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*Cover design and poetry by Jas. H. Duke: "Around the word all things converge" and "Day followed day like the links of a chain/I'm asking who you are"*

# Overland

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RAY ERICKSEN **The Glen**

In its fifth year the dream was rich and strong. Tended and fed in fantasy, it was the product of my mind and partly subject to my will. I could shape it in detail as I chose, indulge it in excited anticipation or shade it dark to hold it quiet. But I could neither dismiss it nor fully control it. It lived within me, surfacing unbidden, waiting for conversion into reality; and when the chance came, as my control loosened in a spasm of revulsion against the city, it possessed me. With the undeviating certainty of precognition it led me back to the Glen of Palms in Central Australia.

I knew exactly where to go. Mid-way down a long reach of the Finke River, south-west of Alice Springs, a permanent waterhole is fed by underground springs and surrounded by trees. I discovered it some time ago and I knew its quality. I had planned in advance the camp I would make and determined the time I would spend there—a full year in which to experience all four seasons. So there was no indecisive delay in starting work.

I chose a site on the eastern side of the waterhole—high enough to be out of reach of the floods which heavy rains sometimes cause even in the dry upper Finke, but close enough for me to share in the natural life which in dry country congregates wherever water and trees abound.

A simple hut was all that I would need. I left most of three walls open to the air, hung with fibre glass netting against insects; and I closed one end with solid walls, fitted with windows and a door, to protect books and papers when wind and dust were bad. The frame was built with green timber cut on the site. Other materials—sawn and dressed timber, corrugated iron, insulation and window glass—were delivered by truck to the bank of Ellery's Creek not many miles

above its confluence with the Finke. From there I carted it in small lots by Land Rover. It took weeks of hard work and some of it was difficult. But the camp looked as if it would be secure enough against weather and pests to be tolerable; one in which a man could live, however roughly and uncomfortably, and also write.

I felt pleased with the hut when I had finished building it and the life it supported was the most exciting I have known. The great river was my private pathway of sand and stone, blazing rock walls and shadowed caves, giant river gums and delicate wildflowers. I came to know with intimate familiarity every reach of the one hundred miles of serpentine course which make the Glen of Palms. I carried a swag through every section of the sprawling Krichauff Range through which the river winds and explored its intricate complex of long ridges and free-standing hills, rough gorges and surprise miniature plains.

I studied with delight varied by nervousness the wildlife the range sustains—emus and rock wallabies, wild camels and brumbies, dingoes and goannas, enchanting dwarf marsupials and grotesque insects—and I marvelled at the laws of delicate balance which preserve a secure place for each species in so complex a system of infinitely varied life. Birds in stunning variety enlivened every place I entered, and at my camp they gave rich reward for the water and food with which I drew them close. I collected stones and rocks of rainbow hue and sculptured shape, plotted the distribution of an exquisite flora, found plant forms hitherto unknown, stood where no other white man had been and found a new grove of *Livistona mariae*, the ancient palm that once crowded the Glen and now is almost extinct.

I spent scores of nights of peace amongst the hills under the blazing canopy of the central

stars and, with the heightened perception that exposure to space and infinity bring, I thought and felt my way to a new appreciation of man and nature and found a way to end the all destructive conflict we invite and fear. My camp became a meeting place for restless survivors of the Aboriginal tribes for whom the range had been home for tens of thousands of years until they lost all that made life good under swift conquest by white-faced invaders. In talk and song, and in the companionable silences that often teach as much as words, I heard the legends in which their fathers recorded with sensitive reverence and wonder the natural history of the region. I learnt to see the land and all it holds with their unclouded vision; and between us we devised a way to restore the land to the only people who can be trusted to use it well.

It was a year of great works and proud achievement, a year of excited discovery and personal growth. I felt at last complete, a man who was fit to share the earth with other creatures, an integral part of the natural order; no longer an alien instrument of blind destruction. But how I suffered. The year of delight and achievement was also a year of fear and hardship, pain and anguish, defeat and shame.

It began early in September, as if completion of the hut were a signal for the first of a series of dust storms in rapid succession such as no living man had seen. For days and nights the sun and the stars were blotted out by a cloud of whirling particles, a mile high, drawn from the dry surface of the earth. My world of sight was reduced to the interior of the hut, and even there it was hard to see across the short distance from one wall to another as dust, fine and red, covered every surface, crept between the pages of books, smeared every sheet of paper and all that I possessed. Life was an endless waiting with my head swathed in wet towels, wondering whether I would choke to death before I went mad or whether, when the end came, I would be too crazed to know it. For a full month there was only enough time after each storm for me to fill my dehydrated and starving body with water and food, to breathe clear air, to clean the hut and its contents and to resume writing before the western sky darkened again and the world contracted once more.

Meteorologists nominate the first day of December as the first day of summer, and there may be some years in the Centre when that choice of date is appropriate; but for me in my year there

summer began in October and lasted until April. There was a peak in the middle of those six months, long weeks in the heart of the fire, when it seemed that the sun would never set and the short nights were still ovens of sleepless waiting for the red disk to rise again in fury over the eastern ridge. But to distinguish those weeks from the ones that went before and came after by such terms as spring, summer and autumn would make quibbling nonsense.

The waterhole shrank under fearful evaporation faster than the springs that make it permanent could replenish. It contracted from a mile long to a hot pool of two hundred yards, brown and green and stinking, farther and farther from my reach across cracked clay and burning rocks. The grasses turned brown, then white wherever the wind failed to sweep them away. Wildflowers and shrubs wilted and withered, to die suddenly in the dramatic manner that swiftly transforms a plant near death, that rain might yet save, to one that is unmistakably dead. The trees, old enough to have known drought before and to have survived it, seemed to crouch, with limp foliage and peeling bark, in total concentration on survival, like tough old people waiting to die but refusing to let it happen. Even the spinifex, which usually gives an impression of indestructibility, lost its vigor and turned grey in its suffering.

Birds died in thousands, many of them falling from the air at my feet, and those that lived could hardly manage a flutter. Life vanished from the trees and the sky. The aerial play of fantails and finches, the soaring flight of cranes and hawks, the flashing color of flocks of budgerigars and pigeons—all was gone. The song, the matchless song that lightens the day and lifts a man's spirits, was stilled. Only the flies that darkened the lower air and the ants that laced the ground in frantic trails were flourishing, stimulated by the heat to a new height of pestilential activity. Spiders in all sizes, centipedes and scorpions, clustered under bark and sticks, under anything that would give them cover within reach of the water cans that moistened a small patch of earth whenever I used them carelessly; and they invaded the hut in scores to turn my days into treading nervousness and my nights into waking nightmares of crawling shapes and painful bites.

The Land Rover slumped in meagre shade, its metal frame melting and weakening and its tyres threatening to dissolve in black liquid. I knew it would explode in flames if I switched on the ignition and pressed the starter button. All driv-

ing had to be done at night or in the lost hours before sunrise. It was a slow labor, and a dangerous one, picking a blind way along the river bed and across treacherous bends, thudding into rocks and fallen trees, bogging in soft sand, losing my way in deceptive moonlight, back-tracking time and again, fighting despair, and caught by the sun when only half-way out to the Alice Springs road.

They were crowded trips, too. Every living creature within range, weakened by hunger but driven by imperative need, stumbled and tottered, hopped or crawled under cover of darkness to drink at the one substantial water in a hundred square miles. The margins of the waterhole, and the surrounds of the three pools which lasted, contracting and foul, where Ellery's Creek joins the river, were a slithering carpet, black in the dark, of all the reptiles in the neighborhood, hungry and aggressive. When walking ahead to plot the next stage of a hidden track, which was no track at the best of times, I felt as helpless as a blind man in a snake pit.

It was hard to find relief. The reduced waterhole teemed with insect and water life. To sink below the scum-covered surface between patches of red water weed, and enjoy the delicious lave of cooling water on hot skin, had to be paid for with such nibbles and bites and later itching that I seldom indulged, and then for only a few minutes at a time. To walk the hills and gullies, dazed and breathless, indrawn and silent, was like staggering through the lower levels of a depopulated Hell. Not that it would have been easy to talk if there had been other wanderers, even ones as interesting as the shades who peopled Dante's Inferno. Thirst made it impossible to swallow and heat numbed my brain beyond all capacity to think—only to hold quietly a fear of getting lost and dying in an agony of tongue-swollen madness, or of falling heavily with broken bones to lie in parched torment, defenceless against swarming ants and casual, eye-picking crows.

In some ways it was worse in camp. The old kerosene refrigerator I had carted in with much labor fought me all the way, streaming black smoke and cooling nothing. Meat turned putrid under my nose; cheese became bitter, sweating yellow outside and baked hard within the crust; butter dissolved into running oil, as unpalatable as melted axle grease; my store of eggs seemed about to hatch. I was reduced to hot bully beef and sardines, trying in nausea to hold enough of

them down to extract the meagre nourishment that even an inert body needs. It was torment to build and tend a fire on which to bake a damper; or to make the tea which was the one remedy available for continual thirst and for a deadening lethargy which, in extreme heat in a fixed camp, will usually overcome all but the most dedicated and naturally active of men.

I lost patience with my new-found black friends, became irritable, swore at them and offended them; and they despised me. The laughing children mocked me and hid my gear and the stern elders ordered me off their tribal land. Whenever I tried to work I spread red smears of sweat and dust over all the paper I touched. I went blind with the unbearable pain of ophthalmia and spilt a billy of boiling water over my feet. I fell ill with nameless complaints, lay sweating in pain, weak and pathetic, died a dozen lonely deaths, left touching notes, last words feebly scribbled, for those who might find me and those others who might miss me. Dear God, even my whisky, the final solace, which might have given a brief mask of pleasure and illusion of escape, bubbled hot like water over a billy fire.

There was no rain until the fourteenth day of April when the summer ended. The rain fell all night, in noisy downpours spaced by intervals of dripping quiet, to cool the air and soften the ground. Trees, as rain washed clean their dust-choked leaves and softened and made whole again their cracked bark, came erect from their drought-stricken crouch. The surviving shrubs immediately sprouted new growth as if impatient to make up for the growing time they had lost. Green shoots covered the ground in an instant carpet, racing in the frenetic fashion peculiar to desert flora to grow and flower and seed in minimum time, cramming a full life-span, which in gentler climes might last for a year or several years, into a few weeks, because the rain might not return for several years. Birds came back in countless numbers, bringing to life again the dead waterhole and filling the air with song and flight. Cushions of spinifex, dry and yellow, were transformed into living hillocks, green and spongy, to make a vivid stipple over the red sand slopes in the distance.

It was a marvellous time to be writing again, to be feeling and thinking, to be alive again. The refrigerator recovered. I could again grill beef over open coals and bake lamb in the neglected camp oven, eat big and drink cold whisky and

cool wine. My friends returned. We laughed and forgave and told stories and thought together in the wondering intervals of silence.

Maggie, gap-toothed and growing stout in the floral print of her mission dress, with soft voice and filmed eyes, grew confident enough to tut-tut in mock dismay a recurring scatter of fallen leaves, screwed up paper, cigarette butts and dead matches. She fashioned a long switch of reeds to sweep clean the earth floor and the ground outside. She would shrilly scold the dogs whenever they crept too close in search of scraps and affection; then she would let the laughter come as we made the one joke serve time and again. Her boys, as alike as twins, slender and supple in khaki shorts, were serious in concentration as they used thin sticks to practise spear-throwing skills. Then they would join in a crouch of conspiratorial whispers and giggles or explode in shrieks and laughs as they played the games and tricks they had invented. Nina, four years old and without a word, lost enough shyness to appear sometimes beside me where I sat on a stool, accept my arm about her shoulders, tuck her head into my side and accept and give with the special love of a little girl.

Larry, with mobile face and fluent English, a man of smiles and sighs and earnest sequential questions, ambitious and frustrated, enlisted my aid in acquiring knowledge of a white man's world in which he sought a future; and in return he told a little of his life and much about the land around us. Even Wally, a younger cousin, the surly one, angry and unhappy, abrupt in demand for tobacco and papers, one day approved a bench I had made and brought some sticks for the fire. Two days later he formally presented me with a strangely marked stone; and we tried to establish some mutual tolerance, which was a generous attempt on both sides, since we really did not like each other.

It was more complicated with the elders. A silent one regularly came with the others. As the talk flowed, or limped, he would occasionally add a small stick to the fire, always carefully placed, with never a word. He drank tea and smoked and appeared physically to be at ease while seemingly emotionally distant. No other man has ever made me feel more of an imposter or less sure of who I am; and he did it in silence, without even a detectable gesture or facial expression. It was simply that, whenever I caught his eye, no matter how well things were going with the rest of the group, I saw something that checked me, wiped

any smile from my face and made me feel uncomfortable, with no right to be there.

His look was one of incredulity, an expression of private conviction that all friendliness on my part was a false posture and all acceptance a contrived deception. He seemed to believe that I was wearing a mask that might fall at any time to reveal my true character as a white marauder, arrogant, ignorant, contemptuous and destructive. Perhaps he wished it were still the days of his boyhood and those of his father when an insolent intruder might be dealt with by a shower of spears and to hell with the consequences. Or did he doubt my reality, half expecting and hoping that I and my camp might suddenly disappear like a bad dream? He displayed no active antagonism, and undoubtedly I was partly reacting to my own sense of guilt in being a member of a people who had conquered, killed, manipulated and needlessly destroyed a stable society that had successfully lived in the Glen for many thousands of years. But there was no denying the steady distrust and disbelief in those eyes.

Larapitja was different. Sorrow, loss, hard memories and no future were strongly present. But he had thought and felt his way through to an acceptance of reality. The appalling tragedy was complete; too real to be wished away, yet too final and irreversible to be granted obsessional dominance in his awareness. In a true sense one of the last of his kind, his final years were a living expression of the past, as if all that had lived in the consciousness of his ancestors might yet mysteriously survive the extinction of his people, fixed imperishably in time by the concentrated effort of his being. He had a greatness of spirit that I have found in few men, and a natural dignity that accompanies great maturity.

Words were difficult. Larry often had to act as interpreter of my wondering questions and of Larapitja's cadenced answers unfolding the mysteries of people and place. In human consciousness the land and the life it supports consist of an infinite number of unique realities in varying degrees of compatibility and conflict; and, when walking around, observing and thinking, I had been forming my own version of the Glen. Now it was being changed and enriched by my exposure to the collective vision of a people whose intimate world it had been since the beginning of their time. The origins of every outstanding feature, and of many that otherwise I would not have noticed, had a place in a detailed history of great

complexity, legendary yet coherent and deeply satisfying.

As the days passed I progressed from detached observation to increasingly informed intimacy with the land and the spirits who inhabit it; and I walked through it proud and tall, surer of myself than I have ever been. There was a bond between the old man and me from the start. It was a feeling of mutual respect that required no words, as I recognised in him a spiritual strength that he already knew to be there and found it in myself where I had not known it existed until his silent recognition told me of it.

I might have achieved much if my new-found courage had not failed under further misfortune. The rain came again; and this time it was not gentle and beneficent. It was a deluge thundering into the earth, bending all growth to the ground and sending all creatures in flight to shelter. It turned dry gullies into cascading torrents, swelled the river to a tossing flood that raged through cliff-confined gorges and swept for miles over the adjacent flats. It was the end for any river gums whose hold on land and life had weakened in the years since the previous major flood. Half-rotten trunks and broken branches tossed helplessly in foaming water, like drowning giants. They caught on rocks or against the trunks of stronger trees yet standing, freed themselves only to be swept round another bend or down a turbulent straight, joined their fallen fellows in tangled dams and lost them again as the flood exerted still more power. Some were carried all the way through the Glen to reach the southern plain; most of them were deposited on banks and flats, in side gullies and on the bed of the main stream, in the random fashion of flood debris, in tangled piles or in solitary state. There they will lie, providing homes for reptiles, beetles and grubs, until the next flood overpowers them and takes them a further stage along the path of decay which, in the natural world, makes life for other species.

The flood was no direct threat to me. My camp was high enough above the river to be safe from engulfment, and I knew that. But I could not rest easy until the peak had passed, and I had some other troubles while the rain lasted. Water, sheeting down the hillside, poured through the hut, turning the hard earth floor into mud and carrying off small articles of gear, including some water cans that I would not see again and could not replace. Invasion by a horde of creeping, crawling creatures added another discomfort dur-

ing the four days of rain; though, on the credit side, they did give me something interesting to look at during the awkward time, short though it was. I was sited near enough to the head of the river, only fifty miles below it, for the flood to be short-lived. Within a few days of the rain ceasing the river crossing was again passable, with little more than a swollen waterhole and piles and scatters of rubbish to show that anything unusual had happened.

Stated like that, it might seem that my troubles were minor and quickly over. But I was trapped, as effectively as if an army had built a stockade around me and ringed it with tanks. The Finke itself was the major obstacle. For most of the twenty-three miles that separated me from the Ellery's Creek junction, sheer rock cliffs, broken ridges and eroded flats made the bed of the river at any time the sole practicable route for the Land Rover; and the same restrictive conditions applied for a further seven miles up the creek to a place of escape on to wheel tracks that wandered across a small plain to a road. Even under the best of conditions it took three hours of first gear and low-ratio work to drive the thirty miles of river and creek. Now much of it was impassable.

The river bed that I had come to know well was dramatically changed. The track, if one could ever call it that, no longer existed as a recognisable path to follow. Wheel marks and small recognition signs had been washed away. Compression caused by rock walls and high banks had sent the flood, pressure-packed in power, to relocate sand and stones, fill former depressions and rip out new holes. Piles of debris blocked former narrow paths between deep pools and clusters of boulders. Fresh falls from undercut cliffs spread tumbled slabs out far from the base. Even in the easier places the slopes I had used for climbing and descending the banks had been guttered and ruined by wash-aways.

It took a month of hard labor with pick and shovel, crowbar and axe to clear a new path for the Land Rover—removing branches and rocks, testing the bottom through long pools, driving stakes to mark a tortuous way and cutting new exits in the banks. In one sense it was a good month, perhaps the best of the dozen I spent in the Glen. Exhausted and exhilarated by responding to the pressure of necessity, I felt growing satisfaction as each day I pushed the track on for another stage. Though I walked out once to the Mission, sleeping on the way, to buy supplies and

to collect the mail which they had agreed over the transceiver to hold for me, I refused all other offers of help. The track was my own responsibility; and pride, cranky and martyred at times when the task seemed beyond me, made me determined to carry the work through alone.

On the tenth day of winter, the shortest and best season in the Centre, I made my first trip for nearly two months to Alice Springs. It was urgent. I badly needed a break, my supplies were exhausted, and hard work had taken so much out of the Land Rover that it was groaning for attention by a mechanic as a sick man might cry for a doctor. Indeed, it was running so sluggishly and complaining with so many alarming noises that I wondered whether I would ever get it out of the Glen. But it kept going, and after the first uncertain fifty miles on the road it perked up greatly, no doubt cheered by the prospect of fresh oil and grease and some expert care instead of the ignorant neglect which was its usual lot. So much so that, instead of the major surgery which I feared would be needed and the heavy bills I would have been hard-pressed to pay, routine maintenance and some minor repairs restored it to health. For my own part four lazy days in a pub, free of chores, cocooned against all weather and all nature, and enjoying the luxury of regular showers and good food, cold beer and lively company, worked wonders.

When I returned to my camp I had every reason for feeling optimistic. For the next six weeks most of the nights would be harsh with the bitter cold that strikes the elevated western plateau in the heart of winter. But the days were safely predictable: rich sunlight from a cloudless blue sky, producing enough warmth in the still air for short-sleeved comfort through the main part of each day. They would be ideal days for writing and exploring and for enjoying the simple fact of being, a chance to achieve a concentrated burst of activity and make up some of the time lost during the previous nine months. And for a wonderful fortnight expectation and reality were one. I felt in tune with all about me, rhythmically adjusted to the pulse of a larger life than my own, yet spending my individual life freely and productively within the larger whole.

If only it could have continued through the remainder of my stay, the year might yet have been saved. Instead, the final ten weeks were amongst the most wretched and anxious that I have known. Writing hard through the extreme

cold of night and early morning in an unheated hut took its toll. I fell ill with a chest infection that most likely was close to bronchial pneumonia. By the time I admitted to myself that it was more than a minor trouble I was too ill to face the long drive out; and that was my one hope of getting help. The transceiver, which was supposed to be my lifeline in case of emergency, failed when I most needed it. It mocked me by receiving clearly all of the radio traffic through the Flying Doctor base in Alice Springs and conversations of maddening cheerfulness between outlying cattle stations; but nothing would persuade it to transmit my cry for help.

For ten days, as I discovered later by counting back, I was virtually immobilised, burning and choking, scarcely able to move yet having to because there was no one else even to fetch a mug of water, delirious for some lost time in the middle of the agony, close to death and wishing to die, yet not quite doing so. Some stubborn will to live, operating below my level of consciousness, preserved a flicker of life; until a day came when I woke in the early morning, awash in sweat, and woke again in the afternoon, too weak to move but knowing that I had had the most healing sleep of my life. Soon I was able to make some tea, and later I heated a can of soup. Next morning I was really hungry and once more interested in the world about me. Three days later I declared myself fit enough to drive to town to get the transceiver repaired.

But it was the beginning of the end. The Land Rover, my faithful companion, always reliable, never failing, refused to start. I prodded and peered, checked what parts I could, pleaded, coaxed, swore; and prayed for a miracle, only one, just this one time. But I had to walk out, still weak, to the road where I hitched a lift in a tourist car. Two days later I returned with a co-operative mechanic. He repaired both transceiver and Land Rover, at high cost to me; but there was no end to troubles now.

My gas lamp and transistor radio, without which the long nights were scarcely bearable, developed persistent faults and I could get little from them. The carriage movement of my typewriter stuck, intermittently but with increasing frequency, and the repeated overstrike of letters made so many words illegible that I erupted in a blaze of anger and hurled the machine to the floor. Then I picked it up, repentant and also afraid of the fury that had possessed me. The fall of a tree, which at the start I had inspected with

suspicion and then pronounced safe, demolished one corner of the hut. I patched it as best I could, well enough to serve. But I was losing heart, and so was the Land Rover. For the first time in the years we had shared we were not getting on well together. I was making mistakes in driving on time-wasting trips to town to get other equipment repaired, battering the panels and once coming close to a serious accident; and twice more the Land Rover went on strike. I called in help over the transceiver but the cost was taking me fast down the final slide into destitution.

It was a devastating year and I have not told all of it. Admittedly I have concentrated on the hardships and omitted many of the pleasures. I was surrounded by the great beauty which distinguishes this part of Central Australia, a combination of form and color that makes it above all regions the one that I think of as being my kind of country. Within sight of my camp a gentle rise was crowded with cassias. Usually they grow singly or in widely spaced miniature stands. But here some rare combination of soil and aspect produced a close concentration of great power. Four feet high, with rounded heads of compact stems and small leaves of ashen grey, they claimed the ground as their own exclusive preserve. Only a few wild grasses and stunted crowns of spinifex could survive in the small spaces between the bushes. When they flowered in winter the slope was an unbroken display of color that would have strained even Van Gogh's genius for converting dull canvas into a blaze of yellow. In the distance mulga crowded the gullies and dark-leaved cypress dotted the crests of long ridges in a startling illusion of blackness against blue sky. Every patch of ground held examples of a flora that is as rich as any we possess. The land itself was like an exciting combination of sculpture and painting of the highest order, forever changing in varying light throughout each day, intriguing, stimulating and enormously satisfying.

There was more enjoyment than I have mentioned, more delight and achievement, more meetings with other people and with bush creatures. I think I could claim as a pet a goanna who adopted me soon after I arrived. He would turn up at any hour, wary enough to keep out of reach but enough at home to stay some time. Padding about in search of food, eating the eggs I put out for him in return for his company, or dozing in the sun, he seemed to be oblivious to the protesting chatter of the finches who regarded the

fireplace as their own and the alarm cries of the parrots who came for bread and biscuit whenever I walked outside.

One evening an old horse appeared on the edge of the clearing. He was not a brumby, though he might well have spent some time on the outskirts of one of their mobs. He acted as if he had been a packhorse in a travelling string who had wandered off one night and been left behind by his owner. At any rate, he clearly wanted human company in what turned out to be the last few weeks of his life. We spent bits of time together in pats and nuzzles, *my* murmured nonsense and his liquid eyes exchanging sentiment and affection, each of us glad of the other's presence to ease our separate loneliness. It was a morning of grief when I woke to find him dead, lying very close to the hut; of regret that I had not spent more time with him while I had the chance; but of thankfulness that I had been able to give him a little of what he had known in his earlier years when he most needed it. It was difficult, but I managed to tie heavy ropes to his body and drag him behind the Land Rover, as gently as I could, to a distant sandy hollow which became his open burial ground.

A party of geologists in search of rocks and fossils arrived one day, travelling with elaborate precaution in three Land Rovers burdened with gear and enough food to last a month. Five days later they returned from a short way farther down the Glen, flushed with triumph but seemingly relieved that they were on their way back from adventure. They camped for the night, spending most of it in my hut where we talked and ate and drank. They showed me some of their finds, which to my untutored eye seemed worth no search, sympathetically wondered what madness might drive a man into such solitude, pressed on me their surplus food and drink, and left me stimulated and exhausted.

Two young men from Alice Springs rode in, leading packhorses laden with ropes and high-powered rifles and buoyed by an extravagant hope of catching brumbies to convert a holiday trip into profit. I enjoyed their naive optimism and their natural earthiness and tried to wish them success. Then I felt relieved when they came out ten days later with only the excitement of the hunt to show for their efforts. Could anyone who has watched a mob of brumbies galloping across a plain or filing in careful order down to a waterhole wish to see them trapped, subjected to the indignity of droving and sent south to be

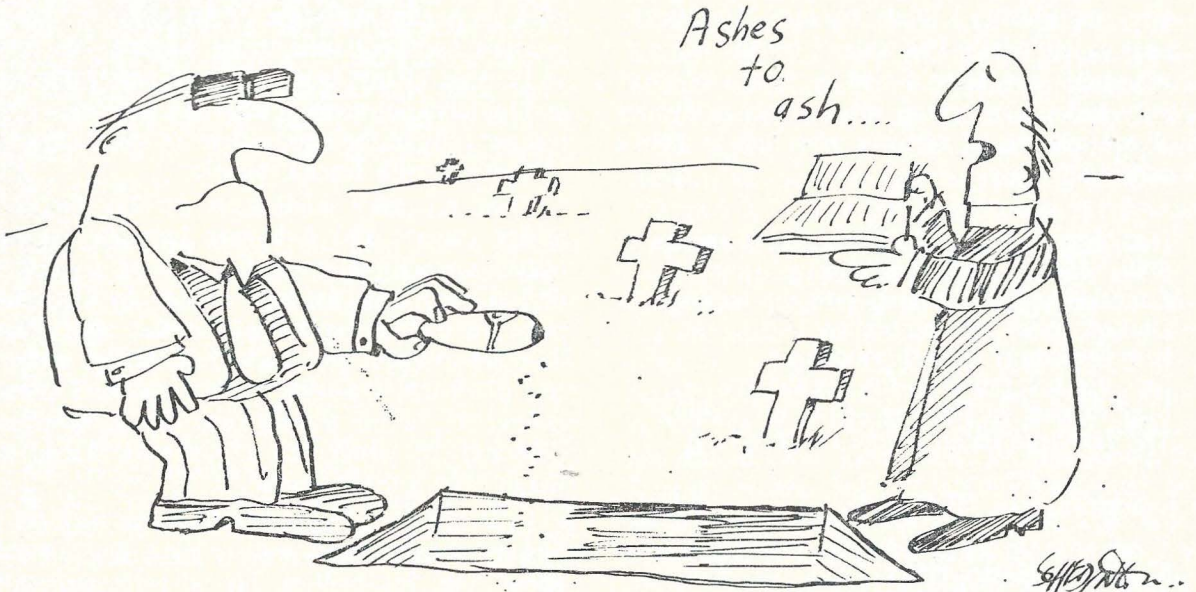
killed for pet food? Several had been shot, carelessly or in exasperation. But that seemed a better fate than the one they had escaped.

The third visit was the liveliest. A land Cruiser suddenly arrived at midday, driven fast by a man of boundless energy, attended by his wife and sister, all three of them looking for country to paint. I helped them move their camp down from Ellery's Creek and they stayed for six days of enthusiastic sketching and painting and six nights of good talk and lively companionship. It was the brightest oasis that appeared in the desert of comparative solitude, and well worth the price I had to pay after they had gone in readjusting to the abnormal state of aloneness which I had come to accept as being normal.

There were many times when my year seemed

full of brilliant promise and a certainty of success. But they were negated by an equal number of terrors and disasters—so many that I knew I must finish the trial before it finished me. Though stubborn pride made me complete the full year, I made everything ready in advance, loaded all that I intended taking with me, and started the final drive out on the 365th day.

If it had been Leap Year, I might not have lasted the distance; and if the year's experience had been real, I would not be here to tell the tale. By injecting nightmare into my fantasy I succeeded in quietening this dream of mine for long enough to do other things. Yet the dream survives, troubling and tantalising. It is so persistent that I expect not finally to be free until I have lived it.



# Where Does a Man Belong?

NANCY KEESING

*David Martin and his Work*

*Some man can only love  
The country of their birth.  
But some are not like that,  
Their hearts have wider girth.*

*All trees have but one stem,  
Yet some have many roots:  
Don't judge them by their bark;  
But judge them by their fruits.*

DAVID MARTIN

I first became aware of David Martin through his poetry, and chiefly, I think, because "Unsolicited Sonnet to a Sydney Policeman" caught my eye. It appeared soon after a visiting pianist of great artistry and world renown was arrested in Sydney by those minions of anti-vice who lurk in public lavatories:

*Hail, angel of the public comfort stations,  
Thou shining symbol of legality,  
Dauntlessly probing deep into the nation's  
Darkest recess of immorality.  
Ever solicitous against soliciting,  
Lies are not found in thy vocabulary.  
May thieves go thieving—thou art visiting  
The favourite haunt of the constabulary. . .*

I remember, too, "Collinsville":

*The seven silent colliers,  
Their eyes turned within,  
They lie and they listen  
To a far, secret thing.  
Like a mourning ribbon  
The black veins in their skin.*

*Like a mourning ribbon  
Two thousand marchers press  
Behind the seven coffins.  
More softly than the rest*

Walk the black-clad women  
In the widows' dress.

This is where they drank,  
And this is where they sat,  
And this is where they courted  
The girls that wear black:  
Their town and their lives,  
And the games they were at . . .

When someone told me that Martin's native language was not English I was incredulous. I read his poetry and some of his prose in various journals and continued to be amazed, the more so because of my own ineptitude with languages and my consciousness of what my ignorance costs me, not only in the deprivations of translation but in contacts with foreign people.

Then my very admiration for his linguistic ability came to be a barrier between me and Martin's work. (For similar reasons I used to find it very hard to 'lose myself' in Conrad—Nabakov at last somehow effected a cure.) Martin's achievement smacked of conjuring: I *know* this is a trick; I admire what I see but I cannot believe it. So for a long time the phenomenon obscured the writer and I preferred Martin the wit to Martin the profound.

I did not meet David Martin when he lived in Sydney though there was a good deal of talk about him, his politics, his adventurous youth. During the 1950s my increasing preoccupation was with my own life and poetry, and with Australian social history as background to collecting bush ballads and bush songs. My interest in contemporary politics was minimal.

Thus incompletely equipped, in 1962 I opened *The Young Wife*. I still wonder what difference a personal knowledge of Martin might have made to my first reading of that fine book. Martin's

personality is forceful and his Jewishness, which in a quite different way and from a different background I share, tends to envelop me. In 1962 I did not regard *The Young Wife* as a Jewish, but as a migrant work. Re-reading it ten years later I perceived many Jewish parallels, both in people and in situations, and I am now sure that, in this first of his novels set in Australia, Martin confronted himself much more directly than immediately appears.

It is a novel about Greek migrants in Melbourne. The central characters are intensely and unmistakably Greek. Yet, consciously or unconsciously, many of the people and situations selected by Martin can be seen as “translations” of Jewish people and situations; two instances: the old, blind, sybilline Greek mother recalls the Jewish mother of so much fiction, and fact; Criton’s youthful involvement with the civil war in a Cyprus torn by struggles between Greeks and Turks and terrorism against the British army, can obviously be equated with Palestine/Israel.

*Meanjin* (No. 1, 1961) featured David Martin with a Louis Kahan portrait (the first likeness I had seen and very unlike my mental picture); a poem; a chapter from the then unpublished *The Young Wife*; an article by A. A. Phillips discussing Martin’s published work to that time, and a reply to this by Martin called “Apologia Without Apology”. The “Apologia” contains this significant passage:

My immediate interest in life, and a passion for history, compel me towards realism, but I am working under an additional handicap. For reasons that are hard to discuss, but which have to do with a not very happy childhood, and a highly ambivalent attitude toward Germany, I find it difficult to do what many novelists do, namely to draw on early domestic and family experience. I have a horror of producing “naked” books that bare the soul too much; such books would embarrass me. On the other hand I am aware of the dangers of reticence.

Martin also foreshadowed books he planned to write but which have never appeared. One was a novel about an Anabaptist uprising in sixteenth century Germany, and one a book whose hero would be an officer at St Kilda barracks. Instead his next published novel was *The Hero of Too* (1965), a genial satiric romp through a host of cherished Australian myths and institutions. One

might see *The Hero of Too* as a pause, a breathing space before *Where a Man Belongs*; or one might see it as yet another evasion—another refusal to face the naked book. Perhaps more justly one might regard *The Hero of Too* as being two things—an affirmation of Martin’s acceptance of Australia and a colossal piece of skite. For consider—in this light-hearted, but not unprofound, book Martin the migrant takes on a whole Australian district, both in the present and in its glorious bushranger-ridden past, contriving to puncture balloons of pomposity, absurdity, jealousy, and avarice, without spoiling the very real values, goodness, and pathos that also underlie clusters of human beings. Martin showed that he could write an ‘old’ bush song with the best of the balladists; that he could perhaps get very close to the truth about outlaws like the Hall and Kelly gangs, long before it was fashionable to speculate about the nature of their sexuality; that he could regard a Hungarian migrant as objectively as he could view a plain, ageing spinster, and with as much compassionate irony.

*The King Between* (1966) is a much shorter novel than *The Hero of Too* and concerns a small Indo-Chinese country called “Lhaodia”. If proof were needed of how much a truly sensitive ‘international’ human being can absorb of the spirit of a place during a relatively short journey, then *The King Between* affords that proof. Martin has a high regard for this novel—for my part it remains less interesting than either *The Hero* or *Where a Man Belongs*, only because it represents an interruption in an inevitable progression.

To return to 1961 and A. A. Phillips’s *Meanjin* discussion of Martin’s work. Phillips wrote before the publication of *The Young Wife*, at a time when it was reasonable to regard Martin as equally poet/novelist. (He has not ceased writing poetry but the balance of output and emphasis has shifted.) Yet, even today, Phillips should find little to recant, least of all his farsighted conclusion: “His best work lies ahead. The way is necessarily long for the writer who begins from an obstinate integrity of faith which is partly a faith in simplicity; but the ultimate achievement is solider.”

One point which Phillips made, however, must be amplified and amended—it became debatable after *The Young Wife* and *The Hero of Too* but was, in my view, invalidated when *Where a Man Belongs* was published in 1969. Phillips said: “It would be misleading to call [Martin] an inter-

nationalist or a supra-nationalist, or a cosmopolitan. He is something more unusual: he is a member of the human race."

This summing up still does not sufficiently distinguish Martin from those truly regional writers who find, and express, the universe in grains of local sand. Nor, I am sure, did Phillips mean to imply that the many great writers whose preoccupation is local are somehow not complete members of the human race.

Phillips rightly rejected the coinage "supra national" which does not exactly fit Martin's case — he might not approve my coinage "trans-national", but *Where a Man Belongs* has forced me to arrive at this term. In a trans-national sense Martin belongs with men like Nabokov, Graham Greene, perhaps Chaim Potok (with *My Name Is Asher Lev*)—writers who dredge sand by the grabful from a world rapidly diminishing in terms of communications, and who appear to find the notion of the world as global village liberating rather than threatening.

To exemplify the antithesis of a trans-national writer one might think of James Joyce, for all his universality, or the Czech, Ludvik Vaculik. Vaculik in *The Axe* (Deutsch 1973, translated Marian Sling) argues through his characters that *place within a limited region is all important*. "With synthetic man there can be no communication," he says, for nowadays the atoms of people, and indeed

their whole being, comes from consignments of raw materials, instead of from this or that valley. . . . The potatoes composing their souls could have come from the Highlands, the phosphorous for their bones from one of the oceans.

Vaculik has also written:

Literature is always written for readers of your own nation. . . . Therefore as long as one of my books is not published in Czech and on Czech soil, I will not know how I went over. Acclaim abroad is only a comfort in sorrow . . .

Vaculik's *The Axe* is a major novel which speaks to people anywhere, despite being regional in setting and argument. Vaculik and Martin, I believe, are equally universal. Both authors are central Europeans, but Martin transcends nationality and region, while Vaculik, I imagine, though unemployed and in eclipse for political reasons, would not welcome the 'freedom' of another country

since his kind of tree cannot put down roots except in its native soil.

If I am correct in postulating trans-nationalism it will follow that, as the world grows 'smaller', the number of trans-national writers will grow. Some, like Martin, are or will be migrants whose personal histories reflect social and political upheavals, but an immigrant condition is not a first requirement and, of course, by no means all migrant writers will be trans-national.

Martin's trans-national qualities pervade his whole life vision. They are not a simple matter of invention of galaxies of characters of various races, creeds and tongues but, rather, they result from subtle interactions between places and people. People dominate but invariably from a wholly visualised and understood background. Conversely when Martin writes of his travels (as in *The Road to Sydney*) the places are interesting because of the people in them. His novels are firmly plotted and carefully designed; their pace is quick and it is often surprising to realise how much one has retained of background without being aware of descriptive passages. Martin frequently interprets one place by reference to some other, often distant or foreign place. Whatever the region the world beyond is kept in view and constantly impinges.

Tooramit folk can get terribly homesick for Tooramit. They pine for it in Melbourne and Sydney, having been driven there by a lack of local employment. When, as happens surprisingly often, one Tooramitian meets another in Piccadilly Circus or on Broadway, it takes all their native pluck to keep the tears out of their eyes at the mention of the old high school (completed in 1923) or the cliff pool in the creek, where the trout jump like girls in spring. They are members of a race not noted for its emotionalism, hence the reasons for these sentimental attachments are not discussed. This is natural because they are too elusive. The taste of good barley in beer, the slaty colour of the creek after rain, the special quality of comradesly abuse with which Tooramit men salute each other after their team has whipped the pants off Boobyalla, the old enemy, on the football field . . . these things are too intimate to be remarkable, while others are too transient: like the perfume of January that drifts across Main Street, rich and sweet, gentling the oppressive north wind and wafting away the stink of the nightcart. (*The Hero of Too.*)

All through the week, working and putting the

flat in order, she had missed something that had been a part of her life always, the special tension of Easter Week. Soaking in the new bath she was thinking of it: the long fast, the boiling and dyeing of eggs, the procession through the fields with the cross swaying above the green shoots, the Masses that continued from Thursday to Sunday, the body of Christ lying among the black-draped icons of His flower strewn bier. At home it was the time of visiting. On Easter Monday, every other year, her mother would travel with her to Mimassol to see her aunt who was a nun and take a plucked chicken to the abbess. Here there were no processions, the priests had no beards and cut their hair; there were no nuns and Yannis painted his shop on Good Friday. That morning, praying with his mother, she had felt nothing, except a little envy for the old woman who, being blind, was always in her own church. (*The Young Wife.*)

It was a little meadow with a gentle slope sinking to a ledge that dropped sheerly to a stream some hundred feet below, from where it rose again in three almost equal terraces, covered with young alders. Gudrun distributed the sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs. As I was drinking my coffee a cuckoo in the forest behind us began to count the years. It would stop for a little and then start again farther away. Mariechen thought there were two, probably a male and a female, but Paul would not have it. This was a stratagem familiar to him from the Australian mopoke, who also loved to confuse the listener. The argument was resolved by first one bird and then a second flying low across our clearing, as in mockery of the man. Then they began to cuckoo together, contrapuntally, from near where they had dipped from sight. (*Where a Man Belongs.*)

I cannot define my coinage "trans-national" more precisely. I do not regard it as a "better" quality *per se* than any other—all lasting literature strikes universal chords.

In 1969 *Where a Man Belongs* was published. Maria Wolkowsky in the *Bulletin* immediately, and rightly, hailed it as "the naked book [which] David Martin once stated in *Meanjin* that he feared ever to write". It remains Martin's most significant novel so far.

With this book Martin turned to a theme which few migrant authors anywhere have attempted—the return to a country of origin. The country is Germany described both as an actual place and a spiritual and emotional quest. When the novel

appeared Martin had recently returned from a journey to Europe which included a trip to the Germany he had last seen as a lad in the mid-1930s. The central situation of the book concerns such a journey. One of the chief characters is Max, an Australian writer born a German Jew. A great deal of the book was directly autobiographical. Some Australian readers assumed that the novel followed the actual journey. This belief was wrong: *Where a Man Belongs* was completed before David Martin left Australia.

The straightforward and easily read style of the book, its careful attention to details of structure, enhance the complexities of its characters both in themselves and in their relationships. There are no direct (and fashionable) parallels with any myth, but the book is highly allegorical—an indisputable quest and Odyssey within its own terms of reference. It is autobiographical but also an indubitable and fully imagined novel. Its naked quality exists perhaps even more in its inventions than in its directer accounts.

There is simply no space here to outline the plot or explain its challenges. Max, the German-Jewish-Australian writer, has no physical resemblance to his creator with whom, however, he shares a great deal of childhood, youth and ambivalence towards his father. Paul Burtle, the ageing Australian ex-soldier whom Max befriends, "invents", loves and destroys, and in whose company he returns to Germany, is as much Max's creature as his foil or *alter ego*. (But it is important to remember that, to many of the people *within the book itself*, it is Paul who is central, and Max who is viewed as a 'mirror image' of what Paul, in fact, represents to him.) The German woman, Gudrun, a splendid character in her own right, is not only actual and most solid flesh, but symbolic of her country during its Nazi past and reformed present. Her daughter may represent Germany of the future. Additionally Gudrun in one scene of violent passion is almost a liberating exorcist. In another scene she is a kind of Wagnerian sybil who tells Max "You are your own country", to which he replies, "If I am my own country I try to keep my frontiers open."

In 1969 I wondered where on earth Martin could turn after this great and scarifying book. There is a gap of from four to five years between most of his published novels with publications of verse, travel and other genres in between. I did not expect another major novel soon. In fact since 1969 he has entered quite another field, and is

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writing fiction for young people. These are true novels in which, through plot and strong characterisation, he affirms his strongest and deepest belief in the common humanity of man.

Nowadays David Martin (who now lives in the Victorian town of Beechworth) and I exchange letters. In his I find considerable and deliberate provocation and a deep well of wisdom. I pick up one dated 13 February 1974. He writes (my italics):

I keep saying to myself that I must put these young novels aside for a little and tackle other things again, but the drive is not very strong. There is something very satisfying to one like me, in being read by young people, but satisfying also creatively. The challenge (if you will forgive the use of that abused word) is powerful. You know how it is about ideas: you may *want* to have ideas in a certain direction, but others come instead, and the ones that come to me, from the subconscious I hope, seem to relate to these young books all the time. *And, gradually, the gap between the young books and the other ones is closing in my mind to such a degree that I can no longer even feel that there is one. Could all this have to do with confronting childhood, as one also confronts it in one's so-called adult work? And that there is, therefore, a unity?*

It becomes apparent at the time of writing (October 1975) that Martin shows no sign of returning to adult novels, because the gap in his mind is so nearly closed.

If one reads these later books in sequence (*Hughie*, 1971; *Frank and Francesca*, 1972; *The Chinese Boy*, 1973; *The Cabby's Daughter*, 1974 and *Mister P and His Remarkable Flight*, 1975) one notes not only a tightening of form but a

growth of confidence. Good as his first two were, they introduced important social and racial issues in a self-conscious way. There is a sense in which the old-fashioned 'story with a moral' has never disappeared from young people's fiction, and the moral in *Hughie* and in *Frank and Francesca*, while perhaps not over-stated or obtrusive, is at least obvious and even rather contrived. *The Chinese Boy* marks an interesting turning, away from the obvious towards the organic and more subtle. However even in that book, while the introduction of historical information is necessary, it is sometimes very deliberate.

I will leave *The Cabby's Daughter* for a moment and turn to the latest, *Mister P and His Remarkable Flight*. Here information, some of a quite complicated description about the nurture and racing of homing pigeons, is given throughout the book, and is always associated very closely with events and characters. But now the author has solved his difficult problem in a most subtle, satisfactory way, to achieve a beautiful novel devoid of anthropomorphism, sentimentality or archness. It is a book which recalls some of the happier achievements of Lorenz and none of the syrup of Gallico or the pseudo-mysticism of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*.

*Mister P* speaks directly through symbolism and widely through realism and is an advance even on *The Cabby's Daughter*, a book in which Martin at last achieved an unforced work of wide appeal.

I conclude with mention of *Katie*, a charming recent book for very young children jointly written by Martin and his wife Richenda. I doubt whether Martin will often wish to write for so young an audience, but with so versatile and surprising an author—who knows?

Will Durant, my favorite historian, often stressed that groups and individuals must be judged by how well they withstand despair. Those who have the robustness to keep alive some hope in all the blood and muddle of human affairs deserve to survive.

The nature of the hope may differ from person to person, period to period. Durant's own sturdy but never blind faith was in the residue of reason which, his research taught him, was available to humankind to save itself from the consequences of its worst excesses.

I used to believe this myself. Perhaps I still do. No Armageddon. . . . But that's not very much—not to accept the idea of a universal doom. For most of my life I did better than that. My long-term prognosis, for what it was worth, was optimistic. That, too, could still be true, but in a far less sustaining sense. Who can get excited about a future he cannot even visualise? I think the next hundred years or more will be appalling; not red or black but reddish grey, with large gory streaks.

More serious still—for myself, that is—is the fact that I find it ever harder to define my own standpoint and position.

This is unpleasant to admit, but to hide it would be cowardly. It is particularly unpleasant because Durant, I believe, included in his concept of despair-resistance the ability to maintain a standpoint, which implies the willingness to judge between moral-philosophical alternatives. No action without judgement; no judgement without action . . . with open eyes, without illusions, without fanaticism.

(Today the word "fanatic" is very contentious. The hottest fanatics hate it most; they accuse those who describe them thus of cold-hearted, aloof indifference, of having the rich man's smug

objectivity. But that's not really new either. In 18th century England "indifferentism" was used as a term of abuse.)

What happens when it becomes so difficult to decide between alternatives that doubt-resolving decisions keep being put off? Well, let's look at it from a comparatively low level.

No democratic system can work if the government which is to administrate it does not receive some trust also from its opponents. This, since last November, seems no longer possible here. A high percentage of Australians will not give the present government any trust, not even, I think, in a deep crisis. For those who like democracy that is not a prospect to rejoice in. And it has come about despite the fact that the December vote which put Mr Fraser into office was not at all an ideological vote, but a most understandable, though most ineffectual, vote against a world-wide slump.

Notwithstanding the gathering drive to de-politicise Australia, there is likely to be a confrontation. All the time, in the face of innumerable pleas, the middle-ground is shrinking. Yet in order to welcome the confrontation one must almost have a revolutionary outlook. The ALP has no newspaper, and—the extent of this is something new, too—Labor cannot expect any fair reporting; the press is trying to isolate it. It won't actually be silenced, and there will be shifts and frustrations in both camps, but, to cut through it all—what pole does a fellow like me stand on in the inevitable polarisation which the Right has engendered?

Sooner rather than later the battle-lines will be drawn. I would like Whitlam, or perhaps Don Dunstan or Hayden, to be the bold champions then, but I think it is more likely to be more

like Halfpenny, Slater, Carmichael, Hartley and so on.

I am not a revolutionary whatever I may once have been. I am for equality, not for liberation. On what historical evidence we have, reform achieves as much as revolution; but of course that's no iron rule: there are countries in which reform is impossible. My feelings about human sufferings and the imperative need to end them, in as much as they are economically and socially derived, are as passionate as ever, and among my ideals justice remains the foremost. But I have changed my mind about the conclusions to be drawn, and he who wants to trace this back to my class position is welcome to do so.

I've been told that I react too one-sidedly against what is happening in the USSR, that I am the victim of permanent ideological shock. I rather doubt it. I do not think—and even to be unsure about it is bad enough—that an Australian People's Republic, except in its first year or years, would be markedly less bloodthirsty than the Sudanese, more humane than the Cambodian, more free than the Czechoslovakian, more tolerant and less given to torture than the Algerian, less spy-ridden than the Iraqi, more broad-minded than the Albanian. Relatively backward countries all, or dominated by a great power's strategic interests? Yes, but even the best—Rumania, Yugoslavia—give writers as much liberty as the Blacks have in Detroit.

Not being a Black, I could be mistaken in this. But what I know of revolutions, and what I've seen of revolutionaries, has shaken my confidence. In Australia a lot of workers, even though they might not put it like this, dislike capitalism, the business civilisation. But they don't want the other thing either; cannot conceive what it would be like, and suspect it would be too pressureful for their tastes.

Their reservations are much like my own. Powerful collectives with a strong central inspiration are too inherently self-righteous and destructive: become tyrannies too easily; they repress the 'private' in its positive as well as in its negative aspects.

If they do release you from material bondage they also strive to release you from your 'self', this allegedly so bourgeois ego, the old alienated thing . . . the one most men and women prize and treasure because they need it to function as creative beings. (But perhaps this applies more to people in civilisations which have tended to extol the individual rather than the group, even

in religion; which do not seek to solve the human dilemma through intensified consciousness of the one-ness of the all; which either do not preach that man must escape from his self (be it false or true), or, if they do preach it, traditionally do so without success.)

Well, back to Fraserism. Are its most eager enemies to be my best friends? I fear this is exactly what may happen, whether they want me as a friend, or not. The choice may not come this very week, but it looks as if it will come in my life-time, and I am now sixty.

Platonic solutions are barely worth discussing. For Australia the best way out would be through a Scandinavian type Social Democratic party, which could unite farmers and unionists, as well as the whig middle-class, against the pastoral behemoths and their equivalents in Collins Street and Lygon Street. But there's little hope of that. We have the ALP, a democratic alliance of contradictions, increasingly a centrifuge, a party which tolerates a senate candidate so incompatible in his attitudes that in a life-and-death election he loses the party a senate seat.

Still! When it's a question of condoning, through passivity, the plot of November 11 (and I am one of those who like to ridicule the conspiracy theory of history!), or of throwing in my puny lot with those anti-Fraserites who give me the shudders, I know what I shall do. I'll go with the shudder-makers, though I don't expect to enjoy it.

Is it a matter of temperament how, in the end, you decide which of two evils is the greater?

All said and done, what's so awful about Fraserism, that it should outweigh the Russian-Cambodian-Albanian scale? What has it done to me, even to induce thoughts of desperate remedies?

The men who conspired to destroy Whitlam—leaving his nemesis aside—took one of the relatively few societies where people could breathe (yes, I know: special, untypical historical conditions, etc.) and for ever poned the air. That fart, though not of the Hitler type and perfume, was of the Hindenburg, Horthy, Pétain brand. Two of those I've had to inhale before—it's a quite unmistakable stink. I know what it does to the sense organs, even if an Adolf may not actually follow.

Rather Hartley than Horthy, if the choice must be made!

A little higher now.

I have not been able to work the reasons out for myself, but there is something about China which does not freeze the spirit as Russia does. A more fraternal vitality altogether, probably the result of healthier traditions. Or it could be that it is easier for us to 'understand' the Soviet Union, so making us more intolerant. Yet among my friends most people seem to feel about the two countries as I do.

If there are Chinese Mandelstams they have not been translated; if Chinese dissenters end up in padded cells it has remained unreported.

But the warmth I feel for China is not enough to melt my dilemma. A country whose leaders are so single-minded about the world power struggle that they honor and feast Nixon, the crook of crooks, midwife of McCarthyism, the hounder of the Moratorium generation!

Some say that to the Chinese all western politicians are crooks; they just prefer those crooks who can be helpful to them. But to 'isolate' the Nixon who brought China out into the balance of the Three from all the other disgusting Nixons—that must be (one hopes) the ultimate in the perversion of dialectics. It far surpasses the perpetual labelling of all disgraced local leaders a 'capitalist roaders'.

Here also is a country so neo-Tolstoyan that it gives primacy to the moral will of the individual as a main force for social change, entirely in contradiction to scientific materialism, though still with the heaviest communal pressure. A country which not only lays great stress on the right values, but—here's the crux—makes them unchallengingly supreme in its ideology.

Values! Communism and radical socialism in all its modern forms becomes more and more religiously tinged. It is this which I can't swallow. What a strange change: the radical Left today embraces a new species of philosophical idealism, it extols 'the will'; and the bourgeoisie, renouncing divine missions, proclaims a feeble and corrupt 'nature-force' determinism. Between them, and here and there overlapping them both, is the new no-man's-land of 'young' superstitions—a bad augury.

To act with maximum fervor under the flag of values requires that at a certain point you must begin thinking 'purely morally'. But in nature, which includes human nature, there is nowhere a dialectical cut-off point, a point where absolutes begin.

An attempt, crude and incomplete, at an example.

Timor. Obviously, "The Friends of an Independent East Timor" are really the friends of a communist Indonesia; with Denis Freeny as secretary, how could they not be? But what of the many others who now barrack for Fretilin? What kind of independence do they envisage for the half of an island in this volatile region? Will it be isolated from the deadly serious struggles of the three Bigs? Will it embroil Indonesia with China? Will it be independent like Liechtenstein, or like Panama, or like the Khmer Rouge?

I wish I could still close my eyes at the proper moment and, responding to the right stimuli, yell, with an Irish rather than a Continental accent, "Up with self-determination! Down intervention!" But I keep wanting to know who is "self" and what, in the visible future (all other being a fantasy) is being determined.

In which there is danger, summed up in a French proverb: to understand everything is to forgive everything. It is a risk one must take, seeing the mess one gets into when one aborts understanding at an emotionally convenient point, and seeing also the morass of rationalisation into which one stumbles if one acts on the assumption that it is better, or safer, to know a little less.

It could be argued that it is unreasonable not to accept confusions as a stable datum of the human condition. Muddle through, in the name of profit, or in the name of the Great Hope. . . . But the mind which, however weakly, seeks to comprehend the rhythm, if there is one, which underlies chaos, revolts at the proposition.

Revolutionaries are 'Christians'. (Indeed, much interesting work has lately been done to show what links Marx and Marxism to the Judeo-Christian tradition.) But I am not, at least not in that sense, a Judeo-Christian. I cannot say, "This part of chaos doesn't concern me; I have made a decision, founded on values, to stop thinking of it at this and this point: I shall voluntarily limit myself."

It may be good therapy to use values like this, for philosophical self-limitation, but that is like saying that for mental health one must believe in god, because non-belief is too stressful. How can freedom from stress validate ideas, any more than can valium? The mystic says that faith must precede knowledge. The non-mystic says that *before any faith, any certitude whatever, there must be knowledge*: at any rate that no limits must be set to the search for it. That you must risk the collapse of all your convictions, if you want them to live, which is most stressful

indeed. But it is the acceptance of stress, its internalisation and social conversion, which makes us 'human'.

This is a view so heretical that every road from it, right or left, leads to the stake.

For quite a long time I have been active in Amnesty International, or have tried to support it. I still do, in its fight against the use of torture, against cruel and degrading forms of incarceration and in its defence of innocent victims, the dependants of Prisoners of Conscience.

But what is a prisoner of 'conscience'?

Man's conscience (or consciousness, a term which often means much the same) permits him to do terrible things; the purer the conscience the more terrible they can be. Abraham was drunk with Yaveh when he prepared to slaughter Isaac; Torquemada was drunk with Jesus; Babur with Allah; Djershinsky with Lenin and even Irma Griese may have been besotted with Hitler. . . . How do you distinguish between the conscience/consciousness which makes one man refuse to bear arms in Switzerland, and allows another to throw a bomb into a Belfast pub?

Not quite fair, this: Amnesty does not help bomb-throwers. But it would, I believe, try to help a mild and learned political individual who is in jail because he can 'understand bomb-throwers'. The prisoner of conscience is also a prisoner of his own conscience.

Does it matter? When we obtain amnesty for somebody who, later, imprisons others, then we shall demand an amnesty for the others when the time comes. There's some sense, a rather dismal sense in that, if not much logic.

However, I feel Amnesty really tries to apply the Westminster test. We pressure Lee Kuan-yu in Singapore to behave like the Home Secretary in an English Labour government—which today doesn't sound as funny-peculiar as it would have a decade ago. Singapore is still not London. Lee sits on a racial blockbuster. We demand that he bring his opponents to trial at last. Why won't he? Does not the truth always shame the devil. If only it would! We have a right to pester Lee in and out of season (and Indira Gandhi and anyone else) not to maltreat or shockingly confine their prisoners for long periods. But there, more or less, our right ends, *habeas corpus* and all,

because we are not answerable for what conceivably might happen if our other demands were conceded.

We cannot make a finer world by pretending that it already latently exists. I used to say, evidently in defiance of the class-war principle, that there are no conflicts which rational people cannot talk to some reasonable resolution. It's nonsense, because what is rational to 'A' is highly irrational to 'B'. Aren't there even types now who speak of non-violent violence?

If we deny ourselves as regards Lee, do we not bind our hands vis-à-vis Pinochet in Chile?

I see no problem there. The Pinochets take power by bloody force and hold it by organized terror. (Sometimes they take it legally, and then hold it by organized terror.) If you tell me that as between Lee and Pinochet it is only a matter of degree, I answer that degree is everything.

Once you accept this, you must continually make decisions for yourself, without the aid of any of the many kinds of 'big character posters' which, in many languages, clutter up the world. Like a cop, you must decide when force, and how much of it, is reasonable. The ancient test of motive is a false one. If a good man does a rotten thing, the thing does not become good but the man becomes rotten.

I wish Will Durant were alive to help one think it out. Perhaps, after all, I have not strayed as far from him as I had feared.

I will have to go on trying to choose between evils, but with this difference: I cannot (and here I finally part with my youth) sing myself into a state where a smaller evil begins to shine like a Great Good.

The job is to live without god, without inventing yourself a god, or have one invented for you, and yet to live so as if there were a judge whose trumpeter will call you.

Values exist within reality; at least they seem to. I think their function is to guide us in our personal lives, or—you might say—for us to guide them. To use them in other ways, generalising and universalising their relevance into new absolutes, turns them inside out, perverts them, and—dialectics!—changes them into their opposites. Life is full . . . in its emptiness.

Try that for comfort.

**A photo of some people  
In a football stadium**

when y write a poem on Chile  
most of it's MADE IN USA  
man & machine gun in th stadium  
which empties after a while  
said in true TIME magazine style  
"those you see enjoy th sun  
those y don't see prefer th shade"

go to th football  
cowboys to a man  
it's frontier justice  
they'll break yr two  
good hands

stay alive I always say  
advance australia fair  
is rather nineteenth  
century  
Santiago Chile September 11  
this country will either be  
th refuge of th oppressed  
or th grave of th free

victor jara  
from whom history  
has tortured a name  
& th blank face  
of a soldier  
who goose steps still  
past general sunglasses  
past a dead woman  
who stares

ERIC BEACH

**I said I was listening**

Did you hear me? Yes I heard  
you now where was I?  
You were I am (as it were)  
as I am . . . I remember —  
as I was as a child: taking  
what's said away  
to think on  
in retreat;

taking some in  
leaving some out;  
changing a few details  
discarding names and times . . .  
Wishing they were different?  
Well who wouldn't  
who walks  
with dreams?

Where does that leave us? Now who's  
not listening — be it leaden, feathered,  
flowing going gone or  
back next week, truth's  
a lurker, makes me honest  
in its way; makes me yours  
(believe it) if you'll have me  
as I am.

JANE ZAGERIS

**Elephant Poem**

He was out seeking elephants.  
The circumference of his sun-helmet  
wasn't sufficient to shade embarrassment.  
Fanning out the natives he restrained  
the motions of his hands to vague indications,  
and his voice ebbed to an all time low.  
Think him mad, but his good woman  
has this craze for ponderous pets.  
Dominative, with arms akimbo, her adamant  
vociferation compelled him, at this instant—  
GO!  
A challenge for someone daring, the chance  
to introduce yourself as primitive  
to boundless possibilities.  
But for the mild unobtrusive type,  
hunting for elephants in cities  
is not their line in life.

FRANK HOGAN

## Conjunctions

### I

#### The Watling Collection

Torn from the needy indulgence of dear Aunt May  
For forgery in Dumfries — an occupational  
Hazard for improvident artists; tossed in the hell  
Ship *Pitt*; an escape; then dumped in Botany Bay  
To sketch “the non-descript productions of the country”  
As an assignee to John White, the Surgeon-General,  
“A mercenary, sordid person” — Tom Watling might well  
Write carping letters home. And now his *Sydney*  
*In 1794* proclaims him father  
Of the arts in a country “where little good,” he wrote  
Would come “from the coupling of rogue and whore.”  
In the British Museum, thumbing through the Watling Collection,  
A “warratta” and colored birds fly out  
Screeching of home in hanging bloody London.

### II

Forging a Lowland guinea, I suppose,  
Is a kind of plagiarism. John White set Thomas  
And any rogue or whore with an eye or promise  
To limn a new land. His singleness of purpose  
Was the collector's, criminal, without care for those  
Who served his purpose. He paid them with a curse  
And erased their signatures; yet was not averse  
To England's plundering naturalists who chose  
To copy the collection. Yet it stands.  
Watling signed in ink and so can claim his third  
Of these first moving records of a people  
Ascetic, unpredictable; of beast and bird  
That had not passed through Noah's numbering hands:  
For some a drum, for others a nautilus shell.

DAVID CAMPBELL

#### Sullied Adam wept

outcaste  
I made my peregrination  
round the atolls  
of perverse desire

(keep thy mind in hell

but for you, my lord,  
I filched  
a red hibiscus  
over fences

(wind, stop mourning today

DON MAYNARD

## Gruff Sister John

Gruff Sister John  
So the legend says  
Did a great deed  
In the town of Yass.

She was so clever  
She could speak  
With scholarly ease  
Both Latin and Greek

And taught such stuff  
To the small Yass boys  
With a bamboo cane  
To rule their noise;

And though she was known  
For a kindly soul  
She looked, it is true,  
Like a small black bull;

And what is remembered  
Chiefly of her  
Is the deed she did  
To the Lilleys of the River.

The Lilleys were ragged  
And hungry and poor  
And only the river  
Called at their door

And they lived in the floods  
In their tall stone house  
All by themselves  
At the bottom of Yass.

But the seventeen children  
Loved each other  
And their mother and father  
When he was sober,

And seldom so pretty  
A child was seen  
As the seventeenth  
Of the seventeen

For his mother kept him  
To be her dear  
In long long tresses  
Of yellow hair;

And fair he floated  
Like an autumn willow  
To the age of twelve  
In his cloud of yellow,

Till at school one day  
That stout small Sister,  
Gruff Sister John  
Like a black rooster,

Fierce Sister John  
With her dark downed llp  
And her cane and her scissors  
That went snip snip,

Felt she had borne it  
Quite long enough  
And she seized Jack Lillley  
And cut it all off.

And whatever was said  
By the Lilleys of the River  
In the house in the floods  
Where they all lived together

They never dared march  
From the bottom of the town  
To argue about it  
With gruff Sister John.

DOUGLAS STEWART

## Sibona: alone

pure  
keel of the boat  
true / *stret*  
like Kaputin

& the australians?

a niuginian  
gracious  
contactable  
thats the question

about LITERATURE?

bodies problems  
are leftover  
the island  
with perfect hearts

whitemoonfullrose

drums  
in the silence  
underscore  
our ethno-

music

DON MAYNARD



Arriving at dawn  
and finding the house an ideogram  
an island propped above crossroads in seas of frost  
bedstead askew  
doorslam  
lapping old hinges

### Renovations at Franklinford

lists to assist cryptography  
with ciphers and deceptions  
significant connections

swell up in household rubbish  
The rabbiting hands of the miners  
gone into a room where the smell of wheat  
drives their ghosts  
off slag heaps

(freewheeling dread at auroras  
where blood thumps up to  
lionize light between fingers,  
the grammar that conjugates matter and time)  
tumbles away in the sunshine

just to be here  
watching it rise  
and Alan explaining the key is lost

A windless day —  
an old door slams behind us  
Nearby a rank magnolia. Imagination's  
plump birds  
fly and fly

fleshed out of tenants  
ragbags who took  
in steady succession  
the slim realm of yield and plagues assured  
by omens on vacant possession  
Find what  
under perished hessian?

I AM HUNGRY  
chalked on a stud  
you picture the slices of wedding cake

newspapers pasted to keep out the cold  
rejoicing German victories  
in Russia, the end of '17

and under the floorboards  
bottlenecks  
dry ninety years, the litter of mice  
and an alloy trinket still ready to sheer  
a grin off at light like

sculpture writhing out of stone  
"Here, we'd better get rid of this evidence of mice"  
the new timber waits, optimistic bride  
among lepers

it waits to be wedded into a list  
of sentimental affections  
hung between love and habit:  
washing days  
disappointments  
rows,  
corrosive air at the statue's pores

and the laughter of mine through a lonely house  
an undertow  
beneath the tide  
the smooth tide marries dread and jubilation

We sing.  
Clumsy nails will pierce the forest's daughter  
the sap will tremble and not know why

ROBERT HARRIS

### Coming Up Behind You

covering your eyes: dove  
dove don't  
make it / intimate talk  
is always about a photograph of friends  
out there who aren't  
friends in here,

too liberal  
with their play money / thanking you  
for the rare privilege of coming up behind you  
with doves like the stuff  
of theatre:

### A Part

of the killing is domestic

& wants to slide, more so  
than the moves of most men

it wants to glide,  
have a go,  
a fandango.  
it wants to slip

shoe from the foot,  
snake from the skin,  
water  
from the duck's back. god bless  
the salters of tails. god bless the dance  
of the hen's body. more so  
than a hanged man's

it wants to hide,  
have a rest,  
a nest.

comedy (comic abuse) "in flux"  
like doves outside, out there  
with the punsters covering  
cages with . . . what? — wigs? — too  
contrived, just  
rags for the rich;

or tragedy (tragic abuse) the  
sweet reddish smell of those doves when  
they're good & bloody like rags  
coming up behind you.

PHILIP HAMMIAL

PHILIP HAMMIAL

## Morning Over Richmond

Such sweet and morning light floating through  
Windows where gentle voices call against the sky  
Like the knock of the rain on the blue blouse  
She has pinned out in the sun  
Curling in the breeze like a wave around a bay  
Dusted petals of streetlights  
Drunks stumbling off trams through sherry parks  
Laughter and cigarette smoke come curling  
Round the blue blouse

And last night the Aboriginals dancing in moonwhite shirts  
Gleaming teeth blinking and black eyes smiling  
Hitting up in boozed back alleys  
So beautiful and black asleep in the lakes of grass  
And buds and the shade of marigold  
Cloud and glittering smashed windowpane

And i dreamed the streets as the flower opened  
Your face your eyes half closed the eyelids so heavy  
Let them close let the flower close  
Now the sunlight pours across the blowing skyblue blouse.

BARRY DICKINS

## A loyal process

tentacles                    manage loss  
your                        variant charm  
delicate variant  
variants fade                    our  
obsession does negate the need  
to vary not explore

                                  rayed  
fluorescence froze in some small profound  
jade & bronze eardrops you wore

                                  coral  
moonblaze, jet sun  
no venture between,  
the severing light  
no venture beyond

                                  your palms  
parched by indifference

your gestures were so skilled  
in slender hesitance  
so vivaciously disengaged

it would be too sinister to try  
to manage it away  
to venture you again  
                                  to fight  
the instinct to grasp when  
last age like first  
prompts such an urge  
to carry to thought in one's arms

                                  so dewily surprised  
in the newly felt brine  
my limpid curious  
octopus eyes

                                  surrounded  
now you don't  
use the smoke's  
mint taste to disengage you  
from cloistral intensities, from  
the compulsion of the stutterer  
to chronicle, the  
invalid to quarrel, the  
traitor to explain

a loyal process  
loyal as decay  
loyal as arithmetic:  
the numbers in service  
count.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

## Two Simple Ones

### The Generations

Since, from beyond our origin  
caught in the cycles that recur,  
men must repeat the being men,  
there could be reason to infer  
all were young once, and even when  
one cannot believe our elders were.

Call it feasible to suppose  
dear kin were children first, then grew  
much as ourselves have done, and chose  
to love and live through youth and through  
the years that followed — which were those  
shared in a world we likewise knew.

Yet they eluded us in their prime —  
ahead of us or an alien race —  
for, as the generations climb  
up out of history and efface  
gone centuries from living time,  
each clambers to abandoned space;

none overtake. But, in their course,  
folk find photographs in a box,  
or stories of old times, like ours;  
and each posterity interlocks  
with all that staticly endures  
yet flows in the years by paradox.

For example: pass the schoolground fence  
on your way citywards, and fill  
your ears and eyes with evidence  
in running and shouting there that spill  
from days cast back of you and dispense  
children's unaging childhood still.

### Having Slept

Having slept to wake again  
shall you not be now two men  
not just lingering and lost,  
singly, on some Crusoe's coast,  
neither sea nor land, between  
what's to come and what has been?

This one trod your past and kept  
on its roads to where you slept.  
There his future's drift of haze,  
thick — then thin to tempt his gaze —  
turned him back to all gone by,  
fading, fading from his eye.

Now this other, sliced away  
from the ejected yesterday  
flung across time's refuse-heap,  
fronts beyond your screen of sleep  
whatsoever near-at-hand  
he shall grasp or must withstand.

Gather both in you as one.  
Here again is all begun:  
life and time and space and earth  
in perpetual rebirth  
where this westering daybreak burns  
and this present — yours — returns.

R. D. FITZGERALD

'In the designation "Australian Writer" all the emphasis is placed on the adjective, to the relegation of the noun — a noun moreover which ought to be an active verb, but which, in Australia, is a nominal, passive article, grown soft and flabby on inactivity and irresponsibility.'

Thus Kris Hemensley in the latest *Meanjin*. You can also read Terry Smith on the art scene in New York, and its increasing politicisation; together with Peter Corrigan on the B.H.P. building and modern architecture.

There are also pieces by Humphrey McQueen and Lloyd Robson on World War One, David Walker on the Palmers, and Chris Wallace-Crabbe on Bruce Dawe. To say nothing of Gareth Evans' important essay on Labor and the Constitution . . .

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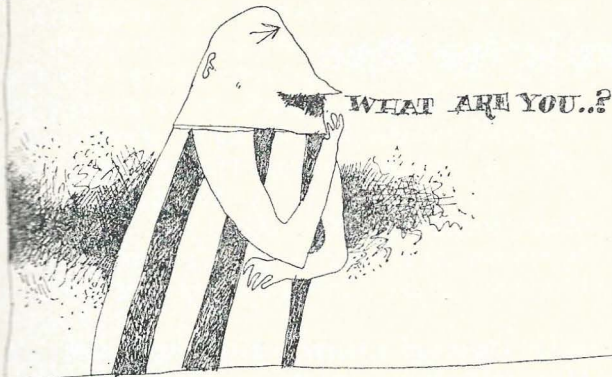


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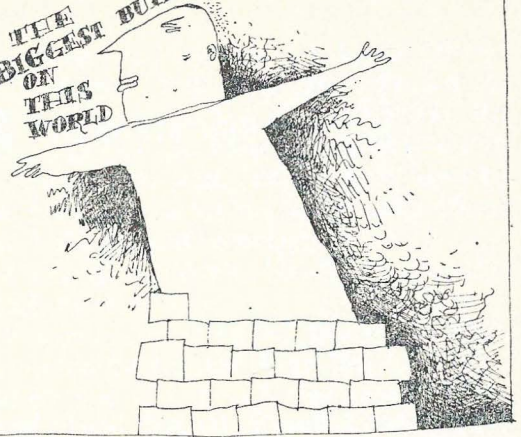
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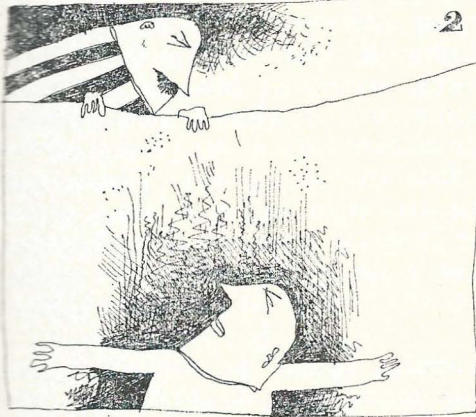
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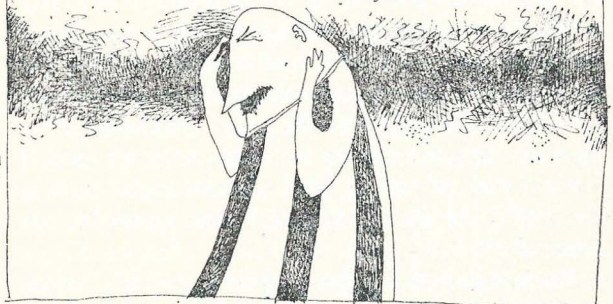


WHAT ABOUT YOU?

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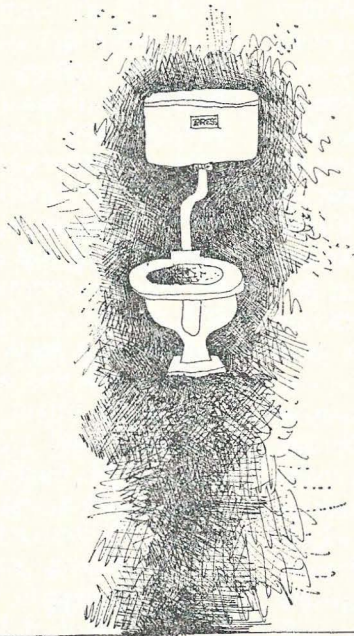
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WHAT ABOUT ME?



4

YES.. I KNOW



Yurion Howard 7/15

## WARREN STRAKER **A Picnic for One**

Sweet Jesus, I thought, today it has to happen. I walk quickly when I'm thinking as it helps to push my thoughts along. There was a cool breeze blowing against my back and I walked quickly to keep warm. It was early. The first weekend in spring and we were to go on a picnic and I was walking very quickly indeed. I cut across Hyde Park to go up Oxford Street to Paddington. The grass was wet with dew and the moisture seeped into my left boot where the sole had pulled away from the upper, making my sock wet and cold. I made a mental note to glue my boot together later if I could. In the meantime it just added to my discomfort.

During the week the newspapers had broken the story of the Anarchist Cellar. Political intrigue. Drugs. Seduction of the innocent. It was almost worth buying a paper for the reassurance that innocence still existed. Even the planned picnic got a mention. So why was I on my way to the lion's den? Well I have a theory. It's about crime and punishment—although it can be best explained in that concept of motion. You know the one. "For every action there must be an equal and opposite reaction." In terms of crime and punishment it simply means if you commit a crime you have to be prepared to pay for it somehow and not necessarily in court. But you always pay and that was why I was hurrying. I wanted to pay direct—square on the jaw. Subtleties confuse me.

A block away when everyone else was part of the background blur, Doolin stood out. He was wearing the clothes he usually wore when he spoke in the Domain on Sunday afternoons—lime green slacks, a florescent, yellow T-shirt and a richly embroidered Tibetan jacket, which hung loosely around his shoulders. I could even make out the red badge positioned on his shirt like the bull

in the middle of a target, which I knew said I AM AN ENEMY OF THE STATE.

And to my twenty-year old mind he was. Dark-eyed. Bearded. Irish. A self-professed anarchist sprouting names like Bakunin and "that great humanitarian and scientist, Peter Kropotkin". He promised the rise of the Masses and the fall of the State which had given us Vietnam and conscription. He shared with us his vision of the new culture based on Peace, Love and Freedom and while we waited in the wings for the curtain to go up on THE REVOLUTION he sold us LSD.

He stood leaning against the wall which surrounded the courtyard of the Cellar. We had cemented broken glass into the top of the wall so the only way in was through a door on which someone had painted the words LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY in white paint.

Behind him was a mountain of supplies. Cases of apples, oranges and tomatoes, six huge watermelons, a dozen cartons of hard-boiled eggs, biscuits, sandwiches, a bag of lettuce, sausages, steak, two crates of milk and four flagons of dry red for the infidels. That was only the food. There was a set of drums, two electric guitars, a record player and speakers and a petrol-powered generator to operate them. Rolled up against the wall was his red and black anarchist flag. It was enough for a small army.

His army was arriving. The beautiful people. Their faces bright with the anticipation of love, revolution and the ever happening experience. They came smelling of leather, patchouli and sweat, in jeans, sheep-skin and leather jackets and flowing Indian embroidered cottons. The emancipated breasts, long hair and wild beards, all almost dancing to the music of copper jewellery and the swish of beads against their bodies.

"We didn't think it'd be on. Not after the papers . . ." a girl said, seeing, believing yet still doubting.

"The cops. Where are they?" someone asked.

We blocked the footpath and spilled out onto the street. Cars and buses slowed down and stopped to watch. Across the road the delicatessen proprietor stood crucified in his window, his eyes wide with that appearance of innocent bewilderment common in Mediterraneans, who in reality have seen it all before.

Then the two double-decker government buses we had hired pulled up in front of us and everyone, appreciating the irony of it all, let out a wild "Yahoooo!"

The drivers were less than enthusiastic. They climbed out looking as though they had expected to pick up a party from the local senior citizens' club. After looking, some discussion between themselves and the lighting of cigarettes, one asked who was in charge.

"Nobody," a voice replied. "We're anarchists." And another cheer went up.

The other driver looked at a piece of paper he had taken from his pocket, turned to Doolin and asked, "This is the Paddington Mutual Aid Society?"

Doolin grinned and nodded.

Meanwhile I could see Hans and Betha strolling leisurely towards us, Betha's children running ahead of them. Hans was as thin as Betha was plump. Subdivided they would have made the perfect couple. Receiving inspiration from cosmic sources, Hans had dressed from his moccasins to his hat in soft rough leather. He leant on a cudgel that was more knobblv and bent than ten dog legs and as he moved his body was flaved by the fringes on his coat and jeans. Hans liked to think of himself as creative, but he looked like some incredible insect.

"How goes it?" I called out to them.

"Out of focus, man," Hans yelled back. "Out of focus."

We loaded our gear into the lower deck of the first bus and I went upstairs with Betha, Hans and the kids in the second.

Before we were out of the suburbs a group of kids in front of us had lit some grass and were laughing so much they were almost rolling on the floor. Hans said he was tired of Sydney and wanted to get out.

"I'm pissed off with the whole scene, man," he said. "Everywhere you go, the same screwed-up heads. Everyone hanging up everyone else. The

country. Nature. Land's cheap. Grow your own vegetables. That's where I want to go. Live in a commune."

Betha eased him back from the dream. "Baby? Do you know what they do to types like you out there? On nights when there's a full moon, the straights break out and hang hippies like you up by your own leather work. Take it from one who climbed out from under the sheep shit. Please don't go," she pleaded mockingly.

"And what do you think of it all, spunky one?" she asked, turning to me.

"Well, I guess I don't know," I said and didn't, having lived in the suburbs all my life.

"Christ!" She said it with true anarcho-libertarian solemnity. "Never a thought. Nothing. No wonder they go to Vietnam."

There was only bush now. The roving joint had reached us and had been passed on. We sat back and watched stringybark trees and dark red soil running beside, then above us as we went down the road and into the park. Hans opened a window and the marihuana smell was swept away and replaced by crisp eucalyptus. The buses slowed going over the causeway and we saw rowing boats resting lightly on the grey water, the only movement as the last swirls of mist rose and vanished. Again we were moving upward, until we saw clouds through the trees where sky becomes water, then down into the strangling growths and earthy smells of the rain forest. The trees stopped before the next rise where the stunted and sandblasted scrub began—and before us the sea.

We pulled into the picnic area and stopped near the ranger's hut. The ranger came out, saw the government buses, smiled and came over. Doolin got off the first bus and the ranger stopped smiling. While Doolin was talking to him, the ranger was looking at the equipment in the first bus, up at the freaks in our bus—who were looking down at him—and sniffing the air like a bloodhound. Doolin was pointing to a grassy area with fireplaces from where you could see the waves flash like tiny mirrors as they broke on the entrance to the bay. The ranger was shaking his head and pointing to the far side, away from the water, where the ground slumped down and was hidden from the rest of the picnic ground.

It was exile to the desert, except there was no sand only clay strewn with sharp pieces of shale. We laid out the blankets and food and set up the record player.

Doolin walked amongst us with a plastic bag filled with his LSD capsules. You could see his mind was blown. He was like a priest offering the Sacrament to his disciples. He would smile benignly, extending his arm, while his Host—a square of impregnated blotting paper encased in a capsule of gelatine—became sticky from the heat of his fist. The disciples—philistines—would tear the capsule apart and devour the contents.

I took two capsules from him, but out of consideration for his ritual and caution in case we were raided by the police, made a point of swallowing them whole.

Not everyone wanted acid. Hans claimed it rotted your teeth, but he took a flagon of red and some food from the supplies and sat away from the rest of us, with the juice freaks.

The food vanished in a matter of minutes. Everybody ate as though they hadn't seen food for days, and some looked as though they hadn't eaten for at least that long. The canny ones filled the pockets of their jackets for after. By the time we were getting to the last shreds of lettuce most of us were lying back, content to listen to the wine jug music of "Country Joe and the Fish" bombarding us from the record player:

*And it's one, two, three,  
What are we fighting for?  
Don't ask me, I don't give a damn,  
Next stop is Vi-et-nam.  
And it's five, six, seven—  
Open up the pearly gates.  
Well there ain't no time to wonder why  
Whoopee!  
We'all goin' to die.*

Two small brass pipes filled with a green mixture of hashish and aniseed were being passed around. I was sitting with Betha; she wasn't smoking on account of the children. Some of the alcoholics had deserted Hans and his flagon, so I shared the pipe with them.

I lay back on the blanket, listening to the music and looking across the flat scrubland to the misty hills in the distance. It was Greek music, beginning slowly and becoming faster and more complicated, defying the feet to follow. Doolin was dancing with his arms stretched out and his eyes closed, concentrating as his feet struggled to hold the beat, while we clapped in time. He swirled faster and faster, his feet kicking out and his

Tibetan jacket flying about him. Then he tripped and fell, laughing.

The top of my head had been rising and falling in time with the music and I was very relaxed. Doolin triggered it and then I couldn't help myself. I just had to smile. My lips slid down, away from my teeth and seemed to stretch back to the lobes of my ears. I turned to Betha, who with her brown hair and olive skin, looked like the original Earth Mother. I just stared at her, into the pores of her skin, and she said,

"Man, if you don't stop grinning there'll be nothing left of you but that grin." She was smiling.

"I feel like the Cheshire cat of all time," I said, I was laughing. Laughing and grinning. It was too painful. I thought my mouth would split. Everyone was laughing now. It was real laughter like you never hear anymore, coming up from deep inside and our faces were red and streaked with tears.

I wanted to get up and dance and yell and sing, but I no longer had the strength and then the music stopped. I rolled over, burying my face into the blanket, while the sun burnt through the back of my shirt and jeans, warming me till I glowed.

The silence was shattered by another record and my mind became a kaleidoscope. I saw delicate cobweb designs in brilliant red and purple which slipped out of shape as I tried to catch and fix them in my mind, changing into a shining guitar string, vibrating in time with the music, the vibrations coming together then dividing to form a comet of parallel lines soaring away to infinity.

The sound of the music came back to me again and I saw each note as perfect, colored smoke rings swirling through one another. The rings carried me on with them back through time to that time when I was very young. I was being taught mental arithmetic problems in front of that magic, vision filled, open fire in my grandparents' lounge.

From somewhere I heard the sound of chanting. At first I thought it was part of my hallucination. It became louder until it was impossible to ignore and my childhood disappeared. I looked up and saw Hans towering above us, his eyes bulging and the half empty flagon in his hand. He was praying at the top of his voice:

"Almighty and most merciful father, pardon these your most miserable sinners, these kids who have strayed from your flock. Forgive them their whoring and drug taking ways. They are not bad kids. Blind. Ignorant. Stupid bastards that they

are, they do not deserve to burn in Hell fire forever. Oh Lord, spare them for they are lost, dying about you even now and not realising it." He stopped and slowly looked about at each of us. His voice became wilder, broken with sobbing. "Goddam you. Drugs. You're eating from your own brains. I saw a dear friend of mine—insane on drugs—bite a lump from his arm, choking as he tried to swallow it. And here, here all you can do is grin and snigger. Look at them. You think it's funny. Listen to me, damn you all. Ah what's the use. What's the bloody use. You'll burn. Hear that? Burn!"

He had lost all control over himself and stood there crying while we all waited patiently. Then he wiped his face with the back of his free hand and started over again. It was all too much for one of the hippies, who freaked out and ran past me to the buses, his face contorted with pain and misery.

I have to admit I was a little shaken although I had seen Hans go through this routine before, after he had been drinking. The sun was warm and the music had started again, so I lay back and allowed the psychedelic grin to crawl across my face. I had just closed my eyes when someone kicked me in the ribs.

"And save this grinning bucktoothed sinner also." Hans instructed his Master.

I clenched my teeth, jumped up and pushed him to the ground. He dropped the bottle and I picked it up and smashed it against a rock.

"There! Now shut up you bloody maniac," I screamed.

He crouched above where the wine had soaked into the clay and rubbed his hands in the mud, then stared at me. His eyes were slits and his face flushed from the booze. He fumbled with the broken neck of the bottle and lurched towards me.

"You little . . ." Before he could finish he tripped over his own feet and went sprawling on the ground. I kicked the glass away.

"Peace, babies. Don't fight," a hippie lisped. He had a black cane with a silver knob, which he was waving back and forth like a pendulum. "Give peace a chance." He was crooning like a banshee. "Give peace a chance."

I was trembling with anger. I ran up to him, grabbed the stick out of his hand and brought it down hard on his left shoulder. He rolled over and I kept hitting into his back. It was like punching into a pillow and I was enjoying it. Fortunately for him the cane broke. He sat look-

ing stunned for a moment, then let out a bellow like a cow. Stupid little pansy, I thought.

Suddenly I was knocked forward onto him. Hans was on my back blindly pummelling into both of us. Just as quickly we were dragged free of each other and held tightly from behind. Hans was still struggling and breathing heavily, but all the fight had been knocked out of me. I relaxed and was allowed to slide gently to the ground. The hippy was lying like a squashed beetle on the blanket.

Doolin came over carrying a large chillum.

"Knock it off, will you, or we'll lay you both out," he warned as he tamped down the bowl with his thumb. He ran a match around the top of the pipe, drawing the smoke deep into his lungs and kept it there. He held the pipe out to Hans but he folded his arms and turned away. I took it and sucked greedily on the stem. It was good hash. After two puffs my mouth was completely anaesthetised and I could feel its warmth spreading throughout my body. Doolin took the pipe from me and passed it to Hans, insisting he try it. Finally Hans did take it and drew on it so hard he had to fight to keep the smoke down. Tears rolled out of his eyes and he gave out in a fit of coughing.

In this way other pipes were passed amongst us—Red Indian style—and around again, while we rocked and swayed back and forth, holding on to our stomachs and breath until we almost burst or it was our turn once more.

When the pipes had finished we passed huge slices of watermelon around in the same manner, biting down into the pink flesh, sticky liquid dripped from our chins and ran down our arms, then ripping it out and giving the remainder to our neighbours.

The group who had come out with us set up their instruments and started playing, feeding the sound through our amplifiers and speakers. They usually played the wine bar circuit around town and it was the best music of the day—too good in fact. It hit me like a shower of arrows. My head ached and my skin tingled. I had had enough. It was like being in a tin box with someone beating on the sides with a stick. I stumbled away to where the vibrations were softer and collapsed in some bushes.

Close by I heard voices and laughter. It was Hans and a couple of girls. They had a pipe, I joined them and started smoking again.

"Man, isn't this the life?" Hans asked lazily, our differences forgotten.

"This is insane," I said without intending to answer him. I closed my eyes and saw my chest as a lift well, with my heart, lungs and kidneys dangling from ropes like parts of a mobile. I laughed and my voice seemed to crack. "It's insane!" I cackled.

The girl beside me had fallen back as though asleep. I tried to pass the pipe over to Hans and he stretched across to take it, but it was only a token gesture on both our parts. We had no strength left.

"What a day," I sighed. "Think what's happened."

"Don't say that," said the other girl, who was still smoking.

I was on the point of asking her why when the whole day flashed through my eyes. I said it again just to tease her.

"Please don't." She checked the bowl of the pipe. "Oh blast. It's finished."

Nobody spoke and I saw myself standing alone in a paddock below a high, yellow mountain. I looked up. The sky was purple and there was lightning on the other side of the mountain, but around me there was no sound except the wind rustling the grass at my feet and I was at peace with everything.

"It's incredible," the first girl said, opening her eyes. "You no sooner get over one trip and you start on another. It's like watching a slide show."

"I've never . . ." I started to say something but it was lost in another trip. "I've . . ." I wasn't sure whether I had said anything or was

just imagining it. Nobody took any notice.

"Remember when we were flower children?" the other girl asked. She had picked a plum-pudding flower and was removing the petals one by one while we watched, fascinated.

"You can see right down into it," she said. "And the petals are so soft. Here, feel." She gave us a petal each and we sat pondering over the small pieces of velvet for what seemed to be an eternity.

"The music's stopped," Peter said, standing up. Everyone was packing up and moving towards the buses. I was afraid they would leave without us. Our legs seemed weighted down and we moved with the desperation of people left to die in the wilderness. I kept on stopping and having visions and losing sight of the buses, sometimes finding them in the direction opposite to where I was going. It was as though time had taken a holiday; no matter how hard I tried I didn't seem to be making any progress.

Then I realised we had made it through the day. The cops hadn't come and the picnic had been a success. It was only the first weekend of spring.

I didn't know where I was going—nor did any of the others so far as I could see. All I felt was on a trip such as this you never came back to exactly where you started. That was the idea of the experience.

The buses were here to take us somewhere.

I reached the first bus, hauled myself upstairs and fell into a seat.

## floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: No-one seems to know at the moment what is going to happen to grants to literary magazines under the New Order now established in Canberra. Indeed, no-one seems to know what is going to happen to the Australia Council or to the Literature Board itself. It seems a fair bet that the least that will happen will be that less and less money will be available to the arts—this is already happening—and that the size of the Council and the various boards will be reduced. (No bad thing, perhaps.) In addition an attempt will be made to channel more funds through the states. In any case, and as we all know, the future looks dark, and all the more reason to thank those who have again generously contributed to the Floating Fund. A record total of \$1020 this time, though admittedly we didn't print a list last issue.

\$94 RM; \$60 FM; \$40 BG; \$26 MC; \$25 GB; \$24 KS; \$20 GH, JM; \$18 JB; \$16 DD, ML; \$14 TE, RS, CT-S; \$11 JP; \$10 JP, ED, CM, WW, DC; \$9 AD, TD, LB; \$8 LM, DP, RT, SC; \$6 EM, JH, MG, CC, WMcD, GT, JH, MM, DH, LC, MM, MJ, DF, WB, RM, BW, JB, FB, JW, JW; \$5 RB, RE, JB, KM; \$4 SP, HS, RW, ER, EC, AS, CS, GF, VB, DB, RC, HMcM, BA, JS, JD, LT, IM, JT, JJ, NM, JO'C, PM, GS, DR, AS, JC, HH, MO, DM, MW, IG, GD, MC, RD, JS, KF, JE, CE, HS, RG, BM, IMcI, TB, SD, IM, PF, DC, GS, HR, RB, BR, DH, HD, BI, ES; \$3 AB, KS, DP; \$2.50 GS; \$2 HC, LB, JH, MR, TG, BW, DG, HVB, LF, FG, NA, BD, PW, TM, HD, DD, AM, RN-S, DB, RE, WG, TD, JS, JH, JG, MB, FH, GL; \$1.50 LJ; \$1 BH, HN, PT, EM, MW, JB, JG, JL, GP, MC, LMcK, IM, EK, ER, DW, NZ, LF, HH, SC, MC, WR, CT, JC, WC, HW, AS, EL, DC, DdeB, AJ, GA, SF, MK, DA, EM, KG, NG, IR. Total \$1020.

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## THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF AUTHORS

The Australian Society of Authors is an organisation devoted to the interests of authors wherever they are, but particularly authors within Australia, its Territories and New Zealand.

The Society does not make any profit and depends very largely upon the voluntary work given to it by its Officers, the Council and interested members.

The Society was founded in 1963 and at the present time has a membership exceeding 1400. Members live in every State of the Commonwealth, its Territories, New Zealand and overseas.

The Society's business is conducted from its office by its Executive Secretary under the direction of the Committee of Management (which meets on the fourth Monday of every month), with the authority of the Quarterly General Meetings and of the Annual Meeting.

### What the Society has done:

- Achieved Public Lending Right.
- Founded the Australian Copyright Council.
- Published *A Guide to Book Contracts*.
- Published the "Minimum Approved Book Contract."
- Arranged publication of *The Australian and New Zealand Writers' Handbook*.
- Negotiated a series of agreements with the Australian Broadcasting Commission.
- Advised members continually on contracts.
- Represented members' interests in the Parliaments of Australia.
- Obtained for authors increases in Commonwealth Literary Fund Grants and Fellowships, and Awards from the N.S.W. State Advisory Committee on Cultural Grants.
- Negotiated higher anthology fees.
- Negotiated with newspaper and magazine editors on behalf of members.
- Negotiated agreements with the A.B.C.

### What the Society is doing:

- Publishing a quarterly magazine *The Australian Author* (since January 1969).
- Publishing a Chairman's Letter informing members every 5-6 weeks of matters of interest.
- Providing taxation guides.
- Conducting negotiations regarding freelance rates.
- Organising seminars, the latest one being "Writers in Sydney '76."
- Proposing suitable rates for reprinting and speaking published prose and poetry.
- Maintaining reciprocal arrangements with The Society of Authors in London.
- Administering the Mary Drake Award.

Further information from The Executive Secretary, 24 Alfred Street, Milsons Point, NSW 2061. Telephone: 92 7235.

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JOAN CLARKE **Letter from Vienna**

Sunday 23rd November 1975

Dear Stephen,

You asked me to write you from Vienna while I was attending the 40th Congress of International PEN this past week. It seemed an easy assignment at the time. Now, with the Congress just over and its four hundred-odd writer participants rushing for planes and trains to the thirty-eight countries they represented, I really don't know where to start.

At this moment I'd much prefer to tell you about the first soft fall of snowflakes gracefully whirling past my window, or about the park below where the black wings of ravens are circling the bare-limbed trees. In front of the park, in that flimsy little "cubbyhouse", an old woman roasts and sells hot chestnuts—I can almost smell them from here! In the grey distance I can recognise the baroque spire of St Stephan's, and beyond that the Rathaus, where we were entertained so lavishly by the city's Burgermeisters. (Writers are important people in this country.)

If I were crazy enough to open my window, thirteen Hilton-carpeted floors above the ground, and lean out backwards, I may be able to see the enormous sign telling the world in three languages that this has been International PEN Congress week. Dear old Galsworthy, who promoted the PEN idea, would be delighted if he could see it.

The Viennese certainly know about PEN, even without the sign. All the week radio broadcasts and newspaper articles have been regaling them with Congress highlights. On the very first day they knew that the Australian and Greek delegates had—after passionate debate—received unanimous support in calling on ". . . the International Secretariat and all Centres to approach

all appropriate national and international authorities . . . to grant and guarantee freedom of movement to all writers and to take all measures for the respect and advancement of the rights of man and the protection of writers persecuted for defending these rights."

But I was telling you about the view. It's difficult to see from here, but somewhere over there is the old Hofburg building, where we were given a "command performance" by the Spanish Riding School. Those incredible white dancing horses! They waltz, they polka, they skip, just as their well-bred ancestors did for royalty in the 18th and 19th centuries. And aren't the Viennese proud of them. Everyone wants to tell you the story of how, at the end of the last war, General Patton of the U.S. Army rescued their beloved horses from Soviet occupied territory. (Only a very few Viennese tell the story of how, at the beginning of the war, the Nazis packed into the empty riding arena over 2000 Viennese Jews, leaving them there for four days, without food, without toilet facilities. When the victims' cry for water became too insistent, it is said that the Nazis complied by throwing, from the spectators' galleries, buckets of water onto the heads of the thirsty and the dead.)

Today, with the Austrian socialists newly reinstated in government with an increased majority, the country gives refuge to victims of persecution. They come from all parts of the world. Hundreds of Chileans have found safety in Austria.

I wonder what the Austrians felt when they read of the Congress debate on Chilean PEN. Two years ago, following its statement supporting the overthrow of Allende, the Chilean PEN centre was suspended for violation of our charter. The freedom of every writer to express and publish his or her views is fundamental to PEN. This

week we listened to a representative of the suspended centre, Senora Gavent. She expressed some regret for her centre's statement in 1973, but maintained that no "important authors" were in prison at the moment and that there was no real justification for the suspension. This failed to convince the majority of the delegates that even now Chilean PEN is operating in accordance with the charter. However, as our standing orders require a two-thirds majority to suspend or expel a centre, the twenty-four votes to twelve were inadequate for continued suspension. The decision received a stormy reception, with the Bulgarian and East German delegations walking out in protest.

Look! There's the bus that took us to Alpl, a little village tucked snugly into a crevice of the snow-capped mountains. It was there we visited the school of the Austrian poet, Peter Rosegger, and were generously wined and dined by the governor of Styria. But it was the Alpl "brandy"—a sort of schnapps with a fragrance of pine-trees—that really put our toes on fire, and, I suspect, inspired the singing on the homeward journey.

The delegations are leaving now, boarding the buses for the airport. I have friends down there—friends I didn't know seven days ago. How many of them will I see again? If, as we hope, the 1977 Congress is held in Sydney, will we be able to greet those same warm, friendly faces from South Korea? The report of the "Writers in Prison" Committee paid special tribute to their efforts for their fellow writers.

And what about Marianne Laurson, the Finnish poet, and Dr Pacheco e Silva, the gentle-voiced Brazilian psychiatrist? And the English delegates—vivacious Madelaine Duke, and Michael Rubinstein, with whom we shared that wonderful kellar meal, accompanied by good beer and lively discussion. That's Kurt Vonnegut from the States. And that's our mate, Ray Grover, President of New Zealand PEN. So many, I can't name them all, but I can name some who didn't make it to Vienna: Kohout, Havel and Vaculik of Czechoslovakia, where PEN has been disbanded; Eva Sastre, imprisoned without trial in Spain; Nasir of Iraq, arrested and allegedly tortured because of his writings; the poet Breytenbach, on trial in South Africa . . . The list is endless, it seems. Almost every day there were resolutions of protest to be followed up by the International Secretariat and the "Writers in Prison" Committee—and, where appropriate, by

national centres. There are signs that these resolutions can help: Per Wästberg, Swedish delegate and spokesman for the "Writers in Prison" Committee, said: ". . . it is . . . a fact of political life that in countries with active PEN centres writers are less likely to be put in prison."

Now, rushing for the bus, I see my dear Greek friends, Jean and Lena Coutsocheras. Their very presence at this Congress is proof of Per Wästberg's words. Jean—President of Greek PEN, lawyer, poet and parliamentarian—spent the long years of the colonel's rule under house arrest. Had it not been for the constant protests of other PEN centres he would almost certainly have been imprisoned, perhaps killed. I find it impossible to imagine the stilling of that courageous heart, the silencing of that fearless voice. Physically, one has to describe him as smallish, white-haired, even frail-looking, but such a picture completely negates the real person. Coutsocheras is a warm, strong, glowing giant of a man. The sight of one eye has almost gone. That was the result of his single-handed attempt to stop the colonel's police from bashing-up Athens' students.

Behind him, as always, is Lena, his wife. Oh, the energy of that wonderful woman, always helping someone, anyone, with real problems. Yet the laughter lurks always behind the friendly eyes, ready to bubble at the slightest provocation, for Lena really enjoys people, enjoys life. The glorious midnight arguments we had here in this room, furtively sipping the milkless tea brewed with teabags and Renata's immersion heater!

That's Renata Cochrane, my co-delegate from Sydney, boarding the bus behind Jean and Lena. They're taking her back to Athens with them, where they'll proudly introduce her to the rest of Greek PEN as the Australian writer who, with her writer-husband Percy, worked so hard in those dark days of 1973, contacting PEN in Austria, Hungary and other European centres to rally help for their Greek colleagues.

Well, they've gone now and the next bus is mine. As I pack my papers the weightiest bundle is this dossier of names: men and women—writers, journalists, editors—their voices now silent in the loneliness of prison cells and wired compounds.

Here, under Vienna's grey November sky, the truth of it all is devastating. Like the truth of the past: those Jewish families herded together in that horses' arena.

The snow falls. Oh, how hungry I am for sunlight and Australian blue skies! Of course, if

writing something like this meant being thrown into Long Bay, or Pentridge, I wouldn't see much sun, would I?

Really, I must get things in perspective. Soon I'll be home in Sydney debating with my mates the important matters of royalty rates, photocopying infringements, and all the down-to-earth bread and butter questions. Who needs PEN in Australia—yet?

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH ADDS A FOOTNOTE: At the opening session of Writers' Week at the Adelaide Festival, on 8 March 1976, I moved and Michael Wilding seconded a motion which asked the Writers' Week committee, in cases where there was good reason to believe that invited writers from abroad had been prevented by political and administrative means from coming to Australia, not to issue invitations in future to official writers' organizations in the offending countries.

Although no specific names were mentioned, the motion was inspired (a) by the fact that the two invited Soviet writers did not appear, one of whom was Bella Akmadulina (a few days before Writers' Week opened the Soviet embassy in Canberra informed the Writers' Week committee that two other — and unknown — Soviet

writers were attending), (b) by the failure to arrive of the Czech writer Jiri Mucha.

After some fifteen minutes debate the motion was put to the meeting. Some 53 of those present voted for it, but considerably more against. Neil Jillett of the Melbourne Herald subsequently commented (12 March): "A gathering of writers rejected the principle that writers should be free of political control [and thus] struck a blow for tyranny".

Despite this a petition was circulated among writers at the Festival and was presented to the Writers' Week committee. It seems unlikely that either the Literature Board of the Australia Council or the Writers' Week committee, will again so readily accept the cavalier treatment they were handed out this time.

And one further point. At that Writers' Week meeting, just after the vote was taken, it was announced from the platform that the Festival had just received a message that Jiri Mucha was in London and on his way to Writers' Week. (Jeers at those of us who had attempted to lodge a protest on his behalf.) I have now discovered that the Czechoslovak authorities did not issue Mucha an exit visa and he never left Prague. Unfortunately Festival visitors were not informed of this.

## A NOTE ON THE A.B.S.

JACK BEASLEY

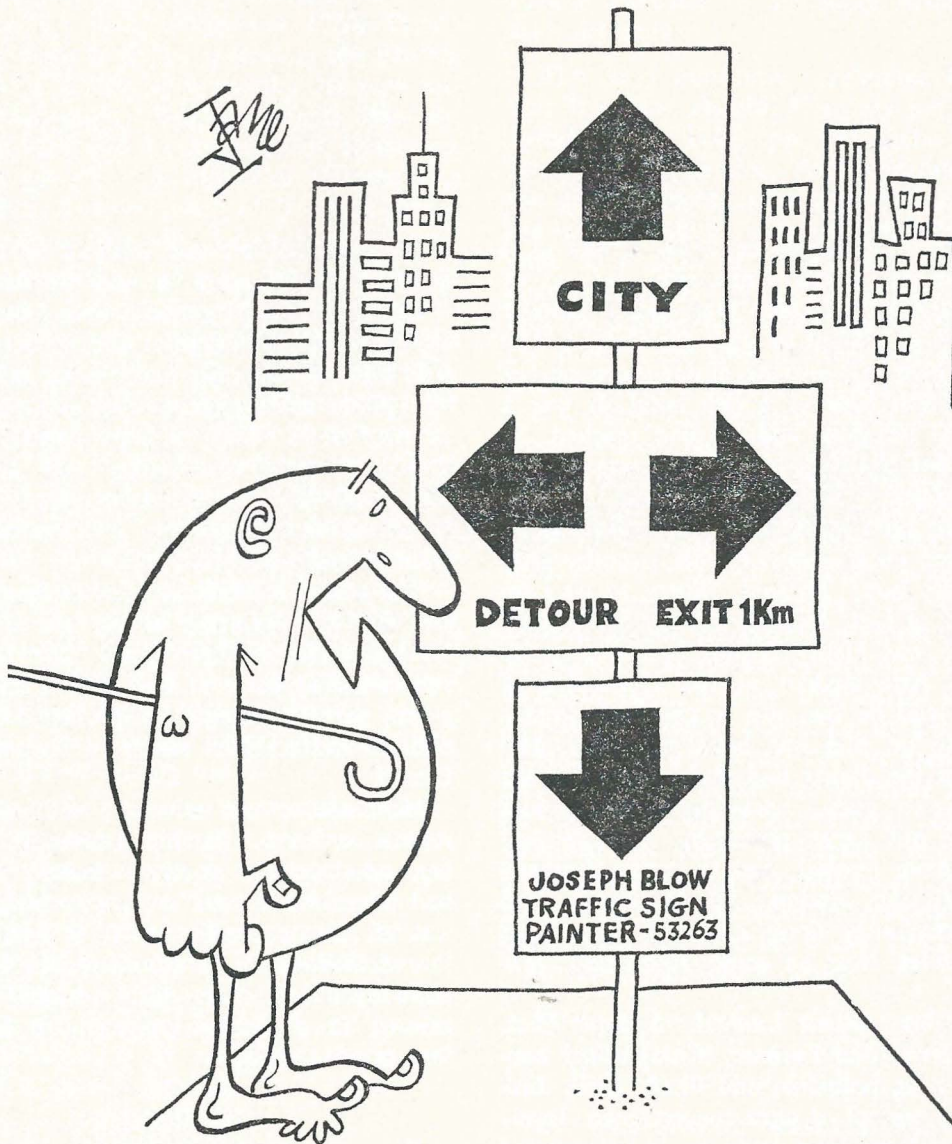
Various aspects of Australasian Book Society history are coming up, with varying degrees of accuracy. Len Fox has commented (Overland 61) on Ian Turner's earlier notes. Zoë O'Leary (*The Desolate Market*) says the A.B.S. was a co-operative, which it never was and isn't. Noel Hilliard (Overland 62) points up the absurdity of the "Australasian" term but, still disappointed that *Maori Girl* wasn't accepted by A.B.S., strays a little.

As A.B.S. secretary at the time I can assure him that no "ideologists in New Zealand" or anywhere else had any say in the matter. A.B.S. was formed to publish books for its members, not to be a re-issue book club. An unfortunate trend

had developed in the latter direction, but by the time *Maori Girl* was offered by Heinemann this was being corrected. There was no "plethora of manuscripts stacked up awaiting publication". Business reasons came into it, as they had to, and Heinemann's price may have been "minimal", as Noel Hilliard still believes, but it would have added to the Society's financial difficulties.

I can't understand, if Noel was so keen on being published by A.B.S., why he didn't offer *Maori Girl* to A.B.S. in the first place. Acceptance would have been certain, I would say, and, as with David Forrest's *The Last Blue Sea* not long before, extended commercial publication may have been arranged. This would have been satisfactory to both author and A.B.S. as publisher.

I have dealt with problems of this type, among other questions, in my notes on A.B.S. history, part of a volume to be published later this year.



Vane Lindsay

CYRIL PEARL **Alwyn Lee**

In Melbourne, one night in 1931, I was at a dinner given by fellow University students to R. T. E. (Dick) Latham, that year's Rhodes Scholar, who was about to leave for Oxford. The dinner was held in a private dining-room on the sixth or seventh floor of a city hotel. It was a quiet, formal function, and we had reached the coffee-and-speeches stage when there was a startling interruption. Through an open window jumped a tall agile young man. He walked up to the astonished guest-of-honor with a toothy grin. "Hello, Dicky boy," he said. "Sorry to be late. As a matter of fact, I didn't get my invitation."

His name was Henry Alwyn Lee. He was a second-year Arts student at the University of Melbourne, and he had not received his invitation because he had not been sent one. The organisers of the dinner had decided he was too unpredictable a guest, particularly as he and Latham did not agree politically. So Lee had chosen to invite himself, and to arrive dramatically through the window. To do this he had clambered perilously along a narrow ledge, high above the street, from an empty room some distance away.

To Lee, an ardent radical, austere Dick Latham, son of John Latham, distinguished barrister, right-wing politician and future Chief Justice, was the symbol of ultra-conservatism. Ironically, Dick Latham later drove an ambulance for the Republican government in the Spanish Civil War, and Alwyn Lee became a conservative member of the Catholic church. But Lee at this time was not only an active student radical, but a card-carrying member of the Communist Party. Under the cover-name of Comrade Ferguson he addressed meetings of the unemployed, wrote for a Communist paper and acted in left-wing morality

plays in which all the workers were lithe and heroic and all bosses fat and horrible.

Lee in his early twenties, when I met him, was extraordinarily handsome, almost beautiful, in a wild Byronic way. He had a thin, sensitive face, an aquiline nose, piercing eyes and a dazzling endearing smile. Girl students pasted his photograph in their note-books, and one admirer christened him "Young Endymion". (Endymion in Greek mythology was a beautiful shepherd endowed with eternal youth.)

The son of Melbourne middle-class parents, he had won a scholarship at the age of thirteen to Wesley College. Three years later he took the school poetry prize of £60 with a long chivalric poem, an astonishingly competent pastiche in the difficult and complex stanza of Spenser's "Faerie Queen".

He came to the university with a formidable reputation for scholarship, irreverent wit, debating, mimicry and poetry—though by then he had outgrown Spenser's sugary romanticism and was an ardent disciple of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Sometimes he would recite his poems in an intense low chant. One which I afterwards printed in a literary magazine I had started, *Stream*, was called

REVERSION

*From the drudgery and pain of thinking  
and of coming to conclusions  
that can only be acknowledged in drunkenness  
or by the very old  
from crawling forever in the catacombs  
which the dead have mined  
from the intricate and interminable alleys  
of thought  
I turn  
to the grassed uplands of the sun,*

*and to this sun-tawny woman  
in whose limbs is the strong drowse  
of endless vacant summers.*

Stream, of course, like most little magazines, was undernourished, and faded away after three issues. But in them I had the honor of printing not only several of Lee's poems, but also his first book-review, a sardonic assessment of J. B. Priestley's novel *Angel Pavement*. ("Mr Priestley has the attitude of one defending the Eternal Verities and yet is unable to see that his own soft art, his sentimental atomism, is worse than Nihilism.") Stream had a circulation of about five hundred. A quarter of a century or so later, Lee was the chief book-reviewer of *Time*, a news-magazine with a somewhat larger circulation.

Lee's university days were a confusion of politics, poetry, and pretty girls. He cut his political teeth on the great depression of the 1930s when nearly one-third of the Australian workforce was unemployed and thousands tramped the bush hopelessly, prepared to take any work for their keep. "Rage-reaction is the most definite thing about the modern man's attitude to this confused society," he wrote at this time. And in his own rage and confusion he had joined the Communist Party, as had many of his contemporaries. But he was no mere parlor pink. In one university vacation he humped his bluey and took to the road, living with the unemployed and sharing their hardships and their despair. For a time he swung his axe for tucker in Warburton, a Victorian timber-milling town.

Indisputably, he was the outstanding personality in a university that did not lack talent. Among his fellow students were many who were to achieve distinction: the historians Alan Moorehead and Chester Wilmot; the diplomats Patrick Shaw, Graham McInnes and Keith Waller; the academics Geoffrey Sawyer and A. C. Jackson; the columnist and wit Ross Campbell, and a prime minister, Harold Holt. In versatility, charm and humor, Lee outshone them all.

Lee broke into journalism as a second-year cadet on the *Herald*. With Alan Moorehead, he was put on the 'western round', a rather dreary routine assignment covering a number of government departments. Chafing under its limitations, he wrote an outrageously funny paragraph that has passed into Australian newspaper legend. His report on Victoria's leprosarium on Coode Island, in the Yarra, began: "'Conditions at Coode Is-

land are disgraceful,' a leading Melbourne leper said today." This whimsy did not please his editor. Neither did a later story in which he invented a maddened pack of savage Alsatians swimming the Murray and terrorising north-eastern Victoria. He did not know that the wife of the *Herald's* managing director was an ardent Alsatian lover, and president of the Alsatian Defence League, a society dedicated to defending Alsatians against their detractors.

This story may have accelerated Lee's departure from the *Herald*. His next job was on the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, but again his sense of humor caused trouble. For some offence against the paper's decorum he was sentenced to cover the lottery results — the newspaper equivalent of exile to a Siberian labor-camp. Lee responded characteristically by awarding big prizes, with reckless indifference to the official results. It took the paper some time to clear up the confusion, and conciliate anguished readers. Lee found himself working for the *Daily News*, a Labor organ now defunct. Here he created a daily column called "Knockabout", in which his puckish humor, incisive wit, and irreverent satire had full scope. Free to write what he liked about people he disliked — jackbooted dictators, pompous politicians, pretentious socialites — he conducted a column unique in Australian journalism. On one occasion he appointed Australia's London High Commissioner, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, guest columnist (without bothering to tell him), substituting Bruce's picture for his own at the top of the column. Bruce had returned to Australia to report on world affairs and Lee, who had attended his press conference, wrote a biting parody of the High Commissioner's platitudinous utterances. He concluded by making Australian-born Bruce say: "On the whole, I like Australians — a crude but kindly people."

Bruce, to his credit, took the send-up urbanely. "I rather like that," he said. "*Clever* lad, Master Lee. *Must* see more of him."

Lee's imaginative sense of humor was not always appreciated by the victim. There was a Chinese restaurant in Sydney's King's Cross frequented by lonely sailors. Lee noticed that the walls of its phone-booth were decorated with the names and telephone numbers of hospitable girls. To the catalogue of "Beryls", "Bettys" and "Myrtles", he added the name "Pearl", and my telephone number. I was not amused when the phone rang late at night, or early in the morning.

I was a witness when Lee married Essie Morrison, a talented Melbourne pianist, at a Sydney registry office. The wedding took place on a Saturday, and the ceremony was rather hurried because the registrar announced briskly that he wanted to get off to a football-match. This interrupted Lee's learned discussion on marriage customs and ceremonies.

Not long after, the Lees left Australia for the United States by way of Mexico. They arrived in Mexico City in time for Alwyn to interview Leon Trotsky before he was assassinated by a Stalinist agent. Lee's fading faith in communism may have received its death-blow from the icepick which struck Trotsky down.

Lee did free-lance writing in New York, and for a while worked for the Australian News and Information Bureau. In 1945 he was reporting the Pacific War for his old paper, the Melbourne Herald. On 19 February, he landed with the U.S. Fifth Amphibious Corps on Red Beach, at Iwo Jima. The assault on Iwo Jima, the heavily-fortified and fanatically-defended Japanese bastion, 760 miles south of Tokyo, was one of the bloodiest operations of the Pacific campaign. Lee covered the battle with characteristic perception and humor.

In his first report, filed on the day of the landing, he described his emotions as he crouched on the black rotten sand of the beach, under heavy mortar fire, with John Lardner Jnr., Newsweek correspondent. "Throughout the day I had adopted the policy of watching Lardner's face," Lee wrote. "If he looked worried, I felt entitled to be scared. Unfortunately, it appeared that Lardner was descended from a Potawatamie Indian tribe, famous for their facial inflexibility. If possible, I should have been much more scared than I was. 'How was it?' I asked cautiously. 'Ugh,' said Lardner."

He and Lardner were the only two correspondents to get their stories off Red Beach on "Dog Day", the day of the landing.

Less than six weeks later, Lee was wounded in the assault on Okinawa, the last of Japan's island outposts in the Pacific. A fragment of cannon shell from a Japanese suicide plane, attacking American ships at mast-level, struck him in the knee. His war was over.

On his way back to the United States he had a stop-over in Honolulu. Here, he was invited to dine with a high-ranking United States officer. For some unexplained reason, Lee and his host fell out. The dinner ended abruptly with hot words, and Lee, with his weakness for under-

graduate japes, crept back to the dining-room, removed a piece of antique silver on which his host had lectured rather tiresomely, and buried it in the front garden. The operation bore bitter fruit. Months later, looking for a job in New York, Lee was given an introduction to an editor of Fortune magazine. The interview was satisfactory, and Lee was ceremoniously ushered into the office of a top executive to discuss terms. As his feet sank into the lush carpet, his heart also sank. Behind the desk sat his affronted and unforgiving Honolulu host. Lee did not get the job. "Fortune didn't smile on me that day," he told me wryly.

Lee never outgrew his passion for living dangerously. The idiosyncrasy which led to his early ledge-climbing exploits remained with him all his life. If he did not actually have what psychologists call a death wish, he certainly had a remarkable capacity for inviting trouble. I have often been an embarrassed witness of this. One of his favorite haunts in New York was P. J. (Paddy) Clarke's cosy saloon on Third Avenue. The genial Clarke had a fatherly affection for Lee. His saloon was patronised mainly by New York Irish, than whom there are no more sentimental, nationalistic—and belligerent—Irishmen in the world, despite the fact that very few have ever trodden Irish soil.

One night, when a voluble group of Guinness-swallowers was keening over Ireland's rights and England's wrongs, Lee turned towards them with his flashing smile—always a danger-signal—and announced blandly: "The trouble with you Irish is—you just can't fight. If you had any guts, you'd never have let the Poms tread you into the bogs."

My impressions of the next few minutes are necessarily blurred. I recall a roar of Irish-American rage, a furious cohort advancing on us, Paddy Clarke snapping back the flap of the bar and urging us to hurry through a devious back-door escape route, a breathless run towards the East River, and a long period crouched in the cabin of a parked truck, while the forces of outraged Erin still sought us out.

On a more peaceful occasion an eccentric drinker removed his glass eye, dropped it in his beer, and said to Lee, "Will you drink to my eye?" Lee swiftly removed a set of false teeth and dropped them in his own beer. "With pleasure," he said, raising his glass. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

Lee's consuming curiosity about life led him

to many unconventional friendships. In Sydney, he startled a starchy society hostess by arriving at a formal dinner with two uninvited guests, introduced as "Princess Pontas" and "Mr Chan". The Princess was seven feet high without her shoes, and Mr Chan about three feet low, with his. Lee had made their acquaintance at the Royal Show, where they were billed as "The Brazilian Giantess and the Pin-Headed Chinaman".

Among Lee's New York friends were two 'special projects' writers on *Time*, Whittaker Chambers and James Agee, and an eccentric Greenwich Villager, Joe Gould. Chambers, an ex-communist like Lee, was the central figure in the famous Alger Hiss treason case. Agee was a talented writer and critic, who died young.

Joe Gould defied classification. He was a toothless, squat, long-haired, shabby bohemian, a former Harvard graduate, generally known as "Professor Sea Gull", because he claimed to speak the language of sea-gulls. He was also believed to be writing a monumental *Oral History of Our Time*, running to nine to ten million words. Gould had a quenchless thirst and no money, and Lee used to buy him liquor and discuss the *Oral History* with him. I was persuaded to act as Lee's co-host and caterer at one of Gould's weekly birthday-parties. My last recollection is of the professor and Lee holding a dialogue on the footpath of Village Square in fluent seagullese, both flapping their arms like wings, and screeching horribly.

Lee left Australia in 1939, and except for two brief visits, never saw it again. But vivid memories of his childhood and deep nostalgia for his homeland remained with him all his life. Writing in the *New Yorker* in 1956, he recalled with photographic fidelity the Victorian sheep-station, two hundred miles from Melbourne, where, as a child of twelve, he had spent a school holiday:

In those dreary plains, the sky and the birds that inhabit it alone had beauty. It was a magical experience to see a "mob" of galahs rise screeching from the khaki-colored plains; they kept a strict flight pattern, showing now their dove-grey backs and now, in a flash, their rose-colored breasts. Budgerigars were common as sparrows, and we ate them in game pie, like quail. Always the air was filled with the lovely carolling of "maggies"—really a kind of shrike, with a voice range between tenor flute and oboe. The "robins" were red as tanagers, and

there were "wrens" like blue enamel. There were mallee hens, who hatch their eggs in nesting mounds in the manner of turtles, and there was the bowerbird, which makes a display house of woven sticks decorated with bright pebbles, wildflowers, and bits of broken glass. One species even paints the sticks with the juice of crushed berries. It was my ambition to find such a bower; the bird was the only artist living in that vast region, and may still be, for all I know.

A vision of birds led to Lee's conversion to Catholicism. (He was brought up a nonconformist but drifted into agnosticism in his teens.) In New York a few years ago, he had a near fatal operation. In his slow convalescence, he had a horrifying dream. He saw himself waking on the cold hard stony shore of a frozen sea while vultures circled overhead and swooped at his heart. . . .

For fifteen years, less a period when he was freelancing with stories and articles in the *New Yorker*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and other American magazines, Lee wrote witty and informed book-reviews for *Time*. Many of his contributions, such as the 6,000 word cover-story about his Ossining neighbor, novelist John Cheever (*Time*, 27 March 1964) were important critical essays which will surely be reprinted. And I hope that some publisher tracks down the long satirical poem about Australia on which he was working for many years, and which his friend Sidney Nolan was to illustrate.

Articles in *Time* are traditionally anonymous. But when an admiring reader complained that a piece about George Bernard Shaw ("the usual abundance of puns, japes and witticisms") was unsigned, *Time's* publisher, Henry Luce III, in his weekly *Letter*, took the unprecedented step of identifying the author as Alwyn Lee.

Almost exactly a year later, on 20 July 1970, Henry Luce III wrote again of Lee when he announced, "with deep regret", the death in Rome of *Time's* "foremost literary critic". "There were many Alwyns," Luce wrote, "and probably none of us knew all of them. Alwyn the critic could sift a ton of aesthetic sludge and produce a column and a half of buoyant wit, pleasure and wisdom . . . he was a rare, complex, rewarding and endearing man."

A New York colleague described him as "a swinger of the intellect". And in Hong Kong, the foreign correspondent, Richard Hughes, and an old Melbourne friend, said fondly: "God bless him! It's a duller world without him."

# AUSTRALIA'S OWN FASCISTS?

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Sybil dropped me off just past the Wacol army camp. It wasn't exactly a fond farewell as the trip away was part of our tacit separation. She'd been to Sydney with her boyfriend the week before, now I was hitching to Melbourne alone . . . togetherness. The first lift was easy and took me to just outside of Warwick. He was a nondescript commercial van and a rightwing fanatic with a rifle in his back seat, but apart from that he was friendly enough. I was still fresh and eager to please so I jovially agreed with him that radicals were poofs and ratbags and that the left at university was quite unrepresentative of the majority, which wasn't so far from the truth. . . . Outside Warwick the flies caught up with me. When you're in the city flies are an occasional nuisance but in the bush they're always with you. Poor flies. Did Banjo Paterson ever write about flies? Robin Boyd did. . . . There was a local rodeo on plus a Scots-back-to-Warwick week and some modishly garbed people drove past me slowly, but none stopped. I was there about thirty minutes, slapping away at the damn flies, till along came a stroke of real luck. A young Holden ute stopped and said he was going right through to Sydney. . . . I would have preferred to have gone the back way to Melbourne as it's quicker and prettier and it seems that I rarely do things directly, but when you're hitching long rides are the best deal so I went with him. He wanted me along mainly to help drive and for a little company. Only a little though as he wasn't talkative and he seemed lonely, as a lot of people from the bush do. . . . He was from outback Queensland and held a petrol distribution franchise. He'd been born in the same area and only shifted round a few times via a variety of unskilled jobs like mustering. Considering we spent twelve hours together I didn't get to know him very well. He was

a bachelor and thought I was lucky to be married. . . . When we were coming down the range again a semi almost ran us off the road; that was a shared experience, but we were so busy being scared it didn't count. . . . In Sydney he dropped me right in the centre of the city on the north side of the harbor bridge. After spending the day driving through miles of open country it was surreal finding yourself in the concrete canyons of that part of town late on a Saturday afternoon. Strains of the races and drinking came from one of the few pubs in the area, the only signs of human life. . . . I knew some people at Glebe I could spend the night with. I wouldn't be heartily welcome as they were more friends of my wife, but I wasn't sure where my own friends were and thought the Glebe people owed it to me anyway, so I headed out there. I've always found Sydney busdrivers friendly in the offpeak hours and on the way the conductor had a good chat with another passenger about the miserable state of the world. That was simple and reassuring to me after being immersed in the violence on the road all day. Just normal driving of course. . . . I hadn't been in Sydney for several years and it had grown enormously. And passing through so briefly heightened the fragmented feeling I was picking up. . . . It seemed very strange so many people should be living so close together. . . . The air was heavy and drowsy as the sun expired spectacularly in the polluted sky and a curious luminescence came from inside some of the green terraced houses, where Greek families sat in doorways framed by yellow and red interiors, chattering happily or at least loudly as I passed. It was seductive but scary. . . . I'll pass over the details of the stay at Glebe, which was handled with a maximum of counter-cultural coolness on both sides. Next morning I caught the first train from

Central to Liverpool and was back on the road again like Jack Kerouac looking for a job. . . . Waiting at Liverpool on the highway at six thirty on a week day morning was like being suspended in a massive empty factory or a ravaged abandoned supermarket. It was entertainingly ugly and a fine tribute to industrial culture. . . . Then the purpose of it all surprisingly stopped right in front of me: a young handsome sports car with a cultivated youth behind its wheel. . . . He quickly sized up my bedraggled appearance and air of genial subservience and held forth about the money in quantity surveying. He'd been round Australia once as a Volkswagen and offered a lot of advice about hitching techniques. Naturally he drove at seventy miles an hour without blinking an eye. . . . The next lift was much nicer. An unpretentious Austin in his mid-fifties. The sort of older generation person who makes you feel that perhaps the legendary Australian was an honorable man by his own lights. He owned a sawmilling yard in Sydney and was on his way to his weekend farm, which was a labor of love as well as a tax dodge. He had a boy my age, he said, and we became quite friendly. I explained that one of my problems at the moment was a collapsing concrete patio at my house. We'd been standing there peaceably one evening, having a smoke and enjoying the sunset, when Fay had fallen through the floor to her waist. Disturbing. . . . Since then we'd covered the hole with cardboard and chairs to stop our two year old going the same way. It was likely to cost a lot to repair and I was toying with the idea of fixing it myself, so he gave me some valuable hints. By the time we parted he was concerned enough to know whether I'd make a success of the job to give me his address. He also presented me with his firm's wall calendar. . . . By now I was halfway to Melbourne. I wasn't appreciating the scenery at all because it was too emotionally demanding to relate to so many new people in a short space of time. I'd also been on the Hume Highway several times before so the country made little impression. . . . My next lift was a battered Renault station wagon. A big burly car with a canoe on his roof. He was a canoeing fanatic, in fact, off to the wilderness for deliverance and to practice for a forthcoming championship. Gruff and inarticulate, but friendly, almost rhapsodic when explaining what canoeing meant to him. There were no women and it was rough and tough but immensely satisfying like smoking. He seemed to have no job and no other real interests in life or personal

relationships. He was even indifferent to his car. . . . He dropped me in an inconvenient part of the road and I was stuck there for several hours. The sun blazed down, the flies swarmed like they hadn't had a meal for a week, I was ready to pack up and go home, wherever that was, when at last someone stopped. . . . This time a happysad Danish migrant carpenter. He liked Australian girls, Australian beer, Australian cars, and the Australian sun, but was lukewarm about the people. . . . He decided to pause for a drink after a while because it was so bloody hot, so he pulled up precisely in the middle of a long treeless straight stretch where we squatted in two inches of shadow next to the car to sip cold tubes of beer from his esky. I told him I'd been to Copenhagen and seen the big Tuborg bottle so we had a good laugh at that, but his English was too indifferent. We had to leave it there. . . . By now it was becoming dark and I was hot, itchy, and dying for a shower. The last thing I wanted was another long wait. . . . This time I was standing at an ideal point, five hundred yards past a major junction, Adelaide one way and Melbourne the other. But it was frustrating too; you could see the cars coming for a long time and you psyched yourself up, then when they whizzed past you were let down. . . . Actually I didn't have long to wait because a little red Mazda nipped me up and took me right through to Melbourne eventually. Eventually because he stopped at Albury to pick up a friend. I tried to get another ride in the meantime, showing my nice legs, but no luck. So he picked me up again and took me right down. . . . He was a friendly soldier from Canberra on leave but the dominant reality was the test match on the radio; conversation was punctuated with agonised cries and moans about the state of play. I was tired and couldn't bother to make conversation. Mentally I was already in Melbourne with my friends. . . . They dropped me off at a deserted railway station on the outskirts that looked like it was rarely used. But you knew that people did use it as there was a proliferation of signs saying no trespassing, pay here, no trespassing, day returns, and no trespassing. The vandals had had a field day and the station was covered with marks of hatred for authority. Outside at the phone box where I called my friends it was even more remarkable. Every pane of glass in the booth had been shattered yet the phone was in perfect working order. I felt encouraged by this. I had to wait some time to be picked up so while waiting I

broke open one of the glass framed lists of station names and charges on the platform. I don't know why; I hadn't pinched anything for years and it was valueless, but it seemed an act of solidarity with the other vandals who'd been through before me. . . .

Well, that was the trip down. It makes more sense when you put it alongside the trip back. Hitching is a time sequence of its own with its specified rules and rituals. Both trips were disconnected from what actually happened in Melbourne, yet they were exact images of what occurred there. . . . No room for details. . . . The weeks were spent in a haze of dope and friendship. Two outstanding events: a new year's eve party and a mad parachutists' dinner. . . . At the party an enormous quantity of dope was passed round. It was a safe situation miles out of Melbourne, a very respectable house where some friendly ageing groovers had moved in. An odd combination of live dixieland jazz, dope, a fancy-dress setting and party games into the bargain like spin the chillum and find the joint. Too many strangers and too much dope for real contact but still fun. . . . The parachutists' dinner was another story I'll sell elsewhere. No dope, lots of liquor, much more communication but mainly about the joys of skydiving. I was present only because my friend was a pilot and his girlfriend jumped, very nicely too. . . . We got rotten drunk and enjoyed ourselves, even when we shot past a squad car at a phenomenal speed on the way home, but there was an undercurrent of insanity under all the bravado. They told a lot of jumping jokes. One was about a club which offered a thousand bucks for the first fuck in the air. They were all young people, probably brighter than average, apparently looking for more meaningful experiences by risking their lives. . . . So I suppose the frightening part of the trip home mirrored this bit of the Melbourne stay. Of course I didn't know that when I started back. I hadn't thought it out at all. I can't think anything out properly until days or weeks later when I've detached myself from it. That's why I normally hold off in most situations and relax only when close friends are round. Not that it was clearly dramatic, mind you. I doubt if real life works like that. When tragedy occurs there still seem to be mundane matters to offset it. And when you get scared enough, or paranoid as they say in the Captain America comics, then the little things seem potentially dangerous too. . . . Hohum. Anyway . . . it began with the first

guy who picked me up. He was a beat up old Customline dairy farmer who smelt like he carried the cattle round. Grumpy and touchy from the start and I don't know why he bothered to pick me up except possibly for the pleasure of abusing me. That's happened before. He came to a head when I pulled down the sunvisor to shield my eyes and it came loose in my hand. Apparently I should have known it would do that. I told him what I thought of him too and suggested he deposit me right there, but he dourly insisted on taking me to where he'd originally agreed. We parted in stony silence. . . . I had to wait an hour and was making slow progress as they say in the annual reports when a young blue Valiant pulled up and smiled at me. It was a nervous American boy, very reticent about talking until he discovered I was a member of the international dope conspiracy too, then he blossomed out with stories of how he'd fled the States for dope deals and was now being pursued by the FBI. Bizarre, but he seemed frightened enough for it to be true. He was heading for Albury to work as a dozer driver but had bigger plans, like most Americans in Australia. Because Albury was going to be a boom town he had ideas about real estate and more Miller Highlife dope deals. . . . Apart from these stories he was pleasant company and we had a relaxed counterfeit lunch in an air-conditioned pub surrounded by harassed office workers and indifferent laborers. . . . A few more miles along the road we picked up my brother-in-law James. This was quite a surprise as James had left Melbourne the same time as me, but on his motorbike. He'd blown his exhaust and had to put the disgusting machine on the train. It was comforting to meet James like that and we went on a little ways together but when we parted at Albury it was almost impossible to get another lift. . . . We walked a mile or two in the sun, then waited a few hundred yards apart. And waited and waited and waited, while the good people of Albury drove round and about us, in between us, but never picked us up. . . . I was beginning to feel like the north going Zax in the Dr Seuss story when at last a smart blue Torana that was two pretty girls stopped. I thought at first they'd made a mistake. By now I was convinced women never picked up hitchhikers but always drove past either indifferent or amused and superior. But suddenly here were two golden-haired angels who'd taken pity on me and were also going a long way. . . . It turned out they hadn't made a mistake and I had. They were

jesus freaks. Until then I thought such people existed only in Time magazine or on university campuses at lunchtime, but here was living proof to the contrary. They were quite nice about it and didn't force their ideas on me, it actually took some time to realise that was how things were. Yet eventually they were very informative. . . . Like the parachute people they were fun-loving and smart, one was strikingly pretty as well. She was the passenger while her friend the driver was older, more dominant, not so pretty. They lived in circumstances of moderate respectability in outlying Melbourne suburbs I'd never heard of. The older girl became involved in the religious business through her mother's bad back. The specialists had been tried but no use until faith-healing did the trick. . . . Zowie Bowie. It was a miracle. . . . The parents had since brought her up as a god-fearing person. She'd mastered the intricacies of the game, such as talking in tongues which I was fascinated by. It sounded like a wowseryish equivalent of voodoo dancing. . . . The strangest thing about them, considering their rather unorthodox beliefs, was how fundamentally ordinary they were otherwise. They wore makeup, prattled away about boys, the pretty one inspected herself regularly in the rear-vision mirror. . . . At one roadside cafe there was a tough interesting girl on a bike. She coolly checked the pretty twosome and me out and pulled a little face. . . . The girls fished round to find out how I was romantically placed, were mildly relieved to discover I was married, and naturally delighted that I had a two-year old boy with brown eyes like his mum. . . . They were en route to a religious convention in Coffs Harbor and wanted to avoid driving through Sydney, so I volunteered to take them round via Wiseman's Ferry. This was a guess on my part and we ended up going round in concentric circles on narrow dirt roads for hours before we found the highway again. The older girl was angry about this, also that I was flirting with the pretty one, so she pressed me for my views on the religious stuff. I asked her instead how she felt about women's lib, which broke the tension and filled the air with shrieks of multicolored laughter. The subject was so ridiculous. . . . We stopped at a coastal town for a meal in the Athens cafe, which was ostentatiously air-conditioned and had a large goldfish bowl as a room divider. It was the thing for the locals to take their evening meal there and observe the passers through, who in turn looked at the locals. The girls were now well be-

hind their schedule and pressed on too quickly after eating — on the outskirts of town a traffic cop got them for a twenty dollar speeding fine. They were dismayed but I was impressed with such clear evidence of the impartiality of the law, which normally only stopped kombivans and sports cars. . . . In this thoughtful frame of mind we came to a camping ground to spend the night. I had my little pup tent, they had a more elaborate affair that I helped them erect. We were fed, washed, and settled in by eight, then the girls were ready to go to bed. By now the older one's antagonism to me had changed to vague attraction and when she said she felt like a walk I said I'd go too. But her conscience got the best of her so off I went alone. . . . It was early in the evening but it was Sunday night and the main street of the little town was deserted. Empty buildings again projected a strange power over me, like the deserted Sydney skyline had a few weeks previously. The structures possessed a life of their own it seemed; the names of some of them immaculately suited their function. The most opulent buildings were the banks and the old courthouse, the shops were the shabbiest. In one window a series of sepia photographs showed a cross-section of townspeople with their hair brushed back in nice smiles. . . . It was a hot, sultry night. On the way back to the camp I was tempted to break into the local swimming pool which looked cool and inviting but my conscience got the better of me too. . . . Next morning there was a certain awkwardness in our manner until we got back into the car and re-established our travelling routine. It wasn't much further till they dropped me off and we were quite friendly in our farewells. . . . Then Coffs Harbor and the Big Banana. The tourist people have erected a giant fibreglass banana — crafted, I believe, by the local surfies familiar with fibreglass techniques — as a monument to progress. In Queensland they have giant pineapples and peanuts. They're lovely for the kids to play inside and they can buy little plastic replicas to take home. . . . I was stuck again for hours and there was a trail of dismal depressed hitchers stranded round and about me. . . . I gave up, went to a caravan park, showered, changed my clothes and when I went back my luck had changed. . . . A Falcon GT panel van approached like an angry manta ray and hissed to a silent halt next to me. A black-gloved hand opened the door. I was lightheaded from the heat and it registered as a purple hearse with a mad chauffeur

. . . but at that stage even if the creature from the black lagoon had stepped out I would have asked for a lift. I was dogtired and the temperature was round a hundred. . . . It turned out to be two young boys who were fussy about who they picked up. Naturally they would have preferred a girl but I was the best offering. They refused to answer my queries about where they were going until they'd knocked off a few hairpin racing turns to test my reaction. If I'd shown fear or rage they'd have kicked me out, so I admired their driving. . . . It was going to be a race for life and death, my life and my death, I thought. My christ. . . . We had two hundred miles to go. They'd carefully mapped their route out and were determined to cover it in the shortest possible time. Not that they needed to be back to a deadline, that wasn't the point. I realised there was a good chance of them killing themselves and me into the bargain, but I was so tired and depressed by my days on the road I just lay down in the back and fell into a deep sleep. . . . Awake I was treated to a dreamlike exhibition of low level flying. Sitting in their imitation leather bucket seats like real pilots, the tacho swinging crazily around, with Dr Death's hand in black leather poised above the stubby gearshift, with the overdrive on autodestruct and prospects of overkill or crippled survival; I was terrified. . . . It felt like a ride in a furious rocket ship. It was only a hotted up commercial van but had frightening power. The other cars went past in slow motion and for two hundred miles we passed hundreds and none passed us. . . . The only interlude was an abortive romantic one when they pulled in at a little health food naturopath cottage to give a going-away present to a girl they barely

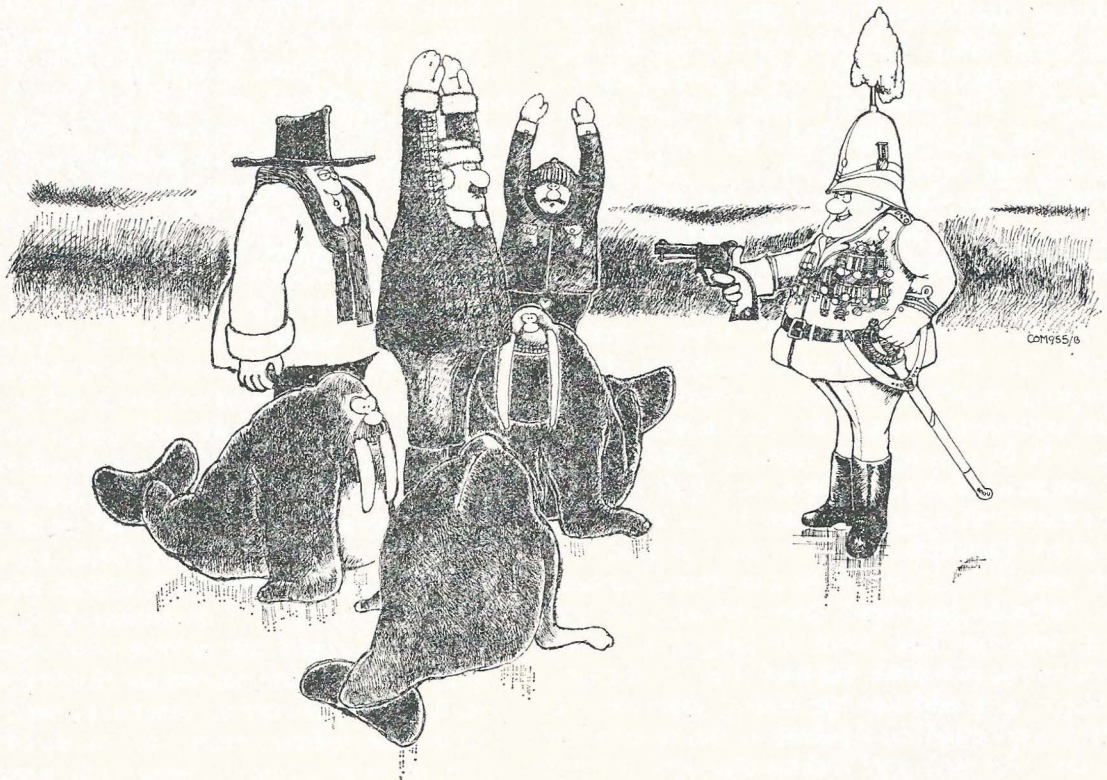
knew. A roll of shit music, a love song of course. . . . Then down to the serious business. Peter and Paul were an odd contrast. Peter the driver was very straight, very heavy, and ominously up tight; he cursed every other driver as a weak cunt. He was tall, thin, and quick to take offence. His friend Paul was small and rather delicate with long hair and all the latest Cat Stevens songs on a portable stereo cassette. Paul talked a lot of soft meaningless hip talk, Peter grunted and drove. They were both in office jobs and had just been away for their annual holiday. For three whole weeks they'd driven round, surfed, unsuccessfully chased girls at dances, at the beach, at the pub, and got drunk. I wondered how many others were doing the same thing. . . . We talked for a while and I told them about some of the crazy people I'd been hitching with, but by now I was a little hysterical: I was urging them to drive as fast as they could, reasoning that the sooner it was over with the better. . . . When they got stuck behind other cars momentarily a stony silence would settle over us until there was a sudden ruthless surge of power and the car flashed out and away from the sleepy tortoises alongside it. . . . Then it was over quickly as it had begun. They arrived in Ipswich, an ugly industrial outpost of Brisbane, dropped me off in a courteous way on the Brisbane road and that was it. . . . An insurance salesman who was a Holden Kingswood with built-in country music picked me up and in no time at all deposited me close to home. . . . I walked up the side of the lovely old house where we were staying, completely entangled with exotic plants and palm trees, little Morgan came out to me happily, then Sybil, still hostile and indifferent. . . . I felt like I'd never been away.

# Last time the Colonel won a medal he nearly collapsed.

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Barry Dickins

# books

## MAKE OR FAKE? SOME CURRENT FICTION

Fay Zwicky

Murray Bail: *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories* (University of Queensland Press, \$2.50).

Michael Wilding: *The West Midland Underground* (University of Queensland Press, \$2.50).

Rodney Hall: *A Place Among People* (University of Queensland Press, \$2.50).

Antigone Kefala: *The First Journey* (Wild & Wolley, \$3.50).

Thea Astley: *A Kindness Cup* (Nelson, \$5.95).

I have been asking a friend: "Is alienation the true condition of man in society, and am I out of step with my time in asking fiction to reject the displacements of modern life with their unhappy consequences and instead seek to present man with a spiritually satisfying conception of himself and of his relation to the world?" According to my friend this is just what I'm doing. He replies: "Where I think you're amiss is in not considering the thing in its own terms—if it works intuitively, then in some basic but not total sense, it is being insensitive not to respond to it intuitively also . . . You worry that these new boys are looking at their own society like returning astronauts, and I don't understand why you worry—if that's not a definition of new-boy art, then what is? I find . . . a new vision of things exciting. Why must a writer (prose or poetry) be judged on how he looks at society? Let us enjoy realism (in its richest sense) but let us also enjoy the fabulators. I see no reason for your pessimism—Barthelme, Brautigan, sometimes Carey and Moorhouse are fresh buds, signs of, if not spring, then some kind of growth in the venerable oak."

He is, of course, right. About Barthelme, Brautigan, Carey and Moorhouse, that is. But

the novels and collections of stories in front of me seem neither important nor interesting but, for the most part, dull and boring.

I lose patience with critics like W. Green who, reviewing Bail's *Contemporary Portraits* in *Westerly*, December 1975, said: "Writers such as Barthelme, Coover and Borges demand an active participation on the part of the reader, incorporating this demand into the very structure of their fictions by a conscious use of indeterminacy. It is pleasing, then, to see Australian fiction concerning itself with these same pre-occupations as it indicates that we are becoming less obsessively aware of our national identity and more attuned to the actual business of seeking to order our universal experience." Since when was the "conscious use of indeterminacy" the sole province of the latter half of the twentieth century? Which good writer of any period has *not* demanded "an active participation on the part of the reader"? And what, might one ask, is "our universal experience"? Reading Barthelme, Coover and Borges?

The question of national identity is not so easily shelved in Australia. Or anywhere else, for that matter. The very poignancy of the need to find a sense of identity seems to expose us perhaps more than elsewhere to outside influences which sit artificially and incongruously upon the reality of our own culture which is more heterogeneous than we like to admit.

Because Australians lack confidence in the continuity of a past, writers band together under the banner of whatever genre is currently fashionable in the U.S. or Britain. Group solidarity is more comforting, much simpler to sustain than the individualist pursuit of self-knowledge, and I would cantankerously contend that writers cannot afford the luxury of fantasy until they have first

come to terms with reality, the several realities of a dissentient regionalism. In other words, America has the diversity of its Bellows, Mailers, Algrens, Updikes, Cheevers, as well as its Bartelmes, Brautigans, Coovers and Pynchons. Where are the Australian equivalents?

The Westerly critic continues: “[Bail is] a fabulist in the sense that he allows his imagination to flow freely to create a significant fiction, a completely autonomous ‘reality’ which *adds* to our commonly-perceived reality.” The essential step of presenting and interpreting that “commonly-perceived reality” has been missed in this country. Fiction can’t add to reality unless it has something in common with it. Imagination, therefore, becomes fantasy, the play of fancy—not the conversion of real experience, but merely pictures flashed on the retina. The human being at the centre of it all is forgotten as writers move on to a new planet. The new fantasists provide yet another item on the old Australian romantic menu.

Why do I find the stories of Bail and Wilding dull? To begin to explain my disappointment it’s necessary to probe the critic’s function a little. I recently rashly asked, thinking aloud in public as it were, “Shouldn’t *something* be said to establish a vocabulary for serious discrimination, a ‘language of preference and value’?” It was not a question arising from the intellectual insecurity of an academic critic looking for an orderly, neatly hierarchical evaluation of contemporary writing. A writer too must know what’s good and what is not before setting it out in front of a reader. I think a writer owes it to the reader *not* to publish his 5-finger exercises; if he doesn’t know the difference between rehearsal and performance, then the reader is done down.

I know, as my writing friend knows, that every work of art is unique and though a critic may recognize the existence of literary genres, these don’t emerge by arbitrary decree but because of the kind of material they embody. The critic’s job is not to observe how nearly a work approximates to a formal definition, but to discern how fully it realizes the laws implicit in its own being. If one senses the nature of a work to be organic and not mechanical, then it doesn’t matter if the writer’s vision is social, anti-social, absurd or tragic, the critic can then try and discern how the elements come together and form that unity which is more than the sum of the individual parts. If, however, the writer’s work appears as mechanical and inorganic, then there will be the sum of those parts

and nothing more. A false or strained work can, to use Alfred Kazin’s phrase, “make you literally sick”, because anybody who takes literature seriously, and for whom the making of distinctions is an active part of daily consciousness, will have actively sensory responses to poems, stories, and novels. Bad writing is threatening to the imaginative life.

I refuse to take as received the aesthetic dogmas pertaining to the post anti-novel-novel, the new American Gothicism, Metafiction et al. I will question, as ruthlessly as scientists are supposed to do, the hypotheses behind these fictions, test their values in the crucible of reality. Now, what if my “reality” differs from that perceived by Wilding and Bail? What if mine is whole and theirs fragmented? Age difference, the different regions in which we live, pace of life, language usage, social decorums—all these factors will color a writer’s view of this elusive ‘reality’, and the question of fiction reflecting ‘new modes of consciousness’ becomes trickier if one happens to live in a society where these so-called new modes have scarcely begun to penetrate, a society where new modes of anything are actively resisted. How ‘universal’ does this make the Australian experience? Because I live in Perth and Wilding and Bail in Sydney does not mean, however, that I cannot re-imagine their world or accept their creation of a new one if they no longer find the traditional forms congenial. It is the ‘how’ as well as the ‘what’ with which I’m quarrelling.

I believe that unless literature is given its proper due as a serious and powerful influence (and, lest I be stoned as a Leavisite, this does not preclude game-playing and the chirpy recording of civilization’s collapse as subject material), then we are, as readers, at the mercy of amateurs and dilettantes. I demand intactness and fresh communication. I want the “really told” story, the essential qualities—not the stereotyped elements of a genre. I want to feel the compulsion of what was important to the writer.

To tin-tacks then: the blurb on Michael Wilding’s collection, *The West Midland Underground*, defines the adventures of a pair of queers in one story as “ridiculously funny”. Here is a passage in which Hector challenges Freddie to a fart-lighting competition:

“Wait for it, wait, wa-it, ready, watch Freddie, aaarrrrrhhhh, here she comes.”

And he would flick the lighter, holding it below his arse, to ignite the steady jet of gas.

WHOOOOOOOOOSSSSSSSHHH

"Isn't it beautiful, Freddie, like a neon rainbow?"

They were not short, yet somehow transitory. And so that Freddie would not doubt his eyes, Hector would wait, his feet up, his stomach muscles contracting to force out more gas, and light another, and another, and another.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOOSSSSSHHH  
"You'll scorch yourself," said Freddie, from the corner of his damp walls, his stack of books beside him.

"Never," said Hector: "come and look, see," fingering the trousers taut across his rectum. "Come and look, feel it it's burnt."

But Freddie stuck to his walls.

Ridiculous? Maybe. Funny? No. Dissociated? Yes. Hardly a tight style either. Is this a question of new modes of consciousness or a satirizing of the old? Or neither? Certainly the reader has to keep his wits about him, particularly whichever wit is involved in perceiving and interpreting tone, but as a performance it's a damp squib, without energy, verve or the quick changes of diction, pace and pause that comedy, black or white, deserves. The charmless bum-and-do nudging of the sentimental schoolboy obsessed by bodily functions, dwelling with loving distaste on digestive processes, sheep-fucks, transvestitism, etc. In case the reader fails to receive the import of the passage quoted, the next paragraph will enlighten him:

My farts are damp and do not ignite, masturbation is stunting, my eyes are weak, I fear sexual intercourse lest I am trapped by vaginal contractions, my society values virginity at the cost of health, organs not in constant use atrophy and drop away, one in six women in the streets is menstruating: our morning hymn is this, and song at evening.

Beneath the parodic shock-effects there's a squelchy sentimentalism which cancels out satirical intent, renders the human being a vocalising organism. Forced humor and dead filler language—"he said" . . . "Hector told him" . . . "wailed Freddie" . . . "he laughed nervously", etc. As a *performance*, then, it appears contrived and mechanical when set beside the spontaneous manic energy and flow of a Philip Roth or a Barry Oakley sequence.

Just in case I stand accused of expecting literature to Tell All about the human condition, I

will say that the best humor (and I put Portnoy in this class) usually tells us little or nothing about such a condition and is chronically superficial to boot. Mr Portnoy's bowel movements (if humorous they be) may have a tragic interpretation but I, for one, don't want to hear about it. Humor demands quick recognitions, stereotypes, and *Portnoy's Complaint* not only makes no effort to steer clear of such stereotypes, it consorts with them enthusiastically, inflates them, even, to more farcical and ferocious dimensions. "I am the son in the Jewish joke," says Portnoy, "*only it ain't no joke!*" But we're meant to laugh and we do, Jews, Catholics, Methodists, for guilt and mothers know no denominational boundaries.

In the ever-darkening field of humor in contemporary fiction, we find ourselves called on to respond in limbo to conventions and decorums so frail, brittle, and so primarily 'literary' that the reader, unaware of the original being parodied, fails to get the joke. If joke it is. One hears only too often in the cinema that dissociated schizoid cackle in response to humiliation of man by his fellow man that makes me seriously question current definitions of sanity. There is certainly nothing being written today that approaches an absurd, exuberant, truly funny book like *Portnoy's Complaint*.

In a sense, Roth's novel was the apotheosis of a genre, the summit of a fictional quest, and also a bit of a cul-de-sac. For, after this definitive gush of guilt and its successful relief, it could be said that guilt, in aesthetic as well as behavioral terms, can be debilitating and destructive. And only by getting above and beyond guilt, moving to the problems implicit in adult independence can any literature—or genre—hope to reach maturity.

I seem to be stating a preference for the work of those trying to preserve some of the old fictional values—understanding, compassion, controlled gradations of feeling, even narrative amusement. A writer like Nabokov, for example, can shift gears between the realist/anti-realist conventions—in his novel *Ada*, in his short story, 'The Potato Elf', he (like Wilding) flirts with the black stuff of deformity and anguish. He tells of the brief sexual life of his dwarf protagonist, of his frustrated longing for love, friendship, a son, and ends on an arrantly compassionate note. Within the rich, complex convolutions of Nabokov's anti-realism lies the human being—not an arid organism. And the authorial confidence controlling it all provides what Albert Guerard calls

*authority within discontinuity*, an overriding voice, a manner authentic even in its whimsicalities.

"What does one do with living people where they are needed for short prose?" asks Heinrich Böll. Murray Bail's answer emerges as self-consciously as Wilding's, revealing a mind cut off from the life it observes. Like Kafka's suppliant in 'Conversation with a Suppliant', the characters and the narrative voice in Bail's stories (with the exception of the entertaining and authoritatively-controlled tale of 'The Drover's Wife') start from the existential position of ontological insecurity. When Kafka's suppliant wants to get people to look at him, he thereby allays the sense of his own inner deadness: the rhetorical narrative voice controlling the creatures of Bail's fictional world seems to spring from a similar source.

The key story, "Zoellner's Definition", uses an inhuman bureaucratic classificatory-jargonistic mode for the purpose, presumably, of vindicating the human. But like Kubrick's "Clockwork Orange", the seductiveness of the target proves too strong. The deliberately unemotional tone keeps Bail safe from the charge of sentimentality, but the reader, flattened by the relentless monotony of objective reportage, comes dangerously near to becoming the atrophied creature being parodied:

Zoellner without shoes measures 5 feet 6 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Metrically this is 1.68 metres. He also weighs 114 lb. (51.71 kilos). At that height he is considered to have less than the desirable weight. Zoellner is regarded as a under-weight specimen. He thinks more of the space he fills (approx. 7 cu. ft., or 0.1981 cu. metres) and the volumes of air he breathes. Generally he believes that measurements of distance (and time) are nothing more than arbitrary notches. His interest in space is, of course, another question.

Fiction about the anxieties of fiction-making will have, I believe, no more than a passing interest, the recorded symptom of present cultural malaise. Bail's story, 'A,B,C, . . . X,Y,Z' illustrates the dilemma of acute literary self-consciousness:

I am writing a story.

Here, the trouble begins.

The word "dog", as William James pointed out, does not bite; and my story begins with a weeping woman. She sat at the kitchen table one afternoon and wept uncontrollably. How can words, particularly "wept uncontrollably"

convey her sadness (her self-pity)?

O.K. So Bail is questioning the widening gap between language and experience, revealing his distrust of value-judgments. But is this literature or philosophical speculation? What does the writer himself *feel* about it all? The question of 'tone' comes to seem rather esoteric in the face of this grim blandness. One has a strong impression that stories matter more than people, and that characters are never acting but rehearsing from a script composed well in advance under a bell-jar. Fictional life is muted, experience filtered, emotion anaesthetized. The cultural warping of human feeling is eased by compartmentalization: there are special times, places, situations where the disparaged responses are permitted. And the control of these responses lies in the hands of the omnipotent puppet-master playing a cold god in his fictional world.

So isn't fiction, then, being truly the mirror of the times? What more should the reader ask of current work than that it reflect faithfully the reality of vast institutional machinery, the realities of the fragmented consciousness, the reality of the banishment of that perilously sustained absurdity—the 'soul'? As Leslie Fiedler has said in *Waiting for the End*: "There is a weariness in the West . . . a weariness with humanism itself which underlies all the movements of our world, a weariness with the striving to be men . . . Let the experiment be over; let the focused consciousness blur into the cosmic night; let the hallucinatory monsters bred of fragmented consciousness prowl that night again . . ." Not monsters of apocalyptic dream stature, however, but middle-brow mini-monsters, legends of a mediocre demotically-levelled society, a society with a taboo on tenderness, a society that inflates the trivial and flattens the splendid.

Like science fiction come true, our writers give us robots, humanoids, the automatons from distant galaxies inheriting the earth we have failed to love. Gimmicky dreams arranged mechanically, methods of fictional composition which will one day be performed with greater thoroughness by a computer. Whatever experimentalism there has been in our fiction has been imported and acclimatized to middlebrow demands: Australian anti-intellectualism has finally found its accommodations in fake intellectual guise.

Writers like Wilding and Bail are being credited with a weight and importance, an avant-garde

cachet associated with fictional manners developed by first-rate experimental writers overseas. Their works are the five-finger exercises of our second-hand cultural exchanges.

The realists are scarcely any better: slight, inconclusive, as consciously 'poetic' as Bail is 'prosaic' despite documentary ethnic interest (Kefala); morally obtuse and ill-organized (Hall); obvious and dull (Astley). Surely there has never been a period with quite so many egregious failures as that between 1950-1975? And surely it's not just because of the overall cultural upheaval, political and social, aesthetic and moral, that so many promising writers have betrayed not only their promise but even our fairly modest hopes on their behalf?

Of course, in any complex culture there is not a single system of manners but a conflicting diversity, and one of the jobs of writers in such a culture is the recording and assessment of this diversity. Perhaps it's unfair to expect the fiction writer in Australia today to have sufficient knowledge, to be master, in the creative sense, of the community he celebrates. Perhaps he can only wander about, self-consciously lost among the others who do not know who they are either, lost souls with the gift of speech. And because all such mariners tend to sound alike, this may account for the feeling that I've heard it all before, already suffered all the situations with which serious fiction attempts to make the contemporary significant. But seriousness and sincerity are no true substitute for the mastery (and mystery) of creativity. Hell is where we are and others who are with us. It should be through the grace of good fiction that our location is transcended, not confirmed. And this, I feel, lies beyond the scope of most Australian writers at present.

## AUSTRALIANS IN BLACK AND WHITE

Edward Kynaston

Nancy Cato: *Brown Sugar* (Heinemann, \$6.90).  
Richard Beilby: *The Brown Land Crying*  
(Angus & Robertson, \$6.95).  
David Ireland: *Burn* (Angus & Robertson, \$4.95).  
Robert Macklin: *The Queenslander* (Angus &  
Robertson, \$6.95).  
David Malouf: *Johnno* (University of  
Queensland Press, \$4.25).

The first three of these novels are about colored people in Australia. Nancy Cato's *Brown Sugar* deals with indentured Kanaka labor in Queens-

land. Richard Beilby's *The Brown Land Crying* deals with a more or less contemporary Aboriginal scene in Perth and Western Australia. David Ireland's *Burn* deals with a family of Aboriginals in a shanty beside the Murray. Together and separately they raise a major problem of Australian writing; the difficulty of portraying convincingly the consciousness of colored people.

Colored people are just the same as white people, except that they are different. This does not make them any less worthy or somehow inferior. Colored people are quite clear that white people are just the same as they are, except that they are different. Colored people recognise the obvious that white people don't and won't and the practical result is that they are now refusing, everywhere, to accept white tutelage, white help, and white *mores*. They know that they are different from white people and that *all* their needs are colored in a hue that is distinctly not white.

It is necessary to labor this point because obscure guilt (justified), a species of fear (unjustified), and white persons' thinking (often mechanical and appropriately called black-and-white) combine together to make whites refuse to come at the not-so-simple fact. If colored people are human beings then they must be exactly like white people. Anything else is prejudice, racism, elitism, fascism; depending on exactly how insecure the white person making the comment happens to be. It is all a sort of white-wash job that shows how dangerously narrow and rigid white thought and feeling has gradually become in taking up new attitudes under the compulsion of accelerated change. Whites are being just as totalitarian now as they used to be when coloreds were considered inferior. In saying that coloreds are exactly, perfectly the same as whites, and precisely, pluperfectly equal ("and if they're not then they ought to be" say some under their breath) whites are refusing to accept coloreds in the same way that they have always done. The stance has changed through 180 degrees but not the attitude.

Colored consciousness *is* different from white consciousness. The world is seen and felt and intuited differently. Emotional response is different in quantity and quality. The world is apprehended in a significantly different way, without most of the white blocks, compulsions, and hang-ups, but with a different series of innate difficulties which show especially clearly in colored interaction with white-constructed society. The basic dimensions of Time, Space, and Distance are felt

entirely differently. How then can a white person, the result of thousands of years of evolution of strongly urban-connected societies, enter into and experience the consciousness of a colored person, who is the result of an evolution that, until recently, was natural, rural, and usually tribal?

The answer to that one seems to be that it is impossible. Nor can a white-conditioned and educated colored person really and fully experience that consciousness. White domination has meant mental and emotional genocide for most colored people.

All three authors of these novels bring sympathy, understanding, empathy, tact, and deep feeling to their work as well as highly professional expertise. Yet none really succeeds. However held by the writing, entertained by the narrative, gripped by the story, these remain books written from the outside looking in. This is not to denigrate any of them for a moment. It is rather a way of stating their courage and persistence in the face of a problem that, for them, must remain ultimately insoluble.

*Brown Sugar* moves between the Pacific islands and the Queensland sugar plantations of late in the last century. Joseph Tulu Efate, the chief character, is taken, as a young man, from his island by blackbirders. Indentured in Queensland on a sugar plantation, his life runs parallel with that of the family who own and run the plantation. He suffers extreme exploitation but gradually accustoms himself to white living and eventually frees himself from the grasp of the cane growers and marries a white woman. As he raises his family and grows old, so the fortunes of the family by whom he was first employed gradually decline.

The bare story, laid out like that, does no justice to the quality of the writing, the fascination of the tale, or the deft way in which the author underplays and understates the life and social background of the time so that they become more sharply effective. This is not only an enjoyable novel but a flood of light on the dark subjects who were carried unwillingly to Queensland, and just as unwillingly returned, many of them, to their islands when conditions changed. It should add a little to any guilt felt by white readers. Incidentally, Nancy Cato gives her colored folk an effective simplified white consciousness.

*The Brown Land Crying* by Richard Beilby is another highly professional and very well written novel; a close textured study of a young part-

Aboriginal product of a white high school education who decides to return to his people, becomes involved with white man's law, goes to prison, and returns finally, and hopelessly, to his people. The device of using Milton Odel, the young part-Aboriginal, to bring out the different nature of Aboriginal consciousness, is an effective one. Milton is very well white-conditioned and programmed. His first contacts with his own people, in a city slum and in a small town reserve, bring out dramatically the gulf between white and colored attitudes and consciousness, and the grotesque expectations of many white people which Aboriginals take care to conform to.

This is a very effective and bitter novel, but it is still what one can only call an outside job, effective and well authenticated though it is. While it side-steps the problem of consciousness it does bring out once again in all its raw painfulness the tragic position of Aboriginal people who are forgotten for most of the time by a society insanely pursuing merely material progress and which is liable to do more harm than good by doing anything else but letting the Aboriginals alone to close with their own problems.

*Burn* is the least effective and the bravest of these three books. Its scene is limited for most of its movement to a shanty on a river bank and its characters are few and mostly part of the same family. The single scene, which continues until almost the end of the book, suggests strongly that it was first conceived and written as a play and only subsequently turned into a novel—with consequent inevitable structural weaknesses. But all this matters little beside the central fact of the book, which is that the author attempted to tackle the problem of colored consciousness head-on. The attempt is a failure, but this is unimportant beside the fact that it was attempted. Honorable failure is infinitely preferable to dishonest, slick, glancingly superficial 'success' in this region of Australian writing.

The people in the shanty by the river are waiting to be evicted. They are the last of the shanty people left and they, Gunner and Mary, and their oddly adopted adolescent daughter Joy, are also waiting for the return of their two symbolic sons. Both young men have been away for years. One succeeded in school and went to the white life of the big white city, the other went modern walk-about, bumming rides along the dusty roads, snatching a precarious, groggy living from any odd jobs that turned up along the way.

Gunner served in the second world war, which

he remembers in italicised snatches throughout the book, as a marksman. His efficient killing gave him the fearful respect of his comrades. From the war he brought back medals and a pension, and a smuggled army rifle and some ammunition. The local white authorities know that he has the rifle but have never been able to find it. It is the symbol of his dubious schizophrenic manhood, but also a symbol of power and retributive justice from which he can never be parted. His life is a drift through dreams and memories, with the reality of the rifle always ready to be reached on waking. He has no relationship with his wife Mary, who sells her body round the little rural town, without much thought or remorse and totally without guilt, in order to send money to her son in the city.

Other characters appear briefly. The sons return and make their comments on the lives they have been leading. A gang of white rowdies is beaten off. At night the family leave, after setting fire to the shanty, having discovered that their little bit of living space, apparently of little use, is to make way for a highly profitable caravan park. The local policeman is waiting in the shadowed streets to seize the gun that is an unalterable past and doubtful future but which is all that Gunner lives for.

The author tries to tie up the half-life of the Aboriginals with the noble warrior-artist-craftsman past by a number of devices which don't succeed very well at all. There are incidents which contribute nothing to development, atmosphere, feeling or anything else in the story. The telling is in an odd-seeming present tense which presumably is meant to try to convey the ever-present now that is part dreamtime heritage and part white-man-imposed hopelessness.

The action, such as it is, takes place in a single day. The narrative and the dialogue are often strained and flatly unconvincing. It is all a bit dreamy, casual, relaxed (too relaxed at times), uncaring; and yet it feels right! It *is* different, it does *not* really succeed, and yet. . .

The last two novels both deal with growing up in Queensland after the second world war. Both are first novels. *The Queenslander*, by Robert Macklin, is a competent, strongly written young man's novel, strong on sensation, sex and power, and weak on feeling, discrimination, sensitivity, penetration and verisimilitude. It seems to me that it should never have been accepted in its present form without the most rigorous editing, and in

places, rewriting. Also it represents, together with *Johnno* by David Malouf, the peculiar predilection of Australian publishers for the mediocre and the purely commercial. Literatures grow out of the compost of the 'writing of previous generations. A high level of quality in the past tends to ensure minimum standards in the present. These two books, together with many others down the years, make it hard to believe that Australian literature has ever had any standards at all, and of course with one or two honorable exceptions, which can be counted on the fingers of one hand, it hasn't. All the more reason then to start setting high standards now. Works of non-fiction have never sold as well as they do today and publishers can surely make their obligatory fast buck with these, instead of with any hopefuls who might be helpful to the future of serious writing. Writers take time to grow into the obligations of their craft, and good publishers need patience and a determination to publish only the excellent.

Something of the quite unremarked extent of our smugly illiterate parochialism can be gauged from a recent remark by the managing director of a famous English publishing house. He told me that he found it difficult to understand why Nigerian writers in English were achieving immense competence and originality and achieving fame in the English-speaking world but Australian writers, with two or three notable exceptions, weren't! Distance and isolation are no longer adequate excuses. They may have justified the awkward amateurism of so much of Australian writing until recent times, but do so no longer.

Local publishers are certainly responsible for this dreary situation. They demand the crudely commercial, the sensational, the mediocre, the incompetent by world standards and, in general, refuse to take anything else. In doing so they effectively geld young writers and commit them to a life of awful neither-nor sterility. They have an unerring eye for the bland, the slick, the unoriginal, the already harmless, who will go on laying their tin eggs (gold will always be beyond them) into the cultural desert ahead which is exactly the featureless same as the desert behind. Admittedly many Australian writers (publisher selected?) do seem to lack an essential dimension when it comes to creative writing; but there is not the time or space to examine that macabre phenomenon here.

*The Queenslander*, Pal Lingard, grows up in Brisbane and the outback of Queensland. He is

an unattractive dreary boy who is captain of his school, dux of this or that, and his chief adolescent interest (whose wasn't?) lies in sex. Seduced at an early age by his father's occasional mistress, he later catches his father in bed with her and acquires the usual load of obligatory guilt. After leaving school he rides off into the sunset of the outback to continue his exciting career of seduction and manly adventure, but not before having attracted the attention of a neurotic young Catholic girl who is part narrator of the book. The girl waits, and waits, and waits. Meanwhile Pal is acquiring mistresses (one wealthy and influential whom he can exploit to further his career), missing out by a hairsbreadth on matrimony, ensuring an abortion, and becoming a writer.

In due course he returns to Brisbane, endures traumas, joins what passes for a newspaper locally, and of course encounters his little Catholic mouse of a girl who neatly nabs him into domesticity. From here on it's our long-haired dull young Samson straining at the pillars of life in simulated *Grand Guignol* virility, while mixing with the biggest lot of no-hoper journalists I have ever encountered in print or in reality. It's a Marlon Brando story all the rest of the wretched road, with retchings and ruptures, and stretchings, and passions torn into fine (and unconvincing) tatters, as the awful, ruthlessly stupid, coarsely insensitive boy from the outback and the backstreets turns himself into, God save us all, a successful playwright!

Not to put too fine a point on it: this book contains an awful lot of crap.

If *Johnno*, by David Malouf, had had some crap in it, it might have had something to commend it (and there, I've put two hads together and two its). Obviously conceived as a Dylan Thomasish reminiscence of Brisbane, and the comicalities of growing, *Johnno* is a total disaster. It is not funny, nor convincing, nor gripping nor anything. It is sloppily written with a total absence of any real feeling for words. It is pretentious, uninventive, unoriginal and dull, dull, dull. This particular publisher seems intent not so much on procuring mediocrity as committing suicide by public strangulation.

## HISTORIANS AT WORK

Alison Patrick

R. M. Crawford: *A Bit of a Rebel: the life and work of George Arnold Wood* (Sydney University Press, \$16).

Max Crawford was professor of history at the University of Melbourne from 1937 until 1970. He raised the prestige of his school, already considerable under his predecessor Ernest Scott, to a new level, and he has become something of a legend for the influence that this school has had on Australian educational and public life through the graduates it has turned out. But Crawford was and is a private man, and he has until now told us little in his writing about his personal values.

Now he has done so, at least to some extent, through the biography he has written of another significant Australian history professor, George Arnold Wood, who held the Sydney chair from 1891 to 1928. Wood must rank amongst the most significant citizens, as well as academics, of his time. So must Crawford. For the one to write on the other is an event of major interest, and not only for historians; its impact is heightened because Crawford was a student of Wood's, and—as this book makes clear—in many ways the heir to the tradition which Wood worked so hard to create. The book is a tribute to an achievement which Crawford greatly valued, and an examination of the way that achievement was arrived at. In itself, it is an unusual book, because biographies of professors are uncommon, biographies of professors of history are rather rare, and biographies of Australian professors of history have been non-existent. We know little about our own intellectual, as distinct from our cultural, background, and even less about the backgrounds of those who came to this country to create it.

It is an attractive book, scholarly, beautifully documented and elegantly written. The man walks living from the pages, and the exploration of his attitudes, doubts, standards and faith becomes also an examination of the type for which he stood: a late nineteenth-century liberal of English non-conformist background, working out the implications of his principles in an Australian context, and in the process acquiring a fruitful interest in the history of this new society. The style of the narrative is leisurely, and at times a little self-indulgent: some repetitions might have been avoided. One criticism might be made. The manner of Wood's death was clearly tragic, but it

should not be left to the reader to infer; however briefly, his biographer needs to confront reality at every point. It is plain enough what happened, but not how it happened. The facts should be there.

Is the book a little large for its theme? Wood's was an engaging personality, he stimulated and encouraged his students' interests. He wrote one good book, which has stood the test of time to a surprising degree, a number of articles and reviews, some first-rate journalism, and a good book for boys. And he also became the leading figure in a significant controversy over the right of a professor to take an unpopular stance over a major political issue—in this case, Australian (and British) participation in the Boer War. Does the total of these things justify a full-scale biography? I think the answer is yes: not only because of Wood's activities in themselves, but because of the wider issues which are opened by this discussion of his life.

Naturally it is the Boer War controversy which first attracts one's attention. These chapters are fascinating to read, and Wood's hurt, disillusionment and anger come over very well. From his own point of view, all that he was doing was claiming a freedom of judgement which was available to many people in England, and his protests against the attempts of the university senate to bring him back into line show his surprise as well as his indignation. The whole episode rouses one to reflect on the reasons for the "Professor Wood must go" campaign. Was he an even readier target for abuse because he was not a native, and in addition, because his most notorious offence was to misrepresent his adopted country to an English audience? As he pointed out, there was evidence to justify what he had written in the *Manchester Guardian* about Australian attitudes to the war, but his critics were not interested in the evidence, what they objected to was his point of view and his impudence in putting it forward. From this they proceeded to argue that his academic position made any public statement of unconventional views morally improper. (Political views were all right so long as they were the proper kind: Professor Mungo McCallum incurred no censure.) What was involved was more significant than merely personal eccentricity. It is an issue which has often enough come up since. Wood was in fact willing to resign his presidency of the Anti-War League, after the senate had called him to order. What he was not willing

to do was to repudiate his freedom to hold the views which had led him to take the presidency in the first place. In the end he won his fight, though Crawford implies that matters might have been more difficult had not the war been virtually over in any case. It is suggestive that, in defending his position, Wood accused the Australian press of simply failing to report the criticisms of the war which were made in England and noted in the English press, and it certainly seems to be true that the long delay between a cabled summary of some contentious statement and the arrival of the English papers with the full text might create quite unfair impressions—as was to some extent the case with Wood's *Manchester Guardian* article. Even the *Melbourne Age*, which did report meetings of the Melbourne Peace movement, did so with little sympathy and no elaboration. It also seems that Wood's own origins and background did him no harm with Australia's most vociferously nationalist periodical. The *Bulletin* was against the war, and it was in favor of Wood and backed him consistently. How this support affected his standing with the Sydney Establishment it would be interesting to know; as also what opinion Sydney at large was led to have of academics. The Melbourne anti-war movement was led by a couple of clergymen whose way-out character was already recognised. Professor Wood was of a different calibre.

But the Boer War controversy, however painful and significant, was only an episode in an academic career which spanned more than thirty years. What else did Wood do which is worthy of record?

He wrote a good book, yes. But the book came very late in his career, and he never added to it as he planned to do. He was something more difficult and uncommon than a good historian: he seems to have been a great teacher.

This is something much easier to say than it is to establish. Part of the evidence may come from the life-long admiration which drove Crawford to write this book, but the book itself supplies a good deal more: the numbers of his students, growing much faster than the total numbers in Sydney Faculty of Arts, and the burden of their industry. It is suggestive that Wood felt himself weighed down by the demands of MA students and MA theses, since in his time research was not yet a prerequisite for an academic career, and indeed the chances of embarking on an academic career in the Arts Faculty were almost non-

existent. Whatever Wood's research students were interested in, it can hardly have been their prospects of academic promotion. Yet students he had, and in ever-increasing numbers. One might indeed say that the whole furore over the Boer War might have taken a different form if its central figure had been obscure and unpopular.

Given that Wood was a great teacher, one is led on to think about the whole question of the relationship between universities and the society within which they operate, and more particularly, the importance of that relationship in a relatively unformed community whose cultural patterns are just beginning to consolidate. Wood was one of a group of young and highly talented professors who came to Sydney in the late eighties and early nineties, finding opportunities in the new colonial universities which were not open to them at home. What was their collective impact on the society into which they came? Wood's lectures must have been addressed to prospective school-teachers, perhaps to future civil servants, probably to a number of lawyers, and to anyone else who happened to be interested. And of course he gave extension lectures as well. What kind of influence did he and his colleagues have, and how was it disseminated? We know now that Wood did not think much of the history taught in New South Wales schools at the turn of the century; did his criticisms, his advice have any impact on what was taught and how it was taught? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, they should tell us something about the character of New South Wales society.

What did Wood offer his non-specialist students of history? He did not set out to make scholars, since the cream of his graduates would go on probably to Oxford, to acquire range and proper polish by way of further undergraduate study. And in any case, his own technical scholarship was open to criticism. Crawford explains this by the colonial isolation which prevented him from discussing his work continually with his equals, but it seems as likely that, coming to published work very late in his career, he relied too confidently and uncritically on the training of his youth. (Significantly, Ernest Scott, the professor of history at Melbourne and an untrained amateur, was technically Wood's superior, being presumably constantly aware of his need to inform himself about standards and practices of which he had no experience at all.) No, Wood did not give students expertise of that kind. What he did give them seems to have been above all excitement,

enthusiasm, a feeling for the fascination and significance of their subject. And he practised what he preached. He revised his courses, and his one important book, on the discovery of Australia, was on a subject to which he introduced himself after he had come to Sydney. When he taught on "The Discovery of Australia" in 1917, and a general Australian history course in 1925, they were the first such courses; Scott did not teach Australian history until 1927. What held Wood back so long was not willingness (he had contemplated an Australian history course in 1893) but the sheer lack of sources for the students to work on. When the printed sources were available, the courses followed, and he discovered Australia for his students as well as for himself.

The interest, and the kind of history that aroused it, of course grew from the character of the man. We can trace the relationship between background, education, and the development of values and professional outlook. This raises a significant point for Australian historiographers, for the values which Wood brought to bear on the investigation of Australian history had been acquired in a society which was not Australian. The *Bulletin* approved his Boer War stand; did it also approve the ideal of Empire which in its essentials he had brought to Australia with him? At the turn of the century Australia was still largely a migrant society. How did views of Australian history develop as they were increasingly put forward by historians who had grown up within Australia instead of spending their formative years somewhere else? And—a more general point—what kind of insight has been contributed by what kind of historian? There are indications in this book that its author's background and family have given him a special empathy with his subject.

There are other questions. How are intellectual traditions developed and transmitted? Is this by the accident of personalities? At the professorial level, there is an intriguing paradox in the history of history teaching in Australian universities. Blainey has remarked that, at one time, all the Australian chairs of history were held by Ernest Scott and his former students. This was after Wood's death, Wood having been succeeded by Stephen Roberts, and before the post-war university explosion. The Melbourne school of history was never again to exercise such dominance; nevertheless, twenty years later a disproportionate number of the by now far more numerous professors still came from Melbourne . . . but from

a Melbourne in which Crawford had grafted much of the Wood tradition on to Scott's legacy. The partnership with Scott's former students, now on Crawford's staff, was real and valuable, but no student of Crawford's who reads this book can doubt the source of much of the inspiration, which provides an essential background for Crawford's own great achievement. The paradox is this: why was it in Melbourne, and not in Sydney, that Wood's tradition was consciously developed, and that (among other things) the tutorial teaching of which Wood had vainly dreamed was first to become a reality? Scott and Wood got on well, and collaborated in planning a revival of official interest in Australian history, but their legacies seem to have merged in Scott's university rather than in Wood's, and one would like to know why. Part of the clue may lie in the more generous attitude towards teaching which was apparent in Melbourne even before Wood died; Crawford comments that Scott, though overworked, was twice as well off for help as Wood was. But why the continued willingness (whatever the initial reluctance) to accept academic innovation? Does this point again to the need to look carefully at the relationship between university and community?

Another matter one would like to see looked into is the influence of Oxford, and particularly the influence of Balliol, on Australian university teaching. Wood was a student in Jowett's Balliol. Crawford, a student of Wood's, went in due course to Balliol in his turn, and so in their turn did some of Crawford's own students. After R. H. Tawney's retirement, he spent a still-remembered year as the guest of the Melbourne history department. (The fact that he did so tells in itself a good deal about Crawford's school.) While he was in Melbourne, there was a Balliol dinner in his honour . . . at which he is said to have claimed that he was the only third-class honors man present. What is the significance of the fact that such a dinner could be held? In Wood's day, the Sydney professorial board came directly from British universities. By Crawford's time, the connections were less obvious, but they had not disappeared.

To revert to an earlier point: Wood's teaching, cast in an older mould, was more accessible to the general public than a good deal of history teaching has since become. The research which for Wood was an excitement and a recreation—in the most literal sense—has become a necessary passport to academic advancement. But for many students, something seems to have gone missing

—an awareness of curiosity, perhaps. And the study of history in schools is dropping off, in favor of more allegedly relevant disciplines such as social studies and pop sociology. Perhaps teachers of history at all levels, as well as anyone interested in history, should read this book rather carefully. It is the biography of a man for whom history could never become irrelevant, who had the gift of communicating something of his vision, and who amused himself by using what he had learned from writing a monograph on the discovery of Australia to put together an exciting book for boys.

## THE SHAPING OF EXPERIENCE

Leonie Kramer

Hal Porter: *The Extra* (Nelson, \$9.95).

It sometimes seems that the most difficult thing a writer can do is survive his own successes. *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony*, justly praised, is in danger of preventing its author's subsequent achievements from being adequately recognised. Already some reviewers have shown that they can read *The Extra* only in the shadow of the earlier work. Yet its own merits are obvious and remarkable.

"The autobiography of a childhood has a small cast, few incidents, fewer scenes. All's cut and dried, easy to write. The autobiography of someone who's been about since 1911, and who's a gregarious wanderer, isn't so easy." That modest understatement no more than hints at the difficulties Hal Porter has faced and surmounted in writing *The Extra*. For it is not, and could not be, merely a chronological extension of the two earlier autobiographies. It reawakens the echoes of Hal Porter's remoter past, and lengthens the perspective of his life. It reintroduces—as it must do—traces of his childhood, this time partly through a brilliantly executed portrait of his father. It gathers up threads of earlier experience which are woven into the fabric of his immediate past. And it deals with the "unlayable ghosts, the dear and tiresome dead".

I suppose it is inevitable that his evocation of those ghosts should have attracted the attention and censure of critics. No doubt Porter anticipated this. "Not for me," he writes, "the fantasies of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason for things, the true character of mankind, that humanity's climate's only agreeable at certain

times." There is bound to be argument about the propriety of his revelations—especially about Slessor. His own defence is plainly stated—that he was not only permitted, but invited to witness Slessor's "connubial malice" as a "front-seat spectator, an accredited observer". One might still, of course, argue that the invitation need not have been accepted. But I think there is no argument about the intention of Porter's account of his friendship with Slessor. It is written out of affection and regard, not out of malice. The pane of glass which in Slessor's poetry so frequently cuts off the observer from the world he observes, and makes him an outsider even to his own experience might, Porter hints, reflect the depths of some indescribable personal anguish.

By comparison his brief sketch of Katharine Susannah Prichard does seem to a degree ungenerous. An old woman's vanity about the many translations of her novels might readily be excused: and one has the uncomfortable feeling that her political views are used as a stick to beat her with, in the absence of a more substantial understanding of her character.

Yet one cannot properly view his "unlayable ghosts" as detachable from the whole work, and there could be no more mistaken approach to *The Extra* than to regard it as a source-book for literary biographers and historians. "Literature doesn't exist without artifice," Porter remarks parenthetically, and by way of introducing his criticisms of those who saw *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony* as a compendium of truths about "youth and its problems". In *The Extra* Porter is a cunning artificer, defining his own role with great care and precision, and through the title, revealing the metaphor which controls and shapes the whole work.

For this is the period in which Porter becomes a professional writer, and moves, through his writing and travel, onto the world stage. His cast is gathered from the living and the dead, and always he is the extra, "straying into and out of other's scenes", "left over, left out . . . left to speak a fragment of the epilogue". He plays bit-parts at the Adelaide Festival, at writers' conferences and parties, on ships and tourist buses, in hotels, universities and the homes of friends and employers. He is detached, observant, critical, and exposed to his own wit. He airs his dislikes and prejudices, his weaknesses and insensitivities. His ungracious refusal of John Shaw Neilson's offer of a cup of tea (and he never sees him again) is more revealing than whole paragraphs

of self-analysis would be. "Brazen and insensitive as I am, I've not been able to bring myself to tell the timorous man, the man immeasurably old to me, there's tomato sauce all over his chin."

The singular success of Hal Porter in this book seems to me to be his shaping of experience, and the subtle sense of narrative drive he gives to his unfinished "play". The topical detail so conspicuous in *The Paper Chase* is reduced, but no less vivid in *The Extra*. Scene changes are signalled by a sharp and concise evocation of the atmosphere of time and place. Some of his characters, Slessor, his father, Eve Langley, Myra Morris—and many others, more briefly—appear not larger than life but with more brilliant clarity. There are many individual passages and scenes which represent some of the best writing Porter has ever accomplished.

I recall that in reviewing *The Paper Chase* I commented upon Porter's elusiveness. It was as though, having set himself to the task of autobiography, he had withdrawn himself from the cast, and could be glimpsed only occasionally, lurking in the wings. In *The Extra*, bit-actor though he might be, he is on stage all the time, offering himself for scrutiny. One of his epigraphs from Montaigne is particularly apt: "My mind so frequently contradicts and condemns itself that it's all one to me if someone else does so, especially as I give his criticism only such authority as I choose." So be it.

The theatrical metaphor announced in the title shapes one's sense of Porter's dramatisation of this section of his life. But equally important in "placing" him are the opening and closing scenes of the book. He begins at Glen Avon in the village of Garvoc, and in a few haunting pages creates a rural idyll. He describes a way of life where time is measured by seasons, and Tam-Tam the German clock is there "to tick his eyelids down". It is from this harmonious and natural reality that Porter steps into the theatre, to act out the routines of man-made events. From this, at the end, he returns to Tam-Tam's hands "like mine unemployed with reality for months", back to the place where "many of the most refreshing and fortifying elements lie to hand". The circle of wandering is complete, and it encloses all the countries, cities, people and events that have passed on the world's stage, an all which is "nothing more than nothing; nothing, zero, nought". If *The Extra* brings Hal Porter closer to the reader than he has been before, it also draws its audience into the perplexities of time and dis-

tance, stability and change, the "wanderings, seekings, waitings, questionings" that preoccupy us all. Given this achievement criticisms of his sharp-tongued revelations, and disclosures of prejudices, seem to me relatively unimportant. He has set himself the task of respecting "the reality of facts". In doing so he has exposed himself to judgment with an honesty a good deal more commendable than the common habit of damning with faint praise.

## WOMEN: REAPPRAISALS

Julie Marginson

Beverley Kingston: *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann* (Nelson, \$9.95).  
Anne Summers: *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Penguin Books, \$4.95).

Two authors of books on women in Australian history, both women, each concerned that (male) historians have failed to recognize and accredit Australian women in any but a hopelessly patronizing and stereotyped way, must surely make genuine contributions to our intellectual development and understanding. Or so I innocently thought. It was a great blow to my female pride that *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann* by Beverley Kingston should fall so far short of making any such contribution. Unfortunately it succeeds neither as history nor as 'feminist literature'.

Beverley Kingston is a university academic and her book is sub-titled "Women and Work in Australia", a necessary adjunct to the catchy title. Chapters are devoted to detailing aspects of the major occupational niches Australian women have filled: marriage, domestic service, factory work, retail trade and business, governessing, teaching and nursing. Some major themes are developed: "the servant problem", mechanization and its effect on job status, marriage as an unpaid occupation. The book begins promisingly with an implied threat not to adhere too closely to the unwritten rules of writing history for fellow historians. But far from taking a radical stand on any aspect of writing history, the author fails to confront squarely any of the issues she raises, historical or historiographical. The result is at best pedestrian with some light anecdotal moments; at worst it is aggravatingly illogical.

The most serious problem with the book is that, despite her being described as a feminist by

the publisher, Kingston is not prepared to state outright any ideological framework for her many conclusions, conclusions which simply do not follow from the data alone. Occasional references to Australia as a capitalist economy are not sufficient, and neither is a concluding polemic which is intended to bring together some of the threads and to relate past to present. It is not clear why the polemic should be left till the end, unless it is to avoid having to argue the inadequacies of her (male) colleagues' accounts of Australian society. Undoubtedly the price paid is that the book has no sound rationale.

Another serious criticism of the work as history is its narrow range of sources. Kingston claims that, not long after she began to survey the source material, she discovered that "the readily available sources had really been exhausted", the point being presumably that this book would be based on a range of new and unusual sources. But far from this being so, nearly all her sources are of the 'rate-book' type—parliamentary papers, contemporary newspapers and journals, and assorted published contemporary and recent works including novels—a desultory selection occasionally made colorful by a few references to Hester Massie's diaries. And most of her sources are readily available in Sydney, in the safe confines of the Mitchell Library. Rather than make a genuine effort to find new sources, she chose to exhaust the old ones a little more. The author has several irritating stylistic expressions indicative of low self-esteem, and offers as her best justification for publishing: "I decided that where women were concerned, some history was better than none".

Although the book is supposed to deal with the period spanning the 1860s to the 1930s, most attention is devoted to the period from the 1890s to world war I. Concentration on this latter period seems to prevent Kingston from developing any real feeling of time passing, of history in the making, and this despite references to changing rates of marriage and changing employment patterns. The point may well be that nothing much happened to change the lot of women over seventy-odd years, but not even that point is made clearly. At its pedestrian best, when giving detailed information gained directly from sources, the material should have been presented as a series of descriptive/speculative articles on the individual occupations (including prostitution). As it is, a range of people may well find it a useful source of assembled information.

*Damned Whores and God's Police* by Anne Summers stands in total contrast in every respect. As an historical appraisal of Australian (white) women intended to illuminate their present position, it makes a genuine and generous contribution to understanding. Though it will undoubtedly have its detractors, it ought to have an impact similar to Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* or McQueen's *A New Britannia*. If it should be ignored as history (which is not unlikely—it's written by a woman after all), it will at least be counted as a considerable piece of feminist literature.

Sub-titled "The Colonization of Women in Australia", this book is much more broadly conceived than Kingston's. Summers is not only prepared to provide an ideological framework; she undertakes the development of it extensively before she embarks on the historical appraisal. The result is an intense commitment to a complete appreciation of the processes of socialization of Australian women. Furthermore, she is prepared to argue in detail precisely what she considers to be unsatisfactory about the established conventions of Australian historical and sociological writings, and to depart from them without apology. The book is therefore self-sufficient, properly justified and readable.

An important area discussed in some detail by Summers is women in Australian literature, both as authors and as characters. Quantitative facts are often cited by historians and literary editors to support a view that women authors have really done pretty well; great names are even dropped—like Henry Handel Richardson and Miles Franklin. Summers is concerned to discuss what historians and editors have often failed to understand, namely why so many women authors are considered to have made their contributions outside the mainstream of Australian literary traditions. The main thesis is that, if they don't suffer from critical neglect, then the experiences they relate are systematically trivialized. Women characters are invariably stereotyped props and foils for the male experience just as they often are in real life—the termagant bitch, the little Aussie battle-axe, or, in Summers' historical parlance, damned whores and God's police. Has it never occurred to our literary patrons that Australian women might have cause to cringe at the false representation of their lives and experiences in all the literary art forms? And that the cringing might not be due to minatory Englishwomen, but to a home-made literary tradition preoccupied

with nationalism, the harsh bush environment, mateship and the slap-dash Australian character? It is far easier to read from distant cultures than to try and make some private sense out of our lop-sided local traditions.

As part of her development of an ideological framework Summers extensively pursues an analogy between being female and being colonized (though she insists it is no mere analogy). For this, she has been resoundingly criticized by Jill Roe, especially for the implication that the only solution lies in revolution (*Nation Review*, November 7-13, 1975). My main criticism of the analogy is that as an explanatory device, indeed as a theory of women's oppression, it runs the risk of being unfalsifiable; so well will it explain historical events that in the end it will explain nothing.

It has been put to me by an historian that a new historical appraisal (well-rooted in a new and extensive ideology) should not be taken too seriously on the grounds that we shouldn't judge the past by present standards. This view entails the possibility of giving value-free descriptions of historical events, and it successfully confuses historical figures with historians. It fails to recognize that a new appraisal is a new interpretation of old events, some of which may not have been described before. Any judgments which follow from a new appraisal are of the works of historians, whose points of view are at any time (arguably) deficient. Historical figures may be blameless creatures of social and cultural determinism, no matter how much power they held or what ideology guides an interpretation of their actions. The whole point is to attempt to understand better the condition of womankind. Summers understands this well; Kingston less so.

## A SHREWD POET-TASTER

A. A. Phillips

Paul Hasluck: *The Poet in Australia*  
(Hawthorn Press, \$4.50).

This book should not be prejudged by its first page. Sir Paul there writes: "I will not believe that Australia is fully civilised . . . until some men will talk as naturally and as knowledgeably about poetry as most men talk about golf and the stock market." Most Australians don't talk golf and the market. Since Women's Year is over, we can perhaps accept the sexist use of "men"

rather than "people" as a linguistic convenience. But the sporting preoccupation of most Australian men is likely to be footie, and they do their oscar at the T.A.B., not on the stock-market. Sir Paul is naughtily assuming that "most men" really means "the chappies I meet at the club".

Such middle-class myopia perhaps does not matter much in the context of a discussion of poetry, though one would prefer any literary commentator to have a more alert awareness of the social environment; but when one reflects that Sir Paul was for years a shaper of our political policies, the implication of his assumption is disturbing.

There is another objection to his statement. He writes "*until some men will talk as naturally and as knowledgeably about poetry . . .*". Either Sir Paul is using words with a sloppiness discreditable to his diplomat's training, or he means that such men are virtually non-existent in Australia. It must be a dismal business writing an essay with the foreknowledge that it can find no fit audience.

Social myopia and a touch of intellectualist hauteur occasionally recur in the pamphlet, notably in some assumptions about the nature of Australians which should have died twenty years ago. But they are mild blemishes in an often engaging book. Sir Paul gives the lie to his own generalisation: he at least is both an Australian and a knowledgeable lover of poetry, discriminate in his responses to it. He has certain hostilities to contemporary poetic practices, but all of us have our patriotisms towards our own generation. He bewails the predominance of poor poetry in contemporary journals, forgetting that by far the greater part of the verse published in every age was sheer tripe (save perhaps, in the literature of our language between 1580 and 1670, when, it would seem, Englishmen's words sprang into a gutsy vividness almost as a matter of course). But which of us does not sometimes fall into this trap? We forget that we use only the garnered grain from the past, whereas we must do our own winnowing-out of straw in the present. Despite his frank patriotism-of-generation, Sir Paul can respond delightedly to good modernist work and analyse its successes with a shrewd penetration.

I doubt if knowledgeable Australian lovers of poetry (assuming their existence) will find much in this discussion which is new to them; its charm lies in the persistence and sincerity with which Sir Paul pursues his quarry rather than in any excitement over the kill. As it happens, he has chosen as his central problem a particularly

elusive question — "what is Australian poetry?" He comes up with the seemingly secure answer that an Australian poem is one which deals with an Australian experience; but when you begin to test this out, it falls to bits. Does Judith Wright's "Woman to Man" deal with an Australian experience? I am credibly informed that quite a few babies are conceived in China. On the other hand "Nigger's Leap" and many other of Wright's poems do communicate specifically Australian experience (or should we rather say that they deal with universal experiences as they are encountered in Australian situations?). Are we then to say that Wright sometimes writes Australian poetry, and sometimes writes poetry in English written in Australia (an answer to his question which Sir Paul considers and rejects)? A canon which thus splits the corpus of a poet's work down the middle seems a bit butcherly.

In my view Sir Paul has looked in the wrong direction for his distinctive marks of Australian poetry. Specifically Australian experiences will only occasionally mark a poem, and the poems which happen to display it will not necessarily be more Australian than those which don't. The Australian-ness of a poem will more often declare itself in other ways. Language will be used in subtly different ways from those customary in other Anglo-Saxon communities. Our poets, one hopes, will more often cull their images from their environment than from books, so that the imagery will often be specifically Australian—and will provoke a full response only from Australian readers. Assuming that, despite some recent trends, poetry is still aimed to be heard by the inner ear, rather than skimmed off the page by the eye, most of our poetry will be composed in an Australian accent (one can leach much of the life out of some of Shaw Neilson's finest achievements by speaking them in an Oxford or Lancashire voice). Characteristics of Australian temperament, special modes of response to life, will leave their marks on the writing (maybe the term "Australian experience" may be held to cover this).

All these are dangerously vague, incapable of definition. They are flavors only, and no one can effectively describe a flavor. But we recognise a wine or a cheese by its flavor; and the experiencing of a poem has much in common with experiencing a wine or cheese. Provided we are not intimidated into imitativeness, our poetry will achieve a recognisable Australian-ness through tinctures in its flavoring. Meanwhile the poet,

intent on his task of compelling the inadequacy of words to adequately suggest his experience, won't give a damn whether he is being Australian or not. Perhaps we can best help him by shutting up about it, leaving Australian-ness to happen as it happens; though the tendering of such advice must seem pretty fair cheek from one who has been shooting off his mouth on themes concerned with cultural nationalism for thirty years.

My disagreement with Sir Paul on this central theme of his discussion does not prevent me from finding much in this essay which I enjoy and respect. At the least, his pamphlet puts him among the three best living writers in the Hasluck family—and that is not a back-handed compliment.

## HE SINGS AND HE KNOWS

Gwen Harwood

Rodney Hall: *Selected Poems* (University of Queensland Press, \$7.95 and \$3.95).

Years ago, my first feeling on coming across Rodney Hall's poems was of intellectual excitement. Here was someone showing me states of affairs which had always been before my mind's eye, yet had somehow escaped my true attention. In the poems from 1959 to 1965 there are images of light stabbing, destroying and refining, staring back savagely from eyes, winking from teeth, clattering across the floor in unstrung beads, combing and scratching, flashing from a swinging window to burn the watcher eyeless. The reader is in the picture; he is addressed often as one present in the experience, not as one looking through a limiting frame.

The goddess sang  
—I come of simple light  
my feet touch no man's floor;  
take from my hand this lily  
and learn the prodigious wonder  
of the least thing in the world.

In one of the best of the poems from *Eye-witness* there was a verse which prefigured Hall's poetic development and achievement:

Frozen mountains thaw. The truth of song  
becomes a current I ride beneath the waves  
to greet far lands of my tongue.

With *Autobiography of a Gorgon* Hall began

his searching meditations on the divine, heroic and human aspects of history. Under the ritual mask, through the lolling tongue of a monster of the underworld, he reveals what petrifies us:

You do not want my truth;  
the most you'll hear  
is some mythology  
of snow that fell  
like centuries of grief  
upon the desert—  
but not of years that fall  
heavily now  
on your own conceited heart.

He is finding the form that suits his poetic individuality, the sequence, or progression of short poems. Often those drawn to myth and legend fall into an obscure profundity, but Hall's style becomes more polished, his thought and diction more definitely matched. The sometimes fragmentary brilliance of the early poems is to become a searching light, showing us our own age. He has rightly been called a fine craftsman. As a musician he knows that flourishes must be exact, trills expertly executed. But the labor itself must not show. In such poems in this collection as "Mrs. Macintosh", "The public turns to its hero", "The mother", "A question of manners", his skill seems to be effortless. At times there is a likeness to Graves, but it is one of temperament and interest, not of imitation. By the time he comes to "Romulus and Remus" Hall's style is securely his own, and he is able to achieve fine effects with longer lines:

He screeched the final death of all he understood. The membrane  
of his world had burst, a gap of blood slammed  
against his ear.  
He felt the wolf-tongue once more rasping at  
his hair.

The selection of poems up to 1972 is so right that one must not complain if a few particular favorites are missing. A poet's imagination does not develop in a curve like a baby's growth chart, but the poet himself is carried by daily life through time, season by season, and the delight of a selection like this is that it enables us to see the poet returning to old themes with a new power of harmonising thought and reality, giving new life to symbols whose life is in their use, as in the "Elegy for the funeral of Michael Dransfield".

The first sixty pages of the *Selected Poems* consist of new work, and are entitled "The Owner of my Face". These poems are Hall's finest achievement. They hold us at once with the force of music:

A sound hovers  
high and free  
At the turning  
of your neck  
or wrist or eye  
the blood halts in me.

The lovers move in a magic space that is also a real city in which being is interpreted as loving. Being *is* loving. Their bodies are fields of experience, and the lines are strong and flexible enough to match the swift enchantments of the shapes their world assumes.

In "The Owner of My Face" Hall has reached the far lands of his tongue. Nothing in this sequence is ready-made. Through language we find out what we do not know, and anyone who has ever endured the anguish of separation and parting will rejoice when poems like these lift their light out of a speechless darkness.

Trees breathe warmth  
some gaunt old singer has a young girl in his  
power  
and he sings and he knows and  
grateful fingers cage the neck of his guitar.

The range of Hall's poems is very wide, from the tenderness and charm of children to sharp satire. He seems at home in remote legendary countries and in the unimaginable spaces of modern science. It is one of the paradoxes of art that in his most personal poems he speaks most vividly of man's age-old involvement in the struggle to understand the world in all its complexity. This is a book to which no one who loves poetry and the concerns of poets can remain unresponsive.

## BUSH SINGER

Arthur Lumsden

Hugh Anderson: *Time Out of Mind: Simon McDonald of Creswick* (National Press, \$4.75).

*Time Out of Mind* is not only the story of a talented bush singer and writer of verse, but it

is also an interesting social document. Simon McDonald lived in the old gold-mining town of Creswick, Victoria—cradle of the Lindsays and many other distinguished Australians—during the period it "died away and decayed". Hugh Anderson gives us an account of the process in his introduction.

Simon McDonald, the subject of the book, had learned a lot of his traditional songs from his parents and grandparents. Listening to him singing and playing his fiddle many years ago in the old Mechanics Hall in Creswick, he was obviously influenced by the country singers of the day and sang any songs that were popular. This is the way our 'traditional' singers and musicians grow up. He was the product of a period when Creswick had almost become a ghost town and the struggle to survive from his childhood through the 1920s and 1930s, and then the war years, is graphically told in the book. Simon McDonald must be studied against the background of a society that could produce nothing but unemployment and war and the resulting economic and social waste.

It is fortunate that Hugh Anderson, while living in nearby Ballarat, was able to devote so much of his time to Simon McDonald, getting to know him and recording his story. Hugh commenced his study when others had long discarded Simon after publishing some of his songs and verses. The circulation was limited to a handful of folksingers and admirers but the real story of Simon McDonald did not emerge.

In July 1966 an A.B.C. news team spent a whole week-end filming and recording Simon. This was an interesting experience. He was wary of the A.B.C. team at first after his experiences with others to whom he had given so much of his time and from whom he had gained very little. He soon warmed up to his part with the news people and completely won their admiration. Unfortunately the end result of all this work was a ten minute television news item, the remainder being destroyed! Only one copy of the news film remains.

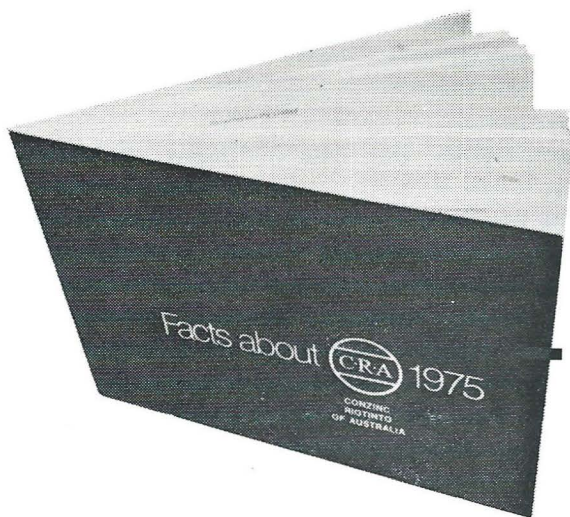
Simon was very close to the soil and he often described himself as part of the gum trees. The birds, snakes and bush animals were his friends. Some of the fascinating little stories he would tell in conversation reflected this—the kids loved him. Anderson's book is a real contribution to the picture of our national character through a national character.

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