

overland

stories

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poetry

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Tom McElroy



stories

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Overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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Overland is a quarterly literary magazine which tries to appear every three months. The subscription rate is six dollars a year (four issues); for students, Niuginians, pensioners the subscription is three dollars. Manuscripts are welcomed but s.a.e. required.

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The Annual General Meeting

GARRY DISHER

A man in a white hard-hat walked into the road and waved us onto a dirt track led into the hills. His taut thumb and his winking face confirmed our prowess. The truck tray lurched as the water in the tanks heaved about, and our boots slipped on the wet steel top. The others opened a cabinet and divided the goggles and hard-hats among themselves. Tony had nothing and so I gave him my goggles. My glasses would do. I told him to roll down his sleeves and do up all his shirt buttons. With our cloth hats and our winter working clothes, we looked like Depression characters in the evening light and the dust from the road.

We drove far into the hills, but with no guides about we had to choose roads that seemed to lead to the fire. We passed an ungrassed paddock choked with dusty sheep drinking at a dam and standing among bleached railings. Tony's hat blew off and flopped into the powdered dirt at a corner. He looked at me quickly but I shook my head. The driver changed gears many times, and through the rear window I could see his laughing face occasionally turn to speak to the radio man. They were confident and expert. The truck protested from all its organs. Tony shook his head and frowned at the heads of the men in the cabin, and then he looked upwards and smiled.

A utility passed briskly and the driver waved at us to stop. Our driver managed to stop close behind it. The man was wearing a yellow armband which he indicated with his other hand as he walked to us. He glanced at the side of the truck, pursed his lips, and stroked his cheek with his fingers. He had to yell over the sound of our engine.

"Are you the Anamar boys? Where's Ted Murray?"

"Dunno. We're from the Gorge, except for two blokes from Anamar way. There was nobody else at the shed when we got there. Waited a bit, though. Then we thought we'd better come up here."

"Well. Well, do you know how to work the bloody pumps?"

"Yeah. No worries, we done it before. We got two of Bob Ryman's boys with us, and they can use the bags."

"Well. Well, you'd better get on up this road and fork to the left. It's getting away on the east flank over there. So Cliff McDonald reckons. But he's the district Fire Officer so better do as he says."

He looked at us briefly and ran to the other vehicles that had stopped behind us. Tony smiled at me because we had been mentioned. His head snapped back with the jerk of the truck as our driver accelerated in first gear. The Scholar brothers and their sons leaned back on their arms, and shouted across the pumps and tanks to each other. The faces in both families were similar. Their skin was soft and loose and formed and dissolved as they spoke. Their eyes and their hair and their skin were pale in color. The smoke was thick and flakes of black ash blew onto us. My eyes watered. The driver turned on the truck lights and the beam picked out tree tops and then the track, as we moved up and down.

The truck stopped suddenly between the posts of an open gate which was burning. The driver shouted at us to start the motor and build up pressure in the pumps. Jim Scholar pushed at my shoulder and knelt down to prime the motor. He pulled the cord vigorously, and the motor started, built up to a high note and stopped. He pulled hard several times, and then thrust the

handle into my hands. I pulled once, my boots slipping on the tray. Murray Scholar looked at me irritably and took the handle from me. "Oh, for fucksake." He looked into the petrol tank, pumped the carburettor primer, finely adjusted levers and pulled at the cord. Soon his breathing sounded despairing and liquid in his throat.

"This bloody thing is as live as my cows are pregnant. Must be the bloody spark-plug."

We gathered in a protective circle as the engine was tended to. It started. Murray Scholar looked up and said to Tony, "Turn the . . . the bloody master cock on. That one. No no no! *This one!*"

He turned to his brother.

"Now Jim, pump like blazes on this lever. Yeah, that's it."

I felt water running over my boots.

"Hey Mr. Scholar. Water's coming out of this hose."

"Well, turn the bloody tap off on it then. Then unwind it from the thing and wait till the pressure builds up. You boys do the same on the other hoses. Tony, get some wheat bags out."

The driver climbed into the back of the truck with us, took the hose from me, and looped graceful streams of water onto the burning posts. He proudly grasped his braces with one hand. His trousers were held high so that the top came almost to his chest. His wife called them Empire Line trousers. The headlights of other vehicles behind us lighted the scene. One sounded its horn.

"Jeez, soon have this bloody fire out. How's it goin' boys? Fair humdinger I reckon. This fuck'n' thing works alright though, but I'll have to get goin' in a minute. Looks like there's others tryin' to get past. Hang on boys, we're off to fight a fire."

We drove along a track that looked pink and naked in the black ash. Small trees still glowed red and orange in spastic attitudes on each side, and we often had to crouch away from the beckoning branches of close trees. The wind blew streams of sparks at us. Hot little twigs steamed as they fell onto the wet floor. Tony's lips twitched as he looked wildly and kicked wildly at one that fell from his chest. I watched him closely, but he affected to look away. He held his hand near his chest and rubbed his fingers together. I felt afraid and a flooding feeling overwhelmed me. I felt that I was the

land of my father and his friends, and I knew their vulnerability.

Cliff McDonald was at the bottom of the extreme edge of the fire and ours was the first truck to be directed to go along the eastern side. The flames had looked a crimson tattered ribbon from the gate, but now I could see that they were consuming and noisy. The truck lumbered near and then away from the fire as we drove around quartz reefs. The Scholars aimed their streams of water along a broad front. The burning eyes of the star-thistles bent away and back again under the pressure. As we climbed the hill the pumps often starved of water. At the top of the hill we ran out. A little farm truck came up behind us; a thin boy stood braced on the back, directing water at burning grass that we had missed. He looked to be urinating furiously.

As we began to turn back, the other driver ran to us. He wore a greasy beret and a thin beard.

"I got a spare hose and bags on the back. Can you spare a bloke?"

"I'll go. Tony, I'll meet up with you later. If you see Dad say don't worry."

Tony nodded, and looked out over the valley with calm eyes. I jumped to the ground, my feet disappearing into the grass, and my knees bending to the ground with the shock. As I climbed onto the back of the little truck, the thin boy grinned at me. The driver shouted instructions to me for saving petrol and water. I waved to Tony. He had draped a bag over the railings and was holding it tightly, and behind him Jim Scholar waved to me and put a hand on Tony's back.

And then we were alone on the hillside. I fell over many times at first, burning myself once on the little motor which was sliding about erratically. It was hot, dirty work, and my eyes hurt and my lungs and nostrils were seared by the smoke. Time and time again I ran back to beat out flames with a bag. We yelled instructions to the driver until our voices were hoarse, and we then quickly devised a communication by beating the cabin top. We hit stones and reefs and knocked our knees. Our boots softened from the hot earth. We went down the hillside alone, following a jagged swathe of burning grass that curved down into the trees where it became a rage. We wanted someone to come. We were tired and sobbing. The water splashed weakly on the bottom of the tank, and then

the motor howled as the pumps sucked air.

The driver hurried around to where we stood. He stopped and opened his mouth with a gulping sigh and relaxed so that all his energy seemed to run into the ground. It was quiet with the motors off. The wind blew and the fire cracked but the hill was peaceful. A purposeful truck was coming up to meet us, and little vehicles were scurrying in from the road at the bottom. A motorbike came up quickly and passed us; the rider looked at us curiously and yelled, but we turned our faces into the wind.

"Silly fucker. They reckon that's how it started. 'Bout five-thirty this arvo, from a station bike. Anyway, what's your name. Mine's Jackson, Len Jackson. This here's me brother-in-law. Up for a swimming carnival that's been interrupted, eh, Andy? We left a fuckin' chicken in the oven. Me wife's expect'n' so we're batchin' at the moment. Took the truck without askin' the boss, but he's up New South Wales at the sales. We had to fill up at the big house. Run over his bloody garden!"

"Don Ryman. I'm from near Anamar. We had to come thirty miles so I don't know much about what's goin' on here."

"Eh Andy. This bloke's from the house over the hill from us. I know your old man, mate. He always stops for a yarn on the road. Tell you what, his ute's a bit past it! You must be the one who's away studyin'."

"Yeah. Yeah, my old man's mind is always on other things when he's in his ute. That's his cosy office. And the dog is his secretary. He just cruises around, sorts out his problems, ponders his sons, and runs into creeks and gates."

"Yeah, well. Anyway, quite a coincidence. Let's get down onto the road there. I reckon these blokes comin' can finish off, and we can wait on the road and find out where to get water, and see what's goin' on. Hop in the front. Just turn off the petrol first, will ya, Don?"

The valley road was a border of the fire. The next hill was covered with tossing grass that looked grey in that light. We drove for several minutes along the middle of the road to the top of the hill. Trucks and utilities armed with drums and hoses were parked at the sides. It was like a town that showed no lights. The men stood and watched the fire burn itself out. They waited for it to attempt to cross the road. I squinted to see familiar faces or vehicles, but

these men were all from towns to the north. Len was a tennis player and a fisherman. He knew many of them.

"Any of you blokes seen the Anamar truck or any blokes from down that way? This here's young Don Ryman. His brother's on the truck and his old man probably come up with neighbors. He got split up from them."

But it was a rhetorical question. The expressionless men looked at me but preserved their security. I felt like an interloper. Len's friends offered him a drink of beer. Andy and I stood alone at the edge of the truck for a few minutes, and eventually climbed aboard and sat with our legs dangling. I wondered if the man who owned the farm was here. Would he put a notice in the Record? Thanks. Mr. and Mrs. Clem Taylor wish to express their heart-felt appreciation to all those friends and neighbors who helped to save their home on the night of the fifth. The main article would mention the close feeling engendered by the fire amongst all the men on the land, and the townfolk, for a neighbor in distress. Response was quick and cheerful. Units were promised from as far away as Adelaide — one hundred miles.

Presently my legs began to hurt from the steel lip of the tray. I climbed down and walked desultorily from group to group, looking at names on truck doors. I found a group standing close to a van and gratefully accepted a cup of tea offered by a cheerful woman. She said that I looked tired and gave me a thick, soft sandwich.

"Hello there, where you from?"

"Oh, from near Anamar. Do you live locally?"

"Yes Right in the town, bless it. My husband's the policeman. He said even if I did refuse to join the C.W.A. I should at least make tea and sandwiches at a bushfire! The fire came within half a mile of the town, you know. I had to take the sheets in! They were sexy black ones anyway, but I think better in than out in *that* town, I'm beginning to realize! Hello there, Mr. Beazly, like a cup of tea? Genuine enamel mugs! See you love."

I asked an old man about the fire. His voice was lilting and confiding.

Oh, it's burnt out most of Clem Taylor's place, but they saved the house and the sheep. Lost some fencing and yards, though. It's a bad show for a bloke. But laugh? I nearly died. Richards, them's me neighbors, ran their Inter into the creek. Laugh, I nearly died. They wet

all around it and it's still there all skewiff in a patch of dry grass in the creek. Black around it for bloody miles. Burnt bloody quick, don't you think son? What direction would you say the wind is now? Fairly strong too. I remember before the war we had one up here. Didn't have the same equipment in them days, boy. Bags and shovels on foot it was. Some that had knapsacks used them. Up in the hills for a bloody week once. Tired? I thought I'd die. Cured me bloody asthma though. Must've dried it out inside me. Don't you think that's funny, son? I was by meself in them days. Most of me family'd died of diptheria . . ."

I gently eased away. Perhaps he thought I was rude. Old men pick their way through the past with high, dainty steps.

A motor bike appeared out of the gloom slowly, the rider's long legs clutching it primly and firmly. He searched anxiously and smiled apologetically at the knots of men who greeted him. He looked sad and old.

"Hello boys, I just wanted to say how thankful I am for what you've all done. A shed down near the town got burnt but the house and the stock are all okay. Thank bloody Christ I'd finished reaping, too, though the bloody stubble made a nice old bonfire. You've done a bloody marvellous thing for me tonight. A bloke doesn't realize what a fire can do till he gets burnt out. Christ, I . . . I dunno. Anyway, I have to get down to the town now. They're sendin' a grader up here soon to get those burnin' stumps before the wind can blow up sparks."

I walked slowly among the vehicles. I felt to be on sentry duty, guarding the trenches and looking out over No-Man's Land. My clothes were thick and sensible, and my boots sturdy and firm in the soft dust. I kicked at it and peered down into the valley. The farmers among their vehicles talked softly. None of the big antiseptic District Units was from Anamar. The little farm vehicles rested and ticked softly as they cooled. Quiet, grey, conspiratorial men surrounded them.

Cliff McDonald's utility cruised past me with its thick radio tentacle whipping about. I ran clumsily after it until it stopped, but before I could ask about Tony the men who greeted him edged me aside. They dwarfed him.

"How's it goin' here, fellas? Keeping it under control? Saw Clem Taylor back there a bit, and he's a bloody relieved bloke if I ever saw one.

Hello there, Barry, how's it goin'? Jim. Macka. Far as I can ascertain, the north, south and west flanks are all pretty much under control."

He smiled through plump unhappy lips. The radio gave a prolonged electric sound.

"Mobile Two calling Mobile One, over. This is Mobile Two calling Cliff McDonald, over. Are you receiving me, over?"

"Mobile Two, this is Mobile One," said Cliff McDonald carefully. "Am receiving you loud and clear, over."

Precise formalities were over. The detached voice became animated.

"Oh, Cliff, this is Arch Connors. I'm out on the west flank. Most of the boys here are out of water, but she's under control. Where's the nearest water? Over."

"Hello, Arch. Your nearest water is in the town, over. Rather, about a mile on the Adelaide side, over."

"Rightio, thanks Cliff. See you in the pub later. Most of the boys have retired there already."

We all laughed.

"See you, Arch. Doesn't seem to be much doin' here at the moment, either, but we're waitin' for the Leverton Council to send up their graders. This is Mobile One, over and out."

"Mobile Two, over and out."

Cliff McDonald sighed for his cares, and replaced the microphone in its cradle. Its cord immediately entwined itself about the steering wheel. The radio crackled again.

"Hello, Cliff McDonald! This is District Unit A N Zero, over. How's it goin', ol' son? Sounds like you're givin' permission for us poor weary bastards to retire for a beer, is that right! By the way, is Don Ryman with you blokes? His brother and his old man are with us. Said when he got off this truck he went off on a Bedford to the east somewhere."

"District Unit A N Zero, this is Mobile One. In response to your last question, the answer is negative; repeat, negative. Over. Radio manners, Jesus!"

"But Mr. McDonald. I *am* here."

"What's that? Don. Well, why didn't you speak up, son. Jesus."

He thrust the microphone to his mouth and sent his words over the hills. "Hello, Mobile One calling A N Zero. Mobile One calling A N Zero, over. Are you receiving me, over."

The speaker emitted a warm busy hum. The atmosphere crackled softly. Faint voices arranged

to retire to the town. Cliff McDonald spoke again very slowly.

"Mobile One calling District Unit A N. Zero. Are you receiving me. Are you receiving me. Over."

He waited, and then sighed.

"Must've gone behind a bloody hill. Look, son, get into town the first chance you get. They'll be there somewhere."

He was already about his business again.

"You know what happened down there a while ago? Bloody Hedley Muir, chairman of the Leverton bloody Council, wouldn't give his permission to take the graders out. Can you believe it? Fuckin' bushfire threat'n'n' the state, and he says 'the situation doesn't warrant it.' Doesn't warrant it. Jesus. I bet if the fire was threat'n'n' his bloody place he wouldn't be so bloody toothy. Bet if it was threat'n'n' his stiff-arsed wife and poncey bloody kids he wouldn't be so slow. But I had a bit of a talk with him and pointed out that the wind was goin' away from Leverton now, that he should take them out and send them up here. He listened to reason after a bit, but it wasn't bloody easy, I don't mind tellin' ya."

The talk of the men rose and fell into the night. Suggestions, advice, rumors and counters bound them together as they watched the lighted valley and waited for their orders. A bike caused it; no, lightning caused it; they should give everyone some training with the equipment; rust hit the late crops again this year; he would get his this weekend — she was just crying for it. The wind continued to blow up thick smoke from the smouldering stumps, and the men coughed and wiped their eyes. Little groups broke up and became fragmented and formed again. The hill seemed to be doomed. Ghosts crossed and re-crossed the road. The graders arrived.

"Now what we're goin' t'do is grade a break, and then push dirt over the stumps. Those of you still got water, go down the hill and onto the flats and use it all up on the trees. Don't be scared of wastin' it. This bloody fire will have to be watched for a week as it is."

The men stood slowly to their feet and swore softly with relief. One man cheered. They moved more quickly. Engines started and headlights created new silhouettes. Doors banged and vehicles began to race crudely over the banks and down the hill. Water was discharged impatiently at the glowing trees; the vehicles

growled under and around their trees and then moved on. Their scrabbling passion eased. The trucks returned to the roadside and allowed the graders to scrape up the charred earth.

Len and Andy found me, and we watched from the cabin of our truck. When our interest waned we quietly drove towards the town. We had to stop for many gates, and we looked back at the fire each time. It was still a fierce ribbon within the firebreak some miles from where we had been. We could also see the town lights ahead of us, but they continued to be elusive. As we approached a dark house and sheds guarded by looming pine trees, Len murmured, "This is Clem Taylor's place." The truck bumped over a broad ploughed border that surrounded the house and sheds. Two women appeared in our lights, standing by the entrance ramp and looking beyond us to the hills. Len turned off the engine and let the truck roll silently to a stop before them. Their gaunt faces were disquieting. One woman was thin and awkward, and stood with one hand on her hip with the other shading her eyes as if it were mid-day. Her face was hollow. Her skin was brown and her hair was tied in a plait that gleamed dryly. The other woman made little steps on legs that swelled comfortably above her flat slippers. She looked at us and her mouth worked anxiously, but she could not speak. She was softer; she belonged to little domestic comforts. The wind and the soil confronted her. The hard woman jerked her head.

"Keep goin' to get to the town. Don't take none of our water — or petrol —, and don't run over the garden."

I saw little damp runs near her eyes. We drove away guiltily. Parked outside the silent house was a tractor and trailer, loaded with furniture and cases. Mattresses had been abandoned on an unused tennis court. Grass grew high into the net. We drove over a plastic toy and too close to the random borders of the garden.

"Shit," said Andy, when we had left.

"Jesus," said Len, "the poor old bitch. I bet she doesn't know what's goin' on. She can see the fire but prob'ly doesn't know it's burnin' only in the break now." He paused. "Bet she looked okay in her day, too. Sort of in them days when skinny birds were in the fashion in long dresses, like they are now." I smiled and nodded to give him encouragement, for he

looked embarrassed. "Think we oughter go back and tell her it's okay?"

"No. She's probably sick of guys driving through to town to have a beer. She'd just get shitty. She probably thinks we're all having a good time."

"Okay. Shouldn't be too hard to find your old man and Tony. Bet they're drownin' a few coldies, waitin' for you to come back."

The town had the regulation highway as the main street. Little houses tucked themselves behind high fences and verdant gardens. The town had always wavered according to wars or ambitious youth or good times, but it would never fail. Nor would it ever be ambitious. All the vehicles of that night jostled for parking areas in the broad street, and joyous men disappeared and reappeared in the riot of lights. A van with fat alloy wheels and painted in all the colors of summer and the city was parked on the highway outside the hotel. Young men filmed the firefighters and asked excited questions. The firefighters gave paternal answers.

In the hotel, the returning men met in a moving press at the bar. Some shy and tired farmers stood in corners, watching, with their dusty broad hats pushed back to reveal white foreheads. Meanwhile the hotel owner served the firefighters quickly, smiling that the town had been spared. Tomorrow he would send an account to Clem Taylor for petrol and beer. I

couldn't see Dad or Tony. The chairman of the District Council was talking to some stocky young jackeroos who wore clean pressed clothes. One brushed the dust from his boots by rubbing them against his trousers. Hedley Muir had intelligent grey eyes, sharp behind fragile gold-rimmed glasses. His hair was short and grey. A prickly moustache balanced his eyes, for he had once been a major. He countenanced no silliness apart from that which stemmed from men he knew well. He was an arbiter of actions and philosophies. He waved a thin hand at the men, and the jackeroos turned healthy faces to watch the crowd, while I looked for Dad and Tony among the warm crush of celebrating, congratulating men. They became quiet and expectant. The wind blew open a door.

"A bit of bad news, I'm afraid, chaps. Another fire has started near Anamar, so any district units from the towns to the south of here should go back now. There are water tanks on the road just outside the town. The Anamar unit, I understand, has already left. Local trucks here should stay to patrol tonight. It's going to be a long night, I'm afraid, chaps."

The men roared in disappointment and irony. The tired farmers seemed to shrink. Len slapped my back and laughed as the crowd pushed towards the door. As he was carried out into the lighted street, he looked around to where I was standing against the movement of the men. He called and waved to me, and I let myself be guided through the swinging doors.



Stephen Scheduling

IAN TURNER

High Noon at Yarralumla

Some Causes and Some Consequences

Whatever losses may have flowed from the Governor General's dismissal of the Prime Minister on 11 November 1975 and the catastrophic defeat of Labor in the elections of 13 December, these events were a bonanza for writers, publishers and printers. Three descriptive accounts, two interpretative essays, one novel (all by journalists) and one booklet of documents (reprinted from the Age), depicting and discussing Australia's greatest political crisis, arrived within six months; no doubt more will appear as the more leisurely academic digestions go to work. (Two lucky printers—one in Sydney and one in Maryborough, Victoria—each produced two of the books.) The operation demonstrated great initiative and perspicacity: the journalists showed a talent for instant history which many professional historians will quite rightly envy, while the publishers and printers revealed an unsuspected capacity for rapid action. Australian writers and book-producers have not yet matched the speed of their British and American counterparts, as evidenced by the response to Entebbe, but they are closing the gap. Of course, the promise of material reward was also important, and who-

ever was first home was likely to take the biggest prize. But the demand for speed worked both ways. Some of the judgements are hasty and suffer from the foreshortened perspective; but, taken as a whole, these books record not only what happened but how it felt to knowledgeable and intelligent observers who were writing hard up against the events and who were often emotionally engaged: they are not only records of contemporary history but historical documents.

As the race was run, Donald Horne was first past the post, on *Death of the Lucky Country*, despite the serious handicap he was carrying. (Horne writes with dry reticence about the detached retina which struck him in the first days of the campaign: those who would know more about this frightening complaint might read the chilling account given by C. P. Snow in *The Sleep of Reason*. Patrick Tennison, who, in *The Lucky Country Reborn*, mocks Horne's references to it, should certainly read Snow.) First home; and perhaps because of that, as well as Horne's own concern for the broad historical sweep and his personal involvement, of all these books this is the one which reaches furthest for the long-term implications of the November coup and conveys most clearly the anguish and the anger. "Has there ever been such a crying on an Australian election night? It was not only the Labor Party that was being destroyed, but the sense of trust of hundreds of thousands of Australians."

Inevitably, the three detailed accounts of the events (Paul Kelly: *The Unmaking of Gough*; Clem Lloyd and Andrew Clark: *Kerr's King Hit*; Laurie Oakes: *Crash Through or Crash*) cover much of the same ground. There are perhaps few surprises for anyone who had followed

Elections 75 (The Age, 1976).

Chris Forsyth: *The Governor General* (Widescope, 1976).

Donald Horne: *Death of the Lucky Country* (Penguin, 1976).

Paul Kelly: *The Unmaking of Gough* (Angus & Robertson, 1976).

Clem Lloyd and Andrew Clark: *Kerr's King Hit* (Cassell, 1976).

Laurie Oakes: *Crash Through or Crash* (Drummond, 1976).

Patrick Tennison: *The Lucky Country Reborn* (Hill of Content, 1976).

Hugh Stretton: *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment* (Cambridge University Press, 1976).

closely the ups and downs of the Whitlam government, the constitutional crisis and the December elections; but it is immensely worthwhile to have the story presented as a coherent whole. There is little to choose between these three books on grounds of style or presentation, but each contributes something individual. Kelly offers the most detailed account, and is strong on Fraser. Lloyd and Clark give a very good description of Kerr's background, and have some extra detail about the inner workings of the Whitlam government. Oakes's book is marginally the crispest and most graphic of the three, and has as a bonus his account (he broke the story) of the shameful attempt to raise election funds for Labor from Iraqi sources.

Donald Horne's essay sees the Whitlam government as one which sought to break through the mediocrity, subservience and philistinism which had characterised the Liberal-Country Party decades; a government which made more than its fair share of mistakes but which was dogged by more than its fair share of bad luck; a government which was destroyed by a "constitutional *coup d'état*" engineered by an establishment which had never recognised the legitimacy of the Labor government and which believed that it had a divine right to rule; a government which will stand high in history. Patrick Tennyson describes Horne's book as a "quickie . . . based on emotion and conjecture". He sees the Whitlam government as a "Pop Government" led by a capricious grandstander with no real concern for the common people; a government which was legitimately removed from office; a government which destroyed itself by its own mistakes and because it pursued policies which were "more socialistic than realistic". I disagree profoundly with Tennyson. Partly because he cheapens and trivialises the issues: a writer friend of his failed to get a grant from the Australia Council, Medibank did not cover artificial eyes, a motor mechanic (in private employ!) boasted of deliberately sabotaging repair work, Whitlam bought "Blue Poles". More importantly because I think that his historical judgement—of both past and future—is both bad and wrong. I agree generally with Horne, for reasons which I will discuss later.

The Age booklet reprints news-stories and comments of John Jost, Allan Barnes and Creighton Burns, who are among the most incisive (even when I disagree with them) political journalists in Australia; the statements of Whit-

lam and Fraser on the constitutional crisis; and its own editorials. These last reveal the Age as agonising over the impropriety of Kerr's "*coup d'état*" (the phrase was not unique to Horne)—but, once the writs were issued, coming down heavily on Fraser's side, and concluding with the pious wish that "whichever side wins, democracy will live on". It was a sad day for those who had hoped that the Age's editorial independence would survive the invasion of its boardroom by the Fairfax-Sydney Morning Herald interests.

On his own account, the events of late 1975 must have fallen on Chris Forsyth like manna from heaven. He had begun work in January 1975 on a piece of "speculative fiction" about the constitutional crisis which developed in Australia following the assassination of the Governor General by a group of revolutionary (faction unspecified) terrorists in January 1982. All he had to do was to rewrite: "it is apparent that in Australian politics today, fact is indeed stranger than fiction". Contrariwise, Forsyth makes fiction considerably stranger than fact. The plot is ingenious: briefly, after much wheeling and dealing, the Labor Prime Minister is manoeuvred by his own colleagues (who have their various reasons for wanting to get rid of him) into the office of Governor General. He sets Australia on course for the Socialist Republic. Western Australia secedes, with CIA support. The Russians provide the financial backing for an anti-American socialist aspirant to the Australian presidency. The implication is that the Muscovian candidate is set to win. But the characterisation is wooden and unconvincing; all motivation is reduced to blackmail, greed, power-hunger, and (mostly bizarre) lust; many of the political and administrative details are wildly improbable; supposedly sophisticated operators act out naively stereotyped roles. What might have been an interesting exercise in fictional futurology somehow emerges as farce.

Beyond those comments, I do not propose to 'review' these books. Instead, I propose to use them—and one other of a quite different kind, Hugh Stretton's *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment*—as a starting point to ask three questions: How did it happen? what went wrong? where do we go from here?

In one sense, the answer to "how did it happen?" has already been given. Kelly, Lloyd/Clark and Oakes provide a blow-by-blow account of the

course of events from Fraser's final decision to block supply on 15 October 1975, the act which precipitated the constitutional crisis, to Kerr's dismissal of Whitlam on 11 November. They record the meetings and statements which are on the public record, and they draw what conclusions they can about the motivations, intentions and states of mind of the three principal parties. But the big questions remain unanswered—and sometimes unposed. Was there a 'conspiracy' against the Labor government? If so, who was involved? What does the dismissal of Whitlam reveal about Australian power structures? Can a social democratic (or democratic socialist) government ever hope to exercise 'real' power?

The allegation of a conspiracy was clearly stated by Senator Jim McClelland, once Kerr's "closest friend" (Lloyd/Clark) and a relatively new minister in the Whitlam government: "I believe that [Kerr] had made up his mind before supply was deferred and that at all times the leading figures of the Liberal Party knew that they had this ace up their sleeve." There is no evidence to prove that such a conspiracy existed (and, of course, there is no evidence to prove that it did not exist—as every bush lawyer knows, it is very difficult to prove a negative). It is unlikely that the case will ever be established either way. If Kerr and Fraser had in fact agreed on a course of action before 15 October, the odds are that they would have kept no written record of their agreement. (Perhaps in their retirement—roll on the day!—one or other might reveal all in his memoirs; meantime, historians will continue to guess—and will not be satisfied with a simple denial. At best, the allegation will be marked "unproven".) There is, however, other relevant evidence. Oakes calls James McAuley as witness (and he can scarcely be regarded as a hostile witness) to the fact that Kerr had decided, a week before 11 November, that he would sack the government unless Whitlam agreed to a general election—and (on his wife's advice) that he would give Whitlam no warning of his intention. Oakes further believes that the confidence which Fraser and other leading Liberals showed in the outcome of the crisis ("It will all be over next week") demonstrates that they (unlike Whitlam) had prior knowledge of the course which Kerr proposed to follow. McAuley's evidence as to Kerr's intention is presumably hard (although Kerr told him of it some weeks after the event). And it is clearly

supported by the wording of Sir Garfield Barwick's letter to Kerr of 10 November, which answered a question posed by Kerr: "If Your Excellency is satisfied . . . that the present Government is unable to secure Supply, the course upon which Your Excellency *has determined* is consistent with your constitutional authority and duty." (My emphasis.) The conclusion about the Liberal leader's advance knowledge of Kerr's intention is inferential, and in any case it does not go as far as Senator McClelland's allegation that he had that knowledge before 15 October. Nevertheless (and trying to discount my own biases) I find the argument persuasive: I find it hard to believe that, when Kerr summoned Fraser to Yarralumla on the morning of 11 November (shortly after he had agreed to meet Whitlam), Fraser did not know what Kerr intended to do.

So it is evident that Kerr had decided in advance on his course of action, without giving the Prime Minister any indication of his decision; and it is a reasonable inference that the Leader of the Opposition had at least some advance notice. But what led Kerr to his decision—did he jump, or was he pushed? And how widely was the advance knowledge spread?—certainly to the Chief Justice of the High Court (himself a former Liberal Attorney-General), but where else?

Left-wing and revolutionary critics of the Whitlam government have often enough suggested that it was a 'sell-out' government, sacrificing socialist principles and working-class interests to the interests of the bourgeoisie. But the bourgeoisie didn't seem to see it that way. On the contrary, they never recognised the legitimacy of the Labor government (in this they were much less sophisticated than their British counterparts), and they supported the continuing claim of the coalition parties to be the natural rulers of Australia. And this for the best of reasons: making all allowances for the 'moderate' character of the Whitlam government, it nevertheless challenged the interests of Australian capital in three significant ways. It threatened to disturb the allocation of incomes between wages and profits and between rich and poor. It sought to establish a new balance of resources between the private and public sectors, between primary and secondary industry on one hand and the service industries on the other. And it called into question the privileges of multi-national capital in the Australian

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BRIAN FITZPATRICK:

THE PRAGMATIC UTOPIAN

In the latest *Meanjin* Don Watson has written of Brian Fitzpatrick's concerns and achievements in a remarkably accessible article which is also a first class contribution to Australian cultural history. There's also a piece by Lucy Frost questioning the assumptions of English Departments in the universities, and a discussion of contemporary American and Australian poetry — with fresh examples.

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economy—privileges with which significant sections of Australian capital were closely aligned. It is not necessary to postulate an overt plot of the kind suggested by Chris Forsyth in his novel; it is enough to suggest that there was a consensus within the Australian establishment (let us use the Melbourne Club, which Kelly describes as Fraser's "power base", as a symbol) that Whitlam had to go. A nod is as good as a wink in the Melbourne Club; indeed, anything louder than a nod or a wink would probably be thought unnecessary and in bad taste. All accounts agree that Kerr is a vain, ambitious and garrulous man, and that he had had some success in building bridges to the establishment. He would not have been unaware of—or unresponsive to—these pressures, though that is not to say that he signalled his intentions in advance. But, given the long-standing and well-documented links between the leading echelons of the Liberal Party and the dominant groupings of Australian capital, it seems likely that, if the Liberal leadership had advance knowledge of what Kerr intended to do, so did their friends and backers in the wealthy boardrooms and exclusive clubs. The bourgeois grapevines, of whatever estate and vintage, would look after that.

The CIA connection is more obscure. Obviously, American intelligence was (and is) interested in what happens in Australia, because it is concerned to protect both American strategic and economic interests. Given the known record of the CIA's subterranean interventions in European politics, it is not hard to believe that it would do what it could in Australia—without necessarily telling the U.S. State Department what it was about. And given the fact of Kerr's earlier associations with both Australian and American intelligence (Lloyd/Clark), it is not inconceivable that he was under pressure from these quarters. But the hard evidence is not there. Kelly gives a detailed account of the CIA panic when it seemed possible that the cover of some of its Australian agents would be blown as a consequence of the revelations about Doug Anthony's relations with Richard Lee Stallings, a CIA man and one-time head of the U.S. missile-tracking base at Pine Gap. The CIA man responsible for East Asia (which includes Australia) cabled his concern to ASIO, Melbourne, expecting that ASIO would see its prime responsibility as being to him (the 'international intelligence community' network) rather than to the Australian Labor government; unluckily for

him, the man in charge in Australia was a protem appointee of the Whitlam government, who promptly passed the CIA cable over to the Prime Minister's Department. Kelly quite rightly points out that, had the CIA wanted to lean on Kerr to sack Whitlam, it would not have used such a circuitous route. All the same it seems likely that the CIA had its own reasons for wanting a change of government in Australia.

What that adds up to is a consensus, in which all parties knew instinctively what they had to do, rather than a conspiracy—except for the likelihood that the Liberal Opposition had advance notice that, in the Constitutional Cup, it was home and hosed. But the existence of a conservative consensus, which involves the head of state and results in the unconstitutional removal of a social-democratic government, necessarily raises the question, first posed by Marx, of just where does the locus of power lie—is it in the formal institutions of governance, or outside them, in the commanding heights of the economy? To pose the question in that way is to assert that there is no necessary one-to-one relationship between economic and political power; but it is also to ask whether limits are not set to the exercise of political power by the power of the controllers of the economy, standing outside the formal political process. The question is further complicated by the fact that much (and an increasing proportion of) economic power is exercised by multi-national groupings which can, by redistributing their operations internationally, effectively insulate themselves from particular national political processes. It is not an entirely one-sided affair. The public sector, and the fiscal controls exercised by government, do represent a countervailing economic power. But private economic power still has a lot on its side—the ability to manipulate markets, investments and employment opportunities; the wealth to buy political influence; control of the communications media. Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible for democratic political processes to bring arbitrary economic power to heel—given a realistic understanding, and the proper circumstances. Conversely, I believe that, given Australia's political traditional and present political climate, a revolutionary resolution of the conflict between public political and private economic power is not a real possibility. For better or worse (for better, I believe) we are stuck with the democratic process? What we have to do is to learn how to use that process.

with more intelligence, more sophistication, and more determination.

The rhetoric of the early socialist movement spoke of the "classes" (the privileged, the owners of land and industry) and the "masses" (the rest of society, the great majority). The language implied a clear conflict of interest between classes and masses; historically, the movement saw the conservative parties as standing for the classes, and the socialist and Labor parties as standing for the masses. This simple dichotomy has been obscured and complicated by the growth of a 'new middle class', the 'salaried and professional' employees, whose life style distinguishes them from the circumstances (though not necessarily the aspirations) of the old industrial working class. The politics of those modern societies which are professedly democratic, in the sense that they allow for an electoral choice between parties or coalitions which offer alternative programs, seems to resolve itself into a competition between the parties of the classes and the masses for the support of this new middle class. It is true that men and women from the 'salaried and professional' grouping have moved in increasing numbers into positions of influence in the established parties (though women are still grossly under-represented); and, in the case of the Labor Party, that invasion has caused some resentment among people of industrial working-class background, who regard themselves, understandably, as the founding fathers and legitimate inheritors of that party. But it is also true that most of those who have no clear and continuing allegiance to one or other party belong to this social stratum. That was where the swing to Labor was in 1972—and the swing against in 1975. The fact is that Labor lost its majority—and, even if the electoral system has not been loaded against it, would still have lost it—because it lost the support of a decisive part of this section of the Australian community. The question is: why?

Two common Labor answers to that question are that the government suffered from a communications lag or gap, and that the media went all out to destroy it. The first point is fairly taken. Much of what the Whitlam government did, or tried to do, was not understood by those whom the policies were intended to benefit, let alone by the community at large. Partly that was because the government failed adequately to communicate what it was doing. But it was

also partly—as was recognised in the final months—because the government had tried to do so many things so fast that communication became impossible. Labor carried with it to power in 1972 a quarter of a century of frustration and pent-up desire for change. Understandably, every minister of the new government wanted immediate action on that part of the Labor program for which his ministry was responsible (and often enough on some pet projects of his own). At the same time, the advent of the Labor government created a crisis of expectations among those sectional groupings which had felt themselves treated unjustly by Liberal-Country Party governments and which had contributed significantly to Labor's return to power; they too wanted immediate action on their sectional demands. That created a new range of problems. When the government did not respond immediately and whole-heartedly to the whole range of demands of its sectional supporters, those supporters tended to condemn it as pusillanimous and time-serving. (Some outstanding examples of this were to be found among artists, Aborigines, and the women's movement.) But when the government did act immediately, it sometimes acted hastily, without considering all the consequences and side-effects of its actions, and thus made enemies. The speed of change created a new series of plateaus in Australian politics from which it would be difficult to force a retreat but which required consolidation; but at the same time it bewildered and disturbed a significant section of the community. The simultaneous inauguration of far-reaching programs in many areas of economic and social life, based as it was on an over-optimistic reading of the economy, exacerbated the economic difficulties into which the government was heading. Communication was a problem, certainly, but it was important to establish and to communicate about priorities and a time-scale of change, about what could not be done, as well as about what could and would be done. It is to be hoped those lessons have been learned.

The argument about the media is more dodgy. No reforming party or government can expect the support of the Australian media, if only for the reason that, with the exception of the ABC, the media are privately owned, and reform programs threaten the interests of the private sector. There is much that could be done to redress the balance in the Australian media—perhaps along the lines of worker-management, as established

in *Le Monde*, arguably the world's best daily paper—though any such measures should recognise that it is a legitimate function of the media to respond critically to any government's initiatives and administration. But even as things are, the interests of the media proprietors are not the same as those of their employees, the 'working journalists'. In the run up to 1972, and in its first two years of office, Labor received fair and often generous treatment from the working journalists. By 1975 (except for the almost universal angry reaction to the Kerr coup) most of the goodwill had been dissipated. The question remains: why?

The egregious mistakes made by the government—prominent among them the public scandal surrounding certain ministerial appointments, and the loans affair—were part of the answer; they provided opportunities which no self-respecting journalist could be expected to pass up, and they were enough to try the loyalty of even the most dedicated Labor supporters. (In regard to the loans affair, I should say that—setting aside the arguments about commission, interest rates, and the possible inflationary effect of a loan of the size envisaged, all of which could have been handled satisfactorily—I have no criticism of the principle involved. The concept of a public equity in, and control over, Australia's national resources is rightly a central part of Labor's thinking. It was rather, to use Jim McClelland's words, the "naïve and amateurish" way in which the government went about the operation to which criticism could reasonably be directed.) These questions are canvassed at great length in the books under review; there seems no point in going over them again.

Conceivably, the government could have ridden out these mistakes—despite the demand of the Age in the aftermath of the loans affair that it 'Go now, go decently'—had its economic record been better. Here it was afflicted by both bad luck and bad management. The bad luck was that it inherited the domestic consequences of the world economic instability which derived from the Vietnam war, an instability which was exacerbated by the painful readjustments caused by the hike in oil prices in 1973-74. The bad management was in the failure of the government to judge correctly the economic upturn of 1973 which led directly into the boom of 1974; the consequences of the rapid inflation of 1973-74 and the new balance which was struck between wages and profits in those years; and the severity

of the downturn in 1975. (The Whitlam government should not be singled out for blame in this respect. Nowhere in the capitalist world did governments or economists come up with satisfactory answers, either practical or theoretical, to the peculiar combination of inflation and unemployment, known as 'stagflation', from which all capitalist countries suffered.) The government quite rightly rejected the draconian view of its Treasury advisers that what the economy needed was a 'short, sharp shock'—that is, a dose of unemployment sufficient to dissuade workers from pursuing wage increases which were, Treasury believed, a prime cause of inflation. But it ended up willy-nilly with an unemployment level of 5 per cent., which was about the level envisaged by Treasury. That, along with an inflation running at around 15 per cent., cost it dearly.

I have no training in economics, and I venture into the field with considerable trepidation. But it seems to me that there are certain self-evident truths which are often ignored or downplayed by the labor movement because they do not fit comfortably with socialist values or ideology. Inflation has a superficial attraction for a reforming government; constantly rising wages (and therefore tax-derived revenue) seem to offer an easy way of financing expansion of the public sector, and particularly of publicly financed services. But, at any given moment, the resources of labor and raw materials available to satisfy the demands for goods and services is finite. An expansion in the supply of money cannot create new resources. (It may, on the other hand, activate unused resources—the Keynesian argument—or enable investment in new development or technology which will pay off in a greater availability of resources at a later date, although that may be subject to a law of diminishing returns as physical resources grow scarcer and more costly to extract.) What then does inflation do? It may make it easier to redistribute resources between the private and public sectors, between private consumption and the 'social wage' (that is, the publicly supplied services) without people noticing what is happening. But it does so at considerable social and economic cost. Inflation disadvantages lower income earners as compared with higher income earners, and thereby counteracts whatever egalitarian thrust may come from an expanded public sector. And it disadvantages most of all those with least bargaining power,

and thereby multiplies underprivilege. Inflation creates a climate of uncertainty and insecurity. Politically, this must run in the long term (the higher the rate of inflation, the shorter the term) against the government in office. Economically, inflation encourages the kind of saving that provides a hedge against rising prices, but inhibits productive investment. Inflation is a slippery slide into oblivion for reforming governments. It is a common socialist belief that the most effective way of making a society more equal is to use revenue derived from sliding-scale taxation to finance a wide range of services (health, education, housing, social welfare) which are equally available to all citizens. Observation suggests that these public services are not in practice equally available, that the better educated make more effective use of them, and Hugh Stretton (in his *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment*) makes some other important qualifications which I will discuss later; but in general I share the socialist belief. But it is self-defeating for a reforming government to pretend that an expansion of publicly supplied services can be provided at no cost. Resources which are used to supply public services are set off against the resources which are used to supply goods for private consumption. There are two further complications. One is economic: the 'services' industry tends to be labour-intensive, while the 'goods' industry tends to be capital intensive, which means that production costs of services will tend to rise in relation to production costs of goods. (That dilemma underlies the financial crisis which confronts the arts and entertainment industries.) The other is political: to the consumer, the 'social income' does not seem like an income—it seems more like a windfall, the gift of a generous heaven; while the 'personal income' represents freedom—the freedom to choose between commodities on the market. A reforming social-democratic government cannot avoid the responsibility of convincing its electorate that the good life—and a more equal life for all its citizens—rests on an expansion of the publicly provided services, and that this necessarily involves a restriction of the income which can be spent on the open market.

The second economic truth which I believe to be self-evident is that there is no way in which inflation can be prevented (or at least held to a level where it does not threaten social and economic disruption), full employment be guaranteed, and at the same time a free market be

allowed to operate in incomes and prices. The organised labor movement was created by the working class in order that it might improve its material circumstances; the central concerns of the movement were with hours of labor and rates of pay. During 120 years in Australia, the labor movement has succeeded in reducing the working week from 60 to 72 hours to 40 or 35; in winning a significant rise in real wages (which cannot be accurately measured because the statistics are not adequate); and, through political action, in establishing and expanding the 'social wage'. The factors which have made these successes possible have been the relatively rapid long-term growth of the Australian economy, the generally favorable condition of the labor market (especially since 1945), and the strength of working-class organisation. In the course of that century of struggle, the labor movement has changed dramatically the balance of power between capital and labor. It is no longer possible, in any democratic country in which a mixed economy prevails, for capital to set the limits to labor's progress. In the interests of profit, capital still confronts labor with the alternatives: either substantial unemployment and forced wage restraint, or near-full employment and voluntary wage restraint. But the strength of organised labor, and the democratic process, make it increasingly difficult for capital to enforce this alternative. On the other hand labor, conscious of the historical maldistribution of wealth and relating this to private ownership of the means of production, accepts no responsibility for the working of the 'system' and tends to assume that the only limit is the sky—a tendency which is reinforced by the vested interest of labor movement officials in achieving immediate results for their members.

This is the dilemma which confronts social-democratic governments. Whether they like it or not, such governments confront the reality of a mixed economy, and little prospect of a revolutionary transformation. They must live with the mixed economy and try to make it work—and work to the advantage of their own social base, the wage and salary earners. In times of economic upswing, that is relatively easy, although a redistribution of resources between wages and profits may so squeeze profits as to inhibit investment and therefore future growth; the argument here is about the rate of working-class advance. In times of downturn (and some degree of cyclical fluctuation seems inescapable

in mixed economies), it is much more difficult, or impossible; the argument here is not about sharing the benefits of growth but rather about sharing the costs of recession. (If the environmentalists are right in their argument that the finite supply of physical resources means that the world will have, in the foreseeable future, to move to a no-growth or negative-growth economy, the whole of politics—instead of just aberrant temporary circumstances—will be about sharing losses rather than gains.)

I take it as axiomatic, and a starting point for any further discussion, that what the labor movement is about is the equitable sharing of both gains and losses (“equitable” in the sense of a sharing which moves society in a more egalitarian direction), and that what their conservative opponents are concerned with is maintaining minority privilege. What then of social-democratic practice? The basic contradiction of the private enterprise economies, even when they have a substantial public sector, is still that stated by Marx—the contradiction between social production and private appropriation. It is most clearly manifest in income differentials. But the example of the communist command economies does not suggest (any more than does nationalisation within the mixed economy) that this contradiction can be resolved by a state take-over of the means of production. Public bureaucracies replace private owners as the new privileged elite; an inequitable distribution of power is still reflected in an inequitable distribution of income. Historically, private appropriation has made it possible for the appropriators to direct investment to where the prospects of profit are greatest, regardless of social need; and to maximise their own incomes while holding down those of their employees. But private initiative and the market economy have a virtuous as well as a vicious side—the virtues are efficiency and responsiveness to consumer demand. Social-democratic practice should be directed towards realising a combination (not a reconciliation, because they are often contradictory) of the public virtue of social justice and the private virtue of efficiency and responsiveness. (If the future is as the pessimistic environmentalists predict, the need to realise such a combination, or compromise, will become even more urgent.) That means a ‘social contract’.

The idea of a social contract raises many traditional labor and socialist hackles. The labor

movement has believed that a social contract is necessarily a kind of class collaboration, that any contract must work to the advantage of capital and the disadvantage of labor because capital is the stronger of the contracting parties. I believe that the balance of power between capital and labor has changed, and that the old response to the idea of a social contract is an anachronism. As I write this in London, the British Trade Union Congress is meeting to consider, among other questions, its attitude to this year’s social contract, and to the future. The Congress has accepted this year’s contract, despite the high level of unemployment and the fact that the wage rises provided in the contract will not cover the expected inflation of the cost of living; they have agreed that the alternative to the social contract is a massive economic crisis which would impose intolerable burdens on the working class; they have resolved, in effect, not to precipitate a ‘break-down crisis’. The British trade unions have accepted that they have the power to make or break the British economy, and have resolved to keep it working—but already the most powerful British unions have made clear the terms on which they are prepared to strike that bargain: future social contracts will depend on full trade union participation in the process of economic planning and control, which in turn will have to rest on the values of the labor movement. The British economy suffers from a number of specific, acute weaknesses which has diminished the bargaining power of the British unions. Nevertheless, there are important lessons to be learned from the British experience—and the Australian trade union movement starts from a much more favorable situation.

Given that the Australian starting points are the mixed economy and the democratic process, some form of social contract is essential to future well-being. That cannot be a contract which merely records, as did the phoney social contracts of the corporate state, that the interests of capital will prevail over those of labor—or that the policies of the state will prevail over both. It cannot be a contract which, in the name of efficiency and growth, sacrifices social justice to minority privilege. Nor can it be a contract which, in the name of social justice, sacrifices long-term well-being to immediate advantage. It can only be a contract which represents an immediate balance between conflicting interests—and which rests on a democratic

majority consensus that the overall thrust of a series of social contracts is towards the realisation of the long-term social aims of an equitable distribution of wealth and power. I believe that the achievement of such a social contract, encompassing both the distribution and incomes and the allocation of investment resources, should have a central place in the program of future social-democratic governments, and that the organised labor movement is strong enough to make such a contract a reality.

So, where do we go from here? The catastrophe of late 1975 made it imperative for Labor to rethink its situation—its principles, its programme, and its strategy. Fortunately for Labor's long term thinking (if it were not that this is such an eminently rational book, I would be tempted to say "providentially"), Hugh Stretton, or his publishers, chose just this time to publish his *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment*. (The title is presumably a deliberate echo of Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, and Stretton's book promises to be at least as influential as Schumpeter's.) Stretton addresses himself to the questions which must be central to social democratic thinking—to inflation, and to an environment which contains finite physical resources, as the most difficult present and future problems; and to how these problems might be solved consistently with socialist values. He sketches three possible 'scenarios' (to use the fashionable jargon which Stretton carefully avoids). The first suggests the possibility of a privileged minority ruling over an authoritarian society in which the losses which flow from a diminished and more costly flow of physical resources are carried by the exploited masses. (This picture sounds rather like the obverse side of the European communist states, in which privileged elites hold down the masses so that capital may be accumulated for investment in growth.) The second suggests a continuation of the free market economy—a less draconian solution, but one within which the solidarity of the labor movement disappears as individuals and small groups struggle to preserve their living standards in the face of an all-round decline; inevitably, though rather more gently, the strong become stronger and the weak weaker—scenario two ends up much like scenario one. Against these, Stretton poses scenario three, which he regards as rational, desirable, and possible (though not inevitable—he is no sense a deter-

minist). This scenario rests on the value judgement that fraternity and co-operation are to be preferred to individualism and competition, and on the belief that men, rational beings rather than human apes, will come to understand that this is where their interests lie. His book concludes: "Material equalities may not by themselves generate much brotherhood, but they are a necessary condition of it. They may soon be a condition of government by consent: the only workable basis left for social arrangements between political equals."

Stretton rates equality highest among his values; he suggests that environmental imperatives and continuing inflation will confront people with a choice between accepting a growing inequality or working their way towards a society in which the costs of controlling the rate of resource-usage and inflation are equitably shared. The greater part of his book is devoted to the development of detailed strategies which will produce the end he desires—among them, an incomes policy which redistributes from the top bracket to the bottom, and a new distribution of capital which gives everybody a share in the ownership of productive resources. He argues strongly, and convincingly, that 'domestic production' (which is not counted as part of the gross national product, because it is not carried out for wages) represents a major part of total production; that a growth in domestic production moves society in an egalitarian direction; and that therefore it should be central to socialist policy to distribute universally—and preferably equally—a basic supply of domestic capital—house, land, equipment. "Socialism should cease to be the factory-floor and chicken-battery party and become the hearth-and-home, do-it-yourself party." There is much to argue with in Stretton's analysis, but he offers us the most coherent, and the most suggestive, thinking about possible futures that we have had in many years.

If Labor is to rebuild the electoral base which it needs to regain power, it must deepen its understanding in at least these three areas: the nature of its electoral base, and Labor's relation to that base; the major social and economic problems which it confronts, practical programs appropriate to those problems, and the conditions under which such programs can be realised; its ideals and values, or, if you like, its ideology. In other words, the day of easy-going pragmatism has ended; Labor can no longer exist as a party of

“socialism without doctrines” (as a French observer, Albert Mélin, described it at the beginning of the century); it must begin to evolve and to enunciate a clear and distinctive social philosophy of its own. (That is not to deny the value of the ideas which have come forward in the last twenty years from many sections of the movement, from the Fabians, the Marxists, the Socialist Left, and from many individuals, among whom Gough Whitlam must be rated high. It is rather to suggest that, if Labor is to take its place as the natural government of Australia, the discussion must move beyond the narrow bounds of individuals and often factional minorities to embrace the whole of the movement and its electoral base.) I do not have space to do more than sketch what seem to me to be some of the most important questions.

Labor has traditionally been silent about the values which underlie its program—or at best vague, describing its values in such terms as “social welfare” and “social justice”, without seeking to give a more precise definition to them. Hugh Stretton argues cogently that equality is the central value of socialism. I would agree with that but go somewhat further to say that I believe that contemporary socialism should incorporate at least this set of values: libertarian, egalitarian, and democratic. (Gareth Evans has a valuable discussion of this in a recent article, “Labor and the Constitution”, in *Meanjin*.) By “libertarian”, I mean not only the traditional freedoms of speech, publication and assembly, but that government should seek to maximise the range of choice available to all its citizens (rather than maximising the options of the few at the expense of the many). By “egalitarian”, I mean not merely ‘equality of opportunity’ but that government should move towards equalising material benefits, the distribution of goods and services. (I agree profoundly with Stretton that “material incentives are *not* needed to get the very highest performance from the very ablest people”, and that “the lovers of inequality talk [rubbish] on that subject”. But in order to transcend material incentives as the central motive, work must seem inherently interesting or socially useful or, preferably, both.) By “democratic”, I do not mean just the formalities of representative political democracy (which I believe will remain with us: ‘direct democracy’ can only work in relatively small units) but a ‘participatory democracy’ in the sense that government seeks continually to decentralise the

processes of decision-making and administrative control. Evans comments, I think rightly, that “there are probably not many of those who would call themselves socialists (or, maybe more accurately, those who would be embarrassed *denying* they were socialists) who would buy the whole package”. And, within the labor movement, there are some inbuilt obstacles to realising these values. Observation suggests that libertarian (‘permissive’) values are more acceptable to ‘middle class’ people than to the industrial working class. ‘Relativities’ (that is, the maintenance of income differentials) remain a major concern of many trade unions. If ‘participatory democracy’ is to mean truly popular control rather than manipulation by activist minorities, it will require an investment of time and energy which Australians have shown themselves reluctant to make. The difficulties are manifold and undeniable. But what is important is the direction of movement—that the policies and administrative actions of Labor should be judged by these yardsticks. If such a judgement is to be made, the movement must first recognise that these are indeed the appropriate yardsticks.

Traditionally, the labor movement, or at least its Marxist wing, has held that socialist values can only be realised if private ownership of the means of production gives way to social ownership. A more sophisticated recent version of this argument asserts that particular, detailed movements in the direction of liberty, equality and democracy are an illusion which conceals the reality of the continuing existence of authoritarianism, inequality, and unfreedom—that is, ‘repressive tolerance.’ I do not accept the second argument; on the contrary, I believe that every extension of liberty, equality and democracy increases the appetite for these goods. The argument about social ownership is harder. The experience of the communist command economies demonstrates that the realisation of socialist values does not automatically follow from state ownership; whether social ownership is a necessary condition for such a realisation is an open question. At least this might be said: state ownership is not necessary to social control; some forms of productive activity (for example, local retailing, repair services) might be better carried out by private entrepreneurs; there are many forms, and perhaps even some degrees, of social ownership other than state ownership, all of which deserve consideration and experiment in



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order to determine how socialist values are best served.

It is beyond my scope (and for that matter my ability) to try to delineate a detailed program; that requires long discussion both by experts and by the movement as a whole. But this much seems clear. If Labor is to become the 'natural' government in Australia (in the sense in which social-democratic parties have come to be the natural governments of the Scandinavian countries), a socialist program must be set within the framework of the long-term problems. Stretton isolates inflation and the possible environmental/resources crisis as major threats to socialist values. To those I would add technological change, and the growing advantage which advanced industrial societies enjoy over the Third World in terms of capital resources, which threaten to create new technocratic power structures and to increase inequalities. A socialist program must be written within these parameters, and it must incorporate an order of priorities. That requires the understanding and agreement of both the movement and its electorate—and above all of the trade union movement, which has traditionally concerned itself with immediate sectional advance, assuming that if it looked after the days the decades would look after themselves. (The unionist 'green ban' movement is a notable exception to that general comment. More important even than the immediate issues is the change that this implies in the time-scale of trade union thinking; though, in the short run, it may prove difficult for the unions concerned to maintain these policies in the face of growing unemployment.) The condition for the realisation of a socialist program, which will necessarily involve sacrifices as well as gains, is the involvement of the movement and the electorate in its creation and implementation.

(Questions of the style of government, and of the relations between government and the civil service, are also of great significance. The caucus system was established as an expression of party democracy and a check on arbitrary leadership, but too often it became a field of battle rather than a means of reaching agreement on policies and setting priorities; new ground rules are urgently needed. And it seems to me that consideration should be given to the possibility of restructuring the administrative apparatus so that departmental secretaries come and go with governments. But those are matters that need more detailed discussion.)

Finally, Labor can only realise its values and its programs if it understands its own nature, and that of the electorate it represents. The pattern of Australian society, and its electoral system, are such that Labor cannot win a parliamentary majority on the basis of the support of the industrial working class alone. Everyone knows that to be true; but the recognition is often grudging. The potential Labor electorate covers the whole spectrum of wage and salary earners—professionals, intellectuals and white collar workers as well as industrial workers. In the past, Labor's electorate covered a significant section of small working farmers; it is a tragedy that that support has been lost. Within that electorate, there is a conflict as well as a potential community of interest. Labor's program must centre on making its electorate aware of the pressing long-term problems which confront it and on the common interest in finding appropriate solutions to those problems (which means persuading its electorate that the general pursuit of sectional solutions can only lead to general defeat).

If Labor is to secure its electoral base, the party itself must reflect that base. Labor is nothing if it is not a broad radical consensus party, in general agreement on its values, the nature of the problems which confront Australia, the program appropriate to those problems, and a practical order of priorities. Vanguard parties and single-issue movements are an important part of the Australian political process; they are a counterweight to the inevitable tendency of a broad consensus party to compromise, and they help to create the climate of opinion within which the consensus party operates; but they cannot take the place of the consensus party, which necessarily walks a narrow path between offering a lead to its electorate and getting so far ahead that it is out of sight. The democratic process leads to cumulative rather than immediately comprehensive change; movement beyond the present radical consensus requires establishing the legitimacy of that consensus rather than seeking to outflank it with a revolutionary critique.

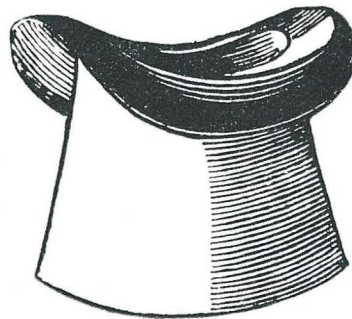
The survey edited by Gordon Greenwood, *Australia: A Social and Political History*, was published in 1955. That edited by Frank Crowley, *A New History of Australia*, followed twenty years later. What will the historian who contributes the chapter on the 1970s to the 1995

survey have to say about the Labor government of 1972-75? If past patterns continue, he or she is likely to be between forty and fifty years old when he/she writes the chapter—born sometime in the post-war decade, between twenty and thirty when the government was brought to its untimely end, probably sympathetic to the government and bitterly hostile to the action of the Governor-General. This is not likely to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, so I am prepared to chance my hand at the last few sentences:

The quarter-century of conservative rule, during which foreign relations and the economy had been dominated by foreign (notably American) power and interests, was brought to an end by the debacle of Vietnam. The Labor government which came precariously to power in 1972 sought to establish a new independence in international affairs and new economic and social priorities, which it enshrined in a new rhetoric and symbolism. It confronted the unprecedented hostility of Australian capital and other special interests, and of powerful multi-national corporations whose dominant position in the Australian economy it threatened; and it suffered grievously from internal division and deficiency of performance. An aggrieved and frightened establishment, a bitterly hostile Opposition which controlled the Senate (the 'Upper House' in the then bicameral legislature) and a compliant head of state combined to remove the Labor government from office in 1975. But, without

being fully aware of it, the Whitlam government was pursuing policies which anticipated the shift in the international balance of power, soon to eventuate, and the new priorities which were set by the growing awareness of environmental imperatives. The novel, and for their time radical, policies of the 1972-75 Labor governments created new expectations in the Australian electorate; at the same time the policies of the conservative coalition which came to power in 1975 proved unable to cope with new international and domestic (social and environmental) exigencies. Acting in an untypically volatile manner, the Australian electorate swept the conservatives out of office in . . . [Here, my courage fails me.] The return of Labor to power, and the subsequent reform of the Australian political system (which included Australia becoming a republic within the British Commonwealth, on the Indian pattern), created a new political consensus; it resulted in the disappearance of conservatism as an effective alternative to social-democratic government and the emergence of a lively opposition on the government's left, which enjoyed a growing popular support.

That paragraph may, of course, turn out to be evidence not so much of my prescience as of the likelihood that the only characteristic which all socialists share is a residual and irrepressible optimism. But I hope not—and, anyway, I'm not likely to be around to check it out.



JOHN MORRISON **Frank Davison**

Owen Webster's glimpse (Overland 61) of Frank Dalby Davison battling it out in Queensland as a young selector fits well with the Frank Davison I got to know as an elderly literary gent still battling it out — on a small farm at Hurstbridge, Victoria, named "Folding Hills".

In 1963 I had a heart attack. Not what is so dramatically known as a "massive coronary", but sufficiently severe for me to be certified as unfit for any more of the manual occupations I'd followed for over forty years. My anxieties at the time were as much economic as physical.

Friends, however, served me well. Local mates — and they ranged from a laborer to a solicitor — took over the essential odd jobs a man has to do about house and garden, while the literary fraternity rallied handsomely on the economic front.

Which brings me to Frank Davison. Within days of my bad luck getting around there came from him one of the warmest letters I had ever received. Short, quietly sympathetic, and finishing right to the point. Knowing from experience, he wrote, that illness in a working man always brings with it financial worries, he assured me that if a "long loan" of £50 would help to smooth the way he would be delighted.

Nothing could have been more characteristic of the man than the delicacy of that "long loan", the real meaning of which I never doubted. All the evidence of the early 1960s indicated that he and his wife Marie were making only a modest living milking their small dairy herd out at Hurstbridge. £50 would be a lot of money to them then.

There's no denying that Frank could be irascible. I myself was ticked off on two occasions when I felt I hardly deserved it. Older members of the Fellowship of Writers have told me of a meeting when, from all accounts, Frank

exploded rather reprehensibly. And there was a night at "Folding Hills" which found me there when the cows were calving. Marie — who, I should explain, was inclined to treat all the cows as family pets — went out just before bedtime to check up on that corner of a near paddock which was favored as a labor ward. When, a few minutes later, she returned to announce that Susie (it might have been Sally or Pansy) was in trouble and that we might be in for a hectic night, Frank startled me by letting himself go in an outburst that consigned cows and all their accursed progeny to a blistering, everlasting, and decidedly obscene hell.

Anyone who knew him, however, would agree with me that such outbursts were nothing more than the spontaneous and fleeting reactions of a man who, always forthright, was nevertheless fundamentally kind and tolerant. Not every writer's work reflects the person. I think Frank Davison's does. There aren't any all-black scoundrels in it; at the worst only a few weaklings in an interesting variety of shapes and sizes. He had an impish sense of humor, looked on all of us with an eye more indulgent than censorious, helped many young writers, was one of the founders of the Victorian branch of our Fellowship, and was never a malicious critic. Knowing that he had been a leading contributor to the Bulletin's Red Page, I once asked him what his approach to reviewing had been, and received the reply: "Be as gentle as you can, John. Be as gentle as you can."

He is the only *Coast to Coast* editor who, mindful of his own painful experiences with those early rejection slips, seized the chance, in an introduction, to offer a few words of comfort to the failed. Referring to his experiences as an adjudicator in several national short story competitions, he wrote: "I have often regretted the

lack of opportunity to pierce with a few explanatory words the seemingly god-like silence that follows the bare announcement of a decision. I have in mind the entrant who has had an hour darkened by the return of a fat package . . .”, from where he proceeded to lay bare some of the pitfalls and mirages that lie in the path of the struggling beginner. One of the most concise and helpful statements on the art of the short story I’ve ever come across. Only a compassionate man would have done that.

The same Frank Davison could, of course, play it rough wherever he got a whiff of cant or pretentiousness, or when he felt that a newcomer worth his attention was letting the side down. In his introduction to my own first collection of short stories (*Sailors Belong Ships*) he had no hesitation in declaring that one of them “stuck in his literary maw”, and that certain others were “meretricious”, a fault he had a particularly keen nose for. (Still, in regard to my own work I can’t resist observing here that he turned out to be at fault in his dislike of a later story, “Morning Glory”, where his sensitivity as a poultry farmer appeared to get the better of his literary judgement. But let me be fair: he himself had suffered losses from thieves and vandals about that time, one of his neighbors had just had a good cow crippled by some weekend shooter, and another had had a bullet shot through a precious tank of water right in the middle of a dry summer.)

Frank shared the hostility of the near rural fraternity to gun-toting city louts, but there was nothing in him of the selfish and possessive landowner. He was lucky to escape a bashing one Sunday when he challenged a shooting party just as they were about to knock over one of the few kangaroos surviving in the district. But a family group poking over his paddocks for a few mushrooms would be looked on with a benign eye. I once asked him what on earth was the meaning of a series of gaunt erections like big black gallows which, since my previous visit, had appeared on one of his rolling hillsides.

“You don’t like them, John? As a matter of fact, neither do I. But a young trendy artist came in here one day and asked me if I’d let him put them up. A crazy idea; he wanted to see what they’d look like on a big green background. He seemed a nice bloke; I told him to help himself. What the heck — it made him happy.”

I used to look forward immensely to those periodical invitations to spend a weekend at

“Folding Hills.” The name was well chosen, with its suggestion of rest and peace. Set amid softly rolling hills, and with only one (distant) homestead in sight, the property gives a pleasant illusion of being 300 miles out of Melbourne rather than its actual thirty. If I were asked to sum up in one word its attraction for me in the 1950s I would say it was quiet. Quiet. I was working very hard then, with long hours of travel to and from, and a peck of anxieties to boot. “Folding Hills” was a badly needed breather, an escape. It was mellow, warm, low key, like everything else about the Davisons. A very typical, old, work-worn, Australian small homestead, updated a bit in Marie’s excellent taste, but retaining a quite spartan simplicity. Books in every room, and none of that often kitschy conglomeration of odds and ends known as bric-a-brac. A quiet man who would as soon listen as talk, who made you feel he really wanted to know what you thought of this or that. And a quiet woman, a woman of great charm, who went unobtrusively about the preparation of a first-class dinner without for a moment losing place in whatever was under discussion. Marie knows her books — and human nature — as well as any of us, and conversation was always three-sided.

Except on special occasions the Davisons lived in the kitchen, and I always took it as a compliment that I was not a special occasion. We had dinner at the kitchen table, and then, lubricated by an occasional coffee or sherry, stayed there yarning until it was time to go to bed. On my bedside table — I understood the Davisons better than ever to protest over being given the main bedroom on my one or two night stands — there was a photograph of Frank taken in the prime of life. It showed a decidedly handsome man wearing evening clothes and looking very much the distinguished author. The images of him that linger with me, however, are of Frank Davison the countryman who gave us *Man-Shy* and *Dusty* and some of the best short stories in Australian literature; Frank Davison, work-stained and gum-booted, slopping around a muddy cow-yard or leaning on a fence thoughtfully contemplating one of Marie’s pregnant pets; Frank Davison in the evening, changed into clean work clothes, crouched opposite me across the kitchen table, tin of roll-your-own tobacco and flagon of sherry at elbow, staring at me with rapt and amiable interest.

He was one of the best listeners I ever met,

never rudely anxious to project himself, and always ready to give fair consideration to an original idea or one he didn't share. A man who didn't rush to judgement and then pull out all stops in an effort to hold a weak position. He had plenty of convictions, but didn't feel under an obligation to take a firm stand one way or another on every issue that cropped up. All of which made him a formidable opponent whenever he did feel an urge to dig in.

One of our points of difference was the work of Vance Palmer. Vance was one of Frank's closest friends in the literary fraternity; they were mates. And I well remember the characteristic dropping of the corners of Frank's mouth when, one evening, I expressed a lack of enthusiasm for Vance's writing.

"You know, John," he said, "I think you'll find that when there's been time for him to be properly assessed he'll be recognised as the Australian writer who left the best overall picture of the period he lived in."

A few minutes later, when we'd got into a discussion of Vance's work he referred to him as "a man of great moderation". Which is, I think, one reason why V.P.'s books have never deeply impressed me. Too much the accomplished technician, and too little the warm and thoughtful artist. I said so to Frank, but the point was allowed to languish. Perhaps friendship inhibited the pronouncement of a cold literary judgement. Perhaps he was reluctant to take the mickey out of a guest. I do know that I was left with an impression that he didn't altogether disagree with me.

There must have been some rich discussions around that kitchen table when Vance and Nettie were visiting. It isn't difficult to comprehend the affection existing between the two couples. The word 'quietness' comes back to me. Four quiet people; moderation applied to all of them when it came to talking, with, I suspect, no very sharp points of difference, but any one of them capable of discovering a fresh angle to whatever came under scrutiny. It's a regret that I only once shared a table with the quartet, and that was early in my acquaintance with them, when Frank and Marie were rooming in East Melbourne, and when I, a wharfie and with only a few short stories to my name, was too overawed to enjoy the occasion. I got to know Vance also fairly well later, and owe much as a writer to both men, but never had another

opportunity to sit with them together. I'd have liked to, if only to compare the springs of their respective talents, something which is always revealed in what writers like to talk about. I think Vance would have been happiest talking about literature, while Frank was at his best on what literature is all about — men and women. Both had the encouragement of young talent very much at heart. The difference between them there was that Vance labored at an organisational/national level, while Frank would be better — well, chin to chin across a kitchen table.

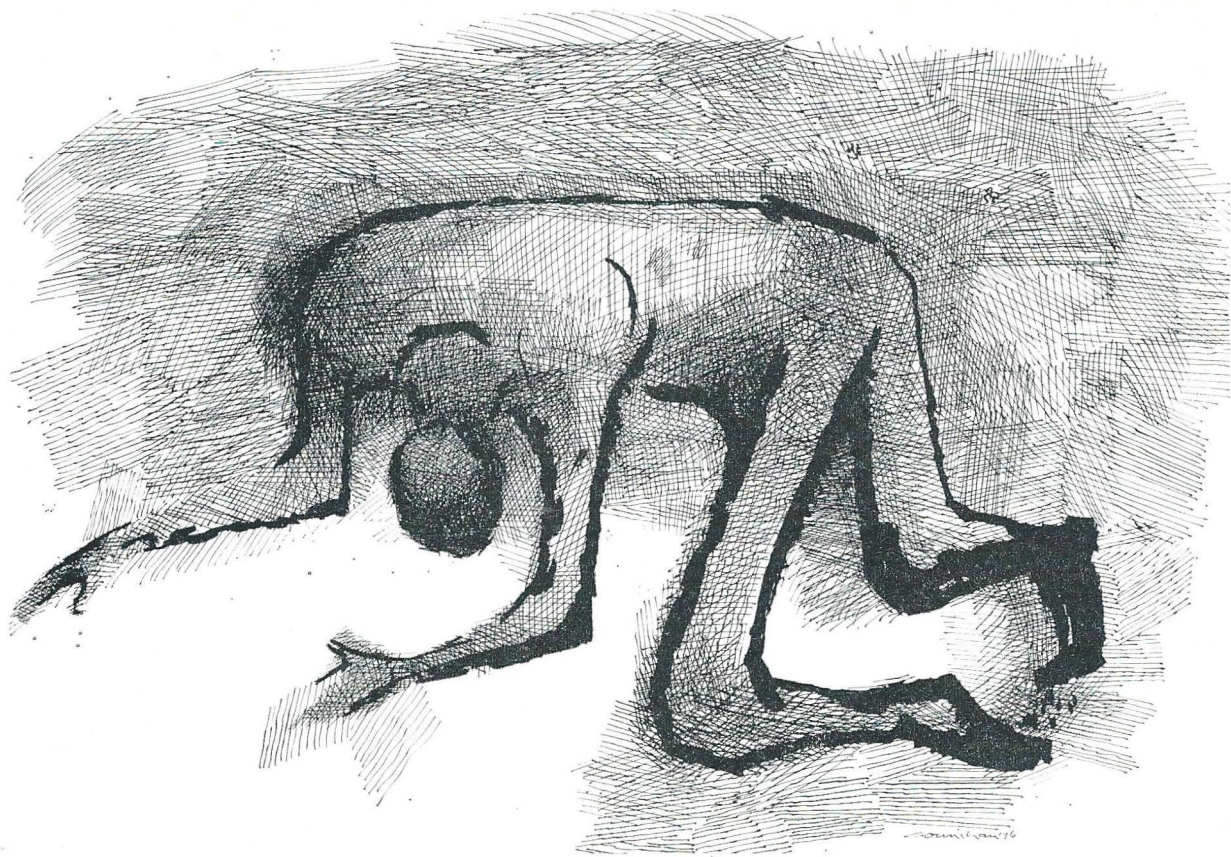
A fellow writer has expressed the opinion to me that there was something of the English squire in Frank. He was probably right — in a special sense — but I think it could be more truly said of Vance Palmer. Vance was — and, from what I know, intended to be from the beginning — a professional writer. Frank wanted to be a writer on terms which had nothing to do with economics, which meant that his nose always remained closer to the earth, his ear better attuned to the common voice. He never saw himself as a literary big shot; never suggested that either critics or public under-rated him. On the contrary — "You know, John," he told me once, "I've been very well treated on the strength of a very small body of work."

And there was the day when I asked him if there was any truth in the suggestion, usually coming from the literary left-wing, that his book *Man-Shy* is an allegory, with the brave little red cow representing Man in his eternal struggle for freedom.

A dry smile indicated that he'd heard it all before. "It's just the story of a bloody cow, John. And what's wrong with that? I knew that little heifer. She had guts. If she couldn't jump over a fence she'd wriggle under it. And if she couldn't wriggle under it she'd go through it. She was a story —"

No equivocation for Frank Davison, either allegorical or anthropomorphic. The little red heifer is just an animal, like *Dusty* the sheep-dog. And the thirsting horses on which his Australian cavalymen fought like tigers for possession of the wells of Beersheeba.

I for one, however, find him at his literary best when he is contemplating with the same warm objectivity those so-much-more complicated animals, men and women, as in his short story collection *The Road to Yesterday*.



NOEL COUNIHAN

Study of falling figure

Demonstrator



Counihan '76

Thoughts at Prospect Cemetery

IAN MACDOUGALL

She died of a stroke.

Paralysed, she said she wanted to go home, to her own little fibro cottage.

She had come from the bush to Sydney when her kids were still fairly young, just after the Great War. They moved out there from Leichhardt to a rented house, and when the kids finally left home she built that fibro cottage, late in the depression.

It was a winding, pot-holed dirt track of a street then, ending in a dead end at the cow paddock, with four houses, a lot of paspalum and standing ironbark. She kept a soft-eyed Jersey cow on the other half of her block, along with a tin shed to milk it in.

The grass is all thick matted lawn now, and old deaf Mr Lee over the road who used to shout to us kids at the top of his voice "WHAT'S THAT YER SAY?" is sixteen years dead too.

A lot of things pass in the suburbs in sixteen years. The big cow paddock is a pounding through road with semis up and down it all the time. A grimy new red brick and car-park shopping centre—no old wooden verandah posts as she knew back in Mungindi—hospital and school, agonise in texture and terra cotta and oil slicks through the heat of the summer.

The flies have fallen to Shelltox strips—inside the houses, that is. And Taylor's black and white Guernsey cow that she encountered badly half-way up the road one day—"The brute came at me from behind, and then it was up and down, up and down, up and down: oh, I've got a terrible awful back!"—went to the butchers twelve years ago.

The Stells' house, once prominent on the ridge, is lost now in a sea of isolated brick veneers and fibros and texture brick cladding.

Corrugated iron and undressed posts are out

now. And dirt floors in cowsheds. And cowsheds.

The waterhole we rolled Mr Lee's jam melons into when we were six has been lengthened out into a stormwater drain, and the blackberries finally cleared away.

The trains used to rattle past down the line, whistling and blowing smoke, on their way to the distant town of Katoomba, sixty miles away or something, then Mount Victoria and points west, light years away. The little puffing billy 32's, that couldn't make it up the foothills beyond Penrith: the wonderful 36's and 38's and the 57's and 58's—the greatest engines ever assembled—that went blue whaling down the line and on out of sight into the cutting towards Blacktown, made the world of a child even smaller by comparison than it really was. Though it was small enough then.

Now the electrics and diesel-electrics thunder past to the suburbs of Katoomba and Mount Victoria, and the 747's screech westward. The fan in the Braemar heater resonates through the steel frame without so much as a vibrato, let alone the sound of charcoals collapsing in the glow. To think this taxi ride of a place was once a town in its own right. Seven Hills.

They tell me that it is one of Greenway's churches, up on the hill over the cemetery. A shell now, rotten and desolate, obscenities written up on the walls in charcoal and Johnno was here 5.6.69, beer bottles and the breakdown stink of urine coming up through the very mortar. But you can't blame the hoods and bikies for having their orgies in here, any more than the Hodads, the Bodgies, the two-bob lairs or the larrikin push. It's never been less exciting to grow up in, this district.

But it's still a great old Georgian church, even now more dignified and real to the memory of the settlers lying in this suburban earth than can

be brought back by all the Billy Graham revivals, polished brass lecterns and fund drives by the Wells organisation. Religion is nothing, really, if you can't be buried alongside your neighbour friends in your own churchyard.

She said in a swirling subconscious reflex that she wanted to go back home, paralysed down one side, breathing shallower each time, her brain lying wet with blood inside her head and slowly dying.

She never came back. We drove out behind the hearse to that churchyard, and the men fought their tears and bit their lower lips, and the women

cried as this little old Irish woman who had been closer to the soil than anyone was finally lowered into it.

Overhead, the 22,000 volt lines dip and rise and march by sixes away, and hum on the insulators in the rain.

The Western Distributor will be coming through soon.

Childhood curiosity: "Nanna . . ." She was in the wash house at the tubs. "How do you spell 'bun'?"

"Why, that's b - u - n."

She'd never been to school in her life. She told me later that she learned to count by count-

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ing the stars over her parents' bog Irish pig farm in New Zealand. God knows how she ever taught herself to read. Very few ever manage that.

"Then how do you spell **BUM!**"

You could hardly get that out for laughing, then you went for your life.

"I'll not have you teaching Ian language like that. He's my little grandson." The innocent little bastard.

Watch the cow as she backs out, horns bumping about in the wood of the bails. The jam melons kept rolling in the water, just floating. Beautiful to watch them sink and then just slowly break the surface again, rolling. Like a season changing.

"Your uncle Arthur kept canaries in there when he was a little boy."

The aviary was enormous, but birdless now. Full of tools, bags of lime, superphosphate and shellgrit and seeds.

"You can have it to raise birds in one day. But you have to be big enough to take care of them."

"Mrs Stell's very bad. Can't make it back up the hill when she comes down to see me. Oh, it's terrible awful. Dadda! Dadda! she keeps calling out. Then she has to lean on him all the way back."

"Me chickies are good because of all the green feed. I give 'em loads and loads all the time.

"It's the garlic that keeps the turkeys healthy.

"It's because I rot down all the leafs and digs 'em in."

She said: "Can you let me have this tree?"

They said: "OK lady. Just for you we'll even cut it up with the chain saw and cart it down in the truck."

"I can manage with the barra."

"Oh, steady! Steady!" Children are always knocking things over.

"So she came running out. Oh Mrs Martin, let me wheel that! So she started wheelin' it, puffin' and blowin', puffin' and blowin'. Then she had to let me take over again!"

"Mum, she does know you're 85!"

It was true. The sparkle was going from her voice.

She wrote letters with a shaky child's hand. Do the other jackeroos have motor-bikes? Don't you buy a motor-bike. They are only death traps. Watch out for the horses. They kicks back. . .

Her husband had been a stockman, mail coach driver and shearer. He held ticket number 46 in

the Shearers' Union, and was in the great strike of '91. But he fell victim to a chronic disease called gambling, and they separated.

She once had to watch helplessly as he was dragged by the foot around the yard by a bolting horse. So watch out for the horses.

—Mrs Martin blushed when the rector thanked her for her chickens. . .

There was that bush yarn about her. She had a little lolly shop in Mungindi on the Queensland border, around 1913. It was in the main street, and sandwiched between the town's two pubs.

All the buildings were wooden, and one day one of the pubs caught fire. To save the other, so the story goes, all the town's men hitched up a team of horses or bullocks to the lolly shop and pulled it clear out from in between. The legend of the battler. . .

By the time she died, she'd given nearly all her few possessions away. She knew it was coming, but she expected it to be a heart attack. She'd expected a fatal heart attack soon since the night twenty years ago when she'd taken that turn and thought she wouldn't see daylight, and had left the back door unlocked so that they wouldn't have to break it down to get in when they eventually realised she'd died.

"There son. That's money towards your farm."

Always a bloody fiver. On her pension.

"I just want to live long enough to see Ian settled on his farm."

Perhaps that's why she lived so long.

Mrs Stell's dead.

Mr Stell's dead.

There was always a strong, lively clutch in greetings from her little arms and body and her broad gripping hands. A wrinkled and affectionate, almost childlike kiss goodbye. A wave out of the back seat of Arthur's Holden.

Never again. Those sliprails are down for good now.

Beneath this clay is the little old woman I saw in her white lace funeral dress with its high lace 1890s collar, and with her hands square folded and her breathing strangely still.

This is the soil from which I grew. Down there are my genes and molecules, passing back into what is left of the eternal cycle.

Every grandchild should have at least one such spot to come to.

Pentecostal Witness Punches Poet!
— No Witnesses

Except His Children

No — not His children — Mine.
It was probably my fault, anyway
(Poet claimed, proving . . .)

Poets Know More About Guilt

It must have been the Wrath
of God come in Judgement
(Poet explained afterwards
in his hotel suite.)

He t'rew his T'ree punches —
I'd been in training, fast
footwork and second dan defensive
irony; but the Holy T'ird got me,
just inside my threshold,
right in the breadbasket.

A Gut Reaction:

Pentecostal Poet Punches Witness

Pushed, actually: do get it right.
And I said, I started it.
(Rejecting religion? Reactionary rampage?)
No — in fact, he was pushing
Glad Tidings soda pop.

(Has it left a bad taste?
Does the whole thing stink?)

Oh no, a tiny
passionfruitflavored nuisance:
comes out like a lion,
lies flat on the mat.

ANDREW McDONALD

Incident at Mysia

Insistent, indifferent, they clutch at his arms,
Hylas agape, recoiling in dislike;
he wanting water, water wanting him
will not surrender. The cool hands
of girls among white lilies are relentless,
with death strong tentacles they pull him down,
to roll him, his blue tunic belling out,
through water weeds and scuds of little fish,
down to their chilly caves' unfruitful deeps.

What pleasure had the naiads of their catch,
Hercules' lover, disinclined for girls?
and when his absence shook the Troad coast
with shouting, "Hylas! Hylas! Hylas!"
Did a drowned body rise, bloating, through lilies?

BARBARA GILES

Indecent Exposure

Feeling suddenly free
one daylight-saving
water-restriction,
fire-ban summery night

he dropped his daks,
threw away his shirt,
set up an illegal sprinkler
for the cool hell of it

and raced around the avenues
for the tickle of getting dry.
The open roses yearned for him
behind their cyclone fence.

He tried to tell the jury
of gardeners holding hoses
calling him luck. No ears
could understand hibiscus

bush all mouths, maids
who did not meet his eye
nor turn away, who bared
their thighs on steamer chairs

in that late heat.
The jury slapped him down
with a word: foreman
was a public figure, known

about the district, tough
and moral, would not take
that nonsense. You know him,
probably sold you your house,

old army man, retired.
You've seen him: Dawn Service,
the march, Vietnam medals
flashing and bobbing in the sun.

JOHN GRIFFIN

The Act Provides

we,
all of us,
write or die
nonsense/trusense
in our own ways
jettisoned from
outriggers, caiques, dhows
Malinowski touched
the loving isles
Stow was another
but hardly/
anthropologic
an undefeated
'hard case'
we subbed the journals
of imperial geographer
Mikloucho-Maklai
(Maclay/in oz)
with blacks some in-
explicable years, boundaries
& legendary 'grand-pigs'
followed tropical tides
not banking on
spilling jugulars
with vibes/hypes
nor recalling cold (so cold)
with nothing about
warmth
Nero, Vespasian,
decadent *wantaim* friends
lived quietly enough
(masters/monsters)
in acts of
creation
as the law was then
& now
the local co-ops
of south-crossed
crane chasers/troppo,
brain-fagged, bitter,
swell with
fellow feeling

bro,
under the torrid sun,
i query yu:
whats the object/
trouve
of that
freedom

DON MAYNARD

The Mother Superior

Being Mother Superior, how pleasant it was,
While high above her her great buildings stood
And two by two the nuns trooped into Mass
To walk with blue eyes sparkling under her hood
With her own visiting family in the garden
And be herself and talk their childhood idiom
And let it all drop a while, her convent's burden,
The isolation, the splendor and the tedium.

So firm she stood, unfaltering in her belief,
Yet once when she was walking with her people,
Said "Wouldn't it be awful," pausing then like Eve
To take one secret nibble at that apple,
"Wouldn't it be awful if it was all a have?"
Then crossed herself and hurried into the chapel.

DOUGLAS STEWART

At Wentworth Falls Lookout

(for Paul McGillick)

Nobody now offers answers, only questions.
But urgent sonorities of our blood continue;
cathedrals build on its rhythmic pulse.
Above Megalong Valley a tenacious hawk
spires slowly, rising on the translucent
valley mist above vision-clubbed trees.
Small, furtive scuttlings by the creek:
this search for safety. Ogled. Coup d'oeil.
If we stand here, vantaged, and imagine
floating softly down to that svelte cope,
it is because we still make some replies;
knowing mouth, bowel, eye, and flexed fingers.

VIV KITSON

Fruit Market

The weak light does not reach the back of a cell.

Padlocks secure the grilles and cage doors
for Saturday solely, next Saturday.
Skin shed of a giant serpent, a peel spun off an enormous fruit
the rubbish streams and twists along the gutters
a decimal point that plays through the square root of purpose
— as simple as certain dimensions.
Banana merchants, the import / export traders
SCIENTIFIC and ALL STATES TOO
hold this Orient casual in ugliness,
in strong maternal arches.
And the carny signboards so bright they lure silver
right now when the streets are deserted. Music
and cranky children
will not, have never, failed them.
Uphill in a small bowl of light floats the silent theatre.

Along the top of the darkest building in white tiles
a line of crossroads, of starglow, which stands forth.

ROBERT HARRIS

The Way Home

High, the wind cold has picked the clouds
fishbone clean. From Canberra we scud the hills
up to Braidwood: sheep in a cotton coat,
hot pies in the lee of a pub
Australia
a lake silverly rising or seeping dry.
I was going to say I don't know why
my country (bores you) tires you
all that space out there and you so cramped
in the back seat two adults two kids,
but perhaps your sleeping is just
a hopeless envy.

One of us in this car doesn't love
my country. Against the pillow, is it you
slack with car-sick draughts and trusting
the trees' indifference to continue? Is it
me (crouched over the wheel)
doubting the road?

MARK MACLEOD

Transposition

The idea of being another man
has always
admired me.

Has brushed my hair
in the bathroom mirror, slowly.

Has fondled my genitals carefully
and with great delicacy.

Has thrown my bags onto the train / has stood
on the platform at Central Station waving
me goodbye

and finally
has written me letters telling me
our love affair
is over.

LYNDON WALKER

Two poems travelling

A Little Unlicked

& i am tender sirloin, bleeding in a tray
in the refrigerated window of time —
this happens, just as a streetcar
slicing my vision of 20th St in two
hands it back to me, being gone.
i cross over Mission & idle
drinking carrot juice in a corner store
handing the cup back, empty
but for a little unlicked froth

L.A.

After the meeting, as if
artists rarely have a chance
to see private collections

guaranteed to destroy
'impossible' foot odors,
that was enough for Ruth:

when she saw the Doctor
coming toward her in a white coat
the child screamed —

"you goofed! Ten strokes for Abby
with a wet tongue depressor!"
runs out of the room.

RICHARD TIPPING

Sisters

*based on a film narrated by June
Langley about her sister Eve*

Aerialist

such delicate dancing
that streets are ballrooms
paved with eyes.

a crowd had come out
risking pickpockets & fatmen
— the sharks & whales of crowds —

to watch a soul's silent counterpoints
feathering death in the softspot
between officeblock shoulders.

a good death was always
a crowdpleaser
providing there is control

& certainly the police did much
yelling & made the
(by Law) shoving scene.

with eyes a polevault fulcrum
the crowd leapt back in itself
staring into meatcaves
the body flowed out to them

skull wide to the sky.
perhaps if birds had flown out,
white doves

even so, would they have asked
“was it worth the attempt
that's one dimension / too many?”
moving out on that line

the faces cricking up
plummeting down moving off
another black mark against the sky.

sprays of wattle move
over the window
“how, now
don't hurry me want to drink
me tea can't help the film running
out me tea is cold got to drink
it — you've finished yours
 ah yes that was me 18
went down to melbourne wanted
a job male only we go into
a shop i ask for a suit for
me brother same size as me try
it on

walking down the street me new
pants fall down eve covered me
got the job

 just like that
had to clamp meself down though
 and eve dead for 2 weeks
before they found her
 she liked living alone
in the bush

 with the hum of the wattle
 click of the long grass.

She didn't need people always writing
hadn't seen her for a long time we fell out
had a feeling that day though
i was psychic eve was psychic
our mother was psychic she came from
Gippsland.

 We decided to go fruitpicking
there dressed as men — i was “blue”
eve was “steve” no-one guessed
i was handsome all right — the girls liked me
 and the boys

yes, that's me in the picture there, yes
and that's her that's me sister
just decided to do it — needed work
 that's her dead for 2 weeks
i knew yes it was fun

 me sister alone in the
bush the hum of the wattle dead

 & me
in the picture not bad
 and her

 beside me
alone

COLLEEN BURKE

PHILIP COLLIER

The Dissidents

Do not, for you should not, underestimate
The absolutely overriding significance
Of biological circumstances in the study of
Human society.

The greatest force that makes for its cohesion
Is the mutual attraction of the sexes —
Males continuously potent, females receptive
For a high proportion

Of the reproductive period. Glancing sideways
At the mountain gorillas of the Eastern Congo
We see that the females were stable, while the virile males
Ranged free in encounter.

But in human societies — it is assumed — very early
The normal was the monogamous. Food habits
And sexual division of labor determined the dominance
Of the paternal.

(And sometimes in the long procession of human history
There has been heard a cry from either male or female —
“Oh, that I were a mountain gorilla from the Eastern Congo!”)

The possession of culture, by which one implies the patterns
Of behavior inherited by a group society,
Is not a possession confined to mankind only —
Consider birdsong.

Birdsong is produced from the lower portion of the larynx,
That is to say *the sweet bird's throat*, whence issue
Sounds for two purposes, both territorial, meaning
“Beware”, “Come hither”.

(And sometimes in the long procession of prehistorians
One will exclaim, “I weary of the continual examination
Of human sexual attraction in the study of cultural origins —
I'll settle for birdsong.”)

ROSEMARY DOBSON

The Six-Inch Dog

Bob the Ganger has sunk the dog
with four well-placed blows
of the ten pound hammer;
lefhanded:
righthanded: straight down, brush your ear as you'd
bowl an inswinger.

But the rhythm kept the same
— spot on —

that delightful swing
from high above his shoulders,
had a beginning at his toes

I nod; position my feet
incorrectly.
Again he demonstrates,
effortlessly . . .
delivering now from a slight stoop.

it's become as nothing or else like sugar in tea,
with the pain subdued,
over donkey's years
upon sleepers wrapped in ballast;
the pain's subdued,
kept within the muscle;
there are echoes of it sometimes when he smiles,
when it shuffles along, coughing
against the bone.

Lag of sinews/
i bounce one off the rail/
rev-er-ber-a-tive
tre-mors
annihilate my aura/mushrooms cloud
my frontal lobe
where his muscles drank
mine were led to water

“Keep a firm grip — size 'er up and strike it clean”

“Yeah, right Bob”

under their eyes (the track-gang's
around)

with an Ali disposition
i sink it in

“Five”
“Six”
“Seven”

MALCOLM BRODIE

Travelling

When sleeping towers and minarets,
beehives of glass and concrete,
spider-web bridges of steel,
improbable horizons,
heave up over the curve's edge,
we steam into a strangeness,
a speech quinine on the tongue
and breaking glass in the ears.

Women with flesh like honey
and men with eyes of bottle
reflect the long sea hunger
in bloom or glooming shine
but reject the mariners.

At the bottom of washaways
of steel, glass, plastic, concrete
they hold each other close
in vegetative loving.
For them we don't exist,
we're here but they don't see us.
Nobody knows a stranger.

We wander like smoke, thinking,
I am a seagull shadow
here. Here I am a movement
of second-hand wings in flight;
or is this land beyond the city real?
These boulders, are they solid,
these boulders and this lichen
white and scaly like dandruff,
this moss-spring hill, fist tree-tops,
or are they a trick of mirrors?

When I'm gone they disappear
perhaps. Perhaps they're mind rocks
mind-lichen, hill and treetops.

Desperate I kick the rock,
beat hand to knuckled bruises.
Watered by pain like a green shoot
I climb alive from my shrivelled root.

FRANK KELLAWAY

Ra'hel

Ra'hel, her eyes are not like almonds
almond-eyed Ra'hel.
The almond is a stone-fruit-stone
but not her eyes,
though sometimes they are stones
through which the light moon sometimes shines
grey-blue and cold.
More are they deep pools for subtle flowers of sense;
more they are quick and animal with life.
Around her eyes are wrinkles in the fresh skin
where the sly crows have trodden in their humor.
Look, her girl's face is delicate and uncertain
and suns in her smile unbind space-covered suns.
The tender-framing hair for the thrust and white light of her face
is black
and buck teeth make her strangely look
more strangely beautiful.
Still that is not Ra'hel.

FRANK KELLAWAY

Show me the Way to go Home

Writing off the top of my head one night,
I come into this house I used to call
My home as a stranger; like a blind man
Among derelict pots and pans, and clothes worn out
In the holes and damp flat smells of others,
I come back to this house I called my own.

And there two children I used to think were
My sons once, lay on their beds like actors,
Gravely asleep in dreams of their own . . . So
I kissed them goodnight, as I hope I would
Have done sometimes when this house was my home.
Oh yes! As I came writing off the top

Of this house one night, and found a woman
Lying alone, looking as though she could
Have been mine if this house had been my home,
I lay down beside her and, falling from
The top of my head, I loved her surely
As I must have — when this house was my home.

PETER STANSFIELD

The Music of the Spheres

Once there was music curved round us
like a womb. Once there was a Hand
Shuttling us from cradle to grave
to cradle, and there seemed no End.
We were the Centre then, yes we
were, till some damned scientific
prying eye in polished lenses
telescoped our light blue.

We burnt
him, of course, but the emptiness
still came bursting through.

And now we . . .

I perch here like a wingless fly
on a withering balloon: I
peering over the edge of things
watch the so-called fecund moon tide
the quick skin off this sole planet.
Now the down spinning sprays our green
hearts out, and nothing will cling here;
And now our two worlds hang in space
like chimes, tolling on the solar
wind, unheard, unfelt and unseen.

PETER STANSFIELD

Mary Rainbow

a photo of himself
taken in poor light
by the jacks
heel-cap toe-cap on th cat-walk
no moon, no visitors
a man's honor
her arms locked
in an alien sleep
is a woman's loneliness
begin strugglin' to keep
above suspicion
all goods marked down
nothin' hot that's not stolen
nothin' as nude as betrayal
cut lunch lust
youth a neighborhood
y had to move out of /

a free-way stuck its leg
thru th roof of yr house
kids on skateboards
people smile at award rates
lamplight stoops
th ballast of th enterprise
huge dogs lurk near blocks
of housing commission flats
on leases
live in a cautious world
— trust to lifts
in a world between jobs
on dole afternoons
in th greyness after movies
metal in th beer
step out of a grubby pub
into a street of bare arms

ERIC BEACH

East Timor Street

lived there nigh on thirty years
number one, that's all there is
y have to get there thru th railway yards now
there's more trains now
they tried to tell me
up at th G.P.O.
there's no street by that name
I should know
lived there nigh on thirty years
East Timor? they said
which suburb is that?

ERIC BEACH

Still Park

Still park near middle night
The wallaby down on all fours
on the sweet wet scented grass
moves only his mouth

The moon squats down to look
— there — between the two front-paws —
is it moonlight he is eating
is it grassblades

J. S. HARRY

swag

The attack by the I.A.C. on subsidies for the performing arts in Australia is at least partly justified. The vast extravaganzas of opera and ballet have achieved standards of excellence in one sense, but they have contributed little that is new, exciting or relevant to life in Australia today. Nor can the prices they charge and the system of priority booking for established subscribers be justified in the light of the subsidies they receive. These deficiencies do not, however, offer any justification for a policy of withdrawing subsidies which would lead to the disappearance of these art forms in Australia. Even the three per cent of the population who it is said comprise their audience amount to a sizable number of people. The elimination of subsidy would do nothing to increase this number. The direction of subsidy towards the provision of cheaper seats would diversify the composition of the audience.

Another line of attack by the I.A.C. on the performing arts is that the clearest benefit from their maintenance flows to the artists who work with them. There is no need to apologize for this. The arts policy adopted by the Whitlam government was intended to enable artists in all fields to pursue their careers in Australia. If the major companies do no more than make this possible, and allow their members to contribute their talents to other artistic enterprises, their existence would be justified. Certainly, it is not possible to achieve the alternative aims suggested by the I.A.C.—the cultivation of alternative arts forms, the support of education in the arts, and the extension of access to the arts, particularly

through electronic means—unless we make it possible for artists to maintain themselves in the community. What the report recommends is in fact a diversion of subsidy from artists to electronic technicians. It should be noted that if the recommendations of the I.A.C. were accepted no new or experimental company established in the next five years could be given continuing support.

The chief fault of the report however is that it applies inappropriate economic criteria, based on demonstrably false assumptions of the existence and value of a free market economy to what is essentially an issue of values. While political considerations ensure that there is little chance of the report being implemented as it stands, the danger is that its methods and conclusions may become accepted wisdom in the whole field of the arts. There is a need for people concerned with the health of the community to meet the challenge of arguing the value to Australia of subsidized and, in many cases, minority arts—truth is, after all, usually the possession of a minority—provided that they do not fall for the trap of agreeing with the commissioners that such a question can be settled by appeal to empirical evidence. We hope to publish some contributions to what we hope will be a continuing debate.

JOHN MCLAREN

Manning Clark and Leonie Kramer spoke briefly but movingly about Jim McAuley at the National Book Council annual dinner in Melbourne on 15 October. Manning remarked that when they first met at the Carlton Football Ground in 1943 both were having problems with their centre of gravity, but that even then it was possible to

discern a man "who had begun a great journey". Both Manning and Leonie mentioned Jim's magnificent honky-tonk piano playing, which I'm sorry I never heard. I never knew McAuley very well, and I suppose politics kept us apart to some extent. Whenever we were together, though, I enjoyed his tough gentleness, his wide gash of a smile and his good manners. We express our sense of loss at his death and send our sympathies to his family.

Henry Schoenheimer too is dead. He killed himself early in October, at the age I think of 58 or 59. As much as any single individual I can think of he represented the liberal conscience of our day, and his death was commented on and deplored and argued about and agonised over more than the death of anyone I have known well. Henry was cranky and lovable and a damn good occasional poet, in the Sagittarius class. I loved printing his verses, full of witty shafts, when I was editing the Victorian Teachers' Journal many years ago. John McLaren has said of him, in an admirable obituary in *Farrago* (15 October 1976): "He was not merely an idealist preaching a faith without facts. Although not particularly interested in empirical research on his own account, he had a rare gift both for recognising findings which were significant and for adjusting his ideas accordingly. He recognised that he lived in a real world whose boundaries are revealed by objective study, but he insisted that such studies, like the teaching of skills and facts, must serve a human end. His contribution was to make clear to us the ends we have it in our power to choose."

We were also sad to hear recently of the deaths of Ian Mudie and Ann Chloe Elder. Ian Mudie was a man who served literature in many ways, and a unaffected, charming Australian. We will review Ian Mudie's *Collected Poems* in our next issue. Ann Elder's poems, unfortunately, did not appear in our pages as often as we should have wished. Many readers will remember, however, her splendid reminiscence of Edouard Boro-vansky, which we reprinted in our anthology, *An Overland Muster*. We will be publishing shortly what we hope will be a definitive article on Ann Elder's work, to be written by Graham Rowlands.

Talking of *An Overland Muster*, the highly successful anthology of the first ten years of *Overland* which was published in 1965, I'm pleased

to announce that the Australian National University Press is to publish next year an anthology of the second ten years of this magazine. This will be an Australian literary 'first'—no Australian literary magazine has ever twice been anthologised—and present plans are to publish it for the Christmas market next year. A nice thing about this is that Brian Clouston, who as director of Jacaranda Press enthusiastically supported and published our first anthology, will, as the new director of A.N.U. Press, be the publisher of the second collection.

A splendid speech in the House of Representatives by Gough Whitlam, on 7 October 1976, should not be overlooked by *Overland* readers. In this long speech Whitlam analyses the shortcomings in the government's approach to the arts, and in particular takes up the cause of the three-year Literature Board grants (quoting at length from a letter of Judith Wright's) and attacks the transfer of public lending right to the Australia Council. "To a conservative government, the very idea of free artistic expression and the challenge to accepted ideas, the spirit of innovation, experiment and questioning implicit in creative art, are incomprehensible and dangerous." I am sure anyone interested could get a copy of this speech by writing to the Leader of the Opposition at Parliament House, Canberra.

What with Donald Grant's attack on *Poor Fellow my Country* in this issue, and Edward Kynaston's acid review in *Overland* 62, readers, and Xavier Herbert himself, might be justified in thinking we had a 'set' on him. Not at all. That's just the way things have turned out, and we are anxious to invite further contributions to discussion. Whatever the weaknesses of the book, it would be interesting to have some explanation of its sales. I've just rung William Collins, the publishers, and they tell me that the hardback edition has sold 28,000 copies, and that a paperback edition of 30,000 has just appeared. Even leaving the size and price of the book out of it, those must surely be record figures for an Australian novel so soon after publication. Perhaps *They're a Weird Mob* did better in the time, but I can't think of any other competitor.

Our readers are usually very patient with us but from time to time there are complaints about the length of time it takes us to handle manuscripts, and the delays in receiving copies of

Overland that have been subscribed to or ordered. On the first issue, may I respectfully remind writers that Overland is *entirely* edited in the spare time of very busy people, and no one receives a cent for their editorial work. (Vane Lindesay does receive a small fee for lay-out and art direction, because what he does for Overland is part of his professional livelihood.) On the second matter, the high cost of posting individual copies of Overland now makes it necessary for us to hold postings back for days or even a couple of weeks until we have enough accumulated to post at bulk rates. Sorry!

The National Book Council recently protested to Australia Post about the absence of book post in this country. We print here the deathless words of Mr A. F. Spratt, managing director of Australia Post, in his reply to the National Book Council:

The special book post was introduced in the last century when there was a real need to assist and encourage the dissemination of news and information, and to develop greater literacy in the Australian community. These purposes have largely lost relevance in today's environment.

At lunch with David Martin, down from Beechworth, the other day, he offered me some twisted proverbs: "Blood is sicker than water", "Hell hath no fury like a woman spermed" and "Too many cocks spoil the hen". Any to cap these? David's piece on louts and books, in this issue, was delivered to a recent seminar of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Melbourne.

And I thought our subscriber (and band leader at the annual cricket match), John Bergin, had a nice touch in two limericks he sent me:

*A professor of English named Morris
Once took out a girl from the chorus:
But he noticed, with pique,
By the end of the week
His roget becoming thesaurus.*

*At a lit'rary party, I learn,
Henry James was seduced in the fern-
ery humid and dense
By a lady intense
Whom he christened "the screw of the turn".*

And, while we are on the subject of 'found objects' so to speak, here is a piece Rupert Lockwood sent me. It is the farewell message delivered to members of the South Coast branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation, in September 1976, by Mr J. ("The Bomber") Williams, on his compulsory retirement at the age of 65:

*Fellow Members, South Coast Branch!
Having become redundant and outlived my usefulness as far as the employers and their agents are concerned and now thrown on the scapheap, which is not unusual and something which one can expect after working for years for the most ruthless employers of labor in the universe, whose ancestors from Drake down were pirates and plunderers of the seven seas, I can say without fear of contradiction I have got nothing from them, only abuse and ill use.*

However, fellow workers, I have the satisfaction of having worked and shared in the struggles to try and improve conditions from the Roster days with some of the most sincere, liberal and fair-dinkum men in the trade union movement.

So I'll say all the best to the members of the South Coast branch. Fight on for a better life and conditions but always remember he who tries to do his best gets the arse same as the rest.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

DON GRANT **Xavier Herbert's Botch**

Xavier Herbert has taken to rejecting *Capricornia* (1938) as "just a botch, the work of a boy . . . a book written by an amateur. This [*Poor Fellow My Country* (1975)] is the real book, the one I should have written".¹ Herbert also has the idea that a novelist can produce one great work only; his great work, he believes, is not *Capricornia* but *Poor Fellow My Country*:

Every true novelist writes only one real book — the distillation of his experience of life . . . This is mine, and everything else — *Capricornia*, *Soldiers' Women*, my autobiography, every word I ever wrote — has been a preparation for it.²

There is little point in discussing the first assertion. If Herbert is correct, which would be Patrick White's one real book? Or for that matter Conrad's, Tolstoy's or Dickens'? The second assertion, that *Capricornia* and the other earlier works were only a preparation for the real book, *Poor Fellow My Country*, is more interesting, but also incorrect. No doubt these works helped prepare Herbert for *Poor Fellow My Country*, but *Capricornia* in particular is far from being an apprentice writer's botch. It is, in fact, a better novel than *Poor Fellow My Country*.

There are many possible points of comparison between the two works, but the one I believe to be most important, and which I intend to examine in some detail, concerns the extent and the intensity of the author's intrusion into his art. Such intrusion is a fault in *Capricornia*; it is a disaster in *Poor Fellow My Country*. Herbert has long been a vociferous propagandist for his own nationalist theories. His claim, made a few years ago, to be "the only novelist, at least in this country, who lives like a hermit"³ is only

partly true. Although for nearly three decades Herbert has lived close to the bush in various places (some remote) in northern Queensland, he has in no sense been a recluse. He has continued to communicate with that wider Australian society beyond his retreats, and to maintain a steady flow of comment to it and criticism about it. Herbert has, in fact, been a very well-publicized hermit.

Indeed, few Australian writers have had so much to say about themselves. In a string of articles and interviews in daily newspapers, weekly journals, literary magazines and, more recently, through personal appearances on television, Herbert has recounted the story of his life and the parallel story (as he sees it) of the destruction of Australia. The two stories are closely entwined in Herbert's view, because he sees himself as a very special Australian, perhaps the only real Australian.

I feel I am the only Australian, apart from the Aborigines. I don't believe anyone is as close to the land as I am. I belong to the country and the only way to do that is to feel the same way about it as the black man.⁴

The speaker might well be, not Xavier Herbert, but Jeremy Delacy, the central character, in *Poor Fellow My Country*. For in his fiction, and in *Poor Fellow My Country* mainly through the character of Delacy, Herbert assails his readers with lengthy accounts of his own eccentric and frequently inconsistent brands of patriotism and nationalism, and castigates his fellow Australians for failing to share his beliefs or live up to his ideals. Fiction, for Herbert, is an eminently suitable vehicle for the polemicist. There is nothing extraordinary about this, of course. What does surprise in Herbert's fiction, and

particularly in *Poor Fellow My Country*, is the extent to which the polemical author intrudes into his art.

Herbert then has not been the type of hermit who draws satisfaction from solitary meditation. He has made it clear that he rejects his countrymen, but he has retired from their presence not to escape them or forget them, but through whatever means — fiction, non-fiction, television — to pour scorn on them. Speaking in 1971 about his intentions in *Poor Fellow My Country*, he said: "I'm going to water all over them . . . When I'm finished they'll think it's been a Gulf country flood".⁵ And in 1973, again referring to *Poor Fellow My Country*, he claimed to be "reserving an epilogue for a final statement in which I'll either piss on the place or pray for it".⁶

Herbert says that *Poor Fellow My Country* is his last novel. "It's my life work, the reason for my being".⁷ One must surely agree about it being his last novel, if only because it is hard to imagine that after *Poor Fellow My Country* Herbert would have anything left to say. In this massive outpouring Herbert must surely have settled all the old scores and exposed, even to his satisfaction, the weaknesses, deceits, cowardices and evasions of his fellow Australians. *Poor Fellow My Country* has provided Herbert with the opportunity to bring together and expound all the views, theories and prejudices which he has collected during a long and eventful life.

This leads, however, to a fundamental weakness in the novel, for the reader is always acutely aware that he is being badgered and hectorated by the writer. Further weaknesses result from Herbert's determination to leave nothing unsaid, to pour forth a lifetime's collection of wisdom and bigotry, common sense and nonsense. As a result the novel is excessively long; it contains repetitions and contradictions; the plot is distorted by the polemics; and because most are simply mouth-pieces, dummies, or stock figures there are few credible characters. Most important and most unreal of these is Jeremy Delacy, whom Herbert must have intended to be taken as a mixture of what he himself is or would have wanted to be.

Before looking more closely at the effect of authorial intrusion on *Poor Fellow My Country* it might be useful to examine the same thing in *Capricornia*, Herbert's most successful novel,

and one which has much in common with *Poor Fellow My Country*. Both works are concerned predominantly with a way of life known to few Australians, that of those who live north of the tropic of Capricorn, specifically the inhabitants of the Northern Territory. Both novels explore many of the same themes and raise the same problems, necessarily with important modifications, since the time span of one follows the other chronologically, and deals with a brief period of six years compared with half a century. And both novels are impaired, though to different degrees, by the failure of the author to let his fiction speak for itself.

In *Capricornia* Herbert's practice is to interrupt his story in order to elaborate a point, pass judgement on an action, or proffer an opinion on a matter possibly of only peripheral concern to the plot. The intrusions are unmistakable and the reader is fully aware that he is on these occasions being lectured, harangued or scolded by the author. The intrusions are also usually brief and do little damage to plot or characterization. That wild and crazy world that Herbert creates in *Capricornia* is evident, vividly so, without any reference at all to the authorial prefaces and postscripts.

There is an enormous vigor and gusto, indeed a vast good humor about *Capricornia*, yet its subject matter is that of shattered hopes, pointless suffering and human degradation. What Herbert seems to be saying in the novel is that permanence is an illusion and that man will always be thwarted in his search for security. He advocates a pragmatic solution: accept the situation; extract what pleasure one can from the passing moment rather than waste time and energy in a futile attempt to impose order on what must always remain a chaotic world. Probably because they do live for the moment the characters in *Capricornia* seem to possess a great joy in existing.

"The main thing in life is Living" were the concluding words of Herbert's autobiography.⁸ How apposite those words are to the lives of the people in *Capricornia*. Because of their abounding good-humor and joy in life many of these characters, who for the most part seem to be self-centred rogues or scapegraces, nevertheless emerge as warm and even attractive people. Not for them the gloom and futility of brooding over the past or future, of blaming others for events which really derive from the disorder brought by civilization itself, or of seek-

ing solution for problems when there are none to be found. Through these characters Herbert makes perhaps the most important point in *Capricornia*, that injustice, folly and grief exist side by side with transitory delights in a pointless world.

Capricornia is a long book, yet it contains fewer than one third as many words as *Poor Fellow My Country*. Unlike *Poor Fellow My Country* though, *Capricornia* was substantially rewritten, reduced and edited. Herbert has estimated that the first draft amounted to about one million words, and that the typescript "with ruthless editing, ran to half that".⁹ The final rewrite a year or two later further reduced the work by half, to a quarter of a million words. The effects of these successive cuts are apparent in the novel. They explain, no doubt, a certain formlessness about *Capricornia*, a sense of gaps and loose ends, and they account for the disappearance and subsequent reappearance of various characters throughout the story. But the ruthlessness of the editing has also contributed to some of the greatest strengths of *Capricornia*: speed of action, economy of words, tight description, and a multiplicity of sparingly drawn but effective characters. In other words the vitality of the novel and the credibility of the characters derives, at least in part, from Herbert's severity as editor. This also explains the need for the author himself to intrude when he feels it necessary to emphasize a point or comment on a situation. He cannot (with one or two minor exceptions) use his characters to do this task for him. The contrast is great in *Poor Fellow My Country*, where the characters are made to descant or debate Herbertian philosophy, often at tedious length.

Capricornia was reduced from one million words to one quarter of a million. *Poor Fellow My Country* remains at the original 830,000 words. "I was determined that it be published in its entirety or not at all".¹⁰ As a result the very qualities which bring strength to *Capricornia* are singularly lacking in *Poor Fellow My Country*, which is marred by overstatement, repetition, slowness of action, and characters who are little more than puppets.

On the other hand there are striking similarities between the two novels. For example many of the minor characters could be transposed, especially those cast as government officials, from judges and Aboriginal welfare officers to police and railway fettlers. In both novels Herbert

uses the device of the railway line to serve as a type of artery for the North Australian body. In *Poor Fellow My Country*, because the area to be served is considerably expanded, this device is extended to include the use of a light aircraft. Another common device is the use in both books of an island to which people can escape for temporary release from their problems and for replenishment. The Northern Territory setting is, of course, common to both, but there is one important difference. People, such as the smart lawyers coming from the southern cities, drift in and out of the fairly self-contained world of *Capricornia*, but the action of the story remains concentrated in the north. In *Poor Fellow My Country*, however, large sections of the narrative are set in Sydney and Melbourne, and with unhappy consequences.

Herbert seems ill at ease when he writes about places other than the North which he knows so well, and those sections of *Poor Fellow My Country* set in the southern cities contain not only descriptions of the most unlikely and absurd events (public meetings, brawls, imprisonments), but also introduce the most hollow and unbelievable characters, many modelled on actual people of the period, ranging from a prime minister through army generals to the leaders of fringe political movements. Herbert's intention is plain enough. He wants to present a complete picture of Australia between the years 1937 and 1943, not just that part of Australia which he called Capricornia in his first book. It is essential that he do this if he is to achieve his stated aim for the novel.

All the time I am trying to show the reality of the Australia Felix. This is the only place on God's earth that had a chance to have been made into an honest community of men. That is the truth. It has gone down the drain, of course, because of two wars. It began to go down the drain in 1914 and this last one finished it. And nothing will ever be any good anymore. But I want to leave behind the Australia Felix idea because I was born into the Australia Felix idea and into the love of a land that is now being destroyed.¹¹

Obviously Herbert does not achieve his aim. His superficial, selective, idiosyncratic and totally unbelievable treatment of people and situations outside the North ensures that. The very intensity of his effort contributes to his failure. The reader of *Capricornia* develops an empathy with its

sparingly-drawn characters, but the reader cannot even believe in, let alone respect or sympathize with, the characters so laboriously developed in *Poor Fellow My Country*, including those whom Herbert wants us to like, such as Prindy and Rifkah.

Jeremy Delacy, the character we are meant to heed most, the man who alone can save Australia Felix, he who personifies all that is good in the Australian character, is far from being the hero, the potential savior, that Herbert intended. Delacy emerges as an arrogant, aggressive, hypocritical, racist, sexist, pompous and insensitive windbag. Throughout the book Delacy expatiates, interminably it seems, on the subjects close to Herbert's heart (and which subjects are not?): personal independence and public protestation, Aboriginals and immigrants, celibacy and sexual fulfilment, conservation, economics, nationalism, politics, religion, pharmacology — the list could be greatly extended. Herbert and Delacy have other things in common too. Neither has much time for his "poor damned compatriots,"¹² for the "lousy Aussie,"¹³ "the immigrant rabble,"¹⁴ or the "colonial crawlers."¹⁵ Each derives pleasure from the appellation "Scrub Bull"¹⁶; each has seen his shade, his other self, his "yalmaru" in the form of a black man;¹⁷ each has ancestors bearing the name Lacey (Lacy) with some doubt pertaining to the subsequent permutation to de Lacey (Delacy);¹⁸ each is a carping and persistent critic of his fellows, but neither offers solutions to problems nor actively seeks to reform: "I am essentially an observer of life, not a reformer"¹⁹ and "My answer is a shrug";²⁰ and tragically, each fails in his purpose, and indeed ends up destroying that which he most cherishes. Prindy, whom Delacy has nurtured and protected, is killed because of Delacy's blundering interference in the rites of the Rainbow Snake cult, and Herbert's "cry for Australia" that *Poor Fellow My Country* is intended to be passed unheeded.

The result may have been different had Herbert created more characters the reader could believe in as living people. For in addition to the unacceptable characters already mentioned, there is another group of dummy characters, of people of straw, who are used simply as mouth-pieces to present an assortment of philosophies and ideologies. These include an English fascist, British army generals, Australian conservative and Labor politicians, and German, Japanese

and British capitalists. These people appear to have no inner life of their own; rather they are superficial reflections of people, sometimes historical personages, in Xaxier Herbert's observed world. Herbert controls them absolutely. There is certainly no hint in this novel of any character taking over from the author. The reader is conscious all the time of the writer talking to him through these people of straw who will, or should be, knocked down by real Australians of the likes of Delacy. It is significant that the characters who do have some life of their own have no part to play in Herbert's polemics. These are the type of characters Herbert created so successfully in *Capricornia*: the little people, battlers of various kinds such as Nugget and Knobby Knowles, Bridie and Con Cullity, Billy Brew the donkey teamster, and the Aboriginals, especially Bobwirridirridi, the Pookarakka of the Rainbow Snake cult. Unfortunately there are few such types in *Poor Fellow My Country*.

It is interesting to speculate on the outcome had Herbert been willing to edit this novel as rigorously as he did *Capricornia*; if he had reduced the length and made himself less conspicuous in the text. Perhaps what would remain, after all, would be simply a sequel to *Capricornia*. But there would remain also a fundamental difference, just as there is one between the two books as published. The joyful nihilism of *Capricornia* reflects the vigor, love of life and anger of an active and enthusiastic young man. Like *Capricornia*, *Poor Fellow My Country* is concerned also with human suffering, with disappointment, failure and destruction. But in *Poor Fellow My Country* there is no joy at all amid the confusion and the wreckage. The country and the people are still going to Hell, but they are much closer now than they were in *Capricornia*, and all fun has gone from the journey. As in *Capricornia* all plans for the future are overthrown and all the idealists are defeated, but in *Poor Fellow My Country* the blame for this is directed, not at the heart of western civilization itself as in *Capricornia*, but squarely at the feet of the "lousy Aussie".

It has over the years been Herbert's custom to point out their faults to his fellow Australians, to explain how and where their country is being contaminated, usually with their own connivance. With the publication of *Poor Fellow My Country* it appears that Herbert has at last given away his countrymen altogether. "I piss

on the nation".²¹ Has Australia changed so much in the years between the writing of *Capricornia* and *Poor Fellow My Country*? Or has

the youthful joy of the writer of *Capricornia* spent itself? "Life is for Living" — but *Poor Fellow My Country* is no affirmation of this.

¹ Interview with Keith Dunstan, *West Australian*, 26 July, 1975, p. 21.

² Interview with Keith Willey, *National Times*, 30 April, 1973, p. 24.

³ Xavier Herbert, "The Agony and the Joy", *Overland*, 50/51, Autumn 1972, p. 65.

⁴ Interview with Keith Willey, loc. cit., p. 24.

⁵ Interview with Philip Cornford, *Sunday Australian*, 2 May, 1971, p. 33.

⁶ Interview with Keith Willey, loc. cit., p. 24.

⁷ Interview with Keith Dunstan, loc. cit., p. 21.

⁸ Xavier Herbert, *Disturbing Element*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1963, p. 271.

⁹ Xavier Herbert, "The Writing of *Capricornia*", *Australian Literary Studies*, 4 (1970), p. 213.

¹⁰ Xavier Herbert, "The Signing of the Peace Treaty", *Australian*, 29 March, 1975.

¹¹ Interview with Patricia Rolfe, *Bulletin*, 5 January, 1974, p. 34.

¹² Xavier Herbert, "The Signing of the Peace Treaty", *Australian*, 29 March, 1975.

¹³ Interview with Patricia Rolfe, loc. cit., p. 34.

¹⁴ Interview with Keith Willey, loc. cit., p. 24.

¹⁵ Interview with Patricia Rolfe, loc. cit., p. 34.

¹⁶ Xavier Herbert, "The Agony and the Joy", *Overland* 50/51, Autumn 1972, p. 67.

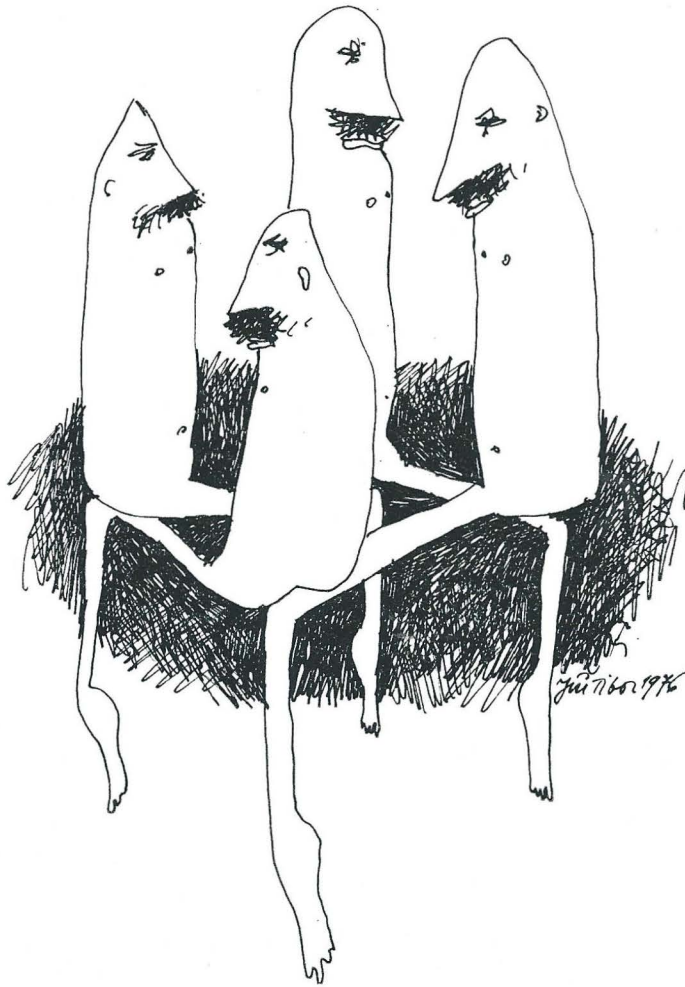
¹⁷ Interview with Keith Willey, loc. cit., p. 24 and interview with Patricia Rolfe, loc. cit., p. 34.

¹⁸ Xavier Herbert, *Disturbing Element*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1963, p. 12.

¹⁹ Xavier Herbert, "A Town Like Elliott", *Bulletin*, 31 March, 1962, p. 23.

²⁰ Interview with Patricia Rolfe, loc. cit., p. 34.

²¹ Interview with Patricia Rolfe, loc. cit., p. 34.



NANCY PHELAN **Semana Santa in Salvador**

San Salvador was full. It was Thursday of Holy Week and I only got a bed by sharing with a Canadian and an American girl who had come on the same bus from Nicaragua.

I was so exhausted that I meant to sleep straight away, but the hotel porter told us excitedly that a torchlight procession was just about to start from a nearby church. People would walk through the town all night, with candles, singing hymns and penitent chants till seven o'clock in the morning. The bells were already tolling. We went out to see.

The church was an island surrounded by crowds; lights shone from the cupola, an illuminated cross floated high. It was impossible to get near and every minute more people appeared. Most of them carried long candles with cardboard saucers pushed up towards the wick to catch melting wax. It gave the effect of rough crosses. Along the streets women with harsh doleful voices were hawking these crucifix torches, dealing them out from string-bags.

Through the whole world was there no one seemed to quite know why, or what was happening. The crowds surged aimlessly up and down the narrow streets between the shabby one-story buildings, working people come straight from their jobs in aprons and overalls, cotton shirts and black dresses. Most of them looked very tired and rather worn.

We waited by a shop window where silver handles and plastic flowers were displayed among groceries, vegetables, Coca Cola ads and notices for cut-price funerals. Inside, cold white neon lights glared down on shining rows of steel-grey coffins.

It was a long wait. The promenaders surged, the candle-vendors called. A family emerged from a nearby house and arranged themselves on

their narrow porch. There was barely room for them all, but seeing that we were strangers they called us to join them, for later the crowd would be dense.

A group of young men came down the street with rattles, whirling them as at a regatta . . . *cracker-crack . . . cracker-crack . . .* like rifle-shots, like stockmen cracking whips. The crowd moved apart for them eagerly but they passed on and we returned to our waiting.

How tired we were! Night had fallen; the watchers hugged their candles, gossiped, gaped, shifted feet, sat on the roadside. Then came a far-off groan, a sense of massed swaying. The crowd strained to see. Slowly, with long halts, preceded by cracker-shots, a procession advanced. Candles were hastily lit and as the flames flickered up the groan became louder, the rhythmical moaning, closer and clearer. Now they were here, a long line of sombre penitents: *Perdon! Perdon, senior!* What a strange cry. I felt gooseflesh on my arms. No jewelled images, no fine music, only the sound of feet in the dust and the bare beauty of the Spanish words: *Perdon! Perdon, senior.*

The penitents shuffled past, halting and slow, packed bodies swaying from side to side, eyes closed, heads up or heads bowed. *Perdon! perdon, senior!* The low moan went on, a man-trum, monotonous, rhythmical, and again in the intervals the soft sounds of feet in thin shoes. There was a smell of hot wax. Behind came men carrying a great cross.

As the procession inched up and paused and inched on again bystanders joined in till the whole street was a river of swaying figures, chanting and moving and halting. It was like an infection, a weird sort of mourning dance. Our kind hosts had risen and stood, crossing them-

selves, swaying gently, sighing *Perdon . . . Perdon, señor!* and I could feel myself becoming drawn in. I slipped down to the street and into the slow stream. All round me bodies were shuffling, shoulders touching, swaying and groaning together, and I shuffled and swayed with them.

I had no torch but the grey battered woman beside me reached down and lifted my hand, clasping it with her own round her candle.

I began to feel very odd; my state of fatigue offered little resistance to the repetitive rhythm, the slow swaying dance. There was no sense here of strange gods or dark forces, as in *condoblé* or voodoo; the essence was innocent yet powerfully hypnotic. We were all in a trance.

Strange thoughts came, visions of gruesome *Via Crucis* scenes from Central American Lenten churches — the figure staggering under the weight of the cross, the figure stumbling and falling, struggling to its knees, unable to rise, whipped to go on when it could walk no further, but now strangely translated from plaster and wax into human flesh. It was so intense, so real that I felt the rough wood cutting into the shoulder, the breaking back, the sweat running into the eyes, the blood trickling from the crown of thorns, as though all the sufferings of the Indians who prayed to those images were now projected upon us by this mass penitence.

One was swept up in a tremendous remorse, a wish to atone; to atone for the fact that suffering existed . . . all suffering, any suffering, for Christ and the Indians had become merged as universal pain. Unknowing, the crowd was creating vibrations that intensified awareness of an actual happening, an ugly occasion they understood only too well. Or were we all releasing a far older memory?

All night the procession of sleep-walkers shuffled, swayed, groaned through the darkness, circling the dusty town. Towards ten o'clock, returning from Plaza Barrios, we met it again, beautiful with its flickering flames. Even after we reached the hotel by a roundabout route I could hear, faintly, far-off, the curious chant, and feel again the strange rhythm. In bed, tired to prostration, my mind repeated the beats: *two — pause — four: Per-DON . . . Per-DON, Se-NOR! Per-DON . . . Per-DON, Se-NOR!*

Next morning, Good Friday, the hotel porter, still stupefied from last night (he walked till the

end), told us that the *Santo Entierro* would take place at five o'clock. The procession, carrying the dead Christ, would set out from a church at the far end of town, beyond Plaza Barrios. He spoke as though of a family funeral, with earnest simplicity, reverence and grief.

All day crowds streamed in and out the cathedral doors, kissing relics and crucifixes, watching and praying before going home to eat or to relax in the square. Plaza Barrios was full of visitors in from the country and stalls were set up in the streets selling tropical fruit, fried bananas, sweets and potato chips.

In the late afternoon men in black suits began assembling at the cathedral. Nearby, people were crowding round a curious pattern on the ground, a large intricate design of colored chalk and rose petals, like the carpets of flowers Hindus spread for gurus or honoured guests to walk on. Others lined the streets, holding candles, rosaries, crucifixes.

Funeral bells began to toll. We followed the main crowd towards the scene of the crucifixion. The area with the market stalls had been busy and rowdy, but there was silence in the long narrow street leading up to the church. It stood at the far end, forming a cul-de-sac, a cold ugly building set up high. On the top step the figure of Christ hung on an enormous cross. Ramshackle shops, shabby little houses with shutters and iron-barred windows continued right to the steps. The gutters were thick with black slime and decaying refuse which gave off a terrible stench when stirred by passing feet. Most of the shops were no more than awnings with boxes for counters, or gaps in a wall only big enough to hold a woman and child. In these tiny booths goods for sale hung from above or were stuck on the walls. Food was set out in enamel basins.

The poor squalid street, the overcast day, the humble people slowly crowding towards the church gave extraordinary reality and immediacy to the scene. Stripped of ecclesiastical pomp and grandeur, reduced to Christ's own earthly background, it became completely contemporary both of his time and the present. One could believe the execution had really taken place here, that the body up there on the cross was human flesh, that

on his either side hang dead
a labourer and a factory hand,
Or one is maybe a lynched Jew
And one a Negro or a Red.

The people were quiet and serious, waiting along the street or pushing slowly down the centre towards the foot of the cross. The only sounds were the tolling bells and the mournful cries of the candle-sellers. We wondered if we would be able to see the procession; though the crowd was polite and considerate we had already been pushed back against the shop fronts. Suddenly a fat woman in the little stall behind me touched my arm, pulled out a box and told me to stand on it. When I protested that she would lose her own view she shook her head, crossed herself and said, "*No importa.*"

Meanwhile, groups from other districts had been arriving to join the cortege. The men in black from the cathedral were there, now carrying placards which they held reversed. The bells tolled; the candle-sellers cried; the solemn crowd edged forward. We were pressed in beside a pretty girl with a large baby and a slim handsome young husband. She was wearing her best for the holiday, a vivid green dress with gold lace, swinging gold earrings, hair fluffed out, and told us that they were very poor but very happy. When I remarked on the crowd the husband, a teacher, said rather sadly that the spirit had changed; once, people came for love of Jesus Christ; now, many were here just from custom, for curiosity, duty or habit. Most young people didn't care at all.

Yet it seemed to me that people were caring, very much. The whole atmosphere was sombre, devout, deeply expectant.

Now in the shuffling crowd came little eddies of action, swirling and stopping and moving on again, independent of the main stream. In the centre, groups were bending down, murmuring, almost groaning. Our neighbour said with controlled excitement, "*Los penitentes, senora. Los penitentes.*"

I worked my way through to one of the groups and saw that some of the bending forms were spreading cloths and newspapers on the road while others were guiding a big dog on a leash; but it wasn't a dog, it was a woman and the leash was a strap passed under her chest and held at each end by stooping figures. The woman was crawling on all fours, supported only by the strap, on which she sagged, sobbing with pain and fatigue. Her eyes were blindfolded. She seemed about to collapse but after a pause crawled on, slowly, over the rags and papers her friends had spread to soften her way. Then again

she collapsed, moaning. On her face tears, sweat, the dust of the day had formed a fine mud; her hair and clothes were dishevelled, her hands and knees bleeding. She had crawled in the terrible heat from the cathedral at the other end of the town and was trying to reach the foot of the cross to ask forgiveness. She moved so slowly and seemed so exhausted I felt she would never get there, but she went on through the crowd, helped by her friends. Other penitents crawled behind.

The afternoon had darkened. The bells tolled on, there was an air of solemn tension. Again I had the odd feeling of participation, this time of being present at a public execution. A ladder had been set against the great cross and the crowd strained towards it, groaning and sighing. Those round us on the sidelines stood quiet and patient, watching as the priest climbed up, as the body was carefully lowered. Now they were wrapping it in a winding sheet, lifting it into the coffin. Again came the great sigh from the crowd.

Were they really doing it or were we seeing it in imagination? It made no difference; it was happening again, as every year since the first time.

In the deep dusk candles were lit, shawls, mantillas drawn over heads. Against the sounds of mournful music, or chanting and tolling bells the coffin was carried down the steps and the cortege set out.

Awed and moved, the young wife beside me said, "Now they are bringing Him. Now they are bringing our Savior."

They came very slowly; the coffin was heavy, the bearers stopped often to rest. In front walked men and women from different organizations, young people, church workers with banners and candles and crosses. The men in mourning suits now carried their black placards raised on poles and we could see the words written in white.

As they came close I heard Joyce, the Canadian, reading out idly, translating. "*Tengo sed — I'm thirsty.*" Then her voice changed, became startled, almost stricken. "I'm thirsty . . . *I thirst!* It's the words from the cross!"

"I'm thirsty!" So much more disturbing, immediate, human than the archaic *I thirst*. The simple words of any dying man craving a drink, yet the very essence of all thirst, of every parched agony.

The silent cries went by — *Padre mio, Porque me has abandonado? — En tus manos —* and

the expression on Joyce's face, in the eyes of the crowd showed the drama had become real for them too. Once again, something was being generated by the crowd, with fearful intensity. We were all watching a man die, all participating, feeling the thirst, the torn hands and feet, the pull at the armpits as the body slumped forward, the awful tearing of flesh dragging against nails. All human pain, bleeding, dying, crystallized into this instant so sickeningly, so overpoweringly that I heard my own shocked voice say to Joyce, "Surely they *tied* them on to the cross?" She was pale and as though sharing my thought said almost desperately, "There *must* have been ropes, or the hands would tear right away."

The people began to moan. A decorated bier was approaching, carried high above the crowd, a glass coffin lined with strip-lights. At each corner were colored lamps and an angel with sheltering wings; inside, among white plastic flowers and white satin cushions lay the body of Christ, at once atrocious and moving.

For one saw, not the cheapness and tawdriness, but the impulse behind it, the love and compassion of those who had prepared this macabre spectacle; and, despite its Shirley Temple sausage curls, the figure was terribly human. Tired; dreadfully tired, but peaceful. Sweat and blood wiped away, sores bandaged up, aching back resting on cushions. One could feel the peace, the comfort of being clean again, as when one is sponged by the nurse after a ghastly night. The head, fallen limply to one side, was unspeakably sad and defenceless, the knees, slightly drawn up as in natural sleep, gave a touch of disturbing reality. Compassion flowed from the

crowd; they murmured, "*Pobre . . . Pobrecito.*" Poor Senor; but at rest now, at last. All over; in out of the storm. My little neighbour had tears in her eyes. She whispered, "*Perdon Senor.*"

When the bearers paused beside us, shifting the weight of the heavy bier, the crowd stood very quiet. There was no craning or pushing. A few wiped their eyes, others crossed themselves. A woman told me pityingly that *el Senor* was now at rest. Some murmured prayers or asked for pardon, as though apologizing, blaming themselves for it all.

Behind the coffin, life-sized figures advanced unevenly, above the crowd; an angel with protecting wings, the Virgin, the Marys, the friends. There was a deep sigh as the Mother of Christ approached, dressed in black velvet, holding a white handkerchief.

Once again, a conventional symbol was transformed by projected human emotion. This woman in black was no longer a cheap wax figure of doubtful aesthetic value. Imperfectly lit by street lights, it was even more real than the tired senor in the coffin. She moved slowly, and swayed by the bearers' uneven movements, seemed to totter, even to reel a little as though dazed with grief. She had seen it all happen, unable to help or prevent; she had watched her son die and now it was over she must somehow face up to the funeral, the silent house, the emptiness of reaction. It was all there in the eyes of the watching crowd. They knew the whole story, they knew how it felt; they were no longer worshippers or devotees but just the neighbors, silently supporting a friend through the grey aftermath of a family death.

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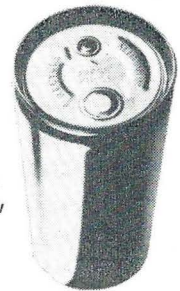
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JOHN GUNTHER **A Nation in the Womb**

In *A Time to Speak*, Edward St John wrote:

It is easy to see now that we made a tragically wrong decision. Mr Hasluck would have been infinitely superior to Senator Gorton as Prime Minister. He would have conducted himself responsibly, circumspectly and with complete integrity.

It is absorbing to wonder what Sir Paul Hasluck, Governor-General, would have done about the continuous deferring of Supply, if he had accepted the offer to stay on; and to think about Australia's political situation today had he become Prime Minister. But Hasluck had already earned a place in Australian history and the history of Papua and New Guinea.

A Time for Building is the unique story of an Australian minister who held the same portfolio for twelve and a half years. If one excludes Prime Minister Menzies' tenure, it was a record term in any federal ministry. Hasluck says it killed him politically, but Papua and New Guinea gained greatly. If Australia lost, it was in large part due to Hasluck's self-proclaimed non-conformist conscience that prevented him pushing himself forward, as first McMahon and then Gorton and their supporters had done, and for whom the end justified the means.

A Time for Building is an autobiographical account of a minister chosen to create a new department, and to develop policies for Australia's territories (other than the Capital Territory). Hasluck's narrative is confined to his work for Papua and New Guinea and refers only to those years he was minister: 1951-1963. It tells how he came to be involved with two

civil services, to define policies, and how he was frustrated by the Prime Minister and many of his ministerial colleagues. But it was the frustrations caused by public service inefficiency and indifferences, and the fact he had to be his own inspector-general, that has made him write.

Hasluck's history of his ministry will challenge his critics and future historians because much of his source material is his meticulously argued reasons for the making of policy. Hasluck was completely exasperated by what he found in Papua and New Guinea in 1951. As I was part of that Port Moresby scene I am sure it is reasonable to explain it, if not to excuse it. Sir Walter McNicoll was Administrator of the Mandated Territory for seven years and four months, until the time of the Japanese invasion. In that time he served under nine ministers. He was happiest with Sir George Pearce, he found W. M. Hughes capricious, vain and obstinate. Sir Hubert Murray in Papua had the same ministers. Pearce allowed him to go his own way in matters of policy. Murray found another "a chattering little nincompoop". It is small wonder ministers counted for little in the administrations of Papua and of New Guinea.

There was no Department of Territories or External Territories in those days, only a branch in the Prime Minister's Department. Almost all of those who lived in New Guinea before the war believed it was responsible for their contemporaries being lost on the *Montevideo Maru*. On 15 January, 1942 Page, the Deputy Administrator in Rabaul, had asked for approval to evacuate the civilians by a particular ship, but the authorities in Canberra and Melbourne wanted further information; by the time this was given that ship had been sunk. There had always been little respect in the islands for Australian public ser-

Paul Hasluck: *A Time for Building* (Melbourne University Press, \$15.50).

vants. Sir Hubert Murray was once constrained to write:

Don't you think your despatch . . . is 'over the odds'? You write like the Head of a Department scolding a clerk — surely you cannot think this is the proper way to write to me? I do not wish to make an official complaint about it — but please, like a good fellow, do not go in for any more of this sort of thing.

In 1945-1951 these same feelings existed. In that period there were three ministers: Ward, Chambers, Spender. Ward visited the Territory in war-time, April 1944, and never again in five and a half years. Chambers relieved him during the Bulolo timber royal commission and visited the Territory once when Chief Judge Phillips was Acting or Deputy Administrator. Chambers was given a police guard of honour, and Phillips accompanied him on his inspection. Chambers asked a constable: "How long have you been in the police force?" The constable had no idea what he was asked, even after it had been repeated three times. Phillips intervened: "Haumus Krismas yu stap wantaim long plis?" "Tu", said the constable. "Two years," said Phillips to Chambers. Chambers asked Phillips: "How long have you been here?" Phillips replied, "Twenty years." Chambers then berated him in front of the guard and its commander, telling him he should be ashamed of himself because he had done nothing to get rid of such gibberish. Chambers continued his tour in the same manner. He certainly didn't impress us.

Neither did Percy Spender, whose one and only tour was like the proverbial Bondi tram. At the completion of his tour all heads of departments were called to Rabaul to "discuss" with Spender what he had observed during his tour. He told Groves, the Director of Education, that he had decided a multi-racial (I think we called it integrated) school was not to proceed, he said he had heard arguments against it. Groves had not been present at those discussions and, when he tried to reason, Spender told him the decision had been made. He told the Director of Forests: "Mr McAdam, for Christ's sake cut down a tree". He told me he had chosen a site for a hospital at Madang. When he told me where, I said it was too small. He said it was a hospital for Europeans. I said that was completely contrary to policy which I thought he had accepted.

He said the decision had been made, and when I asked "Irrevocably?", he said "Absolutely".

That afternoon there were drinks in the garden of the home of the district commissioner. It got to Groves that Spender had said he was a communist. Groves spent the evening moving up on Spender who would see him coming and quickly move to another group. Colonel Murray accused J. R. Halligan, secretary to External Territories, of not answering correspondence. Spender and Halligan had words. It was a fiasco! That evening District Commissioner McCarthy and his wife had a small 'family' dinner. After dinner Murray asked Spender how to treat the forthcoming visiting mission from the Trusteeship Council. Spender said: "Show them nothing, tell them nothing, and let them hear nothing." It was quite the wrong time of the evening to have asked such a question, but Murray persisted. He said he thought the minister's approach was quite contrary to the terms of the Trusteeship Agreement. Spender demanded to see the Agreement. One was found about three whiskies later. Spender read the Agreement through, called for paper, and wrote out a directive that I would have hated to have had to show the leader of the visiting mission, a respected, but allegedly irascible, retired colonial governor. Spender did not feel well enough to visit Bougainville the next day. I am sure he came to the Territory already believing Colonel Murray should be sacked. He later offered Murray the job of principal of the Australian School of Pacific Administration and senior commissioner to the South Pacific Commission. Murray asked him was he trying to get rid of him. Spender said "No". If Spender told Hasluck he should sack Murray, Spender himself had squibbed it when he had had the opportunity. When Hasluck sacked Murray he was offered no alternatives.

They were three bad ministers with bigger fish to fry. External Territories was the humblest of departments, and the three ministers had more senior portfolios. The Department of External Territories was created in 1944, J. R. Halligan being appointed its Secretary. Its early functioning was complicated by the influence that Colonel A. A. Conlon, the Director of Research and Civil Affairs, Australian Army, had on Ward. Conlon had been responsible for the establishment of the military School of Civil Affairs. Colonel Murray was its chief instructor, and it is pretty obvious that Conlon recommended to Ward that

Murray be Administrator when civil administration resumed in Papua and a small part of New Guinea in October 1945.

The School of Civil Affairs transferred to Sydney and became the Australian School of Pacific Administration with John Kerr (now Governor-General) as principal. No doubt the school was to be an instrument of Conlon's, and would help provide some of the academic muscle that would give Ward's 'new deal' its punch. I am sure Halligan, trying to make something of the Department of Territories, was constantly diverted by the actions of Conlon and his colleagues. Halligan was seventeen when he joined the Commonwealth Public Service, he was fifty years old when he became secretary of the Department of Territories, and in all that time neither he nor, for that matter, any other Commonwealth departmental head, experienced such an advisory group of men of vision and attainment. The history of this period 1944 to 1946 has still to be written. My guess is it will show that Halligan thwarted the visionaries by ignoring them, although doing that took much time and effort. Hasluck describes Halligan as "a devoted likable and thoroughly good man". Colonel Murray complained that the Department of External Territories failed to respond to requests and that the minister (Spender) held up decisions on submissions for some long periods; he blamed Halligan for Spender's failings. I accept both views of Halligan; to me he was a friendly, generous person. I often saw him in the years 1946 to 1951. His department probably had the lowest priority of any in the Commonwealth when it came to getting competent staff.

For those of us in Papua and New Guinea in 1946 there was nothing inspiring about the minister or his department. It was easy for the newcomers to accept the prognostications of the 'befores' that we should expect nothing from them. In the provisional administration's public service we were a pretty mixed lot. There were the 'befores' from the Papua or New Guinea services; some who had served with the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU); some were recruited from Australia; and two kinds of persons from the armed services—those seeking a career and those who were promised accelerated release from the army if they volunteered to spend a year in Papua and New Guinea. There were three separate public service associa-

tions: Papua, New Guinea, and Provisional Administration. There were disagreements, misunderstandings and even dislikes between the two pre-war services, and yet a somewhat petulant ganging-up by the 'befores' as a whole against the newcomers. There were new departments like Education and Native Labor. (Very few 'befores' wanted Native Labor; Native Affairs could carry out Labor's functions.) The housing situation was, as Hasluck comments, "seriously deficient". Murray squarely blamed Canberra and especially Halligan for this. I am sure Murray was buoyed up by the thought that ultimately Conlon's influence on Ward would prevail; instead, in 1946, it was loosened and disappeared. So, just as Hasluck had been unable to get a basic decision or guidance from the Prime Minister, Colonel Murray was waiting for his 'instructions' from the Governor-General. He probably had nothing more than the words of Ward to act on: "the Government regards it as its bounden duty to further to the utmost the advancement of the natives and considers that can be achieved only by providing for better health, better education and for a greater participation by the natives in the wealth of their country and eventually in the government".

It was provided in the Papua and New Guinea Act that "instructions" might be given by the Governor-General.

The public service was an inefficient service from its beginnings. We were like untrained troops, with insufficient skills, suddenly thrown into battle ill-equipped, and with poor logistic support; and its structure was ill designed. Most colonial administrations were designed or enjoined to 'assist' the dependent people. So a service usually came to a peak in a secretariat coordinating native affairs, education, agriculture, public works, local government and so on. The secretariat was the governor's adviser. But not so in the Papua and New Guinea Provisional Administration of 1946. There was a government secretary, and one of his service departments was District Administration and Native Affairs. This was so cumbersome, and in the beginning so ineffective, some service department heads adopted go-it-alone methods—coordination was non-existent. This probably hindered and subsequently prevented the development of an adequate structure.

I am sure Hasluck was aware of this. He writes of raising the status of the Administrator.

His options were few: he either had to admit he had a colonial service which was anathema to him, or to create an Australian Department of Territories with a field division in the Territory, and divisions of experts and logistics in Canberra. This could not have worked when there had to be a Legislative Council or House of Assembly which would want to ensure increasing localization, and there would be conflicts over Australian citizenship. Hasluck knew it wouldn't work unless the Territory were to become the seventh state. A third alternative was to make the Administrator head of the public service in Papua and New Guinea and for Hasluck, the Commonwealth Executive Council and the Governor-General to take over all of the Administrator's gubernatorial functions. This would have been severely criticized as the entrenchment of Australia's sovereignty.

To stir this murky potage and make it even stickier was the establishment of the Public Service Commission, with the commissioner being responsible to nobody in Papua and New Guinea. Well after Hasluck's time it became ludicrous when the Administrator wrote to the chairman of the Public Service Board in Port Moresby and received his reply from the secretary, Department of Territories, Canberra. (With due respect to the first two commissioners, I believe they were the choice of Sir William Dunk, then chairman of the Australian Public Service Board. They came from fairly low clerical positions in the Commonwealth service, and had not had the experience to enable them to reorganize the Territory service.)

Under the *Papua and New Guinea Act* 1949, His Honor the Administrator had certain clear gubernatorial functions. He could appoint times for the Legislative Council to meet and he could prorogue it; he could assent or withhold assent to ordinances or reserve them for the Governor-General; he could grant a pardon to any convicted person, except a person sentenced to death. In the South Pacific Commission region there were six metropolitan powers: Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. All except Australia were represented by "His Excellency the Governor", other than the New Zealander, who was "His Excellency the High Commissioner". All lived in Government Houses (except in Netherlands New Guinea, where it was the Governor's Palace). The population of all the other South Pacific

Commission territories put together was about half of that of Papua and New Guinea. All governors would take precedence over His Honor; and Sir Hubert Murray had been Lieutenant Governor of Papua for nearly thirty years.

These are the conditions that Colonel Murray and Donald Cleland had to suffer. (In the case of Murray I have continued to give him the military title he used, to make sure he is not confused with his two predecessors in Papua: Sir Hubert and Leonard Murray). Hasluck had also to suffer it. I think there were times in the Department of Territories when it suited them to have structural chaos in Papua and New Guinea with the Administrator sitting in limbo, neither vice-regal Head of the Territory nor head of the public service.

Hasluck was revolted by the ugly face of colonialism. It has been the habit of all colonisers to behave as first class citizens administering the lower orders of man. Rowley, in his three volumes on *Aboriginal Policy and Practice* (1971), refers to Hasluck's study, *Black Australians: A survey of Native Policy in Western Australia 1829-1897* (1942)—Rowley says it is the only detailed study of the effect of frontier conditions on Aboriginal legislation. Hasluck asks: "What possible outcome there can be from a system that confines the native within a legal status that has more in common with that of a born idiot than of any other class of British subject?"

No doubt this earlier experience made Hasluck determined not to allow Australians as colonisers to behave as they had three to four generations before on the Australian frontiers. Despite his heavy involvement in Papua and New Guinea Hasluck still had time to be the first minister to succeed in committing the Commonwealth to a new order of priorities in Aboriginal welfare. Colonel Murray flew the Union Jack; I was told that he did this on the advice of the Governor-General, Sir William McKell, who told Murray he was McKell's "representative". The Administrator's status continued to change. He had gubernatorial functions but was never vice-regal. In 1946 he had assumed he was responsible for the organisation, efficiency and behavior of the public service, but slowly and surely it was made clear that he was not—culminating in the 1963 ordinance that the public service commissioner was in no way responsible to the Administrator. In 1961 two assistant administrators were appointed. Thus the Administrator became *primus inter*

pares with five departments reporting to him and five each to the two assistant administrators—yet he was charged with ultimate accountability! I agree with Hasluck that his own punctilious care in “procedure tends to distort the documentary record in a way that may be less than fair to Cleland.” I am sure it would often have been better to accuse the Administration, including the Public Service Commission, rather than the Administrator, for inattention or delay. Cleland could well have felt Paul Hasluck needed no other inspector-general than Hasluck himself. I do believe that many of Hasluck’s problems came from an ill-conceived public service set on an infirm base.

In *A Time for Building* Hasluck sets out the problems he saw, what caused him to reach the decisions he did. He reinforces all of this with quotations from his detailed minutes arguing for his policy decision and setting out his directions. In this way he deals with education, land policy, economic development, native labor, political advancement and the administration of justice. Although Hasluck had his critics, there were not too many in the public service who thought his directions were wrong, except in the administration of justice. He opens a chapter on this subject: “Writing as a layman . . .”, and then in a later chapter says “I wish I were more certain than I am that I made the right decision on policy in regard to the administration of justice and I wish that I had been given wider discussion and more time for studying the whole question . . .” For my part I accepted the decisions but had doubts, and today think some were wrong. At the time the decisions were made, the majority of Papuans and New Guineans wanted *kots bilong mipela* as well as *kots bilong gaveman*. The judges and lawyers in the Territory were unanimous and vehement that the peoples’ traditional courts wouldn’t, or couldn’t, dispense justice; this meant that until the late nineteen sixties there were no courts presided over by a black man. It hardly need be said that in defiance of the law traditional courts—*kots bilong mipela*—were flourishing all over the country. Native Affairs officers almost to a man believed that in so many areas the administration of justice should be administered as much as possible according to custom, and justice must be seen by the people to be done according to their own beliefs. A guilty man should not go unpunished on some legal technicality.

One story was told of a brutal murder in a primitive area of the Madang District. A European police officer with a squad of local police went to the scene. The officer’s investigations clearly pointed to a suspect, who by the way was not as primitive as his fellow villagers—he had spent some time away from the village and knew the difference between right and wrong according to the white man’s code. Having satisfied himself, the officer left the squad to bring him in with witnesses and the usual hangers-on. It was a few days’ walk back. It was said that when they reached Madang the suspect willingly attested that a confession he had made was correct. The confession had not been given freely, since the police had their rifles beside them—they always carried rifles on patrol—and thus the confession was obtained under menace or duress. The indigenous police were also sure the courts had become too legalistic.

The views of the Chief Justice on a system of courts were well known to the Native Affairs officers. Donald Cleland, a solicitor, was sincerely committed to the administration of justice as seen by the judges and the lawyers, but knew that some of his ‘outside men’, whom he had to recognise as experts in native matters, were opposed to these views. Some had expressed strong opposition. Hasluck appointed the eminent jurist David Derham (now Vice Chancellor, University of Melbourne) to advise him on the whole range of the administration of justice. In regard the system of courts Derham’s quite excellent report in general supported the proposals of the Chief Justice. This came as a shock to some who had discussed things with Derham. Derham had a habit of seeking information by playing the role of devil’s advocate. Hasluck gave directions to carry out Derham’s recommendations. The report had been classified as confidential, thus preventing a public debate on what Derham proposed. There was a feeling abroad that Canberra was interfering in matters about which they knew nothing. Frankly I think that, if the report had not been labelled confidential, useful discussion could have taken place, and a quick resolution of the opposition to Hasluck’s directions achieved.

Hasluck writes that he made it clear to Cleland the appointments of judges was no concern of his. But I’m sure Cleland would believe the Administrator was a competent person, if not to nominate appointments to the Supreme Court, at least to advise on the kind of qualifications

and experiences new judges should have. I fear there was no reconciliation between the judges and Native Affairs officers, but since Papua New Guinea became independent *kots bilong mipela* have been introduced. Does this speak for itself and vindicate those other laymen who saw the British system of justice as too precise for a traditional society?

Hasluck had his critics among journalists and academics. This might be the place to say that, whilst Calwell was Leader of the Opposition, he supported Hasluck and acknowledged there was a bipartisan policy. Hasluck wrote and lectured, and he claimed his critics either didn't read what he wrote or didn't understand it. He got exasperated when he was quoted without any countervailing arguments he himself may have put being mentioned. He was accused of paternalism, and has satisfactorily dealt with that in *A Time for Building*. He was also accused of gradualism. I am sure Hasluck thought that what was done should be well and thoroughly done, and the time taken was the time available. But he clearly saw that pressures would almost certainly shorten the time. In an address to the Institute of Political Science in Canberra, 1958, he said:

Now, however, the pressures are growing for a variety of causes and the rate of change is accelerating. The impact of the outside world no less than the awakening curiosity and the interest of the people themselves present us with a far greater urgency than we have ever faced before and this urgency is likely to grow year by year.

Hasluck's critics say he held back secondary education. A school was started during the war by ANGAU. In early 1946 it was the only Administration native school. At the end of 1946 and early 1947 this was the only source of students for the Suva Medical School. Suva at the time were asking for Cambridge senior entrance standard. Our students had a particularly rough time for the next six years or so. The Education Department wanted as many primary school leavers as they could get for teacher training, and many of the departments, especially Public Health, were actively recruiting into apprenticeships. Rather than wait for the Education Department to complete their primary syllabus in the 3Rs, the Public Health department took on recruits and employed their own 'teachers'. This approach was, of course, extremely bad for the development of education.

The University of Papua and New Guinea started in 1966 with what was called a preliminary year—a matriculating year. None of the first intake of 58 had had the equivalent of ten years at school. If you assume there was virtually no meaningful government education for Papuans and New Guineans, other than Sogeri, in 1951, surely the first emphasis had to be on primary education? If that were so, then there was no holding back of secondary education. It should be remembered that suitable pupils were being sent to Australia—there were 56 there in April 1956. In 1956 Hasluck clearly saw the need to proceed beyond primary education and to produce more rapidly a number of people who would become instructors and leaders among their own people to assist in handling the tasks set by progress in the coming decade. At about this time the word 'elite' became an in-word. Hasluck came to hate it; he became impatient with journalists and with academics who advised the creation of an elite. I still don't understand the current meaning of the word.

In 1956 I asked myself when it would be possible to have the first Papuan or New Guinean Director of Public Health. It would not be before 1962 that anyone was available to start a medical course in Australia, then six years to graduation, two years in an Australian hospital, say three years experience in the Territory, a two year post-graduate qualification and another five years in the Territory service with leave and some other overseas experience. The answer came to 1984. *I was just ten years out*. In 1956 I was as sure as I could be that Papuans and New Guineans would want the Queen (or her successor) to be Head of State. The society was so acutely divided that a demagogue from one linguistic group would be viewed with the greatest suspicion and inevitably be distrusted by all the others. At that time, as in 1976, the Queen was the only common denominator. It was not until 1966 that I was game to write in the Melbourne Age that independence year would be 1976. I doubt if any of Hasluck's critics with all their demands could have chosen an earlier date. It was a matter of watching for the signs. Hasluck showed clearly he saw them and kept abreast of them. Had he remained minister he would have pushed education, and independence could have come a year, probably two years earlier. By 1975 secondary and tertiary education were well set up on firm bases to provide the leaders of the new nation, and some

previous critics were asking how the size of the elite was to be restricted.

There were two decisions during Hasluck's ministry that I personally saw as among the highlights, and they didn't get the acclaim they deserved; and Sir Paul doesn't, in *A Time for Building*, make enough of them. After Hasluck's transfer both were allowed to lapse, to the disadvantage of Papua New Guinea. The first was the proposal to take into teacher training in the Territory Australians with intermediate certificates. It came about from Hasluck's demand that something more had to be done for primary education. I was told details of the final scheme were suggested by Dudley McCarthy, war historian, then a first assistant secretary in the Department of Territories, and later a diplomat. The Director of Education proposed universal primary education and literacy in English. These were mere cliches unless something heroic was done. McCarthy's idea was to put the teacher trainees into a short special course named the 'E' course—there were already A, B, C and D teacher-training courses. The E course teachers were to teach in schools in the centre of the village, not on the outskirts. The theme was to teach English and more English. Ordinarily recruiting for teachers was a failure. The Territory was lucky to get thirty teachers for eighty positions, but on this occasion there were 3000 applicants for eighty positions. The scheme caught the imagination of Australians. For the first time in the post-war history we got a large number of people really wanting to serve. Of those taken on, some had trades, others were experienced teachers, though without certificates, and most had the leaving certificate. Furthermore it was the first fully integrated policy program. Whilst the teachers were being trained, sites were located for their special schools, and houses and classrooms were built. Coordination was done by an officer of the Papua and New Guinea Department of Education attached to the department of the Administrator, and not by the Department of Territories. Hasluck gives credit to an officer of the Department of Territories, who from Papua and New Guinea's point of view was one of the most helpful of officials, and no doubt he gave much help from Canberra, but the real planning and leg-work were done by a Territory civil servant. Some of us in Papua and New Guinea often wondered whether credit was always given to the people

in the Territory when it was due; or whether, being the last through the door, those in Canberra took credit if they could. The E Course continued to be a success until it was suddenly closed down—to this day I don't know why.

The second program of Hasluck's which he nurtured until he left the ministry, but which wasn't encouraged to flourish after that, was his 1961 target date program—or, more euphemistically, "Program for Accelerated Development in Papua and New Guinea". Just as with the E Course, which Hasluck mentions briefly as the "emergency education plan" while describing the troubles he was having with the Commonwealth Department of Works, he writes of the five-year plan target dates, and accelerated development, during a long explanation of his great difficulties with Cabinet and the Treasurer. It is impossible to find reference to the E course or target dates in the index. On 26 October 1961 Hasluck made a statement in the House of Representatives on "Educational Social and Economic Advancement in Papua and New Guinea". Here are two of the things he said:

This five-year programme is part of the further planning which is intended to lead by the end of 1975 to a situation in which the whole of the children of school age (estimated to be approximately 750,000 by that date) will be within the reach of schools. [In 1975, only 238,318 found places in primary schools and 28,844 in secondary schools.] Complete the protection of people exposed to malaria, raising the numbers protected from 250,000 now to 1,300,000 by the end of the year 1966/67.

It reached 1,200,000 in 1968/69 and was still about the same in 1974/75, with an obvious break-down in some so-called controlled areas.

Hasluck set targets for increases of production in cocoa, coffee, rubber, sawn timber, plywood production and logs. Some three or four years later the World Bank survey report suggested similar or even lesser figures. Then in September 1968, just seven years after Hasluck's statement in the House of Representatives, the Territory administration put forward another five year program: *Programmes and Policies for Economic Development of Papua and New Guinea*. It refers to the World Bank mission's five year plan, but makes no mention of Hasluck's plan. (As an aside, in my time in the Administration I took part in the development of a twelve year

plan, a seven years plan, three five year plans and a three year plan—not one of them progressed to completion. They were either suspended or lapsed as Hasluck's plan was allowed to lapse by his successor, whilst all waited for a breathtaking World Bank survey report.) Hasluck's plan was a coordinated plan for staff, housing and materials: you couldn't plant more cash crops unless you had another extension officer and he had to have a house and a centre to work from, and a vehicle. An officer from the Department of Territories visited Papua and New Guinea quarterly to discuss recruiting, housing, and supplies, the plan's targets were altered up and down, mostly down, according to the success in staff recruitment and building. After Hasluck became Minister for Defence these visits ceased.

In a public lecture in Papua New Guinea in 1975 I posed the question: what would Papua New Guinea be like if Hasluck had remained minister? I said that Hasluck almost always got what he wanted, so the mind simply inflated at the thought of universal primary education and a marked progress toward universal literacy in English in 1975. Hasluck went to Defence in December 1963. For the budget year 1963-64 he had got for the Territory 26 per cent more in the Commonwealth grant than it had spent in 1962-63. I am sure this was the Territory's undoing. Hasluck, in his chapter "Turning Point", frankly describes the lack of interest of some of his cabinet colleagues in development in Papua and New Guinea, and tells of how he had to battle with the Prime Minister and the Treasurer outside cabinet to get more money. Thus his transfer to Defence would not have been mourned by those colleagues who thought that £1 spent in the Territory was £1 less spent in Australia, and especially in Australia's undeveloped rural areas. My guess is Country Party leader McEwen did a deal with Menzies who wanted a Liberal in the post office portfolio: you take the post office, we'll have Territories. It is interesting to look at the annual increases in the Commonwealth grant. Hasluck got from Cabinet an increase of 15 per cent in 1960-61, then annually 17, 16 and 26 per cent, but this dropped to 11 per cent in 1964-65 and 10 per cent in 1965-66, the amounts sought by his successor.

Hasluck may not always have been properly

informed of just what was being done in PNG. For example, within the chapter "Access to Land" Hasluck castigates Cleland, the Administrator's Council and the Legislative Council for not having obtained "the confidence of the landowners in the system of conversion . . ." He particularly asks why John Guise (now Sir John and Governor-General of Papua New Guinea), a member of the Administrator's Council, was not given the proper opportunity to present his views. If we are thinking of the same legislation, and unless my memory is greatly wanting (and I agree it is ageing), the behavior of the Administration was the opposite to that described by Paul Hasluck. He has written that "Land is one of the most sensitive political points in the Territory . . ." With hindsight it was for me the most sensitive issue the Administration had to deal with. From 1946 I had been told there was no commercial future for agriculture in Papua and New Guinea until clan land was converted to individual titles. The advice came from all manner of experts. In about 1962 I wrote about the need for conversion but, understanding the people's great attachment to their land, expressed in many violent physical disputes, I became eloquent and borrowed from Genesis: "cursed be the land". Policy was that if a clan wished to convert its land to individual tenure the holdings should be registered in the names of individuals. A Bill was introduced that provided that if 70 or 80 per cent approved of conversion the whole of the land would be subdivided and registered. This was previously seen by Guise in the Administrator's Council, and I can remember no objection coming from him. Guise was not the kind of person to whom you gave unasked-for paternal advice. As I remember the meeting, Guise had nothing to say, and he had very little to say in the Legislative Council but he opposed the Bill, and although I think only one other Papuan or New Guinean member spoke, it was obvious they all opposed it while all the white members supported it. Some official members met and decided they would not in any circumstances go to a black versus white vote. There was no hesitation in arranging that the Public Solicitor should advise the Papuan and New Guinean members. They saw the Public Solicitor as *man bilong lo bilong mipela*. It was an indication of the Administration's desire to help. I spoke individually to each indigenous member, including Guise, but none would discuss the issue. I am sure they knew that all expert

advice was for individual ownership. They had no arguments to oppose it; land to them had a preeminence which was something the experts couldn't understand, and they couldn't describe. To try to do so they may have made fools of themselves and by so doing felt great shame. All the demands of the Papuan and New Guinean members completely emasculated the intention of the legislation.

There are some piddling errors in *A Time for Building*. Fadden didn't open a hospital at Bomania, but at Taurama; Bobby Gibbes' plantation was in the Western Highlands District, not in the Sepik District; Sir John Crawford was not Vice Chancellor of the Australian National University in 1961. Under "Giving the Workers a Future," "the highly educational tour" of employers, employees and the public service was initiated, organized and led by Bland (now Sir Henry) and included Albert Monk. In "A Mixed Bag of Social Events" Hasluck says that he received in October 1959 the first results of a direction he had given twelve months before for the preparation of a medical training plan. I submitted it in September 1956, but it had been asked for twelve months before. There are

other issues I would like to discuss with the author sometime.

However under no circumstances do I argue with the main tenor of his book: that, while suffering many frustrations, and through hectoring and pummelling some of us black and blue, Hasluck laid down firm policies that allowed Papua and New Guinea to pass from colonial dependent status to self-government, then to independence, without trauma and with the two peoples maintaining their mutual respect. The Australian flag was reverently lowered, not torn down.

A Time for Building made me look again at *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*: "There are witnesses enough up and down the country to verify, or correct, or complete it; and letters moreover of my own in abundance unless they have been destroyed." *A Time for Building* is a grand start for someone who wants to complete the history of the building of a nation. Hasluck was missed but affectionately remembered when the Australian flag was lowered and the flag of a proud new nation raised. And, by the way, of all Menzies' many ministers who, other than Hasluck, would have sat on an airstrip surrounded by swamp in Western Papua reading Racine whilst waiting for his aircraft?

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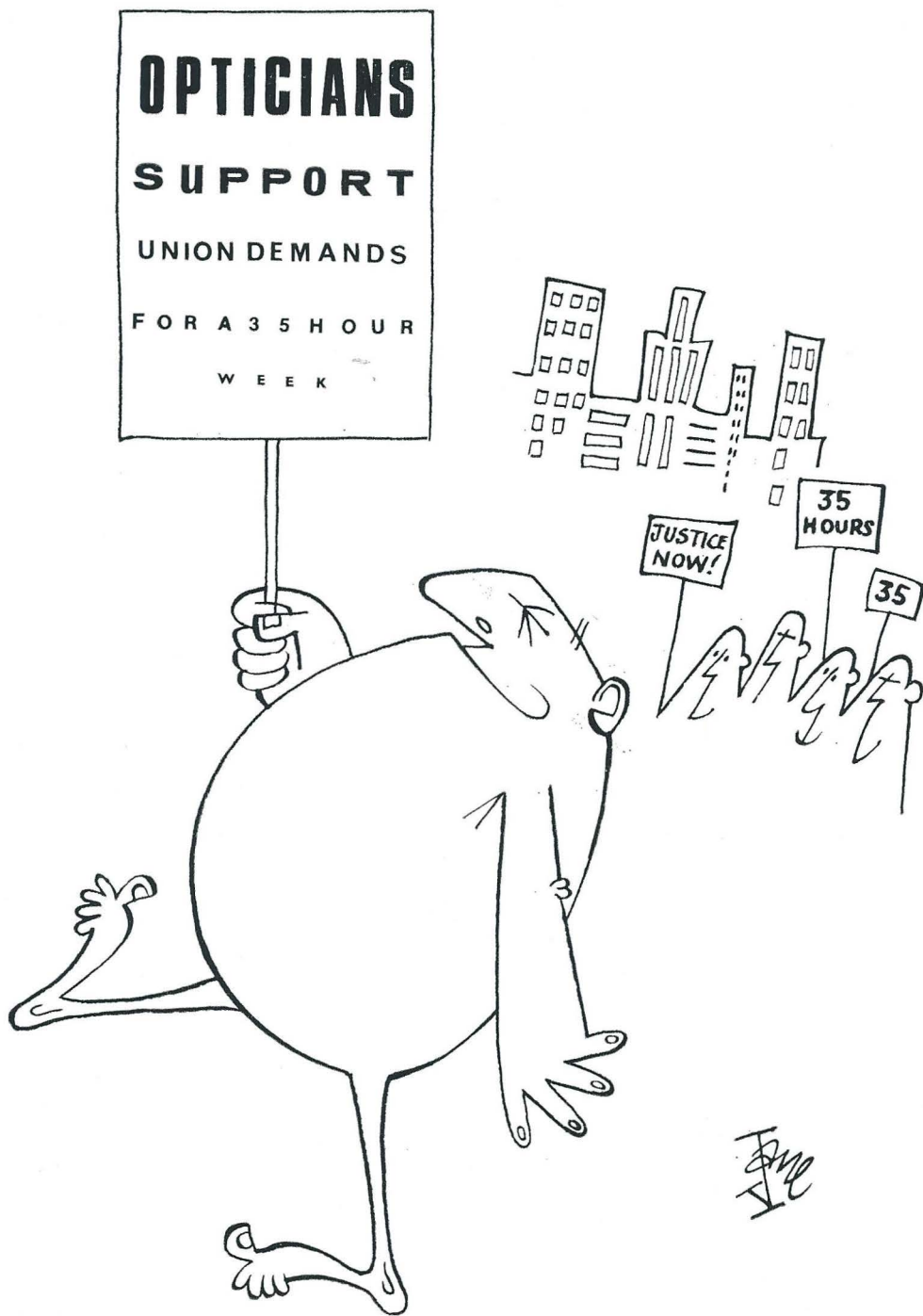
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Vane Lindesay

DAVID MARTIN

Books for and about Louts

Recently, towards eleven o'clock on a cold night, I was driving through Beechworth with a local resident. We passed three boys hanging about a bus-shelter. "Look at them," my companion growled. "There they are, the louts!"

I knew what he was thinking of. He was thinking of the vandalism in the town, of the filth smeared over our post office boxes, of the young pine trees uprooted by the caravan park, of a hut which was wrecked not far from there.

I answered that I felt a bit sorry for kids who have nowhere to meet except in the freezing cold. I said it without much conviction, knowing that a suitable retort would not have been hard to find.

That very day I had finished working on my sixth "young novel", a book for readers in their early and middle teens. Because the problem of kids and books concerns me, the three boys have remained in my mind. In this matter of writing for young people there are many things I still feel uncertain of, and I don't want to pontificate: as it is there are more than enough pontifices in this field. I can only put forward a few tentative ideas.

We'll assume that the trio in the shelter was indeed the gang which has committed so many depredations. It certainly could have been. If it was, its members go in for 'adventure' far more boldly than does the great majority of youngsters in these parts. This does not mean that I condone such activities, or wish to glorify them. I am not discussing them as a sociologist but as a writer, to the extent that the two can be separated.

We have some boy scouts and girl guides here, but I think not many, and the usual quota of basket-ballers, trail bike riders, and such. Children from homes with plenty of money have ponies

and occasionally go trail-riding. We have no youth club now, and the last one got little support from parents. Of youthful and spontaneous outdoor activity, other than at the beach during holidays, there isn't much — it's becoming rarer and rarer to meet children, individually or together, in the bush, walking, rabbiting, exploring, fossicking. . .

As to going out, three of them, at night challenging the spooky, outwitting adults, guarding against surprise, dispersing unseen — apparently this is now more or less reserved for potential young offenders.

All three come from "bad homes", where drinking is even rife than in most others hereabouts and which display the well-known symptoms of what we like to call underprivilege. I cannot see much hope in our society for kids like these, who come together to find destructive outlets for their aggressive urges. They generally become louts, and later drifters, no-hopers, crims. In their own way, I suppose, they go on being adventurous, but as the years pass they'll get less and less fun out of it. (Obviously this isn't true for all of them; some will always manage to have quite a good time in a style which the community considers perverted.)

In theory there are three escape routes for such folk, but unfortunately they don't work in practice. They can be 'saved' through religion; they can save themselves through joining in political or similar action; they may be 'rehabilitated' in some form or other.

The last possibility is the least likely, because the institutions which are supposed to prepare damaged people for a "normal, useful life" are so abnormally organized. We wouldn't train a cart-horse on a race track, but we imagine we can re-train our outcasts for citizenship in a fairly

open and very complex society by locking them away for months and years in a narrow space, with no one from the opposite sex. A crazy notion!

As regards religion, the men of the cloth tell me that for them training prisons are an infertile Sahara. And revolutions? They are made not by untouchables but for untouchables.

I believe I could probably write a novel about our three loutish Beechworthites. The task would be difficult but not daunting. It could be creatively rewarding. Some publishers might even urge me to do just that, perhaps not realizing how deep their tongues would be in their cheeks. They would insist that they are eager for reality settings, that we must bravely march away from the too-sheltered and conventional, that in fact the whole tendency is towards more truth, more freedom and — oh, blessed word! — more *challenge*.

But I don't think I would try to write such a book.

Why not?

Chiefly because it would be a book "about kids" and not "for kids". I strongly hold that a really good young novel is for children as well as about children. *For* children, in the sense that it should be interesting and if possible fascinating for them to read, and that it contain characters, roughly of their own age, into which they can project and with whom they can identify. *About* them, in the sense that these characters are depicted so roundly and richly, with problems so compelling and in a manner so effective, that the book will have something for every age group, and ideally for every age.

A book which is at the same time for children and about children (it is immaterial for the mature taste that conflicts and situations are 'young' conflicts and situations) closes the gap of artificial specialisation. It is universal and truly valid. It is a book to grow with and a book that grows with us, as happens with good poems.

A book that is only 'about' children will leave children cold. A book which is only 'for' them they can enjoy, but I think it will never be a masterpiece, not even in its own genre. Yes, I could write a novel which involves our Beechworth three, their own world and the world they are up against, but if it had proper integrity it would be a book exclusively for grown-ups.

This is a pity because their doings could make a strong, tense and very human story. On the lowest level of objection, one would have to contend with the army of parents, teachers and

librarians who still refuse to sanction the use of the language, in print, which these children actually employ all the time. Not to mention images and associations! If you told the story honestly, not trying to shock anyone but also without forcing it into an utterly unreal and inappropriate style, you would break every taboo which dominates this discipline. It has never been done: to write a book full of the kind of things teenagers want, about youngsters like our threesome and their real problems, in a language and with ideas faithful to the protagonists as heroes and victims.

Today you are encouraged to write about children without subterfuge. The more ruthlessly you do it the more you will be praised. But of course you are never allowed to write like that *for* children, whatever you may have been told.

This level of objection already hints at a higher and more important one, where the problem becomes more complicated.

Kids can take a lot of reality; much more than adults, in some ways. But it is reality of a certain type. They can accept death — children incinerated during a bush-fire — and all kinds of sorrows and misfortunes, sexual ones included. They can accept tragedy — but only on their own level of coping. For example, there is no reason why a story should not show them suffering deeply from conflicts among their parents. Or from their parents' impending divorce. After all, it impinges on their lives. But children, in books and out of them, must not be made to solve such problems for their parents; they shouldn't scheme how to bring them together again. Except, possibly, in a comic context.

Children are not to be sheltered from the tragic. To do so is to deceive and deprive them, because the world is tragic — as well as many other things — and children know that this is so. They must and indeed want to learn how to grapple with tragedy. Death doesn't scare them all that much, as I have observed it: the thing that really frightens them, once they begin to confront it, is the knowledge of infinity . . . or 'eternity' if you like. Apparently the human brain can be comfortable only with the finite, with beginnings and ends. Children may not often talk about it, but it is a hard thing for them to face up to, the realisation of absolute relativity: no beginnings, no ends. Doesn't it scare heaven as well as hell out of much of the human race, young or old? The 'faith' that is given to children is the ancestral antidote to a primeval fear, but for many years during the process of growing the fear

is much more powerful than the antidote. Even when they do make it their own, fully or after a fashion, it takes time to enter their spiritual bloodstream.

It is pointless to hide tragedy from children, but to leave them without hope is criminal. They read books in order to have a model for living. Fiction is an ordered reality; to read fiction helps them to bring some order, some pattern into the chaos of expansion, of growing up. It does not hurt kids to identify with suffering and with struggle, but they also need to identify with hope.

Which is not necessarily true for adults. At least I think it shouldn't be. In my own case, I don't feel I need all that many books which hold out hope. I've lived long enough to appreciate that order is arbitrary and that nature, though vastly rich in structured patterns has no hierarchy of 'values'. I can accept nature, but it hasn't come all at once.

Children cannot be left to confront chaos directly, just like that. As a writer I cannot leave them without hope. I doubt that even Heidegger would have told kids that the only hope there is is the one they can create or invent . . . it comes to the same thing.

Some people never stop drivelling about what they call "the world of childhood". They applaud writers who, they claim, can bring this world almost magically to life, like the prince who kissed the Sleeping Beauty. Like other sub-groups, children have needs which are special to themselves, and they have their secrets and their own ways of experiencing. This "world of childhood" is not perfectly libertarian and classless, like the millenium. It doesn't float unseen above the 'real' world, ready to receive the soul of every child with sufficient imagination and I.Q. The world of childhood is very much part of the other, and very troubled, world, and whether and how a child finds its way about in it depends on how it lives and how its friends and parents live. The childhood world of the three who shoot up water tanks and ravage plantations is fundamentally unlike the one which I, for instance, may have had some access to.

Of the special needs of children, hope is perhaps the greatest. The writer who leaves them in despair is a sadist. In any case he won't be published.

Yet how can you write about our three shelter kids without taking away hope to a very large extent? You can't, unless you know how to

transmute self-deception into art, or believe in a savior, or emulate the socialist-realist whose literary intent is essentially educational, with a propagandist emphasis. The cards are too heavily stacked against the happiness of these young ones. You can write with sincere hope about the trio only if you are willing to conjure with compromises, which is hardly the best way of producing excellent books. You might permit one of the three to fight his way out of the trap, which is made of something like iron and encloses his whole environment. Somehow, somewhere a girl might help, or some understanding adult. But especially of the last the chances would not be good, statistically. And that's a fact which can be proved.

For rescue, or self-rescue, the kid would need an uncommon amount of luck. Luck exists. I don't discount it, least of all as a novelist. But I would not let the entire solution to the conflict turn on something so rare and unpredictable.

True enough, harrowing conflicts are tackled fairly often now in young novels. But inevitably there is compromise of a typically middle-class and comforting variety. It's unavoidable, because at least ninety per cent of young writing is by middle-class writers for middle-class children, edited by middle-class editors and published by middle-class publishers. Middle-class children with a high, middle-class culturally conditioned reading skill are, to use a brand-new term, the backbone of this industry.

So far, all attempts to get away from this have remained unconvincing. These attempts are invariably middle-class 'constructivist' in approach, gamely accepting the semblance of out-of-luck reality—the high-rise flat, the training centre for juvenile offenders, the factory assembly-line and the latch-key family—but not the full, cruel facts. Protesting their fierce hostility to the mechanical happy ending, the various interests concerned still promote happy endings—happy endings by implication. The poor non-achiever can't be let down! The morality play, the cautionary tale, remains little altered, save that the moral is cleverly tucked away.

I am not slinging off, unless it be at myself.

I am aware of internal conflicts when I write for children, a tension between knowledge and conscience. I partly avoid the dilemma by avoiding relationships and confrontations of the more hopeless kind, which is the easier because it agrees with my temperament, though not with my

intellectual convictions. When I chose a grim subject, like the fate of the Chinese on our gold-fields, my young heroes are apt to be exceptionally intelligent and self-reliant, if not in the orthodox manner. Still, I have injected more hope into certain situations than was warranted, above all in a short novel written for 'reluctant readers'. After all, I grew up with many privileges.

Kids from homes without privileges, who destroy trees for fun, lack the skill to read books based on their own venturing. They might enjoy such books, or they might not: I daresay a little escapism would on the whole do them more good. If they had adequate reading skills they wouldn't need such destructive outlets. The children who would almost certainly enjoy reading about such deeds, if not about their likely consequences, are the ones who either don't want to destroy trees or, if they do, know how to convert these urges — not least because they are skilled readers. Neither morally nor in any other way are we allowed to give them the whole unvarnished, heart-rending and often hopeless truth. You may give it to adults, but then you have a book wholly *about* children.

The problem is old, but it's rarely discussed. Huckleberry Finn is rescued by Tom Sawyer, the boy from a respectable home who sometimes likes slumming, and who frees a Negro who doesn't need to be set free. Huck's real chances of being rescued by Tom, his friend out of a higher social drawer, were the chances of a snowball in Tennessee in mid-summer. His father was a sottish brute. Huck's chances of being able to read any book by Mark Twain, vernacular or no vernacular, would have been nil. Huck's great-grandson's chances are only slightly better.

It probably comes down to what we think about free will. We can safely assume that what freedom of the will there is has more scope in the individual than in the mass, the latter being influenced still more deterministically by complex pressures from without and within. This does not deny that there are freedoms which the individual can only assure himself of through the group, but moral volition is not one of these.

In writing for kids we habitually exaggerate the area of available freedom. This attitude seems deeply rooted in western societies. Maybe we think that in this way we can strengthen the 'will' within the child, thus enlarging his freedom. I don't know whether this is all bad. Suggestion may eventually become auto-suggestion; white lying is a part of education, though I often wish

it weren't. Does it help us to push back the frontiers if we reach out for the truly impossible? In practice there seems to be the widest pedagogical agreement that it does. Most of us are committed to some kind of moral betterment, and to this end we are apparently prepared to bend reality a little.

As if these matters were not difficult enough, they are made much more so by the didactic nonsense which pervades this field. Everybody—the teacher, the librarian, the critic—knows exactly what children like, what they need, and what they can and can't assimilate.

The list of the exclusively well-informed is ever-growing. The domains about which they know everything are almost numberless. There is more pressure, open and hidden, crude or subtle, on writers for young people than on any other kind. An exuberant censorship! (Which, like any other, at last becomes self-censorship.) In Australia the Children's Book Council is doing splendid work in many areas, but the system of selecting two or three titles for the annual Children's Book Awards also reinforces foibles and preconceptions, whether about the right or wrong length for a book, illustrations, approach to characterisations, or to fantasy, or the correct and permitted mixture of humor, eros and terror . . . anything at all. Reviewing of young fiction, what there is of it, is likewise notoriously subjective and opinionated. Adult passions rage in the realm of children's books.

Publishers compound these troubles by not acknowledging that some books, from the moment they are written, are for children as well as about children; that is, for young and not so young readers. I fondly believe that I myself have written two such books (mentioned by Nancy Keesing in *Overland* 63). But publishers, always falling back on book-trade customs and techniques, will not promote them in two different markets, much to their own loss. They will not, for instance, use two different kinds of cover and blurb in one edition, which would be relatively cheap and, I imagine, practical. This leads to false specialisation. It inhibits creativity, militates against the writing of many more first-class young novels, perpetuates the unhelpfully extreme division of literature into adult and non-adult, and estranges writers like myself from one of their two possible audiences.

None of these propositions are meant to be water-tight. Some books for adults, written with

noble frankness, become popular with young people reaching their fourteenth or fifteenth year, and sometimes earlier. However, I think this happens mainly through the workings of time and chance, and the significance remains marginal. I have in mind books like *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

Can answers be proposed to the following questions?

How can we find a language and a style to express reasonably subtle and complex actions and feelings in a much more simple way than hitherto, without creating just another minority language, a basic English for Reluctant Readers, which, though a useful tool in its own right, is also a reluctant English for basic readers?

Are there better methods than those we have now of driving the tunnel through the mountain from both sides — a new style and syntax, and better teaching for more kids?

Does anyone know how despair-resistant 'nor-

mal' children really are, how much pessimism — if that is the word — they can accept in their reading (as distinct from horror) without serious harm? Most of their reading will be hope-promoting in some manner, so perhaps they can put up with a good deal more of no-hope than we allow. How many princesses can we permit to live unhappily ever after?

I used to deny that we write for the young because there is less self-confrontation and pain in such writing. Now I am not so certain. In my own work I hunger to bridge the last span of the gap between young writing and other writing. 'Children's Literature' as such doesn't interest me. We are not failed teachers! We write to express ourselves, and we write best, for whatever reader, if we hold back least, because then we give most.

The evenings in Beechworth are pretty cold now and the three boys there know very well that the town calls them louts. One night they may heave a few rocks into our small branch library.

MIRIAM DIXSON **A Reply**

Reviewing *The Real Matilda* (Overland 64), Amirah Inglis ignores the nub of the actual argument, which rests on comparison with women in similar or cousin communities: specified are chiefly England, America, Sweden and Finland. Mrs Inglis then goes on to ignore or misconstrue a good deal of the rest of the argument. She indicts the entire book for “wonky” scholarship on the basis of about five specific examples from what she calls “the key chapter”, a chapter which is no more the key chapter than any other.

Matilda argues that for a network of historical reasons Australian women came out of the nineteenth century with a lower status and self-concept than their counterparts in comparable, sometimes cousin, communities. The argument’s fulcrum rests on Hartz’s notion of countervailing influences and thus involves what I defined as “colonial” qualities of the Australian elite. Mrs Inglis says nothing about this. Countervailance was central to the book in that I pictured the Australian class structure as throwing up a tension between the ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ (or robust) role model clusters for overall female identity formation or role definition. The positive cluster failed to operate as an effective countervailing influence because of the unusual strength of the negative cluster. Central to that strength was the fact that, as is common with colonial elites, ours was culturally thin (I use ‘culture’ here in its several senses). Its members tended towards an unusually constricted notion of sex role (female and male), of marriage, and of ‘seemly’ public female activity (‘tended’, because exceptions existed and exceptions matter very much). My Hartzian approaches ‘freezes’ these elite characteristics and incorporates them into the argument about overall female status, quite as much as it does those of the so-called ‘lower orders’ and the

Irish. To ignore my stress on the Hartzian ‘countervailing’ mechanism is to seriously distort the argument. Yet your reviewer gives it no mention: crucial stretches of chapters two, six and the conclusion have gone unnoticed.

Convictism was thus treated as *one* by-product of emergent industrial capitalism. If they ever do get round to thinking about the status of our women in international perspective (though I don’t think Australians like international comparisons), historians might well finally decide convictism *is* the ‘key’ to that status. But for my money it’s early days yet, so I took care to tread warily about allocating relative weighting to the various influences I examined. Thus “casual poor” (free, pre-working class) women in chapter three, weigh as much in the overall argument as do convict women in chapter four and the Irish in chapter five. To the Irish, your reviewer devotes nine lines, to the convicts, about three columns. This thoroughly misrepresents their relative weighting in the book, and hence the structure of the overall argument.

Addressing herself then, neither to the comparative nub of the argument, nor to the actual argument, Amirah Inglis goes on to do something which surely indicts the whole book as close to worthless: the “scholarship” is “wonky”. The only specific examples of bad scholarship come from one chapter, the one mistakenly designated as “the key chapter”. There seem to be about five items. None stand up to examination.

Take that concerning Governor King. I cite him at page 133. Your reviewer says his words there “do not . . . show a wish to attach a stigma to the female children of convicts”. True. But I don’t claim his words do show such a wish. Governor King is invoked because he described movingly, and as a man of some compassion, “the

early abuses the female [children] suffered'. So to cite *his* words was, I felt, an effective way of conveying the visible and tragic plight of female children. The argument suggesting a widespread (which does not mean universal) "wish" to attach stigmatic caste-qualities to convicts, covers pages 128-133. I may be among the earliest of Australian historians to write as if 'wishes' have unconscious components, but I am not the only historian to suggest there was a wish to turn convicts into a 'plantation' type caste. Child development theory shows that communities intuitively know women and children are key transmitters. Thus I'd keep to my argument that the treatment of women and children was remarkable even for so brutalized a little community, that one is entitled to explore its possible psychodynamics, and that these might relate to the creation of a convict caste.

One 'clue' to the possibility that women might have performed the function of outcasts, was Governor King's *observation* in 1800: Inglis misinterpreted my understanding of it as a 'wish', and thus offers it as an example of the general wonky scholarship charge. Other clues, also presumably testifying to scholarly wonkiness—I can only discuss the specific examples provided in the review—include treatment of convict babies and their mortality rate. Was their mortality rate higher than that among the community as a whole, asks the reviewer. Since I didn't (and don't) know, this reveals wonkiness. But to command credibility when she reproaches me for failing to offer relative statistics on infant mortality in Van Diemen's Land in the 1840s, your reviewer should show she knows how tricky the state of play is in that statistical area. I am citing R. C. Hutchinson, whose 1963 monograph dealing in part with the Hobart Female Factory in the 1840s finds the infant mortality rate "unbelievably high". It is Hutchinson who fails to furnish the relative statistics, and I simply follow suit. If Inglis thinks they were available, she should indicate this. To arrive at such statistics I would have had to go beyond Hutchinson's scholarly monograph into a very tricky field indeed, one which historical demographers seem slow in opening up.

I have shown that your reviewer has failed to review the actual argument of *The Real Matilda*. But apart from this, as far as I can make out, she also shows no sensitivity as to the kind of problem inherent in its range and its nature. Yet some such sensitivity should surely inform the texture

of a reviewer's approach? Amirah Inglis reviews *The Real Matilda* for all the world as if it were identical in genre to her own fine study of the 1926 White Women's Protection Ordinance in Papua. Her reviewing, I submit, is geared to historical enterprises which are essential but different in their aim and nature to mine, and certainly more limited in what they set as their tasks. I would think it proper for your reviewer to openly condemn the *kind of historical enterprise* embodied in *Matilda*. But it is not proper to damn it to a large extent in terms of criteria appropriate to radically different historical ventures.

I strongly agree with Inglis that I did not give long enough examples: for instance, of cruel methods of treating women and children. For the most part all I give, Inglis charges, is 'snippets'. In a book of 237 pages, I offered a pioneering, exploratory argument, drawn against a limited international canvas and using an interdisciplinary methodology, about the largely-ignored half of our population 1788-1975.

A further example of my scholarly wonkiness concerns yet another issue in the convict chapter, on convict women as an outcast group. The reviewer demonstrates wonkiness here by rejecting what she describes as my attempt "to apply the sociology of outcast groups" in favor of an attempt to apply her own 'sociology of outcast groups'. She writes: "If the sociology of outcast groups applied to women, then only the bad ones would be remarked." However, she adds, Governor Hunter *noted* the good outcasts: "If we estimate their merits by the charming children with which they have filled the colony . . . they well deserve our care." Let us follow Inglis and assume there was no element of cruel irony in Hunter's words. What kind of treatment did these women and children *actually get*? Governor King's 1800 comment is only one of many which shows the agony caused by that treatment, a treatment for all the world befitting an unavowed outcast group. The overriding thing about outcasts is whether or not they are, in whatever sense, outcasts, *not* whether they are 'bad' or good outcasts.

The remaining specific items establishing scholarly wonkiness, concern an issue Inglis seems to think fairly central to the theme of what she, but not I, designates as the 'key' chapter. That issue Inglis sees as my alleged "case that women convicts were treated worse than the men . . ." It is a non-case. I proposed that *similar*, or even

the same, treatment, *was experienced* as worse by women, partly because of vulnerabilities arising from their reproductive functions—haemorrhaging, miscarriage, pregnancy, lactation, etc. The reviewer however occupies herself with her own argument about whether I say treatment was better or worse than that given to males. That it “*should . . . have been better*” (Inglis) follows automatically from my thesis that women convicts *experienced* the *same* treatment as worse. One does not have to spell out the obvious. Female convicts *experienced* the same treatment as worse, and I propose this was no secret. That female prostitution, head-shaving, marriage-mart, drunkenness-triggered-by-desperation, ‘vengeance’

on convict babies and general degradation of poor women, was visible and known in that tiny community, also gives weight to my suggestion that these things represented “a savouring of vulnerability only too obvious”. “Savouring” does not have to be conscious: *Matilda* repeatedly assumes that the unconscious existed in the nineteenth century as it does in 1976. However I can only “*suggest*” because that word, and not the word “*prove*”, is in keeping with the kind of mood I was trying to explore. Until the actual argument of *Matilda* is looked at; until a comparative perspective is brought to bear on it; and until it is reviewed roughly as the kind of venture it claims to be, I rest my case.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: One of the great mysteries of contemporary Australia to me is that in recent years thousands of millions of dollars have been spent on the arts and on education, and yet a spin-off in terms of increased sales of books, and magazines like this one, seems hardly apparent. After all, *Overland* is a reasonably ‘popular’ magazine as these things go: it’s not as though we were catering to a small, incestuous, mutual-admiration group of precious eggheads. (Anyway, I don’t see it that way.) *Therefore*, dear friends, may I suggest at this time of the year you consider a \$6 sub. to *Overland* as an inexpensive but touching gift to the as-yet unenlightened? We write your friends a nice note explaining how thoughtful you have been. While you think that over, many thanks to the following for their ever-important donations amounting to \$266.50 since our last issue:

\$25 JMcL; \$20 RD, AG, FM, SR; \$10 AAP, CS; \$8 IL, JW; \$6 JL; \$4 BH, HD, DP, JP, DD, DD, PF, LB, PH, JR, DB, GM, MM, TM, AB, VI, JH, JH, GP, MTS, SP, DRB, TD, JG, LC, GS; \$2 CW, HN, JS, RM, GM, MT, EB; \$1 ME; 50c WR.

books

NATURE AND LEGEND

John McLaren

Patrick White: *A Fringe of Leaves* (Jonathan Cape, \$12.50).

Each successive novel of Patrick White comes as a familiar surprise. *A Fringe of Leaves* is no exception. The carefully constructed style of the opening, the women carefully dissecting their acquaintance in conversation, the developing concerns about loneliness and communion, society and spirit, the one who orders life and the one who is ordered, are unmistakable. Yet, like the earlier novels, this one again takes us into completely unexpected territory. After the study of an ostensibly commonplace life in *The Tree of Man* came the heroic aspirations of *Voss*. More recently, White seems to have been retreating into suburbia. In this novel we are again in colonial Australia, and again in the wilderness, but with a central character who has more of the passivity of Stan Parker than the qualities of his more recent figures. And, although the book is in one sense much simpler in style than its predecessors, in form it is very intricately interwoven so that each part furthers the development of the story on a number of levels—social, psychological or moral, spiritual and chronological. These levels are brought into focus through the figure of Mrs Roxburgh, who is also Ellen Gluyas the Cornish farm-girl, and perhaps also Iseult waking to the reality of love.

The references to Tristan and Iseult help to give a symbolic depth to the character of Ellen Roxburgh, but the symbol is left implicit. It is not a part of the novel to explore it, and the reader does not need to unravel it for himself to work out the sense of the story. At all times White

allows the story to move forward in a purely realistic vein. The reference to Tristan forms a part of Ellen's reminiscences of her harsh childhood on the farm at Zennor. This memory is brought back by the sting of sea spray, like a Cornish mist, and the ship's captain guiding her back to her cabin as her father used to send her back to the house. This in turn leads her to recall her identity with the countryside of her youth, and the legends with which it had been animated, legends which in turn had hinted at the hope of something more, the hope that she too might one day be called by a god. "She was drawn to nature as she would not have been in different circumstances; she depended on it for sustenance, and legend for hope." It is these elements of her past which are brought to the fore again in her ordeal, and which enable her not only to sustain it, but to return to society at its finish.

The central episode of the story is the shipwreck which leaves Mrs Roxburgh alone among the natives of Fraser Island, and her eventual escape through the assistance of the convict Jack Chance. She is able to survive because of the passivity and the matter-of-fact commonsense of her farm-girl upbringing, but in the company of Jack Chance she discovers too the kind of love implicit in the Tristan story. This love generates not so much high passion between the lovers—neither the circumstances nor their personalities would be appropriate for such romantic legend—but a wholeness in herself and a compassion for the world, and particularly for Jack Chance's fellow convicts.

The shipwreck and its consequences, based presumably on the real experience of Eliza Fraser, do not commence until half way through the novel. The first chapter, in fact, which is occupied with the reaction of Sydney acquaintances to the Roxburghs, suggests a quite different social per-

spective. The snappishness of the two ladies, quite unaware of their own limited frame of reference, and the contrast with the surveyor, Merivale, who is prepared to accept the mystery and difference of another, suggest that the novel's concern will be with those who have the strength to go beyond social convention. When we encounter the Roxburghs in the following chapter this impression is strengthened. Although he is sickly, and not able to meet the physical challenges of the environment, it appears that he by his containment in books and she by her native strength are removed above their fellows.

The main event of the first part of the book is Ellen's momentary seduction by Austin Roxburgh's reprobate brother. This episode seems to define what is not right about the relationship of husband and wife, and sets the problem which Ellen eventually answers only through her acceptance of Jack Chance. For the marriage is essentially founded on the twin lies of respectability and Christianity, both of which overlie Ellen's true nature and the real reason, his own convenience, for which Austin married her.

The relation between Ellen and Austin is based on a mutual dependence which masks their essential inequality. He lives only in and through books, which separate him from life and its distasteful elements, labour and death, which he reduces to literary conventions. They first come together in a storm, where only her natural strength protects him from the consequences of her rashness. "Her improvidence did not prevent her feeling much older, wiser, than this slanted stick of a gentleman. If the storm did burst upon them, she was strong and jubilant enough to steady the reeling earth, while he, poor man, would most probably break, scattering a dust of dictionary words and useless knowledge."

This, in fact, is what ultimately does happen to him, but only after the necessity of her parents' death and his need of support have betrayed them into marriage and she has become a gentlewoman. The ne'er-do-well brother Garnett reveals what is wrong with her marriage, but is himself purely physical and so has nothing to offer her. For although Austin is weak, only partly alive, he is by no means contemptible. His literary studies do have a wisdom, the wisdom that he is happy who will live to understand the causes of things, but this wisdom will be reached only by his wife. There is a further irony in the fact that his favorite book is Virgil's *Georgics*, which embody

that European ideal of rural bliss which has proved so frequently disastrous in the Australian environment. His death comes, however, not as the product of a literary conceit, but as the result of a rash but heroic moment of concern for another.

The end of Mrs Roxburgh's wanderings is her return to society and her recovery through the care and attention of others, including one of the ladies who had been presented in so unfavorable a light in the first chapter. During her delirium, Jack Chance and her husband become confused, and by the time she is restored to health she is restored also to an acceptance of the world as it is. During her wanderings Ellen Gluyas has been recovered from below the surface of Mrs Roxburgh. Now that Mrs Roxburgh is restored, it is with the strength of both, as well as with the wisdom of both her lovers. Patrick White does not endeavor to follow her career beyond Brisbane, but he shows her setting forth on a new beginning, not an end. It is as though the book itself discovers a renewed faith in human possibility in the world as it is.

THE GENTLE BATTLER

A. A. Phillips

Ric Throssell: *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers: The Life and Letters of Katharine Susannah Prichard* (Angus & Robertson, \$6.95).

This book should be approached with a recognition of Ric Throssell's prefatorial warning: that it is a personal memoir of those phases of Katharine Prichard's life of which he had direct knowledge, not the definitive biography which must some day be achieved (or rather, approached, for no biographer can hope to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, to quote the law's ingenuous estimate of human capability). That biography will need to fulfil the time-honored formula "The Life and Times of . . ."; for, though Katharina was an interestingly individual personality, she was also a significantly representative figure in Australian cultural development. She was the most prominent member of the gallant little beleaguered garrison which, a generation ago, strove to build forward from the Australian literary achievements of the 1890s, and to wring from readers a recognition of, and a pride in, our national culture. Like most of the garrison, she accepted the radical tradition,

though she was further left, more actively involved, and more doctrinaire, than most of her literary colleagues. She was also a vigorous exponent of the cultural nationalism of the garrison, obvious both in her use of variedly representative Australian environments as the backgrounds of her novels, and in the lyrical intensity of her natural descriptions (the quality in her work which, I suspect, posterity will most value).

Any discussion of the background and historical significances of such attitudes lies outside Throssell's purposes; but he provides plenty of evidence of them — evidence which later biographers will seize with grateful avidity. His accounts of the novels do not attempt any depth of critical analysis—he clearly shares his mother's distaste for contemporary modes of criticism. Two chapters are devoted to *Katharine's political involvement*, but they are too discreetly dutiful to tell us the things we most want to know.

Katharine was a foundation member of the Australian Communist Party (1920). She had been converted at the time of the Russian revolution, and remained a devoted champion of the USSR for the remaining 52 years of her life. Throssell declares that in intra-party discussions she was often critical of official proposals, but once a 'line' was declared she accepted the duty of solidarity. Her only really vigorous disagreement, it would appear, came three years before her death when the Communist Party of Australia turned away from Russia. Even then she did not resign but she attacked the decision with indignant force — and perhaps, as other indications suggest, with a sad recognition that the ideologies, the moral principles, the optimisms, even the manners, on which her living was based, were passing from the world about her, leaving her a lonely, almost an embattled, survivor.

To maintain her half-century of belief in the USSR, Katharine had to pass through the traumatic experiences of the Stalinist purges, the pact with Hitler, the admissions of the villainies of the once idolised Stalin, the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. What inward struggles did those events cause her? Could she really have retained a full conviction of the USSR's infallibility, almost as if history were not happening about her? The few conventional statements about such events quoted by Throssell tell us virtually nothing except that her obedience survived.

Was she, then, merely a gullible do-gooder? That won't fit one's impression of her personality. Certainly her political commitments sprang from deep emotional needs; but she did her intellectual

homework faithfully, and she did not have a tame mind. Had she gone so far out on a limb that retreat became impossible? She had already fought and won a gruelling battle to reconstruct her life after the suicide of the husband who had been the epicentre of her emotional life. Was it more than even her strength could face to admit to herself a second shattering; for her commitment to Russia — or so the record seems to suggest — had satisfied her needs to believe in the future and to feel an active unity with the humble and the victimised?

There is another possibility. One gathers the impression that for Katharine loyalty was an usually powerful emotional imperative. Communism was, for her, a loyalty, not merely an intellectual conviction; and belief in USSR gave communism the concreteness that a loyalty demands. If she had moments of doubt, they may, for her, have smelled so strongly of treachery that she shooed them across the threshold of her mind.

"One gathers the impression"; this review is uncomfortably cluttered with such saving clauses, and they indicate the gravest weakness of this book. A son-biographer faces exceptional difficulties. It would be inhuman to ask him an objective impartiality, which Throssell frankly disclaims. But an affectionate warmth of championship does not need discreet evasion. Throssell tells us virtually nothing about Katharine's failings, her foibles, her obstinacies or her inconsistencies. Without them no wholeness of personality will take shape in the reader's imagination. We are left to grope through the mist of Throssell's dutifulness for the real Katharine.

On one page, this book presents two reproductions of portraits. One is politely flattering with the nose straightened, endowed with dignity, and robbed of character. The other is a toughly-candid, and affectionate, near-caricature. This time the nose is almost a clown's rubicund knob. The photographs reproduced support neither version. Of the two paintings the near-caricature tells us the more and tells it more sympathetically. The smoothly-poised lips in the polite portrait decline to speak to us. Ten minutes contemplation of those pictures might have taught Ric Throssell much to his advantage about the art of biography.

He achieves, however, one notable success in what must have been his most difficult task — his chapter on his father's suicide. It is firmly controlled and it is deeply moving. His portrait of his father does achieve wholeness and vitality. Superficially considered, suicide seems an impro-

bable end for a man of unquestionable courage — attested less by his V.C. than by the boldness with which this farmer son of a W.A. conservative premier, and former athletic hero of a conventional public school, publicly proclaimed the communism to which Katharine had converted him. As Ric Throssell recreates his father's personality, the seeming inconsistencies weld into a unity. Hugo Throssell's tragic story and the charm of his wayward personality might well excite the imagination of any novelist. Ironically the novelist who knew him so intimately could not tell that story. Indeed she defended her right of privacy so fiercely that she even destroyed her husband's letters to her, as well as much other intimate correspondence — thus creating a difficulty for her biographer which partly answers my complaints against this book.

Though the personality of Katharine remains shadowy, certain facets of it do emerge, and must win from the reader a warmth of respect for her unaggressive strength. Her best writing, in my view, was achieved before her husband's death, but as a personality she is most impressive in her later years. She had always been beset by poverty, which probably mattered little to her. Shut away in her country home, she must have known much grey loneliness. Ill health, which another woman might have accepted as disabling, made writing a tough physical labor. In her early years she had swiftly achieved what was near to triumphant success for an Australian writer of her time; but with changing moods and literary modes, her work was more coolly appraised. Yet nothing could blunt her determination not to rust unburnished. Her political zeal remained unabated. She wrote on and on, always accepting the wearing duty of revision. I have suggested that she became an embattled survivor; but she remained the resolute and gentle-mannered battler she had always been.

INDONESIA CALLING

Ailsa Thomson Zainu'ddin

Rupert Lockwood: *Black Armada* (Australasian Book Society, \$7.95).

Black Armada is a lively account of the boycott imposed on Dutch shipping by Australian waterside workers, along with Indonesian and Indian crew members, in the immediate post-war period,

and of the effects of this boycott on the Indonesian independence movement and Australian foreign policy. It is written by a participant observer with a fine eye for the "unpredictable symmetries" of history, particularly the irony that the Dutch government-in-exile, by transferring its political prisoners from Tanah Merah in Irian Jaya to internment in Australia, provided the leadership for anti-colonial activity which contributed to the final overthrow of the Netherlands East Indies; and the further irony that Australia, which had made facilities available to the Dutch government-in-exile for the training of troops, was reluctant to allow troops, ammunition and war supplies to be shipped from Australian ports to Indonesia.

It is a difficult book to categorise. Initially for me it was "the book of the film". To view "Indonesia Calling", the film produced by Joris Ivens, as I first did in an audience of Indonesians in Australia celebrating their Independence Day, is to be swept along by the excitement of this heroic-romantic interpretation of events and to want to know more about the film itself as well as the events surrounding it. The book provides both of these and is itself partly in the same heroic-romantic tradition, plunging the reader into the drama of events vividly recounted. Quick changes of scene and switches back and forth in time give a kaleidoscopic effect, recording the events in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle rather than attempting to explain why things happened the way they did. Viewed in this light it is "an Australian chronicling of the historic boycotts, mutinies and riots staged in Australia against the Colonial Dutch in 1942-49", requested by the writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer in a letter to Rupert Lockwood in 1963.

The book could perhaps be compared with John Coast's *Recruit to Revolution*. Many of the Australians involved were recruited, almost to their own surprise, into support for the Indonesian cause. Yet, while the focus of the book is largely on Australian activity and initiatives, perhaps such a comparison is a little unfair to Lockwood, who does consciously seek to avoid the "how I won the revolution" account of events in which Coast indulges. Lockwood refers only briefly and in passing to his own involvement in the matters he describes. He also concludes with a specific recognition that "the Australian boycotts and mutinies were certainly not decisive, but they were an historic contribution to the scales that tipped against the Dutch and their allies and allowed the Republic of Indonesia, first repre-

sented before the nations at UNO by the Australian Government of 1947, to step on to the world stage" (pp. 312-3). The disclaimer is necessary and perhaps could have been even more firmly underlined, because it is assumed either that the reader has some knowledge of the Indonesian background or that such knowledge is largely irrelevant to the tale being told.

The dust jacket claims, nevertheless, that this is a "significant work on the 1945-49 revolution". In this respect I do not believe that it adds anything that is not already contained in Lockwood's article "The Indonesian Exiles in Australia, 1942-47" published in *Indonesia*, No. 10, 1970. There, succinctly presented, is the argument that the Indonesian exiles from Tanah Merah concentration camp, from ships' crews, in military units, were the first to confront the colonial government after the Japanese had taken control in Indonesia and that, after the fall of Japan, the boycott of Dutch ships by Australian unions in conjunction with the Indonesian exiles provided the delay vital to enable the Republic to establish its viability. A final paragraph sketches the effect of the Indonesian exiles in giving "White Australia the first face-to-face introduction to the colonial revolutions of Asia" (p. 56), and the amplification of this final paragraph forms the bulk of the book, making it more a study of the impact of the 1945-49 Indonesian revolution on Australian thinking than a significant work on the revolution itself.

It is the further claim that this work is "the yield of years of research" which raises queries in the mind of the reader. If this is so then it must be judged by the canons of research and it is here that doubts begin to arise. In the first place the footnote references would be unacceptable in a first year undergraduate essay. There is, as far as I can see, not one single page reference given in any footnote.

The work is a valuable contribution to research in drawing on such sources as the Waterside Workers' Federation Indonesian file and other trade union material. It also uses interviews with deportees, with various trade union officials, and with the occasional Labor politician. It draws on Indonesian propaganda material published in Australia in the early years of the republic. Other sources seem mainly to be Commonwealth parliamentary debates, the Australian press and official war histories, along with two recent ANU theses on Australian foreign policy. The source material seems rather limited. Were there, for

example, no files of the various Australian-Indonesian associations? Was any attempt made to interview or even to account for the support of such people as Bishop Cranswick? If the files of the Central Committee of Indonesian Independence were not available it should have been possible to interview Bondan, its secretary. Ivan Southall did so for his *Indonesia Face to Face*.

This raises questions about the role of the Tanah Merah PKI members as the leaders of the Indonesians in exile. Out of the 507 Tanah Merah exiles how many belonged to the "sizeable group" with artisan skills in electrical, engineering and metal trades"? Where had they acquired such skills and how had they preserved them in the camp at Boven Digul? How many of those "stumbling barefooted down the *Both's* gangplank at Sydney" were "graduates of Netherlands and Asian universities?" (p. 30). One suspects a certain exaggeration here, and the suspicion is reinforced by the fact that Lockwood refers throughout to Dr Sjahrir, although Sjahrir did not complete his law degree, and to Dr Sjari-fuddin, whose degree was not a doctorate. The total number of graduates for the whole of Indonesia at the end of the colonial period was just over a thousand. And can the claim that the Communist Party of Indonesia was based in Australia really be sustained? It may not have been viable in the Netherlands East Indies, but what of such leaders as Musso and Tan Malaka? It is interesting to note that the Australian Communist Party, like the Comintern before it and the first Dutch communists in Indonesia, took a paternal attitude to the PKI, acting as advisers and deploring the Indonesians' initial "sectarian errors that made ACP hairs stand on end" (p. 35). Indeed, there is a certain lack of sensitivity in the dealings with Indonesians. When, for example, Jim Healy persuaded the N.S.W. Trades and Labor Council that the NEI government-in-exile should have the Indonesian strikers "bundled into their laps", Lockwood comments that "the Dutch in Australia were never celebrated for their sense of humour". But one feels that the Trades and Labor Council was not showing very much sense of humanity in having "dumped back" into Dutch care and military prison camps the "Indonesians who had refused to sail them back to Java" (pp. 126-7). There is no hint that the Indonesians had any say in the matter. The book is strongly anti-Dutch and anti-colonial; the paternalism of the trade union leaders toward their Indonesian proteges is barely disguised.

It was this 'big brother' attitude of the ACP which led to the long delay in transfer of wages owing to the Indonesian seamen repatriated on the *Esperance Bay*. "The trustees had guaranteed the Indonesian owners that no one would touch the money; it would be sent to them or next of kin in Indonesia when conditions were sufficiently settled. The Soekarno Government was anxious to get its hands on the deposits" (p. 140) but nevertheless the Labor Council did not see fit to transfer the funds through Indonesian government representatives even though they would have had the facilities for doing so. Nor is there any evidence adduced to support the implication that the Soekarno government wanted the money for its own purposes rather than for the Indonesian citizens to whom it was due.

Many of Rupert Lockwood's most trenchant comments are reserved for Australian politicians of all parties. Having castigated politicians right and left he is, in fact, unduly generous when he claims that "Mr Calwell could say with truth in 1947 . . . 'Every Indonesian who left these shores left voluntarily'" (p. 147). Anyone who has read the moving account by Eric Marshall of Zakaria, "The man who stayed behind", in *It Pays*

to be White, will know that this is simply not true. Lockwood brushes aside the implications of the White Australia policy in its relationship to Australian-Indonesian marriages.

Perhaps it is in the context of Australian history that the book is best placed. It is an exploration of Australian attitudes and Australian attempts to come to terms with the new post-colonial world of Asia in which, despite all the problems which have arisen, "independence . . . was a thousand times better than the humiliation of colonial subjugation" (p. 313). In particular, Lockwood's chapter on Australian "plottings for a kangaroo-leap forward into an island empire" (p. 249) and his evidence that these were to a large degree bi-partisan policies which still linger in the minds of many, is perhaps one of the most thought-provoking in the book. So is his comment that "an archetypal 'colonial Australian' awaits depiction . . . The pot always knows how to describe the kettle" (p. 379). As an Australian chronicle, a little larger than life in places, this book presents a small segment of Australian history and raises a great many questions of significance to Australians.

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He claims to have scholarly reasons for his desire.

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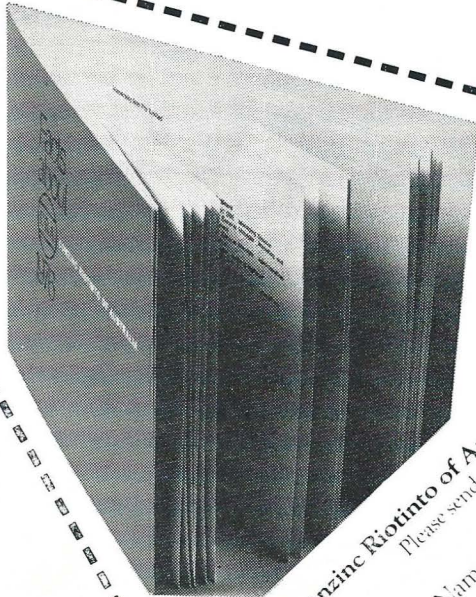
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