of his poems. It is an uneven book, giving the impression that it contains a few juvenalia that might have been better left unpublished in book form. A couple of the poems are of a standard one would expect to find in a high school magazine, but in spite of this Lea has considerable lyrical and descriptive abilities which occasionally produce some very successful images, as in poem number 14:

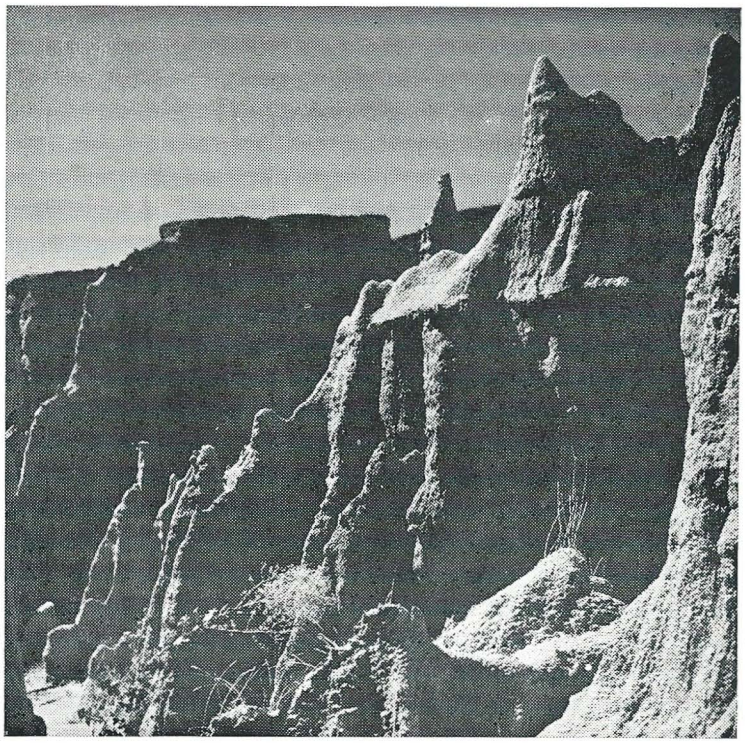
the wind has played its symphony
with trees
and sight has watched the mountains
long explosions
on the sky . . .

Through some of the poems runs a bubbling sense of fun which is one of the most engaging qualities of Lea's poetry. Poem number 12 contains some of the best lines:

but under the twilight
there, next to the tree
where patches of light fall on the book
on his knees
sits the poet in me, preening his nostrils
to the fine country air
he finds in the 'park' called
the City Square
frantically writing of his brother man's big toe
and the imprint it makes in the fine snow of
his mind . . .

In years to come Shelton Lea may regret the publication of some of the poems in "Corners in Cans". Others, in spite of the poet's youth, show considerable achievement. I shall look forward to his second book.

Published by S. Murray-Smith, Mount Eliza, Victoria; and printed by "Richmond Chronicle," 5 Shakespeare Street, Richmond, Vic., 3121.



"The damage is done!"

Erosion is the result of bad land management, lack of interest and often just plain ignorance. Had this land received the attention it requires and indeed, deserves, it may have produced vital products for our home market or for export. But instead — ugliness! It is essential if Australia is to continue with its economic growth and success that senseless wastage of land be stopped.

You too can help by joining the Australian Conservation Foundation.

For further information write to the Australian Conservation Foundation,
191 Royal Parade,
Parkville, 3052.

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