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Temper democratic, bias Australian

Winter 1974

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VIC CARUSO

Giovanni's Courtship

A whole car load of them, each Italian to the core, all looking like something out of Mario Puzzo, all in a recent model Valiant.

The eldest, of course, was the father, Don Nunzo, cradling a great pot belly which slumped on the front bench seat like a sitting Buddha's. The coat of the dark indigo suit struggled incessantly to maintain its reach around the incredible girth, and the button holes had long ago resigned to what seemed to be a daily growth. They extended a full inch, open, behind the tense buttons. Don Nunzo's belt was down there somewhere in no man's land, beneath the summit of his barrel-like stomach. Otherwise he looked quite a neat man.

The women, of course, were in the back seat, with Angela a grain of wheat between two enormous millstones—one on either side of her, crushing to her left or right depending on which direction the car turned. She was a dainty little flower, a thirteen year old Madame Pompadour with a quaint little plastic flower planted in each long curl. The little garden of hair was even scented with the perfume of the age, VO5 — by "Alberrtto", as the clever Don Nunzo would say each time the ad flashed through the family's living room.

"I think it's in the next street, *va piano!*" It was the officious voice of Carlo Puiastro, matchmaker for a day. He was short, hiding behind a moustache that struggled to grow on his barren upper lip. He endeavored to create a reputation as an impeccably dressed, stylish man. Thus he was the only member of the party to be wearing a pastel shirt, striped at the collar, and an artificial breast-pocket handkerchief with six peaks sprouting as though the rest of the *Cutty Sark* was there also. His hair gleamed, thick and straight as it was.

Don Nunzo looked out of the car window, observing the houses. Red brick, cream brick. He was quite impressed. "Good neighborhood," he commented, "I must compliment you, Carlo." Smiled Carlo—a smile of "I told-you-so" and "but of course".

"Yes, you picked the right girl for my Giovanni," Don Nunzo added.

Giovanni, driving, tightened his grip on the steering wheel. His fat mamma in the back seat could sense that Giovanni was doing his bit to express that he didn't like "Giovanni", preferring "John". Giovanni could have made a fuss about this as he usually would, but now his mind was occupied. What would she be like? Not fat, I hope. Not skinny, either, unless she looked like Audrey Hepburn. Not a chance! After sorting through the line-up of various Italian girls in his mind, his heart gained a couple of beats more than usual, and his mouth drooped . . . "Fat!" he said it aloud.

"What?" asked Don Nunzo, his eyes still on the infatuating red and cream bricks.

"*Nienti,*" replied Giovanni. "Just thinking aloud."

Don Nunzo finally turned his head towards where the car was travelling, looking at the long street ahead. "You know, Carlo, the more I see of Fawkner the more I must compliment you! This girl must be a princess to live here." Carlo laughed—he could not hold back his delight for such praise.

"*Si, si,*" he began, trying to metamorphose the laugh into serious words. "They come from near Naples, you know—but of course, I told you that. And what's more, they've got, er, ah, taste, yes, taste; you know how the *Napolitani* are."

It was Don Nunzo's turn to smile with satisfaction. His son from the depths of Sicily's Catanzaro was marrying into virtual nobility. He tossed his head with more satisfaction, and thought: "Nobility, yes, nobility!"

Once more he turned to view the houses and exclaimed: "Fawkner! My my, Fawkner!"

Little Angela did not have her father's real-estate appreciation of domestic abodes, but nevertheless she felt obliged to comment. "When are *we* moving to Fawkner, Papa?" she asked, leaning on the front seat's backrest. "I don't like Brunsuwickki," she said.

All laughed. Fat sister at her side, with just a hint of a sharp tongue, reminded her that life was not always "Brunsuwiccki", for it was much worse in Catanzaro.

Giovanni kept driving, the car bouncing along smoothly under the weight of its occupants. Don Nunzo himself had thoroughly washed it that Sunday morning, and he had felt an air about himself there in the driveway, poised with rag and bucket in hand. As people were returning from church dressed in their Sunday best he had not been perturbed at cleaning away there in his Monday worst. After all, theirs was the most recent model Valiant in the street, its irridescent orange like the bush of biblical fame, burning there for the adulation of all passers-by.

"Not so fast, Giovanni, we might miss the street"—it was Signor Carlo again, fully in charge of the situation as a proper matchmaker should be. "You might break the springs, too," came advice from Giovanni's mamma, sitting bored and apprehensive in the back. She was half-smothering Angela, pinning her fast to the seat.

"Impossible!" retorted Giovanni. "Valiant springs are like a truck's", he said with pride. He resented women—including his mother—interfering with his driving or making comments about things mechanical. That was a man's field, remote from a woman's domain between the kitchen stove and the kitchen sink.

"Of course they are," added Don Nunzo. "Nothing like the springs of a *Valiante!* Right, Carlo?" Carlo just grunted. He had a Falcon, considerably older than the Calvari's Valiant, and if anyone wanted his opinion, Falcons were the best cars on the road!

"You have to see it on a dirt track—then you really appreciate the springs," said the proud Giovanni.

"Yes, well just as long as you don't drive madly like you always do when *I'm* in the car," boomed the voice of big married sister. Her wrist looked like a tempting proposition for Angela to bite; then maybe she would rest it on her own lap! But you don't bite the wrist of a sister whose husband has deserted her. However, as the Calvaris would say, the less said about that the better.

Wind and road noise began to give way to the sounds of deceleration as the car was thrown into a lower gear to slow it down—a little too suddenly, perhaps. Abuses! Complaints!

"What are you, a maniac?!" the mother screamed at Giovanni, brushing her arms as though the Sahara desert had just blown through the window and settled on her sequined, hand-sewn coat.

"Sh! We don't want to let them see us quarrelling," cautioned Carlo. All part of the expertise required to be a matchmaker.

"Is *that* it?" Don Nunzo was awe-struck. Across the other side of the road, sitting low in all its magnificence and embalmed in cream brick, was the house of his son's future wife. Not a pull-down spring blind in sight, but oceans of white venetians, floral in design, enhanced by silky-white curtains. Roll-away awnings, four of them, one on each of the four windows, each window on one of the four fronts of the house. Garden gnomes basking in the gentle sunshine, guarding the conglomerate of lilies, rose bushes and geraniums. Deep terra-cotta tiles rising away to their apex in the roof. And a little black fairy born of wrought iron told all interested—and all not interested as well—that this was number 211, named, maybe, after some mystical Aboriginal place: EMOH RUO.

Don Nunzo wiped his brow. *"Ma che casa! Ma che casa per d'avero!"* Yes, it certainly was quite a house, Angela agreed, but before she could ask why they could not have one like it Carlo suggested that Giovanni steer the car right into the large concrete driveway. "Would it be all right?" Don Nunzo wasn't sure, but he trusted Carlo. Any man who had found a family of this quality had his unshakeable confidence.

Last minute adjustments. advice and wrangling. "Now, Giovannuzzo, don't forget what I said. Act intelligent, don't drink lemonade, drink beer or wine and don't, for goodness sake, take a sip until everyone else has a glass, and you must say *salute* before you drink, and . . ."

One after the other, doors slammed shut as the party emerged. The suspension breathed a sigh of relief as the fat mother, fat daughter and fat

father clambered out onto the cement of the driveway. Giovanni was the last out, taking ritual-like pride in securing the doors, pulling on the hand-brake and carrying out sophisticated procedures known only to one who has sat behind the wheel.

Don Nunzo was taking the opportunity to survey the very neat angle at which the television aerial lead was anchored to the hole in the roof. "Ingenious, simply ingenious!"

All collected around the side of the car nearest the front verandah. The two and a half women made sure that all was in order with their hems and seams and, with handbags cradled before them, proceeded to walk behind the men up the garden path. Leather and concrete played a tune of their own as the sextet shuffled along. No one saw one of the louvres of the venetians lifted ever so slightly in the room behind the verandah.

It was Carlo who gave a sharp flick to the doorbell, setting it ringing inside the house, just as Giovanni was feeling his pulse rate. Thoughts flew. Who would open the door? Will they *all* come out to greet us? What are they wearing? Should we get right to the point? How well does Carlo *really* know these people? Maybe they are a trifle superior to us. Will the marriage work out? I wonder at whose house we'll have the Christmas dinner? . . .

The signs of animation inside the house made themselves evident. Footsteps, muffled by a thick carpet, became audible. A pause. Vibrations on the doorhandle. Suddenly a big parallel space, temporarily all black and void, embellished by the full view of a woman.

To the right of the hall was the lounge; to the left, judging from Don Nunzo's own reflection in a mirror there, could have been a bedroom. But for the time being the party of six stood, some heads turned towards the decorative plaster ceiling, others eyeing each other, and still others staring at the beautiful woman. All were lost. Even the woman, the hostess, had not got far after the hellos were finished with. Carlo rallied himself to the front of the company and did the honors. A few more moments and the silence would have been embarrassing.

"Signora Madafferi," he began, pointing out the hostess, "this is Signor Calvari", and then stepped back, proud of his proper Italian, letting Don Nunzo Calvari shake hands with the hostess Signora. Then came Don Nunzo's wife, Giovanni, and finally the fat sister and little Angela.

"Please, step into the loungeroom, won't you," beckoned the noble Signora Madafferi. "My husband and Natalina will be here right away—they've been in the garden, you know." "Natalina," thought Giovanni. It sounded different now that her mother had said it, and there was a certain sweetness that was lost on the numerous occasions Carlo had said the name. Natalina—of course, he'd have to shorten that to Natalie, just like the actress, the American actress.

"Yes, yes, of course," replied Don Nunzo to the Signora, and he took in the laminated buffet neatly packed with glasses for all occasions, cutlery sets, tea sets and the occasional sugar almonds packed in the mock-silk nets. His eyes were parched sponges aching to be quenched by the wonders of the room. And everything was a wonder: old photographs in neat rows on top of the buffet, television and mantel, with some larger ones hanging from the soft-hued violet walls.

"It certainly is a nice house," smiled Carlo at Don Nunzo. He saw in his eyes the laughter that one manifests when one is about to praise.

"Yes, yes, a very nice house," agreed Don Nunzo. Carlo smiled in deep satisfaction: he was the matchmaker, the guest of honor, the go-between, the talent scout.

"Oh, but it's such a bother to keep clean," laughed Signora Madafferi. "Every Sunday morning! We start with the hall and end up on the back porch! Whew! But it must be done."

"Of course, of course, I know just what you mean," retorted Signora Calvari, "we always clean ours!" That was just in case the lovely Signora Madafferi had any wrong notions about the Calvari standard of cleanliness.

"And the neighborhood—it's excellent," dictated Don Nunzo. His tone was beatific. "Fawkner is fast becoming the best, most modern suburb in Melbourne."

"*Si, si,*" replied Signora Madafferi. Somewhere she had read about another up and coming Melbourne suburb which the Calvaris had not heard about: Toorak.

At that moment the keenly awaited footsteps were heard outside the doors to the loungeroom. All heads turned in their direction, and in entered Signor Madafferi, trailed by a humble looking girl of about twenty. Madafferi was a robust man, tall with clearly defined features—almost as well defined as Don Nunzo's. He wore a check sports shirt, almost entirely hidden by a mohair pullover and dark sports coat on top of that. He was fifty, he looked it, and he was proud of it.

Madafferi stopped just inside the doorway, and very quickly eyed the company assembled on the divan, with Carlo sitting slightly higher than the rest, on a kitchen chair. Signora Madafferi lounged in one of the two armchairs.

"Ah, Carlo, you've arrived," he said, aiming his outstretched hand towards Carlo. Not exactly the most appropriate greeting for anyone in such circumstances, but he was lost for words. Carlo, sensing this, knew it was time to take full control, the chairman of the board presiding at the board meeting.

He shook hands with Madafferi, and again began the laborious 'so and so, meet so and so', until finally he introduced Madafferi's daughter. The latter had stopped short in the centre of the room, inconspicuous behind her father's frame. When she shook hands with Giovanni she raised her head ever so slightly, but turned her eyes as far up as their sockets would allow. Giovanni, being a man, looked at her squarely, his heart fluttering perhaps even more than hers. He had held her hand perhaps a second longer than necessary, and realizing this he dropped it smartly.

Natalina resigned herself to the outskirts of the room, well away in her place. She was only the bride to be.

Giovanni was up there with the best of them on that couch, but it was his presence, and not his conversation, that was mandatory. Little Angela wriggled helplessly.

"It was a little cold, this morning," said Carlo at last, oiling the machinery of marital protocol. "I'm afraid my few *feet* of tomato got the frost!" He eyed the oil heater, placidly stuck to the wall, silent, vigilant. Signora Madafferi saw the object of his gaze, and promptly gave the command to Natalina.

"Why don't you switch the heater on," she snapped. Natalina promptly flew off her chair and bent over the heater, turning knobs. Her parents were proud. They eyed all on the couch, making sure that they appreciated Natalina's obedience and alertness. Giovanni's heart fluttered as he watched her slender figure—unusual for an Italian girl, and more beautiful than his most daring expectations—bending over the heater, the force of gravity doing its neat work on her upper body. She was not just a stranger—this was his future wife—negotiations going well, that is.

Natalina sat down again in her place in no man's land. It was just then that Madafferi felt the social thirst in his throat. "Natalina, the beer!" Up sprang Natalina, and quickly, though with delightful grace, she left the room. Madafferi turned to Don Nunzo, searching his face for some sign, some expression of acceptance.

"Nice girl, nice girl" — it came from Don Nunzo, just as Madafferi hoped it would. Don Nunzo was nodding his head affirming his own words, looking like a wool buyer's agent at a wool sale advising his client on the merits of the wool. A chorus of words and heads agreed with Don Nunzo.

"She's only twenty years old," said Signora Calvari, more in the fashion of a question than an appreciative statement.

"*Si, si,* only twenty," replied the owners of that obedient girl. "But we think it the right age," continued Madafferi. Naturally, there was no need for anyone to question or ponder: the right age for what? Even little Angela, occasionally moaning and groaning there, a sardine amongst the whales, understood. And she took some interest, too, for half a decade only would have to expire before she'd be sitting in the background switching on oil heaters and fetching the beer.

"And she, ah, she does hair, hum?" Signora Calvari was determined to get all her facts—which had been delivered by Carlo in his brief—confirmed.

"Oh yes, well, you know how it is with a young girl, as soon as she reaches—" Signora Madafferi turned to her husband—"what grade is it?"

"*Form,* not grade, form four," he insisted.

"Form four," continued the now enlightened Signora Madafferi, "as soon as a girl reaches form four, it's that time when her parents must help her as much as possible. After all, what else are parents for but to do the best for their children?" This with the voice of a martyr.

"Right, *si,* of course," agreed Don Nunzo. "It's the same with Giovannuzzo," he began, not to be outdone in matters of martyrdom. "Now, he went to third form—he could have gone on, but the studying! Every night locked away in his room! Oh yes, the studying! It's too much for a young boy, you know. So we talked it over and we decided it was the best he was apprenticed, and now he has his own car." Don Nunzo lounged back with satisfaction.

"And he's a builder . . .?" queried Madafferi.

"Yes, a builder. It's builders who've built this country for the Australians, us Italians with our own hands." Don Nunzo's fists were clenched, shaking, as he made his point. And all agreed with him, taking his facts as well-known ones,

facts which the Australiani would never realize or appreciate.

"Do you find much work?" asked Signora Madafferi. Carlo answered her before Giovanni could reply.

"Never a moment to spare! He did my kitchen a while back. That boy has brains in his head!"

"You'd think he was born with a hammer in his hand," laughed Don Nunzo, looking at his son, who was shying back in embarrassment.

"Even our Natalina," began Signora Madafferi in defence of her own offspring. "She knows all the fashions, cutting, styling—she knows it all."

"It's a blessing when we have to go to a wedding," added Natalina's proud mother. "Don't have to worry about appointments with your own daughter a hairdresser!"

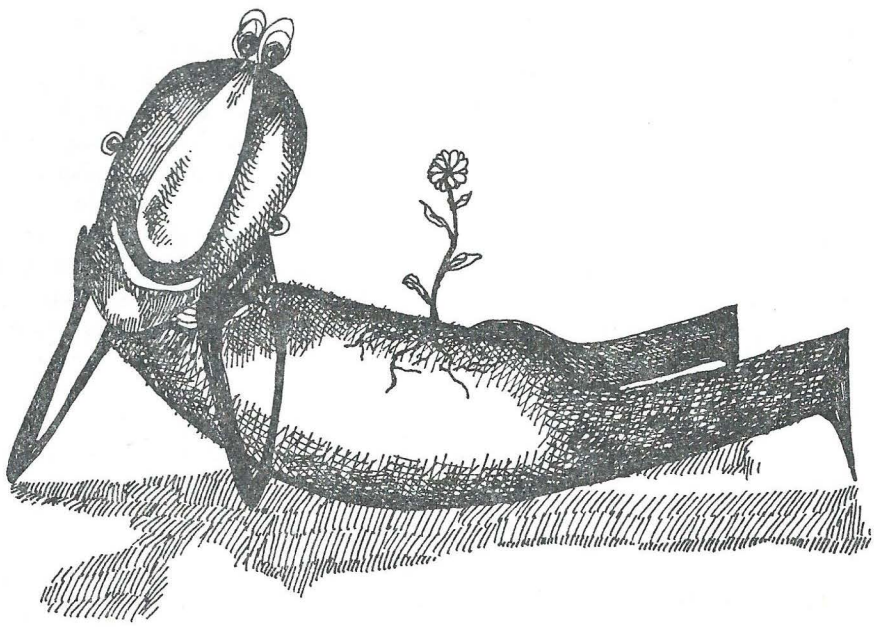
"True, true. It must be quite a convenience. Hairdressers are so hard to get when you have a wedding coming up, no?"

Carlo sensed the situation running away from him, and before Signora Calvari went on about the scarcity of hairdressers, he intervened, sanctioned by his authority as matchmaker.

"It's the right time for building, all right. I remember when Pascoe Vale was the end of the earth in Melbourne. Now it's right in the middle, thanks to God for the building boom." At least his conversation was more important than trite talk about hair. All agreed with him, and he continued. "And it's we Italians who venture beyond the borders building when the Australians haven't even paid off their homes after twenty years!" More sighs in the affirmative. "And Giovanni is still a boy—it's all there for him: as long as there's land, there's houses for him to build. Not like ourselves, eh, Don Nunzo. Where were *we* at his age, eh, where were *we*?"

Ah, but this was the land of opportunity. "America," they called it in the old country. America, where the excess meat was thrown out with the bread crumbs and unused milk.

Natalina returned with the tray of nine long, floral-design glasses, in the midst of which were a bottle of beer and a bottle of orange drink. She placed it on a coffee table in the centre of the company and opened the bottles, filling some of the glasses with beer, and the rest with orange. She then disappeared out of the room, nobody questioning why, for they knew. Customs varied little from house to house. And as expected, she was back in no time with a bowl of peanuts and an empty bowl for the shells to be placed in. She



Jiri Tibor Novak

then began to go around the room with the tray, whilst her father talked of wine.

"Beer is all right," he said, "but occasionally we need wine. Wine is *sincere*, not like this beer: there are too many impurities in beer and spirits. But wine . . . wine is sincere."

Angela was listening intently. Madafferi said beer was impure, and she thought of her own family crushing away at grapes each autumn in their small grape crusher. And she thought how dust settled on the conglomerate of crushed grapes and seeds and grape juice, raw and crude.

"But wine is dirty!" she burst out, aiming her bit of knowledge at no one in particular.

"Charming little girl," commented Signora Madafferi, as though she was noticing Angela for the first time.

"Zitto!" urged fat sister raising a finger to her lips. Just as big sister told her, she shut up.

All had a glass of drink in their hands now, and Giovanni was a little more self-conscious than the others. He glanced around the room making sure that everyone else had a glass in his or her hand and then he waited for someone to offer a toast. "*Al Salute,*" Carlo toasted, repeated by a chorus of voices who then indeed drank to health. Giovanni wondered how good a cook his bride to be was. He wondered many things about her—but there was time enough to find out all about her after they were married.

Glasses down, there was a disturbing silence all around the room. The crunch had come.

"Well!" began Carlo. Indeed, well. This was the time to talk, when the festivities gave way to the realities of the situation, where Carlo's mission came to verbal fulfilment. "Tony," he said, turning to Madafferi, "I've known you for a long time. Many times I've come to this house and you've treated me well. Good. And I know that yours is a family of respect, and you're known and respected." Madafferi listened intently. All else listened too, some with heads bowed—just like when a priest, standing before a couple at the altar, begins "Dearly beloved we are gathered here today . . ."

"I can tell from my own heart that you are a good family," Carlo continued, and all were touched. It is not often that an Italian refers to his heart unless he has high blood pressure or similar cardiac complaints. Carlo then turned to Don Nunzo. "And you, Don Nunzo, even you are a man of respect, an honest man. I know that your family cannot speak of any disgraces, and you're all hard workers." Angela buried her chin in her chest. These were high words, oratory to stir the soul, and her own little soul was pricked by the majesty of Carlo's soul-stirring. The fat sister had been through the routine and was interested more in manner than matter. This time the Madafferis had their heads bowed and Don Nunzo listened.

"Giovannuzzo is a noble boy. He is young and benevolent as bread. He is a noble boy indeed. I can only speak the highest regards for him as I am sure everyone can."

Since all either had their heads bowed or were looking Carlo in the eye, including Giovanni, Natalina ventured to take a good look at Giovanni. The top of his hair was curled, and one could see in his face the boy reluctantly giving way to the man. His shoulders were broad, and his light grey suit clung to him, doing justice to his strong build. There was the man who would take her away from her parents' domain and furnish her with a house and family, to be cradled in his loving care. What was he really like? She knew he had not been in Australia as long as she had, and having read English and American novels at school she could not help but be influenced by their romance—something very alien to the Italian culture. She dared not admit it to herself, but she secretly yearned for a life like those novels and Hollywood films depicted: to be nestled in her husband's arms as he called her "Honey" and kissed her goodbye as he left for the office in the morning.

Carlo's talk seemed incessant, but no one objected. This was the proper way to enter into courtship, not like those Australians did, leaving everything to their immature, irresponsible sons and callous, loose-moralled, bitchy daughters. Ah, if only the Australians took a page out of the Italian book.

At last Carlo was through, and conversation once more flowed freely. The subject matter now no longer involved mutual compliments, for both families were now virtually as one. Natalina still sat quietly in the background, demure and lovely, her suitor across the other end of the room. They were a pair that fate—or Carlo—had seen fit to unite in betrothal.

"No, no, no," said Carlo in the usual Italian way meaning "yes, yes, yes": Giovanni and Natalina would get along very well.

"Of course, the house I will help them out with myself," added Madafferi, "for she's my only

daughter, and I want to do that much for her." They all agreed on a date. It was now May, so September would be fine for the engagement. Giovanni agreed, taking pride in having the opportunity to say yea or nay. But with regards to the wedding . . . now that was a problem.

"I'll have to speak to the caterers again," sighed Carlo, "and see if they can squeeze us in for December. It's not their fault but the council's. All these dances on Saturday nights — if they stopped having them so regularly, maybe the more serious business of having a wedding breakfast could be managed more easily."

Madafferi would personally go along with Carlo to Augustini Catering Service during the week to see what could be done. Don Nunzo was confident that something *would* be done, and judging from what he considered to be the fine, contemporary style of Madafferi's house, the latter would spare no expense in seeing that it would be a grand wedding, and all guests on both sides would be impressed. But the actual details would be worked out at a later date, when the board once more resumed, with Giovanni or his father taking over Carlo's role as chairman.

"Giovanni! Giovanni! Look out, there's a car!" Giovanni jumped in his seat, spinning the steering wheel violently to the left, almost running the Valiant into the gutter, braking frantically at the same time. The other car had screeched out of a side street on Giovanni's right, blasting Giovanni with his horn. Giovanni's cheeks were burning.

"But what are you, mad?" Once again his mother yelled.

No, not mad, but in a daze. She was trailing them, behind, aloft in the air, shy, beautiful, wide-eyed, Natalina, a vision, a wife to be. Who can concentrate on the road when his mind is on such a vision?

"Don't get alarmed, Anna," said Don Nunzo. "He's got other things on his mind!"

"Bella famillia, no?" stated Carlo, lounging back in the car seat.

"She seemed a good girl," commented the mother.

"Si, si, bella ragazza," agreed Don Nunzo, nodding discreetly. "You're fortunate, Giovanni; what a girl, eh!"

Giovanni drank from the cup of contentment which his family and Carlo offered. He would marry a vision, a blushing, shy vision, a little lamb he would overwhelm with his manhood. Wonderful Carlo, wonderful parents, wonderful Valiant.

"Not so fast, Giovanni, you're going too fast!" came the voice from the back seat.

"Shut up, Ma, I know what I'm doing!" came the voice from behind the steering wheel.

WILLIAM R. TANKSLEY

Dear Endeavor II:

Does this ship go to Topeka, Kansas?

On 4 July 1969, American Independence Day and my second day in Australia, I manoeuvred my purple, semi-dependable 1963 Wolseley through a left-hand turn into the right-hand lane of Victoria Road, Drummoyne, six-lanes wide. Australians, three-lanes wide, were driving towards me — Australian commuters, breadmen, housewives, businessmen, taxi, bus, and lorry drivers. Before I could swing right (again into the right-hand lane of, thank God, a side street), what seemed like fifty cars, a dozen trucks, and three lumbering double deckers swept by me on the left and right, centre-laners deftly switching within a few yards of me, the American obstruction. No one honked his horn. No audible profanity. Indeed, none but children seemed to notice anything odd about an old Wolseley puffing up the middle of the wrong side of one of Sydney's busiest highways.

Parked in sweaty post-panic shock, it struck me as odd enough that, upside-down or not, Australians should all drive on the wrong side of the road. But it was positively perverse of them to take so little notice of my act of unintentional defiance and independence. Why, an American would have run into me just as a matter of principle.

Now 4 July was not the hottest day of the year, so it was difficult to bring into play my favorite what-I-had-read-and-speculated-about-Australia-before-I-came principle: that you are all so sun-baked that even when driving you are in a state of permanent sitting-siesta. I was left with choosing among:

(a) All the drivers were drunk on that strong and heavy Australian beer,
(b) All were distraught over heavy gambling losses in your Las Vegas-style clubs,
(c) All were looking at dirty pictures in the *Mirror*,
(d) Everyone was excitedly off to watch kangaroos hop or was going to the outback to shear a sheep,
(e) I did not know.

Being an American, I could not choose (e). And, besides, it had not been for nothing that I had so thoroughly researched Australia and the Australian character before coming here.

In the months to come I was to be a great deal more perplexed and exasperated by Australia. You fit some of my theories, but not all. Clearly you needed much changing.

For eleven months I observed, with shaking head and clucking tongue, that Australians were unconsciously slow, inefficient, and undependable. You seemed more interested in sports, booze, thighs, and sensational crimes than in ideas, your own political system, or the world around you. American entertainers flattered you and you beamed and (not incidentally) bought more tickets; but criticism from foreigners or Australians brought cries of "throw the bloody bastard out". Your children, if boys, established their masculinity by bullying, yet no Australian child would dare to talk back to his parents nor to assert himself vocally like the 'cheeky' American child. Your families, your society, your schools enforced discipline and conformity — and you had tests to assure and prove it. Australians might whinge about the system now and then, but they would not dream of disobeying orders from the top. Your state schools might be fifth-rate while your government underwrites a TV lab studio for SCEGGS, but you accept that, as you accept business and government collusion and

corruption, nineteenth century censorship standards, governmental, professional, and educational leadership and dominance by and for the old landed aristocracy, with the concomitant reward of the world's most inequitable tax structure. And, while vociferously denying any racism in your attitudes toward the 'wogs', you agreed to an immigration policy which might seem rational only if each Sunday afternoon you could stroll across the green to Lancashire.

Let's face it, that's a lot of change for an American visitor to initiate in one year — although it could not be denied by any Australian to whom I preached that I did anything short of my best to win converts and apostles to the messianic faith in a radical new order for Australia.

But it was only in the twelfth month, only as I was preparing to return to the United States that the shock of recognition came: the realization that for eleven months I had been continuously driving down the wrong side of the street. I had demanded that everyone drive on the right-hand side of the road, insisted that the only norm for highway construction, for road manners, was the American one. If Australian society deviated in values and ideals from the American counterparts, that surely bespoke a failure of Australia to reach the ideas and norms upon which any good society must be built. The American people, the American society, the American ideals were what I knew, and that society, that people, those ideals were not merely American but universal and natural lines of human and social nature. Or so I had assumed for eleven months.

I had failed to perceive that different aspirations, different histories and immigration patterns, different economies, cultures, and climates, could and must engender different national visions, different values and ideals, different ways of seeing human nature and society. Australia is not, nor should it be, nor can it ever become a little America down-under. The assumption that men and societies are essentially alike is buttressed by the conviction that the values and dreams and ideals with which I am familiar are the norms by which to measure all men and all societies.

Such reasoning is natural, it is understandable, but it is nonetheless wrong, nonetheless distorting and dangerous. And if my naturally American misconceptions kept me for eleven months from perceiving the real Australia, made my commentaries on Australian society as laughable as those of the English social critics who so frequently bemoan the failure of Australia to be eighteenth century England, so too do Australians fail to understand the world around *them*.

The failure of Americans and Australians to understand each other, though supported by the little tyrannies of distance and lack of contact and the great tyranny of sensational, distorted press coverage, is rooted in three essential differences in outlooks and ideals. Americans and Australians are far apart in their attitudes toward stability, morality, and individualism.

Stability

Perhaps nothing about America frightens Australians more than the conflict, turmoil, confusion, and almost supersonic change which seems to mark so much of the American society. Americans talk about, write about, and live the New Morality, New Politics, New Theology. Revolution and anarchy seem to have swept not only American colleges and cities, but to have sunk unexplainable roots into the deep, rich soil of traditional stability: priests and ministers, government officials, teachers and scholars, scientists and novelists all seem to have joined a mad crusade to destroy the foundations of Western Civilization. There are no voices of reason anymore — no good, grey cardinal, no ageing patriarch of arts or politics crying for Americans to stand by God, country, and the old virtues: thrift, obedience, humility, and order.

Australians have a rage for order, a passion for stability. They assume that change must come slowly, insist that innovations be thoroughly investigated and, if found useful, be incorporated smoothly into the existing structure of society. The Australian assumes that any sort of good life is dependent upon the existence of a dependably *stable* society. The best, most rewarding life can only be lived when the individual can be sure that certain ideals, certain structures, certain patterns will remain substantially unchanged. There must be peace — physical, political, and intellectual peace — before there can be pleasure or meaning.

This desire for a stable society is understandable in Australia, rooted in British traditions and traditionalism, given a history in which peace and stability were not given, but obtained only through struggle and hardship. Given, too, a frontier which rewarded the impetuous, not with lush valleys and a new freedom, but with disappointment or death.

But the Australian too often assumes that all

people, by their common human nature, share the Australian passion for stability. Most Americans do not. If there is an American passion it is the passion for change — a passion reflected, augmented, and explained by almost every aspect of our history: from the very act of *choosing* a new and unknown world, organizing it along radical social lines, from the theocracies of Puritan New England, the democracy of Rhode Island, Lord Baltimore's experiments in religious tolerance in the colony of Maryland, to the utopian communes which have marked American life from colonial days through George Ripley and Margaret Fuller at Brook Farm and Upton Sinclair's Helicon Hall, to the hippie citadels from Taos to Minnesota.

From the Revolution comes the violent overthrow of old tyrannies and traditions and the espousal of the most radical of eighteenth century thought — from Locke to Rousseau and Paine — and all of that reflected in a designedly malleable Constitution. Nor did the frontier do anything to mute the cry for change, for it was the impetuous, the risk-takers who were rewarded with rich new lands to cultivate, with oil fields and gold strikes. And our business history is filled, not with tales of cautious, chartered men, slowly building upon the resources left them through the generations, but of the wild speculations of poor but ambitious men taking chances and reaping rewards. Admittedly our memories are selective. Horatio Alger was a myth, and money has talked with increasing shrillness for over a century. The frontier dramas are filled with folklore, and dreams and ambitions were often laid to rest, as were numerous unlucky frontiersmen, unfortunate of friend, foe or terrain. We know that. But myths are important. Nowhere is folklore so integral a part of the memories and dreams of a people as in America.

In short, the culmination of both history and myth is an America in which most are willing to take the risk of change and suffer the torments of upheaval for the euphoria of seeing and reaching new horizons. This essential difference in character between Americans and Australians reflects itself everywhere — symbolized best, perhaps, by the contrast between the Americans' willingness to give lifetime reign to the President responsible for making the most profound and sweeping changes in American life, Franklin Roosevelt, and the Australians' perpetual love affair with that rock of stability, Robert Menzies.

So Australia accepts a social system of extremely limited mobility: the leaders in politics, education, business, the arts and professions are still most likely to belong to the line of the old British elite. The condition is perpetuated and insured by a separate elitist school system and social systems, and made acceptable, or at least tolerable, by the erection of a "separate but equal" mass society and culture, given pleasure and security, but no power. The American system has always been marked by extraordinary social mobility. If it is becoming increasingly difficult for the self-made man to obtain great wealth, it is nonetheless likely that he will gain power and influence in politics, the arts, the professions, or education, and with a radical voice echoing his anti-Establishment background, he will substantially unstabilize and reshape his society. And even when the reality fails, the myth survives for most Americans.

Everywhere does the American love of change manifest itself in contrast to the Australian attachment to stability. In the field of education not only is the American system given to startling innovations, but it is structured to extend a broad, liberal education, an education for leadership, to as large a number of Americans of all classes as possible. And so American education keeps expanding at a rate inconceivable to Australians, with a greater percentage of Americans finishing college than Australians receiving their leaving certificates from secondary school. The Australian system, training to lead only those elite who will *indeed* lead, and training even those to remember and accept the wisdom of the past, brings as a result the desired stability. Potential carpenters are not exposed to education beyond a carpenter's needs. But the American system, training masses to leadership and demanding that they think, imagine, innovate does, indeed, create an articulate and broadly based leadership. But it creates, too, huge numbers of lumpen-intellectuals, over-trained, over-refined, over-educated to assume the dreary and meaningless roles assigned them in a highly technologized society. The result is frustration, some chaos, and a marked decrease in stability of all sorts. America, so far, is living with that.

So the American accepts as normal the turmoil of political dissent, the existence of various radical movements, left and right, the dangerous but exciting role of America in world affairs, the changes in religion and the activist role of the American churches in seeking social and political and moral change, the violent and exciting nature of U.S. arts, literature, movies, and music — with all of their emphasis on confrontation. American

intellectual life, then, has the vitality of its mixed origins and its preoccupation with originality and innovation.

The lack of concern for stability helps account, too, for the hectic pace of American life, the pressures to excel, the abuse of traditions, and fascination with any and all innovations, no matter how cheap or phony. You may better understand the American New Left when you realize that our different attitude toward stability naturally leads us to be impatient with gradual changes: everything can and must be done *now*. If the American withdrawal from Vietnam seemed frighteningly rapid to some Australians, it seemed unbearably slow to most Americans.

In America there are excitement, involvement, some fear, outlandish errors and brutal crimes and brilliant innovations. Some, surely, seek greater stability. Others, increasingly frightened by what change might mean at this time in history, would welcome stagnation. Most Americans, however, can only be understood in light of the impact which American history and society and mythology has had upon them in making them uninterested in, even suspicious of, stability. If the Australian cannot understand our fascination with change, it is because we are different peoples.

Morality

Another of our outlooks which differs from yours is our view of morality. Perhaps nothing makes us more difficult to understand, nothing is more annoying to foreigners and more dangerous for the world, than the American's excessive concern with morality. He is obsessively moralistic. It seems especially difficult for Australians to understand how extensive and how deep is the American commitment to torturous moralistic analyses of every situation, of every potential act, for the Australian seems by contrast healthily amoral. He is practical rather than rigidly ethical, given to compromise, not absolutes. What guides him is manners, traditions, the rather loose ethical guidelines of western civilization.

It is a truism that the Puritan influence has never died in America, but, like most truisms, it is not often taken seriously. It should be. Whatever the American people have done, they have done at the swell of self-righteous fervor. The Puritan lacerated the sinner, the frontiersman decimated the Indian, stole his land, and robbed his survivors of their identity, not out of the practical self-interest and crude greed with which the Australian wiped out the Aboriginal, but with the righteous indignation and tearful missionary zeal of God's and civilization's appointed executioners.

We fought each other, not for economic reasons, but for God, brotherly love, and a way of life. We did not enter World War I to save a balance of power in Europe nor to solidify our sea trade advantage, but at the pleading of J. Mitchell Palmer and Woodrow Wilson that we avenge crucified Belgian babies. Can we justify Hiroshima because it exchanged hundreds of thousands of Japanese dead for an equal number of American lives? Never. We saved countless Japanese women and children from suicide and bloody massacre and freed a people from tyranny. We have created enormous myths of communist tyranny, of enslaved peoples, because Americans are incapable of fighting a war or pressing a foreign policy for anything so sordid as national self-interest.

Every decision made by Americans is made in the torture of moral analysis. That may be self-delusion, it may even be self-hypnotic madness, but it is hardly hypocrisy. What a stunning revelation it was to come to Australia and discover that neither side of the Vietnam argument presented its case in terms of the morality of the war. Everything was a question of strategy, of risk, of cost, of American reaction. It was all there in dollars, cents, lives bartered for unspoken promises of American support, and everything with the same conviction that there was a Secretary of Accounts in the U.S. cabinet engaged in the same careful and practical calculations.

But the Vietnam war and all future commitments are *moral* questions for every side of American public opinion, in spite of the anti-Vietnam crusaders' attempt to claim all morality for their side (a common and honest practice for all absolute moralists). Are we securing oil rights? Protecting vital crops? Preserving essential military positions? Making Vietnam safe for General Motors? *Never*. We are saving a threatened people from attack, from overthrow, from the imposition of the iron grip of communism. What is important to understand is that Americans, at every level and of every degree of sophistication, *believed* that Vietnam was purely a moral issue. And so, how can we practise that brilliant but amoral British art of diplomacy? How can we compromise? Right is right and expediency is sinful, slothful, hypocritical. If moral right is against us, get out *now*; why delay? Why continue to practise evil? If we are right, carry through, seize victory, destroy evil.

Surely this is madness, a paranoic vision, obsessive myth; but again, it would be unfortunate if you were to underestimate the importance of dream and myth to Americans. In these dreams we are our own law makers, and each law must meet the stern demands of our inner gods. Welfare, unions, defence spending, restrictions on personal liberty are not matters to be thrashed out by compromises, twisted like the arms of Lyndon Johnson's Senate colleagues. Each American demands that the laws embody his particular moral viewpoint and, if the failure is large enough, he will turn to the streets in riots, he will form secret societies, burn crosses or collect guns, crusade, denounce, strike, and burn. Certainly it is the code of the West; but, what foreigners so often fail to understand, it is a code going back far beyond the West, past the eastern frontiers, through the political philosophy of Jackson and even Jefferson, to the earliest roots of American tradition. And perhaps the continuing dichotomy of left and right moral visions can most clearly be seen as the heritage of the Unitarian-Transcendentalist and conventional branches of Puritanism.

Even our immorality must be justified: few Americans simply "make" girls. No adulterous American husband seeks mere physical pleasure. If students live together, it is for a higher, a truer morality. We don't turn on because it provides a pleasant experience: LSD opens our minds, widens our horizons, helps us in our search for truth. Our Robber Barons turned philanthropists, our sadistic murderers are seeking a greater good, a purged and pure society; our looters and burners are employing the new code of political protest, saving future brothers and sisters. Perhaps no one better than Philip Roth in *Portnoy's Complaint* gives a full picture, a profound insight into the perverted insanity of a nation dedicated to scrutinizing its every act with the torching magnifying glass of moral absolutes. To understand Portnoy is to understand a great deal about America: to understand America is to learn and appreciate a great deal about Australia.

Individualism

You might learn a great deal, too, by looking again at the Australian dedication to the older, European model of an ordered society, with everyone knowing and taking his proper place, allowing the whole to function smoothly, the individual submerged within his society to produce the best for the most. The Australian citizen is a part of his society, is less than the whole of his society, is educated, trained, and lightly prodded in the direction of submersion and — it must be said — complacency and conformity.

Again, you tend too often to take this as the standard, the only model on which a people, a society can be formed. But the American is, above everything else, passionately, pugnaciously independent. Perhaps that is our greatest pride. We demand to think for ourselves, to know for ourselves, to criticize and praise by our own lights. We resist regimentation, are tormented by any society which tends to herd or collectivize its people, whatever the reasons, whatever the results. We are frightened by a world in which efficiency, in which mere survival, seems to demand the chipping away of corners and edges of individuality. We abhor the thought of a standardized, die-cut human being and, good Americans, we naturally exaggerate, mythologize the threat.

Our concern for becoming and remaining individual and independent reveals itself in numerous aspects of American life and character, aspects almost universally appalling to outsiders. From the crib, our children are subject to little discipline, little moulding. We allow them, we actually aid them to discover and develop their own individual personalities. And too often, for Australian tastes, they manifest their unique personalities as wall-colorers, canned-goods-knocker-downers, loud, obnoxious, cheeky, and undisciplined creatures.

That process is certainly augmented by our schools, where the student who looks for established truths, correct answers is likely to find himself sinking in a sea of confusion; for American educators, more and more, have left the British tradition and are fostering, instead of memory and acceptance, imagination, personal understanding, spontaneity, and eccentric innovations.

Even our businessmen, our politicians, our movie stars and writers, our educators and religious are finding that the individual, the different, the eccentric approach and personality is more likely to succeed than the best of standard blends.

And so, free and independent, we exact few general laws of censorship. Individuals resent the protection of others. We are, as Australians see us, shockingly self-critical. We seem whingers, spoiled and carping, incapable of satisfaction, fanatical idealists, well-informed but insufferably know-it-all. But we must know, we must criticize, we must express and assert our personal identity.

And, if we don't have one, we must frantically burrow, borrow, or build until we have one of our very own; for one of the prices of national individualism is that you are marked with an invisible scarlet 'C' as conformist and clod unless you have a distinguishable, crystal-clear, shining irridescent, purple-patchy personality of your very own.

And so, there is a constant concern in the United States, not only with the superficials of dress, of doing your own thing, but with the 'Existential dilemma', with the protections of the Bill of Rights, with, above all, individual conscience, individual freedom. For no one in the U.S., left or right, seeks or would tolerate a uniform society, no matter how good or how Great. We demand the freedom to be different, the freedom of each individual to direct, determine, create his own unique life.

And if you find this accelerating growth of the individual society dangerous, you are probably right. It risks chaos, it threatens anarchy, it destroys the stable society — but then Americans have not traditionally been over-concerned with maintaining stability, have they? And what other way to practise morality than individually, each with his own voice and each new missionary bringing what may seem the babble of a thousand different messages into a million corners of the globe and creating that tower of Babel or Babylon which may well mark the twentieth century — America's century, and man's finest or perhaps final century upon this earth.

Ozenfant

His tiny feet patter about
the ballroom, the sawdust, still
in patches, catches between his toes.
He always put the direct question,
took the knock a dozen times
to take the knock, to knock the knockers.
At his sister's: chocolate rings
and a door swings. Love was ever
automobile so that, at the end,
only the inside of his car and he
could rouse him from his fantasy
of naked loss in a ragged cave
of mirrors with a diamond bit
at hand and with nothing to count on.

We were never mathematically inclined,
we had no reason, no rhythm (listen to
the patter of iambiguous feet) but just the same
I figure he would have been three on Derby Day.
Bring out your black bands for the greatest
of them all by a mile and a half. You didn't
claim the visit to the doctor from the HBA
or take the expensive prescription off your
income tax. You let me pay and share the guilt
although I didn't know what you were doing.
He's under the limbo stick where we can't
get at him and who am I to judge that that
is worse than flushing him away unconceived
in a once used wet suit. I stifle myself
on rag poetry, riding the unfancied: oh you bitch,

you beautiful, beautiful bitch.
I harden in the salon's padded chair,
stiffen my cigarette alight, pull the latest
Mad Mode Magazine, covered by a haughty angled model
and her leaning hauteur-hound companion,
from the bare topped casual table.
Beyond the nippled rib-cage, the hot red
penis-tongue panting, two beautiful bitches
strain in their slips, loins ungirdled,
baring their breasts, sheathing their swordlike legs
in preparation for the annual assault.
Near peers, we will deliver our beloved
espoused causes to cut our fellows down
to after-dinner sighs, and each,
according to his confidence, will essay
to shock it to his near superior, or, if not,
to do as best as he can bear
to conform, making our bitches
ladies for the night, surrendering
to the strictures of the leash.

LEON SLADE

Meditation on Wyatt

'Whoso list to hunt'

Here and everywhere I meet your crazy scent
except in dreams — you are too near to dream —
I split envelopes and you fall out

introducing your music, such operatic flowers
in the fields of discourse! your dashes and stops!
Whose is the emblem of a running hound?

I have your world either side of my nose,
to heel! to heel! my sealcoat shining
through harping grasses the fields breathe open

I root and feast no respecter of persons
the rankbrained rulers rankriding bitches
swallowed the festering single eye

down and out deep and bitter the taste
I have run through your dream and muzzle you out
to ground level light and lie on your belly

silky and patient and the dim people
sketch us in pencil: Master & Faithful Hound.
When the horn speaks, we are equal to that sound.

GWEN HARWOOD

The Wasps

To Edwin Tanner

Take up your brush, beloved artist,
paint me a devil forced to wear
a dress of lavender crochet, picture
the broomstick limbs and flaming hair.

It is Sunday; a child's Sunday pictures
lie scattered in loose-fingered grass.
Lolly-colored assorted faces
beam at what God has brought to pass.

Under an orange tree her brother
waddles and crows, absurdly fat.
No godhead skims those rosy features.
Who said, *Be thou on earth* to that?

Bright from horizon to horizon
God's eyespace brims with Sunday prayer.
Somewhere above the blue sits Jesus,
light streaming from his ginger hair.

You told me once you saw in childhood
a vitreous floater in the sky,
believed it Jesus, and determined
he should not enter through your eye.

Your brother (Cain? or Abel?) and a
goanna in the orchard were
enough of scripture when you hunted
the sky in vain for Lucifer.

Two children of the Devil's party —
the years frog-march us place by place
to meet in middle life, still probing
the ambiguities of space.

The sorcerer's apprentice, loathing
her rival in his harmless play,
implores the Friend of Little Children
to take and keep him far away.

His plump hand rests in hers. She leads him
across forbidden garden beds
to trample on the Jesus-gentle
flowers, and strew their torn-off heads

along the orchard path. No murmur
comes from the Sinner's Friend on high.
They reach the shadowy barn and stand there
roofed from the wrath of God's blue eye.

High on a cross-beam wasps, entombing
a lightless banquet for their young,
flourish their tiger-stripes to menace
a child armed with a rake, not stung

before, so fearless. Paint the frantic
confusion as she strikes at them;
paint the long lavender thread, unravelled
in headlong flight, from her ripped hem;

paint her supporting blameless Abel
through Eden spoilt; the mother-saint
forgiving the torn dress, applying
the bluebag. Pain you cannot paint —

not then, not now, when pain assails you
in matchless colors, burning bright,
erasing form, dissolving substance.
You are the shade of its pure light.

When asked once, at an exhibition,
"Do you believe in God?", for fun
you asked the questioner politely
"The Blue God, or the Ginger One?".

When I heard this, the colors took me
through half a lifetime to that day
when I believed the wasps had punished
my sins in God's mysterious way,

probed my black mocking heart and taught me
the foolishness of unbelief.
Now it is pain that I believe in,
saying at your side, like the Good Thief,

"Remember me". Remember talking
late at night of the language game.
"The image of pain is not a picture,"
said Wittgenstein, "is not the same

as anything we call a picture."
Tell me, who can talk sense with pain
when it becomes the body's language
and its unpictured signs remain

a personal mystery affirming
the person in whose breast reside
all deities, beyond games or language,
the problem no one gets outside

to solve. With colors in solution
fix me the opalescent light
of our lost years in solid pigment,
build me art's heaven in hell's despite:

two children bathed in bluebag, sharing
the softness of one earthly breast;
old Nobodaddy's social workers
smoked without mercy from their nest;

picture the tiger-sun declining
as memory lights with equal flame
vestiges of the pain that leads us
to truth beyond the language game.

GWEN HARWOOD

Theft

Who stole my coat? I plead
for whomsoever it was.
If for his children's need
he stole, I can bear the loss
better than I could bear
to taint myself as judge,
morally, of despair
and, sourly so, to begrudge
that thief his very remorse —
a spendthrift, ambushed in debt,
or a mug, maybe, who had bet
his fortnight's pay on a horse.

I turned from a task done
to where my coat was left.
Surely the world spun
then, from shock of the theft
and anger, shattering enough,
over me in a burst —
now only a puff
blown by the years, dispersed;
for though that tailored coat
was the best I have ever had,
better to be meanly clad
in garment than in thought.

One hangs one's life aside
in hours of the day spent
at work for the hand's pride
in its own accomplishment
and for that life too
as fittingly to be worn
again, when a job's through,
the coat for a man's return
to bodily self's brief
lodging with light and air —
the homecoming one may share
with even such as a thief.

ROBERT D. FITZGERALD

A Couple of Books

Somebody told me how you were still interested, so
I grabbed the first bus to your place
with a book or two under my arm. I reached the door
and it was open, depriving me the thrill
of the tentative knock and the holding of my
breath until you came. I walked in without a knock.
It was strange to find you had me on tenterhooks.
Music was in the air. I suppose I'll always
be pretty ponderous: though how could anyone, you
included, know of the wild deliberations
that consume me? When your new friend came back in,
I just couldn't help wondering what you saw
in some one like him, with his humiliating way of looking
people up and down — Oh never mind, but if you
are still going to criticize me, you may
as well know the truth. I'm happy the books you're
always reading are getting you down, and that your idea
of 'compassionate art' is dumb.

ROBERT ADAMSON

Pealed Sundown

droplet,
sunburnt, bells, teutonically
fall, unlaced din/
wept,
my hair, hammering
ears/ wind,
butted rain,
lettering/leaves.

toss . . .
succulent oceans,
mysteriously, toss
the night, so blue,
and rich with fish /drinking
violins!

sunset, whores cress wings,
into a fortune night
embrace/i peal
my sonnets,
silk —
her
person fancy's voice.

IAN HILL

Fred Nurk is Leaving Town

1.

others	others	others	others	others
others	others	others	others	others
others	others	Fred Nurk	others	others
others	others	others	others	others
others	others	others	others	others

2.

Fred Nurk is going South

He canna go North
He canna go East
He canno go West.

BEN WALLACE CRABBE

TWO POEMS BY BROOKE MURPHY

Friends

My friend, walks now
over printed flowers
in grey fields to warm
the tips of his yellow
ears; (carefully) dressed
in his graphic camouflage
tattered only by green
holes to show the accept-
able intellectual monkey suit
within (hardly happy at
picnics)

My other friend, who is
sometimes me, leaps between
blue pools in blue fields
only slightly troubled by
the eternal mis-calculation
of each blue footed jump.
As he says: "For some, ink
between the toes may be
enough".

Trotters Training

and every afternoon across
the road and down the hill and
through the still poplars
(secret) trotters are training
disguised in the heat and
their long dusty tails.

(vivian says they are going the
wrong way round.
i (smartly) say they race at night
and it depends on the state you're in)

till they unwind themselves
once (somewhere else) in a frantic
swing time swirl of legs (nothing else)
that flows close by in the dark
cool night through the goblets of icy light
& the drivers suitably dressed in silk.

Moon-man

Stranded on the moon,
a librium dreamer in a lunar landscape,
the tabloids were full of your blurred, blown-up face,
the neat curled head, the secret animal eyes,
immolated forever in the Sea of Tranquillity.

I keep getting messages from outer space,
"Meet me at Cape Canaveral, Houston, Tullamarine."
A telegram came through at dawn to the Dead Heart Tracking Station.
I wait on winter mornings in hangars
dwarfed by grounded crates like giant moths
  furred with frost.

Moon-pictures — you dance clumsily on the screen,
phosphorescent, domed, dehumanized,
  floating above the dust,
your robot voice hollow as bells.

The crowds queue for the late edition,
scan headlines avidly, their necks permanently awry,
looking for a sign, a scapegoat, a priest, a king:
the circulation is rising.

They say you have been knighted in your absence,
but those who swear they know you best,
assert you are still too radical to accept the honor.

They have sent several missions,
but at lift-off three astronauts fried,
  strapped in their webbing.
Plane-spotters on penthouse roofs
have sighted more UFOs.

Sometimes I go out at night
  to stare at the galaxies.
Is that your shadow, weightless,
  magnified in light,
man's flesh enclosed in armor,
suffering eyes in perspex looking down,
sacred and murderous from your sanctuary?

DOROTHY HEWETT

The Ballad of Willie Three Sticks

Grab your fireside women & jump from th hot hotel
for I've got a longer tale than any of you to tell
about our Willie Three Sticks / who went to a boys' boys' school
& a record of th needle where he just went round playin' it cool

he was hung in th drug squad gallery & his fingerprints were famed
up in Queensland it's not just portraits that get framed
his friends were told there's NO WHEELS TURNIN' they couldn't buy him free
& when they asked who th man in blue replied th POWERS THAT BE

I'm not in that scene said Willie when they told him to strip bare
& stared ahead his eyes quite dead as they cut his weepin' hair
Boggo Road on mushies O it seemed a stern reproach
th cop was a martian & green-fingered with a roach

O like an ancient drag queen with Woman's Weekly by his bed
poss dang drugs upon th door & less hairy on th head
fittin' end to a winter on other people's floors
agreein' with th wallpaper & th automatic door

& he went to court with shaven head rinsed Silver Magic White
which came off purple on his pillow & under fluorescent light
he denied that he was runnin' th wrong way in th human race
he was from another planet brought to trial at this place

he was still trippin' when they asked him to make his plea
he said he was a mutant & from good family
& th judge was fair though he turned full square when Willie cried lies
forsooth
said try / I put it to you that you are not tellin' th truth

a month of remands twice a week before he got th charge dismissed
it was th section of th Health Act that dealt with Total Bliss
th D.S. were like little girls expectin' to be kissed
mutterin' I'll kill th bathtard with a lithp

Willie Three Sticks looked around then went & bought a hat
th dole office said too cavalier & that was th end of that
then they sent him to saw mills & brick yards & took away his form
& left him with no grass no horse no sniff to raise a storm

& friends like trains & no more gone or bent
th kind that stop you & ask you what you meant
& nod so many heads so many heads O so far out in space
& mention a book they read by a person in a very high place

discussin' whether relationships & if Anzac Day meant war
like th thighs of a middle-aged American woman shore shore shore
& th heavy stopped him dealin' with a shotgun full of speed
Willie Three Sticks hitched to Sydney till th heavy head o deed

& he came back with a stripper & he came back with a plan
to pimp off th earnin's of th common workin' man
but th lady said she loved him & she wouldn't turn a trick
he was back down on th railways shiftin' sleepers with a pick

maybe yr m' woman
maybe 'm yr man
maybe is th monkey
'n th monkey he doan know

so be m' maybe baby
till th monkey go
but he began to swing it sour
& to sing it kinda slow

& he sang as he fled from billabong to yarrawong
who'll come a washin' th mantelpiece with me?
wangaratta as he lurg & wagga wagga woolloomooloo
who'll come a washin 'th mantel piece with me?

now Willie was no jockey for he stood at fourteen hands
he could run like a white arab across the burnin' sands
he thought he was an owner but he was ridden by a grin
she was oiled she was necked she was nosed & tipped to win

anyhow he got married to a glossy woman & home
before long she'd lost her marbles on th stairway Titus Groaned
Lolita's in th nursery with her pacifier honed
behind th bars of her cot in a world of her own

so he claimed he was an alchemist in th sixteenth century
& suddenly declared not out when th boss came round for tea
they sent him to get sanitized in a pressin' while y wait
& drew his head a weather map when he muttered half past eight

they got him down to quarter to & let him out again
with a measurement of sanity & a certificate to explain
& an almanac of moon & tides & a boy scout in his brain
to blow th whistle on him when he knotted up in pain

now Willie took his weekend acid whenever he could score
Sunday sex in a state house like his father had before
& he & his woman made star love in th universal womb
but he began to write for poetry & it all rhymed with tomb

Willie Three Sticks Willie Three Sticks with yr longin' all in chrome
all th way home all th way home
y came unbuttoned wher yr realised that / for all yr skill with domes
yr little dolly couldn't take you / all th way home

all th sad rooms that he'd lived in where th pin-ups flapped like ghosts
& th summer girls with blancmange eyes all along th pavlova coast
O some are topped with cherries & some are topped with cream
yr twenty-five next Christmas kid & it's all passed like a dream

Willie Three Sticks back on th road found his old friends refugees
his wife she sued for maintenance but she wrote him "watch for d's"
he disappeared / it's not known where — th desert hides all things
wanted men & shiftin' sands & joeys perched in slings

"Such a bare-forked creature as thou art" / was a Willie Three Sticks quote
from old Bill Shakespeare back of Bourke / now up on th heavenly Tote
come all you yawnin' city women with th chemicals on yr breath
with a stake in Willie Three Sticks & th insured blue skies of death

forgive th lone deserter who's th hero of this rave
at least he was no vampire & he loved no opened grave
for women they will rise again as all things rise & fall
& Willie Three Sticks will go under with a smile on his dial

ERIC BEACH

GRACE PERRY

Road Train

Sim stared straight ahead, both hands clenched upon the wheel. Purposefully he forced himself to relax. He hunched shoulders, first one and then the other, wriggled his back, stretched and flexed the moist fingers. He reached for a piece of soiled cotton waste under the dashboard and wiped his hands and the wheel sticky with dust and sweat. The beeping horn annoyed him. What did they want? Those little cars thought they owned the road. The side mirror showed the blue and white Holden. Must have passed him twice already. He swore and edged over. Now, what were they waiting for. Nothing in sight for miles.

The family waved hands and handkerchiefs as if they were old friends as they sped past. Must be on holidays with that luggage rack on the roof. Sim was showered in their swirling wake. He could not understand anyone being on that road for pleasure. He let the Holden draw well ahead as he reclaimed the crest. He wondered why they kept on stopping. Never get far that way. To make the range before sundown he'd have to hit it hard and keep going.

Should have been able to take the whole haul easily in the one lap. He'd be glad to be rid of this lot. His broad nostrils twitched at the odor of the cargo, a triple decker crate of sheep for slaughter. Packed up tight they were too. Less damage that way. This lot were in pretty poor shape. Some half-dead already, if you asked him. One had put a leg through the sidewire on loading and been too weak to get it back.

He could see the others crowding in, trampling it, and hear the pitiful bleating diminishing as hoofs pounded on the helpless head. Fine mess that would be to clean up. There was always something.

Sim had no fondness for the animals. It was just a job. Thirty-five cents a mile. That's all. And jobs were not easy to get after the long dry.

Amazing how a man could move so many sheep all by himself. The strength swelled within him. Well, not really alone. He'd never make it, never be able to handle them, the loading and the unloading, without Danny Boy. His left arm with the sleeve rolled up groped across the cabin to pat the black and tan kelpie, head back, mouth open in a pink delicious yawn. Not much on looks the dog, the black right ear turned down like the corner of a book, the grey blotch below evidence of some previous war. The rough tongue relished his fingers.

He withdrew his hand and smeared it down his shirtfront. Under the armpits the stain of sweat spread to the waist. The dog yawned again and settled himself, head on forepaws resting against his left knee.

A man must be mad to set out mid-morning. All Julie's fault. He cursed her aloud with unusual venom.

He flipped down the tattered sunvisor and without looking up fingered the faded snapshot clipped to the back. He did not need to see the eager features, the shining blonde hair blurred by constant handling.

Sure, she'd been beautiful. At least to the boy from west of Walgett, she'd been beautiful. Wild and beautiful as those birds flying over, those great white cockatoos.

Sim sucked sunburned lips. He'd almost forgotten what mortadella tasted like. No fancy sausages in the bush. Tony the Greek in the cafe by the picture show was O.K. for steak and eggs and chips. Great on hamburgers. Best damn hamburgers in the whole west. Everything in them. A man had to have a mighty mouth to get round it

all in the one bite without the sauce or a straggle of lettuce spilling down the chin. You had to hand it to Tony.

But neither he nor his black-eyed sister were a patch on Julie when it came to something fancy like the sandwiches for the famished factory hands she used to dream up in that flywire enclosure of hers.

Sim was used to brown women. Varying intensities of brown produced either by prolonged exposure or heredity, or a bit of both.

And back home he'd seen plenty of babies kept in flywire cots, "Meat safes", was the local name. So it was not surprising that he saw Julie as another baby — Julie of the white face, white hands, white uniform. From the first glance his thoughts, like a stone settling slowly through a sunlit pool, developed overtones and secret significances.

He squirmed in the seat and tugged his trousers. Phew. It was hot. Must be nudging the century, and hardly into summer.

His throat was dry with the powdery dryness of hours of travel. His mouth tasted stale, as if he had recently belched garlic and peppercorn. He ran the tip of his tongue along the backs of the upper teeth. No relief. No sweetness anywhere.

He remembered the canvas waterbag swinging on the front bumper. He bet it would be getting the dust right through it. Funny thing dust. It could taste like metal. It could taste like blood. It could get anywhere. Into a man's nails and hair. Into his lungs turning the lumps of pink sponge into red stone. That's how it felt when he coughed. He even imagined the particles penetrating the skin. Sometimes when he washed up at the pub at the end of a haul, he was red all over. Hard to wash it all away. And then it left tell-tale rings of red scum around the white enamel bath.

He leaned out to clear the mirror with the butt of his hand. It clouded again with the whirlwind of his own creation.

One day, he supposed, all the roads would be bitumen. Black streams shining between shoulders of earth baked and cracked as the face of an old woman.

Ahead, the road unwound over the plain, a bandage soaked in old blood—no, a red sword narrowing into the distance. His grey eyes squinted through the speckled windscreen in an effort to penetrate the haze. He wondered how far he could really see. There was always the illusion that sunlight is forever, the straight road dividing ocean of Mitchell grass, a knife at the breast, the lon flash, from here to whatever.

Sim's head hurt.

Past the floodway signs ribbons of swamp edge both sides and he was isolated from the land Bright tongues of light along the powerlines re minded him he was not entirely alone.

They took him by surprise, that clump o charred trees gaunt as girl children by dry water holes.

Funny that there were still surprises.

What a kid he'd been. The feeble erections whe he'd read those books or sneaked to town Satur day to some foreign film. No girls like that i Walgett. And the dreams.

But they hardly bothered him until he knev Julie. Must've been six months in the city already Job to job, and then the wireless factory. He' trailed the crowd into the sandwich shop.

She breathed through her mouth as if she'd bee running. Plump breasts rustled the white starche front like wind in ripe wheat, while the dough fingers sprinkled shredded lettuce on a mound o pink salmon. Then the face creased with concen tration, tip of the tongue gripped between th teeth as she pressed the bread together, and wit a dramatic gesture of the big knife sliced righ through. No wonder the formica bench wa scarred with her strokes.

To Sim it was a revelation. The gates ha opened a chink and he had glimpsed the ligh within. She leaned over, breasts bulging toward him where the top button threatened to give way and he knew then for what purpose his weepin penis was intended.

"Will that be all?" She was actually speakin to him. She repeated the question. He swallowe and nodded.

She wrapped the sandwich in tissue and droppe it into a brown paper bag torn with one swif vicious tug from a nail in the edge of the shel behind her. She took the bag by the corners an executed a professional flip. The sandwich per formed a complete revolution. She opened th sliding panel and offered it to Sim, holding it b the mutilated ear.

He accepted it into oilstained hands and backe away.

Each lunchtime he planned what he would say He took to carrying a greasy comb in the bac pocket of his overalls, washing his face an hands and splashing water on his wiry hair, rakin

it back from his forehead and slapping the sides down roughly before venturing into the sandwich shop. He tried to saunter in with a jaunty air, but the preparations invariably made him late and he had to stand in line and wait his turn with mounting annoyance while she smiled and joked with other men.

Sometimes he wondered about her. What she did when she was not in the shop. Maybe . . . he felt the beat of blood, the straining against the trousers. A fellow's mad to let a bit of skirt get him that way. And she was older . . . she must be . . . so calm and sure of herself . . . motherly almost.

His nostrils contracted as he breathed in deeply when she looked up at him—as if he could inhale her—suck her body right into himself.

"What'll it be today? Beef's good. And there's a new one on the board—Hawaiian Salad."

The prospect of change disturbed him. His future was threatened.

"What's that?"

With the point of a buttery knife she indicated a yellow plastic bowl holding a lumpy colorless mess. He was not impressed.

"Apples and nuts and stuff in mayonnaise. You'll like it." She had made up his mind for him.

"O.K." Maybe she didn't mean anything. He shivered as she separated two bits of buttered bread with clawlike fingernails, splashed a spoonful of salad on one, and spread it about with the back of the spoon.

He knew it then. "Reckon I love her." Doubts attacked him like a swarm of flies. What if . . .? What did it matter? What did anything matter? Get a load of those breasts. Man could make a meal of them. He just bet her legs would be strong.

He felt the excitement. Wished he could see all of her properly—no high counter or flywire in between.

He was out in the street again before he knew it, the brown paper bag blotching and softening with melting grease and sweat.

Weeks later in the scrap of park by the harbor with the sound of water beating a soft accompaniment, he'd told himself again, "Reckon I must love her."

So that was what love was all about. Of course he'd heard talk. But that was impersonal. Always happening to some other fellow. He'd been invited sometimes, but could never bring himself to go with a group on a "gang bang", frightened of his inexperience, his inadequacy. Sim couldn't sift fiction from fact.

But Julie lying back on the damp grass, her hands about his head, was real enough. When he looked down he could see her thighs spread like a dead bird in the moonlight. He shuddered then. He wanted to be sick. He hoped she didn't notice anything.

Her big soft legs pressed unexpectedly across his back, her feet locked behind him and they rolled over dangerously down the slope. For a moment she loomed above him and there was the whiff of garlic on her breath.

Strange the things a fellow could get used to.

By day he made his body behave like a machine, stooping over the moving assembly line until back and shoulders ached, and at night he acquired pains in other places.

Once a stone beneath him grazed his buttock. Once bull ants raised atrocious weals. Julie was oblivious to his personal comfort until mission accomplished, her head sagged on his shoulder and beside him on the grass she dozed to sleep. He learned to wait for the altered rhythm, the gentle snore, before attempting to withdraw to a safer distance.

She began to talk about getting married. Probably it would have remained no more than talk, but the factory was taken over, and he found himself out of work.

Day after day, he searched the advertisement columns and trudged with increasing despair from possible job to job.

He should have known how it would be. Surely he had the warning. She berated him about his impotence and, perched upon his thighs, attempted to remedy his deficiences.

Sim couldn't help it and he didn't care.

Yet, she had become a habit and he missed her ministrations on those evenings he stayed away.

That was how it was. Women get under your skin for sure, if you let them. Drag a fellow by the flaming balls.

It took two months of torture for Sim to admit the city had him beaten. It was that last job cleaning at night that got him down. Doing the 5.30 shift meant no Julie. Then weekends she wouldn't let him alone. His landlady had words to say about it: "Disgusting behavior . . ."

He cursed the bedsprings and their miserable squeak—like an ancient see-saw working with a fat child standing astride the fulcrum leaning with one leg and then the other—up, down—up,

down—banging each end against the sand-pit.

He didn't get worked up. It was pretty much routine. Sometimes if he let himself go, he could beat her to the finish. He knew that drove her mad. She would whimper and bite her lip and try to coax him back again.

That last day there was sun through the window. She had insisted on pulling up the blind. The light confused him. Made it all different. He blinked and tried to focus on the white spots of her brown dress crumpled on the chair but the spots magnified and blurred and danced before his eyes. He struggled to get his breath, her weight upon him. He knew he would have to get away, get out of there.

Yet the old place was no solution. Time had contracted the miles of spreading green. At the end of summer the earth was red-brown reaching to a pale horizon, flat as a plate with here and there the charcoal squiggle of a tree. The thin sheep nosing scanty grass clumps were not the animals of the lush pastures he remembered. He had never seen so many dead sheep as that season. Someone should do something about it. Puffs of discolored wool clung to the barbed wire.

And in the two years he had been away his parents had changed incredibly. His father, sturdy as stringybark, had lost the youthful resilience. Most of the time he was little different from any city drunk.

His mother's face, grooved and furrowed by the torrents of other seasons' storms, had fallen away, become expressionless as a dry creek bed. Mud colored. That was all you could call the skin. Mud colored.

Even the house was smaller and shabbier. From a distance, the sun dancing on the corrugated iron roof so that it gave off flashes of rippling light, no longer amazed him. The spidery bushes of broom around the verandah, the passionvines screening the makeshift lavatory, gave him no joy.

There was a restlessness upon him.

Sundown he watched the pink and grey galahs settle to sleep in the shade tree by the house and he had the urge to shout out or shoot at them to drive them away.

And in the morning when they rose up screaming together as if on signal, it seemed that their breast feathers were smeared with blood.

Then his father died. None of the heroic deaths he may have dreamed. Nosedived the Chev. over a timbered causeway and concertinaed it early one Sunday.

Must have been some party. Sim remembered the smell of that stifling morning.

Steering wheel had punctured the chest. Dried blood everywhere sizzled with flies.

Quite a business. Cranes tugging the battered chassis. Sim wished they'd left it and covered it over where it was. It could be months, years maybe, before the next big wet, and then maybe it wouldn't be enough to fill that creek.

Didn't even look human, the old man. Not like anyone he'd known. Head cut about and pulped like chook food.

Then the note from Sydney. Blue paper, cheap scent. Julie was pregnant. Same old Julie. Just come right out with it. No beating about the bush. She took it for granted he'd want her. He'd checked the date. She'd be there already at the pub at the rail terminal.

He folded the letter up again and slipped it back into the envelope. It seemed fatter. It did not want to go. He hid it in the drawer among his underpants and singlets, but the odor rose up and followed him. Lavender, or was it violets? It stuck to his fingers, and he imagined it was dark and tacky as blood.

He supposed he could find an excuse to go up to town Saturday. Only the truck, the same rattley affair. Not much to cart. Maybe he should get it fitted out. Might be O.K. as a sheep crate. Money in that, if you could believe the talk. Why, a man could . . . He would not have admitted he was making plans.

Julie had infected the pub bedroom with the robust cleanliness of the sandwich bar. It smelled of soap. No flies here. The sheets could have been extra-thin bread, and he was undoubtedly the filling in the sandwich. With her head rolling and moaning, she tasted and approved.

Sim was never sure himself that she was pregnant — before, that is. But certainly she was pregnant later. It didn't matter.

For once she was all softness and submission. It frightened him the way she agreed without a murmur to everything he suggested. Maybe it would be O.K. to be married. He knew plenty who'd done all right.

He supposed the kids made a difference. Jack and Jocylyn and then the twins.

He supposed he was happy. But he couldn't have explained to anyone or even to himself the sense of liberation he got away on a job. He took longer and longer hauls. Anything to anywhere, he used to joke. Just him and Danny Boy. Why

that dog was more use to a man than any woman with her whining and her whims.

Sure, his mother had always warned him, but he took no notice. Should have been awake to what she was all along. His sense should have told him.

His eyes smarted with dust. He brushed the back of his hand across his forehead. There'd been so many, and he didn't know the half of it. Swore at the old woman and called her names when she'd tried to tell him. Knocked her down once, his own mother. Funny how a man won't listen when he doesn't want to hear.

Whatever she did in town, that was different. It didn't touch him. But the fencer behind the tank-stand in broad daylight. The children could have seen. That was too bloody much.

Everything had conspired to delay him. He was already late when the lean bushman had asked for water and he had waved, "Help yourself."

Must've had it arranged between them. Expected him to be on the road, miles away. If it wasn't for that empty waterbag, he'd never have found them.

There was bitterness in his mouth. He sucked in his cheeks, stuck his head out and spat. The glob struck the side wall of the cab and trembled glistening, reluctant to fall.

The stench of sheep rolled over him. He stared at the way ahead. Potholed. Have to be careful. Should soon be coming to the bitumen. New highway sure made a difference. No more night stopovers by the road. He must be travelling some. He could feel the sway of the crate behind him being tossed from side to side like one giant body.

He forced himself to concentrate on the driving, reciting the towns that would flash past before he reached the city limits, the resting paddocks.

Never make it before closing time. Marie at the Golden Eagle, an insignia left from times when bar and barmaids had serviced a nearby military establishment, would be disappointed if he were late, or would she?

He wondered why he liked his women older. She must be near fifty that one if she was a day. With her he felt secure. When her great arms closed like sails about him, he was a grey bird sleeping in an ancient tree.

He shifted in the seat. His left leg was always getting pins and needles. He tried to stretch it out. The dog lowered his head in sympathy and settled himself for sleep.

Strange how it affects a man, the long miles driving across the plains. The signs, the ditches, the culverts. And for miles—nothing. No fences some places—straggles of sheep crossing. He was often afraid he'd hit one; yet, no matter how fast he travelled, the wheels scattering showers of stones, the animals managed to trot out of the way and he never did.

Sundown over to the right of him. The sky pinned out like a cloth of gold and still no fall in temperature. No wind. The moon was already up, a sliver of fingernail, a ghost of a moon.

No trace of coolness. A man could cook in the cabin of his truck. He was melting surely. The shirt stuck to the skin.

He wished the sun would be gone and get it over with.

Under the occasional trees a tinge of blueness and a wisp of mist, and far off to the south the crease of mountains.

He would have sworn that it was real. Over in the east where endless low scrub had stretched a moment ago, the vision of mountains. Not the grey-blue humps that he would cross later, but strange high tops disappearing into cloud and snow. White troughs of snowfields, and below, rock eroded into scarps and shingle fans. A harsh landscape.

Shaggy foothills seemed to advance upon the thread of road. And there were darker patches he could not at first make out, but as he approached he recognised with satisfaction, almost affection, the tortured outlines of vines and olive trees.

He searched the hills for signs of habitation.

And then he saw the man. He was not surprised. It was something he had waited for a long time —way back—since the bible stories of his youth told by a high-pitched female voice to the handful of barefoot children in the leanto shed by the tiny wooden structure they dignified as "Church".

The bearded man in the long robe that may have been white was somehow familiar. Sim couldn't see the feet. He seemed to glide towards the road at the head of a small flock—no more than fifty sheep at the outside. How could he make a crust like that? And the sheep were different.

Under the flowing headveil, bound with two black twisted cords, the face was blackened by years of sun. Sim slowed down.

They were in the road ahead of the truck, the man talking in a loud singsong voice in a weird language like nothing Sim had heard. He was walking straight ahead, unaware of any danger, unaware that his sheep had split into two groups,

one head down devouring a rich patch of grass.

He had crossed over. His head and shoulders glowed against the lowdown sun when he turned and saw the stragglers. Sim was sorry he could not get a good look at that face.

Then he called. At least, Sim supposed it must have been a call. Animal sounds in some primitive pattern. A kind of chant, over and over. The sheep looked up in the direction of the sound and gave an answering bleat. Then heads lowered again into the green.

Again the call. This time, a single sound. One animal heard and jogged obediently across the road. The others turned to one another in confusion. The truck was almost upon them. They were unsure what to do. At the last moment they scampered across, jostling one another. The last one was smaller than the rest and appeared to be lame. Sim tooted and almost scuttled it. The broad flat tail must have touched the bumper bar. There was a thud. Then it was away.

Funny thing, sheep with tails like that. In the rear-vision mirror Sim watched the tall figure of the man moving west through the dust and the sheep following.

Danny Boy sat up and barked, his skin quivering. Sim stroked his head.

Then there was nothing behind the truck except the dust, the road, the sprawling plains.

Dropping dark. Never make it.

The crossroads, the highway, the broad bitumen.

Home and hosed. Lips drawn back, Sim began to whistle, the steamy breath squeezed tunelessly between his teeth. The old truck could just about steer herself from here on in. Used to it all right. Running like a beaut.

Sim shifted his thighs and rotated his shoulders, arms stretched, hands slack upon the wheel. He let his aching back settle against the worn leather. He thought of the sheep—how they were feeling back there. Did sheep feel anything? Sim wondered if they knew they were going to die.

Rot, he told himself. Going soft in the head. But the doubt persisted, mile after mile.

It was quite dark except for the two wavering beams of the headlights, the slip of moon and one star hung low in the west. Sim cleared his throat and spat in the direction of that small and ineffectual light.

Sometimes, well away from the road, the flicker of a house, or closer, brighter clusters of small towns. To Sim they were all the same. He didn't bother to put names to them. They were not going any place, cut off from him, from the bulleting motor by rivers of dark.

Sim was sealed into himself. He had been hungry so long he had forgotten about food, and thirsty so long he had forgotten the waterbag rattling in front. Maybe the sheep were hungry and thirsty too. Someone had told him sheep could go two days without feeling it. He doubted that. He wouldn't like to find out.

He pressed down hard with his right foot. Illuminated in the greenish dashboard glow, the needle inched further to the right. The speed did not renew his strength as it used to when he was younger. His head ached. The hot wind rushing through the open cabin made it worse. He squeezed his eyes shut. There was the waving red and green tracery of fern burning the sockets. Always like that when he was tired driving at night.

He shook his head, blinked twice and opened again. Something hurtled at the windscreen. There was the sickening crunch of impact. Like a rifle-shot, the glass exploding. For a moment it sparkled white and opaque as a sheet of snow and did not fall. And somewhere outside, the wrench and shriek of metal, the animal noises.

Sim felt himself being crushed in slow motion —legs, abdomen, chest—his face being smothered, his head bursting. Unconsciousness was a huge bird, beak and claws tearing his flesh into strips of pain. He burned and bled and her weight was upon him.

Above the roaring engine he heard the raucous laughter become a gurgle of froth and he saw Julie of the white skin on the ground behind the tank—the water dripping slowly on the spreading pool of blood. . .

The truck lay on its side against an embankment where the road curved. The gates of the crate were open. Danny Boy supervised the descent of the terrified sheep.

A few from the top deck took off as if they could fly and fell and did not get up again, but he was up there after the rest of them, yelping and urging, climbing over their backs and heads to push them out safely. Sheep slithered over the tilted floor, tumbling over one another into the road. Some leapt to the top of the ridge and tottered down.

And beyond the cutting were trees and grass and a creek of running water. And when they had refreshed themselves, the dog rounded up his flock on the bank and they settled down to sleep and wait.

The Short Stories of John Morrison

A. A. PHILLIPS

John Morrison began his march towards becoming an Australian writer when he rebelled against employment in the English north-country museum of which his Presbyterian father was curator, and took to the sea. That life-accepting initiative explains much in his writing, but I believe that nearly as much is explained by the nature of his background; for the values which Morrison's writings assume and express are often the values of certain conformisms, positively accepted and practised with strength. That is also the tradition, on its best side, of those whom we call Nonconformists; and that best side is often best achieved in the northern sections of the United Kingdom.

Such a statement about the practitioner of an art must seem derogatory and is likely to be resented by Morrison's admirers—who could produce apparently convincing evidence in its refutation. But I believe it is neither unjust nor derogatory.

So improbable an assertion demands the wariness of an oblique approach to its justification. Let me begin, then, with a proposition that cannot arouse argument—that Morrison was certainly no conformist to the fashionable trends in the writing of his time. He adopted old-fashioned methods of story-writing, and there was a certain square-jawed determination about his rejection of modernisms.

Lying behind his acceptance of old-fashioned methods is a conception of the nature of literature which strongly influences his work. He saw it as a way of commenting on the lives of men; he did not see it as a way of revealing the nature of the Life of Man (with certain important exceptions to this principle I shall deal later). That, of course, implies a real limitation; but it also refreshingly separates Morrison from the ruck of writers who insist upon attempting what only the greatest can achieve. In defence of his position, he might claim: "If I can get my observation of the lives of men accurate and honest, something about the Life of Man will emerge; that must be left to take its chance".

Such an attitude inevitably affects his approach to technique. He does not see story-writing as the achievement of Significant Form. What the story has to tell about men and their lives is what alone matters. Form is important only in helping that purpose. That does not mean that his technique is off-hand or sloppy. It is carefully carpentered, with a particularly alert awareness of the value of the evocative ending. It is easy to miss the degree of skill which Morrison has often expended on his structuring. In "The Nightshift", for instance, the description of the river crossing seems merely matter-of-fact, without memorable phrase or hint of fine writing. But it not only accurately conveys the scene, it communicates the mood of the romantic adolescent through whose eyes we are looking. But, where no such special need calls forth a special engagement in method, Morrison is quite content to let the stories clump along in working-boots.

How far he carries his principle of the supremacy of the comment on life can best be seen in the early stories of the wharfside. They are thinly represented in the recently issued paper-back of his selected stories, presumably because most of them are not "stories" by any acceptable formal definition of the term. They exist in a no-man's-land lying somewhere between documentary and fiction. Their rejection might therefore seem reasonable; but it ignores the truth that the hybrid nature of the form there employed is rightly conceived for the kind of comment which these pieces make.

Primarily Morrison wants here to speak for the

wharfies, to bring to his readers an understanding of their problems and a justification of their approach to industrial politics. But straight documentary or political argument could not achieve his purpose, because it was the human situation creating the political attitudes which he wanted to illuminate. For that he needed the intimacy of created dialogue and individualised characters. The hybrid method which results ignores theories of "artistry", but the result justifies the means. As a commentator has said, "after reading them one will never again glance at a newspaper report about a waterside dispute or a rationalisation plan without a new life starting between the dull lines".

That illumination works most effectively when the impulses of the fiction-writer predominate over the insistences of political engagement. "Nine O'Clock Shift", for example, is a simple account of a gang's resistance to a decision to continue work over the week-end; but it probes the nature of sea-front industrial politics probably better than "Black Cargo", which traces the course of a famous confrontation between left and right Labor Party cliques, accurately recording the historical facts. Nevertheless "Black Cargo" probably tells the uninformed more about how Labor politics in the post-war era really worked than most economic historians are likely to convey (or know), despite some distortions through partisan emphases.

In the best known of these stories, "Going Through", it is again the deployment of an artistic mode which communicates most effectively. Morrison here wants to convey the pride of solidarity built about membership of the Waterside Workers' Federation, the frontline infantry brigade of the ports' industrial battles. The detail of the account of the admission of new members to the WWF is rather less humanly informing than is usual in a Morrison story, always built on the meticulous observation and selection of detail. The vigor of the pride is rather conveyed in the rhythms which the narrative achieves. One wonders, if one has the intrusive curiosity of the critic, how far Morrison conceived this rhythmic method as a deliberated ploy and how far it ran unsummoned from his mind's engagement with his theme to his pen.

These stories, which in some respects stand apart from most of Morrison's work, particularly well illustrate one of its persistent characteristics. The men with whom he is concerned are those placed in the lower half of the economic scale. "Upper class" figures appear usually in response to a plot-demand, and are shallowly conceived. Most of them, indeed, are variants of the same figure: rigid of mind, formal of manners, deep-frozen in feeling and ridden by a harsh and egoistic possessiveness. They are the creations of a Socialist Realist writer rather than of a social realist—and usually Morrison can justly claim the more honorable title.

Any fiction-writer of good sense is likely to stand on the social ground where he feels most at home, most capable of achieving sympathy with his characters. But Morrison achieves something rarer in a writer than sympathy: he stands not merely on the side of his proletarians but among them. He responds to life as they do—or at least he successfully creates that impression. There is no trace in him of the artist's usual claim to membership of the élite of special sensitivity or superior imaginative vitality (a confrontation between him and Norman Lindsay, that propagandist for the aristocracy of the artist, might have been fun, unless Norman had borne him down by the sheer impetus of his volubility turned against a personality with little taste for verbal pyrotechnics). His work implies that men are most men (and, perhaps, most Man) when they are most ordinary.

He determinedly restricts his art to the sphere of the actual—and once almost truculently declares for it. "The Man in the Night" is a slight and peaceful sketch of a child's experience. Unusually, Morrison's first-person narrator is here the central figure in the story, which suggests that it is autobiographic. At the end of this tranquil piece of relaxed reminiscing, Morrison suddenly leaps to his feet and hurls a hand-grenade:

"That was the day that I learned for all time that the creatures of fable and fantasy are never half as nice as the creatures of real life".

That would seem sheer treason to whole tribes of writers who believe that the aim of art is to achieve the fables which will reveal truth—and with them stands their archetype, the great artist myth-maker of ancient Athens who held that Reality lies outside our cave of shadows. Morrison takes a stand opposing Plato, only in part because he enlisted with Marx.

In conformity with his view he uses a largely objective approach, save when he feels called to battle in support of a temperately militant leftism. For him, the story-writer's duty is to observe and report. Strangely, at first thought, his objectivity is indicated by his preference for first-

person narrative; for his narrators are usually observers stationed on the fringe of the action, noting its course. Such a viewing-point denies the writer the opportunity to move inside the head of a character and report his thinking—a resource almost essential to a fiction-writer who is really writing about his own extra-ordinariness, or assaying to illuminate the Life of Man (which is, in the practice of the less great, often much the same thing). As I have said, that indicates a limitation to the degree of Morrison's penetration—it is perhaps significant that two of his most humanly revealing stories—"The Nightshift" and "Morning Glory"—discard the first-person method. But if Morrison's acceptance of a limited aim and a limiting method keep him out of the more exciting oceanic depths, they also help to create a sense of unpretentious honesty in his work.

However objective the methods which Morrison quietistically adopts, that honesty prevents him from draining out of his stories a necessary measure of subjectivity. He is too direct, too square-jawed a writer, to assume an attitude of ironic agnosticism, to conceal his values or refuse to place the sympathy as those values demand.

In these values, I believe, one can sense the north-country Presbyterian still working within him. It is apparent in the kind of theme which he finds worth writing about. The point of conflict in his stories is usually a moral point. He is indifferent to the attractions of ingenious twists of plot, and is quite prepared to let the reader see where the story is heading after the first few paragraphs. The fascinations of emotional intricacies, of the devastations of passion, leave him unstirred. He is antipathetic to the whine over the dismal fate of modern man—I doubt if he believes there is any such subdivision of the eternally human species. What pins his aroused attention is the moment when one of his plain men is faced with a decision about conduct; and while he regards human weakness with understanding and compassion, the rightness or wrongness of the character's decision is firmly implied—not that he is the kind of bore who subjects fiction to a moral didacticism, save occasionally in a piece of political propagandism. Simply, for him the moments that really matter are the moments of moral decision, so that acceptance of the doctrine of the amorality of art would mean, from his view, a denial of any reality of interest in life. An elder of the kirk who read him might seldom accept his judgments, but nonetheless feel a concordant direction of interest.

The judgments which underlie these studies are, with certain important modifications, judgments on the side of conformity with the simpler moral verities. A hostile amorality-of-art man might, with some show of justice, accuse him of respectability, despite his contempt for primness, hypocrisy, and the wrong kind of submissiveness; for his work implies an unhesitating acceptance of the simple but rigorous demands of a sense of duty. One can feel it in his attitude in "The Drunk". The conflict here lies between the demands of loyalty to a mate, which is almost the religion of the watersider, and the duty of condemning a man who compromises everyone's safety by getting drunk on the job. No-one has extolled the values of solidarity more convincingly than Morrison; but his disapproval of the men who want to cover up the drunkard's offence is firm. Again, in his portrait of "The Sleeping Doll", when he writes, "Boyd looked as if he'd never raised a sweat or a blister since the day he was born", one can sense the rejecting twist of his lip. That is partly, of course, an expression of Morrison's sympathy with the "working man" against the possessors and the manipulators; but it is more an abiding preference for the man who accepts the duty of work over the drone (although the story ends with enjoyment of the sleeping doll's victory over the hard-working, and hard-driving, boss; no writing which humanely relishes life can afford the luxury of a schematic consistency).

Perhaps the most expressive indication of Morrison's valuation of moral toughness is a word dropped into "The Incense Burner". He is describing a Salvation Army refuge and the 'trusties' who assure themselves comfortable jobs on the staff by going through the ritual of being "saved":

> "And if you weren't anxious to move on, and were sufficiently unscrupulous, you could be one of the running brigade".

Observe the strength of contempt conveyed by the choice of so emphatic a term as "unscrupulous". It is, of course, partly conveying a Marxist's scorn for the opium of the people; but it also reveals a moral conviction which the elders of the kirk would understand. That conviction does not exclude the tenderness; it is tempered by the tolerance implicit in a humorous approach and by the writer's duty of compassion; but ultimately it stands pat on the belief that a man shows his strength through his fidelity to the simpler moral imperatives.

There is one strand in Morrison's writing which seems to run counter to this essential Puritanism. A scatter of stories approve the rebels who desert suburbanism in a search for the horizons of adventure and freedom. Rory O'Mahony is the fullest study of this type of rebel, though the story ends ambiguously — rightly enough, for Such is Life. The theme is perhaps better illustrated in "The Door", despite its slightness. A drunk at the genial stage of beeriness finds himself in a railway carriage with two prim respectables who disapprove both his beery expansiveness and a trio of kids who slam the door. So the drunk hoists his little red flag by a super-slam which smashes the window. It is significant that the narrator of the story for once deserts the neutral stance. He does a little slamming too.

Yet even here there is a betraying survival from the tradition of the north-country kirk. The paragraph describing the narrator's slam contains the phrase "even the most disciplined of us" and the assertion that, having been challenged by the drunk with whom he has revealed his sympathy "he had to go through with it for the sake of his blessed self-respect". Door-slammers should be inspired by more pagan motives.

I doubt if there is a real contraction between the two themes which I have been discussing, though the one sympathises with the emancipation of vitality from the bondage of social responsibility and the other admires fidelity to moral imperatives: for each is a way by which a man may find and test his strength. When Morrison deserted the museum for the sea, was he drawn by a thirst for romance or by the desire to test his strength against the challenge of tough demand? It is a silly question; for the adolescent who thus adventures feels both these impulses and does not nicely discriminate between them.

The easy mating of the themes can be seen in another which is the most persistent in Morrison's writing, revealed in a series of studies of the debilitating influence of possessions. Of the seventeen stories in *Selected Stories*,* six are centred on this theme, and it is a contributing element in two others. There are for example the two mates who win Tatts and, quarrelling about the division of the spoils, destroy their mateship, thus coming out losers. There is Abbs of "This Freedom", who cannot blossom into meaningful living until he has broken the drought of his house-pride. There is the fine story "Morning Glory", in which a man accepts the primacy of possessions and ends by accepting a killing as a proper penalty for the invasion of his property rights.

In some of these stories the bondage to possessions destroys, or threatens, the victim's freedom and the vitality which it can bestow. In some it erodes his fidelity to moral demands. But the implication behind these variants is the same. "The imp of avarice", as Morrison once calls it, has damned the victim by stealing his strength. The man who lets his vitality rot and the man who evades moral demand have both lost the ability to stand sturdy on firmly-planted feet.

A different dimension of this recognition is presented in "Pioneers", one of Morrison's most mature stories, in quality as well as dating (1964). Like "Morning Glory", belonging to the same late period, it follows a technical method first successfully exploited in the early "The Nightshift" (1944). The well-carpentered evolvement of a narrative is supplemented by a more atmospheric, and imaginatively involved, process, the juxtaposing of pictures which will cumulatively convey the story's inward significance. In these stories, as in "Goyai" and a few others, that significance is less exclusively concerned with observation of the process of living, more intent on suggesting the element of mystery in human existence. It is significant that in both these late stories, and in "The Nightshift", death is an important element, with all that implies about the view of life. The atmosphere is darker-hued; "wuthering" is perhaps the right word to describe it, although Morrison in this mood is closer to Hardy than to Brontë.

The central figure in "Pioneers" is seen from a hostile point of view. Yet he has much in common with those neo-Puritans whom Morrison often admires. He has the sturdiness of stance. He has fidelity to his principles, such as they are; and he is efficient, a quality which Morrison normally approves. He is disqualified from sympathy because he is consumed by egotism. If he is in part a neo-Puritan, he is also a development from that upper-class stereotype whom Morrison has used when the plot-development demanded a near-villain. This variant has been demoted to the social status of a selector and promoted to a full individuality.

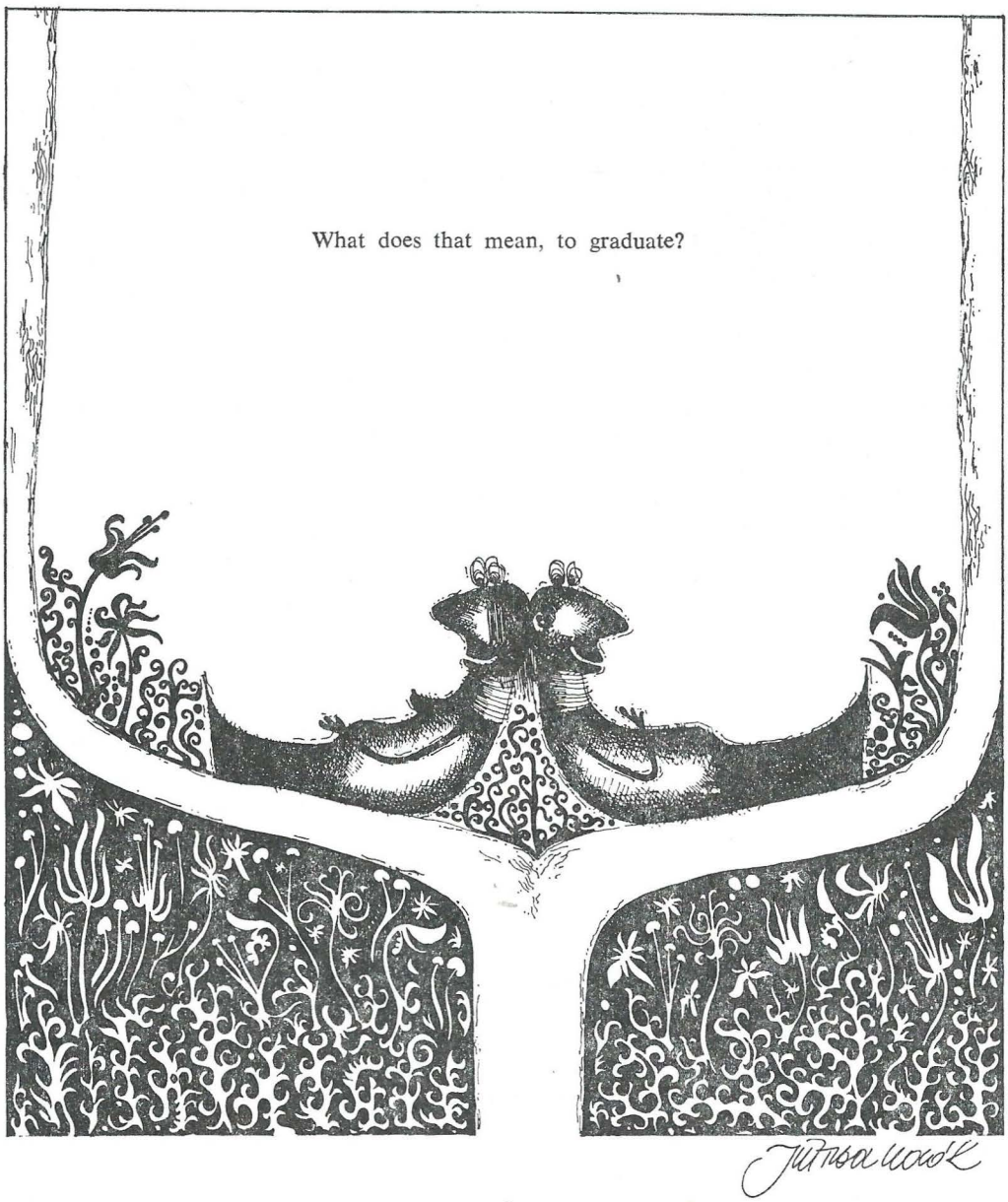
Unlike the upper-class villains and the central figure of "Morning Glory", the selector has not been rotted by possessions, which he largely despises, preferring to indulge subtler forms of possessiveness, which he exercises against his wife

*John Morrison: *Selected Stories* (Rigby, $1.75).

and daughters. Here lies his essential criminality. He denies life and he has the power to destroy it in others. That he commits a murder is merely incidental to the deeper viciousness of his hostility to a warm and flowering vitality.

For if Morrison's sturdiness of stance, derived from his north-country Presbyterian forbears, gives his writing its special flavor, in the last resort he stands with the artists against the deniers of life—who frown upon exuberant slammers of railway-carriage doors and who would have shut a youth within the creaking doors of a museum.

GOOD BOOK: 2



swag

Geoffrey Blainey made it clear enough in our last issue that government patronage of the arts in general, and literature in particular, has come to stay. It is no longer either possible or desirable for the best expressions of a nation's cultural vitality to survive solely on the operation of market forces. Since this is so, of the greatest concern to those interested in writing in Australia is the nature and quality of the institutions which will dispense patronage.

Let it be said at once that the Whitlam regime has activated the whole field. A Council for the Arts has been established, some energy and initiative shown in bringing new names and talents forward in the Council and its subordinate boards, and the government has vastly increased public spending in the arts field right across the board. Australian writers, painters and what-have-you should be chartering coaches to Canberra to strew flowers in Mr Whitlam's path.

But, instead, and in the literary area in particular, clouds are gathering. A lot of alarm has been caused by the precipitate dropping of Geoffrey Blainey as chairman of the Literature Board. Blainey, a charming and scholarly writer, and a human being of quite exceptional intelligence, kindliness and insight, has been retired, not only from the chairmanship, but from the Literature Board itself. *And this despite the fact that the Board unanimously and strongly requested the Prime Minister to retain Blainey as chairman in view of what a Board member called his "fundamental importance in the formulation of new policies now being adopted and promulgated."*

Together with Blainey went A. D. Hope, Manning Clark, Geoffrey Dutton and Judah Waten. It is true that the (short) terms of these people had expired, and that some of them probably desired to retire, but the effect has been disastrously to reduce the Board's ratio of relatively-older to relatively-younger writers, and also its books-published-per-member figure. (Those who have left the Board probably had thirty to forty substantial books between them; I would be surprised if the whole Board now could muster ten. This is *not* necessarily a vital criterion, but other things being equal is surely not a disability either.) Perhaps even more seriously, with Clark's and Blainey's departure the only historians on the Board have gone—and a high percentage of the manuscripts and applications that come before the Board are in non-fiction, non-poetry areas. Nor is there now a novelist on the Board.

I am informed that the Literature Board submitted a list of some twenty names which might be considered for new members, and that this list was almost totally disregarded in the subsequent appointments. (In case anyone thinks this is all sour grapes on my part, I should point out that I believe I am ineligible in any case, as *Overland* is a recipient of a Literature Board grant.) Now of course one is pleased to see, among the new appointees, the names of friends and colleagues. Barrie Reid, for instance, is of course actually *Overland's* poetry editor. Every one of these new appointees has a valid claim to a place on the Board. But the question that must concern us all is: Who is doing the choosing? What advice is Whitlam being tendered, and by whom, and what kind of arguments are being used? We know none of these things and there are sufficient anomalies apparent to make us increasingly worried about 'secret government'—the very vice that Whitlam promised to evict.

In my view what is happening is that 'participatory democracy'—rapid turnover of boards, let anyone nominate themselves for a job, and all that kind of thing—is backfiring. And the backfiring is creating a smoke-screen behind which democracy of any kind, including participatory democracy, is being mocked. Let's take the Council for the Arts itself—the main body which is superior to the individual arts boards. There are two permanent sets of officials on the Council and behind it — Jean Battersby's permanent bureaucracy at the Council for the Arts head office, and the representatives of the other interested sections of the public service which also sit on it. Everyone else there is supposed to be only on a temporary basis (though there are indications that if you get on well with Jean Battersby and Coombs you may have a charmed life). It is obviously a simple matter for the operation to be controlled from the top. The new chairman of the Literature Board, Nancy Keesing, for instance, is the *only* retiring member of the old Board to be reappointed. Nancy is also known to be a closer supporter of Jean Battersby's than any other member of the Board. And, as I have said, she is now chairman. Nancy is an old friend of mine, a distinguished writer, a contributor to *Overland*, and she may be the best chairman the Board has ever had. But it would be totally dishonest to ignore the power politics in this situation. (Incidentally, the Literature Board had recommended that, failing Blainey, the next chairman of the Literature Board should be Ian Turner or John Douglas Pringle.)

It is clear why Blainey was rolled by Coombs and Battersby. He had been too independent a chairman of the Literature Board; he had spoken out as chairman of the Board on matters which Coombs and Battersby thought *they* should determine; and he showed a turbulent spirit in such matters as having the Literature Board determine to have its headquarters in Melbourne, rather than under Jean Battersby's wing in her Sydney headquarters, where Nancy Keesing now has an office. (It will be interesting to see how long the Board's headquarters stay in Melbourne.)

In the meantime men and women with a lifetime of service to the cause of literature and democracy in Australia are being passed over. I think of people like Geoffrey Serle, Max Harris and Arthur Phillips—all men whose contribution to letters and whose social conscience are beyond any debate. One can see, perhaps, why a Liberal Government wouldn't touch them. It's both ironic and infuriating that sordid back-room politicking ensures that they are blackballed by a Labor Government also. (I'm informed that at least two of those three names were on the list of suggestions for new members the Board sent to the Prime Minister.) They, and others like them, continue to be victimised (hardly too strong a word) because of their experience, their knowledge, their courage and their individuality.

However, whatever one's views on the above, the real point is that the say of artists and writers in their own affairs has diminished very rapidly in the last eighteen months — since the Whitlam government was elected, in fact. There used to be great outcries when Liberal governments made politic appointments in the arts field — but no Liberal government ever overrode its arts boards as this government has done. Is the problem the fact that Whitlam wants to be Minister for the Arts without having to work too hard at it? That he is not keeping his ear close enough to the ground?

So things are going awry in the arts field. There are plenty of indications that the Literature Board is not the only board affected. What's the answer? I think the time may be coming at which the writers and artists of Australia may have to get together to demand a commission of enquiry into the Council for the Arts and its operations. And this is the last thing many of us wanted to happen. Yet if Whitlam's reactionary advisers are going to tighten their authoritarian grip on the arts in this way, and if Whitlam is going to continue to let them get away with it, the fine initiatives taken by the Labor government are going to be negated. And, incidentally, there's going to be a magnificent, autocratic administration all set up for the next right-wing government that takes office in Australia.

The other campaign that I think now becomes imperative is one for the Literature Board to be separated from the Council for the Arts, and allowed to operate independently, as in fact it did until the last year or so. The Literature Board has little in common with the performing and graphic arts boards that make up the rest of the Council for the Arts, and there was never any real need to bring it under the Council's umbrella. If the Ministry for the Arts can't handle

the Literature Board as a separate entity from the Council, then it has little *finesse*.

Despite several requests, incidentally, the Council for the Arts still refuses to send any of its hand-outs or press releases to *Overland*.

I wrote above that those receiving subsidies from the various boards are not eligible for appointment to those boards. That at least was my impression, and I'm in favor of the idea on the whole, though there are problems with it. However I was interested to be told the other day that Mr John Winther, general manager of the Australian Opera Company, sits on the Music Board of the Council for the Arts, despite the fact that the A.O.C. is probably the biggest recipient of funds from the Music Board, to the tune (!) of about $1m. a year. And of course Mr Richard Walsh, who runs Angus and Robertson, has been on the Literature Board for some time, despite the considerable subsidies his firm receives.

In the last *Overland* I referred to the fact that outgoing members of the old advisory board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund, displaced after Whitlam came to office, were dismissed in a cavalier fashion. Kylie Tennant writes to say that this is not so: that not all the members of the old advisory board were displaced, and that she herself, though she retired, had been asked to continue and received "a warm letter of thanks from the Prime Minister for my past services". I apologise for the misinformation, but I have also made further enquiries. These establish that Harry Kippax and Douglas Stewart were in fact summarily dropped from the CLF board—despite the fact, I am informed, that one of these men at least had only six months to go, and had been invited by the chairman of the board to remain. Both, however, did I understand receive letters of thanks, though not until one day before the new appointments were announced.

Kylie Tennant also takes me up on my remarks about Martin Boyd's "starving in Rome" for years before he received a literary pension at the very end of his life. "I hope there is not going to be myth built up about this," Kylie writes. Both Kylie and another member of the old CLF board have been at pains to insist that Boyd received a pension as soon as his plight was brought to the notice of the board. Well, as for starving in Rome, we have to make up our own minds, and I suggest the best evidence is Desmond O'Grady's fine obituary article in *Overland* 56. But my main point has been misunderstood. I'm sure the CLF board reacted promptly to news of Boyd's distress. What I was saying was that the secrecy surrounding the holders of literary pensions (a secrecy which does not prevail in England) means that deserving cases can go unremarked until far too late. We may all assume they are receiving assistance when they have been forgotten and overlooked—as in fact Martin Boyd was.

It is splendid to be able to publish Oscar Spate's article on the Baudin journals in this issue of *Overland*. But the recent appearance of Baudin (for the first time *in any language*) reminds us of the astonishing fact that this "small, rich, industrial country" (as it has been called) has hardly yet started on the publication of the materials of its own history—all the more regrettable since we are supposed to have the best recorded history of any nation. As well as the Baudin journals, for instance, there remain about *fifteen* unpublished journals of the Baudin expedition, and about *fifteen* for the D'Entrecasteaux expedition (1792-1793), in the French National Archives. The French were much better observers of, for instance, the Aboriginals than were the English. Yet the only person who has ever looked at these journals, so far as I know, is my friend Brian Plomley, editor of the superb *Friendly Mission*, the most disregarded Australian work of scholarship of the last thirty years, at least. To me, this is one of the saddest and most incisive comments, both on the lucky country and on the quality of our academic life.

A residential poetry workshop will be held at Morpeth, near Newcastle, from 3-6 September 1974. Group leaders will include Gwen Harwood, Roland Robinson and Dorothy Hewett. Details from Dr Donald Moore, Department of Community Programmes, University of Newcastle, 2308.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

JOHN HADFIELD

High Neutral

It's James who is waiting there handsome to play billiards with, and he faces the window as if it is raining outside. Perhaps from the view he has chosen his reflection and then lost focus, and it's Cassius who is *aware* with fresh alarm. His friend strolls over and says like a girl would in confidence that it's not real good, his thoughts are coming upon one another, he's feeling a little psychiatric. And for a while Cassius attempts to live as little as possible, and Jamie is playing, with things, just turning them over as a savage would, and his audience moves around, getting bored. Jamie reports that the flame is *turning*, and without excitement he exhibits a poem, he forces a hand past a louvre as if his sanity depended on it and begins a scrawl on the dust of the window, withdraws exhausted to a lotus pose on the lounge, it is all so hopeless really, and his eyes roll, he smiles and the time passes.

The time passes, the valley darkens, the blue sweep of the ocean gives way by degrees to an awning of storm clouds, and is dark with the approaching rain.

At first it just comes as a flimsy web of droplets which swirl like dust and settle like bubbles; there is a lightning photograph including the mountains, the sky is all nerves, and for a moment the flat is corrugated by a wracked bass as the thunder rolls out the anthem, the storm breaks all at once, and the rain comes warmly, it feels like an emulsion does, and symbolically speaking it is not wholly clear or fluid: and all roofs are a mist of splashes, you can't see the office blocks, and the squall marches for the river as the drops thin out and fatten but they keep arriving as if there is a quota to fill. And when the sun breaks in the air is alive and the garden sparkles, the wind has gone and the curtain is *drenched*. The storm is only a cloud on a postcard, and when you look around to see if there has been any change the dog smiles as if he wasn't really under the lounge, the furniture is unmoved, the stylus is quietly following specifications, the clock has all its chimes in store, and if you do go over and switch it on, the television will be as receptive as ever.

Jamie looks ill, as if he hasn't slept. And for him, as they say in the trade, it's a vacant scene.

It must be a dead feeling, when there is a thing that is very inertial and always on the road. That Negro feeling, the alter so far away, and you are not *small*, you just aren't big enough to get there. There is withdrawal and longing, an investment in formalities, and the occasional excess of passion that leaves one empty, and incongruously passive. So that the environment becomes too large to handle, its components are too impressive, and one loses power.

James has the feeling all right, but he has not the etiology, only the refund on the miracle ingredient. No build up. He feels like he's been punched in the nose, there is grit behind his eyes, he is tired, oppressed by detail, the room is *yellow*, and the dust, the dust is too much to handle.

And the curtain is drenched, it's a wet negligeé dripping, and the water stands up like mercury because of the dust. It's the surface tension you know, the surface tension. The cushion feels like a blood-clot, the tea towel is mottled with curry, and *it* feels like mothballs, and perhaps it smells of sweat or something.

The pineal, the astral plane and the psi-field, contraception by concentration, psychokinesis, xenoglossia . . . you name it, there are a few things in which Jamie disbelieves.

He's a bit eclectic.

But how would the dog look
with his ears stapled together?

and if you insist that an enzyme is a chemical, that the big spiral is a common or garden polymer (you eat some every day) he claims that a molecule has some kind of freedom, and in conversation he mentions Heisenberg, and waits for some expansion of that principle. He denies that Jung is too easy to understand (you know?) and he has good words for Donovan and he suggests that God, as a fact, has yet to be created. And Cassius, who has the evidence to speak of, can only mumble about the Hamiltonian and the equation of state, and he can actually *describe* the hydrogen atom (or molecule); butadiene, benzene (etc.) and Jamie will just smile as if something has been lost in translation.

His friend is sleeping, or at least he is very quiet, and Rodney takes up the poem, compares the level of their ashtrays, lights a cigarette and leaves by means of the door.

Oh yes, the street. The gutters are muddy, the wall was built by convicts, they had a lousy union; one tree is favored above all others by the starlings and if you know about them you do not place your car under their tree.

The poem isn't hard to read, no concentration is required. Jamie called it "Concerto for Gum Leaf Didgeridoo and Bull Roarer, a Variation upon a Word" and Cassius pushes it into his shirt pocket, so he can give it back. More Chinese religious slogans.

The street is crowded and there are girls, many of them young, who pass him by. Flesh rubbing behind mini-skirts are overtaken; a girl passes. She wears her clothes like bangles, her eyes are green, she stops at a window. Some hippies enter Woolworth's, a wife hauls a shopping trolley. And Cassius, in his own little cloud of unconscious logic, proceeds to the bookstore near the tobacconist. The window offers some of De Sade's conscientiously naughty stories, but then the Marquis has not been entirely translated. There is a religious offering, and you could say that another Christian has assumed the right of dialogue, if you like puns.

Anyway the first counter is a litter of plastic toys and fire crackers, the checkout buffers a lovely girl from the customary swirl, the uncircumcised clerk in technical books has taken to glasses, there is a shelf of Penguins, any number of Penguins . . . and the block busters, the odysseys of skin and pricks and kissing, and stuff to go with your furniture, and a nest of second hand books all in together.

Out into the street.

A red sports behind glass.

That car has carbon thrust, and it's a beauty.

A Bond poster, and James has nostrils flared and suntan, and his women minister, as obedient as record players. Next week, an alternative pageant. Mrs Robinson, Bedazzled, The Fearless Vampire Killers . . . Irma, Darling . . . The Green Slime, have come and gone, they are somewhere else.

Over to the health shop, for a grape juice.

White please.

I don't *care* about the fluoride.

Along for the news, under the nurses home, past the fruit shop. Four bob for some drug sticks.

Steakburgers, thickshakes and supalikas.

A boy comes along, he is pale, and he carries excess flesh. You feel that his underpants are hoisted way up.

A freeway, two ferries, a pub and the newsagents, hemmed in between the flower shop and the pool room.

The posters are unanimous.

The moon has been landed upon.

A typically American achievement.

And what a great freedom, to be able to walk down a street without knowing anybody.

A bus lumbers into the peak hour, and people stream out of doors.

The moon is chylous. The sun a jaundiced saffron, and it's light is waning, so that the clouds are rouged, and quite stationary.

Soon there will be frosted starlight from above the salt haze, the grass will fade.

And the rubbish, like vermin,

Scuttles over the concrete, for the wind is a little testy.

It's about time to get off the streets.

The taxi driver was out of smokes and they had a conversation. The driver talked a lot, and he mentioned a brawl at a late night out at the Fanny Bay (pub). Blood and shouting, bottles broken. Two blokes as pissed as plovers trying to kill each other. Rodney asked if they were natives but the driver said no, they were Australians, and Rod let that one pass because of his eagerness for where he was going.

Her skin was like *leaves*, all plastic and talcum, and when he touched her it was as if he had rummaged in a wheat bin and come out with the dust on his fingers. She likes to explore his pockets and she just laughs if he points out any

connexions. And in due course it is fantastic (divine) . . . he offers to go out for a meal, but no (love) she is not hungry.

They are walking to the taxi rank hand in hand and the streets are clear. Under a tree there was a rustle, but it was only a bat sucking mangoes, swimming over the branches; the animal stumbled into flight and moved off as a shadow. There was a gum tree (gum tree. gumb-tree) just beautiful in twilight, a fan palm. And although the air feels like glycerin, it is a peppermint wind. She had checked the mail box and her skirt had risen, she had taken up the milk and stood there and he became ill with the need to bury his face an . . . i don't know how they would have said goodbye, for Cassius had no idea of her feelings, and was humbled (crushed) by the feeling that perhaps in leaving they would be individually sustained by illusions without intersection, illusions that grow unheeded until a sign from the world external allows them emotion.

But they are embracing, aware of each other and the milk of course, so that he must have appeared lovable from her aspect (unmanly) and he laughed and the dew was freezing and they went inside.

Hand Waving

In Melbourne rain,
in Canberra cold,
you were everywhere,
ghost in the mind,
tranquillized, one hand waving
  above the sheets.

Oranges from a tin,
Angela Davis,
  fantasies of Rome.
We shared the Grt. October Revolution,
phone calls, crow calls:
sealed in my motel room
the air conditioner hums
late night cowboy movies,
seven stories down
  a body splats
scattering the wrought iron chairs.

A haunted city,
granite, bluestone,
Collins St canyons of rock.
I danced on the St Kilda tramlines,
"HENRY BOLTE IS THE POOR MAN'S FRIEND!"

Planes take off,
every airport plays
  enchanted evenings.
"HAWKS FACE CRISIS AT WINDY HILL!"
"What a game to come back on ! "
A heartbeat stops . . .
The Big Sleep,
crow call, phone call,
  valium, brandy,

and a hand waving
  wav - ing.

DOROTHY HEWETT

HERBERT FEITH

Indonesia's Dungeons

The grim plight of Indonesia's political prisoners is comprehensively and poignantly described in a recent English-language edition of *Wordt Vervolgd,* the organ of the Dutch section of Amnesty International. Copies of this 32-page Indonesia Special are available from the Australian sections of Amnesty. More than most other writing on Indonesia, it highlights the moral ambiguity of the McMahon-Whitlam Indonesia policy which has made our government an exceedingly close partner of Suharto's.

The publication presents the situation of 55,000 or more untried political prisoners detained as suspected communists, left-wing nationalists, and so on, since the abortive coup of 1 October, 1965 which gave the generals their opportunity to crush the Left. It describes the conditions of neglect and under-nourishment which prevail in the Indonesian jails and camps and the vulnerability of the prisoners' families to various forms of discrimination and extortion. The wealth of detailed information it contains—including a map which lists the number of prisoners in particular provinces and districts for which figures have been made available—gives the document a highly authoritative ring.

Amnesty's credentials in relation to Indonesia are hard to deny. The London-based organization has been actively concerned with Indonesian political imprisonment since the Sukarno period, when most political prisoners were militant anti-communists. Of the information it has compiled in recent years much comes from what was obtained by missions it sent to Indonesia in 1969 and 1970. One of these was led by Professor Julius Stone of the Law Faculty of the University of Sydney, the other by the former Foreign Minister of Ireland and Secretary General of the International Commission of Jurists, Sean McBride.

Though Suharto has greatly strengthened his domestic political position in recent years, his government has been very slow to respond to international pressure on the political prisoners it has held untried since 1965. Some tens of thousands were apparently released after the 1971 elections. But it is clear that the momentum of releases soon ebbed.

The Amnesty report quotes widely discrepant figures, given by official Indonesian spokesmen, on the exact number of the political prisoners. According to the man who was till recently his country's Attorney General, Lieutenant General Sugih Arto: "It is impossible to say exactly how many political prisoners there are; it is a floating rate, like the Japanese yen vis-a-vis the dollar". The Amnesty researchers compare the figures given by different officials in recent years and come to the conclusion that "the lowest estimate must be 55,000 and the real figure may well be much greater".

Prisoners are classed into the categories of A, B, and C and occasionally the further category X is mentioned. Only against the comparatively few A class prisoners is there sufficient evidence (of direct or indirect involvement in the coup attempt of 1965) for the government to envisage a trial. B class prisoners are ones who are slated to be kept in detention indefinitely despite the fact that they are not to be tried. According to the former Attorney General, "We know for certain they are traitors but there is not enough evidence to bring them before a court." C class prisoners are ones who are scheduled for release as and when political circumstances permit. And some official statements refer to the category X, that of prisoners who are yet to be given a firm classification as A, B, or C.

The circumstances which have led to arrest are described for a number of individuals. One extraordinary case is that of the youngest prisoner known to be on Buru Island (a prison resettlement camp on a small island of the Moluccas). When he was eleven, his father and mother were both arrested. Too young to survive alone, he accompanied his mother to prison. When she died some time later the boy was taken to his father in detention at Nusakambangan, the prison island off Central Java. The father was scheduled for transfer to Buru, but died before he could be shipped off. But the boy was sent to Buru nevertheless. He is now there as a B prisoner, the category of "committed marxists and traitors" in Sugih Arto's words.

A thirteen-year old school-girl, Sugiyah, was arrested in October, 1965. Her crime was that she had been present at Halim airfield outside Jakarta (as a volunteer trainee recruited for the campaign of Confrontation against Malaya) at the time that the six murdered generals were buried there by the left-wing plotters who started the coup. When first arrested, she wept continuously for her mother. Apparently quite unaware of the political implications of the events in which she had become involved, she is still held at the Plantungan women's detention camp in Central Java, a place for "hard-core Communists" and "security risks".

The famous Nationalist Party poet and essayist Sitor Situmorang, jailed in 1967 because he was said to have possessed writings "critical of the New Order", is an A prisoner, still believed to be in Salemba Prison, Jakarta.

The composer Subronto Kusuma Atmaja was arrested in 1968, apparently on the grounds that he had composed songs which contributed to the "atmosphere that led to the coup", and that former colleagues from a left-wing artists' organisation had visited his house.

Perhaps the most moving section of the Amnesty document is the story of a woman prisoner in Jakarta who was carrying garbage into the street outside her prison when she suddenly sighted her own child. The boy, dressed in rags and collecting cigarette butts, did not recognize his mother's voice when she shouted across the road to him. When a prison guard began, at her suggestion, to run after him, he took to his heels and fled. Only when he was dragged to the prison did the boy realize that it was his own mother who had been calling him. Guards as well as prisoners wept as they watched the reunion, the mother torn between joy at finding her child after years of separation and anger at seeing him destitute, unkempt and homeless.

Descriptions of the treatment of prisoners suggest that even minimal diet is often not provided. Frequently no medical treatment is available for a prisoner who falls ill. Detainees sleep on stone or tile floors in grossly overcrowded, unhygienic and forbidding prisons. For instance, Tanggerang prison not far from Jakarta has three prisoners in each of a number of cells measuring 1.4 by 2 metres. The vast majority of prisoners are permitted neither writing materials nor reading other than the Koran and the Bible. Many have not written or received a letter for many years.

The establishment of detention camps on Buru Island in 1969, it is pointed out. added a new dimension of permanency to Indonesia's policies of political detention. Survival, on crocodile-ridden Buru, costs a 12-hour day of arduous agricultural labour under strict supervision by armed guards. This is required of everyone, old and young, sick and healthy. Significantly, prisoners have been emphatic in writing to their wives in Java to reject government offers to take them to join their husbands on the island.

The lot of the prisoners released since 1971 is only marginally easier than that of those still incarcerated. Many forms of employment are closed to them because they cannot produce a "free from involvement in the 30th September Affair certificate". Moreover, the home community to which the released prisoner returns is often afraid to welcome him back. Many a prisoner has returned to civil society to find his home and land taken away and his family scattered. Finally there is always the spectre of re-arrest. For arresting and re-arresting is going on all the time.

Since the Amnesty publication appeared the Suharto government has created a new group of political prisoners, people it arrested in the wake of the anti-Tanaka riots of January 1974. These riots, which came at the end of a remarkable three-month period of thaw, were used to justify a major new wave of repression directed particularly at the press and the universities. The newly arrested group includes a number of Indonesia's best-known lawyers, academics and student leaders. As middle class prisoners, their lot may not be as desperately bad as that of the majority of those who have been held since 1965. But their arrest is further evidence that the trend in Suharto's Indonesia is for political coercion to grow nastier year by year.

MAURICE SHADBOLT

The Other Side

From an address to the Adelaide Festival

The problem, when a New Zealand writer addresses an Australian audience, or an Australian writer a New Zealand one, is seemingly a problem of mutual indifference—or indifference, and of lack of information in the most elementary way. A well-known Australian writer, in New Zealand last year, made a point of inquiring in a number of good bookshops for his titles. The answer usually received: "If you want Australian books, try the libraries. We can't sell them." A New Zealand writer, though I don't feel obliged to put it to the test, would doubtless find a similar response on this side of the Tasman.

It was, of course, not always so. It is worth remembering that at the beginning of the century Henry Lawson was to some extent a trans-Tasman figure, that some of his stories were set in New Zealand; and that Katherine Mansfield published her first stories not in Wellington, but Melbourne. I don't propose to explore the likely reasons for the gap which has grown between us since—I do remember pondering on them lengthily and possibly pointlessly when I wrote and reviewed for one or two Australian magazines, particularly the *Bulletin,* for a brief period in the 1960s.

But, as indication of the attitude still prevalent between us, I might observe that when first invited to Adelaide, it was suggested that I might care to speak on the novel in general, perhaps, or international literary trends: in short, on anything but New Zealand writing—which I was informed would have little interest for an Australian audience. This left me understandably bewildered; I fail to see much value in my presence here if I'm not to bring some news from the region I know best. And it also poses the question: if much recent New Zealand writing can demonstrably engage the attention of Englishmen, Americans and Germans — among others — why should it not then have interest for Australians?

I ask this in no querulous way, but simply use the question as preliminary to illustrate my dilemma here. How is it possible to discuss recent developments in New Zealand writing before an audience to whom New Zealand writing is largely an alien affair? More alien, say, than English, American or even Russian? I cannot assume great familiarity on your part with the substance of our writing since, say, the 1930s; yet it is only against that background that recent developments can be valued. And it isn't really possible for me to provide, other than in the most sketchy and inadequate way, much of that background now. All I can do then is cast my bit of bread upon the waters, and hope that half a loaf is better than none. If I can do no more than suggest to you that something worthwhile can sometimes be found on our side of the water, then that will have to be sufficient.

Let me begin then with an outsider's observation; an outsider who has rather more intimate connection with Australia than with New Zealand, but who has some familiarity with the literature of both countries. Writing in the 1960s, Colin MacInnes argued that New Zealand writers had made a 'sharper, deeper revelation' of their country than had their Australian counterparts. I feel he may have been overstating the case; I can hardly think he was taking Patrick White, for example, into account. Still, it may have been a reasonable point if the bulk of Australian and New Zealand writing is considered. Up to the immediate post-war period New Zealand's best writing resided largely in poetry and the short story: in work, that is, of concentrated vision and often considerable craftsmanship. In poetry,

especially. Though I've no wish to stun you with a barrage of names, the work of such as Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, A. R. D. Fairburn, Charles Brasch—and, later, James K. Baxter and Keith Sinclair—gave cultural definition to their country where it had none before; they gave it some coherent identity, and a mythology of sorts; a native mythology which might respectably exist alongside the earlier Polynesian cultural response to a new land, and which sometimes drew—and I think especially of Baxter, Sinclair, and the part-Polynesian poet Alistair Campbell—on the strength and color of that earlier response. At the very least, these writers gave New Zealand a semblance of a tradition with which later writers could argue—or, perhaps, explore and expand.

In the nineteenth century Samuel Butler used his New Zealand experience vividly in the opening chapters of *Erewhon;* he made of it a springboard to Utopia. And I think the idea of some lost earthly—and specifically antipodean—paradise has colored, and continued to color, the New Zealand literary imagination — and indeed the work of other artists too. Perhaps New Zealand, by virtue of its more modest size, its absence of giant contrasts, its more comprehensible human history, has been easier of imaginative assimilation. And perhaps this is one reason why, when the Oxford University Press produced its first considerable anthology of New Zealand verse in the 1950s, an English reviewer in the *London Magazine* said he found New Zealand verse a delight, and wondered why Katherine Mansfield ever felt she had to leave.

Such a reaction, and it was by no means uncommon, would have been unlikely to our work in prose: on the whole much more dour and graceless. In the novel, one finds not so much tradition as a range of oddities, individual and often freakish and short-lived achievements—the novels of Jane Mander, for example, who began writing in London and New York and dried up swiftly on return to native ground; John A. Lee's *Children of the Poor* and *The Hunted,* the work of a one-time outlaw turned politician, books which have been seen as having some enduring quality beyond the period of social unrest and protest in which they were first published. The two most promising novelists of the late 1930s, Robin Hyde and John Mulgan, both took their own lives, both outside New Zealand, one at the beginning of the war and the other at the end; one after experience of the Chinese-Japanese conflict, and the other after fighting alongside Greek partisans. Mulgan's one potent novel *Man Alone,* though, first published in 1940 and reprinted often since, both in title and theme sounded a central note in our fiction: that of man alone against society, man alone against strange landscape—a note which has found many and diverse echoes.

Post-war, however, the New Zealand novel—if it can fairly be called that — was kept alive mainly by two expatriates, James Courage and Dan Davin, both of whom, in the Mansfield manner, drew deeply on reserves of New Zealand experience in childhood and youth in composing their fictions. It was in the short story, rather than in the novel, that some distinctive native accent was to be discovered, and nowhere more than in the work of Frank Sargeson. The yarn-spinner, in some shape or other, has distinguished most New World writing, and it was this considered and sometimes devious disguise Sargeson used in writing his stories within a cryptic vernacular; his apparently casual mask did more than make literature of the commonplaces of New Zealand life and language; it also gave him the distance he needed, at times, from his obsessive concern with the murkier underside of New Zealand's secular puritanism, as suffered by the waifs and strays and down-and-outs who largely populate his early stories.

Sargeson was soon far from a lonely figure, both in use of New Zealand vernacular, and in the short story. His contemporary Roderick Finlayson, in a less sophisticated manner, worked another vein on that puritan underside, and in his stories the Maori surfaces for the first time as a figure of complex dignity, and not as mere noble savage or as stock comic relief, in the country's fiction.

Yet it must be said that most of the storytellers who followed in their wake left first volumes of brilliance or striking promise rather like lonely tombstones on desert terrain. I don't think I need elaborate on the difficulties of the literary life in a small country — the absence of large circulation magazines, for example, or any of the other props which elsewhere make the life possible in the twentieth century; difficulties more recently ameliorated by scholarships and public lending right, but which will always remain in a country of small population. Yet collectively—overlooking individual fates—there has been some richness and vigor in the New Zealand short story, and a dedication to craftsmanship which possibly owes more to Sargeson than to Katherine Mansfield, who is often given credit by outsiders; in truth

Katherine Mansfield's influence seldom surfaces obviously in the New Zealand short story at all. More to the point, there was in the short story—as in verse—now the implicit assumption of a native audience, where there was no such assumption before: in 1920 Katherine Mansfield, reviewing Jane Mander's *Story of a New Zealand River*, complained that the names of New Zealand trees and plants meant nothing to an English reader, thereby assuming there were no other readers possible; New Zealand writers could now name names and places without embarrassment, as writers of any country could, because they were writing in the first instance for those around them.

So much for scene-setting, then: by the 1950s New Zealand had a substantial and accomplished tradition in verse—indeed it could and has been argued that between 1930 and 1955 New Zealand poetry had a golden age of sorts, with work as interesting as anywhere else in the English speaking world; we also had some distinction in the short story; but the New Zealand novel was still pretty thin on the ground, and only the most earnest patriot would claim a respectable tradition. That changed, and changed most dramatically, in the late 1950s and 1960s; it was as if the country were suddenly harvesting that which the poets had sown. Yet that image is a rather shaky one when the diverse individual talents are considered.

Janet Frame, for example; no work of the fictional imagination could have been more unexpected, in terms of precedent, than her first novel *Owls do Cry*, first published in New Zealand, and later in the United States and Britain. And that of course is as it should be—large talent (and in Janet Frame's case one might sometimes speak of genius) is utterly unexpected when it surfaces. Her vision — and her concern for small, crippled lives—doesn't offer much for our comfort, and nor does it have much to do, most of the time, with New Zealand as more than just another place where the human spirit suffers. Yet one might still have been pardoned for seeing *Owls do Cry* as likely to be another lonely achievement, in New Zealand's then mostly fitful and freakish collection of worthwhile novels; one could not easily have foreseen Janet Frame moving forward, in novel after novel, to explore her unique and often eccentric vision; and engaging an international audience in that process. In the seventeen years since, no New Zealand writer has produced a comparable or more consistent body of work.

But there were others, of course; and others as surprising. Sylvia Ashton-Warner, with her novel *Spinster*, likewise confused and confounded native critical prescriptions when that book descended upon New Zealand, with an avalanche of applause from Britain and the United States; again one might have seen it as a freakish and likely solitary accomplishment; but the truth is that she still hasn't ceased to write and publish—even if, in most estimates, her talent hasn't been seen to such advantage again. Then there was Ian Cross—again out of an empty sky—with his still haunting and striking novel *The God Boy*, with its cosmic rather than parochial concerns firmly gripped in a New Zealand setting.

This trio, then, marked the end of the drought. Of the three, one might have considered Cross most likely to build upon his initial achievement; but perhaps the literary life, the development of a personal vision, still has too many hazards for the male writer in New Zealand. The fact is that he gave us only two more novels, both soon after the first — one of them, *After Anzac Day*, still arguably the most truly urban and urbane novel of society we have, one which tries to make sense of the welfare state we so early began shaping from the raw material of pioneer society. Since then, he has been quiet for a decade — though, perhaps as a result of his own experience, no one has been more active and forceful in making life as a writer possible in the country; it was largely his effort which produced public lending right in New Zealand, for the first time in the English speaking world, and now makes full-time authorship more than an unrealistic aspiration there.

Otherwise to summarize the past ten years or so is near impossible. In any case, as first a storywriter and then a novelist who began publishing through this period, I can scarcely look from a desirable distance upon recent development; I am myself too much a part of it, in one sense, and too little in another. By which I mean that, though industrious enough as a writer resident in New Zealand, and creatively committed to that country, I have also found it necessary, for reasons of personal comfort and imaginative health, to live and work at some remove from the alarms and confusions of the village: a frequent and understandable necessity, I feel, in any small country—and particularly in one suddenly conscious of itself, where eagerly grabbed straws of identity are often made to appear as haystacks, with the needle of literary truth hopelessly lost

inside; and where critical boundary-riders and heresy-hunters seemingly tend to take personal offence if they haven't officially authorized an author.

This said, or confessed, it is neverthless possible to observe health and enterprise in the New Zealand novel — a greater vigor in manner and variety in material, and an imaginative confidence which has been far from apparent in the past. Of those who began publishing in the 1960s some substantial and sustained achievement is already evident in the novels and stories of such harder-edged realist writers as Noel Hilliard, Maurice Gee, and Joy Cowley; there is literal expansion, beyond the country's immediate environment, to the tropical Pacific on the one hand, and to the Antarctic on the other, in the work of Errol Brathwaite and Graham Billing; there is at last some striking literary evidence that the country is home to a multi-racial society in the recent work of Polynesian writers, the Maori poet Hone Tuwhare, the Maori storywriter and novelist Witi Ihimaera, and the Samoan novelist Albert Wendt; there is, more generally, and without naming names, an attempt to find shape and resonance in New Zealand's past—and at the same time, if a little paradoxically, a markedly less obsessive concern with New Zealand's distinctions both as a land and a society, with both country and people seen in a wider Western context.

Though most novelists look to publishers in the United Kingdom or United States — for obvious reasons, not least that of a larger audience than available in a country with a population of three million — it is worth remark that New Zealand publishing has seen immense expansion over the past decade; and if New Zealand publishers' lists are sometimes short on fresh imaginative work, at least it can be argued that they are now, among other things, reprinting much work once neglected or too soon out of print in the past; and the fact of their activity in general non-fiction gives the New Zealand novelist another possible prop with which to support himself in lean times.

But one of the most fascinating features of the past few years has been the resurrection of talents at first somewhat submerged under the new rush of writers. And the most obvious instance is Frank Sargeson, now over seventy years old. It began with publication of his *Collected Stories,* introduced by E. M. Forster, in 1965; something which might understandably have been seen as a worthy postscript to his life's industry. Instead it marked an entirely new beginning. After more than a decade's publishing silence, he then came up with three new novels, a collection of novellas, and a memoir; but the notable thing about all this was qualitative as well as quantitative. We seemed to be reading a new Sargeson altogether. Gone was the vernacular yarn-spinning manner which distinguished his early work; he discarded that self-imposed restriction of vocabulary for a stylistic and linguistic richness, in a rather Jamesian manner, seen at its best, I think, in *Joy of the Worm,* published in 1969.

Another who seemingly came back to life was David Ballantyne, a much younger writer, whose remarkable novel of working class life, *The Cunninghams,* first published in the United States when he was 22, seemed another of those lonely freaks which made up our once shaky tradition in the novel; in the 1960s, after fifteen quiet years, he came up with three more novels and a collection of stories. Not that we still don't have our freaks: Bill Pearson's long and meticulously observed study of a small mining community, *Coal Flat,* for example, published in 1963, and still a solitary accomplishment; or James McNeish's *Mackenzie,* published in 1970, which strove to find universal significance in a nineteenth century New Zealand folk-hero.

I am too conscious of evasions and omissions in this narrative of recent development in our prose fiction: of failing to discuss or mention the work of such conspicuously urban writers as Marilyn Duckworth, M. K. Joseph, and Gordon Dryland; of the fine continued work in the short story of Maurice Duggan, possibly our most delicate stylist, and Phillip Wilson and O. E. Middleton; of the folk writers Barry Crump and Ronald Hugh Morrieson, and the phenomenon they represent nationally—on the one hand commercial success without precedent in the country, and on the other a short and wretchedly frustrated creative life.

Likewise I must skim lightly over other prose; over most non-fiction, history, biography, and autobiography. Possibly it isn't without significance, something I haven't time to explore, that in recent years our finest biographies have been about New Zealand expatriates: Antony Alper's *Katherine Mansfield,* for example; E. H. McCormick's *The Expatriate,* a life of the painter Frances Hodgkins; Keith Sinclair's *Pember Reeves,* the Fabian politician-poet of the 1890s, who after helping to shape New Zealand's welfare state was expediently booted upstairs to a high commissionership in London, there to join

theorist Fabians like Wells and Shaw; and J. B. Condliffe's *Te Rangi Hiroa,* a life of the Maori anthropologist Peter Buck who had to follow his star elsewhere. It is almost as if our first need, nationally, is to reclaim those figures lost to us in our arid, immediately post-colonial years when the country could nurse talent, but never offer it room to grow.

So far as history is concerned two figures stand well above the ruck—J. C. Beaglehole and Keith Sinclair. Beaglehole, one of this century's most remarkable scholars by any measure, was driven to bury himself in the life of Captain James Cook, and seemed in some rare and possibly unique feat of sympathetic identifiction to become one with that incredible explorer; his mammoth edition of Cook's journals remains his lasting memorial. But I find his history *The Discovery of the Pacific* as creatively and imaginatively exciting as any twentieth century novel.

It is worth note that Beaglehole was a poet, and so is Keith Sinclair—indeed one of the country's finest. The problem with Sinclair is where the poet ends and the historian begins, and vice versa; he sometimes seems to be writing history as a poet, and poetry as a historian. But his Penguin *History of New Zealand* is more than just a model of its kind: resonant with observation, rich with insight, it remains the most substantial attempt to grip the how and why of New Zealand, and to explain what it means to be a New Zealander in the twentieth century; he attempts the social novelist's task as well as the historian's. By contrast, one may also find Sinclair the historian considerably present in a poem like "Memorial to a Missionary", where he engages himself within the world of Thomas Kendall, the country's first Christian missionary: a rather tragic, Faustian figure who still haunts the national imagination.

The indications seem to be that I should return to poetry to round off this brief account of recent development in New Zealand writing: not only because of Sinclair's poem on Kendall, but also because of another figure who seems likely to haunt the New Zealand imagination. I mean the poet James K. Baxter. His death at the age of 46 in 1972 touched off mourning far beyond literary circles, making not only newspaper headlines, but lengthy editorials and billboards, with television cameramen and broadcasters breathless at his graveside; it was the first time that the country as a whole was aware of the death of a poet and seemingly stricken by that death. It isn't the place to discuss his life in depth or detail; or indeed his work; for both in the end, and perhaps that is his significance, seem one. It will have to be sufficient to say, as Allen Curnow did when Baxter published his first volume of verse at the age of 18 in 1945, that no New Zealand poet had proved so early his power to say and his right to speak; that no New Zealand writer, novelists and storytellers included, spoke so fluently and forcefully about the business of inhabiting our islands in the South Pacific; that none had quite his fertilising influence, both personally and poetically; and finally that none is likely to leave so potent a legend—a legend that, for a time, may obscure the real distinctions of his verse. That is a problem which all of us who knew him, and were in his debt, will have to live with for some time, and even to die with.

For Baxter was, like Tolstoy, one of those rare writers who felt need to show that he meant what he said, who had to follow his words where they led—and perhaps not altogether vainly. That journey took him through and beyond literary bohemia into the world of the alcoholic, the Catholic church, Maori life, among hippies and junkies and the down-and-outs of the city; finally a barefoot and austere journey dedicated to the lost and distressed and wounded of human society by a man who felt the poet's vocation to be 'a cell of good living in a corrupt society'. And a journey finished too soon, for Baxter is now buried alongside the commune he founded in the small Maori village of Jerusalem, in the centre of the North Island; we have his last poems to tell us that his work had lost little along the way, and indeed at the end had a new and reverberant purity. But those who will try to separate the poet from the legend may find it a profitless enterprise; poetry was his life, and his life was poetry — or the poem he might most have wished to write.

All this leaves the rest of what I might say seeming rather trivial; but it doesn't hurt to be reminded, on an occasion such as this, that the true business of literature is a transaction with life, and not with literature itself. And, that being so, it should always surprise us, as life does. I think I can safely report a reasonable measure of surprise from New Zealand, of diverse enterprise and industry in all literary forms; I might have dwelt, for example, on the work of younger poets, their vigor and variety, and noted too that they appear to be winning an astonishingly wide native audience; I might equally well have spoken about

the more recent work of older poets like Allen Curnow or Denis Glover, or the poets of the middle ground like Kendrick Smithyam or Karl Stead; I might have said more about our Polynesian writers, and what they may imply for the future; I might have said something about playwrights, essayists, literary magazines; I might have examined trends, and offered prophecies. Rather I think it enough to announce, before an Australian audience, that we're alive; and worth something more than a passing glance. Our mutual indifference, which I observed when I began this talk, is also a mutual loss; but I can now at least plead that I've offered some sort of rough plank towards the bridge we may one day need to build between us.

Barry Dickins

The cost of WHAT has gone up???!!

A Primer for Poetry Readers

We are often attacked, for the verse we print, by readers who claim they cannot understand it. Often, we feel, it's because they want an easily-digested, breakfast-food kind of poetry that doesn't hold them up too much. Yet poetry needs not only thought to write but thought to read. It may also need not only several readings, but also a genuine desire to enter into the writer's experience. It's possible to spend more time discussing the alleged obscurity of a poem than in an actual close reading of it. And unfortunately we have found that often the 'old' make little effort to understand the language and preoccupations of the 'young' — and that the 'young' are even more closed in their indifference to the thought and style of the 'old'.

Poetry, like any other kind of art, need not be entirely explicit. (Some would say that good art can never be entirely explicit, but we wouldn't.) Much good art has overtones of the ambiguous and the inexplicable. But, having said that, it must also be said that some poets (or painters or novelists for that matter) may use specialist language, or references to highly personal matters impossible for the reader to understand, in order to present a forced impression of 'mystery' or 'grandeur of thought'.

We repeat, then: difficult language or private experience may be central to a genuine poet's real poetic intention, and legitimately so. Where the line is between properly teasing out a reader's mind, on the one hand, and subjecting him to a pretentious kind of intellectual crossword puzzle, each of us has to decide for himself. So, as an experiment, we decided to ask poets contributing to this issue of Overland to give us a brief statement as to what they were saying, or trying to say, in their poems. We realised that some would be offended and would reply: "Read the poem". (In a famous anecdote Mozart, when asked to explain the meaning of a piece of music he had just played, said "Very well", and played the piece again!) On the other hand artists' comments on their own work are often more interesting than comments by critics, and we have been fortified by the fact that T. S. Eliot didn't find it demeaning to provide copious footnotes to The Waste Land, and encouraged in this exercise when Brooke Murphy wrote: "After the freedom that poetry offers, it helps sometimes to come to terms with what you have written."

Here are the replies we have received:

Dorothy Hewett: "I couldn't and wouldn't paraphrase the meaning of a poem for *anybody*. You don't ask your short story writers to *explain* the short story. The whole idea is so philistine it takes my breath away. The only thing I will explain is the title 'Hand Waving' . . . a hand waving for help, a sign, a drowning man. See Stevie Smith's 'Not Waving, but Drowning'. Both poems are I suppose love poems of a particularly wry sort, the only kind of love poems that seem possible now. 'Moon Man' was based on a very desolate dream. Both poems are influenced very much by cinema and TV images—montages."

Brooke Murphy: " 'Friends' is about my own eco-aesthetic preference for using a fountain pen. Things have a tendency to become formalised and assume the role of authorities, thereby becoming clumsy and inflexible; this is especially true of things in print. It's possible (perhaps better) to revel in the mess and get a bit closer to the personal process; like kids making mud pies. Only the last stanza of 'trotters training' seems to me to have any validity. All the rest is an attempt to rationalise about a process of natural deception; a ruse that distances things to the point where only the glibness of words can suffice. The last stanza tries to be more immediate and closer. The 'unwind' goes along with the conceit, but they might be unwinding in any direction, a bit like a crazy dance."

Leon Slade: "I consider the best poems explorations: 'Ozenfant' is in fact the exploration of a

particular Australian generation — my own — through the encapsulation of many lives into one. The title is the name of my composite hero. It's an European name which, broken into its parts, represents for me the Australian child. Perhaps, in time, I can write 'Ozenfant Old'."

R. D. FitzGerald: "Sorry, no! This is something I have always refused to do for poetry-readings, lectures, anthologies and the like. If my poems can't stand on their own feet they should fall over into the basket. They've done so often enough before this! Or if readers are too uninterested to try and follow them without explanations, then I don't want those kind of readers."
Gwen Harwood: " 'Whoso list to hunt' directs the reader to Wyatt's poem about Anne Boleyn, and like it echoes the movement of the hunt. The speaker is chasing a vision of his own, and has to choke down rationality, misunderstanding and corruption as he moves through the music of the natural world (the harping grasses) towards a moment of fulfilment. The poem is addressed to the muse. I think your idea is excellent and look forward to seeing my companions' illuminations."

Eric Beach: "I use myself as a model, not because I'm a solipsist, but rather because, in any large society, the process of learning is split from the process of identification—there's any amount of information, but no reality. I write poems to voice and songs to sing. I agree with Eluard that 'there is another world, but it is here'. I don't agree that this world is made up only of things and sensations. To those content to live their lives the way it's set up for them to live, to those who satisfy themselves with echoing 'It's not yuman nature'—to those people I'm an alien. 'The poem is the direct experience. The statement is independent of the poem.' "

Ames Damnees: Baudin and Peron

O. H. K. SPATE

The voyage of *Le Géographe* and *Le Naturaliste* has left its mark on our shores, in some eighty French names; but its commander is commemorated only in Baudin's Rocks, a name bestowed, ironically, not by himself nor by the Frenchmen who served under him but by his successful English rival Flinders. Indeed, so bitter was the hatred of his subordinates François Péron and Louis de Freycinet, who prepared the official history, that Baudin is there mentioned by name twice only: once in the nominal roll of the complement, once to record his death and burial: an extraordinary suppression of truth, surely unparalleled in the often acrimonious annals of discovery. It is no less extraordinary that Australia, not France, should have the honor of the first publication of Baudin's own *Journal.*

The *Journal* has not indeed been quite so much neglected as Dr J.-P. Faivre, the acknowledged authority, indicates in his very useful foreword: to the names of Christine Cornell and Jack Dowling should be added those of Arthur Jose and William Dixson, who used it for a paper on Baudin for the Royal Australian Historical Society in 1934, and John Dunmore, in *French Explorers in the Pacific* (vol. II, 1969). Its publication is yet another admirable contribution from the Libraries Board of South Australia, to whom we owe the splendid facsimile of Flinders' *Terra Australis.* Baudin's *Journal* is a fitting complement, and—by exception these days—at an almost ludicrously low price for so handsome a volume. Christine Cornell's editing and translation are excellent. There are a few minor and readily detectable errors of date or position, very difficult to avoid in such work; we might have had a few more identifications of places in Western Australia (South Australia and Tasmania are well served); and it seems rather absurd to repeat the running head *Journal of Nicholas Baudin* 574 times. But these are trivial beside the very substantial and valuable achievement. The appendices include the remarkable schedule of desirable data put forward by the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme—in all probability the first anthropological sociey, an engaging hangover from the early zeal of Anarchasis Klootz and his like—from which one cannot resist quoting the last section: '*Of man considered in the exercise of reproduction.* Our correspondents will rally easily to this heading . . .'

Baudin was 46 when the expedition sailed, and had behind him a meritorious but odd and not highly distinguished career. Beginning, briefly, as a soldier with the Compagnie des Indes, he became an '*officier bleu*'—i.e. of non-noble birth—in the American war. An intrigue of noble '*officiers rouges*' deprived him of his command, and he entered the Austrian service (short of indigenous naval men), being employed in command of voyages to stock the imperial gardens at Schönbrunn with exotic plants; this took him to the Indian Ocean and the West Indies. He seems therefore to have picked up both seamanship and scientific know-how by empirical practice rather than by formal training: a factor in his distrust, or contempt, of 'theoretical' seamen and scientists. This prejudice nearly ruined his Australian enterprise; and, since his *Journal* fell into the hands of a scientist, Péron, and a seaman, Freycinet, both (and for cause) his personal enemies, it completely ruined his posthumous reputation.

The Journal of Post Captain Nicholas Baudin . . , translated by Christine Cornell (Libraries Board of South Australia, $15).

In 1798 Baudin proposed to the Musée National and the prestigious Institut an elaborate Pacific voyage, later whittled down to the specific task of filling in the gaps on the Australian coast. In this form it was backed by the Institut and secured the necessary approval of Napoleon, then First Consul; and it is probably this as much as some incidents on the voyage which gave rise to the view, found at its most extreme in Holland Rose's somewhat chauvinist history, that the voyage was primarily political in intent, designed to spy out the land for desirable territorial acquisitions. The rationale is over-simple: nothing could happen under Napoleon except by his direct inspiration, and everything that did happen must serve some vast imperial design. There is no substantial evidence for this view, which is scouted by Ernest Scott in *Terre Napoléon,* though the call at Port Jackson, which was unplanned and forced on Baudin by the state of his ships and crews, was definitely used by Péron and Freycinet for unofficial espionage.

One might, it is true, suspect Péron, in Faivre's phrase *"impulsif et frondeur",* and zealously Anglophobe, of being a secretly commissioned agent; but this seems negatived by the fact that his appointment was as a last-minute replacement. Certainly his report to Governor Decaen at Ile de France was political through and through, stating firmly that the ostensible scientific aim was only a façade to cover definite imperialist ends. This is very doubtful, and the report was probably in part designed to show a proper zeal for the glory of France and Napoleon, in part simply the standard French reaction of awed suspicion of the mighty designs of perfidious Albion. As Faivre puts it, the French readily "attributed to English statesmen a largeness of view, and to the authorities of Port Jackson resources, which neither party was within a thousand leagues of possessing". The compliment was as readily returned by the British.

Baudin himself, in his desperate efforts to extract supplies from the needy and recalcitrant administration of Ile de France, rather more than hinted at national interests transcending the avowed scientific design of the voyage, and this might be held to imply secret instructions; but the slightly shocked reception in Paris of the report from Ile de France is against this. Of course, any accurate information on those coasts of New Holland not already pre-empted by the British would be of potential political value; and a scientific objective—indispensable to secure the necessary safe-conducts—would be far from precluding the odd political by-product; any officer worth his salt, British as well as French, might be expected to keep his eyes open, within the limits of decency. As we shall see, the voyage did in fact have a tangible political by-product — but unintended and 'in the opposite phase'. This was Governor King's scramble to assert British rights in Bass Strait; but these had been in effect already accepted in Baudin's instructions.

It is true that later on—much later, in 1810—Napoleon did envisage the taking of Port Jackson, rather loosely located as "south of Ile de France"; and Faivre acutely remarks that Decaen, the tough and dedicated governor of that island, was not only Péron's confidant but the instigator of such schemes, for which the naval resources were utterly lacking. In this context it is very likely significant that Péron's report to Decaen is dated only four days before the former sailed for Europe, and he excuses himself for lack of time to add details to a report already detailed, if not always accurate—no murders heard of since the beginning of the colony! He had had four months to discuss matters with Decaen, and the report could be the final intelligence memo. There seems little doubt that Péron was acting on his own responsibility. The careful and judicious discussion in Christine Cornell's 1965 *Questions Relating* to the expedition leaves the question a little open, but on the whole discounts political motivation, certainly as a primary factor. We may fairly conclude: political, incidentally, yes; political as part of a formal design, no.

So much for the politics, interesting enough but pallid beside the human—one is tempted to say inhuman—story. The picture of Baudin which emerges from the Péron-Freycinet *Voyage de Découvertes aux Terres Australes* (1807-16) is of an unbalanced man, utterly capricious and tyrannical, willing to abandon his people without any show of reason (but one feels that Péron was eminently abandonable!), and moreover stupid and technically incompetent; as Scott says, one would judge him "barely fit to command a canal barge". Scott himself defends Baudin from some of the more outrageous accusations. He could not possibly have had any responsibility for Flinders' detention by Decaen (this is an Australian charge; Péron might have thought it a mitigation!), since he was dead three months before Flinders reached Ile de France. In only one case, the renaming of Kangaroo Island as Ile Borda, did Baudin replace a Flinders name, and then he is careful to give a reasonable if not conclusive reason; the galliciz-

ing of the coast was the work of Péron, and its Napoleonic emphasis greatly embarrassed Freycinet when he came to finish the *Voyage* after the Hundred Days. So also was the extravagant extension of Terre Napoléon from a legitimate 1½ degrees of longitude, from Cape Banks to Encounter Bay, to 13 degrees, Westernport to Cape Adieu. Nor, although they did not know Flinders' names, can Péron and Freycinet be acquitted of jumping the claim to priority in the publication of the *Voyage* while they knew Flinders to be safely captive in the Indian Ocean.

Clearly Baudin had admirable qualities: he was tough, courageous, relentlessly devoted to his duty, driving himself as hard as he drove his people, even when both were sick unto death. If his scientific training was merely incidental to his earlier botanising voyage, he retained a lively interest in scientific phenomena: his summaries of the coasts he charted are models of succinct description, his observations on the Tasmanian Aboriginals thoughtful and humane. He seems to have been a good seaman tactically, though despite his reproaches to his officers for slackness in taking soundings, he puts forward an odd reason for not heaving the lead in doubtful waters—that the revelation of decreasing depths might worry the crew! The major reproach to his seamanship—even Faivre says that here Péron is right for once—is that he committed the strategic error of keeping too close to the African coast on the voyage out, thereby losing so much time that the whole programme of discovery was disrupted.

This view is based on Péron's long lecture on his commander's stupidity, and is very dubious. In the first place, although it is true that Baudin intended to cross the Equator in about 10 or 11 degrees West from Greenwich, and Péron makes much play with the fact that the standard track cut the Line at 25 to 28 West, yet on the critic's own showing the crossing was made in about 20 degrees—but actually between 22°28′ and 23°19′. That this was due to adverse currents does not alter the fact that the error, if such it was, largely cancelled out. Baudin's course was not absurd, though perhaps difficult; Flinders himself held that a good passage could be made "by steering around the Bight of Benin", and as a matter of fact below about five or six degrees North Baudin's actual track was much further from Africa than was Flinders' until probably around fifteen degrees South, where the tracks crossed again and thenceforward were very close together as far as the Cape. From the Canaries until the crossing north of the Equator, Baudin was closer to the African shore—and here he made much better time than Flinders. On either side of the Line, however, he met a long spell of adverse winds and calms, and here, where Flinders was nearer Africa, Baudin took much longer than he did; and these relative timings make nonsense of Péron's armchair argument. Taking the whole Atlantic run, Flinders took 86 sailing days to reach the Cape (he spent three or four looking for St Paul and the non-existent Ile Saxembourg), Baudin 93 or 94—a difference of one week! Baudin's real loss of time came in the Indian Ocean, from a fortnight of consistent and extraordinary adverse winds, and most of all from the inordinate delays, not of his making, at Tenerife and especially Ile de France: his instructions allowed him fourteen days there, he was detained for forty-one.

Nevertheless, the prolonged voyage out was disastrous for supplies, health, and morale: sailing from Le Havre on 19 October 1800, Baudin did not reach Cape Leeuwin until 27 May 1801, when he judged it too near winter for southern navigation, and so turned up the west coast of New Holland. Péron blames him for this; though to judge from his almost hysterical account of the perils of storms off Tasmania in *December*, one shudders to think of his reactions to mid-winter! Flinders sighted the Leeuwin on 6 December 1801, in the height of summer, and proceeded along the south coast; Baudin returned from Timor directly to Van Diemen's Land (a key locale in his instructions), reaching it on 13 January 1802. Flinders had won the race, and handsomely; by the time the two men met in Encounter Bay, on 8 April 1802, the French had lost priority on nearly all the south coast of New Holland, and this could not be indefinitely obscured by the Péron-Freycinet sleight-of-hand and the grandiose nomenclature of Terre Napoléon.

Apart from this failure, the achievements of the voyage were very considerable, but less in the way of geographical discovery than in scientific description; while Péron's uncritical admiration of the convict system at Botany Bay had a definite influence on French thinking on colonisation. Very valuable collections were brought back to France—23,415 items in 204 cases, 23 mammals, 17 birds, 41 turtles, 210 living plants: from Josephine's gardens at Malmaison the great eucalypts spread to the coasts of Provence, to become ultimately an integral part of the Mediterranean landscape. In botany, zoology, and to some extent

ethnography, the results were outstanding, and very ably written up by Péron who, whatever else he was, was a good scientist and an attractive writer—though Baudin would not have agreed. How much of this success was due to Baudin, how much was achieved in spite of him?

The answer is not easy. Faivre in 1953 expressed the opinion that from the original documents Baudin would emerge "greater, cleansed from the accusations with which his enemies overwhelmed him". But the evidence of the *Journal* is equivocal. The general effect is near-paranoid; *Le Géographe* was a terrible ship, and that there was no officers' mutiny is a near-miracle.

On the one hand, Baudin emerges as a man of tremendous resolution, keeping his ships and men going regardless of distress, to the point that his enfeebled crew had to be helped into Port Jackson by a party of Flinders' men—irony again! A lesser man might well have given up long before. But the cost in human suffering was great, and much of it needless; his second in command, Hamelin in *Le Naturaliste*, was a disciple of Cook, and kept a healthy and it seems a happy ship; *Le Géographe* was riddled with dysentery and scurvy. Although the long delay in reaching Ile de France, and the frustrations when it was reached, might be thought to have poisoned the voyage, the rot had set in long before: at Tenerife, only two weeks out, we have the first of the acid complaints about the scientists—and almost everybody else—which are the *Leitmotiv* of the *Journal*. There were certainly too many scientists and auxiliaries—23 all told—and many of them were doubtless impracticable nuisances, impertinent *frondeurs;* the error was not repeated in later French voyages. But the root of the malaise lay deeper, in Baudin's own character. For like the eighteenth century poet-of-sorts John Armstrong, he seems to have had "a rooted aversion to the whole human Race, except a few Friends, which it seems are dead". His relations with Hamelin were correct but not really cordial. Some friends indeed he had; but the two old scientific colleagues with him, Maugé and Riedlé, died on the voyage.

Baudin indeed, from his own words and not Péron's, seems rarely to have been capable of conveying encouragement, or what he meant to be such, in encouraging terms; at his best, in his letter on the promotion of midshipman Charles Baudin (no relation), he is insufferably patronising; much more often his counsel is given in harsh and wounding terms. Officers, scientists, midshipmen, all but one or two favorites whose tenure of favor was precarious, were found wanting, often doubtless with reason, but as often with injustice which could be monstrous. Towards the end he uses petty-officers to do officers' jobs whenever he can, which can have done no good to morale and discipline. The hard-bitten seadog's distrust of 'theorists', the petit-bourgeois officer's enjoyment of authority over regular navy men whose like had once unjustly deprived him of command, the inevitably consequent insecurity taking refuge in aloofness, compulsive worrying, complete self-righteousness, all compounded by the lurking consciousness of incurable consumption—all these stand out from entry after entry in the *Journal*. Baudin's written instructions as a rule could leave their recipients in no doubt that they were inferior untrustworthy types, given a job solely for lack of anybody else, debarred from any slightest exercise of their own discretion or intelligence. The officers may have been a poor lot, though at least five went on to careers of distinction; Baudin's *de haut en bas* approach was guaranteed not to bring out the best in them.

Here and there in the *Journal* is an arch attempt at a joke; the Tasmanian ladies were greatly taken by pocket mirrors, so true it is that "in all countries of the world, women overlook nothing to please or charm!" But his unpleasant pleasantries are nearly all at the expense of Péron, and for his own people there are few gleams of geniality or generosity, although once or twice he does try to extend a helping hand—maladroitly. Even the "grief and sorrow" with which he waits for news of a missing boat seems to reveal self-centred anxiety; or perhaps by this time one is so fed up with Nicolas Baudin that one willy-nilly takes a poor view of him. But while few are spared, the vials of Baudin's wrath were more particularly reserved for Péron, to whom he seems to have instantly allotted a special hate. From Péron's own account of his own doings, he must have been quite infuriating to any practical man; but, one or two early comments on Péron's meteorology apart, there is scarcely one of the obsessively numerous references to Péron which is not bitterly and insultingly contemptuous, charged with a hard spiteful sarcasm which would enrage a saint. Péron was assuredly very far from saintliness, and he had the *Journal* before him when he wrote the *Voyage* . . .

To document this characterisation would be easy but tedious; there is just all too much material in the *Journal*. The hatred was returned

in kind; it is no wonder that Péron did his best to turn Baudin into a non-person—the references are again obsessively numerous, but never once by name, always *'notre Commandant'* or *'notre Chef'*, and except for mere passing records of events, they are invariably charged with slur and innuenda. Péron must however be acquitted of one charge: when remarking that "He showed more regret when he had to throw away the skin of the alligator [*sic:* crocodile] which he had shot at Timor, than when mentioning the death of the man who had been his chief for three years", Scott overlooked the fact that this part of the *Voyage* was written by Freycinet. But—Baudin himself, by this time a dying man, when at last he is forced to turn back gives as his first reason not the difficulty of keeping alive his crew, overworked, under-fed, sick with dysentery, but the difficulty of keeping alive the kangaroos and emus. . .

And yet this man, so utterly impossible in relations with his subordinates, was capable of the most admirable calm and tact in the awkward if ludicrous imbroglio with Governor King over King Island. During the long involuntary stay at Port Jackson, the British had been very forthcoming with refitting and hospitality, in marked contrast to the worse-than-grudging reception at Ile de France, where Baudin was reduced to borrowing at 33.3 per cent interest from the Danish consul; but then, Ile de France was very conscious of being a beleaguered garrison. Clearly at Sydney Town parties, the 'good Bengal' flowing free, there had been indiscretions—probably by Péron; at any rate, King heard stories of French boasts of intent to start a settlement in Bass Strait. In hot haste he sent off Lieutenant Robbins and 17 men to forestall this design; and Baudin, returning to his camp on the island, was astonished to see the Union Jack drooping limply from a tree over his tents.

King's letter was courteous and personally friendly; but Lieutenant Robbins was young, probably nervous, anxious to do the thing in

style, and hence naturally enough brash. A one-time officer of the Holy Roman Emperor might be expected to have more *savoir faire* than the lieutenant, but nothing in the *Journal* prepares us for the magnificent cool with which Baudin took this affront. He does mention to King that he thought the flag had been hung out to dry, though the *Journal* entry does not warrant Dunmore's ascription to him of the appalling insult that he thought it was somebody's washing. Nor does he labor the exquisite addition to the farce, that Robbins had been sent off in such a hurry that he had to beg all sorts of needful stores from Baudin — including the gunpowder to fire the salute, of muskets merely, to signalise British sovereignty. His letter to King is a model, maintaining the dignity of his own flag (which he had not hoisted on the island), brushing off the misunderstanding without giving any opening for the British to take offence, and yet leaving King looking faintly ridiculous: before Robbins' act of possession, Baudin had set proofs of the French visit at the four points of the island, but he will retain the name King Island. . . Yet the ironic upshot, as Faivre stresses, is that the one tangible political result of the voyage was this hasty extension of the British domain.

Again, despite Baudin's scorn for the junior scientists on his ships, he was by no means an uncultured man, and he was able to keep his end up with the first scientists of the day; he was supported by a commission which included Bougainville (whose son, on the voyage, received if he did not earn Baudin's disfavor), Lacépède, and Jussieu. The Institut as a whole rallied to his project; not to mention Napoleon himself, who interviewed Baudin and was not likely to be taken in by an incompetent or an impostor: there must have been some quality in the man to stand up to that! Even more striking, a man far greater than Napoleon in the realm of thought, Alexander von Humboldt, wished to join Baudin on the projected 1798 voyage up the Pacific shores of South America; although he seems not to have been greatly impressed by Baudin as a man, on his own evidence the two for some time met almost daily. It is indeed a most solemn thought that, but for lack of funds for the 1798 scheme, the greatest scientific traveller of any age, the architect of the magnificent synthesis of *Cosmos*, might have died of scurvy or dysentery in his early thirties.

Clearly, and despite his own writing-down of himself in the *Journal*, a man to whom such contacts were possible, who could gain such backing, was far indeed from the compound of oaf and fool and tyrant of Péron's caricature; far also, though not so immeasurably far, from the almost paranoid figure of Baudin's self-portrait. Schizoid? An easy way out; but at any rate a fascinating and baffling figure, the elements strangely and sadly mixed in him: iron courage and peevish complaints, a lofty sense of duty and petty spite in its execution. Baudin has his place in Australian history; but the gratitude we owe to Christine Cornell and the Libraries Board of South Australia is not solely for the scholarly presentation of historical data, valuable as this is: it is at least as much for the portrayal of an all too human figure, fit material for the Ironic Muse. And in the last resort, there are those eighty-odd Napoleonic names around our shores; least perhaps in fame, though in justice not least in honor, Baudin's Rocks.

[Note: the background for this review-article is drawn mainly from: F. Péron and L. de Freycinet. *Voyage de Découverte aux Terres Australes,* Paris, 1807-16; M. Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis,* London, 1814; Ernest Scott, *Terre Napoléon,* London, 1910; Ernest Scott, *The Life of Matthew Flinders,* Sydney, 1914; A. W. Jose, 'Nicolas Baudin', with notes by F. J. Bayldon and W. Dixson, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society,* XX, 1934, 337-96; J.-P. Faivre, *L'Expansion française dans le Pacifique de 1800 à 1842,* Paris, 1953; C. Cornell, *Questions Relating to Nicolas Baudin's Australian Expedition, 1800-1804,* Adelaide, 1965; J. Dunmore, *French Explorers in the Pacific,* Vol. II, Oxford, 1969.]

books

PROTECTING OUR WOMEN

Percy Chatterton

Amirah Inglis: *Not a White Woman Safe* (A.N.U. Press, $7.95).

Percy Chatterton worked as a missionary in Papua from 1924 to 1964, and from 1964 until 1972 was a member of the House of Assembly. He now lives in retirement in Port Moresby.

If the myth that the Australian brand of colonialism has been different from and more benign than other brands still needs debunking, this is the book to do it. Amirah Inglis has made a meticulously detailed and documented study of one of the least creditable facets of Australian administration in what had formerly been British New Guinea and had been re-named Papua when it was taken over by the Commonwealth of Australia in the early 1900s.

In 1926 the Australian adminstration of Papua, headed by the prestigious Sir Hubert Murray, enacted the notorious "White Women's Protection Ordinance", a measure designed to protect white women in Papua from sex-motivated attacks on them by Papuans. It was inspired by the hysterical reaction of Port Moresby's then quite small white community to a series of, mostly somewhat timid, advances made by Papuan males to white women, and in part perhaps by a dislike for what was regarded as Sir Hubert Murray's pro-nativism. It imposed a mandatory death penalty for either the rape or the attempted rape of a white woman, at a time when the rape of a Papuan woman earned her attacker, if a Papuan, a short jail sentence, or, if a white man, an opportunity to leave the country ahead of arrest. Although a product of panic and malice, it remained a part of the criminal law of Papua till 1958, when external pressures led to its repeal.

Mrs Inglis sets the stage for her study in two introductory chapters. The first, entitled "You can never be quite the same as the white man", brings together a quite horrifying collection of quotations illustrating the invincible assurance of racial superiority which sustained the white (predominantly British and Australian) community that formed a tiny minority of Papua's pre-1942 population. All sections of the community, government officers, traders and missionaries, though differing widely as to what use should be made of it, were unanimous in their agreement as to the "fact" of the innate superiority of the white race over those blessed by providence with darker colored skins. Perhaps the most astonishing case of all was that of the Government Anthropologist, F. E. Williams, whom one might have expected to have known better, but who not only shared the views of the rest but expressed them with a quite revolting style of patronising facetiousness in his brain-child *The Papuan Villager*. This government-sponsored magazine was ostensibly directed towards an indigenous readership but, as Mrs Inglis points out, it attracted more European than Papuan subscribers, and it was sometimes difficult to avoid the suspicion that Williams, who wrote most of it in addition to editing it, was sometimes playing for laughs from the white gallery.

In her second chapter, "The white man's town", Mrs Inglis draws a picture of Port Moresby in the 1920s. Like Ian Stuart before her, in his *Port Moresby — Yesterday and Today* (1970), she uses the available documentation to recreate the period in a way which rings true to the present reviewer, who lived through it. Segrega-

tion of the races was as complete as it could be made without inconvenience to the whites, who depended so much on the labor of Papuans for their comfort. Port Moresby was, as Mrs Inglis designates it, a white man's town, and most of the whites were determined to keep it that way by restrictive regulations, curfews and so on. At one stage it was even advocated that a fence should be built across the neck of the peninsula on which the town stood. Few Europeans other than district administration officers and missionaries had any dealings with Papuans other than in an employer-employee relationship, or any idea of how Papuans lived in their own communities.

This segregation had two results. In the first place, it instilled fear of the Papuan majority in the hearts of the tiny white minority. In the second, there was a complete lack of comprehension by each community as to what made the other community tick. The Papuans tried to understand the whites but gave it up as hopeless, and took refuge in hilarious burlesques of white behavior. Perhaps it was a good thing that they could laugh at us; laughter provided a safety valve against hatred. On the European side, of course, most whites would have rejected outright any suggestion that they should try to understand the Papuans.

This state of mutual incomprehension was particularly dangerous when it came to matters of sex. Most whites assumed that Papuans were uninhibited and even animal-like in their sexual behavior. Nothing could have been farther from the truth. True, the rules of the game varied from tribe to tribe. Some communities were more permissive, some less. The Motu, the first Papuan community with which Europeans came into close contact, had a particularly strict code of sexual behavior. But each community had its rules, and its members, until demoralized by contact with whites, kept those rules a good deal more faithfully than many Australians kept theirs even back in the 1920s. Of the 1970s the less said the better.

This is the one point in Mrs Inglis' otherwise excellent and well-balanced book on which I would take issue with her. She rejects the view, put forward at the time and later, that white women were themselves largely responsible for the advances made to them by Papuans. As regards deliberate provocation, I think that she is mainly, though not completely, right. But I feel sure that there was a great deal of unintentional provocation, arising inevitably from the state of mutual incomprehension to which I have referred. It just didn't occur to the Europeans that their Papuan neighbors might have views quite different from theirs about what behavior was proper and what improper. White women of the period sometimes quite unwittingly behaved in ways which, though they seemed perfectly proper to themselves and to their menfolk, appeared improper and even invitatory to Papuans. In more recent times miniskirts have been stigmatized as licentious by Papuans whose womenfolk habitually go baretopped but are punctilious about keeping their knees covered. I believe that some, at any rate, of the advances made by Papuans to white women in the 1920s and 1930s were made under an expectation, perhaps quite unwittingly created, of potential complaisance. Mrs Inglis makes merry over Vincent Eri's story (in *The Crocodile*) of the naked white lady who asks the young servant to bring her a towel. But to me the story rings true. Indeed I could cap it with worse. Admittedly these were exceptions, but they were there.

The chapter in which Mrs Inglis recounts the incidents leading up to the enactment of the White Women's Protection Ordinance and the story of its passage through the Legislative Council is headed, fairly enough I think, "Something very like hysteria". It is followed by three chapters tracing the consequences of that enactment. After describing in detail the two most important cases, Mrs Inglis refers to a number of others, and is able to show that the savage provisions of the ordinance were not as effective a deterrent as those responsible for them liked to think, and indeed have claimed.

Finally, in a perceptive epilogue, Mrs Inglis points out that today, while fear remains, hysteria has gone. Gone too, in the thinking of an increasing number of whites, is the concern for racial purity and prestige which made sex relations between black and white so repugnant in the Port Moresby of the 1920s, of which Mrs Inglis writes: "In such a town, for a white women to be peeped at or touched was for white women a frightening experience, for white men an infamy against white womanhood and an outrage against the prestige of the white race. And in this town it was also a weapon against the policies and personality of the Lieutenant-Governor."

One finds oneself wondering what sort of impression this book will make on Papuans and New Guineans who read it. Probably they will regard it as just another example of the innate beastliness of the white man. If so, it will be a pity.

Because, as I see it, this sorry story is in fact an example of the sort of thing that can happen whenever a group of people convinced of its superiority rules over another group which it regards as its inferiors. The two groups don't have to have differently colored skins. Two thousand years ago the Romans were being beastly to the ancestors of Port Moresby's whites. Today, and nearer home in Irian Jaya, brown Indonesians are ruling over brown Melanesians whom they regard as their inferiors in a way which has stung Ron Crocombe into writing "I would not have believed the extent of the brutality . . . of Indonesian officials there if I had not seen it with my own eyes." (*The New South Pacific* (1973), p. 40). Moreover, the two groups don't even have to be of different races. An educated elite obsessed with its own superiority can be just as beastly to the common people of its own race as the wicked white colonialists ever were. And that is something which Papuan and New Guinean readers may well ponder.

COMING FROM SOMEWHERE

A. M. McBriar

Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie: *The Time Traveller: the Life of H. G. Wells* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, $15.65).

H. G. Wells has been well served, during the last two decades, by critics, editors and biographers. Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie have come at a good moment to reap the harvest of this earlier work and to add their own special contribution. They have succeeded in producing the best *Life* so far written. It is detailed, yet readable; comprehensive, yet clearly organised. Their work at the historical "brute empirical" level is excellently researched; and they also show an awareness of the extra finesse which is now being demanded of biographers by psychologists (see, for example, A. F. Davies's chapter 8 in his *Essays in Political Sociology*, Melbourne, 1972), ideal demands, which, alas, the information in documents does not always permit the historian to meet. Nevertheless, H. G. Wells gave his future biographers a flying start with his own *Experiment in Autobiography*, and even if John Dollard's criticism of it in his *Criteria for the Life History* (N.Y., 1949) does not find a place in the MacKenzies' bibliography, they have gone a long way towards complying with the psychologist's standards.

The last major biography of Wells before this one, Lovat Dickson's *H. G. Wells: His Turbulent Life and Times*, was also an observant study, greatly aided by its author's special insight into the publishing side of Wells's books. It must have presented a challenge to the MacKenzies to "go one better". But their researches in the Wells archive at the University of Illinois on the personal material, and their perceptive use of the Fabian papers and documents, which bring so much illumination to Wells's excursion into politics, have enabled them to outdistance their precursor.

In his novels, as in his *Experiment*, Wells was richly self-revealing. It was part of Henry James's friendly criticism of him that his projection of himself in his novels dimmed the interest in his characters and their problems: ". . . your 'story', through the five hundred pages, says more to me than theirs". Wells was generous in making available to his biographers his access to his own past. His eye was especially sharp in describing the frame of social organization into which he was born; his mother's respect for it, his father's dispirited attempts to evade responsibilities it sought to impose, and Wells's opportunity to reach a higher and freer status through education, science and literary achievement gave him an abnormally sensitive critical perception both of established social rituals and the changes which were happening to society. His critical vision remained charged with the emotion generated by his own struggle and egotism, and was never defused into cooler 'objectivity' by academic training.

Wells was aware of the role of his family in forming his views, and in his autobiography he made a considerable effort to define his relationship with his mother, though his picture of his father and brothers remained distant and shadowy. The MacKenzies have added some flesh to these shades—as much probably as can now be added. They are adventurous in their speculations about the family's influence upon his later behavior and ideas: his intellectual rejection of his mother's religion, and yet the enduring importance of the millenarian symbolism which came from the puritanical doctrines she embraced so passionately; the way his mother's ambition and his father's incapacity determined him to 'get on', though not in the direction his mother wanted; the "dialectic of martyrdom and self-indulgence" (repre-

sented by the life-styles of his mother and father) which "became a driving conflict of Wells's life"; the spoiling and over-indulgence of H.G. as the youngest son of the family which resulted in abrupt alternations of temperament between his being a charmer and a bad-tempered, spiteful person who was unable to cooperate with his colleagues; and his absorption of his family's contempt of the working class in his later visions of the future society.

We are left, however, with two fundamental problems about Wells unsolved (perhaps it is asking too much of any biographer to solve them). Whence came that appalling energy, that drive, which could make him able to write (in the later 1890s) "an average of one book and thirty stories and articles every six months, and well over a million words in all", and which, in still later years, could push his industrious collaborators in his "outlines" and encyclopaedias to the edge of distraction? Whence also came this commitment to literature and story telling? Surely we are not to accept Wells's own account that it was all inspired by the reading he was able to do when as a boy he was laid up with a broken leg?

As the story become more amply documented with Wells's ascent to fame, the puzzles become fewer. But some still remain. His squandering of his chances at the Normal School of Science after T. H. Huxley's retirement needs fuller explanation if we are to believe the effort of will he made to get there. The personal influence of Huxley and his retirement, though no doubt important, seems too slender an explanation to account for Wells's initial interest and then the waning of his interest in pure science, and the special direction of his literary talents towards 'science fiction'. The MacKenzies tell us a little, but too little, about Wells's young friends and student contemporaries at the South Kensington school. It seems likely that a fuller explanation lies hidden there.

An outstanding contribution made in this biography is the careful account of Wells's irruption into Fabian politics in the years between 1903 and 1908. Samuel Hynes in his *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, N.J., 1968) made a valuable excursion into this episode, and the MacKenzies have given a full description of all its complexities. Essentially, they show that Wells was not prepared to work at the job of being a politician, even amongst the group most likely to pay homage to a lively-minded theorist. He wanted to be the prophet who brought down the new laws from Sinai, and to be accepted as unchallenged leader in consequence. But it is doubtful if Wells had any really practicable contribution to make to the reorganization of the Fabian Society beyond the 'shake-up' his brief presence caused. He disqualified himself from leadership by his delusions of grandeur, his refusal to take advice on tactics from an old hand like Bernard Shaw, and by his advocacy and his practice of "freer love" at this inopportune moment. In the circumstances, Shaw and the Webbs were extraordinarily indulgent to Wells. "There was no chance of taming Wells into a Fabian asset," as the MacKenzies say. What they might have emphasised a little more strongly are the consequences of the estrangement. The Fabians and Wells both were losers in the breakdown of their collaboration. Wells had an important theoretical message for the Fabians—a message that no other person seemed capable of giving them at that point—a criticism that stabbed at the heart of established Fabian municipal socialism by revealing the importance of changes in technology to the state of the future.

At this time Wells's cosmic imagination was in an orbit closer to the actual political and social world than it had been earlier or was to be later. It was his greatest moment as novelist and political thinker. Just before he joined the Fabian Society he had marked out a new path in his splendid work *Anticipations* (1901); the idea of it, he said without too much modesty in his *Experiment in Autobiography*, was "as new as a new-laid egg". It was a kind of "Human Ecology" different from the fantastic exaggerations of his earlier science fiction.

In *Anticipations* he tried to harness his powerful and somewhat pessimistic imagination to the extrapolation of real social tendencies; and though the harness sat loosely upon him in the later chapters, the impact of the book and the accuracy of many of its predictions depended on this restraint. If he had wished to become a serious social theorist, Wells in that line had as much to learn from the Fabians as they had to learn from him. But his imagination was not to be confined by earthbound politics that did not involve the Day of Judgment or a new edition of the New Jerusalem; he saw the Webbs merely as objects of satire. Some may think it a gain that his imagination should have sailed off again into the empyrean; but perhaps G. K. Chesterton had the last word when he remarked: "whenever I met H.G. he always seemed to be coming from somewhere rather than going anywhere".

VIEWS OF NORMAN LINDSAY

R. D. FitzGerald

John Hetherington: *Norman Lindsay: The Embattled Olympian* (Oxford, $7.50).

Jane Lindsay: *Portrait of Pa* (Angus & Robertson, $5.95).

Long, long ago Norman Lindsay wrote:

> The moral value of the Image in Art must consist in its power to arouse a conviction of Beauty.
>
> If a conviction of Beauty is aroused all images of Passion and Action allied to it will become vitalized.
>
> Vitality in a work of Art thus becomes a communicable element in mind, and so fulfils its function of stimulating vitality in Life.

These are the opening sentences of an article he contributed to the first issue of *Vision* (May 1923); and, when all else about Norman Lindsay's art is threshed out by admirers or critics or persecutors, I see these sentences as condensing what basically throughout his life that art sought not only to achieve but also to express and expound. All values in art, he has said elsewhere, are moral values.

As inherent in such principles he advanced two workaday extensions:

> If art is to create in the grand manner, it is essential that it should reject no subject-matter in the Action of Life, and the test of its greatness will be the power to draw beautiful and vital imagery from whatever subject-matter it may choose for expression.

and

> Sex is the function which produces Life, therefore it must be of first importance to Art, since Art is the process which vitalizes Life. But unless Life produced by the sex function reacts to beauty in some form, it is of very little moral value as mind; therefore, if Art is to serve Life truly, it must always reveal sex in terms of beauty, so that life stimulated by it may produce mind able to react again to Beauty, which we accept as the highest symbol of vitality of mind.

Add to these the simple remark I have heard him make in conversation, "A beautiful woman is the most beautiful thing there is", and you have in direct enough terms a purely aesthetic basic philosophy which has nevertheless been misunderstood by so many who did not necessarily join in the enraged uproar of puritanism but were persuaded by it to look askance at Lindsay nudes.

As to that, as late, I think, as the early sixties when the uproar had largely subsided, a retrospective exhibition of Lindsay etchings was dismissed with distaste by a critic of the Sydney press as "just sex". And I recall with delight how a colleague of mine with no artistic pretensions said after seeing the show and reading that dismissal: "Yes, of course it is just sex; but what lovely sex!" A natural, sound critic.

I will never listen to the conventional jeering at the remark: "I don't know anything about art; but I know what I like." Anyone who really knows what he likes in any of the arts, especially if he knows why, is surely beginning to know quite a lot. Norman, I think, would have invited my colleague to Springwood then and there to discuss art and life.

One may well be disappointed that neither Jane Lindsay in her lively *Portrait of Pa* nor John Hetherington in his *Norman Lindsay: The Embattled Olympian* examine the working-out of those *Vision* principles in stated Lindsay pictures; and neither of them gives us any kind of study of his art's development throughout his long career, though Hetherington does relate something of his difficulties in mastering the pen. Yet, in fairness, one must concede that the concern of biography is properly with events and character rather than with aesthetic values. Moreover any such discussion would have had to be largely in technical terms out of reach for most of us. Of the creative influence and spiritual values of his work nothing finer has been written than Douglas Stewart's essay "The Flesh and the Spirit", to which I would refer any seeker after that understanding which was always so beyond the attainment of Lindsay's hated wowsers.

Hetherington's book closes with a bibliography and an index. For these one is grateful. They multiply the usefulness of a volume which I see as itself really an index to the life of a genius rather than as a portrayal of that life. I am told it contains a few errors; but minor lapses are probably unavoidable in a compilation of this kind. That the book was written at Norman Lindsay's own invitation, with his express authority and with the aid of outspoken letters, visits and intimate papers, vouches for its authenticity but not for its adequacy. True, it is packed with information, much of it unlikely to be found else-

where by research, even that of the most zealous emmaythesist. It directs the reader usefully to successive items of a crowded life, but the very profuseness of that material makes it a bit opaque —it robs it of illumination. The mind's eye seldom sees the man behind except dulled through a fog of facts.

So, using Hetherington appreciatively for reference and to fill in a number of gaps, one turns to other available records—again, in particular, to the artist's own writings: to the Creswick-based novels for insight into background and beginnings; to *Rooms and Houses* for personal experiences of the Melbourne years; and then to the turbulent autobiography *My Mask* for confirmation and expansion of much that had previously been interwoven with fiction, also for its extension of the account into periods that followed. It is less meticulous than Hetherington's factual build-up, but all a spectacle of life in action.

A spectacle, however, which shows the narrator, of course, solely from one viewpoint, his own. For a view of other aspects (though nothing, surely, could ever complete the picture) one does well to turn again from that indexed index, this time to Rose Lindsay's entertaining and very worthwhile reminiscences *Model Wife* which cover the same period more sociably and extend it more fully into the Springwood years—the years of that dominion where she was consort and regent.

Or we are able to turn now to Jane Lindsay's glimpses of the inhabitant of a "one-man picture factory" just beyond the backdoor, as seen from a child's corner in affairs, and to her account of a period shared at Springwood with a father who considered that to be unremittingly engaged in creative writing should be her only excuse for being alive.

Certainly those of us who admired Jane Lindsay's early novel *Kurrajong* are thus far with him as to regret that no year since 1945 has brought us a second novel to follow it. But here, as *Portrait of Pa,* is a lively substitute, giving us much of what was evidently the pioneering background of *Kurrajong*; for though Pa is looked at sharply and frequently—on the domestic rather than the artistic level—the book is primarily autobiographical.

Here is a fascinating account, briefly, of young girls brought up, or bringing themselves up, in the near isolation of a rambling house and estate several miles in the bush from the nearest small country centre; then, more fully, of the young Jane's gradual break-away into a life of her own. Interest in the cows, pigs, fowls and horses that contributed to the family's establishment extended in stages to concern and assistance with the minor farming of neighbors and eventually to country employment and share-farming elsewhere; in all of which one sees the genesis of *Kurrajong*. Jane Lindsay writes with the inborn Lindsay competence and visual evocation. There must surely be more novel material within her reach, also a ghost nearby getting cranky about absences from her desk.

All sources and versions of Lindsay's life-story make very evident the devoted support and cooperation he received from his wife, Rose: her financial management of his affairs and pictures; her skill and labor in the printing of etchings; her attention to his physical well-being. "Ma always cossetted him with amazing protectiveness," Jane writes; but she perhaps does him less than justice in suggesting that he could forget his own acknowledgment, frequently made: "I wouldn't have got anywhere without Rose." No doubt an art-centred man disappearing into a studio or to Sydney from problems left to others might seem more a self-centred one at near hand; but clearly there must have been greater reciprocity in the relationship than might have been apparent to a growing girl. One may surely see, for example, the husband's activity in making alterations to the home the wife ruled, and in beautifying its surrounds, as a matter of mutual interests, and as outgoing rather than insulated.

Indeed Hetherington gives examples of the man's "unfailing kindness and surpassing generosity"; and more examples could be assembled from the years when he inhabited his Bridge Street studio in Sydney like a voluntary exile. Valuable though Hetherington's factual record is elsewhere, it is disappointingly nebulous about that period. Other witnesses could testify that, besides inspiration returning to the artist there after a bad interval, as Hetherington reveals, Lindsay's activities and influence were diverse and creative among struggling artists and literary aspirants. A number of writers, for example, owed publication to his help and efforts on their behalf. Hetherington does, however, a service, neglected perhaps a bit by others, in expanding, with justice, on Lindsay's long connection with the *Bulletin* in those years and earlier, with mutual benefits: to Lindsay as a reliable source of income and of interesting associates, and to the *Bulletin* as a source, equally reliable, of car-

toons having always an extraordinary nation-wide influence.

Strangely though I can from my own experience endorse evidence of his encouragement and generosity (including a frontispiece drawing for my *Between Two Tides*) and though I was described once (aptly enough) as "a peripheral member of the Lindsay group", I did not myself have opportunities of meeting Norman, the group's fountainhead, during that Bridge Street interval or till some years later. My "periphery" was my early association with Norman's sons, Jack, Ray and more particularly Phil; and it was through them that the ideas and ideals of the fountainhead filtered to me as a spur and an inspiration.

There is nothing to disappoint me, however, in what I see from my periphery of Hetherington's detailed reports of the savage attacks a misunderstood genius had to suffer on grounds of obscenity. That puritanism and the gutter-mind should have interpreted his reverence for the beauty of the female form as obscene, or the healthy comedy of his novels as pornographic, is painful to consider and as absurd as the myths once current, as a by-product of persecution, that this self-disciplined abstemious man was some sort of Bacchanalian profligate. Actually obscenities appalled him. He wrote to me in 1969:

> I have thought much on the crude pornography of today, and realise that it comes from precisely the same source as the Wowserism I had to face all through my early years. It is just puritanism gone rancid. Our early fight for freedom of self-expression in art has been won. And the mob attack on it has rushed in with the licensed debauch of every combination of words defined by the dictionary as obscene.

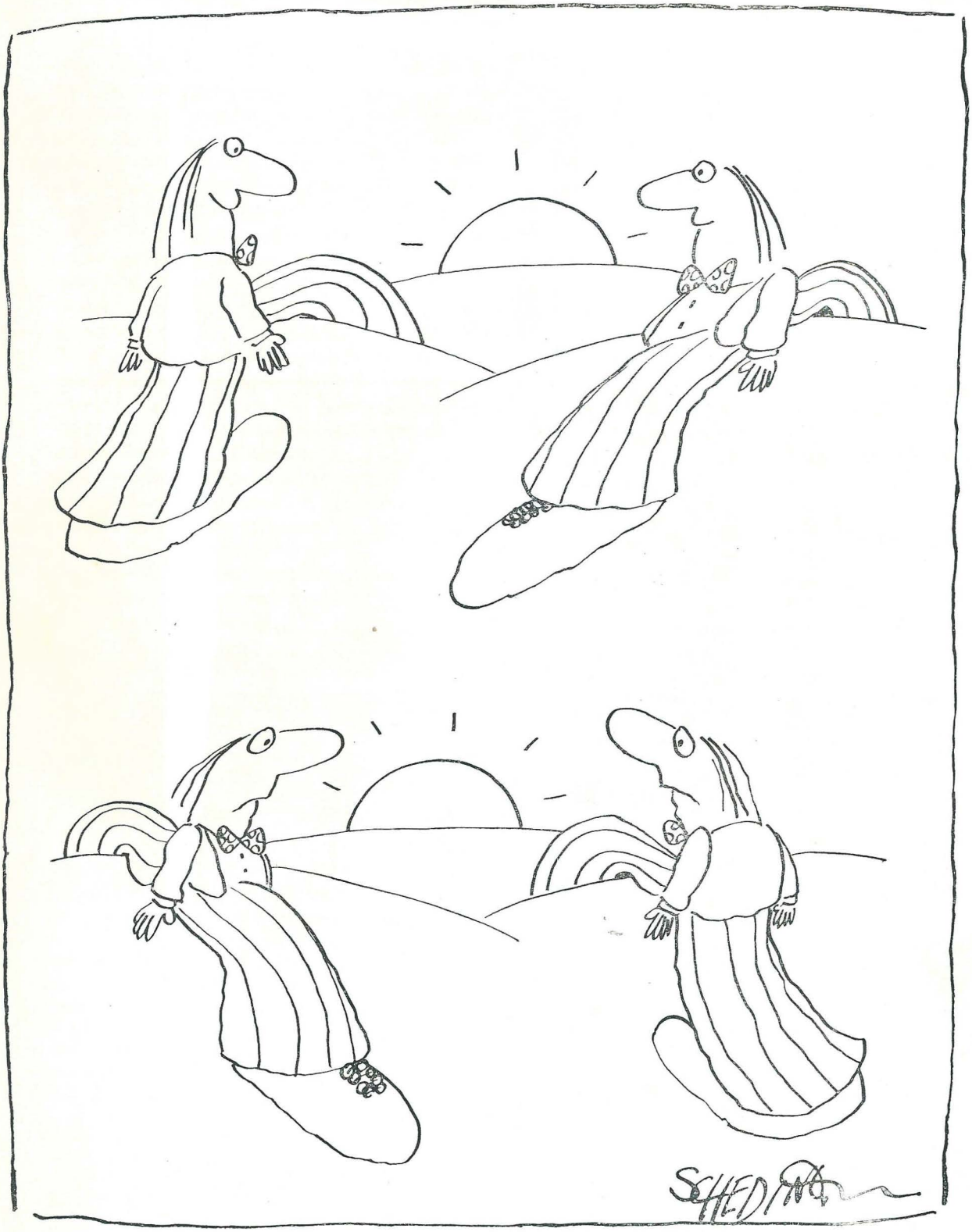
Such a view does not, and did not, limit the scope of the contention that art should reject no subject-matter in the action of life: but a limit is certainly imposed by the corollary that the nature of the imagery should contribute to vitality of mind, of which Beauty is the highest symbol. "Shakespeare," he wrote in that *Vision* article, "may take murder, as in *Macbeth*, for his theme and altogether submerge the depressing nature of his subject in the exaltation of mind aroused by its perfect imagery."

A subject-matter, in short, must be looked at in terms of its surroundings and the purposes to which it is put as imagery. I recall Norman's son Ray, that fine painter of early convict and historical scenes, telling me once, even with a trifle of irritation: "I have painted with Norman from the same model, with our easels set up side by side. But whereas I tried to capture the essential vulgarity of the little bitch, Norman turned her into one of his beautiful smooth nudes."

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Our donations are rather down this issue (from $337 last time) but that is a reason for being even more grateful for those who *have* contributed beyond the call of duty. I'm making no further impassioned plea for funds on this occasion (although they have always been of vital importance) but will content myself with remarking that *Overland* has *no* salaried editorial staff—all editorial work is done on a voluntary basis by a group whose names will be found on our title page. This may be worth remarking, firstly because it does not apply to at least two of the other Australian literary magazines, and because irate contributors, who sometimes feel their manuscripts have been in our hands too long, perhaps overlook this point. Many thanks to those who have donated $177.75:

$16 MC; $12 AD; $10 KP, JMcL; $7 MR; $6 HW, JW, DB, DF, MG, JB, DD; $5 DM, MM; $4 HS, RB, PA, CE, JH, BN-S, TD; $3 LF; $2.50 MN; $2 MM, GF, MB, JleM, IM, MJ; $1 JC, DD, DC, KS, JS, JK, NW, MH, GS, MM, KF, GA, MO'D, LMcK, ER, LJ, MP, JS, GP, JE, LB, BR, RC, LC; 75c JC; 50c NP.



Stephen Scheding