

53 Overland

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poetry

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RETORTING TO AN IMPROBABLE

BEAST *Ronald Conway*

THE MELBOURNE FILM FESTIVAL *Bernard Rechter*

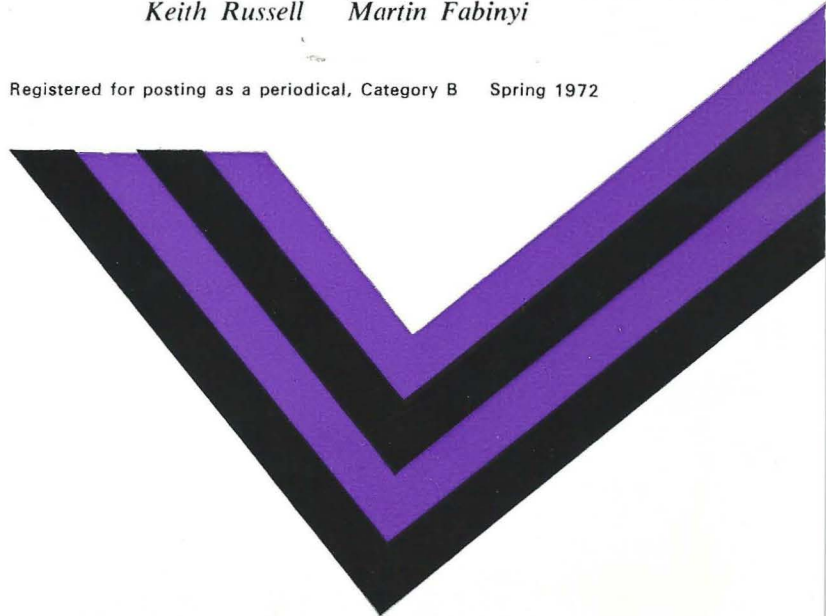
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A WAKER AND DREAMER *Christina Stead*

BATTLING IN AUSTRALIA *T. W. Corbett*

POETRY *Dorothy Hewett* *Andrew Burke* *Grahame Pitt*
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Registered for posting as a periodical, Category B Spring 1972



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Cover design by Vane Lindesay. John Kryzwokulski designed the cover for our last issue. We apologise for omitting the credit.

Overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

Spring 1972

53

Overland is a quarterly literary magazine which tries to appear every three months. The subscription rate is two dollars a year (four issues); for students and Nuiginians the subscription is one dollar. Manuscripts are welcomed, but should have a stamped, addressed envelope for return. *Overland* receives assistance from the Commonwealth Literary Fund, which insists that we state *minimum* fees: so, let us say ten dollars for a story or feature and five dollars for a poem or book review. We normally pay far more than this.

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A Tender Age for Love

LAURENCE COLLINSON

*In memory of the Barjai clique's most
tantalising, enchanting, and exasperating girl,
Patricia O'Rourke*

I keep trying to recollect whether or not Jak had a beard. It's possible that he had, for he was determined to be a complete bohemian, and a beard, although commonplace today, in Brisbane in 1944 would certainly have been a squalid symbol of his seriousness as an artist and of his rejection of middle-class values. The only beards to be seen were those in newsreels of soldiers in hospitals or at the front — except a suave beard owned by a newspaper theatre critic. We, the cultured young of the city, regarded this journalist's beard as an impertinent disguise to deceive both camps — the avant-garde and the philistines.

On the other hand, it's just as possible that what I seem to remember as Jak's beard was merely his failure to shave regularly. This too would have been an indication of his bohemian status. Whichever was the case, I remember *all* his hair as having a reddish and, to me, unpleasant tinge. Though eighteen (my own age) he was not yet free of adolescent acne, which was emphasized on his sunburned face by his ginger hair; I found the earth redness of his complexion crude against the pallor of his long jagged body. He was, indeed, physically repulsive to me. And as I was then as plain as I am now, as round shouldered, and as reticent, I was surprised that we became lovers. On my side, and I suppose on his, there was the urgency of the sexual impulse. Perhaps also the facts that I shaved daily, always wore clean and austere clothes, and yet claimed to be a poet, may have held some attraction for him.

He had been John Barkar. The John of course had early developed into Jack; it was only after he had been taken up by our tiny tribe of intellectuals that he became the much more fascinating Jak. He began to sign his paintings Jak —

nothing else, no surname — an affectation we decided to admire.

I first met him when he came along to one of the occasional meetings of our group. None of us had heard of or known him before: he simply appeared; and it was enough for us that he told us he was an artist and that he wore sandals and a gaudy shirt. In addition, he looked none too clean — the tones of his skin rather than lack of water being responsible — which I suppose some of us (not me) considered creditable. He had read of our meetings in our "literary and artistic youth" magazine, which he had picked up in a bookshop. He frequently browsed in bookshops, he told us, which in itself was behavior sufficient to endear him to us. We accepted him at once and wholeheartedly. Perhaps also he appealed to our idealism and helped to lull our consciences: we all professed socialism and we were all of the middle class; Jak came from a poor family and let us know it whenever the opportunity arose; we were glad to be reminded. He was from a small farm outside Brisbane; his father had deserted the family, and his mother and his grandfather made a lean living out of vegetables and fruit. We were only too happy to waive his "subscription", and to pay for him (collectively) whenever we went on an outing or for a snack. He had at that time been studying at a local art school for a few months; where he obtained the money from to pay his fees, or to pay his train fares into town, or even to supply himself with the peppermints he was continually sucking, we never discovered. He never offered information of this kind, and we were all much too well-mannered to question him on such a personal matter, though we discussed it among ourselves.

There were a dozen or so of us in the group.

None of us at the time was much over twenty; the youngest, Erica Peters, was sixteen, and still a day-girl at one of Brisbane's more fashionable convents, the walls of which had not, we knew, been able to preserve her virtue. Erica and I had periods of mutual detestation, but usually we were close friends. I knew her better than her lovers (who generally lasted only a couple of nights, or a few weeks at most) for we used to confide in each other about our affairs or lack of them and to exhibit much sympathy for each other's emotional or familial problems.

Erica was the first to be hospitable toward Jak. One Sunday afternoon, when I was talking to her in a corner of the room we hired for our meetings, she beckoned him over to her. To say merely that she smiled at him is not enough. Erica's smile was a smile of absolute purity and absolute sincerity. To be smiled at by her was to know that this was a girl to whom you were the most important person in the world. And her voice, low and soft, was the voice of absolute conviction. But the most extraordinary fact about her was that when she smiled at you in this way, and spoke to you in this way, she meant it. She was gullible. She trusted people until, as was inevitable, they could not live up to her trust (some of course never intended to), and then she hated them. She smiled still, and she spoke low, but her smile was tainted with bitterness and her voice with irony.

She smiled at Jak. "I'm giving a party next week," she announced in the extreme syllables of her elocution teacher. "Perhaps you would like to come?"

"I'd adore to," said Jak, who had already acquired our not very original idiom in the few weeks he had been with us. "Is it your birthday or something?"

"Well, yes," she confessed hesitantly. "It is, as a matter of fact. But I'll be horribly angry if anyone brings a present."

Not half as angry, I knew, as she would be if any of us failed to bring a present.

Erica's family was wealthy. She lived with her parents at Hamilton, a rich riverside suburb, in an old wooden house on Queensland stilts. It had wide verandahs all round and a neglected appearance, but it was set in huge grounds and was tremendously comfortable. We were all envious of the freedom she was allowed. She had a room of her own (apart from her bedroom) in which to entertain; even so, she contrived to hold her biggest parties when her parents were away ozoning at Caloundra or recuperating at Lamington or being graceful at some other resort frequented by fastidious Brisbanites. Her parents were absent on her birthday night, so there were the whole house and grounds for us to utilize.

Erica was acting the hostess when I arrived. Into every role she performed, whether on or off the amateur stage, Erica injected an intensity rather stronger than was needed. In the role of hostess she welcomed everyone regally, she was hospitable to excess (she could afford to be, since her father paid for the food and drink), and she did her utmost to ensure that nobody was bored, for long at any rate, even if it meant that she had to bore herself in the bored one's company. I must admit, though, that few of Erica's friends were boring: the mere fact that she knew them and had thought enough of them to invite them to her party invested them with a glamor that would have seemed absurd if they had been confronted in their everyday environment the morning before or the morning after. Despite what I have said, it should not be thought that Erica's parties were invariably, or even often,

orgies. Such improprieties as took place were conducted privately, in rooms away from the main gathering; or, more frequently, two people *met* at Erica's home, and in the relaxation afforded by alcohol and lack of parental supervision developed a relationship that reached its culmination elsewhere.

Is it the dishonesty of nostalgia that causes me to remember Erica's parties with such affection? For, to be truthful, I can remember nothing *specific*. At the time, I suppose, they might have been dull, even unpleasant. But if they were, they are no longer. Certainly, whatever was wretched about this particular party no longer survives in my mind: the one recollected event is of Erica, Jak, Madonna Quinn, and me making a four-some for an extremely early breakfast after everyone else had gone home. We had coffee, hot tinned asparagus with melted butter, and warmed-up oyster savories. In having such food available, Erica demonstrated not only her father's largesse, but also his cunning, for American troops were in town, and the population's larder was, if not bare, distressingly plain. Asparagus and oysters were luxuries.

At Erica's, such early morning explorations of life as this were splendid and stimulating. We engaged in philosophical dialogue that usually left at least one participant aware that his thoughts were original and significant. We ate and drank — whisky as well as coffee — and talked. Madonna, I imagine, did most of the talking.

Perhaps I should offer some information about Madonna, whom we had met only that afternoon. She was a famous person. She had written a novel that the critics were describing as "delicate" and "sensitive" and "touchingly innocent". We had all read it: it was about the childhood of a girl in Tasmania. We all thought it was delicate and sensitive and touchingly innocent. I had even gone so far as to write a note to the author in Hobart to tell her how impressed my friends and I had been with her book. I had expected, at best, a brief letter of thanks; instead, a telegram, signed Madonna Quinn, had arrived the previous afternoon (less than a week after I had written) to say that she was arriving in Brisbane the following day. I had immediately phoned Erica, who agreed to meet me at the station — I felt too nervous to tackle such a celebrity on my own.

We had no idea what Madonna looked like, beyond knowing that she was a woman in her early twenties, but we did not think we would

have much trouble in recognising her. The majority of rail travellers in those days were members of the armed services. Most of the others would be people with some sort of priority for travel: business men; wives, mothers, and children of servicemen. We pictured Madonna as demure, plainly dressed — possibly even dowdy, not at all pretty but with an inner glow that would render her more beautiful than any glamorous film star.

We waited on the interstate platform. We saw no one emerge from the train who approximated in any way our preconceptions. The crowd thinned until there was only one other female on the platform apart from Erica. It seemed to us so impossible that she could be Madonna that once we had seen her we did not consider her again. She was surrounded by half a dozen American soldiers who, to judge from their manner, seemed on the friendliest terms with her. They were laughing and joking and kissing her; they looked not unlike a family of puppies gambolling around their mistress. We could not help being curious about this girl: she had a pointed and ugly face that was nevertheless attractive, and her red natural hair hung way down beyond her shoulders. Most extraordinary was her costume made of pink silk: a low-cut blouse tied at the waist to leave a bare midriff; what can only be described as pantaloons — a type of trousers that billowed with the breeze and at every movement of her legs; and a pair of gold sandals. If we had not been so anxious about Madonna we would have shifted nearer for closer observation. We waited another ten minutes. It seemed clear by this time that either Madonna had missed the train or I had mistaken the time. I took out the telegram and read it again, but I could not see that I had made an error. The girl in the pantaloons was now left with only one soldier whom she was, as far as we could judge, ordering to leave. She made laughing gestures directed at the exit, but he seemed intent on staying; finally, after a long movie-style kiss that seemed somehow to originate in pride rather than pleasure, he departed. Excluding the railway attendants, there were now only three of us left on the platform: Erica, myself, and the girl. She stared at us and we stared at her. It can't be, I was thinking; but even as I was about to urge Erica to the exit, the pantaloons set sail toward us. We hesitated; if Erica had made just one slight movement I know we both would have fled. I don't know why we would have fled; perhaps the difference between the illusion and the reality was so great that it became alarming. Yet had we been at all pre-

pared we would have met Madonna with aplomb. We would have been proud to receive her: it would have been a wonderful event, demonstrating to all our acquaintance that we held up no barriers of any sort to true friendship, that we were tolerant to an exceptional degree.

We smiled because she smiled at us. As she spoke I noticed that she wore no cosmetics, not even lipstick; nor were her fingernails or toenails painted. She had done nothing to assist nature, which had not been particularly benevolent toward her. Her hair was now seen to be coarse and dirty and her face grimy. She appeared to me unhealthy — it didn't occur to me then that the overlong train journey may have been responsible for her looks; and, indeed, later, when she had showered and rested, she didn't look much improved.

"Are you Larry Simms?" she asked in a high, childish voice.

She ignored Erica's suggestion that she book in at an hotel and insisted that we help her find a room. There were a number of stipulations: it must be large, it must be cheap, it must have easy access to the city — all perfectly ordinary requirements that nevertheless to our ears took on a sinister significance. We had had no experience in this sort of search, but it turned out that our aid was unnecessary; she was, despite a deliberately infantile exterior, a most capable person; we were led to assume that it was our company rather than our help that she wanted. Finding a taxi, for instance. In wartime Brisbane it was not always easy to obtain one. Erica and I were resigned to taking a tram back to town — but Madonna merely stepped into the roadway and looked around and two taxis drew up at once. Taxi drivers instinctively understood that here was a woman who would tip them well. She sat in front with the driver and talked to him softly, with the result that the very first "boarding house" to which he took us turned out to be satisfactory. I helped Madonna take in her suitcases and I overheard her telling the proprietor that she needed a lot of space for all her dolls. It seemed to me likely that this was some kind of double-talk comprehensible only to those connected with Madonna's profession, but, oddly enough, when I was once invited to a small party in her room, there were dolls everywhere — tiny kewpies and large expensive sleeping dolls that said mama, Mickey Mouses and Donald Ducks, giraffes and elephants, teddy bears, koalas, and kangaroos. The pride of her collection, which she demonstrated with glee, was an American doll that sat

on a chamber-pot and wee-weed (to use her own expression). She displayed it often during the evening and burst into girlish laughter whenever it performed.

So there we were, at Erica's party, the four of us, together for the first time. The last time, also, though none of us knew it.

I was, at that period, doing a university course which I never completed. All I can remember of it is the philosophy lecturer, a woman of about forty, explaining hesitantly to a mixed group of students that, for the ancient Greeks, homosexuality had been more or less a way of life, and that, no matter how repulsive the idea must be to people of this century, we just had to accept that fact about the Greeks if we were to gain any understanding of their philosophy.

I had pretensions to being an artist. A couple of years previously, having failed my matriculation exam — deliberately in a sense, as I expected to become a sixteen-year-old literary celebrity at any moment — I had spent a year studying painting.

It was at Erica's party that Jak offered to pose for me; or perhaps I asked him to. He had arrived carrying a small messy bunch of wildflowers that, to judge by their appearance and their wrapping of greaseproof paper, he had picked himself; I could not imagine that they would enthral Erica, who had a sophisticated taste that we all admired. She was in the kitchen and had not yet noticed Jak's arrival, so I went over to him and, after some preliminary conversation, offered, as tactfully as I could, to "lend" him some money to buy chocolates at the corner shop. He refused, though not with any appearance of pride. He said that he was sure that Erica would appreciate his gift — after all, it was the thought that mattered, wasn't it? To my surprise he was correct, though I thought I observed a scornful expression on her lips when he drew the flowers from behind his back to present to her in a stagey courtier manner. Nevertheless she gave him an exquisite smile and remarked, to my amazement, that she loved simplicity in all things.

It was just before Erica came back into the room that Jak arranged his modelling schedule with me. I had been complaining of my failure to get in enough life drawing, so perhaps he was showing his gratitude at my offer of money. Or perhaps there were other motives prompting our association that we did not fully care to admit, even to ourselves. His angled, almost cubist face, and his tall, drifting body offered a good excuse

to a would-be artist. We sought for times not occupied by either his art classes or my lectures, and we worked out that Monday and Thursday mornings, from about nine to noon, would be excellent for both of us. To add to our satisfaction — indeed, to make the occasions possible at all — my father was away on one of his selling trips and had taken my mother with him: I had the flat to myself for three weeks or so.

On the morning of Jak's first visit, a few days after Erica's party, I woke up feeling extraordinarily tired and simply could not, I told myself, get out of bed. At a quarter to nine the doorbell rang. I put my dressing gown on over my pyjamas and let Jak in, making much ado about my state of exhaustion. He had had no breakfast either, so I made tea and toast. Where Jak had come from, whether he had caught an early train or slept in the city, or why he had not eaten, I courteously did not enquire. My bedroom was the front room of our claustrophobic flat (situated, expensively enough, in one of the "better" inner suburbs), and had the best light, so it was natural for us to commence work there. I posed Jak in my only armchair and sat on the bed with my sketching materials. After a few minutes it seemed more comfortable for me to put my legs up on the bed and to prop myself up with pillows. Jak was holding himself stiffly.

"Just relax," I told him.

He loosened his body but still looked uncomfortable. He always looked uncomfortable, whatever his position; I thought it must have had something to do with his bone structure.

"If you wouldn't mind undoing your collar . . ." I suggested.

"Shall I take off my shirt?" he asked. "Then you can get in my chest, as well."

I hesitated, wondering if he meant this genuinely, or whether it was a tactical move. I was finding it increasingly difficult to control my pencil.

He removed his shirt; he wore no undervest. My line was not at all firm (though it never really was).

Another ten minutes passed. I tried to concentrate on my drawing.

"I think I'll strip," he said. He did not ask if I wanted him to. Under his trousers he wore a florid pair of swimming shorts. He never wore underpants, I was to discover; only swimming shorts. He took them off and there was no more pretence that I was attempting his portrait.

For the next few weeks, Jak "posed" for me regularly — but only on Monday and Thursday

mornings, despite my pleas that other times might be more sensible. When my parents returned we necessarily had to change the hours. He would take time off from the tech. in the mornings, or I would skip a lecture in the afternoons, and we would catch a bus to one of the outer suburbs and hike into the green and concealing bush. There were pleasant places to go — some of them with streams of clear water in which we could splash around. He never spoke of the future, or the past; only of his lessons at the tech., his new paintings, his opinions of his teachers' competence, and other more or less impersonal topics. Never of his feelings, or his ambitions. And he never gossiped — which was unusual in our circle, for we were all consumed with a tremendous passion to know our own and each other's souls, though we would never have expressed it in such a way. The dialogues between Jak and me were never easy — I have always been a poor conversationalist — but he did not seem to mind. If his classes or my lectures seemed on occasion too critical to miss, he would come over to my place for dinner (my mother was amazingly tolerant of my friends) or in the evening; and later we would say we were going for a walk, or visiting, or to the cinema, and disappear. It would never have occurred to my mother to suspect anything out of the ordinary, let alone outside the law; and if my father had any misgivings, he never voiced them. Except at night, we always commenced our assignments with Jak posing and me sketching, which perhaps was a method of offering to pay for our pleasures. Our consciences — mine, at any rate — were still vestigially conventional. Needless to say, I never finished the portrait. I doubt if I even have a photograph of Jak after all these years.

I kept our affair secret, not merely because there was only Erica to whom I would have wanted to confide it, but also because Jak asked me not to talk about it with anyone. This would have been difficult had I been in love with him. When one is in love one wants to issue a proclamation. But, as I have already mentioned, Jak was physically repulsive to me (and attractive at the same time, if you can understand the contradiction); the chief advantage of our relationship was that, my body finding relief, my mind was left free for intelligent activity. Also, in a desert, one is content to discover even sullied water. And there is no little delight in being aware of a fact that nobody else knows, as long as one can share it with at least one other person. Had any other group members found out, the subject

would have been discussed, as they say, interminably: our suitability for each other, the effect of the affair on our characters, its effect on our creative work, its possible duration. There would have been jokes and gossip and congratulations and little furtive jealousies and alarms. So life went on much as usual for the next three or four months; the only difference, and one that I did not think trivial, being that I felt happier in myself.

Then one evening, about six o'clock, Erica phoned me.

"You must come immediately," she begged.

"What's the matter?"

"I can't tell you over the phone," she said.

Then, in a loud whisper: "I'm in a public place."

"I understand," I said, although I did not. There must have been an echo of Erica's perturbation in my voice, for my parents were watching curiously. I grinned at the receiver, as if this might convince them that there was nothing wrong. I asked where she was. "I'll be there in twenty minutes."

In a quick, garbled voice Erica said: "Jak is going to commit suicide."

"What?" I had heard what she had said, but it seemed to require the confirmation of repetition.

"I can't say it again," she said. "Hurry!"

My mother was naturally annoyed at my leaving just as dinner was being served, but I muttered something about important circumstances, and fled. My father said nothing. (They were both used by now to the peculiar behavior of young people.)

The coffee lounge where Erica was waiting was a small square basement lit mainly by table lamps covered in red satin; it would possibly have made a suitable dark room for a photographer. There were so few patrons, however, that I had no difficulty in finding her: she was laughing, and her long smooth hair shimmered with scarlet reflections. I had not known whether Jak was with her, but there he sat, an animated crag protruding above the low tables and chairs. I drew a chair up to their table and looked and listened but could detect nothing odd about their conversation or their behavior: it may have been my imagination that Erica's smile seemed, for once, rather forced, and that the theatrical quality of her accents was a trifle emphatic. They had apparently been discussing the army, for Jak was complaining that he had not been called up because of a tubercular infection in childhood.

Erica was aghast that any friend of hers should even consider going into the forces. "How can any decent, intelligent person be anything but a conscientious objector?" she wanted to know.

"Being a conscientious objector requires great moral courage," I offered.

"So does going into battle," Jak said.

As I had been rejected for military service because of my asthma, the argument had little personal relevance. I knew only that I was appalled by all aspects of militarism.

"But how could you deliberately attempt to kill another human being?" I demanded. "Someone perhaps of your own age — or a man with a wife and children, who loves life just as much as you do."

"It would be me or him," Jak said, "and it wouldn't matter much to me which."

"You don't mean that, Jak," Erica said sternly.

"I do," he insisted.

He rose and excused himself for a few minutes. I presumed he was going to the city hall toilets, a few minutes away. I was glad to have the opportunity of being alone with Erica; I thought later that he may have left us on purpose, so that Erica could inform me of the situation at the moment.

"Jak," she called as he was leaving. There was a strange note of appeal in her voice.

He looked back and, as far as I could tell in the semi-darkness, grinned, shook his head, and left.

Erica moved her chair closer to mine and said in an undertone: "O Larry, thank God you've arrived. I'm absolutely frantic. Jak's going to commit suicide."

"Yes," I said. "How do you know?"

"He says so."

"He's joking."

"He keeps on saying it, and laughing every time. He means it. I know he does."

"Why?"

"He won't tell me. He just keeps saying that by morning he'll be dead, and he laughs this awful laugh. It's so exasperating!"

"Has he been drinking?"

"No. He seems just the same as always. That's what's so horrible about it."

"I'm sure he's just putting on an act," I said. I needed to convince myself; I had never known Jak "put on an act". He had seemed to me incapable of the dramatics in which many of our group indulged.

Yet he had phoned Erica that evening to ask her urgently to meet him, and when they met

he had revealed his intention. That indicated at least some capacity for exhibitionism. Nor had he objected when she asked him if he would mind if I joined them — in fact, he said, he had been going to make the same suggestion. An audience of even two was an audience; had he been really serious about suicide, would he not just have gone ahead and *acted* rather than prolonged the incident to this absurd length? I attempted to reassure Erica.

"I don't know," she said after I had explained my belief. "He's going to kill himself. I have a feeling about it."

This should have reassured *me*: Erica's premonitions were always faulty.

"We must stay with him every minute," she said. "We mustn't let him out of sight."

"We just have," I pointed out.

"O . . ." She dismissed this contemptuously. "He won't do anything in the middle of town."

I failed to understand why. If he were determined to kill himself, being in the middle of town should not stop him.

"But there are so many people," she said with a gesture that filled the streets, squares, and parks of Brisbane with uncountable masses. "One just wouldn't!" That was how Erica's mind often functioned.

"We can't stay with him all night," I observed. "Why not?"

I could think of a number of reasons, including the state of mind of my parents if they found my bed unslept in in the morning. I could, of course, ring them up and say I was spending the night with a friend. But supposing Jak changed his mind and the evening ended early and uneventfully. I would have to find another excuse to counter my first. And then, supposing that Jak *did* commit suicide in our company. What a lot of expalining I would have to do. I was already becoming irritated with Jak. I half hoped he would kill himself in the toilet and relieve us of the necessity of spending further time with him.

"Do you think he's carrying any . . . weapon with him?" I asked Erica.

"He says he's got a gun, but he wouldn't show it to me."

"Did you notice if his pockets were bulging?"

"Not that I could see."

By the time Jak returned, the only conclusion we had come to was that we should stay with him as long as seemed feasible, and if he made any attempt to behave as he had threatened we should do our best to stop him.

"We must try to talk him out it, too," Erica added.

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?



I agreed, but wondered how.

There was no sign that Jak had a weapon on his person, but as he was carrying an old leather briefcase, it was possibly concealed in that. I pictured myself struggling with him as he took out the revolver and aimed it at himself. It was just like the movies. Erica, as befitted the girl in such a scene, stood helplessly by as we fought. In the struggle, the gun was twisted this way and that so that, as Jak finally got his finger on the trigger, I was the one who got shot . . .

Our conversation was bleak and fragmentary. Jak joined in readily enough when we initiated the topics, but he made no effort himself. Erica and I struggled for every sentence, but even she fell silent after half an hour of desperation. I was not able to bring myself to raise the matter of Jak's intended suicide: I was afraid that he might react emotionally, do something scandalous there and then, in front of us and, to our embarrassment, in front of anyone else who happened to be present. How would we be able to explain his long forlorn body? Eventually I forced myself to say: "Jak, you're not really serious about . . ."

Jak was doodling on a scrap of paper. It occurred to me that the small shapes might later be useful to a psychiatrist as evidence of Jak's condition. He did not even raise his head. "O," he said casually, "don't worry about that."

This silenced us completely for the next five minutes. Then Erica smiled with apparent happiness and said brightly: "Well, I suppose we'd better go."

"Yes," I said, "we'd better." Erica and I shared the bill, and the three of us left. It wasn't until we were outside in the street that I realised that we had nowhere to go. It was about half-past-seven, and still light. Most of the passers-by were defenders of democracy: diggers, G.Is, marines, members of the R.A.A.F., some of them wandering alone and disconsolate in a strange town; others, more at home, loping along eagerly with boozy mates or with high-heeled, short-skirted girls, on their way to the cinema, or to parties, or to the American Centre, or to bedrooms where, for a few warming minutes, they might be able to forget their own insignificance. The traffic was mostly military jeeps and trucks. Brisbane had become part of the ugly body of war; it had developed a hectic glow that was not unexciting . . .

We stood back against the shop fronts, out of the way of all these intruders. Jak suddenly said: "I want to go and see Madonna."

"What a good idea!" exclaimed Erica, unperturbed. "We'll go with you."

I would rather have let him go alone; then he would have been Madonna's responsibility or, at any rate, not ours. But Erica had spoken quickly and left me with no choice. I backed her suggestion and hoped that I sounded enthusiastic.

"All right," said Jak.

We caught the tram to Spring Hill, and then walked up the side-street in which rested the dismal old house containing Madonna's room. The front door was open but it gaped no welcome; Erica and I hesitated on the steps. Jak, however, decided for us by saying: "Wait here, I won't be long," and just leaving us standing. We watched him disappear down the dim corridor.

"Of all the nerve!" Erica gasped. "I've a good mind not to wait."

Now it was my turn to be my brother's keeper. I don't know why I should have wanted to remain; we had a good excuse to escape; but I urged Erica to take into consideration the strain Jak was probably undergoing at the moment. Perhaps I was beginning to feel that I might in some way be guilty . . .

There was a phone booth nearby, and Jak's absence gave me the opportunity to make two calls. The first was to my father to tell him that I was not sure what time I would be home as I was going to a party that might last till early morning. He merely reminded me that it was midweek and I should not stay out too late. The second was to our culture-loving friend, Dr. Minov.

The doctor was a Viennese Jew who had seen what was coming and had left Austria well ahead of the Hitlerian disaster. He was now well established in a Brisbane practice. He attended all orchestral and chamber music concerts and amateur theatre productions and art shows and he took an unlikely but spirited interest in the activities of our group, assisting us now and then with a donation, but more often attempting the seduction of one or other of our prettier young girls. As he was fifty and gross in appearance he was rarely successful. Despite this dreadful-sounding catalog, he had an endearing personality and was unusually sympathetic to our absurdities and sanctioned our foibles. I had no hesitation in calling him on this occasion; he knew us all (some of us were his patients) and he fraternized somewhat heartily with psychology; he had explained the inferiority complex to me and had

lent me books by and about his mentor, Alfred Adler.

I was relieved to find him at home. He listened carefully while I told him about Jak.

"Yess, yess," he hissed when I had finished. He had no German accent to speak of, but he stretched most of his sibilants to two or three times the standard length. "It iss all very clear."

"O good," I said, pleased that an expert was in control. "What shall we do?"

"Yess, yess, that iss the problem."

This was less helpful than I had hoped. I too was aware that this was the problem.

"I tell you hiss trouble," Dr. Minov said. "He iss craving attention."

I nodded to the telephone.

"He feelsss sso ssmall insside and he wantsss to feel big, sso he comess to you and poor little Erica to sstartle you by pretending he shall kill himself."

"Pretending?"

Dr. Minov grunted several times, which I knew to be his version of laughter. "You do not think he meanss it! Ah, my dear Larry, you musst learn about human nature. Of coursse he will not kill himself. He iss enjoying himself with an audiensse."

I was proud that my opinion and the doctor's coincided. "I'm worried that he might try something violent. You know, suddenly. I don't know how we could stop him."

"I jusst told you. He will not do anything, especially in front of you. He iss too happy to have you consserned."

"But what about when we leave him? We can't stay with him all night, or forever. We've got to leave him some time."

"Yess, that iss true." There was silence for a few moments while, I suppose, he analysed Jak further. "When you leave him he will jusst go home to bed. You musst tell him to come and have a talk with me later in the week. Tell him I shall be pleased to ssee him."

"Yes," I said, "I shall." Though I could not see myself during this particular evening urging Jak to see a doctor. "Then it's all right for us to leave him when we have to."

"Yess, yess," he assured me. "You need not to fear."

"Thank you, Dr. Minov. It was kind of you to listen." I felt much better, and was sure that Erica would too.

"It iss nothing. I am pleased to assisst. You will let me know what happens?"

I agreed, but I wondered why he should want to know the outcome of the evening when he had already informed me what it was to be.

I passed the doctor's good news on to Erica, but gave her no hint of my reservations. She was pleased, but anxious to get away. While I had been making my calls, she had been approached by two Yank sailors who had evidently been informed that Spring Hill was the place to find a pick-up. It was typical of Erica that she had been amused as well as frightened. If the Americans had not been so crude in their tactics, she told me, she might have gone along with them; one of them had been handsome in a boyish kind of way; she had got rid of them by asking a price far above what they considered fair — "for my specialities", she had informed them.

"But they told me they just wanted a quick poke," she added. "Which isn't very flattering, is it?"

She would have sent them in to Madonna if Jak had not been there; though she had half a mind to, anyway, because it was time the *tete-à-tete* was interrupted.

I agreed with her. I walked down the corridor, nervously bold; I had never entered Madonna's premises *alone* before. But the place looked and smelt like any other musty boarding-house. I arrived at Madonna's door, which was open a fraction, but I did not do any interrupting. From within I heard Jak sobbing.

"Darling," Madonna was saying in her baby voice, "I can't afford to have a lover."

"But you could before," Jak mumbled. "Our days together were the most important days of the week to me. Wednesday will be here soon, I'd say to myself. Sunday will be here soon, I'd say to myself. Wednesday and Sunday. I'd nothing else to look forward to."

Madonna's little girl had a harsh edge to her voice. "Yes, but I'm established now. I can't afford to give up two whole days to . . . to pleasure. Look, darling, any time you want, you *can come along and have one. On the house.*"

"That's not what I want."

"Well, what else is love when you come down to it? Only a free fuck."

Here were two pieces of knowledge to amaze me: Madonna's philosophy of love, which touched a fury inside me and grew monstrous within moments, so that I could immediately and fervently reject it without examining it to determine its truth or falsity; and Jak's infidelity.

Standing unseen outside Madonna's door, I hated her. Her literary inclinations were hypo-

critical, her dolls were a subterfuge, her way of life was filth, even her tiny voice that was arguing away in a style something between a prattle and a lisp was evil. Surely Jak could tell, surely he was aware of the kind of person she was. I longed to throw open the door and seize her and reveal her to Jak in all her corruption and depravity.

What strength, what bitterness of emotion I then possessed! I cannot now look back on the occasion without a kind of lugubrious mirth, or without questioning to what extent my distress at Madonna's frank statement and my anger and misery at Jak's deceit were merged; for over the years I have, from time to time, shared Madonna's opinion, and I have been unfaithful. And I cannot now tell whether I should scorn the young man of principle that I was then, or whether I should regret him.

Had Jak deceived me, in fact? We had never pledged fidelity; we had never discussed ourselves in relation to other people; we were not even in love. I had in my innocence assumed a pact between us, but this was evidence of my quixotic nature, and I could not expect Jak to maintain an agreement that for him had never existed. But these thoughts came later . . .

I did not hear Jak's reply to Madonna. In his place I would have expatiated on the marriage of true minds, the sharing of all things, the hand-in-hand walks in the country, the exchange of innermost dreams, the sun and the moon and the stars and eternity, etcetera, etcetera. I would have made bed the last, the least important aspect of love. I would have shown myself up as a young prig. But my mind was confusion; louder voices than Jak's were resounding through it: hate, envy, jealousy, disgust, and a dozen other sensations growled in my ears. I just walked away from the door and back into the alley where Erica was waiting. I said that I thought Jak would be out in a minute or two. I had difficulty in speaking, and my eyes were brimming; I shall never know whether they were tears of petulance or grief. Fortunately it was getting dark.

But Erica had been having thoughts of her own. She had decided that the three of us ought to go to the pictures. If we did, she explained, we would not have to concentrate our entire attention on Jak; he might be distracted from his sombre reflections; and he might be tired enough afterwards to want to go straight home to sleep.

This seemed to me as tolerable an activity for us as any other, though personally I would have preferred to go straight home, there and then; and would indeed have done so if it had not

meant deserting Erica. I had plenty to think about.

Jak followed me out almost at once. He said nothing, and in the dim light I could see no signs of his recent crisis on his face. He approved quite cheerfully of Erica's suggestion about the cinema, and we set off to walk the short and downhill distance back to town. At one stage he linked elbows with us and rushed forward so that we were all obliged to run a hundred yards or so down to the next corner. He burst out laughing as he let us go; we laughed too, but politely, as if we were sharing a joke with him.

I remember the film well—it was the technicolored biography of a composer of popular songs. It was obviously much romanticized, and it ended on a nauseatingly patriotic note with the composer doing his stint in the second world war by touring the battle zones and playing his ballads to the boys and girls in uniform. I enjoyed the film, to my surprise and self-disapproval. I felt that I should not have—not merely because it was a sentimental fiction, but also because of Jak who, for all I knew, might be seeing his last film and breathing his last breaths. Yet there were periods when I was delighted by the brilliance of the singing and dancing performers, or when the superficial veracity of the love scenes drained me of reason, and I completely forgot about Jak and our present predicament.

When we emerged from the cinema we returned to the coffee lounge. We just sat there silently, not even trying to make conversation after exchanging a few trivial remarks about the film. It must have been nearly a quarter-to-twelve when we left, in nice time for Jak to catch his last train. We offered to accompany him to the station, but he said he did not want us to. He shook hands with us very seriously, said goodbye, and hurried off before we could stop him. We might possibly have caught up with him if we had tried, but we were pretty numb by that time and our only feeling at seeing him disappear was one of relief.

My desire now was to go home to bed, but Erica, who confessed to a similar wish, said that nevertheless she simply must talk to me, even if only for a few minutes, so we strolled along to the Barnes Auto all-night café where, confronted by pies and coffee, I discovered that I was hungry.

"Do you think he'll do it?" Erica asked.

A shrug was the most I could commit myself to.

"Larry," said Erica, gazing at me earnestly above the smears of tomato sauce and pastry

crumbs that ridged her plate, "there's something I must tell you."

I was hardly in the mood to respond to revelations from Erica, interesting as they usually were. There was, however, no way of avoiding this one, so I smiled encouragingly.

She started her sentence in the way she often started to relate what was, to her, a momentous piece of news: "You won't believe this, but . . . I've been having an affair with Jak."

Somehow I must have known because I was not astonished or shocked or anything.

"How long?" was all I said.

She counted back on her fingers. "About three months . . . I think."

"Are you in love with him?"

"No . . . I don't think so. If anything, I find him rather . . . unpleasant. I can't imagine why we go to bed together . . ." She paused, her ivory face held sideways in puzzlement.

"Two days a week?"

"But Larry, how did you know?"

"Tuesday and Friday," I said.

She smiled. It was one of her most engaging smiles, and I grinned back, and I no longer felt tired or worried or angry, but fresh and awake and full of wonder that life had so many spectacular little facets.

I had no choice but to tell her about *my* affair with Jak, and she laughed, and I laughed, and we both became hilarious as we discussed our mutual lover and compared notes. I told her breathlessly about Jak and Madonna. The few truckdrivers and deadbeats in the café stared at us.

"It's all so peculiar," she giggled. "Why do you think he behaves like this?"

I had to admit that I had no idea.

Her face became grave; she was lovely when she was grave. "Larry, suppose Jak *does* kill himself. I know it's an awfully selfish attitude to take, and you probably think that I'm heartless . . ."

I demurred.

". . . and I suppose I am in a way, but if he commits suicide, the police will be called, and we might be involved, and . . ."

This had occurred to me, too, but I had refused to think about it.

"Well," I said, "he probably won't do anything anyway, but even if he does, that doesn't mean that *we* have to be connected with it."

"But I mean, he might leave a note, or he mightn't . . . do it . . . properly, and then he might say things . . . even if he's unconscious

he might say things . . ."

Erica was frightening me: if either or both our names were connected with Jak's, my involvement would be the more disastrous, for the relationship between Jak and myself was, incredibly, a criminal one. I decided that should the matter reach such a stage that I was questioned, I would deny everything except mere acquaintanceship. I warned Erica to do the same. I saw her to a taxi rank where we kissed each other lightly, and then I went home.

Our fears came to nothing. So, practically, did Jak's suicide. Dr. Minov rang me the following day to tell me that he had been woken at two o'clock in the morning by a ring at his door. It was Jak. He was sitting propped up against the wall, his shirt and pants covered in blood. He was clutching his crumbling briefcase and whimpering in pain. Dr. Minov dragged him to the bathroom and investigated, but the wound turned out to be a shallow one that required only three stitches and three or four days to heal.

"He obviously meant not to harm himself," the doctor told me cheerfully. "The boy is unhappy, but he is not insane. I had a talk with him and gave him some facts about life. He will not try it again. Besides, I took away the revolver he had."

I thanked Dr. Minov for his kindness to Jak.

"He knew no other doctor. I had to do what I could. He was smiling when I sent him home. I said he should rest a few days."

"Did he tell you why he wanted to do what he did?"

"No. There was no time for long analysis, but it is not necessary to know. He has committed an act and satisfied himself, and now his sadness will be healed over like his wound."

Was it unnecessary to know? I asked myself. Dr. Minov seemed to take too facile a view. I would discuss it with Jak, later, when the incident had settled into the past and might not hurt too much to recall.

But I never saw Jak again. He came to no more of our group functions, and was never seen again around Brisbane. Some of us tried to contact him, but his mother told us he had gone to live in Sydney. A couple of years later I heard by chance at a party that there was a man from Brisbane working in Paris as a model for artists and photographers. His name was John Barkar.

I sometimes wonder what he used to do on Saturdays.

Martin Boyd

A Tribute by DOROTHY GREEN

First Steps in Eroticism — Catherine Duncan; *Rock of Ages: Grooving on the Blood of the Lamb* — Dennis Pryor; *The Feminine Frontier: Women's Suffrage and Economic Reality* — Coral Lansbury; *Stereotype in Recent Australian Drama* — Margaret Williams; *Should Australia Become a Republic?* — Noel McLachlan; *The Probable Derivation of 'Billy'* — Russel Ward; *Eric Partridge and the Scholartis Press* — Richard Fotheringham; *Jacques Monod's Change and Necessity* — Alex Comfort; *The Poetry of Thomas Shapcott* — C. Harrison-Ford.

Other contributors include: Brian Kiernan, Colin Hughes, Lloyd Churchward, C. Wallace-Crabbe, David Campbell, C. B. Christesen, Frank Kellaway, Tony Cartouche, Judith Rodriguez, Craig Powell, Klaus Loewald, Norman Talbot.

\$5.60 p.a. on direct subscription

Meanjin Quarterly

PARKVILLE, VICTORIA 3052

SONG FOR AMERICA

(a continuous song of question)

America

have you portnoy's complaint?
will you always wack off over Asia?
is it an obsession—big brother-savior of
the oppressed?
whose liver is next-surgeon of democ-
racy?

America

you're one big wet dream/your life's
dripping away.
your underwear is rank.
will you always spread your seeds.
your land of milk and honey has the clap!
you're paying the price of your price.
henry ford is neurotic.
disneyland is a summer camp for
leninists.
face it/look yourself in the eye.
if cousin walt could see you now
look his grave is rumbling.
lavas gonna flow an "a hard rains gonna
fall."
you ain't got no brelly.

America

you're a fraud/land of the free yeh
people are in chains/
bombs planted in their brains.
your wall st. warriors suck away at my
manhood for
your fucken scrooge mcduck/black tied/
apple pied/kentucky fried
free enterprise.
free enterprise.
each t' attain his full potential.
potentiality for what?
yeh walleted love leads t'usury/avarice/
\$ is God.
the tongue of insecurity licks my face.
on your face sinner.
competition = frustration for those who
fail an heads for those
succeed.

America

f.b.i. i'm a red.
come an get me/quick start the tapes
an files running.
your youth are flying on ginsbergs plain/
while leary ploughs the
field/sunny goodge st./samuel your
body odor is oppressive.
your valley of rational knowledge is
deepening.
where's the philosophy in that chuck?

America

define your terms before yeh speak t' me.
what is democracy?
what is free?
is your land really free?
what of cuba?
what of brother bitasti?
what of asia?
what of cousin chiang and uncle diem?
what is a puppet govt.?
"the average european does not seem
to feel free
until he succeeds in enslaving others",
b. berenson
america has the page turned?
has the print faded?
is the truth now a lie?

"a hungry man is not a free man",
a. stevenson, 1952
america what is a ghetto?
what is a nigger?
what is a spec?
face it hero—you're a fraud!
whitman an paine are posthumously
vomiting at you!

if democracy is necessarily controlled by
public opinion
(fenimore/democrat)
why not hear the voice of yeh youth.
herman melville what do yeh mean "we
americans are the chosen people—
the israel of our time—we bear the ark
of liberties of the world"
herman is your real name munster?
do you do it often?
does alex join you often?
do you hang pictures of wall st. on your
toilet wall?
herman?????
i can see corns!

America

i rode a lotus leaf past the big bordel
where el presidente
hangs out—an spoke softly cause walls
talk an i need the job.
your jeans are so tight i know what
you're thinking!
your trees are shivering like has been
informers!

America

i (james arness an another notch)

GRAHAME E. PITT

walking
was the
rhythm

walking was the rhythm
of our first days.
oakleigh railway station
a long way from home
quite a walk for a girl with breasts
like startled fish
your nipple pouts into
my palm
sadnight is wearing italian black
down in saint kilda.

to tell you all i want to say is to tell you
your essence/possible only by making our
time
into a giant ragdoll of a poem
never ending
monstrous as a mayan
or chinese hieroglyph
or the haiku of all the four seasons.

now
you bring the trains
of your grandfather
to our bed
i piston
into the tunnel dark
carriages shudder
on the rails
tempting
the precipice the dropaway
we railroad ride
our bed
the longest
straight stretch in the world
night is hissing
steam electric on the latent wires
riiiiiiii ding
the long
s t r a i g h t
s t r e t c h
that builds up
up
into the orgasmic jettison
along the railroad desert
of your thighs
a steaming balloonbursting explosion
against the bufferboard of our bed.

we are not just of now.
other times have been;
a time will come, will be,
that we cannot believe exists
when we shall only look
backward to ourselves.

ANDREW BURKE

**Underneath
the
Arches**

I wear black now,
the witch's clothes.
Portents, omens, stab me in the dark.
Old age is either pastels, twin-sets, pearls of
gentle wisdom, or else a robe of power.

A difficult sleight of hand —
to remain vulnerable to experience,
yet closed in the black cloak of flesh.

To stand open in a wooden O
is always risky,
but a cyclorama of small orbs, a moon,
a skyrocket or two, is never vulgar,
and cosmic imagery is right in fashion.

The impudent terror of the lady sawed in half,
for that one needs the magic nudity —
34 24 34.

If you didn't drop dead in the Tiv,
a Marcus Girl,
suffocated in a tight skin of gilded flesh,
mourned by Lennie Lower, Mo and Cine-
sound,
don't haunt the massage parlors:
G-strings don't snap on hairy terrors.

But power is something else:
to write a poem
Dame Edith Sitwell
bade the London jackhammers cease,
and Nellie Melba (with insomnia),
stopped the Town Hall clock in Bendigo.
Dissolving in a spotlight
keep your cool
with a pack of tarot cards
and jiggery-pokery behind a screen.

*GENTLEMEN MAY REMOVE ANY GARMENT CONSISTENT WITH
DECENCY.*

LADIES MAY REMOVE ANY GARMENT CONSISTENT WITH CHARM.

DOROTHY HEWETT

RONALD CONWAY

Retorting to an Improbable Beast

An Incredulous Reply to a Griffin

“See how these Christians love one another”

Sooner or later somebody was bound to have a substantial poke at *The Great Australian Stupor*. When the axe fell, I had hoped to learn something of real critical value to use in a possible revised edition. Alas, Jim Griffin's 'review' in the *Overland* No. 52 turns out to be no more than a peppery re-hash of themes originally played out in that most *sotto voce* of publications, the *Catholic Worker*. Griffin merely sought a more respectable forum for his persiflage. Yet there is no doubt whatever that he is quite a literary card — in his venomous fashion.

But let me be brutally clear. Griffin's real motivation for writing his article is founded upon a one-sided paranoid personal animus extending back over twenty years to circumstances which have nothing whatever to do with legitimate critique or the decent evaluation of merit. I could easily document the real basis for Griffin's irrational and stubborn hatreds, but to do so would be to stoop to his level of paltry personal denigration. Readers must be left to sniff the gamey scent of vendetta for themselves. Griffin knows only too well that I will not play games according to his kind of rough-house rules. His own absurd personal secrets are safe with me.

Griffin's witty strip-tease of my apocryphal family history, allegiances, writings, pretensions and inconsistencies gives me a Hollywoodish sort of distinction I never expected to achieve. A writer must not pass unnoticed for long and even an article which skitters smartly around the edges of libel need not be regarded with complete ingratitude. Griffin may, in fact, be in danger of adding to both my legend and my royalties. I hope he does not gag too much at that ironic possibility.

Now to the matter of G.A.S. (What a golden opportunity my critic missed to use this logical

abbreviation to conserve his own noisy flatus!) I find no trouble in conceding that my historical prelude to G.A.S. could be judged a riskily over-compressed survey of some facets of our history which I needed to support certain propositions about our contemporary life-style. However Griffin's flea-spotting approach toward flaws in my historical argument has no breadth of perspective whatever; it is merely sneering and tendentious. Some superficiality in my approach was inevitable and I *expected* some *responsible* academic criticism here rather than the third-rate nit-picking, personal reference and cheap innuendo which is all Griffin can manage.

As against his nasty judgments from the frontier, I venture to quote a gracious letter to me from Professor Manning Clark (whose ears Griffin says I boxed) who expressed great pleasure with G.A.S. because it dealt with “the things which really matter in our country”. Presumably Clark, of all people, was well aware of any scholarly deficiencies, in my opening chapters, but he preferred to take a more spacious view of an non-academic work than seemed possible for Griffin's bloodshot squint. Reasonably, Clark did not expect to uncover an Arnold Toynbee in a mere three chapters ambitiously racing through 150 years of Australian history! But before consigning too hastily my reasonable plea for a new kind of approach to Australian history “to the dust-bin of historiography”, Griffin might well look back red-faced on his own principal effort in this area — a shoddily-edited, slapped-up book of readings in Australian history which proved to be an intolerable penance even for his own sixth form students. It ill behoves him to demand a scholarly rigor of others which he has rarely practised himself.

As for the psychological and sociologically-oriented chapters of my book, I will ignore Griffin's libellous hints about my ethics and point out that any competent evaluation is well outside his professional domain and capacity. One would prefer to be attacked by one's peers in these areas. His remark, therefore, that I am "bewildered" by my own clinical evidence is gratuitous to say the least. How could he know? One cannot help but admire his cheek.

Griffin was wise of course not to phrase his attack in the form of a normal book review, since approximately half of his commentary has nothing to do with G.A.S. at all. He affects a nauseating innocence as to the distinction between *ad hoc* weekly journalism and an attempt at a serious sustained piece of writing. Thus he makes constant, inadmissible cross-inferences between my polemical *Advocate* column (written in an official Church newspaper) and a quite independent work written for general public consumption. To say that my critic is selective in his quotations would be an hilarious understatement. He must have spent months with scissors and paste concocting his farrago of false correspondences and discrepancies between my statements which he has the impertinence to present as evidence for (a) my illiteracy and hypocrisy and (b) my gutlessness toward those whom he terms my "episcopal masters". Who his 'masters' are he omits to confide.

As for his memorable *Advocate* list of my 'clerical' likes, dislikes, fixations, Griffin lapses luxuriantly into the haziest of *Comic Cuts* impressionism, stirring in a couple of hearty lies to give the brew some stench. One does not need to argue against cynical caricature such as this, merely to hope that one carries sufficient weight to be worthy of it. Evidently Griffin's quaint test of a Catholic layman's courage and consistency would be to have me denounce Archbishop Knox while writing regularly in his own diocesan journal.

Moreover if Griffin wanted full mileage out of his crafty extrapolations from my early *Advocate* experiments with 'Here and Now', he might at least have kept himself up to date. He seems to have mostly run out of quotable material after February 1970. In the intervening period of over two and a half years his espionage system (or more likely his paid-up subscription) seems to have broken down. A pity! He has been missing no end of good clean fun now that I have struck form.

Griffin's lengthy black-list of papist scoundrels, ignoramuses and obscurantists has barely altered

in fifteen years. Any growth towards a mellowing accommodation or new insight represents 'cowardice' or 'compromise' for so beggarly a spirit. The black-list is so long in fact that one wonders why he has not finally abandoned his long love-hate affair with the Scarlet Woman of Rome and founded his own cargo cult. Busily rooting for tasty truffles of scandal, he does not realise that softly-spoken figures like Dr. James Knox are not so easily docketed. Griffin is clearly unaware that this 'patrist-authoritarian' bishop is now implementing a most liberal reform of seminary training, whereby even professional laymen are being invited to take part in the formation of young clergy. As for Bishop Fox, this rather forlorn voice from the past has surely sufficient overtones of self-satire not to require notice, unless it be from journalists out for a few chuckles on the cheap.

If any evidence were needed that Griffin's joyous hates are based more on subjective pathology than real knowledge of or contact with his anti-heroes, one need only to point to that limb of Beelzebub. B. A. Santamaria. Griffin has never met the gentleman and he has shrewdly ducked any opportunity to do so. Conway, it would appear, is not the only one who 'dares' at a safe distance. Santamaria, for his part, has patiently ignored the nagging calumnies of small fry like Griffin — doubtless aware that the whale need not concern himself with an isolated parana fish.

Returning to G.A.S., my critic deploys his very few guns cunningly enough to suggest dozens of possible hits at 'errors' which in fact do not exist. True, he does manage to bag a sparrow once or twice, such as reminding me of the non-American origins of Dr. George Nadel. But mostly he relies on bland presumptions which he cannot substantiate, i.e. that I have got Bentham "quite wrong" (behold Griffin, philosophicus as well as junior historicus!) and that I have barely read the historians I quote. I was in fact partly raised on "Portus" when I read history and Griffin knows very well that I know that he was a *monstre sacre* at Sydney University between the two World Wars.

So many of Griffin's pedantries smack of those owlsh displays of one-upmanship which caused undergraduates to flee tutorials for a pee twenty years ago. He natters irrelevantly about railways and grain, fusses like a senile don over an incredibly barren distinction between 'metropolitan' and 'urban', decides for me that Fitzhardinge is more useful than Whyte and implies that Michael Roe illuminates colonial Whiggery better than

Nadel (which is surely a matter of opinion). His point from Margaret Kiddle about the prevalence of sodomy among early male settlers could have carried much interest had he been clinically educated enough to understand the difference between homoerotic attraction as a behavioral trait and sodomy as a vicarious sexual outlet. I seem to have made this distinction clear enough in G.A.S. (p. 134).

In one case only does Griffin manage to bring down a fairly fat pigeon. Concerning my quotation of Kinsey's figures for the incidence of homosexual outlets among American males, I discovered that the important qualifying adjectives "mature, single" (males) appeared in the original MS. but not in the final printing. I gladly join Griffin in expressing astonishment that nobody (including myself) had noticed the error before. But before I congratulate him too fulsomely for contributing at least *one* important erratum for a new printing, I should point out that he fiddles with the figures himself. If he will study again p. 261 of Kinsey he will find that the general figure of only 6.3 per cent. is meaningless. Even among young *married* males up to 20 years, the incidence of homosexual outlets is shown to be 10 per cent. From this point it rises to 18 per cent. among single teenagers, reaching its zenith at 54 per cent. for single 50-year-old males!

Which represents the more fatuous exercise — a touch of myopic proof-reading or idiotic oversimplification to score a point? I leave readers to decide. Indeed, one is struck by the critic's obsessive fascination with my discussion of homosexuality — entirely disproportionate to its overall status in the book. Clearly, something he dare not say is bothering him. His maladroitness remark, "I long for Conway's description of the Australian woman" (when, in fact a textual description of women *is* given) and his ostentatious jibes at my bachelorhood will alert all but the greenest observer as to what sort of game he is playing.

My critic of course imagines that he will throw the more scrupulous reader off the trail by tossing in a few crumbs of bonny recognition for my skills as a 'polymath' and for my chapter on the Family, which is, after all, pivotal to the whole book. But the brief magnanimous pose is fatally undermined by his patronising, tasteless and often totally inaccurate incursion into my personal history. This is done with a sturdy insolence which I am still stuffy enough to regard as normally being reserved for authors who are dead and cannot hit back. Perhaps Griffin is cherishing some fond personal hopes here? Oddly, his lynx

eye conveniently skates over the most laudatory article of all on the subject of Conway. This was done by a woman — Claudia Wright in the *Melbourne Herald* (11 November, 1971). Miss Wright has a razor-sharp mind and pen and her propensity for deflating chauvinist males is well known. A careful re-examination of Miss Wright's very accurate reporting would hardly reveal that my late mother was in fact one of *eight* children *all* of whom married! Griffin cannot even get his sleazy little horror stories right. After all, I had little to hide, then or now. One hopes that Griffin is prepared to make the same claim for his own personal odyssey — but I would not care to lay a bet on it.

Concerning the *News-Weekly* Knopfmacher 'spread', which Griffin's fervid imagination takes as further evidence of my close collusion with B. A. Santamaria and his mob: this was arranged entirely without my knowledge and its appearance was a complete surprise to me. As for the 'normal' cover photograph which Griffin naturally found so incongruous, it originally appeared in Claudia's *Herald* article. Maybe she is secretly on 'Santa's' payroll too? One can never tell in these conspiratorial times.

My only point of special disgust lies in Griffin's indecent hammering away at my "gratuitous probe" into the problems of a group of secondary school students. The only "gratuitous" aspect of that "probe" is the scurrilous guesswork he makes in connection with it. By making a special out-of-context issue of the matter, Griffin is stirring up the very kind of bitter mischief he is moralising about, and he has both the wit and malice to know it.

The writer's real aims stand revealed in his opening two pages in which he records his disapproval (or is it sour grapes?) concerning ten critics who have all been mysteriously gulled by the pretensions of G.A.S. to be a useful and original book. Rather could I quote twenty more criticisms from a variety of sources — all mostly well informed and reasonably perceptive and all generally favorable. Even dissent and reservations have so far been expressed with some show of courtesy.

Griffin of course makes a grand play on the *assumption* that I inhabit an archaic kind of holy Catholic ghetto which disqualifies me for the clinical appraisal of more emancipated types. I have, in fact, acted in a consultative capacity at St. Vincent's Hospital since early 1959. St. Vincent's is a *public* teaching hospital with its own University Department of Medicine, and my duties

often involve lecturing to medical students and performing many advisory functions. Sixty-seven per cent. of all the people I encounter, both there and in an extensive private practice, are non-Catholics from all strata of society. Yet Griffin is bold enough to point out that my "range of reference is narrow". It would be interesting to see how well his own favorite role of the cheerily nonchalant smart-arse would wear under so many varied encounters with human stress. His fumbling attempt to confine my 'fan-club' to a group of potty clerical despots is puerile. Moreover it fails completely to account for the fact that G.A.S. has evoked a steady flow of congratulatory letters from all over the Commonwealth, ranging from professors to housewives, noteworthy in view of the fact that G.A.S. hardly makes consoling reading.

As for public lectures, I am now bone-weary and hoarse from insisting that I am not really a New Guru with an answer to all Australia's problems. I take this as less a compliment to quite a fairish book of whose pioneering gropings I am only too well aware. Rather is it an indication of the acute famine of creative social thought in the Australian community, which jackals like Griffin do nothing to relieve.

In summation, Griffin seems to stand almost alone in his occult insight into the "hoax" I have brazenly foisted on the Australian reading community. He should not really be so quick to judge

his enemies as practising his own wretched arts of prestidigitation. Meanwhile the burden of explaining why he alone is so perceptive and so many critics are deluded still lies squarely on his own shoulders.

The last wry smile probably belongs to Conway anyway. He simply sat down and honestly did his 'own thing' without seeking anybody's approval, help or permission. His 'own thing' happened to win acclaim and nobody was more unprepared for it than Conway himself. Success is really nobody's property but when it comes it is surely not improper to accept its equivocal rewards.

For the rest, why should it be necessary to reiterate that G.A.S. was not written to satisfy pedants but to stimulate some intelligent public discussion? And if it is as "thin" and "bump-tious" as Griffin strains so hard to demonstrate, scholars of distinction (Manning Clark, Ronald Taft and Geoffrey Blainey to cite only three) would hardly have found it worthy of such interest. Doubtless Griffin, who struts the groves of academe with such slender credentials, *needs* to be that petty. For that much he has my sympathy.

To extend Griffin's own original vulgarity, he has unwisely exposed his own arse without the benefit of any protective grass at all. And since I have no further interest in vengefulness disguised as critique, I will leave him stooping — hoping that some worthier boot than mine may be tempted by such an opulent target.

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BERNARD RECHTER

The Melbourne Film Festival

What memories remain of the twenty-first Film Festival after a lapse of some months? In a city in which one could see "Sunday Bloody Sunday", "Klute", "Taking Off", to mention only the most attractive city and suburban features, a film festival did indeed contend with heavy competition. And yet the limited seasons were quickly oversubscribed and the attendance at most sessions, despite the cold, the fog, the weariness, and the occasional boredom, satisfactorily high.

A cynic might put the success down to several things. When subscriptions are due there is the magnetism of possibly unknown masterpieces, a promise of excitement which, despite so many dashed hopes, never quite vanishes. The possibility of a spellbinder at the next five o'clock session lingers on to revive the flagging spirit. More, the festival is damn cheap — all those films for the price of three or four visits to city cinemas.

Above all, however, the fact remains that if one ignores the bait of unannounced masterpieces and accepts what is offered as moderate in quality, though profligate in quantity, the annual festival continues to provide a fascinating smorgasbord from many countries and a variety of cultures. Some of the films are of course destined for the commercial screens, others might with profit never have been shown; but the real attraction are those offerings which one would not otherwise have an opportunity to see in Australia.

It is in this context that one has to record one's continuing disappointment at the poor quality and lack of imagination in so many of the short films — the task of the committee selecting those to be awarded prizes was an unenviable one. It is hard now to recall the situation only a few years ago when the shorts *were* the festival. Looking at the programme one struggles

to remember the visuals which the names represent — "The Sea", "November", "Labyrinth", etc., barely a memory stirs. "The Spirit of Sailing" comes to mind only as one of the many shorts without any saving worth at all.

A few films about films — Norman Jewison making "Fiddler on the Roof" and Arthur Penn (yet again) making "Little Big Man" were often more interesting than their putative subjects. "The Clockmaker", a striking chronicle of an artful craftsman, was absorbing by virtue of its meticulous detail and the character study of its unique subject.

Interest centred on the features this year — a particularly varied lot. Bernardo Bertolucci's "The Spider's Strategy", widely heralded as the *pièce-de-résistance* of the festival, and strategically programmed as the climax of the brown season, arrived in an subtitled version, thus providing the great disappointment of the festival. It is clearly a film requiring an appreciation and understanding of the nuances in the script.

The festival opened with Vittorio De Sica and a film that seemed to have strayed in from more simple if equally harrowing times; "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis", an adaptation of the novel by Giorgio Bassani, lost something in the retelling — despite the presence of Dominique Sanda and the dignified portrayal of the obliteration of a wealthy and cultured Jewish family in Ferrara by the cancer of fascism. The film medium, at least in the hands of De Sica, seemed too blunt an instrument to portray this little vignette of the great holocaust.

The preparatory publicity stressed the 'political' nature of many of the scheduled films — true enough if, by 'political', one means a focus on man, the political and social animal. Only a few of the films, notably Robert Bresson's "Four

Nights of a Dreamer", concentrated on man the individual. The Yugoslavs — what have they got to be so exuberant about? — provided the most exhilarating fare — much of "WR-Mysteries of the Organism" and "The Role of My Family in the World Revolution" breathed a welcome spirit of iconoclasm and bravado. The birthday party scene in the latter film, with its use of a model of Stalin's head cast apparently in tasty sugar and cream, was the highlight of a very human comic entertainment. "Knockout" by Boro Draskovic, also from Yugoslavia, was far less interesting. Desperately trying to ape the very latest in tough, contemporary cinematic techniques, it succeeded only in showing that its young director has the technical skill to make a good film but lacks the necessary ideas to put them to good use.

In complete contrast, yet typical of what one has come to expect from the National Film Board of Canada, was "Mon Oncle Antoine", a touching, finely observed, often comic story of life in a small mining town in French Canada, seen through the eyes of a young boy growing to manhood. No special effects, no real violence, plainly told and quite superb. It would make a nice contrast on a commercial screen to "Straw Dogs" and "A Clockwork Orange", the major 'R' attractions showing in Australia at the time of writing. Not dissimilar was the Czech adaptation of Alan Marshall's "I Can Jump Puddles", which many readers who missed the festival will have seen commercially. It does not detract from the quality of this very warm film to wonder whether the making of it might not have resulted in part from the inability of the Czech studios to continue their exploration of current problems after the Soviet invasion of 1968. Which comment leads naturally to the Soviet production of "A Nest of Gentlefolk". There is a sad irony in the fact that the Russian directors are at their best in retelling the past. Michalkor-Konchalovsky's loving reproduction of Turgenev's characters pro-

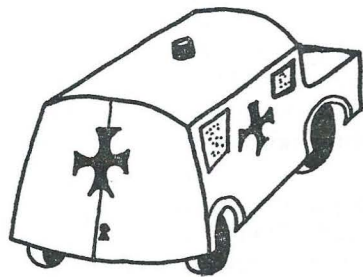
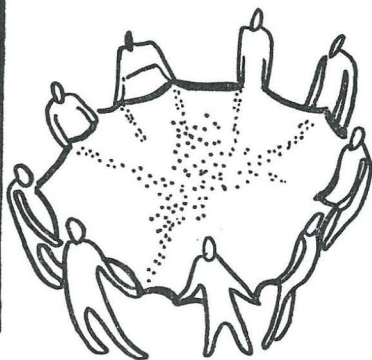
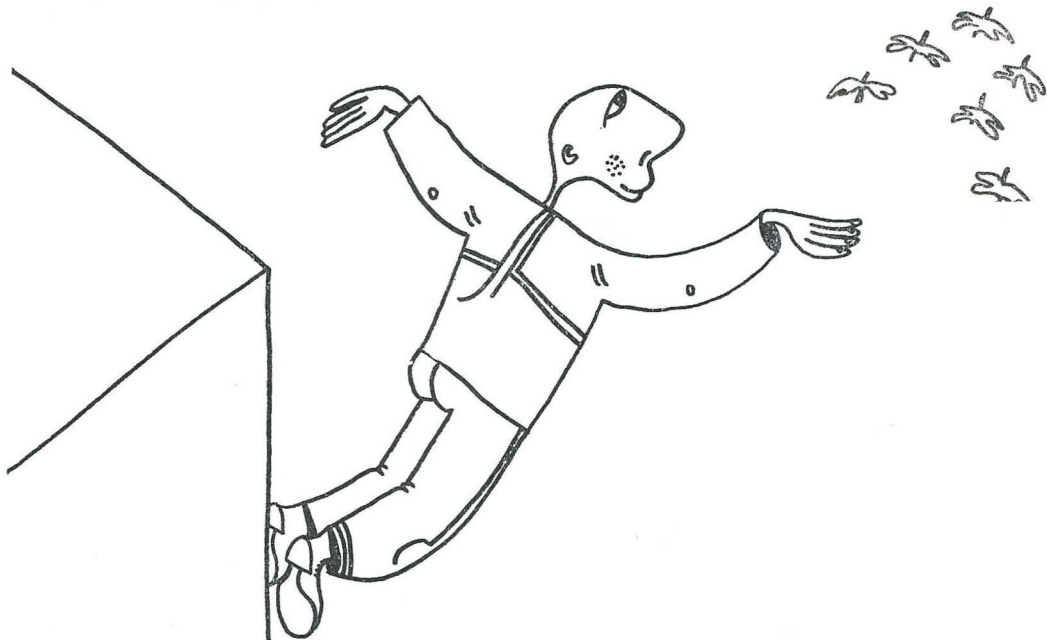
vided by far the best escapist moments of the festival; as the program described it — a film of 'great stunning beauty'.

After last year's "Goto, Isle of Love" one looked forward to the same director's "Blanche" with apprehension and hope. This year's Borowczyk was not as good — an attempt to mix Polish, Macbeth-like drama with medieval French sensuality and romance that did not quite come off. Nonetheless the film is visually striking, the troubadour music enchanting, and the whole completely absorbing.

No comment on the 1972 festival can ignore the Hungarian "Love". The old mother of a political prisoner believes him to be in America making films, and waits desperately for his return. She dies just before his release. As played by Lily Darvas, the bedridden old lady is in turn imperious and pathetic while those around her, particularly her daughter-in-law, keep the truth at bay. It is instructive that Hungarian and Yugoslav film makers, of those in communist countries, seem to have the greatest freedom to explore present problems with feeling and wit; unfortunately no Cuban feature film was shown.

"Millhouse", savagely condemnatory of Nixon, largely out of his own mouth, was entertaining but not very convincing propaganda, but these notes would be incomplete without mention of two strange features. Both "La Vacanza", made in Italy and starring Franco Negro and Vanesse Redgrave, a bizarre social commentary teetering continually on the brink of surrealism, and "How Tasty was My Little Frenchman", a marvellous Brazilian historical comedy, deserve screening beyond the confines of the converted at the Palais.

Australian films received little exposure, and one wonders whether perhaps at last in 1973 an Australian feature film might finally make one of the major night screenings. It is a hope to live with.



Jiri Tibor

Crabs

Crabs is very neat in everything he does. His movements are almost fussy, but he has so much fight in his delicate frame that they're not fussy at all. Lately he has been eating. When Frank eats one steak, Crabs eats two. When Frank has a pint of milk, Crabs drinks two. He spends a lot of time lying on his bed, groaning, because of the food. But he's building up. At night he runs five miles to Clayton. He always means to run back, but he always ends up on the train, hot and sweating and sticking to the seat. His aim is to increase his weight and get a job driving for Allied Panel and Towing. Already he has his licence but he's too small, not tough enough to beat off the competition at a crash scene.

Frank drives night shift. He tells Crabs to get into something else, not the tow truck game, but Crabs has his heart set on the tow trucks. In his mind he sees himself driving at eighty miles an hour with the light flashing, arriving at the scene first, getting the job, being interviewed by the guy from 3UZ's Night Watch.

At the moment Crabs weighs eight stone and four pounds, but he's increasing his weight all the time.

He is known as Crabs because of the time last year when he claimed to have the crabs and everyone knew he was bullshitting. And then Frank told Trev that Crabs was still a virgin and so they called him Crabs. He doesn't mind it so much now. He's not a virgin now and he's more comfortable with the name. It gives him a small distinction, character is how he looks at it.

Crabs appears to be very small behind the wheel of this 1956 Dodge. He sits on two cushions so he can see properly. Carmen sits close beside him, a little shorter, because of the cushions, and around them is the vast empty space of the car

—leopard-skin stretching everywhere, taut and beautiful.

The night is sweet, filled with the red tail-lights of other cars, sweeping headlights, flickering neon signs. Crabs drives fast, keeping the needle on the seventy mark, sweating with fear and excitement as he chops in and out of the traffic. He keeps his small dark eyes on the rear-vision mirror, half hoping for the flashing blue lights that will announce the arrival of the cops. Maybe he'll accelerate, maybe he'll pull over. He doesn't know, but he dreams of that sweet moment when he will plant his foot and all the power of this hotted-up Dodge will roar to life and he will leave the cops behind. The papers will say "An early model American car drew away from police at 100 m.p.h."

Beside him Carmen is quiet. She keeps using the cigarette-lighter because she likes to use it. She thinks he doesn't see her, the way she throws away her cigarettes after a few drags, so she can use the cigarette-lighter again. The cigarette-lighter and the leopard-skin upholstery make her feel great.

The leopard-skin upholstery is why they're going to a drive-in tonight. Because Carmen whispered in his ear that she'd like to do it on the leopard-skin upholstery. She was shy. It pleased him, those small hot words blowing on his ear. She blushed when he looked at her. He liked that.

He didn't tell Frank about the leopard-skin. He didn't think it was good for Frank to know how Carmen felt about it. Anyway Frank hates the leopard-skin. He normally keeps it covered with a couple of old grey blankets. He didn't tell Frank about the drive-in either because of the Karboys.

The Karboys have come about slowly and be-

come more famous as the times have got worse. With every strike they seem to grow in strength. And now that imports are restricted and most of the car factories are closed down they've got worse. A year ago you only had to worry if your car broke down on the highway or in a tough suburb. They'd come and strip down your car and leave you with nothing but the picked bones. Now it's different. If you buy a used car part (and you try and get a *new* carbie, say, for a 1956 Dodge) it's sure to come from some Karboy gang or other and who's to say they didn't kill the poor bastard who owned the Dodge it came off. Every time Frank buys a part he crosses himself. It's a big joke with Frank, crossing himself. Crabs too. They both have this big thing going about crossing themselves. It's a joke they have. Carmen doesn't get it, but she never was a Catholic anyway.

The official word is not to resist the Karboys, to give them all your car if you have to, but you don't see a man giving away his car that easily. So a lot of drivers are carrying guns, mostly sawn off .22s. And if you've got any sense you keep your doors locked and windows up and you keep your car in good nick, so you don't get stranded anywhere. The insurance companies have altered the Wars and Civil Disturbances clauses to cover themselves, so you take good care of your car because you'll never get another one if you lose it.

And you don't go to drive-ins. Drive-ins are bad news. You get the odd killing. The cops are there but they don't help much. Last week a cop shot another cop who was knocking off a bumper bar. He thought the cop was a Karboy but he was only supplementing his income.

So Crabs hasn't told Frank what he's doing tonight. And he's got some of Frank's defensive gear out of the truck. This is a sharpened bike chain and a heavy duty spanner. He's got them under the front seat and he's half hoping for a little trouble. He's scared, but he's hoping. Carmen hasn't said anything about the Karboys and Crabs wonders if she even knows about them. There's so much she doesn't know about. She spends all day reading papers but she never takes anything in. He wonders what she thinks about when she reads.

There are more cars at the drive-in than he expected and he drives around until he finds the cop car. He plans on parking nearby, just to be on the safe side. But Carmen is very edgy about the police, because she is only just sixteen and her mother is still looking for her, and she makes

Crabs park somewhere else. In the harsh lights her small face seems very pale and frightened. So Crabs finds a lonely spot up in the back corner and combs his thick black hair with a tortoiseshell comb while he waits for the lights to go out. Carmen arranges the blankets over the windows. Frank has got this all worked out, from the times when he went to drive-ins. There are little hooks around the tops of all the windows so they can be curtained with towels or blankets. Frank is ingenious. In the old days he used to remove all the inside door handles too, just in case his girl friends wanted to run away.

They put down the layback seats and Carmen unpins her long red hair. She only pinned it up because Crabs said how he liked her unpinning it. He sits like a small Italian buddha in the back seat and watches her, watches the hair fall.

She says, you're neat, you know that, very neat.

She says that he doesn't know how to take that. She means that he is almost dainty. She says, you're sort of . . . She is going to say "graceful" but she doesn't.

Crabs says, shut-up, and begins to struggle with the buckle of his motor-cycle boots. Crabs never had a motor bike, but he bought the boots off Frank who was driving one night when there was a bike in a prang. He got them from the ambulance driver for a packet of fags. Crabs bought them for three packets of Marlboro. There was a bit of blood, but he covered it up with raven oil.

Crabs really likes heavy things. Also he dislikes laces. All his shoes have zips or buckles, or slip on. When he was at the tech. they used to tie him to the cyclone fence by the shoe laces, every lunch time. They tied him to the fence right in front of the principal's window and the only way he could ever get out was to break the laces, because he couldn't bend down—if he bent down they kicked him in the arse. Crabs' father was always coming up to see the principal and complaining about the shoe-laces but it never did any good. Once Crabs came to school with zip-up boots and they stole them from him, so he had to wear the laces, for his own protection.

The first film is crackling through the loud speaker and Carmen sits up near the front window with only her black pants on, her hair down, covered with a heavy sweet perfume she always wears. Crabs shyly eyes her breasts which are small and tight. He would like her to have big boobs, like the girls in *Playboy*. That is the only way he would like to improve on her, for

her to have huge boobs, but he never says anything about this, even to himself. He says, help me with my boot. He is embarrassed to ask her. He knew this would happen and it was worrying him. He says, just pull. Normally Frank pulls off his boots for him. The boots are one size too small but they don't hurt too much.

Crabs lies back with his shirt off, his black jeans down, and one sock off while Carmen pulls at the second boot. Crabs is coming on fuzzy as he watches Carmen stretched back, her face screwed up with concentration and effort. He watches the small soft muscle on the inside of her thigh and the small soft hollow it has, just where it disappears into her pants.

She says, hey careful. The boot is still half on the foot.

He is on top of her and she, giggling and groaning, manoeuvres sweetly below him, reciting nursery rhymes with her arse. He thinks, for the hundredth time, of the change that comes over her when she screws. Until now she is nothing much, talking dumb or sleeping or listening to the serials on the radio. It is only now she wakes up. And you could never guess, no matter how much you knew, that this girl would turn-on like this. She sits around all day eating peanut butter and honey sandwiches or reading the *Women's Weekly* or reading the Tatt's results or the grocery advertisements. Crabs feels he is drowning a sea of honey. He says, "Humpty-dumpty". Carmen, swerving, swaying, singing beneath him says "wha?"

Crabs says, bang, bang-bang-bang.

Carmen, her mascara-smudged eyes blinking beneath his mascara-smudged lips, giggles, groans, arches like a cat.

Crabs says, bang, bang, bang-bang.

Carmen arches. Crabs thinks she will break in half. Him too. She falls. He rolls and keeps rolling down to the left hand side of the car. He says, shit, oh *shit!*

The car is on one side, listing sharply. Carmen lies on her back, smiling at the ceiling. She says, mmm.

Crabs says, Jesus Christ, someone's knocked off the wheels, Jesus *Christ*.

Carmen turns on her side and says, the Kar-boys. So she knew about them all the time. She sounds pleased.

Crabs says, you'll stain the upholstery. He searches for the other boot and the bike chain.

He runs through the cars. He doesn't know what he is looking for, just those two wheels, one will

do because he has the spare. His white jacket is weighed down by the chain. He runs through the cars. Sometimes he stops. He knocks on windows but no one will answer. Everyone's too scared.

He rounds the back of a late model Chevvy and comes face to face with the cop car. One of the cops is putting something in the boot. Crabs is convinced that it's the wheels. He keeps going past the car, walks round the perimeter of the drive-in and returns to the Dodge. Carmen has taken the blankets down and is watching the film. He tells her his theory about the cops and she says, shh, watch.

The manager fills out the two forms and gives them meal tickets. He is a slow fat man with a worn grey cardigan. He explains the meal ticket system — the government will supply them with \$10 worth of tickets each week, these tickets can be spent at the Ezy-Eatin right here on the drive-in. If they run out of tickets, that's too bad, because it's all they'll get. If they want blankets they have to sign for them now. Carmen asks about banana fritters. The manager looks at her feet and slowly raises his half-shut eyes until they meet hers. He says that banana fritters are only at night, but she can purchase anything sold in the cafeteria.

The manager then asks if there's anyone they want to notify. Crabs begins to give him Frank's name and then stops. The manager waits and licks the stubby pencil he is using. Crabs says, it doesn't matter. The manager says, that's your decision. Crabs says, no it doesn't matter, forget it. He can see Frank when he gets the notification, when he learns that his Dodge has lost two wheels, when he learns Crabs took it to a drive-in. He'd come out and kill them both.

Carmen says, we'll walk home next Saturday.

The manager sighs loudly and scratches his balls. Crabs wonders if he should hit him. He's got the chain in his jacket. The manager is saying, "Now this time listen to what I tell you. First, you ain't got no public transport . . ."

Carmen says, I didn't *mean* public transport. I . . .

". . . you don't have a bus or a train because buses and trains don't come to the Star Drive-in. They've got no reason to, do they? Secondly, you can't walk down that highway, young lady, because it's an 'S' road. And if you know the laws of the land you ain't permitted to walk on or near an 'S' road." He looks across at Crabs and says, "And dogs aren't allowed on 'S' roads, or bicycles or learner drivers. So we're not allowed

to let you out of that gate until this bloody government finds a bus that they can spare to get you all home. There are now seventy-three people in your situation. I don't like it either. I don't make a profit from you so don't think I want you around. So we'll all have to wait until something is done. And we all pray to God that something's done soon." He crosses himself absently and Carmen laughs.

The manager stares at her blankly. Crabs would like to lay that chain across his fat face. The man says, "You want me to notify your mother?" and Carmen becomes very quiet and smooths her skirt with great concentration. She says "no" very quietly.

The manager is standing up. He shakes them both by the hand. He advises them to sign for blankets but they say no, they have some. He has become very fatherly. At the door he shakes their hands again and says he hopes they can make themselves comfortable.

It is bright sunlight outside. Carmen says, he seemed nice.

Crabs says, he's a bastard. I'll get him.

Carmen says, for what?

Crabs says, for being a bastard.

Carmen takes his hand and they walk to the Ezy-Eatin, dodging in and out of the temporary clothes lines that have sprung up since last night. There are about thirty cars scattered throughout the drive-in. Some kids are playing on the swings beneath the screen. In front of the Ezy-Eatin a blonde woman of about forty is hanging out her washing and wearing a grey blanket like a cape. She smiles at them, Crabs scowls. When they pass she calls out, "Honey-mooners" and a man laughs. Crabs takes his hand out of Carmen's but she grabs it back.

The woman at the Ezy-Eatin explains to Carmen about the banana fritters, that they only have them at night, so she has an ice cream sundae instead. Crabs has a chocolate malted with double malt. The woman takes the coupons. Carmen says, isn't it lovely, like a picnic.

It takes him a week to collect the bricks for the back wheel. When he has enough he chocks them under the rear axle and then puts the spare on the front. Carmen reads comics and listens to the music they play through the speakers. Crabs goes looking for another Dodge to get a wheel from. There aren't any.

At nights he wanders round the drive-in tapping on car windows. He plans to get a lift out, get a wheel somehow, and return. But no one will open their windows.

He begins to collect petrol caps and hub caps, just to keep himself occupied. When he has enough he'll find a Karboy and swap his lot for a wheel. He feels heavy and dull and spends a lot of time sleeping.

Carmen seems happy. She eats banana fritters at night and watches the movie. Crabs strips down the engine and puts it together again. A lot of the day he spends balancing the flow through the twin carbies, until, one afternoon at about four o'clock, he runs out of petrol.

There is no way out. Carmen tells him this every day. Each day she comes back from the Ladies' with new reasons why there is no way out. At the Ladies' they know everything. They stand and squat for hours on end, their arms folded, holding up their breasts. At the Men's it is the same. But Crabs shits in silence with his ears disconnected. He has no wish to know why there is no way out.

He is waiting for the arrival of a 1956 Dodge. He eats little, saving his coupons to exchange for a wheel and hub cap he will need. There are dozens of other wheels he could use, but he wants to return Frank's Dodge in perfect condition. So he waits, lying on the leopard-skin upholstery he has come to hate. He tries not to think of Frank but he has nothing else to think of. He is not used to this, doing nothing. He has always been busy before, getting fit, or going to the pictures or out in the truck with Frank. And all day he has worked, delivering engravers' proofs in the Mini Minor. He hated that Mini. He misses that hate. He misses driving it, knocking shit out of its piddling little engine, revving it hard enough to burst, waiting for the day when he would work at Allied Panel and Towing.

But his mind keeps coming back to Frank and every day the pain is worse. He tries to think of reasons why Frank will forgive him. He can't think of any. He tries to make Frank's big spud face smile at him and say, forget it, mate, it happens to the best of us. But the face contorts, the big knobbly jaw juts and he sees Frank take out his teeth, ready for a fight. Or he sees Frank's hand holding the shifting wrench.

Frank said, you get a nice car, people respect you when you got a nice car. You go somewhere, a motel, and you got a nice car, they look after you.

Frank looked after Crabs. Frank said, you build up your body, then you can stand up for yourself anywhere. You build up your body and you can walk in anywhere and know how to look after yourself.

He gave him the chest expanders and an old photo he had of Charles Atlas. Frank said, that man is a genius.

Crabs hid in the Dodge and tried to keep his mind free of all these things. He tried to keep his mind free by keeping busy with Carmen but she didn't like doing it in the daylight.

Carmen lies on the roof, sunbaking while Crabs hides in the Dodge. He makes plans for getting out and he tells them to Carmen. But the wire is now electrified. But the drive-in is closed to visitors. But the security cars circle the perimeter all night.

Crabs walks through the drive-in each morning after breakfast, looking for the Dodge he is sure will arrive, somehow, one night. He picks his way through the clothes lines, around the temporary toilet facilities, skirts round the rubbish disposal holes, edges by the card games and temporary cricket pitches. It is like the beach when he was a kid. Everybody is doing something. He would like to blow them all up.

He looks at Carmen's face and tries to see exactly what has happened to it. It is older. Her sweater is covered with small 'pills' of wool. Her hair is pulled back and done in a plait but doesn't hold in her ears which seem to stick out. She has got fatter. Her mouth is full of hamburger while she tells him. He knows. He has seen it. He watched it all. She knows he saw it. She wipes her mouth clean of hamburger grease with the arm of her sweater, and tells him about what happened last night.

He says, I know, I saw.

But she tells him, because she feels he sees nothing. She has told everyone at the Ladies about him and they've come to gaze at him individually and in groups. He puts up the blankets to keep out their stares, but Carmen invites them in. Their husbands come and invite him to cricket or two-up. He thinks of Frank and the Dodge that will come.

He says, I saw.

He saw last night, the convoy of trucks come in through the main gate of the drive-in. Everybody went to look. Crabs went afterwards and stood on the edge of the crowd. For some reason they cheered, they cheered the trucks and the drivers as if they were liberating troops. But the trucks only held more cars, cars without wheels, cars without engines, crippled cars, cars unable to move. Crabs watched silently, wondering what it meant.

He watched while the huge mobile crane

shifted the cars from the trucks to the ground. He watched the new cars being arranged in lines, in vacant spaces. And when everyone else had lost interest he still watched. He saw the Nissen huts come on a huge Mercedes low-loader. He watched the Nissen huts unloaded under the harsh glares of search-lights that had been mounted on top of the old projection room, on top of the Ezy-Eatin.

And he was still there at dawn, when the low-loaders, the cranes and the other trucks had gone, he was there when the buses began to arrive.

He was there, removing two wheels from a 1956 Dodge.

Everybody goes to stare at the arrivals. Carmen is frantic, she begs him to come. He has never seen her so happy, so angry. Her eyes are sharp and clear. He would like to screw her but he is busy. He would love to hold her, to calm her, warm her, cool her. But he has two wheels from a 1956 Dodge and he is busy. In the corner of his eyes he sees exotic things: cloaks, robes, dark skin, swarthy complexions. He hears voices he doesn't understand, he thinks of the tower of Babel and then he thinks of the Sunday school where he heard about the tower of Babel and then he thinks about peppercorn trees and then he thinks of the two wheels and he tells Carmen, soon, I'll come soon.

The jack is in good shape. He has kept it in good shape. He jacks up the back of the car and removes the bricks. Then he puts on the new wheel. The tyre is a little flat. He guesses at about 15 pounds per square inch, but it is good enough. Then he removes the front wheel, and puts it back in the spare compartment, and then he puts on the new front wheel.

He will need petrol. Maybe oil too.

He feels as if he is alive again. He will bring the car back to Frank. He will tell a story to him, a fantastic story. He was driving in the country. He was forced off the road by a Mercedes low-loader and cut off by a jeep. They lifted the Dodge onto the low-loader, with Crabs and Carmen inside, and drove off to a country rendezvous. There was a gang. Crabs joined the gang. At night they drove off with the low-loaders. Crabs drove one of them, a Leyland. They stole cars from off the highway. Made the drivers walk home. Crabs became their leader after a fight. He regained the Dodge. Rebuilt it. Then he escaped and brought it back here, to you, Frank.

He is happy. There is tumult around him. He

will need to check the oil and petrol. He lifts the bonnet and has the dip stick half out when he notices the carbies are missing. He stops, frozen. Then, slowly he begins the check. The generator is gone. The distributor also. The fan and fan belt. The battery together with the terminals. Both radiator hoses and the air cleaner.

Something inside him goes very taut. Some invisible string is taken in one more notch.

He walks, very slowly, back to the newly arrived Dodge. There are people in it. He ignores them. He opens the door and tugs the bonnet release catch. Someone pulls at his clothing. He knocks them off. He opens the bonnet and looks in, looking for the parts he will salvage. There is nothing there. No engine. A dirty piece of plywood has been placed inside to give the engine compartment a floor. Some small chickens, very young, are drinking water from a bowl in the middle.

He lies back on the leopard-skin and gazes at the sights outside. Carmen is beside him. She is snuggled up against him. She is saying a lot. Slowly Crabs begins to see what his eyes see.

A large group of Indians, dressed in saris, are gathered around a battered blue Ford Falcon. One of them, an old man, squats on the roof. The Ford Falcon was delivered last night.

A group of men, possibly Italians, lean against the front of Frank's Dodge. They are laughing. They seem to be playing a game, taking turns to throw a small stone so that it lands near the front wheel of a bright yellow Holden Monaro.

Small children, black, with swollen bellies run past shouting, chased by a small English child with spectacles.

Carmen is crying. She is saying, they are everywhere. They stare at me. They want to rape me.

Crabs has been thinking. He has been thinking very deeply. Things have been occurring to him and he has reached a conclusion. He has formed the conclusion into a sentence and he tells Carmen the sentence.

Crabs says, to be free, you must be a motor car or vehicle in good health.

Carmen is crying. She says, you are mad, mad. They all said you were going mad.

Crabs says, no, not mad, think about the words — to be free you . . .

She puts her hand over his mouth.

She says, it stinks. It stinks. The whole place stinks of filthy wogs. They're dirty, filthy, everything is horrible.

Crabs sees a car moving along the lane that

separates this line of cars from the next. It is a 1954 Austin Sheerline. Inside is the manager, he sits behind the wheel stiffly, looking neither to left or right. It is moving. Crabs is excited for a moment, wondering if he can buy the car with his meal tickets. The car narrowly misses the Indian family and, as it passes in front of him, he sees that the Austin is being pushed by an English family, a man, a woman and three young boys.

Crabs says, a motor car or vehicle in good health.

Flags, some of them ragged and dirty, flutter in the evening breeze. With every step Crabs smells a different smell, a different dish, a different excretion. He walks slowly along the dusty lanes filled with bustling people. Carmen is in the Dodge. He left her with the bicycle chain and the doors locked.

The situation has become such that no progress is possible. Crabs is now formulating a different direction. Movement is essential, it is the only thing he has ever believed.

Only a motor car can save him and he is now manufacturing one. Crabs has decided to become a motor vehicle in good health.

As yet, as he walks, he is unsure of what he will be. Not a Mini Minor. He would like something larger, stronger.

He begins to manufacture the tyres, they are large and fat with heavy treads. He can feel them, he feels the way they roll along the dusty lanes. He feels them roll over an empty can and squash it into the dust. Then the bumper bars, huge thick pieces of roughly welded steel to protect him in case of collision. Mud guards, large and curving. They feel cool and smooth in the evening breeze. There is something that feels like a tray, a tray at the back. He can feel, with his nerve ends, an apparatus, but as yet he doesn't know what the apparatus is. The engine is a V8, a Ford, he feels the rhythm of its engine, the warm, strong vibratings. A six speed gear box and another lever to operate the towing rig. That is what the apparatus is, a towing rig.

He feels whole. For the first time in his life Crabs feels complete. He shifts into low gear and cruises slowly between the lanes of wrecked cars, between the crowds, the families preparing their evening meals.

And he knows he can leave.

He has forgotten Carmen. He is complete. He changes into second and turns on the lights, turning from one lane into the next, driving carefully through the maze of cars and Nissen huts, look-

ing for the gate. The drive-in seems to have been extended because he drives for several miles in the direction of the south fence. He turns, giving up, and shifting into third, looks for the west fence where the gate was.

It is late when he finds it. His headlights pick up the entry office. No one seems to be on guard. As he comes closer he sees that the gates are open. He changes down to second, accelerates, and leaves the drive-in behind him in a cloud of dust.

On the highway he accelerates. He feels the light on top of him flashing and, for the pure joy of it, he turns on the siren. The truck has no governor and he sits it on 92 m.p.h., belting down the dark highway with the air blasting into the radiator, the cool radiator water cooling his hot engine.

He has gone for an hour when he realises that the road is empty. He is the only motor vehicle around. He drives through empty suburbs. There are no neon signs. No lights in the houses. A strong headwind is blowing.

He begins to take sideroads. To turn at every turn he sees. He feels sharp pains as his tyres grate, squeal and battle for grip of the cold hard roads.

He has no sense of direction.

He has been travelling for perhaps three hours. His speed is down now, hovering around thirty. He turns a corner and enters a large highway. In the distance he can see lights, dancing and waving.

He feels better, warmer already. The highway takes him towards the lights, the only lights in the world. They are closer. They are here. He turns off the highway and finds himself separated from the lights by a high cyclone fence. Inside he sees people moving around, laughing, talking. Some are dancing. He drives around the perimeter of the wire, driving over rough unmade roads, through paddocks until, at last he comes to a large gate. The gate is locked and reinforced with heavy duty steel.

Above the gate is a faded sign with peeling paint. It says, "Star Drive-in Theatre. Please turn off your lights."



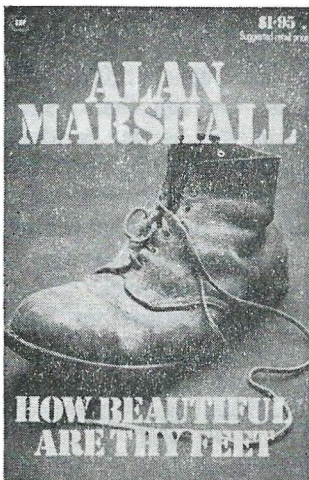
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David Stead was a socialist, a government servant, a notable naturalist and a man who 'dared to be a Daniel'. He was also the father of Christina Stead, who writes of

A Waker and Dreamer

Samuel, the father, was born in 1846 in Maidstone, "a man of Kent". He spent his childhood round and about, his holidays at the sea, at Margate and Ramsgate. How he used to say those two words! Ramsgate, the harbor, shipping, lifeboat, beach; Margate —! He went to work at twelve with paintpot and brush, up a ladder, thick hair upstanding, lively Sam, cracking jokes and singing songs he handed on:

*Slap dash slap with a whitewash brush,
Talk about a County Ball!*

He loved Charles Dickens, lived in a Dickensian world. The family talk after him was full of Dickens words; "Only Brooks of Sheffield, when found made a note of, cucumber, a lone lorn creetur, Mrs. Harris, Codlin's the friend, not Short." Dickens in 1861 brought out *Great Expectations*, in which the transported convict Magwitch makes a fortune in sheep in Australia and secretly supports a boy in England. In 1864, Samuel, aged eighteen, made himself a small box like a toolbox, of wood bound with iron, with a light padlock; and with it under his arm stepped aboard a sailing ship for Sydney, leaving behind him parents and numerous brothers and sisters. He was one of the youngest.

Samuel got a job in North Sydney at his trade, carpenter, painter, builder, married, had children, became his own man, built weatherboard houses for themselves to live in. The second house was called Minstead, after his second wife; the last, at Mortdale, was called Gad's Hill. He was a freethinker, an Oddfellow, (of which he became Grandmaster), belonged to the Dickens Lodge and, at its annual meetings, recited and acted from *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Pickwick Papers*, *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*.

In the nineteenth century little in England was Merrie. To begin with they feared French invasion. The agricultural workers in the south hoped for it, believing the French would bring down their oppressors the landlords. There was "Captain Swing" (rick-burning, machine-breaking with the anonymous threats to "swing" the landlords); the Chartists; and 1848; major epidemics of typhus and cholera (1847 and 1865); and they were still transporting for a sheep or a lamb, a loaf of bread and a meeting.

The government, finding this did not deal with the ferment, was encouraging emigration. A copy of *Punch*, 1848, shows two pictures, "HERE" and "THERE": "Here — Poverty; There — Paradise", the legend runs. HERE (England) is a homeless couple, in torn clothes, with five dejected children sheltering by a wall bearing the notices: "Whereas all such meetings . . . ILLEGAL. Meeting — CHARTER . . . LECTURE ON SOCIALISM . . ." While in picture two, THERE (overseas), the same couple, contented, robust, their children bonny (not bony), are eating in a rough-hewn highroofed cabin with hams hanging from the rafters, a whole slaughtered sheep of their own hooked to the wall, an open halfdoor showing a palmtree; and leaning on the halfdoor, an attractive darkskinned man, to whom the pretty daughter is bringing food. The tables are turned; it is now they who can make handouts to the natives. An engaging travel fiction.

There was the American Civil War (1861-1865) with the promise of freeing slaves; the foundation in London of the First Workingmen's International, 1864, and the Communist Manifesto—"you have nothing to lose but your chains." The Government, anxious to lose the discontent, had luck too. Six hundred thousand British people went to Australia between 1851

and 1858 (the gold rush), and others to California, Canada and the Argentine. The Government also was looking abroad, sending big money to India, the Argentine, Australia and elsewhere. The Empire was on the move.

So that Samuel, though enterprising, was not a pioneer nor a soldier of fortune; just a young optimistic artisan, among many. The old country and its troubles did not weigh on him; and if his older children had some sentimental and quite uninformed views of England, which his gallant daughter Jess called "home", the younger ones, and especially David, youngest boy, were a little like the dream children in *Punch*, all bad times forgotten. David was an Adam; Australia was his prolific and innocent garden. This was his nature. He came to his young manhood and prime in the time of "the optimists" (Manning Clark); and he was a naturalist with a new (old) country and its wildlife to explore; his imagination and ardent love for his country called forth marvels. He was a kind boy. He loved his parents, and his brothers and sisters, who had a great love for him.

The boys all went to work at twelve; the two older boys as painters (ships' painter and sign-painter); and David, at twelve, was apprenticed to a rubber-stamp maker, where he learned the careful lettering which was his pride; which was of use to him when he entered the Fisheries Department as a junior. He lettered the labels for the specimen cases in the department. He went to Sydney Technical College for zoology; and during the course, boiled down and mounted a cat and a dog, the only cat and dog in our home life; we always carried these two glass cases with us. David had a horror of cats and dogs, for carrying disease communicable to man; hydatids (encysted larval tapeworms), rabies, tetanus, for example. Hydatids, in fact became with us a comic danger cry; "Watch out, hydatids!" Our pets were wild animals.

The mother, Christina, was of Scots extraction. Her views were not those of her husband. She was nonconformist in religion and strict, with many tabus; no dancing, smoking, cardplaying, alcoholic drinks, theatre and so on; yet between them they represented the two forms revolt had taken among the working classes in England. The nonconformist churches, after the "Swing" and allied troubles, gathered in people dissatisfied with landlords and their hired men in the vicarage; while in the towns especially, the lodges (to begin with, Manchester Unity) attracted the more go-ahead and liberal type of workmen. The parents' background was much the same; and family life was

quite cheerful. They were a musical family; gathered round the piano, sang the old favorites, the men whistled like blackbirds, all had clear light voices, soprano, baritone, tenor.

This bright picture was fogged in one corner. Samuel, the father, had "habits", about which the women spoke in lowered voices (which failed not to get the attention of every child within ear-shot). Samuel took snuff (and always sported a handsome clean dark red handkerchief, sailor style) and he liked a glass of port.

This is what comes of freethinking and acting Quilp and Sam Weller in Lodges!

On her deathbed, when David was fifteen, his mother, as he told it later, made him promise to keep her rules of life; and he was proud of doing so. He never went to the theatre or to concerts; he abhorred dancing, because of the contact of bodies; he did not allow kissing or embracing in the home, nor endearments, nor cajoling, which he thought led to degrading habits of mind. The home was however, because of his own gaiety and talent for entertainment, and endless invention, gay and lively. He liked to lecture, he liked meetings and he did not miss the arts; he had the outdoors, the sea, the shore, the bush. He whistled very tunefully, and usually tunes from operas, but only moral operas—*Martha*, *William Tell*, *Mari-tana*, and a *motif* from the overture to *Semiramide*. He was shocked that the arts so often dealt with what seemed to a pure man, unsavory subjects; and then, the wrongdoers were not usually admonished, punished, made to repent; or not chastened in such a way to discourage others. Vice was made attractive. Yet he never censured his brothers and sisters for their good times; he always excused them.

He extended his sobriety to the intellectual world; he added prohibitions of his own; for instance, no French or no history. He hated us learning history at school, because it was a record of old European villainy and bloodshed; he gave the French no credit for their enlightenment or struggles for liberty; and he disliked Pasteur, perhaps because Pasteur thought wine good. He did not speak French; perhaps he had an intimation of their intense rationality, subtlety and wit; feared them in argument; and the shy boy fears the bogey and tourist tales of French licence.

David was "floodlit" (Claud Cockburn), remarkably fair, with noticeable thick yellow hair, tender blue eyes and a speaker's mobile mouth. For a long time the cameras caught this pale blaze. It was not merely his fairness, but a sign

of his vitality, his self-trust and restless inner and outward life; and a sign, I think, of the tribe of Abou ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!) who love their fellowmen. I have seen it in one or two others such. Among humane people, some are quiet, almost taciturn; but others rejoice openly in the mass of humanity, in teaching, bringing the light, and when they are in the midst of people and their own good work, they actually shine. This accounts for some of the mysteries of mass illusion; as when the congregation of Latterday Saints (the Mormons) saw Brigham Young turn into Joseph Smith (to justify his election), on the platform, before their eyes, as he spoke.

David's appearance, of whiteness, fairness and all that goes with it, dazzled himself. He believed in himself so strongly that, sure of his innocence, pure intentions, he felt he was a favored son of Fate (which to him was progress and therefore good), that he was Good, and he could not do anything but good. Those who opposed him, a simple reasoning, were evil. This was not his mother's work but his own nature. He would sing certain songs, especially when something went wrong in the Department or his work in the naturalist societies, some defeat, jibe, unkind joke; he would sing, "Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone, Dare to have a purpose true and Dare to make it know."

A friend in his early years took him to a séance at which the medium said, "There is a young man with fair hair standing at the back of the room with a friend; and by his side I see Charles Darwin who is saying to him, 'Go on, persevere, you will succeed'." David was encouraged by this, believed in the message; it never occurred to him that the friend might have prompted the medium.

I turned this peculiar incident over in my mind for some time, as a child, because I could not believe it; it was too apt; but I was not the sort to express doubts; and it did not pay with David; he was capable of turning the incident into a three-ring circus.

The youngest of David's family was his sister Florence, a very lively, pretty girl who went to work at fourteen in David Jones's workrooms, where she made a friend, Ellen, another slender dark girl. Florence introduced Ellen to her brother and eventually they began to go on nature excursions together. They married, a child was born, and Ellen died. For two years or so, we had a very merry household at Oakleigh Villa, a white cottage near Rockdale station, where Florence kept house, looked after her own infant girl and her brother and me.

In the front was a picket fence. In the backyard were echidna who helped us with the numerous anthills, a tortoise large enough to bear two small bare feet (and so it is true about the tortoise who holds up the world), a duck who dabbled madly at the iron porridge saucepan; and a darkroom, for David was a fond photographer. The duck dabbled desperately, for the porridge was often burned and stuck to the saucepan. The reason was, that while David shaved before breakfast, whistled, sang, and expatiated, Florence would have to make many little sorties from the kitchen to relate breathlessly to her brother the latest gossip from the *Green Room*—a theatre magazine she took in. She was stage-struck and had once belonged to an amateur repertory company in North Sydney, which did the Savoy operas and others.

The two baby girls were full of stage lore, knew all about divas, prima donnas, jeune premières, entrances, exits and all the rest. But the porridge, left to itself, boiled and bubbled and blew its top (so that it was always true about the Sorcerer's Apprentice).

Before sitting up in my high chair to breakfast, there was another ritual. I was lifted up by David and we did the rounds of the dining-room, while I had to name the fish, bream, trout, gurnard, john dory, their fins pectoral, dorsal, ventral, caudal; the photographs of men, Cuvier, Buffon, Darwin, Huxley, and Captain Cook. These were the first words I learned; or rather the first word was 'itties' (fishes).

David never objected to Florrie's stage talk. She, poor girl, would have loved to spend her life in one of the suburban repertories that go on for ever, growing older with the same leading man, leading lady, understudies—but Fate, which she always called Kismet, was not good to her. She led a life of drudgery; without the slightest complaint, cheerfully, happily, in fact. In trouble, she was not woebegone, or only for a moment and then would say, "Well, it is Kismet, isn't it?" and "A merry heart goes all the way". Those were very gay years with the brother and sister in the house together; but David was very young, he had to remarry.

He would be out in the weekends, on naturalist excursions; and in the week very often, either on day visits to a near place like the trout hatchery at Prospect Dam; or on long trips to inspect the rivers which were being stocked with rainbow trout; or to the oyster leases. At oyster leases at Camden Haven he met his future father-in-law Frederick Gibbons, a pleasant Edwardian, dressy,

well-to-do, who owned considerable property in the then undeveloped district along the Wollongong Road (Arncliffe and Bexley); and had a Victorian villa in five acres of ground on the road. He and his wife, Kate, from a South Coast dairying family, had had ten or eleven children. There were only two now at home, a middle-aged bachelor brother and the youngest daughter, Ada, a very pretty dark slender girl, who became David's second wife. They had six children and lived at Lydham Hill (the original name of the place, not Lydham Hall) in a cottage built of large sandstone blocks cut in the quarry at the foot of the hill, by convicts in the old days. The house stood on top of the rise, facing the Pacific Ocean directly through the headlands of Botany Bay; Cape Banks and Cape Solander. The monument to Captain Cook at his landing place at Kurnell was visible from the attic windows. David was very pleased at this; he never failed a Kurnell anniversary.

The house was surrounded by two paddocks, an old orchard, grassy places and a belt of trees, pines, camphor laurels and others, some seventy years old. It was a splendid place for children. One of the paddocks was occupied by two emus, which came to us as striped chicks (about the size of fowls). There was a paved courtyard surrounded by the stonebuilt kitchen, washhouse and servants' rooms; in the middle, an old well. David and his boys filled it in and made a tall aviary there, with many birds, budgerigars, a cockateel, finches. In the other old well, outside the kitchen were two large turtles. One of the servants' rooms was used by David for his Museum; to which the children had access every Saturday; a miscellany, Aboriginal weapons, a humming bird, crabs, a crocodile, a whale's tooth, a painted dried head . . . Sometimes in the other room we had a servant; not often.

Round the courtyard stood the cages containing snakes, a boobook owl, a kookaburra, two kinds of possum, black and honey-colored, and in various corners of the house were aquaria and various small beings, such as fire-bellied newts and pygmy opossums. It was a colorful house, a good life for children.

In 1915 David became general manager of the State trawling industry, and felt part of his dream of state socialism, the state for the people, was coming true. He was supported throughout by the Labor premier W. A. Holman; and went to England in 1915 to buy three modern trawlers in Hull. The trawlers sailed out across the world

and for five lively years we had nothing but trawling and fishing talk. In the meantime, we had moved to Watson's Bay, to a harborside house with a good natural swimming bath on smooth soft red kerosene shale and surrounded by fallen sandstone boulders. The water was clear, we caught octopodes, and fish and even a shark there (which we boiled down in the copper, a reminiscence of his student days when he boiled down the dog and cat in his family's washboiler). We swam there and the boys made friends of the fishermen and the watchman on the dredge in the bay. It was a fine place for children.

In the course of his long career in the Department, David ran into bitter opposition, which he ignored when he could, laughed off when he could; but which he allowed to grow out of containment, because he could not consider compromise, nor any view but his own. The state industries did not make money; but he always cried out that a young socialist industry is not supposed to make money, it is for the people. Nevertheless this failing was made the excuse for many shocking crass attacks, both on the government, its ministers and on him personally.

Private fishing interests also injected their disingenuous arguments into the debate. It was stated, for instance that the waters were "fished out"—of the Southern Ocean and the Australian coastline, in five years! This didn't prevent private fishing interests from buying the trawlers when the State industry was smashed and the trawlers sold.

David was a state socialist, but he knew little about socialism. He believed in "evolution not revolution", in men of goodwill getting together and producing happiness for all. He accepted the Labor Party's platform in those early days, even Article One, the White Australia policy; but this was not his view. He fought for the rights of the *Aboriginals*; when in *Singapore* and invited to sit on the platform by the Governor of the F.M.S. he refused because there were to be there no *native representatives, only British people*. He was there as Acting Director of Food Supplies to the British government in Malaya in 1921-23.

When he returned he never tired of talking of his secretary Tan Guan Hoe, a very able Chinese who knew five languages. "Guan Hoe" (as David always said) had to abscond, because he was ruined by his father's funeral, given lavishly in the Chinese manner. Then there was Abishegenadan, a Tamil, the engineer. Abishegenadan's wife had just had a baby and David visited the family in Singapore in an area said never to be visited

by white men. He pictured himself to us, a tall fair man, all in white, treading cheerily down the dark streets in the evening, a smile for all along the crowded noisy pavement and littered road, in what was called in Kipling and Maugham days "the native quarter" (where the native-born citizens lived).

He believed he was safe because he was Good; and from the word Good we get the word God, he said and from the word Evil, we invented the Devil. He was ousted from the department, from the industry unfairly, because they were able to bring against him a serious charge, an error of judgment, made in a fit of righteous anger. It sprang entirely from this firm belief he had in his own purpose: opponents, particularly political opponents, were really Evil in the flesh.

He could speak of this to no one (but to me); but he knew now that his career in the department was ended. Not only that, they robbed him of his pension, though he had spent his life there. Whatever the weather changes in a family's atmosphere, I can never forget his expression, in misery, at the numerous unfair and even rascally charges voiced in Parliament and carried in the newspapers. "Dare to be a Daniel"—but the time had come when it was not enough; it was no use at all.

That he recovered sufficiently to go into other enterprises and that he always worked for the natural history societies, until his health failed in his seventies, showed his great courage.

He had done much writing on fish, crustaceans, deep sea mammals, written weekly fishing columns and sent many public-spirited letters to men in place; his pen was a brave one. The fish on the wall in those early days were beautifully

tinted drawings done to illustrate his first book, *Fishes of Australia* (1908). After his death, his widow Thistle Harris produced from his mss. another book, *Sharks and Rays of Australian Seas*. When I dip into this book, I am at home again and hear the old sea names I knew well. For he told us everything he could; he "expatiated", as he said. Now, I read a bit about the Wobbegong and I see suddenly a real wobbegong I saw somewhere, at Bateman's Bay perhaps, when a child; I hear the eucalypts rustling at old Lydham, the cockchafer beetles, burnished gold, falling from the boughs, smell their peculiar smell; and the whole landscape of childhood rises up, a marvellous real world, not bounded by our time, fragrant, colored by the books he liked, *Typee*, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, *Extinct Monsters*, a book I loved as well as Grimm, *The Sleeper Awakes*. That landscape stretched far and wide, with his talk of foreshores and rising and depressing coasts, the deeps, the desert; the landscape had no time limits—it had "giants and pygmies of the deep" (one of his lectures), extinct monsters roaming among extinct cycads and mud swamps, it had Triceratops, Mastodon, Diprotodon, Labyrinthodon, Palorchestes, the extinct giant kangaroo, all brought near by the living fossils, and in the wonderful talk there were volcanoes, Krakatoa and Mauna Loa—how is it possible to reconstruct in a few pages the life of a man and his children, when the man has a genius for verbiage, a tireless "interest in every aspect of nature" (his words) which he brought always to his friends, his writings and his family?

But I know, I can remember, how my life was filled with story from the first days, and this book of Rays and Sharks is to me the life poem of an unusually gifted man and of our long morning.

**Before
the smash,
I remember**

Before the smash, I remember:
300 caravans, Porta-gassed and ready to roll;
1 chiropractor;
28 Individually Designed Homes;
11 mandala nailed to a fence;
2 lovers eating in the New American Road-
house;
15 Prestige Housing Estates promising child-
ren's King Arthurland,
bedrooms, *en suite*, bellbirds singing, walk-
in robes and *cul de sac* blocks;
3 forgotten pines;
4 signs saying: Juicy Hamburgers, What Do
You Know? Barney Bananas and Reach
Out For Life;
200 peach trees, cyclone-fenced upon the
broken hill;
30 elegant TV masts;
10,000 crickets dying in the dew-filled grass;
3 upturned trundlers on a Shoppingtown car-
park;
400 starlings bursting from the severed limb;
1 old cattle race (no steaming dung, nor tired
dogs barking);
3 Consolidated trucks filled with red rock
from the quarry;
7 pre-historic hills, beleaguered and em-
battled;
13 dunces' caps;
8 Valiant Chargers;
1 wind blowing from the cliffs of winter
and Australia's Golden Gas Man saying:
Thank you for your custom, call again,
call again,
call again.

JOHN HOOKER

**Another
day**

In the dark before the dawn,
the birds began to sing
in the ornamental palms
whose severed roots lay trapped
beneath the Shoppingtown;
and behind the unreal embattlements,
the technicolored sun arose
to heat once more
the cold and boarded Paramount Estates
of our Marlboro Country.

Not a waking child's cry
from 10,000 New Generation Homes,
where gas-fired barbeques
and Ford Capris stood waiting;
but the smash of International trucks
hurling dead-centre for the hinterland.

Beneath the high, Kodak sky,
5 broken trundlers lay
overthrown and gleaming
on that vast commercial amphitheatre;
and as I stood on this reeling continent
the carefully positioned ball of fire
shone once more
on these eternal signs:
MYERS,
COLES,
WALTONS,
THE NEW WORLD.

JOHN HOOKER

imagine

imagine . . .

michael angelo disguised as satan
discussing the pros of zen
with a condom from the land of
fountain pen

imagine . . .

nixon & kosygin divorcing their bags
while john & yoko play
catch the virgin with
quincy quaker & christine keeler

imagine . . .

skip james jamming with the 1910 fruit-
gum co.
while the white rabbit slays the 4th of
july
and frank zappa and the mothers play
hopscotch
with liberace
while lille ole orphan annie
continues to pose as the boston
strangler.

imagine . . .

all redblooded american boys telling the
truth
and ginsberg/donovan finally getting
laid in chinatown

imagine . . .

adolf hitler (posing as john dewey) saying
"a family that learns together burns to-
gether."
and lucretia borgia (posing as thomas
more) saying
"a family that slays together stays to-
gether."

imagine . . .

if these imaginings catch your thoughts
even for a moment
—don't worry . . .
but just don't forget to hang out your
stockings this xmas!

GRAHAME PITT

**To be
Poet**

To reach where tendrils' hands fall short.
To make a new case for jewels.
To pass through walls between the senses'
gates.
To repay with interest.
To hear black.
To atone for the assassinated water-lily.
To teach stars English.
To walk through fire.

R. H. MORRISON

**a
matter
of
measurement**

a matter of measurement.

he came.

night after night.

THE ALLEY.

brick walls that led conveniently to roofs.
measuring/the height of first one roof and
then the other,

the one that he could climb to from the wall.
measuring/with a tape the width of the alley.

cobblestones

9"

by

9".

3 sets of cobblestones

lying side by side like babies lying together
in a bed.

27" plus the concrete path as borders.

then.

home.

recreate the circumstance/the dream.

practice, next.

leaning forward in his room/take the jump.

arms bent like hooks to take the body's
weight. torso tensed to make the final side-
ways swing . . .

inside himself he sings.

it works.

he can do it.

in the mind's eye it is always night.

body but a lithe black shadow in the dark
avoiding sight.

a shrouded moon and cold damp air,

perhaps a drop of rain.

a long stare at lightless rooms beyond the
fancy balustrades.

SHELTON LEA

**The
Increase
of
Light**

full of miracles
the tail of epilepsy
grey on his face

& his luggage
three vinyl bags
each sacrosanct & torn

the dross of using
the effort of magic
riding the brute
thru actual fences

the first wing
stretchings
the taste
of solid firmament
electrified

& the centre
still as a lizard
still as a fly
intent on his lip

his skull
hoed open
like a nest of ants
who scatter
this way & that
under the feet
of fowls

KEITH RUSSELL

sometime

arriving on a razorblade
to steel wires humming
with activity and summer cool
smiling trips to the national
marathon sawblade nights
and a big house of illrepute
records on the radio
parties
and lots of dreams

by fires and storytelling
wooden and grassy rain
washing into electric workshops
damp neon pizzas
losing pieces of the wall in
brown rice/holes in the wall
smoking loose joints
empty leaves shaking the peace
walking through episodes one week
behind never finding villain/hero
missing the bus

sitting staring thinking
of kitchen tables so realistic
but without the laser beams
talking of paranoia
tossing lies on the visiting milkmen/bottles
floating through parks
catching everything
and forgetting the oars

cut-out Mondays to last till Friday
which was about a month ago
sitting in the darkness
discovering the day
pulling up the floor to check the mechanism

reaching for the blankets

MARTIN FABINYI

Oxford Street

softly the sun eases warmth through the
petals of my pores and the hollow wind
scores a symphony in my hair.
Oxford St. bristles with shadows
and buses collide with the air.
by the church,
six benches against the fence wait, like
primed canvas waits for a painting.

i
cross the road.
sit
down.
become the first stroke.
take out a smoke and search for a match,
scratch at my ear, then pat a tune on my
knees and wait for the nearsighted old
men with their sneezes and wheezes to
gather like dusk . . .

SHELTON LEA

T. W. CORBETT

Battling in Australia 1926-1936

Thomas William Corbett was born in Staffordshire in 1898 and, after service in the first world war, worked in Ireland and India. He married in Australia, returned to England in 1936, and worked as a caster in foundries until his retirement.

I left India for Australia in 1926. I left the boat at Melbourne, where I was met by a friend, Jim Slater, whom I had known since 1914 after joining the army. After a short stay in Melbourne, we both went to Brisbane and then Cairns to work in the sugar industry at Gordonvale. It was work seven days a week, working eight hour shifts. One good thing was that the workers would not let any man work unless he was in a trade union. The men consisted of all races—less black. They were all very friendly to one another. We had a sportsfield and played football. We must have had a good team (which I played for) because we won two gold medals. Before coming to Australia, I had promised Jim that I would take a trip home in 1929 with him because he wanted to see his parents. Mine had passed on.

After the 1928 season had finished at the mill, instead of going south to spend our money as usual, we went into the bush prospecting tin. The tent and other things we required cost about £40. Then we got on a train and went north as far as the railway line went. We had a walk for about two miles into the bush before staking our claim. We found out a few days after arriving that we had neighbors about five miles or six away who I am pleased to say, turned out to be good friends. We used to visit them on Saturday nights for cards and rum. They told us about a stores which was about seven miles from our camp. I used to go to the stores each Sunday morning for a few things, meet a couple of friends from the other camp, get the piano going and have a few beers. It was very enjoyable.

Sometimes I would get a drop too much and have to sleep in the bush but it was worth it. I would like to say that the boss of the stores was the most miserable old bastard I'd ever met. To him, it was a crime to sing or laugh. On Sun-

days, he would go out collecting money owing to him. When we arrived on Sunday, we would get a true Australian, an Aboriginal, to watch from a hill to let us know when he was coming back on his horse. Looking back, my time in the bush, only about seven months, was one of the happiest times of my life. I used to watch the ants at work. I also loved the beautiful birds.

Once a week a train used to come to the end of the line bringing for Jim and I fresh meat and bread which I would fetch. It would only keep for about twenty-four hours owing to the heat so we used to make sure of a good big meal. The time went very quickly and it was soon time to think about getting back to Gordonvale to start work. By this time I had made a few friends—one in particular, a man who used to join us in our sing-songs and drinks on Sunday mornings, an old timer in the tin fields. I found him one Sunday as I was going home flat out, lying in the hen house belonging to the stores. I had an idea where he camped so I took off my rucksack and put him on my back and took him home. About a couple of weeks later on, one Sunday morning, he came to me asking if it was me who took him home. I said, "Yes." Then he said, "I would like to repay you." He told me that a few years ago he had been north near the Gulf of Carpentaria for gold, and had been very successful. He had horses and pack mules. Would I go with him? Personally, I would have said, "Yes", at once but I thought of the promise I had given Jim about going to England. I tried for a week to get Jim to let me off my promise but without success.

I knew I would have loved going north—gold or no gold. So, alas, we arrived in Gordonvale for the 1929 season, after which we came to England for six months. After our 1929 vacation we returned to Gordonvale. When the season

finished I went to West Australia, where I met a girl I had first met on the boat, and who was later to become my wife.

I found a lot of unemployment in West Australia, and after a short time I found myself working with comrades of the Left. One of them, Jack Bunce, returned with his family to England shortly before I left in 1936. He eventually settled in Watford, Hertfordshire. Jack and I got the unemployed together and in no time we had 500 paying no rent. Those were the days when to get a tin of powdered milk for my son I had to work two hours chopping wood. I also used to chop up old telegraph poles for firewood with which to do our cooking.

One time I had occasion to go and see one of the officers at the Labor Exchange. After some time he informed me that he was sorry but he could not help me. I said, "O.K., but I would like to warn you that I shall never let a pane of glass stand between me and food for my wife and children." He looked surprised and said: "What do you mean?" I said: "I shall kick it in." He gave me a very hard look and I got to my feet to go out of the office. "Don't put me to the test," I said. Then he said: "Wait a minute." He went out of the room for about ten minutes and came back with £3 18s for me.

About this time the powers that be were getting ready to welcome a friend of theirs to wine and dine in Perth. Most of the time the unemployed went for help it was: "Sorry, no money." But they could find it to entertain the Social Credit man from Canada. At a meeting it was suggested that we should give him a welcome to let him know, and the government, that things were not so good in West Australia. It was planned that a party of us should go to Perth to welcome the man from Canada. We located the hall for the big event. When it was thought that our masters were getting *on nicely with the chicken and wine there was a signal whistle, and stones from all sides of the hall went through the windows. It had been suggested that three comrades should stand still and wait for the police to pick them up. Jack Bunce was to do all the talking. Jack got three months in Fremantle prison. When he came out he sent to the government applications for him and his family to be returned to England. After a short time, this request was granted. At this time in Fremantle we received no money for being unemployed.*

We were given tickets, which I had to hand over for food at the shops. They tried hard to get us to go to the bush chopping down trees ready

for the coming farmers, and to get us out of the way, of course. However, a lot of us would not go for a long time. Then, after one of our meetings, it was decided that we should go as we were isolating ourselves from the workers. We should go and explain to them that being sent away from wives and children was all wrong. No doubt, the men did a wonderful job. Within a few days they organised hundreds to get on the trains for Perth and home.

One evening a comrade called for me to go to a public meeting in one of the halls in Fremantle. One of the subjects that came up was how to get more emigrants. I asked the chairman what about getting two million Chinese to come. Of course, most of the people at the meeting came from the town hall or were local business people. As I finished speaking, most of them stood up and had a good look at me. The chairman asked why I had made such a request.

I said they would help to pay taxes; they would want food and clothing and homes, and said they would create more jobs and more work for us all. I said West Australia had a lot of spare land. We already had some Chinese but a lot of people thought they, the Chinese, could only grow vegetables and wash clothes.

I have never heard or read of the Chinese being admitted. I think that the authorities only want the so-called white but even when they do get their favourite color they don't treat them as human beings.

It was at this time that I was out with a friend in Fremantle when we were stopped by a solicitor who asked him for a cheque for the bread he had had. My friend said, "Yes, I will give you a cheque if you will cash it and give me the change." The solicitor gave him a hard look and walked on. I told my friend if only we had a few Ned Kellys we could make a better life for all the people.

Incidentally, when I first came to West Australia from India I went on a train from Perth to Adelaide. The train stopped at a place I think was called Halls Creek. As soon as the train stopped hundreds of very poor Aboriginals came to the side of the train with their hands out begging. I saw food that had been left over from the meals on the train being given to them like you would give it to pigs. But they ate it and seemed very thankful for it. About a hundred yards away from the train was their home—about two hundred little shelters made up from old rags and tins. I said to myself: "And all this is done under Christianity!" I felt very pleased that I was not a member.

Arriving in Adelaide, the carriage stopped right in front of a long red carpet. I had an idea it was not put down for us and found it out later that it was for the royal family due to arrive in a few hour's time. I thought it was a waste of money to do such things when people were in want.

Incidentally, I came on the same boat to Australia as a number of other soldiers and their families. In the early 1920s, a great deal of publicity was carried out in England, with posters and photographs, of life in Australia—Go Farming in Australia. The publicity showed what a home could be like after two or three years—a nice bungalow, a beautiful car and about two hundred sheep in very green grass. I left the soldiers and their families in Fremantle in 1926 but when I came back in 1929 I went to see them. They informed me that they were taken by the Salvation Army in Perth to wait while a place was found for them to go. They were all sent to a place about thirty miles out of Perth. The land was thick with “beautiful” trees and each man had so much to clear to make his farm. Dumped on each patch were nails, an axe, a hammer and some steel sheets. That was their home—it had only to be put together. You can imagine how happy they must have been. In 1929, when I went to visit them, they still had a few trees to get out. However, some time later I was talking to Jack Bunce about it, who I was surprised to learn, had also been a victim. He told me that he had sent letters home to England about it—to the press and to those in charge and responsible for the beautiful photographs. Jack told me that after a big outcry in England the colonel in charge retired. Jack said that the most the people who went on the scheme could expect was to become farm managers because the years of hard work and suffering required money from the bank and when the farmers missed a payment the farm was sold over their heads.

Later, after getting a lot of men to return home from the bush we interviewed an MP, a number of MPs, actually, regarding the unemployed. With

the help of our trade union, we suggested a public meeting in the trade union hall, Fremantle. After interviewing our local MP, Mr. McCallum, he very reluctantly agreed to speak. It was a large meeting. When our MP started to speak it was the same old story—“I will speak to the prime minister, but, of course, we are doing all we can do.” He was trying to lead us up the garden path.

I jumped up on my feet and said, “Mr. Chairman, we don't want our MP to lead us up the garden path, or plead poverty for us in the House. We want him to speak up in the House and demand justice.”

Of course, the Labor Party in Australia in those days, 1931, was like the Labour Party in England in 1971. If you try to put socialism into practice they expel you.

I should add that the place where we had to go for relief work in Fremantle was an old school, I believe. We had to go to the playground to a small window. The surface of the playground was just nice for writing with chalk so we wrote the Red Flag in full and also, “Your home is your castle—defend it with all your might.” Just some time after writing this, the powers that be selected Jack Bunce and his family for eviction. However, when the day arrived for the bailiff to get them out Mrs. Bunce was waiting behind the door. As he knocked, Mrs. Bunce opened the door, holding an axe in her hand, and shouting, “Be off! Or I'll chop your bloody head off.” The bailiff turned tail, with Mrs. Bunce behind him.

We told the men that the eviction had been tried to intimidate us, and the Bunces lived on in their home until returning to England. This happened during a rent strike campaign.

Finally, by the end of 1933 my family totalled five in all, and as there were little hopes of a permanent job in Australia I decided to return to England. I came home with my family in 1934, settled in West Bromwich and joined the Communist Party. I remain a member to this day.

It may be of interest to add that I believe I was instrumental in introducing ladies' hockey to Gordonvale during my time there.

The Fifth Sparrow

an autobiography by M. L. Skinner

with a Foreword by Mary Durack

Mollie Louisa Skinner was born in Perth, Western Australia, in 1866 and died in 1955. She wrote six books, mainly novels, of which the best known is *The Boy in the Bush*, co-authored by D. H. Lawrence.

What could the author of *Lady Chatterly's Lover* have had in common with a middle-aged Quaker spinster helping to run a guesthouse in a remote backwater of Western Australia? That is a question that has intrigued the literary world ever since the identity of D. H. Lawrence's collaborator in the novel *The Boy in the Bush* became known. How did such a seemingly incongruous association originate? What sort of person was M. L. Skinner anyway?

In this autobiography Mollie Skinner tells simply and with honesty of her own brave and unusual life as a nurse who yearned to write and a writer who longed to nurse. She recalls her meeting with Lawrence in 1922, her impressions of him and the circumstances of their collaboration. To Mollie, Lawrence was 'a spirit . . . a creature of fire.' To Lawrence, Mollie was as clay in the potter's hands. He saw her potential and with mingled exasperation and excitement used her in the shaping of one extraordinary novel.

In her Foreword, Mary Durack tells poignantly of the many difficulties encountered by Mollie (she became totally blind and deaf) and her friends (before and after her death) until the work was finally shaped for publication.

A most readable book for the many general readers of Australian writing and writers, and of especial scholarly interest and importance for all concerned with Lawrence studies throughout the world.

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books

SAVED BY THE CENTRE

Geoffrey Dutton

Ray Ericksen: *West of Centre* (Heinemann, \$5.90).

To be a drop-out in a Land-Rover, heading for the mulga and the sands of forgetfulness! What a sweet prospect for the 1970s! The only snag might be the availability of pot in Marble Bar.

But Ray Ericksen isn't at all the usual style of drop-out, and by the time the average city-dweller finishes reading *West of Centre* he is going to think twice about dropping out Land-Rover-Central-Australian style. Forgetting the world is fine, but being by the world forgot is literal hell if your Land-Rover breaks down on a track crossed only by the odd emu.

West of Centre is a subtle and fascinating book; a cry of despair from organization man in the city, answered with love but not without danger by the birds and flowers and red sand of Central Australia, that vast ancestral home which belongs to all Australians but in which few are brave enough to set foot.

In 1967 Ray Ericksen was a middle-aged man with an excellent job as an administrator at the University of Melbourne. Apparently successful, with an assured income and a secure future, he had, however, reached a double crisis in his life. The first, though he does not exactly spell it out, was that soul-search that afflicts many thoughtful men in their forties or fifties, that desolating sense that all they are doing is worthless. It is really a spiritual crisis, but in our secular world it is not often surmounted by the grace of religion. Ericksen's second crisis was a peculiarly Australian one, more obvious but none the less acute, that afflicts the traveller returning home from a longish visit to the older civilizations, sharpened

to horror by a thorough exposure to that waking nightmare of the future, the USA. The charges are familiar, but Ericksen puts them well. "On return to Melbourne I found little, in the city or in the university, to limit my disillusionment and despair; and there were other factors to complete the process of disenchantment. I had tried, almost desperately at times, to search out reasons for wanting to come back to Australia. They were few and hard to find. It had been much easier to list reasons for staying away. The aesthetic poverty of our cities and the deadly non-life of our suburbs, the incompetent larrikinism of our politics, the weak villainy of our foreign relations, the hypocrisy and brutal results of our colour prejudice, our intolerance of the non-conformist individual, our dreadful pubs and over-rated beer, our complacent materialism and our witless imitation of many of the worst features of one of the worst models in the world; there seemed to be no end to the list of deterrents and some of them were basic and truly alarming."

Most Australians, and most middle-aged men, batten down the hatches and keep on their old course. Somehow they survive and make survival an excuse for acquiescence. Not so Ray Ericksen. He resigned his good job, used a great whack of his savings to buy a new Land-Rover, and headed for the bush for most of a year. In answer to that terrible suburban question, "What are you going to *do*?" he put forward his only talent, "so minor," he disarmingly says, "so untried and underdeveloped, that it consisted of nothing more than being able to put one word after another, laboriously and falteringly." He would write a book, and then he might be able to write others.

Well, on that score Ray Ericksen has no further need to worry. He certainly can write. He knows the flow and strength of words, and he is a

sensitive recorder of people and nature, of the voices of battlers and of the sound of wind in spinifex; he also has imagination and humor, and is fair-minded and conscientious, as a professional historian ought to be. (Before joining the administration of the University of Melbourne, he was on the staff of the history department.) He will also soon find out, of course, how unkind Australia is to writers financially, and he had better start looking for a well-paid part-time job like that of public lavatory attendant.

If Ray Ericksen is not an ordinary drop-out, then *West of Centre* is likewise no ordinary chunk of outback memoirs. Ericksen had an intellectual quest which gave a physical shape to his travels. In reading about the interior he discovered Ernest Giles the explorer, and his enchanting account of his fantastic journeys to and fro across the centre and west, *Australia Twice Traversed*. All this was in 1967, and no one had written a book on Giles, so Ericksen decided to fill the gap. (Oddly enough, Ericksen was not to know that in 1966 the present reviewer had signed a contract with Faber & Faber to write a short biography of Giles for their 'Great Travellers' series; *Australia's Last Explorer: Ernest Giles* was published in 1970 when Ericksen finished writing *West of Centre*. Although *West of Centre* is published in 1972 there is still nothing to indicate the incorrectness of the statement on p. 7 that no one has written a book about Giles.)

West of Centre is not a book about Giles, though a good part of Ericksen's route roughly follows that of Giles on his various expeditions, but the genial, poetic ghost of Giles is often there to make a glen of a rift in the rocks, and it is a fine act of humility and devotion for a townsman in a Land-Rover to pay constant homage to the tormented explorer and his companions on horse and camel and foot. To yield any of its secrets, the far outback demands such homage, as it also demands time and patience and the ability to sit in silence round a mulga wood fire at night, chest roasting and back freezing, under the full battery of stars.

It is worth quoting from *West of Centre* again, to show how deeply Ericksen responds to what elsewhere he calls "one of the chief elements in my feeling of being an Australian", and also as a token of how well he can write. "In one respect, my awareness of safety on this trip was regrettable, because it closed off one part of the explorer's experience; but it had the advantage of leaving me free to follow other lines of empathetic

speculation. I realised this especially at night. That is the time when the vastness and emptiness of the region have their strongest impact. It is quite certain that there is no other person within hundreds of miles. The live circle of light cast by the flame of a mulga fire, alternately leaping and cringing in the moving air, is the traveller's private world. All around, the bush is dark, brooding and intensely quiet. The flutter-rush of a night-flying bird, the quick, momentary rustle of a small creature in the undergrowth, sometimes a dingo's cough or howl in the distance, are the sole reminders that there is life outside. Mostly the silence is profound, and it is left to the mind rather than the sense to affirm that the desert is not dead.

"It all looks fearfully exposed. Turn from the fire and a moonless sky presses close. The earth seems defenceless in the dry, clear air; as if its protective atmosphere has been stripped away. There is nothing to filter the cold, hard blaze of a myriad stars and it is almost a relief when the spell is broken by a gold-flashing satellite, tumbling in a short arc between the shadows of the sky. Exposure to such nights and the quiet inactivity of sitting by the campfire give a better chance than usual of penetrating the heart of an explorer's experience."

If Ericksen is harsh on the experience of living in the suburbia of Australian cities, he is equally caustic about the pastoralists who own or run the land he drove through. He accuses them of waste, spoliation, racial prejudice and bigoted conservatism, and of being kind to their own kind but not to the passing traveller. Alas, he is mostly right. There are some shining exceptions, but most of the men in the station homesteads, whether owners or, more likely, managers for absentee landlords, are tough bastards who do not see the wider or future issues involved in their present acts. In travelling in those regions, a boundary fence is sometimes enough to show the difference between the rule and the exception. On the one side, dead branches and tree trunks and exposed red sand; on the other, mulga and shrubs and grass growing thickly. Hundreds and thousands of square miles are involved, but although the land is all lease-hold no state or federal government has the guts to save it from sometimes irreparable damage. "The mulga'll come back" is the Central Australian equivalent of the urban "She'll be right, mate."

Just as the story of an adventure, *West of Centre* makes enthralling reading. This lone city

slicker, who admits to being scared to try oiling the Land-Rover's distributor, charges successfully over terrifyingly isolated tracks through the remotest regions of South and Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Always modest and humorously conscious of his amateurism, he nevertheless responds to everything the country has to offer, including the towns and settlements. But the book is also an indictment of our urban values, and, in his words, "a lament for the land itself, for its wild life, and for ourselves". It is an intellectual and spiritual journey (as the book's subtitle indicates), and at the deepest level a search for the missing religious centre of Australian life, which the Aboriginals had, and which our artists and writers have interpreted.

Surely Giles would have approved of *West of Centre*, and would have found Ericksen's motives close to his explorer's heart. In Giles' words, "An explorer is an explorer from love, and it is nature, not art that makes him so".

The book itself is well produced, but with that deplorable lack of liaison between design and editorial which is so characteristic of so many publishing houses, the large Land-Rover on both flaps of the messy dustjacket is unregistered, has left-hand drive, and sports a body quite different from that of the faithful friend of Ray Ericksen.

DOWN ON THE FARM

Max Piggott

Ronald Anderson: *Crisis on the Land*
(Sun Books. \$2.95).

Is the farmer worth his weight? asks the blurb on the back cover of *Crisis on the Land*. In beef, barley or butterfat one is tempted to ask, and the answer is crucial to Anderson's belief that many farming industries in Australia have to shed their unwanted surpluses of produce and cull off those farmers who are unable to be sustained without government sustenance.

The author is our most widely read and respected agricultural journalist, and what he has to say will be unacceptable to many of his farmer readers, particularly those in the powerful farm lobbies. But it should be received with generous praise by everyone interested in rural affairs.

Farmers throughout the world have been assisted by massive government support programs, and it has been surprising how readily the consuming public or taxpayer has agreed to the continuance of these programs and the reasons put forward for their adoption. However it is not

the withdrawal of these various aid schemes which is critical to the Australian scene, but the undermining of individual prosperity by the limits of the farm boundary under today's economic demands; continued drought in large areas of Australia; and a shift in consumer demand in the market place, particularly on export markets.

The recent Federal budget and statements by Country Party leaders on low-interest, long-term loans for producers, does not alter Anderson's pre-budget thesis that the Commonwealth cannot continue to apply indiscriminate palliatives to industries already overloaded with aid of one form or another. The taxpayer no longer believes the backbone of the economy runs anywhere but through Newcastle to Geelong, Mount Newman to Gove.

Anderson rightly places much of the blame for waste in government programs at the feet of the farmer organizations. Divided as they are by caste systems in the sheep and cattle industries, farmers have never been able to demand real results from their elected leaders. It has been too easy to play off one side against the other. There is, as the author points out, no real unity among farmers. The social and economic relationships between a potato grower and a Merino stud breeder are as wide and unrelated as any in commercial life.

Running throughout the book is Anderson's concern for greater expertise in management, particularly in the market place, and therefore for more emphasis on farmer education.

I recall raising the question of the inadequacies of rural education at a conference of Victoria's largest farmer organization. My comments were undramatic, and reaped from my experience on a number of bodies associated in a small way with research and extension, and on my service on a high school council. The response surprised me: our schools had produced the world's most efficient farmers; our country lads did not behave like their city counterparts; and the subject was not an appropriate one for a farmer's conference. Some speakers, I suspect, thought I was supporting government high schools at the expense of other schools.

Anderson's view is that too many under-educated men rise to the top in these organizations, and too many go on to dominate the marketing boards responsible for selling so much farm produce at home and abroad. An unwillingness to employ experts in marketing, although occasionally a talented amateur performs well, is the crux of the crisis.

The commercial future of much of Australian agriculture is bright and will continue to attract many intelligent young men, but whether these men are likely to play any role in farmer politics is what worries Anderson. The seats are held by the conservative and the garrulous.

The sheer size of the financial stake needed to farm efficiently in the major industries limits the introduction of new blood and restricts recruiting to farmers' sons. A modest sheep, grain, dairy or beef farm providing an income level equal to a plumber's or electrician's might employ capital ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000.

Why then do men farm? Anderson says it is a way of life from which they are loath to break out. They know nothing else, and urban life holds terrors for them. I think the 'way-of-life' syndrome is grossly overdone, both by the author and sociologists. There is a lot to say for the farmer's wish to be his own boss, but so many farmers suffer the same anxieties as other small businessmen that living in a rural atmosphere hardly compensates for the difficulties, especially when one is too old to cope with the physical work required on the average farm. Men go farming to make money; there is a bonanza somewhere over the horizon, but when the waiting period is excessive very few farmers are unwilling to pull out. The thing is to be able to hang on until one can profitably get away.

As farming drifts towards factory-type enterprises such as we already see in the poultry and pig industries; as beef fattening in feed lots grows and our vegetables are grown by canneries, the way of life of the farmer more closely resembles that of the urban factory. Farmers will become more vertically integrated and organized. Only the odd bods will remain in the 'way-of-life' fringe, having tax-wise professional men as curious bedfellows.

Perhaps because we have managed to avoid dealing directly with the consuming public, farmers have enjoyed freedoms missed by other commercial people. Rarely is the position idyllic however, as many a retired army officer must have found out when buying a modern poultry farm business, orchard or dairy farm.

A well-written chapter on agricultural journalism draws attention to the excellent rural services of the A.B.C. A monument to Sir Charles Boyer? Lack of independence from advertising revenue limits the value of much rural journalism and seldom does one see well-written editorials or leading articles.

The author points out the weakness of Labor's non-policy on agriculture. Rex Patterson sits in the sticky seat of sugar politics, while Al Grassby makes good newspaper copy without really impressing the sardonic farmer outside his electorate. Anderson makes no forecast on the coming Federal elections, but if Labor's lack of lustre in West Australian rural politics is an indication of events elsewhere, one cannot be optimistic about their gaining, or even holding, rural seats. Unfortunately for Labor, Rex Patterson has not established a national identity as a rural spokesman.

If *Crisis on the Land* is widely read in the cities it will not enhance the city-dweller's opinion of those whingeing bushies. However it offers us the most accurate and unbiased picture yet published of the politics and commerce of that important but declining portion of our population — the Australian farmer.

It makes little attempt to look at the man who does the farming as a character, a personality. However the figure of a once strong and independent character cringing on his knees before the apostles of 'get big or get out', as sometimes portrayed in the press, is worth erasing. Erosion of the rural population there is, but the industries are, with the exception of some minor ones, very sound. Ronald Anderson has not allowed his sympathy for those being eroded to cloud his assessment of agriculture's needs now and in the future.

Expensive for a paperback at \$2.95, and unlikely to be read in tram and train. No country cousin should be without one, and necessary reading for anyone interested in why those Mercedes aren't as common around Balranald as they used to be.

IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY

John McLaren

Brian Kiernan: *Images of Society and Nature—Seven essays on Australian novels* (Oxford University Press, \$8.75 and \$5.25). Chris Wallace-Crabbe (ed.): *The Australian Nationalist—Modern critical essays* (Oxford University Press, \$9.95). T. Inglis Moore: *Social Patterns in Australian Literature* (Angus and Robertson, \$10).

Anyone writing or teaching in Australia about the literature of any time or country is inevitably also considering the nature of Australian civilization, if only because his perspective will be Aus-

tralian and thus the things he perceives as of value will be determined by the Australian context. An important, in fact predominant, part of this context is the fact that white Australians live in a derivative and provincial culture. This does not mean that our experience of life is any less valuable than that anywhere else, nor that we should look overseas for our models of excellence. It does mean that we cannot expect to be culturally self-sufficient, and that a great part of our national endeavor will continue to be the adaptation of overseas forms to our local environment.

This process of adaptation provides the connecting link between the various essays which comprise Brian Kiernan's book. Although he acknowledges his debt to Eliot and to Leavis for his understanding of the meaning of tradition, he is not attempting to define the canon of the great works of Australian fiction. Rather, he is looking at a number of novelists whose work is of high imaginative quality in order to discover what they tell us about the human experience, and what there is in their understanding of this experience which can be distinguished as specifically Australian. In carrying out his task, he relates his authors not to each other or to an Australian literary tradition, but to European literature in general and the romantic impulse in particular. The common quality he discovers in his writers is the way in which they see the betrayal of the romantic dream and the essential loneliness of the individual. He claims that the recurrence of this theme in Australian writing points to a constant element in Australian life.

The great strength of Kiernan's work is his insight into the texts themselves. A reader need not accept his conclusions in order to profit from the lucid exploration of the themes of the separate novels. His essay on the Australian novels of Christina Stead makes clear both the importance of the geographic location in Sydney as an image of contemporary life and the universal import of the quest for liberation which her characters pursue in this setting. His essay on Xavier Herbert draws attention to the way the shifting consciousness of the author in *Capricornia* creates the tension between delight in comic energy and horror at destruction — a tension which is at the heart of our response to the novel as well as being its significant insight into the Australian condition.

Similarly, Kiernan's study of Patrick White traces the conflict in his novels between man's assertive demand to shape life according to his own vision, and his desire to lose himself in the

rhythms of life itself. This conflict, seen in Stan Parker, in Voss, and in the artist of *The Vivisector*, becomes an image of Australia's history, with the conflict between those who wish to shape it according to some European pattern, and the currency lads who accept it for what it is. Kiernan is careful, however, to point to the multiplying ironies in White's vision of life, and to warn us against accepting any too easy division of his characters into good and bad or wise and foolish.

Kiernan's book, however, seeks to be more than a collection of essays, and it must be judged in part by its success in pointing to a specifically Australian tradition. Some critics, such as Leonie Kramer and H. S. Heseltine, have thrown doubt on the very possibility of enunciating such a tradition at this stage of our history. If, however, we accept the fact that the Australian experience is different from any other, it would seem self-evidently worthwhile to discover the distinctive features of the literature it has produced. Mr. Kiernan avoids the mistake of trying to trace any developing tradition, or of asserting any influence from one writer to another, but he does demonstrate quite convincingly that, at least among the writers he examines, there are certain characteristic ways of viewing human experience. These characteristics include a certain pessimism about human possibilities, an ironic attitude towards political mythology, and a sardonic approach to human pretension. While it is not possible to say that these attitudes are representative of Australians at large, it is fair to suppose that their repeated appearance in Australian novels of literary worth is due to persisting qualities of Australian life.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe's collection is not a study of the Australian tradition but a record of the development of our ideas about it. The book opens with a chapter from Vance Palmer's seminal work, *The Legend of the Nineties*, which gave definitive shape to the myths of democracy and egalitarianism which led to "the conviction that Australia was capable of building a society that would give new hope to mankind". Palmer's view is essentially retrospective, looking back to the myth of a golden age of hope in order to sanction his own dreams of the future. This stance is shared by T. Inglis Moore, whose *Social Patterns in Australian Literature* is a monument to a lifetime's scholarship inspired by a faith in the qualities of mateship, endurance and vision that he finds in our writing.

Unfortunately, however, while Inglis Moore's book is an invaluable source of data about what writers said about his various themes, its worth as a social history of literature is doubtful. Embedded in it are perceptive accounts of particular writings, but on the whole it is accumulative rather than critical in its method, and so reads as a compilation of annotated lists rather than an original contribution to our understanding. The stated aim of viewing literature within a framework of human ecology as a response to a unique landscape could provide an illuminating approach to our literature, but the author fails to shape his material according to this concept. Instead of tracing the patterns the writers themselves have evolved in response to their experience, he imposes his own patterns, and so the reader becomes lost in the listing of similarities which obscure too much of the individuality which gives the writers their value.

In the collection of *Australian Nationalists*, on the other hand, the generality of the first essay is tested by the specificity of the later ones. The legend is examined critically by R. M. Crawford, who draws attention to its limitations as well as to its achievement of confidence. Ken Levis assesses the actual achievement of the *Bulletin* school of writers by tracing the changes in the fiction published in that magazine during the eighties and nineties, and comparing this with other colonial collections. The effect of the *Bulletin* may have been to place undue emphasis on the importance of the bush, but it did also emphasize the qualities of realism. The remaining essays in the book give body to these more general observations by examining the actual contributions of Lawson, Furphy, Baynton, Stone, Paterson, Brennan and O'Dowd. The last of these are perhaps most important, in demonstrating Crawford's assertion of the hostility of colonial culture to the things of the mind.

The three books under consideration represent three different approaches to the problem of defining our tradition. All have moved beyond the point of evaluating a work according to its Australianess or lack of it, and none seeks to inflate the quality of the present achievement of our writers. Wallace-Crabbe's collection, in a sense, avoids the question of whether there is any specifically Australian tradition, by contenting himself with reprinting what others have said about their views of the tradition and about the writers who have contributed to the way we see ourselves. In so doing, he has also made accessible

such particularly valuable writings as Hope's essay on *Such is Life*, and it may be that at this stage this uncommitted approach is the most useful.

However, Inglis Moore does demonstrate the existence of a vast quantity of writing which contains attitudes recognizably Australian, and this fact in itself raises questions about the value of these attitudes. Kiernan contributes to our understanding of these questions by his examination of the light cast on our attitudes in the works in which they are embodied, an examination which shows that the writer's response is much more complex than is suggested by a superficial scanning of their themes. His book is therefore the most stimulating of the three, being both a new contribution to the criticism of the novelists he discusses and a further contribution towards our understanding of ourselves.

AUSTRALIANS IN BLACK AND WHITE

Bill Wannan

Vane Lindesay: *The Inked-in Image: A Survey of Australian Comic Art* (Heinemann, \$8.25).

I remember a day in 1933 when I stood with a group of men looking into a shop window in Little Collins Street, Melbourne. We were all laughing unrestrainedly. The object of our mirth was a large reproduction of Stan Cross's drawing "For gorsake stop laughing—this is serious". In those bleak days of the great Depression laughter was the necessary drug and anodyne; and there were plenty of Australian humorists around to supply it. Comic drawings, wordy jests, and the wit of such inimitables as Lennie Lower and WEP, were at the core of the popularity of the *Sydney Bulletin*, *Smith's Weekly*, *Table Talk* and *Australian Women's Weekly*. Laughter was the cheapest form of escape, and the most readily accessible.

Looking once again at Stan Cross's 'For gorsake stop laughing' after an interval of nearly forty years, and at the other comic drawings of the Depression era included in Vane Lindesay's collection, I find it hard to raise more than a smile. No doubt advancing age has tempered my sense of what is funny; but so have the times. A vast gulf separates our way of looking at things nowadays from the way we saw things then. At that time there was a certain innocence of mind, an optimism, which the winds of economic winter couldn't entirely blow away. The most devastating

tragedies the world has known—Spain, the Nazi terror, the ‘Final Solution’, World War Two, Hiroshima, Vietnam—had yet to become horrifying realities. It was possible, then, especially if you weren’t Jewish, to accept with unconcern ‘Hop’s’ seemingly innocuous cartoon of two large-nosed Jews, Mr. Millionstein and Mr. Hoofenberger, talking together: ‘And how did you vote on dot referenda?’ ‘Oh, I followed der *noes!*’ Nowadays, memories of the anti-semitic propaganda in Streicher’s *Der Stürmer*, and the ghosts of Warsaw and Belsen, are likely to intervene; and such jests become nightmare images.

Lindesay’s splendid book enables us for the first time to view the whole range of Australian black-and-white comic art in historical progression, from the 1850s to 1970. In a generous offering of some 350 cartoons and caricatures no artist of any importance, with the exception of Sam Wells of ‘Drongo’ fame, appears to have been overlooked.

Beginning with the rather nondescript woodcuts of Nicholas Chevalier and Thomas Carrington—which nevertheless present an Australian middle-class way of looking at the local scene—*The Inked-In Image* gradually encompasses the major myths that have moulded the ordinary Australian’s thinking and attitudes. Here are xenophobia, chauvinism, anti-authoritarianism, the Noble Bushman, the Ignoble Savage, the antics of Dad and Dave, the Irreverent Digger, the cadging Bush Boozer, and so on. Racism, whether consciously expressed or not, is seen as a persistent attitude, as any reader of Humphrey McQueen’s *A New Britannia* would expect. Have a look at the drawing on page 181. It depicts a group of white Australians gathered around two Aborigines. The faces of the white men are humorously drawn, but not offensive exaggerations. The faces of the black men are sub-human. I’m reminded of Brunton Stephen’s nauseating lines on ‘A Piccaninny’:

Die young, for mercy’s sake! If thou grow
older,
Thou shalt grow lean of calf and sharp at
shoulder,
And daily greedier and daily bolder;

A pipe between thy savage grinders thrusting,
For rum and everlasting ‘bacca lusting,
And altogether filthy and disgusting.

New-chum ‘Poms’, ‘Dagoes’ (*Smith’s Weekly* called the ‘typical’ southern European migrant

Steaka Da Oyst), ‘Chows’ (‘Yas, you sabbee? Roast em cat—me eat em cat—very good’, goes a Nicholas Chevalier caption), ‘Yids’, ‘shabby Nigs’ (Henry Kendall’s term for the Aboriginal fringe-dweller), all the national and ethnic groups implied by such insulting vernacular provided a field day for some of the best-known humorists of pre-1939 Australia.

Many of the drawings reproduced in this book now have only an historical interest. Their humor has long since evaporated and we are not amused. In others, it is the techniques and draughtsmanship that are the sources of delight. Others again, the masterly caricatures by Will Dyson, Low, George Finey and Noel Counihan, have a timeless humor which exists independently of our knowledge of the subjects.

The final group of cartoons, belonging to the late 1960s, includes some of the best and most incisive work in the collection. When one has turned to the excellence and vitality of Molnar, Mercier, Weg and Bruce Petty one cannot entirely share Vane Lindesay’s belief that Australian comic art has arrived at the end of its Golden Age.

OUR FIRST CAPITALISTS

Gwyneth M. Dow

D. R. Hainsworth: *The Sydney Traders: Simeon Lord and his Contemporaries 1788-1821* (Cassell, \$15.50).

Dr. Hainsworth’s most important research into the early years of New South Wales will be essential reading for students and, for the most part, will be of absorbing interest to the general reader. It must be said, however, that, when in doubt, Dr. Hainsworth settles for the scholar rather than Joe Blow. His detailed research dictates this; but perhaps the scaffolding is sometimes unnecessarily obvious.

His hero is the entrepreneur in our early days — the imaginative adventurer who took great financial risks, who clandestinely defied the East India Company’s trade monopoly, and who by-passed the restrictive orders of governors (sometimes with their implicit connivance), whenever lured by visions of profit in trade, shipbuilding and other pursuits. Such men often lost through shipwrecks, bad debts and miscalculations; but they were responsible for turning New South Wales from a gaol into a colony. This major theme gives the book a splendid narrative force.

We begin with the origins of trade in Part I — with the “passion for commerce in the infant colony” first exhibited by the officers of the New South Wales Corps, who responded to the neglected colony’s need for consumers’ goods and who benefited from their exclusive access to acceptable foreign exchange. They were soon joined by merchant emancipists in an embryonic economy that profited trade at the expense of the farmer and small settler and that left its mark on subsequent Australian development. Part II traces the development of commerce, particularly with China, India and England. Some men went under, while the prizes went to those whose predictions were most shrewd and informed.

The third section, perhaps the most gripping one, deals with the search for a staple, which fostered shipping and shipbuilding, and was based on sealing as well as the exploitation of pork and sandalwood from trade in the Pacific (what about local timber, by the way?). The story of sealing illustrates the ruthlessness of the early entrepreneurs who cared little about the possible extinction of seals and less about the men sent out on lonely sealing expeditions. As one of them commented, “Galley Slaves have a preferable life”. In the fourth part, Dr. Hainsworth traces the diversifying of the economy into industry and other forms of private enterprise.

His conclusion is that the penal settlement became a land of opportunity despite Whitehall, whose policies were “better calculated to strangle the colony than rear it to a lusty infant”, and despite the handicap of distance, infertility and “corporate privilege”. In this the free men were important but their “path was easier” than that of the freed — the emancipist merchants who formed “an honour roll of names which were once dishonoured”.

This is an appealing theme. It is not as sentimental as a reviewer might make it appear, for Dr. Hainsworth recognizes that the colony could be brutal to the small men, the bulk of the population, who leave few records for historians to interpret. If he errs, it is in underplaying the unprincipled, self-seeking trading practices that his heroes adopted. But he convincingly argues his case that the early entrepreneurs were more diverse than is generally realized, and that it took audacious, tough men of vision to succeed.

Less convincing is his notion that late in Macquarie’s regime the money-makers polarized into specialized groups (p. 109). Citing Hannibal

Macarthur, who said he had discovered that a man could be a merchant or a farmer but not both, Dr. Hainsworth concludes that the merchant’s task had become so difficult that it required “intensive professionalism and greater specialization”.

It may be broadly true that the big men did increasingly concentrate their efforts, yet many still took a bob two or more ways. Dr. Hainsworth’s point is not entirely clear, and his generalization is over-simplified probably because he concentrates on chosen examples, particularly on the emancipist Simeon Lord.

What of the diverse interests of Daniel Cooper, Samuel Terry, T. W. M. Winder, Solomon Levy and William Hutchinson, for example? Winder, whom Dr. Hainsworth classifies as one who invested in manufacturing, not land, acquired ten thousand acres. Joseph Underwood, a shipper — “a merchant operating from George Street” — owned “3758 acres . . . and more than 1000 head of cattle”. The source of that information? Dr. Hainsworth’s entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Yet in *Sydney Traders* Dr. Hainsworth says that Underwood chose manufacturing, not land. Perhaps he means James Underwood. He forgets to mention which one.

But if I am being too rough (what Manning Clark calls a “knocker”) it is because I am playing Dr. Hainsworth’s own game. The second theme (or is it the first?) in his book is that almost every historian needs correction. He expresses his gratitude for a three-year research fellowship at the Public Library of New South Wales to look into “the more obscure parts of that great collection”, and he acknowledges that he therefore had access to material that was previously unavailable to historians. This excuses the earlier historians who depended heavily on governors’ despatches and whom Dr. Hainsworth engagingly labels as those with the “Government House verandah” perspective (Fitzpatrick, Shann, Evatt, for example). As the book proceeds, however, we discover that most subsequent historians have somewhere or other missed or messed the point — Margaret Steven, Douglas Pike, G. P. Walsh. Tributes are paid and debts acknowledged, but there is a harping on faults that at times gets close to nagging.

But this book is a most important contribution and a very readable one. You’d better order it from your library; it is too expensive for most people, other than reviewers, to own.

RECENT FORTUNES OF "RICHARD MAHONY"

Ken Stewart

Henry Handel Richardson: *Australia Felix, The Way Home, Ultima Thule* (Penguin Books, \$4.85 the set). Edited by Leonie Kramer.

When *Australia Felix* first appeared in 1917, under the title *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, the *Bulletin* Red Page reviewer contributed towards Richardson's obscurity at the time with a bright, wrongheaded review that began with the announcement "Henry Handel Richardson is hereby awarded the prize for longwindedness"; and continued, "not only is his hero dull, but most of the other characters are duller. . . . The whole book bears the impress of a rather dull person . . . Richard Mahony is a dull dog, upright and unenterprising, wooing and winning his demure prunella-shoed Polly with matter-of-fact determination".

I suspect that the *Bulletin's* failures in 1917 and in 1925 to recognize the achievement of *Australia Felix* and *The Way Home* were the most outstanding literary gaffes in its generally creative career. It is true that explanations and justifications may be offered to account for its attitude: these first two volumes displayed only the unity and completeness of a finished part, not of a whole; each book was mid-Victorian and in a sense 'English' in subject matter; the style was in parts constipated and (to the reviewer) "pedestrian"; the author was an expatriate.

The *Bulletin* was justified, though over-emphatic, in pointing to the dullness of the style, but was surprisingly and unfortunately imperceptive in failing to see that the two most convincingly real characters in Australian fiction had been created; and that the sustained study of the colonial aristocracy of wealth and of mid-Victorian manners and values was remarkable for its critical penetration, and general *lack* of Victorian ' quaintness ' and indulgence.

The period of adulation of *Mahony* in Australia, following the publication of *Ultima Thule* in 1929, began equally inauspiciously. The *Sydney Daily Telegraph* (31.1.1929), reporting the success of the "famous" unknown expatriate, provided the information that *Ultima Thule* is the last volume of a trilogy of which the first two volumes were *Maurice Guest* and *The Ordeal of Richardson Compton*; and the *Sun* announced that afternoon, on its front page, "Our Famous Authoress Remains Incognito". The job of put-

ting the record straight was performed, as spectacularly, several days later, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Miss Ida Leeson, who was able to headline her article "Henry Handel Richardson, A Genius".

The re-publication of the *Mahony* trilogy in the Penguin Modern Classics series will arouse neither jeers nor fanfares. It will, one is tempted to hope, gain for the book a wider popular audience (*Mahony* is probably not as widely read as, say, Marcus Clarke, or Lawson), and it may make a gesture towards re-establishing a reputation for Richardson in England, where she was "discovered" and is now forgotten. The trilogy's parts are published separately by Penguin, each in a manageable size. The cover illustrations (from a goldfields artist, Tom Roberts, and Arthur Streeton) are particularly appropriate and compelling.

The decision to issue three volumes, however, will cause confusion, as the publishers do not adequately indicate which version of the trilogy is being presented. One tends to assume that since the work was originally published in three separate volumes over a period of twelve years, the text of each Penguin will repeat that of the first edition of each separate volume. But the text offered is that of the revised "omnibus" edition, first compiled when the three parts were collected and revised to make a whole, in 1930. An inconclusive reference on the back cover of each Penguin to "this uniform edition" is better than nothing, but not sufficiently helpful. "Uniform" with what? The muddle is aggravated by the fact that reissues in separate volumes of the original texts are available in a Norton paperback edition that is still being sold and remaindered. Though the purpose of the Penguin Modern Classics series is not to provide scholarly texts, any reader, especially a student or teacher, needs to know which version he is reading. He will be further misled by the summaries of printing history. The *Australia Felix* entry, for example, states: "First published by William Heinemann 1917; published in Penguin Books 1971", thereby strengthening the impression that the 1917 text is being presented.

It would be helpful, too, to learn from the Penguin introduction, or to have the issue raised, whether Richardson herself made the revisions for the 1930 edition. Another point of interest is that Richardson's epigraph to the trilogy, which appears in the longer texts and in some but not all subsequent shorter collected editions, is omitted from the Penguin text (and from recent Heine-

mann editions). This motto, from Browne's *Religio Medici* ("every man is not only himself; . . . men are lived over again; the world is now as it was in ages past; there was none then but there hath been someone since, that parallels him, and is, as it were, his revived self") is an indispensable instruction to the reader, redolent with implication concerning Mahony, the minor characters, Cuffy, the themes and construction of the trilogy, and possibly the author herself. The omission is unfortunate, especially since the epigraph has been used in several discussions of *Mahony* in the last six years.

The 1930 version offered by Penguin is certainly the better to read (though a scholarly edition and collation of both texts is needed urgently as well). *The Way Home* probably gains most from the revision: it was reduced (in my rough calculation) from about 128,000 to 120,000 words, and a skimming comparison shows the revision was felicitous. Much naturalistic bulk carved away; and there is some restructuring of paragraphs and sentences, resulting in valuable abbreviation and at times in greater fluency. Gratuitous and tautological phrases and adjectives are omitted; and the punctuation is improved, so that superfluous, jerky and stiffening sets of commas are eliminated, and dashes are replaced by commas.

Since publishers don't attach 'Caveat Emptor' signs, it is worth warning readers that the introduction by Professor Leonie Kramer is duplicated in each volume: despite appearances each book is not separately introduced. The advantage of this confusing practice is plain: the *Mahony* trilogy is probably more closely integrated, more truly *one* novel than any comparable fictional undertaking, and needs to be discussed in that way. The introduction is lucid and balanced, and apart from one glaring self-contradiction is valuable both for its biographical and historical background, and for its criticism, in which Professor Kramer's previous arguments are developed, and some new important perspectives set up. The one error can be corrected here: Richardson began work on *Maurice Guest* in the late 1890s (as Professor Kramer states on p. vii), not "some time in 1906 or 1907", as she mis-states three paragraphs later.

It is good to have the *Mahony* trilogy placed by Professor Kramer within the context of a developing Australian literature. This approach brings the trilogy back to Australian earth, and leads to awareness of affinities and contrasts with resident

writers which illuminate the novel itself, and which help us to see it as a work that ought to be discussed along with Lawson, Furphy and Barbara Baynton, and not detached from contemporary fiction as a kind of monumental tripartite near-oddity. It would be a corollary to Professor Kramer's discussion, I believe, to suggest that Richardson is closer to Lawson than Lawson is to Furphy or Prichard. And this bracketing is more than literary arithmetic. Mahony's story is the first to depict the mental tug-of-war between England and Australia with an equal force at each end of the rope. If the squatters in *Geoffrey Hamlyn* inevitably retire to "enjoy . . . to the fullest that charming English country life, the like of which . . . no other country can show", returning wealthy from an Arcadian Australia to a Christmas card England, Richard Mahony is probably the first credible Englishman to go *back* to Australia. And Mahony's sensibility, somewhat like Lawson's, is "divided" as he experiences Australia itself with its physical harshness and human coarseness on the one hand, its dream-like distances and hills and generous, less taut humanity on the other. For Mahony, the process of discovering that Australia is not Utopia is at the same time, and unwittingly, a process of growth and knowledge as a colonial Australian. At the peak of his financial fortunes he voluntarily chooses to return to "his adopted country"; and despite the monstrous adversity he experiences in *Ultima Thule*, he does not regret his decision to live out what life remains for him in the colony (returning to England, ironically enough, as a tourist), or seriously blame the colony as such for his suffering. Professor Kramer defines the complex sense in which "Richardson makes it plain enough that Mahony has been captured by Australia".

Probably because Richardson was an expatriate, the affinities between *Mahony* and the fiction of Lawson and Barbara Baynton are overlooked. Parts of *Bush Studies* are thematically and technically closer than any other Australian fiction to Richardson's evocation of the nightmare world and fragmented experience of Mahony in the inland summer climate of northern Victoria. And though there are both obvious and subtle reasons why Lawson's stories, and not *Mahony*, have entered a popular tradition, it has not always appeared to those who put *Mahony* on a different shelf that what is comparable in both writers is the blend of romanticism and realism, and the common ambiguity (more controlled in Richardson) concerning the question of group allegiance

and spiritual alienation in an Australian community.

It is not really surprising that Lawson's realism explores many of the areas of physical hardship, collective prejudice, intolerance, apathy, expansive and aggressive extrovertism that Mahony experiences. Lawson and Richardson were born within three years of each other, each the child of an immigrant who came to Australia to seek gold, was unsuccessful at the diggings, and was forced to turn to other work. Both authors knew the effects on the parents of failure in the effort to gain a workable income in rural areas: the father as impractical dreamer and the mother as realist enter their fiction, together with the landscape of dream and of destructive reality:

Far away across the creek to the south a spur from the Blue Mountain range ran west, with a tall, blue granite peak showing clear in the broad moonlight, yet dream-like and distant over the sweeps of dark green bush.

That is Lawson's familiar projection of the dream of a 'gentleman once' onto the landscape; but only the slightly more accurate geographical flavor of the passage distinguishes it from Richardson's prose. The romanticism and detail are common to both.

One of Professor Kramer's important contributions is her lucid, necessarily brief but complex summary of the way Richardson's realism operates. Her introduction sorts out the implications that arise for the reader from the gulf between the quality of Richardson's (or Mahony's) expression and the (presumably intended) quality of his thinking and experience. Professor Kramer argues persuasively that as a consequence of this gap Mahony's stature as a speculative man is diminished or rendered ambiguous. The deficiencies of Richardson's style are for the first time deeply probed. If one feels that the Introduction stops short, however, it is because a sufficient answer, in terms of the art of the trilogy, is not provided to explain why even relatively unenthusiastic critics, such as Vincent Buckley, admit to being "haunted" by *Ultima Thule*. The question that might still be explored is: what elusive artistry in *Ultima Thule* (it is *there*) brought about the exaggerated comparisons and acclamations in the first place? What is the source of the poignancy?

A NEW AUSTRALIA?

Gareth Evans

John McLaren (ed.): *Towards a New Australia* (Cheshire, \$1.95).

It is perhaps only parties with no expectation of office that can afford to approach the hustings with flaring nostrils and fire in the belly. Certainly the federal Labor Party, now scenting power for the first time since God knows when, has this year been playing it cool. And caution, pragmatism, respectability and responsibility are the dominant themes in this new collection of Fabian essays, written with varying degrees of elegance by thirteen more or less prominent parliamentarians and ably assembled by John McLaren in time to catch the market.

There is little here to frighten the timid. Gough Whitlam, is calm, almost schoolmasterly, in his account of the necessity and inevitability of our recognising the People's Republic of China, and the desirability of our achieving closer relationships with the rest of the region (especially Indonesia, with whom it seems "we have suffered a strange physiological block", whatever that means). He remains carefully silent about some of the harder questions, in particular about the kinds of specific arrangements that might be involved in achieving this warm regional togetherness, suggesting only that we can learn much from the cheeky but useful recent initiatives of a comparable small power, Canada. Lance Barnard's paper on defence seems primarily designed to cheer up the military by indicating that Labor will be nicer to soldiers: there is no mention of unifying the services, or of engaging in any other kind of ruthless organizational clean-up.

On matters economic, Frank Crean and the first-term member for Adelaide, Chris Hurford, both wax enthusiastic about indicative planning but are clear that, in Crean's words, Labor "must start with existing mechanisms, and must work within a federal pattern and in the context of a mixed economy". Socialism, when it is mentioned at all by any of the writers, means "fairer shares", "teamwork", "humane values" or some other analogous pleasingly vague hurrah-concept; nationalisation is not only unconstitutional, but unpopular and probably unnecessary as well. Industrialists, safe from expropriation, will find little to fear either in Jim Cairns's paper on tariffs, though his staunchly protectionist stance is clearly motivated by Labor's traditional concern with un-

employment rather than sympathy for the profit-makers.

And industrial proponents of growthmanship can, on the evidence of these essays, rest easy against any threatened onslaught by a ministerial environment lobby. It is true that Tom Uren, in a characteristically amiable plea for a "serene and gentle" urban world, makes some noises about the necessity of controlling pollution, as does Al Grassby in his stylish essay on rural affairs; so too does Lionel Murphy, straying beyond his likely portfolio if not necessarily out of his depth, in a paper on "Science and Technology" that is balanced, interesting and wide-ranging but often quite remarkably turgid (sample: "The incredible watershed for good provided by the efficiency and speed of scientifically-based methods of attacking the environmental, societal and human problems facing this country has not been tapped"). But none of the contributors seems really concerned to dissent from Crean's simplistic dictum that "not everybody can have more unless more is produced". Whether *everybody* has to have more is perhaps one of the questions that socialists, today, should be asking rather than assuming.

Among other constraints, real or imagined, the Commonwealth Constitution looms large in many of the papers, particularly those on economic issues. It is true that, on the question of nationalisation, the inhibitory role of section 92 can scarce be exaggerated, interpreted as that vexatious provision continues to be by a rampantly Spencerian High Court. But as Whitlam has elsewhere emphasized, albeit with more caution than is arguably necessary, there are power-conferring provisions in the Constitution which enable a great many things to be done indirectly which cannot be done directly. And the corporations' power, recently rescued from oblivion, would seem to allow quite far-reaching direct control of the trading activities of companies, including the prices at which their goods and services are sold. Section 92 is again a bogey here, but not an insurmountable one, since it does allow "reasonable regulation", if not the prohibition, of private enterprise. Labor spokesmen continue to glance nervously over their shoulders when contemplating legislation of this kind, and dream wistfully but unrealistically of constitutional change by referendum. There is a good case for a new Labor government exercising its whole range of actual and potential constitutional powers with determination and persistence and with less sensitivity to possible rebuffs from the High Court.

For most voters the workings of the law remain an unfathomable mystery, while the vacillations of government are only too obvious.

By no means everything in this book is as bland or depressing as the reader might be beginning to suspect from the comment so far. Douglas McClland is sound and civilized on media and the arts, and John Wheeldon equally so on Labor's approach to civil liberties. Wheeldon directs some well-aimed shafts at backwoodsmen in his own party who have been, on issues like censorship, abortion and divorce, more illiberal even than a number of their Liberal opponents. But he is perhaps unduly prickly in his antagonism to the conscience vote, even for abortion where it has so often proved the vehicle for reform: this is surely at least one area where a little bit of pragmatism goes a long way.

Among the very best pieces in the book are those gathered together at the end, by Kennedy on education and by Cass and Hayden on health and social welfare. One hopes there is still a classic swinging voter or two about who will be dogged enough to fight through the material thus far. David Kennedy adds to his reputation as the parliamentary party's most thoughtful and well-informed spokesman on education, official or unofficial, by paying attention not only to the nature and distribution of the handouts that will be necessary to improve standards and remedy inequalities, but also to the rethinking of educational aims that will need to accompany them. On the debit side, however, he could do with some instruction from the women's lobby on the question of child-care centres, which need not be just the poor relations of fully-fledged government controlled pre-school centres; he could also be legitimately accused of viewing rather too rosilily the idea of the Open University.

Bill Hayden's paper is a crisp account of Labor's health and welfare policies—in particular the national health insurance, accident compensation and superannuation schemes—which between them represent the most attractive, best researched and most far-reaching likely innovations. Doctrinaire socialists may cavil a little at some of the compromises with medical-profession neuroses that have been dictated by both political and constitutional realities, namely the continued availability of private care, the doctors' billing option and so on, but these are policies in the best compassionate-egalitarian tradition of the Labor (and Fabian) movement, and of which the party can justly feel proud.

The aim and style of this collection, taken as a whole, is informative rather than inspirational, and it sometimes as a consequence makes rather dull reading. It is by no means all-encompassing in scope: industrial relations and immigration are notable absentees among the topics discussed, and Kim Beazley and Clyde Cameron among the authors. But the book does, unquestionably, usefully supplement the bare bones of the official platform and give interesting insights into how most of the leading figures in a Labor administration are thinking and how they will cope with their jobs. Not all of them are invested with sparkling personalities, venturesome spirits or ideological purity, but they are all competent men with humane and civilized instincts. In what they have written there is plenty to give pause to those numerous pessimists, optimists or just plain cynics among us who insist that a Labor government will make no difference.

THE GREEN CONSCIOUSNESS

Spencer Zifcak

Charles Reich: *The Greening of America*
(Penguin Books, \$1.85).

Reich bases this book on two interconnected themes. The first is that in America today a potent new force for political change has arisen. This force is a profoundly humanitarian consciousness which has begun to take hold amongst American youth. The second theme is his belief that this consciousness will become so powerful that the corporate state will crumble beneath its might, thereby effecting a revolution.

He describes the new consciousness in broad terms. It has its origins in the contrast between the promise society gives to the young through its affluence, technology and idealism, and the threat to that promise which is visible everywhere in the plastic, tediously conformist, irrational world which is America.

The new consciousness rests in the rediscovery of fundamental human values. Crucial importance is laid upon the individual's acceptance of himself as worthwhile and his refusal to regard himself as superior or inferior to others on the basis of inhuman criteria. Man ought no longer consider himself as a company executive, lawyer or wharf laborer, his value being assessed on the basis of his position in the social hierarchy. Instead he must see himself—and be seen—as a human being who may have his deficiencies or peculiarities, but is not rejected or classed as inferior

because of these. To the new generation the individual is the only true reality.

This is not however because of self interest. The individual now has an intense concern for his fellows, and thus for the society in which he lives.

Despite the intensity of this social concern, change is not to involve actions which are a violation of the basic principles upon which the new thought is based. In order to achieve good, only methods which involve no harm to others can be invoked. This clearly marks off the new conception of the revolution from the old.

Evidence of the new consciousness, Reich contends, can be found in youth culture, especially in trends in clothing, in new attitudes to careers, in music and the sense of community.

Reich stresses continually that worthwhile change will only come through a change in self. To impose a new socio-economic structure upon people whose values remain the same would be a futile exercise—for eventually that structure would begin again to reflect the old values.

For Reich, hopeful signs of the breakdown of the capitalist system are seen in the increasing dissatisfaction of the worker-consumer. Work is no longer expected to be satisfying. The meaninglessness of pushing papers is becoming more evident, and rigid job hierarchy is making the dream of equality and democracy lose its acceptability. The consumer finds the products he buys deficient, or nowhere near the quality expected as a result of advertising, and begins to express concern that big business is leaving less of the environment for him.

Dissatisfaction is encouraged further by the state's "rigidity-repression syndrome". Its failure to deal with certain underlying societal problems leads to protest, and then, often, to repression of that protest by the authorities. Strike-ban clauses imposed upon unsatisfactorily paid workers, and harassment of anti-war activists, are cited as examples of this.

Reich sees the new consciousness as the answer to all these problems, for with it "the corporate state vanishes. It can no longer sell people things to satisfy any but real needs which means the consumer has regained power over what is produced. And it can no longer get anyone to work except for real satisfactions, which means the status system is at an end and people within organizations regain power over the organizations and structure of society . . ."

But how widespread is this new morality? There

is clearly some new "consciousness", but it would appear to be limited mainly to pockets of young people in the colleges and the universities. Revolutionary fervor may be more widespread, especially in the youthful black communities, but it still remains tightly bound to notions of class struggle within the system, rather than the questioning of the system's wasteful, bureaucratic, meritocratic and technocratic nature.

Of course the system in which we live would be radically altered should the new consciousness prevail. But it is far from clear that present dissatisfaction will lead to the adoption of the "liberated consciousness". The grip which the materialist ethic has upon society still mitigates very strongly against the new revolution. Thus, while work is not satisfying, it has its purpose, i.e. the acquisition of goods and services, which may compensate for the unpleasant toil undertaken. The rigidity of the job hierarchy still goes largely unnoticed; but if it is the average man normally seeks, not for social alternatives, but for an escape, usually in the form of television or permissible drugs.

Unhappiness with the quality of consumer goods, while widespread, is again resulting in little to inspire revolutionary confidence — and even the quality of goods is not the major issue. The more important direction of inquiry is: What ought to be being produced for the greater benefit of the community? Until this aspect of the new consciousness becomes accepted, concern about the quality of goods to satisfy falsely created needs will do little to encourage radical change.

Unfortunately the book makes little of people's natural propensity towards conservatism. In opting for the new consciousness and the world it will create, one steps into the realm of uncertainty. The "new thought" is a threat to conventional patterns of living, however unhappy and unequal, and people will in general opt for the devil they know.

These factors point to the great dilemma which faces those who seek a total revolution. A violent revolution which seeks to alter the structure of society is unlikely to achieve full success unless preceded by a revolution of consciousness. However the revolution of consciousness is unlikely to come about unless there is some revolutionary upheaval in society which will break down the system's power of consciousness management.

As an exposition of the view that we must concentrate upon achieving change through consciousness, Reich's book is well worth reading, especially for its lucid — although at times exag-

gerated — description of the new consciousness, and its picture of the shallowness and falsity of the life most of us now lead. Although the optimism of the author concerning the "new consciousness" is unfounded, especially taking into account the short time span now being posed by environmental problems, one can only hope that Reich is right.

PHILLIPS ON LAWSON

Brian Matthews

A. A. Phillips: *Henry Lawson* (Twayne Publishers, \$6.90. Australian agents: Collins Book Depot, 86 Bourke Street, Melbourne).

A. A. Phillips' book on Lawson is welcome not only because he has already made a tremendous contribution to Lawson studies in his two famous essays "The Craftsmanship of Lawson" and "Henry Lawson Revisited", but also because despite considerable publishing and anthologising activity, Lawson's work still seems to engender a disproportionately small amount of close critical attention. The important essays of Wallace-Crabbe, Heseltine and Murray-Smith notwithstanding, one could still claim with justice that Lawson's slender but powerful canon deserves more notice.

It is especially necessary to espouse Lawson's cause, I think, because he makes his own case in a profoundly deceptive and understated way. Not only is the evidence for the defence meagre in actual physical size — it consists in my opinion of *While The Billy Boils* (both series), *Joe Wilson* and one or two isolated stories, including "Telling Mrs. Barker" — but also the actual content, the substance, is misleadingly simple-looking. It sounds too easy, its art is fragile and flickers elusively when one tries to pin it down. This can be variously illustrated but is perhaps most noticeable in certain Mitchell sketches and *Joe Wilson*. The symbolic possibilities at the end of "On The Edge of The Plain" are clear enough:

They shouldered the swags, with the pup on top of Mitchell's, took up their billies and water bags, turned their unshaven faces to the wide hazy distances and left the timber behind them.

Yet it is a shy symbolism. While we appreciate, in the context of the sketch, the significance of Mitchell's action in leaving the complexity and constriction of the timber for the unambiguous

plains, we are reluctant to push the symbolism too far: the tough actuality of the lives presented remains compelling and dominant. Yet we recognise that the *excitement* of this portrayal resides at least as much in the apprehension of its scarcely emphasized symbolic aura as in the skilful and vivid presentation of observed reality. The same may be said of "Some Day", where Mitchell, having remarked ambiguously that there was a "a long dry stretch before" them on the morrow, "covered his face with a piece of calico, because the moonlight and wind kept him awake", and of "The Bush Undertaker", where the goanna constantly grows towards symbolic stature, as symbol of death, yet is constantly and tactfully drawn back into its own tangible, utterly earthy actuality. Like the snake in "The Drover's Wife" it dies in a way that suggests symbolic possibilities without being clearly committed to them. So unasserted is this symbolic sense, in fact, that I think it might better be called a sort of mental reverberation — an effect that stays with one, disturbingly, allusively, excitingly — but, in a sense, unformed.

The prose often achieves its most successful effects by similarly unobtrusive means, a characteristic that has led to its being described as "artless". One of the best examples of this is found in "Water Them Geraniums", when Joe and Mary, gloomy and estranged, are on their way to Lahey's Creek:

In this sort of country a stranger might travel for miles without seeming to have moved, for all the difference there is in the scenery. The new tracks were "blazed" — that is, slices of bark cut off from both sides of trees, within sight of each other, in a line, to mark the track until the horses and wheel marks made it plain.

Though this description superficially deals with directions, with clarification, it is actually tortuous and obscuring in its essential effect: the technical explanation and the repetitions produce a sense of intricacy, not the resolution that the tone implies. And this is precisely Joe's state of mind. He badly needs directions to help him through the unfamiliar territory of failing relationship, disintegrating communication. That country, like his physical surroundings, is faceless, puzzling, dangerous. In this extract the subtle organization of the prose thus works against its immediate surface impression to suggest not merely landscape and physical detail, but above all, a state of mind.

This is at least the *sort* of evidence which I think needs to be adduced in Lawson's 'case'. A. A. Phillips has already brought much of it forward in his two famous essays and, with greater scope in the present book, he recapitulates and elaborates upon those two earlier works. Phillips tackles a number of issues which inevitably present themselves when Lawson's work is closely examined: one of these is Lawson's catastrophic decline. It has been customary to attribute this largely to alcohol; yet, while one cannot of course discount the effects of Lawson's alcoholism and the various difficulties and crises that attended it, it has never seemed to me a satisfactory answer. For one thing, the alcoholism itself could have been symptomatic. Phillips, also reluctant to attribute the decline exclusively to alcohol, brings the shadowy figure of Hannah Thornburn into the foreground:

As Henry crossed the Indian Ocean with this thin-lipped disapproval [of his wife] accompanying him, his mind must have been leaping forward to Hannah, who admired as well as loved him. When he reached port, he learned that she had died a few days earlier. The last, frail chance of salvation had slipped from his grasp.

A frail chance, certainly. It is not even sure that Hannah and Henry intended to attempt a permanent relationship. If they had, there was only an outside chance that Hannah's companionship would have cured or effectively mitigated Henry's alcoholism. . . . This much, however, seems almost certain: once this crashing blow had fallen, there was no hope for him. Henceforth, whenever the drink called, Lawson had the excuses of the malice of his fate and of an impressively romantic sorrow which needed to be drowned.

This is an important passage: Phillips here takes a stand on Lawson's decline which I have not encountered before and which certainly seems to me more tenable than the usual purely 'alcoholic' line.

He is in fact tentatively suggesting that Lawson's artistic decline was more the result of a crushing bereavement, a final blow, than of the alcoholism which was so much a part of his life before and after Hannah's death. In another reference, later in the book, he is less tentative in seeing Hannah's death as crucial:

In fact, of course, the development [of his artistic powers] never took place. The transplantation to England disturbed his

concentration on the creative process; the death of Hannah crushed it.

It nevertheless remains worrying, I think, to ignore Lawson's *art* as a possible source of the crisis. Though he was not self critical nor a man of intellectual bent, Lawson was aware at different times of his own art, and I think he was aware fleetingly of its frailty. It seems to me that significant light could be thrown upon his tragic descent if the reasons for that descent were sought less in the vicissitudes of his personal life and more in the precise nature of his art and artistic sensibility.

The three chapters devoted to consideration of Lawson's work — "The Folk Speaker", "The Personal View", "The Craftsman" — offer close and original studies of Lawson's work and a comprehensive consideration of important issues such as 'mateship', Lawson's attitude to the bush and his trip to Bourke (though the latter is repeatedly referred to as being of eighteen months' duration, and on another occasion Lawson is described as looking to return home half way through 1892: in fact he did not arrive in Bourke till about September 1892 and left about February 1893).

The format of this series does actually constrict Mr. Phillips: this book, good and comprehensive though it is, is still not the closely focussed, exhaustive work that A. A. Phillips could undoubtedly give us. He has to keep his American audience firmly in mind, which occasionally acts as a restraint on his witty, trenchant style. And, in keeping with the survey requirements of a series such as this, he is committed to a contextual chapter on the 1890s, which is inevitably rather generalising, and to chapters on biographical detail and critical reception. This limits the space actually devoted closely to Lawson's work, to about half the book; I am not persuaded that the amount of thinking, reading and speculating on Lawson that A. A. Phillips has done over the years can be adequately contained in so confined a space, even though, as I have said, the three chapters themselves are packed and invaluable.

For all that, Phillips' *Henry Lawson* is the most sustained, original and balanced book-length study that we have on the subject. It is fitting that the man whose essay on Lawson's craftsmanship began a new era in Lawson studies, should have given us this first critical book on a writer who, as Phillips' final chapter shows, has been variously received, to put it mildly.

A SERVICE TO OUR POETRY

Frank Kellaway

The 'Poets on Record' series from the University of Queensland Press (\$2.95 each): Bruce Dawe, James McAuley, Rosemary Dobson, R. D. FitzGerald, Rodney Hall.

The 'Paperback Poets' series from the University of Queensland Press (\$1 each): *Heaven in a Way* by Rodney Hall; *Streets of the Long Voyage* by Michael Dransfield; *The Inspector of Tides* by Michael Dransfield; *Bicycle* by David Malouf; *The Brineshrimp* by Rhyll McMaster; *Diver* by R. A. Simpson. Richard Packer: *Being out of Order* (U.Q.P., \$3.50).

In America it is not uncommon for publishers to bring out volumes of poems which include a record of the poet reading his work. As far as I know the University of Queensland Press is the first to do this in Australia.

The thousands of people who have heard Bruce Dawe read his own work will want to own a copy of his volume in the series *Poets on Record*. The poetry is witty and compassionate and the reading has a droll, original quality which does perfect justice to the work. Indeed it is hard, after hearing Dawe, to imagine anyone else reading the poems entirely satisfactorily.

James McAuley also reads well. He renders the light verse, "A letter from Captain Gulliver to Lord Peterborough" and "The convict and the lady", with a smooth elegance which is perfectly appropriate. He even manages to make the swan poems, which have always seemed to me false and trite, a little more convincing. The style is less suited to the best poems. The stark simplicity of the best of all, "Pietà", is given an uncomfortable sugar-coating and those awkward, honest poems about his parents, which in their way are almost as admirable, are slicked up to sound quite glossy.

Rosemary Dobson's poems with their shapeliness, wit and passion survive a particularly flat, nasal reading, though most of her admirers are more likely to return to the text of the poems than to the record. The same is true of the volumes by Harold Stewart and R. D. FitzGerald. Stewart's reading, in particular, lacks energy, indeed sounds limp and at times almost wretched.

Rodney Hall's volume seems a little out of place in this distinguished company. He reads a single long poem, "Romulus and Remus", from his volume *Heaven in a way*, also published by the University of Queensland Press. Hall reads like a professional actor and renders the piece

well for what it is — theatrical rhetoric.

The texts of these records are also available separately for teaching purposes, at fifty cents each.

Heaven in a Way is the third in a series of paperback poets brought out by the same publishers. The worst of these poems by Rodney Hall are clever-clever like "Cut-out":

This love has cut me
from my background —
snip like a pair of scissors
snip — too close to the heart,
look out for blood.
At last I'm extrovert.

or pretentious like "Romulus and Remus", but the quieter, more personal poems, "Husband and wife with newspaper", "Domesticity", "Not complaining", do approach the ideal he articulates in "Giving Tongue":

We learn by each excitement
how the mind can build
complete harmonic series
upon a central tone,
attract remote familiarities;
can cause the music of a thought
to hum with heavenly discords
and — the miracle — contain them.

Michael Dransfield has two books in the 'Paperback Poets' series: *Streets of the long Voyage* and *The Inspector of Tides*. The poems are remarkably varied in technique. It is uncomfortable, fierce poetry with great nervous energy. Some pieces are imagist fragments influenced by Japanese haiku or senryu. "Deuteronomy", "Quartorzain", the "Mouse" poems, "Letter to Kris Hemensley", "Rainpoem", "Ryokan", "The Inspector of Tides" and a dozen others in both volumes are of this kind.

Some of the poems are surrealistic and at his best Dransfield evokes electric images of great power and beauty, but in spite of that a great deal of the work is scrappy and fragmented. This is intentional, of course, but I find this kind of deliberate fragmentation irritating and affected and react in the same way to the eccentricities of punctuation which seem to me to impede rather than to help the poetry.

Dransfield's contempt for what he takes to be the establishment lumps together A. D. Hope and Sir Paul Hasluck, which seems indiscriminating, to say the least. His unkind attack on the works of the Official Poets, whose genteel iambs chide industrialists

for making life extinct,

has some truth, but not enough.

Still there is a great deal here to be grateful for, particularly in the second book, *The Inspector of Tides*.

David Malouf's *Bicycle and other Poems* was the first book to be printed in this paperback series. The poems are fluent and urbane. He is just the poet to translate, or rather adapt, Horace's odes to twentieth century English. Even better are a number of introspective poems about mental and physical suffering, including "Birth-day poem at Thirty" which ends:

I watch the newsboy figure-
-of-eight on burning wheels
and toss it in: the day
rolled tight on its lies, twelve inches
of sunlight on the path.
Go down and take it up,
unfold it. The dawn ticks
but does not explode: another
day. So far so good.

The Brineshrimp by Rhyll McMaster is the ninth in the paperback series. Objectivity and brilliance of vision characterise these poems. Here is an original voice, a sharp but myopic and often painful vision of animals and things and people. In spite of occasional awkward twists of rhythm I enjoyed almost every poem.

Reviewing R. A. Simpson's second book, *This real Pompeii*, some years ago I complained, unfairly it seems in retrospect, of its greyness, its lack of celebration. That is the last objection that could be raised against his most recent book, *Diver*. The first poem, "Diver", sets the tone, existential and self-mocking, (in his case the two are not contradictory) and essentially celebratory. It ends:

Water gulps me down,
Chilling me with its grip,
Then arms pine up and up
Like worship.

These poems have a profound humility and humor as well as wit.

The most pleasing aspect of *Being out of Order* by Richard Packer is its jazzy use of the vernacular.

He'd have chiselled a pretty packet, that
boy,
if he'd only kept his ears awake to me:
enough of that rolling yellow stuff
to freewheel us into villas. Yes, we could
have clubbed the gay Aegean in the teeth
with top-class empties each headachy
dawn,

and loafed on cushions until snuffing time,
nibbling grapes and nipples like two
politicos

who've given a sly home to public funds.

The whole book is fluent and assured, but for all the naturalness of the language there is something artificial about it. One feels that the angry tone of many of the poems is more a matter of style than of real outrage. There is also the occasional note of arch cuteness, as in "Love of Learning", and some attitudinising, as in "Name Me". Nevertheless there are at least two good poems: "Circe boiling" and "Pastoral with Visitor". The last two-thirds of the book is taken up with "The uncommercial Traveller", a theatre-of-the-absurd play for radio.

The University of Queensland Press deserves high praise for the quality, cheapness and quantity of its poetry publications.

THE MYTH OF AUSTRALIA?

Hume Dow

Coral Lansbury: *Arcady in Australia: The Evocation of Australia in Nineteenth-century English Literature* (M.U.P., \$7.50).

... an El Dorado and an Arcadia combined, where the hardest and the easiest, best-paid employments are to be found, where every striving man who rears a race of industrious children, may sit under the shadow of his own vine and his own fig-tree—not without work, but with little care—living on his own land, looking down to the valleys to his herds—towards the hills to his flocks, amid the humming of bees, which know no winters.

Australia? That, in any case, is the picture of Australia put forward by Samuel Sidney in London in 1852. Coral Lansbury tells us that Sidney's view of the Australian colonies was the principal source of an Arcadian myth that became the accepted picture of our continent in English fiction of the 1850s and 1860s—a picture adopted and repeated by Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, Charles Reade and many others.

Dr. Lansbury traces the myth back to the Arcadianism of the Romantic movement early in the century—"the belief that only by a return to the land could men find contentment of spirit and a tranquil and prosperous life". Such yearnings for a Golden Age, reminiscent of writers as diverse as Rousseau and Cobbett, had, of course, become largely unreal and unrealizable in Britain by the 1830s. As more and more of the green and pleasant land succumbed to the encroach-

ments of mine and mill, writers sought elsewhere for Arcady; Dr. Lansbury clearly establishes that by 1850 many were locating it in Australia, led there in imagination by the industrious writings of Sidney (who never visited us). Here, in the new Arcadia, it was believed that England's surplus poor—and surplus failures—could find prosperity with four acres and a cow. There was the added advantage that the dissatisfied would be ten thousand miles away, safely diverted from the rebellion or revolution threatened by Chartism in England and "1848" on the Continent.

Arcady in Australia is a valuable and original work, provocative in its claims and stimulating in its examples. It is extraordinary that we have heard so little of Samuel Sidney before. His brother John had been in New South Wales in the early 1840s, and claimed to have explored the "Barwen" River. Samuel, an expert on agriculture and railways, accepted John's picture of lush, fertile plains as a haven for Britain's dispossessed, and began to write of Australia with enthusiasm. By 1848, *Sidney's Australian Handbook* was selling in thousands, and Dickens drew on it in 1849 for Micawber's happy relegation to Port Middlebay (Melbourne) at the end of *David Copperfield*. More importantly, Dickens adopted Sidney as his "Australian writer" and adviser on emigration, and publicized his views in the first issue of *Household Words* in 1850. Dr. Lansbury indeed gives us a convincing reason for the unreality of the view of Australian life so prevalent in Victorian fiction.

It must be added, however, that she is tempted to overstate the influence of the Arcadian myth and to overstate its unreality. She begins the book with a sound thesis:

The traditions of a country and its people are determined by historical events, but those traditions are frequently modified and changed by literature in the continuous interplay of the reality of the imagination and the reality of life.

Agreed. But, too often, she leaves the impression not of an "interplay" but of a one-way traffic by which literature is always the shaping influence. Australia in English fiction "could always account for unexpected wealth and it could dispose of an unwanted character"—but did not Australia very often do precisely this in fact? The success of Magwitch in *Great Expectations* is not inherently impossible. And, on a less grand scale, it may be said that, rosy and unreal as Sidney's Arcadian picture of Australia is, the dispossessed of Britain often did find a better life by emigrat-

ing. Sidney's reasons for urging emigration are by no means entirely false. The vision of Australia had its origins in fact as well as in the imagination.

It is perhaps more than quibbling to raise also the question of chronology in *Arcady in Australia*. There is great emphasis on scholarly paraphernalia in the book, with exhaustive footnotes, but nevertheless one often searches in vain for the date of an important quotation; reference to a later collected edition is hardly helpful. When did Sydney Smith make his comments on transportation? (?) When was *The Caxtons* published? (1849.) When did Froude visit Australia? (1885.) Dr. Lansbury falls into a number of time-traps by ignoring dates. To link Southey and Hazlitt as "radicals" is ludicrous: by the time Hazlitt was expressing radical opinions, Southey was calling for the transportation to Botany Bay of such

treasonable people. And more attention to Trollope's account of his travels in Australia in 1871-72 would have prevented a comment about his making "the customary pilgrimage to the bush" — Trollope probably saw more of country areas than any other nineteenth century visitor to Australia.

Despite such faults, however, Dr. Lansbury has given us an important work. Though she is thinking primarily in historical terms, her judgments of the quality of the fiction she discusses are usually sound. Brian Kiernan has rightly pointed out elsewhere that she has shown how "the two disciplines [of history and literary criticism] can be combined profitably". The result of this well-written investigation should be to stimulate further exploration of an interesting subject.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: I am happy to hand over my begging column in this issue to my favorite correspondent of recent times, Harry Jackman of Port Moresby. I hope his touching letter goes straight to the hearts and the pockets of all our readers, and here it is:

Because recent issues of your journal had contained too much esoteric waffle, I had decided to let my subscription run out. Your last issue with its paean to Dr. Murray-Smith did, however, make me realize that Overland is now primarily a gallant attempt by middle-aged radicals, on salaries of \$10,000 per year and pensionable, to relive their youth.

As I, too, am a middle-aged radical, ex-2nd A.I.F., and a colonialist oppressor to boot, there is an immoral (? amoral) obligation on me to support Overland.

That plaintive note by Hilary Newton—probably the wife of a middle-aged radical, writing many such notes on the kitchen table, surrounded by be-jeaned undergraduates clamouring for dinner—has given me the final nudge to send you a cheque.

Herewith \$14 for two (2) years' subscription and \$10 donation.

While awaiting your response, I would like to thank those who feel as Mr. Jackman does:

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