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Hammers Over the Anvil

ALAN MARSHALL

People of my Childhood

Those of my age who spent their childhood in small country villages knew them all. They were part of isolated places. They thrived under conditions where everyone knew everyone else, where the struggles of the one enlarged the life of the other, where an individual triumph was often a dagger twisted in the heart of a neighbor.

I think their personalities were stronger than the rest of us. They were often suspect, often feared, sometimes loved. They were sources of rumor, distributors of dark tales, furtive discoverers of secrets, leaders of factions, denouncers of sins.

They were people of power and influence, people of no power and no influence. They had one common denominator: they made their presence felt. Everyone was aware of them. They were part of the township's air, they were the township's personality, they were the township's burden.

Mr Thomas

Bill Thomas was the local blacksmith. He was also an elder of the Presbyterian Church. His face had been the battlefield of many an emotional conflict and the blows of defeat had left lines of tension engraved upon it.

He must have thought a lot about sex. His gaze did not linger upon women—elders of the church were free of lust—but even his averted gaze carried the knowledge of what a brief glance had suggested. He leant towards you as he spoke, smiling ingratiatingly and displaying teeth as strong as anvils.

He dressed in black when going to church on Sunday mornings. He walked ahead of his wife who followed like a conscience. She was a little woman. She was short and thin, but she smiled at me sometimes. "She has a sweet face," somebody said. I thought she had.

When they reached the church he stood aside for her to enter first; he was always courteous to women. He bowed and spoke to them all. He didn't do this to the husbands.

There was a girl he spoke to. Her name was Nellie Bolster. She was an orphan from a Home and had come to Turalla to live with Mrs Frank who was always ill. Now Mrs Frank didn't have to do any work at all; Nellie did it.

Nellie used to call in at the blacksmith's shop and talk to Mr Thomas. She would sit on the anvil but before she sat on it Mr Thomas would wipe it clean with a piece of cotton waste. He was a clean man and didn't want her to dirty her frock. He helped her to sit down and while he helped her his hands escaped him and moved over her thighs and bottom. Nellie didn't mind.

One day a kid at school told me that Nellie was up the duff. I didn't know what this meant but I knew it must be pretty terrible because this kid heard his mother telling someone and when she discovered him listening she roared hell out of him.

Joe told me it meant Nellie was going to have a baby.

"All girls have babies," I said. I knew far more about girls than Joe.

"Yes, but they're not allowed to have them until they grow up," Joe explained.

"Nellie's grown up—well, nearly," I said. I was patient with Joe.

"It's hard to say," said Joe.

Mr Thomas must have thought she wasn't

grown up, because he was terribly worried over her. He told the men who came into the blacksmith shop. He said, "If I could get my hands on the man who got her into trouble I'd murder him. To take advantage of an orphan is as low as you can get."

When he said this he lifted the horse's leg and shod it.

Everyone admired Mr Thomas. "You mightn't like him," I heard a man say, "but you've got to give him his due. He's even offered to pay her expenses because she's an orphan and he's sorry for Mrs Frank."

Mr Thomas went to see Mrs Frank. When she heard Nellie was going to have a baby she collapsed and had to go to bed so Mr Thomas had to talk to her in bed.

"Don't you worry, Mrs Frank," he told her. "I'll attend to the lot."

"After all I've done for her," moaned Mrs Frank.

"Yes, yes, I know," murmured Mr Thomas.

"I couldn't possibly keep a girl like that around the place now all this has happened," said Mrs Frank.

"I agree, I agree," said Mr Thomas, loosening the collar around his neck and grimacing. "There's an orphanage at Ballaarat that attends to such matters. I'll . . . "

"Will you?" asked Mrs Frank with such relief that she sat up in her nightgown.

"I will," said Mr Thomas, lowering his eyes.

"Oh, you're a good man!" sighed Mrs Frank. Her face took on an expression of distaste. "I'd like you to arrange everything with Nellie. I just can't talk to her in my condition — with things being as they are — you know — it's so sordid and everything."

"Leave it to me," said Mr Thomas, feeling brighter.

Nellie wouldn't tell who was the father of the child. She just looked at the people who asked her. They said she was stubborn as a mule. The ladies wanted to know more than the men, but they couldn't break Nellie down. Nellie remained silent as a mourner.

Mr Thomas took her by train to Ballaarat and we never heard of her again. She was "no good," they said, but I had always liked her. She used to laugh a lot.

Jimmy Virtue

I wasn't allowed to go near the pub. I didn't know why. I was five and I knew a lot about pubs. Father had told me stories of outback pubs where men wearing white moleskin trousers and riding boots would come out of the bar singing, and jump on horses that bucked all over the place. I often thought of these men. They yelled out "Wild Cattle" while their horses were bucking and they could all fight like threshing machines. I wanted to be like them when I grew up.

Jimmy Virtue didn't ride bucking horses. But that didn't matter with him. I liked him because he could climb trees better than any other man. I knew this because Mr Smith told me. Mr Smith lived in a wheel-chair and he was all twisted. His hands curved round until the fingers were hooked like soft claws, and he would never be able to straighten them again in all his life. I couldn't see his legs because he had a possum-skin rug over them, but he could tell stories just as good as my father.

He would throw back his head and laugh at his stories, but his teeth needed cleaning. He wrote articles about birds for the papers. He used to teach me about birds, but he was no good on horses.

He used to go for drives in a phaeton. They wheeled his chair up the back, and he would sit in it all the day. Jimmy Virtue pushed the chair into the phaeton and then he would drive him where he wanted to go.

They used to look for parrots' and owls' nests in hollow limbs so high up it made you giddy to look down. But Jimmy Virtue could climb up to them. He climbed up on a rope and put his hand down the hollow limbs and pulled out eggs to show to Mr Smith, then he would put them back again.

Mr Smith told me Jimmy never broke an egg, and when he pulled out baby parrots he held them the right way, and he would never crush them by holding them tight. He was a good man, and Mr Smith liked him, and so did I.

I was standing near our fence one day, and Jimmy Virtue came walking towards me. He nearly fell over several times. His legs didn't work properly. They carried him from one side of the path to the other. He stopped near me and hung over the fence. He vomited. His face was twisted. He looked as if he was going to cry. He suddenly flung back his head and cried out, "Oh, no, no, no, no!"

I fled inside to my mother and hid my face in her black apron. I lifted my face to her and sobbed, "Jimmy Virtue can't walk straight and

he's hanging on our fence calling out No, no, no, no."

Mother looked out of the window while she held me against her.

"Poor Jimmy Virtue's sick," she said.

"Why don't you bring him inside and put him to bed?" I pleaded.

"He'll get better soon. Don't think about it."

You told me not to think about it, mother.

Why then does Jimmy Virtue come to my room now that I am old? Why does he stagger in the dark, a symbol of all sickness, echoing my own thoughts with his terrible No, no, no, no. There is no black apron to shield me now.

Miss Barlow

When I was about fifteen Mrs Thomas died. She accepted death without protest. To her it was like going to church and not coming out, but it was a blow to Mr Thomas. She would not follow him anymore. Now, when he opened the church gate, he did not have to stand aside; he stepped through alone.

For the first few weeks the obligations of a bereavement, and the necessity of observing a code of behavior acceptable to the members of the church as suitable for the loss of a wife, guided Mr Thomas in everything he did. He walked to church with measured stride and lowered head. He refrained from smiling at women. Instead he looked into their eyes in a silent appeal for comfort. It inspired in the devout a desire to pray for him; in the not so devout the memory of Nellie Bronson.

In a few months Mr Thomas was smiling and bowing to the women of the churchyard but his warmest smile, his most gracious greeting, was reserved for Miss Prudence Barlow.

Miss Barlow was like a slender plant with a frail blossom that grew in poor soil. She needed water to nourish the blossom, but there was little water in Miss Barlow's life.

She was an old maid. I never liked to hear a woman called an old maid, but I didn't know why. It was just wrong, I thought.

Circumstances had compressed Miss Barlow until, from a young and pretty girl, she had emerged an angular and severe woman. Yet . . . I don't know; there were moments when that young girl looked at you with her eyes.

Miss Barlow's father and mother were dead. They were once farmers, but Miss Barlow sold the farm when they died, retaining only the house, which sat in a small garden surrounded by a picket fence. This little square of flowering shrubs and wattle trees reposed in a green paddock, ten acres in area, across which wound a dirt track leading from the picket fence to the road gate.

Miss Barlow drove down this winding track each Sunday on her way to church. She owned a grey horse and an Abbott buggy and she sat upright in the centre of the seat holding a long buggy whip in her right hand. She never struck the grey horse with the whip, but carrying a buggy whip was the right thing to do.

When she reached the church Mr Thomas would step forward from amongst the women and take the horse out of the buggy and tie it to the fence with a halter. Then he would join the women and walk into church with them.

The women talked about Mr Thomas and Miss Barlow when they weren't around, but, as I heard Miss McPherson say, "One needs much more evidence than that."

I had evidence enough. Three evenings a week I rode past Miss Barlow's on my way to the mechanics' institute, where a church club used to meet. It was known as "The Guild". I was a member of the Guild.

I rode home late at night and always passed Miss Barlow's house at half past eleven. The Guild closed at eleven.

I cantered most of the way home but I left it to Hairy Legs to make his own pace. Poised in darkness, rising and falling upon a saddle moving to the swing of a horse I could not see, I felt I was being carried forward into a sea of darkness that broke upon my face and glided past in soundless waves of black.

The track past Miss Barlow's was littered with stones and pitted with pot-holes. When Hairy Legs came to this stretch he would slow to a walk and I would relax. I would sit loosely in the saddle and wonder about people and of how they left their homes at night and went visiting and no one knew anything about their lives at all except in the daylight.

Hairy Legs stopped when he was opposite Miss Barlow's house. He did it because I would have stopped him if he hadn't. It was half past eleven and something beautiful always happened then.

After a little while the door of the house opened and an upright oblong of light appeared in the darkness. Against this light I could see the silhouette of Mr Thomas. His arm like a long shadow reached out and held the hand of Miss Barlow. They stepped out of the doorway together

and Mr Thomas closed the door behind him.

I couldn't see them now but I could hear them walking through the little garden to the gate in the picket fence. It creaked when it was opened and then they were in the paddock. It was not far now to his horse and jinker.

Miss Barlow stopped near the jinker step. I couldn't hear her footsteps any longer. I heard Mr Thomas walk to his horse's head and I knew he was untying the halter from the post and knotting it around his horse's neck. He then stepped back and pulled the looped reins from the ring in the hames and hung it over the dashboard. Now he would be standing quite near Miss Barlow. He struck a match, pulled open the front of the gig lamp and held the match to the candle. The wick took the yellow flame, but it was a while before the wax melted. The pointed flame grew upwards sending out a steady, gentle light that illuminated the two faces each side of it.

I could see their faces quite clearly. All around them was a thick, impenetrable darkness. They stood there looking at each other, united by the light of a candle.

I lifted my horse's reins and rode away.

Elsie

My sister, Elsie, was very beautiful. There were always stars in her sky but she never noticed them; the sun under which she walked was too bright.

She knew all about poetry but bugger-all about horses. If I said to her, "That horse has greasy heels", she would say, "Yes", and that was the end of it. When it came to horses she was as dumb as they come, but as Joe said, "You can't have everything."

Joe pumped the church organ for her when she was practising. She liked playing the pipe organ. The handle at the back of the organ was like that on a blacksmith's forge and Joe lent his elbow on it and pushed it up and down like Mr Thomas.

He told me once he would only do it for Elsie and for no one else.

"You see, I am a Catholic," he explained, "and I'd get into a power of trouble if Father Guiness heard about it."

"To hell with Father Guiness!" I exclaimed.

Joe shied away from me when I cursed priests. He thought he'd be struck by a bolt from heaven or something, standing close to me like that.

Joe was strong on righteousness. He liked Elsie but he thought Jeanie McLean had gone too far when she had a miscarriage after having had two babies to other men.

I was a bit vague about the miscarriage business. Anything to do with carriages always suggested horses to me, but I did know Jeanie McLean was a bad girl. Everybody said that.

She used to come to our place once a week with a lot of others from the church to practise songs for a church concert. Elsie used to play the piano and they would all gather round it. There was Fred and George Black, Minnie Sturgess, Ida Foster, Bill Atkins, Robert Barnes and three other girls who were members of the church choir.

They must have been pretty good because, once when they were singing Irish songs, Paddy Flynn, he was an Irishman and he was sitting in the kitchen with Dad listening to the singing from the front room, he said—and I heard him myself—"I tell ye, Bill, it tears the heart out of me to hear the voices of them. They sing like bloody angels; by hell they do."

I think it was Jeanie McLean whose voice tore the heart out of him because she was a hell of a good singer. Her voice was soft and gentle but you could always hear it somehow.

One night I was sitting in the front room listening to them singing when Jeanie suddenly knocked off and sat down. Later on she took Elsie aside and said, "I don't feel very well, Elsie. I've pains in the stomach. I think I'll have to go home."

Elsie was concerned. "Wait until I get you a cup of tea, Jeanie. I won't be a minute."

Jeanie followed her into the kitchen and drank it out there while Elsie stood watching her with a troubled face. When she had gone Elsie said to mother, "I hope she's all right."

I thought she looked all right. Elsie used to worry over nothing. Next day mother told Elsie that Jeanie had had a baby that night. The doctor drove four miles in the middle of the night to help her have it—the doctor's horse was a bay with white points—but she didn't really have a baby at all; she had a miscarriage, which is quite different according to Joe who had heard his mother talking about it. With a miscarriage you are the same as you were before although you feel crook.

Elsie got a letter next day. It was delivered by Jeanie's brother, a little bloke with a tooth out in the front. He delivered it because if it had gone through the post office Miss West would have opened and read it.

When Elsie read Jeanie's letter it said, "Would you come and see me. I'd love to talk to you."

Elsie didn't want to go; she was afraid. She'd heard someone say that Jeanie McLean had had a baby but it died. Mother thought she ought to go. "She is a sad girl," mother said.

So Elsie walked to Jeanie's place and knocked at the door. Mr McLean opened it. He was a thin man like a drover's dog, but he had a face that had been out in the wind and rain a lot. It was a good face. Elsie told him she had come to see Jeanie.

"Yes, yes," he said. "She's in the bedroom. Go in to her."

Elsie walked down the passage and went into a little bedroom like a box. It was lined with tongued and grooved boards, and the bed nearly filled it. But there was a chair there. Jeanie was sitting on the edge of the bed with a dressing-gown on.

"I'm glad you came," she said to Elsie. Elsie sat down on the chair. "I suppose you've heard about me," Jeanie said.

Elsie said something but Jeanie went on. "I wanted to talk to you, Elsie, because Johnnie McPhee told me you had gone through the same experience. You went away for a holiday, didn't you?—You know, about three months ago. When Hughie James came to see me, he told me he'd heard about it." Elsie stood up. She couldn't think clearly. She kept saying, "It's a lie, it's a lie!"

Jeanie stopped when she saw her face and she talked about something else. But it was too late to do anything about Elsie.

Peter McLeod

When Peter McLeod talked to you, you listened. He punched his words out. You could have dodged them and turned away but I faced them and took them on the chin. I didn't mind his swears. They were good and smelt of horses and the earth.

"Who the bloody hell took my trace chain off this bloody hook? Here — look at it, that bloody hook there," and he pointed to a hook in the wall of the stable.

"I didn't take it, Mr McLeod."

"Well, somebody did." He pulled at his beard and looked around him. "I think I must have shifted the bloody thing myself." He sat down on a chopping block near the door of the slab stable and started to shave tobacco from a plug of Dark Havelock.

He was a tall man, over six foot high, with a loose body that sat on his long legs with a forward lean. When he rose from sitting down he straightened out in sections. He took big strides, his eyes looking straight ahead like a thirsty man making for a beer.

Father reckoned he was not properly contained, whatever that meant, and that he'd been badly handled when he was a kid. He was an old man—he must have been easily forty—but he talked to me like as if I knew what he was talking about. I always believed what he told me but Father said he was the greatest liar this side of the Black Stump.

I didn't like Father saying that, but then he said, "There are liars and liars. You see, when a man tells a yarn and aims to get a laugh, he's pulling your leg; he's not a liar. If a bloke tells the same yarn to build himself up — well, he's a liar."

"Mr McLeod doesn't make me laugh."

"No, he makes himself laugh. Look at his eyes when he's telling you a yarn. They are as bright as a rooster's."

I liked Peter McLeod telling me about the fights he had.

"There was big Jim Bourke from Mortlake. Ever heard of him?"

I hadn't but I made up my mind to ask Dad about him.

"I fought him once — two hours it lasted."

I looked astonished.

"Well — er — make it an hour. I tell you, I fought him for an hour in front of the pub at Purnim." He lit his pipe, drawing on it with hollowed cheeks so strongly that it gurgled in protest.

"An hour's a long fight, Mr McLeod," I said.

"Yes . . ." He took his pipe from his mouth and looked into the bowl. "It's a long fight, but then he was a tough man. The tougher they are the longer it takes. There are some blokes that won't lie down. He was like that. I was having a drink with him and he said to me—and I won't forget it in a hurry, but all the Bourkes are skites —he said, 'I've been cutting colts all my life and I've never lost one.' 'What about Wilkinson's draught colt you did last year?' I asked him. 'What about him?' 'They found him dead against the fence.' 'Yair, that's right,' he said, 'and he'd still be alive today if you hadn't told Jack to gallop him around the paddock to bust the swelling. You killed that colt—I'm telling ya.' I heard him all right; that's what he said, so I said, 'Come outside and say that.' Now, I had big Jim's measure. I knew bloody well that if I went down

he'd get stuck into me with those blucher boots he was wearing."

("He'd never do that would he, Dad—not kick him with blucher boots?" "When you're mixing it outside a pub, anything goes," Dad said.)

"It didn't take long to finish him," Peter continued. "I kept him off while pasting him with my right—he didn't have the reach of a sick dog. I waited for an opening like Jack Johnson used to, then I moved in and knocked him cold."

"But you said you took an hour," I said.

"Yes, it took an hour to bring him round," Peter explained.

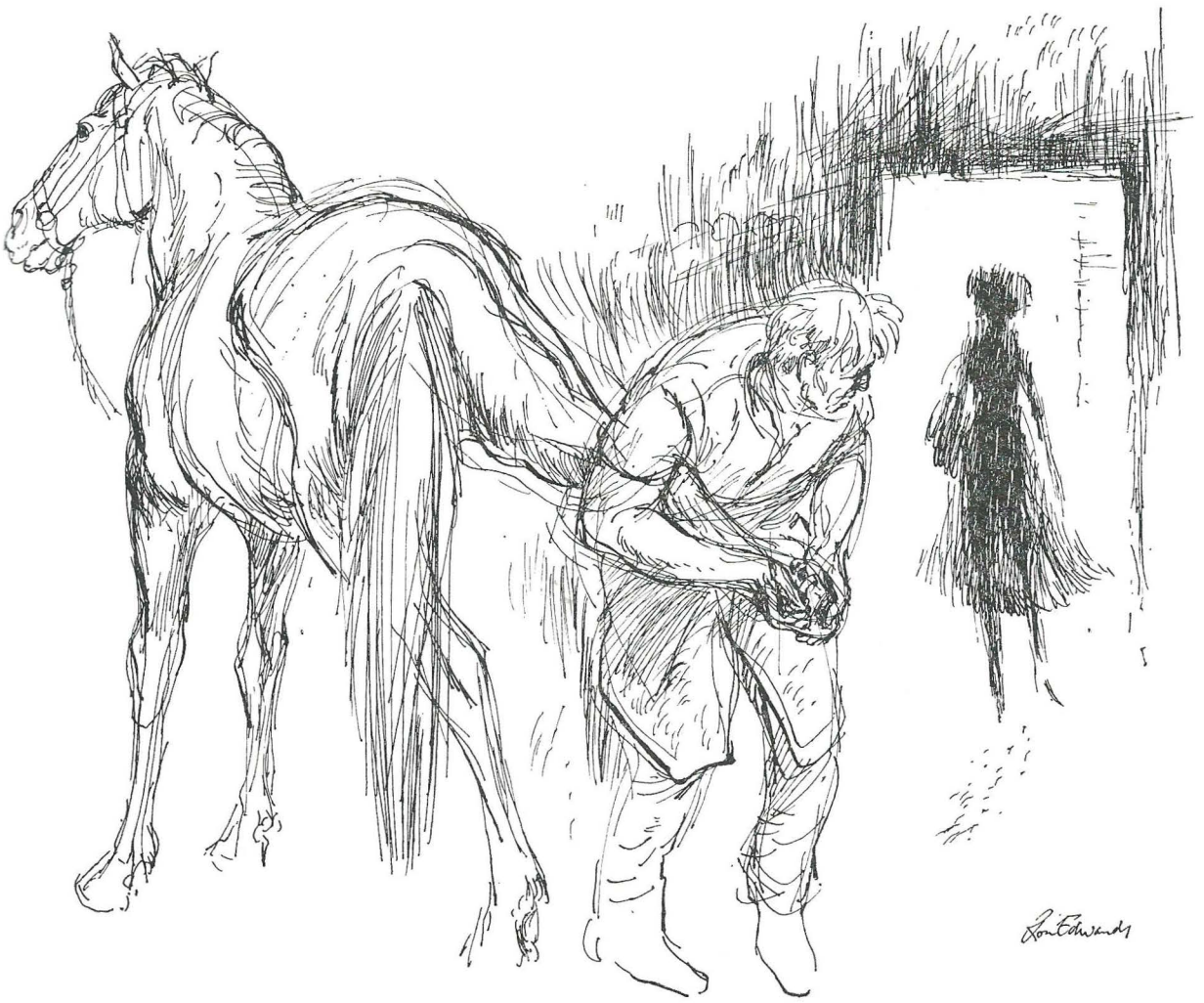
Peter McLeod again

I was sitting on the top rail of a fence watching the bar doorway of the pub across the road. The shouts and exclamations of angry men fled through the doorway like a flock of escaping bats.

It was hot with a north wind blowing and each horse in the gigs and buggies in front of the hotel rested on three legs in the shafts. Their heads drooped in the heat.

Above the whip-cracks of curses and abuse I could hear the bull-bellow of Peter McLeod sending out his challenge. The surge of accompanying sound erupted in a sudden explosive burst and a man came staggering backwards through the doorway, arms outstretched seeking balance, a smear of blood on his upper lip, his face still awry from a blow.

In front of him, following his backward plunge with ferocious purpose, came Peter. Arresting hands gripped his shoulders, arms like ropes encircled his waist. As this knot of men spilt onto the roadway, Peter began shedding them like pieces of box-thorn hedge hooked onto him in his passage through a pig-yard fence.



"Let go of me, blast ya!"

"Hold your horses, Peter!"

Excited men with flushed faces poured out of the bar.

"Make a ring."

"Hold on! Peter's been boozing all the morning."

"He's on his feet, isn't he!"

"The bastard asked for it."

"Is Sam having a go?"

Then I heard Peter's voice:

"Where's that lyin' cow?"

"I'm . . ."

"Ugh!"

"Ah!"

There was a sudden flurry of blows. I heard gasps and grunts. The crowd reeled back.

"Give them room!"

"Stand back, bugger you!"

I hurriedly clambered from the rail and grabbed my crutches from the ground. I bounded across the roadway to the circular wall of men, flung my crutches to one side and dropped to my hands and knees. I lowered my head and thrust it between the spread legs of a tall outside man, pushed through and kept going. I went through legs, by the side of legs, around legs all anxious to avoid me. Some side-stepped when I touched them or swung away from me as if bitten by a dog. Above me in the world of heads I could hear curses and exclamations of concern.

"It's that bloody Marshall kid!"

"Look out or you'll step on him."

"God Almighty, can't a man look at a fight without him tangling with your legs!"

I shot underneath the last barrier of men and squatted cross-legged like a Buddha in front of the two fighters.

This was the moment for which I had waited—to see Peter McLeod punish a bullying man. He would flatten him like a tack, of that I was sure. A hundred tales, a hundred victorious fights had been my preparation for this proof of Peter's courage.

I waited for the killing straight left, the merciless right hook, the magnificent upper-cut which his yarns supplied in plenty. But this staggering man struggling to lift himself out of a stupefying fog—this wasn't Peter McLeod. This wasn't the man of a hundred tales. He wasn't even defending himself properly. He swayed and lurched into the pathway of blows that a bobbing head could have avoided. He was always off balance. No swift, tigerish leaps here, only a will that held a body upright against blows that made it recoil with sudden jerks.

Charlie Robbins was stone, cold sober. He watched Peter with the eyes of a hawk, watching for openings through which his fists shot like the kick of a horse.

I had never regarded Charlie Robbins as a fighter. He was a heavy, thick-set farmer who rested his hands on the backs of cows while walking them into bails. He milked Friesians and in some way resembled them. Dad always said he was a good cheese man, then added as an afterthought—"Immature cheese."

When he knocked Peter off his feet Peter would get up again. This was good. I liked Peter for getting up. But in the end he had blood on his face and his eyes were closed and he couldn't get up. Some men lifted him and carried him behind the pub where they put his head under a pump.

A man got my crutches for me and I went home. I didn't want to tell father about it. I felt I had taken a hiding too, so I shut up; but he found out somehow. All he said was, "Well, he took a fall. Go down and see him in the morning and take it with him like a man."

I walked down to his farm next morning. He was sitting on a box outside the stable door, looking at a white horse tied with a halter to a ring on the wall. That's all you could say about this horse.

"Good morning, Mr McLeod," I said.

"Good day."

I sat down on the ground beside him.

"I didn't mind you getting a belting, Mr McLeod."

"Shut up."

After a while he straightened up and said, "I'm sore as a boil this morning. I can't move my bloody neck to the left. What's wrong with the bloody thing? I can move it to the right, but when I move it to the left if catches me here," and he pointed to a sinew like a piece of fencing wire that braced his neck to his shoulder. He screwed up his face and went on, "Do you know I was sober as a judge at three o'clock. That bastard O'Connor put my head under the pump. Well! I didn't mind that. He's a good chap. But he needn't have held me under it for ten minutes. Sometimes he's as stupid as a green colt. Anyway, I came round all right. I felt good, so I walked down to Charlie Robbins'. He'd belted me when I was drunk; I wanted to see if he could belt me when I was sober. I came across the

paddock but he saw me coming and took shelter amongst his cows. He'd yarded them for milking. He was standing in the middle of them like a bull."

" 'Listen, you bloody fat bastard,' I yelled at him. 'I'm sober now. Come out here on the grass and let me cut you down to size.'

" 'Not me, not me, Peter. I'm not that bloody stupid. You'd paste hell out of me when you're sober. I'd never fight you when you're sober.'

" 'Look here,' I said. 'You fought me down at the pub when I could hardly stand on my feet. Come out here now, you mongrel.'

" 'Look, Peter. I fought you because you were drunk. I'm not bloody well mad. If I came out there now you'd give me a hiding. What sort of bloody fool do you think I am? No! I'd only fight you when you're drunk. I've got a chance then. But anyone who takes you on sober — well — he's asking for trouble. Let's forget it.'

" 'Well, I'll go to buggery!'

" 'You can go there too, but my hell you're not taking me with you. I'm stopping here.'

" 'You haven't got the guts of a louse,' I said to him. 'You're a cowardly bastard.'

" 'Yes, that's right. I'm a cowardly bastard when it comes to fighting you sober.'

"Well, what could I do? There he was amongst his cows; I'd have to wade through a foot of cow shit to get at him."

" 'Where did you pick up that white horse down the paddock?' I asked him.

" 'I bought him at the sale last week. I gave a fiver for him.'

" 'What's he like as a hack?'

" 'Never had better. I tell you, I've never had better. You never move in the saddle. He's like a rocking horse.'

" 'I'm looking for a hack like that. Is he quiet?'

" 'Like a lamb, that's what he is. Like a lamb.'

" 'What'll you take for him?' I asked.

" 'Look, Peter, seein' as how I should never have hopped into you while you were drunk, you can have him for what I gave for him—a fiver—an' that's dirt cheap.'

"So he came out and caught him, and threw in a halter, and I paid him and led him home. I haven't had a proper look at him yet. I've just run him in."

We sat in silence looking at the white horse tethered to the fence.

"Did you look at his mouth?" I asked.

"Yes. He's rising five."

"He'll never see five again, Mr McLeod," I said, then I added, "I don't think he's much of a horse."

"Why, what's wrong with him?" asked Peter aggressively.

"Well, he's down in the hocks, he's hollow backed and he's got a ewe neck."

"That's enough," roared Peter with sudden anger. "Shut up, will ya."

I shut up.

After a while Peter got up and walked round the horse. He spat on the ground, then lent on its rump while he scratched his beard.

"Of course," he said. "I hadn't sobered up properly when I left the pub. I wasn't quite right in the head. That bastard, Charlie, belted me when I was drunk and then ends up by robbing me when I'm sober. I tell you this. That bastard is a proper bastard."

He paused a moment. "Now get to hell out of here."

East Driscoll

Sometimes in the dead of night I would awake to the sound of horse's hooves pounding the roadway past our home. I would sit up in bed and look hurriedly out of the window and wait for the yells that always heralded this rider's passing. The yells were an accompaniment to the hoof beats, the trumpet calls above the roll of drums. They laced the sound into one wild melody, the untamed cry of a moonlit night.

It was a sound that quickened the heart beats of people in sleeping houses and goaded the village dogs into a frenzied barking.

"Yah-hoo-oo-oo-oo-oo. Ho, ho, ho, ho."

"Whoo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

Some awakened husband would mutter to his wife, "East Driscoll's on the booze again", then turn over and return to sleep. The wives remained awake staring into the dark while they remembered his provocative eyes, his grin, his lithe flexible body and his swagger. He had flashed messages past their husbands' heads to all of them at one time or another.

Dad once said to me, though I didn't understand what he meant until years later, "A good rider on a good horse takes from the horse the virility and vigor of the animal and makes it his own. A man riding easily on a free-striding horse is a bigger man than when he is on the ground. Women think that he is all they have missed."

East Driscoll was the local horse-breaker. He dressed in white corduroy riding trousers, held in

place with a broad leather belt fastened by a buckle of silver in the form of a horse-shoe framing a horse's head. He wore Gillespie's elastic-sided boots and a white shirt and had a red cotton handkerchief knotted around his neck. His hat had a broad brim and he wore it pulled to one side. His eyes were bright and eager and laughter lurked in them. The women thought he was handsome and when he rode past them, sitting loosely and easily to the movement of a horse walking proudly, the women dropped their eyes before his glance.

But he was a larrikin. He obeyed no rules. He had a contempt for authority and went on wild benders when he felt like it.

He had a stock-yard with an eight foot high post and rail fence beside his house on the outskirts of Turalla. I would climb up on this fence and sit on the top rail and watch him breaking in horses brought to him by farmers who had neither the time nor the skill to break them in themselves.

To me he represented freedom and I always looked at him with a feeling of admiration. Elsie thought he looked like a god with the spirit of a horse.

"He's not only a good rider," Dad said. "He's a good horseman, and that is rare."

I often sat on the fence and watched him handling a horse on a lungeing rein. He always talked to the horse he was handling. "Steady, old boy, steady. Easy does it. Lift those legs. Hup! Hup! Steady, steady."

Father once told me a well handled horse never bucks, but there were times when East felt a need to display his skill as a rider. Then he would mount a horse not quite prepared for it. He was a balance rider, pivoting in the stirrups while the horse bucked beneath him. He never lost control of his head. It moved easily above him, never jerking free from his hold. He anticipated every buck before it happened and met it with responses from his body that went with the horse in every violent, grunting effort to unseat him.

Dust would rise from the hooves of the plunging horse. Men, driving milk carts laden with cans, would pull up on the roadway and yell encouragement from their milk-stained seat on the dashboard of the waggon. "Into him, East. Stick to him. You got him."

Dad told me that this was East Driscoll's one weakness. "He sometimes rides for the gallery and never thinks of the horse. He's building up his reputation at the expense of the horse, but he's pretty to watch, isn't he?"

When East Driscoll went on a bender he always dressed up for the occasion. His white trousers were freshly washed; his boots shone with polish. His shirt was ironed and clean and his red handkerchief was perfectly knotted. He rode the best horse amongst those he was breaking and he rode through the village on his way to the pub at Turalla, acknowledging with a wave of his hand the greetings of all those he met. I would climb onto our gate while Elsie stood behind me to watch him pass.

Ah! Those eyes, that cheeky grin that promised quick kisses in the grip of powerful arms!

One afternoon he was riding a half-broken colt with a wicked eye and a nervous temperament. It veered sideways, it propped and snorted at a limb on the road or sprang sideways like a cat. It walked uncertainly, reefing at the bit, and lowering its head to snort at shadows on the road.

"A dangerous horse to go drinking on," father said.

That night I lay in bed awake and looked out into the moonlight and watched the trees thrash in the rising wind. It was a restless, unsettled night, with gusts of wind that lifted the dust beyond my window and sent dead gum leaves hurrying like demented little people along the road. I was lying awake waiting for the sound of hooves and the wild yells of East returning to his home; but I fell asleep before he passed.

He didn't pass at all that night. Early next morning a farmer, driving cattle along the road in the half-dark, saw a riderless horse grazing by the side of the road. He could just see something hanging in the stirrup leather. He hurried over to the horse, then approached it quietly and held its head. East Driscoll's foot was caught in the stirrup and he hung downwards like a bloody rag with his head and shoulders on the ground. His face and head were badly battered. The white shirt was half torn from his body. He was limp, loose, his legs bent unnaturally, one arm flayed from the grind of metal. The farmer carried him to his waggon and took him to the hospital. He was unconscious for three weeks. One of his legs was pulled out of joint; one of his arms was broken; he had a fractured skull; his face was torn; his teeth broken; his mouth out of shape.

He had left the pub about midnight, they said. He took a long while to mount his horse, but men helped him on to the saddle and he lurched away into the night singing "There is a tavern in the town". They heard him urge the horse into a gallop, then the night closed round him. Some-

where along the road he was thrown and his foot caught in the stirrup. What happened in the mad gallop that followed no one knew, but he had been dragged for hours until the exhausted horse stopped and began grazing on the long grass near the Pejark Creek.

For the next month everyone fought beside him for his life. They suffered with him. He survived, and I saw him walking round his stock-yard again; but he did not laugh or joke anymore. He sometimes looked round vaguely as if striving to remember. There was no spring in his walk, though he continued riding horses, but he sat heavily upon them.

"East Driscoll is not the man he was," said a farmer. "Half the time he's not there. A bloody shame isn't it?"

Talking to Alan Marshall

HARRY MARKS

Notes for a Biography

When did you first contract polio?
I was born on 2 May, 1902, at a place called Noorat in the Western District in Victoria, and in August, 1908, I went down with infantile paralysis. Little was known of this complaint at the time and people, seeing that I was apparently paralysed, were afraid of their own children getting the mysterious disease. I had three doctors. Two of them thought I would die and one who stuttered a lot thought I would live. When I first got the complaint I was delirious for a few days. In fact I was very ill for a while and had a long period in bed.

Were you read to when you were ill?
Yes, by an old lady who was a friend of my mother's. Well, she seemed very old to me, but she was a stout woman and while my mother was working she used to come and sit beside my bed. She wasn't much of a story-teller but she had a little book called *Thoughtful Joe,* and she read this book to me. Now that was the first story I ever remember hearing, and it had woodcut illustrations of a boy picking robins out of the snow and helping widows over stiles. A drip of a story but I loved it. I've still got it, by the way. I pinched it out of the mechanics' institute at Noorat. The books there were just lying on the floor, deserted. Nobody went near them. They were covered in dust, and amongst them was *Thoughtful Joe,* the very book she'd read the story from, so I kept it.

Were you able to go to school?
I used to get wheeled to school in a sort of perambulator affair. The children took it in turns to wheel me. And I kept on at the state school until 1916, when I went to Terang High School, and I used to ride four miles to this school on a pony.

Did you become closer to your parents as a result of your illness?
My father particularly. Even when I was a very little boy, he used to tell me a lot of stories about his own life. He came to Noorat in 1900 and opened a general store. He came because he'd met an old shearer way up north of Balranald, a man called Hughie McLean, who had told him there was a township without a store. Now father at this time was a hawker and he'd been travelling round the outback—partners with a man called Hugh Murdoch, who was a brother of Walter Murdoch, the professor, that brilliant man who lived in Western Australia. Hugh Murdoch and my father had four horses and a van, and they travelled all round the outback of New South Wales.

Later on, Hugh Murdoch died of TB. He was an ill man when he came up there. He came for reasons of health. My father lived in a sort of little log house beside the pub, it was a shanty really. And Hugh Murdoch had a house. That's all there was, two houses, a pub and a shanty. Murdoch ended up marrying one of the girls in the pub, the daughter of the proprietor, and father brought mother up there and they lived in the other house. It was hot. Kangaroos and emus wandered about the saltbush plains all round them and it was a desolate place. Noorat to me . . . I had no great love for it. I was brought up there and I hunted rabbits and moved around with a character I called Joe, who was my mate, but always my heart was in the Riverina, in the outback, because father had been by turn a drover and a horse breaker and then a hawker until he came to Noorat. And the tales he told me fired my imagination. I lived, in my mind, in the outback. I got to know it very well. I used to question him very closely until I knew everything about it. I knew the saltbush and the pine

ridges, I knew the belar clumps . . . and how they were good burning wood, and all there was to know, so I thought, about horses and breaking in horses and training horses.

What inspired you to start writing?

Well, I started reading a lot. I read Valentine, Henty, Kingston, Fenimore Cooper, and then I got on to Rider Haggard and I had a great urge to write. I wanted to write very much, and I remember deciding one day that that's just what I'd do. I was only very young, but I can recall it quite plainly. It started off like this, "She walked very slowly behind the herd of cows as they came down through the bush towards the cowyard. The girl was swinging a switch made of gum leaves and she was hitting the cows." I described her walking down and when she got the cows into the cowyard, I was stuck. I wondered what in the devil she was driving the cows for, and what I was going to do with her. So I knocked off and couldn't go any further. You see, everything I had to do so far as writing was concerned, I had to teach myself. I knew nothing. I didn't know you had to plan a story first. It never entered my mind. And then I had a wonderful feeling of discovery when I realized that you have to think the story out first. You've got to know the end before you start.

How long was it before your writing began to show maturity?

Oh, many years later. When I was working as an accountant at the Truform Shoe Factory, this was in the early thirties, I began writing down dialogue. I'd written a number of stories before this, all of them imaginative, all pretty dreadful. You see, the trouble was they had nothing to do with reality whatsoever. And then one day I was sitting out on the curb having my lunch with a lot of factory girls. We were like a row of birds, sitting on the curb with our feet in the gutter, eating great lumps of bread and meat and tossing the crust to dogs. Now while we were having our lunch I had my notebook open on my knee and I was trying to construct a story. The conversation of the girls was going on all round me. They were talking across me, yelling out to each other, feeding the dogs. Well, the story I was writing was about some wonderful person. I was describing him just as I imagined he would be described by a great writer, and I heard a remark made by one of the girls. She said, "Look at that there dog, the way it holds back, it's starving." And another girl said, "I've got a dog like that at home. But," she said, "they'll always be cowards until they've had a bitch." She said, "That's what dogs are like." And one of them said, "Don't be silly, Gladys", or something like that. And the girl who had the dog at home said, "Yes, it's a fact, once they've had a bitch they get courage." Then some girl said, "Men are like that, you know." And I suddenly thought to myself, what the hell am I doing? This is *life*. This is marvellous. And it was as if a great load had been lifted off me. I was seeing people for the first time. Suddenly I knew what I had to do, where I was going. From then on I started recording their dialogue, what the girls said each day. That's when I began to realize that you don't draw your material simply from your imagination, you should draw it from life. And there were stories, I was discovering, all round me, in little things that were said, and I began listening, and taking notes, and it was a magnificent feeling.

Can you think of a single criterion you apply to all your work?

I've always worried about rhythm in my writing. The words have to fall right. Perhaps this is the one lasting influence my father has had in connection with my writing. He started me off thinking like this when he was talking about stockwhips. I recall him referring to "the fall of the lash". And when he told me once, "those words fall well", I knew I had written something good.

That Depression is an Abstract

That depression is an abstract
is my doctor's view, who watches me open
one ear on a hinge and looks with interest
at a countryside of flowers and barges
and squares of green each carrying
a cow —
None of this is necessary
he says in his subtle lower case,
you have landlines to ten capitals.
Good thinking,
bring the calabashes of iced wine
and the little sausages, I reply.
Lie on this couch
and tell me what Europe said to you.
She showed me an olive hillside
with the minty dead trowelled in a wall
and scented black steadying itself
for entry to Avernus.
She took my brown eyes
for gristle; something she could never swallow,
though they had held tears at one age —
She said, my son,
I would name a river for you
if only I had one left —
I loved your galloping through the evening fields,
your snout plating over and your gills
forming where the love-bites were.
I saw the old castle
where deformity took itself as subject
and wrote God into the moon. Aunty Dolour
was my university and our good dog
played the Wolf of Gubbio
at the back door.
Eventually, doctor,
we must come down to cases
but my memory is bad.
There are these polemics
you write against the new art —
"Why persecutest thou me?"
You have a cruel masterpiece
crying to get out.

TWO POEMS BY PETER PORTER

Six pounds fifty
an hour should clear your head.
Indeed, as the sun sketched along my side,
I gazed at the advertisements —
I do not feel depressed
although it is old in May and not
my time of year.
I would like you
to use plain words and straight syntax,
to practice to perfect you left-hand scales.
They fell from my eyes
in the first reels of eternity
and my self-doubt was Job's bandages,
my bones were hollow before the lark's —
Having paid and spoken and been listened to,
I have my certificate of going back
guaranteeing it as it was then,
coming down a winding road of villas
to the Badia, the lodge gates plaqued
"Domenico Cimarosa lived here
in 1779." And then the black sky breaking,
seeing a face I loved and knowing
it had no respect for me, seeing my father
in the rain trying to clip the bougainvillea.
Until death
the abstracts will have silver faces,
baroque lanterns like the moon,
terror pressed into depression,
you and you and you,
father, son and lover of the world.

My Three Aunts

Aunt Lakey whom I haven't seen
In years once took me rowing
On Pittwater, explained how
The possums waltzed on the roof
By moonlight, and said that God
Was in the corner of the verandah:
She married a ship's doctor
And saw the end of Aeolus
In the China Sea. She looked at me
From a branch of the pepperina tree
And I heard her eyes saying,
"At birth you are set adrift
Among the fat mothers in the
Bay of Dreams, trying to keep up
With despair's fast torque. Swim
Across the baths and I'll give you sixpence,
An obol for your tearful eye."
Aunty Klot is a heap of fun,
Especially when we're car sick
Or passing crematoriums,
But she can't resist macabre
Quotations like "Don't marry
If you're afraid of loneliness"
And "Unhappiness is timed to ring
In Middle Age." She has her own
Version of Borrioboola-Gha
So she never notices anyone crying,
Least of all when the American
Evangelist raises his hands
To heaven. At Christmas, she reads
As you are, so once were we;
As we are, so shall you be!
And blames it on the low-grade crackers.
"Kill me when the time comes", she says.
Aunt Troppo's in a fold of time.
Don't pull the cat's tail we tell
The sullen children or your green
Aunt will swell up from the irises
And stifle you. She's every family's
Aunt, and one day she'll pay
That often-threatened visit. "Your
Poor Aunty's out of wool, my dear,
Have you anything I could finish off
This pattern with?" Your grandfather
Who spent his last year on the waggon,
Your spinster cousin who coughed up
Her heart at twenty-eight, the strawberry
Hunchback with the keyboard touch —
All shuddered at her lavender regret
And waited blue-eyed for her to take
From her work basket the pinking shears.

Soft
Marijuana
Laughter
Drops like
Daubs
Of yellow
Paint, from the ceiling drops there's
something it anoints/the hurt
the high heartbreak
— very persistent and very high —
of evening beauties of the streets
decaying under grim factory stacks
& much more fundamental griefs

Eulogy

after and for
Charles Buckmaster

(piece
of a tin fence
fixed halfway
down the windy
corridor
of a fall, got
rusted there
by the concrete face 30 feet of it
the railway embankment turns to the world
where gentle things
needs must be curled
sequestered in hearts or curled about
lazy archipelagos of cloud
extending vain fingers disinterestedly
to some component in the heart
that's mirrored in the porcelain air
over streets where the tram's conductress, only she,
has half an idea
of the way
'twixt overhead wires, the silver and telegraph
poles

and where love
alights on a midnight shooter
for a little while
alights
on an one
that came to the junction
at the evening time
for song
but runs
always behind a swaying skirt
in the middle distance of sentimental dusk
WHOM YOU LOVE WHOM YOU LOVE
has also heard
the rat-a-plan of
industry ground zero, seen//
the iron tartan
shadowed from a bridge
on the houses — small
brave houses —
hovering down as if they would like
to cuddle and in some way befriend
their damned and beautiful
occupants . .

September 1972

ROBERT HARRIS

Epistle
to
Ken & Jeanne

Like
at the site
of a childhood dig
I dig
in my garden . . .
A foot-and-a-half down
I find
red half bricks and brickbits
roof tiles no-longer-aloof tiles
rusted guns triggers locked by
some grimace of time
(and whose fingers pulled them anyway?)
wood which would with time
have carbonized . . . Now I dig
I interrupt all this and also
am interrupted —
how can spinach grow amongst this junk?!

Still we have no earthworms.
a)
When I was a kid we had a big house
with nearly an acre to play in
but I done just the same then!

I dug dams
I dug rivers
I sailed Kon Tiki rafts made of pegs
down rapids between tea tree roots
I called my dams Loreto
Ignatius Loyola Xavier
Francis of Assisi
Now I call my son Miles
now I call my cat
Mahayana Banana
both for the sound
and the bent fruit
for the monkey monk of zen.

(Could I call my future loves
Chuang Tzu Cucumber Bee Tao-nail
or would the taxman reject their forms
their votes be declared
"Informal due to Humor.")

b)
"Daddy build a house?"
and straight-off
not having 3-year-old perception
I say "No!
Daddy dig a hole
so that spinach can grow!"

And ain't that a house?

c)
I daydream as I dig:
who painted the pattern on old china?
maybe a peasant,
maybe a monk . . .
and Crash! in Subiaco of the sixties,
crash! against a wall —
"You bastard!
you come home drunk again
you beat me around
ONCE MORE
an' I'll go back to me husband!"
*K*A*P*O*W*
Sweet Dreams, Baby!

envoi)
So the splintered fragments
tell me a tale like clouds
have shapes for children

and still we have no earthworms.

I'm thinking of having my hair cut.

ANDREW BURKE

Keeping in Touch

This letter has the fault
of all those I've known well,
of forcing me to say
how I am and what it is
I'm doing.
A reminder of remaining still.

The miracle's that as time goes on
times and places, faces
do not merge silently
into the great archetype one
unpeopled past
but remain threatening, distant pressures.

It hardly seems I took part
here remote, looking back.
I get a painful sense
of not belonging.
Like driving through a fog
I can't see what's going on around me.

Oh let's settle this
and forget by winding up
these crazy loves.
It's going too far back
to track down
old feelings, the fascination of deceit.

Learn by experience?
I'm better now at keeping face
and love a little on the side.
I shove all this aside
for a later date.
What else is there to do?

STEPHEN GILFEDDER

Let's face the music and dance

the structure of the song
changes from hand to typescript

words are as physical
as their letters let 'em be

but the music rings
between the ears
layers of sound
neither over or
under each other

humming around
the heads hum
ming a sound
tee hee the hee
heads
let's not
let it get
too loose now
it's rot
to beget
ink juice now

dancing and reeling
above our own heads
strutting out of
rutting / we not
coming down
no more
to your floor
mister inkman —
our words
take off
their clothes
and throw them
in your face

let's go, let's
go, let
's go

ANDREW BURKE

Bird

Above the roar of the television
at *Wild Kingdom* time
comes the moist fretting of the bird
in its orange-box from Palmwoods.
It clings to the chicken-wire netting
as if something behind it or perhaps around it
is filling the box, is pressing it flat
against the hexagonals. Perhaps this is
the emptiness we meet in the great places,
in cities, in the landscape's caverns,
pushing us about, flattening us
to walls, to rocky floors, with nothing there where we cling
and nowhere, nowhere to fly to.

BRUCE DAWE

Blue Wren

Go-between set
there, when you fly
you link the sky
and violet.

What moves you then
can make us, through
you, see the blue
before the wren.

Even the kite
on his winged tower,
for all his power,
lacks that blue might.

Your velvet sheen
goes between what
seen and seen not
as go-between?

R. H. MORRISON

This Following Dark

Having not long since left that gully
I walk the more wakeful — aware
of its huge dark above me, wholly
hung but by tension of spread air
and following as a threat that still
might merge with shadows of some hill
that wedges bulk between
eyes and unfolding green.
Horizon-countries of the untrodden
distance of days extend
past those retreating miles or sudden
chasms of earthquake, and beyond;
and are, since never reached, possessed
by the new now that joins the quest
and still by failure, stark
under this following dark.

ROBERT D. FITZGERALD

TWO POEMS BY NOEL MACAINSH

At the Front

They bring up fresh troops from the rear
We bring up fresh troops from the rear
Their troops are fresher than ours
We freshen our troops like theirs
The fighting is fresher
We bring up more guns from the rear
They bring up more guns from the rear
We pound their guns with ours
They pound our guns with theirs
The pounding is greater
We bring up more planes from the rear
They bring up more planes from the rear
We bomb their planes with ours
They bomb our planes with theirs
The bombing is greater
We bomb and pound and fight
They bomb and pound and fight
There is bombing and pounding and fighting
More and more and more
We ask where will it end
They ask where will it end
Who do we ask?
Who do they ask?
We ask
They ask
Till we have nothing left at the rear
Till they have nothing left at the rear
Till there is nothing left at the rear
Till there is nothing left

The Quiet Tiger

All other clubs fear the Tiger
who is called the Quiet Tiger
never roaring
and never seen to bare his claws
in anger
No captain would pick
him for the crew
but
he has played
Great Games!
66 with Richmond Firsts
crowning many O many games
beginning with his love
for Footscray —
longing always as a lad
longing for the League,
to be in it
not caring which club
but admitting
(after we coaxed him)
Tigers are Best!
Shy, physically unimpressive,
pale-faced sandy-haired
appearing lighter than his statistics
5.9 and 11.4
Starting with Hawksburn State School
he was captain
(we coaxed it from him)
and was captain again
with the Try Boys' Society
played for a while with Prahran Tech.
Then, at 15
(his own explanation)
"I just happened to be
living in Richmond"
and he trained —
'62 with the fourths
'63 and '64 with the thirds
in '65 he played his first senior game
And last year (when they were premiers)
his award
was for the fairest and the best
as earlier
for the fourths and thirds
A premiership, a great win,
he celebrates
with a quiet night at the pictures
He is Player of the Week
And though in a crisis
he is a real Tiger
(to the core)
he is so unassuming
he can walk down Collins Street
in his lunchtime and
in his lunchtime
be rarely pestered
for an autograph.

George

Two loaves a week extra for the birds he'd take
and wander the six miles out from the pub
with a finch or two behind each ear
like an old bronze equestrian duke.

In town they'll talk about the place he had,
how he burnt and pulled and fenced it,
with a girl on his mind built a six-roomed house,
rolled the scrub back like a blanket.

Then he showed his hand but she turned it down
so he sold up, drank the cheque,
and left with a bullet-mould and a thirty-two
blasting the dust for years up off the tracks.

And where he started, near the yards,
he finished up, in this hut scalped by a wind
where squatters nest, and grapes droop from the rafters
and the stockmen stop, and have a bunch for him.

PETER ANNAND

Counselling

An odd shelf of fiction stands close by my elbow here.
Amis (the later), Moravia, Braine, Updike, Muriel Spark,
Narayan and Simenon and David Storey, much that is dark

about people who want it now, honeymooning bitterly,
gods jealous, couples fleeing to Camden. Is it seen
that meeting with others wherever, however, is always mean?

Are the facts of life any harder than the ficts of reading?
How can we distinguish between the pain of people in chairs
and the pain of people in books? What matter if no one cares.

Whether there is a difference? On the other side of the fire
sits one now, not in a book but in a chair, head
in hands, limp of frame, believes all has been said.

I hear myself doing a convincing lit. crit. study
of people in Margaret Drabble. I weigh motives with great skill
and have an answer to questions in books. But now the pain still

flows into me. I cannot close the page but go on staring
at fleshed words in that silent chair, nothing to give
but my own silence, which seems to be the only way to live

against meanness and terror. Talk about fiction is too easy,
somehow, though it ought to be, fiction is not real.
How do I return the look of those eyes whose pain I would heal?

I. V. HANSEN

DOROTHY GREEN

Patrick White's Nobel Prize

The turn of the diplomatic wheel, and a happy coincidence of time, place, person and achievement, have brought the Nobel prize for literature to Australia, in the person of Patrick White. It should be the duty and pleasure of anyone genuinely interested in sincere artistic endeavor to thank White, congratulate him and wish him well. He has written one undoubted masterpiece, *Voss,* two near-masterpieces, *The Aunt's Story* and the *Tree of Man,* a novel of some importance to the problem of world peace, *Riders in the Chariot,* and five other novels, which, in spite of their defects, bear the impress of the writer's passionate seriousness, his earnest wish to help men know themselves and to know the spark of divinity in them which they seem bent on destroying. He has also written a volume of short stories, *The Burnt Ones,* and four plays, besides an early volume of poems, now out of print. In bulk and in general excellence—taking into account legitimate differences of opinion on the latter point—these constitute an achievement enough to enable a man to think he has made sense of his life. It is characteristic of the underlying tenor of White's novels that he should have decided to make his prize money available to sponsor an annual award to a distinguished Australian writer who has not received adequate recognition. Those who point out that he can afford to do so may reflect that men rich enough to make such gestures rarely make them.

Having said what in justice must be said, one is faced with reservations. These in no way diminish nor add to one's estimate of White. They emerge from the difficulties attending all awards, in particular the difficulty of administering a vaguely worded will in a rapidly changing world.

In the first place, the unbecoming haste of a number of journalists and reviewers to identify themselves with White's success leaves a nasty taste in the mouth, especially when one remembers what some of them actually said about his books when they first reviewed them. The totalitarian fervor with which a number of them have attempted to bludgeon their readers into unqualified admiration of White's every work is no service to that work. The extravagant claims made for White's prose style cannot impress those who have lived on familiar terms with the great English prose writers from Malory, Hooker, Donne, Taylor, Browne, Swift, Gibbon, Goldsmith, Hume through to Orwell and Bertrand Russell. Fortunately for White, novels do not depend mainly on stylistic virtues for their effects.

Particularly unfortunate was the resurrection of that hoary old myth that White was always honored overseas but never in his own country. The facts are quite otherwise, as Alan Lawson's exhaustive research has amply demonstrated. The myth, sad to say, has partly been kept going by White himself. It is strange that such a conscientious artist, holding the metaphysical views seemingly advocated in the novels, should be so intolerant of criticism, instead of, like William Morris, being indifferent to it. It must have been clear to him long ago that the best of his work was strong enough to survive misunderstanding: Richardson's has done so, with less encouragement than White's received.

A second reservation lies in the feeling that there is something fortuitous about the award, not only in relation to the work of earlier European writers (White himself has expressed his embarrassment on that point), but also in relation to the work of earlier Australian writers and at

least one contemporary. The citation encourages the ignorant to think that White is initiating a tradition, instead of standing squarely some way within an existing one. It reads: "For an epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature." No one would wish to deny the epic and psychological virtues of White's work. But to say that his "narrative art has introduced a new continent into literature" is simply not true. The introduction was effected long ago, over a period of 130-odd years. It was begun by Alexander Harris in *Settlers and Convicts.* In *The Emigrant Family* indeed he adumbrates the same conscious use of symbolism that attends White's portrayal of Mrs Flack and Mrs Jolley in *Riders in the Chariot.* The introduction was continued, to name only the big names, by Marcus Clarke, whose *His Natural Life* is as much about nothingness and redemption as *Voss;* by Lawson, whose view that one serves God by loving one's neighbor is expressed as emphatically as that of *Riders in the Chariot;* by Henry Handel Richardson, who was writing about the fundamental polarities of permanence and change long before White made them the centre of his metaphysics; by Martin Boyd, who made the imagery of the crucifixion peculiarly his own; by Christina Stead, who held up the terrifying image of the white man's impact on Australia in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* a whole generation ago. The truth is that Australian writers have never been given credit for the originality of their achievements; their works have dropped out of print quickly, they have had little publicity, so that later writers, benefiting by the current boom in promotion, seem more original than they are.

The strongest living contender with White for recognition is Christina Stead, whose work is equal to White's in bulk. From the point of view of sheer artistic excellence alone it has few rivals in any English-speaking country. The massive intellectual grasp of *House of All Nations,* the psychological complexity of *The Man Who Loved Children,* the exuberant vitality of the prose of *The Salzburg Tales* or *The Puzzle-headed Girl,* the density of experience of *Letty Fox, Her Luck,* would be difficult to match. Stead, however, has three disadvantages. Her work has been difficult to come by until recently, and she has rarely been the subject of scholarly attention; her books have been over the heads of most of the newspaper reviewers who first wrote about them. Secondly, she is a woman, of uncomfortable politics, and expatriate. Thirdly, she is an atheist. The last disability could be construed as disqualifying her in the terms of Nobel's will, which specifically states that the award shall be given "to the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work of an idealist tendency."

I do not myself think that atheism is incompatible with idealism; what we need to know is whether Alfred Nobel thought it was. We need to know indeed what he meant by "idealist tendency." The prize committee seem to have equated 'idealist' with 'religious'.

There is no doubt that it would take a greater effort of critical attention to perceive the idealism in Christina Stead's work than it does to perceive it in White's, where it lies always on the surface. If one concedes the equation of idealism with religion, then White's books are overtly and recognisably religious, in spite of Leonie Kramer's illogical and regrettably specious argument to the contrary. One might question the vitality, the internal contradictions of some of his religious views, but not that they *are* religious. One might question with some justification his rather amorphous syncretism, and the dubious psychological origins of his preoccupation with nothingness and the destruction of the 'self'. The latter is the *sine qua non* of Buddhism and some forms of Hinduism; it has a place in Christianity, but not a central place. As R. C. Zaehner argued about Huxley, White "greatly exaggerates this urge to escape and longing to transcend ourselves." He goes on to argue that this urge is characteristic of the "cerebral approach" to life. It is certainly found in an extreme and somewhat repulsive form in Simone Weil, the Jewish-Christian 'mystic' whose work seems to have influenced two or three of White's books, especially *Voss.* If there is no influence, there is a striking parallelism of ideas. A new and rather uncomfortable light has been thrown on Simone Weil's obsession with self-annihilation in a recent interview with her brother, printed in the *Listener* (24 May 1973). The article is provocative of insights into the themes of some of White's novels, particularly his treatment of brother and sister relationships.

Unfortunately, the religious content of White's novels has proved a fatal happy hunting-ground for subjects for critics who have never themselves been to church or Sunday school, or read any theology or metaphysics. Bemused by the seeming novelty of such material in the modern novel, they overlook the fact that White is merely restating the great commonplaces of metaphysics

and religion, and shut their eyes to the other levels of the books, which are of far more interest. It is the political and sociological implications of his religious views which need discussion, not the doctrinal platitudes.

Underlying all the busy-ness about religious symbol-hunting lies the concealed premise that a work full of such symbolism must *ipso facto* be good. The assumption blinds critics to some of the defects of the novels: their repetitiousness, their rhythmical monotony (the pace is more like Charles Morgan's than anyone else's), the terrible authorial omniscience and the compulsion to share it, which undermine the dramatic statement at every turn. (It is not surprising there is a strong 'narrator' element in White's plays.) So that in the end, with the exception of criticism like J. F. Burrows's, ten years ago, what is written about White is concerned with peripheral rather than central issues.

Between his idolators and his detractors his books have had rough justice, and it is to be hoped that the Nobel award will not further delay the calm, balanced, informed judgement the works merit, nor lead to further uncritical adulation which can only be insulting to a writer of White's calibre.

Meanwhile, on the basis of *Voss* alone, he deserves an honorable place in even a short history of world literature. Simone Weil showed how "sensitivity to the beauty of the world is slowly disappearing in the white race, which is also driving it out of every continent into which it has introduced 'its arms, its commerce, its religion'." *Voss* forces us to face our own particular instance of the impact of European civilisation on a quiet continent; it directs the attention of Australians to essentials and urges them to rise to the spiritual challenge of living in this most austere, most aristocratic, this least vulgar of countries. It takes up the message where Richardson left off. To understand this becomes more and more imperative.

swag

Overland's editorial board has written to the secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers conveying the dismay of the board and of our readers at the treatment meted out to Solzhenitsyn. We have pointed out the shame of the most distinguished Soviet writer's being a "non-writer" so far as officialdom is concerned—a real Orwellian touch! We said that we thought it important that the Soviet government and the Union of Soviet Writers should know the virtually unanimous feelings of detestation throughout the world at Solzhenitsyn's treatment, and concluded: "That this writer arouses fear and persecution in your country illustrates to the outside world that, more than fifty years after the October Revolution, a fundamental sense of insecurity and fear pervades Soviet officialdom. It also exemplifies that your Union exists to discipline writers and not to protect them."

I have heard a splendid Solzhenitsyn story from a friend who was in Moscow recently and saw a small notice advertising a 'readers' meeting' for *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the writers' union paper. He went along to the jam-packed meeting in a hall at the Lenin Library, holding many hundreds of people. The notorious apologist Chakovsky, together with other editorial representatives, was on the stand. Questions were passed up from the predominantly youthful audience. Question after question was on the Solzhenitsyn affair, and Chakovsky got more and more infuriated, finally doing his block and accusing the author of a more than usually pointed question of hiding behind a cowardly anonymity. "Has he got the guts to stand up and show us the kind of Soviet citizen that asks a question like that?" Slowly, firstly in ones and twos, and then row by row, three-quarters of the audience stood to its feet.

I tangled with Chakovsky, who speaks excellent English with an American accent, when I visited Moscow in — I think — 1957, as the national organising secretary of the Australian Peace Council — and, of course, as a communist. I had been taken to see a puppet play in the famous Obratsov puppet theatre, and noticed that an 'American capitalist' in one sketch was both repulsively caricatured as a Jew and spoke his Russian with a 'Jewish' accent. Afterwards I protested and wrote a letter to Obratsov. The Soviet Peace Council refused to deliver it ("it would kill the old man to be accused of anti-semitism"). Chakovsky was then wheeled in to talk some sense into me. "How can there be anti-semitism here? — I'm a Jew and look at me!" He also explained to me at great length why there was no Yiddish press or publishing in the Soviet Union: "There's no demand for it." I remember how furious he was when I said, on our parting, "Well, when you come round to reinstating Yiddish again, please remember to write and tell me just how the demand suddenly re-developed."

We will all be grateful for Geoff Blainey's article on the Literature Board in this issue, probably the most thoughtful and important statement ever to have appeared in print on its functions and history. I think the Australian literary world is immensely fortunate to have a man as humble yet as strong-minded as Blainey in his position as chairman. The way he, with help from others, defeated attempts to have the Literature Board centralized in Sydney with the rest of the Council for the Arts apparatus is an inspiration to those who fear the growth of a mindless uniformity in our burgeoning cultural bureaucracy.

Whitlam is quite entitled to some annoyance when he points out that he got not one message of appreciation for the government's voting the unprecedented sum of $15 million for the arts last year. I think it was a pity, though, that the old Commonwealth Literary Fund Board was dismissed by Whitlam so peremptorily. Members had worked extremely hard for (in some cases) many years; they got not a word of thanks, let alone a human letter recognising the contribution they had made. It was surely extraordinary that the talents of a man like Douglas Stewart should have been dispensed with in so cavalier a fashion. If the Minister for the Arts, who is also of course the Prime Minister, wants thanks, perhaps he should get into the habit of thanking people himself.

I was concerned to hear recently that literary pensions are under a moratorium, in the sense that no further pensions are being awarded at the moment. Coombs is supposed to be against them, but God knows why. They've been a tremendous boon to many aging and talented writers, who've never been on a superannuation scheme nor had a sabbatical in their lives. There is at the moment, for instance, one outstanding case for a pension on literary as well as humanitarian grounds for a writer who is simply left out in the cold. Poor Martin Boyd, as we read in our last issue, was starving in Rome for years before he was given a helping hand, and then it was too late. (This is one of the faults of the secrecy surrounding who gets pensions. In Britain the Civil List pensions are public knowledge, I believe.) A literary pension is worth three times the basic old age pension, but is taxable and carries none of the fringe benefits that the old age pension does.

Readers may be interested in details of the postage racket as it affects *Overland*. Before October last year it cost us 7c. to send a single copy to a reader (and we despatch scores of 'singles' of each issue, as well as our bulk mailings). It now costs 20c.—virtually a three-hundred per cent. rise overnight! How's that for inflation! Bulk rates, formerly 4½c. a copy, are now 9½c., and next year will be 11c.—again, nearly a three-fold increase. Protests to the Australian Post Office bring the rejoinder: "Everyone gets a subsidy of some kind. Just get them to increase your subsidy!" Of course there are hundred of valuable papers and journals which receive no subsidies whatever, and many of which are being driven into oblivion. So much for the New, Open Society, in which Ideas Flourish as Never Before.

Another racket is the trendy metrication racket. After an article I wrote recently in the Melbourne *Herald* on the 'great standover', as I see it, I have been deluged with letters, many of them desperate, moving and sad—letters from people who see themselves as the helpless victims of bureaucratic bullying. We are so institutionalised in our charity these days we don't worry about the non-measurable traumas which make many people's lives as unbearable as poverty and ill health. "Nothing has any interest any more," writes a woman from Chadstone. A Catholic priest and teacher writes: "The complexities of our measurements (greatly exaggerated by metricmaniacs) chime in with the idiom of our tongue and with the illogical and inconsistent elements in the heart of every man". Metrication has been introduced in Australia *not* because it's 'progressive' (it's not) but because it gives the illusion of change. That a Labor government, supposedly dedicated to the welfare of the masses and the consumer, should go along with this cheap, Gortonian ramp is a sad comment on its priorities.

However battle is still possible, especially over the insanity of changing miles to kilometres. (How can this possibly benefit anyone?) Write your local members and the press, and join, if you wish, the Australian Anti-Metric Association, 50 Cardigan Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053.

Alex Selenitsch, our cover designer for this issue, comments: "On the front cover, a sign emerges from a boiling word block; on the back cover, a word is boiled away from its definition."

Peter Karmel is no doubt an urbane and successful man, but his recent appointment as chairman of the Council for the Arts cannot be fully welcomed. He himself has pointed out that he has had little contact with the arts. Nor does the run of economics professors in the key cultural jobs (Coombs, Downing, now Karmel) really build confidence. Are these chaps chosen in part because the quasi-science of economics sounds respectable, and because they have a certain expertise useful in wringing a bit more money out of Treasury? The Labor government may not be in power long—its opportunities for giving a genuinely democratic and socialist direction to the arts may be limited. One wouldn't suggest an arid

and dogmatic socialist theorist in Karmel's place, but there were men available for the job who could have brought to it a lifetime of insight and thought about the problems of high culture versus mass culture. And who would have had administrative *nous* too.

In other words I think Clif Pugh is basically right—not necessarily about the arts being run by artists (though I think he's had second thoughts about some of the implications of this) but about the bureaucratic tendencies already amply visible in the Council for the Arts. Ideologically directionless, the Council represents an attempt to reach a lowest-common-denominator consensus. The Prime Minister is reported to have said recently that the Council needs "more Clif Pughs" (Pugh has recently resigned). I see no chance of their being appointed. By and large the individual boards appear to be doing excellent work. No one has yet convincingly demonstrated why they should not be left to get on with it. The Council is supererogatory, but it's now thoroughly institutionalised and presumably will be here to stay, busily trying to find ways to justify its existence.

The Adelaide Festival was marvellous, as usual, and Writers' Week the usual drawcard. It's pointless regretting that Writers' Week functions are being overrun by those who come along for the show, or that the public side of the Week seems to be increasingly academic and ego-tripish. To a large extent these things have always been, or are, inevitable. What does seem unfortunate, however, is that there does not seem to be a forum in Australia where writers, publishers, booksellers, journalists, editors, members of the Literature Board and those similarly involved can get together to hammer out issues and resolve various forms of paranoia. One wouldn't want a 'trade union consciousness' to prevail, but there's a lot of material (the new copyright Act, for instance) worthy of close discussion among those most involved. I heard some suggestion that a special kind of literary forum, say at Albury on years alternate to the Festival, should be organised.

The sixteenth annual *Overland-Meanjin* cricket match was played on 10 March at Mount Eliza. Regrettably, *Meanjin* won for the second year running: 179 to 166. Top scorers for *Meanjin* were Chris Wallace Crabbe (36) and Laurie Clancy (32); for *Overland* Harry Torrens (27) and Gregory Marginson (26, retired). Gordon Bryant, who as usual presented the emu egg, scored two—for *Overland,* of course. Of the sixteen games nine have been won by *Meanjin,* five by *Overland,* while one has been a tie and one a draw. We play by an unusual set of rules: everyone must score, for instance. We really thought we had it in the bag this year, too.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

ALLAIN JARIA

Kanisol Ul Elaf

He dropped his dead hands into his shirt pocket for his smoke. He felt both hands numb with cold. He tried to exercise his hands, but the blood was frozen and his hands were as heavy as a lump of ice. He felt the same on his face and below on the legs, and on the bare feet, except the middle trunk which was kept warm by a khaki waterproof shirt. Pinned on this coat at his breast was a medal. On this was printed: "Woitape Local Government Council."

It was this medal and the coat that gave him warmth, fame, trust and distinction in this wet weather and encouraged him to walk such a long road to his destination. Added to this was an inner motivation that pushed him onwards. All gave him confidence, and so he put his thoughts in various compartments for the coming meeting.

The smoke tasted good and warm. He pulled the first puff into his lungs very slowly and exhaled it through both mouth and nose. He pulled it several times.

"Anio!"

"Eh?" as he turned his head, both surprised and questioningly, to a group of his boys.

"Give me some smoke to make me warm on the road!" came again the same voice.

Aniov Aio gave some smokes to the boys and said, "I suggest, boys, we keep moving forward. We must reach Woitape before five."

It was an incessant drizzle out in the open, but among the very tall pandanus and other trees, the heavy rain drops kept hammering the leaves, like marbles falling on a dried pandanus roof.

They arrived at Woitape very late, after six in the evening. The orange-colored mud was right up to their knees. The drizzle kept on. Many of his boys had chattering teeth, but he kept his tight.

There was no proper accommodation for the councillors. The lucky ones slept with their friends at the outpost. Many of them had relatives or friends from their own village, or had made friends with people who lived at the outpost. One could hardly call Woitape a town!

By seven it was pitch dark. If one could survive the next day one needed fire, and plenty of it, food and warm shelter.

The next day Aniov Aio went for the first session of the week's meeting. Half way through the meeting week, he did not want to stay there. He wanted to go home and tell his people the result of the meeting, to say that the tax had been raised this year, a road would soon be on the way to their little village, and that the school would start soon in their place because he, Aniov Aio, was constantly fighting hard for them and tearing his finger nails for them.

At the end of the meeting Anio, with his boys, went back. He would not stop for another day after the meeting. Anio knew exactly the varying times of the year. The damp, heavy, wet weather had started and it would continue with hardly a fine day. No witch, no sorcerer, not even his totem, would stop this rain. They went back to their place the way they had come, with bright promises that one might or might not see in his lifetime.

On his way home Aniov Aio could visualize what the people would say about the recent rise in taxation, but he was the councillor, and he was doing his work. He was told to say that, and since he was a councillor himself, Anio must not show his own feelings, but do the right thing for the good of his people even though it was sometimes against his will.

Tired and wet, Aniov Aio arrived in his place.

He decided to deliver the news of the meeting the next day. In the meantime he would think things out, scale them and present them in the way he thought the people would accept.

At the gathering of the dark he told the people the experiences of his journey to Woitape and back.

Aniov Aio woke up unwillingly from his hammock, which was almost within the reach of the fire-place. Cold was creeping into the marrow of his bones, so Anio moved his hammock very close to the hearth. Even though it was very late morning, the room was still dark. Inside it was warm and inviting; outside it was drizzling, as ever through the still fog. This was the time when people, who walked out into the rain, left their hearts behind with warm fire and hot food. He could have remained pinned down on that hammock for ever, he thought, had not the people pressed him for the news of the meeting. He always told the people that they sat on their bottoms and did nothing to help develop their place. He always told them what they heard just entered one ear and did not stick in their minds, but went out the other ear. He checked himself and yawned.

It was about noon when he gathered the people. He waited silently, making sure that he saw everybody's faces. In olden times he could have been in front of a fearful, silent assembly. The people could now understand that a patrol officer is a patrol officer and a councillor is a councillor.

He spoke gently first, as though Aniov Aio was relating the legend of his tumbuna to his little interested children.

"As you know," he cleared his throat, "I went for the meeting. I told them that you want the school in your place and also about the road that will lead to your little place."

He looked around. Silence reigned. Anio went on:

"Everyone of us is still thinking about it. We see that people are thinking about these things. It is good. They should help themselves. While you are waiting for these good things that will take place in your village, keep your pigs out of the village street, do not let them leave their droppings, and keep the place tidy. Road and school will come later."

Now confused voices rose from the assembly. They had heard the same story hundreds of times before. They had paid the taxes so many times before that they hoped to get something in return. Among these deafening noises, a voice floated above:

"Is there anything new? What you said now is the old story told many times before. Are you telling us a legend, or something that really concerns our lives? We paid taxes and you know how many times!"

"The patrol officer is coming soon for tax," Aniov Aio answered. "The patrol officer and the councillors raise the tax. They said those who have no money would have to go either to jail, or give so many pigs to the patrol officer."

Another voice rang through the damp air:

"This is the time to talk sense, Mr Councillor. Those without money when they give pigs, pigs cannot build a school for us. You and I cannot simply grow money in the garden! You, me, and the people here do not get money from the trees. Money itself cannot fly from Moresby to here. We need something that can bring in money. How can you expect us to pay tax if we have no money? You must go to Moresby, sit in the council chamber and talk sense. Go to our people in town and ask them for money, *they* are working for money. We get our money from our relatives who are working for money in Moresby. We do not work for money here."

Aniov Aio stood half dumb and half ashamed. His legs were heavy and unyielding. He knew everything. He knew why people flocked to Moresby, but Anio would not mention it, for fear that either he would lose his job or that he would hurt the patrol officer.

"All right," he said, as he found his voice again. "All right, we'll see, we'll see."

After he had closed the meeting, he went to his house very quickly. He had never before expected to be beaten during any type of meeting. He expected everyone to say "yes" and be done with it. No one should ever go against the patrol officer and the councillors. He hated to be beaten, especially among so many people. He must take things through the right way.

It was during the month of June. The sky was cleanly swept and the hidden clouds waited patiently to welcome the giver of light and day. Aniov Aio went out, looked up at the sky and smiled satisfactorily to himself. Things always turned out to his liking, he heard himself muttering inside him. He wanted fine weather to walk to the road of his mission. Down, in front of him, the morning dew lay glittering. The ground was

very cold and he could feel the sharp air cutting his mouth and nose, particularly on his bare parts. He must go to Moresby. He thought it over again and again, as he went inside the house and huddled himself to the warmth of the fire.

The plane due to Woitape was not in until about ten in the morning. Aniov Aio waited patiently, but busily composed his thoughts to present them in the Council Chamber today, as soon as he arrived in Moresby. He remembered vividly that he had fought hard to go to Moresby, firstly to show to the people that he kept their promises and to affirm that he could continue to do it.

As Anio pondered over these things, he did not realise the change in the atmosphere from the cold, biting air of the highlands to the humid, muggy hot air of the coastlands. Before he could grasp where he was, the plane suddenly swung to her right side and dived into Jacksons Airport.

When Aniov Aio reached the terminal he did not expect to find government transport, and if there was any for him he did not know how to find it. Instead he took a P.M.V. and made his way to Kila-Kila compound. Of all places in Moresby, Anio knew this place very well. He had been there many times before he became councillor and undoubtedly he knew exactly the situation the people were in. Aniov Aio had tasted that life, shared it and realised what it was like. Now, he as a councillor, he must look to different horizons, which ought to be above these people.

In the first place, his cousin's house was very full. This house was actually for a family of about three people. According to Aniov Aio's reckoning, there were four times the usual number of occupants, so that some slept under the house. His cousin and a few men worked, some went on holidays for six months, some stayed there while looking for work and, others, but not many, found good markets from their wives. So it went on and on and it will go on and on. Once again the worthy councillor had to adapt himself to this community.

Aniov Aio's cousin managed to get a good place for Anio. Right in the heart of the compound Anio dwelt, yet when he looked at the matters at his own level, he was sitting on a hammock above them, as he had done at home, and blaming his wantoks for their stupidity and slowness.

The month of June went by unnoticed. Now they were in July; quite a long time for such people as himself. His people in town went about, taking very little interest in him. Some few weeks ago Anio's cousin had told him that, before he went back, they would "boil his tea". Now the time had come around to "boil the tea" for the councillor.

On the day itself, many people, mostly his own people, arrived. When the food was ready, Anio stood up and addressed the crowd:

"I came down here for one purpose; to say that you must help those at home. They have no means of getting money there to pay tax. They cannot extract money from the bark of a tree. Money is not like leaves in our place. You who are working for money must help them. I am sorry that you who have come here, to work for tax money, some of you, are not working. Keep trying, keep looking for jobs. You must go back home, because there are hardly any young men, working men there who can pay tax."

His speech was cut short by the noise of a heavy metal or a stone on a corrugated iron roof. He knew the reason why. He knew their way of life. He was born in it, lived among them, not on the moon. However, he must talk the language of the patrol officer and the councillors of Woitape. But Anio could not go on. He stopped. He recoiled, withdrew, and the food was shared. While they ate the people brought donations, mostly in the form of money. It all added up to eighty dollars. That was his. This is why he had come to Moresby.

Tomorrow, when he got the plane at Jackson's to go home, he would scale his thoughts down and present them to his people. He would repress what he saw, walked in and out of and lived in, and talk the language of the patrol officer and the councillors once again.

FINOLA MOORHEAD

A National Experience?

The Second Australian National Playwrights' Conference

We care about our national identity.

A guest at the second Australian National Playwrights' Conference, Martin Esslin, Head of BBC Radio Drama, said Australian playwrights seem obsessed with police, prisons, alcohol and unsatisfactory marital relationships. Only two of the six plays workshopped at Newcastle this year did not mention police. We know about Jim McNeil and the thriving creative writing centre at the once-firm Bathurst Penitentiary and *The Removalists,* but these head an iceberg of similar plays written by those unheard. We all found ourselves reading manila-covered carbon scripts distributed quietly by hopefuls. But surely the scars on our ankles from the Marcus Clarke days no longer hurt? Maybe they haven't healed, maybe we will love and hate authority until the day of our dissolution.

Plawrights seem to be grabbing our inferiority complex by the short hairs and tearing at it. The process is painful for them, but it is doubly painful for us when we see it before it is sewn up in a spherical 'work of art'. If complete we could bat it about in a safe game of academic royal tennis. But we try to catch the spilling, uncontrolled sincerities with phrases like: "It doesn't quite work, but there is a talent for naturalistic dialogue"; "A possibility for a very funny piece here" or "We'll have to clear up that dead spot there, it's embarrassing." All the playwrights felt, at one time or another, as I did last year—floating in a hot-air balloon over the abyss of failure: feeling the world change beyond their wildest hopes, and yet knowing deep-down that they are only themselves. The same ones who were ignored before will be ignored again. Although they worked, rewrote, listened to advice with nods and frowns, their plays did not change significantly during the conference. The major faults they came with, they left with.

The hope of the organizers is that the 'experience' will have a profound effect on their future writing. One woman was quietened when she cried: "We've come to learn how to write plays, not to . . ." Her cry came from a frustration caused by the nature of the conference. It is ridiculous to think anybody can go somewhere for two weeks and learn how to write plays. But the objectives lie somewhere between this vain hope and a fortnight designed to show potential playwrights theatre technique. The latter could be done more quietly, cheaply and effectively within the living theatre, schools and resident dramatist positions. The Australian National Playwrights' Conference aims higher than that—it wants to bring together directors, actors, working writers and potential writers and give them the means to communicate, earth on which to throw their seeds and from which will grow a vital, indigenous theatre. It is modelled on the American National Playwrights' Conference, which ran into entirely different problems by its second year. That conference had become a place and a time for the big Broadway producers to spot their future hits. The designers, directors, actors and writers worked hard in the short time to impress the gentlemen with the lights in their pockets. By cutting down budgets, forbidding this and that, the organisers of the Waterford Conference succeeded in avoiding the pressures of commercialism. The Waterford objective is to give a playwright the chance to fail without being destroyed by failure.

Lloyd Richards, who is artistic director of the American conference, was our guest at the second Australian one. Both he and Arthur Ballet, who has Rockefeller Foundation money to discover

and produce new plays, were full of beautiful words regarding the theatre, its art and the nature of creativity. But they were both bemused by, I think, the 'Australianism' of our conference. They had arrived at their new-playwright-fostering position from the standpoint of Americans, who know that success is possible. "If you want to, buddy, you can do anything." It wasn't that we weren't working with American fervor, we were prepared to work. It was something deeper . . . we all try to put words to it.

An outspoken woman playwright of Australian renown told me at one stage she was sick of that saintly Negro!

I ask again: how far are we from the currency lad in the pub?

"What the conference needs is a smash hit, and then it'll be on its feet!" I was horrified to hear that said by one of the organizers. After the hit, we can demand money and give six playwrights a two-week balloon ride every year while we wait for the next smash hit. That's what Australians will do, given the chance! The American conference 'hits' came from the roots of their philosophy. Australians can be great, very great, but they achieve that excellence in spite of Australians, not because of them. And their greatness rarely takes the 'smash hit' form. Because of the knocks, the work has to be tough, resilient to temporal failures — it has to have lasting value to last long enough to be appreciated. It would do our conference no good to emulate the American conference's faults! Australians are not often destroyed by failure, but they are, and have been, by facile success.

To be an Australian national success the ANPC-writers have to succeed in spite of the conference. It may sound harsh, but a conference of the type of Canberra '73 and Newcastle '74 can be a harrowing experience for a writer who sees the criticism through the praise.

The playwrights are sincerely trying to reflect life in Australia. It seems we have to handle the personal experience before epic subjects can emerge.

Six scripts, six ideas lay ready to be built from the blueprint. The teams of workmen were hired.

A Training Run by Mervyn Rutherford takes place in a country police station, where it's tough and lonely, and, apparently, a cop has to be corrupt. Merv. thinks that Crawford-sponsored myths should be slain. *Who Moved The Winning Post?* by Lesma Sturmer follows a tripping clown of a little old spinster in her search for a film director who has stolen her story and made a successful film of it. *The Business of Living* by Berwyn Lewis portrays an old couple in the dying 'corner store' and the passing of time and the coming of the super-duper market. *Apartment* by Russell Beedles is two long speeches joined by small dialogue in which husband speaks to a dummy of wife and wife to a dummy of husband. *The Mad Scene* by John Upton is about a man who has built a twenty-one foot well in his living room to get 'to the bottom of things' and is a Zulu-phil, but his wife is worried about the neighbors and goes to bed with a girl-friend. *Pigs* by David O'Brien is about sex, and the woman beats both men at the numerous games they play.

These plays went into a seventeen hour rehearsal period each—all rehearsals were open to observers. The proscenium-arch stage of the union theatre at the University of Newcastle was used for as full a performance of each as is possible with script in hand; the audience reaction and the critics' forum the next morning were important parts of the writer's experience. Wandering about the place were a number of successful Australian playwrights, critics, all manner of theatre people and writers hoping to learn the secrets of success. For those not working in the workshop there was time to talk . . . to criticize . . . to knock.

There were two formal debates on the middle Sunday in which worn-out subjects were defended by worn-out arguments. Old prejudices, old enemies popped up to knock their heads against the same old brick walls. To cuckoo away another year. Commercial theatre is still talking about overseas stars and blandly asking Australian playwrights for a *Move Over Mrs Markham*. One observer rose slowly in the assembly —the debaters ruffling their notes with argument but not excitement—and said: "This could be funny, but this is for real, mate!"

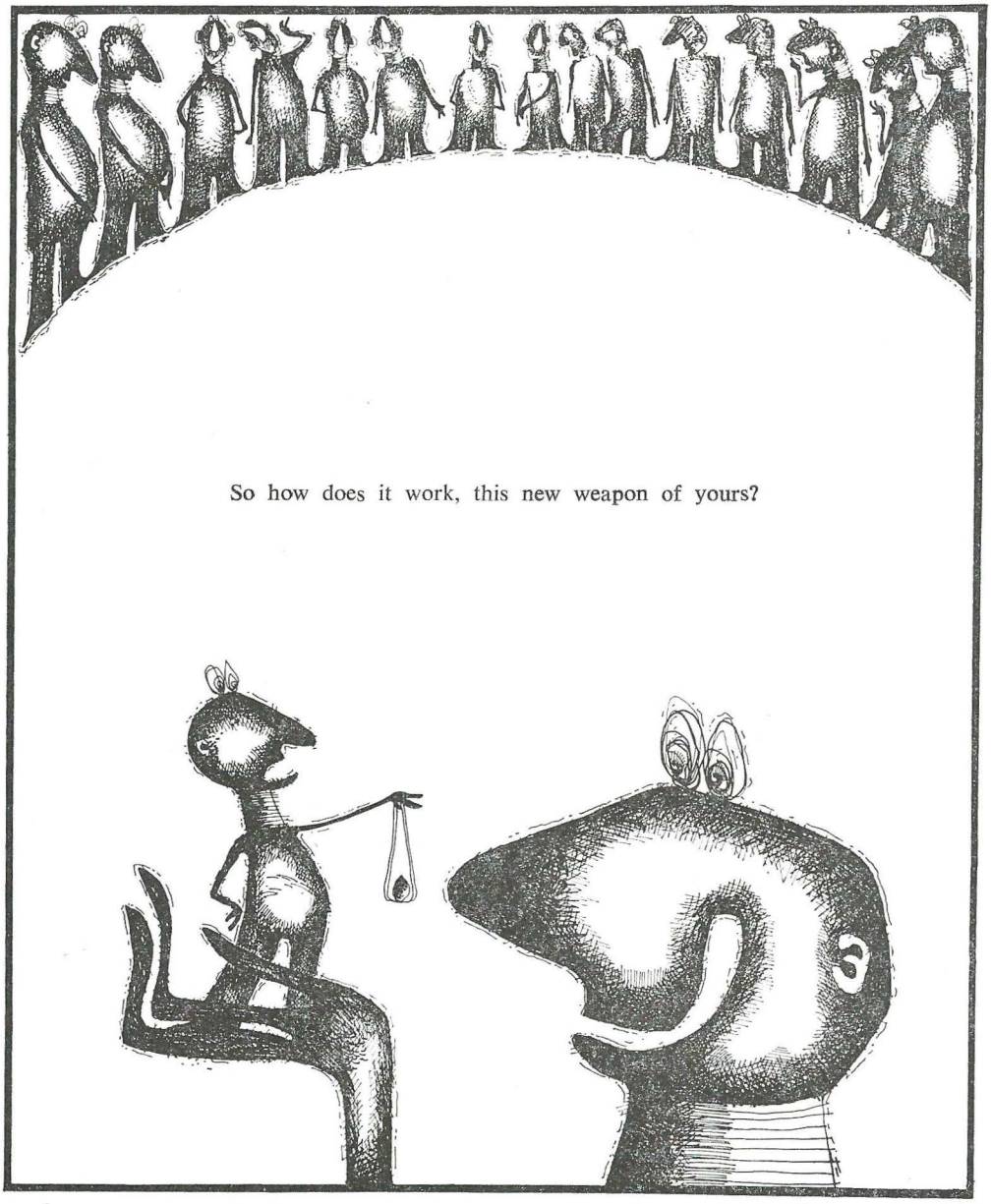
This *is* for real, mate! This muck you're talking is being called 'Theatre in Australia'. They were worried about the same thing in the *Bulletin* in 1911: the import of Broadway and West End successes because, therefore, they will be a commercial success in Australia. Why?

We're raw enough in Australia to come at a basic, age-old problem as if it were our very own. Theatre is two things: common entertainment and a high literary art. Any one of the six plays in the conference could be made, by a business

director 'with the clues', into a *Move Over Mrs Markham.* But making it literary art rests on one uncomplicated thing: the genius of the author.

The Australian National Playwrights' Conference must work out where it stands in relation to the basic concept of theatre. If it decides to make big theatrical successes, it could well call itself the Australian Playwrights' Conference. If it is to be 'national' it must come to terms with our identity, our personality, our national experience, and this takes literary art with all the dedication, self-sacrifice and self-criticism that such art requires.

GOOD BOOK — I



Have You Ever Been Lonely, Have You Ever Been Blue?

MORRIS LURIE

Leo was alone. He had always wanted to be alone and now he was. No pestering acquaintances, no nagging relatives, no poky neighbors, no boss. Maybe just a little bit more alone than he wanted to be (he was twelve months an orphan, and his girl friend had just married someone else), but what the hell, in reasonable moments he saw her for the bitch she really was, gymnastic lovemaking notwithstanding, and though he still grieved for his parents, and probably always would, life had to go on.

Look, he had everything. Money, freedom, all Europe spread out in front of him like a map. He could go anywhere, do anything, all the places and things he'd dreamed about for years. Run with the bulls in Pamplona, sail down the Rhine, hang around the medina in Tangier. Sit at the Deux Magots, whip round the Louvre, take in a few fiords in Norway, drink camparis in Rome. Anything. He had a good year at least up his sleeve, maybe even two. No job. No need for a job. He had two suitcases, a guidebook, a wallet crammed with cash. He was twenty-eight years old, wide shouldered, enjoyed perfect health. He had brought from Australia (twelve thousand miles from the false charity of his relatives, twelve thousand miles from that rutty girl) a great curiosity and an alert pair of eyes. What more could you possibly want?

However, he was alone.

He was alone in Paris, alone in Spain, alone in Portugal, Morocco and Algiers. Then across the Mediterranean to be alone in Italy — Naples, Rome, Florence, Milan — and from there he went to Switzerland and was alone in Geneva for two days and nights. He was alone in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, then back to Denmark, still alone. This is not to say that he spoke to no one, exchanged no addresses, did not smile, said no hellos, but there are ways of being alone even with all this, and Leo was in the true sense of the word alone. He was so much alone that a strange thing happened to him. It had to do with his personal habits. Oh, he brushed his teeth, combed his hair, shaved his chin and cheeks, bathed or showered every second day, anointing his body with scented talc and after-shave—no, this was something else. In short, Leo became a farter.

Now this is a shameful and loathesome thing, but think a minute. The reason we don't do it—you and I—is because we fear the scorn of our friends, but who was there to hear Leo, alone in Europe, a stranger in every city and town? A waiter in a restaurant? A priest in a church? A bored attendant in some ill-lit gallery or museum? A woman in a shop? Fellow patrons in a cinema? A shoe-shine boy in Naples? The man cutting Leo's hair in a booth in Tangier? He would never see them again, he would never see any of them again, so why hold back? Even if they spoke, Leo couldn't understand a word. Chastisement loses its sting when delivered in a foreign tongue. Maybe, anyhow, they were saying something else. Who could be sure? Boop, went Leo. Farting is antisocial, and Leo was part of no society. He was alone.

Occasionally, cuttingly alone. Like when he saw a girl who reminded him of *her*—her smile, her eyes, her way of walking, her way of moving her hands. He saw her, once, slipping her hand under a man's coat, and turned instantly to ice. But a bottle of wine sorted that out, and then afterwards a walk along a fashionable avenue or

boulevard, past cafes and elegant lit-up windows, feeling tall, loose and free. And perhaps some other times too. But then all he had to do was summon up the faces of all those meddlesome uncles, cousins, nephews and aunts—"Leo, my Leo, what can we do for you?"—and he was all right. Hey, I'm in Europe! he told himself. Me!

He had gone through several countries before he realized the habit was on him. Walking up a flight of stairs in the Prado, he popped forth a short series—squeaks, actually—without turning a hair. These continued with Velasquez, went on through El Greco, and the series came to a close with Goya, in front of that magnificent painting called The Third of May, 1808. What a performance, Leo thought, relishing the detail.

He was a little louder in Portugal, and in his room in Tangier gave vent to several tumultuous blasts. Palm trees waved outside his window. There was a cooling breeze from the sea. No day in Algiers was silent—he was there a month—and when he got to Italy he really blossomed. Was it the pasta? The chianti? Or was it the operatic tradition of the land? *O sole mio!* There were twig snaps in the Sistine Chapel, a salvo in St Peter's, an ancient Model T in La Scala in Milan. He went there for *La Boheme.* Before he knew what was happening, he had breakfast farts, pre- and post-luncheon farts, a special repertoire for after dinner. Always a couple before he went to bed. Stairs unlocked them, up or down. Bending for a suitcase or to tie up a shoe was sure to release a few. He became aware of them somewhere in Germany—the sauerkraut? the spicy sausages? all that foamy beer?—but didn't hold them back. There didn't seem to be any need. He was alone. He ascended the stairs of a local Rathaus his guidebook told him not to miss in a carnival of rockets and bursting balloons.

He kept them up in Copenhagen, carried them over on the ferry to Sweden (two toots in Malmo to signal his arrival), crossed the border into Norway with a snap and a pop—always more in open spaces—and it was in a restaurant in Oslo that they finally brought him shame. He was dining, alone of course, but at the next table sat a girl with long blonde hair and a look of love and adoration in her soft blue eyes. The look was not for Leo, but for the young man she sat with. As Leo watched, the man put a hand to the girl's cheek, and she raised her shoulder, inclined her head, caressing her lover's hand like a kitten. Leo, spellbound, touched off a doleful bassoon. Neither the girl nor her lover seemed to notice, but Leo's face caught fire and he looked down quickly into his plate. He was vile. He was a beast. He was not fit to mix with men. He saw his mother's gentle face and burned with shame. Also some uncles, aunts, several family friends. He didn't bother with coffee and left Oslo that night.

But the same thing happened, more or less, three times in Copenhagen, when he returned. He tried desperately to keep them under control but still they escaped. A beauty in a museum. One in a restaurant. One on a bus. Good God! cried Leo. What is it? What have I done? I always wanted to run with the bulls in Pamplona, but why (crack!) can't I stop? Aren't I enjoying myself? Aren't I having a good time? Oh Europe, he moaned. Historic, priceless Europe. I've blown it. Blown it to hell.

He had been too long in countries where he couldn't speak the language. That was it. He had never done them at home. He needed a job. He needed regular hours. He needed the company of acquaintances and friends. Let them be pestering, nagging and poky! He needed to visit his parents, to lay flowers on their twin lonely graves. He hadn't mourned them properly. His head had been filled with dreams. He packed his bags, sizzling like a fuse. He boarded an aeroplane, firing sniper shots as he went up the steps. He tried to keep them muffled on board, and did, with only the occasional lapse. In Singapore he bought some books, and flying home he kept himself distracted with the essays and poems of John Donne.

"No man is an *Iland* (he read), intire of it self; every man is a peece of the *Continent,* a part of the *maine*—"

"Coffee?" the hostess asked him.

"Yes, please," Leo said.

"And therefore (he read) never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls (ping! ping!) for *thee.*"

GEOFFREY BLAINEY

Government Patronage and Literature

Based on a talk given in Canberra in November 1972, this article has been rendered anachronistic in some respects by the change of government and the institution of the Council for the Arts, to which the Literature Board is now subordinate. However the article is printed here because it is important enough, in the general issues it deals with, to place on permanent record. Geoffrey Blainey, who was of course chairman of the advisory board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund and is now chairman of the Literature Board, has kindly provided a post-script. This is the first of a series we shall publish on the Council for the Arts.

The book has always been challenged; it always seems to be endangered. A century or more ago the main challenge was illiteracy. As most adults in western countries in 1850 could not read they had no use for books. Even those adults who could read were rarely able to afford books. Complaints about the high price of books today often come from readers who vaguely invoke a memory of a golden age when the shops were crowded with buyers of cheap and plentiful books. It is doubtful, however, whether that golden age of cheap books existed. Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers,* for instance, appeared originally as a monthly serial at only one shilling a copy; but when you count the number of issues which made up the complete volume, and when you count the number of working hours which earned a shilling for a laborer or artisan, you begin to realize that Dickens' book was expensive. For a London laborer of 1836 the new novel was really more expensive than is the most lavish of coffee-table books for the Sydney laborer of 1972.

I am not suggesting that we should be complacent. The difficulties of authors, publishers, booksellers and librarians differ from era to era; but ours is certainly not the first difficult era. What makes our times seem unusually dismal to authors is the plight of novelists. To write novels in the English-speaking world in the nineteenth century was to belong to perhaps the most glamorous of all occupations, but much of that glamor has gone. In many nations the novel is now one of the main recipients of government aid to literature; and the poor rewards for the average novelist and publisher of novels has become a mirror of the state of the trade. The novel, however, is only one mirror, and sometimes a distorting mirror, of the innumerable ways in which books and their readers are changing.

Those who see distressing trends amongst books disagree about the causes of the distress, but most agree that governments must provide a part of the remedy. Government aid to literature in Australia will obviously increase during the 1970s. How should that aid best be allotted? In discussing the advantages and defects of government aid I cannot offer simple solutions. Nor can I say anything authoritative about government policy in Australia; though my views are obviously influenced by my experiences as a member or as chairman of the advisory board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund I do not speak here on behalf of the board. At the same time so little has been previously written about many facets of the Commonwealth Literary Fund that I can perhaps offer something new about several issues inseparable from government aid to authors and publishers. But first I'll outline the origins of government aid to literature in Australia and how that aid is administered today. As the purpose of a seminar is discussion and criticism, please feel free to take

down anything I say as evidence against me.

In Australia a few of the colonial governments surreptitiously helped men of letters. The idea of paying them so that they would have time in which to write was probably deemed an incentive to laziness; but writers—like footballers today—could at least be offered lucrative jobs. In Victoria the immigrant poet R. H. Horne was a commissioner of Melbourne's waterworks and an official on remote goldfields during many of the years 1853-69; these appointments were hardly a recognition of his administrative ability. In the 1870s the novelist Marcus Clarke was given a good job in the Melbourne Public Library, and though he was not really a librarian he was offered in 1878 the post of parliamentary librarian. In New South Wales the poet Charles Harpur was an assistant commissioner at the goldfield in the secluded valley of Araluen until 1886, and Henry Kendall was given several clerical posts, of which the most profitable was £350 a year for the position of Inspector of Forests. (A Diogenes-like task: how does one begin inspecting a forest?) Kendall's inspecting ended when he collapsed at Wagga Wagga in 1882.

Henry Lawson received a smattering of help from the New South Wales government; and we can be deeply grateful that he received it even if we don't know whether it had literary effects. About 1898 the government statistician, Timothy Coghlan, had offered Lawson clerical work in his Sydney office at £3.10 a week. That was rather high pay, and Lawson came to collect it. Lawson's obligation was simply to remain in the office until 4.30. He could write what he liked—short story or official memorandum—but in the six weeks of his captivity he probably wrote neither. During the First World War Henry Lawson was again offered an official post, and at an irrigation colony near Leeton he wrote verse and prose to advertise the area. For his part he did not think a prohibition-area was worth advertising, and sometimes he used his free railway pass to escape; for the best part of two years he was on the public payroll. Whether any of these haphazard but generous acts towards writers led to creative writing is difficult to assess. We still don't know enough about the creative effects—direct or indirect—of government aid to writers in this or other lands.

Meanwhile in 1906 the Commonwealth Literary Fund was launched, or at least the keel was laid. In Sydney in the previous year the Irish-born poet Victor Daley had died, leaving little money for his widow and children. News of their plight prompted the prime minister, Alfred Deakin, to set up a small fund of £500 for deserving authors. "There may surely be found in a new country, even more than there is in older and more populous lands, a full justification for this expenditure," said Deakin in 1906. How the money should be spent was outlined by a small committee, chaired by the Adelaide newspaper-owner Sir Langdon Bonython; and when the CLF was formally gazetted in May 1908 Bonython was its chairman. The proclaimed purpose of the Commonwealth Literary Fund was to help authors who were old and poor or infirm and poor. If they died poor the Fund gave an annual pension to the family. Today one widow and one child are on the confidential pension list of the CLF but at one time the families—sometimes the families of literary nonentities—dominated the pension list. The CLF originally had one other aim—to support "literary men doing good work, but unable on account of poverty to persist in that work". In that particular aim the literary had priority over the charitable, the living over the dying, but that aim was ignored for thirty years. Nevertheless the CLF was the first sustained government support for creative artists in Australia.

In 1939—during Mr R. G. Menzies' first ministry—the Fund's aims were enlarged. Thereafter, in addition to literary pensions, the CLF financed lectures on Australian literature in universities and in country towns, subsidised the publication of new Australian books or of Australian classics which were out of print, and gave fellowships enabling talented authors to give their full time to writing. The first fellowships, worth £250 a year, were taken up in 1940; Frank Dalby Davison, Xavier Herbert, Miles Franklin, and Ernestine Hill held four of the five initial awards. It was an impressive list for the inauguration of what was then perhaps the boldest literary patronage in the English-speaking world; but even an impressive list can arouse indignation. The complaint—"Why do successful writers receive the help?"—has been often heard in Australia. I'll comment on it later.

The Commonwealth Literary Fund today is based on that re-shaping of 1939, though the annual budget and the variety of activities are much larger. In 1946 a literary magazine was first voted money; the sum was £100 and was called "an emergency grant". The magazine, of course, was Clem Christesen's *Meanjin* which has done so much for Australian writing. For literary magazines an emergency is an annual rather than a

special event; and from 1950 *Meanjin* received a regular grant and slowly others were added to the list, until today nearly one-fifth of the CLF budget goes to literary magazines. Other innovations came in the late 1960s and early 1970s: research and travel grants enabling writers to go interstate or overseas; grants to writers' seminars and schools; a cluster of annual book prizes including £5000 for the Australian book judged the best of the year; and the awards for young writers which have just been announced. If you relish financial figures here are two. In the last 35 years the annual budget of the CLF has risen from less than $3000 to $300,000, but a lot of that hundredfold increase represents inflation.

The main work of the Fund is performed by an advisory board of seven members: Douglas Stewart, Kylie Tennant and Harry Kippax from Sydney; Alec Hope from Canberra; Geoffrey Dutton from Kapunda (S.A.); and Frank Eyre and myself from Melbourne. I suppose, in all, they have written forty or fifty books; those books range from poetry and novels and plays to biography, essays, history, dramatic and literary criticism, and travel. In addition most members have had experience of publishing, either as publishers, directors of publishing houses, or as professional editors. As members have personally read and reported on almost all the manuscripts and books submitted annually by writers who want grants, this variety of experience is probably essential. The advisory board has rarely farmed out manuscripts to outside referees—partly because each application to the CLF is, if rejected, treated as confidential. But the increasing load will soon, I think, demand more delegation.

This year the work of close to 400 authors or intending authors must have come before the advisory board in one context or another. To give you some idea of how much work preceded a two-day meeting of the advisory board in Perth this spring, each member had to read or examine the recent work—published or unpublished—of about forty authors. In addition they had to read an agenda and supplementary papers which, even when severely summarized, probably exceeded five hundred typed pages. I can't say I counted the pages because they reach us, by way of the overworked secretariat in Canberra, in taxi-delivered envelopes right up to the eve of each meeting. You may suggest, as part of a solution to the pressure, that the advisory board should impose strict guidelines on applicants, limitations on the length of manuscripts submitted, or other defensive rules, but so far the board has tended to resist this kind of solution. Since so many authors live from crisis to crisis, and since not all manage their work or their financial affairs with the orderliness of filing clerks, the CLF has to tolerate some inconvenience. This imposes strain on the full-time secretariat in Canberra—I can't speak too highly of their tolerance.

You may wonder why I'm digressing on the humdrum mechanics of literary grants—no, mechanics is not the right word, for it's too subjective to be called mechanical. Nevertheless it is pointless to talk of the principles which should guide the granting of aid to writers and publishers if we forget that principles are often bruised by daily pressures and occupational hazards.

The CLF is primarily guided by the principle of literary merit. It is therefore élitist in aims. As talent which seems likely to lack stamina is often regarded less favorably, literary stamina should be listed as one of our criteria. We also occasionally take into account a writer's income. Those who apply for fellowships are asked to specify their income of the two previous years, but most writers do not receive the kind of royalties which would make the additional bonus of a CLF fellowship a waste of taxpayers' money. As the holders of fellowships have to give up full-time work in other occupations they often lose rather than gain money by accepting a fellowship.

It is easier to talk about such principles than to carry them out. Talent is a subjective word. It is difficult enough to compare the merits of a hundred novelists, let alone bring in, say, playwrights, poets, literary historians and biographers into the comparison. Moreover our comparisons have to be expressed by a voting system or loose agreement around the table. A secret ballot, open vote, or preferential listing will each yield different results, especially for the last four or five places in a list of say twenty fellowships. Moreover scarcity or abundance of money often decides the point where grants or fellowships cut out. It seems to me — and I could be wrong — that in such a fallible enterprise it is vital to keep on searching for and affirming principles of selection, even though those principles become blurred, and are sometimes infringed, when applied to individual writers and books.

The advisory board has, to my knowledge, always tried to make judgments that ignore the political opinions of the writer, magazine, or book in question. The first day I attended a meeting

was in 1967, and Sir Grenfell Price was in the chair, and I was struck by the board's fierce tradition of independence in the face of political pressures. At the same time the board does not alone decide which writers and magazines should be aided. Above the advisory board is a political committee known as "the commitee": it has the power to accept or reject the literary recommendations that come forward from the advisory board. The role of senior politicians in the final decisions of the Commonwealth Literary Fund is so little known that it deserves comment. It is also an unusual role: it possibly has no parallel in the cultural affairs of this country nor perhaps of any country.

The political committee was set up in 1939, when the aims of the CLF were enlarged, and the first chairman of the committee was the prime minister, Mr Menzies. For a quarter of a century the prime minister of the day served as chairman; and it was not until the end of 1963 that Menzies abandoned the custom and handed over the chair to Senator John Gorton, who was then a minister. Menzies, it should be said, had a keen interest in literature; he believed it should be read. The leaders of the opposition, even more than successive prime ministers, have attended meetings of the political committee of the CLF. In most years the committee has consisted of a representative of the three main parties; and the present committee consists of Mr Peter Howson as minister for the arts, Mr E. G. Whitlam as leader of the Labor Party, and Mr P. E. Lucock of the Country Party. Twice a year, usually at parliament house in Canberra, the advisory board formally meets in the presence of the committee, and the board's major recommendations are discussed and decided upon. At the normal meeting the advisory board's recommendations—and they usually cover scores of items—are completely accepted. Nonetheless there have been abnormal meetings. An abnormal meeting is when one recommendation is rejected primarily on political grounds. Such rejections occurred occasionally in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

I have never heard a politician discuss the advantages of the political committee, nor can I recall reading anything anywhere about the way in which that committee functions. The reasons for political oversight, however, are worth discussing. This whole issue is much more important than an issue such as which ministry should control the arts; but the latter is frequently discussed whereas the issue of political oversight is ignored.

In my opinion government patronage of literature is more hazardous, politically, than patronage of any of the other arts. (In the hierarchy of hazards the film probably hangs second to literature.) Politicians who foster literature run more risks—and in the short term probably earn less praise—than by fostering opera, ballet, painting or any other form of art. The risks of literary patronage seem to arise from five circumstances. Words are the currency of literature but they are also the currency of politics. Hence a politician usually takes more interest in words than in ballet steps, opera overtures, or painted portraits—unless they are the portraits of politicians. Secondly, a political message—soft or loud, blunt or subtle—can be conveyed in every art form; but political messages in the printed word are potentially more conspicuous and probably crisper than those conveyed through painting, wood carving, or oboe concertos. Political messages in books and magazines are certainly more portable, more quotable, than in another form of culture. For this reason politicians are more likely to see danger in the printed word. One mildly insidious sentence in a book is more easily recognizable than an intensely insidious painting. Furthermore writers have clearer access to public channels of criticism than sculptors, choreographers and other kinds of artists. Therefore anything vulnerable to criticism in a government's literary transactions is more likely to be aired.

There is another reason why government aid to writers is politically awkward. A subsidised novel or biography can be open to criticism before it is written. This year the CLF announced a grant to enable Mr Michael Parer, a former priest, to write a biography of that well-known political figure, the late Archbishop Mannix. The grant aroused strong criticism of the CLF from some orthodox Catholics before one chapter of Mr Parer's book had been written and perhaps before his research had seriously commenced. If Mr Parer's book can be called a literary child, then this is one of the rare instances when Catholics favoured abortion.

Finally the CLF—unlike some literary agencies in other lands—tries to foster creative writing in biography and history and other forms of non-fiction, and also tries to support a group of literary magazines which are also interested in current politics. Entering these controversial fields the CLF is obviously exposed to political criticism, especially from politicians and voters who have

strong tastes in politics and little interest in literature.

I'm not complaining—I'm merely commenting—that government encouragement of literature is vulnerable to political criticism and therefore to political interference. It's a fact of life. We should recognize this characteristic of literary patronage; we should also try to see its implications. If the political committee were abolished, and if the present advisory board received independence and an annual budget free of strings, we can't be sure that Australian literature would gain. The present system whereby the main political parties have the formal responsibility seems to offer several quiet advantages. It is a valuable contact between politicians and writers, and advantage can sometimes be taken of that contact to promote Australian writing. More important, the existence of the political committee probably prevents many literary issues from becoming party issues in parliament; and in parliamentary debate those issues are not likely to be judged on those literary grounds which it is the advisory board's aim to foster and preserve. If, on the other hand, the present advisory board became the sole arbiter, it would be exposed to the political attacks which at present the political committee largely neutralize. And increased political attacks could curb the government's annual vote to the CLF. The board would then, in deciding which writers or magazines or books should receive support, become more and more conscious of the political criticism which its decisions might provoke. Moreover membership of the board of an independent CLF might be determined predominantly by political rather than by literary-type considerations. I can raise this issue but I can't be sure of the solution.

If I may sum up: the patronage of literature in Australia has this anomaly. Here the politicians' control of patronage—in formality—is detailed and scrutinizing. At the same time the patronage may well be politically more adventurous and more wide-ranging than in England, Canada, the USA and those countries which from time to time are upheld by some Australian writers as models of impartial aid for the arts.

While many Australians argue that the CLF should not aid writers whose political, religious and social opinions are unpopular, there is also strong criticism of aid to those writers whose books — and, maybe, opinions — are relatively popular. This argument was strongly stated in an editorial of 31 October in the *Australian*, a newspaper which, to its credit, publicises a variety of cultural issues. It complained that the CLF was supporting "some of the financially most successful writers in Australia, people who have been able to support themselves with visible success by the professional writer's normal method of income from sales and advances." In the same issue a staff journalist echoed the criticism: "Some may see the grants as a waste of taxpayers' money. Subsidies to allow already established writers the luxury of self indulgence." I'm inclined to think that hundreds of thousands of Australians share the idea that many Australian authors must be rich. No doubt they observe that the price of books rises steadily, that some books become films, and that best-sellers are still very profitable. The *Australian* similarly suggested that nearly half of the fellowships announced by the CLF in 1972 were a waste or misuse of money because the recipients were "full-time writers already". By implication a full-time writer in Australia is making so much money that he neither needs nor deserves help from the Commonwealth.

In fact those who write the kind of books which the CLF supports rarely receive large incomes. In terms of their contribution to the country they are seriously under-paid. Even in terms of other professions and occupations their rewards are meagre. The CLF gathers annually a lot of information on the earnings of authors. That information is confidential but an aggregate picture can be quickly sketched.

Of the 22 writers who were recently offered fellowships of $4000 or $8000, not one earned in the previous year as much as the average university professor earns. Not one of the 22 earned as much as the principal of a country high school is paid in NSW. Only four of the 22—and they included outstanding writers—earned more than $6,300 in the previous year; and three of those four earned nearly all the income from sources other than writing. Only 10 of the 22 earned more than a NSW graduate teacher earns in his first year. And six of the writers earned less than $70 per week in the previous year. I should add that these figures include the income not only from writing but from other work.

The free market rarely gives talented authors a reasonable income from writing. That is the main reason why the government has to act as patron. Indeed the case for government aid for writers is at least as strong as the government aid for teachers; and that's why I used teachers' salaries by way of comparison. If teachers had to depend

on the free market—on the fees received from children—few would make a reasonable living; accordingly just on a century ago in Australia the state began to take over the sole responsibility for teachers' salaries in most schools.

The similarity between the writer and the teacher is much closer than we usually realize. A talented author is a teacher, a very special teacher. He might not be teaching dogma, he might not be teaching what is fashionable, he might not be teaching what a syllabus prescribes; but by his ability to observe people and society, by his ability to reassess attitudes and values, by his ability to recreate what he sees, and by his ability to refresh the language, he carries out an indispensable function. He is therefore entitled to his reward.

Postscript:

That speech I made late in 1972 now has a far-away sound. The CLF—advisory board and political committee—has been abolished. In its place is a literature board—eleven members instead of the previous seven—and it is part of the Australian Council for the Arts, which in turn belongs to the Prime Minister's Department. Henceforth, it seems, the government will grant an annual sum to the Council for the Arts which will break that sum into eight parts—one for the Council's own activities and central services and a part to each of the seven boards. How the literature board spends its allotted sum will be largely its own concern and responsibility.

Is this new system of patronage better than the old whose swansong I half-sang? The new board at present has more independence than the board of the CLF possessed. The literature board is answerable to the Council for the Arts, but of course a council of 24 members is too large to pay close attention to the detailed transactions of the seven boards over which it has oversight. The size of the council has been much criticised in recent months but I think a small council of, say, a dozen members would have been more inclined to interfere in the detailed decisions of the boards.

So far the literature board has had a high degree of independence. None of the decisions made at its first twenty meetings have been overruled or amended by the council. The council in turn is subject to the Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, and of course he has the power—until such time as the Council for the Arts is set up as a statutory authority rather in the manner of the ABC—to interfere in the detailed operations of the seven boards and the Council. To my knowledge he has not interfered. The literature board has thus been given a rare opportunity to review the present state of creative literature and the opportunity, moreover, to frame new policies in the belief that relatively large sums will be made available to finance those policies.

If the Council for the Arts, as is planned, becomes a statutory authority, I am not sure that greater independence will result: the main advantage may well be administrative flexibility, rather than the freedom from episodes of political interference. Admittedly a statutory authority is usually free from formal interference by ministers or parliament. So if the literature board decides to support a novelist whose last book was widely considered to be a political or moral outrage, or if the film and television board decides to finance a film which denounces a major political party, no political pressure can formally prevent those projects from receiving public money. For these reasons a statutory authority in charge of the arts is seen as a kind of fortress of cultural independence. Once the fort is built, we are often told by artists, it will shield rebellious artists from public interference. I might be too pessimistic but I am inclined to think that such a fort will often have weak walls. It is also likely to surrender after a short siege, especially a financial siege directed by the government of the day.

Some of the strongest advocates of surrender —those who in the end decide to abandon or compromise artistic independence—will probably be found within the Council for the Arts. Faced with the prospect in the coming financial year of either more money or less independence they will not always prefer independence. As cultural organizations swiftly swallow every cheque handed to them, they are vulnerable to financial threats. In my opinion those arts whose message is not conspicuously political — for instance opera or sculpture or ballet — will realise in some years that their demands for more public money are endangered by the state-subsidised activities of writers, film producers or the practitioners of those arts which often are more conspicuously political. Accordingly within the Council for the Arts there will occasionally be pressures and tensions as some groups attempt to deter others from actions which might arouse public and political anger and, in consequence, lead to a static financial vote from parliament in the coming year. Thus the new Council for the Arts, if formally granted independence, will remain dependent. Deprived of its former political censors, it will

soon provide its own. Indeed it is more likely to be a frequent censor — and often a politically-motivated censor of cultural activities within its control—if practitioners of the various arts win the right to elect all or most of the members of the boards.

The main difference in the new set-up is not so much the organizational structure as the increased budget. Much can now be done which previously was unattainable. In its first year the literature board has been able to support nearly as many full-time writers as were supported by the CLF in the era 1940-1970. About 150 writers have won fellowships enabling them to become full-time writers for terms ranging from six months to three years: about forty of them are young writers in age-range of say nineteen to twenty-eight. About one hundred other writers, especially biographers and historians and other writers of non-fiction, have received smaller research and travel grants. Many others will benefit from grants to writers' societies, literary magazines, and writers' seminars and festivals. One advantage of a budget which in 1973-74 is four times that of the previous year is the opportunity to support many streams of writing. There can be no single or unchanging definition of excellence in assessing creative writers; and the board this year offered grants to many writers whose work is admired only by minority opinion.

Support on this large scale has induced indignation as well as pleasure: in the opinion of some newspaper commentators it is "scandalous". And yet perhaps the scandal—if such a strong word is justified—lies less in the number and value of the grants than in the sacrifices which many people still have to make to follow a craft which by any intellectual hallmark is of great value to a nation. Most writers receiving literary fellowships or guaranteed incomes would be, financially, better off if they chose instead to work as clerks in the civil service. Some of the writers would earn twice or three times as much if they continued to work in their profession rather than accept fellowships ranging in value from $5000 to $9000 a year.

Likewise those who criticise the large number of writers receiving grants perhaps overlook a few relevant issues. The proportion of applications rejected by the literature board was much larger than that rejected, I think, by other boards. Scores of applicants, whose books had been published and well received, were not awarded money because the money had run out, or the board did not think the standard of their writing necessarily merited support, or because their planned writing project was unlikely to interest any publisher and so would not reach an audience. Understandably most of the complaints in the press about the large number of grants to writers have originated from writers who applied for grants and were rejected. Similarly the pressure for detailed political interference in literary subsidies at present is coming less from the party considerations of politicians than from the ambitions of wounded writers. The pressure should not perhaps surprise us; after all every writer and artist is in one sense a very independent politician. At the same time any selection panel should be answerable when it spends public money. Any selection panel is fallible and should be willing to correct mistakes and injustices. It should also make known as widely as possible both the ground rules and the higher principles on which it make decisions.

Grants to individual writers have monopolized public discussion, but other policies have been started or enlarged. The board has been able to experiment in stimulating the buying and reading of Australian books, to bring distinguished overseas and expatriate writers to Australia, to reshape the CLF's scheme for subsidizing the publication of worthwhile but financially-risky books, promote cultural exchange, including the translation of Australian works into Asian languages, organize a simple scheme for public lending right, and devise what may well be the most comprehensive scheme of literary support in the English-speaking world.

I'd like that to have been the final sentence. But the test of the effectiveness of this scheme is not what is spent now but what ultimately is written.

Footnote:

The eleven members of the board are: Geoffrey Blainey (V), Manning Clark (ACT), Geoffrey Dutton (SA), Richard Hall (NSW), Alec Hope (ACT), Nancy Keesing (NSW), David Malouf (NSW), Elizabeth Riddell (NSW), Tom Shapcott (Q), Richard Walsh (NSW) and Judah Waten (V). Their terms of appointment are one or two years.

The New Apprentice

You had your chance. The school
won't tolerate laughter, it will not
yield from its position on this one jot
"We are not here, my boy, to suffer fools."

Now a fussy wind lectures endlessly on
the oil dripped boredom of a street
where rows of panel beaters' shops compete
for custom with 'WE DO IT FOR A SONG —

We (ha ha) pay in whispers. Din
and confusion your first day on the job.
Amalgamated Metal Trades, Federated Sheetmetal Workers,
these necessary words that you say stick in your gob

have got you now and they won't let go:
the garments the hard world clothes your glory in.

ROBERT HARRIS

WILLIAM DICK

The Pensioners

I walked out of my room in Grey Street, Goodway, with the half empty bottle of wine in my overcoat pocket. I was bleary eyed and I hadn't shaved for four days but I didn't care. I passed old Johnno in the hall. His coat was filthy and the front of his pants were wet. He'd pissed himself again, the old bastard.

"G'day," I grunted.

"G'day," he answered, and shifted the newspaper-wrapped bottle of plonk under his other arm. "Bastards have put the pension up a dollar. A bloody, lousy dollar. The miserable bastards. I fought for this bloody country and they give yuh a dollar. I shoulda let the Japs get it!"

"They're all the bloody same," I answered. "They just look after themselves. They don't give a stuff about anybody else, the bastards."

"Yeah, that's right. Wanta come in for a snort. Elsie's gone to the quack. She's got the shits. Won't stop."

"No thanks Johnno. I gotta meet Benny. I got a bottle," I said, patting my army overcoat pocket.

"Orright," he answered and walked on to his room carrying the smell with him. I think he'd shit himself as well.

I walked along the old passage and opened the front door. It squeaked and made my head thump. The sunlight hurt my eyes. I felt in my other pocket for my money and pulled it out and counted it. Thirty-eight cents and four days to pension day. I squinted my eyes. "Bugger it. Bloody sun. It's bad for you," I said to myself. "I need a drink."

I stepped around the broken verandah boards and went round the side of the house and pushed my way past the overgrown bushes and walked down the sideway to the lavatory. I took off my overcoat and hung it on the nail behind the door. I dropped my pants and took the bottle out of the coat and sat down on the cracked seat. I pulled the cork out and took a coupla of mouthfuls and swallowed them. I farted loudly and scratched my belly with my other hand. Then I took another drink and swallowed and then bulged up some wind. I put the bottle to my lips and drank again. "Christ," I said as I leaned back against the lavatory pipe and thought of my birthday next week. I'd be forty-one. Bloody birthdays. They're all bullshit. Just a lot of bloody bullshit. I wondered where Hazel and the kids were. I hadn't seen 'em for twelve years. Stuff 'em anyway. They didn't want me. She was always bloody naggin'. Naggin', naggin', naggin', all the bloody time. The bitch. The kids didn't like me anyway. Bugger 'em all. I'm all right Jack. Bugger you. I lifted the bottle and drank again. And again. Then I had a shit, but didn't do much. When did I last eat? I think it was when I had that plate of spaghetti. I can't remember. I was drunk. I'd been drunk since last pension day. I think I have. I'm not sure. Anyhow, who cares? I'm not hungry. I might go up the Salva's tomorrer if I ain't got any plonk left. I laughed to myself and drank again. I put the bottle in my left hand. I leaned back against the toilet again and thought of the harlots at the wine shop. Them bloody bitches'll never get three dollars outa me to use their snatch. The harlots. Three dollars. It's not worth bloody nothin'. And mugs get married for snatches. I did. I lifted the bottle up and drank again. I was feeling relaxed. It's not worth three dollars but I wouldn't mind a poke.

I ripped a couple of pieces of 'phone book off the wad hanging from the string and wiped my behind. I laughed to myself. Then I picked the bottle up from off the floor where I'd put it and drank again. I felt sleepy and I blinked my eyes,

and drank again. The bottle was going down. Then I thought about the last time I was in Pentridge. The other bastard in the cell kept talking about shooting his brother when he got out. He was a crap artist. He wouldn't shoot nobody. You meet some bloody idiots in there. But some of 'em are all right. Some of 'em are real good blokes and yuh become mates. But yuh never do meet up with them when you get out. Not the good ones. It's better to be on your own. That's the only way. Yuh come in on yuh own, and yuh go out on yuh own, under six foot a bloody dirt. I stood up, pulled up my pants and put on my overcoat. I put the bottle back in my pocket and pulled the chain a few times until the water ran. I was feeling a bit drunk. I was feeling good. I'd go and meet Benny down the park beside the railway line. We had a good spot there. Outa the bloody sun and no sticky-nose bastards can see you from the street. It's well hidden. I walked out of the lavatory towards the sideway.

Benny was sitting on a newspaper looking into an empty Penfold's bottle when I got there. I'd stopped a couple of times along the way and had finished off the bottle and left it in the lane behind the bakery. I wasn't gonna bring no bottle with me for Benny to drink. If I worked it right I could bludge on his. I was disappointed to see that his was empty.

"Got a bottle?" he asked, looking up.

"No," I answered.

"Huh," he said in the surly bloody manner he had. "Drank it all yuh bloody self I suppose."

"What're yuh bloody talkin' about?" I asked and sat down. "I never had any."

"Don't start that again, Harry. You bloody had one. You've always got one."

"Yeah have I. You're so bloody smart," I answered.

He tossed the bottle lightly towards my feet and the neck hit my right boot.

"That's bloody empty," he said angrily.

"Well you bloody drank it, not me," I answered.

"Like buggery, yuh bastard, I found it here," he answered.

"Yeah," I said. "I know who the bastard is."

"Listen you bastard, don't go callin' me no bastard or I'll kick your bloody head in. You pommie bastards are all the bloody same."

"Are we. You bloody Aussie bastards give me the shits, mate, I'll tell you that," I said.

"Well why don't you get back to bloody England?" he said.

"Why don't you go to buggery," I answered. "You're as weak as piss. You couldn't beat time with a bloody kettle drum."

"Couldn't I. You wanna try me," he said, starting to shape up.

"Sit down before I bloody knock you down. The coppers'll be here if you keep carryin' on like a stale bottle of piss. And then we'll be locked up."

He looked at me for a moment and then lowered his fists.

"Orright, but don't go insultin' me no more." Then he sat down on his newspaper and looked glumly at me.

"We'd be all right if we had a bottle," he said.

"Yuh tried metho yet? It ain't too bad if you have somethin' beforehand. It carries you through and it's cheap," I said.

"Yeah, I have."

The bushes opposite me parted and a fella came through carrying a flagon. It was nearly full. He was a nuggety bloke dressed in sandshoes and an old navy double breasted suit. He looked about forty-eight. I glanced quickly at Benny and he looked at me and his eyes lit up. We'd never seen this bloke before.

"G'day," I said.

"G'day," the fella answered.

"G'day," said Benny.

The bloke came and sat down on the ground beside us.

Me and Benny didn't speak and we watched him pull the cork out of the flagon. He put it to his lips and drank long. Then he put it down and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

He looked at Benny whose mouth was drooling and then at me, and squinted his eyes. He bit his bottom lip as if thinking of what to say.

"It's hot out in that sun," he ventured.

"Yeah, makes a man get up a thirst," answered Benny.

"Yeah," the bloke agreed.

"Ain't seen you around before," I added.

"Ain't been around here before."

"Here, have a drink," he said and shoved the bottle at Benny, who nearly fell over in his eagerness to reach for it.

Benny quickly swallowed mouthful after mouthful and then suddenly he stopped, remembered it didn't belong to him and handed it back to the stranger.

"Here," said the fella and passed it to me. I drank from it. I passed it back to him and licked my lips. It tasted real good. It was good plonk. He took it from me and put it to his mouth and

swallowed a number of times. Then he put down the bottle.

"Sure is a warm day," he said.

"Yeah, better'n winter though," Benny said. "It's too cold when you're sleepin' out. Me, I got cold bones. All the newspapers in the world don't keep the cold out."

"True," said the bloke. "If you got cold bones, ain't nothin' you can do. Fella give me a medical book once and I read a lot of it but I burned it. In the end I reckoned I had every disease under the sun. Was only bad for a man to have a book like that. Got worrying too much. I didn't even bother to try and sell it. Just up and burned it where I was sitting behind a band rotunda. Got kicked outa the park when they saw the fire." He laughed loudly. "Funny it was. Only books I read now are race books." He laughed again and drank on the bottle. Then he passed it to Benny. Benny drank a lot and passed it to me and I drank long. We kept on drinking and talking for a long time. The sun went in and it began to get a bit cold.

"I feel good," said the bloke.

"Me too," said Benny in a drunken voice.

"I'm gonna go to sleep," the bloke said, and he lay down holding the flagon. I felt really drunk and tired and I lay on my side and put my head on my arm.

"And me," I heard Benny say and I closed my eyes.

When noises woke me later it was dark and very cold. Someone was yelling. I didn't know what was happening. I staggered to my feet and I could see Benny and the bloke fighting and rolling on the ground. Benny had the flagon in his hand and the bloke was trying to get it from him. Benny rolled over on top of the fella and the fella forced his fingers up to Benny's face and tore at his eyes. Blood ran down Benny's cheek.

"Yuh bastard!' he swore. 'Yuh bloody bastard!"

The bloke punched at him and caught Benny a hard blow in the face. They rolled over and over. I didn't speak or move in. I was scared the coppers would hear. Then suddenly Benny crashed the flagon over the fella's head and it smashed. He brought down the long broken neck of the bottle into the bloke's face. Again and again and again. The bloke screamed as Benny kept slashing at him. I jumped at Benny and tried to drag him off the fella. Benny slashed at me and tore great gashes down my arm and wrist. Then he brought the broken bottle down into the fella's throat twice. I was staggering around in agony. Blood was pouring from my hand and arteries and tears were streaming down my face with the pain. My heart felt like it would explode. Benny was screaming and yelling as he stabbed and stabbed.

"For Christ's sake Benny! Stop it! Stop it!" I screamed. He looked at me. He'd gone crazy. He jumped up and charged at me with the upraised broken bottle. He slashed at my face. I jumped backwards and he missed and fell.

"You pommie bastard!" he yelled. "You rotten pommie bastards! All of youse!" I tried to run but I tripped over in the darkness and he slashed at me again. I felt the glass go deep into my shoulder. I tried to crawl away but he grabbed at me. He was trying to kill me. I was terrified. Then in the darkness suddenly I found my hand on a stone. I swung round and crashed it into Benny's forehead. I hit him again and again and he was still.

I lay there breathing deeply and my heart pounding. Benny didn't move. The blood was pouring out of my cut artery in my left hand and wrist. I looked across at the stranger. His face was just a mass of slashed flesh. Then I vomited and kept vomiting and I must have fainted.

When I awoke I began to get terrified. I looked at Benny and leaned over him to hear if he was breathing. I put my head on his chest. There was no heartbeat. I'd done first aid as a kid at school. The wound in my shoulder was bleeding badly and the blood was pumping out in spurts from my wrist. "O God!" I cried, as I tried to stop it with my other hand and then I began to cry. My body wracked with sobs as the tears poured down my face. The blood ran between my fingers and onto my pants' leg. It wouldn't stop. I was scared and feeling weak. I thought of the coppers and of Pentridge and of H Division where the screws kick your guts out. The fear was everywhere. I'd killed a man, really killed him. They might say I'd killed them both. I didn't want to kill anybody. I'm not violent. I wouldn't have a chance. Nobody would believe me. What could I do. I'd have to get to a doctor. But he'd call the police. "Help me, God help me!" I cried and I buried my face in the dirt and sobbed. I heard a bloke and a woman walk by. They were laughing and talking. I kept quiet. I lay there sobbing as the blood kept coming out of my wrist. I thought of Hazel and the kids, and the day I got married. I remembered my mum there. "Mum!" I cried, "help me! Please help me!" I vomited again and the pain was bad in my shoulder. The ground started to spin and I felt weaker. I remembered my sister and how we used to fight over the grey

horse the old man bought us when we lived in Ballarat. We never should have come to Melbourne. I ran my hand around my mouth and wiped the vomit away and then I vomited again.

"Oh God! Dear Mary up in Heaven. Mother of God. Forgive me for my sins. Oh God, please help me!" The ground began to spin faster and then it slowed. The pain in my shoulder was easing now. It wasn't hurting so much. I felt for my slashed hand and it was warm and soft and sticky. Just like my little pup Blackie had been the day he'd been run over and killed when I was ten. I remember how I'd felt after all these years. Then I vomited again and the ground spun faster. But the pain was easing. It wasn't hurting so much now. . . .

"Good gord, a bloody fish!"

Barry Dickins

OWEN WEBSTER

One Man's Meed

> The kind of book that is endangered, and the kind of writer who is endangered, is the one that does present a challenge to the admass mentality; the kind that insists on raising difficult or embarrassing questions, showing us truths about ourselves or our society that we don't want to know, or making demands on our capacities of thought, feeling and imagination. . .
>
> Where material success and material rewards are the only ones that most people regard as worth striving after, the serious writer is going to be both unprized and, probably, poor. And where social criticism is regarded as an uncomfortable and unnecessary function, the rebellious writer with a private vision and a conscience will be unacceptable, where he is not actually outcast. He may have as much trouble in finding a publisher as he will have in finding an audience.
>
> JUDITH WRIGHT

I have just finished writing a 6000-word article which was asked for, with no stipulations as to length, by the editor of an Australian magazine. It took all my creative energy over six consecutive days and, between periods of writing, I was either thinking about the article as I worked in my garden or reading books by the subject of the article. I found the job particularly demanding, probably because I was trying to codify in a short space a topic about which I happen to know a good deal and making at the same time what I considered to be an important statement involving part of the foundation of my own world-view.

For these reasons, I was glad of the commission. I knew that the magazine, which had a monthly circulation of some 5000, was operating on a tight budget and without subsidy; that extending the budget could easily destroy the magazine. The article would not have been considered by any other publication in the country. I could easily have refused the commission: I had plenty of other work on hand.

The other particulars are unimportant and I withhold them because I do not want to give anyone the impression that I am complaining. The point is that the fee I agreed to was the maximum paid by that magazine to any contributor: $45. The disparity between it and the work and experience involved is so great that I might as well have done it for nothing. But alas, I can't afford to turn down anything, however small, that's income; and even my relaxation in the garden is occupied with food growing. However, I do try to refuse work, even well paid work, that I don't want to do.

Already (April 1973) the income tax authorities are threatening legal action for my failure to pay $314 in tax on my 1971-72 earnings. We have a mortgage, two children, an overdraft, a car and no other source of income but my writing. Dependable weekly income at present: $50.

The year 1971-72 was financially the best I have ever known. Taxable income: $3973, of which $531 was payable in tax and $217 of it was deducted at source. I have never in my life been required to pay so much tax. My income that year had been inflated by the beneficence of the Commonwealth Literary Fund and included the last of five monthly payments of the half-year fellowship awarded in 1971 ($443; tax was de-

ducted at source) and a special projects grant of $1500 awarded in 1972 from which no tax was deducted. That figure of $3973 brought my total taxable income after seven years of living and writing in the Land of Opportunity to $9537 (gross from all sources: $26,957). I carry little insurance, have no superannuation, pension, expense account, nor holiday and sick pay.

The above figures represent a steady financial improvement year by year, even without the aid of the CLF, and it was on the strength of their pattern that I decided at the end of 1972 to support the four of us entirely by my writing, while the children were still young enough to be at their least costly. Theretofore I had been supplementing my income by lecturing for the Council of Adult Education in Melbourne, but I saw that this accounted for a gross annual maximum of less than $2000 and, saving on expenses incurred by working away from home, I thought I could make the equivalent with my typewriter and have more time also for food growing. By that time, too, it seemed pretty certain that *Nation Review* would not fold under me, nor I under it, so we were guaranteed (the word is hyperbolical) that minimum weekly income of $50.

During thirteen years of that multifarious occupation known as freelancing, I had written three published books and edited a fourth. I had three more in progress, two abandoned, one finished and still seeking a publisher and one finished and withdrawn unpublished. Now I decided the time had come to commit myself wholly to the craft I had set out exactly thirty years earlier to pursue when, aged sixteen, I left school to be a trainee journalist with no other ambition but to learn to become a full-time self-employed author. It was now or never.

Since then, life has been no tougher than before and certainly much happier. My greatest success has been in the degree to which I've conquered, in the space of only three months, much of the anxiety about poverty inherited from an upbringing in a poor but respectable home, the dominant note of whose ambience was a terror that one backward step would mean pawnbrokers, bailiffs and irredeemable perdition. Today, I'm even enjoying the challenge of living outside the acquisitive norms of a society from whose norms I find myself almost totally alienated. It seems a properly honest and incorruptible position for a writer. And I have all the work I can handle.

This week, indeed, came the first sign of a new upward turn; and when I have finished this article I shall start on a commission which came in the first unsolicited letter I have ever received from an editor unknown to me, and the first offer of a fee higher than the minimum rate for contributions recommended by the Australian Society of Authors. The 'minimum' is $50 per thousand words used and pro rata. *But I have never been paid at that rate in Australia,* neither by the ABC for radio talks and book reviews nor by the *Age, Australian, Bulletin, Southerly* and *Meanjin* for which, at different times, I have reviewed books or written articles. Until the Australian advertising industry supports *Nation Review,* which in less than three years has developed the highest circulation of any weekly news commentary in the country, I don't expect to receive the 'minimum' from that source, either. The present article, in fact, is the first piece of writing for which I have been paid that minimum rate in nearly eight years.

Once I was a member of the management committee of the Australian Society of Authors and a dedicated enthusiast on its Victorian committee. At the June 1971 meeting of that committee I proposed that the management committee should be asked to prepare a list of those publications which were paying the recommended minimum. No one could understand why my proposal was necessary. I explained that I had never been paid it.

Patsy Adam Smith breezed: "*I've* never been paid less."

Joyce Nicholson commented: "Perhaps your work isn't good enough." As managing director of the ultra-conservative *Australian Bookseller,* who would be better equipped to know?

I looked round the rest of the table, Mavis Thorpe-Clark, children's author and married woman. Tim Graham, public relations officer, ex-advertising. William Dick, school library assistant. D. C. Charlwood, air traffic controller, had sent his apologies for absence. In the chair, Ivan Southall. The committee, in its wisdom, decided that no action need be taken on my proposal.

Then came one of those blinding flashes of reality that can change the course of one's life. *What, in the name of all that matters, am I doing here?* I asked myself. *These people have no idea of what I'm about; and no more in common with me and my concerns than a union of Siberian prison camp guards.* I saw that my proper place was at my desk. I was the first to leave at the end of the meeting, and I've never returned.

SALES AND ROYALTIES OF FOUR BOOKS.

Title	*Writing time (mths.)*	*Date of completed MS*	*Date of first publication*	*Advance of royalties (1st edn.)*	*No. of editions*	*Publisher's contracts cancelled*	*Date of latest sales figures*	*Date of latest royalty statement*	*Total sales to that date*	*Total excess royalties*	*Total gross earnings*
Read Well and Remember	6	Jan. 1964 (contracted)	June 1965	£stg 150	5	3	Mar. 1973	Aug. 1973	39,746	£stg 3,244	£stg 3,394
What We All Wear	13	Jan. 1965 (contracted)	Nov. 1968	£stg 200	1	—	Dec. 1972	May 1973	6,310	£stg 498	£stg 698
Adam Pilgrim: So	18	Apr. 1968	Nov. 1970	—	1	1	Apr. 1973	—	1,350 (approx.)	—	$850
Disenchantment (ed.)	7	Feb. 1970 (contracted)	Aug. 1972	$750	1	2	Mar. 1973	July 1973	5,486 (10,000 printed)	—	$1,250

Notes: *Read Well and Remember*: Cancelled publisher's contracts were all for foreign translation rights. 'Editions' does not refer to reprints: four editions have reprints.

Adam Pilgrim: So: Total gross earnings derived from legal action against publisher for breach of contract. The book was eventually published by the author with borrowed money. Sales have not yet repaid outlay.

Disenchantment: Total gross earnings include $500 advance from cancelled contract. An earlier advance from the first (contracting) publisher was disbursed to contributors.

Figures at 1 October, 1973. 'Contracted' means that the book was contracted before being written.—O.W.

Will I survive, out here in the wilderness? Will the cost of living outstrip my earning capacity? Already dollar revaluation has slashed my meagre British royalties to a point where it seems no longer worth having them transferred here, and I'm spending them instead on imported books. Will my health continue to withstand working for six or seven days a week? I gamble on the sanity of working at what pleases me. Since I try to grow food bio-dynamically, it would be inconsistent not to try to grow my children that way, too. The elder is attending a Rudolf Steiner kindergarten and we propose to educate them both through the Steiner system. Rather than expose them to the massacre of human creativity practised by (indeed, the *raison d'ētre* of) the Victorian Education Department, I would educate them at home. But can I, instead, pay private school fees for the next sixteen years?

These are all questions of tomorrow; and mine is a life which must only be lived for today. It is a measure of the conquest of anxiety. I have yet to learn not to worry about time running out before my life's work is accomplished. But I know I need never retire; and I've the good fortune of having my best work still ahead of me, my ambition far from fulfilment.

I shall apply again this year for a literary fellowship to help me complete my major work-in-progress, which has taken all my book-writing time since the beginning of 1970. It is my Life of Frank Dalby Davison (1893-1970) and the penultimate draft of it, beginning in 1852, has reached 1919, with some gaps still to be filled. Substantial basic research has still to be carried out on the Sydney years, 1923 to 1945, but I cannot yet afford to spend a month in Sydney for the purpose.

If my fellowship application is successful, will it be enough also to help me finish the remaining one and a half parts of my three-decker novel, the Adam Pilgrim trilogy, of which the first was *So?* I have no illusions that the life and times of Davison will make me enough money to finish the trilogy; certainly it will never compensate me financially for the time it has taken.

But then, I don't write for money. I need money in order to write. For anyone afflicted with such a quirk in our times, some form of patronage is essential. Government patronage is the only form available, but is it the best? The requirement that applications for one-year, or less than one-year, fellowships must be made annually inevitably makes for a kind of annual lottery when there are always more applicants than fellowships. But many artists of the past have been obliged to endure more humiliating forms of patronage.

My own ideal needs would be met, I think, by an unstrung grant every year pegged to the salary of, say, a university senior lecturer, giving me freedom, to write what, how and when I liked. In exchange for this, I would surrender all my income. How feasible is it?

The Musil-Gesellschaft was a small private society of business and professional men founded in Vienna in 1933 by a distinguished art historian who asked the question, What does a man who writes such books live on? The writer in question was the Viennese novelist, Robert Musil (1880-1942), and the society was formed simply to give him financial support. Musil had published his first short novel, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless (Young Törless)* in 1906, a small volume containing two short stories in 1911, two plays in 1921 and 1924 respectively, and then nothing till 1930, when the first volume was published of the vast novel that was to occupy him for the rest of his life: *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften (The Man without Qualities)*. The second volume appeared in 1933 shortly before the Musil-Gesellschaft was founded. The third volume of the novel was then begun and, in the few years that followed, Musil enjoyed a period of the greatest independence as a writer that he ever knew. The society apparently survived till about 1938, when Musil emigrated to Switzerland. Thereafter his books were banned in Germany and Austria and remained unobtainable there until after 1952, when *The Man without Qualities* was translated and published in England. Its third volume was first published in Switzerland after its author's sudden death in Geneva.

He was a man of encyclopaedic knowledge with training in mathematics, engineering and logic, but he was extremely impractical, leaving even such everyday matters as tea making and fare paying to his wife. But sometimes he did assert himself, albeit naively, in practical affairs, such as when he would check the membership list of the Musil-Gesellschaft and ask why so-and-so had not paid his quarterly subscription.

If I were asked to point to the one novel in the world's literature in the first half of the twentieth century which encompasses its entire epoch and foreshadows the rest of the century's literature and events — therefore perhaps the

greatest single novel of its epoch—I would point to *The Man without Qualities*. The fact that it was unfinished is of no consequence: the twentieth century may be unfinished, too. It has no proper beginning really, either; but only 'A Sort of Introduction' and a first chapter entitled 'Which, remarkably enough, does not get anyone anywhere.'

The Webster Society, or Trust, might have to be founded against longer odds than the Musi-Gesellschaft, but there could be unexpected side-benefits to Australian literature. It would require sixty members, each guaranteeing a maximum quarterly subscription, to begin with, of $50; and safeguards would have to be devised to replace loss by death or resignation. An income tied to that of a senior lecturer would be guaranteed for the rest of my life and that of my widow, in exchange for which all my estate, now and in the future, would become the property of the trust. In due course, my house could be maintained to provide a residence and fellowships, in three- or five-year cycles, for future authors engaged in significant literary projects. Members of the trust would receive a free autographed copy of each of my books (perhaps even one of a specially bound and numbered edition), and an annual address from the sponsee.

Such is the skeleton of my proposal: I merely strike it off the typewriter to see if it sets fire to anyone. Of course, there must be a catch in it somewhere. Like not finding more than two members? Well, yes; but another one for me that I couldn't anticipate. A guaranteed income would certainly allow me to spend more time writing books and less time with ephemera, but would my books ever reach as many readers as the ephemera? I would also be able to travel, an occupation that seldom appeals to me, but have I a duty to do so, in the interests of my own creativity? Would a guaranteed income encourage me to become lazy; or does my commitment to work exist, as I imagine, independently of 'irrelevant' economics?

Most important of all, and least determinable: to what degree is my creativity as an artist *fed* by those last traces of anxiety that would disappear like morning mists in the sunlight of financial security? Perhaps the risk *is* too great, and Providence a more faithful muse than I know. I think I am content in my discontent.

Postscript

Since the above was written, the Literature Board of the Australian Council for the Arts has announced guaranteed income awards of $6000 a year, which turned out to be awarded for three years, but with a possibility of renewal thereafter. My application for that award, owing to the uncertainties of whether I would be granted anything at all, precipitated several weeks of gathering anxiety and self-contempt, with attendant constrictions of creativity; but I rejoiced in due course, from the relief as much as the recognition, on learning that I had been awarded a one-year fellowship worth $6000 gross.

On this sudden access of wealth ($417 per month, for tax is deducted at source) I felt free to relieve myself of the chore of writing a weekly newspaper column, which seemed to have begun leading nowhere. But I had not anticipated the administrative confusion that resulted from unprecedented demands on the Council for the Arts. Payments have turned out to be so irregular that the object of the fellowship, the relief of economic anxiety, has tended to become impaired. Only with the eighth of the twelve instalments, this March, does some promise of regularity appear to have been achieved. Other writers on shorter fellowships have suffered more than I.

The monthly instalment always arrived in the fullness of time, but often not before the burst of creative energy that followed the announcement of the fellowship had been overtaken by renewed anxiety as the overdraft topped its limit and the interest on the mortgage restored the principal to what it stood at eighteen months earlier. Inflation has noticeably reduced the initial value of the fellowship; and revaluation here and devaluation there have reduced my dependable trickle of British royalties to a drip. So I have abandoned all medical insurance (gambling on the imminent introduction of a national health service); and I took the precaution of extending the vegetable garden.

Volume one of what has grown to be the two-volume Davison biography is almost complete and the final rewrite is in progress. Capital is tied up in a book completed in mid-1970, which at the time of writing (March 1974) has been awaiting the fulfilment of an entrepreneurial promise for twelve months. One publisher's contract for it, drawn up in 1972, was never signed due to a sudden change of policy in the publishing house.

Gross income from all sources, 1972-73: $4654. Taxable income: $1060.

Thoughts from Java

JONATHON CLARKE

Java. We are staying in a hotel in Jogjakarta. Cream walls, floor of that peculiar Indonesian cement that never dries. Apply pressure and, like a sand flat, it draws water to the surface. Ceilings of whitewashed bamboo matting. Last night the rats made so much noise running about inside the ceiling, I thought they would fall through. This afternoon I discovered a bird's feather on the floor.

The service is haphazard. When there are too many guests calling for tea and coffee all day, they close up shop early and won't serve us any more. Fortunately the European population has thinned out lately and they're in a better humor. I ask for coffee.

"Ada kopi?"

"Kopi habis. Man beli baru."

"Habis?"

Finished! No kopi. I stared, nearly to tears. How could they run out of kopi, my sweet addiction.

Then they all laughed. *"Baru sadja beli."*

They bring me coffee; boiling water poured onto equal amounts of sugar and grounds. Usually they strain it. When they forget, you have to chew through the top layer of grains floating thickly on the strong sweet blackness.

Indonesians drink endless cups of kopi. Sitting at the street stalls, *betjak* boys and grey headed muslim sages pour kopi into a saucer and discreetly sip. It is inevitably sweet. Sugar is the mainstay of their existence. I think it rivals rice. Every drink is sweetened to the point of saturation. Tea without sugar is free with a meal. For sugar you pay. Their food also abounds in sweet tastes; little cakes and rice with brown sugar. Meat is the only exception. Instead they drown it in peanut sauces and lavish chillies and biting hot spices on it. To eat a piece of grilled meat without some sort of overpowering sauce was unheard of, but the Westerners like their meat plain and the Chinese gratefully cater to this weird habit, locking the money in their wooden desks.

I drink my kopi in appreciative silence. "Kimber chicks" says a sign on the window, above a menu advertising EVERY MORNING FRESH EGGS. They run a tight fowl yard near the washing block, a miniature poultry farm set amongst a clump of banana palms, with chickens in wire coops, segregated as to type; strutting black and purple cocks enjoying five hens, bandy legged snowy white roosters with their clucking pullets and bantams. Each cage is numbered. On each boiled egg the number is written. This morning I had a K11 and a K15. The difference escaped my tongue; both had yolks like swollen breasts that popped out when I removed the lids. Fed on sweet corn, even the eggs tasted sweet.

Our staff of boys wear only their underwear all day, singlets and shorts, spotlessly white. They are disturbed from sitting around or sleeping only by our requests for drinks. 'They' are some half dozen in number, with the bodies of youths and faces of indeterminate age. I don't know any names. Everyone is 'man'. "Hey, man, ada kopi?" and we all respond. Names become irrelevant. They're mostly unpronounceable and I forget them anyway. Only slowly do I find myself looking at their brown smooth features and taking in their individuality, instead of that sameness which was part of their first strangeness.

They service the twenty rooms of the hotel and its Indonesian and European guests without favor. There is one old lady who spends hours every morning washing sheets by the well. Their relationship to each other or to the hotel I can't

discover. They seem to run it for a family who leads a more middle-class life.

They're watching me. Indonesians look at a Westerner, staring at him as though he might suddenly disappear. It is not impolite to stare back, with a nod of 'hullo'. If you don't like to be stared at, stay at home. (A friend who yelled abuse to stop the eyes found it only attracted more attention to himself. The paranoia is inside you.) Westerners are just weird objects here and Indonesians seem to us more like curious children. But their children are not like our children.

A beautiful shining-eyed boy comes in, holding up two wretched birds. I avoid their glassy eyes. "No," I say to his smile. Outside big brother, wearing the money bag, grabs the birds back. It sounds like a lecture in technique that he deals out. Children's games!

Those who can, develop an independent game. Shine shoes. Sell stuffed birds or souvenir dolls. There are the ladies who sit delicately, *tjantings* in hand, making beautiful batik by the traditional process, but the shops are filled with printed cottons from Singapore and Europe. It is only the old and feeble or, as tourist guides eagerly point out to you, the irrelevant guards in the Sultan's palace, who wear their traditional clothes. The guides wear non-crease trousers and practise their English. Shopping at night the streets are crowded with pelaco shirts, sports trousers, skin tight jeans, and the girls in dresses, not mini, but with that same western cut. Loudspeakers replace the plump stone idols at each shop entrance, blaring out schmaltz and pop music from the west. The radio competes with gamelan and the strange eerie chant of Javanese women stretching their vocal chords. Credence always wins.

It is hot again. The sweat pours off me and I have a rash on my shoulders. Soon it will rain.

It rains nearly every afternoon, giving plenty of warning. The clouds roll down from the volcano Merapi, that peers at Jogja between its woollen curls. They steal across the sky, form into a fluffy blanket, then grow dark and growl for about an hour. The wind blows and everything is moved under shelter. The street stalls tie down their flaps, the *betjaks* bring out their plastic covers and seek a resting place. No one goes out in the rain. You just sit and wait it out. It comes: the sky falls in a huge bucket, emptying over us. In moments the gutter is full, the streets cleared of people, faces peering from doorways. Outside the hotel the children dance and laugh beneath a spouting roof gutter. Ducks revel in the downpour. Everything is swept away in the rush of water.

It stops: life resumes, voices through the clear air. Plastics are folded away, faces come out. The world has washed, cleaned and refreshed her face.

It is not only clean, for a while it is even cool.

A small randy rooster who, with his two hens, is not confined to a cage, but given the run of the hotel, comes to roost on the handlebars of a bicycle. Kimber chicks, I am reminded, LAY GOOD EGGS. Alongside the bicycle Hondas are now being parked. I hope it doesn't change the eggs.

The Tram as Springboard

JOHN JENKINS

Robert Adamson's review of *The Drunken Tram* in *Overland* 55 was a curious mixture of valid criticism, half-truths and wild assertion.

I agree with him that the anthology was mediocre and poorly edited. Adamson states the obvious. But then he goes on to make a series of statements which try to make up in guess-work for what they lack in informed judgement.

I would also remind him that any anthology stands or falls by its contents. And it is the reviewer's job to examine the poetry, not attack the personalities involved. Nor is it his lot to assume that oblique and gnomic references to matters which lie outside the case in question, even though they are couched in a tone of authority, are acceptable substitutes for sound logic or critical acumen.

Where Adamson *does* actually come to grips with the poems, pointing out their particular weaknesses, I found myself in substantial agreement with him.

However there was never any attempt by the younger Melbourne writers to present a united front of New-Leftist poetics, as he asserts. Even if *some* were working along these lines, it certainly wasn't a unanimous preoccupation. And to accuse the poets of being either "incredibly stupid or diabolical opportunists" is ill-considered and unfair. Even more astounding is the off-hand way Mr Adamson links this supposed mixture of politics, stupidity and opportunism with the KGB, ASIO and Bob Dylan's elusive Cheshire Cat smile! I fail to see the connection. It certainly isn't made clear in Adamson's article.

But it seems to me that there *is* a malaise affecting Australian poetry at the moment, one which has been in existence for a long time, and to which younger poets are particularly susceptible, and that these weaknesses are very clearly demonstrated in *The Drunken Tram*. The real problem has escaped Mr Adamson.

After the widely publicised Ern Malley hoax, the previous (middle) generation of contemporary poets were sent running back under the banner of Respectable Australian Literature like turkeys running to brush. One feels there must have been considerable pressures acting against them, and little confidence amongst those concerned, for the bud to be so effectively nipped.

Essentially, I think, the Ern Malley business demonstrated the destructiveness of entrenched literary conservatism in Australia further consolidating the incestuous parochialism of its interests. And one could add that this situation led directly to the proliferation of small, so-called 'underground' magazines which thrived in '68 and '69, and hence to *The Drunken Tram*. What these untidy back-yard publications did was to clear the air a little; they created an alternative space. They were determined to propagate an audacious and experimental avantgardism. But the writing was at that time still in a very formative stage. And I think it is only now that we are seeing traces of this ambition being fulfilled.

It is interesting to note that what might have been 'modern' in Australia in 1960 would have been quite dated in, say, Europe (even taking into account the strong influence of the American Beat poets and the more marginal influence of Olsen, Williams, Duncan and Creeley). Australian writers who have more than just a passing interest in modern innovative literature are forced into the curious position of having to be pioneers! In France or Germany this is not the case, as there have been succeeding generations of writers

working within a now well-established tradition of contemporary literature.

But the situation has changed. Conservatism followed by radical reaction is no longer the model. There has been time to look overseas, time for serious study, and for individuals to take particular directions and follow their interests. Personally, I'm very sceptical of anything very good coming from something which remains just a reaction against a set of unacceptable precedents, because everything tends to become defined *only* in relationship to those precedents. And it is all too easy for the actual work to be lost amongst the polemics and posturing involved, to the point where the reaction against conservatism may be seen as a reason for abandoning intelligence, care, and a serious concern for language altogether.

One thing which can effectively bog down today's poetry is a style of address loosely termed "hip talk". It derives from the American Beat poets, such as Ferlingetti, Ginsberg, Corso and Keroac. Or rather, it borrows from the 'local color' of their poetic language, not necessarily its substance. A strange growth to be imported from the American social, economic, literary, and historical situation which gave it birth. It's the popular language of a peculiar self-styled modern romanticism. But used excessively or thoughtlessly it can only, I feel, narrow the horizons of poetry. It isn't linguistically strong enough to create subtle distinctions or make any real departures from formularised subject matter.

Another syndrome which often goes hand in hand with hip talk (though not necessarily) is more of an attitude, a stance, than a language infra-structure. It could be called the '*enfant terrible* complex'. A romanticised ideal of the alienated, suffering poet burning down in flames, singing all the while of his own glorious self destruction. A sort of woolly-headed Rimbaud fetish. This leads to a type of poem one sees thrashed to death. The preconceived stance gives a particular, recognisable form to the poem. The poem becomes a cliché-ornament. Not that I advocate the taming of poets. But, by itself, anger is just not enough. And the same goes for those other ready-made standbys, sincerity and commitment. To become poetry they must be wedded to intelligence, an abiding concern for the poem as its own field of references, and a love of and serious approach to language itself.

The sins of the fathers are of another type. Amongst the older, more established poets one still finds a deeply ingrained parochialism, a reluctance to undertake any formal or stylistic departures, and the tendency to write descriptive poems along very predictable guidelines. Within the Australian tradition there are poets of Brennan's, Webb's and Slessor's magnitude whom one could fruitfully study. But there is also the rest of the world.

Contemporary literature is becoming increasingly internationalistic in outlook. But Australia insists on remaining closed-off within her own back yard. I feel there should be more comparing of notes and swapping of ideas with writers overseas: an access to and interchange with the various schools of writing at work in the world today, especially where the work is of an exploratory and innovative nature.

In this regard it is very heartening to see Walter Billeter's translations of Paul Celan's poems appearing (in some cases for the first time in the English language) in recent editions of *Contempa* and *Ear In The Wheatfield,* and to know that he will soon be publishing translations of Arno Schmidt, a contemporary German writer who ranks, as innovator and stylist, with James Joyce.

The dichotomies within the Australian scene would simply disappear if there was a general acceptance of the fact that there is a firmly established tradition of serious and disciplined contemporary experimental literature, and that this tradition has been vigorous and active in Europe, America, and Britain for some time. That it is not a flash in the pan, and that it will continue to develop and undergo change.

But, in the meantime, I think we will be seeing quite a few anthologies of bad or mediocre verse similar to *The Drunken Tram,* but also, I hope, volumes of more solid material which may succeed them.

I know that as far as my own contribution to *The Drunken Tram* goes, I have rejected everything except "The White Wolf", which I still feel is of interest. I don't know if the other poets anthologised there feel similarly. But they might well do. It would be very refreshing indeed for some real break-through writing to originate in Australia, and not just bits of superficial trendiness, or the safe and predictable reworking of ground already won.

books

OH DEAR!

Poor Geoff Serle (with Leonie Kramer) is the latest butt of *Overland's* tribe of gremlins. They are the victims of two out of three serious errors that crept into the review section of our last issue—the worst bunch I can remember in the twenty years of editing *Overland*. Firstly, I was responsible for transcribing the sub-title of Serle's new book—*The Creative Spirit in Australia*—as the title. The full title is, of course, *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1788-1972*. The final line of the review was dropped in the comping; the final sentence should read:

> [The future historian] will no doubt speculate on [*From Deserts the Prophets Come*] as a phenomenon of the 1970s; and perhaps in exploring the connection between what it says, and what it is, he will see as peculiarly Australian its avoidance of speculation, its cautious approach to the arts, its respect for authority (and its simultaneous championing of independence) and its determined practicality and sense of purpose.

As if this were not bad enough, the whole final sentence of Dick Johnson's review of George Gellie's *Sophocles: A Reading* was also omitted. It reads:

> The book is modestly sub-titled "A Reading". It is the fruit of a great many readings—Gellie must know Sophocles almost by heart. It is also the fruit of much reading; the bibliography covers three pages of books and five of articles, not bad for seven plays. All of this has been absorbed and digested, has led Gellie to a profound appreciation of Sophocles, and has enabled him to help us easily to share that appreciation.

I can only apologise to readers, reviewers and the authors concerned.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

TRUTH AND FICTION MEET

Michael Cannon

David Martin: *The Chinese Boy* (Hodder and Stoughton, $3.95).

To my knowledge, no Australian novelist has ever been able to get beneath the skin of the Chinese immigrants who came to Australia during the 19th century, and stayed there for the twin attractions of gold and a life somewhat preferable to the one left behind.

Buried deep in a mullocky sort of xenophobia, most local writers have treated the yellow man —when they have noticed him at all—as a figure of mystery, a carrier of exotic disease, or a practitioner of strange vices.

We have had to wait for another immigrant, a man not subject to years of conditioning against the "yellow peril", to write a believable story of the vanished Chinese adventurers.

David Martin prepared himself for this work by exploring the available factual material, which is rather thin but sufficient for his purpose. Most writers today would have been content to stop there and present their discoveries to the hungry non-fiction market. But Martin in addition possesses an enviable talent for absorbing the historical background so completely that it almost disappears, using it merely as a setting in which a few representative characters re-create the struggle of life.

This capacity, which helps to make Martin a first-class novelist, was probably best shown in his book *The Young Wife*, in which a immigrant woman is thrown into the unfamiliar milieu of postwar Australian life. In a hundred years' time historians will have to turn to that book to discover what life was really like in the melting-pot.

The Young Wife was no doubt partly based on Martin's own observations and experiences. His latest achievement is the greater because he had to absorb a whole century of development, action and feeling, bred into the bones of native-born Australians but strange and even repellent to a civilised European.

Having scratched in the same lode, I can attest to Martin's success. Everything rings true: not even Henry Handel Richardson did a better job of making the goldfields live again, and her version (in *Richard Mahony*) was given mainly through the eyes of Anglo-Saxon protagonists.

What intrigues me most about Martin's new novel is that he selected a young Chinese boy as the lens through which Australia is viewed. This deceptively simple device enables Martin to explain the peculiar features of the diggings and their floating population without ever appearing to preach or instruct.

Unfortunately, the publishers' presentation of *The Chinese Boy* as a novel for children is almost as ludicrous as the listing of *The Young Wife* in the front as a book "for young people".

Adult buyers who know Martin's earlier work will probably be put off by the gaudy dust wrapper of the latest, obviously designed for the children's market. Mature children will certainly be able to read *The Chinese Boy* and profit greatly from it. But to my mind it is actually a novel for adults, told in language of such simple power that it can be read in a couple of hours and possess a corner of the reader's mind forever.

I hope that David Martin, and others, will be able to extend the technique of basing novels on sound historical premises. The life and times of a man like Alfred Deakin, for instance, might make a superb political novel. The elements of drama and conflict are there: the background of boom-time Melbourne, Deakin's legal and journalistic experiences, his obsession with spiritualism, his long-term balancing act between proletariat and bourgeoisie, his leadership in the new Commonwealth, and so on.

At least two earnest biographers have already written books on Deakin, but it seems to me that only a novelist of Martin's calibre will finally liberate the man's tortured soul from the limbo where he still cries out for understanding. He has the capacity to enter into the minds and lives of his characters in a way which suggests that, if he were to look more closely at the biographical novel, new insights for us all might emerge.

THE NEW WHITE

John McLaren

Patrick White: *The Eye of the Storm* (Cape, $6.75).

In all of Patrick White's work there has been a search for God, or goodness. In the two earliest novels the object of this search seemed located in daily work, in human relationships, even in politics. Since *The Living and the Dead* there has been no suggestion in his work of politics as salvation, and it has appeared only in such forms as nazism as a manifestation of evil. There has continued, however, an interest in personal relationships, such as those between Voss and Laura, or in everyday labor, such as that of Stan Parker, Mrs Godbold or Arthur Brown, as a way to the truth. This truth has nevertheless lain outside the main action and business of life, and has required sanctification by a vision coming from outside, as in *Riders in the Chariot,* or a symbol becoming transcendent, as in *The Tree of Man* or *The Solid Mandala.*

In *The Vivisector* White seemed to have abandoned entirely the hope of discovering meaning within the bounds of life. Each of the series of relationships in which Hurtle Duffield is involved obtains meaning only in the art to which it gives rise as he successively casts each woman aside. Nor does work seem important to him for what it is, but only for what it reveals. When he achieves God with the last expiring breath and brushstroke of his life, he seems to be giving final form to the vision which White has been seeking throughout his writing. Art, in the form of painting, dance and music, gives man the only truth he can find in his life, the only means of reconciling the aspiration of the spirit with the sordid ugliness of the flesh.

Yet, just as each of his earlier novels has forced us to look back again at all his earlier writing, so *The Eye of the Storm* marks both a fresh stage in a continuing development and an entirely new start. Where his earlier work seemed to trace a continuing progress towards transcendence, this book returns us to the daily reality of living. While the central characters of his more recent books have been outsiders—the meek, the artists, the visionaries—this novel studies the death, and retrospectively the life, of a proud, wealthy and socially eminent woman. Although earlier novels have seemed impelled towards transcendence by a

distaste for living, this work triumphantly celebrates life.

This does not mean, however, that the novel is in entirely unfamiliar territory. Opening the book almost at random, we encounter sentences like "She delivered her line in a level tone of voice, except at the point where she swooped on his Christian name," or "Good old Dudley was automatically sleepily pouring you another drink. It was a relief to sink your mouth afresh; and no one had accused you of ignoble intent." Certainly, these remarks are part of a conversation between actors, but the conscious role-playing, the sense of life as an insincere game, is characteristically White. So is the fact that human relationships are often tentative, usually temporary and always unsuccessful.

Another familiar element of the novel is the sense of sacramental mystery which is conferred by members of an elect on the duties of their lives. The representative of the elect in this novel is the night nurse, Sister de Santis, who is repeatedly likened to a nun, and who makes the central character of the novel, Elizabeth Hunter, the object of her devotions. The awareness of the sacred in the everyday, and of the irony which would impute the sacred to what is merely everyday, leads also to occasionally confusing imagery . . . "this house become shrine, in which there was even a hint of incense, if only from cypresses rubbed up the wrong way by the storm withdrawing from the garden."

This particular passage gives the clue to the total control which White exerts over every moment in this novel. This image is firmly located in Basil Hunter's perceptions, and the irony of the natural explanation both indicates Basil's own self-awareness, his refusal to surrender either to his mother's charms or to his own intimations of eternity, and places the whole episode in the context of the duality of life. This duality, between the natural processes and the order imposed on them by human awareness, is central to the novel. It explains why Elizabeth Hunter, who is both the eye of the storm and the one who has come through it, triumphs not only over the decay and grotesquery of the flesh, but even over the betrayals of her own spirit, particularly her betrayal of her husband and of her children.

Patrick White's control over this novel seems stronger than in much of his earlier work because the perceptions and intimations are located firmly in the consciousness of the various characters. Sister de Santis is not merely seen as a secular nun, she sees herself as one, and her choice of this role is carefully substantiated through her family background. Similarly, the two children, Basil and Dorothy, come alive for us through their own consciousness. We are not told of their separate failures, we experience them, we understand their repudiation of their mother and their meanness of spirit, and occasional generosity, towards others in their lives. We also share the hope of fulfilment, Basil through another attempt at playing Lear, Dorothy through piety and comfortable domesticity, even as we know its futility.

Supremely, however, the consciousness of this novel is that of Elizabeth Hunter herself. She is the grand lady of Sydney society, and in a sense the other characters are in the novel only to reflect and react to aspects of her being. For the first part of the novel, however, we see the world largely through her own eyes, in prose whose effortless command is one of White's greatest achievements. She is presented to us with a completeness which prevents any hint of convention or artificiality, yet she is a character whose life in its externals is so conventional and artificial that she might seem to defy the powers of any writer to give her reality. This social life, with its surface adulteries and central infidelity, is rendered completely human. We do not merely see the true woman through her social artifices, but see how she creates and realizes herself in her external life. Through a power of will, a determination to be herself which is in itself a greatness of spirit, she overcomes the duality of her life, so that her very untruth becomes truth. In a reversal of conventional morality, by living for herself she saves herself, and also those who believe in her. The lost are those, like Dorothy, with no lives of their own, who are incapable of either giving or receiving.

Like Elizabeth Hunter, this novel is completely itself.

A MANLY LOVE

David Martin

Merv Lilley: *Cautious Birds* ($1. Available bookshop, University of W.A., Nedlands.)

From the west, where poets are at work of whom our east knows too little, comes a little illustrated book of 24 pages by Merv Lilley — *Cautious Birds*. Lilley, well known among folk-song collectors and broadsheeters, an unprolific poet and

the author of some good short stories — and, *pace* Man's Liberation, husband of Dorothy Hewett—has given us something surprising: a few hundred lines of assorted and often delightful verse, very loosely attached to the bird theme. Surprising, because I didn't think of Lilley as chiefly a lyricist, though now I realize that the lyric streak was always there.

Of all the traditions and influences in our poetry Shaw Neilson's has not, lately, been the most powerful. But here it is, direct, unselfconscious, and quite modern.

> And is the sun more malevolent this summer
> that I hear no birds call either in the morning light
> high noon or when the evening swarms with final appetites
> before the night's long unease when they sit naked in the leaves . . .

But this blends well with another, harder note:

> Let there be some dialogue m/s sweetface nightowl with the snub nose
> about your death in our garden the night before the
> first thunderstorm in April,
> though no significance can be placed on thunder and lightning
> that had not occurred . . .

Sorry! When I began abstracting these lines I did not appreciate that there was no natural stop before the 17th! But see how well it ends:

> I trust it is romantically true since we all need birds in the trees,
> so I will stick to my assertion of this till the world boil over
> and hell freeze,
> but you m/s nightowl can have no concern for the accuracy
> of that promulgation
> because you are without soul as I am
> and we have no Christian salvation.

As is usual in short reviews, the odd quotation hardly conveys the flavor. Still: I very much like to think of snub-nosed owls! About "God's Fool" Lilley says:

> Yesterday he caught a bird
> that had not learned to fly;
> he could not know that birds are held
> only within the eye.

Not every stanza is so apt but most are. In many poems there are moods recovered from a Queensland bush childhood, and their freshness is preserved though they are felt with a man's wry, tough knowledge. Yes! They make me think of something that one sees at the bottom of a well, or of a barrel: there it lies, out of reach, lit up and slightly magnified by the fluid in between. Here it is the waters of time and love (in what used to be called, without shame, a manly sense) which lie between the eye and the object, making it painfully distant and yet sweetly near.

> Through all my grey and beautiful dawns
> my heroes have been unrecognised
> doomed to work forever and resigned to it,
> we have levered up the sun in the east with a crowbar,
> made games of the torture of living, the burning day
> held it above the rim of the west with block and tackle
> lest we go down with the sun.

A CENTURY OF CARTOONING

Vane Lindesay

Marguerite Mahood: *The Loaded Line: Australian Political Caricature 1788-1901* (Melbourne University Press, $13.50).

The most outstanding feature of Australian book publishing during the last six years has been the quantity and wide variety of Australiana available, reflecting a national awareness cautiously emerging since the second world war.

To take one instance, for years the only definitive work on Australian lepidoptera was *What Butterfly is That?* by Waterhouse and Caley, published forty-one years ago. And, although sadly out of date, this book has been a quite costly collectors' item. But today three different, up-to-date and definitive works in full color are available. We now have a plethora of works on subjects ranging from flora and fauna and Australian Rules Football to local history, Australian architecture, Australian films (both 'silent' and 'talkies'), our painters, parrots and postage stamps and god bless us—a work on noxious weeds in color.

Although local booksellers have not been happy at the huge volume of books from Australian publishers (together with those from overseas) these are stimulating days in local book publishing. And not the least of books breaking new ground is Marguerite Mahood's deeply researched work on the Australian political cartoon before Federation.

Marguerite Mahood won a doctorate of philosophy at Melbourne University for her work, which explores Australian history as interpreted by the cartoonists drawing, engraving and lithographing for popular prints and the press in Australia between 1788 and 1901. The development of a national spirit from the pugnacious individualism of early settlement to the awareness of a common destiny and ultimately to Federation is traced through political cartoons. These are discussed, described and pictured throughout this three hundred page book, as are the various graphic techniques of the artists who practised them. And for the student or interested reader there are two pages of artists' and engravers' monograms and cyphers for identification—these it should be noted are the result of some admirable research. The thoughtful introductory section defines in clear terms the subject.

"Humour, satire, irony, are intangible elements of the cartoon," Mahood says. "There is little in the way of sophisticated satire or delicate irony in the early colonial cartoon, but what might be called the mechanical or manipulative elements of allegory, analogy and association are much in evidence. Allegory brings the magniloquence of legend, mythology and history to a prosaic subject. The admired politician is presented as Hercules with club and lion-skin as he cleanses the Augean stables of the State from political corruption. Or the unsuccessful politician is the doomed Sisyphus engaged in his eternally vain task of pushing his great boulder of Reform up the steep hill of Legislative Opposition only to have it roll down again."

"Analogy, on the other hand," the author continues, "draws a parallel between the political situation and a common, and preferably undignified, human experience. The reforming statesman becomes not Hercules but the local garbage man clearing away political corruption in the dustbin of a parliamentary Act or sharing some other common human experience with his fellow citizens."

Dr Mahood explains how both the allegorical and the analogous cartoons indicated public taste and the standards of public education. Classical references in early colonial cartoons were common because most subscribers to satirical papers were migrants with an English middle-class education. They understood what was meant by Ajax defying the lightning and Dido mourning the departure of Aeneas; they were not baffled by the much-used Latin tag *arcades ambo,* meaning 'birds of a feather' or 'they're both as bad as each other', as a comment on politicians. But when in the later years of the nineteenth century an Australian-born population replaced the older readership of illustrated papers and magazines, the classical allegory disappeared. The politician was no longer Hercules with club and lion-skin but a shearer collaring a refractory sheep, or, a miner disputing a claim with a rival politician.

The Loaded Line is a thorough, interpretive record which catalogues responses to Antipodean affairs of state. There is no question about it—ante-nuclear, colonial politics could be cosy and dull. But the "fighting cartoonists" of the day were savage. Their forthright comment is astonishing to us, hobbled by libel laws.

During the 1870's *Melbourne Punch* cartoonist Thomas Carrington, for instance, saw to it that no laxity, no incautious remark, no personal idiosyncrasies of the Victorian premier Graham Berry, or of his party, escaped his ruthless pen. Drunkenness and belligerence were emphasized. More than once Carrington drew a people's representative in a drunken stupor on the Treasury benches; Peter Lalor was drawn in a state of dizzy inebriation, a wineglass drooping from his hand; Grant, the minister for lands, was pictured standing beside 'Grant's Line', while an endless string of bottles and glasses vanished over the horizon.

Australian political caricature started with the founding and publication of *Melbourne Punch* in 1855, a shameless copy in layout, appearance, and spirit of its London model, which was at this date only fifteen years old. Through its artist Nicholas Chevalier *Melbourne Punch* printed the first cartoon symbol representing Australia, "Mr Kangaroo Bull". Surprisingly, this symbol was not a miner or farmer or shearer or any popular battling figure of frontier Australia. He was "a solid middle-class individual with a stake in the land or in business, inclined to be suspicious of the activities of both local and imperial governments—an independent citizen who had defeated the old governor's tyranny with his new constitution yet who distrusted the too-democratic ideas

of the growing working class. He was, in fact, the 'middle section' of the community, the majority of voters."

'Mr Kangaroo Bull' failed—and rightly—to be accepted as a national figure. More successful was Livingston Hopkins' symbol the 'Little Boy at Manly', a figure of a small, Dickensian child labelled alternatively 'Australia' or 'New South Wales'. Why Hopkins pictured his 'Little Boy' in a tall, peaked cap complete with swinging tassle, Eton collar and pantaloons has never been explained. But Dr Mahood hints that the costume was that which might have been worn by a young 'currency lad'. In fact an early engraving of a Sydney boys' school depicts Australian youngsters in similar garb. In any case the 'Little Boy' symbol was popular and was adopted by succeeding *Bulletin* cartoonists. He survived well into the twentieth century until finally he was pensioned off as a trade mark for Meggitt's linseed oil.

Much of the information unearthed by Dr Mahood is fascinating. Among the many items surfacing in her work is an 1892 report from the *Review of Reviews,* expressing astonishment "that an Australian population of only four millions scattered to an exceptional degree should support some nine hundred newspapers, among them weekly journals".

In her conclusion Dr Mahood advances a proposition many practising cartoonists could not agree to. She writes: "Is the political cartoon an art? It does not aspire to be a graphic art; it is a graphic instrument of explanation or propaganda." Well, editorially speaking, yes—it has of course degenerated to this. For there is a widely held concept that political cartoonists (and for that matter joke-cartoonists too) need not be good at drawing—argued by those usually not involved in the exercise of ideas and the expression of them in terms of draughtmanship. But there are cartoonists of independent expression who surely should be the yard-stick of judgement, not that least-common-denominator—the editorial hack.

In these days when we talk of the art of weaving, or the art of photography, or the art of the film, or of glass-blowing or of fine printing, we should remember that significant, pioneering political cartoonists included Gillray, Hogarth and Daumier, followed by men like Grosz, Gulbransson and Th. Th. Heine of Germany, Australia's Will Dyson and his rival David Low. If there is any doubt about cartooning being an art then the superb pen draughtsmanship of Britain's contemporary cartoonist and caricaturist Gerald Scarfe should put paid to the query.

Throughout *The Loaded Line* Dr Mahood has skilfully balanced the flow between description and background of cartoons, of comment on various newspapers and journals, of political figures, of events, of artists, of their methods and of technical advances. Her very useful work is presented in a form visually immaculate by Australia's finest book designer, Alison Forbes.

SURPRISE THEM READING

Dennis Pryor

Peter Porter: *After Martial* (Oxford, $3.15).

Classical scholars have been the greatest enemies of classical poetry. The construe and the translation have been for them as close as siblings if not twins. And translation has, in the main, been regarded as a second-rate, unsound activity. The scholarly drive has been in two directions: commentaries and textual criticism. The commentaries produced massive collections of parallel passages suggesting that ancient writers were peripatetic computers producing print-outs of a wild range of references to other writers. Mayor's *Juvenal* is a notorious example, a great junk shop of learning enlivened only by an extraordinary homily on vegetarianism in its introduction.

Textual criticism served as a convenient device to postpone discussion of anything worth discussing until we had got the texts right, which was of course impossible anyway. A. E. Housman was the Messiah and his scholarly legacy is a continuing line of housmanic depressives, the most horrific example of which is a recent book containing textual emendations not of an ancient text, not even of an ancient commentary, but of the ancient scholia of an ancient commentary on an ancient text.

There have been a few freak translations. Murray's Swinburnian metamorphosis of Greek tragedy was fully dealt with in Eliot's denunciation ("Professor Murray has simply interposed between Euripides and ourselves a barrier more impenetrable than the Greek language"). But Eliot has not prevented continuing generations of readers from being loused up by Murray. A. S. Way's *Euripides* in the Loeb series is re-tread Murray and succeeds (incredibly) in being worse than Murray.

Then came the boom. Rieu's Penguin *Odyssey* destroyed Homer where even the dark days of the Dorian invasions had failed. And spheniscan versions of the Greek tragedians constituted a neo-brutalist rebuilding of Murray's pre-Raphaelite chichi.

But the poets are rescuing ancient literature from the scholars. Pound did something for Propertius, who has always worried the scholars. Logue's *Patrocleia* uniquely gives a notion of what it might feel like to hear a Homeric bard.

Martial has always attracted translators. Even the Bohn classical library, that mausoleum of decomposing and rigormorticed classical corpses, has a *Martial* containing some splendid verse translations. Peter Porter's *After Martial* is admirable. The introduction should be an examinable text for professional classicists. He's not afraid to state what might appear obvious: he knows that the obvious is so often ignored. "English has no verse forms in common with Latin and Greek, and classical poetry has a special strangeness which needs to be naturalized . . . Latin and Greek are quantitative and English qualitative . . . The translator's first loyalty is to the poem in English: otherwise, he might as well leave it where it is."

He goes on to describe his methods, his anachronisms and his failures, e.g. "what is always missing is [Martial's] perfection of form."

I don't intend to make detailed comments on Porter's poems. Commentary is an occupational disease for professional classicists, and there is no known vaccine other than simply avoiding infection. He has produced poems of strength and vigor. The wit of Martial is there and a lot more besides—obscenity, social comment, humor, even a spare and taut lyricism. His selection is more than a random sample, it has shape as a *book* of poems. It's worth taking his advice in poem IV. xlix:

> . . . don't set store by what men praise
> nor what they proudly put upon their
> shelves—
> surprise them reading, it'll be something
> true and scabrous from my kind of book.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Many thanks again to those who have helped out again with that-bit-extra on their renewals. In keeping with our policy of 'open government' for *Overland,* we are passing on the following figures from the 1972-1973 financial report, just to hand. *Sales,* $3206. *Operating expenses,* $9963 (these include fees to authors and artists $3098, printing $3365, postage $915). Operating loss for the year was $6768, less the Literature Board grants of $6475, ending in a deficiency for the year of $293. I would consider this a pretty good year!

$21 LO'N; $20 KJS; $16 MW, FM, JRL; $12 RM; $7.50 MS; $6 HJH, MC, OG, LB, RM, HH, GP, WW, IMcI, DG, GP, LC; $5 DL; $4 JMcK, DP, JM, DG, RT, LadyL, JL, RF, ESM, GKS; $3 RS, KF, GJ, JM, HJ; $2 AB, EMcL, GH, GF, DD, TS, AB, SB, PH, LB, MJT, WD, JS, JH, CW, JB, JP; $1 ME, JA, GS, RO, NG, RR, JR, KC, TS, HW, ER, DA, AM, JC, AF, JB, GM, BB, JT, AC, JS, AL, KB, AA, HN, EW, RS, AB, JC, JR; 87c JC; 50c LF, JS; 20c GK. Total: $336.57.

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uninterrupted repetition of the sa e t e utterance f successive syllables or words wi h ut cha g of pitch or key

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a si gle unchanging t ne

reci ati chanting or singing in such a ton

a person who sings in such a tone